



*After
the Party*

Shan Lee

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by
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12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507
Houston TX 77065
www.sbpri.com

ISBN: 978-1-62516-763-7

I pushed apart my heavy eyelids to focus upon the quaint little bird pecking against the laundry room window. Whether my inability to depict the colour of its feathers was a result of the striking glare of the midday sun, or my pounding temples from a much anticipated hangover, I could not fathom.

For a while I simply stared at the mother bird feeding its newly hatched offspring nesting at the crook of the window and tried to recall the events of the party my sister had hosted the previous night. Suddenly flustered by the brightness of a day well past dawn, I lifted my eyes off the featherless chicks and realised that Dad would soon be arriving home from the airport.

How typical of Reno to disappear and leave me passed out here on a bed of dirty laundry, I thought to myself as I slowly rotated my stiff neck and searched the room for the items of clothing which had been ripped off my body in a moment of passion in the early hours of the morning.

As I reached behind me for my bra, my ankle brushed against the cold tiles and an icy shiver ran across my body. My skin instantly covered with goose bumps and resembled the skin of the two innocent chicks I had been scrutinizing only moments ago.

Still thinking of the mother bird caring for her nestling, I pictured my affectionate father and smiled. I loved it when Daddy would come home to greet me as his precious 'little princess'.

"Bella, my perfect angel, you know you will always be my little princess," he would say before spoiling me with gifts from his many business trips.

I began to question whether the very same words would continue to affectionately flow from his lips in the event that he was to become aware of the details of last night. Would I still be his little princess? I was beginning to feel as though I had stripped myself of any claim I was previously entitled to of being Daddy's 'perfect angel'.

"Come on now, you're 18!" I defended myself as I foolishly hobbled around the room balancing on my right stiletto heel, searching through the clothing for my left heel, squirming as the same foot moved back only to land on the heel itself.

Was my sudden pang of pain not a sign of the heartbreak my actions would bring upon Dad? *Stop being so silly, Bella! If your 21-year-old sister, Cathy, can party the night away then so can you,* I continued to reassure myself. *Cathy organised the party, all you did was find a sexy man to pleasure you for the night,* I told myself, feeling almost psychotic for all the conversations with myself.

"Bella, Bella, Bella, you are responsible," I muttered to myself. I was, after all, responsible enough to take precautions against pregnancy. As long as the house is clean, Dad will never know a thing.

But, somehow, being my first time, I still could not help but question my actions. Since Mum's death, Dad really has given Cathy and I the lives of princesses. Yet we still had the audacity to throw an outrageous party at our home, with people he would never approve of us associating ourselves with, half of whom were complete strangers to even Cathy and me. Could there be any thing worse? I felt completely filled with remorse as I contemplated the consequences of our actions.

The rumbling of my empty stomach interrupted my thoughts and I began to wonder what Franco, our personal chef, had prepared for breakfast, or was it now time for lunch? Why had Franco not sought after me? He was always so particular about us eating as a family in the dining hall at the specific times he felt were appropriate when we were home.

Surely he had seen my red Porsche parked in front of the garage upon his arrival. Once the party had gotten started, the last thing on my mind was to make the effort to park it in the garage, paying more attention instead to someone else parking their own motor in my 'personal garage'. I giggled with a naughty smile on my face at the thought of last night's wild sex.

I made my way upstairs to the kitchen, no longer nude, preparing myself to receive the wrath of Franco as to the condition the house must have been in upon his arrival and the mess that our housekeeper, Maria, and the other servants were forced to deal with.

However, upon reaching the top of the stairs, I was met by no one. I halted in my tracks, aghast to find the house in a catastrophic state, the sight making my body tremor in fright.

A mountain of dishes lay in the sink overflowing onto the counters, even scattered across the floor. Several cupboards, as well as the refrigerator door, lay open, and for the first time the inner back of the refrigerator was visible to me, as it had previously always been filled to the brim.

Food was strewn across the bar counter in the adjacent

entertainment room visible through the kitchen hatchway. Broken glass, as well as the white shooting ball and pool sticks lay across the pool table, leading me to believe that glassware had been used as substitutes for the balls, by our intoxicated guests, in an attempt to provide them with amusement.

I looked up at the clock above the hatchway. 11:45 AM. Only 15 minutes till lunch, yet nothing on the stove.

“Where is Franco?” I said aloud.

Why has Cathy not removed all the evidence yet? I asked myself. Dad was expected home at 03:00PM.

Treading carefully over the dishes on the floor, I closed the refrigerator door before proceeding into the dining area. Perhaps Cathy had ordered take out and was waiting for me there.

All revved up to vent my agitation to her as to the state of the house, I was dismayed to find myself being met, neither by Cathy nor Franco but rather by yet another unexpected sight.

The main table, usually set for dining an hour before a meal, was not set, but instead resembled a sight similar to that of the kitchen counter.

An unidentified young man stood in front of the opened doors of the crystal wear cabinet. He jolted around, anxiety on his face, holding what, according to the shape of the visible grip of his right hand, I assumed to be a crystal candle stick holder.

“Hello there, handsome,” I said with a smile. “Don’t look so worried. I did not mean to disturb you. In fact, I should be the worried one right now. Considering how

soon my dad will be home from the airport, the house is in a frightful mess.”

He simply stared, his eyes not meeting mine but focusing past me. I turned around towards the open plan lounge to see what had captured his attention only to encounter the puzzled gaze of two more unidentified young men, both of whom stood fixated in uneasy postures behind the 18 cm plasma screen.

“Are you from the catering company? I did not know my sister had hired any dishes. What am I saying? Of course she didn’t. We have enough dishes to host a party for the queen!” I laughed, answering my own question. “I assume you are from a cleaning service. That would explain why you are wearing gloves,”

The taller of the two men in the lounge nodded, his baseball cap not slipping back as he did so, the other two glancing around uneasily.

“I suppose one look at this place and the servants walked out. I was always under the impression every company had a uniform. I guess my sister is cutting costs. Considering the amount of alcohol she bought last night, it’s only logical that she went for a less expensive company. Do you know where she is?” All three men shook their head.

“Well, I’m sure Franco will see to you. I have a splitting headache. A nice long soak in the tub and a few painkillers will do me good. Please do hurry up though, my dad is expected back at 03:00pm,” I said. I made my way to the staircase that led up to the bedrooms, and stopped in my tracks by an unexpected vocal response.

“Apologies, we arrived late,” replied the taller man. “The other Madam asked us to move some things into the garage but we could not open it,” his voice so alluring, my body suddenly feeling enticed, my thoughts in a muddle for a few seconds before being able to regain my composure.

“Oh, you mean you need the security pin. How forgetful of my sister not to give it to you.”

“Yes.”

“54321”

“Thanks,” he said with a wink and a huge grin upon his face.

“Dad had to set an easy pin. Cathy and I have never been good with our figures.”

“I agree,” replied the same man, offending me with what I thought was a rude statement.

“When it comes to you and figures you are not good, you’re more than just good. You are simply tantalizing,” he added after a pause causing me to blush, a welcomed change in emotions.

A whistle from the man standing beside him followed by the teasing words, “Come to Papa,” from the man in the dining room. Their faces finally looking more relaxed.

I flirtatiously fluttered my eyelids, sucking my gums between my teeth to display an inviting fish mouth smile.

“Come now you naughty boys, stop throwing me up. Just make sure the place is completely cleaned out.”

“Oh, don’t worry it will be completely ‘cleaned out’ of all the necessary items,” he said, producing a chuckle

from the other two men, puzzling me for a moment as to what the joke was about.

Still confounded by their glee, I glanced out the clear glass sliding door, only to discover the presence of two unusually large vehicles.

“I was unaware that such large delivery vehicles were required in order to carry out your job. I would have assumed that those vehicles out there were only used to deliver furniture and so forth. Oh wait, you’ll probably have a lot of cleaning equipment,” I replied naively, despite wondering why the men were not using any.

“Gosh, I certainly am being a silly girl today. Do forgive me, I guess I’m still recovering from my hangover.”

If only I had known exactly how silly and blind to reality I was in fact being, perhaps my forthcoming experience could have been averted.

“I really do apologise, you men came here with a job to do and I have been an obstacle to you for far too long, please do continue. Remember the job needs to be done as fast as possible and you’ll need to be out of the house before 03:00PM.”

“Thanks for the heads up,” replied the taller man, once again grinning at his companions, his arousing voice making me yet again feel my heart rate pulsate. If only he had been at the party last night, I would have undoubtedly selected him as ‘my man’ for the night, considering the effect his voice alone had on me, surely he would have pleased me even more than Reno had.

As I ascended the staircase, my mind once again began questioning the whereabouts of my sister and Franco. Upon

reaching my bedroom at the end of the long passage, I reached for my mobile inside my handbag, determined to attain more knowledge as to why they were no where to be found. However, after several attempts, I was baffled to find both numbers repetitively redirecting me to their voice mail messages.

“How strange,” I said aloud before tossing my phone onto the bed, slightly frustrated. Cathy always answered my calls, irrespective of where she was or what she was doing.

As I turned on the Jacuzzi, waiting for it to fill up, I began to undress.

“Now that really is a tantalizing figure,” his enticing voice came, arousing my desires once again.

“What are you doing here?” I said turning around.

“I just wanted to find out if you needed the upstairs to be ‘cleaned out’ as well, though I sure am glad I came,” he replied with a smirk, scanning my figure up and down, as I unintentionally posed for him in just my underwear.

“Well, just check that the beds are properly dressed, some of the couples might have made use of them last night. Maria normally handles that department but I have no idea where she is. You don’t have to worry about the room at the head of the staircase though, that’s my dad’s room. We always keep that room locked since the safe is there. If our guests last night had to find out that the key merely rested above my dad’s door frame, I have no doubt they would have made themselves comfortable in their too.”

He smiled, removing his baseball cap for the first time, finally giving me a clear view of his face.

“Wait a minute, I remember you. You were at the party last night.”

“Yes, I was.”

“The moment I laid eyes on you I yearned for your kiss so badly but,” I smiled shyly, “by the time I pushed my way through the crowd, you were gone.”

“I could not stay long,” he said, walking towards me. “How about a kiss now?”

Before I could respond he pulled me towards him, kissing me until I pulled away breathless, his lips so tender, so moist.

“Thanks again,” he winked and walked away, leaving me stunned by his sudden disappearance after such an intense kiss.

“How strange,” I mumbled

Oh well, a soak in the Jacuzzi is what I need now, I told myself. I grabbed my iPod from the top of my dressing table, set my alarm for 02:50 and climbed into the tub, just in time to turn off the water.

Time flew by much faster then I could have anticipated as I relaxed and reminisced over the events of the day. My sensation of contentment, however would not last long and could not surpass the reality of which I had been so blind to.

The sudden ear-splitting blare of an alarm awakened me from my fantasies. I frantically tried to switch off my alarm clock only to realize that the time was only 02:35PM and my little clock was not the source of the noise.

The house alarm. It couldn't be, but it was.

I jumped out of the tub, my right foot slipping upon landing on the wet tiles. I grabbed my bath towel, wrapping it around me as quickly as possible, frantically trying to find my gown. Where was my cell? I was certain I had left it on my bed. In the distance I could hear the approaching sound of sirens. Terrified by the thought of a possible fire, I ran out of my room with only the towel around me.

As I ran towards the staircase my pursuit of getting out of the house was diverted by the discovery that my dad's bedroom door was slightly ajar. I kicked it open. The safe had been opened. The safe was empty. My body began to tremble.

I could hear my father's voice at the bottom of the staircase. I could hear Cathy crying, Franco's voice comforting her.

I had to grip the railing with all my might as I descended the staircase to prevent myself from falling.

Upon reaching the bottom, I was dumbstruck. The TV was gone and so was the lounge suite. A flashback of the two men behind the TV came to mind and everything suddenly made sense. I had interrupted them when they were about to take it away.

When I turned towards Dad, Cathy and Franco in the empty dining room, only the remnants of food on the floor, I failed to respond to their questions. I stared blankly past them at the spot where the man had been holding something behind his back. Had he been holding a gun?

I ran out the house staring at the now vacant land that had been occupied by the trucks and then at the police cars, some men already looking for evidence while more vehicles

arrived. In the distance I could see several officers releasing Maria and other servants from the shed; masking tape over their lips, their hands tied.

Why had they not taken me to the shed and tied me up with the others? Was it because I had aided them? Had my blindness to the reality of the situation actually worked in my favour?

“Oh, dear God,” I said vigorously rubbing my lips, a queasy feeling building up inside me. I had kissed a criminal. I ran to the grass and began to hurl. My throat burning as the intoxicated liquid passed out.

“Girl, put something decent on for a change!” said Dad, throwing a bathrobe at me. Girl! Dad had never previously referred to me as just ‘Girl’.

“Not ‘Girl’, little princess,” I whispered, my sight blurring with tears.

As I stood up to put on my robe I noticed a featherless chick hobbling on the drive way. I looked at the laundry room window and noticed that there was now only one chick in the nest, confirming my suspicion.

“What led you astray, little chick?” I asked almost expecting an answer.

I shivered as I gently picked it up, the resemblance between our skins once again catching my attention.

“Don’t try to fly before your time,” I said as I gently placed it in its nest, tears streaming down my cheeks.

Reluctantly turning away, I made my way back into the house, ready to face my father. No longer his perfect angel! No longer his little princess!

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