

Bondage

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Amy stood on the raised platform and hung her head in shame, as the people stared up at her nakedness. In the background she heard the auctioneer's voice intoning: "Ladies and gentlemen, what am I bid for this fine female slave? Twenty-three years old, sound in wind and limb, intelligent, good worker, first class breeding stock." Pathetically, she tried to cover herself with her hands, but the auctioneer's assistants roughly grabbed her wrists, forcing her arms to her sides, and leaving her fully exposed to the gaze of the crowd below. One of the men seized her hair and forced her head up, while the other pushed his fingers between her lips, to expose her teeth.

It struck her as odd, that although the auctioneer's assistants had grabbed her far more brutally than John ever had, their hands lacked the bruising pressure he had accidentally exerted on the occasions they had skylarked together. In addition, there had been no sting as her hair had been pulled, nor discomfort as her mouth was forced open. She realized that she was dreaming, and as she drifted to full consciousness, wondered why she kept getting this strange dream, for it was the third or fourth time that it had come to her in the past couple of weeks. Surely this was not how she really felt about her relationship with John. She had been delighted when he had asked her to marry him, and had been looking forward to the wedding, as to nothing before in her life. Then again, there was her nakedness, and her shame at people seeing her like that. She was, after all, not exactly a virgin bride, and had grasped their rare opportunities for intimacy as eagerly as John had. She had, perhaps, been a little shy that first time he had seen her naked, but had soon come to luxuriate in the worship of his eyes in any state of dress or undress.

The oddness of the situation was accentuated by the fact that the light was different. She realised that she was not waking in the familiarity of her university residence room, with Stella, her roommate, sleeping in the other bed, but in the room she had occupied while growing up in her parents' home. The door slowly opened, and her mother peered round it. "I'm sorry to wake you dear, on your big day, but we are due at the hairdressers in an hour's time. Here, I've brought you some breakfast." As she wriggled into a sitting position, and her mother arranged the tray across her knees, she glanced across at the open door of the closet, where her wedding dress hung, encased in clear polythene. Today was her wedding day.

Her mother lingered. "The flowers came an hour and a half ago, and your father had taken them in before I saw them. I don't know what that florist was thinking, they could not have been more wrong. Of course your father never noticed. I'm sure the silly man can't tell a dahlia from a dandelion. Anyway, I called the florist and they've taken them back, promising to get them right, and have them back by eleven. Now, up you get, I've told your brother and your father they can't have the bathroom till you're finished"

They could tell there was something wrong as soon as they entered the hairdressing salon. There were just too many people there. Amy spotted her eighteen year-old cousin, Jennifer, standing by the receptionist's counter looking crestfallen. Jennifer was to be one of her bridesmaids. "They've double booked us with another wedding party," the girl blurted out as they approached.

The proprietress of the establishment could hardly have been more apologetic, both for the original error, and the fact that nobody had spotted it. To make matters worse, both brides had been booked for Francine, the hot-shot hairdresser upon whose skills the reputation of the establishment had been based. Amy's mother pushed her way up to the counter and began remonstrating with the unlucky proprietress. She was soon joined by a lady of similar vintage, remonstrating just

as loudly; obviously the other bride's mother. "Look we'll do the best we can to get everybody dealt with as quickly as possible," said the proprietress. "I've called in all my part time staff, and I will pitch in myself. I hope nobody will be out of here more than half an hour later than originally planned."

At the back of the scrum, Amy caught the eye of another girl, "Are you the other bride?"

"Yes. I wish they would stop arguing. It's our problem, after all. Not theirs."

"Well I don't think they quite see it like that. They have probably both been planning this day ever since we were first born, and they're determined it will be perfect, as much for themselves as for us. How about we toss for Francine?"

"Sounds fair to me."

One of the other girl's bridesmaids produced a 'looney' from her purse and spun it in the air. Amy lost the toss, but the girl pressed the 'looney' into her hand saying she deserved it for being a good sport.

With all extra help called in, they actually spent less time than anticipated at the hairdresser. Amy was well pleased with the efforts of the girl who fixed her hair, secretly believing she had done a better job than Francine. The only sour note was the absence of Karen. Karen had been Amy's best friend since kindergarten. There was no way she would ever let her down, and her failure to keep the hairdressing appointment was distinctly disturbing.

They arrived home to find Amy's brother, Kevin, and her father clad in suit trousers and creamy white shirts, but, as yet, no jackets and ties. Her father beamed with the confidence of a man who has everything under control. "The flowers arrived about twenty minutes ago, they were right this time, I checked, I put them in the basement to keep cool." Then, with the air of a man describing some

minor setback at some sporting event, he went on to say, "By the way, Karen can't make it after all. Her mother phoned from the hospital. They were on their way here and were side swiped by some idiot jumping a red light." As his daughter's face crumpled, he realised that he had put this rather badly, and hastened to assure them, "They're all OK. Her mom and dad were in the front of the car, they're only shaken up. Karen's OK as well, but she was sitting closer to the impact, and she's got a broken leg, two cracked ribs and mild concussion. The hospital are insisting on keeping her in over night, for observation, on account of the concussion."

Half an hour later, her tears stemmed and her makeup restored, Amy stepped into her wedding dress, and her mother raised the long zip. It passed freely enough over her rump. But as it reached the small of her back the fabric stretched like a balloon. Amy pulled in her tummy muscles as tightly as she could, and her mother strained at the tag. Suddenly, the zip was between her shoulder blades and running freely up to her neck. As her mother stepped back to admire her handiwork, there was a slight ripping sound and a six inch length of zip, where the material was under the greatest tension, popped open again.

Amy swore, amazing her mother at the extent of her vocabulary. She was sorry to shock her mother, but the only alternative was to burst into tears and she did not have time to fix her makeup a third time.

"I'll just phone Mrs. Hetherington," said her mother, pretending not to hear. Mrs. Hetherington was the seamstress who had made the dress. She only lived three doors away, and arrived panting and anxious, within a couple of minutes, with her three year-old daughter, Tracy, in tow.

"I'm sorry about bringing Tracy, but I've got nobody to leave her with."

"That's alright said Amy's mother. "Kevin!" And when the lad put his head round the door, "Look, just keep Tracy quiet for us for a few minutes, will you."

"I can't imagine how I've put on this much weight in the two weeks since the fitting," wailed Amy.

"Oh, a lot of girls put on weight just before their weddings. You've no idea how many times this has happened before. It's just nerves dear. Don't worry. I always put an extra row of stitches on a couple of seams so I can let them out if necessary," said Mrs. Hetherington. "I'll just unpick these two seams here and here, and it'll be fine. I can't do anything about the zip I'm afraid, I'll just have to sew you in. Won't take ten minutes."

Amy's mother gave Amy a searching look and said, "I hope there isn't something you haven't told me young lady."

"Absolutely not, mother!" said Amy indignantly, this was one aspect of the whole sorry mess she was quite certain about.

Mrs. Hetherington had let out the two seams, ironed out the creases and was in the act of sewing Amy back into the dress, when there was a ring at the doorbell, and Amy's father announced that the car had arrived. "Look, you Kevin and Jennifer will just have to go on," he said. "We'll be ready when the car gets back." There was, of course, nothing else to be said or done, and Mrs. Hetherington easily accomplished her task in spite of the fact that with Kevin gone, Tracy was under her feet again.

A mile away, John was sitting in church wondering if he had not bitten off more than he could chew with this marriage thing. He had no doubts about Amy. If he was going to do this at all, Amy was definitely the girl he wanted to do it with. But he was not sure that he was up to coping with it. They had met at the beginning of the academic year when Amy had joined the Masters programme. They had dated a couple of times, then seen more of each other, and then seen as much of each other as they possibly could, while he was sharing a two bedroom apartment with three other lads, and she was in residence with Stella. When he came to the conclusion he could not live without her, he asked her to marry him. But he had no idea it would be this

complicated. He thought it would just be a matter of a half hour ceremony, then start looking for somewhere to live. But since they had announced their engagement at Christmas, Amy's mother, and, to lesser extent, his own, seemed to have simply taken over, and the whole thing had 'mushroomed' out of all proportion. He glanced at his watch. The service should have started ten minutes ago. Whatever was keeping them? Her mother was not even here yet.

He turned his head a little, and out of the corner of his eye, saw a glamorous, older woman, like the aging film stars Elwy Yost used to interview on TVO, approaching down the aisle. With a shock, he realized it was Amy's mother. She came across and rested a gloved hand on his shoulder. "Sorry about all this John. Don't worry, she'll be here soon. We had a little problem with the dress. Then, on the way here, our driver got pulled over by the police, for running a stop sign."

Amy's mother settled into the front pew, across the aisle from John, her face set in a beatific smile. After five more minutes, there was a bustle at the door, the minister came forward and nodded for John to approach him, as the organist struck up the wedding march. John turned his head a little, to see Amy and her father approaching, and experienced a moment of blind panic. Whatever was going on? He was supposed to be marrying Amy, not this dazzling, stunningly beautiful apparition in the white dress. How could an ordinary guy like him marry a sophisticated girl like that?

As Amy and her father reached the front pew, the beatific smile froze on her mother's face, and she directed a vitriolic glare at Kevin, who was standing beside her. "I'm sorry Mom, but you did say to keep her quiet. How was I supposed to know that we would be leaving before she did?" The reason for this exchange, was, of course, the unmistakable imprint of young Tracy Hetherington's chocolate coated right hand on Amy's otherwise pristine left buttock.

As was only fitting, the actual service went off without a hitch,

and the bridal party went to the vestry to sign the register. Fortunately, Kevin accompanied them, for suddenly, just as John picked up the pen, a musical chime erupted in Kevin's jacket pocket. He took out his cell phone and announced his name. There was a short pause and he said, "We're all here, where are you?" There was another short pause, and he continued, "No you idiot not St. Marks, St. Martins." Guiltily, he put the phone away, and, in response to a further glare from his mother, said, "Sorry, I had to leave it switched on. I had a feeling Tony would louse it up. He's gone to the wrong church." Tony was a friend of Kevin's who had just set up in business as a photographer, and had agreed to do the photos for a cut rate.

The minister did not, in the least, mind them waiting for their photographer to arrive, but pointed out that they had run very late, and he had a christening to perform in about ten minutes. Soon, instead of two families milling about outside the church in their best clothes, there were four, and nobody was quite sure who belonged to which. Amy and John were standing on the top step of the church entrance, as the other young couple arrived; the young woman clutching her new-born infant. As she brushed past, a brooch she was wearing caught on Amy's veil, and for a moment they seemed to be tied together. Somehow, in all the confusion, Amy wound up holding the baby, and at that moment, a voice from ten feet away called "Hold it!" and a flash bulb went off. Everybody agreed that the photo of Amy holding the baby was the best one Tony shot that day, and Kevin could never understand why Amy refused to have it in her wedding album.

It took Tony twenty minutes to sort out the crowd, and even then, Amy and John discovered people featuring prominently in their wedding photographs that neither of them had ever seen before.

The reception had been deliberately restricted to lunch. The police had been called to the last two weddings on Amy's father's

side of the family, and they figured that if they kept it to just lunch, there was less time for people to get drunk and cause trouble. Besides the wedding came at a time when Amy's dad was strapped for cash. As a result, nothing too untoward happened at the reception. There was, however, just one little thing. As Amy's mother took her place in the reception line, there was a discreet tug at her elbow. She turned to find the catering manager whispering in her ear. "We have made out the place cards in silver ink as you requested madam and set them out in accordance with the plan you provided. However, I regret to say that we were unable to get the cards with the silver borders as you requested. Unfortunately they delivered the wrong stock, and nobody noticed until it was too late to replace them."

"So long as the ones they sent were fairly suitable, I don't suppose it matters that much, but it is a pity, I rather liked the ones we picked out."

"You may not consider them quite as suitable as we might wish madam. That's the problem. The ones we were sent had black borders instead of silver, but the words 'In Memorium' in the top left hand corner are very small, hardly show at all. We have carefully ruled them through with the silver ink."

In the event, no-one commented on the place cards. The last person to notice, would, of course, have been John. He was so bewildered by it all, that if his mother or his new mother-in-law had told him it was customary for the bridegroom to strip naked and stand on his head at the top table, he would have complied, just to get it over with. Amy was nearly as comatose. Nobody had told her about the chocolate mark on her bottom. A tactless aunt had come close to doing so, but had been 'shushed' to silence by her quicker witted sister. Had she known about it, however, it is unlikely she could have cared.

There was, of course, no way a penurious couple of graduate students could afford a fancy honeymoon. But John's mother had insisted they needed a few days peace and quiet together, and had

pressed them to use the family cottage. While the wedding guests enjoyed their coffee, Amy and John slipped away to her parents' house to change. John cut Amy out of her wedding dress, and while she finished dressing, loaded their suitcases into his ancient heap of a car. They made a brief trip back to the restaurant, just to say goodby, then they were away.

They had been lucky with the weather, for the wedding itself. But as they headed into cottage country, dark clouds closed in, and soon they were heading into a rip-roaring thunderstorm, which lasted for hours. It was quite dark, and still raining heavily, by the time they reached the turn off to the cottage. John picked his way carefully on the unmade road. Suddenly, he jammed on the brakes, as the headlights stabbed into a dark void, where there should have been road. Getting out of the car, into the deluge, he found that his wheels were only inches from the edge of a deep ravine, at the bottom of which raged the torrent that had washed away the road.

There was obviously no way they would make it up to the cottage tonight. Gingerly, he backed and filled until the car was facing the other way, then headed back five miles, to the nearest village, which also happened to front onto the lake. Discounting their earlier intimacies, their marriage was consummated between the vaguely damp sheets of the tiny, rundown motel that was all the village boasted by way of accommodation.

When they arrived at the motel, John drove as close as he could to the door marked 'Office'. Running through the downpour, hand in hand, they were both haunted by the irrational fear that the place might be fully booked. The door opened at a touch, however, and they discovered that it was merely a side entrance to the general store, which stretched away into the darkness, for it was long past closing time. The reception counter was bathed in a localised pool of light, but there seemed nobody about. On the counter was a small bell, which John rang. The man who answered this summons assured them there was a

cabin available for them, and glancing at the old-fashioned register, it was apparent that they were the first visitors to the place in six months. The man seemed un-surprised that the road up to the cottages was washed out, apparently it was a frequent occurrence. But on past experience he thought it unlikely that the damage would be repaired in less than six weeks. It was not usually a problem as most of the cottage dwellers had boats. Having registered their arrival, he gave them a key, and totally redundant directions to their cabin, for there were only four, all clearly numbered and plainly visible from the door of the office.

While Amy explored the cabin, John brought in their suitcases. He set his own on the shelf provided for the purpose, and dumped Amy's on one of the two double beds, with which the room was furnished. After the tribulations of the day, they were both grimly determined that they would need only one bed tonight.

Amy emerged from the bathroom and demanded, "Where's my suitcase?"

"On the bed, of course," said John, fiddling to open his own.

"That's not mine."

"Well that's the one you told me to put in the car."

"It certainly isn't. For heaven's sake John what have you done? I asked you to fetch my suitcase from the passage, outside my bedroom. Where did you get this one from?"

"Look, you never said anything about your bedroom, You just called down the stairs for me to fetch your suitcase from the passage. I was standing in the passage just behind the front door, I turned round and there was a suitcase. This one."

Amy hovered for a moment on the verge of tears, but when the eruption came, it was a violent fit of giggles, ominously close to hysteria. "It must be my Nan's." The suitcase was not locked, and a brief glance at the contents confirmed, for Amy, that it was indeed her grandmother's; a lady more than three times her age, and twice

her girth. She had come to them, from out of town, the night before the wedding, and was proceeding on holiday, immediately after the wedding reception, on a late afternoon flight.

They went to bed, hoping that things might look better in the morning, but they were wrong. The motel, though clean and tidy, was more rundown than it had looked in the dark, and the weather was still dismal. They bought breakfast in the general store, which also had a couple of tables at which primitive meals were served. The motel keeper's wife seemed to be on duty for the morning shift, and, after cooking their breakfast, willingly let John make a collect call home from the office. John told his parents about the cottage being cut off, and said that, under the circumstances, they would make their way back to university.

When he put the phone down, the motel keeper's wife, who had been present throughout the call, said, "Oh dear, what a shame. Were you supposed to be opening the cottage for your Mom and Dad then?"

"No. They came up and opened the place a couple of weeks ago. We were supposed to be on our honeymoon."

At this, the woman seemed deeply moved and said, "Oh no. How awful for you. I do wish I could help. Hey, maybe I could. Have you got a boat up at the cottage?"

"Sure. I think everybody round here does."

"Well, look. My brother Joe, owns the marina across the road. I'm sure he wouldn't mind running you down the lake in one of his boats, then you could use your own boat to get about. You can leave your car here. It'll be no trouble."

John had not known there was a marina in the village. But peering through the mist, he could discern, beyond the emporium he knew as 'Joe's Bait and Tackle' a rotting jetty with a couple of boats tied up to it. He had, frankly, lost interest in a honeymoon by now, but there was such sincerity in the woman's voice, and she seemed so put

out by their plight that he wavered. He glanced toward his bride, and caught a gleam in her eye that positively dared him to refuse. The woman called her brother, who said he would be ready in an hour's time.

The woman called her brother, who agreed to take them up the lake in an hour's time.

They spent the hour shopping for provisions in the general store, and Amy tried to replace some of the more urgent items from her missing suitcase. But the best she could find was a toothbrush, and a cotton bikini of garish colour and outrageous brevity and price; the nearest she could get to a change of underwear. There was a pay-phone on the wall of the motel, and Amy put through a collect call to her parents. She was delighted to hear that Karen was now out of hospital. But her mother seemed far more concerned about her grandmother's suitcase.

"Your father will drive up and get it from the motel," she announced, "we will have to air-freight it to your grandmother. I hate to think what that will cost. I will send your case up with your father."

This was a relief to Amy, because her system for remembering important things, was to keep them with her toothbrush, which she knew she would use on a regular basis. Replacing the toothbrush itself had been the least of her worries. "I must say I'd be glad to have it Mom, if you're sure Daddy won't mind."

"Well he has nothing else to do, that's useful. He was only going to waste the afternoon watching some silly ball-game on television."

Joe was as good as his word, and a little over an hour later, his boat was nosing its way into a pretty little cove five miles up the lake. The cove was dominated by a cottage standing on a rocky outcrop twenty feet or so above the lake. A flight of wooden steps led down the cliff to a dock, where a small boat was tied up. The movement of

Joe's boat caused the moored boat to bob up and down like an excited puppy wagging its tail in greeting. Amy was enchanted.

Joe helped them stack the boxes of provisions on the dock beside John's suitcase. Then, with a wave of his hand, he revved up the outboard and sped out of the cove. Like many middle-aged bachelors, he was taciturn and shy in the presence of a couple of young newlyweds. Amy grabbed one of the provision boxes, and, leaving John to bring his suitcase and the next box, tripped lightly up the steps toward the cottage. As her head came above the level of the small lawn, which ran down from the cottage to the edge of the cliff, the romantic perception of the place, she had gained from the boat exploded. The whole site looked like a cross between a council garbage dump and an abandoned tinker's encampment. There were a couple of mattresses ripped open from end to end, and their contents strewn everywhere. There were blankets and soft furnishings, similarly mutilated, odd items of broken furniture, newspapers and magazines all sodden and seemingly rotting in the persistent rain. How could John's family live like this, she wondered. His mother had seemed such a fastidious woman. She glanced back at her husband, as his head came above the level of the lawn, and could tell from his devastated expression, and the way his jaw dropped, that they did not live like this; it was not at all what he had expected to see.

John rushed past her and dumped what he was carrying on the porch, which ran the full width of the cottage. The screen door was propped open with a rock, and the door itself was flapping loose, a splintered void where the lock had been. The lock was lying on the floor, and the doorpost was deeply grooved, where a chisel or crowbar has been used to force the door open.

"We can't stay here," John said decisively, "I'd better get the outboard and we'll go back down the lake, and let the police know the place has been broken into. I'd better call Mom and Dad as well, then we'll be on our way."

But Amy had noticed something else. On top of the huge pile of rubbish on the lawn, was an old, rusting deed box, its lid hanging open and the contents scattered. It had obviously been used to store basic staples so that animals could not get at them. There were tea bags, instant coffee, sugar, milk powder and pasta, all dissolving in the rain and adding their distinctive colours to the mess. In the midst of the heap, Amy spotted a single cookie, the rest no doubt carried away by marauding rodents. When she had first met John's mother she had complimented her on these particular cookies and begged the recipe from her. This simple exchange had broken the ice between them. One might almost say that the relationship between Amy and her mother-in-law was founded on those cookies. But this cookie was special; cut into a heart shape with 'John' and 'Amy' spelled out in white icing. She was deeply touched that her mother-in-law would not only have stocked the box, which she probably did every spring, but had gone to the extra trouble of putting in something special for her and John; a subtle message of love and goodwill. Then she remembered something else.

"No John, we must stay," she said quietly, "You remember that weekend when your Mom first suggested we come here for our honeymoon? Well she called me on the Monday and did quite a selling job on the place. Told me all about how your grandfather built the place, and how she and your Dad came here for their honeymoon. I never told you about it because I knew you would say she was being manipulative. Perhaps she was, a bit, but I know this, it was plainly obvious it is very special to her. She loves the place, and there is no way I'm going to walk away and leave it for her to see in this state. We're not going anywhere until we have sorted all this mess out."

"OK. But we still have to report this to the police. I'll get the outboard."

The outboard was kept chained to one of the concrete piers supporting the cottage, and John had to crawl underneath to fetch it.

The other equipment for the boat: life-jackets, bailer etc. was kept there as well. But all he could find, when he reached the spot was the padlock, its hasp cleanly severed by bolt-cutters. He decided he had better find out what else had been taken if he was to report this to the police.

While John went to get the outboard, Amy had made her way into the cottage. The scene inside was every bit as bad as the situation outside. The furniture all tipped over, the contents spilled and much of it broken. Amy began picking things up and trying to set them to rights. She was soon joined by John, who looked grimmer than ever. "Well we know why they came here. They've stolen everything movable: the outboard, the generator, the gas barbecue, even the life-jackets and the oars for the boat. It looks like we're stranded. By the way, should you be doing that? I don't think you're supposed to touch anything at a crime scene."

"I can't see the police dusting the place for finger prints. I just felt I had to do something. I couldn't just stand here looking at it."

"I think we had a second pair of oars once. I'll see if I can find them."

John did find the other oars. They were buried even deeper under the house; old, weathered and brittle, the varnish long gone and the grain of the wood separating. The reason for their replacement was obvious, one of the blades had lost half its width. They loaded the food and John's suitcase back into the boat, and set off rowing awkwardly down the lake. John had to keep putting in an extra stroke, on the side of the damaged oar in order to stay on course.

They were about half way there when the oar broke. Of course, it was not the damaged one, but the complete one, that snapped off just above the blade, and drifted away, uselessly, behind them. They changed places, and John began to try to skull the boat along with the oar sticking out over the stern, but it was slow and difficult

progress. The only consolation in the situation, was the fact that the rain had stopped and the sun had come out.

Their rescue came in the form of an OPP motor-boat, whose occupants were, at first inclined to lecture them severely on the illegal folly of setting out in a boat with no adequate means of propulsion, not to mention one bereft of life-jackets, bailer and a fifty foot throw-bag. They did not seem much impressed by John's explanation that the whole point of their voyage was to report the theft of these items, but did conclude with a seemingly reluctant assurance that they would let them off with a caution this time. They then took the boat in tow back to Joe's marina, where they recorded details of the break-in.

Another collect call to John's parents, much of it conducted between his father and Joe, resulted in the rental of an outboard motor and safety equipment for the boat. They shopped again in the general store for a few simple tools, the toolkit from the cottage being among the things stolen, and a camping lantern to stand in lieu of the stolen generator. They also had lunch while they were about it, with the result that they were still there when Amy's father arrived with her suitcase.

The next day and a half passed in a frenzy of hard work, cleaning, clearing and repairing what they could. The weather changed, becoming hot and humid, making the work seem even harder. The things that were beyond repair, John burned in a campfire pit. By the end of the second day, they had the place more or less habitable. They found the bug screen panels for the porch under the cottage, and dragged the Adirondack chairs onto the porch, so that they could watch the sunset. John's mother always said those chairs were the only comfortable place to sit, in the whole cottage.

Their problems were not over, however. That second night they spent in the cottage was hot and sultry. Neither of them could sleep, and when John got up in the small hours announcing that he was going

for a swim, Amy said she would join him. There seemed little point in wearing swim-suits at that time of night, so they spent a refreshing ten minutes skinny dipping in the moonlight. Amy was the first to get out, and as she stood on the edge of the raised platform of the dock, remembered her dream of the slave market. She knew that her husband was looking up at her, and far from hanging her head in shame, stood proud and tall, looking up at the moon. Suddenly, she thought she saw something move on the lawn above her. "John," she called in a kind of stage whisper, "There's somebody up by the cottage." The thought of the ruffians who had caused so much wanton damage finding her in this vulnerable state was terrifying. John quickly joined her on the dock, and they crept together up the steps, to discover a large black bear pacing up and down the lawn like a sentry. The bear spotted them, and gave a little charge toward them, sending them scurrying back down the steps and into the water. But the bear made no attempt to follow them. Nor, for some reason, did it attempt to get into the cottage, though there was nothing to stop it. They made a couple more attempts to slip past the bear, but the animal made it very clear it was not going to let them pass. Despite the fact that they had been too hot earlier in the night, it was a lot cooler running around in the open air naked, and they were becoming uncomfortably cold. They had left the boat fully equipped, ready for the next occasion they would need it, so they put off from shore in it, pulling on the life-jackets for their meagre insulation value. John found an old pair of waders in a locker, which he gallantly offered to Amy.

When John had been growing up, the cottage had seen many visitors, and it had been the custom for the adults, typically his grandparents, aunts and uncles, to sleep in the cottage, and for the kids to camp out on the headland. It was toward this spot that he steered the boat. The bear seemed to have no objection to their coming ashore this far from the cottage, so they moored the boat and John began searching for something. "I'm sure I remember, when we were kids, we hid one of those old flint and steel gas-lighters out

here. We used to light a campfire most nights, look, you can still see the black marks on the rocks." After a brief search, he found the implement, and to his slight surprise found he could still strike a spark from it. It took half an hour to gather enough dry driftwood for a fire, and to persuade one of the sparks struck from the gadget to ignite it. But the effort had helped to keep them a little warmer. Any hope the fire might drive the bear away were quickly dispelled, however, the fire did help them to keep a little warmer.

As dawn broke, they heard the sound of another boat approaching up the lake: a fisherman getting an early start. They climbed into their boat so that their nakedness was a little less obvious. The other boat came in quite close to them, and the occupant hailed them. "You're out early, couldn't you sleep?"

"No, it was too hot, so we went for a swim, but a bear came and started guarding the cottage, so we couldn't get ashore."

The man looked at them somewhat quizzically. Had they but known it, he was well aware they were on their honeymoon, for news travels fast in so small a village, and he was wondering what kind of sexual antics young, modern newly-weds got up to in life-jackets and waders. "I don't actually see a bear up there it looks like it's gone."

They both looked, and found he was right.

They lazed about for the rest of the day, enjoying the holiday a honeymoon is supposed to be. They were able to sleep better that night, and looked forward to another day's holiday, but it was not quite as they had envisioned because that was the day of their first row. The cause was so trivial they had both forgotten what it was all about by the time it was halfway through. They both said things that were cruel and contained a kernel of fact that inflicted pain, but which were only partly true. They sulked for much of the afternoon, and were reconciled with spectacular passion soon after supper. The course of their quarrel was typical of first rows in most marriages, which are less a conflict than a fearful, hand in hand, exploration

of the depths of a shared love, and the boundaries of forgiveness. They came out of the experience with a stronger marriage than they had entered it.

The odd thing was, that after the row they were able to relax and enjoy the remaining days of their honeymoon. They felt as if they had been through some kind of trial, and perhaps they had. They had spent those early days creating a habitable home out of a state of chaos, and what better foundation can there be for a marriage than that? All too soon, the holiday was over, and they found themselves sitting on the porch for a last cup of tea before going to bed.

As the sun set over the Canadian Shield and made a beautiful reflection on the water, John and Amy sat back in their comfortable chairs and reflected on the days that had just passed. Did they want another week like the past one ever again or was this a series of events that would draw them closer together in the end. Or, would they ever want to come here again because of the memories held here? What had they learned, what had they discovered about each other and where would it take them in the weeks and months ahead?