

Leaving - Part Two

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Published on Lush Stories on 19 Mar 2007



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Megan flies to America to break off her Engagement.

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“Leaving..... “CH. 2 Chapter 2 Megan shook herself out of her daydream when the Flight Attendant asked if she wanted coffee. “What? I’m sorry, my mind was miles away.” Looking at the coffee pot in the attendant’s hand she said, “Oh yes, cream but no sugar, thank you.” Sipping her coffee Megan kept hearing the song she had heard in Heathrow’s departure lounge as she waited to hear her flight called. “I’m leaving on a jet plane don’t know when I’ll be back again. Oh Babe... I hate... to go.” The deep sense of longing that those words invoked. It was as if the singer had been crying out from the depths of her soul. The words, which Megan had heard many times, had an almost haunting quality about them now. Before boarding her plane at Heathrow airport she was sitting in the departure lounge when a mother sat down beside her. She had twin girls, no more than nine or ten years of age, who were dressed in white blouses and tartan skirts, proudly Scottish. Their hair was short-cropped and softly auburn, their eyes storm grey. What caught Megan’s attention was the way they were arguing; one child was sitting on the bench seat beside her mother while her sibling stood defiantly in front of her, hands on hips glaring in the face of her sister. “You’re wrong Kirsty, being a woman in a profession is better, like Daddy. That’s why I’m going to be a Doctor. Boys are stupid and horrible and...and...” “You can be whatever you want Lizzy, but I’m going to be like Mummy and have children and a husband. So there! You can work your silly fat head off at school and things for all I care. I don’t have to do what you tell me just because you’re ten minutes older. I bet one day you’ll be really, really, sorry, and I bet you’ll be like our teacher, all miserable, and dried up like a prune. I bet all she’s got is class work and teaching.” “Now you two stop squabbling and settle down. Apologise to the lady and read your books” their mother sharply told them. She looked at Megan and raised her eyebrows, grinning ruefully. “I’m so sorry. You wouldn’t believe they are great friends would you?” The girls had both said “sorry Ma’am” and promptly scurried off to explore. “I think they’re sweet, and I see we share the same tartan. I’m MacLean too. My Mother went to my Gran’s home in Ayr to have me so I can claim to be a true Scot,” Megan laughed “but afterwards she brought me back to England

and I live there still.” “You’re MacLean? Goodness what a coincidence. My husband’s a surgeon and attending a conference in New York City. We’re going to spend a few days with him. Are you taking a holiday there or do you have business?” “Actually I’m visiting my fiancé.” Megan’s heart seemed to contract at the thought that she soon would end that relationship. “He, ... he’s a Professor at Crestin University in New York State. Actually he has tenure there.” ‘Oh god,’ she thought as her eyes prickled, ‘I love him so much. Here I am bragging about him and I know I’m going to hurt him terribly.’ Again the song that tortured her was playing in her mind ‘Every place I go, I’ll think of you... Every song I sing, I’ll sing for you... When I come back, I’ll wear your wedding ring...’ But she knew that wasn’t to be. A tear slid, unfelt, unnoticed down her cheek. “Miss MacLean? Are you quite alright? Are you troubled?” Megan stood and ran to the ladies rest room. She locked herself in a stall and cried, her tears now unchecked, her throat painfully tight as she tried to stifle her tears. There was a tentative tap on the door. A soft Scottish voice was again asking, “Miss MacLean, please, can I help you? After all, we are both MacLean.” Megan savagely pulled sheets from the dispenser, dabbed at her eyes and wiped her cheeks. She tried to breathe deeply, calmly. Giving a little sniffle, she stood and opened the door. The mother was standing there and she held out her arms. Megan’s resolve crumpled and she went to her then wept on her shoulder. “There, there. Shhhhh, shhhhh there now, there” she soothed while gently stroking Megan’s shoulder. “I’m Helen. What’s your name?” she asked in her soft Scottish lilt. “Megan” she replied in a strangled voice. “Well, Megan I’m a great believer in a nice cup of tea when things seem wrong. Come along now.” She took charge as only a mother of young children can when emotions boil over. They sat quietly and sipped their tea until Megan was calm again. She felt she owed Helen an explanation for her embarrassing loss of control. “Helen, I said ‘my fiancé’ but I’m going to break off our understanding and I know how hurt he will be.” “Oh. Oh dear me. Is it because you live so far apart?” “Not really. You see, like one of your daughters, I’m set on a career that I’ve dreamed about since her age. I can’t give it up now. I do love him. I love him so much I couldn’t just write to him. He deserves better than that. I HAVE to tell him myself. Helen I’m hurting inside.” “And the career you want can’t be followed in America?” “I, well honestly I don’t know I’ve only thought about UK based to start with, and then I might have to travel all over the world you see.” “HmMMM. Well it’s your business and I certainly can’t advise you. But, Megan, in life, single or married, there are dreadful hurts and anguishes over the horizon waiting to ambush you. We women don’t feel things the same way as men do. We feel and experience things totally differently. What we want, sometimes what we need can’t be gained alone. Most of us need someone else at times. Not selfishly, not to use, but to be with, to cherish. We always hope that it will be with someone who feels the same way about us. One day you may feel, your body and your emotions may almost demand that you hold your own child in your arms and say he is MINE. Except of course it’s handy to have a man around when you feel like that!”, and Helen laughed. “If you are sure, quite certain in your own mind that you must end your friendship, then you must. BUT, why not, instead of saying bluntly that you cannot marry him, why not talk to him about your hopes and fears. Not just careers, not just ‘I want’ or ‘I need.’ If, as you say, you love him deeply, and if he feels as you do, don’t lightly throw that away. Listen to your woman’s heart as well as your mind. Maybe you can talk with him about what

you both want and need. The path of love has many twists and turns and is seldom edged by pretty flowers, and the very best of love will want compromise by both of you at times. I hope you don't think I'm interfering or being impertinent." Megan shook her head as she thought over her clansman's advice. Their flight was announced, Helen rushed to gather her children and they boarded separately. ***** After her usual apprehension at takeoff all Megan could do was nervously thumb her magazine, her emotions on edge and her mind spinning. The song was playing in her head again; "Already I'm so lonesome I could cry..." another tear streaked her pretty face. She thought about the lasting friends she had made at Queen Anne's. Five of them had been fired with ambition and over drinks in the Student's Union bar, or during the occasional all-girl pub meal on a Friday evening they had confided their hopes and fears. They all wanted different careers, but most of all they wanted personal success in a man's world. Of the five of them, Megan was the only one to take additional degrees. Her Masters and then her BSc, a Bachelor of Science for her Political Science qualification. Sharon and Judy were both married, one with a baby and the other pregnant, and both now seemed happily content to raise a family, to forget success in a man's world and give no more than a casual wave of goodbye to abandoned careers and ambitions. Yvonne was in a relationship and complained bitterly to Megan about the household duties that seemed expected of her. Her partner had his football on Saturdays, his sport on TV during the week, his beer, his men's night out. "He just bloody well takes me for granted. His mother did everything for the idle bastard and I'm expected to do the same as well as work," was her constant complaint. "Who does the sodding washing and ironing? I DO. Who hurtles around in lunch breaks to do the marketing? I DO. Who cleans the flat and the bathroom and the flaming toilet? I DO. I've had just about as much as I can take. And sex. He's bloody sex mad. Morning and night. Anywhere in the house; on the stairs and the kitchen table, even at the kitchen sink with me bending over peeling the fucking potatoes with my knickers round my ankles. I won't even degrade myself by telling you how he wants it when I'm on my period. Megan I should have done the same as you and not got involved with men. I'm going to dump him when I find a nice little flat and just take care of myself. Men. Huh. You can keep 'em" Melanie, the other member of the 'Gang of Five' as they called themselves was in the Middle East working as an engineer for an oil company. They exchanged sporadic letters and Mel seemed to be going places. She hinted at occasional liaisons with men, none of them lasting. The last time they had met when Mel was on leave, they had splashed out on a meal in London and taken in a show. In answer to Megan's question about her 'men friends' she had said "Meg, my old sedate friend, as far as men are concerned the only thing to do is use them as they use us. Have a nice time and wave bye-bye. Unless, like you, you don't bother with them at all." Melanie's words had shocked her " ... unless like you ..." But that wasn't true. She had her Andrew didn't she? She breathed deeply, slowly relaxing back into the airline seat and slipped into a light sleep. In her sleep, she heard Helen's lilting voice "Women don't feel the same as men do." Her dreaming mind connected to her Mentor, her Professor when she worked on her Political Science studies. She was single and immensely confident, forthright in her opinions; commanding, even intimidating in her counsel and tutorship. Her dark brown hair was cropped short, almost mannish, her figure slim and small breasted, her eyes a light piercing

blue. Her movements were lissome but failed to disguise her forceful nature. She spoke with a clipped, slightly Midlands accent with the typical flat 'a' of the north. As a student with a First Class Degree, and already with her Masters behind her, Megan was treated with respect and what seemed special consideration. It had been at her final tutorial, alone with Frankie (her Mentor) that Megan sensed that Frankie wanted more than a Mentor/Student relationship. Nothing was overtly said or done, it was just a feeling she had. As the tutorial ended, Frankie asked, "Megan, are you free this evening?" Startled by the question and without time to think, Megan said she was. "Why not come to my apartment? We could relax and have a drink. We could talk some more about your intended career you know?" "Yes, yes ok." She received the directions and went to her own small flat. Megan bathed and dressed. It was summer and she wore a white cotton blouse with a shirt neck and a full cotton skirt belted at the waist. It was too hot for pantyhose. She wore sandals and felt fresh and comfortable in the warmth of the evening. Frankie's home was an easy 20 minute walk away so Megan strolled there, relishing the slight cooling breeze. Megan was greeted with an unusual display of friendship and was led to the sitting room where a sherry decanter, glasses and cocktail biscuits stood on a small table. Frankie was elegantly dressed in a light blue trouser suit which complimented the blue of her eyes. "Make yourself comfortable, Megan. Relax, we are not Mentor and student now, we are friends. Yes? Tell me more about what you want to achieve in your career." Armed with a generous pale cream sherry Megan spoke about her dreams as a young girl, about her studies and what she hoped for. As her enthusiasm grew for explaining what she wanted she sipped continually at her glass and was surprised when Frankie was reaching out to refill it. "Is there a man in your life, Megan?" Megan admitted there was. "Hmmm. That's a pity..." "Why? Why is it pity? I'm sure he only wants for me what I want for myself." "Well, if you are quite sure – after all I'd never want to cast doubts in your mind." "But why? Why do you say that?" "Megan I'm almost forty five you know. I too had ambitions at your age and they were almost wrecked by a man who I thought loved me deeply and wanted for me what I wanted for myself, just like you. Here, let me fill your glass." "What happened, Professor?" "Not 'Professor' anymore Megan, we are friends now. Please call me Frankie. Well it was like this you see. We were close. VERY close ... you understand VERY close?" Megan had nodded in understanding. "He too had his career and it was beginning to succeed for him. Increasingly he had to socialise and naturally I was with him as his partner. Then I found that we had to start inviting people important to him. Invite them to his cocktail and small dinner parties, and it was my job to organise, organise invitations and send them out, organise drinks, organise refreshments, organise caterers and finally organise the damned clearing up afterwards. To add insult to injury he would give me a scruffy bit of damned paper and I had to transcribe the name and address and organise his bloody address book for him too. Then I had to help him celebrate the success of the evening in the way men like to do with a girl, and there I was exhausted from the preparations and supervising the caterers, doing the rounds and looking after his guests. I was left staring over his shoulder at the ceiling and wondering where my career had gone. Finally, it just got too much and I told him 'no more, all you want is a secretary, handywoman, maid and bed partner.' So I got rid of him and have been so happy since. Believe me Megan, men will suck the life out of you, wipe their feet all

over you, use you and will never be there for you when you need their love and their comfort. You will be told you are just being an emotional female and why the hell can't you be as strong as a man and get on with things? Here let me fill your glass." "But ... errr ... Frankie, my Andrew isn't like that one little bit. He loves me. He wants me to have a career." She realised she was slurring her words very slightly. "Yes dear. Of course he does. I've been told that too," she said in a voice that indicated disbelief in anything a man might say. Frankie stood and moved behind Megan's chair. "You look hot Megan. Are you hot? Why not open the top buttons of your blouse, dear. Here let me help you." Her arms reached over Megan's shoulders. Her fingers brushed across her cheeks, her neck then she lightly began to undo the top button, then the next. Megan shivered and watched transfixed as Frankie's fingers slipped inside her blouse and began to trace over her stiffening nipples, concealed only by her lacy bra. Her nerve ends seemed to reach out to Frankie's erotic touch. Awareness of what was about to happen at last penetrated her alcohol confused brain; the realisation that very soon she might surrender to an expert touch. She leapt to her feet. "NO. NO. Don't do that. I don't want that. I'm sorry Frankie I never meant ... I'm sorry ... I can't" Frantically she fastened her blouse, grabbed her handbag and fled to the safety of her flat. Andrew. She wanted Andrew. She needed to feel Andrew's voice wrapping around her, comforting her, reassuring her. She snatched at her phone and dialed his number. The ringing tone went on and on. What time was it? Her wristwatch said 11 p.m. Let's see, that was 6 p.m. for Andrew. He should be there. There was no reply. No comfort. No reassurance. Tears streaked her cheeks and she lay on her bed, clutching 'Andrew's' pillow in her arms. She slept. She woke and looked blearily at her bedside clock. 2.47 a.m. Further sleep seemed impossible as her mind replayed the evening spent with Frankie. Another glance at her clock. 3.02 a.m. She stood and realised she still wore her blouse and skirt. The night was warm and she felt sticky and uncomfortable. She hurriedly undressed and stood in her shower, the cool water flowing over her. Refreshed she dried herself and lay on her bed, naked in the darkness. 3.30 a.m. Frankie's words replaying in her mind. Nothing would dispel them. 3.56 a.m. Damn, damn, damn, damn. She must phone Andrew he must be home by now it was almost 11 p.m. for him. There was no reply. Megan sat at her dining table, papers spread over it that related to her studies, her head in her hands. She could not silence Frankie's sinister words that still crawled through her brain. "... I too had ambitions at your age and they were almost wrecked by a man who I thought loved me deeply and wanted for me what I wanted for myself, just like you ..." "... men will suck the life out of you, wipe their feet all over you, use you and will never be there for you when you need their love and their comfort. You will be told you are just being an emotional female and why the hell can't you be as strong as a man and get on with things? " "... Frankie, my Andrew isn't like that one little bit. He loves me. He wants me to have a career ... " "... Yes dear. Of course he does. I've been told that too," What had Andrew said to her as they had kissed goodbye after their last meeting in January? Had he really said 'Honey soon all the study and qualifications you wanted will be behind you. How's about after your BSc degree in June, you come over to Crestin and we get a little place of our own. Take a break. We can be together at last. You'll like a lot of the wives there and you can rest up for a while. Girl you have done nothing but study for damn near 20 years. You don't have to get a job I get

enough and more for both of us. Just take a year off, two if you like, and let's be together." What had he really meant by that? Would he be like Frankie's lover? In the loving comfort of Andrew's arms would her ambitions drain silently away, like water through sand? Would she abandon her dreams as so many of her friends had, and be a willing slave to a home and a man's needs? In her heart her love for him wasn't in doubt, but why oh why did these worms of doubt persist and invade her mind? Thank god nothing intimate had started with Frankie. She felt only shame that she might so easily have betrayed her love for Andrew. But she hadn't. It was her only comfort. She hadn't. And yet the insidious corrosive thoughts about men and their selfishness implanted by Frankie, by student friends who had abandoned careers, by friends who had found that men were best when at arm's length, were all clamouring to be heard. As a baseline to the discordant clamour of doubts, were Andrew's own remarks – 'Girl you have done nothing but study for damn near 20 years. You don't have to get a job I get enough and more for both of us. Just take a year off, two if you like and let's be together.'

She made a sudden decision and pulled her writing pad towards her. She would send him a letter putting everything on hold. Maybe they should part, at least for a while, yes that was it ... that's what she would write ... attend interviews ... get a job ... begin the career she had planned for herself ... see how it went from there. She began to write..... As she signed her name she scanned her letter and saw the stains of her tears. Oh God she couldn't send that to him. Whatever their future he deserved to be told face to face. She turned on her computer and searched for air tickets – there was one – London Heathrow to New York Kennedy with a reasonable connection onwards to Albany NY – tomorrow early. She would take her latest study papers and might be able to do some work on the flight. She gathered everything together from the desktop and stuffed them into her well worn leather briefcase. Now that she had made decision her mind cleared, and at last she could sleep.

Continued in Part Three Co-authored – Susan England and Writingdragon The authors would welcome comments and criticisms at either of their email addresses, namely authors acknowledge the words used in the song "Leaving on a Jet Plane" written by John Denver and performed by Peter, Paul and Mary.