

## The Lady Who Has Consumption Guilt

Y York

I don't mind that my family went to court to get an injunction against me; I mean I mind, but I don't mind that it is an injunction or that it's my family, what is troubling is their deep need to make sure I keep all my stuff. The psychiatrist says I'm suffering from - and already he's wrong because I'm not suffering - I'm suffering from upper middle class consumption guilt. I don't think so. I don't consume; even as a kid I was always indifferent to shopping. Shopping didn't make my heart race; I like things you could die from or get into terrible trouble for. Alligator wresting. We visited the Everglades when I was 12. Two locals introduced me to some gators. The trick of course is to select a gator who is a whole lot smaller than you; then it's fine. So, does it even make sense that after I'd spent a whole morning chasing and wrestling little alligators that I could care which color halter top my mother bought in Miami? When I got old enough to notice, I liked the dangerous guys, too; ones out of the main stream, anyway. It didn't matter what he looks like, so long as the energy was high and a secret furnace was smoldering inside. My boyfriends terrified my family for whom physical acceptability was paramount. When I found the guy who made my heart race at the exact right speed, who had the right amount of heat, I married him - well metaphorically speaking - on the spot without so much as a byyourleave; we had a the lovers' leap notion of life. But a funny thing happens when a danger-loving spirit and her revolutionary have their first

child. We hovered over her, desperate for ways to protect her, and all those ways led us meekly back into the material family fold; Dear husband walked dutifully into corporate life; but because his furnace still smoldered deep inside, his heart exploded. Of course, by then, there were policies and trust funds so my daughter and I would want for nothing, nothing except the dear sweet husband/father. I let her grow up ignorant of my wild past, because I didn't want her to emulate me. And she grows up safe. There is universal rejoicing - almost universal - when she announces her engagement to David, one of her crowd - a young man with great prospects, old family money, a splendid exterior, and no detectable heat. It is too late to take her alligator wrestling; she only knows alligator shoes. My psychosis, or whatever, begins with the arrival of certain wedding gifts. It starts like wariness and unease; when the necklace arrives, 36 inches of ten millimeter perfect pearls arrives, I am a full bore insane person. When I see the pearls, my jaw gets tight; when I touch them I experience full body muscle contractions.

Fortunately no one sees. My mother and David's mother chirp about value and rarity, but my daughter eyes the pearls with suspicion. The engagement ring is to be another of his family heirlooms. David takes her to some twenty star restaurant for the presentation. I wait up, but she rushes past; I call her back; her hand is hidden. show me, show me your ring. She looks appalled as she presents the ring, recites its statistics, carats of diamond, carats of gold, percentage of platinum. Do I want to hold it? It's in my hand before I can protest, and I am

immediately thrust into musky, dank, deep underground, cave, engulfed by the human misery that accompanied the worker who plucked this diamond from the earth some hundred years before. This vision or psychotic episode does not pass until my daughter takes the diamond from my hand. She is very worried when I try to explain. From then on, I am subject to the potential painful history of everything I touch. I am finally urged onto the psychiatrist after the celebratory bridal shower supper of veal tips, during which I stand and shout my indignation at being kept in a small box until I am ready for slaughter. Only my daughter realizes I am talking in the persona of the baby cow we're eating; at least I didn't moo. The psychiatrist says I'm treatable. The contractions, he says, are psychotically induced because I know how an oyster creates a pearl to ease its own discomfort; the diamond mine vision is psychotically induced because I know about the DeBeers mines; the baby veal episode, etc. etc. He says I am summoning these visions from inside my brain to punish myself because I am suffering from upper middle class consumption guilt; he gives me Prozac. For a time, I'm actually waiting for their drugs to cure me. It is my dear daughter who rescues me, and who gets the two of us in this current legal mess. by asking those long unasked questions about my girlhood. So I tell her a few things, about the circus, high wire walking, alligators, that I met her dad in Cuba, where I'd gone on a date, and where he was cutting cane to help with the revolution. How could we abandon all that for this, she asks with desperate urgency. I do not say, for you; we did it for

you. And she tells me of secret misgivings about this and that, David; not too late, not too late, she thinks. She returns the wedding presents, except the pearls and engagement ring, which are far too dangerous to be released. We pile the dining room table with our priceless personal heirlooms. Which thing, I wonder, could protect my daughter, which thing was worth my husband, nothing here equals alligator wrestling. There are things on this table for which people have died; an ancient jade box, the diamond, surely. Maybe we should mail everything to the relief effort in Rwanda. But people might fight over things and die if we do that. We pack our items into boxes large and small and send them to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC where they have experts. It's a choice than throwing it in the ocean which we considered long enough to even have the boat rented. Only David stands by us, elevating him in my mind; the rest of them rise in revolt. We didn't leave ourselves destitute, the way they describe it, and we are not stupid; we are capable of making our way in the world. Time now to tell my daughter about furnaces and rapid heartbeats. Then she can do what she wants. And then I can do what I want, too.