

# ALMA.

It is a Saturday afternoon, and Paul Turner is in his local shopping area. This is unusual for him, but when he was doing his weekly shopping the evening before there were two or three items he had forgotten to purchase. Therefore, he had come down this afternoon to buy the required articles. He was about to enter the shop when he was brought to a stop; there before him was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. She was of medium height, slim, with dark shiny hair, dark eyes and a perfect mouth.

Paul stood transfixed, then he realised that her eyes and indeed her whole face were smiling at him, and he was blocking the doorway. "I'er, I'm sorry, I'er, I'm in your way" he stammered. That's quite alright the smiling face replied; the voice was soft and warm. Paul stood aside and watches the vision walk away. Will you excuse me, I want to get into the shop, He was brought back to reality by a large, angry faced woman; he stepped aside, and then followed the lady into the shop. Paul walked around the shop for several minutes, trying to think of the things he had to buy, but the image of that lovely face kept filling his mind. After what seemed an age, he found what he was looking for, made the purchase and walked home in a kind of dream.

All through the following week Paul found it very hard to concentrate on his work, his mind kept wondering back to that chance meeting and the beautiful creature that has appeared like a vision before him. He kept wondering if there was a chance of seeing her again, perhaps if he went down to the shops next Saturday afternoon, he might see her again; but what if he did, how was he to start up a conversation, and would she be interested? She might laugh at him.

At last the long week came to an end, and on Friday night, Paul was doing his weekly shopping, making sure he had everything he wanted on his list, at the same time keeping his eyes open for her, just in case she was out and about as well. On the Saturday morning Paul could not make up his mind what to do, should he go down to the shopping area in the hope that he would meet her again, what if he did and he saw her and she snubbed him, how would he feel, and how would he feel if he did not see her. At the same time, there was the nagging thought that he was acting like a teenager who had met his first love, instead of a grown man of twenty six.

As he prepared his lunch, he made up his mind; he would do what he did most Saturday afternoons, go and watch his friends play rugby, it would be best if he was to forget all about what happened last weekend, it would be illogical to expect to see her just because he had feeling, even imaginary feeling for her.

After lunch, he dressed in warm clothes as it is always chilly in the open rugby ground, and left his apartment; but instead of getting into his car and driving to see his friends play, he was unable to stop himself from walking down to the shops. As he walk along he was cursing himself for being so weak, this is just complete madness, he kept telling himself, you are acting like a school boy, and I'm just wasting time. On reaching the shops he stopped and said to himself, Now what am I going to do, spend the rest of the afternoon walking up and down? You are nothing but a blood fool, and you always thought you had your feet firmly on the ground. As usual, the area was crowded with shoppers, and the chances of spotting someone in such a dense mass were extremely slim. This is madness; he thought to himself, I still have got time to go over to see my friends play.

He started to walk home, and suddenly, there she was, and she was smiling at him. Without thinking, he went over to her and apologized for last Saturday, then again without thinking, and though it sounded so very corny, he told her that she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen and that he had been thinking of her all week. "That is most kind of you to say that, but I'm sure that's not true" "I can assure you its true," Paul replied, then a flash of inspiration, Would you like a cup of tea, there is a cafe' just a little way along the road, after only a seconds pause she answered that would be very nice, thank you. They walked the few yards to the cafe and found a table, and after seeing his new friend seated asked her what she would like to drink, I'll have a coffee please, white and no sugar, I'm a tea man Paul responded, I'll go and order them. Within a few minutes their drink were served. As they drunk their drink, Paul told the girl his name, my name is Paul, Turner and I have an apartment in Oakwood Court. Hello Paul, I'm Alma Hosier, and I live

with my parents in Arundel Gardens, are you a member of the Jewish community Paul asked on the spur of the moment without thinking. Why yes, Alma answered with some surprise, My Father is the Cantor at Whittle Road Synagogue. In fact he is the fourth generation of Cantors, his father, grandfather and great grandfathers were all Cantors. That's very interesting, I know a Cantor has a high place in your religion, but I don't have any idea of what his duties are. It's a very high position; the Cantor is in charge of the music and chants during the service, he also leads the Synagogue liturgy and congregational prayers I knew he had an important position but I was not sure what that involved. So your family are very much involved in the running and organising at the synagogue, Paul replied. Yes, the whole family are, someone is always doing something or other.

Changing the subject, Paul asked Alma if she worked locally, no, I work in the City, I'm a secretary to the Chairman of United Insurance; and you Paul what do you do?". I'm a solicitor, I don't have my own practise, I work for M, D&S solicitors in the High Street. I know them" Alma said, They have quite a good name I think.

As they chatted away while they drunk, anyone looking at them would have thought that they were old friends; during their talk Paul asked her if she like dancing and Alma said that did. Then would you like to come with me to the Mascot Ballroom I go there every Saturday night and it would be nice if you would join me. After a few seconds hesitation Alma said yes. If I pick you up at 7.30pm would that be alright a delighted Paul asked. Yes thank you, I live at number 7 Arundel Gardens. They sat for a while longer talking about the things they liked to do and the music they enjoyed listening to; then Alma said that she had some more shopping to do, so they parted until later in the day.

Paul returned to his apartment in high spirits, he could not get over his luck in meeting Alma, who would have thought that one chance meeting would lead to another one; it seemed too good to be true. The excitement of spending an evening with Alma increased as Paul took extra care in getting ready. As Arundel Gardens was only a short drive from his apartment, he did not have to leave until 7-15, and he was outside number 7 with time to spare. As he got out of his car, Alma came out of her house, slamming the front door behind her; there was a dark expression on her face which turned into a bright smile when she saw Paul.

She was dressed in a very attractive powder blue suit and to Paul she looked stunning. Arriving at the Mascot Ballroom Paul found room to park, then escorting Alma into the building and into the ballroom, he was able to find an empty table near the floor. Sitting his new love down, he asked her if she would like a drink.

Alma was surprised that they served drink, but would like a Gin and Tonic, Paul then excused himself while he went to get their drinks, coming back with Alma's and a Whisky Mac for himself. As he placed the drinks on the table, the band started to play a Fox-Trot, so Paul asked if she would like to dance, and the response was a bright smile and an emphatic yes. They took to the floor. Alma holding herself close to Paul; they dance well together, and again, anyone seeing them would have thought that they had been dancing together for years. As they danced together, the look in their eyes as they gazed at each other showed that there was something stronger than friendship between them. They danced most of the dances, Paul had never experienced such a wonderful evening, and Alma had a feeling of contentment inside her.

During the course of the evening, they finished their drink, and Paul asked if she would like another, to which Alma replied no, she was only a social drinker, and one was enough, just like me then Paul said, I only drink when I'm in company and then I can make a drink last a long time. All too soon the last waltz was being played and the couple danced it holding each other tightly; they left the floor arms around each other and walked to the car. On the drive to Alma's home they sang some of the popular dance tunes they had danced too. Arriving at number 7, they sat in the car holding hands and making arrangements to meet the next day. Getting out of the car, Paul escorted Alma to her gate, there they held each other for a few minutes then their lips met and a gentle kiss developed into a long passionate one, it seemed as though no words had to be spoken, the look in their eyes said it all. Paul watched Alma walk to her front door and enter the house,

and then he got back into his car and drove home, unaware that Mrs Hosier had been watching from her bedroom window.

Next morning at breakfast time in the Hosier household, Alma was quizzed by her mother about why she went out with a Gentile, Look at all the nice boys you could go out with, there is Geo Mosses' boy Maurice, he has good prospects in the Foreign Office, and Aidan Cohen will take over his father's jewellery shops, and there young Harry Asquith, he is soon to qualify as a doctor, all good boys, who will give you a good home and a good life. Mum, I have no feelings for any of them, or anyone else we know. Feelings, Feelings, what's that got to do with it your position in the community is what matters, look at me and your father, our parents arranged our marriage, as you well know, and look at what we have achieved, four children, all doing well, your sister and brother all married and doing well, why should you be different.

Mr Hosier, who had been reading a newspaper at the end of the table, looks at Alma and said "Your mothers right, marriage between couples of different faiths, especially if they are strong ones, can cause a lot of trouble .I am only going out with Paul, there is no talk of marriage" Alma answered, getting up from the table.

Meanwhile, at 16, Oakwood Court, Paul was busy doing his usual Sunday morning jobs, but he was doing them in good spirits. He had arranged to take Alma out to lunch at a little country inn he had stumbled on by chance some months ago, and was counting the hours until he picked her up. At the appointed time he arrived outside her house and as he walked down the front path. Alma came out, slamming the door behind her, and there was that dark expression on her face again, and as before it turned into a bright smile as she approached Paul and she put her arms around him and they kissed.

As they drove out to the inn they chatted away, but there was a little nagging worry at the back of Paul's mind. The lunch was a happy one, and they stayed there well into the afternoon, then Paul took her to meet some of his friends; they all took to Alma straight off, and the rest of the day was spent in a most pleasurable way. All too soon it was time to take Alma home, as they drove along they arranged to go dancing on Saturday night, they could not meet in the week as by the time Alma got home from work it was too late. Arriving outside number 7, they stayed in the car for a few minutes, and then Paul saw Alma to her gate, they embraced and kissed, then Paul watched Alma enter her house than got back into his car and drove away, unaware that Mrs Hosier had been watching from her bedroom window.

The week dragged by slowly for Paul, but it was made easier by the happy thoughts of their previous meetings. On the Saturday he watched his friends play rugby in the afternoon, then got ready to meet his love. As he drove up to her house he was surprised and a little troubled to see her standing outside. Alma was all smiles as she got into the car and leaned across to kiss him. Have you been waiting long?" he asked, the question surprised her. "Oh, no, I was ready so I thought I'd stand outside." Paul was not convinced by her answer, but said he was glad Saturday had at last come so they could be together. The happy couple spent another enjoyable evening dancing, and for both of them the time passed too quickly and it seemed as though in no time at all the last waltz was being played.

On the drive home, Paul asked Alma what she would like to do the next day, she said she would like to go to the inn again and perhaps after she would take him to meet some of her friends. They stayed in the car for a while, and then Paul saw her to the gate and watches her enter the house, drove home, again unaware that Mrs Hosier had been watching them.

As on the previous Sunday morning, Mrs Hosier harangued her daughter for going out with a Gentile, she should marry one of their own kind and produce children, especially sons, so one of them might follow their Grandfather and become a fifth generation Cantor. Later when Alma was in her bedroom getting ready to meet Paul, her father came in, a most unusual thing for him to do. You know my dear, your mother is right; your place in the community will be much stronger if you marry into our faith. Also I have noticed that people that marry for love, after a time, both lead separate lives, whereas couples bound by the same faith share their lives with each other and their faith. So my dear, think seriously about what your mother is

saying, two people sharing the same faith and bring up their children in it have a common purpose that binds them together.

This Sunday morning was a rainy one, so Paul was more than a little surprised to see Alma waiting for him outside in the rain. When she got into the car Alma did not seem to be her usual happy self. They kissed and he asked her if she was alright, she nodded and replied she was fine. Why were you waiting out in the rain? There was no reply for a few seconds then Alma said. You may as well know the truth; there is a lot of opposition to me seeing you as you are not one of our faiths. Those words brought the nagging worry that had been in the back of his mind to the fore. I had an idea that something was bothering you, but I could not think what it may be; now I know. Sorry, I did not want you to tell you, but the pressure on me is just too strong, the trouble is my whole family are so involved in the synagogue and have been for generations, that they expect me to follow them.

Make no mistake, my faith and my commitment to it is as strong as theirs, but at the same time I want to lead my own life. Paul took her hand, do you still want to go out for a meal. Alma squeezed his hand, Oh yes, despite what has happened I have been looking forward to it all week, me to, and it might help to lift your spirits. They did enjoy their meal and they chatted away as always, but there was an atmosphere about them that cast a cloud over them. Afterwards, they went to meet some of Alma's friends, and spent the rest of the day in their company, enjoying some lively conversations with lots of laughter, which helped them forget their troubles.

When Paul took Alma home, they sat in the car for a while just holding hands, each one deep in their thoughts. I must go, she told him, it's been a lovely day, and I feel much better for it and being with you. Paul accompanied her to the gate, they embraced and kissed. Will you be alright Paul asked, thinking about what might happen when she enters the house. Alma gave him a hug, of course, don't you worry about me, then after a pause, what will be will be Paul. With that she gave him a kiss and went into the house, Paul drove away, still unaware that Mrs Hosier had been watching from the bedroom window.

During the week when Paul was working in his office, one of the partners, Mr Dozsa came in; this surprised Paul as that was the first time he had been in to see him, he was even more surprised when Mr Dozsa asked him about the case he was working on; it was simple Power of Attorney case, nothing complicated at all. When Mr Dozsa left he paused at the door, I understand you are taking my nice Alma Hosier, out. Paul's jaw dropped, Why yes, sir, I am he replied. Mr Dozsa looked at him for a few seconds then walked out. So, that was the reason for the visit, although nothing had been said, Paul got the impression that his boss was not pleased. Alma was right; the whole family were putting pressure not only on her, but him as well.

Paul sat at his desk pondering the situation, if they were to marry, would Alma be ostracized by her family and other members of her faith. If they had children he would have no objections to them being brought up in the Jewish faith, but would they be accepted; and if they had a son, would he be able to become a Cantor like his grandfather, or would the fact that he had a Gentile father bar him from holding such an important position. The more he thought about the problem the more confusing it became. All the rest of the week he turned the problem over in his mind, he was also concerned about how Alma would feel about it. Would she be willing to marry, and risk a break with her family, or would she feel more secure by keeping in with them, no matter what may happen.

By the end of the week he had made up his mind, it would be better if they went their separate ways, although he had been practicing law for only a few years, he had seen enough family quarrels to know just how bitter they could become, and he did not want that to happen to Alma. He had no doubt over his love for her and he knew she loved him, but his experience had taught him just how much anger and hatred family feuds could generate.

On the Saturday night when Paul drove up to Alma's house, she was waiting outside again, as she got into the car she looked grave, but gave him a smile, though not the bright one she use to give him. As they drove to the Mascot Ballroom, Paul told her he had learnt that one of her Uncles was his Boss. Alma laughed, Yes, he is my mother's brother, and he has in the past spoken well of you. That was gratifying to Paul's ears, but

did it mean that Alma knew all about him before they met?. "Did you know about me before we met he asked, no, absolutely not, but when you told me you worked for M, D&S, I did put two and two together. The rest of the drive to the ballroom was completed in silence; they found a table but neither of them felt like having a drink, so they just danced, and as they danced they seemed to avoid each other's eyes, and when they did meet, there was a look of great sorrow and sadness in them, it was as if they realised their relationship had come to an end.

They danced the last waltz with their arms around each other and hardly moving at all. As they walked to the car there was a melancholy air about them which lasted on the drive to Alma's home. They sat in silence for several minutes, then Paul started to speak, his voice was low and solemn. "I've been thinking about...." His voice trailed away. Alma took his hand and said quietly, I know what you are going to say Paul, we must part. There was silence for a few minutes then Paul, his voice still soft and uneven answered, "I'm so sorry, but you are under such pressure from your family and I know of cases where whole families have been torn apart because of the hostility of one family over a marriage, and because I love you so much I would be cruel to put you in a position where you had to choose between the love of your family and me. His voice broke, Alma squeezed his hand, he continued, I've seen so many cases where marriages have caused such bitterness and hatred between families that I could not live with myself I put you through that ordeal.

After a few moments Alma spoke, religion and faith is so strong in my family that I do not think I could just walk away from them, and if we did marry and have children I'm not too sure how they would be received into our faith. They sat in silence for a long time, and then Paul told Alma he would always love her and if he did marry her, his first and only true love would be her. Alma said she had the same feeling for him and just thinking about he gave her a nice feeling inside. Paul got out of the car and helped Alma out and walked with her to her gate. They just held hands, no words were spoken, and then with tears running down her face, she turned and walked into the house. Paul got back into the car and drove away, still unaware that Mrs Hosier had been watching from her window. The rest of the week-end and the following week were sheer agony for Paul, he could not sleep and had the utmost difficulty in concentrating on his work.

At the week-end he watched his friends play rugby in the afternoon, and then joined them in the pub in the evening. He had no desire to go dancing and although spending an entire evening in a pub did not appeal to him, it was better than being at home on his own. As the weeks went by life slowly settled down for him, he let himself get involved in some of the cases he was working on which helped to take his mind away from thinking of her. He even noticed that on the rare occasions he saw Mr Dozsa he was always pleasant to him, a sure sign Alma's family were happy about the break-up.

After a few weeks he gave up joining his friends in the pub on Saturday evenings and started to go to the cinema and theatre instead, he was lonely and Alma was always at the back of his mind, but he was gradually coming to terms over being without her. One day on his return to his apartment after work, there was the usual pile of letters waiting to be picked up. Among all the type written envelopes was one written in a delicate female hand. Intrigued, he opened that one first, imagine his surprise when he saw it was from Alma!, his heart leapt and he could hardly keep his hands still enough to read it.

My dear Paul, it began, and went on to say how much she had missed him and how hard it had been to get back to a normal life. It continued to say that she could never go through her life without spending some time alone with him.

Her friends, who were sympathetic to her feelings and had come up with a plan whereby she could spend time with Paul, their plan was that they would let everyone know that they and Alma were going to spend a week-end in Brighton, they would go, but Alma would be spending the time with him. They were going to leave work on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> and return to work on Monday 20<sup>th</sup>; Alma would leave work after lunch on that Friday and travel home early so that she did not see any of the usual passengers. If Paul would meet her at the station at 14.45pm she would be with him the whole week-end and not travel back until late Monday morning.

Paul could not believe his luck, never in his wildest dreams had he imagined anything like this happening. He looked at the calendar and saw Friday the 17<sup>th</sup> was just over two weeks away. He was so excited he did not know how to stop himself from shouting from the rooftops that the girl he loved was going to spend some time with him.

At work his colleagues noticed how bright and happy he was, he did not tell them why in case Mr Dozsa, Alma's uncle got wind of it. The two weeks were the longest he had ever spent, time seemed to have stopped, at home he spent his time getting the place ready and making sure there were enough provisions in so that they did not have to go out, and it would be fatal if they were spotted. At long last, the day and the appointed hour arrived. Paul was at the station in good time, the excitement mounting, and then suddenly, there she was, looking absolutely radiant. They embraced and their lips met in a long emotional kiss; the drive to Oakwood Court was made in an atmosphere of supreme joy and happiness.

Arriving there they took the lift up to the first floor and number 16; they entered and closed the door on the outside world. Soon the apartment was filled with the soft vibrations of the physical expression of their love. The passion, the warmth, the tenderness, the deeply shared satisfaction were almost tangible. As they lay in each other's arms, Paul said what a wonderful feeling of deep contentment he had and that gave him a wonderful warm glow inside him. Alma hugged him and said that this was the moment in her life, whatever happened to her, this was something she would always remember, and when times got hard and stressful, and in time of disappointments and sorrow, she would remember this one time and draw strength and comfort from it and the great love they shared.

Love, no matter how deep and strong, cannot stop time, and all too soon the fateful Monday and the hour they had to leave the apartment was upon them. Paul carried Alma's case as they made their way down to the car; he helped her in then put the case into the boot. The drive to the station was made in doleful silence; there were no words to express their deep sorrow. At the station, Paul got out of the car and by the time he had retrieved the case from the boot, Alma at his side. As he handed her the case their hands touched for a few moments and two pairs of eye, filled with sorrow and pain, gazed at each other through their tears. Then Alma turned and walked into the station, caring her case and something very precious deep inside her. Paul watched her enter, then got back into his car, sat there for a few moments, then drove away.

By Alf