# “Connection and Chance”

by Miall James

“Humans, Homo sapiens, are a social species, as are in fact quite a few species of primates. What is different about us is that, once paired, or you could say connected, by parenting, we often ….. to put it no higher than that ….. stay in those pairs well after the duties of parenting have been long discharged. There are few if any primate species where older animals perform grandparental duties, although it is believed that elephants may.”

Malcolm stared at the opening paragraph of the essay, set on the subject of ‘connection’; it was quite surprising, he reflected, what students could make of a subject, and the twists and turns a mind could take. And, by chance. the author had hit upon an issue which was becoming personally relevant to Malcolm. Up until now, as a junior lecturer at a university concerned with his career and his doctorate thesis he was normally to be found, when not lecturing or behind his laptop at home, in the library. His social life was limited to occasional visits to the common room in search of coffee, meals in the refectory and, on Sundays, attendance at at least one church service.

And that was where it had started, on a Sunday evening three weeks ago. He’d been, uncharacteristically ,a bit late for Evensong, the evening service, so instead of sitting in one of the pews around the middle of the church he’d slipped into one at the back, just inside the door, as the service was about to start And there he’d seen her, sitting demurely in the same pew, and, unusually, for todays girls, wearing a hat. He remembered that his grandmother had grumbled about women and grown girls not wearing hats in church; disrespectful to God she’d called it. If he recalled correctly St Paul had said something about it.

Malcolm wasn’t good at approaching girls; to be truthful he’d never really tried although he’d often thought he’d like to. However, there wasn’t a hymn book near him so vey gently he touched her hand and asked her if she could pass him one from the pile at the end of the pew. She’s done so, with a shy smile and then the service had started. When the service was over he’d thanked her and was just picking up courage to say something else when the priest arrived and wanted to speak to her; Malcolm didn’t feel brave enough to hang about until they’d finished, especially as the conversation seemed to developing into a long one, so with a polite ‘Bye’ off he went to his flat, his book and his evening cocoa.

Two days later he’d gone into the university library and to his surprise saw her, sitting at an Assistant Librarians desk. He wasn’t sure at first if it was her, but he’d made his way over to check and when she looked up she recognised him. Library rules about silence were strict, and enforced, so he couldn’t say much to her, but he

managed to discover that she’d recently joined the library team, although mostly she was behind the scenes. Then the light on her desk glowed, indicating that she was wanted elsewhere. Malcolm waited a while to see if she’d come back, but she didn’t.He did though pluck up enough courage  to ask the duty librarian about her and discovered her name was Jane and that she was a very new member of staff. She had, according to his informant, graduated earlier that year from another university but somehow managed to get a job with this one.

He hadn’t seen her for a few days after that, and he was booked to visit his parents the following weekend, so he didn’t go to his usual church . However eventually, by a lucky chance, he did manage to meet her again in the corridor outside the library, which meant they could talk and establish some sort of contact. Greatly daring Malcolm asked Jane to meet him in the coffee shop after work and to his delight she agreed. Matters progressed from there to a trip to the local theatre the following Friday and a meeting at Church, followed by a Sunday lunch, the following weekend, in one of the more upmarket local cafés.

Now staring at the piece in front of him Malcolm was beginning, as they say, furiously to think. A chance meeting in church had led him to make a connection with Jane, but how permanent did he want that connection to be? She seemed to enjoy his company; for now at any rate but it wasn’t as if they’d been romantic; he recalled student friends laughing about kissing and whatever on the first date with their girl-friends but it wasn’t a subject where he’d ever had anything to contribute to the discussion, so, as the phrase goes, he’d made an excuse and left.

But, he asked himself, was a new aspect of life opening up? Had a chance encounter brought the prospect of a connection with a new person and a whole new series of experiences for him?

And how, he asked himself, did one go about handling the situation?