

Late Bloomer

Mairi Neil

Sarah sat down with a wheeze beside her old friend Jean and pulled her coat tighter around her chest. 'That wind cuts like a knife; we should have met in Seeds Cafe.'

Jean grinned, removed her woolly purple glove and thrust her left hand at Sarah. 'Look! I wanted you to know about it first - in private.' Jean's voice rose an octave and she giggled before adding, 'Brian popped the question...'

Silence grew as Jean waited for her best friend to react. She wanted Sarah's face to mirror the joy she felt, but Sarah sat motionless, her brown eyes staring at the Sapphire and diamond ring.

The jewel a twinkling star in the grey day. However, the coldness Sarah felt walking against the wind to meet up with her friend of forty years insignificant to the ice block now in her chest. Aware of Jean's scrutiny and expectations she managed to twist her lips into a smile but her, 'How wonderful,' an unconvincing whisper.

Jean's blue eyes lost some of their sparkle as she pulled her glove back on, 'You don't really mean that Sarah, that smile doesn't reach your eyes!'

'I do mean it... I was just surprised,' Sarah's words tumbled and stumbled as she tried to undo the hurt creasing Jean's face. 'You've only known him five minutes,' she muttered, shoving her hands deep into coat pockets, more to hide nervousness than the cold.

Sarah felt Jean withdraw to a corner of the park bench and stiffen and tried to still the turmoil making her body act so predictably before she suffered a full-blown panic attack. She wanted to explain her fears to Jean but couldn't voice her thoughts. It wasn't just jealousy at Jean's happiness, she worried about Brian being a gold digger, a divorcee only known for four months since joining the Over 60s Dancing Class.

She wanted to say, he spotted your vulnerability and couldn't wait to get his hands on your house and Jim's superannuation. You've been a widow for a year and I know my brother's dying wish was for you to be happy saying you should look for another partner but he didn't mean to marry the first bloke who asked you. You've been a wonderful friend and sister-in-law to me, but I just feel this is wrong. There's truth in fools rush in where angels fear to tread...

Sarah never voiced any of her fears. Instead she dredged a modicum of enthusiasm from fragmented emotions and hugged Jean, whispering, 'I'm sorry, it was a shock... I didn't expect it... Of course, I'm happy for you... Just jealous you're glowing!'

A gust of wind rustled leaves at their feet and from the corner of her eye Sarah watched the last pink blossoms fall from a nearby Crepe Myrtle. Anxiety knotted her stomach and she remembered the Chinese proverb: When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills.

What will a spring wedding bring?