

DARREN'S NEW CAR

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The car was ancient. It was all Darren could afford. He was so proud, he and Laura, his girlfriend, had driven straight over to our house after buying it.

"You can't buy cars like this nowadays, Dad," he told my husband, Pete, running his hand along the bonnet.

Good job, I thought. It didn't look as if it would make it off our drive, never mind get them home again. But I didn't want to burst Darren's bubble so I said nothing.

"Isn't it great, Mum? My own set of wheels, at last."

I looked at the car trying to find something positive to say. I couldn't find a thing. "I'm glad you're so happy with it, Darren," I said. "Who'd like a cup of tea?" I added hurriedly before I said the wrong thing.

"I'll help," Laura volunteered.

"I told him not to buy it," she said as we got out the mugs. "Wait until you can afford something better, I said."

"Darren's like his father," I confided. "No patience."

"Tell me about it," Laura said. "I'm hardly through the door before he wants to rip off my clothes."

I covered my embarrassment by looking hard in the cupboard for some biscuits. I wasn't sure I wanted to hear this.

"But you'll be glad to know I made sure we were okay in case of an accident," Laura continued.

I gulped. This, I definitely didn't want to know.

"Fully comprehensive or nothing, I told him." Laura was getting

the milk from the fridge so missed my relieved smile.

"And I made him join the AA," she said. "I don't want to break down and end up stuck in the middle of nowhere."

"Oh, I don't know," I whispered to myself. "The middle of nowhere has its advantages."

"Real wood on the dashboard," Darren was enthusing when we returned to the driveway with the tea. "Craftsmen built these cars."

"I know," Pete told him. "Your mother and I had one just like this. It was an antique then."

An image from twenty-five years ago sprang into my mind. Pete standing next to a Triumph Herald. We'd painted it with bright purple emulsion. Pete's hair was way past his shoulders then. He was dressed in a cheese cloth shirt and a pair of flares. It was our honeymoon.

Pete looked wistful as I handed him his tea. "Good car that," he said.

"Rubbish," I laughed. "It broke down on the way back from Devon. We had to spend the night in the car. Your dad came out to rescue us the next day."

Pete laughed too. "I'd forgotten that."

"How could you forget?" I asked. "We've got six foot two of evidence right in front of us."

"Sounds interesting." Darren rubbed his hands together. "Tell all."

Pete looked at me and shrugged. "Up to you, love," he said.

"Let's just say," I could feel myself blushing, "if we hadn't broken down that night, you wouldn't be standing here now."

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"Really?" Darren's eyebrows had disappeared over the top of his head. "In a car?"

"We were young once too, you know," Pete said, winking at me.

Was I really standing in my drive, drinking tea and discussing sex with my son and a girl I hardly knew? How times change. My mother's never even said the word sex in front of me.

"I've never done it in a car," Laura said, somewhat absent-mindedly, but without any embarrassment.

Darren swallowed hard and stared intently at a small hole in the passenger door. "I wonder if I could patch that," he said in a strangled voice.

Pete coughed and picked at a bit of rust round the headlight.

In just the same way, I realised, that children can't believe their parents ever have sex, parents don't like to believe their children do either. My mother certainly doesn't. Even though I've got Darren to prove it.

I suppose if I'd ever thought about it, I'd have realised Darren and Laura would be sleeping together. It wasn't as if I'd saved myself for my wedding night or anything. And that was twenty five years ago.

"It's rather uncomfortable actually," I told her. "Especially in this car, I seem to remember." Laura's relaxed attitude to sex was catching. "But the car we've got now..."

Pete and Darren looked at me and then each other. They both blushed and studied the tarmac on the drive. Like father like son.

By the time they were going I'd decided I really liked Laura.

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She was open and honest. Both good qualities. Once you got used to them in such abundance.

"See you again," she said, as she kissed me good-bye.

"I do hope so," I told her.

"Bye, Mum." Darren gave me a quick hug and a peck on the cheek.

"If anything goes wrong with the car," I said as he walked down the path, "don't call us, your dad's hopeless where cars are concerned."

"Thanks very much," Pete scowled.

"And if you break down on the way home," I called as Darren and Laura got into the car, "and decide to have sex while you wait for the AA, please be careful!"

"MUM!" Darren shouted, his face aflame.

"That gear stick can really get in the way," I added.

"MUM!"

"Thanks for the tip," Laura called. "I'll let you know what I think."

"I'll look forward to comparing notes," I said as Pete looked aghast and Darren roared off the drive in a cloud of exhaust fumes.

"I don't know what got into you," Pete said as we went back inside. "Fancy talking to Laura like that."

"Oh, you old prude," I told him, kissing his cheek. "I think it's very healthy to be able to discuss sex openly."

"But not with our son and his girlfriend."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I just don't like it."

"You know what I'd like right now?"

"I dread to think," Pete said.

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I smiled and slipped my hand in his. "A nice drive in the country..."