

# A SPIDER WEB NAMED CHARM

Beaula is, as her name suggests, a beautiful woman. Yet, in her own words, “I threw away the best years of my life.” On what or on whom, and why? Her story is one she hopes will open the eyes of other young women.

**L**ife was exciting. Wherever she went heads turned to watch the raven-haired girl. As she grew older her tawny brown skin would belie her age, but in 1982 she was only twenty and having a good time. She was working for her own money and enjoying the freedom and mobility it brought when she met Alex. They made an enviable couple. They soon fell pregnant, had a baby and got married. And in the wink of an eye, Beaula had to grow up. She had wanted to live an adult life but did not know how being grown-up isn't all that great.

Beaula was still getting used to having a husband when she no longer wanted one. The baby was lovely to have; if only the father could assist more. Instead, he seemed to be permanently stressed out. Why she couldn't tell since he had quit two of his jobs in the short time they were together. His conduct soon made more sense when she recognised it must be his love for weed that kept him from keeping a job. She didn't sign up for raising another lady's adult son and decided it would be better if she and her Anna-May lived alone. That was until her father's words had her reconsider leaving Alex. Beaula lay in hospital. Still in a daze because of the news that she was pregnant again, she heard her father say, “God is giving you a second chance to make your marriage work.” She gave it another chance. She tolerated how little he contributed to anything. She also tolerated the stench of his weed. She even suffered the madness of her and the children forced to dance for him in the middle of the night when he would come home high. But the day he slapped her and she hurt herself against the bath tub was

the day she refused to give their marriage a further chance. Although he hardly contributed to the household and would not pay maintenance, he walked out of the marriage with everything and did not even leave a spoon behind. Oscar wasn't older than three and Anna-May ten or eleven.

Beaula raised her children alone for a number of years until she met Philip. They met at a work event. She was not attracted to him but did find him charming. When he came to collect a book he had forgotten in her car, he came with a red rose for her. Cheesy, yes. It was not the red rose or the teasing and compliments that made her give him a second look, it was the fact that he offered to fix her broken door – and that he promptly did so the next day. Struggling by herself, being a mother and a father to her children, and carrying life's burdens alone had created a conducive environment to fall for a Philip. It had been early days in their relationship when he told her he was married.

She should have run then. But she did not. He was not handsome at all, but she had learned not to be moved by a man's looks again. This man was so incredibly charming. Being woman alone and struggling, he did not come to pay her bills or buy her things. He came and made her feel like a woman: appreciated, admired, praised, desired, supported. He told her he would leave his wife. His charm became a spider web. At first she could not get enough of it and then she fell in love with him. In the end she loved him for 18 years. No, for longer. Because after their break-up it took her six years to get over him, all the while wishing that despite his betrayal, he would return to her.



Beaula gave Philip the best years of her life. She wanted to get away from him, but somehow she could not. Whenever his wife had damaged her property, Philip would stay over at her place for the weekend; charm her until she felt high on the infamous trio: endorphins, dopamine and serotonin, and leave with the promise that he would divorce his wife. And yet for 18 years Beaula spent Christmas and New Year's Day without Philip, because he spent it with his family. Looking back, she says, "I was blind and stupid." She never went to any of his family events, yet he attended her family functions like he belonged there more than some of the legitimate brothers-in-law. Only one of Beaula's brothers made it very clear that he could not stand the man. Everybody else, including her parents, tolerated him and seemed to have accepted their relationship. In all the years of being together she never pressed Philip to divorce his wife, nor did she want them to have a child together. As much as she loved him, she wondered if she would marry him if he asked her to. What she did know was that she had come to love him deeply.

Beaula warns women who raise their children alone. She says it is easy to fall for a married man because you just want someone to share the load with. But do you really? In Beaula's case Philip did not lighten her financial burdens. Also, being in a sexual relationship with a married man means you are definitely not his only partner and that leaves you vulnerable to all sorts of health hazards. If you were to contract something fatal, your children would be the biggest losers because your lover is not their father and

if you were to fall away, what would they have gained? You also have to honestly ask yourself if your children can really connect with this man. A few years later at Alex's funeral, Oscar's paternal grandparents took him from Beaula to get him away from what they considered as the indecency of her lifestyle. This arrangement did not last long, but it certainly caused turmoil in the boy's life. Besides having been uprooted for a while, Oscar was often plagued with fighting to protect his mother's honour against the comments of other boys. Anna-May built up resentment over the years and moved out of the house the very day she wrote her last high school exam.

After the relationship with Philip came to an end, Beaula recognised that the scars left on her children's lives were greater than what she suffered. She lived in a fool's paradise, because for all her loving Philip, she remained the other woman. Despite the façade of a normal relationship, in retrospect she admits that she had sacrificed her children on the altar of... her relationship with another woman's husband. As much as he was a peacemaker and assisted her children whenever they got into trouble, the truth is, his presence in her life was the main reason for the conflicts they got into. Oscar's joining a gang was in rebellion to the father figure in his mother's house. Anna-May's walking out of the house was in response to her own turmoil over her mother's relationship.

In the end she realised she was lucky to get out with only a broken heart and fortunate to be able to rebuild relationships with her children.

