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Bully For Her

Written by BlueKittyTales on commission for SaltirePhoenix.

01/11/18

Part 4 – Epilogue

Two weeks later...Thursday March 19th 2020, 19:01. The impact of Johnny's actions has lingered, and Freya fears it will not fade for a long time.

How Johnny could live with himself after what he had done was a mystery that neither Freya or Denise thought they would ever be able to give a truthful answer to. They'd both feared that he would somehow be able to escape from his debtors and come after them again, and with a much worse plan in mind. What's more, Denise had sensed one of the things Freya was afraid of – that any of the creatures who had seen her at the strip club she'd told her about would one day come to her agency and recognise her from that night.

She couldn't wait to get out of the hospital, but at the same time, it felt like the only safe place there was. Nobody could try to get to them in this building, at the very least, but it didn't stop her fearing that Johnny would come back for her at any moment. Indeed, one of the hospital's psychiatrists, whose name she knew to be Dr. Harry Hedges, hadn't been slow to pick up on this, and had insisted she stay within the grounds out of concern for her mental state.

"I should imagine you'll never see him again." replied Dr Hedges, the short plump human wearing a warm expression. "I'm informed that he's left the country."

"But I'm still safe here, right?" asked Denise manically. "He doesn't know where I am?"

"I don't believe so." answered Dr Hedges. "I don't mean to be obstructive, but I didn't think it would be wise to allow you to be discharged without us ascertaining exactly how your ordeal affected you. Even now, you're still afraid to leave this ward, and that is a common symptom amongst those who have been through a terrible ordeal such as yours."

"I suppose it would be." agreed Denise. "It still feels like it was some sort of nightmare. It's like I was floating above somehow, watching the whole thing happening to me."

"It will feel that way, Ms Watson." said Dr Hedges.

"What can you do?" asked Denise. The doctor smiled.

"I don't think any medication other than those you've already been administered to dull the pain of your physical injuries will be needed." he answered. "I've been discussing this with the doctors who treated you. We will put you in touch with a counselling service, and we should be able to discharge you first thing in the morning. But only if you feel ready." Try as Denise might, she knew that staying in the ward for eternity was never going to be an option. Plus, Freya would need her secretary again soon rather than be forced to bring in cover from police stations from all around the country. It was a decision that, while it sounded easy, sent a cold chill through her.

"I think I can." she finally said. "But I don't know if I feel ready to return to work yet."

"It's best you discuss that aspect with your employer, considering her part in what happened." said the doctor. Suddenly, the ward's double doors opened and a nurse showed Freya in. She wanted to rush up to her and hug her tightly again, but the expression on her face stopped her.

"You called?" said Freya. The psychiatrist smiled to her. "How is she?"

"She's doing much better than she was when you first brought her to us." said Dr Hedges. *Much better?* thought Denise. *Are you sure? I still feel like I'm a fucking wreck.* "You'll need to keep your eyes on her in the next few weeks, Ms Maxwell. As I've just explained to her, we'll give her a number for a counselling service

that works closely with this hospital. Guard against, as they say. I will leave you two to talk. Sorry for the abrupt exit, but I'm needed in another department." With that, Dr Hedges left with the nurse, while Freya knelt beside her bed.

"How are you feeling, Denise?" she asked tenderly.

"It still hurts from when one of the creatures he had with him hit me with a gun." she answered, wincing when Freya reached for her jaw.

"I bet it does." said Freya sadly. "But he's gone now. And good fucking riddance to bad rubbish. He's extraordinarily lucky I didn't tear his throat out."

"Have you told the police?" persisted Denise. "You sure you haven't heard from him again? I mean, he tried to extort you. You said he had a lot of debt on his shoulders."

"I've heard absolutely nothing." replied Freya. "Whether I ever do or not, he's never going to accept that this was his own damn fault. As I explained when Peyton came, he splashed out, he got into gambling way over his head, but he never saw the bigger picture. Who knows what his debtors have done with him. Sending the police after him would waste their resources." Denise got the impression that she knew more than she was letting on.

"Epsilon asked me to give this to you." said Freya before Denise could say anything else. Epsilon was the younger brother of one of her employees, a bat named Nova Sinclair. Denise got on rather well with both of them, even though they didn't often get to meet.

"He couldn't make it this time?"

"He's got a school play next week, and his teacher changed his rehearsal time at the last minute." continued Freya. "He says he hopes you recover soon and that he's looking forward to seeing you again."

"What does he know about all this?" Freya looked anxious.

"Nova and I don't think he's ready to hear it yet." she explained. "Not until he's older. I know he might be mature for his age, but I feel he would not fully comprehend the entire situation. That, and he's got enough on his plate already. And you can imagine why I hate talking about my past. It would change his perception of me, and Nova's too."

"I don't think there's a way I can argue with that." said Denise. Slowly she opened the package, aware of one of the other patients watching her, and she was touched by what she saw.

"The next time you see Epsilon," she said, stroking the small purple teddy bear and cuddling it, briefly imagining it to be the bovine before her, "let him know that this is really sweet of him. This is lovely!"

"I'll see to it once I get back." said Freya, stroking her hand as Denise laid the teddy on the duvet. "Now that I'm here again, we should talk about where you should go after you get out of here."

"When do you want me back at work?"

"Denise," said Freya, saddened, "as much as I love having you around, I feel it's too soon for you to return. I might have been utterly humiliated, but you got the brunt of the trauma. Best we do what Dr Hedges says – get you your first appointment with a counsellor." Denise went to object, but she realised she had no higher trump cards at hand.

"But what will you do without me, Freya?"

"I can ask the police to supply me with some cover until you come back." she replied. "It's not just your work that I care about. It's not much without your well being. So consider yourself on temporary leave."

"I get it." said Denise quietly. "Maybe the counselling will help."

"I've had to do it before. And it really helped me out."

"I hope so. At least you dealt with that Peyton guy."

"Yeah," said Freya, and Denise could hear the regret in her voice. "He came tearing into this ward. Once I'd talked him down, you'll remember I told both of you everything before I gave him back his money. I still remember how devastated he was that not only had his wife cheated on him, but someone he called a friend took advantage of him like this. And for what? Just to appease some psycho who only wanted what was worst for us."

"You had no choice," said Denise.

"I know," said Freya, sighing to himself. "But that doesn't make it any easier."

"Freya, you know I'll always be in your debt," said Denise.

"Peyton will never think the same way, even though he understands why I did that to him."

"That might be what he thinks, but in my eyes, you're my heroine. You saved my life, and I'll never forget it."

"I wouldn't call myself that, considering everything Johnny made me do."

"Don't be so modest. If you hadn't come tearing across half the city looking for me, I don't think I'd be here now. I really don't know how I can thank you," Freya showed her a warm smile.

"Just don't buy me any bunches of daisies," she said, before she sat down on the bed and pulled Denise into her arms. "For you, I would do anything, snakey." Wherever she would go after this, she couldn't deny that she had missed the touch from the woman she loved. Just being held in her arms made her feel like she was in a waking dream. What the future held for her, she couldn't pinpoint at that moment, but what she did know was that ahead of her waited many things and many stumbling blocks. Soon her mind set to work on what would come after her first counselling session. She was determined to bounce back, even if it took an eternity. But her mind wasn't going to rest until one more question was answered.

"Keep me posted on how you get on. I'll be thinking about you."

"I have to know," said Denise. "Is there anyone else from your past who might want to come after us?" Freya looked unsettled by the very idea.

"He's the only lover I had before you, Denise," she answered. "And my family want nothing to do with me."

"You said that. But are you sure there's nobody else?"

"I am," answered Freya truthfully.

"Not even your blood relatives?"

"Whatever side of the pond they're on," she said, "I'm as sure as the sun will come up tomorrow that their view of me that I'm a deranged fucking psycho will never change. I'm pretty sure they'd see any attempt to connect with me as a waste of their time." This awakened the painful memories of the early days of her courting, which had seen her attempt to appeal to her heart go disastrously wrong. She had sent a secret admirer card, only for this to open old wounds when she'd mistakenly believed it to be from Johnny. Even so long later, she hadn't quite forgiven herself for this act, despite not having known about him at that stage.

"I can't believe they'd do that to you," she said. "Believing him over their own daughter like that. If I was your mother, I wouldn't just cast you aside."

"I don't care about them any more," said Freya bluntly. "I'll never forgive them for taking Johnny's side."

"I see your point."

"Johnny didn't manage to completely ruin my life," said Freya. "I'm not sure I ever would have met you if I hadn't come back here." She reached forth and cradled her into her arms. The pain Denise felt from her wounds didn't seem to matter at all at that moment. All that did was that she felt much safer now, a weight lifted off her still aching shoulders. "We owe so much to each other. We've made each other who we are, and nobody can change that, no matter how they try."

"I feel the same way, my love."

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Tuesday April 7th 2020, 12:15 Mountain Daylight Time. The vast Colorado Plateau seems to go on forever, but for one soul passing through one of its long roads, sightseeing is not a priority.

The sun burned in the cloudless sky, though the air was lukewarm at most. The road was endless, surrounded only by the vast deserts. The horizon saw no let up, consisting only of desert plains and the huge mountains in the far distance. Situated far from any living settlements was the long road, and there were few places where shade could be found. How was it that such a place could still go largely untouched even in the world as it was in these times?

This was a question that escaped the minds of many as soon as thirst raised its head to the surface. The silence was broken only by the purring of a lone motorcycle. While not travelling at breakneck speeds, the rider still managed to keep control despite being clad in a black leatherette jacket and trousers with a dark coloured helmet concealing what features there were. The biker was free to drive at any speed, for the authorities were nowhere to be found.

But it was not speed or anything in the environment on either side that was on the biker's mind. It was instead getting to the nearest town as soon as was possible. That train of thought was soon interrupted by a familiar vibration. Interested, the biker pulled over to the side of the road and drew out a mobile phone, opening the helmet's visor.

"Yeah?" answered the biker. "Yeah...what's up? Uh huh...alright, how much are we talking?" A grin crossed the biker's face. "Hm, I like that offer. I'll take it. Your problem will be dealt with soon." The biker hung up and kicked the bike back into life, speeding off into the still young afternoon without looking back.

The End

