

When I opened my bedroom door, the smell and sound were even worse. “What the hell?” I said to nobody as I walked down the short hall to Renee’s room. Jerry Michael was standing on a ladder holding a flat metal disc to the wall. He was wearing a flowered babushka on his head. I recognized the steaming machine because my mom had used one in our dining room when we first moved in.

“What is that smell?” I hollered over the hissing sound.

He stepped off the ladder and shut the machine off. “Well good morning to you, too, RA. How are *you* feeling this lovely morning?”

“Like crap.” I turned around to be sure nobody else was around. “Thanks again for last night.”

“Don’t mention it. Go eat something and take some aspirin. And don’t worry, my lips are sealed.”

“Thanks.” I managed to smile, even though it made my headache worse. “But what is that smell?”

“Vinegar. It helps the wallpaper come off easier.”

“Oh. Maybe that’s why I was dreaming about Easter eggs.”

I passed Renee on the stairs. She was also wearing a babushka. “Well, what do you know?” she said. “Her majesty has awakened.”

I was relieved that my mom wasn’t around when I got downstairs. I was nibbling on toast when somebody knocked on the back door. I thought about ignoring it, since I was in no shape to face anybody, but they continued knocking. When I opened the door, Cathy was standing there with a small plate and some scrapers.

“Hi. Your mom wanted to borrow these,” she said. “And here’s some anise cookies too.” I must have looked confused, because she went on. “They’re for the wallpaper. To scrape the wallpaper.”

I really wanted to take the stuff and shut the door, but I knew that would be rude. “Oh yeah. Thanks, Cath. You wanna come in? I’m just getting something to eat.”

She sat across from me at the dining room table while I sipped on Carnation Instant Breakfast.