

## Just TheTicket

“Good-bye, love you too,” Mary said, as she put down the phone. Seconds later she found her husband Jack’s arm lovingly placed on her shoulder as she tried to holdback the tears. It was always the same every time she spoke to Clare, it finished up with her crying and Jack trying to comfort her.

“Oh, Jack, you don’t know how much I miss her, we haven’t seen her since last Christmas, that was nine months ago. And now she’s working part time to help with her tuition fees she can’t find time to visit us either. I want to look at her face and give her a great big cuddle. Why did she have to pick a university that was so far away? She could’ve picked somewhere closer, somewhere in Scotland would’ve made it easier for us to visit her.”

“I miss her too, Mary. I wish I could find a way for us to both be able to go and see her, but the cost of going down to York on public transport is beyond our pensions

“Yes I know, Jack, if only we still had our car we would be alright, we could pop down and see her every couple of months.”

Although she hadn’t done it on purpose, Mary’s comments had made Jack feel a guilty even though the situation that they found themselves in wasn’t his fault. For thirty years he’d been a production manager in a factory but the job became too stressful. He was making people redundant on a regular basis, his blood pressure was high and he couldn’t sleep.

Mary was worried that the stress might lead to some serious health problems and they talked often about having a complete change of lifestyle.

“Just pack it in, Jack,” she would say, “just leave, we’ll manage somehow. There’s no point in going to work every day if it’s making you ill.” A few weeks later the opportunity arose for him to volunteer for redundancy and he took it. It was the start of a new lifestyle for them both, they wouldn’t have much money but they’d be happy in each other’s company.

They sold their large detached bungalow and moved into a smaller place to reduced their out-goings and Jack earned some money by doing odd jobs. They were happy spending more quality time together and ever hour they spent in each other’s company was a blessing.

The plan was going well, they had settled into their smaller home where they were happy and content. The only cloud on the horizon was not being able to see Clare and it was beginning to create some anxiety especially for Mary.

“What are we going to do, Jack? If I don’t see her soon I’ll burst.”

“There was that week-end special coach trip to York, that I pointed out to you in the local paper last Friday, sweetheart. It included all meals and evening entertainment, it sounded just perfect.”

“But it cost £149 each, Jack, we just don’t have that sort of money to spare do we?” She wiped another tear from her eyes.

“I’m going to take a bath perhaps a long soak will cheer me up a bit.”

Jack, did as he always did when she went for a bath, he took the opportunity to listen to some music, the ‘King’ would put a smile

back on his face he thought. He and Mary had always had different tastes in music, so he played his favourite when she was out of the room. She couldn't stand Elvis, she much preferred Cliff.

He could still remember the comment she made about Elvis when they first started courting in the fifties, she called him a "pathetic Yankee crooner."

He'd been an Elvis fan ever since he left school and over the years he had amassed a great record collection. He popped a CD in the draw and sat back to listen to one of his greatest hits. The two suitcases that he kept in the loft contained LPs, EPs, forty fives and even a couple of old seventy eights. He couldn't play them now of course, his music system didn't have a turntable. Anyway he had bought CDs with all of his favourite tracks so it didn't matter much.

Elvis was about half-way through singing "Can't help falling in love," when he had a flash of inspiration. He could sell his record collection and use the money to fund the trip to York. He wasn't sure how much he'd make out of the sale so decided to keep it a secret from Mary until he knew. He didn't want to raise her hopes and cause any more upset.

The following day Jack went out for his usual morning stroll to the newsagents for his paper and bought a copy of a magazine that specialised in record collecting. He felt very devious when he dropped it off in the shed where he would read it later.

"I'm off to give the shed a bit of a tidy up," he said to Mary, as he left the house after his breakfast. The magazine was interesting and he made a list of the dealers that he thought would

make him a good offer. He rang the potential buyers later the same day while Mary was out shopping and made arrangements for them to view the records on Saturday afternoon when she would be helping out at the church jumble sale.

Saturday soon came. "Good-bye dear, hope you make lots of money." And I hope I do too, he thought to himself and went to work getting the two suitcases of records down from the loft. He had arranged for three buyers to see his collection at half hour intervals and was soon opening the door to the first one.

The first buyer was roughly what he expected. About thirty years old mostly dressed in black, long hair and sunglasses. He wasted no time, and was soon looking through the records making a tutting sound every now and again. After ten minutes he came to his decision, it wasn't what Jack had expected

"No, not much call for vinyl now a days, all this stuff is available on CDs. Tell you what, granddad, I'll give you fifty quid for the lot, I can't be fairer than that."

Jack showed the man to the door.

"I'll let you know if I decide to sell them," he said while forcing a smile, "thanks for coming."

Jack, was gutted, his high expectations and hopes of making Mary happy had just been dashed. Perhaps the next one will offer a better deal he thought, but a seed of doubt had been sown. His lack of confidence proved to be right, the next man was almost a carbon copy. He went through the same motions, even making the same tutting noises, he even had the cheek to offered him less than the first crook.

He couldn't understand why these men were bothering. They knew what he was selling before they came, so why turn up and offer such low amounts? It didn't make sense. Disillusioned he even thought of ringing the last potential buyer and telling him not to both, but it was too late, he would probably be on his way.

Another darkly clad man of similar age duly arrived and followed the same pattern as the other two, going through the records and making noises to himself. Jack was taken by surprise when the man finally spoke.

"It's a marvellous collection that you have here, sir, in fact it's one of the best collections of Elvis records that I've ever seen. You should be very proud of yourself."

"Thank you, said Jack, a little taken aback by such praise. "I'm pleased that you like them, they have given me a lot of pleasure over the years. Now, what would you be willing to pay for them."

"Well, I've already told you that I like them so I won't insult your intelligence, I'm a fair man, how does six hundred sound?"

"It sounds pretty good compared with the other offers that I've had. "Jack thought for moment, his treasure would be gone for ever if he sold them, but then he pictured the look on Mary's face when she saw Clare again.

"You've got a deal." Jack knew that he could've haggled and perhaps squeezed another fifty out of the buyer, but the man hadn't tried to rip him off like the other two, so he was satisfied. It was more than he expected, they would have enough for the tickets and some useful spending money. While the man was

counting out the cash, Jack was thinking that it would be nice if they could treat Clare to a nice meal out in a restaurant.

Right now, he just had time to rush down to the travel agents and buy the tickets before Mary came home.

“How did you get on, dear?” he asked as she came through the door.

“Not bad we raised quite a bit of cash but it was jolly hard work, my legs are throbbing like mad.”

“Why don’t you sit down and put your feet up then my angel while I put the kettle on, I’ll make you a nice cup of tea and then get us both something to eat.”

“That’s very nice of you, Jack, you are good to me.”

Jack was very pleased with himself, everything was going according to plan.

The following morning he was up early. This was the day he would reveal his surprise and he wanted it to be perfect. He made tea and toast and put it on a tray along with the envelope containing the tickets to York. Then to give the whole thing his special little touch, he went into the garden and picked a rose which he put into a sherry glass and placed it the middle of the other items .

As he took the tray into the bedroom he greeted Mary with a cheery good morning.

“It’s a lovely day, darling, here’s your breakfast and a surprise.”

Mary sat up and took the tray on her lap.

“What have you been up to, Jack?” she asked, as she

opened the envelope with fumbling fingers that were still half asleep. When she drew out the tickets, she looked at him through tear filled eyes.

“Oh Jack, you’ve made me so happy, but I don’t understand, where did you get the money from?”

“Well let’s just say, that I was helped by some pathetic Yankee crooner.”