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Bully For Her

Written by BlueKittyTales on commission for SaltirePhoenix.

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Part 3 – Black Maria

“Are you fucking kidding me?” cried Freya. “I’ve really got to do this?”

“You’ll do fine.” said Johnny’s voice at the end of the phone. “They know you’re coming.”

“I’m inside now, no thanks to you.” said Freya.

“You know what you have to do, don’t you?”

“Yes I do. I just want Denise back.”

“And you know what’s at stake if you don’t. You’ll do it for as long as I want you to, moo moo. Don’t fuck this up, or you know what will happen.” He abruptly hung up. She looked around her. How could it have come to this? She was now inside the rear corridor of a strip club, and it looked as seedy as it did degrading, the bright neon lights and the many punters and strippers only strengthening the deep disgust welling up inside her. *How could you reduce me to this?* she thought miserably, beginning to sniffle to herself as she approached the row of dressing rooms.

She wanted to flee the club as fast as she could. But something stopped her. Her feet wouldn’t respond and soon she knew why. There came an image in her mind that shook her to the core. She imagined Denise sitting tied up somewhere, pleading with Johnny or whoever he’d roped into this for her life. She couldn’t bear the thought of her being snuffed out, especially not as the result of someone like him. *I can’t run away now.* she thought. *If I do...I can’t be responsible for Denise dying. She deserves her life...and I can’t let him take that away from her. I’ve got to save her or wreck my own life or die trying to.*

She knocked on the second door, and the creature who opened it looked rather interested in her. She was a scantily clad wolf with white fur whose long muzzle barely showed the layer of lipstick she wore, an appearance broken only by the nearly knee length boots she had on.

“You’re Freya, right?” she said in a high pitched, silky voice.

“Yes.” she said unenthusiastically. “That’s my name. What’s yours?”

“Anything you want it to be, beautiful.” purred the wolf, swinging her hips and her tail. Freya folded her arms. “Okay, okay. My name’s Sandy. Your agent told us you were coming.” Freya’s eyes sprang open at this description. “There’s an art to it, Freya. Haven’t you ever seen a movie? You’re there to get the punters turned on and make a bit of money for yourself and the club.” Freya nodded, showing she understood. “Uh-huh. Training’s not going to be necessary for you though. Your agent said you had plenty of experience at your last place.”

“Johnny said that?”

“That’s the guy.” *I should have known.* she thought, her heart sinking. *I don’t know how he’s convinced this lot, but they think I’m one of their own now.* “You transferred from the Pink Silicon club, right?” She went to call her out on this, but bit her tongue. *I’ve got no choice. I have to play along.*

“That’s right.”

“That’s a good club, so I’m sure you know your way around. Our boss hasn’t met you yet ‘cause she’s got a lot of office work to do tonight. But this club has a lot of creatures come and go.”

“Why’s that?”

"The club's got a high standard for pole dancing, waitressing and private performances, and you'd be amazed how many guys and girls don't make the cut. The club's a higher calibre than that one could ever be." *What's the fucking difference between them?* she thought bitterly. *They're just seedy establishments, and my business has plenty of experience with them.* "From what that Johnny guy was saying, you'll do just fine."

"I hope so." said Freya, feeling revolted saying this. "I've never been a waitress before."

"You'll probably be asked to show some leg on the first run." *I'll have to do this, even if it is just for this sicko's twisted enjoyment.* she thought. *But I don't know where he is now. If he's here, that's even worse.* There then came a sudden knock on the door.

"Sandy, it's me. You're due on stage in five." said the voice on the other side, shrill and high pitched. It was not a voice that Freya recognised, but she assumed this to be the club's boss.

"I'm almost there, Zara." said Sandy. "I'm just showing the new girl the ropes."

"Ah, that Freya chick?" drawled Zara. "You don't need to worry about that. Where she's come from is a good place to be."

"I'm on my way." She turned to Freya with a smile that looked fond. "I'll see you on the stage. They're going to love you out there. Swing those hips for me, okay?" And with that, Sandy left, nudging the door shut with one thrust of her pelvis. Once she was certain she was alone, she looked all around the dressing room. Walls painted a deep magenta, a screen with a miniskirt hanging over it, a dressing table adorned with various beauty products and with several bras dangling from it, a clothing rail with many outfits that left barely anything to the imagination...she had never imagined she would end up in a place like this.

She began to feel sick at the prospect of having to dance in front of so many creatures, none of whom she was sure were the kind of creatures she wanted to spend very long around. The mere thought of any of them recognising her made her feel like vomiting. Her eyes stung and she began to cry to herself again, tears matting into her facial fur. *I'm finished.* she thought. She couldn't remember any time other than when she'd had to flee from America when she'd felt so miserable. *If anyone sees me here and then at the office, my career and my business are ruined. Why the hell couldn't Johnny have just stolen my car instead? He didn't have to get Denise involved.*

Gritting her teeth at the reminder of Denise, she changed out of her clothing. If she was going to do this, she realised, then she had to be as convincing as possible, disgusted though she felt about the whole ordeal. But just as she'd put on a matching sapphire blue bra, panties and miniskirt, she spotted a half empty bottle of vodka glinting in the wardrobe. And it was sitting just behind a pair of open toed high heeled shoes that were the same tone of deep blue as her clothing. She reached for it, feeling the urge to swig from it, but she thought better of it. *That's probably Sandy's.* she thought. *She'll notice if any of it's gone.*

She put on the heels, and she found that they were a perfect fit for her. *It's like someone besides the creatures in this place knew I was coming.* she thought dourly. She looked at herself in the mirror at the other side of the room. Looking back at her was a cow who, in any other circumstance, would have been ready to sweep Denise off her feet, but instead was as degraded as a rusted sheet of iron. But a sudden voice interrupted her train of thought.

"You're due on stage, Freya." called Zara. "You coming? I've got shit to do in the back office."

"I'm on my way out."

"You know what you've got to do from your past experience, my dear. The punters are waiting for their bovine princess. As I'm sure you know, tonight will be a way to determine whether your dancing and your waitressing are up to snuff." *Oh, sure.* she thought angrily, wanting to come out and slap her in the face for this. *You just have to fucking rub it in, don't you?* Turning away from her reflection, she left the room, not bothering to close the door behind her. It was only then that she got a quick glance at Zara just before she went into her office. She was a thin, almost skeletal human woman with a mane of black hair, and she wore a green dress that hugged what little there was of her figure. What sort of face she had, she never saw, but she was certain she'd recognise her later.

She made her way to the club's main floor, trying her best to mimic the motions of the other dancer in front of her heading the same way. The loud, pounding electronic music stung her ears, and she wondered how anyone, erotic dancer or otherwise, could dance to it. She saw Sandy approaching one of the stages near the

bar area, tilting her head back and releasing a long howl as her audience greeted and whistled at her, much to their evident delight. At one of the other poles, she saw a pair of clearly very drunk canine women throwing banknotes at the only male dancer currently performing, who she saw was a muscular husky wearing nothing but a pair of boxer shorts.

She couldn't bring herself to smile as she came out into the open, but this didn't dampen the spirits of the many creatures waiting eagerly for her. Two feline women sitting at the bar area whirled around in their stools to cheer her on, while a group of men sitting at the table next to the pole, one of whom she noticed was a bull, cheered and hooted, and she heard someone in the background send a wolf whistle her way. While part of her was reassured to know that they didn't consider her ugly, the rest of her did all it could to contain her urge to shudder at the thought of what Denise would say and do if she found out where she had gone. What's more, she was weary at the sight of the bull.

"Hey sexy!" he crowed. "I like the way you're looking tonight!" Freya met eyes with him as she climbed up onto the stage. Now that she got a closer look at him, she felt a slight sliver of relief when she saw this wasn't Johnny, this bull being much less muscular and having light grey fur. Feeling a wave of unease, she forced her expression into a smile that looked and felt painful. Despite her not feeling it was convincing, it still proved enough to evoke delighted crowing from each of the men. Before she'd even grabbed the pole, one of them laid a banknote on the stage.

Aware of the eyes on her, she felt around her miniskirt for a pocket. Not finding any, she slipped it into her bra, the only place she was sure it wouldn't fall out. *I can't believe I just did that.* she thought, her heart plummeting. She met eyes with the bull again, and he was eager to see much more of her than her clothing was already revealing. *They think I'm attractive.* she thought, surprised when Sandy glanced her way during her pole dancing and winked at her. *At least it means they won't boo me out of here. I hope all of this will be enough for me to get Denise back.*

"Are you ready for this?" she said as affectionately as she could. Without waiting for the ecstatic shouted answer, she crouched down, running her rear along the pole. One of the bull's friends tossed another banknote her way, and when she straightened her legs again, she turned around, thrusting her breasts into the pole and brushing them up and down its length, her smile briefly contorting into a scowl.

Aware of the lights above her starting to follow her every move, she momentarily stopped and brushed herself down with one hand while gripping the pole with the other. Then, in a motion that got those watching her crowing, she leaned back and allowed gravity to take her head as she mounted the pole, crossing her legs around it and letting her mane of hair drop. Next, she took her hand off the pole and allowed herself to hang inverted, her miniskirt revealing her panties. She found herself frowning again when she spotted the group of men staring.

"Yoo-hoo! You're making our nights!" cried one of the bull's friends. She felt her cheeks begin to blush, even when one of them, a lanky green frog, got up to leave.

"Hey guys, I've gotta use the phone." he said to his friends, before he approached Freya. "Room 114 at the King Raleigh Hotel. How about it, love?" he proposed, leaving his half finished glass of cranberry juice on the table. Freya watched him leave before she spotted a shadowy figure in the distance. It looked like... *no, it can't be! He surely can't be here!* In her panic, she uncoiled her legs from the pole too early, and tumbled to the stage and landed on her head with a thump. The music kept going, although the lights fell on her, fully revealing her crumpled form as she tried to recover. She half expected everyone to start laughing, but instead, the bull looked concerned.

"You okay?" he asked. "You're not hurt, are you?" *At least this guy's not a total bastard.* she thought. Mustering up all the courage she could, she said the first thing that came into her head once she got back to her feet.

"I'm alright, sugar." she said softly, as she reached for him and cupped his chin into her hand. His friends each reacted with loud cheering, with one of them chugging down the rest of his beer before he gave a loud whoop. *I can't believe I just did that.* she thought.

"It's in the bag now, Jamie! She wants ya!" he crowed, before he headed to the bar and ordered another. Showing the group a tender smile, she stroked the bull's cheek before she eased away from him. With that, she worked her way back to the pole and arched her back, straightening out her leg and curving the other around it. She looked past her audience for a moment. The shrouded figure that had been there before had vanished. Where it was, if it had been there to begin with, she couldn't say. Who it was...she thought it might

have been Johnny, but now, she wasn't sure even of that. Was her desperation creating its own illusions inside her brain?

She whirled around, hugging the pole as if it was another creature. Briefly she imagined she was cradling Denise in her arms, and found herself not wanting to let go as she thrust her rear towards the patrons. Another banknote, and then one more was laid onto the stage, and when the frog returned sipping from a bottle of alcopop, he watched her with a wide smile as she thrust her breasts in his direction. Next, when she noticed that a pair of cheetahs had sat down at the table behind them, she crossed her wrists across each other and bent her arms around the pole, giving the impression that invisible hands had tied her to it as she slowly knelt down. This won her another banknote.

She wondered how much longer she had to keep this up, finding herself mentally going back to where Denise could possibly be now. She crouched down to the floor and was bracing herself as the frog tried to get closer to her, wincing when she saw his sticky tongue flick out momentarily. She found herself unable to return his adoring smile, and soon his faded also. But then his face lit up like a candle when she reached out for his hand and began to stroke it as though it was his mane of hair, drawing both applause and cheers from the group of men.

For a brief moment, she wondered about the possibility of pulling him up onto the stage and allowing him to dance with her...a split second before she realised how deeply she was getting into the act. No longer did it feel as humiliating, or indeed as degrading, as it did when she first began. Perhaps she could even change her career path...*no, what the hell am I thinking?* she scolded herself. *Throw away everything I've built for this? You must be kidding. But this isn't so bad. My ordeal will be over soon.*

In the end, she released her hand from his, not wanting to risk the ire of the other dancers. She knew from a previous case where a strip club had been one of her business' lines of investigation that if a new dancer did something that outlandish, there was a chance of at least one other performer seeing this as a territorial grab. By now, she wanted to wrap this dance up as fast as she could so that she could go and find Denise.

With that, she twirled into the pole, and raised her left leg as high as it would go. She could feel herself involuntarily spreading without even trying to, and she feared that her panties wouldn't be able to stand it any longer. Nonetheless, the men stood up and applauded her as she showed them a smile that was more enthusiastic than she felt, each of them tipping her handsomely before she left the stage. If this was what the men before her had come here for that evening, then she hoped that it was enough to at least get close to sating them.

"You'll be in my dreams tonight, sweetheart." purred the frog.

"Yeah, I'm with him, madam. You're really sexy!" said the bull.

"Stick around for us, alright?" grinned one of their friends, a big, beefy raccoon adorned with an off colour suit. She turned to face them, her hips swaying with her every step.

"See you around." she said simply, flashing them a smile and a wink as they cheered once more.

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As she slowly walked back to the dressing rooms, her head was spinning. On the one hand, she'd successfully charmed a group of complete strangers, something she had never thought she would be able to do. Though she had never considered herself the most beautiful creature alive, she couldn't deny that she felt a little more confident about her appearance than she did before. But on the other hand, she hoped they would all be too drunk by the end of the evening to remember her, even though none of the creatures in the club had appeared to recognise her at all. If someone she knew was there tonight, then there was a chance she would lose everything.

Sandy was nowhere to be found, even though she could scent her. But Freya only had time to quickly run a brush through her hair when Zara suddenly popped out of the office. Her face looked quite stern.

"Begging your pardon, Freya," she said, "but you're not supposed to be taking those clothes off yet. You still have your waitressing duties." Freya blushed. She'd completely forgotten about them in her haste to put on her show.

"Shit," she muttered, "that must have completely slipped my mind." Zara stared.

"Is something the matter, Freya?" asked Zara.

"No, I'm alright." said Freya. "Sorry. I've just been through a lot lately. But I don't really want to talk about it." *I hope she isn't going to ask me about what's happened today.* she thought.

"I see." said Zara, not sounding convinced. "Well, I've got to get back to work. You'll do fine out there. Fluffy rabbit ears are in all the wardrobes." And before Freya could say anything more, she whirled around on a foot and headed straight back into her office, locking the door behind her. Freya wasn't quite sure what she was supposed to do.

"It can't be that hard." she said, thinking out loud. "I've been to plenty of restaurants. It's just a matter of taking orders." *Don't forget you've got to make these creatures want to have sex with you as well.* the voice in her mind reminded her. This brought a heavy sigh from her throat.

"Fucking shit," she muttered to herself, "how long does Johnny want me to do this?" Deciding not to don the ears, she headed back to the main room, but she was unaware of someone popping their head out of one of the rooms behind her.

"I'd better tell Zara about this."

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Freya was ready to expect the unexpected at just about every turn, given the night was still young. And she barely reached the bar area before she attracted her first order of the evening. The barman, a young looking human who couldn't be any older than his mid 20s, watched her stoically, but when he spoke, his voice was loud and booming.

"Your first order's up, Freya." he said, handing her a small slip.

"Four white wine spritzers." she read to herself. "Which table? It doesn't say on here."

"Table five, just over there." he said, pointing at the same table that had been in front of her stage and presenting her with the tray. She took it and headed over, finding the table now populated with a quartet of women, each a different species of canine.

"Your spritzers, ladies?" she said, managing a small smile. Three of them greeted her cheerfully, although one of them, a grey Great Dane, looked at her sourly, like a human child being given the food they hated the most.

"I thought we were gonna get a man serving our drinks?" she commented as each woman took their glasses.

"Now, now," said another of them, a long nosed wolf who rather resembled Sandy, "let's not criticise this lady to death. She's got a job to do. Isn't that right, lass?"

"Yeah."

"Let me just say," said a third woman, a terrier whose nose seemed to always be twitching, "you're doing a great job tonight. I saw your dancing just now. My ex would have loved watching you."

"Hey, thanks a lot." said Freya. "That makes it all worthwhile."

"Freya, order up!" called the barman.

"Coming. Enjoy your drinks." The wolf tipped her before she headed off and took another tray, this one having a bottle of red wine and four glasses, which she took to a trio of suited businessmen, all of them humans. However, only one of them seemed to know she existed, for the only interaction she got out of them was a sizeable tip he slipped into her cleavage. *Not fucking funny.* she thought angrily. She watched for a moment as they went back to talking about their business deal, before the barman called out to her again.

"We've got someone who specifically requested you, Freya." said the barman. "You're starting to get popular here already!"

"Have they ordered anything?"

"He wants you to go to his table first. He's at number three." She headed over, but when she arrived, she froze, as though winter had come back in the blink of an eye. It was that shadowy figure again. And this time, he looked unmistakably familiar. A feline woman was sitting next to him, and she had clearly already had a lot of wine judging from the empty bottle on the table. *No*, she thought, *you cannot be serious*.

"Having a good evening, Freya?" hooted Johnny.

"I should have known it was you." said Freya bitterly.

"That's not a very nice way to talk to the punters." said Johnny obsequiously.

"You think that's funny?"

"Ooh, getting edgy, are we?" grinned Johnny. "I see you're getting quite an audience. They like you here."

"I am only here because of you." said Freya pointedly.

"You were right about this one, eh?" said the feline. Her speech was slurred and her breath stank of alcohol.

"Well, you'd better hope you'll be able to keep your new audience after I've ruined you." It took every ounce of her self control not to smash the empty wine bottle over his head for this remark. He had her stolen money, he had the woman she loved, and now he wanted to take away what little dignity she had left? She could scarcely believe the nerve of this man.

"You're really pushing it." she snarled through gritted teeth. "Tell me where Denise is!"

"To show you what a nice guy I am," said Johnny, "I'll hold up my end of this bargain. But first, get me two beers like a good girl. And give this lady here the cheapest champagne this place has got while you're at it. Work up a good swing of that ass, Freya baby." Enraged though she was by this, she knew she didn't have a choice but to bite her tongue. Sighing heavily, she headed to the bar. When she returned with his drinks and set down the tray, his first move was to grab one of the beer tankards and drain it one third of the way.

"Ah, that's better." he said. "Mouth was a bit dry. And I have to hand it to you, Freya – I owe you a lot of congratulations."

"What for?"

"Showing your true colours." he grinned. "You still have feelings for me, do you?"

"After you cheated on me?" said Freya, barely able to believe he'd ask her this. "Do you think I'm stupid?"

"I know the signs. You looked my way while you were dancing." Freya's eyes sprang open on realisation. *So you were here*. she thought. *You've been here this entire time, haven't you?* "Nothing but a whore, and I knew I could get it to come out sometime." She wanted to launch into a violent frenzy and beat him to a pulp, but for what it was worth, she remained still. It felt like nerve impulses were travelling to her limbs but somehow getting lost on the way. As though to taunt her further, he drank the rest of his beer in one gulp.

"There's another matter at hand." he said. "Your colleague."

"Where is she?" demanded Freya, rising from her seat.

"She's in a shipping container I rented from a guy at that pub we met in earlier. I forget what its name is now." he said. "I never even saw the guy's face, but I know his name. He never pulled his hoodie down." Instinctively, Freya made to run, but Johnny was quick to notice this.

"Oh no you don't, moo moo." he said. "I'm not finished with you yet." The woman next to him gave what sounded like empty headed laughter, before letting out a loud belch. Freya sat back down, not daring to take his eyes off him. *Whatever he's planning now, at least she's out of it for tonight. She won't remember anything tomorrow.*

"I can't wait until I get back to America. I've got a plane to catch first thing in the morning, so let's make this quick."

"You've run out of time to pay your creditors, haven't you?" guessed Freya aloud. Johnny simply ignored her answer, but this told her everything she needed to know.

"Soon I'll have it made, and it's all thanks to your generous contribution to the Johnny Campbell coffers. And it starts with the briefcase. But before I leave you, maybe I'll share something with you." He whipped out a small video camera. When she made the connection, she began to feel sick.

"Have you...?"

"Arrwe...genna movie?" said the woman. Her words were so slurred, Freya barely understood what she was saying.

"I'm not paying you to talk." snapped Johnny. Freya stared at her.

"I know why she's here." snapped Freya. "Pile her with drink so she'll agree with anything you say? That's not going to sway me. She's not like the dim witted Southern trash you ran off with."

"How insightful." said Johnny dismissively, looking like he was trying to contain the urge to laugh in her face. "A big well done to you, Freya. I knew you had it in you."

"I've done what you wanted, so just –"

"Wait until your family sees what their daughter has become since the day she left." gloated Johnny as he grabbed the other beer glass and took a sip, his grin getting even wider until he finally chuckled.

"Don't you *dare* talk about my family!" snarled Freya. "You've already done enough!"

"Not quite. Soon, they'll get to see that Freya Maxwell has fallen further from grace than they ever could have imagined. Reduced from a footballer's wife to nothing but a dirty fucking whore, just like the rest of these shitbags." He cast his hand all around the club. "I'll have it all once I get back, all thanks to your generous contribution."

"You really are something else entirely." said Freya. "Is this seriously how far you'd go to prove a point?"

"You bet it is." smirked Johnny, gladly holding the video camera above his head. "And it doesn't stop there. You get the glory of making me even more money too once I've paid off my debts, once I get this video onto the Internet. There's gonna be plenty of men who –" But before he could finish, Freya spotted three dark figures approaching in the limited light behind him, and in mid flow, one of them stepped forward and grabbed his video camera out of his hands.

"You." snapped the figure. "Filming of the performers is strictly prohibited on these premises. And I managed to get that written into law in my home country." Freya was surprised at the sight before her. The figure came into the light and revealed herself as a tall and imposing dragoness adorned with black and silver scales, with a mane of jade hair and horns poking through it. The suit she wore barely concealed her wide hips or her very large breasts, and in the shadows of her huge wings were two burly and muscular huskies wearing identical black suits, who Freya guessed were either her bodyguards or two of the club's bouncers. And the dragoness looked like she was ready to blow her stack. Johnny, however, burst out laughing again.

"Oh, that's *really* original, Freya." he scoffed.

"You think I called her here?"

"You're not seriously trying to tell me that you think a dragon will scare me, are you?"

"I don't even know who this dragon is!"

"Yeah, *sure* you don't." Johnny turned to the dragoness, who had smoke starting to billow from her nostrils. "Hey lady, who the hell do you think you are? That's *my* video camera! Security!"

"Listen, you," snarled the dragoness, "my name's Brenda Chesterfield. This is my club, and I want to know why you think you can just drag someone here and make her dance against her will!"

"What, I'm supposed to bow down to you and treat you like a fucking queen?"

"I own this club. And what I say goes." snapped Brenda. "And I know what's going on." Johnny remained silent, and Freya anticipated what was coming next. "I was nearby when Zara called me. There was no transfer from another club at all, was there? I don't know how you did it, but you and your contacts had my staff fooled." Despite seemingly being cornered, Johnny wasn't the least bit moved.

"The game's up, Johnny." said Freya. But Johnny continued on as though she'd never said anything.

"You can't scare me." he said derisively. "Now run along, draggy. I hear they're building a city for you to rampage through somewhere." Brenda was incensed, the smoke drifting from her nostrils thickening.

"You think this is a joke?" she snapped. "I won't have this going on in one of my clubs."

"Well, this is a strip club, lady." said Johnny. "You sound like you're even more unhinged than Freya here." Freya's ears twitched at the sound of Brenda giving a low pitched growl.

"You want to know how I got the nickname Beautiful Beast?" She gestured to the bouncers on either side of her. "Boys, you might want to stand back."

"What are you doing?" cried one of the huskies.

"Just watch. He'll get the idea." They did so, and Freya recoiled in utter amazement when Brenda breathed a narrow column of apple green flames into the air straight ahead of her. It formed into the shape of a dragon's head before it vanished into nothingness. Freya was awed at the sight. She had never known that the manipulation of the elements in this way was possible. However, Johnny still wasn't impressed.

"Watch this, Freya." he smiled. "I don't know who the hell she thinks she is, but I bet she'll calm down after a few drinks. Won't you, sweetheart?" Finally, Brenda snapped.

"I've had about enough of this shit!" she barked when she noticed him reaching for her breasts despite warning growls from the suited huskies. "You really think you're nature's gift to women? I doubt you've ever met a woman like me." When he started to fondle her chest, she rolled up her right sleeve and breathed her flames directly onto her bracelet, and then grabbed hold of his hand and clamped it onto the hot metal, causing him to scream in agony as he tried all he could to get away. This drew shocked stares from all around the club, and even the dancers stopped their performances to see where the scream was coming from. Jubilant though Freya felt inside at seeing his pain, she sat watching the spectacle in utter shock until the dragoness let him go, leaving him to clutch his burnt hand as she held the video camera out of his reach.

"You fucking psycho!" roared Johnny. "What did you do to me?"

"What'd she do, honey?" slurred the woman next to him as she finished his beer for him, before she belched again and finally fell asleep where she sat.

"You two," she directed the bouncers, "I want this pompous American prick made an example of for this. Take him into the back and get him into something matching his accent." She showed a grin that bore her serrated teeth. "Zara will handle the rest. Know what I mean?" She winked at the bouncers, who both nodded and set upon Johnny when he tried feebly to run away from them, still groaning and shaking his burnt hand. Freya watched with a smile as he was quickly overwhelmed, before being dragged through to the dressing rooms. She met eyes with the dragoness as she pulled out a radio from her skirt pocket, not knowing what to say.

"Zara, this is Beautiful Beast." said Brenda into the radio. "You've got a temporary addition to your line up of dancers just for tonight. He's on his way in now."

"Received. I'll help him get ready." replied Zara. She pocketed the device and turned to Freya.

"Freya," said Brenda, "please allow me to extend my heartfelt apologies for what you were subjected to on these premises. It sickens me knowing this was happening in a club that's a part of my empire." Freya was dumbstruck. She hadn't expected this at all from her.

"You run a chain of strip clubs?"

"That's right." said Brenda. "I started in South Triston with nothing but the sizeable contents of my bra. You can stare if you want. I get it all the time." Brenda chuckled to herself as she squared her shoulders, making

her breasts jiggle. Freya couldn't help but stare momentarily. "This business began as a way to cope with my brother's murder, but then I realised that since I hadn't been lucky in love, I could bring pleasure to others."

"I'm sorry about your brother." said Freya earnestly.

"It's alright." said Brenda. "But I think he would have loved a chance to run these clubs alongside me, now that I think about it. He was a good man, and while some guys brag about being good with girls, he was amazing with *ladies*. He knew how to charm the classy ones, and I gave him a few points on how. But at least the fucker who killed him suffered in the end."

"Well, I wish I'd had the chance to meet him." said Freya. "At times like this, I'm glad there is still justice out there."

"I'm with you on that one." agreed Brenda. "You would have liked him. After the first club took off, the lure of expanding my business was too much for me to resist. Now, my business owns clubs in about two dozen countries across the globe. This is the most recent one I set up in and I've entered a deal to convert an abandoned youth club in Ireland. But, back to the more important matter of you."

"I want to thank you for getting me out of this." said Freya, extending her hand, which Brenda shook. "He's already taken so much from me."

"Any time, Freya." said Brenda. "I was dealing with a security incident in another of my clubs nearby when this one's manager called me. I sensed you were here against your will. She said she'd found out that the club this man's associates told her you'd come from had no idea who you were. If we can make it up to you in any way, Zara has already notified the police. And I can make sure they charge him once he's finished his performance." *What a stupid plan.* she thought. *Did he actually think he was untouchable?*

"Let's see how he likes it, huh?" said Freya with a grin.

"He'll see what it really is to be humiliated like you were." agreed Brenda. She gently shook the camera as though to drive home the point. "I normally don't use my fire on others unless I have to. But justice is a wonderful thing, especially when someone deserves it as much as he does. My clubs require consent from every party, particularly as for some of my business' employees, it's their sole means of making their living." At that moment, one of the staff members returned holding several items.

"Brenda," he said, "here's what we found on that bull."

"Thank you, David." said Brenda. "Just leave them on the table." He did so and left. Revealed were Johnny's car keys, his wallet, a camera memory card, two USB flash drives and his mobile phone. Freya's face lit up. Johnny hadn't been holding the suitcase containing Peyton's money, and if he'd left it in his car and it hadn't been broken into, she could still get it back.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about getting a conviction." she said as she surveyed the items. "He's already out of time. He's got some dangerous creatures after him, and he's leaving the country tomorrow. I've got a feeling they might be waiting for him once he gets back to America." Brenda smiled before she swapped over the memory card in the video camera.

"That would explain a few things." she said. "Still, if you ever fall on hard times or you want to dance again, you're always welcome back. There are almost always vacancies available."

"I don't think that'll be necessary." said Freya.

"I understand." said Brenda. "But if you should ever change your mind, or you want to bring a date along, there are plenty of places you can go." She drew a business card from the inside of her suit. Freya took it and put it with the banknotes inside her bra.

"And before you go," she added, "maybe you should have this." She gave her the memory card. "If he ever sees this video camera again, at least he can't ruin your life like he said he wanted to."

"Thank you very much." said Freya appreciatively. She wanted to hug this dragoness and never let her go, but, feeling it inappropriate, instead shook her hand again, feeling her claws digging into her fingers.

“Get yourself home, or wherever it is you need to go.” said Brenda. “Perhaps we’ll meet again someday. In the meantime, you may keep the outfit. I’ll reimburse Zara for it. It looks good on you too, if I do say so myself, so consider it a gift.”

“I don’t know what I should say to that.”

“You don’t need to. Your self proclaimed agent won’t bother you again. I’ll make sure of it.”

“Let go, you fucking mongrel!” protested an all too familiar voice suddenly. Johnny had his arms bound by the huskies, and he was in a highly revealing Texan cowboy outfit that was adorned with various tones of pink and white, complete with tassels on the minitop. This drew mocking laughter from many of the punters and two of the dancers. With that, Freya took the car keys and started to walk away as the bouncers forced him up onto the very same stage she had performed on.

“Freya!” he called. “Don’t leave me here! Please! Help me!” But Freya was not in any mood for mercy.

“Start filming, Brenda.” she called. “There’s plenty of shady porn sites who will eat his dancing up.”

“With pleasure, my dear.” said Brenda slyly. “I’ve got time before I have to go back to my other club. Perhaps I’ll have a photo or two to show you too.” Freya couldn’t help but giggle at the thought. After watching him start to reluctantly dance on the command of the punters, she left as fast as she possibly could, not wanting to spend another second of her life in his company.

When she got into the crowded car park, she looked at the badge on the car keys. Identifying his car proved to be fairly easy, for the brand was not well known in the country. And she couldn’t hide her delight when, on the vehicle’s rear seats, was the suitcase containing the many thousands she had stolen from Peyton. For a moment, she wondered what the politician was doing right now and whether he’d caught on to what was happening. But she soon put it out of her mind. The sooner this money was returned to its rightful owner, the better.

“You’re finished now, Johnny boy.” she said, unlocking the rear door and grabbing the suitcase before she rushed to her own car and threw it into the boot. She briefly opened the case, and to her relief, its contents had remained undisturbed. Throwing on her coat and shoving the banknotes in her bra into its pockets, she raced out as quickly as she possibly could, thoughts of Denise’s fate hanging in the balance clouding her head. *Denise needs me.* she thought frantically. *The sooner I find her, the better. I can’t wait until his debtors rip his throat out.*

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Where was she now? She didn’t know, yet she didn’t think she’d been moved. What was happening around her? She couldn’t tell. She could hear no voices and her surroundings were shrouded in darkness. She was in a sitting position and her bruises and her wounds still stung. All of her clothing was gone, and she was shivering from the cold. How she cursed her body for its cold bloodedness and the way it reacted to sharply dropping ambient temperatures. Her limbs were completely immobilised, so she wasn’t going anywhere. Whatever this Johnny’s feud with Freya was, what reason did he have to involve her? She couldn’t work it out.

She hadn’t heard any voices for a long time, and she couldn’t even cry out. All she could do to pass the time was try to sleep, but her only attempt had been met with a terrifying hallucination upon waking up again. Strangely, Johnny’s associates had not tried to silence her, seemingly having felt that her visions were more torturous than the pistol whip had been. She remained still this time, not wanting to give them any reason to get in touch with him or attack her again. But the pain and sadness welling up within her had already begun to spill out, for the blindfold was moist with her own tears.

In fact, she wasn’t sure anyone was still there. The silence was broken only by the sounds of various machinery that sounded loud enough to be nearby. If anyone was still there, the last thing she wanted was to give Johnny the satisfaction of thinking he’d won. Would she ever see Freya again? Was she doomed never to get a glimpse of the outside world again? Would the last thing she saw be the blackness inflicted upon her by the blindfold?

Suddenly, after what seemed like an eternity, there came a pounding on the corrugated metal doors in front of her, then a thud that shook the enclosure. She froze, not daring to move in case it was Johnny or his associates. But a woman’s voice sounded. It was a moment before she could make out who it was. *Freya?* she thought. *This can’t be true, right? I thought I was destined to freeze to death here.*

Moonlight stung her eyes as she felt a rush of cold air race towards her. Despite the limited light from the night sky, she found the sight before her too much for her to take. The bovine before her lacked black fur or muscles as huge as what she'd seen. The eyes she found herself looking into were not at all malicious. Instead, all she saw in them was relief and adoration. And then she realised they belonged to Freya. But was this really her? *Hey, why's she in that lewd blue outfit? Am I hallucinating here?* Was this her wildest dreams coming to life before her very eyes? It had to be.

"If I wake up now," she said to herself aloud, "then I'll see Johnny and his cronies ready to strike me again. He said he'd come and kill me if Freya didn't play his game." The face before her looked grim.

"Denise! I'm so glad he didn't kill you." said the overwhelmed bovine, wrapping her arms around her. *That voice!* she thought, her body warming up just from the sight. *It's not a dream after all. It really is Freya!* "I thought I'd never see you again."

"I thought he was going to beat me to death." said Denise in a small voice. "You have no idea how glad I am to see you again."

"Let's get you out of here immediately." announced Freya as she cut through the ropes binding her to the chair one by one. "I don't know where his associates are now, but I've dealt with that warped piece of shit. He's about to pay for what he did to us."

"Where is he now?" said Denise. "He said he wasn't coming back."

"That doesn't matter right now. What does is that our ordeal's over." Unable to contain her relief for any longer, she stretched her limbs and immediately afterwards coiled her body all around Freya's as tightly as she could. She was so overwhelmed and so delighted to see her love again that she thought she would faint. Immediately she began to cry again, her own tears feeling like the warmest thing there was before Freya's hold.

"My saviour," breathed Denise between her sobs, "I will never forget this. Did you see anyone coming here?"

"No." said Freya gladly as she dried her eyes. "Nobody followed me here." She removed her coat and wrapped it around Denise's bare and broken body, but just then, Freya's mobile phone rang. "Hello?"

"Freya."

"Peyton."

"I've been trying to contact you the entire evening." said the familiar voice on the other end.

"I saw the twenty missed calls, all from you."

"Obviously you're developing some kind of hearing problem, so I'll speak up. WHERE THE FUCK'S MY MONEY? WHERE'S THE FUCK'S THE INVESTIGATION YOU PROMISED ME? AND WHY HAVE YOU IGNORED EVERY SINGLE ONE OF MY CALLS?" He yelled so loudly, Freya held the receiver away from her as though she had a venomous spider in her hand, and Denise could only look on in shock. "You're not only tearing my emotions to shreds, but you're making an idiot out of me too. Nobody takes advantage of me when I'm at my most vulnerable and gets away with it! I will have you put in prison for a long time for this, Freya."

"Freya?" asked Denise. "What's he talking about?"

"Peyton," said Freya, "come to the hospital. Please. I've got your money. I will tell you everything when we get there."

"We?" snapped Peyton. "What the fucking hell is going on?"

"You deserve to know." said Freya. "And I won't spare you any of the details. Meet me at the A&E in twenty minutes." She hung up and pocketed the phone. Denise said nothing as Freya carried her out of the shipping container, and to her relief, didn't appear to react upon noticing that her wig was dishevelled and askew.

They didn't speak again until after Freya had got her into her car's passenger seat. As much as she wanted to know what she'd been through, she couldn't muster the energy to ask. And soon it wasn't long before sleep

threatened to overtake her body and her mind once more, like a rook preparing to deliver a back rank checkmate. But then Freya's voice awoke her from the onset of her trance.

"I'm so sorry, Freya." she said tearfully. "I'll never forgive myself."

"For what?"

"That psycho," she said, "he had me do some reprehensible things as part of his plan. I knew he was a bastard, but I never thought he'd do this to you. I feel like this is all my fucking fault."

"How can it be?" said Denise. "You didn't tell him to do this."

"I suppose his mind doesn't work like ours do." conceded Freya.

"I don't understand." said Denise, not sure if she ever would fully understand. "This was all between you two. What would Johnny want with me? I had nothing to do with this."

"It hurts to say this, because it does." said Freya. "You know you mean everything to me. But to him, you were just a pawn in his game. I don't think he found out about...you know, us."

"Think he'll ever come back?" asked Denise. "What if he finds us again?"

"Trust me," said Freya with a confident smile, "he won't. I made a friend in a very high place along the way." But Denise didn't have the strength or the energy to ask any more questions. All she could do was to finally allow the urge to pass out claim everything it could. The last thing she heard was Freya starting the car when all went black and her reality faded from her as finally, one of the most traumatic days she'd ever lived drew to its long awaited close.

