

A close-up photograph of a brown spider on its web, eating a fly. The spider is positioned in the lower-left quadrant, with its body and legs clearly visible. The web is a complex, white, spiral structure that fills most of the frame. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting foliage. The text is overlaid on the image in white, with the title in a large serif font and the author's name in a bold sans-serif font.

Forty Winks But One

SHORT STORY

BY MARINA GERRARD

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Dick Dozy was his name and that's what he was. Dozy. In more ways than one. He was lazy and most of the time he was idle, work not being one of his favourite pastimes.

When you came across him he was usually sitting down, eyes half-closed. He would perch himself on any bench, chair or seat available and spend hours there, slouched with or without a drink in hand, casting a lethargic eye on the world and passers-by. If you should speak to him in passing, even so little as wishing him a good day, his eyelids would raise a fraction. The eyes themselves would move sluggishly your way and remain unfocused, as if he had only registered the sound of your words but not the meaning of them. Most people avoided him, thinking he was a druggie or a vagrant. Those that knew him also avoided him but for other reasons.

You'd think with a name and manner like that he'd also be two loaves short of a picnic but that's not what he was. Anything but. Even thinking it would be a mistake. In fact, he was a very smart cookie. Of course there was a screw loose somewhere but the exact place of where it was missing was rather hard to find. As is the case with most people, if one came to think about it, but not so noticeably perhaps as it was in his case. But then again you'd be a fool to underrate him or his intelligence. Believe me, I know. I made that mistake. Once and never again thereafter. I tell you, I take a wide berth whenever I see him. I avoid him like the plague but don't tell anyone I said so. You never know what might happen if he got the wind of it. I wouldn't put it past him to come and haunt his victims even after he died. Which as far as I'm concerned he can't do fast enough. Unfortunately he isn't that old, so it's not very likely that he'll pop his clogs any time soon.

All this doziness is just play, take it from me. Totally fake. It only serves one purpose. To get people off-guard. He just sits there quietly, minding his own business and waits. He reminded me of a spider in its web waiting for the flies to come and mistakenly settle themselves on one of the threads. He'd give it a little time, tweak the thread to check whether the victim was caught properly and then pounce. Cocoon you in and suck you dry for all your life's juices. Then leave you to limp along with your life as best you can. If you have any life left, that is.

You don't believe me? Let me tell you a story about the time he did that to me. Then you can decide for yourself and good luck to you!

I was a little bit down in the dumps that time. Not having much interest in the world around me. Girlfriend trouble, should you want to know. Someone I was really keen on.

Feeling sorry for myself, lost and lonely, broken-hearted and all that nonsense. A likely victim therefore. So I was walking about in a bit of a daze. Been walking for hours and so, worn out with it all, I plonked myself down on this bench in the park. Next to, you've guessed it, Dozy Dick.

I had a hipflask and was about to take a sip when this voice beside me said 'Like to share that with me, mate?' I handed the flask over without so much as looking at him. When I held out my hand and didn't get the flask back I checked and found him looking at me. Twinkle in his eye, smirk around the gills and not a bit dozy. 'You in deep, pal?' is what he said when he handed me the flask. It was the tone of voice that got me.

Oozing sympathy. Just what the doctor ordered. Oh, he was clever I tell you. When I shook the flask to have a sip of my own there wasn't a drop left in it. He had drunk the lot. That should have told me straight off there was something not right about him. Even had the gall to lick his lips and say 'That was some bloody good bourbon, mate.'

I was gormless and so out of it at the time all I could say was 'You could have left me some.'

He replied 'Well, it wouldn't have made a blind bit of difference, would it now? State you're in.'

I had to agree with him on that. So I left it. Had I had my full faculties upon me none of what happened after would have happened, I can tell you that. But I didn't have any faculties right then. They had all gone with my girlfriend. Not that she wanted them but there you are. I was gormless, as I said before. Gormless. Totally out of it. Devastated. Ripe for the picking, as it were. I wouldn't have taken a blind bit of notice if he had bonked me on the head right there, robbed me of everything I had and left me to die. I was that far gone. Oh, I was an easy victim and he played me. He tweaked me here and he tweaked me there with that syrupy voice of his. He wheedled the entire story out of me and then he pounced.

He put his arm around me and hugged me tight. Hugged *me*, who never went for the touchy-feely thing. I have always been more of a straightforward kind of guy, if you get my drift. That's what got up my girlfriend's snout eventually. Slapped me in the face with it, if you must know. Well, it was a pillow she used actually. Rather uncouth, if you ask me, but I got the drift all the same. I gathered she wasn't pleased with me. She had expected more as the relationship progressed, she said. *I* thought we were doing fine. She

had the nerve to call me short-sighted. Okay, I do wear glasses but that says nothing about how my brain works. I've got my sight on other things. More long-distance kind of things. Like investments.

But she wasn't interested in that. One-track mind was the other thing she tried on me. Well, I wasn't having that. I'm broad-minded, even if I say so myself.

Then she gathered her stuff and left without so much as saying goodbye. It was only after, when she didn't come back, that I understood she was serious. It hit me for six. Practically knocked me out. And there I had been, larking about, thinking we were all hunky-dory when it was only me that was. It hurt. That's when I got the bourbon out and started consoling myself.

That's how come I ended up on that bench, sitting next to Dick the Dozy, who wasn't the least dozy.

He hugged me tight, not because he was interested in my woes. No, not him. He had heard that one magic word that made him sit up straight and open his eyeballs. Investments.

But before he went in for the kill he plied me with sympathy. Oh, he had sympathy oozing out of every pore. He tutted and clucked and purred in all the right places. His voice dripped compassion into my ear like honey. I felt soothed and embalmed with the rich ointment of human kindness right down to the core. My beaten mind lifted and my broken heart mended.

He mollycoddled me back to life but all the time he had his eye on the money. My money.

He poisoned me with kindness and paralysed my sanity. I was a fat fly hanging in his web and I didn't have a clue.

I gave the flask another try and found it as empty as before. Useless. I dropped it on the bench.

Oh, he was clever, so goddamn clever and I fell for it. He interspersed his poisonous mollycoddling with all the leading questions. About the how and where and when of my investments and of course about how much. I was so hypnotized by his voice I just allowed myself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter. Which in my case was the sucking dry of my bank accounts, with the intention of leaving me the empty shell. Which as a matter of fact

didn't start right away. Oh no. He was clever enough to give it some time. He had cocooned me in sympathy and I felt grateful. Grateful, if you please! What a sap I was! A great big bloody fool!

Dick picked up the flask, tucked it in my pocket and thanked me for joining him. Then he patted me on the back and with that kind, syrupy voice sent me on my way.

'Off, you go, lad,' he said and winked at me. 'You'll get over it, trust me.'

Upon which the eyelids sank back heavily and he looked as dozy as before.

I got up and walked away, still in a bit of a daze but the world certainly looked a lighter place at that moment. Little did I suspect the disaster that was looming over my head and my bank accounts.

I don't know how he did it but somehow he had wheedled the access codes out of me and he knew how to use them. Slowly but surely he began to bleed me dry. I didn't notice it to begin with. I inherited an ample estate and a nice tidy sum to go with it. My salary came in at a regular time in the month and that is all I wanted to know. It covered all my costs. I mean, there was enough money in my accounts to pay the bills *and* play the stock market. I hardly ever checked up on the state of affairs. Didn't dawn on me I needed to. The bills were paid automatically anyway.

It was when the Dozard started to play the stock market alongside of me I felt a niggles of unease but I ignored it, fool that I was. I was of course vaguely aware of the win and lose but hey that wasn't anything new was it now. It was when the capital mysteriously started to be siphoned off until at some point I couldn't place a little bet I had in mind. That's when I started checking and found out that the money in the investment account had severely dwindled. There still was some come and go in it but the investments were risky ones and I would never have gone for them. It gave me a shock, I tell you. I didn't understand what had happened. I thought at first there was a glitch. Internet being what it is and me not exactly computer savvy. By then Dick had already cleared out my three savings accounts and had moved on to my private account. That's when the alarm bells rang loud enough for me to get off my butt and do something about it.

Oh I was gormless, so infinitely gormless, I fully admit. I should've checked before but I was busy with other things, you know. New girlfriend and all that jazz. Turned out I didn't even have the money to pay for a little gift I had promised Janelle either and off toddled girlfriend number two. Who had her beady eye on my money as well apparently.

I couldn't figure out why the bank hadn't sent me a warning. I went to talk to them. I wanted them to explain to me in simple words what was causing the drain on my resources. That's when I found out Dick had also committed identity theft and it wasn't me who owned the account anymore. Well, sort of. He had turned everything into joint accounts so there wouldn't be any comeback on him.

I don't know how he did it. You wouldn't have thought he had it in him, not with that dozy look and that slouched manner. But he was a top notch con man, I'll grant him that. Grudgingly, reluctantly, of course, but with a touch of admiration as well. It was done so bloody cleverly.

When the penny finally dropped, I panicked. Oh boy, did I panic. You could have mopped me up from the floor at that point. I felt faint, I felt dizzy, my heart was going ten to a dozen and I thought I would die right there and then. I couldn't for the life of me see how I could put a stop to it. The bank guy I talked to was no help either. He just shrugged and told me to open another account for my salary. In other words cut my losses and otherwise grin and bear it. Take it on the chin and man up about it. I thought that was really the pits of customer service. I should have reported him to the bank manager but I was too busy dealing with my panic attack to even think of it.

I dragged myself home and sank into deep despair and despondency. I even cried. I'm not one to cry but the thought of all that money lost touched me where I lived. I cried buckets, helped by a lot of bourbon. I drank myself to sleep that night. I woke up in the morning with the mother of all hangovers but also with a plan. It had hatched in the night. It was a brilliant as it was simple. I say this in full modesty because I was out of it when it hatched but I saw the full potential of it straight away. I scrutinised it in full daylight while nursing a hair of the dog to disperse with the hangover. It looked foolproof to me but who am I. I needed to be sure and I needed a backup. I knew I couldn't do this on my own.

So later that day I phoned up the bank manager and took him into my confidence. Old mate of mine. We go back a long, long way. He was shocked, I tell you, when he saw what had happened. Thought it was one of the most ingenious cons he'd ever seen perpetrated. I had to agree, even though I had a ton load of egg on my face!

Together we looked at my plan and he agreed it was brilliant and eminently doable. When he nodded and said he would gladly give old Dozy Dick a nasty turn for my sake I nearly hugged him. I didn't of course but I was that close to doing it! I also almost cried

tears of joy. Which of course I held back. Stiff upper lip and all that. Not been to Oxford for nothing, you know.

We set a date and my friend would see to the necessary admin. I went home a happy man. There's nothing as exhilarating as getting your revenge, that's for sure.

So eventually Dick got his come-uppance, I'm very glad to say. I made sure he did. Because, believe me, I'm not normally as gormless and as stupid as I had been at that time. I'm normally quite an astute and clever guy, even if I say so myself. I can be devious too. So my friend and I plotted his downfall as cleverly as he had plotted mine. Together we spun a fine web of lies and slowly but surely we pulled him and then we pounced, in a manner of speaking.

Here's the story of how that played out.

It took a few days for my friend to set the trap. He opened a new bank account and detoured what was left of my money -not much, I can tell you that- into that. Hats off to the employee who told me to do just that by the way. Lucky I didn't report him.

Secretly we took my name of the old accounts so they were all solely Dick's. And then we plied him with false information. The savings accounts stayed as empty as they were so as not to raise suspicion. But there was fake money steadily arriving in the private account -my fake monthly salary to wit- and there were fake wins and losses in the investment account, like before. Then for a while the wins became smaller and the losses became bigger. Then the opposite happened. The losses became smaller and the wins bigger. Then we created a windfall on one of the investments. Old Dick got greedy and he spent the entire big win on a juicy fake investment that we knew would tickle his fancy. POUNCE!

Boy, did he go down! With a bang. Flat on his greedy, dozy face! I was so happy, so happy to be a witness to his downfall. I was practically delirious!

The investment account was by now grossly in the red and remained so. He tried to pump the fake money from the private account into the investment account and had the virtual door slammed in his face. There were no readies anywhere. He panicked. Oh, did he panic. He even contacted the bank and was invited for a chat. He tried to lay the blame squarely on me, the apparent joint owner of the accounts. That's when he found out that the accounts were solely his. He practically fainted.

I was a witness, as I said. I was in the conference room, which had a video connection with the room where the meeting took place. Oh boy, did I enjoy seeing him blanch. The look of terror on his face was priceless. Priceless! I'll treasure forever the look of rage that replaced it when he was told he had fallen into a trap. My trap. Set by me and the bank manager. When the truth hit him -of how he had been hoisted with his own petard so to speak- he practically choked with rage. His eyes opened. Wide as wide can be and they burned. They sparked fire and brimstone. There wasn't an ounce of doziness about them then! A more extreme change of personality you've never seen! He ranted, he raved. He called me everything under the sun. There was no syrup left in that voice! He almost went for the bank manager before he regained a modicum of control.

Then he attempted to make a run for it. To no avail, of course. We had foreseen this and the door had been locked from the outside. Of course we had staff standing by in case of emergency. They were watching the screen with me. They too were enjoying themselves hugely with the drama being played out in front of our eyes. It was a good old round of entertainment for everyone. And of course we had the police waiting outside.

When they took him away, handcuffed and foaming at the mouth, I was there too.

I took out my hipflask and waved at him.

'Want to join me when you come out of jail, Dicky boy?' I said in a voice oozing sympathy and winked.

He growled and lunged for me but the police had him secure. Thank heavens for that.

I would have returned the odious hug too if I had been able to but I didn't think it was wise. Not when he was rabid like that.

What a performance that was. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I was there at the court, of course, sitting right behind him. He would have bitten me if he hadn't been restrained. He was done for fraud and sentenced to spend a goodly time at Her Majesty's pleasure.

That was the end of his forty winks! Minus the one I gave him back, of course.

Afterwards my friend and I celebrated. We had a good old knees-up around the pub. People looked at us askance. We didn't care. We were extremely pleased with the outcome of events.

I've since gone back to restoring the state of my ravaged accounts, a sadder and wiser but also a very happy man. I'll stay clear from dozy men for ever, that's for sure. And greedy girlfriends too. For the time being. I'd strongly advise you to do the same. Amen to that. Well, here's looking at you!

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Thanks!

Marina Gerrard

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About the author

Marina Gerrard graduated to writing novels after finishing a creative writing course and producing a few prize winning short stories. She is the author of Journeys into the Heartland, a mini series of three psychological thrillers that delve deeply into the world of relived traumatic experiences. After finishing this trilogy she decided it was time for something less intense. She then embarked on writing a series of light-hearted novels that can be best classed as 'dreamscapes'. In between she took to writing short stories. Her books and short stories are available in e book format, the short stories also in PDF.

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