

TENTERHOOKS

**By
Cerise de Gelder**

EMAIL: cerisedegelder@live.com.au

CHARACTERS:

KAREN – Luke’s wife.

LUKE – Karen’s husband.

SETTING:

The loungeroom of Karen and Luke’s house. Luke is sitting reading the paper as Karen enters holding an umbrella in one hand and a bag in the other.

KAREN: Your umbrella.

LUKE: My umbrella! I’ve been searching high and low.
Thought I’d left it somewhere silly.

KAREN: You had no idea where?

LUKE: No!

KAREN: Well, you’re right, it just so happens.
Gee, you’ll laugh when you find out
where you went and left your broolly.
Such a silly place!

LUKE: No doubt.

(She pulls out a pair of spectacles from the bag.)

KAREN: Oh, and these.

LUKE: My reading glasses!

KAREN: It was really quite bizarre.
They were lying in the back seat of my friend Joanna’s car.

(Awkward pause.)

LUKE: *(As though suddenly remembering)* It was raining...

KAREN: And no broolly?

LUKE: No, I had the broolly then.
I was waiting for a bus...

KAREN: What day was this?

LUKE: I don't know when.
It was late...

KAREN: At night?

LUKE: The bus was late,
and pelting down with rain.

KAREN: Public transport!

LUKE: Yes, I know.
Enough to drive a man insane.
Then a car pulled up beside me
and I thought I knew her face,
from that party at your office
when you worked at Smith and Grace.
And she said, "My name's Joanna.
You remember? Karen's mate?"
And I said, "Of course, how are you?"
And she said, "This must be fate.
Are you waiting for a bus?"
I said I was, but it was late.
So she offered me a ride, and I said,
"Thanks, that'd be great."
But she had a bag of apples
on the front seat, so I said,
"Don't you bother moving those,
I'll take the back seat here instead."

KAREN: And you lost your glasses then.

LUKE: I guess they fell out of my bag,
because I dropped it as I got out.
God, I felt like such a dag.

KAREN: It's just strange...

LUKE: Not really strange.
It was nice of her to stop.

KAREN: No, I mean she never mentioned it
to me.

LUKE: Guess she forgot.

(She pulls a man's tie from the bag.)

KAREN: Then there's this.

LUKE: A tie?

KAREN: Your tie,
unless I'm wrong, and I think not.
It was tied around a teddy
in Joanna's baby's cot.

LUKE: That's not mine.

KAREN: It looks like yours.

LUKE: Joanna's husband's probably got one.

KAREN: He's in prison. Fifteen years
for robbing milk bars with a shotgun.

LUKE: Oh, my God!

KAREN: I know,
and there's poor Jo,
alone with baby Kylie.

LUKE: Must be tough.

KAREN: I guess it is, but then
Joanna's pretty wily.
She would see a man like you and think,
"Now there's a guy who'd stray."
So she'd bide her time and wait
until a rainy winter's day,
and she'd spot you at the bus stop
with your daggy golf umbrella,
and she'd think, "Great, here's my chance.
I'll have a go at Karen's fella.
I'll pick him up tonight
and take my time and when I'm ready,
I'll have his pants off pronto
and his tie on Kylie's teddy."

LUKE: You're crazy!

KAREN: *(Pulling a shirt from the bag)* Am I really? Well then, what's this?

LUKE: It's a shirt.

KAREN: It's *your* shirt,
you cheating bastard.
Was she washing off the dirt?
Was she cleaning off the evidence?
The lipstick and the stains?

LUKE: Where'd you find it?

KAREN: In her laundry.

LUKE: It's not mine.

KAREN: That line again!

LUKE: It's the truth!

KAREN: So teddy's tie's not yours
and neither is the shirt.
And the spectacles are yours
but there's a reason...

(She pokes him with the tip of the umbrella.)

LUKE: Ow! That hurt!

KAREN: I could almost be convinced
by all the bullshit that you've said,
if I hadn't found your brolly
lying beside Joanna's bed!

(Awkward pause.)

LUKE: It's not mine.

KAREN: Not yours!

LUKE: I thought it was
but now I clearly see.
Mine was older, slightly damaged,
so it's not mine. Couldn't be.

KAREN: Well, your cover's blown,
Joanna squealed.

LUKE: She said it's mine?

KAREN: The whore.
She was tight-lipped 'til I pushed her
and she hit the kitchen floor.
When her arm was twisted up her back
Her memory got quite clear.
She remembered all your secret meetings.
Places, dates...

LUKE: Oh, dear.

(Pause)

You must know, she's nothing to me.

KAREN: Just a good roll in the sack?

LUKE: She was never of your standard.

KAREN: And so I should take you back?
Because men think with their dicks
and, never fear, your love is true.
And you'll never stray again this way...

LUKE: I really *do* love you.

KAREN: Well, that's a crying shame,
because your love is soon to die.

LUKE: It will never die 'til I do.

KAREN: Yes, I know it won't. That's why.

LUKE: I don't understand.

KAREN: I've killed you,
but you'll take three days to die.
It's an old technique
the secret service used to kill a spy.

LUKE: I'm afraid you've lost me, sweetheart.

KAREN: Yes, I have. That much is true.
And it's sad because no matter what you've done
I still love you.
But my love is far exceeded
by my bitter disappointment.
And this sad affair of yours
is like a blow fly in our ointment.
There's no way I can forgive you
or forget it or see past it,
so I said to myself, "Karen,
you'll just have to kill the bastard."
And I read about this writer guy
called Markov, how this fella
from the secret service pricked him
with the tip of his umbrella.
And the tip was filled with poison
which would kill him in three days.
And I thought, "Perhaps in three days
he'll have time to mend his ways,
and to think about the things he's done
to wreck out life together..."

LUKE: So, you've ended it completely?

KAREN: Yes, but don't you think it's clever?

LUKE: You're a psycho!

KAREN: But I love you.

LUKE: I need help!

KAREN: And I'm right here.

LUKE: I need medical attention...!

KAREN: Take your shoes off, have a beer.

LUKE: I'll call the cops!

KAREN: And say what?
That your wife has used your brolly
to inject a deadly poison?
They'll just think you're off your trolly!

(Pause)

And besides, I could be joking.
Maybe none of this is true.
Maybe I just made the whole thing up
to make you fret and stew.

LUKE: So the poison...?

KAREN: Where would I get poisons
like the secret service?

LUKE: *(Relieved)* Oh, my God!

KAREN: I had you worried?

LUKE: I was just a little nervous.

KAREN: *(Laughing)* I'll go cook tea, we'll talk...

LUKE: You know I'll never stray again.

KAREN: No, you won't. Of that I'm certain.

LUKE: How long *has* it been now? Ten?
Ten years wed, and only one affair.
That's pretty good, I'd say.

KAREN: And you never slept around
before you met my friend?

LUKE: No way!
God, you really had me going
with that poisoned broly deal.

KAREN: Yeah, it seems a bit of overkill
when I could spike your meal.
Or mix you up a cocktail
with a little deadly twist.
Or send a letter to Joanna's guy
about your tryst.
He's escaped before, she tells me,
and he beat the last one senseless.

LUKE: There's been others?

KAREN: Hate to think of that big brute
and you... defenseless.

LUKE: Are you threatening me?

KAREN: Why darling,
I was merely stating facts.
There's a million ways that I
could make you fall between the cracks.
If revenge was what I wanted,
and most other women would,
there are ways and means of killing
off a husband who's no good.

LUKE: I've always tried my best for you
no matter how it looks...

KAREN: Of course you have.

(She kisses him on the forehead.)

I'll go cook tea.

(She starts to exit.)

You stay on tenterhooks.

(She exits. Lights down.)

END