

Synopsis – The Angel

James, a charismatic but newly unemployed headhunter, sinks his whole redundancy cheque into buying the tenancy of his local pub, ‘The Angel’, which was rescued from closure by a syndicate of village worthies. James has absolutely no experience of running a pub – but he is a very enthusiastic customer. He’s spent much of the ten years since his graduation drinking inside them. Emma, his pretty but prosaic new wife, is appalled by his impetuosity – she’d secretly earmarked the cash for a new kitchen.

James is told he must find a partner with experience and a ‘big personality’ and starts an increasingly desperate search: Emma is adamant she will not sacrifice her HR management career.

Prior to redundancy, James had become disillusioned with corporate life and found that his latent creative interests were re-awakening. He has come to know Kim, a Hackney-based artist working in a London bar to support her struggling career. On James’ last day at work she had accompanied him around London on a day-long bender. Bohemian and broke, Kim is suffering bouts of depression brought on by the stress of urban life. James offers her the partnership in the pub and is amazed when she accepts.

Kim’s forthrightness and alternative dress create initial tension with the locals but her charm soon sees her accepted. Her artistic influence subtly transforms the pub, which attracts a more vibrant clientele. James’s gastronomic plans prove over-ambitious but, against the odds, the business becomes a modest success.

Pragmatic Emma can’t understand the change in her husband and realises their careers are pushing them publicly apart. By contrast his partnership with Kim intensifies, becoming loaded with suppressed sexual attraction. Emma is panic-

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stricken that she'll end up divorced, like her parents. She begins to drink heavily, especially in the pub, which compounds James' anxiety about his faltering marriage. Kim settles in comfortably, converting a pub outbuilding to a studio and discovering artistic and spiritual inspiration from the local Chilterns landscape, which is dotted with prehistoric sites.

James encounters several obstacles that lead him to harbour suspicions about some of the investors' motives: perhaps the venture has been deliberately set up to fail so the council will allow it to be bulldozed for commuter housing?

Gordon, Emma's father, is an investor in the pub and the local GP. He becomes infatuated with Kim and his disastrous attempts at seduction culminate in an alleged sexual assault. In a test of his loyalties and priorities, James decides to support Kim against Gordon, which leads to a separation from Emma and puts the business in jeopardy. James and Kim finally start a sexual affair.

Trade thrives but a suspicious fire guts the pub and much of Kim's artwork is destroyed. Kim's depression sets in and she disappears back to London. Emma offers a rapprochement if James will leave the pub but he commits himself to re-open it. He realises how much he misses Kim and, after a search, tracks her down in the Tate Modern. They are reconciled on the Millennium Bridge.

This novel considers changing direction in life. It examines the hard choices this creates and the consequences of tough decisions that stem from the tension between creativity and practicality. It is also about moving between urban and rural and being accepted within a new community.

549 words