

NEW PLEASURES

Chapter TWENTY



By
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Codes: noseX

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Preface

This story is the next instalment of the “Growing Pains” universe: Rhea is in serious trouble while Andy and Ray fight and Sarah receives a shock.

“New Pleasures” is set from June to October 1998.

The “Growing Pains” universe is a set of stories that centres around the life of Andy Williams and all those who got to know him as he grows up. While everything may not be totally clear, it will be the time the Universe is all released. For a fuller explanation please see my website under “Site and Story Credits.”

All stories should work well on their own but I believe there is more to be gained from the unfolding characters and plot lines to read it them order.

I shall try and keep to a regular posting schedule and will upload all stories to StoriesOnline.net, asstr.org, Feedbooks and my website. Completed stories will also be uploaded to Amazon Kindle, Smashwords and FirstyFish, where their internal policies permit but some instalments may be absent where the content is not compliant with their rules.

Please provide feedback to me, either by e-mail, Twitter or website review, whether you enjoyed it or not; I like to be told and it is the only payment I ask for.

Kind regards, John D

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Chapter XX

“What have you been up to now?” I asked the crestfallen Rhea, who was sat with the secretary in the office outside the headmistresses' study. She had been crying, clearly, but there was a mark of defiance in her body language that made me apprehensive. Like so many things Rhea did, there was going to be a complicated explanation to this.

“Where's Mum?” she asked, ignoring my question.

“Earls Court probably. I haven't been able to reach her. Her mobile is dead,” I replied answering her question. “So, what have you done?”

Before Rhea could reply the headmistress, Mrs Wyatt, opened her door and beckoned Sarah, myself and Rhea into her office. We exchanged pleasantries and she asked how Sarah and I were getting on at the College before asking where Mum was. I recounted the fact that she was unreachable and she tutted and then turned to my troublesome sister. “Rhea was involved in a violent incident today that is most regrettable, and unfortunately Government guidelines state that this means a temporary exclusion from the school.” She gave a simpering look towards my sister and cleared her throat. “Now ...”

Rhea looked up and interrupted the teacher. “So I'm getting suspended for stopping some bullying and protecting myself?” she asked in an accusatory voice, wiping her eyes as she spoke. “It was self-defence.” She banged the desk with her angry fists before sweeping her hair back.

Mrs Wyatt looked uncomfortable. “That is not quite what you said to Mr Rogers when he intervened. You used some disgraceful language by all accounts that threatened another pupil.” She glanced down at the paper in front of her and then back at my angry sister. “Mr Rogers said he had not heard such language from a pupil in all his life.”

Rhea shook her head. “That's not fair,” she moaned and the headmistress suggested Rhea recount the events of the “incident” herself. Rhea took a deep breath. “Nat has been bullying Si all term. I only found out about it today so I went and told him to stop it. He was there, smoking, behind the Technology block and he pushed me when I told him to stay out of it and was going to hit me so I smacked him in self-defence. Not hard, just to stop him,” she told her headmistress with a fierce determination. “I mean, he is almost twice the size of me.”

“It's admirable intentions, Rhea.”

“I do not have admirable intentions,” my sister thundered and raised herself from her seat to lean over the desk. “I was stopping some bullying!”

Mrs Wyatt told her to return to her seat. “We have an anti-bullying policy in place at the school and there was no need to get involved when it doesn't concern you.” Mrs Wyatt replied soothingly and gestured with her finger for my sister to sit down. “Now ...”

Rhea interrupted aggressively. “...but it does concern me. I was dating Nat but we split up in the Summer and he doesn't like me seeing Si. So he was having a go at Si to get at me.”

Mrs Wyatt shook her head slowly. “I am sorry Rhea. We have a robust anti-bullying policy and vigilantism by the pupils is not going to be tolerated ...”

Rhea banged her fist on the headmistress's desk again, causing her pens to topple over. "Bollocks. If your policy is so bloody fantastic then why has Si been bullied for the last six weeks, eh?" Rhea asked aggressively as her hands pointed accusingly towards Mrs Wyatt and I put my hand on Rhea's shoulder to calm her down.

"I don't tolerate that sort of language, young lady," Mrs Wyatt snapped at the angry teenager with a threatening degree of finality. "Now I know you meant well ..."

"I did not 'mean well'" Rhea shouting, leaning back over the desk. "I was putting a stop to bullying. Which is your bloody job but you can't do it. Perhaps we should just let everyone be threatened by bullies like Nat and their lives made a misery because some old hag can't be bothered."

"Rhea," I called to warn her but she was angry.

The headmistress took a deep breath and looked at my sister. "We do not tolerate bullying, Rhea. But neither do we tolerate fighting. Fighting on school premises is punished by a period of exclusion, you know that. And this isn't the first time this term that the little spat between you, and young Mr Pillington have caused problems, is it? Perhaps this will make you let bygones be bygones and put it behind you. And I know you don't want to, but it's time to let it go."

I could feel Rhea steaming at the softly spoken headmistress, but she didn't respond to the words spoken by Mrs Wyatt, who turned to me and passed an envelope. "Please give this to your mother on her return and we will see her and Rhea at 9am on Tuesday in this office for a discussion about Rhea's behaviour. And her language."

"This is bloody ridiculous!" Rhea exclaimed and got up. "Nat gets away scot-free for bullying and assaulting me, while I get suspended for stopping it." Mrs Wyatt went to respond but Rhea cut across her, my little sister's body language aggressive and unwelcoming. "This is pathetic. You're a flaming disgrace!"

Mrs Wyatt told Rhea that she would be addressing the behaviour of Nathan Pillington but as no-one had actually seen him hit her or Simon, he would not be suspended. This did little to improve Rhea's feeling of injustice and we left the office, and the school, in silence, after Rhea had kicked the door of the headmistress in anger on the way out.

We took a walk through the park and Rhea was still brooding. She was incandescent, and I could tell that she did not want to talk; Mum would ensure she would do enough of that later. Sarah held my hand as we meandered around the lake with my scowling sister behind us.

"Drink?" I asked, hoping that this would cheer Rhea up. "And a scone?" I nodded towards the little park café and we walked up the small incline in silence. Rhea was quiet and she sat staring out of the window. Her expression was a mixture of anger and resentment; it didn't bode well. We left after we had drunk the lemonades and as we descended the ramp, there was some shouting from our left.

"Nice one Rhea. Suspended for slapping me," Nathan bellowed from twenty yards away, and his two friends laughed at her. "Barely touched me and you get done."

"Leave it," I warned Rhea and she shot me a dangerous look. "Just leave it."

"Simon was crying his little eyes out when he thought you'd been expelled. Little cry-baby."

Wonder what he'll do now.”

“Rhea----” I said in a low voice. “Ignore him. He just wants a reaction. He just wants to taunt you, don't let him win.”

“But then the little wuss did need a girl to stand up for him. Wonder what will happen on Monday when you're not there to protect the little faggot. If he dares to come to school that is. I'm gonna do him over nicely. You can go visit him in hospital when I've finished with him.”

“Shut it Nathan,” I called across the park to him. “Fuckin' shut it.” He laughed, and he began taunting Rhea again.

“Or what, Andy? You protecting your little baby sister now? Poor little Rhea.”

“Fuck this!” Rhea flung her bag on the floor and started walking purposely over the grass and flowerbeds towards him, her arms outstretched and shouting. “Fucking come on Nat. This is between you and me. Not Si. You can't stand that it that I dumped you. Well it's over but if you want revenge, try and take it, you arrogant cunt.” Nathan's expression changed as my sister charged across the small football pitch towards him. “Well come on. I always could take you out.” I ran to keep with her and put my hand on her shoulder but Rhea shook it off with an expletive. “You want some Nat, well come on then.”

“Go on. Do as your big brother says or you'll get hurt.” She snorted derisively “Don't mess with me,” Nathan told her as she approached him. “I will hurt you and there's no teachers to stop me. And I'll fuck Simon up if...”. Rhea was almost level with Nathan and his two friends when, as part of her stride, her fist smacked into his solar plexus and in an instant, he keeled over, bending at the waist.

I grabbed Rhea and pulled her back. “Bloody hell, Rhea. Fucks sake, calm down,” I yelled and she wriggled out of my grip, her eyes not leaving the writhing boy on the floor. One of his friends went to move towards her but Rhea raised her hand into a fist and he instantly backed off a few yards towards the flowerbeds.

Standing over the prostrate teenager she yelled at him. “If you ever touch Si again I will tell everyone that you, the little virgin, just got beat up by a girl. For the third time. See what that goes to your standing in the fucking rugby team, captain?”

Nathan writhing on the floor, his hands over his stomach, muttered. “Fucking hate you Rhea.” He struggled onto all fours to right himself but Rhea smiled ominously.

“Yeah I fucking hate you too,” my sister shouted and kicked him in the face. “That's for trying to rape me,” she yelled. He howled in pain, collapsing onto the ground and I pulled her back but she spun round and stamped the groaning boy in the testicles. He yelled out a blood-curdling scream and I grabbed my baby sister by the waist, to drag her away. “And that, Tiny Cock, is for getting me suspended!” she shouted and even I could not suppress a wry smile.

I marched Rhea home in almost complete silence. She stormed upstairs and slammed her bedroom door and I put the letter from the school on the table. “Remind me never, ever, to upset your sister,” Sarah said and, the tenseness broken, we laughed.

Mum wouldn't though; Rhea was in deep, deep trouble.

I spoke to Mum on her mobile phone as the afternoon drew to a close and told her that

Rhea had been suspended for breaking up a fight in her own inevitable way. She didn't quite believe it but I did not want to go into details over the 'phone as it was up to Rhea to tell her side of the story. Mum said her train would get in at around seven and Sarah cooked some pasta with a sauce and some cheese. Rhea shouted at me through a closed door to tell me that she wasn't hungry so we left some out for her and ate ours while we did our homework.

At ten to seven the doorbell rang and I went down the stairs to answer it; I was expecting Miss Edwards but Simon's mother - Emma Matheson - and Simon stood in the windy street looking slightly anxious. "Is your mother in please? I need to speak to her," she asked.

"You better come in," I offered the stoical lady and guided them up the stairs to the lounge. "Take a seat," I offered, pointing to the sofa, and asked her if she wanted a drink as Mum wouldn't be home until 7pm. She tutted and I sent Sarah up the stairs to retrieve my errant sibling.

"Si!" Rhea called, greeting her boyfriend the moment she reached the bottom of the stairs and they hugged. "Why didn't you tell me about Nat?"

Rhea, dressed in jeans and T-Shirt, sat down on the sofa with her boyfriend and she glared at him waiting for an answer. There was a click on the door and I heard footsteps; Mum appeared and everyone in the lounge turned to face her. "Rhea, what's going on?"

"That's what I would like to know," Emma added and Mum spun round, taking off her coat and putting her bag down by the television.

"Emma Matheson?" She asked and Simon's mother nodded. "Grace Hardy," she said coolly and shook Emma's hand.

"I recognise that name," Emma muttered thoughtfully.

"Yes, I own and run the nightclub next door. You wrote and objected to the license being extended," Mum told her coldly and Emma shifted uncomfortably in her seat. "And organised that petition to the Council." Emma looked at Grace a little warily but Mum didn't notice or didn't care, and stared at her daughter. "Now Rhea, tell me what's been going on? You better not have been fighting in school."

Rhea looked at me and then Simon sheepishly and with trepidation started her explanation. "Well sort of. But it was self defence so stop scowling at me." Mum sighed and Rhea rubbed her nose. "You know I split with Nat in the Summer? Well I did that because he tried to blackmail me into having sex and then tried to force himself onto me," Rhea admitted quite calmly and Mum looked at Rhea aghast.

"You what?" She thundered and Rhea wiped her eyes. Simon put his arm around her, and she rested her head on his shoulder.

"He tried to rape me. But I can look after myself, and I fought him off. He got hit in places he didn't want to and that was the end of it ..."

"He tried to rape you?" She asked incredulously and Rhea nodded.

"He wanted to take my cherry and I wouldn't let him," she replied and Mum shook her head, her eyes boring into the coffee table. "He was the only one of his friends not sleeping with their girlfriend and he didn't like it. I wasn't prepared to have sex with him and

he got very angry with me.”

Simon squeezed Rhea as Mum asked the inevitable question, “Why the hell didn't you tell me? We need to speak to the Police and ...”

“This is why I didn't tell you,” Rhea barked. “You think one person's word against another is going to stand up in court? I don't want to be branded a liar for telling the truth.” She sighed and looked at her boyfriend. “But I didn't need to, I dealt with it at the time. And I had Si and Becky to talk to, particularly Si and he was great.” She gulped. “It scared me and I just didn't want to think about it but I dealt with it.”

“You silly, silly girl,” Mum told her and Rhea wiped her face with her hand. “So did he try it again today? I am not happy about this in the slightest.”

“He did not try to rape me today,” Rhea told her. “He didn't touch me.”

“So what did happen today?”

“So Nat is history and I start going out with Si who is brilliant with me but when we go back to school, Nat finds out and is not too happy, especially as the story of him being beaten up by me is all over the school so he starts bullying Si, only he didn't tell me. Or anyone, it seems.”

Mum looked over at Simon who shrugged his shoulders. “Well, it, um, wasn't much,” he stammered but Rhea sat up and shook her head, looking at her boyfriend and then his mother.

“I saw bruises every week on him and he told me it was just football. He missed half-a-dozen homework deadlines when I knew he had done the work as we did it together but always said he left it at home. He suddenly refused to go to the park after school and wouldn't tell me why,” Rhea muttered looking up at her boyfriend, who wiped a tear away from his eye. “He's been miserable for six weeks and said bugger all to the one person who needed to know.”

“You did not need to know,” Simon responded and rubbed his eye.

“Why didn't you tell me?” Emma asked her son and he didn't respond. “Or the teachers.”

“Or me,” Rhea barked. “Me. I did need to know. And what about the nasty rumours Si, was that Nat as well?” She asked him and Simon nodded but didn't speak.

His mum pressed for answer on why he didn't report the bullying and eventually he snapped a half-hearted answer. “Because I didn't want what's happened today. It was me he had a problem with, not Rhea. And she would get involved if she knew.”

“Too bloody right,” Rhea cried and clenched her hands into fists. “Of course I'd put a stop to it. You think I'd 'ave that? And I'd put a stop to it the moment I found out.”

Mum groaned. “So that's what has happened today?” Mum asked and Rhea shifted in her seat. “You tried to put a stop to it?”

“He told me. Or more to the point I found out from Laurence and he 'fessed up when I cornered him. So I went and found Nat and told him to leave me and Si alone or there would be trouble and he just pushed me and laughed. Said he would do what he wanted to Si and no-one would stop him. Not even me. He went to hit me and I just smacked him in

the face to protect myself. It came out of nowhere I promise, but at that point Mr Rogers came 'round the corner and saw me," Rhea said emotionally. Her voice was stressed and she had a pleading look in her eye, willing for Mum to believe her.

"That's when they phoned and we went to pick her up," I added and Mum looked at Rhea.

"Is that it?"

"Yeah," she muttered and Mum glared at her. Rhea looked sheepish for a moment and then looked at me. "Well, I sort of told the headmistress she was useless," Rhea admitted. "And as I left her office everything over the previous few weeks fell into place and I realised what that bastard had been doing to Si and I got a bit angry. But it was outside school, so it's fine."

"Oh Rhea, what happened?" Mum asked, her voice dripping with dread and weariness.

"He taunted me in the park, said he was going to do Si over good and proper on Monday as I wasn't going to be there to protect him and I sort of told him that if he touches Simon there really would be repercussions. And that was it." Mum raised her eyebrows and glowered at my teenage sister. "OK, and I may have hit him a little bit as well." Rhea shifted awkwardly and rubbed her eyes, as Mum cocked her head. "And a small kick. But that was it. Just a little bit of self-defence."

"Rhea, he was laid out in a bloody agony when we left," I added. Mum asked in an exasperated tone why I didn't stop her and I responded in an annoyed voice. "Because an angry Rhea is dangerous. I tried but the red mist had descended and she pushed me away. You know what she is like."

"I don't get why if this Nathan guy is so awful then why did you get involved with him?" Emma asked of Rhea who shrugged.

"I don't know. I've asked myself the same question why I was dating the school bully and didn't see it. He wasn't like that at first, he was OK. He is well into his rugby but we had a good laugh and I liked him. But since Christmas he's been getting nastier and nastier and doesn't like it that I dumped him. Certainly not in the way that I did. But I can't let him keep doing what he was doing to Si. It had to stop and the only way it was going to stop was me doing what I did. Draw a line in the sand, and all that. I knew I might get into trouble for it," Rhea muttered with a shrug. "But it had to stop, for Si's sake."

"You did all that and got suspended, just for me?" Simon whispered and Rhea nodded. "Why?"

"Because you are my boyfriend and I love you," she responded instantly and Simon squeezed her hand. "It's what you do with people you care about, you think about them before yourself."

I sniggered. "You are supposed to love me but you go out of your way to make my life difficult"

"You're a special case," she replied instantly and Sarah gave a hollow laugh. "While you are with that ..."

"Yes thank you Rhea," Mum interrupted and turned to Emma. "I think I need to go see this headmistress on Monday," she said with a sigh and Emma agreed.

"I think I do too. This Nathan sounds like he has been causing a lot of trouble."

"No don't," Rhea pleaded and looked at Mum. "I shouldn't have lost my temper or hit him so she is sort of right about that. From a school point of view anyway. And the attempted rape wasn't on school premises so they won't care and I can't prove that. And if he starts again I will take care of it."

Mum shook her head. "No young lady. You have done quite enough. If both of you had been honest with us from the start then this would not be as bad as it is. Now I want an address for this Nathan lad as I am going to go and have some serious words with his parents."

Rhea's eyes flashed. "Oh no Mum, please. I don't need you to. I can look after myself." Mum stared at Rhea who stared at the floor. "I'm not telling you," Rhea murmured.

"Rhea, you will tell me."

"Bloody won't," my sister told her and Mum glared at her. "I am not having my mother run 'round and fight my battles for me. It's not happening."

"Rhea, it is not a request. Tell me."

"No," Rhea shouted. "I don't need you to."

Mum looked at Simon who bit his lip. "Do you know?"

"Don't you dare," Rhea threatened but Emma glared at her son and he coughed.

"14 Riverview Lane, Weston Turville," Simon muttered and Rhea breathed in sharply and scowled at him, who simply squeezed his girlfriend's hand. Rhea shook her hand free and snorted.

"If you go then I'm coming," Rhea told her mother as she got up and cut across any protest. "I am not having my mother doing my dirty work."

This caused a smile across Emma's face and Mum took a deep breath. "You come, you behave, you hear?" Rhea said she did, and while I didn't doubt she had heard, would she have listened?

"I wouldn't mind a word with her as well," Emma asked. "If you don't mind that is."

Mum acquiesced to the request and guided her guests and Rhea to the stairs to go down the fire escape. I heard her Golf start up and the sound of an indignant Rhea as they left to see Nathan. Sarah and I looked at each other the moment the car left the car park. "Why did Rhea and Si have to keep secrets?"

"I don't know. That's Rhea isn't it? She thinks she has an answer and a solution to everything and everyone."

"She doesn't though," Sarah said, somewhat wistfully and I snorted.

"Of course she doesn't, but she won't ask for help when she needs it," I told her, suddenly thinking of at least one other girl in my life who was painfully similar in that regard.

Our peace was shattered by a door bell which Sarah went downstairs to answer. Miss

Edwards followed her back into the lounge and I smiled at her, she was wearing a coat with a big hood that covered her face completely. As it was not raining, I would suggest that this made her more noticeable, not less.

“Don't tell me you were followed?” I teased and my teacher groaned. “Quick, check the windows for MI5 spies and ...”

“It isn't funny. I could lose my job if what happened came out,” she said warningly and I nodded.

“Do you want to come up to my bedroom to get them or shall I bring them down here?”

Miss Edwards went to go upstairs and then thought better of it. “I'll stay here,” she said with a nervous grin. “I think me going into a student's bedroom to retrieve naked photographs might just get me into more trouble.”

Sarah laughed and I bounded upstairs, retrieved my portfolio and spare photos and came back into the lounge. It took only a couple of minutes to find the set of erotic images that related to Gemma and I had only put a couple of her in my portfolio. Miss Edwards stood nervously as I fished them out but I made sure neither Sarah nor Gemma could see any photos of the other girls.

“They are very good,” Sarah gushed as I flicked the salacious photographs across the table towards them and Miss Edwards forced a smile. “You do look very sexy.”

I laughed. “In future years they'll worth gold dust,” I joked. “Female teacher and all that.” Miss Edwards recoiled immediately as I spoke and I shrugged. “Sorry.”

She shook her head and gathered the pictures. “It's OK. I just need to be so careful now. People wouldn't understand.”

Sarah and I looked at her. She looked vulnerable and scared, but had no reason to be. “I am not going to tell anyone,” I promised and Sarah did likewise.

“I know, but not everyone would understand if it came out. There would be an outrage if they knew I worked in a strip club or that I messed with a sixteen year old. It'll cause so many problems.”

Sarah and I looked at each other. “Not from me. Or Mum.”

“Or me,” Sarah added. “We liked you as Gemma.”

Miss Edwards smiled, flicking her hair back and looked towards the stairs. Sensing her discomfort, we said goodbye to her and she hurriedly left the flat.

It took over an hour but there some creaking on the staircase and Sarah and I looked up expecting to hear shouting, from Rhea's mouth at least, but there was a sense of calm. The fire door swung open and the four-man party descended into the lounge. Sarah and I had our work spread out on the dining room table, with Sarah having got permission to spend the night at mine so we could work on our joint Mechanics project, due in that week.

Mum and Emma came into the dining room, and walked through into the kitchen. They were talking calmly and seemed to be in some agreement. Rhea appeared in the archway as Mum filled the kettle up.

"I know it's a lot to ask, but please can Si come up to the Lake District with me?" Rhea asked Mum and then Emma.

Emma looked at Mum for an explanation. "Every half-term Andy and Rhea go and spend a week with their Dad in the Lake District. He has a big house up there and they take it in turns to take a friend."

"Well I don't know," Emma said to Simon, who appeared behind Rhea. "We do have a few things to do in half-term and it is a long way to go."

"It's just, since we got together we've had all this. I didn't know about it, but for the last six weeks, Si has been bullied because of me and I want us to spend some time together where there isn't that hanging over us. And anyway, it will take him a week of him being nice to me for me to forgive him."

"You can't blame him for being bullied," I told Rhea, joining the conversation and she put her arm around his back.

"I don't blame him for that. I am annoyed with him for lying to me. I asked him if he knew where the rumours about him were coming from and he told me no. And he did know so he is in trouble for that," Rhea replied, her eyes not leaving his and a smile creeping across her face.

"No offence Rhea, but you are not really the sort of person to approach with problems," I told her with a smile and Sarah giggled.

"That's true. More the sort of person to get your problems from," Sarah added and Rhea clenched her fists.

"But he lied to me!" She said firmly staring at her boyfriend. "We can't have a relationship where he is lying to me. Or me to him. It's not on."

Simon nodded. "Sorry," he muttered.

"Yep, you will be if you do it again," she quipped and turned to Mum. "So can he come?"

Emma chortled. "Your daughter is very self-assured and confident"

A flicker came over Rhea's face but Mum answered, "She's too self-assured at times."

"Is that a yes then?" Rhea asked impatiently and Emma sucked in some air through her teeth.

"Well Rhea, you need to ask your father if it is fine for Simon to go," Mum told her but Rhea gave a grin and ran into the lounge to use the phone. She returned a few minutes later with an even bigger smile.

"He said that Simon is more than welcome and he will ensure the spare room is ready. So he is going then?"

Emma sighed and turned to Mum. "Well if Simon goes to the Lake District as John is away for the week at Scouts and Zoe is off with the Guides, I will have a child-free week."

Mum smiled and passed Emma a freshly brewed cup of tea. "I've got one too. It's a good feeling."

Once the Mathesons had left, Rhea later explained that Nathan was still in agony when they arrived at the house and his mother, who Rhea had often affectionately called "the Witch" laid into her when she saw her. Mum was apoplectic with rage when the Witch had shouted at Rhea and asked her if she thought it was OK for her son to try to rape schoolgirls and then bully his peers, at which point the mood changed. The Witch expected Nathan to deny the allegations Mum was making but with Rhea there, she said he seemed distracted and scared and eventually the truth came out although he denied the attempted rape, which made my sister swear profusely at the Pillingtons.

They left as Nathan was made to apologise to Simon. Mum demanded an apology from Nathan regarding the attempted rape but Nathan refused and the Witch told Mum that due to her violent tendencies, Rhea was psychotic and a danger to the rest of the school. She claimed her son had been crying in pain for most of the last five hours; this cheered Rhea up no end and she rationalised that it was even worth getting suspended to know that.

I winced as Rhea continued the story. Mum had simply got up and left with her and the Mathesons but Rhea had a glint in her eye as she got to that part of her tale. "I ran my keys down the side of their new car," Rhea admitted when I pressed her, "but I did it on the other side so no-one saw me. Not even Mum" I sighed and looked at her but she shrugged her shoulders. "No don't worry. I got a decent grip on the key. It went very deep. Nice scratch and everything on that side - the boot, back door, front door and bonnet. Car is only a couple of months old but looks shit now. Violent tendencies? Psychotic? Honestly, it's ludicrous. How can they say such things?" She muttered with not a single trace of irony in her voice.

* * * * *

The end of the last week of a half-term was tantalising, the one week break was only days away and talk of the half-term started to dominate the chatter at school and my thoughts outside of it.

I was travelling up to the Lake District to see my father and unfortunately wasn't taking anyone. Abi was working, Ray wasn't talking to me much, Sarah needed to sort out Kevin (so I could get promotion from the prospective boyfriend-to-be) and that only left Zoe. She was on Guide Camp as a semi-responsible leader and therefore I was resolved to go to Coniston on my own, but this was not really a problem; I needed some time to collect my thoughts.

I did wonder about Sarah as I lugged the carpet cleaner out of its cupboard and started returning the carpet to its' pristine state; would she really split up with Kevin? She had had opportunities to do it before and hadn't but if she didn't do it over the half-term break, what future did we have? It really was a make-or-break time in our relationship.

Ikenna and Susie greeted me as I neared the end of the work but did not engage in any conversation as I wiped down the bar and tables before returning the appliances.

It was something I had never seen before but as the Hoover was being returned, I caught a glimpse of something shiny in the corner of the small cupboard. I looked in and felt along the floor, expecting it to be a 5p coin but it was where the carpet met the wall and it was half-buried under the skirting.

I teased it out and gradually a small silver bracelet emerged into my hands. It was nice, but where had it come from? I sauntered into the lounge and walked through into the dining room. Mum was dishing up sausage, eggs and beans and I pulled out the bracelet and

looked it. It certainly looked a decent quality but it also looked familiar.

“Hey Mum?” I called and held out the bracelet.

“What?” came the abrupt reply. “I’m late. I promised ...”

“Where have I seen this before?” I asked. She turned and shrieked, throwing the sausages all over the oven top.

“Oh my God! Where was that?”

I looked at her in surprise. “Just in the club. At the back of a cupboard. I think it fell off or something.”

“It’s ... wow ... I never thought I’d see it again.”

She took the bracelet and examined the clip. It was a little weak and she reckoned that was how she lost it in the first place. “Why, what is it?”

Mum held the item on her hand and kissed the top of it, before putting it on a shelf in the kitchen. “It has sentimental value,” she finished and looked up at it. “I suppose I need to stop wearing it every day but it ... well can you set the table?”

I just shrugged and wandered back out of the kitchen, not expecting the reaction which I got from her.

The weekend passed quickly. I didn’t see or speak to Abi, Sarah, Ray or Zoe. A couple of school friends came to collect some work from me, but apart from cleaning the club when I had a nice chat with Susie, I was almost anti-social.

Abi was with Angela for the weekend at a family do so she didn’t even join me in bed. Rhea woke me up first thing on Sunday morning telling me to get “my lazy ass to church” as she went and I gave her a most unholy reply, but for the first time in months, I had some quality time to myself to read and enjoy my own company. I wasn’t sure I liked too much and was almost grateful when Monday came around again.

* * * * *

“Oi, Andy,” a familiar voice behind me called as I ambled out of College. I turned to see Ray and Donna running down the path and I waited for them to reach me.

“Hiya mate,” I called cheerily but he was scowling and angry.

“Why ya trying to split Ray and me up?” Donna asked as she reached me. Her face was hard and angry, while Ray was beet red and flustered.

“What?” I asked in amazement.

“Why are you getting your slutty sister to feel him up?”

“What gives you the right to call my sister slutty?”

“Rhea was stark naked when I was at your house and she jumped on me in the street earlier,” Ray told me.

“Disgraceful thing to do to a friend,” Donna added in a derisive tone.

I breathed out. "I didn't. Ray, you know Rhea. I couldn't get her to do it if I wanted to and I couldn't get her stop if I didn't. It's just Rhea."

"Don't lie to us," Donna shouted angrily.

"I'm not but if your relationship is in trouble don't blame me or my family ..." Donna drew back her breath and her shoulders swelled. "...and anyway, perhaps if you were less of a rabid bitch you wouldn't have to worry."

Donna screeched and Ray stepped forward.

"Don't call Donna a bitch," he shouted.

"You're fucked up," Donna told him. "All of your family are. It's being around that club and all those sluts."

"Rubbish!" Ray nodded as Donna spoke and I laughed at him. "You agree with her, do you? Only sluts work in the club?"

He was staring straight at me trying to read my mind but I glared back. "Yeah. I do," he added eventually. "Donna's right. And to think that you lust over them. And like them."

I grinned and lowered my voice. "Well next time you speak to your big sister, ask her if she agrees. Ask her if she thinks anyone who works in the club is a slut? 'Cause I reckon, she'd tell you to shut the fuck up."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Just ask her."

"He's bluffing Ray," Donna told him with a trace of concern in her voice.

"Oh really? Only one way to find out, ask her."

"You're lying Andy," Donna shouted and I shrugged. "I know her and she wouldn't go anywhere near there."

"OK. What you choose to believe is up to you, I don't care," I snapped. "But Ray knows not to make sweeping statements like that 'cause he's just called his sister a slut."

Out of nowhere Ray pushed me on my shoulder and I fell back against the small wall. I dropped my shoulder to let my bag drop on the floor and without hesitation launched myself at him. His face contorted with apprehension as I threw all my bodyweight into my hands and propelled him back across the path and into the flowerbed on the other side.

"GET UP," I yelled at him and Donna shrieked at me. "FUCKING GET UP AND FIGHT."

"Leave him alone!" Implored Donna as she helped him out from the roses, but I could feel a tightness and anger inside of me.

"He wanted a fight, he started it," I shouted at Donna as Ray got up.

"And I'm going to finish it," replied the gruff voice of Dr Parker, the Physics and boxing teacher, and my heart skipped a beat. "If you want a fight Master Williams then I will arrange for a match-up with one of my boys from the squad."

"No, Sir," I said meekly and he nodded.

"And you Master Ashton, perhaps you would care for twelve rounds, or as many as you can last, against one of my boys?"

Ray had shaken the last of the leaves from his body and had just returned to his feet. "No Sir"

"Right then both of you. Piss off and calm down. I don't want to see you 'round 'ere for the rest of today."

I looked at Sarah and she sighed. "You gotta learn to calm down," she told me, the moment we left the company of Ray and Donna. "I've ..."

"But he started that one," I told her and she shook her head. "We umm ..."

"Are as bad as one another," Sarah finished for me and stroked my arm. "Just calm down, OK? You promised me."

"Yeah," I muttered. "Sorry." Sarah shook her head and kissed me on the lips.

"Just ... don't," she pleaded. "For me."

I just about managed to be calm when I arrived home and propelled my bag across the living room and got Sarah and I a drink, when the doorbell rang. "Bet that's Ray," I moaned and stormed down the stairs.

"Andy," Sarah barked. "Stay calm." I snorted but took a deep breath and opened the door.

"Where's that psycho?" A woman shouted the moment I saw her.

"What?"

"Rhea," a boy from behind her asked and I knew him as Nathan.

"She isn't in, but then I don't think she wants to talk to you anyway," I replied tersely. "I think she made her opinions of you perfectly clear when she stamped on your balls."

"She did our new car," Nathan exclaimed and I suppressed a smile.

"She did what?" I asked, in a faux-polite voice and Nathan's mother, a crow-like woman replied.

"She ran some keys down the side of my new car. Over four hundred pounds worth of damage and I want compensation and an apology."

"That doesn't sound like Rhea," I told them feigning ignorance. "She is normally such a genteel girl. Perhaps it was some kids."

Both of them looked at me incredulously and the Witch shook her head. "I either get my money and an apology or I get the Police involved."

"You have proof then, that it was Rhea?" I asked and she spluttered for a moment.

"Of course it was Rhea. It was done when she came to my house."

“So lets get this right, you will go to do the Police. Say that the girl your son tried to rape may or may not have damaged your car and no-one saw her do it?” I was getting a smug satisfaction out of watching them squirm and it felt considerably more relaxed than I had done with Ray. “Good luck with that.”

Nathan waved his finger at me and Rhea appeared at the top of the stairs with Sarah. “You said she wasn't in. You fucking bitch. You scratched our car,” Nathan shouted up the stairs and I told Rhea to go back into the lounge, before bidding Nathan and his mother goodbye.

The Witch put her foot in the door to stop me from closing it and I took great delight in ramming the wood against her toes, causing her to howl in agony.

They rang on the doorbell and hammered on the door for a few minutes and then swore at me and said they would be back later, but somehow I didn't think Mum would take too kindly to them either.

They did return an hour later but Mum sent them away with a flea in their ear. They said they would get the Police involved but Mum was certain that they wouldn't. Rhea did get an ear-bashing though and while “you can't prove it was Rhea so go away” was fine for Nathan and his family, it didn't work very well when Rhea tried to use it against Mum applying sanctions.

In the end Mum decided Rhea had been through enough and she was given just a stern telling off and was grounded for the evening. “So what have you been up to today?” I asked Rhea (she had spent all day at home due to her suspension) as we settled down for our dinner; Sarah had left to go home and it was just Rhea, Mum and myself.

Rhea smiled. “Well Mum said I had to go to work with her 'cause I had to do some work. It was brilliant,” she enthused. “Sorting out stuff ... I wanna work there but Mum said ...” I smiled at Mum who shook her head.

“That wasn't meant to happen?” I asked with a wry smile; Rhea being suspended was supposed to be a punishment!

“No. But then afterwards I went for a walk in town. Saw Becky's sister, she is getting married in January.” I grunted and reminded myself that I had a job to do: I needed to speak to Ray's sister and it would be an awkward conversation. “And I've been invited.”

* * * * *

I put off speaking to Ray's sister (Jenny or Jessica dependent on the guise) for a couple of hours but after I had exhausted my homework diary for procrastination went to the privacy of my bedroom and dialled her number; she answered immediately.

I told her what had been said and gone on, skipping a few more pertinent details of that it was me who let it slip and she sighed with an air of resigned acceptance. She reasoned that he would probably find out anyway and thanked me for warning her. She said she hadn't heard from Ray that evening and I suspected he was probably licking his wounds at Donna's that caused Jenny to giggle.

She said she would probably text me if he rang but I knew that my outburst would not be the last of the matter. I didn't receive a text message but knew that Ray would either be OK with it the following morning or very far from happy.

* * * * *

I was in a world of my own as I ambled to College and bumped into a familiar face as I walked through the town centre. "Hiya," I called out to Scarlet who smiled at me as she got her balance back. "You OK?"

Scarlet nodded and straightened her clothes out. "Yeah sorry, didn't see where I was going." She licked her lips and rubbed her noses. "Just doing last minute shopping, when the bloody shops open. Fly out to Monaco tomorrow."

"Your film?" I asked and she nodded.

"Yeah, well excited about it. Came out of the blue, they've brought the filming of my scenes forward." Her excitement was evident and she was beaming as she spoke. "And I have more lines than before. Been learning them all and ..." She stopped and smiled. "It's cool."

"How long are you away for?"

She shrugged. "A few days," she told me. "Just a few days, but I'm so looking forward to it. It's only a small role but I've waited for so long to get it. And hopefully might lead onto other things." She shook her untidy, brown hair back. "But there's some real Hollywood royalty on the film as well. I hope I get to see them."

"They might ask you on a date," I teased and she pursed her lips.

"You sound like Eddie. They won't," she told me but I detected a note of caution in her voice. I wished her luck and continued on towards College, making her promise to tell me all about it when she got back; I was genuinely pleased for her, she deserved all of her success and could tell she was desperately hoping that this role would be a stepping stone and not the pinnacle of her career.

Sarah and I were talking in the Common Room when I saw Ray storm into the room. He surveyed the room for a moment, saw me and came bounding over, Donna in tow.

"Hey," I called out jovially. "Look Ray, about yesterday ..." Sarah had told me to talk to him about the day before but he ignored me and slammed his fist into my stomach.

"You fucked my sister, didn't you?" He shouted and the room went quiet as everyone turned to look at Ray and I. I was gasping for breath and had backed away, the suddenness of the attack causing more of a shock than the punch itself. "Tell me, Andy. You screwed her, didn't you?" Ray added, his voice quivering with anger.

"Is that what she said?" I asked gasping for breath.

Ray looked at the faces staring at us. "She didn't need to."

"Then you don't need me to tell you what we did, do you?"

"YOU FUCKING BASTARD," he yelled launching himself towards me again but I was ready for him and pushed him back against the benches. "You leave her alone."

"Or what? It's only you that doesn't see your sister might have a sex life."

Ray got back to his feet and stared at me. "She's my sister and you fucked her. You never

loved her or anything.”

“Oh of course I didn't love her. She was a one night fling, nothing more.”

Ray propelled himself towards me but I was ready and pushed him into the floor as he approached. “Oh grow up Ray. So what, I messed around with your sister, she is old enough to choose for herself. And by the way, I didn't fuck her?”

“That's my sister...”

I could feel anger coursing through my body and stood staring at my incandescent friend. I wanted to hurt him, I needed to but I knew Sarah would never forgive me if I hit him so I just taunted him. “Yeah, and I took naked pictures of her as well. Oh she does have a lovely body, doesn't she?” I goaded my friend. “I love her firm, round tits.”

Ray stared at me for a few moments. “You're a bastard, Andy,” he yelled, scrambling to his feet, and then stormed off wiping his eyes.

“Dude, how many birds are you screwing?” Jez shouted from the corner of the room.

“Err...do you mind. Private life,” I replied, despite having broadcast most of it around the room. I left with Sarah as the silence was replaced with hushed whispers and chatter.

“Donna. Ray,” Sarah called out as they stormed off and Donna turned around to face us.

“I don't know what you see in him Sarah,” Donna told my companion and she shook her head.

“Leave him alone. I know he had sex with Jessica...”

“Jenny,” Donna corrected sharply.

“Well I know. It's none of your business.”

I looked around the College courtyard for a moment and murmured to Sarah. “Can we all please go somewhere a little more private?” I asked and with much protestation – and only on the promise that I told Ray everything - we walked into an empty classroom. “Sit down,” I told Ray and he ignored me. “I said SIT DOWN. If you want to know what happened between Jenny and me then sit down.”

“We don't trust you,” Donna added and I glared at her.

“Technically Donna this doesn't concern you so shut the fuck up. Actually it doesn't really concern Ray but I am going to tell him as he is my friend.”

Ray scoffed and leant against the wall. “OK Ray. We've known each other for years and we used to do everything together. Now it'll be really shit if you walk out of here hating me. I know Donna doesn't like me one iota but I can't do much about that but I can at least build bridges with you. Now sit down, please, For old times sake and I shall explain.”

I gestured towards the empty chair and he looked at me and sat down. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes for a moment, sitting on the table at the front of the class.

“You know Jenny works in the club as a dancer?” I asked him and he nodded. “Shock, eh? It surprised me as well. I had a chat with her when I first found out, she is only dancing

Burlesque and not getting completely undressed, well not much anyway. We had a chat and a laugh. Now I saw her on a weekly basis and we'd have a chat, but the day after our GCSE results, her car broke down and came into the flat." Ray squirmed a little as I spoke and Donna was completely silent. "Now the flat was completely empty, and she rang her mechanic friend who was in London and said he would come and fix her car. While she was there she wanted to try on some underwear she had bought and she did, and she modelled it, and one thing led to another."

I saw Ray's fists clench and I breathed in deeply. "She is my sister," he said slowly. "I don't go screwing your sisters."

"She wasn't. Well isn't your sister in the club. I didn't sleep with Jenny. I slept with Jessica."

"Whose Jessica?" Donna asked, confused.

"Jenny," Sarah explained and I tapped the desk.

"Everyone who works at the club works under a pseudonym, an assumed name. So while she is at the club, she is Jessica. And outside Jenny. It's the way it works. Jenny is your sister who is untouchable, Jessica is a dancer who is very seductive." I told Ray but he didn't seem convinced.

"But she is my sister." I tapped my fingers on the table.

"But that's just how it works." I shrugged and he sniffed. "Now, most of the girls wanted photographs taking of them, mostly in the buff, so I have been doing photo shoots with them so I have seen all of your sister."

"Are you even sorry for what you did?" Donna asked and I pursed my lips together.

"I am sorry Ray is upset," I finally responded. "We didn't mean it to happen, and we certainly didn't want Ray to find out, for, well these reasons." Ray took a deep breath and I continued. "When you spoke to her, did she regret it?"

Ray bit his lip and, still staring at me, shrugged his shoulders. "No," he said in a low voice. "Said that her sex life was personal."

"Well maybe it's best to let it go," Sarah soothingly added and Donna flashed her eyes.

"He slept with Ray's sister," she spat.

"I didn't." I sighed and turned to Donna. "But if me getting it on with a relative is so bad, what was Astrid all about, eh?"

Donna glared at me, before adding, "it's got nothing to do with it."

"No, maybe not. But you took your cousin to see me as, and I quote, I was single. You must have hoped that we hit it off."

"You wouldn't have had to have sex," Donna replied venomously and I snorted.

"Oh, so what was you and young Master Ashton doing at Sarah's house those nights?" Donna expression changed from angry to furious and Ray blushed. "Look, I know I am no angel but both Jessica and I did something consensually and did it so no-one knew for months. We both enjoyed ourselves. Now I am sorry if that upsets you, Ray, but it isn't a

great deal different from what you two have been up to anyhow.”

Donna's eyes flashed and she took a sharp intake of breath. Fortunately the bell sounded, and I got up, picking my bag from the floor. Neither Ray nor Donna made any move and Sarah and I walked past them with their glares boring into our skulls. I wished Ray the best and offered my hand for him to shake but he didn't take it.

I knew it would have been difficult and I regretted the way I had reacted earlier in the week, but Ray and Donna were both hypocrites – they had a sex life of their own, and suddenly objected to me having mine, with whoever I wanted.

Ray needed to grow up, and I wondered how much of his anger came from Donna.

* * * * *

“So how are your bruises?” Rhea asked with a smirk as I was laid out on the sofa flicking through a magazine.

“What bruises?” I asked barely looking up from the half-naked ladies in print. “I don't have any bruises.”

Rhea snorted. “I heard that that you got into a fight with Ray. Brawling across the common room because you fucked his sister.”

I put the magazine down on my lap and looked at my sister. “Who told you that?”

“I protect my sources. But I heard that you gave Ray's sister one when her car broke down and she needed your help and so I guess Ray found out and tried to get even with you.”

“That's very insightful,” I said with mock seriousness and Rhea giggled as I picked up my naked ladies again.

“So how are they?”

I put my magazine back down and looked over at her. “I don't have any bruises, but then, how many would you have if Zoe knew everything about your relationship with her brother?”

Rhea snorted. “I know you wouldn't dare,” she said and shook her hair out of her face. “Because I would unleash the forces of hell upon you if you did.”

I hummed. “You've done that before. You should really try and come up with better threats,” I goaded her and picked up my magazine again.

I wondered if Zoe could have talked about it and Simon overheard and told Rhea, but I wasn't sure how much Zoe knew. It wasn't the first time Rhea had found out things she shouldn't have; just how did my little sister find out so much?

* * * * *

I had finished washing up when the doorbell rang and Simon appeared with his mother and Zoe.

“We were in town to see the dentist, how did Rhea and you get on?” Emma asked after the usual polite greetings had been exchanged.

"Oh, fine," Mum added and asked me to make a pot of tea. I returned with four cups, a milk jug, some sugar cubes, one teapot of tea and two lemonades.

"Don't I get tea," Rhea moaned and I passed her a fizzy drink and she smiled. "OK cheers bro."

"So I told her that I found the handling of this unacceptable and that I didn't expect the school to find bullying or attempted rape so permissive," Mum added to the conversation I had missed most of and Emma nodded. "There wasn't much she could do, Rhea had already served her suspension but she admitted that if she known about the history she would have handled it differently and has promised to keep Rhea and Simon separate from Nathan."

Emma smiled as Mum poured the tea. Zoe sat down on the couch next to me and took a full cup from Mum.

"And you didn't challenge her on her policies again, Rhea?" I asked and Rhea snarled at me.

"No. I was left outside. Totally outrageous, it was. I got ignored last time and then completely cut out this time."

Zoe grinned at Simon. "What did I tell you?"

Rhea paused for a moment and then looked at Simon. "What did she tell you?"

Simon blushed and was rescued by Mum talking to Emma. "So was she OK about Simon then?"

Emma nodded. "Oh yes. She said she didn't know about it before Rhea was suspended. Or the history between Nathan and Rhea or even Rhea and Simon although..." Emma paused and looked at Mum between taking sips of her drink. "Although she did indicate that Simon would do well to avoid Rhea."

"She said what?" Rhea shouted and looked at Simon's mother.

Emma recoiled and everyone looked at her. "She said you had been in trouble since you arrived and had dragged Simon into this and I should encourage Simon to avoid you."

"I'll kill her, I'll..." Rhea started and Mum interrupted her to be quiet.

"I've already told her that I am considering making a complaint to the Board of Governors. Just more to add," Mum said dismissively and Emma sucked in her lips.

"It didn't seem fair to me but she doesn't seem to like your daughter very much."

"I know," Rhea replied. "It's totally unfair and I don't know why."

"You did kick her door," I told my baby sister and she shrugged.

"She had just suspended me and not done her job properly. She always asks for 'feedback', well I gave it to her. She is absolutely useless."

"You are hardly the easiest pupil to have in the school," I suggested to Rhea who chuckled.

Mum stopped the conversation Rhea and myself were having and allowed Emma to continue speaking. "I've spoken to Rhea's dad on the phone last night and he is happy for Simon to go up and I have addresses and the like so if Simon wants to go, he can do."

Rhea and Simon beamed and looked at Mum. "Well I don't mind. As long as you don't terrorise him, Rhea."

"I won't," Rhea promised quickly and Mum raised her eyebrows.

"I mean it. You upset him once and you will be in such trouble, young lady," Mum warned and Rhea sighed.

"I won't. He is my boyfriend not my punch-bag."

"Good. Remember that. I know what you are like. Forget he concealed the bullying from you and move on."

"Mum! I know," Rhea replied sharply with an annoyed tone.

Emma watched the little exchange between Rhea and Mum and then nodded towards Zoe.

My little blonde friend looked at Mum and smiled. "Grace, you know when I saw you the other day. You said the cleaner had fallen and broke her hip and the replacement only could work when her kids were in school."

Mum hummed in agreement and Zoe bit her lip before continuing.

"Well that's Saturday and Sunday free. Would I be able to apply for the job, like what Andy does?"

Mum looked at Emma who shrugged. "It's her idea. She's badgering me all week to let me allow her to work with Andy."

"And you don't object?" Mum asked quite coldly but Emma didn't notice the animosity.

"Well I am not happy with it especially as it is the day of rest, but as long as it doesn't interfere with school work and church it's up to her. As I said she's been begging me all week, and she is seventeen. She needs a weekend job."

Mum raised her eyebrows and gave a grin. "I've got the next couple of weeks sorted. After that, I'll give you a weekend, see how you fit in." Zoe beamed and thanked Mum who nodded. "It's no walk in the park. It is hard work," she told my friend who nodded.

"I know, I've had Andy moan about it to me."

Mum looked at me with raised eyebrows. "Oh really?"

* * * * *

"That's a mamihlapinatapei," Rhea told us as we told her about our argument.

"A what?" Sarah asked and Rhea giggled.

"It's a fuck load of points at Scrabble," I teased and Rhea just leant back.

"It's when a couple both like each other and both won't make the first move."

"She wound up her English teacher."

"Ahh ... no!" Rhea shouted. "Completely the opposite. He thought it was incredible." Her eyes dropped for a moment then grunted. "The fucking bastard. It was utterly unreadable. I fuckin' 'ate English teachers," she moaned. "Cunts the lot of them. Or nackets. Or caitiffs. I put a sex scene in there and he still gave me top marks. It's a disgrace. He should be thrown out of the school for allowing such filth in the classroom. I'm outraged."

"But you wrote it," I told her and Rhea snorted.

"And? What's that got to do with anything."

Sarah and I looked each other, and smiled. "Maybe you've found your match," I teased and Rhea shook her head, taking a bite of her sandwich. "Because you used different words! You did what he wanted you to!"

"Yeah but ... oh fuck!"

Sarah looked at me as Rhea sniffed. "Come on, we got a bus to catch." I bade my sister farewell at the little café and we crossed the road to catch the Stoke Mandeville bus with seconds to spare. I nervously sat on the window seat thinking. I knew the day after that I had been stupid and thought there had been no problems as I felt fine (as did my genitals) but Sarah's insistence that I took an STI check was a responsible attitude; just why didn't I think of it?

I knew I had tried to put that night out of my mind but this didn't stop me from worrying about it and Sarah tugged my arm as the bus drew up outside the hospital.

The walk to the sexual health clinic within the hospital was a long one, but it felt longer and the receptionist recognised us the moment she saw us: I guessed not many people willingly go in with their "partners" and she called a nurse to come and see us. I didn't see this as a good sign, but the plump Pauline passed us our results. I trembled as I opened them and Sarah put her arm around my shoulder. "Clean," I muttered and Pauline nodded.

"I won't lecture you," she said soothingly. "But here is a big bag of condoms," she told me and passed me a paper bag. "We always give 'em out and you didn't want any last time, but it'll stop moments like this."

Sarah idly flicked open her results and muttered "snap" to me, and we got up to leave, thanking her. "You are very, very lucky," Sarah told me as we got to the bus stop and she checked her watch. "I need to catch a Wendover bus, but you are so lucky. Please don't do it again."

"I won't," I promised and she kissed me on the lips.

"And you're right, it was a silly thing to do."

"I know," I told her and watched as she got on a bus going in the opposite direction to me.

It gave me time to think: Sarah was right, I had been lucky, and I had not enjoyed that evening. At the time, it was good but it had pained me ever since, and with the test I felt as though I had closure. I had no intention of ever re-opening those wounds and made a resolution: that I would never touch drugs again! It just wasn't worth it.

"It's for you," Mum said passing me the phone as I came into the flat and I subconsciously picked it from her hands without asking who it was. I heard the sounds of crying the moment I put the phone to my ear.

"What's wrong?" I asked immediately and Sarah sniffed back.

"The bastard. He has been cheating on me with another girl," she wailed and a few things ran through my mind, namely that Sarah was hardly innocent in this department.

"You what?" I asked, not voicing my thoughts.

"Kev. He has been cheating on me. I have just had his girlfriend on the phone threatening me to leave him alone. I've rung him and he has admitted the lot."

"Oh, I am sorry, Sarah. I'll come over," I promised and looked at Mum, listening in on my conversation. "Please can you take me to Wendover?" I asked, looking out of the window at the ominous black clouds gathering overhead. "I need to see Sarah."

Mum sighed and put down her newspaper that she was not reading. "Nothing I should know about?" I suspected she was asking whether Sarah was pregnant or in serious trouble, but I just shook my head.

"No. Nothing like that," I replied quickly. "Just she is upset and I need to speak to her."

"Yeah, OK. This once. But don't be too long. I know what you two are like when you get talking."

"Cheers Mum," I told her and put the phone to my ear as Mum found her car keys. "Fifteen minutes," I promised my prospective girlfriend-to-be.

We travelled in silence down the roads towards the little town in rural Buckinghamshire and I directed her towards the upmarket house on the outskirts. She pulled into the drive of Sarah's house, parking her car in the corner of the gravelled driveway and I leapt out of the vehicle before it had stopped.

A tearful Sarah threw her arms around me the moment she saw me and Mum said she had to see Angela and went inside while Sarah and I embraced in the front garden; the rain was holding off and we didn't want to be overheard.

We hugged for a few moments and saw our mothers looking over us from the kitchen window. "I knew they'd be watching," I said, barely suppressing a grin, and we sat down on the small bench that was partly hidden from prying eyes in the house by a neatly trimmed hedge.

"I've told him that I never want to see him again and he just started weeping and promised to be faithful. But I told him that it was over," Sarah said resolutely.

"I'm sorry," I told her and held her hand. She bit her lip and looked into my eyes.

"Really? I thought you wanted me to split up with Kevin?"

I shrugged. "I did, you know I did. I didn't like him and ... well I want his place. But I didn't want him to cheat on you. I mean we were so careful to not overstep a particular line, but Abi reckoned he was playing away, he hit on her when we went bowling."

“And you didn't tell me,” Sarah barked and I took a deep breath.

“Would you have believed me if I had?” I asked and Sarah sniffed. “If Abi had told you, would you have believed her over your first love?” Sarah grunted in admission that I was right. “And it was just talk not him doing anything.”

“Well the fucking bastard did do something. Clarissa Hyde-Marriott. I mean what sort of name is that? She rang me up and started calling me all sorts. Saying I was a slut trying to steal her boyfriend and she was going to cut me open.” I took a sharp intake of breath and Sarah snarled as she spoke. “I mean, as if. And then I told her we had been dating for two years and she went off on one. So I ring Kev and ask him and he confessed and promised to be a proper boyfriend again, saying Clarissa meant nothing to him.”

“And what did you say?”

“I said that it was over and I never wanted to see him again and that I hated him. He has rung since but I won't talk to him.” I smiled, remembering Sarah's behaviour when she was annoyed at me.

“What does your mum say?” I asked. “She wasn't too fond of Kevin either was she?”

“Yeah, nobody was, and she told me to snap you up while you are still single,” Sarah replied and I grinned and kissed her on the cheek.

“Well I'm off to the Lake District. Can I be snapped up before then, or will I have to wait until I come back?” I asked and Sarah smirked.

“Or maybe dating boys is just too much trouble. I should go lesbian and ask Abi out.”

“Or Zoe?” I laughed at her, and wiped her eyes. “Well boyfriend or friend, I will still be here for you,” I promised. “You know that.”

Sarah snorted. “You know what I want, but well it's going to be a shit few days, I'm going to feel like poo I know it. To think that he cheated on me, it's just ... I didn't want my relationship to end like this; I just don't know what to think at the moment.”

I sighed and looked at her. She stared back at me with expectant eyes. “You could come with me? To Coniston? You'd have to share a room with me, but it's only you that nicks the covers and snores,” I teased and Sarah smiled.

“But it's tomorrow.”

“You weren't planning to do anything this week anyway, were you?”

Sarah smiled. “No. Well, I was going to split up with Kevin over a meal in London, but I s'pose I've already done that.”

“Then come. Dad won't mind, I'll check. I'd only be lonely. As will you be if you stay.”

“I am not sure if Mum will let me,” Sarah added and I shrugged. “But I'll ask.”

“Come on then,” I told her and dragged her up by her hand. She hesitated and I looked into her eyes. “You do want to, don't you?”

A smile flickered across her face and she pursed her lips, nodding. “Yeah,” she muttered.

"It's just so quick." My heart fell and I took a deep breath, waiting for her to say something.

"Well it's up to you, I don't want to push you into anything, but I would love you to join me and ..."

Sarah gulped and nodded before licking her lips. "I do want to," she said firmly and broke into a warm smile. "I think a week with you would be great." I smiled and she put her arms around me, kissing me on the lips before squeezing me tightly. "Thank you for putting up with me," she muttered as I rubbed my hands over her back. "I know I can be a bitch at times."

I didn't disagree with her, and we walked back into her house holding hands. "Mum, I am going with Andy tomorrow to stay at his Dad's house for the week," Sarah announced the moment we entered the kitchen. Angela looked at Mum who was grinning gleefully. "OK?"

"I'll take that tenner now," Mum said triumphantly before Angela could respond to her daughter.

"I bet Andy said something in the car on the way over."

Mum and I looked at each other and I spoke. "Something about what?"

Angela ignored my question and turned to Sarah. "You can do, if it's what you want."

"Yeah, yeah I do," Sarah replied with a smile on her face. "I think we could both do with the company."

"And as his friend I suppose?" Angela mocked in a high-pitched voice.

Sarah looked at me and shook her head. "No, as his girlfriend," she responded with a smirk. "It's something I should have done three months ago ... if only he had bloody asked!"

Rhea, Abi, Sarah, Andy, Scarlet, Grace, Zoe and Co will return in "New Secrets" and I will start posting that in November!

Note from the author

The “Growing Pains” universe is a set of stories that centres around the life of Andy Williams and all those who got to know him as he grows up. While everything may not be totally clear, it will be the time the Universe is all released. For a fuller explanation please see my website at <http://www.johndstories.co.uk>

I shall try and keep to a regular posting schedule and will upload to StoriesOnline.net, Feedbooks, asstr.org and my website. Completed stories will also be uploaded to Amazon Kindle, Smashwords and FirstyFish, where their internal policies permit.

The next two stories to be released are:

The wooing of a London soubrette

Young Terry Williams is desperate to woo a shockingly independent young lady, Grace Hardy, and needs all of his charm – and some help from Grace's friend – to get him close.

Excerpt: Terry was waiting for Grace at the entrance to the theatre on Old Compton Street with a big bouquet of flowers. “My friend recommended this show. Reckon the guy is going to be big and it is ideal place to take my young lady.”

“We can go to the show, it is a date, but am I really your young lady?” she teased and Terry smiled.

“Sorry. I know. I would like you to be my young lady.”

“And babe, I know you are trying to be nice, but please, stop the gifts. You are spending too much on me,” she told him and he looked at her with surprised puppy-dog eyes. He hesitated and Grace continued. “You don't buy people's affections with gifts.”

“I'm not trying to buy your affections, I just want you to be happy.”

To be released on, or before: 19th October 2012