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# *Nutrients*

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They had met one summer in a seaside resort in Greece -- he, Ramiro Jiménez, an economist, scion of an aristocratic Chilean family; and she, Birgitta Andersen, a pharmacist, daughter of third generation Scandinavian immigrants, from Minnesota. Culturally and intellectually, the two had little in common, not even a language. His English was as limited as was her Spanish, and neither spoke a word of Greek. But fueled by the warmth of the Aegean sun and the fine local wines, their encounter soon flared into a full-fledged passion. Both in the late 30s and never been married, they figured that their time for marital bliss was running out. By the end of the summer they had tied the knot.

They bought an old frame house in a Alexandria, a twenty minute drive across the river from Washington, D.C. Ramiro landed a job with the World Bank and Birgitta in the pharmaceutical department of the George Washington University Medical Center.

Predictably, their marriage began to unravel from day one. Though Birgitta worked longer and harder hours, Ramiro expected her, the woman, to cook dinner, wash the dishes, grocery shop and, between the maid's bi-weekly visits, keep the house clean, as tradition required in his native country. Nor would he contribute to the yard work and minor repairs around the house, manual labor also being inconsistent with his aristocratic tradition, beneath a cultured *caballero*, gentleman, like himself, or so he claimed. When the boy they hired to mow the lawn didn't show up, as was often the case, or they couldn't find a handyman to nail down the loose boards on the deck or replace a broken tile, it fell on Birgitta to do the work herself.

Then began a pattern of abuse. Ramiro would mock her opinions, make fun of her physical appearance, demean her in front of others, neglect to introduce her at parties, as if she didn't exist. Then came staying out all night, the womanizing. Birgitta could smell the scent of the women on his clothes and skin. And next, the slapping and shoving at the slightest annoyance. All also part of his native macho tradition.

Needless to say, their sex life diminished, from the two and three times a day in the Greek resort, to once a week, to every two months, then down to zero, each now sleeping in separate rooms on opposite sides of the house.

At first Birgitta retaliated by becoming overly neat, a tactic she recalled one of her aunts using effectively to torment her four husbands. If Ramiro left a book he was

reading on the dining room table, when he got back to it, the book would be gone, hidden away in some shelf in another room, where he would have look for it. If he left a cup of coffee to cool on the kitchen counter, when he came back to drink it, the empty cup would be washed and put away in the cupboard. And so on it with his clothes, shoes, toothbrush, the various creams to check his fast receding hairline and, most galling, his wallet and car keys.

“Damn *eet!*” He would shriek in his heavily accented English. Where *deed* you *poot eet?*”

“Where it belongs, of course,” she’d say evenly, riling him all the more.

“*Coño!* And where *een* the hell *ees* that?”

But for all the abuse Birgittta had taken, she didn’t want Ramiro to bolt the marriage, as had her aunt’s four husbands. (Actually, one went mad and committed suicide). Instead, she would try to change him, make the marriage work. So she came up with a new tactic.

In his youth, Ramiro had been a first-rate rugby player and over the years had stayed in reasonably good shape jogging and playing pick-up games on weekends with friends. Age, however, had inexorably crept up on him. He no longer could keep up with the younger players and his once resilient body became susceptible to injuries. That and the receding hairline were beginning to take a toll on his ego.

“What you need,” Birgittta offered, “are vitamin and mineral supplements. As we grow older, you know, the body doesn’t process nutrients from food as efficiently as it once did. It needs help to regain its youthful vigor.”

“Really? What supplements, then, would you recommend for an athletic man like me?”

“My supervisor at the hospital is a pharmacologist associated with the National Institutes of Health. A world authority on men’s nutrition. I’ll check with him first thing tomorrow.”

Next day Birgittta came home with a bagful of small plastic bottles —Vitamins A, B, C and D; zinc, selenium, calcium, potassium; amino acids; digestive enzymes; and a testosterone booster formula. Arraying the bottles on the dining room table, she described the contents of each and how they would work to together rejuvenate his male body.

“The important thing,” she explained, “is to take them religiously, as prescribed, never skipping a day. When you see one of the bottles running low, let me know and I’ll get you another one.” And handing him a pill dispenser with compartments for each day of the week, “Here, this will help you stay on schedule.”

Ramiro gathered his nutrients and, for the first time since they married gave his wife an appreciative peck on the cheek.

It didn’t take long for the nutrients to start taking effect. By the end third month, he was a different man, less aggressive, more sensitive, more inclined to help with the dishes and the housework. Now instead of playing weekend rugby with his friends, for exercise he would take Birgitta dancing, or on long walks, as they had done at the Greek resort where they first met. Their sex life, too, was rekindled, though not with the same fire as before. Now it was more like a warm glow. His erections were not as firm as they used to be. Sometimes he could not get erect at all. But that didn’t matter. The hugging and cuddling and just being together. That was all that the satisfaction each needed. One night Ramiro moved back into the main bedroom with Birgitta.

As the months passed, Ramiro waxed increasingly sentimental and emotionally dependent on his wife. Instead of the fast action films he used to enjoy watching, his preference was now for maudlin novels and songs, which would move him to tears. Sometimes he would cry for no apparent reason. His physical appearance was also changing. The hairline had stopped receding, the facial and body hair had become downy, the skin more sensitive, muscles softer, and the buttocks, hips and thighs a fuller. He looked ten years younger.

A year into the nutrient regimen he felt a slight, almost pleasurable tingling in his breasts. Birgitta checked them out and saw that the corollas had noticeably increased in size and the nipples stood erect and pretty, like the budding breasts of a pubescent girl.

“Nothing to worry about,” she told him. “Just the normal effects of the nutrients. The tingling would soon go away.”

That night, as Ramiro slept contently beside her, Birgitta’s went downstairs to the kitchen shelf where Ramiro’s nutrients were kept and refilled the empty testosterone booster bottle with the estrogen tablets that she had been putting in it all along, this time upping the dose from 2.5mg to 5.0mg.

“This ought to do it,” she grinned, putting the bottle back on the shelf with the other nutrients.