

*tha was CEO of a chip company and was used to taking charge, especially when drastic measures were required...*”

‘I don’t know if I’m ever going to get into this book,’ Carol said to her husband, as she rested her back against the headboard.

‘Why do people always choose such nonsense?’

Nevertheless, it pleased her to read the transcription that her colleague had written for her. When Marvin didn’t reply, she looked at him. He was engrossed in his novel of war and torture, while playing with his left nipple. She nudged him playfully. When he closed his book and looked at her expectantly she said:

‘Look, I’ll read you this extract, which I’ve just read and we can tell each other, how we think the story will end’. She squinted her eyes at him.

‘You never know, it might help to clarify why we haven’t been getting along well lately. Just humour me for ten minutes and then you can go back to your book.’

Marvin decided for the sake of peace to keep his thoughts to himself. He knew why they hadn’t been compatible lately and it had a lot to do with ending the day by reading in bed. In his mind, there were also much more exciting options they could consider, but nowadays, his wife, Carol, seemed to prefer grabbing her book instead of him. What with her work, her gym evenings and now that bloody book club he was doomed to a life of celibacy. He was beginning to understand the male mid-life crisis.

‘Yes, alright darling. If that pleases you, I’m your man.’

Carol had never been one to pick up on cynicism so she smiled at him, thinking he actually meant what he had said and re-read the passage out loud. When she was done, she closed the book and offered up her version of an ending.

‘I think that Martha falls in love with Jake, while Alexi and

Hans meet each other on a more spiritual level. John will eventually succumb to food-poisoning, caused by the shrimp he ate at his last meal on board. After seven days a navy Destroyer picks them up and returns them to safety. Both couples find the happiness that we had in the beginning of our marriage. Okay, now it's your turn.'

Marvin's anger got the better of him:

'After two days the men forge a plan while the women are asleep. They brutally rape them, first the younger one and then the older one. This nightmare for the women carries on for another three days, until they both die of exhaustion and because of the extensive abuse. When they see a shark's fin some way off, the men slit the women's throats and throw them into the water. The next day they are rescued and they return home to live long and happy lives'.

'What a gruesome, morbid, gross interpretation Marvin. What has happened to you? When did you become so insensitive? Surely there's more to life than animalistic pairing. We're humans not Neanderthals. What is wrong with you?'

'With me? That's a laugh. When was the last time you showed any interest in me, as a man? Your head is so full of that romantic clap-trap you forget that you are also a woman. And what do men and women do? THEY HAVE SEX. Have you got somebody else? Or are you turning frigid in your old age?'

'That's totally unfair Marvin!' Carol threw her book onto the floor and stood up. 'But I'm glad it's all out in the open. I'm going to need a minute,' she added before leaving the bedroom.

Carol went into the bathroom and cried her eyes out for a while. She thought of throwing his deodorant bottle at the mirror, but being a Virgo her rationale overruled her impulse. Returning to bed she sat next to Marvin and laid her hand on his arm.

‘You’re right Marvin. I should have spoken out earlier, but avoidance always seemed preferable to confrontation. Look, I still love you very much, but I don’t feel that it is our sex life, it’s yours. Where is the intimacy? I want to be treated like a woman and... and for you to see me as a woman and not a device. When was the last time you asked me how I felt or even how my day was?’ By this time Carol had started crying again. ‘I want to be desired as a woman, as me Carol. Surely that’s not asking too much? I want us to make love, body and mind and not for you to treat me as a thing. Remember that book we used to read together the first year we were married? It was called: *The Joy of Sex* and not *The Joy of Sex for Men Only*. Your urges have overtaken your desire for me. It’s not the act that matters to me, it is the experience.’

Marvin listened. He knew Carol was right, but because he was still feeling frustrated, he carried on sulking as if his mother had taken his sweets away. He’d buy her a bunch of flowers on his way home from work tomorrow afternoon, but tonight all he could say was:

‘Goodnight. I’m going to sleep.’

Carol sighed and wiped the tears from her eyes. Fortunately, tomorrow was her monthly book club evening and she could have a heart-to-heart with her colleague, who had also joined the club two months ago and who had chosen the book for this month’s meeting. When he’d given her a copy at work just the other day, he mentioned that he saw her as a kindred spirit. She looked again at the inscription he’d written in her novel:

*“Dear Carol, whenever we hit stormy seas I always imagine you at the rudder: strong, reliable and, dare I say it? Beautiful! That’s why I chose this book for us to read. Rodney x”*