

With a Little Help from Heaven
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"The Heavenly Ball?" Lindy Owen said, staring at her best friend Karin as if she'd gone mad. "What on earth is that?"

Karin laughed.

"What do you think, silly? It's a fancy dress ball and it's next Saturday night and I've got two free tickets. I won them in the charity raffle at work. So – will you come with me?"

She was excitedly waving two big, luxurious, gilt-edged cards. Lindy stared at them longingly. A ball sounded marvellous - so elegant, so indulgent... so romantic.

She shook her head quickly.

"You should take Greg, Karin, not me."

"I can't," Karin replied, "it's his stag weekend, remember?"

Of course it was. Greg and Karin were getting married next month. Karin had already had her hen party – a wonderful long weekend in Karin's parents holiday cottage on Holy Island. They'd had it early to fit in with Lindy's half-term as she was an infant teacher, but next weekend it was Greg's turn. And that left Karin without a partner to this heavenly ball. Lindy allowed herself to think about it and felt a smile creep across her face.

Karin, noticing, pounced.

"So you will come then! Brilliant! It'll be so much fun. And who knows, a ball, you might meet someone."

Lindy flinched.

"Just cos it worked for Cinderella," she grumbled but then she caught a worryingly familiar glint in her friend's eye.

"Karin?"

"What?"

Karin was all innocence.

“What are you up to?”

“Nothing.”

“You’re not playing cupid again are you?”

Lindy had had several brushes with Karin’s matchmaking attempts over the last year. They’d all been well intentioned, but ultimately disastrous. Mind you, Lindy thought miserably, that was probably more her fault than her friend’s.

“Cupid!” Karin exclaimed, totally un-offended. “That’s a great idea for a costume.”

Lindy narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

“Can I see the invitations please?”

Karin flushed but was hard-pushed to refuse. Reluctantly she held one out. Lindy took it, read the elaborately curved lettering and then gasped.

“It’s in Edinburgh!”

“Yep but don’t worry, I know a great little hotel, very cheap. Come on Lindy, it’ll do us good to get away.”

“But Edinburgh!” Lindy’s heart was racing and she handed the invitation back.

“Karin, I’m not sure I can.”

“Of course you can.”

“I know what you’re playing at – cupid! But he won’t be there you know. It’s a big city. Why would he be there?”

“I don’t suppose he will, but there might be other men hey?”

“Other men,” Lindy agreed dully and turned away, suddenly miserable.

She’d tried other men. She’d dated several people since Ewan had left, most of them arranged by Karin, but none of them had even come close to his warmth and energy and love. Again and again in the last year Lindy had cursed her rash actions when her boyfriend first told her he’d got a job up in Edinburgh. Again and again she’d considered calling him, asking to talk, but then she’d thought of how he’d left

without a backward glance and decided to stick with being lonely instead. It was less risky after all.

Lindy thought back to that awful day now. Ewan had taken her so much by surprise. She'd been cooking dinner for him and he'd bounced into her little flat with even more than his usual verve, snatched her from the cooker and twirled her around and around until she was giddy with him.

"I've got a promotion Lindy."

"Really? That's wonderful."

"I've been offered a junior partnership! Can you believe it?"

She could, easily. Ewan was a wonderful architect. His designs were so fresh and different. He'd promised to build them a house one day; they'd discussed it for hours. Who was he promising that to now?

Lindy shivered, forcing herself to remember. She'd been so pleased for him and then he'd said, all solemn suddenly,

"I need to ask you something."

Her heart had done flips. Was this it? Was he going to propose? They'd only been together eight months but she knew he was the one for her and was sure he felt the same. She'd composed herself as he took her hands, wanting to remember this moment all her life, and then he'd said,

"Will you come to Edinburgh with me?"

"Edinburgh!"

The shock had hit her like a punch in the stomach. They were living in Leeds. She'd only recently finished her teacher training and now she was in her first year in a wonderful little school that she loved. How could she go all the way to Edinburgh? Especially without a proposal.

"But..."

"The job's in the firm's Edinburgh office, Lindy. It's a great opportunity. There's a lot of exciting work going on up there and it's a beautiful place."

“I know that,” she’d snapped.

Her grandparents had lived there and Lindy had spent many a happy childhood holiday exploring the city’s endless nooks and crannies. She’d even had her sixteenth birthday barbeque on Arthur’s seat. She knew exactly how beautiful Edinburgh was – and how far away.

“But Ewan, what about my job, the school...?”

“There are schools everywhere Lindy. They do educate children in Scotland you know.”

That was when her pounding heart had missed a beat. ‘There are schools everywhere,’ he’d said, as if her career was of no importance.

“But I love my school!”

She did. The headmistress had been wonderful with her and the children were so sweet. It had taken her the first two terms to really get a handle on the best ways of teaching so how could she move now? How could he ask her to drop it just like that as if it didn’t matter?

“I know you do,” Ewan had said quickly, “but don’t you love me too?”

And of course she did, or she’d thought she did but this was serious now. If she made this move she’d be choosing Ewan for life. Maybe love wasn’t enough any more?

“I don’t want to just be your little woman you know,” she’d told him.

He’d stared at her then for what felt like a long time, then he’d said, cautiously but determinedly.

“Lindy if we, you know, stay together, get married, have kids, you will stop work to look after them, won’t you?”

Lindy’d gulped, unable to believe she was having this conversation, unprepared for it.

“Maybe. Or maybe you could.”

“Me? I’m an architect!”

And that was when the cold certainty had settled on her. She'd loved Ewan for his drive but maybe with that came an ambition that she couldn't live with. She didn't want to be one of those women whose husbands spent more time at work than with their family.

"Well you better go off and be one then. Have fun!"

"Lindy! Come on, can't we talk?"

"There's not much to say. Goodbye Ewan."

"But..."

"Goodbye."

And that's when he'd gone. He'd walked out of the door and that was the last she'd heard of him. Not the last she'd thought of him though. She'd tried telling herself 'good riddance', and 'I'd have hated it' and even 'we didn't love each other properly' but none of it had worked. She missed him as much now as she had the evening he left. And now here was Karin wanting to take her up to Edinburgh to see 'other men'!

'But he *might* be there,' a little voice said in Lindy's head. 'He just might.'

It was on that 'might' that she agreed to go, and on that 'might' that she let class one raid the nativity play costumes to find her a halo and some wings. They were so excited.

"You'll make a lovely angel, Miss Owen," young Sam said, gazing up at her.

"Beautiful," Amy agreed. "Try the dress on, Miss."

Lindy looked at the children's tunic and smiled.

"I think it might be a bit small for me."

Amy's face fell.

"But you have to have a white dress."

Lindy nodded, not missing the irony. She and Karin had been to the final try of her friend's wedding dress the day before. Karin had looked so beautiful Lindy had wanted to cry.

"It's OK Amy," she said. "I have a dress at home that might just do."

It was a lovely dress – very long with soft, floaty skirts and spaghetti straps. She'd bought it last summer but never quite found the opportunity to wear it. Now she could and she'd be looking good if...

'He might be there', she thought again as class one cooed round her. Karin was a solicitor and surely they hung out with architects, didn't they? Please!

"You're a perfect angel, Miss," little Sam concluded and Lindy smiled at him. They were such lovely children. How could she have left them? And yet, without Ewan, life outside school felt so empty.

'I'll call him' she promised herself. He'd emailed her a number once. 'Call me' he'd said but she hadn't dared until now. All this business with the ball had got her thinking and she knew now that she couldn't get on with her life until she'd at least tried to get Ewan back. It was time to act. She'd call him on the Sunday, see if they could meet, because he wouldn't be at the ball, no way.

'Although he might....'

When Lindy and Karin walked into the huge hall the following Saturday, however, Lindy realised it was quite possible Ewan could be here and she'd still never see him. There were hundreds of people there, in every possible shade of white and gold. The walls were draped with pale blue silks and huge clouds of white balloons hung from the ceiling. There was a harp group playing by the door and 'angels' everywhere. Most of the women were in halos and wings (few, Lindy bet, as lovingly made as hers) although she did see two in shimmering white body-suits, strapped together with a big arch.

"The pearly gates!" she laughed, pointing them out to Karin.

Karin looked great in a tiny tunic and crooked halo, clutching a little golden bow and arrow.

“Cupid!” Lindy had exclaimed when her friend had stepped out of the en-suite in their hotel room.

“Cupid,” Karin had confirmed, with another glint that made Lindy shudder. If her friend thought Lindy was going to be swept off her feet by some Scottish stranger who’d make her forget Ewan she’d got another think coming. Not that there weren’t lots of nice men there.

It had clearly been harder for men to come out in a white dress and wings. Some brave souls had gone for it. Others sported long beards and God-like crowns, or papal St Peter’s mitres. There were quite a few Elvis’ and even the odd bright red daredevil. Everyone, at least, had made an effort and the effect was stunning.

Summoning up a smile Lindy determined to enjoy herself, man or no man.

“Come on Karin, let’s get a drink.”

But Karin had stopped, frozen to the spot, her bow and arrow dangling limply at her side.

“Karin?”

Lindy followed her friend’s gaze and her heart stopped. For there, talking away to an Elvis, was Ewan.

“Karin,” Lindy whispered. “Karin, did you know he was going to be here?”

Karin nodded, not looking at her.

“We’ve been doing some work for his firm. I saw his name on the guest list, so I thought...”

“You didn’t win the tickets in the raffle?”

“Not exactly.”

“You lied.”

“For the best of reasons! God, Lindy, you’ve just been so miserable without him.”

“Not as miserable as I am now.”

For Ewan had his arms wrapped around the shoulders of the most skimpily clad angel in the room. She had her back to the two girls but he kept turning to include her in the conversation.

“Oh Lindy, I’m so sorry,” Karin whispered, almost in tears herself.

“Let’s go,” Lindy replied. Suddenly this ball wasn’t quite so heavenly any more.

“And Karin, next time you want to play cupid – don’t!”

“No, I...”

But just then Ewan turned and saw Lindy. She froze, unable to turn away, waiting to see something in his eyes. Guilt? Sorrow? Anything.

What she did see, however, was pure delight.

“Lindy!”

He unwrapped himself from the angel and bounded across in the way she remembered so well.

“Lindy! Oh my God, it’s so wonderful to see you. You look stunning.”

“A little over-dressed maybe,” Lindy said sarcastically, unable to stop herself and then a new voice said.

“Lindy! Boy are you a sight for sore eyes,” and there she was, she skimpy angel.

“Rebecca!”

“Have you come to see my stupid brother? I do hope so. He’s pining away without you.”

“Becky!” Ewan admonished.

And suddenly familiar arms were round Lindy’s waist and she was being whisked away onto the dance floor and spun around and around until she felt giddy – gloriously, familiarly giddy. What was this, some sort of heaven-sent rewind?

“Lindy, I’ve missed you so much. I waited and waited for you to call but when you didn’t I assumed you’d forgotten me.”

“Never. Oh Ewan I’m sorry. I was stupid, I...”

“No I was stupid. Crass and thoughtless and full of myself and...”

Lindy put a finger to his lips to stop him.

“All that maybe, but I should have let you talk.”

He looked down at her, love in his eyes, as a hundred other couples swirled around them.

“I’ll come back to Leeds, Lindy, if that’s what you want. Hey, I’ll even look after kids – if I must!”

Lindy laughed. He was safe there. There was no way she’d miss out on bringing up her children – their children. She thought of Sam and Amy and all the rest of her class and sighed. She’d miss them but they’d be moving up soon anyway and they’d had a lovely student in on work placement recently who’d love her job. And Edinburgh was beautiful. Walking around with Karin earlier had reminded her how much she loved it. It was a heavenly place to be – especially tonight.

“It’s OK Ewan,” she said softly. “I’ll move up – if you still want me.”

“Want you? Of course I want you – as my girlfriend, as my partner, as my wife.”

Lindy gasped as Ewan dropped to one knee. His halo had flopped forward and his wings were askew but his eyes were dark and full of something scary but exciting: her future.

The music stopped as the DJ hailed them, delighted to have a proposal to start the night with a swing. Lindy flushed furiously, aware of Karin dancing excitedly up and down in the background waving her cupid’s arrow triumphantly.

“Will you marry me Lindy?”

This was a rewind and Lindy wasn’t going to miss her chance twice.

“Yes,” she said, pulling Ewan up and into her arms. “Yes, yes, yes!”