

Frank was fat. He wasn't always so rotund but the last ten years seemed to encourage his metabolism's deterioration.

Every morning he'd stand against his reflection, seething with loathe at the balding 40-year-old in front of him. His chin had doubled. His fingers appeared swollen. His gut profused forward. But the worst change of all for Frank was the lack of hair upon his unnaturally shiny scalp and the abundance everywhere else.

Frank was unbearably miserable. Frank's wife, Doreen, was unbearably cold. After watching her husband's appearance unfold, Doreen grew bitter with resentment for Frank. She was not yet 40 and had maintained her girlish figure over the years. She felt discouraged that such a pretty face was wasted upon marrying a man like Frank. How could she not see this coming?

Frank and Doreen's marriage no longer had a pulse. The attraction was gone, the patience had vanished, and the chances of a healthy future partnership were growing slimmer. Their marriage became a cold corpse. Since Frank and Doreen had no children, or pets for that matter, it was hard for an outsider to understand why the two remained legally bound. The fact was, the hatred shared between Frank and Doreen had manifested so greatly that neither could even bring themselves to put in the effort to file divorce papers.

So while Doreen spent her days running errands and visiting friends, Frank went to and fro work, not returning home until dinnertime. Their schedules were very compatible but if they weren't, it wouldn't matter in the least because Frank and Doreen hadn't slept in the same bed in over 4 years.

Typically though, Frank would return home around 6 o'clock. Around this time, Doreen would have dinner made and the table set with organized cutlery. The two would sit directly opposite each other, and without a word or a glimpse of recognition that the other was there, would eat their meals in intentional unacknowledgement.

The routine maintained its tradition, with the occasional night out for Doreen. On these rare nights, Frank would come home to a brief note explaining

how to cook the frozen meal awaiting him. She never detailed her whereabouts or expected time home, but this was unimportant to Frank, who usually brought out the old bottle of brandy hidden in his office's cabinet. It was always the same: a short glass cylinder, 3 square ice cubes, and the intention to refill as many times necessary before his wife returned.

Frank held the cool bottle in his hands for a moment. He thought about his father, handing him the brandy on his wedding day. "This will put some hair on ya' chest!" he had said with a smile. The words chased circles around his head. Frank's father might have been joking at the time, but the irony of it all tormented him now.

Frank sighed in frustration and popped the rustic cork. As he filled the glass to the rim, he noticed himself in the curve of the bottle. His hollow eyes only accented the void he saw and felt. How many more drinks until his life regained value?

He made his way to the leather sofa that had memorized his essence. It seemed to breathe relief as Frank's weight pressed into the usual mold. Frank considered the seat the most intimate relation he had had in years. With no friends, family, or wife, he had lost his true perception of intimacy. As he flipped through the television channels, the reality began its usual toll. Between soap operas and enhanced commercials, Frank grew incredibly angry. Here were countless people pretending that love was a given, that sex was simply a commodity, and that having many personal relationships was natural and easy. How dare these actors portray such desires so casually when here sat a man toiling under the hot sun of sexual deprivation.

Out of growing frustration, Frank flipped the TV off and turned his attention to the coffee table scattered with mail and magazines and a lone drink on a green-woven coaster. He reached for his glass but his eye caught on a little blue checkbook next to an L.L. Bean catalogue. On the corner read Doreen McConville in lacy white stitching.

While prying was never an avid factor typical of Frank's behavior, the rare

feeling of curiosity bloomed before him. He succumbed to it, and in his mind, he excused himself on the defense that she might have bought him something from the catalogue. Despite that this was highly unlikely, what he found was even more unexpected.

A flip of a page un-birthing an unsettling discovery; a lingerie check for \$234.95 for Veronica's Unmentionables.

Lingerie? What wife would need provocative clothing for a marriage that was sexually driven as a slug? Frank sat in a petrified self-realization. In a desperate attempt to discover the truth, Frank flipped through the rest of the checkbook.

Payments for chocolate, sex shops, and dinners revealed themselves, all paid in the past week. Frank did not have the heart to investigate the earlier chapters of the checkbook. In fact, he did not have a heart at all. In an instant, his carefree attitude towards his marriage took a violent turn. Frank had never considered the possibility that his wife could be disloyal. Sure, their marriage was highly unorthodox but was that enough ground to admit cheating? Even if such a claim was indeed viable, shouldn't Frank be wary of the crimes against him?

More shaky swallows of brandy led Frank back to the liquor counter. A tip of the bottle refilled his glass and his thinking resumed. The primary problem with the discovery was not a jealousy issue; it was the fault in honesty. In all fifteen years of marriage, Doreen and Frank had never lied to each other. Perhaps this was the reason their engagement crumbled so easily. After all, when Doreen realized that she no longer loved her husband, he had been informed the day of. The honesty had always been mutual, even if it was brutal. The truth had been the last stitch holding the marriage together.

But now Frank stood in a crowd of silence, trying to reconnect the threads in his mind. Frank and Doreen may have learned to hate each other, but they never lied about it.

For the first time since the ten years that their marriage began to uncoil, tears oozed from Frank's ducts. He felt hurt and hollow for something that

should have been anticipated. Of course his wife was cheating, that should have been a given. His leaky eyes glistened as drop by drop, he had nothing left in him. Before he knew it, drop by drop, the brandy had nothing left for him either. Its emptiness mocked Frank's weakness.

"What's a matter Frank?" the bottle seemed to seduce in a voice similar to his wife's.

"It's... it's Doreen. She's cheating on me..." he sobbed.

"Oh there there... It's not so bad baby. Think of it this way: now you have every ground to divorce that petty bitch. You're free to indulge in me *any* time you need now".

"Who says I want *you!* I want my wife. I want my old life back. I want the truth"

The glass seemed to titter-tatter in laughter. "Frank, stop being so pathetic. Who are you trying to kid anyway? I've always been the one for you, baby. You picked me before and you picked me now and nothing will ever change that. Now, be a good boy and grab my sister from the cabinet. She's probably even more lonely than you are" the glass giggled.

"Shut up! I can't think right now... you did this to me. You ruined my life!" Frank slurred.

"Honey, the only one accountable for destroying your life is you. I never forced you to fill the glass. The fact is, you chose me over her. So why aren't you happy that it's just me and you now?"

"I never wanted this and I still don't!" Frank screamed as he chucked the bottle across the wall. A million little shards scattered across the linoleum.

Frank's heart-felt moans and yelps echoed throughout the house, making each piece vibrate from the sound. From afar, they looked as dancing sparkles. He would have continued to sob and watch but the sound of a turning key alerted him of Doreen's return.

Frank quickly smeared the salt water from his eyes and tried to steady himself. The room seemed to spinning but he managed to balance against the

counter. Doreen's heels clicked against the kitchen tiles as they headed for the stairs.

"Doreen!" Frank yelled from his study. "Come here now."

The sound of her heels turning confirmed her change in direction. He listened to the mesmerizing click-click as her presence loomed closer. What was he to say? He couldn't just outright ask her, he had to lead her into admitting it.

As soon as he saw Doreen in the doorway however, he blurted in anger, "Are you cheating on me?"

Doreen's face blushed pale and her eyes shifted downward. Her gaze bounced from her battered-down husband to the shattered bottle.

"Have you been drinking Frank?" she whispered.

"YES. Yes I have because I just found out my fucking wife is fucking cheating on me!" he shouted, clenching his fists.

Doreen looked away in shame. "Do you really want to know? Yes, I've been seeing someone. I've been with a man who acknowledges me. A man who touches me. A man who isn't so self absorbed in his mediocre image to not do anything about it!"

This last statement stung Frank. "You're such a bitch... how could... how could you do this to me?" he gasped in somber hyperventilation.

"Me? No, no Frank. *You* this to yourself. We had a good run baby, but I can't run anymore. It's time to make official our separation. You can't revive a cold corpse. We've been dead for too long."

And with that, Doreen shook her head and exited the room. Frank sank to the floor. He held his face in his hands for a moment to let his wife's words sink in. It was over.

When he looked up, a million little shards were smiling at him; each laughing "I told you so".