

Tory watched as old Mr. and Mrs. Prince wandered hand in hand past her house.

'Oh, Andy. Now, don't call me that,' she heard Mrs Prince chide her husband gently. The old man chuckled.

Tory sighed as they strolled past. They'd been walking past her house for as long as she could remember, always around the same time of day, and always hand in hand, as much in love as they must have been when they first met.

'Tory, are you day-dreaming again about those two oldies?' Her mother, Hannah stood just inside the door. 'Don't you think they're sick of you spying on them all the time?'

'I'm not exactly spying. Do you know, for as long as I can remember, she says the same thing to him each day?'

Hannah looked at her daughter. 'Not that I'm one for eaves-dropping, mind you. Come on, tell me inside.'

'Well,' Tory began, standing at the kitchen table. 'Mr. Prince always calls her by some name which I don't hear, and Mrs. Prince always tells him not to call her that.'

'That's it?'

Tory nodded. 'Yes, that's it. Don't you think that's strange? I mean, it's always the same. Wonder why that is?'

Hannah switched off the boiling kettle. 'I don't know. But do you think it should really interest you?'

Tory spooned coffee into two mugs then poured the boiling water. 'I used to visit the Princes quite a lot, didn't I?'

'You did, as a little thing. Three years of age you were, and you'd totter over there to visit.'

'Do you know,' Tory started as she sat down and poured milk into their coffees.
'Their house was magical, a grand place of pinks and golds and chandeliers.'

'That old fibro place across the road? No.' Hannah knew the little house was romantically named Happily Ever After. It had always made her laugh, the absurdity of it.

'Mum, it was grand. There was a long staircase which swept up and up and up.'

'Tory, you were three years old, you couldn't remember that. It must be a fairy tale you're recalling.'

'And I remember Mrs. Prince's beautiful gowns. And her shoes, Mum, so pretty and delicate.'

Hannah thought of poor Mrs. Prince's bunions. 'Surely not. And beautiful gowns?' Hannah looked at her wistful daughter. 'Are you still missing Jack so terribly much?'

Tory tucked her chin on to her chest. 'Oh, Mum. It's not that.'

Hannah reached across the table and clasped her daughter's hand. 'Give yourself a bit more space, and try not to think about the Princes and their grand love affair. It'll happen to you again one day.' *Though it certainly never happened to me again.*

Tory's eyes prickled with hot tears. Why did Jack have to slip up to heaven without so much as a by-your-leave? 'Perhaps I'm just remembering something good from long ago,' she said.

Tory spotted Mr. Prince in his garden the next day. 'Hello, Mr. Prince,' she said, as something compelled her to cross the street and present him with her best smile.

He squinted at her. 'Oh – hello.'

'It's Tory from over the road. Remember? I used to visit you and Mrs. Prince years ago.'

The old man looked hard at her and Tory thought that once upon a time those old eyes would have been in a very handsome face.

'Of course you did,' he mumbled.

'Grandpa,' a voice called as the front door was swung open.

Tory had no idea there were grandchildren. But it wasn't a child who stood in the doorway. It was a man, dark-haired, with blue eyes twinkling and smile broadening. Every girl's hero was in that face.

'G'day,' he said and smiled at Tory.

Her breath caught. 'Hi.'

'This is my grandson, John,' the old man said.

'But the family calls me Jack.'

Oh no, another Jack! Tory fled. She ran back across the road to home.

'What's the matter?' Hannah asked as Tory rushed inside.

'He's gorgeous,' she blurted and sped upstairs.

When the door bell rang and Hannah opened it, she knew just who Gorgeous was.

'I'm John Prince. My grandparents live over the road.'

'Yes, I know your grandparents. I'm Hannah. I think you just met my daughter, Tory.'

He looked bemused. 'I think I upset her, but I'm not sure how.'

'What happened?'

'I just told her my name, that they call me Jack, and –'

`I'm sorry, it's a sad thing but her boyfriend, a childhood sweetheart, died two years ago. His name was Jack.'

Jack shifted from one foot to the other. `I brought this bottle of wine hoping maybe your daughter would accept it as a – a something. I so hope I can be forgiven for being called Jack.'

`Of course.' Hannah took the proffered bottle and held it up to read the label. `"*Magic Bouquet. Made with Love and Romance from Happily Ever After*".

Jack smiled. `My Grandpa. He's an old romantic. He and Grandma both. They met years ago when Grandma worked for the Gentry's, you know over on Hoity Hill.'

Hannah nodded. `The Gentry's were well known for their money and ... power.'

`Yes. And rumour has it that Grandpa's the black sheep of the Gentry family. He proved it by growing fruit for the demon drink.' He grinned. `The wine is from Grandpa's own vineyard.'

`Sit down, This is fascinating,' Hannah said. `But let me get Tory for you.'

John stood up when Tory came down. As their handshake lingered she apologised for being so flustered earlier.

`As you were saying, John,' Hannah prompted as she poured three glasses of Magic Bouquet. A small glass for herself wouldn't hurt even though the magic obviously wasn't for her. She took a couple of appreciative sips.

`Well, Grandpa's father told him to find himself a decent wife, settle down and marry.'

Hannah lifted her shoulders. `In those days, they did that.' Then she boomed out, `Find yourself a wife, son, or don't come Monday.'

Both Tory and John looked at her.

'That's what used to happen,' Hannah reiterated, still booming but thinking she should've had more coffee instead of the glass of Magic Burknips.

'Grandpa says that he found Grandma, the girl of his dreams, polishing the silver in his father's house. She never looked at him, never acknowledged him, but he knew that she was the one he wanted.'

Hannah sighed aloud and both the youngsters looked at her again. She sipped more Mansky Batflips.

Tory sipped her Magic Bouquet. 'Go on.'

'When Grandpa went to his father and said his heart was set on Grandma, story goes that Great Grandpa had a fit. Grandma overheard the argument and decided to quit the House, certainly not prepared to be the cause of a problem between father and son.'

As John took a sip of Magic Bouquet he smiled at Tory and her heart did a little fluttery dance.

'But when Grandpa realised she'd gone, a terrible fight ensued with his father who then disowned him.'

'No,' Tory cried. 'What happened?'

'He looked for her but she'd changed her name, and had gone back to live with her stepmother, a terrible woman who had two girls of her own.'

Hannah's eyes widened. She'd heard this story before somewhere... She took another swallow of delicious Mogrim Bonnet.

'Once the stepmother heard that Grandpa was after Grandma, she did whatever she could to make sure they'd never get together. Then one day, just when a new

band was coming to town and there was a big dance planned, the stepmother and her two girls went off to the dance, leaving Grandma at home.'

'No,' Tory said, still entranced.

Okay, here we go, Hannah thought. 'Don't tell me – there was a sickly sweet fairy godmother who just appears out of the blue in her tu-tu and gives Grandma an Yves St Laurent to wear to the dance.'

John shook his head. 'Grandpa had found Grandma in the local shoe shop earlier that day. So he talks to her and they agree to meet secretly after the Stepmother goes off to the dance with the two Uglies. '

Hannah *had* heard this before.

'Grandpa arrives in his father's surrey to take Grandma to the dance after the Uglies have gone.'

Tory sipped Magic Bouquet. 'And? '

Hannah gulped Marlic Bunkey. 'Get to the part where the punkin comes in.'

'Pumpkin?' the two youngsters asked.

'Yeah the punkin, Peter Peter Punkin Eater,' Hannah recited then stared hard at her glass.

'Are you all right, Mum?'

'Farn.'

John Prince twirled his glass. 'Long story short, they're at the dance but of course everyone gets in a twist, especially Great Grandpa, the powerful Joshua Gentry. When Grandpa announced at the dance that he was going to marry Grandma, they had to run away.'

'Why?'

'Because she was beneath his station and all that.'

Hannah snorted. 'I've heard all this before. Gimme some more of that Medic Basknit.'

Tory looked at her mother. 'You're not fine.'

'I am. It's just all this talk of fairy tales gets to me. No-one has that sort of story and lives happily ever after.'

John shrugged. 'They're the living proof. Poor as church mice, but rich for each other.'

'Did they have chandeliers?' Tory asked.

John nodded. 'Everything was pink and gold, and sparkling and rich.'

'Didn't I tell you?' Tory looked at her mum, then back at John. 'But what happened? How did they marry?'

John poured a little more Magic Bouquet into each glass. 'One day he just came up to her house and whisked her away. That was that.'

Hannah sniffed her Memnic Bumquets. She was sure she was drunk, but she'd only had a few sips. She looked owlshly at the youngsters. They seemed fine. 'So what 'appened nescht?'

'Mum, you better go lie down. I'll come up with you.'

'Noelbefineloan.'

John and Tory watched Hannah weave her way upstairs.

'What happened to Mum?' Tory asked John.

'It's the Magic Bouquet. It only works for people who believe in fairy tales, in hope. Maybe it was all a bit 'rich' for her.' John smiled. 'Come across and meet my grandparents again.'

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Tory stepped inside the little fibro house across the road. There before her were the chandeliers, and the pinks and golds of the fairy-tale style home, and Mrs. Prince gliding down the stairs.

She was dressed in a frothy pink and white gown, her hair swept high on her head, and a row of pearls at her throat. Long, white gloves covered her hands and arms. Tory looked her up and down. Mrs. Prince was missing a golden ballet slipper.

Mr. Prince came out from a room beneath the stairs.

John bent close to Tory's ear. 'They play this one again and again,' he whispered.

Tory didn't understand. But when Mr. Prince produced a matching gold slipper and slipped it on to Mrs Prince's foot, he cried 'It fits! It fits!' and then swept her off the stairs into his arms, Tory's mouth dropped open.

'Grandpa, Grandma. Do you remember Tory?' John asked, as they whirled to a standstill.

Two fairy-tale heads turned in Tory's direction. 'Oh yes,' they said in unison, and Tory was agape.

'What is it, dear?' Mrs. Prince asked, her youthful gaze twinkling as she laid a gloved hand on Tory's arm.

'Wh-what are your names?' Tory asked, feeling the magic feather wisp up her arm under Mrs. Prince's touch.

'Oh, excuse me,' John interrupted. 'I haven't introduced you properly. This is my grandfather, Handy Prince.'

Tory swiveled her stare at the old man. 'Handy?'

Mrs. Prince gave a little laugh. 'A family joke. Short for Handsome as in Handsome Prince.'

John began, 'And my grandmother is –'

'I think she knows my name, dear,' Mrs Prince interrupted. 'She's known it for years, ever since she was little girl who used to visit here at Happily Ever After.'

'Of course she knows you Grandmother's name, John,' Handy cried. 'It's Cinderella.'

'Oh, Handy,' Mrs Prince chided gently, her voice tremulous with long-time love and affection. 'Now, don't call me that.'