Shush!

By Ian Guy

Jane, Security Guard

The Professor (F)

*The professor walks down a corridor, faint sounds of a party can be heard in the distance. As she reaches some large, imposing, doors she sees Jane, the security guard, walking towards her.*

Jane: Oh, sorry Professor, I thought you were still at the party and then leaving straight from there. I was just going to start locking up in this wing…

Prof: I’ve left the party Jane, you’re correct there, but I wanted to do a final goodbye before walking out of here for the last time.

Jane: Didn’t get to do all the farewells at the party then?

Prof: Most of them. I just need to do the most important one.

Jane: But there’s only you and me in this wing Professor, I would have known if anyone had popped back as the sensors in my office would have flashed.

Prof: My final goodbye, Jane, wasn’t to someone who was at the party. I say my final goodbye behind this door.

Jane: But the world and his wife came along this evening for your retirement party, surely there can’t be anyone else left to say goodbye to? Oooh? Have you got a secret admirer who you smuggle in, late at night? It must be someone from the IT department who can override the sensors and cameras in my office. Now that I think about it I’ve seen you chatting to that hunky junior professor. The one from Nigeria, the one who always seems to work late. Is it him? Please tell me it is.

Prof: Jane, I know I don’t know you very well, we just nod to each other at the end of the day as I leave and go back to my flat, but I had no idea you had such an active imagination. Thank you for making me smile. I see from your left hand that you’re married. You have a husband waiting for you at home?

Jane: Yes, Kevin. But he’s usually fast asleep in front of the telly when I get home.

Prof: But not tonight surely? It’s Valentine’s Day, he’ll have something special lined up won’t he?

Jane: Kevin?! Ha! If I’m lucky I’ll get a bunch of petrol station flowers and a box of Maltesers. If I’m really lucky he might still be awake. And if I’m really, really, lucky he’ll whisk me off to the bedroom where, on a good night, he could spend almost two minutes showing me how much he loves me. He like me to keep my high Vis jacket on, I think that’s what causes early lift off.

Prof: Ah. Quite. But my point is, he’ll be there, waiting for you when you get home. My love is waiting behind this door for me. If I could have a little privacy Jane…?

*She opens the large door and steps inside.*

Jane: I can give you ten minutes professor then I really do need to start locking up and setting alarms. Can’t leave Casanova waiting too long for me.

Prof: (muffled from behind the door). Thank you Jane.

Jane: (as she walks away) Mad. The whole bloody lot of them.

Prof: (*with authority*) Silence. (*Pause*) I need to speak and it’s going to be very, very difficult for me so, please*, please* can you let me say what I’ve come here to say. (*pause as she gathers her* *thoughts*) Well, this is it. I want you to know that I fell in love with you from the minute I walked through these doors thirty two years ago and looked at you for the first time and that that love has grown stronger and deeper as the days and years have rolled by. Oh, it hasn’t always been fun and games I know. We’ve fallen out over the mess that invariably happens when you’re left unsupervised for too long, at times you’ve made me angrier than I can ever remember but then, in the next second, I was laughing so much that I had tears running down my cheeks. Then, of course, there were the times when the tears were real tears of pain, anguish and sadness. Gut wrenching misery. And all caused by you! But, we came to appreciate each other and have grown together over the years learning each other’s ways, what makes us tick. What we like, what we don’t like. I’ll be honest and say that there have been days when your dark side, the evil, menacing, cold blooded aspect of you have left me chilled and despairing. Sometimes those moods would go on for days, weeks sometimes. It used to make me low. But somehow, somehow, even in those dark times there was still some underlying comfort, the feeling that I was safe and secure with you. When this part of the campus was full, bustling with young academics and we were surrounded by noise I’d look at you across the jostling bodies and smile. Smile because sooner or later I’d have you all to myself again. Although the chaos and mess left at the end of the day, encouraged by you I have to say, was enough to drive me drink. And don’t act all affronted! I caught that mood change. (*pause*) I’m sorry, let’s not leave it like this. I loved you. Love you still. Will love you always. I got the feeling I had to work bloody hard to win you over in the early years but I know I captured your heart. I know that you feel about me the same way I feel about you. We’ve grown old together. Both maturing at the same pace, greying around the edges and starting to sag a little but we had a good time didn’t we? So, goodbye to you all, my wonderful, infuriating, delicious, statesmanlike books. I love you all so much, thank you from the bottom of my heart for the best thirty two years of my life. There’s no going back, I won’t set foot in here again, I think it’s always a mistake to go back after a year or two and see what they’ve done with the place. But I know you’ll stay the same. Solid, reliable and full of knowledge. Everyone from Austen through to Zephaniah with side rooms for the technical manuals, Tax law, veganism and thousands upon thousands of other subjects. And all useful to someone. And I’ve loved you all.

*Jane enters*

Jane: Are you done Professor? I’ve just had a text from Kev, he’s splashed out on a Taste the Difference Prawn Curry and he’s about the shove it in the microwave. Has your secret lover gone? Do I need to avert my eyes?

Professor: Honestly Jane, one day your imagination’s going to get you in trouble. There’s no secret lover, well no flesh and blood one anyway, it’s the Library. The library and the books that consume me, they are what I love more than anything else in this world.

Jane: Crikey. You need to go on one of those daytime TV shows where odd women talk about their perversions. You might get your own series.

Professor: Jane, really. Have you no passion for books? At all? Don’t you ever snuggle up with a hardback and lose yourself in its covers? Surely you and Kevin have a couple of books back at the flat? What do you reach for when there’s nothing on television and there’s a howling gale outside.

Jane: (*thinks*) Well of course we read, we’ll crack open a couple of tins of IPA and I’ll grab a Mills and Boon and Kev’ll thumb through some of his girlie mags. Mind you there’s not much reading he has to do there…..

Professor: For the love of God, look around you Jane. You could come in anytime and borrow something. Go and sit in the reading room on your break, there are unexplored worlds here, just waiting for you.

Jane: I don’t know. There’s always the updates in the security manuals to read……

Professor: Well, it’s all here, only a few steps from your office, whenever you want it. And now, I must go, I can’t keep you from Kevin and the Prawn Curry any longer. (*to the Library*) Goodbye my darlings, think fondly of me. I leave you with a new apprentice. Bon Voyage Jane dear.

*She sweeps out.*

Jane: Yep. Right the first time, bloody mad, they should have packed her off years ago. (*Sighs*) Now, listen here you lot, I’ve been on tenterhooks for the past month, terrified that the Prof would find out and drop down dead of a heart attack. Everyone’s been sworn to secrecy. You lot are off. Packing cases and boxes arriving tomorrow. Most of you are going into storage but a select few will still be on display in the new digital library in the IT building. This stuffy old room is getting a makeover and will re-emerge as the Dream Catcher Holistic Centre. I’ve been told you’ll be able to reach out to Astral Plains. I might book Kev in for a session.

*She turns off the lights and exits.*