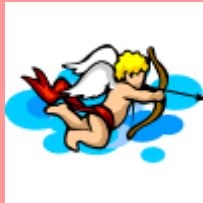


Cupid Traps



Collection of Short Romance Stories

By Anusuya Veth

About This Book

Cupid Traps is a compilation of modern romance fiction.

This is the debut short fiction collection by Anusuya Veth (ironically she hasn't fallen into any cupid traps yet!) who has a great passion for writing stories and poetry.

While coping with work and study she devotes her free time to writing stories and maintaining her creative websites 'Wow Mag' & 'Celebrity Jam'.

Wow Mag – http://www.geocities.com/wow_mag

Celebrity Jam – <http://celebrityjam.ontheweb.com>

If you wish to contact or email your feedback to the author

send your emails to wow_mag@yahoo.com

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Cupid at Work

Cupid At Work

"He's coming," Mary Jacobs whispered to her sounding excited. Ashley Jones stole a fast glance and saw the tall man making his way towards them. She quickly diverted her gaze to the newspaper she was holding in her hands.

"Hi, Jed!" cried Mary cheerfully but Ashley pretended to be vastly absorbed in the paper.

"Hi!" he answered. As usual, he looked smart and professional; his hair which reached his collar looked too long for a man but on him it just added a reckless look. He looked so confident that she wondered whether he was born with it. He obviously had the charisma. Whenever he walked into a room, everybody noticed him. Of course, the women would never be able to take their eyes off him. He wasn't drop-dead gorgeous but he possessed a certain reckless charisma.

That smug confidence with his brooding good looks helped him gain attention among the females effortlessly.

His eyes, the shade of hot chocolate were now looking at her and she shifted her gaze back to the print of her paper. She hated looking at his eyes. They always disturbed her.

She wondered how could a guy with rugged features have such lovely long eyelashes! It was a sin for a man to have such beautiful lashes! His sharp nose looked aristocratic while his stubborn jaw made him formidable and of course, his well-built physique made him stand apart from the other men in the place. In short, he was totally masculine. "I want to see you in my office later," he announced suddenly breaking the silence. Ashley looked up and saw him nod curtly and leave.

What was that supposed to mean? Ashley wondered with irritation. Mary stifled a giggle.

"How lucky you are!" Mary winked at her.

"I'm lucky? You are kidding! It must be about the report I had prepared. He loves to find fault with everything I do." Ashley's eyes flashed with annoyance.

"Come on! Any woman would love to be called into his office. You have to appreciate this chance," Mary exclaimed her eyes twinkling mischievously.

"Maybe to you he's a Greek God but not to me. He's so arrogant and unreasonable that I can't believe that you actually worship the ground he walks as if he's godsend," rambled Ashley sarcastically.

"I have always wondered about the chemistry between the two of you whenever you meet," added Mary slyly.

"Please, don't get carried away by silly thoughts. He's not my type," declared Ashley furiously and Mary chuckled. Ashley shot her a frowning look.

"Why are you getting so worked up for? But since you are his assistant how do you find working for him? It's a great pleasure isn't it?" Mary's eyes turned dreamy as if she was indulging in some secret fantasy with Jed Martin. Ashley smirked and rolled her eyes heavenward seeing Mary's trance-like look.

"I have only been here for a week and I find that he's an awful person to work with. Believe me, he's not your average Mr. Nice guy at all!" Mary was obviously smitten with Jed but she was not!

How could she convince her dear colleague that Jed was no simple man? He was a perfectionist and a very domineering boss too.

He had made her retype a proposal she had typed so many times that her patience had run short and she had nearly felt like telling him to do it himself. How would she understand? Ashley sighed as she saw how dreamy Mary's eyes would get whenever someone mentions Jed's name. The lass was besotted with the man without even knowing what kind of person he was!

"I noticed that you omitted some information in the report." He fixed her with an intense probing gaze.

She managed to look cool though she knew that inside she was a nervous wreck. She wondered why he had the power to make her feel so unsure and uncomfortable in his presence. She knew that he must have sensed her nervousness. Maybe he was laughing at her thinking what a coward she was or worse still being egoistic about how women always trembled under his gaze. Huh! I am not like the other women, thought Ashley with derision.

"Did you hear what I just said?" He stared back at her giving her a brooding look.

"Of course." Ashley stared back at him in the eye, not flinching at all.

"All right, Ashley. I expect the report back at my desk by today," he declared in a nonsense tone of voice.

"Sure," answered Ashley stiffly.

"Another thing, Ashley. I realize that you are not used to writing a report so if you need help you can ask me."

"Sure, but I doubt I would need your help. I can do it on my own," Ashley replied coolly and she could see the amusement in his eyes.

"You actually said that!" Mary's eyes were wide open with ill-concealed surprise.

"Why should I be afraid of him? Anyway, I don't need HIS help in writing the report!"

Ashley scoffed.

"Seriously, I think you are blind!" Mary declared throwing her hands up in the air as if

Ashley was really hopelessly blind!

"Maybe, I am." Ashley shrugged her shoulders carelessly.

"One day, you are going to be attracted by him. Maybe, he is always picking on you so that he can get closer to you." Mary's eyes gleamed with excitement.

Ashley laughed it off by replying, "Your imagination is running wild, Mary!"

It was seven p.m. and she had just finished the report. She almost sulked at the thought of putting the report at his desk. What if he still insisted that the report was incomplete?

That thought almost made her groan in misery. Nevertheless, she marched to his office and realized that the light in his office was still on.

After knocking on the door, she heard him call, "Come in!"

He looked up as she entered and she said, "I have finished the report."

He took the report and exclaimed, "I'll read it later."

She turned around and was about to leave when she heard him ask, "Are you free for dinner?"

She turned around and gave him a cold look. "I'm not free."

"The reason why I am asking you for dinner is to discuss about the meeting which is going to be held for the new business proposal. You don't have to worry that the dinner is for other social reasons." His eyes were twinkling with humor as if he could read her mind.

Ashley's face grew red with embarrassment. He still had the cheek to look at her and grin as if he was talking to an ignorant kid.

Ashley was at a loss for words but he asked with a mocking gaze, "So, are you free for this business dinner?"

"Yes, I am free," she replied avoiding his eyes. She felt like escaping from his office. Why did he always have to embarrass her? He just smiled at her strangely and she realized that the smile brighten up his face and made him look more handsome. Realizing that she was close to gawking she abruptly stammered, "I will wait for you at the lobby," and left quickly.

"The meeting would be on next Wednesday, right?"

"Yes, I am putting you in charge of the preparations."

"That would be fine."

"How do you find working with me?" he asked surprising her.

"It's not that bad," Ashley answered frankly.

"Am I such an awful boss?" he chuckled looking at her.

"No, you aren't," Ashley was surprised at the warm and easy-going way he was talking to her now. In the office, he was always cool and distant but now he was a different person.

"You are always so quiet unlike the other women in the office."

"I don't like to gossip. I concentrate on my work more than talking unnecessarily."

"I noticed that you are a very frank person as well." Jed gave her an admiring gaze.

"How do you know that? You don't know me well," she commented with curiosity.

"I can see the way you answer me. Besides I can see that you always tell the truth rather than lying. Even about the report; you didn't like me helping you and you told me straight away. I like that." He shot her a brief engaging grin.

"Really? I thought that you might be offended." Ashley gave him a wary look.

"No, I am not offended. But I got to tell you that I am very serious when it comes to work," Jed revealed in a professionally serious tone.

Soon, the two of them found themselves easily conversing and Ashley was surprised to learn that Jed Martin was amiable after all.

Ashley heard the doorbell rang and she went to check who it was. Standing at her doorstep was her neighbour Peter Daniels. As usual Peter was very neatly dressed. No ruffles in his shirt and Ashley was wondering inside her mind how many times had he ironed his shirt to look that tidy!

"Hi!" As usual he had a friendly smile on his face. Ashley often wondered if he ever suffered from bad moods cause he always had an ultra optimistic grin each day. It was as if all were going super smoothly in his life. Maybe he is real lucky, she thought. Not like me having a demanding boss, she groaned thinking about Jed.

"Hi," she greeted back wondering why he was there.

“Are you busy today?” he asked smiling sheepishly.

“No.” Was he going to ask her out?

“I have got two tickets to the concert tonight and I was wondering if you are free to catch it.”

He had a very hopeful look on his face.

Ashley shrugged. “I am free.” Peter was so elated by her acceptance that it showed on his face.

Later that evening Ashley wondered whether she had made a big mistake by going for the concert. It turned out to be a boring one and after that they had gone for coffee. Just when she thought that maybe the evening would turn a little interesting Peter made it a complete drag. He had dominated the entire date. He had gone talking non-stop about his business and how successful it was going to be. She had nearly dozed off and she wondered if he had noticed her numerous yawns.

But throughout their entire date, he had never asked anything about her. Not even one question. That was when Ashley wondered how she had failed to see what a self-centered and boastful man her nice neighbour was!

As he sent her home Peter exclaimed enthusiastically, “I had a wonderful time. Guess we should meet up often.”

Ashley sighed and wondered what would he think if she had revealed how boring she had felt throughout the date. Not wanting to hurt his feelings she just shrugged carelessly and smiled.

Of course, Peter did not notice her disinterest and strolled off to his house whistling. Ashley muttered to herself, ‘What a boring and absolutely self-centered man!’

Two weeks later, when Ashley was leaving her office for home she got an emergency call from her mother. Her grandfather was sick and had been rushed to the hospital. Ashley got frantic with worry. It was just six p.m. and she knew that if she took the bus, it would take ages to reach the hospital. As she waited for a cab, she didn't notice Jed until he stood beside her.

"What's wrong?" he asked noticing the tension on her face.

"I need to get a cab to reach the hospital. My grandfather is seriously ill." She glanced frantically at her watch.

"Come, I'll drive you there," he offered and soon they reached the hospital in ten minutes.

"Thanks for your help," Ashley exclaimed looking at him thankfully.

"That's nothing. We better hurry to find the ward in which your grandfather is in."

Upon reaching the ward, the doctor told them that Ashley's grandfather was out of danger and was in stable condition. Ashley was relieved to hear the news. She turned to Jed who was still beside her. "Why don't you leave first? It is getting late."

"Take care," he told her and left.

When Mary heard about Jed driving her to the hospital, she exclaimed, "I told you that he's a great guy, didn't I?"

"Yes, I guess so," Ashley smiled sheepishly. She couldn't help wondering how helpful Jed had been to her.

Soon, time flew and Ashley found that Jed could be a person to get along with easily and she enjoyed working with him. It was on Valentines Day that she saw the bouquet of red roses lying on her desk. With excitement Mary searched through the bouquet and found the card.

It read, "*For Ashley Jones, have a beautiful Valentines Day. With Love, a secret admirer.*"

"Isn't it romantic?" gushed Mary staring at the roses.

"I wonder who sent it?" Ashley was puzzled. Was it a prank?

She turned suspiciously at Mary who replied defensively, "I am not guilty of this. I suspect somebody really likes you. Look at the roses. He's in love with you."

The entire day, Ashley was thinking about the person who had sent the flowers. Who could that be? She guessed it to be Peter. After all he knew where she was working. She sighed at the thought of Peter being her secret admirer.

On the other hand, she wondered whether it could be Jed? She then brushed that ridiculous thought away. It was impossible that he could be the one. Even today, she had gone to his office to give him some documents but he seemed busy as usual and he didn't behave strangely at all. Maybe, I'll just forget about it, she told herself.

But before leaving her office, she went to Jed's office to submit the sales report.

"I need your help in coming up with the new product proposal. Do you want to discuss it over dinner?" he asked busily browsing through some files.

"Sure."

"Are you going to celebrate Valentines Day with anybody? Just asking, in case I'm disturbing your arrangements."

"No, I have no plans tonight so it's fine with me."

The restaurant looked elegant. Huge crystal chandeliers hung beautifully from the ceiling. She could see a number of couples dining and her mind went back to thinking about the identity of her secret admirer.

"Do you like the place?" he asked his eyes resting on her.

"Yes, it is really grand."

"So, how's your Valentines Day?"

"Nothing exciting," laughed Ashley remembering the roses.

"Really? I thought you must have got some beautiful red roses," Jed smiled with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

"Mary told you about the flowers? Oh no! The whole office must have known about the flowers then," groaned Ashley thinking how talkative her friend was.

"No, she didn't tell me about the roses." Jed smiled mysteriously, watching her expression closely.

"Then how?" Ashley Jones started but stopped as it hit her. He was the secret admirer? She looked at him dumbfounded.

"Yes, I am that secret admirer. I just wanted to reveal my feelings to you at the right place and at the right time. But most importantly, I want to know whether I can court you? I promise I won't send anonymous roses anymore."

Ashley laughed. With her eyes twinkling with elation she replied, "With hundred percent approval, I agree to you courting me."

She felt joyful as she gazed at Jed who had an elated look on his handsome face. It seemed that romance had indeed crept into her life after all.

Taking A Chance

Taking A Chance

“The kids look so cute!” gushed Nicole Barnell.

Myra Vaz agreed on her statement but a pang of sadness grabbed her heart. These kids though young and lovely all suffered from abuse. Abuse from irresponsible parents who had ill-treated them. Both Nicole and Myra were visiting a children’s home. They had heard about the home from a colleague and they wanted to visit it. It was a first time visit for Myra and it was an experience that she would never forget. The kids’ eyes which spoke of hurt and pain made her feel sad. Suddenly Myra wondered why there was so much pain in the world. If only everyone truly loves everyone else. Truly loved. The words struck an ache in her heart and she brushed those past memories away.

“Guess we are done for the day. Let’s go for lunch. I am starving,” Nicole grumbled making Myra forget about her worries.

She looked very vulnerable, he thought. Her big brown were sad as usual and she seemed as though she was occupied with deep thoughts in her mind. He thought of approaching her and asking her how was her day.

Myra looked up. It was Mark Reynolds. She had not noticed him. Obviously he had been observing her and he looked concerned. She didn’t feel like talking to anyone, especially Mark who seemed to know what was on her mind most of the time. She stood up calmly and hoped that he wouldn’t be able to see the sadness and loneliness in her eyes.

“Hi,” he started with a friendly grin.

“Hi.” Myra smiled wanly.

“You okay?” Concern showed in his eyes and Myra avoided his gaze.

“I am fine. I got to go and check on the patients,” she said in a rush hoping her voice was cool.

“Okay.” He nodded and looked as if he knew what was on her mind.

As Myra walked away, one thing was greatly disturbing her. Mark Reynolds was getting on her nerves.

The nursing home for the elderly was quiet. The old ladies were sitting on chairs. Some were napping while some were staring off to space, caught in their lonely world of memories. Myra approached Mrs Jones. She was her favorite. There was something so comforting and warm about the elderly woman. Myra found that talking to her was just like talking to her own grandmother. Of course her grandmother was not here. She was in Australia and it had been two years since she had last visited her grandmother and her mother. She still remembered how worried her grandmother had sounded when she had last called her. Her words rang out in her ears vividly.

“We all miss you here, Myra. You should come back here.” She pushed her grandmother’s words to the back of her mind as she focused on Mrs. Jones.

“Hi Mrs. Jones!” She hugged her and she could see how happily Mrs. Jones smiled back at her.

“Hello dear.” Mrs. Jones held her hand and gestured her to sit beside her.

After chatting a while, Mrs. Jones asked about her work.

“Are you happy here?”

“Of course, I like it here. There is nothing more heartwarming than helping others,” Myra answered frankly.

“ A young lady like you should be out more often meeting younger people like yourself,” Mrs. Jones remarked with concern.

Myra just smiled. At the age of 27 she felt she was on a journey of self-discovery. She had quit her boring paralegal job to get into the social work field. She wanted to help people, especially unfortunate folks. Last year, she had completed her course in social work and this present one year internship was to give her more exposure in this field.

That evening after completing a report she went to pass it to her internship supervisor Mrs. Darcy Marshall. Instead she found Mark Reynolds sitting in the office. He was browsing through some files and he looked up as she entered the room. She asked him about Mrs. Darcy and found that she had gone on urgent leave for two weeks.

“Your good friend Nicole is quitting from the program.” Mark’s sudden remark got her attention.

“Really? I didn’t know.”

“Nowadays interns don’t seem to know what they want. Staying in this field is not a piece of cake. Well, it is good that she made up her mind fast before she gets in deep,” Mark stated professionally.

He had been in this field for 10 years since he graduated with his social work degree at the age of 25. It seemed a long time ago for him. He had seen a lot of people with several problems, especially emotional problems which needed a lot of help and counseling. Some even affected him so much that he wondered why he was still in this job.

“How about you? Can I expect you to do the same?” he joked lightly.

“No I won’t.” Somehow the question made her stiff and defensive. Mark noticed it and regretted it. She was a bit different from the rest. She was serious and he wondered how she would react if he told her to be a little easy on herself. She was hiding some problem and he could see it clearly. He wished he knew what it was so that he could help her. She was too young to carry a huge load over her shoulders.

“That’s good to hear. You can give the report to me,” he motioned to the report in her hands. She passed it to him and looked at him. He didn’t look like he was in stress at all. Maybe it was the way he was. He was always humorous and looking at the lighter side of things. Sometimes she wanted to ask him how could he be like that when he was around people who had so many problems. At first hearing tales about how some of the old folks’ families had left them in the home had made her terribly sad but now she was used to it.

He stood up suddenly. He was taller than most of the men and he towered over her. She only reached a bit over his shoulders. She recalled how Nicole was always saying Mark’s dark blue eyes and sharp nose were his best features.

Nicole was one big fan of him and Myra could understand why. His eyes were a unique shade of turquoise and he had the luxury of thick spiky eyelashes framing them. His nose seemed perfectly sculptured and it can be said that though he was not drop-dead gorgeous he was attractive in a rugged sort of way.

Myra wondered what was wrong with her. She stopped herself from further analyzing Mark’s looks and realized that he was also studying her. It made her lose her composure.

“Ok I guess if there isn’t anything else I am leaving now,” Myra spoke in a rush, fully conscious that she was under his scrutiny.

“Yeah,” he shrugged as the woman who intrigued him walk away quickly.

Myra had her hair tied up often. Today for the party with Nicole’s insistence she let down her dark brown hair letting it touch her shoulders.

“Do you know how gorgeous you look like that?” Nicole remarked, her hand on her hip inspecting her friend’s appearance.

“Please, who’s going to look at me? Besides I am not interested,” she answered back.

The dark maroon dress ended at her knees and it had been a long time since she had worn a dress. That memory made her remember David. The guy who made her realized that romance was not easy and nice. Quickly she pushed those regretful memories far away in her mind.

As she walked out to her car with Nicole behind her, a guy turned and whistled giving her an appreciative glance.

“Saw that, gal?” Nicole shouted winking at her.

“I think it is high time you find a guy. You have a zero romance life.”

“I don’t need to search for Mr Right. I don’t believe in him anyway,” Myra shot back.

“Ok I rest my case.” Nicole sighed.

They reached the nursing home and saw Mark talking to one of the other interns.

The woman was laughing at Mark's words. He must be telling some jokes to make people laugh as usual, thought Myra as she heard the roars of laughter.

"Mark is always early," Nicole remarked and waved to him.

Mark turned, waved back at Nicole and then looked at her.

Myra looked different and the look suited her, he thought with surprise. It was that dress and the way she had let her hair down. He wondered if she was going to dress like that everyday.

Myra was surprised at Mark's look. He seemed as if he couldn't recognize her. Had she really over-dressed?

"You saw the way even Mark was shocked by your new look," Nicole whispered to her shooting her a mischievous grin.

"Stop it Nicole," chided Myra.

Glancing at her watch she remarked to Nicole, "I will go and check on the food for the party."

"Okay, see you." Nicole replied as she walked over to talk to Mark.

Myra was very glad that the party had cheered up the folks. They deserved to be happy, she thought as she gazed at the elated looks on most of their faces. Just then she walked over to the hallway hoping to see Mrs. Jones.

Mrs. Jones was laughing at something Mark was saying. She looked to be in high spirits and this made Myra smile. Mark had a way to cheer up people. He could say the right words and jokes and even sad people would suddenly sparkle with mirth. It was his job after all, she heard her inner voice speak up.

Mark turned and saw her smile. He waved to Myra and motioned her over. She walked over. He knew Mrs. Jones was Myra's favorite patient. She was always spending time talking to the nice old lady. He felt that there was a special relationship between them. Just then Mrs. Jones remarked that she was feeling tired and wished to retire for the night. Myra brought her to her room.

Returning back to the hallway she found Mark standing there.

"The party was a success. You did a great job with the planning. Keep up the good job."

Myra seemed pleased to hear his remark. "I am so glad that they were happy. It is so rare to see so much joy on their sad faces, isn't it?"

"Yeah," he continued. Today she was unusually elated and it was obvious in her face. Her smile was brighter and she did look prettier like that, he thought to himself. She should smile more, it suited her. He grinned as he realized how much attention he was paying to her. Watch yourself Mark, he warned himself mentally.

"I guess we are all tired after a long day." He sighed and glanced at his watch.

Myra nodded. "Good night." She smiled at him warmly. He grinned back at her.

The last thought in his mind as he saw her walk away was "One day some guy is going to be very lucky to have her in his life." He wondered who would it be and brushed away a feeling of confusion he felt at that troubling question.

“I am sorry.” He hoped his gentle words would comfort her. Her eyes were blank as though she was in shock. He felt like hugging her close to him to protect her from the hurt and pain.

Tears rolled down her cheeks. She brushed them away not knowing what to say. She had died peacefully. That comforted her a bit but the pain she felt was still there. She was such a nice lady and she had died. Just yesterday she had seen elation on her face and today she was gone.

“I am sorry,” Mark repeated.

He looked to be in pain and she could see sympathy in his eyes.

She didn't know how but she found herself engulfed in his arms. She was crying and he was soothing her speaking softly comforting her. It was only when she felt the warmth of his arms that she remembered where she was. She stiffened recalling how similarly she had let her guard down with another man from her past and how it had brought her pain. She stood back suddenly drying her tears. “It's okay. I will be fine. Thanks Mark.”

Mark was caught by surprise. One moment she was ready to be comforted in his arms while the next instance she became cold and distant as if she wanted to move away not wanting him to soothe her pain away.

He was confused by her behavior and as he saw her walk away, Mark wondered when would he ever find out why Myra was so afraid to let her guard down.

“Are you Mark?”

Mark turned to see a woman standing there. She looked as if she was in her late 40s. He didn't recognize her and wondered who she was. He smiled and asked, “Do I know you?”

“I am Gina Titans. My aunt was in your nursing home. She died recently.”

“Mrs. Jones?” Mark arched his eyebrows in question.

“Yes,” the woman's eyes showed the sadness.

“I am sorry. Is there anything I can do for you?” Mark asked gently.

“I came to thank you and all the staff here for taking good care of her.” She smiled gratefully.

“You are welcome.”

As she turned to leave Myra walked in and seeing the woman she was surprised.

“Is that you Myra?” asked Gina looking pleasantly surprised.

“Yes,” Myra answered still looking shocked.

Mark introduced Myra to her and he couldn't help seeing how both women looked shocked to see each other. He wondered why.

“I didn't know you are working here. It is a wonderful surprise,” Gina spoke on but Myra didn't comment. She was still in shock realizing how Mrs. Jones was actually related to someone from her past.

Myra suddenly remarked in a cold tone, “I am busy with work. I got to go.”

Her words shocked Mark. He wondered why she was being cold to Gina. Gina looked surprised but smiled sadly as she watched Myra walk away.

“I understand why she did that,” she sighed with regret.

“Mind if I ask why? It is unlike of her to be like that.” He continued, “I know this could be personal but I am quite concerned about her. She seems to be carrying some sadness with her.”

“It is a long story,” Gina sighed looking wistfully.

“Tell me,” he requested impatiently. He was very concerned and worried about Myra and he wanted to know what was troubling her. If Gina could tell him the reason he would be very thankful, he thought to himself.

“Maybe we should go for coffee,” Gina suggested. Mark agreed without hesitation.

“Myra was full of life five years ago. She was happy, loving and always helpful to all. She was my neighbour’s daughter,” Gina started. Mark nodded urging her to continue.

“All was fine till she caught my son David’s eye. Okay, at first I thought he was serious about her. But only later did I realized that it was all just a game for him.”

“David was always changing his girlfriends. I thought that having a nice girl like Myra would change him but boy was I wrong! He continued flirting despite the fact that Myra invested a lot of her time and feelings into the relationship. Within a few months he was having another relationship with another girl behind her back. The worst part was that the other woman was Myra’s childhood friend. You can imagine how betrayed and hurt she felt by the both of them.”

As she continued Mark finally realized the bitter truth of Myra's reluctance to let her guard down. She had been cheated by a man who didn't appreciate her kind feelings and love for him.

Mark was still absorbing the story Gina had told him in his mind. The past of Myra. The reason why she seemed so distrustful of men. He felt sad for her and angry over David Titans, the man who had robbed her trust in men and relationships.

"Gina spoke to me today."

Myra turned around and looked at Mark. She saw the look in his eyes and then she knew. He had learnt of her past. She suddenly felt worried and insecure. She brushed that thoughts away swiftly. Why should she care what Mark thought about her past.

"So?" she asked defensively.

He walked towards her calmly and looked directly into her eyes.

"I understand how you feel Myra. Sometimes we have to let go of unpleasant memories and people. It is only when we get rid of them can we move forward," he advised gently.

"I am fine," she said impatiently not wishing to hear anymore of his words. She knew he cared about her and it disturbed her in a strange way, which she didn't wish to explore further.

"No, don't stop me. I want you to be happy and not sad like this thinking of that worthless jerk." Mark sounded angry and Myra was surprised to feel his annoyance.

“Yes I am angry at David. You are a nice and wonderful person and I think that idiot didn’t deserve your love at all.”

Myra was surprised to see the anger and annoyance in Mark’s voice as he talked about David. It had been a long time since someone spoke defensively for her. It felt good, she realized with surprise.

He came closer and brushed away the lock of hair falling over her forehead. She shivered in spite of herself wondering what he was going to do. Somehow having him close to her disturbed her. She could hear her heartbeat accelerating and she refused to explore deeper into the reasons why Mark was starting to affect her.

“I really hope you will not judge all men to the likes of David. There are good men out there and I am confident that one day you will meet the man who will love and treasure you for who you are, Myra. Trust me. Take a chance with love,” his encouraging words and intense stare did something to her. She felt at a loss for words and before she knew it Mark brushed a kiss on her cheek and left.

She was still standing there looking dazed as he walked away quickly.

The last thought which alarmed her greatly was that when he had kissed her she had nearly wanted to lay her head on his shoulders and tell him all about her fears and insecurities. Oh my God, she whispered to herself shakily as she walked away lost in thoughts of Mark.

He kissed her! Why? He couldn’t answer the question himself. As Mark rested on his bed thinking of the day’s incidents he realized with growing fear that he wanted to do more than just kiss Myra. He wanted to be the guy who could drive away all the demons of her past. In other words, he wanted to be the right man in her life. Good God! He stood up, slapped his face and shouted, “I am in love with her!”

“You are coming right?” Nicole asked her for the third time.

Myra sighed.

“Yes, I am coming. Why are you so anxious?”

Nicole remained silent. Myra frowned. It was unlike her friend to be unusually quiet.

Something was not right.

“I got you a dress. Promise me you will wear it for the event later.”

Myra turned to her arching her eyebrows in question. “What’s up with this party?”

“Nothing. It’s my friend’s party and since he invited I couldn’t refuse. You know how boring it is to go alone so please come with me,” pleaded Nicole.

“Okay, I will.” Myra grinned seeing Nicole’s eager expression.

“This party will be special,” Nicole’s eyes twinkled as if she was guarding some secret.

“What’s so special?” Myra looked amused.

“You will know when you are there. Trust me, it will be a pleasant surprise for you,” Nicole shot a mysterious smile and walked away whistling.

Myra shrugged and wondered what surprises can a party give?

He was wearing a dark blue shirt which matched his eyes perfectly. She smiled at him uncomfortably recalling his kiss. She never expected to see him here tonight. She turned to Nicole and stated "Mark is also here."

"Why not? I think he knows the host of the party. Come on it's a small town. Everyone is sure to know someone we know. Let's go and say hello to him," Nicole dragged her forward.

She was wearing a black lacy dress which ended at her knees. Her hair was bound up classily in a bun and some curls lingered gracefully down her nape. She never wore much make-up before but tonight the red lipstick and dark eyeliner helped to make a difference to her already remarkable features. He grinned seeing how Nicole was enthusiastically pulling her forward.

"Hello Mark," Nicole smiled and diverted her eyes to Myra.

"Hello." Mark noted how Myra's eyes rested on his. She seemed self-conscious as he took in her appearance and he hid a grin.

"Oh I just spotted William. He is the guy I am currently dating. Got something to tell him. See you people later," Nicole enthusiastically announced to both of them and left quickly. Before she left she turned, winked at Mark and pointed at Myra.

Mark gave a nod to indicate that he understood her signals. Myra who was facing Mark didn't see Nicole's hints. She was busy in deep thoughts.

"Thinking about something?" he asked as if he knew what she was thinking about. She blushed.

“Nothing,” she answered back. She wondered whether it was only her or whether the other women too had noticed how handsome he looked today.

“Want to dance?” Mark asked resting his eyes on her.

The question threw her out of balance and she wondered why. After a second of hesitation she nodded.

Nicole was watching both of them with great anticipation. It was working. Good. Inside her heart she wished that Mark would succeed. Good luck Mark, she whispered to herself.

The music was slow and easy. Some romantic song was being played. Myra couldn't recall the song's title but she had heard it before.

“What's wrong? If you don't want to dance it is okay,” he spoke looking into her confused eyes. “No. It's just that it has been a long time since I last danced,” she admitted to him looking at him apologetically. He smiled. “Don't worry. You can step on my feet. But please don't do it often else you will lose your dancing partner.”

She laughed at that. It was good to see her laugh and it gave Mark a rare feeling of satisfaction. She found him giving her a tender look and she blushed. She didn't know whether it was the warmth of his gaze or the tenderness of his smile which was making her nervous and excited at the same time.

Within minutes he had relaxed her and soon she was laughing merrily at his jokes. She even lost count of the times she had laughed and soon before she knew it the time was already midnight.

“Gosh, midnight already. I got to return Ms Cinderella safely home,” Mark joked.

“I am no Cinderella.” She had a sad smile on her face which he badly wanted to replace with a happy one.

“Who said so? You are one special Cinderella.” He rested his eyes on her making her feel warm and she wondered whether he really thought that she was special.

Inside the car both were quiet. Not knowing what to say and what to do. Myra wondered what would he think if she told him that he was the nicest man she had ever met. He wondered what would she think if he told her about his feelings for her.

“Okay, home is here,” he sighed. She saw the disappointment in his eyes and realized that she too didn’t want the night to end so quickly. He turned to face her. He was not smiling but looking at her intently as if he was studying her eyes hoping to read her emotions. She decided to speak up.

“I had a wonderful time tonight. I really appreciate the advice you gave me the other day. Actually I had built a wall between me and the rest of the world after the failed relationship with David. I kept blaming myself for falling for him and I thought it was my fault that he cheated on me. Your words made me realized that I was wrong and that I shouldn’t think that all men are like David.”

He listened to her words with anticipation pounding in his heart.

“Actually, I had wanted to tell you all about David. I don’t know why but I felt I could confide in you. You are special Mark. You are so nice and warm and I am so glad that I know you,” she smiled beautifully as she spoke.

He never gave a chance to continue as he leaned forward to kiss her on her lips. Warm, tender and full of feelings. True feelings, thought Myra as she felt his kiss on her lips.

“I have something to tell you too. Remember I told you that someday there will be a man who will love you and treasure you for who you are?” he asked holding her in his arms cradling her closely to his chest.

“Yes,” she nodded not wanting to break free from his alluring gaze and embrace.

“I am selfish. I want to be that man,” he confessed passionately looking at her. It was then Myra realized that what she had been searching for all these years was right here with this warm and loving man. He was offering her sincere love and she knew now why she had felt comforted in his presence. He loves me, the thought cheered her and as she laid her head on his shoulder she whispered, “I am lucky.”

“I am lucky too,” Mark answered softly as he held her in his arms. It felt good, he realized holding the woman he loved in his arms and telling her how much she meant to him. He started thinking how he was going to make Myra happy for the rest of her life.

A Date With Mr. Rival

A Date With Mr. Rival

“You have got the facts wrong Lisa!” cried Laura Wills loudly. Shooting an annoyed look at her assistant she rushed to read the article the tenth time hoping as if by miracle the mistake will disappear. But it didn’t.

“I am sorry.” Lisa sounded very apologetic and worried. She started to bite her nails. Biting nails was one bad habit which Lisa at the age of twenty-one had not managed to give up. Whenever she was hyper worried or tensed up the habit would return with a vengeance and now Laura could see how nervously her intern was biting into her nails. She decided to ease the pressure off the poor gal.

“It’s okay. It is already in print anyway. Too late to cry over it,” Laura sighed and wondered what could she do next.

At 28, running her own magazine was her ideal job and for the past two years Laura had been very elated as her publication ‘*Successful Single Women*’ was winning many readers. But recently with the entry of ‘*Ladies Get Committed*’ the new publication by her archrival had given her some headaches and well misery.

She sighed again at the article and pushed the magazine away in the corner of her desk.

“I won’t do it again. I promise,” Lisa rambled. Lisa knew that her blunder was going to create a big problem. Laura was a perfectionist. She never liked mistakes and with the competition from their rival magazine, this mistake might be costly.

“I want to be alone,” Laura stated looking at the ceiling hoping to see some angel flying down to whisper some encouraging words that the mistake would not be spotted by the readers and most of all by that notorious man!

“Come on. It was just a statistical mistake,” remarked Nancy biting into her sandwich.

“It was supposed to be that 70 percent of the single women were successful in living their lives without a man. Instead she had typed it as 60 percent. A ten percent different is huge!” sighed Laura.

“I am sure nobody will notice it!”

“Even if the readers don’t someone will gloat over the fact that we had made a mistake!” Laura threw the fork on the table with a bang. Annoyance was flashing in her eyes.

“You mean Jack McNeve?” Nancy chuckled seeing her friend’s dark frown.

“Of course. Who else is dying to see my magazine close down so that his will be more successful?” answered Laura with irritation. Just mentioning the man was enough to make her blood boil.

“Oh, speak of the devil. Look who’s over there?” rushed Nancy excitedly.

Laura turned and then wished she had not seen him.

“Are you drooling over him?” Laura looked at her friend accusingly.

“No dear I am not. I am your best friend, remember? But I can’t help seeing how he scores in the looks department. Come on all the other women are turning as well. That man is definitely getting attention,” rattled Nancy while Laura continued cursing Jack.

He was leaning over the table busy talking to a lady.

The lady looked very besotted with what he was saying. He must be telling her to buy his ‘sensational’ magazine, thought Laura with a sulk.

His smile was mega-watt and she heard him laugh out loud. A deep throaty laughter and she cringed. It was quite obvious that the blond was gawking at him and not listening to his words. Enough of the sickening scene, Laura turned back rolling her eyes heavenward.

“Even if anyone offers me a million I will never sit next to that man,” she exclaimed with sarcasm. Nancy laughed seeing how much Laura hated Jack.

“Can’t believe that since university days till now you two are still rivals. Man, this is interesting. In the past you used to fight to be tops for the scholarships and now you are fighting to produce the best women magazine. Your magazine encourages single women to remain single while his magazine advises women to commit. I wonder when would this competition ever stop?” Nancy had a mischievous grin on her face.

“Don’t count on it. It will never stop,” Laura remarked firmly.

“Oh no, he saw us!” Nancy gasped and she flashed a bright smile towards Jack’s direction.

“Why are you smiling at that idiot?” accused Laura with annoyance. She didn’t wish to turn around to see what the idiot’s reaction was. She would rather face an ice-cream sundae than that man! Laura focused on the melting chocolate sundae and using a spoon she dug into it with much energy. Nancy laughed seeing her friend’s expression.

“He is coming,” Nancy warned while Laura shot her an I-don’t-care look.

“You still love chocolate sundaes don’t you?” he asked in a teasing tone.

She frowned hearing his voice but ignored him and continued to eat her ice cream.

“Must be delicious,” he added and without warning took the spoon from her hands, scooped a small portion of the remaining sundae and tasted it. That riled her up.

She stood up glaring at him. How dare he just help himself to her food like that!

He looked as if he was having a wonderful time. His dark hazel eyes were twinkling as if he found her very funny. Laura grabbed back the spoon and shot back, “Nobody told you it’s rude to just take a bite without asking for permission?”

He raised his dark eyebrows mockingly and shrugged. He smiled. The devil had a charming smile and he obviously thought she would melt. Huh, she thought with annoyance mounting in her.

He leaned closer suddenly making her feel more irritated while Nancy barely contained her laughter seeing the chemistry between the two.

“What are you doing?” she demanded angrily.

“I am wondering why am I forever making you angry?” he drawled lazily still smiling like an idiot. She reached up to his eye-level and she stared back at him daringly. Had he thought that he could scare her like that? Nah, she was Laura Wills and not some dumb bimbo who would swoon over his looks easily.

He rubbed his chin, sighed and gave her a mocking look. She continued frowning.

“Come on guys,” spoke up Nancy hoping to ease the tension.

“Okay, how about this? I shall buy you chocolate ice cream. It will be my treat. I will call you. I think next Saturday night will be perfect for our date. See you Laura.” With a confident smile he strode away.

Laura was speechless and Nancy burst out into laughter.

“What? He never gave me a chance to speak at all! Who wants him to buy me chocolate ice-cream?” Laura cried with frustration.

Nancy winked at her friend. “You better go. I have a gut feeling that this will lead to some exciting developments.”

“What is it?”

Lisa was flushing. Her face was red and she looked very excited.

“He is here,” she spoke eagerly.

“Who?” Laura was puzzled. She didn’t have any appointments to meet anyone today.

“Mr. Jack McNeville!” Lisa gushed with enthusiasm.

Laura frowned. That man was becoming a pain in the neck. After the incident in the restaurant he had been calling up to ask her when could they go out for their dessert date. She had told him curtly that she was too busy to meet him. Now he was here! Worse still her assistant looked so dazzled and excited. Why were the women so blind? Laura cursed the man for the hundredth time and stood up. Something has to be done, she decided with determination.

“Great to see you again Laura.” He gave her an appreciative smile as he studied her appearance.

She was wearing a dark blue pantsuit. Her fiery red hair was tied in a ponytail making her look younger than her age. He smiled wondering how prettier she looked when she was angry. Her dark blue eyes flashed like sapphires and he wondered how she would react if he told her exactly what he had in mind.

She looked very stiff as she watched him surveying her.

“I am very busy and I have told you many times that I have no time to go out with you for that so-called dessert treat. Anyway I don’t need your treat. You can save it for the other women who would be very eager to go out with you,” she spoke quickly as if she couldn’t wait to get him out of her sight.

He smiled and walked towards her sighing.

“I am hurt that you reject my date,” he spoke mockingly touching his heart while Laura shot him an irritated glance.

“Sorry. There is nothing I can do about that.” She gave a careless shrug and turned to walk back. He was hurt? What joke was he up to?

“Stop Laura. I have something to speak to you about. I am serious,” he exclaimed sounding very desperate and serious. Maybe it was his tone. She turned around with a surprised look.

“There is some issues about the magazines which I wanted to speak to you about for some time,” he continued. He was no longer smiling but looked serious. She wondered what tricks was he up to.

“What is it? You can tell me now. We don’t need to meet up to talk,” she shot back impatiently.

“No, it is very personal and I think we have to meet up,” he suggested stubbornly.

“I don’t buy it.” She looked at him warily.

He sighed.

“Trust me. Besides it is not like I am going to seduce you or anything like that. Or are you afraid of going out with me?” he asked looking intently into her eyes.

She laughed in his face.

“Why should I be afraid of you? Believe me I can’t even imagine us going out. You are obviously the last man I can ever think when it comes to romance, seduction or whatever. So don’t worry I won’t think that you are a potential Don Juan,” she remarked sarcastically.

He was shocked speechless by her words. Then he grinned wickedly.

“Last man! Wow what a compliment you have lavished on me, Laura. By the way I am not gay you know,” he replied sardonically not wishing to realize how her careless words provoked his emotions greatly.

She shrugged saying “I am not interested to know if you are or not.”

“You are simply hurting me again. First rejecting my date and now the remark that I am simply incapable of provoking any passion in you!” He shook his head as if he couldn’t believe her words.

She looked bored and her eyes went heavenward as if he was some boring guy talking irrelevant stuff.

He knew that women have always paid him attention. All women except the one and only Laura Wills. He had been wondering about that since university days.

Now seeing her treat him as if he was transparent was something he could not take.

“Cut it short, I am busy.” She started yawning. That riled him up. Nobody or should he say, no woman had ever found him so boring that she yawned in his presence. She was starting to make him feel insecure and he didn’t like it a bit.

He didn’t think but acted on impulse. He leaned forward, grabbed her arms pulling her to him and kissed her on her lips. His action shocked her. She pushed him and shouted, “How dare you?”

“Why not? I am a normal man and men do kiss women Laura.” He grinned widely with satisfaction. Her cheeks were red and she was very angry. He laughed seeing her expression.

“I am not going out with you,” she declared furiously. He could see her shooting daggers with her eyes.

“Huh! So the lady is afraid of me. I bet you are afraid I am going to kiss you again.” He continued with a smug smile ignoring her furious glare.

She looked as if she wanted to kill him. He saw her walk towards him. Although she was close to exploding with wrath Laura forced herself to sound calm. “Nothing would make me ever afraid Jack. I repeat, I am not afraid of you.”

“Fine. In that case see you next Saturday,” he winked and left her gaping as he left.

“Darn!” she cursed and walked away angrily.

“He kissed you? I can’t believe it. So what did you do?” Nancy asked breathlessly as if she was listening to some wild romantic saga unfolding and it irritated Laura greatly.

“I pushed him away of course. Who wants to kiss him?” she shot back with annoyance.

“Well he has made the first move. You know, I have always had a suspicion that he was carrying a torch for you.”

“Please,” Laura exclaimed with an exasperated look at her friend.

He was attracted to her? Ridiculous, she thought.

“Well, maybe that was why he kept pestering you to go out with him,” Nancy continued as if she had just made the ultimate discovery about Jack McNeville.

“Come on. I am not interested in him. I am going next week to meet him because the idiot said the meeting has something to do with the magazines.” Laura brushed away the memory of his kiss.

“Okay, but I have got a feeling that you have been targeted by cupid,” Nancy remarked studying her intently.

“Yeah, yeah,” shrugged a sarcastic Laura.

“You are early.”

“You are late.”

He chuckled and teased, “Laura, why are you forever throwing insults at me?”

“I can’t help it,” she shrugged her shoulders carelessly.

“Okay, shall we get to business? You said you wanted to talk about the magazines.” She shot an impatient stare at his grinning face.

“Don’t hurry. It is still early. Let’s order food first. I’m starving,” he groaned touching his stomach and giving her a please-have-mercy-on-me look.

Laura couldn’t eat much. In fact she didn’t feel she had any mood to eat. Somehow sitting opposite her archrival was making her uneasy and uncomfortable. Why did he have to keep staring at me? Laura frowned as he kept grinning at her. He was acting like an idiot again!

“Okay I can’t waste any more time. Tell me what you wanted to say about the magazines,” she demanded. He could detect the annoyance and irritation in her voice and it amused him.

“Impatience is not a good virtue,” he chided shooting her a mischievous smile.

She stood up. Her patience had run short. She was not going to sit down and wait like a fool while Jack went on rambling nonsense. She had better things to do and having dinner with Jack McNevele was definitely not something she was very eager to do.

“Okay, sit down. I am always making you angry and irritated. I wonder why you never let yourself relax around me.” He observed how her eyes flashed with annoyance. Strangely it excited him to provoke her temper further.

She sighed and took a sip of water. She was going to get a headache soon if he went on talking about irrelevant things.

“I felt that I had to clear up the air about the misunderstanding between us,” he remarked looking serious.

“What misunderstanding?” she asked warily.

“Well you obviously must have thought I started *‘Ladies Get Committed’* to give competition to your publication.”

“Of course I thought that way. What did you expect?”

He sighed and frowned at her.

“Why would I want to compete with you?” he asked her back impatiently.

“You always enjoyed competing with me,” she replied defensively.

“Please, for god’s sake Laura! I don’t get a kick out of competing with you. It is always you who thinks that I am dying to compete with you. Even during university days it was like that,” he accused her. She was surprised that he looked annoyed.

“Are you denying that your magazine is competing with us?”

“My magazine is for women who wish to commit and improve their relationships,” he explained a little impatiently.

“Mine is for single women who don’t wish to get into relationships.”

“Yeah, so can’t you see that both of us are going for different readers?” he fired back.

“But with your magazine my readers may get diverted.”

“Why? It is their choice whether they wish to get into a relationship or remain single, right?” argued Jack.

She remained silent.

“Anyway, what is wrong with commitment? I think you should think about it. Being single is boring and lonely right?” He arched his eyebrows knowingly and shot her a cheeky smile.

“Huh! I am very much happy being single. Thank you very much,” she replied haughtily.

He laughed and then turning serious asked, “So do you trust me now that I am not competing with you?”

She shrugged carelessly.

“What can I do to make you believe me?” He looked exasperated.

“You don’t have to. It doesn’t matter,” she remarked carelessly.

“Yeah, no matter what I do I never get into your good books right? Why Laura? What is it about me that you don’t like? This has amazed me since university days.” He threw up his hands in frustration.

She was surprised by his emotional outburst. She didn’t know what to say. Suddenly she felt confused. Had she really held a grudge against Jack all this while?

“It is getting late,” she spoke glancing at her watch. She had to get away. His questions were disturbing her mind and making her feel troubled.

“Okay,” he sighed and smiled wanly.

Both turned and walked towards their own cars. Suddenly he stopped her with a yell.

“I forgot something,” he shouted. She turned around and saw him walking towards her. He had an unreadable expression on his face as he strode towards her swiftly.

As she stood there wondering what had he forgotten, he shocked her again. He bent down and kissed her. It was a lingering soft kiss which took her by surprise. She dared not think how it made her feel and instead focused on stopping the man from doing crazy things to her!

“Stop it,” she yelled giving him a push. He was smiling widely as if he knew some secret of hers.

“Now I have got my answer.” The victorious grin on his face pushed her to great irritation.

“What answer?” Caution and tension were flashing in her eyes.

“About you and me. Why I always riled you up? You are attracted to me, that’s why!” He moved closer to her still having the irritating grin stuck on his face.

“Stay back. You are talking nonsense,” she yelled refusing to listen and believe his words.

“Yeah, go ahead and start denying it. How long have you denied this chemistry? Can’t you feel it?” he asked not caring that she was glaring at him. He held her arms and pulled her towards him smiling down at her recklessly.

“We should explore this further,” he whispered huskily as he brushed a lock of her hair across her forehead gently.

She shivered suddenly wondering what on earth was Jack up to? She knew that she was a nervous wreck in his embrace and it was driving her crazy! No man had ever made her feel like this and it was worrying her greatly!

“Stop it,” she cried not wanting to feel anything.

“Please Laura, tell me truthfully. Don’t you feel anything when I kissed you?” His eyes were brooding and he looked dead serious. She blushed in spite of herself and he laughed.

She hit him on his chest provoking more laughter from him.

“What is so funny?” she demanded shooting him an annoyed look.

“You look so lovely.” He fixed his warm gaze on her and it disturbed her greatly. Up close his hazel eyes looked molten chocolate and strangely she wondered why she felt like bolting from him and his knowing gaze. The rush of feelings felt too alien to Laura and she felt like escaping from him. But he refused to let go, holding her close to him as if he was imprisoning her. She shot him an annoyed look. “Let me go, Jack!”

“Okay, only if you tell me how I make you feel,” he demanded smiling wickedly.

“I don’t know,” she sighed. She felt him relax his grip on her arms and she looked at him wondering what a troublesome man he was.

“Let me spell it out for me. I irritate the hell out of you and at the same time there is something that pulls you to me right,” his eyes twinkled dangerously.

“You make yourself sound as if you are such a devastatingly attractive man,” she spoke with sarcasm.

“Ha! Never losing your sarcasm with me. That’s good. I love it when you throw insults at me. At least I know there is one woman who is always dying to fight with me,” he teased and played with her hair.

“Why are you doing this?” she asked sounding tired. He could see that she was nervous and uneasy. He smiled back reassuringly.

“I have always wanted to tell you something since university days but I kept it a secret.” Gone was the teasing smile and instead a warm and intimate look crept into his eyes.

He looked serious and it scared her stiff as to what he was going to reveal.

Her eyes widen with surprise and a little anticipation. He paused and wondered if he should proceed. Would she laugh in his face? He prayed not.

“I have always liked you. Since the day I first saw you but you always moved far away from me as if you couldn’t stand the sight of me,” he spoke passionately. She could see the heavy emotions in his eyes and for a moment she was speechless by his declaration.

“But I don’t care about you pushing me away. I still have feelings for you and I can bet you Laura, I have a gut feeling this is not an one-sided attraction.”

She didn’t know what to say. She didn’t like the way he was staring into her eyes. She felt a chill and she shivered.

He went on, “You can go on pretending I didn’t speak about this at all. It is your choice. But trust me, I want you in my life.”

After that he walked back to his car while Laura couldn’t forget his words and the confident way he had spoken them. It was as if he had meant each and every word he had told her. She shivered again recalling his disturbing words.

Nancy sighed.

“My hunch was right after all. Oh he is a poor thing isn’t he?” she spoke on looking sympathetically.

“Jack McNeville a poor thing?” remarked Laura unable to imagine the scenario.

“Please have a heart Laura. The man just declared his feelings for you. What else do you need?” Nancy demanded sounding a bit annoyed.

“Now you make it seem as if I am some cold-hearted woman. How am I supposed to know his feelings? I am not a psychic!” Laura replied defensively.

Just then Lisa walked in. She looked very enthusiastic. Laura recognized the look. It meant she had something very important for them to know.

“What is it?” Laura asked.

“You won’t believe it. I am not sure if it is true. Remember my friend Darrel, the one who is working in ‘Ladies Get Committed’ magazine?” Lisa blurted.

“Yeah, what about him?”

“According to him, it seems Mr. Jack McNeville is going to stop the magazine. This month is the last issue,” Lisa rattled on with excitement. Nancy and Laura looked shocked.

“Oh my God. He did it for you,” Nancy announced looking amazed and surprised.

“What? It can’t be!” Laura remarked looking as if she was at a loss for words. Could it be really true? It had been two days since they had last met and he had not called her up since that date. Suddenly she felt light headed. Maybe Lisa’s friend got it wrong.

“Maybe it’s not true.” Laura tried to convince herself.

“There is only one way to find out,” Nancy exclaimed confidently.

“What are you going to do?” Laura saw Nancy’s purposeful look and wondered what she was going to do next.

“I am going to call Jack,” Nancy replied with determination.

“No, you are not going to stop me Laura. For God’s sake if this is true I think you better come to your senses and think about what a great sacrifice that man has done for you.”

As Nancy called him up, Laura started wondering what could have caused him to do that. Could he really have folded up his magazine because of her? It was unbelievable that Jack could do it for her.

She was getting a headache and as she walked out of her office she realized that she badly needed a cup of coffee to ease her headache.

“You really did that?” Laura shot him a wary look.

He nodded shrugging his shoulders carelessly. He sipped the coffee and studied her. She looked troubled. He hoped she was not sympathizing with him. He didn’t need that.

“Can I ask why?” Laura continued looking confused.

He sighed. She could still ask him why he shut down his magazine. Couldn't she see?

“I didn't want to be a rival in your eyes, my dear. That's why I stopped the magazine.”

When she continued to look at him blankly he continued with sarcasm, “Is there any more questions you want me to answer?” Even with him shutting down the magazine she had not understood his feelings for her. Was she blind? Couldn't she see how much she made him feel that he was willing to do any sacrifices for her?!

She was surprised to see a flicker of annoyance and pain in his eyes. She stood up not knowing what to say. Nancy had been right. He had closed the magazine for her. She felt dizzy again and wondered if she should get out of his office.

“What are you going to do then?”

“Don't know,” he shrugged his shoulders and walked towards her purposefully. She wondered what he was going to do next.

“It still didn't make any difference to you, didn't it?” He searched her eyes as he gave a longing smile.

“I don't know,” she mumbled feeling uneasy and nervous.

“Seriously I don't know Jack,” she repeated as she felt a flutter inside her heart. He took her in his arms and she didn't fight him this time.

“Thank God you are not pushing me away now.” He chuckled and caressed her hair.

”It is just that I never expected you to close your magazine. I always thought you are very ambitious and competitive,” Laura confessed and saw him smile at her warmly.

“Yeah I am still ambitious in my work but somehow I guess now I am paying more attention to something called love and commitment,” she saw the emotions in his eyes and felt a thrilling warmth in her heart.

“Really?” she asked searching his eyes.

“Cross my heart and hope to die if I lie,” he spoke passionately, touching his heart and giving her a wide grin.

She laughed. He smiled.

“Okay.” She started grinning at him.

“Okay?” he asked bewildered to see her smiling at him warmly.

“Remember our next dessert date? It is on me this time.”

“Am I dreaming? Laura Wills asking me out? Wow!” he teased her. She punched him on his chest lightly provoking more laughter.

As Laura left Jack’s office ten minutes later she was heavy in thoughts. Had she really fought the attraction between them all these years? As she smiled in memory of Jack she realized that she was looking forward to their next dessert date.

“Oh no, I have fallen,” Laura remarked to herself with amazement and delight.

***** THE END *****

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