

Mixed Feelings

Maria had come to this country with nothing and here she was twelve years later with nothing again. The years in between had been very difficult—she married a man she thought she loved. He was good fun, had a job and was going to take care of her but gradually as the years went by she realised he was trying to control her totally. If she challenged him, he told her she was a complete narcissist. It didn't matter what she did it was never good enough. Perhaps the fact that he was a stripper when she met him should have been a red flag. He started working in his family's factory. She worked there as well.

They had a son but the abusive treatment of her continued.

The beatings got so bad she ended up in hospital many times, making excuses for her injuries. She stuck it out because she had no family here, no one to turn to and she foolishly thought he would stop. His mother started recording her when she dared to complain about him and then showed her son.

Maria had to get out but how?

Where would she live? What would she live on?

She was in A&E once again when a nurse drew the curtain closed around her bed.

'Do you know we have a Domestic Violence unit attached to this hospital?' Maria was dumbfounded.

It was the lifeline she needed.

They immediately put her in touch with people who could help and now here she was, finally safe, with a place for her and her son.

As she walked around the small supermarket opposite the flat she almost felt happy.

'Mum, can I have a gingerbread man?'

'I'm not sure if I have enough money' The cash machine wasn't working so she couldn't check her balance.

She was out of work now as there was no way she would go back to the factory. She put more food in her basket, along with the gingerbread man. The self-service till showed £32 to pay.

She slipped her card in. 'Declined'. She had another card, one she'd taken out for her son. 'Declined'. She stared at the screen, unsure what to do.

'Here, let me'. A hand with a card tapped on the payment machine.

She mumbled 'Thank you' to the woman but she had gone. Maria picked up her bags.

She walked towards her block of flats. A few daffodils held their heads up, almost as a greeting. 'Love you, Mum,' her son said.

'Love you too,' she smiled.