

## Woven Love

“Meet Martin, our new man in accounts.”

She’d seen him before, Lara was sure of that. Even as Mrs Sellers, the office manager, was introducing them, Lara knew she’d seen him before. The rest of the team looked up from their rattling keyboards to nod briefly; but Lara’s gaze lingered on a face so familiar this couldn’t be the first time they’d met.

“Do you go to the gym?” she asked him, as they queued at the canteen that lunchtime. Maybe that’s where she knew him from.

He glanced down at the stodgy pudding on his tray, and the slight paunch that nudged it away from his body.

“No,” he said, apologetically.

Lara tried again. Perhaps she saw him at the park where she walked Mitzi on Saturday mornings.

“Do you have a dog?” she blurted out, as they waited for the lift down to the ground floor at the end of the day.

He shook his head again.

“No,” he said, “why?”

Lara didn’t tell the truth; that she felt she already knew him. It sounded like one of those silly things women say, when they’re angling for a date.

“I thought you might be a pet lover,” she giggled.

“I’m scared of dogs,” Martin said.

He was quiet at work, didn’t join in the office banter, but Lara found him more attractive because of it. She could flirt shamelessly with Jamie from stationary, talking in a way that would raise eyebrows in the bedroom; but just asking Martin if she could borrow his stapler made her stammer and blush.

They sometimes had to work together on projects that needed two heads, side-by-side in front of the computer screen, two bodies almost touching at one desk. They could have sent each other emails; the rest of the team were battling chatty messages

back and forth to each other constantly. But when Lara and Martin emailed each other the messages were so stiff and formal it was embarrassing, and Lara had resorted to walking to his desk and standing there mutely until he looked up and saw her.

“Do you think he feels the chemistry too?” Lara quizzed her best friend, in the pub on Friday evening.

“I reckon,” replied Katie, sipping a shocking pink cocktail, “that if you feel something that strongly he must be aware of it too. The very air around you is coloured with love.

“You’re drunk!” laughed Lara.

What Katie said was worth thinking about though. At work the next week Lara started acting as if it were true, and Martin fancied her too. She wore mascara, and made sure she fluttered her lashes whenever he was looking. He seemed to be fluttering his too.

The progress of this passion was slow, though. Come the office party, he still hadn’t declared any sort of feeling for her. Lara made a point of going to it as a single person, playing up to the meaningless threats and promises made by Jamie; stung that the man she really cared about hadn’t tried to make her his own for the evening.

“Or for a lifetime,” Lara thought, applying her lipstick in the ladies loo.

As the party progressed she loosened up to Martin again; first smiling at him, then chatting and eventually dancing with him. It was late, and the dance floor was littered with crumpled streamers, as they shuffled in a slow circle around their beating hearts.

The music got slower still. With the sweat drying sparkly on her cooling body, Lara hugged Martin tighter; squeezed him, thrust herself against him; rubbing intimately on his soft woollen folds and taut cotton.

It was like a slap, as he stepped away from her; liked he’d slapped her, for going too far. Then he left.

“Flounced out of the party,” Lara reportedly tearfully to Katie later.

The next time she saw him was by the photocopier. He quickly walked off again, but he’d left something in it.

Lara was reading the page as Martin rushed back to retrieve it.

... the warp and weft of traditional weaving, it said. Something about spindles and spinning wheels...

“What’s this got to do with accounts?” she demanded.

“Nothing,” Martin spoke quietly, looking around to make sure nobody could hear. “It’s a hobby. I’m interested in history.”

Lara had found it interesting too. The words stayed with her all day, and wove into her dreams at night. She dreamed she was shearing sheep, and giving the fleeces to a woman, the farmer’s wife, who spun them into wool. She dreamed of the wheel, and watching the lady, all in flounces, who was none other than Martin. When they kissed, Lara woke up.

He was not at work the next day. She couldn’t do a single job. Jamie, who’d got the last dance with her after Martin had left the ball early, was frisky. Lara managed to resist his advances.

It was on Saturday morning, as she walked Mitzi in the park, that Lara saw Martin again. He joined her on the tree-lined path, and they strolled together as if they’d always shared this journey. When she put her arm around him, he shied away still.

“I had a dream about you,” said Lara, teasingly, “and you were a lady.”

She didn’t add that it was in past times, because although they felt it, they couldn’t really have known each other that long. It wasn’t quite the thing to say that she’d been the man, rough and ready; and Martin had been reluctant.

“So, what else are you scared of?” she asked.

“The sums not adding up,” he said.

He was an accountant and she was a secretary; that much was clear even on a Saturday morning walk in the park. But Mitzi was rather an odd name for a sheep-dog. And the path she was leading Martin and Lara on took them to a previous relationship as man and wife, as well as the one they would have in the future.

By Alison Habens

