



The R Word

The packers have arrived. I rush to get to the door before Leo has a chance to moan at them for the breakages he's convinced we're going to have. Typical Leo. Always worrying about what might happen. It doesn't take long to organize our possessions into two groups; those we're taking to our new place and the rest that's going into storage.

The middle-aged supervisor gives my shoulder a sympathetic squeeze when we finish our short tour through the house. He tells me he's had quite a few customers in the same situation as us recently and he sounds so full of pity I shudder. It wasn't that long ago he'd have looked at me appreciatively, now I'm just another middle aged woman who has lost her home.

I grab my handbag and go outside to sit in the car while Leo goes through the house and his precious shed again. I'm agitated as I wait. I'd really like to leave now. Curtains twitch across the road and I resist the impulse to lean on the car horn. Finally, I see Leo appear. He's pulling weeds from the path at the side of the house, as if that matters now. His shoulders are drooping and he seems smaller - thinner for sure, but shorter too. In the spirit of the new life we're going to, he's wearing a lumberjack shirt hanging loose over jeans. It doesn't quite work. From the tip of his blonde head to his work boots brightly polished, the effect is too neat and tidy to be convincing.

Tears, those tears that never seem far away recently, rush to my eyes and I swallow with the effort of not allowing them to fall. I pretend to look for something on the back seat so that I can surreptitiously wipe my eyes and blow my nose. I can't manage a smile as he climbs into the car, but at least I'm not crying.

Leo sits with his hands on the wheel staring straight ahead until the curtains twitch again. He turns the ignition key and we pull quickly away from the house we've

called home for the past seven years.

“Don’t mention the ‘R’ word”, my ten- year-old nephew had begged me the day I told my sister we were going to lose our house. Jason thought the Recession with a capital R was a plan to curtail his enjoyment. He wasn’t completely wrong either. Jill confided that she did occasionally use the Recession as an excuse not to buy him some useless fad that he swore he couldn’t live without.

In the real world though, the Recession is another way to spell despair for an increasing number of people. Leo and Betty Berkley included. We’d been made redundant within six weeks of each other and it had only taken three months for us to miss a mortgage repayment.

During the past week, as we’d packed and labeled, I sometimes found it hard to believe that only one year ago we’d been talking about where we’d go on holiday. How quickly life can change. A week from now, we’ll be running a motel in Yorkshire.

As Leo indicates to leave our street, I feel deep within myself a tiny bud of something that could be excitement. Yes, everything changes. Good times change to bad and bad times change to good. Our lives had actually become quite boring and we hadn’t had the will to do anything about it. Having this momentous change forced upon us ensured we had no choice other than to make changes and the past few weeks hadn’t been quite as horrendous as we’d feared.

I look over to Leo and he glances quickly at me.

“Are you okay Bets?”

I lay a hand on his knee and say “I think I am. I think I will be”.

Leo takes a hand off the steering wheel to cover mine and he squeezes it tightly.

“That’s all I need” he says and I can hear the truth of that in his voice and see it in his suddenly squarer shoulders. I lean over to him and for a few moments as he puts his arm around my shoulders it’s as if we’re teenagers again. A blast of a hydraulic horn startles us and we look sheepishly at the burly truck driver who’s shaking his head at us in mock despair. I wave at him and he grins and I feel the corners of my mouth lift and a giggle forms in my throat.

I settle back in my seat and gaze out the window as the familiar streets give way to suburban sprawl. It’s not long before cornfields and summer meadows begin to appear and I know that even though this situation was never what we wanted,

maybe it will turn out to be what we needed. Only time will tell, but at least we still have time.

The R word didn't take that away from us.