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No Breath For Candles

by Martin Bourne

“My mistake was in telling a stranger my private business.”

“Our private business you mean Harold, now tell me exactly what you said.”

“Well, I had already bought five from Robert Dyas and I was standing in the queue in Sainsburys. I’d managed to get another ten glades there and three aroma candles. I’m gasping for a cup of tea Hilly.”

“I’ll put the kettle on, but carry on, and tell me what was said.”

“I was waiting my turn in the scan and pay line and a woman in front turned round and said wow you’re buying a lot of air fresheners.”

“And I said that I was stocking up, you know shortages and all that. Can we open the chocolate digestives, I love one with a cup of tea?”

“What did she say?”

“Oh, she said she didn’t know there was going to be a shortage on air fresheners, not that she was inclined to buy them anyway, and then she said that we must have some type of issue if I needed to buy all these. You see Hilda I told you that we should have got them on-line.”

“Never mind that, what happened next?”

“Oh yes, well now we get to the interesting bit. She said, wasn’t I married to Agnes’s girl Hilda?”

“And I said yes.”

"Then she said that she used to be very good friends with your mum and they used to go for short walks when she had a Dachshund."

"My mother never had a dachshund."

"No not Agnes, this woman."

"Well, who is she then. Did she give you her name?"

"No."

"What did she look like?"

"Short plump woman with grey hair, and her face was a bit lopsided."

"I know her. Dora Duggan, mother used to call her dozy Dora. She didn't have a dachshund, it was just a scruffy old mongrel with a long body and short legs. Right nosy cow. Lives round the corner in Myrtle Road."

"So here's the problem, she was asking after your mother, you know how was she, and how was her bad hip, as that was the reason she had to stop going for walks."

"And I said she was fine."

"And then she said how it had been a shame she hadn't seen her for a while so could she come round and visit."

"So what did you say to that?"

"Well, that threw me obviously. So I said that your mum was virtually bed-bound now, you know because of her age, so it was not a good idea. Yes, she said, she thought your mum was getting on, and of course she has a birthday coming up. I just smiled, you know I never remember dates."

"We can't have her coming round. I'll have to go and put her off."

"By the way, how is your mother? I haven't been up to see her recently."

"Well, she's sort of mouldy, like a well ripe Stilton."

"How about your Dad?"

"He's just bones really, but it's nice they're in the same room keeping each other company."

"Well, I suppose we had no option. They were both living with us, and when my company pension scheme went under, we needed their pension money."

"There's the post. That's late today, and the phone's ringing can you get that?"

Hilda opened the letters and Harold answered the phone. They both looked at each other, the blood draining from their faces.

“Mum and Dad both reach their hundredth birthday shortly and will get a birthday greeting from the Queen but the palace need proof they’re both still alive. Apparently, it’s due to identity fraud.”

”Well, that woman has gone and informed the local paper and they want to come round and interview your mum and dad on reaching a hundred.”