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The Good, the Bad and the Dumped

Written by Jenny Colgan

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The Good, the Bad and the Dumped

Jenny Colgan


sphere



Chapter One

Posy is wishing she'd checked the weather forecast,
even if they are a bit useless.

Comment, Matt: There's no such thing as bad
weather, just bad clothing.

Comment, Posy: Well, you would know.

Posy Fairweather wasn't quite sure why she was at the top of
a mountain.

Mountains weren't exactly her thing – they hadn't been here
in ages – even though it was very beautiful up here, she sup-
posed, the clouds shifting below them, sending patterns onto
the fields and sheep. They really hadn't done anything like this
for yonks. Probably because she moaned too much about the
weather. She turned to look at Matt in the clear light. He looked
slightly effortful, his face pinker than the walk warranted.

Suddenly she had a flash of clairvoyance, and knew exactly
what he was about to do. And her stomach lurched.

‘What a view,’ he said, looking nervous. ‘Are we right at the top?’

‘Not yet,’ she said, smiling, feeling her throat constrict as she said it. She would just make sure. ‘Is it *really* important that we make it all the way to the top?’

‘Uh.’ Matt looked conflicted. Obviously it didn’t, not really, if they were just looking for somewhere to have a picnic. But Posy suspected that, today, the small things like whether they were really at the top might actually matter.

‘Come on, let’s just go,’ she said, and he scrambled up the scree behind her gratefully.

The view, from beside the little pile of rocks, wasn’t much different, although with no more rock above them and nothing left to climb, she felt closer to the clouds than ever. The sky was a freshly washed blue. Posy watched as Matt tried to look innocent, although he was clearly waiting for another pair of walkers, in blue cagoules, to move away from the summit. Her heart pounded.

Finally they did and, jiggling slightly, he turned to face her. The dark bristle on his unshaven face suited him, she thought, made his jawline taut and his cheekbones more evident. He grinned at her, more awkwardly than he had since the first moment they’d met.

‘Posy,’ he said, swallowing.

And Posy found herself thinking, stupidly: I wonder how your face should look when you’re being proposed to. Happy? Obviously. Surprised? Sexily surprised? How would that work? Maybe pretend you’re getting an Oscar. No, hang on, don’t pretend it’s *anything*, this is one of the most amazing experiences of your life that you’re meant to remember for ever! But

then, the last thing you want to think of is whether or not you were making a pig's face. Or even thinking about your face at all, instead of love, and the future, and the wonderfulness of it all! Why didn't she put more lipstick on? What if he wasn't about to propose and she'd got it all wrong? Maybe he was going to chuck her. But on top of a mountain? Who would do that? Maybe he was going to chuck her *off* the mountain?

'Uh, Posy, are you all right? You look like you're about to be sick.'

Posy managed to hold it together. Vomiting was definitely *not* the look she was after. No. There was a long moment of silence, and in the distance a bird circled the sun. Posy turned to look at it, giving what she felt was a nice polite long stare. And sure enough, when she turned round again, Matt was very awkwardly perched on one knee. Suddenly, she didn't have to worry about her face, because she could feel her heart leap straight into her mouth, and an uncontrollable grin start to stretch into her cheeks.

'Matthew Farmer!' she said, in a surprised tone.

Matt returned the grin, somewhat lopsidedly.

'You should know,' he said. 'This is profoundly uncomfortable. I have pebbles sticking into me and, I think, some poo.'

'I shall remember these words until my dying day,' said Posy. Matt went pink.

'Sorry,' he said. 'Hang on. I meant to be . . . Right. Hang on. I have it.'

Posy nodded expectantly.

Matt held up a blue box and popped it open. The noon-time sun caught the glint of the diamond inside, and it winked across the hilltops like a signal beam.

‘Posy. *If it’s not love . . .*’ He took a deep breath. ‘*If it’s not love then it’s the bomb, the bomb, the bomb, the bomb, the bomb, the bomb, the bomb that will bring us together.*’

Posy caught her breath. Then, just to be equal, she knelt down too, in the sheep poo and small rocks on the ground. He proffered her the box.

‘Do you mean it?’

‘More than anything, Posy. More than anything.’

They stared into each other’s eyes; Matt’s blue and clear, Posy’s so dark they were almost black, with a thick fringe of lash.

From nowhere, she felt a little stab of something that felt suspiciously like panic. Matt and her . . . they were so different. Such an unlikely match, everyone said.

But on the other hand, they were here. Now. After everything that had happened. After every morning she’d woken up feeling she could never be happy again . . . here, finally, was the moment she’d dreamt of for such a long time. Not always with the same man, it had to be said. But still.

She burst out, ‘Oh yes! Ooh yes! I love you!’

Matt’s face split into a grin.

‘But not *too* much of The Smiths at the wedding, all right?’

They both jumped up and dusted themselves down, so they could embrace more easily.

‘Some.’

‘No!’

‘I’m going to invite Morrissey.’

‘You are not. He’ll bring the mood down.’

They kissed again, laughing. Posy felt lightheaded and giddy, as if she were outside her own body, watching herself.

‘Can you get a signal up here? Can we phone everyone?’

‘Put the ring on first.’

‘Ooh, yes.’ Posy extended her finger. ‘Did you get it fitted?’

‘No,’ admitted Matt. ‘I just said that my girlfriend has really gigantic shovel-like man hands.’

‘You *didn’t*?’ said Posy, whose large hands and feet were the bane of her life.

‘I did too,’ said Matt, as the ring slid perfectly on to the fourth finger of her left hand. ‘They thought I was buying it for a chap. The jeweller kept trying to intimate that it was quite all right, gay weddings were legal and everything. It was really embarrassing.’

He looked at her. ‘Do you like it?’

It was a perfect solitaire, with two smaller cut diamonds on either side, on a platinum band.

‘I love it,’ said Posy, truthfully.

‘You didn’t want to shop for it?’

‘Matt. Ssh.’ She looked at him. ‘You chose it. Which means it’s exactly right. Now can we call everyone?’

‘*Not* your sister. You’ll be on for two hours and I want lunch and champagne and lots of nice things!’

‘*Can’t* promise,’ said Posy. Then she paused. ‘Did you say . . . champagne?’

Posy is !!!!!!!!!!!

Comment: Like.

Matt Farmer likes this.

So Posy had to wait till they’d got down the mountain and celebrated rather loudly in a pub (she’d thought people would

have been more excited, but it turned out that loads of couples got engaged on the peak every year, they even kept a special bottle of champagne in the fridge just for the purpose). But this didn't dent her amazing feeling – that she had caught a cloud from the mountain top and surfed it down.

Later, post- an afternoon sojourn at their bed and breakfast (Posy felt obscurely weird having sex in a B&B, after all it was someone else's house and someone else's bed. And in the afternoon, too! Their landlady had been full of congratulatory winks, but oddly that didn't seem to make things any easier):

'Ooh, marital relations,' Matt said. 'I could get used to this.'

'Well, you're going to have to,' said Posy, then wondered if reminding Matt he was only going to get to sleep with one woman for the rest of his life wasn't a bit mean.

'Good,' said Matt, smiling at her, and she reached up to meet him. 'I'm very, very happy. I was bricking it a bit though.'

'Why?' said Posy, genuinely surprised. 'Didn't you think I would say yes?'

Matt shrugged. 'Well, I don't know, do I? Women, you're funny things.'

Posy bit her lip. It wasn't like he didn't know she had a past.

'But you know I love you, don't you?'

'Yeah, course I do,' said Matt.

'Well then, why were you nervous?'

'No reason. I just . . . you know, sometimes you're a bit private . . .'

Posy sat up and put her arms around her legs. 'You say that like it's a bad thing.'

‘It’s not a bad thing. But, you know. Sometimes I think there’s a part of you locked away that I can’t get to – I don’t mind so much. A woman should be a bit of a mystery. But it makes you . . . unpredictable.’

‘I’m the least mysterious person ever! You’re the one that spends six hours boiling up their Oyster card to get the magnetic bit out and stick it to a wand so you can magic open the tube barriers. *That* is mysterious.’

‘You’re right,’ said Matt. ‘Forget I said it. Shall we go out for a super slap-up engagement feast? And tell the waiters and everything? We must be able to get freebies *somewhere* – what’s the point in having a big life event if people don’t buy you drinks?’



Chapter Two

Posy is cheerfully shagged out.

Comment, Fleur: XXX hoho missus.

When they got home on Sunday, it was inevitable that Posy would head straight to Fleur's, and Matt didn't try to prevent it.

They were lying on Fleur's sofa-cum-bed-cum-dinner table. Fleur liked to think that her flat was Bohemian – i.e. it had lots of things hanging from it – but really it was just a very small tip with some windchimes in it. Being a freelance herbal therapist (Fleur didn't like to pin herself down to what types of therapy she actually liked to do) didn't pay that well. Fleur said the satisfaction of helping people was obvious enough, although Posy noticed that Fleur did sigh a little and talk about wills when in the houses of her more elderly clients.

Still, Fleur had got the looks in the family – long wavy curls (Posy sometimes wondered if people with long Bohemian

curls got into Bohemian jobs because of their hair or if the hair came later), and a beautiful bee-stung cupid's bow of a mouth, which made men go all funny and fail to listen to what she was saying. Which, when she went through her period of wasp venom healing, was probably just as well.

Posy was pretty-ish in a slightly determined way, with dark hair and shrewd, dark eyes. It wasn't, after all, that bad to be the 'smart' one, but just occasionally she'd like to borrow Fleur's head – just to walk into a party, for example, or a room where she didn't know anyone.

'So he said I was mysterious,' Posy was saying, slurping the last of her frappuccino.

'You? Mysterious? Does he or does he not remember how many times you've sent him out to buy your Tampax because you've forgotten it?'

'Yeah, I know, but . . . well . . .'

'I think he's just pretending to himself that that's the case, so that he doesn't think he's marrying someone who's really straight up and not that interesting and works in insurance.'

'In insurance *marketing*,' said Posy, although she didn't know why she still bothered to attempt to convince her sister that that was an interesting take on insurance. Or herself. 'Do you really think?'

Fleur ignored this. 'How was Mum?' she said. She shook her frappuccino. 'I wonder if you could read the ice cubes in these? Like, reading tea leaves but for today?'

'Might be money in it,' said Posy.

'I'm not interested in money,' said Fleur. 'I'm interested in divination and helping people. If they want to recompense me royally for that, who am I to dissuade them?'

‘And until then, you’ll just keep borrowing from your sister,’ said Posy.

Fleur sniffed grandly, as if this was too trivial to bother with.

‘Have you told Mum yet?’

Posy sighed. ‘What do you think?’

Posy and Fleur’s mother was a psychotherapist. She was constantly exhorting them to tell her about their childhood. Because of her extreme nosiness and occasional experimental techniques (such as starting each day when they were younger with dream dissection, as a result of which Posy and Fleur pretended to dream about nice friendly butterflies and rainbows for about four years apiece), the girls elected to tell her as little as possible about their lives.

Posy screwed up her eyes and pretended to take off imaginary glasses.

‘It seems to me that the loss of a father figure at a young age has led to trust issues with the masculine species, compounded by a particularly difficult break-up in the subject’s late twenties, thus leading me to conclude that . . .’

Fleur continued, ‘. . . her desperate hunt for commitment from any source has led her to accept a life of rape-filled slavery from a human male masquerading as a P.E. teacher.’

‘OK, that’s enough,’ said Posy, throwing a cushion at her head. ‘And he’s a *personal trainer*.’

‘These feelings of inadequacy and social pressure as she approaches her middle thirties . . .’

Posy kicked her firmly on the leg. The girls had mostly grown out of their belief, as know-it-all teenagers, that their mother’s clients, some of whom came for years to the rambling

clinic at the top of the house, were just losers, and their mother should inform them of this fact. But a certain distrust of their mother, who was frequently so deep in her clients' problems she would forget to put supper on the table, who believed doing housework was a sign of slavery and/or anxiety, and who clearly loved them but only in quite an abstract fashion, ran deep.

'Want to know what I really love about Matt?' she asked her sister suddenly.

'I don't know . . . it's that you want to be taken care of combined with a horror of your biological clock running out? A horror of getting your heart broken again? A fear of being alone at thirty-two and possessing a deeply conventional nature?'

'He is *uncomplicated*. Jeez. I'm off to phone Leah. You're turning into Mum, by the way. The imitation is absolutely spot-on.'

Fifteen minutes after the phone call, Leah turned up on the doorstep bearing a bottle of gift-wrapped champagne and four editions of bridal magazines.

'EEEEK!' she shrieked, the second Posy opened the door.

'*That's* more like it,' said Posy, gratefully accepting her best friend's hug.

'EEEEK!' said Leah again. 'You're getting married!'

'I know!'

'Did you buy all those magazines?' said Fleur. 'Wow, that was quick.'

'Uh, no, I had them lying around,' said Leah, trying to look nonchalant at this fact. Fleur rolled her eyes.

‘Fleur, you are not too old for me to send you out of the room,’ said Posy.

‘This is *my* flat!’ said Fleur, looking stung. She had always been the younger sister when Posy and Leah were dressing up and going out, and had never quite got over her feelings of resentment.

‘Let me see, let me see!’ clamoured Leah, going for Posy’s hand.

‘Oh,’ she said.

‘What do you mean, “Oh”? I love it,’ said Posy.

‘I know, I just wondered if he’d let you choose it.’ She turned to Fleur. ‘I’m going to have emerald-cut rose diamonds on a rose-gold band.’

Fleur heaved a sigh. ‘*I’m going to have blah blah blah*, waste of head space. I’m going to make tea. Do you want some?’

‘Is it still that stuff that tastes of toe jam?’ said Posy.

‘I roll my own tea. What’s wrong with that?’

‘No, thank you,’ said Leah and Posy simultaneously.

‘Well, *I* love it,’ said Posy determinedly, gazing at her ring.

‘Posy,’ said Fleur maddeningly from the corner of the room, kettle in hand. ‘How does Leah know what kind of ring she wants when she hasn’t got a boyfriend?’

‘Shut up, Fleur,’ Posy said.

Leah stretched out. ‘Are you the happiest girl in the world?’

Posy smiled. ‘I suppose.’

‘What do you mean, *you suppose*? Aren’t you delirious? Don’t you keep bursting into song, like Amy Adams?’

‘Yeah,’ said Fleur from her corner. “‘The Drugs Don’t Work”.’

‘SHUT UP, FLEUR.’

‘No, I’m really chuffed, I really am,’ Posy said. ‘Honestly. It just took me a bit by surprise, that’s all.’

‘I really thought Robert was going to propose,’ said Leah. ‘I walked really slowly past jewellery shops and everything.’

‘You went out with Robert for *two weeks*,’ Posy said, trying to keep the surprise out of her voice. She knew Leah was pretty keen on finding a man, but she’d never suspected the depths of it.

‘Yes, but I just thought he might be The One. I thought we might get caught up in a whirlwind and he might fly me to Vegas and just whisk me off. It could happen.’

‘It could happen,’ Posy agreed. ‘To *crazy* people. You didn’t mention this to him?’

‘No!’ exclaimed Leah. ‘Well. Maybe I just said it one night *for a joke*.’

‘We’re over thirty! How could that be a joke?’ Something dawned on her. ‘I always wondered why you two broke up so quickly.’

‘Well, he wasn’t ready for a commitment,’ said Leah sulkily.

‘After eight days.’ Posy shook her head. ‘Fleur, stop boiling that kettle. Instead, I think we need booze.’

‘Anyway,’ said Leah, ‘I’ve highlighted some really lovely venues in here but there’s a few I wouldn’t want you to use because I’d like them.’

‘Lots of booze,’ Posy said.

Several hours later they were all lying on the floor of the bedsit. *Dirty Dancing* was playing on the DVD. Posy didn’t

think it was the first time it had been on. Leah had a pair of black tights tied round her arm in memoriam.

'*You*,' Leah was saying loudly, 'are the luckiest girl in the *world*.'

Posy stared at the cracks in the ceiling. Was that one spider's web or two?

'Course I'm not,' she said. 'People get engaged every day.'

That wasn't the right answer. There was a loud sniff. Posy felt terrible.

'Come on, Leah, that's not what I mean.'

But it was too late. She'd started sobbing.

'What is it?'

'Everyone's going to get married! Except me! And I'll be left behind and then I'll have to have a donor baby only it will turn out to be sperm donated by a prisoner and it will grow up and hate me and turn evil and do mass murder and I'll be in all the papers.'

Posy propped herself up on one arm.

'You've really thought this through, haven't you?'

'I've kind of been married,' said Fleur.

'You have not!'

'I have! I got married to that drummer I met at Glastonbury. A tree married us. In a field. It was gorgeous.'

'I am not lending you the money to go to Glastonbury any more.'

'I wonder where he is,' mused Fleur. 'I think he wanted us to have a threesome with that tree.'

'See! What's wrong with me?' sniffed Leah.

Posy sat up. 'Nothing is wrong with you.'

Posy meant this sincerely. Leah had been her best friend

since she'd been cutting out wedding gown dress-up doll patterns in Miss Wheeler's Year Four. 'Look at you! You're supercool. You have a great flat and a really great job.'

Leah did PR for a fashion company. Not much money in it, but she always got to go to cool things *and* she got free clothes. Frankly, sometimes Posy thought the clothes were a bit odd – today she was wearing gigantic parachute pants and a silver Star Trek T-shirt – but she did love it.

'So it's just going to take you a bit longer.'

Leah rested her chin on one hand.

'It's not fair. You work for the most boring company on earth and all you do is meet hot men in suits and ties all day long and get to slip off and have sex in the toilets with them.'

'That was *one* time Matt came over and—'

'Meanwhile I, who have a fabulous job lots of people would kill for, spend all day with really *really* thin women deliberately not eating lunch, and gay men complaining about how fat everyone is these days. Next to nine-foot-tall sixteen-year-old Croatian girls. It's *totally* not fair. And I haven't got long!'

Fleur looked up to where she was mimicking Baby's dance moves on the screen, but using her fingers. 'What about men who come up to you on the street and in bars and give you flowers and stuff?'

Posy and Leah both rolled their eyes at her.

'We don't look that available,' Posy said.

'Or that *hot*,' said Fleur quietly.

'Well, whatever,' said Leah. 'It's still not fair. Especially when you're not really cut out for marriage.'

'What?' Posy said. Suddenly she didn't feel quite so drunk.

'Well, you know. To Matt. You're just not that fussed.'

‘That’s not true!’ Posy said. ‘I’m . . . *quite* fussed.’

‘Oh, I understand. After everything that happened before with—’

‘Don’t say his name,’ said Fleur.

Leah rolled her eyes. ‘OK. Lord Voldemort.’

Posy tutted. ‘You can say his name.’

‘I can,’ said Leah. ‘Can you?’

Posy could see what they were driving at. She could. One moment she was whirling in shock, recovering from the love of her life, her heart ripped out, stamped on, rolled in the dust and ground into the floor. The next she was dating big bluff handsome Matt, straightforward, plain speaking and not particularly exceptional in any way. She understood that it looked weird to them. She did. But she just didn’t . . . she didn’t feel like talking about it. It was three years ago, it was all in the past. She hardly gave . . . *him* . . . she hardly gave him a second thought these days. Hardly at all.

Leah was still talking.

‘And of course,’ she was saying, ‘with your dad and everything.’

‘Bollocks. It’s nothing to do with my dad.’ Posy sat up. ‘Hang on. How come we’re meant to be celebrating my engagement and we’re all lying on the floor nearly in tears?’

‘I’m fine,’ said Fleur. ‘Except that Leah’s right about everything.’

‘Shut up!’