

Benny & Penny

By Lily Murphy

Benny would come home from work at the chicken factory and lay down maybe six or twelve beers before laying his fists into his wife.

Benny was a funny guy and made everyone laugh down at The Olive bar with his tall tales and outrageous jokes. He had the habit of lighting up that dark dive bar with his stories and infect the other bar flies with his infectious laugh.

Everyone loved Benny but sometimes too much booze rubbed him up the wrong way and it was usually his wife Penny who bore the brunt of it.

Penny came from a large working class family from the other side of the country. She left the family abode before she had time to leave her adolescence.

Penny couldn't bear the thought of staying in the same house where one Wednesday after school she found her father hanging from a tree in the back garden. A note in his breast pocket simply scribbled 'Please don't cry for me.' Penny never disobeyed her father so even in death she did as he had ordered and she didn't cry.

Penny left home, left her still grieving mother, left her five brothers and ended up in Benny's home town.

It was the first bus she got in the morning which took her to that foul old town Benny called home, a town bursting to the seams with lost opportunities and roughed up dreams defiled, a town on the scenic route for people who like to take the dark path in life.

Penny ended up in Benny's local boozier The Olive bar where she would sit on the same stool at the same time every night and drink the same drink, double bourbon with a small dash of soda.

Penny could put away her whiskey well. It was her way of crying without shedding any tears.

Benny observed her from the other end of the bar for the first few nights. He knew she

wasn't just there out of boredom because her face told of some heartache or loss and it took him some more nights to muster up the courage to go talk to her.

Benny wasn't the type who would offer a shoulder to cry on, Benny wasn't at one with his or anyone else's emotions. Penny didn't stir anyone's curiosity in The Olive bar, it's the kind of place that plays host the types who care only about the next drink but Benny took notice of Penny when no one else did.

Within a year they were married and renting a one bedroom apartment paid out of Benny's meagre wage packet from the chicken factory outside town.

In the early days of the marriage Benny would joke to Penny about their threadbare existence, he would tell her that they were so poor they didn't have a pot to piss in or even a window to throw it out of but they were happy none the less.

Benny knew all too well they were living a squalid life but he didn't flaunt it to his fellow drinkers, he liked to keep up the appearance that he was solid but in reality Benny was soiled with a paltry life, one he shared with Penny.

Penny tried her hand at hair dressing but it was a short lived occupation. She gave up and reserved herself for the life of the home maker wife.

Penny wasn't yet thirty and could have done a lot more to live a better life but her decision was made, she had married Benny and would live with him in a rundown apartment in a rundown town.

Penny found a strange yet uneasy contentment swirling around in that town which resembled nothing more than a vulgar pot of shit. Swirling around with all the losers, the boozers, the crack heads, the psychotics, the thieves, the sexual deviants, the misfits, the lost.

Years rolled by for Benny and Penny yet their great thirst for alcohol never waned and neither did their appetite for destruction.

Together they made for the perfect boozing couple. Between them they consumed bath tubs of booze and spilled buckets of blood.

Penny could put away copious amounts of Bourbon while Benny couldn't drink much

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Bourbon at all. Benny was a beer man and he could drink it from morning 'till night and still walk in a straight line. After all, he had a large gut which drooped over his belt buckle thus enabling him to carry gallons of beer in that barrel of a belly he had. It was a mystery where Penny put her whiskey because she had the most miserable figure you could ever see.

Together the two of them boozed like hell and the result would almost always be a big ugly mess. Booze and blood, vomit and piss, love and hate, peace and war, war and peace.

On the last day of Benny's life the sun shone like a demon in the sky and heated the town which caused a stench to rise from its filthy streets.

For Benny and Penny the morning began sometime before noon as Benny trundled out of bed with a stale smell of beer swilling around him. His eyes were heavy and red, his lips chapped and dry, his vest stained with sweat while his jeans stuck to his legs and cried out for a wash.

Benny followed the smell that had drifted in from the kitchen to the box roomed bedroom. Penny was scrambling eggs. He made himself a screwdriver to lift the haze from his head. Penny placed the plate of half burnt scrambled eggs in front of him on the kitchen table. There was only one chair left at the table because the other one had been broken during a heated argument some nights before.

'Hey Penny tell me something, was I dreaming or did you fuck up your eyes when we got home last night with nail varnish remover?'

Benny's voice was cut hoarse through his question. Penny who was draped in a well-worn satin night dress was hanging out the window taking in the summer sun and smoking a Marlboro red.

'Yeah.....I fucking mistook nail varnish remover for eye makeup remover!'

Penny remained at the window without turning away from the sound of Saturday on the street below.

A wino was shouting at kids who were teasing him while car horns were beeping at an out of date hooker flashing her ancient used up ware from a ground level bedroom window

across the street.

Benny shrugged his big brooding shoulders and tucked into his breakfast, he was still too tired and hung over to laugh at his wife's misfortune.

As Saturday raveled itself out Benny was working on his fourth can of cheap beer while watching the sports news on a TV with an awful reception. Penny was in the shower lathering her wasted body with soap, removing last night's stains to make room for new ones.

Sick of straining his eyes to watch the fuzzy TV picture, Benny managed his body out of the torn brown couch and searched for cigarettes. When he came to the conclusion there were no more cigarettes left he burst into the bathroom where Penny was.

'You smoked the last of the cigarettes you fucking bitch!'

Penny was no glass coin, she gave back as good as she got, she always did. Benny lunged for her in the grime ridden shower but missed her as she leapt out grabbing a towel to cover her bag of bones body.

'I'm gonna beat the living Christmas out of you! You fucking bitch!!'

Benny had his fists of fury flailing as he chased Penny around the apartment until she grabbed a plate from the kitchen and flung it at him. It smashed directly across his forehead immediately halting his chase.

Blood poured uncontrollably from his head but Benny didn't take much notice as he staggered in a daze before landing his body on the one chair at the kitchen table. Penny took the towel that had been shielding her body and wrapped it around Benny's head.

'I'll get more fucking smokes okay Benny?'

Penny tightened the towel in a turban like fashion around his wound and then picked up the pieces of broken plate scattered around the small kitchen.

'Benny if you ever burst into the shower on me again like that, I'll fucking throw more than a fucking plate at your fucking head!'

As the day wore on and Benny nursed his head with a sleep on the couch, Penny searched for some vodka.

It was only a recent routine that Penny acquired in which she would sip on some vodka while slapping a load of makeup on her face, prepping herself for another night boozing down at The Olive bar.

The makeup got much heavier as the years went by, not just to cover up the black eyes and cuts and bruises she got from Benny but to cover up the wasted years laid bare naked on her ravaged face. All the bright lipstick and dangerously dark eye shadow in the world couldn't hide the fact that she was wasted but then again in that town, where she was all fur coat and no knickers, everyone is equal in their own shameful thoughts of upperosity.

'You drank the last of my fucking vodka Benny!!'

Penny's voice hissed over Benny as he lay across the couch with his cut forehead and dried blood painted across it.

'So what if I did drink the last of your fucking vodka! You fucking smoked the last the cigs.'

Penny drew closer to the couch that was holding up Benny and his self-pity and raised her leg to give him a kick with her bare heel. Even though it was his balls she was aiming for she ended up hitting his thigh.

'You can have that one you fucking prick!'

By the time evening had arrived Benny and Penny were with the other booze hounds at The Olive bar. That night there was a special offer for the whiskey drinkers, buy one get one free. Penny goaded Benny into drinking some Bourbon and wouldn't stop until he caved in and swapped beer for whiskey, lots of whiskey.

Benny showed her his fist, she laughed at him, one of her front teeth was missing but it was all part of their drinking way of life. Her scraggy hair matched her worn out face while his cut and bruised forehead was struggling to heal itself but that look didn't matter in The Olive Bar, it was dark in there for a reason, it was where the inhabitants of the dark side of life went to drink.

As the night got soaked in more and more booze Benny's jokes got more dirtier and his

stories more outlandish. He had a circle around him all cackling and forgetting how sad their lives have been.

Penny took herself from the bar which she had been holding up with her whiskey drinking and made her way to Benny who was holding court at the other end of the dark dive.

As Benny's laughing got louder Penny's jealousy grew larger.

'We all can laugh even though we are broke as fuck! But hey, we may be poor but we are rich in spirits! Isn't that right Benny?'

Penny held a glass of bourbon aloft and winked at Benny. It drew cheers and jeers from whomever cared but Benny had nothing but disgust wrapped tight in contempt for his wife. His facial expressions swam around like a sea of mortal sins and by closing time he had the opportunity to set his wife right on their financial affairs, which he would have preferred to keep private.

After closing the bar Benny and Penny staggered home.

'You dirty fucking tramp with your big dirty fucking tramp mouth!' Benny's words slurred out through his mouth but Penny took no notice and walked ahead of her husband.

Whiskey didn't agree with Benny and the amount he drank that night wouldn't agree with him on any given good day.

Penny turned around and glared at Benny who had a lobotomized look about him. Suddenly he charged for her as if he were in Pamplona Spain, he a bull and she the bull fighter.

Benny landed a punch in Penny's face and then she took her knee and caved it right into his gut. He could have wretched to the ground but he kept his stance and had breath enough to spit out more words.

'You don't talk about our financial state to no one.'

Benny followed up his warning with a punch that he forwarded into Penny's face. She staggered back but managed to hock a bourbon tasting spit up from her throat and aim it right into Benny's eye.

Some more punches were thrown from both sides along with some more harsh words.

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By the time the both of them were tired Benny's knuckles were sore but Penny's tongue never knew tardiness and kept spiting more and more venom at him. Her mouth resembled a skipping rope while her two eyes were like two pieces of coal, round, wide, black and hard.

After the brief street fight Benny and Penny trudged onwards and homewards. As they crossed the bridge which spanned the motorway Benny lurched to one side and leaned his big structure over the wall while placing his left foot up on a mid-way groove of it. He coughed up some yellow tinged vomit which dribbled fast from his mouth, some of it ran down his shirt while some went right down on the quite motorway below.

There were no words just silence between Benny and Penny but in the background were the screaming chorus of sirens, howling hookers and pissed pimps along with sighs of life yet to be born and life already dug deep into the grit and the grime of the streets.

Benny finished upchucking his guts and swayed over the bridge for a few moments longer. He found himself unable to gain his balance, his belly full of whiskey didn't agree with him mentally and neither did it agree with him physically.

Penny cursed at him to get going and stop his loitering on the bridge but then his body took a forward slant and she stood in silence as her husband fell to his death.

After he disappeared over the bridge she leaned over and peered down at the stain on the motorway which was once her living breathing husband and then she turned and staggered on for home.

As Penny continued for home the night air cut a soberness through her which left her feeling raw and as worthless as the night before. Making her way down the street she passed the window with the disgusting old prostitute still flashing her ware while at the door two dopey looking young men smoked their brains out.

As she made her way up to her apartment she stepped her common red stilettos over a crack head who was asleep on top of another crack head whom he had unsuccessfully tried to hump.

After navigating her way through the broken beer bottles and faeces, Penny eventually

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made it to the door of the apartment she had been living in since she married Benny and took a brief moment to think of life outside that filthy town, a life without the burden of Benny.

She flung her tired worn out body against the door of the apartment which was yellow stained contrasting with her skin and let out a miserable laugh as she realised that Benny had the key in his pocket.

'The fucking bastard!'

Penny slumped down at the door.

'He'll always get the last fucking laugh.'

The End

Lily Murphy bio: Lily Murphy is a freelance writer from Cork city, Ireland. You'll find her at your local race track betting on donkeys and drinking whiskey from a coconut.