

## A Wintry Walk

by Katy Wise

'Why is it we can never love the people we ought to?'

*I don't know why she is asking me, it's not as if I have had any better luck than her in the love department.*

I followed the gaze of my dog, Agnus, to a fat, plushie squirrel. Ripe in its winter coat. It really was the most beautiful afternoon. The crisp white frost had given way to a low orange sun which had forced our scarfs into our pockets and our own coats around our waists.

I realised then she was looking at me pointedly.

*Oh dear. Keep it vague, and if in doubt borrow the words of those wiser.*

'Next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed in love a little now and then.'

*(Jane Austen)*

She looked at me. For all her academia and schooling I think *Pride and Prejudice* was lost on her.

Agnus had stopped again, this time to peruse the landscape below. Looking for bunny or dear.

*I wonder if she has noticed? Perhaps I should voice it? Nope she is onto the next one now. They all sound very similar. Buff gym blokes. How can you know which one you ought to love when they all sound the same?*

Even when I interjected with my own relevant tail of jilted love, she barely responded before moving back to her own topic. I didn't begrudge her of it, someone once said of me 'she wasn't a person to whom things happen. She did all the happenings.' Which means that my stories far out weigh hers in variety and magnitude and I am content in my triumphed and failed loves, they led me here, to this place, on this wintry afternoon, and I regard most of them fondly. Nothing lasts forever.

I watched Agnus who had bounded off in hot pursuit of an unexpected rabbit.

*Might be an unlucky rabbit in a minute.*

My legs were starting to ache, we were covering ground at a rapid pace not designed for wellies.

*Was I setting the pace or her? Me I think, trying to hurry her to the point or at least to a conclusion.*

‘I know Jack likes me, and he is really nice, and he is a PT

*(of course he is)*

but I just really like Ben. I think if I just play it chill, give him time to sort out his head, I hope he will come round and realise we are made for each other.

I was quicker this time in providing a response.

‘We all hope. Its what keeps us alive.’

She looked startled at this.

*Bit deep. Fair enough.*

Agnus had returned after an unsuccessful hunt, tongue lolling out, sides heaving she slotted into step close at my heels as we descended the grassy slope, a brave muntjak watching us judgementally as the frozen ground gave way to churning mud.

‘It’s just gone wrong so many times, I haven’t got the energy for the heartache again.’

She sighed and her shoulders drooped. I felt a bit sorry for her now. Heartache takes practice.

I smiled broadly at her,

‘A motto I’ve adopted is, if at first you don’t succeed, hide evidence that you ever tried.’

She genuinely laughed this time and bent down to pat Agnus who responded with a slow wag, eyes pinned where the bank and the river had merged. We waited as she waded over to cool off in the shallows of the flood water. Rinsing our wellies I noticed the sinking sun, which never fully reached its final destination at this time of year, setting only briefly after its rise, almost as if it couldn’t be bothered to finish its own wintry walk.

‘OMG he has just text me!’

*Which one?*

She was engrossed in her phone now.

‘Ooh what do I reply? Can I reply this? Does it make sense?’

'It doesn't have to make sense it just has to sound like it does.'

*No? Nope, nothing. To preoccupied to pick up on that one.*

'Thank you SO much for such a lovely afternoon, it really helps getting to vent and I'm so happy I could listen and help you with your problems too.'

*Huh? I guess people say its not what happens in your life that matters, its what you think happened.*

She hugged me. 'Let's do the theatre soon. War horse is showing.'

And she looked back at her phone as she got in the car.

Agnus and I made our steady way back to the house on foot, a red kite circled over head and a robin took off from the bird table as the sun finally gave in to dusk.

Agnus stood acceptingly as I rubbed her wet legs and tummy with a towel. I looked at her and she smiled in a way only dogs can, attempting to lick my face.

*Dogs love exactly the people they ought to.*

'Luckily for me.' I told her.

And we shut the door on the creeping frost and left the moon to its cold night sky.