

LIFE WITHOUT KATY

A life without surprises

'Eighty-First Street!' shouted the driver of the bus. A crowd of people climbed out. Another crowd climbed in. The bell of the bus rang — Ding-ding! and the full bus drove away.

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John Perkins walked away from the bus stop. He was on his way home from work. He walked slowly towards Frogmore Flats.

He walked towards Frogmore Flats, because he lived there. He walked slowly, because there were no surprises in his life. There was nothing to hurry for. John Perkins was a married man, and he lived in a small New York flat. For people like him, life has no surprises.

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'I know what will happen next,' thought John. 'Katy will meet me at the door. She will give me a kiss. Her kiss will taste of face-powder and sweets. Katy's kisses are always like that. I shall take off my coat. Then I shall sit down. There will be hot beef and boiled potatoes for dinner, and fruit from a tin. After dinner, Katy will tell me about the price of soap. She will tell me about old Mrs Grey; the whole story of her day.'

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John thought about the evening to come. At half past seven he and Katy always put old newspapers over their furniture. This was because of the fat man in the flat above theirs. He always started his exercises at half past seven. The exercises always shook the ceiling and sent dust down on their furniture.

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At eight, the married couple in the flat across the hall always started their fight. They always shouted and

The note on the table



kicked and threw the furniture about. Just after that, the lady with the pink hair and the bright jewellery always went downstairs. She changed the name over her door bell. Then she was ready for business again. At a quarter past eight Mrs Zanowitski's children always started to cry. The Zanowitskis did not beat their children; the children just did not want to go to bed. And every night, at exactly a quarter past eight, John Perkins always put on his hat. This always made Katy ask, 'And where are you going, John Perkins?'

The answer, too, was always the same. 'Just down to the club for a game of cards.'

John always went to the club. He always played cards with the same friends and he always came home at eleven o'clock. Sometimes Katy was already asleep. Sometimes she was awake and ready for a little argument. They argued about how John always went out every evening. Oh, life in the Frogmore Flats did not offer many surprises.

But tonight things were different. John reached his door, but there was no Katy. No kind, sweet-tasting kiss greeted him. The flat was very untidy. There were shoes and clothes in the middle of the floor. Drawers hung open. That was strange. Katy never left things lying about like this. Then John saw Katy's comb on the floor. Between its teeth was some of her soft brown hair. That made John feel very worried. Katy always took every hair out of her comb. She kept the hair in a little blue cloth bag. 'When there is enough, I'll use it to make a hairpiece,' she once explained to John.

Then he saw the note. It lay on the table.

'Dear John,

I have just had a telegram from my brother Sam. Mother is very ill. I will take the 4.30 train. Sam will meet me at the station. There is cold chicken in the kitchen. I hope it isn't Mother's bad leg again. Please pay for the milk — sixty cents. She was very ill with her leg last spring. (Don't forget to write about the electric light.) Your clean socks are in the top drawer. I will write tomorrow. Love from Katy.'

'This is terrible,' thought John. 'We've been married for two years now. We've spent every night of those two years together. I can't believe this is happening.'

He read the note again and again. Here was a big change in his way of life. It felt strange and uncomfortable.

Katy's house-coat hung on the back of a chair. She always wore it when she was cooking the dinner. It looked empty, without Katy inside it. A little paper bag lay on the table: Katy's sweets. The newspaper

lay open on the floor. It was open at the 'Trains Today' page. The 4.30 from New York was marked in red.

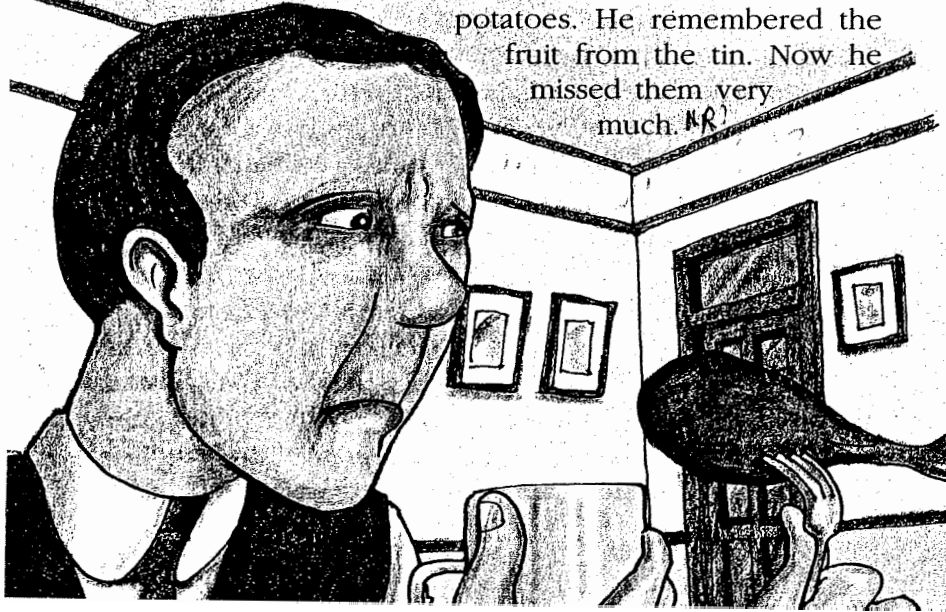
The flat looked sad and empty, because Katy was not there. John stood among these things. There was a
5 strange, sad feeling in his heart.

John is sorry

He began to tidy the flat. He wasn't very good at it. Katy usually did it for him. When he touched her clothes, a strange feeling went through him. Life without
10 Katy! He hated to think about it. Katy was a part of his life, like the air all around him. Now, suddenly, she was not there. 'Of course, she will only be away for a few days,' he said to himself. But it did not make him any happier. Katy was gone, and he was alone.

15 John took the cold chicken out of the kitchen. He made some coffee. Then he sat down and ate. There was no one to enjoy the food with him. There was no one to talk to. The food was not as good as when Katy cooked it. He remembered the hot beef and boiled

potatoes. He remembered the fruit from the tin. Now he missed them very
much. KR?



So Katy's mother was ill and this was able to change John Perkins's whole life. He finished his dinner. Then he looked sadly out of the window. Outside, the city was coming to life. People were having fun. And he was free! He could stay out until morning. No angry
5 Katy if he came home late. No questions, no arguments. He was a free man.

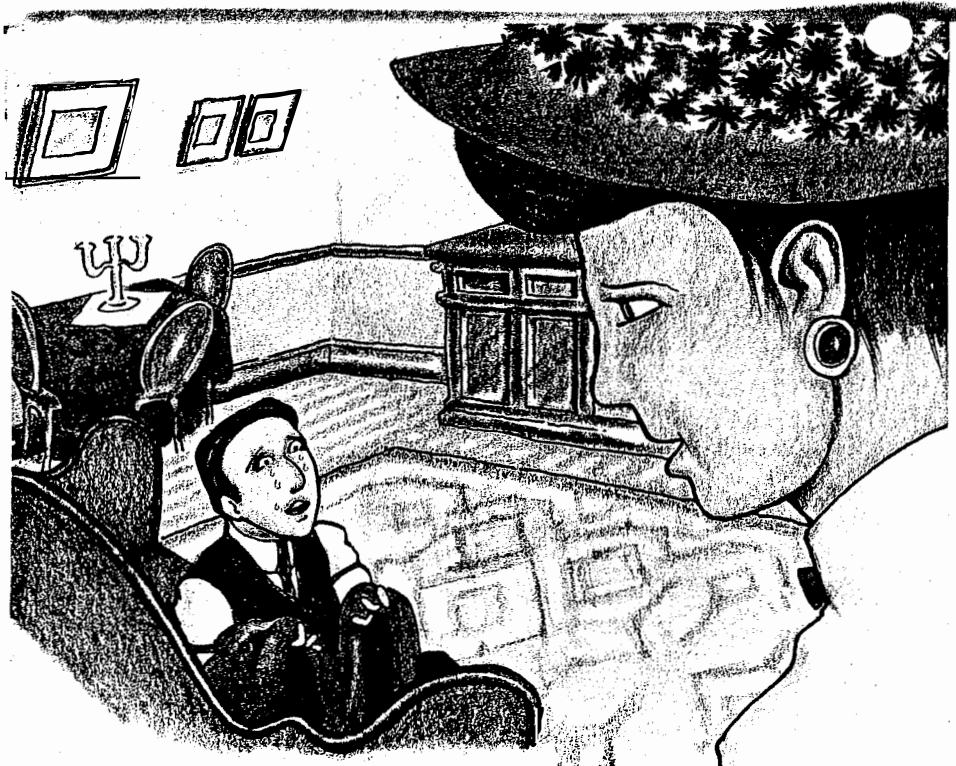
All these feelings were new to John. He thought and thought. He began to understand his new, unhappy feelings. While Katy was there, he never thought about
10 her. Does a man notice the air around him? Now Katy was gone and suddenly John knew something. He loved Katy and he missed her very much.

'I've acted very badly,' he thought. 'I've been very unkind to Katy. I went out to the club every night. Poor girl — I left her all alone, all evening. I never thought
15 about her feelings. Well, I've learnt my lesson. When Katy gets home, I'll show her! I'll take her out! I'll give her some fun. I'll be kind and thoughtful. And I'll stop going to the club — from tonight!'

20 Outside, the city was calling John Perkins. His friends were waiting for him at the club but John Perkins did not care about them. His Katy was not at home. He could not stop thinking about her. And, because she was gone, he missed her and he wanted her. He did
25 not want to go out.

A surprise

Near John's right hand stood a chair. Katy's blue dress was on the back of the chair. The cloth still had the shape of her body. The dress smelt of her face-powder.
30 John took it in his hand. He looked at it, and felt it, and held it to his nose. Suddenly his feelings were too strong for him. He began to cry. *extra?*



The door opened and Katy walked in.
John looked at her stupidly.

'I'm glad I'm back,' said Katy. 'Mother isn't really ill after all. Sam was worried and he sent the telegram. Then she got better again. He told me at the station. So I took the next train back home. Oh, I need a cup of coffee!'

Like a big machine, the Frogmore Flats burst into life. The big wheels turned again. John Perkins's ordinary life began once more. He heard the married couple fighting. He heard the lady with the pink hair shut her front door. He heard Mrs Zanowitski's children start to cry. He looked at the clock. The time was exactly a quarter past eight. He put on his hat. He walked towards the door.

'And where are you going, John Perkins?' asked Katy.

'Just down to the club,' said John, 'for a game of cards.'