III. Hatpins, Stilettos & Swords

KAREN arrived early on Saturday afternoon. Claudia encouraged her to enjoy the garden while she finished preparing the tea and coffee. Since the third chair was empty, Karen had a chance to examine Burt’s recent addition to the unique set. While she stared in awe at the exquisitely carved piece of furniture, the artist came up beside her.

“What do you think?” Burt asked, his voice soft and gravelly.

“I think it’s astonishingly beautiful. Evocative. Has Kim seen it yet?”

“Nope, not yet,” he replied. “She finally comprehended the original table and chairs when she came to Claudia for help. After ten years of thinking the images were roses, that was a bit of a shock. But she hasn’t noticed this one yet.”

Karen shook her head. “If she had to open her heart to recognize the images of Claudia, I can’t guess what it’ll take to see this.”

“I’ve been thinking about that too. She might have to learn to love herself. And open her eyes to her own strength and beauty.”

Karen smiled. “Yes, that may be it. I hope that happens for her.” Hmm, have I opened my eyes to my own beauty? Probably not. I can only see it through Mike’s eyes. Another thing I miss. For a while, through his vision, she’d felt beautiful, inside and out.

“What had you make it?” she asked, coming back to the present.
Burt grimaced. “Claudia was waiting and waiting and waiting. Month after month. I had to do something.” He smiled. “This was my way of willing Kimberlee to come around.”

“Kind of like magic, huh?” Karen teased.

Burt briefly touched her arm. “Don’t you think we could use some magic?” His bushy eyebrows rose inquisitively. Then his deep brown eyes grew moist. His voice lowered, “At least, it was a way to add my blessing to these proceedings.”

Karen impulsively hugged the big man. She was gratified by a hearty embrace in return.

CLAUDIA could not help but smile as Kimberlee blurted out: “Why do women do it? It doesn’t work. It drives men away. Or to silence, at least. We don’t get what we need out of it. What’s the point?”

They had barely sat down. Claudia chuckled, pleased beyond her most hopeful expectations. “My, how far we have come.”

Kimberlee asked, “What do you mean?”

“I am only pointing out that, merely a week ago, it made perfect sense to you. You have experienced a paradigm shift. Now it is difficult to imagine what was completely normal before.”

“But to your question,” Claudia added, “let us take a moment to put the proverbial nail in the coffin. Or it will still be possible to go back. Remember: What is the point of punishing men? Why did you do it?”

“Hmm. Let me think. Got any clues for me?” Kimberlee asked.

“Yes. Picture the men. As they are being punished; after they have been punished. What do they look like?” Claudia said.

Karen unexpectedly chimed in, “I can see them. But it starts before they’re punished. They look strong, powerful and full of themselves. That’s what we hate. It’s somehow threatening.”

Karen sipped her coffee and continued, “While we criticize them, or cold shoulder them, or remain unimpressed, they look chastised. Little boys being spanked, or wagged a finger at. After their initial shock, they look dismayed, disbelieving.”

She finished with, “Afterwards, their shoulders droop. Their heads hang. But most important, they’re not powerful anymore. Their bravado has been stolen and they’re weak. And we feel comfortable again.” She stared into her cup.

Claudia sat back in awe. It was poetry to her; sad, tragic even, but poetry. She had thought she would have to draw it out of them both. She looked to see if Kimberlee understood. The tears pooling in her eyes said it all.

Claudia waited in silence. She felt blessed to have been only sixteen when she was in their position. Less damage to process, to reconcile, to forgive myself for, she remembered.

“Grandmother?” Kimberlee said, her voice small, reminding Claudia of when the beautiful young woman was sixteen herself — and Claudia was forbidden from handing
over her inheritance. The inheritance that would have saved fifteen years of suffering.

“Yes, dear?”

Kimberlee blew her nose. “Obviously, I’m emotional about this. But I’m confused, too. Why should I care that we steal men’s power? Siphon it off? Drain it like blood? Honestly, why should I give a damn? I’m like Karen — I’m one of the women who feels safer when men are weak. I hate to admit it, but it’s true. It’s been true as long as I can remember.”


She steadied herself before she spoke. She knew they would criticize themselves more than enough. She did not need to provide that. It was her job to provide perspective, compassion, understanding; and, ultimately, an alternative.

“Thank you both. You have been startlingly, beautifully, disarmingly honest. And accurate,” Claudia began. “This is the state of affairs. This is the natural outcome of comparing men to an idealized woman — the Perfect Person.”

“How so?” Karen asked.

“Yeah, how does that work?” Kimberlee added.

Claudia replied, “Compared to the Perfect Person, men appear to be doing the wrong thing on purpose. In other words, misbehaving. When someone misbehaves, they must be punished. When someone consistently misbehaves, his power must be taken away or limited severely — to prevent a bigger disaster. When someone belongs to a group that is known for misbehavior, his power is removed preemptively. This is how most women relate to men.”

Kimberlee was bent over and looked as if she might be choking. “Are you all right, dear?” Claudia asked. The dark head nodded.

After some moments, still looking in her lap, Kimberlee whispered, “But what if they’ve proven that they can’t be trusted? That they’re bad?”

Although Kimberlee did not know it, Claudia knew precisely of what she spoke. But there were still more pieces of information needed to disarm that particular bomb. She prayed she could help Kimberlee around this barrier now, in the abstract.

“I think you are asking about dangerous men,” she began. Kimberlee looked up suddenly, her bright eyes wide in surprise.

Claudia continued, her words gentle but firm. “It is true that there are dangerous men. Unfortunately, when a woman has encountered one, especially as a child, she often concludes that all men are dangerous. Then she spends a lifetime defending herself against all men, not only the ones who deserve it.”

She added, “It is even more tragic than you can imagine.”

“Why?” Kimberlee asked suspiciously.

“Because most women subscribe to the idea that ‘the best defense is a good offense.’ With the belief that she must defend herself against all men, she actually attacks them. This leaves the 97 percent of mankind that is healthy and honorable having to defend themselves from her.”

Claudia sighed and continued, “Since men are Single Focused, if they have to defend themselves, they cannot simultaneously defend the woman that they would otherwise have gladly protected. In other words, they cannot defend her because
they have to defend themselves from her. Thus, she is left on her own, when she could have had most men on her side.”

“It’s exhausting,” Kimberlee exclaimed and looked abashed at her accidental admission.

“Yes,” Claudia responded slowly, “it is a heavy sword to lug around.”

“What’s the alternative?” Karen interjected.

Claudia suspected Karen was uncomfortable with the tension palpable in Kimberlee. If Karen’s going to teach this, I’ll have to train her to allow the tension instead of always easing it.

Claudia replied simply, anticipating, “Lay it down. Lay down your sword.”

“But how will I protect myself?” Kimberlee asked, her eyes desperate.

Claudia sipped her tea, leaving the question hanging in the air between them.

“Before I answer your question directly, let us take another look at this ‘sword,’” she said. “How it functions and how well it actually performs. Is that agreeable to you both?”

The women nodded, with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm.

“The most accurate word for what we are referring to is ‘castration,’” Claudia began.

“Isn’t that a bit harsh?” Karen protested.

“Yes, the word is harsh,” Claudia replied. “But no more harsh than the action, or its effects.”

“Okay, I’m listening.” Karen responded.

“In Webster’s dictionary, the word ‘castrate’ means ‘to deprive of strength, power, or efficiency; to weaken.’ Its synonym is ‘emasculate,’ which is a little milder and the preferred word to use around men. Even the word ‘castrate’ can make a man flinch.”

“I prefer ‘emasculate’ too,” Karen said.

“Most women do,” Claudia responded. “But watch that you do not use it to avoid confronting the brutality of what women do. It must be faced head-on. Or it will never stop.”

“Umm, not to be dense or anything, but why should it stop?” Kimberlee asked tentatively.

Claudia took a moment to compose. Remember, Missy, they know not what they do, she reminded herself. They have never seen what is possible between women and men without castration and objectification. It is hard to imagine what you have never witnessed. They cannot conceive of the power of the Queen’s Code.

She decided to try a different tack, hoping to create compassion. “Kimberlee, have you ever felt backed into a corner? Where you felt pushed and pushed until you exploded, finally reacting in self-defense?”

Kimberlee nodded.

“Were you proud of it? Is it what you would have done if you had not been pushed that hard?”

She waited while Kimberlee thought.

“Usually I regret my reaction. But in those situations, I can’t think. The person is in my face. The pressure’s too great,” Kimberlee said.
Claudia nodded, thankful for the opening. “Imagine that this is how women on the attack seem to men. Pressure with no relief. Pressure provoking the most primitive, defensive response, which they struggle to control. And which most men deeply regret.”

Kimberlee protested, “But they should control it! They’re ridiculous! Once Mathew threw a wrench across the lawn. And Raul got so wound up, he punched a wall!”


Claudia pressed her eyes closed, slowly shaking her head. Please, God, help her see this. She opened her eyes and willed herself to be patient.

“I will answer your question. But first, are you willing to see something from a completely different point of view? From a man’s point of view?”

Kimberlee ran her fingers through her hair, pulling hard on the short strands, as if to pull her brains out too. “Ugh! This is soooo hard. Why’s it this hard? I just wanted to stop Frog Farming!”

Thank you, God, Claudia thought and responded firmly. “Castrating men is the foundation of Frog Farming. It is the ‘how’ of Frog Farming. The act of diminishing men and the attitude that they deserve to be diminished. Castration is how all women bring out the worst in men.”

KIMBERLEE groaned and closed her eyes.

“Claudia, I feel sick,” she said, putting her hand on her roiling stomach.

She was surprised at Claudia’s gentle response. “I know, dear. I felt sick too when I found out.”

“You did? How come?” Karen asked.

“Even though I was only sixteen, I had already attacked my father and brothers. And experienced the long-term effects of castrating men.” Her grandmother looked sad.

“Would you tell us about them?” Karen interjected, reminding Kimberlee that she, too, was confronting this topic. I am not alone, she thought gratefully.

“Of course,” Claudia replied. “But you might want to write this down. It is worth reviewing from time to time. If you are ever concerned that you are castrating men, simply look for its effects.”

Kimberlee reluctantly turned to a fresh sheet in her spiral notebook. Unlike Karen, she wasn’t into taking notes. Okay, if we’ve arrived at the foundation of Frog Farming, I’d better pay close attention.

“First, the Long-term Effects,” Claudia declared. “Over time, when a man is castrated in a relationship, in a family, in an organization — even in a society — he will respond to women in a way the opposite of his nature. One of his initial reactions will be to keep his distance instead of seeking intimacy.”

Kimberlee couldn’t help herself: “You’re saying that ‘seeking intimacy’ is part of a man’s nature? Never seen it; are you sure?”

She watched Claudia take a deep breath. That was happening often today.

“If what I am saying is true, that men naturally seek intimacy, and you have never seen it … what would that tell you?” Claudia asked.

Kimberlee closed her eyes again in despair. Ahh. The knife is turned.

After a moment in which she wanted to disappear, she ventured, “That I’m so quick to attack that men never have a chance?”

She received a compassionate squeeze of her hand and her stomach flip-flopped.

KAREN’s heart went out to Kimberlee. What courage. I would have fled from such a realization.

“Claudia, what are the other long-term effects of emas — of castration?” she asked, forcing herself to use the more brutal word.

Claudia smiled appreciatively and Karen felt warmed by the recognition.

“Yes, thank you, Karen. Besides keeping their distance instead of seeking intimacy, there are several other significant effects. One is to compete with a woman instead of cherishing her.”

With a wave of nausea, Karen remembered Mike telling her that he felt he had to compete with her, when her teaching career was going better than his business.

“Okay, now I’m gonna be sick. Or ‘blow chunks,’ as the boys would say,” she joked feebly and Kim chuckled.

“Keep breathing, both of you. Remember the saying, ‘the truth will set you free,’” Claudia encouraged.

“But,” Kim quipped, “you left out the part: ‘First it will piss you off.’”

“It is good to bring a sense of humor to this,” Claudia said.

“Why?” Karen asked.

“Because compassionate humor is an expression of Human Spirit. As you battle your own most primitive, defensive reactions, there is no better weapon.”

“Would you say more about that?” Karen asked.

“Another time, dear. We have three more long-term effects to illuminate,” Claudia responded. “Ready?”

They both nodded again.

“Over time, castration will cause a man to anticipate women with suspicion instead of trust.”

Karen nodded, “That makes sense. What else?”

She saw Claudia look deliberately at Kimberlee as she said, “Instead of respect, which men naturally have for women, it causes men to treat women with disdain.”

Karen watched Kimberlee blanche. The younger woman asked feebly, “Does that mean Myra is the source of her own complaint?”

Claudia merely nodded.

“And the last one, Claudia?” Karen prompted.
“After being castrated — again, in a relationship or a society, or anywhere in between — a man will eventually come to relate to women — a particular woman, or all women — from fear.”

“Instead of?” Karen prompted.

“Love.”

KIMBERLEE’s mind reeled as she put the pieces together. While my mind’s been screaming that it can’t be true, my heart is singing for the first time since I was a child. When I was innocent and open and loving — and whole.

Cautiously, she asked Claudia, “Can I make sure I’ve got this straight?”

Claudia nodded.

“You’re saying that ‘by nature’ men regard women with love and trust, seeking intimacy and willing to cherish them?”

Her eyes held Claudia’s as the older woman nodded, without a word.

“And we get the opposite because we castrate them.”

“Yes,” Claudia stated, “that is Frog Farming pure and simple.”

Kimberlee leaned back in her chair and let out a sigh. She noticed she was pursing her lips in a perfect imitation of her grandmother.

Shaking her head ruefully, she said, “I can’t imagine how it must have been for you all these years, Grandmother. Watching me Frog Farm Mathew. And emasculate Granddad, even. Ignoring him. Interrupting him. Even accusing him of trying to control me. I’m very sorry.”

CLAUDIA was touched by Kimberlee’s apology. Unprecedented that I should hear such words. It will mean the world to Burt. She smiled at Kimberlee, holding her gaze. In that moment, Kimberlee seemed more grown up to her than ever.

There was more to accomplish but Claudia thought this was a good time for a break. “How about we stretch our legs, replenish our refreshments, and then talk about men’s immediate reaction to castration?”

“Oh, goodie,” Kimberlee chirped.

“It should not take long. But it will tie up some loose ends for that brain of yours,” Claudia said.

After they had all recharged, Claudia began, “This brings us back to Kimberlee’s question, ‘But how will I protect myself?’ Remember asking that?”

Kimberlee nodded, “Of course. I’m not as concerned about it as I was. Because I can see that, over time, not castrating men would make a woman safer. Because a man will protect what he cherishes. But I’m still worried about dealing with a dangerous man, in the moment.”

Claudia felt relieved. We can do this, she thought with satisfaction.
“There are more topics I need to teach you, to make sense of how to set boundaries with men. That would be the what-to-do part. For now, Kimberlee, would you accept seeing what not to do?”

“I don’t know.”

“Thank you for your honesty. I am willing to work with that.” She forged ahead, “When a man is castrated, he has an immediate emotional response. Karen mentioned earlier ‘shock,’ ‘dismay’ and ‘disbelief.’ That is a pretty good description. I would only improve upon it in this way: Men experience a sudden loss of power accompanied by an emotional response. It would be fair to say that men experience rage or fury when they are castrated.”

“Is that why they throw things and hit walls?” Kimberlee asked.

Claudia smiled, grateful again. “Thank you for bringing us back to that Kimberlee. It is important. It demonstrates that even in a moment of rage or fury, most men have more concern for our safety than anything else.”

“What do you mean?”

“Would you care to step into a man’s shoes again for a moment?” Claudia asked, intentionally putting Kimberlee off balance.

“Um, okay ….”

“Imagine you are a man and you hold a club in your hand,” Claudia said.

Kimberlee nodded. Claudia glanced to make sure Karen was following too.

“It could be a wrench or a hammer, yes?” Karen asked, catching on.

“Yes, it could be anything. But in that moment, when he has been provoked to rage or fury, it becomes a weapon. A club.”

Kimberlee said, “Yeah, and …?”

“To protect another from his own rage, he throws the club away. Intentionally disarming himself.”

She watched as Kimberlee’s eyes grew wide, the pupils flaring. The young woman gulped. “Wow, that’s wild … And, are you saying that he’s hitting the wall — instead of me?”

Claudia only smiled and watched Kimberlee.

“But what about the men who don’t have that control?” Kimberlee persisted.

“What do you do about them?”

“As I said,” Claudia began, “I cannot teach you yet what to do. But I can show you what not to do. You have already seen that, over time, a woman will be safer by not emasculating men.”

“Yes,” Kimberlee acknowledged and Karen nodded her head.

“Can you see that in the immediate moment, you are never safer by causing a man to feel rage or fury?”

KIMBERLEE wearily drove home, a song verse looping endlessly in her head: The walls come tumblin’ down. The walls come tumblin’ down ….

Their session had ended with a small ray of hope even though Claudia never did answer, “How do I protect myself?”
Kimberlee now saw clearly what not to do. *Castrating men doesn’t work, period.* Intuitively negotiating the familiar curves of the highway, she thought about the moments following Claudia’s provocative question. Kimberlee couldn’t deny the obvious truth: causing a man to feel rage or fury never helped. The emasculation she’d thought was her best defense actually made situations worse. “Why do women do it?” she had spontaneously asked Claudia. To her surprise and relief, Claudia’s response didn’t blame women. Hence the feeling of hope. Claudia had answered: “It is a knee-jerk response out of fear of men’s power. It is a learned behavior to reduce men’s pressure. And it is the only way women have to deal with their hurt, disappointment and frustration. Soon, you two will have effective alternatives.” “Is that the Queen’s Code?” Kimberlee had asked. She and Karen laughed when Claudia grinned and said nothing. Once home, Kimberlee sought her usual escape in a movie. She got an extra big spoonful of peanut butter and deliberately picked an action adventure with an all-male cast. *That way,* she thought as she curled up with Lancelot, *I won’t have to watch women emasculating men in what used to pass for comedy.*

Karen was ready to drop castrating men like a rotten fish-head, but Claudia insisted that they research the phenomenon until Wednesday. At first, Karen couldn’t imagine what else there was to know about it, but she trusted Claudia. That didn’t make her any happier when told about the homework, though. She dreaded the assignment Claudia had given to her specifically: Talk to Mike. Ask him how she emasculated him. *Ugh,* she groaned, *that’s not going to be pretty.* Same as the week before, she wasn’t ready to face her husband or her marriage yet. She wasn’t quite ready to deal with her past, or her future, either. She stopped in the café once again to play with her notes. She worked on grouping the information into bite-sized bits.

**Short-term Effects of Castration/Emasculation**

- Sudden LOSS of POWER
- Mental response of DISMAY or DISBELIEF
- Emotional response of RAGE or FURY
- Physical response of DISARMAMENT and/or STRIKING OUT

As she wrote the last line, she contemplated the role of castration in domestic abuse. *Hmm? A connection?* She abhorred any implication that women might be at fault in something that awful. *But if there is a potential cause and effect there, knowing that would ultimately make women safer.* She’d have to ask Claudia about it.
Long-term Effects of Castration/Emasculaton

- COMPETE instead of CHERISH
- Keep DISTANCE instead of seek INTIMACY
- Approach with SUSPICION instead of TRUST
- Treat with DISDAIN instead of RESPECT
- Relate from FEAR instead of LOVE

Next she reviewed the assignment Claudia gave them:

**Homework:**
1. Notice how you castrate men. Specifically, your methods “to deprive of strength, power, or efficiency; to weaken.”
2. Pay attention to how and when other women castrate men.
3. Observe how other women react when they witness a man being castrated.
4. Notice how men respond to being castrated.
5. Don’t assume that a man “feeling bad” is the same as emasculated. Watch for a reduced ability to produce results.

**BURT** found Claudia on the couch again, eyes closed, the back of her hand resting on her forehead. He picked up a foot and began rubbing.

“Anything you want to say about today, my sweets?”

He had watched at intervals from his workshop, pausing his new project long enough to read the body language in the garden. Both young women looked ill most of the time and Claudia had a determined set to her shoulders. He wondered what could have caused such reactions. He sensed that Claudia needed rest more than anything. She looks as if she’s been loadin’ cannon fodder, he thought.

“It may not look it,” Claudia opened her eyes and replied, “but I am happy with what we accomplished today. They are both nearly ready.”

“Ready for what?” Burt asked, delighted.

“To lay down their swords.”

“Wonderful,” he replied. “God bless them.”

After a moment of working on her arch, he asked, “You said ‘nearly ready.’ What needs to happen first?”

“They have to see all the ways they castrate men. There can be no mistake about what I am asking them to give up. Right now, they only see the most obvious.”

She continued with a wry, mischievous smile. “But women do more damage with their hatpins and stilettos than with their machetes.”

❤️
MIKE took Karen’s hand. “Do you want me to stop?”

She shook her head. “No, I need to hear everything; even if I don’t want to.”

They were sitting with half full glasses of wine, the remains of dinner still on the table. Mike had confirmed that competing with him had, indeed, been emasculating. This was one time when being right had clearly not made her glad. He hesitated; he didn’t want to hurt her. “Do you want it in chronological order? Or, in order of severity?”

Karen groaned but didn’t waver. “Is there a way that I used to emasculate you that I don’t anymore?” She asked hopefully.

Mike thought about all their years together. As they were dating, after they got serious, when they were first married, their adventures in the Peace Corps. And the difficult years, after they returned to the States and both knuckled down with their careers. Same as most men, he didn’t have a long memory for petty injuries. Only the real gut-kickers stood out.

“Okay, let’s try it that way,” he conceded. “Remember before we got engaged, how you used to yak on and on about how smart and handsome and mature your English Lit professor was?”

Karen blanched and took a gulp of wine. “Wow, you’re going way back.”

He shrugged. “You wanted something you don’t do anymore.”

“Pretty tacky, huh? I wanted to make you jealous. I was trying to get you to commit.”

Mike shook his head. “That’s crazy. Jealousy doesn’t make a man commit. It only makes him mad. And besides, I didn’t feel jealous. I felt not good enough for you. I wanted to head for the hills.”

Karen looked puzzled. “How come you didn’t? Shortly after that, we got engaged.”

Mike smiled victoriously. “You don’t remember, do you? That schmuck gave you a C on your mid-term and you came crying to me. I was the one who made you feel better. That’s when I knew I had what you truly needed.”

Karen’s dark golden eyes, framed by naturally thick black lashes, went round in astonishment. “You guys don’t do anything for the reasons we think. All this time, I thought my strategy had worked.”

Mike chuckled. “Quite the opposite, Darlin’. You made me feel two feet tall. And there was this red-headed filly in your dorm always telling me how smart I was. I’d started thinkin’ about jumpin’ the fence.”

Karen’s mouth opened in alarm, “I thought redheads weren’t your type!”

“They aren’t,” he said. “But admiration is every man’s type.” He raised his eyebrows suggestively.

Karen shook her head in dismay. “Well, I’m glad I haven’t tried that trick lately. Anything else?”

“Well, not feelin’ like I’m good enough for you still happens from time to time,” he said.

Karen stammered, “I d-d-don’t understand. How could you not be good enough for me?”

Mike studied her closely. Could she not know how beautiful she is? And smart? What a prize she is?
“Babe, you’ve got to look at it from my perspective. I’m a poor Italian wannabe cowboy. And this goddess runs my home and graces my bed. She even wants my children. How am I supposed to deserve that?”

The look on her face was comical. “Huh?” was all she managed.

He cracked up. Taking her hand again, he said, “And on top of your breathtaking, exotic beauty, you’re kind and generous and smart and capable. And you thought nothin’ of sleepin’ on the floor in a mud hut, peein’ over a hole.”

She looked dumbfounded.

“Let me put it this way. Since the specific is not computing, how about the generic?”

She nodded helplessly, “Okay ....”

“When a man cares about a woman, he’s in trouble. Every moment he’s with her, he’s looking for signs. Signs that she cares about him too. And more than that — that she thinks he’s worthy of her caring about him. If he does something that impresses her, he feels ten feet tall. If she’s not impressed by anything he does, he wants to crawl away on his belly. That’s emasculated.”

He waited while Karen took a sip of her Merlot and tried to compose herself. She hadn’t reached for the box of tissues she conspicuously put on the table at the end of dinner. But he thought that wasn’t far off.

“Sometimes you’re trying to impress me?” she asked cautiously.

Mike chuckled again. She really doesn’t get it, does she?

He took both her hands and waited until she was looking right at him. Slowly, he said, “Darlin’. Gorgeous. Love of my life. I’m always trying to impress you.”

Karen’s mind was screaming that what he said could not possibly be accurate. There was no way he could feel that way about her. But her heart knew it for truth. And two decades together were illuminated, glowing in the simple beauty of his love for her.

How can something cause such ecstasy and such pain at the same time?

She had no idea he was this vulnerable. That her reactions meant that much to him. Did I even pause for a fraction of the things he did to impress me? At first, when I was weak-kneed about his Mediterranean good looks and fascinated by his methodical mind and, even, his endearing cowboy fantasies — then I might have gushed about everything. But definitely not later ....

What happened? What changed? She could see that after they became intimate, both as lovers and better friends, she took him for granted. She thought his kindness and generosity were how he was. I didn’t know that’s how he was for me — on purpose.

Tears streamed down her face. But Karen was more confused than ever.

Glad for her foresight, she grabbed tissues and wiped her eyes. She said tentatively, “I don’t mean to be a jerk. Honestly. But, I’m lost. If you’re always trying to impress me, how come you don’t take out the trash?”

The look on his face was priceless.

He blurted out in undisguised bewilderment, “That would impress you?”
KIMBERLEE wasn’t looking forward to this week’s assignment, but she found abundant opportunities to observe how and when other women emasculated men. At first, she didn’t even have to leave the house. Besides Hollywood blockbusters, which showed a multitude of young women “putting men in their place,” she had her own memories to sort through. The most colorful recollections were years’ worth of interactions she’d witnessed between Melissa and Scott.

In the past, Kimberlee always sympathized with Melissa about her inattentive, work-obsessed husband. But as she played her own internal movie, in light of her new perspective, she saw things she had missed before. Like the other night, when Melissa had no interest in Scott’s work. Kimberlee was surprised that Scott spoke with such enthusiasm.

Was that always there? This passion? But no one was listening? She thought if she was as engaged and dedicated as he, she’d spend her time with folks who shared that passion as well. And as little as possible with someone who bitched about it nonstop.

It occurred to her that Melissa may well be the source of the lack of intimacy she often complained about. Suddenly, Kimberlee had a vision of a tiger bemoaning that no one would make love to it, all the while having its claws and teeth bared in anger. She considered how Melissa’s attitude toward Scott might affect John and Bradley, their young sons. Could they be emasculated by that?

Her research included a short trip to the grocery store, where she witnessed four different incidences of emasculation. Following her assignment, she paid particular attention to the way the men reacted:

A young mother roughly forced her son back into the child’s seat of the shopping cart, saying, “Why can’t you sit still like your sister?” When the woman turned away, Kimberlee saw the young boy angrily pinch his baby sister.

In line in front of her, an elderly, arthritic gentleman slowly pulled the exact amount for his groceries out of his wallet. As the clerk rolled her eyes at his pace and made an impatient “tsk” sound, his hand began to shake and he fumbled even more.

At the check stand next to her, Kimberlee heard the box boy offer help out. The thirty-something woman responded harshly, “I can get it myself.” The teenager slumped and cast his eyes to the floor.

A middle-aged woman unloading her cart behind Kimberlee suddenly exclaimed to her husband, “Why didn’t you get the family size? Didn’t you look at the price per pound? No wonder we can’t get by on your tiny paycheck!” Kimberlee watched as the man’s collarbones appeared to be
crushed and his shoulders slumped inward. Unexpectedly heartsick, she realized what “crestfallen” looked like.

At work, Kimberlee watched as the women communicated their disapproval of the men. Passing by without any acknowledgement, as if the men were not worth notice. Ignoring a comment or suggestion, as if it weren’t even spoken. Rolling their eyes when the men joked around, as if that conduct were, obviously, ridiculous.

The female processors treated the salesmen with overt hostility. When one of them came in after making a big sale, many of them turned away from his boisterous self-congratulation. But one woman said loudly, “Yeah, well, you’re still behind your quota for the year,” and watched his reaction. When he slumped and retreated, she looked around victoriously for approval from the other women.

Kimberlee was fascinated by her observations. Whether by word or gesture, tone or attitude, men were easily emasculated. They appeared to be more affected by women they cared about, but they were also vulnerable to total strangers.

She was most surprised, though, by her reaction to seeing men being diminished. What she had accepted as normal behavior, only days before, was now appalling. She was shocked for them, angry for them and even hurt for them.

She was compelled to come to their defense; to explain to the women how they weren’t necessarily misbehaving. But as she imagined herself doing that, she had no alternative explanation for their conduct. She was returned to the question Karen had given her: “What if there’s a good reason for everything men do?” More than ever, she wanted to know what those reasons were.

RAUL was looking for more opportunities to train Kimberlee, now that he’d revealed his intention to groom her as his replacement. Plus the change in her demeanor made her more approachable. He honestly enjoyed spending time with her in a way he hadn’t before, in all the years she’d worked for him.

Hence, he was completely off guard when she reacted strongly to him telling her a story about his own early days at the company. She’d rolled her eyes and said snidely, “I know this story. Heck, I could tell it myself, I’ve heard it that many times.”

Taken aback, his hand had immediately gone to his upper chest. He’d sputtered in defense, “Sorry, I didn’t mean to bore you.”

Even more surprising than the attack was her response to his reaction. She had looked aghast, hastily apologized and fled his office.

CLAUDIA was immediately concerned at the distress she heard in Kimberlee’s voice on the other end of the phone. “Grandmother, can you talk? I mean, Claudia?”

“Yes, dear. What is it?”
“Umm. I did something bad. And I’m not sure how to fix it. And I want to understand why it happened in the first place. And I’m hoping I don’t have to wait till tomorrow night.”

Sitting on the couch, Claudia responded. “I never want you to suffer longer than you have to. Tell me what happened.”

She listened in amazement as Kimberlee relayed to her the results of her observations and the change in her own reactions to emasculation. She was happy for her, knowing that this shift would reap benefits for the rest of her life.

“Then what is the problem, dear?”

Claudia could feel Kimberlee’s embarrassment as she said, “To put it bluntly, I cut off my boss’s balls. And when I realized what I’d done, I apologized pathetically and literally ran. Not too dignified.”

“Okay,” Claudia began, nodding even though Kimberlee couldn’t see her, “I understand. Not something you would want on your resume.”

“Even worse than that; he’s been especially great with me lately!” Kimberlee responded. “He’s grooming me to replace him. The job I’ve always wanted.”

“Can you see what triggered you?” Claudia asked.

After a few moments, Kimberlee answered. “Raul was chewing gum and telling me a story I’ve heard at least a dozen times. Does he think I’m stupid? Or have a lousy memory? Or, am I so forgettable that he doesn’t remember telling me?”

Claudia could not suppress a chuckle. “Ah, that one. Yes, I know that offense quite well.”

“See what I mean? How else could I react?” Kimberlee asked.

Claudia settled into the cushions. “Actually, when you understand what a man is doing while telling a story, it is easier to respond more graciously.”

“Huh?” a perplexed Kimberlee responded. “Is this a ‘what if there’s a good reason’ thing?”

“Absolutely. Do you want to know what it is? Pretty interesting, actually,” Claudia offered.

“Yes. Please!” Kimberlee exclaimed. These were words that, over the years, Claudia would gladly have given an eyetooth to hear.

“Kimberlee, men use words for different reasons than women. What you encountered is what we call the ‘Story Telling Phase of the Hunt.’”

“Huh?”

“For now, suffice it to say that most men think and behave as hunters and warriors. In each phase of the hunt, language has a different purpose. In the phase called Story Telling, a man is reliving a particularly vivid challenge or accomplishment. In the telling of it, he may be doing one or more of several things: teaching a moral lesson, proving the value of a method, encouraging others, or empowering himself with the juices — the hormones — that telling the story causes to surge in his body. It is a way of recovering the power or energy spent in the hunt.”

“But why does he tell it over and over again?” Kimberlee asked impatiently.

Claudia laughed. “With that many benefits, why not?”

After a long pause, Kimberlee said, “I’m looking at this ‘as compared to the Perfect Person’ aren’t I?”
Claudia smiled to herself, uncrossed her fingers, and nodded. “Yes, you are. As compared to the female-based Perfect Person who never repeats her stories. In fact, women are sensitive to this such that we will even say, ‘Forgive me if I have told you this before.’ But that is because women have a different purpose for speaking than men have.”

“What do you mean?” Kimberlee asked.

“Women can be hunters. But estrogen shapes the brain more for gathering and tending. If you look at women as gatherers, much of their behavior becomes more obvious. There is not nearly the danger, challenge or excitement in a gather as in a hunt. But there is an enormous amount of information and experience that goes into that basket with the fruits and nuts. Upon returning from a ‘meadow,’ a gatherer will relay to other members of her tribe the pertinent information. She expects others to listen and retain it. To repeat herself would be to insult their intelligence or memories, same as she would be insulted.”

Claudia could almost hear Kimberlee’s mind whirring as she processed all this. She loved how bright and quick her granddaughter was. That must be why she gets triggered by anything that smacks of “stupid,” she thought with compassion.

“You’re saying that Raul probably doesn’t think I’m slow or can’t remember. Nor has he forgotten that he told me this before. He doesn’t relate to story telling the way I do. It has a different purpose for him and he’s fulfilling that.”

Claudia could feel her own dimples as she grinned in satisfaction. “Well done.”

“But what about that little teensy-weensy, testicle-harvesting part? Where I said I’d heard the story so many times I could tell it? What do I do about that?” Kimberlee begged.

“How did Raul react?”

“Hmm. He kinda grabbed his chest, up high like, and looked like he’d been pushed back. He mumbled something about being sorry to bore me.”

“Oh, dear,” Claudia said sadly.

“Why? What’d I do?”

“It wasn’t ‘teensy weensy’ as you said. Men experience happiness and power in their upper chest, shoulders and neck. Grabbing his upper chest that way would be in response to a sudden loss of power. As if the air was forced out of his lungs. What he might call ‘crushed.’ If you watch closely, their upper body is caving in.”

“Yes! I saw that before! In the grocery store. A woman insulted her husband’s paycheck,” Kimberlee exclaimed. “Oh, dear, is right. What do I do now?”

Claudia consciously released her attachment to the outcome. “It all depends on what you are committed to.”

Kimberlee responded tentatively, “What do you mean?”

“Most women consider it their right to treat men this way. To crush them. Or, at the very least, to diminish them. If you are going to defend your right to do what you did, there is no point in saying anything else to Raul about it.”

There was a long silence. “And the alternative?” Kimberlee asked.

Claudia took in a long breath. “If you choose to give up the right to emasculate men, all the men around you can become your teachers and trainers and support system in breaking a lifelong habit.”
She waited, allowing Kimberlee to consider her words with their implied invitation.

“How do I give up that right?”
 “You take a vow, renouncing it. That is the beginning of embracing the Queen’s Code, which in addition to being a kind of secret code, is a code of honor and a code of conduct. Then you learn how to live from that vow, developing a new understanding of men and a new set of reactions to men.”

Claudia heard Kimberlee sigh. “Is this what you’ve been leading us up to?”

Claudia paused, considering, and chose complete honesty. “I hope so. I have never done this before.”

After another silence, Kimberlee said, “Can I think about it?”

“Of course, dear. It is a choice best considered at length. And any questions you have, I will happily answer tomorrow night.”

KIMBERLEE thought Melissa sounded distraught.

“I know things have been strange between us. And you’re busy at work. But I didn’t know who else to call.”

“What’s wrong?” Kimberlee asked and was reminded of reaching out to her grandmother in a similar state the night before. I hope I can be as useful.

“Scott and I had a horrible fight and he hasn’t been home since last night. I don’t know what to do. The boys are asking for him and I keep saying he’s working, as usual. But he’s always home when they wake up in the morning. You know, that wrestling thing they do on the bed? Messes up the covers and drives me crazy.”

Remembering how Claudia always waded in slowly, Kimberlee asked, “How can I help? What do you need?”

Melissa asked somewhat skeptically, “Could you just listen?”

Kimberlee had a feeling of dread. But she set it aside and made herself be the friend Melissa seemed to need. “Of course. Do you want to tell me what happened?”

“Yeah, but I’m so pissed I could throw something. Let me close the door. I don’t want the kids to hear me.”

While Kimberlee waited for Melissa to return, she hunkered down for a diatribe. She wasn’t disappointed.

“It started when Scott brought two of the new guys from the office home for dinner. He likes to adopt these youngsters. Makes him feel like the big man, bringing them home to the little lady. As usual, he didn’t give me more than a half-hour’s notice but I still whipped up an impressive meal. The guys were gushing over how lucky he was to have me.”

“That must have been nice,” Kimberlee offered.

Melissa scoffed, “Nice? Nice? It would have been — if Scott had been quick to agree!”

She practically screeched, “A polite, ‘I think that too’ would have been fine. But nooo! He’d already downed a few gin and tonics. He smirked. SMIRKED! Then made a
bullshit snide remark about how he’d trade in some chicken cordon bleu for a blowjob!”

Kimberlee suppressed a gasp.

Melissa continued, “A blow job? Like he deserves a blow job? All he says to me for weeks are things like, ‘Did you pick up my shirts at the cleaners?’ and ‘I need some more socks and underwear.’ Blow job? I’ll show him a blow job. I’ll blow up the goddamn office is what I’ll do. Then maybe he’d spend some time at home, and help with the kids, and I’d have the energy to give him a blow job!”

“What an asshole,” Melissa concluded.

Kimberlee thought, What would Claudia do?

“What happened after he said that?” she asked in a gentle tone.

“Oh, I blew — ha, good pun — and said something about how he put all his juice into his job and couldn’t even get it up for a quickie, let alone a blow job. The guys left in a hurry at that point. And Scott left right after them.”

Again, Melissa said, “What an asshole.”

Kimberlee was silent and felt profoundly conflicted. Melissa experienced one scenario and she saw another entirely. Her take on things had shifted and she couldn’t help but see from her new awareness. She was shocked by Melissa’s attack. In front of his co-workers? Yikes.

She saw the distance between the Melissa and her husband as a result of Melissa emasculating Scott for years with her complaints and criticism. She imagined the rage he must have felt in that moment, embarrassed by his wife. But what would have him say something that tacky in the first place? Is that the ‘disdain’ Claudia spoke of? She wondered how a man could get to that place with his own wife. What would cause that?

But she could see her friend’s pain and frustration as well. And her fear and loneliness. She wanted to help. But how?

“Melissa, I’m sorry that happened to you. What can I do?”

“Your sympathy helps. I was afraid I wouldn’t even get that,” Melissa replied.

“Why not?”

“You’re different, Kimmee. Ever since you started your man lessons. You’re on his side now, not mine.” Melissa sounded angry and dejected.

Kimberlee took a deep breath. Oh, this is hard. “Melissa, I’m not on anyone’s side. I’m trying to figure out how it works. You know, men and women. And Claudia has offered me the first approach that fits me.”

“But is it worth abandoning your best friend for?”

“I’m not abandoning you, Mel. I’m abandoning Frog Farming. And ... I hope you will too.”

Melissa shot back, “Not if it means letting that asshole get away with being an absentee father and an entitled husband, thinking all we need is a paycheck.”

Kimberlee pressed on. “But what if there’s a good reason for how much Scott works? For everything he does? And doesn’t do?”

Melissa exploded, “That’s exactly what I’m talking about! You’re sticking up for him. How can what he said be justified? It was disgusting!”

Kimberlee struggled to find the words. “I’m not trying to justify it. I’m trying to understand it. There’s a difference.”
“What’s there to understand?”
“I’m trying to understand what would have a man — a man who I know loves you — get to the point where he’d say something mean, even cruel. I’m trying to understand what we do that brings out the worst in men.”
“It’s my fault? I brought this out? No way. I’m not buying it. He’s an asshole. He’s always been an asshole. He’ll always be an asshole.” Melissa added grudgingly, “I was only fooled for a while.”
Kimberlee sighed in despair. How can I help her? She stuck her neck out again. “I’m learning another way of understanding men. I’ve found out there are things we do, called emasculation, that cause men to relate to us the opposite of what we want ....”
Melissa interrupted, “Now I emasculate my husband? And that’s why he’s an asshole? How can you emasculate a man who has no balls in the first place? He runs from an argument, he shirks his responsibilities, and he only spends time with people who fawn all over him. He’s not even a real man to begin with.”
Kimberlee felt nauseous. Would she fall into the chasm that lay gaping between them?
She took several deep breaths while feeling the cold silence. She couldn’t think of any way to go forward and their friendship was too important to her.
She backed up. “I’m sorry, Melissa. I’m sorry this is what you have to deal with. You deserve more.”
As the words came out of her mouth, Kimberlee felt like a traitor to her grandmother, to her heritage, to the possibility of men and women coexisting peacefully.
She’s right. I have changed. How could I identify this quickly with what I’ve learned? After years of thinking exactly the same as Melissa? Because it feels right. And good.
“I have a stack of work on my desk and I’m leaving early for my annual checkup. Is there anything else I can do tonight? Do you want me to come over after my lesson?” Kimberlee offered out of years of loyalty.
“No, thanks. He still may show yet. And your being here would make it worse.” Melissa added quietly, “Thanks for listening, though. It means a lot.”
Kimberlee heard the words as Melissa’s own attempt to heal the fracture. If they remained civil, they could probably even pretend that it wasn’t there.

KAREN found herself envying Kimberlee again. It must be simpler being single, she thought. Not nearly as many things to react to; not nearly as many moments of anger or frustration.
Over the last four days, she had uncovered her most tried and true ways of emasculating Mike. If she ignored the pain, she could admire the efficiency of her methods; they required little energy. They mostly consisted of withholding something from him: appreciation and admiration, clearly; sex, naturally; not as obvious, participation.
Just say no, huh? All those times she’d assumed his invitations were polite, not sincere. And she’d declined in an offhanded way, unconcerned that he displayed no signs of relief — the way a woman would when an insincere offer was turned down. Mike’s disappointment had been real and she’d discounted it. Another way to emasculate: not trusting.

As she confronted the price of her behavior, she was unraveled. The currency was intimacy, love, sharing, attention, respect, affection and partnership. She was nearly bankrupt. No, she thought, we both are nearly bankrupt. Mike has paid the price too. Our marriage has paid the price. Even if he never helps around the house, it’s not worth this.

Still, she held onto the hope that Claudia would teach her a way to get the support she desperately wanted. Without nagging, criticizing, needling — and withholding.

Though he acted as if it were obvious, Karen didn’t understand Mike’s question about taking out the trash. How could that impress me? Should it? And did his eagerness imply that he’d gladly do it if it impressed me?

Reviewing her notes during lunch, Karen began creating another flipchart display:

How Women Emasculate Men
- Withhold appreciation
- Withhold admiration
- Withhold participation
- Withhold sex
- Don’t let them impress you
- Compare unfavorably - be impressed by someone else
- Don’t trust them
- Assume insincerity
- Don’t need them for anything important to you

When she exhausted her own discoveries, she phoned Kimberlee to see if she could compile a complete set of notes from both their observations. She was surprised how happy Kimberlee sounded to hear from her, even at work. And she was delighted with how many other things Kimberlee had to add.

- Be disinterested in their passions
- Complain
- Expect them to act the same as girls/women
- Don’t let them help you
- Demean their earning abilities
- Blow off their suggestions and ideas
- Ignore them
- Criticize them
- Interrupt them
Karen thought she should have caught that one herself. She’d learned to listen to Mike months earlier. She hadn’t realized that the opposite of what works could be emasculating. The list continued:

- Rolled eyes
- Tsk or scoffing sounds
- Be impatient
- Take over something you gave them to do
- Demean their virility
- Shut down their storytelling

The last two certainly piqued Karen’s curiosity. But Kimberlee didn’t elaborate. As Karen finished her list, it occurred to her that each manner of emasculating men might have a specific consequence, in addition to the general short-term and long-term effects of emasculation.

JACK looked for an excuse to go by Raul’s office Wednesday afternoon. He normally dropped in once or twice a month. He admitted it wasn’t his friend he wanted to see. He told himself that the subtle change in Kimberlee merely intrigued him, but it was more than that.

He’d always been attracted to her physically. He appreciated the female form and she was his type. He loved curves, he craved substance, and he wanted a woman with plenty to hold onto. Jack appreciated the voluptuous beauty of her body, as he would any work of art.

For years, he’d admired Kimberlee’s figure at his leisure. After her initial scowl, she studiously ignored him, chin up, and he’d responded by becoming more obvious. It had become a kind of game, trying to get a bigger rise out of her.

Now he was looking for a different kind of reaction. He hadn’t been able to forget the experience of being seen below the surface, however briefly. Her brilliant blue eyes had widened in recognition. As if he’d suddenly become real, a whole person, more than merely another man admiring her body. It made him want to be known by her, seen even more deeply. And it compelled him to find out who she was in her entirety. In the moment that he had become three dimensional to her, so had she to him.

He knew he was at least ten years older. But he liked that. Not because of the trophy BS people talked about; it wasn’t the youthful beauty he needed. He’d learned that a significant age difference tended to eliminate a woman’s need to compete with him. It made it all right for him to have “made it” while she was still in hot pursuit of success. He could encourage and support and he liked that. If only a woman would be content to receive and appreciate all he wanted to provide. Unfortunately, he’d never met a woman of any age who could.

When he discovered that Kimberlee had already left for the day, he was hugely disappointed. Raul said she had a doctor’s appointment.
“Is she okay?” Jack asked anxiously, surprising both of them.

Raul’s eyebrows shot up. “As far I know, she’s fine. I think it’s one of those annual check ups the medical establishment subjects women to. Thank God we don’t have to go through that.”

Jack relaxed somewhat. “And besides that, she’s okay, right? I mean, you know, she’s been acting strange,” he hedged.

Raul laughed outright, “You got it bad, my friend.”

“What?” He replied, uncomfortable.

“She got to you,” Raul said with a sympathetic smile.

“What are you talking about?” Jack dodged.

“Don’t worry, Buddy, I understand. If I were single, I’d be looking closely all of a sudden too. Something’s happening over there. Something inter-r-resting.” Raul drew out the last word as he unwrapped a piece of gum.

Jack took the opening. “What do you think it is?”

Raul shook his head and spoke around the wad in his mouth. “I honestly don’t know. Since you saw her last week, she’s been even more strange. She took my head off yesterday. That’s nothing unusual. It’s awful but I’m used to it from women.”

He grinned. “But this time she came back and apologized. That was weird and unprecedented. She’s been different since.”

“How so?” Jack asked.


Jack listened with interest. What’s behind all this? What could produce such a change?

Raul laughed again. “I guess this means I’ll be seeing more of my old pal?”

Jack felt himself redden. He was unable to remember the last time that happened.

KIMBERLEE was relieved that their Wednesday night session was moved to her grandparents’ house. Given the preview Claudia had given her, it seemed a more appropriate environment. Give up the right to emasculate men. Can I do that?

If someone had proposed that even a week ago, she would have thought Never. But her entire world had changed since then. From listening to Scott wax poetic about accounting and observing other women emasculate men; from finding out Raul had plans for her future, and witnessing the demise of Melissa’s marriage with a different point-of-view. Those things in themselves may have been enough to convince her. Then the most unthinkable person did the most unthinkable thing...

It was rare for Raul to contact her when she was out of the office. Hence her surprise to see his number show up on her phone as she left the gynecologist.

“Hey Raul. Is there a problem?”
“Um. Hi, Kimberlee,” Raul started, sounding uncomfortable. “I was, uh, checking up on you.”

“What for?” Huh? This has never happened, she thought.

“Yeah, you know, you had a doctor’s appointment and all.” He fumbled.

“Everything’s fine.” She hesitated, as this was a great deal more personal than they ever got. “The usual rigamaroll women go through. I’m sure Sally’s filled you in.” What’s this all about?

“Oh, good. Uh, glad to hear it.” Raul replied tentatively.

Overcome by curiosity, she asked, “What’s going on? You’ve never checked up on me before.”

He hesitated, clearing his throat. She knew he only did that when he was in unfamiliar territory.

“It’s Jack. He’s worried about you.” Raul replied and added hastily, “But you can’t tell him I told you. He’d throttle me.”

Kimberlee nearly dropped her phone. Jack?

When she recovered, she asked, “Are we talking about the same Jack? Mr. Cool?”

Raul laughed and his voice returned to normal. “Yep, you got it. Mr. Cool. Only he’s not that cool these days. You got his heart thumping.”

Kimberlee’s own heart skipped a beat. Now she was the one fumbling, “I’m not quite sure what to do with this information.”

He laughed again. “There’s nothing to do. Keep being yourself. It’s marvelous.”

She hung up after mumbling an embarrassed “Thank you.” Flabbergasted, she replayed the conversation in her head. Jack was worried about me? She was frightened; anything that smacked remotely of lust scared the bejesus out of her. She had responded in her usual manner: she studiously ignored him. What else was there to do? For years she
steeled herself and walked by as if he wasn’t there, though she could feel his eyes following her.

Oh, dear, she thought now, that’s emasculating. Her internal voice replied, But he deserved it.

It was obvious, in light of Claudia’s teachings, that Jack’s response followed the pattern of emasculation. As she ignored him, he became more blatant. Admit it: he began treating me with a little disdain instead of respect. She realized that there had been no disrespect in his initial appraisal; that had grown over time.

As she thought about this, her opinion of him softened somewhat. But she couldn’t reconcile how angry his attitude made her feel. She felt objectified; reduced to one dimension. That’s why she’d started thinking of him as a jerk, a letch, an asshole.

Until last week when his appraisal occurred as genuine appreciation. Uplifting instead of diminishing. She hadn’t felt like a sex object. She’d felt beautiful.

She remembered his expression as she’d studied his face, thinking, “What if there’s a good reason...?” Apparently he’d been affected by that moment as well.

He was worried about me. That sounds protective. The sudden insight stunned her. She had stopped emasculating Jack in that one interaction. And he’d immediately become protective of me. Is that possible?

Claudia had said women were interfering with men’s natural relationship to them. She had not believed her. But now she had evidence. In a nanosecond, an apparent attacker—in the form most frightening to Kimberlee—had become a protector. Kimberlee couldn’t deny the effect on her. Knowing Jack was worried about her made her feel safer, as if she had another ally in the world. A big, strong, resourceful one.

Even with this new, warm feeling, she was angry about being objectified. Kimberlee resolved to ask Claudia about it. She didn’t feel comfortable with giving up the right to emasculate men if it meant they’d be allowed to reduce her to one dimension.

CLAUDIA waited until they were settled at the garden table with tea and coffee and cookies. The outdoor lights cast shadows around them, making the large garden seem smaller and cozier. She lit a large candle and placed it in the middle of the table with a hurricane glass around it.

They began by sharing their composite list of ways women emasculate men. When Claudia wanted more detail, Kimberlee and Karen briefly recounted their experiences with observing emasculation since Saturday, including Kimberlee and Claudia’s “emergency” conversation.
By the time they were finished, Claudia couldn’t help but smile at them. She knew from Kimberlee’s phone call that the younger woman was on the threshold of a new paradigm. Now she knew that Karen’s commitment to partnership with Mike had brought her there as well.

She enjoyed the satisfaction for a moment and pressed on with a silent prayer, Please God, let them make this leap of faith. In themselves. In men. Reluctantly she added, In me.

“As Kimberlee has relayed,” Claudia began, “the invitation before you is to give up the right to castrate men, forever. I want to take some time to explain exactly what I mean and do not mean by this.”

Kimberlee interrupted, “Claudia, before you go on, there’s something I need to ask you about. Something that would prevent me from being able to do this.”

“Of course, dear. Ask me anything,” Claudia responded, welcoming the dialogue.

“There’s been a change in the way a man is relating to me. It’s as if you wrote the script. I stopped emasculating him and he’s become protective of me,” Kimberlee stated.

“That’s wonderful,” Claudia smiled.

“But I’m still upset about how he used to relate to me. He objectified me. I hate that more than anything. It makes me furious. And it makes me think he deserved to be emasculated. That any man who does that deserves to be emasculated.”

Claudia smiled and replied, “Yes, Objectification. I am glad you brought it up. It is one of the things I wanted to cover.” She noticed Kimberlee’s immediate relief and thought, Kimberlee wants to give this up. She is hoping this hiccup will not stop her. Good.

She began, “Kimberlee, objectification is the female equivalent of emasculation. That is why it makes you experience rage and fury.”

“Why do they do it?” Kimberlee asked, clearly missing the reference.

At that moment, Claudia saw Burt closing up his shop and it gave her an idea.

BURT had been watching the body language from his position at his workbench. Claudia was committed, Karen looked sad and resolute, and Kimberlee was obviously
conflicted. On the one hand, her young face was more radiant than could be explained by the candlelight. On the other, the scrunch of Kimberlee’s small shoulders belied some doubt.

As he made his way towards the house, he was surprised when Claudia waved him over.

“Sweetheart, did you need something?” He asked.

Claudia smiled up at him but her eyes were serious. “Burt, I am wondering if you would be willing to provide a man’s perspective on a touchy subject.”

“If it’ll help, I’d be glad to. What’s the subject?”

“Objectification.”

After a moment, Burt replied, “Ah, yes. Touchy, indeed. What do you need to know?”

Claudia reached up and squeezed his arm. “I am sorry to have sprung this on you since we have never talked about it before. But I am counting on your long history as a man. Could you think about your interactions with women and remember times when you have been compelled to objectify them? And explain to us the mental process?”

Well, now, that’s an interesting request. He rubbed his nearly bald head as three incidences came to mind. He trusted that Claudia knew where this might lead; he counted on her to not be hurt. And if she was, that she’d tell him and let him fix it.

It didn’t feel right to tower over them, so he squatted next to Claudia’s chair. Slowly, he began, “The most obvious, of course, is sexual objectification.”

He looked to Claudia for approval, and received a nod and a smile. He proceeded, “There was a time when I was in the Navy. We were on leave in the Orient and visited what you might call a ‘Gentlemen’s Club.’” He cleared his throat.

All the women nodded their understanding. Claudia didn’t seem upset and he continued, “One of the dancers began performing right in front of us. Her overt invitation, her movements—they overwhelmed me. I felt overpowered. I thought, ‘Harlot,’ and instantly she was reduced to something manageable. I was in control again.”

He watched as Claudia looked around the table. Karen was nodding and Kimberlee’s eyes were wide.

“Can you see it?” Claudia asked them softly. By her voice, Burt could tell Claudia wasn’t upset by his reference to another woman’s sexuality. He was relieved but not surprised.
Kimberlee nodded, “It sounds like you felt emasculated. And responded by objectifying her.”

He hadn’t thought of it that way, but it was accurate. “That’s true. In this incident and in all the times I’ve objectified women in other ways.”

“Other ways? There’s more than sexual objectification?” Karen asked, perplexed.

Burt nodded. “When a woman overwhelmed me with her sexuality, she became a sex object. When I was overwhelmed by a woman’s anger, my mind would instantly turn her into a ‘shrew.’ Not Claudia—she’s never caused that. But customers whose demands never ended and whose volume always escalated.”

Noticing they were listening still, he continued, “When little Myra would overwhelm me with her tantrums, I’d think ‘Brat.’ That was the easiest way of turning her into a manageable thing instead of the person who could most readily pull my heartstrings.”

*Claudia has taught them well,* he thought as they didn’t interrupt. He continued, warming to the topic, “You have to understand that objectification isn’t limited to women though. We do it to everyone we can’t handle. It takes a complex, multi-dimensional being and reduces them into a simple, single classification thing. That’s where ‘objectification’ comes from: ‘object,’ another word for ‘thing.’ To objectify is to reduce to thing-ness. We were taught to do it in the military because otherwise many found it impossible to fire a gun at another human being. If he was merely a ‘jap’ or a ‘kraut’ it could be done. Pardon my language.”

Karen had begun taking notes. He smiled. “It isn’t limited to men either. I see women do it all the time: ‘dead-beat dad’ or ‘men are pigs.’ Or the way they refer to each other: ‘ditsy blonde,’ or ‘career-woman.’ Positive or negative, all labels are objectifiers. They make everyone seem simpler, and more manageable, than they actually are.”

Kimberlee looked mortified.

“Did you want to say something?” Claudia asked.

Kimberlee waved her hand in distress. “I’m seeing the cycle. The man I was telling you about, Jack. He’s my boss’s best friend from way back. He’s older, extremely successful, and handsome in a rugged, bushy-haired, broken-nose sort of way. When he first noticed my body, I got scared. I felt overwhelmed, like you said, Granddad. And I objectified him with ‘Lech.’ And I ignored him—that not-so-subtle form of emasculation. I think that’s when he started objectifying me. And I objectified him in return: ‘Jerk,’ ‘Horndog,’ etcetera. And he became even less respectful.”
Her eyes widened again. “Grandmother—Claudia—are you implying that giving up emasculating men will prevent them from objectifying me?”

Burt was curious how Claudia would respond. He knew what he would say.

Claudia nodded, “For the most part, yes. If you are not using your assets to emasculate, he will naturally appreciate your beauty, sexuality, intellect, humor, needs, etc. If he can keep his power, he will not be overwhelmed by yours. He will not be triggered to objectify you.”

She added, intently, “And if he is triggered, the solution is to give him more power, not take it away.”

Karen held up a finger in a “Wait” signal and Burt watched her furiously scribbling. It tickled him that Claudia paused while Karen’s note-taking was satisfied.

When finished, Karen said, “You said something disturbing: ‘the solution is to give him more power.’ What did you mean by that? Why would we want to give a man more power?”

Claudia sighed and patted Burt’s shoulder. “Because the more power your partner has, the more power you both have.” Claudia said, smiling at him. She turned back to Karen, and Burt watched Kimberlee, who sat in rapt attention.

“Because if you give him enough power to handle you, he will not feel overwhelmed and need to steal yours through objectification.” Claudia concluded, “Because there is no alternative: men and women are going to both be powerful, or both be weak. That is how it works.”

Kimberlee gasped, her eyes wide yet again.

“Yes, dear?” Claudia asked.

Kimberlee looked from Claudia to Burt shyly. He nodded encouragement, feeling incredibly privileged to witness this conversation. Not merely a witness, he thought, I’m part of it!

“If I told the truth,” Kimberlee began, “every time I’ve emasculated a man, though I felt glee in the moment, it reinforced my own feelings of weakness. Since I always did it out of fear or frustration, that’s what got magnified.”

Claudia nodded and briefly squeezed Kimberlee’s hand. “Excellent observation. Emasculation leaves you both disempowered.”
His knees beginning to ache, Burt stood up. “It sounds as if objectification is as deadly as emasculation. I never thought of it that way before. It seemed a natural way to defend myself. But it sounds like it creates a vicious cycle.”

Claudia nodded again. “An excellent observation on your part too. I would love to talk to you more about that.” Looking at him meaningfully, she added gently, “Later.”

The signal was clear. “Thank you, Karen, Kimberlee.” He gave a slight bow. “It’s been a pleasure being part of the discussion. Sweetheart, I’m getting some coffee. Do you care for any?”

They all declined and thanked him. He squeezed Claudia’s shoulder and took his leave.

KAREN studied Kimberlee as Burt went inside. Compared to when they began their lessons only 10 days before, Kimberlee had less of the tough gal/scared rabbit look about her. That strange combination of offense and defense that many women have. She seemed calmer and happier. And more powerful; in a quiet not-needing-to-prove it way. She was infinitely more attractive and pleasant to be around.

Is that what happened to me when Claudia first came into my life? No wonder Mike couldn’t resist me. It must be happening again, if last night is any indication…Sex for its own sake; not on demand to make a baby…

“Do you have any other questions?” Claudia brought Karen out of her reverie.

“I have another one on the same subject,” Kimberlee responded. “You and Granddad both used the word ‘overwhelming’ in reference to women’s beauty and brains and whatnot. I don’t understand that. What could be overwhelming about us?”

Karen had noticed that too and was glad Kimberlee brought it up.

Claudia shook her head ruefully. “Alas, my dears, this is one of the most important things women do not understand about men.”

Karen recognized that phrase from how many times it preceded mind-blowing information. She braced herself.

Earnestly, Claudia said, “Everything about women can overwhelm men. Because of how sensitive they are to women. Because of how fascinated and nurtured and enlivened and inspired they are by women. Because of how men need women.”

Karen gasped, “Men need women?”
Claudia nodded, “Men need women. They know it and most of them accept it. They are not working on getting over it. They are working on getting enough of us.”

Karen was stunned. *Men need women? Mike needs me?* She tried hard to never need him; it hadn’t occurred to her that he might need her.

“You’re talking about more than sex, right?” Karen asked.

“Of course,” Claudia replied emphatically. “That is merely the need that women are most aware of because men’s persistence is obvious. But while it is sometimes their most urgent need, it is not always their greatest need. Tell me, Karen, does Mike ever try to have time with you? Outside of the bedroom?”

Karen had to think about it. “Yes, in funny ways though. Sometimes he wants me to sit next to him while he watches a college football game. It’s silly though because he’s not paying any attention to me. His eyes are on the big screen, even during the commercials. Or he wants me to go on a drive with him, even though he rarely talks.”

Kimberlee was nodding and Karen assumed she could relate. It reminded her that the fair-skinned beauty had been married once.

Claudia was shaking her head again. “This is something I cannot fully explain with the limited understanding you have of men. For now, let me say that men are nurtured—literally fed energy—merely by being in the presence of a contented woman. They do not need to pay attention to her for it to matter that she is there. If she is happy, they are getting recharged.”

Looking from one to the other, Claudia added, “Even a young boy will care that his mother is on the premises, although he may seem oblivious to her.”

Karen turned to Kimberlee in amazement right as Kimberlee turned to her. Looking across the light of the candle, into each other’s eyes, the differences in age, ethnicity and lifestyle fell away. *We’re the same,* Karen thought. *We have the same blind spots.*

Kimberlee responded by reaching out and patting Karen’s hand, as Claudia often did. Karen smiled and patted right back.

Karen took a deep breath and turned to Claudia, feeling safe in speaking for both of them. “Okay, we’ll accept that explanation for now.”

Kimberlee nodded and prompted, “Would this be a good time to tell us what you mean, exactly, by ‘giving up the right to castrate men forever?’”
Claudia nodded and sipped her tea. Karen was comforted by the familiar way the older woman gathered her thoughts.

“Giving up the right to castrate men forever does not mean that you will never do it again. Besides a knee-jerk reaction to fear, frustration and pressure, it is an old habit. It will take some time to replace it with the Language of Heroes. And with confidence in getting your needs met.” Karen felt Claudia looking pointedly at her.

“It does mean you give up the practice of treating men as if they are misbehaving and deserve to be punished. It does mean you challenge the attitude that men’s power must be limited for women to be safe.”

Claudia now looked specifically at Kimberlee. “It does not mean you give up the right to protect yourself.”

Kimberlee shook her head. “It’s okay, Claudia. I see that emasculation never protects me.”

“Good,” Claudia nodded and continued, “It does mean that you will not justify having emasculated a man. When you catch yourself rationalizing your behavior, you stop. And you apologize.”

“How do you apologize?” Kimberlee interjected.

“That is a better question than you may think,” Claudia responded. “It is important to apologize simply and sincerely for your reaction. And drop it. If you go on and on, as with a child whose boo boos need to be kissed, that will be emasculating in another way. If you stop the behavior, apologize for it, and move on, he will recover himself. Men are enormously resilient. Though they are vulnerable, they are not fragile. It is important to respect that.”

“You’re saying that the way women keep checking to see if someone’s okay—that would be bad?” Karen asked, thinking of how they interacted with the children at school.

“Yes, Karen,” Claudia replied. “A girl-child or woman might think it ‘caring’ to check on them. To a man, even a boy, it is annoying and emasculating. It is a form of ‘mothering’ that makes a man feel five years old.”

Karen flipped back to her list of ways women emasculate and added “Mothering—treating like a five year old” to the list. It seemed fairly common. Both the girls and the teachers at school tended to mother the boys.

“What else should we know?” Kimberlee asked.

Claudia pursed her lips again and Karen waited with the pen poised above her paper.
“You do not have to personally think you have this right, to give it up. Our culture says you have it. That makes it a powerful declaration for anyone.”

“You said ‘declaration,’” Karen responded. “How exactly does one ‘Give up the right?’ Is it a paper we sign?” She joked, “A Declaration of Independence?”

Claudia smiled at her kindly. “In some ways it could be a declaration of independence: independence from the tyranny of the Perfect Person; independence from the need to punish and be righteous. Independence from the burden of policing men’s behavior and trying to make them act like women.

“And, I imagine you could write it down. Since the written word is important to you. In my family, it has been a vow we spoke to the ones who went before us. I said it to my mother and grandmother,” Claudia finished.

Kimberlee raised her hand tentatively, as if in class. It made Karen smile.

“Yes, dear?” Claudia asked.

“Do we have to trust men to do this?” Kimberlee asked. “Because while I’m warming up to them, I don’t think I’m there yet.”

Claudia shook her head. Karen would have thought the opposite.

“No, dear. Trusting men is something that takes time. First you have to learn what they can be trusted for. Which I plan on teaching you. But that can only come after giving up the right. Which means there is faith and determination required.”

“Faith and determination?” Karen questioned.

“Yes,” Claudia said seriously. “It could be faith in your self, faith in men, even faith in me. Faith in your ability to meet men on a level playing field. Both of you being powerful.” She added, “Even faith in feminine power, which you may have only experienced briefly.”

Claudia concluded, “And some determination to have a relationship with men based on being partners instead of enemies. Even though you do not yet know how.”

Kimberlee looked uncomfortable. “Yes?” Claudia asked.

“Um, I don’t mean to be rude, or ungrateful. But it’s obvious that this is extremely important to you. Will you tell us why?”

Claudia nodded, “I would be happy to. It will also explain something that Karen already knows only part of.”
“What’s that?” Kimberlee asked, now eager.

“The women in our family have been studying men for twenty-five generations,” Claudia began. “Initially, we shared our findings, like the Language of Heroes, with others in the community. Nine generations ago, we formed our Covenant whereby we promised not to teach anyone outside the family. Even more than that, we promised to only teach a daughter whom they had personally raised.”

“Why?” Kimberlee interrupted.

“Because the other women used the language to manipulate men. The results were terrible.” The candlelight made Claudia’s face look tragic.

“How so?” Karen prompted.

“With the traditional view of men as adversaries, ordinary women used the information we provided to manipulate and castrate men even more effectively. But it was not entirely their fault. They had never witnessed men and women honoring each other.”

Claudia shook her head sadly, “We became very cautious. On top of agreeing to only teach the young women who grew up in a household of partnership, they added the vow. So each recipient would promise to use the information for good, not ill. To strengthen partnerships, not wage war on men.”

“Grandmother, you know how I was raised,” Kimberlee said earnestly. “Do you think taking this vow will make up for the fact that I’ve only seen what you’re talking about between you and Granddad?”

Karen held still while Claudia searched Kimberlee’s face and then her own.

“I hope so.” Claudia was equally earnest and reached for both their hands. “The changes you have made already are encouraging. But I am betting on the vow and the courage it takes to make it. I am trusting your honor in upholding it. And your faith and dedication.”

“And this is required, right?” Kimberlee persisted.

Claudia nodded emphatically and sat back, releasing them. “The vow is the foundation of the Queen’s Code. For my lessons to bring the love and satisfaction you are both seeking, you must start here. Otherwise you will only have more suffering and misery. I will not allow my knowledge to contribute to that.”

In the silence that followed, Karen was left with her thoughts and her notes. A breeze came up and the candlelight danced lightly across her paper.
“I give up the right to castrate men forever.”
• Doesn’t mean I’ll never do it again.
• Gotta break the habit.
• And gain confidence in getting my needs met
• Does mean I won’t justify punishing men
• Does mean I hand them back with an apology (without mothering)
• Doesn’t mean I give up the right to protect myself

While it was clear that miracles could be gained by making this commitment, the cost was high. Karen recognized it as one she’d had to pay before: letting go of Righteous Indignation. She remembered when she’d given up punishing Mike for all the behaviors driven by his Stage of Development. The rewards she’d reaped far outweighed the shallow, bitter companionship of her anger and resentment.

“I’m ready,” Karen said and sighed.

KIMBERLEE looked searchingly into Claudia’s eyes. She knew what her grandmother wanted most to hear. Can I do it?

Memories more than two decades old came unwelcome to the surface. She shuddered, feeling the fear and shame as if it were yesterday. She pulled her sweater closer, glad of the darkness surrounding them. Tears began down her cheeks. She felt them but didn’t move to wipe them away. Claudia’s compassionate eyes still held hers, even while the memories and emotions pressed upon her.

I am not that girl, she thought suddenly. I’m a grown woman. What would it be like to act like one? From partnership instead of fear?

“She don’t know if I’ll ever be completely ready,” Kimberlee managed to get out. “But I’m doing it anyway…”

She reached out and took her grandmother’s hand in a firm grip. Looking determinedly into her eyes, Kimberlee said, “I give up the right to castrate men forever.”

A wave of warmth spread over her and around her. It felt like a cloak of the softest fibers, holding the vibrancy of fertile earth and fresh air, and the strength of deep oceans and majestic peaks. Is this feminine power? She wondered. It feels like home.
Kimberlee turned to Karen who immediately took their free hands. Looking first at Kimberlee with moist eyes and a smile, Karen faced Claudia and said, “I give up the right to castrate men forever.”

Kimberlee watched Karen closely, hoping she felt the same rush of warmth and power. She only knew for sure that Karen looked peaceful. Karen and Claudia rose in an impulsive hug and kissed each others’ cheeks. After a moment, Kimberlee realized she wanted to join them. The warmth and softness of their feminine embrace felt wonderful.

It seemed a long time had passed before they disengaged their arms, kissed cheeks again, and turned to sit down. Kimberlee gasped at what she saw before her.

“How long has that been there?”

CLAUDIA giggled. In relief and delight. What a perfect time for her to finally see it, she thought.

“The whole time,” Karen replied, smiling with joy equal to what Claudia felt.

“It has?” Kimberlee asked, incredulous.

Karen laughed and exchanged a warm conspiratorial glance with Claudia. They sat and grinned while Kimberlee continued to stand, gawking at her chair. For it was truly her chair. The wide arms were covered in tiny carvings of Kimberlee; images of her at every age. She lifted the candle from the table and studied each one of them with awe.

Claudia waited patiently, watching Kimberlee struggle with receiving this profound expression of her grandfather’s love. She waited to see what would happen when she got to the back of the chair. Many minutes later, Kimberlee still stood, her head tilted, trying to make out the large oval portrait that she had leaned against for hours.

“I think Granddad took some artistic license with this one,” She finally said. “She’s prettier than I am. Beautiful, really. And regal.”

“That is because it is not an image of who you are now,” Claudia stated. Kimberlee raised an eyebrow inquisitively.

“That is because it is not an image of who you are now,” Claudia stated. Kimberlee raised an eyebrow inquisitively.

“It is an image of the woman you are becoming. As a man who adores you foresees it.”
BURT watched Claudia’s delightfully expressive face as she described Kimberlee’s reaction to his creation. He felt completely content.

He remembered his role in her evening. “Sweetheart, given how often men are responding to women, no doubt giving up the right to castrate men forever will have a profound effect. But…I was thinking about what we were talking about. How emasculation can cause objectification. And vice versa…”

He paused, unsure. “Do you think I should give up the right to objectify women?”

He was shocked to see tears spring into Claudia’s eyes. “What, Sweetheart?”

Claudia smiled through her tears, “I am surprised at my own reaction. Apparently that would mean a great deal to me. But I did not know it until you offered, my love.”

Claudia rubbed his arm with her foot. “But I would not want to be hasty. Giving up the right to castrate men would seem the nicest thing a woman could do for men. But where a woman has to stand to make such a declaration ends up empowering her equally, if not more. I could see it in both of their faces tonight. They will never be the same—not only about men, also about themselves.”

“That’s good to hear,” he replied, smiling.

“I am curious, Burt,” Claudia continued, “with the role that objectification plays—the last line of defense I would call it—where would you have to stand to give up the right to do that?”

Burt nodded, “‘Last line of defense’ is a good way to put it. I’m sure lots of men think of it that way.”

Claudia smiled, “That is who I learned the phrase from.”

He squeezed her foot. “If I were to give it up, I’d have to think I didn’t need it. Which would mean I thought I could handle anything women might throw at me and not lose my balance.”

“Would that take faith in your self?”

“Yes, I believe it would.”

Claudia rubbed her foot on his arm again. “Would you think about it and let me know what you notice? Do some research for me?”
He loved any opportunity to do something for her. Especially something that would contribute to her calling. “Of course,” he smiled back at her.

KAREN’s interludes at the coffee shop were becoming a habit. I need this, she thought, to transition from these intense conversations to being with Mike.

She sipped a decaf cappuccino and began organizing her notes into her teaching format. She was still skeptical about men needing women and being overwhelmed by them. But she trusted Claudia to illuminate that in the weeks to come.

**OBJECTIFICATION**
- Reduces a multi-dimensional being to a simple thing
- Makes it/them seem more manageable
- Happens when a man is overwhelmed, feels out of control—feels emasculated
- Men can feel overwhelmed by beauty, sexuality, intellect, humor, anger, demands, etc.
- But being objectified ticks us off in the extreme—causing emasculation
- Vicious cycle!

When she got to the last part of her notes, she read her handwriting:

- “I give up the right to castrate men forever.”

After speaking the words aloud, she had written them in her notebook. She didn’t have words for her experience. She was trying for once to actually feel the feelings and not worry about articulating them.

She had been surprised by the brief homework assignment:

- Notice when you’re triggered to emasculate a man
- And how you react having given up the right to do that
- Don’t beat yourself up if you do emasculate him
- Stop and apologize.

Kimberlee had asked, “But now what do we do? We’ve given up bringing out the worst in men. How do we bring out the best?”

Claudia had replied mysteriously, “I will start teaching you about that on Saturday. But the Queen’s Code is both a code of honor and a secret code, the Language of
Heroes. I want you to discover who men are when you merely stop antagonizing them. Before you ever do anything to intentionally empower them.”

Karen finished her cappuccino and closed her notebook. With a deep breath, she readied herself for home and for a new way of relating to Mike.
Are You Ready to Lay Down Your Sword?

If you’re ready to take the vow:

“I give up the right to castrate men forever.”

We’d be honored to receive this commitment from you. Here are your options:

♥ Make the commitment on the Queen’s Code site. That makes it official.

♥ Record a video making the commitment, and post it.

♥ Join or create a Queen’s Code Book Club event and both give and receive the vow with fellow participants. We provide instructions.

If you’re not ready to make this commitment, I recommend you stop reading here. You will be in danger of using the material in a way that will ultimately make your life more difficult and full of suffering. If you choose to keep reading anyway, you’re encouraged to take the vow at the earliest possible moment.

Blessings,
Alison