

Huntingtons

by Mary Lane

My mother-in-law can't stop talking about how she prefers butter to margarine. "It's the German way to do it," she says while fixing the flat kind of pancakes. There's already a breakfast casserole cooking in the oven. The neighbor's brought it over last night.

"It turns such a pretty brown color and doesn't burn so quick. Would you like some sausage?" she asks.

My husband shakes his head. He and I are still and somber at the kitchen table. We're both wearing black and stare at each other through blood-shot eyes. The children's thumps echo on the ceiling above. I think about the other family's children. How they won't ever play upstairs at their grandmother's house ever again and I start to cry.

"I'll make some sausage," she says, pulling out another pan. She lights the gas and wipes a dollop of butter on the side. It slides down. "How about eggs? Would you eat a few?"

"No," I whisper.

"I'll make us some eggs." She moves around the kitchen in a Bavarian frenzy, trying to cover our silence with the clashes and clangs of cooking. The smoky sausage smell fills the small room and my stomach turns. She drops an egg with a gasp and stops bustling.

When she doesn't move, I pick up all the egg shells and clean the yoke with several paper towels. Finally, I disinfect the area with a Clorox wipe. My mother-in-law hasn't moved and she finally lets out a sob. Quick and quiet.

Before I can look up and see her face, she turns her back on us to whip the eggs. "I have some bacon. Would you eat a slice?"

We don't answer and she goes to pull it out. I stop her, putting my hand on her back, my arm around her shoulder. I never see her cry or break down, but today she collapses against me and weeps.

"He shouldn't have been driving. He's so bull-headed stubborn and has to have his way. I told him, the doctor told him, but he don't hear any of that. Stupid fool man, that man of mine."

She spouts a few other things in German and I just hold her. Over her head, my husband and I study each other, tears falling down our faces.

"He shouldn't have been driving," she says one final time and takes a dish towel to her face, standing there for another moment. She heads back to the stove to busy herself, sighing. "I've let the butter burn."

