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Meat in the Sandwich

Richard sat on his unmade bed under the Megadeath poster, inching ever closer to his Nintendo top score.

Alison stood at the kitchen sink making everyone's lunch sandwiches, breakfast radio blaring.

"Alison!" Mother staggered down the hall, dry retching at the kitchen door. "Alison!"

"Not now Mum, I'm making lunches," said Alison.

Mother dropped dead on the kitchen floor, hooking the cord of the clock radio as she fell, flinging it across the kitchen.

"Mum," said Alison, "if you don't like Triple J, just say so!"

She turned to see her mother on the floor.

"Mum?"

Alison wiped the butter off her thumb with her tunic, then bent over her mother and checked for a pulse. "Oh, bloody brilliant Mum! And how are we supposed to get to school?"

Alison stood up and leaned against the sink.

"Richard!"

"Not now." Richard was less than 200 points from his top score but had only one life left.

"Richard! Come here!"

He put the Nintendo on pause.

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“What!”

“Richard! Come here! I think Mum’s dead.”

Richard frowned momentarily.

“Whatever.”

“Richard!”

“I SAID, ‘WHATEVER!’”

The Nintendo sprung back into life.

“RICHARD! I’m serious! I think Mum just died on the kitchen floor!”

The distraction was all it took – ‘kaboom!’ Richard’s last Nintendo life evaporated.

“Oh shit, bugger, bum, pus!”

He strode aggressively down the hall. “What! What! What! What!”

Alison pointed at Mum’s body.

Richard shrugged. “Well, what do you want me to do about it?”

“Check it out.”

Richard prodded the corpse with his foot. “Yeah, she’s dead.” He looked at his watch. “S’pose better catch the bus then.”

“What about your lunch?” Alison called after him. “I just made this sandwich for Mum. Do you want it?”

“No way! I’m not eating a dead person’s lunch!”

He stepped over his mother to examine the other sandwiches.

“And I’m not having the Polish salami either. Makes your breath stink!”

He snaffled the non-salami sandwich into his backpack and headed for the door starting a new game on the Nintendo. “See ya sis.”

“And what exactly am I going to do with this?”

Alison held aloft the Polish salami sandwich.

“And what about Mum?”

“I don’t know – you’re the oldest.”

The door slammed and Alison bit her nails pondering her mother’s body.

“Hmm – rent out her room?”

Ruggedly handsome 21 year-old Guy rubbed his chin, hoping his 5 o'clock stubble didn't distract Alison from his steroid enhanced biceps. They threatened to split the stitching of his t-shirt at any moment, as he raised his arm a little more for Alison's viewing pleasure.

"Yeeees, I don't know," he said, striking an open-legged pose in his lycra bike pants.

"It's easily the best room in the house," said Alison eagerly. "Northerly aspect, Not too hot in summer."

The estate agent had told her to press that point.

"And what's the rent?" asked Guy, catching himself in the mirror and realising his raised arm was now blocking Alison's line of sight to his penetrating green eyes, easily his most hypnotic feature.

"We couldn't go lower than \$115 a week," said Alison.

"Dunno," said Guy.

"100?" said Alison.

Guy placed both hands behind his head and alternately flexed each bicep. "Oh, you can do better than that."

"95."

"90?"

"Yeah – alright," said Alison.

"Great," said Guy. "Hmm, bathroom's a bit small."

Alison chased Guy down the hallway and passed him into the kitchen.

"Now, this is the kitchen," she said, stepping over her mother and hurriedly picking up the fallen clock radio.

"Now this is the dishwasher. You just load the dishes in here and put the powder in here, then turn this ..."

"What about her?" Guy pointed to the body on the floor.

"Oh, that's just Mum. Don't mind her ..."

"Your mother!"

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“Yeah – she spends a lot of time in the kitchen. Now to turn the dishwasher on, you just ...”

“Wait a minute,” said Guy. “Is your mother going to be staying?”

“Is that a problem?”

“Is that a problem!” said Guy. “She can’t stay here!”

“Oh give her a chance,” said Alison. “You hardly know her. And technically the house is hers.”

“That’s hardly the point,” said Guy, quickly checking his buttocks in the reflection of the oven.

I mean, what’s she going to contribute?”

“She’s an excellent cook,” said Alison. “Well, she was.”

Guy shrugged.

“You could use her car,” said Alison.

“Late model?” asked Guy.

“Current model Saab,” said Alison.

Guy groomed his hair.

“Fuel injected,” said Alison.

Guy wobbled his head.

“Twin overheads. All leather interior. Zero to a hundred in 4 seconds!”

Guy flexed his abs, flashed his teeth and struck a ‘Mr Universe’ pose.

I’ll be a regular chick magnet in that baby, he thought.

“And it’s a hatch!” said Alison.

“Oh no!” said Guy. “Not a girlie blouse car!”

He watched his reflection in the microwave door and his pectorals tensed, making his nipples vibrate up and down. “I tell you what – make it 85 a week and we’ve got a deal.”

“But you said 90!” complained Alison.

“That was before I knew about your mother. Now I have to run her car as well!” It’ll probably work out all right, thought Guy. I’ll need the garage for my weights anyway – and my drum kit.

And of course, the 1942 fifteen inch anti-aircraft canon he was restoring.

Suddenly, Guy was assailed by a pungent odour – a mixture of dirty socks, post-aerobic gymnasium and the back alley behind the pizza shop.

“What the hell is that stink?”

Alison ran to the front curtains thinking it might be Richard coming up the driveway, but Guy followed the trail of the smell to the half-open fridge.

“Pwor! What the ...” Guy had pulled opened the fridge door before Alison could return to the kitchen. “Oh! Help! Help! Somebody help me!” He was screaming like a smoke alarm at an indoor tyre burning competition.

“The Polish salami!”

Alison remembered, and hurriedly reached past Guy into the fridge. Holding it at arm’s length, she carried the sandwich to the insinkerator. “I’ll get rid of that right now.”

“Oh! My God! I need a shower!” exclaimed Guy, as the insinkerator happily munched the offending item to nothing, before it let out a long, satisfied burp as Alison turned the kitchen tap off.

“You’ll forgive me if we don’t shake hands,” said Guy heading for the door.

“So you’ll be moving in Friday?”

Guy had no time to answer before he was flattened by the front door. Richard bowled through beeping away on his Nintendo.

“Where the hell have you been?” Alison fumed.

“Bloody Mum didn’t pick me up from footy training, did she!” he yelled from half way down the hall.

“Well, you could have phoned,” retorted Alison.

“Oh and who died and made you mother?” Richard strode past the kitchen door en route to the couch. “Hi Mum. What’s for dinner? I’m starving.”

The television foumped on.

“Oh, that’s my brother Richard,” said Alison to Guy as he picked himself up from the vestibule lino, checking himself for injuries.

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“Guy – Richard. Richard – Guy. Guy’s going to be moving into Mum’s room.”

“Yeah, whatever,” said Richard. “Buy a vowel, you idiot! Buy a vowel.”

Alison walked Guy to the front gate. “Don’t mind my brother, Guy. He’s only twice as bad as he seems.”

“Yes – so am I,” said Guy, bending over the knee-high fence to stretch his gluteus group.

“Hey Al,” called Richard from the sofa, “have you seen my ferret?”

She turned to Guy as he flung a leg over his bike seat. “Alright – make it 80 bucks.”

The birds were a-tweeting. The trees were a-swaying. A perfect day to bury Mum down behind the shed.

Guy hung out the bunting.

The doctor, the undertaker and Richard waited silently as Alison dragged Mum by the feet, down the back stairs and across the grass.

The only hitch was Mum’s arm tangling with the cat-flap in the screen door, but on the whole it went well, Alison thought.

“Hmmm,” said the doctor, forcing back the lantana with his bottom as he crouched to examine the body.

“So doctor is there any hope?” asked Alison.

“No, I’m afraid she’s completely dead,” said the doc.

“Are you sure?” Alison pressed.

“Of course I’m sure – she’s been dead for two and a half days!”

Best to check, thought Alison. There’s a lot riding on this – 80 bucks a week for a start!

“Can we get a second opinion?” asked Richard.

“Sure,” said the doctor. “The undertaker’s pretty experienced with dead people.”

The undertaker stepped forward and glanced at the body. “Yes – the deceased is definitely dead.”

“Yeah, well you would say that, dickhead,” said Richard.

“Richard! Not in front of Mother,” said Alison.

Richard sneered at the undertaker. Bloody ulterior motive, he thought, and pulled out his Nintendo, with headphones this time, suitable deference to the occasion.

Together the doctor and undertaker folded Mum into her box. Alison lovingly placed one final Polish salami sandwich onto her mother’s chest. Head bowed, she stepped back into Guy’s waiting arm.

“How touching, he said.

Alison nodded pensively, her smile quivering ever so slightly. The undertaker set the lid on the coffin and hammered in the nails.

The doctor removed his stethoscope in reverence as the undertaker commenced a Bible reading that Alison had picked out the night before with a pin.

“And Balaam smote his ass. Three times did he smite his ass, until his ass could be smote no longer, did he smite his ass ...”

And the sun beat down.

The flannelette-lined coffin warmed.

The cheese on the sandwich began to melt.

The coffin jostled towards its final resting place to strains of Vengeance’s ‘Crush the Head of Baby Jesus’, which Guy assumed was his cue to enthusiastically stretch his groin.

Alison smiled, nodded.

And Richard could have sworn he heard amid the beeps and zaps in his headphones, the voice of his mother yelling, “Not the salami! Not the salami!”

He momentarily put the Nintendo on pause to listen.

“Whatever.”