

# ~ Valentine Day ~

{An original yarn fiction by Anj Medhurst}

‘Why?’ they asked. ‘Is it a family name? Not your birthday? Must be when you were conceived.’

‘What was she thinking?’ they said. ‘With their surname as well.’

‘You’ll always be lucky in love.’ His mother said. And he believed her. Why wouldn’t he? She loved him. He loved her. It was simple. It was magic.

He was sure there must have been a time when he didn’t know, didn’t feel it, but he couldn’t remember one. He’d always had a sense, even when he was a babe in arms, or in a second-hand pushchair, of the power of it. He had worn it like a badge. His mother’s smile, her hand squeeze at the school gate that first day. They’d stood their ground, him and his mum, when the teacher had said,

‘Can we shorten it? Does he have a nickname? It’s an awful lot for a wee lad to learn to write.’

‘It’s not’, he’d replied. ‘I can write it, look I’ll show you.’

And he’d carefully formed the nine letters, brow furrowed with concentration, fingers tight around the pencil. And that was that, the teachers loved him.

The neighbour’s cat, a scruffy tom, renowned for his snarling, teeth-baring temper, flopped at his feet by the garden gate, waiting for the tummy-rub,

purring like an idling Harley. 'Well I never,' Harriet said, 'He likes you. You've got the magic touch.'

He didn't hear colours, he didn't feel sounds, they weren't visions. It was different. When he looked, he simply saw what wasn't there; what was missing. He saw leaves on trees in the dead of winter; flames in unlit grates; he saw the mundane missing; the overlooked ordinary; the salt left out of the soup, but he also saw the love that Harriet's scruffy tom cat craved and the reason for the sadness behind Rita's smile when he paid for his morning newspaper.

He scribbled in his little notebook so he'd remember them all. He had a lot of the little books, lined up on a shelf. The older ones are spiral-bound but these days they are A6, soft-cover, narrow rules. Always black; but not little black books, not the way you're thinking.

Sometimes all they needed was a nudge; a good old-fashioned card. The ones who couldn't see for looking, as mum would've said. 'Be mine, all of the time' had been enough for Ray and Helen, volunteers at a local charity, sharing a smile and a cup of tea, both wondering if they were ready to dip a toe in again.

Others needed a different kind of magic. You see, it wasn't always about finding someone to love, sometimes it was about finding something to love. Janet was perfectly happy on her own, her one true love a long-distant but treasured memory. She was just missing a spark, a light, an object for her affections. A sprinkling of seed was all it took to entice a charm of Goldfinches, and Janet was bewitched. Her and her garden birds, feeding each other love, the circle complete.

And so, it went. Every year he collected all the missing bits in his little book and come the day, his day, he worked his magic. Maybe a card, a little note, a conveniently placed ad in the newsagent's window.

George had grabbed his hand and shaken it in both of his when they first met. 'Valentine, you say? I had an uncle Valentine. He was a wonderful dancer...' and right there he'd seen the wistful look, the seed of an idea take shape. "Learn to Tango; Learn to Love Life" the card in the window had said and George had known in that moment, what was missing.

Valentine marked another line in his notebook with a tiny red tick and tucked it back in his pocket and smiled.

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