

LAURA'S 72-HOUR HOLD
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Part 3: Friday Morning

A groggy Laura awoke the following morning, still disoriented from the night before. She opened her eyes, but could see nothing under the thickly padded blindfold. Her jaw ached from the large ball gag the orderlies stuffed inside her mouth, and her whole body somehow felt sore and numb at the same time. She moved her arms as much as she could within the straitjacket she had been wearing since late yesterday afternoon, trying to alleviate the pins-and-needles sensation she had in her hands, but she was defeated by the unyielding tightness of the modified Posey jacket, compounded by the harness straps holding the canvas legsack securely on her lower body, not to mention the myriad of straps pressing her cocooned body into the mattress of the ambulance gurney.

All Laura could do was turn her head side to side. She turned it to her right as far as she could, and heard a loud crack from her neck, which startled her more than hurt her. Her neck felt a little better, so she turned to her left as well, and heard another, softer crack. She moved her head slowly back and forth, working out the stiffness as much as she could. After a few minutes, Laura heard the cell door open, and heard two sets of footsteps on the soft padded floor. She froze, scared of what could happen, but immediately relaxed when she heard a familiar voice.

"Good morning, Laura, this is Nurse Jodie. Do you remember me from last night?" Laura eagerly nodded and grunted from behind her gag. "Excellent! The orderly saw you moving on the video feed, so we decided to see if you wanted some breakfast." Laura nodded again. "Well, we're going to take off your blindfold and gag now." Nurse Jodie slipped the blindfold off, and Laura immediately shut her eyes, as the fluorescent lights looked to her like the flash from a nuclear bomb. The orderly crouched behind Laura's head and unbuckled the ballgag, and then grabbed two fistfuls of Laura's hair as Nurse Jodie worked the large white rubber ball out of her mouth. The orderly relaxed her grip once the nurse fully dislodged the wide gag, and Laura groaned as she worked her sore jaw muscles and tried to get some saliva flowing into her parched mouth.

Nurse Jodie and the orderly positioned themselves on opposite sides of the gurney, and unlocked hinges located near Laura's hips. The two of them were then able to raise the upper half of the gurney to a 45-degree angle, making it easier to feed Laura.

"Now, Laura, I read the orderlies' notes from last night, and I'm concerned about the violent behavior you displayed, so I'm not going to remove your restraints yet. The orderly and I will place this rubber bib over you to minimize any cleanup problems, and then I'll feed you breakfast. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied a weary Laura, her eyes still not fully adjusted to the light.

The orderly produced a large pink package, and unrolled it along the cell floor. She then unfolded it lengthwise, exposing a series of straps attached along one side. The bib was designed to cover almost the entire gurney. It was made of thick, shiny pink rubber, with a three-inch high neck collar emerging from near the top and a heavy-duty zipper running a foot back from the collar to the very top of the bib. The words "COUNTY MENTAL HOSPITAL" were stenciled across the bottom half.

"Laura, please keep your head still as we place the bib over you." Nurse Jodie and the orderly positioned the bib on top of Laura's straitjacketed, legsacked, and gurney-strapped body. The collar was draped around Laura's neck. "Now, Laura, please move your head forward so we can fit the bib around your neck." Laura brought her chin towards her chest, and the nurse moved Laura's red hair away from the zipper at the top of the bib. The orderly again grabbed two fistfuls of hair near Laura's scalp and held her head forward as Nurse Jodie pulled the zipper along the bib up to the top of the neck collar. The nurse then took two small straps at the top of the bib and looped them around the metal tubing of the gurney, to secure the top of the bib.

The orderly let go of Laura's hair, and Laura placed her head back down on the now rubber-covered

pillow on the gurney. The high rubber collar fit very snugly around her entire neck, right below her chin, but the turtleneck on her bodysuit prevented any discomfort. By now, Laura's eyes had adjusted to the light, and she now noticed a wheeled cart by the cell door, with a food tray on the top and what looked like a small stool on the bottom. Nurse Jodie took each strap from the side of the bib and laced it underneath the gurney, and the orderly buckled it on the opposite side, all the way down to Laura's ankles. Only Laura's head and canvas-covered feet remained uncovered by the bib.

"Everything looks nice and secure," Nurse Jodie said to the orderly. "I'll call you if I need you." The orderly nodded and left the cell. The nurse took the stool from the bottom of the cart and placed it next to the gurney. She then took the food tray and carefully positioned it across Laura's rubber-covered lap. Laura saw a plastic bowl filled with oatmeal with brown sugar, and two plastic "sippy cups", filled with milk and orange juice. Nurse Jodie picked up the orange juice and placed it near Laura's lips. Laura wrapped her lips around the spout and sucked down almost half the cup's contents before the nurse pulled it away. Laura felt the cold juice sliding down her esophagus, and it felt so good that she shuddered involuntarily and let out a sigh of relief, releasing much of her accumulated tension.

"That felt good, didn't it? Here, have some oatmeal." Nurse Jodie picked up the bowl and held it close to Laura's mouth as she spoon-fed the young woman. Oatmeal was a common breakfast for Laura, but it had never smelled nor tasted as sweet as it did that morning, a welcome note of comfort for Laura in her current condition. The nurse placed the bowl down on the tray and picked up the cup of milk. After Laura took a big gulp, Nurse Jodie said, "We can talk a little, Laura, as long as you remain calm and keep your voice down."

"Thank you, ma'am. How long was I asleep for?"

"Judging by the time stamp on your file from last night, you were probably asleep for almost twelve hours." A wide-eyed Laura stared at her in astonishment; due to her busy life at college, she was lucky to get half that sleep most nights. "Don't be surprised, Laura. Most new patients sleep from 10 to 14 hours their first night. You'd be surprised what a long rest can do for a woman's mental health."

"So what time is it now?"

"It's . . . a quarter past eight," Nurse Jodie replied, checking her watch.

Laura glanced down at her rubber-covered body and asked, "When will I be released from all of this?"

Nurse Jodie picked up the bowl of oatmeal and began feeding Laura again. "When you're done with your breakfast, I'll have the orderlies take you to the shower room so you can wash up." Laura tensed up a little at this news. She recalled that mental hospital film again, specifically the scene in which the undercover reporter was sprayed with a high-powered hose by the sadistic attendants. The nurse noticed this and said, "I'll be with you the whole time, Laura. You don't need to be afraid."

Laura relaxed a little. "What's going to happen after that?"

"Well, you'll get dressed in the patient uniform and we'll escort you to Dr. Blymire's office, so she can discuss the testing you'll undergo here."

Laura frowned a bit at the mention of the psychiatrist's name. Her father always told her that you never get a second chance to make a first impression, and she was kicking herself for making such a rotten one last night - or would be, if her legs weren't strapped down. She stayed silent for the remainder of the breakfast. Nurse Jodie put the tray and the stool back on the cart, and she removed a walkie-talkie from her pants pocket. "This is Nurse Jodie. Please send two orderlies to Padded Cell 8."

As they waited, Laura spoke. "Nurse Jodie? How many people admitted for 72-hour holds end up committed for longer periods?"

Nurse Jodie gave Laura a comforting smile. "I'd be surprised if it's even 5 percent, Laura. Try not to engage in any more behavior like you did last night and you should make it through, and emerge a stronger woman for it."

Laura smiled back at her as two orderlies entered the cell. The three of them undid the bindings of the rubber bib, and Nurse Jodie said "We can re-use this without cleaning, since Laura was such a good girl this morning." As they folded the bib up, Laura felt somewhat uneasy about that statement. After all, she was a grown woman, not a little baby! Maybe that was an occupational quirk of nursing, she thought, borne of taking care of sick people. The orderlies lowered the top half of the gurney down to its normal horizontal position, raised Laura's prone body to the top position on the gurney, and wheeled her out with Nurse Jodie in front.

Laura was wheeled into a large room with off-white tiled walls and a peach-pink tiled floor. There was a small table with rounded corners and two sinks to the right of the door and three toilet stalls with locking doors on the wall opposite to the door. There was nothing on the left side of the room, except for a doorless entrance to the shower room proper.

The orderlies lowered the gurney to the floor, and undid the dozen straps holding Laura down on it. They then loosened the straps on the legsack and slid it off her legs. Laura slowly moved her sore, stiff legs along the mattress; twelve hours in bondage left her strong muscles feeling like jelly. The orderlies sat Laura upright on the gurney and removed her straitjacket, and even though her arms fell limp at her sides, she almost felt reborn after all that time encased in the merciless embrace of the heavy canvas.

Nurse Jodie sat behind Laura and began to massage her shoulders and arms, and the orderlies began to rub Laura's legs. She relaxed as she felt the sensation returning to her extremities, and she started to flex her fingers and stretch out her arms.

"Is this OK?" Laura asked Nurse Jodie.

"Just do it slowly and keep your arms lower than shoulder height." Laura nodded and raised her arms to a horizontal position, stretching and twisting them to work out the kinks in her cramped muscles. Even given her youth and excellent physical condition, Laura was pleasantly surprised by how quickly she was able to recover from the enforced motionlessness, thanks to the expert massage.

"Laura, do you think you're able to stand upright?" Nurse Jodie asked.

"I think so. Thank you all so much for the rubdown!"

"You're very welcome," the nurse replied as the orderlies unzipped and removed Laura's thigh boots to give her some stability as she stood. Laura swung her legs off the gurney and slowly stood up, with her hands on Nurse Jodie's shoulders for support. Once Laura was standing at her full six feet of height, the nurse unzipped the bodysuit and slid it off Laura's upper body. Even though she was wearing a bra, Laura instinctively covered her chest with her arms as the orderlies pulled the bodysuit down her legs and had her step out of it. One of the orderlies placed the bodysuit and boots in a bin on the table.

An almost naked Laura stood uneasily on the cold tile floor. She knew what had to come next, but felt terribly embarrassed.

"Laura," Nurse Jodie said, "do you need some assistance?"

"Oh . . . no, I can do this," Laura responded reluctantly. Avoiding any eye contact, she undid the front hooks on her bra and removed it, and then removed her thong panties and handed both to the orderlies.

"Thank you, Laura," Nurse Jodie said, keeping her eyes locked on Laura's and not looking at her

nakedness. "Do you need to go to the bathroom before you shower?"

"Yes, please." Nurse Jodie nodded to the orderlies, who each grabbed one of Laura's arms at the wrist and bicep and guided her to the middle stall. Once Laura was inside, they closed and locked the heavy door, startling the young woman. The stall was about 4 feet square, containing only a small toilet bowl with a push-button flush control. As Laura sat down, she saw that the door had a long, narrow window made of unbreakable glass, as well as a small sliding access door, like those on prison cell doors. Laura definitely felt like a prisoner as she did her business. When she was finished, she automatically reached to her right for some toilet paper, but realized that there was no dispenser. She stood up and gently tapped on the window. Nurse Jodie appeared at the window and asked, "Do you need some bathroom tissue?"

Laura nodded in affirmation. The access door slid open and Nurse Jodie called in, "Please stick your hand outside the door, Laura." She did so, and the nurse placed several sheets in her hand. After Laura cleaned herself and flushed the toilet, she knocked on the window again. "I'm done," she said when Nurse Jodie appeared.

"OK, Laura. Please hold up your hands, so we know you're not holding anything," the nurse replied, demonstrating by holding her hands up and spreading her fingers apart. Laura did the same, turning her hands around to show she wasn't hiding anything.

"Thank you, Laura. After I unlock the door, please walk out slowly. The orderlies will take you to a shower stall to clean up." Laura did as she was told, and the orderlies grabbed her arms again and led her through the entranceway into the shower room. Directly opposite of the entrance was an open shower area with a rolled-up water hose hanging on one wall and a metal frame standing against another wall, with blue plastic locking restraints hanging off each corner. Laura swallowed nervously as she was led off to the left, and locked into a stall similar to the one she was just in. The dimensions of the compartment and the door features were identical, but instead of a toilet, there was a small shower head imbedded in the far wall.

One of the orderlies opened the access door and called in, "Hold out your hands and we'll give you some liquid soap." Laura cupped her hands together and put them outside the door, and the orderly poured out about half a cup of pink soap. When Laura brought her hands back in, the access door was closed and the shower was turned on. She stood in a corner and waved her foot under the stream of water to test the temperature; when she found that it was hot but not scalding, she stepped into the spray to wash herself. As she lathered up, Laura was soothed by the hot water and the steam, and felt the residual soreness of her night in institutional bondage melt away.

Laura slowly rinsed off, wanting to enjoy her relative freedom as long as she could. When she was done, she knocked on the door window, and the shower was shut off. The access door slid open, and a white towel was shoved through. Laura grabbed it and as she unfolded it, she saw the words "COUNTY MENTAL HOSPITAL" in black stenciled letters printed on it. "I guess that keeps people from walking off with it," Laura mused as she dried herself off. After she finished, Laura handed it back through the access door, and a few seconds later the stall door was unlocked, and the orderlies led her back into the main room.

Nurse Jodie was waiting with several large packets lying on the table. She opened one up and produced a wireless sports bra and a pair of regular panties, and handed them to Laura to put on. The nurse then handed Laura a set of thermal underwear, a long-sleeved turtleneck top and bottom. Laura examined the garments confusedly, and the nurse said, "We want to make sure our patients stay nice and warm." Laura shrugged and put the underwear on, and she felt the thick fleece clinging tightly to every curve.

Nurse Jodie then brought out the standard uniform for the patients: a thick cotton t-shirt with "COUNTY MENTAL HOSPITAL" stenciled across the chest, and elastic-banded cotton pants with the same words stenciled down the left leg. Both pieces of clothing were day-glo yellow in color, which made Laura's eyes hurt a little. "Why are they so bright?" she asked.

"It makes it easier to see you if you escape," one of the orderlies replied. Laura was not terribly comforted by this answer. She put the uniform on, and was surprised at how well the clothes fit, almost as if they were tailored for her. Nurse Jodie gave Laura a pair of ankle socks and a pair of paper slippers to complete the outfit. After Laura got her shoes and socks on, she looked up and was crestfallen to see the orderlies holding a standard Posey straitjacket.

"We're going to take you to see Dr. Blymire now," Nurse Jodie told her, "and after last night's incident, we have to keep you restrained for both her and your safety."

Laura sighed deeply and nodded. "I understand," she replied, as the orderlies slipped the jacket on and began to fasten the straps. When they were done, the four back straps and the crotch strap were pulled very snugly, almost as tightly as those on the modified version Laura had previously worn. However, the sleeve strap was somewhat looser, enabling Laura to maneuver her arms a little to relieve any discomfort. The front and side loops still kept her from raising or lowering her arms to escape. Her torso felt rather warm under the three layers of fleece and cotton, but not oppressively hot. After Nurse Jodie checked the straps, the orderlies produced two leather cuffs attached to a hobble, and locked them around Jodie's ankles.

The orderlies grabbed Laura's straitjacket and pulled her out of the room, with Nurse Jodie following closely behind. As they began to walk down the hall to the psychiatrist's office, Nurse Jodie's beeper went off. After checking it, she said, "Sorry, but I'm needed up front. You two can take her to Blymire's. Take care, Laura." She turned away and walked towards the front of the ward.

"Thank you, Nurse Jodie," Laura called back as the orderlies hustled her in the opposite direction. Laura felt a knot growing in her stomach, now that the only friendly face she had met so far was leaving her side.

A few minutes later, Laura found herself alone in Dr. Blymire's office, sitting in a brown leather chair in front of her desk. The orderlies had placed her there with a very stern warning to "not give the doctor any trouble," advice she was more than happy to follow. The office was rather small and featureless, save a couple of framed diplomas on the wall behind the desk, and a large bookcase on the adjacent wall.

Laura sank into the cushioned chair and reflected on her situation. The psychiatrist at the exam center said she was going to be committed for 72 hours. She remembered getting there at about a quarter to 4, so she assumed the committal period started at 5 PM. Nurse Jodie told her it was about 8:15 AM when she brought in breakfast, so Laura figured it must be at least 9:15 or 9:30 now. Therefore, she already had over 16 hours out of the way; granted, 12 of those hours she spent asleep, but if she slept that long tonight and tomorrow night, that would take care of half of the committal period, which would be a great relief.

In a strange way, Laura felt that the previous night's sleep was perhaps the best sleep she had had in ages. Her mom had e-mailed her several articles on how adolescents and young people needed more sleep than average, but she had always dumped them in the trash bin as soon as she read the first paragraph. If she got out of this place, Laura thought, she was going to make sure to get her full 8 hours a night, no matter what.

"If she got out?" Laura was surprised she had used "if" instead of "when". It was difficult to keep those doubts from surfacing. She already felt like she had two strikes against her, with the verbal altercation in the waiting room, and almost tackling the doctor in the padded cell. One more slip-up, and she feared she would end up spending years in some long forgotten corner of the hospital, heavily drugged and drooling on her straitjacket, her youth and potential slowly fading away.

Laura's reveries were interrupted by Dr. Blymire entering the office, dressed much as she was last night,

and carrying Laura's medical file. She placed the file on her desk as she sat down. "Good morning, Laura. I'm sorry to keep you waiting, but I'm afraid I have a very full schedule today."

Laura decided to take a stab at improving her situation. "Dr. Blymire, I want to apologize for my behavior last night. I was scared and upset by my situation, but I shouldn't have taken it out on you."

The psychiatrist smiled faintly. "Why, thank you very much, Laura. Apology accepted. I've dealt with enough patients admitted for 72-hour holds to know how stressful it can be. Now," she continued, looking into Laura's file, "I remember you were concerned with your parents' reaction to your committal."

Laura nodded vigorously. "I know they must be worried sick about me. I just want to talk to them, if I could."

"I'll actually be talking to them later today by phone, to get a more-rounded picture of your life. However, we've found that having visitors meet with the 72-hour patients just adds to the anxiety and confusion for everyone concerned. We would have to keep you restrained for safety and security purposes, and no parent wants to see their child in such a state. Also, when the parents leave the hospital after visiting, that action can create a subconscious feeling of abandonment in the patient's psyche, which can unfairly distort the psychological profile and cause the patient's psychiatrist to err in her diagnosis."

Laura accepted this line of reasoning, but she was still troubled by not being able to get some reassurance from her parents. "Well, um, how exactly are you going to determine my psychological profile?"

"A psychometrist will administer a battery of psychological exams, specially designed to identify personality identity and psychopathologies, if any. We'll also have a one-on-one private session, to discuss your feelings and thoughts about your life. These activities will take place during the mornings and afternoons of your stay. In the evenings, after dinner, you'll have free time to relax, perhaps read or watch TV."

"Is there any forced medication on this ward?"

"Other than mild sedatives, we are forbidden by law from prescribing any psychotropic medications during a 72-hour hold, so you needn't worry about that."

Laura nodded, relieved. "I remember signing the document at the exam center, stating that I'd be held here for *no more* than 72 hours. When are my 72 hours up, and what'll happen after that?"

"Your committal period will end on 5 PM Sunday evening. By that time, I'll have reviewed the test results and our private session, and come up with a recommendation concerning your future treatment, if any. The most likely direction will be outpatient therapy sessions, but I also have the option to keep you at the hospital for a longer period, at least 14 days, for more intensive therapy and advanced methods to deal with your problems."

Laura coughed nervously. "What's the probability that that'll happen?"

"I know you're a math major, Laura, but you shouldn't worry about probabilities now. Let's take things one step at a time."

Laura looked down at her canvas-covered arms. "I'm very sorry, but do I have to wear this my entire time here? I already feel like a long-term mental patient, wearing this straitjacket." She immediately regretted saying the second sentence, and silently resolved to think carefully about what to say and not just blurt things out. Why plant any more suggestions in the doctor's mind at this point?

"The level of restraint is dependent on the level of agitation the patient displays. We'll lessen the level of restraint if you remain calm and nonviolent over a period of time, but we will also increase it if you display

aggression. Laura," Dr. Blymire said, leaning forward in her chair, "please understand that these restraints are not punitive in nature, but are simply precautions against possible injuries to the patients and the staff."

"I can understand that, but why do they have to be so tight?" Laura replied in a slightly aggravated tone, twisting her torso a bit.

"If the straitjackets were too loose, the patients could twist their arms into uncomfortable positions and badly hurt themselves trying to escape. When I was conducting research for my doctoral dissertation, I read reports of patients causing permanent nerve damage to their arms in this way, and even a case where one person strangulated himself by trying to slide his arm over his head and getting it caught around his neck instead. That's why our straitjackets all have those loops for your arms to go into, to prevent such a tragedy."

Laura nodded. "I see. What about the gags, though? It seems like their only purpose is to keep us quiet, and not bother the staff."

"Well, stifling unnecessary screaming is useful in preventing hysteria, but the gags also keep people from biting or swallowing their tongues, or hurting their teeth by trying to tear the straitjackets." Laura could readily testify to that, as the white ball gag had kept her tongue pinned down firmly, and she had been unable to budge it one millimeter. Dr. Blymire continued, "There is a rationale for all of this, Laura, and the restraint protocols are designed to minimize short-term discomfort to ensure the long-term physical and mental safety of the patients. Do you have any more questions or concerns?"

Laura looked down and paused for a bit. Among other questions, she wanted to ask the doctor if being tightly trussed up in head-to-toe restraints overnight would "distort her psychological profile" any worse than meeting her parents for a few minutes. However, she was afraid of aggravating the person who would decide her entire future, even though Dr. Blymire was nothing but calm and collected during the meeting. Laura resolved to keep her wits about her and try to get through this without any more drama. "No, doctor, I think I'm fine for now."

"Good, now we can begin!"