

I Met a Man, Tonight...

by Judith Nolan



Dearest Diary,

I met a man, tonight... it seems so prosaic, now that I come to write it down. Did I only dream it... and him? He seemed real enough. He appeared out of nowhere, like a magical genie. I was spinning around, enjoying the night, as I moved to the distant music of the party I'd just left. My dress flew out and caught fast on the thorns of a rose bush. I was trapped. He set me free, saving me from ruining my expensive dress, and my evening!

I can smile about it now, but back then it wasn't so funny. My dear father had paid a lot of money for that fancy dress hanging on my closet door. He would've been upset if I'd ruined it. But then, the whole evening became so strange and surreal.

It had begun with Dad deciding he wanted me to act as his companion to these big events, now that I've turned sixteen. I know he misses my mother terribly, as do I. And I'm also aware he wants me to go away to college in a few years, and then join him at the firm. But I'm not at all sure. Corporate law has always seemed so humdrum. Do I really want to practice law, at all? I don't know the answer...

Anyway, my Dad's firm had the idea of hosting a corporate masked ball, based on Shakespeare's characters. They booked out the Tavern on the Green. I chose to dress as Rosalind, the heroine in As You Like It. I played the daughter of Duke Senior, before she was exiled to the Forest of Arden, where she became a shepherd boy called Ganymede. My father was wryly impressed with my knowledge of the Bard's works! But that's not the important thing that happened this evening...

Now that I'm home again, the whole episode seems an impossibility, manufactured by the moonlight and the night. Did we really meet, my mysterious man and I, there in the darkness? Even as he rescued me from my sad predicament with the rose bush, he was very careful to keep his face hidden. He would not be persuaded to put back his hood, and let me see him. In his great cloak, leather clothing and long boots, he looked like a hero of the Bard. I told him I was dressed as Rosalind. I dared to ask if he was my very own Orlando, but he refused to say.

He did tell me he lives with his father, as I live with mine. We had that much in common, along with a passion for the Bard's works. I asked him to stay with me, to go back inside the tavern, where we could talk. We could hear the music from the party. I was even bold enough to ask him to dance with me. Sadly, he said he didn't dance. I tried not to let my disappointment show. Suddenly, he was in a hurry to be gone. I guessed he had other places to be. I tried to detain him. I even told him my real name, but he refused to give me his. My poor father was calling for me, and I was suddenly left all alone, there in the dark night.

So, dear diary, I am destined to always wonder. Who was he? Where did he come from? And will I ever see him again? My head says I must forget him, but my heart whispers of a deeper, older magic. He didn't appear to be of this world. His voice was truly beautiful, low and slight raspy. And the way he said my name... even now, the sensation of it shivers across my bare skin. He touched me... and yet he didn't... I don't know what to believe. It's all so complicated and confusing...

Despite everything, I felt I knew him, on some mysterious, unfathomable level. I felt a kinship with him that I've never known with anyone before. Could it have been only the moonlight and the stars, giving me such romantic flights of fancy? I truly do not know. But I wish, oh how I wish, I could see him again. Even just once more...

I sit here now, watching the dawn. I should get up and shower, then try to get some rest. Maybe I'm too tired to dream. But, perhaps, that's the only place where I will ever meet him again. In the safety of my most secret fantasies...

Catherine

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