



A Future Together

Five months ago Jeanette Palmer doused her lover's home with petrol and set it alight, hoping she would die in the inferno. Today she's jetting off to spend Christmas in Tenerife after her man stuck by her and a judge spared her from a prison sentence. As she walked out of court, Jeanette, 48, said: "It has to be the ultimate Christmas present. I lost control of my life, but I feel that now I have it back again." Her relieved partner John Keeping, 57, fought back tears as she joined him from the dock instead of being led to a cell. Now they are looking forward to getting married and enjoying a happy life together. He said: "Today is the shortest day but I thought it was going to be the longest. Now we can go forward." Jeanette, of Swindon Road, Stratton, pleaded guilty to arson. She had been given bail after John told an earlier hearing that he forgave her for starting the fire, which caused £26,000 damage to his bungalow, which they shared. The court heard she had taken 20 sleeping pills and had tried to gas herself before starting the fire. Bristol Crown Court was told that Jeanette, who had no previous convictions, had suffered mood swings, becoming suicidal, but she had striven to end her dependency on alcohol. Recorder Mr Frank Abbott sentenced Jeanette to two years probation on condition she undergoes psychiatric counselling after John had said that he had forgiven her and that he was helping her recover from her addiction. Jeanette said: "I spent nine weeks on remand in Gloucester and it gave me time to reflect on my life. "I've had a rough, hard life. I was a foster mum to two children who social services, in their wisdom, decided to take from me after two-and-a-half years. I lost my husband of 25 years and then I met John, and at first it was fantastic. "But I started to get down, I drank and I was losing control of my drinking. I couldn't stand waking up at 7.30am, having dry heaves, having a vodka to start the day off and then drinking Diamond White and Strongbow. I just wanted to die it had gotten hold of me and I couldn't handle it. "I was in a drunken stupor. I tried to gas myself and that failed so I spilt petrol all over the hall and, with my pea-brain, I shut my eyes and lit it. "The next I remember I was walking the streets." It was haulage boss John who, after calling an ambulance for stupefied Jeanette as she lay on the pavement outside, beat back the flames in his burning bungalow after discovering the fire in June. He said: "I had never realised Jeanette was drinking so much because it didn't show. Two weeks prior I had shouted 'help' because she was a little bit violent. We went for some counselling and I went to see her mum. "After the fire and I learned Jeanette admitted what she'd done to police I thought why, what has gone wrong, why has this happened? "What I do know is I love her. If she was in prison today it would be a bigger punishment for me. Now we want to try and get a good life together, put this behind us and go on holiday. And we can plan now, we will get married in the summertime."

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