

# LIFE WITHOUT GEORGE

by

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The thing that shocked Emily was how incredibly easy it was to hide a murder.

Thirty years of marriage, and not a single person doubted that George had left her for another woman. Frankly, it stunned her. It even made her a tich angry.

“Poor Em,” said Dennis from next door. “George is a jerk, everyone knows that.”

“And Em-” Charlene shook her head,. “ – well, you know how she got...let herself go. And he was at that dangerous age....probably some floosy he met down south.”

So when Emily came back from Mexico alone, looking painfully sorrowful, people just shook their heads. When she put the house up for lease and put on a brave face, everyone said, “Good for Em!”

No one was at all surprised when she moved from Hamilton to Oakville. Poor girl had to get away from all the memories. And if she bought a swank new secluded townhouse, no one thought to ask where she got all the money to do this. No one visited, because who wanted to be with an overweight, broken-hearted, middle-aged woman?

But they didn’t know it all. They didn’t know that for many years, Em had been dreaming about money...that if she could ever get her hands on enough of it, she would leave George.

Then one day last April, it occurred to her that it would be infinitely more convenient if George left her.

For Emily had a secret vice: she bought lottery tickets. She bought them weekly with the grocery money, so George wouldn't know. Easy to slip one in with the eggs and butter and ground beef. It made shopping a pleasure, thinking of all the places she would travel to when the lottery dream came true. England, France, Italy....maybe even Greece and Egypt, in winter. Places she could never go now, because George always insisted they vacation down south where he could sail.

Last April, an innocuous little piece of paper struck pay dirt. Now she would be able to go to Europe. But first, she would take one last vacation with George.

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They had been in Mexico five days before Emily took steps. Plenty of time to plan the situation, allow for contingencies, and generally relish the anticipation. On the sixth morning, Em went down to the beach early, to arrange for the day's rental. George always left the mundane clerical arrangements to her. "You go, Em. I've got to finish the business section."

For years she had resented always being the one to phone for reservations, deal with contractors, argue with the phone company. Today however, she was rather glad to be making arrangements, to be the 'face' of the couple that was Em and George.

Later, out at sea, Em waited for the right moment.

"Something's wrong with the engine. Take the tiller, Em."

She dutifully moved from her seat and watched him bend over the motor. In her hand, was a paddle. She aimed, so that the blow would take him over the transom. It did.

So easy, and no blood at all. She threw the paddle in after him.

Years of assisting with boats had made her a competent sailor. No trouble at all to sail the boat back to port. The beach was busy now with half naked young bodies

grilling under the sun; nobody noticed Emily as she carefully docked the boat and reported back to the hotel marina.

“Mister Harper enjoy the sail today?” the marina manager asked.

“Oh yes,” she said cheerfully, “We both did.”

“Sorry to see you leave Paradise Landing,” the big man said. “You’ve been good customers.”

“We’ll be back next year,” Em replied, knowing full well they wouldn’t.

The plane trip back to Canada was peaceful, with the empty seat beside her. She put George’s wallet and passport in a plastic bag. At the airport in Toronto, she dumped the plastic bag in the bathroom in the women’s loo.

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George eventually washed up on shore, but by that time, various body parts had been munched away. The local fisherman who found the body checked for a wallet. No wallet, no cash in the pockets. Totally disappointing, and as the fellow wanted no trouble, he threw the body back in, only this time weighted down with a few rocks.

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The biggest problem Emily had was getting rid of his clothes. Closets’ full, and not inexpensive, they were. George had always found reason to spend money on himself. “Gotta look successful in this business, Em.”

She packed up the best things, and put them in a suitcase. The rest, she bundled up for Goodwill. She made a point of telling the couple next door.

“George wants me to forward these on to him, but to hell with that. I’ll give him three months. If he can’t be bothered to pick them up, off they go to charity.”

“Poor Em,” Charlene said to her husband later. “George doesn’t want to face her, is all.”

Dennis merely shook his head. Best the pathetic woman leave them all alone.

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Emily made lots of friends in Oakville. At the University Women's Club, she met like-minded women – clever women who helped her settle in to the city. As money was no object, she could do whatever jaunts they suggested. Life without George was infinitely better.

Three months went by quickly. She thought about joining E-Harmony, but then realized that she was having more fun with her women-friends than she ever did with men. Besides, if she met a man, she would end up having to share her money, and then it would be *his* money and *his* choices of what to do with it. No, she was happier without a man.

She had never been happier, in fact. Except for the suitcase.

It sat in the second bedroom closet and haunted her. Like an Edgar Allen Poe story come to life, that suitcase called to her every time she climbed the stairs to the second floor. Damn the Hugo Boss suit, and the bespoke shirts.

Early one rainy Sunday, Em decided to do something about it. She would take George's BMW to that mission downtown, and leave the suitcase on the step with a note: 'Help yourself. My husband cheated on me so I'm giving away his clothes.'

Did he cheat on her? Em wasn't sure. Certainly he traveled a lot in those last few years. Maybe it wasn't fair to say he cheated on her. But perhaps she could justify it with the thought that he cheated her out of happiness. Cheated her out of years of pleasure and love.

She brought the suitcase out of the closet and placed it in the front hall. She was just about to drag it down the eight concrete steps to the street when the doorbell buzzed. Em stopped. It buzzed again, insistently, like a hundred wasps.

Em opened the door. A thirty-ish woman stood on the top step and walked right in like she was appraising the place for market.

“Hey, pretty spiff digs here. I like the hardwood floors. Okay, where is the son of a bitch? Where’s George?”

Em stood with her mouth open. Who was this creature from the pages of Fashion Magazine?

“Guess you’re the wife. You look just like he described.” It didn’t sound like a compliment.

“And you are...?” A younger version of me, Em thought suddenly. Yes, that was it - a clone of me from twenty years ago. There was something gratifying about that, in a remarkably perverse way.

“So is the son of a bitch here?”

Em shook her head. “He left me three months ago.” The words just kind of popped out.

“Get outta town! He left you too. What, some other broad?”

Em hesitated, then nodded. This was the story she had put about. What remarkable lunacy to hear it flung back at her now by this woman.

Caramel blond hair she had, and a good figure. Predatory eyes. Didn’t seem college educated, but to a man like George, that wasn’t a deal-breaker.

“Do you know, the bastard hasn’t sent me a cheque in three months?”

So, not just a cheater – a bigamist of sorts. She wanted to laugh. Poor George, trying to keep two households going. No wonder he was such a skinflint. Really, life without George was so much simpler.

“Hey, that’s his suitcase! I recognize it - what are you doing with his suitcase?”

Em looked down. That damned suitcase. She thought quickly. “He asked me to forward it to the hotel.”

“What?” The blond was derisive. “And you’re doing it? So he can be with some slag in a hotel? Are you out of your mind?”

Em stared. It was really quite funny, if you could divorce yourself from the emotion. This woman, calling the fictitious ‘other’ a slag.

“Well, he’s not getting away with it. No sir, I’m not gonna let it happen, the two-timing son of a bitch.”

“Three-timing,” Em said under her breath. She was quite enjoying this now.

“Here, gimme that suitcase.” Blondie gestured with her hand. “I’m gonna deliver it to him myself. Deliver it and brain the bastard.”

Too late, already done, Em thought. She felt the hysteria building. It was all she could do to keep down a giggle.

“What hotel is he at?”

Silence.

“Come on! Give. What hotel? I can find out easily enough.”

No you can’t, thought Em. And that was precisely the problem. Emily made a sudden, reckless decision.

“Paradise Landing, Acapulco.” Her voice was breathy.

“I’ll send him to Paradise myself when I get my hands on him,” muttered Blondie. “The fucking bastard. Just what the hell am I supposed to do, with a two-year-old, and another on the way?”

The words hit like a strike to the face. This woman had children... his children. Em stared at the female before her, the one with a family. All these years, Em had wanted a family. It didn’t happen.

She felt ill.

She felt hate.

The woman continued to bitch, and Em's mind spun fast-forward. It was inevitable. Blondie would go down to Mexico, and find out George was supposed to be back here. Then she would raise a ruckus. Em sighed. She tried to feel sorry, but there was only one logical step forward.

"I'll help you with the suitcase," Em said, picking it up. "You get the door."

Blondie turned, opened the door and stepped out on the porch. The suitcase hit the back of her legs with more than enough force; a slight ooph, and the body went over, tumbling down the slippery concrete steps like a pumpkin with bandy legs. In a moment, all was quiet. The body twitched twice, then fell still.

Em stared down the steps and shook her head. Stupid, stupid woman. Why couldn't she just accept that life was better without George?

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