

*Saturday Night
Date*



Jane Hill

Saturday Night Date

Jane Hill

Copyright © 2007 Jane Hill

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written consent of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

The right of Jane Hill to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2007

First Edition

All characters in this publication are purely fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Edited by Jane Belfield

Cover by Maria Morpeth

'I THOUGHT he was picking you up at half-past eight,' said Tina.

Cathy, sitting in front of the TV with her flatmate, said, 'So did I! And he's twenty-five minutes late already. We'll miss the start of the movie. I was crazy to agree to go out with him.'

'You'd have been crazy if you'd refused a date with a hunk like that!' Tina retorted. 'I'm the one that's insane, to go clubbing with you! How can a dumpy brunette compete with a natural blonde with Liz Hurley's body? You're the one the guys ask out all the time.'

'But this is the first time I've agreed to a date with a guy I've only just met. All I know about him is that his name's Steve Grant, he's an electrician, and he's just bought a new car.'

'And he looks like Brad Pitt!' Tina sighed. Then she said, 'And it's not as if it was a pickup. You were introduced by his cousin...and you know her.'

'Only from her trying on clothes,' said Cathy, who worked in a trendy -boutique. She glanced at her watch. 'And it looks like Cousin Steve has stood me up!'

Then the doorbell rang.

'Don't rush!' Tina advised. 'Keep him waiting!'

But Cathy was already at the door.

'Hi!' said Steve Grant. He was wearing a beige jacket over a black t-shirt, black jeans, and a sexy aftershave. And Cathy could detect a hint of breath freshener. Kissing was on the agenda, then!

'Sorry I'm a bit late,' he shrugged. 'Had to wait for Pete to get out of the shower. Then, at the last minute, he decided to change his shirt.'

'Pete?'

'Pete Baker. The bloke I share with.'

'Oh,' said Cathy, baffled about the connection between Pete's shirt and Steve being half-an-hour late. Then, sensing Tina hovering, she added, 'I won't ask you in, because we'll miss half the movie if we don't get going.' She'd let him know just how late he was.

'Oh, there's been a change of plan,' Steve said breezily. 'We're going to a house-warming party.'

'A *party*? But I'm not dressed for a party!' She indicated her jeans and form-fitting pink sweater - long-sleeved because of the cinema's icy airconditioning.

'You look fine!' His blue-eyed gaze travelled over her body. 'Come on, pretty woman! Let's party!'

'I'll ... I'll just grab my bag.' She turned to see Tina holding it out to her.

'Thanks, pal.' She gave her flatmate a hug. 'I won't be late back.'

Tina winked. 'Have fun!'

Out on the street, Steve put an arm around Cathy's waist.

'What do you think?' he asked. 'Isn't she a beauty?'

It took her a couple of seconds to realise he was talking about the red Mazda parked by the kerb.

'Oh, your new car!' she said. 'It's...' Then, as they reached the car: 'OH!'

Steve opened the front passenger door.

'This is Pete,' he said.

The ginger-haired giant behind the wheel grinned amiably. 'Pete Baker. I'm the designated driver. Both ways, it turns out – because Steve's already had a couple of heart-starters.'

Hence the breath freshener! Cathy forced a smile.

'Hello, Pete.' And, because Steve hadn't bothered to introduce her, she added, 'I'm Cathy. Cathy Logan.'

'Pleased to meet you, Miss.' Pete touched an imaginary cap. His unironed maroon shirt clashed with his hair. 'Don't look so worried, love. I'm on mineral water tonight. Football training.'

'That's a relief!' Cathy said tartly. First the movies had turned into a party, and now it was a threesome. Some date! Then she remembered Tina, home alone on Saturday night, telling her to have fun. So she'd try!

'Get in, then,' said Steve.

She hesitated.

'In the back,' he indicated, opening the door.

Of course! She climbed in and slid along the slippery leather to make room for him.

Steve shook his head. 'I'm in the front with Pete. Got to make sure he doesn't mistreat my new baby.'

She was dumbstruck as she watched him ease his tall frame into the front passenger seat and, by the time she'd opened her mouth to say she'd changed her mind about this date, Pete was already revving the engine.

'Who's throwing this party, anyway?' she asked, when she could get a word in over Steve's elaborate instructions to Pete about the best route to the new housing estate on the edge of town.

It was Pete who answered: 'The couple who lived in the flat next to us. Kevin and Liz Walker. They just moved into their first house.'

'You'll like them,' said Steve confidently.

How did he know? 'But was I invited?' she asked.

'Oh, don't worry about that!' Steve laughed. 'They'll be expecting me to bring a girl!'

Bring a girl! She bit back the caustic retort on the tip of her tongue, and said instead, 'Well, I should take something. Can we stop off at a bottle shop so I can buy a nice bottle of wine?'

'No need. There's a cask of red in the boot, and beer and whisky. And fizzy water for the chauffeur.'

No inquiry about what she might like to drink, she fumed. A good thing she'd already decided to stick to mineral water.

'I'd still like to take a house-warming present,' she insisted.

'No bottle shops between here and there,' Steve shrugged. Then, to Pete, 'Turn left here. And...'

Cathy suspected that she wasn't going to have fun.

~

'Hello, darling. All on your own?' The balding, middle-aged man had a predatory gleam in his eyes. His breath reeked of whisky.

'No, I'm not!' Cathy said icily, taking a step backwards. This was the third time she'd been chatted-up by a drunk since she'd arrived at this awful party. That was nearly three hours ago and, far from having fun, she was having a horrible time.

Their hostess, Liz – a skinny, thirty-something woman with bleached hair – had looked surprised when Steve had introduced her...as if she'd been expecting a different girl.

Cathy's embarrassment had deepened when she saw that Liz was wearing a long red frock, and that the other females in the room were likewise in party gear. Her mortification had been complete when the couple who'd followed them in had presented Liz with a bottle of champagne and a gift-wrapped package.

A trestle table by the far wall was serving as a bar, and people were helping themselves. Some of the drinks from the Mazda's boot had been deposited on this table; the rest had gone somewhere out the back.

Steve had handed her a glass of cask red – curling his lip when she'd rejected it in favour of mineral water – and poured a Scotch for himself. They – Steve and Pete and herself – had stood by the bar for nearly an hour, Steve talking animatedly with fellow-drinkers while she had tried to look as if she were enjoying herself. Then Steve had left her with Pete, saying he 'needed the gents'.

Pete, drinking mineral water like herself, had been surprisingly attentive, joking about them both being on the same wagon and offering her nuts and olives. And he'd introduced her to Liz's husband Kevin, a burly man in a black skivvy who seemed to have abandoned his role of host to concentrate on drinking.

Kevin had given her a beery kiss on the cheek and then departed in the direction Steve had taken. After refilling Cathy's glass, Pete had followed him, mumbling something about finding Steve for her, and leaving her at the edge of a group of women.

She'd recognised two of them as boutique customers – considerably older than her own twenty years and dressed to kill – and she'd felt totally out of place in her pink sweater and jeans, but she'd forced herself to smile and chat about clothes.

Eventually she'd excused herself and gone in search of the loo. On the way back she'd peeped into the kitchen, to see if Steve and Pete were in there. But there were only women making sandwiches, and she'd returned angrily to the lounge. She'd circulated at first, seeking out girls closer to her own age, but those with boyfriends in tow had regarded her with suspicion.

So she'd got herself another mineral water – warding off the attentions of a couple of fellows at the bar – and gradually retreated into this corner, wishing she were at home, watching a video with Tina.

Tina was wrong. She *had* been crazy to agree to a date with Steve Grant. Never mind his movie-star looks...what a creep he'd turned out to be! Even his scruffy flatmate had better manners. But she hadn't sighted Pete, either, since he'd gone in search of Steve.

They were probably with a bunch of other guys somewhere...talking cars and football and telling off-colour jokes. She wondered why Steve had bothered to bring her. Another trophy?

She wondered, too, why Liz and Kevin should want to celebrate moving to this estate of identical red-brick houses. Little boxes. And this lounge had no space for dancing to the music that sporadically blared from the hi-fi. She wished someone would turn down the volume. She was getting a headache, and the room was hot and stuffy. She needed fresh air...and to escape from the old creep who had her trapped in this corner.

'You look as if you're on your own,' the middle-aged man with the predatory eyes was insisting.

'Well, I'm not!' she snapped. 'My boyfriend's getting me a drink.' Then she enlarged on the lie: 'Oh, here he is!'

He half-turned. 'Where...' But she was already pushing past him.

She almost collided with a woman with a tray of sandwiches. She politely declined a choice of ham or chicken.

'Well, there's more food in the dining room,' the woman said, and moved on. Was this a sign that the party was coming to an end? Most people were already moving towards the dining room, but a group of four – two men and two women – was deep in conversation. Well, three of them were.

The man in the green shirt was looking her way, and he raised a hand and smiled. She was puzzled. Where had she seen him before?

Of course, he'd come to fix the shop computer when it crashed a couple of weeks ago! Mrs Rose had left her to attend to the shopful of customer, so she'd hardly got a look at him, except to notice that his hair was dark and curly and he had a nice smile. Still, he seemed to remember her – he was beckoning her over. She'd go and say hello. Then she'd go and find Steve and Pete.

As she got closer she saw that one of the two women in the group was their hostess.

'Oh, hello!' said Liz. 'You're the girl who came with Steve and Pete, aren't you? I see they've left you all on your own. Typical!'

Cathy held on to her smile. 'Well, I was wondering where they'd got to, because I'm ready to go home.'

'But you haven't had supper yet! I was just trying to persuade these people to eat something. But Tom and Helen say they're leaving. So *early!*'

Cathy caught the computer guy's eye. He winked. He was quite good-looking, she decided. Not what Tina would call a hunk, like Steve, but attractive in a less obvious way. And he had nice brown eyes as well as a nice smile. He looked older than Steve, who, according to Pete, was twenty-two.

Liz had a hand on the second man's arm. He was grey-haired and grey-suited.

He said, 'And who is this lovely young lady?'

'Oh, sorry!' Liz turned to Cathy. 'What was your name again?'

Cathy seethed. 'Cathy Logan.'

'Right! Cathy, this is John Day...' she tightened her grip on his arm. 'And this nice-looking couple are Tom and Helen Conway.'

Cathy felt a pang of dismay. The computer guy was married! But she nodded and smiled.

The grey man gave a courtly bow, and Helen Conway – a pretty brunette in a blue dress – said, 'Nice to meet you, Cathy.'

Tom Conway grinned. 'We've already met...well, sort of, when I went to fix the computer at Rosie's Fashions. But we didn't have a chance to say hello. So "hello" now, Cathy!'

'Hello,' Cathy murmured. It was just her luck to meet a nice guy like this, she thought despondently, only to find that he was spoken for.

After Liz had led the grey man off towards the food, Cathy told the Conways, 'It was nice meeting you. But I really must go and find Steve and Pete.'

'Two blokes?' Tom raised an eyebrow. 'Which one's the boyfriend?'

'Oh, neither one!' she said hastily. 'I just came with them.' Not that it mattered to him, she thought. But then – because she was totally fed-up – she added, 'I actually had a date to go to the movies with Steve...but it turned into a threesome and a party. And now I want to go home, but they've both disappeared.'

'Oh, they'll be out the back...in Kevin's playroom,' said Helen, pulling a face.

'He's converted the shed to a boys-only retreat,' Tom grinned. 'But Helen wouldn't let me go out there!'

'No way!' Helen laughed. 'I'm keeping you on a tight rein tonight, chum!'

Cathy smiled weakly. 'Well, goodbye, then.' And she turned towards the door.

Then she gave a sigh of relief. Coming towards her – a bit unsteadily – was Steve! But the guy with him wasn't Pete.

'Oh, *there* you are!' Steve slurred.

'I've been here all the time,' she said frostily. 'And I want to go home.'

'Yes, well, there's a bit of a problem. Pete's fallen off the wagon.'

'What?' She stared at him in dismay. 'You mean he's not in fit state to drive?'

Steve sniggered. 'Not even in a fit state to stand! So we're going to crash in the shed. But young Gary here can take you home in his van. He's not drinking because he's on medication.'

The pimply-faced youth smirked.

Cathy shuddered. 'No, thank you,' she said. 'I'll call a taxi.'

'Please yourself,' Steve shrugged. 'But I hope you don't expect me to fork out for the fare.'

'I don't expect anything at all from a sleaze like you!' she snapped. 'Goodbye, Steve.' And she turned away.

Her eyes blurred with angry tears, she almost bumped into the woman behind her. It was Helen Conway.

'Good for you!' Helen applauded. 'He *is* a sleaze, and he deserved a telling-off!' Then, apologetically: 'I couldn't help overhearing. But you don't have to take a taxi, you know. Tom and I can run you home. We were just leaving anyway.'

Cathy brushed a hand over her eyes. 'Thank you,' she said. 'It's very kind of you.'

'You go in the front with Helen.' Tom Conway opened the front passenger door. 'She's our designated driver!'

'No!' Cathy protested. 'I'd be quite happy in the back.'

'Don't argue,' he said. 'I'll go in the back with the kiddie seat and chewed rusks. Jack's a messy little devil.'

'Just like Daddy!' Helen laughed.

Cathy felt a twinge of jealousy. But, as Tom slid into the back seat, said lightly, 'Oh dear, Tom, are you a messy person?'

'*What?*' His voice was startled.

Helen, switching on the ignition, exclaimed, 'Good heavens, Cathy...Tom isn't Jack's *dad*! He's his *uncle*.'

'But...'

'Did you think we were married? No, I'm married to Tom's brother!'

'Oh!' It was as if the sun had just come out from behind a cloud, Cathy thought.

'...And Daddy's baby-sitting tonight,' Helen went on. 'He can't stand Liz – she manages the hair salon where I work part-time. So, when she invited us to this housewarming do and I told him that I'd better turn up, at least, he bribed Tom into bringing me.'

'Well, *she* brought *me*,' Tom chimed in. 'I told brother Phil that, even for an offer to help re-pave my patio, there was no way I was going to a party without a designated driver. So Helen said she'd drive. And this is her car. Good lord, you don't think *I'd* drive a silver Volvo, do you?'

'So what sort of a car *do* you drive?'

'You'll soon find out,' he said mysteriously. And Cathy decided that this party had been worthwhile, after all.

When they reached her block of flats and Tom walked her to the door, he held on to her hand.

'I hope you're free next Saturday night,' he said. 'We could catch that movie you wanted to see. And I promise I won't make it a threesome!'

THE END

About the Author:

Author bio: Jane Hill (pen name) is a former radio and print journalist and editor. Born in England, where she started her writing career on a popular magazine, she lived and worked in Papua New Guinea for 25 years – and travelled widely – before settling down in Australia. Now retired from full-time journalism, she works as a freelance writer and editor from her home by the sea in Victoria. Her work has been published and broadcast in several countries (under several different names).

Jane has two novels available for sale at Alinar Publishing.

King of the Castle

Emma Bancroft is beautiful and spirited. Flynn Dexter is handsome and arrogant.

When they meet, the sexual chemistry is palpable. But, finding his arrogance insufferable, she's determined not to succumb to his charms...and he's determined not to fall in love with anyone at all.

Or so they say.

Set in the beautiful English countryside, the action is enlivened by a supporting cast which includes a doting father, a foolishly garrulous mother on the lookout for wealthy husbands for her daughters, and a predatory cad.

Sounds familiar? Of course it does.

"Any resemblance to *Pride and Prejudice* is quite intentional," says Jane Hill, author of this modern take on an age-old theme.

The Prayer Tree

THIS is a collection of short stories I've written over the years. The first story sets the theme, and is the only one in the collection which is not fiction. In the other six stories: a retired spinster schoolteacher goes in search of flowers for an old friend's funeral; a widow visits a flamboyant fortune-teller; a wife takes revenge for her husband's infidelity; an elderly woman, lonely following the death of her husband and the estrangement from her granddaughter, finds herself in hospital; a migraine forces a young woman to visit a doctor in an unfamiliar town; an encounter on a lonely beach is unnerving for a young divorcee. Yes, the leading players in all seven stories are women Enjoy! Jane Hill

Available at -

<http://www.alinarpublishing.com>