

## Good Morrow

by Francesca Ryan

He'd done it twice. The first time was in the college library. Hovering round the history section, there she was, the tall girl with the vivid pink Pixie cut framing a scowling face. He edged past her to pull out the work he needed.

"Excuse me I hope you don't mind me saying, you smell wonderful. Your perfume I mean."

The glare he received in return let him know just how welcome that was. It was difficult back then in the 70's, approaching a girl. A woman. Especially one wearing white dungarees over a red top, and a badge that said, 'a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.' The second time he blew it, was Dave's party. A barrel of beer, no wine, and the worst chilli con carne he'd ever eaten, even on a student budget. Several people had been quite sick the day after. Not Angela though. The fragrant Angela. He'd tried to chat her up over a booming stereo thumping out 'I don't want to go to Chelsea.' God, couldn't they have put on something a little more conducive to romance?

"Sorry mate", said Dave over a pint the next day, as they reviewed their attempts at pulling. "She thinks you're an arrogant tosser." And that was that. He tried once more when she was on a picket line in front of the student's union. *Support the Greenham Common Women.*

"Solidarity," he shouted going up the steps, stopping to look at Angela, pink hair behind her placard. A glower in return. Oh, comrade. Most beautiful of comrades.

And here they were, forty years later, in the sprawling big house he knew so well. Oldest of friends. She was thin, the pink crop now grey and sparse. He remembered Dave telling him how she'd coped, losing her hair to the chemo. Big deal for her, he'd said, shaking his head. Even though she didn't do all that 'looks' shit. Husband Dave had been dead three years now. Today was the anniversary of his passing. They'd seen Dave through the stages of an illness that left him little dignity. She'd cried in his arms the day of Dave's funeral, and he'd kept his promise to Dave; he'd always look out for his beloved Angela. Fierce, indomitable Angela, an oldie among the young eco warriors. She'd been there for him, too. A painful divorce in his late thirties. Without Dave and Angela, he'd have never got through, especially that battle over Jen taking the kids to Australia.

“Nice, this Beaujolais” she said, opening a second bottle. “God, that cheap Bulgarian crap we all used to drink!” She bent over him to re-fill their glasses. “But not after Chernobyl of course.”

Still that same perfume; it could still stir a faint something in him after all these years. A trace of a young man's yearning. He raised his glass, a toast to Dave.

“Do you remember” she said. “Do you remember when you left me a poem in the library, on top of my work?” He blinked. No, actually he didn't. Had he really persisted against the odds? The poem thing had worked with a couple of girls, he remembered. Usually a bit of Byron, something like that.

“Yes, it was something about love, something about snoring in a sleeping den. Dave couldn't stop laughing when he read it.” She shook her head, a little smile. “What was it about?”

He took another swig of the warm wine in his glass.

“Probably John Donne. I think I used that line on a couple girls. It meant something like, we are asleep until we fall in love.”

“You were in love with me, then weren't you. A bit,” She squinted at him.

Oh, you have no idea how much. Her face was leaning so close to his now, he could smell the garlic on her breath. And something a little staler underneath. Her bottom teeth stained with wine and tea. She should go to the dentist.

“You were, weren't you.” Yes. I was. Yes I am. I always will be.

“Of course I was.” He kissed her on the cheek. A gentle kiss. And then, almost on the side of her mouth; so gently. She started to cry. Her glass tipping over, the last of her red wine running in a little puddle on the table.

“Oh bugger, bugger, bugger.” She was really crying now. He wiped the salt tears from her cheek with his fingers. She pulled a tissue from her sleeve, hiccupping as she blew her nose.

“Sorry, sorry. I still get so lonely sometimes, you know? I still hate waking up on my own.” She stood up, swaying slightly. “C'mon. Help me make it through the night” she was giggling through tears now, as she started singing in parody of herself. “Help me make it through the night...”

“I'm putting you to bed now” he said as he helped her steady herself.

“I've only got one tit left but you already know that.”

He took off her shoes and helped her into bed, pulled the cover over her. He lay down next to her, fully clothed; he watched over her as she drifted into sleep, snoring a little.

