

Kitchen Scrap

by Matt Potter

"It stopped me dead in my tracks," Valerie said, sitting in her darkened kitchen.

I nodded. Even in the gloom I could see the empty glass canisters, the shelves bereft of cookbooks, the apron hanging clean but dusty behind the door.

Her pudgy face, flour-coated and sugary and so life-nurturing in the past, had a different spark now, a searching look I'd seen as soon as she opened the door.

"So I gave away forty years of cookbooks. Gave away all the food in the cupboards and all my utensils."

"Even the old wooden rolling pins?"

"Yes," she said.

Oh, I had always loved watching those rolling pins work their pastry magic.

"What about meals?" I asked.

"My daughters both have me over once a week," she said.

"Sometimes I go out for dinner. Sometimes I don't." She smiled thinly.

I wiped the dust from the island cupboard where we were sitting — once the workspace for so many handsome feasts — and clasping my hands in front of me, considered what to say.

"You could have had the gas reconnected," I said. "Having your gas accidentally cut off isn't a sign from God that you should stop cooking."

Valerie laughed. "No, it didn't seem so at first."

She hugged her elbows and looked at me.

"I gave my neighbour my kettle," she said. "So if you want coffee, you'll have to go next door."

