

Title: No One the Wiser

Danielle Miller didn't need a guru to tell her what she already knew—her nine-year-old marriage had lost its luster.

But as she prepared supper in their New York apartment, a glimmer of hope flickered within her.

She was thirty-two, with an athletic build. He was thirty-four—had let himself go over the years, but he was still pleasing to the eyes. Perhaps there was hope.

Maybe this dinner would be the catalyst that moved things in the right direction. Maybe tonight's laughter would bridge the gaps that had formed. Maybe, just maybe, this evening's warmth would melt the frost that had settled between them.

Richard had called earlier.

“I have good news! I'll be home by 7:30.”

She was taken aback. For the past few years, the only thing they shared was a last name. What the heck?

She got past the surprise and decided this was an opportunity she shouldn't let pass. She would make dinner.

Dressed in leggings and a tee shirt, her official staying-at-home gear, she secured her blonde hair in a ponytail, put on an apron, and went to work.

Richard loved baked ziti, and she planned to make the best she'd ever made.

She set the oven at three hundred and seventy-five degrees and opened a can of tomato for the sauce. She put a pot to boil.

Four minutes later, bubbles danced at the bottom of the water in the saucepan on the cooker. She lowered the heat and poured in the pasta.

Al dente in ten minutes.

Danielle mixed the cheese and the spices and the salt in a bowl, and set the minced meat and the sauce to cook.

Next, set the table.

She used the good China. The ones they got as a wedding present from her great Aunt Elizabeth.

Danielle stopped what she was doing. Guilt clouded her vision like a bride's veil. Aunt Elizabeth, her only living relative, passed away in hospice care, and she never visited.

She inhaled and exhaled, "At least I carried out her last wishes."

Feeling better, she continued setting the table, and her mind drifted back to the beginning when she met Richard Miller.

She'd met Richard at a charity event. Richard was an up-and-coming investment banker. She was in sales, a Toys R Us cashier, and on the hunt to marry rich.

Dressed in a little black dress she stole, no...borrowed from Macy's, she put her best assets to work to do the heavy lifting.

If she didn't snag a single man, she'd borrow a boyfriend or husband. And, if her plan worked, neither the borrowed dress nor the gentleman would be returned.

Richard had his eyes on a large bosomed young thing working with the hard-to-get playbook. She bided her time.

When Miss Hard-to-get left for the bathroom, Danielle saw her chance and slid into the recently vacated seat next to Richard. Her long legs, short dress, and generous tip to the bartender who kept Richard's glass perpetually filled worked in her favor.

"You have the longest legs I've ever seen," Richard said, his words slightly slurred.

Danielle batted her eyelids. "Do you want to see where they end?"

Richard laughed. "No."

But, the more times he saw the bottom of his wine glass, his no morphed into maybe. Why not. Then hell, yes!

They ended up in the back of his Tesla, rocking the car like a 7.2-magnitude earthquake had hit New York.

A whirl-wind romance followed, and five weeks later, they exchanged their 'for better or worse....'

Danielle moved in after the honeymoon. "I'm going to transform your bachelor pad into a home."

"Go for it. Don't think about the money. I got it."

Despite growing up poor, Danielle acquired an expensive taste. She hired the best interior decorators and used Richard's investment banking bonus.

Danielle quit her job and became a homemaker. "Let's start a family."

"Not yet," Richard said. "I want you all to myself for as long as possible."

For the next couple of years, the stock market soared, taking the value of Richard's portfolio up with it.

In nature, everything that goes up must come down.

Richard dropped the R-word around a few times. "I think a recession is coming."

When it finally arrived, it took Richard's riches down with it.

One night, after a very silent dinner, a distraught Danielle said, "Sweetie, I'm not getting any younger. Let's start a family now."

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At first, Richard kept his cool, then shot to his feet as if stung by a bee. His chair slid back with a screech and clattered behind him.

He let loose Mount Vesuvius.

"Woman! You do not have to tell me." He boomed. "I, too, want a family. He slammed his palm on his chest twice. "But we can't afford it." His voice lowered to a barely audible

timbre. He inhaled and exhaled. “Look at the market. I didn’t cause it. But, if we hang in there, it will recover, and we’ll be fine.”

Danielle wasn’t having any of that. She jabbed a finger at him. “You can try something else, anything that makes money.”

“Like What?” His voice cut the air like a twig snapped in two.

She lobbed it back. “Short selling!” “Alyson’s husband is making money despite all the collapse.” Her pitch rose with each word. “Why didn’t you do the same thing?”

Richard stared at her for an eternity, then exhaled loudly, dragging his shoulders down. “Why didn’t I do that?” His voice had calmed, no longer enough to bury her like Pompeii. “Everybody’s strategy is different. I’m in Advisory Services. I help companies restructure their debt, advise them on risk management, and provide strategic consulting. The salary is constant. Proprietary Trading is not my expertise.”

“Then make it your expertise!”

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Richard loved his wife, and her happiness was important to him. He shifted strategy and did what she recommended. He got into the Proprietary Trading division, which included trading in stocks, bonds, currencies, commodities, derivatives, and other financial instruments.

At first, everything was honkey dory, but by the end of two and a half years practicing a strategy he wasn't used to, they'd left the frying pan and were in the fire. They downsized and then moved to another town. But their affairs continued downhill.

“Richard, I can't believe it! We've gone from eating on the table to scrounging on the floor. Can't you find something that would bring money?”

“Remember, you convinced me to switch to Proprietary Trading. If I'd stuck with Advisory Services, we would have recovered by now.”

Danielle scuffed. “Advisory Services, what a laugh. All your strategic advice caused the recession we're experiencing now.”

Richard clenched his jaws. He looked away to hide the hurt and embarrassment her words had caused him. He stroked his chin, his mind doing cartwheels to find a solution.

“Why do you stand there like something made out of stone?” Danielle's tone was forceful and aggressive.

Richard's face brightened. Sighing, he said, “I think I've got it.” He looked up, eye-shinning. “I'll go into Fintech.” He was nodding. “Specifically, cryptocurrencies and blockchain. That's where the money is today.”

Danielle threw out her hands. “Cryptocurrencies?” That's even worse. It's new, and nobody understands it. You'd be better off flipping burgers at McDonalds!”

Richard glared at his wife, turned, and walked away.

“Where are you going?” Danielle asked in a how-dare-you-walk away-from-me-voice.

“None of your business.” The hissed words sliced through the air. He walked out, slamming the door shut behind him.

Danielle flew out of her chair after him. She halted at the door, her heart pounding, her fists tight, and her chest rising and falling like she’d run a mile.

She’d find a real man who would care for her financial and personal needs.

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A knocking sound from the kitchen brought Danielle back to the present.

The cover of the pasta pot was rising and falling. She cracked the pot open, and the rising foam calmed.

Ten minutes later, she drained the pasta and added it to the cheese mix. After mixing, she poured them into a baking pan and placed it in the oven.

She checked the time on the oven clock: 6:45 p.m. Richard would be home by 7:30. She rushed to the bedroom, showered, and slipped into the body-hugging red dress she’d picked.

The feel of the fabric on her skin reminded her of the night she met Bill. Like tonight, she’s showered and dressed in the same red dress.

She reminisced about the night she met Bill wearing the same red dress.

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With her mind made up, Danielle went to a bar to hunt or be hunted.

She sipped her Sangria and watched people behind her in the bar mirror. A Mercedes key fob landed on the counter next to her. Next, a palm spotting a masculine gold chain bracelet with manicured nails rested on the counter.

Within minutes, William Burton, Bill, as he liked to be called, was deep in conversation with Danielle.

He ran a cybersecurity company and was the ideal man Danielle had been looking for—handsome, in shape, rich, resourceful, and into her.

Her eyes were on him all night. Whenever he spoke, she smiled. And when he joked, she laughed a little too loud. It was love at first sight.

Two hours later, he had her spread out in his hotel room. When she came, his name was on her lips.

The affair went on for weeks. Bill, whose company headquarters was in California, flew every two weeks to New York for business and to meet his newfound love.

Danielle and Richard were like two ships passing in the night. They kept to themselves, rarely spoke, and sex was out of the question.

It suited Danielle fine. She had Bill for that.

Despite the dip in their finances, Richard still settled her bills. He never suggested that she work to help out.

Richard came home one evening—shoulders slumped, feet dragging heavily with each step. He'd switched from expensive suits to the style you get four for a hundred dollars from some warehouse. The one he wore looked like a hairball coughed up by a cat.



She felt sorry for him, but she quickly kicked that door shut. Right now, she straddled the fence. Nothing would stop her from leaping over to greener pastures. It was only a matter of time.

Richard attempted a smile. He looked like the living dead. “Hey.” He dropped onto the sofa in the living room.

He still paid her bills; the least she could do was be nice to him. “Rough day at work?”

“Phew. You can say that again.”

Something was on his mind. She might as well ask. “Anything new?”

Richard groaned, sat up, and leaned forward. His eyes lit up, and a wide grin spread across his face. “There’s this new company I’m working with on the side...strategic advising. It looks promising.”

Danielle’s ears would have shot up straight if she were a dog. That was good. Her pulse picked up. She leaned forward with a subtle cock of her head. Maybe she would reward him tonight.

Richard continued. “I gave them strategic advice, and they paid me in crypto and stock options. If their company breaks out, we’ll become millionaires.”

Richard was still talking but Danielle had switched off.

He lost her at crypto. She was interested in real greenbacks, and her little change of heart evaporated like rain on the sidewalk on a summer afternoon.

She left him in the living room, with his mouth open and bewilderment written all over his face, and returned to their bedroom. She locked the door behind her and engaged the deadbolt. He was already on the sofa; he should get comfortable.

As she lay on the bed, a text came in from Bill. Babe, what about a weekend in Florida?

Danielle was thrilled. “Yes!”

She sent her reply to Bill.

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As the plane descended towards the shimmering coastline of Florida, Danielle couldn't help but squeeze Bill's hand a little tighter. The thrill of their first vacation together was like her first time balancing on her bicycle without help. Richard hadn't taken her anywhere in years.

Their first day was a whirlwind of shared laughter and adventure. They both threw caution to the wind and strolled hand-in-hand along the bustling boardwalks of Miami Beach, their skin kissed by the salty sea breeze. Bill surprised her with a private salsa lesson, where they lost themselves in the rhythm and each other's arms.

The next day, they rented a convertible, the warm wind tugging playfully at Danielle's blonde hair as they drove down to the Keys. They stopped at a secluded spot where Bill had arranged a snorkeling session. Underwater, they swam alongside colorful parrotfish and curious sea turtles, their eyes wide with wonder and mutual delight.

They dined by candlelight that evening, the ocean's symphony serenading them. Bill's attentiveness and how he looked at her across the table made her feel cherished and seen. As they shared key lime pie, Danielle imagined a life together, woven from moments like these.

On Sunday afternoon, the last day of their vacation, they lay in each other's arms, catching their breath after a round of explosive passion.

Danielle was in love. She felt bold and broached the subject of their future. "I've never been happier." Her voice was soft but earnest. "I think... I think I'm ready for the next step."

Bill's smile faltered, and he took a deep breath. "Sweetie, there's something I need to tell you." He was hesitant, his eyes avoiding hers. "I love you more than I've ever loved anyone. But I'm not the man you think I am."

Danielle's heart skipped a beat. "What do you mean?"

"I don't have much money." He lowered his gaze and lifted it again. "The lifestyle I've shown you, this trip, is not my money. It's... it's my wife's money."

Danielle recoiled, her dreamy gaze hardening. "Your wife? Bill, what are you talking about?"

Bill exhaled noisily through his nose, his face a mixture of regret and resolve. "Like you, I'm married. I've wanted to leave but haven't had the courage. I can leave her, but only if you leave your husband first. We'd have to start over, really start over because I won't have access to this kind of money anymore."

The revelation hit Danielle like a rogue wave, cold and shocking. She climbed off the bed, wrapped herself in the bedsheet, and walked to their balcony.

She stared ahead, her thoughts churning like the stormy sea before her. Danielle processed the situation's duplicity, complexity, and silent perplexity.

A hand on her shoulder caused her to jump.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," Bill said. He hesitated and then placed his hand over Danielle's shoulder. Danielle rested her head on his shoulder, and then he pulled her closer. "I'm so sorry." His voice choked with tears. "Tell me how to make it right."

Danielle reached a conclusion as the sun set on the horizon, its fading light mirroring the dimming of her initial dreams. The future she envisioned was a pipe dream, but a new one jumped into her mind, and it would bear no resemblance to the glittering fantasy that had brought her here.

Danielle flew back to New York while Bill headed for California. She was surprised she wasn't too angry with him. Was that what love did to you? Did it give you the ability to see around corners?

She devised a plan, which she didn't share with Bill.

Bill, conservative, proper, and well-behaved,...might be horrified. Danielle understood that the safest secrets were those kept entirely to oneself—shared only with me, myself, and I.

Danielle returned from Florida and got bad news through a phone call. Her great aunt, Elizabeth, had passed away, and she was required to come and pick up her things from hospice.

Danielle was apprehensive. "Did my aunt owe the facility anything?"

"No, she was in a program that covers her expenses until death," said the hospice person. "All we need is for you to pick up her personal effects."

What could Aunt Elizabeth have that would be important? “Can you give them to charity? Or...throw them away?” Her voice lowered toward the end of her sentence.

There was a sharp intake of air. “You are Danielle Miller, right?”

“Yes.”

“That was her dying wish.” The hospice person’s voice was louder, and her tone was aggressive. She exhaled. “We have an address here for you. We can mail them to you, and you can do whatever you want with them. Have a nice day.” She hung up.

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Danielle’s phone alarm went off, pulling her out of her reverie and back to the present. She’d set it to go off ten minutes before Richard arrived.

She rushed to the kitchen to bring out the pasta and prepare another of Richards’s favorites—Zuppa Toscana soup, made with sweet Italian sausage flavor, creamy broth, potatoes, and kale.

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Danielle had never seen Richard this happy since their early married days. He could have passed for his old self but for his suit.

He kissed her cheeks. “I brought you a bottle of your favorite Bordeaux and twelve roses.”

Danielle went to the kitchen and brought the rabbit wine opener. “This must be some news. Sit, I’ll get the food ready.” Danielle was curious. “You can go ahead and pour us some wine.”

“Take your time. I’ll tell you as we eat.”

Danielle moved gracefully around the kitchen, her movements meticulous and calculated. In her pocket, she fiddled with a small bottle, recently acquired from her late aunt’s personal effects.

The label read ‘Warfarin,’ which was prescribed for her aunt’s heart condition. She looked it up online and discovered it had darker uses, too. Tonight, it would serve a new purpose.

She filled two soup bowls with the sweet Zuppa Toscana. On Richards’s plate, she added an extra heaping of sausage, then sprinkled the finely ground powder over it. The white crystals of Warfarin disappeared into the rich, creamy broth like little secrets dissolving into the night.

She carried the plates to the table, her hands steady and her heart pounding treacherously.

“Rich, I hope you’re hungry,” she said, offering him a smile as brittle as the wine glasses filled with red wine on the table.

Danielle placed the food on the table and picked up her wine glass.

She swirled the ruby liquid gently, catching the light from the candle. She brought it to her nose, inhaling deeply, then took a cautious sip, letting the flavors linger on her palate.

Richard cocked his head, his eyes sparkling. “It’s the best they had at the store. How is it?”

Danielle twirled the liquid in her mouth for a few seconds. “Mmm.” She swallowed. It’s pretty smooth. There’s a hint of oak and... cherry, I think? It’s richer than what I usually drink. It’s Bordeaux.” She took another sip, paused, and considered the wine for another moment before tipping the glass back and draining it in one long, appreciative gulp.

Richard gave a satisfied nod. “I told you it was good.”

Danielle nodded. “Delicious indeed. Sometimes, a little change is exactly what you need.”

“Wow, you made my favorite soup.” Richard sniffed it. He stared at her, shaking his head. He picked up his spoon. “It looks wonderful too. I didn't expect you to go to such lengths.”

Richard shoveled the first helping into his mouth. He closed his eyes, savoring the flavor. He chewed and swallowed. “Thank you.” Then, he ate hurriedly as if someone was going to take the plate away.

Danielle watched him with an intensity masked by casual conversation. “Do you want more?”

“Maybe after the baked ziti. I can smell it.”

“I’ll go get it.” She pointed at her wine glass and then rushed off to the kitchen. Using mittens, she brought the food to the table. “Help yourself.”

Richard carved out a decent portion for himself. “I missed this.”

Danielle sat down, sipped more wine, and said, “What news do you want to share with me?”

Chewing thoughtfully, Richard seemed to relax. “You remember that company I told you about that paid me in stock and crypto.”

Danielle’s pulse skipped a beat. She stopped chewing and nodded slowly.

“Their stock exploded! We are millionaires!” He shoveled food into his mouth. “I told you,” he spoke with food in his mouth, “things would change, and they have.”

Danielle felt hot and cold at the same time. For a moment, she didn’t know what to say. The room filled with the clinks of cutlery as Richard dug in. Was she better off with him dead or alive? “Millionaires?” She intoned in a low voice. She raised her glass. “A toast.

Richard wiped his mouth and raised his glass.

“To long life and prosperity.” Her voice quivered. Danielle wondered what the warfarin was waiting for.

“To-long life-and prosperity.” Richard’s voice faltered.

Danielle froze—eyes on Richard.

His cheeks flushed, and his eyes glazed over. He coughed, a faint, startled sound, then dropped his wine glass. His hand went to his chest, his forehead furrowed, eyes darting all over in confusion.

“Richard, are you okay?” Her voice was barely audible.

“Danielle, I feel... something’s not right.” He gasped, his voice weak.

Danielle bolted to her feet and came to his side, her face a mask of concern. “What is it, Richard? Too much wine, perhaps?”



“No, it’s my... my heart,” he stuttered and tried to get up.

She patted his shoulder. “There, there, just sit for a moment. It’ll pass.” Her voice was soft and soothing, but her eyes were cold and calculating.

Richard slumped back, his breaths shallow. “Call a nine-one-one.”

Danielle could hardly hear him. She leaned in close, her lips brushing his ear. “Remember my Aunt Elizabeth in hospice that died? You just took all her leftover warfarin in your Zuppa Tuscan.”

Richards’s eyes widened as the realization dawned. His hand reached out and grasped at air. “Why? You won’t get away with this.”

“Yes, I will. I’ve got someone else, Richard. Someone who understands me! Who loves me. With your life insurance money—” she let out a laugh. Plus, your stock options—we’re all set. No more worrying about the future.”

“I...have someone...too.” Those were Richard’s last words before he toppled off his chair.

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The Miller’s two-bedroom apartment was filled with people—uniformed police, detectives, and the medical examiner.

She sat on the sofa, answering the same questions over and over again. She was tired. Her stomach was cramping, with waves of nausea coming off and on. Maybe she wouldn't have done it if she knew it would be this grueling.

“You said you were having dinner, and he clutched his heart?” Detective Hogan asked for the hundredth time.

“Yes.” It came out as a croak. Her throat was dry. Danielle swallowed. “Yes.”

“What did you do?”

She wanted to scream. She'd already told the uniformed police who came with paramedics all this before. Danielle inhaled and exhaled. “When he said he wasn't feeling alright, I told him to give it a few minutes. I thought it was indigestion.”

Detective Hogan stopped scribbling and looked up. “Indigestion?”

Danielle nodded.

When he collapsed, did you try to render help him?”

“Not right away. I thought he was fooling around.” She'd waited almost an hour before calling. She didn't want him to pull a Lazarus on her with the help of paramedics.

Detective Hogan cocked his head. “Do you think it had to do with the food?”

Danielle coughed. “I ate the same food.”

“Did you make it?”

A wave of pain shot from her left side to her right like an arrow. She grimaced and shut her eyes tight.

“Mrs. Miller, are you alright?”

She nodded. “Yeah.”

He gave her a look like she didn’t believe her.

“I made the pasta. Richard brought the soup and the wine with him. I only heated it.”

She pointed at an empty container.

The coroner, wearing white overalls and gloves, was examining Richard.

Danielle’s heart was pounding like a housefly colliding with a window pane, trying to escape. She’d waited an hour before calling nine-one-one. Would they know?

Danielle’s stomach gurgled and rumbled. She felt an incredible urge to fart, but she thought she’d get more than she bargained for. Cold sweat formed on her forehead. She sank into the couch, breathing hard.

The detective stared at her, his eyes growing wide. “Mrs. Miller, you don’t look too good.”

Detective Hogan pulled out his phone and speed-dialed a number. “I’m going to call an ambulance.”

He gave instructions, then hung up.

“Do you want some water?”

She shook her head. But the pain. Her whole muscles were cramping. Pain crisscrossed her abdomen like vehicles in a Cloverleaf Interchange.

Sit tight, Mrs. Miller; help is on the way. He walked over to the coroner.

The coroner looked up. “Hey Paul.”

“Doc. How’s it going?”

“It’s going.”

Detective Hogan glanced over his shoulder, leaned in, and whispered, “She’s not doing well.”

The doctor raised an eyebrow. “Grief.” It sounded like a statement.

“There could be more. I’ve called for help. Has the body yielded any secrets?”

His voice was loud enough for only the doctor, but Danielle heard.

“There’s bleeding from gums, nose, and eyes. The body is covered with ecchymosis and petechia.”

“English doc,” Hogan said.

The doctor exhaled. “That is bleeding underneath the skin, usually seen in patients with warfarin overdose or poisoning. I can tell you more after I open him up.

The detective glanced back at Danielle, then back to the doctor. “Homicide?”

The doctor shrugged a neither-here-nor-there shrug. “Until I get him on the table, I can’t be sure.” He raised an evidence bag with a clear plastic bottle containing a white powder. “I found this in his pocket. “I used the portable XRF analyzer to scan the material—Digitalis.”

“The heart medication? You think they poisoned each other?” Detective Hogan asked.

“Very possible.”

Danielle heard it all. Jesus. They were onto her already.

Richard poisoned her? It must have been the wine when she went to get his soup. And she'd delayed calling for help. A shudder went through her. What were his last words—I have someone too. He also had a plan to get rid of her.

Danielle winced. Her body felt like it was on fire. Her muscles cramped, then she shook violently.

The detective said, “She’s convulsing!”

It was the last thing Danielle heard. Her vision dimmed at the sides, and then everything went black.

The End.