

Kevin Butcher:

After work, my cell phone rang while I walked to my truck. The display read, "Andrew Schmidt." I'll be damned; Kristin hasn't screwed him to death. I tapped accept and said, "Hello?"

"Kevin, it's me, Andy."

"Sup Dude."

"Ah, what?"

"Sorry, I'm messing around. How are you doing?"

"Oh, I'm all right. Hey, is everyone OK? I guess Aunt Deborah is upset with me?"

"Far as she's concerned, you and I will have adjoining spots in the lake of fire."

"You shouldn't joke about that." Andrew took a breath. "Ah, heck, who am I kidding? After these days with Kristin, I'd go there willingly."

I could hear a rustling in the background, and then Kristin's voice. "Are you talking to Kevin? Let me say hi."

Andy asked me to hang on. A moment later, Kristin said, "Hi, Kevin!"

"Hey, Kris, are you doing OK with Andy?"

"Andy, like his cousin Rebecca, is a sweetheart. That's what I want to talk to you about."

"What's up?"

"You better treat that girl right. She's nice, and she's got it bad for you. If you're playing her, I'll hunt you down, you hear me?"

"Whoa, Kris, I'm going to marry her in a couple of weeks. I'm serious about her."

"You better be!"

"Well, how about you? Have you been good to Andy? He's not used to casual relationships."

Kristin sighed, she paused a moment and spoke to Andrew, "Andy, be a dear and go down to the corner and buy me a diet Coke."

Andy actually said, "Yes dear," and left, I heard a door open and close.

"Kevin, why didn't you warn me about him? He's nice, like Rebecca. He makes me wish I was a nice girl."

"Kris, this might come as a surprise, but you are a nice girl. Maybe you hadn't found the right guy."

"I don't think I'm Andy's kind of girl."

"You may not be, but you don't need to make any kind of decision right now. Be straight with him. Tell him to call me if he needs to talk. Hey, better yet, tell him to bring you to my wedding. Meet the family."

"Kev, I don't know...I, I wouldn't fit in. You've heard the expression about a whore in church."

"Here's Rebecca's number." I recited her number while Kristin wrote it down. "Call her. Ask if she can hook you up with the right kind of dress." I've imagined Rebecca tarted up in a mini skirt and heels. I now added a mental picture of Kristin wearing a modest dress.

"Are you sure? I don't want to be in the way." Kristin sounded hopeful.

I thought about it, and yeah, there could be a Deborah sized problem. But I'd talk to Rachel first. "I'll talk to Rebecca's mom. She's nice, you'll see. Oh, one thing, you can't wear heels."

"What! No heels?" Kristin wailed. "Do you know how short I am? There are kids taller than me!"

"You'll be fine. Call Becks. I got to go."

"All right, I'll call her. And I'll come to your wedding, just to make sure you go through with it!"

I laughed. "Cool, I'm looking forward to seeing you there. Nice talking to you, Kris. Take care and call us anytime."

"Bye."

Kristin Macleod:

Doubt crept in only a few minutes after I finished speaking with Rebecca. What was I doing? I hooked up with Andy to irritate Kevin as much as to scratch my itch. But, it didn't feel like a hook-up now, did it? Sometime in the last two days, things changed for me, and I didn't know what to do. Andy and Rebecca lived in a different world from me. And me going to a Mennonite wedding would be a joke. It was time to move on.

When Andy came back from the corner grocery store, he found me in the window seat. I sat against the wall with my knees hugged to my chest. Andy, the sensitive bastard, knew right away that something bothered me.

Andy hovered next to me, his concern obvious. He said, "Kris, what's wrong?"

"Kevin invited us to his wedding." I glanced up to see his expression.

His face lit up as he smiled. "That's wonderful," he said. Then he frowned. "Hmm, you might want to call Rebecca and find out what kind of dress to wear. Some of my family can be downright stodgy."

"I've already called Rebecca. She told me what to wear."

Andy smiled. "Great," then he studied me for a second and his frown came back. "but you don't want to go."

I shook my head. "Andy, you're a dear, but we've only known each other for a couple of days. Now I'm going to meet your family? This is all moving too fast."

"Oh," Andy's frown deepened, "I understand." He stepped away from me and turned towards the door. "You know," he said, "I should be getting back home. I'll leave you one of my cards, it has my cell phone number on it." He turned back and walked over to me. I felt tears burning my eyes, and I couldn't look up at him. His lips pressed against the top of my head and his large, strong hands squeezed both of mine. "I don't know what's proper for this. So, I'll just tell you what I think. These couple of days have meant a lot. You're amazing."

I sniffled while Andy gathered up his stuff and walked to the door. I wiped my eyes and dared a peek at him. He stood with his hand on the doorknob, and when he saw me watching, his smile came back. He said, "I grew up thinking I loved Rebecca, but I didn't know what it truly felt like." Then he left.

Andy's card lay on the coffee table. Half of it wet from the water trickling down my untouched bottle of Diet Coke. I picked up the card and the soda and carried both to my kitchenette. His card went under a refrigerator magnet, on top of a bunch of torn slips of paper with phone numbers and names. I poured the Coke into a glass and carried it into my bedroom. I needed to get ready for work.

"Hey, Kristen, where you been? The bar isn't the same without your pretty little ass behind it."

Carlos was one of my regulars. He hit on me constantly, but he never pressed, and I never accepted. I turned to the row of bottles looking for his rye whiskey. Sure enough, when I glanced up into the mirror, his eyes were glued to my ass. On any other night, I'd give him a wiggle, all in the name of a better tip. Tonight, I didn't feel like doing it.

The shot glass clinked against the wooden surface when I set it on the bar. Carlos watched me pour his shot. He reached for it and stopped. His dark eyes met mine. He said, "What's bothering you, Kristen? Man trouble? Do you need me to take care of some punk for you?"

"Drink up, Carlos, I'm fine." He tossed back his shot and waved me off when I offered him a second. I moved to the next customer.

Stacy dropped off some drink orders, and I got busy filling them. We talked while I made the drinks. Stacy asked, "Do you have any new stories for Tom?"

My fiancé Tom, the long-distance truck driver, visited me once or twice a month. We'd stay in bed, exchange stories, and I'd walk funny for a few days. Stacy thought Tom was the shit. Her boyfriend was a jealous prick with a mean streak. I glanced up to see Stacy smirking at me. "What?" I asked.

“I saw you having dinner at Mama’s Pizza last night. You were with that tall blonde hunk. You never just have dinner with a man, so you must have a story.”

Damn it, why did she have to ask about him? My eyes burned. “I don’t think I’ll tell Tom about it.” I finished Stacy’s order in a rush. “I need to go to the bathroom.” The tears waited until the bathroom door closed behind me.

When Stacy found me, I was bawling into a handful of tissues. Thank God for waterproof makeup.

“Kris, what’s wrong?” Her eyes opened wide as she put two and two together. “You are *not* the kind of girl to get teary-eyed over a man.”

“Maybe I am.” I blew my nose and grabbed another tissue.

“Whoa, I’ve known you since high school. You never get like this. Who was that guy?”

“Just some loser farmer.”

“If he has you this crazy, he must be a rich, loser farmer and hung like a porn star. What happened? Did he ‘hit and run?’”

“No, he isn’t rich or anything. He...he wants me to go to a wedding with him.”

“Oh my God! Kristen, did you fall for him?”

All I could do was nod and cry.

His business card read, “Andrew Schmidt, Manager” It also gave his business address and several phone numbers. It didn’t give his home address. My kitchen clock read 2:15 AM. I had to do it now. If I waited, I’d lose my nerve.

The sky was bright enough that I could read the sign. The name of the dairy farm matched the one on Andrew’s business card. Snapshots of memories from last night’s drive flashed through my mind. Huge eighteen-wheeled trucks zooming past me on the Pennsylvania and Ohio turnpikes. Curious stares from

other travelers at the rest stops. My panic when I had to search for the cash to pay the tolls. I turned the wheel and drove down the gravel covered lane.

I got out of my car and stared. McConnellsburg has its share of dairy farms. But none of them compared to this. All the buildings were huge. They must have thousands of cows. The front door of the house opened, and an older woman, dressed like that awful Aunt Deborah character stepped out and stared at me. For the first time, I realized that I still wore my bartending outfit. The hell with it, I raised my voice and said, "I'm looking for Andy, Andy Schmidt."

The woman pursed her lips and said. "Andrew? You're looking for Andrew?" I nodded, and she pointed towards a long metal roofed building.

It only took about a dozen steps before I stopped to take off my shoes. Their stiletto heels dug into the gravel and made it difficult to walk. Inside the building, I saw a group of men scrubbing shiny, stainless-steel machines. One man stopped and stared at me before he elbowed the next man. A chain reaction of elbowing occurred and within a few moments a room full of men stared at me. I said, "I'm looking for Andrew Schmidt."

"Kristen?" Andy stepped through the door behind me.

We sat in his family's kitchen, drinking tea, and talking. Well, I cried more than I talked. Andy's mother brought me a box of tissues. She gave Andy a questioning look and left us alone.

"Kris, I, uh, I didn't expect to see you again. I mean, I hoped to, but...why are you here?"

"After you left, I realized how much I missed you, and I wanted to tell you I changed my mind about us going to the wedding."

Andrew's smile came back full force, and it made me smile back. He leaned forward and kissed me. His hands squeezed mine. Someone cleared their throat, and Andy and I pulled away from each other. He turned to his mother who stood in the doorway. He said. "I'm going to take Kristen to my room. She drove all night and needs to sleep. Could you find something for her to wear?" His mother said, "Your grandmother will be even more scandalized than she is now. I'll show your friend to the guest room and get her settled in."

Andrew said, "Thank you." He kissed me again and told me he'd check in on me at dinnertime.

Andrew's mother, Adriel, said, "You aren't exactly the girl I expected my son to bring home."

Tired, anger welled up inside of me. I snapped, "Because of the way I'm dressed?"

She laughed, "Well your outfit is quite provocative, but you have the figure to do it justice. No, I always thought Andrew preferred blondes."

"Like his cousin Rebecca?"

"Ah, you've met Rebecca. That must be how you met Andrew."

"Do you know Rebecca's fiancé Kevin?"

"Dear, the entire family knows about Rebecca and Kevin Butcher. Rebecca's surprise visit to Kevin's home had tongues wagging."

"Rebecca's Aunt Deborah called me..."

I woke up in this strangely comfortable room. On the foot of bed lay a neat stack of clothing and toiletries. Someone elsewhere in the house sang something, but I couldn't make out the words. I found a note next to the stack.

Miss Macleod, the bathroom is directly across the hall. Help yourself to anything you need.

-Adriel Schmidt

The shower and clean clothing helped me regain my humanity. The dress was a simple shift and it hung down to my ankles. The new slippers Mrs. Schmidt laid out for me fit well enough. Along with the clothing I found a neatly folded scarf. At first, I couldn't figure it out, but then I remembered how these women covered their heads. I tried to fold it into a prayer scarf.

Andrew's Grandmother, Martha, sat across from me at the kitchen table. She'd peer at me then go back to eating. Finally, she spoke. "Tell me, dear, do you sew?"