

*Current Time – Now*

“You read this stuff a lot?” His wry smile mocked her while she found the musk from his body diametrically pleasing. He knew there would be no answer to his question as he turned the book over several times in his hand, then tossed it absently on the bedside table. The book skidded over the table and fell to the floor out of sight in the dark corner.

He stood and paced in the small bedroom, smacked himself on the right hip as he walked. “You really don’t like me very much. Know how I can tell? Want to know how I can tell? Just give me a nod. You don’t need to talk, even if you could...Oh, Christ!”

He stopped pacing, pulled a tissue from the box on the bed table, and wiped her nose. He threw the tissue on the floor in disgust. “Stop with the sniffing and the runny nose mess. Got me feeling like a nursemaid. I’ll let you go in a bit. I’ve got some thinking and talking to do. Then, I’ll let you go. Not much longer now, so try to relax.”

He looked down at the young woman on the bed, slowly ran his left hand through her golden hair, saw the redness around her eyes and cheeks. Gently he guided his fingers along her forehead and sat next to her.

An involuntary tautness came to her body but she felt no panic.

The man fingered the edges of the wide white tape that covered her lips and suddenly stripped it away.

The girl gasped, her eyes widened, and she began to open her mouth.

“Now, listen up,” the man said as his right hand closed over her lips, “I took the tape off but you can’t yell and scream. You got me? Blink if you do.”

The girl blinked and let out a deep sigh. “I would never scream and yell... you should know that. Can I have some water?” she asked weakly as the man took his hand away.

“In a minute, I’ll get you water, but now you have to listen. Will you listen to me, Marcie? I don’t want to put this tape back on you.”

“Yes,” her voice barely audible. “Can you please untie me? I hurt so badly.”

“Maybe... Yes, I will, but you have to listen first. Will you listen?”

“Yes, I told you I would,” her voice weak and just audible.

The man hesitated there on the bed for several seconds, stared steadily into the pleading eyes of the young woman.

“Ah, what the hell, I’ll get your water now.”

The man left the room quickly, and the woman called Marcie closed her eyes and breathed deeply for the few seconds he was gone. As best she could she slowly arched and moved her body and wondered how long all of this would last. She in fact wondered how all of this had really begun.

When he returned, he stood silently in the doorway with a tall glass of water and watched the girl’s torpid stretching of her body, her face wrinkled with the aches of her moves. There was no attempt to escape. She was only after some degree of comfort from the bindings. He came to a decision. Fateful or not, he had to do it.

He hurried to the bed, placed the glass of water on the bedside table. “Okay, I’m going to take away the bindings, but you have got to promise me you won’t try to get away from me...not until you’ve heard me out...not until you have completely heard me out. Do you understand me? Do you promise? You won’t have to try to escape when I’m finished. I’ll let you go. Do you promise, Marcie?”

“Yes, Billy,” came her soft broken reply, “I promise. I don’t want to escape from you. I wish you knew that. Just let me have my body back.”

Billy undid the bindings from the posts of the bed, then from her arms and ankles. When he laid the white rubber-corded bindings in four separate loop piles on the floor next to the bed, he held out the glass of water. He held the glass while Marcie squirmed, turned, and he could hear the sounds of her body responding to their release from bondage.

For a while Marcie lay curled in a fetal position on the bed, silent, moaning in near orgasmic release. Finally, she began to unfold herself, limb by limb, opening and closing her fingers, moving the various joints, until she ended up with her back against the headboard of the bed. Her short gold and lavender dress hiked up to show the gold bikini panties, and she made no attempt in her weakness to hide them. Some of her previous fear had left her. An uncertain calmness spread through her.

“Here, drink some water, Marcie.”

She took the glass, spilled some drops on her bared thighs, and sipped cautiously at first, then gulped the water down. She sat uncertainly holding the empty glass until he took it from her.

“You want more?”

She meekly, negatively shook her head, and painfully raised her arms above her head two times. She then leaned again against the headboard.

Billy moved the chair closer to the bed just a few feet from where Marcie now sat. With his nearness, her legs were drawn tightly together and she pulled at her dress to hide her gold silk panties. It was more a gesture than a concern. He looked in her eyes softly and steadily until the silence between them prompted him to speak: “You’re so damned lovely, Marcie, I...”

“Billy, why...”

He didn't allow her to finish the question. His mood subtly shifted, as though reminding himself that he could not go back to where his thoughts were taking him. "You are to listen, Marcie, remember?"

She nodded her assent, but added, "I'm queasy, Billy. Can I have some crackers?"

"When I'm finished you get your crackers. The water will hold you. Now, be quiet and listen to me..."

"Just a few crackers, Billy, that's all, and another glass of water... Please! I'm feeling nauseous. Maybe it'll settle my stomach."

He sighed, blinked his eyes, shook his head and almost smiled. He got up, grabbed the empty glass off the night stand, and left the room. Going out the bedroom door, he looked back at Marcie and gave her a thoughtful nod.

He returned shortly with a paper napkin holding several saltines and the glass of water. Putting the water on the bedside table he handed her the napkin and soda crackers. "Now, eat your crackers and don't talk. I've got to get this said..."

He watched her daintily nibble at the crackers, pausing to swallow with some effort. She almost choked with her first swallow, but he handed her the water to help force the food down. She managed to finish the crackers, more water, and appeared to be feeling better.

Then Marcie closed her eyes for a moment, reopened them, and leaned back against the headboard. "Thank you, Billy," she muttered weakly as she tried to clear her throat of any lingering crackers. "I'll be quiet now and let you talk."

He bowed his head briefly as he picked a start point for his monologue. "You know none of this had to happen, and it's so stupid to even hear me say that! Christ, give me a time machine. Let me go back and get a second chance at all this... But, damn, it did happen! You, I, Jerry, Albert, the frigging finger of fate. You're

beautiful, Marcie, and you know it, and you use it. You drove me crazy with it. You wanted too damned much from Jerry and me, and when you got it you turned it all inside out and made this happen...”

“But, Billy, you know...”

“Shush, Marcie. I’ve got to get it out, so be quiet. That night, after the big dinner banquet, that night began this whole thing. Jerry drunk, you and creepy Albert half-drunk and playful there in our little corner of the Eastside Tennis Club Lounge, and, yeah, I had a little buzz as well. It was Jerry, feeling his booze, who was dredging up the ‘fun game’ he got from the comedian. He was like a silly schoolboy about his idea. I can still see the wrinkled look on your face when he brought it up, the way you looked sort of embarrassed, the way you looked at all of us at the table. You gave him that, ‘Oh, Jerry, don’t be silly’ look. You put on a good show. Albert was the only one who didn’t have a clue. He was still up for more fun and games with you...the bastard! Guess I could have lived with it all, Marcie, but your part of setting me up...”

“But, I didn’t, Billy...”

“Shush, I’m talking here. Yeah, maybe I could have lived with it all until my ass was on the line, until I was the one to take the fall for something that was all ‘Swahili’ to me. Me, I was a really ripe country pumpkin ready for the pie bowl.”

“But it wasn’t that way, Billy. You have to believe me. It was Albert.”

“Bull, Marcie, Albert hardly knew what was happening.”

“That was all an act, Billy. Albert knew much more than he let on. It was his evil doing all along. The little flirtatious business between Albert and me was all just fun and games, something we started at the beginning of my employment there. There was never anything serious between us.”

“Funny how you didn’t sing these songs when I was passed out on the floor, blood all over me. In the end you ran up here to your new cabin.”

“Billy, I thought you were dead. Please believe me! Albert was the only ringmaster for that little ‘solve the murder’ game. He used Jerry just like he used you. I didn’t trust him but I also didn’t know what he was up to.”

“You really expect me to believe that? After all this crap I’ve been through, you’re just going to tell me that this was all Albert. You, sweet little Marcie, had no part in it at all. You’re something else! You want to be tied and taped again until I finish?”

“You don’t have to finish, Billy. I know you didn’t kill the little girl. I know you didn’t kill Jerry. And, you didn’t kill Albert and his wife... I killed Albert after he killed his wife and kid and came after me!”

“Jesus! Will you still use me like this? Have I been in a Grimm fairy tale all along? Do you have not an ounce of decency and feeling in you, Marcie? I’m eager to tell you this story of mine, and you’re telling me I have no story to tell. I was there, remember? The little girl, the woman, Jerry, and Albert, they were all there dead when I regained some senses. Their blood was all over me. They were all dead!”

Billy paused as the image of the little girl came and somehow got stuck in his throat. The memory quakes made him turn briefly away from Marcie. He shuttered and almost cried. Then his brain dipped and swooned for a moment. Maybe some of the brain action was coming from the old air force injury.

“Billy, it was Albert. He easily manipulated Jerry into bringing up the ‘game.’ He manipulated you. He manipulated all of us. That’s the truth, I swear it!”

“Christ, Marcie, don’t do this to me.”

“I swear to you it is true.”

“So why did you run, Marcie? Where were you when I came out of my drugged daze, blood all over me, bodies everywhere?”

“I was afraid, Billy! My God! I thought you were dead! Forgive me for being so weak and terrified. Albert was still making some small movements on the floor. I was afraid – and I’m ashamed that I left you. With all the blood on you, I was sure you were dead. I know better now. I know that Albert made sure you had blood all over you. That had to be his plan, Billy, but I didn’t know his plan. I swear to you, I did not know his plan.”

“Where did you get the gun to kill Albert? Were there guns all over the place?”

“Jerry gave it to me to carry, just in case there was any trouble – he worried about me after he got beat up after that merger meeting. Look, Billy, everyone was dead, or, I thought so, when I came into that room. Shock overtook me and I saw Albert standing over the dead girl on the bed. There was a gun next to him on the bed. He saw me, started to pick up the gun, and I shot him two, three times. He fell, twitched a couple times, and I ran... I’m sorry, Billy, but that’s the truth. I just had to be out of that room. I’m a coward but I would never have left had I known you were alive.”

“Why did you run here to the cabin?” Why not run to the police?”

“Jerry had just gotten this place. Nobody knew about it. People do stupid things in a crisis. The cabin was my first thought...just to be away from everything, where no one knew where I was. There was just so much to explain and I wasn’t up to it. I ran to the car and drove up here. All I’ve said, Billy, I swear it’s all the truth.”

“Are you also going to tell me you love me? Even now, when I’ve had you imprisoned here for all these hours?”

“Yes, I’m going to tell you I love you, because I do.”

“That didn’t seem the case a short while ago, with the tears, the runny nose, and the fear in your eyes. You thought I was some kind of monster.”

“Damn it, Billy, my body was hurting. My brain was working overtime. The tears were not so much from fear as from sadness at seeing you this way.”

“God, Marcie, if I thought you meant any of what you’re saying, your words would take some of the pain away. It would maybe bring back some sanity I fear I’ve lost. It would...”

Suddenly, there were loud crashing sounds and harsh voices coming from behind the closed bedroom door.

Instinctively, Billy rose from his chair with wild eyes, mouth agape, and moved quickly toward the only window in the small room.

Amid a chorus of shrieks the door burst open, and Billy felt a jolting sting to the back of his head as he tried to exit the window. He fell limp and unconscious to the floor.