

MRS. FEENEY ON THE COUCH

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"Mash one for me, Sugar."

Because the voice sounded familiar, we looked around, and sure enough, there standing behind us in the elevator was our old friend, the dietary control lady, Mrs. Jay Feeney. Remembering the conversation with her last December and her plans for remarrying, we were a little uncertain about how to address her. Apparently noting our hesitation and sensing the difficulty, she said, "It's still Feeney, dearie. And don't think I haven't had my troubles this spring."

We followed the sprightly lady out to her car and helped her onto the running board and into the high seat behind the wheel. Mrs. Feeney drives an air-cooled, slant-nosed Franklin, a legacy from her third husband, Colonel Thimble.

"What happened to your fiancé, the retired Master Sergeant?" we asked.

"I must have miscalculated," said Mrs. Feeney. "I got him through the last two bridal showers in good shape, but he collapsed at the bachelor's party the night before the wedding. We rushed him to the emergency room with me giving him that mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and cardiac massage, but he passed before the preacher could get there to perform the marriage ceremony."

"It must have been a great tragedy for you."

"Absolutely. Six months of courting down the drain. He could have at least held on for another twenty-four hours. As it was, I couldn't even give him a decent burial."

We said it looked like she had held up remarkably well through her ordeal.

"It's all a front, son. My nerves are gone. Inside I'm all torn up. I tried to sign up at the funeral home for some grief therapy sessions, but they welshed on the contract on account of no family connection and a G.I. burial. It's been almost more than a body can stand. I've got conflicts Freud never heard about. I talked to my psychologist friend from Human Research out at Benning, and when she told me I was living a life of inauthentic existential modality, I *knowed* I was in bad shape."

We tried to reassure Mrs. Feeney that her mood would pass, and that particularly now that spring and pleasant weather had come, she would be able to get out and enjoy some sport and recreation.

"You can say that, dearie, but it don't help any," complained Mrs. Feeney. "I always used to enjoy the baseball season, but then I just read that paper Dr. Petty gave to the

American Psychoanalytic Association last year. This baseball is not the kind of a game you think it is, sugar. Nothing but a primitive totem feast of incestuous Oedipus complexes and phallic symbolizations. It turns my stomach—at least it turns what's left of it after the gastrectomy."

"Maybe going fishing or a trip to the seashore would do you good," we suggested.

"You're too innocent, baby," said Mrs. Feeney. "I can see you never read Dr. Oreste Carvahlo's paper. He exposed all those nasty sports in 1960. They're all just warmed-over sex. That swimming and beach stuff is nothing but a bunch of semi-nude virgins with sadomasochistic tendencies, trying to symbolize their return to the womb. And them fish! They're all just a lot of slimy transvestites. I wouldn't touch one with a ten-foot pole."

"You do sound like you're in bad shape," we said.

"Well, I was," agreed Mrs. Feeney, "until I got me one of these Do-It-Yourself Psychiatry Kits from my pastor last week. I'm working at it now.

"Has it helped?"

"I'm ventilating like mad. It's a struggle though. Every afternoon I lie down on the couch at home and ask myself questions. And you should read some of them questions!"

Mrs. Feeney reached for the thermos bottle on the back seat and, with hands atremble, poured two cups of eggnog. "Here," she said, "it'll do you good. In the spring and summer, I have to thin it out some."

"Do you use skim milk?" we asked.

"No, Baby, I can't spare the nourishment. I just dilute it with more alcohol." After a brief toast, Mrs. Feeney's arm disappeared up to the elbow in her voluminous handbag and in a moment emerged with a fat sheaf of papers. "Here it is," she continued. "I've skipped through most of it already, but right now I'm bogged down in the Biographical Questionnaire on this Number IV where it wants you to write about your marriage."

We observed that she should be an expert on that subject.

"That's the trouble, sweetie. When you've buried seven husbands you've got to cover too much ground, and they didn't leave me but just one page. But I'm too cagey to write everything down. Nobody is going to trap old Jay girl."

"How did you do on the Mooney Problem Check List?" we asked.

"It was a breeze. The only thing I needed to underline was that Number 54 where it

says, 'Do your feet hurt?' My bunions kill me, sugar." Mrs. Feeney poured seconds from the thermos, gulped hers down and handed us another sheet. "Now, I don't trust this here C.I. Form N2. It's a real sneaky one. Some kind of nut must have dreamed this one up. Look at this question Number 55: 'Are you a bed wetter?' Imagine! I wouldn't tell 'em if I was."

"Did you answer questions Numbers 91 and 92?" we asked.

"If those are the ones about being arrested more than three times, and taking dope regular, the answer is no. When the questions get too personal, I stand on my constitutional rights and take the Fifth Amendment. There is some things even my preacher don't need to know."

Mrs. Feeney glared at the Cornell Index form. "Hah!" she said, pointing. "There's one question I know the answer to. This Number 83 that says, 'Do you have the feeling that people are watching you on the street?' For a while I thought the FBI had put a tail on me, but last week I discovered it was this kooky psychiatric social worker who was following me around."

"You mean someone was actually following you?"

"Night and day." Mrs. Feeney nodded. "Followed me all over. And she kept writing things down in her little notebook. Tried to give her the slip a couple of times, but I couldn't shake her. Yesterday, I trapped her in a corner of Kirven's basement and asked her what she thought she was doing. Liked to scared the wits out of her."

"You talked to her?"

"Sure," cackled Mrs. Feeney. "She said she was working up a field report for her master's degree and using me 'cause I was such an interesting case. But I set her straight. I told her she'd be better off chasing after some of them feisty soldiers and getting one of them all worked up. The poor thing is 32 years old and ain't caught her a man yet. And soldiers ain't all that particular."

Mrs. Feeney handed us the crank from under the seat. After we had gotten the Franklin's air-cooled engine started for her, she downed one more cup of eggnog for the road. As she roared off, she leaned out the window and yelled, "Soon as I get through with this Do-It-Yourself thing, I'm going to work out a Feeney Questionnaire for the psychologists and psychiatric social workers. Looks like they need help, son."