

# Cross My Heart

## Chapter 1 - And Hope to Die

"I'm just saying it would be nice to play around like that once in a while," I said. "I don't think I'm asking for a lot."

Robyn smiled back at me, but with a hint of irritation. "So, this isn't feminine enough for you? I must go the whole movie star sex vamp route?" She gestured, waving both hands at her figure like a game show hostess modeling an expensive prize. Damn she'd look good as a game show hostess. Robyn was tall and lean, just a hair short of my own five-eleven. Her runner's body was toned without being hard or angular, unlike mine, which seemed to be all elbows and knees, angles, and knots.

She wore an orange sundress patterned with little blue flowers. There might have been a strapless bra under the bodice. My wife can be sneaky like that, playful, when she wants to be. She watched my gaze follow her pointing hands down. As my head tilted, taking in her long, lightly tanned legs, she struck a little pose. Her knee bent as she lifted her heel, pressing the toe of her strappy, flat, white summer sandal against the tile floor.

My face, and other parts, warmed, and I doubled down on my estimation of her game show hostess potential, which I knew better than to voice out loud. "You're a babe and you know it. And I love you, which you know too..."

"Then why this obsession with dressing me up like a lingerie model, screwing around while I'm tied to a chair, or banging in the shower in a camisole and stockings, or..."

"Okay! I get it." I interrupted her interruption of me, throwing up my hands.

"... letting my damn hair grow out," she went on as if I hadn't spoken. "Andy, do you have any idea what a pain in the ass long hair is?"

Her thick blonde hair barely grazed her shoulders, and to be honest, I could imagine how sweaty it might get during the summer heat. My own mud brown hair was pretty shaggy now. I had missed a few appointments thanks to my new

schedule. But picturing her warm hazel eyes peeking out from a tangle of that wheat-colored hair was a favorite fantasy image of mine.

"I said I get it. Cross my heart," I said, making the appropriate gesture over my chest, "and hope to die."

"You said that the last time." She shuddered, "Well, not the 'cross your heart, hope to die' part. You know that creeped me out even when we were kids."

"Hope. To. Die." I didn't want to be creepy, but the heat in her voice let me know how she felt more than her words did. I was being stupid and ungrateful, again, and now I just wanted to be done with this subject and never visit it again. In addition to being intensely focused, smart, and funny, Robyn is gorgeous, loves to make out, loves to cuddle, and loves sex. I should just be happy and thankful for what I have.

"I just don't get the allure. And what do I get in return? What are you doing for me?" she said.

"Of the two people in this room, which one is not letting the subject drop?" The color in her face told me she had risen from irritated to angry at my question, but I poked back anyway. "But since you ask so nicely, let me see. 'Honey, I think you should cut back on the carbs.' and 'Sweetie, if you aren't using that weight set, can I put it in the basement?' and 'Babe, if we're going out tonight, can you wear that brown jacket?' and 'I love it when your hair gets curly.' and-"

"Fine! If you're so accommodating, you can wear all those outfits you like so much. Tell me what you think, and maybe I'll try them on myself. Oh, and make sure I get to handcuff you to the closet rod or some shit like that!" She stared at me, red faced and breathing hard.

I stepped back. The speed of her emotional shift really surprised me, and she didn't usually swear at me either. I chalked it up to a little bit of cabin fever. The shift to 'work from anywhere' had meant moving my office to the house, so we were together a lot more. Now it was time to work, so I couldn't go for a drive and let her cool off. This new paradigm was taking some getting used to. At least we still had jobs, but I could not get excited about saving my firm so much money by eliminating my office and transferring utilities and maintenance expenses to my own wallet.

Robyn taught math at the local junior college, and most of her classes and tutoring sessions were online now too, so she wasn't going anywhere. I looked her square in the eye, my own temper hot now, desire to get her out of that dress forgotten.

I traced my finger in an X over my sternum. "I'll pass on trading places if it's all the same to you. And I'll not make any further suggestions that impose on you. I have to go to work now, but I hope we can have lunch together." I walked to the stairs, heading for the home office set up in one of our spare rooms. Maybe she noticed that I had started my 'No Imposition' policy by leaving it open as to where, when, and how we might have that lunch together.

"Fine." The word shot back at me like a bullet.

I guess she had noticed.

Seated at my makeshift desk, surrounded by computers, laptops, paper files, printers, scanners, shredders, and every other gizmo my employer had decided its legion of telecommuters needed, I wondered why such a simple request set Robyn off like that.

I thought for a minute, and the question answered itself. I had brought the subject up more than a few times over the relatively short time we'd been married. Never insisting or demanding, but I guess she was tired of hearing about it. I had figured a woman who was down for skinny dipping, or sex bare ass under the stars at a campsite, or any other of several mildly crazy stunts she's pulled, wouldn't balk at my fetish suggestions.

We had known each other forever, growing up together in a small southern town. We had gone out a few times in high school, but nothing really sparked then. I had gone off to a big state college right after graduation. Robyn started out in junior college and transferred to the same big school after two years, but we didn't meet again until senior year.

We were engaged before we even graduated and married the following January. That was three and a half years ago, and except for the infrequent head butting over stupid crap like this, the honeymoon was still going. I love her so much; I keep my hot temper under control around her. She returns the favor by saving her sarcastic wit to make jokes for her students.

I considered her current level of agitation and decided to cover my ass. I don't waste a lot of time surfing porn, but I had a small collection of photos copied from the web. Athletic blondes in various states of bondage, usually wearing lingerie. If I could draw, I would have drawn Robyn in those positions and poses instead. Oh well.

I grabbed my personal laptop from the floor and logged in. If Robyn decided to snoop, those pictures might be a problem. I consigned them to electronic oblivion, then deleted the folder they had been in, then erased the partition. Just to be thorough, I started the disk compression utility too. I should install cleaning software on this thing, I thought.

And that was the end of covering my trail.

I leaned back in my ergonomic office chair, too distracted to open a file or start poring over pages of data.

Her parting shot still perched, front and center, in my troubled head. Suggesting that I wear the stuff I wanted to see her in was weird, bordering on insulting. I might go for letting her tie me down, but not the rest of it. Well, if I didn't do something with my hair soon, I'd be living that for myself, but that really wasn't a thing. Lots of guys had long hair, but not lots of guys wear stockings and heels and corsets.

Why was my brain stuck on this? I tries to picture myself dressed as Robyn had suggested. Nope. Ridiculous.

Her words continued echoing in my head. I realized that what bothered me was the nature of the outburst. Robyn is usually funny and sarcastic, even when she's mad at me. This time was different, but I didn't know why.

Clearly, I had pissed her off for the last time on this topic. I might never be able to banish those thoughts, but I could live up to my vow to keep them to myself.

I bent to work, finally able to focus my mind on the job. I let my thoughts frequently return to my promise, reinforcing the words and the meaning. No more pestering Robyn. It became like a song in my head.

Spoiler alert: I made it almost eight weeks.

## Chapter 2 - Like Humpy Dumpy, I Was Pushed

Late June, and summer, though technically just starting, made its presence known. The air had gone from sultry to intensely damp, and though the daytime temperatures promised oppressive heat ahead, nights were still pleasant.

I descended from my unchanged home office. Well, almost unchanged. One flash drive, hidden among forty or so other flash drives, now contained a single photo of some blonde actress, fully clothed, tied to a wooden chair. I just couldn't resist, though I thought Robyn would look way better in the pose. Things had thawed out between us within a day of our tense moments back in April. I had not even suggested she wear a sweater on a particularly chilly weekend that had taken the state by surprise in early May. I was certain the trouble was behind us.

Robyn was on her phone, chatting loudly with Carrie, a friend from her community college days. I listened to the half of the conversation I could hear and quickly discovered we would have company at dinner tonight.

"Would you mind grilling for four?" she asked as I stepped into the kitchen.

"No," I answered without thinking. One of my techniques for living up to my promise was to stop stressing and over-analyzing the small things. I was enjoying my growing nonchalance. It wasn't full-fledged detachment, and I doubted it ever would be, but rolling with the punches felt pretty good. The house had been a little too quiet after that last argument. I was glad the next day when Robyn was her old self again, bubbly, and quick to laugh. Also, she couldn't keep her hands off me.

She seemed more energetic and loving than ever, and I imagined it was due, at least partially, to the fact that I was sticking to my pledge not to hassle her about clothes or sex games outside her comfort zone. As the weeks went on, and we adjusted to our new economic reality, life together at home became more pleasant. I wondered why I had been so pushy about the subject.

The few kinks I'd dabbled in during my early college days excite me. I don't know why. I don't know how far I'd take them if the chance came up. Not that far, I think. I concluded that there was a lot I didn't know, and that most of it would remain a mystery.

Robyn was bouncing off the walls by the time Carrie arrived. Our guest lugged a cooler straight to the kitchen. I had wondered what I'd be grilling. My wife had gone to the store, but only brought home pasta, vegetables, fruit, a package she said was dessert that I couldn't see yet, and a lot of wine.

"Seafood," she said.

"Like I'll know what it is when I see it?"

"No, dipstick." She grinned, letting me know the insult was meant in fun. "Carrie's got some connection who traded her some fresh seafood for an antique she found at a thrift store."

Anyway, the food had arrived but not the fourth guest. I suppressed a double take when Carrie stepped around from the kitchen breakfast counter to hand me a list of what she had brought. The short brunette wore a sleeveless red dress, white nylons, and black Mary Janes with blocky, medium height heels. Carrie looked like she belonged on a Valentine's Day card. I took the list and made a show of reading it, feeling an almost tangible pressure from Robyn's gaze.

"Wow, Carrie, this looks great. Do you guys want everything done at the same time or in courses?" I looked from one face to the other.

Robyn looked me straight in the eye, a hint of something I couldn't figure out on her face. Mild annoyance? Disbelief? "We're still waiting for Heather, so don't start cooking yet. Plus, I have to get the veggies going, and the noodles."

"Everything's ready to go," Carrie said. She looked at Robyn and grinned. "Spiced, marinated, whatever. All you'll need to do is the grilling."

"Got it. I'll get the grill hot." I turned and got the hell out of there. Later I would hear that Carrie had come over straight from work. Work in an actual office, and she didn't have time to change. Something was off about the whole thing, and the way they were acting had the hair on the back of my neck standing up. As I shut the sliding glass door that opened onto the patio, I heard them laughing, and Carrie saying something about having a house full of people tonight. Considering how little socializing we had done lately, I guess four would make a full house.

I had cleaned the grill about twenty times before Heather arrived, carrying more wine and some beer. I got a good look at Robyn's new friend as she stopped by the door to wave at me. New friend means we hadn't gone to high school together. I had no idea how long the two had really known each other.

Heather lingered by the door; head tilted as though studying me. I raised my brush in mock salute. She was like the third corner of a fantasy feminine triangle. Tall where Carrie was short, curvy but still buff where Robyn was lean. Her long, streaked brown hair was done up in a pile atop her head.

I knew she ran a local gym and taught martial arts there too. I wondered if she had come straight from work as well. I didn't see her shoes, but I did catch the black yoga pants with revealing sheer panels in an eye-catching pattern. They went well with her cropped electric blue sleeveless top. I wouldn't call it a shirt. I don't know what to call it except tight. Along with her attractive bustline, it showed off her toned abs and discreet navel piercing.

I focused on my mission. Grill food, then find an excuse to be somewhere else.

These were Robyn's friends, not mine. Our separate circles of friends were one significant place where all the shared togetherness of married life didn't apply. So, it seemed a little weird when Carrie came out to hand me a beer.

"Thanks," I said, keeping it simple.

"You looked like you could use one," she said, stepping a little closer than comfortable. "Damn! This is hot work. We'll keep the refreshment coming." Her fingertips brushed my arm before she turned back for the house.

Friendly gesture or a come on? Beer in hand, I turned back to the grill, resisting the temptation to watch her walk away. But I did take a moment to picture Robyn's long legs sporting white stockings and a taller version of those sexy shoes.

The food was still in the kitchen, but the beer kept coming, each one accompanied by a bit of friendly chat and mild flirtation. After a few rounds, Robyn came out, a brown bottle in each hand.

"Having fun?" she said as she handed me a sweating bottle.

"Loads." I drank deeply. Well, it was hot work, standing next to a gas grill, cleaning it unnecessarily repeatedly. I gestured with the bottle, "I need to slow down though, or you'll have to carry me upstairs."

"Looks like I'd have some help," she said, arching one eyebrow and giving me a crooked smile. I raised my hands, a warding gesture, and she laughed. "I know you aren't egging them on. I think they're having a little laugh at our expense. One of their more pointed comments in the kitchen was about how little they see of you despite how long we've been friends."

Exasperated! I suddenly realized the word that I had been trying to think of earlier. It fit the situation. It fit the look she was giving me now, in fact.

Robyn moved close and then said, "Speaking of pointed comments, I'm surprised I haven't heard any feedback from you on their wardrobe selection and other matters of personal appearance?"

Yes, she made the statement into a question, voice rising precipitously at the end. "None of my business," I said. "None of my business what they wear. None of my business what you wear." I touched a finger from my non-beer holding hand to my chest. "Hope to die," I said before she could protest. Her mouth was already open, but I didn't give her time to get the words out.

"So, you keep saying," she said with a shudder.

"I wouldn't have to keep saying, if you just let it go," I muttered. That was half beer and half my famous temper talking. Robyn was two steps toward the patio door, and if she heard me, she chose not to reply.

Carrie brought the food out, and I grilled it to perfection. Scallops, shrimp, crab cakes, and tuna steaks. She stayed outside with me for the few minutes it took, sitting in a chair and messing with the hem of her dress. I caught a flash of skin above the white of her nylons and realized she was wearing stockings instead of pantyhose.

My brain turned to beer flavored slush with a generous helping of lust, but I focused on dinner, reminding myself of the plan: make dinner, disappear. I wondered if Robyn knew. Stupid question, I thought. When I looked up, worried I had voiced my thoughts, Carrie was looking at me, measuring me.



"Need a clean platter!" I called out, not really caring who brought it.

"Right here," Heather said as she stepped onto the patio, carrying a large serving dish and sheets of aluminum foil. Was it just me or had her shirt ridden up while her pants drooped down a bit? The blue jewel in her belly button caught the evening light and glittered. A sheet of foil blew off the tray and she bent to retrieve it. Her skintight pants became translucent skintight pants revealing her electric blue thong panties. I felt something twitch in my own pants and quickly turned back to the grill.

*"Dinner. Focus on dinner,"* I thought. Food flew from the grill to the serving dish in a flurry of movement my muscles conducted from memory without input from my useless brain. Heather held the tray, turning it to present open space for food while Carrie quickly covered the various portions with foil. The two women crowded me, nearly touching.

"Shoo. Get that inside before it cools off. I gotta clean a bit." They left, which surprised me a little, and I spent more time than needed on scraping and brushing the grill. The heat felt good now, as if it was burning away some of the stupid that had taken root in my brain.

The women were halfway through their plates when I finally came in. Instead of sitting down, I grabbed my plate and turned.

"Where are you going?" Robyn said to my back.

I looked over my shoulder at her. "I'm sure you three have lots to catch up on. Plus, I smell like smoke, sweat, and beer."

"We've missed you too, Andy. Stay and be sociable for a while," Heather said. Carrie added an enthusiastic invitation of her own. I remained still, looking at my wife, who nodded curtly, almost making it a command. The contrary part of me hesitated. I don't like commands, but I also didn't want to rain on her first social moment in recent memory.

Carrie hefted a bottle of wine and filled the glass I had left on the table. White wine, I noted. The women were being traditional for a seafood dinner, or maybe no one wanted a red wine hangover tomorrow. I sat and ate and kept my mouth shut. I was doing a really good job of it too, I thought.

"Andy!" Robyn said, voice raised. I looked up and reached for my glass, which had magically become full yet again. "Yes, you outdid yourself with dinner tonight, but if you could tune in? Carrie's been trying to ask you a question for about a minute now. What planet are you on?"

"Sorry," I managed.

"That's okay," Carrie said. Her cheerfulness was nearly cloying now, possibly fueled by wine. There was a faint undertone of something darker in her voice as well. I hoped I hadn't pissed her off. "What do you wear for all the Zoom meetings you do?"

"Nothing." I reached for the bread. The looks on their faces told me to think about what I just said. "Shit. I mean nothing special. I don't use the camera, so jeans and T-shirt." My water glass was empty and so was the water pitcher, but my wine glass was full, so I took a long drink from it.

Heather laughed. "Must be nice. I tried some Zoom workouts with a few clients. That doesn't work so well."

"What about you, babe?" I said to Robyn. "Do you have to wear anything special for those virtual classrooms? Dress up real nice?" I only meant it to be a little tweak, but of course it came out a little stronger.

"They're used to seeing me dress like I work on a farm," she said, shooting me a look that made her usually warm, welcoming eyes into a pair of death ray lasers.

"Oh, I think that would be so awesome," Carrie said. "I could stand a break from dresses, stockings, and heels for a while. I'm in the office or the courthouse three or four days a week, and the partners expect us to 'look professional' for the clients," she said, complete with air quote gesture.

The glimpse of her stocking tops was still fresh in my head. I had not had nearly enough wine to mention it, but there was plenty of room for other stupidity to come out of my mouth.

"No one wears stockings anymore, except drag queens. At least according to Robyn. You know, if you want to change right now, I'm sure between the two of us we can find some shorts and a T-shirt that'll fit. Shoes too." I raised my wine

glass to them both, wondering when it had been refilled, and drained it. Leaning back in the chair, I closed my eyes. "I'm bushed. I need to go to bed."

"I'm sure you can stay up long enough for dessert, honey," Robyn said. I was not too far gone to notice the emphasis she put on 'honey' and wondered how much shit I was going to be in tomorrow.

I vaguely remember dessert. It was something chocolate. I think I made another stupid joke or two about stockings and maybe a double entendre about bondage. Robyn and her friends had fruit cocktails, saying something about carbs or processed sugar. That should have set off some warning bells in my head. I don't remember how I got upstairs.

As it turned out, I underestimated the amount of shit I was in by orders of magnitude.

### **Chapter 3 - The Day of the Dina**

The alarm clock chirped. The sound was mild, nearly melodic as alarm clocks go. It stabbed my ears with ice picks.

No, I remembered. That was all the beer and wine I had last night. I opened my eyes, but the room was still dark. The pressure in my bladder was enough to keep me from going back to sleep, so I swung my legs off the bed. They moved a bit and stopped hard, held by something at my ankles.

"What the fuck?" I muttered, pulling my arms down and sitting up. Well, that's what I ordered my muscles to do, but my arms moved a few inches and sitting up was suddenly impossible even if I could move my arms further. Something was wrapped around me, tight and a little heavy. I also finally realized that the darkness was something covering my eyes and not necessarily the light level in the room.

"What the fuck!" I doubled down on the obscenity.

"Hey sweetie," Robyn said, practically straight into my ear. "Looks like you figured out you're tied to the bed. Don't panic..."

"This is not funny, Robyn. Let me loose right now!"

"...really wanted you to get a firsthand feel for all those charming things you think I should be doing for you. You'll find..."

"RIGHT FUCKING NOW!" I shouted as loud as I could. Her voice just kept up its calm recitation, which is when I figured out it was a recording. Lucky me, it was set to loop, so I gritted my teeth and lay still, listening to the whole thing and then the bits I had missed. The little audio gizmo shut off after two repetitions, but it started again every time I spoke loudly enough. I had bigger fish to fry right now though.

I learned that I was bound and blindfolded, but that my hands could reach the knots that would free my arms, and I could then free myself from the bed. She assured me this would be the easy part of my day but didn't want to give everything away in this message. Further instructions awaited me once I was out of bed. She was out of the house but keeping an eye on me. But she felt that wasn't enough for safety's sake, so she had another backup too, whatever the fuck that meant.

Oh, I can't leave out the part where she said it was my behavior last night that was the final push, prompting her to embark on a lesson I would not soon forget.

The darkness that appeared before my eyes thanks to the blindfold turned red at that pronouncement. I paused to concoct the vilest, meanest, worst retribution I could exact on her and her friends, who had obviously been a part of this steaming pile of bullshit. I tore at the ropes with frenzied energy, making a mess out of them. She might have arranged it so I could get loose, but she didn't make it easy.

I relaxed and tried taking a deep breath. Something was interfering with my breathing, and my body felt weird. Struggling to keep my temper in check, I methodically felt my wrists. Something was wrong with my fingers too. Even without being able to see them, I realized my nails were suddenly longer than they had been last night.

Multiple knotted ropes encircled my wrists, connecting my arms to various places on the bed frame. I swore, again, and her recorded message started. I was deep in concentration, almost done with one arm when I heard a noise. I froze, certain someone was in the room with me.

Was that what she meant by having safety back up?

"Hello?"

"Hey sweetie. Looks like..."

I thrashed my almost free arm, trying to find the offending device, but I was one knot short. When I finally got my hand free, I reached for the blindfold. In my hurry to pull it off, I scratched the side of my face.

I was alone.

It helped to see the ropes remaining on my bound arm. I found out the joke was on me. Some of the ropes were false trails, just loose ropes tied to my arm.

"Very funny, darling," I whispered, teeth gritted, trying not to set off the voice activated gizmo.

I freed my remaining arm, threw the sheet off, and sat up, with difficulty. I was still swearing about this stupid prank when I got the next surprise in this morning's series of unpleasant surprises. The tightness and weight I felt around my middle was a hot pink corset tightly laced around my body, which had been augmented with a set of tits.

I felt a moment of utter terror until I jabbed a finger into what little bit of cleavage showed beyond the confines of the stiff pink fabric. Soft plastic yielded to my bright pink fingernail. My sigh of relief would have been louder if I had been able to inhale properly.

"What the fuck?" I would lose count of the number of times I uttered those words. Distracted by ropes and corset, I had forgotten. My nails had been enhanced, extending well past my fingertips and shaped, with the addition of bright pink polish and what looked like a clear coat of sealant. My face burned, and not just from the scratch I had given myself with my new talons.

My gaze wandered past my nails to my new cleavage. Well, what guy can resist such a nice rack, right? I received another shock when I saw the little padlock nestled between my fake boobs, locking a zipper tab to a metal fitting.

Freeing my ankles turned out to be a bit more challenging than I expected. I couldn't sit up properly or see my target easily with the corset and tits in the way. This would turn into something of a chant for me: corset and tits, corset and tits, can't see shit for the corset and tits!

Yes. I am prone to tangential digression. But I was starting to get mad. Not the swearing, frenzied, hot and cold mad of my confused hungover self of a few minutes ago, but a slow infusion of rage, growing and spreading through my body and mind, building to what I knew would be blinding fury. I breathed and focused.

At least I could see the outline of my predicament. There were no decoy ropes this time. Instead, the ropes were tied to my ankles with layers of knots. I started picking them apart. They eventually yielded and I swung my feet to the floor. Surprise, my toenails were the same shade of pink as my fingernails. When I tried leaning forward to get a good look at my feet, heavy locks of brown hair flipped down past my neck and around my shoulders.

I shouldn't have been surprised, but I was. My fingers probed cautiously at my scalp and followed the trail of what had to be hair extensions. I was now the proud owner of a head of hair that reached the middle of my back. That, at least, should be easy to fix. I grabbed a short piece of the rope scattered all over the bed and tied the tangled mess back.

When I stood up, I felt a weight and a pull around my waist and crotch that could not be from the corset. My fingers flashed downward and found fabric that would turn out to be bright pink panties, in the tanga style, I would later learn.

But the panties didn't account for the weight or the tightness. I made for the bathroom, skinning out of the underwear as I moved and leaving it on the floor. The mirror revealed a metal belt tight around my waist connecting to more metal covering my crotch. A metal strap divided my cheeks below my tailbone and something that felt like cables ran from down under there somewhere up to the belt.

"What the fuck?" How had I missed all the weird sensations this fresh hell was now plainly causing? My bladder explained how, sending more urgent messages along my nervous system. My bowels also chimed in. I sat down on the toilet to do my business. It took forever to convince my bladder and dick that it was safe to

pee. Messy, but safe. I'll stop there and save myself further indignity regarding the morning's necessities.

I noticed the big bath towels were gone, and the shower curtain, and the bathroom rugs. I noticed something else too, a new tissue box holder on Robyn's vanity. It was a huge bathroom with a sink and counter space for each of us. I vaguely, fuzzily, recalled that in the last week she had been doing some of her periodic redecorating. Some new pillows had appeared in various places. Some nick-nacks had been replaced, and family photos had been rotated to more recent shots, that kind of thing.

Only this Kleenex holder had a small hole on the side of the box that was angled toward the entire room. I filed this suspicion away and got up, taking inventory of the room. My toothbrush was still there, so I could make a shiv when I needed to. I laughed too loudly at my own joke, and Robyn's voice started up from the speakers on the bed.

The back of the toilet tank was also still there, and a quick check revealed it was not glued down. I noted the mirror, again. The first time I had looked I was a little distracted. I made a more thorough examination.

A male chastity belt. Of course, I had run across a few pictures online, but it wasn't something I investigated in depth. Nor had I read up on female chastity, for the record. I like having immediate access to my wife's sexy bits.

I had to pull my stomach in hard just to barely fit a finger under the padded steel belt; it was that tight. It sat above my hips, which made it unlikely I could just push it down, and who knew how my poor penis was entrapped within? I would have to research, which meant I would need a computer or smartphone, which was appearing less and less likely.

The mirror had revealed something else, which got lost in the shuffle of outrage over the chastity belt and the discovery of what looked like a hidden camera in the bathroom. A second strap, or little belt, wrapped from the back of the corset to the front, and was also fastened with a small padlock. The laces were completely covered by a stiffened fabric panel and locked in what turned out to be three places, top, middle, and bottom.

The wheels in my head were already turning, but I needed to understand the full scope of this disaster. I left the bathroom and continued my investigation in our bedroom. There was a note taped over the framed photo of me and Robyn that I kept on my chest of drawers. It simply said "Start Here" in big block letters with an arrow pointing down toward the drawers.

I opened the top drawer. It was empty. No socks. No underwear. No \$500 in twenties that I kept for emergencies.

All the drawers were empty, save the bottom one, which had a sheet of paper with an arrow pointing at the closet door. I opened the closet door. All the clothes were gone, as were the shoes. Even Robyn's stuff was gone. I suppose I could have worn her sweats in a pinch, maybe a T-shirt, but why did she take her shoes? She was a size seven and I was a size ten. A plastic tote sat on the floor, pushed all the way to the right, and I saw something hanging from the rod, wrapped in plastic.

And a note, of course, telling me to look on the back of the closet door. Dutifully, I turned. There was another mirror. Great. More glass to make mayhem with if the rest of the house turned out to be as empty as the master suite. I got another good look at myself too, and noticed my legs and arms had been shaved, or something. Waxed, chemically de-haired, who knows what they did to me? Yes, I was sure now that Robyn had the aid of friends in her twisted little game. The point is the hair was gone. My face was smoother than it had been in months.

My mind flitted back to April, when Robyn had angrily suggested I try on the clothes I wanted to see her wearing. I looked every bit as ridiculous as I had imagined I would.

I refocused and saw a large envelope taped to the door, at eye level next to the mirror. My name had been scribbled on it in heavy marker, along with the initials R.I.P. and a very nice line drawing of some lilies. Understandably, this shook me a little, which may have contributed to the excessive force I used tearing the envelope off the door, which swung nearly closed as I pulled at the tape.

This was more than a short note, Robyn had written me an epistle, longhand, covering several pages. I started reading, turning so the low wattage closet light shined on the page.



Dear Husband,

Andy is, temporarily, no longer with us. Maybe he crossed his heart one too many times. In his place is now Dina, the tall, willowy, dusky vixen who loves her lingerie and heels, her short dresses, make-up, and all the accessories of the fairer sex.

Yes, you are Dina for now. Face it love, you have a bosom, no visible sex organs, and you sit to pee.

I stopped reading and crumpled the pages in my hands, compressing the multiple sheets of paper into as small and tight a ball as I could before dropping it to the floor. Backing out of the closet, I scanned the room, searching frantically for some sign that this was all an elaborate joke that would end soon. My breath was coming in ragged, jerky gasps and my heart pounded inside my pink prison. With barely any warning, I felt the first spasms start.

I raced to the bathroom, only five or so steps to the toilet. My knees slammed painfully against the floor as I vomited into the porcelain bowl. If you've never thrown up while wearing a tight-laced corset and chastity appliance, it's a chore. Between episodes of barfing, her recorded words and the start of her letter kept coming back to me.

Fuck her.

The smell was horrendous, and my abs ached in ways I'm not sure I had ever felt. When I thought I was done, I flushed and sat back on my haunches. My brain had just told my legs to stand me up when my stomach flip-flopped again and sent truly nasty globs of something spewing into the clean water. I stayed down this time, waiting until I was certain the nausea had passed.

The phone beside the bed started ringing. Believing it was Robyn, fantasizing that she was calling to release me, having seen the results of her warped game being forcibly ejected from my guts, I raced to the phone, diving across the bed to grab it. I heard her voice and felt a gush of relief.

It was the little black sound player and speakers on the bed, activating at the sound of my voice.

The call was a fucking phone scam about my credit card rate. I clicked the end call button and then clicked talk. No dialtone. Somehow, the phone had been rigged to allow incoming calls but not outgoing. I looked at it again. The damn thing was new, silver instead of our trusty black cordless handsets.

"FUCK!" I threw the phone as hard as I could. It exploded against Robyn's dresser, gouging the wood. Fragments of plastic sprayed the room.

"Hey sweetie-"

I yanked wires apart and the little audio player and speakers, quickly followed the phone, though with less spectacular results. My vision swam and alternating waves of hot and cold ran over my skin and through my flesh.

I was beyond pissed, and there was no way in fucking hell this day would end with me still trapped in Robyn's fucking game. I put the sharp edge of one pink tipped finger against the skin of my chest and dragged it through the two strokes of an X. The scratch was deep enough to draw blood, which oozed slowly from the vivid mark.

I took as deep a breath as the fucking corset allowed, then started playing a game of my own.

#### **Chapter 4 - Seeds of Destruction**

The first thing I did was sit on the bed and calm down. I breathed, trying to oxygenate my air starved body. My mind wandered, gathering data, and planning without conscious input. Also, unless she was rushing home to release me, I didn't want Robyn here. I figured her arrival would signal intensification of her plot, not abandonment of it. Mindful of the cameras probably watching me, I sat, and I breathed, and I thought.

My eyes flicked around the room. There was a little stuffed toy atop her chest, angled to take in the room. That was new. Something else tickled my memory. I turned to look at the alarm clock. It read 7:19. It was also not our old alarm clock, and in fact had a tiny black dot in the lower left of the face plate that looked a lot like a camera lens or lens window.

I wondered where the video was going. I assumed there was audio too. It occurred to me the devices might have onboard memory as well. That could be handy. Questions flooded my mind in rapid succession. How many of her friends were in on this? Neighbors? Who were they? How was I getting out of this fucking corset, and worse yet, the fucking chastity belt? Who was downstairs, as her messages had twice hinted? Was Robyn cheating on me?

Whoa.

The question came out of the blue, bubbling up from my fertile imagination. The more it rolled around inside my skull, the more sense it made.

My wife was cheating on me and decided that humiliating the shit out of me in front of friends, neighbors, and total strangers would be the perfect way to get rid of me. Funny. I always pictured her as a murder-me-over-dinner kind of woman, quick and merciful, possibly not even seen coming. The picture clarified. She must think there was no way I'd take her to court or go to the cops or do anything other than slink away in mortified shame after this. Short of murder, it was the perfect out. Most guys would agree to any settlement just to be away from a psycho bitch capable of this kind of shit.

Most guys.

No. It made no sense.

I reconsidered. She wouldn't do that. I could practically see the tiny angelic version of me perched on my right shoulder, trying to talk sense into me. Robyn had never shown this level of cruelty, right? I was listening, but the seeds of destruction had already been planted.

I stood up, reminding myself to breathe. I had to breathe constantly, in short quick cycles, to keep enough oxygen running through my system. I went back to the closet. The object hanging from the rod was heavily wrapped in plastic, but I thought I could see a black dress. I took it off the rod, laying it on the bed.

Looking at the plastic, it occurred to me that if I could barely see the dress for the plastic, the plastic might make an adequate cover for me. I carefully removed the wrapping and considered the dress. It was black with a round white collar and white trim on the openings of the sleeves. When I saw the separate white apron, I

realized it was a maid's dress. Would wearing this to escape be more humiliating than the pink corset or less? I could wrap it around my waist, and that was about it. Useless.

Well, maybe not totally useless, I thought as I considered the amount of fabric. I wrapped the dress around my waist, covering my ass, securing it with knotted sleeves, which provided some cover over my crotch. Then I wrapped the plastic around the corset, partially concealing the pink fabric and obscuring the shape of my new hourglass figure.

I retrieved the tote, my new shirt squeaking annoyingly the whole time, and emptied it onto the bed. It was also getting warm under the layers. Anyway, a lot of little boxes, packages, and a book, fell out. I ignored all that shit, but I thought a plastic tote might come in handy. From the bathroom, I retrieved the tissue box hidden camera combo and took it apart. Paydirt. Well, if paydirt was verifying that your cheating sack-of-shit wife had been broadcasting surveillance footage of your new career as a transvestite lingerie model and projectile vomiter, then I had hit the mother lode.

The tissue box pieces got tossed on top of the bed. I yanked the alarm clock free of the wall outlet, smashed it against the nightstand, and tossed the broken bits onto the pile. I grabbed the little plush toy from the dresser, holding it in a death grip. I would have my own record of the day's events, from my perspective.

Then I took stock of the two rooms. I had a toilet tank lid as an improvised blunt force weapon. The thick glass of either bathroom mirror would make a fine knife when combined with a hand towel. I could set the house on fire from here, any number of ways, actually, but a curling iron, blow dryer, makeup mirror, or just plain electric current from any number of sources were close at hand. If I wanted a flood instead of a fire, I could also turn the water on in the tub, shower, both sinks, and toilet, and direct the outflow to the floor instead of a drain.

I filed all but the mirror glass under 'Plan Last Resort' just in case. The glass was looking like 'Plan A' for getting free of the damn corset. I was fairly certain cutting the stiff fabric of the corset would leave me a bloody mess though.

Fuzzy friend in hand, I toured the rest of the second floor. The two spare bedrooms were as barren as my own room. No curtains, bed linens, blankets, pillow cases, and so on. The other upstairs bathroom was the same. All three

rooms had spy cams in them. I closed the doors as I left. True to her word, Robyn had left me less than nothing for covering up and escaping. I searched thoroughly anyway. I found a penny as I shut the last door. It was heads up.

I picked it up and dropped it in my décolletage.

My office door had been replaced. What had been the standard light weight, hollow core, bedroom door was now a dead-bolted solid wood affair (there was that word again) with no key stuck in the lock for my convenience. The little devil popped up on my left shoulder and commented on how long Robyn must have been planning this little charade.

I agreed.

Okay, there was no little devilish me on my shoulder. I may have anger issues, but I'm not hallucinatory. The notion was sound, though. I didn't just piss her off last night and find myself in girl's reform school on a whim. This was a long-term plan, executed with help, and it must have cost a good bit too. I don't know what a corset and chastity belt cost, but I could tell you to the dollar what that door and lockset ran these days.

Just to be sure, I gripped the knob and pushed quietly. The frame had not been replaced, so I could probably bust the door out of the frame if I had too. Was I going to find an empty room for my trouble, or a set of keys, or my wife? I would save that as a last resort too. It would give me something to do while the house caught fire.

I wanted to see what was waiting downstairs, but I didn't want to come back upstairs before making whatever getaway I was about to make. This left me with a few decisions to make. I stepped back into the bathroom and realized I could just take a hand mirror if I needed sharp glass, so I picked up the larger of the two Robyn had next to her vanity, and I grabbed a couple washcloths for improvised handles, should it come to that.

No sound or other indication drifted up the stairs, which surprised me. By now, I imagined I would have an audience of Robyn's shithead friends, taunting me or whatever. On the other hand, there were probably still active cameras enabling my every move to be examined in detail and recorded for posterity.

I put the mirror and the washcloths in the tote.

The room looked wrong. It was sterile. A motel room that had been stripped for cleaning, devoid of any hint of the people who had lived in it, however temporarily. For a moment, sadness replaced my anger. I looked around and had more thoughts. I grabbed the balled-up letter and the MP3 player I had thrown across the room. They might be needed in court later, I thought as I tossed them in the box. I put the lid on the tote and placed the little stuffed horse on top, camera eye pointing up at me.

Walking down the stairs was a bit of theater, since I couldn't see my feet that well.

"Can't see shit! Can't see shit! Corset and tits!" I sang the line in a whisper to myself as I carefully descended.

I turned right at the bottom and into the den, which was a quaint word for a room with a big screen TV and comfortable seats. Two women lounged in my sofa and chair as though they owned the place. They both had their phones out. Carrie sat on the sofa. Gone were her Valentine's card duds. Today she wore a ripped black button up shirt over a ripped black t-shirt that showed a generous amount of her midriff. Her dark hair was tousled and wild, and her makeup was dark and intense. Black cargo shorts, cut off to make most of the pockets useless, covered her hips, barely. Black fishnet stockings and a pair of black army boots finished the look.

In the chair, sitting up straight and looking like she meant to be in charge, was Stephanie. Her dark red hair was cut pixie style, and she was decked out in gym clothes closely mimicking Heather's from last night. Cropped tank top, green. Skintight yoga pants with a wavy line pattern on them, gray. Her shoes were those clunky white sneakers like the high school girls wear to stroll about the shops downtown.

They burst into laughter when I entered the room, but quickly composed themselves. I ignored them.

"You are being a very naughty girl, Dina," Carrie said sweetly, her tone at odds with her goth thrasher outfit. She turned to Stephanie, "Maybe it's good she's plastic wrapped? We do need to get her hair done."

"Get back upstairs and get properly dressed, Dina. You don't want to disappoint your lovely wife. Robyn went through a lot of trouble to arrange today's education for you. When you return, bring your hair care supplies with you." Stephanie ordered. She projected friendly confidence and control, but there was a hint of wariness to both of them. Then I realized they had been watching a video feed of me having my assorted meltdowns, at least until I destroyed or moved some of the cameras.

I'd have to keep an eye on Stephanie. She was one of Heather's martial arts students, and pretty damn good as I recalled. I noted with interest that the couch cushions were still in place, though I'd have to wrestle them out from under two angry women. The dining room set was still there. Chairs and table, cherry, or something hard and heavy stained cherry. Either way, I added makeshift clubs to my list of assets. Even the karate chick might think twice about having a chair swung at her head.

I walked past them into the dining room on my way to the kitchen. They didn't move. I noticed the China cabinet was empty. No plates, stemware, cake dishes, and so on. But I saw the back of the couch. The biggest swath of fabric I had seen in the house so far was the upholstery on that piece of furniture. Clearly, desperation level had been reached. I also noted the number of disguised web cams scattered throughout the three rooms. Whatever happened here in the house today, it would be well documented.

I probably don't need to mention how utterly devoid of anything useful the kitchen was. Of course, the knives were gone. Forks as well. And plates, glasses, canned goods. Pretty much anything that could be thrown or turned into a cutting tool or weapon was gone. Though the bar stools at the breakfast counter were still there. I looked down the hall. The key that usually resided in the deadbolt lock on this side of the basement was gone. That door was steel, set in a steel frame. I wouldn't gain entry to the basement that way.

"There's nothing in there for you, Dina," Stephanie called, apparently still not moving. I believed her.

I continued foraging. The cabinets were well stocked with paper plates, plastic cups, plastic spoons, and sporks. There were still a number of non-hazardous utensils as well. Or at least what the amateur mayhem artist might think of as

non-hazardous. I noted a nice serving spoon with a thick handle. That would make a good tool for busting the fucking locks off the corset.

"Get back in here, Dina. You're just making this harder on yourself!" Carrie added a moment later. "Don't think we won't tie you to the table and spank your ass!"

"Coffee." I said, finally deigning to acknowledge their presence. It was tough to pull off, ignoring their threats and acting like I didn't give a shit what they saw. As far as I knew, they had already seen everything, so why should I give a fuck? They could stare at my ridiculous appearance all they wanted, if that's what kept them out of my way.

"On the counter. There's styrofoam cups." I wasn't sure which one said that. The promised coffee was one of those pod machines. My phone was there too, plugged into the charger as promised. My wallet was also there. I checked it. It held my driver's license and health insurance card and nothing else. Even my small collection of photos was gone. Into the tote it went. My PIN didn't unlock my phone. I clicked the emergency call button. I could call Robyn or 911. The phone joined my wallet in the tote.

"I hate that soy latte foamed crappacino double shot latte shit," I said. I didn't shout, just spoke and let them decide if they heard me.

"You said 'latte' twice." That was Carrie. I had never been on the receiving end of her reputedly acid wit, but I thought she might be warming up to give me a taste. 'Fuck you' didn't seem like constructive repartee, so I just kept looking. Finally, in the pantry, I found a battered old multi-piece pot and some filters that didn't fit but could be pressed into service. The coffee grounds were there, but not much else useful. I noticed that even the garbage bags were gone.

That triggered a pleasant memory. Me and Robyn at a concert when we were first dating. We had no rain gear, fancy or otherwise, to deal with the soaking wet outdoor venue. We had garbage bags and the tiniest pocketknife ever, which had been ignored by the security check. I shook my head and got back to business, but the memory persisted, ricocheting around my tired brain. How had it all gone so wrong?

I started the water to heating. The stove worked. The gas stove in case you thought I was kidding about burning the house down. The toaster was still on the



counter, which was weird, I thought. The room was like an arson kit, which sparked a thought.

I opened a cabinet tucked into a corner and presto, a few bottles of booze, mainly used for cooking. I grabbed a bottle of brandy and set it on the counter next to the coffee grounds and sad little stack of filters.

As the water heated, I looked around, noting the sliding glass door leading out to the patio and back yard. There was a shed out there, and a basement access door. I was certain they were locked or empty, or maybe both, but I knew a couple things I doubted Robyn did.

The door slid open, letting the warm air flood in, triggering the AC to start. Both women were instantly up from their seats, still keeping their distance. I saw Stephanie scan the room, noting my coffee preparations.

"Little early, don't you think?" She tilted her head at the counter.

"Just a splash," I said.

Carrie was more confrontational. "You go out, we lock the door behind you. And believe me, you'll pay with more than a little spanking to get back inside." The look on her face dared me to test that pronouncement. I shrugged, picked up my trusty bin, and stepped out onto the patio.

The door slid shut hard, and the latch snapped into place. I strode across my lush green lawn. Erin Campbell was looking out her kitchen window, straight at me, thanks to the fact that her tri-level house put her kitchen above my fence. Another friend of Robyn's. I waved and kept walking. I swear she smiled before twitching the curtains closed. Bitch. Tomorrow's headline would read "Insane Transvestite Goes on Murder Rampage in Quiet Middle-Class Neighborhood" which suited me fine for a moment before my surge of anger evaporated.

There were three things I needed from the back yard. First was a pair of flip flops that had been abandoned near the wood pile after I stepped in some dog shit last summer. That stray dog's habit of crapping in my yard was the reason we had a new fence, by the way. I also needed the broken shovel head that I had hurled into the holly bushes that grew inside the corner of the fence, and a brick.

I could probably have executed my plan with one of the bar stools as my persuasion, but I really wanted something on my feet, even cheap plastic sandals.

The flip flops were gone. I doubted Robyn had done that last night. I might have tossed them and forgot, run over them with the mower, or they might have been buried under fallen leaves and grass clippings. The shovel blade, with a foot of handle still attached, was deep in the holly, and it cost me more scratches to retrieve. But I did get it. All the scratches on my arms, face, and shoulders reminded me of the X shaped scratch on my chest. Neither woman had commented on my self-inflicted mark. Maybe that little bit of craziness was why they were being so circumspect?

Armed with a potentially lethal weapon and a stuffed animal spy cam, I went to collect my final prize, a brick. Not just any brick, but a red brick colored landscape border stone that weighed the same as four or five regular bricks. I tucked the brown and white toy horse camera into my hair and held the tote under my left arm.

The little horse needed a fitting name. I stopped, noting the sudden expression of uncertainty on Carrie's formerly smug face. I decided on May, short for Mayhem. Together we stepped onto the patio.

Both women were now talking into their mobiles. I thought they looked a little frantic, but I might be giving myself too much credit. Who would be afraid of a corseted, dick armored, plastic wrapped specter of pink hell striding into battle with a piece of shovel and an oversize brick? Whatever they thought of me, Stephanie finished her conversation, reached past Carrie, and unlatched the door just as I began the awkward wind up with the brick.

As badly as I wanted to break that door, I checked my throw. The two women had stepped away from the door, but were still close. I dropped the rock just as I reached the entrance, giving it a little spin so it would hopefully not land on my foot. The door opened easily, and I walked in. No one jumped me. Carrie did not produce a gun from her purse and start barking orders, which was a possibility I had considered. Sirens were not howling in the distance.

I wanted to hurt them. I wanted to hurt anyone right now. The fantasy frothed wildly in my brain. I told my brain to shut up and get with the program. I am not a

psychopath. It was a compelling fairy tale, though, prevailing over such personal evil by sheer force of will and martial prowess. Fantasy bullshit.

I shut the door behind me and returned to my coffee prep, leaving my possessions on the counter. The water boiled furiously in the little pot, as I had intended. I put May on the counter, pointing the camera toward the waiting women. Boiling water really would make a good weapon, I thought as I glanced at the two women who stood at the edge of the dining room entryway.

*"For fuck sake,"* I said silently, imploring my aching head to work with me. I was finessing my way out of here. Violence was the last of a long line of last resorts, assuming I could even do it. Miracle of miracles, my tired mind refocused rationally on the problem at hand.

I turned away from them for a second and poured the boiling water into a cup, or so I hoped they thought. I had filled the cup with tap water before going out the door. Turning and stepping at the same time, smiling as I clutched my cup as though I planned to drink it, I made sure Carrie was actively texting and then I threw the water at her.

She yelled as she jumped, arms flailing, obviously expecting scalding hot coffee. I grabbed her phone.

"Shit! Dammit! Give me that!"

So much for her acid wit. Stephanie, who was also having a love affair with her phone, started toward me. I moved fast to the counter and grabbed the shovel, while continuing to press letter keys to enter text and keep the phone from timing out.

"Drop it, Dina." Stephanie said from about six feet away. I hefted the shovel blade like I knew how to use it and glanced down long enough to get the menu to the little phone icon. The phone vibrated, an incoming call. Gee. I wonder who that could be?

"It's Andy, you fucking bitch, and don't come any closer. You may be a bad ass, Stephanie, but I have nothing to lose right now. If I land one lucky shot, I won't stop. I won't be able to stop."

She paused then, and I think it was that last sentence that did it. Carrie was edging closer as well, at a loss for words.

"That goes double for you, Carrie. I actually want you to try something." My brain disconnected from my mouth, focusing on the phone. I punched a number in from memory. "I will beat you bloody and when my future ex-wife gets here, I'll give her the same."

Carrie blanched. Her mouth popped open, but nothing came out. Stephanie inched forward, but I was ready, turning the burner up to high and dropping a kitchen towel very close to the flame. I picked up the bottle of brandy, pouring a little onto the towel to demonstrate my intent.

"I have no problem setting this dump on fire," I said. She stopped.

"Hello," the voice from the phone answered.

"Deacon! It's Andy and I need your help right now. It's an emergency. I'll be on the curb in front of the house."

"Got it," he said. The call disconnected. I punched in another number, Henry Arnold, attorney.

"Carrie? I thought you were off today?" Henry said, probably from his office downtown.

Well of course Carrie would be in his contact list. What a dumb fucking move calling him was. I looked from face to face, but the women were frozen in place.

"Henry, it's Andy Simmons. I had to borrow Carrie's phone. Mine is busted."

"Oh. Good to hear from you, Andy. I thought you'd be on your way to the mountains or the beach. Aren't you off next week?"

"Yes, but we didn't plan ahead and now every place we like is booked solid, so we're staying home this week. Listen, I had a problem come up that I don't want to discuss on the phone. Do you have an open spot in your calendar early next week?" There was a moment of silence as he consulted whatever oracular device kept his calendar.

"Tuesday at 9:00."

"I'll take it. And Henry, this one is carved in stone. I will be there and if I'm not, it won't be by choice. Do not accept any cancellations for this meeting, especially text or email. I will be there, in person."

There was another longer pause. "I'll be in the office from 3:00 until 5:00 this afternoon. Just come by." I heard him take a deep breath. "What have you done, Andy?"

"It'll have to keep, Henry. Thanks. I'll see you in a while." As much as I wanted to keep Carrie's phone, which had not stopped vibrating with incoming calls or texts the whole time I had it, it was of limited use now. I tossed it at her. Surprised, she fumbled the phone and it fell to the floor, still buzzing. I picked up my tote, my toy, and my shovel. Belatedly, I realized Henry might think that Carrie and I were up to something. Oops.

Stephanie still waited, like a coiled spring. "You have no idea what you've done, you stupid, fucking, asshole."

Wow. I will have to make an effort with my next wife's friends. I did not think I was so universally despised.

"You didn't have to do this, Stephanie," I said, taking the high ground by not calling her a cunt like I really wanted to. "Clearly, you think I'm a sub-human piece of shit, so did you really expect me to come flouncing down the stairs as Maid Dina with a smile on my face and a song on my lips? You're supposed to be smart. Back up and let me by."

"What happened to you?" she said. I thought she was looking at the scratches on my chest, but looking back, it might have been a more general question. At the time, I was sure she meant to jump me, expecting me to look down. I watched Carrie out of the corner of my eye, but she was engrossed with her phone.

"Didn't Robyn tell you?" I said, deliberately answering her question with nonsense. No one moved. "Get the fuck out of my way," I said.

"Robyn wants you to wait for her. She says she can explain," Carrie said. She looked sick, suddenly pale and a little sweaty.

"Are you on the phone with her? Or are you just texting?"

"On voice," she answered. She held the phone against her chest, as though that might keep our chat private.

"That ship has sailed," I said. A cold dread filled me when they didn't move. Last resorts loomed over us all.

"Please," Carrie said. "She's calling the house. Just talk to her."

"Fuck her. And fuck you. And fuck all your absent friends who helped with this idiocy. I will see you all in court. Now get out of the fucking way, or I will cut you down where you stand."

And just like that, the women were out of words. I could hear a voice, tinny and small, issuing from Carrie's mobile. The house phone started ringing. The two women finally moved out of my way. I walked past them, wanting to show dignity and control, but really afraid of tripping and killing myself with my own improvised weapon. They stayed back, keeping ten feet away at least.

"Tell me, Carrie, who's she with now? What's his name?"

Her brows knit together, and an utterly vapid, uncomprehending look clouded her face. Really, why had I ever thought she was hot?

I left the house through the front door, and I could see Deacon's truck coming down the street. Behind me, the phone was still ringing.

I recalled the stunned expression on Carrie's face, the total disconnection, as though I had asked her what starlight tastes like. Now I knew one thing with utter certainty. There was no other man.

Well. That drained a lot of the old-time righteous fury right out of me.

## **Chapter 5 - The Nuts and Bolts of Escape**

I waved down Deacon. Understandably, he was not slowing down for a half-naked street walker. The flash of recognition on his face will be etched in my mind forever. I dropped the tote in the already crowded bed of the massive diesel crew cab and climbed into the passenger seat.

"Go," I said.

He went. We were out of the subdivisions when he finally turned to look at me. "Andy," his surprisingly deep voice filled the cab. "What happened to you?"

"Robyn," I answered. "And her... friends." I kept my voice down and my temper in check. Deacon was the best example of humanity I knew. He would give a stranger the shirt off his back, run into a burning building to rescue a dog, and might even be up for giving you a kidney. On the other hand, he had a low tolerance for swearing, drinking, blasphemy, stupidity, and shenanigans of all kinds. Right now, I pretty much checked all the boxes. I really didn't want him to leave me on the side of the road.

"Robyn," he said. "Could you be a little more detailed?" We were approaching a fork in the road, and he put his right turn signal on.

"Don't go to your place," I said. He took his foot off the gas. "Please. I need some tools to get out of this..." I bit my tongue. "Out of this predicament, and some clothes, and a ride downtown."

"That's all you need?" he asked.

My head drooped forward. I discovered it was possible to want to scream and to cry at the same time. I did neither. "Thanks, Deacon. Does this put you up by one or by two?"

"I quit counting years ago," he said. "I will do whatever I can to help, but I really do need to know what I'm getting into." The truck turned right anyway, but then turned onto a dirt track at the edge of his place instead of continuing toward his house. His phone started singing about angels.

"Yes, Miss Maddie," he said to the air. He must have installed a hands-free device in his ancient diesel beast of a truck.

"Where are you?" his wife said.

"In the truck. Andy's with me, and you're on speaker," he said.

That's the fundamental difference between Deacon and most of the rest of the world. I could think of twenty smart-ass things to say to Robyn in such a situation, or, I might have neglected to tell her I wasn't alone and seen what kind of laughs that sparked.

"But where are you?" she reiterated. I was shaking my head and waving my arms, but Deacon wasn't lying to Maddie, not on my account, probably not ever.

"Heading to the barn."

"Alright. See you shortly," Maddie said and the call ended.

"Stop here, please," I said.

The truck slowed to a stop. Deacon turned to face me.

"I apparently upset Robyn. Upset her a lot, though I didn't realize how much. Last night, she had a couple friends over to the house, and I grilled dinner. She got me drunk, probably drugged my food. While I was out cold, she fixed me up like this. Well, not exactly like this. There's a corset under this plastic and a metal belt under the black cloth wrapped around me."

He blinked, once, and stared at me like I had lost my mind.

"I don't know how many of her friends helped, but at least three of them did. They also removed or locked away everything from the house that I might wear to cover this mess, anything I could use as a tool to get out of this mess, my car, keys, credit cards, and money. They disabled my access to phones and computers." I stopped for a breath.

Deacon just sat, watching me unload. For a brief second, I wondered if he was in on the plot too.

"Robyn left me an outfit to wear. I will spare you the details, but I decided not to cooperate. Oh," I lifted May, "she also spread little spy cameras all over the house to record the festivities."

"Then how'd you get away?"



I was barely keeping my shit together, the enormity of the day now landed on my shoulders like a ton of bricks.

"Without leaving a trail of broken bodies in my wake," I said. Deacon twitched a little at my answer.

"Did you hurt anyone?"

"Only their feelings."

"Then how'd you do it?" he asked again.

"I snatched Carrie's phone after she unlocked it to make a call. I threatened them both with my trusty shovel here, and they didn't try anything. I grabbed my stuff and ran out of the house before anyone could change their mind about stopping me."

"How'd you come by that shovel, Andy?"

"Can we play twenty questions while I use a set of bolt cutters, please?" I asked.

"Please answer me. I just want to know what I'm getting into," he said, evenly and reasonably as ever.

"I remembered that I had thrown it into the bushes in a fit of snit after I broke it trying to pry up that rock. You recall? The rock that turned out needing a backhoe to dig up?"

He laughed. "Yes. I remember that. Y'all kept me all day, but you fed me lunch and fed the whole family dinner too. Okay, hop out. Mind your feet though."

I hesitated, and he read my mind.

"I don't need a shop for this, Andy. I carry tools with me. Though I don't know what we'll do for clothes. I have boots and a rain suit in the box," he pointed at the truck-bed's toolbox. "That should be enough to get you to the dollar store. I'll spot you the money for some new clothes."

The step down from the truck cab was long and a bit treacherous, but I relished the thought that it would be the last step I would take wearing a fucking corset

and chastity belt. Deacon looked up at me as though he could hear my mental obscenities. He tossed the plastic pants and jacket at me. Then a pair of rubber boots that I prayed would fit.

"Stay put. No sense getting this far with just a few scratches only to step on a rusty nail or piece of glass." He wrestled with boxes and waterproof bags, looking for something.

In my plastic tote, I could hear my phone buzzing. It was Robyn, I imagined, and I wasn't sure I wanted to talk to her right now. Less than an hour ago, I had imagined murdering her, and voiced that proposition to one of her friends, who I also threatened to kill. Not exactly a firm foundation for patching up our differences.

I opened the box and dug out the phone, anyway, dropping my shovel to the soft grass of the old pasture. The blade broke in two when it hit the ground. I laughed hysterically, holding the buzzing phone, and sliding to the ground, back to the truck. Tears of relief, humor, and sadness fell freely, watering the ground, wetting my plastic wrap, and stinging my scratches. Deacon rounded the back of the truck, a huge set of bolt cutters in his powerful hands.

Deacon is not tall, but he is big. I had him by four or five inches height-wise, but he outweighed me by at least sixty pounds, all of it dense muscle. He waited for me to figure out what I was doing. My phone would not stop buzzing. I decided to answer it, then maybe I'd have a moment's peace to plan the rest of the day.

The video chat icon was flashing. I put my thumb over the lens and accepted the call.

"Oh, thank God," was the first thing out of her mouth.

"What is it, Robyn? I'm a little busy right now."

"Please just come home," she said. Her face filled the viewing window, and I couldn't tell where she was. "I'll meet you there. We can fix this if you'll just come back."

"I'll be back later tonight. I've got a lot of errands to run today."

"Deacon? Don't let him talk you into trouble," she said. This pissed me off, for no other reason than her friends could treat me like shit and my friends were supposed to kiss her ass.

"What's the PIN for my phone now, Robyn?" I asked before Deacon could respond. She just looked at me. "My new PIN, Robyn. You were the one who set it, right?"

"I can't..."

I hung up. It was buzzing again in seconds, so I turned it off. I would dump it later and get a new one. Well, maybe. I had to see what was left in the bank account first. I could be penniless now for all I knew.

"You should try..." Deacon stopped when I looked up at him from my seat in the grass. He didn't flinch or react in any other way to whatever expression was on my face. He just pursed his lips and blew out a breath. "Okay. Stand up, and let's get this done."

I stood. Plastic and a black dress quickly fell to the ground. The bolt cutters made short work of the padlocks. Naturally, it couldn't be that easy. Yes, I'm guilty of asking Robyn if she would try a corset. The only thing I knew about them, before wearing one today, was that they shaped a torso and had laces, and I wasn't sure about laces. I just wanted her to wear something sexy and different and, I don't know, fitted?

Now I was learning that in addition to the laces that had been concealed in the back, there was a zipper and some hook closures that had been concealed in the front. And everything had been locked or covered and then locked. My fingernails made opening the various little fasteners insanely difficult.

"Andy," Deacon said quietly, clearly noting my frustration. I looked up and he handed me some nail clippers.

"Thanks." After turning my long pink fingernails into short pink fingernails, I had the thing off in a jiff. I held it, studying it. Part of me was deciding how many pieces to cut it into. Part of me was learning something that Robyn maybe wanted me to learn, and that was happening despite my resistance to learning anything at all. I inhaled deeply and threw the offending garment into the tote.

The motion set my tits to jiggling, which snapped me back to the moment.

"What size would you say these are?" I said without thinking of my audience.

"I don't know. More than B. Maybe more than C. I think D," Deacon answered.

I looked over at him. He was, of course, totally serious. "Are you making a joke?"

"No. It depends on a combination of two measurements. Don't forget, I got married in high school, so it's not like Maddie's clothes and sizes are a mystery."

I gripped one prosthetic breast with both hands and slowly tugged. It was glued on firmly, and my actual skin beneath began to sting in protest. I pried at the edges of the plastic with my fingers, but no gap or crack appeared. Well, I wasn't about to wait for them to fall off.

"Any idea what would take these off?" I asked. Deacon did what all good modern folks do, he pulled out his phone and started a web search. While he searched, I continued probing for weak points.

"It depends. There are a variety of adhesives available." He went back to his phone

I was thinking about turning my phone back on but didn't really want to hear more of Robyn's bullshit. I was a little surprised not to see her cruising by. That was one reason I had asked Deacon not to go straight to his place. The other reason was he has five kids, and I did not want them to see me. Finally, I really didn't want to deal with Maddie.

"This says some kind of hydrated naphtha, which I don't have in the truck. Another one is isobutane and some silicone compound I can't hope to pronounce. There are others, but none of them are things I have on the truck. I have some WD40, propyl alcohol, anti-freeze, and acetone. I wouldn't recommend using any of those on your skin, except maybe the WD40."

"Let's try it," I said. "And the acetone too, if you don't mind. That should take the nail polish off, right?"

As it turned out, WD40 does not dissolve boob adhesive, and industrial strength acetone is hard on the skin. It dissolved the nail polish, and it dissolved the nail extensions, or press-ons, or whatever Robyn had done. Later I would learn that the process is called a gel nail, and it is meant to be very durable. My skin was utterly dried out where the acetone had touched it. However, this did prevent me from trying acetone on my fake breasts, which was probably a good thing.

"Just give me a knife, please. I'm wasting too much time messing around with this stuff," I said. Deacon stopped rummaging in the truck bed and looked at me.

"You're just going to hack them off? Those things must have cost some real money," he said.

Now it was my turn to stare. "And I'm going to return them for a refund, you think? Or maybe I'll just bust them out and glue them on for old time's sake next year. Or this winter. They have been so nice and warm."

Deacon bowed up a bit, and I was afraid I had run someone else off with my mouth. Then he relaxed and paused before he spoke.

"Andy, I have a wife and five kids, and I work as a handyman for the area churches. Penny pinching is second nature to me. I'm sorry that my mouth got ahead of my mind. I can't imagine how stressful today has been for you."

"No problem. I should be apologizing to you for being such a smart - uh - smarty pants. If I hadn't gotten hold of you..." I left the words hanging in the air. He held out a utility knife.

"Fresh blade. Don't hurt yourself."

I could go into the details of the procedure. The short story is I hacked the damn things until there was about a quarter inch layer of plastic or rubber or whatever the fuck it was still bonded to my skin.

"Next," I said, feeling more buoyed by the minute, but also aware of the amount of time this was taking.

"How do you want to do this?" Deacon asked, uncertainty in his voice for the first time.

"Can you cut the waistband?"

"I don't think so, well, not in one go at least. The cutting head needs a lot of room, and that thing looks pretty tight."

I thought for a few seconds. "Let me see where it's loosest. I sucked my belly in and worked a finger under the belt at my right hip. I thought it would be loose at the crack of my ass, but that was not the case, at least not while standing up. After a couple good breaths, I tried again, working from the side toward the front.

As it turned out, the damn thing was the loosest right below my navel, perilously close to where I keep vital parts of my anatomy. Finally, I hit upon a plan. I leaned back against the truck and pressed my fingers into my abs, pushing the tissue in and a little down. Deacon made three cuts in quick succession, and the belt was severed. I bent the belt away from my body and looked down at the cup-like shield pressing on my cock and balls. My junk had been stuffed into some kind of downward pointing tube and my balls were just squished into the cup beside the tube.

Gingerly, I pulled the thing loose. Nothing more than my pride and my emotional stability were damaged. I put the belt, dress, plastic wrap, and chunks of my fake tits into the handy plastic tote Robyn had so thoughtfully provided.

"You mind getting dressed," Deacon said. "Or should I drop you off at the nudist camp?"

I turned in shock. "Was that a joke, buddy? Did you just make a joke at my expense?"

"Well, I didn't want to discuss how you are just strolling around my truck in the buff. I thought you would respond better to humor."

"Two jokes! I am a bad influence on you," I said as I pulled on the plastic rain suit.

I picked up the broken pieces of my shovel and carefully placed them in the truck. I know it's an inanimate object, but it deserved better than being left in a field or thrown in the garbage. I looked into the tote, seeing the belt in a new light. "Can I see those bolt cutters for a few minutes?"

When I finished, Deacon took the heavy tool and put it behind the driver's seat. Then he picked up his phone from the top of the dash.

"I've got over thirty missed calls from your wife, eleven voice mails, and eight text messages."

The words 'fuck her' nearly escaped my mouth. But Deacon deserved better. Not that his ears would catch fire, but because I owed him. I opened my mouth to disavow her and was struck by one of those tangential thoughts that bounce through my head periodically.

If I could avoid swearing around Deacon because I owed him, what did I owe Robyn?

## **Chapter 6 - The Rest of the Show**

The drama was over for a while. I had a pair of carpenter's jeans and a blue work shirt, underwear, socks, and sneakers. I had Deacon's utility blade in one pocket, my wallet in another, and May in still another. Carpenter's jeans have lots of pockets. We had cut my hair in the dollar store parking lot. First, I hacked as much of it off as I could with a pair of scissors, then Deacon buzzed it with the electric clippers he had just bought.

After I promised to pay him back promptly, and he promised to take good care of my other worldly possessions, still in the plastic tote in his truck, Deacon dropped me off downtown at the bank, within walking distance of Henry's office. I hoped he wasn't in trouble with Maddie. I'm pretty sure I was.

The bank showered me with sympathy and courtesy, a welcome reception. Though, one of the tellers kept glancing my way. I didn't know her more than to say hi, but that was hardly conclusive. She might have objected to the small stuffed horse peering out of my pocket. I reported my credit cards and debit card as stolen. Take that, bitches!

Our joint accounts were untouched, which I thought was odd, but welcome, news. Just to be safe, I withdrew a hefty sum, setting some aside in an envelope for my friend. I also opened a Christmas savings account in just my name and transferred some money into it. Never too early to be ready for Christmas, right?

I walked to a gas station and bought a new phone and some first aid supplies. My first burner phone. I tried to think of a good use for it. My old phone was still in the box, on its way to Deacon's. I stopped long enough to cover the scratch on my chest with ointment and a large, rectangular adhesive dressing. Three o'clock was still hours away. All the walking around I had done, combined with the slow subsidence of the stress of the day, had made me hungry.

There were several restaurants in the few blocks around the courthouse. I picked one I had eaten at before. The dining room was full, as were the few sidewalk tables. Several customers stood around, waiting patiently for a table or a to-go order.

As I moved toward the to-go window, who would I find sitting at one of the outdoor tables but Heather and two of her gym rat pals, who I recognized as acquaintances of Robyn, if not friends. Once she recognized me, Heather speared me with an ugly stare and spoke a few quiet words to her friend across the table. The woman's back was to me, but I thought it was Bobbi, a real bruiser of a lady. I could see the muscles in her back and shoulders. I chose to ignore the women but be wary. On the other hand, my plan for a quiet lunch was in peril.

I foolishly decided not to change my course, which had me walking right past their table. As I walked by, Bobbi's hand shot out, straight at my crotch. I reacted with an instinct borne of a typical guy's lifetime of guarding against nut shots. My left hand shot down to grab her wrist and my right hand gripped her elbow.

She started to twist and get up, and I realized I had a tiger by the tail and was in jeopardy of getting my ass kicked even if Heather and her other friend didn't join in. All the day's stress and anger flooded back into me. Without thinking, I doubled down. I twisted harder on her wrist and put my weight down on her arm, pushing her elbow the wrong way.

"Sit. Down!" I hissed into her ear as her ass hit the chair. "All of you. You may fucking kill me right here, but I will break her arm backwards and laugh myself to death as she bleeds out!"

Bobbi grunted, but gave no other hint of the pain I knew she had to be in. Heather and friend sat, but they weren't done.



"You have no idea how completely you've fucked this up, you stupid dipshit asshole!" Heather spat at me from across the table. I don't just mean that her venomous words shot out at me with heat. I mean she literally spat at me.

"I think that's an act of terrorism, bitch. Assault with a deadly cock sucker." Oh, I was feeling all the pent-up rage now. Heather came back up out of the chair, so I bore down on Bobbi's arm. She let out a sharp little cry.

Before I could say anything, a new voice joined the fray. "Sit down! And you, Andy Simmons, release that woman and step back!"

I turned toward the voice, which came from the street. Deputy Jenny Bellafont stood just off the curb, one hand on the butt of her holstered sidearm. I complied without hesitation, adding an extra step of separation between me and Bobbi for good measure.

No one spoke. The deputy approached the table and eyed us all, one at a time. "Tell me that was some kind of friendly martial arts demo and not an assault."

I was stunned speechless and could only nod. Heather seemed willing to accept this solution too, but Bobbi had other ideas.

"This dickhead nearly broke my arm. He threatened to cripple me! He..."

"She tried to hit him in the sac!" one of the other patrons yelled. I looked over to see a table with a couple delivery drivers about halfway through their lunch, regarding the altercation with expressions that proclaimed their hope for shots to be fired.

"Bobbi?"

"I wasn't trying to hit him," she blurted.

"Oh, that makes it all better then," Deputy Bellafont said as she approached the table. She pulled up a chair and sat down. "Sit down," she said, looking up at me.

"Yes, ma'am." I nodded. I barely knew her, and had very little contact with her, despite the small size of my hometown. Unlike most of the other people within

my view, she was a newer resident. That also meant she had an unbiased opinion of us, for now.

"Is there something you all need to share with me? Something that might explain some of the weird calls I've been getting today?" she asked with a sweetness that did not match the expression on her face. I had the feeling she already knew at least part of the story.

Her gaze flicked from face to face, stopping on mine. "How'd you come by all those scratches, Andy?"

"Gardening, Deputy."

"You fall into a blackberry thicket? Naked?"

This made me wonder if someone on my street had called about a naked man, or woman. "Holly, Deputy, but I had clothes on."

"Just Jenny, if you don't mind me calling you Andy," she said.

I assumed she was trying to put me at ease, playing good cop, but I went along.

"Are you good, Bobbi? Need some ice for that arm?" Jenny asked.

"I'm fine," she said, sinking into her chair.

"Great. So now you can start explaining yourselves, right?"

No one said anything. Where would they even start? Jenny did not look inclined to go anywhere. This was probably her most interesting encounter in months. Finally, I spoke up.

"Me and Robyn are having some problems. Messy divorce in the works," I said. To my surprise, Heather's expression suddenly became alarmed. Shaking her head, she started to object.

"I'm talking to Andy now, Heather. Be quiet." Jenny said. Her eyes never left mine, even as she addressed Heather, but now they bored right into me. "There's a fine line between a messy divorce and a domestic violence situation. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am. I think the shouting's over. Just got to clean up the mess we made now." My own gaze shifted to Heather and her pals. "I'm seeing Henry in a little bit. That should calm things down."

Jenny sat, silent now, just watching. I'm pretty sure she was waiting for someone to say something stupid and hang themselves, but we were all quiet.

"Sorry to hear that, Andy. I hope everything works out for the best." She stood up to leave. I saw her eyes drop to my pocket and take in Mayhem, but she didn't say anything else. She stepped over to the two delivery drivers. I discovered I was still hungry and got up to order some food.

"Wait, Andy!" Heather said, starting to rise. "It's not..."

"Fuck you, Heather," I said quietly, not wanting to get Jenny back on the case. "Rot in hell, you fucking cunts. All of you." Heather's ass hit her chair, again, with a solid thud as she recoiled from me. Bobbi looked ready to fight. The one I didn't know simply sat, eyes wide. Do I know how to make an exit or what?

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Jenny looking back over at us. I smiled sweetly at Heather and turned my back on them all. The restaurant was busy, and my order took a while to fill, leaving me waiting uncomfortably at the scene of the crime. When I walked away from the window with my food, having decided I didn't really want to sit at one of these tables, Heather was deep in conversation with someone on her mobile.

I finished half my lunch before my guts rebelled. It was an odd sensation. I felt hungry, but at the same time, the thought of eating any more made me sick. I left the unfinished food under a tree, immediately attracting birds and a squirrel. My new phone told me it was barely noon, but I didn't have much else to do, so I headed for Henry's office figuring I'd wait it out in a safe place.

## Part 2

### Chapter 7 - Reunion

I walked up the stairs to reach his second-floor office. A woman was sitting on the bench in the dimly lit hallway of the old office building.

I took a step toward her and stopped. From twenty feet away, in the dim light, she looked like Robyn.

Well, shit.

She stood up, now looking down at me and clearly trying to figure out who I was. On second glance, I was suddenly uncertain. This woman's face was red, and her eyes were a little puffy. Also, she was wearing tailored black dress pants and a shiny pale blue long sleeved blouse. Her short hair was trimmed and styled with a generous amount of some hair product, which wasn't Robyn's style. Then I noticed her shoes. Black wedge heels, closed toe with maybe three inches of heel, made her long legs look even longer. When she moved, I caught a glimpse of a delicate ankle strap over charcoal gray nylon.

"Sorry," I said, still moving toward Henry's door. "I thought you were someone else. My bad." She took one step toward me and stopped dead.

"I know it's a little dark in here, Andy, but it's going to be hard to talk if you don't even recognize me."

"Robyn? Really?"

"Andy? Really?" she said with a hint of her usual wise ass sarcasm. "I see you finally got your hair under control."

"What do you want?" I asked. Sure, she looked great. And she looked like she had been crying. Neither of those was my problem.

"Wow. Straight to the heart. I want to talk to you," she paused, "before you talk to Henry. I want to fix the mess I've made." Her face reddened at this last statement, not in anger, but in embarrassment, I thought. As much as I wanted to tell her to fuck off, I was curious. What could she possibly say that would fix this?

"Do you want to sit down?" I asked. She looked relieved.

"Yes. Thank you."

We both sat, taking opposite ends of the bench. I looked at her again. She had been crying, and this made me not want to look at her face. My eyes cut down, drawn by the light color of her blouse. There was something weird about it, some kind of texture or pattern I hadn't seen from ten steps away. I looked closer. There was something underneath the blouse. My eyes searched for a sign, and I thought I saw a hint of black just under the last button before her collar.

"It's your show," I said, prompting her to start.

"I don't know where to start," she said. "Maybe I should shut up and ask you what it's going to take to stay together?"

"I haven't really considered that possibility," I said. She bit her lip. If she had started crying, I would have called bullshit and just walked away.

"I made a mistake," she started. "Actually, I made two or three massive blunders, but you only know about one of them. Now I'd like a chance to explain." She stopped again. Dammit, I was really curious now.

"Alright. Let's start at the beginning. What did I do to piss you off so much?"

"It was that last time we argued over your wardrobe and sex suggestions. Back in April. And all that 'cross my heart' nonsense you were spouting, but I was never really mad at you!"

"You didn't think I meant it?" I asked.

"That you hoped to drop dead if you ever mentioned stockings or ropes again? Of course not."

"You did notice that I have not made such requests of you since then?" She opened her mouth to object, but I plowed ahead. "You had to get me drunk for me to break that promise."

"Which just shows it was still on your mind," she shot back.

"And Carrie and Heather just happened to show up in their 'work' clothes," I said, fingers adding the air quotes. "And I can't imagine any woman on the face of this earth with the guts to flirt with me right in front of you. It was a set up designed to get the response you wanted. To rationalize what you did next!" I was standing now, and I didn't even remember getting up.

She remained still, seated on the bench. At some point during my tirade, she had lowered her gaze to the floor. It stayed there now. I'm pretty sure she was crying. I realized then that she, and all her friends, were right about one thing. I could be a huge fucking asshole. Part of me wanted to cry myself, but I didn't see the point.

The door opened, revealing Henry. "I thought I heard shouting," he said.

"You did, Henry. I'm sorry," I said.

"Andy, please," Robyn said, eyes still downcast. At this point, I wanted to just chuck my whole life and start over from scratch. A mulligan, that's what I needed. I just didn't see a way forward that let us repair the damage we had both done to our relationship.

"Henry, we need a little time, if you don't mind," I finally said, because bailing now, without at least trying, would cement my status as gigantic douche bag.

"Okay," he said cheerily. "I'm starting your clock now though," he laughed. "Take as long as you need." He shut the door, and I wasn't entirely sure he was kidding.

"You heard the man. We have to hash this out by five or he'll charge us for the whole weekend," I said to Robyn. She looked up. Her expression rocked me back on my heels. My soon to be ex-wife looked at me with a level of hope bordering on adoration.

"Let me tell my story, start to finish. Then you can question me and poke holes in it, okay?" she asked.

"Go ahead." I sat down so we could be eye to eye.

"Yes, it was a set up. I knew it was risky with some potential to blow up in my face, but it was never supposed to go like this! I lost control of it, or I would have

backed off as soon as I saw you puking. I meant what I said in the letter. I don't understand you, at least where these things are concerned.

"And, I admit, I thought it would be fun. You have a wacky sense of humor, Andy. I thought there was a real possibility that you would dive in with minimum fuss, and I would make it a memorable experience for us both. I meant what I said about trading places too. I figured if you put up with my ideas for figuring this out, I could pony up too." She stopped and looked at me.

I had no idea what she was talking about. Her letter must have explained whatever the hell it was she was thinking. I kept my face steady and looked back at her.

"Keep going," I said.

"So, yeah. I got you hammered, and then I spiked dessert with some over the counter sleep aid. And while you were out, we executed my plan. Well, I thought it was my plan, but..." she trailed off and looked away for a moment. "When I first had the idea, I was having a drink with Heather, and she started suggesting things. And then a few more friends added suggestions, and they all seemed reasonable. I mean, why dress you up if you can just grab some clothes out of the drawer and change back? Or you can phone a friend," she paused to give me a little look, "and get bailed out. So, we made you our captive. And although you do have a wacky sense of humor, you also have a wicked hot temper, and I was worried about that too. I thought you'd need time to cool off, and it would be best if no one was around. Heather convinced me to let a few others stay in the house with you as a safety measure."

"And the spy cams?" I asked, holding up Mayhem.

"My idea. I wanted to see you. I wanted to make sure you didn't blow a gasket and set the house on fire."

Whoa. Was I that transparent? "If you thought there was an outside chance I'd do something so extreme, why would you even try this?"

"I thought we could make it work." She looked at me, staring hard at my face.

"Did you even read the letter I left for you? The one where I promised to make a really fun and sexy game out of this if you played along?"

"I read as far as I needed to." I returned her hard gaze with a heated one of my own. More calmly, I added, "I thought it was some warped scheme to humiliate me before dumping me for another guy."

We were both quiet for a minute.

"Yes. I gathered that from the frantic texts Carrie bombarded me with after you threatened to kill us all, plus, I did hear some of it live as it was happening."

"The cameras. They were recording, right? You weren't just monitoring my safety."

"They were recording," she said. "Let me finish, then you can shame me about all my stupidity in one lump."

"Okay."

"My plan, the one you didn't read about, was to make a sexy sex game out of it and get all our cards on the table and maybe finally understand what's going on in your head when you offer one of your ideas. Anyway, my friends had ideas of their own. They thought it would be even more interesting to have two captives. They had plans for us, and if you didn't like this morning, I know for certain you wouldn't have liked them." She paused, watching my face, searching for a reaction. I was too wrapped up in my own grievances to get her drift.

"Go on. What happened next?" I said.

"After you were all fixed up and the house was cleared out and all the other details were taken care of, most of us went to Stephanie's. It was pretty late, but we were all full of giddy energy. There was some more wine and late night talk tweaking my plans.

"And then, suddenly, I was a little woozy. Then I was naked. Then I was a captive too. They took all the keys, my wallet, everything. They did the same thing to my phone that I did to yours. I could call you, or I could call 911. And they told me that Carrie had changed the PIN on your phone so I couldn't give you that access. The only reason they cut me loose now, and I'm still not completely free, is your fiery temper. When Carrie heard you call Henry, she lost it. Of course, that was after you called me your ex-wife and threatened to murder us all. They told me to



meet you here and patch things up. I think they think we'll just give in and start playing the game with them again."

I snorted. "Fat chance."

Which is when my temper surged again. Not at my wife, who pressed back into the seat, obviously recognizing my anger.

I wanted to say a few more choice, ugly, things about her so-called friends and how miserable I was about to make their lives, but two things stopped me. Robyn's opinion of me, and the fact that we were just outside an attorney's office where I didn't want to be heard making threats. I breathed, deeply, appreciating the freedom. "My turn?"

"Go for it."

"I don't understand what happened? You went through all this," I waved my arms wildly, "just to 'understand' me? What is there to understand? Why didn't you just ask?"

"You always shut down when I say no, or you come back at me with promises I already know you can't keep. But I say no because I'm scared that there's something about you, I'm not going to like. I was trying to figure it out without losing control." She gave a bitter little laugh. "That worked out so well."

No words sprang to mind. I had no idea what the hell she was talking about or thinking about. I didn't much care for what she implied. Maybe I was a pouty little shit when she said no to whatever idea I sprang on her. I'd like to think I was more mature than that. But it was her use of the word 'scared' that really stung.

"What are you thinking right now?" she said. I was deep in thought and taking too long to respond. I refocused on her face and saw her staring at me in that focused way she has when she's concentrating on solving a problem. Now I was a problem to be solved.

"I still don't get how and why this happened. Obviously, we have some communication problems in this area. Today aside, I don't like the idea that you've ever been afraid of me. I also don't understand or appreciate that your friends have become involved in our lives in this way."

I was starting to thaw out a little and maybe back up from the brink.

"I don't get it, but maybe that's something we can figure out later if we're still together." I paused, then plunged ahead with the question I really needed answered. "So, just to be clear, you aren't trying to dump me in some convoluted, very public way?" I asked. I had to know.

"No! No, Andy-" she started to say more but stopped.

"You want to stay together?" Another thing I wanted to be certain of before going any further.

"Yes, I want to stay together with you," she said. Robyn looked at me, and I realized she wanted some positive statement as much as I did.

"Me too, Robyn. Very much so." That was settled, I hoped. Now that I had calmed down a lot, I felt safe to ask, "Did they hurt you? In any way? No matter how small?"

"God no, Andy. Well, my pride at being fooled and tricked. Being nude in front of my friends is nothing new, but they decided to play their little games with me. They tied me up a few times, but they said it was practice for when you got to have your way with me. It was a little uncomfortable, but I think they were also worried I might take a frying pan to someone's head. I was more angry than I usually get."

The way she was blushing now suggested that her friends may have taken more liberties than she was willing to admit. My eyes narrowed. Yes, I was ready to leave my wife over what she had done to me, at least when I thought the worst, but I was ready to do far worse over what they had done to her.

"On the other hand," she said, "I got my hair styled and my nails done." She paused so long I thought she was done. She blushed. "I got some new clothes too."

A thought hit me. One of those intuitive leaps that Robyn seemed to be impressed by. "I guess we both learned a few things."

"Now what?" she asked.

"I still have a few questions." She nodded for me to go on. "Who was in on this?" I asked the question as levelly as I could, but she still looked worried.

"No paybacks, Andy."

"One payback," I said. "I want the names of everyone involved, no matter how small their involvement was. They're your friends, so you can treat them as you please, but I don't ever want to see them again. Don't include me in any group outings. If you invite them to the house, tell me in advance so I can make plans to be somewhere else. And let them know, too. I wasn't really their friend to start with, but we are quits now."

"Done," she said quickly. Misinterpreting her entirely, I wondered how long it would be before she started prying at the edges of that condition. On the other hand, her friends thought I was a bastard, for good reason, and I'm sure they wanted nothing to do with me. "What else?"

"How much did this cost?" I asked. She winced.

"Not as much as you might think. They all pitched in. Not counting whatever you spent today on that haircut and those new clothes, I'm in for about fourteen hundred," she said. "Plus, whatever Henry charges us," she added, trying a smile out on me.

My brain went into overdrive, doing the multiplication and coming up with a total. Damn. I hope they spent all that on the security door. I quit running the numbers. Robyn was more important. Somewhere in the last twenty minutes or so, she had stopped being my future ex-wife. When that realization hit home, my entire body relaxed.

The resolution of all that tension let my thoughts start flowing. One ugly thing jumped out in the process. Her friends had spent a lot of money, time, and effort setting up this insanity. They didn't do this as a casual joke or for a day's worth of laughs. What they planned to do with me, and my wife was unclear, but the more I thought about the possibilities, the madder I was getting.

"What did they do to you last night and this morning?" I asked, finally realizing that something was really bothering Robyn, and for once it wasn't me. Her face twisted, and I belatedly understood that I was not the only injured party here.

"I... You..." she started. Something shifted in her head, like maybe she saw that I was ready to listen.

She looked straight into my eyes and spoke again, softly, but clearly.

"They tied me to the bed, the same way I did you, spread out in an X, but without an escape route," she said. She stopped, watching me.

I stayed calm. "Go ahead," I said, watching her emotions play out on her face.

"They teased me. Stephanie and Heather. Carrie and Bobbi stayed at the house to watch you. There were others helping too, but it was mostly those four. Stephanie laid down on the bed beside me. She ran her fingers along my arms and my face. She never touched me anywhere... intimate.

"But she kept up a constant stream of explicit suggestions. She whispered her thoughts about how I would look with a vibrator on my crotch. She even got one out and turned it on, but she didn't touch me with it. She put it between her own legs and said after watching our friends orgasm from it, I would beg to have them try it on me. She told me about a game they wanted to try. Would you and I know each other if we were gagged and blindfolded separately and then brought together. She hinted that we would end up fucking each other like that."

I wanted to hold her, but I felt just reaching for her would be wrong. I was too stunned to be angry, which was an unimaginable first for me. She was trembling, nearly shaking, but she wasn't done.

"Stephanie decided to dress me. White stockings. Tight white thing I thought was a girdle, but she called it a waist cincher. That was all. She was careful, only releasing one leg at a time and always holding on tight while Heather put the stockings on me and attached the garter tabs. Stephanie massaged my feet through the nylon for a few minutes, then tickled them, then buckled some very tall, white, strappy stilettos onto me. They admired their handiwork for a few minutes, then they hogtied me." She stopped, and I could see she was struggling to go further.

"That's enough, Robyn," I said softly. "I don't need to hear more."

"Yes, you do. I fucked this up so thoroughly. It was supposed to be a game. A dumb game. They're my friends. Well, they were," she said. Then she continued as though there had been no interruption. "They tied my ankles together, and then my knees. Then they released my arms and I thought I might punch one of them, but they were too strong, too prepared. I was rolled over on my belly, and they tied my wrists behind my back. Then they tied my arms together at my elbows."

She went through the motions as she spoke, first putting her wrists behind her, palm to palm, then pushing her elbows together. They nearly touched. I imagined with rope cinched around them, they would touch. Her chest pushed out. For a moment, I couldn't understand why I was suddenly enveloped in a cold fury instead of getting hard at the vision of Robyn dressed and restrained as I had sometimes desired her.

"Robyn-"

"No." She inhaled deeply. "I need to get this out."

I nodded silently. I could bear to hear the rest, but I didn't think I wanted to. She continued.

"Heather spanked me. First with her hand, then with a flexible piece of leather, a slapper, I think it's called. After a lot of strokes with that, they switched to a paddle. I'm probably still red. I think she almost got off on it. They tied a rope to the loops around my ankles and then joined it to the one at my wrists. Heather took her sweet time pulling my ankles to my hands.

"While Heather tightened the hogtie, Stephanie kept up a running commentary. How hot I looked. How much she wanted me. How much of a tease I was. To you. To her. How badly she wanted to watch us together and then have me to herself after you were exhausted. Heather blindfolded me. Then they either had sex right there in front of me, or they acted it out very convincingly. Eventually, I fell asleep like that, hogtied, ass stinging, listening to them whisper and laugh and moan."

Robyn stopped as though she had run out of words. She was shaking harder now, and I moved out of instinct, edging closer to her, getting into her space. Her arms wrapped around me. I held her close while she just breathed and slowly regained her control.

"A part of me was laughing inside when you turned the tables. A small part of me wanted something bad to happen to Stephanie, but I also don't think they are worth going to prison over," she whispered to me.

I just held her, feeling the warmth of her, breathing in her scent. We sat like that for minutes, holding each other as though we would never let go. As the time passed, she relaxed, and I felt the weight of her press against me. The texture of her blouse felt strange, which is when I figured out there was more beneath it than just a bra. My fingers slid over the fabric. She twitched when I touched something hard and unyielding.

"What's under your shirt?"

"A leather bustier," she said, tonelessly.

"Locked on?"

"Yes."

"What else is locked on?" I asked.

"Garter belt and shoes," she said. She pulled back a little, just far enough to look at me.

"I have Deacon's utility knife in my pocket. We can cut that stuff off you any time you want," I said. She gave me that exasperated look that was becoming so familiar.

"I'm good. If we don't get the keys by dinner, we'll buy some safety shears and you can free me," she said. "What now?"

"A few more questions?" I said, pausing to see how she reacted. She looked like she was about to be sick, but she nodded for me to go ahead. "Did they video you too? Where is it? Where is the video you've been recording on your little webcams?"

"They didn't say, but I imagine they did. The videos of you were recorded on a PC at the house." She pointed at May. "Your little friend may have recorded to some

onboard memory, but once you were out of the house, no broadcasting. We set it up with a password protected website for viewing."

"Videos of me are now mine and mine alone, assuming none of your helpful friends haven't deleted them already. Any and all copies." I gave no wiggle room. "Videos of you are yours, and I don't ever need to see them. But if any of that stuff becomes public..." I let the words trail off.

She nodded, and I could tell she wasn't wild about the turn our conversation had taken. I resisted the temptation to pull out my new phone and try accessing the home network to shut it down.

"How many pictures of us were taken and by who?"

"I told them no pictures!"

"There's pictures, Robyn. You can bet the house on it."

"Okay. You're probably right. Shit."

"I'm not going to make a stink. We'll handle it if it comes up, same as the videos."

Robyn looked at me like I had grown on an extra arm. "You're kidding?"

"No. I'm not happy about it, but it's not worth the aggravation. Plus, unless your pals gave you back all our stuff, and the keys we'll need, maybe I should wait a while before being such an asshole to them."

"Former pals," she said darkly. Then she eyed me, her mood changing even as I watched her. "You still need keys?" she asked. The tone of her voice left no doubt what keys she was asking about.

"Only to the house, Robyn. I know a guy with bolt cutters."

"Oh," she said. "Stupid question." There was another long pause. "I should have known. How many pieces are they in?"

"The corset is intact, except for the locks being cut, some grass stains, a little blood, and general wear and tear."

"And?"

I shook my head. "After Deacon cut the thing off me, I chopped it into about fifty pieces."

## **Chapter 8 - Aftermath**

The visit with Henry, who charged us for two hours, was anticlimactic, but surprising. He was happy to hear that Robyn and I were staying together. He suggested a marriage counselor, and I politely accepted the counselor's business card.

I beat around the bush asking about trespassers and friends who had borrowed some property and not returned it. That was when the bomb dropped.

Carrie, who is the last person I expected this from, had delivered a box to Henry's office, addressed to me. She must have done it right after I made my getaway with Deacon.

The box included a list of changed phone codes, a set of keys, a bottle of solvent, and the locations of all our property, which was mostly locked up at the house. Everything they wanted to keep from me was in the basement, except the old shotgun and rifle I had inherited from Dad. Stephanie had the guns, and the cash Robyn had been carrying, and the jewelry she had been wearing. I bristled a bit at that, but Robyn explained that her jewelry came off when they did her manicure and hair. She turned red again, but I didn't ask.

Her other belongings that had been with her when she was drafted into the Dumb Game, as she now named it, were in a suitcase on the couch. Our cars and the truck were in the driveway.

Lastly, there was a card addressed to Robyn. It was from Carrie. Robyn read it silently and then aloud to me. It contained a nicely penned apology and an offer to help return the house to its proper condition. Well, that was just lovely.

"I could patch things up with them, Andy. Some of them," she said. "This whole mess was my idea to start with, even if they interfered with my plan, and I know you scared them with your reactions. Even I didn't think it would get so hairy."



She said these things out loud, but she sounded uncertain and still very angry. She seemed to be trying on the idea for size.

"You do what you need to do with them. Just without me around, but don't forget, it wasn't all your idea," I said. I got hugged for that, long and hard, right there in Henry's office.

We talked about walking to the house, but in the end, we shared a taxi ride home when it was all over.

We still had a ton of work to do, but we were home. Well, we were home briefly. Robyn mentioned that her friends thought we would just jump back into a maybe less aggressive version of the Dumb Game. I decided to decline any such generous offer. Robyn hesitated, and for a moment, I thought she was going to try persuading me to reconsider doing something in private, or maybe she was going to ask me to read her now absent letter. What I couldn't read was my wife. None of her cues or vibes made sense to me now.

"If I see those women again, in this house, there will be trouble," I said. I tried to project calm composure, but I don't think it worked.

"Okay."

I thought about it for a few more seconds. Would playing a 'sexy sex game' with Robyn, one that shattered all the boundaries I ever thought I had, be so terrible? Maybe if it was just her and only her playing with me and only me, at some distant future date when we had talked out all these issues, and when the memory of this shit-sucking day had faded.

I shifted gears to the here and now.

In my infinite paranoia, I put the video computer in the trunk, then booked us a hotel suite in the state capital, two counties away. We stayed there until I arranged to have the locks changed, the alarm system inspected, the spy cams removed, the computers checked for malware, and the opened packages of food thrown out. Robyn thought it was overkill, but she didn't try to stop me. As we drove, it occurred to me that if the car was bugged, we might get some visitors.

I exhaled, long and hard enough that Robyn looked over at me. She put her hand on my leg, the first time she had touched me since the hug in Henry's office. At some point, I needed to relax my vigilance. When I remembered that the hotel, I had chosen, had secure parking, I finally did relax a little.

That first night in the hotel, she stripped my new shirt off to see about getting the last of the boob plastic and adhesive removed.

"What happened?" she asked, pointing at the oversize band-aids.

"Uh... That's the worst of the scratches, and I didn't want it to get infected," I said, showing her all the holly leaf scratches on my arms, neck, and shoulders. She didn't press the question, and I was glad not to have to lie. Technically, it was the worst scratch I had gotten.

She gingerly removed the remaining bits of fake boob. Then she cleaned the adhesive off and massaged lotion into my skin in the numerous places it had been abused. She rubbed the top of my head, laughing at the texture of my buzz cut. Then I found out the hair extensions had been bonded to my actual scalp and would need time to come off.

I took this news in stride. I look forward to the day when she stops being amazed by the absence of outbursts of temper from me. I look forward to the day when I stop having them.

"What can I do for you?" I asked. The look this earned me proclaimed that I had said the wrong thing yet again. "Sorry," I said, getting up and grabbing my shirt. Her expression turned to alarm when I pulled it over my head.

"What are you doing?" She got up and put her hands over mine.

"Going for a walk."

"Please don't," she said. I massaged the bridge of my nose. The headache that was building would be epic, I could just tell.

"Honey, I'm confused. I asked you what you wanted, and you glared at me. I get up to give you some space to process the awful day we've both had, and you stop me in my tracks. Would you like a snack? A bottle of wine? A cocktail? Maybe I

can read you a bedtime story?" The funny thing was, as exasperated as I was, I was not mad, just voicing my painful confusion.

Exasperated, I thought. There it was again.

"What do you want to do?" she said. "**Really** want to do. And if you say go for a walk, you have to carry me on your shoulders."

"I don't know what I'm allowed to want, anymore," I said, feeling one of those flashes of intuition I supposedly have.

"What you want is your business," she said, turning my own words around on me. "What you ask for is your business. What I'm willing to do is my business. But I swear, I will not get mad at you for asking, if you are as nice and thoughtful as you've been with me today."

"I want you, out of those clothes, in this bed, with me, out of these clothes, and in this bed with you," I said.

"Let me get yours first," Robyn said. She slid my pants off and then my underwear. Squatting down on the floor to get my feet out of my jeans, she was eye level with my hard cock. "I don't think I've seen you this hairless since we were kids," she said.

Before I could reply, she opened her mouth and slipped her lips over the head of my dick. That was the end of coherent thought for me. The pain, the stress, the anger, it all slipped away as my beautiful, awesome wife kissed, tongued, and teased my now throbbing erection. She worked her way down its length, wetting every bit of skin with her tongue. She paused to caress my balls with her mouth, and the absence of hair made the sensation incredibly intense. I was close, which she knew.

"If I finish you off, will you still have the energy to do me?" she purred before going back to kissing the head of my throbbing erection.

"I think so," I said.

"Mmmm," she answered, engulfing several inches of my cock. She bounced up and down for a few strokes, teasing, sometimes making soft sounds that vibrated

my flesh and seemed to pound straight into my brain. She came up to her knees and reached around me, hugging my hips and drawing us closer together. My shaft disappeared into her mouth. Her lips teased my balls for a few seconds, then she pulled back just long enough for a deep breath before sliding forward again.

She looked up at me. Her hazel eyes were still a little red from the roller coaster emotions of the day, but they also glittered with lust. Robyn pulled back one more time and then slid forward, still making eye contact. She winked at me. My orgasm erupted into her mouth. She licked and teased my cock until my shaking spasms subsided and my knees threatened to buckle.

Instead of buckling, I managed to fold them until I was sitting next to her on the floor. We kissed, and I didn't care where her mouth had just been or what was mixed with her spit.

"You know, being shaved down here," she squeezed me gently, "makes that much nicer, if you catch my drift."

"I think we can come to some agreement on that. It's not like the pubic hair police are going to bust down our door in the middle of the night," I said, still a little woozy. She laughed.

"You have such a way with words."

"Let me show you a few other tricks I know," I said, standing up and hauling her to her feet. My fingers worked the buttons on her blouse. I paused to lay the garment on the chair instead of leaving it on the floor with my clothes. The bustier was soft leather, fitting her tightly, and maybe offering a little bit of shaping. She was every bit as gorgeous in it as I had ever imagined. She saw me smile.

"You really do like this, don't you?" she asked.

"You are so beautiful," I said. "Not just your body, but through and through. Sit down so I can get your shoes."

"I'll bet the slacks would come off over the shoes, if you're careful."

I unfastened her pants and let them fall as she sat down. She laid back on the bed and raised her legs. I need to quit being amazed by her actions and reactions. Every time I think I know what to expect, she throws something new at me. Getting the pants off over her shoes was easier than I expected. I helped her stand back up. She looked surprised.

Still holding her hand, I regarded her long, lean, black, and gray clad body. On any other day, my cock would have been hard and ready. Right now, it needed just a little more time. Plus, I was enjoying the moment. I lifted our linked arms and spun her about. The bustier sported tiny padlocks at the top, middle, and bottom, holding what I now knew would be a panel covering the laces or zipper.

The leather garter belt was cleverly locked on as well, using a set of rings and two more tiny locks. I looked down and noticed that her shoes had small locks securing the little straps. I felt a flash of nausea, thinking about the similar experiences we had shared separately over the past day. My gaze shifted to her backside, which was mostly covered by a pair of lacy black panties. I could see the pink tinged skin, the lingering results of her time as Heather's play toy. I looked at her wrists. At least there were no rope marks still visible, but I could imagine the invisible marks that she would see for weeks or months or years to come.

I let go of Robyn and stepped toward the ring of keys laying on the dresser. "Let's get you out of that stuff." Even in my own ears, my voice sounded a little too forceful and hard.

"Wait," she said, putting her hand on my shoulder. "What's bothering you?"

My thoughts took forever to collect. "I know I was an asshole for pestering you about what I wanted you to wear, or to do, but I never, ever, would have forced you."

"Like I did to you," she said, small and quiet. "There's a mood killer."

I blinked. She was right. I had gone cold. "Well, yes, you did it to me, but I was referring to what your dick-head friends did to you. Yes, I think you're gorgeous in that outfit, but it feels wrong now." I struggled to find the right word, "Tainted."

"My friends did this without my consent, true, but I've been on my own since lunch. After your escape, Heather let me redo my hair and makeup, bought my

lunch, gave me my wallet with my driver's license and told me to meet you at Henry's and 'straighten out this misunderstanding' I believe she said. It wouldn't have been easy, but I could have changed anytime."

I bristled some more. "Heather gave you. Heather let you." My hands flexed, and I took several deep breaths to purge the really ugly thoughts I was having. Robyn waited, silent and still. "Why didn't you take off, like I did?"

"I don't know. I was more embarrassed than furious? It seemed fair? Penance? Make up sex?" she said. Neither of us seemed to be certain about anything right now.

"Now what?" I asked. Would that be my default mode now and forever? Always asking, worried about overstepping some constantly changing invisible boundary?

She laughed. "I was going to ask you that."

My stomach growled. In all the excitement, we had not had dinner, and it was late.

"I guess I know your answer to that question!" She laughed some more. It was good to hear her laugh.

"I could stand to eat something. I have no idea what our options are at this hour, though."

She picked up the keys and some clothes out of her suitcase. As she headed for the bathroom, she looked over her shoulder at me. "We'll figure something out."

## Chapter 9 - Game Over

We returned to town the next day, after sleeping in and eating lunch. Robyn retrieved our remaining belongings without incident. She met Stephanie outside her front door. Badass martial artist or not, when I got out of the truck, she took a step back toward her house. I stayed by the still running truck without saying a word, smiling to myself on the inside.

We were back and forth between the hotel and the house for the next few days. Despite going everywhere together, another part of my security paranoia that Robyn didn't seem to mind, we had no further discussions of what had happened on that ill-fated day.

I supervised all the work on the house, verifying that no one performing any of the work was one of Robyn's Dumb Game friends, or, as near as I could tell, a brother, cousin, uncle, or friend of a friend. Deacon swung by after I texted him, dropping off my plastic tote and receiving repayment of the money I owed him. The tote went into the shed where I would sort it out later.

When everyone was gone and all the keys were swapped out and the passwords were reviewed and all the rest of that bullshit was done, I stood at the kitchen counter, making myself a sandwich. There was a long scratch on the counter where I had dropped the mighty shovel blade a lifetime ago.

"You want a beer with that?" Robyn asked from behind me.

"No, thank you."

She closed the fridge and stepped out where she could see me. "What?"

"No, thank you," I repeated.

"Is the world about to end? Should I put this wine back in the bottle or down the whole thing right now?" she asked, half seriously, I think.

"Only if you can do either without spilling it," I said, trying to be funny. There was still tension between us, and I didn't know how to unravel it. We had worked together, talked about the everyday things that keep a home running, had sex,

and done all the things couples do, but that day and all its fallout was still between us.

"Can we just forget this ever happened?" she said, looking from her glass to my face to the scratch in the countertop.

"I don't think I can," I said, taking her question literally. I had watched hours of video recently, which cemented the memory of the day firmly in my head. I had been drugged, man handled, stripped, washed, chemically depilated, shaved in the places they couldn't Nair, crammed into a chastity belt, corseted, pantied, and restrained. Aside from the pictures that had been taken, violation of my person by someone other than my wife had been limited to the very helpful hands all over my body during the process, and a few strokes and swats on my cock when it didn't behave as wished. At least no one had stuck anything in my ass or pleased themselves with my mouth.

Not that I would have been much good, I imagine. I was entirely unconscious at the time and have no memory at all of these events.

I had been focused entirely on myself as the aggrieved party, but Robyn had been put through some similar or worse experience, only she had been awake. I noticed that her pussy had been shaved. The fine blonde down that covered parts of her skin usually unseen, was also gone. I didn't ask her about it. If there were videos of her brief captivity, they had not surfaced anywhere. If they had been given to her, as I hoped they had, she had not mentioned it.

I really didn't want to see them.

"Do you forgive me?" she asked, adding, "I am so very fucking sorry. I had thought-"

"Of course," I interrupted, not letting her finish. I got up and moved the chair, sitting down beside her, grabbing her hand. I decided to be honest, not certain if this was the time for it. My instincts really suck sometimes. "I forgive you. I think I forgave you in Henry's waiting area. But I'm still working through my feelings, which are mostly anger, and I think that will take some time. And I understand you may need some time to sort some things too." Her hand tightened on mine, but I wasn't sure what it meant.



She leaned her head against my shoulder and said nothing more. I wondered what thought I had interrupted in my desire to reassure her. I probably should have waited for her to finish talking. Now she seemed content to let it slide.

What I wasn't being honest about was everything that wasn't me being mad at Heather, Carrie, Stephanie, Bobbi, and company. After all the shit we had been through, the simple fact was that I still wanted what I wanted. What I had always wanted. I still wanted to see Robyn dressed up like some teenage boy's wet dream. I still wanted her to be my damsel in distress, or play some other gently kinky scene with me.

But now all these desires came with a generous helping of guilt, doubt, and uncertainty. Which Robyn should I believe? The one who had said I was being a demanding ass? The one who said it was okay to ask nicely as long as I accepted the answer? Or the one whose new 'friend provided' clothes were nowhere to be found and whose underwear drawer now looked like the beige section of the old lady's underwear sales rack?

Short of asking her, which felt like a bad idea, I resolved to return to my original promise and be happy with the wonderful life we have together. I would pay closer attention to her, too, and try to see the signs of lingering hurts still troubling her.

October arrived before we had any breakthroughs. We had gone to some couples therapy, which was kind of fun, but neither of us was willing to discuss more than the polite, surface issues, like our difficulties communicating or my bad temper. As emotional scars go, I guessed these weren't so bad. I worried about Robyn and whatever had happened to her, but that subject seemed closed now too.

I was sweeping some leaves off the patio. They had blown in from the Campbell's trees. By the way, Erin had been in on the Dumb Game, and I had not spoken to her since. I was nice enough to toss the occasional wayward toy, ball, or Frisbee back over the fence. For some reason, her kids no longer ventured into the yard to retrieve them.

"Would you mind grilling tomorrow? For nine?" Robyn called, phone in hand, from the door, which I hadn't even heard slide open.

"No," I said, feeling a flash of Deja vu. Tomorrow was Friday. It wouldn't be the Dumb Game gang. Despite her earlier contemplation of working things out, there had been no reconciliation with her friends, except Bobbi and Erin. Erin because we were neighbors, and she was only tangentially involved. I'm not sure what Bobbi had done, except to be the only Dumb Game participant to be physically accosted by me.

Carrie had moved to Texas at the end of August. There was a going away dinner which Robyn did not attend. I don't know if she was even invited, and I sure as hell wasn't going to ask. The long phone chats she used to have with Heather had not resumed. Heather still ran a popular gym, and taught fitness and martial arts, but Robyn didn't go there anymore.

Robyn shut the door and vanished, only to come back a few minutes later without her phone. I looked at her with my best expectant expression.

"Deacon, Maddie, and the kids are coming over for lunch tomorrow," she said. "Burgers, hot dogs, maybe some chicken? And sides, which I'll take care of."

I guess my expression had shifted to bewilderment. I suppose 'grilling for nine' should have given it away. Analysis is supposed to be my strong suit, but I was still caught off guard. Robyn walked over and wrapped her arms around me. I dropped the broom and returned the hug with one of my own. We held on to each other, and for a moment, I forgot everything that had happened this year.

She smelled nice too, I thought as I inhaled the Robyn scented autumn air. My arms tightened, squeezing us together. I never wanted to let go, but eventually, I had to.

"I need a better class of friends," she said, resuming the conversation our embrace had interrupted.

"Well, they're a good place to start, but I thought you and Maddie didn't much like each other," I said.

"Why would you think that? We just don't have much in common except husbands that are best friends. I think it would be nice to see more of them."

I had seen a lot more of Deacon, and even Maddie, since June. Neither of them ever mentioned the Dumb Game. Neither of them acted surprised to find out that me and Robyn were still together. Both were quietly supportive without being at all inquisitive.

We went inside and I noticed the rather lengthy grocery list on the table. "Who's making the grocery run?" I asked, mentally erasing the list of things I had planned to do today.

"How about we both go?" Robyn answered. "You can guard the cart while I forage for meat and veggies," she said.

Acting more like a pair of love-struck teens than the responsible adults we thought we were, we navigated the store without issue, right up until the bread aisle.

"Hey Robyn. Andy," a woman said. We both looked, and I belatedly recognized Heather. She had cut her hair and was wearing gray sweats and a ball cap instead of fashionable, trendy gym wear.

"Excuse me," Robyn said, reaching right past Heather's face for some hot dog buns. She turned to me and said, "Four packages enough, you think?"

I nodded, and she dropped the bread into the cart, took two steps, and grabbed four packages of hamburger buns. We rolled on without another word. Following Robyn's lead, I didn't even turn around to look. I did note, out of the side of my eye as we went left at the end of the aisle, that Heather was still standing by the buns, staring at Robyn's back. I stifled a laugh.

"Well played," I said as we picked up cheese in the refrigerated section.

"What was well played?" she replied. She turned to me and flashed a beatific smile. We never heard from Heather again. On those rare instances when we crossed paths, she ignored us as thoroughly as Robyn had ignored her.

After that, lunch the next day was calm in comparison. The day was mild enough to leave the doors and windows open, but we mostly sat outside.

Deacon, Maddie, their three boys, and the twin girls, were excellent lunch company. The kids played in the yard, organizing makeshift games with ever-changing rules. The sort of thing Dad used to call 'disorganized grab ass' in his singularly charming manner. We chatted. I grilled. We made about twice as much as we could eat and sent the leftovers home with Maddie. They didn't need them for themselves. The downturn had barely affected them, but they knew plenty of folks that could use a little help right now.

Deacon's handyman church jobs had morphed into general work about town. He had no shortage of paying gigs, but he also saved a chunk of time every week to help families that could only pay him with an IOU, or something from their garden or workshop.

Maddie had been homeschooling her older kids already, so the teacher shortage and various school disruptions hadn't affected her either. Robyn reminded us all that she taught math, should they need any help. Maddie smiled at this and said she was okay for the moment since her oldest was only a third grader, but she knew some teenagers that would be grateful for the help.

Robyn got up and grabbed her phone from the kitchen counter, immediately sharing her contact info with Maddie. I wondered who had replaced my wife with an alien clone in the middle of the night.

The fun was over by around 3:30. Maddie hugged me before she got in the van, and I knew then that the aliens had come for sure.

"That was fun," Robyn said. "We should do it again." She put her arm around me. "You smell like smoke, sweat, and grilled chicken. Go jump in the shower. I'll be along in a few."

At least I didn't smell like beer this time. I kept that thought to myself. I did feel grungy, so I headed to the bathroom, stripping along the way.

I had just lathered up my hair, and had my eyes closed to keep the suds out of them when I heard Robyn come in.

"Room in there for me?" she said over the sound of the water.

"You know it!"

I heard the shower curtain rustle and then Robyn's body pressed against me. She wiped my mouth and then kissed me. Her hands roved and roamed about my body, and her tongue flicked past my lips, probing and caressing. When I wrapped my arms around her, I felt slick, wet, fabric instead of naked skin.

I opened my eyes and noticed two things. First, I had not rinsed all the suds off my face, making my eyes sting. Second, Robyn was wearing a black camisole and black stockings. I hadn't stopped kissing her, but she still sensed a change and opened her eyes. No need for questions now, the look on her face signaled her desire with crystal clarity.

I thought about lifting her on to me, face to face. I wanted to be looking at her. We had done this before, believe me. Well, we were both naked those times. The point is, we weren't novices, but the shower floor was slippery with soap and we were both practically vibrating with frantic lust.

Robyn licked her lips and turned away from me, leaning against the wall and going up on her toes. I didn't wait for a further invitation. I stepped forward, arms wrapping around her, fondling her breasts through the wet fabric of her camisole. We had not turned the shower off, and the hot water beat against my back. My cock, hard and jutting up, slipped easily into her, and she relaxed her legs, sinking onto me. Our bodies pressed together, as I pushed up and into her pussy.

My hips ground against her, feeling every bit of her skin against mine that I could, plus the now soaked fabric of her top and her stockings. Our arms provided some cushion against the wall as we rocked together. My cock slipped and slid within her pussy, staying inside her instead of slamming in and out. I kissed the back of her neck, the sides of her head, her wet hair. We continued our passion for minutes, edging closer and closer to climax.

We knew each other's bodies well, and Robyn used that knowledge now, rising slightly on her toes and tilting her hips. The motion put pressure on the sensitive underside of my cock. I lasted four more strokes. Tightening my arms around her, and pressing hard against her, my whole body shook with my release. I held on for a few more seconds, just feeling the heat soaking into me from all directions.

Gently, Robyn pushed backward against me, and I let her move me, uncoupling our bodies as I did. I was planning what to do next, but she was ahead of me again. She shut the water off and then reached down to grab the hair that had

regrown in my crotch. Before I could protest, she laid one finger from her free hand across my lips. I remained quiet, and she released my hair only to grab another tender part, urging me to follow her.

We went only as far as the bedroom, where she had covered the bed with a heavy quilt and layers of towels. When she turned to face me, I took hold of the hem of her soaked camisole and lifted it up and over her head. She raised her arms to help, and I tossed the soaked wad of cloth over my shoulder toward the bathroom.

She tumbled backward onto the bed and beckoned me to follow. I helped her scoot further onto the bed, and she helped me fall on top of her by wrapping her long, black nylon clad legs around my waist and pulling. Catching myself with my arms on either side of her, I kissed her and entered her at the same time.

Where our sex in the shower had been intense, passionate, but slow and paced, this encounter was quickly turning into a lust flavored wrestling match. My arms had slipped beneath her, wrapping her tightly as our lips and tongues sought to kiss the spots that aroused us the most. She clung to me with arms and legs, helping time my thrusts to a rhythm that brought her steadily closer to orgasm.

When Robyn stopped exploring with her mouth and simply pressed her head hard against my shoulder, I knew she was on the edge. I changed the tempo, slowing slightly and allowing my cock to verge close to sliding out of her. Small sounds began to escape from her lips, bubbling up from somewhere beyond conscious thought. They were expressions of desire, her way of saying 'Please make me come' and 'I never want this to stop' at the same time.

I knew her body as well as she knew mine. Gradually, I quickened my thrusts and she bucked in time with me, letting me set the pace. Time slowed to a crawl even as our bodies slapped together with increasing frequency. Robyn's fingers tightened against my back, and I felt her magnificent body clench before releasing all tension with a low moan. Spasms, big and small, ran through her, gradually relaxing her into a sweating, panting bundle of bliss.

"Mmmm," she murmured, looking up at me. She flexed her hands, fingers mashing into my back and shoulders. "I may have left some marks."

"Won't be the first time," I said quietly.

She wiggled her butt against the bed. I was still inside her, still hard. Her head tilted to her right, a quick little gesture. We rolled and now I was looking up at her.

I love looking up at her this way. There are so many things to see and do and touch. We grasped hands and she adjusted her position, taking the opportunity to tease my manhood.

"I think someone's ready to play," she said. "We're not going to break anything important like this, are we?" she teased. She was already starting to ride me, correctly intuiting my willingness.

My eyes took her in from her wet blonde hair down to her flexing legs. Of course, I lingered on the sexy parts, but when you can see the woman you love in the throes of such passion and pleasure, they're all sexy parts. She caught me looking at her and winked, slowing her bouncing ride on my cock to near stillness.

Her hands tightened their grip on mine, and she pushed down against my arms for support as she slowly rose, legs bending at the knees. I could see all the details of our coupling, which I think was her goal. Her legs trembled slightly at the apex of her motion, and it felt like my cock was about to slip from the grasp of her sex.

Then she descended, moving as slowly on the downward trip as she had on the upward. I watched the skin of her labia fold in around my own flesh as she seated herself firmly upon me.

She must have known I was close because she started teasing. First, there was a wiggle of her butt, then a shaking of her tits. She released my hands and ran her fingers through the damp tangle of her hair. Her arms dropped to her sides, and her fingers trailed over the black nylon still covering her thighs. Then she did something she had never done before.

Her hands dropped down to the V of her legs and fondled my balls before encircling the shaft of my penis, gripping firmly despite the wetness of all parts involved. She kept this grip while continuing to ride up and down, slowly and gently. Without warning, she released me and flung her arms up and out for me to catch before engaging in a wild, bucking ride upon me. It didn't take much to push me over the edge.

For a minute or two, we stayed together in a pleasantly exhausted heap.

"I love you," I said into blonde locks partially covering my face.

"I can tell," she answered. She slid off and rolled to her side, facing me. "I love you, too." I kissed her, tenderly. I felt somewhere between mellow and frenetic, as though I could go either way. If she asked me to do something naughty, I was game, but if she asked me to take a nap with her, I could have done that too.

Naturally, we did neither.

## **Chapter 10 - A New Game**

"You were never going to ask me to do this, were you?" she said. Her fingers tugged at the elastic band of one of her stockings.

"Never is a really long time," I said without answering the question. She was right though; I was aiming for never. "But yeah." I really didn't want to spoil a perfect day with this conversation.

"I told you it was okay."

"After telling me a few dozen times that it wasn't, and being forced into it," I answered, already tired of the subject. "Can we talk about something else, Robyn?"

"We could," she said, "but I'm done waiting for you to start the talk. I've done all the reflection I care to do. Whatever comes next, it will be something we decide together, not just whatever happens because we're both too scared to talk about it." She sat up, and I followed her, sitting up cross-legged, shoulder against the headboard.

"Okay," I said. "Where would you like to start?"

"I don't understand you at all. At least not about this," she said.

"Feels like you understand just fine. This was amazing."

"Really?" She looked perplexed. "That's all you want to do?"



"I can think of a few other things that might be fun to try, but yeah, this was great."

"So, like..." she started. Her use of the word 'like' and the long pause that followed told me that she was a little flustered about something.

"Whatever it is, just spit it out," I finally prompted.

"You just... You're not... You don't want to do, like, whips and chains and stuff? On either of us?" She took a deep breath and the floodgates opened. "And the stuff you want me to wear? You just meant to bed, or on the way to bed? And you're not planning to go all leather and boots and stuff?"

My mouth fell open. I couldn't help it. Robyn continued to pepper me with questions of similar nature, covering a huge swath of the kink spectrum. When she finally wound down, I wasn't sure what to do.

In the end, I went with honesty again.

"Out of all those things you just reeled off, is there anything that you think you'd like to try?" I asked.

"Not really," she said. "Well, maybe a couple. I don't know."

"Then those are the things I'd like to hear about. When you're ready."

Instead of the red I'd seen in her face so often since June, this time I watched the color drain from her face. That was all the warning I had before catching a sobbing, incoherent, clutching wife as she flung herself across the short distance between us. The only word I could make out was 'sorry' repeated over and over.

I held on, and at some point, started rocking, trying to be comforting. Eventually, she pulled away a little, just far enough to speak.

"I'm sorry," she said. That was the last time she would utter those words on this subject, but the discussion was not done. "I should have just asked you. I was," she paused. "I don't know what I was. Confused and a little scared, maybe. I was afraid that your little suggestions were just the start of something. That wearing certain things to bed would be the start of you asking me to wear them all the

time. Or tying me to a chair would end up with a rope around my neck someday, or something stuck up my butt. I don't even know what to call you. You sound like a dominant, but then you don't push the issue, so I thought you might be a switch, or maybe even a sub, but now I'm pretty sure I can rule out CD, gender play, or exhibitionism."

"Whoa," I said when she paused for a breath. Her words had rushed out in one continuous stream, and I had a feeling she was about to repeat the entire recitation she had made a few minutes ago. "Let me think for a minute." I watched her watch me like she could see wheels turning in my head. Realizing I had been too wrapped up in my own issues to pick up on hers was a little troubling.

"Which is more important to you: figuring out where we went into the weeds before now, or figuring out where to go from here?" I finally asked.

"Can we do both?"

I was not surprised. Robyn does not let go of vexing problems easily, and apparently, we had created not one, but two of them. Also obvious was my mistaken belief that planning to never ask for anything outside her well-defined comfort zone was the right choice. Another light went off in my overwhelmed brain. I realized that she had probably now read more about the kinkier side of the sex world than I had ever considered investigating. Her problem-solving method, and I could see that I, or my behavior, had become a problem, is to gather data, form a solution, then test the solution.

And she is extremely focused and expert in her methods. Lather, rinse, repeat, as it says on the shampoo bottle.

"Let's do 'where to go from here', and I think that will shed some light on the rest of it," I said.

"Okay," she said. "I like your approach."

I couldn't help but smile back at her. Her face and tone told me she was confident that the 'problem' would soon be resolved. I was not so confident. Suddenly, I needed to express in words exactly what I felt and wanted to do. This was not

something I had ever done before. In the past, my explorations of mild kink had happened organically. Oh well.

Suddenly, no words would come to me.

"Uhm. Hmm," was all I could manage.

"Just spit it out," she said. I could tell by the twinkle in her eyes that she was enjoying throwing my own words back at me, again. Instead of getting mad, I almost laughed.

"I like picturing you in certain clothes. I like the idea of playing some lightweight kinky games with you. It really is that simple. I'm not some kind of dungeon master. I don't want to hurt you, expose you, or share you," I finally said, thinking I had come up with a nice summary.

"What about a spanking?" she asked. Her head tilted slightly, and her face gave me no insight into where the question came from.

"If you wanted to try that, I think we could figure it out," I said, trying to sound sure of myself.

"What if I wanted to spank you?"

"I'd be willing to try, but under the same conditions that I want you to have," I said, wondering where this was going.

"Which are?" she asked. I saw the trap looming ahead of me, but it was too late to avoid it now. I plowed on, knowing I was about to get my ass handed to me as the whole debacle came full circle.

"That if we learn it's not fun for us both, we move on to something that is," I said. Silence flooded the space between us as Robyn seemed to consider my words. The punch I expected never came.

"I like that. What if it's fun for one of us, but just okay for the other? Or not even okay, but not fun at all?" Her eyes were locked onto me, a look I knew from our year together in college.

"I think we'd have to figure that out as we go, but I will not do anything that would endanger either of us. Nothing that would expose either of us. Nothing that involves anyone else. And absolutely nothing that would endanger our relationship. At all. Those are my limits," I said. I wondered if I should apologize, again, for my own requests to her. Between the two of us, we had broken all those limits already. I decided we had both apologized enough.

"I need to show you something," she said quietly. "You might want to throw some shorts on. And shoes. It's in the basement."

I had a brief moment of suspicion, but Robyn is not acting furtive. She's distracted.

We go to the basement and after she rearranges some stuff and pulls an old drop cloth down, she drags a stack of familiar plastic totes out and then opens two upright steel cabinets that had been crammed into an empty space between some built-in shelves and an old water heater.

The cabinets are full of toys and clothes for big boys and girls, like someone picked up an adult store catalog and ordered one of everything. The totes are packed with ropes, leather cuffs and straps, and nylon cuffs and straps, in a spectrum of colors.

"So, when you said sexy sex game, you really meant to have all the bases covered," I said.

"I just wasn't sure what you really wanted. Plus, I listened to my friends, who I now see were having their own fun with me. And you. The looks on their faces when you - well, nevermind," she chuckled to herself. "Now that it's over without bloodshed, I think it's funny as hell how unprepared we were for your reaction." She looked at me, expression unreadable for a change. "I'll bet every picture and video of us that is not here in this house has been deleted. They certainly aren't in circulation like I was afraid they'd be. Not even Bobbi, who thinks she's been forgiven, wants to piss you off again."

Those assholes were still affecting my life even though they had been excluded from it. I was so tired of them. She was right about needing a better class of friends.

"What do you want to do with all this stuff?" I really didn't see her wearing a female chastity outfit and I wasn't about to ask her to do so for my sake. And the riding crop and flogger? Not really a thing for us either, or at least I hoped.

"I don't think we can get a refund. We'll sort it out some day and get rid of anything we're sure we won't ever want to play with. Together. Using words this time," she said. "For now, I want you to think of something fun to do tomorrow."

She took my hand and pulled me toward the stairs.

"Tomorrow," she repeated. "After we catch up on our sleep."

My brain was in overdrive already, and I knew what I'd be dreaming about tonight. Inspiration eluded me though. I mean, the first choices were obvious: the things I'd asked of her like lingerie and heels and a little bedroom bondage. They were the safe choices.

The other possibilities were things I had a little experience with, such as spankings or candle wax or similar sense play.

I was making breakfast for the two of us, standing exactly where I had started a pot of coffee that I never finished back in June, when the thought hit me. The first thing I did was put up the bacon and eggs that I had been ready to start cooking.

"Buttered toast and apple slices?" Robyn said when I set plates on the table. "Who are you, and where is Andy?"

"I had an idea, so I thought we might want to go easy on the food," I said, still distracted by my evolving brainstorm.

She stopped and stared at me for a moment, and even in my distraction I wondered if that was an expression of curiosity, excitement, or alarm.

"Let me know what you need me to do," she said. Then she nibbled on her toast as though she didn't have a worry in the world.

"Go to our room when you finish," I nodded at her plate. "I'll meet you there in a few." I polished off my toast and apple, put my plate in the sink, and grabbed a large garbage bag from the pantry. At the basement door, I turned back to her.

"Love you," I said. Without waiting for a reply, I stepped onto the stairs down and shut the door behind me.

Our basement is not some dank, dim, dungeon, and I didn't mean to leave that impression. I flipped all the light switches, and the large room was bathed in the glow of bright LED lights and not just a single, flickering twenty-watt bulb from an old horror movie. Ignoring all the items I didn't want to think about, which was most of them, I filled the bag with the things I thought I'd use. Later I'd figure out that I overfilled the bag.

By the time I returned to the main floor, the kitchen was empty, and I assumed Robyn was either waiting for me in our bedroom, or, she had changed her mind and lit out for parts unknown.

She was in our room.

When I came in, she stood up from where she had been sitting on the bed. Her attention flicked from my face to the bag and back to my face. I held the bag closed and set it on the bed.

"You sure you want to do this?" I asked.

"Will you stop if I ask you too?"

"Maybe you'll have to stop if I ask you to," I said. She laughed.

"I doubt that." It was weird to see her so relaxed after all the tension we'd had, most of it surrounding the very things we were about to experiment with.

"To answer your question, yes. I will stop if you ask me to. I will stop if I feel weird. I will stop if you give off any weird vibes, and so on."

"We might never get done," she said.

"Not if we keep talking," I joked. "Take off your clothes." She needed less than ten seconds to strip. "And back up to the bed but stay standing." She did what I asked, and I was struck by the stark difference between now and the first time I had ever said something like, 'Can I tie you to the bed with these scarves?'

I pulled a rope out of the bag. I had prepared it while in the basement, tying four steel rings to it, hopefully spaced to achieve my aim. I reached around Robyn and started wrapping it around her waist. She raised her arms up over her head, giving me a nice view of her chest as I leaned down.

The rope was braided nylon, bright pink. The rings were just hardware store steel rings, roughly two inches across. I had gotten the spacing right, which was good. Once the first loop was around her waist, I threaded the ends through the rings in opposite directions twice, making a total of five loops around her, then tied the ends together in front. That left a few feet on each end that I'd either use somewhere else or cut off with the safety shears I had found in a small plastic bin marked 'Safety!'

Shame no one thought to just give me the 'Safety!' bin them when I asked for release back in June. I banished the thought with a deep breath and returned to the bondage at hand. That was the only rope I planned to use on Robyn. Well, directly on her body, anyway.

Luckily, I had the foresight to arrange all the things neatly, even though it looked like I just dumped a bunch of stuff into a garbage bag.

"You can put your arms down," I said as I reached into the bag. My hand came out holding what looked at first like four pink nylon dog collars, about an inch wide. They were cuffs with Velcro closures and a pair of D-rings each. Several lengths and colors had been neatly organized in plastic bins, complete with suggested uses like 'male wrist' or 'female collar' and so on.

Instead of telling her to hold out her hands, I stepped close, very close to her naked body and fastened a cuff around each wrist and then around each upper arm, just above her elbows.

Another dip into the bag and four more cuffs appeared, two for her ankles and two around her thighs, about halfway between her hip and knee.

"Put your foot on my quad," I said. She raised her leg and planted just the toes of her foot against my thigh, reminding me of the pose she struck back in the spring. I cuffed her ankle and lightly stroked the top of her foot.

I saw a possible flaw. The cuff for her thigh was going to ride down until it reached her knee, or I needed to make it uncomfortably tight. Or, I realized, I had just found a use for the excess rope still hanging between her legs.

I wrapped the longer strap around her upper leg and closed it.

"Other leg," I said. She switched legs, making even that simple motion graceful.

This time, I put the thigh cuff on her first, then the ankle cuff. Then I spent an extra moment on her foot and toes. I don't have a thing for feet, but I should spend more time on all of Robyn.

"Both feet on the floor," I told her. "There's something I need to fix."

One tail of rope went left and one right, each through a ring and then down to one of the rings on the thigh cuff. It wasn't beautiful, but I tied the rope to a D-ring and cut the excess off after wrapping a couple turns of black vinyl tape around the spot I was about to cut.

There was just one more thing. Well, there were two more things, but in my head, this was the thing that could trip us up. I pulled one more pink nylon restraint from the bag and held it up.

"I don't know much about bondage rules or S and M protocols or symbolism," I said. Robyn probably knew way more than I did now since she had researched. "But I know a collar is a special symbol in that world with several different meanings, but almost all of them signify a singular bond between two people."

I paused. She looked at me and then at the collar in my hand and then back at me, saying nothing.

"May I fasten this around your neck, Robyn?" I asked. It wasn't a rope, but I was treading dangerously close to something she had been concerned about enough to specifically mention it. But if she had done all the reading, I thought she had, she would understand the meaning.

She looked at me so long and so hard that I was sure she was about to refuse. I had a back-up plan in case she balked. I would toss the thing over my shoulder with a smile.



"Yes," she said, without preamble or even drawing a deep breath. I wrapped the collar around her pale skin, making it snug but not tight, and pressed the two Velcro covered surfaces together. She didn't reach up, though I think she wanted to.

"Now," I said, opening the bag to show that there was another layer of rope and cuffs, all in a vivid, electric blue. "Repeat the whole process on me."

The surprise on her face was gratifying, though not unexpected. As I've mentioned, Robyn is persistent and thorough when solving problems, but she tends to be linear. My history of requests made a pattern she probably expected me to follow. Asking her to apply the same rope and cuffs to my own body deviated from that expectation, especially after my reactions back in June.

"Really? Pink and blue?" she said. She laughed and shook her head, her slightly damp hair swinging as she did.

Her own reaction was where this plan could go off the rails in a heartbeat, and I had a moment of uncertainty over the wisdom of my idea.

"Strip," she said. Her tone was light and amused. That could be a good sign or a bad one. I complied, and she quickly tied the blue rope around my waist. Her touch lingered on my skin, fingertips stroking my belly and chest.

She looked at me from just a few inches away. I had no idea what she was thinking now. I had just handed her the reins, the control of our scene, and now I would just have to see what came next.

My plan was to do something she would not expect, and it had worked. On the other hand, she didn't need a plan to do something I didn't expect.

She pulled two cuffs from the bag and looked at them closely, as if estimating their sizes.

"Stand still. Don't move," she said. She stepped behind me. I felt light, hot, touches of her skin as she wrapped the cuff around my wrist and closed the Velcro strip. The brush of her arms and the rubbing of the side of her leg felt unintentional, soft, and incidental to her task.

She placed the other cuff above my elbow and leaned in to fasten it, her hair tickling the back of my neck and the side of my face. I felt something brush my back, and then I was certain her hip had just bumped my ass.

The amazingly sensual contact continued as she cuffed my other arm. I was so intent on how and where the next contact would occur that I didn't notice my own arousal.

Robyn did.

"Are you going to make it to the end of whatever it is we're doing today?"

"I'm sure I'll make it to the end several times," I said, remaining still.

She chuckled, almost a giggle. Robyn never giggles. "And you're being so good, too. I wasn't sure you had it in you."

She turned to the bag and pulled the next four nylon restraints out, dropping them to the floor. Leaning toward me, so close I could feel the heat from her naked flesh, she said, "I'm going to go down... there to take care of your legs."

The long pause in the middle of her statement did not help cool me down.

"While I'm there," she continued, "I want you to stroke my hair with your fingers. Just your fingers, and do it gently, softly."

She squatted down, directly before my jutting erection. It twitched a little, pointing right at her face, but she ignored it entirely. Whether it was an act or she was totally absorbed, she focused all her attention on fastening the nylon straps in their appropriate locations.

I did as she had asked, more like ordered, and ran my fingers through her hair and over her scalp. The action of stroking her thick blonde mane focused me on her, and at the same time made me keenly aware of how hot I suddenly felt.

Abruptly, she stood up, having fastened all four cuffs around my legs. She stepped in even closer, but to the side so she touched me nowhere at all and gathered the tails of the rope tied around my waist.

"I see why you secured those thigh straps the way you did, but I think I'll just leave these here," she said. She tied the ropes in a loose bow around my waist and then paused. Her gaze was on the bow she had just tied, but I could tell her mind was elsewhere.

She inhaled and reached into the bag, retrieving the last item in that layer. Slowly, but smoothly and confidently, she wrapped the collar around my neck, pressing gently to engage the hooks and loops. I had to focus to remain still, and I was berating myself internally for not thinking this scheme through.

"With this ring, I thee wed," she said, snapping my attention back to her face. Robyn's fingers lingered on the nylon, then on my collarbone before she lowered her hands to her sides.

Well, she had done something unexpected. Before I could ask the question, she spoke.

"It seemed like the right thing to say," she said. Her brow furrowed and she looked like she was having second thoughts. "Like we are renewing old vows and making new ones, if that makes any sense."

"It makes perfect sense," I said. I wasn't as sure as I sounded, but I liked that she had seen something in this that I had not. I pulled the cover off the last layer. The bottom of the bag was full of various lengths of black straps and black rope. Robyn looked at the array of restraints, obviously wondering what was happening. I decided not to let her stew.

"We're going to bind ourselves to each other, and hopefully have enough wiggle room to make things interesting," I said. And suddenly, I was even more unsure of the whole idea. Should I have talked it through with her? Maybe throwing a curveball when she thought in terms of Dom, sub, or switch, was not such a great plan?

It was too late to back out now.

"How do we decide who is doing what?" she asked. It was the obvious question.

"One of us could take the lead. We could do something cooperatively. Or, we could make a competition out of it," I answered.

"I have guessed wrong too many times. I want to know what you would do, to understand you, but with one request. I want to be able to see everything," she said. Her face was calm and worry free, two qualities I wished I could embrace now.

Then I realized I could be calm. Robyn had just given me her trust. Inspiration hit me.

"Grab some of these towels and quilts and follow me," I said, picking up the bag and an armload of towels. I led us to one of the two unused bedrooms and dropped the towels to the floor.

The room wasn't so much unused as it was used for whatever we needed, and what we had needed lately was a place to store items and supplies we were using for renovating and updating of our home. Two of those items were the old mirrors from the bathroom, basically three feet by four foot pieces of mirrored glass with beveled edges.

I arranged the pile of towels and blankets to make a comfortable nest and protection for knees and other bits that might not like being mashed against the bare floor. Then I positioned the mirrors, leaning them against the walls and propping them so they wouldn't fall over, but would still work to see ourselves. Robyn watched the entire process from just inside the door.

"Come in and kneel down right here," I said, sweeping my hand over the pile of fabric. She stepped forward and knelt. The smile she offered was radiant, bordering on joyful. Her normal trepidation was nowhere to be found. I marveled at the change, especially now that I understood where those feelings had come from.

I considered the remaining items in the bag. I had added a few of the Velcro cuffs, in case I needed them, which I didn't think I would. I had also included short ropes, straps with metal clips on the ends, and straps with Velcro closures, which were intended for use in binding, restraining, or otherwise connecting me and Robyn. I decided on the Velcro closed straps. The straps that looked like double ended dog leashes would be faster, but the metal bits might poke us in uncomfortable places. The ropes were the most flexible and probably comfortable, but would take time to tie securely, at least with my level of expertise.

Robyn waited patiently while I worked all this out in my head.

"Okay," I said. "I'm going to move your legs where I want them."

"Got it," she said. She helped by lifting and letting me guide her to a slightly wider legged position. I knelt between her calves and made certain the bag was in reach before threading the nylon strap through the rings on her ankle cuffs and fastening it to a ring on mine. I didn't explain to her yet, and I probably didn't need to since she could see what I had done in the mirror, but when she spread her legs, mine would go with them until they were snugged up against the inside of hers. I repeated the process at our knees.

After a long pause to plot and calculate, I connected six more straps in a flurry of motion. Hopefully, we weren't about to get into something we couldn't escape without help. That gave me a pause as I imagined the abject humiliation of needing one of Robyn's friends to release us from a self-inflicted bondage foul-up.

Recovered from the moment of doubt, I left two straps and two ropes where they might be reachable if we felt the need to add some extra restraint. I hoped that in a few minutes we would be too far gone in mutual pleasure to need them.

"Hands and knees," I said, bracing myself with my own hands on her waist. She bent, catching herself on her lowered arms, and I immediately felt the tug of my bondage design.

"Ooh," she said. "I hope there's more." Robyn nearly purred, then snapped her legs apart, instantly drawing mine hard against hers. She stretched her arms forward, pulling me slightly against her, but not entirely. I had set things up so that it took us cooperating to become, ah, fully engaged.

"Is that what you want?" I teased her a bit by running my fingertips along her upper back and shoulders, which created slack for me. She could only stretch her hands out so far, and it was not enough. "Or is it this?" I asked, drawing my hands down toward her hips, which tightened things to the point that my hard-on was starting to poke at the wetness between her legs.

She pushed back, trying to get ahead of our little game, and I leaned forward and let my hands wander up to her shoulders, again providing enough slack to delay. Then she slid into a position she had never taken before, stretching her arms fully

forward and dropping her head, shoulders, and chest to the floor, while pushing her hips and ass up.

That nearly pushed me right over the edge, but I managed.

Inevitability took over. I pulled my hands back onto her up-thrusting ass, forcing my torso forward against her, and into her. Robyn is not shy about expressing herself, but the moan that arose as my erection slid into her extraordinarily wet pussy was unlike anything I had heard before.

"Baby. Ooh, baby. Tie us together. Ties us together around the waist... please..."

That was a request I could not refuse. I grabbed at the rope, which was the longest, and wrapped it around our waists as fast as I could. Not waiting for further direction from my wife, I started flexing and bucking my hips, driving into her as hard and fast as I could. I lasted longer than I thought I would. My orgasm came suddenly, shaking me the way a dog shakes a toy.

I didn't stop. Slick with our combined wetness, I kept thrusting. My cock gradually hardened, and we let our passion take control. What followed was an incredible combination of frenzied sex, orgasm, struggle, and finally exhaustion.

We collapsed in a heap, letting the towels cushion us. When I put my hands and arms down to keep my weight off of Robyn, she said, "It's okay. I want to feel you on me. It's not like you'll crush me."

I eased down onto her, and we stayed like that for a while. When we finally decided to move, we discovered we were much more thoroughly entangled than I had planned. There must be some universal law that all cords, ropes, and cables become tangled messes even when left undisturbed.

Our restraints had definitely not been left undisturbed.

Like a game of Twister in reverse, with some bondage thrown in, we eventually freed ourselves. We snuggled, pulled a blanket over us, and took a nap.

## Chapter 11 - What Comes Next?

We slept for several hours and woke up slowly. Her stomach growled and mine echoed the sentiment.

"Lunch?" I asked.

"Something more than toast and fruit?" She answered with a question of her own.

We washed up before heading to the kitchen where we decided on bacon and eggs. The eggs turned into omelets, for which we raided our supply of cold cuts and veggies to complete. We talked while we ate. Just everyday talk about grocery lists and new tires for the truck and all the other little details of life together. Well, mostly.

"How long does it take for the marks to go away?" Robyn asked, looking at her wrist, a forkful of food stopped almost to her mouth.

"I don't really know," I answered. "I think it depends a lot on the person, and what made the mark." I looked at the already fading pink mark left by the nylon. "Don't rub it. I read that somewhere."

She looked over the fork at me, eyes twinkling with familiar mischief, but took the bite instead of teasing me.

At some point, we ended up back in the spare room. I think our plan was to clean up the disarray we had created. We got distracted by the pretty colors of the straps and the lingering scents of our sex still in the air.

Another shower later and we were in the basement, sorting. Surprisingly, we kept more than I thought we would, at least on the first pass. Robyn figured we can always toss something, but we should keep the marginal items in the event we changed our minds.

She saved even the raunchiest, sluttiest clothes and shoes. "Maybe I'll do a fashion show for you someday," she teased.

On the other hand, I tossed every bit of apparel meant for me. It was almost all women's wear anyway. Robyn didn't say a word, except to claim the packages of stockings and anything else she thought would fit her before I could add them to the trash pile.

She kept the female chastity. I was stunned at first, but she explained.

"It's metal lingerie! Whenever else will I find, let alone buy, an armored bikini?" She turned serious. "However," she said, making sure I was listening, "no locks. And no putting this on me without my very explicit permission."

I met her eyes, and her gaze was full of challenge. I stared right back. "That won't be an issue. Really, Robyn. Never."

Her face softened. "Never. I guess I knew that already."

The days rolled on and we grew together, stronger in our relationship and in our trust. Part of me wishes I could say we turned into a pair of well-equipped fetish sex fiends, but that's just not us. Sometimes we play around with our new kink fascination, and sometimes we do something else.

That's really all I ever wanted.