

## Wichita Lineman

---

'Thanks again Arthur, you're a star, you really are. OK, here we go, Adriana my girl, 'Let's take your love to Town!'

The door slammed before he could catch it. Adriana was off to meet up with her best friend Lillias, his younger sister. He held his breath, praying the kids would not waken.

'Mummy, I need a drink, my throat is dry,' called a little voice.

Arthur raced up the stairs to see to Mary Jo before she wakened the other two kids but by the time he got to them baby Randy was already girning, his cheeks aflame, teething. Jolene was out of bed and standing beside him.

'Uncle Arthur, can I come down and watch the telly with you? I'm seven now and Mummy lets me stay up till nine on Saturdays. She only put me in bed early because she was going out.'

'OK hen, off ye go doon, but dinnae let the sound get up too high, OK? An' pit oan yer dressin' goon tae, OK?'

'OK, Uncle Arthur.'

'Noo Mary Jo, sit up hen, and hae a sip o' this, OK.'

'Uncle Arthur, can I get up to watch the tele too?'

'Naw, ye canny hen, but whit if Ah tell ye a wee story instead? OK? Just haud oan while Ah get the wean afore he gits cairrit away.'

The tall thin man lifted two-year-old Randy, wiped the drool from his chin, stuck in his dummy, wrapped him in a blanket and snuggled him into the crook of his arm before sitting down on the bed with his back against the wall.

'Noo Mary Jo, shuv ower and coorie doon.'

Mary Jo was four and her sharp pixie face stared up at him from the pillow in expectation; she loved hearing his made-up stories.

'Right then Mary Jo, whit' stoary wid ye like the night, hen?'

'The one with the two wee Christmas robins that always want to fight each other. Can you do that one, please, Uncle Arthur?'

'OK hen.'

## Wichita Lineman

---

He watched her eyelids close as he finished his third story. Her thumb was in her mouth but she had stopped sucking. He stopped talking. Waited. She was gone.

He tucked both kids in and went down to face his interrogator, Jolene. At seven going on seventeen the girl always had a long list of questions:

*What had he been doing at work?*

*How was his Mum doing after her big operation?*

*Did he really enjoy cooking?*

*Was he frightened of working up the pylons?*

*When was he getting a new car?*

*Did he like Country Music too, like her Mum?*

*Had he ever been to the Grand Ole Opry?*

*What was it really like?*

But tonight the conversation took a different twist and it completely threw him.

'Uncle Arthur would you ever tell me a lie?'

'Naw Jolene hen, Ah wid never tell ye a lie. Never.'

'Do you love my Mummy?'

He felt his face flush; his breath quickened; his mouth was dry and he could feel his big ears throbbing. He cleared his throat, fumbled for his hankie and blew his nose while he tried to think of the right answer.

'No, it's OK, Uncle Arthur. I know I shouldn't have asked you like that. When I told Granny Blair I was going to ask you she said it would only embarrass you. She said everybody but Mummy knows you love her and Granny said it's a terrible pity that she doesn't fancy you. And do you know that's really annoying me because I would really like it if you were my Daddy.'

At last Arthur felt he was out of the deep water.

'No Jolene, hen, ye cannae say that. Yer Daddy is always yer Daddy, even when he's no here.'

'No he isn't Uncle Arthur. I don't want him to come back. He just shouts at us all the time and he makes Mummy cry. Anyway, he's not coming back. Not ever. I heard

## Wichita Lineman

---

Aunty Lillias telling a lady outside the school that my Daddy's got a new wife up in Glasgow and he's given her a baby too. So he's not coming back. So you don't need to worry about that. OK, Uncle Arthur? So you can be my Daddy now. If you want to, that is.'

His eyes brimmed. He blew his nose hard. Jolene was off again.

'Look, I know I'm just a wee nosey parker Uncle Arthur. Sorry but it's just that my Granny says you're too shy to ask Mummy out without a big kick up the bottom. So I thought, well, maybe if you knew I want you to be my Daddy, well it might help you.'

She moved across from the couch to the settee and cuddled into him. He draped his arm round her shoulders and hugged her back, then blew his nose again several times before he regained control.

'Right then Jolene, whit will we watch, hen?'

'Well, how about 'Only Fools and Horses'?''

'Ok hen, ah'm sure yer Mammy wid be OK wi' that. Then straight tae bed efter, OK?'

'OK Daddy Arthur.'

\*\*\*\*\*

It was a few weeks later when the phone rang. Adriana was wrapped in her dressing gown already heading for bed. She was on early shift at the supermarket next day. She checked the clock, nearly eleven; she almost left it to the answering machine. Later she wished she had.

'Hello.'

'Adriana, it's me hen.'

'Oh Arthur, I was going to ring you tomorrow. Would you be able to watch the kids again next Saturday? Jeana at work is trying to get me tickets for the Glen Campbell Concert. Her sister works at the Concert Hall box office and sometimes she gets return tickets. Are you OK to do that? I want to pay you, Arthur, if you'll let me.'

'Ah well hen, that's why ah'm ringing you. Ah went in the day tae the booking office an' Ah managed tae get two returns masel an' Ah wundert if ye might go wi' me. Ah talked tae Lillias and she'd look efter the weans fur ye and if ye are OK wi' that, then maybe we could go up tae Glesga early and go fur a wee bite tae eat? So whit dae

## Wichita Lineman

---

ye think, hen? Ah've made a booking fur hauf past six at that Italian place 'O Sole Mio' that Ah heard ye sayin' wan time that ye fancied.

While he was speaking Adriana had been cringing, dreading this moment ever since Jolene had told her about the match-making conversation with 'Daddy Arthur'. Arthur had always seemed ancient to her With his big ears, his long hooked nose and his three-piece suits, he seemed more like a minister than a potential boyfriend. And although he was very nice he was just so 'old fashioned'. She must try to find a way of letting him down gently.

'Well Arthur, that would be lovely, but only if you let me pay for everything. After all, you won't let me pay you anything for all the babysitting you've done for me.'

'Naw, Adriana, Ah cannae huv ye payin', hen. It widnae be right. The man hustae pay for a lassie on a date.'

'Well Arthur, if you won't let me pay for my half at least, then I'm going to have to say no. I'm sorry but my mind's made up.'

There was a long silence while Arthur struggled with this idea.

'OK Adriana, huv it yer ain way hen. Ye can pay me fur the ticket but Ah'll pay fur the meal, OK?'

'OK, I accept. Thanks very much Arthur, you are a very kind man.'

'Right then. So, if Ah come for the kids at say fowr and take them roon to Lillias' hoos then come back fur ye at say five, wid that be OK?'

\*\*\*\*\*

The next Sunday Lillias returned the kids mid-morning to find Adriana still in her dressing gown, sitting on the couch with her feet curled up under her, staring into the middle distance, and nursing a mug of coffee.

'Well how wiz it?'

'Oh, Lillias, he was fantastic, he's got such a sexy voice. And we had great seats. And the restaurant was great too; they were so nice and friendly. I had the lasagne, really tasty, real Italian cooking, the proper stuff, you know, home-made; and a half carafe of red wine to myself. It was really nice. A lovely evening; thanks for taking the kids.'

'Great, great Adriana, great. But efter, ye know, how did it go, ye know whit Ah mean.'

## Wichita Lineman

---

'Oh fine, I've to give him a ring if I ever fancy another night out.'

'So, are you goan' tae give him a wee ring?'

'Look, Lillias. I can't, you know, I just can't. I would if I could but, well you know. I mean he's a really nice guy and I know he has a good job with the electricity board and a nice car. And he's great with the kids but, well, he's just not my type. I really like him but, well, he's too old, too old fashioned. Sorry Lillias. I'm really, really sorry.'

'Adriana Morrison, don't you bother tae say 'sorry' tae me; jist you look in the mirror every day and say sorry tae yerself. You're a bluddy halfwit, so you are. Arthur's the best man in the hale o' Lochwinnoch, so he is.'

'Look, Lillias, look, wait ...'

The door slammed. Lillias was gone. It was nearly three weeks before they made up again. But Adriana had lost her best ever babysitter.

### *Nineteen years later.*

The phone rang.

'Hi this is Randy; who calls the Morrison mansion?'

'It's me son, Lillias. Look son, is your Mammy in?'

'No Aunty Lillias, she's still out at her place of business. She'll not be home until about ten tonight.'

'OK, son. Tell her Lillias was on, OK? Tell her Uncle Tommy and me are goan tae huv a twenty-fifth Wedding Anniversary Party a week on Saturday and that she huz tae make sure she's there, OK? Eight o'clock at the Social Club, OK? Nae excuses and nae presents. Just so that she's there. OK, son?'

'Yip! Roger that! Message received loud and clear. Three line whip and all that. I'll make sure she gets that message; Roger and over and out.'

'Aye right; cheerio son.'

\*\*\*\*\*

The bus had broken down on the motorway and Adriana was feeling stressed when she arrived at the Club and sat down beside big Elsie. She downed a double

## Wichita Lineman

---

Vodka-Coke, trying to calm herself. She loved her new job at the supermarket even though her promotion meant extra travel up to Glasgow. Another drink appeared and she downed it too. She was feeling zingy and the music was getting better: 'Wichita Lineman'. She began to sing along quietly; her body was swaying and she wanted to dance.

She saw Arthur sitting by himself and thought he looked smarter, younger than she remembered, although he still looked like a fish out of water. She giggled to herself at the thought. Well, Adriana, you are 'Head of Fish' after all. She finished the rest of her drink.

'So, Arthur, would you like to dance with me?'

'Adriana, hen, Ah've wantit tae dance wi' you the hale o' ma life!'

She was surprised at how good he was. She felt safe and secure in his arms as he waltzed her confidently to the swing of the music. She started to sing quietly and he sang along with her. He had a lovely voice, just like Glen Campbell's.

Adrina smiled up at his big long face and Arthur smiled back. He seemed much younger when he smiled.

They were married six months later.

### *Eight years on.*

Arthur is still old fashioned but she likes it now: breakfast in bed at weekends; flowers every Saturday; wee presents out of the blue. He opens the car door for her getting in and out. He does most of the cooking and housework.

Nowadays they go to the Grand Ole Opry together. He knows the words to all the songs. They sing a lot in the car and at parties. People always say they make great duo. Sometimes people ask her why she smiles so much.