

On “Lyle Mitchell”
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I was really taken with “Escape at Dannemora,” a seven-part series on SHOWTIME which aired in November and December of 2018 and I binge watched in January, 2019. I signed up for SHOWTIME and then cancelled my subscription right away, so all seven episodes cost me \$6.99. It’s mid-February as I write this, and the series is still on my mind.

“Escape at Dannemora,” directed by Ben Stiller, is based on the real-life breakout from a prison in up-state New York by two life-sentence murderers, one 37, the other 48. They were abetted in their escape, as well as sexually serviced, by a prison employee, Joyce “Tilly” Mitchell--married, 50-ish, dumpy-looking, glasses, bottle-blond permed ringlets obscuring her face. “Dannemora” has a screenplay, direction, acting, settings, and production values that are first rank. Consider this a strong recommendation to give the series a try.

The focus here is on what has particularly stayed with me these past weeks since I watched “Dannemora,” the relationship between Tilly and her husband Lyle, at least as portrayed in the film; they may have been very different in real life. Lyle, also 50ish, dark hair combed down over his forehead, a nondescript mustache he would have been better off without, two protruding front teeth (you get the sense that regular visits to the dentist may not have been a feature of his childhood), and a hangdog persona.

Tilly consistently treats Lyle with disdain and scorn, and adds cuckolding to the package, although it appears he doesn’t know, or does he?, he probably suspects. She strides ahead of him when they go someplace, insults him, and discounts him.

It’s her birthday, or their wedding anniversary, I can’t remember which. Early in the day, Lyle goes to a restaurant and carefully picks out just the right table for that evening’s dinner celebration with just the two of them. He arrives promptly at the

designated time for dinner and waits for Tilly who said she'd be there. She stiffens him, never shows up. He eats by himself, getting more forlorn by the minute, and goes home. Tilly treats her failure to be at the restaurant as being neither here nor there, never apologizes, and Lyle doesn't make anything of it.

They are in bed. Lyle initiates sex, which, it should be obvious to him, is about on a par with a root canal to Tilly. She abruptly turns her back to him and curls up in a prone defensive crouch. From behind, Lyle throws his pale, fleshy arm over her saying "I've got a deed to this ranch." "You don't have a deed to jack shit," Tilly snarls.

And so it goes. Does Lyle object to any of this, show anger or indignation, go into the other room, anything? No. He just stays on the scene and gets more and more accommodative. My take on Lyle is he figures that if he's kind enough, devoted enough, loyal enough, servile enough, if he says just the right thing, if he wags his tail and licks Tilly's face in just the right way, she will change her treatment of him: from disrespect to respect, from enduring him to celebrating him, from ignoring his needs to supporting him, from being cruel to being kind.

As far as I can see, what Lyle is doing isn't going to make things better for him. He's trying to change Tilly, and that's not going to work given what he's like and how Tilly perceives him. A generalization about women: Regardless of what they may say in these times of feminist rhetoric, and, I'm sure, what they've come to believe in their heads, what they really want are masculine guys, hard guys, tough guys, strong guys, real guys, real men. They want their men working on their car in the garage or in their study writing their book, not hanging around the kitchen talking to them. They don't want effusive guys, sensitive guys, nice guys, funny guys, self-deprecating guys, needy guys, soft guys, dependent guys. They want to be honored and protected, but not fawned over and catered to. They want action-oriented men, terse in speech, confident, independent, prideful, who believe in what they are doing with their lives, who feel they are going someplace that matters, who with

regularity will give them great sex, and just do it, not talk about it. You can be sure these two virile convicts Tilly was getting it on with didn't come on with the line, "I've got a deed to this ranch."

A week or so after I saw "Dannamora," I watched an Amazon series that I believe was originally on HBO about the Arizona Cardinals NFL football team. There were a lot of scenes of the players with their wives and girlfriends. It struck me that these football players weren't of the sort to take guff from the women in their lives. No way would Tilly for a minute think of running her "Lyle number" on these guys; they simply aren't there for that. They don't put up with grief from women, that's the story in a nutshell. They aren't on this earth to engage that kind of thing, period.

These men aren't about to try to turn around a woman who dumps on them. If you don't have high regard for them and don't affirm them, they are gone, and if they can't get away from you, it's sober, wordless indifference mixed with disdain. They aren't your punching bag; that comes across in their stance, their beating, their posture. If you have nothing to give to them, if you put them down, they are done with you, for that moment at least and perhaps longer, nothing to talk about.

I'm not implying that Lyle has to turn himself into a stolid NFL linebacker, but I do think he needs to adopt a different tack with Tilly. He's been trying to stay as he is and say and do things to change her when what he needs to do is change himself as an individual.

And what might those changes look like? I've spent some time thinking about that. When I was doing it, some things I had written for this website came to mind. What I've come up with doesn't just apply to Lyle; that's why I put Lyle's name in quotes in the title of this thought. The Lyle Mitchell fictional character prompted the identification of this general issue, but what I have to say about it applies to all men being worked over by the women in their lives, which could include you and me.

Here's my to-do list for the Lyles of the world. Add to this, fix it, or replace it with something better.

- *Don't hurt her.* Don't reply in kind to what she's done to you. Be better than that. Don't turn on her. Be kind, decent, encouraging, supportive. And especially, especially, don't hurt any children involved in your relationship. A poem called "The Mower" by Philip Larkin (British, 1922-1985) I used in an August, 2013 thought for this website comes to mind. It includes these lines

. . . we should be careful
Of each other, we should be kind
While there is still time.

- *Don't take crap from a woman.* Don't take crap from anybody, but we're talking about women in this context.

- *Quit chasing her.* In the words of an April, 2010 website thought, stop trying to "charm the uninterested." Cut the fawning, obsequiousness, favors, and entertaining trying to win her over. Shut the hell up. Let her come to you, and if she doesn't come to you, so it is. Women go for what they want—if she wants you, you'll find that out. The truth of the matter is that you may simply not be her man--basically, biologically--and the sooner you learn that hard reality and come to terms with it the better.

- *Think "alpha."* Alpha is a way of being. One of the first thoughts I put together for this website, in November of 2007, was called "On Victoria's Dogs." Victoria was Victoria Stilwell, a dog trainer. She had a show on PBS where she dispensed advice on how to control your dog. I decided that what Victoria had to say about dogs applies to dealing with people. A quote from the thought:

The first thing you have to do when you are getting static from someone is work on yourself: namely, get yourself as close to being an alpha dog as you can in bearing and manner. An alpha dog (person) is calm, confident, in charge, no nonsense, direct,

and action-oriented. Victoria points out that if you come on as an omega—reactive, whiny, flitty, overly expansive, “bottom dog”—you are inviting trouble. In fact, moving from an omega to an alpha will often end your problem, or a lot of it, right there.

Throughout the day, and especially when you’re with your “Tilly,” silently say to yourself “alpha.” The challenge becomes, moment-to-moment, to think and do alpha.

- *Have standards to judge her by.* She is tacitly getting across to you that what’s going on with her is what a woman is like with the likes of you, deal with it. You need to have something to counter that so that you are able, if only to yourself, say, no, *this* is what a woman in a relationship with me is like. In a March, 2018 website thought called “On Dr. Toni Grant,” I outlined three qualities a woman should bring to a relationship with a man: Amazon, Madonna, and Courtesan.

Amazon. Assertive, self-referenced, autonomous, goal directed, informed, opinionated. Relates to the man in her life as a companion, friend, co-worker, partner, help-mate, talk-mate, spar-mate, and/or competitor. Today’s feminist ideal, which is not to imply it is all bad. To the contrary, as one aspect of a total relationship, it has worth.

Madonna. Embodies the quintessential feminine virtues of patience, kindness, softness, and gentleness. Loving, peaceful, joyous, serene, flowing, graceful. Virtuous, decent, generous, patient, and tolerant. Embodies and imparts human-centered standards, values, and ideals. Home creator. Nurturer. Enhancer, inspirer. Respects, affirms, believes in, and supports her man in his quest for fulfillment. A woman and proud of it, not an emulator of men, not a pseudo-man. A complement to her man, not a mirror image of him.

Courtesan. Emotionally, bodily, connected to her man. In close harmony with him, intimate with him. Fully present, attentive,

for him. Affirming of her man as a sexual being. Devoted to sexually attracting, pleasing, affirming, and satisfying her man.

These could be the standards we to choose and assess the women in our lives.

- *Quit paying off her abuse.* She gets something out of the bad way she treats you, namely: 1) attention; 2) power; 3) she gets one-up on you, superior to you; and 4) she gets to hurt you, put you down, she gets revenge. The best you can, don't play along with anything that takes things in those directions, and never let on that she is getting any of those payoffs.
- *Get yourself together.* Get in physical shape, toned, lose the excess weight, get your teeth fixed, get rid of habits that limit you (alcohol, dope, whatever it is), get your grooming together, get a new wardrobe, get a better haircut. Get the junk out of your life, the bad television, the dumb websites, the video games, whatever it is—replace it with high quality. Stand up straight and tall, shoulders back. Decide where you're going in your life: make it something you really believe in and that is worthy of you at your best. Move yourself toward pride, honor, autonomy, and dignity. If you're together as a man, as a human being, it will greatly inflate your chances of getting a favorable reaction from the women in your life.
- *Develop an exit plan.* You may never need to go there, but in very concrete, explicit, practical terms, have someplace in mind to go if she doesn't turn around her perception and treatment of you. Just having an exit plan—and you never have to talk about it—will empower you. You don't *have* to put up with what's been going on; that will show through to her.

That's my work-on-yourself list. What do you think?

