

Café Myra

Evie heard only the tail end of the message on the answering machine:

"so, our Patricia, you will just have to make the best of it, sorry."

It was Martin's voice. The cold hand of anxiety gripped her heart. Pastor Walter had been failing to respond for weeks and had been losing weight steadily.

She washed the mud off her hands and looked out at the herb garden where she had been working, getting the place tidied ahead of the re-opening in a few days' time. It was now eight years since Eric had passed over, seven since she had started volunteering as a garden helper.

The phone rang and she picked it up.

'Hello, Café Myra?'

'Evie, have you heard?' It was Amalleeah, the exuberantly irritating thirty-something refugee who had pitched up at the café about six months ago under a council sponsored scheme. 'It's Pastor Walter, he's won the lottery! £95 million! Marty says they're going to be airlifted to Switzerland right away for specialist treatment. Hallelujah! *God is Good* after all! See you tomorrow, OK? Praise the Lord!'

Evie sat down and stared at the handset. Why would Pastor Walter play the Lottery? Surely it did not make sense to gamble while telling everyone to "Trust in God"?

She dialled Martin. The line was engaged.

Taking the sanitizing spray and a pack of wipes, she moved around the kitchen, wiping up, thinking back over the last few months. In Marty's absence caring for his partner, his sister Patricia had stepped up, running things, bossing everyone. Evie had thought of resigning but she loved working in the garden, especially during lockdown when she had it to herself.

Unaware she was speaking, she consulted Eric:

'What do you think? Should I accept Bill's offer, give up here, share his allotment, start over again?'

Taking out the mop, she filled the bucket adding a good shot of disinfecting detergent, enjoying the old-fashioned pine smell.

'Look, Eric, I know Bill is a bit rough round the edges but he's a nice gentle man, and well, who else would take on an arthritic cripple like me, now you're swanning about over there in Paradise?'

Pressing the mop onto the bucket, she squeezed out as best she could and arranged it on the bench outside to dry then stood looking down the path towards the herb garden,

Café Myra

bathed in sunshine, nestled into the corner, protected from cooling winds by the high wall.

A figure in fluorescent pink dungarees pushed open the wrought iron gate at the bottom of the garden, banged it closed with her foot then set off at a trot towards her. April of Pamela, the lesbian couple who volunteered on Mondays and Fridays in memory of Pamela's mother Myra, who had founded the Café twenty years after the death of her son from aids. In the years which followed it had gradually morphed into a meeting place for the LGBTQ + community in nearby well-heeled Pollokshields and High Shawlands.

'So-o-o-o! **There** you are, Evie! Hey, nice wellies! Yeah, pale blue suits you, and that shade exactly matches your hair. Brill! **So**, what's the story? I hear Pastor Walter has won zillions on the lottery, yeah? So, his *God is Good* mumbo-jumbo works after all? Do **you** do the lottery, Evie?'

'No, never. Eric was very against it.'

'Hey, the special thing in Switzerland, is it bone marrow treatment? It's far too late for that, surely? Anyway, I thought he had "given himself over to God for healing", yeah?'

'Yes, that's what I heard too but, well, I'm only on the fringe of all this, I'm only in the garden, not in the café proper, not really in the know, not really.'

'Look, Evie, it's OK to be **straight** you know, but come on, Pammie and I have been watching you and we reckon you know everything that goes down here, so, spill the beans.'

'No. Honestly April, I don't know a thing. You might try Amalleeah.'

'That bitch! Never! She is a nosey, interfering charlatan. We saw her shoplifting in *M and Co*, bold as brass. Don't leave your handbag where she can get her grubby hands on it. Look, if you are **determined** to keep up the secret squirrel act, I'm off. I've got a Pilates class starting in half an hour. Bye-ee!'

Alone again, Evie checked her watch, almost five. Bill would be here to collect her soon. She locked up, used the outdoor loo, washed her hands then sanitised them and started down the path towards the car park, moving painfully, on the edge of exhaustion.

'Eric, I'm sorry if it upsets you but I've made my decision. I'm going to accept Bill's offer and move in with him, on a trial basis. That way I get to keep your pension.'

From behind a voice called out. Evie cringed.

'Evie, yet again you've left you handbag!'

'Thank you Patricia, very kind of you. Look, I was hoping to catch you. I'm so sorry to have to add to your burden but I intend to resign, as soon as you can find a replacement. It's all becoming a bit too much for me, I'm afraid.'

Café Myra

'Actually, that is absolutely more than convenient as we need that herb garden corner to put down a new patio seating area for socially distanced tables. Marty has promised me funding for it. So, why don't you let me have your keys now, save you any more trouble. Actually, the patio café area was Amalleeah's idea so I've decided to take her on as a full-time worker. She is such a sweet girl, isn't she? And let's face it, we do need a bit more *energy* about this place, don't we? I mean, I'm all for tranquillity but over these last years this place has become like, well, *a morgue*, really. Don't you agree?'

The bottom gate swung open and a tall, wiry man with a long, grey pigtail strode towards them.

'Evie, hiya, howaryedooin hen? Cumooan, grab ma erm. Noo, Evie, honey, wait tae ye see whit Ah've made fur oor tea. Cheerio Pattie.'

Bill turned and banged the gate shut.

The shrill voice sailed over the high wall: 'Oh, Evie, thanks for everything. Bye-bye.'

'Prat', he muttered under his breath. 'Here noo, honey bunny, dinnae tear up. Cumooan, geeza wee cuddle.'