

Romance meets Death

Ina Disguise

For Toby, 2005

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“Looks like I’m in trouble again, then.” I twisted my fingers, earthy from an earlier spontaneous gardening stint, into my fists to stop Rita, the tanned blonde identikit agency temp hirer from spotting them.

“I’ll say. The council are talking about suing, although since you managed not to make a mess, I am not sure why.” Rena smiled affectionately at this point, and I knew I had her by the imaginative short and curlies. I could do anything I wanted with her now, I chortled to myself. Actually, I mused, how irritating that Peter wasn’t interested, because he was the only person I had ever met that did it too. He had finally slain me with an image of his goddess-like long distance girlfriend being blown up by a British landmine in Bosnia. Knowing, as he did, that I have, publically at least, a strong affection for ‘Associated Defence Products’ on an economic basis, I had, mistakenly as it turned out, taken this as an ‘uber’ come on.

“It was a wonderful piece of film though, really wonderful – Romance, it’s intercourse with mortality. Wonderful, I could bring you in a DVD it’s only five minutes long?”

“That won’t be necessary.” Drat, I had pushed her too far. She got up, thrusting a piece of paper into my hand. “Even you cannot manage to cause any trouble here.” She sniffed and drew herself up to her full height in full Dickensian fashion. Didn’t really go with the accent and tan, I thought.

I looked at the scrap of paper that dictated my next assignment. It was packing Aran Jumpers. Eugh, can you imagine what my manky hands were gong to do with them? Never mind what rough, oily wool was going to do to me. “Is this my punishment?” What a useful classical education, I thought for the thousandth time.

Rena laughed heartily, with a surprisingly sardonic air. “I shall hear from you next week.”

Meanwhile our hero Peter, he of the irresistible tummy and bat ears (sigh) had indeed had the fright of his life. Perving at the temp staff was supposed to be acceptable and discreet. Dreadful creature, with her single inch of fishnet stockings beneath the long skirt. He had received quite a number of communications from her, email, letter, telephone, firecracker. He had turned up on Monday morning to find our grubby and dishevelled heroine with a film crew outside the mortuary, capturing some 300 Chinese lanterns containing firecrackers go off in a controlled explosion all over the fascia of the building. Now he was thinking about her. The little minx. “Walk like a duck! I do not!”

His vanity dictated that she was not at all mad, on one level, he was a damned good catch. On the other hand he was not at all interested in even slightly deranged chubby women turning up on his doorstep with slashed wrists, or whatever. Hazards of dealing with the dead, ghouls will gather, etc. He tried to put it out of his mind. That last email had been particularly naughty. A rather blunt attempt at linking individualism, ducks and her, meaning that she would be torturing him for some time to come, every time he saw a duck, or felt stifled. Mental torture. How interesting though, that one look had provoked such an attack. She was obviously cross about something or other. God only knew how such people think.

“At least this means I’m not dead, I guess.”

Thank heaven for St Marion, she of the calm exterior and passionate embrace. The cool-headed, worthy St Marion, who would guarantee him and his children a world class reputation for pathology for generations to come. All hail Saint Marion! No mental complications there then. Peace at last. If only the dreadful girl would come home and have some babies whilst they were still young enough to enjoy them. She could always go back to work later, he mused.

Imagine if he had run off with the dreadful temp with genes like that in the bank. How amusing! His colleagues would have been eyeing him strangely for years. He thought of this with great glee for a moment, before moving on to his customary state of utter boredom.

“I think I’ll go and get my ducks framed, in case I get any grief from Doctor Peterson. I can eye it in a vaguely threatening Dilbertian way and say nothing at all. No-one will know whether it really means anything.” He laughed maniacally. The 4 x 3 foot duck study had caused quite the sensation in the office, however inexpertly done. It was a time marker, nothing more. Just a passing gift from a stranger....weird girl.

“I’ve decided to move to the country for a few years. I won’t be away all the time.” I knew that mother would not like his, but continued. “I think I have gone mad.”

“What have you done this time?” She looked nervous this time.

“I made an inappropriately large pass at a world class pathologist on the strength of his right eye in a corridor. And then I made a film to celebrate.”

“Was it really that good?”

“I’m afraid so, mother.”

“Well, you’ve always been a bit like that, haven’t you? A bit desperate. You always rush at things.” No changes from mother then. Feeling so much more confident. Thanks for that. Running like hell sounding more attractive by the minute.

“Possibly. I like to think of it as ‘unrestricted by social convention’, myself. I realise that my free-spiritedness is getting a little dated, but you know, if everyone was the same, life would be boring. You always said so.”

“Yes, I’m beginning to question that statement’s validity.” She stuck her proud central Scottish nose in the air.

She objected to my ‘dropping out’, but a few years away from Glasgow would do me no harm at all. I could amass a carpet collection to exhibit. I could write. I could take dogs for lengthy walks. I could seduce random old boys in village pubs in a carefree manner and not think about anything of consequence. Most importantly I would be as far away as possible from the mortuary and the site of my terrible firecracker disgrace. I had made the local papers this time. Poor Peter. I wondered if he would ever live it down. In the meantime I had debts to clear, in case I ever did find a permanent

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