

Ms Sensible & The Red Leather

Dear Whoever,

I have a story to tell. You wouldn't have thought a person like me could have told you anything interesting apart from the best pension plan or the amount of memory in the average PC. Not that I know any of that, I am just trying to get over to how I am - or rather was - the kind of person who would know something worthy and infinitely dull. Mind you that was twelve months ago.

They called me Ms Sensible.

I was always the milk monitor, School Captain, Head Girl, the best all-rounder with 'quiet confidence' who could 'keep her head in a crises'. I was the archetypal 'old head on young shoulders', not one foot wrong in my whole twenty-seven year existence. Until that fateful day, one year's anniversary ago...

I had been to the doctor's, I had several things to do in the half-day's holiday I had taken to have the appointment. Banking, M&S for that night's dinner, and a quick well-earned perusal of the season's sales...

The whole thing is imprinted in my mind as if it were this morning. I was walking to the smallish branch of the bankified building society where I had banked since I was seven (yes that sensible you see). I had a passbook, and it was the only concession I would not make to the modern ways of doing things. I hated cards - all those direct debits coming out all month without my knowing until the month-end statement - it made my stomach somersault with the feeling that I was out of control. Yes I really was that sad. Anyway, I had to pay off one of these hated plastic things as I had rashly paid for the dry cleaning with it and - knowing Giles would not approve of such a foolish action - I took out exactly enough for it and the food shopping and then went on my way to the other bank via the shops.

It was a cold frosty morning, but blinding bright in one of those ways that only freezing days can be. As a consequence I had wrapped up well, in my long camel coat with a beige scarf round my hair. Rather frumpy I know but I thought I was rather dashing with my big Jackie O glasses, sensibly screening out the glaring sunlight. I will always be glad I wore that particular ensemble, or I would never have got away with what happened next.

On my way to the bank I stepped into a boutique where I sometimes bought shoes. I felt many of the clothes were too young for me, but then again when I had been young I had felt the same also, so not much change there then. As I walked past the racks I spotted it, and it called to me. It beckoned.

It was leather, it was shiny, it was burnt red. It was sex, it was rock 'n' roll, it was drugs. Although I was never big on any of those three, it said all that to me. It made love to my eyes and pulled my hips towards it. My god but it was everything I wasn't. My hands pulled it off the rack and my legs raced to the changing room. I slipped off that beige coloured shapeless sheath and slid on a new skin. It was only a

coat; long but figure hugging, but it was the best orgasmic thrill I had ever had. I pulled my mouse-coloured hair out of its tight bun and my heart pounded. Imagination had caught fire and my head was awash with visions of a new wardrobe, a new outlook, a new me. I had no idea how right I would be.

Only then my hand fingered the price tag and my heart faltered. It was more money than I had on me. It was outrageously priced and in a cooler frame of mind I would have considered it a scandal to pay anywhere near that price for a coat, even a leather one. But this was not one of my coolest days, in fact it was one of the maddest days I had ever had.

I felt that if I did not have the coat right now I would die. My brain quickly processed the ways by which I could get the money together and came up with the aforementioned card. But Giles would kill me. Then inspiration struck me. I would go back to the building society and use my passbook.

Now anyone who has ever had a passbook knows that one cannot make a transaction beyond the certified amount (which, with the earlier withdrawal would have been over the limit, but I never thought of that) and one cannot take out money with a passbook more than once a day. But I reasoned that since not a half an hour had passed, they would not mind. If I begged. Honestly that was my intention...

Hurrying back, but taking care to look just as I had when I had entered the first time, I went up to the same teller, and told her my predicament.

Now I don't know if it was because I was the only customer in the bank, or whether the fact that I did not have a debit card, but she was disdainful to the point of downright rude. She was all blonde and gold jewellery - why is it that tellers all seem to be frustrated jewellers - and she was not impressed by my pleas. Having listened to my words as they penetrated her cheap perfume cloud, she nasally pointed out.

'I am sorry madam, but as you have already taken out money I cannot do anything for you.'

Things were starting to get desperate. She obviously did not grasp the absolute gravity of the situation. I rebutted hotly,

'You mean to say that I have banked here for twenty years and you are not going to help me?'

Feeling superior in the knowledge she was not as old as I (though I thought she could not have been a day younger than thirty - however all that tanning and bleaching made it difficult to tell, she could have seventeen for all I know), she issued forth,

'In a word, no.'

And that's when I reached into my bag and pulled out the gun.

Now I had better explain myself. I have led you to believe that I was a good, conscientious, law-abiding citizen, and I would not be surprised if you wondered what I was doing with a gun. Well it wasn't real - I mean it even wasn't very realistic as I know now, having handled real ones - but what was a nice girl like me doing with a replica, a shoddy one notwithstanding? I will elucidate.

I have a nephew. I hate the brat. Oh I know that sounds awful but this is not part of the new tough me, this is long-term loathing, even when I was a kind timid creature. I never liked children that much, even less babies, which makes me wonder what in the name of heaven made me go to the doctors in the first place? I went to check my plumbing out, to ensure I was a fertile fiancée for Giles. We were getting married and it was very important that we did not just arrange the joint mortgage, we also had to make sure our bodies were healthy and fruitful, so that we could produce fine bland progeny for posterity's sake. What was I thinking?

Anyway back to my nephew. As pets know instinctively when a person dislikes animals, and some will perversely make a beeline for them, so my nephew Crispin (I mean for Chrissakes Crispin?) made my life hell. The night before I had been visiting my overly complacent elder sister, who had married the bilious billionaire who fathered the satanic spawn, and the demon-child had delighted in drenching me with his new toy, a revolver-like water pistol.

Eventually having had enough, I turned to the little scrote whilst its mother was in the hall, and asked.

'That is a really lovely gun, could I borrow it for Giles? I would love to squirt him the way you have been squirting me.'

Being a sly little git and a mercenary one at that he lisped,

'You just want to confis- confisc- take it off me...how much for?' He asked evilly.

Not wanting to go into the ins and outs of how improper it is to sell one's toys to adults, as I really couldn't give a toss if the tyke had no scruples, believing as I did that he was a lost cause anyway, I quickly bargained,

'Fifty pence.'

'Get lost. Tenner.'

'You little shit, erm fiver.' Whoops, I lost my temper a bit.

'Done.' For the first time I had won his respect, and a little bit of liking, I had let my guard down and sworn at him. And kids love filthy language: it's so cool!

And so I had a gun in my bag. And when I reached in to get some more ID and demand to speak to her manager, I pulled a replica on her. Before I knew what I had done, she had clocked the gun and blurted out.

'OK, OK, you can have it. How much?'

'What do you mean? Um £500.' Not wanting to lose my advantage, as I still had no idea why she was backtracking.

'Not more, not more? Call yourself a robber - oh sorry yes of course.'

And that's when I looked down and I saw the gun. And fate yawned before me like an infinite horizon viewed from a cliff and I gasped. I could go with it, go with it, and be free. It would be more than just a red leather coat, it would be everything. And Ms Sensible tutted behind me, and I turned and shot her. Real bullets not water this time. I jumped and I went with it.

'No, how much have you got, in the whole place?' A new authority entered my voice, it was like breathing for the first time: racy and cutting but exhilarating.

'Well the delivery was this morning - about eight hundred thousand,' her nasally pitch whisked up the scale in fear.

I mused, 'That should cover it - get it now or I'll kill the old bird at the desk over there - and no funny stuff.' Even in my new self-assured frame of mind, I inwardly cringed at that.

But she did as she was told - she was obviously younger than I had assumed because all her confident posturing belly-flopped at the sight of the pistol. It took no time at all, well not enough to make me change my mind. Next thing I am walking out the door with more money than I have seen in my life in a carrier bag.

What did I do next? Well what do you think? I went and bought the coat. I bought knee-high black suede boots, a short tight black dress and a big black hat. I binned the old clothes in the boutique and insisted that they took off the tags and rang up the price whilst I wore my purchases. I paid by card. I kept the Jackie O shades though.

I went to the other bank and drew out all the money out of the joint credit account. Then I coolly went to a phone box, rang my brother-in-law, and told him what I had just done.

Now you might think this was mad - I did not want to be caught, indeed I was making sure I was not going to be caught. The new me is not quite as impulsive as it might seem - common sense prevailed.

He thought me insane. I waited for him to calm down, then waited still as he went apoplectic and started to whimper. Then, when he told me he'd get me a good barrister, I snapped,

'I am a good solicitor, if I need representation I will be my own. What I need is money.'

'You've just robbed a bank!' he yelled.

Fearing he might have an attack, and the last thing I needed was a dead getaway plan, I quickly explained I needed a trade-off - they would be looking for the cash I stole, it was all marked. And I needed different bank notes. Oh and a passport.

'But, but why should I do it for you?' He sounded like his old ruthless self, now that business was concerned.

'Because if you don't and I go down I will blow open all your dirty secrets and ruin your empire. Think of the damage to your reputation. Think of my sister...Think of Crispin.' God how I loved that child, he was the turnkey.

'You bitch.'

'No time for compliments...meet me tomorrow morning at the Hilton with the stuff, I will be registered as Ms Sensible.'

'That's a stupid pseudonym.'

'You're right, I never liked it either.'

* * *

Dear Jerry,

You know, as in Jerry Springer? I think my story warrants a slot, a whole show even. My brother-in-law did turn up with the money, a few thousand less

because of the passport and the usual middle-man cut, but what did I care? I took a plane out of Heathrow and never looked back.

Since then I have dabbled in all sorts of naughty things, and made moves that are not in the least bit sensible, some not as inspired as that first day, some with regrettable consequences - for others I might add. But I never regret anything. As I sit here in old Mexico, the Mecca for criminal misfits, slamming tequilas back whilst the sun slides under the horizon leaving fire in its wake, I muse on the redness of the sky. I still have the red coat; in fact I have had several copies made, for other occasions such as the one above. But the original one still remains in its virgin state, little knowing what cataclysmic turn of events it excited. I don't have the gun; I sent it back to Crispin.

I hope Giles is okay, I am sure he has found a nice neat little thing to take my place. Oh screw him actually!

I hope my sister was horrified to find her hubby helped me - but then again he might never have told her. You see he has never been caught either.

Well I must stop now, I have to go and not plan the next job. My, I am such a gangster; I can't remember how I managed without daft slang words!

Anyway, till next time. Happy birthday to me and all that.

Love
Scarlet