

Reminds

They're sitting on a bench together, an old lady and a teenage boy, waiting for the nurse to call a name. He was there first and she chose to sit beside him, landing with a sigh and a giggle. She smells of soap. He can tell she's staring at the white plaster cast that runs from his wrist to his elbow.

'You break your arm?' she asks.

'Fell off my bike,' he tells her.

'You poor boy,' she says. 'And your right arm too. Are you right-handed?' The boy says he is. 'You poor boy,' she says again. 'Oh you poor, poor boy,' she repeats, laughing out loud.

He turns to look at her, his face growing red. Does she mean what he thinks she means? She must be nearly eighty years old. She couldn't mean that.

'I don't know how I'd survive if it was me,' she says then. 'It's one of my few remaining pleasures in life.'

A younger woman turns the corner – she reminds him of those mothers who've just lost a toddler in a supermarket – and she looks immediately relieved when she finds what she's been looking for.

'There you are,' she says kindly, walking over and taking the old lady by the arm. 'I asked you to stay put, didn't I?'

'Andrew and I were just having a lovely chat,' she replies, pointing to the teenage boy, whose name is not Andrew. 'He's a *red*,' she adds then fiercely. 'Goes on marches for communist causes.'

'I'm so sorry,' says the younger woman looking his way but the boy shakes his head and says it's fine, there's no problem here. He wishes they would both just go away and leave him alone. She reminds him a little of his dead grandmother, but maybe it's just because she's so old. The younger woman reminds him a little of his dead mother, but maybe it's just because she's so stressed. Either way, they're not good memories.

'Pinko,' hisses the old woman as she's taken away.

The boy smiles but then his arm spasms and he grimaces while stroking the plaster with his good hand. When he looks up, he sees a man putting money in the Coke machine and he reminds him of his father, who snapped his arm like a twig because he spilled a little orange juice on the sofa and told him he'd snap the other one clean off if he told anyone the truth about what went on between the two of them.

The nurse calls him in and as she pulls the curtain he sees the old lady sitting nearby, winking at him, making the universal sign.