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workshops

Roma

by Sue Hitchcock

While Margie had no idea what she might become, Roma knew what she didn't want to be. She didn't want to be Len's wife. It was more than a year since the row, which had been the final straw in their deteriorating relationship. It had started two years before, when she took a job in a factory producing diesel pumps. The only attraction was the pay, as she was hoping to save up enough to enrol at Rochester Art School. She didn't have very good qualifications but had been building up a portfolio of drawings and watercolours she had made of everything in her life – the boat, her father, whose craggy face was fascinating. Then there were the landscapes and seascapes, with the ever changing sky.

The seaplane factory, as it was known, overlooked the Medway, but inside was a hell of noise and oil. Her job, making up kits for export, was out of the main machine shop, but it was still unpleasant, the oils melting the rubber gloves into grotesque claws and gradually eating into her shoes. Nevertheless she seemed to be a source of entertainment for the mainly male staff, who would lure her up to a raised grid level, so they could peer at her legs under her overall. She soon learned to wear shorts, if it was too hot for jeans.

Len fancied her too, glancing at her when she wasn't looking. He had a woman, who worked in the machine shop, but she was married and not available as often as he would have liked. So he plucked up courage and asked Roma out for a date.

Len met her at Gillingham station in the mid-afternoon. It was a beautiful day, so he suggested a walk along the coast – you had to call it coast because the Essex shore of the estuary was over the horizon, too far away to see.

It wasn't a promenade, only a concreted barrier to stop the tide, which would otherwise flood the area at sea level, which separated the sea from the first houses built where the ground started to rise towards the North Downs. The tide hadn't come over for a good number of years and the wilderness thrived with hawthorns and elders growing several metres high. People were walking their dogs and small kids by the sea, more than Len expected, but he found a secluded dip behind a clump of elders where they could kiss and cuddle without offending passers-by, but after an hour their urges were nearing an unmanageable heat, so they began the walk back into town.

It was a dilemma for Len. The urge to consummate, which given his experience and ability to control himself, was his intention, simply to find out if Roma was what he hoped for and not just a tease. The obvious solution, to take her home, was not an option. Len and his brother had shared the house for years and weren't concerned with appearances, but Roma might be appalled.

They had a meal, not the usual pizza, burger junk food, but at Len's suggestion, a salmon salad served on his favourite density lettuce. Roma was unused to such healthy food, but later realised that Len's main pride was his perfect physique, which she was beginning to appreciate herself.

After dark they walked back towards to station, but Len took her round the back and up the alley, which backed his house. He knew no one went down there at night, not even drug addicts. There he took her roughly against the brick wall, not the most romantic venue, but Roma had been thoroughly primed and climaxed despite the bricks scratching her back.

Before she got on the train, Len held her close, "marry me, Roma."

She didn't answer, but sat on the train, in shock and amazed.