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 gracefully and with sensitivity extricate himself from the relationship."

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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 gracefully and with sensitivity extricate himself from the relationship.

Divorces are another story altogether. Once they get their legs around you, "Buddy, Watch Out!" They might not be used to a new man but they're sure willing to get used to him . . . fast. They're too damn confused about their divorce and they've just got to discover the "real" cause for the breakup. They can't understand how once they had a husband and now they don't, especially if he's still walking around the neighborhood or making it with their best friend. They want to remarry immediately so they can find out if the fault was theirs.

I'll take a widow any day. And I will 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 as 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

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A recent graduate and recently married, Nancy O'Donnell remains uncertain about whether to pattern herself after Lady Antonia Fraser or St. Catherine of Siena.
month my mother was pregnant. She was too old to have another child and he knew it. He was most helpful. He helped her miscarry. She never cared what he did to her after that. I remember him calling her into the bedroom one night. There was a few minutes of silence, then music blared on. He beat her carefully and quietly for a half-hour. Then he went out and got drunk. He made this a ritual. One night a month, the bedroom door would close and it would take years to open again.

She would always say, "Stefan, do not hate your father. He is a very unhappy man." That just shows what kind of woman my mother was. She was the most faithful woman, I'll ever hope to meet. She died when I was seventeen. I think she had a stroke.

After the funeral, I hoped to whisper, "Herr Gruber, You're going to get yours." I planned to call him into the bedroom and put some nice quiet music on and beat him into the ground.

Instead, the crathy womsat me-down at the kitchen table and offered me a beer. Then he started moaning and crying. He melted before my eyes. The great, red beefy vantage. He continued to make myself into shape. There's millions of shapeless people in the world, not doing anything, wanting 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 Cunonelli. 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 light 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 with 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 overtired. 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-

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cause right afterwards two divorcees came on heavy.

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. 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 gift 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 shrewed 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 blurted it out one day, she actually understood. “Oh yes,” she said. “Of course, you wouldn’t want to go to bars to meet women.”

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 know 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.” I knew that I would have had to work especially hard to make them forget, maybe even produce, my son.

When I left town, I actually thought about giving up and taking some night courses at a University to meet new women, but one day I walked past a funeral parlor and these people were supporting a crying woman with the most beautiful behind, I’ve ever seen. I knew that any other kind of woman might as well be dead for all I care.

I attended the first meeting of “Single Parenthood Incorporated” last week. And I’ll 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.