

Gone Woman

David waits on the mezzanine floor overlooking the barn interior below, filled with wedding guests dancing, drinking at the bar and trying to chat, despite the loud music Projected on the far wall -*Congratulations Jane and Steve, May 1st 2021.*

Should he break the spell that has enraptured all for the last five hours? The last time he'd seen Anna was an hour ago, one of the smiling onlookers, watching her daughter and new husband pirouetting to *All of Me*.

David has only known Anna a few months and was delighted she'd invited him to her daughter 's wedding, revealing their relationship to friends and family. He'd left her to wander for most of the day, knowing she had many friends to catch up with and wouldn't want to factor him into every conversation. He has sat with some of her friends for the Wedding Breakfast while she was at the top table, next to her ex-husband. Now the dancing has started, he hopes they will spend some time together. Surely, she would have come to find him by now?

As a detective, he's trained to spot irregularities and his disappointment is turning to concern. Has Anna drunk too much and is being sick? He checks with her sister and a few others. He tries to be light-hearted but his instinct suggests a problem and when a person goes missing the first two hours are critical.

With reluctance, he shares his worry with the bride and groom. They agree to make an announcement. Jane steps up as the band finish playing *Help me make it through the night*. David hopes Anna will.

"Sorry to interrupt the party everyone. And no, this isn't another speech. We seem to be missing Mum. Steve and I have to go soon and we can't without saying goodbye to her. Do any of you know where she is?" There are murmurs but no answers.

David doubts Anna will be found tonight, but is sure someone who was at the wedding knows where she'd gone. A hundred suspects need to be screened for evidence. You always suspect the husband first but Anna's ex is leaning on the bar chatting with several others. David prompts Jane.

“Please can you check your mobiles for recent pictures of Mum. If you have any, show us. Mum’s friend here is a Police Officer and can help us find her.”

David nods.

A girl in a red dress, rushes to him. “Look,” she said, “I’ve picture of Anna, about half an hour ago, talking to a man with a dark beard. I don’t know him and I can’t see him here now.”

David is ready to initiate a nationwide alert when Anna and a bearded man burst through the door, dressed in livery costumes.

“Jane and Steve, your carriage awaits you.” Through the open barn door, David sees a pair of white horses and a carriage. He pockets his phone, relieved Anna is safe and he hasn’t embarrassed himself at work.