

13. Unearned Sighs of Relief

Kyla followed Patrice into the gym.

For maybe ten token minutes, they had half-heartedly searched for their classmates' corpses. To hell with school spirit. Then they headed back to the gym to wait for the bodies to be found and brought in.

A bridge had been crossed.

Kyla saw it in the teachers' faces and in the way the chaperones looked at everybody.

Though the grown-ups remained aloof, a new bond, a bond of adulthood, had begun to form between them and the returning survivors.

Mostly, Kyla didn't feel grown up.

But an essential part of her did.

On the bandstand, riding above soft cymbal brushings and steady bass drum thumps, Jiminy Jones noodled ineptly on his downturned muted trumpet. He had one of those bulb-mutes in, the kind that laced his playing with silvery silken regret and caresses that zinged straight to the heart.

"Oh, Kyla," whined Patrice.

Kyla followed her lover's eyes.

She wasn't looking at Pesky and Flense, their bodies lying there like broken dolls beneath the Ice Ghoul's triumphant leer. Nor was she wasting time on the principal, who stood by Miss Phipps holding his speech notes, pale and really upset about something.

No.

Patrice's eyes were trained on Fido Jenner. One hand was stuck in his pants pocket. In the other, he held a paper cup.

Bowser stood beside him.

They were grinning.

Why? Because that slim tramp Peach, Cobra's girl—or from the look of it, Cobra's ex-girl—was talking them up, fondling their friendship lobes, hipping and breasting and just generally slinking outrageously before them.



"He's breaking my heart," Patrice went on.

"You can't push the river, sweetie," Kyla said, trying to be as gentle as she could. "If it wants to flow toward us, it will. Besides, he'd have to break up with Bowser, if we were to have a prayer."

Or she and Patrice would have to break up, but Kyla didn't mention that.

Petulant: "Bowser McPhee isn't worthy of Fido. He never has been. And he never will be. It looks to me like Peach is doing one heck of a job pushing *her* river."

Kyla stopped feeding her whining girlfriend. She was feeling jubilant as all get-out. There they were, numbered among the survivors!

Too bad about Pesky.

Too bad about Flense.

But the important thing was that she and Patrice had made it. They were alive and free, a rush of exhilaration coursing through her.

Odd, how you could be shackled and never know it till someone took a sledgehammer to your bonds and set you free.

"I could use some food."

"Get some for me too, okay?" Patrice said, dole-eyed above sultry trumpet sorrow. "I don't want to go *near* him."

"Sure."

Kyla headed off.

Patrice was a tad bit irritating. Kyla had heard that all sorts of splits and new pairings, and sometimes the beginning of threesomes, were often precipitated by surviving the kill.

That was what Fido seemed to be engaged in.

And Peach's scuzzy boyfriend, Cobra, was hip-deep in conversation with—of all people—Sandy Gunderloy and Rocky Stark. He was staring at the cheerleader's breasts, pretending he wasn't upset at Peach's having deserted him.

The creep was miffed though, powerful miffed. Kyla could tell.

Clusters of kids stood around jabbering about the dead girls. Kyla skirted their conversations, the perfect eavesdropper, not being asked to join in, of course. That *never* happened.

The long table of food drew nearer. This was a special night. A binge was definitely in order. The cold cuts called to her in all their splendor.

Kyla glanced back.

Poor Mr. Buttweiler hadn't moved a muscle. He stood by the bandstand, Miss Phipps talking at him. Something was definitely bothering their principal. Something besides his dead daughter.

He just stood there staring at the Ice Ghoul and at the bloody couple splayed before it.

Kyla wondered what special hell he was in that could bring such a low, mean, sorrowful look to his face.

Each kill affirmed the rightness.

And the righteousness.

There'd been a concern that conscience might get in the way. Antiquated, wrongheaded conceit.

Come right down to it, these were acts of *love*, acts that helped heal wounds.

Killing the compromised punkfucks in the costume shop had been a joy. The bloodrush down torsos, the crimson that painted breasts, bore a certain savage grace.

Consumed by the heat of perverse lust, the writhing wantons had, in an instant, flopped dead and cold.

This Pimlico and her Altoona may have jerked about like severed frogslegs as they died. It was impossible to tell, what with their blood-splashed guyfucks struggling to unzip their mouths from the girls' vulvas as the knifeblade opened the throat of one, then the other.

Then, peace reigned everywhere.

Bright, red, wet, and full of love in the costume shop's pure light—such was the calm, a calm more like a cathedral than a high school.

The corpses could have been left the way they were. But it offended one's aesthetics.

Far better to unzip them, despite the sticky blood-bother. Things went smoother, now that the struggles had ceased.

Death simplified matters.

Stick the boys together first. Lined up, rolled out, facing each other, the damned zippers didn't match up, both pulls located on the right lower lip.

Slide one boy around.

Slick leather made the pivot easy, Condor's chin to Blayne's nose and vice versa, the two of them stretched out thin as rolled dough oozed over with burbles of cherry liqueur.

Clots between the zipper teeth made the going tough. But at last, twice over, an upper lip was successfully joined to a lower.

Touching. An insufferably cute kissing pair of bloody punkfuck lowlife losers.

Then a rack of Beefeater costumes was wheeled free of the crammed congestion. Bulky red and black uniforms harrumphed to the floor, moth-musty padded stuff that three years before had strutted and sung, beneath the baton of Jiminy Jones, in a failed attempt at light opera.

The dead zip-mouths were heavy little fucks. But eventually they made it over the thick metal bar, Blayne's nape creased and deeply lined from the weight of his corpse, the abrupt angle of his back-bent head, the wide open smile opened in his neck, the lipstrain of his best bud's zipped body pulling down on the other side.

They looked uncomfortable indeed.

Their skin might give, before anyone found them.

Then again, it might not.

Time for the naked girls, flops of meat and bone that had once tantalized. There was no attraction here now. But the light falling harsh on lifeless, blood-splashed skin carried a certain charm. It touched memories. It soothed them. It gave assurance that this act was not only just but that love's revenge demanded it.

The girls proved more difficult to get right.

Dragging Pim on top of Altoona was easy, one dead face skull-smacking the other.

But managing the zippers was hard.

All that leg flesh. Thighs. The gleam of matched niobium between the anuses was the only part visible, that and the zipper pulls.

No room to maneuver there. None.

These two had been lovers, of which the world was owed proof. Not to zip them together simply wouldn't do. They required the same treatment as the boys, to be racked up there, hanging over the big iron bar by their parts.

Visions of cooked chicken arose, one leg snapped aside to reach meat. Dig a knee into the small of the back, grasp the right thigh with both arms, and lever it sharply up, using every ounce of strength—that was the way to proceed.

Something snapped, a dull pop, a thigh bone dislocated. Discoloration bruised the stretched flesh, a major vein broken by exertion.

But it allowed sufficient access.

The girl's zipper pull slipped over its first tooth and drew up nicely.

An obedient little mechanism.

Her left leg bent back more easily than her right.

There was only one slight vulval snag, halfway up. But backtracking a few zip-teeth set things right again.

Jesus, the lifting! It deepened one's respect for the poor joes who load haunches of beef onto meat trucks.

At last the females were up, slid onto the bar next to the dead boys but not touching them. Propriety had to be maintained.

Heads down. Blood would have dripped from them if there'd been any left.

The stocky one—it felt wrong to call this dead thing Altoona—threatened the balance. But the other girl's oddly angled, disjointed thighs tipped sufficiently in the opposing direction to steady them on the clothesrack.

As the rack rumbled toward the passageway, the foursome swayed like commuters on a subway car.

It would be good to position them where the others would discover them.

Raise a few hackles.

Make the little shits shit their britches, get the blood pumping, their adrenalin flowing, divide and conquer them.

Perhaps at some point, the hunger would be satisfied.

But there were plenty of worthy victims out there, the evening was still young, and after all, wasn't prom night made for love?

Peach felt sexy and free.

And her own damned woman at last.

As she and Cobra, him with his back turned, had risen from their waiting spot, Bowser smiled, blew her a kiss, and left with Fido.

That had been enough to jazz her.

Almost before the echo of the find-the-dead-folks alarm was finished, Peach blurted out that they were through. In spite of Cobra's stunned disbelief, she held her ground, taking his abuse and riding out his little-boy tempest, knowing in her heart that what she was doing was right.

Now, having sauntered brazenly up to Bowser and his increasingly okay date Fido, Peach Popkin was suddenly on top of a world she hadn't known could exist.

Blue, red, and orange lights maundered high in the gym, catching balloons and streamers up by the rafters. Wherever her gaze fell, young gods and goddesses looked back, disbelief and elation in their eyes.

Peach had worried that Cobra would make a scene. But he didn't. Sandy and Rocky, of all people, had caught his attention. He even ignored his gang members, almost as if they had split up too.

"Yeah, well you're cute too," said Peach. "You're both cute. Isn't it neat?"

Fido's clownish look made her laugh.

Bowser said, "You mean surviving? Yep. Too bad about Pesky and Flense, but I guess someone had to bite it."

"No, silly," she said, "I meant isn't it neat that we feel so good together? I love your lobes. Do you love my lobes?"

They averred that they did, very much.

"Do you think you two could, I don't know, futter me a nipple or something? I'd love you forever."

"I'll bet Bowser could," Fido said. There was a hint of fear in his voice.

But he was wiry. Peach recalled his supple way of threading the hallways between classes, a skim past the lowing herds without touching them, almost balletic in his grace.

Fido was a mercurial sort. Come futtering time, he would slip past a flurry of cuts and rends as the senior class tore into the sacrificed girls. Beneath it all, his butcher knife would zip in, copping a prize Peach would cherish for years to come.

"I'll bet *you* could too. You and Bowser *both*," she said, moving in to plant a lush kiss on Fido's friendship lobe. In doing so, her breasts splayed shamelessly against the poor boy's suit front. Peach heard him gasp.

"Would you crop us if we did?" he said.

"Hmmm, neat idea," cracked Bowser. He mock-leered at her, but he was one excited boy, as his tented crotch made clear.

"Sure I would," said Peach.

Cobra'd always been the one to crop, to whip, to slap and smack. It did neat things to her head to imagine doling it out instead.

"I'd crop you both with such love, your flesh would throb for days and days."

Cobra's violence had been so ugly and mean. While that had had its appeal, what Peach felt now seemed so much more limitless and pure.

"And you know what?"

"What?" asked Fido.

"Sometimes,"—she brought their heads near her mouth, Fido's friendship lobe on her right, Bowser's bagged sexlobe on her left—"sometimes, I'll want the two of you to crop *me*!"

Her hands cupped their napes where a barber's razor had edged off stubble. Dry fear-sweat mixed there with some sort of yummy fruity cologne.

Their hips came close enough to hers that she could feel hints of hard cock on either side.

At any moment, Futzzy Buttweiler would have his say. They would dance and dance and finally futter the dead couple. Then it was off to some place private, a place where she could show these cute boys lots of good things to share.

On the far edge of the gym, still near the hallway, stood Dex and Tweed holding hands.

There would be time enough to get closer to the Ice Ghoul, check out the sprawl of Pesky and Flense, how their bodies were arrayed and how best to approach them when midnight came.

At the moment, Dex felt oddly detached from it all.

The phones had unsettled him.

The dead girls as well, dripping blood down the hallway.

And now the principal.

Mr. Buttweiler and Miss Phipps were huddled by the bandstand. They had been huddled there for some time.

What was the delay? Why didn't he start?

The doors to the gym were clear, everyone but a few stragglers inside again.

But something kept Mr. Buttweiler from the mike, and now Mr. Versailles and Miss Brindisi came in to confer as well.

Dex thought he must be imagining it, but their eyes seemed often to peek up and glare at him and Tweed.

Had they done something wrong? Had the paperwork been screwed up? Had they been sitting under the wrong number? What was the penalty for that? And would they get a chance to show what had been written in their packet before the law came down, by mistake, on them?

Dex patted his coat. Something springy responded from the inside pocket. Relief. The paper with their location and number.

"What?" asked Tweed.

"Nothing."

"Come on."

"Just making sure the paper's there."

"What paper? Oh you mean the one about where to sit. Why?"

"Nervous habit. I don't know. What if we sat in the wrong place?"

Tweed squeezed his hand. "Silly, we did just what the paper told us to do. Besides, what difference does it make? We've got our designated victims. Jeepers, I can hardly see them through the crowd."

"Yeah, you're right," said Dex. "I wonder what the hangup is."

"Mr. Jones can't play for beans, can he?"

Dex laughed. "Sure can't."

Yet another reason for the principal to start speaking. Shut up the noodling muted trumpet and Festus Targer's random bass thumps and steel-brush cymbal circlings.

Futzy Buttweiler would release some hot air about the girls, about sacrifice, prom spirit, motherhood, and apple pie.

Then Jiminy Jones would call the band members back to the stand. Tweed would pick up her 'bone and Dex would strap his sax to his neck and stick a reed in his mouth to moisten it and secure it on the mouthpiece and they'd be off and away into the music again, flying high.

But the minutes slid by and Futzy Buttweiler kept conferring with the faculty.

Dex's elation at surviving had begun to turn into something else, something unsettled, an uh-oh not yet fully understood.

"My God," said Tweed in a dreamy voice, "this is a special night. There's ozone in the air."

Dex sniffed. "If you say so."

"Silly. I *do* say so. And it *is* so. So let's have a smile. There, that's better. Is my yumminums impatient for Mr. Buttweiler's immortal words? Me too. Just soak in the atmosphere, Dex. Okay? We're not gonna pass this way again."

"Right-o," said Dex, giving Tweed's hand a squeeze.

But in his heart, the dread just got thicker and thicker. Come on, Futzy, he thought. Say it. Get this show on the road.

And for the love of Christ, stop *staring* at us!



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