

FOLLYFOOT FANFIC

*The storm at
the end of the
rainbow*
by
Sabrina



Dora has been at Follyfoot for six months. While she finds Steve an attractive boy, it's an older man who dares to make a move who catches her eye...

The steam rose on her mug of tea, and Dora stared at it, unseeingly, a wistful smile on her lips. She was unaware of the knowing glances of Slugger and Ron over the breakfast table, or the sudden surliness of Steve, who gulped his tea so quickly it scalded his tongue.

When he pushed back his chair more roughly than it deserved and headed for the yard, Dora was still lost in thought.

Who'd have thought that Patrick Radisson would be...so... physically AND emotionally attractive? Dora's smile broadened. For once, one of the young men her Uncle Geoffrey introduced her to from time to time had piqued her curiosity. She'd dismissed nearly all of them as Hooray Henriets, shallow, cravat-wearing types who still called girls 'fillies' and bought her Babycham without asking what she wanted. But Patrick was different.

For a start, he was older. Thirty. An attractive age, Dora mused. So much a man, where Steve – unfathomable, unreachable Steve, with his sudden flashes of humour and friendship – seemed such a boy in comparison. It had been six months since both she and Steve arrived at Follyfoot, and while she found him attractive, she also knew he was dismissive of her as a rich girl working at Follyfoot on a whim, thinking her childish, and her dreams without substance, the dreams of a girl, not the plans of a woman. She'd ached for him to make a pass at her – a lady never makes the first move, her finishing school had drummed that in – but he hadn't, even though she'd felt those huge dark eyes watching her when he thought she wasn't aware of it.

Hence Patrick, who thought her very much an adult, for all of her seventeen years, who listened to her without chiding her, and who, last night at that lovely French restaurant tucked inconsequentially in the heart of Leeds, didn't order for her but assumed she had the wit, mind and language skills to make her own choice.

His hair was golden and naturally wavy, cut shorter than Steve's and curling over the top of his collar, but expertly so the waves fell into place even after he ran his fingers through it, and if he wore a signet ring on his little finger, the finger in question was calloused from working with horses and not soft from pushing a pen around. Patrick was an eventer, trying hard to make the shift from gifted amateur to gifted professional. The blue eyes that met hers with a challenging twinkle had little wrinkles at the sides from squinting into the sun. A chipped front tooth gave his regular, handsome features a slightly necessary character. He smiled a lot. Dora liked that.

It was the second time they'd been out after meeting at local horse trials, where, after winning the open section and being presented with his rosette and cheque by the Colonel, he was introduced to Dora. Their first date had been Sunday lunch in a pub by the river, where dogs and children ran riot in the beer garden, the sun was unusually warm for autumn, and the trees had turned such a shade of gold in the afternoon sun that Dora almost felt tears at their beauty. It was that give-away blinking, that gasp as the sun hit the beeches, that made Patrick take her hand. He understood. He saw the beauty in it, too, rather than the falling leaves that would have to be swept away later before rain fell and made them a slippery nuisance.

That Sunday, he'd driven her back to Follyfoot and said goodbye with a squeeze of his hand and a request to take her to dinner.

But after dinner, when his new Land Rover had purred up the hill to the Follyfoot gates, he'd kissed her on the lips. Once, tentatively, then, as she responded with her lips parted, again, more firmly.



Dora's experience of being kissed was fairly minimal. At finishing school the girls had been introduced to young men – boys their own age, or suitable candidates in their early twenties – but she found their awkward fumbling to be offputting, and their kisses too wet and sloppy to be endured, let alone enjoyed, so she either refused to go on dates or simply said goodnight with a handshake, knowing she wouldn't be asked again. Dreamer Dora wanted the real thing: a proper man, a proper kiss.

And with Patrick, she got it. The Land Rover windows steamed up in the chill night, and Steve, watching from his room above the feed shed, felt a sharp pang of loss. He'd told himself she could never be more than just a friend, that she and him were wrong, just wrong, they were from different worlds, but seeing that she'd met someone from her own world hurt more than it should have. How many times had he longed to kiss those pale pink lips? Countless. From the first day he saw her, when he'd been accused by the Squire's men of being a Night Rider and she provided a less than effective defence of him, he'd been captivated by her hazel eyes and slender, colt-like frame. He'd been waiting for her to grow up enough to appreciate him, understand him, but now someone else had slipped in under the radar, and Dora was an education the finishing school didn't provide.

Dora pulled away from Patrick with a sigh. "I must go in. You know what it's like with horses; you have to be up early in the mornings. And you've got a long drive ahead of you."

"It'll go in no time," Patrick smiled. He caressed Dora's soft cheek with a big hand that encompassed her face. "Dora. Can I see you again? And again?"

"Yes," she said simply, turning to kiss the palm that held her cheek. "Oh, yes."

"I'll call you. I'm riding this weekend. Come and watch, if you like, but it's miles away, and I'm usually too done in at the

end of it to do much. But there's always Sunday. How about Sunday?"

Sunday... when Steve was due for a day off and Dora had promised she'd work his shift. She bit her lip. "I'm working here on Sunday. We often get people in to look at the horses. Ron doesn't work on Sundays and it's Steve's day off, so I said I'd do his work too."

"Why don't I help you?" Patrick said gallantly, any plans of taking Dora out somewhere nice on the road to seduction falling by the wayside. But he had a hunch that horses were the way to Dora's heart, and he'd do his cause good.

"What about your own horses?" Dora was touched.

"I've got grooms, dear girl. I'll look in on the neddies in the morning before I come over here. Now, what about one last kiss?"

... And it was that last kiss that Dora was reliving now, with her tea going cold and Ron sniggering at her.

"What?" She snapped out of her reverie.

"Earth to Dora, earth to Dora. I hope you was dreamin' about a winner at Doncaster or somethin' useful," Ron grinned.

"I'm not telling you my dreams," Dora retorted. "Dreams aren't appreciated around here. Or at least MY dreams aren't."

"Ooh, touchy!" Ron ducked out the door before she could throw a teatowel at him.

Slugger took her cup of untouched tea and poured it down the sink before putting the basin in and filling it with hot water and detergent. "What time did you get in last night, love?" he said kindly. "You look tired."

Dora bit back a snappy remark. She WAS tired, but in a nice way, having lain awake for ages with Patrick's touch still warm on her face and her back where he'd caressed her. Slugger was, unlike Steve or Ron, only being kind. And he was her closest friend, rapidly becoming the father her father should have been.

"About eleven, Slugs. But I'm fine. Really." She stifled a yawn.

"Young girl like you needs a bit of fun," Slugger grunted, rattling cutlery. "Cooped up here day in, day out with them horses. It's not natural. Just be careful, though, that he's not one of them posh blokes who just wants a pretty girl on 'is arm who laughs at all 'is jokes and never speaks out of turn."

"Slugger!" Dora's eyes widened. "He's not like that!"

"You're young, girl, that's what I'm sayin'. You don't know what's what, finishin' school or not. Lots of them posh blokes want a young girl they can marry and train to be what they want, in no time you'll have two children and be doing charity work, not riding over the moors, not riding at all probably. He's older than you, quite a bit older, isn't he?"

"Oh, Slugger! That's a bit Victorian." She smiled, wiping the

mugs as he passed them to her. "This is 1971. Things are different."

"He's thirty, love. How come he's not married?"

"Horses," Dora said simply. "No time for women until now, when he's getting where he wants to be."

"Horses!" Slugger snorted. "It's always horses, around here."

"Slugs, it's fine. Really. Don't worry about me." She patted his shoulder and skipped happily out of the kitchen, humming.

And at those words and that cheerful little dance, Slugger felt like the father she'd never had. He didn't have children, but if Dora was his, he'd be meeting Patrick Radisson at the gate with a shotgun in his hand and telling him to sod off. He could see Dora was trying desperately to grow up – Steve's jibes at her had met their target more than once – but dating someone as worldly wise as Patrick wasn't the answer. Why wasn't Patrick married? Slugger could tell her a different story. He was a playboy, who liked pretty girls in pretty dresses that he could show off at parties. Once they started getting serious, he dropped them without a backward glance. Dora hadn't heard the gossip; Slugger, with Ron his ear to the wide world, had heard it all.

"It's fine, she says," Slugger said to the dishcloth as he wrung it out forcefully. "Doesn't sound fine to me. There'll be tears," he said grimly.

Patrick, to give him his credit, rolled his Land Rover into the yard at precisely 9am on Sunday; Slugger saw him from the window, and it was all he could do to get Dora to sit down and finish her eggs.

"Eggs is a proper breakfast, eggs is. And he'll wait. IF he's a gentleman."

Steve had caught an early bus, and didn't tell anyone, even an inquisitive Dora, where he was going. He had no intention of hanging around to see Dora throw herself into Patrick's expensively-clad arms.

"Finished." Dora swallowed the last morsel of toast and gulped her tea. "Now, Slugs, we've got fifteen horses to do. I'm sure we'll both be dying for a cup of tea before we finish," she said winningly, slipping out the door before Slugger could answer.

She knew Slugger was watching from the farmhouse, but that didn't stop her running over to Patrick and being swung in his embrace, around and around like they did in the movies. When she was dizzy enough, he bent forward and kissed her until she was breathless and the world spun.

"Good morning," she said finally when she could stand without falling.

"And good morning to you," Patrick said solemnly. "How do you manage to look so gorgeous when it's only 9 o'clock?"

Dora just smiled. She'd got up half an hour early to perfect her

makeup and blow dry her hair.

"So this is Follyfoot in daylight." Patrick took in the stables, strong, dour Yorkshire stone built to withstand the bitter winters, the doors of which needed a new coat of paint, and the ancient heads that swung enquiringly over them: sunken eye sockets, white muzzles, winter coats coming shaggily through. A couple of eager whickers and a stamping hoof or two at the notion of breakfast told him there was life in the old beggars yet.

Dora took him on the tour as they distributed breakfast. Privately, Patrick thought half the old ducks should be put out of their misery, but he admired Dora's love for them, and the way she treated each horse individually.

"And this is Folly," she said proudly. The dark grey colt whinnied at the sound of her voice and swung around in his loose-box, ears pricked.

"A bit of breeding there," Patrick said, taking in the long, slim legs, the perfectly sloping shoulder and well-developed neck.

"We think his father was an Anglo Arab. We got his mother when she was in foal." Dora rubbed Folly's face tenderly and held up the bucket for his eager nose before tipping it into the manger, where Folly tossed the food about with his muzzle, seeking the oats he adored.

"Won't have the height for an eventer," Patrick said sadly. The colt might make 15 hands, 15.2 at a pinch.

"Oh, I wouldn't event him anyway," Dora said. "He'll make a lovely hack. I'm not the competitive type. I just enjoy riding."

Patrick was thoughtful. "You know, we've never gone for a ride together. Are any of these old plugs rideable? We could go out for a little while today, surely?"

Dora bridled at "old plugs" but compared to Patrick's sleek animals they did look rather decrepit. "There's Starlight. And Sultan."

"Then let's muck out before the hordes of Sunday visitors arrive, shall we? Did you say there was someone else here who could mind the shop while we're out? Slasher?"

"Slugger," Dora corrected gently, and handed him a pitchfork. "And he's a lovely man."

The lovely man brought them mugs of tea, and chose to ignore Patrick's face when he discovered the two sugars Slugger routinely put into anyone's mug. To give him his due, Patrick bravely thanked him and drank the lot.

Slugger agreed grumpily to watch the yard while they went riding. He'd planned on a quiet day inside writing to his sister and listening to the radio, both of which could really be done from the kitchen with an occasional glance into the yard, Dora

persuaded him.

Patrick roared with laughter when Dora presented him with Starlight. "Good grief! What a poor old duck! I feel too sorry for her to get on her back!"

"She's fine," Dora said, a little shortly. "She belongs to the Hammonds, who run a riding school and hotel. They were mistreating her so she's here to recuperate. She's much fitter than she was, and happy to be ridden again." She swung into Sultan's saddle; the grey pony, almost white with age, sidled about, eager to move out into the open fields.

Dora took Patrick through the woods and along the side of the river. The clouds that had hung about over breakfast had cleared to present to them a crisp autumn day, and both the horses had a spring in their step that was probably due more to the wisps of north wind that blew around them than the oat breakfast they'd enjoyed.

"Oh, this is wonderful," Patrick murmured, when the trees gave way to fields and, on the other side of the river the moors encroached, the soft river grass giving way visibly to the tougher grass of the moors, the heather red on the hills in great patches, rough tors tumbled about like a giant toddler's building blocks, carelessly knocked by a huge hand. "I'd forgotten how utterly gorgeous the moors are. Serves me right for living too near Leeds."

Dora beamed; she felt proprietary about this land, her only real home; the moors, the woods, the very openness of it.

"Shall we sit and watch the view for a bit, Dora?" He reined Starlight to a halt and the mare, like all Follyfoot horses, immediately dragged the reins through his fingers and began to



crop the lush grass that grew near the river.

Dora dismounted and let Sultan do the same. They let the horses graze, loose, while they sat, Patrick's arm around Dora's shoulder, the jingling bits barely audible over the rush and tinkle of the river as it darted between and over the rocks.

Patrick turned her face to his with the touch of one warm finger. "Now this is truly a beautiful view," he said, and she felt herself blushing at the keen appreciation she saw in his eyes, which were the same colour as the sky.

The kiss lasted forever; first tentative, then more authoritative as Patrick's tongue staked its claim on Dora's willing mouth. Her hands slid into his hair – silky! – then down his neck and over and around his back as Patrick lay her down on the grass.

Through her clothing, he stroked her from her neck to her knees, Dora both awkward but pliant. Nobody had done this before, nobody had dared to run their hands over her breasts, clothed or unclothed. She had a fleeting thought that it should be Steve doing this, not Patrick, but then had Steve ever said such flattering things to her? Would he even think to? Would he be like one of the village lads, jerking his head to where he wanted her to go? Would he have such finesse as this experienced man who was setting her body alight?

Patrick sneaked a hand up under her raspberry sweater, feeling the heat of her body through the thin shirt she wore underneath it. "Too many clothes," he muttered, and began to unbutton the waistband of her jodhpurs. "You're so beautiful, I want to see all of you."

Not yet, Dora thought wildly, not yet. Let me get used to one thing at a time. "No," she gasped. "Just kiss me."

"Little tease." But Patrick left her jodhpurs alone, stroked her hair back from her face, and turned his attention to her lips. She was a virgin, he was sure of it; but virgins aren't virgins forever, and he'd be prepared to wait a week or two to stake his claim on this one, to make his mark, be the one she'd remember forever.

His hands roamed her breasts while he kissed her, and while her mouth was giving he could feel her ready for flight beneath him, like a horse being broken in; half wanting to give in, but also striving for self-preservation. But all young horses give in sometime; if not today, then tomorrow. She had the innocence of a colt; a breath of fresh air in the midst of the women he usually saw who were knowing and had done it all.

"Dora, if we don't stop soon I won't be responsible for my actions," he threatened, the bulge in his jodhpurs obvious as he knelt and pulled her to her knees. "Do you have any idea what you do to me, lovely girl?"

Dora's heart thudded; happiness surged through her; lust, love... close cousins, she couldn't tell the difference. For a moment she'd been worried in case he took her anyway, regardless of her saying no, but now he was pulling her to her feet, still kissing her, still wanting her – but respecting her. Oh yes, thought Dora, oh yes, this is how it's supposed to be. She was his lovely girl; next time, then, she'd have the courage to go all the way.

"Have you any idea how hard it is to mount a horse with an erection?" Patrick grumbled.

"Starlight's a mare, she can't have one," Dora giggled, deliberately misunderstanding him. It was feeble, but they doubled up, giggling hopelessly.

Dora rode home in a cloud of love, imagining many more days like this, countless days. Patrick could move his yard closer to Follyfoot – if he loved her, he would, as her work with the old horses was, in her view, as important as his own. They'd ride

together, she could help him school young horses, he could help her on Sundays at Follyfoot; that is, if they weren't going somewhere lovely for lunch and leaving Steve in charge. Steve...she felt a flush of guilt, a pang of desire, and dismissed it. He'd made it clear he was only a friend over the time she'd known him, leaving the way clear for her to meet someone as perfect as Patrick.

"Where are you riding next weekend?" she asked him. The eventing season was still in full swing.

"There are trials near Manchester. Archer Park. Not huge, but there's some stiff competition. We'll be leaving before dawn on Saturday and won't get home until after dark, so I won't ask you to come along, it'll be too dreary for you. Do you think you'll be free for lunch on Sunday though, or does Sean get every Sunday off?"

"Steve," she said automatically, wondering why Patrick couldn't remember the names of people at Follyfoot, when she'd mentioned them so often. "And I'll be free." She smiled. "All afternoon."

He smiled back, and his smile widened in triumph as he realised what she meant.

Patrick stayed at Follyfoot for hours, helping Dora sweep the yard and do other chores, flirting with her and giving her darting, soft kisses when she least expected them. As dusk started to fall, Steve returned. His eyes took in the body language, Dora's guileless laugh and sparkling eyes, and he sighed miserably. He should never have gone to visit his gran and aunty; or would this have happened anyway?

The clinch Patrick held her in when he said goodbye made Steve clench his fists. He knew he should be happy for Dora, and he also knew he should have made a play for her before now, but she'd only ever treated him as a mate. Now it was too late; he'd seen that look before in women; they glowed when they were falling in love. And the bastard was her class too, the type who knew which knife and fork to hold for which course of food, and how to catch a waiter's attention with a James Bond-type tilt of one eyebrow.

He watched from his room, every touch of their lips burning a hole in him, and contemplated leaving. The thing that held him, beyond Dora, was the sense of home, of Slugger's kind face, and Ron's mocking laugh; he belonged here, as they all did. Or did Dora? Really? Had this phase of her life, the folly of



being at Follyfoot, run its course and would she pursue what she had been brought up to do? Steve knew he'd stay and find out, no matter how painful it was.

The Land Rover drove away with a toot of the horn and much waving from both the driver's window and Dora's right arm. Steve sighed, and trudged downstairs and across the yard.

"Hi," Dora said cheerfully.

"Hi yourself." He tried to act normal, but it all seemed fake. "Nice day?"

"Lovely. We went for a ride. How about you?"

Steve couldn't take her delighted face any more. For the first time, he lied to her. "Fantastic. I went out with a girl, she took me home, and we had a great time. All that activity makes a man hungry." He smiled tautly, rubbing his hands, and strode to the farmhouse, leaving Dora shocked and open mouthed behind him.

They barely spoke to each other for the rest of the week. If they did, it was simply about the horses they were looking after. The friendly banter, even the jibes about Dora being a dreamer and Steve being negative, stopped. Steve was jealous of Patrick. Dora was jealous of a girl who didn't exist, little did she know it. Quite why she was jealous she wasn't sure; after all, she had Patrick now, and she'd be seeing him on Sunday.

After a particularly silent breakfast on Saturday, which was so uncomfortable even Ron had stopped larking about, Dora phoned the Colonel. "Uncle, what are you doing today?"

"Pottering, my dear. I'd hoped to have someone over to view a horse but they've cancelled. Why? Did you fancy a day with your old Uncle? I thought you'd much prefer young Patrick."

"Patrick's riding at Archer Park, near Manchester. I'd love to go and see him ride, but I can't drive. Yet." She'd been practicing on the ancient Follyfoot Land Rover, Ron and Steve patiently sitting with her as she crunched gears around the lanes. "I don't suppose you'd like a day watching horse trials?"

"Dora, that's a splendid idea. There's supposed to be hot competition at Archer Park, too. Should be a marvellous day out. I'll pick you up in half an hour, shall I?"

Dora frantically changed clothes four times. She couldn't decide whether to turn up in a tweed jacket and jodhpurs, thereby claiming her knowledge of what was actually going on, or be an archetypal eventer's girlfriend in a pretty dress and boots. Good sense won out – "you can't help Patrick with his horses in a DRESS," she told herself, particularly, a little voice said, one that's clearly last year's since you don't buy dresses. She added to the tweed and jodhs ensemble with a flat woollen cap, the sort grooms wore, which, when paired with her tight jodhs, form-fitting jacket and heavy eye makeup, gave her a jaunty if not horsily sexy air. She barely had time to dash some pale pink lipstick on when the Colonel blew the horn on the red sports car.

Steve noticed her go. He wondered where she was off to, and surmised it was loverboy. The getup was horsey, but the makeup was come-hither, even more than she wore on a daily basis. Of course the Colonel would be happy to take her. Patrick was one of his class, not like Steve, a miner's son with hardly a penny in the bank.

The Colonel drove with the same careful efficiency that had seen him successfully through the last war, overtaking with precision, enjoying the power when he had the space. The little car roared happily and Dora felt on top of the world.

"So young Patrick's taken a shine to you?" he yelled over the engine.

"Oh yes – and me to him!" Dora replied.

"Hmm... he might be thinking of settling down at last. Plenty of girls in his past."

Dora felt a slight unease. "I thought he didn't have time for girls."

"Every man has time for girls, Dora. But they weren't like you. They weren't the kind of girls you marry."

Dora gasped. Marriage? The Colonel knew Patrick's father, Sir Giles Radisson; they'd fought in the war together. Patrick must have said something to his family. "Uncle! Do you think so?"

"You're the sort of girl men like him choose to marry when they've done their racing around," the Colonel shouted. "Apparently he's told Giles you're quite a prize."

Dora grinned from ear to ear as the car sped across the endless grey ribbon to Manchester. Finally the signs for Archer Park, tacked to trees, started appearing. She felt butterflies in her stomach.

Bunting fluttered in the brisk breeze. The tannoy was indistinguishable, a distorted echo of sound, and trailers and lorries of all descriptions dotted the green expanse of the riders' area. The Colonel barked at anyone who tried to tell him to park elsewhere and slotted the car neatly in a space near a soggy bit of ground grandly titled Judges' Car Park.

The cross-country segment had started, with horses still engaged in the dressage phase. Dora dragged the Colonel around the front of the judges' tent where they found a board which told them that, at the moment, Patrick was second in dressage behind Princess Anne and was, according to one of the stewards she grabbed, about to go through the start on the cross-country.

"Come on, Dora, let's go to the last fence and watch." The Colonel, pipe in mouth, strode purposefully through the crowd, Dora dodging people beside him, until they found the final fence, a fearsomely heavy pyramid of hardwood, ready to make the weariest horse lift his legs.

A bay thundered closer as they watched, its rider swearing loudly as the horse, tired, thought of ducking out. A flick with the crop and the horse straightened up and cleared the jump

by a mile. Despite the language, Dora recognized the unmistakable features of the Princess Royal, grim-faced, ponytail flowing over her shoulders as she pushed the bay on to the finish.

The course was a long one; once a rider was half way round, the next one was given the go-ahead. So they waited while a black horse, its shoulders white with sweat and forelegs cream with grease, was ridden hard at the fence by a man Dora didn't know. The black was, despite the sweat, still pulling at the bit, giving his all, and treated the fence with disdain.

"Now it's Patrick," Dora said with certainty, savouring his name on her tongue. Patrick. Mrs Patrick Radisson. Dora Radisson. She squinted until Patrick's bright chestnut mount – Russet Day – came into view over the rise. Russet, she recalled, was an ex-racehorse, considered by many to be too fine-boned for eventing, but the gelding had nerves of steel and the spring to match. Patrick was all concentration going into the final fence – a glorious thud of hooves, a grunt from the horse, a moment of silence as the fence fell away under them, then the kadok, kadok, as Russet headed for the finishing line.

"Fine seat," said the Colonel approvingly of Patrick's back view.

"Let's go find his trailer," urged Dora.

Unlike the bigger stables, Patrick didn't have a lorry, but towed a trailer with Patrick Radisson, Eventer, painted on the sides. He'd told Dora that with sponsorship he could expect to upgrade to a lorry any time now, so the grooms could take the horses in comfort throughout the UK and Europe. Until now he'd hired a lorry for long journeys.

Patrick's navy blue trailer with the smart gold lettering was easy to find, parked at an arrogant angle under the shelter of an oak tree. There was a groom – male – leaning against the side of the trailer smoking, and beside him a very glamourously dressed girl, in a Kelly green minidress and matching leather boots, fishnet stockings, and an alic band holding back a waistlength waterfall of hair as chestnut as Russet Day himself. Dora thought she had to be at least 25, probably older. Perhaps too old for the alic band. She had a cunning, knowing face with even heavier makeup than Dora's, and pulled on a cigarette as she chatted to the groom. The groom's girlfriend? Dressed up for a day out?

Patrick suddenly appeared from around the front of the trailer, on a blowing Russet Day. He jumped down, threw the reins to the groom, and unclipped his helmet, chucking it to the ground and running his hands through his damp, curling hair.

Dora was about to call out, "Patrick! Darling!" but lacking the courage to actually call him Darling to his face, changed her mind. She waved, and decided on "Patrick!" instead, but the word died in her throat as Patrick embraced the redhead with-

out noticing Dora at all. He kissed her so long and hard Dora didn't know whether to feel hurt, angry, or plain uncomfortable. He wrapped his legs around and about hers, pulling her close, his hands like spiders up and down her body, one hand having the daring to go up her miniskirt, exposing the fact she only wore stockings and suspenders, not a knicker in sight, and burrow happily in there, the girl writhing against him, moaning in between her kisses. Patrick, his face still joined to hers, opened the front door of the trailer, dragged her inside and shut it after them with a slam.

It was hurt, after all. If he was serious about her, he wouldn't be dragging the redhead so lustfully into the trailer. Dora felt tears spring to her eyes and turned away.

"Dora." The Colonel gently took her arm and led her behind the huge oak. "I'm sorry. We shouldn't have come."

"Did you know?"

"Of course not! Silly girl, do you think I'd let you see that? My dear, obviously he's not for you. He's not ready to settle down."



Dora sobbed. The golden afternoons, his mouth, his hands, his lips, his lovely, lovely words... even if she saw him again, she could never give herself to him. Not to just be one of many, for sense told her the Kelly green girl was one of a series, to be taken in triumph after a good round, and just as easily discarded when the next pretty girl came along. I won't be the next one, she told herself. A voice inside her said that even if she became Mrs Patrick Radisson, the girls would still be around any moment that she wasn't.

The Colonel held her, patting her back awkwardly, hoping firstly that she couldn't hear the moans of ecstasy from the trailer, then hoping she could, to know once and for all Patrick still liked his unsuitable girls.

"Let's go home," he said, an arm around her shoulder, guiding her to the car, because Dora was blind with tears.

Steve looked keenly at her face as they measured the feed for evening stables. It was, curiously, freshly scrubbed, bereft of even the usual eyeliner. Her eyelids were swollen. He felt a swell of triumph and couldn't resist it: "How was loverboy then?"

"He's not loverboy," she said shortly, busy with the barley.

"Oh, sorry. Patrick. How was Patrick?" Amazing how much you could make a name sound like an insult, he discovered.

"Busy. With a girl in Kelly green." Dora ladled out the barley unthinkingly.

"Whoa....hold it, girl. Sultan doesn't get that much, he's fat enough as it is." His hand, warm and strong and gentle all at once, came down over hers. She dropped the feed measure back into the barley, turning her back on him, but Steve knew all too well by now what that heaving of the shoulders meant.

"Dora. Come here, girl." He took hold of her shoulders, pulled her towards him and held her tight, her head against his collarbone. She felt fragile and very unattainable, yet somehow reachable too. "I'm sorry it didn't work for you."

"Are you?" she hiccupped. "Are you really?"

"Yes. No. I don't know. I just don't like seeing you hurt. You deserve rainbows, not storms." He stroked her back, his cheek on her hair, savouring the moment, and wishing that the occasion could be different, that he was holding her because she wanted him, not someone else.

Rainbows, not storms. That was dreamer's talk, Dora thought. Could it be that Steve was finally accepting her for who she was? It was something to hang onto, something in this particular storm. She nestled against him, her arms around him, feeling his thin, strong frame beneath the equally thin sweater, her cheek close enough to his to feel the warmth emanating from it, and the golden haired man vanished from her thoughts. The dark man holding her was talking rainbows, and that was a start.



The end

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