

“And They Lived...”
by Traci Clark

Sarah felt it finally close in on her. She was tired of fighting it anyway. Tired of fighting it all of the time. Years of fighting with Brad, which did nothing except cause more fighting. When they fought, her words were unheard, empty, quiet—even if she was shouting. Sarah thought she had reached her limit when she yelled so loud and so long that she lost her voice for five days after. When it came over them the last time, all she could do was scream. Words were pointless. But that wasn't her limit, this is: the one place she never let herself go. She fought it for so long because she didn't know if it was permeable or a hard shell or if it would cling to her so close that it would eventually smother her out.

After their last fight, Brad did what he always did. If Sarah talked to him, if she forgot for a while, if they moved through life together, then he did the same. He was an expert at delaying—eventually, if he waited long enough, it would start to feel better. But it would always start up again. Like watching an eclipse, the shadow would start to creep over them. Sarah could pretend it wasn't getting dark as long as she could force herself to stare into the sun. When she couldn't take it anymore, the blindspot she created could last for days...weeks sometimes.

Nothing she did could stop it. She fought it—she was a fighter—but it was a constant contaminant in their relationship: the things that Sarah clung to growing up with parents who fought and bickered as much as they didn't; the things that Brad clung to growing up with parents who talked about anything except the one thing they should have been talking about all along; the things from every relationship blog and Facebook post and self-help book. The

fairytale: marriage is about partnership, marriage is about communication, marriage is about love.

Sarah reads these storybooks all the time. Brad says that he will read them, but he never does. The latest one told her to put post-it notes around the house that read, *Calm Voice*. She didn't want to yell in front of her own kids the way her parents did. But she did. All of the time. She took the post-its down when they had friends over for dinner, but she didn't put them back up. If she wanted them to work, she would need to change them to, *No Voice*, and she didn't know if she could do that.

Brad didn't notice them when they were up. He didn't notice them when they were gone. And that's what set her off. "How could you not have seen them?" she said about the post-its, "They were literally up for weeks. On the microwave. On the mirror. What the fuck."

She didn't really mean for him to answer her, but he always did. "I saw them. I didn't know you were talking about those post-its."

"What other post-its are there? What are you even talking about?"

"You know. Post-it notes. I know what you're talking about."

"Seriously? What the fuck."

And that was it. It was that quick. He brought up how she never closes the cupboards. She mentioned the garbage. The screaming started. The kids kept playing with their Legos.

Sarah loves Brad. Brad loves Sarah too. She knows that. He knows that. They love each other—how can it not work? The unanswerable question can be worse than any fairytale villain.

As everyone already knows who doesn't read the storybooks or listen as the fairytales are told, things got worse for Sarah and Brad. Both were great parents on their own, but—according

to Fairytale #497—great parents don't fight in front of their kids. And they don't, not like this. Add to it that Sarah's paintings hardly ever sold, and Brad's music didn't quite take off, and as all the invisible eyes that are always watching already know, they aren't going to make it—happily ever after doesn't exist. They're the only ones who don't know it yet. The End.