**My Lamplight Moment.**

This is a true story, told exactly as it happened.

Do you believe in fate? Do you believe in destiny? That being in a certain place, at a certain time, was preordained that you should be there? When you reach the end of my story, I will explain why I am asking these questions.

It was October 25th 1970. I was the archetypal Essex Girl; everything was just a little bit false, the eyelashes, the hair, and the lifestyle. I was the Landlord’s daughter of a proper Essex boozer. After the sudden and untimely death of my Mother, I had given up on my own career and thrown my lot in to run the family Pub with my Father, in beautiful Basildon. I wasn’t a bad looking bird, bit on the flash side, and still am fifty-one years later. For a young girl in her early twenties I was earning very good money and had bought myself a white Jaguar 3.4S car. Wish I still had it, as it would probably be worth more than my house. I was driving the white Jag that night, all those years ago, up to London. I had been warned by my Father definitely not go to the Blind Beggar pub or the Regency Club, in fact, not to go to anywhere remotely connected to the infamous Kray Brothers. Did I take any notice? No.

As I travelled along the A13 up to London I noticed a very sinister knocking coming from the rear of the car. My traveling companions or back then known as Pulling Partners were my best mates Viv and Val. We mused between us as to the possible nature of the knocking, and decided to try and seek out help in one of the pubs we were on our way to visit. At this point I should tell you that this awesome vehicle of mine was an x police car, very similar to the one Morse drove. Suffice to say trying to seek mechanical assistance on a pub crawl was not a good idea and after a few orange juices and no joy in finding a mechanic we decided to attempt our journey back home to Basildon.

It got worse, the knocking. Then I had a flash of inspiration, this was an x police car so if we were to flag down a police car they would surely help us. I thought it best to get off the busy Bethnal Green road so pulled into the curb in Hereford Street by a church close to an old-fashioned gaslight style lamppost and waited for a Police car to come over the horizon. By some amazing fluke of chance within seconds a blue and white Police Panda car came into view. Viv and Val got out of the Jag and waved it down. The Officer in the passenger seat emerged and walked towards me, he removed his hat, a flat cap happily not a helmet. As he did so our eyes connected, in that moment, I was totally smitten and knew I would marry him.

‘Is this your vehicle Miss?’ Asked the Officer.

‘Well, yes’ I replied.

‘What’s the registration number?’ My mind went blank.

‘Just a second Officer I will get out and have a look’. The officer looked a little bemused.

‘Stay where you are Miss, what’s the problem?’ I related the knocking saga and suggested he joined me in the car to hear it for himself and to advise if he thought it safe to drive the 30 or so miles home.

‘I am not getting in that car with you, you could claim anything, say I touched you inappropriately or worse. Back it up under that lamppost and I will take a look’.

‘Bit of a problem here, I’m not very good at reversing. (Another thing that hasn’t changed in 50 years). So, could you please reverse it back under the lamplight for me Officer?’ I handed him the keys and smiled sweetly.

‘You and your friends go and sit in the Panda Car, my colleague and I will take a look, and most important don’t touch anything’. Val, Viv and I sat in the Police car and the other Officer Roy, joined my Officer Graham, who had, by then, backed the car up under the light of the old streetlamp to investigate my sinister sound.

The Police radio crackled into life. It was just too tempting, ‘126 come in, coffee has just arrived at the Nick, where are you? 126 respond’, Oh dare I? I couldn’t resist.

‘126 is just a little bit busy at the moment, just keep the pot warm, he will be with you shortly, over’.

‘Who’s that? Where is 126?’ I bottled out and replaced the handset.

Moments later Graham walked back towards the Panda car, leaned in. I melted.

‘I advise you not to attempt to drive this car any further tonight’ said the dashing Graham. He had extremely dark hair with tiny premature flashes of grey at the temples. Dark eyes, he was absolutely delicious. ‘Leave the car with us there’s a garage around the corner, owner owes us a favor. We will get it sorted’.

Quite elated with his offer, I decided to chance my luck just a little further, ‘How will we get home?’ I fluttered through the false top and bottom lashes.

‘We will take you to Liverpool Street but as that is out of our patrol area please don’t contact us, don’t thank us, we will call you with news of the car once it’s fixed. You haven’t touched anything inside our vehicle have you?’

‘Most definitely not’ flutter flutter of the lashes.

With Roy driving, Graham in the front, Viv, Val and myself on the rear seat of the somewhat snug Police Panda car we started our journey home. I left a note out for my Dad, as I knew he would be concerned when he got up next morning, and noticed the car was missing. It read ‘Dear Dad, don’t worry about the car, I have left it in London with a Police Officer who I will most probably marry XXX’. I still have that note.

A few days later Graham and Roy delivered the car back to our Pub, I don’t think they were quite prepared for the full on effect of The Barge. They likened us to the characters in Beverly Hillbillies a popular TV series of the time, casting myself as Elly May Clampett. I gave them lunch all sitting round a large wooden kitchen table, fire in the hearth, dog under the table, pub closing in the afternoon so we could all sit and eat together. Cozy really cozy, nothing like the London they had come from or the Basildon that is today. It did take just a little gentle persuasion but on April 13th 1971 Graham and I were married, with Roy as our Best man, Viv and Val, and the cream of H Division Bethnal Green’s finest as our guests.

Graham had to leave the Met Police, as back then a police Officer could not be married to a Licensee’s daughter or live outside the Metropolitan Police district. He joined Dad and I in the Pub and went on to have a very successful career in the Licensed Trade. In the year 2000 Graham was Governor of the Society of Licensed Victuallers. Together we had three children and I now have eight amazing grandchildren. Sadly, we lost Graham 2004 so the Lamplight Moment of our first meeting remains especially precious to me.

I now return to the questions I asked of you at the start, the ‘déjà vu’ of my story. Is there a hand out there that guides you to be in a certain place at a given time so destiny or fate can work its magic? See what you think. I was at Newmarket races, with my Father sometime, around 1973. Dad was a racing man usually betting on odds on favorites, he was having a disastrous day, nothing came in for him. We were just about to give up on any luck that day and leave the course when the runners and riders for the last race came over the tannoy. Dad did something completely out of character, he put the last his cash on an outsider HEREFORD. By a miracle, good old Hereford romped in at thirty-three to one. ‘What ever made you pick that horse?’ I asked. His reply, ‘Hereford Street, that’s where the church was where I married your Mother’. A little shiver ran down my spine as I realized that it was outside that same church, under the light of the old fashioned lamppost, where my Lamplight Moment happened.

What happened to me? Still an Essex girl at heart I decided to start my 70’s having as much fun as I did in the 70’s. Always out for lunch and having fun with my friends. This time last year I was off on a Caribbean cruise. Now I’m told I’m old and vulnerable, to stay at home and lock myself away from this horrible virus we are all fighting. So, here I am making Zoom calls with my lovely grandchildren and writing true, but slightly silly stories of days gone by. I hope you have enjoyed the little tale of my Lamplight Moment, and that it made you smile, stay safe.

The End.