

## Of Ministers and Concubines

*By Tomas Frydrych*

George was a minister in a mainstream Scottish denomination; he lived happily with his girlfriend, Jane. (Some people raised eyebrows over that, but most recognised that is how things are these days.) One morning George did something daft, and he and Jane had a falling out. When George returned home from his hospital visits that day, Jane's things were gone. She moved to her mother's.

By late evening of the next day George was beginning to miss Jane (most specifically, her cooking; the local chipshop left lot to be desired); he wanted to make up with her. Unfortunately Jane's family lived a good half-day's drive away, and somehow George had the feeling he could not deal with this over the phone. So on Thursday afternoon (George got his Fridays off), he filled up his car and drove to Jane's parents' house.

It was James who answered the door (George did not get on that well with Jane's mom, but her father, James, was OK, so George saw it as a good omen). The pleasure was mutual, for hearing Jane's side of the story her dad could see it was just a misunderstanding blown out of all proportions (and now that Jane had a joint mortgage with George, it was in everyone's interest that they make up).

George apologised, and Jane apologised, and there was great rejoicing. James brought out a bottle of 30-year-old Laphroaig he kept for special occasions, and they had a little celebration. By the time the evening arrived, George was not in a fit state to

drive (being a minister, he really could not afford to drive under the influence, in case he got caught).

Saturday morning George and Jane overslept, and then James insisted they stay for a lunch (they see so little of them), and after the lunch they had to stay for the afternoon coffee and cake (not to offend Jane's mother, James said, although George suspected she would prefer him to be gone ASAP). Well, by the time they set out, it was getting rather late.



George's Vauxhall was a teenager, with all the moodiness that comes with puberty; as they were driving back home, the car started coughing and misfiring.

'Of all times right in the middle of this neighbourhood', George thought, for he could see clearly from the graffiti on the walls that these people supported a rival football team (George wished he did not have that club sticker on his bumper -- he should have known better and at least got a smaller sticker); things could get rather nasty if they got stuck here for the night.

Thanks God, they made it out of there; George could tell from the graffiti that these folk supported the same team he did and breathed a huge sigh of relief. So did the car, as its rusty soul passed to the Other Side.

George pulled out Nokia's very latest; no signal. Fortunately he could see a pay phone near by; except, someone smashed the glass, and ripped out the receiver. Now that George had a better look around in the failing street lighting, treading carefully among the shreds of buckfast bottles, this really was not a great

place to break down this time of the day (any time of the day, really).

George went back to his car and they sat there for a while, feeling increasingly uneasy (could not help noticing a group of rowdy youths gathering at the head of the street – George wished, he got the huge club sticker, not just the medium one!).

An older guy limped along the pavement. He caught glimpse of Jane, and knocked on the window:

‘What are yous doing here?’

‘Car’s deead.’ (George trying to sound local.)

‘Yous canna stay here; this is a bad neighbourhood – better come in with me’.

Gorge and Jane hesitated, but the group at the head of the street was getting noticeably bigger and rowdier, gazing increasingly toward their car.



The ground floor council flat clearly seen better days; the wallpaper put it into an era well before George’s time; loud music was coming from behind one of the doors. ‘Teenagers’, the old guy muttered as he lit gas under a chip pan and got three cans of cheep lager from the fridge.

Bang! George spilled the watery fluid all over his shirt. He could see a prepubescent boy working his Vauxhall over with a driver (or perhaps no. 7 iron, the street lamp near by was not working). Laughter and some more breaking glass, as a buckfast bottle hit the front door. Then the bell rang.

‘Hey Tammy, who’s that you have in there? A pal of yours? Let us introduce ourselves to him, if you get my drift, ey?’ (Laughter.)

Old Tammy went to the door.

‘Come on, lads, he is one of our own; go check out the sticker on his bumper.’

‘Aye, that’s all we want -- to check out his bumper! (More laughter.)

George could see from Tammy’s face they were in trouble.

‘Why don’t you have some fun with my daughter and his girlfriend, just leave him alone – it is just not right lads! This used to be a decent neighbourhood.’

‘Old Tammy says its is not right, lads, do you hear that!’

The whole street shakes with laughter and expletives (most of which George never heard before). ‘There must be at least three-dozen of them’, George thinks.

‘We should call the police.’

‘Polis dinna come here after dark, son; and besides, nae phone here, couldna pay the bills’.

Suddenly the evening sky lights up. At first George thinks of fire descending from heaven in judgement, but quickly realises it his Vauxhall coming spectacularly alight. He seizes the moment; as the attention of the crowd turns momentarily from the house to the fireworks, George opens the front door and shuvs terrified Jane outside, locking the door behind her. Jane’s voice tears through the night, only to echo in the laughter of the crowd.



As time passes, Jane's screams are getting feebler and feebler, and George decides to get some sleep. By the time the dawn breaks, the street is silent and peaceful, the crowd gone. Relieved, Gorge opens the door, and finds Jane sitting on the steps, all huddled up.

'Time to head home Jane; it's all over now.'

No answer. George puts his hand gently on her shoulder; at first there is no response, then her body rolls down the steps.



The bus stinks of vomit – fitting background to George's reflection on the events of last night. He has decided earlier this morning to do the funeral service himself – it is the least he can do for poor Jane and her family; he grows increasingly angry.

'What is the world coming to!' People have to hear about such perversity! Jane deserves justice and George will make sure she would get it. (He was sensible enough to take some graphic pictures of Jane with his mobile; no matter how distasteful, the world has to know.) Three bars flashing on his mobile: he is back in the civilised world and dials directory enquiries. 'Number for the ...', his voice momentarily drowning in the sound of a passing train.



Next morning, graphic and explicit pictures of the molested Jane, together with a photo of George, old Tammy and the burnt out Vauxhall fills up the front page of The Thunder; the headline reads:

## Death to Puffs !!!

(Says a local man)

And all who read the story over their cup of tea before heading off to work that morning said:

'Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Think about it! Consider it! Tell us what to do!' [Judges 19:30]

The rioting started in the late afternoon, under the watchful eye of TV crews:

... And the men of Israel turned back against the Benjamites and smote them with the edge of the sword, men and beasts and all that they found. And all the towns which they found they set on fire. [Judges 20:48]

By midnight the whole neighbourhood was ablaze.



Next morning, watching TV over a bowl of cereal, George caught sight of his car behind the classy, immaculately made up TV reporter, just as four firemen brought out two black body bags from what used to be old Tammy's house.

George was overwhelmed by sadness, tears running down his cheeks over the fate of his loyal friend. But on the bright side, the insurance covered fire, and he really needed to get a new car anyway.

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