

Valerie's Story – Emotions Based on Speculation

I wanted to take his head off.

My husband knows that there are a few things that make me crazy. I can't stand clutter, and I have no tolerance for lateness. So when he leaves a trail of clothing and equipment between the back door and the bedroom, it feels like he's purposely trying to provoke me. It feels unloving. Or when he makes me late for a dinner date, I get so angry I ruin my whole evening over 25 minutes' tardiness. The consequence of me getting this irritated is likely to be a candy binge; and he knows it.

I once arrived on the dot at the restaurant where I was supposed to meet him for lunch. My romantic fantasies that he would be on time were dashed. It came as no real surprise that he wasn't there and I just started fiddling. I called and left him a message. I erased the inbox on my cell phone, sent off a couple gratuitous text messages, and cleaned out my already clean pocket book. My agitation built as I visualized him playing at his computer, oblivious to the vibrations of his cell phone sitting in the charger two rooms over. Stress contracted the muscles in my neck and shoulders, tightening them as I pictured him totally absorbed by some project he cares about more than me. I shuddered realizing he just doesn't love me any more. At that point I dove into my favorite divorce fantasy, and my jaw started hurting. I got a hard knot in my stomach. And just before I got to the part where I took his head off, the derelict walked in, 14 minutes late and arms wide to greet me.

He hadn't been dithering at the computer; he was in a sales meeting. His cell phone wasn't sitting in the charger; it was turned off for the meeting and he forgot to put it back on. He wasn't fixed on ruining our marriage; he's just a man with a broader definition than I have about what it means to be on time. In less than a quarter hour, I had imagined every cell in my body into a lather of emotions based on speculation. When he arrived, my brain caught up but my body was still tense and knotted, not a great way to start a meal.

When we talked about stress at Suppers, I learned that the effects on my body are the same whether the stress is real or imagined. It was my own fabrications that tensed my jaw, brought my shoulders up to my ears, and soured my stomach. The lesson for me has been that having emotions based on speculation is like eating bad food. It gets into my body, setting off alarms and seriously jeopardizing my intentions to stick with the food plan I've laid out for myself.

My problem is that my imagination carries me away whenever it's idle too long. I start making assumptions and produce real emotions based on wrong information. I decided a good matching solution would be always to have a paperback book with me so I can be pleasurably reading instead of furiously waiting. Carrying a slightly larger pocket book is a small price to pay for avoiding binges or divorcing a perfectly nice man who just runs a little late.