



ONLY THE LONELY

by Lisa Mecham

THE women and I drew numbers and took turns fetching gifts from under the Christmas tree, opening them one by one, showing all what we'd unwrapped. I was thrilled to be invited to this holiday gathering, joining the PTO President, the head of the Women's Auxiliary, all the movers and shakers on the home front of this rural, sophisticated Connecticut town. My husband, two children and I had just moved to Weston earlier that summer, so to be included felt good.

I was one of the last to go and when it came to my turn, I chose a small square package, unwrapping it to reveal a silky scarf. Everyone sighed longingly as I held it up between outstretched arms. I feigned excitement as

the gift made me anxious; I'd seen others wear scarves like this draped casually, so effortlessly across their shoulders. I wasn't even sure I had anything to wear with it.

The last woman to go grabbed her gift from under the tree and the room exploded with laughter as she unwrapped it and held it high, amongst the plush covered chairs and gold-framed art, for all to see. A giant. Purple. Dick.



The party was called a Yankee Swap and it was held in the meticulously decorated living room of a woman whose husband was a Wall Street banker. To participate, we'd each been instructed to bring a wrapped present, a funny "gag" gift or serious luxury item, or anything in between.

At this point, we were all three white wine glasses to the wind, but still it surprised me, how much I was drawn to the vibrator. How I felt this overwhelming impulse to rescue it from public shaming.

So before the laughter subsided, I stood up and grabbed the vibrator out of the woman's hand.

I... I have a friend who would love this, I said.

The room went dead.

And this would look so much better on you! In a grand comedic gesture, I threw the delicate scarf up in the air so it would flutter down upon the woman's lap. But it missed and slumped to the floor.

Odd glances, weak smiles. Dinner was served.

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Up until that moment, I'd never held a vibrator in my hand and had rarely seen one in action. Once, in college, I'd walked in on some guys in my boyfriend's fraternity communally watching porn. Seven guys in a darkened room, scattered on chairs and couches and the floor, staring at the hot glare of the television screen where an overly hairy guy said, *Come on, baby. You know you love it baby* while he jammed a dildo as long as his forearm into the asshole of a woman bent over a table. Her moan low, interspersed with piercing cries that did not sound like pleasure.

But at the holiday party, amidst all its contained civilization, the vibrator felt like the most powerful object in the room.

After dinner, the women gathered in yet another part of the grand home and poured more wine. I was ready to leave, still embarrassed by my unexpected snatch of this gift. So I excused myself, lamenting the fact that I had no purse, no place to stow the vibrator. Laughter followed me as I left the room.

Hope your friend enjoys that!



I flipped on the light in the darkened kitchen and saw the hostess' husband standing there, leaning against the counter. I knew him a bit, had talked to him when stuck in the corner at a school function. He was an important man—you could tell this by the way the other men deferred to him. A money guy. A hedge fund guy.

He was drinking—etched glass in hand, filled with an inch of golden liquor. I stopped in my tracks, surprised to see him.

He didn't say anything; the room was still save for the motion of his wrist swirling, swirling, swirling the drink around.

A muted shriek of laughter. The women far away on the other side of

the house.

Fun party? he asked. He brought the drink to his lips and swallowed it, greedily, in one gulp, eyes on mine.

Oh, yeah. I said. *Look what I picked.* I held up the vibrator.

He walked towards me, blocking my path around the counter. My nose tingled from all that liquor on his breath.

He put the glass down and raised his hand to my collarbone, exposed by the fancy top I'd bought to wear to the party. Dragging his finger from one shoulder, across my throat, to the other.

I want to lick you.

His face inches from mine, charged air where our mouths might meet. My body's wired response to being wanted by a man so sure of his place in the world.

Like all those boys, watching the woman bent over the table. Her face screwed up in the pain of performance. Tongues darting around their mouths.

I moved past him to the pile of coats on the table, searching for mine as I felt him approach from behind. I wanted to shout, get someone else in the room. But this man, he was power. And me? I was the new girl in town

who'd snatched a sex toy out of another woman's hand.

Instead, I turned to face him, placing the packaged device between my thighs, pressing them together, holding it there while I put one arm through my coat, then the other. I pulled the vibrator from between my legs and turned to leave.

Be careful, he hissed, if you use that too much, your clit will go numb.

But I was out the back door. Fumbling through the dark, across the expansive property, to the long gravel driveway, to the safety of my car.

At home, I stashed the vibrator way in the back of my underwear drawer.

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In Connecticut, I had long stretches of the day to myself. The school bus would come at dawn to pick up my daughters. And my husband always left early as he had a long commute to work.

It didn't feel right, liberating the vibrator from the drawer in the harsh morning light, but that's what I did, the first Monday after I'd plucked it out of the hands of the woman at the party.

I extricated it from the complicated plastic wrapping. It was bright purple, with sparkles, about six inches long. I had no idea if this was considered a normal sized vibrator but it was certainly less intimidating than the one I'd seen in the porn long ago. I inserted two batteries and turned it on to the first setting. A slight pulsing. Next setting, more. On the final setting, the vibrator gave off a sound like my neighbor mowing his lawn. I dropped it on the floor and watched it buzz its way under my bed.

What was I doing? All of this, ludicrous. Purple, my daughter's favorite color. The drone of it under my bed reminded me of all those women, laughing at me at the party.

I wrestled my way under the bed. Balls of dust and fluff clung to the vibrator's shaft like stubborn pubic hair. I turned it off and thrust it back into my drawer again.

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Months later. Spring. Bus came. Husband left for work. There were school functions and the random dinner party but I couldn't decipher the terms of female friendship in this town. Solitude is one thing but this was a

particular kind of lonely, the kind you don't expect when you've checked off the boxes of living a lucky life. All smiles at events, but then, no follow through. Maybe, I thought, my middle-class Midwestern roots were showing—I was an imposter without the financial assets to dilly-dally in elite country clubs and vacation homes.

I was weeding old clothes out of my drawers when I found the vibrator. Still purple, still sparkly. I turned it on. The batteries still worked.

I removed my clothes and lay on the bed. The breeze from the open window was sharp and my nipples grew hard.

Alone in the house, I imagined my husband, how we used to make love. How he'd say, so gently, *you can come again. I know you can.* And he'd give me that gift.

And now, how I couldn't stand to kiss him. He tasted like copper in my mouth. Intimacy replaced by something far more desperate. He'd been staying up late, unable to sleep. His speech, fast and hard, like a train with no destination.

It scared me.

Instead of sex, I'd pull off his pants. How he'd be so hard, which always surprised me because we'd done nothing to get to that point. He

was always ready. How he'd put his hand on my head and move me. I contributed nothing but an open cavity.

As I rubbed my nipple lightly with a finger, pleasure rippled through my body, a feeling I'd not had in months. I turned the vibrator on and spread my legs. But it was awkward. I didn't know whether to put it in me or on me.

All I felt was a deadening throb.

your clit will go numb

That hairy man behind. The dildo jamming again and again into the woman's gaping hole.

I turned the vibrator off.

In the wake of its buzz, an aching silence. It was so quiet in Connecticut. Cars rarely passed our house. No sidewalks. Trees competing for open sky.

I closed my eyes and laid the vibrator on my belly, crossing my hands over it.

It's hard to tell people when something is wrong. Hard to whisper, out loud, that your husband might be going crazy. Because maybe it's not him, it's you. The woman married to the bright, young doctor. The woman with

two beautiful daughters and two acres of land and two cars.

The woman at the party who grabbed the vibrator.



I came out the front door, wrapped in my bathrobe, vibrator in hand. In front of our house, a doe stood, head raised to the branches of a laurel tree, pulling off leathery leaves with her teeth. She skittered off as I made my way into the yard.

It felt good to be outdoors. How desperately I longed for the seasons to turn. Animals, plants, the land—they demanded nothing from me. For once I was glad our house was set back from the road, surrounded by a dense cover of trees. No one could see me out here.

I turned my back on our worn-out house, the stage of my failure, and walked to the far edge of our property marked with a stone wall. On hands and knees I parted the dead leaves, clawed at the soil with the vibrator's purple tip. The surface was harder than I thought, not yet thawed from the harsh winter, so I stabbed it repeatedly against the earth until the ground broke into chunks, triggering the instrument on.

My digging fingers finished the dirty work. When the hole was deep enough, I dropped it in. That implement. For the lonely, unwanted. I mashed dirt, leaves, sticks, whatever I could find until all that was left was the muffled hum of a buried thing.

I sat back against the wall, and my breath turned to gulps. The fresh smell of turned soil in my throat. And my hands, my hands. I wrapped them around my shins and pulled in tight and cried and thought about how when you're hurt, way before you say it, you have to feel it.

How wounded animals in the woods look for a quiet place. How they stay without moving for days.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Mecham writes a little bit of everything and her work has appeared in Amazon's *Day One*, *Mid-American Review*, and *BOAAT*, among other publications. A Midwesterner at heart, Lisa lives in Los Angeles with her two daughters where she's

finishing a book about surviving mental illness in the suburbs; think: “The Shining” meets “Revolutionary Road.”

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