

A JOYFUL COUPLE

by

Erin Spofford

[e.spofford.writer@gmail.com](mailto:e.spofford.writer@gmail.com)

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

A black and white, poster-sized print of a lighthouse on a stormy New England-esque coast hangs noticeably crooked behind the sofa.

Two side tables bookend a sofa. A well-worn bible, cheap lamp, and analogue clock sits on one. On the other, a matching cheap lamp and the following three photos in mismatched frames:

A wedding photo in sepia; A couple's baptism in a lake; The couple with their two boys.

JOY, mid 30s, braided hair, small-town parochial wife, roughly guides PHIL, late 40s, clean-cut, former athlete with a beer belly, toward the sofa like a parent dealing with a willful child.

Phil carries a plastic grocery bag full of random trash - flattened cans, candy wrappers, cigarette butts, sun bleached pages of newspaper.

JOY

Sit down. And give me that.

She snatches the grocery bag from Phil.

Phil laughs briefly at Joy's aggressiveness.

PHIL

Take it easy. No worries.

He sits.

JOY

(sotto)

Yeah, no worries. What have you got to worry about? I'm the one who gets to worry about everything.

She takes a deep breath.

JOY (CONT'D)

Phil, as head of this household, I need to get your permission to do something.

Phil smiles.

PHIL

What can I do to help?

Joy barks out a laugh.

JOY

You can help me by not wandering off while I'm at work. I'm lucky you stayed on the main road this time.

Phil giggles.

Joy, lips pressed tight, clenches the grocery bag of trash.

JOY (CONT'D)

I'll be right back.

Joy storms off.

Phil remains on the sofa.

A bird SINGS outside. Phil whistles a tuneless response. The bird song quickly fades away, leaving nothing but quiet.

Phil reaches for the TV remote on the side table. His medical alert bracelet TINKLES and CLACKS as it drags across the table top. Phil lifts the remote and points it forward.

EXPLOSIONS and GUNFIRE replace the quiet of the living room as the stock footage of a black and white war plays.

PHIL

Crash, bang, boom. So much noise.

Bombs WHISTLE through the air. Phil duplicates the sound with his own whistle. He laughs.

His laughter stops. His eyes drift. He stares off into space. He drops the remote on the floor.

The falling bombs EXPLODE.

His eyes refocus. He taps his knees (shave and a haircut) and looks around the room without purpose. Phil picks up the framed family photo of Joy, himself, and their two boys.

Joy returns. She turns off the television.

Phil, looking at the photo, doesn't notice.

Joy sits on the edge of the sofa next to Phil. He smiles at her, putting the photo on his legs.

She holds a tri-fold pamphlet.

JOY

Okay, honey, I need you to pay attention. This is important.

PHIL  
Of course.

JOY  
Great.

She shows him the pamphlet.

JOY (CONT'D)  
This is Heartville. It's a home for  
people --

PHIL  
This is my home.

JOY  
It is. But this would be another  
home. A safer one.

PHIL  
You have such pretty eyes. So  
lovely.

Joy flashes a smile and rolls her eyes at his compliment. She  
puts on a serious face.

JOY  
Phil, just listen to me, please.

She shows the pamphlet to him.

JOY (CONT'D)  
This place has a flower garden and  
a swimming pool. Isn't that great?

Joy looks to Phil, hopeful.

Phil, distracted, looks at the framed photo in his lap.

Joy frowns. She sits further back on the sofa. Leans against  
her husband. Puts her head on his shoulder. Lifts pamphlet.

JOY (CONT'D)  
It even has a couple of billiard  
tables.

Phil perks up at that.

PHIL  
I played nine-ball with Minnesota  
Fats once in Chicago.

JOY

I know. We can play whenever I visit. Sunday is family day and I can bring the kids with me.

Phil, looking down at the photo he's holding, points to the younger child in the picture. His words slur together.

PHIL

Who's this?

JOY

Andrew, silly. But tell me what do you think about --

Phil's shoulder stiffens then twitches, hard and sudden. The movement sharply jostles Joy's head.

Joy grabs her ear in pain.

JOY (CONT'D)

What was that for?

No reply from Phil. Just a thousand yard stare as the left half of his face spasms slightly then stops.

Joy turns to face him.

JOY (CONT'D)

Phil? Are you okay?

She waves her hand in front his face and gets no response. Her eyes grow wide.

JOY (CONT'D)

Honey, I need you to lie down on the floor.

She gently guides him with practiced familiarity.

Phil's movements are slow and stiff as he moves to the floor. The left side of his face spasms non-stop.

Joy rolls him on his side.

She checks the clock on the side table.

JOY (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Four fifteen.

Phil's arms jerk sporadically. His legs, too.

Joy focuses on keeping him on his side. Phil's size difference makes it difficult. Tears well up in her eyes.

JOY (CONT'D)

I can't do this anymore. I thought  
I was strong. But I'm weak.

She takes a hit from his forearm across her cheek. She shakes it off. Full-on crying now.

Joy watches Phil's limbs jerk and spasm. She struggles to keep her husband on his side.

Moisture stains spread across Phil's pants, front and back.

She pushes her face into his side.

JOY (CONT'D)

I don't want to send you away but I  
have to. Just tell me it's okay.

Phil's body convulses violently. Joy's muscles strain to keep him on his side. Phil's spasming arm hits her again.

Joy weeps.

Phil's body spasms slow. His face twitches stop.

Joy wipes her eyes and cheeks with the cuff of her blouse. She checks the clock.

JOY (CONT'D)

(sotto)  
Four seventeen.

Joy puts Phil's head in her lap. Runs her hand through his sweaty hair.

Phil, eyes bloodshot and watery, looks at Joy. A sheen of drool coats his chin. Foamy spit clings to the corners of his mouth. His words are slurred and mushy.

PHIL

Hey beautiful.

Joy laughs. She strokes his head with care.

JOY

Hey handsome. Welcome back.

Phil's words are easier to understand, less slurry.

PHIL

You know why I married you, Joy?

She looks lovingly at him.

JOY  
Why, Phil?

Phil's words now clear and crisp.

PHIL  
Because I knew, no matter what,  
we'd always be a Joy-Phil couple.

Joy laughs. She studies his face.

Phil raises his hand to Joy's cheek.

PHIL (CONT'D)  
No matter what.

Joy's eyes brim with fresh tears but she maintains her composure. She nods.

JOY  
Thank you. Now, come on, let's get  
you cleaned up before the kids get  
home from school.

She helps Phil sit up.

INT. A LIVING ROOM - LATER

Joy paces in front of the sofa on a cordless house phone. Phil and the kids LAUGH and GIGGLE as they play in another part of the house.

Off the sofa, Joy picks up the framed family photo and puts it back on the side table.

JOY  
(to phone)  
Hi. Hello. I'd like to speak to  
someone about admitting a family  
member.

She steps up onto the sofa and adjusts the black and white lighthouse picture until it no longer hangs crooked.

JOY (CONT'D)  
No worries. I can hold.

She steps down and sits where Phil sat before his seizure, taking his spot on the sofa.