

Someday a Prince

by Moshe Dann (April 2014)

There were times when it seemed to Helen that her over-priced one-bedroom apartment – foundation of her independence and freedom – was more like a prison. In a new housing project, close to the public school where she taught 5th grade English, near a suburban shopping mall, her “home” was convenient. But it was missing what she wanted most of all.

A soft early morning light spilled across the courtyard below as the street began to fill with traffic and people. Standing in front of the window, she remembered Morris. They’d met at a New Year’s Eve party, and he’d seemed interesting, but her romantic infatuation dissolved the more he revealed; no steady job, problems with his Ex, his kids and a cloud of doom.

“It’s not working,” she’d told him, wanting someone who would take care of her, not another loser.

“Let’s give it another chance, Helen,” he pleaded, his sad eyes searching for a spark of hope.

“There’s no future for us,” she insisted, remembering the last time that they had spent the weekend together. He’d arrived late; she was upset. It was a little thing, she conceded, but it mattered, like his scuffed shoes and frayed collars.

“You can’t give me what I want,” she spoke with determination and he seemed to accept it reluctantly, without an emotional scene. It was easier than she’d anticipated; he didn’t even try to seduce her again. It was, she reckoned, quite civilized.

“We’ll still be friends,” she offered as their boat sank without a sound.

“Friends,” Morris stood in the doorway, shoulders sagging. Her kiss on his cheek was like a handshake between opponents after the game is over, with a sense of relief and exhaustion. *It’s over, finished, and no regrets.* Her path seemed clear, but not without doubts and a confusing mixture of sadness and relief.

She had thought it would be easier and exciting after her divorce, especially without children; but it wasn’t. Men had come into her life; she had wanted one or two to stay, to leave their toothbrush and call her with mundane questions, but they seemed busy with their lives and everything else.

Time, she mused, was catching up to her. Thirty-three-not-married fear already lurked inside her. *I'm still young*, she reassured herself, smoothing her face; a new hair had sprouted between her eyebrows.

Helen had endured a broken-down marriage until it just fell apart and died, like her old car, its rusting hulk abandoned on the street. One day the city towed it away, leaving an empty space where it had been, bits of rubbish that had been stuck underneath and an oil stain, like blood, that taunted her unmercifully; *why didn't you take care of me?*

She clenched her teeth as an old woman pulling a shopping cart walked slowly past her building toward the bus stop on her way to the supermarket. A young man wearing a T-shirt ran past, tingling the wind chimes of her heart. She wondered if she was ready for a man in her life. *Women friends had no demands and expectations; men wanted.*

Her face reflected in the window, wisps of hair caught in the trees, something raged inside her. It was early spring and she felt empty.

Her classes at school were starting late; there was time for a quick run. Pulling on shorts, a T-shirt and jogging shoes, she glanced at the mirror. *Nice body, but small breasts*