

# LOVE'S UNLIKELY PATH

## My Take Away Builder



### Juliette Foster

In the past few days I've had the feeling that I'm surrounded by emotional disorder. The normally hard-nosed, hard-headed, ruthless males at my workplace have suddenly discovered they really do have a tender side. As if that wasn't strange enough, the usually level-headed, tough-talking women of my social circle have been giggling like hysterical teenagers and buying expensive perfume and lacy lingerie. It can only point to one thing – Valentine's Day!

Call me a cynic, but I stopped believing in St. Valentine when I gave up on Santa Claus. The possibility of a patron saint of romantics dispatching an army of naked cherubs to fire love darts at the unwary, is about as likely as a fat guy in a red suit sliding his gut and gift sack down a narrow chimney. Of course, I believe in romantic love but not like that.

In any case, I do know that true love's arrows can pierce even the toughest and most grizzled of hearts.

That certainly happened with George, my ancient but trusted builder-cum-handyman. George and I met five years ago shortly after I bought my house. My initial impression of him was less than favourable. He was a man of few words and even fewer facial expressions. Basically, he was a bit short changed in the sense of humour department.

But what George lacked in social skills, he more

than made up for with the brilliance of his handy work. Under his skillful hands, the abominable décor favoured by the previous owners of my house – doors painted a sludge brown gloss, walls with sickly yellow wallpaper and floorboards buried beneath a shag pile ensemble of scarlet, green, and purple – were soon replaced with feathery pastels and calming shades of white to make it a real home for me.

During a rare conversation with the laconic George, I found that he was almost seventy years old and, following his wife's death, had lived alone for the past thirty years! Work was his life and as long as he was gainfully employed he was perfectly happy. It therefore came as a bit of shock when three weeks after our conversation, George's behaviour began to change. He seemed easily distracted, less focused, and often late for work. As the decorating fell dangerously behind schedule, I had to confront him:

'Okay George, what's going on with you?'

After a brief but uncomfortable silence, George finally mumbled, 'I'm in love'.

The man of few words grew misty eyed as he revealed how he had been energetically courting the 33-year old sister of one of his clients.

A further twist to his story was that the object of his affection didn't speak a word of English and lived in Beijing! That's a long way from Croydon and George (bless him) couldn't speak Mandarin! 'So how does it work?' I dared to ask.

'We do it with letters', replied George and he proceeded to explain how he would write notes to his lover in English, post them to his client, who then translated them into Mandarin and sent them on to his sister. She in turn would write her replies in Mandarin, send to her brother who would translate into English, and then post back to George.

This relationship was not so much long distant as it was long winded!

But somehow love had flourished between the two to the extent that George had booked a flight to China to 'check out' his new girlfriend.

'What about the decorating?' I wailed, selfishly. He was supposed to be gutting my kitchen, after all.

'Don't worry', he said reassuringly. 'I'll be back in a couple of weeks.'

He did indeed return. Fourteen days after flying to Beijing a bachelor, George returned to England a married man. He briefly stopped by to show me his wedding photographs and to arrange a date to finish my kitchen.

That was almost a year ago and I'm still waiting!

Oh well, perhaps it was unreasonable to assume that, having been bitten by the love bug, George would return to the quiet efficiency of his bachelor days. Either way, George has now hung up his grubby overalls for good and thanks to St Valentine's arrows, the gutting of my kitchen still awaits a builder.

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