

The Wrong Word

She knocked tentatively on the front door of their terraced house. He wouldn't let her have her own key. It was the same with money. He gave her exactly what was needed every day and watched her like a hawk to make sure she didn't salt any away for herself. She was only allowed out to shop locally and never for more than half an hour. Over the years he had assumed rigid control of her life and systematically eradicated any social interaction with her former family and friends.

"Where've you been?"

He grabbed her wrist, yanked her into the hall and leaned belligerently towards her. She could smell his sour, whisky-sodden breath.

"You know where I went Jack...You told me to go and get your fags from the corner shop."

"Oh yeah," releasing his painful grip on her arm, he snatched the pack of super kings from her hand, "And I'll have the change as well."

She gave him a crumpled fiver and a few coins. He looked blearily at the cash, "I gave you twenty, where's the rest? You know what happens if you try it on."

"You know I'd never do that Jack. I know I'm not allowed to have any money. Your fags cost £10.60 and I've given you £9.40."

He grunted and said menacingly, "You'd better not try to rob me. You'll get a really good belt if you do."

Rita nodded meekly, adopted the cringing posture she knew he liked and edged past him towards the kitchen, "I'll make you a cuppa shall I?"

"Nah, get me a big beer I'm parched."

Rita thought, *"I'm not surprised you're dehydrated, you've got the best part of a bottle of scotch inside you."*

She scuttled into the kitchen and reached for a pint bottle of Doom Bar on the shelf. Her sleeve rode up her arm and she saw the livid bruise on her wrist. She knew that her lower back would look even worse. He had rammed her against the edge of the sink that morning when she had spread jam on his toast. He said he'd asked for Marmite but she knew he hadn't. He hated Marmite.

It didn't take much to make Jack lash out. The problem was she couldn't predict what would set him off. Yesterday he'd punched her in the stomach because he said she was looking at him funny. But he was canny. He never hit her in the face in case people started asking questions.

She took his beer into the living room and tried to give him the bottle and glass. He glowered at her and shouted, "Well pour the bloody beer for me you stupid bitch."

She told the police afterwards that it was his use of **that** word that did it.

“I’m not a dog officer. That’s a horrible thing to call a woman. I remember going back into the kitchen and getting the claw hammer from the tool drawer. After that it’s all a bit hazy....”

500 Words