

Make life easier

GET two outfits for the price of one with this range of reversible children's clothing.

Seesaw's hand-made outfits, created by two mums in Kent, include the best-selling reversible pinafores for girls from £22. The range also includes gilets, trousers, dungarees, fleeces and a pony fleece/waterproof jacket (www.seesaw.uk.com).



Seasonal stress less



KISSING under the mistletoe might set your pulse racing – but those green leaves could also help you unwind.

Mistletoe tea is popular in Europe, where it's used to treat stress and high blood pressure. Herbalists say it works by widening the blood vessels, which helps circulation and lowers blood pressure. But while the leaves are harmless the white berries are highly poisonous.

So don't try this one at home and pick up some teabags instead.

High-end to High Street



£75

Biker cape coat, £75, asos.com

£1,370

Double-face wool cape, chloe.com

Styling: AMY KESTER

by Antonia Hoyle

MICHELLE MILLS was as impeccably groomed as she was well mannered. Her nails were neatly manicured; her blonde hair sleek. Her gentle nature and diminutive, 4ft 11in stature seemed perfectly suited to her career as a children's nursery worker.

But Michelle's pleasant demeanour masked an altogether more disturbing personality. Behind closed doors she was a volatile character, prone to irrational behaviour and violent outbursts, as her boyfriend Edward Miller would discover.

Michelle subjected Edward to an onslaught of abuse. He was scratched, punched and screamed at until one morning Michelle, brandishing a kitchen knife, stabbed him to death in the living room of their picturesque cottage in the pretty village of Scalford, Leicestershire.

The attack was so ferocious that the knife blade broke away from the handle. In April, Michelle was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

'Eddie was a kind man who would never hurt anyone,' says his mother Sara Wrestle, blinking back tears. 'I still can't believe he's gone. I want other men who are suffering at the hands of an abusive wife or girlfriend to seek help, so that nobody else loses their life like my son did.'

Troublingly, in a society where the roles of men and women are becoming increasingly blurred, female-on-male domestic violence is on the rise.

The latest findings from the British Crime Survey reveal that 17 men were killed by their partners in England and Wales last year.

Forty per cent of reported domestic abuse victims were male (although this includes assaults by male relatives and partners).

Incredibly, if these figures are to be believed, more married men suffered abuse at the hands of their spouse than married women (2.3 per cent of married men were recorded to have complained about domestic abuse compared with 1.8 per cent of married women).

Of course, it is easy to blame women's increased violence on their emancipation: they move more in men's worlds, earning and competing with as much aggression and vigour as their male colleagues.

They're drinking more, too: figures from the Office of National Statistics show that women are fast catching men up in the alcohol stakes. The proportion of women consuming more than the recommended limit of 14 units a week has grown by a fifth in a decade.

'Domestic abuse against men is one of Britain's last remaining taboos, but every year our helpline is seeing at least a 25 per cent increase in the number of men seeking help,' says Mark Brooks, chairman of Mankind, a charity for male victims.

EDDIE was 18 and had just graduated from a business studies course at college when he met Michelle, then 29, through mutual friends.

'She was Eddie's first serious girlfriend and his eyes lit up when he spoke of her,' says Sara.

Sara, 48, invited Michelle over for dinner. 'She was well mannered and friendly. Eddie seemed so happy the age gap didn't bother me.'

Yet there were perhaps already troubling signs. Michelle had a young son and daughter who were living with their different fathers and with whom she had only sporadic contact. She also had a predilection for alcohol.

'When she'd drunk too much she would find fault with even the smallest things Eddie did,' says Sara. 'If she didn't think he was being attentive enough towards her she'd snap at him. If he was tired she'd accuse him of being grumpy. I didn't feel it was my place to intervene.'

Sara, a former hospitality manager who became a full-time mother after Eddie was born, did her best to befriend Michelle.

But in October 2011 Eddie — who was a strapping 6ft tall and 14 stone — came home with scratches and bruises on his face after spending the night at Michelle's three-bedroom home in Melton Mowbray.

'I was horrified,' says Sara. 'Eddie admitted Michelle, drunk, had lashed out at him. He wouldn't say what the argument was about and

insisted he could handle himself.' As the months passed, Michelle became ever more controlling.

'She was jealous of Eddie's friends,' says Sara. 'If he was out, she'd text him saying he had to come home. Once she even threatened to kill herself if he didn't. Eddie grew withdrawn. I suggested he leave Michelle but he said he loved her.'

So that December, less than a year after they had started seeing each other, Sara talked to Michelle instead. 'She admitted she had a problem with alcohol and wanted to stop drinking,' she recalls.

'For a while she and Eddie seemed happy together. But one evening in July 2012, when the couple were spending the night at Sara's house, she heard Michelle shouting.'

'They'd been lying on Eddie's bed watching a film while sharing a bottle of wine,' says Sara. 'I knew they were drinking but tried not to worry. Michelle insisted she could handle alcohol in moderation.'

But the shouting intensified and Sara opened the bedroom door to see Michelle punching Eddie's chest. 'Appalled, I tried to pull her away, but she grabbed a mug and threw it at him.'

Sara finally managed to drag Michelle into the spare room, where Michelle picked up a mirror and hurled it to the floor.

'Furious, I told her to leave my house,' says Sara. 'She left — but

BARGAIN OF THE WEEK:

Wither Hills Pinot Noir 2010, £11.19 (normally £13.99), Waitrose

GOOD Pinot Noir wines can be seriously expensive. But this one, from New Zealand, is great value. Smooth and spicy, and thinking ahead, it makes a great partner to roast goose or turkey.

KNACKERED MOTHERS'

WHITE: Truly Irresistible Godello 2012, £8.49, Co-op
THIS is a gorgeous, bright white from Spain's Galicia region. The flavours are all peach and pear-like. Lip-smackingly crisp and fresh, with serious healing properties.

FOOD PAIRING: Most seafood. Happy on it's own, too.

RED: Mon Plaisir 2010, £9.99, Laithwaites
TRY this bramble-fruit loaded red whilst curled up by the fireside. Laithwaites' resident winemaker

Why are so many becoming domestic viol



Murderer: Sally Challen killed her husband Richard (right)



not before calmly putting her make-up on in the reflection of a shattered piece of glass. It was chilling.'

Even then, she couldn't stop Eddie's infatuation with this volatile woman.

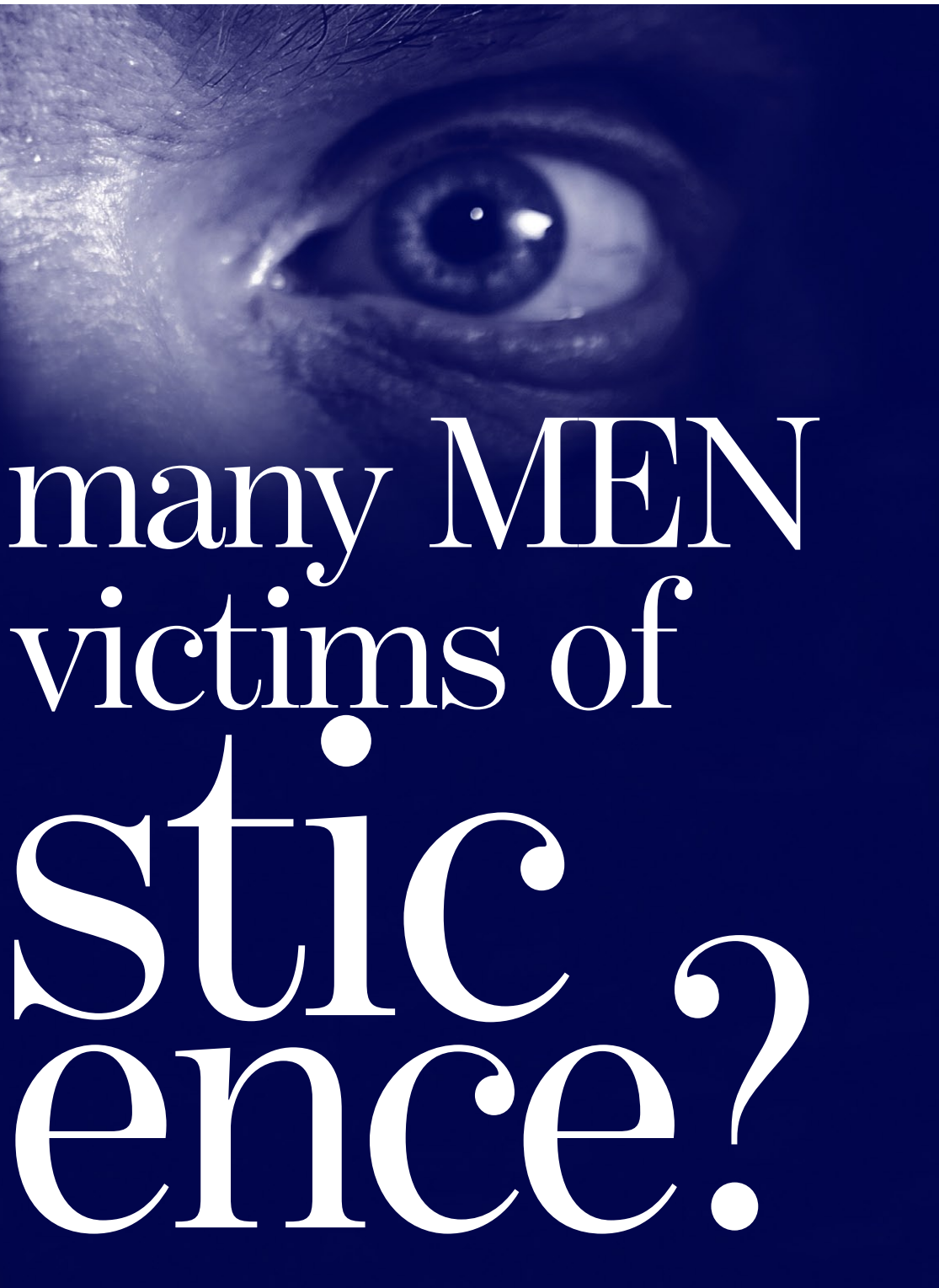
'He was 20; an adult. And at the back of my mind was always Michelle's tiny build — how much harm could she do?'

Sara last saw her son on November 2, 2012. 'Eddie had been accepted on a hotel management course and they seemed happy.' But four days later, at 5.20am, two

police officers knocked on Sara's door. They said that Eddie had been stabbed and had died from his injuries. 'I was numb with disbelief,' says Sara.

It wasn't until later that day that a family liaison officer told Sara that Michelle had been arrested and charged with her son's murder.

Michelle had apparently stabbed Eddie 24 times in his back, chest and stomach. She'd then waited 20 minutes before calling an ambulance, by which time Eddie



many MEN victims of stic ence?

was dead. Sara, inconsolable, was prescribed sleeping tablets and went to counselling while Michelle remained in custody. During a four-week trial at Lincoln Crown Court, two former boyfriends testified that Michelle had attacked them with knives. Charges had never been brought against her. Money and infidelity seem the two biggest external triggers for female domestic violence.

THE examples are myriad and depressing. In March 2010 Jennifer Parkinson, 68, stabbed her husband, retired headmaster Michael, 65, to death after the couple's £1million property portfolio went bust and they faced bankruptcy. And in August 2010, office manager Sally Challen, then 57, bludgeoned her wealthy car salesman husband Richard, 61, over the head with a hammer after discovering he'd had an affair. Sandra Clinch, a four-times-married mother-of-five, unleashed her fury on at least two of her former husbands before she stabbed her fourth

husband Alan to death in May last year. To the outside world Sandra, 50, seemed a devoted wife and mother. Known to her friends as Sandy, she liked needlework and keeping her semi-detached home in the tiny Cornish village of Darite immaculate. But her respectable middle-class facade belied a vicious temper. Her first husband Andrew Fazekas, 52, a social worker with whom she has two sons, recalls Sandra becoming so enraged on the night before their 1981 wedding that she threw their wedding cake across the room. 'On another occasion, Sandra stabbed me in the left arm, cut my right wrist and attacked me with a pipe from the vacuum cleaner.' Their son recalled: 'A red mist would come down and she got into a rage. That would be over the smallest thing such as not washing up properly or using the wrong sort of polish.' Her second husband Peter

Knibbs, 50, whom she married in July 1986, and with whom she raised two children, also suffered her mood swings. In 1989, Sandra stabbed Peter with a kitchen knife. One of their children later reported their mother to the police, but charges were never pressed. Sandra married third husband Richard Lewis, 44, in February 1995. They had a daughter but that marriage failed, too, and in 2001 she met Alan, a slight and unassuming man who devoted his spare time to charity and his passion for American cars. When Sandra lashed out at him, he would react not with anger but with kindness. 'He would usually give me a kiss and I would calm down,' she admitted in court. But being at the receiving end of his wife's sharp tongue undoubtedly had an impact. Alan became withdrawn. In the years before his death he tried to leave Sandra twice but, too weak to leave, came back.

Secret suffering
More than 60 per cent of domestic violence incidents take place in the home

Jean Marc Sauboua snapped up two vats of Merlot from them, and aged the wine in oak barrels for a year. I'm glad he did, frankly. **FOOD PAIRING:** Whatever's in the slow cooker.

SPARKLING: *Tesco Finest Prosecco Brut NV, £9.99* **HERE, we're going for quality over the cheap thrill. Made by a great producer in Italy's northern Veneto region, it's frothy and fizzing with fresh fruit.**

FOOD PAIRING: Just add nibbles and a really good crowd. **■ HELEN'S first book — *The Knackered Mother's Wine Club* — is out now (£12.99, Pan Macmillan)**

Neighbours regularly heard Sandra screaming at Alan during their one-sided rows, while the couple's boss at the home improvement store where they both worked claims he saw Sandra hitting her husband round the face during a fight in their car. But on May 13 2012, something inside Alan, 48, snapped. As he tended to their garden, Sandra demanded he come in and tidy ahead of their friends' arrival for Sunday lunch. Instead of complying he apparently said, simply: 'shut up.'

SANDRA picked up a pair of her embroidery scissors — bought for a dress-making course — and plunged them into her husband's chest. As he lay dying, she dialled 999 and told attendant paramedics: 'Please help him. I love him so much.' In court, Sandra — still wearing her wedding ring — claimed Alan's death was an accident. But she was found guilty of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility and sentenced to nine years. No one knows whether Alan ever sought help for the abuse he was suffering, but it would appear not; according to recent research men are twice as likely as women to keep abuse secret. 'They feel emasculated,' says Mark Brooks. 'Their pride is undermined and they are reluctant to see themselves as victims.'

Leonora Sinclair, for one, took pleasure out of belittling her third husband Lloyd, 73. An extrovert with an active social life, Leonora, 51, met Lloyd, a driver for a church care centre, in 2008. He had four adult children and was proud to have put them through university. Now his children had flown the nest, he was seeking someone else to centre his world around. They married in March 2011, but their relationship soon grew fractious.

The couple rowed over money and Lloyd began to bear the brunt of Leonora's aggression. He would go to work with bruises on his face, admitting they had been caused by Leonora. One colleague recalled: 'He always had an injury.' In September 2011 Lloyd called the police after a row, saying his wife had 'gone crazy.' They arrived to find her in a locked bedroom with a knife. On another occasion, she apparently broke his arm. Lloyd's friend Monica Thompson once saw Leonora beating him up outside her London home. 'He was very calm as usual while she was raging at him,' she says. 'He was afraid of her. She was hitting him in his face and everywhere. He was quite shocked.' On the afternoon of Lloyd's death, January 15, 2011, Leonora sent a text to a friend. It read: 'I am watching Steel Magnolias and getting p***ed on wine while Lloyd makes the dinner. LOL (laugh out loud).' Later that evening an argument broke out over what to watch on television. Lloyd was stabbed with a large kitchen knife in the back of his left thigh and bled to death in the hallway of their semi-detached home in Enfield, North London. At her trial at the Old Bailey that October, Leonora insisted Lloyd must have stabbed himself by accident. Sobbing, she told the court: 'I treated my husband with respect and dignity. I loved my husband.'

The jury weren't convinced. Sandra was convicted of manslaughter and jailed for ten years; one of an increasing number of women whose violence plagued — then ended — their husband's lives. **■ Additional reporting: Lauren Taylor**

Modern manners for middle age

CLAUDIA CONNELL, takes a humorous look at some of the modern-day dilemmas a woman over 45 faces:

TOO OLD FOR: One Moment TOP of the wishlist for every bright young thing this Christmas is the One Direction fragrance, Our Moment. The perfume comes in a jewelled pink bottle in a presentation box adorned with moody pictures of Harry, Zayn, Liam et al. Word on the street is that the perfume — a heady mixture of lime, seasonal flowers and warm musk — is actually rather nice and with stores in hot competition, it's possible to snap up a bottle of eau de perfume for £17.

But do you really want to smell the same as the teenage girl who delivers your newspaper? And if that doesn't put you off, how about the fact that Harry Styles's mum Anne is only 43 years old.

TOO YOUNG FOR: Lily of the Valley by Yardley EVERY now and then you'll catch a whiff of this sweet, overpowering smell. Perhaps at your local library, or a bus during off-peak hours — anywhere the over-80s tend to hang out. Instantly you'll be filled with nostalgia for the days spent sitting at your granny's knee, playing with her vintage pump scent bottle and giant talc puff.

It was nice to smell like your granny when you were six years old but now, 40 years on, it's less endearing. Today, perfumes are less likely to knock you out at 30 paces. Lily of the Valley is best kept to scented drawer liners, or potpourri.



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