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STORY**



A PRETTY FACE

BY JOHN ESCOTT

ENGLISH SHORT STORIES FOR BEGINNERS

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A Pretty Face

By John Escott

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Chapter one: Zoe is angry



Zoe is seventeen years old. She works in a bookstore, in the little town of Newport. Zoe likes books and she likes her work. But after work she likes to act in plays with the Newport Players.

The Newport Players do six plays every year, and Zoe is in most of them. Some plays are exciting, and some plays are famous. This week, the play is *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare.

“A lot of people are coming to see it,” Zoe thinks. “I must act well.”

Mike is eighteen years old. He is a student at Newport College and he likes writing.

One day he wants to write plays for the theatre and for television.

“One day I want to be famous,” he thinks.

Newport has a newspaper. The Newport Weekly News is its name, and Mike’s Aunt Peggy is the editor. One morning, she phones Mike.

“Do you want to write a review of *Romeo and Juliet* for the newspaper, Mike?” she asks him. “The Newport Players are doing the play tonight at the Little Theatre.”

“Yes, please, Aunt Peggy!” Mike says. “Thanks for asking me.” That evening, he goes to Newport’s Little Theatre to see the play.

Mike goes into the theatre and sits at the front. He gets out his notebook and pen, ready to write notes for his review. There are a lot of people in the audience.

Five minutes later, the play begins.

Zoe acts the part of Juliet's mother. She knows all her words and speaks them well. Mike is watching her.

"She's very pretty and she's doing her best," he thinks.

"But it's not easy to act the part of an older woman. She's only sixteen or seventeen years old, and we all know it."

He begins to write in his notebook.

Two hours later, the play ends and the audience leaves the theatre. Mike goes home and writes his review for the newspaper. He doesn't feel very happy.

"It was a good play, but what can I say about the girl acting the part of Juliet's mother?" he thinks.

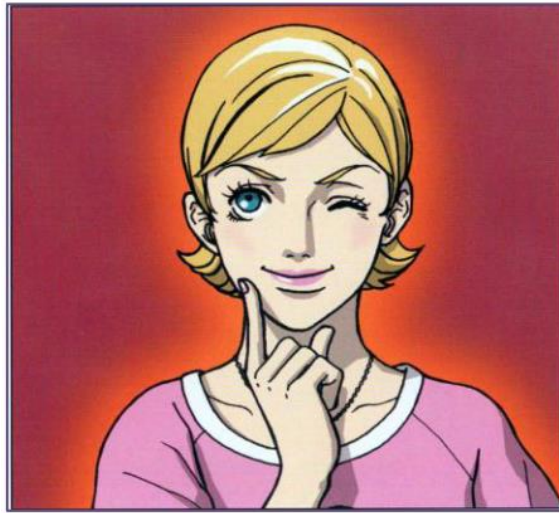
"I want to be kind but I must be honest, too."

At the bookstore on Friday, Zoe reads Mike's review of the play in the Newport Weekly News.

Zoe is angry. She looks at the name under the review: Mike Morrison.

"Who is this Mike Morrison?" she thinks. "What does he know about acting?"

Chapter Two: Zoe has an idea



On Tuesday evening the next week, Zoe and her friend Annie are drinking coffee in the Newport Cafe. Annie is a student at Newport College and sometimes in the evenings she and Zoe meet at the cafe.

Suddenly, Zoe sees a boy sitting at a table across the room. “Who’s that boy?” she asks Annie.

Annie laughs. “Do you like him? He has a nice face,” she says. “His name’s Mike. I often see him at the college.”

“Mike?” Zoe says. “Mike who?”

“Mike Morrison,” Annie says.

“That’s Mike Morrison?” Zoe says. She is furious.

“Yes, why?” Annie asks.

“He writes reviews for the Newport Weekly News,” Zoe says.

“That’s right,” Annie says. “His aunt is the editor. He ... oh!” She stops suddenly and looks at Zoe.

“The review of Romeo and Juliet—”

“Right!” Zoe says.

“Do you remember it? Zoe Baker acts the part of Juliet’s mother. She has a pretty face and she speaks her words well. But she is a young girl in an older furious very woman’s costume, and we all know it.”

“Nice face or no nice face, I hate him!”

Annie laughs. “OK, go and tell him,” she says. “Go and say, ‘I hate you, Mike Morrison. You write stupid reviews for the newspaper.’ Go on.”

But Zoe isn’t laughing. “Yes, all right!” she says furiously, and she begins to get up from her chair. Then she stops, suddenly.

“What’s wrong?” Annie asks. “Are you afraid?”

“No,” Zoe says. “I have a better idea. Does he come into this cafe often?”

“Every Tuesday and Thursday evening, I think,” Annie says. “He has a writing class at the college, and he comes here after it finishes.”

Zoe thinks for a minute or two. “That’s very interesting,” she says at last.

“Is it?” Annie says. She looks across at Mike Morrison, then at Zoe. “Why is it interesting? What are you thinking of doing?”

“Tell me, am I a good actress?” Zoe asks.

“Yes, you are,” Annie says. “But—”

“OK,” Zoe says. “I’m a good actress and I want to prove it to Mr Mike-Nice-Face Morrison.”

“How do you want to do that?” Annie asks.

Zoe smiles and begins to tell Annie about her idea...

Chapter Three: A difficult interview



On Thursday, Mike comes to the Newport Cafe after his writing class.

He asks for a cup of coffee, then starts to read one of his books. Some minutes later, a woman comes into the cafe. She is carrying a magazine under her arm.

At first, Mike does not see the woman. Then she comes across to his table.

“Hello,” she says. “Are you Mike Morrison?”

Mike is surprised. “Yes,” he says. “That’s me.”

The woman smiles. “Can I sit at this table?” she asks.

“Yes, of course,” Mike says.

“My name is Kate Lawson,” the woman says. “I’m the editor of Yes! magazine. Do you know it?”

She sits down and puts the magazine on the table in front of Mike.

“Yes, I know it,” Mike says. “It’s a magazine about famous people.”

“That’s right,” Kate says. “Do you want to write something for it? Can you do an interview for me?”

“An interview?” Mike says, surprised. “Why are you asking me?”

“You sometimes write theatre reviews for the Newport weekly newspaper,” she says. “Is that right?”

“Yes, I do,” he says. “I want to write plays one day, and—”

“Well, do this interview for my magazine then,” she says. “It’s with a famous playwright. He lives in Newport.”

“Todd Marin is the only famous playwright in Newport,” Mike says. “He lives quietly and doesn’t go out very often. And he’s famous for not talking to reporters from gossip magazines. He throws them out of his house!”

Kate laughs. “Are you afraid?” she says. “Good reporters aren’t afraid to do difficult interviews. You want to write plays, don’t you? Well, perhaps he can tell you something about play-writing.”

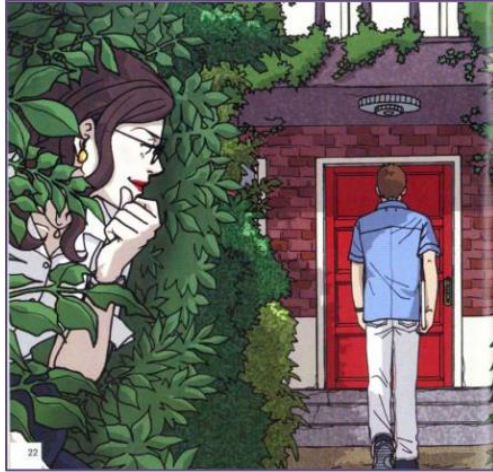
Mike thinks, “She’s right. Perhaps I can learn something from Todd Marin.”

“OK!” he says. “When can I do it?”

“Tomorrow morning,” Kate says. “You must tell Marin, ‘This interview is for Yes! magazine.’ But tell him after you get into the house. OK?”

“OK,” Mike says.

Chapter four: Todd Marin's house



Later that evening, Zoe is speaking to Annie on the phone.

“... so I say to him, ‘I’m the editor of Yes! magazine and can you interview Todd Marin,’” Zoe tells Annie.

“Todd Marin!” Annie says. “But he throws gossip magazine reporters out of his house!”

“I know!” Zoe says, laughing. “And I want to stand outside his house and watch Todd Marin throw Mike Morrison out!”

The next morning, Mike goes to Todd Marin’s house. It is a big house, and there are lots of bushes and tall trees in front of it.

“I don’t like Yes! magazine very much, but this is an important interview,” Mike thinks. “And perhaps I can talk to Todd Marin about my play.” (Mike is writing a play for television.)

He walks up to the front door of the house. He is carrying his notebook and he has a list of questions to ask the playwright. But he is a little afraid of the famous man.

Zoe follows Mike to Todd Marin’s house. She is careful and she follows Mike very quietly. Zoe is acting the part of Kate Lawson again. She has a black wig over her hair and she is wearing glasses.

She hides behind one of the bushes in front of Todd Marin’s house and watches Mike go to the front door. It is a big, dark house.

“This is funny,” she thinks, smiling.

When Todd Marin opens the door of his house, Mike begins to talk quickly.

“Hello, Mr. Marin,” he says. “I’m Mike Morrison. I’m a student at Newport College and I want to write plays.”

“Do you?” Todd Marin says.

And I write reviews in the Newport Weekly News,” Mike tells him.

“What do you want from me?” Todd Marin asks.

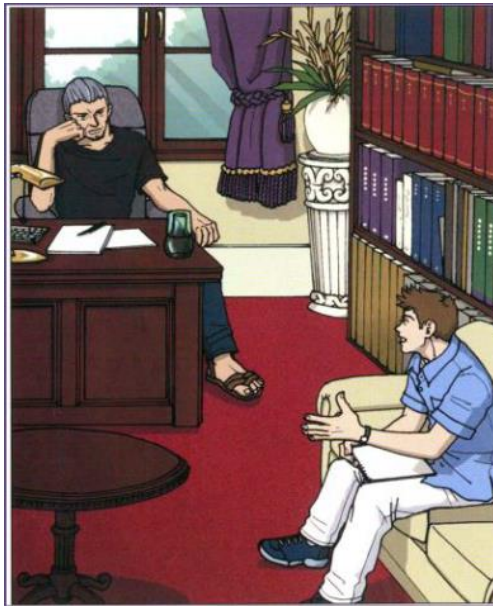
“Can I ask you some questions?” Mike says.

“Why?” Marin asks. “Is it for the Newport Weekly News?”

“That’s a difficult question. What do I do now?” Mike thinks. “Do I tell him a lie, or do I tell him the truth?”

Then, after a second or two, he says “It ... it’s for Yes! magazine. Listen, I know it’s a stupid magazine. But...”

Chapter five: Zoe waits



Zoe is watching Mike and Todd Marin from behind a bush. She can see them but she cannot hear them speaking. She sees Todd Marin open the door, and she sees Mike follow him into the house.

Zoe smiles. “Right. He’s in the house,” she thinks. “Now let’s wait for Todd Marin to throw him out!”

Todd Marin takes Mike to his study. There are hundreds of books in the room and a big desk. Todd goes and sits behind the desk.

“Thank you for telling me the truth,” he says to Mike. “I can see you’re an honest young man. You can ask your questions. But not for Yes! magazine. You’re right. It is a stupid magazine. I hate gossip magazines. Why do people write for them?”

“Because they pay a lot of money, I believe,” Mike says.

Todd Marin laughs. “Yes, you’re right again,” he says. “But you can write about me for the Newport Weekly News. Is that OK?”

“Yes, that’s OK,” Mike says, and he smiles at Todd Marin happily.

“I like to help young writers with ideas when I can,” Todd says kindly. “Sit down.”

Mike sits down, puts his notebook on Todd's desk and opens it. "I read your reviews in the newspaper sometimes," Todd says. "They're very good."

"Well, I think they're OK," Mike says. "But I want to write for the theatre, for TV, and for movies. I'm writing a play now."

"Are you? Tell me about it," Todd says.

"Can I?" Mike asks. "Well, it's about a boy and a girl."

"A boy and a girl?"

"That's right. They..."

Todd Marin sits back in his chair to listen and Mike tells him the plot of his play. Mike is very nervous, but Todd Marin does not speak. He smiles at Mike and he listens to him very carefully.

When at last Mike stops speaking, Todd says, "Thank you. That's very interesting. It's a good story, and it's funny too. But there are one or two things you can do to make it better. To begin with..."

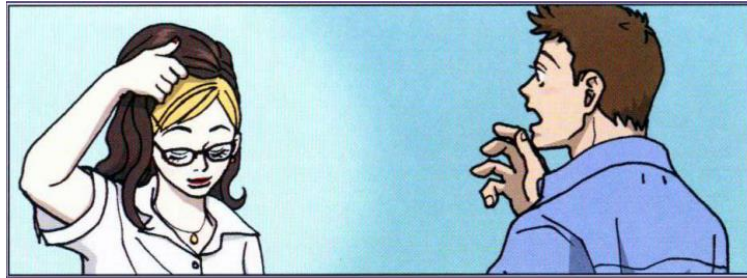
Zoe stays behind the bush and waits. An hour goes by and nothing happens. She is getting impatient.

"What are they doing in there?" she thinks. "Todd Marin never gives interviews to gossip magazines, so what are they talking about?"

She remembers Mike Morrison's review of Romeo and Juliet in the newspaper. She remembers his words about her acting – and she wants to see his face when Todd Marin throws him out of the house.

"How long must I wait?" she thinks impatiently.

Chapter six: Telling the truth



After an hour and a half, Mike Morrison leaves Todd Marin's study and comes out of the house. He and the playwright are smiling and Mike is saying "Thank you."

They talk for two or three minutes and Zoe watches them from behind the bush. She is amazed.

"What's happening?" she thinks. "Why are they so friendly?"

After a minute or two more, they shake hands. Then Todd Marin goes back into the house and Mike Morrison walks away.

Mike sees Kate Lawson waiting for him.

"Oh, hello," he says nervously. He is surprised to see her so soon. "Are you waiting for me?"

"Yes," she says impatiently. "I'm waiting for your interview."

"Look, I can't lie to you," he replies. "There's no interview for Yes! magazine. Mr. Marin always refuses to talk to reporters from gossip magazines."

"But what—?" Kate begins.

"What can two people talk about for an hour and a half?" Mike says, laughing.

"About writing, about characters and about plot. Nothing for Yes! magazine, I'm afraid. Oh, I have my list of questions and Mr. Marin's answers, but my interview is for the Newport Weekly News. And I know a lot more about writing plays now. He's very interested in my play."

"Your play?" Kate says furiously.

“Yes. I’m writing a play for TV,” Mike says. “And Mr Marin wants to read it. He can help me with the characters and the plot.”

“Well, that’s nice,” she says. “Say hello to Mike Morrison, the famous playwright! He writes stupid reviews for the Newport Weekly News but his plays are OK.”

“That’s right,” Zoe says. “I’m a seventeen-year-old girl in an older woman’s costume, Mr. Mike Morrison, review writer for the Newport Weekly News!”

Mike’s face is very red now. He feels embarrassed.

“What a trick! So there is no Kate Lawson, editor of Yes! magazine,” he says.

“No, there isn’t,” Zoe says, laughing. “What do you think now? Does this prove something? Am I a good actress?”

“Yes, you are a good actress,” Mike says, laughing with her. “And I’m going to put that in the Newport Weekly News.”

“Are you?” Zoe says.

“Yes, and thanks for making me go and see Todd Marin,” Mike tells her. He doesn’t feel embarrassed any more.

“Now I can get help with my play,” he says. “Come on, let’s get a cup of coffee. And I’m paying!”

“Well, I can’t refuse a free coffee!” Zoe says, and she laughs.

- THE END-

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