

The day got off to a very bad start and it was not that I woke up on the wrong side of bed. The left side of my bed was pushed against the wall, so naturally I didn't wake up on that side. When I opened my eyes, I saw a glass on the wooden dressing table, orange liquid still inside, so I knew that I had been drinking orange juice before I fell asleep last night. I didn't take the pill before I went to bed; nowadays I didn't need these little white pills to stop me from getting pregnant.

From my bed, if I raised my head a little and peered up, I could see my face in the mirror. It always had a trace of makeup on. I hadn't been washing my face before I went to bed these days, in case Christopher came back to look for me in the middle of the night.

It had been three years since Christopher left, and I had been counting the dates. That morning I took my time to lay in bed, preferring to wait for the alarm to wake me up. I had set the alarm to 11:00 a.m., as I knew that I had no work to do except go to the supermarket, and then I would get a manicure and pedicure from the salon next door.

I went to the toilet to ease myself. I was forced to wake up, as I could no longer hold my bladder. The clock in the bathroom told me it was 13 January 1999.

Part of me felt jubilation that I could strip myself off the title of "Mrs. Leow" once and for all. In all fairness to Christopher Leow, he did try to make our marriage work, but eventually he had to leave. Friends asked me on which ground I wished to file for divorce with Christopher: "desertion, adultery, or three-year separation after the marriage has irretrievably broken down".

I had contemplated using "desertion" to file for divorce, as I thought

that if fault lay with Christopher I could get more money by way of alimony from the Family Court. To this end, I consulted several lawyers and they all advised me against it, the reason being that I knew exactly where to find him, so I could not say that he deserted me. To use “desertion” he had to be away for five years.

Christopher was a specialist surgeon. He had his own private clinic at Tanglin Mall, where he operated under the trade name of *The Neat Surgeon*. He earned enough to make me a housewife, allowing me to sleep in every morning. I had not been working since I married Christopher.

Christopher did not tell me how much he earned, but from the bills he paid I knew it to be around the region of twenty thousand dollars per month. My lawyer friend Susan told me that divorce could get me at least seven thousand dollars a month by way of maintenance, and a lump sum payment I could get at least a million dollars from Christopher.

I knew that divorce was coming when Christopher took over payment of all the bills. His excuse was that he was going to pay everything online, so it was not necessary for me to handle them anymore. The rift came when I opened one of the letters from his bank and he yelled at me although I hadn't opened his bank statements before. I never asked Christopher about what he did in the day.

If there was nothing to hide, he could let me see where his money went. I went to look at the statement when Christopher was having his shower. So eventually I did get to see the expenditure on the bill. And that was when I suspected that Christopher was harboring another woman. I had no clue what she looked like. She could be prettier or uglier, taller and thinner. She could even be very wealthy. No one knew why I allowed

Christopher to walk out on me except myself. And I am not about to tell you now.

Rare or Well Done? I liked my steak well done. In fact, very well done. Christopher and I used to patronize *Club 32*, where the best Italian restaurant was. It was called *Club 32* simply because it was located on the thirty-second floor on the *Watermark Building*. The *Watermark Building* was just by the seafront so that when you were dining at the restaurant you could see the ships moored there.

The lights in the restaurant were dimly lit so that there was practically no reflection on the full-length glass facade of the building. Christopher and I liked the window seats, and since we were regulars, the restaurant manager always reserved a table by the window for us. It was also the same table where Christopher proposed to me.

He did not choose to do so on Christmas Eve as the Italian restaurant was fully booked.

In fact, *Club 32* was where I worked as a chef. I knew that Christopher was going to propose to me on that night, as he sent me a bouquet of flowers before the evening with a card to warn me of his intentions. There were eleven red roses, and Christopher told me that I was the number twelve rose.

I first met Christopher on a Wednesday while serving him the famous *Baby Soft Beef Steak*, our signature dish. Christopher requested it, but when the dish came he changed his order to *Wild Roast Duck*. Ordinarily this would not have involved me, but the man said that he knew another restaurant which served better *Baby Soft Beef Steak*. I was the chef who created this dish, so naturally I was sent to settle the score.

I was told to find out the name of our competitor with the difficult customer who was Christopher, whereupon he asked me if I would be off the next Wednesday. I said *no*. Since then, Christopher came to dine every Wednesday, waiting for me to finish work before he paid for the bill, then coming around to the back door at the kitchen to look for me. It was as though Christopher and I had made a private arrangement. I knew that Christopher was rich from the kind of credit cards he used to pay for the bill.

Don't call me mercenary. I never planned to marry a rich man. Christopher was good looking. and he was kind. And that was why I liked him. I liked his kindness more than his good looks. Later on, I found out that he was a surgeon. To be a good surgeon you not only have to be good at sewing people up, you also have to be good looking for the patients to like you.

Even mothers tended to hug their better-looking children more often. I didn't know if it was because I could cook steak to the right tenderness that Christopher married me, or that he genuinely loved me. It couldn't be because he wanted to learn how to cook beef steak from me.

I loved my work. And I loved Christopher.

On 13 January 1996 three years before today, Christopher Leow and I were married at the local Registry. It was a small house by the side of Fort Canning Road, just behind the Wesley Methodist Church. The ROM as it was short known, was so conveniently located that the pastor who performed the solemnization need only cross the road to the venue.

We contemplated holding a ceremony at the church, but at the time Nancy was away in Canada. Nancy Leong was my best friend, and I

promised her that she would be my bridesmaid when I married. So that since she was not available at the material time, we dismissed the idea of a church ceremony. Nancy did promise to call as soon as she returned from Canada. And Christopher and I decided that we would have a church ceremony the moment we heard from Nancy.

Nancy never called me and so in the end Christopher and I married without the church ceremony. I missed wearing the white gown which made all the difference to our marriage.

In all fairness Christopher was not a womanizer. I had tested him on almost all of my female friends. The only person he hadn't met was Nancy. Nancy was pretty and rich. But Nancy suffered from polio. One of her legs was very much shorter than the other. I had never looked at her hard enough to remember which leg was shorter.

I loved Nancy for her devotion to God. Nancy never once blamed God for her handicap, and she was not resentful towards anyone. She took life as it came dispute her short comings. Her face was free of blemishes, her nose small and curved out at the right angle. She had large eyes, which made her full of expression when she spoke.

When Nancy and I were young children in school, I was selected to play the lead role, but I fell sick on the day. The white costume which Nancy was supposed to bring for me from her mother's collection had to be kept aside as the play was cancelled.

I couldn't say for sure if Nancy eventually rang and if Christopher picked up the call. But after the first argument arose between Christopher and myself, which was over the bill statements, Christopher and I began to quarrel more often. In the beginning it was over who was to wash up after

dinner; later it became who was to drive the car down to the supermarket.

Previously I would wash up after Christopher had cooked the *Baby Soft Beef Steak* - my signature dish which I had taught him. And then after dinner Christopher would go straight for the television. Once I was done in the kitchen I would join him. Christopher chose the channels. I was just the passive audience.

I began suspecting that Christopher wanted to use the time that I washed up in the kitchen to call his lover. Nowadays he even wanted me out of the house, sending me to the supermarket by myself. But we were barely one year into our marriage. How could it have turned sour so soon?

As Christopher started to eat out more often without me, I wanted to know where he went and whom he went out with. It was not difficult to find out where he went, since credit card companies listed the names of the merchants in their bill statements.

It was always *Rare or Well Done*. I looked up the company on the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority the ACRA to find out its whereabouts. That was how I found out about Christopher and her. To my horror, Christopher Leow was listed as one of the directors.

Apparently, she also owned the restaurant. She was wealthy after all. My competitor was not to be underestimated. But was she whom I thought she was? This was what I went to find out that day.

That was the day that created this day – 13 January 1999.

That night, as usual, Christopher was not coming home for dinner again. *What more evidence do you want? How long more do you want to*

*wait?* I found a voice asking myself these questions.

I stopped the taxi at the roadside just where you could see the name of the restaurant in English above the drawing of a cow. A little bell was attached to it, so that even if I had decided not to go in the minute I touched the door, the people inside would know that someone was outside.

Of course, I was not very unhappy after I had gone to the scene of the crime. To commit adultery against your wife is as bad as killing your enemy or stealing money from your boss. Adultery is listed as one of the sins in the Bible alongside the commandment not to steal and not to kill. It was almost impossible to pardon such an act unless you were God yourself. Most people would have filed for divorce under such circumstances, but I had not.

So now I was heartbroken. I was sad because I knew that I will never be able to compete with my competitor. She had won him over, and now she was going to be my husband's wife, if not his lover already. I tried to imagine him making love with her, but it was difficult to conjure up the image.

I told myself to hire a private detective to collect evidence of adultery and to tie up the loose ends. Life like this, knowing that your husband was with another woman and yet not being able to divorce him, was most unsatisfactory. I wanted to decide on the ground for divorce.

Inevitably it had to be adultery. I knew that Christopher was sleeping with her because I had not had sex with him for more than three years. We had been operating on "two households" three years ago, so that I could ask for a divorce on the ground of a "three-year separation" rather than the ground of adultery.

I thought of the credit card bills and the fact that I was still using his supplementary card to pay for the more expensive transactions. Using his card for payment had never been an issue, so that we were still “one household”.

I thought of the ground of desertion. I had not seen Christopher for almost two years now and I would have to wait another three years. I had it so clear in my mind that it was two years ago because I stopped taking the pill since the day I stood outside *Rare or Well Done*, pondering whether to go in to confront the two of them. The restaurant’s hours 6:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. were carved on the wooden door.

Christopher stopped coming home that day. I stopped taking the pill as soon as I realized once and for all that I would not be having children with Christopher.

Two years ago, I stood outside before I decided to walk into *Rare or Well Done*. When I saw a wheelchair prominently parked at the entrance, I had a hunch who was inside with Christopher. It was only 2:00 p.m., not time for the little Italian restaurant to open yet.

I also saw a bunch of flowers wrapped up in apple green paper. They were nice flowers. I counted eleven red roses. Inside the wrapper a slip below the flowers were the words: *Marry Me, Nancy*. So, Nancy had finally come back from Canada, and Christopher had picked her up. I knew that it would happen one day. My premonition had come true.

My husband has always been a very kind man. And I was not sure if he loved Nancy or if he felt sorry for her. That was why till this date I still haven’t filed for divorce. I simply could not decide on the ground to pursue.

I wished them all my best.