

“**S**HELLY’S IN surgery,” the ER nurse tells Brigid and Jerry.

“Her right leg is broken in four places. Her spleen has ruptured and will be removed. We’ll know more soon. Please have a seat.”

***Brigid begins crying as Jerry puts his arms around her.***

Brigid begins crying as Jerry puts his arms around her. The drive up had been torture for the two. Brigid had been in no state to drive, and it took Jerry every bit of control he had to go slowly on the slick roads.

“It’s my fault, Pop. I tried to keep her calm. But I couldn’t. I never should have let her leave.”

Jerry squeezes Brigid and says, “I know, my girl. And you couldn’t have stopped her if it was in her head to go. This is not your fault.”

The two sit in silence for the hours that Shelly is in surgery. Brigid cries, and Jerry simply holds his daughter’s girlfriend close.

---

SHELLY LIES MOTIONLESS in the hospital bed. Brigid can hardly take the sight. Shelly’s right leg is raised in traction, but that is the least of their worries. The breathing tube down her throat connects her to the ventilator and is accompanied by IVs, wires, tubes, and monitors. Her broken nose is packed, and her eyes are blackened from the impact. Her chin is stitched closed, as is a large gash on her forehead.

Brigid moves in close and holds Shelly’s right hand. It seems to be the only part of her not damaged.

The doctor joins Brigid and Jerry. “As you know, we had to remove her spleen. Her liver was lacerated, her kidney and heart were bruised and

she needed to be stitched up in several places. We're keeping her in a drug-induced coma for several days to help her begin to heal."

Brigid steels herself against the possible answer and asks, "Was there a head injury?"

"No. There doesn't appear to be any damage to the brain."

A strange kind of relief washes over Brigid. As she looks at Jerry, she notices the first tears streaking his face. He sits down hard in the closest chair and cries in release.

---

THE FIRST DAY of Shelly's coma, Brigid and Jerry don't really know what to do. They sit and watch. They watch her breathe. They watch the nurses come and go, checking vitals and adjusting the bed sheets. They just watch. One particular volunteer brings them coffee each time she visits.

"It really looks worse than it is. The induced coma is scary. But it gives her body a chance to catch up with what's happened to it."

Brigid does not want to let go of Shelly's hand. Jerry brings food up to the room, but she seldom eats. Flowers come, but Jerry keeps away the visitors because Brigid can't handle them. The two sleep in uncomfortable chairs and never leave Shelly alone.

***Three days in, Brigid has not showered or eaten properly.***

Three days in, Brigid has not showered or eaten properly. She is exhausted and numb.

"Sweetie," Jerry says. "Give me her hand. Now, I want you to go in there and clean up, eat that good food the nurse brought you, and rest for a bit."

When I think you've caught up enough, you and I are gonna have a little chat. Okay?"

"I can't. What if she...?"

"She's not going to wake up until the doctors want her to. Now git."

---

"BRIGID, HONEY. Wake up. You and me, we gotta talk." Jerry lightly shakes Brigid's shoulder.

"Now, Shel there has always been a stubborn girl. Growing up, she wanted to know everything. Once, when she was no more than four or five, someone had written F-U-C-K on our sidewalk. She looked at her momma and asked what it said. Her ma said that she would tell her when she got older. Shelly said, 'Tell me now.' So I did. Pissed off her ma somethin' fierce.

"There was this song about 'Don't Fence Me In.' We were puttin' up a fence for her dog and her so they could play outside and not get too close to the highway. She looked up at me and said 'Daddy, why do you fence me in?' That's when I knew I was in trouble.

"And smart. That girl was damn good in school when she wasn't messin' around or under the hood of a car with me. That pissed off her ma too.

"I guess lots of things I did made her momma mad. I'd try and keep her ma calm, but it got me nowhere. She'd scream and yell and I'd just keep quiet. Hell, I didn't know what to say. And Shelly'd be upstairs, hearin' it all.

***Shel heard her momma tell me, 'I don't care if you did put your dick in her.'***

"Then there was this lady. She came into the shop one day and told me that her car was dry-docked at her house and wanted me to come over

and work on it. She'd pay me, so it was a regular job. Well, Shelly's ma got the idea I was messin' around on her. And, one night, Shel heard her momma tell me, 'I don't care if you did put your dick in her.' The next day her momma was gone. Just up and left us.

"I don't think Shel ever really knew what to think about all that. One minute she's blamin' me, the next her momma. Till, one day, she loaded up this old Oldsmobile Eighty-Eight and told me it was time for her to go.

"She was always good about sending me letters or calling me from wherever she was. She just had to get away from it. Guess she learned it from both her ma and me. Yell like hell, or shut up and walk away.

"So you see, sweetie, her wreck ain't your fault. It's all she really ever knew.

"Now, you're gonna get yourself together. 'Cause she's gonna wake up, and that's when she'll really need us."

---

SHELLY GAGS as the doctor removes the breathing tube. Her eyes flutter and then close.

"She'll be groggy as she comes around. She's on morphine right now, so there should be no trouble. But, if she indicates she's having pain, call the nurse right away, and we'll take care of it.

Brigid takes the opportunity to kiss Shelly on the lips. A strange arousal runs through her body as she remembers the last moments they had together. She lifts the neck of the hospital gown and kisses Shelly on the collarbone she had nipped not four days prior.

"I saw that, girl," says Jerry and grins.

"You know I love her."

“You love her more than I ever hoped for her,” says Shelly’s dad.

“When did you know?”

“About you or about her? You, I knew the moment you showed up that Shel was history.”

“No, her. When did you know she was gay?”

“She was young. Too young to be having sex. But I made the mistake of leaving the ‘talk’ up to her ma. She waited until too damn late. And she talked about boys. Shelly didn’t care about boys. Some day you’ll have to ask her about it.”

---

“UMMMM ... Mmmm.”

“Shelly?”

“Bri—”

***“Shelly! Pop, she’s waking up.”***

“Shelly! Pop, she’s waking up.”

Brigid almost trips over the wheels of the hospital bed getting to Shelly.

“Baby? Baby? Can you hear me?”

Shelly reaches out blindly and Brigid grabs her hand. “Yeah, I can hear you,” she mumbles through a fog of morphine.

“Oh, baby. I didn’t think I’d ever talk to you again.” Brigid starts to cry.

“Fuck! What the hell happened to me?”

“You’re really busted up, baby. I’m sorry.”

“Why are you sorry?”

Brigid looks to Jerry for strength. He smiles as he gets up from his chair and crosses the room. “You’ll do fine.” He pats Brigid on the shoulder and leaves the room.

“We had a fight, baby, and you just got so mad, so fast. And ... And...”

“Wait, wait. Calm down. I remember the fight, and I remember leaving.”

“You got out on the highway and the Chevelle caught the ice. You hit a tree.” Brigid continues to tell Shelly about all of her injuries. “Suffice to say, your car is totaled.”

Shelly shakes her head. “I’m such a fucking idiot. I’m so worried about someone stealing you that I run off and leave you.”

“You almost left me permanently.”

“You think there’s any hope for me?” Shelly smiles at Brigid. “You love me?”

“You know I do.”

“Then what are we gonna do with me?”

---

“THE WHOLE GANG wanted to be here, but I told them that we got to come first,” says Darby.

“Darb practically arm-wrestled Culley. The flowers are from him.” Lenore smiles. “So, how’re you doing, Shelly?”

“I have pins and a big ol’ rod in my leg. Only rod that’ll ever be in me.” Shelly laughs a little. “Hurts too much to get going too hard. Want to see where my scars will be?”

***"Oh, for goodness' sakes. Can't you wait until you don't look like you've been through a meat grinder?"***

Brigid stands and pulls the covers back over Shelly. "Oh, for goodness' sakes. Can't you wait until you don't look like you've been through a meat grinder?" She stretches a bit and sits back down. "Shel has a foot-long seam on the outside of her leg and an incision from the removal of her spleen."

"You can live without a spleen?" Lenore asks. "Anything inside seems kinda vital."

"Evidently, I can," says Shelly. "Man! You should have seen it when my tit was all black and blue. It was fucking nasty."

Brigid cringes. "Oh, yeah. It's all fun and games now. How's the shop?"

Darby shrugs. "It ain't the same without Shel and Pop, but people are being patient and Lenore has been turning a wrench or two. And doing a damn fine job." Lenore blushes at her lover's compliment. "But, like I said, it ain't the same."

"When're we getting you guys back?" Lenore asks.

"Hopefully, we'll be home in a couple of weeks. Shelly has to go through physical therapy to get up and around on crutches. Can't very well use wheelchair at the cabin."

The girls get up to leave. Lenore plants a little kiss on Shelly's forehead and Darby hugs Brigid. "We can't wait to get you back."

---

IT'S THE TWELFTH DAY at Methodist. Brigid is giving Shelly a good rub-down of lotion after her sponge bath. Jerry has run home and will be back later.

“You take good care of me,” Shelly says.

“I’d do anything for you.” Brigid works the lotion up Shelly’s unbroken leg. Her calf is still strong and her thigh firm. Brigid skips to the outside of Shelly’s hip in hesitation.

“I’m not dead, you know,” Shelly says.

“What?”

“Touch me.”

“I shouldn’t.”

“You want to, don’t you? Make me feel beautiful again.”

Brigid looks her lover in the eye and smiles. She walks around the bed and pulls the curtain closed around them.

Brigid comes to the end of the bed and looks at her bruised and broken lover. “You’re always beautiful to me.” She kisses Shelly’s toes. She steps to side of the bed and takes in the curves of Shelly’s body under the covers. Brigid pulls the sheet to expose more of Shelly’s perfect, unbroken left leg and her beautiful hip.

### ***Brigid kisses Shelly’s knee as she runs her hands up Shelly’s calf.***

Brigid kisses Shelly’s knee as she runs her hands up Shelly’s calf. Her fingers meet and travel further up her lover’s thigh. She reaches Shelly’s vee and trips the backs of her fingers over the sensitive flesh. Shelly smiles and rests her head back on the pillow. Brigid shifts the covers from Shelly’s upper body and pulls back the hospital gown to expose her breasts, rising and falling with heavier breaths.

“Baby, I thought I’d lost you.”

“Never.”

Nestling her face in the hollow of Shelly’s throat, Brigid places kisses and nips all along the blonde’s neck. Shelly’s warm scent takes over Brigid and she escalates her efforts. Her hand reaches for her lover’s breast as she lowers her head to take the rosy nipple in her mouth. The smooth areola puckers under her tongue and the nipple stands hard. Shelly moans.

Eyes closed and suckling, Brigid runs her hand down Shelly’s belly to her patch of fur and eases her fingers into the folds. The wetness met invites Brigid farther in, over the knot that is Shelly’s clitoris and down into her opening.

“Baby, I don’t want to hurt you...”

“Shush. You’re doing great.”

Brigid looks into Shelly’s eyes and plunges two fingers inside. Deeper. Deeper, to the spot that makes everything feel just right. She can tell that Shelly wants to squirm and arch but can’t, so she rushes to bring her to climax.

Two fingers enter while her thumb massages Shelly’s clit. Rubbing and pressing.

Shelly grips Brigid’s shoulder and let’s out a small whimper. A whimper triumphant in the fact it could happen at all.

“Eno—enough.”

“Oh, baby—did I hurt you?”

“No, you did good. Real good.”

---

***"Just me and your girl for now. Surprises come later."***

THE NURSE COMES IN. "Girl. Time to get you up on two—well, four feet. It's off to physical therapy for you." Brigid helps the nurse guide Shelly into the wheelchair. "Watch out, she'll be flying in here on crutches before you know it." Brigid begins to follow, but the nurse stops her. "Just me and your girl for now. Surprises come later."

Brigid sits back in the chair that's held her for over two weeks. Shelly's dad is out, walking the halls, and Brigid's alone with her thoughts. She's in the middle of berating herself yet again for letting Shelly leave that night when the phone by the bed rings.

"Miss Griffen. You have a guest at the nurse's station."

"Thank you. I'll be right down."

Brigid checks her reflection in the bathroom mirror. The color has returned to her, and she doesn't look nearly as exhausted as she did. She heads down the hall to meet who she is sure will be Culley.

Instead she is faced with Josie.

"What in God's name are you doing here?" Brigid sneers.

"I called your office phone for over a week and couldn't get you. I tried your home too. So I got desperate that something had happened to you and I decided to call Shelly at her garage. Her phone guy told me where you two were."

"I'm gonna kill Brad."

"Brigid, we've got to talk."

"No kidding. But not here where Shelly might see us. I'll meet you in the cafeteria in a minute."

“Okay. Brigid? You look great.”

“Whatever. I’ll be right down.”

Brigid goes back to the hospital room and writes a quick note to Pop promising to be back soon. She knows Shelly won’t be back for another good hour, but she hopes this won’t take too long.

---

“IS SHELLY going to be all right? They said she had a wreck.” Josie looks great in a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt. Brigid shakes her head to get the image of Josie in nothing but panties out of her mind.

***“What do you care? What on earth made you come here?”***

“What do you care? What on earth made you come here?”

“I was worried about you. I couldn’t get hold of you after seeing you...”

“You shouldn’t have been trying. I can’t be around you.”

“Is that because *she* won’t let you?” Josie crosses her arms and her face tightens.

“*I* won’t let me. *She’s* here because of us. Because I told her that I’d seen you. I think it brought back all of the bad feelings for her.”

“Did seeing me bring back any feelings for you?”

Brigid doesn’t know what to say. On one hand, her body had felt compelled to join Josie in the kiss offered at the zoo. But, on the other hand...

“Yes, it brought back feelings. But nothing I care to act on. I’m in love, Josie. Permanently.”

Brigid can see Josie getting angry. “Would have you wanted me if she didn’t make it?”

Brigid’s heard enough and catches the side of Josie’s face in a sharp smack.

The cafeteria gets quiet and Josie rubs her face. “You’re right. That was too far. I apologize.” Then she turns and walks away.

Brigid is stunned at her actions, but proud at the same time. As she walks back to the room, she laughs at herself. That’s something Shelly would have done.

---

SHELLY SPENDS the majority of the week in physical therapy. Soon, she can speed up and down the halls on crutches and races the young kids. What’s unlikely is that she lets them win.

Brigid just sits back and laughs. “You’ll have to race Ursa at home.”

“Nah. I’m waiting for the day I can race you again.”

---

BRIGID IS ASLEEP in the room when Shelly and her dad walk the halls. The practice and strength building is good for Shelly. The walks are good for father and daughter.

***“Girl, have you learned anything from this nonsense?”***

“Girl, have you learned anything from this nonsense?”

“I’m not invincible?”

“I’m serious, little girl.”

“I know, Pop. And I’ve got an idea. I need you to go to the cabin.”

“Okay. I’ll bite. Why?”

“I’ll give you the combination to my safe. Now, here’s the plan...”

---

“WE’RE GOING home, baby.” Brigid glowed with the prospect.

“You gonna let me drive?”

“My ass I will. For once, you’re going to have to sit in the passenger’s seat.”

“You’re a cruel woman, Brigid Griffen. Cruel.” Shelly leans in to kiss her girl.

“Can’t keep you two apart, can I?” Jerry comes up from behind with their bags.

Brigid and Jerry start to help Shelly into the car. “I can do this, you know.”

“All right, stud. I’ll load the bags.” Brigid takes the bags from Pop and heads around back.

Shelly climbs in the car, and Jerry hands her a small package that she slips into her pocket. “Thanks, Pop.”

“Okay kids, we’re outta here. Jerry, I’d race you home, but I know better. We’ll see you at the cabin.”

“I gotta go by the shop first. I’ll see you later.”

“It’s a deal, old man,” says Shelly.

---

BRIGID'S 'CUDA shoots down the highway with its precious cargo.

"It's going to be so good to be back home with you," Brigid says.

***Shelly reaches for Brigid's hand on the stick shift.  
"After all that, you still love me?"***

"It's gonna be good to be home, period. I'm so sick of doctors and nurses and hospital rooms." Shelly reaches for Brigid's hand on the stick shift.  
"After all that, you still love me?"

"Honestly, I'm pretty sure I love you more. If that's possible. But you pull a stunt like that again and I'll mess you up myself."

"I've learned my lesson. I've just gotta talk to you instead of freaking out. I freak out so easily."

"I know. It won't come easy, but we'll work through it." Brigid meshes her fingers with Shelly's. "But I've got to ask that you do something else for me too."

"Anything."

"You've got to trust me. I know I will never do anything awful like that again. I know where my heart belongs. It's with you. Can you trust me?"

"I do trust you. I guess I always assumed the worst since I haven't always been a saint, God freaking knows. But, yes baby, I trust you. Completely."

Brigid's eyes well up with tears. "I've got to pull this thing over and kiss you."

"How 'bout you keep driving and I do something for you."

Shelly leans over in the bucket seat, putting all of her weight on her strong left hip, and places a kiss on Brigid's cheek. As the road straightens, Brigid turns her head to a full kiss. "You're going to cause another wreck."

“Nah. You’re a good driver.”

Shelly runs her fingers through Brigid’s hair, pushing it behind her lover’s ear. “I want to be able to see your face.”

Brigid relaxes into Shelly’s fingers as they trace her jaw and down her throat. The car hums along smoothly and Shelly reaches out to cup Brigid’s right breast through her shirt. She runs the rough pad of her thumb over Brigid’s nipple.

“That feels good,” murmurs Brigid.

“If you think that feels good, then this should be even better.”

Shelly unbuttons Brigid’s jeans. “Lift your hips a bit for me.” Brigid focuses on the car and road as Shelly dismantles her clothes. She slows to the speed limit and keeps her eyes on the road.

### ***Shelly slips her hand down Brigid’s belly and between her legs.***

Shelly slips her hand down Brigid’s belly and between her legs. Brigid. It seems to have been so long since she was touched by the woman she loves. Keeping her feet on the accelerator and the clutch, she spreads her legs for Shelly.

Shelly massages Brigid’s clit gently at first and then plunges her fingers deeper into Brigid’s wetness. She works the moisture into her lover’s nub, eliciting small cries and moans.

“You are going to make me wreck this car.”

“No, I’m going to make you come.”

Shelly finger-fucks Brigid at sixty miles an hour on a curvy road until the brunette screams in climax.

Shelly smiles. “Now do you want me to drive?”

---

THEY TURN OFF the highway at the garage and make their way back to the cabin. A brisk wind whips through the trees, but the snow and ice are melting and patches of grass are poking through.

Brigid parks the hotrod, straightens her pants, and comes around to help Shelly across the rock drive and up the porch steps.

“I’d better pin Ursa up in the bedroom. She’s going to lose her mind when she sees you.”

Shelly takes a moment to rest on the porch swing. “Hold up. Just sit here with me for a minute.”

The day is unusually warm. As the two sway back and forth, Brigid reaches for Shelly’s hand. It’s good to be home. Home with the most important person in her life. She can hear Ursa snuffling at the door and whining for her mistress, but she would have to wait.

“Baby?”

Brigid blinks out of her reverie and turns to smile at Shelly. “Yes?”

“Are you happy?”

“Very. Very happy, honey.”

“So am I and ... Well ... I...” Shelly has a strange look about her. “I ... Oh, hell.”

“What?”

Shelly shrugs. “Nothing. Better get in there before that dog breaks her way through the door.”

“Do you want me to lock her in the bedroom?”

“No. She’ll listen to us, and I want to see her.”

***Brigid opens the door to almost two hundred pounds of excited dog.***

Brigid opens the door to almost two hundred pounds of excited dog.

“Hey, girl. Your mommies are home.”

After getting Shelly settled on the sofa, Brigid bounds up the stairs. “I’m going to straighten up. Be right back.”

Shelly hollers up the stairs behind her. “Hey, baby—wear that low-cut sweater I like so much.”

As Brigid changes clothes and primps for her lover, she thinks back on the moments on the porch. She smiles at the fact Shelly wanted to know if she’s happy. Looking in the mirror, she sees a woman very much in love and one still a bit flushed from the car ride home.

“Babe, let’s change out of those old jeans,” Brigid says when she gets downstairs.

“No, I’m good.”

“Honey, they’re awful.”

“But I’m comfortable.”

“Fine. How are you feeling?”

Shelly smiles down at Brigid. “Great.”

“We’ll have to leave soon to get to the Blue River for dinner with everyone.”

“Brigid, I gotta ask. What’d they do with my car?”

“The flatbed brought it back to the shop after the insurance company declared it a total loss.”

“Oh.”

“Do you want to go see her?”

“Yeah. Let’s go see her.”

---

THE CHEVELLE SITS under a tarp in the corner of the shop.

“I found her under a tarp forever ago,” Shelly says.

***Brigid pulls the cover back to expose the twisted metal of the front of the car.***

“You’ll bring her back to life.” Brigid pulls the cover back to expose the twisted metal of the front of the car. “The rear end is in good shape. The frame is junk, but you can use a lot of the parts.”

Brigid watches as Shelly takes in the wreckage.

“How did they get me out of it?”

“Jaws of Life.”

“Boy, I really fucked her up, didn’t I?”

“She’ll forgive you.”

“You think?”

“I did.”

Shelly turns to Brigid. “I saw you for the first time in this shop. I knew I was a goner.”

Brigid smiles and reaches out to touch Shelly’s face. Shelly catches her hand and holds it.

“I knew you were meant for me from the beginning. Brigid, I ... I can’t begin to tell you how much I ... How much you mean to me.”

“Baby, you don’t have to...”

“But I do.” Shelly walks on crutches to lean on the rear of the Chevelle. “Come here.”

Brigid looks at Shelly just a little sideways and makes her way to her lover. Shelly fishes around in her jeans pocket and brings out something in her hand. “You love me, baby?”

“You know I do.”

***“Then would you ... will you?” Shelly sighs deeply.***

“Then would you ... will you?” Shelly sighs deeply. “Will you marry me, Brigid?”

Brigid’s eyes grow wide as she looks between Shelly’s face and the diamond held in her hand.

“Please say ‘Yes.’”

“Yes!”

“We can’t really marry in Indiana, but...”

“Yes!”

Shelly leans in and places the diamond ring on Brigid's hand. "You love me?"

"I love you."

"I love you, too. Now get your ass over here and kiss me."