

The Day Off by Ina Disguise

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“It's OK, people like you shouldn't have children anyway.”

“What do you mean, mother? Why do you keep saying that? Why are you being so horrible?” Given that Petra had just saved her mother's life, she felt that this was a little bit harsh, to say the least.

“People like you...” Petra's mother, at 90, had forgotten the thread of the conversation.

“Why do you always get so nasty on Sundays? Is it because Alice is coming over and you need the practise when she starts bitching about me?” Petra was genuinely curious about this phenomenon. For someone with dementia, her mother always seemed to sense that it was Sunday, with similar results.

“You're not very ...nice...People like you deserve all they get. I don't like clever people.”

“Is that why you let them behave like that? Is that why you join in? Because you don't like clever people?” Petra felt the lump in her chest worsen as she realised that her life had been meaningless to her mother because she didn't like clever people. “I gave up everything for you. I haven't had a night out since 2003. I took you around Europe when they wanted to take your money and throw you into a care home. I restored your entire house. I took care of your husband and you. I'll never own a house or have a family or a pension. That drink you are drinking cost me £1200 to put together. I had to fight the NHS to give it to you. Are you saying that I haven't done enough for you?”

“Oh, I don't know....I don't know.” Petra's mother appeared to be turning back into the pillow to go to sleep.

Petra, who had had three hours sleep, felt the tears return again. She went through to the lounge. One of the cats sensed her despair and settled next to her on the couch. She tried to pull herself together before the nurses would arrive to give her mother her daily injection. As it was Sunday, she would have to clean down the kitchen, Hoover and remove any personal items from her mother's room before her sister arrived to formulate her next complaint. Petra often wished she had let her family be prosecuted rather than prevent them from committing the crime in the first place.

At eleven, the nurses duly arrived. “There is a stain on the bed. Has she been sick?”

“My mother does not suffer from such problems, she does, however, like to throw her drink around a bit before drinking it.” Petra eyed the small green spot on the duvet cover.

“You need carers in. We want carers in.” The small silver haired nurse looked at Petra menacingly.

“That is too bad, because we value our privacy. Carers do not magically produce more bedsheets as far as I know.”

“That's just it, it's too much work for one person. We want carers in.”

“I live here. You are here for five minutes per day. I do not want any more people in making any more false allegations.” In the last three months, a variety of strangers had barged into the house inventing a surprising range of stories, usually relating to invented cat-related problems. Evidently these bitches did not like cats. “Are you done yet?” Two nurses stood over Petra as she patiently waited to be able to leave the room again. She knew from experience that if she left the room when they were here she would be accused of neglect. How one goes about neglecting a sleeping person

had never been explained.

“We've got to look after you as well.” the nurse tried.

“Well, the best way of doing that is to leave, and not invite any more hostile strangers into my home. You have a salary, a pension, a home of your own and probably a family life. I have to lock myself behind that door even to continue giving up all of those things for my mother. You have no idea of the situation I'm in.”

“Oh we don't deal with family dynamic.” the nurse pursed her lips.

“Exactly, so perhaps, since you refuse to take the biggest problem we have into account, you should stop trying to force me to do things I do not want to do.” Petra was trying hard not to lose her temper again.

At length the nurses gave up and left, and Petra finished up the washing and completed her removal of anything remotely incriminating before her sister was due to arrive. She locked the door to her mother's room and left, leaving access for Alice. She returned to her room and continued to ponder which of the many tasks she had on her list to do next. There was the gardens, the cleaning, the books, the artwork, the shops, the writing. Petra had tasks for every mood, every time limit. She did not know how carers in smaller houses coped, since she had been driven nearly mad with her imprisonment. Alice would only stay for ten minutes, so she could not go out until she had gone.

Petra looked at the internet for a while. Gary Walsh, a motivational speaker she had admired and briefly known, was due to have an event in a month's time. She looked down at herself. She did not look good enough to go. She looked at the prices, and considered the amount she would have to spend to go. No, surely not? Two days of carers, a housesitter, care for the cats. Gary would probably not want to see her anyway, particularly looking so ugly. Even if he let her into the non-refundable event, he would probably not speak to her.

At length, Petra thought more positively. Did she not deserve a day off? Should she not seize the day, as he frequently recommended? Try to grab the opportunity, since she would be unlikely to ever be able to afford to go to such an event again? Petra thought of her impending destitution, and at length decided that since life was so very short, she should go, regardless of her appearance. She emailed the organiser, asked whether Gary would object to her attending given that their relationship had been rather stormy in the past.

A few days later, no email had appeared. Petra was fasting, trying to lose some weight. She changed her hair in anticipation of 'going or being damned'. She had snatched a couple of hours a day to walk, and try to repair her ailing health. She knew she had to make a big change in a short space of time even to organise all the help she would need to make it at all.

Two weeks later, and still no email. Petra looked in the mirror. She still looked awful. Should she go? She guessed that she did not begrudge him the cost of the ticket regardless, and bought it. She felt briefly empowered by this. This was what he recommended, after all. Positive thinking, not considering others, doing what you want to achieve what you want etc. Petra's walk became noticeably straighter as she went about her mundane day.

Still no email. Petra had by now resolved her lack of suitable clothing for the event, hired the relevant people and informed the housesitter of the situation with visiting nurses and carers. The event was in the south of the country, and would require at least one overnight stay. So far her day

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