

And a snippet from today's work

By Holly Lisle

Hmmm... Things are getting tense for Phoebe.

Phoebe hit the landing, and heard Michael's feet on the stairs behind her.

Here she could see – windows from open doors and the skylights over the balcony let in moonlight. It seemed, after the darkness of the corridor and the back stairs, like stepping into daylight.

From these stairs, she had to turn left again. Three rooms down. Or was it four. She's never come at the room from this direction.

She started loping, going easy on the bad leg, praying that she would be able to recognize the right room when she reached it.

And Michael reached the top of the stairs, bolted after her, and grabbed her.

She screamed. Fought him. But she weighed about a hundred pounds, and he was a big man. He'd always been tall, strong, but now he was simply big. Hands like hams, hard and thick-fingered and callused. Massive arms. The rock-hard chest of some steroid-enhanced gym-monster. He stank. Old sweat, unwashed skin, and something darker, viler. He smelled like Death walked with him. In her ear, he whispered, "Don't do that, sweetheart. If you fight me, you might hurt yourself."

And I wouldn't want you to hurt yourself."

He took a rope, soft, thin, almost velvety, and bound her wrists with it – tightly, behind her back. As soon as he did it, she could feel her fingers start to go numb. He flipped her to the floor as neatly as a cowboy flipping a calf, and bound her ankles the same way.

"Boy Scout knots," he said. "My years of Scouting have turned out to be useful in so many ways."

"You were never a Boy Scout," Phoebe whispered.

"Well ... no. But my ... partner, for lack of a better word ... was. I got the benefits without the tedium. The best of all possible worlds."

Then he picked her up, slung her over his shoulder, and started back toward the stairs.

"Time to have some fun," he said.

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