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My Best Friend's Girl

by Christina Buchanan

It was at Baz's thirtieth birthday party that I told Jaqueline I loved her. Baz and I had been best mates since mixed infants, but I hadn't seen much of him since he went off to university, and then he got some temporary job in Australia. When he came back, we picked up where we'd left off, except that now he had this girl.

Jaqueline.

At first I felt pretty fed up. He was always suggesting we went places with Jaqueline and his sister, Betsy, instead of the two of us hanging out together. You'd need to have seen Betsy to really understand - a bit chubby, with ginger hair, thick glasses and protruding teeth. And Jaqueline, well she was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. I watched the way Baz treated her, it was the way he treated everyone - jokey, laid-back, no big deal. And I was stuck with Betsy, except I wasn't *with* her of course, but that's what people would think.

So at the party, I confessed to Jaqueline that I loved her, that I really, really loved her, not just messing around, like Baz. I'd had a skinful, I admit. She gave me a funny look, kind of pitying, put her hand on my arm and said she and Baz were going to get married, but she hoped we'd always be friends.

As I stumbled away I noticed the inevitable ginger lump standing there with her goofy teeth and glasses. She reached out to me and said something I didn't quite catch. I think I swore at her.

The next morning I wanted to die, but the deed was done. Jaqueline never mentioned it again. I don't think she said anything to Baz, and Betsy seemed to have got the message and stopped hanging round me looking pathetic and hopeful.

Baz and Jaqueline got married and I moved away. I heard they had a little boy, and of course Baz's career was going fantastically well, he was one of those people that everything just works out for.

I never stopped thinking about Jaqueline of course. There was this moment, the moment I first realised I loved her - it was almost like a film clip - when she slowly turned to me and smiled. I kept playing that film clip in my mind. No one else ever stood a chance.

Then one day, out of the blue, I got a letter from her. Baz had been killed in a car accident, there were details of the funeral. I realised I hadn't kept in touch with Baz over the years, and he had been my best friend. I felt terrible about that, but not terrible enough to squash this tiny flicker of hope. Maybe Jaqueline would turn to me now. I'd be there for her.

I don't know what I expected, it had been thirteen years since I last saw her. She looked pale, she'd put on a few pounds, she looked - I hate to say it - ordinary. She took my hand and thanked me for coming and said Baz had always talked about me and the great times we'd had together as kids, but her eyes were red-rimmed and the expression in them was dead. The girl in the film clip was gone.

Someone came over and put an arm round Jaqueline, giving me a little apologetic smile. There was something familiar about that smile. The protruding teeth had been straightened and the thick glasses had gone. Her figure was slim and shapely, her hair like a sheet of flame falling onto her shoulders.

I watched her leading Jaqueline gently away. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.