

Haunting Humor
By
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Today, I am making a lattice gate, to finish off the 18” high perimeter fence I installed, to stop my mini-poodle Sugar’s unauthorized neighborhood patrols.

I assemble the gate pieces and plan to fasten them together with my electric stapler. It lives on the shelf over my workbench, but when I reach up, I find it gone. My stomach tightens as my “start time” becomes my “search time.” I try to stay calm and methodical as I ransack my home, but my lack of success and growing frustration creates chaos. In a moment of clarity, I realize my husband, Michael, is teasing me from the grave.

During our first few years together, Michael’s dry sense of humor eluded me. With a straight face, while watching news coverage of some hate crime, and he’d opine that every cultural group should have its own state. Outraged, I’d argue until my anger turned inward. How could I have married such a tall, handsome, loving, narrow-minded nut -job. Just before my head did a 360, he’d back off, agree with me and hug me until I calmed down. Before long, I acknowledged his outbursts with a knowing smile and let them pass.

Twenty-two years gone, he still haunts me with his humor. If I’m in a rush, Michael hides my keys, jewelry or anything I need at that moment, returning the missing object du jour in his own time.

Patience gone and humorless, I drive to the store and buy the cheapest stapler available because I know, in my heart, I will find mine. Forty minutes later, back at my workbench, before I open the box, I check the shelf. The stapler is still MIA. Resigned, I open the new one, get my staples and -- they do not fit.

I grab the stapler, jamb it in the box and drive back to the store, cursing one word like a broken record. Determined, I buy the professional 5-in-1 stapler and I expect it to work. Forty long minutes later, hot and tired, I set the 5-in-1 on my workbench and gaze up at the shelf.

“Come on, Michael, no more jokes. Where’s my stapler?”

He whispers, “Look again.”

I reach up on my tiptoes, stretching my fingers into the darkness, and touch -- my stapler. Relieved, “Thank you, Michael,” I finish the gate and set it in place.

In the twilight, Sugar and I sit in our fenced front yard. I feel like a benevolent queen in her kingdom. As I execute a royal wave to a neighbor, Sugar barks, runs at the gate, breaks a hinge, backs off and jumps the fence. Michael’s laughter floats on the wind, hugging my body. I am touched but un-moved.

“Not funny, Michael. Not funny at all.”