

LAURA'S 72-HOUR HOLD
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Part 4: Friday

After Dr. Blymire concluded their initial meeting, she walked to her office door, opened it, and spoke to someone out of Laura's sight. "Oh, good, you're already here. Do you have the wheelchair ready?"

"Yes, doctor," was the reply.

"All right, then. You can take Laura to the testing room." As the doctor stepped back, a group of four orderlies entered the office, yanked Laura off of the chair and marched her outside. Laura called back, "Goodbye, Dr. Bly-" but was cut off when the doctor unceremoniously closed the door.

One of the orderlies unfastened the crotch strap of the straitjacket, brought it back between Laura's legs and hooked it through the arm hoop in the front. While this happened, Laura looked at the wheelchair in front of her. The chair was thickly cushioned and covered in black vinyl, with heavy brown leather straps hanging off of every edge. She was brought in front of it and positioned so she was facing away from the chair. The head orderly said firmly, "Sit down and keep your back straight against the seat back. Any funny business and you'll wind up in the same situation you were in last night. Got it?"

"Yes, ma'am," Laura quickly replied. The head orderly went behind the wheelchair with one of her colleagues and held onto Laura's shoulders to guide her as she sat down and placed her feet on the small footrests at the bottom. They then held Laura back by holding onto her canvas-covered biceps and grabbing big handfuls of her red hair. Laura gritted her teeth at the latter precaution; was hair-pulling really part of the standard restraint procedure at the hospital? She guessed that it must be, since Nurse Jodie didn't have a problem with it last night. The other two orderlies removed her ankle hobbles and spread her legs apart. There were locking leather cuffs of similar design attached to the leg rests, only the cuffs were made of black leather, rather than brown. The orderlies locked cuffs around Laura's ankles and upper calves, and wrapped more cuffs around her upper and lower thighs.

The head orderly spoke again. "Laura, lean forward as far as you can, keeping your head down. We're going to remove the straitjacket. Again, don't do anything stupid." They released Laura and she leaned forward, resting her crossed arms on her thighs. The two orderlies in front of Laura grabbed onto her shoulders and pressed Laura down as the other two quickly unbuckled the straps. "Laura, you can slowly sit back up, but do not move your arms yet." Laura raised her torso as the orderlies relaxed their hold on her. As Laura's back touched the chair again, the orderlies grabbed her arms and held them straight in front of her, as they made her do at the exam center, and quickly slid the jacket off. One of the orderlies folded the jacket up and placed it in a garment bag, as two others pressed Laura's arms onto the arm rests of the wheelchair. Three more sets of locking leather cuffs were attached to her wrists, lower biceps, and right below her armpits. Two wide leather straps were fixed, one on her lap and the other beneath her chest. Laura was relieved to be out of the straitjacket, but wasn't sure this was much of an improvement. She felt especially awkward about how the enforced posture and the wide belts emphasized her large bust, and was glad there were no males in the ward.

The head orderly gave directions to her underlings. "You two, throw that jacket in the laundry hamper and report to Nurse Jodie for further duties." They nodded and walked off. Talking to the remaining orderly, she said, "You can help me move Laura to the testing room." They unlocked the wheels and pushed the chair down a winding series of identical-seeming white hallways before entering a small, dark room. There was a single fluorescent lighting fixture above a small table. A petite, serious-looking Asian woman was shuffling a pile of papers on the other side of the table.

The orderlies wheeled Laura into the room and positioned her a few feet away from the table, opposite the seated woman. "Ms. Chong, this is Laura Granger," the head orderly announced.

The woman looked up for the briefest moment before returning to her papers. "Yes, yes, that's fine. I'll call you if I need you." The orderlies locked the wheelchair into place and left the room, closing the door behind them. The woman continued sorting her papers for a few minutes, as Laura wondered if she should say anything. She silently cursed herself for not preparing for the initial exam. She knew the Benjamin County Health Department web site had a detailed description of the exam process, even including a few sample questions, and there were also personal sites and forums run by people or relatives of people who went through the exams and/or 72-hour holds, with more extensive, "unofficial" advice on how to handle the whole ordeal.

The woman finished fiddling with her papers and suddenly looked up at Laura with a wide smile. "Hello, Laura! My name is Elaine Chong, and I will be conducting your psychological testing today. Now, I don't doubt that you're very concerned with this aspect of your hold. Let me reassure you that none of these are designed to be 'traps' or are meant to make you look bad. They've all been designed by professionals to be as fair and accurate as possible in determining your psychological state. Let's ease into things by starting out with a test most people have heard of, the Rorschach test."

"With the ink blots?" Laura asked.

"Precisely!" Elaine said as she held up a white card with an elaborate ink blot design. "Now, just tell me what you see here - your first impression, please."

Laura and Elaine went through the Rorschach cards efficiently; Laura was glad that Elaine didn't rush her or make any comments about her responses. Her professionalism put Laura at ease. After the Rorschach test came the Thematic Apperception Test (where Laura had to describe what is happening in a series of ambiguous pictures) and the Burns Depression and Anxiety Checklists.

After these tests, Elaine pressed a button on her pager and powered up a laptop computer. A minute later, two orderlies entered the room. "Laura, the following test is performed on a computer, so we're going to free your arms," Elaine said. "Please don't move your arms until I say so, OK?" Laura nodded, and the orderlies unlocked the three sets of cuffs holding her arms down on the cushioned arm rests.

"Please hold your arms out, at shoulder height, as the orderlies move your wheelchair under the table. Then, slowly place your forearms and your palms flat on the table." Laura did as she was told. The orderlies pushed the wheelchair until the table edge was lightly touching the strap below Laura's chest, locked the wheels in place, and stood back from the wheelchair.

"This test is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, or the MMPI," Elaine said. "It's the model for the exam you initially took at the exam center. It's a list of 567 questions, all true-false. Just press 'T' or 'F' on the keyboard; none of the other keys will work on this program. Again, just answer honestly; there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers." She slid the laptop into two small rails in the table, which kept the computer from being lifted or jostled, and locked it into place. Laura saw a sample question on the screen, with large rectangles marked TRUE and FALSE underneath.

"Just answer this sample question, so I know the program is working properly." Laura pressed the T key, and the TRUE rectangle was highlighted in blue for a second before the program moved onto the first real question of the exam.

"We're going to leave the room for a bit, as this exam will take a while to do. You will be

monitored, however, so take care not to make any sudden movements. You can stretch your arms, but keep your movements slow and controlled. And don't try to fiddle with your restraints or the computer, OK?"

"I understand, Ms. Chong. Thank you very much."

Elaine smiled. "You're very welcome, Laura. I appreciate your behavior today, and I'll make sure to note that in my report." She and the orderlies walked out and closed the door, leaving Laura alone with her thoughts and the computer. She was a little scared of this exam, given that the shorter version she took yesterday was partially responsible for her current situation. But Laura was determined not to make the same mistake twice, and she slowly and carefully considered every one of those 567 questions before answering them. She had barely noticed that almost two hours had passed by the time she finished the final question.

A few minutes after Laura finished the MMPI, Elaine and the two orderlies entered the exam room. "Laura, the orderlies will take you to the bathroom and then you'll have a lunch break before we continue with the exams." The orderlies pulled the wheelchair back from the table and tied Laura's arms down again before the three of them left. The orderlies wheeled Laura to the bathroom, freed her from the wheelchair, and helped her wobbly body into the stall, locking the door.

Laura took her time in the stall, stretching out her moment of freedom as long as possible. She was surprised to find how exhausting it felt to be constantly tied down. After several minutes, she flushed the toilet and the orderlies unlocked the stall. They let her wash her hands thoroughly before restraining her once again and guiding her towards the ward's small cafeteria.

Nurse Jodie was sitting at a round table, eating her lunch, with another tray of food next to her. She motioned to the orderlies, who rolled Laura up to the table.

"Hi, Nurse Jodie. I'm glad to see you again," Laura said, smiling.

Nurse Jodie smiled back at Laura. "As am I, Laura. Ms. Chong told me that you've behaved yourself throughout the testing, so I think we can free your arms again so you can feed yourself." She nodded to the orderlies, who removed Laura's arms from the cuffs again before leaving to get their own lunches.

She pushed the tray in front of Laura; the lunch consisted of an old-fashioned peanut butter and jelly sandwich, mozzarella sticks, chocolate-chip cookies and a sippy cup of orange juice. As Laura began to eat, Nurse Jodie asked, "So, how do you feel about the testing so far?"

Laura swallowed a mouthful of PB&J before responding. "Well, things seem to have gone OK so far. I really don't know; I've never been in this sort of situation before. Are the other patients being tested as well?"

"They are, but you really shouldn't worry about them. Stay focused on yourself; don't get lost in other people's problems." Laura nodded and went back to her lunch.

After the two women finished their meals, Nurse Jodie gave Laura a wet-wipe to clean up with and summoned the orderlies back. They tied Laura's arms down again and wheeled her out of the cafeteria and back to the exam room, where Elaine was already waiting.

"Welcome back, Laura; I hope you had a good lunch break." She nodded to the orderlies, who unbuckled Laura's arms again and left the room.

"Laura, this final exam is not psychological. It's called the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, or WAIS for short, and it's an IQ test. It will test your verbal comprehension and perceptual

reasoning skills." She placed a thick booklet, two #2 pencils, and a fill-in-the-bubble answer sheet in front of Laura. "You can open the booklet and start now. It'll probably take you the rest of the afternoon. I'll stay here, in case you have any questions."

Laura felt much more comfortable taking the WIAS exam than she had with the other exams. She had no experience with the psychological tests at all, whereas she was used to dealing with the vocabulary and abstract reasoning problems during her years in high school. Laura again took her time with the WAIS, going back to double-check the more difficult questions, before telling Elaine that she was finished.

"Excellent!" Elaine collected the test materials and paged the orderlies again. "Well, unless Dr. Blymire requests more information before your interview, this should complete your examinations. I wish you the best of luck, Laura," she continued, extending her hand to Laura.

Laura shook Elaine's hand. "Ms. Chong, thank you so much for making all of this as painless as possible."

The orderlies entered the room. "Well, that was mostly your doing, not mine. Good night, Laura," Elaine said as Laura was wheeled into the hallway.

The orderlies took Laura to the bathroom again before going to the cafeteria, where Nurse Jodie brought in Laura's dinner: chicken nuggets with BBQ sauce, potato wedges with ketchup, a small brownie and a sippy cup of lemon-lime soda.

"Well, I'm glad all that's over with," Laura sighed as she began to eat.

"Don't forget, you still have your interview with Dr. Blymire tomorrow afternoon," Nurse Jodie warned. Laura had hoped that they would schedule the interview as early as possible, just to get it out of the way and relax a little before her 72 hours were up.

After Laura finished eating, Nurse Jodie said, "Ms. Chong told me that you remained calm and collected, so we're going to untie you from that wheelchair and leave you in minimal restraints tonight. You can relax for a few hours in the recreation room before we have to put you to bed."

"Not on that stretcher again, I hope."

"Oh, as long as nothing goes wrong, you'll be in a nice, comfy bed in a regular room, not the padded cell. It'll be important to rest up for tomorrow." Laura winced inwardly at the indirect reminder of the private session with the doctor.

Nurse Jodie and the orderlies freed Laura from the wheelchair's assortment of cuffs and straps, and gingerly lifted her to a standing position. "Can you stand up on your own?" The nurse asked.

"I think so." The orderlies cautiously let go of Laura, and she remained upright with no problems. She turned to Nurse Jodie and asked, "Can I stretch out a bit before you put the cuffs on again?"

"Well, I don't see why not."

"Thank you so much." Laura reached over her head and stretched out as far as she could, spreading her fingers and standing on the balls of her feet. She felt every muscle and tendon in her body respond with rapturous applause. She was brought back down to earth when she felt the orderlies wrap an eight-inch-wide belt of padded brown leather around her waist. "If you could keep your arms up, that would be perfect," Nurse Jodie said. Laura exhaled and put her hands on her head as the orderlies snugly fastened and locked the three buckles which closed the corset-like belt in the back. Each orderly then grabbed an arm and brought it down to her

waist, where they locked leather cuffs around her wrists. Each cuff was attached to the belt by a six-inch tether.

"OK, you can take her down now," Nurse Jodie told the orderlies.

Laura looked down at her bonds. "Is this all?"

Nurse Jodie and the orderlies looked at each other for a moment, and then all three laughed out loud. One of the orderlies said, "No one's ever said *that* before!"

"Well, Laura," Nurse Jodie said, trying to stifle her giggles, "if you *insist*, we can-"

"Oh, no, no, no," Laura replied. "I was a little surprised, that's all."

"Well, don't be. You've done very well for yourself, Laura. Good night," said Nurse Jodie as they all left the testing room.

"Good night, Nurse Jodie," Laura responded as the nurse left.

The orderlies led Laura into the recreation room. The room was surprisingly large to Laura's eyes; at about 15 feet by 50 feet, it was obviously meant to house more than the four women currently admitted to the ward. The decor was rather sparse, with several well-padded couches and chairs scattered around the room, a small magazine rack by the orderly's desk next to the door, and a widescreen television at the far end of the room. The orderly manning the recreation room desk signed Laura in, and came out from behind to show Laura around as the other orderlies left.

"Well, as you can see, there's not a whole lot to do here," the orderly told Laura, a little apologetically. "We've only got National Geographic and travel magazines in the rack here. Under doctor's orders, we keep the TV locked on nature documentaries and kids's shows. She doesn't want anyone to get too excited, I dunno. They aren't half bad, actually, if you've got nothing else to do." Laura nodded.

Laura saw the black-haired girl looking out a window on the right side of the room, slouching on a chair with her legs propped up on a hassock. She had her back to the room, and Laura thought she saw her wearing a Posey straitjacket. Laura didn't see the other two girls there; she was a little curious about the blond, but was more than happy not to deal with the really crazy girl tonight.

"And if I were you, I'd give Little Miss Sunshine over there a wide berth," the orderly whispered into Laura's ear. "She's given us nothing but trouble all day." Laura nodded and thanked the orderly as the latter settled behind the desk again.

Laura sat down on the couch directly in front of the TV, determined to stay out of trouble for the rest of the night. She looked forward to sleeping in an actual bed tonight, with minimal (or maybe even no) restraints, instead of being wrapped up like Hannibal Lecter. She had done everything the hospital staff asked of her, and was glad to see that they were fair-minded and let her have a relative amount of freedom from all that oppressive bondage. She relaxed a little more, sinking down into the couch, and began to feel a little like the old, confident Laura again. All that testing was exhausting, but at least Elaine wasn't out to get her, and it was better than being strapped down and doing nothing all day long. She did feel a little nervous about the session with Dr. Blymire tomorrow, but she shook off her fears. The doctor seemed compassionate, and would no doubt see that Laura was perfectly rational and sane, and this three day nightmare would come to a happy end.

Laura started watching the program, something about how animals survived in Death Valley, but

her thoughts kept drifting to the black-haired girl. She was the first 72-hour hold patient Laura had seen, and she had wondered why she had been trussed up in that horrible leather monstrosity, instead of the canvas straitjackets Laura and the other girls had worn. Laura glimpsed over her shoulder for a second or two, long enough to see that the other girl was definitely wearing a standard straitjacket, and also that she had some weird devices strapped on her legs. Laura saw the girl's head move, so she quickly turned around and focused on the TV again.

Several minutes later, Laura decided to hazard another glimpse at the raven-haired beauty. The girl stared out the window, her facial expression an equal mix of sullen anger and dejection. Laura felt sympathy for a fellow committal and her curiosity over the girl's background overrode her instincts for self-preservation. Laura checked on the orderly; she had her head propped up with one arm on the desk, idly paging through a magazine. Laura thought if she kept things calm and quiet, she could talk with the other woman, compare their experiences at the hospital so far and give each other some advice, and even some hope.

Laura sat up on the edge of the couch and carefully raised herself to a standing position, as she couldn't move her arms out to adjust her balance. She made her way towards the other girl as casually as she could, not wanting to draw the orderly's attention. Laura sat down in a chair a few feet away from the other girl, who hadn't noticed her at all.

"Um, hi there," Laura said hesitantly. The other girl turned her head with a start. "My name's Laura. I saw you in the van yesterday. If you don't want to talk, I'll go away, but I just wanted to talk to someone who wasn't a doctor or an orderly, you know."

The girl's face softened from her formerly angry countenance, and she actually smiled a little. "Yeah, I remember you. You were wearing that weird sleeveless thing. What was that about?"

"Well, they had me in a straitjacket, and then they put what they called a transport jacket over that. It went from my neck to my legs. I don't know why they bothered; I certainly couldn't have gotten out of the straitjacket by itself! What about your jacket; that didn't look comfortable either."

The girl grunted and tried to straighten herself up in the chair. Laura noticed that the devices on her legs were actually braces with locking hinges at the knees. She couldn't bend her legs to push herself up, so she was reduced to bouncing her torso in the chair in a futile attempt to sit up properly. Laura checked on the orderly once more, and propped up her feet against those of the girl. "Here, jump up again and I'll push you in." The girl bounced her torso a couple more times, and Laura was able to push her enough so that she could sit up straight in the chair.

"Thanks a lot, Laura. My name's Michelle by the way. Michelle Martinez. Anyway, the guys at the place I took my exam at said that that leather straitjacket was some sort of sample from their restraint supplier, and that it was meant to be used on violent prisoners. I really freaked out when the shrink said that I had to come here, so they all jumped on me and wrapped that damn thing around me." Michelle's voice got louder and more agitated as she continued the description. "It felt all weird and slick inside, like I couldn't get a grip on anything. My fingers were jammed together at the ends of the sleeves, and those bitches nearly broke my ribs when they yanked all the straps closed!"

The orderly looked up from her magazine at the two patients. "Hey, come on guys, keep it civil, OK?" she said in a distracted tone.

"Oh, sorry, ma'am," Laura hurriedly responded, while Michelle just nodded at the orderly.

"Anyway," Michelle resumed in a lower tone, "that jacket must have weighed like 20 pounds! It was so oppressive, like I was trapped under a dozen wet towels or blankets. I could see it being useful for a bodybuilder or strongman, but this regular jacket is a lot better - relatively speaking."

Michelle exhaled. "Man, they're afraid of us big girls, aren't they?"

Laura smiled and nodded. "You know, I nearly threw up when the psychiatrist said he had committed me. I was too scared to put up any sort of fight."

"Yeah, well . . ." Michelle leaned forward and lowered her voice a little. "Laura? Did you have any trouble with the computer during your exam?"

"No, I didn't. Why, did you-"

"Yeah, my computer was all screwed up! It seemed like every once in a while the computer wasn't recording the right answer for a question. You know how you selected an answer, and it would highlight it on the screen? Well, the computer was highlighting the wrong answer! It wasn't that often, like one in every 8 or so, but it was enough to make me worry. I tried to tell the shrink when he came in for the interview, but he was all, 'Oh, the computer doesn't make mistakes' and, he, he just wouldn't *listen*, you know?"

Michelle's voice was rising again, and the annoyed orderly stood up from behind the desk and called out, "You really need to be quiet there."

Michelle jerked her head towards the orderly, and Laura tried to calm her down and keep the both of them out of trouble. "I agree, that really sounds awful, but maybe you can tell the doctor during your session, and she'll pass that along to the Health Department, and they'll investigate-"

"You think anyone here's going to listen to us? They already think we're crazy. They threw me in a padded cell when we arrived and hogtied me with cuffs and straps. They stretched my legs back so much it was killing my knees and ankles. And when that doctor finally came in to check on me, she was so condescending - 'There, there, let's settle down now' - I mean, she had the orderlies undo the hogtie, which was *soooo* nice of her, but I don't think she heard a thing I said. I mean, she wasn't taking notes or anything. And then she stuck a syringe in my butt to knock me out! I was woozy from that shot almost all day, man!"

Laura empathized with Michelle's troubles. "Well, I didn't get sedated, but I ended up in a padded cell too. I got stuck in a waiting room with the other girls, and the orderlies thought I was trying to help one of them escape, so I spent all night strapped to a stretcher. They're awfully strict around here."

"That's not strict, that's sadistic!" Michelle shouted, impotently slamming her legs on the hassock. "They're doing everything they can to wind us up, so we'll stay locked up forever!"

The orderly stood up again and said in a pleading tone, "Guys, you're going to get in trouble if you don't-"

"Oh, piss off, you bitch!!" Michelle screamed at the orderly. A wide-eyed Laura moved away from Michelle as inconspicuously as she could as the orderly called for backup on her intercom.

The head orderly and four others burst into the room. After consulting with the orderly on duty in the break room, the head orderly said to the others, "Take that loudmouth back to her padded cell!" Two orderlies grabbed the struggling Michelle by her straitjacket, and the remaining two each wrapped their arms around her legs. "Get those braces off, and gag and hogtie her again. Nurse Jodie went home, so we can keep that her stretched out all night if we want."

Laura continued to make her way back towards the TV, but she was stopped by a hand on her shoulder, which spun her around and brought her face to face with the head orderly. "Don't walk away from me, Laura. What did you say to Michelle to get her so upset?"

"Nothing! I mean, I didn't mean to . . ." Laura trailed off.

The head orderly slowly shook her head. "First you make a mess of things in the waiting room yesterday, and now this." She turned to the room orderly. "And after Ms. Chong went out of her way to say how good she had been during the testing."

"I warned them several times, but they kept disrespecting the rules," the room orderly responded.

The head orderly turned back to Laura and asked, "What are we going to do with you, Laura?"

Laura had felt a sneeze coming on, and had turned her head away, but the head orderly grabbed her firmly by the chin, squeezing her cheeks together, and brought her head up, so their faces were just inches apart. "Are you listening to me? I-"

Laura interrupted the head orderly by sneezing right in her face. Laura was afraid to open her eyes, but she did anyway, to see the head orderly's glowering visage coated with her saliva.

The head orderly paused for a few beats before resuming. "As I said before I was so rudely interrupted . . . what ARE we going to do with you, Laura Granger?"