

## WHUPPED TOO

### CHAPTER 1

*Farrin, ex Maid of Honor*

Every woman in this place is gorgeous. I feel like a Big Mac at a vegan buffet. They're looking at me wondering when I'll be called up to the stage and introduced as the winner of the grand prize drawing for *The Complete New You*, which includes a new set of breasts, liposuction for life, and thigh gap therapy.

"Oh, thank you so much, The Southern California Plastic Surgeons Society, for making all my dreams come true." I'll gush my appreciation to the five-hundred assembled guests. "I can't wait to look like all the rest of the women in this room—perfect!" Then I'll shed a few tears, blow my nose into my hand, and wipe the snot with a hunk of my dirty, tangled hair.

Oh, God, gag me before I gag myself.

What as Conrad thinking when he invited me to this opulent, self-congratulatory, medical celebrity, wing ding? Does he want all his contemporaries to see, in person, the *before* picture of his greatest challenge? He could be seated next to a babe with perfect set of C cups, a twenty-two inch waist, long blond tresses, whiter than white teeth, and a butt so tight you could bounce a quarter off it, but he invites me. What was he thinking?

I glance around the room. There are enough diamonds sparkling in the crowd to rival the Aurora Borealis. The unwrinkled women wearing these diamonds, whether they are married, single, divorced, or digging for gold, all share a similar beauty. Their hair is perfect, smooth skin radiant, eyes clear, breasts firm, and bodies taught. The adoring looks upon their faces, as they watch Conrad's every move, tell me they also share one distinct feeling and desire concerning my date for this evening: "I'd fuck this guy in a New York minute."

And I'm here, seated at the #1 table? I should be at the tucked away table in the back of the room with the other pudgies, saggies, and muffin toppers, who sit stretching their ugly necks to glimpse the beautiful people in front of them. But lo and behold, I'm right next to Conrad, who wears a perfectly fitted tuxedo, and looks even better than he did at Alyssa's

wedding, when he looked fabulous. This should be my Cinderella evening, but I feel more like the uglier of her two ugly stepsisters. Even a pair of Jimmy Choo glass slippers wouldn't help my cause.

I won't let myself believe Conrad loves me, but he must feel something or he wouldn't have brought me here tonight. On the reverse side of that coin, I'm hopelessly in love with the guy. At first I was merely totally infatuated, but now I can't get him out of my head. I think about him constantly. When I'm trying to work, the thought of his touch comes into my brain and I either drop the brush or spill my palette. In the shower, I have to relieve myself when I picture his naked body. The only way I can get to sleep (alone) is to clutch an oversized pillow between my knees and arms. The last time I felt like this I was seventeen and in love with bad boy Danny Therhume, but in retrospect, those feelings could've been the result of the constant cloud of marijuana smoke, which acted as the glue in our relationship.

How did I ever get to be the lucky one?

Besides being smart, rich, accomplished, handsome, and rock hard, Conrad exists on a plane above all others. Nothing seems to faze the guy. At Alyssa's wedding when my bridezilla step-sister uppercuts best man, Gideon, in his family jewels, and lays him out like a flopping out-of-water flounder, Conrad hardly batted an eyelash. And when Jake, at the altar looking like Jesus on a bad hair day, right before he's supposed to say "I do," asks Conrad if Alyssa is on her period; he merely says, "Yep, Aunt Scarlet's reading her meter right now."

No wonder Conrad's getting the award tonight.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the SCPSS's Annual Nip and Tuck Ball."

The chattering ceases, the event begins.

"I'm Dr. Lionel Scapaletta and a funny thing happened to me on my way to the Beverly Hills Hotel..."

Doctors are rarely trained in the art of public speaking and this guy is no exception. He tries a few jokes that don't work, segues into all the do-gooder stuff the association is doing, which is pretty much self-serving bullshit, and finally gets to the important matter at hand.

"Tonight, it gives me great pleasure to announce this year's Plastic Surgeon of the Year award."

Applause.

Conrad doesn't break a smile.

"Never has a surgeon come so far so fast in our field of medicine. He has rocketed his way to the forefront of stem cell tummy tucking, has pioneered new techniques for labiaplasty, and is blazing new ground in bingo wing brachioplasty surgery."

Applause, applause.

"A surgeon so sure with his hands, he could perform a left and right eyelid transplant simultaneously."

Applause, applause, applause.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the Southern California Plastic Surgeon of the Year, Dr. Conrad Blaine."

Standing ovation.

Conrad rises from his chair, and his tuxedo magically un-wrinkles as he pushes away from the table. He smiles to the applauding attendees, gives them a nod, and makes his way onto the stage. As he approaches the podium the emcee hands Conrad the Gold Sculpture Award, a solid gold scalpel encased in clear liquid plastic, mounted on a tiny operating table. The inscription reads: *A Cut Above the Rest*.

Conrad, holding his trophy in his right hand, speaks slowly and assuredly into the microphone. "I am humbled and flattered to be accepting this award. Thank you very much."

Short, sweet, and to the point. No one could have said it better.

When the final ovation dies down and the guests sit, the emcee ends the evening with a reminder for all to pay their yearly dues. The house lights come up. The older doctors with older wives head for the exits. The older docs with younger wives, the ugly doctors with the good-looking wives, and the rest of the crowd head for the bar to offer their personal congratulations to the man of the evening. The crowd hovers around Conrad. Beautiful women form the first circle, gushing their good wishes as if he just won the Super Bowl. Not only could Conrad go to Disneyworld, but he could take all these women with him.

I try to hold my ground somewhere near my date, but that proves more difficult than playing solitaire in a windstorm. I feel like a pinball being simultaneously bumped by every

bumper on its way to thirty-seven free games, as I'm jostled in the crowd of adoring maidens to their god. The women all want to touch him, and not just lay a hand on his sleeve. They're tapping his cheek, rubbing the back of his neck, or sliding a breast or two up his arm or torso. Fellow docs are slapping his back, and medical salesmen push their business cards into Conrad's hand as if they were tips to parking lot valets.

And Conrad takes this all like a politician amongst his most ardent supporters. He's gentle to the women, humble to his contemporaries, and cordial to the salesmen. The smile never leaves his face. He's as calm, cool, and collected as a guru in the midst of meditation.

How could any woman not fall in love with this guy?

"Congratulations, Conrad," I say as we start home riding in his new Maserati. "You should be very proud."

"I guess I've come a long way from a wiseass kid in St. Theresa Grammar School."

"Yes, I'd say so."

"If I didn't say it before," he says, "you look very nice this evening, Farrin."

I'm no idiot. What he's saying is, "Thanks for leaving the piercings and nose ring out, going easy on the black eye makeup, and adding only one streak of purple to your hair."

"Thank you, Conrad," I tell him.

There is a short pause as we head down Sunset towards the ocean. "Conrad, I have to ask you one question."

"Go ahead."

"What the hell are you doing with me?"

"What do you mean, Farrin?" He's being polite.

"I don't hold a candle to any of those women. I don't even hold a matchstick to them. They're all gorgeous. They're perfect. They're the reason Darwin came up with his theory."

"You're being too hard on yourself."

"I'm being honest."

"And that's one thing I like about you, Farrin."

"Oh come on, Conrad. You can't tell me you aren't attracted to these women?"

Conrad chuckles; he's enjoying this conversation. "Those women are for sex, Farrin, not conversation." He pauses. "Unless it's a conversation about sex."

"And where does that leave me?"

"In the challenge category."

"What? You want to climb me like Everest? See how long you can hold your breath? Try for the Guinness record for being mismatched?"

"You have qualities I admire, Farrin. Although often hidden behind your punk façade, you have diamonds waiting to be polished."

I pause before speaking. "I'm not sure if that's a compliment."

"I assure you it is."

"Do you love me?" I ask.

"Like a summer's day." He quotes Shakespeare. Could this guy be any more perfect?

I spend the night in his penthouse condo.

It is mind-boggling to believe, but sex with Conrad keeps getting better and better.

I'm whapped.

## CHAPTER 2

Jake, Unemployed ex-Groom

Living in LA without a car is cruel and unusual punishment.

I walk three blocks and have to wait fifteen minutes for the bus. Once aboard, I go twelve minutes and get off at the train station. I take the Expo-line downtown, where I wait another ten minutes to transfer to the Purple Line, which gets me to Union Station, where I have to walk across a mile of terra cotta floor, and wait to transfer to the Gold Line, which will take me to the San Gabriel Valley, where I finally get off, exit the elevated station, and stand at another bus stop to wait for the bus to get me three blocks away from Sunset City.

All this to go see my mother, who won't have a clue about who I am when I finally arrive.

"Hi, Mom. How you feeling?"

“You’re not from the gas company, are you?”

“No, Mom, I’m your son. Remember, you birthed me twenty-eight years ago?”

“I think there is a problem with my meter,” she tells me.

Actually, she’s pretty good today. No mismatched shoes, her hair is somewhat brushed, and her fingernails don’t look like they let her play in the litter box again.

“Did you get to go on the field trip yesterday, Mom?”

Each week the Sunset City staff herds the Alzheimer’s patients together, jams them onto the company bus, which takes off to visit a local garden, museum, historical venue, or other point of interest. In the Sunset brochure, they make a big deal out of these weekly excursions, but the reality is, the bus never stops. It just rides out one way for an hour, gets to its destination, turns around, and rides back. Nobody ever gets off, goes anywhere, or visits anyplace. Oddly enough, none of the patients seem to mind. They must love it because they stay calm as they peer out the window at places and things they have seen a million times before, but seeing them now as if it’s the first time.

“I can’t remember,” Mom says, an understatement in its finest form.

Back when I drove a company car, I would pile Mom in and get her out of the place. We’d go visit some of our old haunts, drive by the house we used to rent, past my grammar school, and to the graveyard where my Dad waited for her to join him.

Every-so-often on these memory flogger sojourns, she comes out with a comment that is not only lucid, but also touching.

“I always knew you would make good, Jake. You could always feel what other people were feeling.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

She then she goes on to talk about the price of asparagus.

Now during my weekly visits, we’re left to sit outside on the patio, by the pool, in the depressing day room, or in her room, which she shares with another woman, who also doesn’t know if it is six o’clock or Wednesday.

Today, we’re outside. I tell her I never did get married. Instead, I was hijacked by my two ex-best friends, who thought they knew my future wife better than I knew her. I also tell her I’m

unemployed, broke, lost my car, and have been eating spaghetti and hot dogs to stay alive. I leave out the part about me becoming pretty much a miserable recluse.

Mom tells me, "Dan Quail will make a great president."

"I'm sure he will, Mom, I'm sure he will."

I can only take about two hours of this. If I was feeling depressed before I got here, I'm pretty much suicidal as I get up to leave.

"Excuse me, Mr. Dombrowski."

Ah, oh. It's Mrs. Futtz, the accountant, comptroller, and Simon Legree trained collector of past due bills.

"Mrs. Futtz, how nice to see you."

"There seems to be a slowdown in your monthly payments."

"Really?"

"And it seems to be getting slower day by day."

This conversation always begins in the absurd; and this isn't the first time the topic has been discussed.

"I have to be honest with you, Mrs. Futtz." I'm lying and she knows I'm lying. "I am in the process of re-assembling my assets, so I can reap the maximum tax benefits before I liquidate."

"And when can I expect payment for your mother's care from this liquidation?"

"I'll ask my financial advisor the next time we meet."

"And when will that be?"

"Soon."

She gives me the same hard stare she gives me at the end of all these conversation. It's a stare that could melt eyeballs.

I'm not sure she knows that I know the way this all works. In California there is a law, which states that once admitted to a facility such as Sunset City, a patient can't be kicked out for non-payment. The facility can take her Social Security, any pension and assets she might have, and convert those into cash, but they can't throw her out into the street. Sunset already gets her Social Security, which is the only asset she has, but it's obviously not enough.

What Mrs. Futtz wants is the extra money I pay to give my Mom the next level of care. If I quit paying the overage, Mom will be back wearing two different shoes and sitting in a wet Depend all day. I'm stalling, trying to keep Mom dry until I can get another job or sell my bovine gas idea to a venture capital firm.

"How about if I give you a partial payment to show my goodwill in this matter, Mrs. Futtz?"

Before she can ask me for the amount, I pull out my wallet, find the one folded up check I keep for emergencies, take her pen from her clipboard, and start writing.

She waits.

I hand her the check with the brightest smile I can muster.

"Fifty bucks?" she says with her cold stare morphing into disgusted disbelief.

"From the little acorn grew the mighty oak."

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The biggest event of my day is the arrival of the mailman. Is this pathetic or what?

In this age of the computer no one sends letters, cards, or first class mail anymore; that's why email was invented. Today, our mailboxes are filled with circulars, ads, come-ons, subscription offers, cable and phone deals, and coupons for stuff you can't afford or never need. The majority of the mailers are addressed to Resident, Homeowner, or Poor Schmuck. The only other mail you receive are bills or letters from the government.

So, what do I do every day when I see the mailman coming up the walk to my apartment building? I take off down the stairs like Ursain Bolt. I am waiting and praying for two pieces of government correspondence. The second is a notice to appear for jury duty, which would be a great reason to get out of this apartment for a few days. The first is a check from the Unemployment Office with a corresponding letter, granting me full benefits, which aren't full enough to pay even half my bills. When I went and applied for unemployment, I filled out the form, took it to the window, where the bored-to-death clerk checked my checked boxes, then re-asked me if I was laid off or quit. "I was fired," I answered without hesitation. She then stamped some stamp on the form, put it in her out box, and announced, "Next."

I've been waiting weeks for my first check.



Today, the envelope arrives. I take it out of the mailman's hands before he slips it into my cubbyhole, and tear it open.

No check.

It's a letter stating: *Upon contacting ex-employer, La Rue Walworth from the Walworth Recycling Company, the reason for leaving listed was a failure to report to work for an extended period of time, and not a firing or lay-off. Your request for full benefits has been denied and you should re-report to the nearest office to refile your claim.*

What? This can't be. I need that money. My rent's due. I'm so broke I can't afford tap water.

What the hell is he telling these people? LaRue knows I got kidnapped. It wasn't my fault I couldn't get to work. I was chained to a radiator for a week. I'm a victim of circumstances, not a guy trying to scam the Unemployment Office. There's no way I can live on the second tier payments. The amount of money is a hell of a lot less for a guy who quits, compared to a guy who gets canned. What am I going to do?

After all the poverty I've been through in my life, you'd think I'd be good at this.

## **And Coming Soon**

*The Seventh Richard Sherlock Whodunit:*

### **The Case of the Dearly Departed**

Richard Sherlock is hot on the cold trail of a missing Richmond Insurance customer, whose disgusting, rotting, remains are unexpectedly stumbled upon by a couple playing with their new geo-catcher GPS phone app. Talk about being surprised. The only problem is a couple of weeks ago, the guy was on the Outdoor Lover's dating website, advertising for *The Nature Girl of my dreams*. So, how could he be dead?

As the death benefit payout is made, Tiffany can't wait to meet this Mr. Wilderness and get Richmond's million dollars back in her and her daddy's pocket.

Sherlock will get to the grave bottom of this one, or die trying.