

Secret In The Cellar

Mackenzie gave the steel shell door a shove with her shoulder, and it burst open, causing her to nearly fall into the sweltering garage. As if the oppressive heat and humidity outside wasn't bad enough...

She closed the door behind her again, giving it another shove to re-stick it closed. To her right was the back door to the house, and the puff of cool air conditioning sent a shiver across her damp skin as she walked inside.

The kitchen was swarmed with people, mostly her friend's female relatives. Somewhere cleaning up after that afternoon's barbecue; but most just stood around gossiping, escaping the oppressive heat outside. Her mother was at the sink, rinsing out dishes and placing them in the washer. Megan, a friend of hers (and quickly her immediate family's) and about seven years older than her, was pulling pies out of the 'fridge and appeared to be ignoring everything around her. Neither her nor Mack were "people" people, and that was probably why they got along so well.

It had been over a year since they had talked. Mack had spent the past year at a small, private college two states over and had stopped in at Megan's yearly "family" picnic (which always seemed to include half of her own relatives) on her way to go backpacking for the remainder of the summer. Megan owned the small hobby farm with Tony, her husband since they had bought the place shortly after they got married. Every summer while she had been growing up she had visited for a few days with her folks. Last summer, however, her parents insisted that she stay home and take care of her grandmother. The viscous, half-crazy old lady had made her life hell. The only thing that had prevented her from bailing on the whole thing was her mother's threat to not pay for her school the next semester.

Mack had made sure this year not to be in such a compromised

situation. As soon as she had returned to school she had applied to every scholarship and grant she could think of, as well as snatching up a couple of part time jobs close to campus.

By the time summer rolled around again her hard work paid off. She had enough money to cover her college for the next year, as well as enough savings to purchase herself a small archaic car and spend the summer backpacking, which she was on her way to do. She had always intended on visiting her rural friends on the way to her intended trailhead, but had completely forgotten about the annual barbecue and had inadvertently arrived the day of.

She had made her way across the room finally, and stood by her friend in the doorway into the living room.

"Megan, where is your bathroom?" she blurted, her bladder suddenly elevating its message of urgency.

"You came in just in time for desert!- Oh, uh, the bathroom is down the hall on the right. Same place it's been."

Mack ducked down the hall and grabbed the door, but it was locked. She knocked frantically, fighting the urge to dance.

"Oh, Kenzi, don't go down there," said her friend, who had poked her head around the corner. She pointed in her direction, " next one over."

Mack looked at the next door over, which was slightly ajar.

"Thanks!" she said as she pushed the door open.

All the memories revolving around her friend's mysterious basement came flooding in: The door was always locked. Not only that, but they

would even lock the door behind them if they went down to get something (always alone) yet her friend and her husband both acted like there was nothing precious or dangerous down there.

Mack wiped her hands on the towel and contemplated what to do next. Now that her bladder had been relieved and her hands no longer sticky from sweat, she felt no desire to return to the insufferable heat outdoors.

Her hand on the doorknob she overheard her mother's voice in the hall talking about something indistinguishable. She was about to tune her out when she caught the words "Mackenzie's photo album." Knowing she couldn't remain ignored by her relatives with them gawking over her baby pictures she gritted her teeth and opened the bathroom door. Her Uncle Carl, a British man with no blood relation to her was standing there, apparently waiting for his turn on "the loo".

"Quick!" he said, "They have your baby pictures. I'll help you through the office window so you can duck out."

Further down the hall was a small office that had a window opening onto the driveway behind the house. Stealthily she opened the window and climbed out before turning to her uncle.

"Are you coming?"

"No," he replied, "I'm going to wait it out on the throne with a good book. Remember to stay away from the windows!" he added with a wink.

With that he closed the window and latched it behind her.

The sun felt like it was pushing her into the scorched earth. Because of

how the living room was positioned on the East side of the house, there weren't many places she could go. The living room had almost 270 Degrees of view, encompassing almost all of the front yard, the yard to the East, and the backyard. The only section that was safe was the area immediately to the West, occupied by the driveway, six beehives, and bordered by the world's most disgusting drainage ditch; and the driveway, which was blocked from the view by the garage that stuck out from the middle of the back of the house. It being the afternoon meant that the only shade on this side of the building was her own shadow. Unless...

She eyed the two big garage doors. She could open them, allowing the inside of the garage to air out and be shade instead of a giant sweat box.

Once again she shoved the access door open and walked into the sweltering garage. The latches on the two big doors inside were the simple lever type found on many unpowered garage doors. She tugged and pushed on the latches, but nothing budged: the rusty bell-cranks firmly stuck in place.

A frown spread across her face and her eyes probed the cobweb covered corners in search of something to pry on it with. Not finding anything, her attention turned to the cluttered workbench in the back of the garage. There was no easy path through the clutter, so she began climbing over the medium sized tractor. She mused over how small the machine appeared outside, but how large it seemed to be when squeezed into the garage. Sliding off the hood onto the front tire, she jumped down. Her eyes scanned the piles of junk, parts, and tools before her gaze fell on the stairs to her left. The dark, concrete stairwell sloped downwards towards the basement of the house. As her eyes adjusted, she could see it terminate in another door set in the foundation of the house. Curiosity gripped her, as well as the memory

of her parents' house before her father broke down and got air conditioning.

On hot summer days she, her siblings and mother had stayed in the basement, where it remained cool simply by being underground. Mack slowly stepped down the stairs, her nerves straining to detect any relief from the heat. It wasn't until her foot stepped off the final stair that it splashed into the refreshing pool of cold air that settled there. She quickly sank to the concrete floor, enjoying the goosebumps that washed over her legs. She put her hands palm down on the cool concrete, feeling the ceramic pull the moisture and heat off them. Even though the oppressive heat still caused the rest of her to sweat profusely, at least her hands and legs were cool.

A few minutes went by, and her eyes adjusted more. She watched a thread left by a passing spider twist and turn from where it clung to the bottom of the basement door. Sticking her finger close to the crack she realized that there was a small draft. Instantly she longed for the chill darkness that she knew lay beyond the door.

That's when she noticed the door wasn't completely shut. Oh, sure, it was closed, but there was just a slightly larger than normal gap in between the door and the frame. Standing up, she gently tried the knob. It was locked, but a gentle push on the door caused it to swing into black void. A wave of cold air washed over her legs, and tendrils of cool wrapped around her, drawing her in. She couldn't see anything around her, and she didn't care. She would finally be able to relax in the cool, un-harassed by solution of families above. Just as quickly paranoia tickled her, the basement feeling welcoming and yet foreboding. Softly she pushed the door closed, giving it a gentle push until the latch clicked home. She would wait only until she heard the group break apart upstairs and then she would slip back out the door into the garage. Until then she didn't want any sign that she was down here.

The door closed, she sprawled out on the floor, letting out a deep breath and closing her eyes. According to the voices upstairs they were still looking at pictures of her as a toddler, indicating that she still had plenty of time; even if nobody else had albums of their own to share.

Minutes dragged by. The concrete floor that had started out so comfortable and cool quickly became downright cold and very hard. Her eyes had adjusted to the low light, and she grew restless to find something more comfortable... Or at least less hard. From where she lay she could see two dog kennels in a corner next to the furnace. Many times, she had visited in the past she clearly remembered hearing the dogs running loose in the basement--playing and crashing into things as they ran around. They had recently lost one to cancer, but she knew Megan would want another before long.

Mack stood up. Maybe they had a couple of dog beds somewhere she could lay on. In the corner on the other side of the door she had come through there was a washer and drier as well as a folding table piled high with what looked like canning equipment and a smoker. Directly in front of her was a set of stairs that led up to what she presumed to be the door in the hall. She walked towards the furnace, her eyes straining to see in the little bit of light allowed in by a small window. In the far corner there was some weightlifting and exercise equipment.

Turning around, her view was blocked by what was clearly their pantry and beekeeping storage. Two large tables divided the room in half underneath the staircase and they were piled high with empty honey supers, cases of empty honey jars, dried and canned food, honey extractors, and bins labeled "rice", "white", and "wheat". Perhaps this was why the door remained locked. Maybe Megan and Tony didn't want it to be known that they had enough food stashed away to feed and entire clan for a year.

Mackenzie thought it was pretty cool, though she could understand the looks it might earn from more judgmental family members. Still, no dog bed. Not even a pile of rags to lay on. Tearing her eyes off the larder she walked back around the staircase and towards the laundry area. She would even relax on a pile of dirty clothes. Anything to get her off the unforgiving concrete floor.

She had been hoping for a blanket to fold up or even a couple of towels, but the area around the washer and dryer was disappointingly tidy. Laundry must have just been done, since the only things that remained were some dirty socks and a muddy pair of men's shorts. Mack let out a quiet sigh and turned to walk back to the bottom of the staircase when her eye caught the dark void in between the cluttered laundry table and the stacks of honey supers.

The gap was only about a foot and a half wide, and even though her eyes had become well accustomed to the gloom of the basement she could barely make out the shapes of objects in the inky darkness beyond. She briefly scanned the laundry area for a flashlight before setting her cellphone down at the entrance. She had thought briefly of using it as a light but stopped when she thought of dropping it or it falling out of her pocket in the inky gloom. The only thing worse than being caught down here would be to leave identifying evidence. The very thought of having to ask her friend and her spouse for it back made her face flush.

Her phone safely at the entrance she dropped to all fours and waved her hand into the opening and across the ground, ensuring that she didn't crash into anything. Slowly she made her way forward, and as she did, she was surprised how quickly her eyes further adjusted. Though she still couldn't make out fine detail, she could see the objects in the room more clearly. Straight ahead of her there was a workbench

against the far wall. She could make out the silhouette of a vice mounted on the corner and tools hanging on the backboard. Surprisingly, the surface appeared free of clutter, at least from where she was on the floor.

In the final corner of the basement There appeared to be a large desk or something. More clutter appeared stacked on top, the front appeared to be facing out and a dark spot on the side with a panel leaning on the wall next to it suggested that it was down here to be repaired. In front of the desk along the side wall of the basement was a large footlocker. Shadows of bizarre shapes on it piqued her curiosity as to what or what combination of things would make a silhouette like that. Beside the locker a sizable chest freezer rumbled on, the low tone lulling her mind at ease.

In the center of the area something small and round lay on the floor. Mack's first impression was that it was a shallow pet bowl, but as she crawled up to it on her way to investigate the objects on the footlocker, she found it was not so. It was a metal collar, about an inch and a half wide and hinged on one side. On the opposite side was a latch; a dime sized, spring-loaded knurled knob about an eighth of an inch thick on one of the collar halves that Mack twisted on the open collar. She wondered briefly why someone had such a unique and cool looking collar down here kicking around on the floor instead of on their dog or at least on a shelf. She shrugged to herself and set the collar back on the floor.

Mack crawled over to the footlocker, eager to see what other oddities might reside down here. A small LED on the chest freezer cast an eerie shadow over the locker, and she squinted to see what object or objects were forming the silhouette.

Mack jumped as she made out the figure of a dog's head sitting on the

locker. She tried to recompose herself, re-assuring that there had to be a good reason why her friend and her husband would keep a decapitated canine in their basement. Timidly she reached out to pick it up. She wanted to take a closer look, and something like this deserved better light. Picking it up she instantly realized that it was part of a costume. The bottom of the hood terminated in a narrow but thick metal collar, back part of the head falling open to either side along what she felt was a zipper. The pull had a short, wide forked tang on it that had a hole on either tine. Her hand moved down to the collar, which had tine-shaped holes on either side along with a similar knob as to that of the other collar on the floor. Mack thought about how cute it would be to walk around costumed to match her dog. She brought the head to the gap near the washing machines to get a better look at it. The realism and detail was fantastic. Holding it facing herself it really appeared as if an eyeless German shepherd-type dog was looking back at her, ears alert and mouth slightly agape. The collar seemed a bit out of place, however. It would be very high on the wearer's neck - immediately below their chin- and even though it was at most only a half inch wide it was nearly as thick, hinged on either side of the head to allow the costumer entrance.

Her fingers felt something very smooth on the inside of the head, and she opened the back and flipped the head over to get a better look. The inside was lined with a polished black rubber. Mack wondered briefly why someone would want something so hot inside an already warm fur head, but then she figured it might be that way to protect the faux fur from all the sweat. She adjusted the head to see deeper inside, and noticed small holes on either side, presumably to let the wearer hear, as well as a grid of very small, rounded metal nubs that covered the inside of the hood from the Back to above the ears all the way to above the eyes. This puzzled her. The grid reminded her of something use to pick up brain waves, but what for? She couldn't think of anything, and rolled the head to look a the inside of the face. When she did, she

gasped

"Oh cool!"

The nose was formed into the rubber, and there were nostril holes. Below that, however, extended a pair of wire frameworks clearly intended to fit around one's teeth. Mack moved the costume's jaw, and the bottom frame moved with it. This meant that the mouth on the dog would move with the wearers. In front of the frames another hole was cut into the rubber, the costume's own tongue and teeth visible behind it.

She was barely able to contain herself, and she just had to try the head on. When she was a Child, she had gone trick-or-treating as a skunk one year, and had loved it. Ever since then she had wanted to dress as an animal again. She had looked at costumes, even tried them on, though never bought one, and this head was possibly the most detailed thing she had seen. Holding the head by its collar she brought the thing up to her face. She could see two spots of the basement floor in front of her, and the collar fit right below her chin.

The liner was seemed custom shaped to fit someone's head almost perfectly, but it definitely seemed like it might fit her too. Holding her mouth open she slipped her face the rest of the way into the head. It was a snug but comfortable fit. She felt the round points of the spikes raking through her hair, dragging gently across her scalp as she guided the framework into her mouth with her tongue. Once they were positioned over her jaws she bit down until they snapped into place around her teeth. She ran her tongue over it, feeling the thin coat of rubber over the tiny, rigid wire frame. Two narrow rods ran along the outside of each jaw and out of her mouth, connecting her jaw to the costume's. Reaching up her fingers found the zipper, and she pulled it closed, feeling the fur flap slide over the zipper, effectively hiding it.

It was a snug fit: the zipper kept wanting to spring open and Mack was thankful of her short "lesbian haircut" as her mother put it. If she was planning on wearing this, she would have to buzz her head to help it fit. She finally got the zipper closed and began wondering how she was going to keep it from springing up again. She ran her fingers over the forked pull tab and remembered the holes in the collar. That was it! The collar doubled as a zipper latch, taking some of the strain off the zipper itself while effectively holding the pull down, and the round knob was the latch release! Quickly she found the holes on the top of the collar and pushed the tab in until she was rewarded with a "click".

There was a quiet "beep" and a dull red flash illuminated the shadow of a stack of honey supers. She turned her head but didn't see anything. Even so, she really admired the visibility of the head. Aside from the muzzle at the bottom of her vision, her eyesight appeared to be unrestricted. She turned her head to either side, feeling the movement. Even though she had had her doubts about the thick collar, she was amazed to find how much freedom the high placement gave her. There was no binding of neck fur that usually limited her movement. The collar did prevent her from tilting her head very far down, as well as from looking extremely far up. However, with the excellent vision she reasoned she shouldn't need to stare at her feet -or the sky- anyway.

Next she opened and closed her mouth, feeling the movement of her "face" with her hands. The movement was so realistic that it felt exactly like a real dog's would. The excitement of wearing such an amazing costume was almost too much. She was beginning to tremble and felt like yelling and dancing around like a little kid. She took a deep breath and let out a sigh, calming herself. Something on her head moved. She jumped, nearly peeling out of her own skin. Even before her heart began pounding though, there was another movement in the same place. Mack took another deep breath to calm herself and carefully felt

the top of her head with her fingers. As she did, "her" dog ear twitched, and her hand jerked back.

Above her, someone laughed, snapping her attention upwards. The ears moved again, focusing the same way her nose was pointing. The voices suddenly became sharper, if not a little louder. It was as if they were on the other side of the room rather than upstairs. Or was that just her imagination? Even with the ear holes, her hearing should be worse now, not better. She did her best to keep her attention on the voices upstairs and snapped her fingers next to where her ear lay buried inside the head. The sound was muffled, and if the hole was open to the outside, it did nothing to help move the sound. Excitedly she moved her hand up to in front of her pointed dog ears and snapped again. This time the concussion popped in her ear, almost painfully.

Well, she thought, that answers that.

She glanced around the basement briefly, wishing she had a mirror to look at herself with. She didn't expect to find one, so she wasn't disappointed in not finding one, and didn't bother getting up from where she knelt on the floor. Since she couldn't look at herself, her curiosity quickly turned to wondering where the rest of the costume was.

She crawled back over to the footlocker again, pretending to be a dog for a few minutes before feeling a little silly. She strained her eyes against the black, impatiently waiting for them to read just to the darkness. There was an oblong blob hanging over the edge of the footlocker, and she reached out with a hand to feel what it was.

True to her hopes, it felt like a tail. Oblong and furry, she could feel some sort of structure inside to give it shape and form. She wrapped her hand around it and gently tugged. To her surprise it didn't slide

freely. There was a possibility that it was caught on something, or more likely something else was laying on top of it.

The thought of feeling around for what was on top of it was quickly followed by that of spiders. She shook off the chills that ran over her skin before giving the tail a sharper pull. The tail came this time, and something fell to the ground. There was a loud clatter. A stack of unused honey frames slides off the stack of things to her right, crashing onto the floor in front of the washing machine.

The voices upstairs went quiet, and her heart pounded in her throat. She felt her ears turn towards the floor above her as she strained to hear what was going on above them. After what seemed like hours, though likely only a few seconds, Megan spoke.

"It was probably just the dog, rough housing. He loves to crash around. Don't worry though, there's nothing down there for him to hurt."

Mack hadn't realized that she was holding her breath, but she let it out in a sigh of relief. Her relatives soon went back to gawking over pictures and she turned her attention back to the tail. The reason it had been so hard to slide and made so much noise she realized was because it was attached to something large made from curved sheet metal. As she curiously lifted on of the hinged edges she realized that it was lined on one side with the same black polished rubber the hood was. The hourglass had a banana-shaped protrusion. She ran her fingers over it, feeling the alternating stripes of rubber and metal that ran from the base to the tip.

She was really thrown for a loop on this one. What kind of contraption was this, and how was one supposed to wear the tail attached to it? She picked it up, working the hinged sections. Near the top of the bottom half of the hourglass was an oval shaped hole a couple inches

wide. Above it, in the exact middle of the hourglass was another slim hinge. She picked it up by the top and bottom halves, letting the middle hinge fall in the center.

She gasped when she realized what it was. The tail was attached to a pair of metal underpants. Round latches like those on the hood and the collar adorn hinged leaves on either hip. She stared at the striped banana, now realizing where it was supposed to go. She was just starting to wonder how perverted this costume really was, when she remembered the ears on her "head", and she wondered if this was an unusual solution for making a animated tail?

Her excitement and curiosity eventually got the best of her. Her friends were pretty upright and strait-laced folks. They probably didn't even know about such perversions, the same adult attractions that she had recently discovered and had attracted her like a beetle to a streetlamp. Besides, if this tail acted as great as the ears did, then she wanted to at least try it out.

She quietly untied her shoelaces and slipped off her shoes and pants. Then, with a nervous look around, she slid her panties to the floor before kicking them to the side with her pants and shoes. She scooted the pile over to where her phone lay on the floor.

She knelt over the metal underwear before dribbling a little spit onto her fingertips. She wiped it on the tip of the banana-shaped protrusion before picking the contraption up. The phallus was instantly very slippery, as if it had previously lubed and had just dried out, but she payed no mind to it in her excitement. She held her breath, gasping as the cold object was pushed into her. She had to stop and wipe some more spit on it several times before she could work it all the way into herself.

Supporting the front plate against her she lifted the back half with the tail up and, holding both halves with her elbows, pushed the two leaves just over her hip together until the latch clicked. There were what appeared to be two large bands that hung from small metal pistons that attached to the very bottom of the garment. She wrapped one around her thigh, finding it to fit snugly but comfortably, snapping closed with another round-knob latch. After latching the other side there was a quiet beep and a soft red flash emitted from somewhere behind her. Instantly the tail seemed to come to life, lifting slightly from where it had hung lifeless and began to wag softly from side to side, as if to mimic her excitement. The feeling of the heavy intruder inside of her felt awkward, but not uncomfortable. Actually, she might even go so far as to say it felt... good?

She tried to slide her fingertips under the belt to touch the dildo and was surprised to find how snugly the contraption fit. Despite being made from rigid steel and lined with rubber she didn't feel any discomfort. It conformed to her body like a second skin, so much that she couldn't get more than the very tip of her finger between her and it. Well, she might have been able to if the thigh bands hadn't prevented her from spreading her legs all the way to either side.

She wiggled her torso around a bit, then crawled in a small circle. She had expected to feel some restriction from something so ridged but was surprised that it didn't pinch. It remained firmly clamped around her pelvis, artfully curved to allow her legs and torso free movement nearly any way they were meant to bend. Her tail began to wag again, the joy welling up in her at such a wonderful (albeit very bizarre and a little creepy) discovery! She wanted to romp in circles, barking and yipping with doggish happiness. She had enough self-control to remain silent, but she made a little play-bow before bounding to the side.

Her balled up "paw" of a hand crashed into something and sent it

skittering along the floor as her heart froze in her chest.

Above her she could still hear voices talking in the living room above, and she sighed, realizing that she had been holding her breath. Her attention turned back to the floor, and the collar she had just smacked.

She picked it up with renewed interest. Her friends obviously were into some very strange things, but none of them seem malicious. She tried her best to not think of who might have worn the equipment she now donned before her, but if her friend enjoyed dressing and acting as her husband's pet then who was she to judge? Besides, hadn't she wished herself countless times that she could be the family dog? How often had she envied Ernie, the Australian Shepherd mix, in his carefree life while she grew up?

She turned the collar over in her hands, holding it close to her face to see it better in the dim light. It seemed wider than she remembered, yet felt impressively light. A deep channel was cut along the inside diameter of the collar, matched by a much smaller, parallel channel immediately next to it. Inside the channels were several impressions she couldn't make out, but in the large channel near the back of the collar was a large hole that went all the way through the metal. She fingered the latch knob before sticking her finger through the hole in the back. An idea forming, she felt the diameter of the collar around the base of the mask and then compared that to the width of the channel. It almost seemed like this was supposed to fit around the base of the mask, but why? The heavy collar that was already around the hood was more than enough to strengthen the fabric and hold it securely closed. She ran her nails along the narrow channel and then it dawned on her. This mated and concealed the seam between what must have been the rest of the costume and the head, cleverly disguising it's self as a fancy dog collar!

She lifted the collar to her neck, eager to test her hypothesis. She fit the hole over the knob on the hood and was pleased to feel the collar of the hood slide neatly into the groove. She guided the collar around her neck until the ends met behind her neck again, closing with a small "click." She crawled around on all fours for a few more seconds, pretending to smell something on the ground before she giggled inwardly. She was acting every bit like a child, and she loved it.

Something large and dark loomed in front of her, and she picked her nose off the ground and looked up. What she had thought was a desk earlier she could now make out to be a very large sheet metal cage. Holes big enough to stick her thumb through ran along the top in several rows. The wood panel she had seen was actually a solid metal door, propped open with a small piece of wood. This must be the human "dog's" kennel, she realized.

She swallowed a chill of uneasiness and continued sniffing the ground, heading towards the open door. She felt like she had to prove something to the uneasiness that had suddenly sprouted, as if showing it up would make it go away. The floor was a durable fabric over some solid padding. It reminded her of the tumbling mats she had used in a gym class when she was growing up, but the fabric gave her a lot more traction than the slick surface of those mats. She carefully crawled almost all the way into the enclosure when her hand brushed against something furry in the black. She froze, her mind racing about what sorts of private and kinky things might lurk in the darkness of someone's private cage.

Gingerly she reached out a hand, slowly moving it forward until she felt the object again. It wasn't just her imagination, it was furry, much like the mask she was wearing. She picked it up, and while doing so brushed against something that felt the same. Puzzled, she carefully snatched the other item as well before backing out of the kennel. Out in the less-

dim darkness of the little area she had been in she turned the objects over in her hands. The bottoms had thick, coarse rubber soles, and each was tipped with four stubby plastic claws. About four inches from the "toes" the object terminated in a metal cuff, similar in design to that of the hood. Just below the cuff on opposite sides was a single dew claw, indicating which paw was for which side.

She lay them on the ground and stared at the paws for a moment. They definitely were not designed to go on her feet, which left her hands. Instead of gloves, however, these did not look like they left any freedom of movement in her fingers. The wearer's ability to grasp appeared to be zero to none, and she briefly wondered how someone was supposed to get them off again once they had them on.

A finger traced over the textured, hard rubber paw pad, and she remembered the knobs on everything. She touched one of the paws' pads to the other's latch and twisted, watching the knob turn easily with it. She shrugged. If it worked, why not? Once again, she found herself thinking about putting them on, as if each additional garment freed her that much more from the burdens of humanity.

Already this far, so why not? She thought with a sigh. Carefully she worked her fingers into a paw, feeling them stick to the familiar rubber lining that mimicked that of the hood. About halfway in she felt holes for individual fingers, and she carefully lined hers up before sliding them in. The paw forced her fingers to curl in on themselves, until she found her hand committed to grabbing some sort of stiff, spongy lump. She closed the cuff around her wrist and then put her "paw" on the ground. Her knuckles were on the ground side, smashed in between the pad she was forced to grasp in the palm of her hand and the sole. She tried crawling a little on the paw and noticed that the pad effectively cushioned her weight and was actually more comfortably than just her bare hand, though she wondered how comfortable it would be to be

unable to move her fingers for a length of time.

She rolled the other paw over and held it still while she tried to get her other hand in. It was difficult: the stickiness of the rubber lining and the slick fur on the outside made it nearly impossible to hold the glove still with her "paw" and shove her hand in at the same time. Finally, her fingers reached the holes, and she lifted it up to her muzzle. Grasping the cuff with the "mouth" of the hood, she was able to bite the cuff and work the mitt the rest of the way onto her hand. She closed the cuff with her paw and as it clicked shut, she silently hoped she'd be able to get it off again.

There was a commotion upstairs, and she felt her ears snap up to focus on the spot. There were a plethora of footsteps and chuckling. Lots of muffled voices together, making it difficult to hear what any particular one was saying. She caught the phrase "must be leaving" as what sounded now like a stampede of Hippos made their way through the living room to the front door.

Her heart stood in shock for a moment before she remembered her duties to the other organs.

It's ok, she thought to herself, they'll be outside talking for at least ten minutes, and it's probably just a few people. I've got plenty of time.

She pressed her left paw pad on the knob of her right paw and twisted. Nothing happened. She tried twisting the knob in the other direction, and felt the knob stay rigid as the pad slid over the top of it. She repositioned her paws and tried again, turning it in the first direction again until the knob bottomed out and she felt it slide against her pad.

She became aware of the quickening beat within her chest as she failed for a fourth time to open the latch that held her hand captive. She

repeated the same process on her left paw with the same result. Doing her best not to panic she sat on the ground and clamped the small knob the best she could with her feet and tried to twist it again. She felt the knob spin freely again before bottoming out. Once it stopped, she couldn't get it to turn further to matter how hard she pressed with her feet.

She held the knob in the back of the hood's maw and bit on it, trying to get a better grip on it. She felt the frame around her own jaws vibrate as the "teeth" slipped over the coarse pattern on the metal knob. In frantic desperation she shoved her whole wrist into the muzzle, cramming it until the maw had her own mouth forced wide open. She tried to get her own teeth on it and ended up biting her arm with the costume jaws in the process. Not to be deterred, especially as she heard only two sets of footsteps reenter the house above her, she tried again, working through the pain as the surprisingly sharp teeth dug into her arm. She ran her tongue over the knob in desperation to at least touch it with her mouth, and she froze.

Her tongue ran back over the face of the knob, as if it were unsure that it had really felt what she thought it had. Sure enough, there was the rectangular cut-out. She even felt the small metal door push in at the pressure of her tongue. Her heart plunged to her bowels and sat there, quivering in a dark corner. There was no doubt about it, in the middle of the knob there was a keyhole.

There was no removing the paws, nor anything else she was wearing. Even if she somehow managed to find something to cut the mitt away from the metal cuff that encircled her wrist, there would be no way to use it without the use of at least one hand.

"Have you seen Mack?" The voice was Tony's. She frantically glanced around the small area, searching for a place to hide, and escape route,

anything.

"No," Megan replied. "Last I saw her she was looking for the bathroom. Carl said he helped her dodge the album embarrassment but didn't know where she went. Her car is still here though, so I'm sure she's" her friend tapped her foot on the floor twice, "somewhere."

"You're kidding me. How? You're sure?"

"The garage side door's been sticking. Maybe it wasn't latched? And I know she was down there. I've heard something get knocked around, and then there was the sound of stuff falling over, but the dog is in the den."

Mack groaned, and she looked at her pile of clothes near her phone. She could still scoop them up into her arms, and perhaps her mouth. She was fairly certain she could still open the door, even with her paws. From there she could hide in the garage until nightfall, then escape outside and run. Eventually she might be able to find someone who could help, someone who could cut her out of the costume that now entrapped her.

She stood up, and briskly walked towards where her belonging's lay. She made it almost all the way to the pile when she was sharply jerked backwards off her feet by her neck. She tried to stop herself, but it was too late. The rest of her body kept moving forward, feet first, and she landed on the concrete floor with all the grace of a jumbo jet landing with the wheels up.

She groaned again, her body complaining from the impact. She scooted backwards, and the collar released the choking pressure it had on her neck. She suddenly remembered the pair upstairs and did her best to quiet her breath to listen. To her relief they didn't seem to have heard

anything.

"Well," said Tony's voice, "she didn't come running up here mortified, so she's probably taking a nap in the cool air. I doubt she even-

"Or," interjected her friend, "she got herself into trouble, and she *can't* come upstairs."

"That's even if she's still down there. She might have left and gone outside again. Who knows, maybe she's out walking trails."

Mack rolled over and got back on her hands and knees. She reached up with a paw behind her neck, and felt it catch on something thin extending from the back of it. She crawled a few "steps" away from her belongings, giving the line slack enough until she could turn around and hook it with a paw, bringing it around to in front of her face.

It was a cable, fairly thin in gauge, and coated in black plastic. It ran towards the cage, vanishing into the bowels of its black interior. Her heart kicked into overdrive again. She was a rat, scurrying around in a place she didn't belong, and now she was caught in a trap that wasn't even set.

There were voices overhead, but she was too caught up in her predicament to pay any attention to them. Suddenly there was the sound of the door at the top of the staircase opening, and a single pair of footsteps coming down the stairs.

Mackenzie gave her pile of belongings one last longing look. Her underwear and shorts were displayed. She wished in vain that she could replace it with anything else of hers.

The footsteps reached the bottom stair and she gave a panicked glance

around before diving into the only hiding place available. As she plunged into the safety of the darkness, she felt her foot strike something hard and wooden, knocking it loose. There was a solid "CLACK" and with it what little light there had been vanished from the cage.

She spun around, only to find the view through the cage door replaced by a solid sheet of black, perforated by a triple row of quarter sized holes near the top. She could hear shoes on the concrete, and she peered out the holes near the top to see what was going on--to watch her shame and doom unfold.

The messy hair of her friend's mate could be seen bobbing along the top of the honey supers. There was a snap, and with it the entire basement was flooded with what Mack felt was a brilliant light. Everything was exposed in the light, and she was slightly glad the cage door was closed, preserving what little remained of her modesty.

She prayed he would search the rest of the basement first, or at least take a few seconds to glance around for her before walking her way. He didn't. Instead, she watched in horror as he stopped at the gap and looked at her shoes and clothes on the floor. He nudged her cell phone with his foot before stepping through the opening.

She watched him cast a glance towards the footlocker. He pressed his lips together before his eyes moved on to the cage. She quickly scooted back, as far into the corner as she could in order to hide in the dark, but the man's eyes looked directly at her, as if he had no difficulty penetrating the darkness, as if nothing could be hidden. He gave a tired, sad sign. The kind a father gives when some great disappointment comes from a child. She sank lower. If her face could be seen, it would have been a brilliant red. Even though the lower half of her was all but naked the costume was suddenly oppressively hot.

He walked up to the side of the kennel and crouched down, his face close to the holes. When he spoke, his low voice sounded heavy.

"You knew better."

"Plea-" She had meant to beg for forgiveness, or maybe just to be released, but she didn't make it past the first syllable of "Please" before pain exploded from her throat. Her muscles convulsed in blinding quick spasms, slamming her neck like Joe Louis on a speed bag. She collapsed to the ground, pawing at her throat. After a couple of agonizing seconds, the pain stopped, and she was left gasping for breath on the cage floor.

"You're a dog Mack, your hood won't let you make any noises that don't fit what it considers 'canine'. We'll talk about this in a bit, but know that you are safe, and that neither Megan nor I will harm you." He stood back up and turned, then glanced back at the cage and let out a short "Heh" half under his breath. "Megan was saying she felt the house was too empty without a second..."

He calmly walked back to the stairs and began to climb them again.

"Megan!" He called, "Remember how you wanted another dog?"

The End