

Chapter 1 *The fridge door*

Marina looked at the fridge for a moment and then read out the list of words written on the fridge door:

washing up after a meal
vacuum cleaning
ironing
cleaning
shopping

This was her ‘top five’. It was a bit like the ‘top ten’ on the radio. You know, the best selling records of the week. The only difference was that her ‘top five’ was actually her ‘bottom five’. Let me explain. The thing that was top of her list was actually the thing she hated doing the most.

Sometimes it was very difficult to decide which *one* of the five she really hated the most. Then she might put two things in first place. Or three things. Sometimes she really wanted to put them all in first place. She hated all of them. She hated all kinds of housework. Full stop.

There were just two reasons why she did not put everything in first place. Reason one: the fridge door was not wide enough. Reason two: changing the ‘top five’ was one of the only things that she enjoyed doing in the kitchen. It gave her the time to make a cup of coffee and drink it slowly, and it gave her time to think. Sometimes

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she played a game with herself and moved the letters around to make other words, words describing more interesting activities, like:

move out of the village
go back to London
find a job and meet fun-loving people

The idea of the game was to use all the letters on the fridge to make new words. Once she used nearly all of them but then found that the letters she had left spelt out the words:

leave Tom

She put the letters back as they had been. She hated housework but she loved Tom. She did not want to leave him.

Tom and Marina had been married now for almost three years. The first two and a half years in London. Wonderful London. Fun London. Things-to-do and people-to-meet London. TOO-FAR-AWAY-LONDON!! They now lived in a small village called Felton, near Cambridge. They had lived here, in the middle of nowhere land, for ninety-two days and (looking at the clock) four hours, thirty-eight minutes.

She looked again at the fridge door. The letters had little magnets on the back so that when you put them on anything metal they stayed there. Marina thought about what other people did with them. Leave little messages for their husbands and wives, like: 'Dear Bill, Your dinner is in

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the cooker, *I am in the West Indies*’ or ‘The cat ran away from home. I have decided to join him.’ When Tom had seen the list of words Marina had put on the fridge door he smiled and said:

‘So this is your “things to do” list. Good idea.’

And then he added:

‘There are two “u”s in “vacuum”.’

When she explained to Tom about her ‘top five’ he thought for a moment. Then he looked sad and put his arm around her.

‘Oh, you poor thing. I’m sorry. I know it’s difficult for you to get used to living here, but you are not too unhappy, are you? Give it a little time. Maybe you could find something to do. Get a job in the village. Have coffee mornings for the other women. Start playing golf.’

Tom was making another list for her and she soon stopped listening. He enjoyed making lists. Things to do at work. Things to do at home. Things to read. He even made lists of other lists he would like to make when he had more time.

When they could not decide how to spend their bank holidays he would make a list of things they could do. Sometimes he spent the day just making a list of what they could do. By the time he had finished it was too late to go anywhere or do anything. This did not really matter as it always seemed to rain on bank holidays anyway. He made lists of places they could visit. He made lists of restaurants they could stop at on the way to those places. He made lists of things they could eat at those restaurants. Lists of friends they could invite to their house for dinner. This last list was very short. They had no friends in the

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village. There was no-one of their age in the village. Everyone was older. Even the grandchildren of the people who lived in the village were probably older than they were.

Tom went through his list of things she could do in the village. Marina did not speak. He talked, she listened. He made lists, she listened. But she did think about what he was saying and the lists he made.

Find a job in the village? There was one shop in the village. There was also a café that opened in the summer. Mrs Pringle-Smythe was the manager of both of these places and she didn't seem to need anyone else. Not many people lived in the village and not many people passed through the village and no tourists came to the village. Well, tourists came to the village if they had lost their way. So the shop and the café were not very busy, and there was nowhere else in the village to work.

Coffee mornings? The women in the village probably enjoyed coffee mornings. The women she had met always enjoyed talking about the weather. They got very excited talking about the weather. They often compared the weather now with the weather when they were young, many, many years ago. For example, the women would say:

‘Oh, it’s not like it used to be. When we were young it was always hot in summer – long, hot, summer days. Do you remember, Susan, how hot it used to be?’

‘Of course I do, Sally. And the winters were lovely too, short, cold days. And there was always snow on Christmas Day. But now, well, you never know what the weather’s going to be like, do you? It’s the end of the world.’

Or the women got sad, and sometimes almost angry as they talked about how the village had changed (and all the changes were bad changes!).

Marina had no idea what they were talking about. Nothing had changed in the village since Tom and Marina had come to live here. Well, that was not quite true. There was a new sign for the National Lottery outside the village shop now. The women were probably thinking about that! Nothing else had changed since Queen Victoria had passed through the village as a young child almost two hundred years ago. (Her driver was new and they had got very lost.)

Start playing golf? For Marina, if there was one thing she did not understand about men, and actually there were many things she did not understand about men, it was why they got so excited running after balls. Little balls, big balls, round balls, not quite round balls, soft balls, hard balls. And when they were tired of running after balls or too old to run, they *walked* slowly after balls. Balls!

She looked again at the fridge door. Poor Tom. He was so busy with his new job that he did not see how bored she was becoming, how unhappy she was.

She put 'ironing' at the top of the list on the fridge. Then she walked over to the ironing board, which stood in the corner of the kitchen. She picked up a shirt and looked at it. She could not remember if she had already ironed this one. She probably had ironed it but it still looked as if someone had been playing football with it.

Balls, she thought, and smiled to herself. She looked at the shirt again.

She remembered once ironing a shirt. First she ironed one side, then she turned it over and ironed the other side.