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# No Pain, No Gain

By Jacqueline Freimor

## P rologue

### About the Author

Ms. Freimor is an award winning short story writer (MWA) and her work has appeared in AHMM, Red Herring, Murderous Intent and Blue Murder. One of her stories received honorable mention in The Best American Mystery Stories 1997, edited by Robert B. Parker.

Susan waited until Dennis had changed out of his suit and entered the living room, where she was patiently sitting on the sofa.

"Stop," she said, and raised the gun. She leveled it at his chest.

He stared at her. "What the—?"

"Stop!" she said, then let out a bloodcurdling scream.

Dennis stopped, the annoyance on his face hardening into anger. "I don't know what's going on here," he said, "but if this is another one of your stupid--"

"Why don't you yell at me?" she said. "Make it really loud, so the neighbors can hear."

"What's wrong with you? Put that thing down!" It wasn't quite a yell, but he was working up to it.

"Shout," she said. "I mean it."

"Damn it!" he shouted. "You're nuts! You're a freakin' lunatic, you know that?"

Susan screamed again, and Dennis started toward her. That's when she shot him. Once, in the chest. Once was enough.

While she waited for the police, Susan wrapped Dennis's limp right hand around the handle of the fireplace poker and let them fall to the floor. Then she ripped the shoulder of her silk blouse, overturned the occasional table by the sofa, and watched as the Venetian blown-glass vase bounced onto the carpet. She was glad the vase didn't break. It was something she would have hated to lose.

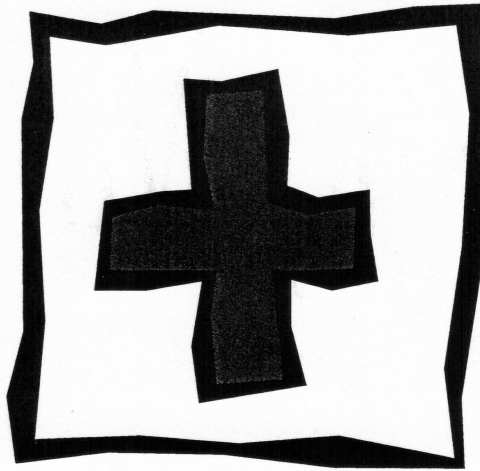
She didn't mind losing Dennis. Not since the day he announced to her that he had found someone else and

wanted a divorce. Fat chance, she'd told him. She had no intention of returning to the typing pool where he had found her sixteen years before, and if he insisted on this divorce she would take him for every one of the millions of dollars he had. Then she had gathered up her gym bag and gone to the club for her aerobics class.

But for all her outward calm in class, Susan was panicked. Dennis would never give up; that's how he'd made all his money in the first place. Not only would he would divorce her, he would destroy her, and leave her without a cent. It was clear: she would never be financially secure unless she killed him. But how could it be done? How?

As she showered and dressed, Susan considered and rejected one plan after another. She couldn't make it look like an accident; she wasn't





clever enough. And then, standing by the lockers, one woman complained about the tough new aerobics instructor, and another woman replied, "No pain, no gain." And Susan had seen her way out.

A siren wailed in the distance. Susan hoped that the police officers responding to her call would be the same ones who had visited her in the hospital two weeks before, when she had refused to tell the doctors or social services woman how she had broken her ankle. Or the ones who'd seen her two weeks before that about the stab wounds she couldn't adequately explain. It didn't matter, though; the list of injuries was long, and all could be verified by the women at the club, who for months had been stealing surreptitious glances at Susan's bruised and battered body and pretending to believe her feeble excuses. All of the women except Emily, of course, who stared openly, questioning, at Susan whenever she offered up another obvious lie. Susan felt awful about Emily. She had never kept secrets from her best friend before, but how could she have told her about what she was doing? Even a best friend couldn't be expected to understand this.

The siren grew louder. Susan bit down on her lip, hard and then harder, until she tasted blood. Then she hobbled on her broken ankle to

the door, flung the door open, and faced the police, tears streaming from her eyes.

\* \* \*

"This just came for you," the nurse said, smiling, and set the vase of flowers on the bedside table. "Get-well wishes, I'm sure!"

It was the smile that told Susan she had won. Everyone believed her! Even the police had been solicitous, ferrying her to the hospital when she collapsed and agreeing to hold all questions until the next day, when she "felt up to it." She had convinced the police and the hospital staff that she had shot Dennis in self-defense; now all she had to do was convince a jury, and she would be free. And set for life.

Susan plucked the card from amid the flowers and tore open the envelope. As she read, she sat up straighter and straighter in the bed, her eyes widening and her neck mottling with rage.

"Dear Susan," the card said, "Two days ago, when Dennis liquidated his assets so we could run away together, I resigned myself to putting up with him for the sake of the money. Now I don't have to, and I owe it all to you. Don't try to find me, and I won't tell the police

how you've gotten away with murder. Thanks a million (or ten)! Emily."

Susan read the note twice more before she noticed that someone in the room was laughing--no, crying. No, laughing. Susan wished she'd stop.

"Are you all right?" the nurse said, frowning. "Are you having any pain?"

"No pain, no gain," Susan said soberly, and started to laugh once more.

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Author's Pen