

Trimblings from the Editorial Floor

122 Rules – Tracy, Wilma, and Tracy’s Letter to Sam

by Deek Rhew

Tracy knew Sam didn’t mean what he said, but it still hurt. She understood he needed her to stand by him, so when he came back, she told him she loved him and would support his decision. They made love that night and every night until he left for boot camp.

Six long weeks drug by between the time she watched him board a plane and when she picked him up at the base in San Diego in their rattling Toyota. Her eyes flew open in astonishment at the changes in her husband as the tall, and now lanky, man approached. Only half way through basic training, but in the ensuing time, the military had stripped off the little bit of belly Sam had been collecting since they’d gotten married.

She had teased him about his budding bulge, and he would pretend to be hurt, needing to drown his sorrows in a double cheese bacon burger, large order of fries, and a milkshake. “This is my coping mechanism to getting fat,” he laughed.

But now...oh my now, he had the beginnings of some serious muscle definition. She took him back to her hotel room, stripped him down, and did her own inspection. She admired his sculpted abs and rock hard butt. She traced a finger along his taut shoulders, now lean and cut, and when she touched his chest, the pecs felt solid and strong. She climbed him with the enthusiasm of a child at a jungle gym, wrapped her legs around his much-slimmer waist, and whispered in his ear, “Take me, soldier boy.”

Tracy didn’t care what the people in the neighboring rooms heard as the two of them knocked pictures down.

Their energy spent, she wanted him to hold her and talk. They lay back, and he wrapped her in his arms. But he started snoring just seconds after his head hit the pillow. She draped her

body over his and, with her head on his chest, listened to the steady beat of his heart as she too drifted off.

He had to be back at “O’ 800,” which she learned meant eight in the morning. She woke him at six, and they made love again--less like animals, slower and more tender. Then she drove him to the base where she didn’t get to see him again until he graduated boot camp.

For the ceremony, she bought a tight little black dress that hugged her figure and had a scooped neckline that showed off a generous helping of cleavage. She felt proud as she watched him cross over, becoming a soldier. Semper Fi. She took him home, and he had only closed the door before bending her over the edge of the counter, pushed the slinky black dress up over her hips, and thrust into her. She hadn’t worn any panties and had showed him as much on the car ride home.

Before going into the military, he had been a patient, giving, and tender lover. This initial union established a pattern, and though in the beginning, she enjoyed his new aggressiveness, she wanted a more emotional connection. He had become an animal. All hard, lean, and muscular. He now could hold her up with one hand and explore her body with the other, but the tender man she had known seemed to have vanished.

A couple of weeks after he returned home, she tried to talk to him about it, but his curt reply left no room for argument. “Look, this is the way I am. You just need to accept it.” He added, a sharp bitterness in his voice, “You never really liked that side of me anyway.” Even though they both knew the falsehood of the statement, she let it go and tried to accept him for the man he had become.

At least at first.

Before long, she started making excuses to not have sex. More than the utter lack of emotion, her body had become raw and bruised from the rough way he handled her. Part of her loved it but the other part, the sensitive side, starved for some softness to her man.

A few weeks later, her worst fears became realized. Sam got his orders: deployment for six months. The formal letter, with US Marine Corps printed at the top, didn't say where they intended to send him. What she didn't know, because he hadn't told her, he had signed up for the assignment. When he enlisted, he promised he would never do such a thing, and when she found out, the knowledge hurt her like nothing he had done before.

When he left for his tour of duty, they parted on amicable terms. She wanted him to profess his love and undying devotion to her; instead their parting, both unromantic and lacking in emotion, left her feeling empty and alone. The night before, he had made love to her in his usual aggressive fashion and then went to sleep.

He kissed her for the last time as the car waited outside, and he said he would see her in a few months. A promise he would not keep.

Tracy's last images of Sam, of him being driven away as she watched forlorn on the front porch in her silk robe and bare feet, would haunt her sleep. As much as she wanted him to, he didn't even glance out the window, just stared straight ahead. She endured, alone, watching as the car trundled down the road and disappeared from sight. Sam did not look back.

Tracy would never see her husband again.

Tracy waited for word from her soldier. The days drug by, unwinding as they do, inching towards the date circled with a heart on her *Scenes from the Majestic US* calendar. The occasional phone call or letter did little to alleviate the growing loneliness and discontent. At last, she flipped to the month she had been waiting for. Her spirit soared, only two weeks left. She had no more than put a fat red X through the first day of the final month when the mailman pushed a stack of envelopes through the slot in the front door.

She hummed a nameless but happy tune as she walked down the hall, stocking feet gliding on cheap faded linoleum, her mind a million miles away. She picked up the mail and flipped through it. *Bill. Bill. Cable... come-on.* Her fingers paused at the letter with the familiar APO return address. The dog eared and smudged envelope looked as though it had done a hard tour of duty itself.

She hesitated before unsealing it as a feeling of dread filled the pit of her stomach. She almost put it in the kitchen drawer without opening it but steeled herself and tore off the flap. Halfway through the first page, she started crying and had to keep wiping her eyes to clear them enough to finish the cheap, acid paper covered in her husband's familiar neat, block print.

In short, simple, military-like statements, Sam told her he had been promoted, and as part of his new position, his assignment had been extended. He would be there another six months.

"No!" Tears streamed down her face. Tracy ripped the calendar off the wall and hurled it across the kitchen.

That letter, that moment, tipped her over the edge. The loneliness had become too much, and she couldn't stand it any longer. She wanted companionship and the comfort of others. A group of spouses, all in the same position as her—waiting waiting waiting—got together a couple times a week. Sometimes they went bowling, sometimes for dinner or drinks, just a casual

gathering of friends. A meeting had been scheduled for that night, and she chose the jeans that made her ass look hot and the fitted sweater that showed just the right amount of cleavage.

She pulled out the stops and shamelessly flirted with Chuck, one of the husbands in the group. They had a good rapport and had been talking for months. His wife, Wilma, had been deployed with Sam. Chuck flirted back with just as much enthusiasm. As the group finished dinner, she whispered in his ear, and he followed her home. She took him to her bed that night.

This event marked the beginning of their relationship. Phone calls and letters between deployed soldiers and their families occurred rarely enough Chuck and Tracy could pretend they were just like any other dating couple.

But they knew the day of reckoning would arrive soon.

Wilma, a stout, muscular woman, and built like a fire hydrant came home first since Sam re-upped. That night, Chuck told her what had happened between him and Tracy. He hoped she would understand.

Her reaction could not have been less amicable.

“You stupid bitch. I have been off fighting for our country, your right to freedom, and this is how you repay me? This is the thanks I get? You tell me you’ve been bonking some whore the whole time I was away? Nice.” She didn’t cry—Wilma never cried—but she did get angry, and her face turned crimson.

He tried to explain about the long lonely months and how he and Tracy had been there for each other. That over time he had developed feelings for Sam’s wife.

“Whatever. You’re lucky I don’t effing cut your balls off. It’s what you deserve. I want you the hell out of my life. Go to your little girlfriend; I hope you two are happy together.” With that, she stormed out.

Chuck called to give Tracy a heads up.

“You told her?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Everything?”

“Yes. Just like we discussed.”

“How’d she take it?”

“She’s pissed as a bear. She left, I think on her way to see you.”

“K. Thanks.”

He the line disconnected and a deep dread filled his stomach.

Tracy hung up the phone, staring at it for a few seconds before wandering over to the window to wait.

A few minutes later, an irate fireplug in fatigues came tearing down the road. The throaty engine of her large, fully-restored Mustang, growled in response to the heavy pressure on the accelerator. As she passed Tracy’s house, she spun the steering wheel without slowing down. Gravel flew and rubber screeched as the large vehicle skidded to a stop halfway into the driveway, leaving the rear of the muscle car hanging out in the street. The angry Marine

slammed her door and marched up the front stoop. Wilma didn't knock, didn't even pause, but came barreling in yelling, "Tracy! Tracy! Where are you, bitch?!"

"I'm right here," Tracy said in a quiet but resolved voice from the kitchen entrance.

Wilma pivoted, her viper-like eyes locking on Tracy's. On previous occasions when the military couples had gotten together, Tracy found Wilma to be butch and crass like the men she served with. Tracy, a Marine's wife and used to such people, had seen first-hand how the Military brothers and sisters protected one another on and off the field. The Marines all belonged to one big family. No relatives on Earth protected one another or remained so dedicated. That anger, that protectiveness, had now been turned on her, and the sensation frightened her.

"I been away for eight months, and when I come back, Chuck tells me the two of you been slapping."

Tracy started to say something, but Wilma just held up her hand. "No. You don't get a turn. This is me talking; the only thing you're gonna get to say is 'yes' or 'no.' Understand?"

Tracy nodded.

"Good. Look, you and I were never really friends, but it seemed like we got along okay. I know you and Chuck had more in common than we did, and that was okay. Talking with him about what you two were going through was okay. I get that. What we do is tough, and I understand it's hard on those left behind too. But, bitch, you crossed the line."

Tracy started to say something then thought better of it when Wilma's eyes narrowed to rock-hard flints.

"Me and Chuck have been through a lot, just like I know you and Sam been through some shit. But for me, this is it. I'm done with him, and I think you already decided that you and

Sam are through too. As women, it's our job to decide when things are over, when we need to cut our losses and move on.

“Sam deserves to have his wife look him in the eye and tell him, but since he re-upped he ain't gonna be back for a while and knowing that mother, he might go and do it again. The best I can do is to make sure he doesn't hear about all of this shit third-hand months down the line, where he'll feel like a fool. Don't want him finding out that the people back home he trusts and loves are disrespecting him, and his sister knew but didn't tell him. So, here's what's gonna happen. You're gonna sit that little ass of yours down, and you're gonna write him a long letter telling him everything that has been going on. Don't leave anything out. If you want him, then you need to straighten yourself the hell out. Be a good little wife, and wait for him. Then when he gets home, get on your knees and show him how much you want him to stay. Maybe he will, maybe he won't. If you don't want him anymore, you tell him that. He's my CO and a tough bastard. People been trying to send him back home in a pine box, so he can take whatever your pansy ass can dish out. Is all this clear? Do you know exactly what you're going to do?”

Tracy held her tears in check and nodded.

Wilma continued, “Sam's a good man. He's screwed up, like the rest of us. But don't disrespect him.”

With that, she turned on her heels and marched back out the door, not bothering to close it behind her. She got in her Mustang, revved the engine of the powerful machine, backed out of the driveway, and tore off down the road, spitting gravel in her wake.

Tracy stood in the empty hallway, staring at the space where Wilma's car had been. She closed the door and walked, legs feeling like they weighed a thousand pounds, to the kitchen where she got the big pad of stationery from the drawer, the one with roses around the border.

Blood red blooms--thorned stems intertwined with thorned stems. She got a pen and headed out to the back patio. An hour or so of daylight still remained in the early evening. On her way, she opened the fridge and reached for a beer, thought better of it, and instead grabbed the entire six pack.

She sat in the new double swing she bought at the nearby home store. Sam hadn't seen it yet, but she and Chuck had spent many nights lounging and talking in it. A few times after it had gotten dark, and they had a little too much to drink, they would make love under the stars. Their time together had felt so wicked, so hot in the moment. They would giggle about it afterwards. But there would be no laughing tonight.

She sat on the swing, popped a beer, folded her feet under her light spring sun dress wrapped around her thin legs, and started to write.

Dear Sam,

This is the hardest thing I have ever had to do. I wanted to tell you face to face. But you re-upped, again, without talking to me. Now we won't see each other for at least another five months.

You are a brave man, an honest man, who doesn't feel like anyone owes him anything for the sacrifices he has made. You are taking care of me and the rest of the country. It's honorable. It's noble. But you never told me you were going to sign up for the military, never told me the first time you signed up for this mission, and you never told me you were going to stay.

You have been through some serious hell these last few years, and I have been there for you. But no matter what I did, you always pushed me away. I tried and tried to reach out to you, to get you to open up to me, but you keep everything bottled up inside. I think it's eating you up.

This seems like a never-ending circle—the more you keep bottled up, the more you have to close down to keep things together.

You used to be one of the most free-spirited people I knew, and at one time, we were able to talk about anything. We were each other's support system. But over the years, you closed me off and shoved me out. I have been standing outside, alone, for so long, and I just can't do it anymore. You used to say that life is short, so you have to grab your dreams while you can and hold on to those that mean the most to you. Granted, that was during happier times, when life was your oyster so to speak, but when things are most dark, aren't those the times you reach for the people you claimed to have loved so much?

You taught me not to worry about the small stuff, that most shit doesn't matter. So much of the crap that people care about and hold onto day to day—a sparkling clean house, all the bills paid on time, or at all, getting the newest version of the latest gizmo—just aren't important. The measure of how successful you are isn't by the car you drive or the house you own but by how happy you are.

But how do you measure happiness? How do you measure the feeling you have after laughing and sharing stories with your best friend? Or how about the butterflies in your stomach when your hot future husband walks up to you and lays his best pick-up line on you then winds up in the emergency room because your boyfriend pops him? Broken nose or not, he later that night gives you orgasms that have to be measured on the Richter scale? Or knowing that no matter what happens, you will have a person you can open your heart to and not be afraid to do so. That person will understand and be there for you.

The thing is, I haven't been happy for a long time. You and I used to be in the trenches together, to borrow a term from your military buddies. But one day, I looked around and

realized you had gone off and left me alone. I searched for you, but every time I found you, you just left me alone again. I miss the man I married. I miss the man I could talk to and laugh with. I don't know exactly what happened. At some point, you simply stopped putting effort into "us."

Maybe this is who you were all along and with time your true colors came out. Or maybe I didn't measure up to be the person you wanted me to be. Maybe I just needed to be stronger? I don't know, and I doubt I ever will. And it isn't just now, with you being gone. For the last couple of years we were "together" but not really together. Know what I mean?

You have gotten so focused on being a soldier; there isn't anything wrong with that, but you forgot about everything else. This is a big part of you now, I get it, but remember life is about the journey. The big destinations you have in your head are just milestones. Not the journey itself.

Yes, you hurt me. Not physically of course, but there are ways that hurt that don't heal as fast as a bruise. You made me feel like shit for wanting to get close to you. You made me feel weak. Like sharing with you—you the person who promised to love and understand and be there—was wrong somehow. You made me feel shallow and stupid for wanting to be near. Dumb for wanting to do things with you, to explore and have new experiences.

Maybe I was foolish to think that things like what we had would last. Maybe young love equals stupid love? I don't know; I never changed. I still want all of that. So I guess I am foolish. It seems that your love of life is gone, and when it left, it took an essential part of you with it. It broke my heart to witness but be unable to do anything to help.

The last few months, I have been having an affair with Chuck. There I said it. Only I think that "affair" is too vulgar a word for it. It implies that it was just a sexual, dirty thing. The truth is, I have fallen in love with him. Don't know exactly where we are going, but he is open and

honest and makes me happy. We do things together and have common interests. He wants to go out and live life, to experience things, take chances, and meet people, not just brood and drown his sorrows by hiding away from the world.

He, in other words, reminds me of the younger, optimistic, driven version of you.

I love you and always will, but I have fallen out of love with you. Actually, if you are truthful with yourself, you will admit that you fell out of love with me a long time ago. I have just been a safe place for you to return to again and again. We have been out of alignment for so long that I don't think there is any way to get "us" back.

I will be filing for a divorce soon and will put your stuff in a storage unit. Again, sorry we can't do this face to face. I don't want to point fingers, but that is your doing. The details will come with the papers. Right now, I don't want to see you. Maybe, with time, we can be friends again.

I am not what you need in your life. I cannot help you open up and grow and get out of the darkness. I think you have been searching for something, but I don't think you have found it yet. Actually, I think it is someone not something. There is someone that can do things for you that I cannot, and I want you to find that person and be happy again. Sam, all I want is for you to be happy again.

Tracy