

The Missing Button

By Joanna Beresford

The living room flashed like a summer thunderstorm. Cherie selected a song from the list in her phone. Billy Joel's 'Uptown Girl' blasted out. Heaving, dancing bodies pressed in tight as laughter swirled above her head.

'There you are!'

Cherie turned and peered through the jungle of waving arms.

The good-looking guy with hair that flopped across his eyes grabbed her arm and made a beeline straight for the liquor on the island bench.

She watched him twist the cap off a bottle—tequila!—and pour the drink into two plastic cups already lined up on the granite. 'You're beautiful,' he mouthed and handed one over.

Cherie threw back the shot and savoured the sting. She put the glass down, tugged on his fingers and led him out to the garden. Ripe with the scent of frangipani, it was a welcome sanctuary from the celebration continuing inside.

'Are you OK?' James asked.

A carnal buzz surged through her groin. She giggled. He was cute. So very, very cute. Temptation always reared its head when her defences were down.

'Come with me.' He shifted his hand to the small of her back and guided her beneath the umbrella canopy of a jacaranda tree. He looked up into the branches. 'Awesome out here, don't you reckon?'

'Yep.' Cherie's tongue felt thick and cumbersome. She scanned the back of the house and felt oddly nervous.

'Cold?'

'No, I'm fine.' Her head swam. Too much wine before the tequila.

James leaned in and kissed her. He smiled softly against her lips and pulled away for just a moment.

She dragged him back to her and they furiously tore at each other. Lost in their primal ritual, they did not hear the sharp heels on the veranda steps, nor the crunching of leaf litter underfoot.



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'Hey, where are you guys?'

From their hiding place, still out of sight, Cherie squinted at the familiar shape of their sixteen-year-old daughter, Tahlia, silhouetted against a backdrop of fairy lights. 'I'm coming,' she called out, and shortly after emerged out into the open, James close behind.

'What were you doing?' Tahlia asked.

'Mum thought she saw a possum.'

'Did you find it?'

'No.' James trudged back inside.

'Mum.' The word was thick with adolescent judgement.

'What?'

'Your shirt's missing a button.'

Cherie looked down, hid a smirk, and saw that so it was.



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