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## **Fly on the Wall**

'I know this might seem strange to my readers but that is exactly what I am. No-one sees me or notices that I am around. If I stay perfectly quiet and still, then I am just *'a fly on the wall'* and these are my stories.'

### **'Tactical Brutality'**

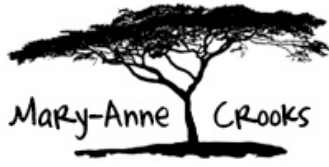
'Anton, what are you doing?' she asked in a hushed tone trying to defuse the situation.

'This is your fault,' he taunted, waving the gun randomly in the air, clicking the safety catch on and off continually. 'Why do you always make me angry? Are you scared? You look scared; well don't be, the gun is to kill myself, not you.'

*If only I had that in writing*, she thought to herself, petrified that he would change his mind as he brandished the gun in her direction. 'I didn't intend to annoy you but you accuse me of things, scream and shout and just expect me not to react.' Realising that her words were not helping the situation, seeing the fury glaze his eyes, she rapidly changed tactics. 'Honey, I don't know why you get angry and jealous,' she said cajoling him in a calm manner. I knew you were waiting for me after work but as you know the building is thirty stories high and I am on floor fifteen. By the time the elevators get to us they are full and knowing that you would be getting impatient I ran down those flights of stairs only to find you cold and hostile. To be truthful that made me angry as I was exhausted and if you weren't so suspicious I could have waited for an empty lift. 'Anyway,' she carried on in a softer tone, 'what could I have done to make you jealous in a period of fifteen minutes?'

'I've seen how guys look at you and it takes less than fifteen minutes, as you so succinctly put it, to flirt or for some-one to chat you up.'

'Anton,' she replied, summoning all her courage to walk over to him. 'We have been married for almost four years now and been together for six, when are you going to learn to trust me?'



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‘Never,’ he screamed as his eyes narrowed and his lips snarled, the gun waving dangerously close to her head.

Faced with the cold reality of a weapon pointing straight towards her body she felt an icy calm overcome her as adrenaline surged through her. ‘Put that gun down or I am walking away.’

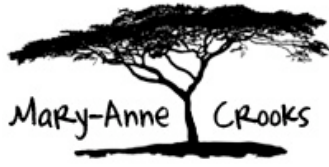
‘I wonder how you will feel knowing that you killed me when I pull the trigger?’

Making eye contact she moved his hand, holding the gun, away from her. ‘Anton, if you pull that trigger you will have killed yourself, I will not be responsible,’ she answered quietly.

He put down the gun, sat on the bed and covered his face with his hands, and then began to sob. She couldn’t bring herself to sit next to him and comfort him, knowing as she did that it was a form of manipulation; marriage counselling had taught her a lot. The Scottish Minister was extremely straight with both of them and didn’t allow any scheming or tactics to impact his sessions. In fact, during their last marriage appointment, Anton had threatened to ‘*blow his brains out*’, and the Minister had calmly told him to please leave his church office as he had just had the walls painted. Anton, realising that he had been beaten at his own game, had stormed out of the session. Geoff, the Minister had then warned Jenny about strategies couples will use to try and gain sympathy, or approval and agreement, to influence and control others to realise that they are not responsible for the decline in the marriage; the other partner is the problem. As he commented, it always takes two to contribute to the success or failure of a relationship.

Jenny walked slowly from the room. ‘I’ll bring you some tea, please put the gun away.’ When she returned she wordlessly handed him the mug of steaming liquid, trying with difficulty not to throw it at his face. She then walked away, sat in the lounge and switched the TV on.

An hour went by then two, her body twitching in nervousness with every movement from the bedroom, half expecting the blast of a gun shot at any



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minute. When she finally went to bed the lights were switched off, he was sleeping on his side, his breathing deep and even. Angrily Jenny shut the door again, quietly though, as she couldn't handle dealing with him waking up. She reached for a blanket from the hall closet and returned to the lounge switching the TV on again, the sound turned low so as not to awaken him.

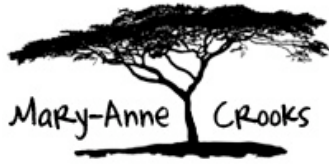
The next day Anton acted perfectly normally, as if life was wonderful. She could hear him whistling in the shower and then bursting into song. She looked like a bristling hedgehog and could quite easily have retrieved his gun and done his dirty deed for him. Not wanting an altercation before work she quickly got dressed, grabbed her make-up to apply at the office and dashed out of the house before he appeared.

The day progressed as everyday did, Jenny receiving a phone-call from Anton at lunch-time. *Just wanting to check up on me*, she thought to herself as she answered his questions in a bland tone, not quite managing to talk to him sweetly but effectively oppressing the aggression she was feeling. He joked with her, she forced a laugh, he told her about his day, she pretended to be interested and then with relief he told her that he had to return to some pressing matters that only '*his Lordship*' would be able to resolve.

Jenny didn't bother to wait for the elevator that evening but ran down the fifteen flights of stairs, panting and puffing, flushed bright red when she made eye-contact with Anton. He smiled, a triumphant smirk, he had won. She was angry with herself as she knew that Geoff, the Minister would tell her she was at fault as she was allowing Anton to manipulate her. He had just successfully won the argument in his head and that would validate his position, with the misguided opinion, that he had been right to be jealous as she must have been up to something.

Taking her hand possessively, they walked out of the building together towards his sports car. He chivalrously opened the door; she thanked him dutifully and then they drove home silently.

'You're quiet, is something wrong?' he asked.



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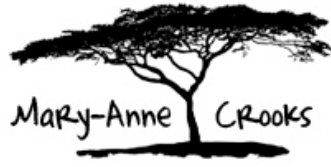
'What could possibly be wrong,' she answered and then could have kicked herself. *Why couldn't she control herself and stop making snide or sarcastic remarks. She knew what his reaction would be; Geoff had spoken to her and advised her not to throw fuel on to a simmering flame; oh gosh, what is wrong with me?*

Quite unexpectedly he allowed her comment to pass and carried on talking about his day and how good he was at his job and so on. She understood why he had to talk 'big', as even though he was considered brilliant as far as I.Q. went; he had an extremely low self-esteem. *The little man syndrome*, her mother had called it.

Jenny had met Anton when she had just completed her final year of school. She, her brother and sister had had a difficult year; their mother was in hospital with depression and had tried to kill herself several times and her father had had an affair with a woman fourteen years his junior and moved with her to a town three hours away. Luckily for Jenny and her siblings their grandparents had been remarkable with standing in the gap and trying to parent the three teenagers. When Jenny met Anton, deep within her self-conscience she realised she was looking for a father figure but squashed the thought whenever it surfaced. Anton was nineteen years older than her, two years younger than her mother.

*Maybe it was the sports car, she thought to herself. Well, then I suppose it serves me right! This is retribution for being so shallow!*

The reason they had waited to marry six days after her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday was that both her father and mother had refused to sign permission for the marriage. It was a sombre affair, her father reluctantly walking her down the aisle, her sister, one of her bridesmaid's, had a face like thunder and her mother was trying to smile through her tears. Jenny had the veil in front of her face, which was just as well, as the tears were rolling down her cheeks. She knew she was being foolish; she didn't love this man. They fought all the time because of his uncontrollable jealousy and in all truthfulness; she had never looked at another



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man whilst she had been with him. Of course young men flirted with her but she made them aware that she was engaged to get married.

Another reason she shouldn't have married Anton was that she was embarrassed to introduce him to family members, friends or work colleagues. She could see their shocked expressions, looks of surprise or just plain amusement. The sudden realisation, that she had not only been unfair to him, but also to herself, hit her fully in the face.

'Have you heard a word I've said?' Anton asked, pulling into the drive-way of their house.'

'Yes', she replied gently, 'you handled the crisis extremely well.' Her remorse had softened her tone and guilt triggered off a kindness towards him as she tenderly moved in and gave him a light kiss on his cheek.

'What was that for?' he asked, a tad suspiciously.

'No reason,' she replied, forcing a smile, just impulse. She walked into the house and put her things down.

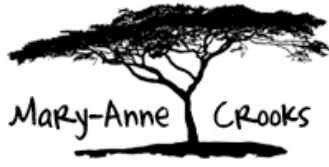
'You relax, I'll whip up something to eat,' he called out.

'Are you sure?' she asked. Receiving an affirmative reply she was filled with a sense of sadness as this kind side of him, a side that she often saw when he was dealing with others was something that rarely occurred between them. He had also had a difficult childhood but then again, Jenny thought, I don't know many people that have had easy lives. We cannot blame bad times for wrong decisions we make; sometimes we just have to take responsibility for being plain stupid!

She sighed as she sat down and reached for the TV control. Battling to concentrate she walked into the kitchen to see if she could help out.

'I'm a far superior cook to you; just chill out,' he smiled.

That thoughtfulness again, the repeat of a ripple of guilt flooded her body, and then with a grin, she replied, 'No questioning that comment, only the starving would enjoy my cooking!' She once again returned to the TV but all she could think about was what a mess she had made of her life and of his.



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Anton brought in two plates of steaming curry on rice with vegetables. As they sat down together to eat the phone rang. He got up and answered. 'No! That's terrible!' She heard the horror in his voice and then strained to hear the rest of the conversation as he spoke in a hushed tone. When he returned he quickly repeated that an old girlfriend of his had lost her husband in a motorbike accident that day. He was grabbing his jacket so that he could go and comfort her.

'Maybe I should come with,' Jenny suggested.

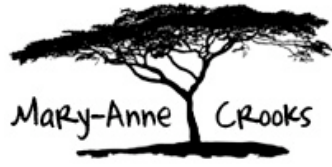
'No, probably better if you don't; you haven't met her and it would be awkward.'

'Okay, well then see you later,' she replied; on one hand she was relieved to have time to herself but on the other slightly suspicious that he didn't want her to accompany him. *Becoming just like him*, she thought to herself. *Stay with the devil and you become the devil!*

She recalled his best man commenting that if Bernadine, his friend, hadn't been married Anton would definitely have taken her as his bride. He had also hinted, camouflaging it with humour, that he wouldn't be surprised if Anton hadn't been having an affair with her all of her married life. She decided to discard this comment. Being sceptical about his loyalty to her just made her more like him; not an option!

After a hot bath she retired to bed to read a book. She loved reading, anything from forensic science murder stories to historic novels. The only material she didn't enjoy was romance books and science fiction. When she looked at the clock she saw that it was after 12pm. She had become so engrossed in the storyline that she had lost all sense of time. Picking up the phone she dialled his mobile. No answer, it just went to message.

'Anton, could you please let me know approximately what time you will be coming home. Hope Bernadine is okay?' *What a stupid question, of course she wasn't coping!* 'Anyway, I'm going to sleep now but don't mind being woken up by your call. Bye honey.'

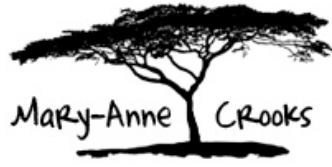


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The next morning Jenny woke early to the singing of the birds. Feeling grumpy from her late, restless night, she grabbed her pillow, covered her head and screamed at the birds to shut up! Realising that they didn't have a care in the world and were enjoying the glorious sunrise she reluctantly got up, still irritated by their chirping. 'You are not a very nice person anymore,' she told herself. She had changed over the last six years. Her gentle side had all but disappeared and she had become aggressive, particularly with Anton. He was always needling her, wanting to know every detail about her day, who she had spoken to, where and what she had for lunch and the questions would just go on. Frustration normally caused a negative reaction and it was almost nightly now that they fought over some inconsequential aspect. As a last resort she had suggested marriage counselling but knew that she was just biding time as eventually she would leave him. His latest tactics with the gun were getting out of hand. He was either brandishing it around, threatening with it or stroking it as if it was his lover. When it wasn't in his hand he made a point of putting it under his pillow, always taking care that she was present when he did it. She knew his behaviour was controlling and tactical but it was brutal, cruel and she was always tense, scared and edgy; this was no life.

As it was a Saturday she got up, showered and had breakfast; Anton still wasn't returning her phone calls. She was getting worried as he was always controlling her every move and this was unusual behaviour. The more concerned she got, the angrier she became. Eventually she put her costume and towel in a bag and took a walk down to the local swimming pool. Even though the place was a bit crowded she enjoyed the giggling of the children, their playfulness and just their general joyfulness; such a contrast to the life she was currently living.

She noticed a young man trying to make eye-contact with her and decided to turn over onto her stomach and sunbathe. The sun was beating down and she could hear the cold water calling her name. She had a long swim, using the time to exercise and cool down. The water had always soothed her and she missed



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her sailing days with her dad. Every week-end would be spent at the sailing club and she would crew for her father. They had been close during her late teens but after his affair their relationship had chilled considerably. In a way, she supposed she had taken her mother's side as she and her siblings had all felt abandoned by her father.

When she got back to her spot on the grass she noticed that there had been a missed call. 'Anton,' she said as she called back, 'where have you been?'

'I might ask you the same question,' he replied. 'Why aren't you answering the home phone?'

'Actually,' she replied, 'in response to your taunting question I have the same query. Why weren't you answering your mobile?'

'You are unbelievable! I have just spent the night trying to console a devastated wife and mother and you want to know why I didn't answer my phone; maybe it was because I was busy. Do you have as good a reason?'

'I was worried; you didn't let me know you would be gone all night. I know my unease about your safety is nowhere in the same category as to what you were dealing with but I did expect one call letting me know that you were okay and not coming home. I'm sorry; I know you must have had one hell of a night.'

'Where are you?'

'I'm at the swimming pool. I didn't want to stay at home and do nothing and have enjoyed exercising and just soaking up the sun.'

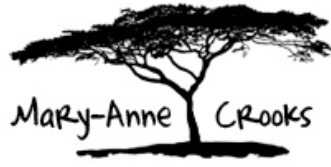
'Are you sure that is all you are soaking up?'

'Pardon, what's that supposed to mean? Anton, I'm in the middle of a large crowd and I'm not going to argue on the phone. I'll be leaving now, will you be at home?'

'No, I need to be with my friend. I'll see you tomorrow night,' he replied, clicking off his phone.

Jenny just sat looking at the phone. Would she ever understand the complexity of her husband's character?





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The weekend rapidly progressed downhill after that. Even though she left two messages apologising to Anton for being inconsiderate he didn't return her calls. She then received a ring from her best friend asking if she could possibly move in for a week as she was leaving her husband. Jenny told her to come right over. They sat up talking until after 10pm when the car door slammed shut outside. He was home.

As Anton walked in Jenny went to greet him. His stony silence told her how he was feeling about her lack of consideration. Her kiss was countered with a quick evasive move as he walked into the bedroom. She followed him as she had to let him know that her friend, Sally, was in the lounge. Ignoring her he turned his back towards her and walked into the lounge.

'Sally,' he said warmly, so good to see you. Hear you are having a spot of bother with your husband; are you okay?'

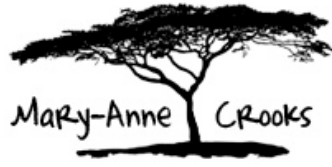
'Yes thank you Anton, really appreciate you asking,' she replied, looking over dubiously at Jenny, questioning her friend's adverse remarks about her husband.

'Has my wife been kind enough to feed you?' he asked.

'I haven't been hungry,' Sally replied.

'Jenny, could you please hustle up something quick and easy for us to eat; I have had a long, emotional weekend and I am hungry. As you have neglected Sally, I'm sure she wants something to eat.'

What could she do? *'I wonder how many personalities live in that body,'* she whispered to herself as she exited the room. Eventually she came back with toasted cheese sandwiches and a prayer that he wasn't going to perform at her lack of imagination. To her surprise, the evening progressed comfortably, Anton sitting on the opposite side of the lounge to her. He was witty, repeating amusing stories of how his day progressed as an Editor for a top newspaper. Eventually Jenny excused herself and went to bed. She didn't know how long her closest friend and *'possibly her closest enemy'* stayed up.



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Monday morning was much the same as every beginning of the week. She got her lunchtime call from her husband as normal, the only difference being that he informed her he wouldn't be home for dinner as he was going around to his bereaved friend. He would however, be home later.

Sally was subdued when Jenny returned home. She and her husband had not managed to resolve their issues and she needed to make plans to find a permanent place to stay. Jenny assured her that she could stay with them as long as she needed to.'

'Anton seems really sweet Jenny. Why are you so unhappy with him? I mean, he provides well for you, he's attentive and understood all that I was feeling last night. I really, really like him.'

'You don't know him,' answered Jenny shortly. 'That sounds like him now; I'll just go and heat up his dinner.' She heard him enter the house, greet Sally warmly and then settle down with her in the lounge. She listened to them laughing about something he had said. He didn't bother to go to the kitchen to greet her and when she entered with his dinner she received an obligatory thanks.

Once again she was the first to head off to bed. This time, however, he followed her in.

'What the hell is wrong with you? You're such an inconsiderate cow! I'm dealing with a devastated friend, trying to be sympathetic with Sally and all you do is hand me my food and sit with a long face all night. You are unreal!'

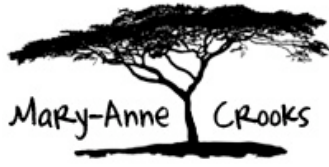
She couldn't believe that he was picking on her again. *Maybe she was a cow? She didn't know anymore; but one thing she did know – she was beginning to hate him!*

'Anton, I don't want to fight, I'm going to sleep.'

'No, you're not. Why are you always pushing me, making me angry? You go out of your way to be difficult and cause trouble.'

'If you say so,' she remarked knowing that she would receive a reaction.

'Oh, I see sarcasm again, can't you think of anything intelligent to say?'



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'No, I leave that area to you Anton,' she replied, climbing into bed and turning her back on him. The clicking of the gun's safety catch had her swiftly turning back to face him. 'Please, not again Anton. Remember, Geoff said that you shouldn't use your gun to manipulate me. Put it away, I'm sorry.'

His ranting caused Sally to knock on the door and hurriedly enter. 'What's going on?' she asked bewildered.

'Anton is angry with me and threatening to kill himself,' replied Jenny.

'Anton, put the gun away,' Sally said in a soothing voice. 'Surely you can sort this problem out?'

'Get out!' he yelled. She made a hasty retreat and shortly afterwards Jenny heard her car start up and leave.

Anton was now calmly sitting on the bed with his gun held to his temple, the safety catch off. 'You think I won't do it but I will and then where will you be; weeping at my grave and full of regret.'

Jenny had suddenly had enough. 'Do what you have too,' she replied running from the room, into the bathroom and slamming the door. She stayed there all night, sleeping on the bathroom mat. Only when she heard the front door slam shut, the next morning, did she exit.

'Mom, it's me.' She started to sob over the phone.

'What has that lunatic done now; are you okay?'

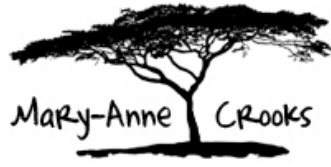
'Yes, please could you and Roger come and fetch me?' Roger was her step-father and she adored him.

'I'll phone you back now,' replied her mother. Within an hour her mother and Roger turned up. He had borrowed a van from work. In the meantime Jenny had packed her clothing and was waiting for them.

'Is that all you are taking?' asked her mother.

'I just want to get away,' Jenny replied.

'I know, but you have also contributed to this household and a lot of your wedding gifts were from our family. Come, let's sort out the kitchen and take what you will need to start again.'



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Jenny took, what she considered, her wedding gifts, half the cutlery and crockery, a few pots and pans and then looked at the slow-cooker. Anton's best man had given it to them as a wedding gift. She walked over and picked it up. 'For all the money I have put into this house and will never see again,' she said as they left.

Many calls followed; a lot of screaming and shouting, then swearing and threatening. Eventually Jenny got a lawyer and informed Anton that if he had anything to say he could contact her attorney.

It was coming up to what would have been their fourth wedding anniversary. Jenny's mom received a call from Anton on her birthday. He told her to inform Jenny that he had a birthday present for her; he was going to blow his brains out! Jenny's mom told him to leave her daughter alone and to get psychological help.

On the morning of what should have been a celebration of marriage – four years, Jenny went to work as usual. She was feeling a little apprehensive as she realised that this would be the last chance he would have to hurt her. Soon they would be divorced and she could get on with her life and hopefully he would find someone that understood and loved him. Maybe Bernadine would be interested?

'Well, another hour and we are out of here,' she commented to her colleagues as the day was coming to a finish. 'His last chance to hurt me is almost over,' she joked, feeling the fear leaving her body and almost elation at the thought of starting a new life.

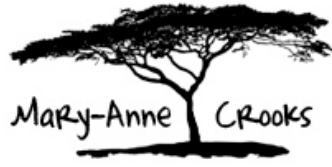
'Clarke's engineering,' said her colleague, answering the phone.

'Jenny, call for you.'

'Hello... Mom, what's the matter?'

'Anton's dead, he shot himself. Roger is on his way to pick you up.' Jenny sat down all emotion draining from her body.

'You okay?' asked the receptionist.



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'No, Anton has finally killed himself. He always told me he would but I never believed him.' The intensity of her sobs overwhelmed the shocked silence in the office.

Had the brutality of his tactical action ruined her life?