

H2O Treatment

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Scott Linder is sitting behind his desk in his large, sprawling office. It's in a large life insurance building which keeps Scott occupied from eight until five Monday to Friday every week, with scant holidays at Christmas and Summer.

Scott is bored, repeatedly spinning a desk calendar round and round. As he plays he is unconsciously humming a tune to himself. His black, wavy hair is constantly misbehaving and his shirt is always creeping out of his long trousers. Scott is a youthful 36 but a closer inspection reveals a face etched with deep lines. When he smiles, he doesn't seem to have a care in the world.

Scott keeps all his most prized possessions on his desk. His telephone, his calendar, a little gold pen given to him by his wife Margaret for their tenth wedding anniversary. Of course there is a photograph of himself with Maggie and his son Rory.

The photograph stands upright and proud. Scott is kneeling beside 8 year old Rory while Maggie stands behind them, making sure that they are in the correct position for the camera. She should know all about camera positions after all - she is a photographer, and a good one at that. Scott is still spinning the calendar. Isn't it funny how the letters and numbers all seem to whiz into each other?

At that moment Scott's boss, McTeague, pits his bald egg of a head around the door. He points to his watch, a Rolex no less, indicating not only that Scott must get a move on with his work, but also that McTeague owns a bigger, better and more expensive watch than his employee.

Scott slowly looks down at the heaps of paperwork he must do, sighs softly and picks up his little gold pen. He starts to sign his name slowly and carefully on several documents, including a letter. Maggie always laughs at his penmanship, saying it looks like "baby writing," so he always tries to write properly (in a grown up fashion) when he's at work.

Scott usually leaves work around 5.30 p.m. and heads for the car park. Today is remarkably hot, especially for Scotland. Scott saunters along the street baked by the sun and flanked by hot-bricked buildings. In the distance he spies several

scruffy children squealing, laughing and shouting as they play. As Scott approaches he discovers that the children are playing with a water hose. The water gushes forth, drenching everyone in its path.

The kids yell with delight but Scott finds himself screaming, full of fright. No one else can hear the scream - it's inside his head, paralyzing him. He wipes his damp forehead and rubs the palms of his hands on his linen trousers. The palms are sticky with sweat.

His tie is still loose but it feels like some unknown assailant slowly suffocating him. It's getting tighter and tighter, he's struggling to breathe, gasping while the beats of his heart seem to hit 100 decibels. The water has become a torrent, echoes resounding round his skull. He is completely incapacitated, frozen like an ice cube stuck to the wall of an ice box.

The faint, soft sob of a small child slowly infiltrates Scott's brain. It is far away. Far in the distance, barely audible. Scott perceives a flicker of a picture: a hazy silhouette of a tiny boy sitting on a small boat and obscured by night mist. As suddenly as the image is recalled, it vanishes.

Scott is still an ice cube in the baked furnace of the street. He is staring at the water and struggles to break himself free from its spell. As he drags his eyes away he runs off towards his car.

Maggie marches along the narrow road that leads to her home where her husband will be waiting. Slung across her left shoulder are a large 35 mm Pentax, top of the range camera with zoom lens, carrying cases and all the other paraphernalia needed for a high-powered professional photographer like herself.

Maggie (how she hates that name, so common) smoothes her straight, slim skirt and razor sharp hair before she enters the crisp garden of her lily white house. She must look good for Scott. After all, women must make sure that they look good or their husbands will take up with other less deserving ladies.

She sneaks towards the kitchen window, peers in and spies Scott preparing the evening meal. She smiles to herself. How lucky she is to have a man like him, so good looking, so smart, so right for her. What a pity that she always has to look after him so much - she always has to check that he dresses in matching colors and remembers to take his packed

lunch to work with him. 10 years they've been married and not once has he strayed. Probably wouldn't even know how to.

Maggie taps on the window and smiles at her spouse. Scott has been fighting with a fat chicken for the past half hour - it refuses to stay in its cook tin. He hates cooking but he wants to impress Maggie. A small tap on the window interrupts his frustrated thoughts; he looks up to find Maggie peering from the garden.

He smiles back at her and runs over to the window, excited that she's home. He breathes hard on the glass, making it mist over and writes "I LUV U" with his index finger. Maggie presses her lips together on her hand and blows the invisible impression across to Scott.

A few days later, Scott and Rory are sitting cross legged on a rug in the garden. Rory sees his Daddy as his 'bestest friend.' This friend runs and plays and jumps and hides and laughs and sings, even if his singing does sound awful.

Mummy never likes Rory and Scott to have great fun. She says that they will get dirty and that they must stop making a racket or the neighbors will complain. She stops all their games.

Daddy is almost as much fun as his other pal, Joey. This friend sits beside Rory in school and the teachers are always telling them off for talking or giggling. Mrs. Calson the head teacher tells them that they will never get good grades if they talk all the time and never listen. What does she know? Her stuffy old books will never be as interesting as the fish in the nearby river. And anyway, what have books or grades got to do with being a World Champion swimmer?

The swimming gala is tomorrow and Rory must practice his strokes. It's a shame Daddy is so scared of the water, because Rory would be chuffed if Daddy came to the pool to watch him swim.

Scott has taken out an old album of photographs. He is showing Rory all the pictures of the boy as a baby. Time seems to go so fast and Rory seems to be so big for his age. He has his father's blue eyes but his mother's stubborn mouth. His fair hair is already becoming darker with each passing month. How quickly children change from little men to grown up boys!

Scott finds a photograph of himself as a youngster, pulls it out. He was around four years old when the picture was taken; he's engulfed in the arms of a large, burly blond god

of a man. His father. They are clasping two fishing rods in front of them while the view of a lake borders the image. Sundays had always been the best day of the week for young Scott. Sundays were when the two of them used to go fishing.

Rory is in the passenger seat of the family's vast tank of a car. Scott steers the vehicle with great authority. The hulk comes to a stop in front of the swimming baths. Rory tugs at his little swimming bag and pushes open the car door, looking at his father, then at the baths, then back again.

Scott shakes his head. He can't follow Rory into the baths, watch him swim in the gala. Several kids head for the pool with their parents in tow, but Scott can't be swayed. He watches his son walk away, his head and shoulders hunched forward. He watches him until the small boy disappears into the depths of the building.

Scott has just parked his car when he sees his old friend and colleague, John. They have been pals since they were tiny tots. Now they both work for the same life insurance company, for the same bald eagle of a boss. John has always been more ambitious than Scott, gaining promotion long before Scott had even recognised the word. It's not that Scott isn't bright - he isn't as worldly-wise as John.

John always had to look out for Scott when they were children, picking him up if he tripped (which he was often doing on account of his untied shoelaces.) Not that he minded at all. In fact he quite liked the fact that Scott looked up to him as if he was a saintly big brother. It made him feel quite important. As a boy, Scott was usually good fun as he didn't mind a bit of rough and tumble. These days Maggie is always badgering him, mothering him far too much. Scott's in line for a promotion and John hopes that Maggie won't show her husband up in front of the boss. Scott has to make a good impression on McTeague, informally at least.

The summer weeks pass without much precipitation. Scott has just left work and is heading for his car when the rain begins. The rain falls slowly at first, one, two, three drops of water splashing on his shoulders. Then the amount of rain increases until the drops merge into one huge sheet of water.

Scott is aghast, running over to a building for shelter. His head is surrounded by torrents of sounds - his pounding heart, his quick, sharp breathing and the echoes of a child sobbing.

The faint vision of a child is barely grasped within the fog of Scott's mind. The sobs continue to echo across a vast, desolate lake. The boy is Scott aged four, fishing rod in hand, eyes scanning the water for his father. At first trepidatious then anxious, he uses his rod then his hand to fish for the drowned man.

As the grown-up Scott recalls the incident, he steps out of the building into the rain, allowing it to soak his hair, face and clothes. He starts to weep, walking slowly back towards his car.

In the river near Rory's school, the boy is fishing in a makeshift rowing boat. Gazing into the water, calling for his dad. Scott sits behind him, moves forward to see what Rory's making such a fuss about. A large fish glides through the water, ancient and beautiful.