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Zip and Mel

by Sho Botham

Kally dragged herself across the kitchen to the kettle. Silent tears dripped from her chin. The heel of her right hand roughly pushing them away time and time again. To an observer this action would have an automatic quality. Kally was oblivious to what she was doing.

An alarm pinged. She galvanised into action. Grabbing the towel and sweeping it roughly across her face, she ran out of the kitchen and took the stairs two at a time. Tears gone. Dressed in her only suit and wearing one of her two white shirts, Kally looked at herself in the mirror, leaning forward and pinching her cheeks to give them some colour. She forced a smile on her face. She was ready to go to work.

Picking up her phone from the kitchen worktop she sighed and turned over two red bills that had arrived in the morning post. They would have to wait.

In the cafeteria at work, Zip and Mel knew there was something wrong. Kally wasn't her usual self. Zip (she got her nickname from her permanent ability to be, zip de doo cheerful, at any time of the day) asked her friend if something had happened. Kally sat hunched over and silent. Zip looked at Mel telepathically indicating, her turn. Mel turned sympathetically to Kally and quietly asked her if it was Bill. Bill being her fairly recent, ex-husband. Kally raised her eyes looking at her two closest friends. "It is bills but not Bill, if you know what I mean. Two more red bills this morning. I had no idea how expensive it would be to live on my own. With energy bills going up so fast and food becoming a luxury, I don't know how I'm going to cope. At home. I cry all the time. I try not to but I can't pay my bills. I worry I will get thrown out of my home. My wages don't stretch far enough. I'm even considering going to the food bank. But how can I? I've got a good job but prices are rising so fast, I can't keep up."

Trying to lighten the load, Zip said, cheerily, “we all have bills to pay. Mel and I thought you were having some crisis. Kally’s chin rested in her hand, her elbow perched firmly on the edge of the table. She mumbled through her hand. “Any idiot can face a crisis; it’s this day-to-day living that wears you out. A crisis, will come and go. but there’s no getting away from all these mounting bills.”

Zip moved closer to Kally and put her arm around her friend. “Don’t do that,” shouted Kally, stiffening up as she pushed her friend away. “You’ll make me cry and if I start, I won’t stop.”

Mel and Zip stood up together saying they’d be right back and disappearing at pace in the direction of the corridor. Kally slumped further into her chair, with a tortured expression on her face.

Mel and Zip rushed back into the cafeteria like two whirlwinds, just managing to stop before bumping into their table. “Kally, Kally, Kally,” chorused the two women together. “We’ve got an idea. It’s the answer to your financial problems.” Kally looked up with a trace of hope in her eyes. Mel sat down opposite, Kally. Zip was too excited to sit down.

“Kally,” began, Mel, “how would you like two housemates? We can pay you rent and help with the bills and you won’t be rattling around in that big house all on your own. What do you say?” Kally’s shoulders visibly relaxed as she looked at her friends through tears of happiness. “Yes, oh yes,” she said, smiling.