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My husband George is a crook. Everyone knows that. But Uncle John, a wise and respected patriarch, gave me permission not to know.

'No one knows that you know,' he told me, 'and if they don't know, you don't have to do anything about it. You can remain honest.'

Whenever I tried to walk out on George, Uncle John would step in. He'd lay out the scenario that would face me once I stepped outside the front door. 'Four children, four hungry mouths to feed', he'd say, 'you could never win with George, I'm his Uncle, I know him.'

'How can I stay married to him? He's so corrupt, and what does that say about me?'

Uncle John would sit back and chuckle. 'It says that you're the wife and the wife is the last to know.'

I respected Uncle John. He was a family icon, a survivor of many economic booms and busts, of cancer and widowhood.

'Look at the big picture,' he'd say. 'You'll find that your husband is a good man. He's given you and the kids so much. Do you know how many women would love to be in your shoes? In your car? In your mansion?'

'I can do without' I replied. 'I never had it before and I don't need to have it now. On the other hand, I'm not going to leave with nothing.'

Uncle John laughed until he began to cough. 'The way your husband conducts business is his business, it may not be perfect, but then again who is? At least he gets things done. The state gallery, the council..., these are the things that matter. No one will ask about the how's and the why's, all that will be forgotten. Let's say he rises above the system. If one day you find yourself on the verge of knowing something that's disagreeable, that might give you let's say, a bit of indigestion, think of your friends. Friends, not husbands are a true reflection of who you are, with friends like yours you have nothing to worry about.'

A talk from Uncle John made honesty and ethics a side issue, a bonus in a relationship, rather than a necessity. It put the corruption of my husband in the context of our imperfect human nature, and I felt unduly demanding of a man operating in an imperfect world. After a brief session with Uncle John, I'd soften. I'd become more tolerant of human frailties. I became forgiving of what previously seemed unforgivable. For a period of time, though brief, George would appear a victim, a casualty of his wife's harsh judgement, her rigid upbringing and values. During that period of altered perception I'd experience a fuzzy warmth inside me, and I'd begin to trust George and see faults not so much in him but in the world around him. I'd throw myself at mothering my four boys, cooking, shopping and feeding four healthy and above all honest boys. In the school parent committee, I was the one appointed to promote and maintain school values and ethics. I'd urge George to make donations to the school, to their arts hall, to the rugby team, for a new rugby oval, somewhere where all children, of the rich and poor, the honest and dishonest, can be on a level playing

field.

This state of blinkered bliss lasted until the evening of our tenth wedding anniversary. We were getting ready to go out to dinner at our favourite restaurant when the police arrived handing a restraining order to George. It came from a woman called Chantal. She claimed to have been sexually harassed by George and wanted him off her premises.

'There was nothing sexual between us,' George reassured me. 'She borrowed money from me and now she doesn't want to pay me back.'

I remembered Uncle John's words about human frailties and imperfections.

'Wear your yellow tie tonight', was all I said.

'Damn, it's at the laundry,' George replied. 'We'll pick it up on our way to the restaurant.'

George's business was to bully—'help' he would say—people in businesses smaller than his. For the last few years, since the siege of Gaza, his target had been illegals from that city. Men who fled hunger, disease and bombs, searching for work in order to support their families back home. Men who knew nothing of George's schemes or his dealings, who could barely speak the language let alone understand his body language. They were easy prey. I recall when I first met George, I had mistaken his quick furtive movements as signs of dynamism and enthusiasm.

The presser at the Gaza Laundromat was one of George's clients. This poor illegal had set up an ironing service behind the Afghani bakery, in order to support his wife and six kids back home.

He received us with a smile. But when he could neither recall nor imagine anything like the yellow tie, the smile turned into an anxious plea.

'You're lying' George said. 'I'll report you, you'll be on that boat sooner than you think'.

The presser went to the back of his shop and came back with his weekly takings.

As George counted the money, the illegal went to the bakery and came back with a bag full of hot bread.

'For your kids,' he said looking at me.

The counting done, George was not quite satisfied. 'Admit that you were lying, go on admit it, say it yes, or no?'

The illegal looked at me and I nodded, encouraging him, coaching him.

He began to nod in time with me until his voice knew what to do. 'Yay,' said the illegal from Gaza.

George turned to me, triumphant: 'See I told you the tie was here.' He clutched the presser by the shoulders: 'Whatever you did with that tie, I forgive you. I'll even help you to get a visa, a permanent residence, somewhere legal for you to live. Hmmm? You won't say no to that.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Loubna Haikal.*