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Carnal Acts

Written by Sam Alexander

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Carnal Acts

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to
Gill Plain
with
gratitude and admiration

Prologue

Somehow Gaz had managed to sleep, on his side with knees drawn up and arms folded over his chest. The bed was wide and the sheets fresh. The only light came from the crack beneath the door. It was enough for him to see the toilet through the other door, that one open. After drinking thirstily from the tap, he realised that his clothes had been removed. He was wearing some kind of loose gown, white. His heart missed a beat when he understood what it was – he'd seen his father in one when he was coughing his life away in hospital.

He ran to the door and banged on it, shouting. The wood was thick and the handle round, cold and immobile. Turning to the bed, he saw there was food – rolls, cheese, apples – and kneeled by the low table to satisfy the hunger that suddenly raged. Then he sat on the bed and tried to remember what had happened.

He'd been pissed, all right – the usual Friday night pints in the pubs he and his mates visited. It had been damp in Newcastle, but only drizzle so his nuts hadn't frozen off for a change. They'd gone for a curry and downed plenty of Indian beer. Then his memory got rough around the edges. They'd gone to the night-club, he remembered that, and he'd danced with a fit bird, long dark hair and a foreign accent. And after that? A big car. Had he passed out in the back seat? Must have done. But what the fuck was he doing locked up in a room that had blacked-out windows? Never mind the soft mattress and clean sheets, the place smelled damp and old, like a dungeon.

Gaz cried out again, a chill running through him. The place was warm enough – he couldn't work out how – but he was afraid. He might have been over six feet and the hardest centre back in the amateur leagues, but this was way beyond

his experience. What could anyone want from him? His job at the warehouse didn't even pay enough for him to get his own place. He thought of his mother. She wouldn't be wondering where he was; he often spent the weekends at friends' places. She'd be at the kitchen table, smoking and throwing back voddie and orange. He held up his wrist in the dim light and saw that his watch had gone. How long had he been here? Another shiver gripped him.

Then he heard footsteps, heavy as they approached, boots like the steel toe caps he wore at work. He shouted, but his voice dried up as bolts were drawn and a key turned in the lock. There was a light in what he could see was a stairwell, stone steps leading upwards. A barrel-chested figure wearing a black balaclava, thick jersey and jeans filled the space. What really scared him was the object in his captor's hands. It was long and metallic, with a sharp point.

'Lie down!' the man ordered.

'Fuck you!' Gaz said, making a dash for the door. He was poked with the pole and a jolt of electricity threw him to the stone-flagged floor.

'On the bed!'

Quivering, Gaz got to his feet and did as he was told.

'Arms out, legs open! I'm aiming the cattle prod at your cock.'

Gaz felt metal on his right wrist and heard a click as the cuff was closed. The same happened on his other hand and both ankles.

'Don't you piss yourself,' the man growled. 'That'll earn you an arse that'll sting for days.' The heavy head came close to his face, dark eyes boring. 'Aye, you'll do,' his captor said. 'I see you've stuffed your guts.' He straightened up and raised the gown so that Gaz's groin and abdomen were bare. 'One more thing.' He took a balaclava from his pocket and pulled it over his captive's head. This one didn't have eyeholes. 'Enjoy yourself,' he said, with a sick laugh.

young, to let off all the steam they could raise. It was a demographic fact that more Corham babies were born in February than any other month, particularly to underage mothers.

Springtime, fertility: Joni felt oppressed. Her mother, who lived half-an-hour's drive further north, regularly reminded her that time was running out. Joni was thirty-four and had never been interested in starting a family, but the maternal pressure was wearing her down. It would help if she had a man, especially one who could look past the crimped scars on her abdomen.

It was time to hit the streets. Earlier she'd been for a two-hour run near the Roman Wall. She was buzzing, invigorated and ready to take part in the local carnival.

.....

2

Gaz heard the door open again – it could only have been a few minutes after the gorilla had left. Listening intently, he realised that it hadn't closed. He could see a blur of light through the wool of the balaclava. For a moment he forgot about his bonds and tried to get up. A soft hand was laid on his stomach. He breathed in through the damp wool and picked up a hint of perfume. It was more subtle than any used by the women he got his end away with.

Then the hand began to move slowly downwards. He gulped involuntarily as his body responded to a shock almost as violent as the cattle prod's. He was erect before the fingers closed around his cock. He tried to raise his arms, desperate to touch the woman's breasts. A thought struck him. Maybe it wasn't a woman. Maybe the shithead who'd tied him down got off on dabbing perfume behind his ears and slathering on hand cream.

He breathed out as he felt himself being guided into what was without any doubt a cunt, moist and welcoming. The woman began to move slowly up and down on him. The sensations were

so overwhelming that Gaz came in seconds, thrusting his groin upwards in a series of jerks. He was still breathless when he took a hard slap on the cheek. The balaclava soaked up some of the force, but his head still whipped sideways. Obviously he had disappointed her.

He heard the door close. What now, he thought. This is fucking crazy. Despite the painful rubbing of the cuffs, he laughed. His mates weren't going to believe this. Tied down and used as a sex toy? It was like something out of a porn film. Then he remembered the man with the prod. What the bleeding hell was going on?

Some time later the door opened again. Fingers touched his damp cock again and worked it. Then he felt the woman's breath through the wool.

'Make it last this time,' she whispered, 'or I'll cut your balls off.'

Gaz made it last.



3

Heck Rutherford spent a couple of hours walking on the Roman Wall on Sunday morning. He breathed in deeply, his heart thundering and sweat beading his forehead. Before the operation and subsequent chemotherapy, he could walk all day without losing his breath. The surgeon who told him that cancer changed everything had got that right. Then again, the scalpel-wielder's idiot colleagues had consistently failed to spot the tumour that had been growing in his urinary tract for years, gradually sapping his strength and intermittently nagging at his groin like a piranha with attention-deficit disorder. By the time they finally decided to operate a year back, the growth was a monster, one end rooting around in his left kidney and the other creeping towards his bladder.

‘Hector Hugh Rutherford, you listen to me,’ Ag had said, the night before the operation, one which the surgeon had been less than optimistic about performing. His lower abdomen and groin had been shaved and he’d been given an enema, both of which made him feel that he’d reached rock bottom in the human dignity stakes. He was an innocent back then.

‘Don’t lecture me,’ he said to his wife. ‘This is already bad enough.’

Agnes Rutherford, née Sweet (‘You wonder why I want to take your name?’), was thirty-nine at the time, thirteen years younger than Heck, a primary school headmistress who took no prisoners but was loved by almost all her pupils. She was only a couple of inches over five feet, surprisingly full breasted, and the owner of long auburn hair that a Pre-Raphaelite would have killed for.

‘I’m not lecturing,’ she said. ‘I’m just telling you what you have to live for.’

‘I know what I have to...’ He broke off when she squeezed his arm hard. She looked like a schoolgirl, but she had the strength of a wrestler.

‘You have a wife who loves you more than she loves herself – unusual, that, you know.’ She paused, waiting for him to smile, which he eventually did. ‘And two kids who worship the ground you walk on and are wetting themselves about what’ll become of you. Not forgetting a father who’d happily take your place in this bed, a dog who waits at the door for you to come every night and a cat—’

‘That doesn’t give a shit about me,’ Heck interrupted, blinking back tears.

‘Well, you may be right there,’ Ag said, with a smile.

‘All Adolf cares about is his food. The little bugger sleeps with his paws over the bowl, for Christ’s sake.’ Kat and Mikey, ten and eight at the time, had found the stray kitten in the garden and fallen for it immediately. They didn’t know that the diagonal stripe of black above his eye and the black splotches beneath his

nose that marred otherwise completely white fur had a historical connotation. The fact that the animal seemed to possess the dictator's character had also been beyond them back then, although both had done Nazi Germany projects at school by now.

'I'm serious, Heck,' Ag said, squeezing again. 'You're going to come through this and you're going to be fine. For yourself and for all of us.'

He drew his forearm across his eyes, ignoring the tissue she held out. 'Oh, yeah, big girl? Whatcha gonna do if I don't?'

'You're a detective chief inspector, not Philip Marlowe,' his wife said. 'What am I going to do? Take your pension and run?'

That made him laugh. As if Ag, most devoted of mothers, would ever desert their children. She'd even look after his father until his dying day, despite the fact that she often found David a serious pain.

She leaned over and looked into his eyes. He couldn't resist the grey-green of hers: they had enchanted him the first time he saw her, at a funfair of all places. After he divorced Lindsey, he used to go to places like that to pick up women. In Ag he'd found a lot more than he'd been looking for – he'd found his saviour.

'I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you,' he said resentfully.

'True. You'd have a year of life, if you were lucky.'

'I might still only have a year. Shit, I might never come round from the anaesthetic.'

'Look at me,' Ag commanded. 'You *will* come round, you *will* recover, and you *will* be back with us, a better man than before.'

'Oh great. I'm having a personality transplant too, am I?'

'You *will* recover,' she said, smiling but transmitting her full intensity to him. He felt it course through him like a surge of electricity. 'For me. For us.'

And he did, though it was a close one. Grade three (four being terminal) – a belligerent sod – and stage three, one, zero. The last was good, meaning no metastases, the first less so: it showed the fucker was well advanced. Which meant four months of chemotherapy. At least his hair hadn't fallen out, but it had thinned,

so he wore it close cut now. And, despite taking the pills they'd prescribed, he'd vomited like a student on the lash. Having spent most of his life as a six-foot-one hunk, he now resembled a vertical stick insect, as Ag had pointed out caustically when he declined one of the no-nonsense puddings she'd started making.

Heck stood on a rock. He had nothing to complain about, he thought, scanning the contours to the north, the last of the dew rising smokily in the sunlight. He was back at work, in a new job, with a new boss and new colleagues. His prognosis, although no better than fifty-fifty after the op, was improving by the month and he'd had no recurrent symptoms. His bladder was the most likely area to have been colonised by malignant cells, so he'd already had an unfeasibly large camera up his dick three times, with another cystoscopy scheduled next month. The first time he really did think he'd gone beyond all the shame barriers, but the cheery nurses and dexterous surgeon helped him through. It didn't even hurt that much, though the first pee afterwards would have delighted a masochist.

Heck had only been back for six weeks at the headquarters of the new Police Force of North East England – Pofnee as it was already widely known. Starting the Major Crimes Unit from scratch had been challenging and he hadn't fully shaken off the effects of his wound. He still had pains in his abdomen at the end of every week and walked to work them off. But that did nothing to help the fear that had gripped him. Being a northern man and an ex-rugby player, he hadn't told anyone – not even his wife. Had the cancer left him unable to do his job?

Ag Rutherford heard the sound of the Cherokee as her husband pulled into the drive. They had moved to a run-down farmhouse ten miles northwest of Corham five years back. Heck and her father-in-law had done a lot of work on it, despite the fact that the former's grasp of DIY was shaky. Their closest neighbours were fifty yards down the road, Henthaw being less a hamlet than a line of separate houses. She had never liked their home's name – Whiffler's Close – but had agreed to keep it

because Heck, who was sentimental off duty, had a friend who'd lived there when he was a kid. Her husband wasn't great with change and he'd had to cope with a lot of it recently.

She went out as Heck was on his way to the garage, his hiking boots over his shoulder. He was trying ineffectively to push away Cass, their Golden Retriever.

'Catch any criminal Picts?'

He gave her a long-suffering look. 'The tribe that occupied the area north of the wall didn't paint themselves. They were the—'

'Votadini, aka Otadini,' Ag interrupted. 'I do know something about local history, sweetheart.' She stepped closer. 'You look tired.'

'No worse than usual.'

'Well, that's something. Are you going into town later?'

'No chance. Morrie Sutton's on duty. Let's hope he doesn't cock anything up.'

'Dad!' Their twelve-year-old son Luke ran up and thumped his shoulder into Heck's thigh, his back bent in the approved rugby tackle stance. Cass jumped up, forepaws scrabbling on the boy's sweatshirt.

Heck winced as he returned Ag's wry smile, which said, 'You wanted him to play rugby, now take the consequences.' His own nose, broken when he was nineteen and not properly reset, was a permanent reminder of the sport's hazards.

'Very good, lad,' he said. 'What've you been up to?'

'A bit of this, a bit of that,' Luke said, acting the wide boy from some TV programme. Heck only ever watched the news, sport and the History Channel.

'Hi, Daddy.' Kat stood at the garage door, her black hair in a ponytail and pretty face damp beneath dark brown eyes.

'Not again,' Heck said. His daughter might only have been fourteen, but she was already showing a worrying propensity for affairs of the heart. 'I'll break his legs.'

She laughed. 'Don't be daft. He'll be on the phone again in a

few minutes.' She held up the ludicrously expensive mobile he'd been talked into buying for her last birthday.

'Ah, the strider returns.' David Rutherford came under the retractable door, bowing his head with its bush of demented professor's white hair. 'See any interesting birds?' he asked, with a wry smile.

His father had an encyclopaedic knowledge of wild birds, but he also still had an eye for women.

Heck shook his head in resignation.

'Come on, you lot,' Ag said. 'Lunch is nearly ready.'

'Are you doing roast spuds?' Luke asked. His face was a mass of freckles and his red hair was cut short in imitation of his father's.

'I might be,' his mother replied, pulling him away from Heck. 'Leave your dad alone. He's knackered himself on the Wall. Come on, Cass.'

Kat slipped her arm under her father's. 'You should rest more,' she said. 'And spend more time with us.'

Heck nodded, his eyes meeting David's. 'I know, pet. I need time to get my head together, that's all. How about Monopoly after lunch?'

Kat shook her head. 'Grandpa always steals money when he thinks we're not looking. Cluedo?'

'Cluedo it is,' Heck agreed. If only catching real criminals was so easy; not that he often won the game. He'd been in love with Miss Scarlett since he was Luke's age and he cut her all kinds of slack.

