

A Romance by Chance

The Meeting

The air was unduly cold and large snow flakes fell vertically on that windless late afternoon. Jack Story clutched the scarf about him but not before several flakes melted and ran down his neck. The cold seemed to seep through him; he wished he'd worn his overcoat rather than the raincoat as he hurriedly made his way from the taxi into the Oxford Street store. Once through the door the atmosphere changed, his face tingled with the warmth, and gaily-lit Christmas decorations altered a shopper's winter attitude.

Some people browsed the displays; others made their way from one department to another. Jack was determined to get all his present in one go, truth was he had not that many to get. Mum and Dad had everything; so he would get them something ridiculously frivolous, his sister too wanted for nothing. His brother-in-law was one of those offensively overpaid types in the City. His two nieces were a different matter. Being their favourite and only uncle, he would be lavish with their presents and have them gaily packaged which would endear him even more in their eyes. Hil.. .Hilary, why on earth had her name come up, they had broken up two weeks before. He told himself and his friends that he was over her and glad of it, but he lied. She had left him and it hurt, but at least that was one present he could forget.

It was perhaps these thoughts that made him lack concentration; for he suddenly collided with a young woman as they both mounted the escalator.

"Christ... I am sorry.. .are you okay." He grabbed her arm and managed to stop her falling as she stumbled forward. She gave a halfhearted shriek and the store bag she was carrying crashed against the metal guide rail, they both heard the breaking of glass.

"Bloody hell," she exclaimed as she regained her composure and gave him a withering look.

"Hey look I am sorry, that sounded like broken glass," he suggested.

"I'm sure you're right, if you had only been look.. ."but she bit off the recrimination mid-sentence as she looked at his remorseful expression and before she could say anything else, he added,

"I am really sorry, can we see the damage?" They were nearing the next floor and he continued, " There is a nice cafe on this floor, perhaps we can go in there and see what's broken, of course I will make good any loss."

Before she agree or protest he said,

"Let me get you a coffee.. .they do spectacular cakes here!"

"I know ," she replied, " but I'll settle for a hot chocolate, cakes are a no no," she added, patting stomach.

Thirty minutes later with their drinks finished and he insisting replacing the gift, they returned to the ground floor almost like old friends. A single rose crystal vase was purchased but she gently refused his request for her telephone number, although she did accept his business card with his office number.

With her woollen hat covering her ears and coat collar up, Angela made her way to the

bus stop and was relieved to see her bus arriving.. Once seated with the packages on her lap, she had time to consider Mr. Jack Story. A very attractive guy, well dressed, super smile and yes she would...., a wicked smile spread across her face Of course Eric would not be happy, he never was these days. She looked at her watch, she would just have time to get home and prepare a meal to celebrate the year they had been together. She hoped he would remember too but it wasn't a certainty, they seemed to have settled into a bit of rut.

The Second Coming

It was just a week before Christmas and almost two weeks since he'd seen Angela. She was not in forefront of his mind, however her image had been stored away in one those not to be forgotten recesses of the mind. Nothing was planned; how could it be, he had no idea where she worked or lived, whether she was married or single. He left his client's office and hurried to the Underground station on the other side of the road. As he picked his way through the busy early evening traffic, a flower shop with its Christmas displays attracted him. Artistic thought had been given '**Bouquet's**' window display which glistened in the drizzle that grew heavier. "I'll take some flowers to Mum' he thought to himself as he dashed the last thirty feet to the doorway. The briefcase was in his left hand held above his head, which shielded him from the rain and probably obscured his vision. He pushed open the door, rather to quickly in his eagerness to escape the weather, the door didn't open to easily at first but once she lost her footing it swung back. The green plastic bucket of water she was lifting with its Chrysanthemums cascaded over her.

Laying on her back; drenched in water and blooms, her skirt had ridden up revealing delicate apricot coloured underwear. A gentleman might have averted his eyes but Jack was a man who loved women, and when his eyes eventually reached her face, he recognised her.

"God are you a complete moron, you idiot," she gasped and spluttered. "You are ...**It's You**, do you make a habit of knocking over women or am I just bloody lucky!" He shrugged and held out his hand, "Let me help you up, I didn't mean it... I never saw you! What were you doing crouching behind the door?"

"I wasn't crouching, I was just moving the bucket to the back room, we are closing shortly and .. hell I don't have to explain to you, I... she shouted.

Jack put a finger to her lips, "Shush" he whispered, "it was an accident, how can I put it right?"

She looked at him as he said "If you're closing can I take you home, do you have anything here you could change into?" "Please."

This was the second time he had charmed her out of being vindictive. She half smiled, nodded, turned and made way to the rear of the shop. The other occupant, an older woman assistant smile and said , "Wow, you must be a good friend."

He forgo the Underground and they took a taxi out to Richmond. The large Edwardian house belonged to her sister and her husband; she explained that she had temporarily moved in with them whilst searching for a flat. The house was really too large for the young couple, but as the sister was heavily pregnant they obviously intended to remedy that. Rosemary welcomed him into the drawing room, an elegant room with lofty ceilings whilst Angela went upstairs to change.

"Have you known my sister long?"

"No, we bumped into one another a couple of weeks ago."

"You .. you weren't the one who crashed into her on the moving staircase in...", before she could finish he nodded and shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes that's me and she hasn't had time to tell of this afternoon's disaster."

Jack went on to explain the episode of bucket of flowers, her sister rolled about sofa in laughter,

"And she is still talking to you!"

"Yep, we are going out for a meal this evening."

"Well you must have something, you are certainly an improvement on Eric, sorry I shouldn't have said that." she said shrugging her shoulders.

"Who is Eric?"

Rosemary had just finished explaining about her Sister's ex., and how they had broken up when Angela re-entered the room.

"How do I look?" She said pirouetting.

"Don't ask me ask him." Said Rosemary smirking, "So what do you think Jack?"

"Well.. .I think I prefer her prostrate in petals." Jack replied with a smile

"Bastard." said a grinning Angela.

In a quiet readjust off one of London main thoroughfares, two friends sat in an intimate Italian restaurant enjoying their own company and some delicious pasta. He poured her some more wine,

"Are you trying to get me drunk Jack? Don't you drink wine?"

"My place and the car are just around the corner and if I am to drive you home, I daren't"

"Oh.. So I am going home am I," Angela said with that wicked smile.

Jack looked at her and then slowly poured himself some of the Barolo

She lay on the crumpled bed and watched him dress, his question whether she had to go into the shop this Saturday morning, drew from her a long dissatisfied sigh.

"I suppose so though Anne; you saw her yesterday in the shop, she has a key and she will open up.

"Come on, shower and get dressed. I'll run you home first and then take you to the shop."

She rose, stretched and walked naked to the bathroom. Turning her head she asked,

"What are you doing today, will I see you for lunch?"

"No sorry, this afternoon Arsenal are at home, but tonight I am all yours."

"Lovely," she pouted and disappeared into the shower.

They spent the evening at a riverside inn, good pub food, fine ale and returned to her sisters where he spent the night. The four of them spent a lazy Sunday, a light breakfast, the papers and then to show off; Angela cooked lunch, where it was revealed that Rosemary and her husband were going north to visit his parents for Christmas. They had asked Angela to come with them but she declined. They said they were happy for her to stay in the house, but it would be a lonely holiday.

"That is easy then," said Jack, "Angela must spend Christmas with me!"

"Oh I must; must I, and what makes you think I'd want to spend the whole holiday with you."

"You've been pretty close the last couple of days," Rosemary said and they all laughed. Jack explained that he was staying with his parents in High Wycombe and that their large house had more than enough room.

The End Game

The 'Old Bakehouse' was a large rambling Victorian house, the gravel driveway was the only announcement a visitor needed. Jack's Father appeared at the door to greet them, and once inside as introductions were made, the two nieces came running down the stairs and threw their arms around Jack's legs. His sister Wendy and his brother-in-law joined them a few minutes later.

The two little girls continued their excitement for the rest of Christmas Eve, devoting their energies on Jack and his new friend. The parents had invited guests for a buffet supper, the house was full and festive. Wendy and her husband stayed in the house when the children were put to bed, whilst everyone else attended a midnight service. Christmas Day was almost perfect, friends called during the morning and lunch was triumph. Angela and Jack went for walk during the remains of the afternoon and it was quite dark as they strolled back arm in arm. She cuddled up to him saying perfect how the holiday had been and how she was glad he had blundered into the her shop that wet afternoon.

They stayed a few more days; whilst Wendy, her husband and children had returned home earlier, and the night before their departure Jack took his parents out for a meal.

The 'Chequers' was one of those quality inns with several bars and a dedicated dining room. Tasteful decorations and oak panelling gave the room a great ambience.

Every thing went well until around nine o'clock, with the main courses eaten and the promise of exotic desserts from the cold trolley the interruption came. The voice was loud, "Well it didn't take long to latch onto new one Jack,"

The four heads turned towards the willowy blonde. Jack had forgotten about Hilary but she obviously stayed with her brother over Christmas, it was through him that they had first met.

"Hello Hilary," and trying his best to be civil, "have you had nice Christmas?"

"Not that you'd care, you bastard ! Aren't you going to introduce your busty bimbo?"

"Now just a minute, you left me.. ..and quite honestly I am rather glad, I think you have had" ..but before he could finish Angela stood up,

"I don't know who you are lady but the name is Angela, I am not a bimbo, I am a bit busty but at least I am not drunk."

"Bitch", Hilary said and threw the contents other drink over Angela. She might be charmed by Jack but this blonde was not getting away with it, Angela swung a punch but Hilary swayed with the booze, the punch missed, Angela lost her balance and could not stop until she crashed into the sweet trolley. She finished on the carpet liberally covered in Strawberry Gateau, Raspberry Roulade and a smattering of Death by Chocolate.

"Oh my God," Jack's Mother exclaimed raising her hands to her face, "is she alright?"

"Oh Yes," said Jack, "she okay, She's just accident prone!"

Jack proposed on Valentine's night, they were married on the following Boxing Day.