SUSAN: Every time I'm up Top Town for coffee with the girls the question is always asked: "How's Michael", they'll say. "Has he got a job yet or a girlfriend?" They all smile and then there's a general titter before Eileen takes a nibble of her Eccles cake and polishes things off with: "Left home yet has he?" I want to say, "has he hell as like" but I just laugh along , change the subject sharpish and ask how Eileen's piles are doing. I do worry about him still living at home with no job and no girlfriend. Maybe if his Dad was still around things would have been different. He needs geeing up. I mean he should have a job and a house and be married with kids at his age shouldn't he. No, I wouldn't say Michael is an embarrassment. More of a disappointment.

MICHAEL: I in the room Mother.

SUSAN: The truth hurts Michael. About time you heard it.

MICHAEL: Mother. You're supposed to record your thoughts when you're alone that's what the woman said. Like a diary. They edit it all after and put it together.

SUSAN: Alright, alright, clever. I'll edit you in a minute. Can I just remind you Michael...

MICHAEL: What?

SUSAN: You are forty one years of age my lad.

MICHAEL: And?

SUSAN: And? And? And ruddy everything. You're

MICHAEL: Any way I am going to move out.

SUSAN: Oh is this when NASA write back and say you've been accepted to be an astronaut?

MICHAEL: No. I have plans for all sorts of things.

SUSAN: Try putting some into action then!

MICHAEL: I'm off upstairs!

MICHAEL: Yeah I'm probably going to New York or something. Going to get a car like they did in Top Gear. A Cadillac , a Chevy or a pick up even. Wear a cowboy hat and drive across to er.... San Francisco I think. It's gonna be brilliant. Hot over there too. Might even just buy a motorbike and ride across the Rockies. Camp out at night. Light a fire and roast a couple of Wombats or something. Sleep under the stars and smoke me head off. Man it's gonna be brilliant. They drive on the left hand side of the road there you know. Yeah, gonna save up and take me driving test.

MICHAEL: Is she?

SUSAN: Oh yes moved to London and everything. No stigma these days. These peas have got mint in I think. So what's it to be?

MICHAEL: What?

SUSAN: Man or woman?

MICHAEL: Look I can find....

SUSAN: Man or woman? If you don't decide now I'll get you one of each and let nature decide.

MICHAEL: Woman.

SUSAN: Very well then. Watch this space. Now, do you want a warm Ribena?

MICHAEL: No.

SUSAN: I shouldn't blame him really. I mean his dad dying like that really affected him. He was there you see and saw it all. It was so unexpected. Being run over by yer own milk float. And right in the middle of our street. We still don't really know what happened but Mrs Dalkin at number 35 said he was trying to dislodge a branch from under the front axle when Michael

stood on the accelerator somehow. Apparently he was drinking from a bottle of silver top. Well he was only ten so we couldn't blame him. And what's done is done and there's no use crying over spilt....well you know.

So, I've been on the phone and things are in motion. Eileen says her niece is single and about the same age as Michael so that's a start. Works at Fiveways apparently; in that little bakery that serves them hot cross buns all year round. Not seen her there myself unless she's the Polish girl. Anyway, Eileen's going to e mail me a picture so I can size her up. A cv would be good. Mind you as long as she can walk and talk at the same time. I mean you can't be too picky at forty one can you? Then June Willy rang about going to Pennels for coffee Wednesday week and I happened to mention the predicament. She says that her neighbour has been single for five years. Nice woman she says. Forty three and keeps a lovely front garden. Works in Freeman's Dept store so she must be clean and well mannered. Her name's Heidi which is nice. Anyway, we're working on a pincer movement. June will give me a call when Heidi's in her garden. She'll keep her talking and I'll march Michael over there sharpish. Let the dog see the rabbit , do the introductions, get them talking and leave them to it. Cupid's bow is primed.

MICHAEL: I can't believe you did that Mother.

SUSAN: Don't you try and blame me.

MICHAEL: Why not? It was your fault.

SUSAN: How?

MICHAEL: Volunteering me to cut her lawn.

SUSAN: I had to do something. You just stood there looking at yer shoes. You didn't even have the gumption to say hello. I was worried that she thought you were a retard or something.

MICHAEL: Mother you can't say that! Anyway she wasn't my type.

SUSAN: Not your type? Beggars can't be choosers. That's all I'll say.

MICHAEL: She was about twenty stone.

SUSAN: Oh yes and you're a picture of health are you? The last time you did any exercise was when you spilt hot Ribena on yer crotch.

MICHAEL: And you know I'm not good with mowers; they're dangerous.

SUSAN: I didn't expect her to have one of them ride on things.

MICHAEL: Well she did.

seconds.....Especially if I'm going to America. Suppose I'll get married someday and there are a few special women in my life that I don't tell Mum about. Penelope Cruz for one. She sent me a signed photo. And she's Spanish. Sandra Bullock is probably number two. I went to see her in that film with the massive bloke who sleeps on her settee. I'd like to sleep on her settee I can tell you. (laughs) I wrote her a letter when I first

SUSAN: Michael I was in the kitchen. In a different room. I cannot hear

SUSAN:

the back of the shop, hands covered in cake mix and wielding a huge rolling pin. Well now Michael screamed and started throwing Millionaire shortbreads at him before backing into the window display and sitting in a Thomas the Tank birthday cake. Cost me £50 did that little fiasco and we're both banned for life. It looks like I'll have to pay someone to take him off my hands at this rate.

SUSAN: I was going to boycott that bakery anyway Michael.

MICHAEL: What for?

SUSAN: Them Eccles cakes are full of floor sweepings I reckon. Fish pie tonight.

MICHAEL: Can I have gravy?

SUSAN: You what?

MICHAEL: Gravy.

SUSAN: Gravy on fish? There's no wonder you're a virgin.

MICHAEL: Mum. Don't talk about.....

SUSAN: I think maybe if I'd told you about the birds and the bees sooner then we wouldn't be in this mess. I mean what if I wanted to invite a gentleman round?

MICHAEL: Mum!

SUSAN: What? A woman has needs and wants and desires. I'm not on a zimmer frame just yet. Pass them waffles will you?

MICHAEL: Anyway I've made plans.

SUSAN: Oh yeah planning an extension on the side return are you?

MICHAEL:

MICHAEL: We've been chatting on line for ages.

SUSAN: On one of them dating places? What is it? Over the hill.com? Forty and desperate.co.uks?

MICHAEL: No, we both play Warlock World.

SUSAN: That's as bad.

MICHAEL: It's not Mum. We have something in common and we get on.

SUSAN: Good job your father's not alive to witness this?

MICHAEL: Don't bring Dad into this.

SUSAN: Meeting a woman on the internets. Oh dear.

MICHAEL: Look Mum I know you have haven't forgiven me for running Dad over with his own milk float but I'm sorry alright. I'm sorry! I was ten. (

MICHAEL: Silver Avenger.

SUSAN: You what?

MICAHEL: In Warlock World.

SUSAN: Well what's her real name?

MICHAEL: I don't yet she said she'd tell me tonight. We're meeting outside Jake's Rock shop on the Prom.

SUSAN: Oh right well. Do you want a lift?

MICHAEL: No thanks Mum I'll go on me bike. Won't be late.

SUSAN: Okay son. Well good luck. Take five pound out of my purse and buy her something nice.

SUSAN: I think my main strength is that I can always tacifsomethin

SUSAN: Sorry Michael. I am sorry.

MICHAEL: Sorry I can't get a girlfriend.

SUSAN: Hey come on chin up. How were you to know?

MICHAEL: Gonna go to New York this year. Drive across to San Francisco.

SUSAN: Course you are son. Here, you want a warm Ribena?

MICHAEL: Yes please.