

Thumbtacks and Spandex

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This morning my body enveloped yours under the doona of our new bed. Your rounded back warmed my period cramp. We silently spooned. I looked over your head at your alarm clock next to our tub of Sukin cream and well-read hardback of Mick Foley's *The Hardcore Diaries*. 6:54am glowed red. Knowing that the alarm would ring in six minutes I closed my eyes, savoured this feeling, then opened them and stroked your hair off your left shoulder to peck it and kiss your cheek. You didn't move so I gently laid my hand and stroked with my thumb.

"Today's the day, champ," I whispered.

You opened your eyes and made me feel so special as you smiled *that* smile—the one that shows the gap where your molar used to be before I accidentally knocked it out. I know you think it's ugly but I still think it's cute. You pulled me into your lips and we kissed.

"Ready to get fucked up tonight?" you said as you winked.

Now blood drips from my forehead and pools onto the broken table and shattered light tubes. Drip, drip, drip. Every drop makes me fainter—feels like I'm taking another step down the Staircase to Unconsciousness. The fans chant: *Holy shit! Holy shit! Holy shit! Holy shit!* That makes everything worth it. Getting power-bombed through a table and fluorescent light tubes for that chant is better than sex (I think you'd say that too) and makes it hurt a tiny bit less.

I roll over onto my side to look out to the crowd to study their faces. My left ear rests on shards of glass. My vision is blurred by blood and sweat. Damn it—my left contact has come out. My eyes sting. It looks like the crowd's defying gravity, sitting at 90°. Some are cringing, some are laughing, some are just sitting there. Those are the marks I need to win over.

While you stand on the second rope taunting the crowd your ass looks so juicy in your little pink spandex shorts. You are perfect. I can't wait for us to get home, have a shower and be alone. I roll onto my back and feel more glass piercing my shoulder blades so I keep going onto my right. The big projector screen glows from the stage. It's fixed on the promo photo for this match. Under the photos of us it says:

Women's Hardcore Championship Match

"Queen of Hardcore" Maddison Crowe vs Kat "Here Comes the Money" Price

Although the patriarchy is fucked, I still like my nickname. And it's funny how you hate the monetary system and was born with that name—like a vegan whose last name is 'Butcher'.

I hear you get out of the ring behind me—the thump of your boots onto the gymnasium floor. The crowd pops twice: cheering then screaming. You must've gotten the bag of thumbtacks and barbed wire baseball bat from under the ring. This is exactly what we anticipated. I leave a trail of blood as I crawl to the ropes, using them to help myself up to my feet. The grey canvas is mixed with red from my blood and white from the tube lights.

You toss the bag and bat onto the apron and slide into the ring. You gut kick me right in my period cramp, hook your left arm around my neck and hoist me up for a brainbuster. I get winded as I hit the mat head-first and hear the crash and clang of the plywood banging against the metal bars of the ring frame. Then you pick up the bag and pour it out next to me.

It looks like a waterfall made of hundreds of thumbtacks. The four floodlights around the ring posts make them sparkle as they hit the mat. It makes a satisfying sound in a weird way—like the waves breaking and sizzling on the shore at Hillary’s yesterday.

You pick me up in a front headlock and walk me over to the edge of the scattered thumbtacks. The sweaty scent of your left armpit is left on my head and my blood stains your abs. With your back towards the thumbtacks you hook my arm over your neck again like you’re going for another brainbuster. As we go down and up I reverse it and pick you up in a front suplex and release you while you’re horizontal in the air. You land face down on your boobs, stomach and legs. Instead of writhing in agony or clutching your boobs or reacting to the thumbtacks that’ve pierced your skin, you just stay there—just lay there.

Motionless.

The crowd doesn’t know how to react. I don’t either.

Do you remember when we met—the very first time we saw each other? I do. I was looking for nutritional yeast at PAWS and I noticed you looking at the mock meats in the chest freezer. I hid behind a shelf of dairy-free chocolates and peeped out halfway. As you bent over the chest freezer your perfect ass was accentuated by your favourite purple leggings. Then my heart panged as I noticed you looking back at me in the mirror in front of you. I quickly looked back at the nutritional yeast (\$13 for 500g) then back at you. I just couldn’t resist. Then I saw your WWF rip-off shirt (the one with the panda hitting another panda with a steel chair) so I went up to you.

You jolt onto your back like you’ve been electrocuted. My heart pangs the same way as when you looked at me in the mirror. Thumbtacks are stuck to your face, forearms and thighs. Your right arm is propped 90° on its elbow and your left one is limp. Your right hand

is open and twisting *left-right-left-right-left-right* like it's possessed. Now your chest is convulsing. It looks like you're having a seizure.

You're reminding me of my match with Brittany Bliss in Nagoya last year. Do you remember that? We were in a Barbed Wire Massacre Match and she had an actual seizure after I hit her in the back of the head with a ladder and she fell onto the barbed wire ropes. Now you're staring at the ceiling. The reflection of the floodlights glisten in your eyes but your right one is brighter. It glistens harder. I take three steps forward and stop when I notice a thumbtack has punctured it. I dry heave. It makes my period cramp feel like razor blades. Your eyes slowly close. You cry a tear of blood from your right eye. The ref goes to your side and drops to his knees.

“Are you alright? Kat? Serious or a work¹?”

You keep convulsing. The ref gives me a legitimate look of distress—a non-verbal cue to keep taunting the crowd and buy time since you're seriously fucked. I contemplate breaking character and helping you but I'm not paid to be an ambo, I'm paid to entertain, to stay in character, to hurt myself for the show. This kills me.

I'm so sorry.

“Excuse me, hi, um... nice shirt,” I stuttered.

“Hey, thanks,” you replied, “are you into wrestling too?”

Your softly-spoken voice was such a turn on. It seemed like you were slightly struggling to get the words out. It was gentle and inviting. I felt so close to you. Then we found out that we were both wrestlers.

¹ Something part of the show and meant to happen.

“Yeah, I actually wrestle for a local promotion called Perth Pro Wrestling,” I said with pride, “I’m the only female wrestler on the roster so I always wrestle the guys.”

Your face lit up. “Wow, me too! I just moved from Melbourne because I got a job at the Perth Library.”

Then I told you that I’d try to get you a job with PPW and you dropped the mock chicken you were holding onto the chest freezer and hugged me. You weren’t wearing any perfume. You just smelt natural. I wanted to wrestle you so badly. I wanted you to get me into a body scissors—hug me with your legs and never let go because I’ll never tap.

“Here Comes the Money?” I shout to the crowd, “more like ‘Here Comes the Ambulance!’”

They boo. Exactly what I wanted since you’re the face² and I’m the heel³ as usual.

“Shut up, you ugly slut!” a neckbeard orders me.

Those words send me back to high school—to Year 9 when the boys from the *cool group* found out that I was lesbian and called me shit like ‘rug muncher’ and ‘lezzo’—then in Year 10 when Liam Carson talked shit about me being fat. But it also reminds me of lying in your arms, crying, as I told you about how hard it was growing up being out. And it was comforting to know that you felt the same way. You went through it all too.

Now it’s time for a witty comeback.

“*You* shut up. If I wanted to listen to shit, I’d fart!”

That gets some laughs and claps—even from the neckbeard. I know those type of guys are just joking when they talk shit to me. I know it’s just part of the show but it still

² A ‘good guy’ that the crowd is supposed to like.

³ A ‘bad guy’ that the crowd is supposed to boo.

hurts. It still hurts because it comes from truth and they're getting away with it. I know I'm ugly. That's the one thing we hate about wrestling—how sexist it is. I remember our talks about stealing the show from the guys and proving that we can wrestle even better than them. They can call us 'feminazis' while they drag their knuckles on the ground but we'll prove them wrong. And we're doing it tonight.

I was so nervous sitting with you while we ate coconut curry with mock pork balls at PAWS. I hardly made eye contact and when I did my heart palpitated. I liked the way you held your fork and spoon in the opposite hands. You smiled every time I talked and nodded like a studious school girl.

You're still convulsing. Two male ambos jump the guard rail and slide into the ring. The younger one kneels down beside your head. The older one slides a stretcher into the ring like Stephanie McMahon sliding a sledgehammer to Triple H. They both try speaking to you. I can't hear what they're saying over the crowd's cacophony of *You killed Kat!* chants. The older ambo snaps his fingers in your bleeding ear. It looks like you've reached the bottom of the Staircase to Unconsciousness.

I'm so sorry.

A ref from backstage jogs to the ring announcer, whispers something in his ear, and comes up to me, standing outside on the ring apron. He must have a message from the booker⁴.

“Mehdi says to pin Kat for the finish—but be gentle coz you might injure her even more. I'll count it.”

⁴ The person who creates matches and their outcomes.

Even more? Shit. I think about a heel way of doing this. I spot the barbed wire baseball bat you tossed on the apron and pick it up.

“Get the fuck out of my way!” I order the medics and ref as I hold up the bat so it looks like I’m threatening to swing it at them.

I grab the ref by his dreadlocks and undies and toss him out of the ring through the middle rope so it looks like I’m angry that they’re helping you. The ambos have no idea what I’m doing. They look genuinely scared and freeze. After a few seconds they crawl over to the other side of the ring. I think the ref knows what I’m doing because I see him selling⁵ the toss outside on the ground. I lightly put my right foot on your convulsing chest and flex my biceps.

I’m so sorry.

My foot moves up and down with your chest. It feels like I’m holding down a squirming fish. I wish these two feelings were foreign to me. Blood from my forehead slides off my chest and onto your cheek exactly where I kissed you this morning. A tear quickly follows. The ref that just came out slides into the ring and quickly counts *one, two, three*. After a dramatic pause the bell rings: *ding, ding, ding*.

With hesitation in his voice (since you were supposed to win) the ring announcer declares me the new Women’s Hardcore Champion. As I walk backwards up the entrance ramp I stare at you lying in the ring and see us sitting there during the day while we went over our match. We’ve done it so many times—sitting in the middle of the ring, planning our match, going through the big spots and overall structure.

⁵ To feign pain.

“So, we’ll just lock up and do a bit of technical shit to start with, yeah?” you proposed, “and then I’ll hit you with a big move, maybe a release German suplex.”

“Yeah, that’d be good,” I replied, “then when I’m selling that, you can get a chair, taunt the crowd a bit and hit me a few times... or just give me a big shot in the head and then give me time to blade⁶ so I start bleeding early and it’ll look good for the rest of the match.”

You know how much I hate taking chair shots to the back. It’s always shit because I don’t really know when they’re going to hit—so I don’t know when to breathe out. Getting winded is a certainty. I’d rather get hit straight in the head. At least I can see it coming.

We went over the other big spots in the match: using tables, thumbtacks, barbed wire, fluorescent light tubes and all that shit and made sure that we knew where we put them all. The four tables were under the ring on the right next to the coil of barbed wire, the thumbtacks were in a cotton bag under the steel steps and I would bring the fluorescent light tubes and a metal rubbish bin in a shopping trolley during my entrance. Since there was a Woolworths nearby we decided to walk over there to steal a shopping trolley.

With our hands interlocked we walked along the footpath to Woolworths. When we found one that actually rolled straight you insisted on making me go in the trolley so I jumped in. The trolley’s plastic wheels rolling over concrete and twigs sounded unusual and deafening compared to the sterile sound of the supermarket floor as you pushed me across the car park and back onto the footpath towards the community centre.

Backstage is chaotic. Half-naked wrestlers bicep curling resistance bands are trying to peak out of the curtain to see what’s going on in the ring. Words are flying in the air and landing on me and other people.

⁶ When a wrestler inconspicuously cuts their forehead with a concealed razor blade to bleed.

“Can you see anything?”

“Those pops were huge!”

“Is this a work?”

“Good job, bud.”

“I thought Kat was going over⁷.”

“What’s going on, man?”

“Are you alright, Maddy?”

“That was so good!”

“She’s farked, bro.”

I drop the belt on the wooden stage floor. My legs collapse. I cry. I don’t know if the ambos are going to take you backstage or straight into the ambulance. I don’t know where to go—what to do. I just want to be with you. I wait and wait and wait for the ambos to bring you backstage but nothing’s happening. It’s taking too long. I panic and panic and panic. It’s taking too long. Nothing else matters besides you. I don’t care about my period pain, the glass in my skin, all the shit that happened to me in the ring, the price of fuel—none of that matters. Where the fuck are you? Mehdi runs up to me and pushes a white towel into my face.

“Are you alright, Mad?”

⁷ To win a match.

The towel becomes more red than white as I gently rub it over the cuts on my face and body. I respond by asking him: “Do you know what they’re gonna do with Kat? Where are they taking her?”

Before he opens his mouth I remember that there’s a video feed of the ring at the sound guy’s desk. I hobble over to the glowing screen and see the ambos rolling you on a stretcher towards the exit.

Fuck kayfabe⁸—I’m coming, babe.

I leave the belt on the ground and go back out to the ring with the blood-stained towel in my hands. Fans are crowding around you. They know this isn’t a work. They’ve broken apart the guard rail and pushed chairs out of the way to make a gap for you to be rolled out through. There’s a silent stillness in the sweat-filled air as the fans just stand and watch, almost like a funeral procession.

“Oi!” The neckbeard breaks the silence. “Why did ya kill her, ya lezzo?”

He laughs to his friends and sips his VB. My skin vibrates and chills like a cow shoeing flies away. I walk up to him, ready to punch his ugly beard back to Midland; but instead I spit a ball of saliva and blood onto him. It lands right on his glasses and cheek. I turn around and the ambos look petrified when they see me storming over to you.

“I’m her girlfriend,” I tell them, “can I come with you?”

They nod.

Now I’m in the ambulance with you while you’re tied up to the stretcher. I’m picking out the loose thumbtacks from your skin and dropping them into a petri dish. It sounds like

⁸ The idea that professional wrestling and its storylines and gimmicks are genuine and not an act. To ‘break kayfabe’ is to ‘break character’.

intermittent rain on a tin roof. You don't flinch. The ambos have wrapped gauze over your eyes because they couldn't get the thumbtack out. Blood seeps through. You can't see me—you never will. Between sobs I tell you, "I'm so sorry, Kat. I'm so sorry," but I don't think you can hear me. Your chest has stopped convulsing. You're not breathing—you never will again.