

## An Encounter with Royalty

“Incoming!!”

Lyssie looked up from her phone in alarm, just in time to see a very drunk, burly young man stumbling into the chair next to her. He was dressed as Merida from Brave, complete with auburn wig. “You’re

pretty!” he said before smiling blissfully at her and then slumping over, to pillow his head in his arms on the table.

Perplexed at this turn of events, Lyssie scanned the surroundings and saw a group of Disney Princes and Princesses crossing the road between the ‘Blooming Magic’ florist and the legal firm of ‘Adams, Alty & Fenman’. They rushed towards her.

“I am so sorry about that. Are you o.k.?” Cinderella asked. “My brother is such an idiot! We told him to not to do shots on the pub crawl. Now he’s in no fit state to join us at karaoke!”

“It’s o.k. I’ll stay outside with him.” offered an attractive young man, dressed as The King of Hearts playing card. “Can you let your mum know what’s happened?”

“Sure Wills...and thanks.” Cinderella gently patted Merida’s back before leading the rest of the cartoon court into the pub.

*Ping!* The notification pulled Lyssie’s attention from the odd happenings next to her and back to her phone. After a moment of consideration, she typed in a word and submitted it.

Wills had taken up the seat opposite her, on the other side of Merida. “I’m sorry that we’ve taken over your table. Were you saving these seats for anyone?” Wills had a dusting of embarrassment on his face. “I think he overdid the alcohol to get out of the singing. They couldn’t agree on one activity



for their birthday celebration so they compromised. Paul chose the pub crawl and meal part. Em chose the dressing up and the karaoke. Singing's not really Paul's kind of thing "

Lyssie smiled reassuringly. "It's fine. I was only sitting out here for a breather. My friends are joining in the karaoke night too. I just found the atmosphere inside a little overwhelming. "

There was a blast of someone singing 'Mister Brightside' with gusto as the pub door opened. The more intimidating of the two bar staff bustled up to the table. She was armed with a blanket and a pint of iced water. She draped the former over Paul's shoulders.

"I just knew my son would end up like this! At least it hasn't stopped his sister from carrying on celebrating." She pushed the corkscrew curls of the wig further back from Paul's face and turned to Wills. "Thank you for looking out for him. Can I bring you anything?"

"No problem Louise. I'd love a coke if you're offering." Wills gestured to Lyssie's mostly empty glass.

"Would you like anything? It's the least we can do for crashing your table."

The thought of going back into the noisy, hot and crowded space overrode Lyssie's natural inclination to refuse the offer of the drink. "A coke sounds lovely" she agreed.

Wills relaxed back in his chair as Paul's Mum headed back to the din.

*Ping!* It was time for Lyssie to make her next move. The letters were not favourable. She was also aware of Wills trying (and failing) not to be interested in what she was doing. She gave into her urge to fill the silence with an explanation. "I'm playing a Scrabble-like game with my Gran. She's a fiend for finding those really short words that fit between other words. She wins most of our matches."

Wills smiled in understanding. "My Dad loves word games too. Perhaps you can help me with some pointers towards my match with him?"

They passed the next hour companionably, sharing Scrabble and cryptic crossword tips. Seated between them, Paul slumbered on peacefully.

Unfortunately, Lyssie knew that she could not avoid the inevitable group rendition of 'Dancing Queen' with her friends. She rose regretfully. "It's been nice meeting you William. Thank you for the drink and your wordplay advice. I hope that you manage to get Paul back home safely." She then added hopefully "Perhaps I'll see you around?"

Confusion, followed by comprehension flitted across Wills' face. "Er, Wills is a nickname - with a double purpose. I'm studying Law, specialising in Property, to join the family firm." He nodded across the road to the solicitors' offices. "And, please don't laugh but, my real name is Roy...Roy Alty." He shrugged and grinned sheepishly. "I told you that my Dad loves word games."

(Word count, including title, is 750 words)