

# Nights in White Feathers

—MinervaDeannaBond

8.24.14

*The inspiration for this story came while I was watching the Season 3 episode "Murder in a Minor Key" last week. I saw those fluffy white marabou slippers Jessica was wearing and got so tickled that I knew I had to write a story about them. She said herself that Grady got them for her, but why and how? Well... here's the answer in this little prequel to "Murder in a Minor Key."*

*December 1986*

*What do you get for the Queen of Mystery?*

The question seemed unanswerable as Grady Fletcher strolled through foreign territory in Bloomingdale's. He used the expression *foreign territory* loosely, as he rarely had any reason to visit the ladies' department, but every now and then, he would stop in to look for a present for his current flame or for his favorite aunt - the latter of which he was shopping for now. Christmas was coming up and all of his shopping was done, save for his Aunt Jess, alias mystery writer J.B. Fletcher. He always got a kick out of buying presents for her, because he knew that no matter if the gift was serious or goofy, she would love it.

It wasn't that Grady made a habit of buying his aunt gag gifts every year. On most birthdays and Christmases, he took care to pick out something nice for her, something that showed how much he loved her. Just this past Christmas, he had bought her a beautiful strand of cultured pearls, and the birthday before, he had gifted her with a warm, deep red scarf. But sometimes, he just couldn't help himself whenever he saw something funny, like the Mickey Mouse ears hat he'd found in a thrift store a few years back. This year, however, he couldn't decide whether to get her something funny or something nice.

He'd quickly learned that the dresses were a no-no, as he'd made the mistake of buying her a dress one year that was a shocking Pepto-Bismol pink and so bulky that when Jessica had tried it on, it looked as though she were wearing a neon-pink potato sack. The jewelry, as always, was gorgeous, but all the pieces he knew his aunt would like were worth more money than what rested in his modest bank account, and unfortunately, there were no sales on the jewelry at the present time. *I could always get her a pair of silk pajamas. Aunt Jess loves her PJs,* Grady thought as he

strolled through the sleepwear. However, he found himself blushing furiously when the silk two-pieces gave way to silk and lace nightgowns. *Jeez, I can't buy her one of these! Talk about embarrassing!* The back of his neck burning, Grady scurried out of the intimates department and walked as fast as he could go to the shoes. *At least I know that section's harmless.*

As soon as he got there, he made for the women's shoes and browsed the racks. Normally, he didn't know bo diddley about shoes. All he knew was Jessica's shoe size and that she seemed to like all kinds of shoes, not just one particular type. But darned if he knew what to get her, sandals or high heels or sneakers. *I don't get women and shoes, I just don't*, he thought, his eyes roving over the seemingly endless display of footwear and growing more frustrated by the minute. *Man, maybe I should just get Aunt Jess a book... hey, wait a second, what's this?*

Grady slammed on the brakes as a colorful display caught his eye. There, next to the cozy slippers, stood a bunch of high-heeled, slide-on sandals, each with a puff of feathers on the strap. Grady couldn't help himself and he started to laugh; they looked so silly. And as luck would have it, his laughter attracted the attention of a young salesgirl, who immediately strode to his side. "Is there something I can help you with, sir?" she asked, smiling at him.

Grady hushed his chortling and turned to the girl, noticing, of course, that she was pretty. Chestnut hair and brown eyes; her name badge read *Tiffany*. "Um... I was just curious. What are these?" he asked, pointing to the feathery shoes.

Tiffany's eyes twinkled. "Are you asking for yourself?"

Grady flushed a deep shade of plum. "Oh, no! No, no, no! I'm asking for my aunt! I'm trying to find her a Christmas present," he explained, kicking himself for acting like a monkey in front of this pretty girl.

Now it was Tiffany's turn to laugh. "I'm sorry if I embarrassed you. I was just teasing." When Grady's body relaxed somewhat and some of the color had drained from his face, she then launched into an explanation of her product. "These are marabou slippers. I know, I know, they don't look like typical fuzzy slippers, but they are typically worn with sleepwear, usually a satin nightgown. And sometimes women just wear them with anything, just for the heck of it. They're just for fun. I've seen men come in and buy them for their wives purely because they look silly."

"They *do* look silly," Grady agreed, taking another look at the shoes. "Man, my Aunt Jess would get a kick out of these if she was here." As soon as the

words left his mouth, the light bulb went off. *Of course! I can get her a pair of these slippers!* "Do you have a pair of these in a size 8?"

"Sure do. What color were you looking for?"

Grady paused, thinking back to the pajamas he'd seen his aunt wear. "Well, I'm not sure. My aunt wears a lot of different colors."

"Well, why not get her something neutral, then? Something that goes with everything?"

"Hey, that's a good idea! I never would've thought of that."

Tiffany grinned. "That's because you're a guy." She turned and plucked one slipper from the display. "How about white? This goes with everything for sure."

Grady took the slipper in his hand and looked it over. From his point of view, it just plain looked ridiculous, like somebody had hot-glued a powder puff to a pair of high heels. But if it gave his beloved aunt a belly laugh, then it would be well worth the purchase. "Works for me." He handed the slipper back to Tiffany. "I'll take 'em."

"Size 8, right?" Grady nodded and Tiffany searched the racks until she found a box marked with the right size. "Wear or wrap?" she asked, her eyes glittering with mirth as she rang the shoes up.

"Wrap," Grady said firmly, watching her stuff the shoebox into a brown bag.

"Relax, honey," Tiffany said, handing him his purchase. "I'm just teasing you." She gave him a sincere smile. "Your aunt's a lucky lady. You must love her a lot to walk through the ladies' shoes and then put up with me just to get her a present."

"I do love her very much. Don't know what I'd do without her." Grady offered her a shy smile. "Thanks, Tiffany, and Merry Christmas!" He returned her wave as he took his leave, now fit to bursting with excitement. *I wish I could see Aunt Jess's face when she opens these up.*

### *Christmas Day*

*Grady, my dear, what did you send me this time?*

Although Jessica Fletcher always looked forward to Christmas each year, she never knew what to expect when she opened the package that Grady always sent. Jessica loved her nephew dearly, yet his choices in gifts were sometimes a little questionable. He never missed when it came to jewelry, as she owned several lovely necklaces and earrings that he'd given her over the years, but in regard to clothing... his taste was more than slightly off the chart. He'd bought her a pair of parachute pants just a year or two ago that made her feel as though she could get airborne in a strong wind,

and don't even get her started on that one dress, a hot pink nightmare with shoulder pads big enough to land a plane on.

But this year's parcel was too large for jewelry and too small for clothes. Her brow furrowing in curiosity, Jessica held up the still-wrapped box and shook it. The contents clunked around in their confinement, sounding very much like shoes hitting cardboard. *He got me shoes, I know it.* Praying that they weren't clown shoes, she tore the brown paper off to reveal the shoebox from Bloomingdale's and a card from Grady. She slit the envelope open with a fingernail and pulled the Christmas card out, opening it to read her nephew's Christmas message.

*Merry Christmas, Aunt Jess!*

*I know how stressed you get writing your books sometimes, so hopefully these will make you laugh whenever you feel like throwing your typewriter against the wall. I miss you so much, and I hope we can see each other again soon!*

*Love,*

*Grady*

"I love you too, Grady," Jessica said, kissing the card as though she were kissing her dear nephew's cheek. Taking a deep breath, she lifted the lid of the box.

Jessica burst out laughing as she took out a pair of marabou slippers, snowy white and feathery enough to tickle anyone's toes. "Oh, Grady," she giggled, sliding her feet out of her comfy slippers and into the marabou slides. Surprisingly, they were quite comfortable, and would be even more so after she got them broken in. The only problem was, where would she wear them? Certainly not out anywhere. And not when company came to visit; dear Lord, she could hear the jokes now. *J.B. Feathers. Not a nickname I want to be stuck with.* Still, it was a delightful present, one she could wear every night and chuckle over in private. Desiring a better look at them, she trotted upstairs to her bedroom and posed before her vanity mirror, popping her feet model-style.

"Jessica, you look like a vamp from the 40s," she said to herself, turning her feet this way and that to see the slippers from different angles. Indeed, with the ruby-red flannel nightgown she was wearing and the fluffy marabou slippers on her feet, she looked like Mrs. Claus's sister. Feeling flirty and in the Christmas spirit, Jessica turned on the radio and surfed through the stations until she heard a familiar *ba-boom, ba-boom*. Laughing anew and wishing she had a feather boa to go with the slippers, she vamped around her room, singing along to "Santa Baby" and shaking what her mama gave her. But even as she sang with Eartha about the sable

under the tree, the yacht, the Tiffany decorations, and the rest of the bling, she knew that none of these pricy gifts could match up to what Grady gave her. True, some of his presents were goofy and downright outrageous while others were honestly beautiful, but they always came from his heart. She wasn't his blood, but she and Frank had raised him after the death of his parents, and she loved him as strongly as any mother could.

Yes, she would wear these slippers. She would wear them when the nights were cold, when she needed a laugh, when she was feeling silly and sexy, and when she needed to be reminded of just how much she was loved.

She would wear them to think about Grady, the nephew who loved her better than a son. One thing she knew for sure, nights in white feathers were going to be a blast from now on.