

*The Tale of the Unhappy Housewife*

Once upon a time, a very unhappy housewife, feeling much abused by fate and woefully tired of her stupid life—tired of forever vacuuming and polishing and washing pots and pants and windows, tired of bedroom squabbles and living-room messes and hollow television yatter, tired of everything, of this whole damned place she lived in, this no place, this stupid house in nowheresville where she must peel potatoes and walk the dumb stupid dog and prepare school lunches and get the family car repaired, desperately tired of all that and tired of her tired sweating husband coming home each evening with his tiresome troubles, tired of the stupid ice cubes clattering in his whiskey glass and the wheezing of the recliner chair as he collapses stupidly into it in front of the yattering television, tired of their tiresome neighbors and of their tiresome friends who were not real friends at all and of their stupid golf scores and aerobic lessons and their insane parties dull as death, and all their children's parties, too, and all their damned children, tired of it all and above all tired of him, whose car was just pulling into their drive, grinding on her nerves as the wheels ground upon the gravel, tired of his irritating burps and farts and baggy suits and his ceaseless picking of his dumb stupid nose, and so much wanting it to change, wanting something meaningful and beautiful to happen in her life (the only one she had to live, and it was going fast)—wished, this woefully unhappy housewife did, just as she cut her thumb with the potato peeler (oh fuck!) and the door banged open, first, that he was dead and, secondly, that she could just drop everything, including the bloody potato peeler, right now, leave it all behind somehow, and fly off forever to romantic places. As it happened, he was just thumping baggily through the door, clutching an envelope in his sweaty fist—she winced in quiet rage, he gave a little cry, staggered forward, and, a finger stuffed up his nose, toppled over, smacking his head on the kitchen counter (he probably didn't feel it), and died there at her feet. Well, now she was sorry, she hadn't really meant it, she was just a bit out of sorts, but what could she do, she could not wish him back to life again. So sad. But in his fat damp hand, now going cold, were two tickets for a cruise to tropical islands and a pretty card that read: The kids have run away! We're free! So she buried him, traded one ticket in for cash, the cars and house as well, bought herself new clothes, some black,

some not (the see-through things were not), and went off on the cruise as a mysterious widow of means from some exotic place she would not name. During which seaborne adventure she met and was swept off her feet by a handsome and affectionate young man of immense wealth and sexual energy whose only flaw was an inordinate love of his late lamented mother which had caused him to fall so passionately in love with an older woman. He was witty and generous and graceful and considerate and they traveled the world together, amazed at the pleasures (she was amazed) that life, when it was good, could provide. In fact it was the next thing to paradise and she liked to say she'd got it all on just two wishes, she still (she'd read the stories) had one to spare. Then, as over time it happened, as no doubt it had to happen (she'd read these stories, too), her handsome young husband, now less young, developed a desire to know younger women as he'd known her. He no longer, in short, wished to see through her see-through things, and proposed in his considerate and graceful way another cruise for each, each traveling separately. She made sure their papers were all in order, then, with a sad smile, used up her third wish, thereby becoming a widow for the second time (his ship sank, there were no survivors, other wishes in the world no doubt also came true), this time an immensely wealthy one, and, loved by all, both young and old (for she was generous, considerate, and affectionate, the graces of the rich being easy to acquire), lived happily ever after.