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# Date With Alice

by Christine Chen

Joe had just turned his computer off for the day when Perry walked into his cubicle and asked “You heading out?”

“Yeah.”

Perry gestured over one shoulder with his thumb. “Wanna grab a beer before you head home?”

Joe shook his head and started gathering paperwork to place in his briefcase. “No thanks. I’ve got a date.”

His friend’s eyebrows rose about half an inch. “With Alice?”

“Yup.” Joe closed the briefcase lid. Both latches snapped into place with a palpable *click*.

Perry leaned against the wall of the cubicle. “So when do I get to meet her?”

Joe looked up, surprised. “Uh—I don’t know. I think it’s too early for that.”

“Oh, come on. How long you been seeing her now? Six months?”

Joe counted backward in his head. He’d started seeing Alice in June, and it was now November. “Five.” *Wow*, he thought in amazement. The time had really flown by.

Perry nodded as if to prove his point. “Yeah. And I haven’t heard you mention anyone else that whole time. Sounds like you two are getting pretty serious.”

Joe shrugged, scratched his head, and hoped Perry would drop the subject.

He didn’t. “Good for you, man. I have to admit, there was a time when I was really worried about you. All work and no play. And it wasn’t just me. Lots of folks thought you were a little...” Perry paused.

“Antisocial?” Joe said.

“You said it, not me. But no more, eh? You finally got a life...and a woman. Good for you, man.”

“Gee, thanks, Perry. Listen, I gotta go; I’m running late.” Joe stood up, hoping Perry would take the hint.

He didn’t. “So. Maybe I’ll see her at the office party this Christmas?”

“Nah,” Joe said quickly. “I don’t think so. I’m not sure that would be appropriate.”

Perry guffawed. “Listen to you, Mr. Manners. ‘Wouldn’t be appropriate.’ Next thing I know, you’ll be telling me you haven’t even slept with her yet.”

To his horror, Joe’s face burst into flames.

“You mean—you haven’t even slept with her yet?” Perry burst out, a bit too loudly.

Joe mumbled, “I have to go,” and he fumbled for his briefcase. He pushed past his co-worker. Perry, still in shock, let him go.

All the way home, Joe flushed and blushed at the memory of his conversation with Perry. It was a fair question, he supposed (though it was, in classic Perry fashion, far too personal).



After all, he was almost 35 years old, and at that age, most men wouldn't have waited five months to consummate a relationship with a woman. Hell, he knew some men who wouldn't have waited five *minutes*. But Alice was classier than that, and he wanted to set a higher standard. She deserved it.

Just thinking about her made him feel warm all over. He could see her in his mind's eye, as clearly as though she were sitting in the passenger seat with him. A bob of honey-blond hair, a five-foot-six frame, long slender legs. He wondered what she'd be wearing tonight. Maybe the beige turtleneck and brown suede skirt. Or the sky-blue dress that stopped just above her knees. That would be nice. Whatever she wore, she was sure to look fabulous.

He pulled into the driveway of the house at precisely six o'clock—just enough time to hit the shower and change before Alice showed up. He loosened his tie as he went through the front door, grabbed a beer from the fridge in the kitchen, and headed upstairs to the master bath. Twenty minutes later, he emerged in a cloud of steam, his black hair damp and wavy and his skin wet and wrinkled.

He changed into a fresh pair of khakis and a white button-down shirt, then opened his sock drawer. He withdrew two items: a pair of brown argyles and a soft leather case. Crossing over to the front window, he twirled the clear plastic rod that swivelled the blinds. From here, he had a good view of the street, and he'd know precisely when Alice pulled into the driveway.

Joe spent a few minutes glancing up and down the street, nursing his beer. It was a nice neighborhood, he thought. The residents were mostly young professionals, some married with young families. The people here really cared about their homes; on any given Saturday, the street buzzed with the sound of lawnmowers and weed-whackers. The lawn across the street was particularly well-groomed, but Joe noticed again that the curtains were much too sheer. He could see everything through them. He'd have to caution the family about that one of these days.

He turned the TV on with the remote and sat down on the bed, nursing his beer and waiting for Alice to arrive. He didn't have to wait long before he heard the car turn into the driveway. He set his

beer down on the nightstand, went to the window, and looked. Alice had arrived, all right. She stepped out, wearing the brown suede skirt and holding a shopping bag in her left hand. In her right hand, she held a cell phone to her ear, and she was laughing—presumably at something the other person had just said. As she approached the front door of the house across the street, she juggled the phone between her shoulder and her ear while she searched for her keys. Then she disappeared through the

door. A few minutes later, she resurfaced in the upstairs bedroom where she began to change out of her clothes behind the too-sheer curtains.

With a practiced motion, Joe opened the leather case, withdrew a pair of binoculars, and began his date with Alice.



*Photo by Rita Ji*

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