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Lily's Achilles Heel

by MaryPat Campbell

Lily sashayed into the bar, looking fabulous. James sat patiently waiting for her, knowing she would be late, making her entrance extravagant as usual. He stood up, smiled with pleasure at the sight of her, saw her glance around to see who was looking at her, apart from him, who else was there that she needed to impress. James didn't need impressing, he had been impressed long ago and wondered why she still thought she had to work so hard at it.

Lily greeted James with a kiss on his cheek, while handing him her coat. He draped it neatly over what would be her chair, which was facing into the bar so that she could see everyone, and everyone could see her.

"What's it to be?" James asked.

"G and T," she replied, "with that nice Fever Tree tonic, so much better than the ordinary stuff."

Lily was one of those people who suffered from FOMO, and when James once asked what this was, she rolled her eyes in exasperation, and told him it meant fear-of-missing-out. She couldn't bear to be behind the times or not to know about the latest trends and fashions. She waved enthusiastically at a small group of people in the corner of the bar, one of whom waved back lazily.

At last she turned to James, her eyes still shining from the glow of being seen and appreciated by the bartender, the group in the corner, and James himself.

"So what's new?" he asked, returning to their table with her G&T and a pint for himself. Lily looked pained and was silent.

“Nothing much,” she sighed, but James recognised a troubled brow when he saw one, especially when it belonged to Lily.

It took an hour to get it out of her. She had auditioned for the main part in a new play and didn't get it. James couldn't understand why, as she was easily the most talented and gorgeous woman he had ever known, not to mention her ability for shape shifting and hard work. There was to be a new version of My Fair Lady, a more modern and up to date take on the story of Professor Higgins and his famous protégé Eliza Doolittle.

Now that he thought of it, Lily reminded James of Eliza Doolittle. She used to speak with a cockney accent, was fearless at standing up for herself, worked hard to pass as a cool and educated upper middle class woman, and was an all-round tough cookie. James was keen to hear why she hadn't got the part. Lily's story came out in bits and pieces.

Apparently she ruined the audition because she couldn't bear to go back, even as a character in a play, to the common girl she felt she really was, tough times at home, a poor education and not much room for things other than the absolute essentials. She saved up and paid for elocution lessons and learnt how to dress, went to night classes to catch up on her schooling, found a styling tutor who taught her which colours and clothes suited her and how to present herself in a way that impressed the hell out of people so that they turned to look at her in the street.

Lily preferred to think that she had always been like this, preferred to forget about her poor upbringing and her ordinary working class family. Auditioning to play the part of a woman like she used to be, was too much for Lily. It was more or less her own life story, much too close to the bone. She couldn't do it.

James didn't understand, he had always loved her for who she was. He was genuinely impressed at how far she had come in life, and loved her all the more for it. He didn't understand the shame Lily felt about her background and family, he thought her story was a dream come true. It was, but now Lily couldn't face going back there, even in fantasy, to the place she had worked so hard to leave behind.