

There are Ants in my Sugar

ONE

KILLING ME WITH KULTURE

“Let me put this politely,” snarled my dearest friend. “You are fucking mad to do it.” His quarter-inch high haircut was emitting sparks.

“That’s the polite version?” I sniffed. “Where’s the cream? These scones are evil.”

“Don’t try and change the subject,” Harry told me heatedly. “I warned you not to marry him, then you did. I told you not to breed — and you did!” He rolled his eyes “Now you’re going to go and squat in a squalid hovel in a poor-white slum!” His voice had been rising excitedly and it cracked with a squawk on this last word.

He glared at me accusingly. “You’ll be the only English people for miles, in the middle of a lot of hairy *Rocks*¹ in crimplene² and curlers. You’ll never make it out of there alive — they’ll kill you slowly with crocheted toilet seat covers and ... and Rock kulture—”

“Being racist now,” I murmured mildly, licking a drip of jam off my thumb. “And you’re exaggerating madly.”

“Oh, no I’m not,” he reared up, racist fangs visibly growing three inches. “The South is where all the survivors of the Anglo-Boer War are holed up — rabid Afrikaners.”

He patted an agitated hand over his quivering hair, the way one would calm a small pet. “And you can’t even speak Afrikaans. They’ll massacre you —”

“Harry, it’s the sixties! The Anglo-Boer War didn’t even happen in our lifetime!” I was frowning ferociously at him. “You

¹ Colloquial English derogatory term for Afrikaans people

² South Africa’s sartorial fabric shame

1 and 2: See End Notes for more detail

are being utterly ridiculous. I can't sit here and let you talk such drivel —"

"Darling," he groaned, running both hands through his hair in theatrical anguish, "don't do it."

I stared in distraction at his hair; it was standing straight up on end. I could feel the beginnings of a shuddering, huge sigh take hold of me. And then I was helplessly listening again to the previous evening's astonishing conversation.

"I've found this great place in the country, Rustic, you know," the husband informed me exuberantly over dinner.

"Rustic ...?" I'd inquired cautiously.

"Back to the earth!" he'd enthused. "You can start a garden from scratch!"

I recall a vigorous chill fingered my spine right there, like a prescient pickpocket lightly brailing one's purse.

"Have you quite forgotten that I loathe gardening?" said I, strident with sudden distress.

"All those worms. And mud under your nails. Much better for Karen — all that fresh air. Growing up away from the city." He hugged our eighteen month-old daughter, who grinned toothlessly and traitorously up at him.

"What are you thinking?" Harry demanded suspiciously. His fingers were twitching the buttons of his cerise waistcoat; it would be undone soon, a sure sign of stress. Then he would unknot his tie. His ring would come off next, then his watch —

I shrugged helplessly.

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“A girl’s survival instructions, you know? They’re written on the inside of our foreheads at birth: marry a rich guy. I did. And I wasn’t just being predatory — I do love him.” I looked up at Harry, aggrieved, “So what went wrong here?”

“Yes, yes, but he didn’t stay rich,” Harry pointed out unnecessarily, unbuttoning his collar. “And he’s fifty-two and you’re twenty one, come on —”

“Oh, who’s counting? This can work.”

“Face it, he’s a nut. All these fantastic ideas he’s working on, he’s going to make millions — meanwhile he’s broke! He’s not rational.”

A picture of the ultra-fit, turbo-charged tennis fiend of two years before misted up my vision. This eccentric inventor who drove a Vintage Rolls Bentley — I mean, wasn’t that original? Who else do you know who is a self-employed inventor? He owned a string of rent-paying properties and dressed in tailored suits and took me dancing four or five times a week. “As soon as I’ve finished development on this project, I’m taking a year off, going overseas. Italy, France ... come with me?”

You see what I mean? He sounded highly rational and definitely to be snapped up directly.

“Oh hell,” I groaned, “who was to know his project would bomb like that?”

“Or that your house would be almost completely burgled, down to your clothes and the linen off the beds and that you wouldn’t have insurance,” Harry’s voice was rising. “And that you would land up married, parents and broke!” He ripped his tie off. “No-one needed a crystal ball to see this coming!”

I looked up bemusedly at him. He'd kicked off his shoes now. I'd have to do something to prevent a complete strip.

"It's not as though I'm just a tenant, you know. I'm married to him. And we have a child —"

"I believe I just mentioned these two lamentable facts."

"So what do I say — Garth, sorry your luck went sour. Karen and I are bailing out —?"

"Yes," agreed Harry swiftly. "That's exactly what you say. And come and live with me."

"Oh and Tony wouldn't mind that!" I snorted. "Thank you, my love, but I can't do that to you."

Harry's face tightened.

"Tony and I ... it's probably over," he gritted out. "I caught him tomcatting."

He looked up wryly, "Gay boys are evolutionarily frozen in the Hunter stage. We just can't stay home and look after the dogs."

He grinned a wan little grin, trying to lift the mood. "That's why you and I should set up house together; then we'd always have each other to come home to."

I smiled at him.

"I'd be a great daddy for Karen —" he added longingly.

"You're sweet." I kissed his ear.

"You do know you are making a mistake don't you?" Harry muttered into his coffee mug. "He's probably dragging you out to

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some mouldy hencoop without lights or water. And it's got a long drop³. With spiders," he added morosely.

"Harry, you're being medieval! Places like that don't exist anymore —"

"A-ha, you haven't even seen it! Doesn't that worry you?"

"This is just a temporary setback," I told him firmly. "We are going to flee into the rustic hinterland for a short while to economize and regroup. And we'll go to France next year."

"Beware temporary solutions; they turn into permanent addresses," Harry observed avuncularly.

He slumped his head into his hands with a small groan. "Oh Lord, I'm having a psychic moment. Here's the future Mrs Foxcroft, her crimplene mini two sizes too small, third child on the way, hair still in curlers and she's cooking the evening meal —*stywe pap en wors*⁴ — with yet another *klippies en coke*⁵ —"

"You're a rat!" I punched his arm. "I'm not having an identity meltdown — I'm just moving to the countryside. Temporarily!"

Harry looked up manically, arms outstretched like a monster tarantula homing in on me. "With temporary spiders and scorpions and snakes!"

"Er," I considered this scenario for the first time. How had I avoided remembering about all the ghastly wildlife in the country — them ... you know, live and let live —?"

³ Outside toilet positioned over a deep hole

⁴ Stiff maize meal porridge and stewed, savoury country sausage; a rural culinary staple

⁵ Brandy and coke; Klipdrift brandy, a firm beverage favourite in South Africa

“Yeh, like the Apartheid⁶ myth,” he drawled. “Snakes better stay in their allotted snake township, and if they venture out we’ll thrash them into oblivion.” He stood up slowly. “I can see I am going to have to kiss you goodbye while I can still recognize you.”

⁶ This needs no footnote. South Africa is famous for Apartheid and boerewors