

Baileys on Mondays

Dermot gave two quick rings on the bell as he always did. He heard the shuffling of feet along the hallway inside.

“Is it you, Dermot?” Gretta asked from inside.

“Yes, it’s me.” he answered.

He heard the two dead bolts being pulled across and, slowly, Gretta pulled open the heavy door, taking all of her strength to do so.

“Did you bring us some Baileys Liqueur?” she asked him before he had even made his way into the dark hallway.

“And hello to you too, Aunt Gretta. Yes, I did. Don’t I always bring Baileys on a Monday? How are you keeping? Is Aunt Mildred up?”

“She was up earlier. She’s gone back to bed for a nap. She warned me that if you called you weren’t to wake her.”

“Charming!” Dermot muttered under his breath.

He followed Gretta down the hall and went down the two steps into the small kitchen at the back of the house. The smell was always worse on a Monday. The odour of dampness, the lack of fresh air mingled with the smells of rotting food, body odour and urine. He knew that Gretta was incontinent, but it was just another of those taboo subjects that was never spoken about with either of his two aunts.

He put the bag of groceries on the table and the bag of freshly laundered clothes on the floor.

“Will I put this stuff away for you, Gretta?”

“No, don’t bother. Sure, I’ve all day to do it. You need to be getting along to work now. Leave it there. Did you bring doughnuts today?”

“No, they were all out. I brought a bit of chicken and Miriam sent a nice, fresh brown loaf for you.”

“Right. OK. That’s fine,” said Gretta, but he could hear the coldness in her tone. Despite his best efforts to get his aunts to eat some decent food, he knew most of it finished up in the bin. And, in all the years of bringing his wife’s baking and home-cooking, her efforts were never acknowledged. When he had married Miriam twenty years before, Gretta and Mildred had made it clear to Dermot that they felt he had married ‘beneath himself’ and, now that they were in their nineties, there was little hope of them changing their attitude towards her.

“Have you any washing for me to take away?” he inquired.

“No, none today,” Gretta answered quickly.

“Oh, I thought you’d have some after the weekend. Did you change your clothes at all? How about your nightdresses and underwear?”

Gretta glared at him with hard eyes. “Mind your own business about our wardrobe situation. We’ll change our clothes when we’re good and ready to change our clothes. Now, you’d best be off. You’ll be late for work in that big important job of yours.”

Dermot ignored the jibe.

“Right so. I’ll put the rubbish in the bin on my way out.”

He pulled open the press door under the sink where the bin was and did his best not to gag. The stench was overwhelming. He didn’t care to investigate what was in the stinking black bag, but he could hear the familiar clink of the three brown Baileys bottles that his aunts managed to drain every week.

“See you on Wednesday morning so. Tell Mildred I was asking for her. I haven’t seen her in more than a week. Is she doing OK?”

“Grand, grand. Not a bother on her, only giving me grief as usual. I’ll tell her you called.”

Dermot put the black bag in the outside bin, got into his car and negotiated his way back into the traffic. He drove up the South Circular Rd. and headed for his office in the city. After he parked, he called Miriam before he went into the office.

“Just heading into work now, pet. Are the kids up and about?”

“Yes, all fed and watered and the two of them are heading out to school as we speak. How were your girls this morning?” Miriam teased. It was a standing joke between them.

“No sign of Mildred again. But Gretta was fine. Asking for you. Delighted with your brown bread as usual,” he fibbed.

“I’m sure. And I suppose they gave you a nice bag of dirty laundry in return for me?”

“Not today, dear. But send them another bit of that nice beef stew that they loved last week and I’m sure the prize is yours!” said Dermot.

Mildred was in bed again when he called on the Wednesday and Friday mornings later that week. Gretta said that her sister had a bit of a cold and that she was staying in bed where it was nice and warm. As there was no heating upstairs in the old, Edwardian house, Dermot knew that the bedroom was anything but nice and warm. The only heating sources in the house were the open fireplace in the sitting room and the range in the kitchen, but that was rarely if ever lit nowadays. When he called the

following Monday morning, and there was still no sign of Mildred, he was beginning to get concerned.

“I’ll go up and see if she’s alright. Maybe we should call the doctor?” Dermot said to Gretta.

“There’ll be no doctors coming to this house. Doctors know nothing and all they do is put you into hospital. Mildred and I will only leave this house in a box, and that’s the end of it. So don’t mention doctors to me again. When we both get taken out of this house to the graveyard, it’ll all be yours then. She asked for a glass of Baileys and a doughnut earlier, so I hope you brought them.”

“Well, I brought doughnuts all right, but the off-licence had no Baileys yesterday. They have it on order, so I’ll get it tomorrow and bring it with me on Wednesday,” explained Dermot.

“No Baileys! Sure why did you bother coming so? Don’t you know well that’s the only little comfort we have in our lives now? Our health is gone, our looks are gone, and we know more people inside the wall of the graveyard now than outside. Our small little drop of Baileys keeps us going in this hard world. And here you are coming to see us with one arm as long as the other! And you knowing that when we pass on, all our earthly belongings will go to you. And still you can’t take the time to go and find another shop that has a drop of Baileys for us.”

Dermot said nothing about the cooked ham and the vegetable soup he had brought. Instead, he said, “I’ll make Mildred a ham sandwich and bring it up to her all the same. It’ll do her good.”

“You’ll do no such a thing. She particularly said not to wake her this morning ‘cos she didn’t get a wink of sleep last night with that bad cough she has.”

“Ah, I’ll bring it up to her anyway. I’ll take a chance that she might be awake.”

As he made the sandwich, Gretta continued to glare at Dermot.

“I told you she doesn’t want it. Isn’t it a fright to God when your own nephew won’t listen to you and do as you ask in your own house?”

Dermot ignored her and put a tray together and began making his way up the stairs.

The last thing he felt was the smashing of an empty brown bottle over his head from behind. The last thing he smelt was a faint sweet smell as the drops of sticky liquid dripped down over his forehead before he tumbled back down the steep stairway.

Later that evening, Gretta answered the phone to Miriam.

“No, I haven’t seen him since Friday. I thought it was strange that we saw no sign of him this morning. He’s usually very reliable. And we were here waiting for our little drop of Baileys. You might bring us over a drop when you get a chance. If I’m in bed and don’t answer the door, just leave it on the front step, dear. Sure, we’re not long for this world and it’s our only bit of comfort. And I’m sure we’ll see Dermot soon.”

(1,389 words)