

Chapter Nine

Reception

Berks County, Pennsylvania, Schmidt Farm

Kevin Butcher:

I leaned close and whispered, "I don't want to wait until tonight. But I will because you're worth it."

With my words, my wife's eyes softened. She threw her arms around my neck and pulled my lips to hers. If the Mennonites had an official list of unapproved public displays of affection, this kiss would be number one. My father-in-law gave us about thirty seconds before he coughed.

Rachel said, "Rebecca and Kevin, you have guests."

I turned to my wife. "In that case, Mrs. Butcher, we should join the party." She nodded, took my arm, and the four of us formed an abbreviated receiving line. As the hosts, Jonathan and Rachel headed the line. Rebecca and I were second. My parents, had they been alive, would have been there with us. Everyone took the time to greet the Schmidts and the newly formed Butchers.

One elderly couple, the Hanevys, stood out from the rest of the guests. Mrs. Hanevy, a gray-haired matron, eyed me before focusing her attention on Rebecca. She said, "I have watched you from when you were a tiny little girl. You and your mother used to pick wildflowers along our shared fence line, and you were always so polite. Now you're all grown up and married." She gave me another searching glance. "Well, your husband looks eager enough to get on with making a family. Now, if you want boys, you'll want to make sure he gets it tucked in good and deep."

The longer the woman spoke, the tighter Rebecca gripped my hand. My wife's cheeks were now crimson. Rebecca said, "Thank you, Mrs. Hanevy. Kevin and I appreciate your advice."

"I certainly do," I added, and Rebecca's elbow thumped me. Mr. Hanevy shook my hand and escorted his wife on to the dining room and the buffet. Before the next well-wishers could step in front of us, I leaned over and whispered, "I like your neighbors."

Rebecca whispered, "Momma warned me we may get some advice like that."

The February sun shone bright and kept the air temperature in the upper sixties. After we greeted everyone, we slipped out to the front porch to get some fresh air. Rebecca said, "You and Tommy look so handsome in your tuxedos."

"Me handsome? Thank you, but no one looks at me when you're in the room." Rebecca's cheeks flushed from my compliment.

The posse soon surrounded us. In their colorful dresses, they resembled a cluster of flowers. Susan and Brenda chattered about their latest conquests. The new girl, Colleen, looked especially lovely, and dangerous. Something about weddings brought out certain interests in the single ladies. For the same reason, weddings made most single men nervous. Mary hung back and smiled knowingly, as if her friends' antics provided amusement, just for her.

Eyes bright, Susan asked, "Kevin, do you have anything special planned for tonight?"

Five sets of bright and eager eyes fixed on me.

"Um, one of Rebecca's neighbors gave us some excellent advice. Tonight, I'll get it tucked in go—" That's all I could say before Rebecca covered my mouth with her hand.

When Grainger showed up, he looked flushed and tired. Rachel noticed this and put her hand on his forehead to check his temperature. "You're not feverish, but you don't look well."

"I'm fine, Mrs. Schmidt," Grainger said.

"Well, take yourself upstairs and get cleaned up. I've laid out a change of clothes for you."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And don't call me ma'am. It makes me feel old. Hurry up now." With a grin, Grainger turned and hurried up the stairs.

"That boy needs a full-time keeper," Rachel said.

"That boy," Jonathan said, "is almost the same age as Rebecca. He's a good worker, and I never have to tell him the same thing twice. I found him behind the barn cleaning the front-end loader. He told me he didn't want to get behind on the chores."

Sometime later, Grainger walked out onto the porch wearing a suit. In his hand, he carried a necktie. Before I could offer to assist him with it, Rebecca's friend Colleen stepped up. She asked if he needed help. With quick, precise motions, Colleen tied a double Windsor knot. She stepped back and conferred with her friends. They all shook their heads. Colleen stepped back to Grainger, untied the Windsor, and tied it with a four-in-hand knot. Even I could see the improvement. The posse nodded their collective approval.

Rebecca tugged on my arm. She whispered, "They all think he's cute."

I peered at Grainger. The word I'd use would be scruffy. Like a lot of young men, he tried to grow a beard, but all he had achieved was a scraggly goatee. Still, standing here all dressed up, he didn't look too bad. These months of good food, fresh air, and hard work had changed him. His shoulders had filled out, and he didn't slouch anymore. I wondered if he understood why the posse fussed over him. Like I said earlier: weddings put ideas into single ladies' minds.

"If your friends think *he's* cute, what do they think of me?"

"Never mind," Rebecca said tartly. I rolled my eyes, but I didn't let her see me do it.

The aroma of home cooked food called to me from the dining room. Nearly every family attending the reception brought a covered dish. German potato salad, pot roast, and plum dumplings sang their siren songs. Rebecca ate sparingly, but I had to try a little of each. After my second trip to the buffet, I passed Mrs. Hanevy. She told me I needed to eat because of my upcoming honeymoon exertions. Mrs. Hanevy was OK in my book.

Someone set up a radio on the back porch and a few of the more daring couples danced. Rebecca and I joined in, and we ignored the clucking from the few who disapproved. At some point, Major

Pittsenbargar crashed the reception. I thought he might need a nap after eating so much homemade food. Aunt Deborah stayed close to him but never touching.

Soon enough, we made our rounds, thanking our guests, and saying goodbye. Grainger caught up with us and asked, "What should I do if a girl likes me?"

I smiled. "Enjoy yourself, girls are quite nice. Especially with this cold weather." Rebecca's elbow thudded into my side. "Ahem, there are rules you need to follow." He nodded, and I continued. "First, always remember that she is in charge. Second, if you're unsure about something, ask her or ask her friends. Third, she'll expect you to push her boundaries, but no always means no."

After we moved on, Rebecca asked, "I'm in charge?"

"Yep."

"I don't feel like I'm in charge."

"Hmm, that's because we meshed together so well. Have I ever made you do something you didn't want to do?"

Her cheeks warmed, and she squeezed my hand. "Noooo...but sometimes you had me wanting to do a lot more."

"In that case, I did my job right. I wanted you to want more."

"Huh, you sound so sure of yourself. Like you had it all planned out."

"No more than you and your mother did with me." Rebecca leaned close and kissed me. I kissed her right back.

We happened to be in the kitchen, and no one seemed to be paying close attention to us. I tugged Rebecca into the pantry at the top of their basement stairs. The door clicked closed behind us.

"What are you doing?" she asked, concern for someone finding us clear in her voice. "If we get caught...."

I said, "I don't know the exact moment when I fell in love with you. It may have happened one of those nights we sat in your kitchen talking. But the night when we first kissed, I knew it for sure." While I spoke, Rebecca leaned close and hugged me.

She chuckled and said, "After that one little kiss, I went inside and walked right into a kitchen chair. Momma watched me do it. See, you made me crazy even then."

I bent and kissed her with as much passion and desire as I could muster. At first, concerns about hiding made her tense, but she relaxed, and then, she melted into my arms. The soft fabric of her wedding dress transmitted the warmth of her body, and I felt the rapid beating of her heart. As her excitement grew, that wonderful wildflower fragrance filled my nose. My own need surged, and I crushed her to me.

"You're going to make me crazy," she gasped.

"I plan to make you crazy enough to marry me." My lips found that special spot, just below her ear. Goosebumps rose on her arms, and she shivered.

"It's too late, I already married you."

"Oh, then I need to make you crazy enough to sleep with me."

Panting, "I already am. But not in here, at least not today."

As much as I wanted to take liberties, someone would discover us soon enough. I eased up my embrace. We shared a few more kisses. Rebecca said, "I love you, but when you make me crazy, I can't think straight."

"Good. I have plans for you tonight, and I don't want you thinking too much about what I'm doing to you." I stepped back and examined her with care. She looked flushed, but I hadn't mussed her too much. She reached up and straightened out my hair.

"What," she asked, "are you planning to do tonight?"

"Shhh, it's a secret." I took her hand and opened the pantry door. No one seemed to notice us.

"Kevin...."

Still holding hands, we slipped upstairs to change our clothes. A few of the guests noticed us heading for the stairs. Some few grinned and nodded, others didn't seem to take any notice. After all, what is unusual about a married couple going upstairs together? We had a change of clothing laid out in Rebecca's old bedroom.

When I closed the door behind us, the sudden quiet seemed to highlight the change in our reality. Before, someone always nominally supervised us. Now we were alone, unsupervised, married, and free to do anything we wanted. Rebecca turned away from me and asked me to unzip her.

As I lowered the zipper, I kissed each bit of exposed skin. I skipped over Rebecca's brassiere strap and continued unzipping and kissing. The zipper ended near her waist. Goosebumps rose, and I hooked a finger into the waistband of her panties.

She shuddered. "If you keep that up, we're not going to make it to Niagara Falls."

Sighing, I said, "Sorry, sweetheart."

Rebecca shrugged out of her dress. It collapsed to the floor, and I helped her step out of it. Underneath her dress, she wore a simple bra and panty set in white. We picked up her dress and draped it across the bed. I took off my tux with Rebecca's help.

With both of us in our underwear, my wife hugged me. She said, "I missed you last night." One of her hands slipped down and patted my full erection. "I'm used to this thing poking against my bottom."

"I'll try to make it up to you."

"Good!" She stood on her toes and kissed me. Her tongue touched my lips and promised more. "Kevin Butcher, my husband, finally! I love you, and after I finish school, I'll have your babies."

We almost didn't make out of her room.

Honeymoon

Kevin Butcher:

The normal travel time from the Schmidts' farm to Niagara Falls, New York, is six to seven hours, except in the winter. During the winter, northern Pennsylvania and upstate New York are subject to Lake Effect Snowfall. A storm blowing across Lake Erie or Lake Ontario can pick up enough moisture to cause significant snowfall for hundreds of miles. Concerned that today's drive might take longer than expected, I called the hotel. The manager had my credit card information and promised she would hold the room for us.

Back when we planned our honeymoon, Rebecca told me to keep it simple. She said, "All I want is a nice room with a normal bed. No indoor swimming pools, saunas or jungle gyms." Fine, I'd save the decadent resort for another time. My compromise was a nice room with a queen-sized bed, at an upscale hotel. If we chose to actually tour the falls, weather permitting, we could walk there in minutes.

We stopped as needed for snacks and potty calls. Otherwise, we kept going.

Winter weather caught up with us near the Pennsylvania/New York state line. A wintry mix of snow and sleet blew across the road. Traffic slowed in response.

Niagara Falls, New York

After the exit from I-109, we got our first view of Niagara Falls, New York. It resembled the ice-covered surface of Pluto. Peering out the window, Rebecca commented that everything looked like a glazed doughnut.

I dropped Rebecca and our luggage off at the hotel's front doors and drove off in search of a parking spot. She met me at the door telling me of a problem with the room. They hadn't held our room for us.

The desk clerk said, "I'm very sorry sir, but there are no rooms available."

I explained we had a confirmed reservation and the manager herself had promised she'd keep our room for us. They listened politely and apologized. There must have been an error, but they had no rooms available. I enquired about my options. They would be glad to locate another room, and the hotel would pick up the charge. They'd even load our luggage back into our car.

I smiled and prepared a verbal assault. Rebecca felt me tense up, she took my arm and pulled me away from the counter. "Kevin, they're just doing their jobs. Be nice."

It took a while, but they found a place with an available room. Actually, it was a motel, and it was on the other side of town, about thirty minutes away. They promised the manager would straighten out the room problem in the morning. They even gave Rebecca a card for us to have a complimentary breakfast in their dining room. How nice.

We drove all the way across town, past the interstate, to the motel. Along the way, we stopped at a Wendy's drive-through window.

The motel staff, one person, greeted us indifferently and after I signed in, tossed me a key. "Hey," he called out, "the room comes with two bottles of water and your choice of pretzels or potato chips. Help yourself." He waved towards an ancient refrigerator and a cardboard box. I grabbed two bottles of water and a bag of pretzels. Things were looking up.

Our room was definitely not the honeymoon suite. The door opened onto the parking lot. At least I wouldn't have to carry the luggage a long way. I offered to carry Rebecca across the threshold, but she laughed and told me it was too cold. Instead, Rebecca took the key and opened the door while I brought the luggage.

The room held a desk, two chairs, a television, and a double bed. Otherwise, the room smelled clean, and it passed my bed bug inspection. The thermostat wouldn't go higher than 68 degrees. So, I disassembled it and readjusted the limiter. Being a technician had its perks. Outside, the wind picked up, and sleet began to strike the motel's exterior.

We ate our dinner while the room warmed. The wind outside continued to howl. Obviously, we made it here just in time.

Eventually, the room warmed enough, and my wife announced it was time for her to get ready for bed. She pointed to a few bags, and I carried them into the bathroom for her.

Nerves. I don't think I've been this nervous since boot camp. I sat on the end of the bed and flipped through the available TV channels.

The bathroom door clicked open, and my bride stepped out. For the first time, I saw her hair completely unbound. Otherwise, she wore my old terry cloth bathrobe and new pink fuzzy slippers. I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't her wearing my old robe. When I approached, she gave me a kiss before pushing me towards the bathroom. She said, "Take a shower, brush your teeth and shave. When you come to our bed tonight, I want you to be nice and clean."

"But...." I glanced at the bed.

Shaking her head, she said, "We've waited this long, another few minutes won't hurt you. When you're ready, knock on the door, and I'll tell you if I'm ready."

Fog from Rebecca's shower still covered most of the bathroom mirror, except for an area she had wiped clean. The room smelled like my bride. On the counter top, to the left of the sink stood a few feminine toiletries. Next to those, lay a flat, foil-backed package of birth control pills. Tonight, became very real.

The motel did not scrimp on hot water. I shampooed and scrubbed, paying careful attention to my armpits and undercarriage. Then I flossed, brushed my teeth, and shaved. Oops, I forgot to pack my comb, so I borrowed Rebecca's brush. There were still fresh towels stacked on the counter, and I wrapped one around my waist. At the door, I raised my hand and tapped. I felt nervous. This had to be perfect.

She said, "Just a second." The bed rustled. Then my wife said, "I'm ready."

When I opened the door, I found Rebecca facing away from me and leaning on the bed. She held herself still as if my entrance had interrupted her while turning down the bed. Instead of her normal flannel nightgown, she wore a simple white silk chemise. In deference to the cold outside, thick blue socks covered her legs from her feet to her knees. The abbreviated length of the chemise highlighted her long and slender legs. It also revealed the cornflower blue and white lace garter around her left thigh.

After giving me enough time to appreciate the view, she straightened up and turned to face me. It took several moments before my brain got back on track. When I finally made eye contact, she bit her lip and did her best to appear innocent.

My case of nerves vanished, pushed aside by an incredible wave of desire. When I took a step forward, Rebecca grinned and took one back. At least she tried to. She forgot how close she was to the bed. The inside of her knee hit the mattress, and she overbalanced. Arms awhirl, she toppled backward onto the bed.

Laughing would not be smart. I stepped to the bed and asked, "Are you OK?"

She looked embarrassed, but nodded up at me, "I'm fine."

"I don't know. You may have sustained dangerous contusions." I gave her my best leer. "The doctor should give you a close examination."

Rebecca giggled. "Oh, Doctor Kevin, do you think my condition is serious?" Her knees came up, and her feet slipped under my towel. Fuzzy sock covered toes found me and my attention wavered.

Ignoring her feet was impossible, and from the look in her eyes, she knew exactly what effect she had on me. Still, I needed to get my act together. "Yes, I must perform a close examination, from the top to your bottom." My eyes dropped from her face to the junction of her thighs. With her knees raised, the chemise had flipped back and revealed her lack of underwear. I gulped, and my penis throbbed. "Oh, sweetheart, I love you so much." She put her heels on the edge of the mattress and scooted back to give me some room. I followed and crawled on top of her. Our lips touched. Her arms and legs wrapped around me. While our tongues danced, her feet pushed the towel away. She pulled me down; her pelvis lifted and pressed against my penis.

We'd played like this before but always kept things under control. Rebecca would press against me, and I'd provide a rigid counter for her soft warmth. Tonight, with no need for restraint, I ground my erection against her in a tight circle. Rebecca gasped; I had never been this forceful before. Her hands gripped my hips, guiding me to rub just the right spot. She pulled her mouth free. Both of us were panting.

Rebecca asked, "Is...is this how you want me?"

I wanted to tell her no, and ask her to get on top because of the control it would give her. I wanted to lift her all the way onto the bed and make gentle love to her in that classic old-school position. Instead, with my wife aroused and supine beneath me, I growled, "Yes."

She reached down, intending to guide me. Instead, I lifted up, took hold of her hips, and pulled her to the edge of the bed. The chemise rode up and fully exposed her bare sex. She took me in both of her hands and rubbed my erect penis up and down her slick warmth. I groaned out my need, and she nudged me into position. For a brief moment we balanced there on edge, she nodded, and I pressed against her. There was a brief resistance, and suddenly, her hot, slippery sheath surrounded and squeezed the head of my penis.

"Wait," she said, her hands pressing against my abdomen. "You're big."

As much as she needed to adjust, I needed to adjust as well. If I didn't get a grip, this would be over much too soon. Her pelvis tilted up and down while she felt for the best angle. It also had the effect of sliding my glans in and out. The slight friction was exquisite. I couldn't have been harder. The skin was so taut every motion felt magnified. Her hands reached out and measured my still exposed length, and her eyes widened.

"So much more...go slow," she said. Her hands came back to my waist, and she guided me. My inner brute demanded I grab her thighs, fold her legs back, and pound her. She looked at me, her eyes bright and eager. With a huge effort of will, I pushed the brute aside and took my wife with love. Exercising care, I worked in and out, gradually increasing the penetration. When our pelvises touched, I bent down, and we kissed. Her legs settled around my waist.

I asked, "Still good?"

She nodded and said, "I love you." Then her hands and heels urged me on.

I let her guide me, and we settled into a steady pace with me penetrating about halfway. A red flush built upon her chest then spread to her neck. Our breathing became short. Suddenly, Rebecca's hands gripped my waist hard, and she cried out. Her legs crushed me against her, and her rapid internal pulses pushed me over the edge. I buried myself to the hilt, thrusting and spurting. I didn't think it would stop.

When I regained awareness, I found I had fucked us halfway back across the bed. Rebecca's eyes were open and alert. Her legs were loose around me. "Hey," she said, "are you back?"

"Mmmm...yeah. Becks, that was soooo good." My eyes closed all on their own.

"Hey!" Her hands shook me, and my eyes popped open again. Had I dozed off? Rebecca pointed towards the nightstand. A folded white towel lay on top of the alarm clock. "Can you reach the towel?" she asked. "I feel all squishy down there. You must have filled me up."

I reached for the towel, sporting the goofiest grin ever. Heh, I filled her up!

Rebecca told me to stay in bed while she went to clean up. I watched her roll out of bed and scamper into the bathroom, one hand holding the towel between her legs. A few minutes later she came out with a washcloth and cleaned me up.

After returning the washcloth to the bathroom, she came back wearing only the garter and the socks. I scooted back to give her the warm spot I had made. We kissed and snuggled. She said, "I love you, Kevin, I couldn't have a better husband."

I asked about her cute nightie, and she told me we made a mess of it. Our free hands explored, keeping the interest high. Sooner than I expected, she pulled me on top of her, and we made love. It was better this time. We found a nice rhythm, and I rode high to increase her stimulation. She came twice, and I think the first one surprised her with its intensity. The second seemed to last a long time. I can't be sure because I came soon after her second climax began. This time I grabbed the towel without needing a prompt.

The late hour and our lovemaking took its toll. We went into the bathroom together to pee and wash up. The unremarked familiarity of this warmed me. I guess we'd have an open-door type of relationship. Rebecca giggled when I kneeled at her feet to remove the garter. It joined the chemise in a dry-clean only laundry bag. The chemise wouldn't be the last messy nightgown we had to throw into the laundry. It kind of became a thing for me as it often resulted in me sleeping with a nude wife.

Once back in the bedroom, Rebecca slipped on panties, fresh socks, and my red USMC T-shirt. We left a night light on and crawled under the covers. Sometime later, I woke after the fierce winter storm moved

on. The only sounds were my wife's gentle breaths. She felt so warm and alive and all mine. I loved this woman so much, I thought my heart would burst. Sleep found me a short time later.

The next morning, I woke with an erection and no wife. A few seconds later, the toilet flushed, and water ran in the sink. Rebecca slipped back under the covers. She said, "It's cold in here, warm me up." Sometime in the night, the heater had shut off, or the thermostat reset.

"How do you feel, is everything OK?"

"I'm a little sore. You're bigger than you think you are." I hugged her extra tight, my wife is a treasure. As she warmed up, her pelvis pushed against my penis. She said, "But I'm not too sore, and I washed up really good, can Doctor Kevin kiss it for me and make it all better?"

I sincerely told her, "You are the best wife ever, and I love you so much!"

For the record, screwing underneath blankets isn't great, but the post-coital snuggling is awesome. This time, we had the foresight to put a folded towel down. After I softened and slipped out, the flood of semen didn't make us contort to reach a towel.

"You got me all squishy again," she said. A sock covered foot rubbed against the back of my calf.

"Mmmm..." I said.

"Making love with you makes me feel so alive, and I'm all full of energy."

"Mmmm..."

"I liked how we played around before, but actual love making is soooo much better." Soft fingertips trailed from my shoulders, down to my buttocks. With little playful nips on my neck and ear, she pinched my butt in rhythm with her mouth.

The part of your brain responsible for the most basic of survival functions is the brain stem. It controls things like heart rate and breathing. My brain stem recognized a serious threat to my survival. It rebooted my brain and sounded the alarm: Danger, Danger! I focused and reviewed my wife's words, loaded the pillow-talk and bonding protocols. With my brain fully functioning, I said, "How much better?"

She didn't notice my lapse in awareness. "Oh, lots. It makes me feel so much closer to you, and it's like explosions. Is it like that for you?"

"Oh, definitely, but I just get one big pulsing explosion."

"Just one?" She cocked an eyebrow.

"Yeah, but there is all the stuff I feel before."

"Like what?"

"Like feeling you move with me, and I love how you squeeze me when I'm inside. Then, this morning, you were so into it, you even lost control and bit me."

"I bit you, where?" She pushed the covers down, and I nodded to the bite mark on my shoulder. She frowned. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't know I hurt you."

"Sweetheart, the only way you could hurt me is if you left me. I love you more than I can explain. Language doesn't have the words." Our eyes met, and we kissed. Then we discovered our morning breath and broke the kiss. Even true love has limits.

By the time I went out to start the truck, road crews had already scraped and treated the street. Up here in New York, in freezing conditions, they used a mixture of treated salt and sand. The motel parking lot still looked like an ice skating rink. Another fine Niagara Falls morning. With our truck running and the defroster set to max, I went back inside to fetch the luggage. When I opened the door to our room, a mostly nude Rebecca darted back into the bathroom. What's the line in that song? Oh yeah, "Victoria's Secret ain't a secret no more."

I tapped on the bathroom door. "Sorry sweetheart, I didn't mean to startle you."

The door opened a few inches, she blushed as my eyes traveled the length of her body. I said, "If you show me what luggage you need, I'll take the rest out."

That earned me a wary look. She said, "You want to get me in bed again."

"Not me." I gave her the cub scout salute. Oops, Mennonites don't do scouting, and she missed my joke.

"Go sit in the chair," she said. "Stay there while I dress. I'm hungry, and we have a coupon for a free breakfast." The bathroom door opened, and she shooed me away.

"Yes dear." I shrugged out of my winter gear and sat in the chair. Then I enjoyed watching Rebecca dress. She knew I watched and stuck her tongue out when I caught her smiling.

Rebecca sat on the edge of the bed pulling on what looked like skin-tight pants. I asked, "Are those yoga pants?"

"Pretty much." She laughed and stood. "Momma calls them leggings. We wear them when it's cold and windy."

I watched as she wiggled the leggings over her bottom and up to her waist. They fit every bit as snug as yoga pants. I stretched my arm out and ran my hand over her butt.

She paused when my fingers touched her. "If you keep that up," she said, "we'll miss breakfast."

"I'll take you to Waffle House. They serve breakfast all day long."

Before and after checking out from the motel, Rebecca took pictures. We then drove to our original hotel.

The manager, her face set in an apologetic frown, stepped out from her office to greet us. She said, "Mr. and Mrs. Butcher, I am very sorry for the mix-up yesterday. I trust the lodgings we found for you were adequate?"

Before I could retort, Rebecca put her hand on my arm and spoke. "My husband and I are upset. You told us you would hold our room. You let us down."

The manager blinked. I'm not sure what she expected, but it wasn't a calm statement of disappointment.

She opened her hands and held them face up. "What can I do to make up for it?"

"I don't know," Rebecca said, "what *can* you do?" The manager dithered. Rebecca turned to me. "Kevin, take care of the luggage." I borrowed a luggage cart and pushed it out to the truck before I realized what happened. Rebecca had taken charge, and the transition had been so smooth I never noticed. It reminded me of the few times I'd seen her mother do the same.

Loading the luggage into the cart didn't take long. When I returned to the lobby, Rebecca and the manager were shaking hands. My wife turned to me and said, "Leave the bags here, the manager will have them taken to our room. Let's go have breakfast, I'm starved."

I said, "Yes, Dear."

The hostess plucked the reserved sign from the booth and gestured for us to sit. A waitress stood ready and offered us menus. Rebecca showed her the complimentary breakfast coupon and said, "We'll have the buffet." The waitress told us to help ourselves.

"What did you work out with the manager?" I asked.

"I let her take care of it. Whatever she does will be fine."

I wanted to argue we couldn't trust the manager, but I had to let Rebecca take care of problems as she chose.

Our breakfast over, Rebecca sipped her tea and me my coffee. The manager found us. She said, "Your room will be ready by noon. Stop by the desk, and we'll give you the keys. My wife thanked her."

We walked over to the falls and played tourist for a few hours.

Back at the hotel, the manager herself gave us the key cards and wished us a wonderful honeymoon. The room turned out to be a suite. We had a king-sized bed and a two-person Jacuzzi. Heavy, light-blocking drapes covered the wall at the end of the room. I located the remote control and pressed the button.

Retracting the drapes revealed the room had an unobstructed view of the falls. As I stood at the window, Rebecca crept up behind me and wrapped her arms around me. She felt warmer than usual. I reached back and found bare skin. "Uh oh," I said, "something is going to happen, isn't it?" She laughed, and staying behind me, pulled me back to the bed.

"You have to close the curtains first," she said.

I found the control. As the draperies closed off the view, Rebecca's hands reached around and unbuckled my belt. She then stepped around in front of me and unfastened my jeans. "Sit," she said. I sat on the edge of the bed. Dropping to her knees, she pulled my shoes off and then my pants and boxers. I pulled my shirt off over my head.

"Scoot back," she said. As I scooted, she unfastened her bra and dropped her panties. Enough light seeped around the edge of the drapes, to give me a fascinating outline view. The sight of her curves was breathtaking, but it became even more so when she bent and took me into her mouth.

"Ah, Becks, that's...mmmm." Blood rushed into my penis drawing the sensitive skin tight. I sucked in a breath when her teeth grazed the surface of my engorged glans. I looked down, and her eyes met mine. Her mouth left me with an audible pop.

"I have a better place for that." She crawled up and sat on top of my pelvis, my erection pressed against her vulva. "Can we try it with me on top?" All I could do was nod; I was completely under her control. She lifted up onto her knees and scooted forward. I helped guide her into position. Her hips shifted back and forth while she searched for the right spot. With a wiggle, she pressed down, and her warmth oozed around the head of my penis. I heard and felt her gasp at the initial penetration. Rebecca lifted up a bit, and then down, each repetition sunk more of me inside and brought us closer. When our pelvises touched, she bent down and kissed my lips and then my neck.

"When we're joined," she said, "Ahhh...I can feel how much you love me."

"Ah...I do, you know. More than anything."

"I know, dearest."

She lifted herself up onto her hands and moved back and forth. Short strokes at first, sometimes shifting to grind her clitoris against my pelvis. I watched her bite her lip as she searched for completion. When she came, it was the most amazing thing. Her hips lost their smooth motions, and her groans became low and insistent. I felt her internal fluttering, and for a second, she went rigid. Her internal pulses came fast and strong. Her torso jerked, and with a cry, she collapsed onto me. My penis throbbed, but I hadn't come. I hugged her against me and listened to her sighs.

"Hey," I asked, "are you back yet?"

Her hands squeezed my shoulders. In a lofty tone she said, "Unlike you, sex doesn't knock me out."

"Oh, we'll see about that. Hold on, I'm going to roll us over."

"What?" she squeaked. We rolled, and I stopped with me on top. Her eyes widened when I shifted up onto my knees. "Kev? You're not done yet?"

I gave her my best evil grin and reached for her ankles. Time to take care of business.

"Ohhh, Kev...."

...

Rebecca and I lay snuggled together, one of her legs wrapped possessively around me. The two new bite marks on my shoulder tingled and stung. At least, somehow, she had the presence of mind to not mark my neck. I don't know how we'd explain hickeys to her family.

She stirred, her free hand slid from my shoulder, down my chest to my penis. Her fingers squeezed and tugged. If the sticky wetness bothered her, I couldn't tell. With a dreamy voice, she asked, "What did you do to me?"

"Hmmm, I kind of pounded you."

"Ohhh...I had no idea. That was better than good." Her lips pressed against my neck. She said, "I love you. Now help me up, husband. I need to pee."

Both of us needed to pee and wash up. This bathroom featured a double sink, and we both washed up at the same time. I noticed Rebecca staring at my shoulder. Her eyes narrowed. "Did I bite you again?"

"Twice."

"Darn it! Sit down so I can look." She gestured towards the toilet. Like a good husband, I had already lowered the lid.

"Yes, dear." I sat.

She lathered up a washcloth and scrubbed at the marks. "Kevin, you can't let me bite you."

"I'll try." How do I explain that knowing I can make her lose control made me feel hot for her? This required thought. We took a shower and called room service. After dinner, we lounged in bed and watched a movie, *The Princess Bride*. Afterwards, we made love again. A nice passionate session with mutual orgasms and while we both nibbled, there wasn't any biting.

"C'mon sleepyhead, I'm hungry."

"Mmmm, what time is it?" My last conscious memory was of my frisky wife waking me at zero dark thirty. After a successful effort at fulfilling my conjugal duties, I had fallen into a deep, deep slumber. With a massive effort of will, I cracked one eye open. As I expected, no light streamed past the edges of the closed curtains. I rolled onto my back. Muscles I hadn't exercised since boot camp ached. It felt as if I spent the wee hours doing bend and thrust exercises. Now that I thought about it, I guess I had. A hand jostled my shoulder, and I cracked open my other eye.

My wife stood next to the bed, once again wearing my bathrobe. Her hair looked damp, and I could smell her shampoo and body wash. Hmm, I wondered, what might she be wearing under the bathrobe?

I made another effort of will and slid my hand out from under the covers and under the bathrobe. Nothing but wife. Her eyes had followed my hand, and she smiled while I made my examination. She said, "I'm not too hungry yet...but you need to take a shower."

I may have set a new world record for taking a shower.

We held hands while riding the elevator. Two floors down it stopped, and another couple got on. The man looked to be in his fifties, the woman could have been anything from the man's daughter to his wife or mistress. Both of their expressions were tight, and I had the impression they had been arguing. As they entered the elevator car, Rebecca and I moved to the side, giving them plenty of room. The woman, I now pegged her as a trophy wife or mistress, gave Rebecca and me a quick look. She smiled and said, "Newlyweds?"

Rebecca smiled and said, "Is it that obvious?"

"You're both so happy, you almost glow."

As the elevator stopped, the man reached out and took his woman's hand. The doors opened, and as they stepped out, he turned and said, "Congratulations. Stay happy with each other."

To be honest, when we planned our honeymoon, I'd hoped we'd stay inside and order room service. My wife had different plans. We spent another day touring the falls and the surrounding attractions.

I should have known taking Rebecca into the Butterfly Conservatory would create a scene. She did her very own interpretation of a Disney princess. Instead of birds, Rebecca attracted butterflies. Signs warn visitors the butterflies may land on you if you wear bright clothing or cologne. Rebecca wore a lovely outfit featuring muted colors. While it attracted me, I doubt it would attract a butterfly. She did wear her homemade wildflower cologne. That cologne lit up the olfactory receivers of every butterfly we passed. I have pictures, lots of pictures. My favorite has Rebecca looking at a swallowtail perched on her shoulder. Twice we encountered families with small children. Children who complained in loud voices when my wife stole "their" butterflies. Three times, conservatory staff came by to shoo the critters back

into the foliage. Rebecca was at turns delighted, befuddled, and concerned. She did not want her winged admirers to come to harm.

On our last night, we decided to have an early dinner and then to head back to the hotel for a late night. The hotel provided a notebook with menus from local restaurants. Rebecca and I shared one of the suite's oversized chairs and flipped through the pages. One menu caught her eye. "What's this?" she asked.

The menu's cover featured artwork of a chef wielding cutlery in an aggressive stance. I said, "It's a Japanese steakhouse. The chef," I tapped the picture, "cooks your dinner right in front of you."

"How does that work?" Her brow furrowed.

I did my best to describe teppanyaki style cuisine. Rebecca wanted to try it. I called the hotel's concierge. He called back in less than ten minutes. We had reservations for two seats at a hibachi table.

We arrived early, and the hostess seated us right away. A server took our drink orders. When she came back, along with our iced teas, she dropped off two small ceramic cups. Each cup held a clear liquid. It took me a moment, but I realized it must be sake.

Rebecca pointed to hers and asked, "What is that?"

I took a sip from my cup. "Sake. It's fermented rice."

With care, she picked up her cup and sniffed. "It doesn't smell bad." She sniffed again. "It smells like flowers."

"The same as you, sweetheart."

"What? That I don't smell bad, or that I smell like flowers?"

"Both actually."

She rolled her eyes. "Ha, ha, ha. You think you're so funny." Her blue eyes took on a more dangerous look. "I'll have to think of an appropriate punishment for you." She lifted the cup and took a sip. "It's kind of flowery and sweet," A quick flash of blue eyes dared me to say something cute. "I can taste the alcohol." She returned the cup to the table and slid it over to me. "You can drink it."

"I prefer beer or whiskey. Besides, I won't drink when you're going to be in the car with me." That earned me a kiss.

"I've never seen you drink," she said.

"One of your dad's rules was, 'No alcohol in his house.' Besides, I'd rather spend time with you than drink. When we're at home, I may have a beer once in a while."

The other party who would have shared the table with us canceled at the last minute. Rebecca and I both decided to have steak, and we placed our orders.

Our chief, a rotund man with an infectious grin, introduced himself as Chef Shogun. It didn't take him long to discover Rebecca and I were on our honeymoon. Nor did it take him long to see we hadn't finished the sake. He convinced Rebecca to try another sip. Chef Shogun claimed sake had amazing abilities to enhance marital relations. We enjoyed the food and Chef Shogun's show in equal proportions. After Rebecca finished her cup of sake, she sipped from mine. Rebecca became giggly, touchy-feely, and very affectionate.

After dinner, I paid the bill and left a sizable tip. Rebecca told me we needed to hurry back to the hotel because she didn't want to wait. We raced to the truck. I fired it up and turned the heater on full blast. Rebecca pulled me down on top of her, and we made out as if we were teenagers at a drive-in theater. Both of us got out of control, and parts of our clothing became dislodged. If not for other people walking to their cars, we might have got lucky right there in the restaurant parking lot. While I have much to be thankful for, having a wife who prefers to wear dresses is at the very top of my list.

On our way back to the hotel, we stopped at a convenience store. While I pumped gasoline, Rebecca ran inside to buy a few bottles of unsweetened iced green tea. Sometimes I swore she needed it to live. With half of my attention on the pump, I watched her move through the store. As she walked to the drink coolers, her blonde hair and natural good looks turned heads.

A flicker of motion at the edge of the parking lot turned my head. Two figures walked with a swagger towards the store's entrance. Something about these guys raised my hackles. Mentally, I crossed my fingers and hoped they'd pass on by.

They didn't, and I hung up the pump handle and tightened my gas cap. I reached the door a few dozen seconds behind them.

An electronic "Ding" sounded when I pulled the door open. Both of the men I followed turned towards me; their dark eyes stared for a few seconds before dismissing me. I moved towards Rebecca, and moments later a pair of shoes squeaked on the tile floor behind me. It sucked that New York State did not honor out of state concealed carry permits. My Sig Sauer P227 lay locked up back at the Schmidts'. Right now, I missed its comforting weight.

Rebecca carried two glass bottles of iced tea, which she handed to me. Not that I minded, but I wanted us clear of this store and these two suspicious men. The man who followed me eyed Rebecca and stepped over to the coolers. I now tagged him as Hood Number One. He glanced back at us, again eyeing Rebecca. I switched a bottle of iced tea into each hand and stepped between him and my wife. If he pulled out a weapon, I'd throw a bottle at him, and brain him with the second.

Hood Number One opened a cooler, reached inside, and removed a bottle of iced coffee. I glanced at the label: snickerdoodle. A quick glance to the front of the store revealed the other hood busy at the hot coffee bar.

We paid for the iced tea and walked out to the truck. Yeah, I felt relieved and silly.

Something lay on the ground underneath my truck, some kind of critter. Rebecca didn't notice it, and I helped her up and into the cab. While she fastened her seat belt, I kneeled down to check. Huddled under the muffler was a kitten. Heat was heat, and it was a very cold night. I reached out and snatched the cat; it latched onto my hand with its tiny teeth and claws. Rebecca never noticed me do any of this. Before I closed her door, I handed her the cat. Her eyes went wide. She said, "A kitten? Where, how?" She thrust the wee furball underneath her coat.

A lot of dairy farms have barn cats. The Schmidts' farm had their share. They provided a minor but useful function. But they were not house pets. That didn't stop Rebecca from wanting a kitty. Months

ago, I had promised her she could have a cat. My only stipulation was that it would be an indoor cat and not allowed to wander outside.

On the way to the hotel, we stopped at a pet shop and bought a disposable litter pan and other cat related sundries. When we arrived at the hotel, I carried the bags and waved a greeting to the desk staff. Once in the room, we set the cat stuff up in the bathroom. "Kitty" tore into the food.

Sometime during the night, Rebecca woke and brought her cat into bed with us. I found out when I slipped my hand between her legs, and her pussy bit the heck out of me.

"Ow! What's that cat doing there?"

"Kitty is protecting my virtue."

"Hey! I rescued you from a fate worse than death. You should be eager to surrender your virtue."

"I didn't say I wasn't eager."

We woke a little earlier than usual because we had to pack up and check out.

Rebecca kept the kitty company while I loaded everything else into the truck. Back at the room, I found her sitting on one of the chairs with her feet up on the footrest. The kitty lay stretched out and purring on her lap. When I stood next to her, she smiled up at me and asked, "Would you like to pet my kitty?"

"I'd love to, sweetheart, but you'll need to move the cat."

For a brief moment, her face went neutral while she parsed my words. As comprehension dawned, her cheeks turned scarlet. "Oh," she said, "you are so...dirty! I should have listened to Aunt Deborah."

I bent down and kissed the junction of her shoulder and neck. Her head tipped to the side to give me more room. She almost purred herself while I kissed and nibbled. I said, "If you had, you would have missed all this fun."

Our honeymoon over, we checked out, grabbed breakfast, and hit the road. Once we got on the highway, Rebecca pulled a large paperback book from her bag and started reading. I'd hear the occasional "Mmm" or "Hmmm." More than once I caught her giving me speculative looks.

"What are you reading, sweetheart?"

"A book my friends bought for me."

Knowing that group, it could be anything. I kept my attention on the road but managed an occasional glance over. Rebecca got a little careless, and I read the cover. "Advanced Sex Positions? You're reading a sex manual!" My attention needed to stay on the road, but I bet she was blushing.

"Ye-es. Is it a problem?" She sounded defensive.

"No, not at all. I didn't mean to sound like it was." I risked a quick glance. She held the book face down on her lap. "But, if you want, when you find something interesting, you could read it out loud."

"Oh, I suppose you'd like that."

"We have a long way to travel, and there are all those lonely rest stops." I wagged my eyebrows.

All she said was, "We'll see." Ten minutes later, she spoke. "Here's one. I'm almost too embarrassed to ask you to try it."

"I understand. What's it called?"

"It's called rear entry and," Her next words came in a rush. "I'd have to be on my elbows and knees. I think it's something you'd like." I bet her face was beet red.

"You're right, I would. Hey, does your book mention one called the Reverse Cowgirl?"

Pages rasped together while she searched. "Here it is, let me read...Oh, yeah, you'd love me doing it like this."

"Once we got going, you'd love it, too. Think about how far in it would go."

No sounds came from the passenger seat for a few minutes. Then the book slammed shut. Her bag rustled while she tucked the book inside. "I can't keep reading that, it'll make me crazy, and we'll never get home."

The weather had taken a turn for the worse. By the time we crossed the Berks County line, snow dusted the road. We reached her parents' farm without any problems. I pulled into my usual parking spot and cautioned Rebecca to wait until I could walk her to the back door. Someone had already swept snow from the walk, but flakes were covering the concrete. We managed a brief snog at our usual spot, but the cold wind drove us to the back porch.

We took Rachel by surprise when the two of us stepped into her kitchen. She stood at the sink peeling potatoes. When she recognized Rebecca, Rachel's face lit up. Mother and daughter embraced, and I knew to take my leave.

I said, "I'll get the luggage," and slipped back outside.

Interlude, Schmidt Kitchen:

Rebecca frowned and turned towards the door as it clicked closed. Her head tracked Kevin's footsteps across the porch.

"He's only going to fetch the luggage," Rachel said. She smiled at her daughter's apparent unsettledness.

"I guess I'm silly. Except for when Kev loaded the truck this morning, we haven't been apart since the wedding." Rebecca shrugged out of her winter coat and hung it on a hook by the door.

"I'll put the water on for tea. Get the cups out, and you can tell me about your honeymoon."

It took a few minutes, but Rebecca noticed the quiet. Before her wedding, the TV would be on, or the sewing machine would be running. She said, "Where is Aunt Deborah?"

"Oh, your aunt is out having a coffee with Mr. Pittsenbargar." When Rebecca didn't speak, Rachel glanced over. Her daughter had an all-knowing grin plastered across her face. "Now, now. It's only a cup of coffee."

"How long have they been gone?"

Rachel made a show of studying the old plug-in wall clock. "Hmmm, I'd say about three hours." She tried but couldn't suppress her smile.

"Wow, that must be a big cup of coffee."

"No doubt." Rachel poured the hot water and returned the kettle to the stove. She brought a plate of cookies and sat across from her daughter.

Rebecca felt herself flush as her mother studied her. "What?" she asked.

"You know, for all of the changes you experienced on your honeymoon, you still look the same as you did before you left."

"Thanks, Momma. Everything's still the same and different now. I guess it's sinking in that I'm leaving to go home with Kevin."

"Getting married and moving in with your husband is a part of life. You'll always be my bright ray of sunshine, now you're Kevin's as well. You have plenty of sunshine to go around."

"Thank you, Momma. I'm going to miss you."

"Well, if you find yourself missing your father or me, then Kevin isn't keeping you busy enough. Speaking of which, I don't want to pry, but everything went well between you two?"

"Yes, Momma," Rebecca felt her face warm. "Kevin loved the chemise, just like you thought."

The back door squeaked open. Kevin came in with a cat carrier which he sat on the floor. "Kitty" meowed.

"Oh, dear. You went all the way to Niagara Falls and got a cat?"

Kevin smiled. "Kitty is Rebecca's protector. I'll find Jonathan and give you two time to talk."

For supper, Rachel made one of my favorite meals. Meatloaf, green beans, mashed potatoes, and as a special surprise, apple crisp for dessert. We took our usual seats, and Jonathan said grace. He added an extra request for us to always make time to share meals together. While I poured gravy onto my potatoes and meatloaf, Deborah broke her silence. She said, "So, Kevin, how did you enjoy *your* February honeymoon?"

I smiled and said, "The best thing about a February honeymoon in Niagara Falls is no one asks why you didn't get any sun." I made eye contact with my wife and winked. She blushed, and her foot thudded against mine. A moment later, Jonathan coughed, then chuckled. He excused himself from the table and stepped out back. We could still hear his laughter through the closed door. A moment later, Rachel got up and joined him. Rebecca kicked me a second time. Tommy and Grainger chuckled. Deborah scowled, but a hint of a smile won through.

Several minutes passed before Jonathan and Rachel returned, holding hands. Rachel kissed her husband's cheek before they returned to their seats. On his way past, Jonathan patted me on the shoulder. He said, "Thank you, Kevin, I haven't laughed like that for quite a while."

Rachel asked, "Did you manage to take any pictures?"

"I did," Rebecca said.

After dinner, Grainger and I washed the dishes. The ladies drank tea and browsed through the pictures.

Deborah said, "This is where you stayed? This motel?"

Rachel leaned over to examine the photograph.

Rebecca said, "The hotel made an error and didn't hold our room. That motel is where they sent us. We spent our wedding night night there."

"Oh, my goodness," said Deborah. "That's the same motel where Thomas and I stayed. This is so wonderful. Did they still offer the free pretzels and bottles of water?" I had a coughing fit until Grainger pounded my back for me.

Trial

February 19, 2017

Berks County, Pennsylvania, Schmidt Farm

Kevin Butcher:

"May I have a word with you, Kevin?" Pittsenbargar asked. He had bid goodnight to Deborah and was standing at the back door.

"Sure John, what's up?" He gestured to the door. I grabbed my coat, a new hooded jacket, and stepped outside with him.

We walked around to the front of the house. He said, "You and your family will testify against Hanslein tomorrow. I want to talk to you about your behavior in the courtroom."

There was enough light outside for Pittsenbargar to read me. He saw me bristle and waited for me to say something. When I spoke, it was with a calm voice, "What are you talking about, I know when to be good."

"Ha. I wish it were that simple. No, I don't even want you in the same room when Waters questions Rebecca. If he makes her cry, I'd have to shoot you to keep Waters alive."

Was I that impulsive? I doubted I'd vault the bar and administer an in-court beating, but I may wait until later and track Waters down. John watched me think it through.

"Kevin, if I have to arrest you, I'll be persona non-grata around here. Deborah is starting to warm up to me, and I don't want to screw it up."

"Okay, okay. When Rebecca takes the stand, I'll step out into the hallway." I decided to ask something personal. "Hey, how's it going with Deborah?"

John smiled. "Deb is a good woman. Sometimes, I almost feel like I should thank Hanslein. If not for him, I'd never have met her."

Deb? Did he dare call her that to her face? I'd never do it.

February 20, 2017

Berks County Courthouse

Kevin Butcher:

The Schmidts and the Butchers arrived at the courthouse thirty minutes early. A tipstaff escorted us to our assigned seats in the courtroom. A few moments later, Major John Pittsenbargar, in full state police regalia, arrived. He caused some consternation by insisting I sit on the aisle. Where other states have bailiffs, Pennsylvania has tipstuffs. The tipstuffs title is a remnant of our time as an English colony. The tipstuffs run the courtroom their way and dislike outside interference. Our tipstaff, a wizened older woman, glared up at the imposing state trooper. Pittsenbargar did something unexpected, he smiled and said, "Please." The tipstaff, completely disarmed, stammered she'd see about it. Five minutes later, with the seating arrangements amended, I sat on the aisle. Deborah excused herself to go and look around. She never made it further than the doorway where Pittsenbargar stood.

Rebecca whispered, "Aunt Deborah has it bad for Major Pittsenbargar. She told Momma last night."

Rachel's testimony consisted of the prosecutor stepping her through the events. Rachel detailed Hanslein's plan to hold her hostage while raping her daughter. A quick glance at Jonathan made me think he and I should both be out in the hallway.

Joseph Waters began his cross-examination innocently enough. Then he went off on an odd tangent. "Mrs. Schmidt, has your husband known Mr. Hanslein long?"

"Yes."

Before the trial began, the Chief Deputy District Attorney sat with us. He told us to answer the defense's questions but do not add anything. "Keep your answers short and to the point. If you don't know an answer, say so."

"How long has your husband known Mr. Hanslein?"

Rachel's head tilted back while she thought about it. She said, "At least nineteen years."

"Would you say they are friends?"

With a grimace, Rachel shook her head. "No, they are not friends."

The questions continued. I realized Waters wanted to establish the enmity between the Schmidts and Hansleins. His last question seemed odd. "Would you say your husband is more violent, or thoughtful?"

"My husband abhors violence. He is an intelligent and thoughtful man."

With that question, Waters told the judge he had no further questions, Rachel stood to return to her seat, and the prosecution called for Rebecca. I stood and stepped into the aisle. As Rebecca stepped past, she reached out and gave my hand a brief squeeze. I turned and walked to the rear of the courtroom. Pittsenbargar opened the door, and we both stepped into the hallway.

Klaus Hanslein Senior leaned over to his lawyer. Keeping his voice low, he said, "Explain to me again, what you're trying to do."

Joseph Waters didn't look up from his hastily scribbled notes. In an equally low voice, he replied, "I don't have time to keep answering the same questions, Klaus."

"Make the time."

Throwing his mechanical pencil down, Waters turned to his client. "In a few minutes, the DA will put Rebecca Butcher on the stand. You remember her, she's one of the two women you threatened with a

rather brutal plan of kidnapping and rape. Mrs. Butcher is attractive, fresh-faced, and dresses modestly. The jury will love her. They'll believe everything she says, and there isn't anything I can do about it. Since I can't discredit her, I'm going to push her, and hope her hot-headed husband comes after me. If he jumps the bar and decks me, we just might win this.

Rebecca stood next to the witness box. Nervous about being the focus of everyone's attention, she kept her hands clasped together. One of the tipstiffs approached carrying a bible. She thought the title tipstaff was odd. After she affirmed she would tell the truth she sat, and only then dared to glance around the courtroom. It seemed as if everyone stared at her. Mr. Hanslein, stared at her as if she were a thing. Rebecca allowed herself an unchristian thought. Both Mr. Hanslein and his son, were horrible people. She would have to try and pray for them again. It would be difficult.

The DA stood and smiled. "Mrs. Butcher, in your own words, tell us what happened on the night of September eighteenth."

"Momma and I were on our way to the store to buy peppermint oil..." A brief titter came from the audience, and Rebecca waited for it to stop, "when Mr. Hanslein's men jumped out in front of us." Rebecca continued to tell the story. Occasionally the defense attorney would object, and the judge would give her instructions. When she got to the part where Mr. Hanslein detailed his plans to rape her and her mother, everyone in the courtroom kept still.

When the defense attorney got his turn, he stood and walked towards her. The questions started out easy.

The courtroom doors were thick enough I couldn't hear anything from inside. I turned to John and asked, "Do you know what Waters is up to?"

John shook his head, "I'm not sure. Joseph Waters is a terrible trial lawyer. Most of the cases he's won were over technicalities or plea bargains. He avoids the courtroom like the plague."

I gestured towards the closed doors. "How about the DA prosecuting Hanslein, is he any good?"

Pittsenbargar chuckled. "You don't know, do you?"

"What?"

"That man is the chief assistant DA for the county. He's good, and he wanted to prosecute you. You went way over the top in subduing Hanslein's men. I asked several like-minded peace officers to meet, and we discussed the problem. One of us, a local yokel named Robertson, put the good word in for you."

"I, uh, I was a little crazy that night."

"Yeah, crazy isn't a bad word to use. Hey, while I'm thinking about it, the Special Emergency Response Team would like you to speak at our next training."

"SERT? Isn't that the state trooper SWAT team?" I heard a muffled exclamation from inside the courtroom. It sounded like Rebecca! My hand grabbed the door handle and yanked. I managed to open the door about an inch before Pittsenbargar blocked it with his foot. Through clenched teeth, I said, "Get away from the door, John."

"I don't think that's a good idea. Remember our talk."

My hand still gripped the handle. Pulling the door open against a man with his mass was a losing proposition. I'd have to move him out of the way. My hand released the door handle, and I spun to face him. For such a large man, he is light on his feet. While I spun, he took two steps back, and now stood with one hand on his Taser. I said, "Waters may have hurt Rebecca."

"If Waters hurt your wife, he will go to jail. Which is where you will go if you don't calm the fuck down."

"Is there a problem, Major?" A new voice issued from behind me. I stepped to the side, and half turned to face the door. Pittsenbargar stood to my right, and two state troopers stood to my left. Both new troopers watched me.

Pittsenbargar assumed a more relaxed posture. He said, "Troopers, I'd like to introduce Kevin Butcher. Mr. Butcher was telling me about the Hanslein attack on his in-laws."

The two state troopers smiled and relaxed. They offered me their hands, and we shook. "Nice use of the Castle Doctrine, Mr. Butcher."

"Thank you, it was a very scary night." The four of us stood there in the hallway. We discussed unarmed takedowns and improvised weapons. At no time did Pittsenbargar allow me within an arm's length of the door.

The courtroom door clicked open. One of the tipstaves peered out. "Major, Mrs. Butcher has left the stand, and the judge has adjourned the court for thirty minutes."

Several clots of people left the courtroom heading for the bathrooms or outside for a smoke. I elbowed my way in and found Rebecca.

Rebecca sat in her chair dabbing reddened eyes with a tissue. Her parents flanked her. My eyes scanned the defense table, but Joseph Waters was absent. The assistant district attorney stepped up to me. He said, "The judge took defense attorney Waters to his chambers."

"What happened?"

The DA said, "Waters is getting desperate. He can't refute the evidence, so he's trying to discredit the witnesses. He asked your wife some inappropriate questions. I objected, the judge sustained, but Waters kept pushing."

Jonathan took my arm. He said, "Excuse us," then steered me back out to the hallway. He said, "That lawyer," and there was a wealth of scorn in Jonathan's voice. "He asked Rebecca how a good Mennonite could have carnal relations with a killer."

Those words shook me. If I'd been inside the courtroom and heard it first-hand, I don't know what I'd have done. Heck, I didn't know what I'd do when the DA put me on the stand.

Rebecca and Rachel found us in the hallway. My wife wormed her way under my arm. The four of us stood together while the local TV news reporter shouted questions at us.

The DA called me to the stand. While a tipstaff swore me in, I watched an apparent argument between Klaus and his lawyer. Something wasn't going well.

When the DA finished with me, he turned me over to the defense. Waters stood and glanced towards Rebecca and back to me. He approached the witness stand with a professional smile on his face. He made a point of measuring the distance between us and said, "Mr. Butcher, how many men have you killed?"

I refused to allow his question to surprise me. "Do you mean directly, or by calling in air strikes or artillery?"

"Well, let's start with the direct killings. How many?"

"It's difficult to be accurate. The enemy forces often removed the bodies, but I'd guess somewhere over fifty."

Waters strode back to his table and extracted a sheet of paper from a folder. His eyes glanced down at the page. "Does that include the fifteen you killed, 'barehanded or with improvised weapons' on the outskirts of Marjah, Afghanistan?"

"It does."

"So, you are The Butcher of Helmand Province?"

Where did this bastard get his information? A couple guys in my fire team stuck me with that handle. "Some jokers in my squad called me that."

"What's it like, Mr. Butcher, killing someone up close, with your bare hands?"

"It's scary, stinky, and often messy."

"You say that so flippantly. As if killing a human being doesn't bother you."

Although he hadn't phrased it as a question, I chose to interpret it as one. I said, "I have nightmares."

"I'm sure you do." Water's voice dripped with insincerity. He paused a moment with one index finger raised. "Tell me, Mr. Butcher. When you kill someone do you see them as a person, or as something else?"

The DA interrupted, "Your honor, I object to this line of questions. Mr. Butcher is not on trial."

Waters followed up the objection. "Your honor, I explained this in chambers. I need to establish the character of the witnesses against my client."

The Judge looked as if he had bitten into a lemon. "Very well, I'll overrule the objection, but you need to wrap this up, counselor. My patience is wearing thin. Mr. Butcher, you may answer the question."

"The enemy is the enemy."

"So, you see yourself as someone with the right to dispense justice?"

"No," I chuckled. "not at all. For example, while I've known your client, Hanslein, was a vicious thug. I never bothered 'dispense justice' and kick his ass until *after* he attacked my fiancée. You see, counselor, I'm a good guy, and that's how we roll."

Waters spun to face the judge. "Your Honor, I request Mr. Butcher's spurious remarks be stricken. Also, please instruct the jury to disregard them as well."

Sighing, the judge nodded. He instructed the court reporter, and the jury to ignore the remarks following, "No, not at all." He then turned his attention to Waters. "Do you have any more questions for the witness?"

"No, your honor, Mr. Butcher has given me the answers I need."

"Very well, the court will adjourn for ten minutes." He banged his gavel and left the stand. The sheriffs collected Hanslein, and most everyone else headed out to the hallway. I stood up from behind the witness stand and walked towards the gate and the gallery beyond. Waters stood there blocking my path. At first, I thought he intended me to strike him, but as I closed the distance, he appeared to be deep in thought. I despised this man, and if this were a dark alley, only one of us would walk out. As I stepped towards him, I realized he might some have information I needed. I took a chance and said, "I don't envy you your job."

His eyes met mine before he looked away. "I don't suppose you do."

"I have a question, perhaps you can help me."

His eyes came back to mine. We both studied the other. I'd like to say I read into his soul, but if he had one, I couldn't see it. Finally, he said, "Why should I help you?"

"This trial is going to be over soon. We both know your client's going to jail. The FBI and the state police are all over this. There'll be more indictments. It might be useful if you had a friend. You know Major Pittsenbargar? He's dating my wife's aunt, and right now, he doesn't like you. If you help me, I'll put in a good word for you."

He looked surprised, then he gave me an odd self-deprecating smile. "What do you want to know?"

"Junior, where is he?"

The smile vanished, and he shook his head. I nodded and stepped around him. Then he surprised the hell out of me. Without glancing my way, he said: "Junior's gone. He won't bother you."

I nodded and murmured, "Thank you."

The defense's cross-examination of Jonathan was either brilliant or birdbrained. After the first few questions, I realized Waters used an old sales technique, the Yes-set Close. You've heard of it; a salesperson asks questions with easy answers, and those answers are all "Yes." After several questions, the customer falls into a rhythm. The salesperson then closes the deal. I doubted Jonathan would fall for it.

Waters stayed sitting at the defense table. He looked up at Jonathan and said, "You have known my client, Klaus Hanslein, for a long time, haven't you?"

"Yes, I—"

Before Jonathan could continue, Waters interrupted him with his next question. "Before you married Rachel Weigel, you courted Naomi Miller?"

Even from my aisle seat in the gallery, I could see Jonathan stiffen. "Yes, I did."

"But, Naomi left you for Klaus Hanslein, didn't she? Yes or no, please."

"Yes, but—"

At Jonathan's affirmative answer, Waters stood and closed the distance to the stand. "It bothered you, didn't it? Naomi leaving you for Mr. Hanslein."

"Yes," Jonathan clenched his jaws.

"But your religious beliefs forbid violence, don't they?"

"Yes."

"Naomi married Klaus Hanslein and bore him a son, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"You courted and married Rachel Weigel, even though she was seven years your junior?"

A faint smile touched Jonathan's face, his eyes sought Rachel's. "Yes."

"Rachel bore you a beautiful daughter, then later a strong son?"

"Yes."

"Then one day, Mr. Butcher appeared on your doorstep looking for a place to live?"

"Yes."

"You allowed Mr. Butcher to court your daughter, in spite of his violent past."

"Yes, I did."

Waters smiled. He and leaned in and, in a conspiratorial tone, said, "In Mr. Butcher, you found the perfect tool to use against your former rival. In exchange for your daughter, Kevin Butcher enacted the violent act of revenge you yourself could not."

“What?”

In a loud and accusatory tone, Waters said. “Yes or no, Mr. Schmidt. You gave your daughter to a known killer. A man who brutally beat my client after viciously killing two of his associates. Yes or no?”

The DA jumped up and objected. Pandemonium erupted in the courtroom. The judge banged his gavel demanding order and threatening to empty the courtroom. Waters turned and like a boss, strode back to his client. He sat, folded his hands, and said, “I have no further questions, your honor.”

The trial continued for another week. I wanted to attend the proceedings, but Rebecca wanted us to go home. After we returned to McConnellsburg, I kept track of the trial via the internet. In his closing arguments, Waters accused Jonathan of masterminding a plot to exact revenge. Jury deliberations lasted four days. When the verdicts came down, the jury found Hanslein guilty of nearly every charge. The next business day, a flood of attorneys, mine included, descended on the courthouse. They all filed civil complaints against Klaus Hanslein Senior.

Reporters hounded the Schmidts for weeks. My lawyer issued a statement for us, and the furor died down.

Married Life

Berks County, Pennsylvania

“Has anyone seen Rebecca and Kevin?” Rachel asked.

Deborah paused while filling out an order to Fabric World. She said, “They keep sneaking off to fornicate.”

“They’re married! It isn’t fornication after they’re married.”

“Whatever. One would think he’d have worn it down to a nub by now.”

Shocked almost into silence. Rachel recovered and said, “I...I can’t believe you said that.”

Deborah stopped writing, she looked up and frowned. "I'm sorry, Rachel, but John has me in a terrible state."

Rachel's eyebrows rose when she noticed Deborah's slip up. Deborah would not normally refer to Mr. Pittsenbargar by his given name. Something must have changed in their relationship. "Mr. Pittsenbargar is terribly pushy. How do you manage to put up with him?" Rachel grinned.

"Rachel," Deborah sat the catalog down. "You should be more sympathetic. No man has ever pursued me like this. His attentions are...disconcerting."

"Well, I'm sure you'll make the right decision." Deborah didn't answer.

The back door squeaked open. A moment later, Rebecca came inside closely followed by her new husband. The newlyweds looked as if they had run a marathon. Both of them had red cheeks and mussed hair.

"Kevin," Rachel said. She peered at his neck. "What is that mark on your neck?"

Rebecca spun in place to examine Kevin's neck. She said, "I didn't bite him this time. Wait, there aren't any marks." She turned back to see her mother and her aunt chuckling. "Very funny, Momma. Are we still going shopping?"

"If you and Kevin can spare the time away from each other, we'll go. Unless Kev is coming along?"

"Leave him here," Deborah spoke up. "Clothing stores have dressing rooms, those two are liable to be arrested."

McConnellsburg, PA.

Kevin Butcher:

"Hey, Becks," I called out from the living room.

"Yeesss?" she replied, her voice flirty.

"Want to make out with me on the couch while we watch a movie?"

"No, no, no, Aunt Deborah warned me about you and couches."

A moment later, I heard footsteps as she approached. I turned my head towards her and said, "What does Deborah have against couches?"

Rebecca stopped behind me. She leaned forward and gave me an upside-down kiss. She pulled back and said, "Actually she warned me against you and any horizontal surface." Her hands dropped to my shoulders. I reached up and covered them with my own.

"A couch also has vertical surfaces, so it would be perfectly safe for you."

"I don't think any kind of surface is safe with you around, but I'll bite. What vertical surface?"

I stood and stepped behind the couch. Rebecca turned to face me, her back to the couch. She had a wary look in her eyes. "What are you up to?" she asked.

I invaded her personal space. This close I could see the flush had already started on her neck. I said, "Trust me?"

"Don't be silly, I trust you with my life."

I placed my hands on her waist, lifted her up and sat her on the back of the couch.

She giggled and held onto my shoulders for balance. I stepped close and her legs spread and wrapped around me. This forced her dress up well above her knees. Rebecca glanced down and frowned. The back of the couch put her out of reach for intercourse. She said, "I don't think you're tall enough to do it like this."

"Take my hands." She did, and I lowered her down backward until her shoulders rested on the couch's seat cushions. Her legs hung over the back of the couch, and her butt remained propped up.

"What are you gonna do now?" she asked.

I pushed her dress up, exposing powder blue panties. She sighed when I pulled them aside and kissed her mons.

Later, we cuddled under a comforter, mostly naked. Rebecca lay on top of me, my spent semen dripping onto my pelvis.

"Deborah was right," she said, "you are a menace."

"But you love me anyway?"

In answer, she gave me a blistering hot kiss. She pulled back and looked around. "Hey," she asked, "We've done it in every room, haven't we?"

I thought for a moment. "We haven't done it in the kitchen or the dining room." I paused. "Or on the front porch." I'll never forget the other night, out on the patio beside the fire. Both us covered in blankets.

"We can't do it in the kitchen. That's not proper."

I lifted my head and kissed and bit her neck. "Can you imagine making supper for your parents, after we make love on the countertop?"

She squirmed when my lips found that special spot below her ear. "Not going to happen!"

Somehow, I thought it might happen anyway. I said, "Probably not tonight, I think you wore me out."

We sat on our couch watching the closing credits after *Pale Rider*. Rebecca said she liked the idea of God sending an angel, like the preacher, to help those in need. She looked thoughtful and said, "Do you think God sent you to help us?"

"Seeing as how I got shot up, God should have sent Clint Eastwood."

"You don't think he could have sent you?"

"Hmmm, maybe." I wouldn't put anything past Gunnery Sergeant God. "If he did, then you would be my reward."

"So, I'm your reward?"

"Yeah, come here, reward. I'm not sleepy."

The End