

## **Trapped in a Painful Love by Corie McMillian**

Underneath the bottom left drawer of the dresser in the upstairs closet. This was the very best hiding spot in the entire house. Cassidy knew this well as she had used it many times to hide her phone. It wasn't a difficult spot to find, all you had to do was remove the drawer and there was an empty space big enough to fit an average sized pillow. The dresser itself wasn't anything special either. A vintage dresser Cassidy had bought from the Goodwill down the street roughly a month after buying the house. She hadn't noticed the amount of space between the floor and the drawers when she bought it, and lucky for her neither had Deon. If he had known about her hiding space then she wouldn't have found what he needed to be hidden. A hairbrush. A small, light orange, travel hairbrush meant to fit in a backpack or a purse. Cassidy knew what this meant. She wasn't clueless.

This wasn't the first time Deon had done this. Something as small as a pair of light blue rhinestone earrings, or a brand new, bright pink, bracelet might not mean much to someone else, but Cassidy knew better than that. She'd discovered one too many "birthday presents" to ignore what was blatantly under her nose. She didn't have pierced ears, she wasn't allowed to wear bright colors, and she certainly didn't have long enough hair to need this kind of hair brush.

Finding this new "present" and connecting the dots for what Cassidy swore is the last time left her sitting on the couch 4 hours later, waiting for Deon to return home. The hairbrush sat nicely on the coffee table in front of her. Slight mascara smudges ran down her face. Cassidy had never liked make-up when she was younger, but

eventually, the need for it outweighed her lack of desire after going through a bottle of concealer every week. But none of that mattered now. Deon was home.

The clock read 9:38 as the key to the front door turned and clicked. First thing Cassidy saw were his boots. Dark brown, leather boots she had bought him after they moved into the house. Next were his jeans. Slightly run down, blue jeans flowed by a plain black shirt with a flannel-coat combination on top. Finally, Cassidy saw his face. He had no expression and didn't even make eye contact as he closed the door behind him, hung up his keys, and began to take off his boots.

"Hey Deon..." she was cut off.

"Don't call me that." Deon didn't stop to look up at her.

"Um... Baby, can we talk for a minute?" Cassidy continued slightly more hesitant this time. By now Deon had taken off his boots and finally looked Cassidy in the eyes. Cassidy remained on the couch with her hands placed in her lap. It wasn't unusual for her to be sitting there when Deon returned. In fact, it was quite the opposite. Deon liked to know where she was at all times resulting in the rule that she must be waiting for him in a visible spot when he walked through the door as well as him knowing her work schedule and every time she left the house for any reason at all.

"About what?" Deon replied, crossing his arms. Cassidy pushed the hairbrush closer to him.

"This." was all she said.

"That was going to be a surprise for you, but I guess you had to go looking and ruin it." he said after a small pause that felt like forever to Cassidy. Deon was visibly angry already.

"I don't believe you..." she said hesitantly.

"What?" Deon was growing more and more pissed by the second. Cassidy knew he would start yelling soon. She didn't like what would normally follow.

"My hair isn't long enough to need this." Cassidy continued. "I don't think you bought this for me. I don't think you bought this at all."

"Cass, I bought this for you because I told you to grow your hair back out. You know I liked your long hair a lot better and you still went behind my back and cut it all off." He took a step forward, opening his arms. Cassidy had liked her long hair better too. Long, soft, blonde, bullet curls. The only issue was how much it dragged her down, or more accurately, how much he dragged her around.

"Deo... Baby. It has another name written on it." The name *Sherri* was written on the side in cursive with a heart as the dot in the "i". This upset Deon even further.

"Cass, it isn't my fault. You were working the night shift and she knocked on the door. Said she had been kicked out by her boyfriend, then she went on to me. What was I supposed to do? Just leave her sitting out there all depressed?" Deon took another step forward. Cassidy stood up.

"How did she even know you were here in the first place? How did she know you were here alone? When even was this, Deon?" Cassidy could feel the tears begin to form in her eyes. She knew he was lying, she could tell by the look in his eyes. That fearful look a child has when it gets caught raiding the cookie jar late late at night.

"How am I supposed to know, Cass? And you know I hate it when you call me that!"

Another step. Deon was almost to Cassidy now.

“Deon, you’ve done this before and I know what it means, so please just stop lying to me!” Deon had reached Cassidy. He looked furious.

“Stop calling me Deon!” He grabbed her by the wrist. Cassidy felt herself begin to cry. She knew what was coming and it scared her.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry! Baby!” She said in a rush. She couldn’t manage to break free of his grasp. She knew her wrist would be bruised in the morning. Cassidy was almost shaking in fear as she saw his other hand reach up. There it was.

*Whack!*

Deon let go of her wrist. Cassidy stood there speechless for a second before taking a step back from Deon.

“Oh great, now I’m the bad guy! Really, Cass, why can’t you just believe me? It wasn’t my fault.” Deon’s voice was stern and angry. Cassidy couldn’t find her voice. All her re-applied mascara was running down her cheeks and her make-up was failing to conceal a previous day’s argument.

“And just when I thought you were over all this petty arguing.” Deon began to walk towards the stairs. Apparently, this conversation was over. Cassidy remained silent, her feet seemingly glued to the floor where she stood. Deon didn’t even cast her a second glance as he began up the stairs. He was half way up when Cassidy began to move. Not towards the stairs, however, but towards the door, and fast.

She ran straight to the row of shoes, right next to Deon’s boots. She grabbed her sneakers and ran out the front door. After Cassidy left the house she didn’t stop, she didn’t turn around, she didn’t look back. Even if she couldn’t see Deon, she knew he was behind her. She could hear his heavy footsteps as he chased her half way down

the block, yelling profanities the whole way. If she turned around or stopped now, she'd have to buy more concealer a lot sooner than she wanted.

Cassidy ran for a solid 10 minutes before she had to stop to catch her breath. Deon wasn't chasing her anymore and she finally had time to put on her shoes. It was late fall in the middle of Colorado and she couldn't feel her feet anymore. Cassidy just wished she had had time to grab a coat. Deon didn't like it when she wore masculine clothes so she really only owned leggings and short shirts, both neutral colors of course. Her fingers were cold and her lips were beginning to turn blue, but Cassidy was almost where she wanted to be.

The bus stop.

Cassidy got on the bus using the small amount of cash she had in her pocket. It was just past 10, and not many people were out tonight. Cassidy took a seat at the back of the bus, the only other person on the bus sitting up at the front. The moment was bittersweet. On one hand, Cassidy was out, that in of itself being an achievement. On the other, she had no plan, no money, and no support. Cassidy didn't even know where this bus was taking her. She was alone.

In the midst of her terrible night, she caught something in the corner of her eye. A street sign that looked extremely familiar. It only took Cassidy a minute to realize where she had seen it before. She now knew where she was. Maybe there was hope for her after all.

Cassidy grew up in a small house in Missouri before moving to Colorado. She had lived with her mom, dad, and her older brother. She was 12 when he moved out of

the house. Andrew. Cassidy had always looked up to her brother which is perhaps why she decided to follow him to Colorado.

Tonight seemed to be her lucky night because that familiar street sign was 3 blocks away from his house. She got off at the next bus station and walked the remainder of the way there. It was nearing 11 now, so she had little faith as she rang the doorbell. Much to her surprise, her brother answered the door after a minute in sweats and a white t-shirt. Despite the late hour, he looked wide awake.

“Cassy? What are you doing here? And this late too? Please, come inside.” Andrew stepped out of the doorway, his blonde hair falling in front of his face. He took a second to sweep it out of his eyes.

“I... um. I.” Cassidy couldn’t speak. Her sobs had taken all the energy out of her and Andrew could tell. He didn’t poke her any further, he just opened his arms and hugged her. Cassidy knew she looked like a mess. Her hair was sticking up in the places it was longer, her body was freezing cold, her face was covered in black streaks and half-covered purple splotches. She didn’t have the energy to care. She didn’t say anything for the rest of the night. She didn’t have to.

In the morning, Cassidy woke up on the couch. Andrew’s house was smaller than hers. A two bedroom apartment with one room converted into an office. Andrew was in that office. She could hear him talking in a hushed voice on the phone. Cassidy knew what she needed to do next. She had all night to think about it. To think about Deon.

“Drew?” she called out as he appeared in the hallway.

“Yes Cassy?” he walked over with a worried expression. Cassidy did her best to smile. She knew that it was her fault. She knew Deon was right. She knew she was trapped.

“Take me home? Please?”

The End!!