



She Met Him at the Mall

By Emmalisa Horlacher

She sat down at one of those tables—the kind where you definitely know that other people have sat there before, but you don't know where they have been. She'd just gotten her mall-style Chinese food box with orange chicken and fried rice. She got out her fork and was just about to take the hungriest, biggest bite, mouth wide open, head ready to catch any of the drippings, when she noticed a guy staring at her. She realized how ridiculous she must have looked but there really wasn't much she could do at this point, and she was still hungry. So, she took the bite, then checked back in his direction to see if he was still staring. He was. She shrugged. He smiled. Maybe he was hungry too. He then pantomimed exactly what she had done when she was about to take a bite of her food. She was offended and it read easily on her face. The guy laughed.

In the most polite and dainty of ways she took her doiky plastic fork and tenderly inserted it into a small piece of chicken. Naturally, he was still watching. She lifted the piece of meat with the delicateness of a queen passing judgment over the future of her country. The meat on her fork fell off. She checked to see if he had seen. He was laughing. She started laughing too. It was just silly.

Then, he came over to her.

“Hi,” he said, “I couldn’t help but see you struggle to eat your food.”

“Yes, I’m glad you noticed. If you’ve come to see a show you need pay first,” she said.

“I see.” the guy said. Then he walked away, bought a cookie from the pastry shop, and set it down in front of her. “Will this suffice?”

She slyly slid the cookie into her possession.

“I suppose,” she said.

They began with some small conversation: what brought you to the mall, just getting a birthday present, etc., etc. It was easy between them. No big judgements, no attempts to prove or impress. Just two people, being themselves, with another person. It was fun.

At the end of the conversation his hands started getting really sweaty as he realized he wanted to ask for her number. He wanted to see her again. He wanted to talk like this with another person, with her.

He didn’t want to be weird. He didn’t want to be rude or presumptuous or pushy. She could have a boyfriend. She could have an overprotective father or a big mean dog with rabies. But if she didn’t . . .

She said, “If you’d want to ask for my number I would say yes, but don’t feel obligated please.”

Wow. What a woman.

He brought out his phone and got her number and later that night he texted her.

Then a few dates followed with three years of a serious relationship, a wedding, and four kids. He was on a business trip when the third child came early, and he flew across the nation to be there to hold that precious little girl and her mother. He had cried. The soccer games kept Saturdays busy, and weekdays kept the kids at school, freeing her to paint a gallery. The youngest graduated valedictorian and they were so proud. The oldest ended up in jail. They were so heartbroken. When his mother got sick, she cared for her until her passing. He could never express how much that had meant to him. Grandchildren and Christmas cards became the yearly highlights. Then she was standing at his gravestone, her name next to his but her body still functioning. She hadn’t known how easy life was until she had to live it without him.

She visited that old mall, the place where they met. The fake Chinese food restaurant was still there. It went under a new name now, but the food still tasted like plastic. She stared at the tables. They still carried evidence that people had sat there before. How many people had come and gone over the years? After all the life lived, and the loss she had endured, she finally felt like she understood where those people had gone and where they had been.



About the Author

This coming June Emmalisa Horlacher will be a Theater Arts Studies graduate from Brigham Young University. Her book, “Henry’s Hope” was featured at the Frankfurt Germany International Book Fair Oct 2022. She is looking to continue her writing career in family-friendly entertainment as a producer and screenwriter.

Instagram: [instagram.com/emmalisahorlacher](https://www.instagram.com/emmalisahorlacher)

Website: [emmalisabooks.com](https://www.emmalisabooks.com)