

The Party

by Elizabeth Kate Switaj

Mike poured vermouth over his Campari and ice. "Gotta say, you have the most amazing view up here."

"Thanks. It's great when I'm washing dishes."

"Yeah, and the view in your front room isn't bad either. This cocktail potluck idea is ace, Rebecca."

"Call me Reb." I turned on the blender for another pitcher of margaritas, while he smiled and raised an eyebrow.

"That's new," he shouted over the motor and the grinding.

"Actually, it's old." I poured myself a glass before emptying the rest of the alcoholic slush into the green carafe I'd picked up the day before at the Cancer Research charity shop.

"Inviting people into your flat, a nickname. What's next? Changing your thesis subject to Early Modern lit?"

"Actually, the critical part of my MFA thesis was about a seventeenth-century poet, Lady Mary Wroth and. . . What?"

He had been shaking his head. "It's strange is all."

"Being social?"

"You being social, yeah. You always seemed cold. You only ever come out after department events."

I shrugged. He should have known that I wasn't usually asked.

"Have you ever had anyone in your flat, Reb?"

"Just the Tesco delivery guy."

"So why now?"

"Mm. It's an anniversary."

"Of what?"

"Five years ago I was raped."

Mike set down his drink, paused, then picked it up again and threw back a mouthful. "You can't have a party to ce . . . to mark that."

"I can. And I am. I'm even serving the best approximation of what I'd had to drink that night. Don't worry: no drugs were involved."

"That's not . . . I mean, It's si . . . Do you think anyone here would want to be part of that if they knew?"

"Are you going to leave? No, I didn't think so. Look, I'm a survivor, right? And that's supposed to be a good thing."

He took another drink. "Rebecca . . ."

"Reb."

"Reb, of course it is, but it's not the same as . . . It's . . ."

I shook my head and smiled. "No, it's terrible. Being a survivor is horrible. Surviving is miserable."

"That's not what I mean. It's . . ."

"It's not what you meant, but it's true. I'm tired of surviving. Thriving. That's what I want. I thought I could have it until the breakup, so instead I'll have its form." I sipped my margarita.

"Celebrate surviving to look like you're thriving."

"Reb," he reached out and rested his free hand on my shoulder, "at least don't drink too much."

I laughed. "Honey, I have hangover tabs in my cabinet. There's no reason for me not to get smashed. The worst already happened. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to see who wants a refill."

