

MOST OF THE STORY IS G-RATED



It was already dark when Ria and Andrew arrived in Raleigh. Her parents were waiting and hurried out to greet them.

“Oh, Baby!” cried Sarah. “It’s been so long since I’ve seen you!”

Ria and Sarah hugged while Andrew and Richard clapped each other on the shoulders. Then Ria turned to her father. “Daddy!” Her father hugged her close, then held her back so he could look at her.

“One year of marriage has only made you prettier,” he declared. “Andrew’s obviously looking after you well.”

“Of course he is,” she answered, beaming at Andrew, who was being hugged by Sarah.

“Let’s go ahead and get this car unloaded,” urged Richard. He and Andrew started pulling things out of the trunk.

Ria and Andrew MacNeil had just driven down from New York City, where they’d spent the last four days celebrating their first wedding anniversary. Now they would spend Christmas week with her family, Sarah and Richard Davis.

“I’m dying to hear all about your anniversary,” said Sarah as she

and Ria moved into the house, leaving the men to unpack the car. Then she stopped short. "Oh, my lord, Baby, let me see that ring!"

She took her daughter's right hand and looked at the gorgeous emerald ring that Andrew had given her the night before in honor of their first anniversary. The 2-carat stone was a deep clear green and was set in a contemporary white-gold setting. On either side was a tiny diamond. Andrew hated ostentation, and this ring was perfectly sized to not call undue attention to itself.

Sarah stared at the ring, moving Ria's hand around so she could see it in different lights. "Your husband is right out of a fairy tale," she said, looking back at Ria. "He's simply too good to be true."

"I agree, Mama," she nodded, but then she smiled mysteriously and added, "Well, at least most of the time."

"And those other times you just let him be, Baby," counseled her mother. "No man can be perfect every moment of every day." She glanced over at Andrew, who was on his way back outside to bring in the Christmas packages and thought to herself, *but he may well come the closest of any man I've ever known.*

"Let's get some drinks," announced Richard coming into the living room. He gave the ladies white wine and then poured Scotch for himself and Andrew. "Here's to your first year of marriage," he said, holding his glass up in the direction of Ria and Andrew.

"Thank you, sir," answered Andrew, holding his glass up as Ria and her mother also raised their own.

"And now, tell us how you celebrated," Richard smiled at them, then hurried to add, "The public parts, that is."

"Richard!" scolded Sarah.

"Daddy!" Ria seconded her mother.

Andrew just grinned and said, "Don't worry, sir, most of the story is G-rated."



THE NEXT DAY Andrew left Ria and her mother happily doing pre-

Christmas things while he headed to Duke University to keep an appointment he'd made with one of the architecture professors. He was gone several hours, and when he returned, he noticed another car in the driveway.

Expecting to hear voices when he entered, he instead met silence. He looked through several of the ground-floor rooms but still found nothing, so he went into the kitchen and asked Martha, the housekeeper, where everyone was.

"I think they're all upstairs," she said. "Are you hungry?"

"Honestly, I'm starved," he admitted. "Don't interrupt what you're doing, though. I can get myself something."

"You'll do no such thing!" She pushed his hand off the refrigerator door handle and then quickly made him a cold chicken sandwich with some potato salad and tomatoes on the side.

"You're an angel," Andrew said as he took the inviting plate.

He didn't see any trace of the women upstairs either, so, not wanting to interrupt a ladies' pow-wow, he went to the bedroom he and Ria were staying in and opened his laptop. Half an hour later Ria came in, tears on her face and her shoulders sagging, looking for all the world like a little girl whose favorite doll had disappeared.

"What's the matter, lass?" he exclaimed in concern, jumping up to go to her.

"Oh, Andrew!" She started to cry again.

"Tell me what's wrong," he demanded, pulling her over to the sofa.

"It's Becca," she sniffled. "Tom has a girlfriend." Becca was Ria's older sister, and Tom was her cardiologist husband.

Andrew was dumbfounded. "Are you sure?" he asked, putting his arm around her.

"Yes. Becca said he's involved with a resident at the hospital."

"Have they separated?"

"No, he doesn't know that she knows." Ria sniffled again.

"Is this affair in the past or is it still going on?"

"It's still going on."

"So, Tom has a wife and two kids at home and a girlfriend at work?" asked Andrew, his sense of honor outraged for Becca.

"I guess."

"I take it Becca's here now," he asked.

"Yes. She said she's been suspecting something, but she found a bunch of receipts that proved it." She started to cry again, then asked angrily, "What's the matter with men, anyway? They're always doing this kind of thing. There should be a law against men!"

Andrew looked at her startled. "You want to outlaw me?"

"You're different."

"I'm a man, and you just condemned all of us."

Ria shrugged. "Whatever."

Evidently this wasn't the moment for logic, so Andrew pulled her onto his lap and wrapped his arms around her. Becca was five years older than Ria, so they hadn't been really close growing up, but they had a good relationship, and Ria had always looked up to Becca. This was obviously hitting her hard.

"So, what's Becca going to do?" asked Andrew.

"I don't know. She doesn't want to mess up Christmas for the kids." Then she looked at Andrew and said, "Why don't you just go beat him up? It would serve him right!"

"That would help a lot!" he answered, shaking his head. "Then I could spend Christmas in jail."

Becca had already left by the time Richard came home, so he and Sarah spent time in their bedroom behind closed doors. Dinner was a stressful event, with Richard and Sarah vacillating between playing host and being angry. Andrew didn't feel it was his place to weigh in on family matters, so he kept fairly quiet, and after dinner he took Ria out to buy a few last-minute gifts, giving Richard and Sarah more time alone.

"Do you remember when I asked you if everything was all right

between them?" Andrew asked. "I suspect there's been a problem there for a while."

"Maybe," answered Ria sadly.

They were sitting in a Victorian-style ice cream shop drinking big mugs of hot chocolate served by men with arm garters and straw hats.

"So the plan is to put up a front for the kids?" he asked.

"I guess."

"Kids usually see through these things."

Ria shrugged, then looked at him and said, "What happens someday if *you* find a girlfriend?"

Andrew looked unhappy. "I already found my girlfriend, remember?"

"That's not what I mean. What if you find another one?"

"Impossible. I'm like a pigeon. I mate once, and it's for life."

"A lot of men cheat."

"So do a lot of women."

"But I think more men cheat than women." She looked at him almost accusingly.

"Well, you're safe, because you have Grandfather on your side," he told her, looking amused. "One word from you and he'd come skelp me good."

Ria giggled. "What does that mean?"

"It means you're safe." He took her hands and kissed her fingers. "I'm really sorry that Becca and Tom have a problem, but don't let it spill over to us. You and I are fine, and I intend to keep it that way."

After they got home, they had a drink with Sarah and Richard and then said good night and went to their room. After they'd showered, Andrew wanted to watch some TV with Ria, but she was restless and couldn't quite settle down. She jumped up frequently and paced around the room, and although Andrew kept pulling her back down, she'd soon be up again.

Finally, on one of her circuits, he reached under her nightie and

patted her bare bottom a couple times. "I know how to settle you down, you know," he said, giving her a meaningful look.

She pulled back quickly. "Don't!" she said with a frown.

"I'm not going to let you pace all night long," he warned, still looking at her.

Ria looked at him with a sulky face. "I'm not happy," she said. "Tom's ruined Christmas."

"Not if we don't let him."

"I can't help it," she said, still pouting.

"I have just the remedy," Andrew told her. "Let's get in bed."

"I'm not ready for bed," she protested.

"Come anyway," he answered. "I'm going to help you be ready."

"What are you going to do?" she asked cautiously.

"I'm going to relax your body."

He turned out most of the lights and then got in bed, sitting up leaning against the backboard.

"Come over here and lie across me," he said, indicating his upper legs.

"Are you going to spank me?" she asked in an unhappy voice.

"What do you think?"

"With you, I never know."

"Then I guess you'll be surprised." She still hesitated. "Come on," he repeated, patting his leg.

Reluctantly she got on the bed and lay down across his legs. He pulled her nightie up around her shoulders, then looked at the beautiful naked body of his wife.

He took some hand lotion she had on her nightstand, rubbed it on both of his hands, then started rubbing it on her body. Slowly he caressed her back, her legs, and her cheeks, rubbing his large hands up and down over her soft skin. He could feel her body losing some of the tension as she lay there draped across him.

He went up and down her back, then ran his hands up and down her shapely legs, then massaged her round cheeks, watching his strong fingers make pink marks on the soft flesh. Usually when

he had this view of her backside he was spanking it, not massaging it.

“Does that feel good?” he asked, still rubbing her body.

“Mm-m-m.”

“I’ll take that as a yes,” he said, smiling to himself.

He put more lotion on his hands and kept massaging. Back... legs... Her bottom looked so tempting, so bare and softly feminine. He would have liked to spank it a little, but she was half asleep now, and that would undo all his work. “Are you ready to go to sleep?”

This time he got no answer, so he maneuvered her off his legs and onto her own side of the bed, then turned off the last light and settled down beside her, his arm draped over her.



“DID you get the picture from Grandmother?” Ria asked Sarah.

Ria, Andrew, and Sarah were all sitting at the breakfast table. Richard had promised that today was the last one he’d work until after Christmas.

“Oh, Baby, with all the upset yesterday I totally forgot to mention it. It’s lovely, and so sweet of his grandmother to send it to us.” Sarah was animated as she spoke of it.

“Where did you put it?”

“I have it in our bedroom right now,” she answered. “I know it belongs downstairs on the family wall, but I don’t see that wall so often these days, and I wanted to be able to look at it.” She got up and went to her bedroom to bring it back.

“You two are just the most handsome couple!” she said as she showed them the framed photo Grandmother had sent. Andrew was in his full-dress kilt and Ria had a MacNeil tartan sash across the bodice of her floor-length green gown.

Just then the phone rang. Sarah walked into the other room to talk to Becca, and when she returned she announced, “Slight change of plans. We’re going to have the children here today.”

"Where's Louise?" asked Ria. Louise was the children's au pair.

"She had to start her Christmas holiday early due to a family emergency." Sarah sat down again, not looking all that pleased. "Becca has to be in court this afternoon. It's all right, we'll manage. We just have to be sure that nothing is left around that they shouldn't see before Christmas morning."

"Why don't Ria and I take them out for a while today?" volunteered Andrew, looking to see that Ria was okay with the idea.

"Oh, no, I couldn't impose that on you," said Sarah shaking her head.

"I don't mind at all," replied Andrew.

"Are you sure it's all right, Andrew?" asked Ria. "Tyler can be a handful sometimes."

"I'm sure we'll get along fine."

"Okay," she agreed doubtfully.

"You two are lifesavers!" Sarah beamed at them. "Becca's going to drop them off about ten."

"We'll be ready to whisk them out of your way," Andrew told her, smiling.