Ups and Downs

Mary Jane Staples

Chapter 1

December, 1956.

Mrs Patsy Adams, American wife of Daniel, elder son of Sammy and Susie Adams, was upset, and to such an extent that she was storming around her house in Kestrel Avenue, close by Denmark Hill in south-east London.

She and Daniel had had their first real quarrel, all over their son, six-year-old Andrew. The boy hadn't wanted to go to school that morning, saying he didn't feel well. Daniel said he'd tried that before. Patsy said no, if he didn't feel well he should stay home. Daniel said there was nothing wrong with the lad except liking his own way, and he packed him off to school with his sister, eight-year-old Arabella. Then he told Patsy she was spoiling the boy. That did it. They quarrelled, and were still throwing wounding words at each other when Daniel left for his work at the Adams offices in Camberwell Green.

Patsy fumed. High-spirited and as mettlesome as any modern American woman of twenty-nine, she threw things about. Cushions from the lounge furniture went sailing through the air to pummel the walls. She couldn't believe that Daniel, her fun guy, could have been ratty enough to accuse her of spoiling their son. Her temper wasn't improved by knowing she did give in to the boy sometimes, but after all, he was only six.

The advance of the morning didn't cure her of her upset and resentment. At eleven o'clock she came down from tidying up the bedrooms. Reaching the open door of the kitchen, she stiffened. There was a face at the window, a grubby bearded face under an old floppy hat. The face of a tramp. He didn't see her, his eyes were travelling around the kitchen. He moved, he disappeared, and she heard the slight sound of the back door handle being turned.

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Patsy was in too much of a temper to be frightened, and when she heard the sound of the back door opening, she rushed, picked up a saucepan, rushed again and came face to face with the intruder. He was clad in a tatty old overcoat, and she caught the smell of unwashed clothes and body. He stared at the sudden apparition of a flushed, seething housewife with a saucepan in her hand.

Patsy struck, and the saucepan bounced on his floppy hat. His head rang muffledly from the metallic blow. Patsy struck again. The tramp staggered, flung up his mittened hands to ward off another hurtful whack, turned and ran out through the open back door. Patsy chased after him in the cold of the damp morning. Around the side of the house he went, down the drive and out through the gate, Patsy on his heels and close enough to hit him again. He gasped and pelted down the avenue as fast as his legs could carry him, his head suffering. Patsy, breathing hard, pulled up and waited until he disappeared, along with his bruised and aching head. She felt a bit better then.

At which moment a small white van appeared, bearing the sign BEADLES THE FLORISTS. It pulled up outside the house, and the driver, a woman in white overalls, stepped down. She was carrying a wrapped bouquet of huge bronze chrysanthemums. She met Patsy at the gate.

'Mrs Adams?'

'Yes?'

'Our pleasure, Mrs Adams.' Smiling, the woman handed the bouquet to Patsy, who gathered it to her, along with the saucepan.

'You're sure these are for me?' she asked, flush receding.

'Quite sure, Mrs Adams,' said the woman, checking the house number. 'Good morning.' She returned to her van, while Patsy carried the bouquet and the saucepan into the house by way of the still-open back door. She dropped the saucepan into the sink, where it rang with the satisfaction of a job well done. Then she looked for a card. She found one. It bore just a few words.

'I still love you. Daniel.'

At which Patsy, of course, sat down and cried.

Five minutes later, Daniel took a private phone call in his office.

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'Daniel?'

'Patsy?'

'Don't ever make me so miserable again.'

'Hearing you, Patsy, but haven't you received my gesture of apology, some flowers?'

'Yes, and they made me cry. Daniel, I'm so sorry we quarrelled like that. Don't let it happen again.'

'You held your own, you know.'

'It was awful. Let's be forgiving. The flowers are lovely.'

'So are you, Patsy.'

'We'll talk to Andrew this evening.'

'Good idea.'

'Daniel, thank you.'

'See you, Patsy.'

'See you, Daniel.'

They talked to Andrew that evening and discovered what the real trouble was. He didn't get on with one of the teachers.

So the following morning, Patsy went to the school herself, spoke to the teacher in question, pointed out that Andrew was only six and persuaded her to be more tolerant of his little bouts of childish obstinacy. He did have such moments. Patsy had her own way of getting on the right side of people, including harassed teachers, and as a result Andrew received kinder words in class, and made no more fuss about going to school.

Patsy's arrangement of the chrysanthemums glowed in its vase.

The year had seen more than the occasional tiffs among lovers. It had seen, for instance, the ever-growing popularity of Elvis Presley, a former truck driver from

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America's deep South. Now undisputed king of rock 'n' roll, he had a voice like melting velvet. It was a voice that sent American teenage girls dotty, stopped the traffic and actually overtook the crooning tones of Frank Sinatra in the charts, and induced rapture in vast numbers of young females in the British Isles. Further, at live American concerts his rhythmic body language brought him extra renown as 'Elvis the Pelvis'. That really got to susceptible girls. Some fainted and keeled over. Others had fits of bliss. In Britain, young girls like Emily Chapman, thirteen-year-old daughter of Rosie and Matthew Chapman, worshipped Elvis from afar, and sent their parents potty by playing his records over and over again.

Generally, however, the United Kingdom's young stars, such as Tommy Steele and Terry Dene, had created their own following of teenagers, leading them into undreamed-of realms of jive and swing. It looked as if young people in the West were beginning to enjoy a world of their own.

It was a pity, accordingly, to note that in Eastern Europe things were uncomfortably different. Indeed, in Hungary an uprising by the people against the oppressive rule of Communism had been crushed by Soviet tanks. But then, the Kremlin discouraged musical self-expression, full stop, and if an Elvis Presley or a Tommy Steele had emerged in Moscow or Budapest, either would have disappeared overnight as a corrupter of Communist culture.

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