

Chapter Four

Klaus Hanslein Junior: Data Center

We argued about the plan. I wanted to swarm Butcher and kick the shit out of him. Ronnie wanted to stay with his first plan and sucker him into fighting. Damn it, Ronnie's plan made sense. Rebecca wouldn't be here to keep her boyfriend from fighting.

Ronnie and Grainger make extra money selling stolen construction supplies. They knew every construction site in the county. If the site isn't fenced in, or guarded, they'll take everything that will fit in their truck. Ronnie had no problems getting into the data center parking lot. He drove his Bronco down an old trail, over a dirt pile and we came out behind the building. Butcher's dark green truck sat all by itself. We parked two spaces away, and completed our plans.

"This will be simple," Ronnie said. "Klaus, after he hits you, I'll call the police. Grainger will have him on video."

"What? After he hits me? He has to hit Grainger."

From the back seat, Grainger laughed. "Fuck you, Klaus, I ain't taking a beating for you."

"You bastard, we're friends. All the times I've helped you." I'd been drinking the shitty energy drinks and felt angry and jumpy.

"Klaus, you ain't done nothing for me." Grainger said. I turned in the front seat and swung at him. Grainger opened his door, slid out and said, "Fuck you, Klaus, I'm done with your shit." He turned his back and walked away.

I jumped out of the car and grabbed him by the arm, "You fuck, you're gonna ruin this."

Grainger spun so fast he pulled me off balance, and I had to let go of his arm. He completed his spin, his arm came around leading with his fist. Still staggered from Grainger's spin, I didn't dodge fast enough and his fist hit my cheek and nose. His punch rocked me back, and I saw stars.

The pain exploding in my face, I flew into a rage. Everyone gave me shit. Rebecca betrayed me, her boyfriend kicked my ass, and now Grainger. I reached out with my left hand and caught his shirt in my clenched fist. Grainger pulled back, away from me. I hit him in his face. He tried to block, but he couldn't stop me. Pummeling Grainger felt good. All the shit I've taken and now, I gave it back. I punched everyone who ever fucked with me. I punched Dad and that cheating whore Rebecca. I punched Rebecca's boyfriend.

He wobbled, and I pulled him around and pinned him against his brother's Bronco. I swapped hands and beat him more.

My hands hurt, and I stopped swinging to examine the torn skin on my knuckles. I remembered hitting Ronnie's truck several times. Grainger was in a bad way, his face a bloody mess, and without me holding him up, he slid sideways. I bent to follow him down, but Ronnie grabbed me in a full nelson. He lifted me up and off my feet.

I flailed around, but Ronnie yelled in my ear, "Stop it, Klaus, you're gonna fuck it all up." Grainger lay on his back sobbing. He held his arms over his ruined face. Grainger pleaded with me to stop hitting him. His voice sounded wet and raspy. Grainger's tears mixed with his blood and ran down his cheeks. I slipped out of Ronnie's grip and stumbled. I felt sick. *What did I do?*

Ronnie dropped to his knees next to his brother and examined Grainger's face and said, "Grainger, listen." Grainger continued to wail. Ronnie shook his brother to get his attention and said, "Listen!"

Grainger rasped, "Ronnie, why didn't you help me?"

Glancing up to me up, Ronnie said, "We got one chance here, pay attention." Ronnie turned back to Grainger, "Dude, we're gonna leave you here and call an ambulance. You tell them that Butcher beat you up." It took Ronnie ten minutes of talking before Grainger agreed to do it. Grainger repeated the story a bunch of times.

Ronnie turned and told me to write, "Asshole" on Butcher's truck. The truck had a light coating of dust. I used my finger and drew the letters. Ronnie had me apologize to Grainger, then we got in his Bronco and drove back out through the woods. Hidden by the trees, we waited, and watched.

Ten minutes later, Butcher found Grainger. We stayed and watched the show. My favorite part: the cop arresting Butcher. He got patted down and cuffed. We waited until the ambulance and the cop left.

Ronnie drove us back to my house. I thought we were free and clear. But, Dad must have parked his car in the garage because I didn't know he was home until he punched me in the gut.

"Where the fuck were you? I told you to stay on the property." Dad growled.

Doubled over from the punch, I groaned, "Out riding with Ronnie and Grainger."

"Yeah?" Dad studied Ronnie's Bronco, he could see it was empty. "Where's Grainger?"

White faced, Ronnie said. "I better get home now, call me later, Klaus." Nodding to my dad, "Good night Mr. Hanslein."

Dad caught Ronnie's shoulder. "Not so fast, you fucking weasel. What kind of shit did you get my son into?"

My dad is a scary fucker, and he can intimidate anyone. Ronnie looked into dad's eyes and dad gave him his 'I will kill you' smile. Ronnie folded like a bitch. "Mr. Hanslein, when, Klaus came back from your hunting cabin, he complained a lot about losing Rebecca to that Butcher guy and I, um, we came up with a plan. ..." Ronnie detailed the whole thing to my dad.

"Where is Grainger?"

"We left him next to Butcher's truck. He's OK, the ambulance came and took him, and the cops arrested Butcher."

Dad stood still, his jaw working. "Both of you, in the kitchen, sit and wait."

We waited, Dad got on the phone to his lawyer. "Joseph, It's Klaus, I need you to make some calls. Two things, has Kevin Butcher been arrested, and has Grainger Thomas been hospitalized? Call me as soon as you get the info." Dad sat at the kitchen table, he closed his eyes and shook his head. Dad looked at me, then at Ronnie. "Tell me why Grainger would lie after Junior beat him up."

Ronnie swallowed, "Um, I told him you'd kill him if he didn't."

Dad sat there thinking, his jaw sort of worked like he chewed his thoughts. He slapped his hands down on the table. The sound scared the hell out of Ronnie and me. Dad looked at Ronnie and said, "Your first plan wasn't bad." Ronnie perked up hearing that. Dad continued, "If you could have recorded Kevin Butcher fighting, it might have worked. Your second plan, though, the one you made up on the fly, was

pure stupidity. You should have put him in your car and taken him home. It has too many flaws, and it's gonna fall apart in a day or two."

Ronnie's balls must have descended because he questioned my dad. "What flaws?"

Dad said to me, "Put your hands out." I put my hands, palms down, on the table. Dad grabbed my right hand and held it up. "Look at his knuckles." Blood seeped from the little cuts. "Unless Butcher's hands look like those, your story won't work. At the most, you'll inconvenience Butcher for two days. Then the police will be after your brother for filing a false report."

Ronnie shook his head, "I didn't think about that."

Schmidt Farm, Living Room

Rachel Schmidt and her husband Jonathan sat on their chairs and watched the evening news. They had watched the news together every night for eighteen years. This summer brought a change to their routine, their daughter had a suitor. Rebecca and Kevin spent their evenings spooning outside on the glider.

Kevin worked a lot of extra hours. His eagerness to work long shifts was one of several reasons her husband liked him. Tonight, Kevin must be working a double. Rebecca sat at the kitchen table with his laptop and planned her do-over of Kevin's house.

Mr. Schmidt increased the volume and leaned towards the television. A "Breaking News" ticker scrolled across the bottom of the screen. Behind the reporter, a computer displayed the logo of the company owning the data center. The reporter said, "A local man suffered a vicious assault and is in the hospital tonight. Grainger Thomas was assaulted for, allegedly, defacing a contractor's vehicle. The contractor, Kevin Butcher of Fulton County, allegedly found Mr. Thomas drawing a vulgar word on the side of his work vehicle. A fight ensued and Mr. Thomas sustained serious injuries. Mr. Thomas was transported to the hospital. Mr. Butcher is under arrest and is being held at Central Booking."

The news cut to a commercial.

Jonathan said, "This is terrible. Why would Kevin do that?"

Rachel said, "Grainger helped his brother hold Rebecca at the fair."

Jonathan nodded, "And, at the ice cream shop, Rebecca stopped Kevin from hitting him. We'll see what we can do for Kevin."

The phone rang. Rebecca, expecting a call from Kevin, picked up the kitchen phone. She didn't know about Kevin! "Daddy, " she called out, "it's Pastor Luke."

Rachel knew Jonathan did *not* want to talk to Pastor Luke. Not after watching the news report about Kevin. Pastor Luke had "counseled" Jonathan on Rebecca's undesirable suitor. In Luke's eyes, Kevin Butcher, the former marine, was an irredeemable sinner. Lost and unrepentant sinners had no place within Luke's congregation. After several such counseling sessions, Jonathan refused to attend another.

The Schmidts were certain that Luke's wife, a Hanslein, influenced his opinion.

Rachel touched Jonathan's arm. She said, "I'll listen from the kitchen."

Jonathan squeezed her hand and nodded. He waited until Rachel shoed Rebecca and Tommy out onto the porch. When she had the kitchen phone to her ear, with the microphone covered, he picked up the living room extension and said, "Pastor Luke?"

Pastor Luke came straight to the point, "Your daughter's suitor made the news tonight. Did you see it?"

Jonathan replied. "Rachel and I watched the news, we don't know what happened."

"What happened? Your daughter's English suitor displayed his true nature."

"Mr. Butcher understands our beliefs and showed restraint after a deliberate provocation. We don't have the whole story about tonight's news report."

"Jonathan, I have counseled you to sever ties with this violent outsider. I do not want his lack of Godliness to affect your family. Pray for him if you would; but this man, this Butcher, does not belong within our congregation."

"We don't know if the authorities will bring charges. Even if charged there has not been a trial, nor has the court convicted him."

"If you continue your association with Mr. Butcher, I will ask the elders to ban you, and your family."

Rachel watched her husband lose his temper. Jonathan's face colored and his eyes blazed. "The Ban, Pastor Luke? I hardly think the ban is appropriate." His voice took on a hard edge. "You need to step back and pray for guidance."

Pastor Luke's voice, already strident, increased in volume. He repeated his threat of a ban.

With Jonathan's anger in full bloom, Rachel saw she needed to end this conversation. She put the phone back on the hook, and called out, "Jonathan? Can you help here?"

Jonathan nodded and interrupted Luke's tirade. He said, "Pastor Luke, as Kevin Butcher might say, 'Bring it on, bitch!'" He slammed the phone down.

Jonathan rubbed his temples while he strode into the kitchen. He hadn't been this angry since his father forbade him from marrying Rachel.

Rachel knew Jonathan would have a headache. She said, "Wait here, I'll get your headache pills," and dashed upstairs.

Rebecca, from out on the porch, saw her father step into the kitchen. Thinking the conversation over, she reentered the kitchen. She could ask about the wedding announcement! "Daddy, can we announce my wedding on Sunday?"

Jonathan had a lot on his mind. Kevin's arrest, Pastor Luke's ban, and a building headache. He immediately assumed the worst. His daughter *needed* to get married. "Wedding? You and Kevin *need* me to announce your wedding this Sunday?"

"Well, yes Daddy, how else can we marry in two weeks?"

Jonathan regarded his beautiful daughter, she reminded him so much of his Rachel. Although Rachel had been a year younger when they *needed* to marry. "Does your mother know?"

"Yes Daddy, I told her last week. She thought it too soon to tell you."

"Too soon?" Jonathan couldn't believe this. His daughter needed to marry now. Babies born too soon after a marriage were always sources of gossip. "TOO SOON?"

Rachel reentered the kitchen. She said, "Jonathan, what are you yelling about?"

"You thought it too soon for me to know about Rebecca and Kevin's upcoming marriage."

"Well yes, if we'd told you then, you'd have become upset. As you are now."

Jonathan decided it was time to simplify things. Pastor Luke pushing his buttons. His family threatened by the ban. His unmarried daughter pregnant. The man responsible for his daughter's condition in jail for aggravated assault.

He turned to the wall mounted corded telephone. Thumb tacked to the wall above it, an index card listed important phone numbers. In the upper right corner, in red ink and bracketed with hearts, he found Kevin's cell phone number. Rachel held out a glass with water and his headache pills. Reflexively, he took the pills. Then, with a grim determination, he picked up the phone and dialed Kevin's number.

The voice mail picked up after the fourth ring. "Sorry, I can't take your call, Semper-Fi! BEEP!"

"Kevin, this is Jonathan Schmidt. When you get out of jail ..."

Rebecca who hadn't watched the news, turned to her mother, "Kevin's in jail?"

"... please stay away from my house and my daughter. You are not welcome here right now. If, and I repeat, if the court acquits you, we will discuss your marriage to my daughter." Jonathan was on a roll. Chewing on Kevin satisfied his unchristian need to hurt someone. "If you need clarification, call my cell phone. Do not contact my daughter." He hung up the phone and turned to see his daughter sobbing in his wife's arms. His wife glared at him as though he were responsible for all the world's pain. With the surety that accompanies the absolute certainty in the rightness of one's actions, Jonathan took himself to bed.

Rachel told Rebecca the news about Kevin. She sent her children to bed, tidied up her kitchen, and went to bed herself. Jonathan refused to discuss anything. No one except Tommy got much sleep.

Schmidt Farm, Kitchen:

The next morning, Mrs. Schmidt found her daughter sleeping while clutching a pillow. Rachel sat on the bed and stroked her daughter's hair. After Rebecca woke, Mrs. Schmidt said, "I'm sorry Kevin couldn't come home last night."

Rebecca sat up and hugged her mother, "I'm worried about him, Momma."

"I am worried, too, daughter, come down and help. Maybe we'll get some news." Rachel kissed Rebecca's forehead and went downstairs.

Rebecca hadn't been any help with breakfast.

Jonathan sat and everyone assumed their places. This morning's breakfast was quieter than normal.

He realized his daughter must be distraught with worry about her potentially illegitimate child. He said, "Rebecca, if the worst happens, and Kevin is not acquitted, I will send you to your Aunt Deborah in Ohio."

Mrs. Schmidt and Rebecca sat through this suggestion in silence.

Jonathan didn't understand their silence, weren't they concerned with this unplanned pregnancy? He said. "Deborah lives near your second cousins. You remember your second cousin Andrew? You and he used to play together. Deborah mentioned he'd like to see you."

Still no reply. Maybe they needed more time to understand the gravity of the situation. Jonathan finished his coffee and left to start his day.

Interlude: Schmidt's Farm, Kitchen

"Momma, is daddy trying to marry me to second cousin Andrew again? I am not going to Ohio!"

"Your father is doing what he thinks is best. I'll discuss it with him after he calms down."

"Do you agree with his decision about Kevin?"

Mrs. Schmidt paused before answering; she turned her head and stared out the window. That same window where she and Rebecca would watch Kevin exercise. "No, I don't agree with your father, but that will not change anything."

Rebecca stewed, she needed to do something. "Momma, I'm going to take the van and visit Grainger. Maybe he'll tell me what happened?"

"Rebecca, you can't go there by yourself!"

"Momma, I can't just sit here."

"I understand, help me clean up and I'll go with you."

Kevin Butcher:

On any other day, it would interest me to learn how police make arrests and book criminals. Learning the process from the criminal point of view is unpleasant. Part of the booking process involved discussing my gang affiliations. Another part involved a blood test for STDs. I suppose the STD test was in case of an unplanned romantic encounter. After booking, I made my phone call to a local criminal lawyer. There wouldn't be a magistrate available until morning and they put me in a holding cell. I shared the cell with six other men. They all had neck or facial tattoos. My new friends stared at me until one said, "What ya here for?"

"Aggravated assault." I said. The two bigger guys nodded and everyone left me alone. Get charged with a violent felony, and you get an automatic respect bump.

My new lawyer met me in a small interview room before my preliminary arraignment. He had me tell him what happened, then he examined my hands and remarked, "Those hands don't look like you assaulted someone. I'll make sure your case file has pictures of your hands."

At the preliminary arraignment, the magistrate looked over my file and asked questions. She decided I was not a flight risk because I didn't have a record and I owned property. I think not having a neck or a face tattoo helped. The magistrate released me without bail, but with two travel restrictions. I could not leave the state, and I could not approach Grainger Thomas. My preliminary hearing would be on Wednesday, next week.

I collected my belongings from the lockup, and my keys were missing. The clerk checked and told me they towed my truck to the criminal impound lot last night. I wouldn't be able to get it back until later today, or tomorrow.

After stepping outside, I turned on my phone. There were three voice mails. The first voice mail was Mr. Schmidt calling last night, "Kevin, this is Jonathan Schmidt. After you get out of jail, please stay away from my house and my daughter. You are not welcome here right now. If, and I repeat, if the court

acquits you, we will discuss your marriage to my daughter. If you need clarification, call my cell phone. Do not contact my daughter."

My stomach churned, and it wasn't just from a lack of food.

The next voice mail was from Rebecca. "Kevin, Mom and I heard Daddy when he left that message for you. Don't call me yet. I'll call you."

I felt a little better.

The last voice mail was my employer firing me, for fighting on the customer's property.

My lawyer stepped out of the building behind me. "Mr. Butcher, need a ride somewhere local?"

"I need coffee and a ride to the hotel."

We had coffee and Danish at the hotel. We talked about my string of problems with Klaus Junior and his friends. I also recounted everything I knew about Rebecca's history with Klaus Junior. My lawyer took a lot of notes. He told me it had been stupid to not report the assault at the county fair. My failure to report the incident at the fair led to my current situation.

The hotel wouldn't have a room available until noon. I feel asleep in the lobby.

Berks County Hospital, Room 4311

Grainger Thomas had a hospital room to himself. He didn't know it was due to a request from the police. He liked being alone. When alone, no one picked on him, or expected him to do stupid shit. This morning, he had second thoughts about the stupid shit he and his brother got into.

When he and Ronnie kept watch on Kevin Butcher, Grainger compared his and Kevin's life. Kevin had a job, he had a nice truck, and a hot girlfriend. Rebecca might cover up like a Mennonite, but you only had to watch her walk to know she had a body. Mennonite girls didn't show affection in public, but Rebecca did. She held Kevin's arm, or his hands, and didn't care who saw it. Grainger knew he envied Kevin Butcher.

Earlier this morning, a doctor and nurse changed his bandages. The doctor said something about plastic surgery. More pain medicine came and made Grainger loopy and distant. A nice woman from the hospital's billing department stopped in. She asked for his health insurance information. Grainger answered her questions as best he could. She left unhappy that he didn't have health insurance.

A police detective arrived to take his statement, and Grainger didn't care. He rode the pain killer high. Ronnie had prepared Grainger for this. The detective introduced himself and sat down. Detective Robertson said, "Mr. Thomas, can I call you Grainger? Is that what your friends call you? You don't mind answering a few questions?"

"I don't have any friends, 'cept Klaus Junior and my brother and you can ask questions."

"Thank you, Grainger. Klaus Junior? Is Junior his last name?"

"Heh, no. Klaus's last name is Hanslein, his dad is Klaus Senior. Junior is Junior."

Grainger didn't notice Detective Robertson picked up on that name. The detective read Officer Wilson's report, and he knew Klaus Hanslein by reputation. "You hang out with your brother and Junior?"

Ronnie hadn't prepared him for questions like this. "Yeah, but aren't you going to ask about Butcher beating me up?"

"We'll get to that, I want to get your background first, OK?" Grainger shrugged. "Do you and your friends do any work for Klaus's dad? Run errands? Pick up stuff?"

Grainger laughed, at least he might have laughed. With his pulped nose and fractures, it was a horrible sound. "No way, Senior's scary as hell and thinks we're stupid. He calls my brother Ronnie a weasel." The detective made notes. With Grainger on pain killers, most of this would be inadmissible. He'd keep with it because something useful might slip out.

"So, Grainger, yesterday, how did you get to the data center?"

Grainger had to think, Ronnie hadn't covered that. "Um, I dunno. I guess I walked there."

The detective stepped Grainger through his day and how he arrived at the data center. Grainger's story changed twice, and the detective noted this. The details of the beating stayed consistent.

"Grainger, how long did you wait in the parking lot before Mr. Butcher came out?"

"I don't know, I laid there for a while."

"What was Mr. Butcher wearing?"

"Just clothes."

"Did he wear a hat, or a coat, or gloves?"

Ronnie hadn't covered that; Klaus wore a T-shirt and was bare handed. "Nothing like that."

"Could you describe Mr. Butcher's hands?"

Grainger had a couple vivid memories of Junior's hands with his fists looming large. "His hands? His hands were big and bloody."

"One more thing, Grainger. Could you write the same word on my notepad you wrote on the truck?"

"Sure." Grainger remembered what Ronnie told him. He held the notepad and wrote, "Asshole".

The detective finished making his notes and stood. Grainger, the poor bastard, had taken a beating, but for what? No one knew why he blamed Kevin Butcher. Other than Grainger's testimony, there wasn't any evidence that Mr. Butcher did it. He wanted to compare Grainger's handwriting to the writing on Butcher's truck.

"Grainger, I may have to come back later, would you mind?"

Grainger shrugged and said, "No, anytime." He felt drowsy and hungry.

Later, Grainger stirred. He heard a tapping on the door. He opened his eyes, and Rebecca and her mom stood on either side of his bed. Mrs. Schmidt made tsking sounds as she studied his injuries. Rebecca laid her hand on his shoulder and said, "Grainger Thomas, you look terrible."

He tried to sit up, but Mrs. Schmidt told him to hold still and she used the control to tilt his bed up. While the bed tilted, Grainger voiced his confusion, "Rebecca, what, why are *you* here?"

Mrs. Schmidt spoke up, "Young man, we are here because we care. You are not the only person hurt because of Klaus Junior's unhealthy fixation on my daughter."

"Did Klaus beat up someone else?"

Mrs. Schmidt and Rebecca shared a glance. Rebecca said, "Grainger, you didn't deserve this."

Grainger got back on track. "But, it was Kevin Butcher that hit me and he's in jail now."

Rebecca spoke, her voice one of absolute certainty. "Grainger, Kevin only fights to protect me. I wasn't there and nothing you could do would make him hit you."

Mrs. Schmidt said, "Grainger, has your mom come to sit with you?"

Grainger tried to shake his head, but it hurt too much. He said, "No, ma'am."

Rebecca and Mrs. Schmidt stayed and talked with Grainger for the rest of the morning. When the lunch cart came past, Grainger received a tray of soft foods. Mrs. Schmidt made sure he ate everything.

After lunch, Rebecca asked, "Grainger, what happened last night? Who hit you?"

Grainger looked frightened. "I can't talk about it, Rebecca. I'm sorry, but I can't."

Rebecca looked at her mom, but Mrs. Schmidt shrugged. "Young man, I wish that were otherwise, but we're confident that Kevin is innocent." Mrs. Schmidt checked the clock, "Rebecca, it's time to get back and start dinner. Grainger, we'll check in on you tomorrow."

Rebecca squeezed Grainger's hand and said goodbye.

Grainger tried, but couldn't meet Rebecca's eyes, "I'm sorry about all this, Rebecca. Kevin is lucky to have you."

Mrs. Schmidt said, "Kevin isn't with Rebecca right now."

"Because of me?"

"My husband won't allow him back until the court acquits him."

The Schmidts left and Grainger was alone. He enjoyed their company and hadn't asked for a shot of pain killer. Now with Rebecca and her mom gone, the pain was back. He pushed the call button. In the quiet minutes while he waited for the nurse. He noticed the room felt emptier than before the Schmidts visited.

Kevin Butcher:

The hotel manager woke me when my room was available. I showered and worked on my course of action. I had three goals. Reacquire my girlfriend, clear my name, and hunt down the fucker responsible.

Getting Rebecca back might be tricky. Her dad is angry about the assault on Grainger and he thinks I did it.

Clearing my name would clear up the problem with Mr. Schmidt, but how would I do it? I do electronics, not investigations. What if I sneak into the hospital and question Grainger? Shit, why would he talk? If I got caught, the magistrate would put me back in jail. I'll call my lawyer again.

Klaus Junior had to be the fucker responsible, and I needed to deal with him. Two problems though: finding him, and what to do after. I can Google him and see about an address. Once I get my truck, I could drive there and look for him. What if I find him? What would it take to make him stop? Am I prepared to put him in the ground? Could I do it in cold blood? The world, well, my part of the world, would be a better place.

And If Rebecca ever found out, she might not forgive me. I wouldn't risk that.

I needed information about Junior.

Hotel showers are awesome. All the hot water you need to think problems through.

Out of the shower and wrapped in a big fluffy bathrobe, I went back to my first problem. If Mr. Schmidt would give me the benefit of the doubt, I might see Rebecca again.

Time to call Mr. Schmidt and get clarification.

Mr. Schmidt and a neighbor split the cost of renting a forage harvester. The forage harvester chopped up the entire corn plant. The chopped and compressed silage fermented inside long silage bags. Dairy cows loved fermented silage, and it provided a large part of their diet. Jonathan helped his neighbor

today. Tomorrow, they would work on his fields. Jonathan drove a tractor hauling cut silage. His phone rang. Jonathan checked the Caller ID. It was Kevin, his daughter's baby daddy.

"Well, Hello, Mr. Butcher."

Kevin said, "Mr. Schmidt, I am calling for clarification."

Mr. Schmidt said, "I expected your call, Mr. Butcher. What do you need clarified?"

"You are angry about what happened, I'm sorry."

"You're sorry? Well, I'm sorry too. I had expected you to exercise more restraint."

"Mr. Schmidt, I expected you would give me the benefit of the doubt. I didn't do it."

The nerve of him! Is Kevin saying that my daughter sleeps around? "Just who do you think, did it? The tooth fairy?"

Kevin said, "I don't know who did it. I wasn't even there when it happened."

Mr. Schmidt said, "Mr. Butcher, I am quite certain you *did it*. Your refusal to accept responsibility makes me certain that keeping you away is the best thing I could do."

If Kevin had doubts about Mr. Schmidt's feelings, they were clarified. "This isn't going anywhere, Mr. Schmidt. Good day."

Kevin reviewed his conversation with Mr. Schmidt. Had Mr. Schmidt always been this unwilling to see reason?

A short while later, Rebecca called. "Kevin, are you OK?"

"Becks, I'm going crazy missing you. I'm furious with your father. My employer fired me. No, I'm not OK."

"I'm so sorry. I miss you."

"Everything your father asked, Becky. I did the best I could. Last night, I found Grainger hurt and called for an ambulance. I even stayed with him. That was an action your father should support. I guess I misjudged him."

"Daddy's doing what he thinks is best."

"Not good enough, Becks. I didn't hurt Grainger. I've never started a fight here. Becky, I will not change to suit your father. I won't stand by while someone hurts you."

"What are you going to do?"

"Well, I'm not allowed to leave the state. Tomorrow, I'll get my truck and go home. Without you, there isn't anything for me here. I'll come back next week for the preliminary hearing."

Becky said, "I wish I could go with you. Daddy wants to send me to Ohio."

"Ohio? Why?"

"My aunt Deborah is there and my second cousins live there. I think Daddy wants me to marry one of them."

This was too much, I had enough. It was time to simplify things, "Becky, would you marry me, if you could?"

"You know I would, but we can't without Daddy's permission."

"Come home with me tomorrow. I'll keep you with me and no one can send you to Ohio."

"I can't, Daddy would go crazy."

"Becks, I don't care if your dad goes crazy. I'll regret hurting your mom, though."

"Can you come and get me now?"

"Tomorrow, Becks. I'll have my truck tomorrow morning and I can pick you up whenever you want." A thought occurred to me. "Bring your birth certificate."

"My birth certificate?"

"We can get married on your birthday."

"I'll find it."

"You can bring whatever you want. If you can't pack a bag, don't worry, I'll buy you whatever you need."

"Daddy's coming from the barn for lunch, I have to go. Love you."

She hung up. My phone needed charged, but I didn't have a charger. I called the hotel desk, they had a box of abandoned phone chargers, and I could take one. They also had a laundry, things were looking up.

Interlude: Schmidt Farm, Upstairs

Last night during supper Rebecca kept her head down and said nothing. Her father probably interpreted it as a calm acceptance of her fate. But Rachel Schmidt knew better; she knew her daughter quite well. Rebecca and Kevin planned something, and they did not have many options.

This morning, Rebecca was busy upstairs with her door closed. It was time to talk.

Rachel knocked and entered Rebecca's bedroom. Rebecca sat on her bed packing a small bag with her few collectibles. Rachel sat on the bed and said, "Daughter, you've been too quiet. What's going on?"

Rebecca met her mother's eyes, "I'm going home with Kevin today. Daddy can't send me to Ohio to marry a second cousin."

Rachel sat next to her daughter. She felt concerned, worried, and happy for Rebecca. Rachel lifted her hand and pushed the few stray hairs from her daughter's face. "I understand."

Rebecca's eyes grew large as she realized that her mother understood. "You're not going to stop us?"

"Goodness, no! I've put too much effort into getting the two of you together. Let's get your bags packed, then we'll get Kevin's stuff."

Kevin Butcher:

Late yesterday afternoon, my lawyer dropped off a signed release form, in triplicate. They wouldn't release my truck to me without it. In the morning, I caught a cab over to the criminal impound lot. The guy running the lot wanted me to pay for the tow. Another call to my lawyer had the Chief of Police walk out to give me a written waiver.

After checking out of the hotel, I sat in my truck waiting for Rebecca to call.

Rebecca called! I was to meet her at the end of her lane at 10AM. She had my stuff packed up with hers. Now, I worried her father would stop her.

At 9:45AM, I parked on the side of the road at the end of Rebecca's lane. I was in luck, the corn still stood and my truck was not visible from the farm house. I hoped that Mr. Schmidt wouldn't drive past.

At 9:55AM, I got out of my truck and walked to the end of the lane. As soon as I saw Rebecca, I would grab her and we would go.

At 10:00AM, no Rebecca! I considered driving up to her house, barging in, and taking her with me.

At 10:02AM, the Schmidts' van came into view and drove towards me. My hopes and dreams crashed to the ground. As the van closed, I saw Mrs. Schmidt drove and Rebecca sat in the passenger position! The van stopped, Rebecca jumped out and ran to me. Mrs. Schmidt opened her window and smiled. "Mr. Butcher, I must admit to being irritated when I learned you planned on taking my daughter away from me."

"Mrs. Schmidt, I'm sorry, but I never planned to do this. My only regret is hurting you." Rebecca pulled my head down and kissed me. She grasped my arm with both of her hands.

"As to that, Mr. Butcher, I appreciate your respect for my feelings. The only thing you could do to hurt my feelings would be to present me with a grandchild too soon. Do not make babies until after you two marry."

"Yes ma'am, I understand.

"I am certain you do." Mrs. Schmidt looked straight into my eyes. "I expect you to be careful, Mr. Butcher. Do you take my meaning?"

I swallowed glanced at Rebecca then back to Mrs. Schmidt, "Yes ma'am, I do."

"Your belongings and Rebecca's bags are in the back. Please load your truck, I have errands to run."

I loaded my things and Rebecca's bags into the back seat of my truck. Rebecca and her mother said their goodbyes. Mrs. Schmidt stepped out of her van to hug Rebecca. I offered Mrs. Schmidt my hand and got a hug and a kiss on my cheek. We got into our vehicles and left.

Berks County Hospital, Room 4311

The nurses stopped bringing the nice pain shots after the Schmidts left yesterday. They brought Tylenol instead. This morning, the doctor talked about releasing me tomorrow. All those hours with a clear head and the dulled throbbing pain around my nose and eyes kept me awake. I felt like shit. Rebecca had done nothing to hurt me, and Klaus had done nothing to help. Because I'm stupid, I helped Klaus hurt Rebecca. I am a stupid piece of shit!

Grainger looked up at a knock, and Mrs. Schmidt stepped in.

He waited, but Rebecca didn't follow.

Mrs. Schmidt came over to his bed and said, "Good morning, Grainger, how are you today?"

"I'm feeling better, Mrs. Schmidt, they may let me go tomorrow. Where's Rebecca?"

"Rebecca's gone, she left with Kevin."

"She left? Everything worked out then?"

"No, not at all. My husband will be furious when he finds out."

"Rebecca ran away?"

"Yes, my daughter ran away with Kevin."

Grainger chuckled, then laughed, "Ha, fucking Ronnie. He never expected that!" He caught himself and realized what he said. "I'm sorry for swearing."

Mrs. Schmidt waved away his swearing. "Never mind that." Her eyes bored into his, "What did fu ... ahem, your brother, Ronnie expect to happen?"

"If I tell you, you can't tell anyone. If Senior finds out, I'm dead."

"Grainger, I would have to tell my husband. We don't keep secrets from each other. We also do not tell stories to the Hansleins."

Grainger told her the story.

Mrs. Schmidt looked at Grainger and saw a human being in misery. His face bruised and bandaged, and for what? For the benefit of that monster Klaus Junior

Would the Hansleins ever leave her family alone

Grainger and Mrs. Schmidt heard a knock on the door. Detective Robertson stepped in. He glanced at Mrs. Schmidt and then to Grainger. "I overheard most of your story, Grainger. It explains a lot." He turned to Mrs. Schmidt and extended his hand, "I'm Detective Robertson. Are you related to Grainger?"

Grainger's hoarse laugh sounded from the hospital bed, "That's Mrs. Schmidt, she's the mother of Kevin Butcher's girlfriend."

Mrs. Schmidt and Detective Robertson shook hands. She said, "My daughter, Rebecca, is at the center of all this, Detective Robertson."

Detective Robertson said, "This sounds like an interesting story, do you mind if I sit and listen to it?"

"It all started when my daughter, Rebecca, started in the eighth grade. ..."

Grainger looked both scared and determined.

Schmidt Farm, Kitchen

Mrs. Rachel Schmidt watched her husband as he came in from the porch. Jonathan, now forty, resembled his father more than he resembled his younger self. She met Jonathan a few months before her sixteenth birthday. He had been twenty-two, tall, handsome, gentle, and oh, so smart. Well, it took a while to find out how smart. Jonathan had scored so well on the SAT, he received offers of full academic scholarships.

Jonathan's father Joseph, that stiff necked old Dutchman, ruined his son's future. Joseph decided that the farm would pass to his eldest son. Her father-in-law would not change his mind once he decided on a course of action. Jonathan passed on the scholarships and became a farmer.

When she and Jonathan told his father, she was pregnant, Jonathan's father raged. If not for his earlier decision about the farm, he might have disowned his eldest son. Jonathan and Rachel could have lived with her parents, and Jonathan would have earned a degree.

Sometime over the last eighteen years, her husband became his father. When had Jonathan lost his flexibility? When did he become stiff-necked like his father, and why hadn't she seen it before now?

Rachel had asked Jonathan twice to reconsider and allow Kevin to return. He refused both times. The first time, he spouted nonsense about irresponsible behavior running in the family. The second time he shook his head and continued his chores.

She glanced at the clock, 6 PM. Rebecca had been home with Kevin for some five hours now. Those two alone for five hours in Kevin's house? Rachel believed Kevin when he promised to be careful. But Rebecca knew if she became pregnant, it would guarantee her marriage to Kevin.

Jonathan entered the kitchen and nodded his greetings. Just as he did every day, he washed his hands and arms at the sink. Rachel wondered if he washed his hands after banning Kevin. Her husband sat and Rachel placed the food on the table. After Mrs. Schmidt sat, Jonathan clenched his hands together for the prayer. He noticed the empty seat. "Where is Rebecca?"

"Gone off with her young man."

Jonathan unclenched his hands and placed them flat on the table. He met Rachel's eyes. Why didn't she understand? Without looking at his son he said, "Tommy, fix a plate and go eat on the front porch."

Tommy glanced at both of his parents. His father's cheeks had gained color, and his mother looked serene. This would be bad. Tommy loaded his plate and bolted for the front door.

Jonathan waited until he heard the front door close. He kept his voice even, "When did she leave?"

"Late this morning. I saw her get into his truck when I left to run errands."

He sat up straight and clamped his hands to the edge of the table. When he lost his temper, his hands shook. "Rebecca wouldn't have run off without talking to you first. So, you must support it. Therefore, you disagree with my decision to tell Kevin to stay away."

"Jonathan, I don't understand you. Telling Kevin to stay away. That's something your father would have done."

"I think Dad would have done a bit more. As for Rebecca, I'll go there tomorrow, and fetch her back home."

"Jonathan, your daughter is where she wants to be. If you somehow manage to force her back, you'll not be sleeping in my bed afterwards."

In their eighteen years of marriage, they always went to bed together. That had been one of their wedding night promises.

"You're serious? Where would I sleep?"

"You can sleep in the barn for all I care. You are too much like your father. I didn't like him then, and I don't like you now."

Jonathan sat back in his chair. He shrugged, "Well, the damage is already done, what more trouble can she get into?"

"What are you talking about?"

Why was Rachel being so thick about this? "Because Rebecca is pregnant."

"Don't be silly, Rebecca isn't pregnant."

"Of course, she is, why else would she need to marry Kevin so soon?"

Jonathan couldn't believe it. His wife went over the edge. She sat at the foot of the table, laughing and crying. She looked, pointed at him, and her laughter turned into snorting. This was most improper.

"Rachel, calm down. This is nothing to laugh about." He stood and went to her. Rachel stood and hugged him. He returned her hug and kissed her forehead. "Rachel, forgive me, but I'm so mad that we couldn't keep the kids from making the same mistake as us."

Rachel wiped her face on his shirt, "Marrying me was a mistake?"

"What? No! Marrying you was the best thing I ever did. I'm talking about Rebecca getting pregnant."

Rachel shook her head, "Jonathan, listen carefully. Rebecca isn't pregnant. She and Kevin haven't *done that*. They want to marry now because they are ready. We, I, didn't want to tell you earlier, because you would have assumed that they *needed* to get married. Just like us."

Jonathan said, "Oh."

"Yes, and Rebecca thinks you are sending her to Ohio to marry a second cousin."

Jonathan said, "Oh."

Rachel chuckled, "Remember that Rebecca gets her intelligence from you. She knows what she needs to do to secure Kevin."

Jonathan hugged his wife and said, "I've set the fox into the hen house, haven't I." He stepped towards the phone. "I need to make a phone call."

"To Rebecca and Kevin?"

"No. I need to call my sister."

"Deborah? Why?"

"Rebecca and Kevin think they are being clever. They think they can 'get one over on me.' I'll ask Deborah to visit and chaperone Rebecca."

"Jonathan, that's terrible!"

"It is, isn't it?"

Kevin Butcher:

It was a beautiful day on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The turnpike was America's first limited access highway. It runs across the width of the state. Long sections of the turnpike wind through beautiful wooded hills. The cloudless blue sky above, almost as beautiful as my girlfriend's blue eyes. Today, Rebecca came home with me. I hoped she wouldn't regret her decision to run away with me. Rebecca put my concerns to rest when she kicked off her sneakers and put her feet up on the dashboard. We grinned and held hands.

As the miles slipped by, Rebecca dozed and the hem of her dress slid down until it bunched up at her knees. I hoped it would slide down further. Tonight, we would be alone, and I would leave some lights on. No more fooling around in the dark. I remembered Rebecca's interest in my hot tub I doubted she packed a swimming suit.

Rebecca's doze had an abrupt ending. Her hem had slipped well past her knees and I wondered if Rebecca would wear shorts. Maybe a leather mini skirt and fishnet stockings. No hurry, I had nothing

but time to play games with Becky. While going up one hill, I passed a tractor trailer. The truck driver must have glanced down into my truck and seen Rebecca with her legs on display. The driver tooted his horn in appreciation and Rebecca startled. I watched her figure out the chain of events. Her feet came back down and she swatted my arm. "I don't mind if you see my legs, but I'm not on display for anyone else."

"I'm sorry, sweetheart, next time I'll warn you."

We stopped at the Lawn Service plaza. I bought her a Pumpkin Spiced Latte at Starbuck's. I had a cold brewed coffee, black.

Back on the turnpike, we talked about our future. Rebecca dropped a bomb and told me that if her dad didn't come around, her mom might help us get a marriage license.

My house still stood. The farmer that rented the field behind my house had a harvester running. I parked in the driveway and we got out. Rebecca turned in a circle and said, "This is nice, Kevin."

It is rather nice. I had neighbors on the sides of my house. Their houses were far enough away we had to wave our greetings. The field behind my house had been recently harvested. The nearest neighbors in that direction, were over a mile away.

"I'll unlock the front door; you can explore while I bring in the bags."

Unloading the truck took three trips. I found Rebecca in a different room with each trip. In the living room, she marveled at my 60" curved screen OLED TV and the sectional couch. The kitchen did not meet her standards, but she assured me she would fix it soon enough. On my last trip inside, I found her in the master bedroom, looking at my, well our, queen size bed. The curtains were all closed but sunlight seeped in around the edges. I set our bags on the floor and wrapped my arms around her from behind. She felt warm and soft in all the right places.

I said, "I have you here and it's just us."

Rebecca turned to face me. She lifted herself up on her toes and we kissed. I took a few liberties while we kissed. Her soft cotton dress hid nothing from my roaming hands. When our lips parted, we both were panting and Rebecca's cheeks were pink.

Rebecca reached up and smoothed my hair from where she had mussed it. She said, "Will it always be like this? You make me crazy."

I said, "Sweetheart, I'm just trying to be a good boyfriend."

She pulled me down and kissed me. Her hands slipped from my head and I felt her grab the waistband of my jeans. Her fingers slipped inside and down, against my bare skin.

She pulled her lips away from mine and said, "Want to show me what a good husband does?"

I was already hard from our first kiss; now, I was harder. I was so hard it hurt. Her fingers tickled the tip of my erection.

Groaning, "Your Momma will skin me alive."

Rebecca used her hold on my waistband to steer and push me backwards until I felt the edge of the bed. She stood up on her toes to kiss me. My hands found her butt as her hands opened my pants and pushed them down. The air felt cool on my exposed skin. Rebecca's hands found me and she broke off our kiss. She said, "Sit," and used her hold on me as leverage to push me into sitting. She sunk to her knees and made eye contact with me. Her head lowered, her mouth opening, and she stopped. I couldn't help it, I groaned in frustration.

She said, "Close your eyes. I can't do this if you watch me."

"I can't watch?"

"It's bad enough I like to do this. Lay back and close your eyes, or I won't do it."

I laid back and closed my eyes. Rebecca grumbled, "It's too bright in here." Then she put her mouth on me, and I didn't care about anything else.

Afterwards, I wanted to do the same for her, but she scampered off to the bathroom and brushed her teeth. I called out an offer to keep my eyes closed, but she wouldn't buy it. Note to self: Buy blackout curtains ASAP. Becky came out of the bathroom and helped me stand up.

Rebecca wanted to clean and organize. I countered with us going out to buy her a cell phone and an engagement ring.

"An engagement ring?"

"Yes, we need to make this official."

"Nothing fancy, OK?"

"Nope, I'm thinking a simple diamond solitaire. Would you prefer white or yellow gold?"

That is how Rebecca ended up with an iPhone and, after dipping into my savings, a 1 carat round cut diamond solitaire in white gold. To celebrate, I took her to a small local restaurant.

Rebecca spent a lot of time looking at her ring. I couldn't blame her, the 1 carat diamond looked big and shiny on her. "I can't believe you spent so much on this."

"It's a simple engagement ring and you've been such a good girlfriend."

After we got back home, she asked if she could call her mother. Rebecca and her mother talked for over an hour. I busied myself with maintenance chores like servicing the hot tub. Rebecca found me cleaning the heat pump filters and handed me the phone.

"Hello?"

Mrs. Schmidt said, "My daughter told me about her engagement and her ring. You are not wasting any time."

"No ma'am, I will marry your daughter as soon as I can."

"You'll need parental consent for the marriage license."

"We'll only need yours, Mrs. Schmidt, if you'll give it."

"If I were the only parent, it wouldn't be an issue. We'll see, perhaps my husband will come around."

"Mrs. Schmidt, Rachel, are you OK? I can bring Rebecca back if you need it."

"Kevin, thank you, but we're fine. Jonathan and I discussed it over dinner and he is much calmer now. I don't think your fiancée would leave you."

I looked over and watched Rebecca move my clothes to make room for hers. "No, Rachel, I don't think she would. You've done an outstanding job raising her."

"You can show me your appreciation by not having children too soon, Mr. Butcher."

"Yes, ma'am. I hear you."

"Kevin, my daughter can be willful and very persuasive. I trust you'll be careful."

"Yes, ma'am. I understand."

"Good, one more thing, please email a picture of Rebecca's engagement ring. I want to show it to my husband."

"Will do."

"Ask Rebecca to call me tomorrow. Goodbye."

I needed to set up Rebecca's email on her phone, so I used it to take the picture. "Becky, do you have an email address?"

"I have one: rebeccarachel1999@gmail.com. But, I don't use it much."

"No problem, if you have the password, I'll set it up on your phone."

After setting up her email account she sent the pictures to her mother.

Interlude: Schmidt's Farm, Kitchen

Jonathan Schmidt sat in the living room watching the news. The reporter gave an update on the data center beating. The police were investigating and reviewing security camera footage. A source close to the investigation revealed that local and state police are searching for two specific individuals.

"Jonathan! Come look at this," Rachel called from the kitchen.

Jonathan found his wife staring at a picture on the computer. He looked over her shoulder and said, "What's this?"

"Kevin proposed to Rebecca. That is her engagement ring."

"Funny, but I don't recall Kevin asking me for her hand."

“Jonathan, don’t be a ninny. Kevin is trying to keep you from sending her to Ohio.”

“There isn’t much chance of that happening,” Jonathan said.

“Look at the size of her ring.”

Jonathan peered at the picture. “Hmm, that is big.”

“It’s a full carat round cut, perfect white diamond.” Both Schmidts glanced down at Rachel’s 0.25 carat engagement ring.

Rachel said, “I’ve always loved my ring.”

Jonathan said, “How much...?”

“Rebecca said it was over \$8,000, and he paid cash.”

Jonathan blinked and stood up. “Rachel, one thing is certain, I did not charge him enough for the room and board.”

“Rachel, honey? I’m done with the news, and I’m not sleepy. Let’s go to bed.”

Kevin Butcher:

Later on, I relaxed on my, our, screened in back deck. With the privacy curtains in place, the lights dim, and romantic music streaming, the deck is a cozy spot. Rebecca came out with a tray of sliced cheese and two glasses of water. She sat the snack tray on the table and walked over to the hot tub. I lifted the lid then showed her the controls. Rebecca cycled the controls on and watched the swirling water.

"Climb in," I said.

Becky shook her head and said, "What would I wear, I don't have a bathing suit?"

"You could wear a nightgown or I could give you a T-shirt."

"I guess I'm being silly."

"You're not being silly. You're just doing new things." I stepped behind her and put my lips on her neck.

"Mmm, you always smell so nice."

"You mean I don't smell like a pickle?"

"That was the second time we kissed. I'll never forget how you felt and that you tasted like wintergreen lifesavers."

"And how I smelled?"

"And how you smelled. I used to like pickles, now I love them. Now, I'll never be able to eat a pickle without thinking about kissing you." I paused for a moment and said, "Sweetheart, I screwed up when I said you smelled like pickles. I'm sorry."

She turned and put her arms around my neck and said, "It's OK, I like to tease you about it."

"That afternoon, when I drove home from work, I was so scared you changed your mind and didn't want me."

"I didn't change my mind."

"No, you didn't, and here we are."

Rebecca said, "I like the music you're playing."

"You never had music playing at home, did you?"

"Sometimes Daddy would play hymns. This music is nice."

"This music" was from a playlist. I asked my Amazon Echo to play romantic dance songs. The current song? "At Last" by Etta James. I had a crazy thought. I said, "Do you dance?"

"No, Pastor Luke says it's immodest."

"I think we need to be immodest together." I ran my hands down her sides and pulled her close.

Rebecca giggled. "What do we do?"

"Here, your hand goes here, mine here. Put that hand on my arm, just below my shoulder. Now, this is the box step." I stepped her through the most basic dance step I knew. She was stiff at first and our feet

tangled once or twice, but within a few minutes she got it. My Echo streamed "Thinking Out Loud" by Ed Sheeran, and I pulled her tight. I surprised her with a small dip at the end.

We took a break from dancing, but I kept her hand in mine. Rebecca contemplated the hot tub and said, "You want me in your hot tub, don't you?"

"Yeah, but what I really want is you naked and in my hot tub." She shook her head, and I interrupted and said, "I know, you're not comfortable with that. It's fine, sweetheart."

"Do you have a long shirt I can wear?"

"Let's go look, I'm sure I have something."

Rebecca refused to wear my vintage Iron Maiden T-shirt, and she told me to never, ever, wear it around her parents. I reached into my closet and pulled out an old cotton long sleeve, button down shirt. It is a cool pinkish purple color, and I've owned it for years. I talked Rebecca into letting me help her take off her dress and brassiere before I fit her with my old dress shirt. It didn't hurt telling her how beautiful she was. The shirt tails hung past her hips and left most of her legs bare. The sleeves were too long, but I rolled them up for her.

I turned Rebecca so she could see her reflection in the dresser mirror. She said, "It's too short."

"Sweetheart, if you ever wear this to bed, I won't be able to control myself." She could model for pinup pictures, but I didn't tell her that. Before she changed her mind, I pulled her out to the hot tub. Bryan Adams, "(Everything I do) I do it for you," streamed. I said, "Becky, it's the tub or another dance."

She giggled and said, "I better take the tub, this shirt is too short."

I shut the jets off to make it easier for her to see where to step. I stripped out of my clothes and stepped in with her. We started out on opposite sides. As Becky acclimated to the heat and the bubbles, we gravitated to each other.

We sat side by side, her left leg over my right. Our drinks sat in cup holders on either side of us. Becky sighed, "This is much nicer than I thought. The bubbles hide everything." Her hand slid up my leg and she teased me with the side of her hand.

"You," I said. "are going to get me in trouble."

We played under the hot bubbling water until our fingers wrinkled. I managed to get her panties off, it was dark enough she didn't fuss.

"Here, let me show you something." With my prompting, Becky knelt on her seat, facing out from the tub. Reaching between her legs, I directed the output of a jet upwards. Her eyes popped open as the water and bubbles streamed against her.

Rebecca pulled away from the jet, "You make me do bad things."

"Wait until we get married, I will move from bad to wicked." I stepped out of the tub and held out a hand for her.

Rebecca stood, water streamed from her. She said, "Like what?" as I helped her out of the tub. Distracted, she didn't realize how my shirt clung to her.

"Wait here, sweetheart, I'll get you my robe." I carried my thick terrycloth robe back to her. She waited in the dim light, her hair loose and wavy from the undone braids. The wet shirt left nothing to my imagination. I draped my robe over her shoulders, but paused. My voice rough, I said, "You should take that wet shirt off."

"Maybe I should." The buttons were on the wrong side for her, but she managed well enough.

I wrapped her in my robe and carried her to my bed.

I woke spooned with Rebecca. Her head on my left arm, my right hand held tight to her chest. Last night she let me talk her into wearing one of my plain T-shirts instead of a long night gown. Her warm butt pressed into my groin. I imagined how it would be to take her. It would be easy, once Becky realized my intentions, she would actively cooperate. Rebecca must have felt my growing interest as she wiggled her butt against me.

There came a loud rapping on my front door. I disengaged from Rebecca, pulled on a pair of shorts and a T-shirt, and hurried to the front door. Peeking through the curtains I saw a short round Mennonite woman. She appeared upset, or angry.

She might need help. Maybe her car broke down, or worse. The pounding stopped when she heard me unlock the door. I threw the door wide, ready to offer my assistance. She stood there, an angry petite woman in a dark conservative Mennonite cape dress. Eying my shorts and T-shirt, disapproval for my manner of dress etched on her face. She raised her hands to her hips and locked her gaze on me. "You'll be the butcher?" she said.

"Um, ah, I'm, I'm not a butcher."

"My brother told me your name, but he didn't tell me you were soft headed." Then, leading with an elbow, she pushed past, and into my house. I turned to stop her, but she moved out of my range before I could react. Who, or what, was this woman?

She stood in my foyer, her back to me and yelled, "REBECCA RACHEL SCHMIDT!" I swear her voice echoed back from the nearby Tuscarora mountain.

From my bedroom, Rebecca answered. "Aunt Deborah?"

Aunt Deborah turned and fixed me with a hard stare. "Why are you standing there with your mouth open?" Then she slowed her voice and spaced out her words. "Go Outside Fetch My Bags." She made shooining gestures.

Out on the porch stood a pile of suitcases. One of them appeared to be a steamer trunk! There were no cars parked outside. How did she get here?

Aunt Deborah disappeared down the hallway in search of Rebecca. I've seen Marine Corps Drill Instructors that couldn't match her stride.

I did what any brave former marine would do in this situation, I fetched her bags.

Rebecca's Aunt Deborah marched back as I carried her steamer trunk inside. There was no shifting of the trunk's contents. It felt like a steamer trunk sized brick. What was inside?

She said. "Carry my bags into that Den of Iniquity you call a bedroom. I'll be staying there with Rebecca."

"Wait, no way. I don't know who you are, but this is my house."

"Mr. Butcher, you have a seventeen-year-old girl, to whom you are not married, in your bed. What happens if I call the police?" She pulled a cell phone from a pocket and held it up.

"What do you want?"

"My brother Jonathan asked me to chaperone you and his daughter while she visited you at your home. When you return Rebecca to her home, you may take me there as well." She paused and when I said nothing, resumed speaking. "Put on some proper clothing. Then carry my bags into your bachelor's bordello."

She turned her back on me and called for Rebecca. Rebecca came into the foyer, wearing a modest dress, her hair pinned back up and under a prayer cap. She glanced at her Aunt then at me and rolled her eyes. "Good morning, Kevin. I'll have breakfast ready soon."

Klaus Hanslein Junior: Hanslein Hunting Camp

Dad sat there in the kitchen looking at me. He said, "Klaus, you've caused me a lot of problems over the years. You don't make good decisions, and I don't have time to keep you out of trouble anymore."

"Dad, it ain't my fault."

"It *is* your fault. There is something wrong with you. You don't think things through. Your obsession with the Schmidt girl is stupid. Pussy is everywhere."

I disagreed but dad held his hand up for silence.

"This is your last chance. Joey will take you and your asshole buddy up to the cabin. After your knuckles heal and maybe, after this blows over, we'll bring you back. But, I don't think it will. Ronnie has cooked up a plan that will fall apart. If Grainger talks, the cops will have an arrest warrant out for you."

"Dad, that cabin is fucking boring."

"Shut your fucking mouth. You have cost me too much money and too many favors. Let's go."

While walking to Dad's SUV, he handed me one of his prepaid phones. "This is for emergencies only. Don't lose it!" We got into the Escalade, Ronnie in the back, me in front. Dad glared through the open window. He said, "Stay in the cabin. Don't go poking around. Stay inside." Dad nodded to Joey, and he started the SUV and we left.

Ronnie didn't look good.

Joey drank a lot of coffee and every half hour he needed to find a bathroom. At the third stop, Ronnie pulled me off to the side and said, "Dude, ain't you worried?"

"Worried? What about?"

"Joey is taking us to The Cabin!"

I didn't get it? "And?"

"Dude, when someone pisses off your dad, Joey takes them to The Cabin. You don't come back from The Cabin!"

What the fuck is he talking about? "Ronnie, Joey's drove me to the cabin bunches of times, I'm still here."

"Yeah, well, you're Klaus's son. Shit, here comes Joey."

We got back in Dad's Escalade. Joey turned on the radio and searched through the AM radio band. He found a weak station playing polka and left it play. I thought about what Ronnie said. "Hey Joey, you ever take anyone up to the cabin and not bring them back?"

Joey glanced at me, then in the rear-view mirror. He said, "Someone telling you stories, kid?"

I glanced back at Ronnie, he looked all pale and shit. I turned to Joey and said, "I guess some people are full of shit."

"Kid, I don't know how much your dad tells you."

Dad never tells me anything about his business. The only thing I've seen is Dad punching people or scaring someone. I said, "Dad tells me everything." I glanced back at Ronnie. Ronnie met my eyes and, with small movements, shook his head, "No!"

Joey nodded and said, "Well it figures he would, you'll probably inherit the business. Yeah, I've taken people on one-way rides. You call it the cabin, right? We, your dad's crew, we call it Rootville, because wherever you dig, all you find are roots. It's a real pain in the ass."

I nodded, my mouth dry. Ronnie might be right.