

A PROPER SEND OFF

By

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Gillies (Scottish - 40), Carolyn (American- 35) and Cat (London - 13) sit in leather chairs in a baronial drawing room awaiting the arrival of their host Alistair – the squeal of his wheelchair tyres on lino can be heard approaching. The atmosphere, and their clothes, are funereal; indeed, they have just come from the cremation of Ian – Carolyn's husband, Cat's father, Gillies's brother and Alistair's favourite son.

Feisty and a bit know-it-all, Cat complains to her mum that she should stand up to old man Alistair and tell him that they're taking dad's ashes home. But Carolyn doesn't dare rock the boat. Cat calls her a coward, and appeals instead to her uncle Gillies. Gillies (whose hair clearly hasn't seen a brush in a decade) tells her he can try, but it won't do any good, Alistair ignores anything he says and treats him like an idiot. Cat sulks.

Then formidable Alistair (Scottish - 70) bursts through the doors in his electric wheelchair, carrying the urn of Ian's ashes. Cat is fascinated by a holstered pistol strapped to the side of his chair. He motors over to the mantelpiece and places the urn in pride of place. Ian, he says, has come home and home is where he's staying. My best boy. My first born.

Gillies gallantly mentions that perhaps Ian's widow and child might like to take the urn with them when they go back to London next week. Sure enough Alistair tramples all over him. Cat tries to speak up, but is similarly squashed. Not a word from Carolyn. Cat is furious, but at least manages to mouth Thanks to Gillies.

As they walk down to his cottage, Gillies and Cat share that they both feel they've ended up lumped with the wrong parent: Gillies's mum always understood his passion for science while his dad Alistair writes him off as a mad inventor; Cat's dad was wild and fun, while her mum Carolyn is a boring stiff. Cat is outraged that Alistair carries a gun, Gillies tells her it's because he's a control freak and a bully. She tells him that she'd wanted to send dad's ashes up in a firework, but Carolyn had got all square about it which is why they had that depressing cremation instead. Gillies is immediately intrigued by the idea.

Inside his mad-scientist's cottage Gillies draws a basic firework rocket design on a flip chart – the shell which will contain the propellant and twenty explosive spheres, packed with the ashes, gunpowder and some chemicals for colour. Just as Gillies asks Cat to look up chemicals on the internet, there's a beeping sound: Gillies's medication dispenser. He opens today's compartment and swallows it down while answering Cat's questions about his manic depression: it's no big deal, it's just that sometimes he's too happy and sometimes he's too sad...

Trying to explain it simply as a chemical imbalance, Gillies mentions that his meds are just lithium carbonate and... Lithium carbonate! blurts Cat, pointing at the screen. That's the chemical that turns fireworks red! It's fate!

Together they tip the powder from one capsule out onto the table and put a match to it – it flares red. Already caught up in the idea, Gillies is easily persuaded to sacrifice his meds for the project – anyway, as Cat points out, how can you be too happy?

The first thing they do is grind up Gillies's lithium carbonate. Then Cat steals and replaces the ashes – freezing when she hears the approaching squeal of Alistair's tyres on lino. Then they shape the casing – which ends in a papier mache fight! Next they fill a ping-pong ball with homemade blackpowder, Gillies's lithium and Ian's ashes – one down, nineteen to go. To Cat's delight, Gillies then empties his latest internet purchase over the table: a box of thousands of ping-pong balls!

Over the days that the project progresses, Gillies's spiraling mania is charted by his additions, amendments and annotations on the flip chart: as they get closer and closer to finishing the firework, the once simple design is now a scawly, scribbly mess – more ink than paper.

On the eve of the launch, as Gillies feverishly illustrates the final tasks and almost completely obscures his original drawing, anxiety starts to show in Cat's eyes. She goes to bed leaving Gillies to work through the night – nowadays he's never tired!

Gillies wakes Cat up and shows her his nighttime's work: the rocket is now giant – far too big to launch. When she points it out to him, he turns on her. Now Cat's scared. She tries to defuse the situation, but Gillies has lost it. His anger turns to aggression and it all gets louder and is just about to take an ugly turn when Alistair bursts in.

Alistair takes in the situation, draws his pistol and aims it at Gillies. Cat is terrified but a look of resignation crosses Gillies face: "Not again!" Alistair fires the pistol and a tranquilizer dart plumes out from Gillies's butt cheek.

Alistair escorts a sedated Gillies back up to the big house and tells Cat to wait there for her mother; it's best they leave right away.

Carolyn enters the cottage to find Cat sad and alone. Cat confesses what she and Gillies were up to. Moved by her daughter's spirit and enterprise, Carolyn gets a sudden sparkle in her eye: do you think it will work?

Back in the baronial drawing room Alistair is haranguing Gillies, who has clearly told him at least some of what they've been up to. Alistair is telling him that he's useless, that his madcap projects are doomed to failure, and that his mother's mollycoddling ruined him, when suddenly there's a giant WHOOMP! and the sky turns red. Gillies grins groggily: it worked!

Meanwhile at the launch site, Carolyn and Cat stand hand in hand, their upturned beaming faces reflecting the red light in the sky.

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