

Calista stretched her arm out to its full length and rubbed vigorously; she stepped back and looked at the shelf. She had not been able to reach the very corner and that thought disturbed her; that's where all the dirt and grime would be. Her eyes glanced furtively at the chair; if she was really careful she could climb up and reach right into that corner. Her baby stretched its arms and turned. Calista staggered and stared down in fear at her swollen abdomen. She let her palm slide gently across her taut skin.

"Alright sweetheart, I get the hint, no balancing precariously on chairs. What about a nice cup of milky coffee and two bourbons, will that be alright?"

The baby made no noticeable movement and Calista smiled, she turned to leave the dining room, but her eyes were still drawn to the shelf, she shook her head and let her illogical obsession about dirt go.

Calista gathered her coffee; she had eaten the biscuits whilst waiting for the kettle to boil, and headed ponderously up the stairs. She had about two hours before she needed to start dinner; from her bed she could watch the children wandering home from school and that thought made her smile. She carried a small one of those inside her now and that made the world seem very different.

The nest building instinct had hit with full force about two months ago, she had cleaned and painted everything she could but there were still a few gaps. Like that corner on the top shelf. The last big project had been emptying the loft. Greg had managed to negotiate some of his favourite possessions from the Charity Shop hoard promising he would put the remnants on E-bay; now there was enough room in the loft to hold a Ceilidh.

There was just one small creased suitcase to sort through. Calista stared at it and lifted it carefully onto the bedroom carpet; she slowly knelt in front of it and opened the rusting locks. Inside the battered old caramel coloured case were a range of discarded items. She reached tentatively for her 'Box of Memories' from the floor; inside this box she was gathering items to welcome her child. She had several school photos and a special one of herself and her sister at Yarmouth that had been the best holiday she ever had as a child. She lifted out a handful of old photos from his suitcase; she liked the really old Polaroid ones of him sitting with his mother in the garden that should go in the box she thought. Her hand hovered, maybe he would be angry at her rummaging through his case, she sniggered and brushed off her concern. They were just old photos and he was as delighted as her about the baby.

A sharp pain, maybe an elbow or a foot stabbed her hard. She rested her back onto the edge of the bed and took deep breaths. Calista daydreamed for a moment, Greg and her on a hammock with their child, she liked hammocks. She could feel the gentle sway in the breeze. A smile curled on her lips, if she remembered rightly they both liked hammocks, that thought made her cheeks flush a delicate pink.

She missed sex; they had been so into each other. Her sister Angie had pretended to be disgusted at their antics; they had always disappeared when he came to visit. They had taken to going for 'long walks' all the time and the barn had been a favourite spot. Calista sighed, she loved being pregnant but she was too big to chance any sexual acrobatics but boy would she make up for the enforced abstinence.

Calista lifted out the photo of her and her sister and felt sadness roll over her, her hand instinctively stroked her swollen stomach. It had been such a shock to discover Angie couldn't have children that had been the turning point for her and Greg, that sudden understanding of how precious it was to be able to create life. That's when they had tried even harder to get pregnant. She

sniggered silently, they didn't have to try that hard, one month in and she was 'up the duff'.

Calista could hear the children squealing as they rushed home and she reached into the suitcase. There in the corner was a pale green piece of paper, the colour seemed familiar. She shuffled to one side and pulled out the tatty book. She grinned, that was the book he was always reading the first few times she had met him, in fact she had noticed the book before she had noticed him. She had originally thought he fancied Angie, he had been so chatty with her and yet so reserved with her sister. Funny that, she considered, now she was happily settled with him and about to give birth to their first child. Calista smiled at the phrase 'first child'.

She took a big swig of her tepid coffee and opened the book of short stories. The first two were so dull, and very feminine, no guns or complex plots just people talking about emotions. She turned the page. 'The two sisters', she settled down to read this and then she would lock the suitcase and have a short nap. She yawned and read the first two pages. It was so empty of action, there were two sisters and they loved each other, she yawned again, these two pages lying in front of her were just to set the scene she understood that but as tiredness swept over her she really couldn't be bothered to read any more. She slipped her finger under the page and flicked it over quickly, taking just a micro glance at the remaining part of the story. She had noticed scribbles in the margin and even as she stared blankly at the first two pages the scribbles whispered into her subconscious.

Calista yawned again and reconciled herself to leaving the story unfinished. The book started to slip through the fingers of her right hand; she started to close her hand shutting the book, her thumb still guarding the page. Her left hand slipped and cold coffee slopped onto her thigh. Calista squealed repulsed by the cold brown stain on her leg. She put the cup down leaving her hand free and then suddenly using both hands she opened the book and unconsciously turned the page.

Calista tilted the book and stared at the hand written scrawl. *Great breasts*. Calista chuckled; boys were such pervs she thought. She lifted the book to decipher the micro writing he had scrawled in the side margin. *Stunning green eyes*. Calista stopped reading, she reached for the Yarmouth photograph, there staring out of the scene were stunning green eyes, but they belonged to her sister. Calista continued reading. Gregg had underlined a paragraph in the story where the boyfriend was fantasising about his girlfriends sister. There was a smudged word next to it; she peered at it straining to make out the words. She could feel her heart pounding as she strained to make the letters spell a word, she could feel her forehead become clammy. She closed her eyes and relaxed. This was ridiculous, it was a short story, a work of fiction and then as she slipped effortlessly into sleep, the word came to her 'apt'.

Calista was suddenly very awake. 'Apt', he had used that word to summarise a section where a boyfriend was fantasising about his girlfriends sister. She could barely breathe now. The book lying spread on her enlarged thighs made her feel sick. That word had changed her world so suddenly and so definitely. She picked up the book and continued to read. The baby stretched again, she owed it to them both to continue so she turned the page.

Calista had hoped that the last pages would be empty of scribbles but she couldn't have been more wrong. The next two pages were covered in densely handwritten comments. Greg described how it felt to run the tip of his tongue along her braces, how he reacted when she touched his body, the excitement they felt at making out whilst his girlfriend was in detention. Calista stared blankly at the book. Had this really happened or was this just a young mans fantasy? She didn't know, she would ask Angie, she would call her now.

Calista struggled to stand and then lifted the receiver, she stared at the keypad. What did she hope to achieve? If he had done this it was years ago, she loved him and he loved her, they shared a house, their life, and their future; that was what mattered. She needed to let it go. Gregg was so excited about having a child; this was going to make their life perfect.

She opened the book and turned it ninety degrees reading the words squashed along the edge turning the book as she continued reading.

‘There’s the person you want and the person you can get, and sometimes it’s better to settle and have a good life than to strive for the impossible.’

Calista stared down at her stomach, she watched her baby move and she suddenly became aware of the tears dripping from her chin. He had chosen her, he had settled for her because he could never have what he really wanted, had always wanted, her sister. Perhaps it was her sister’s infertility that sealed the deal. Calista didn’t try to be rational, the fact that his words were hormonal ramblings of a horny young man reinterpreted by a hormonally imbalanced pregnant woman wasn’t considered. Greg would protest that he loved her and that might be sincere, but she knew that those words, those few scribbled notes, would gnaw away inside of her. Every sharp word or stony silence would make her worry; every late night at the office, every delayed train would make her suspicious. These words would fester inside her expanding to take on such importance that she would never be content or happy again; she could never ever be sure that he hadn’t simply ‘settled’.