

'No.'

'I see.'

Promise myself to never mention anything like this in front of any of the girls again.

'Is there anything you want to share wiv us, Lorraine?' He says. Afraid to say anything, don't want to stretch my mouth open wider to fit my other foot in.

'Are you seaching me, Mr Grant?'

Looks at HR bird and then back at me. Wonder if he's riding her?

'Not at all, is there something we should know about?'

Telling them fucking nothing, suits have a habit of using things against ye later on. They're waiting on me to answer. I'm wide to this pair.

HR bird takes a quick glance at him then clears her throat.

'Your father was quite ill last year...'

She smiles at me to finish the sentence like I'm in playschool or something.

'What's that got to do with anything?'

'Has he made a full recovery?'

She reaches across the desk and touches my hand. Don't remember the last time someone touched me, hugged me, or even bleedin' nudged me.

The tightness in my chest loosens a little bit and I burst into tears. I'm mortified but I can't help it. There's snot running down my nose and everything. Mr Grant hands me a tissue and says I should take some time off. Don't want time off, I'd do me nut in at home all day. Says he'll arrange for me to talk to someone instead. Gives me a card, tells me to make an appointment and says the company will take care of the bill. He's to go to a meeting and asks HR bird to look after me. She

makes me tea and gives me one of the nice chocolate biscuits from the luxury tins that we're trying to sell off in the supermarket. I can sit here for as long as I need to. She turns away and starts tapping on her computer.

Kay

(Sitting on a chair, wiggling around.)

I've an itch, down there. Seem to spend most of my life in waiting rooms and here I am again, after swallowing every tablet, trying every cream and changing my washing powder that many times I've run out of brands. Sometimes, when it's really bad, I open the bottom window in the living room and rest my leg on the ledge to let a bit of air circulate. The doctor opens her door and calls me in. She's a nice girl, very young, foreign. Thinks the itch is stress-related. Have you ever heard the likes of it? She's going to refer me to see a dermatologist; it could take a few months for an appointment. Think I could be dead by then, but take the letter and thank her anyway. She asks how my husband is. Tell her he's on the mend. The consultant thinks with the right attitude he could make a full recovery. She asks how I'm coping - grand, there's no use complaining, nobody will listen to me. She says she'll listen. Tell her about his appointments, medications and his physio. She stops me.

'That is all very good, Mrs Neville, but you should take some time for yourself, you are not a young woman any more.'

The fucking cheek of her. I've never felt old until now. She wants to know if I get enough help. Who? How often? Lorraine is a godsend, I couldn't manage without her, and now and again neighbours drop in and sit with him.

'You need more help, Mrs Neville, you look very, very tired.'

Gem doesn't like having people in his house all the time.

She hands me another page with numbers on it and asks if there's anything else I'd like to discuss.

You know that denture ad on the telly, the one with the couple kissing in the car in the rain? My Lorraine always says: 'Ah, Jaysus, there's yourself and Da on the telly again.' Amber does be heaving. Tell this young doctor I'm afraid I'll never get the man in the car back. She looks at me, confused. He was grand in the hospital, brave. It was when they brought him home it all changed. He's not the easiest of patients. He was never one for telly and he gets frustrated reading. In fact, to put it mildly, he's a cantankerous owl fuck. I don't mean to go down this road but sure, I've started so I'll finish. I'm dying for me bit. We've always been very *compatible* in that department, which is a miracle in itself, because by the time you get to our age you'd normally be lacing the cocoa with arsenic not Viagra. I know it's not the done thing talking about your sex life, but Jaysus, I'm the wrong side of sixty not dead. I haven't had sex in well over a year and it's killing me. She's trying not to appear judgemental but I can tell she's shocked because she's fiddling with her hi-jab. Take that as my cue to leave.

Meet Marjorie Burke from pitch 'n' put in Lidl on the way home. The women in the club talk like fuck about her but I've always liked her. She can tell I've been crying and asks me what's wrong. It kinda slips out, like everything bleedin' else today. And fair play to Marjorie, she offers me a solution – which is more than I got from yer wan and she charged me fifty euro. She says to go into Ann Summers and get myself a Rampant Rabbit. She got one six months ago and wouldn't be without it. Little does she know she's just put a stop to all those face-lift rumours; the woman is glowing from good old-fashioned orgasms.

Bit nervous on the 421B thinking about going into Ann Summers. I'm wondering whether you have to untie the staff from some dungeon before they can serve ye or if they parade

around in leather catsuits. When I get there the girl is dressed grand, even smart. Tell her what I'm looking for and she doesn't even flinch. 'Follow me,' says she, so I do. We go down the back, to the left. I'm trying to look all cool, ye know, but I'm mortified. She hands me this thing. I can't believe the size of it. I can only describe it like a luminous, pink, plastic towbar. It has ridges all over it, silver beads down the bottom and a little claw thing sticking out the front.

'What's that for?'

'Your clitoris,' she replies, as calm as you like.

'Watch.'

Turns the thing on. Presses it once and it rotates. Twice and it vibrates. Three times and the head swirls around, all over the place.

'This is the original Rabbit,' she informs me, 'but we also have a Deluxe version.'

'The Deluxe must do the Hoovering,' I say to her.

She tells me they haven't quite perfected that model yet. Ask her if she has anything else, a little less... you know. Jaysus, if I brought that home I'd never have sex with him again, whether he got better or not. She seems a nice enough young one so I'm honest with her, the Jaysus size of the thing petrifies me. She hands me this green thing, which she calls 'the Kermit, a six-incher – no extras.' I've to try Kermit out for a while and come back to 'upgrade' when I'm ready.