

It Ended with Worcestershire
ly NGUYEN

It was an early evening in November when he began to notice that his trousers were ill-fitting. His waistline had shrunk considerably over the past couple of months, although Janson was always rather thin. This fact was suddenly startling to him and had diverted all of his attention, so that he did not notice that his wife, too, had emptied her sewing kit of all the safety pins to pin back her dresses and slacks, now a size too large. In those times, he blamed her for their accidental diet. She hadn't a home-making bone in her body and yet could never hold a job. He felt sorry for her and that's exactly how he felt when he placed the gold wedding band on her finger at the altar.

Janson looked at her now, with something of disdain, with her eyeglasses on so she could watch her rotten game shows. He said, "I'm going out to get my belt notched or who knows, maybe get a whole damned new belt while I'm at it. And whatever happened to that cooking course you were taking at the YMCA? Aren't you supposed to be there now?"

He thought about how he had funded so many of her so-called hobbies, one of which was her failed attempt at going back to college. Before then, Janson wouldn't have thought twice about her integrity to finish up her education, but midway through the semester she had gotten bored, he saw, and only passed one class of the three she was supposedly attending. After that, Janson was left with the responsibility of paying for her carelessness and gained a slight annoyance whenever she was around. But to please her, now and then, he would allow her to take an introductory class in some field he felt she could enjoy, but would also secretly improve her lack of domesticity.

His wife didn't look up from the television set, but merely responded by asking, "Will you get me a case of safety pins if you're going to be out anyway?"

He pursed his lips and grabbed his keys more violently than he intended and the teeth of them cut into his hand, causing him to drop them noisily on the hardwood floor. Janson heard her shush him from the other room. It was the final bonus round, he knew; he could tell by the familiar melody coming from the television. He cursed under his breath and slammed the door on his way out.

He knew it was getting bad when he enjoyed staying late after work. As Janson slowly detached from any interest in his wife or any words she spoke, he found comfort in the camaraderie of his colleagues. They all agreed with him, saw his side of things, and even suggested he was some sort of saint for staying with her, or at least for maintaining fidelity. Packing up and leaving, he thought about every second he had alone, but Janson knew he could never bring himself to solicit the sexual effects of another woman.

THE 2010 ANALECTA

He drove to the hardware store in the tiny strip mall that their modest city had to offer. Janson quickly found what he was looking for, a belt-notcher, but stayed longer to linger a while in the store. He examined various tools and equipment with fake intent to buy so that he could feel at place amidst all of the gung-ho home-improvers and truck-driving handymen in the store. Janson had always liked places like this, where most things were foreign to him, but this somehow deepened his desire to know all of these tools by name, size, and function.

Janson approached the check out lane and inquisitively studied the young teenage girl that was stationed there, chewing gum and solely immersed in the National Geographic article she was reading. It was about carnivorous arctic wolves that inhabit the tundra and the cover showed a pack of snow-white beasts feasting on the bright red remains of a fallen caribou. Janson's thoughts lapsed back to his dull wife again. He found himself constantly comparing her to everyone he saw, no matter where he went to avoid her.

"Why couldn't she be like this girl," Janson dimly thought, "bright and young, willing to digest an article that doesn't include anyone famous or any self-improvement tips. Janson cleared his throat to get the clerk's attention and he had to do it a second time for it to fully register with the girl.

She smiled and said, "Forgive me."

After he had gotten what he needed and had nowhere else to go, he decided to drive around a bit more. Janson stopped at a county park and went for a walk along the town's dingy river. He kept his head low and trampled leaves as he trudged down a sidewalk near the embankment, occasionally looking up to acknowledge joggers involved with their fleeting motivation. He didn't know why he always wanted to be alone and not in the suffocating company of others when he felt annoyed and had to get away from his wife. It would have been simpler and more effective to call up a buddy and have a few beers to take his mind off his deteriorating home life, yet Janson always found himself in solitude, creating ample time to mull over his condition.

"So much for misery loving company," he thought. "My misery thrives on loneliness and prospers in isolation. Misery isn't the worst thing that can happen to a person, but it sure does its job of emptying all desire." This thought cycled through Janson's mind as he walked through the dormant park. He felt like he was on a broken Ferris wheel. The amusement of going up to the top was no longer exciting, only nauseating with repetition.

It was getting colder and Janson was a good distance away from his car now, so he decided to go back. In the stagnant heat of his car, he couldn't help but bask in his desolation once more. The normal cheerless thoughts came flooding back and he breathed them in like rank air, knowing it would only dry up his insides.

"How many gallons of gas wasted by aimless driving because of her? I could have driven to Monaco and back

THE 2010 ANALECTA

by now,” he muttered to himself, with the radio on so he didn't look neurotic to the other drivers looking in. The only appropriate thing he could think to do was let out a long sigh and that's exactly what Janson did. It did not make him feel any better, simply more stifled. His stomach started to growl and Janson finally started to head in the direction of his home.

This time, he made it to the post office three blocks past his house. The last time, it was the flower shop two doors down. Every time Janson would return from work or from these little trips to get away from his wife's inconsiderate nature, he would urge himself to drive off a little farther, from his house, in hopes of gathering up enough encouragement to drive away for good. But most days, he put his car in reverse and turned around.

But this time, he thought would be the time. This was the farthest he had driven away from his grey, concrete driveway and he certainly could not see his house from three blocks down. He put his car in gear and put more distance between himself and his young, unable wife. Janson nervously laughed to himself, thinking how easy all of this was, to run out on someone he had pledged his whole dear life and death to! He turned up his radio as loud as his ears could stand and didn't bother to check the rearview, for there was nothing worthy left for him to look back upon.

At the first stoplight, he took a right and then at the next stoplight, he took another right. He scolded his hands for disobeying the commands of his brain. Janson was half a block away from his house now, and he could see the dim, yellow glow of the reading lamp turned on in the living room.

“Maybe she's learned,” he wishfully thought, “maybe she's all curled up on the sofa there, reading a good book and not watching those stupid game shows anymore.”

Janson entered through the front door and saw her slim body underneath a throw blanket and she was reading on the couch just as he imagined. His lips faintly curled in a look of amusement and he did not hear his stomach grumble again. She looked up from her reading.

“You're hungry,” she said mildly. “Where have you been, Jan? You've been gone for hours. I've got a plate of food ready for you on the kitchen counter. There's a cold beer in the fridge.”

His eyes opened wider and he scoffed, thinking how impossible all of this was, his whims suddenly unfolding now—but then he saw the cover of the book she was reading and it was one of those sultry detective/crime romances, one of those series that is perpetually continuous, never ending because the author with the bad pen name needed to keep a day job to pay for his child support. His mood plummeted sharply. He glanced at the bookcase behind her and saw all of the great authors he had shelved there, classics and promising contemporaries, but she went out and deliberately purchased that piece of shit novel.

THE 2010 ANALECTA

“It's a meatloaf sandwich made from left-overs,” she continued to say as he shot poison arrows at her in his head. “I made it myself, you know. We didn't have any Worsh-worster—how do you say it— Worcester-“shire” sauce so I put soy sauce in it instead. Tell me if it tastes alright. I didn't eat any because I haven't been wanting to eat meat lately. It's bad on my figure. The sandwich looks okay though, I think.”

This was about the time when Janson wished he would have downed a bottle of whiskey and driven recklessly home. He could have totaled his car into a telephone pole, or better yet, Janson could have ran over an innocent child riding his tricycle that just given to him yesterday for his sixth birthday. He could have panicked and driven away from the scene of the crime. If he was lucky, a cop may have pulled him over for going double the speed limit in a residential area. The policeman would have seen Janson in hysterics and he may have confessed on the spot. Yes, Janson definitely would have confessed then and there. Handcuffs would then chafe his wrists and the policeman would have driven him downtown to a holding cell where he certainly wouldn't have wasted his only call on his miserable wife. Janson would have pled guilty and get a life sentence because to Janson's luck, the judge also had a child slaughtered by a reckless drunk driver in midday. He would have been ecstatic about this because it meant Janson would get to spend the rest of his pathetic life in prison, where his talentless wife wasn't. There would be better meals for one thing.