

The Road to Disaster – *Audrey Groom*

Myrna stomped up the path to her lovely little cottage, stomped through the door and slammed it shut behind her. Barney, her little Jack Russell, eyed her warily as he rose to give her a subdued welcome.

Her normal placid features were flushed and her eyes bright with anger. That insufferable man! How could he talk to her like that! After all, she'd only put on her left indicator instead of her right. That van had admittedly skimmed close on overtaking, but it hadn't hit them! This right and left business was a problem for her. In the heat of the moment, she kept getting muddled. But Arthur didn't have to go so over the top about it, did he?

It wasn't the first time he'd lost his temper with her either. Last week, he'd thought she was going to hit a cyclist and had yelled at her. But she'd seen the man in plenty in time. And as for reversing round corners, and doing three-point turns – well, he just had no patience at all!

Still shaking with annoyance, Myrna put the kettle on. She really did need a cup of tea – a very strong one. Much stronger than that silly man gave her when she went to his house for tea.

With trembling hands, she put the teabags in the pot – three of them, because she couldn't wait to let it brew. In fact, she poured it immediately, very hot and just like ink. Thank goodness.

With a sigh, she carried her cup into the lounge and sat down. Barney followed, sitting on her feet. As Myrna drank her tea and petted the dog, she began to relax a little. She thought back over the last few weeks.

It had all started one day in the 'Spinning Wheel'. As she'd enjoyed a lovely pot of tea and selection of cream cakes, she'd begun thinking about herself. Her father had been an ardent film fan and had named her after the beautiful and talented Myrna Loy, hoping she would grow up to be like his idol. Myrna, without any vanity, didn't feel she had disappointed him too seriously. Judging by the compliments she often received and the number of proposals when she was younger, people obviously considered her to be an attractive woman.

She was certainly a happy one. Yet she had never married. She hadn't accepted any of her proposals. Somehow, they'd never seemed to be from quite the right person. She had enjoyed an excellent and interesting job in the publishing world, made lots of friends and was quite content.

Now retired, she'd acquired a delightful cottage in a delightful village. And Barney was good company. What more could she want?

Well, looking out of the 'Spinning Wheel' window, enjoying the last mouthful of her chocolate éclair, she'd known there was something missing

A car!

She'd spent all her life without one, travelling by bus, train and cab – and in other people's cars. To own her own car and drive herself hadn't seemed important. But somehow, nowadays, running for a bus, getting to the station on time, or even waiting

for a cab to arrive, had become more irksome. She'd begun to think that it would be nice to have one's own transport after all. It'd open up a whole new world....

However, acquiring a car was not really the major problem. Myrna had a quite acceptable pension and savings tucked away. No, the biggest problem was that she couldn't drive! Was she too old to learn?

It was as these thoughts were running through her mind, that a strong, masculine voice had startled her.

'May I share your table?'

She'd looked up into the undeniably distinguished face of Arthur Powell. Arthur was a widower who'd moved into the village only a month or so ago. They'd been briefly introduced at church and had passed the time of day on one or two occasions since. Unaccountably, Myrna had felt pleased to see him again. She couldn't say why exactly...perhaps it was his eyes. Or his warm smile.

'It's so nice to recognise a face,' he'd said, sitting down. 'I'm afraid I know so few.'

'Oh, you'll soon know more.' Myrna had assured him. 'It's a friendly village.'

The sun had streamed in through the small latticed window as he'd ordered some tea. Then he'd smiled at her.

'Wonderful weather for the garden. Have you put your daffodils in?'

'Indeed I have.'

Roses, clematis, dahlias – the conversation had soon spread to those. And then to where the best garden centres were. Myrna had had to admit she hadn't been able to visit as many as she'd liked as they were hard to reach on public transport.

Arthur had gallantly offered to take her to his favourite centre and arrangements had soon been made.

That was to be the first of many trips out. They took in pub lunches and, in chatting, discovered they both played golf and had many other things in common. And Myrna, who'd always considered herself to be happy, knew after a few weeks that she was even happier now she'd met Arthur. No one had transformed her life like this before.

Then, one day, she'd confided her great ambition to drive to Arthur.

'My dear girl,' he'd said, 'that's simple. I'll teach you.'

So how had it all gone so badly wrong?

Sitting with her tea now, she remembered how cross Arthur had become and how they'd shouted at each other. Then, not for the first time, she'd flung open the car door and rushed up to her cottage without a backward glance.

They couldn't go on with these lessons, that was certain. And she would tell him that it was the end of their friendship.

Later, he phoned.

'I'm sorry I shouted, Myrna. If you want to go out again tomorrow, I'll try not to get cross,' he said in a strangely stiff voice.

'I don't want to try again tomorrow,' she said haughtily. 'Or ever, thank you, Arthur.'

Then she put the phone down and burst into tears – something she hadn't done since childhood.

Once she'd calmed down and dried her tears, she had a long think. No one had ever made her cry before. But maybe that was because she'd never cared enough about

anyone...Then the realisation struck home.

‘What a silly woman you are, Myrna, not to realize before,’ she scolded herself. ‘You really do care for Arthur, don’t you?’

She didn’t want to lose him, but these driving lessons were spoiling their friendship. She closed her eyes for a moment and pictured Arthur’s face, remembered his warmth and kindness, and their intuitive understanding of each other. And she knew, of course, that the driving was unimportant compared to all those other things. She had waited a long time to fall in love. She wasn’t going to throw away this chance of happiness because of a silly ambition. She picked up the phone again and dialled Arthur’s number.

‘It doesn’t matter about the driving – we’ll forget it if it’s going to spoil our friendship,’ she burst out before he had a chance to speak.

She heard his gasp.

‘Dear Myrna,’ he said at last, his voice rough with emotion, ‘I can’t imagine what it cost you to say that. I know how much you want to learn to drive. But our friendship is more important. I do hope, my dear, that you perhaps care for me as much as I care for you.....’ He cleared the throat. ‘I do hope I’m right.’

She took a deep breath before replying.

‘Yes, I do care, Arthur – very much.’

‘Oh, my love...’ There was a moment’s silence as Myrna sighed happily.

‘In fact, I want to marry you, Myrna. Please say yes.’

This time she didn’t hesitate.

‘Yes, Arthur.’ It was the happiest moment of her life.

‘But, Myrna,’ he said tentatively, ‘we have to go on with the driving lessons, you know. We shall both have to learn to compromise. But, maybe, before we go out again, you could take some lessons at that nice driving school in the village. They guarantee you’ll pass. Then, when we set off on honeymoon, you could be in the driving seat!’

‘What a wonderful idea!’ Myrna couldn’t think of anything she’d like more!