

## THE PARTY

Emily made an effort to sit up straight and hold her shoulders back. She couldn't afford to slouch; not with everyone constantly looking at her to ensure she was having fun. It was, after all, her big day, her party. She owed it to her family and friends to place an exaggerated smile on her face, and look overwhelmingly happy.

Her fingers fondled the smooth turquoise material of her dress. If she didn't know better, she would swear it was silk. It certainly felt like it. She couldn't afford the real thing, or to be honest, she didn't believe in wasting hard earned money on an expensive dress she might never have a chance to wear again. It was new, and this alone made it special.

She had stopped in front of the bedroom mirror several times before leaving the house, and what she had seen had satisfied her. Her smallest handbag was covered with the same material as the dress, and she had found some incredibly comfortable evening shoes at a bargain

price just a few days earlier. The dress was ankle length, quite simple, with a round cut neck and plain three-quarter sleeves. There were a few pleats from the waistline down, but that was about as fancy as it got. She had always hated laces and frills, so Tom had not been in the least surprised when she had bought this one. Anyhow, he probably wouldn't have shown more interest if she'd come home with something outrageous.

The hairdresser had used a new shampoo that gave her naturally curly hair a marvellous oomph. The make up was subtle, just enough to emphasize her emerald green eyes. She wasn't one to indulge in self-appreciation, but fair was fair, and she knew that she looked a million dollars.

She turned slightly and let her gaze rest on Tom's unruly hair. She had secretly hoped he would have made an effort, and polished up for the event. She let out a little sigh. No way. Not her Tom. He would never surprise her and cast aside his blue jeans and those cheap joggers that his feet had basically lived in for the past six months.

She had tossed out the old pair without his permission, and he had come very close to being angry with her, but then, as usual, his good humour had taken

over, and he had laughed and headed to the shop to buy a new pair.

He must have felt her eyes on him because he turned and winked at her.

He could be so unbelievably annoying, she thought, and turned her attention to the dance floor.

Sarah was looking radiant; she had that peculiar and wonderful glow that all young girls have when they fall in love for the first time.

Emily suppressed the hint of jealousy that pushed its way into her thoughts. She liked Sarah; it was simply that she hoped she was the right girl for Peter. It was concern for his happiness that made her feel this way.

Emily looked away, scanning the room for someone who had vaguely neglected their appearance.

Not a chance!

Every male was wearing a suit or an evening outfit, and the women, well, even if she had wanted to fault some of the teenagers, she would have had a hard time finding something less than adequate.

She turned her attention to the plate of sweets in front of her, picked at the overgenerous slice of carrot cake, and then sipped some tea.

Horribly cold.

She could have asked Tom to get her another cup, but she was still annoyed with him, she wasn't in the mood to thank him for anything, not even for a hot cup of tea.

She looked up and, once again, her gaze rested on Sarah. The young girl was whispering something in Peter's ear. He smiled, and then kissed her cheek ever so delicately.

Although the usual feeling of guilt swept over her, Emily refused to look away. She would never admit to anyone that she had a soft spot for him. He was her favourite. It wasn't only because of his charming looks; it was his kindness, and his generosity that mostly attracted her.

Peter must have sensed her scrutiny. He turned towards her, and flashed his most engaging smile.

She felt small butterflies in her stomach and hoped she wasn't blushing as he strode towards her table.

'May I have the pleasure to dance with the most glamorous girl of the party?' He asked in a tone that did not hold a hint of dishonesty.

'Well, I'd be honoured to—' She began with a slight tremble in her voice.

'Excuse me for interrupting.' Tom butted in, suddenly standing very tall at her side. 'But I was just

about to ask Emily if she'd like to join me for this dance.'

She stared, and registered the strange look that had briefly crossed his face. Could it have been jealousy?

Peter stood his ground as usual.

'I didn't think you were interested in dancing. Besides, your outfit kind of clashes with hers.' He grinned.

Tom took a deep breath. He knew when he was being picked on, and this time he certainly deserved it.

The music stopped. The mini-orchestra was waiting for his signal. He took Emily's hand in his and, as she stood up with a bewildered look on her face, the first notes of *Love me Tender* filled the room.

All at once, nearly forty years dropped off her shoulders, and she was a young girl again, madly in love with a handsome guy who only ever wore blue jeans. This was the same guy standing in front of her. He hadn't changed much, and yet she had only just noticed him.

Her heart filled with renewed affection. She was suddenly grateful that her beloved husband had not turned into a stranger while she had been so selfishly engrossed in their grandchildren's lives. Especially Peter's.

'I'd love to dance.' She answered, hardly able to contain her happiness.

'Promise one dance before the end of the party.'

Peter pressured laughingly.

'I promise.' She smiled, and kissed the young man's cheek. 'Thank you.' She whispered.

Tom guided her to the centre of the room and wrapped his arms around her waist. 'It's not everyday that you celebrate a sixtieth birthday, you better make the most of it.' He grinned mischievously.

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