

## **Strings Attached (4,928 words)**

**By Michael Percy**

The mother had problems choosing between the blue push-along walker with the red bricks and the red one with the blue bricks. It did not help that her son was desperate to move away from Tom's stall and she was restraining him with one hand while trying to inspect the quality of the woodwork with the other.

"Lovely colours. I'll take the blue and red one please. Shaun, will you be patient. This is for your cousin Ralph's birthday."

"Is that blue with red bricks or red with blue bricks?" asked Tom.

"It's hard to choose. Can I have a mixture of bricks?"

"Of course, just give me a minute to mix and match."

As Tom sorted the bricks he caught Anna's eye at the next stall. She had heard it all and was laughing and shaking her head in sympathy.

"There you are, blue with a mixture of bricks."

"Do you mind if I take the red one with the mixture?"

"Absolutely fine," said Tom as he winked back at Anna.

When the sale was completed and paid for Anna came over and perched on Tom's counter. "Poor woman, who'd have kids?"

They watched the mother leave the arcade struggling to control little Shaun while carrying the walker.

"I would eventually," said Tom. "One day, when I make my fortune and settle down."

"Since when did anybody make a fortune in this place," asked Anna.

Tom said, "Do you remember the little old man who ran the tobacco kiosk near the entrance? He did alright. His wife came by the other day; she was visiting relatives for a few weeks – would you believe they moved to Spain? A Villa by the sea apparently."

"The truth is he was a drug dealer," said Anna straight faced.

"Drugs? That little old man?" said Tom.

"Tobacco, that's a drug isn't it? And he had the sense to get out before that property company took over and put the rents up. The days of stall holders getting rich have gone."