

PUPPY DOGS AND KITTEN CATS

CHAPTER 5

The walk from the screaming, ascending chopper to the car was done in silence, human silence that is. I had nothing to say to the girl. I hadn't offered to help carry the camera gear; not did I feel remorseful for not offering. I knew what the reaction would be: she handled her own stuff! Even so, her attitude put me off so much that if she did struggle and need help, I wouldn't offer. I didn't like myself for feeling that way...but she was a vexation! An irritation under my skin! And yet...I liked her. Maybe it was infatuation. She was pretty. Actually, very pretty. She had cute dimples when she smiled, a pleasure I had yet to experience in our recent acquaintance. That's what I remember on first seeing her. The dimples. It didn't take much of a smile to create them. It brightened her face instantly; that was my take on it, whatever others felt. I suppose I'm a little disappointed she didn't live up to my expectations. I didn't like her for the kind of person I found her to be and yet I could not blame her for that. I looked for too much from a girl I knew very little about. They say you really get to know a person when you live with that person. Not that I've ever lived with another person, male or female; except for my parents of course. In my case it was working with the girl that soured me. I blame myself for over-reacting, or under-reacting; it's a fine line. I was cooling down somewhat when she sat in the passenger seat, having secured her equipment in the rear with a seat belt. 'You don't mind riding in my jalopy, do you?' I said with a hint of sarcasm. She waved the notion away like she'd forgotten the slur. But she couldn't help herself, I'm sure of it.

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'Doesn't George pay you enough to get a decent car?' I didn't have to think of an answer. 'I look after this vehicle and it looks after me. It hasn't broken down since I bought it.' I said that last bit with a little more conceit than was necessary.

'Or...maybe you're too tight-fisted to spend your money on a good car, a modern one?' She made it sound like a question but it was more a statement about my thriftiness. By not responding to her bait I decided she should languish in Guess-land. Instead, I asked what fancy sports car she drove. The answer was not forthcoming. She looked out the window.

'So? What are you driving? A beamer?' No reply. 'A Toyota?' No reply, 'Maybe a sporty Nissan?' She glared out the window. Her left-side profile indicated she

had developed a frown. I wasn't sure. Gracie turned to me. For the first time in our short acquaintance, etched into her eyes was the slightest suggestion of vulnerability. 'I don't have a licence...yet.' I felt sorry for her instantly.

'I'm a lousy driver', she admitted. 'In case you're wondering, I failed the test six times. So there!'

'I'm surprised you didn't take lessons from a professional?'

'I did.'

'Oh.'

'I told you I'm a bad driver.'

'I think you...you didn't have the right teacher.'

'What are you suggesting, Clifton?'

'Oh, nothing really. My eh, my dad said driving is all about attitude. If you have the right approach... you'll eh, have no problems.'

'What does that mean? That my attitude is bad? Is that what you're saying?' I thought it better to back off. A flurry of anger was attached to each question she fired. Evidently, I began something that now rippled with tension. I said 'sorry if I gave that impression.' She turned to face the window. I asked her where she was staying. Her answer came slowly. An address five k's away, in the opposite direction. I swung the car around. She watched carefully my every move. I could see she was trying to learn something, maybe for her next driving test.

'It's lunchtime. You must be hungry', I prompted. Gracie looked at me strangely.

'What?' I repeated I was hungry, was she? 'I could buy you lunch, we could go solo, or I can take you directly to your accommodation. Your choice.' She came out of her thoughts; however deep they were or whatever they were. 'Oh! Well... ok! I should eat. But we'll go solo. Wouldn't want people to think it was a date or anything.' That took me aback. How do you answer that? I was more than a little miffed by that latest remark.

'If I wanted to ask you out on a date, a real date, I would do so. Today we are working together. It's not a date because we eat together, is it?' She nodded but there were other considerations. 'If you did.... ask a girl out...where would you take her?'

'Eh...out to dinner, or a movie, an opera...I don't know. I'd ask her what she wants, I suppose.'

'How do you get to know a girl in a theatre, watching a movie or a concert? When the only thing a man is absorbed in is his own selfishness! How? Tell me, how?' She eyed me like I was a boxer trapped in the corner, bruised, blinded and semi-conscious, with no escape route; and she was the pugilist coming to finish

me off. This was too much. This girl has an agenda, I told myself. I pulled over and parked.

‘What happened to you, Gracie?’ Well, she just poured her eyes out. In the next few minutes, between sobs, she told me everything. All about her boyfriend, how he treated her the last few weeks, and finally, how he dumped her, and why. Gracie was unashamed of her responses to his wishes. ‘He wanted us to sleep together. I...believe a marriage should start off that way. He asked me often...in the last few months. I was always uncomfortable with it. I still am...I don’t know why I’m telling you all this...I hardly know you.’ My opinion of this girl did a one-eighty; admiration for her mushroomed.

‘You won’t repeat this, will you?’ She said, with worried appeal. I told her she could trust me not to, that I shared her feelings. I asked, did she have a friend, a confidant, someone close to talk to.

‘It’s not necessary now. I’ve got a load off. I hope I didn’t offend you. It just...came out. Are you ok with it?’ I said I was.

‘I’m hungry’, she near-whispered.