

# "LOVE STORY"



**Joanne Wilson**

A "New Woman" Novel



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# “LOVE STORY”

by Joanne Wilson

There were four of us in the group. We were all sixteen years old, in high school together; I guess we came together because we were the so-called “nerds” of the class. Two of us were brains and two of us were what the other guys, the “footballers” called the “wimps.” So far as *we* were concerned, none of us was a wimp, but we didn’t play basketball or football and didn’t turn out for athletics, so that was how we were classified.

Of course, no one cared to take into consideration the fact that all four of us were smaller than average and not exactly built for sports. Well, Michael wasn’t smaller all over; he was six three, but skinny as a rake. Three of us played a pretty good game of tennis, but tennis was not a school sport.

Now I’m not complaining about this because I think it’s fair to say that all of us were above that

sporty bullshit anyway. The point is, it brought us together and for three years, we had been best buddies.

There was Michael, whom I've mentioned, a long streak of pure brain, but with a crazy sense of humor to match.

Then, there was Steve, a little round guy, another brain and sometimes a bit heavy on the corn, but he tried.

There was me, five feet nine of string and bone; not a great brain, but an organizer and sort of leader of the pack.

And, there was Bobby.

Bobby Young.

I think his greatest crime was that he was beautiful. No, I don't mean handsome, Bobby was beautiful. Five seven, slim, with a face like the Madonna.

No, not Madonna, *The* Madonna.

And, a sweet guy; everyone's best friend when it came to helping out. He'd do anything for anybody. Actually, it was this special characteristic that brought about the events I'm about to try to describe.

We'd spent a weekend just a few weeks earlier working with the local Lions Club, cleaning up the Doss House where our town zeros crashed at night. The soup kitchen.

The four of us had met some of the guys, real down and outers, but nice enough when they were sober and, after all, we often felt a bit out of it as well, so we could emphasize.

One of these guys was Wally. Wally was about forty but looked sixty. In the course of a morning tea break conversation, we found out that Wally came from the other side of the country and had recently had news that his Mother was dying of cancer.

He was actually crying by the time he'd told us the story. He wanted to go home but he had no money, of course.

For a couple of days, this sad story haunted me and apparently, the other guys as well, because when I brought it up with them, they all said they had been thinking of poor Wally and a way we could raise the money to send him home. We sat around discussing the subject, but none of us could come up with an idea. We figured we needed to get him a bath, a new suit, airfare and a few nights in a motel. Probably about \$3000 would do it.

But, we came up with no sane way of raising \$3000, although I can promise you, we came up with plenty of *insane* ways.

Later, we were strolling along the boulevard heading to our respective homes when Michael suddenly stopped, staring upwards.

Within a few yards, we had realized he was no longer with us and we stopped as well. The "brain" was obviously hard at work. A huge smile came across his face and he called us together into a huddle.

"You're going to think this is totally crazy but before you dismiss it out of hand, think about it. I remembered seeing in the paper yesterday that there's a competition coming up that pays \$5000 for first prize, \$3000 for second and \$1000 for third. We don't

have to do better than second to raise the money for Wally.”

“What competition?” I asked.

“That’s the crazy part,” Michael admitted. “The Rydel Cup is being run a week from next Saturday.”

“So?” Bobby said. “That’s a horse race.”

“I know,” Michael went on. “But in association with the Cup, there’s a Fashion in the Field contest.”

We looked at each other. It was apparent that Michael had flipped his wig.

“Listen,” he said. “It’s a snap. Who’s the best-dressed woman in town, by far?”

“Bobby’s Mom, by far,” Steve replied, “but so what?”

“So, we can enter the Fashion in the Field contest,” Michael explained.

This was madness.

“How can we enter the Fashion in the Field contest?” I asked. “Bobby’s Mom doesn’t go to horse races and besides, we can’t ask her to raise the money for Wally.”

“I’m not talking about Bobby’s Mom entering. Who’s the best-looking, prettiest guy in town?”

We all looked at Bobby.

“Bobby is,” Steve answered. “No question! But, what are you talking about, Michael? The contest is for women...”

“It’s not a beauty contest,” Michael said, “it’s a *fashion* contest. All Bobby has to be able to do is get his Mom to lend him her best outfit and we can, at least, win second prize, maybe even first!”

Bobby stared at him. “You mean... Michael, you’re crazy! Do you really think I’d go to the races wearing an outfit of my Mother’s clothes? It’s the silliest thing I’ve ever heard!”

“I agree,” Steve said and made to walk on.

“No, wait!” I said, seeing some merit in the idea. “It’s not so silly. Sure, Mrs. Young won’t go. But she’s a good sport and the cause is a good one. At least we can ask her.”

“But,” Bobby said, “I have to agree, don’t I? It’s all very well for you guys to talk but you’re asking me to go to the Rydal Cup dressed as a woman. You’re kidding!”

“Think about it, Bobby. It would be a hell of a lark and I reckon you could win.”

“No deal,” Bobby snapped, and set off for home.

Michael and I looked at each other.

He shrugged. “Well, I thought it was a good idea.”

“It is, Mike. Let’s think about it.”

We separated at this point and went off to our respective homes. By the time I got home, I’d had an



idea on my own. I rang Mrs. Young, Bobby's Mom, and spent ten minutes explaining the whole story to her. By the time I'd finished, I had her on my side.

She thought it was a great idea and very amusing. She agreed she would lend Bobby an outfit of hers. She would talk to him about it.

Two hours later, I had a phone call from Bobby.

"I'll never forgive you, you little s.o.b.!" he said.

"Oh, come on, Bobby, it's a good idea and you know it! Besides, it'll be terrific fun! Just think what it will do for old Wally when we win!"

"We? You got a mouse in your pocket? Who's we? I'm the one who has to make a fool of myself!"

"But you won't, Bobby. You'll be anonymous, for a start, and who's to know? And your Mom agrees! She can set you up with something that will be a winner. You're the exact same size, she says."

"I know, Goddamn it! She's already measured me carefully and started planning what I can wear!"

"So, go for it, Bobby! We'll organize the entry. What should we call you?"

"How about call me next month?" he snarled.

"Be serious."

"Hell, I don't know. For God's sake, that's your problem. I've got my own problems now!"

He hung up in my ear.

The next morning, I met with Michael and Steve before Bobby arrived at school and told them he had agreed to do it.

We got hold of a local newspaper and read the conditions for entry in the contest. It was simple enough.

All we had to do was be there — no official entry required.

At 1:00 P.M., all the ladies who were vying for the honor had to be in the parade ring in front of the main grandstand.

But we needed tickets.

Bobby arrived, still grumbling, and we told him how it was to work. We would buy tickets for Bobby and me — I won the ballot for who was to accompany him — and we would turn up just before parade time and go straight to the judging area. Afterwards, we would collect the prize and go home.

And Wally would be off to see his Mother.

We were insanely confident.

We, that is, except for Bobby.

It should be mentioned here that Bobby's Mom owned and ran a local boutique — *The city's Fashion House*. His Father had died when he was just seven and he and his Mom lived alone.

She had even told Bobby that she would borrow something from the store, if necessary. In that way, they wouldn't have to worry about buying something new and she would be able to judge what the other

women were likely to be wearing from what they bought from her.

Apparently, she already had two outfits in mind, and was going to put them aside so that no one else could buy them.

“She’s bringing the outfits home over the weekend,” Bobby said. “I have to try them on, for God’s sake!” He looked miserable and I almost felt sorry for him.

Almost.

I thought of Wally again.

We didn’t see Bobby all day Saturday and I called him on Saturday night. He was fairly tight-lipped about what had happened during the day, but I was able to glean that he had sore feet from wearing high heels almost all day. He said that his Mother had decided he needed more practice, so he’d be home all day Sunday as well.

When we caught up at school on Monday, he was much brighter.

“It’s not so bad, I guess,” he admitted when we quizzed him. “The clothes look terrific, I must admit, and I’m getting used to the high heels.”

When we wanted to know what he would be wearing, he just smiled.

“Oh, you’ll just have to wait and see, won’t you?”

Well, at least we gathered that he was feeling better about it all.

On Wednesday, Bobby came to me.

“Alan, what’re you going to wear on Saturday?” he asked.

“Gosh, I hadn’t thought about that. I guess I’ll just wear a suit.”

“Sure will. Do you have one?”

“No, but I can rent one.”

“Well, you’d better do it. If you’re going to escort me, you’re going to have to look the part.” He grinned sagely.

“That good, huh?” I grinned back.

But he would say no more.

I went to our local suit-for-hire store that afternoon and rented a smart gray business suit, buying a nice tie to wear with it.

By Friday night, none of us had seen Bobby in the things he would wear and neither would he tell us anything more about it. He was very secretive about it all.

He did say that it was OK for Michael and Steve to come around the next morning at the same time I was to pick him up though, so that they could estimate our chances of winning a prize.

So, in this way, the three of us, me in my suit, arrived at Bobby’s house at eleven on the Saturday morning of the Rydal Cup.

We knocked on the door and Mrs. Young came to open it.

“Come in, boys,” she invited. “Sandra is ready to go.”

Sandra? We looked at each other.

“Well, she has to have a girl’s name, doesn’t she? We can’t have the announcer saying that ‘Bobby Young’ has won the Fashion in the Field contest, now can we?”

We trooped into the house and through to the living room where we were stopped dead in our tracks by one of the most glamorous, beautiful young women any of us had ever seen!

She was wearing a white linen suit. The jacket had a nipped-in waist and the skirt was just above knee-length. She was wearing black and white high-heeled court shoes. Under the jacket, she wore a ruffle front, black blouse and on her head was a wide brimmed black hat with a huge rose in the center front. Under the hat, a profusion of soft blonde waves fell to her shoulders. She wore wrist-length, lace gloves. Her makeup appeared to be flawless.

We knew that this was still Bobby, but none of us could believe it! We just stood there for a moment, open mouthed and stunned.

Bobby just smiled. “What’s wrong?” he asked. “Can’t you guys talk any more? You didn’t have any trouble running your mouths when you dreamed up this stunt!”

“I.. I.. don’t believe it!” Michael whispered. “We’ll win for sure!”

“God, Bobby, you’re beautiful,” Steve added.

“It will be my distinct pleasure to escort you to the races, Sandra,” I said, bowing politely.

“Thank you, Alan, that’s sweet.” Bobby smiled again.

I was astonished. Bobby had gone much further than I think any of us realized he would. He even sounded like a girl. His Mother was standing by, proudly.

“We are a little early,” Bobby/Sandra said, “but I guess we could go now. We can take a look at the competition.”

“Sure,” I agreed, “why not?”

Bobby picked up a black handbag and slung it casually over his shoulder. He kissed his Mother.

“You look lovely, Darling,” Mrs. Young said. “I’m very proud of you.”

Bobby smiled at her. “Thanks for all your help, Mother,” he said, as though he was really pleased with what she had achieved.

We walked out to my car and the other guys went to theirs, looking a little envious. Sandra — I’ll call him, er, *her* that for a while now — slid into the passenger’s seat while I held the door for her. Then I went around to the driver’s side, got in, and we drove off. Beside me, Sandra was actually smiling and enjoying herself.

“You don’t feel so bad about this, now?” I asked.

“No.” He continued to smile. “You said it, it’s for a good cause.”

“You look smashing,” I said. “Like a model or something.”

“Thank you,” he said, and he looked genuinely pleased.

“You seem as though you like it.”

He shrugged. “If I have to look like a girl, I’d rather be a pretty one than an ugly one!”

He crossed his legs and it was impossible not to notice how smooth and sleek they looked. It was obvious that he had shaved them.

“What are you wearing underneath?”

He feigned shock. “Alan! You can’t ask a girl that! It’s impolite!”

“Sorry,” I said, grinning now at his convincing playacting.

“But, since you ask, I’m wearing what any girl would wear under her best outfit, of course.”

“Is that outfit new, or is it one of your Mom’s?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, it’s new, and yes, it’s from my Mom’s store. She bought it for me.”

“For you?”

“Oh, you know what I mean, from her store, but for me to wear.”

I was listening to the way he was talking. He hardly sounded like the Bobby I knew! His voice was softer. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see his fingers through the lace of his gloves and I noticed his nails were painted a vivid red. He smelled of a delicious perfume as well.

“You sure went to a lot of trouble,” I said.

“Mom said we had to do it right. This is my first public appearance, after all.”

We drove in silence for a ways. Bobby/Sandra seemed very relaxed to me, considering what we were doing. Soon, we arrived at the race track and parked the car in the parking area, some distance from the main grandstand.

We got out and walked across to the entrance point where I showed our tickets. Bobby was already attracting attention, but he seemed oblivious to it. We went into the main spectator area where hundreds of people were milling about, watching horses parading or getting their bets on with the bookmakers.

“What do you want to do?” I asked.

“Let’s just wander around,” he replied.

We strolled around the parade and marshaling area. Neither of us had ever been to a horse race meeting before. We watched the horses in the next race preparing to go out onto the track.

“They are such divine animals,” Bobby remarked.



Divine! Divine? First time I'd ever heard Bobby Young use such a girlish expression! I found myself watching him and then comparing him with other smartly dressed women. He was the equal of any of them and much better than most.

And he looked so relaxed and he was smiling all the time. Bobby was usually a fairly uptight little guy, full of tensions of one sort or another.

In his high heels, he was almost equal in height to me. His pale blue eyes sparkled and his cheeks were flushed. His ruby red lips were full, plump, and sensuously kissable.

I saw that he was wearing large gold earrings with a black onyx insert.

The horses began to line up and we went to the fence to watch. There was no special interest for us because we didn't have a bet on anything. We watched the race and then continued our promenade. Bobby began to take an interest in the women and girls he thought might be his competition. From time to time, he would point out a particularly attractive outfit.

"She looks wonderful..." she'd say or, "I adore that outfit!" Or, "I love that hat" or, "what divine shoes."

At one stage, he took my arm. It seemed so perfectly natural that I hardly noticed.

"Do you think we're in the right area?" he asked.

"I think so. It seems we're where all the other women are."

I looked at my watch. It was five after one. Some ten minutes passed. Someone touched Bobby on the arm and both of us turned around. We were confronted by a smartly dressed woman of about fifty. She was smiling broadly.

“Excuse me, Dear,” she said. “May I ask your name?”

Bobby/Sandra smiled back, so sweetly. “My name is Sandra Young.”

“Are you from Rydal, Dear?”

“No. I’m staying with my Aunt, Mrs. Nancy Young. Does it matter?”

“Oh, no, Dear, it’s just that I need to know in case we need to make an announcement. You look absolutely smashing, my Dear.”

She turned and strolled off.

“Why did you say you were staying with your Aunt?” I asked.

“Mom said to tell them that I was from out of town, just in case, you know? They know her and she can cover that easily.”

“Sure, OK. Do you suppose she was a judge or something?”

“I don’t really know. I guess so.”

We continued strolling around, although with all the other beauties, it was more like promenading. Not ten minutes later, the same lady approached us again.

“Miss Young, I should have mentioned it earlier, but my name is Elvira Taylor. I’m one of the judges here, the senior judge, in fact. My colleagues and I have chosen you as one of the three finalists in the Fashion in the Field quest.”

Bobby/Sandra actually squealed, shrieked, perhaps! I was startled.

“Oh, wonderful, thank you!” she croaked happily.

The woman took a long envelope from her handbag. “This is your invitation to tonight’s Rydal Ball. We make the final decisions and presentations there. You can come, of course?”

Bobby was taken aback for only a few seconds.

“Oh, dear,” he said, “I was going home later this afternoon.” He paused. “But, of course I can come. I’d be delighted!”

“It will be so lovely to have you. We’ll see you around eightish, then?”

The woman walked away. I looked at Bobby.

“God! What’re we going to do about this?”

“Can you get a tux by tonight?”

“Well, sure, I guess so, but...”

“Oh, don’t worry about me. Mother will have something stunning I can wear, so let’s get going. We can’t let Wally down now!”

He began walking briskly towards the exit gate and I hurried to keep up.

“You mean, you’re actually going?”

“Of course! Why not?”

“Well, I mean... I don’t really know why not... I guess...”

I drove Bobby home and left him at his front door. Then I took off to try to arrange to hire a tuxedo. This accomplished, I went home to my own house where my parents were interested in knowing what sort of day I’d had.

I’d told them that Bobby and I were going to the Rydal Cup and were taking part in a competition to win some money to help Wally. They thought it was very magnanimous of us.

I hadn’t told them that Bobby was entering the Fashion in the Field competition. Now I had the job of telling them that I had to go to the Rydal Ball, and why.

Rather than cover it up further, I told them the whole story. They both thought it was all pretty weird and couldn’t figure out how Bobby might have been selected as a finalist.

But then, they hadn’t seen him, had they?

Soon after I’d finished all these explanations, Mike rang. He had Steve with him and I had to tell them the story of the day. They were both rapt that Bobby had definitely won something, at least!

“God, I’m not surprised,” Mike said. “I still can’t believe how he looked! He could have won the Miss World Title hands down!”

“Well, maybe, not quite,” I said. “But I admit he did look great! I’m wondering now what he and his Mom will cook up for tonight.”

“Ring us in the morning, huh?” Mike asked excitedly. “Or even tonight, if you’re not too late getting home.”

“OK, I will,” I promised. I checked my watch. I had arranged with Bobby that I would pick her, er, I mean *him*, up at eight. I had plenty of time as it was not yet six. But, I went and took a shower and dressed in the tux, ate some food with my folks and asked to borrow the car again, which they agreed to on the proviso that I would not have anything... “not one drop!” to drink.

At seven thirty, I drove quietly over to Bobby’s house and knocked on the front door. Mrs. Young opened it again.

“Hi, Alan,” she greeted. “This is a turn up for the books, isn’t it? I think she’s about ready. Come on in.”

I looked at her for a moment, startled by the fact that she had referred to Bobby as “she.” But, she seemed not to have even noticed that she’d done it. We went through to the living room. Bobby was not yet downstairs.

“Can I get you something to drink?” Mrs. Young asked.

“Just a Coke, Mrs. Young, thank you.”

She took a bottle from the bar fridge and poured the drink.