

Cyber Romance (1769 words)
By Michael Percy

Mary Waters watched the stream of faces leaving the arrivals area and wondered if she should have held up a card with his name on it like a taxi driver. *Kerim – here is the woman who paid your air fare and will spend the rest of her life with you.* No need, she was sure she would recognise him.

The faces came and went: the hugs and kisses, the tears. Children found their mothers, lovers their lover and businessmen their ride to the next meeting. But then he was there. Shorter than she expected – or hoped – and stretching on tip toe to see out into the crowd, looking for her. She waved, not sure how to be. She felt a strange embarrassment as if all those around her knew. She realised she did not know what his voice sounded like. She knew he could be charming, that came across in the emails and she always assumed his formal stilted style was because English was not his first language.

“Kerim. Over here,” she called.

He pushed his way towards her through the crowd but the barrier was still between them. “Mary – you are here.”

“Of course I’m here.” She turned and ran towards the exit at the end of the barrier. She ran. That surprised her but it felt natural. Then she waited again, that last few moments as he struggled through the crowd with his suitcase. He paused an arm’s length from her and smiled uncertainly.

She stepped forward and embraced him, her cheek beside his, her arms pinning his to his sides. “Hello Kerim. It’s so good to see you at last.”

“Mary. This is wonderful. This is my dream.”

He slid his cheek past hers until he could kiss her. It was brief and slightly awkward. She stepped back.

“Let me carry your shoulder bag. I’m in the car park.” She held out her hand and he obediently handed over the bag. She turned and he followed her out of the terminal.

It was a blue sky sunny day as she drove away from Gatwick. “England is a beautiful country,” he said. “So green. My country is not green like this.”

Mary glanced across at Kerim. He kissed the tips of his fingers and placed them gently on her lips as she drove. She returned her kiss to his fingers.

“I cannot wait to see your home,” he said. “Our home from now on. We will have such a wonderful life together. I am so lucky that we found each other.”

She smiled and blew another kiss back to him. “I have a surprise for you. We are not going to my house. Not just yet. I have booked a little holiday for us. It’s a traditional country hotel near a place called Brighton. You will love it.”

His face clouded briefly. “But we will live in London – you said you live in London.”

“Yes, we will live in London.”

“You are a wonderful woman, doing all this for me. All I can do is to promise to work hard, work long hours until I can repay you.”

“You don’t need to think like that. We have a saying in England – what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is yours.”

Kerim rolled this unfamiliar form of words around in his head and she could see his lips moving as he forced it to make sense. “I have nothing to share with you but my love, and my promise to be a good husband.”

“When we are married and you are a British citizen everything will be perfect. I know it will.”

ooOoo

They reached Tovey Lodge forty minutes later and Mary had to wake Kerim who had been overtaken by the effects of the journey from Turkey. “It’s small,” she said, “but it’s very English. I have ordered champagne in the room so we can celebrate our new lives.”

In the room Kerim was subdued and Mary went to him as he stood staring out of the window looking sad and distracted. “What is it Kerim, I want you to be happy. I know that leaving your home is hard but we have planned this for so long and now we can be together and I can help you make a new start. Things will be good for us. I know it.”

He turned and took her in his arms. “I know these things too. I believe these things.” His head slumped onto her shoulder. “I did not want to tell you this. Not so soon. But I am sad and I do not want you to think I am sad with you.”

“What is it Kerim? You must tell me everything.”

“I want to be with you this is true. But I have to say to you that I was nearly prevented of coming here today.”

“Why?” She held him closer.

“It is my sister. She was not well before, is not well for some time. We thought it was nothing serious but it is.”

Mary drew back so she could see Kerim’s face. His chin dropped to his chest and he looked away towards the country vista beyond the window. “She did not want me to know. But our mother, she told me at the airport. Almas has a tumour of the brain.”

“My God, how awful for you.”

“It was so hard to leave when I know I will never see my sister again. But you and me, our feelings. Our love...”

“Why can’t they operate?” asked Mary.

“It is not possible.” He slumped into a chair with his back to Mary.

“That is terrible. She’s younger than you isn’t she?”

“Only twenty-five, a child still. She loves to teach. She loves the children. And it will be so hard for them – to lose a teacher they love so much.”

“Poor Kerim. Now I understand your sadness. I thought you were having regrets. Regrets about us.”

“Never. When I saw you for real today I knew you were the only one. But I cannot forget my little sister’s suffering.”

“Of course not. Is there nothing, no operation, no treatment?”

“An operation is possible but in Turkey we must pay – for surgeons, medicine. She could be saved but my family is poor. They can only watch her die.”

“How much?”

“It is not possible.”

“How much Kerim?”

“I am here in this beautiful country with a beautiful woman.” He stood and looked her full in the face. “This room, such luxury...”

“How much will it cost Kerim?”

“With everything, maybe over seventy thousand.”

“My goodness, seventy thousand pounds?”

“No, I think in Lira – it is, maybe twenty thousand pounds.”

“Poor Kerim. Will you let me help you? I am not a rich woman but there are ways. Perhaps I can borrow against my flat. You must let me help.”

“No, it cannot be. You have done so much for me. You have given me a new life.” He held his hands in supplication. “But you must understand why it is hard for me to enjoy all this when my sister...”

“We can enjoy this as a new beginning. Then we will help your sister together. We will save her I promise. But first let me save you.”

She slipped his jacket from his shoulders and let it drop to the floor. She took his face in her hands and kissed him. “First we enjoy the champagne, then we enjoy each other. You deserve that.”

ooOoo

Mary looked down on Kerim asleep on the bed. She pulled the covers back and studied his naked body. “You have a lot to learn about women,” she said, throwing the covers onto the floor.

She had stripped him naked and witnessed how excited that made him. Then she had allowed him to remove her clothes while she fed him champagne. At first he took it in great gulps but then she made him slow down and sip gently from the glass as she offered to his lips. She remembered cringing as he deliberately brushed his erect penis against her body. He kissed her but she made him take things slowly saying he needed to allow her time to be ready for him although the pain of his anticipation for her was obvious.

And then he lost his erection and he blamed this on the champagne. He said the drink had gone straight to his head because he was not used to champagne. Soon he slumped down on the bed and passed out.

Using Duck Tape and rope from her overnight case she gagged Kerim and bound him to the bed.

Then Mary took a shower, long and thorough, removing every trace of Kerim’s touch from her as well as the black dye from her hair to regain her natural blonde. She dressed and then rinsed out the glass she had used for Kerim making sure there was no trace of the drug left behind.

Now she found the Stanley knife in her suitcase. She set about shredding every item of Kerim’s clothes from his suitcase until they were reduced to a pile of useless rags on the floor. She slashed the suitcase, found his money and shredded that. His passport she kept.

To the headboard of the bed she pinned a photo copy of a newspaper report. She studied the image of her sister and read again the report of the final act in Julie’s life.

*WOMAN’S TRAGIC SUICIDE
– VICTIM OF INTERNET LOVE RAT*

Spinster Julie Hawthorne took her own life after being deceived by her cyber lover. Adskhan Ahmed, who claimed to be a political refugee from Egypt, duped the forty year old woman who worked as a tour manager at The Royal Pavilion in Brighton out of everything

she possessed in a complicated scam lasting nearly twelve months. It began when he stalked Julie via the internet selecting her from the members of a web based dating agency.

He swore her to secrecy about their relationship claiming that Egyptian secret agents would be hunting him down. As part of the fraud he tricked her into marriage and convinced her to make him co-owner of her flat in Hove. He then used forged documents to secretly sell the flat and transfer the money abroad where it has so far proved untraceable.

Julie's grieving younger sister Tania said "This man murdered my sister. He took everything she had – worst of all he stole her self-respect. She thought she had fallen in love with a freedom fighter but all the time he was a just a crook and a murderer."

The police investigation is moving slowly. Police inspector James Hartley said "These kinds of sophisticated international crimes are challenging to unravel but we expect a satisfactory conclusion soon."

Kerim – or Adskhan or whatever he was called – had begun to snore. Tania slapped his face hard to stop the noise. She stared down at him. Without being aware of the movement, her hand raised the Stanley Knife and pressed the blade against the pulse she could see throbbing in his neck. One push she thought. Push and twist and it's all over.

She retracted the blade.

She collected her suitcase, put on her coat and found her mobile phone.

"Inspector James Hartley please, it's Tania Hawthorne."

(end)