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## The MacGuffin

by Miriam Silver

“You’re on the right track” I assured her, hoping she’d listen, carefully avoiding cliches like “you’ve lots of choices at your age” and “the world’s your oyster”.

“Don’t go on, I’ll never get in, anyway the world’s over-populated, doesn’t need another of anything,” she complained, adding, “the seas full of plastic, we eat too much meat, waste too much and you haven’t planted any trees.”

I managed to stop her without disclaiming responsibility for the entire universe and murmured encouragingly, “you’re halfway there, you haven’t received a rejection yet.” Trying to sound reassuring without mentioning her love of a Sunday roast.

She stamped off anyway, so I buried myself in my iPad in my office under the stairs to concentrate on my own business. I’m going to need money if I’m to help her through the next three years.

“I’m not going anywhere, see you later, stay upbeat darling,” I called, trying not to mind the front door slamming and went to work hoping my unhappy daughter’s adolescent worries would resolve themselves before I disappear in a puff of menopausal heat.

The door slammer is my daughter who is temporarily not going anywhere, least of all university, drama school or a supermarket, repudiating her schools and our beliefs in her abilities.

“What do they know just because I acted in their silly plays and ran their stupid newspaper?”

Now, because she hasn't heard from her one application, that's it, no more applications, no one wants her.

Meanwhile this useless parent is left contemplating a future living with a grumpy, disgruntled, irritable adolescent who complains to a screen, giving no thought to her poor old anxious mother.

Using the house as a hotel is normal, and although I do love my daughter and do occasionally catch a glimpse of the lovely young woman she'll be one day, I am dazed by the sheer awfulness of living with her. She was such a lovely baby, gurgled, laughed, listened to my stories, even shared a dislike of tattoos. Now she holds me responsible for climate change, plastic pollution of the seas to say nothing about our consumption, and hers, of meat.

Perhaps one day my lovely Grace will listen to her Mum, stop searching her screen, being sarcastic and texting sympathetic friends, then perhaps she'll believe her future is in her own hands.

I caught her attention briefly, after we'd eaten a Shepherds Pie meal, dared to ask her to put her plate in the dishwasher.

"Soon," was the expected reply as she rushed upstairs looking at her screen.

Later, employing all my literary skills, realising 'talk the talk' was useless, I tried my famous MacGuffin distraction technique,

"I'm not bad at neuter gender, how's that friend of yours, Jackie dong?"

Lifting her head out of her phone, unsmilingly, she reluctantly turned round while blindly dawdling towards the washing machine.

"Where's my top?" she queried, slightly indicating she'd heard me, and was still living with us.

Feeling desperate for some small sign, hoping one of our silly phrases would make her laugh, I threw out, "you know not many people get up after being hit by a double bass."

"Come on let's see you..." I added and she actually peered over her screen.

“What’s a double...? oh Mum!” she replied, finally finding her sense of humour.

“Nice dinner, OK I’ll apply to that university offer if it’ll keep you happy.”

“Cool,” was the only possible answer from a mother doing her best.