

My Own Love Story by Gerry Bartlett

“What can I do for you?” I answered the phone automatically then realized what I’d said. Not cool. But I was a young teacher who had been working part time nights and weekends at a local department store to get the clothing discount. The question seemed natural. The man on the other end of the phone line liked it a lot. But he was a gentleman and didn’t say what he was imagining a young woman could “do” for him. It was only later that he told me how it had intrigued him.

The call was for a date, a blind date fixed up by a girl I’d gone to high school with. She was dating John’s brother and, for some reason, thought I should meet this man. I had gone through a dating slump. A man liked me, but no sparks on my side. I liked one I’d met at the store but he was younger, still in college and unreliable. So I agreed to the blind date. I wasn’t looking forward to it. They usually were disasters.

My mother was horrified. Did I forget to tell you? John was divorced with four daughters, ages six to ten. Yes, that was a complication. And he was nine years older than I was. I calmed my mother down. “Don’t worry, it’s just something to do on a Saturday night. I probably won’t like him.” Famous last words.

What can I say? John was well-dressed and drove a blue Fiat convertible. I took one look at him and wanted him. I made him put the top down on the car before we left the parking lot of my apartment building. He was impressed. I looked good in a mini-skirt. He

appreciated that. He took me dancing. Disco and slow dancing. I was good at the fast stuff and his slow moves were... mmm. He *smelled* right.

Was it love at first sight? Just about. I knew he was the one for me right away. He caught up pretty fast. It was tough, though. His daughters weren't thrilled that their daddy was getting serious about anyone. They refused to eat the first meal I cooked until John marched them outside for a "talk." They ate after that but if looks could kill...

We married and had our own son. The girls adored him. I had to grow up fast as a stepmother and learn six ways to cook hamburger meat when we had the daughters for the weekend twice a month. We spent hours together bargain hunting in the mall and I realized I had lucked into a great family.

John and I had over thirty years together. Then in 2007 he got up in the middle of the night. I heard him call my name and then an ominous thud. Paramedics never found a pulse. He had died instantly from a blood clot, a complication from diabetes. Totally unexpected, it was an easy way for him to go, really hard for me. I miss him every day.

But my life goes on. His daughter, who was the ringleader in the "We won't eat what *she* cooks!" fiasco, is so dear to me that I dedicated my last book to her. Our son is a fine man who looks more like his father every day. And I can write love stories and know what finding your soul mate feels like. I hope to give my readers just a little taste of that joy and passion in my books. That's what *I* can do for *you*.