

Night Moves

Ruby kicked the apartment door shut behind her and hurled her keys with a practiced flair into the hand blown glass bowl on the hall table. Hanging her bag on a coat rack, she slipped out of her sling backs and reefed her blouse from the waist of her skirt. As she entered the bedroom, she unzipped and unbuttoned and wriggled herself free from her work wear. Pulling pins from her hair she shook her locks loose and stretched her arms worshipfully towards the ceiling. Home - her sanctuary, her hide-away, her place of refuge. No demands, no disturbances and no-one to question her every move. If a man's home is her castle, then a woman's home is her haven. Especially when it had been chosen, purchased, and decorated by her alone. Who needs a man, in this day and age anyway? Not her that's for sure. She'd had her fair share of love and loss and now poured her energy into living a life of her own pleasing right here on the Gold Coast.

On her way through the lounge room Ruby elbowed a photo frame she'd missed and smiled as the image of Trent plummeted and skidded under the bookcase. Flicking on the TV she selected a music channel and increased the volume. Then she entered the kitchen and mix herself a G & T. The drink was half gone by the time Meghan Trainor brought Ruby rushing back into the lounge room to booty shake, and sing along enthusiastically. Checking herself in the wall mirror, she twerked and shimmied and gave an absent Trent the finger.

'Take that you cheating prick! I bet that skinny bitch can't shake it like I can', she yelled. 'I'm all about that bass, 'bout that bass, 'bout that bass, NO BLOODY TREBLE!' she screamed, slapping her satin covered buttocks and jiggling her overflowing lace bra.

A strange addition to the music suddenly caused her to stop mid lyric. She lessened the volume on the TV. There it was again. A rhythmic tapping. Was it the neighbour in the apartment next door? She had never complained about her music before. Maybe she wasn't a Meghan Trainor fan? Ruby muted the song, but the knocking continued. She cocked her head. It wasn't coming from the wall it was coming from behind the slatted blinds. It was coming from the window. She shivered, not because she was only dressed in her underwear, but because her apartment was four floors up.

It was probably a stupid pigeon or a bloody big moth, she assured herself. Peering cautiously through the timber slats she found the setting sun made it too difficult to see anything in the half-light. She quickly scampered into the kitchen and returned with an egg flipper. On second thoughts she retraced her steps and came back with extra utensils; a potato masher and a steak knife. Whatever it was, she was ready to send it on its way.

She placed all three implements in her left hand and wound the lever with her right. The blind rose slowly, then jerked and rolled up swiftly with a sudden stop at the top of the window glass. Ruby let out a yelp when the bare window revealed that the creature was bigger than an insect. Actually it was bigger than a bird. Though dizzy with shock Ruby had enough sense left to note that while it hung upside down and banged against the glass pane with a talon protruding from a bat like wing, it was about the same size as a man. As her

mouth opened to let out the scream that was wrestling its way up from within her ample chest, the creature uttered a screeching noise. One she was surprised to realise she could understand.

'Help me!' it called, swaying out and back in again.

Ruby stepped back and dropped the cooking implements, trying to gather her thoughts. What in God's name should she do? Call the chairman of the Body Corporate? The police? Ghostbusters?

'Help me, will you!' it yelled, 'I'm caught.'

'Caught?' she shouted back.

It twisted and pointed upwards.

Ruby stepped close again and pressed her face against the glass. She peered heavenward. Yes, the creature seemed to be dangling from the roof edge of the building, which was one floor above. It was caught in a mess of string and brightly coloured cloth by its booted feet. Funny, she wasn't aware that winged creatures wore rubber footwear, or a helmet and visor. But then again, how would she know?

'Open the bloody window,' it demanded.

She decided it might be in her best interest to do so. Swiftly she unlocked the catch and slid the window wide.

A blast of cool air slapped her in the face and her head began to clear a little. Here was a man dressed as a bat, hanging from the side of her building and needing some attention. Ruby guessed she was the only one who could give aid at this point in time.

'What can I do?' she asked.

'Grab me!'

'Oh...grab you? Where?'

'Under my arms, and pull me in!'

Ruby leant out and when he swayed towards her she did the best she could. She found out he didn't feel at all like a fleshy winged mammal. He felt like padded nylon and rubber. Hmm...a super hero? Once she had a hold of him she dragged him in far enough so that he could grip her window ledge with gloved fingers.

'Can you get me something to cut the parachute rigging?'

'Parachute?'

'Yes,' he urged.

'Oh... you're a skydiver?'

'Of sorts. What the hell did you think I was?'

'Ahh...never mind. Will this do?' Ruby said offering him the steak knife.

'Maybe. Hold me again.'

She held him by the legs as he doubled up to reach his feet. *Wow he must have good abs to be able to do that*, she thought, holding fast to two well-muscled thighs.

With a slash he was able to slice through the mess of lines and release one leg.

'Don't let go,' he called, banging against the window frame.

Ruby took the strain and leant back. With another lunge, he severed more lines and with a shudder, plunged downward. Fortunately he had been more in than out and they both crashed to the carpeted floor of the apartment.

Ruby couldn't breathe. She was caught under the heavy bulk of a stranger in nylon, carbon fibre and rubber. It might be some woman's idea of a fantasy come true but not hers. She shoved him off and crawled to her feet.

'What the hell were you doing, jumping out of a plane around here?' she screeched.

'I didn't,' he said getting up and removing his helmet. His fingers brushed through a head of dark sweaty curls. 'I base jumped.'

'You what?' she squawked.

'I jumped from a building.'

Ruby thrust her hands on her hips, 'Which one?'

'One a damn sight taller than this, that's all I'm saying.'

'How?'

He held his arms out wide revealing an unusual garment with wide wings, and with webbing between his legs. He gave a rather enticing broad grin. 'I fly, like a sugar glider.'

'Well you didn't fly very well today, by all accounts.'

'I was going fine until I pulled the 'chute. Bad cross wind,' he shrugged.

'Lucky for you this building has opening windows,' she said with sarcasm, 'and someone who was home.'

'Yeah, someone who likes to dance in her underwear,' he smirked.

Ruby looked down. She'd forgotten about her lack of clothing. 'You saw me?' she said crossing her arms over her bare flesh.

'I think your twerking needs a bit of practice.'

Ruby felt her whole body flush pink.

'Back in a sec,' she said exiting the room and returning moments later in a silk robe, a souvenir from a trip to Fiji with Trent, which she liked too much to part with. She turned off the TV and found the human sugar glider in her kitchen.

He was searching inside her fridge. 'I could really do with a drink.'

Ruby shut the door with her foot and pointed to the sink tap. 'I have water, help yourself.'

He found a glass and filled it to the brim. As he gulped it down, he shuffled over to the window and looked outside. Ruby nervously ambled over. Night had fallen and Surfers Paradise shimmered like a sequined drag queen.

'Thanks' he said, 'I owe you one ...ahh...?'

'Ruby,' she answered, 'and you are?'

His dark eyes sparkled with reflected light. 'You can call me...Maverick.'

'How about crazy-mad- bastard-with-a-death-wish', she scoffed.

'Well, yeah, I've been called that too.' His smile and sun kissed features tweaked her heart in a most annoying way. 'Why don't you have a balcony?' he frowned, 'That could have made things a lot easier.'

'The other side has balconies. I couldn't afford one of those apartments.'

'Ok, fair enough,' he nodded.

An approaching siren could be heard from the street below. He shut the window and dropped the blind.

'Stairs or lift?' he asked grabbing his helmet and hurrying towards the front door.

'Both,' Ruby answered, puzzled. 'Are you leaving already?'

He gave a nod, 'Sorry to drop and run.' As he turned the doorknob, he glanced back over his shoulder, 'By the way Rubes. I can't stand skinny girls. Nothing to hold onto in the heat of the moment.' Then he left.

Ruby was still standing in the hallway minutes later, when a knock drummed on her front door. She eagerly flung it open, only to be confronted by a man in a dark suit flashing a gold badge. Behind him was a clutch of uniformed policemen; some with pistols and wearing Kevlar vests.

'Detective Barrett from the Federal Police. We'd like to search your apartment. We believe you might be harbouring a criminal.'

'What? I don't know what you mean.'

He flashed a photograph of someone looking a lot like Maverick the flying possum.

Ruby froze and the police stormed past and quickly began searching every room and behind every door.

'What's going on?' she asked, her stomach churning like a whirlpool.

The detective took her by the arm. 'Are you sure you haven't seen this man? He's quite the charmer.'

She nodded, eyes wide and unblinking. Her mouth felt like a Goldie beach in the summertime. Hot and dry.

'We've been informed that he may have entered this building this evening.'

She shook her head, 'No-one but myself... and you lot... have come through that door today. That's the honest truth.'

He studied her with a gaze so intense, that she thought he might be able to tell her what she'd eaten for breakfast. Then he turned and eyed the goings on. 'Anything?' he called. Heads shook in response and he grunted.

A squat, thick-necked cop suddenly stopped by the slatted blind. Winding it up, he slid back the glass pane and leaned outside.

Ruby held her breath. *The parachute!*

The cop shone his torch into the night and spun around. He waved his gun in her direction and she instantly ducked.

'No balcony?' he barked.

She rolled her eyes and let out a sigh. 'No. The apartments on the other side do.'

He slammed the window and dropped the blind.

Detective Barrett gave a hand signal. 'Okay men,' he ordered, 'let's move on to the next one.'

They all scuffled out and as she closed the door and turned the lock, Ruby heard them rap on the neighbour's door.

'Please God,' she prayed, 'don't let her have heard anything.'

She stumbled into the kitchen and opened the fridge. A double strength G & T was in order. As she reached for the tonic water, Ruby noticed that the lid of her butter container had slipped off. Taking the container out to press it back on she spied something dark buried in the butter. Scooping it out with a finger, she discovered that it was a USB flash drive.

Wiping it clean with a cloth she held it firmly against her breast. Her heart raced. Mav was sure to return.