

## Kate - Copyright © 2023 Joe Brown

Must find another kindly soul. God I'm cold. Which way? Baker Street or carry on?

Filthy night. Try Baker Street. Speed up, try to keep warm.

They pass me. They pass me looking the other way, before I can even get the words out. They know when I look at them what I want. God this rain!

He's just come out of the picture-house. He's leaning against the wall, sheltering under the canopy, but doesn't bother putting his overcoat on.

Why? Maybe he's waiting for someone else inside?

He doesn't look up at me when I stop in front of him. He's staring at his feet, and I can't see his face properly.

"Excuse me Mister. Have you any small change?"

He turns his face up and looks at me. He looks as miserable as I feel, and there are tears in his eyes. I lower my hand, and mumble "Sorry to bother you."

I look away, and start walking.

"Please! Please come back." I hear him call.

I turn, and he's fumbling in his pockets.

"I'm sorry." he says quietly.

He tries to wipe his tears away with his left hand, and is holding out his right. I see a crumpled note and coins.

I step forward and hold out my hand. He is posh and smells nice. I feel my knees give way, and my bag slips off my shoulder. He looms in front of me, and he is all blurry.

I feel like I've just woken up from a bad dream. I feel his arms around me, holding me up, and I hear him exclaim. "My God, you're freezing!"

He leans me against the wall, and I feel him wrapping his overcoat around me.

He is standing in front of me, my bag in his hand. He is handsome, and probably nearly forty. He looks worried.

“We need to get you warm and dry” he says softly.

He turns, and points to the Pizza bar across the road – barely visible in the torrential November rain.

I feel myself nodding, and he links my arm. We cross the road and enter the cafe.

“Hi Prof!”

The cashier looks up at me, then glances at the girl. “Table for two?”

“Yes, Jenny. A warm seat please.”

She smiles indulgently at me. “No problem.” She walks us to the opposite wall. I sit the girl next to the radiator and myself in a chair opposite her.

“What would you like?”

“Pizza's fine, and can I have a milky coffee please?” Her voice is shaky, but she tries to smile.

I get up and place the order, then return to the table and sit down. I don't want to stare, but it's hard not to. She is shivering, despite holding my coat closed around herself.

“You'll feel better after some warm food.” I say softly.

She nods, then tries to speak. A terrible barking cough erupts, and she holds her chest in pain.

I know she's sleeping rough. I don't ask to confirm her misery.

Our order comes. A selection of pizza slices, salad and chips, and two mugs of milky coffee. She lifts the scalding mug and nurses it with both hands, holding it close to her face, taking a few tentative sips.

I avoid staring, and start on my pizza, giving her the occasional encouraging smile. Only when her coffee mug is empty, does she start on the meal.

“Another hot drink?” I ask.

She looks up, and for the 1<sup>st</sup> time holds my gaze. She has light blue eyes, and now that some colour is returning to her face, I can see she is quite pretty, if more than a little scruffy. She smiles. I nearly miss it, then she nods.

“Yes please.”

I get up and order another coffee for her, then return and watch her demolish the food with growing relish and strength. A girl delivers the coffee and asks about sweets. I choose chocolate cake for us both.

“They call you Prof?”

I laugh quietly. “Yes, they know me. I live close by, and use this place regularly.”

“You’re a Professor?”

Again I laughed. “I’ve tried to get them to use my first name, but once they found out, they insist on the title. I suspect it’s their little joke.”

She nodded. “The cashier fancies you.”

He is holding the rear door of the Taxi for me, and I climb in. He shuts the door and climbs into the front seat. I catch the address, Montagu Place. It’s not far and the driver isn’t pleased. He realises this, but chooses not to notice.

A few minutes later, the taxi stops. He is paying the driver and must have given him a big tip, as the driver suddenly becomes polite. He helps me up the few stairs to the big door of the house, and then we’re inside. It’s beautifully warm. He turns and smiles at me.  
“I’ll show you my daughter’s old room.”

The house is laid out like a flat, but I see staircases both up and down. He shows me to a door at the back of the house and switches on the light. The room is lovely, very feminine, and as we enter, he stops and looks around, as if in a daze. Then he remembers me again, and moves across the room opening the door to an en-suite bathroom.

He points around the room. “Use what you need. Some of Celia’s

clothes are in the cupboards and will probably fit you. I'll get you some towels."

I open the wardrobe doors. They are full of clothes and shoes. The dressing table has hairbrush and comb. He is back with a pile of towels in his arms, and places these on the radiator rails in the bathroom.

"Please make yourself comfortable." He is looking at me, concern in his face.

"I'll be in the sitting room at the front of the house."

I believe he feels a little self-conscious and shy. I try to reassure him with a smile.

"Thank you.. Prof."

He laughs gently. "My apologies. My name is Thomas - please call me Tom."

"I'm Kate" I say, "and thank you for your help."

"You are welcome Kate. See you later."

He closes the door quietly behind him.

While the bath is running, I strip off the damp dirty rags of a dress and underclothes, and stand looking at myself in the full-length mirror.

Only when I've been soaking for ten minutes in the huge warm bath, do the sobs subside.

It's over an hour and a half later that I turn the handle and enter his sitting room.

I turn. She's standing a little inside the doorway, her hand still resting on the handle. Her slim body is covered neck to toe in one of Celia's long, warm, nightdresses. Her face and hair are clean, and she is beautiful.

I pick up the TV remote and mute the sound. "Come in Kate, and sit by the fire." I motion to the big settee, pulled up in front of the huge log-burner.

I get up from my seat and pick up a thick Cashmere rug, draping it around her shoulders.

“Is there no bath gown?”  
She shakes her head. “I couldn’t see one.”  
I look down at her bare feet. “Her slippers?”  
She smiles shyly, “Too small.”  
I nod and smile at her. “Sorry about that.”  
She looks up at me. “You shouldn’t apologize. You are very kind.”

I hand her the TV remote. “Would you like a hot drink?”  
She nods. “Yes, please.”  
“Chocolate?” I ask.  
She smiles. “That would be lovely.”  
“Amuse yourself with the TV, or a magazine or book, and try to stay warm. I’ll make us the drink.”  
I leave, closing the door softly behind me.

When I return, she’s sitting on the floor beside one of the bookcases, leafing through my vinyl collection. The TV is turned off. I put down the two steaming mugs of chocolate. “Would you like some music?”

She points to the turntable and gestures to the records. “I’ve never used one of these before.”

I laugh. “What kind of music do you like?”

Her blue eyes meet mine. “Seventies Rock.”

I kneel down and pull out an LP. “Have you heard of this band?”

“Alan Bown? No, never.”

“It’s my opinion they made some of the best – and some of the very worst, tracks in the seventies.”

She laughed.

“Do want to sample it?” I asked her softly.

She nodded. I handed the LP in its cover to her, and switched on the deck and the valve amplifier.

She carefully removed the record from its sleeve, and looked at the surface. “It looks brand-new!”

I laughed. “It’s not, just well looked-after.”

I showed her how to place the pickup, and cranked up the volume a little.

There’s a crash of drums and trumpets – not what I am expecting at all. Then a beautiful creamy sound that sounds for all the world like

a human voice, but which I recognize is a heavily-sustained guitar. A man starts to sing – the words are clear despite the music. I feel the strong rhythm through the floor. I start smiling, I can't help it. "Like it?" he asks.

I nod. "Very much."

The music is hypnotic and the words are full of despair. I become the person trapped in the pyramid, and just before the track ends I can't bear what I feel any more. I cover my face with my hands. The sobs start again, and I can feel the tears running down my face.

He is beside me, taking me in his arms, holding me close. His voice is soft and gentle in my ear, telling me not to worry, telling me everything will be alright. He turns the amplifier off. Then I start coughing again. The pain hurts my chest, I start shivering, and my head feels as if it is going to burst, and then things go away from me, as they did outside the picture house.

He has me in his arms, and I see the ceiling of the sitting room moving, then he places me gently on the settee and covers me with the rug.

Through my tears I see him looking at me, worried about me. I hear him say "May I?" very softly, then his cool hand is on my brow.

"You are burning up." he says. "I'll get you some paracetamol."

He is sat with me on the settee and I've taken his hand. I grip it tight while I tell him. The months of misery, filth and abuse pour out of me, only stopped when I cry again. He doesn't ask questions, he lets me tell it the way I want. Finally, I feel a little better and the sobbing and shivering have stopped.

He still has my hand. "Kate. You are welcome to stay here as long as you wish."

He pauses. "There are no strings. I want only that you wait until you are ready to face the world again."

I look into his face. His sad beautiful brown eyes are looking into mine. Despite my misery, I am convinced he has suffered worse. We are two lost souls alone in a wilderness. I lift his left arm, putting it around me and cuddle in to him.

We talk, quietly, as she adds to her story. Her head is on my chest, her left arm holding onto me. She pauses more and more, until finally her breathing deepens, and I realise she's asleep. I close my eyes and drift, thinking of better days, but also feeling both deeply privileged and honoured by her trust.

I catch myself falling asleep, but not wanting to wake her, I lift her as I stand up, and carry her to Celia's room. She stirs as I walk down the hall, but only murmurs and does not fully wake.

Again, as I place her in the bed, she stirs, but curls up as I cover her. I leave her door ajar, and after tidying up, I go to my own bed, to fall asleep almost immediately.

I'm awake suddenly and open my eyes. She is standing in front of me, the moonlight from the window lighting her face. I don't move in case I startle her. She makes no sign that she knows I'm awake, and I realise that my face is in shadow.

She lifts her right hand to her lips, kissing her middle finger with which she touches me very softly on the cheek. Then she's gone.

I rise just after seven-thirty, and peep in through her part-open bedroom door. She is still asleep, but her breathing seems laboured. I wash myself, then prepare a cooked breakfast. As if on cue, I'm removing the toast from the grill when she enters the kitchen. I turn and look at her, nodding my approval.

She is wearing a pair of Celia's dungarees, with a nice white blouse. A pair of thick socks are on her feet. She smiles at me.

"You look nice." I say. "How are you feeling?"

"Better, I think. Much better."

I walk over to her.

"May I?" I reach out my hand to her brow, and she nods. She feels a little hot.

"I think you still have a temperature."

She nodded. "The headache is still there, but not as bad."

"Some breakfast?"

She smiles. "Yes please."

We tuck in, and she manages to eat about twice as much as I do. I make no comment. When she's finished eating, I place two paracetamol beside her cup.

“Do you feel like going shopping?” I ask.

“Oh! Well..”

I smile. “You need some clothes that fit you properly, and probably more importantly, some shoes.”

She looks at me across the table. “I can't repay you..”

I stop her, and shake my head. “You need clothes Kate. There is no question of repaying me.”

She got up from her chair and kissed me gently on the cheek, saying “Thank you, lovely kind man” in my ear.

I didn't know what to expect. Just after 9am, we leave the house, and walk towards Baker Street. He is concerned about me, and had suggested a taxi, but the sun is shining and I want to walk.

On Baker Street, I glance across the road at the picture house. A gaudy Asian poster is proclaiming the title of the current movie “Bandit Queen.”

I look at him. He catches my glance and nods. “I'll tell you some time, but not now. This morning is for you.”

I link my arm into his, and we walk down towards Oxford Street until we find a shoe shop.

When we leave, the filthy trainers I was wearing have been left in the shop. A new pair of Doc Marten's are on my feet. He carries two bags with new trainers, shoes and slippers. Although my head hurts, I'm happier than I've been for months.

The rest of the morning is a revelation. I have never been so well treat in a shop, nor known anyone who is so organised and efficient.

Just inside Marks, we stop and he makes a 'phone call. He then smiles at me.

“You don't need me hanging around, embarrassing and cramping your style while you shop, so I've arranged you some female help. I want you to choose yourself a complete set of clothes and underclothes, both smart and casual. The young lady who will arrive shortly, will help and advise you if you wish. All of the clothes will be paid for on my account.”

He reaches into his pocket and withdraws some notes. He holds these out to me. "There's £200.00 here and is in addition, for anything else you may need, but which you don't want appearing on the bill."

He is smiling at his own joke. I am in a daze, but I smile, and take the money from his hand.

A young woman introduces herself to me as Susan, my 'personal shopper'. He shakes hands with her and gives her a list, obviously prepared earlier in the morning.

"I'll be in the cafe when you're finished. If you can't find me, ring my cell please, Oh, and could we have those items wrapped which Kate would like to take straight away, and have the rest delivered this afternoon?"

She nods smiling. "Yes, absolutely no problem, Professor."

He kisses me on the cheek.

"Are you OK?"

I smile. "Very much, thank you."

They both arrived in the cafe looking like Christmas trees. I laugh, and help them stack the bags. I tip the young lady, and she leaves. I smile at Kate. "Did you get everything you needed?"

She nods. She's excited, but there's something else.

"Your head?"

She nods again, so I get her a cold drink, and hand her two more paracetamol.

I telephone for a taxi, and we make our way to the front entrance. I'm cursing myself for worsening her current fragile state.

I take her hand while we wait. "I'm sorry. The shopping could have waited."

She turns to me, her blue eyes meeting mine, a sweet sad smile.

"It's been a lovely morning, and I can't thank you enough. I'll rest this afternoon."

She did. After a light lunch of pate, toast, and a small salad, she excused herself and went to rest.

I waited an hour, then checked on her. She was dozing fitfully. I laid

my hand softly on her brow. Her temperature was up again. She stirred, and I sat her up to take a drink of water and more paracetamol. I settled her, then rang my GP.

Kelly Hallett recognized my voice. "Why Tom, Good Afternoon. What can I do for you?"

I greeted her, then explained.

"Another waif?" Although there was a question in her voice, there was no hint of criticism.

"I'll be there within the hour - is that OK?"

I thanked her, and hung up.

A little earlier than expected, she was standing in my hall.

I took her coat, and then walked her through to see Kate.

I helped sit her up, and explained that Kelly was my Doctor.

"Do you mind if Kelly examines you?"

She shook her head slowly, and tried to smile, then she started coughing.

I left Kelly to do her job, and started a new pot of coffee percolating.

I had sat down in the kitchen to sip my coffee when Kelly entered and closed the door behind her.

I looked up. Her face was serious.

"Tell me." was all I said.

"Well I believe she has 'flu, but the chest sounds very bad. I've taken sputum and blood samples, but there will be a delay in confirming a diagnosis..."

Her voice trailed off.

"You suspect TB?"

She looked at me, a little relieved I wasn't surprised.

"Yes, I do, but of course it could be something else, she's very run-down."

I shook my head slowly. "Coffee?"

She nodded and sat down, while I poured her a cup.

"I'll check her sputum sample myself, as soon as I get back to the surgery, and then we can confirm extent with an X-ray if necessary."

I nodded.

"I've given her an antibiotic, and I've made out this script."

I took the prescription from her, and she smiled at me.

"Stop worrying. We'll get her well again."

I feel the blissfully cool cloth gently applied to my brow, and I open my eyes. It hurts, but I see his face before mine, his arm extended holding the flannel.

He smiles, and lowers his hand.

“Awful?” he says quietly.

I blink my reply, and grunt, too frightened to nod.

He dips the flannel in the dish and applies it to my head again.

“You should drink something.” he suggests, nodding to the water jug.

I manage a slight dip of my head, and he pours out water into a glass and offers it to my lips. The angle is wrong. He puts the glass down, and gently lifts me forward, propping up the pillows behind me. We try again. The water is cool, delicious. I finish and he removes the glass, wiping my face gently with the cloth. I close my eyes again.

I must have slept. He has brought an easy chair into the bedroom, and he looks up at me over the top of a book as I stir.

“I need to pee.” I croak.

I swing my legs out of the bed and try to stand up. The whole room turns around at a crazy angle, stopped only as he takes me in his arms.

I can't help it, I moan with the pain in my head, and the dizziness makes me feel sick.

“Put your arms around my neck.” he says softly. I do, and he lifts me carefully up into his arms, cradling me like a baby.

He walks to the en-suite and carefully lowers me onto the lavatory. He holds me steady by the shoulders, and says gently. “Can you do the rest?”

“I think so.” I croak, lifting the nightie clear.

He is in front of me as I pee, holding me safe, and he smiles. “I don't do this very often.”

I begin to laugh, but it hurts. I'm finished. I wipe myself with tissue and he carries me back to the bed.

He looks at his watch. “Can you manage another two paracetamol, and two tablets the Doctor prescribed?”

I nod slowly. He pours more water, and I take the tablets, then he

settles my pillows down again, and sits back in his chair.  
"Thank you for looking after me."

He smiles. "It's my pleasure Kate, you don't have to thank me."

The crisis came around 2am. I awoke to find her threshing around on the bed, moaning, with her head moving from side to side. She was bathed in sweat. I rose from the chair and sat on the bed, talking to her softly. I bathed her face with the cold water and she slowly calmed, finally opening her eyes, though grimacing even in the dim light of the bedside lamp.

I sat her up and gave her a drink, and more paracetamol, wondering what more I could do. Then I remembered. I said softly to her. "Back in a minute."

When I returned, I sat down on the bed again, and dug into the small dish of ice-cream I'd brought, offering her a small spoonful. She murmured her thanks and managed a subdued "Lovely!", with her first mouthful, finally managing to finish off all that I'd brought. I made to move back to my seat but she grabbed my hand. "Hold me please. I'm frightened."

I sat back against the bed head and she snuggled into my shoulder, closing her eyes. I wrapped my right arm around her and closed mine also.

Bouts of shivering and sweating persisted throughout the night, but around daybreak I noticed her temperature had fallen, and she slept peacefully.

I got up, bathed and made myself breakfast.

A soft voice was singing. I was frightened to open my eyes. The last time it had hurt. I thought I was dreaming, so listened to the voice. It didn't matter I couldn't understand, the voice was lovely. Then I heard a tap running.

I opened my eyes. It wasn't a dream, someone was in the bathroom.

Then there she was in front of me, black hair, beautiful peach-coloured skin, flashing black eyes and a dazzling white smile.

"Ola Kate. I 'ope I not wake you too much. My name is Carina, I am 'ousekeeper for Prof."

She approached the bed and held out her hand.

I tried to sit up, but didn't make it. Concern creases her brow.

"Lie still. Would you like tea?"

I nod slowly and try to smile.

She reaches forward and pats my hand. "A minute or so, I make for you."

While she is in the kitchen I test out my legs, I still feel weak and dizzy, but make it to the lavatory and back on my own, just before Carina comes back with a tray of toast, spreads, and a pot of tea. She sits on the bed and helps me with the breakfast. Afterwards, she brings a dish, soap and towel and helps me wash my face.

"I do your hair please?" she asks, when the dish has been taken away.

I smile and nod "Yes, please, that would be lovely."

She asks me no questions, other than how I prefer my hair, but we chat quietly, and I find myself liking her very much.

After a while she senses I am tired and settles me down in the bed again, after offering a drink, the prescribed pills and two more paracetamol.

"You rest now. Prof will be back for lunch. If you need me, pick up telephone and dial 9."

I nod, and she smiles and leaves, and in a little while I drift off to sleep

It's just after one. I had tried to get back before Carina left, but must have just missed her. The house is quiet. I look in on Kate, but her bed is empty and the en-suite door is closed. The sound of the shower can be heard through the door.

I've just finished laying out the cold buffet Carina has prepared, and turn to fill a jug with juice. She is standing in the doorway, smiling at me. She wears one of the outfits from Marks. She is beautiful, but still a little pale.

"Hi." She says, and walks over to kiss me on the cheek.

"How do you feel?" I enquire gently, gesturing to a seat at the table. She sits. "Much better, but a little shaky."

We eat. She asks what I 'do'. Her questions are informed and intelligent, after I tell her the research I am involved in. I'm a little surprised but don't say so. Nor do I question her.

I'm awake. My head on his chest, and although I'm lying on his right side, I can feel the steady, strong beat of his heart. His right arm is still around me, his hand lightly resting on my side.

I want to drink, and to pee, but lying close to him feels so good, so right, I cannot get up. I open my eyes, cautiously, but the headache is gone, for how long I don't know. The room is lit only by the bedside lamp. I feel loved and wanted for the first time in what seems years.

Eventually, my need to pee starts invading my thoughts. I raise myself carefully, gently lifting his arm and placing it softly on the bed. There is no cartwheeling room when I stand up, and I manage my trip to the bathroom without feeling dizzy. While I drink some water I look down at him. His strong handsome face looks peaceful, his breathing is slow and deep.

He is lying on the top of the bedclothes, but partially covered with a fleecy blanket he had used in the armchair.

I get back on the bed, this time alongside him on top of the bedclothes, covering us both with the blanket, and cuddle into him once more, my head upon his chest.

I know I've woken myself up calling her name. Holding her again had felt like Heaven. Now she had gone. Kate hadn't.

She lay across me, her head high on my chest, her silky curls nestling under my chin. Her right arm was across my middle, and her right leg straddled both of mine.

A confused jumble of emotions racked me. Despair at the reality that Belinda is no longer with me. An overwhelming feeling of love for the beautiful girl in my arms, coupled with a terrible guilt that I feel that way about her. Add to that the obvious physical effect her very close presence was having on me, and in my newly-wakened state I didn't know what to do. So I did nothing.

She stirred, lifting her head and turned to look at me. Even by the subdued light from the bedside lamp, I could see that the lines of pain had gone from her brow. She smiled. "Good Morning lovely man."

I managed a smile in return. "Good Morning Kate."

She planted a soft kiss on my cheek. "My headache is gone."

I smiled. "Good. I'm really glad. Do you feel like getting up?"

She gave a little laugh. "Well, it's lovely lying here cuddling you, but I suppose we should really."

Her unblinking blue eyes held me. I wanted to look away, felt guilty of her effect upon me. She spoke again, softly, "Thank you for loving me."

Seeing my struggle to reply, she placed her forefinger gently on my lips and whispered "Sshh, not now" before kissing me again on the cheek, and leaving the bed for the bathroom.

I watched her go, my head spinning, then rose and left for my own room, to wash before breakfast.

He turned to look at me as I entered the kitchen, and smiled.

“Hungry?”

The lovely smell of Bacon and toast filled the room, and I nodded

“Yes please!”

He laughed. “Sit down, it won’t be long.”

After we had eaten and coffee was poured, he sat back in his chair, and looked at me.

“Tell me, if you can.” I said, smiling at him.

He looked at me, his warmth for me in his eyes, but with a slight puzzled shake of his head.

I reached across the table and touched the back of his left hand.

“Your wife and daughter, the tears in your eyes outside the cinema?”

He turned his hand and held mine, again shaking his head.

“It is awful, I cannot, it will upset you.”

I squeezed his hand gently. “You listened patiently and kindly to the awful shit that I should probably have kept to myself. You are the kindest and most loving person I have ever met, so please let me help you.”

He reached across the table and took my other hand.

“Kate. I will tell you, but I must say something else first. What I feel about you isn’t simply that you are someone that needs help, but much more, and more than I imagine you could or will accept. You have thanked me for ‘loving you’. The truth is that I do love you.

Until you are fit and well, I will look after you, and I can’t expect any more than that, even though I wish it were different.”

He paused, I knew there was more, and there were tears in his eyes.

“The ‘Bandit Queen’ was a dramatization of the repeated rape of an Indian woman who led an insurrection. My wife and daughter met the same fate, then death, some time ago.”

At this, he collapsed into tears.

I got up, went around the table and wrapped my arms around him, turning his head to my breast.

Eventually, my sobbing subsided. She reached down and took my hand. "Come, come with me."

She led me back to her bedroom and patted the bed. "Lie down Tom."

She lay beside me, turned slightly and kissed me gently on the lips, her beautiful blue eyes looking into mine.

"I love you. I will stay with you for as long as you want me to. I know what you feel, I feel the same way too. When you are ready, we will make love. For now, let me cuddle you."

She kissed me again, then stroked my head gently.

I wrapped my arms around her, looking up into her lovely face, her concern for me all-too apparent. I tried to speak, but couldn't manage the words. She whispered "Shhh" again gently, and kissed me again, stroking the side of my head.

I finally managed to croak out the words. "I'm sorry, it's you I should be comforting, please forgive me."

She smiled and shook her head "Let's help each other", and kissed me again, this time with a short but delightful caress of my lips with her tongue.

She pulled the blanket over and covered us both, cuddling in, her head on my chest.

My anxiety finally subsided and I closed my eyes and eventually slept.

The door opened and he entered and smiled. "Sorry Kate. I drifted off."

I got up from the table and kissed him. "Please don't apologize, you have nothing to be sorry for."

His arms reached out and held me gently. "You are truly lovely, I can't help wondering if this isn't just a beautiful dream." He kissed me gently, and held me very close. I snuggled in, and felt more loved than I had ever remembered.

His eyes turned to the table and the book.

He sat down suddenly, looking at the open pages, then looked up at

me. "You understand this?"

I pulled out another chair, and sat beside him, touching his hand. I tried to smile, didn't quite make it, and he took my hand and said "Your turn, can you tell to me?"

I told him. I told him about my fascination for chemistry, about being accepted by my chosen university, my progress through two terms, and then I couldn't say more, as I broke down into tears.

I got up and bent over behind her chair to enclose her in my arms, kiss her cheek, and softly tell her I was sorry for pushing her to talk. She reached up with both hands, to grasp mine. "It's OK. You need to know." She paused. "Can I have a drink?"

"Tea?" I said. She smiled "Yes please Tom."

We sat with the tea, and she told me the name of the University and her course, together with the names of her lecturers.

She held my hand as she spoke and her eyes never left mine. Finally she paused "You recognize some of the names I have mentioned?"

I nodded. "Yes I do. Belinda knew them."

Her brows raised in surprise. "Your wife studied chemistry?"

I smiled, reached out and tapped the book. "This is hers."

I paused at her look of surprise, then said "Please come with me, I have something to show you."

He took my hand and we left the kitchen, taking the stairs down into the basement. He switched on a light and we walked to the second door on the right, where he paused and turned to me and smiled. "I must confess, that most of the contents of this room, were chosen by Belinda, and used by her."

He opened the door and turned on the lights, although there was plenty light from two large windows recessed into basement space from pavement level.

He turned to me. "What do you think?"

I let go of his hand and looked around the room. I couldn't help it, I

exclaimed "A fully-equipped Chem Lab!"

He laughed. "Go and look around. I'll wait for you upstairs."

I was on the sofa, listening to an early recording of Fairport Convention, when her soft warm voice was in my right ear, followed by a kiss, then she sat down beside me. I got up and lifted the pickup from the disc.

I sat again beside her and said "What do you think?"

She shook her head, leaned forward and kissed my cheek.

"I feel that I've been asleep, in an all-pervading and unending nightmare, and now I've woken up at last thankfully, to you, lovely man, this beautiful house, and that wonderful laboratory."

She reached forward, and held my head in both hands and kissed me, long and deeply. A kiss that had my heart racing, the effect of which I had never experienced before.

Finally she took her lips from mine, but still holding my head, she whispered softly "I love you Tom."

"I love you too, Kate."

There was a long pause as we gazed into each others eyes.

Finally we both sank back into the sofa cushions, holding each other's hand.

"Do you want to resume your studies?" I said softly.

She squeezed my hand gently. "I'd love to, but I cannot go back there.." Her voice tailed off.

I turned to look at her. "Somewhere else?"

She nodded. "Yes, but I want to stay with you."

I nodded. "Yes, me too, I'll make some enquiries here in London."

The 'phone rang.

"Hi Tom, how's the patient feeling?"

I mouthed "Doctor" to Kate.

"She's a lot better. A little shaky still, but apparently improving."

"I've completed my tests, there's no sign of TB. It's 'flu."

"Thanks Kelly, I was worried."

"Ask her to complete the course of pills I've prescribed.." She paused. "You know the rest." She laughed quietly.

"Many thanks Kelly."

"And take care of yourself too, Tom. I'll call in later in the week to

check her progress. I'll 'phone before I call. Is that OK?"

"That's fine Kelly. See you then. Bye."

"Bye for now Tom." she said quietly, and hung up.

Kate looked expectantly at me.

I smiled. "You have 'flu, as we suspected. That's bad enough, but it could have been worse."

She smiled at me. "She's your friend, as well as your Doctor, isn't she?"

I sat down again beside her nodding. "A damn good one, and a damn good Doctor."

She looked intently at me.

I laughed. "You are a very clever and intuitive girl Kate. Yes, she's an old girl-friend, we met at the same college."

"You have rescued girls like me before."

It wasn't a question, she knew. She touched my face. "Am I different?"

"Yes, you are, very different. I've fallen in love with you."

She lifted up my arm and cuddled in. "And me with you."

I spent a large part of the morning, pouring over Belinda's books, choosing those I thought appropriate. Most had dedications from Tom.

At one point I sat and thought of the love they had shared, and found myself deeply moved and saddened at what had happened. I began to understand his compassion and motivation to help others in distress. My love for him grew, and I vowed never to let him down.

I had taken the books I chose down into the Lab. I found some blank exercise books, and familiarised myself with the equipment.

Later I heard him call my name.

"I'm in the Lab Tom."

"OK Kate. I'll come down." I heard him say.

"Hi, how are you doing? I see you've already made a start."

I walked over and kissed him. "I have. How was your morning?"

He smiled. "Busy, I have some news, please have a seat."

I sat and he looked at me. "My God, even in a Lab coat you are beautiful!"

I laughed. "Flatterer!"

His tone changed. "Let me bring you up to date. I've spoken to one or two colleagues, and eventually talked to your senior lecturer at your old Uni."

He probably detected the apprehension on my face. Smiling, he said. "Calm yourself. There is no bad news."

"I'm sorry." I said. "I was worried."

He reached across and touched my arm. "He has nothing but praise for you, but is concerned that you simply dropped out of sight.."

He paused.

I nodded. "I did. I disappeared, and told no-one."

"It's OK Kate. My conversation was confidential, and referred only to your tentative application to resume a similar course here in London. He will be glad to forward me his recommendation of you."

"No-one else will know?"

"No-one." he said.

I felt the tears begin again in my eyes, a sob in my throat, then his arms around me holding me tight.

He sensed my recovery, released me and said quietly "There's a place at the Queen Mary College for you here in London, to finish your BSc Hons degree, if you want it."

I was shocked. I unfurled myself from his arms and looked at him.

"If I want it? If I want it? Thank you, thank you lovely man.." I paused, looking at his face with the beginnings of a pleased smile.

"How the Hell have you managed to do all of that in a morning?"

He laughed. "A few 'phone calls."

I kissed him, then kissed him again.

"Would you like lunch out?" He said.

"Very much.." I paused. "Nowhere posh please. Could we just visit that Pizza bar again?"

He laughed. "Of course. I'll freshen up, and I'll see you in the lounge."

I opened the door to the Pizza Bar and stood aside to let her in. Jenny glanced up at us as we entered then did a very good impression of a double-take.

I formally introduced Kate.

Jenny smiled, and extended her hand to Kate. "Lovely to see you again, How are you?"

Kate smiled and shook Jenny's hand. "I'm well Jenny, and thanks for asking."

"Table for two?" I said smiling.

"Of course Tom." She nodded, and took us to the table closest the radiator.

A little puzzled, I looked at her as she walked back to the reception desk.

We sat down.

Kate giggled. I turned and caught her smile.

"You've been demoted."

This time I laughed. "Apparently. Now I'm just a ordinary human again, instead of some deity."

Kate laughed. "I told you she fancies you."

I looked at her. "You remember?"

She reached across the table and took my hand.

"You were the first good thing that had happened to me in a long time. Yes I remember, how could I forget." She squeezed my hand. I smiled. "Thank you Kate. It was a strange co-incidence that on that night two strangers, both in dire need of help, found each other."

She nodded then mouthed "I love you."

"And I you." I said quietly. "Shall we order?"

She nodded. "Same for me as last time, Pizza, salad and a hot drink."

I got up and ordered. Jenny smiled at me saying quietly. "You are a lovely, kind man, she looks so much better.." she paused. "In fact, beautiful."

I nodded my thanks, smiling and rejoined Kate.

"How is your head?"

She smiled. "A lot better.." She paused "I try not to think about it."

"Please rest when we get back home."

I realised what I had said almost immediately the words had left my lips. She reached out and touched me. "I will, sweet man."

Later after the Pizza, while waiting for the sweets, I sat back in my chair. "There are a few things. First, you already will know what you are up against and what you need for your course. When you are ready, have a poke about in the Lab and check the Chemical inventory. Make a note of the stuff that you need but which is missing. Note also what is present but out-of-date. I have accounts with two Chem suppliers, and we can order your requirements from them. They will take away, and safely dispose of anything that is now unusable."

I paused and she nodded.

“I will call the equipment suppliers, and ask for the equipment to be checked and if necessary re-calibrated.”

She nodded again, and I continued.

“Queen Mary College are sending their current syllabus for you, and will ‘phone and make you an appointment to talk to the Senior Chemistry Lecturer. Should you wish, I will accompany you.”

She was waiting, she knew I had more.

“If there is anyone else you wish me to contact, we can talk about that later.”

She bit her lip. “Thanks Tom. I’d like to talk about that, but..”

The sweets arrived.

I nodded. She mouthed a kiss.

I enjoyed the short walk. After he had closed the door, I turned around and faced him. “Is this really my home?”

He smiled, and took both of my hands in his. “For as long as you want it to be.”

I gripped both of his hands strongly. “Please, come and cuddle me. I want you Tom.”

He nodded, and I held one hand and we walked to my bedroom.

“Are you sure about this?” He said gently, before I opened the door.

I nodded. “Completely. I love you.”

“OK” he said, “but I need to pee.”

I smiled. “OK. Don’t be long.”

He wasn’t, but I was already in the bed when he returned.

He put the packet of protectives down on the bedside table, then undressed.

I already knew he was strong and fit, but without his clothes just before he lay down beside me, I saw a man in the full glory of his masculinity, and my heart missed a beat.

He parted the sheets and lay down beside me, putting his right arm around me and pulling me close. He held me gently. “You are beautiful Kate, clever, kind and considerate, and I love you. Are you really sure about this?”

“I’ve never been as sure about anything before in my life.” I said and took his left hand and held it to my breast.

It was mid-morning, and I was again studying the syllabus Tom had given me from Queen Mary College.

The door-bell rang, and I went to let Doctor Kelly in. She had rang earlier, and I had told her Tom was out, but she had said "No problem. How do you feel? It's been a few weeks. Are you happy for a final check-up this morning?"

I opened the door, and we went into the sitting room. We sat together on the sofa. She smiled at me, and taking out her stethoscope, began my examination.

Finally she put her equipment back in her bag. "You are very much better, just the hint of a little wheeze left in your chest, but I expect that to clear up altogether soon. How's your head?"

"It's fine. In fact I feel better now than I've felt in months."

She was watching me intently, and didn't miss the small tears as I remembered how miserable I had been.

She took my hand. "He's a good man, and very perceptive.." She paused. "I believe you have had a lucky escape meeting him as you did."

I nodded. "He's lovely."

She gave a little laugh. "I know, but you should also know that you are good for him. These last few weeks he has been more settled and happy, than I've seen him in a long time."

"I love him." I said simply.

"Yes, I know that too.." She paused and squeezed my hand. "And he loves you."

I nodded.

She smiled again and sat back, letting go of my hand, and just looked at me.

"I know there have been other girls.." I paused, not knowing how to say more.

She shook her head and smiled again. "Yes. He has helped several others, but none that he has fallen in love with before."

She glanced down at the open syllabus on the coffee table.

"You are definitely going to resume your studies?"

I nodded. "Well, do you think I'm fit enough?"

"I believe you could start as soon as you want to, but please finish the prescription.." She paused. "Do you know what he does?"

I nodded. "Yes, he told me a little, and I looked up the rest, he researches and lectures in Biochemistry at Kings."

She smiled. "Yes, he tends to play down the importance of his work, and also prefers folks to call him by his first name.." She paused "He can be of immense help to you."

I nodded. "He already has." I felt the tears begin in my eyes.

"Do you think.." I paused.

She again touched my hand. "I think you are good for each other, and love each other, and that's the important thing. Nothing else matters."

I looked at her smiling face. "Thank you for your kindness Doctor, I know he's your friend."

She laughed quietly. "That he is, and so are you, if you want to be, and please call me 'Kelly'."

She stood up, and reaching down took my hand. "C'mon Kate, walk me to the door."

I opened the door and stood to one side. She bent forward and kissed me on the cheek. "Any problems, any at all, give me a call." I thanked her and she was gone.