



ARTICLE 16
MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

KATE ATKINSON

THE WAR ON WOMEN

So it was really going to happen then. Geoff phoned from the office (the ‘Holy Office’, as Tina called it) to say that there would be an announcement on the midday news – announcing the announcement, as it were. Trust Geoff to know ahead of time. He had always liked to think he was standing right on the edge of the future. With Tina it was the other way round, hanging on to what had been and even to what might have been.

Before Geoff had slowly worn her away, like water on stone, Tina Soutar, formerly Peck, had been a woman of the Eighties. (She hadn’t wanted it all, just some of it.) Twenty years old and armed against the world with only her RSA certificates, a power suit from Next and a Chanel ‘Rouge Noir’ lipstick and already thinking with nostalgic fondness of the drunken and careless youth she had exchanged in order to be tethered to a dictaphone (*Dear Sirs, In regard to . . .*) in the cramped back office of MacGregor and MacGregor, an ancient law firm down a dank close off the Royal Mile. The two MacGregors were not related to each other, were not in fact actually alive any more and the practice was in the hands of their equally elderly successors. Sometimes Tina came into work in the morning and found mouse droppings on her desk and wondered if this was how it was going to be forever and if there was anything she could do about it.



Geoff was the harbinger of a brighter future. At MacGregor and MacGregor, Tina worked on a big upright Olivetti machine that had been built to survive a nuclear war. Then Geoff came along and seduced her with his exotic talk of microchips and word processors. (*The Amstrad 1512, Teen – it's the future!*)

The first time she took Geoff to meet her parents ('your beau', her father called him) he turned up in a fashionable but funereal suit and tie from Topman which made her parents anxious. Tina's mother, Carol Peck, was eager to get her daughter off her hands so that Tina's father could take early retirement and the two of them could caravan around the south of England in their Sprite Alpine.

Carol Peck served up her signature tuna and pasta bake and Geoff said, 'Very tasty, Mrs Peck,' with a bonhomie that he was still in the process of learning but would soon perfect. The tuna and pasta bake, on the other hand, found itself somewhat wanting when faced with a cocky twenty-two year old with a (mediocre) business degree from Napier and a strange way of selling himself to her parents through mysterious slogans (*I believe in commitment to growth* and *Profit must be the businessman's mantra*).

Geoff was in at the beginning of computers, selling PCs out of a converted shoe shop on Dalry Road, and it turned out that he was right about the coming revolution. Within the year even the musty old solicitors Tina worked for had succumbed to the lure of the future and she found herself typing out deeds and divorce papers on a word processor with a little blinking cursor that followed her every move like a jealous emerald eye.

The tuna and pasta bake was followed by a Viennetta (*Go on, Geoff, spoil yourself*) after which Tina's mother invited Geoff to a reconnaissance of the Peck family photo albums.

'Just like Madonna,' Geoff said, looking at a photograph of Tina primped and preened for the school prom – black lace fingerless gloves, footless tights, frou-frou skirt, a huge bow in her hair and strings of cheap beads round her neck.

'Done up like a Christmas tree,' Tina's mother said.

'Thanks,' Tina said. Tina had always liked clothes and make-up. Always would.

'Oh, I don't know,' Geoff said, squaring off ever so slightly against his future mother-in-law (even though in that future they would frequently side with each other against Tina). 'I think she looks very nice.'

Her mother moved on to baby photographs, going backwards in time. 'Christina Jane,' she said with a sad smile as if the Tina now sitting on the sofa were a completely different and (let's face it) disappointing person. 'I always wanted a boy,' her mother said wistfully.

Geoff proposed a few months later, offering a ring with a tiny chip of a diamond. 'Buy you a bigger one when I make my first million, Teen,' he said. Neither of these things had come to pass. They were married the following May, confetti falling like blossom on Tina's pearl-crowned head and her enormous wedding hair-do.

Geoff had not managed to hang onto his earlier Thatcherite promise and he now worked, as a regional sales manager, for someone else, someone who had a better grasp of the concept of growth and profit. Undeterred, he embraced his job with an evangelist's enthusiasm (*A 1,000 gig serial ATA II hard drive with a 32 megabyte cache!*). There was, however, something increasingly brittle about Geoff, and Tina wondered if one day soon he was going to realise that his relentless, often absurd, optimism had caused him to spend his life fighting his way upstream to nowhere.

Tina had also moved on, from the Old Town to the New Town, working three days a week for a lettings agency on Dundas Street where her immediate boss, a leery, beery fifty-something in a broad pin-stripe suit, was always trying to get his hands on her in inappropriate ways (*'What's the matter, Tina? It's just a bit of fun'*). The rest of the time she was an Avon lady. *Ding-dong*. She could be enthusiastic about cosmetic products in

a way she never could about leases and surveys. (*‘That foundation really suits you.’*) ‘I’m a people person,’ Tina always said. And she was.

‘And what will happen *after* the announcement?’ Tina puzzled.

‘Oh,’ Geoff said airily, ‘I doubt that you’ll notice much change at all.’ This seemed a ridiculous statement, surely the whole point of the thing was change, but before Tina could pursue this argument the doorbell rang and she said, ‘Well, I’ll see you tonight then,’ and Geoff said, ‘You can bet your bottom dollar on that!’ in that strangely chipper way he had, like a Spitfire pilot about to take to the skies (*Chocks away, Teen!*).

As soon as Tina opened the front door, Shirley and Laura pushed their way into the house. Both women were neighbours in the well-heeled, well-groomed suburb of Edinburgh where Geoff and Tina were clinging onto their expensive mortgage like shipwreck survivors.

Shirley was clasping a Waitrose carrier bag to her chest as if it contained the Holy Grail. ‘Gin,’ she said. ‘Mother’s ruin.’

‘No, mother’s little helper,’ Laura corrected cheerfully. She was a consultant in the A and E at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Laura had a lovely daughter, Clare, and Tina had made the cake for her eighteenth birthday, a triple-layer chocolate cake with fudge icing with fancy piping and ‘Happy Birthday, Clare!’ spelt out in tiny sugarcraft roses that Tina had also made. (Tina had done an ‘Advanced Cake Decoration’ evening class.) Clare was a medical student now. Tina tried to imagine her own spiky, resentful daughter turning to her and saying, ‘Mum, I want to be a doctor!’

Faced with the *crème de la crème* of the Grange bourgeoisie, Tina had a confused moment when she wondered if she had got the day of the week wrong (not to mention the hour and the week itself) and it was her turn to host the book group. Tina had only recently been persuaded to join the ‘Grange Book Group’ but the others (all women, of course) had been meeting

for years, gathering on the first Thursday of every month at the church of fiction, clutching their bottles of wine and their copies of *Atonement* or *The Time Traveler's Wife* (and twice a year, a classic). Tina would have been quite happy with just the wine, novels not featuring high on her list of life's necessities. And then not only to read a novel but to talk about it afterwards! Double trouble, as it were.

It was Shirley, Tina's next-door neighbour, who had asked her to join the book group. You had to be invited by a member, it was like the Masons. Shirley was a journalist with *The Scotsman*, make-up ploughed into her wrinkles and deep into the drink but slap-dash maternal with it (her son was a financial advisor, bespectacled, quiet). Tina used to read the *Mail* but in a half-hearted way; now she read *The Scotsman* so that she could say, 'That was a good piece, Shirley.' It only seemed polite.

Shirley had reached bus-pass age but still kept on working (*Going out feet first*). When Tina got her bus pass (a while to go yet, thank goodness), she was going to catch the first bus that came along and see how far she could get.

The first time Tina went to a meeting of the book club was at the home of a woman called Virginia who was an accountant with Deloitte and Touche – nice house, fresh flowers everywhere, cream carpets. No children, needless to say. Virginia was stringy, as if she spent a lot of her time in the gym. She was single, a divorcee, which she pronounced the French way so that it sounded like an even more alluring state than usual to Tina. When the girls were a little older and she could find enough energy (and it would require a lot), Tina was planning to leave Geoff. She could imagine the acres of arguments ahead of her ('*Come on, Teen, we've made it this far*') but she really didn't want to make old bones with a man who in the middle of (very mundane) sex would suddenly stop and say, 'Damn! I forgot to email in my expenses.'

As soon as Tina walked into Virginia's cream-carpeted living room she had sensed the other members of the book club bristle to attention. Something to do with her high-heeled mules and

low-cut top, she supposed. Or the big earrings like chandeliers. Or her blonde hair, piled on her head like an ice-cream cone. Everyone in the book group seemed to have high-powered jobs. They were the kind of women who employed women like Tina.

‘Ladies,’ Tina said, putting on her Avon smile. ‘I’m Tina.’

Someone called Catriona, who was a lawyer, said to Tina, ‘Oh, wonderful, about time we had some fresh blood!’ but Tina knew they were looking at her clothes and thinking, ‘Uh-oh, not the brightest button in the box.’ It was true she wasn’t as educated as they were, school for Tina had been about getting a social life not an education. The only subjects she had liked were domestic science and games – producing a perfect Victoria sponge or belting up the wing on the hockey pitch (occasionally hacking an opponent’s ankles) had always seemed more enjoyable than knowing about algebra or the Declaration of Arbroath.

‘Why don’t you tell us a bit about yourself, Tina?’ a fat woman called Julia (‘freelance radio producer’) said, as if Tina were a particularly intelligent dog.

‘Wife and mother,’ Tina said. ‘Beth’s fifteen, Zoe’s twelve, Geoff’s old enough to know better. Ha, ha. Always been a secretary. I like cooking and sewing and gardening,’ she added defiantly. Tina and Geoff had assigned themselves traditional roles as soon as the confetti like petals had been brushed from their hair – Geoff went out and sold computers, Tina did everything else. The other women all smiled encouragingly at her, waiting for more. There wasn’t more. It was enough, in Tina’s opinion. It was more than most people had in the world. ‘And a dog,’ she added. ‘An old one.’

She didn’t mention the Avon lady thing although there were one or two of them looked like they could do with a good makeover. Nor did she mention the way that Beth had rolled home at one o’clock this morning, stinking of alcohol and cigarettes, her pupils like black holes that led to another, dangerous world. (*Fuck off and leave me alone, Mum.*) Her school reports were worse every term and she found every sly

opportunity to truant. She visited websites about suicide and anorexia, she treated Tina like dirt on her shoe. She would come through it, Tina reassured herself, through to the other side where obedient adulthood beckoned. Geoff said that this was 'exactly the kind of pressure he could do without'.

Tina imagined a future Beth – a lawyer, a doctor, a journalist – sitting in a cream-carpeted room discussing the latest Booker winner while in a playpark in that same future Tina was babysitting her grandchildren. The future, like the past, was preferable to the present.

Beth was darkness, Zoe was sunshine. She was in her first year at Gillespie's. She would still cuddle and kiss Tina (when had Beth last let her touch so much as a finger?). She liked horses and *High School Musical* and anything pink and still liked to tell silly jokes (*Knock, knock, who's there? Arthur. Arthur who? Arthur any more at home like you?*) Tina was currently employing the global scientific community to find a way of keeping her like this forever. 'Just joking.'

'Great,' said a woman called Margot ('in advertising'). She was wearing exactly the wrong shade of lipstick for her colouring. 'Really great, Tina.'

'No,' Tina said. 'Not great, just ordinary.'

The book they were discussing was *Memoirs of a Geisha* which Tina had watched on DVD so she hadn't needed to read it. Tina thought it was a shame that no one served food at these meetings. When it was her turn, she would lay on a feast.

'It's so hard for us to understand,' Catriona said, 'what it would be like to live the life of a geisha. To be so constrained, economically, socially, politically.'

Well, Tina thought, I think I can understand.

'Right,' Shirley said, chinking ice into glasses and pouring the gin. 'Let's get settled in front of the TV.' Tina put out a dish of salted peanuts. You would think they were about to watch

EastEnders, not a proclamation that was (no matter what Geoff said) about to transform their lives. And not in a good way. Not a bit.

The screen filled with a shot of Big Ben which immediately commenced its solemn *bonging* and Laura said, 'No need to ask for whom it tolls. Thee and me, I fear, ladies.'

Laura reached out to Shirley sitting next to her on the sofa and grabbed her hand so that the pair of them looked as though they were planning to drive off a cliff, like Thelma and Louise. Tina looked out of the window. The blossom trees on the street were bare and stark against a winter sky.

A disembodied voice, the kind they used to announce royal deaths, said, 'And now, live from Westminster, the prime minister is to broadcast to the nation on a matter of national importance . . .'

'Here we go,' Shirley said as the prime minister's mellifluous tones rolled around the kitchen.

'I am speaking to you from the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street . . .'

'That's that, then,' Shirley said, staring like a fortune-teller at the ice cubes in the bottom of her empty glass. 'We're the enemy now.'

'What about the book club?' Laura said suddenly. 'We're still allowed that, aren't we?'

Considering it was a day of such 'national importance', life continued in the same old humdrum vein. Macaroni cheese for tea, clean plates all round, except for Beth, of course, who said she had given up eating for Lent. Geoff said that her self-obsession (as he called it) was a travesty of religion, which was one way of putting it, Tina supposed. Tina didn't believe in God, didn't believe in much really, apart from being kind to small children and old dogs. Teenagers and cats she could take or leave.

Geoff, though, believed in a robust, manly Church of Scotland God, the sort who kept schedules and inventories and who knew all the words to *Address to a Haggis* and probably played golf when he wasn't sending down laws from mountains. When did Geoff start believing in God and why hadn't Tina noticed?

'God is the Law,' Geoff said pompously as he dug into an 'apple streusel crumble' of Tina's own invention. 'And the Law is God.'

Tina passed him the custard.

After tea, the girls went to their rooms, Zoe to do her homework, Beth to sulk. Tina sat in front of the TV and watched a repeat of *Agatha Christie's Marple*. She had the remains of a box of chocolates from Christmas on her knee, as well as the dog, making strange creaking noises as it slept. Geoff came into the living room, a large glass of Talisker in his hand and, toasting thin air, said, 'Well, today's the day when life in Britain changed forever,' and Tina said, 'I thought you said that this thing wasn't going to make much difference?' Geoff looked at her and said quietly, with a funny look of distaste on his face, as if he was thinking through his teeth, 'Not *thing*, Teen, it's the *Law*. Why do you have to be so irreverent?'

'Don't be such an idiot, Geoff,' Tina said and Geoff said, 'You wait, Christina Soutar, you just wait.'

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Nothing happened for a while.

'Phoney war,' Shirley said. 'Don't worry, they're biding their time, waiting to make their first move.' And so it was.

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'A headscarf?' Tina had never worn a headscarf in her life. You couldn't wear it the way the Queen did, horsy and loosely tied, you had to wrap your head up like a parcel. Crazy. And black, for heaven's sake. They were all going to look like Sicilian

widows. No way was Tina going to spend good money on a headscarf so she threw an old sheet in the washing machine with some black Dylon and when it was dry she cut it into squares and hemmed them on the machine. What about Beth and Zoe? Did they have to wear them? There were many unanswered questions. There was a site online that you could go to, www.scottish.parliament.co.uk/newlaw, where it said that all girls who had entered puberty had to wear the scarf. Zoe's periods had started a couple of months ago, but she was only twelve – a *child* – and Tina would like to see someone trying to get Beth to wear a big, ugly, black headscarf, it would be like veiling a tiger. There was a PTA meeting at Gillespie's tonight about changes to the uniform rules. (*No way, Mum, am I wearing that fucking thing.*)

Shirley had written an article about the introduction of the headscarf for *The Scotsman*. It was scathing but funny and Tina said, 'That was a good piece, Shirley,' and Shirley said, 'Sexual apartheid. We have to fight back. They can't silence us all, there are too many of us. We are women, hear us roar.'

The struggle had begun, Shirley said. There was a big demonstration being organised, thousands of women marching through Edinburgh 'sans headscarves', wouldn't Tina join them? 'Well, I don't know,' Tina said, 'I've never been what you would call political.'

Instead she put on her Avon face and made a call on a client, a woman called Fiona who bought only an eye shadow palette because Tina had to spend most of the time giving her a tutorial on how to wrap up her head like a parcel. 'They mustn't see our hair, apparently,' Fiona said. 'They'll become inflamed by desire and be unable to control their lust.'

'Yeah, any excuse not to be responsible,' Tina said.

Tina left Fiona practising packing her head into the scarf. On the drive home Tina noticed that all the blossom trees were now in fat bud. She loved driving around in her little car, 'tootling about' her father would have called it.

When she got home, she made a pot of tea and watched the demonstration on the TV news. Shirley was right, there were so many women, there was no way that men would be able to impose the new law. The whole thing was absurd.

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‘Give up work? What are you talking about?’

Geoff hauled his golf clubs out of the boot of the car. There was a new cheerfulness about him, the same as when he’d pulled off a big deal.

‘You know, stop work,’ he said patiently, as if she were a child or an idiot. ‘Give up your job – jobs – and stay at home to look after your family. A woman’s place is at home, after all.’

‘Says who?’

‘Says the Law. Get used to it, Tina.’

Tina went inside and downed a glass of wine as if it were medicine and then started on a chicken casserole, but her heart wasn’t in it.

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The latest thing was a kind of robe (black, naturally) that they had to swaddle themselves in from top to toe. Eyes, feet, hands, that was all that was left. They were being erased, blacked out inside their blankets.

Beth would have ripped hers off the minute she was out of sight but then she would never have been allowed into school. (‘Modesty!’ Beth spat the word out as if it were poison on her lips.) Geoff wanted her to stay home, he had already pulled Zoe from school, but every morning Beth marched out of the front door as if she were going into combat.

‘Nobody’s going to stop me going to school,’ she whispered fiercely to Tina. Not words Tina had ever expected to hear Beth say. They were allies now, with Geoff as their common enemy.

Beth smuggled textbooks out of school for Zoe, and Tina sat with Zoe at the kitchen table every day after Geoff had gone to work and made her do her lessons while she prepared the

elaborate, labour-intensive meals that Geoff had decided were his due when he came in at night. The joy had gone out of cooking for Tina.

It was dangerous on the streets for young girls and Tina would have driven Beth to school but Geoff had sold her little car because, 'You don't need it any more, after all.' Apparently the Law said that Tina was only allowed to drive the car if she was accompanied by a male relative. Tina didn't have any male relatives. Apart from Geoff, of course, but he had refused to be driven by her even before the Law was passed.

'How am I going to do the shopping without a car?' Tina complained. 'How am I going to get to the supermarket?'

'I'll do the shopping,' Geoff said.

'You?'

No online shopping, either. Geoff didn't allow any of them to use the Internet. 'Too much stuff that's inappropriate for you.'

'Are you sure the Law says we can't use the Internet?' Tina asked. It was funny but the Law seemed to be pretty much whatever Geoff decided it was.

It was ridiculous.

'This is ridiculous,' she said, and Geoff punched her in the face.

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The book group met at Margot's house. Again no food.

'This feels like a secret society,' Julia the radio producer said, as they divested themselves of their black robes.

'Where two or three are gathered together,' Catriona murmured.

The book this month was *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Tina had managed to read a few chapters when she was stuck in the kitchen with Zoe. At least Geoff hadn't banned reading. Not yet anyway. Catriona said, 'It's so hard for us to understand what it would be like to live the life of an Afghani woman. To be so constrained, economically, socially, politically.'

Well, Tina thought, I think I can understand.

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'I want a divorce,' Tina said.

'In your dreams,' Geoff said.

Casualties began to mount. There was an article in the *Evening News* about a woman who was flogged at the Tron for being seen in public with a man. Soon they would be tying them to stakes again and burning them.

'They never stopped,' Shirley said.

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Eyes, hands, feet were still too much, apparently. Now they had to wear a garment that resembled a circus tent, with just a little grille to look through. It was like being inside a post box and no matter how hard she tried Tina couldn't get the hang of wearing it. She felt suffocated inside the stuffy folds of material and because she was blinkered she kept tripping over the hem.

They had disappeared completely now. They were invisible women.

Shirley wrote an article about the new garment. It was angry and not at all funny. 'That was a good piece, Shirley,' Tina said and Shirley said wearily, 'We must keep trying.'

Tina wondered what it was about women that made men so angry. Women disappeared every day. They were kidnapped and beaten and imprisoned and raped and whipped and murdered for talking to a man in public. One girl (younger than Zoe) was killed by her (male, of course) relatives for having an unknown number on her mobile phone. Five girls and one of their teachers were gunned down outside Gillespie's. Tina was terrified for her warrior daughter but then she didn't have

to be terrified any more because the school announced it was closing to girls. Now all three of them sat in the kitchen and read books, like people under siege. The next book for the book group was *Persuasion*. Tina never thought she would enjoy reading Jane Austen. It just went to show.

'This is ridiculous,' Tina said and Geoff punched her twice in the face.

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The Law was unclear on the subject of book groups but it seemed that it wasn't in favour. That was the nature of the Law, it could be interpreted in any way that suited. Tina volunteered to hold the next book group at her house while Geoff was in Aberdeen on a sales conference. She felt like she was in the French Resistance, all the planning, all the secrecy. Although the French Resistance probably didn't eat a warm roasted pepper salad, lemon chicken (Swiss onion tart for the vegetarians) and a chocolate and brandy mousse, which is what Tina spent all morning preparing.

She stood on the doorstep and watched as the women careened along the street towards her house, carried on a stiff spring breeze. They looked like a flock of giant, ungainly birds. They brought a flurry of petals into her house with them, pink thumbprints on their shrouds.

'I could get a three-ring circus under here,' Virginia grumbled, shucking off the sea of material.

The Law didn't actually say they had to wear it, but no one wanted to risk the consequences if they didn't. ('Safer in than out,' Margot said.) They had become their own jailors.

'Well,' Laura said, pulling off her own tent, 'at least I don't have to worry about anyone seeing my cellulite.' She smiled brightly and flapped her arms up and down in an indecipherable gesture. Tina wondered if she was trying to fly away. She was demented, of course. Something terrible had happened to her daughter, the lovely Clare (*Happy Birthday, Clare!*). She had been walking by the Meadows when four men jumped from a car, pulled her into it and drove off. They beat her and raped

her and later threw her out on Niddrie Mains Road like rubbish. Now she wouldn't leave her room at all. 'That's what they want,' Julia said.

A breathless Shirley arrived and said that she had heard that a woman was going to be stoned on Mull for adultery.

'We should protest,' Margot said.

'We should demonstrate outside the Parliament building,' Catriona said.

'A silent vigil,' Virginia chipped in.

'Won't you join us, Tina?' Shirley said.

'Well, I don't know,' Tina said, 'I've never been what you would call political. Shall we talk about the book? We're a book group, after all.'

'It's so hard for us to understand what it would be like to live the life of an Austen heroine!' Catriona said. 'To be so constrained, economically, socially, politically.'

'I think we all understand now,' Tina said.

*

Shirley went to Mull and, under the cover of her big-top garment, she managed to witness the stoning of the woman taken in adultery and wrote an article about it for *The Scotsman*. She described how the woman had been placed in a sack and then she had been put into a pit that had been dug in the ground and how the pit was then filled in, leaving only the woman's head and shoulders free and then how people threw rocks at her head until she was dead.

'That was a good piece, Shirley,' Tina said.

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Shirley was dead. Two men broke into her house and shot her as she lay sleeping. The sound of the gun woke Tina but, not knowing what it was, she fell back to sleep.

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There was a kind of armistice for a while. The economy slumped while women stayed home and read books. And then a new front opened up and hostilities recommenced.

‘Another wife?’

‘Yes.’

‘You’re taking another wife?’

She was called Gina. She was eighteen years old, the daughter of a work colleague.

In many ways it was a relief for Tina to be relegated to the small, musty attic bedroom that was, appropriately, full of unwanted objects. She heard Geoff’s inchoate cries in the night and felt almost sorry for his new bride.

‘I want a divorce,’ Tina said to Geoff and he said, ‘That’s what the woman on Mull said.’

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Geoff got into an accident on the bypass (*bit of a shunt*). He ended up ‘writing off the other guy’s car’, and it turned out that Geoff had let his insurance lapse. ‘Dying under the weight of all the bills, Teen,’ he said.

‘That’s because there’s only one wage coming in,’ Tina said, but managed to keep the words safely inside her mouth because she was tired of being a punchbag.

It was OK, though, Geoff said. He had ‘come to an arrangement with the guy’.

‘That’s good,’ Tina said.

'Yeah,' Geoff said, taking Gina by the elbow and guiding her up the stairs.

'You're *giving* him Zoe?'

'Don't start arguing, Teen.'

'You're giving him your *child*?' Tina howled. 'To settle an insurance claim? Our *baby*?'

'She's not a baby. Zoe's twelve, old enough to be married, according to the Law.'

'How old is he? This man?'

'Fifty-two,' Geoff said.

Zoe danced into the room and said, 'Knock, knock, who's there? Major.'

'Major who?' Tina sobbed.

'Major open the door, didn't I? What's wrong? Mum?'

Tina wondered if this was how it was going to be forever and if there was anything she could do about it.

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Tina did her hair and make-up. She applied extra blusher and lipstick. She put on her armour – the shortest skirt and the tightest, lowest-cut top in her wardrobe. She hitched up her breasts and showed off her cleavage.

'I want to come with you,' Beth said and Tina said, 'You have to stay. You're the future. The fight's yours now. I love you. Don't forget to moisturise. You'll thank me when you're forty. I love you – did I say that already?'

Tina stepped into a pair of spike-heeled shoes. Her legs were bare, her arms were bare. She stood on the doorstep and felt the warm breeze on her skin, on her face. She shook her hair free.

She walked down the path and turned into the street. She didn't look back. She reached the Meadows. She saw her life behind her – baby Christina Peck who should have been a boy, Tina Peck racing up the wing, hockey stick like a weapon, the young bride Tina Soutar, brushing confetti from her hair.

Tina stepped out of her shoes. She removed her top, her skirt, her underwear and let them fall to the ground.

She was no longer invisible. Tina walked naked across the Meadows. The sky peeled back. The light was blinding. The trees that lined the path dropped their petals on her, like confetti. She wondered how far she would get.