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Approximate Word Count: 450

“Blessings”

I fell in love with my wife over a sneeze.

On a day the same as any other day, I boarded the bus to go home after work and sat next to a little mouse with her nose in a paperback. I barely looked at her after a cursory glance at her drab business casual to check for any visible signs of mental instability. She appeared normal, boring, and unlikely to cause a fuss, so I took my seat and pulled a *Time* magazine out of my briefcase.

A few pages into the ride she sneezed; such a dainty, breathy “*choo!*” I blessed her, and she turned her head to thank me, so I glanced at her. Direct eye contact in public transportation is virtually taboo. Total strangers pressed to an

almost unbearable intimacy require a determined anonymity. But I looked. Her eyes thrived with an amber luminosity, humor and mischief dancing within.

We married almost a year later. We raised three boys together: Howard, Richard and Timothy. I have spent my life completely in love with this wonderful, intelligent woman; but never, I think, did I love her more than after that sneeze.

I decided to kill my wife over breakfast.

Oatmeal and coffee, same as every morning, with an English muffin split between us and served on dishes as familiar as my own face in the mirror.

She threw her muffin in the coffee; the scalding splash stung my cheek. "Howard!" she screamed our eldest's name at me. "Your trousers are in my tree!" The sour stink of her emptied bladder followed her display.

I stood and helped her up from the table and guided her, like a marionette, to the bathroom so she could void her bowels. As I cleaned the urine from my wife, I accepted that she was not going to get better. My loving, joyous partner was gone, leaving me with only a shell.

My wife, cleaned and dressed in a new housecoat, opened her mouth for the sedative I gave her and drank from the bathroom glass to swallow. I lead her to the bed and tucked her in, kissing her on the forehead. I puttered around the bedroom for a few minutes, waiting for her to fall asleep.

As I clutched my pillow to my chest, I let the tears flow down my cheeks like an easy spring rain. I remembered that night on the bus almost forty years ago; the light in her eyes, the tears and laughter and simple joys that we shared.

“Bless you,” I said as I pressed the pillow over her face.