

# COCKTAILS AT NOON

Life. Romance. Mystery.

A collection of short stories

Jane Jevons

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# About the Author



Jane Jevons is a writer and artist now living in East Anglia.

Her stories usually start from a true event or happening and are set in a country far away.

These stories take place nearer to home but include France, Italy and Ireland.



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# Cocktails at Noon

‘Hi, my name is Arabella. May I have a selfie please?’

Archie found himself staring into the cornflower blue eyes of the most divine girl he had ever seen. For once, words deserted him and he smiled into her mobile phone, marvelling at the expensive perfume that drifted from her as she took their photo.

‘Thank you,’ she breathed in a soft upper-class accent. Turning as she walked away, she looked back at Archie adding, ‘Would you like to come to lunch tomorrow?’

‘Thank you, yes very much.’

‘At noon then for cocktails.’ With a toss of her long curly hair the colour of beech leaves, she was gone.

‘You didn’t ask where.’ The listening barman laughed as Archie clapped a hand to his forehead, muttering, ‘What an idiot I am.’

‘No problem, any local could tell you that was Lady Arabella Drake-Carruthers and she lives

in Beauwaul Hall about a mile up the road from here.’

Archie gave him a relieved smile. ‘Thanks mate, that is one date I would hate to miss. I think one more drink and I will turn in.’

Next morning, he awoke, still hungover and had the sort of feeling he had as a child on Christmas day. Something nice was about to happen, then he remembered Arabella’s lunch invitation.

At ten minutes to noon, Archie astride his motorbike roared in through the impressive gates of Beauwaul Hall. It was the real deal. A large Tudor hall surrounded by a wide moat complete with many fish. His bike rattled over the wooden bridge and into a cobbled courtyard. He was expected as a man in uniform was waiting.

‘Good morning, sir, please follow me.’

Down corridors hung with ancient portraits, up a wide staircase until they entered the Long Gallery. ‘Mr Archie McVittie,’ the butler announced.

Arabella detached herself from the knot of people idly chatting by the window and ran forward to take his hand.

‘Super that you made it. Do come and meet my parents. Mummy, Daddy, this is Archie, the famous musician I was telling you about.’

Archie tried hard to look like a serious musician and not a guitar playing rock star. He bowed slightly as he shook hands.

‘So glad you could come,’ Lady Ellen said stiffly as she took in Archie’s red hair, beard, bare knees and tartan kilt. Also present was a tall dark-haired girl who was introduced as Magda and Uncle Freddie, who could have passed as a tailor’s dummy.

The butler approached with a tray of glasses. ‘Champagne cocktail sir or I can make any other cocktail you prefer.’

‘No this is fine, thank you.’ Archie took one of the delicious looking drinks noting how the bubbles rose endlessly to the surface.

At precisely one o’clock, the sound of a gong announced lunch was about to be served and they all tramped into the dining room. Archie was seated next to Magda with Arabella on the opposite side of the table.

While Sir Piers expertly carved the beef, Magda fixed Archie with a sultry stare. ‘Why you wear skirt?’ her voice was low and sultry.

Archie smiled at her saying, 'It is the traditional wear for Scottish men. I am from Fort William in Scotland.'

Suddenly he felt a hand on his knee and it was slowly travelling up his leg. His colour drained; this was a situation so unexpected he was at a loss as what to do. Standing up he reached out for the mustard knowing this was bad manners and simultaneously knocking his butter knife on the floor. The butler moved forward with a clean knife and picked up the dropped one.

'Sorry.' Archie sat down making sure his kilt was tucked firmly round his legs. Uncle Freddie guessed what had happened and as he was sitting on the other side of Magda said, 'Magda dear, can you pass me the mustard when Archie has finished with it, oh and the horseradish condiment as well please.' This involved so much passing that Magda's hands were very busy.

At the end of the meal as the others moved to the sitting room for coffee, Archie thanked Lady Ellen for a delightful lunch.

'Always nice to meet Arabella's friends. You must come again.' Her smile was frosty.

‘Mummy, I am going to take Archie to the stables to show him Star.’ With that, Arabella took Archie’s hand and they quickly left.

Outside they almost cantered across a cobbled area to a block of stables. ‘I am not really into horses,’ Archie puffed. Arabella’s long legs could cover ground at an alarming rate.

‘Oh, I said that just so we could get away.’

‘So we could be alone?’ Archie perked up at the thought.

‘Good Lord no, I want to pick up some things.’

Lying on the stable floor were a thick leather jacket and a bulging backpack. Ignoring the snuffling horse, Arabella picked them both up and put them on. Grabbing Archie’s hand again, she pulled him outside saying, ‘Hurry, where have you left your motorbike?’

‘In the courtyard just past the entrance.’

‘Super, come on before we are spotted.’

‘Hang on a minute.’ There was a limit to Archie trying to get into Arabella’s good books. ‘Where are we going?’

‘France.’

‘But why are you running away to France?’

'I want adventure. They want me to marry some titled chinless wonder and live in the Home Counties.' A lone tear trickled down Arabella's cheek.

Archie could not refuse. 'Hop on the back of the bike and hold on tightly to me. I will head for Dover then it is Calais here we come.'

Arabella gave him a quick kiss on the cheek then swung a long leg over the pillion seat. Rattling over the wooden bridge, they roared off in a cloud of dust...

## Another Day in the Salt Mines

**F**or six months of the year Gary and Tracy, live next door to Jim and Ursula in the hills above Bordeaux. The winter months are spent in their small house in Penzance. At the properties in France both gardens are large and while Gary is very casual about planting and weeding on his side of the rather patchy fence, Ursula insists Jim spends every waking minute toiling on their side. Jim is the reluctant wielder of garden implements while Ursula has long lists of jobs for him to do and makes sure he never has a moments rest. Tracy observing this has named her the Garden Fuhrer.

To start with, the two men would have pleasant chats over the fence about sport and the state of the world, however, Ursula did not like this. There would be a rustle in the bushes and a glaring Ursula would appear. Once when Jim thought Ursula had gone indoors for a loo break, he put his head over the fence for a chat but it was a trap and Ursula popped up beside him with a face like thunder. When Jim