

LOVE WILL FIND A WAY

by Georgina Marino

Jennifer Marsden looked around the party when some nearby men burst into laughter. She peered past the corporate lawyer boring her about his last takeover deal. She spotted the noisy group and smiled; it was her brother-in-law Harry, telling another one of his stories.

“So ... want to go for a drive?” the lawyer breathed in her ear, twirling his car keys.

Jennifer cringed inwardly. Then spotting her sister walking by with a bottle of champagne, she excused herself.

“*Please!*” she begged, proffering her glass.

Carol glanced at the scowling lawyer, and smirked: “You should stay away from him.”

“Don’t tell me,” Jennifer rolled her eyes. “He wanted to take me for a drive. *Seriously?*”

“Oh, you’d just be another notch on his gear lever.”

Jennifer sipped her champagne. “Honestly Carol, I’ve had it with men.”

Carol laughed. “Just as well you’re going to Europe then. Think of all those European millionaires you’re going to meet on the French Riviera.”

“Rich men are the last people I want to meet. After going out with Robert, Jason and *Charles!*”

“So he dumped you for a nineteen-year old soapie actress. Good riddance I say.”

Jennifer rolled her eyes skyward. “If I meet another Charles Thornton-Smythe, I’ll scream.”

Carol took her arm. “Come on Jennifer! It’s not like you to be grumpy. Let me introduce you to some of Harry’s mates.”

“No thanks, sis. I’m leaving the country in three weeks so I don’t need any complications.”

“You’ll be sorry,” Carol smiled and strolled across the room, offering the champagne bottle to anyone with an empty glass.

Jennifer watched her younger sister stroll over to Harry who embraced her with a gesture of fond intimacy. Carol and Harry had been together for five years now, and

their relationship just kept getting better. Jennifer turned away. All she had managed to achieve in the same time period was a string of failures.

She walked out to the balcony and stared at the treetops of Hyde Park. The party was in a penthouse apartment in a building on Oxford Street. It was owned by one of Harry's lawyer friends, a recent divorcee who — typically — was now surrounded by young professional women.

She sipped her champagne. *A few years ago, I was one of those women*, Jennifer thought. A chartered accountant, she had met many wealthy people and had dated men like Robert, Jason and Charles. The life style had been exciting: expensive restaurants, sports cars, gifts ... exciting, but oh, so *shallow*.

"This is Sydney's Central Park," a deep voice said behind her.

Jennifer turned. It was one of the thirty-something men who were roaming the party like lone wolves.

"Excuse me?" Jennifer asked curtly.

He leaned on the railing and smiled with warm brown eyes. "This view is just like New York's Ritz Carlton."

Jennifer sighed. Another bore, name-dropping expensive hotels. "I suppose you were there on business?"

"I've spent some time there."

Jennifer cringed. "Look, why don't you leave me alone and find some other bimbo to harass."

His brow furrowed as he pushed himself off the railing. "Wait a minute, you are Jennifer Marsden ...?"

"Yes, why?"

"Cause you don't talk like the Jennifer I met at Harry and Carol's wedding."

She gave him a suspicious look. "Well I'm sorry but I don't remember you."

He cleared his throat. "Liam Macreadie. I was in the bridal party."

Jennifer blinked dumbly in realization. "Oh, you were Harry's best man." He nodded and her cheeks flushed. "I'm sorry, I, I didn't mean to be so rude." She put a hand over her mouth and giggled. "You must think I'm awful."

He smiled. "No, just confused."

"But I haven't seen you since the wedding," she protested, "and you look, er different."

“I used to have a beard. Don’t you remember telling me I’d look younger without it?”

Jennifer nodded slowly as she recalled the night. The bridal party had all gotten on famously throughout the ceremony and reception. And later in the evening, she had teased him by pulling at his beard hard enough to make him yelp. She smiled. Liam was the only man that Charles Thornton-Smythe had ever been jealous of.

“Yes,” she nodded. “And you do look better without it.”

He rubbed his stubbled chin. “I miss it sometimes. It was like an old friend.”

Jennifer drained her glass. “I’m sorry for being so short. I mean, I just had some creep wanting to take me for a drive.”

Liam grinned and his teeth were white against his dark skin. “I assure you that my intentions were purely honourable.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Intentions?”

Now it was his turn to appear flustered. “I came over to catch up with you and maybe see er, if you wanted to go to a movie with me tomorrow night.”

“What movie is it?”

“*A Heart in Winter*. It won two French Oscars.”

She felt a smile tug at the corner of her mouth. “Okay, tomorrow sounds fine.”

Liam picked her up in his old BMW roadster and they drove to an art house cinema. The movie was an emotional French drama about three people caught in a frustrating love triangle. The female character’s world fell apart after her attraction to one of the men, and Jennifer silently willed the character to give up on the men and leave. After the movie, Liam suggested they go to a nearby coffee shop. They found a booth and ordered their drinks.

Jennifer said, “I like European films. They’re so gritty and realistic.”

“I know what you mean,” Liam replied. “They explore real situations much better than clichéd Hollywood romances.” He paused for the arrival of their coffees. “You know, I really like those old black and white Italian movies where everybody has good food, wine and friends.”

Jennifer stirred her coffee. “Is that your philosophy?”

“I think that you need to have those three things and ... if you’re lucky, a long term partner for a full and rewarding life.”

Jennifer found herself staring into his dark brown eyes. “If you don’t mind my asking, what happened to your wife?”

Liam looked away. “We split up about a year ago. We were having troubles and when she was in Melbourne on a course, I . . .” He looked back and winced. “You don’t want to know.”

“I’m a woman, and I always want to know.”

He sighed heavily. “Well there’s not much to tell, really. I flew down there to surprise her with two tickets to the Phantom of the Opera, and found that she had taken up with her managing director.”

“What did you do?” Jennifer asked breathlessly, knowing only too well the pain of betrayal.

“I left them with the tickets and caught the next flight back to Sydney.”

Jennifer stifled a laugh with a hand over her mouth. “Oh I’m sorry, Liam. You left them with the tickets?”

“I didn’t see the point of getting crazy about it. In the end I was just happy that she gave me a clean divorce.” Liam sipped his coffee. “What about you—weren’t you dating someone at Carol’s wedding?”

Jennifer sighed. “Charles was all wallet and no heart. He never could say what he was thinking or feeling.”

Liam nodded soberly. “Communication is so important.”

“Now why don’t more men sound like you?” Jennifer said earnestly.

“Don’t look at me,” he snorted with a shake of his head. “I’m just another divorce statistic.”

Jennifer searched his eyes. “At least you’re not afraid to express yourself.”

Liam sipped his coffee, and then asked, “Are you doing anything next Saturday?”

“I’ve got a party on at night but I’m free during the day.”

“Do you want to go for a ride to the Blue Mountains?”

She looked doubtful. “I don’t think I can ride that far.”

Liam laughed. “Not a bicycle. I meant a motorbike. I’ve got a leather jacket and helmet that will fit you.”

She nodded enthusiastically. “Okay. Sounds like fun.”

Jennifer hung on to Liam's waist as he leaned the Vincent Black Shadow through the hilly roads of the Blue Mountains. She could feel his lean torso through his jacket and smiled slyly at the wicked desire to explore his chest.

Liam finally pulled up at a small cafe. They ordered coffees and strolled to a table on the terrace.

"What a wonderful idea," she murmured as they gazed at the deep valleys and plunging cliff faces.

"You forget how beautiful it is up here," Liam agreed. "I've been working so much that I haven't been out of Sydney for months."

"And the ride was more fun than I thought," she said.

"You weren't frightened?" he teased. "You were hanging on pretty tight."

Jennifer felt her cheeks flush. "It's because your motorcycle shakes so much."

"What do you expect from a bike that's forty years old."

"Forty? But it looks like new."

"That's because my dad looks after it. My parents ride it more than I do."

Jennifer giggled. "Your parents?"

"They used to have one in Scotland when they were courting. They ride the Vincent whenever they want to feel young again."

Jennifer's eyes moistened. "Oh, that's so romantic."

Liam chuckled. "I must admit, my parents seem to have life sorted out."

"Really? What do they do that makes them so different?"

Liam cocked his head. "I think it's because they give each other space, always listen when the other is talking, and they're always hugging."

Jennifer's chest tightened; suddenly craving a hug from Liam. "Sounds like they really got it together."

Liam checked his watch. "We'd better get going so you can make your party."

"Hey, umm," Jennifer started, "this party is an open house, a Mexican theme where you have to dress in a poncho and a sombrero. Do you want to go?"

Liam grinned broadly. "Sounds like fun."

The party was dark, noisy and crowded. Liam managed to pour some wine before they got pushed into a corner. Although they had been getting familiar with light touches and short hugs, nothing had prepared the reaction to their physical closeness. They put their arms around each other and their bodies burned.

Liam hid them from view with his sombrero and Jennifer responded to his lips with a hungry passion. Liam suggested if she wanted to leave and her answer was a breathless “yes”. They caught a cab to his apartment, and it was dawn when they finally fell asleep.

The next day, they were sitting together on Liam’s sofa and staring at the blue sky with streaks of cirrus clouds racing overhead.

“How are you feeling?” Liam asked.

“Exhausted,” Jennifer murmured.

“Last night was special.”

She kissed his cheek. “For me too.”

“It’s weird you know. I feel that we were meant to happen.” They were silent for a few minutes and he added, “I meant what I said last night . . .” he paused, and the air became heavy with his words, “I love you Jennifer.”

“And I love you too,” she replied softly and shook her head lamely. “Oh this is nuts. I’m leaving for Europe next week.”

“I’m going to miss you,” Liam said.

Jennifer gave him a searching look. “Why don’t you travel with me?”

“It’d love too, but I can’t leave my job in the middle of a takeover.”

“Yes you can,” she insisted. “You can do anything you want.”

He shrugged helplessly. “Couldn’t you delay . . .”

She shook her head. “I’m booked on a tour.”

Liam opened his mouth to protest, but closed it and stared glumly at the treetops.

Jennifer’s back tensed as she pulled away from him. “I better go.”

He stood up and wrapped his arms around her. Jennifer clenched her eyes shut to keep back her tears.

“You will email me, won’t you?” he said, his voice choking.

Jennifer sniffed into his shoulder. “Sure. I’ll tell you what a great time I’m having.”

Her flippant comment made Liam chuckle.

Jennifer wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. “My farewell party is at Harry and Carol’s on Friday. Can you make it?”

“I’ll be there,” he said.

“Great,” Jennifer said without enthusiasm and walked out. She shut the door, and her tears were unstoppable as she ran down the corridor.

Harry and Carol had done a terrific job. Streamers and balloons were all over their house and Harry had printed up a long banner with the words: *Bon Voyage Jennifer!* Music thumped in the background and everyone was shouting to be heard. But despite her cheerful face, Jennifer felt hollow inside. It was almost ten and Liam hadn't showed up yet.

Then she heard his booming laughter, but her pleasure at hearing him arrive was quickly overshadowed by anger. *Why was he so happy? Surely if he really loved her he'd be miserable too?*

She watched Liam whisper in Harry's ear. Harry nodded and then laughed and clapped Liam on his back. Liam scanned the room, caught her eye and smiled. Jennifer smiled back, took a deep breath, and walked over to the two men.

"I'll get you a beer," Harry said and scampered off.

"Hey," Liam said. "It's a terrific party."

"You're late!" she scolded.

"I, umm ... got caught up with stuff," he babbled.

"Work I suppose?"

"Sort of," Liam said and grinned. "Hey everybody's here—they must be glad to get rid of you, huh?"

"Just like one person I know," Jennifer retorted, and then regretted it when she saw the pain in his eyes.

"Jennifer —"

"Excuse me, I've got to see Carol," she muttered and pushed past him.

The rest of the party was a blur. There was always someone to fill up her glass with champagne or give her advice on places to go. She didn't mind the distraction; anything to take her mind off the sorrow in her heart. The last stragglers finally left at 3 a.m. Jennifer swayed slightly while she focussed on Liam with one eye. He glanced at her and she turned her back on him.

If he was hanging around so he can sleep with me again, she thought, then he's going to be disappointed.

A car horn honked outside. "That's my cab," Liam announced.

Cab? Jennifer thought in dismay. *He could've at least tried.*

Liam walked up to Jennifer. "We haven't talked much tonight."

She hiccupped. "You spent all your time with Harry."

“We had a few things to sort out.”

“What things?” she retorted.

The taxi honked again. “I’d better go,” he said.

He bent down. Jennifer closed her eyes and pouted her lips but Liam only pecked them.

“Some goodbye kiss,” she slurred and poked his chest with a finger.

“I’ll see you at the airport,” Liam said.

Jennifer felt like throwing her glass at him. *How could he be so cheerful?*

Harry showed Liam out and Jennifer sobbed onto Carol’s shoulder. “He, he doesn’t love me any more.”

“I’m sure he does,” Carol said gently.

“When, when I go to Italy,” she sniffled, “I ... I’m going to join a convent.”

Carol laughed. “You have to think positive, Jennifer. Love will find a way.”

“Maybe for you, sis, but not for me.”

She staggered off to her room and climbed into bed. She cuddled her Teddy Bear under the quilt and its brown fur soaked up her tears.

Jennifer heaved her rucksack onto the scales and forced a smile at the British Airways ticketing officer. She had a slight headache and was grateful she was on a late afternoon flight. The officer processed her ticket and gave her a boarding pass. Jennifer mumbled her thanks and shuffled up to Harry and Carol.

“Has Liam showed up yet?” she asked.

“No,” Carol said.

Harry’s forehead was creased with concern. “He rang me this morning and said he was definitely going to be here.”

“He must’ve found something better to do,” Jennifer muttered.

Harry withdrew his phone and said, “I’ll give him a call.”

The two sisters slowly walked towards the departure lounge. The International Terminal buzzed with conversations and boarding announcements.

“I never thought that leaving was going to be like this,” Jennifer said, her voice quavering. She took out her handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes. “I can’t help feeling that I’m making a huge mistake.”

“You would say the same thing if you stayed,” Carol said gently.

Jennifer sniffled. “I suppose so.”

They sat down in the grey chairs in the departure lounge. Jennifer scanned the people farewelling friends and her heart ached when she saw a young couple kissing each other. She looked up hopefully when Harry returned.

“He’s just arrived!” Harry declared breathlessly.

There was an announcement for her flight and Jennifer stood up. “I suppose that’s it then.”

“Hey!” a voice cried out.

They turned and saw Liam running up to them. He was dressed in baggy pants, t-shirt and sneakers, and was carrying a small daypack.

“Sorry, I’m late.”

Harry clapped him on the back. “I was thinking of sending out a search party.”

“My taxi broke down and it took forever to get another one.”

“Taxi?” Jennifer muttered

Harry glanced at Liam and the two men grinned sheepishly.

Liam strode up to Jennifer and held her shoulders. “I had a long talk with Harry a few nights ago and he made me realise what an idiot I’d be for not going with you.”

Jennifer blinked at him.

Liam broke into a huge grin. “I quit my job and I’ve joined your tour in London.”

Jennifer’s mouth fell open. “Seriously?”

Carol punched her husband’s shoulder. “I knew you two boys were up to something!”

Liam laughed. “I’ve been going nuts trying to get everything sorted, but I didn’t want to say anything to you last night in case I couldn’t make it.”

“Oh Liam!” Jennifer cried and threw her arms around him.

Liam lifted her off the ground and held her tight. “I love you Jennifer, and if being with you means I have to travel across the world, then that’s what I’ll do.”

He kissed her deeply.

Harry and Carol put their arms around each other and became misty-eyed.

Harry cleared his throat. “Excuse me, but don’t you have a plane to catch?”

Liam and Carol pulled apart and the four friends all embraced.

“I’m going to miss you,” Jennifer said to her younger sister.

Carol’s eyes brimmed with tears. “Make sure you call. I want to hear *everything*.”

“Good luck, mate,” Harry said gruffly.

“Thanks, Harry,” Liam said. “Thanks for everything.”

Liam and Carol strode up to the flight attendant and handed in their boarding passes.

“We didn’t get seat allocation at the same time,” Liam said hopefully. “Do you think we can sit together?”

The flight attendant smiled at them. “Not a problem, sir.” She checked her list and scribbled two new seat numbers on their boarding passes. She smiled as she handed them back. “You can sit together.”

“Together,” Jennifer repeated, and squeezed Liam’s hand. She loved the sound of that word.

THE END