

Chapter Twenty-three

On the train, Posy thought about Carrie's words. Her advice was so different from Rhoda's. Rhoda, an experienced therapist, had hinted that Posy should take sex very seriously indeed, and should follow her deeper instincts. Carrie, experienced in motherhood, reminded Posy that the real glue of relationships was not sex but compatibility. Rhoda had a great marriage; Carrie had a marriage which had survived turmoil, and she had a child. Which woman was wisest?

Posy thought back to the early days of her relationship with Barnaby. Their sex life had been exciting at first. Perhaps things would cool off with Leif, too, leaving her in exactly the same position. Had she been truly blinded by lust? Her thumping headache told her that she had, indeed, been drunk.

'There's only one thing to do,' thought Posy, gazing out of the train window at the countryside flashing past. 'I must have sex with Barnaby, and remind myself that sex is, after all, just a physical act. If I make more of an effort, I might well enjoy it just as much as I did with Leif.'

An image of Leif's naked shoulders came into her mind, his chest poised above hers, glistening with perspiration. Her knees bent high, her legs holding his body close. His hands, going everywhere. Then she thought of Barnaby; his pale face a picture of disapproval. She laughed suddenly, and the old lady sitting opposite her gave her a funny look.

'Just thinking about something,' said Posy.

'I can see that,' said the old lady with a twinkle.

'Hi Barnaby,' called Posy as she turned the key to the door of their Millfields flat.

'Oh, hi! I wasn't expecting you back today,' said Barnaby, jumping up from the sofa.

He walked towards Posy and stood an awkward foot away from her. In the old days, they would have embraced. Perhaps it wasn't so appropriate now, after the recent crisis.

'I came back early. Tansy's getting on fine, she doesn't really need me. So I thought... there were things here I could be getting on with.'

'Such as?'

‘Starting plans for the next MABO summer school.’

‘Ah, the new Inner City Arts funding application forms. Good luck.’

‘I’m not talking about that. I won’t be filling in any forms. We’re holding the course in Godfrey’s barn. Godfrey’s agreed to help finance it if we make him Composer in Association.’

Barnaby looked bewildered.

‘I can’t believe you’re collaborating with Godfrey Maxwell Minniver.’

‘Stranger things have happened at sea,’ replied Posy cheerfully.

‘But Maxwell Minniver stands for everything you hate! Just like Leif le Carré and his elitist orchestra, *The Eye*,’ Barnaby added sardonically. ‘I just worry that you’re leaving your integrity behind, Posy.’

Posy laughed softly; if only Barnaby realised how wholesome she felt, artistically. The problem of integrity was more an issue concerning her sex life.

‘You know, I’m feeling a bit lazy. Why don’t we go to bed?’ she blurted.

Barnaby looked confused.

‘But you’ve only just got in.’

‘It’s been a long journey. I want to rest, and...relax.’

Barnaby blinked a couple of times.

‘I am a bit busy.’

‘Come on. It’ll be nice to relax together.’

He frowned. Posy could tell that he was suspicious, but she had to go through with her plan: to connect physically with Barnaby and judge for herself whether the passion she had experienced with Leif was so special after all. And if that didn’t answer her question, well, at least she would have a bit more fresh data to consider.

She sat on the edge of the bed and took off her T-shirt. She was wearing a new bra in a claret shade. Black would have been a step too far, far away from the things she had learnt about herself in the Empowerment Through Clothes workshop. Though these days Posy was learning many new things about herself, she wondered if she might have to go on the course again, even under a different name.

Barnaby stopped in the bedroom doorway and his jaw went slack.

‘Don’t you like it?’ asked Posy with a smile.

She stood up to face him. ‘It’s new.’

Barnaby scratched his head and dodged around her to sit on the other side of the bed. He

pulled his black sweatshirt over his head and his hair crackled with static electricity.

Posy reached out to touch him.

‘Might be a bit tricky today,’ he mumbled.

‘Pardon?’

‘I’m still sore.’

‘What?’

Barnaby sighed.

‘Do you fancy making love... right *now*?’ he asked.

‘Well – er, yes, I thought we might...’ said Posy.

‘It’s just – I’m still sore from the operation. The procedure. The snip.’

‘What have you had done?’

Posy felt her face grow pale and an icy coldness buzzed in her fingertips.

‘I went round to that clinic next door to the vet, and had a vasectomy,’ said Barnaby. Posy’s mouth fell open.

‘I was looking at that advert when we went to have Mao put down. It seemed cheap enough so I thought I’d go for it. You don’t have to stay in – I was only there for an hour.’

‘So – you have made yourself infertile?’

‘Yep - no unwanted puppies from me!’

Puppies? Was that how he saw her future baby?

Posy felt a wave of revulsion and instinctively cradled her belly as if to protect her womb from the insult.

She stood up so abruptly that the room spun and she staggered sideways into the wardrobe.

‘I have to go,’ she said. ‘I’ve forgotten something.’

Posy pulled on her top, rushed from the room and charged down the stairs breathing heavily with shock. Her coat and shoulder bag were by the front door of the flat, and she grabbed them and ran out into the street. The door of Phil and Rhoda’s flat opened as she flew past, and she heard Rhoda’s voice calling.

‘Is that you, Posy?’

She ignored it. She had to escape. Posy turned left towards Millfields West tube station, watching nothing but the pavement wheeling by under her feet, and groping in her pocket for her travel pass. Suddenly there was a soft collision and a wodge of black T shirt fabric pressed into her face, carrying with it a familiar and comforting scent. Raising her head, Posy was astonished to see Leif staring down at her.

She gasped, unable to fathom how he had come to materialise on Millfields High Road when

he was supposed to be in Worcester at Loxley Farm. He could not possibly have followed her, could he? Why would he do that? No-one could possibly care that much about her, could they? In a few seconds, the penny dropped, and Posy stared into Leif's eyes, realising yet still barely able to believe that he had come to rescue her, to take her away, to make her his wife. She threw her arms around his body, which was inconveniently padded with a black jacket, and buried her face against his chest crying tears of happiness.

'I came to fetch you,' said Leif. 'When I realised you had run away, I knew this was my last chance. You were on a tightrope, balanced between me and between...total disaster.'

'I came very close,' said Posy.

Still clinging to Leif, and causing an obstruction in the busy High Road, Posy heard a faint voice approaching from the direction of the flat. It was Rhoda.

'Oh, thank God you're here, Leif,' she said, panting with the effort of running after her friend. 'I was worried she had come back to propose marriage to Barnaby. It would have been a terrible mistake, but she would never have listened to me! I'm just a therapist! What do I know?'

'You know a good man when you see one,' replied Posy.

Rhoda raised her eyebrows and shrugged. 'Maybe I do,' she smiled. 'Now listen. Phil has offered to drive you both back to Godfrey's farm. I want you to get off and go.'

Posy smiled and turned to hug Rhoda.

'I'm going, Rhoda, I'm going.'

'And don't worry about Barnaby. Fergus will give him plenty of emotional support. He certainly owes it. They're welcome to each other,' she added grimly.

Posy cupped Rhoda's flat, well-padded cheek with her hand.

'Thank you, Rhoda.'

'Get in the car before you change your mind. Get in!'

She rapped loudly on the window of Phil's car which had pulled up beside them.

'Unlock the doors, Phil, you ninny! Now go.'