

In a bedroom above him Melissa Buxton lay in bed staring at the ceiling. Her decision made she wanted a divorce. The trappings of power and luxury had run their course and proved too little for what she was expected to endure. Their romance had ended long before now. Lust remained but it was a cruel one-sided pleasure that had gradually developed a few years ago. As if he were blaming her for all the things that sprang up to challenge him in life. She had become his punch bag a way in which he relieved the pressures placed on him by high office. Not once in years had he cared enough to ask if she enjoyed their bouts of sex. Perhaps knowing her answer might force him to change what he clearly enjoyed.

Also, only in the past year or so had he developed a routine for punching her left shoulder whenever suddenly angered by something he read. She could still recall the first time when it happened. They were at the dinner table alone when news on the screen revealed an accident near York involving an old space transport that crashed killing all passengers and more than a hundred residents in homes below. The journalist reporting the tragedy suggested it was as a consequence of the government's use of aging transports. Jumping out of his seat he strode up and down the dining room complaining the journalist would put off settlers and miners from travelling to Mars before coming to a halt directly behind her. She recalled hearing the air whoosh as his hand slapped hard down against her left shoulder. So hard it almost knocked her off her seat. Her yelp as tears streamed uncontrollably down her cheeks brought a smile to his face and appeared to immediately lift his gloom. His apology as he strode back to his seat barely loud enough to be heard. After that day he regularly slapped or punched her left shoulder as therapy to improve his mood. Together with his preference for rough sex she had fought with herself to leave him. To be the first of his wives to do so. Did she possess the courage to accept the fallout that would certainly follow as a consequence? Toying with the notion for months and how he might react took longer than expected. There was little doubt in her mind that her life would be at risk if for no other reason than what he shared about his plans for the future. War to establish BDR superiority in space. The need for a new political structure that finally did away with the two-party system dumping any pretence of democracy. He would step forward to tell the people that he had taken total control of the country to protect it from enemies with whom they were at war.

Shifting uneasily in bed she imagined Chadsworth's input when he discovered she had gone. Where her husband could be a borderline impulsive psychopath

Chadsworth was a far more calculating one. He did nothing without thinking at least a dozen steps ahead. Hence he would view her desertion as a betrayal and threat. If anyone gave the order for her murder it would be him. Perhaps he would even come after himself to perform her assassination? From the way she often caught him staring at her a sense of unbridled lust seemed to simmer just below the surface.

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