Give Me A Widow, Anytime

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.
"I've always been particularly attracted to widows. There is a beautifully bruised quality about them. They retain this quality long after their husbands have congealed in the satin seams of their great mahogany coffins. When widows make it with a man, it always has a sweet scent of hesitation in it. They're not used to a new man. They're not sure they'll like it. They're not sure their husbands would approve. They're just not sure. Afterwards, they're in a mild form of shock and by the time they recover, and sometimes it can take months, a man can gracefoly and with sensitivity extricate himself from the relationship."

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By Nancy O’Donnell

I’ve always been particularly attracted to widows. There is a beautifully bruised quality about them. They retain this quality long after their husbands have congealed in the satin seams of their great mahogany coffins. When widows make it with a man, it always has a sweet scent of hesitation in it. They’re not used to a new man. They’re not sure their husbands would approve. They’re just not sure. Afterwards, they’re in a mild form of shock and by the time they recover, and sometimes it can take months, a man can gracelessly keep me out. I told them my wife had been killed in a Saigon bombing raid, that my son had been burned over ninety percent of his body and was being cared for by dedicated Communist nurses, that I had to wait for his skin to grow back before he could be flown to the States. I figured that after a time, people would begin to ask when exactly little Michael would come to his daddy. I would then look at the ground, sigh about the red tape and political difficulties involved, and curse the President and Kissinger. The story had infinite possibilities. The sympathy I received from the women was awe-inspiring. Tragedy, at a distance, really brings out the compassion in people.

When I found the woman I wanted to marry, I would tell her the truth. I was sure she’d be the type to understand or I wouldn’t get involved with her. Of course, she would be secretly overjoyed that she wouldn’t have to play mother to a half-charred, half-Vietnamese child.

When I first started to go to the weekly meetings, I wanted to have a good time. I gave myself two years to find a wife and then I’d drop out. A man can’t be too careful about picking out the mother of his children. My mother told this to me a hundred times before she died. She should know, having been picked by the greatest bastard who ever lived. She knew that a good woman makes up for the deficiencies in the father. My father was ridden with deficiencies. Luckily, I didn’t have to bear up with them much as I was growing up. He seldom noticed me. He joined the army even though my mother begged him not to go. I remember seeing her on her knees, weeping, “Walter, Walter, don’t leave us. Who Will support us? What if you’re killed?” Walter kept right on packing, stepping over her crumpled body as he went for more handkerchiefs. He was making money hand over fist working in a factory, but no, no, Walter had to go to Europe. It has been my firm belief that he went over primarily to get captured by the Germans. Walter, at heart, was a Nazi. He would send letters home, gleefully describing the destruction of my mother’s beloved Poland. If I know my father at all, he probably aided in the destruction, even if it was only to throw a brick through a window. My mother would ask me if I was praying for his safe return and I was. I was willing to have him come home, minus his arms or legs.

Unfortunately, the swine returned with all his appendages and within a
When I got out of the army, I tried to become a number of things and failed at them for no apparent reason that I could see. I knew that if I waited long enough, I’d find the job that was my job. I was looking for a wife. I was looking for the center of things. I was on the edges of life, because I knew that when I saw what I wanted, I would aim for it, zoom right in and get it, and nothing would distract me. It’s hard to explain the feeling. It was one of drifting, yet I felt I was forming myself into shape. There’s millions of shapeless people in the world; not doing anything, wanted to do anything. I was waiting for my final change. I still am because finalities in life attract me, the end of a job, the end of an affair.

My first widow was Angie Cumonelli. I met her as soon as I entered the door of the social club I mentioned before. She’d been widowed two years and each additional day made her life more miserable. All Angie wanted to do was to get a daddy for Carmen Jr. She didn’t look like the kind of woman who would be unsuccessful in reaching that goal. She was tiny and that gave her an immediate advantage. A man would want to wrap his arms around her and ward off the shafts of lies that her way. Of course, it wouldn’t be a man like me; I’m not stupid enough or heroic enough to try to save anyone. She had long black hair that seemed lacquered in place with hair spray, but it was really so heavy I would slice it with my fingers and barely make it to the end before it would settle back into place. She knew everyone in the club. She was the unofficial social director. She invited me to dinner after we had talked ten minutes.

Her mother must have ingrained in her that old proverb about the way to a man’s heart, but she didn’t know I had ulcers. If her mother had been a little less cautious, she would have told Angie that the way to a man’s heart seldom leads from the throat down but then, women don’t get too far if they work with the truth.

I came to dinner and was overfed. I had to contend with Carmen Jr. who only wanted to be a race-car driver when he grew up and made engine noises throughout dinner. What was worse was the oil portrait of her dear departed husband. He stared at me throughout dinner. A policeman and a very intimidating one at that, his muscles bulged from the canvas. Angie told me he died in a gun battle when he was off-duty. I could see that her feelings were colored by his death. She had definite ideas on what a “real” man was. I could quite easily get away by just disappointing her.

It was a long hard battle to get her into bed. She refused on the grounds that she was a Catholic. She’d say, “Oh Steve, I couldn’t sleep with you. What could I tell my confessor?” I even believed her for a while until I found out she never went to church and the last time she saw the parish priest was when Carmen Jr. was baptized. When I pointed this out to Angie, she shrugged and said she didn’t want to argue any more, and anyway she had fallen in love with me. With that, we fell into bed.

I stayed with her for only about six months, long enough to learn to detest tomato sauce and her son. What can I say? Angie was a disappointment. She had been a policeman’s wife too long. A Caesar’s wife living above reproach: she didn’t seem human. The shape of her personality was as thick, as heavily settled, as her blue-black hair. My Angie had to be forgotten.

I have always been wonderfully successful with women, regardless of my one great deficiency, my total lack of sentimentality. Right in the middle of a passionate declaration of love, even with an extra flourish of the hips, I am not emotionally moved. And I don’t want a woman to try to extract emotions from me.

I ended my relationship with Angie swiftly, leaving no hope of reconciliation, which is the best way. She sobbed over the phone for a few weeks, then she cursed me.

I continued to go to the club and for a couple of months, Angie stayed away. She returned but always stayed across the room and tried to act very “detached,” yet I would see her shiny black eyes following me around the room. She’d gather some women in the corner and I could imagine her telling them how I treated her. She must also have rated my performance in the sack, be-
The club meetings almost became boring until a few months ago. There was a commotion at the door. Mary Halloway was the official greeter. Her breath and body could drive you away, so I always watched the newcomers. Their expressions were worth a lot to me. I like people who show their emotions honestly. Halloway was disgusting. So I was watching the door and saw a beautiful woman enter. Her name tag bobbed up and down as she walked,. Stella Gordon, Stella Gordon, Stella Gordon. Halloway led her to the wall and she stayed where she was placed, obviously waiting. I went over to her with a glass of the noxious punch, told her the suspected ingredients, made her laugh and left with her.

She was different, my Stella was. It took six months to get her into bed, and after that one time, she refused to give me again, which I think is pretty smart. Her husband had been a real-estate agent and I can make no judgments on him because I don’t know the first thing about him. I didn’t want to waste anymore time. I got to the point. I asked her to marry me. Yes, I, Stefan Gruber, the hit-and-run man, had slurred to a shuffle, shuffled away and shuffled back. Stella would not give me a direct answer to my proposal. She said she wanted to know more about me and my son. She wanted to meet him. I agonized over telling her the truth. When I bluntly told her I, Stefan Gruber, the hit-and-run man, had killed her husband and why he did it, I knew she didn’t understand. She wanted to know more about my background.

She made friends with Angie Cumonelli. Angie told her all about me. Apparently, all the women who had been so agreeable to my embrace and had been so anxious to keep their sex lives private had confided in Angie.

Stella wanted to talk to me. When I arrived at her house, she turned her face from me when I leaned down to kiss her. She told me to sit down. I was prepared to lie. I wanted her that much. “Don’t you dare try to lie to me,” was the first thing she said. “I know everything about you,” and “How can you do what you do?” were the second and third. After that, I knew she didn’t know what the hell she was talking about.

I can write the conversation verbatim. She proved herself unbelievably stupid. I had to hear it all.

“It’s not so bad,” she said, “in other circles. A man is single, he sees a woman, he wants her, he has her. Then he realizes he doesn’t want too much of her. But Stefan, why these women? All of them have just been through grief or anger, and are so vulnerable. What if they had really fallen in love with you?”

None of them loved me, you silly bitch.

“You want to marry me. Tell me how it happened? Tell me it’s not true. Say something!”

I told her if she was stupid enough to take offense at what’s done to others, she’d never understand my viewpoint.

She told me to get out. I did and I knew she expected me to call her next day, and say she was right and I was wrong and I was angry. I didn’t, of course.

God, I know so much about women, sometimes I wonder why I bother at all. I ended my association with that branch of “Parents Without Partners” last week. And I tell you, the sympathy I received when I told them about my son with leukemia was really something else. Everyone was dying to see some photographs of little Walter.

The best of it is, the widows outnumber the divorcees five to one.