

She's not ready

Chapter 1

The clamor rang incessantly from her Audrey Hepburn alarm clock. The noise traveled immediately to my floppy ears. I think she turns the volume up all the way intentionally, just to make sure any living creature asleep in the entire King's Grant condominium complex would rise and start their day along with her. The flight pattern of the fire-drill sound made my spotted, floppy ears its first destination, as it does on every morning's six-thirty departure.

Unfortunately, the iron-nickel-plated chain I am hooked to prevents me from scampering into the bedroom and ripping the plug out of the wall and maybe even beating her awake with it. Marcy is one of those non-morning types who would rather half-sleep ten minutes longer than give herself ten minutes more to get ready in the morning or perhaps even ten minutes with *me*. I can hear her wrestling frantically with those ugly, daisy-printed sheets she takes so much pride in wrapping herself in. The flapping sounds like she has a flock of Canadian geese fighting over the last piece of stale Wonder bread within a 50-mile radius. You would think that a perfectly healthy, intelligent, ambitious, educated young professional female (with, not to mention, breasts you can't help greeting first because they say hello to you before she does) would have every reason in the world to rise before the rooster's cry without hesitation. Something keeps her mind south of balanced.

After a year and a half of cohabitation, I have grown quite used to her fast-food approach to life. My stomach doesn't give into the taunting game starvation plays with my mind anymore. No, the images of a still-bleeding T-bone smothered with portabella

mushrooms and caramelized Vidalia onions accompanied by an oversized Idaho potato drowning in a butter and sour cream puddle are only images of some very persuasive restaurant commercials I have the luxury of absorbing on prime-time TV. She would have to look at me more than thirty seconds a day to notice my rib line beginning to make shadows along my thin, white coat.

Chapter II

The melodic, tin-tapping mist streamed from the aluminum showerhead in *her* bathroom and tickled my bladder, informing me of its quickly rising level. I'll never understand why my morning surroundings scheme to wake me so abruptly, especially that diabolical bastard J. Frost. He always seems to have it in for me on winter mornings like these, whispering long, icy breaths through the space at the bottom of the front door. He knows I've nothing but this thin, white coat, but his conscience has obviously been bought off by his twin sister, who is reciting lyrics from Madonna's "lucky star" in *her* shower stall. Common sense, solution, or even *Love* may dictate throwing a blanket across the walnut-paneled floor to block as much of the draft as possible. Better yet, I could just develop a passionate relationship with J. Frost and sleep with him every night on the ice-crystal-painted deck boards outside the door. This may also spare Marcy the agony of facing one of her most disturbing problems. It *can* be quite entertaining:

"Clip the locking-hasps onto the black-leather neck collar, drag the right hand down to the end of the chain, follow with the left, back up with the right, and once more with the left. That's 4 times. Two with the right. Two with the left, tug firmly 4 times: one...two...three...four... Good and snug. Then around the cream-based column by the entrance one...two...three...four...."

Rising to my feet, my bones perform their usual “snap-crackle-pop” ritual. It’s not that I am getting old or lazy; I am just simply tired. Where should I piss today? I didn’t realize, through the arguing last night, that I had spent so much time quenching my thirst in Jamie’s bathroom, licking up water from the toilet. As usual, my attempts to distract one of them went unnoticed. I must have barked the alphabet at least three times.

I got a good bit of piss today. I think the corner by the window on Marcy’s side of the bed will be perfect placement. I figure a few hours of fermenting dog urine will settle into the desert-sand carpet fairly well, and she’ll have a nice present waiting when she returns from work. It couldn’t happen to a better woman. Maybe I’ll piss on Jamie’s side tomorrow, but God knows it wouldn’t have the same effect.

As I made my morning stroll around the condominium, my ever-keen sense noticed a burnt pungency spilling into the air of the newly remodeled kitchen. I have seen the price Jamie has paid in the past for leaving the coffee pot on when he leaves for work. My floppy, spotted ears have been blessed on several occasions by arguments led by Marcy’s blatant exploitation of common mistakes made repeatedly by her incompetent “other half”. It would be, to most pathetic and, maybe to some of the demented, amusing. To me, it’s tragic. I’ve watched him fight and defend his position while juggling hers in the same hand. The one thing Jamie always wanted was for things to be good. “Never go to bed upset” was one of his most treasured philosophies and, to me a commendable quality *worth* something.

A military man, he stood decorated more than his equals. He was easily recognized by his friends and fellow soldiers as hard working, honorable, and motivated. He had a flawless record with the U S Army, working as a Psychological Operations

Specialist, which closely resembles your typical Marketing Analyst/Researcher. He strove to form good relationships with people and was very well-respected by some of the higher ranking officials who have seen more in their lives than he had out of diapers; but he struggled to receive any of that from the person that mattered to him most.

I can't quite reach the switch to turn the coffee pot off, but I can swap my paw at the loose,

dangling plug. Maybe this will save the two of us, at least for tonight.

Chapter III

The relationship Jamie and I had was one easily compared to the “dog is a man’s best friend” cliché. At times, he would confide in me the way he wished he could talk to his own partner. He would divulge his innermost feelings, sometimes at the expense of a pleasant night’s sleep but mostly to ease the emotional torment he had allowed himself to suffer. I suppose I could have attempted to share my thoughts, but all I could do was listen.

I remember one temperate, summer evening particularly around a late July dusk. The day was slowly nearing its end. The wind was gentle, as if it whispered to the nature around us, telling secrets about tomorrow. The Carolina sky spoke in an increasingly darker hue as the exhausted sun-star made its way to bed beneath the distant horizon.

We sat on the deck just outside the French atrium doors of the back entrance to the third level condominium. He sat almost motionless. Oftentimes, he would go outside on that deck, I think mainly to gather some fraction of peace of mind. He would take that beautiful, ebony acoustic guitar and hypnotize us with the melody of his mood. I could always tell what mood it was. The more upset he was, the slower he played. I could tell

in the chords he subconsciously put together what he was feeling. I sat beside him with my floppy, spotted ears ready and awaiting his nightly confession:

“I dreamt as a little boy of someone sort of like my mother, whose love I’d never question. I watched growing up how she catered to the love they shared; not to him per se (like servants do to a king) but to their love. The way she would make that pimento-loaf and cheese sandwich (2 slices with the spicy Gulden’s mustard painted to all the edges) if he was hungry; the way he brought her assorted bundles of wildflowers (of whatever the season dictated) just because. It was that magnetism, that fire I can recognize now as a man that has kept them together for more than thirty years. It is also something I can’t help wanting from someone I expect to wed. Thus far, I find myself living the opposite dream. It takes a lot to recognize imminent unhappiness, but it takes so much more to do something about it. It is only three months before the wedding. I wish she wasn’t working late tonight.”

Chapter IV

The time tip-toed gently beside the solitude Jamie and I had been sharing until the abrupt, iron-clad fist of the cornered mahogany grandfather clock struck a furious *eight-thirty*. To our unpleasant surprise, the distinct nickel-plated clutter of two house, two office, two mailbox, and two Geo Tracker car keys strung by a “Marcy” engraved key-ring, performed their metallic jingle to ears that much preferred the sounds of silence.

“What the hell is she doing here so early?” I tried to convey to Jamie with an utterly disappointed shrug.

“Hey”, she uttered to him with pathetic concern, and following that with yet another colorful line of questions:

“Did you make anything to eat? Did you get the mail today? Did you make sure to drop off the movies? Did you return Moby Dick like I asked?”

I marveled at how her approach to a fashionably early arrival cleverly and consistently failed to constitute not even an ounce of genuine intent. A perfect stranger would have accomplished more with a careless, “How are you?”

Jamie had grown quite skilled in the art of settling, which was often supplemented by a serious knack for superior tolerance. I could shit a week’s worth of that human comparative to Spam, Alpo (food for dog’s like me) in the same corner time after time, and he would then clean it up time after time with little complaint. His demeanor wasn’t too far from similar in the way he handled things with her. I refuse to watch him do this to himself anymore. He has flirted with the pyrotechnics of self-destruction for far too long. He has to know that he stands taller than his own unhappiness. He owes it to himself- and I feel he rather owes it to me. I have been with him since the *beginning* observing from the cheap seats. A forceful hand would do the trick, something to guide him in the right direction where he could enjoy the contents of a life he knows in the dark recesses of his entire being, he very well needs and deserves. He simply needs a push.

After the “Spanish Inquisition” had subsided, she stopped. Interestingly enough, he didn’t respond. He did nothing. He made no attempt to acknowledge her careless badgering and typical harassment. His ears didn’t perk up at the abrupt slam of the oak front door when she came in. He didn’t spring to the demand of her pretentious concerns as to why his motionless body was just facing into the nothingness of the blizzard falling from the top of the television screen. To him, her presence was “null and void”. This was getting good!

She moved towards the scarlet, contemporary style sofa he was sitting on to get a better look. She stood above him in an aggravated state of wonder.

“What the fuck is your problem, Jamie?”

Isn't she pleasant? One must learn to really appreciate the use of cautious verbiage there. A bitch cannot help being a bitch; this is a fact. Marcy, on the other hand, *can* help it, but she can't but help but to be anything else. What a woman!

He reached deep into the left pant leg pocket of his battle dress uniform. His hand wandered around aimlessly giving us the impression that he was searching for something that wasn't there. The suspense drained the saliva from my mouth and formed elastic strands that made their way through the tiny crevices in my teeth and gums forming a tiny puddle on the surface of the floor beneath me. It became obvious that her heart rate was rising. He may have begun to nerve her, but he was intriguing the shit out of me. His confidence had already consumed the air of the condominium with a rotten pungency. I was thinking to myself how used to that smell I could get. If you can believe it, I would pass up the aromatic bouquet of three virgin poodles in heat for a gentle whiff of his electric conceit.

A thin layer of glaze had formed over his piercing, ocean eyes. He almost appeared to be intoxicated. He had a plan all right, but he had remained silent.

Chapter V

She stood there anxiously waiting, as if she knew her fate was amongst the contents within his pocket. Her dew-ridden, sierra-tree-bark eyes locked into his as he lifted his head slightly- perhaps to look at her one last time. Those eyes told a story of her inner-child standing there with dirty kindergarten hands folded together in a perfect

weave; with her head tilting downward at a slight angle looking up at him; and curling that sweet, naked bottom lip in an apologetic, remorseful pout. Without any words she could repent, “I know I have made mistakes. I know I have hurt you. I never meant to hurt you. I never meant to let you down, Jamie. I love you. I love you with all my heart, and I promise to love you always. I want to make you happy. I am here for you. I love you. Please forgive me.”

But not this time. I had faith in him. I knew he couldn’t possibly fall for her diabolical malice. Her throw-in-reverse, psychological deceit was all too blatant. He was too smart for her now. He was onto her game. He had to be.

As her narration approached its close, his focus lowered to her pallid left hand—the three-quarter carat, flawless, princess-cut diamond, which rested comfortably in a platinum setting, emitted an almost angelic luminescence. It shone to him, awesome as on the first day he took it home from the jeweler.

“Look away,” I yelled in an indiscernible grumble. It was his weakness. She kept the ring on this time. Under typical circumstances, that ring would have been off in a matter of seconds and carelessly tossed about the air in the throes of her ire. She showed him she could control it this time. To my dismay, I knew she had already won.

“Dress your blushed cheekbone with a few teardrops, but try real hard to force them out in excess so they smear dread and fear, mixed with your walnut mascara, down that innocent little face of yours. Give him some pretentious words of eternal love sealed with a plastic promise. And for the icing, extend that plastic promise of eternal love and devotion with an acknowledgement of your plastic love with some plastic sex, your almighty weapon- you know, the one you use only when you *have* to.”

Jamie's hand stopped moving in his pocket. The discovery was made. He slid his hand out slowly and revealed a quarter-inch stack of papers fraught with black-inked words and paragraphs and an all-too-distinct signature. Collecting his will, he expressed a phrase more concrete than any law.

"My lease begins on Saturday," he uttered. "I will be taking what is rightfully mine, and as for the rest...it's yours. The sentiment shall remain here with you, and as of Saturday, we will no longer be."

Sugarplums and citrus fruits from foreign lands all over joined hands and danced the train up against my frontal lobe.

Chapter VI

The morning sun delivered a warm, apple pie smile enveloping all with its humble radiance. The Ritalin-dependant lemon chickadee must have been either diagnosed an increase in dosage or had consciously opted to take a few hours off to recuperate from a religious six-month stint of enunciating his boisterous chitter-chatter in my floppy, spotted ears. The Maxwell House brew dripped yet another fresh, aromatic serum with a slight hint of vanilla bean, promptly as always. I knew the burgundy buds of the peach tree standing tall just outside the window would be making their most arduous attempts today to blossom their way into the new season.

This summation was confirmed by the vivid dream I encountered in my sleep last night. I gazed over at Jamie resting soundly on his black, twin size futon, wrapped comfortably in his favorite viridian blanket and sheets. The brick-layered fireplace still reeked of burnt cedar from the night before. The stereo was still playing faintly in the background a medley of concertos Jamie had left on repeat throughout the night.

We are happy and at peace. Despite an autumn mistake (September 23, 2000), my faith and trust in him has since been renewed. Jamie has earned my respect back. This time I know he will keep it. It's March now. Spring and all blessings are here, and I know this year it will be even greener.