

Lily, your phone's ringing.

"I know but it's Facetime and I haven't got any clothes on."

Frantically I toss a poncho over my head, wondering when I thought they were a good fashion statement to make. The fact it's even so close to hand is worrying me, then again, the abstract design may have something to do with it because I've decided to add some colour to my life because the garden centre's closed and I couldn't buy any spring bedding plants, so resorted to draping crazy fashion choices around the house instead.

Mum's face pops up on the screen and I blink. "What have you done to your hair?"

"Do you like it?"

"Not sure. Why purple?"

Mum looks very pleased with herself and whispers, "It was getting serious, Lily. My actual real colour was starting to show through and with no hope of getting to the salon, I had to resort to a home remedy."

"Which was?"

"Food colouring. Rather ingenious if you ask me. In fact, we've had quite a session here this morning."

Finn walks past and winks and I nod. "Hmm, same."

Hoping he manages to get some clothes on before she sees his reflection in a mirror or something, I turn back to the screen as mum says proudly, "Yes, I've become quite proficient at hair management. I even managed to use the dog's clippers on your father."

She looks away and shouts, "David, come here and show Lily your buzz cut."

She swings the phone around and I see my dad looking like something out of Call of Duty. He rolls his eyes and smiles. "Hey, darling, how are you bearing up under the strain?"

Thinking of the strain Finn just put me under, makes me smile and say happily, "It's hard, but you know, we soldier on."

"You're not getting bored then?"

"Not really."

Mum swings the phone back and shakes her head. "We've run out of jigsaws already and the house has never looked so clean. You know, we've even resorted to watching Chris Hemsworth on YouTube to keep fit."

"More like exercising your dirty mind, you mean."

Mum grins. "Well, he is so appealing to watch and someone has to get through the many tubs of ice-cream we panic bought when the news first broke."

"That's not the only thing you appear to have panic bought."

I stare behind her at the apparent wall of toilet rolls she is standing in front of and she shrugs. "We were lucky to get these in Costco before they closed."

"Yes, but why are you decorating the house in them?"

She lowers her voice. "Well, the garage is full with other necessary items and your father didn't want any of the neighbours to see we have such riches. I mean, we could get burgled and in the absence of actually owning a taser. we have no way to fight them off. I don't suppose Finn has a spare one he could lend us?"

"No, he doesn't, why would he?"

Mum shrugs and then lowers her voice, “You know Ralph Martin from next door went out three times yesterday.”

“So, what’s wrong with that?”

“We’re on lockdown, Lily. You know the rules. Once a day for personal exercise and necessary journey’s only.”

“Well, maybe it was necessary.”

“Rubbish. He thought we wouldn’t notice because he changed his outfit every time and wore a different hat. But you know me and I have logged every detail with an accompanying photograph as evidence should the police be around to issue a fine. Shocking, if you ask me, all this blatant flouting of the rules. Even when we clapped the NHS on Thursday, the neighbours took it to mean they could throw an impromptu street party.”

“Why, what happened?”

“They set up trestle tables along the road and everyone contributed a dish of something. Then we took turns in helping ourselves, maintaining the two-metre rule, and then when 8 o’clock came it was like last night of the proms.”

I start to laugh and she shakes her head, looking annoyed. “Guitar man across the street make a horrific noise and the Constables started banging every saucepan in their kitchen. The Anderson’s started singing, ‘We’ll Meet Again’ and the Frobisher’s got their wind instruments out. You have never seen anything like it, Lily, shocking.”

“What did dad think?”

“Oh him, he just carried on watching some programme on land rovers saying he would appreciate them from the comfort of his armchair. He’s never been public spirited.”

Suddenly, the phone rings again and we see Nan trying to join the group chat. It takes mum at least five minutes to add her, which gives me time to make sure the backdrop behind me isn’t one that involves my boyfriend, who is now doing his bench presses on the floor behind me—naked. God, I love lockdown.

“Lily, darling, I love your poncho. I had several myself, in fact, I think that *is* one of mine.”

She squints and I say hastily, “Actually, this one was a steal from Brand Alley. You know guys, that site has kept me sane during this whole thing. My regular email every morning has been a ray of sunshine in a dark time. You should see how much money I’ve saved since this started. I think I’m up to Christmas already and that’s just the women.”

Finn shouts, “Lily’s panic buying fashion as well as stuff for the home she doesn’t need.”

Nan nods her approval. “Yes, I was telling Deidre Marshall only yesterday how much money I’ve saved since this whole thing started. My favourite one is Amazon. My goodness, you just have to type what you want into the search engine and the choice is amazing. It comes the next day and it’s like Christmas. I never knew the pleasure a computer could bring.”

Grandad shouts. “I thought we were keeping deliveries to a minimum to spare people’s lives. You’re adding to the problem.”

“Nonsense, Bert.” Nan looks annoyed.

“We’re keeping the economy afloat and doing our civic duty. Keep quiet about things you know nothing about.”

Grateful that my nan looks well, I say softly, “How are you bearing up, have you got enough food?”

“Oh yes, darling. The local shop is well-stocked and gives me something to do every day.”

“You’re not going out, are you?”

I stare at her in horror and she looks at the screen with a hard expression.

“Listen, I’m no stranger to adversity and hardship, you know. I’ve lived with your grandad for close on fifty years and if I can get through that, I can get through a stupid pandemic.”

Mum shouts, “I told her, Lily. I told her she’s at risk and one of *the vulnerable*.”

Nan rolls her eyes. “Blah, blah. I’m old enough to know my own mind and no politician is going to keep me from doing what I love. Anyway, I go when it’s the over 70s turn, although there are a few imposters taking advantage of that. If you’re telling me Harriet Grainger is a day over 70, I want what she’s applying to her face. Scandalous, if you ask me, exploiting the old people for personal gain. She should be named and shamed in the daily coronavirus bulletin by Boris.”

“Poor Boris.” Mum shakes her head sadly. “Such a martyr to us all. He has bravely taken in the virus so he will be immune and able to lead us through this battle like the great war hero he is.”

“He didn’t volunteer to get the coronavirus, mum. It was by accident.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Lily, nobody gets coronavirus by accident.”

“What are you talking about?”

I shake my head, worrying about my mum’s sanity as nan pipes up, “Ooh, I love that daily bulletin. Your grandad and I wouldn’t miss it for the world. My favourite bit is looking at the homes of the press. I always knew that Robert Peston was an educated man, did you see the books on his bookcase - impressive.”

“Yes, it’s the highlight of my day as well. Who knew Laura Kuenssberg actually had a home? She’s never in it and I thought she lived in the Houses of Parliament.”

Mum nods. “I didn’t like that Sky reporter’s home. Just a blank wall. How are we to judge her by that alone?”

“Mind you, the questions they ask have your dad shouting at the screen—idiots.”

We all nod. “Yes, it must get very challenging when they ask the same thing day after day. At least they demonstrate working from home can be easy though.”

Mum shakes her head sadly. “Victoria Adams told me it was hell in their house. Two kids trying to logon to the computer to complete their lessons at the risk of being marked absence from school if they don’t make it. Barry’s working from home and needs the computer and is sick of the kids arguing during his conference calls. Victoria needs it to keep on refreshing the screen to grab a delivery slot because they are the holy grail these days and I expect there will be a murder before long in that house and who could blame them.”

I snort. “You and your murder obsession. Don’t be ridiculous.”

Mum shakes her head. “You mark my words; sinister things are going on behind the doors of every home in the country right now.”

“Every home? Mum, for goodness’ sake, watch a comedy for once and lighten up.”

She shrugs, “I couldn’t if I wanted to. Your father hogs the TV while he sits with his iPad on his lap watching Facebook videos and if I dare to ask to watch something, he starts ranting about personal space and the 2m rule.”

“I didn’t think that applied to people you live with.”

I stare at her in amazement as Nan says, “We’ve been on that 2m rule for the last twenty years. It’s probably why we’re still married.”

My heart twists as a wave of love washes over me for my grandparents. The tears build and I say softly, “I miss you guys.”

Nan smiles sweetly. “Oh, we’re ok, love. Just make sure you keep safe when you’re out gallivanting at the supermarket. You don’t know what’s waiting for you.”

“A bloody long queue that’s what.”

Dad’s face fills the screen and he sighs. “I got asked to leave yesterday, can you believe that? It only took me two hours to queue around the car park and I was stopped at security on the way in.”

“Why?” I feel angry on his behalf and mum shouts, “Stupid idiot thought wearing a balaclava and ski gloves would substitute a mask and surgical gloves. They thought he was about to raid the joint and he was lucky they didn’t call the police.”

Finn looks up in surprise and I shift uncomfortably on my seat, forgetting I had loaned his gear to my dad for that purpose alone. At least I kept my distance though and left it on the wheelie bin and then rang the bell and ran quickly to the safety of my car. It was a close-run thing though because I fell over the recycling bin on my way past and nearly didn’t make it.

My phone starts flashing and I notice I’m almost out of charge and say sadly, “Sorry, guys, I must go and charge my iPad. Are we still up for the quiz on Zoom later?”

Mum nods, “Yes, I’ve got the questions off the internet. I think they’re from Mastermind or was it University Challenge.”

Dad shouts, “Bloody hell, what did you get them off there for? I want to stand a chance at getting at least one right.”

“Calm down, David and go for your 30 minutes exercise to manage your anger.”

She rolls her eyes. “It’s the only peace and quiet I get, that and my solitary walk around the block each day. The Henderson’s dog looks as if it’s on its last legs, poor thing. I think it’s out more than it’s in because there are five of them in that house and they can’t stand each other. Mind you, the dog may be the one to murder them all just to get some rest, poor thing.”

Nan sighs heavily. “Sorry, got to go, I need a wee. I can’t hold it for long these days and there’s nothing to do but drink tea and watch the news channel. I’ll look forward to the quiz later, just make sure to allow time for comfort breaks.”

She cuts the call before we can reply and mum sighs. “That’s what we’ve got to look forward to, Lily. I just pray to God we make it that far. Remember to stay safe and preserve our NHS because those poor angels don’t get to enjoy the simple pleasures lockdown brings. No, this is a completely different type of nightmare for them and one I pray none of us see first-hand. Well, I should go because I’m due to make my volunteer calls to Mr Higgins and Mrs Clarke. See you virtually later and sending you cyber hugs until then.”

She cuts the call, leaving me staring at the blank screen. My heart is heavy as I wonder when I’ll actually be in the same room as them again.

Finn comes across and puts his arm around me. “You ok, babe?”

I say softly, “We’re the lucky ones, Finn. I just wish everyone was as lucky as we are and a cure is discovered because as crazy as life is most of the time, I would swap it for this one in a heartbeat.”