

SEALED WITH A KISS

The party was winding down. They'd all had lots to drink, celebrating a triple million pound order. Vic, the successful salesman, always flash, had bought everyone champagne, making only a small dent in his enormous bonus. When the landlord rang his bell, several queued for the toilets. Others indulged in multiple goodbyes while a few gave peremptory waves before they rushed off to catch last trains.

Jack, the Sales Manager, had just one kiss. Obviously, a drunken one. You expect this at an office party. Those moments of uninhibited abandon that mean nothing when normal times return. And it was just a goodbye kiss, almost a formality with a close colleague. Yes, he liked Sally. Yes, he'd been influenced by her attractiveness when he recruited her. But she had excellent references and had proved to be very good at her job as Chief Programmer.

He'd forgotten about the party next day. There were urgent business issues to deal with. But Jenny, his secretary, remembered the night and had watched the embrace. She had others to tell when the secretaries met for a lunchtime drink.

"It was just a kiss, Jenny," Christine said. "We all kissed someone sometime in the evening. I know I did but can't remember who. I just hope it wasn't that lech, Frank." The other secretaries laughed.

Jenny wasn't to be fobbed off. "It was more than a kiss," she said. "He had his hands on her bottom. I think that said more about their relationship than a goodbye peck. And I counted to ten before they parted. That's hardly a peck."

"You're not jealous are you, Jenny?" Anne asked.

"Of course not, he's too old for me and married."

"She is attractive though," Anne said. "I suppose I could see them becoming an item."

"Me too," agreed Emma.

By the end of the lunch, the goodbye kiss had convinced four secretaries that the Sales Manager was having an affair with the Chief Programmer and they all had a story to pass on. Like ripples from a pebble tossed into a still pond, the impact of the kiss spread wider and wider. The secretaries told their friends in Accounts and they, in turn, gossiped with the receptionists. Within a day, Sally overheard others talking about her in the toilet. For Jenny, Sally's later meeting with Jack, behind closed doors, proved her suspicion.

Sally sought advice from her close work colleagues. They said a denial wouldn't be believed. It would be best to tough it out, let it blow over. Before mobile phones, this would have been a good strategy. But several people had taken pictures at the party, not of the kiss but close-ups of Jack and Sally talking. It was agreed their facial expressions seemed to show more than a casual chat.

Such a small act generated continued rumours. Sally's fate was sealed with that kiss and she felt forced to resign.