

LISTEN TO YOUR HEART

'Seize the moment,' Elizabeth told herself. 'Take the bull by the horns.' 'Faint heart never won fair lady, nor fair gentleman, either.' The question had to be asked however awkward the answer might be ...

—Don't you like me, Henry? said Elizabeth, standing over him.

—Like you?

—Yes, Henry.

—The truth is, he said, his hands on his knees, his eyes on the carpet ...

—Yes, Henry?

—I don't trust my heart.

Ah, thought Elizabeth. Confirmation of what she'd already guessed: Henry had once been cruelly deceived in love.

—But you must, Henry, she said. You must. One should always trust one's heart.

Henry was not like the other men Elizabeth had encountered through *Silver Hearts*, the dating app for the time of your life. At coffee-shops, in cocktail-bars and pizza-parlours, she'd met the brash, the boastful, the openly lecherous, the silently sinister. All so thoroughly unsatisfactory that she'd been very close to abandoning her quest.

Then she met Henry.

Elizabeth knew at once that Henry was a gentleman: an old-fashioned label but one that suited him perfectly. Calm, courteous, well-groomed. Kind eyes, a pleasing smile. A tidy salt-and-pepper moustache. And remarkably Henry asked her questions. Still more remarkably, he listened to her answers.

Finding herself being listened to was, for Elizabeth, a novel experience. George had never listened. George talked. He talked and talked and talked. It didn't bother her. Not after the first few years of marriage. In time, the verbal flow became a comfort. George's observations, his opinions, his puns and his anecdotes washed over her in

gentle waves. They were a background buzz, a burr, a steady hum. An affirmation that all was as it should be. All was well. It was, then, the stony silence from the sitting-room that alerted her that George was dead.

Her relationship with Henry took its steady course. Concerts and the theatre. (She tried not to fidget but she didn't like either.) Walks in the countryside. (Cows frightened her.) But sacrifices must be made when, later in life, one tries to establish a new connection.

So far, so satisfactory.

Throughout, Henry remained a gentleman. Almost too much a gentleman. Which began to irritate her a little. Twice she invited him home for a nightcap but he politely declined. Then she insisted and Henry complied. But when he'd finished his whisky, he stood up to go.

It was time to be bold. Taking Henry by the hand, Elizabeth led him upstairs to the bedroom. As he sat on the edge of her king size bed, her heart in her mouth, she said:

—Don't you like me, Henry?

Elizabeth woke in the night, as she so often did, and reached out for George's hand. But then remembered it wasn't there.

Instead ...

Replaying what had followed her coaxing, Elizabeth smiled. Henry was certainly shy but he'd been a tender lover and, unlike George, who tossed and turned like an alligator trapped in a sack, a peaceful sleeper.

Next morning, re-entering the bedroom with a pot of tea and a plate of buttered toast, she tentatively touched the still motionless shape in her bed.

The ambulance arrived immediately; a doctor shortly afterwards. It was demeaning to admit she knew so little about Henry and to be able to provide only the most meagre details.

Alone once more, she examined her feelings. Sadness, yes. Regret. Remorse. And — rather shameful to admit — vexation. Why hadn't Henry warned her?

—The truth is, Elizabeth, I don't trust my heart.

—Oh, but you must, Henry. You must. One should always trust one's heart.