

Maxwell's Daughter

Part Seven

The bitterness of winter reached out a long icy claw and tickled Stephen Maxwell. He drew his trench coat tighter about himself and trudged on through the snow. He stopped for a second and was possessed by a deep coughing fit, which produced an inky blackness that splattered across the perfect paper-white snow. His footsteps massacred the snow for another few minutes until he stopped suddenly, realising that he had reached the clearing and looking down, found that he was standing on the trap door. With the Butt of Stephen's gun, he began to dig around the space where the animal traps were laid to find nothing. To his relief, he found the third had trapped a rabbit.

Stephen hurried down the steps and tossed it into the clutches of the demon girl who tore the animal apart in less than a second and then began to moan and scream aggressively at there being no more. Stephen coughed some more black blood onto the earth floor and fell to his knees.

'I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do, there really is nothing,' he sobbed.

With a heavy heart, Maxwell set off to return home. The wind had changed. It blew diagonally across his path so that snow was blown up Stephen's ankles and the bottom of his coat was pushed fiercely in front of him as he struggled through the forest.

Stephen deposited his rifle in the shed and let himself into the house. A fire was burning cosily in the corner leaving a toasty ambience to the room.

'Where have you been?' Asked Andrea. Stephen spun round. Andrea was standing in the doorway, clutching a steaming mug of coffee.

'I just er, went for a walk, why aren't you at work?'

'Well,' started Andrea, crossing the distance between the two and setting her mug down so forcefully that a puddle of coffee splashed onto the wooden table. There was a snowdrift and the car got stuck so I walked three miles back.'

'Aw, I'm sorry dear, that's terrible. Should have rang me.'

'And then,' she continued, as if having not heard Stephen. 'I return

home to find Robbie with this.' She strode over to the counter and picked up a pornographic magazine, which she slammed down on the table in front of Stephen. 'Which apparently he found in your study.' Stephen's eyes grew quickly wild.

'What?' I have no idea about this? Where is he now?'

'In his room,' Andrea exclaimed. 'You best go see him.' Stephen did, taking an unexpected detour to the bathroom to cough viscous phlegm of black blood into the bathroom sink.

The voice of Miss Clarkson continued incessantly, like a fuzzy vinyl in a dream. She was lecturing biology but right here, thought Robbie, right here was real biology.

Folded inside his textbook was a page Robbie had ripped from the penthouse his stupid mum had confiscated. Look at that absolute beauty of a woman. And Robbie wasn't just admiring her knockers, although he would notice that they were particularly spectacular. No. She was beautiful, her body, her personality. Sure it was just a cheap photograph but there was something in her eyes.

'Miss, Miss!' Yelled a boy, nudging into Robbie, as he snatched the page from Robbie's desk. The boy, notorious bully, Mitchell Taylor, waved the page in the air for the whole class to see.

'Look Miss, Robbie's got boobs!'

'Give me that,' Miss Clarkson snapped, taking the porn from Mitch and folded it quickly away. 'Robbie, with me now.' She beckoned towards the door and lead Robbie out. She handed him the page. 'You take this to the headmaster's office now. Let him deal with you.'

A football rolled across the playground towards an oblivious Robbie. It scuffed the back of his foot and bounced off the fence, slowing to a near stop in front of him. Robbie pushed the ball gently with his foot and reared back to kick it. Instead of leading a powerful kick, the likes of such he was currently imagining, his left foot slipped on the icy ground and he fell back onto his back. The back third of the playground erupted in laughter and abuse. At least four snowballs smashed around him, one hitting him in the neck.

'Fucking faggot can't even kick a ball!' One kid yelled and there was another smaller eruption of laughter. Looking up, Robbie noticed that it was of course Mitch Taylor. Robbie reached sideways and his fingers closed on a small rock wedged in the ground. He balled a lump of snow around it and slowly got to his feet.

'Say it again you fuckin' coward!' Yelled Robbie, getting up and striding towards him. 'Big Mitch' was in the year above and had a small gang of which Robbie was a usual victim. Mitch laughed and advanced towards Robbie, his fists curling into plump fists by his sides. A dense crowd was now closing around the two boys; an even closer group consisted of three boys from Mitch's gang. They blocked the view from most of the crowd, save for Robbie, which allowed Big Mitch perfect cover to flick open his penknife and hold it at his waist.

'What's that tough guy?' Mitch said before spitting viciously in Robbie's face. 'What you wanna go one-on-one do ya?' There was a general roar from the crowd as voices yelled out in approval of the idea. Robbie of course knew that one-on-one in Mitch's eyes was him beating the crap out of him in front of everyone and if Robbie landed a decent blow, his little friends would step in and he would get the crap beaten out of him. It was a win-win situation really; either way you looked at it, Robbie was getting his ass kicked.

'Just fists coward!' Robbie yelled out and took a step sideways so that a few could see the knife he was holding. 'Although that's not all your dad uses when he beats your mum is it?'

'You fucker!' Mitch spat, taking a step forward and raising the knife slightly. Robbie instinctively lifted the snowball, readying his arm to throw it. Mitch barked with laughter. 'What the fuck you gonna do with that?' He said, leaning forward so that in one step his face would press against Robbie's.

'Your problem is you don't know real pain. That's what I'm gonna show you.' He raised the knife and stepped forward.

Robbie lunged forward and smashed the rock into Mitch's forehead. Clumps of snow fell from the rock from the impact but the snow that hung on was stained red from the next hit.

Following the momentary disorientation, Robbie lowered his head and

smashed his shoulder into Mitch's stomach, knocking him backward. The crowd quickly parted and re-assembled like a liquid adapting to its constraints. They fell hard together onto the snow and Robbie straightened up, spreading his knees either side of Mitch's chest, his legs sinking into the snow as he straightened up and smashed his fist into Mitch's face. The bloodied rock lay in the snow a few feet from the boys.

'Hey!' A voice yelled and the next thing Robbie knew, his side was burning with ache, he imagined a rib cracking from the blow and as he rolled sideways to protect himself he took another boot to the head and his vision swam for a second. He rolled onto his back and was momentarily blinded by the brightness of the sky. He felt contrasting biting cold and comforting warmth as he passed out.

'Back again eh?' The Headmaster, Mr. Reagan said grudgingly. He looked down at Robbie under his glasses then sighed and put down his pen.

'What's the problem Robert?' He used his real name? Like literally no one used that, even when his parents were mad at him. He used it with a firmness that sent a strong sense of authority sparking between them but there was something else in his voice. Almost a fatherly concern, the likes of which Robbie had never truly seen, reflected in his eyes.

'It's just Mitch and his boys. They're always after me.' Mr. Reagan, listening intently was interrupted by a sharp tone.

'Sorry one second.' He picked up the telephone and listened. 'Yep, yeah okay thanks... bye.' He then turned back to Robbie.

'The snow's getting worse. We're sending the kids home. You want me to call your parents?'

'Nah, it's cool, I'll walk?'

'Sure?' Robbie nodded, his throat suddenly dry. He couldn't face his parents, prolonging it, as much as he could was all he could think about.

'Well, in that case. Go home. Let it blow over, I'll talk to you and the other boys separately when school re-opens, but in the mean time just clear your head yeah?' Robbie nodded again. 'Get out of here then,' he finished with a small smile.

Robbie walked briskly up the village street, or rather tried to in the ever-growing deeper snow. He pulled his hood tight over his head and pushed on, the wind whistling through the street, blowing up his ankles. The wind passed through him as if with no concern whatsoever for his clothing, freezing him through to the bone. His hands were drawn inside his sleeves although the open cuts on his knuckles stung not to mention the added pain from the bitter cold.

Mr. Reagan wouldn't tell his parents, would he? And if they asked about his hands? The likelihood of that was poor; his parents had noticed him less and less over the months. They had become zombies, slaves to their own existences.

Robbie turned instinctively and took a look over his shoulder. His sight was limited due to the strong wind, carrying snow directly into his face. But keeping his head down and looking back up the street, Robbie saw three figures in the distance. He paused for a second until there was another strong gust of wind and as if a result of, he forgot the figures and hunched his arms closer to his body and pressed on.

A little while on, when Robbie had left the village behind and was beginning to ascend the first and steepest of three hills before the lane to his house, he felt the sudden urge again and spun round. Through the mist he saw the same three figures, closer now and knew.

He began to break into a run, his legs burning against the cold with every bend. They were faster than him. He wouldn't make it in time.

Robbie turned left off the road and headed for the trees. He knew they became denser later on and he would have a chance to lose them and then follow the trees to the back of his house. As Robbie took a step, his leg sunk deep into the snow and he lost his balance, falling flat on his face.

'Fuck', he muttered as he pulled himself to his feet. The snow was deeper here.

Robbie moved his legs faster, working harder to pull his knees up from the deep snow.

'Hey come here you little shit!' Yelled Mitch. They were closing the distance quickly, if Robbie tripped once, they would be upon him. He ran hard, reaching up to pull his hood back onto his head, which had blown off on the hill. His blood was ice.

Robbie just ran. His mind was set on nothing else than reach home. He pumped his legs and pushed into dense forest. The snow began to thin out here, it was darker too and just as Robbie reached a clearing, his foot snagged on something and he tripped. He landed hard on something that echoed below, a low thud followed by reverberation. Robbie groaned and pushed himself up onto one knee. His curiosity astounded him even in that second compared to the growing threat of Mitch and his boys. Robbie stamped down with his heel and snow crumbled away to reveal wood underneath. Robbie quickly wiped it clean and saw with awe, a wooden trapdoor beneath him. He pulled at the metal ring and lifted it up, descending the first few steps before pulling the trapdoor shut over his head.

Robbie found himself in complete darkness. He held his breath as the pressure from a boot made the trapdoor groan above his head. Then another smaller groan as the feet moved on. Two more sets of feet passed over quickly and Robbie felt his head fall back in relief. He felt around and descended the stairs where his hands fumbled around on the wall. His eyes lit up in the darkness as he found a light switch and flicked it on.

‘What the fuck?’ He muttered, taking in his surroundings for the first time. He was in a small underground room, mostly empty save for a couple of large metal containers in the corner. And on the far wall, a set of chains hung. Underneath them a stained mattress. Robbie stepped towards it, watching as the chains begun to sway from left to right, despite the lack of wind in the room. They made an eerie scratching as they swayed further out.

Then a scream from somewhere above him. Although he had never heard I before, he recognised the scream of sheer terror to be one of Mitchell Taylor. A high-pitched screeching and a ringing in Robbie’s ears like the after shock of a grenade explosion and then a massive thud as a body fell onto the trapdoor. There was a small groan as the body got to his feet and presumably tried to run but there was another screeching and a bang and then silence.

Robbie stood still as he could, rooted in place. He stood for half an hour? It felt longer, it felt like an eternity, silently shivering and wishing to

wake up and it all be a dream.

He slowly descended the steps, listening closely for any sign of movement and pushed the trapdoor up on its hinges. Robbie climbed out of the room and let the trapdoor fall back with a slam that made him jump. He looked around quickly but he was alone. He walked quickly away from the clearing, looking around quickly but seeing nothing. No sign of the boys either.

Robbie's right foot pressed down on a twig as he walked and he stopped at the sudden sound, looking around once more. Then the screeching sound and Robbie turned back to see a creature slam into him, knocking him back into the snow. It wrapped its clawed hands around his neck and sunk its teeth into his shoulder. Robbie screamed, the burning, agonising pain but at the same time warm against his ice-cold body. The creature stopped suddenly, its black sunken eyes meeting his and the *girl* recognised him, or rather something within him. She scurried off him and screamed herself, a moaning, two-toned high-pitched and low scream. Robbie looked over but she was gone, leaving the warm wetness dripping out from his shoulder and down his front. He clutched at the wound and shivered. He was alone.