

Vicki

Is This The End?

A storm was imminent. There was hardly a cloud in the sky but I could feel it. My eyes stung and each intake of breath seemed to scorch my nostrils. Hairs on my arms prickled audibly and strands on my head arced outward like Virgin Mary's halo. A quick glimpse in the rear view mirror though revealed I looked more like Medusa with a hairdo of writhing serpents than an angelic vision of splendour. I quickly spat into my palms and swatted a few back into place before increasing the air con and planting my foot on the accelerator. My daughter and her boyfriend would've arrived by now and brought with them a citrus tart and chocolate brownies as per my request. My husband would've put together the cheese platter he promised and my son would be ready to man the coffee machine. I was so looking forward to putting my feet up and being waited on, as one would expect on their birthday. Shame I'd had to work today and the six before. I was exhausted but ready to celebrate those fifty-two years I'd spent on this earth.

The sound of an engine approaching rapidly from behind, caused me to look up at the mirror again. Before I had a chance to see what it was, it overtook me on the right and sped past, a blur of black and silver. Why in such a hurry, I asked as it instantly disappeared around a bend in the road. I was about to cry out words of abuse, when a flash of blinding white assaulted my vision and a blast ripped its way into my brain via my eardrums. It was an explosion of ginormous proportions. I skidded to a stop and held my head so tightly that I thought it would come away in my hands. The pain, the pain. A silent rasp ed its way out of my mouth and a few moments later, when my vision returned to a semblance of normal, I managed to restart the car and limp it forward. As my sight increased, so did my fear. What would I discover around the bend? A mangled mess? Unbelievable devastation? Horror unbound? Had the driver hit a petrol tanker? Nausea rose and I trembled from top to toe. I reached for my phone in readiness. Then...nothing. That's what I found, nothing, just a vacant stretch of bitumen with no sign of life... or death.

I eyed left and right, searching for clues of an accident of some kind. Nope, nothing. I was at a loss. I slowly edged the few kilometres of country road home, eager for answers. My family would know. They would've seen and heard something for sure.

My daughter's car was parked in the drive behind our ute. Good, I needed a strong shot of sugar along with my coffee. I ran awkwardly up the back stairs, still feeling a little light headed.

'Oh my God, what just happened?' I called, throwing my bag on a kitchen chair and heading out to the verandah.

The table was set, but there was nobody to greet me, only plates of partly eaten cake, brownies, cheese, antipasto and crackers. Mugs of coffee, lined the tablecloth. All were semi filled, except one, mine. You, rotters, you'd started without the birthday girl. How rude. Wait till I.... Hang on, where were they then? Hiding? Maybe it was a game. They heard me coming and they've taken off. Is that how they wanted to play then. Ok. I picked up a half filled mug and took a sip. It was still warm. They mustn't be too far away then.

I made a lot of noise as I searched the house, talking loudly so they could hear.

'Now where can they be?'

'In here? No.'

'Under there? No.'

'Am I getting warmer?'

'C'mon guys, this is getting really silly.'

'Give me a clue, why don't you.'

'I'm hungry!!'

I stamped my feet, slammed doors and banged furniture, but no-one came to my aid. Bigger them, I thought, and plonked myself down at the table, stuffing a slice of citrus cake into my mouth. I'll just continue my party without them. Stupid game.

After I'd tasted most of the goodies, drank someone else's tepid coffee (yuk, too much sugar) and felt somewhat like Goldilocks trespassing in the bears' cottage, I decided my family must be further afield. Maybe they'd run off into the woods, oh...er... down the road

at least. Maybe they went next door to the adjoining property. The McKenzies. Don't know why.

I phoned my husband first, but his ringtone resounded from the lounge where he'd left his mobile.

I then phoned my daughter. Hers was still in her bag.

My son's, so it happened, was plugged into a socket in his bedroom. But was still flat.

Then I phoned the McKenzies. It rang out.

Damn. Where was everyone? I was far from frustrated, I was now rather anxious.

I stood on the verandah and peered out and around and across. No-one else was in sight, anywhere. A dark purple cloud was covering the sun as it ventured closer to the horizon. I found the moon. It was tinged a strange smoky crimson.

'The sun will become dark. The moon will be turned as blood.' Words memorised from the Bible...so many years before....when I was a church goer.

'In the twinkling of an eye.'

'Like a thief in the night.'

'One will go, one will be left.'

'The first will be last and the last will be first.'

My stomach leapt. Could this be? Had Jesus made a grand entrance and returned for the holy? Was I found unworthy? Of course I was. A reel of mistakes and misdeeds and misdemeanours, played through in my mind. A life filled with selfish acts and hateful words ricocheted around my brain. It's too late. No time to make amends. Lines of a song were stuck on repeat:

'It's the end of the world as we know it...it's the end of the world as we know it...it's the end...'

'No!' I cried, running inside.

The TV. There had to be something on the TV. I found the remote. Nothing. I flicked switches, everywhere. No power in the whole of the house.

Facebook.

I grabbed my mobile and scrolled through. Those who I deemed 'good people' were posting. Those I thought were hell bound were silent. What was going on? I tried to send messages, queries, looking for answers, but I was all thumbs. Tears blurred my sight and I

began to hyperventilate. The room spun and I slumped to the floor, a blubbering, sinful mess.

A sound cut through my grief like the grim reaper's scythe.

'Mum!'

I wiped my eyes. It was my daughter. If anyone was a saint, it was her. Miss goody-two shoes.

'What are you doing here?' I groaned. This didn't make any sense what-so-ever.

She held out a hand, 'I...I came back for you.'

'You did?' I squawked, 'You can do that?' Hope rose. I struggled to my feet and took her hand. 'Its not too late?'

She frowned, 'It's still your birthday, isn't it?'

'I don't know. Is it? Do I get a special dispensation?'

She stared at me with those perfectly blue eyes. Angel eyes. I felt so ashamed under their gaze. My life had been crap compared to hers. I was no good. I was a bad mother. I could have been a better wife, a more grateful daughter, a more faithful friend. I didn't deserve a second chance.

'Don't know what you're talking about Mum. Lightning struck the McKenzies house and we've been over there helping them out. Quite a mess. Thought I'd come back here and rustle up something nice for dinner seeing the afternoon tea was a failure. Looks like it'll have to be a salad, seeing the power's out around here.'

She smiled. But all I could do was cry.