

Love and Trust

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A young man with a red face, a nervous expression, and a starched suit was walking rapidly down the street, muttering to himself under his breath. One who observed him at that moment could assume that he was doing one of two things. He could be going to the annual church social where he had unintentionally agreed to recite “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” or, on a more romantic note, he could be going to meet a girl whom he has as of yet only dared to admire from afar. As it happened, his mission was of the latter nature.

Although Jack Reynolds had never before believed in love at first sight, his first glimpse of Debbie had speedily changed his opinion. He was quite a shy man, and it took him several weeks to summon the courage to call on Miss Deborah, whose address he had learned from a mutual friend.

It was there that he was headed on that fine evening. The cool spring air was blowing gently through the trees, swaying their branches and rustling their leaves. All around him was peace and contentment, but just then Jack was feeling far from peaceful. On the contrary, he felt as if he had never been so anxious in his life. He had spent hours carefully writing and memorizing what he would say to her—it was this which he had been murmuring to himself—but he had a dreadful feeling that the moment he set eyes on her every word of it would slip from his mind.

His rapid steps soon brought him to his destination. Before long he was being shown into the parlor by the maid, and awaiting the arrival of Miss Debbie. His heart began to beat fast as he heard her footsteps in the hall, and he wiped a bead of perspiration from his forehead and stood a little straighter.

That first visit soon resulted in a second, third, fourth, until Jack began calling on her many days a week. Almost every day he would take her out to the theater at night, or a picnic during the day, or simply stay for dinner at her house. Within half a year they were engaged, and a few months later they were wedded in the small village church.

On the morning of the wedding, as Jack watched his bride walking towards him down the aisle, her young face radiating joy, he truly believed himself to be the happiest man alive. “How blessed I am!” he thought. “To be able to spend the rest of my life with her!”

They bought a tiny house in town and began living a life of bliss. They lived in their own small world, reveling each day in each other's company.

One day when Jack came back from work, Debbie noticed how worried and frightened his normally cheerful face was.

"Jack!" she exclaimed, "What's the matter?"

It was then that he told her that he had been drafted that day for the army, and that he would have to leave on a ship for six months of active duty in France.

The last goodbye, which occurred a week later, was a memory which was forever seared in Jack's heart. People milled all around him, filling the wharf with noises of every kind; dogs barked, men called, and children shouted. But Jack saw only his wife's tear-stained face and heard her soft sobbing.

All too soon the clanging of the great bell rang over all the sounds of the pier, beckoning to all the voyagers to board the ship. Jack pressed Debbie to himself one last time, before he ran up the gangway onto the deck.

He stood by the rail watching the small figure on the wharf become smaller and smaller, until she was only a speck on the distant shore. Questions flashed through his head. What would become of her? Would he ever see her again? What would happen to the baby? (For Debbie was pregnant, and would most likely give birth while he was still away.) Would he ever meet his son or daughter?

The voyage overseas was long but passed uneventfully. Every night Jack would lie in his bunk, praying, thinking, and dreaming about his wife and small child living so far away.

They finally landed on the French shores and started on active duty almost immediately. Whether he was training or in the trenches, his mind was always thousands of miles away, in his wife's home and heart. In the beginning he would think only about her, but one day, as he was in trenches, the small seed of doubt was planted in his mind. *Would she stay faithful to him?* he wondered. Such a nice girl, so pretty and young... The explosion of a grenade not far from him snapped him out of his daydreaming.

Though it started out as just a suspicion, the question grew in Jack's mind until it was all he worried about. No longer did the frightening battlefield scare him; all he cared about was Debbie's love.

The war raged on, and it became apparent that Jack would not be able to go home when he had planned, thus dragging out his agony longer. He was torn with

curiosity and longing to know what was in his dear wife's heart. Did she love him still?

One day a piece of shrapnel hit him in the eye and blinded one of his eyes forever. Just a week after he had recovered from that injury, he became seriously wounded during a fierce night of gunfire. He immediately became unconscious and laid in the freezing snow for several hours. By the time the nurses found him he was barely alive.

He was in hospital for months, flickering between life and death. When, after a whole year, he was finally well enough to leave he had one arm, a bad limp, and no memory. The war was over and had been won, but Jack had no memory of it. All he remembered was Debbie, her sweet face was always in his mind, although he never knew where she lived or who she was.

A kind English family who lived nearby offered to take in the wretched man and give him shelter and food in return for the little work Jack could do. And so he spent fifteen years, never remembering anything more than that he loved a beautiful lady, and the fear that she may not still love him haunted him incessantly.

The children of the family who he lived with came to love him very much, and he often would watch them while their parents were busy. One afternoon he sat with one of the small girls who was showing him her new doll.

"And see," she was saying in her childish voice, "She has a pink dress, and brown hair, and blue eyes. Do you want to know what I named her?"

She looked expectantly at Jack, but did not receive an answer, for his mind was far away.

"I named her Debbie. Isn't that such a pretty—"

The rest of her speech was cut short by a cry from Jack. At the mention of that name all his memories had come rushing back like a great flood.

He had, by this time, earned a small amount of money, and within a week he was on a ship bound for his hometown. As it had been the first time he crossed the ocean, his mind was constantly on his wife. But instead of pleasant thoughts, his reflections this time plagued him with anxiety and apprehension.

As soon as he landed he decided to first go to his old home. Rather than make his way through the crowded and bustling streets, he chose to take the slightly longer way through the park.

The sunlight shone through the leaves on the treetops high above him, casting pretty shadows on the path below. Although he was anxious to find Debbie, he was becoming quite nervous and so he walked slowly, savoring the cool breeze of the afternoon.

Hearing voices nearby, he realized that two people were walking towards him. "That voice sounds familiar," thought Jack. He moved closer towards them to see if he recognized either of them. When he was close enough to see their faces clearly, Jack's heart skipped a beat.

A young handsome man was walking down the path, and beside him, with her hand on his arm and a look of enjoyment and admiration on her face, was Debbie. Jack quickly turned down a side path and pulled his cloak over his face to avoid them seeing him.

Jack groaned inwardly. His nightmare had become a reality; she loved someone else. She had forgotten him and there was no use living anymore.

Although Jack knew that it must be true, his heart would not believe it. "No, maybe it's not her. It just looks like her, that must be it," he whispered to himself. He stopped, and started walking back. Seeing a child skipping down the path, he hailed him and asked him who the couple was.

"Them? That's Miss Debbie and—." Jack had no use for listening to anymore. He turned and began walking rapidly through the forest, his eyes blinded with tears. Hearing a noise in front of him he looked up and saw a middle-aged woman coming slowly toward him. When she saw his face she stopped, incredulity written on every one of her features.

"Jack?" she faltered. Jack did not believe what he was seeing. Before him was certainly his wife, but not the girl he had seen walking, she had been much more joyful and younger. Was he dreaming?

Debbie too stared in disbelief. Was this the strong, young, handsome man who had gone to France so long ago? This old, crippled, blind wretch?

Jack reached out and touched her face. How wrinkled and old it seemed! With a sob, Debbie fell into her husband's arms.

"Oh Jack," she cried, "I thought I had lost you forever!"

"I thought I had lost *you*," replied Jack, his tears of anger turning into ones of joy. "But Debbie," said Jack, after a few moments, "Who was that young girl I saw walking? She looked so much like you!"

"Why don't you remember?" laughed his wife. "I was pregnant when you left, that's Debbie, our daughter."

Jack laughed aloud with joy. Relief, as sweet as the first breath of spring, had filled his heart with happiness to its very brim.

“You still love me, then? You always have?” he asked Debbie, thinking of all those agonizing moments of doubt.

She smiled. “Of course I have, and I always will.” She stood on tip-toe, and kissed her husband.