



(from Chapter 6)

(Rick narrates)

I can make nine foot-lengths from the back of my cell to the bars, and then there's maybe half a length left. I can make seven full lengths in the other direction, with a little more than half a length left over. My foot's a little more than 12 inches long, so my cell must be eight by ten. There's a bed bolted to the right 10-foot wall, as I look out the bars. The mattress sucks, but I didn't have any problem sleeping on it last night, seeing as it's softer than the ground, which I've been sleeping on a lot lately. On the opposite wall, a chrome metal sink and toilet. I have to ask for toilet paper if I need it. There's a small window on the back wall, with bars in front of the mesh wire glass. It's about 18 inches square. The sun comes in all afternoon, but no fresh air. There's one bare lightbulb in the center of the ceiling. It goes out at 11, but the lights in the hallway stay on all night. The bed and the toilet are the only places to sit.

I walk over and sit on the bed, where I have a paperback copy of *In Cold Blood* for my entertainment. Very funny, har har har. These guys are regular comic geniuses. No pencils, no paper, no nothing. You could go crazy pretty quickly in a place like this. I don't know where they're keeping Harv, but I assume his cell must be similar to mine.

Will was right about one thing. Well, actually he's been right about a lot of things. But one of the things he was right about is that the sheriff is a pretty decent guy. His deputies are morons. But the sheriff is OK. He was kind of pissed when we wouldn't tell him our names, but Will was still there, and when he explained the legalities of it, the sheriff backed off. Nobody is supposed to talk to us unless Will clears it first. And the sheriff has enforced that rule.

"Hey, Doe Two. You got a visitor." It's the idiot deputy who guards me. I swear I think he'd be out of brains if he blew his nose. Of course, he's the one sitting out there with a gun and I'm locked up in here. So maybe I'm not so smart either.

As I look up, my visitor positions herself in the hallway at the center of my bars and turns to face my cell. I can't believe it. What the fuck is she doing here? Come to gloat a little bit? See the trapped animal in a cage?

"Hey," she says, very softly, disarmingly.

I stand up, not slowly, but not quickly either, keeping my eyes on her the whole time, and as I take the couple of steps over to the bars, I return her "Hey."

She doesn't quite smile at me, but with a look that I can only describe as one of genuine concern, she asks, "How's it goin'?"

"Good. I," and then it occurs to me that I'm not talking to some chick on the Lawn at school. I'm behind bars talking to the reason I'm in here, "Actually, pretty shitty. In case you hadn' noticed, I'm in jail."

"Oh, yeah. Yeah, well that part can't be too good. Are you OK? I mean, other than bein' in jail?"

What the fuck is going on here? I look at her and study her. She's right around five and a half feet tall. Sandy blond hair parted down the middle, mostly straight, but with just a little bounce, cut just below shoulder length. A nice face, I'd go so far as pretty even, but kind of angular. Very striking eyes,

not big huge doe eyes, but gentle friendly eyes with pretty light blue irises. She's got makeup on; foundation and some sort of skin tone, particularly heavy around her left eye. Eye liner and lipstick, too, although the lipstick is muted, not some disgusting bright cherry crap. Her nose is narrow and symmetrical, no flared nostrils; it works well with her angular face.

She's wearing a white sleeveless blouse, not buttoned until the fourth button, so she's showing plenty of cleavage. And she does have a nice rack, restrained only by a very skimpy little bra. Her arms are tanned all the way up to her shoulders, with an ever-so-slight bit of muscle definition at her bicep. Pleasing to the eye, but not delicate. Her blouse is tied off below her tits, exposing her belly, which is flat and taut. She's got an outie. Her floral skirt hangs down to mid-thigh. Her thighs have definition; again, not delicate, but still pleasing to the eye. And just then she whirls around on one foot, flaring out her skirt so that I can see her underwear, as well as her taut pear-shaped calf muscle. "What? Are you reliving it?"

"What? I . . . no! I . . . I . . . What the fuck are you doing here . . ."

She cuts in just as I'm finishing the last word, "Alex."

"What?"

"What the fuck are you doing here, Alex?" She says it in such a plain matter-of-fact way, fuck included. "You're talking to me, right? You might as well use my name."

"So. What the fuck are you doing here, Alex?" I have a definite edge to my voice, to say the least, because she's definitely messing with me.

"Like I said before, I came to see how you're doin'."

"Well not very good. I know you asked, other than being in jail. But I tell you, when you're in here it's pretty hard to think about how things are other than being in jail. Because I'm in jail!" I emphasize the last three words very deliberately and slowly, not quite at a shout, but definitely above a conversational tone.

"I get that. Well," she pauses for a moment, "I ain't gonna testify."

"I'm not going to testify."

"Course not. You're the defendant. You don't hafta."

"No. How you say it is, I'm not going to testify."

"Excuse me?"

"The best thing about ain't is that it's self-explanatory. Ain't ain't a word. I'm not. You aren't. She isn't. They aren't. Ain't no ain't."

"Well, now, ain't that funny? The god damn grammar police is locked up." She's getting an edge to her voice, now.

"Look, sorry. You just gotta understand. I come from a long line of poor white country folk. I'm the first kid in my family, cousins included, who ever graduated from college. There are just certain things that get to me. And one of 'em is speech patterns that say 'I'm P W T'."

"Oh, well now I feel a whole lot better," she's dripping sarcasm. "Knowin' I'm P W T, that is. An' here I thought you were just insulting my English, not my existence."

"No, no. I . . . that came out wrong. I didn' mean it that way."

"You alright back there, Miss Alexis?" It's the moron deputy who's guarding me.

“Mind your own damn business, Billy.” She’s turned her head and raised her voice enough to carry, but not quite shout. Then she turns her head back to me and lowers her voice, “OK, enough with the grammar lesson. Look, my daddy’s a mean prick. He bullied the sheriff into arrestin’ you. That’s why you’re in here. If your friend hadn’ shot Buster you’d be long gone an’ this never woulduh happened. But when everything got to be a public spectacle, well, my daddy figured he needed to protect my, meaning HIS, reputation. So I’m sorry about that. But I ai . . . I’m not . . . going to testify. So you should get outta here.”

I walk back over to the bed and sit down, my feet planted firmly on the floor, elbows resting on my legs just above my bent knees, so it’s almost a crouch. Just like you’d sit in a locker room. I take my right hand and run it along the right side of my head above my ear and back to the nape of my neck, where I pause to scratch for a minute. I’m not quite sure what to make of this. On the one hand, it’s good news that Alex doesn’t want to testify. On the other hand, I need a rich prick after my ass like I need a hole in my head. “Alex, I . . .”

She blurts out, “You’re my first.”

Oh, shit. An underage puppy dog. That’s what this is. She thinks she’s in love. And if I play this wrong, she’ll definitely testify against me. I run my hand across the side of my head again. I stand up and walk back toward the bars. “Alex, I . . .” but she doesn’t let me finish.

“Take me with you.”

“What?”

“When you leave tomorrow, take me with you.”

“What makes you think I’m leavin’ tomorrow?”

“Cause I don’ think you’ll be wantin’ to stick around here. An’ neither do I.”

“Jail.”

“You’ll get out.”

“An’ why do you think that?”

“Just do.”

“Alex, even if I wanted to bring you along, you know I can’t.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re underage.” I put great emphasis on the last word, saying it slowly and stretching out the last two syllables.

“So you do wanna have sex with me again.”

“No. Yes. I mean . . . look, that’s got nothing to do with it. I’m sure it would be kidnapping or somethin’ like that.” Why does she sound like the cool collected person driving this conversation when I’m the one who’s years older than her?

“An’ I’m not underage.”

“Then why the fuck am I in here?”

“Because I was underage last Friday.”

“Say what?”

“Sunday was my birthday.”

“Well happy fuckin’ birthday. But you’re still only sixteen. Not an adult.”

“Look, if you won’t take me with you because I’m askin’ you to, at least take me with you because it’s in your own interest.”

Jesus, not more of this. She’s running fucking circles around me. I back up from the bars, walk around in a circle and turn and face her from several feet away. “OK, I’ll bite. Why would that be?”

“Just take me as far as Denver. They have abortion clinics there. It’s a place my daddy can’t get to me. You’re a nice guy an’ all, but I don’ wanna have a kid with you. I mean, you’re my first, but that dudn’ mean you’ll be my one an’ only. So help yourself out.”

I am just getting my ass handed to me. She’s right. The last thing I need is a kid in west bumfuck Wyoming. And she doesn’t want that, either. I move back up to the bars, “Alex, even if I wanted you to come along, an’ I’m not saying I do, but even if I wanted you to come along, I can’t speak for my buddies.”

“I know. But you can tell ’em how important this is to you. You’re a smart guy. College graduate an’ all. They’re your friends. They’ll say yes. Whaddo I need to bring?” She’s smiling at me, now. She knows she’s won. God it’s annoying.

“No promises. I’ll talk to ’em. If you come, one sleeping bag, mattress or bed roll, one duffle bag for clothes an’ toiletries . . .”

She breaks in, “Ooooh, you guys have toi,” she stretches out the syllable, “letries? I’ll just bring some stuff to clean up with. But please continue.”

“Maybe some hiking boots an’ a canteen.”

“Got ’em.”

“Money, and that’s it. We’re already tight on space. So you haftuh limit what you bring.”

“Why, suh,” she says with an affected southern accent, “I do detect a hint of chivalry in yoiuh mannuh, that you would be willing to shayuh yoiuh tent with me.” She bats her eyelids and pretends to flutter a fan across her bosom.

“We have three tents already. We don’t have room for a fourth. We’ll figure it out.”

“Three three two. Six five eight seven. I’d write it down for you, except Billy would probly confiscate it. All you haftuh remember is the six five eight seven. Everything here begins with three three two. I’ll give you directions when you call. My daddy spends the day in Riverton on business every Thursday, so I’ll be alone at the house. He’s never home before midnight. It’s the perfect time to come get me. Say the number.”

“Three three two. Six five eight seven. No promises.”

She reaches through the bars, grasps my right hand, pulls it through the bars, into her blouse and rests it on her right tit underneath the skimpy bra. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” Then she pivots and walks away.

My arm dangles limp through the bars.