

TEN

At first, I thought there was a truck or some noisy piece of construction equipment just outside my window. The loud “RATATATATAT” sound was bright and cruel, piercing my brain like a strobe light. It yanked me out of sleep so violently that my heart was racing and thumping up into my throat. Finally, I realized my phone was vibrating and dancing on the glass end table. I reached over and picked it up, glancing at the caller ID. It read “DEBORAH.”

My heart started thumping for an entirely different reason. I’d forgotten about my late-night text to her. The phone was still vibrating in my hand, and it was nearing the point where it would go to voicemail. I pressed the answer icon and put it to my ear, trying to sound awake and aware, not like I was having a heart attack.

“Hello?” I asked.

“Winnie,” Deborah said.

“Hello, Deborah. How are you?” I asked, trying to keep my voice light.

“I’m fabulous!” she said with an enthusiasm that was typical for her.

“That’s great! Me too!” I said, now fully awake and sitting up on the couch. I *wasn’t* fabulous, because I was still half asleep, and my heart was still thundering in my chest, but I was getting there the more I heard her voice.

“So, would you like to have lunch today and talk about our little situation?” she asked casually.

“Yeah, definitely!”

“Meet me at The Patio at two.”

I honestly didn’t want to do that at The Patio. There were so many opportunities there to run into people we knew, and I didn’t want to share her with anyone. Additionally, I found the place generally uncomfortable and often felt as though I was being judged there. *It was true. I was right to feel that way.* Everyone constantly judged everyone who went there. No one felt comfortable at The Patio except for the oldest, most entitled members. However, it’s where we always went, and it was familiar, and that was worth something, I guess.

“I’ll be there,” I said.

“Good. See you then, love,” she said. Calling me ‘love’ wasn’t unusual. Deborah tended to speak to her friends as though she were a grandmother or a kindly old country diner server. She used words like ‘darlin’, ‘honey’, and ‘pumpkin’. I found it somewhat endearing and somewhat condescending at the same time. I tried to take it the best way possible, most of the time.

“See you then.”

“Oh, and Winnie?”

“Yes?”

“Wear a skirt,” she said, her voice dropping into a tone that sent chills down my back.

“Okay,” I said back in barely more than a whisper.

Deborah hung up. I sat there, listening to the silence where her voice had been. I placed my phone on the coffee table and just sat there for a long moment, trying to decide how I was feeling. I was either terrified or exhilarated — a bit of both, really.

I stood up, slipped out of my sleep clothes, and walked naked to the sliding glass door that led out back to the pool. I opened the door, walked directly to the pool, and dove in. Swimming my laps got my heart rate up and cleared the sleep out of my head. I swam harder and longer than I ever had, kicking off the wall with such force on every rotation that I thought I might crack the tile.

When my legs felt like they would give out and my heart was going to explode in my chest, I stopped and rested my forehead against the cold lip of the pool, breathing in ragged, sputtering gasps.

When I was in the sixth grade, my class took a series of trips to the indoor pool at a district high school. The idea was to teach the kids who didn’t know how to swim, and to make it a regular P.E. activity for those who did. I was one of the kids who didn’t know how to swim.

The first two days at the pool were spent in the shallow end, which was 3.5 feet deep. I was already quite a bit taller than other girls my age, and the shallowest end only reached my ribs. Towards the end of the second day, I became confident and broke off from the group of newbies, deciding to test the deeper waters. I walked across the pool, feeling the water creep slowly up my body as the bottom sloped gradually downward. I hit four feet, then four and a half. At the five-foot mark, the water splashed against my mouth and nose, forcing me to tilt my head back and hold my face above the water.

At that point, I decided to turn around and head back toward the shallow end. Somehow, though, I couldn’t quite connect my feet to the bottom of the pool without dipping my face into the water. Every time I tried, I slipped just a little further towards the deep end until I was bouncing off the bottom of the pool to get my face to break through the surface. I panicked, my arms grabbed at nothing, and my legs kicked against the water with no effect.

At the same moment, it occurred to me that I was getting more water than air into my mouth and nose, and my feet reached the point where the bottom of the pool abruptly dipped into the deep end. I sank with one last bubbling scream.

Strong arms wrapped around me before I hit the bottom of the pool, and I was quickly dragged to the surface and onto the warm ground next to the pool. I coughed, cried, and pressed my face against the concrete, unable to believe I was on solid ground and not sinking to my doom. My teacher, Mr. Vincent, had pulled me to safety. I can still remember the feeling of choking on chlorine and the warm concrete on my face as I coughed up pool water.

For some people, nearly drowning might scare them away from water forever. I, on the other hand, went in the opposite direction. That experience only strengthened my resolve to learn how to swim. Not only did I learn to swim, but I discovered that I *love* swimming. Water and pools became a key component of my internal identity.

Some twenty or so years later, the same girl was in a pool of her own, feeling very much like she was inching her way towards the deep end. When I thought about Deborah telling me to mount the jacuzzi jet, her voice firm and cold, I felt the floor dip just a little further down beneath my feet. It was terrifying.

As I felt the metaphorical ground slope towards the deeper, colder water, my resolve and determination intensified. When I'd been in that pool as a child, it was like I was sliding into danger. This was very similar, though I also felt it could be ultimately wonderful, as swimming pools eventually became for me. Most of all, I feared the unknown. It was scary, not knowing what I was getting into, but I wanted it, nonetheless. It had to be better than what I was doing on my own at home.

As I dried off and went to the shower in the cabana to wash the chlorine out of my hair and clean up for the day ahead, the idea that I was about to step into an entirely different lifestyle, sexually, hit me. I was ecstatic. The last decade had been such a depressing and embarrassing decline into celibacy. The notion that not only did someone want to have sex *with me*, but someone wanted to have *kinky, exciting sex with me*, thrilled me to no end. I bounced on my toes in the shower, unable to contain my excitement.

I looked down and inspected my pussy. It had been two days since I'd shaved, and I was already growing stubble back. I ran the tips of my fingers over the soft skin, feeling the prickle of hairs coming in. I smiled. It itched a bit, but I liked the feeling. It reminded me of a kind of self-imposed torture I heard about called a hairshirt. It was literally a shirt made of itchy stuff like animal hair or sackcloth that was designed as a form of religious sacrifice or something. It's supposed to be for penance or discipline, but I choose to think of my own little pubic hairshirt as not reparation or sacrifice, but tribute. It's what I endured to be my best self. A sacrifice to me, *and to Deborah, of course.*

Once I was showered and dressed in a white button-up blouse and a dark blue wrap skirt that fell just above my knees, I looked at myself in the mirror and liked what I saw. The skirt, as she had requested, was light enough to be easily pulled up or off if needed. The fact that I was dressing for sex left me giddy. I was also wearing a thong, which I didn't usually wear unless I was wearing something that required hiding VPLs. It had a print of little rainbows and unicorns.

I had errands to run, so I left the house just after eleven and went to Target, Trader Joe's, and a few other places. The whole time I was shopping, I couldn't stop thinking about Deborah. Mostly, I thought about kissing her. I thought about kissing her a lot. That was the thing that felt most intimate. I mean, I put my mouth on her pussy and my tongue inside her. Yet it was her kissing me in the hot tub that felt like the hottest thing I'd ever done.

Once I took my shopping home and put my groceries away, I went to the guest suite bedroom and looked at the bed. There was no evidence of our encounter in the room, but it still *felt* like Deborah, and being there made me happy. I looked at myself in the full-length mirror on the closet door. I looked nice. The skirt was cute. The top was almost see-through, but I wore a white camisole underneath it. This was also nearly see-through, but once they were working in tandem, they kept the girls modestly covered, which was good. I was never an overtly, outwardly sexual person, and I wasn't going to start now. I was flirty when I needed to be or when it served me, but for the most part, I kept my interactions with people as shallow and at arm's length as possible. Except for Deborah. She was the first real friend I'd had as an adult.

That said, there was a part of me that needed to play off Deborah to decide which direction to take on things like how I dress and groom myself. Like when I decided not to shave my this morning, I found myself deferring to her opinion (or what I guessed was her opinion) on how I should groom from now on. I wanted to impress her, but I wasn't sure what that looked like. That said, I didn't know if she liked it shaved or not, so I was letting it grow. If she wanted it shaved, I would shave it.

I had to weigh my need to tell Deborah what my boundaries were against my conflicting feelings of wanting her to test those boundaries. I was wearing the skirt, and that, I felt, said a lot to both Deborah and me. As I drove my Mazda down the highway, I pulled the hem of the skirt up over my hips and let my legs part. The car's stereo was playing *Add it Up* by Violent Femmes, and the bouncing train engine of a bass line was making me hyper.

Cool air from the car's air conditioner drifted between my thighs and felt delicious. As I drove up 95 towards the golf course, I couldn't stop thinking about the day before. It's all I thought about since it happened. I sucked on my bottom lip and let the fingertips of my right hand trail back and forth over my thighs and under my skirt.

The fact that Deborah had specifically asked me — no, *told* me to wear a skirt — was the thing I was fixated on most. I didn't know for certain why she'd told me that, but I had a few guesses, and they were all making me wet. I ran fingers up under the band of my underwear and into the slick opening between my legs. I was dripping and hot to the touch, and I felt a whirlwind of emotion spin up inside me.

Somehow, guilt wasn't present. I was uncomfortable with the lying and sneaking that would be required if we turned this into a full-blown, ongoing affair, but at the same time, I was far less worried about the consequences than I expected. I didn't want to hurt George. *I loved George*. However, I also loved the feeling of being around Deborah. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that I loved that experience of being wanted more than I loved George, at least as a husband. It's not even that George had become worse; he just never became anything

more than what I got in the beginning. There was no evolution of our relationship. It was like he wanted me, he got me, and then he just maintained me with as little effort as he could muster.

When my brain told me that George was a good person and that I was wrong to do something that might hurt him, I found myself asking if that was even true. *Was* he a good person? There was a lot about his job I didn't understand, and I suspected it was sketchy. I knew he worked for some maybe unsavory characters, but I didn't think he was a bad person exactly.

The more I thought about it, though, the more evidence of his nature I found just lying around in my mind that I'd never considered. For instance, politically, we were very different. George was a fiscal conservative and leaned libertarian in everything else. I considered myself a feminist and a democratic socialist, but was relatively inactive in both regards. Not because I didn't care, but because I tended to get overwhelmed easily, which made activism difficult. I didn't do well when I was expected to organize things, and *the job is literally called 'organizer,' so do with that what you will.*

My situation with Deborah was something that, aside from the infidelity, George would likely disapprove of. He was dismissive of the LGBTQ community to the point of being, if not bigoted, at least upsettingly indifferent. He typically simply didn't pay attention to things that didn't directly impact him personally. I suspected that if he were pushed on it, he'd fall on the side of homophobia, and that made what I was doing feel almost political. *Fisting to fight the patriarchy.*

That was an interesting way to make excuses for my cheating, and it seemed to be working. Exiting the highway, I pulled my skirt back into place. I pulled up to The Patio's entrance and turned off the Mazda's engine. The valet approached, and I smiled, thanked him, and handed him the keys. At the host's podium, I told the woman who greeted me that I was meeting a friend at two and asked if Deborah Callahan had arrived yet. The host said that she had and led me through the restaurant. I did my best not to look nervous as I subtly scanned the patrons, looking for Deborah's red hair.

Hearing her name all together out loud made me think of something funny. When I first met her, Deborah told me that she only goes by 'Deborah' and not 'Debbie' or 'Deb,' I immediately thought of Debbie Harry and how *she* started going by Deborah Harry later in her career, and I wondered if *my* Deborah went through a similar name change at some point, or if she'd always been Deborah. Then I thought of *Deborah Harry Callahan*, and I thought about Debbie Harry in the Clint Eastwood 'Dirty Harry' role, holding his huge pistol and asking me, 'Do you feel lucky, punk?' *Yes, ma'am, I sure do. I feel lucky as hell.* Spying her at the table in the corner booth, and how her face lit up when she saw me approach, I felt so incredibly lucky.

As the host and I reached the table, Deborah stood and took my hand. The host left, and we sat at the table.

"Hi, you look nice," I said, unsure of what we were even doing. She *did* look nice, wearing cream-colored shorts and a green button-up shirt.

“Thank you, so do you!” Deborah said, particularly enthusiastic. She was right. I did look nice. I was quite happy with my outfit that day.

“Deborah Harry Callahan,” I said, smiling, before realizing with mortal terror that I said that out loud.

“What?” she asked, smiling and laughing. I shook my head and looked at the salt and pepper shakers, refusing to look anywhere else. She held her hand out on the table, seemingly for me to take. I did, looking up at her finally. I have to admit that a part of me was nervous we’d be seen.

“I’ve been thinking about you a lot lately.”

“Just since yesterday?” I asked.

“No. For a while. I’ve been watching you, how you move, how you speak. The way you carry yourself.”

I laughed nervously. “Okay. Why?”

“You’re very beautiful.”

“I guess...” I said, feeling odd about the sudden flattery. It felt somewhat manipulative, but I would be lying if I said it wasn’t doing the job. I blushed and smiled and looked at my fingernails. “You’re beautiful too. So hot.”

Deborah smiled and took a sip from her scotch. “We should have a conversation about what we’re doing.”

My stomach felt like it was flipping over with anxiety. “Yes. What exactly ARE we doing?”

“I think we need an informal contract.”

“A what?” I asked, unsure if I heard her correctly.

“A consent list. It’s pretty standard in situations like ours, actually.”

“Ahh, I see,” I said. I hadn’t heard of such a thing, but it made sense, if I understood what she meant correctly. Deborah leaned down beside her chair and retrieved a leather folder. I was surprised that she had a physical document. She handed me the folder, and I opened it to find roughly ten pages.

“Jesus,” I said, reviewing the pages. It was an extensive list of sex acts organized into categories, and with a box next to each one for an initial.

“There are two copies, one for each of us. I thought we could initial what we were comfortable with and cross out what we’re not. I already did mine.”

Deborah watched as I read the list.

“Wow,” I said, looking over the list. Practically every sexual act I’ve ever heard of (and many I hadn’t) was represented on the list. “Did you come up with all of these?”

She nodded, taking another sip of her scotch.

“Well, I can’t take credit for *coming up with* most of the acts, but I did curate the list, though.”

I nodded, skimming the list with the tip of my finger.

“Anal fisting?”

She nodded again.

“You never know. Gotta cover all the bases,” she said. I kept reading.

“Is there a ‘check all’ option?” I asked, laughing but also not kidding.

“Nope. You gotta initial them each individually,” she said. I thumbed through the document and got to Deborah’s copy. I was impressed to see that she had agreed to almost everything as well. There were a few specific things she wasn’t into. She didn’t like her feet, and she hated to be tickled, so that was a no. Also, she didn’t like the word ‘cunt’ and calling her that was a *hard no*. I couldn’t imagine a scenario where I would need to call her that, but I appreciated knowing not to, just in case. I made a mental note to never call her that, or even use the word, in or out of the bedroom, again. Under the ‘triggers’ section, she had marked ‘*pregnancy and childbirth*’, and thinking about whatever must have led to that made me momentarily sad. I looked at Deborah, who was watching me, and I smiled.

“Did you see the relationship section?”

I shook my head and skimmed through it. It was interesting.

“You want to be exclusive?” I asked, looking at the section about open relationships and other partners, my heart soaring. She nodded.

“Sexually, yes. Yes, I do. It’s something I need to feel comfortable. Can you be okay with that?”

I was more than okay with it. It was something I was a little worried about, to be honest. I didn’t want Deborah to have flings with other people. I didn’t want to even think about it at all.

“Yes, absolutely. Really okay with it.”

I was almost about to cry. I was more relieved than I expected. I hadn't realized just how much anxiety the idea of Deborah with other people was causing.

She went into her purse and came out with a silver pen. It looked expensive. I took it and started initializing boxes. I agreed to almost everything. After a few minutes of going through the first couple of pages, which were comprised almost entirely of the extensive list of sex acts, I came to my own triggers section. I looked up at the ceiling for a moment, thinking. I was very aware of the music that was playing, *Peter Gabriel*. I could tell it was Peter Gabriel by the tone of it, but it took me a moment to place the song. *Mercy Street*, from his 1986 album *So*. Seemed like a deeper cut for The Patio, and I was impressed. The song filtered through the sound of people around us talking, laughing, and clinking their silverware on plates.

I tried to think of things that might trigger me, and I couldn't think of anything. It's weird because I *do have* triggers. Just in general. Many of them. Yet I couldn't think of a single thing Deborah would need to know. I wasn't afraid of pain or of being treated as a submissive. I wasn't afraid of being humiliated or degraded. The things I was afraid of were meals with complex or unexpected ingredients, chaotic, clashing noises, and soft, squishy food in sink water. Sex stuff didn't faze me. I was literally willing to do anything Deborah wanted me to do. I skipped the triggers box.

“Here comes our girl,” Deborah said, nodding at the server who was approaching. I turned the papers over on the table.

“Hello there, I'm Janelle, and I'll be taking care of you two today. I see you've already got a drink going. Can I get you anything?” she asked, looking at me.

“I'll have a screwdriver, no pulp, lots of ice, please,” I said, forcing my public-facing smile. The server smiled and nodded.

“I'll go rustle that up and come back to take your lunch order when you're ready.”

“Thank you, hon,” Deborah said, taking my hand again. The server glanced at our hands, then left. When she was gone, Deborah looked at me for a long moment.

“So, what do you think? Do you want to do this?”

I thought about it, looking down at our hands. Her nails were manicured short, but neat and painted a tasteful light pink with French tips. Mine were dark indigo, starting to chip, and looked childish next to hers.

“I... I would very much like to explore this further,” I said, finding it difficult to meet her gaze, which was, of course, intense. Her eyes were bright blue and somehow burning and icy at the same time. They were the most captivating eyes I'd ever seen, and when she was looking right at me, it was more than I could handle. She smiled.

“I would like that, too.”

I met her eyes and found them kind and welcoming, in contrast to the intensity I had seen only a moment earlier. My heart was aching with happiness. *How could this be happening?* I had no idea how starved for affection I was before then, and now that I had someone’s full attention, I decided then and there that I would never, ever let it go. If that meant leaving George and blowing up my whole life, so be it.

“I’m so happy,” I said, barely audible under the noise of the restaurant. I don’t think she heard me.

“I want to talk about something else...” she said, and I looked at her again.

“What’s that?”

“If we’re going to do this, there needs to be some expectations put in place. I don’t want to say *rules*, but I do think we should make some things clear,” she said, taking out her phone and looking at something.

“So, this is a different thing than the five-page document?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said, still looking through her phone.

“Did you write up an agenda for this lunch?” I said, trying out a little cheekiness to see how it landed.

“Yes, shut up. Don’t judge my process,” she said. I nodded and took out my phone.

“Okay, I’ll take notes then,” I said, opening the Notes app and getting ready to type. Then I added “And you can call it rules. That’s okay. I don’t mind rules. I like rules.”

Deborah nodded in agreement.

“First of all, we need to be clear about the fact that this is an affair. You’re cheating on your husband. That’s got to be okay with you if we’re going to do this. Can you handle that?”

I thought about it for a moment. I really did think about it, because it was something that I’d been surprisingly nonplussed about. Yes, I was okay with it.

“I can handle that. Can you?”

She gave a half-cocked smile and nodded, rolling her eyes.

“Pfft. Yes. I’m not worried about me. Here comes your drink,” she said, nodding at the server who was on her way. She approached the table and placed my screwdriver on a coaster in front of me. It looked nice and pulp-less and was full of ice.

“Here you go, did you ladies need more time with the menu, or are you ready to order?”

“I think we’re ready,” Deborah said, which was odd since I hadn’t even looked at the menu yet.

“What’ll it be?”

“She’ll have the blackened chicken, and I’ll have the butter-roasted sablefish. And another scotch, please. Oh, and can we get some of that yummy sourdough bread? The little mini loaf with the honey butter?”

The server smiled and nodded. I looked at Deborah, surprised that she’d ordered for me without even asking what I wanted. The server nodded as she wrote this down. *Blackened chicken. I wouldn’t have ordered the blackened chicken. What even was ‘blackened chicken?’ Was it burned? I hadn’t even looked at the blackened chicken on the menu. What if it has a gross sauce? Gravy? What if it has mushrooms or truffles or something on it? Fuck.*

“Oh, certainly, I’ll bring that out right away. Is there anything else?” she asked, looking at me specifically. I felt anxiety gripping my chest.

“I... I think that... can I ask you something?”

I was having trouble getting my words out. I felt frozen, conflicted by my desire to please Deborah, and my intense fear that I would have to eat something I couldn’t cope with. I looked at Deborah, who nodded.

“Of course,” the server said.

“Does that chicken come with any sauce on it? Or vegetables?” I asked, as I looked again at Deborah, whose eyes had narrowed, and was watching me now.

“It does, yes, a Cajun cream sauce. It’s also dredged through butter and Cajun spices before it’s pan-seared.”

I was going into safe-food mode, and I stopped thinking about how Deborah was taking it all in. I forgot about Deborah entirely for the moment. All I could think about was turning this chicken into something I could eat, because I desperately wanted to. I hadn’t eaten anything yet that day but my breakfast of frozen raspberries and shredded wheat, but I couldn’t eat that chicken with a Cajun cream sauce anywhere on my plate. The spice I could handle, but the texture, no thank you. It’s how I ordered my food always, and Deborah had seen me do it many times. My burgers were always plain. My sandwiches were ordered dry. I never ate food that was unpredictable or, even worse, had an unacceptable texture. Anything with cream sauce was certainly a no-go food for me. I picked up the menu and opened it to the entrees and found the blackened chicken.

“Can I have it with no sauce, please?”

“Of course, one blackened chicken, dry. Do you want the sides?”

I suddenly had the feeling that this server understood something about me and was helping. I appreciated her more than I could have expected. As a matter of fact, I didn't want the sides. They were steamed broccoli, stinky cheese sauce, and red beans. Wasn't my kind of food.

“No, thank you,” I said, then sighed and looked at Deborah, whose expression was somewhere between concerned and baffled.

“Would you like something else? A different side?”

I shook my head and looked at my drink, then back up at our server, my public face back on.

“No, I'm good with just bread,” I said, resigning myself to just having the chicken, and then remembered something. “OH, do you have mashed potatoes?” I asked. I'd seen garlic mashed potatoes and chicken strips on the kids' menu on another visit, and I longed for those strips. But maybe I could get some mashed potatoes out of it. That's a Winnie food.

“It's on the kids' menu,” she said, looking around as though she might get busted helping me. “But I think we can come up with some mashed potatoes for you,” she said, giving me a wink and taking our menus.

Deborah picked up my hand again. I was nervous.

“So...” Deborah said, looking at me with those steely blue eyes.

“I'm sorry if that was weird. I have... You know. I have food issues.”

“I know you do, Winnie. It's okay. We're figuring this out. Cool?”

“Thank you, yes. Cool.”

I nodded, and she fingered my wedding ring. I was surprised to notice that her engagement ring was more modest than mine. It was a simple little stone set on a thin band. Her fingers were shorter than mine, but felt stronger and more confident. She is just as physically affectionate and touchy as the rest of our group, but this was more than that. This felt like she *needed* to be touching me. Then she surprised me. Deborah let go of my hand and rested her palm on my face, the ball of her thumb touching my lips. Slowly, but deliberately, she pushed her thumb between my lips. I was acutely aware of the fact that anyone who saw this would think we were acting way too horny for The Patio. I suddenly didn't care anymore. I only wanted to do whatever Deborah wanted.

I let my lips part and took her thumb into my mouth. I ran the tip of my tongue over the end of it. It tasted vaguely like metal or oil from something leather. Her steering wheel, perhaps,

or maybe her purse. I playfully bit on her knuckle, and she pulled her thumb away, giving me a scolding but good-humored look.

She put her thumb in her mouth briefly, sucking my spit off, and took a sip of her scotch. I took a drink of my screwdriver through a straw, which was very strong and very good and not at all pulpy. It felt like an orange juice kind of day, and I was glad for it.

“So what else?” I asked, folding my hands on the table.

“There’s something you should know about me and the way I want to do this, and it’s important to me that I’m completely upfront about this.”

“Okay, I’m listening,” I said, curious where this was going.

“When we’re together, you’re mine,” she said, her face suddenly serious. My heart sped up, and my breath went shallow. *You’re mine.* I looked her in the eye and nodded.

“Yes, I’m yours.”

She nodded and looked at her hands for a moment. I had no idea what she was going to say next, but I knew it would be important.

“When we’re not together. When you’re with George, you’re mine. If we’re going to be a thing, which I really hope that we are, then you have to be willing to be mine.”

“Yes,” I whispered. My head was spinning. *What was happening? This was growing very rapidly. We were going to be a thing. I very badly wanted to be a thing.*

“Good girl,” Deborah said. The words landed like falling onto a comfortable mattress. It knocked the wind out of me, but I was so glad it was there. *Oh fuck. I was so wet.* She took her hand away and reached across the table for the document. She flipped it over and tapped the signature line, then placed that expensive-looking writing pen on it. I looked at her and smiled, uncapped the pen, then signed the document. Deborah took the papers and pen, signed her own copy, and put them back in the folder where they lived.

Then she reached under the table for her purse. After fishing around for a moment, she set something silver, shiny, and heavy-looking on the table. It took me a moment to realize what it was before my eyes widened.

“Put that away!” I hissed. Deborah shook her head.

“No. That’s for you. Take it,” she said.

I shook my head, my lips pressed together.

“No way,” I hissed, not wanting to touch the thing sitting between us in the middle of the table. It was way too big for me. Not for *my* butt. Deborah was smiling at me. Surely she knew the panic that was unfolding in my head, but her eyes drilled me down like a gun to the head. *Do you feel lucky, punk?* I wasn’t so sure anymore.

“Well, here’s the waitress.”

I gasped and quickly covered the shiny silver butt plug with my cloth napkin just as the server arrived with another scotch for Deborah and a steaming loaf of sourdough bread. I picked up the plug, covered in the napkin, and put it in my purse.

“Here you go! Your food will be out momentarily,” the server said, seemingly oblivious to my abject horror at what had just transpired.

“That’s lovely,” Deborah said. The server left, and I scowled at Deborah.

“Oh, by the way, you’re ordering for me now?”

Deborah nodded, spreading honey butter on a hunk of bread.

“Are you okay with that?”

I looked at her for a long moment.

“Yes,” I whispered finally, looking at the pen on the table. Then I followed it up with, “As long as I can pick the sides. And no sauce.”

Deborah seemed to think about this, holding her highball with two fingers of scotch in it, then pointed at me.

“Deal,” she said, then took another drink. Something was shifting inside me. Not only was I becoming intensely aroused, but I was also feeling excited about what was happening. It was a good feeling, almost like happiness, but a little too scary to be exactly that. It was close enough that I would chase that feeling wherever it went.

“Good,” Deborah said, putting that subject to bed. She ate her hunk of bread.

I nodded and leaned closer.

“What am I supposed to do with this?” I asked, holding up my purse with the butt plug in it.

“It’s time for you to excuse yourself, go to the bathroom, and put that in for me. You think you can do that?”

“I... right now?”

“Yes. Right now,” Deborah said.

I sat there for a moment, fidgeting with the plug in my purse. It was cold and hard and felt like it weighed ten pounds. I felt my satin strip in my purse, and I wrapped it around my finger as I stroked the plug. I closed my eyes and tried to decide what I wanted.

“Okay,” I said. I stood to leave but stopped.

“What is it?” she said, almost annoyed. I leaned in and whispered to her.

“I don’t have anything to use for lube. I just have peppermint scented lotion, and that would burn, I think.”

“Winnie, use spit. Go.”

I nodded, got up, and headed across the restaurant.

ELEVEN

The bathroom at The Patio was modern and very nice, featuring a predominantly dark wood design with silver accents. I went into the stall and hung my purse on the coat hook on the back of the door. The song playing on the speakers recessed into the ceiling was *Slip Slidin' Away* by Paul Simon. *Not my jam, but not a bad song. Very eighties. Wait, no, seventies. Fuck.* I took my phone out of my purse and googled it. *Okay. 1977. It sounds like the eighties, though. Rhythmic loops and African-sounding percussion. 1977 was the year Star Wars came out. Just saying.*

I shook my head, put my phone away, scolded myself, then took the plug out of my purse and examined it more closely. It was heavy, stainless steel, and shaped like an anchor. It was obvious which end went where, as one side had a curved handle that was designed to rest between your cheeks. I had no experience with butt plugs personally, only what I'd seen on the internet and in sex shops, but I understood the concept.

I sighed, pulled up my skirt, and propped one of my canvas Vans sneakers up on the toilet. My pussy was dripping, and for a moment, I worried that the back of my blue skirt was getting a wet spot, but my underwear seemed to contain it. I took a deep breath and dipped the two middle fingers of my left hand between my lips and into myself. They became slick immediately, and I rubbed my juice against my asshole. It puckered, and I allowed my finger to slide in just a little. It was tight and hot and sexy.

I took the plug, held it up to my mouth, and let a long line of spit run over it. I pressed the tip of it against my buttock. It was cold and felt oppressively mean. I took another deep breath, held it, then pushed. It wouldn't go, and it hurt. It wasn't a particularly large-looking plug, based on the ones I've seen online. It was probably smaller than Deborah's thumb, which was in my ass just the day before. But yesterday I was in the middle of a heated fuck session, and right then I was getting ready to eat dry blackened chicken with Cajun seasoning, and mashed potatoes. Yes, I was aroused, no doubt about it, but my asshole was not quite ready for this. It needed more lubrication. I ran my fingers across my labia, collecting juice and rubbing it onto my asshole and the plug.

The song changed from Paul Simon to James Taylor. I like James Taylor. I like Paul Simon, but I like James Taylor more. Fuck yeah. James Taylor is more —

Jesus. Focus!

My mind was running a million miles an hour. I closed my eyes, then pushed the plug again, and it suddenly slid in without warning. My ass just grabbed it when it got to a certain depth. I let out a gasp, then covered my mouth. It hurt for just a second, then once it settled into place, it felt oddly natural. I reached between my legs and positioned the handle properly, resituated my underwear, straightened my skirt, and retrieved my purse from the hook. I felt like it was going to be impossible to walk back to the table without it being really obvious that I had something up my ass.

After washing my hands and checking myself once more in the mirror, I walked as normally as I could back to the table. The fact that *Carolina in My Mind* carried over from the bathroom into the restaurant gave me something to think about as I made my way through The Patio. Deborah was sipping her scotch and watching me as I approached. I hoped my food would be waiting for me, but the table was still without lunch, and when I sat back down in the booth, I felt the cushion press against the handle of the plug, driving it just a little deeper, and I sucked air in through my teeth.

“You all good, champ?” Deborah asked as I wriggled in my seat. I nodded and pressed my lips together. I felt so uncomfortable. Not from the physicality of the plug in my ass, but the context. She was staring at me, watching me. My asshole was singing, not out of pain, but just because it was such an unusual feeling. I rolled my hips forward and back, taking little breaths. With each hip movement, the plug leaned one direction and the other and pressed deeper into me. She laughed.

“You like it, don’t you?”

I sat there and closed my eyes, trying to feel something other than the cold, metal lump up my ass. I nodded. That’s when the server brought our food.

“Here you go! Blackened chicken, dry, and mashed potatoes, for you, and sablefish for you. Is there anything else I can get for you?”

Deborah spoke for us, and this time I was grateful, as I wasn’t sure I could put together a coherent response.

“That’s fabulous, thank you so much,” she said, and I nodded my thanks to the server without meeting her eye. When she was gone, I leaned over the table to get closer to Deborah.

“There’s a big hunk of metal up my ass right now,” I said, tapping the table with my finger for emphasis. She nodded enthusiastically.

“I could tell by the way you walked up here that you did it. I’m impressed! How does it feel?”

I thought about it for a moment.

“It feels very full,” I said, looking at my chicken and trying to decide if I wanted to eat it. More than anything, I wanted to get somewhere private and kiss her. I wondered if her mouth still tasted like oranges. *I thought that soon her mouth would taste like sablefish, but I didn’t like that image, so I stopped thinking about it. Or tried to, anyway.*

“Do you like your gift?” she asked, picking at her fish with her fork. I nodded, soft but definitive. The way her fork scratched across her plate momentarily normally would have made my skin crawl, but right then, I shrugged it off. Not because it didn’t bother me, but because I had something bigger going on.

“Good. Eat your chicken,” she said, pointing at my plate with her fork. I took a drink of my screwdriver and started eating. It was delicious.