

Once Upon a Time

by ANO

With more than a nod to Mills and Boon

Once upon a time she had been happy, and in those rare quiet moments or late at night when the noise of the house silenced. She remembered a slender young woman returning from a month's pack packing around Europe. Three stone lighter than now, bronzed, lithe, lifting a substantial rucksack with fluid ease. Whistled at in train stations when young men whistled their approval and lust in a world where such behaviour was still acceptable.

Now at the end of the week the ritual Friday take away. Her husband, reliable, dependable solid, always there, caring, called "Do you want a beer"? No. She wanted a bottle of heavy red wine, strong and rough to the tongue, a quick hit to forgetfulness.

She had met, by chance a friend of a friend, verbose, ebullient, who had talked of a handsome business man who had moved his UK office into the newly built Innovation Centre, set in landscaped grounds on the edge of town. She had been inattentive, unengaged, barely even listening until the name was mentioned. Then a physical thump in the chest, a heartbeat expanded to a physical jolt. The name she knew. Oh yes, the name she knew, unbelievably the old flame that was still a regular fantasy. The man she could have married. The exotic son of a Malaysian businessman, and a Swiss Doctor mother, public school educated, at ease, confident in himself. They had meet at a party in her early twenties and he had regularly picked her up from the university college halls of residence in a taxi, while her friends looked on in awe and admiration at this unaccustomed curiosity and show of wealth. He had invited her to spend the summer at the family home in Malaysia.

She had chosen not him, the rich, dangerous, the exotic. But the known, the safe, the boy from virtually next door, reliable, dependable, the known quantity. While all her married life "What might have been" had haunted her, filled the spare blank hours with a thousand fantasies of what might have been, had she had the courage.

As the red wine began its numbing effect she vowed the next Monday morning she would ring his office, ask for him, and announce herself. Where that might lead she had no idea.

She rang on the Monday. The secretary answered, and with some persuasion and a couple of white lies connected her. Excitement was the dominant emotion, followed by trepidation, even fear.

She need not have planned so well, anticipated so much. He had not remembered her, her name, nothing, only vaguely the college he thought. He showed no desire to renew any acquaintance he had long forgotten.

All those day dreams, years of fantasies evaporated.

Now she looked anew at what was true, reality, a love demonstrated daily. When her husband asked on Friday night "Do you want a drink?" She answered with a smile. No thanks. A cup of tea would be lovely.