**Flash Fiction – June 2024 “Marriage”**

The Winner …..

**TRANSPORTATIONS OF DELIGHT (by V Watkins)**

*Hello, nice to meet you, and how do you do?*

Good heavens, good gracious, my wish has come true!

*I’m sorry, excuse me, I was being polite...*

Oh no, not at all, this is such a delight!

I have dreamt of this moment for such a long time.

And now here you are! The stars have aligned!

I simply must ask you - you’ll quite understand,

I think I might swoon - will you please take my hand?

*Oh dear! Are you ill? Do you need to sit down?*

*And I’m sure we’ve not met, though I’ve seen you around...*

No, I’m head over heels, you surely must see!

My heart’s all a-flutter when you stand next to me!

*Is that how you feel? But whatever’s the fuss?*

*I’m just standing here in the queue for the bus!*

Ah, now it’s the bus, but first the train station -

That was the start of my true admiration.

When I saw you that day, it was love at first sight,

And I’ve dreamt of you since then, by day and by night.

Your smile, it brought me such anticipation;

I hadn’t the nerve to strike up conversation,

But then, on the train, when you sat in my carriage

Oh such sweet rapture! My thoughts turned to marriage!

*How flattering, but really, this is quite unexpected!*

*Are you sure your devotions aren’t a tad misdirected?*

*And while, on the face of it, you do seem quite charming,*

*I must say, your advances are somewhat alarming!*

Of course, silly me, I’ve come on too strong.

It’s just that these feelings, I’ve had them so long!

*This is a little awkward, but take my advice:*

*Keep those thoughts to yourself, put those feelings on ice!*

Bear with me a moment, before I’m preempted -

Let’s tie the knot! Oh, don’t say you’re not tempted!

For richer, for poorer, for better, for worse...

*Now, if you ask me, that sounds like a curse!*

Take the smooth with the rough, when the going gets tough...

*Well now, that’s quite enough! Why don’t you get stuffed?!*

Just picture our bliss, when we’re forever wed,

Those long lazy mornings, that soft feather bed...

*Your overtures and undertones leave me unimpressed -*

*It’s a cold day in hell ’fore you’ll see* ***me*** *get undressed!*

My sweetheart, my treasure, please make me complete,

And let me just sweep you up right off your feet!

(Forgive me, I must catch my breath for a second -

I find that you weigh a bit more than I’d reckoned...)

*Put me down, I insist! Now you’ve quite crossed the line!*

*Take this slap on the wrist as a very clear sign!*

*Right, I’ll be off now. Carry on if you must,*

*You can stand there all day, but here comes my bus!*

Marry me, dearest? Give us our best shot?

*Well, on the whole, dahlink, I rather think... not!*

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**And the runners-up ……..**

**The Right One by Boo Buchanan**

I’ve been trying to make Love, and later marriage, work since I was first taken over by Hollywood romance: passionate conflict, miraculous coincidences, falling in love, and a happy ending. I soon realised that that was what I wanted, and I saw no reason to wait till I was grown up.

I started by choosing my priorities: poetry not comics, kiss-chase not football. And soon enough, life heard my call and I got my opportunity. I was five and a half, standing by our yard fence, heart melting as I listened to Mary Lacey on the other side singing a wonderful Irish ballad. And I knew that she was the one. So I climbed up on a dustbin as she finished with a perfect ten second note that made the larks jealous. I smiled at her, she smiled back, and I said a line stolen from a movie, “Oh Mary, please be mine?” And my heart beat hard as I waited for her to slowly turn, raise her eyes to look at me, and say, “Feck off ya daft twat!” Instantly I knew that Mary wasn’t the one; the girl of my dreams wouldn’t ever be so crude.

I had to think, so I jumped down off the bin, went inside and pulled out a notepad and pen. Before I could write my thoughts I noticed a picture on the cover - a pretty picture-pattern made of flowers and hearts, drawn by Jane Lacey, Mary’s younger sister. And it was obvious that Jane had to be the one no cruel, crude words from her. I looked out of my bedroom window and there she was in their back garden, picking flowers. Aaah... It couldn’t wait, she had to know what I knew. So I swung open my bedroom window, climbed out onto our garage roof, and whistled. It worked, Jane looked up at me and smiled, “What d’you want Benny?” What should I reply? No time to be careful. So I threw my arms wide open and, for the first, but not the last time in my life, I called out, “Will you marry me?” Jane gave me a very strange look which I decided must be the look of girls when they’re falling in love. I was about to add to my proposal, when Jane looked at her watch and said, “Meet me by our side entrance at half past,” and she went inside.

I’d never been so excited. I jumped down, went to our kitchen and counted the minutes. Then it was time, and in those last seconds, as I opened next door’s side gate, I stepped through and I saw stars. Jane had whacked my face with a plank of wood.

Did these first encounters put me off? No, so many times I thought I’d found “The Right One,” and the bloody nose at the age of five was just the the start of my pain.

**An invitation by Stewart Devitt**

The invitation lay on the table.

“Robert Keyes and Claire Clarke invite you to celebrate their marriage at 12.30 on 12th July at the Civic Centre, Hawksby”

It has been a long time since I received such an invitation and I thought the world had moved on from holding such ceremonies. More meaningful in the past they were usually fun occasions; great days out with fine food and conversations and loads of photographs. My wedding was an exception; it had been a civil ceremony and there was a reliance on a freelance photographer to take a series of photos. Having selected half a dozen when we went to see them, we were told we had to purchase all or nothing. So, it was nothing!

The wedding in Wales was memorable, full of family fun and happiness and the first time I tasted pink champagne; lots of it. There have been a few other outings over the years although the details of most of them have been lost to my memory; that is all but our visit to Whakatāne in the north island of New Zealand. It was an informal affair, as befits the rural location with the ceremony held in a field on the grounds of the village hall. I well remember the photographs there as the sheep in the background vied with the happy couple to get prime space in the pictures.

I vaguely recall an occasion when I turned up late for the rituals, having walked out on an important business meeting to honour my commitment. On reflection, I think it might have been for a funeral rather than a wedding. These days it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two especially as there is often more laughter and good storytelling at the former. In truth, it has been a considerable time since I have attended either and I am not sure if I still have appropriate clothing. Politely declining the invitation might be the best option, especially as transport will be a problem for me.

A dollop of melted butter dropped right on top of the invitation and slowly spread out on the white background easing its way out until stopped by a ridged gold border. Pushing the invitation out of the way and watching the butter congeal reminded me of the stag night before Richard’s wedding when we indulged in a game of British Bulldogs. Lots of activity, darting here and there and then getting caught in a snare. Or perhaps you were lucky and found a gap escaping the sea of arms. Like the little clot of butter now on the floor nestling against the table leg. Richard's future in-laws were not entirely happy, although I guess it was not the first time someone with a broken leg walked up the aisle.

It is quiet now and the table is clear, the invitation has been taken away. Matron says I have got to stop opening the Colonel’s mail.

**Summing up by Julie Forester**

At my daughter’s wedding reception, the best man asked ‘how do you sum up a marriage?’ I held my hanky to my eyes and calculated that if people asked me that, I’d stick with numbers, like which year was the wedding, and how long we were married.

When we got married, oh so long ago, the ceremony was in the dead time between Christmas and New Year, because that was the only time we had to book a venue before Joe’s work sent him abroad again, and if we weren’t married, then I wouldn’t be allowed to stay in the flat the company provided.

I didn’t say that when I look back at it now I think ‘why get married just for an economic reason?’ but that was then, when I wanted to be a ‘Mrs’.

It was a church wedding: I still clung to the traditions of my childhood, of going to Sunday school and then later, singing in the church choir. The minister talked to us about marriage being a sacred union, and was there any reason why we should not get married?

I didn't say it at Sally’s wedding, but back then when the minister asked me, I thought, ‘well, I already know the worst that it could be’. Joe had already hit me, but only the one time. I thought it wouldn’t happen again.

Another warning light, my mind says now; why did I go on? I thought I loved him, is the only answer I can come up with.

Nobody else can tell, from the outside, what a marriage is like from the inside. They don’t get to see most of it, like they don’t get to see the bruises, because those are covered up with make-up, or long sleeves and trousers. Most of the time, people see what they want to, anyway. They don’t want to enquire too closely. They certainly don’t want to know about being locked in a room and having your paper money and credit cards cut up to limit your escape options.

 So, the summing up of a marriage, that I didn’t spell out to anyone at that later wedding? (Because nobody asked me; after all, my husband was dead, and who wants a spectre at the feast?) For me the honest version was ‘time passing, but you’re still in the same place, because you’re still shackled together’.  But that’s not what people want to hear. If they’re single, they want to be convinced that there is a perfect ‘other half’ out there somewhere, just for them, their soul mate. And if they’re already married, they still want to believe that happiness is within reach, in the shape of the life partner they signed up with.

So when I killed Joe, I didn't kill him with kindness. It was my Valium and his alcohol that did it. Marriage can be a wonderful thing, but not if you want out and your partner won’t let you.