

laughter that stings like a stab to the heart. stokes of paint that cut like knives.

Jack loves the little brown house he shares with his wife, Lilian. It is small and cozy and it feels like home. The exterior is old, resembling the styling of a home found in cottage country from the 1960s. Vines and leaves grow all around it, giving off a splash of colour and life with every twist and turn. It looks smaller on the outside than what was really on the inside. He knows this space is the perfect place to mature and grow with the person he loves. Perhaps start a family, house some pets, grow old together and die. And this is something he knows is possible for himself. He sees this life in every inch of his home and wants it more than anything.

The only problem was: Jack loves his little brown house, but he hates his wife.

It hadn't always been like this. At the start of their relationship, they shared an overwhelming amount of admiration and love between one another. There was a moment in his life where he would have laid down his life for Lilian and he knew she would do the same. But now, four years in, he has to hold everything in him to not wrap his arms around her neck and squeeze tight.

Now, Jack wouldn't say he hates his wife for no reason. No, not at all. In fact, he would argue the hatred he has for his wife is far more justified than most men could say. See, Jack doesn't hate his wife because she's not submissive or because she doesn't always like to cook or clean. He doesn't hate her because she chews her food too loud or because she pronounces words funny like "pacifically" or "valentimes day". Jack would even say that these are the very things he loves about Lilian because they are what make her the woman he fell in love with. No, Jack doesn't hate his wife for being herself. He hates her because even though he loves her unconditionally, flaws and perfection galore, she can't seem to do the same for him.

When Jack was honest with her about wanting to take up painting lessons, a hobby to pick back up from when he was in college and gave it up to pursue business like his father wanted, she laughed in his face. When he came home with an easel, a painter's palette and a 6 pack of acrylics, she laughed again. When he showed her his creations, told her about his community open houses, told her someone asked to buy his work and when he put up his framed pieces on the walls in their tiny brown house that he loved so dearly, all she did was *laugh*.

Laugh, laugh, laugh.

At first, Jack thought the laughter was out of fondness for pursuing his long lost passion. She had always told him that she found his childlike admiration and perception of the world to be amusing. That it helped her see light in terribly dark places. But, there was a bite in every chuckle she let out when she passed the portrait of a flower vase that hung in the upstairs hallway. It left a sting to his chest like he was being stabbed in the heart. With every laugh she let out in mockery only grew his anger towards her. Jack would then translate this anger into his art work, which Lilian only laughed at more and more. This, in turn, made Jack hate her more and more. Each stroke of his paintings became violent like his brush was a knife and the canvas her body.

Jack used to love the little brown house he shares with his wife, Lilian. It was small and cozy and it felt like home. Vines and leaves grew all around it, giving off a splash of colour and life with every twist and turn. He knew this space was the perfect place to mature and grow with the person he loved. This is something he thought could have been possible for himself and Lilian. He saw this life in every inch of his home and wanted it more than anything.

The only problem was: Jack loves his little brown house and hates his wife, but not more than he loves to paint.

By Suad Alad

Today was the day he was going to ask her for a divorce.