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HELD TOGETHER BY A SAFETY PIN: A BROKEN STORY

I like fun tights. When tights with cutout patterns hit the shelves last season, I bought them in every color.

“Daaaaamn, those are hot,” my boyfriend Marty says whenever I wear them.

Mom says things like, “You look like a slut in those,” or “No wonder the best you can do is a tatted up mess like Marty.”

No surprise there. Mom just tells it like she sees it.

Last night I wore tights to work with a harlequin cutout pattern. One couple I waited on was newlyweds. “Six months today,” the beaming wife offered.

“This place is great,” the husband said, admiring the pallet wood walls & exposed barn beams. “My students would love this place. I’m a woodshop teacher,” he added.

“I’m a teacher too, one without a classroom,” I said. “Working here to support my writing habit.”

He looked me up & down, lingering on the tights.

“Really—“ he cut off.

He didn’t know I knew why he stopped talking.

Neither was the little Mrs hip that I saw her in the wall mirror, crushing his toes. The sharp pinch to the inner thigh is what got him, though—what

would get him through the rest of their visit.

“Anyway.” I said. “What can I get you?”

“A bottle of Revenge,” she said. “That’s a cab-merlot blend, right?”

“Yes.” I flipped my hair & knocked loose my beaded necklace.

If you thought the husband was under pressure looking at my tights, imagine the sweat that formed on his receding hairline while I collected my necklace & broken beads.

Her eyes on mine, his on hers, it was hard to miss *my* sweat trail. What they didn’t know was my sweat was because the safety pin holding my slip to my skirt came undone when I bent over. The pin tip pierced my spine in waves as I grabbed my scattered things.

The wife’s hand was still on her husband’s thigh. “Can we get a gluten-free menu?”

“Absolutely.” I turned mid word to hide my faked enthusiasm.

She craned

over his shoulder. When I returned, she relaxed & quit whispering.

I set down a platter between their glasses.

“What’s that?” she asked.

“Our newlywed special.” I passed her the menu.

“He’s the one who can’t have gluten. I can’t have dairy, though.” She pointed at the dip.

“It’s our signature hummus.” I smiled. Her pores would purge that garlic for days.

His arms still slack at his sides

like they were when first seated,

the husband stared at the menu.

He was the portrait of a returning soldier defeated at the entrance to his own hometown.

“I’ll be back with the Revenge.”

I presented the bottle to the couple by slipping it from my swaddled arms to

the table's edge, where I twisted & popped the cork out in a swift gesture.

His eyes were on my hands, hers on my face, her hand

gripped tight to his thigh.

The whole thing was amusing to watch in the mirror.

I poured him a taste.

"Allow," he took in a sharp breath, "the lady to have the first taste."

She lifted the glass to her lips with her free hand & downed it.

Knowing my tip was a wash, I decided to play teacher, have some fun. Before she could

respond, I said, "The first sip opens your pallet. The second is when you experience the wine's full bouquet." I poured another taste.

She nodded & removed her hand from the husband's thigh. "Excellent," she said.

I filled their glasses, took their dinner order & got out of there.

I waited for her to visit the restroom before collecting the bill.

"First marriage?" But I knew the answers.

"Mine. Second for my wife. She means well."

"Good luck."

"She just gets weird around pretty girls, especially dressed like you."

I'm sure he meant well. But, if—between my blouse buttoned to my chin, my flowy skirt that stopped below the knee & mid-calf boots—four inches of skin blossoming through geometric cutouts was scandalous, we're all doomed.

"If you wore those while teaching, the boys wouldn't pay attention to your lesson. I sure wouldn't."

His laugh was deep-gutted, woody, like he'd finally cut something loose &

could breathe again.

“Really?” I collected the billfold.

I passed the wife heading back to the table. When our paths crossed, I noticed she’d undone buttons on her blouse to open her neckline.

“Good luck,” I offered over my shoulder.

Her cheeks flushed. “On what?”

“Your new marriage. Happy six months.”

I dipped behind the counter to help another couple.

Some days I feel like my sanity—the world’s even—is held together by a safety pin. One wrong move & the pin unhinges, letting everything fall apart.

Mom says I’m safety challenged. She says my fear of commitment & having kids is proof. Wonder what her three marriages & divorces say about her safety challenges.

What’s safety anyway? Some false security blanket we wrap ourselves in that separates us from harm? The only safety I know is internal. You can’t expect it from others. Their resolve is flawed by their motives, by their quest to get what they want however they can.

Tonight Marty’s taking me to dinner.

When he gets home from work, he slips the noose of his tie from his neck & tosses it into the cleaners pile.

Taking me in from head to toe, he says, “You’re the reason I get through the day.”

He hugs & kisses me. I pull away from the kiss. Red lipstick rings his lips. I imagine my reflection mirrors his.

But what’s reflected in his eyes is what intrigues me. No fear. No regret. No holding back.

“Ditch the pin,” he says. “Who gives a shit what people think.”

Though it took me forever to hide the bar of the pin that holds together
the crossed panels of my wrap-around dress, I unfasten the clasp
& slip the pin free.