

## The Man with no Socks

On a warm Monday morning in April Allan Floyd was sitting in a Coffee Plantation café on the north border of Paradise Valley. It was just past 7am, far earlier than his usual time. He had left the house on Mummy Mountain without a shower, and without dressing properly, so as to be gone before his wife came out of her bedroom in search of toast and orange juice. When she was gone he would go home and start the day properly.

It was already ninety degrees. Allan was sitting near the door, and the constant stream of early seekers after coffee, bagels, and scones brought a steady chuffing of hot air. There was nowhere else to sit. He was sweating. He shucked off the poplin beige jacket which he wore and opened another button at the neck of yesterday's shirt. The pants did not go with the shirt nor the brown shoes with the pants. His ankles were naked. Very European. That was not much consolation.

Allan Floyd despised this place – a mixed clientele of community college students and petty bourgeois office workers in banks, brokerages, credit card fulfillment, and other businesses which did nothing but stir the cauldrons of money like Macbeth's three witches, listening to their predictions of coming power.

Allan Floyd despised his life – a yacky-tacky vulgar house at the end of a pompously named cul-de-sac in a town whose greatest public works were a network of speed traps and street cams to keep people from coming there.

Allan Floyd felt cheated and bitter about it and choked on his cold coffee on an unseasonably hot morning.

A slim man with a muffin in one hand and a styrofoam cup in the other and a leather bag on a shoulder strap was standing at the end of the table. Allan floated to the surface of his

reverie.

Excuse me, the slim man said. Would you mind if I sat here? There's nowhere else.

Allan gestured negligently toward the empty chair on the other side of the table. The man took possession of it, putting down things one by one – the coffee, the muffin, the bag, and out of his jacket pockets a phone and a little notebook and a silver pen and lastly a copy of a novel by Donna Leon. Couldn't find my Kindle, he said apologetically. Allan pulled his hands and his coffee cup back into a corner of the table in self-defense at this onslaught of *stuff*. Keys, a wallet, a card case, another phone, a pair of reading glasses. Out of the bag came file folders, a tablet, two more pens, and a wad of receipts. It was comical. Allan felt his sour mood lift. He noticed that this man, too, wore no socks.

The fellow took a sip of coffee and gazed at his small hill of trinkets, both amused and puzzled. One of the phones sang out, He winkled it out of the pile, looked at the caller ID, and smothered it.

Ah! He said suddenly, and plunged one hand into a side pocket of his bag. From there he took a small, round, blue pill case. The lid he dialed to Monday's compartment, from which he turned out three small pills into the palm of his other hand. He took them dry. Then, satisfied and at peace, he began to put everything back.

Fastidiously, Allan polished a bit of the newly uncovered table with a paper napkin. The younger man began a breathless apology, broke off to gulp down some coffee, grabbed his bag and fled, leaving the untouched muffin.

Allan eyed this muffin for a while like a suspicious prairie dog. Surreptitiously he drew it toward him by a corner of the napkin on which it lay. After another long side-eyed stare he broke off a piece. This crumb lay on the table for a while until he ventured a nibble. Slowly his anger and bitterness returned and he pushed the muffin aside. It was too sweet.

He had had a row with Hanna the previous morning. This was no great matter – morning rows were common – but that one had been fierce and he didn't want another. She was beaver-  
ing away at some academic paper she was writing, coming home past midnight, and it made her cranky. At the time when their children were still at home this had been a daily occurrence, leaving Allan to scratch together clothes and food. Alicia boiled spaghetti, Daniel fried some hamburger, and the little one unscrewed the top from a bottle of catsup and dribbled it on the floor. They had made do.

Now that had started again. One Domenic Parra, whose dissertation she was supervising, would find her out and it would be after midnight getting home. Something to do with Buddhist mudras. Hindu mudras. Allan didn't ask. Degrees in art history and comparative religion were not on-putting. On trips she always wanted to visit every cathedral and church and stare at ceilings. On their first trip to Florence he had ad-  
journed to an espresso bar and hadn't been in a cathedral since.

And he did know what a mudra was. And that Donna Leon wrote stories about Venice. Hannah had always been contemptuous of what he knew, as if people who inherited money and didn't work at something were bound to be buck-ignorant. Hanna didn't see that what he did was work. Up long hours at night at his computers, no office or IRA, no mail-room or coffeemaker or photocopier. But he went on stirring his cauldron anyway and out of it came more noxious money. He had started with a few bats' wings and mice hearts and now Hanna drove to work in a natty Mercedes, always new, and wore things she said were ostentatious to gallery openings and to the opera whenever they were somewhere with a decent opera house, and wore ostentatious jeans to work.

Allan felt exploited He did not think that unnatural, if she used his money to finance research trips to Europe and Asia instead of struggling with grants, money which had bought her tenure and a department chair in a second-rate uni-

versity and big roles in professional societies with cauldrons. She had squeezed three children out of him and herself, all three of them liberal ideologues who had nothing to say to people who do nothing useful, and after the third one she wondered why he preferred to make money at night.

Despite that, she kept herself fit. She found time to go running most mornings and was scrupulous about what she ate. It made Allan angry that she would concoct crude, ludicrous scenarios because she believed him incapable of doing likewise, indeed of anything subtle or reasoned. So every morning he buttoned up, maliciously left the orange juice on the breakfast table to warm, and like some stupider Othello went out to the Coffee Plantation on Shea Boulevard to drink his cup of bitterness and resentment, black, no room. Though usually not so early as this, and usually with his socks on.

Allan Floyd went home again. The nifty ever-new Mercedes was still parked at its usual rickety angle in the driveway and the orange juice was warm. Her crumpled valise stood, or leaned, on the hall guest table. Allan never found anything interesting in it. He looked at her calendar and saw that, as he thought, she had missed her morning lecture. Cautiously, he put his ear to her bedroom door. Nothing.

He went away to do some work. After lunch things had not changed, so he put on a brazen face and rudely opened her door.

Hanna was lying across the still-made bed wearing only a bra. Allan noticed with interest that she was going bald between the legs. After a while some men came and hustled her away