

## For You

It was time for a change. And by golly, Kennel, old pal, this was the year for it. This year would be the year that she noticed you.

Her name: Gosselin. Her place: right across the street with the living room curtains always near open so you can see in, right through 'em. Gosselin was a British lady, tried and true. She had afternoon tea at three o'clock, and by four the neighbour girl would be over to dust her china for some spare change and a caramel. The same neighbour girl would buy Goss a new plate twice a year—for Goss' birthday and for Christmas—so that she'd always have something to come over and clean.

It was for Gosselin's sake that you've been getting up at the crack of dawn these last ten years since she moved in across the way. Seven in the morning, come hell or high water, Goss is up and getting the newspaper or the mail or just getting some fresh air into her old pair of lungs. By seven in the morning you're up and washing your hands for breakfast, making sure your blinds are open so that she'll see you if she ever thinks to look over.

You've never been in her house. You'd been invited one time for a cup of tea and you woulda gone if only your favourite granddaughter hadn't just popped out another little angel who would not take your last name.

You brush your wiry mustache with the little, wire comb and look around for your cane. Remember yesterday, Kennel? When you busted it on the front stoop because of the hockey scores?

You find the mop in the hall closet and try to unscrew the head. Remember last year, Kennel? When it kept popping off and you used the super glue on it, nearly taking off half your hand skin in the process? When your granddaughter came over to help you with your bandages? You take it as is, unsure if it'll be a talking point or just a travesty that you'll never live down and Goss will make sure that someone writes it on your grave: *Kennel Whitby, Used a mop as a walking stick once*. You'll never speak to her after that, not even as a ghost. You'll just haunt her in silence to make sure she feels bad for having done it.

It was time. You look yourself over in the hallway mirror, tucking in your favourite plaid shirt. You practise what you're gonna do one time in the mirror, watching as your hands shake with tremors and nerves. You inhale, feeling uncertain, what with your mopping stick and your ugly mustache that your family insists you keep. Remember Kennel, the time you shaved it off and no one could look you in the eyeball? When one of your grandchildren even asked who you were because it'd been so long since you'd had a clear upper lip?

Walking your mop out the door and across the street, you feel a new sense of calm coming over you. You've practised for this. You won't mess it up. You ring the bell and wait, knowing she's probably just about to get her tea ready for three o'clock.

She opens the door, looking like a million bucks. And in perfect sign language that you've never had a chance to put to use, you say, "I was wondering if you would like to have tea with me."

She laughs at you, staring right into your eyeballs. "I didn't know that you knew sign language," she signs in reply. You notice the fluidity of her motions, how natural it looks on her.

You struggle not to stare at her hands as she talks to you, knowing that it's rude. Your face goes into a full, red blush.

“I learned it for you.”

She smiles and touches her hand to her heart. She opens the door to let you in and you limp ever so slowly into the front hall, seeing for the first time the full glory of her home. You note her hand touching your shoulder and you can't help but feel a large, toothy grin forming on your face. You turn in her direction, knowing to focus on her face and her expression more, knowing that both can change the meaning in her signs.

She's giggling sweetly. “Ken, what's with the mop?”