Live Bait

P J Tracy

Extract

It was just after sunrise and still raining when Lily found her husband's body. He was lying face-up on the asphalt apron in front of the greenhouse, eyes and mouth open, collecting rainwater.

Even dead, he looked quite handsome in this position, gravity pulling back the loose, wrinkled skin of his face, smoothing away eighty-four years of pain and smiles and worries.

Lily stood over him for a moment, wincing when the raindrops plopped noisily onto his eyes.

I hate eye drops.

Morey, hold still. Stop blinking.

Stop blinking, she says, while she pours chemicals into my eyes.

Hush. It's not chemicals. Natural tears, see? It says so right on the bottle.

You expect a blind man to read?

A little grain of sand in your eye and suddenly you're blind. Big, tough guy.

And they're not natural tears. What do they do? Go to funerals and hold little bottles under crying people? No, they mix chemicals together and call it natural tears. It's false advertising, is what it is. These are unnatural tears. A little bottle of lies.

Shut up, old man.

This is the thing, Lily. Nothing should, pretend to be what it's not. Everything should have a big label that says what it is so there's no confusion. Like the fertilizer we used on the bedding plants that year that killed all our ladybugs, what was it called?

Plant So Green.

Right. So it should have been called Plant So Green Ladybug So Dead. Forget the tiny print on the back you can't read. Real truth in labeling, that's what we need. This is a good rule. God should follow such a rule.

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Morey!

What can I say? He made a big mistake there. Would it have been such a problem for Him to make things look like what they are? I mean. He's God, right? This is something He could do. Think about it. You've got a guy at the door with this great smile and nice face and you let him in and he kills your whole family. This is God's mistake. Evil should look evil. Then you don't let it in.

You, of all people, should know it's not that simple.

It's exactly that simple.

Lily took a breath, then sat on her heels—a young posture for such an old woman, but her knees were still good, still strong and flexible. She couldn't get Morey's eyes to close all the way, and with them open only a slit, he looked sinister. It was the first thing that had frightened Lily in a very long time. She wouldn't look at them as she pushed back the darkened silver hair the rain had plastered to his skull.

One of her fingers slipped into a hole on the side of his head and she froze. "Oh, no," she whispered, then rose quickly, wiping her fingers on her overalls.

"I told you so, Morey," she scolded her husband one last time. "I told you so."

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