

# Quit Complaining, Willya!

*by Paul Steven Stone*

"Enough already!" I shouted. "You've done nothing but complain since you sat down."

"But, but . . . !" she stammered, "but I thought . . ."

I generally try to show tolerance for another person's distress, but it's not always easy.

"Doesn't matter what you thought," I replied. "You think life is supposed to be easy? Whoever told you that? My life is anything but easy; still you don't hear me whining all over the place. And, trust me, I could teach you a thing or two about suffering.

"Just for example . . . you wouldn't know it, of course, but my wife ran off and left me two weeks ago. That's right, emptied the bank account, took the car, leaving me with two kids and a box of unpaid bills. All she left behind was her dirty laundry and a note that read, 'Don't forget Elliott's dental appointment on Tuesday. I'm leaving.' How's that for rough luck? And you think you've got it bad!"

"Wow," she said, "that must have been hard to take."

"Hard to take? Hell, the guy she ran off with was my lover!"

"Oh, that's horrible," she cried, her eyes widening to the size of serving platters.

"Wait, I'm not done yet. This so-called lover of mine was renting an apartment from my sister, and I just this morning discovered he skipped out owing her six month's back rent. Which is why we don't

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have the money we need to repair our Mother's broken dental bridge. Poor lady, she broke it in a car accident. Now, when she smiles you think you're looking at a checker board, which is less than ideal for someone who works as a greeter at Wal-mart's."

"Car accident . . . ?" she asked, clearly afraid to open up another chapter of my family's sad history for discussion.

"Yeah, it was pretty bad; put my dad in the hospital. We won't know how badly he's hurt until he wakes from the coma."

I could see something was bothering her, so I asked outright, "What's on your mind?"

"I was wondering how your sister could let your lover fall six months behind in his rent?"

"Same old story," I sighed, "she was sleeping with him, of course. She thought he was going to marry her; now she does little else but spend her days and nights crying . . . "

"Because he left her?"

"Ehh, not really . . . "

"Because of the money?"

"Don't think so."

"Your mom's dental bridge; your dad's coma . . . ?"

"Well, more than anything I think it was the test results."

"Test results . . . ?"

"Yeah, she found it in his room after he skipped out. Seems my sister's boyfriend, who was also my lover and my wife's current traveling companion, has what is politely referred to as a 'social disease.' Boy, that got my attention, if you know what I mean."

She started to rise from her chair.

"Where are you going?" I asked in surprise.

"I'm leaving," she tersely replied.

"You can't do that," I pointed out. "We've only barely started your therapy. You have at least another forty minutes to go."

