

Peter

Sometimes the only thing to do is run.

I ran along the sea, the cliffs, and the labyrinth of country lanes that meandered through our little spot in the world. Day after day, hour after hour. Before going to the barn to groom and muck, and at the end of a day of lessons and bill paying. But I couldn't run far enough to leave myself behind. Though Eleanor's words stung, I knew my nature, the hard truth. There was no ready defense, nothing with which to argue. I was, however, still working out her full meaning.

Eleanor hoped I'd work it out on my own, but I needed help. Eric was already worn down, and I feared tiring him even more. Ian wasn't an option. When I first heard about the new vicar, I thought we might have some common interests, but it took just one meeting to see we were cut from different cloth. I wanted to get to know him; he wanted to know the local gossip. A man needs a best mate, but mine wouldn't be found in the West Country.

"Thomas, it's me. Can you spare a few minutes?" I'd worn a path pacing round the cottage, working out how to start the discussion. Now I sat on the bench by the yew bushes, buoyed by the bright, clear day.

"I can't believe it's you. I planned to ring you tonight with my news." His voice ran over the edges with wonder, something I hadn't heard since Liza was expecting their third child.

His joy lifted me out of my own troubles. "Say it, man. What's the news?"

"I'm in love." The joy I felt quickly dissipated, and confusion and anger overwhelmed me so I couldn't speak. "Did you hear me?" he asked, his feet now a bit closer to earth.

"Yeah, I heard you," I groused. "But I don't understand. Did you just meet her in the last month?"

"No, I've known Gemma for awhile. She's been a friend, a good friend. But something has changed."

"Weren't you just here saying you didn't know if you'd ever remarry? I can't work out why you didn't tell me."

“Because I never expected it, was satisfied with the friendship. I hadn’t dared to hope it would be more. But, the more we knew of each other, the more our feelings changed. It’s been the perfect progression.”

How could I stay a scrooge when there was something to celebrate? “Well, I’m chuffed for you, man. It’s brilliant news. I can’t wait to meet her.”

“She feels the same about you. We’re all raving about you—she can hardly believe you’re not a super-hero.” His innocent joke cut straight to my heart.

“Yeah, well, that’s why I rang you. I need to ask you a question.”

“Go on then.”

“Eleanor said something unsettling. I’ve spent a week sorting out her meaning. But I can’t quite lay hold of it.”

“What’s it about?” He’d always been there for me, so I don’t know why I found this so hard. I stopped the posturing and blurted it out. “Jillian and Suzanne.”

“Hold up—who’s Suzanne?”

“She’s an American. I met her just after you were here.”

“Divorced, is she?”

His assumption irritated me. “Widow,” I snapped. “She’s here for a few months, at least.”

“Ah.” Something was lining up in his mind, but I didn’t know what. “What did Eleanor say, then?”

I relayed the conversation I’d been replaying in my head all week long. When I got to Eleanor’s conclusion, Thomas laughed.

“Oh Pete, I think things are coming full circle for you.” I braced for where I guessed he was going with this.

“How so?” I asked.

“It’s time to look at what happened with Laura, full in the face.”

I guess a man can only run for so long.