

A birthday story for Steve.

Remember, Remember.

'Dora' come and help me with this damn thing!

Steve was having trouble tying his purple silk cravat. Days spent outside in the cold and wet had played havoc with his joints, his fingers were stiff and sore but he was still a good looking man. Dora resplendant in a purple dress smiled at him.

'You look particularly handsome today darling.'

'I feel like a bloomin tailor's dummy. Why our Ronnie had to have this kind of wedding I'll never know. Jeff and Pru had the right idea. Nice and relaxed theirs were!'

'It's the bride's choice Steve'

He pulled a face. She was so different to Jenny this new daughter -in- law, Chantelle. Ronnie had met her on a course which had been held in her father's hotel. It had only been 18 months ago but they had soon decided to live together and had arranged their wedding to co-incide with Steve's 65th birthday on November 5th.

'There- you're done birthday boy!' she said planting a kiss on his lips. He took her hands and looked her up and down. 'Still as pretty as a picture Mrs. Ross. You'll 'appen put t'bride to shame!'

'Stop it you old flatterer'

'Not so much of the 'old' if you don't mind. I can still give you the run around!'

'Heaven's look at the time! We'll need to leave soon!'

'Where's my birthday present?'

'You'll get it later. It's from all the family.'

'Is it a new car?'

'It's a surprise-but no it isn't a new car!'

'Shame!'

Although Ronnie hadn't lived at home for years he had spent last night in his old room. His brother Jeff who was to be his best man arrived as Dora was putting her hat on.

'Goodness mum. That's a creation and a half!'

'You look lovely mum' said Jenny, Jeff's wife who was fussing over the floral headdress her 12 year old daughter Stephanie was wearing.

'I look a right plonker in this dress' she said.

'No you don't you look lovely' said Steve. 'Blue's your colour!'

'Steph's right' said her younger brother Artie. 'She does look a plonker and so do I!'

Ronnie came downstairs and surveyed his family.

'You all look great!' The sound of a car horn alerted them to the fact that the taxi had arrived for Ronnie and Jeff. Ronnie hugged his mother and sister in law and shook hands with his dad before pulling on his grey gloves and putting on his top hat. Jeff did the same. Artie burst out laughing. 'Are you going to wear a top hat grandad?' he asked.

'Not likely- I drew the line at that. My suit, shirt and tie match the others but I haven't got the right shaped head for a topper.'

'Nonsense darling. You would have looked even more elegant.'

The phone rang. It was Chantelle's mother to say that the car with the other three bridesmaids in would pick Stephanie up in 10 minutes. It rang again immediately.

'Dad' wailed Pru. 'You'll have to come and pick me up. Carl's been called away on an emergency. He's not supposed to be on call even but there's been a big pile up on the motorway and every doctor in the area has been contacted. You know Carl-he wouldn't say no and I can't drive in my condition.'

'Don't panic love. We're coming.'

'I'll take Artie in my car.' said Jenny.

'Yeah- we can't all fit in grandad's now- auntie Pru takes up all the back seat!!'

'Artie will you stop being so rude! I don't know what's come over you this morning!'

'He feels like his grandad-like a fish out of water. Are you ready now Dora?'

In a few minutes the door had been locked, Jenny had driven off towards the church and Steve and Dora the short distance to Pru's bungalow built on land close to the farmhouse which had been acquired from a neighbour several years before Pru and Carl's wedding. They had started married life still living with Jeff, Jenny and Stephanie but when Jenny fell pregnant with Artie arrangements were put in hand for the construction of the new bungalow. Carl had become a well loved and respected GP in a local group practice. Pru's first baby was due any day and it was not popular that Ronnie and Chantelle had chosen their wedding date so close to it.

When Pru opened the door she looked white as a sheet.

'Are you sure you want to come love? You look tired out!' said Dora.

'I'm not missing my baby brother's wedding for anything!'

Steve took the drive to the church very slowly. The backroads

were not in the best condition.

'Heavens- look at that black cloud!' exclaimed Dora.

The weather broke while they were in church and by the time the service finished the wind was howling and the rain lashing down. There was another wedding imminent so it was decided that the photos would be taken at the reception which was being held at Chantelle's father's swish Montgomery Hotel about 15 miles from Follyfoot. Although the Follyfoot barn venue had been gradually improved over the years and renamed 'Colonel Gs ' it was no match for The Montgomery. Fortunately the drivers of the three hired cars had large umbrellas and they were able to pull up outside the church gates. The ushers gallantly lifted the brides train and she held up her skirts as she hurried to the car.

The two five year old nieces of the bride were carried again by the ushers. Stephanie and Chantelle's 12 year old cousin Monique had on very flimsy gold sandals.

'Piggy back it'll have to be!' said Jeff and he and Monique's father did the honours.

Fortunately Steve always had an umbrella in his car and had prudently taken it into church and left it in the porch. He escorted first Pru then Dora to the car. Pru's mobile rang and Carl told her he had been released from further duties when they learned about the wedding and he was driving straight to Montgomery's.

On arrival the main wedding party hastily did what they could to their appearance. Chantelle was in tears as some of them had a slightly bedraggled look.

'Eh lass- don't take on. You like a picture.' said Steve. Over the

years he had mixed with a number of Yorkshire characters and often bits of dialect would colour his conversation. Chantelle's parents were very BBC but the warmth in Steve's voice cheered the girl considerably. She thought her father-in-law didn't quite approve of her but just maybe... She looked up and gave him a watery smile. 'Thankyou Pops' she said which was the name Jenny called him by and the first time Chantelle had used it. Steve was somewhat amused but also delighted to hear her say it. Dora, who had been standing near by said 'That was nice of you love!'

'Well she *does* look a picture and she's now our daughter in law so I knew I had to make the effort. Uh oh-look out Reginald approaches!'

Reginald Harrington-Bassett, Chantelle's father clapped Steve on the shoulder.

'Got your speech prepared old man?'

'Me- I'm not making a speech!'

'Course you are. I'm officially welcoming Ronnie into my family and you must do the same for Chantelle. Come along now.

Time to sample my chef's famous cuisine.'

Dora was relieved that Carl appeared at that moment and took charge of Pru. Steve was seated next to Delphine, Chantelle's mother with Stephanie on his other side while Dora was in between Reginald and Monique. The food was delicious lobster bisque to start with then beef wellington and tiramisu. The wedding cake too was a masterpiece its three tiers beautifully decorated with sprays of sugar paste cream and pink roses

which were the main flowers in the bridal bouquet. Jeff gave an excellent speech with anecdotes from his brother's past.

Ronnie's was brief and consisted mainly of thank-yous. Reginald extolled the virtues of his daughter but also said that Ronnie, being a vet would be a very useful person to have around as the family had horses for the use of their guests and dogs. Then it was Steve's turn. He hadn't been required to speak at either of his older offspring's wedding and as he rose to his feet and caught Dora's eye the years fell away and he remembered their wedding day when they had both been emotional it being so close to the colonel's death. He felt once again the eyes of Prudence on him although that lady was long since deceased. Stephanie sensed that he was having difficulty and slipped her hand into his.

'I feel a very fortunate man to have two fine sons, two beautiful daughters in law, a lovely daughter and son in law, wonderful grandchildren and the best wife any man could wish for.

Chantelle you are welcome into the close family Ross and I hope you and Ronnie will have many years of happiness.'

He raised his glass, made a toast and would have sat down but Jeff stood up and put his arm around his father's shoulders.

'I am grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Harrington-Bassett for allowing me to add one extra speech- and don't worry I won't keep you long. Some of you will know that today is my dad's 65th birthday. (There was a round of applause, cheers and banging on the tables.) When they got married my mum and dad only had a couple of days honeymoon and throughout the years they've had some holidays in this country and a few weekends abroad but nothing longer than a week. Though dad says he's a

homebird and a Yorkshire man through and through he travels to many places through reading and on the internet and is fascinated by Greek and Roman History and mythology. So dad-the family have got together and booked you a three week cruise starting January 2nd. You'll be able to visit Rome, Athens and many other places. Of course you won't be going alone mum will go too! Oh and there is just one added extra that even mum doesn't know about. Instead of flying directly home after the cruise you will go to Vienna for 3 nights and visit the world famous Spanish riding school, see the Lipizaner horses and go to the opera house. He handed Steve an envelope which contained a large card signed by all his children, partners and grandchildren with all the necessary tickets and travel documents. This will make up for all the times when we've asked mum what she wanted for a present and she's always said that she had all she wanted.'

Steve, still on his feet had tears in his eyes.

'I- I don't quite know what to say. It's true that different circumstances have not allowed Dora and I to travel much but wherever we've been she's always made it special for me and that's the best I can hope for for Chantelle and Ronnie.

Thankyou to all my lovely family that's all I can say.'

He sat down unable to control his emotions any further and Dora got up from her seat to share a hug with him.

The waiting staff brought round coffee. Pru excused herself to visit the toilet. After several minutes had elapsed Carl spoke to Jenny who went to check on her sister in law. Soon a young waitress came hurrying in.

'We need the doctor in the ladies' she said.

Carl rushed off closely followed by Teri Stryker a trained midwife who still helped out at the surgery occasionally even though she had officially retired. Dora rose to join them but Steve shook his head. 'There's enough of them there already love. She's in good hands.' Pru's own birth had been rather traumatic and he knew what she was thinking. Guests were now beginning to mingle many of them puzzled by what was going on. The bride and groom and Chantelle's parents were circulating and Steve said they should do the same.

'How can I when I don't know what's going on!'

Jenny came back to say that they had managed to get Pru into an empty downstairs room. As always Carl had his bag in the car and the staff had found some old sheets to cover the bed and the floor.

'Has the ambulance been called?' asked Dora anxiously.

'Yes but Carl said he doesn't think the baby will wait.

Apparently Pru's been getting contractions all day but didn't say anything. Her waters broke in the toilet. '

'Do I need to go and be with her?' asked Dora.

'Carl and Teri have everything under control and I'm off back now to act as a 'Go for' Don't worry mum, pops everything will be fine!'

The tables had been cleared and the three piece group had arrived and were tuning up. Ron came over.

'Can I have a dance later your highness?'

'Dance? how do you expect me to dance with my daughter giving birth?'

'Like this I'd say' he said taking her hands and twirling her round.'

'Oh Ron!'

' 'Ere I don't s'pose you got room for me in yer suitcase 'ave yer. I fancy a look at those Hitalians. Wonder if they'll be showing anything good at the Colisseum? The Lion King maybe!'

Dora laughed in spite of herself.

'Thanks mate!' said Steve. He steered Dora round the room chatting to various groups and telling them why a doctor had been called for. When everyone knew they were all on tenterhooks waiting to see what the outcome would be.

Suddenly a beaming Jenny appeared in the doorway just as the sirens announced the arrival of the ambulance. Steve and Dora hurried to Jenny's side and after a brief conversation they went over to where the band were coming to the end of a waltz.

Over the microphone Steve announced. 'I am pleased to let you know that our daughter Pru has given birth to a healthy 8lb 4oz baby girl to be called Caroline Daisy. If you'll excuse us Dora and I are just going to look in and see them before they go to the hospital.' There were more cheers and applause and the band struck up 'Congratulations'

Later at Follyfoot with Artie and Stephanie safely tucked in bed Carl told his in-laws that Pru and the baby would spend the night in hospital and be home the next day.

'Well dad have you had a good birthday?' asked Jeff.

'One of the best son.'

'Have you made any decision about whether or not you want to retire?'

'There's still a good few things I want to do with the horses so I'll not retire quite yet. I might ease up a bit and your mum and

I may take some more time off.'

'I'm really glad dad. Your advice is really valuable to us all.'

'I'm really chuffed about this holiday. I'll be having a good look round on the internet for information on the places we'll be visiting but right now It's time we were off.'

Everyone exchanged goodnight hugs and kisses and Dora and Steve drove the short distance to the bungalow.

'You know Steve it was just the family that bought the holiday for you. I saved my own present for later. She handed him a beautifully wrapped present and when he opened it he was delighted to find a pair of binoculars.

' Thanks love-They'll be good to take on the cruise!'

'That's what I thought.'

'Come and sit here with me and let's have a cuddle. You know although it's been a happy day I couldn't help but remember those who have gone before. Your uncle, Slugger, Bert, Milly, your parents and my mum. We're the oldies now Dora and who knows how many more years we'll have together.'

'Hopefully lots- let's not think about it but take each day as it comes and continue to enjoy each other's company. We've had our ups and downs Steve but the good times are what I remember most. Next week we'll plant a new tree in the grove of remembrance to celebrate Caroline's birth.'

As Steve went to draw the curtains the last rocket of the day soared into the sky and burst into a shimmer of gold with a loud bang. Motioning to Dora to stand beside him he picked up his wine glass from the table and raised it.

Dora followed suit.

I know that although I'm not retiring I must now begin handing

over the reigns to the family-and so too must you my darling.  
So a toast- ' The past, the present and future and To Follyfoot  
the next generation' Dora clinked glasses with him and  
whispered 'and to us!'