

Playtime

by Adam Sifre

Her head was free from restraint but she remained stone still, her eyes fixed on the paring knife that lay on the edge of the kitchen table. This wasn't his first rodeo and he knew that right now she only had eyes for the knife. He felt an absurd moment of jealousy. *I'm the real threat, not the knife. You don't want to forget that.* He'd almost gone with a nice pewter meat tenderizer but it felt too gaudy; or cliché.

Jon Tanner smiled. *Sometimes it's the little things that make it all worthwhile.*

He reached out and ran his fingers through her hair, beautiful if a bit matted and damp with sweat. His touch elicited a soft whimper and he closed his eyes, savoring the moment. Even muffled by the duct tape it was enough to make him hard. It was electric! Jon felt his control slip the smallest bit. His fingers tightened their grip on the woman's hair. Another moan. More electricity. *Too soon.* He forced himself to withdraw and the sweet pain of righteous self-denial added itself to the sweet pain in his groin.

Jon took a deep breath and tried to calm himself, ignoring the woman for the moment. It was a pleasant sort of kitchen; painted in soft yellow with white trim. Bright and cheery with the morning light streaming in. Cozy, but not too small. He didn't much care for the clock — one of those institutional faces that reminded him of high school. Certainly not something he'd ever choose. *To each their own.*

The poor woman was terrified. Duct tape covered her mouth so she couldn't scream, but her eyes gave that particular secret away. He had learned a thing or two about women over the years and he knew a woman's eyes concealed more than they revealed. A pretty girl's eyes always kept her mysteries, yes they did. And not even Jon Tanner could tease them out. No sir.

He walked into the dining room and stood before the bay window. "I love suburban neighborhoods." Another soft moan from the kitchen. "Completely empty of men on weekdays. Not a person in

sight. Marvelous." The streets were abandoned from nine am until two, when the schools let out. The sound of a chair scraping against the kitchen's wooden floor drew him back to them moment. He smiled and went back to the kitchen. She'd pushed the chair back almost a full foot. *B for effort.* He sat down on the chair to her left, and gently cupped her face in his hands.

So hot. She's running a fever. Her face was sticky slick with tears, snot, and a little blood. It disgusted him but his face remained impassive. No, not impassive. Kind. He had a kind face and people trusted him because of it.

He was about to reassure the poor woman when his cell phone buzzed. The screen read "Home," and he cursed under his breath. The woman started to really struggle now, her eyes finally pulling away from the knife in favor of the phone. Jon smiled and held a finger to his lip.

"Sh." Duct tape or no, he took the call in the living room, just to be safe.

"Hi babe."

His current 'significant other' had a bad habit of calling at the most inopportune times, and he had to fight to keep his voice free of anger and annoyance.

"Hi love. Busy?"

Jon kept eye contact with the woman in the kitchen, smiling.

"Always. What's up?"

"I just wanted to remind you that I'll be visiting Mother this weekend."

Jon frowned. Of all the stupid, don't-give-a-rat's-ass reasons to call him in the middle of work. "I remember." He made an effort to crank up the cheer factor. "I'll try to muddle by without you."

The voice on the other end turned whiney. "Are you sure you can't come? Mom would love to meet you, and you know how much Jeffrey likes you."

Jon's frown darkened just the tiniest notch. The last thing he wanted to do this weekend — or any weekend -- was waste it watching old people get older at some nursing home. As for Jeffrey,

he was all right as far as 12 year old boys went, which wasn't goddamned far.

"I'm sorry babe, I have too much work. Next time though, I promise."

He heard Lori sigh on the other end of the line. *End of the line.* That made him smile. *We'll see.* A few kissey kisseys later and he ended the call.

Thank Christ.

"Now where were we?" Back in the kitchen, the woman turned away, face toward the floor. *Resignation.* The smile returned to Jon's face and he walked back to her. He slowly turned her head until she faced him. Her breathing was labored and one of her eyes had gone completely bloodshot. That was a disappointment. *Her nose must be all stuffed up.*

"Such lovely eyes," he lied. "You're very fortunate." She tried to pull away, but it wasn't a serious effort. *A beautiful woman can only struggle for so long before understanding weighs her down,* he thought.

"Despair can work better than duct tape," he whispered. Sometimes he wondered if he said shit like that because he was crazy or because he felt that's what someone like him *should* say. His frown returned as he wiped a tear from her cheek and brought his fingers to his mouth.

He let go of her face and gently wiped his hands on her blouse, enjoying the feeling of her soft breasts underneath. Jon wasn't one of those sick sociopaths who killed women out of revulsion. Women excited him, and knowing that he would be the last pleasure they ever had -- *Yum.*

The woman's breathing quickened and she tried to scream when she saw him reach for the knife on the table. John brought a finger to his lips again. "Shhh. It's okay. Everything is okay." He brought the knife to her face and she renewed her struggle, but the tape kept her arms and feet bound to the chair.

"Don't move," he warned. "I don't want to hurt you." That made him giggle. He brought the knife to her mouth and poked a small hole in the duct tape.

"There. Better?"

Her breath made a soft whistling sound as she tried to suck in a full lungful of air.

"You're a whore," Jon said. "I don't know you very well, so I can't say what your price is. But you're a whore." Fresh tears spilled down the pretty woman's face. He gently pressed the knife edge flush against her cheek and watched as they pooled on the metal.

"It's okay," Jon whispered. "I like whores. And I love your eyes, you know."

More tears. More snot.

He took the knife away from her face. "So."

Before she could pull away, Jon grabbed the back of her head and pushed the knife in one eye until it popped. Then the other. The woman screamed, loud enough to cause him a few seconds of worry despite the duct tape. Blood and bits of ... bits of something ran down her face and her whole body convulsed and twisted in the chair, giving the impression of someone being electrocuted. He sat there for a few minutes touching her hands, sometimes squeezing her breasts, until she slowed down and finally just stopped. Only her labored breathing let him know she was still alive.

Later, Jon gently removed the tape from her mouth. He stood up and walked out of the kitchen. *This is exciting!* He went to the front door, took a quick peek outside and was greeted by a ghost town of silent SUVs and soft whisk of automatic sprinklers. He smiled and ducked outside. His car was parked a few streets over, and he had to force himself not to run, just in case.

Such a thrill, to let one live.

"Maybe I'm getting better."

