

In the strangest of places.

By Paul Lister

I was waiting at 'Dating in the Dark'.

I'm blind but that wasn't a disadvantage working as a waiter in a restaurant where the customers ate with the lights off.

There was an 'airlock' for light that led from the kitchen to the restaurant. The lock was either empty or bustling with staff. Which was why I managed to walk straight into someone who was just standing still.

"Sorry miss I didn't know anyone was here. Apologies," I said.

"It's okay, how did you know I was a woman?"

Summer fields, the sweet smell of childhood.

"Perfume," I said.

"Oh, I'm not wearing any, I washed the uniform last night though, maybe it's that," she said. Her voice was thick, rich, like the smoke from grandad's pipe.

"I'm James," I reached out a hand, but she didn't take it. I had a strange feeling of grief, thinking that she was rejecting me. But then I realised that the high-pitched whine from her night vision goggles was missing.

"You know you have to turn those on if you want to see," I said.

"Oh golly," she said, the old-fashioned turn of phrase rattling cute against my eardrums. The whine appeared.

"I'm. gosh. I'm Bernie, ironic I know. Gosh."

She must have finally seen my outstretched hand and took it. I could feel the tremor of her nervous fingertips against the pulse in my wrist. Life beat electricity spiralled up my arm to my heart at her touch.

"Why so nervous?" I managed to say through a mouth suddenly dry.

"It's just, oh dear, your eyes."

And then the fall, the inevitable fear or ridicule of the different. I thought I was used to it, but the familiar vertigo hit me hard.

"They're so beautiful," Bernie said.

And wings. Wings of irony but wings all the same. Even whilst in flight I was reminded of her earlier remark.

"Why did you say that about your name Bernie?"

"I had an accident when I was little, and well, I'm not exactly a glamour model now. Oh, you can't see!"

Again, I was caught off guard but never managed to stutter a reply.

"You haven't got your goggles on either. That's why you walked into me."

"Yes, that's why," I said relieved.

"You must really know your way around."

"I guess so," I said, feeling a staccato beat in my chest. Why could I feel that?

There was a silence and I was about to move off, not wanting to go and happy when she touched my arm to stop me.

"I, gosh, I know I'm being really forward and we've just met but maybe we could go for a drink or something after work. I know you don't even know what I look like yet and someone nice like you are probably seeing lots of people."

I still hadn't let go of her hand. It was then I knew why I worked in that restaurant and what I had been waiting for.

“Oh, you’d be surprised,” I said.