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The Tea Party Revision

The Fifth Floor

I raced to the library. Had to get these papers written. This was my last chance to turn my life around. My fellow cocktail waitresses at Dynasty Lounge thought I was nuts to trade in my high heels for books, but my children were getting older and the last thing I needed was for my sons to realize that their mommy worked at a titty bar. I scurried to the checkout desk. Of course, I found out at the checkout that all of the study rooms were unavailable. I grabbed my suitcase full of notebooks and college books off the floor and stomped into the elevator. Number three. Press. Sigh. Lean. The doors of the elevator opened. I raced around the third floor trying to find a couch, a cubicle, a seat, maybe just a damn corner. Nothing. Everything was occupied. What really pissed me off were all the people lying asleep on the couches.

“Are you serious?” I breathed loudly, hoping I could wake them up. God, go to your damn dorm room if you want to sleep.

I huffed to the elevator. Number four again press. Again sigh. Yet again lean. Same bullshit. I re-entered the elevator and slung my suitcase against the wall. The elevator didn't move. Forgot to press a number. I swung around and glared at the buttons. But there was nowhere else to go. This was the last floor. That's when I saw the glowing number. Number five? But there wasn't a fifth floor. Sure, why not. Number five—press. Sigh. Excited. Hopeful?

The elevator dinged. The compartment dropped a quarter of an inch before the doors slid open. I crept from the elevator and stood in the wide hallway. It seemed quiet enough. Good place to study. I began walking down the hallway and made a left turn. There were people studying in several of the cubicles. A girl peered over a laptop so intently that her glasses had begun to slide down the bridge of her nose.

“Oh thank god,” I breathed. The girl with glasses threw me a stern glare. Her hair was a messy attempt at pigtails. Over-sized flannel shirt hung over her pale, thin frame. In the distance I heard heavy breathing. An “ugh, ugh, ugh” noise echoed down the hallway. I turned to my right and saw a man doing back flips. I staggered sideways, knocking my suitcase to the floor. The carpet cushioned its fall as it made a soft thud against the fibers. What the hell was happening? I did a double take. This is a library, right? He stopped in front of me. Neither sheen nor shine gave away his exertions; it was only his tall, lean body that flexed from the rigorous workout.

He lifted his index finger to his pink lips that seductively turned up in the corners. “Sh.” He lowered his eyes to my breasts, his hand extended as if to touch them. I tried to retreat, but was met with the cold wall of the library. He smiled at my discomfort, and continued his back flips down the hall. I stood there for a moment confused. I looked at the students who were studying. With the exception of the girl with glasses, who fervently typed away at her laptop, they were all looking up, their jaws dropped. They sat stiff. Their mortal flesh turned to marble death. I looked at the direction of their silent gaze. A giant, hairy wolf spider dragged the struggling body of a teenage boy across the paisley wallpapered ceiling. The boy would have been screaming had it not been for all of the webbing encased on his face. That’s it. Had enough.

I was too scared to scream. Only hurried breath and a small whimper escaped my throat. I turned to run back to the elevator, my suitcase of books in tow, but half way down the hall I was met by a young girl dressed as a princess. She was surrounded by lily pads placed strategically on a blue carpet, like a game of Twister. A frog, adorned with a golden crown, hopped next to her. It stuck out its tongue. The girl bent over and swallowed the frog’s tongue with her mouth. My throat closed up. My stomach hurled against my bowels. The girl stopped kissing the frog. It hopped in front her. The girl, dressed in frills of purple and pink chemise and silk, screamed and drew a butcher knife from behind her. She held down the struggling frog and lopped off its legs. She placed a leg in her mouth and dragged the frog’s meat apart from the bone with her teeth. The princess then licked the blood off her fingers, peered up at me and smiled.

“The French could never keep their promises.” She offered me the other leg.

My stomach heaved as bile and coffee filled my mouth. I forced myself to swallow it. Jesus, my kids. I didn't have a will or life insurance or a plan. Run. I had to run. I was back where the spider carried a boy, and where a man performed back flips to enforce library courtesy.

Where was my suitcase? I must have left it in the hallway with the princess. I looked behind me and saw her sucking the brains out of the frog prince's head. She twirled the tiny crown around her index finger. She sucked and sucked until all that was left was its skin and tiny fragile bones. The princess dropped the carcass to the floor and picked up her shiny golden ball. She stood up and placed her right foot on my suitcase. Her little lips were pursed; pale-blond eyebrows lifted and laughing. She threw the ball high in the air and caught it, all the while never taking her murky blue eyes off me. She repeated this juggling act with the agility of a trained carny.

“Don't you want to play with me?” she asked.

I looked at the frog carcass. “No.”

She screamed and threw her golden ball at me. I fell to the floor as the globe exploded like a cannon ball in the wall behind me. Her toy came back through the wall, a spherical boomerang, returning to the palm of the princess. “Play with me!”

I must be dreaming. I must have fallen asleep, exhausted from finals, and reading, and worry, and lack of food, and lack of fun. Maybe I broke down and started drinking. This was a drunken mare. Not real. Just a stupid dream, but dreams offer doors no matter

how smashed the dreamer is, was, is? Shit. There had to be another way out of here. Think, think, fucking think. The other floors had stairs. Where were the stairs? I ran back to the cubicles where the students were still transfixed like gargoyles gazing at the ceiling. The spider was gone. Probably enjoying its feast. They were still staring, though, all except for the girl in glasses. I ran towards her. Just as I was about to reach her my feet became fixed to the floor. My leg muscles stiffened and my arms fell like a rigid corpse at my sides. Silver liquid crept like mercury up my legs, hardening as it moved along, becoming a strange rubber that progressed over every inch of my body.

“Stop struggling,” the girl with glasses said. Her fingers pounded swiftly on a keyboard. The faster she typed, the faster the mercury liquid moved.

“You’re doing this!” I glared at her—now unable to move my head, blink my eyes, or scratch the itch that tickled my nose.

“Shut up. I’m almost done,” she replied. “Done.”

There was a tingling sensation in my toes that slowly spread up my legs to my ribcage. Everywhere this suit had covered was now tingling. My feet loosened up, and I almost fell forward. Whatever was holding me had ceased its grasp.

“Pick up that knife,” she said.

“What knife?”

“The knife on the table.”

I looked at the table. Nothing. “There’s no knife,” I replied.

“What?” She looked past her laptop. “Damn.” Her fingers pounded the keyboard. A dagger appeared right in front of me on the table. “There. Now pick it up and cut me loose.”

“How is that possible? How is all of this possible!”

“I don’t have time for this. Cut me loose.”

I picked up the blade and walked towards her. A gigantic vine had wrapped itself around the girl’s legs, binding her to the chair. It had wrapped so tightly around her calves and thighs that she had started to bleed through her jeans. Every now and then she winced from the pain of it. The vine was spreading its trap, slowly sprouting towards her ribcage.

“What the hell are you looking at? Cut me loose,” she said as beads of sweat pooled on her forehead.

“Not ‘til you tell me what’s going on.”

“I had to write you in order to get out of here. Now cut—

“Wait, what?”

“You’re just a character. Now do as I say and cut me loose.”

“No, I have children. I have a life.” My head was swimming.

“That’s just exposition. Blah, blah, blah. I created you. Now do as I say.”

I wanted to bury the knife into her skull. My life was real. It had meaning. My boys, my struggles, and the disgusting men I dealt with to keep them in diapers and formula. The way I struggled to feed them while trying to get my degree. Character? Her

creation. If it was true then she was the cruelest bitch I had ever seen. Character? I'll show her character.

“Forget it. If I die here, so will you.” She had her finger over the delete button. I rushed her, the knife less than an inch from her temple. “You kill me,” she whispered, “then you'll definitely have no place else to go. Do you wanna get out of here or what?” She turned at me slowly still wincing from the vine's embrace. Her lips were chapped and trembling. Fingers calloused, almost bloody.

“What about them?” I motioned at the frozen students, my knife still at her temple.

“Failed attempts. They wouldn't listen. The fifth floor took them over.” She looked down the hall anticipating a new monster. With the way this place was I wouldn't doubt it. “You need me as much as I need you, so cut—me—loose.”

“Play with ME!” The princess. That voice. My bowels ached. Shit. I forgot all about the princess.

“Oh my god! Cut me loose! Cut me loose! Cut me loose!” She thrashed against the vine pinning her to the chair, causing more blood to seep from her wounds into her jeans.

I knelt down and hacked and sawed through the large vine that intruded from the carpet. Her chair fell over. The greenery snapped. The thrashing vine attempted to grab a hold of me, but the suit she had encased me in repelled it.

“Why won’t you play with me?” The princess’s voice played singsong. Disturbing lullaby of a homicidal brat. I could hear the “boing, boing, boing” of her golden ball. Confusing. How could a ball bounce that previously acted like a weapon? I guess in this world, just about anything could happen. World? Did I even have a world? Was I really just a made up character? Anger burned. My suit started to glow. The girl in glasses moved away from me.

“There you are. Oh! How pretty. Your shiny.” The Princess skipped towards us.

“Get the laptop,” the writer whispered rapidly.

“Just like my ball.” The princess’s voice dropped two octaves into a masculine growl. She opened her mouth wide. Rows of sharp, shark-like teeth jutted from her jaw. I grabbed the laptop and tossed it to the girl with glasses. Immediately her fingers pounded the keyboard. The princess laughed. She cast the ball at me again. The globe caught me square in the gut. I flew against the wall. Aside from having the wind knocked out of me, I was actually fine. The wall behind me splintered then ripped from the impact. I stepped away from it as plaster fell to the carpet. I grabbed that damn ball in the palm of my hand before it could leave my gut and seek out its owner. The golden globe vibrated against the skin of my palms. Every emotion, every bit of rage and terror—mainly rage—was sent from me into her little ball.

“I don’t understand.” The princess stood. Her eyes feigned innocence and remorse.

“You want me to play with you, little bitch?” The ball vibrated harder in my palm. My arm wrenched back. My shoulder extended with such force that my fingertips shook. Her golden globe carried my message back to her. Blonde curls gleamed under the florescent ceiling lights as her head rolled down the hallway. Eventually, her precious, golden globe returned to me.

“Wow, I didn’t expect that to happen,” the girl in glasses said, her fingers still at the keyboard, not typing, just still.

“I thought you were the author.”

“Yeah, so did I. Guess you have more a mind of your own than I thought.”

“It would appear so,” I returned. I had some ideas of what was going on, but I didn’t want to let her in on it. I decided to see how it all panned out.

“Come on. There’s a stairwell over here,” she said.

I followed her. Her shell-shocked body hugged the wall. I walked in the open. I didn’t need cover anymore. I had this great suit and this badass, golden ball. We found the staircase. She pushed open the door and ran without looking. The staircase ended on the third step. There was nothing but a clear drop. She fell but managed to hold on to the third step. She tried to hoist herself up. I could see her face appear over the stairs as she lifted herself onto the third stair. Her leg bled terribly. The laptop was on the cement floor next to my foot. I picked it up and placed it next to her hand. It was dark down there, past that drop. Couldn’t see a thing. That didn’t mean it was empty. There were all sorts of noises, whisperings and growls.

“Help me up,” she grunted.

I kneeled down next to her. “Funny, how you didn’t see that coming.”

“What the—Just help me up!” She winced and pressed her hand to her bleeding leg.

“No, I don’t think so. Seems you have everything you need right there at your fingertips. Why don’t you get yourself out of this jam?”

“If I die, you die.”

“I don’t think so. You typed me, made me—so you say. Well, what brought you here? I have the smokin’ costume, and this fabulous little ball. I destroyed that bitch of a princess. If anything I’m the main character, and you—you’re just the sidekick.” I could tell I had struck a nerve. Her eyes widened as her jaw dropped. “You should really get typing. Something down there sounds hungry.”

I threw the ball in the air, caught it in my palm. Turned on my heel and left her in the stairwell. I walked around the corner towards the elevator, was about to push the down button, but thought maybe I should stay for a bit. See what else I could find on the fifth floor.