

TIDINESS

It had been a big mistake in the first place in agreeing to buy a property with my sister Paula. Our parents had been quite keen on the idea though and in fact they'd even helped us financially with the deposit. They'd said there would be a lot of advantages if we could get our feet on the property ladder sooner rather than later, particularly the way property prices were escalating. Looking back, I think they probably just wanted us out of the house so they could downsize and spend our inheritance on long winter holidays abroad. Anyway, four years ago, Paula and I moved in to number thirty nine Elm Road, a reasonably spacious, modern three bed roomed, semi.

Paula and I had always got on very well. As children, we'd had the usual sibling quarrels but nothing serious. She was three years older than me and was always regarded as the sensible one. We'd both been reasonably bright at school and we'd both gone to university. Now, at the age of thirty she was the human resource manager of a manufacturing company and I was an electronics engineer. She loved her job: I hated mine, but the money was good and so was the pension scheme.

Moving in had been particularly easy. Our parents had given us a lot of their spare furniture and helped with the painting and decorating where it was needed. Paula seemed particularly keen on a particular colour scheme throughout the house and I was quite happy to let her dictate what she wanted. Quite honestly, I was just relishing the idea of freedom and having the lads from the football club round to watch all the big matches on satellite TV. Having been living at home until now, I'd been unable to do that.

At first, things went reasonably well. Paula took charge of running the house and even did the garden. In a chauvinistic manner, I thought that's what big sisters did. However, I was disappointed that she'd not wanted to have a house warming party. She'd explained that she didn't want to risk having beer and wine spilt on the carpet or the smell of cigarette smoke in the house. Some of my footballing cronies did smoke and despite reassuring her that they'd do it outside, she was adamant, no party!

After we'd been at number thirty nine for three months or so, I decided that I would at last have the lads round for an evening when there was a mid week football match on. After all, I'd thought, it's my house too! Tuesday, the night of the match, coincided with the night that Paula went straight from work to her badminton club.

The lads duly arrived bearing gifts of lager and an Indian takeaway, the necessary accoutrements to watching football on TV. All was thus in place for a good evening. Bliss at last I'd thought. This was what the bachelor life was all about! It was just after half time when unexpectedly Paula walked in. Despite the

warm welcome from the lads, Paula had remained stony faced with a look that could kill. She'd immediately begun to tidy up the sitting room. Despite my protestations that I'd do it once we'd finished, she continued to clear up and even petulantly sprayed the sitting room with air freshener. The evening was killed stone dead. As soon as the match was over, the subdued lads quickly left. Apparently, Paula, during a break at badminton had heard from Anne, a sister of one of my footballing friends that I was having the lads round and had thus left immediately.

As soon as the lads had gone, Paula decreed that I would never ever do that again. I'd felt like a little boy being told off. Additionally, I was banned from having any of my football friends in the house. I'd protested that it was my house as well, but to no avail. As I climbed the stairs to bed that night, I'd wondered if things would ever get better?

Over the next year the relationship between Paula and I, slowly deteriorated. Something was definitely wrong with Paula. In desperation I spoke to our parents and they had a word with her. Sadly, there was no improvement. I'd even suggested that she might benefit from seeing a doctor but she had declined, insisting that she was OK. Somehow, Paula's mind was warped. Every night when she came back from work, she cleaned and tidied the house from top to bottom. I was banned from all cooking. I was only allowed to use the downstairs cloakroom. The upstairs toilet was out of bounds, although I was allowed to shower daily. Any of my friends that did call at the house were quickly repulsed on the doorstep. To cap it all, I had to be home by nine o'clock on a weekday and by eleven on a Saturday or else the door would be secured. It was totally bizarre.

You might now be wondering why I put up with it all. To be honest, I was totally bewildered by Paula's compulsive behaviour. However hurtful she had been to me, she was still my sister and I still cared about her. I think you would have probably felt the same. I mistakenly believed that this was reciprocal but it wasn't. She didn't really care about me or anyone else. Slowly, her own friendships were poisoned by her bizarre behaviour and all she was left with was her work.

Things finally came to a head three months ago. I'd met Tracey at work and we'd been going out with each other for about six weeks. We were both very keen on each other and things were heading for a natural conclusion. However, we had a little problem in that area as Tracey lived at home and using my home was out of the question. Ultimately, I had to explain to Tracey about Paula's problems and why I hadn't invited her to my home. Tracey had been quite understanding and had said that love normally found a way. Between us, we devised a plan that would allow us to spend the night together.

It was simple really. On Saturday evenings, my sister usually went to visit our parents. The plan was that as soon as Paula left the house, we would go in and go up to my room. My sister, when she came home, would see my door keys on

the hallstand and assume that I was in bed. The following morning when my sister was at church, Tracey would leave. Hardly the most romantic of venues, but needs must and Paula would be none the wiser.

Things went according to plan until the Sunday morning. Unfortunately, in the throes of passion, Tracey moaned a few decibels too many and too loud. Within seconds, my sister had come through the bedroom door like a supersonic bulldozer. In a frenzy, she dislodged the duvet, exposing both Tracey and myself. Then, to add insult to injury, she gathered up Tracey's clothes and threw them out of the window. Tracey was by now quite alarmed and trembling on the bed. Quickly, I made myself as respectable as possible, retrieved Tracey's clothes, got her dressed and took her home.

A couple of days later, I asked Paula to put the house on the market so we could go our separate ways. She declined, accusing me of being insensitive by bringing strange women home. I tried to involve our parents but they were too upset and didn't want anything to happen that would damage Paula's health any further. In essence, they wished that I would do nothing. Over the next few days I broached the subject with Paula several times, but got the same response each time. By now I was beginning to realise that Paula was immovable and that she was blighting my life. Already she had robbed me of the first woman I'd really cared about. I hadn't heard from Tracey at all. Paula had to pay the price.

During the course of the next three weeks, I tried to rationalise my feelings. If Paula wouldn't be reasonable and sell the house or seek treatment then she had to be put out of her misery so that at least I could enjoy my life. Whatever I did had to be fool proof. Perhaps there just was a way of doing it without getting caught.

The plan involved me going away for a few days holiday. That would establish an alibi. On the last day of the holiday, I would arrive home unseen before Paula got home from work. The first thing that Paula did without fail when she got home was to put on the stereo system to listen to the news. It would be very simple for me to adapt the on-off switch of the radio so that when she pressed it, she got the full dose of 240 volts. Then all I would have to do is remove the alteration to the switch, lock up the house again and go and collect my car from the supermarket car park where I'd left it, again making sure I wasn't seen. I'd probably have to bide my time for an hour or so and then go home, discover poor Paula and then call the police. Shockingly simple really.

It had worked. Everything went according to plan. The police decided that it was a tragic accident, a short circuit caused by her cleaning habits. I'd refined my plan by putting a can of Pledge and a duster in her hands after she'd died. My parents sang my praises as to how good and understanding I'd been towards her, even though Paula hadn't deserved it.

Three months on, I'm slowly getting used to my new life. On a positive note, Tracey has moved in. I'd thought I'd lost her. She said that if I could be so understanding and caring towards Paula, even though she'd been a tyrant, then I must be a pretty wonderful person and she wanted to spend the rest of her life with me. If only she knew the truth, she too would be shocked. I just hope Tracey isn't in to tidiness.