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Fleeting Pleasures

by Fran Duffield

“Come on,” said Alex in a stage whisper, “we’d better go, or they’ll never let us come back again” They made their way out, Roz clinging to the rail on the way downstairs, as despite the sensible shoes, she was not fully in control of her feet.

Out on the road, Alex put his arm round her waist and attempted to get them walking in step, She was trying, but coordination seemed to require an immense effort.

The way back passed in a blur. She vaguely noticed the other restaurant was now shuttered and dark, the wisps of vine on the pergola blown by the night breeze glimpsed in the light of their torch. Half asleep on her feet by now, she stumbled on the loose stones just before the villa but Alex managed to save them from both going down the steep embankment.

“Bed for you, young lady!” he said, manoeuvring Roz through the doorway. She couldn’t imagine anything better at that moment, and began to wonkily wrench off her sandals and clothes. Having got down to underwear, that seemed sufficient and she rolled sideways onto the bed, feet still dangling.

“Come on, in you get!” said Alex, swinging her legs onto the mattress and pulling the thin sheet over her. She murmured something indecipherable, and was instantly asleep.

Alex stood for a moment contemplating her with a thoughtful expression, then very quietly closed the door. He went out to the patio, crossed to the other side of the small swimming pool and reaching into his pocket threw something as far as he could into the scrubby land beyond the fence. He reached into his other pocket, pulled out a phone and dialled, pacing up and down the pool edge. He stopped.

“Hi, hi, sorry it’s so late,” he said.

Roz woke painfully to the sun suddenly stabbing at her face as Alex flung the shutters open.

“Oww!” she groaned, and he laughed.

“Sorry, I’ll close them again, coffee?” Alex said.

“Yes, definitely coffee, please and some water,” Roz croaked, her mouth dry as the papery petals of the neglected bougainvillea languishing just outside the window.

“I think a quiet day by the pool is indicated, eh?” shouted Alex from the kitchen, where he was opening a bag of the coffee that was stockpiled in the cupboard.

“Mmm!” Roz managed, she couldn’t shout just yet. She felt so stupid for drinking that much: God knows what she’d said or possibly done. He seemed fine, so it couldn’t have been anything dreadful. The worst part was that today was going to be spoilt by her hangover, and their time here was so short. She would just have to take some painkillers and put on a brave face.

Long practice should have taught her that one pleasure leads to another, but that the results are sometimes far from pleasurable. She felt stale and grubby in last night’s underwear, and her head bitterly resented the rest of her becoming upright.

Alex appeared with the coffee and water, and made a rueful face.

“Oh dear, we are in a bad way: down both of these and you’ll start to feel human.”

Roz smiled feebly and groped for her bag to find some paracetamol. It seemed emptier somehow than it had last night.

After a shower she felt capable of survival, and looked in her bag for the new lipstick she had taken out with her to the restaurant. As she took it out, she realised what was missing: the camera. Then she remembered Alex had taken it, but what had he done with it? She thought she remembered him putting it in his pocket.

“Alex?” she called to the living room, “have you got my camera?”

“No, I gave it back to you, don’t you remember?” he called back.

“No, you can’t have, it would be in my bag and it’s not. I thought you put it in your pocket?”

“No, sorry, you definitely had it back: I don’t think you’re remembering last night too clearly, are you, you poor thing!” he said with a sympathetic laugh. She padded gingerly into the living room across the tiles, trying not to jolt her head.

“Then where is it?” she muttered almost to herself.

“Well, I don’t know if you remember falling over and nearly tipping us both down the sheer drop down the hillside?” he said, “it probably shot out of your bag and fell down there instead of us!”

A dim confused image of a swirling feeling, dipping down and him dragging her back upright swam into view.

“Oh, yes, I do remember something now, how stupid! I must have not closed my bag. I knew I should have brought two.”

Roz was very dejected. Her one special time to capture memories of them together, and she had to go and lose her camera due to her own stupidity.