

Silver lining

Silver lining II

The doctor finished speaking and looked at her expectantly. What was he waiting for? His words had flowed over her: her test results, the development, the inevitable outcome... Could this really be true? For her? The gradual onset of lethargy and general feeling of not being quite well; she'd ignored it at first thinking it'd go away like other illnesses had done in the past. But she'd grown tired of it and thought maybe she needed a tonic or something. The doctor had sent her off for lots of tests and scans and now the results were back. With an effort, she pulled herself together.

"Tell me again. How long will I be able to get about?"

"Well, Pamela, at the rate it is progressing, maybe six months? Not a year. I'm truly sorry." He watched her anxiously. You never knew how they might react. It was the part of his job he truly hated. "There's special institutions where you can go- I've got these pamphlets.."

She took the pamphlets, settled her bill at the front desk, and walked back out into the wintry sunshine. She'd miss Christmas with the family: all that noisy racket, the two frightful grandchildren children plus the even more frightful cousins. Suddenly it didn't seem so bad. And then the chilling thought: it didn't matter how she felt, her final moments on the face of the earth were rushing towards her and nothing she did would make the slightest bit of difference. She was helpless.

Pamela badly needed to talk it through with someone and when she saw her son and his wife arrive and walk up to the front door, she felt relief. Usually, they visited because they wanted something: a loan (she'd paid the deposit on the new house for them) the old tools that had belonged to her husband, books from her library, furniture for one of their dinner parties. The loan remained unpaid and none of the borrowed items had ever been returned. Well, now they could listen to her for once.

They took their time getting to the front door. Why were they pointing at the front garden and arguing?

She opened the door before they could ring the bell and stepped outside to greet them.

"Hello- I'm glad you're here. I've got something to tell you."

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Lisa gave her a perfunctory peck on the cheek. “Let’s look at you! David, don’t you think she looks a bit off colour? We’ve been talking about it, you see. You must admit that looking after the house is getting too much for you. Now, don’t say no straight away, but we’ve been looking at retirement villages.”

They’d been dropping hints for months about how tired she looked and how much effort it must be to run a house. Retirement villages? She wouldn’t be needing a retirement village, and for some reason this struck her as being so funny she began to laugh and had great difficulty stopping.

“Mum! Mum! Pull yourself together for goodness sake!” Then turning to his wife, “she’s hysterical! Should we call an ambulance?”

This was her son. For 35 years she’d turned a blind eye to his faults, forgiving him and caring for him. Suddenly it was over; she’d had enough of him and his wife. There was certainly no possibility of her ever telling them about her illness. They could find out when she was dead.

“I’m busy right now. Come back in a month after I’ve had time to think!” She retreated inside and slammed the door. She was shaking with fury. They could hardly wait to get her out of the house so that they could live in it; as that wretched woman always mentioned, it was such a nice suburb! Well, they would not get the house. Of course, if she changed her will, they could contest it. Then why not sell the house and spend the money? It would pay for a very good around the world trip and what better way to prevent her dreading on about her illness?

The sense of helplessness had evaporated and she sat down at the computer with a cup of coffee beside her. And what about a couple of chocolate biscuits? After all, keeping to a sensible diet hardly mattered any more.

Smiling now, she began her search for the nearest real estate office. But then she trashed that and instead, hunted for legal firms. The will must be adjusted first to make sure that her wishes were clear. Then the real estate office and finally travel agents for her last holiday. It would be first class travel, of course.

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She felt a sense of empowerment, of suddenly attaining freedom. Never again would she have to put up with her son's scrounging ways or her daughter in law's spiteful tongue. The future, though short, would be bright and full of interesting things. A silver lining to the gathering dark clouds.