**A Good Cup of Coffee**

Gina was saddened, of course when her daughter’s marriage broke up. Tim was not a perfect husband, and sometimes not even a good one, but the end of a long relationship was always the loss of something. In Gina’s case it was the loss of her own house, her own terms and quite a lot of freedom and solitude. She knew it did not reflect well on her but the prospect of her daughter and granddaughter moving back in with her made Gina’s heart sink. Having adult children was wonderful. Gina had raised Bronny largely alone and so, when she left home – in fits in starts admittedly – there had been had been an enormous sense of liberation that Gina had not anticipated. When Bronny moved in with friends and then with Tim, and things looked settled, Gina had eased into her own routines and habits with the delightful garnish of visits from her family and help when she needed it. A Sunday afternoon when Tim helped lug potting mix around or dug a hole, and Bronny lit the barbeque and got the wine out of the fridge while Gina and Tilda planted seedlings *gently*, was immensely satisfying, especially when she waved them goodbye at the end of it. So the teary phone call that announced Bronny and Tilda were “coming home” was received with mixed emotions and they were mainly negative ones.

Gina had expected constant clutter and extra noise, the wet towel on the end of the bed glimpsed as she passed Bronny’s room, the tense blur of late-night conversations and the complete loss of control of the remote. But there were other surprising aspects of Bronny’s return. Just like the fabled frog in warming water, the occasional childminding while Bronny popped to the supermarket quite rapidly became more frequent and for longer periods. A quick trip to the shops became a coffee as well, and then a couple of hours at the hairdresser, then a night out with the girls after work. Sometimes those girls’ nights out became “stayed over at Kel’s because I drank too much soz! (sad face or green face, always love heart)”. It wasn’t until Gina came out early one Saturday morning to find a shirtless young man clutching a bundle of clothes and a pair of boots in her hallway that a penny dropped.

Safe in the knowledge her daughter would sleep on as had been her habit since the age of thirteen, Gina offered coffee. Given that she stood between him and the door, he quickly evaluated that accepting the offer was the least awkward way out of this situation. His name was Josh he said. Gina ground the beans. He was a landscape gardener. He would be starting a job at the Johnstons in a couple of weeks. She put the gas under the espresso maker. He and Bronny had eaten at the RSA. They had a new menu, did she know? She said she did not and set the milk to warm in the small pot. He relaxed when they sat at the outdoor table and began to ask her about her garden. By the bottom of the very good cup – chocolately and spicy, I add a tiny piece of cinnamon stick in the grinder she confessed – he had given her three suggestions for the troublesome shady corner. “Perhaps, when you are next here I’ll ask you about the hydrangeas,” she said. He looked awkward again. “It doesn’t really work that way.” To her blank look he continued, “Tinder,” as if that made things clearer.

Lunch with friends later in the week helped clear up her confusion. “Do you mean it’s just for sex?”

“Yes, pretty much. My nephew suggested I join when Gordon died.”

“And did you?” Lena asked.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Helen replied, “I live in a retirement village. Who needs Tinder?”

That afternoon Gina examined herself in the mirror. Was she just being a prude? Was this just the modern world and she was being old lady about it. She hated the idea of becoming an old lady, although it was inevitable of course. What she really resisted was becoming the type of the old lady who had populated her youth. She remembered being scolded by the church organist for not wearing a petticoat, being asked countless times if she had a boyfriend and having her aspirations for a career dismissed because she’d be getting married soon, surely. Any hint of sexuality was pounced upon as fodder for hissed conversations and disapproving looks. Was it jealousy, Gina wondered? Was it those women’s way of dealing with their regret that they’d been hemmed in so tightly while her generation was watching with glee as American women burned their bras outside beauty pageants. She couldn’t be one of those women.

So Gina held her tongue. She ground her coffee beans in a ceramic grinder she had found in a second-hand shop when she was first setting up house on her own. It was one of those blue and white Dutch ones that she attached to the wall, taking it down and packing it each time she moved. It was very pretty but it also ground the coffee beans to a fine chocolate dirt. She made strong coffee into which she poured a dash or two of warm milk. Just as Josh the gardener had been very pleased to receive a small pottery cup of coffee from her, so was Steve, the firefighter and Mike who worked in the hardware shop. He recommended a glue to fix the broken tile in the bathroom and said she should call in and he'd give her the staff discount.

But, when the fifth man in as many weeks emerged into her hallway Gina decided it might be time for action. The “my house, my rules” speech had never been her style, especially as she been on the receiving end of it from her own father. But it *was* her house. And she would also quite like to get back to her life: she had raised one child, and would rather not raise another. If Bronny chose to deal with the new circumstances of her life by having sex with almost-strangers, well, she could do so under her own roof – which meant she had to get one. Not that it wasn’t nice meeting new people. Brandon the accountant was very charming (although she didn’t really like those tan shoes with the long toes), and Taylor’s family grew dahlias commercially and he gave her some excellent advice. Perhaps it wasn’t so bad after all. But there were a few scuttlers who barely made eye contact much less stayed for coffee or said hello to a bleary-eyes Tilda when she appeared. And the toilet seat was left up, and frankly there were some things you really didn’t want to know about your daughter’s life. She resolved to say something.

The next morning she awoke with a start, not quite sure what had woken her. She lay for a moment, Tilda breathing evenly, scrunched up in the covers beside her where she had fallen asleep during stories the night before. Even though it was early, Gina decided to get up. When she got to the hallway she could hear someone moving about, papers rustling, a drawer being opened. By the time she reached the kitchen she knew what was happening. Whoever he was, he was searching her house. Rage flooded her body as she stepped into the kitchen. “What the hell are you doing?” she roared. He spun and sprang, barging her with his shoulder to get past into the hallway towards the front door. Bronny stumbled out of her bedroom with a rumpled, “Mum?” then darting to grab Gina’s arm and steady her. Rattling and thumping signalled that the front door locks were foiling the burglar’s getaway plans and he appeared in the kitchen doorway again making a plunge for the ranch slider and the freedom of the deck. “Call the cops,” Gina gasped at Bronny. By the time she reached the deck, the young man was at the garden wall. “No!” she shouted, “It’s –“ a cry and a crash cut off her warning. “Higher than you think,” she added more quietly because he would have discovered that fact by now. The neighbour’s yard was not only downhill of Gina’s but dropped away sharply to a terrace. Gina leaned over the wall to see him clutching his ankle.

Bronny appeared on the neighbour’s pathway, her phone held to her ear and a broom in her hand. She put her phone in her pocket and clasped the broom dangerously. Her dark green dressing gown flowing out behind her made her look like a pagan goddess with a touch of Darth Vader. Striding towards the man, shouting at him, she was, Gina thought with a stab of pride, about to add insult to his injury.

A police car arrived quite quickly and then the 4WD fire service truck. Steve the firefighter gave Gina a cheery wave as he carried his first aid bag down to the little crowd in the neighbour’s garden. When the burglar – Leon the burglar as it turned out – was loaded into the police car to be taken to hospital for an x-ray, there was still quite a crowd outside Gina’s. Another officer was inside dusting for fingerprints (the exercise class ladies will love that, Gina thought) and a woman had arrived to take statements. Josh the gardener pulled up in his ute across the road and had a quiet chat with Steve who was packing his kit back into the truck. “How about some of that famous coffee, Gina?” Steve called out across the road. “And you Josh?” Gina called back. He gave her the thumbs up. Bronny, who had been chatting to a policeman and tucking her hair behind her ear a lot, snapped around at this exchange. Looking between the men and her mother, a cog turned, and Gina was a little more gratified than she would like to admit to when the colour started to creep up Bronny’s neck. She’d always thought there wasn’t much a good cuppa couldn’t solve.