

Cyclone

ESTHER VINCENT

Une femme raconte une journée typique quand son mari rentre du travail, trouve mille choses à redire et qui enchaîne sur une scène de rage. Elle se rend compte qu'elle s'est habituée à cette situation parce que dans sa famille on a toujours subi en silence la rage de leur père. Elle se demande si le temps n'est pas venu de quitter son mari.

Jake stormed in the kitchen door, almost pulling the screen off its hinges. In an outstretched hand he held a large, lopsided garbage bag. He was in mid-scream. "That's twice now! Jesus. Why the fuck can't you ever do anything right?"

Sitting at the table with her coffee poised in her hand, Mona's back stiffened. She was ready for this. She pursed her lips and reassured herself that he was only just home from work, still keyed-up from the office. Best not to say anything—just wait until his tirade was over, withstand the insults, let him storm off, and then go ahead and make dinner.

Before they married, Mona had no idea about Jake's temper. Nothing anyone could have said would have made her believe it was in him. Nothing in their two years of dating

even hinted at it. Nothing could have prepared her. Little had she known that it was one of his favourite things. He didn't even try to control it. Why would he?

Eventually Mona came to realize he was proud of his anger. He cherished it. He brought it forth to show her how powerful he was.

Jake's rage first appeared to Mona the day after they were married just short of two years ago. The shocking tone of his voice from that afternoon still rings through her even when he's not around. There had been some reprimand about her behaviour at the wedding party, a comment about how there were certain expectations now that they were married. In that first fight, she had naively objected to his criticism. He responded with such a rain of sound and fury that she could do nothing but stand back, eyes wide, mouth agape, tears welling in her burning lids. She couldn't speak. She couldn't move. She couldn't even look away. She could only stand there in the sparsely decorated honeymoon hotel room and wait for it to end.

Now, when she thought about it, she realized she shouldn't have

been surprised that Jake would have bellowing tantrums. It made a certain kind of sense. In fact, she was strangely comforted by it. She had known rage all her life. She had grown up falling asleep to the sound of shrieking voices and flying epithets. Maybe this was why explosive displays of anger always made her sleepy. Her family had orbited around the gravity of her father's rage. It was a constant in her life from her first memories. Mona felt it was her place—her lot—to live with rage and to struggle to stay above it.

Jake knew that Mona thought this, and it infuriated him. When she got that patient look, that waiting look, he thought she was just cultivating her long-suffering wife act to make him feel like a child. As though she was perfect. As though she had never in her life so much as raised her voice. But she didn't understand—he knew he was right. He wasn't going to give in. It wasn't his fault. His days were filled with provocation. Someone was always doing something stupid and he'd have to deal with it. What was he supposed to do? If he didn't stand up for himself, who would? The world had treated Jake badly and

he was owed a little peace of mind. He had to blow off steam, he had to get it out of his system, or it might come out at the wrong time, in front of the wrong person. The last thing he wanted was to get caught talking back to the boss.

Jake wanted to tell Mr. Stephenson where to go, tell him exactly what he thought. Wouldn't that be great: to

stinking garbage sitting here for a week, collecting flies and maggots."

"Here!" he hollered as he grabbed the bottom of the bag and turned it upside down. Upended, the flapping mouth of the big bag opened spilling garbage all over the kitchen floor. "Now maybe you'll remember when I tell you to do something, it has to be done."

the sensation that he was one of those fantasy people he watched on TV.

She gave him the tray.

"What's this?" he asked, staring at the tray.

"It's your dinner, honey," she said, shyly.

"What the hell is in this glass?"

She became cautious, sending each word out with care, "It's milk. You like

Every day it was something. Today it was the garbage. She ambled about the kitchen, garbage squelching under her feet while she worked. Squish, squish, squish. Maybe she could just learn to accept living this way. Garbage on the floor, garbage in the air, garbage in her head, and garbage sitting in front of the TV upstairs. Squish, squish, squish.

see the look on the boss's face, to see the look on everyone's face when Jake finally said out loud what everybody had been thinking for so long. And he knew they were thinking it. They all agreed with him. He knew everyone hated Stephenson as much as he did. But no one would say anything. And neither would he. What with the bills his wife was always racking up, there was no way he could afford to lose his job. At work he was all smiles and handshakes. The only words Stephenson ever heard out of Jake's mouth were, "Yes, sir."

Standing in the doorway with the trash bag, his arm starting to feel the weight, he shouted, "You're not even answering me. You don't have anything to say, do you? Because you messed up and you know I'm right and you know I have every reason to be angry. All I asked was that you put the garbage out before ten so they could come and take it away. And what did you do? Where did you put it? You didn't put it anywhere. You didn't even pick it up, did you?"

"You lazy bitch. I don't even know what to say. I can't believe you're too stupid to do this goddamn, simple thing. And now we're going to have

He stormed out of the room and stomped up the stairs to the TV room.

Mona sighed, looked up at the ceiling, stood slowly, and gathered the things to start dinner. She tried carefully to avoid the spilled trash but it was everywhere. After a few passes she started to walk right on it, feeling it slide around beneath her slippers. Squish, squish, squish.

Boil the water and find a cup of rice. Get the fry pan. Unwrap the two pork chops she had thawed that morning. Mona was moving on muscle memory alone. Every day was like this. Every day it was something. Today it was the garbage. She ambled about the kitchen, garbage squelching under her feet while she worked. Squish, squish, squish. Maybe she could just learn to accept living this way. Garbage on the floor, garbage in the air, garbage in her head, and garbage sitting in front of the TV upstairs. Squish, squish, squish. It all went around in her head until dinner was ready.

She placed a chop on a plate with some rice, just the way he liked it, nothing fancy. She put it on a tray with a glass of milk, a napkin, and cutlery, and took it upstairs to where he slotted in half slumber, sucking up

milk." She recognized the opening salvo. He was looking for things to pick on. She was only just learning how to dodge the volleys, hadn't perfected the defensive manoeuvres.

"Yes, I like milk," he said, his sarcasm poking at her, pushing her away. "I don't want milk today. I want apple juice. I told you that. I told you that downstairs. Why don't you ever listen to me when I speak to you?"

"I'll go get you some juice," she said as she reached to pick the glass up off the tray.

"Just leave it alone. You brought it up here, I might as well drink it."

She turned to leave, hoping to escape the escalation, her head bowed, her shoulders slightly raised to ward off the words. His voice changed and was suddenly pleasant and soft, almost pleading. He asked, "You gonna watch TV with me tonight?"

She paused.

"I was gonna go over and play crib with Sarah," she said. She didn't want to provoke him, but it was true. She had made plans that afternoon, on the phone. Sarah had tried in her concerned friend kind of way, the way she always did, to get Mona to realize that it would be okay to walk

away. Sarah had said Jake and Mona were only just married; there were no kids to worry about. Now is the time to do it. Now was the time to get out.

Mona didn't want to listen, made a date for cribbage instead.

"Why do you spend time with that crazy bitch? You know she's so full of shit you can smell her coming." He laughed at his own joke and flipped

don't even want to look at you right now." He started to eat, his focus never really straying from the TV. His eyes went glassy and he chewed distractedly.

She wasn't sure if he was even aware that she was still in the room. She went back down to the kitchen. Squish, squish, squish. She realized she had tracked the stains of garbage

sampled, rejected, and left in the fridge until she had thrown it out only just the day before, was now spilled with the rest of the trash. Watery yogurt ooze was spreading across the floor and pooling under the fridge.

She stood up slowly and pressed her palm into the small of her back. She held the dripping, empty yogurt container aloft, her fingers curled

"You should stay here with me. TV is way more interesting than that stupid woman. I really don't know why you bother with her at all. Aren't I enough to keep you happy? We're married, aren't we? You made a promise. You promised that you were mine for ever." He added with unnecessary emphasis, "Until death do we part."

through the channels, always stopping if the image was a man with a gun or a woman with big boobs. All other images were cast aside with the mere move of his thumb.

"You should stay here with me. TV is way more interesting than that stupid woman. I really don't know why you bother with her at all. Aren't I enough to keep you happy? We're married, aren't we? You made a promise. You promised that you were mine for ever."

He added with unnecessary emphasis, "Until death do we part," that's what the priest said. And now you always want to go play stupid cards with some stupid woman."

Here it came. She could feel the building intensity. She was trying her best to think of something to say, something to do to stop up the barrel of his building temper. "It's okay," she said in as friendly a voice as she could muster, "I'll stay. Let me go get my dinner, and I'll be back up." She thought this was the best thing to do, call Sarah, cancel the date. It'd be easier.

"Goddammit. Don't just stay because I told you to. For Christ sakes, if you want to go, then get the fuck out of here. I don't need you here. I

through the house. She stood at the fry pan, picked up the remaining pork chop with a fork and took a bite and chewed. The meat was dry, plain, tasteless. She stood there, paralyzed, except for her jaw—ruminating.

If she cleaned up now, it'd be too late to visit Sarah. If she went to Sarah's first, it would be dark when she got home and she'd be up all night cleaning. If she didn't clean up until the next morning, she wouldn't get out to do the grocery shopping in time. If she didn't get the grocery shopping done in time, she wouldn't have his Thursday night supper ready. If she didn't have his Thursday night supper ready...

Besides, the longer she left the garbage on the floor, the harder it was going to be to clean up.

She dropped the now cold chop back in the pan and bent to gather the drier bits of trash. She noticed, once down at garbage level, how extensive the mess really was. Tea bags and damp coffee filters leaked black liquid into the crevices between the linoleum tiles. Mouldy slices of bread were erupting in clouds of powdery spores. An overturned, half-eaten container of fruit-flavoured yogurt she had bought three months ago,

away from where she pinched the rim between forefinger and thumb as if her fingers weren't already stained and sticky from the trash. She stared at the spill as it continued to seep into the warm darkness under the fridge.

Could she move the fridge by herself? Could she do it without alerting, and thus provoking, Jake? Could she just clean up the visible floor without the whole kitchen starting to smell like rancid dairy in three days? She heard the toilet flush upstairs. He'd be coming down for his post-meal drink. And look at the floor ... brace yourself...

"What the hell is this mess still doing here? You're not expecting me to clean this up are you? I'm a busy man. I've got work to do. I've got a job. I don't sit around the house all day not taking out the garbage. Get this shit off the floor. Off my floor. I pay for this floor. This is my floor. And when I tell you to clean up my floor, I don't mean wait for someone else to come and do it. You want to go play cards with your little friend, you get this cleaned up first." He stumbled around mixing his drink, casually kicking trash into hard to reach places.

"I can't move the fridge," she mumbled meekly.

"You can't move the fridge?! Why in God's name do you have to move the fridge?"

"To clean under it."

"Oh, jeezus—You have to rope me into this somehow, don't you. I can't just come home at night and relax; you've always got something you want me to do. Something you couldn't do by yourself because you were too weak, or you didn't have the car, or you had your head up your ass and you couldn't get it back out.

"Well, you got it figured wrong, missy. I'm not moving no fridge. Not tonight. You clean everything else up and I'll move it tomorrow morning. You can clean under it then."

He lumbered back up to his den. "Christ, it's all through the house. What the fuck were you thinking? Can't even wipe your feet...." His voice trailed away up the stairs.

She paused. She dropped the yogurt

container back on the floor. She poked the pooling liquid with the mop. She pushed one of the mouldy pieces of bread into to it and watched the bread soak up the goo. Then, changing from her slippers to her shoes, she left the house to go to Sarah's. She didn't even stop to check her hair in the little mirror. She grabbed her purse and started moving. She walked out the screen door and off the porch. She walked down the steps, down the side path, across the yard. She turned up the sidewalk and walked

away from the house.

What was it Sarah had said about walking away?

Esther Vincent likes to tell stories. She does so using photography, theatre and the written word. Her stories, photographs, articles and essays have been published in magazines, journals and anthologies. She has had eleven plays and three movement works produced for stage. One of her plays, Shafted, was published by Ordinary Press.

LISA DE NIKOLITS

SILENCE

your
silence
unnerves
me

have you
left me
again?

how many
times
can you
leave?

Lisa de Nikolits is the award-winning author of The Hungry Mirror and West Of Wawa. Her third novel with Inanna, A Glittering Chaos, was released in Spring of 2013.

MARION MUTALA

It was really nothing

Was it the remote thrown through the TV that did it?
Naw, too drastic
Was it my birthday present concert ticket that you gave away to
a brother you dislike?
Nope, too unbelievable
How about the hole in the bathroom wall or in the bedroom door?
Never, much too crazy
Or the constant fighting and bickering with my children?
No, way too childish
Or, how about my 11 year old calling 911
when you and my 13 year old
were fighting over what TV show to watch?
Never, too stupid
Tell me, what was it you asked?
Why are we divorcing?
After ten long years
What was it?
Really, do you need to ask?
Come on now, get real
Do you really need to fricking ask, hey?
The answer is quite explicitly obvious, you jerk
You figure it out,
I told my lawyer
It was nothing, really nothing
Nothing at all

Marion Mutala has a Masters degree in education administration and taught for 30 years. With a mad passion for the arts, she loves to write, folkdance, sing, play guitar, flower garden, travel, and read. Her two bestselling, award-winning books, Baba's Babushka: A Magical Ukrainian Christmas and Baba's Babushka: A Magical Ukrainian Easter are followed by the soon to be released Baba's Babushka: A Magical Ukrainian Wedding.