

Let the Jaw Drop

by Guy Tiphane

BEFORE THE THEATRE PLUNGED into complete darkness, a serious voice asked the members of the audience to turn their cell phones off, and to unwrap their candy now, rather than later, when the urge to cough would warrant it. To Dorothy, these were somewhat contradictory life instructions, for what should one do with the unwrapped candy? It probably mattered less than the annoyance she felt at her husband consequently unwrapping a piece of gum, because of how he chewed it – with such an extreme jaw drop that one could hear the clicking of his overused masseter muscle, and observe his ears as they moved, as if directly attached to the jaw. Years ago, they had laughed together at his ability to move his ears, and even parts of his ears, independently.

The play, she had read in the program, was a comedy, about love. There was a wife, maybe less than ordinary because she was an M.D.; a maid, unwilling to do work; and the wife's sister willing to do the work in the maid's place. The husband only appeared at the end of the first act, saying that he wanted a divorce, since he had met another woman, and some alignment of the planets inevitably commanded it.

At the intermission, waiting in line for decaf coffee, Dorothy asked her husband to refrain from chewing gum during the play. This, she thought, would be a motive for divorce, unquestionably approved by any judge. She smiled at the frivolity of her idea, causing her husband to ask what could be so funny. The play, she said, what a trifle they made of the question of divorce. She was only happy, she added, that nobody would bring a

dead goat on the stage, as they had seen in another play last year.

The lover died, which made act two more tragic than funny. What will they do, now? This was one of those plays where people had to wonder about that. Dorothy, walking alongside her husband, in the procession towards the parking lot, reflected on the fact that she had not seen a good play since Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*. She wished they would stage that play again.

Her husband unwrapped another piece of gum, just before pressing the button on the remote control to awaken the car in its usual, unforgettable corner of the parking lot. He used to open the door for her, before technology made it unnecessary, and she had accepted that. But why, why was she annoyed by his gum chewing, now a twenty-year old routine? Should he have a mistress one day, or reveal to be in love with a goat, perhaps she would make a scene of it, but not for an old habit, a tic, and what not. She turned on the radio, but the usual orchestral music they played at that time of the night failed to distract her.

At the corner of the street, waiting to make a right turn on a red light, their car blocked the crosswalk. She avoided looking at the pedestrians, who had to walk around their car. Someone knocked on the trunk, and she became concerned for their safety. Perhaps they had scratched the paint. Wasn't her husband going to do anything about it?

That was when he snapped, and made a scene in front of all these people seeing him pounding on the steering wheel, all these cars honking behind them. That was when he drove really fast, and put in a CD of hard rock she had never noticed he kept in his car. That was when she realized he wasn't himself any more.