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A Phantom Revealed

by Garf Collins

“See you at the end George,” said Carol as they entered the ‘Photography and Expressionism’ exhibition. She and George could never agree on how much attention to give each picture, so they had decided it was always better to do their own thing. Fortunately, George, who Carol had met on the Internet, was in most other ways a good match.

As she approached the end of the exhibition, Carol had a vivid flashback to her meeting with Pierre at a similar exhibition three years previously. He had seemed to have exactly the same tastes as her and had taken those lovely photos of her against the final colourful abstract. She shuddered as she remembered the passion he had raised in her.

“Nice little exhibition,” said George as she emerged, “You look rather preoccupied. What’s on your mind?” Carol shook herself out of her reverie and, attempting a warm smile, she took George’s arm and said, “Let’s go for a coffee.”

“Good idea. I know just the café.”

“This seems familiar,” said Carol as they approached. “I think it used to be called ‘Coffee Pacifica.’” Inside, George sat her down in a quiet corner, saying that he would get their usual

drinks. Service was very slow but George waited patiently as befitted his steady unemotional character.

The brief affair with Pierre was still in her thoughts so Carol had ample time to torture herself with speculation. She was by now sure this was their intended rendezvous. She relived the pain of waiting fruitlessly for him. Surely their passionate night, as he had promised, should have been followed by meeting there to make plans for their future together.

“There must have been a good reason for him not coming,” she thought. “Maybe I got the name of the café wrong and poor Pierre waited elsewhere until he had to catch his train to Paris. Or, he might have had an accident on the way. I can’t believe he cynically marked me out as a good prospect in the art gallery - good only for a fling while in London. We made such a connection and I’m absolutely sure he enjoyed our night together as much as I did.”

When George returned with the coffees he saw the look of anguish on Carol’s face.

“Good gracious love what’s wrong. Have you had bad news?”

“No George.” Carol paused and then in a sudden rush she said, “George. I have been very unfair to you. I’ve been haunted for the past three years by a fleeting affair.” Slowly at first, and then with increasing urgency, Carol told George about her inconclusive affair with Pierre.

George listened with growing concern and he tenderly took Carole’s hand as she paused for breath at the end of her story.

“Carol. I think it was Virginia Woolf who once said ‘It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality’ but please try. I’m here. I’m very real and I love you.