

9th April, 2009

A GOOD DEED DESERVES A SUMMER HOLIDAY IN DUBAI...

DEAR DIARY, my neighbour across the way's kids were locked out of their house one day last week. At first, I saw them standing on their doorstep and then I saw the older one knocking on their front door, pressing the doorbell and then looking through the window with cupped hands.

After about 20 minutes of spying on their fidgeting, I made a decision. I put my flip-flops on, went outside and called across the road to them. I asked if they were locked out and the older boy said yes. I asked him if they wanted to come inside to call his parents and wait and he said yes please, so in they came.

The boys and their parents are new to our road. They moved in about three months ago. Their father's friendly but their mother is a bit stoic and pinched faced; she's got that sort of tight mouth that resembles a cat's bum.

Anyway, I got talking to the boys. I was being nosey really. They appear to be quite well off so I wanted to know if they went to private school, what their mum and dad did for a living and what sort of house they had because there are a lot of houses on our road with a mixture of both very well off people and those who are furiously struggling, but you can't tell what's going on behind closed doors. For instance, the family living next door to me appear very ordinary on the outside but have a basement which houses a cinema, snooker room, a mini wine bar, a games room, a gym and a sauna. I only know this because the British Telecom engineer told me so when he was re-routing my wires during the same week that he'd done extensive work on the billion pound house next door.

So I got the boys, Simon and Oscar, a carton of apple juice and made them some sandwiches and got down to "question time". The eldest, Simon is 12 and his brother Oscar is 6. They both go to private school. Simon says he loves school but Oscar is dreadfully unhappy. Oscar didn't talk very much, he reminded me of his sullen mother, with brooding eyes and a pinched mouth like a cat's arse; but Simon was quite animated which helped with the questioning. Simon said his mum's a Barrister and his dad is an Architect and Sick Building Consultant and he owns companies throughout the UK, Italy and Dubai. He drives a private plated Bentley and their mother has two cars; a Cayenne Porsche and a Mini Cooper. Simon said they've travelled all over the world and they found a nanny/housekeeper in Spain when he was little. She came to the UK to live with them but she left in December and

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from what I understand she left under a puff of smoke! Apparently their mother sacked her and has never been the same since.

I was then interrupted by Oscar's gesturing to this brother. I asked Simon if everything was OK and he said Oscar wanted to use the toilet; so I walked little Oscar to the bathroom and told him to give me or Simon a shout if he needed help.

I went back into the living room to carry on "interrogating" Simon; who seemed like a lovely boy; polite, chatty and intelligent. I asked him if everything was OK with Oscar because he seemed painfully quiet. He said yes but he's a bit introvert, highly strung and he cries a lot. I said to Simon, tell me more.

Simon went on to say one of the worst things to happen to them recently was Isabella the housekeeper leaving. He said her absence seems to have affected everyone in their family in a different way. He misses her because she was like a big sister and he'd known her since he was four, Oscar misses her because she was more like Oscar's mother than their own mother. He said his father misses her because he used to be happy when she was around but now he seems withdrawn and his mother used to adore her but now hates her like a dose of poison. Simon said he realises that Isabella must have done something to break his mother's heart but he's not been told the facts. All he knows is that Isabella left without saying goodbye and that's unforgiveable. He says it felt like Isabella died.

I asked Simon what he liked to do in his spare time and he said he takes tennis lessons and is quite good at it but he much prefers football and wishes that his parents would allow him to pay more attention to his football as opposed to tennis. He said he also goes to drama classes and really enjoys it. I said I could tell that he was very confident so his drama lessons must have a lot to do with his self assured personality and confidence.

I said to Simon, Oscar's been gone a long time, can you go and see if he's OK please.

About 10 minutes had passed and I could hear both boys talking in hushed tones as I approached the bathroom. Well nothing could have prepared me for what I saw when I opened the bathroom door. The smell hit me first. Oscar had smeared the bath panel, the tiles, the floor, the toilet seat and the sink in his bodily excretion! Both boys looked at me like two deers caught in the headlights. I said Jesus Lord in Heaven, what the devil's going on? Simon said to me, I think that Oscar's had a funny turn; he has funny turns sometimes where he does really awful things. Simon said I'll help you clean it up. I said help me? Help ME? Oh no Simon, I don't need help because I'm not touching this shit. Your mum will be here in about 10 minutes; if you can stand the stench, you stay here with Oscar, if

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not, get out, Oscar can stay right where he is and your mum can sort this shit out; and she'd better get here before my children get home otherwise that's a whole different argument. At 15 and 17, they're not going to take too kindly to their neighbours' affected boy smearing shit all over the walls.

To think that I hate people using my toilet... see - this is why!

While I sat there fuming, I saw their mother's Mini Cooper pull up outside. When their mother came in, I said I'm sorry, I don't even know your name but now is not the time, it's bad news. For some unknown reason, Oscar has smeared shit all over the bathroom. Well this woman burst out crying. When I say she was crying, she was bawling uncontrollably as if I'd told her that Oscar died. But I guess I can understand her grief now but at the time I wasn't very sympathetic. I said to her, look there's plenty of time to cry later, but right now, I need you to put on these rubber gloves, take all this cleaning paraphernalia to the bathroom and please don't come out until there's not a trace of shit in there. I said to her, use plenty of Dettol and bleach!

She walked behind me down the hall with bucket and stuff in hand and she said by the way, my name's Helen, I said nice to meet you Helen, I'm August and I shook her yellow medium sized Marigold hand. I said to Helen here's the bathroom. Good luck!

Out came Simon, he shut the door behind him. We stood outside the bathroom door for a little while and I could hear Helen cleaning and crying and crying and cleaning. I said to Simon, don't worry, it's not the end of the world and gave him a hug. I can't tell you how confused I was feeling though.

In the end, it took Helen about an hour to clean the bathroom and clean Oscar. I gave him some of my children's old clothes; poor Helen looked defeated.

I gave her a cup of tea and she asked if I had anything stronger. I felt like giving Oscar a slap upside the head. Is that strong enough Helen? All the same, I gave Helen a shot glass



of neat brandy and she knocked it back in one and held out her glass for more. I took the Courvoisier bottle off the table and got a tumbler out of the cupboard and a bottle of Wray & Nephew overproof rum and said to her, if you want to make today a blur, drink this instead.

She poured the rum in the tumbler right up to the top and gulped it down and winced.

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All three of us stood there looking at Helen. Me, Oscar and Simon, no words, just eyes moving from person to person and then back at Helen.

Then Helen said thank you August, I owe you. In fact, that bastard husband of mine owes you. This episode is all down to him; our family are shadows of our former selves because of that bastard. (I'm sure this had something to do with her husband and Isabella!) Anyway, Helen said we'll send you to his Seven Star apartment in Dubai for a holiday because of this dreadful inconvenience. Just let me know when you want to go, how long for and how many tickets you need and she put her business card in my hand.



Well if that's what you get for kids smearing crap all over your walls, then my house is a public convenience and I guess bastard husbands, especially the one's who aren't yours, have their uses too.

Now where's the Dubai rule book? I don't want to get clobbered with a truncheon for chewing gum or arrested for bearing my naked shoulders in public or thrown behind bars for drinking a piña colada by the pool.

August Mayfield