

# PEACE

*A moment of doubt.*

BY DANNY DUNLAVEY

It's been 30 days since I killed my husband, my lover, my mate. I feel as though I should hide the evidence (although I don't think there is any), but it's all legal. Or rather, it's not illegal.

All the women know it's coming. The men don't. They find out during. Sort of.

When I asked Gary about his family, he told me that he only had a mother, as if that was natural. And about 100 brothers and sisters. He hardly knew about his father, meaning he didn't at all. Come to think of it, I don't know mine either.

Mum said not to worry about it. Murder comes naturally to the females of our species. It makes sense. We need the nutrients. I, of course, had no idea what she was talking about. She said I'd know when it was time.

And I did.

Martha came over yesterday. She tried to help console me.

"Julie, don't worry about it. I'm sure he didn't mind. Trust me, he died very happy," she said.

"Martha, I killed my husband! I can't just forget about that. I loved him, even if his forelimbs were a bit small. Size isn't what matters."

"Loved him? Love? Oh, never mind. Look, you'll get used to it. Do you know how many husbands I've had?"

"Twelve."

"And how many do I have now?"

"None."

"And am I all upset about it?"

"No, but you were always much more of an extrovert than me. When guys snapped their mandibles at me, my skin turned a red shade of green!"

"So? Even if your personality doesn't lend itself to mating, instinct will triumph. And then you'll learn that nothing's wrong," Martha said.

"Martha, it's not really even murdering Gary that I can't get over."

"Oh. Well, what are you all upset about? That's usually the hardest part. It gets so much more pleasurable after that. Put a few

spiders on it. It's delicious. Not the *sentient* spiders, of course."

"Martha, it's the cannibalism that

seems wrong to me."

"Ugh, I was worried you'd say that. Do you want to see Dr Pratt? A most excellent psychiatrist. Very considerate. When the kids get in trouble at school and I feel a stroke coming from the screaming, I pop a Valium and go comatose in front of the TV. The pinnacle of relaxation, trust me."

"OK. I'll go."

The office was nice. Dr Pratt was male. It looked like he was celibate, seeing as he was alive. He must have asked some serious questions about why he didn't have a father.

"Now, I must warn you, Miss Julie. It may be mating season, but I am just not interested," he began. "No offence. Your forelimbs and thorax are very nice."

"Thank you," I said. "You're perfectly attractive as well, but I think we can reach a mature agreement as two consenting and equal individuals that we should not have sexual relations, for both our sakes."

"Perfect," said Dr Pratt. "Now, Martha told me that you're having some guilt issues, but she didn't explain why. So ... what seems to be the problem?"

Great. Martha wanted to build up the maximum amount of embarrassment for me in front of a total stranger.

"My husband is dead, and I killed him. I know it's not illegal, but I feel there was some betrayal of trust when I cut his head off and ate him. I know it's irrational. I know, I know. But what can I do? I still love Gary," I said.

"I'm sorry, what? Did you say 'love'?" asked Dr Pratt.

"Yes. Love."

"... Right," he said hesitantly. "And what is this 'love' of which you speak?" he asked, moving his forelimbs up and down in the air.

"Well," I began, "I mean I thought Gary was handsome and sweet and he'd be a suitable mate."

"Oh. That's all. We usually just call that *desire* in the medical field. I suppose you may have seen that word somewhere in the old libraries or online," said Dr Pratt.

"You know what, you're right," I replied. "I've been reading books that some of the archaeologists have been putting online. 'Love' pops up a lot. I wasn't even thinking about it."

"Yes, yes. The civilization before the chemical spill a few centuries ago was dramatically different from ours. Suffice it to say, it was not very efficient."

"So, anyway," he continued, "why are you feeling guilty? It's not as if you weren't able to find a mate. You haven't let our species down."

"Well, Gary was more than just a suitable mate. He was sweet. He wrote me poetry, just like the stuff I've read online. He said we would be together forever."

"That does seem unusual for a mantis," said Dr Pratt.

"So, what do you think I should do? I can't ever love again, not after Gary. I mean, obviously I'll still raise all my children responsibly for the mantis race ..."

"Well, maybe you can find solace beyond the physical realm?"

"Beyond the physical?" I asked. "Like those irrational humans I've read about? Before the spill wiped them out? I mean, the poetry sounds nice, but the ideas behind it ..."

"Exactly. Just give it a try. I've read lots about the benefits in radical medical journals. You have a whole bunch of options: asking for forgiveness for stuff; 'spirituality'; coming to peace with yourself through inner dialogue ..."

"All right," I said, "if you think it'll help."

"Now, let's see here ..." he began flipping through a book on his desk. "Right. Just like the name given to our ancestors in the old texts — I believe it's called 'praying.' ■

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Danny Dunlavy is a writer from Maryland. He talks fast, punches trees and murders rocks. In addition, he watches movies and reads. Yes, he knows he's not interesting.

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