

## What You Deserve

It was just sickening, watching him saunter into the living room with the stench of another woman's essence adhering to his clothes. He smiled broadly as he approached his wife, ready to falsify the events of the day. His name is Taylor Grey, age 38, with a very promising future as an attorney. His marriage is falling apart, but he doesn't know it because he's too busy burying his head between someone else's skin. Could he be more careless than entering his home with the embrace of another woman still clinging to him? Something as simple as a shower and some added cologne would have covered it up, but if men had a brain, it would consume them.

"Hey, honey," he sang jovially, catching her by the waist and pulling her into his disgraceful stench. "You won't believe what happened today." He started, releasing his wife from his grasp so that she could relish in his tale. If he had bothered to look at her face, he could have noticed that she was the least bit interested in his normal BS. Of course, Taylor being self absorbed, neglected to notice the change in his wife.

Stephanie, his wife worked only part-time for a small pharmaceutical company. She endeavored having her own Public Relations company. Her bachelor's was in marketing with a Master's in public relations. Thus far, she hasn't been able to get it off the ground, but her spirits hadn't dampened as the five clients she service, make up for the income deficiency of her part-time job.

By no means was Taylor pulling the wool over her eyes. She was well aware of his infidelity. Three years is all it took for her husband to become a dog. Just three conniving, deceitful years. Weekly, she accepted his peace money; really it was the money to keep the house running, the normal stuff, like food, clothes, useless entertainment, etc. Stephanie considered it peace money, because the sight of it kept her from putting a bullet in his hind-part. Her eyes would twinkle like diamonds when he placed a thousand dollars in her hand, every single Friday – without fail. That's right, she thought, without fail, because the day he comes in without it, he can kiss his "A double S" goodbye.

Stephanie fabricated a smile. "Tell me, what happened!" Her display of enthusiasm was astonishing. At times, she even fooled herself. His lips bobbed up and down as he spoke, telling her some crazy story about some fluzzy at his job. She didn't hear a word he said, but reading his expressions, she was able to throw in a "really! No way! Come on!" at the right time to keep him lying.

"You better come on in the kitchen before our dinner get cold." She told him. She caught hold of his awaiting arm and together they entered the kitchen.

Candlelight illuminated the kitchen. They were nice and bright. The table was adorned with pink lace. Three deep red roses stood proudly in a tall glass vase. Two, square, red plates sat opposite each other on the table with red wine and a crystal flute. Mashed

potatoes, beef roast covered in smoking brown gravy, glazed carrots and four asparagus stalks.

A twinge of guilt tugged at the pit of his stomach. His lovely wife spent her afternoon preparing a special dinner for him and he spent his rumpling sheets with Candice. Candice is Taylor's assistant. There was something enticing about the way her dreads adorned her slender neck. Maybe it was the simple style she flaunted or that size 6 figure with the "C" cup breasts. He really didn't know, but whatever it was about her, it started a habitual twice a week rendezvous that left him guilt ridden whenever he looked into his wife's eyes.

Taylor perched in his seat, watching as Stephanie sauntered over to her seat. He hadn't noticed the sexy red dress his wife was wearing with a high slit that displayed her curvy wide thigh and muscular calf. Stephanie was a full-figured woman, but every curve was in the right place. He loved watching her twist her rear-end when she walked. She took a seat across from him. Her eyes focused intently on him.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked her, returning an endearing gaze.

She smiled. The light twinkled in her eyes mesmerizing him. She removed her stare and looked at her plate. The food was barely warm. That reminded her of just how long it took him to come in. She returned her gaze.

"Everything looks lovely. I can't tell you how special you are to me."

His words made her blood boil but she forced a smile. Her eyes glazed in an attempt to betray her.

"That's sweet Taylor."

He lifted his wine flute and held it up in front of him. Stephanie followed suit.

"This is to the three years you and I have spent together and the many more we will share together."

Stephanie wiped her eye and tilted her glass to her lips. She swallowed, half heartedly because their marriage was a farce. She bashfully returned her glass to the table and lifted her fork. She scooped up some mashed potatoes and slid the creamy food into her mouth. Delicious, she thought.

Taylor sliced his steak and it was incredibly tender. When satisfied with the bite-size pieces, he scooped up some mashed potatoes then pressed his fork into a piece of steak then placed it into his mouth. Devine, he thought. Not even his mother could have made it better. Stephanie was beautiful in every way. She deserved better. He gave her more than enough money, but that didn't make up for the guilt he felt when he cheated on her. He worked some more food into his mouth.

“Do you love me Taylor?” Stephanie asked him. There was something so knowing in her voice. He wondered what she would ask him next. Did she know about his escapes or was this just breaking-the-silence conversation?

“Of course honey, more than anything in the world.”

“What if I was maimed, disabled or even ugly?”

“Don’t be silly. You couldn’t be ugly even if you wanted to.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“Honey, I’m not being evasive, it’s just that I don’t see why you are asking me questions like this. I do love you and I don’t know what would happen if you were different. I guess I would love you just as I do now. Well, maybe not if you became really ugly.” He chuckled.

“That’s not funny. I mean it.”

Taylor shoveled the rest of his food into his mouth. He wanted to enjoy the rest of his meal before it took an uncertain spin.

“You know I’ve been thinking. What if I dreaded my hair?”

He choked on the wine he just poured into his mouth.

“Why would you want to do something as dramatic as that?” He straightened himself in his seat wondering if she actually knew.

“I don’t know. It’s different. I’m tired of this prissy look. I want something sassy. I think I need some pizzazz.”

“Stephanie, you’ve got pizzazz. There is nothing wrong with your look. I love the way you look. You’re acting strange. Are you sure there isn’t anything wrong?”

“No. I guess, I feel old and I wanted something to make me feel new again. Why are you making faces at me?”

“I’m not making faces at you. I’m just wondering why you’re asking all these crazy questions.”

His cheeks felt tight as though someone was pulling them. The sensation reminded him of the way he felt when his aunt Gwen used to pinch them when he was younger. His mouth bobbed as he started speaking and for some odd reason, he felt his saliva trickle down his cheek.

“Taylor, that’s disgusting.” Stephanie remarked frowning at Taylor’s unusual behavior.

He chuckled. Not believing that he had done that himself. Blaming the incident on her good cooking, he attempted to speak again, but again, drool escaped.

Stephanie pushed up from her seat and went to the sink. She pulled a paper towel from the roll and returned to the table and handed it to Taylor.

“You want to straighten that crazed look from your face and be serious?” she asked him. Her patience had run thin.

Taylor got up from his seat and went to the bathroom. He didn’t attempt to say anything else because the sensation had intensified so badly and he needed to take a look at his jaw, which felt really swollen. He imagined that a severe toothache would follow. His wisdom tooth had been bothering him lately and this was probably going to be another achy episode. When he reached the bathroom, he turned on the light and stepped up to the mirror over the sink. He squealed and hurried out the bathroom and back to the kitchen.

“Stephanie, hurry, you’ve got to get me to the hospital.” Taylor screamed as he was in full view of Stephanie.

“Oh my, God. Taylor, what happened to you? What’s wrong with your face?”

He fought back the tears.

“I think I’m having a stroke. Come take me to the hospital.” He said, using his fingers to hold his face from twisting any further.

Stephanie hurried out the door with Taylor. She took his car since it was already on the street. Speeding down the street, she glanced at Taylor. The sight of him was hideous, like something straight out of a horror movie.

It only took a few minutes for her to reach the nearby hospital. The two of them rushed into the emergency room. By the time they made it to the triage window, his cheeks were forcing his already chink eyes shut. The nurse summoned the doctor right away. After taking Taylor’s vitals and determining that he was not having a stroke, the doctor pulled a few tubes out and took Taylor’s blood. The blood was sent to the lab for processing.

Taylor waited in a sheeted off room with Stephanie at his side. He believed that he was being punished for all that he had done to her and that if he didn’t come clean, he would be disfigured so hideously that no one would want him.

“Stephanie.” He called, patting the bed so that she could come closer to him. He knew that this was the wrong time to bring up bad news, but if he was going to come through this, he would have to man up and tell her the truth, even if it meant losing her.

She moved very close to him, pulling the chair with her so that she could sit at his side. He was frightening to look at, but she digested her disgust and tried to show just a little mercy. Of course, not even two hours ago, he told her that he would leave her if she was disfigured and now look at him. He was a typical man, always expecting the woman to stick by him no matter what.

“Stephanie, I want you to know that I love you more than anything in the world. You are so special to me and I am proud to be with you. I know that you are the only woman who would stick by me in a time like this.” He paused, swallowed, caught hold of her hand then continued... “I never wanted to hurt you, but sometimes, being a man causes us to do stupid things.”

“What are you talking about Taylor?”

“Honey, I promise you that as long as I live, I won’t ever do anything else to make you unhappy. Anything you want, I will give it to you.”

She listened to him trying to gain pity for his cheating. He deserved every bit of what he got. God don’t like ugly and sometimes, you just got to show a person how much you mean to them.

“I want so much to tell you this, but I’m afraid of what you will say.”

The doctor entered the sectioned off room. He pulled back the curtain and restored their privacy.

“The results of your test are back. Would you like your partner to hear the results as well?”

Taylor nodded. He didn’t want to keep her out of any other facet of his life. Whatever was happening to him, he wanted her to know and go through it with him.

“Yes, I want her to stay. There is nothing about me I want kept from her.”

He acknowledged his wish and opened his file.

“Mr. Grey, your blood turned up with Syphilis. There is no cure for it, but there are medications to make the symptoms less painful or debilitating.”

Taylor shot a glance over to Stephanie. Her anger was apparent and she looked as though she could kill him. She remained in her seat, but she didn’t stop glaring at Taylor for even a moment. That bastard had no idea about the deadly baggage he had been carrying around. She found out about it three weeks ago when her lips started burning and leaking.

The doctor cleared his throat. “I don’t know what caused the disfigurement of your face. Nothing else showed up. I look like maybe a pinched nerve. There is nothing I can do

about it, but it will probably go away in a few week or months. Something like this is uncertain, but you are not suffering from any brain damage or anything that resembles stroke.”

He handed him a bottle of pills.

“These you will need to take daily as prescribed on the bottle and your partner will have to be checked by her gynecologist to see if she is symptomatic.” He looked behind him at Stephanie. Her complexion had darkened with evident anger.

“You can get ready to go. Here are your discharge papers.” The doctor told him as he left the room.

The room fell silent with Stephanie glaring at him. Taylor’s apologetic look was infuriating. She turned and walked away from him. When she was halfway through the corridor, Taylor caught up to her, shouting her name.

“Stephanie wait. Please give me a chance to explain.”

She halted. “What would you like to explain to me Taylor? You want to tell me that your sleeping around was an accident? Or that your lying to me all this time was a mistake?”

She bolted through the doors and thank goodness they were self sliding because she would have broken the glass had she touched them, just as she wanted to do to Taylor.

“Oh, I know what it is, you want to tell me that you didn’t mean to hurt me? That’s it right Taylor?”

“Stephanie, you’re right to be angry with me. I can’t blame you, but I honestly didn’t mean to bring you any harm. I made a mistake and I just thought it would go away. I have been trying to tell you about her all night.”

“Taylor, I’ve been in on to your lies for three weeks. I know about you and Candice and definitely knew about this curse you bestowed on me. I hate you Taylor. I hate everything about you. You deserve everything you got.”

“You knew about us and you didn’t say anything.”

“What did you want me to say Taylor? That I was going to be a good wife to you? That I was going to work harder at making you happy? What didn’t I do for you? You’re selfish and I want you to know that you will never be able to do what you did to me to anyone else.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your face will never return to that player’s look. And your second head will never be buried into anyone else. You’re worthless.”

“You did this to me?”

“You did this to yourself and I hate you for it.”

She turned on her heels not saying another word.

“You did this to me. You hurt me like this?”

“You got what you deserved.” She called back to him fingering for the cab that was passing by. She got in and the car pulled off.”

Taylor chased behind the cab telling her that she had the keys to his car. About three blocks away, she tossed them out into the street. When she got home, she packed her things, cleared the table and dishes. She used bleach to cleanse the dishes of all traces of the drug. “You can’t cure what you can’t find.”