Little Tales from Beatrice's Writing Desk

Just One More Page



Told by Miss Beatrice Pennyfeather

A story by Effie Moss

My dear reader,

I had promised myself an early night.

My correspondence was finished. The ink bottle was closed. I had even put tomorrow's breakfast plate on the table.

A most organised end to the day.

Then I noticed my book.

It was sitting beside the armchair, where I had left it at a particularly inconvenient moment.

Somebody had just knocked on a door.

One could hardly go to bed without knowing who it was.

I put on my slippers.

"One page," I said.

I settled into the chair and opened the book.

The visitor turned out to be a woman carrying a parcel. She refused to give her name.

This was unhelpful.

I read another page.

Inside the parcel was a silver spoon, a railway ticket and a letter which began:

If you are reading this, I have already gone.

"Gone where?" I asked.

The book did not immediately say.

I fetched my blanket.

Outside, the wind brushed against the window. Somewhere along the lane, an owl called.

I hoped it was not calling for me. I was rather occupied.

By the end of the chapter, the woman had disappeared, the spoon had been stolen and somebody was hiding in a cupboard.

I looked at the clock.

Then I looked back at the cupboard.

There are moments when a clock is simply offering information one does not require.

I turned the page.

A little later, I became aware of a sound.

Tap.

I paused.

Tap, tap.

It came from the window.

I lowered my book.

An owl was sitting on the sill.

“Oh,” I said. “It was you.”

He peered through the glass at the lamp, the blanket and the book resting on my knees.

I opened the window a little.

“Is anything the matter?”

“I was going to ask you,” he replied. “Your light is usually out by now.”

“I’m nearly finished.”

He glanced at the book.

There was quite a lot of it remaining.

“With the chapter,” I added.

“Of course.”

He tucked his wings closer.

“What’s happened?”

“Well,” I said, “there’s a missing spoon.”

He leaned forward.

“And a woman with no name.”

“How inconvenient.”

“And somebody in a cupboard.”

The owl considered this.

“Which cupboard?”

I looked down at the page.

“I haven’t got to that part yet.”

He settled more comfortably on the sill.

I brought him a cushion.

Then I began to read aloud.

By the time we discovered who was in the cupboard, he had asked me to go back twice, once because a cart rattled past and once because he felt the railway ticket deserved further consideration.

Eventually, I reached the end of the chapter.

We sat quietly for a moment.

“Well,” said the owl.

“Yes,” I agreed.

Neither of us moved.

Then he tilted his head towards the book.

“Does the next one look terribly long?”

I checked.

“Not especially.”

Which was true, compared with some chapters.

I pulled the blanket over my paws and turned the page.

Tomorrow’s breakfast plate could wait a little longer.

Yours,

Miss Beatrice Pennyfeather

P.S. The owl has borrowed the book. He tells me he intends to return it tomorrow. I shall believe that when I see it.