

# The Cake Looked Lovely

The cake looked lovely, but just as it was being put into the box the lights went out and it fell from Eve's hands awkwardly onto the table.

"Oh damn" she swore, which was unusual for her. Being married to the vicar had made her mindful of her language. She had made a special cake for the Church's anniversary and had just been carefully finishing the intricate decoration she had devised for the top the cake. "Now the icing will go all hard and heaven knows whether it's squirted all over the rest of the pattern. If it has, I just hope I'll be able to match it up again. Never mind: hopefully it's only the kitchen fuse that's blown."

A check, however, revealed that it was more than in just the kitchen. The whole house had been affected and looking out of the window it appeared that all the neighbours had been affected too.

Now she had to decide on a plan of action. First – light: find a torch or a candle. Painfully, because of her arthritic knees, she got up from the chair and felt her way into the kitchen. Touching the drawer fronts she came to the one where she kept the torch and with relief took it and switched it on. No! Surely it couldn't be! But unfortunately yes – it had run out of battery. In vain did she switch it on and off, even changing the position of the batteries, but to no avail. Candles? Matches? She couldn't remember where she had put them for emergencies and, sighing, she made her way back to the kitchen.

She wished that Brian, her husband, the vicar, was with her and with a spurt of annoyance recalled that he had mentioned that he was going to "look after his flock", as he called his parishioners, when she had started decorating the cake. If only he would give her the attention he lavished on them.

Looking out of the window revealed that there was no light to be seen anywhere in the surrounding area. She supposed that the recent snow storm had brought the power lines down. She settled down to wait until such time as the lighting deigned to come on again. If only she could make a cup of tea to help pass the time.

While she waited she pondered. Visually impaired people were recognised as being very aware with their remaining senses. "Let's see", she thought. "Smell". She breathed deeply. Curry. "Well, that's not difficult" she reasoned, seeing as it's what we had for supper. Then she caught a faint scent of her perfume – her favourite – that Brian had given her for her birthday and that she sprayed into her clothes and the brief irritation she had felt earlier disappeared as she thought fondly of him.

Now the cold was seeping into her bones so with care she made her way into the hall so that she could put on her winter coat. She wrapped it closely round her and then found a pair of fur-lined boots that would keep her feet warm.

Suddenly she was roused from her thoughts by headlights that swept round the semi-circular drive in front of the house. They came to a halt with a screech, a door was slammed and heavy footsteps trod up the path followed by a fierce knocking on the front door. She stumbled into the hall and opened it and found herself confronted by a large and belligerent man who shouted at her in a very bombastic voice. "You're still in arrears. I've come all the way into this godforsaken area, quite outside my usual patch, and this time you really will have to pay up or the company will want to know why and you might have the bailiffs on your doorstep instead of me".

Trembling she shrank back into the hall a couple of paces but kept her hand on the panic fob in her pocket. In her position she was accustomed to dealing with difficult people who had felt hard done by so in as calm a tone as she could manage she attempted to defuse the situation. Speaking quietly, she explained who she was and asked who he was and why he had come to their house. He stopped in his tirade and consulted the paperwork he was holding with a torch. When he had finished he turned it round and shone it on her.

"Oh, Well, OK", he said brusquely, backing down. "I can see it's hardly likely to be you but it does look as though I've come to the wrong address. "This is Saunders Crescent, isn't it, or am I on a wild goose chase? I must say I've had a great deal of trouble following instructions and my SatNav has let me down".

"I'm afraid you've been misinformed", Eve advised him. "This is Saunders Road. Saunders Crescent is an offshoot farther along. It won't take you long to drive down there," and he he lost his bluster, thanked her and stomped towards his car. Eve slammed the door but as an afterthought opened it a crack to make sure he was on his way. Suddenly she spotted something on the ground at the side of the car. "Damn", she muttered, "I'd better go and give it to him", and she made her way gingerly towards the vehicle. As she bent down to pick it up she felt herself slipping, the car started moving, and Eve instinctively put out her hand.

"I hope that's the only trouble I have with it on a night like this, Stan Huggett" he thought to himself. "Bloody Satnav." He drove carefully down the road until he came to the turning for Saunders Crescent when he was then occupied in making sure he arrived at the right house. In the moonlight he looked at the poor state of paintwork, the untidy garden and a gate hanging by its hinges. He shuddered. "I'll bet

there'll be a sob story here all right," he thought and rang the bell. It was answered by a shabbily-dressed young woman with messy hair, a dressing gown flopping open down the front and a cigarette hanging from her mouth. In her arms she carried a bawling baby that she was ineffectually trying to quieten down. He could see why in the Regency times the poor were inclined to give babies gin in their bottles.

Before he could explain who he was a door opened at the back of the hallway and a scruffily-dressed man emerged, buttoning up his shirt. "Bye, love," he said in a sarcastic tone, that's the last you'll see of me and I'm not giving you a penny towards the nipper here. If it even is mine" he added sarcastically and he nodded towards the baby, whose fists were waving agitatedly and whose face was now crimson, as much as Stan could gauge, before pushing past Stan with a glare and emerging from the garage with a Cherokee that he revved up and roared down the road.

Anxious to get home as soon as possible Stan now laid into the young woman in his bombastic manner about the money she owed, which was met with a burst of tears and the muffled admission that there was no way she could afford to pay her arrears and she wished to God she'd never been so stupid as to get herself landed with a baby. "I wanted to go to college," she sobbed, "Not be stuck looking after his effing kid."

Stan thought quickly. He could see a way he could turn this to his advantage. "Never mind," he soothed. "I have a way that is not quite what you would call regular, but – H'm - it might serve us both well". He dropped his voice and spoke conspiratorially, "I meet a lot of people, and some of them would love to have a little one to look after but the adoption societies for one reason or another are rather fussy about age, and weight, and ethnic origins and things like that. Suppose .... "he hesitated. "Yes? " She stopped crying and gazed at him in through the smoke. "Well, what I was going to say was that I could find a really nice family who'd love little ..." he looked at the child in enquiry. "Chontelle," she supplied "with an 'o'". He shuddered again. Although not a linguist he felt that the ruination of the lovely French name 'Chantal' was a step too far but there you go nowadays. "Chontelle" he reprised. "And then your arrears would no longer exist."

Hurriedly a blanket was found to line a small car seat and Stan hurried out to the car. So preoccupied was he that he hadn't noticed Eve hanging from the passenger side of his car. As he was leaving she realised that he had dropped a glove on her forecourt and hurried forward to pick it up and give it to him. She had intended to tap on the window but before she could do so Stan was busily driving out of her driveway. She slipped down into the snow but to save herself she managed to grabbed a portion of his passenger seatbelt that was protruding below the door. And thus she was dragged down the road to Saunders Crescent, feeling grateful that the thick snow softened her slide.

Arriving at the destination she was able to disentangle herself from the seatbelt but was now frozen so the only hope was to ensconce herself in the Stan's car in the well between the front and rear seats. At least she was warm, she thought. As she was pondering how to extricate herself from this situation Stan flung the door open and was then busily occupied packing a baby, of all things, into the front passenger seat. The enormity of her situation now overwhelmed her and she wondered if she would ever see her lovely Brian again. Her mind was in a turmoil about what she had seen, and deduced from it, and what was going to happen.

At about the same time Stan found that driving with only one glove in the bitter cold was extremely uncomfortable. No matter what the cost he would have to go back to the old bat in Saunders Road and see if he had dropped it there. He would pick it up quickly and be on his way.

Slipping and sliding over the snow he reversed out of the house and retraced his journey to Saunders Road, driving into the driveway before getting out to look for his glove. At the same moment, Brian returned from his rounds and Eve, recognising his car's engine's noise, burst out of Stan's car and rushed into his arms. Quickly she explained what she thought had been going on and had the presence of mind to open the passenger door and take out the baby, which she cuddled in her arms. Stan tried to grab it from her but Brian, gentle though his parishioners thought him, had not been a boxing champion for nothing and with a swift uppercut Stan fell to the ground with Brian pinioning him. Stan continued to bluster his way out of the situation but Eve had gone into the house to contact the 'Police' and soon the driveway was alive with the sound of sirens and the glare of the blue lights.

Stan was led away for questioning and the necessary calls were made to Social Services for the baby's welfare and protection, who soon came to take the child into care.

In the middle of all the kerfuffle the lights had come on again and Eve and Brian went into their home, closed the door and made for the kitchen. The couple turned to each other. "After all that we've been through," sighed Brian, "let's put the bloody kettle on and have that cup of tea".

"Yes," she agreed eagerly "and, having seen the mess that being without the lights has made of the cake decoration, we'll have a blooming great piece of that cake."

In the split second that followed each of these remarks Eve considered reproving the vicar for his choice of language, and he thought about asking her whether it was wise in view of her diet, but each of them

put these thoughts aside and in perfect harmony the couple smiled at each other and Eve lifted the knife to cut them both a generous slice.