

## Open Season on Butterflies

Spring.

A jasmine scented day with angel clouds promising the world on a string of pearls; a day that saw me at the opening of the Izzy Missoni Spring Collection in my capacity as a minor reporter for The Courier Mail.

I took shots of the local glitzaratti in attendance, then wrote snappy little captions.

That's when the earth shifted and my stomach fluttered hope.

Incognito in a loo cubicle, I overheard two friends of Marina Keeling gossiping. I had wondered why she wasn't with the rest of the A List.

Marina has been married for seventeen years to Martin Keeling, the up and coming bright-eyed boy in politics; now with a stain on his Teflon suit. All thanks to a sixteen year old girl who had just bobbed up to claim him as her father.

From the shocked tones of my unknowing informers, Marina Keeling feels utterly betrayed.

I gave scant attention to Izzy's gauzy multiflorous creations as I scooted home with thoughts of hitting a celebratory bottle of Monkey Bay sauvignon blanc, and the front page, with a blaze of glory.

Butterfly Wilts – Star Reporter.

Opening the wine and my computer I began my notes:

*Has Martin Keeling, minister for family affairs taken his portfolio literally? Sources close to the family are lending their support to a shocked and distraught Marina Keeling. This minister, it will be remembered, has for years been loudly lamenting the lack of morality in modern society...*

I rang the office, leaving a cryptic message that I was following a hot lead and would be in touch when I had hunted down and bagged the ferret.

Dreams of becoming a sought after political journalist took over; private secretaries, privileged passes through the doors of power and eating the oyster whilst wearing the pearl.

Plummeting back to life on planet Earth, I rummaged in my address book for Marina Keeling's private number.

Two years before I had done a weekend piece on her at home; it was for a glossy magazine for which I hoped to do some freelancing.

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I still have the article and slides tucked away in my filing cabinet in a brown *return to sender – unsolicited copy* envelope.

I punched in the numbers, hoping she would answer.

When she did, her voice was shaky, but I ploughed on, reminding her when we had met. I asked for a comment on the rumour about her husband having a sixteen year old daughter by another woman.

Marina replaced the receiver without uttering another word.

Bugger.

I should have just gone around and wormed my way in. I kept dialling the number. It was now permanently engaged.

My answer phone flashed a message-waiting signal and I flicked it on.

*Forgo the ferrets and get your slack arse into this office – pronto!* My boss.

He could wait. He'd be on the floor slobbering at my ankles when he got this story.

Switching on the TV; breaking news had Martin Keeling addressing a crowd of newsmen on his doorstep; Marina clamped to his side. She did *not* look happy.

Strewth. Missed the scoop.

Still – I had the photos from my previous interview. I could win some clout with those. Should be worth a by-line. Maybe a raise.

I turned up the volume as the man explained away a pitiful lack of personal judgement. Gut-wrenching remorse at causing embarrassment to his party and his loyal, devoted wife – who, he stated, had fully forgiven him years ago. *They* had no secrets. And *they* as a family, welcomed his newly discovered daughter into the fold.

He may have sounded overjoyed but he sure looked like he'd got his willy caught in a wringer to me.

The next day I fronted the editor. Waving the photos of Marina under his bulbous nose, I begged to be allowed to fly with the story; as I had been at the coal face as it unfolded. I had links. I had unnamed sources. I had insight and intuition oozing from every pore.

He swung his feet up on his desk; he listened to what my angle would be then shook his head.

*Do what you are being paid for and write the girlie stuff on that Tizzy Spring fashion gig. Unless you want to return to the horoscope section? No? Meanwhile, I'll take those shots*

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*and what you have so far and give it to a more seasoned male hack.*

Izzy, I mumbled.

Jeez. Back to handbags and frocks.

I followed the story as it uncoiled bit by snaky bit. Smiling photos hit the headlines in all the papers – Martin Keeling and long lost, but never forgotten daughter, Chloe.

According to his current crush on religion, he had knelt in prayer every night wondering and thinking about her.

Chloe looked like she'd discovered she *was* the fairy on top of the Christmas tree. And nary a word about her adoptive parents, Mandy and Ray Parker. I wondered if I could beg a chance at getting their slant of the events.

*Good thinking* was the reply from the editor-from-hell. *But No. Not this time. I'll give this one to the boys. You just stick to Titsy and his hats.*

Izzy, I said, a bit louder this time.

Those boys sure do adhere together. Like snot to a blanket. It must be some sort of male bonding on how far they can piss without ever actually hitting the communal urinal.

I have no bloody idea how Lois Lane made it to the big time. Well, yeah I do. She was a comic character. And she always had Clark Kent, alias Superman. The only telephone box weirdo I have recourse to is the local flasher. And even he isn't all that reliable.

Dressing in my newly acquired emerald and purple Lycra, I headed for the gym, where I knew at least one of Marina Keeling's chums hung out.

I was in luck; Cherie Hunnicut was pounding away, wearing out a silver pair of gym shoes on the walker, and the one next to her vacant.

I smiled in an us-girls-together sort of way and murmured *Poor Marina. My heart bleeds. It is only fair and proper that her side of the story gets told; strictly confidentially and from a simpatico feminine perspective.*

After promising to do a flattering, comprehensive piece on Cherie's house and wardrobe for the Celebrity House Beautiful supplement, she agreed to an off-the-record tell-all of the Keeling soap opera.

(I figured I could probably freelance it and my boss could eat dog turds. Or maybe he'd like a box of goanna droppings to share with the boys. )

Cherie confided that Martin had had a platonic with no-sexual-undertone-on-either-

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side-that-he-was-aware-of relationship with one of the long legged posh party supporters that helped with difficult speeches, cricked necks and tired shoulders. Platonic turned into some comforting sessions amongst the debris of take-out curry and vin ordinance. Catherine someone.

She didn't recall the name as Marina was sobbing at the time.

Apparently, Miss Long-legged-posh-knickers took extended leave and the child was adopted. She had her reputation to consider and her plans to marry a Lord.

That's Martin's idea of finally coming clean after the story broke.

It wasn't as much as I hoped. I just had to winkle out Catherine's surname; find her and give her the same sort of spiel. Tell her she shouldn't be made to feel the bad girl in all this.

Ace.

Cherie and I had a few daiquiris and both agreed that aubergine, plum and tangerine were as out as yesterday's fondue set and Izzy's inspiring Spring Collection comprising delicate floaty fabrics clouded in soft pastel floral prints teamed with his lady-bird encrusted hats, were most definitely *in*.

At home I grabbed my notebook to begin deciphering the gibberish that I had scribbled, and tuned into the TV news.

Martin Keeling was being cosily interviewed in his office by a sympathetic and obviously smitten woman television personality. All silky legs, stilettos and flicking hair.

It appears that after a DNA sample from himself and Chloe had been scrutinised – he was not her father. Keeling said how disappointed he and his family felt at having gained then lost such a delightful child. He had spoken to Lady Catherine and had the utmost admiration for her. It was an unfortunate mistake and they could now put the whole episode firmly behind them. Chloe had formed a loving bond with her birth mother and she simply adores her new pony. This, he said, had brought his family even closer together. He would not be resigning from the Conservative party and he had the continuing full support of all his colleagues and leader.

I flicked off the TV and sent the remote flying across the room.

Opening a bottle of sauvignon blanc, I carefully filled a goblet to the brim; then started writing two articles. Izzy Missoni and his cunning introduction of the unique Japanese

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geisha obi as his latest in belts – and the Moon opposes Uranus.

My horoscope indicates changes are afoot in the house of career.