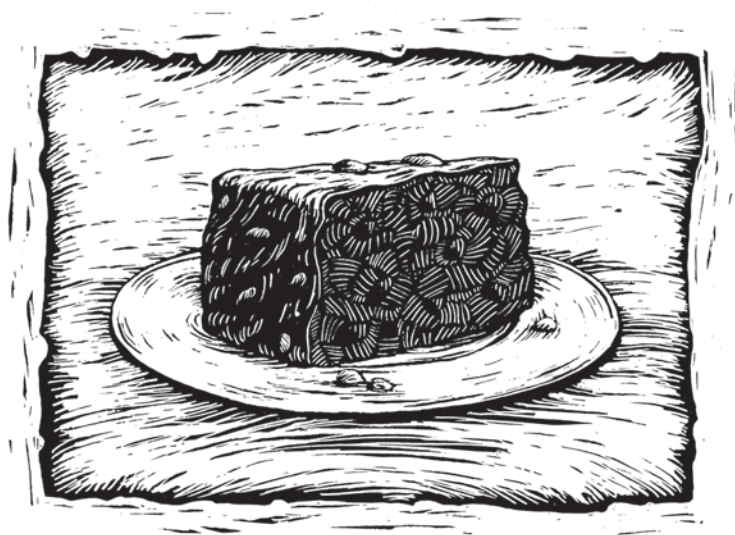


Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-78365-1 - The Fruitcake Special and Other Stories
Frank Brennan
Excerpt
[More information](#)

The Fruitcake Special



I never thought I would discover something quite so amazing by accident. I was a chemist at the Amos Cosmetics factory in New Jersey, USA, trying to design a new perfume when it happened.

I was trying out all the usual mix of flowers and things – just like I always did – when I decided to throw in a piece of the fruitcake Momma had packed for my lunch. I don't know why I did it – I just did.

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I put it into the mix with all the other things. Before long, I had a little bottle of perfume made from the things I had mixed together. I put some on the back of my hand. I thought it smelled nice, but there was nothing special about it, so I put the bottle into my handbag. I couldn't give something like that to my boss. After all, I am a chemist and my job is to make perfumes in a proper way. If I told him how I made this one he would tell me not to be a silly girl. Later, he would probably make a joke about it to his friends at the golf club.

That's the kind of man my boss was.

'Anna!'

It was my boss, David Amos, the owner of Amos Cosmetics. He happened to be walking past where I worked. He never usually spoke to people like me. What did he want? I felt nervous.

'Yes, Mr Amos.' I said.

'You're looking terrific today! Mmm . . . what's that lovely smell? It's like fresh bread and flowers and sunshine all mixed together with . . . I don't know – is it you, Anna?'

I didn't know what he was talking about. I couldn't smell anything special.

Mr Amos had an expert nose for perfumes. And he knew it.

'Yes, it is you!' he said loudly. All the other chemists nearby could hear. It was embarrassing.

I had never heard my boss speak to me like that before. Or to anybody else, come to think of it. David Amos is a dark, handsome English guy who would never dream of saying nice things to ordinary looking girls like me. He

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preferred to be with pretty young models who liked his appearance and his money. When he did speak to the chemists he was usually complaining about something. Was he playing some kind of joke today?

Suddenly he came over right next to me. He spoke in a quiet voice close to my ear.

‘You know, Anna, I’ve never really noticed it before – I can’t think why – but you really are a beautiful woman!’

‘Mr Amos. I . . .’ I tried to answer but I didn’t know what to say.

‘No, it’s true, Anna,’ he said. ‘I must see you outside this dull factory. Will you have dinner with me tonight?’

‘Well, I . . .’ I was still too surprised to speak properly.

‘That’s great! I’ll pick you up at your place tonight at eight. See you then,’ he said.

He was gone before I could say anything.

As I went home on the bus I thought of the strange situation I was in. My boss, who was famous for going out with beautiful women, had told me I was beautiful and had asked me out! But I know I am just ordinary looking and not his usual type at all. When I got home my Momma was in the sitting room talking to my Aunt Mimi.

Aunt Mimi. I like my Aunt Mimi, but she simply can’t mind her own business. She has wanted me to find a husband for ages. She didn’t like the thought of me being single and having a career. She thought it wasn’t natural for a twenty-seven-year-old woman like me not to be married. Aunt Mimi thought that the least she could do for me was to find me a husband. I was used to this by now, but it was still embarrassing.

‘Aunt Mimi – how nice to see you,’ I said.

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Aunt Mimi looked at me and smiled. ‘Anna, my little girl . . . but look at you: you’re not a little girl any more, you’re a twenty-three-year-old woman already! How time flies!’

‘Actually, I’m twenty-seven, Aunt Mimi,’ I said. She always got my age wrong.

‘So soon? And you’re not married yet? Your mother was married when she was eighteen. Eighteen! And you were born when she was nineteen!’ Aunt Mimi looked sad as she said this.

She decided to say what she thought at once – as she always did.

‘So when are you going bring a nice boy home?’ she asked, looking me right in the eye.

‘There was that boy Armstrong you saw two years ago. He was nice,’ said Momma, trying to help me.

‘Momma, Armstrong was the pizza delivery man,’ I tried to explain, but Momma never did listen.

‘Armstrong was here a few times. I liked him,’ said Momma.

‘Momma,’ I said, ‘that was when the cooker broke down – remember? We ate pizzas for almost a week until it was fixed. Armstrong just delivered the pizzas.’

‘I don’t care,’ said Momma. ‘I liked him – he had nice eyes.’

Aunt Mimi raised her eyes in surprise.

‘You mean to say you let this Armstrong boy go?’ said Aunt Mimi.

‘But he was only the pizza delivery man,’ I said, weakly.

‘Then he was. By now he probably owns the company!’ said Aunt Mimi. ‘And you let him go! Anna!’

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It was no use arguing. I knew they were not going to listen to me. So I changed the subject.

‘That fruitcake was nice, Momma,’ I said.

‘Aunt Mimi brought it,’ said Momma. ‘But don’t change the subject – your aunt has something to say to you.’

Oh no! She’s trying to find a husband for me again!

Aunt Mimi began, ‘I’ve found the perfect boy for you, Anna. Well . . . he’s not exactly young, but neither are you any more . . . and he’s still got his own hair . . .’

I decided I had to put a stop to this – I didn’t want to meet Aunt Mimi’s ‘boy’ even if he did have his own hair.

‘Thanks, Aunt Mimi,’ I said. ‘But I’m already seeing someone tonight.’

I hadn’t meant to tell them but I had to do something to stop Aunt Mimi. It certainly surprised them. They both looked at me with their eyes and mouths wide open like a couple of fish.

‘Yes,’ I went on. ‘I’m going out with my boss, Mr Amos. He’s picking me up at eight.’

That certainly surprised them!

* * *

Momma and Aunt Mimi were very pleased, of course. They went off together to plan the wedding and left me to get ready for the man they hoped would be my future husband. I was beginning to wish I hadn’t told them. After all, I had no idea why my boss had behaved towards me in that way. He had never even noticed me before now. However, he had noticed the perfume I had been wearing. Lately I had been wearing a perfume called *Intrigue*. It was