

Napoli

By Deborah Robinson

Jimmy Trent had the kind of face that his grandmother's friends described as 'so handsome'. Frustratingly for Jimmy, however, it never seemed to arouse so much enthusiasm in women of his own age.

He was sitting at his desk in the office when he heard the report on the radio. It distracted him from his usual morning occupation; that of catching glimpses of Anna Edmondson's legs, (elegantly crossed beneath her desk) while pretending to look at spreadsheets. Anna would slip her shoes on and off as she worked, and Jimmy had long laid the blame for his inability to ever achieve promotion squarely at her feet.

The news report told of a cargo ship; grounded on rocks only five miles along the coast from where he sat, spilling its load of cars, wine, and... here his heart beat a little faster... brand new BMW motorcycles. He drifted into a daydream, in which he arrived at work in leathers, astride his new (excitingly obtained) BMW. Anna would flash him a dazzling smile, and after work, he would take her home along the coast road, feeling the delicious pressure of her arms around his waist as she rode pillion. Then of course she would ask him in. for a cup of tea, or a lingering kiss in the hallway, before beckoning him upstairs...

"Jimmy, your grandmother phoned to say; would you drop in at the chiroprapist's for her and make an appointment, she's fretting over her bunions".

Brenda's voice shattered Jimmy's Elysium irrevocably. Once again he was enclosed within greying walls and dusty pot plants, his mind assaulted by images of entirely the wrong kind of feet.. He felt at once the necessity of escape, and before he had a chance to change his mind he strode out of the office, and into the cold sea air.

The scene on the beach was surreal; the air heavy with the reek of oil, and the raised voices of men, the great stricken bulk of the Napoli looming accusingly in the water. He crunched through the debris, eyes sharp to the ground, but finding only broken pieces of cars, tattered clothing, and, strangely, nappies. He walked for a long time, finding nothing to spark his interest, or take his mind off Anna.

The lonely cry of gulls broke through the cacophony of voices and engines, and he was suddenly struck by the sadness of it all. There were paintings and photographs, still clinging to smashed frames... lost pieces of lives that they would never be returned to.

He felt a desire to collect them all, repair and return them, before they were all trampled by the greedy, careless feet of the scavengers. He remembered that he was one of them, and felt ashamed.

Turning back, something caught his eye. Recumbent in the sand was an old, soggy teddy bear, the kind which his grandmother tended to lust over on the Antiques Roadshow, when she wasn't lusting after Michael Aspel. He picked it up absent-mindedly by a hind leg, and made his way back to work, where he now felt he should have stayed all along.

Back in the office, bear concealed under his coat, Jimmy managed to work; absorbed and undisrupted, all afternoon. He was shocked when he looked up and saw that it was getting dark and all was quiet, except for a voice beside him.

“Where did you disappear to today? It asked.

“Oh, nowhere” he replied, almost dismissive. Anna hovered shyly for a moment, as Jimmy picked up his coat; revealing its unexpected contents. He blushed and strided out of the office, feeling more humiliated than he had ever quite believed possible.

To his dismay he heard her footsteps hurrying after him to the bus stop, where he had hoped to sit and wallow in peace... Anna sat next to him quietly for a moment, and then spoke.

‘Um... Jimmy... that bear: is it a Steiff?’

‘Is it a what?’

Anna took the bedraggled bear and examined it like a vet checking over a family pet—paying particular attention to the ears. She smiled and spoke excitedly.

‘It is... I knew it! I collect bears. He’s a bit, er, wet though...’

The faintest traces of a smile began to tug at the corners of Jimmy’s mouth.

‘Well, you can have him if you want him’ he said.

* * *

That evening, he sat with his grandmother, paying even less attention than usual to Coronation Street. He was wrapped in a warm dream, but this time it was a real one. He could still feel her arms around his neck at the bus stop, and the light kiss she had placed on his (so handsome) cheek. Before they parted he had told her about the scene on the beach, though not about his original motivation for going there, and they had sat together on the bench, looking down at the bear. He had told her how it had made him sad, to see all the lost possessions, and she smiled.

He also realised, rather wryly, that being ignored for the space of an afternoon had inspired more affectionate feelings in her than all his previous months’ polite attentions had managed to. He had to forgive her though, when she said...

'We should clean him up, then go to the police, fill in the forms and things, and see if we can find his owner...and he should have a name.. What was the name of the ship?'

'Napoli'

Anna considered for a moment 'I think that would suit him, don't you?'

In the look Anna gave him, in that moment, at the cold wet bus stop. Jimmy felt for the first time in living memory that perhaps his grandmother was right... perhaps he was indeed remarkably attractive.

'Well, he's yours now' he had replied, 'you can do as you like with him'.

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