

The Black Widow by Duncan McGlynn

When your husband dies, they call you a widow, unless you killed him of course, then you're a murderer. I first killed my husband when he was 35, in the prime of his life apparently. 100cm round the waist, balding, sweat dripping out of every pore. It was all downhill from here. He spent all weekend with the telly, some beers, his mates and not with me. The time we did spend together he was asleep and snoring to let the whole world know. So I smothered him with a pillow. It was a mercy killing really.

The police came to investigate, naturally. It was a woman detective constable. She took one look at his grotesque lump of a corpse and declared that there were no suspicious circumstances.

I saw him again after they buried his coffin, at the party to celebrate his passing. He looked slightly thinner and had combed his few hairs differently. What was more, he was calling himself by a different name and was pretending to be married to someone else. I've always been a perfectionist and was shocked that I had failed. His so-called wife was sloshed and having a great time, but he, as usual, was domineering and embarrassed and dragged her away. It was time to make amends. I followed the car he'd obviously rented for the evening and drove them off the road. Their car went up like fireworks. It was a shame the "wife" had to die, but as he always used to say, if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing well.

I really don't know how he survived that, but a few months after "the accident", he was cleaning windows at my work. He was wearing another clever disguise: a wig and thick glasses. I figured I should live and let live until I saw him leering at all of us. He even made a few lewd gestures. I went to the roof of the building and cut the ropes. It was a hard bitumen road he fell twenty stories to hit. I didn't think anyone could have survived that.

But he did.

It wasn't long after my husband's "fall" that I met John, dashing PC Booth—young, tall, blond, good-looking, even intelligent (well, for a man at least). He was, in other words, everything that my husband was not. We met when he was investigating my latest botched attempt to get rid of my husband.

You see, living in a rented flat, I wasn't allowed to touch any of the fixtures, not even to fix a leaking tap. We have to call in "a man." This was, needless to say, my husband in yet another of his cunning disguises. Cunning, but not too cunning, for how could he expect my not to see through it when he had the same rotting gums, the same body odour and the same tendency to devote half his gaze to my chest? He pretended not to know me. I showed him the dripping tap and then escaped to the other end of the flat to open some windows. Then it struck me: the reason he kept coming back was to seek his revenge on me.

As these thoughts raced through my head, I heard him approaching behind me. I swung around. He was wearing his old patronising smile and carrying a wrench. He was going to cudgel my brains out! I grabbed the nearest thing to hand and, well, it's all a bit of a blur until the police arrived—until John arrived.

I fell head over heels in love with him of course and told him everything, to impress him really. I proudly showed him where I had buried that "hitch-hiker" (did I tell you about him?), how I thought I had done away with him and the river where I had thrown the knife. It was so pleasant to finally be able to tell someone all the things that I had been bottling up for so long.

I had my day in court. John coached me. He said all I had to do was plead guilty and it would all be over. I wanted so much to please him, but when they asked me if I had murdered my husband, I could not lie under oath, for I am a moral woman and the bastard was right there in the court room wearing his least convincing disguise yet: an obviously fake silvery wig and red dress. And he was wielding a wooden hammer! He was going to try to kill me again! And John had led me straight to him! They were all in it together!

Betrayed, confused and heartbroken, I made a charge for my husband, wrenched the hammer from his hand and dealt him a good solid whack on the head.

I ran, I hid, I ran some more and I hid some more. Eventually I ended up in deepest darkest Africa. I walked around in circles for 17 weeks trying to spread my scent so that the sniffer dogs would get confused.

I took off all my clothes and hid them deep in a bramble bush so that the sniffer dogs would lead my husband to walk through it. I then walked 278 days in the opposite direction and climbed a tree. I felt relieved. There would be no chance of his finding me.

Once again I was wrong. We're living together again, decided to give the marriage one last chance. He still swings around like he owns the place, still picks nits from his ears, still lazes around all day, still leaves food scraps everywhere and still doesn't talk to me, but at least he's stopped wearing his disguises....