

The Curtain Twitchers

by Ina Disguise

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“Look Aggie, look whit she's da'in noo.” Jessie tugged at the lace curtain, beckoning for Aggie to join her at the window. Aggie duly shuffled across the room, still slugging down her flat rum and coke from the night before.

“Aye, Jessie, it's a pure disgrace that.” Aggie shook her head. “Yon laddie is far too guid fur her.” They huddled together at the small space at the curtain. “Shouldnae be allowed.”

They continued to stare at their sister Moira, who had now somehow got herself a younger boyfriend. Who would have thought it?

“How kin he be interested in her? She's that fat and ugly.” Aggie wrinkled her nose.

“Aye, and ye canny understaun' a wurd she sez.” Jessie was in agreement. “She's pure mental.”

“Whit does he see in hur?” asked Aggie with genuine amazement. “She's boggin’”

“Ah don't know, man, but you shid go oot ther and introduce yersel.' If he's that blind he might go for you an' aww.”

“Aye, Jessie. Yer right. Ah'll go oot an' see him the noo.” Aggie straightened her jumper and headed out of the door towards Moira and the young man, who appeared to be unloading something heavy from the car into Moira's mother's house.

“Whit's that ye've goat?” Aggie cocked her head to one side, eyeing up Moira's friend. The young man smiled awkwardly, slightly confused.

“Oh hello, Aggie.” said Moira. “It's a lawnmower for your mother. We are going to mow the lawn.”

“Whit ye da'in that fur? It's no' yer lawn.” Aggie began to get angry. “You think yer runnin' an old fowk's hame?”

“No, actually the grass is kind of long and needs mowing.” Moira was unsure why this would be a problem. Moira and James continued to lug the large box towards the house.

“Ye shouldnae be da'in that.” Aggie continued. “An' whit's it goat tae dae wi' him?” She motioned roughly at James.

“Well, actually he is helping me with the lawnmower. It is heavy. Would you like to help me with the lawnmower? It is for your mother.”

“Naw, naw, it's no' ma joab. Ah'm too tired.” Aggie ran for the safety of Jessie's house.

“I see I got the one with the looks then.” said James.

“Seriously? They've been saying how ugly I am all my life?” Moira looked cross. “Are you trying to butter me up for any particular reason?”

“No, I had a look at your mother's family pictures when you first brought me.” James was surprised. Moira seemed so confident?

“But they're thin. I stayed in for years because they kept telling me what a frightful sight I am?” Moira was genuinely confused.

“I've got news for you. They were jealous.” James did not smile as he knew Moira would not take him seriously if he sounded remotely flirtatious. It was part of the game with Moira to see how long you could avoid annoying her by sounding too frivolous, or too complimentary, or not asking her for stuff. She was a very strange girl. In order to score a date with her, you would have to ask her to come and paint your front door, or cut the hedge, or mend the Hoover. She was always otherwise busy with her mother or her elderly friends who lived nearby.

“You are just after something, aren't you? The biggest slice of cake.” Moira started to laugh. “I have to mow the lawn, and then I have forms to fill in.”

“No, not really, although I might seduce you with tea later.” James knew that he was allowed a brief smile at this point, since she was laughing.

“I'll need to check on mum first. We've been gone for thirty minutes.”

“She was asleep, she will be fine.” James reassured her. “I will assemble the lawnmower whilst you check on her.”

“Probably quicker if I do it. I ought to be used to it by now, if you don't mind making the tea?” Moira stopped to catch her breath as they lugged the mower down the garden.

“It's interesting how they don't want you to have any help, or do any gardening, but they don't seem to want to do it? How do they expect it to get done?”

“They don't understand things like that. It's probably best not to think about it. Their level of twisted logic defies belief.” Moira looked pained. “It's a bit embarrassing really. My brother is even worse. He was waving a sheaf of letters I had written at somebody whilst shouting about my not communicating the other day. I've never seen anything so immensely stupid.”

“Do you think we should buy them a box set of 'How I Met Your Mother?’” James laughed. Moira's hatred of that show was legendary amongst shy carers locally.

“Don't buy them anything, they would just complain.” Moira laughed. “Their lives are one long series of complaints, strung together with attempts to bully you.” They finally reached their destination with the mower. “Tea please.”

“Coming right up.” James went to make the tea whilst Moira darted upstairs to see her mother, who was still asleep. As she returned to the kitchen, James handed her her tea. “Is there any chance we could go out to see a film later?”

“Sorry, no there is nobody to take care of mother.”

“Your sisters are right there?” James looked incredulous.

“You must be joking. There is no question of them doing that. Their visits are on their terms. It was actually mother that made sure of it.” Moira frowned.

“Why?”

“She didn't like clever people. I think she thought she could get them to bully it out of me.”

“You're kidding.”

“No, she actually said that. She waited until I was over 40 to actually tell me though. There was possibly a measure of selfishness in it. As long as I was miserable and alone she would be looked after. She is quite wicked, you know, but she makes up for it in other ways.” Moira remained remarkably impassive.

“How?” James was faintly horrified. Moira seemed so assertive.

“Well she is very good at giving opinions when you're making artwork or decorating. She has fairly good taste, actually. She's been extremely lucky you know. Her mother, my father and I – all pretty much the same grumpy, helpful, anti-social character. She has always got away with murder as long as she gives opinions when you are in the middle of something that requires focus and dedication. She is also naughty and fun when she is not making horrible comments or inciting a pair of stupid bullies.” Moira got up to go and assemble the lawnmower. “Will you please listen out for mum whilst I mow the lawns?”

“Sure, I will go and wake her with tea if you want?”

“Thanks, she likes boys.” Moira smiled. “I will be back in an hour.”

An hour later, Moira returned, breathless and tired. “I will do the hedges next, I think. More tea?” She went to put the kettle on.

“Let's do the hedges today, and then tomorrow we can sit and talk to your mother whilst you sew. Then you can cook.”

“Thanks, I think.” smiled Moira. “Sure.”

The following day, Moira took her chainsaw and her hedge trimmer and dealt with all the hedges, unwanted trees and laid down weedkiller whilst James stuffed the trimmings into bags to put in the car and take to the local dump. This was not his usual idea of a date, but Moira was worth it, because Moira was comforting and capable. They also had long conversations about nothing, which made for easy company. Maybe he would one day distract her enough to kiss him? As they took the car out to the dump for the fourth time, the curtains again began to twitch across the road.

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