

Dancing

Emily

Three flutes into something *bubbly*, the song playing on the dance floor took me back to when my boyfriend George and I hooked up in his pickup truck after Homecoming. When I closed my eyes, it felt like it could've been yesterday: the air conditioning rattling up my skirt, the raw groping and giggles against each other's skin, the squeak of weight shifting back and forth on uneven tires, and even the reapplication of thick lip gloss afterwards so I'd look good when it was over. I still kept tissues, a tube of lipstick, and a comb in his glove box for tidying up after our friskier nights at the drive-in.

In fact, I'd used all three of those things the night I'd found Betty crying over her now-husband in the bathroom and adopted her as my new best friend. Touch-ups could do wonders. Regardless of advertising my services at the salon, my philosophy was that when a person looked and felt good, they lived their best life. They took risks, they had more energy, and they were more likely to be happy or inspired or figure out whatever else they needed.

Most of the time, I didn't need anything. I didn't even need

George to be dancing with me. We'd done some grinding at the bachelorette party and had years of football games and dances under our belts to the point it felt good just to dance in the crowd, to feel the heat wave around me.

Maybe after we were done enjoying the Parkers' wedding entertainment, George and I could do some private reminiscing. For the moment, I was happy celebrating my best friend's lifetime commitment and the best party our town had seen in years. I shimmied so hard my boobs almost flew out of my dress.

Betty beamed as her groom Reed folded her against his chest, their linked – and freshly inked! – hands resting on her midsection while they pretended to be dancing instead of dabbling in light foreplay while she ground back into him. Those two were insatiable. They had already snuck away to fuck each other at their respective bachelor and bachelorette parties.

“Save some moves for the honeymoon!” I teased.

“Here, here!” The groomsman I had walked down the aisle with cheered, unbuttoning his shirt as he worked up a sweat.

For a Rattler, Milo was actually a pretty good time. Most of Reed's motorcycle gang buddies looked so intense whenever they were milling around town. Even though they all seemed genuinely buzzed, enjoying the wedding, Milo was friendly. Before we walked down the aisle, he'd called me, 'm'lady'. His slicked-back hair was buzzed on the sides and an earring glinted in one ear.

“Have you always had that?” I shouted over the music, gesturing to his accessory.

Reed just *had* to butt in, “Yeah, his mom had a really hard labor. It kept getting caught on everything.”

“Reed,” Betty chided, scandalized.

“Now that you're married, the truth comes out! Reed's a jackass,” Milo ribbed good-naturedly, then leaned in to answer me properly. “I've had it since high school. I only wear it when there's a low chance someone will rip it out in a fight, though if

Betty keeps rejecting me for dances I might have to take it out and fight Reed for the privilege.” My eyes widened and my heart beat faster at the idea of a real fight, which only made him laugh. “That freak you out, Em?”

Em?

His big friend, Chewy, was standing at the edge of the floor, not dancing so much as fist-pumping and rolling his eyes at what he probably thought were Betty’s straight-laced friends.

“No. That’s so cool! I wear earrings all the time and I’ve never had a fight-like, a real fight to test that with.”

“You want me to tug on them for ya?” he teased, reaching up to fuss with my earlobes.

“Stop,” I squealed, waving his hands away. Betty shot me a look but kept dancing with Reed. To be fair, we were being flirty. It was harmless, though. Clearly, Milo enjoyed attention and dancing, like me, whereas George was enjoying the buffet, beer, and easy games like horse shoe and hillbilly golf set up to the side. I wasn’t going to drag him away, especially since he seemed to have a great time recounting man-bonding stories with Frank, Betty’s father-figure who’d also been involved in high school sports and happened to work in a male-dominated industry.

The songs continued, as did the spinning, and soon I was sweaty and nearly falling over. “Easy,” Milo laughed, slinging an arm around my waist. “Ready for a water break?”

“I can take her,” Betty insisted, Reed’s lips at her neck.

“Don’t be silly. This is your chance to make out with no one clinking spoons so you’ll be forced to kiss,” Milo said.

Her eyes narrowed. “She has a boyfriend.”

“It’s just a water break, Betty.”

“Yeah. A water break,” I repeated cheekily, my tongue buzzing. Me and my new friend stumbled off the dance floor towards our table. The centerpieces had classic film reels, books, and flowers. “Everything’s so pretty.”

“Did you help with a lot of the decorating?” He stuck a napkin in his water glass and dabbed it across his face and neck.

Genius, I thought, doing the same with mine. It felt *so good*. “I did. Betty didn’t want anything over-the-top but I think we did well.”

“It’s the best wedding I’ve ever been to! Though, to be fair, Reed’s the first of my friends to get married. Didn’t think the guy would ever be that happy,” he turned to me mischievously. “Getting laid has been good for him.”

“Obviously.” I laughed. “Have you seen Betty? I’d go gay for her any day of the week.”

“Really?” His eyes lit up with curiosity. “Anything happen at the bachelorette party?”

“No.” I flicked him with some water. “In fact, I’m pretty sure she was kidnapped by Reed.”

He slumped back into his seat, disheartened. “Figures. The guy bailed out on his own bachelor party.”

“Was it totally wild?” Pushing my hair off my neck, I tried to catch my breath. “I can only imagine what the Rattlers get up to on a normal day, let alone a stag night.”

“It wasn’t as bad as it could’ve been. Reed said he’d bounce if any strippers showed up, so we weren’t surprised when he went out the back the second a scantily clad girl came in and caused a distraction. Before that, though, we all had a good time.”

“I’m sure he appreciates it. Reed doesn’t strike me as a bachelor party kinda guy.”

“He’s not. I, however, am a bachelor party kinda guy. Hell, if I was invited, I’d be at bachelorette parties with the penis popsicles and stripping for cash. Free alcohol, dancing, and mayhem? Count me in!”

I slapped his arm. “You should have said something! I could’ve tried to fit you in for Betty’s, although I’m not sure how much Reed would’ve appreciated that.”

Milo pulled at his collar, grimacing. “Pretty sure I’d be talking

at a much higher pitch if I wasn't still face down in a ditch. You didn't have real dicks at the party, did you?"

"No, we had Shelly around for most of it, so we tried to keep it tame. We didn't even have any penis cakes."

He tsked. "Shame."

"I know!" My hands fell to the table hard enough for the silverware to clatter. "Put in all this time and effort and—well, we did get to see some hot men by the end. We went to the gay bar and my boyfriend and Reed met up with us there."

Energy dipping, Milo glanced at the dance floor. "When are you and the boyfriend getting married?"

"Oh, no," I scoffed, waving my hand and taking a sip of water. "We want to travel, first. Experience things."

"Other people?"

Shocked, I choked on my water, pounding my chest to dislodge it from the wrong pipe.

"Sorry, it just seemed like that's where that sentence was headed."

"We're not..." I glanced over at my boyfriend. "Opposed to that. We talked about it."

"Really?" Intrigued, Milo leaned forward, resting his chin on his hand and making me feel like my veins became as bubbly as champagne.

"When he first went to college and I went to beauty school, we thought we might have more distance between us than we did at West Ridge." He nodded along, giving me confidence to go on. "We talked about opening things up a bit. As it turned out, the people at my school thought girls with highlights were so last season and George, although he is and was a catch, he was too busy trying to juggle practice, lectures, and parties to initiate anything. But that's not why we're not getting married," I clarified hurriedly, downing some more clear liquid so I didn't get myself in too much trouble. In a town as small as ours, someone was always watching.

“You love each other. That doesn’t have to lead to marriage,” Milo reasoned.

“Right! Thank you. Tell that to my mother.” In an attempt to change the subject, I slapped his leg. “Anyway, tonight’s not about that. It’s about honoring the lovebirds and having fun. Do you have any embarrassing stories about Reed you’d like to share?”

“Considering I’m his best man, I probably shouldn’t be talking shit about him. The rest of the Rattlers are fair game, though. As the occasional bartender, I tend to get all the dirt—and my fair share of phone numbers.”

Thoughts swirling, I refilled my water glass. “Isn’t it mostly guys at Sidewinders?”

“That’s not the only place I bartend,” he said, darting his gaze off to the side with a sly smile. Dumbfounded, I stared. “The gay club you mentioned? I’ve done a little work there. It’s not a free-for-all, like, I do have *types*. Nine times out of ten prefer a girl, but...”

“What’s the one time out of ten guy like?”

Milo shrugged. “A gentleman doesn’t kiss and tell.”

“Oh my God, you are probably the most interesting person from West Ridge,” I shrieked.

He raised his eyebrows dubiously. “Because I’ve swung?”

I shook my head. “You’re in a gang, you wear an earring, you tattoo stuff which means you’re an artist, and you bartend and have lots of sex! On Entertainment Center, your life biopic would be like a rock star’s compared to the rest of us.”

“I am kind of a musician.” His diamond earring shone between his fingers.

“See? Holy shit. I’m a beautician. George and I met in high school so most of my raunchy tales are from back then.”

Glancing at Reed, Milo leaned forward conspiratorially. “You know, my man always says something like, *‘We are the authors of our own stories’*. Most of the time, I think he’s being pretentious, but I

think there's something to that. If you two want to do something exciting... you could make it happen."

"Make it happen," I repeated, nodding solemnly as the water goblet lapped at my lips. There were so many possibilities. Streaking? Singing? Raunchy speeches? "But I can't do that to Betty," I reasoned, gesturing to the blonde sweetheart floating around with the love of her life. "Especially not at her wedding."

"Fair point. We can't always steal the spotlight." After a few minutes of drinking water and commenting on the party, he pushed his seat away from the table. "Ready to get back out there?"

I kicked off my shoes, lazily reapplied my lipstick and took his hand in solidarity. "To Parker parties!"

"Parker parties!" he cackled, leading me back into the throng of sweaty bodies.

Eventually, George caught my eye, wandering the edge of the dance floor. He waggled his eyebrows and grinned at my crazy antics. "We're having so much fun!" I shouted, pulling on his hand. "You have to dance for a minute."

"Just for a minute. Then, can I take you by the s'more pit?"

"S'more pit?" I balked. "How can you be thinking about marshmallows at a time like this?"

"It's *free*," he explained emphatically. "You can dance at home whenever you want with your Bluetooth speaker."

"Marshmallows over dancing?" I sighed, trying not to whine as he lifted me up. One of the fun, yet frustrating, things about having a footballer boyfriend was that he picked me up whenever I was on the verge of being disappointed.

He jostled me up higher. "You saying I could use some cardio?" Although he liked his sweets, he wasn't pudgy. The old football team still hung out at the gym every morning.

"Dance with me."

Champagne swirled warm in my belly and my feet didn't

hurt anymore. Everything was good. Betty and Reed were happily married. We were at a happening party.

George was a fan of the shimmy and fist pump whereas I tended to spin and stomp. The throng of sweaty guests, most of them Rattlers, rocked out around us. The party blurred as I tried to focus on the people I knew.

To my left, Reed picked Betty up and spun her around until she was laughing, dizzy and free.

Wistful envy buzzed between my ears.

It still seemed crazy that every time they interacted there was that spark of lust and love in their eyes. They were glowing.

Who would've thought the same guy who made her cry that first night we met would be the one to make her shine so bright?

Maybe George and I needed more drama. Betty and Reed would randomly try to track each other down and see how long it took for the other person to notice. It had gotten to the point that I was keeping an eye out for him when we went on our bestie dates. As soon as we noticed him, though, I knew it was a losing battle for her attention and left them to make heart-eyes at each other so I didn't feel like a third wheel, no matter how hard she tried not to put me in that category.

It was fine, honestly. Honeymoon periods were natural and she seemed really happy.

George and I needed some new and exciting experiences to keep us busy and buzzed. Our version of West Ridge was tame. We went to football games at the local high schools, his friends' houses for casual card games, and hung out and watched TV. The only places we frequented for food were drive-ins, diners and occasionally, dives. Sidewinders seemed too exclusive and intimidating to brave entering with all the giant hulking motorcycles outside.

"Maybe now that we've partied with the Rattlers, they'll let us play pool with them," I shouted at my boyfriend.

Milo chuckled and leaned in. "You talking about

Sidewinders?” When we nodded, he pulled out his phone. “Take my number. Next time you two want to hang out, let me know.”

“What would we even do?”

“Drink.”

George clapped Milo on the shoulder with a companionable grin. “I like this guy! Put in my number, too. We go to this place that plays the game on a big screen TV if you’re ever looking for that kind of action.”

“Thanks, buddy.” Milo narrowed his eyes like he was trying to judge George’s sincerity, so I subtly tried to suggest with a nod and arm rub that my boyfriend was that easy to win over as a friend. “Now let’s show these cameras how to dance.”

Betty must’ve paid a small fortune to hire such a big crew. Everything was going to look fantastic. I clapped Milo’s shoulder as he led us back onto the dance floor while George clung to the seam of my dress. “Do you think they’ll do a showing of the wedding video after all this?”

Milo shook his head and gestured to the newlyweds eye-fucking the hell out of a slow dance. “It would definitely not be PG. My bet is they’ve already had sex twice today.”

“What? When?” I gasped, scandalized and thrilled. “There was no time! Unless they did it in the morning...”

“They definitely did something this morning. My guess is they did it right after the ceremony, too. They probably hopped into one of the dressing rooms.”

George straightened up, face contorted in concentration as he joined the guessing game. “It wasn’t right after the ceremony because Betty was happy-crying and hugging everybody. That was, what, half an hour?”

“If they did do it again, it would’ve had to have been after we ate and they opened up dancing,” I reasoned.

“Why do you say ‘if’?” Milo’s eyes danced with mirth as he turned to take my hand, vaguely dancing with both of us. “Is it even a question?”

“Yes! We don’t know that they snuck off to do things.”

“This is Betty and Reed. I’m talking about wall-pounding orgasms, here.”

George fanned himself with his collar. “Whew! Is it getting hot in here or is it just me?”

“It’s you.” Milo winked, boldly putting a hand on my hip and sauntering closer. “You and Emily.”

Champagne giggles bubbled out of me as I swayed with both of them. “Have you had a few too many to drink? This is my boyfriend behind me. The huge, football player guy doing the two-step in full view of like three cameras.”

“I’m flirting.”

“With both of us?” I asked, grinning. Part of me was flattered but another part wondered if he would stick his dick in anything.

“Why should Betty and Reed be the only ones I admire?”

“Because they’re married.” I chuckled, enjoying the warmth of George’s arm as he slid his hand down my other hip. “This is their day.”

“I guess so.” He sighed wistfully, watching the way Reed gathered Betty’s skirts enough to skim her bare legs. Those muscles looked smooth. The way they were smiling at each other, I half expected her to jump up and wrap her legs around his waist.

“I don’t blame them,” my boyfriend announced. “If I had that kind of energy, I’d be doing Emily every day.”

“I wish. I mean, we should not be talking about this, especially not in front of mixed company when we’ve all been drinking.”

“You can talk about this,” Milo drawled casually. “I wish you would. Energy shifts when people get into a relationship for a long time. Sex becomes a certain expectation or a compromise and not a fuck-a-thon of pleasure with experimenting. You find this pattern and you do it over and over again.” He rolled his eyes to the rhythm. “There are lots of paths to a happy

ending and a lot of them can get trampled after years of monogamy.”

“Bet Reed’s gonna give her a happy ending tonight,” George mumbled, resting his chin on my head.

“Stop being weird about Betty and Reed being happy!” I warned the boys as much as myself. “We’re here to support them. They’re our friends and they’re not going to fall into that trap. We have to be optimists.”

“Or realists,” Milo mused, his gaze shuffling down to the cleavage of my dress.

“You’re my friend.” George sighed, slumping until his nose was pressed against my neck. “This guy can be our friend.”

Eyes popping wide, I gripped his hands and led him a few feet away to have a somewhat private conversation on the edge of the dance floor. “Are you saying you’re interested in...?”

“What?” He stretched his spine, blinking slowly in that happy-buzzed way he got after a few drinks. “What am I interested in?”

“Having Milo be our special friend for the night.”

Laughter rattled in his throat. “I am?”

With a fond, exasperated sigh, I smoothed his sleeve over his muscles. “If you want to think about it, we should probably have some coffee. It’s kind of a crazy, champagne-fueled suggestion.”

Twisting his mouth in indecision, he glanced at Milo. “He’s into it?”

“He said we’re hot and asked about our situation.”

“I mean, I always figured if and when we did something like that, it’d be with another girl,” he admitted, rubbing the back of his head. “But I never met one who I thought might be a good fit for us.”

“Oh? And what makes someone a good fit?” I teased, pulling at his blazer in the joy of listening to him plan our sex life like a play. Team sports instilled a great group dynamic in him that we’d never utilized sexually. It wasn’t like I wanted to be gang-

banged by all his buddies, but one night with a flirty guy outside of our social group could be interesting.

George's tongue rolled along his teeth. "I don't know. Someone hot and relaxed who we never really had to interact with outside of the act itself. They couldn't try to get more attention or something substantial out of us."

"Do you think Milo's hot?"

"Maybe." He shrugged, appraising. "I'm not really into guys, but he's good-looking."

"He'd probably know what he was doing more than us if we did something poly. But that's an *if*."

"I mean, let's hang out with him some more while I think up some boundaries."

"Fine by me."

"Hey, buddy, get back in here!" The way he said *buddy* made me want to roll my eyes and laugh. He didn't even know Milo's name.

Maybe it was better that way. It might be easier as a single-serving situation.

George bit his lip and pushed me back to grind against Milo, carefully processing whatever it was he felt. With his dark gaze, my rolling hips and Milo's wandering hands, all three of us fell into step naturally.

"This is the best wedding ever," I shouted at them. The crowd raised their hands and cheered in agreement.

Hopefully, I would remember it in the morning.