

French Beans & Inner Peace

By

Natascha Graham

INT. SITTING ROOM. MORNING.

Sitting curled up in an armchair or on the corner of a sofa.
Wearing a dressing gown or pyjamas holding a cup of tea.

WOMAN

I was in the Co-Op the other day. The big one in town. I was talking to my mum. On the phone. Seeings we're not allowed to go shopping together anymore. Which was a blessed relief at first until I realised I'd have to have her in my ear the whole way round and I wouldn't be able to concentrate on avoiding, people, shopping and not catching bloody Coronavirus from someone wearing a mask on their chin.

(PAUSE)

She's already lost the plot with this lockdown business. And it was my fault. Really. The shopping thing. I made the mistake of ringing her up to ask what sort of beans she wanted because they'd run out of French beans and she'd underlined French twice on the list. In pen. So she was obviously making a point. So I wanted to ask if any other bean would suffice...an error on my part that cost me the good part of an afternoon. (PAUSE) Before I'd even had the chance to mention the bean situation she was already off again, saying things like, "It's like it was during the war. There'll be rationing everything next. Ration books. One square of lavatory paper. (PAUSE) Each!

(PAUSE)

I didn't point out that she hadn't actually lived through any world wars, but I was obviously thinking it for a while because she said, "Are you listening?" and I said "Yes, Mum. I'm just-" and I wanted to say stressed. Depressed. Probably. But she'd only tell me not to be so bloody silly, or she'd say something useful like start thinking positive or become a Buddhist and I couldn't cope with that as well as the bean situation so I took my chance on mentioning it again. "Do you want green beans or runner beans?" I asked. I thought if I asked directly this time instead of explaining the situation I might get a straight answer.

(PAUSE)

"French beans," she says because she hasn't been listening, so I say, "They haven't got any Frech beans, Mum. They've got green beans and runner beans. And she says "Oh, don't bother" like it's my fault and then moves on to the next item on her list leaving me dithering by the tomatoes.

(PAUSE)

"What about sweetcorn? She asks. Have they got any sweetcorn? Only not the fresh stuff. The tinned. The fresh stuff gets stuck in my teeth." So I say, "Let me have a look", and she says, "Only if it's no bother", and I make the mistake of saying, "It's fine. Mum. I wanted to have a look for some tinned bits for Gillian anyway, so-" but she cuts me off

because I've mentioned Gillian and my mums already sniffing around that can of worms because Gillian's married to some abusive wanker and I'm (IMITATES HER MUM) clearly barking up the wrong tree with that one, and she says, "Gillian? Why can't Gillian do her own shopping?" And I say, "she can, I just thought I'd pick up a few things while I'm here. As a surprise. I can't imagine she's got much spare cash so I thought I'd help out and my mum does one of those "mmm"s that means she knows exactly what's going on and she doesn't approve, but thankfully she takes it upon herself to change the subject and asks if they've got any pork pies, the freshly made ones from the deli. The ones my dad likes with a bit of piccalilli. So I tell her the deli's not open and she says, "What do you mean it's not open?"

(PAUSE. SLOW INTAKE OF BREATH.)

I tell her I mean (SLOWLY) it's not open...there's a sign. I know there is because I've just passed it twice waiting for her to stop telling me about the war. But she doesn't believe me and asks, What does it say? (SARCASTIC) This sign? So I walk back over to the sign and I say, "It says it's not open" and she says, Well, what good is that? And I want to say I don't bloody know, but I decide to be tactful, "I think they're just focusing on essentials" but she's having none of that, "This is essential. To your dad." she says, Then there's one of those pauses again only this one goes on so long I thought she'd hung up, but then she asks, "Would you mind getting a jar of piccalilli anyway? (SARCASTIC. MAKING A POINT) If they have one?" She asks as if she thinks I'm just standing in front of the pork pies but I can't actually be bothered to buy them, so I ask her if she wants to text me a list so I can shop with both arms but that's a no because according to her it's easier like this otherwise she'll have no idea what they have and I could turn up with (IMITATES HER MUM) god knows what, and then she's going on about the beans again, just when I thought I was nearly done. Are you sure they haven't got any French beans? Have you asked? And I said no I haven't asked and I have no intention of asking - though I didn't say the last bit out loud. She says well, ask, you never know, so I say I will but I'll have to hang up which she agrees to but makes sure I'll ring her when I'm in the car so I can let her know how I get on, which I thought was a bit much considering I'm thirty-five and she only lives around the corner. By the time I've dialled and she's answered I'll be on her doorstep. But I agreed just to get her off the phone but I wasn't going to ask anyone so I bought a bag of green beans and pinched one of those paper bags so I could pour them in there in the car and say I found some loose. I haven't heard yet whether that worked or not...

