



Holy Frigging Matrimony: A Tangled Series Short Story (Tangled #1.5)

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Category: Romance, Young Adult, Humorous

Description: Marriage: the final frontier. Steven went first. He was kind of our test subject. Like those monkeys that NASA sent off into space in the fifties, all the while knowing they'd never make it back.

And now another poor rocket is ready to launch.

But this isn't just any posh New York wedding. You've seen my friends, you've met our families, you know you're in for a treat. Everyone wants their wedding to be memorable. This one's going to be un-frigging-forgettable.

Holy Frigging Matrimony takes place about a year after Tangled's end and is from Drew's POV.

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Page 1

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Chapter One

I SIT IN A HIGH-BACKED CHAIR in the corner of the bedroom in a suite at The Plaza hotel, flipping through the advertisement-packed pages of Bride Magazine. Female-targeted ads are ridiculous. I don't care how "flawless" looking the makeup claims to be; if you don't already look like a Victoria's Secret model, no cover-up in the world is gonna make you look like one.

Another thing I don't get—everyone always raves about The Plaza, but the room is wall to wall florals—the bedding, the upholstery, the framed pictures. It looks like it was designed by a deranged Mistress Mary, quite contrary-obsessed grandmother. I shift in the chair, trying to get comfortable, but the seat was obviously made to be "looked at" not "sat in." I give up on the magazine and wait.

Waiting for what, you ask?

For Kate, of course.

She's behind the closed bathroom door, probably taking a bath. And she doesn't know I'm here yet. It's going to be a surprise. A lust-filled, haven't-seen-her-in-twenty-four-hours-and-I-can't-wait-to-get-inside-her kind of surprise.

You have no idea what's going on right now, do you? Well, hang on; you'll figure it out shortly.

Because the bathroom door opens, and Kate steps into the bedroom. And like a dog who hasn't seen his master all day, my lonely c*ck lifts its head at the sight of her.

She holds a champagne glass filled with bubbly, orange liquid. Her hair is twisted up in a high knot, while delicate, curling strands brush against her damp neck. She's wearing a short, red silk robe that leaves little to the imagination—which is exactly why I bought it for her.

I smile when she sees me. Her beguiling brown eyes widen. “Drew?” She glances at the door. “What are you doing here? You're not supposed to be here.”

“I know. I snuck in. I'm stealthy like that.”

She steps towards me. “If Dee sees you, she's going to freak out.”

I scowl at the mention of Kate's psychotic best friend, whose mission in life is to interfere with mine. “Screw Dee. I wanted to see you.”

Last night was the first night we've spent apart since Kate moved in with me. Now, you might think that one night shouldn't be that big a deal—but you're wrong. Ask any recovering drug addict which night of detox was the worst? When they were hungriest for a fix? The initial hours of withdrawal are always the hardest.

Kate smiles forgivingly, but reminds me, “The guys aren't supposed to see the girls before the reception. It's a tradition.”

I stand up and pull Kate flush against me, because seeing her, smelling her vanilla- and lavender-scented skin, makes touching her a must. “It's a stupid f**king tradition. And that's not even accurate—the actual rule is the groom isn't allowed to see the bride before the ceremony. Delores just made up this shit up to make me miserable.”

Are you starting to figure it out now?

Kate giggles. “Because everything is always about you, right?”

“Well...yeah.”

I lean in to kiss her lips, but she leans back. “You can’t stay here.”

I counter her dodge with a move towards her neck. I kiss and suck the sensitive skin above her collarbone. Delicious.

I mumble against her, “Sure I can.”

Kate tilts her head with a sigh, giving me more room to taste, even while she argues, “And when Dee finds out you’re here?”

“If Delores comes in this room, she’s going to get an eyeful.” I chuckle. “Maybe she’ll go blind. Or she’ll learn something—lucky Matthew.”

Kate sees the wisdom of my words. Or else she’s just as horny as I am. Her body relaxes against mine and her arms tighten around my shoulders, giving in.

Victory is mine.

My hand slides beneath her robe, palming her soft, gorgeous tit. And I whisper, “Tell me you missed me last night.”

She pushes against my hand, wanting more. “I did.”

I trail light, tickling kisses down her chest and bend my knees to reach my target. I rub my face against the velvet flesh of her breast, breathing lightly on her aroused nipple. “Tell me you thought about me, Kate.”

“Mmm...I always think about you.”

I reward her words with the flick of my tongue. I lave her gorgeous nipple, then suck it into my mouth. Kate holds onto my head for dear life. And just as my hand makes its move up her thigh...

There's a knock, and a voice comes from outside the bedroom door.

A grating voice, like the one those Satan-worshipping teens from the '80's probably heard when they played their heavy metal records backwards.

“Kate? Hey, Katie, did you fall asleep in there?”

Delores thought it would be a great idea for her and Kate to share the two bedroom suite for the night. Their mothers shared an identical one a few doors down.

Kate tenses and I close my eyes, praying she'll go the hell away.

But not surprisingly, my prayers go unanswered. The doorknob jiggles. “Kate, open up.”

I get in one last drag on Kate's tit, then release it with a pop. She closes her robe and drags me towards the door, pushing me to the corner so I'll be hidden when it opens. Then she breathes deeply, brushes her hair out of her face, and cracks the door open just enough to see Delores.

Kate tells her, “I'm here. I was just taking a bath—what's up?”

“The photographer's on his way. Get your buns moving—he'll be here in an hour.”
Delores pauses, then asks, “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, of course. I’m fine.”

Suspicion swims in Dee’s tone. “You look flushed. Why are you all flushed?”

Kate is good at almost everything she does. Except lying. She sucks at that.

She waves her hand at her face. “I...I don’t know.”

“Were you masturbating?” Dee teases.

Oh, to all the angels and saints—how I wish she f**king was.

Watching Kate get herself off—in front of me—would be epic. It’s a major fantasy. But she’s hesitant, self-conscious. I’m trying to get her comfortable with the idea. Two birds, one stone and all that.

For guys, it’s a phenomenal turn on. So if you ladies are looking to spice things up a bit? Try a little self-diddling. Trust me—your audience will be begging for an encore.

Kate scoffs, “No, Dee, I wasn’t masturbating.”

Delores still isn’t convinced. “Are you having phone sex with the Goatfucker?”

Phone sex.

Also at the top of my to-do list.

“I told you to stop calling Drew that,” Kate scolds.

“I know—you’re right. I can’t help it. I picture his face and it just comes out of my mouth.”

Now Kate sounds impatient. “Okay—yes, alright? I’m having phone sex with Drew.”

“Eww! Why did you tell me? I don’t want to know that.”

Kate sighs. “Then why did you even ask? Look Dee, you worry about you right now, okay? I’ll make sure I’m ready when the photographer gets here.”

Begrudgingly, Delores says, “Alright. Your mom’s almost dressed, if you need any help.” Then she suggests, “Hey—maybe you should leave him hanging? Dipwad’s balls could be our something blue.”

“Goodbye, Delores.” Kate closes the door.

After we hear Dee close the door to her own bedroom, Kate locks ours and turns to me. “She’s onto us. I’m going to have to make sure she’s completely occupied before you sneak out. You might be here a while.”

I grin. “Oh, no...however will we ever fill the time?”

Kate turns and walks towards the forgotten chair. The silk robe sways teasingly, revealing the barest glimpse of her sumptuous ass.

“You’ll be filling the time perusing Bridal Magazine, while I get dressed. Not all of us can look presentable in five minutes flat.”

I shrug. “Seven if I need to shave.”

“Regardless. There’s no time to mess around—even for a quickie.”

I stalk towards her. “A—there’s always time to mess around. B—it depends on your definition of quickie. My interpretation happens to be how quickly I can make you

scream my name. Past experience has shown I can make that happen pretty damn fast.”

For the first time, I notice the lace undergarments laid out on top of the dresser. A sheer, white bustier and matching string thong. I motion to them with my chin, “No garters?”

I’m not the biggest fan of lingerie, but if you’re going to wear it, garters are always a nice touch.

Kate pulls her hair free from its bun and shakes it out. Shiny dark strands fall down around her, making her look bed-rolling wild and accentuating the refined beauty of her dark eyes, pert nose, and sweetly kissable lips.

She answers, “No, no garters. You’ll understand why when you see the dress--” She stops, her expression panicked. She glances towards the garment bag hanging next to the bed. “You didn’t look at my dress, did you?”

I’m still distracted by Kate’s disheveled hair. I imagine running my hands through its soft waves, then wrapping it around my fingers for a tug while I’m buried deep inside her.

That’s why my voice sounds less than convincing when I answer, “No, I didn’t look.”

Kate points her finger at me, like a teacher reprimanding a student. “Tell the truth, Drew.”

“What am I? Ten years old?”

“Emotionally? Sometimes. But that’s beside the point. Did you peek at my dress?”

I reach around her waist and press our lower halves together. “No, baby, I didn’t look at your dress.”

Kate settles in to my embrace, toying with the neck of my t-shirt as she explains, “I’m glad you didn’t look, because I want you to be surprised. You’re going to lose it when you see me in it. It’ll be your new favorite dress.”

I kiss her forehead, and work my way down over her temple, across her cheek. “My favorite dress of yours will always be...the one on the floor.”

I nip at her lower lip as my hands skim the silk from her shoulders. “Like this robe.” Kate lowers her arms, allowing me to slide it off her completely until it pools around her feet. “It’s my f**king favorite.”

Then I cup her jaw in one hand and kiss her fully. Deeply. I waste no time in sliding my tongue against hers, which eagerly joins mine in the sensuous give and take.

Between kisses I whisper, “You taste like champagne.”

She giggles as I move to her shoulder, scraping it with my teeth and then soothing the love bite with my lips.

“It’s a mimosa. I had a few with breakfast and some more in the bath.”

I push her knees open with my leg and caress the firm flesh of her ass, before dragging her up onto my thigh. The friction makes her moan. She pulls my head back down to her lips for another mimosa-flavored kiss.

Holding her steady, I move us back to the bed. I slide her down my leg and lay her in the middle of the rumpled sheets. Then I pull my t-shirt over my head and push my gym shorts to the floor.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 4:36 am

My ever-enthusiastic dick stands hard and thick. Kate leans up on her elbows, devouring me with her eyes. Her cheeks are tinged pink with desire, her lips parted, and her thighs rub together in anticipation. Fucking stunning. With a needy lick of her lips, her gaze settles on my c*ck as she waits for me to make the next move.

And I think about how hot it'd be to see Kate touch herself. Maybe she needs the 'I show you mine, you show me yours' approach? I take my dick in my hand, and stroke it up and down. Kate follows my every move, mesmerized. After a few more slow pumps I say, "You know, I've never really liked champagne. But maybe I've just been drinking it from the wrong glass. We should test that theory."

I pick up Kate's glass from the bedside table and sit beside her on the bed. She reaches out and replaces my hand with her own, stroking me expertly, caressing the tip with her thumb.

And I can't help but groan.

I raise the glass over her, tip it slightly, and pour the cold liquid between her br**sts. She gasps and her hand tightens around me in the most fantastic way.

Then I lean forward, lapping at the champagne infused juice. Over her sternum, around the supple base of her perfect frigging tits, I lick every drop, tasting the drink—and her. It's a heady combination.

"Mmm...good stuff."

And as much as I love the feel of her hand on me, I take Kate's wrists and bring both

hands over her head, so she's lying flat on her back. Kneeling on the bed, I lean over her and dribble more of the mimosa onto the peaks of her br**sts and suckle hard, flicking at the nipple with my tongue—first one, than the other.

She writhes on the bed and moans, a needy, desperate sound that spurs me on.

A few more drops are poured on her stomach. Kate tenses reflexively, but relaxes again when my warm mouth glides across her skin, following the path of the sweet liquid.

Her moans turn to gasps as I lick and suck my way around her adorable belly button, then down to her thighs. And her gasps turns to high pitched whimpers as I nibble on the flesh of her thighs, inching ever higher.

Kate likes to get creative with the p**sy grooming. Today it's a barely-there landing strip, which has me practically shaking to sink my face into it.

I don't make myself wait long.

I hold the glass above her and pour the rest of the liquor between her spread thighs. Then I cover her with my mouth, sucking and licking, lapping up every trickle like an alcoholic consuming his last indulgence before going cold turkey.

I feel light headed from the taste, the fragrance, the smooth, slick feel of her p**sy against my tongue. I moan against her flesh and Kate cries out in carnal f**king joy.

I bring two fingers to her cl*t and rub it in firm, quick circles. Kate's h*ps rise and push instinctively as she gets closer, in time with my tongue as it pushes in and out.

Her thighs squeeze my head and I grip her h*ps hard, lifting her against my mouth. She stiffens as one last, long, serrated moan escapes her lips.

Then she goes slack in my hands. Spent and satisfied.

And it still gets me. The undiluted gratification of going down on her. Of giving her bliss. But as happy as I am that I made her come, my own hedonistic craving pushes at me, driving me like the roar of a crowd at a college football game.

Go, go, go!

I rise to my knees and hook my arms under Kate's calves, spreading her wide. Then I bury myself fully in one powerful push.

There's nothing better than this—nothing on earth that feels this perfect. That first thrust, when my c*ck is enveloped by Kate's tight, wet, warmth—it's rapture so intense, it borders on pain.

My head rolls back on my neck as I savor the feeling. Then I pull my h*ps back, sliding against her grip, and drive back in.

Using her legs for leverage, I f**k her hard, but slow. When I'm buried to the hilt I rock my h*ps side to side, rubbing my pelvis against Kate's sweet spot, until she's recovered from her first orgasm and climbing towards number two.

With each move of my hips, Kate cries out in harsh breaths.

“Yes!”

“Drew!”

“More!”

The pleasure tingles and builds, gathering low in my stomach. And when Kate arches

her back and clamps down around me, I push forward a final time and pulse inside her as I groan and curse.

Out of breath, I collapse on top of her, and she presses her lips to mine in an open-mouthed, chest-heaving kiss. Afterward, I turn my head and pant against her neck.

With a small laugh she says, “Wow. So I guess you really missed me last night, huh?”

I smile. “What gave me away?”

I roll to the side and Kate snuggles against me. Once her heartbeat slows, she complains, “Now I have to take another bath. You made me sweaty.”

I run my fingers through her hair. “I like you sweaty. You should stay like this.”

Her nose wrinkles. “I smell.”

I press my face against her neck and inhale dramatically. “You smell like sweat and sex...and me. It’s hot. Eau de Cum kicks Chanel Number Five’s ass.”

For a guy, there’s something primordial about a woman covered in your scent—it’s the most primitive way of staking your claim. Of showing every other peckerhead that a woman is very much taken. It’s animalistic, sure, but that doesn’t make it any less arousing.

“That’s gross. I’m taking another bath.”

I chuckle. “Whatever makes you happy.”

Plus, it’ll give me a reason to make her sweaty again. Another reason.

After five minutes of customary cuddling, Kate lifts her head from the pillow of my chest and orders, “You have to get the hell out of here.”

My brow furrows. “Kicking me out already? I feel so used.”

She laughs.

I say, “I see how it is. You only want me for my body.”

Mimicking my earlier tone, Kate replies, “Well...yeah. Although your mind can be mildly entertaining.”

I smack her ass with an open palm.

Slap

She squeaks and jumps out of bed, out of my reach.

“Get dressed.” My clothes are thrown at my head as Kate slips into her robe and tiptoes out the door to check if the coast is clear.

I’m dressed by the time she comes back in.

She holds out her hand. “Come on, Dee’s in her room. You’re good to go.”

I pull on her hand until she crashes against me. “I don’t wanna go. I want to defile the prestigious Plaza Hotel by having you ride me like a slutty mermaid in the bathtub.”

Kate shakes her head. “Not today. I’ll see you in a few hours.”

I sigh. “Fine.” I brush my lips against hers quickly. “I’ll be counting the minutes.”

Kate pinches me, because she knows I'm being sarcastic. "I'll see you downstairs."

"There's going to be a lot of people downstairs. How am I going to find you?"

She smiles. "You won't be able to miss me. I'll be the one walking down the aisle to you. Wearing...silver."

Chapter 2

MARRIAGE.

The final frontier.

Steven went first. He was kind of our test subject. Like those monkeys that NASA sent off into space in the fifties, knowing they'd never make it back alive.

And now Matthew has followed in his footsteps.

What? You didn't think I was getting married today, did you?

No frigging way. I've barely got the boyfriend thing down. I'm not ready to tackle the title of husband. Don't want to bite off more than I can chew. Matthew, on the other hand, is just crazy enough to give it a try.

And the proposal—now, there's a f**king story. Matthew had this whole romantic thing going. Rented out an entire restaurant for just him and Delores. He even had a string quartet playing music in the background. But when the big moment came? He was so nervous, he hyperventilated.

And then he passed the f**k out.

Nailing his head on the table on the way down.

Delores freaked—Kate said she was never good with blood. She called 911. And even though he swore up and down that he was fine, she made him go to the hospital in the ambulance.

That's when things got interesting.

Because hospitals have certain protocols they have to follow. One of them involves hospital gowns. So when they wheeled Matthew in, a bloody bandage on his head, they started to cut his clothes off. Then they put all of his belonging in a big plastic bag—including the two hundred thousand dollar diamond ring he'd purchased for the occasion.

The idea of losing that ring cured Matthew of his cold feet real frigging quick. So he hops off the gurney, grabs the ring, runs out into the ER, and drops to his knees in front of Delores. And that's how he popped the question.

In the middle of the god damn emergency room with his ass hanging out the back of a hospital gown as bare as the day he was born.

Naturally, Delores said yes. And two days later, the four of us jetted to Vegas for the Elvis Chapel Special.

Crazy? Sure. But it kind of fits, don't you think?

Anyway, we come back to the city, where Matthew announces to his parents that he's a married man. I've never seen Estelle Fisher so animated in my life. She started bawling her eyes out, sobbing about how she missed her only child's wedding.

I felt bad, so I can only imagine how shitty Matthew felt. Making your mother cry?

That guilt is like the sixth circle of hell.

Frank, being a man of few words, just looked at his son and said, “Fix this.”

But his eyes said so much more. They said, ‘You may be thirty years old, but I will still kick your ass up and down Park Avenue if you don’t make this right real motherf**king quick.’

And so here we are.

At Matthew and Delores’s grand New York City wedding reception, courtesy of Frank and Estelle. No expense was spared—very New York high society. It’s supposed to be elegant. Classy. And it is.

Except for Delores’s dress, of course. Have you ever seen Madonna’s Like a Virgin video?

Perfect—then you know just what Delores looks like.

Cocktail hour—hands down, it’s the best part of a wedding. Exceeded only by that garter thing. I’ve always been an excellent garter catcher, and there’s no better way to get to know a chick than sticking your hands up her dress as high as you can go.

But that was then. My now is much better.

Because I’ve got the hottest girl in the room sitting next to me—and I can stick my hands up her dress anytime I want.

Now that Kate is wearing her dress, I understand why she said garters wouldn’t work. It’s silver and short. I’m talking micro-mini. And strapless. Every time I look at her, I can’t help but think about how easy it will be to get it off. And her shoes? You

remember my thing for shoes, right? They're very high, very strappy, open toed and...

Amelia Warren, Delores' mother, stands up from the table. She's thin, with shoulder length, feathered 80's style, strawberry blond hair. And like her daughter after her—she's nuts. When I say nuts I mean that in the most literal way possible.

For Kate's birthday, Amelia sent her a huge, heavy, natural crystal necklace harvested from the caves of Perigord, because she believes they'll protect Kate's lungs from the city air pollution.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 4:36 am

It's a shame, how stringent the involuntary commitment protocols in this country have become.

Oh—and Amelia doesn't like me at all. Don't know why. I only met her once before this blessed event, and we didn't speak more than five words to each other. I wonder if the withering glares she throws my way have anything to do with her nephew.

“Oh look—Billy's here! He made it!”

Speak of the Devil and he doth appear. I glance over to the doorway where, sure enough, the ball-licker just waltzed in.

Yep, still hate him. He's like genital herpes—he just won't go the f**k away.

He's been living in LA for the last eight months and much to my displeasure, he and Kate still talk. She says they're just—say it with me—'friends'—but I don't buy it. I mean, sure, for Kate, they're just friends. That I believe. But for a guy? No way.

The “friend” card is one of the oldest hook-up tricks in the book. Right up there with ‘I think I might be gay.’ He's just biding his time—waiting for me to screw up so he can be the shoulder Kate cries on. Then when she's all vulnerable and weak, he'll stick his tongue down her throat.

Not gonna happen. Not on my f**king watch.

He makes his way over to our table and Kate goes up to him. They hug, and I grind my teeth together.

“Hi, Katie.”

“Hey, Billy.”

Pardon me while I swallow the vomit that just surged into my mouth.

“Dee Dee’s going to be so excited to see you. I thought you had a show?”

His smile is smug. Slick. Like a used car salesman. “I had my agent move some things around.” Then he looks Kate over, from head to toe.

And I want to simultaneously cover her with a tablecloth and scoop his eyeballs out with a coffee spoon.

“You look amazing.”

She tilts her head to the side with a smile, “Aww. You’re so sweet. You look great, too.”

She’s actually stomaching this bullshit? Are you f**king kidding me?

I clear my throat and stand up behind her. “Warren.”

“Evans.”

Our eyes clash—like a lion staring down a hyena—and Kate is the fresh kill we’re both looking to eat.

That’s when my mom comes over. “Kate, could you be a dear and help me find your mother? The photographer would like to take a few more family shots outside before the sun goes down.”

Kate's dark eyes cloud over with concern. They dart between the two of us nervously. "Ah...sure, Anne. No problem."

"Thank you, sweetheart."

Kate looks at each of us pointedly. "I'll be right back." As she turns to go, she stops at my shoulder and whispers, "Be good, Drew."

I smirk. "That's not what you wanted this morning."

Her smile's tight and there's warning in her eyes. "It's what I want now."

I tuck a piece of her hair back behind her ear. "I'm always good, baby."

She walks away, leaving me alone with my arch nemesis. This should be interesting.

He jumps right in with both feet. "So, I left Kate a couple voice mails last week. Apparently she didn't get them." His tone is accusing. Rightly so.

"Maybe she just didn't want to talk to you."

He snorts—as pigs tend to do. "Or maybe you deleted them."

I take a step closer, making him back up. "Maybe you shouldn't be calling my apartment."

"I called to talk to Kate."

"Right—Kate who's living in my apartment."

"You can't f**king tell her who she can talk to. Who the hell do you think you are?"

“Her boyfriend. Which means—yeah—I can. And I don’t think that includes you anymore.”

“You know something, Evans? I see right through you. You come off all arrogant and full of yourself, but deep down? You’re shitting your pants. Cause you know it’s just a matter of time before Kate is done with you.”

My brow furrows in mock confusion. “I’m sorry—I don’t speak vag**a. Just what the hell is that supposed to mean?”

He moves forward, so we’re nose to nose, like boxers before the bell. “It means newsflash, dickhead—you’re the rebound guy. A distraction. Kate will have her fun, and then she’ll move on to more permanent prospects.”

I laugh. “Like you?”

“I do have the whole rock star thing going for me, don’t I?”

Kate said he signed a record deal a few months back, and I’ve heard a few of his songs on the radio. But I don’t care how many records he sells—he’ll always be a douche bag to me. Though he’s got a point about the rock star thing. It’s a powerful force. Guys who look like Mick Jagger or Steven Tyler wouldn’t have a shot in hell at getting laid without it, and they’ve spent decades shoulder deep in p**sy.

“But no, not me,” he says. “Kate and I are in the past. That doesn’t mean she’s sticking with you, though. How long have you known her, Evans? Eight months? I dated her for eleven years and I was her friend for nine before that. I think I’m a lot more qualified to predict what Kate will or won’t do.”

Okay—that one hit a little too close to home. It’s one of the reasons I hate the fact that Kate still talks to him. Because he had her before I did. I don’t mean the sex; I

could deal with that. I'm talking about the fact that she loved him, came close to marrying him. So no matter what I do—no matter how good Kate and I are—I'll never be her first where it counts. And that sucks. Second place is just first loser.

But I'll eat my own tongue before I admit that to fuck-face.

“You're talking out your ass. I know Kate. I--”

He cuts me off with a shoulder nudge. “You know what Kate lets you know. I had a front row seat to every significant moment in her life, a**hole. Twenty years worth of memories will always mean more to her than you ever—”

Not to go all Popeye on you? But that's all I can stand and...well...you know the f**king rest.

I pull back and punch him right in the jaw. Iron Mike's got nothing on me right now, and it feels great. I should've done this months ago.

He staggers back. I expect him to come back swinging and I'm ready for the block. What I don't expect is for him to tackle me low in the waist with the skill of a NY Giants linebacker.

We fall back in a heap, taking out the pasta station behind us with a crowd-drawing crash. Marinara sauce flies everywhere, raining down on unsuspecting heads and spattering people's clothes. Kind of looks like the pigs blood scene in Carrie, doesn't it?

Now, contrary to popular belief, these kinds of things don't go down like they do in the movies. Those fights are planned out. Choreographed. Real-life guy fights involve more rolling around on the ground, cursing and grunting, while getting in the occasional punch or kick between the verbal jabs.

Watch.

We roll over till we're side by side. I straight arm him, holding on to the front of his shirt. I get in a nice right hook to his chin, drawing first blood. With a growl he flips over so he's on top, straddling my waist. He nails me in the eye from the left.

I shake it off and grind out, "My sister hits harder than that. Pussy."

He grits his teeth, holding me down at the chest. "Suck my dick."

I bring my leg up and knee him in the back. "You'd like that, wouldn't you? Oh, no, that's right—you wouldn't. Kate sucks fantastic cock, by the way. You don't know what you were missing all those years, you f**king idiot."

Yeah—I know.

I can't believe I just said that, either. In front of a room full of people. In front of Kate's mother.

And if the horrified gasp that sounds suspiciously like my girlfriend's voice is any indication? There's an excellent chance I'll go the rest of my life without ever getting head again.

Still, it was a great comeback, wasn't it?

Without warning, the scent of coffee fills the air. And a second later my legs are burning. It's scorching, like the boiling oil castle guards used to pour down on the invaders in Medieval times.

"Ahh! Christ!"

Instantly, Warren and I forget about knocking each other's teeth out. We're too busy trying to get away from the sizzling liquid that's being poured on us.

I look up into the diabolical eyes of Amelia Warren, who's proudly holding two stainless steel carafes that used to be filled with coffee. And now aren't.

She reaches down and grabs my ear with one hand and Warren's with the other. And we're immobilized. Immediately. Amelia Warren—pain in the ass by day, ninja warrior by night.

She drags us out of the room by our respective ears, not unlike Sister Beatrice would have in the good old days. But we don't go quietly.

“Ow...fuck...oooowwww!”

“Aunt Amelia, let go! I'm a musician, I need my ear!”

“Stop your whining! Beethoven was deaf and he did just fine.”

We're dragged towards an adjoining room. Out of the corner of my eye I see Kate tagging along. Arms folded, back stiff—not a good sign for me. She opens the door and the four of us walk in.

And we all stop dead in our tracks.

Because there, on an empty table, is none other than Kate's mother, Carol, and Steven's father—good old quiet, number-crunching George Reinhart—going at it hot and heavy like two teenagers in the backseat at a drive-in movie theater.

I shit you not.

Kate's mouth opens wide, disbelief clear in her exclamation. "Mom?"

I raise my brows. "Wow. Go, George."

Have I mentioned that Kate's mom is smokin' hot? She is. Very.

She's in her fifties, with wavy russet hair, familiar dark eyes with the barest of wrinkles, and a warm smile. Her body's softly rounded with age, but still petite. The best way to tell how a woman's going to look in her later years is to look at her mother. If I didn't know I was a lucky son of a bitch before? The moment I laid eyes on Carol Brooks, I was sure of it.

Carol and George bust apart like they're on fire, sputtering embarrassed apologies as they readjust their clothing. Carol's face reminds me of that pink dog on Blues Clues. Guess that's where Kate gets the blushing thing from. George straightens his tie, trying his best to look dignified—like he wasn't just caught with his hands on Carol's fun bags.

He nods in our direction. "Boys. Kate."

I wave.

Then Kate sputters, "Mom, the photographer needs you." Carol seems relieved to have an exit strategy and they scurry out the door. Amelia-san releases her kung fu grip on my lobe and turns on her heels like a drill sergeant.

I try to lighten the mood. "Boy...didn't see that one coming, huh?"

Kate frowns. And Amelia pokes me in the chest. "Even though you are not my responsibility, if I ever hear such profane filth out of your mouth again, I will hog tie you, hold your nose, and pour dish detergent down your throat like your mother

should have a long time ago! Am I clear, mister?"

Page 4

Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 4:36 am

Her wrath turns to Warren. “And you—for God’s sakes, act like you have some sense! If you think you’re too old for me to take the belt to, you are sorely mistaken, young man. I raised you better than this.”

He looks down. “Yes, ma’am.”

“I expect you boys to stay on opposite sides of the room the rest of the evening. Any more trouble from either of you and I’ll have you thrown out on your asses.” In a huff she walks out of the room, with Warren trailing behind her like a stray puppy.

Leaving Kate and me alone.

Chapter 3

THE SILENCE IS HEAVY. Awkward. Kate paces angrily, her movements sharp. She finally comes to a stop in front of me. “I don’t even know what to say to you.”

I squirm—just a little. “He started it.”

Her eyes narrow. “Are you serious?”

I think about it for a minute. “Kind of.”

Kate shakes her head. And her chocolate eyes turn wounded. “Do my feelings mean so little to you, Drew?”

I groan. “Come on, Kate. Don’t do that.”

“Do what?”

“Make this into some big thing about me not respecting you, or caring about you enough. It’s really not that complicated. I hate him. I hate that he’s here. I hate that you f**king talk to him.”

She folds her arms over her chest, “We’ve been over this—Billy was my friend long before you and I got involved. We grew up together. Like you and Matthew and Steven. You know what that’s like.”

I do. There’s nothing on earth more valuable than an old friend. Someone who understands you, knows why you are who you are, why you do what you do. No explanations needed.

“Matthew and Steven haven’t seen me nak*d.” And if they have, they certainly haven’t enjoyed it.

“Half the city has seen you nak*d, Drew.”

“Nameless women who mean--”

“Women who we run into every time we step outside the door!”

My voice rises. “I can’t help that!”

Hers rises more. “I never asked you to!”

“Then why the f**k are you bringing it up?”

I can feel the discussion spiraling, gaining momentum like a tornado about to touch down. I push a hand through my hair and force my voice to level out. Not exactly

calm, but reasonable.

“What if I told you it was him or me—that you couldn’t have us both in your life? What would you say?”

Kate stutters, “Are you...are you giving me an ultimatum?”

“No. Just a hypothetical. If I told you that, who would you pick?”

Her eyes stare past me, thinking it over. The fact that she even needs to think about it bothers me more than I can put into words.

Then she looks back at my face. “I’d pick you. Billy’s my past and I care about him very much. But you’re my future.”

I let out a relieved breath. Too soon, it turns out, because then she adds, “But I’d resent you for it, Drew. It would hurt me...hurt us.”

I know I should tell her that she doesn’t have to choose. That just knowing she’d pick me is enough. I should—but I don’t.

And a second later she’s making a bee line for the door. “I have to go help Delores.”

I follow behind her. “Hey, we’re not finished here.”

Her hand’s on the doorknob. “Yes, I realize that, but I can’t deal with this at the moment, okay? Just...stay away from Billy and we’ll talk later.”

And in a whirl of shiny hair, she’s gone.

I walk back into the main ballroom and lean up against the wall, watching the middle-

aged, half-gagged, designer-clad guests trying to get their groove on.

My sister Alexandra walks up and leans back against the wall beside me. “Interesting show. Much better than anything WWF’s come out with recently.”

I scowl. “Not now, Lex.”

She shrugs. “Okay. Just happened to see you floating up shit’s creek and thought I’d throw you a paddle. But if you’re not interested...”

She lets the offer hang.

Until I turn my attention to her. “What?”

She sighs. “You’re new to this whole thing, so I’m going to give you some advice. Relationships only work when both parties put the other person’s feelings before their own. Without that? Things tend to implode rather quickly. Let’s take Matthew and Delores, for instance. It’s obvious she doesn’t like you very much, but she doesn’t let that come between them. How do you think he would feel if she told Matthew she didn’t want him talking to you anymore?”

I’m already shaking my head. “It’s not the same thing.”

“Not to you. But to Kate, it’s exactly the same thing.”

I clench my fists, frustrated. “So what are you saying? I have to invite the guy over to my place for a freaking slumber party? Do each other’s nails?”

She rolls her eyes. “No, you don’t have to be friends with him. You just have to suck it up and accept the fact that Kate is.”

I fold my arms and look around the room, purposely not acknowledging her counsel.

She shrugs. “Or don’t. Ignore everything I’m saying, let your insecurities get the better of you, and completely disregard Kate’s feelings on the matter.” She pats my shoulder. “Let me know how that works out for you.”

Then she walks away. While I stand there. Pouting—yes, I’m aware.

I scan the room and find Kate, talking to Delores. She smiles at something her friend says, but her eyes don’t. It’s fake. A cover.

Fuck.

And then I spot Warren, sitting at the bar. I look back and forth between the two. Then I let out a big breath and walk over. I nod to the bartender. “Whiskey. Double.”

Eating shit? Doesn’t taste very good. I’m going to need something to wash it down.

An hour later, I’ve learned three things about Billy Warren:

- 1) He loves music.
- 2) He’s really into his new truck.
- 3) He can’t hold his liquor for shit.

Douchebag is a total lightweight. Which, for me, is a good thing—a drunk guy is usually an honest guy.

“...custom leather seats as soft as a baby’s ass...”

Blah blah blah. I've tuned him out for a while now. It's the only way I've been able to stop myself from getting as trashed as he is. But warm-up time is over now. Might as well get right to the point.

“So listen, Billy, I need you to level with me—man to man. You looking to hook up with Kate again, or what?”

His face wrinkles. “Nah, man...me and Kate...that's like so yesterday. We were done way before we were done. Water over the bridge.”

“Under.”

“Exactly. Started too young. I mean, I love the girl, always will. Not like...in a sister kind of way exactly, cause we've done it...”

So don't need to hear this right now.

“...but almost. Her and Delores, they're like my inner sanctum. For a long time it was just the three of us against the world, you know what I'm sayin'?”

I digest this information while he takes a drag of his beer.

Then he leans forward and his voice drops low, like he's got a secret to tell. “She's happy, you know. Kate. These last few months, she's sounded really happy. More than she ever was with me, that's for damn sure. Dee Dee says so, too.”

He fingers the label on his beer bottle. “But you know how it is—the higher you climb, the farther you fall—and it's not like you're the sticking type. So when I think about how bad you're gonna hurt her? Pretty much makes me want to put a f**king bullet between your eyes.”

Now that, I can respect.

I slap him on the back. Maybe a little harder than I needed to. “Tell you what, Billy—the day I hurt her? I’ll buy you the gun.”

His drunken eyes regard me suspiciously. Then he holds out his hand. And I shake it firmly.

Why are you so surprised? I can be mature. Sometimes. Besides, just because I’ve decided not to punch him in the face the next time I see him doesn’t mean I’m going to give Kate all of his goddamn messages.

What do I look like? A saint?

Out of nowhere the lovely woman in question appears beside me, standing between our bar stools. “What’s going on? What is this?”

I open my mouth to explain, but Warren beats me to it. “Relax, Katie. Me and Evans...just buryin’ the old hammer.”

“Hatchet.”

“That, too.”

Her eyes flicker back and forth between us. I smile calmly. Reassuringly.

She’s not convinced. “So, what? You two get into a fight, have a few beers, and now you’re all buddy buddy? You gonna go outside and pee on the wall together, too?”

Warren holds up his hand. “Let’s not get crazy. It’s not like we’re gonna hang out and play foosball or something. But if Evans here ever needs an extra hand with an

assisted suicide?” He taps his chest. “I’m your guy.”

I raise my glass. “Well said.”

He downs a shot and stands up. “And on that note, I’m gonna head over to that little hottie on the dance floor who’s been givin’ me the eye all night. Tell Aunt Amelia not to wait up. And hey, Evans-- you should watch your back. This shin-dig is my cousin’s deal, and we messed it up. Dee Dee’s not gonna let that slide.”

I nod. “Thanks for the warning.”

After he’s gone, there’s a moment of silence. And Kate looks sideways at me. “What’s your game, Drew?”

I look surprised. Innocent. “Game? Me? No game. I just...like you more than I hate him. Simple, really.”

She nods slowly, the corners of her mouth turning up in a half smile. “And you couldn’t have had this little revelation before you announced my talent for fellatio to our family and friends?”

That probably would have been better.

“Yeah. Sorry about that. Got caught up in the moment. Although it was the truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.”

She snorts, shaking her head. “Jerk.”

And with that, I know I’m in the clear. My hands circle her waist and pull her between my legs as I change the subject. “Have I told you how cock-stiffeningly gorgeous you look tonight?”

Kate smiles as she rests her forearms on my shoulders. “Not in the last few hours.”

“Consider yourself told.”

She leans in and lays her head against my chest.

And all is right with the world.

“Thank you, Drew.”

And I know she means for more than just the compliment. I brush my face against her hair, inhaling the scent that still captivates me.

“Anytime, Kate. Anything.”

Over her head, I spot Warren—and more importantly, the woman he’s hitting on. And I start to laugh.

Kate’s head pops up. “What?”

I motion with my chin. “Warren’s talking to Christina Berman—a distant cousin of Matthew’s.”

Page 5

Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 4:36 am

She looks towards them. “And that’s funny because...?”

“Because up until a year ago, her dick was bigger than mine. She used to be a guy.”

Kate’s eyes bug out of her head. “Wow. You’d never know it, looking at her.”

“Nope.”

Then her gaze falls on me. Thoughtfully.

And I ask, “What?”

Her eyes shine. At me. For me. “Nothing. I just...I love you, you know.”

I shrug. “I’m a loveable guy.”

She laughs. And brings her palm to my cheek, smacking it softly. “And slappable—definitely a slappable guy.”

“Kinky. We should explore that further, later on.”

She chuckles again and kisses me softly. Then she pulls back and hooks her thumb towards the dance floor. “You want to dance?”

I’m almost offended. “The Electric Slide? I don’t think so.” Not that I have anything against dancing. Some guys will tell you it’s effeminate but I’m not one of them. Today’s dancing is practically sex with your clothes on, dry humping in a room full

of people. And I'm definitely into that.

“What? Too cool for the Electric Slide?”

“Yes, I am. Besides, Steven has the monopoly on group dances.” I point over to where my brother-in-law is burning up the dance floor, at the head of the pack with Mackenzie at his side. “He also does a mean funky chicken.”

Kate cracks up.

A few hours later, we're all walking out to the private parking garage together. My tie's gone, the top three buttons of my shirt open. I'm holding Kate's hand, which is lost in the arm of my tuxedo jacket that she's wearing like a teenaged girl after the prom. Steven carries a sleeping Mackenzie on his shoulder, while Alexandra adjusts her dress with one hand and holds her shoes in the other. Matthew and Delores are already outside, saying their final goodbyes to the departing guests.

When he spots us, Matthew comes jogging up. His face is nervous—and remorseful.

“Drew...I didn't know, man. I'm really sorry.”

“What are you talking about?”

He rubs the back of his neck and his eyes slide to my car, parked a few feet away at ground level, clearly visible under the garage light.

And that's when I see it. Or more to the point—that's when I see the words that have been carved into her hood.

“No, no, no, no, no...”

I stumble forward and fall to my knees beside my baby. I rub over the words, trying

to erase the gouges with my hand. Then I yell over my shoulder at Delores, “You heartless monster! How could you?”

I turn back to my car and whisper soothingly, “It’ll be okay. I’ll get the best body guy in the city. It’ll be like it never happened. No one will ever know you were scarred.”

From the upper level I hear Billy Warren’s wail of anguish, and I know Delores got to his new truck, too.

I feel your pain, Douche Bag.

Leisurely, Delores strolls over. She looks down at me, eyes mocking, one fingerless-lace-gloved hand on her hip. “Pull any shit like that again and I’ll carve it into your f**king forehead.”

Then she smiles cheerily. “Night, everyone. Thank you for being a part of our special day.”

And she disappears into the shadows.

I feel bad for Matthew’s Guardian Angel. He’s going to be working overtime.

‘Cause I’m pretty sure my best friend just married a demon.

THE END