

The country husband

Literature



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John Cheever's short story "The Country Husband" is a story about life in suburbia or in the story Shady Hill, New York. Francis Weed is the main character in the story. He is a husband and father of four children, two girls and two boys. Some would even venture to say that Francis has "the ideal combination for the ideal family" (Flora, 2006). His wife, Julia, is an underappreciated housewife that looks forward to the parties that they are always invited to. Cheever's story really centers on Francis and his life, but what caught this reader's eye was the distant relationship between Francis and his wife.

This paper will focus on the relationship between Francis and Julia. It will attempt to point out the misunderstandings in Julia's character and the problems in their relationship from the start to finish. Francis never really made Julia feel appreciated, and that is what leads to the bigger problems in the relationship. The story starts out with Francis being in a plane crash and returning home to tell the story to his family, which really didn't bother to listen to him. The children were too busy bickering and Julia, his wife, was off preparing for dinner.

Francis felt like nobody cared that he had just been in a plane crash. He felt like life just went on as normal for everyone else. The kids continued doing their normal kid routine and Julia, his wife, had just entered the room as the story was over and the commotion with the kids had ended. This section of the story throws up some red flags. Why would a family/wife not care that their father/husband was nearly killed? One could claim that it's because they never felt a connection to each other. When dinner starts, the bickering among his children continues.

Francis asks Julia if the children could have eaten earlier, because the arguing was annoying him. Julia doesn't have time between raising four children and taking care of a household to make two separate dinners. This shows that Francis has no idea what Julia does all day or what her time constraints are. Francis then goes on to say that he was nearly killed in a plane crash today and doesn't want to come home to a battlefield.

A battlefield is what he called dinner with his wife and children. Julia feels like everything was relaxed and quiet before Francis arrived home and doesn't understand where all of this hostility is coming from. Julia begins to cry and retires to the bedroom. Francis does not go after her to explain or to calm the situation down but instead goes outside to smoke a cigarette ignoring the fact that his wife was upset. During dinner we see just the beginning of how unappreciative Francis can be. He has a warm home, loving family, and a home cooked meal, but this is not good enough for him. He would prefer to be alone and eat instead of listening to his children's voices. Julia was hoping for a peaceful family meal. Francis was in a plane crash.

One would think that after such an ordeal you would be grateful to be alive and thankful that you are still able to hear your children bickering. Julia could have taken the time once again to discuss the plane crash, but Francis attacked her by saying she should have fed the children earlier. Julia is not a psychic, how was she to know that Francis would have such a stressful day? Julia was a well-liked person and liked to go out to the parties that she and Francis were always invited to. The author states, " Her love of parties

sprang from a most natural dread of chaos and loneliness” (Cheever, 2004, p. 229).

This one statement claims that Julia is looking for an escape from the loneliness that she experiences in her house full of five other individuals (four children, and her husband). Julia uses the parties as that escape. A married woman with four children and a husband should never feel lonely. A woman’s husband should not only be her partner in life, but also her best friend. Francis feels as though “ his marriage has become an empty one of the household arrangement, financial support and the need to keep up appearances” (Hipkiss, 2000). While at a party the next evening, Francis saw a woman that reminded him of his War days.

As he is recalling the story from when had last saw this woman, the narrator states that Francis couldn’t tell anyone about this story or how he knows the woman. Not even Julia because, “ he could not count on Julia’s discretion” (Cheever, 2004, p. 230). This statement says a lot about the trust and communication between Francis and Julia. Francis didn’t have a lot of faith in Julia being able to keep this story a secret. Being able to communicate in a relationship is important. Francis does not feel that he can trust Julia enough to keep the secret. This relationship cannot be healthy and thriving without trust.

When a couple has been married for sixteen years there should be some type of trust in the marriage. When they arrived home that night Francis was to take the new babysitter, Anne Murchison, home for the night. When Anne enters the car Francis can tell that she has been crying. After going into detail about Anne’s alcoholic dad’s phone call, the two of them ended up in <https://assignbuster.com/the-country-husband-essay-samples/>

an embrace. The narrator states, “ The layers of their clothing felt thin, and when her shuddering began to diminish it was so much like a paroxysm of love that Francis lost his head and pulled her roughly against him” (Cheever, 2004, p. 31).

This is important because this is the moment that Francis began emotionally cheating on Julia. Francis at that moment started to feel something more than an employer should for his employee. When Francis and Anne reach her home, they walk hand in hand to the door where they share a brief kiss goodnight. This is where the cheating became slightly more physical. Even as he sleeps next to Julia that night he is dreaming of Anne. This shows he total disregard for Julia or her feelings and no respect for the sanctity of their marriage.

The days that follow Francis can't seem to get his mind off of Anne. “ The image of the girl seemed to put him into a relationship to the world that was mysterious and enthralling” (Cheever, 2004, p. 232). If only Francis felt the same way about the woman that he vowed to love and honor until death do them part. Francis' whole attitude changed over the next few days. He even became snappy with Mrs. Wrightson, one of the most prestigious women in the town. He realized that he missed being rude to people and thanked Anne mentally for that new found sense of independence.

Although Francis knew that the path he was taking could be a devastating road to go down, not just for him, but also for Julia and then children, he still went into the jewelry store and bought a bracelet for Anne. The purchase even made him happy. He was happy to be spending money on gifts for the babysitter instead of on his wife and children. Shortly after buying the
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bracelet Francis returns home to find that Anne is there to babysit again for the night. “ Her perfection stunned him like a fine day—a day after a thunderstorm” (Cheever, 2004, p. 233).

Right then and there with no regard to Julia being upstairs he envelopes her in a hard kiss, ignoring her resistance. Even though Francis was at a party with Julia, Francis could only think about being able to drive Anne home that night. Instead of enjoying the night out with his wife he is dreaming of driving the babysitter home and where they could go and not be seen. Unfortunately for him, this is now how his night ended. When Francis and Julia arrived home Anne had already went home for the evening. Julia then brings up the fact that Francis had been rude to Mrs.

Wrightson. After Julia tries to explain to Francis that this could have ruined not only their social lives but also their children’s, Francis “ struck her full in the face. She staggered and then, a moment later, seemed composed” (Cheever, 2004, p. 237). Julia then storms upstairs where she proceeds to pack a suitcase and leave Francis. Francis begins to tell Julia how sorry he is and begs her to stay. Julia responds by telling Francis that he doesn’t love her and that he has no idea how much he actually hates her. He doesn’t realize the “ cruel” things that he does.

By this Julia means the way that Francis leaves his dirty clothes lying all over the house. Julia feels like Francis does this to humiliate her, and that he does this on purpose. Here Julia is expressing how she feels underappreciated and taken advantage of. Julia thinks that Francis hates her and does this just to make her feel worse about herself. Francis begins to feel bad for Julia, but

only because he feels that she is dependent on him. “ Her figure, so helpless in its self-deceptions, bent over the suitcase made him nearly sick with pity.

She did not understand how desolate her life would be without him” (Cheever, 2004, p. 238). Francis goes on to tell Julia that she has become dependent on him. “ Francis Weed might take comfort in the fact that he feels his wife must rely on him to survive. He does not think she is capable of living on her own without him” (Wagner, 2009). Julia does not feel the same way. Julia goes on to remind Francis of this, “ If it weren’t for me, your neckties would be greasy and your clothing would be full of moth holes. You were alone when I met you, Francis Weed, and you’ll be alone when I leave. (Cheever, 2004, p. 239). Here Julia is reminding him that she was independent before him and could take care of herself after she leaves him, but he wouldn’t know the first thing about running the household without her. Francis then begs Julia to stay to which she responds, “ I guess I better stay and take care of you for a little while longer” (Cheever, 2004, p. 239). This scene makes Julia look “ to be tied to a provincial and conventional thinking, meanly vindictive, foolish, and astonishingly weak-willed” (Dessner, 1994). The next day Francis decides that he should go see a psychiatrist.

As he walks into the office he says to the Doctor with tears in his eyes, “ I’m in love, Dr. Herzog” (Cheever, 2004, p. 241). The good doctor prescribes woodworking as a distraction for Francis. The story leaves you to wonder though was Francis in love with Anne Murchison or Julia. If Julia, why would he need a distraction? If he is in love with Anne Murchison then why stay with Julia? Was this just to keep face in the suburban lifestyle? The Weeds stay in a loveless marriage to save face. That is exactly what was expected

of them by society. Julia was an underappreciated housewife. She cooked. She cleaned.

Julia took care of everything her family and husband needed, yet she never got a thank you. Of course Julia could have been more interested in Francis' plane crash, but why would she be when Francis never paid any interest in her thoughts or feelings? During this whole story, Francis has a wife who does everything for him, yet he looks elsewhere to feel complete. Julia is completely overlooked. Francis' feelings and thoughts are explored; Julia's are left in the background. Francis shows complete disregard for his wife's feelings or her actions and the author chooses not to explore what Francis's affair is doing to Julia.