

## After the Party

by Penny Humphrey

“We’ll tell her after the party.”

“But.”

“I’ll have no ‘buts’ from you Miss, it’ll be after the party we tell her and that’s an end to it.”

Mum was firm, resolute as always when she made up her mind about something, so that was it, no use arguing and still she was calling me ‘Miss’ as if I were six years old and she thought I needed reminding to mind my p’s and q’s.

I watched her bend to the task of re-arranging the living room to accommodate twenty guests and for the first time in my life found myself seeing the woman she was, instead of just my Mum.

Little wisps of escaping hair played around the corners of her eyes. The once fiercely auburn hair was retreating fast in the battle against grey.

Tired eyes that had seen too much for one body but still retained a spark.

Her shoulders were slightly stooped over the figure that once had been perfect.

Her immaculate choice of clothing was replaced by clothes that were old, baggy and ill fitting as her body changed shape over the years.

When did that happen? The change from smart attractive up to the minute Mum, to the slightly overweight Mumsy Mum now wedged firmly between two arm chairs, reaching with her feather duster for a tiny cobweb that no one else would have noticed or cared about.

The front door clicked and Jordy came in.

“Hi Mum, all looking good, I spoke to Em and she’ll be here by seven.”

Jordy turned to me and winked.

Mum turned swiftly.

“What’s going you two? You didn’t say anything Jordy? Tell me you didn’t? We’ll tell her after the party.”

“No Mum I didn’t tell her but I really think we should, she’s guessed something’s up already. Kept asking me all sorts of questions. She’s not a child who needs protecting you know.”

“I know,” Mum said more gently, “I just want her to have a nice birthday before we tell her.”

She glanced around the room, satisfied with her work then went upstairs to make herself a little more presentable.

Jordy and I collapsed into chairs and enjoyed some silence together, this was not going to be an easy evening.

Em arrived as Mum came down stairs. She looked pale and concerned. Mum put an arm around her.

“You alright Em? Happy Birthday. Looking forward to your party?”

“Yes of course,” said Em, “there is something I need to tell you but it can wait till after the party.”