

Framed



This is my last chance to tell Mum if I am going to. But how to start?

We aren't close despite having tea together every day. She says I'm moody because I stay in my room reading. Better to be doing something than sitting opposite her in silence.

She wasn't always so aloof. When I was young, she read to me every night and cuddled me before bed. Everything changed when Dad left. I remember the night, the screaming, the crash of crockery, the slamming of the street door.

The French au pair was gorgeous, much younger than Mum and always full of fun. I must never mention her name now, though I write to her secretly

My friends tell me it's typical for middle-aged men to stray when marriage becomes routine.

Mum could get another partner if she made the effort. But she hardly goes out, except to her art class, and then spends most of her time in the garden painting flower pictures. They are good and she has several in the Bushey Art Exhibition that opens tomorrow. That's why I need to speak now.

Can I risk today's teacups with my news? Mum is sitting across the table fiddling with her saucer.

"Mum, I need to tell you something."

She glares at me. "You're not going to tell me you're pregnant are you?"

"No, of course not, I just wanted to warn you that I have a picture in the exhibition."

"When did you ever paint?"

"The picture is of me not by me." I swallow hard. "Peter, your art teacher painted it."

Mum is gripping her cup. She's glaring at me. "Did you give him a photograph?"

"No, I posed for him. He wanted to paint more than a portrait. So I'm warning you my nude picture is in the exhibition."

The teacup misses me, smashing on the wall behind. I run to my bedroom, collect my case and climb out of the window down the rope I've tied to the bed. Peter is meeting me by Bushey church. My new life begins today.

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