

Stuck Between A Rock... *(A Short Story)*

By Antony Simpson

About The Author



Antony Simpson is a Reader and Writer from the UK. He has been telling the story of his life on his blog (www.antonysimpson.com) for sometime. *Stuck Between A Rock...* is the first short story he has ever written.

About This Story

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Stuck Between A Rock...

Gina sat on the bed and twirled her engagement ring around her finger. *How can I tell him that I can't marry him? It's not that I don't want to, it's just...* The chime of the doorbell from downstairs interrupted her thoughts. She heard more party guests arrive and be greeted by Tom. She stood up looking at her new red dress that was made of a silk like material in the full-length mirror.

Fits perfectly, she thought to herself.

She to smiled to herself in the mirror, and saw her lips expand upwards but the smile did not meet her eyes. She grabbed her Dior perfume from her dresser, gave two quick squirts and headed downstairs.

As she descended the stairs, she saw *him*. Tom's mischievous hazel eyes met hers. She thought he looked absolutely divine in his white shirt, grey tie, black trousers with matching shoes and an oversized buckled belt that had a poker design on. His wavy hair was longer than she would have liked curling upwards at its tips which rested on his neck. As she came to the last step of the stairs he said,

"Hey Baby, ready to do the rounds?"

She flashed her smile, "Yep."

Tom stepped into the living room with Gina close behind.

"Congratulations!" a deep voice boomed across the room over the din. Tom turned grasping the large man's hand tightly

"Thanks Dad."

Behind him a short small woman followed with the same wavy hair as Tom's. The size of Gina's smile increased,

"Thank you Gregory" she said before she glanced at the wife "and you too Linda."

"We're so pleased for you both." Gregory bellowed.

Behind Gregory and Linda a queue of well wishers had began to form.

"Greg we better let them greet their other guests." Linda said an octave above a whisper.

"What?" Gregory turned to his wife and then glanced behind her.

"Oh yes. Catch up with you later." Gregory looked down towards his glass.

"We're going for a refill." He turned without waiting for a response and began to barge through the queue towards the kitchen; followed by Linda.

"Gina. Tom." Julie greeted them before she enveloped them into a hug. Gina was like a carbon copy of the woman in front of her; the same auburn hair, distinctive emerald eyes and heart-shaped face. The distinguishable difference between them was that Julie had visible crows feet around her eyes.

"Mum." Gina pleaded to be released from her mother's tight grasp.

Julie complied and released them with some words of congratulations.

Gina noticed her Aunt Jean stood behind her mother.

"Aunt Jean." She said and stepped forward to hug her. Aunt Jean's difference in her appearance was her age she being the older of the two sisters and a small scar on her left cheek. Aunt Jean's wore a long purple gypsy skirt and an ethic style top.

"Hello darling. Lovely to see you and many congratulations." Aunt Jean said.

Stuck Between A Rock...

Aunt Jean looked towards Tom and said “Congratulations, you’re a very lucky man.”

He slid his hand across the small of Gina’s back before placing his hand gently but firmly on her side. He pulled her slightly closer to him and said, “Yes, I am.”

“So go on then...show us the ring?” Julie said to Gina.

Tom laughed to himself and mockingly rolled his eyes.

She held out her hand in response.

“Oh it’s beautiful. Look Jean! Look at the size of that diamond! I’m so happy for you both.”

“Indeed, it’s stunning.” Aunt Jean said as she looked at the ring.

“Tom boy! Get over here!” One of his friends shouted across the room.

“Do you mind?” Tom asked Gina.

“No, not at all.” She replied smiling.

“Come on, we’ll get you a drink.” Aunt Jean linked Gina’s arm. As they walked towards the kitchen Aunt Jean said,

“You must come round and visit me in the next few weeks. I want to show you some photos from my latest adventure to *Saudi*. You know where I live, so pop round any time.”

Her shock was visible on her face, but she quickly regained her composure.

Aunt Jean never invited anyone around these days; but when she had been younger things had been different. Gina had practically lived there at one point in her childhood; loving Aunt Jean’s seemingly magical house that was full of mysterious objects that she had brought back from her travels to the Middle East.



Gina woke with a pounding head. She heard movement at the other side of the plum coloured bedroom. She groaned as she tried to lift her head from the pillow.

“Morning sexy.” Tom smiled coming out of the ensuite in nothing but his black Calvin Kline fitted boxers.

“Some party last night, eh?” She croaked, her throat was so dry.

“Yeah. Your mum sure knows how to drink. I had to stop her calling dial-a-booze.”

“My head.” She groaned.

“Water?” He asked.

“Yes please.” She said, covering her head with the duvet to stop the light that streamed through the window. As she heard him return she removed the duvet from her head.

He put a glass down on the bedside table, went round to his side of the bed and climbed back in cuddling her.

“Do you remember when we met?” He whispered to her.

She turned to meet his eyes. “Yes, of course I do, you rescued me on the train.”

She thought back to that day, she’d rushed to the platform and jumped on the train just in time. Her stomach was full of butterflies as she had an interview at Diageo Gadgets Ltd.

Tom interrupted her thoughts, “You’d forgot your purse. I had to pretend to my Supervisor that you were my spouse.”

Stuck Between A Rock...

She remembered that she frantically searched through her bag and looked up to see him in front of her stood watching as if captivated. Her eyes let out a silent plea.

"Yes well, I remember as soon as your Supervisor moved out of ears shot you being quite insistent on getting my number." She said.

"Can you blame me?" Tom said raising his hand back to his curl of hair. "You were hot. Besides, I knew two things when I looked into your eyes. One that I'd met the woman I had to marry," He paused, "and two that she was also forgetful."

She laughed and gave him a long, slow intimate kiss.

"I've gotta get ready for work. You rest, you've got a lot on tomorrow with the interview and all." He stood up to get his uniform.

"Tom." She said. She grabbed his waist and used all her strength to pull him back onto the bed. He fell back laughing; she had been doing this since they first got together always to steal a kiss.



On a bright morning Gina entered the Georgian square. She stopped, took a deep breath and tightened her smile. In the centre of the square stood a round fountain with water flowing out four lions mouths and some benches positioned close by. All of the former houses' ground floors had been taken up by retail businesses. There was a Costa Coffee, Picasso an Arts shop, The Look - her favourite clothes shop and Attire a men's suit hire shop. Dotted between these shops where Georgian style front doors of various regal colours that gave access to offices on the floors above.

She had got the job in the Sales Department at Diageo Gadgets Ltd the day she'd met Tom. Diageo Gadgets Ltd sold gadgets and gizmos like the sort of things you'd see on the *BBC's Dragon's Den*. When the position came up for Director of Sales she had applied.

She wore a charcoal grey pinstripe suit jacket with matching pencil skirt. A small black briefcase-styled bag completed her outfit. She checked her watch, *Time for a coffee.*

She passed Picasso on her way to Costa and glanced into the window. She saw an array of canvases, tubs of paints and brushes. She stopped moving forward when in the window display she saw a three-legged easel with a sign that said 'Sale.' Then Costa's logo caught the corner of her eye and she continued on.

Costa's pre-work morning rush had passed and she ordered a skinny latte to take out. She paid for her drink, collected it and headed towards the exit. She caught sight of a loose thread on the sleeve of her jacket and as she did someone collided with her, sending a splatter of coffee over her blouse. She looked up and was caught by a pair of mesmerising bright blue eyes.

"Oh I'm so sorry, I wasn't looking where I was going." Blue Eyes said.

Blue Eyes was tall with short cropped hair. She noticed that he was looking down towards her rubbing the back of his head. Blue Eyes wore an expensive suite.

Say something.

Stuck Between A Rock...

She smiled, "Be more careful next time."

"You look like a Dalmatian." He said with a chuckle.

She lost her composure and let out a scowl directed at him.

He held up his hands. "O.K now more like a spotted leopard defending it's cubs. Look I'm sorry, if you want me to pay for the dry cleaning..."

"It's fine." She interrupted fixing a closed lipped smile on her face. "Now if you'll excuse me?"

"Sure." He said moving out of the doorway and with that she left.

She stood by the fountain and surveyed the damage to her blouse. Coffee had splattered the front of her blouse with a big patch on her left breast.

She sat down on a bench and thought about her one competitor for the job, Matt. Matt had never worked in Sales and had a bad case of psoriasis, which he constantly scratched when he got nervous. She glanced at her watch, nearly time for her interview.

Gina headed towards a royal blue door in the square and then pressed the intercom for Diageo Gadgets Ltd.

Rosa the receptionist answered "Diageo Gadgets Limited."

"Hi Rosa. It's Gina. I'm here for my interview."

"Pull the door." Rosa replied, followed by a buzzing noise.

She climbed the stairs to the third floor where Rosa met her.

"Hi Sweetheart. Ready?" Rosa asked.

"Yep." She fixed a smile.

Rosa led her through to an open plan office space. She glanced the empty desk for the new Director of Sales and briefly imagined herself sat there. She kept pace with Rosa until they reached the other end of the office where a glass wall stood with the blinds closed. She knew that this was Bob Harley's office, the Chief Executive.

Rosa knocked on the door and pushed on the large stainless steel handle.

"Your first candidate is here." Rosa said and Gina overheard Bob's deep voice say "Send her in."

She tightened her smile, pushed on the door and stepped inside. There bearded Bob and stood to greet her.

She took his hand and said, "Mr Harley." She gave him a firm but feminine handshake.

"Please sit." He said, gestured towards a chair and sat back down.

"Now, I know you know us but let me formally introduce you. I'm Bob Harley Chief Executive and this is Emma Davies our Director of HR. Emma just here to make sure that the interviews are conducted impartially. Impartiality is important, particularly when two of the three candidates are internal."

Emma nodded in agreement.

Three candidates? Only two are internal?

"So let's get started with the first question shall we?" He stroked his beard.

"As Director of Sales, what would be your strategy to increase sales?"

"In my first year here at Diageo I used Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms to increase sales by 200%." She lent forward slightly and stopped as she saw that Bob wanted to interrupt.

Stuck Between A Rock...

“We know about your impressive use of the social media platforms...it was an innovative idea and did massively increase sales. But what I want to know...is have you any other ideas for increasing Sales going forward? We are in a difficult economic climate and people don't have the same amount of money they used to have to buy luxuries.” He asked.

Her smile tightened,

“Well, I still don't think we are using our social media platforms to their full potential, there's a number of strategies that would increase the Sales from Twitter, Facebook and other social media.”

Bob listened and then sat back. She felt her chances of her getting the job fade.

“OK, we'll move on.”

The questioning continued and Bob asked sort of questions she had expected. Then he explained what would happen next.

“We've got some more interviews to do and then we'll give you a call this afternoon. Is it alright to call you on your mobile?”

“Yes, perfect.” She smiled before she thanked them for their time.

Rosa met her outside of the room. “How did it go?” She asked.

“Could have gone better.” She answered.

“Oh I'm sure you were fine.” Rosa said, she led her to the door where they said their goodbyes.

She began to descend the stairs.

Even though that was the worst interview ever, Matt's will probably be worse. So there's no competition there. But who is this external person?

She hoped that this external person, whoever they were would interview like Matt.

She reached the bottom of the stairs and pressed the green button to release the door. She pulled on the handle and stepped out into the square crashing into someone's body.

“Wow twice in one day! It is my lucky day.” Blue Eyes said.

Gina flustered said, “What are you doing here?”

Blue Eyes chuckled, “I'm here for an interview.”

She gave Blue Eyes the tightest smile she had made all day.

Blue Eyes glanced at his watch and said,

“I don't want to be rude, but if you'll excuse me? I don't want to be late.”

“Sure.” She said moving to the side.

“Thank you.” Blue Eyes said with a smile and entered the building.

In the square she walked over to the nearest bench and slumped down letting out a loud sigh. She knew that Blue Eyes or whatever his name is, was up in Diageo being interviewed for the same position she wanted.

He just oozes charisma and for all I know he's already a Director of Sales somewhere else.

Then she spotted The Look.



She entered The Look and just inside the entrance her eyes lit up as she spotted the most *gorgeous* summer dress she had ever seen. Made from soft white cotton, with small butterflies in the primary colours dotted over the

Stuck Between A Rock...

dress, it called to her. She picked up the dress as well as some pastel yellow flip-flops.

As she head towards the dressing room she shouted,

“Jo, I’m just trying these on! I need to get out of these clothes!”

She was a regular customer at The Look and knew all the Sales Assistants by name.

She gave herself a spin in the butterfly dress. It was exquisite, the cotton made her feel much cooler. It gave freedom to her arms and was just the right length stopping just before her knees. The interview seemed like a lifetime ago as she popped on the flip-flops and stuffed her interview clothes into her black bag. She smiled to her new dress, a smile without the tightness that it had earlier. *Shopping makes everything feel better! I need a bag to match the dress.*

She wondered around The Look for some time and looked down at the pile of items in her hands: a skinny light blue belt, a pair of short shorts, a pastel yellow bag with circular bamboo handles and a pair of pink stilettos. She managed to manoeuvre her wrist to see her watch.

Shit.

She thought realising it was four o’clock.

The post.

Tom would be home in an hour.

She darted for the checkout nearly knocking a middle-aged woman over to stop her getting their first. She moved forward and dumped the items on the desk.

“I’ll take them all! Just hurry.”

Jo quickly and efficiently scanned and bagged everything up; apart from the butterfly dress and flip-flops she was wearing. For these Jo came from behind the desk with the barcode scanner and beeped them.

“That will be five hundred and twenty two pounds and fifty pence please.” Jo said.

She had already pulled her purse out of her bag while Jo had been scanning. Her hand hesitated over the card in the last slot for a second before she pulled it out and shoved it into the reader. She tapped in her pin when requested to do so and then tapped her fingers on the counter waiting for it to be processed. As soon as the machine beeped, she pulled out her card and put it away. Jo popped the receipt into one of the bags. She grabbed the bags and darted for the door.

“Thanks Jo! See you again!”

She freed her keys from her bag and manoeuvred it into the lock. As she pushed down on the handle and the door opened she saw the post sat on the mat. She quickly scooped up the envelopes, aware that he could be home at any minute. She sorted through the post leaving his on the sideboard. She dashed upstairs The Look bags and her post still in hand.

In the bedroom to the left there were two doors, the first one was a walk-in cupboard that had become her wardrobe and the second door led that to the

Stuck Between A Rock...

ensuite. She threw the letters on to the bed and opened the cupboard. Inside Tom had placed rails either side that were crammed with her bland work clothes, brightly coloured dresses and even the odd fancy dress costume. Above the rails on shelves were various bags. Below the rails were shoes, most were loose and thrown in, but some were in boxes. She always put new purchases away before she did anything else, removing the tags as she did so. She rummaged on the floor for a shoebox and pulled out the one she had been looking for.

She took the box and opened it while sat on the bed. Inside were envelopes containing credit card and store card statements. What seemed like hundreds of them. She picked up her post she'd brought upstairs. She began to open the first of the two envelopes. The first was a statement for her The Look store card, she read: *Balance: £5, 270.75*. She made a mental note of the minimum payment and then placed it into the box. She opened the next envelope, doing the same. She read: *Balance: £11, 127.20*.

Just one more to go.

She thought remembering her third card; the one from her bank that she'd probably just maxed out in The Look.

She sighed deeply and rubbed her temples with two fingers. She thought about what she had bought and felt a twinge of guilt.

Did I really need all that stuff?

She thought about Tom. She felt stuck between a rock and a hard place. When they first started dating one thing came very apparent to her early on: he was a saver and she was a spender. She never set out to deliberately hide her debts from him; she had intended to tell him when they got serious. But before she knew it, he'd asked her to move in and she'd said yes. Since then she had got into a habit making sure she was home before him to intercept the post. Her debts were the reason she felt she couldn't marry him and give him the life he craved; yet at the same time she wanted to be with him. She worried that if she told him now after a few years of keeping it to herself he might leave her.

I can't keep it a secret forever she thought.

I need to tell him the truth and soon.

Her phone rang and her whole body tensed up as a reminder her interview. She glanced at the phone and relaxed a little seeing Tom's name and photo. "Hi." She answered.

"Hiya babe. I'm just ringing to let you know I'll be home a little later tonight, we've been short staffed and I've had to cover."

She glanced at the box of statements, walked over to the bedroom door and closed it.

"That's OK. What time will you be home?" She smiled.

"In a few hours. About half eight. Oh how did the interview go?" Tom asked.

She let out a groan and covered her eyes with her free hand.

"Awe sweetheart. Do you want me to pick up Ben and Jerry's on the way home?"

Stuck Between A Rock...

"Yes please. Then we can talk..." She briefly glanced at the shoebox of statements and turned away so that she couldn't see it. "...and I'll tell you all about it."

"Cool. Gotta go, see you in a bit." He said and with that he was gone. Her mobile immediately rang again, this time she didn't need to check the screen to know it said "Bob Harley, Chief Executive. Diageo Gadgets Ltd." Blue Eyes or Sam as he was called had got the Director of Sales job.



A month had passed and it was gone six o'clock in the Diageo office. Three people were left in the office, Bob who Gina saw hunched over his desk on the phone and Sam who sat there concentrated on his computer screen. Since five o'clock when the work force had began to drift off home, the only sounds between Sam and her were key tapping and the clicking of mice.

"Gina" he said as he stood up and walked round to her.

"Yes." She said and fixed her smile.

He sat down on the chair next to hers.

"Look, I know that you applied for this job."

"Oh."

"Yes, Bob told me all about it. But I know your record and I think you're brilliant. Increasing sales by using social media was really innovative and clever. Apparently Diageo might not of survived that year with out that sales increase."

What? Nobody ever told me that.

She opened her mouth but then closed it again.

"I think if we work together, we'll be able to achieve great things. So, can we start again? What do ya think?"

She paused for a second before she let out a quiet, "Yes."

"Good." He stood up and gestured for her to do the same, his lips twitching into a smile.

She stood and he held out his hand, "Sam Smith, a pleasure to meet you."

She took his hand and pumped it up and down slowly, "Gina Marie Cooke. Likewise."

They released their hands.

"Well Gina, would you like to come out for dinner? As a new work colleague I'd like to get to know you better. Plus there's this Italian restaurant near High Street where I'm kind of a regular." He said.

"I'd love too." She replied.

They left the building out into the square and headed past the ground floor shops onto High Street. They walked to the end of the street where most of the pubs and restaurants were located. He took her down a little cobbled side street and there at the end was a small Italian restaurant.

Her eye absorbed the setting. Straight in front of them were some stone stairs with a metal handrail and to the right set into a beautiful old terraced house was the Italian restaurant. She looked inside and noticed the tables were tightly arranged but in a way that made it seem cosy rather than cramped. In the two windows there were tables for two, presumably for couples.

"Wow. I didn't know this place even existed." She said.

Stuck Between A Rock...

“No, not a lot of people do. It’s off High Street, but I guess most commuters would know about it.” He said.

“What? Why?” She asked.

He gestured towards the stone stairs. “That leads to a bridge, over the bridge is the train station.”

“Ah I see.”

“Shall we go inside?” He asked.

She nodded and inside they went.

Inside they were met by a slender-bodied Waiter.

“Table for two.” Sam said.

The waiter showed them to a table in front of the window.

“Can I get you some drinks?” The Waiter asked.

“I’ll have my usual.” Sam said making direct eye contact with him.

“And for the lady?” He asked pulling out pad and pen out of his pocket and scrawling.

“Your usual?” She asked Sam.

“White Wine.” He replied looking at her before turned his attention back to the Waiter.

“Can I have large glass of red, please?” She asked the Waiter.

The Waiter looked a little confused and then looked to Sam, “A glass?”

“Two bottles. One white and one red.” He answered.

“Ah...very well. I’ll be back shortly.” The Waiter said and as he left Sam’s eye lingered on him, before he turned his attention back to Gina.

They began to talk with Sam taking the lead on the conversation topics. The Waiter occasionally interrupted them; first to take their food order and then when he brought their courses out to them.

Gina laughed out loud as Sam entertained her with what he thought about some of his new work colleagues.

She asked him about his Sales & Marketing Strategy presentation and his ideas for increasing sales. He kept tight-lipped about both.

As the alcohol was having more of an effect on her she turned the conversation onto more personal matters. She asked him lots of personal questions: Did he have a girlfriend? No. Why did he go for the job at Diageo? He liked new challenges and the wages were good. Does he live with his parents? No, he’s not close to them. What would be his biggest achievement in life? To find happiness.

He returned her first question back to her.

“So do you have a boyfriend?”

“Yes Tom.” She told him about the difficulties she’d been having with Tom in the last few weeks and once she started she couldn’t stop. She told him about the arguments Tom and she had; mainly about petty things like the washing up.

The Waiter approached with their deserts. They both had opted for the Banana Split. There was a small comfortable silence while they both devoured their desert.

Stuck Between A Rock...

After they had finished and the waiter had taken their dishes; they were finishing their wine when Sam leaned forward and placed his hand on hers that was on the table.

"Are you happy with him?" He asked.

She withdrew her hand, "Look, I'm sorry if you've got the wrong idea..." She stopped as she heard him laugh.

"What?" She said and a tight smile appeared on her face.

"Let's just say you aren't my type..." He said.

"The food here is great, but I'd much prefer the Waiter. If you get what I mean?" He winked.

She looked at him, flicked her eyes over to the Waiter and then back to him.

"Oh." She responded.

He chuckled and glanced at his watch. "Come on. Let's get out of here it's late."

"I'm going to be so hung over the morning." She said with a slight slur.

He smiled, "Relax. Nobody will be noticing you tomorrow morning. All eyes will be on me for my *big* presentation."

He paid the bill and they left. They walked back onto High Street to the Taxi rank. He put her into a taxi and recommended that she drink a pint of water before bed.

She paid the taxi driver and got out of the taxi. She noticed that the house was in darkness. She took out her key and focused her attention on the lock to get the key in the door. Once in, she turned the key and stepped inside. She remembered what Sam had said about the pint of water, so she went into the living room and switched the light on. She sprang back, startled at seeing Tom sat in the chair.

"Tom, you made me jump. What are you doing here sat in the dark?"

"I saw you with him, in the restaurant tonight." His face was tight and his tone of voice lacked any warmth.

"Oh you mean Sam. He's my new boss, we were just talking work." She said.

"You're having an affair with him aren't you? Or at least planning too?" He said.

Her body let a giggle escape and she put her hand to her mouth.

"Oh you think this is *fucking* funny do you!" He bellowed.

She felt as though she had been jolted back into a sober state of mind.

"Were you spying on me?"

"Spying on you? No, I was on my way to surprise you. One of the lads owed me a favour, so I asked him to cover the rest of my shift. I know things have been *difficult* between us these last few weeks.... I bought flowers...."

He gestured to a bunch of flowers on the sideboard that had dried up due to the central heating and having not been put in water.

"Oh Tom." She went over to the flowers and touched their withered heads.

"Gina, Are you cheating on me with him?" His voice was so low and deep; she could barely make out what he had said.

"No! And for your information Sam is *gay*."

"Whatever, I'm going to bed. We'll talk tomorrow when you're sober."

He winced as if he could smell the alcohol on her breath and strode upstairs.

She gave him a few minutes, drinking her pint of water in the kitchen. Then she climbed the stairs, got undressed and slipped into bed.

Stuck Between A Rock...

His back was to her as he did often these days; whether they'd had an argument or not. She missed the cuddles, pillow talk and spooning they had shared at the beginning of their relationship.



She woke up to the sound of her alarm on her bedside table. She clicked it off and rolled to see Tom's side of the bed empty. She rolled back over to her side of the bed and as she did she noticed a glass of fresh water he must have put there. She took a gulp and then stood up to get some breakfast and then get ready for work.

She had tried to call Tom on her way to work, but there had been no answer. *He'll be busy with work*, she tried to convince herself.

Or he doesn't want to talk to you, her thoughts betrayed her.

She headed into the office, being greeted by Sam once she got to her desk.

"Hey. Wow you look..." He struggled to find the words, "...rough."

"Thanks." She said flashing a half smile at him.

"Coffee?"

"Yes please." She answered.

He disappeared for a few minutes and then returned with her coffee.

She took a sip, *perfect*.

He went round to his desk and sat down. He caught her eye over the desks and said to her "Now don't forget the presentation at 10am, I need you there."

At five to ten she followed in the rest of the Sales Team into the massive meeting room. Sam had casually strolled in at ten to ten to set up. She took a seat and looked around the room. At the back of the room, Bob Harley was there talking with some of the other Directors who Sam had invited. At the front of meeting table, the Sales Team and her sat. There was a quiet chatter that alternated between talking about what they expected from Sam's presentation and their plans for the weekend. He stood at the front with a laptop hooked up to a projector to displaying his presentation on the wall. He looked around the room, "Right, I think we're all here. Shall we make a start?"

The chatter immediately died down and all eyes turned to him.

"Good morning, my name's Sam Smith and I'm the new Director of..." He was interrupted by the sound of a mobile phone.

Gina's smile appeared tight as she realised it was hers, she looked down at the screen and intended to clear the call. But when she saw that it was Tom she looked towards Sam and gave him an apologetic smile. "I'm sorry, I've got to take this."

He nodded. She stepped out of the room and closed the door behind her.

She slid her finger across the screen.

"Hi..." She had barely got the word out before his voice boomed at her,

"Gina what the hell is going on! I came home from work because of signalling problems and the post had arrived."

Shit.

Stuck Between A Rock...

He continued, "I opened a letter from the bank, thinking it was mine. After all, all the time you've lived here you've never had any post from my bank. And you owe them over three thousand pounds! Please tell me it's a mistake?"

"Where are you now? Still at home?" She asked.

"Yes." He answered.

"I'll be right there. I'm leaving now. We need to talk."

"For *fuck sake*. It isn't a mistake is it?"

She hung up.

She opened the door to the meeting room as quietly as she could and attempted to make eye contact with Sam. He finished what he was saying and paused to look in her direction.

"I'm really sorry." She said. "But I need to leave, family emergency."

Sam gave her a hard stir, then his features relaxed a little and he raised one eyebrow at her.

She gave a pleading look and he nodded. She closed the door and headed for the exit.

She arrived home to find Tom with his back to her in the kitchen, focused on the credit card bill.

"Hi." She said.

He let out a sigh.

"Look, I meant to tell you about it." She said.

He turned to look at her, his eyes seemingly weakened. "I can sort this out. I have some savings. I was saving for our wedding and a house. But I can pay this off instead."

"Tom, there's something I need to tell you." She gulped, her mouth suddenly dry.

"What is it?" He asked.

"Wait here." She ran upstairs to her cupboard in the bedroom and found the shoebox. She slowly stepped downstairs and then placed it on the kitchen unit close to him. She opened the lid and stepped back as if it contained a poisonous snake.

He looked at the statements in the box. He pulled out the first few and took the statements out of the envelopes.

"*Christ* Gina. Did you ever plan on telling me about these?" He glared at her.

"I..." Gina said and opened her mouth but then closed it again.

"You kept these secret from me the whole *fuckin*g time? What the hell did you spend all this money on?" He said clenching his fists.

"I...I don't know. I didn't mean to spend that much, it just sort of got out of hand."

"This is way more than out of hand!" He bellowed at her.

"I'm sorry." She said quietly.

"Do I even *fuckin*g know you?" He said before he let out a frustrated growl. He flung open the cupboard nearest him and threw the contents out onto the floor.

As she saw and heard cups, plates, cutlery smash and bang to the floor she stepped back to the doorway.

He continued going through cupboard after cupboard and threw anything he could get his hands on out onto the floor. His face was red with rage and his

Stuck Between A Rock...

body pumped full of adrenaline. When he had run out of cupboards and was surrounded by a broken mess on the floor, he looked at her and said, "I'm going to go to the pub."

She was still shocked at his rage, but quietly said, "No, stay here. I'll go."



She headed for the place that always made her feel safe as a child: Aunt Jean's house. Aunt Jean lived in a small terraced house that had a small flagged front garden that was enclosed within a wall and a gate. She opened the gate and used the knocker on the door.

Aunt Jean shouted, "I'm coming!"

Through the two hazed glass panels she could see a figure search through the coats hung up on the wall. As she heard the key turn in the lock as tears sprang from out of her eyes.

Aunt Jean opened the door.

"Goodness me child. Come in." Aunt Jean said. Aunt Jean directed her to sit in the living room while she went into the kitchen. Aunt Jean brought through a teapot, two cups and saucers, a bowl of sugar, jug of milk and two teaspoons – all in a matching eastern design on a tray.

Aunt Jean sat on a chair opposite the sofa and made the tea. She handed Gina a cup and said,

"Now, why don't you tell me what's happened?"

She explained about the credit cards and how Tom had found out about them.

Once she had finished, Aunt Jean stood up and said,

"I've got something to show you."

Aunt Jean headed for a bookshelf and rummaged for a while before she spotted what she had been looking for. "Aha, here it is."

Aunt Jean pulled out what appeared to be a book and handed it to her.

The book had a photograph of Gina as a child on the front and gold embossed text below read 'My Photograph Album.' She looked up at Aunt Jean who glanced at the photo album as if to say "Go on. Take a look."

She opened it to the first page, there she saw herself as a child painting. She flicked through the album seeing photo after photo of her as a child. Most of them were of her painting or sculpting something out of clay.

She continued to flick through the pages and saw her childhood self grow older to reach her teens. In these photos of her she clung to her boyfriend of the time with less of a smile.

She continued on until she got to the latest photo of her with Tom.

Aunt Jean interrupted her thoughts, "Gina darling, what do you see when you look at the photos of you as a child?"

"I see a very happy child."

"Why did you spend all that money on those credit cards?"

She looked up into her Aunt Jean's eyes and tears welled up.

"Because it made me feel better. Whenever anything wasn't going how I wanted it to or I was frustrated or upset, spending money made me feel better."

She realised for the first time that she had been unhappy for a long time and begun to sob.

Stuck Between A Rock...

Aunt Jean handed her a box of tissues and said, "Stay here for as long as you want. The guestroom is upstairs waiting for you."
"Thank you." She said as she dried her eyes.

Monday arrived and she was among the first to arrive at Diageo followed shortly afterwards by Sam. He came over to her.

"Everything OK?" He asked.

"I'm not sure to be honest. But it will be." She answered.

"Good. Can we meet this morning? I need to bring you up to speed on what you missed on Friday." He said.

"Sure." She replied. "But can I nip out for five minutes first?"

"Ok," Sam rubbed the back of his head. "See you in the meeting room in ten?"

"Without fail." She stood up and headed towards the exit. Once outside in the square she strode with purpose towards Picasso.



Dear Aunt Jean,

Thank you for your letter from India! From your photos it looks bright and warm, which is in contrast to the Winter here. Tom and I didn't work out; he couldn't get over my deceit. I can't thank you enough for giving me a place to stay!

At Diageo Sam's ideas have really taken off. He's had part of the offices transformed into a demonstration room. I take the lead in the demonstrations inviting members of the public through Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms. Once I've demonstrated a few gadgets, any they like they can buy and take home there and then. Sam takes the lead on his other idea, selling gadgets on TV shopping channels. He's brilliant at it! Between us we've increased sales and are interviewing next week for a few extra staff. Sam and I have become good friends.

Since the day I bought the easel at Picasso along with several canvases, paints and brushes, all I've done is paint! I forgot how much I loved to do it! I took my first finished piece into Picasso to show Mark (the owner). A customer in the shop wanted to buy it and I sold it for a good price. Mark put me in touch with a gallery and recently the few pieces they were displaying have sold. I've even been approached with a few commissions! I've cut down my hours at Diageo to paint more. Not only is the money I make from my artwork more than I would earn working the hours at Diageo, but it makes me happier.

Sam says he can see that I am happier. I asked him how and he said that my smile not only reaches my eyes but sparkles in them. When I smile now it feels like it beams out of me from somewhere deep inside. I don't spend like I used too and be assured that I have cut up those awful cards.

Write soon. With love,

Gina.