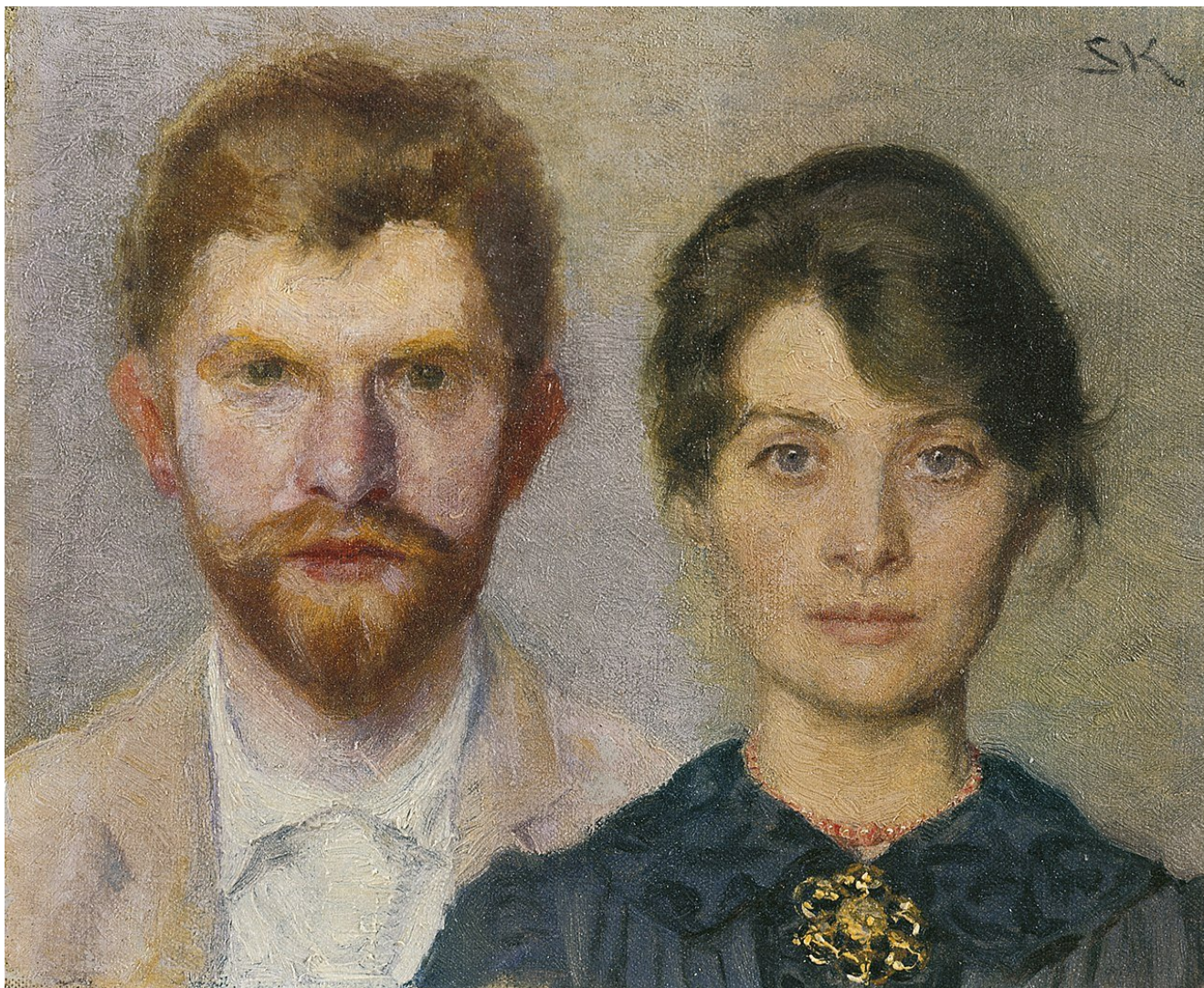


Two Very Short Tales

by [James Como](#) (November 2020)



Dobbeltportræt, P. S. Krøyer and Marie Krøyer, 1880

I Wish More Women Were Like My Wife

Lydia sat at the table cleaning her shotgun. She had finished with the double barrels and the two triggers and now was polishing the stock. She was very fond of shooting. Edward, her husband, sat opposite her, he not quite as insouciantly.

The table was barely more than cocktail size, a fit for the small glass-enclosed porch that sometimes doubled as a dining room. Windows were pushed open. The trees were very close, their canopy heavy, and Edward and Lydia could hear the birds—cardinals, mostly—winding down as dusk settled in. The next house was a half-mile away.

“I’ve prepared Peach Melba, love. Raspberry sauce separate, as you prefer.”

“Why thank you Edward. It’s been too long, you know.”

“After coffee I’ll send off my story. Then a movie? *My Fair Lady*?”

Both had been married many times. Now, in middle age, they were about to celebrate their third anniversary.

“You know what Chekhov said about a rifle in a story, Lydia . . . ”

“Yes, Edward, everyone does, and you’ve reminded me often enough. But we’re not in a story.”

“That’s one of the reasons I love you, Lydia. Your independence. You’re not like other women.”

“Really?” This time Lydia didn’t have to fake interest. The gun was cracked open, ready for loading, but she paused with both shells in one hand and looked up.

“You know what I mean. That woman’s brand. *Adore Me*. Can you imagine? And so many wear those t-shirts.”

“Which ones, Edward?”

“You know. ‘Empower Women’ stitched on. That sort.”

“Well,” Lydia smiled, “you know I’m not at all like that.”

"That's what I mean! You would never say that silly motto from a commercial, 'because I deserve it.'"

"No, Edward. That just isn't me."

"Ah, dear Lydia, I wish more women were like my wife."

Lydia smiled. Edward went to the fridge. As he took out the Peach Melba he heard the shotgun snap shut.

At the table he put down the dessert with one hand, the raspberry sauce with the other, almost. It never made it. When he looked up and saw Lydia pointing the shotgun at his chest he spilled it on his shirt.

"Oh, Edward. You know you're a misogynist, don't you?"

They were very still, gazing deep into each others' eyes, the way movie lovers do.

"It looks just like blood," she said. When she pulled the two triggers Edward heard click . . . and . . . click. By now the birds were quiet.

Then she loaded the gun. "Ah, Chekhov."

Pastorale

"Frankie, time to come in. Suppertime and it's getting dark, and cold." Frankie's mother was the best cook on Blossom Lane. Sometimes she would invite Eddie over for dinner. But not tonight. Frankie dropped his bike on Eddie's lawn, said "so long," and trotted home, into the house next to Eddie's. Stevie was next. "Steven, you get in here now. The street lights are on and you know the rule." He did the same as Frankie, but in the opposite direction. His house was three houses away on the other side of Eddie's. Finally came a shout from Mickey's mother, so he did the same, only he lived across

the street from Eddie so he just walked home. He said, "see you tomorrow Eddie."

Eddie dropped his bike and crouched on that strip of grass between the curb and the sidewalk, only there wasn't any grass now, just dirt. He leaned against the telephone pole until it was dark, and the only light was coming from the lamppost next to the pole. There, in that circle of whiteness, he might see the dirt if he decided to dig into it with a popsicle stick. He had finished the ice cream hours earlier and had put the stick in his back pocket. "You never know when you'll need a good stick," he had thought. He was eight years old, "almost nine" he would say.

The sky was low and dull. For a long time he leaned against the pole, just staring at his house. It was so different from the projects where he was born and lived his whole life, until last year. There had been no grass, no huge farm beyond the backyard, no freedom to ride his bike, and of course no front lawn.

So this house was special, a home like no other, even if it sort of looked like the other houses. His mother loved it so much she had planted a tree right in front, by the steps leading up to the front door, and around the tree she had planted violets.

She was always singing in that house, decorating it with favorite things. And when his father came home all of them, with his big brother Tommy, would eat on the deck behind the house that his father had made himself. But everybody knew it was mother's house, really, and so Eddy loved it not only for itself, and because it wasn't the projects, but because he loved her and loved that she loved it.

This night Eddie's father was at the police station, talking the police into letting Tommy go with a warning. He maybe had vandalized some police cars. So Eddie was alone. But

that was okay. For now, he was in a circle of light and could draw his own circles in the dirt in front of his house, no rush.

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James Como is the author of