

EXTRACT FROM “JIMMY MACK 1967 – STRONG LOVE (Side A)”

CHAPTER 19

I Got What It Takes – Brooks & Jerry (Direction 58-3267 – 1967)

Saturday 21 January 1967

Some of the photographs were astounding. Far better than he'd dared to expect. Out of the hundred or so thirty odd looked almost professional. He'd run them off as contacts. Then, choosing the best, he did eighteen six by fours of the standouts. Another twenty or so were okay. As for the rest, well, he'd work out later why they'd not worked. Effy was still down at Dorothy Perkins and wouldn't be home until the store closed.

Grace, not having a Saturday job yet, had insisted on helping him in the makeshift dark room. He was still nervous doing the developing and having Grace as an extra pair of hands turned out useful. He was learning as he went along and she was learning what to do from him. Effy's sister was definitely a quick learner of the dark room arts. There was enough photographic paper to make forty more six by four prints. The accidental purchase of bromide paper with its silver emulsion produced a distinct clear cold black finish that gave the photos a greater sense of depth for the black-and-white shots. The rest he would have to take in to develop during the week. That wouldn't come cheap but it would be worth getting the best twenty made up as eight by tens.

The Three Graces shots looked so startling he heard Grace gasp. “You're brilliant, Mack. You actually pulled it off. That's an amazing photograph. But so is this one of Angie surrounded by Effy and Ellen. Wow. James MacKinnon, I think you could actually be the next David Bailey. You haven't just made us look fantastic. You've made Effy's designs look fab. You could put these in *Petticoat* or any girl's mag and they'd look brill. I don't know which bit is better. Us looking so gorgeous or the clothes looking so good.”

“Can I come in?” Mack's dad took them by surprise.

“In a minute, Dad. We're waiting to develop the last one.”

“Has that homemade developing tank been alright? I was worried it might not do the job.”

“It's worked fine, Dad.”

“How's the red light worked? Not over-exposed any of the prints?”

“No. It seems to have done okay. We kept the photographic paper safe using the safelight as Tim advised.”

Seconds later, he pulled back the two layers of black curtaining. “Okay. Take a look at these and tell me what you think?”

“He’s done a brill job, Mr MacKinnon. I can’t get over how superb they are. Effy is going to be thrilled when she sees her clothes modelled like this.”

“But aren’t they your clothes too? After all, you’ve helped to make most of them and made some of them all by yourself. You should take some credit.”

“Don’t get me wrong, Mr MacKinnon, but it’s my sister’s designs that make them look so good. She has the ideas. All I do is to turn her design into clothes.”

“Yes, but you’re the better seamstress and cutter, so don’t be so modest. Effy always praises you and tells me how much better you are than her at cutting and sewing.”

“I’m not that much better than Effy. Well, a bit but I don’t have her flair for design. She knows exactly how it’ll look and what colour and fabric will be best before it’s even made. Take this baby doll dress she’s modelling,” Robert MacKinnon’s eyes nearly popped out of his sockets as he studied the photo Grace showed him, “Empire line with under bust ties and in emerald green satin effect chiffon. We’ve made two versions; this one is sleeveless and the other has short puffed Regency type sleeves.”

There was silence. “What’s the matter, Mr MacKinnon? Don’t you like it?”

“How far above her knees is the hemline?” His father’s expression was of a man who’d touched an exposed live mains wire. “Don’t you think it’s a little on the short side, a bit too revealing and risqué?”

Mack chuckled. “Looks okay to my eyes, Dad.”

“I bet it does,” his father replied with a wink, “but do you want other young men gawping and leering at Effy in what looks like nightwear?”

“It’s going to be the trend this year, Mr MacKinnon. All the girls will wear them so short, even me.”

“It’ll just make ’em even more envious, Dad.” Mack grinned. “Not only will she look beautiful but they’ll all be wishing they had a girlfriend like Effy.”

“Or me,” Grace added with more than a faint hint of annoyance.

Robert MacKinnon was going to say something further but thought it wiser not to. Then, after a thoughtful pause, he added. “I hope her mother and father aren’t upset if they see her dressed like this.”

“Not a case of ‘if’. They will, and lots of other girls and young women too by summer time. In Bob Dylan’s words, *the times they are a changing*’.

“What do you think of Angie in this sapphire blue A line shift? I love the way Effy worked the fine silky silver piping into the Peter Pan collar and sleeve ends. Doesn’t she look fab, Mr MacKinnon? I think those white tights and shoes just set off the whole outfit.”

Mack was in silent stitches watching his dad's face. "Er, um, yes Grace. She looks very pretty, very lovely indeed. To be honest I haven't got a clue about anything you've said. You lost me with piping and Peter Pan."

Mack's laughter echoed around the cellar leaving Grace and his dad staring at him.

"What's so funny?" they asked at the same time, thunderstruck by his outburst of laughter.

"It's my Dad, Grace. He's no idea about women's fashions. I've never forgotten when Mum dragged him and me off to Leeds to buy some new outfits. My mum wanted our opinions on her choices. Everything she tried on got the same answer: *that'll do fine, Jane*. He was sweating with fear every time we set foot in a women's dress shop, he didn't know where to look. When we passed ladies' lingerie in Marks, he went bright red like a crab. When it comes to what women wear he's all at sea."

"Nonsense, James. Ignore him, Grace. And I suppose you know more?"

"I've been learning loads ever since I got to know Effy and Grace. And of late a heck of a lot," he added. Pausing he gave his father a reminder. "Even why women shave their legs and underarms."

"Actually, Mr MacKinnon," said Grace, sounding almost apologetic, "he's surprising! Mack knows a fair bit when it comes to trendy fashions for girls. I think that's Effy's doing because he's always looking over her shoulders at the fashion pages. I've even spied him checking out The Sunday Times colour supplements fashion pages."

"Is that so? Next thing he'll be reading his mother's *Woman's Own*."

"Been there and done that," Mack smirked. "Lots of fashion shots in them. The clothes may not be for teenage girls but the models still have to know how to pose. Anyway, you should take more notice yourself and compliment Mum on her appearance a bit more. I'm sure she'd appreciate a compliment now and again."

"Hark at you," mocked his father, "trying to teach this old sea dog well-worn tricks. I'll have you know..."

"...You already do. I'm a fast learner, Dad. Got my best tips from you, especially when it comes to the fair sex. Mind, Grace has yet to join the fair sex..."

"Oi, you cheeky monkey! What are you implying?" Grace gasped.

"I'm only jesting, lass," Mack teased, "you're quite fair already. You look amazing in these photos. No one would think *you* were only fourteen. Astonishing what some war paint can do to age you."

"I'm almost fifteen," she protested. "Well, I will be in ten days."

"Don't forget to switch off this electric bar fire when you've cleared up. I don't want it racking up my electricity bill more than necessary. I'll leave you to it."

“It’s a bit nippy down here. I’ll leave you to tidy up, Mack. Can I take these prints up to show your mum?” Grace grabbed some of the photos, leaving him annoyed at being left.

Jane MacKinnon was surprised by her son’s impressive photography. Effy couldn’t wait to get Ellen and Angie’s reactions; she described the photos as breath taking. Then came her disappointment. Mack was reluctant to take the prints over to Halifax on the scooter but his mum’s suggestion went down well. She told them to invite Angie over for Sunday tea as well as Ellen and Tom. It made sense. It was cold and drizzling. The ride over wasn’t going to be pleasant. The few prints could so easily be ruined. There was a bright side to it all.

Mack’s dad was so struck with the photos he agreed to buy Mack all the photographic paper and chemicals he needed in future. This he did out of earshot of his wife, father to son. The girls weren’t to know either. He also agreed to stump up the cash to buy the lights from the parish hall providing they were cheap enough. Mack gave one mental sigh of relief after another. This photography game was too expensive for his limited means. Thank goodness his father was stepping in to help out.

The smell of stale beer and a choking acrid haze of blue cigarette smoke made Effy cough. It was a stench ingrained in the pub’s tobacco-stained walls and ceiling. The Vic Lounge was always packed Saturday nights. Tony Clarke’s *The Entertainer* was fading out on the jukebox as they found their friends in a tight group near the rear door. It was an all-nighter down The Plebs with Root & Jenny Jackson performing.

Ellen was berating Tom who was laughing and teasing her. It had to be hilarious. Angie was laughing too, as were Linda and Stingray.

“What’ve we missed?” grinned Mack.

“Glad you finally made it.” Tom had to raise his voice to be heard over the hubbub.

“He’s embarrassed me again.” Ellen’s peevishness was clear. “I didn’t know where to put myself.”

“You’ve missed tonight’s funny.” Stingray grinned, while Angie and Linda were still giggling. “He even made Angie laugh.”

“Go on, what did he do?” Effy gave her sister a pitying look.

“It wasn’t so bad,” smirked Tom. “Sherwood was getting a pint in for Dick Wilson and shouted across to him *have you got a glass Dick?*”

Angie cut in delivering the punchline before he could finish. “TC shouted back, *I hope not for his girlfriend’s sake*. The whole pub wet itself. Dick Wilson didn’t find it funny.”

Effy glanced at Mack convulsing. She tried to prevent herself laughing. Not even Ellen’s annoyed look could stop her shaking her head and bursting into a giggling fit.

“It gets worse, Effy,” Ellen continued. “Noddy here humiliates me in front of everyone with a limerick. The whole pub must have heard it.”

“But it’s true, doll! You should find it flattering. And don’t go exaggerating. Only half the pub heard it and they all cheered.”

“Go on. What did you say?” Mack knew he was expected to ask.

“Don’t you dare say it again !” Ellen warned Tom.

Linda grinned. “I’ll tell you!”

Tom stuck his size tens in his mouth some more. “I said it to all the girls at school.”

Linda ignored him, “*Roses are red, emeralds are green and your bum’s the best I’ve ever seen.*”

“Actually, Ellen, you should be flattered.” Mack failed to keep a straight face.

“I might have known you’d stick up for him. You’re opposite sides of the same damned coin, you two. Go on. Why should I be flattered?”

Effy jumped in, steering the conversation in another direction. “Wait until you see Mack’s photos from last night. You look incredible in them. Tom may well be right about your bum.”

Her description of the photos improved Ellen’s humour no end. She brightened on hearing her sister’s glowing report, the peevishness fading into undisguised delight.

Later on Angie turned down the invitation to come over to Mack’s. Problems at home meant she felt she and her sister Gillian needed to be there. It was cryptic but Mack and Effy worked out whatever was happening wasn’t good. Angie had other news she had to relay. Nate had been in touch with possible dates for their modelling work. All the suggested dates were midweek. The news brought them down with a bump.

“How are we going to get round it? Angie’s at work and we’re in school?” The girls looked at Mack for suggestions.

“I’ve got a problem with one of the dates,” Ellen sighed, sounding unhappy. “I’ve got to go for an interview for a teacher training college place.”

Mack and Effy both noticed Tom’s sudden sheepishness.

“You never told me you’d got an interview? Where? St. Mary’s in Strawberry Hill?” Effy asked, excited at her sister’s news.

“Huddersfield.” Ellen answered, taking Tom’s hand while he gave her a supportive glance.

“Huddersfield! Why?” Effy exclaimed in astonishment. “Are you joking, sis? I didn’t even know they had a teacher training college there.”

“Why? Because it’s near home and it’s near Halifax,” Ellen replied with a half smile.

“Has Tom something to do with this? I thought you couldn’t wait to get as far away from home as you could?” Mack challenged, expecting Tom to say something.

“It’s my choice. Tom has had nothing to do with it.”

Tom remained silent.

Angie looked at Ellen, a wry smile forming. “No. I imagine he wouldn’t. Tell me something, Tom. You’d be happy if she did though, wouldn’t you?”

“I’m saying nothing on the grounds it may tend to incriminate me.”

Effy looked daggers at Tom. “No. You might have implied it, knowing you.”

“Stop right there, Eff. It was my choice not his. Tom never ever said anything to me about where I should apply. Nor did he imply anything, so don’t go imagining things and blaming him. He didn’t even know where I’d applied until after I’d got the interview.”

“Okay,” Effy sighed. “I take it back, Tom. I still think you’re daft, sis. You always wanted to go down south to Twickenham and St. Mary’s. I only hope you’re not making the decision for the wrong reasons.”

Ellen looked at Tom, a blissful smile forming. Tom broke into an uncharacteristic bashful smile of his own. Mack noticed them squeezing each other’s hands. It was a near instant revelation. Closely observing others reveals everything to the wise watcher. Never was this more so than at this moment. It was all in perfect focus and not so surprising.