

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/3

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THE HANGING

"THE PICTURE JUST HAS TO GO," my sister says on the phone and I can almost see her pouting. "I can't have it on the wall when you walk in. It's massive. It's the first thing you see at the top of the stairs."

"Oh, actually I never noticed." I lie.

"How could you not?" she screams as I try to hold the phone away from my ear.

"It's huge and the frame is sooo old-fashioned."

"But it's his mother." I say of her latest guy, the one I think this time is 'the one'. "So, he loved his mother. After all, she *is* gone."

"Well, so what? It doesn't have to be the first thing you see."

After a useless attempt at trying to persuade her that a mother's picture is a real, touchy subject, she hangs up.

A week later she is still complaining. "I told him he has to move that picture."

The fighting becomes more frequent. He tells her how since her death his mother's picture was always hanging wherever he was living.

She calls. "It's not like I'm telling him to put the picture of his father someplace else. At least it's smaller and the frame is black—just plain black."

"But you have to respect his feelings too," I tell her.



"Well, it's not my mother. I want to decorate really chic—you know—black, white, grays. It's the 'in' thing. The picture just doesn't go! You know, it would really look better in your place with all those antiques."

I don't know how to respond except to tell her she's nuts so I don't answer.

"He told me how immature *I'm* being. Can you imagine? And he's the one with the mother thing."

I try to put my gear into neutral but it's becoming more difficult. "After all, it's his place too, you know."

"You just don't get it," she says and hangs up.

Actually, I do get it, being the older sister and having grown up with her.

He calls.

I tell him how I hate being in the middle.

He says he understands and thanks me for listening.

She calls. "Some loyalty. I thought you were *my* sister."

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"I am, but what's fair is fair."

"Nothing's fair in love and decorating."

He calls. "I don't believe how stubborn she's being."

She calls. "I didn't know he was so stubborn."

I start looking at caller ID before I answer.

Finally, I pick up. Her tone is lighter. "He's agreed to move the picture."

"Really, to where?"

"The only other place with a free wall—the bedroom."

I know this is not going to be good.

"Can you imagine having sex with his mother's picture overlooking us?"

What can I say? "Well, then why don't you just leave it where it is?"

Apparently, that's not an option.

He calls. "I moved the picture. I can't stand the fighting anymore."

"Well, where is it now?"

"I put it in the bedroom."

She calls. "Well, he did move it, but I can't have sex with his mother staring down at us in her wedding dress."

I'm really annoyed and don't hold back. "Well, what did you expect? He's not getting rid of it, so just live with it!"

"I just can't have it in the bedroom."

He calls. "She hates it in the bedroom."

"I know."

Three weeks later she tells me they're fighting over almost everything. He plays the TV too loud. She hates his messy desk. He over-feeds the bird. She over-feeds the cat.

She tells him he has an Oedipus complex and he gets so angry he calls her a castrating bitch before he takes his pillow and sleeps on the couch with the cat licking his face all night. In the morning when he wakes, he's the one with the fur balls in his throat.

"What about the picture?" I'm almost afraid to ask.

"I told him he *has* to take it out of the bedroom. We haven't had sex in weeks."

He calls. "Well, guess what? It's not in the bedroom anymore."

"Really, so where is it?"

"In the hallway near the bathroom."

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I mumble something he doesn't seem to hear which is fine because I think I said *schmuck* but mean it affectionately, of course.

"Whenever I come out of the bathroom it's so dark I carry a flashlight if I want to get a good look."



Two months later they break up.

She wants the dining room set and, because they chipped in, so does he. He insists on keeping two of the six chairs. She takes the satiny black comforter and white shams. He gets the king size bed which was his anyway and the old couch that she hated. She gets to keep the cat and the microwave and he gets the bird they both hated.

Carefully, he wraps his mother's picture in the crossword section of the NY Times she hasn't finished yet. She leaves first while he stands on a step-stool trying to spackle all the holes in the walls.



A few days later he calls. "I'm looking for a place, but was wondering if you would consider renting out a room in your place. Just for a few weeks. What do you think?"

"Well..."

I can't think of a way to tell him there's a question of loyalty to my sister. And besides where would I put that bird and, of course, the massive picture of his mother?