

## Joana by Behcet Kaya

For three days Joana Miller remained quiet and attentive to her chores. She completed her grocery list with efficiency, dusted the house, swept the floors, finished countless loads of laundry; carefully folding her clothes and her husbands. She paid her bills on-line, went over telephone bills, balanced her checkbook and rechecked bank statements. She brushed Foo Foo, cleaned out his cat litter and disinfected it with her favorite air freshener. She rearranged all the books on the bookshelves and dusted again. She arranged her plants and flowers on the balcony, trimmed the rose bush and bougainvillea, swept the dirt that had spilled over from the pots and only then did she sit down and start one of her Sudoku puzzles. But soon she was back up again to do other chores, rearranging her closets and kitchen cabinets. Her husband, Metehun, thought this sudden proficiency quite unusual, but didn't say anything.

The loud sound of water running in the bathtub woke Metehun. Groggily he opened his eyes and noticed his wife busily arranging her uniform, carefully hung in the closet. She gathered her matching dark blue shoes, her belt and scarf and her pressed white blouse. Joana undressed, flipped the shower head on, lessening the roaring sound of water. She stepped in, letting the hot, steamy water pour over her. Metehun, now wide awake, laid in bed trying to figure out why Joana was taking a shower at four in the morning.

As she stepped out of the bathtub, warm vapors of steam filled the bathroom and seeped out into the bedroom. Metehun watched her bare back through the crack in the open door. Joana wiped steam off the mirror and saw the reflection of her husband watching her. She came out of the bathroom and stood in front of him, combing her hair, hurried to the closet and back to the bathroom, standing again in front of the mirror. Metehun got up and entered the bathroom.

“Honey, can I use the bathroom for a second?”

“Sure. I didn't know you were up.”

She left the room and shouted, “Honey! If you are going to be long, can you use the other bathroom? I have to get dressed. I don't want to be late for work!”

Metehun walked out of the bathroom, staring at his wife.

“Where is it?” Joana cried. “I must find it! Where is it?” She stood, clad only in her underwear, looking through her jewelry box. “Where is my ID card? I always keep it with my wedding rings, but it's not here! I have been looking everywhere and I can't find it! I'm going to be late for work and I am behind with my flights! I must find it!”

She turned and looked into her husband's eyes.

“Come now...,” she said in a whimpering miserable tone. “Let me get to work. Please help me find my ID card.”

Receiving no answer, she raked her hair with her fingers, disheveling her neat hairdo. She walked into the other bedroom and returned to find her husband sitting on the bed, speechless.

“The least you can do is help me find it!” she implored with a dreadful cry. “Help me find my ID card. I can’t enter the building without my ID card. What is to become of us if I can’t get to my work? Who is going to pay our car insurance and health insurance?”

Lost! Completely lost!

“Honey, you are retired. You don’t have to go to work,” Metehun said in a soothing voice.

But Joana did not hear him. She continued looking through her jewelry box.

It was no use to reason with her, or try to restore her to her senses. Metehun came close and hugged her, taking her hand and leading her into the living room. Switching on the gas fireplace he led her over to the sofa, gently sitting her down by the fire with the promise that she would have her ID card soon, hoping the fire would somehow calm her. She sank back into the sofa, brooding over the flames and shed her tears. Joana had been retired for six weeks and all the travel, seeing places of interest, enjoying life and the golden years, all seemed like a momentary fancy, a dream.

In her professional life, Joana had been a very talented woman, and had enjoyed her job working for a major airline, had enjoyed working with her colleagues. They all had one thing in common. They all loved what they did. They worked and lived their lives for their company, so much so, that one year all the employees got together on their own and collected enough funds to buy their airline a new jet. Joana had been with the company for over thirty-two years when the company decided to retire her against her wishes. Her husband and friends had persuaded her to accept the retirement and enjoy her life. Until now she had tried.

For inspired artists and talented people like Joana, working was not just working, it was their entire life. During WWII, when the Germans dropped their bombs over London, the Royal Air force had talented engineers who would approach the live bombs and try to diffuse them before they exploded. Of course many lost their lives, but there were those who persevered and continued to carry out their dangerous work. Those who survived and grew older were retired by the Royal Air force, but these engineers continued to show up at bomb sites perform their specialized tasks. They refused to retire, even though the stress wore them down.

The air force handled the situation expertly by dropping bombs down into pits and other inaccessible places, then asking an old timer's help. The engineer would squeeze himself into the tight spaces to locate the bomb. With every bend of his body and even with all his aches and pains, he felt that same mixture of excitement and fear. After successfully diffusing the bomb, he would find a note inside the structure, "Sorry old chap. Try again next time." Bursting into laughter, the engineer would realize that he was no longer suited for the job, and finally would accept his retirement both mentally and physically.

Then, there are the well known CEOs of major corporations. Some try to take extended time off for trips to Europe, or the Far East, only to find themselves back at work in two weeks time, commenting to their colleagues, "If you've seen one castle, you've seen them all."

Metehun stayed with his wife, hugging her tight until she finally dozed off. By then it was nearly seven-thirty. He decided to call Joana's office and by luck connected with her ex-boss. Metehun explained the desperate situation and asked if there was anything that could be done. Joana's boss came up with an idea to send a program by e-mail with real work, a group of flights that were losing money and instructed Metehun to tell Joana she needed to work the flights as soon as possible.

This was an area that suited Joana's talents perfectly. Although, during her career, she had been offered management positions, she refused, preferring to remain humbly with the work she enjoyed most. She was one of a select few analysts who could successfully turn unprofitable routes into profitable ones. Year after year Joana had watched as the new hires, all with MBAs, came in to the department showing off all their statistical knowledge, and then were off to some other position. Management enticed them to stay, but to no avail. The few older employees who remained, like Joana, had started the department, and had become the most savvy of analysts. Unfortunately it was these most talented that the company decided to retire.

When Metehun woke Joana and gave her the message from her ex-boss, she immediately returned to her fussing about getting dressed and finding her ID card.

"Honey, you don't have to go in to work. Your boss sent you an e-mail with a lot of work for you to do as soon as you can."

"Really?"

"Yes. Really. Go take a look at your inbox."

With that, Joana sat down at her computer, read the e-mail and started moving flights here and there, fussing with this and that. She worked until noon then called her ex-boss, asking pertinent questions as if she had never really left her job.

When Metehun went in to Joana suggesting a break for lunch, she looked up at him for an instant, but then returned to her computer. No amount of persuasion would extract a word from her. She worked on and on and on in silence, Metehun's words falling on her as if a radio was on somewhere and she heard it without taking the sound in, like an echoless wall.

For Joana, the day passed quickly. She stopped only to use the bathroom, or go to the kitchen to fill her coffee mug. For Metehun, the day passed very slowly. He went out for several hours returning only to find Joana still at her computer. As the day wore on, his patience grew thin and he worried what was to become of his wife.

The next day there was no change in her behavior, or the next day, or the next, or the next. By the end of the week Joana started typing her report, her fingers rushing across the computer keys sounding like an army of ants rushing across brittle cement, making their clacking sounds.

On Sunday morning, Metehun awoke to find Joana sleeping soundly. He quietly slipped out of bed and left Joana to her sleep. As he was closing the bedroom door, Joana sleepily opened her eyes.

"I'm so tired."

Metehun returned to the bed, sat down and kissed his wife.

"Yes, I know you must be. You have been working for a week now."

They looked into each other's eyes, but neither spoke.

Later, Joana joined Metehun in the kitchen. He poured her coffee and prepared an omelet for them both. Metehun thought perhaps it was time to talk to Joana.

"Dear, I would like to have your opinion on a matter of great concern. A friend of mine is going through a great deal of anxiety because of a situation thrown at her which she was not prepared for. She has had a relapse and it has been more than a week now, but she has begun to come out of it."

Joana listened attentively, but said nothing.

"Dear, you understand things of this nature much better than I do. My concern is that in case this happens again, I would like to be prepared to handle it more effectively."

Metehun touched Joana's arm gently. They looked into each other's eyes and then Joana turned away.

"How long?" she asked in a low voice.

“It has been about eight days now.”

“Yes. I see.” Joana replied, quite herself again. “You did the right thing, dear. You just leave me be and I’ll be fine. That reminds me, I need to send my report. All this work has worn me down and I think I should do some other things besides work.”

With that, Metehun smiled and said, “What about that trip to Yosemite Park?”