

Just Desserts

by Myrtle Ross

Last year my good friend Ashleigh had gone back to England to look after her aunt. The poor woman had fallen in the shower and broken her hip. Ashleigh had flown to London and was then going to travel to Cornwall by train.

It was mid-morning and she had quite a bit of time before the train was due, so she stopped at a nearby café. The place was surprisingly busy and the line was almost to the door. She was just going to get a coffee, but seeing the pastry case she decided that she would order two boxes of Madeline's as well. One for herself and one for her aunt. As she was being rung up, a young woman popped out of the back room and told the cashier that she still could not find "it". The cashier assured her that it would turn up. Ashleigh asked if the woman would be alright and that she hoped that she didn't lose anything important. The cashier replied that the young lady had been showing off her engagement ring this morning and had simply misplaced it. Ashleigh wished her the best and went searching for a table.

She managed to find an empty table in the back corner. It was a cozy wooden table with a small vase of daffodils and two wicker backed chairs. She settled in and began to read her romance novel. It's that new one by that famous woman who writes those stories about queer werewolves.

Anyways, she's only a few pages in when she feels someone tap on her shoulder. She looks up and there stands this forty-ish man in a three-piece suit. "Excuse me miss"

he says to her. He explains to her that this is the only seat left in the café and asks to join her. Normally she'd never let a strange man just sit with her, but under the circumstances she agreed. He sat down and took the morning paper out of his briefcase. She went back to her book and nothing happened between them for some time.

That changed when Ashleigh opened her box of cookies. She removed one from the box and left the lid open. Apparently, he took this as an invitation and grabbed a cookie. She could not believe the impertinence of this man. She hoped that a cookie was the only thing he felt entitled to and went back to her book. When she went for another Madeline, he took another as well. She locked eyes with him and he smiled. Then he told her that she would be prettier, if she just smiled. Ashleigh was furious.

Now Ashleigh has very bad social anxiety and it makes it harder for her to stand up for herself in public. Due to the thought of making a scene and having everyone stare at her is her worst nightmare. She was proper mad and came close to saying something. Instead, she just took a deep breath and went back to her book. She had decided to try her level best to ignore him, until it was time to catch the train.

It had been a while since she had a Madeline, so she peered down at the box and realized that this man had continued to help himself. Now only a few remained. But it was fine. She'd be leaving soon and she'd never have to see him again. Ashleigh returned to her book once more.

She had gotten lost in a rather steamy section, when she heard the man yelp. She looks over her book to see blood seeping through his lips. He cries out in horror. As he shouts, she notices something fall from his mouth and land under the table. Without a moment's pause, she's kneeling down with a napkin in hand and plucks something from

the pool of blood. She gives it a quick wipe and begins cackling. By now a crowd has gathered. They regard her with a mix of shock and horror, as she continues to laugh. Finally, someone shouts “What’s so damn funny about all this” and Ashleigh just smiles as she holds up the diamond ring.