

Power Moves and Pans

by Helen Miele

Sitting at opposite sides of the table, both nursing a cup of tea, it was clear that the first woman was there to blow off steam, while the second was her captive audience.

“I mean, where to start?” said the first woman. Without waiting for a suggestion about where to start, she continued. “The dishwasher. According to him I have never, NEVER, stacked it correctly. If I rinse things first, I’m not allowing the dishwasher to do its job properly, if I don’t, I’m clogging up the pipes. The plates should load this way, this cup should go next to that cup. You get the picture?”

“I do,” said the second woman.

“You have zero grasp of the architecture of stacking a dishwasher,” he once told me. Well excuse me for not having a dishwasher degree! You might be thinking well at least he does the dishes, what a great husband, but no, this is coming from a man who frequently abandons greasy dishes in the sink to soak ‘til the water is cold, never venturing near them again. Guess who has to sort it out?” She slurped her tea, laden with three sugars and milk, then sat back, folding her arms somewhere between her chin and her chest, her expression a mix of contempt and weary defiance.

Another mouthful of tea then she leaned forward again, conspiratorially, “and then there’s the wet towels. Dumped, on the floor, the bed, the sofa, anywhere except a towel hook. I’ve got up from Inspector Morse thinking I’ve gone incontinent, not realising it’s because a towel’s been living there for most of the day.”

The young man hovering nearby appeared to stifle a snigger.

“Yes, but back to the kitchen...” ventured the second woman.

“The kitchen, god. The pans! Oh my god the pans. I’m sooooo grateful,” she said, arms outstretched in mock enthusiasm, “that he occasionally deigns to empty the dishwasher. Except he absolutely never returns the pans to the cupboard. The nearest they ever get is loitering directly *beneath* the cupboard. They are ALWAYS left on the worktop under the pan cupboard! I timed myself putting them away once and it took me 41 seconds for three pans. But heaven forbid that he invests even a fraction of his precious time to actually put them IN the cupboard. His time is, of course, much more valuable than mine,” leaning in again she confided, “it’s all about power you know.”

Taking advantage of another swig of tea, the second woman interjected “yes, but Saturday in the kitchen...”

“Hmm. Well,” said the first woman, peering into her cup as if the rest of her story was written there.

Reaching over and softly touching her arm, the second woman suggested, “how about another cup of tea?” and gestured ‘same again’ to the young man.

“I was shattered and sleep deprived – I very often am. Thirty-five years I’ve had of his snoring, and when I say snoring I mean like a malfunctioning foghorn screaming at a gang of warthogs. And nearly every morning for 35 long years I have tolerated him whining about being so tired because he always has too much on his mind to sleep. As if he somehow carries all the burdens of the world! Well he seems to be enjoying a pretty hefty slumber during all my hours lying there wide-eyed in the dark. Honestly, sometimes my tiredness hurts so much it keeps me awake, if you know what I mean.”

The second woman nodded and opened her mouth to speak.

“Yes, yes, I know what you’re going to say – I’m getting to it.” She held a finger in the air to pause time while sipping at her freshly delivered tea.

“I had just endured the latest replay of his exhausting night.” She rolled her eyes. “Not that I asked of course, but it’s vital I get that information daily so I’m fully aware of the hardships of his very important life. I simply gritted my teeth as usual and ignored his ‘poor me’ performance. I was about to switch on the Hoover – pity I hadn’t done so a few seconds earlier really, ha! – and took the opportunity to broach the subject of getting a new one. The thing about this one is that it’s corded you see and keeps getting tangled around the furniture. Wilma three doors down has got this swanky new cordless one and she says it’s made vacuuming a breeze. Almost a pleasure she says. So anyway, I dared to mention to the king of the world ‘any chance of getting a cordless Hoover?’ to which he gives me one of his looks and replies there’s no way *he’s* going to pay for a new Hoover because – get this – “*you’re the one who uses it.*”

She flung up her hands in a dramatic display of frustration, then seeing her tea drinking companion about to open her mouth again, hastily continued. “A number of years ago, to keep myself sane during the unrelenting, self-pitying bellyaching and condescending scoldings due to Rules I Have Not Followed Correctly I began imagining taking a frying pan to his head, Tom and Jerry style. Y’know, a satisfying cartoon boiiiiiiiiinnnnng and his head would stretch out to a frying pan shape then ping back again? Well before I knew what I was doing I picked up an actual frying pan – which conveniently had been left on the worktop – and found myself swinging it with all the passion of Andy Murray taking a winning volley at Wimbledon”. She paused and gave a hollow laugh. “Turns out however it was nothing like a cartoon and I’ve been left with a bit of a mess.”

The second woman nodded, sympathetically it seemed, and motioned again to the loitering young man.

“Doris Anne Swift, you are being charged with the murder of Gilbert Arthur Swift on Saturday the 8th of June 2024...”

Taking one last sip of her tea as the young PC stepped towards her with the handcuffs, Doris slumped back in her seat and let out a resigned sigh. “Bastard,” she muttered.