

“Coming of age” theme

Title: “The Ping Pong girl.”

These are the days I love the best and hate the most.

Breakfast with Mum; dinner with Dad.

Never the other way around because I never stay over with dad

Always one or the other.

Never both at once any more.

The Ping pong girl. That’s me.

I’m not allowed to stay over at his. After dinner mum collects me in her latest car or her boyfriend’s car and transports me home. Sometimes it feels more a prison van than a magic carpet ride.

Our home she calls it.

It was a home for our collective family once, until they decided he couldn’t be there. Well, my mum claims that they decided it together, after chatting it through like adults do and considering all the options.

My dad says he came home from work one night to find his case packed and a taxi ordered.

Grannie (Dad’s mum) says what actually happened was he returned from work early and found Mum in bed with another man.

Grandma (Mum’s mum) says what really happened was that Mum came home unexpectedly and found him creeping half-naked over the fence from next door.

Confused? Join the club. I love them both to bits but.....

Dad has always been kind to me; before and after the home-quake.

Mum won’t take the time to explain to me why I can’t stay over.

She knows, as I do, that nothing inappropriate has ever happened.

He doesn’t try to poison me with gossip against Mum, though I wish the same could be said for her. It’s not way out there and shouty. Mum is way too subtle for that. But a sharp dig with a verbal stiletto hurts me as much as it wounds Dad.

He says he loves me just as much as he ever did but concedes that there are good ‘girlie’ reasons why I should stay with and grow up with Mum. He means puberty and periods but hot pliers couldn’t drag those words out of Dad’s mouth. Don’t bother trying to pull out his fingernails either – he doesn’t feel

physical pain. Hits his thumb with a hammer – not a peep! Mum says it is because he has no emotions. WTF? No emotions? Just mention the word ‘boyfriend’ within his audible range and watch some emotions erupt out of the volcano. One day soon this will be a problem for Dad and me but for the moment I can work around it until the steady one comes into my life.

She is being mean to him and insulting to me. Does she really think I am dumb enough to swallow the unfiltered propaganda?

Don’t misunderstand me. As much as I kind of hero worship him (don’t all daughters) he has faults. He buys me clothes that would look great on a Bananarama girl and are always two sizes too big. Room to grow he calls it, even if it means looking like ‘*OMG what is that*’ outside. He buys me clip-on Gipsy Rose Lee earrings because he hasn’t spotted my ears are pierced, or perhaps he is in denial. Wait till we ever go on holiday again and he sees the other piercings. He thinks I still like Winnie the Pooh pj’s which is just on the margin of being ok.

On the plus side he loves cinema (even rom-coms), fiery pizza and kebabs - a welcome contrast to the pseudo- healthy muesli-ridden rabbit food my mum dishes up when she isn’t getting dolled up to go out on the razzle. He only once raised his voice to me – when I forgot the rule and mentioned that Mum’s new hunk had stayed over. Angry or upset? Not sure. He has dated twice since Mum. Neither stuck. Murky depths these adults.

With guilt as thick as hairspray in the air and exploitation potential everywhere, I could be the most pampered girl ever.

But I’m not. Well, not quite.

I glance up from my script on the screen of my new phone to see the solicitor approaching. I fold the hand-written sheet into my Gucci bag.

I’m up. Coming of age day.

The day when I divorce the pair of them.

I love them both equally and madly, but I am tired of breakfast here, dinner there.

Ping Pong.

Tired of being told I should be grateful. Tired of never being asked what I really want.

They haven’t forced me into growing up too quickly, but I have adapted, probably much better than they could imagine.

Auntie Julie, sitting beside me, smiling encouragingly, has offered me a neutral space to breathe in.

This may yet be the day I love the best and hate the most.