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THE PERFECT FIT

Written by **Mary Jayne Baker**

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A 'LOVE IN THE DALES' STORY

The Perfect Fit



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Mirror Books

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rectify any omissions at the earliest opportunity.

For Amy Smith,
my favourite tiny amdrammer.



Chapter 1

'Behind you! Peter! Peter, he's right *there*!'

Pip bounced on her seat, waving frantically at Peter Pan, who just couldn't seem to see the burly pirate lurking by his shoulder.

Peter cupped a theatrical hand to his – well, her – ear. 'Did you say something, boys and girls?'

'Can't you hear me?' Pip yelled, her voice soaring far above the other children. 'He's right behind you! He's gonna take Tinkerbell!'

Peter turned around slowly, the pirate mimicking her movements so he was still behind her back.

'Oh no he isn't!'

'He is! He is!'

'Quiet down a bit, eh, sweetie?' I whispered.

'But why won't he *listen*, Aunty Becky?' Pip asked. 'I've told him a *majillion* times, and he won't look round. And now there!' She clapped her little hands. 'I TOLD YOU!' Pip shouted as Captain Hook's henchman scampered away with Tinkerbell's tiny house under his arm.

I wondered whether I should have another crack at explaining that the panto was just pretend. That Peter wasn't a little boy who would never grow up but a *Hollyoaks* actress in her mid-twenties, and 'the lady with hair like Aunty Yo-yo's' playing Mrs Smee, the pirates' cook, was actually a six-three former Leeds United striker. Except I suspected, underneath her indignation, that Pip was having a great time.

'Serves you right! Serves you flippin' well right, you big *silly*!' she was shouting at Peter now. 'Doesn't it, Aunty Becky? He should've listened when I told him. I *said* the bad man would take Tinkerbell. And now she'll be all on her own and scared, coz of him not listening.'

'Don't get too upset about it, Pipsqueak. Peter and the Lost Boys'll save Tink, double-triple aunty promise.'

I held out my crooked little finger to seal the double-triple promise, but she was too absorbed to notice.

'If I was him, I wouldn't have let the man get even near a bit. I would've – oh my goodness, he's come back! Peter! *PETER!*'

And off she went again, standing up on her chair to get Peter's attention.

'Can you please calm your little girl?' a man sitting behind said. 'My grandson can't see a thing.'

I turned to flash him an apologetic smile. 'Sorry. My niece has never been to a pantomime before. She has a bit of an over-active imagination.'

'If you can't keep her under control, you really ought to take her home,' the man grunted as Pip waved her arms at the stage, shrieking her head off.

I frowned. 'Ok, no need to get in a lather about it. She's only five. Audience participation is all part of the fun, isn't it?'

'Yes, well,' he muttered. 'There's audience participation and there's plain disruptive. She's ruining it for the other children.' He sent me a pointed look. 'You know, the well-mannered ones.'

With a final glare, I tugged Pip's hand, whispering for her to get back in her seat. She grudgingly sat down, amid dark mutterings that Peter Pan must be either deaf or stupid not to hear her.

***

'So, how was it?' Cameron asked when I'd taken Pip home. She was snuggled between me and her dads on the giant floor beanbag while I gratefully supped a post-panto glass of wine the lads had been considerate enough to have waiting for me. 'Did you two girls have fun?'

I mouthed the words 'never again' over his daughter's head before slapping on a bright smile.

'Oh, we had a fantabulous time – that's a panto word, we learned it tonight. Didn't we, Pipsqueak?'

Pip's voice was still hoarse from shouting, but she grinned happily at Cam. 'It was brilliant, Daddy! I mean, er, it was fantastulous – that's a special pantomime word. Peter Pan was a total stupid! But I told him right off, didn't I, Aunty Becky?'

'You certainly did, sweetie,' I said. 'For two whole hours.'

'*And* I learned a new joke,' Pip said, puffing herself up. 'Better'n my dinosaur one, even.'

Tom pulled her onto his knee. 'Will it make me laugh?'

'Yup!' She shuffled on his lap to face him, looking sober as she prepared to deliver The Joke (TM). To Pip, comedy was a serious business. 'Ok. This is my new joke. Ready, Papa?'

'As I'll ever be.'

Her brow puckered with concentration. 'Why – right – why are pirates called pirates?'

'Dunno. Why are pirates called pirates?'

'Because they *arrrr!*'

Pip looked smug as Tom forced a loud belly laugh, suppressing the groan I could see hiding behind his eyes.

Cameron leaned round his husband's back to talk to me. 'Were they all like that?' he muttered.

'That was the best one. Two solid hours, Cam. Two. Solid. Hours.'

'Eesh. Sorry.'

'Come on then, Pips,' Tom said. 'Time for Lost Girls to fly up to bed.'

'You need fairy dust to fly, Papa.'

'Oh, do you now?' Tom swung her up onto his shoulders and jumped to his feet. 'Then what just happened?'

Pip giggled. 'Flying?'

'Yep. Dad magic, even stronger than fairy dust. Come on, kiddo, we can make up –' he paused – 'two whole stories, I think, before it's absolutely sleeptime.'

He shot an enquiring look at Cameron, who nodded slightly to show he was fine with two whole stories. Parenting code. After three years on aunty duty, I was just about starting to get how it worked.

'Yay, stories! Na'night, Daddy. Na'night, Aunty Becky,' Pip called as Tom flew her to the door and galloped away up the stairs. 'Don't let the bedbugs – argh!' She broke off into giggles when Tom dived her into an unexpected swoop at the top of the landing.

I sagged into the beanbag and held up my wine glass.

'That bad, eh?' Cam said, pouring me a refill.

'Worse. That kid of yours'll be the death of me.'

'Heh, join the club. Thanks for taking her, Becks.'

'My pleasure. And at least 43% of me really means that.' I smiled. 'Honestly, though, she was adorable. Couldn't convince her it was pretend.'

'Well, you've done your babysitting stint. Next month she can go to Aunty Lana and Uncle Stew. They need to be getting some practice in.'

'No news?'

'Nope. I swear Lana's started physically vibrating with the stress.'

'Think it'll be much longer?'

'Yeah, could be a while yet. They still have to go through a load of background checks, plus medicals and stuff.'

'How long did you and Tom have to wait till the adoption agency said you could move to the next stage?'

'Two months. Then another four of training before they finally started finding us a match. God, it was hell.' He smiled at the photo of the three of them hanging over the fireplace. 'Worth it though.'

'Poor Lana. I'll pop round on Monday after work, see if I can take her mind off it.' I sipped my wine with the relish that can only come from hours looking after someone else's kid. 'How was date night?'

'Honestly? You want all the gory detail?'

I shrugged. 'Might as well live my sex life vicariously through yours, since I'm getting bugger all.'

'Tom'll kill me for telling you.'

'What? Spanking? Whipped cream? Go on, I can take it.'

He fell back into the squishy beanbag. 'Sleep. Sweet, glorious sleep. I was out like a light within half an hour of the girl being gone.'

I laughed. 'Poor Tommy.'

'I know, he'd got massage oil and everything. Still, think he appreciated the peace and quiet. That's the ultimate aphrodisiac for us these days.'

'Come on. Don't pretend you're not loving this.'

'Yeah,' he said with a sigh. 'I'm knackered, but I know Pip's the best thing we ever did.'

'No arguments here.' I gave his arm a squeeze. 'And I'm trying not to be jealous, honestly. Even if my baby brother is ahead of me in the real-life Game of Life.'

'You know, they actually just call that life.'

I sighed. 'Wish I knew when my turn would come. Over two years now me and Cole have been talking about getting

married and starting a family.' I held up the finger that bore my engagement ring and watched as the light danced from the heart of the diamond. 'I never thought we'd still be at the pre-planning stage by the time we reached our mid-thirties.'

'Pre-planning? God, you make your life sound like a PowerPoint presentation.' Cam leaned on his elbow to look at me. 'It'll happen, Becks. You're home, aren't you? Moving to Egglethwaite was supposed to be the first step.'

'It is nice to be back where there's wide open spaces,' I admitted. 'We wouldn't have been able to keep a hamster in that Finsbury Park matchbox, let alone a baby.'

'Exactly. And now all the other life goals can follow.'

'Ugh. Life goals. Have you been watching *Loose Women* again?'

'I find it empowering,' he said, tossing his head. 'I'm right though, aren't I? Step one: The Big Move. Step two: The Big Wedding. Step three: The Big Bouncing Baby. Or the other way round, if your biological clock's giving you gyp.'

'Hmm. You seem to be forgetting I haven't actually got the necessary equipment to hand for bouncing babies, since Cole and all his attached baby-making apparatus is still down in London.'

'You want to borrow Tommy for the night?'

'Will he bring his massage oil?'

Cam shrugged. 'Yeah, if you want. We're not having a fry-up tomorrow.'

I laughed. 'Best not, eh? I don't fancy explaining that one to Dad and Cynthia, keen as they are for another grandkid.' I put my wine down. 'Right, I'd better go.'

'Why, have you got plans?'

'Yep. PJs, pinot, early night. Bliss.'

Cam shook his head. 'Can you stop being so bloody old? It's half-eight on a Friday night. Stay and have a few drinks with us.'

I hesitated. It did sound tempting.

'Well… half a glass,' I said. 'But then I really have to go. Cole's due to ring at nine.'

'It's not healthy, you know,' Cameron said as he topped up my wine.

'Cam, you're doing that voice again.'

'Well, honestly, you can't keep this up. You here, fiancé at the other end of the country. Shutting yourself up like a nun every night while you wait for him to call. I thought the pair of you were moving here to build a new life. You know, get out and be part of things?'

'We have to talk, don't we?' I said, trying not to sound defensive.

'Every night though?' he said. 'We wouldn't mind seeing you for an evening now and again. How about quiz night at the Fox on Thursday with Stew and Lana? Come on, we could use another brain.'

'Well… maybe. If Cole doesn't mind.'

'Seriously, you have to get permission before you're allowed to play out?'

'No. I just don't want to hurt his feelings.' I sighed. 'Look, I was the one who convinced him moving here was a good idea. I can hardly complain if his job means he has to stay in London a while, can I? We can't afford for either of us to be out of work if we're hoping for a wedding next year.'

'But how long can you live like that?'

'It won't be for long. Just until there's a job opening within commuting distance.'

'And when's that likely to happen? This isn't London, there aren't just art lecturer jobs for the asking.'

'We need to be patient, that's all.' I downed the last of my wine. 'Right, I really have to go. Tell Tommy I said bye.'