

**Nora**

His brain is gettin' addled. It's so very sad, really. He was always so on-the-ball, my 'usband; my Stan. He was a sewing machine mechanic, you know. Went round all the mills fixing 'em. Not any easy job, that. No... That's how we met. At the mill, I mean. It was 1940 and the war was on, but he wasn't tall enough to enlist so he had his pick of the girls at the mills, what with all the other fellas away. Picked me though. He was funny. That's one of the reasons I married him...

... I thought he was right clever when he fixed my machine one day. Now he's making no sense at all. One minute he'll be kissin' me cheeks and bringin' me flowers, sayin' how lovely it is to see me, and the next he's getting all hot under the collar when I kiss him on the mouth. Not appropriate, he says. Goes all red and flustered the daft sod, wiping himself with the back of his hand like our kid when grandma used to kiss him. He used to like it... Used to like a lot more, an all. Did he ever! I don't know what 'appened. I sleep on me own now... in a single bed for Christ's sake. Oh, I am sorry. Pardon me language, won't you? I don't know where it comes from sometimes. Father Doherty wouldn't approve of that. *We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible...*

God knows where Stan goes at night. Sometimes he's away all week it seems like. That's what it seems like. Like he might of found himself some fancy piece. Don't want to say so, that wouldn't be right, would it? Somebody might hear and that won't do. There was a time when he only had eyes for me. I was his beautiful blue-eyed girl. We'd spend Sundays in bed. Hardly ever made it to Church, though we kept saying we should get up and go. What a lark! He made me laugh. That's one of the reasons I married him. I bet it's that Marjory from number 43. Her own 'usband left her. It was 1966 and she's been gunning for my Stan ever since...

Where's me 'andbag? It's gone again. I'll do for whoever's been at it, I will. Give it back.

He wanted to enlist. God's honest truth, but they wouldn't have 'im. Felt like he should have gone to war like his father. We got white feathers through the letterbox. It

scared me. He got so irate about it. Terrible it was. Your dad lost his arm to the war, I told him. You're better off being a whole person than just part of one. Well, you wouldn't want bits missin', would you? I wouldn't want to carry on like that. It's no kind of life.

Father Doherty says men have got needs. How would he know? He's a good man but I bet he's got some secrets. Probably one of them poofers... never seen a naked woman in his life. Don't know what they're missin' Stan always says. Father Doherty comes here to give me Confession and Communion every week so I'm makin' up for not goin' all those years. *Hail Mary full of grace. The Lord is with Thee. Blessed art Thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus...*

...He brought her here once. He did. I know. How dare she! Kept saying her name was Deirdre. Deirdre. Deirdre. Deirdre... can't pull the wool over my fuckin' eyes. There was a dance. Nobody danced but him and her. The rest of 'em just sat gawping at them both. Norman's teeth even fell out and he had trouble pushin' 'em back in. He didn't ask me to dance. His own wife. He showed me right up in front of 'em all...

Those mini-skirts are getting' smaller by the week, I've been watching. She's dyed her hair red and she leans over our fence so he can get an eyeful of her cleavage. What a tart! But Stan's a man like any other, after all and she's after him... Keep off! Keep off me lawn! Go on, get out of it! Stan, they've pulled the heads of your best peonies the little bastards...

Saggy and baggy now. All that's left of the old me are those blue eyes. He doesn't look at me like he used to. He's just the same, always. I like it when he visits. Where is Stan? He hasn't come to see me. They get me blue dress out and help me put it on before he comes. Puffs me right out. Starts me huffin' and that nurse looks all worried. You can't stand up, Nora. Stop it. You'll fall. Do you want to break your other hip? I put some rouge on and get me 'andbag out. Someone's been in this bag, Stan, there's things missin'. Me pension book was in here. Nobody's been in your bag, Mum. What? Makes no sense. There's things missin'. There is. They've had me photos, too. Who are these people? They've put other photos up. They're missin'. Miss...in.

He makes all these old buggers laugh, telling his jokes. Cheers the place up they all say. He's always loved a shaggy dog story. Daft old fools with their laughin' gums

and clatterin' teeth. Your son's absolutely hilarious. Who? My Stan? Yes. Isn't he, though? That's one of the reasons I married him.

[ENDS: 929 words]