

One

‘Scarlett!’ I hear a voice that sounds very much like Oscar’s calling my name. But he sounds far away and muffled, like I’m underwater and he’s on dry land.

‘Scarlett,’ he calls again. ‘Wake up this instant! This is highly embarrassing.’

I open my eyes to find my good friend Oscar glaring down at me. I turn my head to the other side to find my other good friend, Maddie, looking at me with concern.

‘Oh ...’ I say, pushing myself back up in my chair. ‘I must have dropped off.’

‘Dropped off!’ Oscar yelps. ‘You were snoring so loudly at one point the bride and groom stopped at the end of the runway and pointed at you. You were the highlight of the two p.m. showcase!’

I look around me at the empty auditorium where just

minutes earlier I'd been watching models parade down the long runway in wedding gowns and designer morning suits. Had I really managed to fall asleep with all that going on?

'Sorry – it's the jet lag,' I explain, by way of excuse. 'It was really late by the time I got home last night.'

My regular journeys back and forth across the Atlantic between London and New York were usually problem-free, but last night we'd been delayed by some heavy January snowfall arriving into Heathrow Airport. We'd landed on time, but there was such a backlog of planes that we'd had to wait on the tarmac for over two hours for a gate.

'I guess we can let you off this once, then, darling,' Oscar says with a wink. 'Heaven knows I wouldn't want to be stuck on a plane for two extra excruciating hours after a seven-hour flight. I'd be bouncing off the ceiling so hard people would think I'd been fired from an emergency ejector seat!'

I smile at Oscar; he definitely isn't at his best when he has to sit still for a long period of time. Oscar is much better 'uncaged', I guess you'd call it, so his natural enthusiasm for life can be allowed to burst free.

'The actual delay wasn't that bad,' I tell them. 'I got into conversation with a young man sitting next to me and the time passed quite quickly after that.'

As so often happens when you're flying alone, I'd spent the majority of the flight exchanging the odd pleasantry

with the passenger in the seat next to me – we briefly spoke when our food was served or I needed to allow him to pass when he wished to visit the lavatory, as he was in the window seat. But all that changed when we became united in our despair at being stranded on the airport tarmac for so long, when all we wanted to do was disembark the plane, go in search of our bags and be on our way home . . .

‘I guess we should consider ourselves lucky we were actually allowed to fly,’ my neighbour remarks after we’ve been sitting waiting for about twenty minutes. ‘Lots of flights into Heathrow were cancelled last night due to the weather.’

‘Yes,’ I agree, relieved I don’t have to sit in silence any longer. The entertainment system had been switched off when we were preparing to land, and assuming it wouldn’t be long before we left the plane, I’d stowed all my paperwork and my half-read novel in the overhead locker. ‘I wondered if I’d even be getting home today when I saw the forecast on the internet this morning.’

‘Where’s home?’ he politely enquires.

‘London, Notting Hill.’

‘Nice. I have some mates in Notting Hill. How long have you lived there?’

‘About two and a half years. I live there with my fiancé, Sean,’ I proudly tell him.

He nods. ‘Yes, I noticed your ring. Are you getting

married soon?’ Then he flushes a little. ‘Sorry, is that too personal?’

‘No, it’s fine. We may as well chat – we could be here a while. This year, we hope. I’m supposed to be planning it right now.’

‘Supposed to be?’ He raises his dark eyebrows.

‘I mean, I *am* planning it. I’ve just been a bit busy lately – with work.’

It was the truth. I really couldn’t wait to get married to Sean, and planning our dream wedding was always at the top of my to-do list. But just lately work seemed to be taking over everything and I longed for a thirty-six-hour day to try and fit everything in.

‘Yes, I know that feeling well,’ my new companion says. ‘My life is often like that too. What job keeps you so busy?’

I’m quite surprised at all his questions – we’ve hardly spoken during the flight, he’s kept himself very much to himself reading his fitness and men’s fashion magazines, and when he wasn’t doing that or watching a movie, he’s listened to music through a pair of bright red Beats headphones.

‘I own a couple of businesses,’ I reply, trying not to sound too boastful, even though I am immensely proud of both of them. ‘The one based in London I run with my father. We sell popcorn machines.’

‘Popcorn machines!’ he exclaims in delight. ‘Cool. What, to individuals or cinemas?’

‘Cinemas, mainly. We used to be solely based in the UK, but we’ve recently expanded overseas too.’

‘Awesome. And what’s your other business – hot dogs?’ he grins.

I smile politely at his joke. ‘No, completely different. I run a charitable trust over in New York.’

‘Really?’ he says, turning towards me a little. ‘I do a lot of work for charity. Will I have heard of yours?’

I look at him more closely as I answer. He’s quite a good-looking young chap. His thick black hair is cut into a sharp, angular design, and I suspect his casual but trendy clothes all have designer labels.

‘Probably not. It’s called The Dragonfly Trust. We search for missing people: children, parents, whoever needs our help. Our aim is to reunite families. We’re part charity, part private business. The paying clients help fund the charity side.’

‘Awesome. Why Dragonfly, if you don’t mind me asking?’ He glances around the cabin. ‘I see our air stewards are up and moving about now, so it doesn’t look like we’ll be going anywhere just yet.’

‘Gosh, it’s a very long story,’ I tell him. ‘The short version is, I was over in New York tracing the history of an antique dragonfly brooch when I managed to stumble on my half-brother whom I’d never met before. The trust sprang up as a result of me wanting to help others be reunited with their long-lost relatives like I was with mine.’

I decide not to mention doing something very similar

with my then estranged mother some years ago too. The fact I'd searched for and eventually been reunited with her in a cinema in Notting Hill was another long story I hoped there wouldn't be time to tell him during our enforced delay.

'Wow, that's wicked!' he exclaims. 'Not just the trust, but finding your half-brother too. And he didn't know he had a sister?'

I shake my head. 'No, Jamie was as much in the dark as me.'

As I'd just told my new friend, I'd met my half-brother, Jamie, when I visited New York with Oscar. We'd bumped into each other outside Tiffany's, not knowing who the other was. Although I'd felt a connection to him right away, it took a series of random events for us to find out exactly what we meant to each other.

'And do you get on OK?' he asks, seeming genuinely interested.

'Oh yes. It was a little awkward at first, but Jamie and I are really close now.'

'Excellent. So this Dragonfly Trust, is it just in the US?'

'Yes, it is right now. Peter – he helps me run the trust – and I have talked about bringing it over to the UK, though.'

Peter does more than simply help me run the trust. Without him, it would probably never have got off the ground in the first place. Peter is a very well-respected businessman over in the States. We too met on my first trip to New York,

and he's not only become my business partner but my very good friend. Peter introduced me to a children's home called Sunnyside over in Brooklyn, and it was in part due to this association that The Dragonfly Trust was born.

I'm about to ask what my travelling companion does for a living when an air stewardess offers us some drinks.

'I'm very sorry but it seems we may be delayed a little longer,' she explains. 'Please help yourself to some refreshments.'

I take a glass of orange juice and stretch out my legs, glad I'm lucky enough to be able to fly premium economy on long-haul flights.

'So what brings you back to London tonight?' my companion asks, sipping on his own glass of juice. 'Just catching up with your fiancé?'

'Yes, and my friends. We're going to a wedding fair tomorrow at Earls Court to get some ideas for the big day. My friend Oscar has had it all planned for ages. He and Maddie, my other friend, are going to be attendants at my wedding.'

Maddie has been my friend since we were at school together, and I met Oscar when I first came to Notting Hill to house-sit for a month. I'd been so excited that I was going to be staying in the place where one of my all-time favourite movies was filmed, I'd never expected the trip would completely change my life and I'd meet the man I would fall head over heels in love with, Sean.

'I've just realised I know all about your friends and

family and your work, but I don't actually know *your* name!' my travelling companion says now. 'How rude of me.'

I laugh. 'Don't worry about it. I do have a tendency to waffle on if given the chance. My name is Scarlett. And you are?'

'Louis,' he says, holding out his hand for me to shake. 'We should have started this conversation earlier, Scarlett. I would have enjoyed hearing all about your exciting life during the flight.'

'Oh, it's not really that exciting,' I tell him. 'It has its moments, but I bet yours is much more thrilling. Come on, your turn now – tell me something wonderful that's happened in your life.'

Louis smiles. 'Yes, mine has its moments too. Like the time I won a silver medal at the 2012 London Olympics. That was pretty cool.'

I feel my mouth drop open ...

'Scarlett!' Oscar blinks in astonishment as he and Maddie stare at me open-mouthed. 'Are you telling me you flew from New York to Heathrow sitting next to the divine Louis Smith and you didn't realise!'

'You know who he is?' I ask in just as much amazement. 'Louis told me all about his gymnastics career, but I didn't realise he was famous too.'

Oscar simply shakes his head in disbelief.

'Of course we know him,' Maddie says gently. 'But we can't believe you don't. Didn't you watch the Olympics?'

‘Yes, of course, as much as I could. I didn’t watch much gymnastics, though. Perhaps I *have* seen him before.’

‘*Perhaps!*’ Oscar exclaims. ‘What about when he was on *Strictly*? Oh my, I nearly fainted when he did his show dance with no top on. I think half the nation did, actually!’

I look at them still none the wiser.

Oscar pulls out his phone. ‘Look,’ he says, turning it to face me. ‘I had this as my wallpaper for weeks afterwards.’

I peer at the photo Oscar is showing me. It’s of a very fit man holding a female dancer over his head in a *Dirty Dancing*-style pose. He has his shirt off, showcasing a very well-defined chest and upper body.

‘Yes, that’s him!’ I say, looking at the photo. ‘That’s Louis.’

‘We know!’ they both call in unison. ‘We just can’t believe *you* didn’t!’

‘What can I say?’ I hold my hands aloft. ‘I didn’t watch that series of *Strictly*. I think I was mostly in New York then.’

‘My God,’ Oscar says, putting away his phone. ‘If I’d been sitting next to Louis Smith, I’d have had him tangoing me down the aisle by the end of the flight. Actually, no, make that the rhumba!’ He gyrates his hips suggestively.

‘That, my dear friend,’ I say, standing up, ‘is why I now fly alone!’ Then I wink at him. ‘Come on, you two, I thought we had a wedding fair to visit today! What are we waiting for?’

‘You, Sleeping Beauty!’ Oscar calls as we begin to make

our way down some steps and back towards the entrance to the main fair. ‘I seem to remember the gentle snores coming from your delicate lips were our main delay!’

‘To be fair to Scarlett, the show *was* a little dull,’ Maddie suggests. ‘They weren’t the most exciting wedding gowns I’ve ever seen.’

‘Exactly!’ I agree. ‘See – I wasn’t the only one snoozing.’

‘Well, I thought it was simply marvellous!’ Oscar says, clapping his hands together in joy at the thought of all those outfits. Oscar runs his own vintage boutique on the King’s Road; he adores clothes, and definitely has a unique style when it comes to his own choice of outfits. ‘I wish I was getting married. I’d have a simply splendid time choosing the cake, the venue, the gown . . .’

Maddie and I glance at each other.

‘And just who will be wearing the gown at *your* wedding?’ I ask, smiling.

Oscar flicks his head away. ‘You know what I mean. Just because it’s a gay wedding doesn’t mean it can’t have the full works.’

‘If you ever get married, it will certainly have the full works,’ I wink at Maddie, ‘and probably a side order of works thrown in for good measure.’

‘It certainly would that,’ Oscar agrees wistfully. ‘I’d make sure of it. Now then, Rip Van Winkle, we’d better get a move on. We’ve got so much more to see at this bridal show, and as your chief bridesmaid, I’m going to make damn sure we make the most of it.’

‘Oscar,’ I call, as he skips merrily off in the direction of the door, ‘I haven’t chosen a *chief* bridesmaid. You and Maddie are just going to be my attendants.’

Oscar swivels round on the heels of his snakeskin boots and poses with his hands on the hips of his emerald-green trousers. ‘Darling, you’ve known me long enough by now to know if there’s a shimmer of silk or the glimmer of sequins to be had, I’m the perfect man for the job!’