

## Blind Date 1

‘He’s a free agent, and he’s very good looking. He has a good job, he’s charming, isn’t full of himself and he’s happy to go on a blind date with you, even though he’s never been on one before either. Come on Petra, give the guy a chance. What more could you ask? We’re talking Amici’s here, not the local burger bar.’

Stella was getting frustrated. Half an hour of gentle persuasion had got her nowhere. She moved on to cajoling.

‘Honestly, Petra. What have you got to lose? Aren’t you fed up with the TV for company seven nights a week?’

‘Let me think about it, Stella. I’ll let you know by the weekend.’

‘No dice, sister.’ Stella had her on the ropes and she wasn’t going to settle for a draw now. ‘I’m not leaving until you agree.’

Petra threw up her hands. ‘Oh all right, you win, but it’s your fault if it’s a disaster. Tell him I’m okay for Saturday.’

Stella whooped and threw her arms around her best friend. He’s a gentleman, it’s Amici’s. ‘What could possibly go wrong?’

Petra looked at her watch for the twentieth time. *Where was he?* He was half an hour late, and counting. She snatched a quick look towards the door. Nothing! She could sense that people were beginning to take an interest in her. *A woman on her own at a table for two? They must think I’ve been stood up.* One or two of the women looked at her sympathetically. That made it worse.

Petra made up her mind to face the humiliation head on. As she picked up her bag, she heard the door crash open and a gasping male voice ask where table nine was. Thirty seconds later he was at the table, red faced, blurting out apologies.

‘I’m so, so sorry Petra, please forgive me. There was an accident, the traffic. I parked up and caught the bus, got off at the wrong stop and had to run back here. I feel terrible. If I had your mobile...’

Petra held up her hand. ‘It’s fine Martin, honestly. I haven’t been here that long myself.’

Martin began another volley of apologies, but Petra stopped him in mid flow and almost begged him to sit down. She could feel the eyes of the whole restaurant on them. *This was worse than sitting here alone.*

She took him in as he removed his overcoat. He was about thirty-five, and as Stella had promised, very good looking. He was tall, of medium build, with a strong jaw and beautiful soft blue eyes. When he spoke, his voice was deep, smooth, with a maybe a hint of Irish in there somewhere.

‘I’m very pleased to make your acquaintance, Petra. Stella’s told me so much about you.’ Martin offered his hand across the table, caught the cut-glass vase and emptied its contents over the tablecloth.

Petra groaned inwardly. Martin tried to mop up some of the water with his napkin.

‘Oh dear, oh dear,’ he stuttered. ‘I’m so clumsy when I’m nervous.’

Petra looked on silently and breathed a huge sigh of relief as the waiter took control of the situation. Martin leant back in his chair, shamefaced, as the waiter cleared up the mess.

They were offered a new table, but Petra refused in an instant. She was embarrassed enough already. Moving tables would only make them the centre of attention again. She decided to take the initiative. Martin was obviously nervous and trying too hard to make a success of the evening.

‘What do you do, Martin?’ She asked, although she knew the answer before it came. Stella had primed her with all the details.

‘I’m a garage manager,’ he said, glad not to be taking the lead. ‘The same one Stella works at. She’s in sales.’

Petra refrained from saying that she knew exactly what her best friend did for a living. ‘Do you enjoy it? Been there long?’

Martin spent the next ten minutes telling her about how he had started as a mechanic and worked his way through the company. He was just about to relive his job interview for the manager’s post when the wine waiter arrived at their side. Petra looked at him gratefully.

‘Red, white or pink?’ asked Martin, feeling more confident.

Petra decided on the house red and the waiter disappeared to see to the request.

Martin looked across the table. ‘Sorry about that. I always prattle on when I’m nervous. I’m not like this normally, promise.’

Petra smiled. ‘Prattle away,’ she said.

The waiter returned and showed the label to Martin before pouring a small amount into his glass. Martin sipped it, nodded, then held up his hand as the waiter began to fill their glasses. ‘I’ll see to that. Thanks.’

Martin stood up, grabbed the bottle, and made his way around the table in what he hoped was a sophisticated manner.

‘Wine, Madame?’ He cooed.

Petra laughed, eager to lighten the mood. ‘Thank you, kind sir.’

Martin poured the wine with a flourish and theatrically pulled back the bottle. A large gush of wine shot from its neck, splashed over the white tablecloth and the front of Petra’s cream dress.

Petra shrieked and stood up. Martin dabbed ineffectively at the front of her dress with a napkin. ‘Oh dear, oh dear,’ he stammered again. ‘I’m so sorry. What a clumsy fool.’

Petra grabbed her bag and almost ran to the ladies’ room. *No chance of a dignified exit now.* She tried to ignore the chatter as she made her way across the room.

*Just wait until I catch up with you, Stella.*

After doing her best to repair the damage, Petra slunk out of the ladies' room, retrieved her coat, and sneaked out of the door. Martin was waiting outside.

He began to apologise again, but Petra interrupted.

'Some things are just not meant to be, Martin. Go and find your car.'

Petra turned away quickly before he could reply. After walking five yards, she almost fell headlong as the heel of her shoe caught on the pavement and snapped. She shook her head in disbelief and limped off towards the taxi rank half a mile across town. She wasn't at all surprised when the heavens opened up before she had gone a hundred yards.