

Penny bustled around the kitchen quickly putting things in order, wiping leftover toast crumbs off the table, and checking that the floor was clear of debris. She worked with a frazzled sense of hurry about her as she flew from one task to the next.

Brushing away crumbs one moment, closing cupboards the next, scooping up toys from the floor and throwing them in a basket. Her eyes darted, occasionally, to the window, a slight pause in her rushing to listen for an approaching car, and then back to the scramble.

Rinsing the sink now. Quickly switching the dishwasher on. Checking the oven door for fingerprints. Being sure the hand towel was clean. Pausing again to listen to the sound of an approaching car, & then she saw it.

It sat there, just outside the door, the doomed houseplant from Christmas. The one with some emotional backstory that made absolutely no sense. The giver living in a world long gone, a time when things were simpler, happier too, perhaps.

A car door opened as laughter and shouts sounded from the driveway. She quickly slid the door open and scooped up the plant, its leaves half wilted from the heat of the day. A large stray brown garden snail attempting to make its lazy way up the pot was quickly flicked off and sent sprawling towards the property line, but Penny took no heed of where it landed.

She closed the door as the noise started drifting closer, and collapsed against it momentarily, fear and panic washing across her face as her wild terror filled eyes scanned the kitchen and landed on the pantry.

She darted across the room, like a cat chasing a mouse, but no sooner opened the door when she snapped it closed and turned around. The laundry room maybe? She started forward, before lurching to a sudden stop. No, Gran would go in there to use the toilet or wash her hands, wouldn't she?

An abrupt change of direction upset the plant & Penny's spare hand caught the dry dusty potting soil that nearly hit the otherwise clean floor. Lost in her fear she spun on the spot uncertain of where to deposit the plant from prying eyes. Her own eyes roved the room

again, surely there was someplace she could deposit the pathetic thing.

She caught a glimmer of colour in the corner of her eye as the children and their grandmother rounded the corner of the house heading for the back door.

*“Think!”* she silently wailed, *“for the sake of your sanity, think!”* Then her eyes spotted it and in a flurry of speed and momentary insanity she hastily tossed the plant, with one hand, up behind the stack of cookbooks on the kitchen shelf.

Giving it one final glimpse, checking that not a single burnt, curling leaf was visible. She brushed her hands across her jeans to wipe them clean, and darted to open the back door to the mass of children now circling with their grandmother in tow.

She threw open the door and called out, “Hello Gran, you’ve made it at last.”

Children flew in giggling & laughing, all wanting to be first to tell of spotting the taxi that brought the awaited guest, but none could be heard over the playful excited yips of the family dog, or the children talking over one another, and then stampede of feet now piling in the back door.

But Penny’s eyes didn’t waiver from her mother-in-law as she slid the back door closed. “Did you have a good trip over then?”

A stiff curt nod, a sniff, eyes searching, looking in each corner, resting for a moment on the window sill, then casting about again, “I don’t see the plant,” was the curt reply.

A strangled laugh erupted from Penny’s throat, “It’s outside, getting it’s daily dose of sun & air.”

She watched as her husband came in the back door, his thick hair ruffled from the wind and whatever game he’d played with the children coming up the drive, not a care in the world on his mind. But it was *his* plant after all, and *his* problem! He was the one who’d forgotten to water it despite the insistent reminders.

“You’ve killed it then have you,” Gran said with an air of knowing finality.

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I found this fast paced scene written in a 2017 journal. It was derived from a writing prompt from the book [642 Things To Write](#), which originally read, “*A House Plant is Dying And Needs To Live..*”

I rewrote the scene many times, mostly in my head, from Penny pleading and prodding the leaves of the plant, but the outcome was always the same, that upon Gran’s arrival the plant was dead and she just intuitively knew.

While many people may read this and presume it’s a slight dig at my own mother-in-law, it is not. My mother-in-law didn’t make a habit of coming into my home and complaining about any mess she found. However, as the dementia began to cloud her judgement she began to think her late husband’s interests and hobbies were my husband’s.

This led to some very bizarre and interesting gifts, including a few random plants. My husband is not a gardener, and so the plants didn’t always survive. I often felt, much like Penny in the above writing, the hurried frantic need to keep the plant alive or hide its demise. It’s not that my husband doesn’t like plants, it’s that his idea of a good plant is one that cares for itself. Like a cactus.

In fact, we have two, given to my husband via my mother-in-law, that have been sitting outside our side door for years. They sits there in all their prickly silence, an occasional spider making its home atop it, and sometimes blessing us with a few lovely pink flowers each year.

I use to make efforts each week to remove cobwebs, turn it so it grew straight and tall, and would remind my husband that they likely needed to be repotted. His mother noticed that too, and brought him a lovely ceramic pot for one.

They now both reside in the same pot together. They lean backwards as though they are

shocked by the people who come and go from our house. I can't blame them, we rush in and out with a flurry of our own activity hardly bothering to pay it any mind except for the occasional comment about its flowers.

For the most part, though, they sit together in that simple brown pot looking for all the world liked unwanted and unloved plants.

*The Reluctant Author.*

