

One Wet Ex-Squirrel

Cindy Brown Bair

Copyright May 2014

Marissa Porter exhaled when the squirrel landed – SPLAT – in her front yard. *That's one flat, wet ex-squirrel*, she thought.

With practiced ease, she snapped off the blue gloves. Then she tightened the sash of her well-loved orange robe and closed the front door with an assertive THUD.

She turned to face the interior of her immaculate little house, and... “shhhiiii...” She'd promised Steve that she wouldn't curse while his mother was in town. Okay. She took a deep breath. “Upon mah word, Scahlett.”

Two mismatched dining chairs lay overturned. Books and paperwork spilled out from her sofa. Her floor lamp leaned perilously against a wall. Various items were clearly out of place: an afghan on the kitchen counter, a broken plate on the living room floor, a snow shovel by the fireplace. Marissa automatically made and prioritized a mental list. *Establish and secure airway. Assess breathing. Evaluate circulation.*

Remove stuff blocking foot traffic. Clean everything that will smell. Return things to their proper places. Like the snow shovel. She glanced at the time as she moved into action.

Less than 20 minutes later Marissa washed her hands in her bathroom. No time for a shower. *Good thing I know how to scrub in for surgery, or I'd have Rodentia guts under my nails when I meet her.* She smiled for the first time that morning. After forcing her unruly hair into its daily bun she slapped on mascara, a hint of blush, and lip gloss. *The beauty trifecta, baby.*

Then she paused and considered her reflection. Reasonable cheekbones, strong chin, and golden-brown eyes with only a hint of dark circles under them. Not bad for a Doctor of Medicine candidate at Tufts. Or a squirrel-slayer.

Her smile grew and she began to chuckle at her reflection. *You gotta admit, it's not every day a girl awakens to a squeaking bedmate.* Then a full belly-laugh. *Charise, maybe, but not me.*

Steve would love hearing the story. Well, except for the part where she examined the body before tossing it out. You'd think the head would have been covered in blood like the rest of its crushed body. But mostly brain tissue oozed out of its cracked skull. Yeah, better not mention that part.

And better not mention that she'd thrown it into the front yard, where her neighbor's unleashed dogs might find it. And roll in it. And hopefully take the trophy home.

She sighed and leaned on the counter. To be honest, Steve wouldn't appreciate any of the story.

Fortunately her clothes were laid out the night before. Steve had asked to see what she planned to wear to meet his mother. Now she pulled on her Steve-approved skirt (short, but not micro) and sweater (form-fitting but not tight), small silver hoop earrings, and her usual sandals.

Wait. Would Steve prefer I wear pumps? Marissa hadn't dressed to someone else's specifications since high school graduation. *And I'm doing this today because...* Well, Steve had the right to be a little anxious about today's lunch. *Uh-hum. And that's why he went through my entire wardrobe, down to this basic bra and panties.* She bit her bottom lip and her shoulders drooped, just a bit.

This wasn't the first time Marissa questioned her infatuation with Steve. "Steve McFarlane? He's a really smart guy," said Charise when Marissa first went out with him. It was true. In a school of brilliant students, Steve stood out. He knew that he was a braniac, but he genuinely didn't know how handsome he was. Faint chickenpox scars covered his chin and neck, across his shoulders and chest. He was convinced that the scarring made him repulsive.

Marissa was anything but repulsed by Steve. His body was toned by years of playing tennis. In fact, they met when she hit a wild shot directly into his path. From two courts away. He stopped his game, retrieved her ball, and walked it over to her. She thought he was being melodramatic for comedic effect, but Steve launched into a grave speech about Respecting The Game. The "conversation" turned into an ugly shouting match, and the following apologies turned into a romantic dinner.

Marissa sighed as she remembered their first months together. Steve never understood her sense of humor. Maybe humor in general. She patiently explained Monty Python to him. Too esoteric? The Three Stooges. Too low-brow? Chris Rock. Berns and Allen. Gabriel Iglesias. Lucille Ball. Nada.

But what Steve lacked in humor, he made up for with talented lips. *And that was enough for the first two months.*

Marissa paused with one sandal in her hand. *Where did that come from? Okay... I've known for some time now.* Yes, it was true that she had grown tired of ordering chicken lo-mein because Steve couldn't stand the smell of vindaloo. She slowly slipped on the sandal and picked up her small shoulder bag.

I should have been insulted when he panicked at his mother's short-notice visit. "You said you need to visit your sister soon. Maybe this weekend?" he'd asked. It wasn't his mother he was nervous about. It's me. He's afraid of introducing me.

Marissa sat down, hard. It was like opening an unfamiliar door and looking inside to find that she knew exactly what was in there. She just hadn't wanted to see it. He spent the last week telling her everything that his mother didn't like.

And the list was long. Italian food. Mexican food. Hell, just about everything except "American" food. Loud laughter in public. Leaving one's napkin on the table while eating. Skirts too short (trashy) or too long (gypsy), dyed hair, piercings, tats, dangly earrings, nail polish other than pink... *hell, she probably hates both plaids and polka dots.*

A stale feeling spread up from Marissa's gut. Her vision narrowed. She flinched when her purse vibrated, and she reflexively pulled out her phone. *Did Steve call this morning? Oh. During the squirrel-bashing.*

"Hi, honey. Um, I'm going to take Mom to lunch by myself today because she isn't feeling well. You know how moms are... um, yeah. Sorry to ditch you like this. Let's get together on Monday. I'll see you around." Click.

For what seemed like a long time, Marissa sat on the edge of her bed, holding her phone. A range of emotions flowed through her.

Disbelief. Outrage.

Indignation.

And resolve.

Marissa kicked off the sandals, silenced her cell's ringer, popped a Caffeine-Free Diet Pepsi, and plopped onto her couch with an open bag of Double-Stuff Oreos. She looked at the paper's TV section and snorted. The Sci-Fi Channel presented its final day of Shark Week. Discovery Channel offered a Mythbusters festival. And PBS had *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

She settled in for a happy, slumpy day. As she aimed the remote, she nodded sagely. *I flattened the wrong rodent.*

#