

A Cup for a Cop

When her mother stopped the car at the traffic lights, Kylie said, "What is that cup for on the post?"

Her mother looked at the cap on top of the traffic light. "That's not a cup," she said. "It's a cover. To keep the rain off the wiring."

"Oh," said Kylie. She was four. She knew what "cover" meant. You could cover your eyes with your hands. You could cover the table with a cloth. But what did "wiring" mean? And why did you have to keep the rain off it? Perhaps it was like a budgie, Kylie thought. They always covered him when it rained.

"Well," said her father, "it could be a cup. It might be a cup for a policeman to have a drink."

"Oh, yeah!" said Kylie's brother, who was sitting in the back seat. "Oh, yeah, sure, Dad!" Kylie's brother was eleven. That's why he talked like that.

"You never know," their father said, giving Kylie a jab with his elbow. "It just could be a cup for a cop." Then he chuckled and said it again, because it sounded good, "A cup for a cop! Ha, ha!"

"What's a 'cop'?" Kylie asked.

"Oh, you know stupid," her brother said. "A policeman. Everyone knows a cop is a policeman."

The red light winked out and the green one blinked on. Kylie's mother drove away.

The next set of traffic lights they came to turned red and they had to stop again. As they sat in the car waiting for the lights to change a remarkable thing happened.

A policeman roared up to the lights. And he had a ladder tied to his motor bike! He hopped off his bike, untied the ladder and leant it against the post of the traffic light nearest to Kylie's car.

It was a long, wooden ladder, splotted with paint.

"Goodness!" said Kylie's father. "Perhaps he's a painter in his spare time."

The policeman climbed up the ladder, pulled off the wiring cover and filled it up from a little tap at the back of the lights.

He spilt the drink as he lifted it to his lips. "Oops!" he said, as it sloshed onto the road.

He took a gulp. "Ah," he said, closing his eyes. "I needed that!"

He gulped some more. Kylie could see his Adam's apple going up and down in his throat as he swallowed.

When the policeman had finished his drink, he pushed the cup back onto the pole and looked around. He had a red moustache from his drink. He wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his leather jacket.

"Um ah!" Kylie said out loud. "He should use a hanky!"

The policeman got a fright from the sound of her voice. He wobbled a bit on top of the ladder.

"Oh," he said, looking down at her. "Excuse me. I didn't see you."

He climbed down the ladder and poked his head in the car window.

"What's your name," he said.

Kylie was shy. She buried her face in her father's jumper.

"Her name's Kylie," her father told the policeman.

"Kylie, ay?" said the policeman. "That's an Aboriginal name for boomerang, isn't it? Very pretty."

He reached through the window and gave Kylie a gentle poke. She peeped out at him.

"Now Kylie," he said, "you must think I've got terrible manners, not offering you a drink of cordial. Would you like one?"

Kylie nodded.

"Oops!" said the policeman. "The lights have changed. That means you've got to have lime. Unless you want to wait a minute. Orange coming up," he said happily. "And after that, raspberry again."

The cars behind were beginning to honk their horns. They wanted to get going. Kylie's mother was beginning to feel nervous.

"She likes green cordial," Kylie's mother said. "Lime will be fine. Thank you."

"Good," said the policeman. "Just a jiff."

He climbed up the ladder again, pulled off the cup and poured another drink. Then he climbed down and handed the cup to Kylie.

Kylie began to drink.

"Pardon?" said her father.

"What?" Kylie said. She had a big, green smile on her face, like a clown.

"What do you say?"

"Oh," said Kylie. "Thank you, Mr Policeman."

She drank the rest of the cordial down. Her tummy was fat like a tadpole's. She gave the cup back to the policeman.

"Good," he said. "Now I'm off to get a cat down from a tree."

"But what about Ian?" Kylie said.

The policeman looked puzzled. "Who?" he said.

"My brother," Kylie said. "In the back."

The policeman looked at Ian. "Him?" he said. "No, not him. He's eleven. He doesn't believe it. No, he can't have a drink. Impossible."

He climbed up the ladder quickly and put the cup back on top of the pole.

The lights were still green. The cars behind were still honking. Kylie's mother drove off quickly.

"Goodbye!" Kylie called.

But the policeman was too busy tying his ladder to his bike to look up.

"It's not fair!" Ian said.

"Anyway," Kylie said. "It was delicious!"

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Mr Mousey

“A Mr Mousey story, eh?”

“Yes,” Kylie said, snuggling deeper into her blankets. “A really funny one.”

“Funny? My Mr Mousey stories are never funny.”

Kylie rolled her eyes. “Sure, Dad!”

“Well,” Father said, “I was thinking of telling you the one about—” He stopped speaking and stood up abruptly. “Nah! It’s a serious story. You wouldn’t like it.”

Kylie caught his hand. “Come on, Dad!” she scolded. “You’re wasting time.”

“Oh, all right,” Father said. “As long as you don’t laugh.”

He sat down on the bed again and began his story.

When Mr Mousey came out of the freezer he had an orange haircut—

Kylie squealed with laughter. “That’s stupid! What was he doing in the freezer?”

Father looked at her sternly. “He was visiting the barber. What’s so funny about that?”

“Because, why was the barber in the freezer?”

Father sighed. “He worked in the freezer to save sweeping up. Now, like I was saying—”

“Why did it save sweeping up?”

“Aaah!” Father screamed. “Because the hair sticks to the ice cream! Don’t you know anything? Now, may I continue?”

Kylie giggled and nodded.

When Mr Mousey came out of the freezer he had an orange haircut and a blue bow tie.

Mrs Mousey took one look at him and gasped. “Alfred!” she cried. “What on earth have you done to yourself?”

Mr Mousey stopped whistling and stared at her. He had been feeling pretty pleased with his haircut and was hoping to sweep Mrs Mousey off her feet with it.

“You look like a furry orange!” Mrs Mousey exclaimed. Then, unable to help herself, she added, “You look like a furry orange with a patch of blue mould on it!”

“Well, you don’t look so flash yourself,” Mr Mousey huffed. “You look like a tadpole with a gherkin in it.”

Kylie burst out laughing. She sat up and bent over as if she had a pain in her tummy.

“You can laugh all you like,” Father said, “but this is serious. How would you like to be called a tadpole with a gherkin in it?”

This made Kylie laugh and squirm all the more.

Father waited until she stopped. “Now where was I? Ah, that’s right.

Mr Mousey said . . . And Mrs Mousey began to cry.

Father looked at Kylie with his eyebrows raised. “There!” he said. “You see what I mean? Serious. Mrs Mousey was crying.”

Well, Mr Mousey didn’t like to see his wife cry. So he said, “I’m sorry, dear. Why don’t we forgive each other and go to the beach?”

Mrs Mousey snivelled and dabbed her eyes. “All right,” she said. “But don’t wear that tie. It clashes with your haircut.”

Mrs Mousey put on her polka dot bikini. Mr Mousey took off his bow tie and put on his orange bathers.

“You’d better let me drive,” Mrs Mousey said. “A rodent with a haircut like that is bound to be reckless.”

Mr Mousey smirked and handed over the keys. It was true, he thought. He was feeling a little reckless.

“Bother,” Mr Mousey said when they arrived at the beach. “I forgot my shades.” He wanted to look cool with his orange haircut. But without his sunglasses he just looked hot.

Then a strange thing happened as he stepped onto the sand. He disappeared. His orange haircut and his orange trunks matched the sand so perfectly that you couldn’t see him for looking.

“But sand isn’t orange,” Kylie said.

“Well, it was at this beach,” Father said. “It must have been, otherwise Mr Mousey wouldn’t have disappeared. And he did, so there you have it.”

Mr Mousey disappeared—all except for his eyes, which were black. So all you could see of him was a pair of beady eyes bobbing along.

When Mrs Mousey turned to look at him, she screamed. Mr Mousey jumped. Or I should say, his eyes jumped.

“Boyng!” said Kylie, tossing her head, imagining the eyes.

“Alfred! Alfred!” cried Mrs Mousey. “Is that you? What happened to you?” Speak to me, Alfred!”

Mr Mousey, who didn’t know that anything had happened to him, said, “What on earth are you gabbing about, Agnes?” As he spoke his two front teeth flashed whitely in midair.

When Mrs Mousey saw the large teeth beneath the beady eyes, she screamed again.

People nearby came running. They couldn't see Mr Mousey either, and one of them trod on him, thinking he was just a patch of sand.

Just then Kylie's mother came in to kiss her good night and to say her prayers.

"Hey Mum, you should hear Dad's Mr Mousey story. It's the silliest one ever."

Father stood up and got huffy. "It was not silly!" he said.

"Oh yeah?" Kylie replied. "What about Mr Mousey disappearing on the beach?"

"What?" said Mother.

"He was all orange," Father explained, "so he matched the sand."

"But beach sand isn't orange," Mother said.

"Then why did Mr Mousey disappear when he stepped onto it?" Father asked in a superior tone of voice. "Explain that if the sand wasn't orange!"

Mother couldn't explain it.

"And all you could see was his eyes walking along," Kylie squealed.

"Oh you're just telling her the bits that sound silly," said Father. "Taking them out of context. Why don't you tell her the serious bits, like when Mr Mousey came out of the freezer with an orange haircut and told Mrs Mousey that she looked like a tadpole with a gherkin in it?"

This time Mother began to laugh. She and Kylie hugged each other with glee.

"Don't mind me, the pair of you," Father said, leaving the room. "Yuck it up all you like."

And, as Kylie retold the story, they did.

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