**The Exhibitionist Next Door**

by BPClavel

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 355: Miss Whitaker**

"I really had no idea that Alexa was going to do this," pleaded Miss Whitaker. "I know you probably won't believe me, but I didn't."

"Okay…" said Dale, not knowing what to think.

"I've made mistakes before," continued Miss Whitaker. "Never like this. I know I'll have to try and convince a judge that I was taken in. I've been hiding out here, hoping to get a quick opportunity to apologize directly. I am indeed sorry."

"Would you like to sit down, Miss Whitaker?" asked Nate, hoping to make a very awkward situation a little less uncomfortable.

He looked back at Dale. She was biting her thumbnail. Looking into her eyes he saw that she was shaking her head almost imperceptibly.

"No, that's all right," said Miss Whitaker. "I've mostly said what I hoped to have the chance to say. Like I said, I'm here to turn myself in. I'm hoping that they'll take that into account. Everyone seems to think that I was in on this, so the police are looking for me."

"Okay," said Nate. "I'm sure Dale doesn't know what to think right now. What else would you like to tell her before turning yourself in?"

As Nate said that, he stepped a little to the side so that Miss Whitaker could see Dale. Dale held onto Nate’s belt with both hands, examining the very distraught looking young teacher with her face half hidden behind Nate’s large shoulder.

"Well, mostly just that," she said, but then looking at Dale directly she continued, "I really didn't know anything about this plan in advance. I didn't think Alexa was capable of such a thing. I know you'll find this hard to believe, but I even thought that the stories of the earlier stripping incidents were fabrications. I now know that I was relying too heavily on just one source, and a dishonest one at that. I had seen pictures of you doing things naked, doing them willingly, and I was easily convinced that the alleged stripping incidences also fell into that category. To be completely honest, I don't think much of you Dale. I think you brought this upon yourself . . . I do. But that said, no one deserves what happened to you today. I don't think you're a Princess, but you deserve to be left alone to make your own way in life. If you want to run around naked, trying to get yourself raped, I suppose that is your prerogative."

"Miss Whitaker," interjected Nate. "Is that really what you came here to say?"

"I guess not," admitted Miss Whitaker. "My main points are that I'm truly sorry about what happened. And that I was just as surprised as everyone else when Alexa took over the assembly and started waving those remote controls around…"

Nate looked over at Dale, she was staring at the floor, obviously not knowing what to say.

"Okay," said Nate. "I think there are police next door at the Jordan's. That's probably how you go about turning yourself in."

"Nate, would you do me a favor?" asked Miss Whitaker. "Would you go next door and bring an officer back. From my hiding spot, I've seen a lot of people come and go this afternoon. I'd rather not have the audience that is over there right now. I expect handcuffs will be involved."

“Sure," said Nate hesitatingly.

"Nate…" pleaded Dale. She pulled him down, bringing his ear near her face. "You’re not going to leave me here with her," whispered Dale apprehensively.

"Do you want to come with me?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Okay, Miss Whitaker, how should we do this?" said Nate. "Why don’t you follow me out. You can wait in the side yard while I go next door and get an officer. I'm sure you understand. I'm not comfortable leaving you here alone with Dale."

Looking over at Dale he saw her mouth a ‘thank you’.

"I guess," said Miss Whitaker.

Nate led her outside. Before closing the door, he turned to Dale. "Lock the door behind me, okay?" he said.

"Come right back," said Dale. "Remember . . . we stay together."

Nate nodded, "I'll hurry."

He heard the deadbolt click just after he had closed the door. After escorting Miss Whitaker to the side yard away from the Jordan house, he went to the Jordan front door and knocked.

"Oh, thank God!" said Dale's mom, hugging him just after she had opened the door. "Where's my Dale?" she added craning her neck to look around him.

"She's here," said Nate. "You can see her in a minute; however, first, I'd like to speak with an officer in private."

Pulling Nate inside, Mrs. Jordan said, "Nate, this is Officer Kudrow."

"Nate Miller, I presume," said the grey-haired officer, reaching up to shake Nate's hand.

"Can we talk in private," said Nate, indicating to the officer that he wanted him to follow him back out the Jordan front door.

"Absolutely," said Officer Kudrow, following him. Continuing in a casual manner, he said, "Based on what a teacher told me earlier, I had reason to believe that you might be party to this hazing incident. However, I now think that I'm going to need mother-in-law advice from you, son. You disappear with this woman's daughter . . . her naked daughter . . . and she doesn't seem especially worried, at least not about that. She is so proud of her daughter, and so full of praise for you."

"Can we talk about that later, Officer Kudrow,”said Nate, leading him towards the sidewalk. "Right now there is someone who wants to turn herself in."

"Alexa Finch?" asked the officer.

"What?" said Nate in surprise. "She's not in custody."

"Nope, she somehow escaped out the back of the high school. Bottomless, if testimony is to be believed."

"No, not Alexa . . . Miss Whitaker," said Nate. "She's here in my side yard."

They rounded the corner of the house. Miss Whitaker was just standing there, waiting.

"If you'll excuse me officer, I have a daughter to reunite with her mother," said Nate.

"You do that, son," said Officer Kudrow. "We'll need her testimony in short order. Possibly yours as well."

"Okay," said Nate, turning and heading back to his front door. Even though he had a key, he knocked and Dale let him in. As soon as the door was closed, Dale hugged him tight. "Now don't leave me again, "she said.

“Well, I was going to go next door and bring back your mother," said Nate.

"Talking to her does have to be next," said Dale. "But don't you dare leave my side. I'm sure she knows I'm a streaker now. This is going to be so hard for me."

"She loves you, Dale," said Nate. "You know she'd still would, even if you robbed banks."

"Is that supposed to be reassuring?" asked Dale.

"I'm just saying it will be fine," said Nate, turning to head back out the front door.

"Nate, what about, ‘don't leave me again,’ are you not understanding?" asked Dale.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 356: Dale's Mother**

"But…" said Nate.

"Let's call," she said picking up the Miller’s home phone and dialing. When she heard her mother answer she quickly passed the phone to Nate.

"… anyone there?" he heard her mother ask.

"Oh, sorry Mrs. Jordan," he said. "I'm next door with Dale. She’d like to see you. Can you come over . . . alone?"

"I'll be right over," said Mrs. Jordan. The line went dead.

About thirty seconds later, there was a knock. Nate opened the front door. Before Dale's mom entered, they both turned, noticing Officer Kudrow. He was escorting a handcuffed Miss Whitaker to his police cruiser.

"Dale, look out the window," said Nate, directing his words back inside.

The three of them watched as Officer Kudrow placed a hand on Miss Whitaker's head, guiding her carefully into his back seat. Once the car door was closed, Mrs. Jordan stepped inside, Nate closing the door behind her.

"Who was that," asked Mrs. Jordan, lifting up Dale's chin and looking into her eyes. "Not Alexa. She’s blonde, right?"

"That was a teacher, Miss Whitaker,” answered Nate.

"Oh, Dale," said her mother, embracing her and squeezing her tight.

"Oh, mom," said Dale, her tears starting to flow.

The two of them hugged, both of them crying.

Nate quickly felt like a third wheel as the two of them tried to comfort each other, both of them crying tears of anguish mixed with tears of relief. He felt like he should give them some space, and yet he was under strict orders to stay where he was . . . by Dale’s side.

"Are you okay, honey?" asked Dale's mother softly.

"I don't know, mom," she said sobbing. "I'm so…" Her tears came full force, cutting off whatever she might have been intending to say.

"At first, I didn't want to believe what they were telling me," said her mom. "It all sounded so awful. I wanted it to be a nightmare . . . so I could wake up and it would all disappear."

"It was terrible . . . the whole school . . . and me tied like that . . ." said Dale between sobs.

"I know, dear. Don't think about it. Don't force yourself to relive it."

"She's not even physically okay," interjected Nate. "Look at her arms."

Dale loosened her grip on her mother to show her the bruising and abrasion on her wrist and and elbow.

"My ankles too," added Dale, pulling up a pant leg.

"That's terrible! Those ropes must've hurt," commented her mother.

"The worst part was being their prisoner. That felt so awful, and it was more than that I simply couldn't move. It was claustrophobic, and I didn’t know what they intended to do to me. I was at their mercy, trapped . . . and I expect they told you that the ropes . . . were all that I was wearing," said Dale casting her eyes down.

"Yes. I'm so sorry, honey," said her mother, tears flowing down her cheeks. "I need to keep my distance from this girl. I'm sure I would lose my composure. I've never wanted to physically hurt another person before today."

"But you're such a pacifist?" said Dale.

"Like mother, like daughter," said her mother. "But I expect Alexa will have her day in court. I'm sure she will be caught soon."

"What?" said Dale surprised. "Alexa hasn't been arrested?"

"She somehow slipped out a back door before the police got there," replied her mother.

"That's what Officer Kudrow told me as well," offered Nate.

"I hope you know how much I love you, dear," said her mother.

"I hope you can still love me," said Dale.

"That's ridiculous . . . of course I still love you. I’ll always love you," said her mom. "Why would you even say such a thing?"

"I presume you have learned a few things about me today," said Dale.

"Well, naked bungee jumping the night of your first date with this young man . . . was indeed a surprise," said Mrs. Jordan turning to Nate, giving him the eye.

"It's free if you go naked," said Dale hopefully.

"Oh, that explains everything," said Mrs. Jordan, laughing heartily. "Sign me up! And to think, your father and I were limiting how much kissing time the two of you had that evening. I guess the joke’s on us."

"The joke’s on you?" asked Dale.

"Yep, I guess we should have kept Nate from taking you out in the first place," said Mrs. Jordan. "Maybe Mrs. Shepherd is right about our seemingly well-behaved neighbor after all."

"No she's not!" said Dale, letting go of her mother and stepping in front of Nate as if to protect him. "Don't you dare change your opinion of Nate," she added adamantly.

"Don't worry, honey," said her mother. "I know Mrs. Shepherd is wrong about Nate. He is part of the family."

"Part of the family?" Asked Dale. "One second you're talking about not letting us date, the next, you're welcoming him into the family."

"I know him better now. I suppose it is good that we didn't see those photos back in September," replied her mother.

"But one of the family?" asked Dale.

"I don't think that this is a temporary relationship, honey, but I don't want to unduly influence the course of your lives. The two of you have to make your own way," said her mother.

"It's not a temporary relationship, mom," said Dale, turning and hugging Nate around his midsection.

"Well, he's a fine young man," said her mother. "He took care of you this afternoon, and he even found a way to get word to me that you were safe."

"You're not upset that we didn't come right home?" asked Dale.

"You did what you needed to do. I can't begin to imagine what you went through at school. You needed a little time. I'm sure the events of today will take a long time for all of us to come to terms with. More so for you than the rest of us," said her mother.

"So, mom, have they shown you other photos?" asked Dale nervously.

"I've seen a picture from Sunday night in Madison Park," said her mother.

"Sorry," said Dale, hanging her head.

"Why in the heck girls your age get piercings like that – do that to your bodies – is really hard for me to understand," she said. “And you didn't ask me or tell me. Is our newest family member to blame for that?" she asked, looking askance at Nate.

"No, mom," said Dale. "He found out after the fact. It was something I did spontaneously."

"My little Dale . . . spontaneous?" said Mrs. Jordan skeptically. "I've known you far too long to believe that, young lady."

"Well, I guess you're right," said Dale. "The decision was rather spontaneous, but it was something that I had researched beforehand."

"I was also shown a few photos from today's assembly, but the quality was poor . . . fortunately. It would have been too much for me, otherwise," said Dale's mother. "I have heard that there was a line-feed set up. The police want to find it, as evidence, but it was gone, the camera, everything."

"Gone?" Asked both Nate and Dale simultaneously. "That's what I understand," said her mother.

"Oh, my God," said Nate. "That means…"

"… that it will be posted on the Internet," said Dale finishing his sentence, her mouth hanging open, worry in her eyes.

"I sure hope not," said Mrs. Jordan. “But that’s what happens these days, isn’t it?”

"That'll go viral if it makes it to the Internet," said Nate.

"Oh, my God, Nate," commented Dale. "What'll we do?"

"It's almost like the video of a rape," said Nate. "There must be laws against posting videos of sex crimes."

"But once something is on the web, it never goes away," commented Dale, fear evident in her trembling voice. "Alexa must have the camera. She must've placed someone in charge of getting it."

"I don't know," said Nate, shaking his head. "Hopefully Alexa will be caught, and hopefully she'll have it with her."

"That's probably too much to hope for," said Dale, sighing in exasperation. "It already seemed as if I wasn't in control of my destiny. Today has added greatly to that feeling. Being tied up and displayed naked to everyone my age in town really changes one's perspective."

"I'll bet it does, dear," said her mom, fresh tears in her eyes. "I can't begin to imagine what that was like."

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 357: Dale's Father**

"It inspires me to reassert control over the things I can actually take control of," said Dale. Nate was suddenly caught off guard, feeling Dale's hand gripping his nut sack firmly through his pants, down between their bodies such that it was hidden from her mother’s eyes. "If you know what I mean," she added, looking up into Nate's eyes and smiling.

"That's perfectly wise, dear," said Dale's mother. "But experts always advise to avoid making big decisions while under stress or duress."

"Of course, mom," said Dale, stealthily squeezing Nate’s nuts tightly so that he could have no doubt about what she intended to be in control of.

"Dale,” said her mother. "Let's get your father over here. He loves you and he's just as concerned as I am."

“He doesn't want to kick me out of the house?" asked Dale.

"Oh, of course not. Stop with that!" insisted her mother.

"But he won't be home from work for another hour or more," said Dale.

"Oh, he's home," said Mrs. Jordan. "The news of what happened at the high school traveled through town like wildfire. He came right home. Can Nate call him?"

"Sure," said Dale.

While Nate again called next door, Mrs. Jordan held her daughter. They both shed more tears, comforting one another. Dale realized that it might be just as hard to have what happened to her, happen to a daughter.

"So, who's next door now?" asked Mrs. Jordan when her husband arrived.

"Well, the police are gone. I expect they'll be back. They both drove the teacher to the station. Mrs. Shepherd and Mr. McRoberts left as well, so that leaves just Mary, Carly, Carly's dad and the lawyer."

"The lawyer?" asked Dale in surprise.

"Carly's dad brought his attorney," explained Mr. Jordan. "He's just trying to help. Based on what is been discussed, I expect we'll need good legal advice before all is said and done."

"We can't pay for that," said Dale, a look of concern on her face.

"That's what I told him," said her father. "But Mr. Griffin says it will all mostly be covered by his retainer."

"I hope so," said Dale.

"I know a girl needs her mother most of all at a time like this, honey," said her father. "But we were both so shocked and worried. We both love you. May I give you a hug as well?"

Dale nodded and began crying anew as she went to her father and sought comfort in his arms, resting her forehead on his chest.

"I'm so sorry, dad," she said.

"Sorry?" asked her father in surprise.

"You were so proud of me," said Dale. "And now I've let you down. Now you know how naughty I’ve been."

Nate saw surprise and bewilderment on Mr. Jordan's face.

"Honey, Dale has been talking some nonsense. She thinks we might want to disown her because of some of the pictures we have seen." said her mother. "The pictures of her bungee jumping and the one of her running through the park."

"Don't be silly, dear," said her father. "There are quite a few parents in Prospect who have every reason to be disappointed in their girls’ behavior today . . . Alexa's parents, for example. I'm sure the police have paid them a most unpleasant visit."

"I expect so, "said Dale nodding and hugging her father. "I hadn't thought about that, but I'm sure you're right."

Nate stood by quietly as Dale hugged her father, repeating much of what she had discussed with her mother earlier.

"What did Mrs. Shepherd and Mr. McRoberts talk about?" asked Dale.

"They were mostly in shock as well. They were doing their best to comfort us," said her mother.

"But that Mr. McRoberts!" said her dad angrily. "I gave serious thought to punching the man."

"That certainly would have been a bad idea with the police present," said Mrs. Jordan.

"I know, I know," he continued. "But to think that he is actually thinking that Dale deserves to be suspended after what happened today. If that doesn't just take the cake!"

"He did say he'd punish Alexa and I similarly . . . if something more were to happen," said Dale.

"And that very well may be why Alexa decided on such a bold course of action," interjected Nate.

"I sure wish I would've known about that," said Mr. Jordan.

"I'm sorry, dad," said Dale sincerely. "I guess I should've told you and mom about things, but I was mostly trying to keep my problems from you. Not that I didn't want you to know. I really just wanted my problems to go away."

"I expect I should've told you, as well," added Nate.

"You probably should have, Nate," agreed Mr. Jordan, looking somewhat stern.

"I know that now, Sir. I'm sorry," said Nate, realizing full well that the course of events had likely had an impact on how Dale’s parents viewed him.

"Don't worry about it, son," said Mr. Jordan "you were there for Dale when she needed someone. We weren’t. I'm sure I owe you a debt of gratitude, for all you've done for her today. Thank you for whisking her away . . . a bit unconventional how that went down, I understand; however, you were the man on the spot. It's easy to question a person's actions with the advantage of time and distance. Thank you for taking care of her.”

Nate nodded, trying not to allow his facial expression to betray his feelings of guilt. Here were both of Dale's parents, thanking him for ‘taking care’ of their daughter, and all he could think about was how he had indeed ‘taken care’ of her . . . he had deflowered her. She had been well ‘taken care’ of!

"And Mrs. Shepherd?" asked Dale. "What did she have to say?"

"Oh, let me see," said Mrs. Jordan. "Mostly she thinks that you won't be able to return to Prospect High after what happened. She thinks that Riverside High might be a good choice for you to finish out your senior year."

"Riverside?" said Dale, acting startled. "That's like twenty miles away."

"I know," said her mother. "We’d have to get you a car."

I don't want to transfer," said Dale adamantly. "Whatever happens, I'm absolutely not going to a different school than Nate."

"Well, that might be unavoidable, but Mrs. Shepherd says that she's talked to your gymnastics coach, Mr. Ramsey. He of course doesn't want to lose you, but he says that Riverside has a good coach and a good gymnastics program."

"But I wouldn't be a cheerleader!”

"Well, I'm not sure you will be if you stay at Prospect, dear" said her mother.

"That's another reason why I felt like punching Mr. McRoberts," said her dad.

Dale went to Nate. Burying her face in his chest, she sobbed, "It's so unfair!"

"It'll work out, honey, "said her mother, placing a comforting hand on her back. "I sense that you are in the driver’s seat. I sense that Mr. McRoberts’ job is on the line. Decide what you want, and fight for it!"

"I don't want to fight anymore, mom," said Dale. "I just want to go to school . . . quietly. I want to walk down the hall unnoticed, from class to class. I want to do my homework, and take my tests, and finish out the year."

“And cheer, and gymnastics?" asked her mother.

“Of course! Absolutely cheer and gymnastics," said Dale. "But I don't want to have to argue with Mr. McRoberts anymore. And I don’t want to talk to the police."

"Not even the police?" asked her mother. "But they need your testimony. They know Alexa was the ringleader, but they want the others."

"Mom, besides Alexa, I don't know who was in the mat room. And that's my story. And I'm sticking to it,” said Dale.

"They think that a number of varsity cheerleaders helped Alexa," said Mrs. Jordan.

"Well, good for them," said Dale. "They didn't hear it from me."

"I'm not sure the police will be happy with that response," said her mother.

"Dale is pretty adamant about this, Mrs. Jordan," said Nate. "It was dark, they put a pillowcase over her head. They didn't talk. She has some guesses about who else might have been there, but they are just that . . . guesses. She doesn't want to name names. I'm not sure that it is the right thing to do, but it is her call. I support her fully. I think we all need to."

"Well, Nate," said Dale's mom. "I guess I have to agree. Dale’s smart and she's mature, well beyond her years. It should be her call."

"Thanks, mom," said Dale. "And thank you, Nate."

“So you want to continue attending Prospect High . . . are you sure?" asked her mother.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 358: Michelle**

"It's not going to be easy. I'll never be able to forget what everyone saw today," said Dale. "But like I said, I have a need to feel in control of my life. I know I want to finish high school at Prospect."

"You sound able and willing to fight for yourself," remarked her mother.

"But I don't want to mom. I just want to go to class," said Dale.

"Well, in that case, I'm ready to fight for you," said her mother. "You go to class, and I’ll fight for you. I'll see to it that Mr. McRoberts leaves you alone."

Turning to her father, Dale asked, "Dad?"

"Don't look at me," he said. "I'm on the same page. I'd be more than happy to help, but like I said, I might end up punching the man. Your mother is the woman for this job. Mr. McRoberts won't know what hit him!"

"You'll probably have to talk to the police, dear," said her mother.

"Probably, but I don't want to," said Dale.

"Understand, they have your interests at heart. I spent quite a bit of time talking to Officer Kudrow this afternoon. That man chose his profession for all the right reasons. He wants these girls… It was just girls, right?" Dale nodded. "He wants these girls dealt with so that no other girl is subjected to what you went through today. He adamantly believes that they should not get away with this. Any help that you give them is in everyone's interest."

"That's not quite how I see it, mom," said Dale.

"Really?" said her mother in surprise. "Well, give it some thought. But tomorrow morning, unless you want to take the weekend off, we can both go to school. You go to class, and I will march into Mr. McRoberts office and tell him how things are going to be."

Nate almost had to chuckle. Mrs. Jordan was so much like Dale. He could picture Dale doing exactly that for their kids, someday far in the future.

"I don't need any time off, mom," said Dale. "We have a football game to win. The guys need to know that I am behind them one hundred percent. I'm apparently hated at Prospect High, but I'm loved, as well. The football team needs me . . . and I . . . I probably need them.” She again broke into tears realizing that what she had just said was probably very true . . . she did need her friends.

"She's right, you know," said Nate. "Dale is loved at school. It’s just a small number of girls who see themselves in competition with her. Without them, Dale would be loved unanimously."

"Well, it was certainly more than enough girls today," said Dale sighing.

Just then the phone rang. After answering it, Nate handed it to Dale's mother saying, "It’s Aunt Mary."

Mrs. Jordan talked to her for a minute, walking into the kitchen. Once she had completed the call, she returned saying, "I guess Officer Kudrow and his younger partner or getting quite impatient. They really want to take you down to the station for questioning. Mary has been keeping them at bay, but she says she has exhausted all her delaying tactics."

"I don't want to go down to the police station, mom," said Dale. "I'm not going to say much. It's going to be so awkward."

"Well, you'll have to talk to them at some point, dear," said her mother.

"Well, at least not today," pleaded Dale. "It's been a hell of a day."

"Oh, I know that," said her mother, pausing to think. "Okay, here's what we'll do. You focus on school. You focus on going to class, and I’ll run interference. Like I said, I'll fight for you. Come on, Todd, let's go home. Let's go send the police away. This doesn't all have to happen today. You two stay here. Nate, my daughter still needs a lot of hugs. It's your turn again.”

"Thanks, mom. Thanks, dad," said Dale, giving them both another hug. Nate opened the door for them, and they left. He and Dale sat down on the couch, and she snuggled against him. Nate did his best to comfort her while they sat quietly, mentally processing all that the day had thrown at them.

“Do you know what I have been thinking about, Lover?” said Dale, looking deeply into his eyes after they had been sitting quietly for a few minutes.

“I’d like to,” said Nate with a tender smile.

“I was thinking about our afternoon, but specifically about making love,” she said.

“Share your thoughts, Lover,” he said.

“Well, on one level I was thinking about how fun it was to have this,” she reached over and placed a hand lovingly on his dick, “inside of me here,” she said taking the hand that she was holding and placing it on her own jeans covered crotch.

“You liked that?” he asked.

“It was fun,” she said nodding, still looking deeply into his eyes. “It was more fun than I had expected it might be.”

“I liked it too . . . a lot,” said Nate. “Are you glad we waited?”

She shook her head.

“You aren’t glad that we waited?” asked Nate in surprise.

“Well, it’s okay that we did, but think of all the fun we could have been having,” said Dale.

“We’ve been having fun,” said Nate.

“I know,” said Dale. “I’ve had a lot of fun, but today on the rooftop was especially fun.”

“It was,” agreed Nate. “You said ‘on one level.’ How many levels are there?”

“Probably a lot,” she said. “However, what I was going to say, was that on another level it was so very meaningful. I mean, completely separate from the pleasurable physical aspects. I don’t think that there is anything more special. That has to be the ultimate level of intimacy that two people can share. I felt so close to you . . . while you were inside of me . . . and afterwards.”

“Losing our virginity together was indeed meaningful,” agreed Nate. “Too bad it can be done just the once.”

“You know what Nate. I think it will be meaningful every time,” said Dale. “I mean this first time, of course, has the most significance, but I imagine that I will feel so very close to you each and every time this (she squeezed him) enters me here (she pressed his hand into her pussy). I might want to do it a lot. I hope that hearing that doesn’t scare you.”

Nate chuckled, but he knew she was entirely serious. “We’ll both want to do it a lot!” he said, his other hand caressing her cheek as he looked into her eyes.

They exchanged “I love yous” and meaningful kisses, holding each other and continuing to talk affectionately about how devoted they were to one another. The memory of the trauma experienced at the abortive assembly was temporarily forgotten.

About fifteen minutes after Dale's parents had left, the phone rang. Nate answered the call. “It’s your mom,” he said, handing the phone to Dale.

“Hi, mom,” he heard Dale say. “Really? I’ll be right over,” she added excitedly before hanging up. To his surprise, Dale didn’t move. Instead, she sat there, seemingly deep in thought.

“So, we’re going next door?” he asked.

Hopping up but then leaning back down, Dale kissed his forehead. “No, something I need to do alone,” she said before rushing out the door.

Nate sat there in a state of confusion. Dale had been adamant about wanting him to remain by her side. Now suddenly she didn’t? He tried to let her have her space, but after a couple of minutes, curiosity got the best of him. He walked to the front window and peeked out. There was a late model silver SUV in front of the Jordan house, right where the police car had been. As he watched, he saw Dale climb into the passenger seat and Michelle on the other side, get in the driver’s door.

Nate’s heart rate doubled as he leapt to his front door. He went down his front steps in a single bound. As he reached the sidewalk, he turned and raced along the sidewalk. Through the rear window he saw the two girls’ silhouettes merge in the center of the car. He couldn’t be sure, but it looked as if they had kissed. At the very least, they had hugged.

He sprinted to Dale’s door, but just as he reached for the handle, he saw Dale’s hand come up and lock it. He yanked on the handle just in case, but it was indeed locked.

“Dale, what in the heck?” he shouted. “Think! Please! This is far from safe.”

Dale cracked the window saying, “Nate . . . I’m with Michelle.”

“I can see that, but it’s not wise,” he pleaded.

Turning to Michelle, Dale said, “Drive!”

As Michelle put the car in gear and pulled away from the curb, Nate ran alongside shouting, “Dale, think! She’s Alexa’s girlfriend. Alexa’s still at large. Have you forgotten what they are capable of?” He tried to look into Michelle’s back seat. It occurred to him that Alexa might even be in the car already.

As the car accelerated, Nate stopped, looking after them in disbelief. After a split second to consider his options, he dashed back to his own car to give pursuit. However, by the time he was rolling, Michelle’s car was out of sight.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 359: Susie**

On the chance that Michelle might have headed home, Nate made a beeline for the Thompson house. He passed by slowly, scanning carefully. Michelle had obviously not gone there. He did a similar drive by of Alexa’s house. They were also not there. No one seemed to be home at either house.

He felt his phone vibrate in his pocket indicating a text message. He had ignored so many that day, but given what had just happened, he pulled it out to see what it was.

It was from Dale. It read, “I have my phone back! How great is that! Michelle brought me everything they took from me this morning.”

“Isn’t she nice!” replied Nate, wondering if Dale would sense that his comment was dripping with sarcasm.

He received a smiley face in reply.

He immediately tried to call her. The call went straight to voice mail, indicating that she had probably declined it.

He got another text. It read, “I need a little space. Please understand.”

Shaking his head in exasperation, Nate replied, “What I understand is that you don’t think straight when it comes to Michelle.”

“I love you, but I need my space. Please don’t worry. Turning off my phone now,” was her reply.

Nate tried immediately to call, but again the call went straight to voice mail. In disgust he tossed his phone over onto the passenger seat. Pounding his fists against the steering wheel, he indulged in a few choice words yelled almost at the top of his lungs.

“I love you, but I need my space. Please don’t worry,” he said aloud, quoting Dale word for word while continuing to beat up on his steering wheel. He took a deep breath. Full of aggravation, he leaned his head back against the headrest, and tried to think of something constructive to focus on. He tried to think of where they might have gone.

Just then his phone rang. ‘Probably a ransom demand,’ he thought as he reached for it. The screen read, ‘Tink.’ Her name had been among those that he had noticed in his missed call log earlier.

“Hi, Tink,” he said, trying not to sound too upset.

“Oh, Nate, finally,” she answered. “If you’re busy, that’s fine. I’m just so worried about Dale. How is she doing?”

“I’m worried about her, too, Goddam it!” he vented. Realizing that he was just a few blocks from her house, he asked, “Are you home? Can I come by?”

“Sure,” said Susie. “But, what’s wrong?”

“I’ll tell you when I get there,” said Nate, placing his phone back down on the seat to drive.

Barely a minute later he pulled up in front of Susie’s house as she came out the front door to greet him. Nate climbed out of the car, meeting her on the sidewalk. They fell into a natural, tight embrace, both obviously in need of the comfort that only a close friend can provide.

“I can’t believe what they did to Dale,” said Susie. “Even worse than rape, as far as I’m concerned . . . or at least as bad. I couldn’t help myself. I threw up in a school restroom.”

“You did?” asked Nate in surprise.

“That can be our secret,” said Susie. “So where’s Dale?”

“I wish I knew,” said Nate.

“You don’t know?”

“She took off . . . with Nutjob,” said Nate, his expression full of anxiety.

“Oh, Nate . . . Michelle? Really?” she asked.

“I’m so worried,” he added.

Sensing Nate’s level of anguish, Susie held him reassuringly.

“Why would she ever go off with her?” asked Susie.

“Right!” said Nate in agreement. “It makes no sense to me. She’s just drawn to her. And that only seems to get worse. The meaner Michelle is to her, the more Dale seems to seek her out. Like a moth to the flame.”

“Oh, Nate, now I’m really worried,” said Susie. “The two of them . . . alone?”

“As far as I know . . . but by now I expect they’ve met up with Alexa,” said Nate, shaking his head.

“She has to be in jail,” said Susie.

“As I understand it, the police are still looking for her,” said Nate. “When you called me, I was driving around looking for them . . . looking for Michelle’s silver SUV. Dale climbed in, and they drove off.”

“Let’s go!” said Susie. “Let me get my purse. I’ll come with you!”

“I’d like that,” said Nate. “I don’t want to be alone, and besides, two pair of eyes is better than one.”

“I’ll be right back,” said Susie, turning and dashing into her house.

A minute later they were driving through town, brainstorming about where they should search. They again drove by Michelle’s and Alexa’s houses, and then Jodie’s house for good measure.

After driving around Prospect haphazardly for a while, Nate decided to stop and knock on the Thompson front door. It seemed like there might be a possibility that the silver SUV was in the garage; however, it didn’t look as if anyone was home.

To his surprise, Mrs. Thompson answered the door. She spoke courteously with him, but claimed to have no idea where Michelle was.

When he got back to the car, Susie asked what Michelle’s mother had said. Nate hadn’t told her that Michelle had helped Alexa strip Dale in the mat room. He had thought about doing so, but it hadn’t really been necessary as Susie knew all about Dale’s relationship with Michelle. The slap at the Sadie Hawkins dance was just one of the misdeeds that she was aware of.

“Well, she doesn’t know where Michelle is, but she was delighted to hear that she was with Dale. ‘It’s about time!’ Those were her words,” he said, shaking his head. “I didn’t tell her how worried I was. I guess it’s hard to tell a woman that her daughter’s a bully.”

“But you should have, Nate,” said Susie.

“You’re probably right, Tink,” he said. “But that doesn’t find Dale.”

They continued driving around. Every once in a while Nate would stop and knock on a door to ask a friend if he might have seen either Dale or Michelle. That ended up being a time consuming activity as everyone seemed to be so concerned about what had happened to Dale at the assembly that it proved to be difficult to have short conversations.

He was of course keeping an eye peeled for Alexa. It had occurred to him how neat it would be if he himself were the one to deliver her to the police station. He found himself wishing that he had his handcuffs with him for that very purpose. He made a mental note to put them in his glove compartment, next chance he got.

In addition to his efforts, Susie was making calls asking if anyone had seen Dale or Michelle. It was really strange that no one had seen them. Prospect was not that big of a town. All Nate could think of was that Michelle and Alexa had taken Dale and left town altogether. That was his biggest concern. On the face of it, that seemed unlikely as it would be straight up kidnapping. However, Dale had gotten into Michelle’s care willingly and she did have her phone.

Nate and Susie had run out of places to look. Since they were hungry, they decided to stop for pizza. The pizzeria they all frequented also sold pizza by the slice, so it worked as a quick place to eat if time was an issue. They had a great number of people who would call them if they happened to see either Dale or Michelle. For that reason, they decided that they could spare the time it would take to eat.

Nate hadn’t told Susie, but he had decided to go to the police after they had eaten, if at that point, no one had seen them and he had still not had another call or text from Dale.

They had barely started eating when Nate’s phone rang. His screen indicated that it was Dale.

“Dale?” he asked.

“So, you haven’t forgotten me,” she replied laughing.

“Very funny. Where are you?” he asked.

“Don’t sound so worried,” she said.

“I have been worried . . . for obvious reasons. Now where are you?” he asked impatiently.

“Calm down, Nate,” said Dale. “I have a surprise or two for you.”

“I don’t need any more surprises today, Lover,” he said.

“I see your point . . . and you might not like these surprises,” she added.

“I might not,” agreed Nate. “I just want to be positive that you’re safe. Whatever happened to, ‘we stay together’?”

He heard what sounded like Dale talking to someone with her hand over the microphone.

“I told you not to worry, and I am safe,” insisted Dale. “Can you meet us at our park . . . by the swings, at eight o’clock?” asked Dale.

“Sure,” said Nate.

“That should give you enough time to finish your pizza and take your date home,” said Dale laughing.

Nate spun around in his seat, scanning the pizzeria.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 360: Dale's Surprises**

“What is it?” asked Susie, but he was too busy searching the pizzeria with his eyes to answer.

“Okay, eight o’clock,” said Nate.

“I disappear for a few hours, and already you’re seeing other women,” said Dale, again laughing.

“Who’s seeing other women?” asked Nate.

“Touché!” said Dale. “See you at eight, and try and not have a heart attack.”

The phone went dead. He immediately got up and raced out to the parking lot. When he didn’t see them anywhere, he returned to Susie.

“What was that all about?” asked Susie as he again took his seat, checking the time.

“Dale has obviously seen us,” he replied. “She joked about me being out on a date with you.”

“She did?” said Susie looking all around.

“That’s why I checked the parking lot,” said Nate. “I’m supposed to meet them at Madison Park at eight o’clock. She made it eight so we’d have time to finish our pizza and so that I’d have enough time to drop off ‘my date.’”

Susie laughed. “Well, I guess she’s okay. We might as well relax and enjoy our ‘date,’” said Susie.

“I don’t mind at all the idea of being on a date with you, Tink, but I’m not going to be able to relax. She says she has surprises for me . . . surprises, plural. She told me to try and not have a heart attack. There is only one thing that I can think of that she might surprise me with.”

“And that would be?” asked Susie when he didn’t continue.

“I don’t want to think about it,” said Nate. “Suffice it to say, she’s still in love with ‘her Nutshell.’”

“She’s not going to dump you for Nutshell,” said Susie.

“Well, it must be something like that . . . at least that is all that I can think of,” said Nate. “She’s irrationally drawn to her, like I said.”

“But Dale’s hetero,” said Susie.

“Says the girl who nearly freaked out when she started sucking on her nipple,” said Nate.

Nate saw Susie’s mouth open as if she was about to say something, but no words came out. Instead she took another bite of pizza.

They continued eating in silence, both of them deep in thought.

“It will be all right,” said Susie a minute or so later. “I know it will be. Dale is so deeply in love with you.”

“Maybe I’ll just have to share her, right?” he said, forcing a laugh.

“It will be all right. I’m sure of it,” she said, reaching across the table and placing her hand on his to reassure him.

Half an hour later, Nate was waiting alone at the swings. He had gotten there early, and with nothing else to do, he had started swinging.

Right at eight, he saw a car pull up and park near where Alexa and Michelle had parked the night that Dale had been photographed taking her ‘boots outfit’ out for its maiden voyage.

He watched the two girls walking toward him. It was dark, but even in the limited light, he knew which girl was which. Michelle was the tall pole vaulter; she strode confidently along.

Dale, on the other hand, was shorter and more petite. She seemed to be skipping along playfully, first on one side of Michelle, then on the other. As they neared, he saw that Dale was holding Michelle’s hand. He was reminded of how Dale had said that the two of them had held hands back when they were best friends in middle school. He tried to decide if it looked like romantic hand holding. In the end he decided that it looked as if Dale were leading Michelle, pulling her forward . . . as if she were excited for their meeting.

Nate had all but stopped swinging as they came near. His jaw dropped.

“Surprise!” announced Dale gleefully, spinning in place.

“What in the heck?” said Nate.

“Do you like it?” asked Dale enthusiastically.

“Didn’t your mother warn you about drastic decisions?” asked Nate.

“You don’t like it?” she asked, her excitement rapidly dissipating.

“I guess it’s cute,” said Nate. “I’m just shocked.”

“Michelle cut it for me. We picked out one of Natalie Portman’s pixie hair styles and patterned it after that.”

“I’m sure it’s cuter on you than on her,” said Nate.

“Oh, that’s sweet,” said Dale, feeling her hair with the hand that wasn’t holding Michelle’s hand. “It’s really short, isn’t it?”

“It is,” agreed Nate. “I can see your ears, like, all of your ears!”

“I decided to go really short so I could donate to Locks of Love,” said Dale. “I’ve always wanted to do that. I doubt I mentioned it, but that’s why I haven’t had my hair trimmed all fall. I was growing it out to donate. Ten inches is the minimum. So, I was planning to get my hair cut, just not this soon.”

“Well, that’s comforting to know . . . that this wasn’t a spur of the moment thing,” said Nate.

“Oh, but it was,” said Dale.

“I know that. I was just kidding,” said Nate. “I suppose this is your disguise. No one at school will recognize you now. No one will connect you with Lady Godiva.”

“Yeah, she had long hair,” said Dale laughing. “Everyone will think I’m a guy, right?”

“Good luck with that,” said Nate. The whole time they were talking, he was very conscious that Dale was holding hands with Michelle. Deciding that he needed to get it over with, that he needed to just rip off the bandaid, he continued, “On the phone you said ‘surprises’, plural. Do I dare ask what the other surprise or surprises are?”

“I don’t know, Nate,” she said cocking her head to the side. “Do you?”

“Sure, go ahead and tell me,” he replied.

“Do you want to tell him, Nutshell? Or should I?” asked Dale addressing Michelle. “It is kind of a joint announcement.”

Oh, my God, thought Nate, bracing himself.

“I think we should torture the poor lad a bit first,” said Michelle with an impish smile.

“Let’s just get it over with,” said Nate. “I love surprises! I can’t wait to hear whatever it is.”

“If you’re sure,” said Dale, laughing as if she too were in the mood for torturing him.

“Oh, I’m sure,” said Nate, doing his best to appear confident and unconcerned.

“We’re putting the relay back together, Nate!” announced Dale enthusiastically, grinning ear to ear.

“The relay?” asked Nate.

“Michelle thinks we’ll set a new state record!” said Dale beaming.

“I know we’ll break the state record . . . two of them!” said Michelle, her excitement somewhat subdued in comparison with Dale’s. “We’ll beat the current 4x100 mark by a full second, easy. And the 4x200 mark by at least two seconds.”

“What a wonderful surprise,” said Nate sarcastically, while trying to conceal that he was breathing a sigh of relief.

“Can’t you try and be a little excited for me, Nate?” said Dale, obviously disappointed by his reaction.

“I just don’t know what to think, Dale,” said Nate honestly. “It was already quite a day, and then you go and run off with Michelle . . . enemy number two. Next you show back up without your hair . . . talking about track.”

“Without my hair? Enemy number two?” asked Dale, obviously taken aback. “I still have hair. And Michelle . . . she’s always been my friend. I’m hoping the two of you will become friends.”

“After what she did to you this morning?” asked Nate. “Look at your wrists if you’ve forgotten.”

“You don’t know anything about that, Nate. I want you to promise me you won’t mention Michelle’s name to anyone in connection with what happened at school,” said Dale.

“So now I’m supposed to be an accessory after the fact?” said Nate, eyeing Michelle suspiciously.

“You weren’t in the mat room. They aren’t going to ask you who assisted Alexa. Besides, everything you think you know is hearsay. It’s like gossip . . . inadmissible,” said Dale.

“And I expect you are planning to lie to protect, ‘your Nutshell,’” said Nate.

“That’s exactly what I’m planning to do,” said Dale boldly. “I’m not going to turn anyone in. Alexa knew I wouldn’t. She was right.”

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 361: Yet Another Surprise**

“With all due respect, Dale, Michelle probably knows where Alexa is right now. In addition to everything else, she’s probably guilty of harboring a fugitive.”

“I’m right here, Nate,” said Michelle. “You can talk to me. You don’t have to talk about me. And I don’t know where Alexa is. I’m not harboring anybody.”

“Whatever you say,” said Nate.

“Nate . . . please!” pleaded Dale. “This is important to me. Michelle is important to me. We’ve been having a nice time together this evening. Don’t you see, she’s finally decided to let bygones be bygones. She’s again the wonderful friend I used to have. Please . . . don’t try and take this from me. Let’s start over. Let me introduce you to one another. Here . . . Nate, this is Mich…”

Nate interrupted her, “Dale, you aren’t at all suspicious about the timing of this supposed reconciliation? I know exactly what is going on here. Michelle is using you. Suddenly she needs you. Don’t you see? You turn her in, she goes to jail with Alexa. You pretend she wasn’t in the mat room, she goes free. She’s not your friend. Use your head, for God sakes.”

“Use your heart, DJ,” interjected Michelle. “I know you too well. You’re not easily fooled. I wouldn’t be able to fool you. You know that.”

Dale looked torn. She wanted to believe Michelle, but the circumstances were as Nate said.

“I think she could fool you, Dale. With all due respect, I do,” said Nate. “Remember the dance. You thought she was going to dance. You had your guard down and she decked you. Right now, you want to believe that she is ready to be your friend. Today has been rough on you. I know that. Keep that in mind. You want to believe that she is ready to be your friend, but you’re not able to consider the timing of her friendliness objectively.”

“I told you he wouldn’t like me,” said Michelle.

“Nate, this is my chance. I’m taking it,” said Dale obstinately. "You know me well enough to know by now that I have a history of trusting people who don't always deserve to be trusted. That’s who I am. I’m proud to be someone who trusts people. You, for example. Remember the circumstances when I first told you I loved you . . . at the top of my lungs down a certain hallway."

"And I suppose you told Michelle everything," said Nate. "All of our secrets."

"I have not," said Dale. "That's all she has heard about that. Just that, just now. You have to trust me, just as I trusted you that night."

"Dale, I feel like walking away. This conversation is going nowhere. However, I love you too much to walk away and leave you with Michelle," said Nate. "I'll never walk away . . . from you . . . never. But this is so frustrating for me. You are putting yourself at risk. You’re putting us at risk."

Turning to Michelle, Dale said, "Nutshell, will you give me a few minutes of privacy with Nate. Please, just wait by the car. I'll be there shortly."

"Sure," said Michelle, turning to walk away. Pausing she added, "I am sorry for what I've done, Nate. I can tell you're bitter. At one time you wanted to be my friend. At least you said you did. Now I am ready to be your friend . . . please consider giving me a chance."

After she was out of earshot, Nate said, "I don't know, Dale. Sometimes you're so easily taken in."

"I have to be open-minded," said Dale. "I confessed to you some time ago that Michelle is still in my heart. I'm going to spend my life with you, but I love her. I’m just being honest. I love you on an entirely different plane, but I love her as well. I can't help it. From my standpoint it is simply the context in which I live my life."

"And you are planning to leave ‘Our Park’ with her," said Nate.

"I am," said Dale.

"And I expect you're going to have a sleepover with her . . . for old time’s sake," said Nate.

"That would be fun. If it were not a school night, I just might," said Dale. "However, tomorrow is a school day. It's probably going to be the toughest day of my life. But I'm a Brocho-Busting gal. I'm getting right back in the saddle. I'm taking my life back."

"Not this again," said Nate shaking his head. "Not Fight Song, part two."

"What?" said Dale in surprise. But figuring out what he meant she continued, "Oh, no, not that. I'm still your Nudity Slave. I have to be. I'm just going to go to school tomorrow and hold my head high. At least that's what I'm going to try to do . . . and I need you by my side, holding my hand. I think I can do this . . . if you’re right there with me."

"You don't want to do it holding Michelle's hand?" asked Nate.

"Stop torturing yourself!" said Dale. "Nothing has changed. I'm sleeping in my own bed tonight, and you're sleeping with me. By the way, how many condoms do you have?"

"Why?" asked Nate.

"I'm not playing games," said Dale. "I just want to know what we have to work with."

"Well, I bought a box of a dozen, so there would be eleven left," said Nate.

"Bring them tonight, every last one of them," said Dale.

"We won't need anywhere near eleven," said Nate.

"Hey, I told you I'm taking my life back!" said Dale. "If I ask you to bring all eleven condoms, are you going to bring them?"

"Your hair is really cute, especially when you're in a bossy mood. It’s actually movie star cute. It’s short, but it doesn’t look chapped off," said Nate.

"It’s not ‘chopped off.’ It’s styled!” she said. “But Nate… don’t try to change the subject.”

"Okay, I'll bring them . . . all eleven,” said Nate.

"That's better," said Dale. "Now kiss your lover goodbye, and I'll see you in an hour or two."

"If you need a ride, just let me know," said Nate. "I'd be more than happy to come and get you."

"Thank you, that’s nice, but I think that Michelle will be able to drop me off," said Dale.

Nate gave her a goodbye kiss, and then watched as she walked away. She climbed into the car with Michelle. He heard the car start and he watched as the taillights disappeared into the night.

Nate returned to swinging. Before he knew it he had spent another hour there, processing and reprocessing everything he had seen and heard that day. Once he realized how late it had gotten, he headed home. The idea that Dale wanted him to sleep with her and bring condoms was especially nice. All the more so because he had been worrying that he might be losing her to Michelle. He knew he'd do about anything she asked. But he also knew that he’d continue trying to talk some sense into her.

Quite a bit later Nate did indeed find himself in Dale's bedroom. They had brushed their teeth and had said goodnight to Dale's parents. That had taken quite some time to accomplish, especially taking into account Dale's surprises; her drastically different hairstyle as well as her decision to go out for track that spring, to say nothing of her renewed friendship with Michelle. She was excited about everything.

Once Dale's bedroom door was closed, Dale said, "I trust you brought condoms."

"I did," said Nate. "Eleven to be exact."

"Let's see them," said Dale with a randy smile, holding out her hand.

As Nate handed her the pocket full of condoms, he said, "Time to strip down to nothing, Slave Girl."

"I thought you'd never ask," said Dale, placing the condoms on her nightstand and taking Carly's shirt off over her head in one fluid move. There was no bra as there had never been an opportunity to put one on since they had returned from the clubhouse.

"Lots of people saw you naked today, Lover," he reminded her.

"They did, didn't they," she said, unsnapping Carly's pants. As they slid down her legs, Nate's eye was drawn to her beautiful pussy. There were no panties blocking the view.

"That was quick," he remarked. She had gone from clothed to nude in a matter of seconds.

"Nate, remember our trip to Eatonville," said Dale. "Why did I throw the condoms away?"

"Because you're a psycho girlfriend," said Nate.

"Well, that wasn't the reply I had in mind, but I guess for my purposes, one reason is as good as another," she said, scooping up the condoms and tossing them into her wastebasket.

"Well, I didn't see that coming," said Nate trying not to look shocked or disappointed.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door 362: Another Surprise continued**

"Well, back when you declared me your Nudity Slave, you said I could be in charge of the sex," said Dale.

"And today you reconnected with your lesbian side, hence the short hair," said Nate.

"I was just waiting for that to come up," said Dale.

Nate just shrugged.

"Well, I have a present for you," said Dale, taking a small carefully wrapped package out of a drawer and placing it on the bed.

"A present?" asked Nate.

"Go on, open it," said Dale encouragingly.

"Can I open it tomorrow?" asked Nate. “I don’t think my poor heart can take any more surprises.”

Dale laughed. "You can wait until Christmas if you’d like, but you don't really want to. You want to open it now, don't you?" said Dale with an impish grin.

"I guess," said Nate, picking up the small package and examining it.

Dale pushed him down into a seated position on her bed. She sat next to him, but turned so that her trim athletic legs went up and over his lap. Leaning close and caressing his neck with an arm behind his back, she encouraged him sweetly, “Go on. I haven't given you many presents. Indulge me, Lover."

Reaching across with his right hand and stroking the underside of a titty affectionately with the back of his fingers, he said, “Since you put it like that, I don't mind if I do." While continuing to fondle that one pretty little titty, he kissed her lovingly, nibbling on her lower lip a little with his lips.

Breaking off the kiss, Dale said, “The present, Nate. It’s your third surprise of the evening. Maybe you’ll like this one more than the others.”

“I’m hoping I will,” he said with a wink. He made quick work of the ribbon and wrapping paper.

"Three presents?" asked Nate, looking at the contents. He again got distracted, kissing her again.

"Come on, Nate. Plenty of time for kissing. Open the top one," she said attempting to redirect him.

"This is a pill pack, isn't it?" said Nate, peeking inside the plastic lid.

"Smart boy," said Dale, her face right next to his. Kissing his cheek tenderly and speaking softly into his ear, she continued, "Look carefully. Tell me what you see?"

Nate counted, "Nine pills missing. Where are they?"

"How many guesses do you need?" asked Dale.

"You took them? Are they in there?” he asked placing an index finger on her belly and pressing softly, making a small indentation.

Looking into his eyes, she nodded pensively, "I'm on the pill." Suddenly, a broad smile spread across her face. “I mean, I'm on the pill!" she announced excitedly, throwing her hands up over her head and bouncing up and down on the bed on just her butt, her legs still across his lap.

Nate watched her titties bounce up and down as her words started to register.

"You and I, we don't need condoms!" she added throwing her arms around him.

"We don't?" asked Nate, looking deeply into her twinkling eyes.

"Let it sink in, Lover!" she whispered. "We didn't even need one today . . . on top of the clubhouse. I had you use one as I couldn’t remember for sure how many days they say it takes to be fully protected. It depends on where you are in your cycle, and I hadn’t been planning to hold the lottery today."

"We don't need condoms?" said Nate, looking at Dale's wastebasket.

"Nope. I made an appointment and went to Planned Parenthood. I put on my big girl panties and I walked in there all by myself . . . because I wanted to surprise you. Are you surprised?” she asked.

“Is it healthy?” asked Nate. “I mean, no long term health risks?”

“You would ask that,” she said smiling. “Other guys would just say, ‘Yippee! Let’s screw!’ But yes, I did a lot of research. The bottom line seems to be . . . birth control pills are a safe long-term contraceptive method for non-smokers.”

Nate looked again at the condoms in the wastebasket. “You were messing with me. I mean, I’ve had one hell of a day, too,” he said. “There were certainly a few high points, the lottery to name one, but then you go and disappear with Michelle, and then you go and throw the condoms away like that . . . a clearly symbolic gesture.”

“Just trying to make it fun,” she said. “Are you mad? I didn’t plan for it to work out that way with Michelle. Once she and I were together I was just focused on talking through all the issues with her. I mean, I had many of the same concerns that you do. She has been really hard on me. She’s been mean to me; you weren’t the only one seeing that. I had lots of questions. It’s not like I just abandoned you to go have fun and cut hair. I’m sorry you were worried.”

“I was very worried,” said Nate.

“I tried to reassure you,” she said.

“You did? How?” he asked.

“I sent you texts so you would know that I loved you and that you didn’t need to worry because I was with Michelle,” said Dale.

“With all due respect, Lover, your texts didn’t help much,” said Nate. “But about the condoms in the wastebasket. Admit it . . . you were messing with me.”

“Okay, I was messing with you,” said Dale with a coy smile. “Of course I was messing with you! I was trying to make you think that I was not planning to ever have sex with you EVER again, so that seeing the birth control pills would be especially sweet. Did it work?”

“I guess I’ll have to admit that it worked,” said Nate. “Maybe I should get you back by throwing away the birth control pills and disappearing with a homosexual guy.”

“That wouldn’t be nice,” said Dale sticking out her lower lip. “You wouldn’t do that to me, would you?”

“Well, maybe now you know how I felt,” said Nate.

“I’m sorry lover, but can’t we let bygones be bygones and enjoy our new happy reality, the freedom to have carefree sex. It is a school night. We don’t exactly have all the time in the world,” she said kissing him.

“I guess you’re speaking my language,” said Nate.

She scooted back onto the bed. Lifting one of her feet up and over Nate’s head, she slowly spread her legs wide, with him right in between. She loved showing her charms, and she had a keen understanding of her ability to hypnotize Nate using nothing more than her little naked pussy. She rested like that, raised up on her elbows, watching him intently.

“See anything you’d like a go at?” she asked seductively.

Nate nodded, staring into her pussy, moist and inviting.

“Well then, it’s your turn to be on top,” she said. “Take care of those clothes and the lights. Leave the nightlight on if you prefer. This day’s not over. Alexa’s got nothing on me. I’m totally taking the day back!”

“Dale?” said Nate, sliding out from under the one leg that was still across his lap and standing up to start undressing.

“Yes, Lover?”

“You’re still a psycho girlfriend, but right now I wouldn’t have it any other way,” he said.

“Shut up and get naked!” she said winking at him. “It’s finally time to see how much pounding this little girl bed can take.”

**The Exhibitionist Next Door 363: Sleeplessness**

Dale didn’t sleep well, her mind and emotions on fire. The sex had gotten her heart racing, but while Nate had nodded off quickly, she had remained wide awake, initially glowing from the after effects of being so deeply in love, physical love and emotional love. As her sleeplessness had persisted, her emotions jumped all over the map – from euphoria to depression to rage to joy to fear to grief to remorse to loathing to serenity and then back to some new flavor of euphoria restarting the cycle.

Each thought seemed to invite swings between optimism and pessimism, entirely without moderation; optimism about what hopefully lay ahead, but pessimism about what just might unfortunately lie ahead. At Alexa’s hands, she had experienced an attack of extremes – extreme helplessness, extreme dread, extreme exposure – the list of extremes went on and on. The only saving grace that she could think of was that the banner had not gone up revealing her having orgasms on the Maverick’s back. Once away from the school she had survived the day by focusing on similarly extreme remedies . . . the more radical the better.

She hadn’t done so consciously, but as she lay there self-diagnosing, thinking about her reactions and over reactions, that is what she realized that she had done. At the time she had considered it ‘taking back the day’, but in retrospect she realized that it had been something different. She had been forcing painful thoughts out by shoving other similarly extreme yet more palatable thoughts in on top of them.

Losing her virginity had been just such a construct. She had been willing to let Nate take her any time, at his initiative, but he had preferred to allow her to be in charge of the timing via the lottery. That had been fine with her but had involved a lot of trepidation because it had put her back in charge. Going to Planned Parenthood had been difficult enough, but actually pulling the trigger on intercourse had been difficult for her. Once she had latched onto the idea of finally doing so after the pep rally assault, the healing effects had been stunning. The idea of finally having sex was scary, but it completely forced all thoughts about how she had been exposed on the Maverick completely out of her mind.

Returning home and talking to Miss Whitaker and then her parents had caused all the ugly memories of the attack to come rushing back. Similarly, even though she had not been conscious of it at the time, running off with Michelle had been quite therapeutic as well; it had allowed her to mentally escape back to her happy middle school life. And as that had worn off, the idea of having her hair cut had been so extreme that it had again forced all painful thoughts out of her head. Even the idea of throwing away the condoms and surprising Nate by telling him that she was on the pill had occupied her brain such that little bandwidth had been left over to allow thoughts of the pep rally associated trauma to creep back in.

She had experienced a number of bouts of sobbing during the night, whenever she had allowed herself to think about the motivations of Alexa and crew and how industriously they had sought to destroy her life.

She did her best to keep her blubbering from waking Nate, which was difficult given the fact that the bed was small and that she was not willing to separate from him. The thing that helped her the most as she mentally confronted all the issues was being in contact with Nate’s warm skin, and listening to his steady breathing.

Among other things, she wondered how she would be treated. She wondered what people would say, if they would be able to look her in the eye. She wondered what they would think of her hair. She wondered if she should mention Michelle, and yet she knew she would. More than anything she intended to proudly declare her renewed association with Michelle. She wanted everyone to know that things had finally gone full circle . . . that she and Michelle were once again best buddies!

She hadn’t told Nate, but among the reasons she’d let Michelle cut her hair was that she had viewed her haircut as a sort of friendship bracelet, a symbol of something that had real meaning to her. She wanted everyone to know that it was Michelle who had cut her hair. She knew that she’d be happy every time she looked in the mirror because the girl staring back at her would be Michelle’s friend!

She also spent a lot of time thinking through everything that Michelle had told her, much of it dealing with Alexa. That had given her so much new information, so much insight into Alexa, so much to think about. She had wanted to tell Nate, and yet she knew she should wait. She wanted him to hear it directly from Michelle. She realized that there were several advantages to doing it that way. Nate might gain an appreciation of Michelle, and he would be able to ask questions that she had not thought to ask. Another advantage would be that she would be able to hear it for a second time, as well as hear the answers to any questions that Nate might ask. She knew he was smart, and she was certain he’d grill Michelle a little . . . hopefully politely . . . which would add to what they both knew.

About having been stripped, gagged, tied up, displayed naked on the Maverick’s back . . . she couldn’t even begin to imagine how that might come up in conversation. She didn’t imagine that she would bring it up, and she didn’t think that others would bring it up . . . at least not directly. But she knew that it would come up, somehow, and she had no idea how she would respond. She was typically well spoken and good under pressure, so she was sure that she’d manage. Whatever she said, it would be appropriate. Overall, she was planning to say as little as possible. She was not going to answer any questions about who had been involved, and she was not going to recount what had happened in the mat room . . . not for the police, not for Mr. McRoberts, not for anyone. Nate maybe, if he wanted to hear about how she had been stripped and tied, but later. He was the only one that she might tell the story to, but that could wait.

The victory dance came to mind a time or two as well. All the varsity cheerleaders had committed to it, to incentivize the football team. But where did it stand now? The cheerleaders who had helped Alexa had clearly thrown any incentive gains away. She worried about the football players and what they must be thinking. How in the world would they be able to play their best given how it seemed as if some of the cheerleaders had sought to yank the rug out from under them. She tried to focus on ideas for helping them win the game. She thought of ideas for rallying the troops at the noise parade and from the game sidelines.

She thought of the special cheer that everyone had selected as the rallying cry that meant victory dance because it powerfully communicated with cheerleader tits pounding up and down to a steadily increasing tempo, To the “G”, to the “O”, Yell “Go! Go!” She knew that if she could get the other cheerleaders to work that cheer during the game, that it would send the signal that the dance was still on and that bare cheerleader tits were still on offer as the reward for victory. But while that was an encouraging thought, she wondered if the girls were really still ‘all in’, and she questioned her ability to suggest to Jodie, or any of them for the matter, using that cheer to rally the troops.

She started to think more depressing thoughts about how the game would probably be lost, and that would end up being because of her. Not that she had caused the distraction that had resulted in failure, not directly anyway. At the very least she was a central part of the distraction. And as time went on, people would associate the loss with the nude exhibitionist on the Maverick…those who put her there would gradually be forgotten . . . but that she liked being nude . . . that would be remembered. Those thoughts started the tears flowing anew.

Other thoughts that kept her awake involved a realization of how she had treated Nate, how he must have felt at several points during the evening. She kicked herself recognizing that she had been very self-centered. Indeed, she had been the one who had been stripped, so she had been understandably focused on herself, her own survival.

She had been so glad to have the opportunity to talk to Michelle that she had momentarily forgotten about what it must have felt like to Nate. She had locked the car door to prevent him from ‘saving’ her, which would have denied her the opportunity to talk to Michelle, an opportunity that she had been longing for since middle school.

And Nate had been right to call her out about the little stunt with the condoms. She had been looking forward to telling him that she was on the pill, and she had planned that all out in the context of a rooftop lottery. The spontaneous occurrence of the lottery on a Thursday had resulted in a separate pill announcement that had not gone off well. She knew Nate had probably forgiven her, but she still beat herself up over the way it had gone down.

The most depressing part of that was that she had so looked forward to telling him that she was on The Pill. She had imagined that it would be a very special moment, that like losing ones virginity, the two of them could experience just once. And she had muffed it. Throwing away the condoms had not worked out at all like she had intended. She was so angry at herself.

Several times she tried counting sheep to get to sleep, but that only turned into adding up how many people had seen her naked which only served to raise her level of concern, increasing her heart rate, keeping her awake. In the end she did fall asleep, but even the sleep she managed was far from restful.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 364: Returning to School**

When the alarm went off waking Nate, she was already up, showered and dressed. She was seated at her desk, writing in a book with just a small light on.

“Do you keep a journal?” asked Nate, rubbing the sand from his eyes.

“Yes, since 1977,” she replied smiling.

“You weren’t even born in 1977,” he replied.

“I guess you are awake,” she replied, closing the book.

She got up and climbed into bed on top of him. “Good morning, Buster,” she said kissing him on the nose.

“So, how long have you kept a journal?” he asked.

“Not since 1977, but for almost as long as I can remember,” she said. “I started late in grade school. I don’t write that regularly. There are big gaps. But I’ve written a lot this fall. There’s a lot in there about you, but it’s private.”

“As it should be,” said Nate. “Do you keep it locked? I mean, your parents?”

“They’d never open my journal,” said Dale. “But I hide it carefully when Tess is home, far from my bedroom.”

“She’s good at searching bedrooms,” said Nate.

“I know,” said Dale.

“Your eyes are red,” he observed. “Have you been crying?”

“During the night some,” she admitted. “Lots to think about, lots to worry about.”

“I hear you,” said Nate. “I hope you got some sleep.”

“I got some,” said Dale. “I hope it will be enough.”

“I hope so, too,” said Nate. “Big day ahead, right? Are you still planning to go to school?”

“I’m going to school. You’re going to school. Even my mom’s going to school. Today I need you both . . . more than you know,” she said, snuggling against him.

“I’ve come up with a plan for today,” said Nate.

“As long as you stay by my side, holding my hand, I’m in favor of your plan,” she said.

“How did you know my plan? But that’s it. I’m going to walk you from class to class. We both need to go to our own classes, but I’m going to leave my classes early to be standing outside of your classes, waiting for you when the bell rings. And then I’m going to be tardy for all my classes, too. I expect my teachers will understand. If not, I’ll serve some detention next week, proudly. Do you think you’ll be fine in your classes without me there with you?” he asked.

“I’m sure I will be,” she said. “I have to wear my big girl panties today . . . grannie panties . . . figuratively speaking.”

“I’ve already decided what bra and panty set you’ll be wearing, Slave Girl. So you need to change.”

“Unless I’m already wearing the ones you have in mind,” she said.

“You won’t be,” said Nate. “Today you’ll be wearing the sexy little set the fraternity boys bought for you to wear on The Wheel.”

“That’s my skimpiest set,” commented Dale.

“Given what went down yesterday, I want you wearing a bra and panties. I don’t want anyone to suspect that you might be braless. We have your reputation to consider. That might be more important than ever. But the skimpy set because I want you to feel sexy. More than anything, I want you in undies that are just as cute and sexy as your new haircut,” said Nate.

“It’s okay?” asked Dale, still concerned about what Nate thought of it. She reached up and touched her hair. It felt so odd. It felt like a part of her was missing.

“Damn girl . . . it’s hot! And it’s so short that I expect you’ll need to have it trimmed regularly to maintain the look. We’re both going to need to stay in Michelle’s good graces,” said Nate.

“Oh, Nate,” said Dale, her eyes instantly getting moist. She wrapped her arms around his head. “You’ll like her. I know you will.”

“I expect I will,” agreed Nate. “I’m looking forward to getting to know her. If she’s all you say she is, then I’ll like her.

“You’re wonderful!” she said, holding him close and smothering him with kisses. “And your timing is perfect. We have a date tonight!”

“We do?” said Nate in surprise.

“The three of us are going out! Nutshell is going to make reservations at a steak restaurant over in Fairview. Hopefully by getting out of town we can escape all the notoriety that I’ll probably have locally . . . until this blows over . . . if it ever blows over,” she said.

“Awesome,” said Nate, doing his best to disguise his real feelings. The last thing that he wanted to do was go out as a threesome. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly, realizing that he would need to rise to the challenge presented by the new relationship dynamics.

A little while later, Nate, Dale, and her mother gathered in the high school parking lot. Mrs. Jordan had driven separately for flexibility, and they were early, intentionally so. They had wanted to have a little time to discuss their plans for the day, but mostly they had wanted to avoid the last minute rush of students racing to their first period classes.

As they started walking toward the main entrance, Dale squeezed Nate’s hand tightly, “Whatever you do, Nate, I’m counting on you to keep a tight grip on this hand.”

Barely two car rows later, Dale let out a squeal. Shaking her hand to pull it free, she sprinted off to the right.

“I guess this hand holding thing is a one way street,” remarked Nate to Dale’s mom.

“I guess it is,” she replied laughing and shaking her head.

A minute later, Dale was back with Michelle in tow.

“Oh, Michelle,” said Mrs. Jordan, embracing her. “You’ve made Todd and I just as happy as you’ve made our daughter. After what those mean girls did to her yesterday, I’m sure your friendship means more to her than you might ever imagine.”

Nate smiled on the outside, but on the inside he was rolling his eyes and shaking his head. Dale’s mom did not know, nor was she destined to find out, that Michelle was in fact one of those ‘mean girls.’

“By the way, I love her haircut!” added Mrs. Jordan.

“I had hoped that you’d welcome me back . . . without too many hard feelings,” said Michelle. “I can’t honestly say that I’ve missed Tess, but I’ve missed you and your husband a great deal. You both were always so kind to me.”

“You’re absolutely welcome back!” said Dale’s mother enthusiastically.

“Thank you. Do you really like her haircut?” asked Michelle, scrutinizing how it looked that morning.

“I love it, so does Nate,” she said.

“I’m glad to hear that,” said Michelle, eyeing Nate suspiciously. “As soon as the salon opens this morning, I’m going to call and make an appointment. Hopefully I can get in right after school. I want Dale to come with me . . . so our haircuts can match.”

“Really?” said Dale, grabbing her hand and beaming with an inner happiness.

Michelle looked into her eyes, nodding, as Nate watched skeptically.

“Have you ever had hair that short?” asked Mrs. Jordan.

“Same as DJ,” replied Michelle. “Not since about second grade. But DJ inspires me. She told me all about Locks of Love while I cut her hair yesterday. What a wonderful organization.”

“So it’s not because you want to have the same haircut?” asked Mrs. Jordan.

“It’s only because I want to have the same haircut!” replied Michelle. “The chance to help out a child is just the icing on the cake, right DJ?”

Dale nodded, hugging Michelle tightly, tears of joy running down her cheeks.

“Now look what you’ve done, Nutshell,” said Dale. “Now you are going to have to help me fix my makeup.”

“In that case, we should get going,” said Nate, glancing at the time on his phone.

They again headed toward the school, Dale beaming, walking between Nate and Michelle, holding both of their hands. To Nate it was more than a little awkward, but he was glad that Dale looked so happy . . . especially after what she had been through just the day before. She deserved to be happy.

He looked back at Dale’s mom, following them two paces behind. She shrugged, raising her eyebrows, an apologetic smile on her lips.

Glancing over at Dale, he thought about how much she had enjoyed sex the night before. Things looked as if they might end up being a bit unusual going forward, Michelle, an imposter in their midst. However, there had certainly been positive developments. Dale had surprised him by taking the initiative to visit Planned Parenthood. She was on the pill, and she seemed to love making love. In all their discussions she had never seemed to have an interest in having sex with Michelle . . . above the waist, maybe, but below the waist, probably not. Of that he was still far from certain. If anything, he was glad to no longer have to worry whether or not she might be able to enjoy sex with a man.

As they walked together, approaching the front entrance, they stopped short. There were two police cars parked in the fire lane. To their left, they saw a TV news van from Riverside. Prospect was too small to have a TV news station of its own.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 365: School Begins**

“It looks like you’re up, mom!” said Dale.

“Side entrance?” asked Nate.

“Yep,” said Dale nodding. “Give ‘em hell, mom!”

“And you,” said her mom, giving her a quick hug. “Keep your chin up . . . and hang onto Nate’s hand.”

Nate looked over and saw her give him a little stealth wink.

Mrs. Jordan headed confidently for the main entrance, while Dale, Nate, and Michelle skirted around the building to the right.

“First stop, the little girls’ room,” said Michelle hurrying. “We should have enough time to freshen up your makeup, Dale.”

Nate waited outside the ladies room while the two girls were inside. A minute later, Nate was walking Dale to her first period class. Michelle had turned off and headed up a flight of stairs. As they walked along, all conversations would pause. The other students seemed to notice them, yet they all avoided actually looking at them.

"This is strange. What's going on?" whispered Dale.

"I think we're not the only ones trying to come to terms with what happened yesterday," said Nate quietly.

"Do you think it's my hair?" asked Dale.

"I expect that's part of it," said Nate.

"What should I tell people when they ask about it?" asked Dale.

"Whatever you like," said Nate smiling. "It does look cute, so there wouldn't be many questions, were it not for the timing. What ARE you thinking about telling people?"

"I'm still thinking," said Dale continuing to whisper. "Alexa ‘outed me’ . . . so now everyone knows about me . . . about my relationship with nudity. Maybe not everything, but they at least know that I am a girl who will take her clothes off and run around outside. So now . . . somehow . . . I want to be the bold woman . . . the woman with nothing to hide . . . the woman comfortable in her clothes . . . comfortable in her skin. A woman now . . . no longer a virgin . . . not that anyone will know that, but I AM thinking of telling everyone that I'm a NEW woman! A woman who is tired of hiding who she really is. A woman who is through with deceiving everyone around her. A woman who is done with being a victim. A woman who is going to live her life deliberately and honestly . . . and this new haircut can symbolize the new me.”

“You go girl!” said Nate, overflowing with joy at Dale’s take-charge positive attitude. She seemed to be taking a most difficult situation in stride, talking as if she wanted to use it as a springboard into a future that she herself would tailor to fit her needs.

“I lost a lot of sleep last night, but in a way it’s good. It’s like I had a whole extra day to prepare. I got some things sorted out . . . mentally. I have a better handle on what happened and how to capitalize on it,” said Dale. “There’s plenty left to figure out, but at least I made a start at defining the new me.”

“So if the new you has nothing to hide, are you going to start going nude everywhere?” he asked. “I mean, there are probably those who might expect that, even welcome it . . . now that your secret is out.”

“I don’t know,” said Dale. “Am I? It’s not my call, is it?”

“Just testing you, Slave Girl,” he said, smiling and squeezing her hand.

“I probably need to be your Nudity Slave now more than ever,” said Dale. “Without you to keep a lid on things, everything could get out of hand real quick. At least that’s my sense.”

“We should continue this conversation later,” said Nate. “Now’s not the time or place.”

They had arrived at Dale’s class. Nate gave her a quick kiss on the forehead, promising to be right there waiting for her when the bell rang. He hurried off to calculus as she went in and took her seat.

As his math class was about as far from Dale’s class as it could be, he arrived several minutes late. Everyone stopped what they were doing and looked at him as he walked in. He approached the teacher’s desk and handed her a note that he had prepared earlier that morning.

It read, “Due to the unusual circumstances, I am accompanying Dale Jordan from class to class all day today. I am expecting that this will make me late for every class as well as require that I depart early. My apologies for any disruption that this may cause. I beg your understanding and forgiveness. Sincerely, Nate Miller.”

After reading the note, Mrs. Morrison nodded and handed it back.

‘So far, so good,’ thought Nate as he took his seat.

He had only just pulled out his notebook when Miss Hastings, one of the office administrators, appeared in the doorway. “Mrs. Morrison, the police are requesting that I escort Nate Miller back to the offices for questioning,” she said.

“See you Monday, Nate,” said Mrs. Morrison. “Good luck in the game!”

He put his notebook back in his backpack and met Miss Hastings out in the hallway. Officer Kudrow was there as well. “This is what I did all yesterday afternoon,” Miss Hastings remarked. “But at least the number of people still on the ‘to be questioned’ list has dwindled significantly.”

Nate walked with them back to the main office area where Officer Kudrow ushered him into the faculty lounge, a good sized room with numerous tables. The police had set up shop there and had been using it for questioning various students and teachers, in particular those with known association to Alexa.

“So, Mr. Miller, I’m Detective Jacob Harms,” said a lean sandy haired man in a dark suit. “You’ve already met Officer Kudrow, and this is Officer Adams. You may call me, Jake.” He held out his hand and Nate shook it.

Detective Harms explained a number of things, including that they would be recording the proceedings, and then he began asking questions. In the end, the questioning took much less time than Nate had anticipated. The detective was primarily trying to figure out what Nate knew about what had gone on in the mat room. To his surprise, Mr. Wheeler, Nate’s third period history teacher had already been questioned. That meant that the detective knew that Nate had not left his third period class early, but rather late. The detective had all kinds of notes that related to how he had stood up towards the end of class, startled by a text. How he had almost raced out of the room, still looking at his phone.

He was asked many questions about who had sent him the texts and their nature. He thought that they would want to see them, but they didn’t. They had him read them aloud for the recording, and they cautioned him about erasing them. The important thing that came out of all that, he realized, is that it proved to the detective that he had not known anything in advance. And what was quite significant, was that he had almost gotten the chance to change the course of events. Had Susie only sent the first text, then everything would have worked out very differently for Dale.

He knew that they would shortly be talking to Susie, to hear her side of why the texts had been sent. From the questions, he knew that she was among the ‘yet to be questioned.’ He was cautioned about discussing things with her, especially anything related to her texts.

He tried to do his best to help them with their investigation, but it shortly became obvious to both Nate as well as the detective that he had little information that was really helpful. Their primary aim was to locate someone who had seen people come and go from the mat room. He had been too late to the scene to have any information of the sort.

They did probe a little to get a sense about what he knew about certain people: Alexa, Miss Whitaker and a few other seemingly random people such as Ward.

To Nate’s delight, they dismissed him in time to keep his commitment to Dale. As he had promised, he was waiting outside of her classroom as she emerged. She held his hand and they took their time, walking slowly to Spanish. It was just a short distance.

“They just questioned me,” announced Nate.

“They did?” asked Dale in surprise.

“Yep, in the faculty lounge,” he said.

“What did they ask you?” she asked.

“I’m not supposed to discuss what was said with you,” he said. “I guess they don’t want my lack of helpful information to rub off on you.”

“You weren’t helpful?” asked Dale.

“We’re not supposed to discuss this,” said Nate. Continuing in a whisper he added, “but not only was I never in the mat room yesterday, but I was also not an eye witness to what happened in there during third period. They actually asked me that even though Mr. Wheeler told them that I was in third period the entire time.”

“Are you supposed to be telling me this, Nate?” she asked.

“No,” he replied.

“Better follow the rules,” she replied.

“I know,” said Nate. “First period go okay?”

“Yes,” said Dale. “No one spoke to me. I’d sense people looking at me, but when I’d glance over, they’d quickly look away.”

“I hope you know how proud I am of you,” said Nate. “You are unbelievably brave. I doubt there is another girl in this school who could do this after what you went through yesterday.”

“I’m a woman now, Nate. I can do amazing things,” she said holding her head up proudly. “But back when I was a virgin . . . I could do amazing things, too.”

“Come to think of it, you do look different,” remarked Nate quietly. “I had thought that it was the hair, but maybe it’s a side effect of losing your virginity.”

“It’s the hair, silly,” said Dale, elbowing him in the ribs. Leaning in real close and whispering softly in his ear she asked, “Can we make love again tonight?”

“You liked that?” he asked.

Stopping and looking up into his eyes, she nodded her head slowly up and down, a most endearing solemn expression on her face.

“You’re a keeper,” whispered Nate.

“You like screwing too, don’t you?” asked Dale quietly.

Nate looked into her eyes and mimicked her solemn nod.

“Good,” she said, smiling and squeezing his hand.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 366: Kenny Comes Through**

As they neared the entrance of their Spanish class, they saw Kenny standing in the hall, seemingly waiting for them. Dale looked into his eyes. Unlike others, he did not look away. As she studied his expression attempting to gain a little insight into his thoughts, he raised his hands and clapped loudly, once, twice, three times.

On his third clap, a few people nearby clapped as well. By the fifth clap quite a number of people had joined in, matching Kenny’s original slow tempo exactly.

Dale saw some of her Spanish classmates coming out of Señora Flores’ classroom to join in. Turning she saw people flooding back into the hall from other classrooms as well. The number of people clapping was growing with every clap, the sound echoing up and down the hall.

Nate saw Dale’s face flush red with embarrassment and a moment later she buried her face into his chest. “Why are they doing that, Nate?” he heard her ask. He held her as the sound grew louder reverberating through the school. He imagined that there were students in distant hallways clapping . . . not knowing why they were clapping, but clapping nonetheless.

“As a sign of respect,” he said angling his head down so his chin touched her head. “To show their support. As an acknowledgement of your courage.”

Turning his head, he saw that even those still in the classroom across from Spanish were clapping, sincere, supportive expressions on their faces. At first it seemed as if he and Dale might be the only ones in the entire school not clapping, but then he started noticing a few exceptions. In that same classroom he saw a boy shaking his head as well as a girl with her nose buried in a book. Just down the hall a short distance he saw two girls who were also not clapping. He knew them by appearance, but not by name. They were looking at one another and scowling. In the other direction, he saw another girl, a freshman he thought. She was just standing there, a puzzled look on her face. Apparently the acceptance of Dale the exhibitionist was not universal, he realized.

And yet the overwhelming majority were clapping, and the clapping went on and on. When Dale could take it no more, she turned, pulling Nate into Señora Flores’ classroom. With her departure, the clapping in the hall gradually died down and came to an end. Dale was glad that things seemed to be returning to normal as she took her seat.

“Thanks, Kenny,” she said as he sat down next to her. “But don’t you dare do that again.”

Looking into her eyes, Kenny gave her a compassionate nod. “People care about you, Dale. They care a lot.” Dale looked down in embarrassment. Kenny continued, “I care about you. By the way, don’t run off after class. I have something for you.”

“Not more photos,” said Dale, rolling her eyes.

“You’ll see,” said Kenny smiling.

Nate had been interested to see how Señora Flores might treat Dale. He also wanted to watch other interactions during class. It was his one class with Dale, so it was his one chance to observe what Dale might have to deal with in her other classes.

To his surprise, Señora Flores seemed to go to great effort to not say or do anything out of the ordinary . . . nothing at all. He had caught sight of her clapping before class, but that was the only outward sign that he noticed that she even knew of Dale’s Maverick ride the day before. The rest of class was remarkable in how unremarkable it was. He caught sight of a few of the guys looking at Dale, but that too was not at all unusual. She was hardly a wallflower. She had always been beautiful as well as a bona fide Prospect High celebrity. Guys had been stealing glances at her since the beginning of time, years before everyone had gotten a good look at her shaved pussy.

“Dale, hang back for a moment, if you don’t mind,” reminded Kenny just after the bell had rung. Nate and Dale both stayed where they were while everyone else filed out.

“You are so goddam brave,” said a girl Nate only knew of as ‘Em’ as she approached Dale on her way out.

“I’m trying,” said Dale with a genuine smile, looking into the girl’s eyes. Dale held out her hand and the girl grasped it and nodded as she went on by.

Once the class had emptied out, Dale asked, “So, you have something for me, Kenny?”

“I do,” said Kenny, speaking softly so that Señora Flores, working at her desk, would not overhear. “Unzip your backpack.”

Dale reached down and did as instructed. Kenny transferred a box from his own backpack to Dale’s as stealthily as he could. He then zipped her backpack closed.

“Now you can’t say that I have never done you a favor,” he said.

“What did you put in there?” she asked.

“That’s what the police are searching high and low for . . . they were asking everyone what happened to it. But it doesn’t belong to the police.”

“Who does it belong to?” asked Dale.

“I guess it was Alexa’s. Now it’s yours,” said Kenny. “That’s the camera that was supplying the live feed to the big screen . . . internal memory and memory stick intact. Not a copy anywhere. I didn’t make a copy, and I spent the time necessary to verify that nothing had been rigged up to capture a copy remotely.”

Nate felt like slapping Kenny on the back and thanking him, but he knew better. This was between Kenny and Dale. The expression of gratitude in Dale’s eyes as she looked into Kenny’s eyes would be much more meaningful to Kenny than anything he might say or do.

As he watched, Dale took one of Kenny’s hands in both of hers. Pulling it to her face, she kissed his knuckles saying quietly, “I love you, Kenny.” Her hazel eyes were deep pools of extreme emotion.

Nate looked at the emotion on Kenny’s face. Dale had an amazing power. He knew that Kenny would never forget that moment. This was the same guy who had told him to never wash his shoulder after Dale had punched him on the first day of school.

“Where would I be without you and Nate?” asked Dale, breaking the silence.

“While everyone else was following you and Nate out of the gym or watching Carly give Alexa the business, I was thinking of you Dale. You can give that to the police if you want, but I don’t see why you would. They have more than enough witnesses, more than enough photos. They don’t need what’s in that camera.”

“I was so worried about that finding its way onto the Internet, Kenny. You don’t know how much this means to me,” she said.

“There will be pictures on the Internet,” said Kenny. “But what’s in that camera is high resolution, and it was clamped to a railing. It’s steady, unlike all the hand held phone stuff.”

“I know,” said Dale. “You’re a lifesaver. I can’t thank you enough.”

“Anything for you, Dale,” said Kenny.

“Now we’re going to all be late for third period,” said Dale, hugging Kenny and standing on her tiptoes to kiss him on the cheek. Turning to head out into the hall, Dale said, “find me another restroom, guys. How many times am I going to have to fix my makeup today?”

“Dale needs friends . . . now more than ever. Way to come through for her, buddy!” said Nate quietly, slapping Kenny on the back once they were in the hall. He added in a whisper, “And if I were you I’d never again wash that hand . . . or that cheek.”

The break between third and fourth period was also eventful. Susie came up to Dale, giving her a compassionate, clingy hug. Her expression made it obvious that she was hurting inside and that she empathized with Dale a great deal. After a long time spent saying how sorry she was about what had happened, she added, “And it wasn’t a date! Nate and I were just regrouping . . . trying to decide what to do next. We had spoken to a lot of people. We were hoping one of them would call in a Dale/Michelle sighting.”

“Regrouping, huh?” said Dale teasingly while looking at Nate out of the corner of her eye. “So that’s the new euphemism for going out with someone else’s boyfriend!”

“You know nothing was going on,” said Nate, shaking his head.

“Where were you anyway?” asked Susie.

“Michelle’s grandmother’s house,” said Dale. “We went there to talk . . . and to cut hair. Michelle’s grandmother is a retired beautician. She has a mini hair salon in her basement.”

“Is that who cut your hair?” asked Susie. “It’s adorable!”

“No, she was there, but Parkinson’s Disease forced her retirement. Michelle cut my hair while her grandmother talked her through it. Michelle’s gotten quite good under her grandmother’s tutelage. She’s been cutting her grandmother’s hair, her parents hair, her brother’s hair . . . even trimming Alexa’s hair, so I’ve learned.

“Lovely,” said Susie sarcastically, bristling at the mention of Alexa. “But she did a wonderful job on your hair . . . it’s really cute. I love it!”

“Thanks, Tink,” said Dale, accepting another hug.

“Rumor has it that your mom is down in the offices giving Mr. McRoberts hell,” said Susie. “Have you guys heard the other rumors going around?

“Probably not,” said Dale. Nate and I have been living in our own little bubble. Lots of people looking at us, but hardly anyone actually talking to us.”

“Well, the other thing that people are saying is that you are refusing to talk to the police. That you aren’t going to turn in Alexa’s accomplices.”

“Tink, they put a pillowcase over my head before they turned on the lights. No one spoke . . . no one other than Alexa,” lied Dale.

“But you know who helped her, don’t you,” said Susie.

“Even if I did, what purpose would it serve?” asked Dale.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 367: Susie and Jodie**

“Well, for what it’s worth, I support you. Even though I don’t think that anyone should get away with doing that to anybody, I support you. You’re smart and you’re brave,” said Susie. “But I hear there is a young police officer who is quite angry . . . going head to head with your mother. The other rumor is that Mr. McRoberts is going to be fired, and that your mother is going to take his place.”

“Really?” said Dale in surprise.

“No. I actually did hear that, but it was a joke, not a rumor. But it would be so cool. I like your mom,” said Susie. “The real rumor is that Mr. McRoberts is talking about giving all varsity cheerleaders a three day suspension if you don’t come forward and turn in the guilty girls . . . or if they don’t come forward and turn themselves in. Some of the other cheerleaders have already been grilled. I’m just waiting my turn. All the focus seems to be on just us varsity cheerleaders . . . but I guess that makes sense . . . we were supposedly the only ones who were let out of our third period classes early. But I’ll bet drill team girls were involved. Other than Jodie, all of Alexa’s best friends seem to be on the drill team.”

“That’s true,” said Dale thoughtfully.

“Maybe I’ll try and ask about that when it is my turn to answer questions. I’m sure to be grilled, unless of course they think I’m too harmless to be a suspect. I kind of want to be a suspect,” said Susie.

“Were you in the mat room?” asked Dale.

“Of course not, don’t be silly,” said Susie. “But I like the idea of being a suspect. I just don’t want them to dismiss me without talking to me. I guess it would seem a little insulting if they think I’m too much of a chicken shit to ever do anything bad.”

“But you are,” said Dale.

“So are you!” said Susie.

Nate couldn’t help but laugh. “Tink, you should just get a barbed wire tattoo, and have your nipples pierced . . . if you really want to be taken seriously,” he said winking at Dale.

Susie scowled at him. “Ouch!” she said covering her boobs protectively with the palms of her hands. “You stay away from me!”

“Is Mr. McRoberts really considering suspending all of us?” asked Dale.

“I don’t know about you, but the rest of us . . . at least that is what I’ve heard. Ask your mom, I’m sure she knows. I just walked past the offices. She’s right in the thick of things. Pretty exciting up there today. Police, reporters, even members of the school board,” said Susie. “You should go check it out . . . just for fun.”

“We’re avoiding that part of the school entirely,” said Dale. “I made a deal with my mom. I get to go to class. She gets to deal with the mess.”

“Sounds like a good deal to me,” said Susie.

“I forgot about the reporters. We saw a TV van on our way in,” said Dale.

“Yep, reporters . . . both TV and newspaper. Mr. McRoberts won’t them come in,” said Susie. “So they are hanging around outside the entrance, interviewing anyone who will talk to them.”

They were all tardy to their fourth period classes. Nate expected that Dale would be forgiven, and he had his note that seemed to be working, but he expected that Susie would not be able to get it excused.

True to his commitment, Nate was waiting for Dale outside of her classroom when the bell rang signaling the end of fourth period, the start of lunch. The two of them stopped by their lockers to get their sack lunches then made their way, hand in hand towards the lunchroom.

As they turned the corner at the end of a row of lockers, they suddenly came face-to-face with Jodie. Nate saw a spark of alarm in her eyes. For a long moment, no one moved, no one blinked, as if they were each waiting for the other to establish the tone for the unsought encounter.

Dale spoke first, wading into the murky waters. "Hi Jodie," she said as if she were only doing so to buy time.

"Hi?" replied Jodie guardedly, almost as if it was the last thing in the world she had expected to hear.

"Excited about the game?" asked Dale and an even tone.

Nate looked over at her disbelievingly. ‘Really?’ he thought, ’That's it? Excited about the game?’

"Umm . . . yeah,” said Jodie, her look of astonishment transitioning into a smug expression hinting at returning confidence. "It's going to be a great game."

"I know we are the underdogs, but I think we can win," said Dale. "Are there any plans . . . you know . . . things I can help with? Aren't we going to make ‘Go Mavericks’ banners for the team to run through?"

"All taken care of," said Jodie. "But in case you haven't heard, the noise parade has been moved to tomorrow. We meet here in the parking lot at two o'clock, white uniforms with sweaters."

"Okay, 2 pm, white uniforms,” replied Dale.

Glancing suspiciously at Nate, Jodie continued off in the direction she had been going saying, "See you there."

After she had gone, Dale resumed walking toward the lunchroom. Nate didn't budge from where he was standing in a state of shock.

"Dale, what the f\*\*k?” he called after her.

Dale turned and looked back at him. For a long moment she just stared into his eyes. Glancing down she said, "What do you want from me, Nate? Was I supposed to fight her?" she asked. "I'd only lose. I always lose when I go up against these girls."

"Not that, but come on Dale," he urged. "This is ridiculous."

"I know you think I'm a joke, but trying to get along is all I know," she said starting to cry. "I'm sorry I let you down, and now I'm letting you down again by crying."

Sobbing, she walked back to him, leaning up against him as if she hoped that he would hold her. He did. He enveloped her in his arms.

"No, I guess I let you down,” said Nate. "I should've been the one confronting her."

"Please don't," said Dale, looking up into his eyes. "You told me I wouldn't have these problems if Alexa were gone from the mix. Can't we just test out that theory?"

"Right now I'm thinking it might have been a lame theory," said Nate. "Jodie and I got along so well when we were working on the Victory Dance together. Now I'm thinking I was fooled . . . that I was a fool."

"It's a tough day, Nate,” she said. "Let’s not beat ourselves up. Let's just go have lunch. Hopefully things will get easier."

After another attempt at fixing her eye makeup, Nate and Dale found themselves all alone at a table in the lunchroom. Initially they ate in silence. While many people seemed to study them out of the corners of their eyes, no one ventured to join them.

“So, the noise parade has been rescheduled for tomorrow, for game day,” said Dale.

“I guess that’s better,” said Nate. “Too bad we don’t have another week until the game. Everything seems so rushed.”

“I know. One of the main reasons that I wanted to come to school today,” said Dale. “Was to try and help get school spirit back on the front burner. This game is so important, but I’m at a loss as to how I might contribute spirit-wise today . . . without an assembly or a noise parade. And to make matters worse, it’s almost like I’m a leper. No one will even sit with us. I’m probably negatively impacting the football team’s chances just by being here.”

“Don’t say that. It’s absolutely not true. But your right, this is ridiculous,” he said getting up and heading off across the cafeteria.

A minute later he was back with more than half of the defensive team in tow, Cody, Gage, Felipe and Blake among them. Their table filled up, so some of them had to sit at an adjoining table.

“Thanks guys,” said Dale tearing up as she made eye contact with each of them in turn. “I’m really not a leper. I’m the same girl I was before.”

“Dale,” said Nate cautioning her. “Don’t start that again. You’ve fixed your makeup enough today.”

“I know. I can’t help it,” said Dale, laughing and wiping a tear from an eye with a finger.

“We’re all so sorry about yesterday, Dale,” said Cody. Other players echoed the sentiment.

“Thanks, guys,” she said.

“We weren’t avoiding you. You’re not a leper,” said Cody. “I'm just in a state of shock . . . still shaken up. That’s the kind of thing you see on the news. Things like that don't happen here in Prospect, and frankly the situation is a little awkward…”

“A LITTLE awkward?” said Gage with a nervous laugh.

“I mean a LOT awkward,” said Cody.

“For me too,” said Dale. “But like I said, I’m the same girl I was before. Even if all my secrets are out.”

"It's just hard to know what to say. Hard to know where to look . . . where not to look. But Nate's absolutely right, avoiding you is not the right thing to do." said Cody.

"Thanks," said Dale smiling. “I appreciate that.”

An awkward silence ensued and everyone went back to eating their lunches.

Nate broke the silence saying, “Let’s talk football, guys.”

“Yes, please,” said Dale encouragingly. “What happened yesterday needs to be quickly forgotten. The Mighty Mavericks need to win one more game, a big game. That won’t happen without focus. What are you going to focus on in the game tomorrow, Cody?”

“You are so awesome, Dale. I hope you know how much we love you,” said Cody.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 368: Ward**

“Enough about me,” said Dale sternly, pointing a finger between his eyes and staring at him threateningly, a cute thin smile on her lips. “Nate tells me that the primary defensive play is called the I.U.D. He’s kidding me, right?” She knew he wasn’t, but it seemed to be a fun topic to use as an ice breaker.

“He’s not!” said Blake and another player or two talking simultaneously.

“All of our defensive plays are named for methods of birth control,” explained Cody. “It’s an old Prospect High tradition. Last year, Coach Maynard liked ‘Sterilization’ and ‘The Pill’ a lot. This year it seems to be I.U.D. all the way. We have a tiny fraction of the number of plays that the offense has. The different plays just represent minor differences in how we line up . . . and of course our assignments. Most of what the defense does involves reacting to what we observe, before and after the ball is hiked.”

“Well, why is I.U.D. better than Sterilization or The Pill? By the way, does Sterilization mean Vasectomy?” she asked.

“Oh, ouch,” said Cody acting as if he had been kicked in the balls. “No! Of course not. I think it might be short for ‘Tubal Sterilization.’”

“I should have known,” said Dale laughing.

“You should have,” agreed Cody smiling and nodding. “This game is all about keeping ‘balls’ from ‘scoring’ in the ‘end zone.’”

“Okay,” said Dale laughing. “But why I.U.D.? On the face of it, ‘Sterilization’ would seem to be the most effective. It worked for the family cat.”

“Did you guys see how she said that with a straight face?” asked Cody.

“I hear abstinence works quite well, too,” remarked Dale with a sultry smile.

“Rumor has it that it’s your favorite,” said Ward, walking up behind her, resting his hands lightly on her shoulders.

“Especially when you’re around,” she said scowling and twisting to pull her shoulders free of his touch.

Everyone started laughing.

“Ouch!” said Ward, dropping his hands to his sides. “I was just hoping we might hook up.”

“Not that it would make any difference if I wasn’t,” said Dale. “But I’m taken.”

“Goddam it, so am I,” admitted Ward. “But I’ve just learned that Alexa’s in custody, so…”

“She is?” rang out a chorus of voices.

“Yep,” said Ward nodding. “I’m back on manual override for the time being.”

“Are they coming for you next?” asked one of the players.

“Oh, I was f\*\*king grilled, you better believe it,” he said. “Alexa’s a lot of things, but dumb ain’t one of them. She’s smart enough to know not to tell me shit. She probably thought that I’d warn you, Dale. And I would have . . . or I would have gone straight to the police.”

“Thank you, Ward,” said Dale.

“So, bottom line, I’m available,” he said.

“But you’re waiting for Alexa, right?” said Dale.

“F\*\*k, no! I mean, no,” said Ward remembering too late that Dale didn’t like the swearing. “Cute hair, by the way.”

“Yeah, cute hair,” echoed a few more of the guys.

“So, Dale, there’s a rumor going around that your mother is keeping the police from asking you questions,” said Cody. “Why not talk to the police? I mean, these girls shouldn’t get away with this. It’s not like I want them to have prison sentences, or anything, but community service at the very least . . . and of course the embarrassment of having their names in the newspaper. They DO need to pay. What they did to you was just plain wrong. ”

Dale didn’t respond, so Gage added, “Yeah, Dale. Why not talk to the police?”

“Okay, guys,” said Dale taking a deep breath. “It’s like this. As everyone now knows, I have gone places naked. Places where girls are not supposed to go without their clothes. It’s fun . . . for me. You don’t know how liberating it feels to finally be able to admit that. The bungee thing, that wasn’t a big deal. I mean, that was a sanctioned ‘free if you go naked’ thing. But other times and other places . . . well, I’ve been a bad girl. And when running around without my clothes, I’m always on the lookout for the police. I guess I’ve just conditioned myself to think of them as the enemy. This is different, I know. They’re just doing their job. I don’t have any information for them, but I’ll talk to them. I’m just a little apprehensive about it.”

“I guess that makes sense,” said Cody.

“I know they’re not after me,” said Dale. “But when I see them, my feet just want to run. I can’t help it.”

“So, Dale,” interjected Ward. “I’ll ask the question everyone wants to ask . . . but is afraid to. Why, for God’s sake, do you have clothes on?”

“Leave her alone, Ward,” said Cody. “Hasn’t she been through enough?”

“Who wants Dale to strip?” asked Ward. “Raise your hands.”

As hands went up around the table, Nate intervened, “Not a democracy, guys, put your hands down.”

“Stop hassling her, Ward!” said Cody more forcefully.

“Hey,” said Ward. “I’m not hassling her. I care about her as much as anyone, but she likes to be naked. She looks great naked. I think she should be naked.” Turning to Dale he asked again, “So, why aren’t you naked?”

Nate was trying to decide if he should shut things down, but one look at Dale told him that he didn’t need to.

“Ward, that’s quite enough,” said Cody. “Move along.”

“I don’t mind talking about this, Cody,” said Dale. Turning to Ward, she continued, “So you didn’t get enough yesterday, huh?”

“I could never get enough of you. You have such a sweet ass! The things I could do to that ass,” said Ward. “But you didn’t get enough yesterday either, did you?”

“I got plenty yesterday,” she said. “…but I’ll be naked again. Hopefully not at all like it happened yesterday. One thing I am completely through with is being the victim. I can take my clothes off. Nate can take my clothes off. No one else takes my clothes off! No one else even touches them! Got that? Spread the word!”

Upon hearing Dale say that Nate could take her clothes off, Gage reached his fist toward Nate saying, “Dude!” Nate accepted the offered fist bump to a few cheers.

“So when and where will you next be getting naked?” asked Ward. “Here? Today?”

“Well, it’s like this,” explained Dale remembering how Nate had introduced the Nudity Slave agreement. “It’s like the weather. You can’t influence it. Some days I think the forecast is for a chance of naked, and it doesn’t happen. Other days, it happens . . . surprising me . . . like getting caught in the rain without a coat or umbrella.”

“So . . . we won’t know when it will happen?” asked Ward.

“You won’t. But it will happen . . . I’m pretty sure . . . eventually,” she said looking at Nate. “You won’t be able to predict when or where . . . or have any influence.”

“That’s f\*\*king awesome,” said Ward. “A reason to live!”

“And a reason to pay attention to the weather forecast,” joked Blake.

“But we won’t be able to predict it?” asked Ward, obviously trying to decipher what she had said.

“Only Nate seems to be able to predict with any certainty,” she said. She wanted to wink at Nate, but she knew that everyone would see. They were all studying her so carefully, hanging on every word.

“That’s interesting,” said Ward. “I’ll keep that in mind. Any predictions about today, Nate?”

“I don’t think there’s any nudity in the forecast for today,” said Nate glaring at Dale. He was going to have to talk to her, maybe spank her. She seemed willing to let others know about the Nudity Slave agreement; something he was dead set against. Bad Dale seemed to be showing her head a little bit. She was dressed, but she was surrounded by guys and the subject of discussion was nudity . . . her nudity.

“But Nate’s not perfect,” said Dale. “The weather caught him by surprise yesterday. Otherwise, he would have rescued me. He didn’t rescue me . . . only after it was too late . . . that doesn't count.”

Nate closed his eyes. Angling his head down, he took a deep breath. She was right. He hadn’t been there for her, and she seemed to be rubbing his nose in it . . . In front of everyone.

When he opened his eyes, Dale was staring across the table at him. “I’m sorry,” she said softly.

“No, I’m sorry,” he replied.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 369: Cheer My Heart Out**

As he watched, he saw the smile return to her face. For some reason he started to feel as if he were watching her from a dreamlike state. She turned her attention away from him, to the rest of the team seated at the table.

“So, guys,” she said, raising her eyebrows. “How do we beat the Bisons tomorrow? Figuring that out is job one! I know what I’m going to do. I’ll be right there on the sidelines. I’m going to be cheering my heart out . . . cheering like I’ve never cheered before . . . because that is what I can do . . . all that I can do. At the end of the game, I won’t have my voice. They’ll probably have to take me home on a stretcher. Absolutely everything I’ve got for you guys . . . for our school . . . for this game. Let’s go around the table. I want to hear everyone’s level of commitment. I say we win or we go home in body bags!”

A few of the guys cheered and clapped, as they engaged her in turn. Everyone tried to match her level of commitment, but nothing about what was said sounded forced or insincere. It was a truly inspirational moment, electricity filled the air.

Nate tuned in and out as he watched Dale work her magic. He was so proud of her. She had them completely captivated. She knew each of them so well. Her approach was individually tailored to each guy, to their specific positions on the field as well as to their personalities. He felt the excitement level of the team climbing as she orchestrated the miniature pep rally. And the beauty of it was not that she was giving a pep talk to them, but rather that they were giving it to themselves. She was transforming them into winners because they were already winners . . . they just needed to discover it within themselves.

Dale’s spell over the group was shattered when Danielle, the cheerleader that Cody had been dating since the Sadie Hawkins dance walked up behind him, placing her hands on Cody's shoulders.

“Why, look who’s popular today,” she said. “Twenty guys, one girl.”

“Shh…” said Cody, reaching up and patting one of her hands. “We’re talking some serious football here.”

“That’s not what I see,” said Danielle. “I see a group of teen males surrounding the lovely Dale Jordan . . . the queen bee. Hard to resist the naked star of yesterday’s assembly, I can tell. Instant popularity, just remove clothes.”

“Don’t be silly, Danielle,” said Cody. “Dale was always popular. Nothing about that changed yesterday.”

“I’m not so sure,” she continued. “How many times have you ever seen a girl with twenty bees buzzing around her in this lunchroom? I think it’s because you all got a good look at her honeypot. Now you just can’t manage to tear yourselves away.”

“I think Danielle’s on to something, guys,” interjected Ward. “This hypothesis should be tested. You have a honeypot, Danielle. Let’s have a look at it. Strip down! If you’re right, the bees will be swarming around you in no time . . . and the phenomenon should continue even after you put your clothes back on, right?”

Danielle scowled at him but didn’t say a word, so Ward continued, “Come on! I know I’m itching to see what you look like without your clothes. What do you say, guys? Should Danielle show us her honeypot? Is it shaved, groomed, or wild?”

There were a few cheers and a little subdued clapping.

“Come on, Cody. Let’s go,” said Danielle in disgust.

“I’m good,” said Cody. “We WERE talking football.”

“Sure you were,” said Danielle, stomping off.

“That was mean guys,” said Dale chuckling.

“She deserved it,” said Nate.

“Yeah, the very idea that we like you just because we got to see your . . . honeypot. Her term, not mine,” said Blake.

“Don’t make me blush guys,” said Dale. “Even I know what the term ‘honeypot’ means. I’m not that naïve. But back to the game. Felipe, you’ve been quiet. Tell me what the game looks like from the position of left tackle. If Cody calls, ‘I.U.D.’ what is your assignment? Rush, or shut down the run up the middle?”

“Depends,” said Felipe.

“Depends on what?” she said. “Teach me. Inspire me! The game can be won from the position of left tackle. We all know that, right guys?” A chorus of agreement went up. Dale continued, “I want to know what Felipe Fuentes is going to do tomorrow to bring the state title to Prospect High. I want it in our trophy case . . . for generations to come. Felipe?”

Before Felipe could answer, everyone was distracted by a commotion near the entrance to the lunchroom. Two uniformed officers had entered and were searching the room with their eyes. Dale’s mother was with them. Suddenly it was apparent that they had seen who they were looking for. One of them was striding toward the table where Dale was sitting, her mother scurrying along behind. Nate recognized both officers. Officer Adams was headed toward them while Officer Kudrow waited respectfully by the entrance.

Once it was completely obvious that the officer was coming for Dale, everyone at her table started booing. Dale stood up, saying, “Shh, guys. It’s all right. They’re only doing their job.”

Officer Adams marched right up to Dale and said in an emotion-free voice, “Miss Jordan, we need you to come with us.”

His military like brusque attitude incited another round of boos that rippled across the lunchroom.

“Shh… Everybody shh…,” said Dale. Holding up her hands, palms facing down, she made the customary patting sign to indicate that she wanted everyone to be quiet. Nate noticed that the booing died down quickly in deference to Dale’s wishes.

“Okay, let’s go,” said Dale boldly leading the way, squeezing Nate’s hand, taking him along with her.

“He doesn’t need to accompany us,” said the young officer resolutely.

Shooting him a poison look, she said, “If I’m coming, he’s coming! He’s not leaving my side!” She walked bravely through the cafeteria, head up proudly, a death grip on Nate’s hand. Nate matched her stride for stride. She needed him, and he intended to be there for her.

Once out in the relative privacy of the hall, Dale’s mother took her arm opposite Nate saying, “Dale, I’m sorry. I put this off as long as I could, but they have a legitimate need for information. They have agreed to try and limit their questions to the remainder of lunch hour, so you can get back to class. And just so you are prepared for the possibility…” she said pausing. “I have yet to talk Mr. McRoberts out of suspending you. Sorry to hit you with that with little or no warning, but at least he is only talking about a three day suspension, one that wouldn’t go on your permanent record. However, I’m still hoping the school board members will override him.”

“You’re kidding,” said Dale plainly startled. “How can that be fair?”

“I know,” said her mother, as they continued walking down the hall toward the offices. “I agree with you. The idea is ridiculous. He keeps coming back to this crazy theory of his that you and Alexa were engaged in some sort of a high-stakes game.”

“He said that before,” replied Dale. “He’s crazy. I didn’t do anything!”

“I know,” replied her mother.

“I’ve thought of an analogy for Mr. McRoberts’ theory,” said Dale. “It’s something we talked about years ago. The notion of hunters as ‘Sportsmen’. The idea that the little deer eating peacefully in the distance somehow has a chance against the man in camo with the high-powered rifle. Just like that deer, I was Alexa’s prey. The stakes may have been high, but there was no game.”

“I know, honey,” said her mother, shaking her head. "At the moment I'm still trying to work with the man. Getting him fired and replaced is another option. I think that it is doable, but it would take time. But just so that you are aware, he's even been wondering aloud about forfeiting the football game."

"What?" said Nate.

"Oh, mom, don't let that happen," pleaded Dale. "It would be so terrible . . . for the school . . . for the town . . . anything but that."

"I know," said her mom. "You wouldn’t be blamed, but you'd forever be associated with it. I don't want you to have to carry that burden. I told Mr. McRoberts that he'd have to leave town in the dead of night . . . like tonight . . . if he were to do that. It's such a bad idea. It punishes thousands for the acts of just a handful."

"Does he even have the authority to do that?" asked Nate.

"I doubt it, but he seems to think he does," said Mrs. Jordan. "But forfeiting the game is not his only crazy idea. Right now we’re going to see him first. He's waiting in his office. This should be quick. Then we'll talk to the police."

"What are we talking to Mr. McRoberts about?" asked Dale. "Suspending me?"

"No, not that, don't even bring that up," said her mother. "But I promised him I wouldn't tell you in advance. So you don't know anything. I'm pretty sure I know how you'll react, but just give him your honest opinion of his proposal."

A minute later Dale, Nate, and Mrs. Jordan were all seated in Mr. McRoberts’ office. Mr. McRoberts had spent a good amount of time telling Dale how sorry he was for what she had been subjected to "on his watch". He didn't admit fault on any level, except to the extent that he had "failed to grasp the risks present in the situation.” To Nate and Dale that seemed evasive at best.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 370: Mr. McRoberts**

"Is there a specific reason you wanted to see me?" asked Dale, hoping to cut to the chase. Mr. McRoberts was long-winded. His empathy seemed genuine enough, but she didn't want to hear him restate it over and over.

"Yes, there is," he admitted. "I've come to realize that you are not the only victim here."

"I'm not?" said Dale in surprise.

"I guess that came out wrong," he said backtracking. "What I'm trying to get at is that everyone in the gym yesterday is struggling to come to terms with what they witnessed. Essentially, they saw one of their own commit a horrendous act, while another one of their own suffered as a direct result."

"Go on," encouraged Mrs. Jordan. She knew what was coming and wanted him to get his idea out on the table.

"Well, I had a summer session on grief counseling a few years back," said Mr. McRoberts. "It was designed specifically around a situation in which a high school suffers multiple student casualties due to a bad car accident . . . something that sadly does happen. That was the example presented there, but the principles were intended to be broadly applicable."

"Mr. McRoberts, as you know we don't have all day," said Mrs. Jordan.

"Right, well what I'd like to do is call an impromptu assembly for later this afternoon . . . instead of sixth period," he said.

“Grief counseling?" asked Dale.

"Sort of, but not really," he continued. "The point would be to show the students that you are all right. Teachers and students are telling me how concerned they are about you Dale . . . concerned for your well-being. So I thought I would talk to everyone, and then you could as well. You could show everyone that you are fine. I think it would go a long way towards helping everyone heal, helping everyone put this behind them."

"I'm fine?" asked Dale.

"Well, I know that you aren't completely unscathed, but look at you," he said. "You're going to school. You're putting on a brave face. You’re getting on with your life."

"So . . . I'm fine?" asked Dale indignantly, raising her voice slightly.

"Well, aren't you?" He asked. "I mean, come on, Dale. Who are we kidding? We both know you're an exhibitionist. Nobody saw any skin yesterday that you wouldn't have willingly shown them."

"So, what were all the compassionate remarks just as we entered? You actually sounded as if you were sorry about what happened," said Dale.

"Are you saying you're not an exhibitionist?" asked Mr. McRoberts. Dale didn't respond so he continued, "Please, let's just discuss this assembly idea. I think it would be very good for the Prospect High community as a whole. I know how much the school, the student body means to you. I told your mother today how I told you recently that I consider you the de facto Student Body President."

"He did," said her mother, leaning toward her, pride in her eyes.

"You just don't get it, do you, Mr. McRoberts?" said Dale. "You think that this was no big deal for me because I happen to have a comfort level with my body . . . unlike that of other girls. You really don't get it!" After taking a deep breath, she continued, her voice raised due to her heightened excitement, "I mean, I like kissing my boyfriend, Nate. So, since I like kissing, I shouldn't be bothered if another man forcibly kisses me, right? Do you need to hear the rape analogy?"

"No, I don't,” said Mr. McRoberts.

"Well, I think you need to," said Dale. "Because you still don't get it. If a woman loves her husband and enjoys sex with him…"

"I get it!” said Mr. McRoberts, attempting to keep her from continuing.

"Listen to me," she insisted. "…since she enjoys sex, should she be okay with another man forcibly having sex with her . . . raping her?"

"You've made your point, Dale," he said. "I guess you're not ready to talk to the student body and tell them that you're all right."

"Because I'm not all right, God dammit! Look at my wrists, Mr. McRoberts. See this!" she insisted, holding up her bruised arms. "Have you ever been deprived of your freedom by someone with ill intent? You better believe I was scared. I had everything short of my life taken from me . . . taken from me in front of everyone I know . . . my clothes . . . my privacy . . . my ability to talk, to yell for help . . . my ability to move. It was a life-changing experience. It's a feeling I'll never forget. I'm sure the nightmares will come. Just because I'm tough and putting on a brave face, don't think for a moment that I'm fine."

“Okay, okay,” said Mr. McRoberts.

“Don’t ‘okay, okay’ me!” said Dale. “You got me started, so now you need to hear me out. My bruises are nothing, but they are what I can show. They’ll heal, they’ll be gone, but all the rest won’t . . . it won’t ever be gone. This all-out assault was designed to destroy me completely. Alexa tried to brutally rip away my future, not only my future here at Prospect High, but my entire future. The stigma of what happened yesterday will be with me for the rest of my life. She wanted to extinguish my spirit to live . . . teens have killed themselves for far less. In one fell swoop she sought to take my social standing, my ability to attend this school and to live in this town, all my relationships, and all my education and job prospects.

“Even if I’m, ‘putting on a brave face and getting on with my life,’ as you say, I face a lot of challenges. These photos will always be out there, tagged with my essentially unique name. Dale Jordan is hardly Emily Smith. Things aren’t like they used to be back when you were my age. I’ll never have a coworker, employer, or acquaintance who has not seen me tied spread eagle on a horse. My children will see these photos. And you think I can stand up in front of my classmates and tell everyone that I’m ‘All Right’?” asked Dale trying to calm down. “I am a tough cookie. I’m not suicidal. I’ve got family. I’ve got Nate. I’ll come back from this, but it won’t be easy.”

"Well, no assembly then," said Mr. McRoberts. "Without you there is no point. I could talk, but there's nothing I could say that would be meaningful . . . especially in light of all that you have just said."

"What did I tell you?" said Mrs. Jordan.

"Well, you did tell me she wouldn't be ready to talk about this to a large group," said Mr. McRoberts. "But you weren't nearly as convincing as your daughter."

"Maybe that's because she wasn't stripped, gagged, bound and put on display?” interjected Dale.

"She's right, you know," said her mother, looking over sympathetically at her daughter. "The rest of us can only try and imagine what that must have been like."

There was a knock on the door and Miss Hastings, an administrative assistant, stuck her head in. "Sorry to interrupt," she said. "But Officer Kudrow would like a word with you, Mr. McRoberts. He says it's important."

While Mr. McRoberts was out, Dale's mother kneeled next to Dale and hugged her. "I'm so sorry about what you went through. My heart breaks hearing you talk about it like that, but I am so proud of you. You've got a lot of spunk. I know what you went through was awful . . . beyond awful . . . and you’ll face many challenges . . . but I'm glad to see that it didn't break you."

"She is amazing," said Nate. "But she gets it from you, Mrs. Jordan. What a pair!"

"Thanks, Nate," said Mrs. Jordan, obviously appreciating being compared to her daughter.

After Mr. McRoberts had again taken his seat, he started laughing.

"I presume you're going to tell us what's so funny," said Dale's mother.

"Well, you have all heard that Alexa is now in custody," he said. Seeing that they were all nodding, he continued, "Well, Officer Kudrow tells me that she is being questioned as we speak. She has named her accomplices . . . all of them," he said.

"She has?" said Dale in surprise.

"That's what he tells me," said Mr. McRoberts. "Does that worry you, Dale?"

"It just surprises me," she replied.

"Thought you had an agreement, did you?” he asked.

"What?" said Dale.

"Alexa has told them that just the two of you did this . . . all by yourselves," he said. "I was thinking that it must have taken a large number to strip you and tie you down against your will. However, Alexa WOULD have been able to manage everything all by herself if YOU stripped yourself and climbed up on the Maverick to assist her."

Dale's jaw fell open and she stared at Mr. McRoberts in disbelief. Of course that is what Alexa would claim, she realized. She couldn’t believe that she hadn’t anticipated that.

"That's not at all what happened," said Dale. "Mom, tell him," she added, turning to her mother for support.

"You know Alexa's lying, Mr. McRoberts," said Dale's mother firmly.

"I don't know what to believe anymore, Beth," he said shaking his head. "But this would explain a lot. One girl could obviously tie another if she were not resisting."

"That's not at all what happened, and you know it," said Dale.

"Well, Dale," said Mr. McRoberts. "If Alexa's lying, then maybe this is a lesson for you. A lesson about what can happen if you avoid talking to the police. They've only heard one side of the story, and need I remind you how persuasive Alexa can be? If you don't start telling your side of the story soon, she'll end up being the victim and you'll be the one doing time."

"You're out of line," said Mrs. Jordan raising her voice.

"Calm down, Beth," he said. "I never said I believed what Alexa is allegedly telling the police. I now realize that she'd of course say that. She's out to get Dale. We all know that. And what better way would there be to protect her accomplices than to say that there were none, I mean . . . other than Dale? I guess it just goes to show that you can't let your guard down when Alexa is gunning for you." He stood up. "The police are ready to hear your side of the story, Dale. I suggest you tell it to them, including naming those involved."