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Rent – a – Family

by Victoria Cooper

Lucy watched her red wine swirling in the glass.

Her daily bread of bickering, noisy children had left her exhausted. She had longed for quiet but now it felt smothering and endless.

The pain she felt as they waved to her from the misted car windows of their father's car was as deep as the tiredness of being with them all week. The ache of her loss would not subside.

The hours stretched ahead and she searched for something; maybe she should call a friend, catch up without distractions or interruptions.

She smiled, remembering, how only yesterday she had tried to provide a meter reading while deciphering Lego instructions; the phone jammed in the crook of her neck.

She would kickstart this weekend into something fulfilling and shake off the biting loneliness that consumed her.

She rubbed her frowning brow and sighed. She realised a Saturday night phone call would only bring the inevitable response, "Are you Ok? Is everything alright? Are the children sick?"

She pushed the idea away and absently scrolled through her phone only to stop at an advert of a smiling family cuddling on a sofa.

"Rent-a-family." "Borrow a loved one." "Yours for only £99.99 a weekend."

She stared in amazement. It was the perfect solution. She could rent a Dad, a son and daughter and be normal again. She wondered if they rented out dogs?

Would it feel the same as a real family or different? Would they all sit round the dinner table being normal, happily eating chicken legs and chatting? Would they all watch TV and laugh at the same time like the canned audience in sitcoms?

Would they argue over which programme to watch, fight over the best chair? Would irritation slowly build, gnawing at her as one of them clicked their fingers, sniggered noisily or worse, sniffed?

Would she still have to feign interest over boring anecdotes, remembering to nod in the right places? Too soon and they wonder if you have developed a tic, too slow and they repeat the punchline, twice.

Did she really want big family walks with built-in resentment and moody atmospheres or did she just want to binge-watch a box set and finish this bottle?

She grabbed the remote control.