

Morning Tea

“Oh, my head... Is that the time? Nearly half past nine? Really? How could I sleep so long? Oh my head...” I stumbled to the bathroom. “What’s today? Wednesday? Oh hell, I’m supposed to be at the nursing home by ten. What to wear? Yes, the grey slacks look OK. That’ll make me look like a writer...”

I pulled on a pink shirt, but discarded it seconds later. “The blue one looks better, I think...not so tight around the tummy. Umm... must get those pounds off. Oh dear, my socks are odd. Must have been a bit dark when I folded the clothes on Friday. How silly... they really don’t look like a pair at all.” I gazed in horror at my feet, and decided to wear boots. “No one will see my socks if I wear boots. It’ll be okay.”

I grabbed the car keys and flew out the door, patting my hair into place as I drove furiously towards the city. The traffic flowed like a dog swimming against the current in a river of treacle.

“There’s the nursing home... now where was I supposed to go? Don’t remember... I’ll ask at reception.” I wished I’d listened a bit more carefully to the leader of our writers’ group when she made arrangements for us visit another group who met in the nursing home, to have a friendly morning tea and share some of our writing. Some the other members had done it before but it was my first time. I didn’t want to be late.

“Hello I’m Susan. Could you tell me where to go for the morning tea? I’m supposed to read something.” I timidly approached the massive desk.

“No dear. You must be looking for the village.”

“Village? No. The morning tea.” I shook my head.

“There’s something on this morning in our retirement village. Come I’ll show you,” the receptionist offered kindly. “I have to take some letters up there anyway.”

We wandered through a hall, out a door, into another building, and along another hall. We stepped out into a garden and turned a corner, through another building and finally outside into a driveway.

“Up those stairs and through the door,” she informed me and walked away. As I climbed the stairs, I wondered how on earth I would find my car later. Sounds of happy chatter greeted me. At least I’d found the morning tea.

“That’ll be \$6 dear, and would you like some tickets in our raffle?” I didn’t remember our leader saying anything about a charge, but I wasn’t about to argue. I dug around in my pockets and came up with the \$6. A thin woman behind huge glasses handed me a ticket and watched while I tried to make up my mind about the raffle. “The prize is this lovely fruit cake,” she encouraged.

I didn’t like to tell her I had no use whatsoever for a fruit cake or cake of any description, so I parted with another dollar and received another ticket.

“Go through to the morning tea, dear. We’ll draw the raffle later on.”

I searched around for a familiar face. Where were all the others? I couldn't spot a single member of the group seated at the small tables resplendent with pretty tablecloths, flowers and plates of scones.

"Susan." I heard someone call. Ah... someone from the group? No. Just my least favourite person in the whole world.

"Belinda," I said, my voice saccharine sweet. "Lovely to see you." I wondered what she was doing at a morning tea for writers. I don't think she has the brains to write a shopping list let alone anything worthwhile. Maybe some poor unfortunate person had no other friends and had invited her.

"Will you have tea or coffee?" A large woman took my arm and led me towards a table where three other women were already seated.

"Brown tea. No sugar thanks," I mumbled and sat down.

"I'm Esme," the woman beside me said and offered me a scone drowning in jam and cream.

"I'm Susan. I'm from Writers at Work. Which group are you with?" I asked, still trying in vain to see someone from our group.

"I live in C Block, and so does Mary here," she nodded towards the woman beside her.

"And I'm Judy from across the verandah," the other occupant informed me.

They must have invited the residents. That was a nice touch. They could have done without Belinda, but maybe she lived here now. At least I hadn't been forced to sit at her table. She would probably have commented on my odd socks. I sneaked a look down at my boots to make sure my socks were not on display.

"And do you live here too?" Mary asked. "You're new, aren't you?"

"No, of course I don't live here," I replied quickly. Did I look like I belonged in a retirement village? "I just came to read."

"How nice," Esme gushed. "I didn't know we were having entertainment."

"Isn't this the morning tea for writers?" I asked. "Aren't you all going to read something as well?"

"No dear. This is The Biggest Morning Tea to raise money for cancer research. I'm not sure, but I think there's some sort of writers' group that meets here on Fridays."

I sipped my tea and said nothing.