

Last Summer

by blueboar

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You act without regard when you think you've got the whole house to yourself. Go ahead, scratch where you like. Sing badly. Stare at the wall. Watch TV shows or listen to music you'd never want anyone to know about. Right now I was clutching an enormous erection lying in bed. It was a mindless clutch, this erection. It had no real object or desire. It just felt good, this burning need to piss, but holding back till it almost hurt. Half seeing, bleary-eyed, I studied the head of the erection, which was gorged with blood and slimy with pre-cum. The purple, strangled mushroom was huge as I strained and pulled at it, much bigger than the shaft, unnaturally large. It was maybe twice its normal size. The wonder of human anatomy. At the end, we are just organic anti-gravity machines. Owen.

"Owen!" A muffled sound. Far away. Was it real? There was the sound of movement. It was all too real. "Owen!" my mother was calling from somewhere in the house.

I grabbed the sheets, scrambled.

"Ow-en," my mother called again, closer, in an almost sing-song. She was downstairs at the hallway. Thank God for big houses. She was heading up. Footsteps. Sharp, heeled. Up the steps. Steady strong, determined footsteps. She was coming. I rolled to my side, pretended to be asleep, hid my aching cock in a mangle of sheet and comforter.

She knocked. Harshly. The door opened.

She was in the doorway. No sing-song now. Sharp impatience. "Owen! Wake up! What the hell's wrong with you? It's almost two!"

"What do you want?" I lazily called out to her and threw the sheet over my head.

She entered the room. Click-clack, click-clack on the hard-wood floor.

She was at the side of the bed. I could sense her looking down at me, could feel her breath, could smell her perfume. The woman had been up forever it seemed. Did she never sleep? She grabbed at my protective sheet. I held on for dear life.

"Get up," she said, pushing, but not too hard, at my covered shoulder. "I need you to do something for me." Like a scared, but still curiously retarded turtle, my head emerged from under. I peered up at her with as much pathetic helplessness as I could muster. She rolled her eyes. She grabbed my phone from the dresser, almost pulled it from the charger. She turned it on.

"This has a purpose," she said waving the phone at me.

I pulled the sheets tighter. The gruesome Verizon theme wafted up to pollute the air as the phone powered up.

"Mom, go away," I moaned. "And stop messing with my phone."

"I've been calling you all day. I don't have a lot of time. I need you to do me a favor."

She waited.

"What is it?" I said.

"You need to pick up Seth Ackerman from the airport. I took your dad and sister there this morning and I don't want to repeat the experience."

Even in my foggy state, I couldn't help but laugh, my erection irretrievably fading.

"I need to do what?" I said, and I didn't care about the sharp note of annoyance in my voice.

"You heard me."

"Why would I do that?"

She slapped her forehead.

"Wait a minute. Why would that be?" she asked.

Now I rolled my eyes.

She wasn't even looking at me. She was busily tapping away at my phone, but talking all the same. "You know full well why you must. Because we're busy. Okay? Because we're selling the company tomorrow. You know, his mother and I. Sheera. Seth's mother. My partner and I."

"Let her get him. She let him lose on the world nineteen years ago. She's responsible. Or let him take a cab.

What the hell does he have to with anything?"

She unplugged the phone and let it fall on me. It hit my shoulder, settled just above my still turned face. I rolled to my back to look up at her.

She was not happy. She looked tired. Her usually lively blonde bob looked severely straight and dead. But it seemed she still had time for sarcasm. It oozed out as she continued. "Because instead of being in the office, finalizing dozens of documents my lawyers have waiting for me to review, I'm here trying to get my grown son out of bed as if you were some kindergartner afraid of his first day at school. Boy, let me think . . . Why should I be asking you to do this one small favor? Because, let me guess, you're doing nothing today. Wait. You've done nothing all summer, except stay up till four every night partying or playing video games."

In a surprise move, as if she was grabbing for a loose basketball, she gripped at the sheets again. She wasn't the only athlete in the family. I held on just as dearly. God, I needed to piss. This was becoming unpleasant. My mother usually had better sense. She usually left me alone. I left her alone. I left everyone alone.

She shook her head as if to say she didn't know what to do with me. "Come on," she said more gently, still half-heartedly tugging at the sheets. "Get dressed. His flight arrives in an hour. I forwarded his itinerary to you on your phone. If you leave right now, you shouldn't have any problem. Are you going to force me to do this? Come on, I just don't—"

"Okay," I said. "Okay. You're the boss."

"Oh, yeah," she said. She turned to leave. "I'm the boss," she said absently.

The woman was stressed. She was exhausted. No more click-clack in her step. Mother left my room.

I slowly got out of bed, stretched and gave a final, sad tug at my cock, seeing if there was any spark of life left. Sure enough, it felt good. Ackerman could wait at the airport for a few minutes. The waiting might do him some good.

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"Hey, where do you think you're going? I'm not going home," the smart ass Ackermann said, anticipating that I'd be merging onto the bypass for the suburbs. Ackerman was trying hard not to bounce too much in his seat. The shit must be on some new drug, I thought.

"Take me to the office first," he said. "I need to see your mom. You can take me home later."

"See my mom?" I asked.

"Didn't the word get out to you?" he asked gleefully. "That's the only reason I'm in town. I'm here to fuck your mom."

There was nothing about this high-strung twerp I liked. Nothing. Ever. Not in grade school when we first met and I had to act as his friend to appease my mother, not in middle school when he spent most of his time in theater production while I played football, and certainly not in high school when he smoked pot every day, came out as gay before rushing back into the closet to fuck every girl who fell for his bullshit story, while I played still more football. And now, after a single, sad year at NYU, with his wacked out hair and shit-assed clothes, he was not only unbearable, he enraged me. The only thing that held me back was that I knew I could have snapped his scrawny neck easily. Break his neck. Push his pathetic corpse out the door onto the freeway. Ackerman wasn't worth my time.

"Hey, Hansen," he called out, even tapping me on the shoulder. "I'm just joking. Christ, take it easy. I thought you frat boys could take a little ribbing. Jesus."

I got on the exit for downtown, merged onto the heavy traffic. Where had this new quirk of his of calling me "Hansen" come from? All my jock friends called me that. Seth was neither. No friend. No Jock. The sound of him calling me "Hansen" in his high-pitched nasal was like fingernails on a chalkboard.

"Hansen," he said and I knew now that he persisted just to annoy me. "I never figured you for some guy with mother issues. Dude, leave that shit to me. I was born for it. My analyst spelled it all out for me last month. I'm the only child. No father around. You? You're made for middle management and a cheesy country club with Buffy Blue Eyes, her two and half blonde kids and a white picket fence. Leave the motherfucking to me."

"How long you in town?" I asked braking lightly and then more heavily, almost stopping, as traffic began to a crawl. Why not, my mind laughed at me? Why the fuck not? Why not spend the next hour with this sick fuck stuck in traffic?

"Just a couple of days," he said. "Just here for the closing. Sheera insisted. She said it would look bad if she had no one here with her. I'm right back to campaign headquarters after that. On Thursday."

"Yeah, that's right I heard, my mom told me. Why don't they have you out in the boonies somewhere, you know, in one of the battle ground states? You really at the Obama headquarters?"

"What did I just say?" he said, dragging out the "say" for even more annoying affect. "We have plenty of people like you for canvassing the boonies. Look at me, dude. I'd be lynched in Colorado or Iowa. Christ." He snickered at this and I turned to see him smiling at me through his bushy brows and thick black hair.

I turned up the air-conditioning.

"Boy," he said, "with all this traffic, I think we might have time for me to give you that blow job I've always dreamt about. I've got to know." He leaned forward towards me dramatically. "Your baby sister swears you're twice as big as me. But I don't believe her."

I studied his hair. Strings went this way and that and it was coiffed at least four inches high. The effect was a just out of bed chaos, but I knew.

"How long it take you to get your hair looking like that?" I asked and waved back at a car honking for me to move on. Traffic was moving, which lasted for a about ten precious seconds. Then it wasn't. The torture would have to continue. Seth's silence satisfied. I was glad he was annoyed for a change.

"You impress me, Hansen," he yawned. "You're not supposed to notice shit like that."

I grinned looking straight ahead.

"Nah," he said as if he was having second thoughts. "I just didn't have enough time this morning to get it just right. The failure is mine. I could have fooled you in a second if I had the time. If I had time to do my hair right you would have sworn on your Holy Bible in front of the Supreme Court that you just got done fucking me bareback and had to drag me out of bed for some dancing. I'm no longer impressed with you. You're still a clueless fuck as ever."

I laughed at that, and so did he.

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"Look at you!" Sheera Ackerman shrieked at her son yet again. The bitch couldn't stop screaming "Look at you!" The two continued to hug tightly. She gave him another big sloppy kiss right on the mouth. Was that a tongue somewhere in the mix? Good God.

My mother smiled uncomfortably, towering behind them, looked at me for several long beats, was just about to do one of her patented eye-rolls, thought better of it, and motioned for me to follow her. I guess it had occurred to her that the only polite thing to do was to leave the two love-birds alone to catch up. I wanted to tell her not to worry. How wrong my poor mother was! I was sure Ackerman and his mom Skyped daily. I was sure they knew every bowel movement of the other, tweeted the shape and consistency of every lop of shit that dropped from their scrawny asses. I started walking to follow my mother, who had just turned.

"Where do you think you're going?" Sheera said, smoothly unwrapping herself from her son, just holding his hand now. She held out her free hand to me.

"He's the one who wants some alone time with his own mother now," Seth giggled, and dropped his head in a melodramatic, faggy gesture to Sheera's shoulder. "We'd better watch out, Sheera. You and I are a b-a-a-a-d influence. "

Sheera looked at me with mock shock, before smiling and taking my hand. "No, I want you both for myself," she said. She pulled at me. I let myself almost stumble forward. "Is that selfish of me? My two favorite guys in the whole world all to myself," she said grinning. "The quiet Viking and the eccentric Actor. What more could any girl want? Yin and Yang. A multi-ethnic sandwich of love. I love it!" she almost squealed, forcing a quiver along her whole torso not so much at the supposed joy of having Seth and me in each arm, but to celebrate her quickness of mind and wit.

"Is that okay, Kirsten?" Sheera asked sheepishly. "Can I keep your little Thor for an itsy bit? I'll bring him back in one piece . . . more or less."

My mother stepped forward, put her hand on my shoulder, and gently nudged me closer to her business partner.

"You can have him for as long as you like, Sheera," my mother said. "Just make sure he comes home in one piece even if you have to just mail in whatever is left . . ." The poor woman was meandering, was missing the point, and now she was stuck. Her sentence was left hanging. The blush on her face was coming on strong. "I will, sweetheart," Sheera said maternally. "I'll mail all the non-vital organs for you to reassemble at your leisure. You can't honestly ask for more?"

My mother smiled awkwardly, turned and said. "I'll be back with the lawyers. They have so much to go through. All those papers, you know?"

"You go do that, dear." Sheera held me closer, pulled me down close enough so that Seth's stiff and pampered hair was in my face. She held us both to her ample bosom. "Whatever would I do without your mother, Owen? Hmmm?"

I nodded. The only saving grace, the only thing keeping me from pushing her and her fucker son to the floor and stomping out their guts was the certainty that this awful charade would be over soon. Thank God, my mother and Sheera were selling the company.

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I stepped into my mother's office to see what if anything had changed in the décor since my last visit four or five years ago and was surprised to find her sitting behind her desk. She looked up. What happened to all those urgent papers her lawyers were chasing her with? She was on the phone, instead, seeming to be having the time of her life.

"Oh, wait, wait, wait," she said, smiling up at me, genuinely happy. "Let me put you on speaker. Owen just walked in."

"Hi Ow-en," I heard my sister Ellie call out in the same sing-song my mother had long ago perfected. My sister's voice was excited, thrilled.

"Hey Owen," my father said.

"How's it going?" I asked, taking a seat, and dug my flip-flops into the carpet. I leaned back on the chair, stretched my arms and yawned.

"Well, we just gave your mom the details of today's adventures. She can fill you in, but we're doing great," my father said.

"Where are you?" I asked.

"Dartmouth," my sister said.

"Nice," I said.

"God, Owen, we just started today, you know that. You knew we'd be at Dartmouth first. I told you yesterday. Don't—"

"That's enough," my father gently said.

"Is it nice?" I asked.

"It's beautiful," Ellie said. "We just finished a seminar type thing and we've got two more programs to finish still. We're heading for Boston College tonight."

"Wow, that's a distance, isn't it? Boston, I mean. Tonight?"

"Nah," my sister said. "What dad? A couple of hours or so you said?"

"Close enough," my father said.

"Cool," I said.

"Yep," my sister jumped in. "All those other Massachusetts school after that, then down to New Haven and then Brown and then we finish off in Philadelphia. I'm saving Swarthmore for last."

"Yeah, that sounds like a lot of fun," I said. "But in the end, you know, whichever school's basketball coach wants you . . ."

"My SATs are stronger than yours were, Owen. I don't need to be accepted as some student athlete like you were."

"No. No. I mean, you're still . . ." I looked up at my mother, who was smiling at me, probably enjoying my discomfort. "Yeah, Ellie, I mean, the whole thing sounds pretty hectic. Pretty incredible."

"Owen," my father said. "We've got to head out soon, but I'm drafting your help to convince your mom to join us in Boston on Thursday. She still insists she needs to be around to wrap up any loose ends. She should be out here celebrating with us, don't you think? Enough with the work. Right? What do you think?"

"Yeah, sure," I said, and the moment I said it I knew shouldn't have.

My mother laughed. "Nick, you should see his face. Oh, my God, he's like salivating here at the prospect of having the house to himself."

"Well, he does have just a couple of weeks or so left before he returns to St. Louis. He might want to blow off some steam."

"What's he been doing this whole summer except blowing off steam? My God, the kid—"

"Kirsten," my father said in a mock voice of warning.

"Well," my mother said. "It's just . . . we'll see. If things go as smoothly as everyone says they will, I'll probably join you in Boston, but I can't say for sure."

"We're going to hold you to that, right Ellen?" my father said.

"We sure will," my sister said.

"Okay. I know you have to go," my mother said. "I love you guys. Have a wonderful time. Safe drive. Enjoy. Be safe."

"Love you, mom," Ellie said.

"Love you, Kirsten," my father said.

"Have fun," I said.

"You're not going to tell us you love us?" Ellie said.

"No. I'm not."

"Killjoy," my father said.

"Well, we love you all the same," Ellie said. Mock kissing sounds and a giggle from her.

"We sure do, son. Keep working on your mom. And before I forget, make me proud tomorrow at that . . . what're they calling it, that closing dinner. Have a dance with your mom for me."

"It's not that kind of dinner," my mother said.

"Well, whatever it is, have fun," my father said.

"Yeah, I'll try my best," I said.

"Bye," my mother said. She turned off the speaker. She looked at me, tried smiling.

"I'm sorry for earlier," she said. "Thank you, for picking up Seth, I mean. That was nice of you."

I had a lot I wanted to say to her, a lot I should have said. Why was it I was the odd-man out in this family? Why did my mother bend over to accommodate anything my sister Ellie wanted but ragged on me non-stop? She didn't really expect me to dance with her, did she?

"Not a problem," I said, getting up off my chair, ready to get the hell home, dive into the pool, raid the liquor cabinet, call up some friends. . . .

"Actually, I need you to stick around a little longer."

"For what? Ackerman's going home with his mother, isn't he? I don't have to drive him home, do I?"

"No. No. Forget those two. I didn't want to, but I won't be able to sleep at all tonight if I don't. I need you to read these documents with me." She motioned to an almost foot high pile of papers on her desk.

I was aghast. It was as if she'd punched me in the stomach. "Isn't that why you're paying lawyers all that money for? Mom—"

"I'm signing those documents, Owen. I'm not . . . If I'm signing something I want to make sure I know what the hell I'm signing."

"We'll be here for hours."

"I'll have pizza delivered."

"What about your secretary or your CFO . . ."

"Owen, that will be our name on those documents. Hansen. Kirsten Hansen. Not someone else's. In a way, you have as much at stake as I do. It's no one's business but ours. This secures our family's future and we're not going to be careless when everything is so close."

I gave a half-hearted last ditch attempt. "Is that why Seth's here? To help his mom with legal stuff?"

"Oh, God, Owen," my mother said. "Who know what Sheera's doing or not . . . I really don't care. I doubt highly she'll be reading documents tonight. That's what I do. That's what I've always done. I read so she doesn't have to. I make sure the machine runs. That's what I do. Why is that hard for you to understand? Now tell me you're going to do this. You're starting to annoy me." She turned away, red-faced.

I was about to tell her to go pound sand, but I stopped, almost ashamed now. I knew why my mother wanted me with her, why she wanted to review the documents alone with me. She was too embarrassed to talk to the lawyers directly, too afraid they'd think she was stupid for asking basic questions. With me at least, she could bounce thoughts around, make sure she wasn't missing anything obvious. At least I wouldn't laugh at her. I was her son, after all. And she had no one else she could turn to.

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It was like a huge gig-saw puzzle, all these legal documents. There were subtle definitions thirty pages ago, and vague cross-references twenty pages later and subsections that had to start with (aa) and then (bb) because the entire fucking alphabet had been used up earlier. The conventions of something so rudimentary as the Latin alphabet meant nothing to these bastards. These lawyers were creating their own alphabet, their own language. How the hell do you create such an incredible mine-field of mind-fucking complexity? This was secret coding and secret messaging like I'd never seen even in my favorite seminar of Irish writers my Freshman year at Wash U. I loved it. I loved it for its futility and stupidity and sheer audacity. No wonder these fuck lawyers could charge hundreds of dollars an hour. They were like mobsters shaking down some poor small shop owner, except their weapons of choice were words rather than tire irons.

My mother had given up the ghost half an hour ago, but I was going strong four hours on. We were in a conference room at the corner of the long table, her at the end, me across from her, piles and piles of paper sprawled between us, underneath us, and all around the table. The poor woman seemed to be nodding off. She had finally given up the pretense of trying to understand what any of this meant and said she had to trust her lawyers, in the end, anyway, didn't she? And if they messed it up, well, she could always sue them for malpractice, couldn't she? She had even hinted we should be heading home, but fueled by almost a whole pepperoni, deep-dished Chicago-style pizza, three cans of Red Bull, and a couple of monster-sized chocolate chip cookies, I was finding it hard to catch up with my racing mind. Almost two months of a comatose intellectual platform and brain stagnation was burning to the ground in a brilliant blaze of caffeine, rich grease and silky chocolate confronted with this insane, new world of law. I tried not to belch.

"Mom," I called out, wanting to explore yet again whether the equation for determining the final earn-out payment was reasonable given the company's current financial projections—the company was just a glorified employee placement agency, after all—but there was nothing but silence from her. I looked over.

Her eyes were shut, her chin was slumped down and her arms were crossed tightly across her white blouse. The creases in her face were sharp. Strands of hair had fallen to her face. Like an old, stern grandma I thought. Like in a fairy tale by the fireplace, nodding off, while the grandkids chirped and skipped around her. I doubted she was really sleeping, but right now she could do no more. I rubbed my forehead, took a deep breath, could feel my heart starting to pick up yet again and began organizing the papers. I'd pack everything up, put away the pizza box and the cans of cardiac death, every scrap and napkin and we'd be off. I reached down by my feet to pick up those papers on the floor and stopped.

I started trembling.

I was met with the sight of her pink scar, just below my mother's right kneecap clearly visible through her tan hose. Her gray skirt, which normally fell well below her knees had squirmed its way almost two or three inches above. From when I was a little kid, I remembered that scar, it was as long as my pinky finger when I was five. I tried to turn away, but I couldn't. The damn thing . . . What was it? I wanted to touch it. Touch it again. I hadn't seen it in years. Later, as I grew up, it had embarrassed me. I was always afraid one of my friends would notice it, and think my mother was a freak, but . . . think of something else. I wanted to kiss it, kiss the scar, make it all better. Fucking weirdo! Think of something else.

My mother had nice legs. It was just objectively true. I leaned forward closer, almost breathing on them, measuring them, following lines, seeing elegant, full calves, up her knees and her slightly parted lean thighs. Almost with a flinch, I moved back, still studying her legs, but not permitting myself further thoughts of her thighs because thighs didn't end. They just didn't. She was a woman. And a woman's thighs continued up and something mortally forbidden lay hidden between these particular thighs . Holy shit! Furious, I looked back, refused to permit such a thought to stand alone unchallenged. If I was doctor—and that was my dream, to one day be an orthopedic surgeon—these were human legs, after all. This was human anatomy. No, you could give her that. Most tall, older women have okay legs, but hers were especially nice for her age, hell, fine for any age. Well defined and toned, nicely proportioned and curved, the legs of an athlete, which of course she had been. That's how she'd gotten the scar. Surgery in college. She was never the same basketball player after. Get off the fucking scar.

She was a knockout. I mean, she was. I wasn't stupid. That's what had really enraged me about Ackerman's vulgar quip earlier in the car driving here. I mean, if you saw her on the street, yeah, you'd say I'd like to fuck her. You just would. A classic beauty. She was a fucking classic MILF. A flash, and I shuddered. The image, of Ackerman between those legs. His hairy fucking ass pumping up and down, in and out. I wanted to spit. I felt like retching. God, anyone but Ackerman. Anyone but him between my mother's thighs fucking her. I just couldn't see my father there. He was old, Christ. What? Fifteen years older. He'd be retiring in a few years. Emeritus professor. Could he even get it up anymore? It pissed me off. My mother deserved better than that. I mean, strictly speaking as a woman who looked like she did. And she deserved better than a little 19-year old pimp from NYU fucking her. She deserved someone who could really take care of her, really fuck her hard. When was the last time my father had gotten it up in there? I mean, really in there. I mean, really deep in there.

I shook my head hard, tried to rattle my brain back in order. Was I fucking nuts? My God, I was losing my mind! Christ.

"You used to kiss it."

My head jerked up even though the voice had been so soft and kindly, not a hint of annoyance or embarrassment. My mother was looking down at me, fully awake now. She pulled down her skirt in a natural and relaxed way, still staring at me.

"What?" I said, sitting up trying to keep my hands still, trying to keep her from seeing that I was trembling all over.

"My scar," she said. She shook her head and tried to smile to set me at ease. I could see she felt bad that she'd caught me looking at her scar. "When you were a little boy," she said. "When you were small, you used to kiss my knee. You used to ask me whether your kiss had made it better, whether I was okay now."

I cracked my knuckles. First one hand, then the next. God, if she only knew where my mind had just been. I had been having anything but little boy thoughts. I said, "Yeah, I remember. I was kind of a weird kid, right?" She smiled, rising quickly to her feet. "No, you weren't. You were perfect."

I looked down to the floor.

"Come on," she said. "I'm sorry for embarrassing you."

I stood with her.

She hooked her arm into mine. "Let's go home."

"What about all of this?" I said motioning to the mess we were about to leave behind.

"I'll take care of this tomorrow. Or," she laughed, playfully bumping her hip into me, "you can do it if you decide to get out of bed and come to work with me tomorrow morning bright and early."

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I was awake, fevered in bed even though the air-conditioning was going strong and clean. Twice I wanted to call out to my mother and tell her to get an ambulance, but held back knowing it would be horribly unfair to impose on her given that she had a hellish day waiting for her. I was sure I was having a heart attack. My heart rate peaked at 140 twice before slowing to a more steady but still uncomfortable 100, which was almost twice my normal resting rate. I would pull the sheets off, trying to cool down, but that could last only a few minutes before I started shaking uncontrollably in a miserable cold sweat. There were awful hallucinations and tricks my mind kept playing. In a ghastly half-asleep state, I imagined naked college girls I'd fucked this year floating into my room laughing at me, teasing me with their tiny tits and shaven vulvas. The cunts seemed to be dripping on me, yawning open and shutting like shiny red fish gills out of water gasping for oxygen. At one point I thought

my father was sitting in bed with me, stroking my head and I almost screamed when his hands seemed to be slipping down to my throat. At its worst, I would get up and head for the toilet, sit down like a little girl and pee little dribbles of piss, all the while watching as my sweat stained chest rose and fell chaotically. Finally, at about four-thirty in the morning, reality started settling into a reasonable rhythm, my breathing was returning to normal and my heart rate held steady under 70. My whole body ached as if I'd just finished a non-stop no-huddle offence through four quarters of play. The sheets felt better, cooler and sleep seemed very close. I turned onto my back and sighed in deep relief. I felt grateful about the ordeal. I was as if I'd paid the necessary penance for harboring such depraved thoughts about my own mother. I squeezed my limp and puny cock and tested myself, just to be sure. I tried to conjure an image of my mother naked and in bed with me now. I imagined touching her tits, and scraping my hand up high between her thighs, feeling her wetness there, the pubic hair. I breathed easier. Nothing. My cock was shrinking even more as if in revolt, as if it was possible to get even smaller given its current pathetic shape. Nothing. Nothing was happening down there. I was not sick. I was going to be okay. Everyone had an aberration now and then. Mine had come and passed and tomorrow would be fine. I would never think of this again.

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"A suit?"

My mother laughed. "Well, yes, the party's at the Hazelwood Country Club. What did you think you'd be wearing?"

"I don't know. Chinos and a golf shirt? You know, something casual. It has a golf course there, doesn't it?"

"Investment bankers, especially small outfits like the one advising us, are not casual Owen."

"They're pompous asses."

"That may be, but they're hosting the party and, well, you and I are not going to stand out looking like we don't belong. And don't even think you'll be golfing there."

I gave her a look. Not even I was that stupid or selfish.

"Well, I'm just saying," she said.

"What will you be wearing?" I asked.

"Well, there you see I have more options than you. What do you think I should wear?"

I looked at her as if she was crazy.

She laughed, and I couldn't help but to laugh with her. She was radiant, just so happy. The closing was done. The papers had been signed and the wire transfers had gone through. She hadn't even been upset when she returned home that I'd never got to the office to help her clean up the conference room as I'd promised, more or less, last night—I'd simply sat outside all day by the pool and relaxed after I'd gotten up out of bed at about two or so, still achy and still a little confused.

Instead of a snide comment, she made me sit down with her right after she got home, and she got out her tablet. It was then that she opened up the link to the bank account to reveal the ridiculous sum that had been deposited just a little more than an hour ago. After an appropriate stunned silence and genuine, heartfelt congratulations to her, I felt numb. She'd wrapped her arm around me and I awkwardly returned the hug, but all of the will power in the world kept me from just lifting her up off the couch in my arms and twirling her around and around. I was proud of her, but I wasn't sure of myself if actually held her in my arms. I was afraid I'd do something stupid. Rather, I'd said, motioning to her tablet: "Why are we even going to this dance-thing tonight." She'd laughed, "It's not a dance thing, silly. It's a closing party. Go get dressed."

"Owen, really what do you think I should wear?" she asked still standing in my room.

"I don't know mom. What do I know about what women wear? God."

"Well, you put a suit on and meet me in my room and tell me what you think about a couple of outfits."

"Sure, I guess."

"Guess nothing," she said. "You and I are going to be the best-looking couple there tonight if it kills me."

She left, and I dressed in the only dark suit that still fit and put on a lime green tie—all the rest of the ties in my closet were grandfather-type regimentals and ties more fitting for an undertaker's convention. They had belonged to my father. He'd had given them to me last year when he'd decided he'd let his hair go long and opted for a much more casual look at the University. Lime green, would do just fine. My mother wanted us to stand out—well, I'd hold up my end of the bargain.

I walked to my parent's room. The door was open. Even so I knocked.

"Mom," I called.

"Come in," she said, her voice seemingly distant and muffled—she must have been in her walk-in closet or her bathroom. "I'll be right there, I'm still dressing."

"I'll come back when you're done," I yelled, turning around.

"I'm done, I think. Just get in here."

I walked in, trying not to look around. Like most of the guys I knew, your parent's bedroom . . . well, you'd rather be elsewhere. There was always something weird about it, like you were intruding on alien territory. My sister Ellie, on the other hand, she seemed to have no issues walking around in here, looking for things, stealing things, snooping around and not minding her own business.

The sliding door of her walk-in closet opened and my mother stepped out. She wore a navy blue business suit type deal with clean trimming around her lapels, a white satiny undershirt thingy, and form-fitting pants. Her hair was up. As tall as she was, when she put shoes on, she'd look like some six foot blue pencil with a blonde eraser on top, something you might see on the side of the rodeo as a live advertisement. I was a little surprised she'd chosen such a boring outfit, but it was fine by me. In fact, I felt a little sense of relief without knowing why.

"Well," she said, doing a turn so I could see the full effect. You couldn't really tell much as it all seemed to blend together in a rather stark way, but if she liked it, it all seemed to look okay. Just a lot of navy blue. Why not?

"Well," I said after a moment, hoping she would think I was really assessing how she looked. "It's nice and all."

"I know what you mean," my mother said quickly, smiling. "I was just testing you to make sure you would actually be helpful. This is not a party outfit."

"You mean, you have no intention of wearing it?"

"Of course not."

"Well, then, why the hell did you try it on?"

"Oh, Owen, you have a lot to learn about women, young man."

With a laugh, she disappeared back into her closet, not even bothering to slide the door shut, leaving me alone, hands in my pockets wondering how long this nightmare would continue. I cursed my idiot sister for not accepting the scholarship offer from Notre Dame. If she had, my father and she would have been here to deal with my mom's modeling efforts. They would have been dealing with this nonsense.

Instead, I was feeling itchy and flushed. I could hear the soft ruffling and rustling of clothes, the snap and pop of—what? her bra, her panties, good God—things falling to the floor, my mother humming to herself and then singing some ghastly pop song about falling in love in a hopeless place or some such nonsense. I wanted to yell at her—"those aren't even the bitch's lyrics, mother. Some Scottish white guy wrote the damn song." But I kept quiet, started itching my nose.

What the hell was this? Why was she acting so flighty, so weird? I sat down on her bed. Shouldn't she be singing . . . what, what the hell did young girls listen to twenty, twenty-five years ago in college and high school? I was grateful for the mental diversion. I didn't want to think about what was going on in the closet. This was all too ridiculous. I should get the hell out of here. Madonna. Shit, she was even older than my mother. Maybe college ball player Kirsten Rodgers listened to Madonna way back when. She must have. Maybe after she had to give up basketball after her knee surgery, she joined some bimbo sorority. . . maybe, she dated some cheesy frat guys, who knows, maybe she was a total party girl . . . maybe, but I knew better. I knew it all. My mother wasn't, she hadn't been a party girl. She got knocked up with me by the just tenured and married college professor in her medieval art history seminar and the two of them had to flee town in disgrace. I felt bad for her, that tall, geeky kid with bulging belly who'd probably never even had a boyfriend before her illicit contact with her charismatic professor. Or maybe she was just looking for an "A" in his class. I had no idea.

I looked up and she was at the closet doorway, looking down at me.

"Wow!" I couldn't help but say and I could see it was exactly what she wanted to hear. I sort of stumbled to my feet and reached back to the bed to steady myself. Her huge smile stayed fixed on her face and for a moment she looked as if she might start crying.

This wasn't my mother. This was not a stressed out business woman. She was radiating in the sunlight coming through the windows, the floral patterned powder blue and white dress seemed perfectly tailored for her, rather tight and uplifting on top, her tits obvious and bulging proudly. Two thin strips held the top up and accentuated beautifully her long, elegant neck and firm, even muscular shoulders. Her blonde hair was down and fashioned wildly in a pattern I'd never seen before, just at the border of unkempt. As the dress continued down it became more flowing, but clung exactly where needed, accentuating her narrow waist and flaring to follow her full hips before ending smartly right above her knees. She still wore hose, unfortunately, but they were so pale and light they barely registered.

"Wow," I said again.

"Thank you," she said, reaching out to me. She wanted a hug.

Trying not to be too weird about it, I stepped to her and sort of put my arms around, not knowing exactly where to rest my hands.

She solved my dilemma with a laugh. "What sort of hug is that," she said grinning and pulled me tight and I could feel every square inch of what my eyes had been feasting on seconds before. The bulging tits, firm stomach, waist, full hips, all of it. Her smell was fresh and young, and ever so-subtle and private as if it was being reserved just for the fortunate soul she'd let get this close. She rested her chin on my shoulder and whispered. "Thank you."

I mumbled a nervous "You're welcome," and tried gently to disentangle from her. Things that I'd told myself I'd buried far away last night were stirring in me, and I was extremely anxious now to keep what I could sense was a gloriously thickening cock from contact with the area just below her abdomen. Unfortunately, she would have not of it. Her arms dropped from my shoulders and she clasped her hands on my lower back to keep me in place, just tugging me forward.

She raised her face from my shoulder and looked at me. "I can't tell you how happy I am," she said. "I don't know. It's as if I just got released from prison. I've never felt so free in my life."

I smiled back at her and was about to say how happy I was for when I saw a tiny seed of knowledge flutter in her eyes. She had felt it. She'd just casually swayed into it really as she held me. Just a split second of contact and she, if not jumped back, certainly moved away ever so perceptibly. Her light almost gray blue eyes looked into mine and she smiled again and I tried hard not to let her feel my sigh of relief. What remained unsaid and unacknowledged never happened. I really loved her for her decency. She released me, not even glancing down for confirmation or anything overwrought like that. She stepped away and held my hands between us.

In gratitude, to show her I could be just as mature about a silly little contretemps as she'd been, I blurted out.

"You really don't want to wear hose with this stunning dress, do you?"

She looked somewhat surprised. "You want me without hose?" she said.

"Well, I mean, the dress is so beautiful on you. You look so natural and lovely in it. I mean, the hose sort of spoils, you know . . ."

"Hmmm," she said. "What about the scar on my knee?"

"Oh, you can barely notice it. I mean, who cares?"

She smiled. "You don't care?"

"Of course not."

"You used to."

"I used to also put red ants in my mouth for fun, too. What did I know?"

She laughed at that. "Yes, you did," she said. "It was a full-time job just keeping strange objects from your mouth."

I nodded.

"Okay," she said, "I'll trust you. If you don't care, neither will I."

"Trust me," I said.

There was a slight smirk from her. "You sure? You have my back here?"

"Yes, I have your back."

"And nothing more, just my back?" she teased.

"Yes, mother, I have everything," I said. "I've got you covered. I've got your back."

"Speaking of which . . ." she said, letting go of my hands and walking back into her closet. "Just wait a second," she called out.

I tried adjusting my cock, to make it less obvious, but it remained suspended in a half state of excitement, bloated, but not rigid, just waiting for some slight encouragement to reach its full glory. I sat back on the bed just for insurance, pushing the stupid thing to the side along my thigh, hopefully camouflaging its embarrassing presence.

She wasn't kidding. In less than a minute she was back out, even more beautiful now without the hose. Her look worked in perfect and natural harmony, hair, dress, legs, simply gorgeous. Nothing affected or fake about her.

"Okay," she said. "Now I want you to be totally honest. The hose covered the scar, but it served other purposes, covered other things as well, if you get my meaning." She carefully turned around, her back to me, and I could see what she was getting at. Panty lines. Nothing ridiculous, but they were there, at times barely, at times more, as she gently twisted, stepped and turned. "Well?" she said, her back still to me. "Is it pretty bad? Be honest."

"Not really," I said after a moment, and she cut me off.

"That's all I needed to hear," she said and walked back into the closet.

I felt some disappointment. She'd put the hose on again, and I was sure she didn't want to. I should have just bluffed and told her she looked great, which was true. No one would notice unless they were staring at her ass and . . . but then it hit me: They would be staring at her ass, plenty would be. What a dumbass I was! Wouldn't I be staring at women's asses tonight? Wouldn't I be recoiling from that one over there and be intrigued by another over here? And my mother's ass was excellent, you couldn't avoid that. It still looked as if it retained a lot of its muscle tone, still seemed to be standing high and not drooping at all. It was a nice full ass. I felt better about it, felt better about being able to think about her in these terms. It wasn't sexual. Whatever it was, it wasn't that. These were just plain fact-based observations. I mean, she was a woman, she looked great and what the hell, I was a horny nineteen-year-old, with an uncontrollable nineteen-year old dick. My mother understood that, too, I was sure, which is why she'd been so gracious in not embarrassing herself or me earlier when she'd felt my cock against her. I felt better about myself.

She stepped out of the closet again and turned around again and this time all was seamless. But there was no hose. Nothing. And there was no a hint of panty line, just smooth delicate fabric covering a full gorgeous rump. She turned to me and grinned at the confused look on my face.

"Well," she said in mock snootiness, "are you going to lounge around on my bed all day or are you going to take me to this party you've been promising me since yesterday?"

"But," I said standing now and resisted like crazy the urge to point at her lower half.

"Never you mind about that," she laughed, taking my hand and doing another one of her hip bumps. "You've spent enough time today worrying about my hose and my dresses and God knows. Just come here and button this back button."

She turned around, moved her hair, exposing her long neck, and waited. I tried, failing once and she said. "Just button it on, sweetie."

I tried again and still couldn't get it right. "Don't me nervous, Owen," she said. "I'm not your prom date. I won't fly away into someone else's arms if you mess up here or there."

I finally got the button on. I stepped away. She let her hair down.

"Let's go have fun," she said.

[***]

The party at Hazelwood Country was fine, the general atmosphere somewhat stuffy and old, the food equally bland, and the booze . . . well, I wouldn't know since I was the designated driver for the evening. The investment bankers did of their best in cheesy-diché-ridden spiels that left the smarter of their audience neither laughing nor awe-struck, but did work wonders in the less sharp tacks, who smugly nodded or laughed in a knowing, glancing-around-for-confirmation, kind of way.

Sheera, of course, dominated the proceedings, giving the closing speech, almost before the investment bankers had a chance to settle down into their seats. And Sheera's speech bordered on appalling. She was careful to acknowledge "my team", excited to talk about the "process" of the sale, and hinted strongly that she already had a fresh "vision" for her next entrepreneurial endeavor, which she coyly hinted at but did not identify. She started with some blasé observations about my mother's indispensable help before she made sure we all understood that my mother was unlike her in every way. Without using the exact words, Sheera pointed out that Kirsten Hansen didn't have the daring or nerve to start something new and brilliant, like she had and would again. Rather, my mother would be staying on with the company as the new CEO to lead in its transition and hoped-to-be expansion under the corporate umbrella of Multi-State Employee Leasing, Inc. Graciously, Sheera then suggested that such a role suited my mother best given her "inner strength and determination" and warned all present to know that maybe not this year, or even next, but once her new venture had gotten its running legs in order (that is to say, all the hard, interesting work had been completed) no one should be surprised if she—Sheera Ackerman—didn't just swoop down and steal my mother right from under their very noses to do what Kirsten does best: "keep the trains running on time and making sure the oil on the wheels

stays greased and quiet" or some such rot. I really wanted to interrupt her and scream at her to shut the fuck up, but I saw immediately that my mother was totally at ease and showed no discomfort at Sheera's condescending claptrap. Of course, she, like everyone else understood perfectly well Sheera's digs and underhanded compliments, but my mother raised her glass of wine, smiled and laughed at appropriate times, and simply didn't seem to care. I was proud of her even more. She was different this evening, unlike I'd ever seen, not only in her vibrant and sexy appearance, but totally comfortable in her own skin. So that in the end when she led the standing ovation for Sheera at the conclusion of the speech, it looked like the most natural thing in the world for Kirsten Hansen to walk to her partner and give her a big hug of love. And no one could doubt that the two of them together, mismatched and holding each other and teary-eyed and gleaming with pleasure, were not best friends.

Pictures were taken, the closing gifts and deal toys were duly distributed, and the party was wrapping up. Arm-in-arm, the two partners approached their two sons, of whom the less said the better. The two young men had done a great job throughout the evening of progressively ignoring each other and somewhere between Seth's snide—"I love your mom's dress"—and his somewhat lazy "Do you want to eat the fat from my steak?"—the two had reached a silent understanding that this evening would be the last time either laid eyes on the other.

But Sheera had other ideas. To all the people now standing, relieved it was over and so smoothly, it went without saying, and preparing to disperse, she called out: "I want to invite everyone here to the Blue Velvet for drinks and dancing. Let the real party begin!" she said, in a near scream of weird challenge. The response was agonized exasperation from the investment bankers, who really wanted to go home to their wives and children or mistresses, bewilderment from the lawyers, who were desperately seeking guidance from the investment bankers as to what their position should be, and open exuberant enthusiasm from Sheera's "team".

I looked at my mother, who shrugged back at me with a look of "Whatever" and we all left the private dining room deep in the environs of the Hazelwood Country Club, walked through what seemed like miles of oak-paneled corridors before stepping out into the warm night and the parking lot.

In the car, as soon as she put her seat belt on, my mother said: "Don't even start."

"I didn't say anything," I said.

"Well . . . just don't," she said smiling and gently punched me on the shoulder. "Sheera and I are buying and I feel that it's only right that I add to the bar-tab."

"We've got booze at home," I said.

"Do we, really? Really? Whatever do you know about booze at home, I wonder, hmmm?"

I started the car.

"Exactly. You've had your summer of fun and 'booze at home'. Don't you think it's only fair I get one little night of fun in return?"

"Yes, ma'am," I said swinging the car to join the caravan heading out.

"Oh, I love it," she giggled, "I've got my own little chauffeur for the night."

I took a right at the lights. "Could you believe that speech of hers?" I said.

Mom laughed. "You know I edited that speech this morning?"

"What?"

"Oh, my God, it was ten times more insulting, the first draft she wrote. Just insane."

"Are you serious?"

"Of course, I'm serious. I had to tone it down. It wasn't just me initially she went after. She was going off giving her lessons of hard-love to our CFO, to our VP of operations, all of the top executives. The thing would have run for a good hour. We'd still be in there listening to it. And have you ever had a less savory tenderloin?"

I laughed. "I think the only thing I enjoined was the cheesecake for dessert."

"Oh, mine's better than that, don't you think?"

"Sure it is, but—"

"That will be my new business venture. I think I'm going to start a cheesecake company serving the exclusive market of dwarves in Mexico, or something. Don't you think that's a fine idea?" she asked doing a really good impression of Sheera.

I smiled at her.

"Don't you think I'm worthy of a little funding?" she said slowly, grinning, placing a really naughty emphasis on "funding."

I looked away. What the hell was that? Quickly I asked, "How can she be so clueless?"

After a pause, my mother continued, in her normal voice now, "Well, that's just it, I don't think Sheera is. I think she thinks she knows better. She knows it's offensive and rude, but she thinks that's totally irrelevant. She thinks that all that's outweighed by the good she'd be doing for us by telling us how to improve ourselves. Like I said, it's hard love, in her eyes. I'm not making myself clear, but believe me I know her."

"No, I understand. Just wow. How can you stand her?"

"God, sweetie. I stood her for all these years and put up with it, and now I don't have to anymore. You see why I didn't care really what she said tonight. I'll never have to care about anything she says about me or anyone else for the rest of my life. It's like my sentence is ended, you know?"

"I'm glad about that." I got on the freeway, heading downtown with the rest.

She turned on some music and turned down the visor and studied herself in the lit mirror.

"You look great," I said. "Who are you trying to impress tonight?"

She frowned at that. "Why is my driver checking me out? I could have you fired for that, you know."

"You can't blame him. Your driver's only human and male," I said.

She laughed. "My driver's punching way above his weight class, somewhere in the stratosphere, right where St. Paul decides if you get into heaven or should be banished to hell, is what he's doing."

"I'm an ambitious driver."

She grinned. "Are you? Good. Always be ambitious," she said, putting up the visor and leaning back in her seat, getting comfortable, pretending to be smug. Almost, but not quite, to herself, she said, "If I can turn even my son on, I must be doing something right."

"You just are."

"What's that?" she asked.

"You are turning me on. I mean, not, you know . . . I mean, not like that."

"Well, that's no good. What's the point if it's not like that?" she said.

"You know what I mean. I'm sorry, but you are. I've never seen you like this. I love that you're so cool tonight. That you don't give a shit. I love that."

She looked over at me and smiled. "Thank you. Now drive before I change my mind."

"About what?"

"Oh, come on, Owen, don't be so weird. I'm just joking and being a little silly. Can't you take a joke? I just want to have a good time tonight."

"I'm sorry."

"No, no, no. You don't have to apologize for anything. Just let me have a good time, okay, please? Let's just have a fun evening and drink a little too much." She quickly added, "Me, not you. Got it?"

"I understand."

"Good. Let's just be happy tonight and not think too much. My brain is on a well-deserved vacation. It's on strike. Okay?"

"Okay."

"What did you say earlier? You got my back, right? Do you still have it?" she asked.

"I've got your back," I said.

"You're my wing-man," she said.

"That's me," I said.

She took my hand and held it for the rest of the drive.

[***]

Despite sitting atop one of the taller buildings and providing a really cool 360 degree panoramic of the downtown, the Blue Velvet was every bit as dismal as its miserable name would suggest. It was the sort of place no right thinking college kid would be found dead in given its cheesy décor and non-ironic 80's retro lighting and dance floor. It wasn't surprising, then, that it was precisely the sort of place misinformed businessmen might think would be fun to stop at on a Friday evening after work for a couple of beers and in which they just might meet middle-aged divorcees eager to lap up their dated compliments and come-ons. In short, it was exactly the sort of place you'd expect all the staff to know intimately and immediately our hostess, Sheera Ackerman.

Sheera ordered the champagne, made sure everyone had a glass, made sure every glass was filled, and toasted herself and her success more than once before shaking her scrawny ass to the dance floor where she quickly was surrounded by her "team" in a glittering, glamming writhing reproduction of something Andy Warhol might have thought a bit gauche. The music was dated—Jon Bon Jovi, Aerosmith, I mean, Come on!—the dance moves all wrong, the people making the moves sadly out-of-shape and worst Sheera demanded that I join her when she saw me standing alone at the bar with my Coke. Dancing and unabashedly dripping with sweat she grinned wildly at me, pushed my hands down to her hips while she wrapped her arms around my neck and kissed me and forced my mouth open. After exchanging a little spit, she must have thought the green light was on because she started grabbing and groping like a pickpocket on a rampage five minutes before midnight in Times Square on December 31. At the end only my talent for scrambling from brutal sacks coming from head-hunting, blitzing cornerbacks saved me—I shouldn't exaggerate, we are talking DIII football—and after escaping her octopus like death-grip I retreated wearily to the bar.

My mother saw me approaching and was laughing hard, but then stopped when she saw the look on my face. She still couldn't help smiling. I would have walked right past her and towards the exit, but she grabbed my arm and pulled me to her.

"Thank you," she said. "Really, Owen, thank you. You're a very good sport." She gave me a quick peck on the cheek and seemed to be just ready to rest her head on my shoulder, but Seth Ackerman seemed to materialize out from the dance floor and was urging her to join the throng. She shook her head, his entreaties became more vocal and bordering on awkward violence—lots of fruitless grabbing and pulling—and she finally handed me her glass, reminded me not to drink anything, and was quickly absorbed into the dancing fools, Seth and Sheera in the middle of it all.

The next hour or two was something of a blur, the bad out-of-shape dancing continued, but at a progressively less hectic pace, the awful music seemed to be taking a slower turn as well and I kept away as best I could, keeping myself busy with games of Angry Birds and nursing many, many sodas. When I emerged from yet another visit to the bathroom, I saw that things were clearly unwinding and looked around to see whether I could get my mother to leave. I couldn't find her—the whole place seemed to have darkened measurably—and instead I took a seat at the bar next to Seth. I mean, I'd been kind of an asshole earlier at the Country Club and had been ignoring him since, and there was no reason not to be at least civil with the dirtball.

"Well," Seth said, "it looks like that little foursome I had planned with our moms is out tonight."

I yawned heavily, a real yawn, nothing affected or nervous about it. I'd been wrong. Seth couldn't help himself. I wanted to leave. It was close to midnight. I started looking for my mother again.

"God, you're lame," Seth said.

"Why is that Seth?"

"'Cuz you're so fuckin' uptight, asshole."

"Yep. That's me."

"Don't you want to know where your mom is?"

"I'm sure you'll tell me."

"Look over there, at the corner of the dance floor. See her?"

I didn't even pretend to look. "Where's Sheera?" I asked smiling at him. "She find someone else to molest tonight?"

Seth uttered a fake, forced laugh and adopted a pretty awful English accent for some reason. "My mum's always got me to molest, dumbass. You know that. She doesn't need to stray from the field, like your mum does. You think that little show on the dance floor with you meant anything to Sheera? She was just doing you a favor, you dumb, stupid git."

"Yep."

"I'll have you know, Sheera's in a room in the hotel here spread eagle on a bed getting herself ready for me. Neither of us believes in foreplay. I was just about to join her. Gonna get right in that muff."

"I hope you two have a fun," I said.

"I'll send you a video clip, old chap."

"Can't wait."

He dropped the English accent. "I'm fine, Hansen. Don't you worry about us Ackermans. We don't need your pathetic asses. You need us." The full was drunk, obviously, which seemed really unfair. He continued, "That why I just wanted to make sure your mom's being taken care of, you know."

"You're a good man."

"Don't you see her dancing with that big, black guy? Just look."

This time I did look and after a bit of searching I saw that indeed my mother did seem to be dancing with a tall black guy among several other couples in the corner of the dance floor.

"Great," I said.

"You know who that guy be, bro?"

"No, pal. Tell me who that guy be?"

"Homes, that's a guy Sheera and I are paying to fuck your mom tonight. We got her a gigolo. How do you like them apples?"

"Is that right?"

Seth laughed, starting to bob and weave on his seat with the new song now playing. "They're playing it, the dumbasses. I can't believe it. Guetta's 'Sexy Chick'," he said. "I requested this." He shut his eyes as if the song meant something to him.

I didn't know the song, didn't give a shit about it, but it seemed to have added a little spark to the dismal dance floor after all the old crap. Definitely my mother was dancing with the black guy.

Seth seemed amused.

I started to step away, had enough of him, but he stopped me, holding my shirt. I turned back to him.

"You're such a dumb fuck. You don't believe me, do you, about your mom?" he said. "We got a room for them and everything. That big black buck's gonna fuck your mom's brains out. He's packing a good ten inches and it's as thick as my wrist. I did a personal inspection of the beast in the bathroom just a few minutes ago." He wiped his mouth and smiled. "It's our final present to your mom for all the hard work she's done for us all these years."

He released my shirt and waived me away. "Now you just run a long like a good little white boy and go home. We'll be sure to drop her off on your lawn tomorrow morning and you can do what you like with what's left over."

I shook my head. God, the shit never stopped with this asshole.

He continued, staring straight at me, smiling malevolently, "If any poor lady looks like she needs a good fuck, it's good old Kirsten Hansen. I mean, the poor thing's gotta be tired of your dad's grandpa pecker all these years."

He said her name and had been speaking about her with such ridicule, with such open contempt. It was obviously his default position, an attitude no doubt his mother had ingrained in him. He wasn't even pretending to be funny. It was venomous, meant to injure and hurt, and everything I ever thought or felt about him and his mother was confirmed. They did not like us. They wanted to damage us. You can kid yourself that someone you think is otherwise an asshole might have some redeeming qualities or might not actually dislike you as much as you suspect, but when you finally hear it, to your face, it's a bit of shock.

He was smirking.

I grabbed him by the throat. Not too hard, just enough to get his attention. Both his hands flew to my wrist trying to pull me off. He was failing.

"Let me go now, motherfucker, before I tear your fucking heart out, you piece of shit. How dare you, motherfuckin' scum," he sputtered furiously.

I simply stared down at him, studied his face, his creepy, coiffed hair and those hateful eyes, as his mouth worked wildly.

"Let me go, fucker."

I squeezed a bit.

"I'm serious, Hansen" he said. "Let me go."

He kicked me, but didn't have enough room to put much weight behind it. I tightened my grip just a little bit more to tell him I didn't appreciate the kick and pulled him closer and up, forcing him on his toes. His fury turned to fear and his face started to redden. That's what I wanted to see.

"Let me go," he said in a harsh whisper and I could feel his Adam's apple trying to bob up and down in my palm as he tried to swallow. "It was a fuckin' joke," he gasped.

I released him.

As soon as I did he tried to punch me, but I flicked his fist from midflight and squeezed it, very hard, could feel his bones starting to crunch. He gave out a yelp and I let him go. He held his hand. Several people nearby were looking at us now.

"You always were white-trash garbage, Hansen, you know that?" he said, almost crying, massaging his hand.

"You always were nothing, you fuckin' animal. You just wait, fuckin' scum."

"You have anything else you want to say about my mother?" I said.

"Fuck you and your mother, you ungrateful pieces of shit," he said and pushed by me. I watched as he left the Blue Velvet, still working on his hand.

"One more headache," I mumbled to myself. I was sure I'd hear about it tomorrow when Sheera complained to my mother. I was sure my mother would make me apologize for hurting poor little, helpless Seth. God, I was in grade school again. But it had been worth it, just that look on his face at the end, the big baby.

I needed to go home. I'd done my part. This place made me feel dirty. I walked to the dance floor, maneuvering past a few couples—slow music had resumed—and stopped where my mother swayed in the arms of the black guy.

She looked over her shoulder and saw me, and the bored almost uncomfortable look on her face transformed brilliantly into a sparkle of excitement.

"There you are," she said. The black guy stopped and turned around. He had a possessive arm around her waist.

"My boyfriend," my mother said smiling.

The black guy almost guffawed. "What?" He looked me up and down and started laughing with open disdain.

"You're kidding me."

One advantage of being in athletics all your life and especially in a sport like football is that you lose a lot of illusions about other people. You either perform or you don't. There are consequences to pretending you're fast when you're not, pretending to know what to do in a play when you really have no clue. Performers play, posers do not. And posers rarely get a second chance. If coach pegs you as a poser, you're done.

This black guy was a poser, without doubt. His pose was that of a big, tough gangster-type even though he was in a suit and tie. The pose probably worked on most white guys because all most white guys know about blacks is what they see on TV shows or news or music videos. White guys wanted nothing to do with blacks. It just wasn't worth their trouble. But I'd played with blacks guys all my life. I'd tackled them and been tackled by them, shoved them back when they'd shoved me, gotten in their face as much if not more than they'd gotten in mine, and these blacks were a lot more intimidating and frightening than this affirmative action case on the dance floor from some life insurance company down the street. I wanted to say to him, "Dude, you're the only black guy in some place called the Blue Velvet. Do you really want to push your luck?"

Wanna-be gangster released mother's waist, put a scowl on his face, and took an aggressive step towards me and then stopped when he saw that I hadn't moved or been looking nervously around for help. He looked back at my mother and asked incredulously, "Boyfriend?"

My mother, still smiling, shrugged as if to say, "What can I tell you, I like them young."

The guy straightened his tie, then his gold cuffs, and shook his head. "Whatever," he said and walked away to try to find some other (a lot less attractive) middle-aged white woman who might be lonely and curious.

My mother walked to me and said, "Thank you. He was getting a little creepy. Where have you been all night?"

"Talking to Seth."

"That must have been pleasant," she said with a quick grin before stopping when she saw how unhappy I was.

"I'm so sorry," she said.

"Should we go home?" I asked. "I think we're like the last people here from the company." I looked around as if to reinforce the point.

"Okay, if that's what you want."

"Yeah, let's go," I said turning to leave.

We took a step and then she stopped. "Are you angry?" she asked.

"Why would I be angry?" I said turning back to her.

"You are, I can see it. Not because I was dancing with some stranger who just walked up to me? I mean—"

"You can dance with anyone you want, mom."

"Don't be like that," she said.

"Let's just go home and sleep."

"But I didn't even get to dance with you, not once," she said and her eyes were actually moist.

"I never asked."

"You should've," she said, just short of pouting.

"Let's just go," I said.

"No, I want to dance with you. You're the only person that matters to me tonight, and I didn't even get a chance to dance with you."

"It's a slow dance," I said.

"And?" she said. "So much the better. I want to reward my brave little knight. Don't you want to be rewarded?"

Her voice was soft.

"Just one dance, okay?" I said.

She nodded. She put her arms around me and I held her lightly. She looked at me almost startled. She pulled me closer. "God," she said, "I thought you said I turned you on."

Roughly, not sure what I was doing, I pressed my groin just to the inside of her hip, pushed my thigh right up between her legs so that we were pasted to each other. "Is that better?" I asked, looking into her eyes. I was furious, wanted to kiss her, wanted to pull her away with me. I didn't know what I wanted.

Not missing a beat, my mother smiled and nestled her head on my shoulder. "Much. It's much better," she said and readily followed my lead as I moved us to an even darker, much more secluded area of the floor.

"Was it better when the black guy was holding you?" I asked, feeling all of her warmth and firm curves under the wispy, thin fabric of her dress, but it was her soft middle that felt best. I could feel stirring, not really lust, but something, again, closer to anger. I liked the feeling. I pushed closer into her. "Was it?" I said.

"Not at all," she said sighing into my shoulder. "This so much better."

"Is it? Why?"

She was silent for a bit, and we danced and held each other, bodies mashed together. The stirring increased and now became a steady desire of want. I felt myself lengthening against her.

She felt it too and raised her face from my shoulder and looked at me. "Because you feel much better against me than he did," she said, pressing back against me.

"How so?" I asked, trying to steady my breath.

"He was looking for just one thing. He didn't give a shit about me."

"How do you know I'm not looking for the same thing?" I asked wanting more than anything to kiss her. "You love me."

"I do, I love you so much," I said, swallowing hard.

"That's all that matters. Whatever happens, that's all that matters, right?" She put her head back on my shoulder.

I moved my hands which had been firmly gripping her hips, and gently slid them over her rump, back and forth, at first quite lightly and then much more firmly and with purpose. The flesh was pliable, much softer than it looked and it might have rolled under my touch if my kneading had been just a bit harder.

"What are you doing?" she whispered in my ear.

"Trying to find your panty lines." I whispered back.

"I told you earlier to stop worrying about that."

I kept searching. Kept feeling, without really looking for anything. "You're not naked underneath, are you?" I said, trying to catch my breath.

"That's something you'll never know," she said and I could feel her face broaden into a smile.

I reached towards the center of her back there, where these two lovely, thick globes joined, and carefully trailed my hand up to the small of her back, feeling now the distinct lines of panty rising up from her center. "Ahhh," I said understanding.

She snuggled more closely against my neck. Shakily, I moved my hands up to rest again atop her hips.

"I liked them where they were."

"Did you?"

She was silent. I lowered my hands, back on her rump, pulling her closer to me

"Yes," she said.

We stayed like that for a bit more and the song ended. She stopped swaying in my arms, disentangled herself from me.

She looked at me and smiled and said, "Let's go."

My puzzlement was obvious and she laughed.

"I already gave you more than you deserved," she said.

"But—"

"You said just one song and I gave you two," she said.

"That wasn't two songs," I said. "Was it?"

"It most certainly was. You probably missed the first one. You seemed to be pre-occupied."

"Well, then give me four songs. Okay, three songs. I want an encore."

"Don't we all," she said grinning. Then she shook her head. "You get what you ask for, my dear, and just now you got more—way more than you deserved—and I decide if you get more," she said. "You get nothing more than I give you."

"Well, decide more songs then, and the problem s solved."

"Nope, there wouldn't have been any problem to solve if you hadn't been such a jerk to me earlier about dancing. I had to beg. Remember? That's never a turn on. Making a woman beg is not cool. You had your chance. And that's all. I've been too generous as it is."

She took my hand and we started walking out. "Thank you," she said, grazing her hip to mine every third or fourth step.

[***]

My mother said nothing on the half-hour drive home, she might have even been napping, but I doubted it. She held my hand the entire drive, stroking it at intervals, but mostly just holding it, now tightly, now lightly, touching the palm, entwining our fingers.

The garage door opened, I drove in. My mother released my hand and got out of the car. She opened the door to the house and stepped in, not even waiting for me. I followed quickly after, catching up with her in the kitchen. I took her hand and she let me. We walked through the living room and to the back stairs leading up. Slowly we ascended and stopped in the hallway, my bedroom to the left, hers to the right. I felt her hand easing its hold on mine and she started to turn to the right to her bedroom.

I didn't release her hand. Ever so gently, I nudged her towards me, away from her destination, wanted her to follow me to the left. She looked at me in the soft hallway light.

"Come with me," I said.

She shook her head. "That's impossible."

I tugged at her arm a little more firmly and she took a weak step towards me.

"I just want to sleep with you—"

Her eyes widened.

I quickly added, "I mean, you know, just lie in bed with you, spend the night with you that way."

"That's not a good idea," she said. "We're both tired and a little loopy."

"It's not like we've never slept in the same bed before."

She grinned at that and shook her head again. "I'm really tired, Owen. I drank too much and . . . I'm just really tired. Let's talk tomorrow, sweetheart, okay?"

"You just go to my room," I said. "I'll bring you your pajamas."

She laughed. "I don't sleep in pajamas."

"Well, then wear whatever you want or don't want. Come on, I'm barely able to stand on my feet here. Don't make me stand here all night."

"You look like you can do a lot more than stand on your feet, you little liar."

"You owe me," I said, desperately.

"Ha! Ha! Owe you? I owe you? How does that work?"

"I've had to put up with a lot, you know, yesterday and today. I mean . . ."

"Yeah, I know what you mean, you goofball." She was silent for a few seconds. "Are you serious, do you really think I owe you?"

"Of course, not."

"Okay, I'll do it. I'll rest with you a while, in your room, like you want. But that's it, you got it? What we were doing on the dance floor, that was then, this is now. That's done. We had a little naughty fun, but that's it. We're just resting in there. We're even after that. After that, I owe you nothing. I mean . . . that's it, okay." "You don't owe me. I don't want you to think you owe me. I want you—"

She put her finger to my lips. "Just be quiet. You're already ahead. Go on in," she said motioning to my door, pushing me away. "I'll join you in a sec. I need to brush my teeth. Freshen up a little."

[***]

My toothbrush almost jumped out of my hand when I heard the steps in my room. I'd expected her to be much longer. I'd taken a long piss, but didn't want to look down at my cock while I did so. For some reason, it just didn't seem right. I had no idea what my mother had decided would be permissible tonight. On the dance floor, she'd been ready to . . . but she almost certainly meant what she'd said and wanted nothing more, and nothing less, than to rest in bed with me, fully clothed and fully apart right now. I just didn't know and I didn't want to confuse my mind by bringing my cock into the picture.

I cleaned my toothbrush, washed my face. I walked out of the bathroom and saw her standing there, still in her dress, in her heels, smiling brightly, looking around.

"I like your room," she said. "It's like, I don't know, like I've never been in here before, you know. Hey, is your bed even big enough for both of us?"

I grinned, just taking her in. I was awestruck that she was actually here.

"I like when you do that," she said.

"Do what?"

"Come here," she said. "Help me take this dress off."

I walked to her, as slow as I could manage, feeling really light-headed, and she pulled her blonde hair together and lifted it up and to the side. Without a hitch, I unbuttoned the top button, but hesitated what next to do. "Go ahead," she said. "Unzip me."

I slowly lowered the zipper, and the back strap of a white lace bra was revealed. I tried not to touch the strap with my knuckles, realized my hand was shaking but kept pushing the zipper down, stopping just as I approached her tailbone. I couldn't help but to look down. What I'd felt earlier, and assumed to be there, was there. The wings of a white, lacy thong digging into her hips and plunging right into the top of the semi-moons of ass. I stepped away, realizing I was breathing very hard now.

Taking pity on me, most likely, and with her back still to me, she pulled away one strap of her dress and then the other. The dress fell to her waist as it crumpled off her back. She tugged at it bit, grabbing handfuls on each side and bent a little, wiggling her hips at the same time as if to shake it off, and the dress seemed to float softly down to the hardwood floor. She stepped out of it. Her thong seemed to be straining and digging into her as she moved, and the beautiful full plumpness of her ass was in open display. I tried to look away, but couldn't when she actually knelt down and picked up the dress, her ass forming into a gorgeous heart-shape. She carefully straightened up, dress in hand, and walked slowly to my dresser where she carefully folded the dress and put it away. She turned around and faced me.

"You're going to go to bed with your clothes on?" she asked.

I had to take her in, all of her. She was standing there tall and casual as if it was the most natural thing in the world for her to be in her son's bedroom in her sexiest bra and panties. I had seen her in a swimsuit before, many times, usually in a tankini with a little skirt she kept on whenever she was out of the water, but this was a wholly different experience. The bra was strapless, one of those push up things and it seemed to be made for capturing and harnessing in place her tits, the two darker areas of her nipples clearly visible through the lace. Her stomach, flat and even somewhat defined, sloped inwards before a slight swell rose lower beneath her belly button. I looked up and saw mom was waiting for me.

"Aren't you going to get undressed?" she asked.

"I usually sleep with just my underwear," I said and wanted to scream at myself for sounding so shy.

"Well, then, don't let me stop you, just sleep with your underwear."

Trying to keep my hands from too visibly shaking, I took off my tie and started unbuttoning my shirt. As I did, she bent down forward at the waist, lifted a foot and undid one of her shoes, while holding steady with one hand on the drawer. Her tits jiggled and rolled as she did, almost mashing together. She repeated the exercise with her other shoe. She stood straight and folded her arms and blocking her tits from view. She was standing there now as if daring me to look lower, demanding that I focus lower to the lacy "V" between her thighs. I just couldn't do it. Not while she was looking at me like that. I kept my eyes level with hers as I started unbuckling my belt, but something wasn't working. I couldn't get my belt off and then I did. My hands were so unsteady. I kept looking at her face. I thought I caught the tiniest of smiles there. I unzipped and then dropped my pants, kicking them away trying not to stumble.

"You're going to just leave that pile of clothes on the floor?" she asked, her arms still folded.

"No," I said. "I'll put them away. I mean—"

"Never mind," she said grinning.

I smiled back.

"Turn on the TV," she said motioning to the controller on my bed stand. "I'll turn off the lights."

I hesitated and she waited a few seconds longer than she needed. I couldn't help myself and I glanced down quickly to her lacy thong, saw the darker shade of her pubic hair, which looked surprisingly trimmed and neat, and at the gorgeously swollen mound of hers with just the slightest hint of camel toe painted tightly against the lacy fabric. My eyes darted back up to her face, but she was already turning around, her hand on the light switch.

[***]

We were lying in bed under the covers with just the soft bluish tinge of a TV glow for company.

"Did you want it anywhere?" I asked, holding the controller.

"Oh, I don't care, put on one of those channels with some music. Just something to help me fall asleep."

I tried to remember what kind of music she liked best, maybe impress her, soften her a little. "I could just put something on my iPod," I said.

"No, I like the TV on. It's fine from the TV. I don't have anything special in mind. Besides, I doubt there's much on your iPod to help me sleep."

"I never knew you had trouble sleeping."

"There's a lot about me you don't know," she said.

"Yeah, like what?" I asked.

"Like I'm very private and I don't like my children asking personal questions about me," she said.

It was going real well, I thought. I sighed. Nothing would be happening here tonight. Wow. Just wow. After everything tonight, we'd be doing nothing but listen to music, trying to fall asleep. But what was I expecting, and what did I want? Was I hoping to take advantage of her in her somewhat drunken and goofy state? I'd never taken advantage of a girl in my life. Girls simply came to me. But this was no girl. She was my mother. What the hell was I thinking? I almost told her she should just go back to her own room.

"I'm sorry to hear about your insomnia," I said.

"It's not quite that . . . Just put on some soft rock, you know, soft pop, stuff." She turned her head to me. "This was your idea, Owen. I can't do everything for you."

I laughed. "Maybe if I gave you a massage, or something, that would help you sleep."

"Ha! Ha! 'Or something.' That's wonderful. No," she said turning on her side and faced me. I was starting to get used to having someone in the bed with me, and just lying next to her. I seemed to be able to feel every flinch and tic and move from her body in a variety of vibrations emanating from the mattress. It was very exciting knowing everything I was feeling was coming from her, right there, right in front of me.

"You can give me a massage some other time, like when I really need it." She turned on her back again. "Just . . . that's fine." The music was playing. Meaningless music, just the sort of stuff that put you to sleep.

It could well have been Michael Bublé. I simply didn't care. She was close, just a few inches away. I could feel the warmth of her body radiating ever so slightly under the covers, could smell her lovely fragrance. It was all there, just within an arm's reach, all for the taking, but I was frozen.

I looked over. Her eyes were shut and she seemed to be breathing steadily. Her chest was calmly rising and falling. My God, had she actually fallen asleep?

I almost jumped when she spoke.

"Are you going to be looking at me all night?" she asked. "Because that will totally freak me out. I won't get a wink of sleep if you do that."

"No. No. I just—"

"You just what?"

"Do you always sleep with your bra on?" I said, just for something to say. I liked it now that I'd said it, congratulated myself for being so quick and I went with it, but I wasn't expecting much. "I mean, that can't be comfortable."

She laughed, genuinely smiling to herself.

"I wasn't trying to be funny," I said.

"I'm sure you weren't," she said, all smiles.

"Why don't you take it off? I mean, it's not like I haven't seen, you know, your breasts before."

She smiled more broadly. "You always were a little glutton, Owen. Always trying to bite off more than you could chew."

"Well, I'm sure that wouldn't be a problem now," I said, smiling back at her, trying not to be too lewd, but trying also not to hide my intentions. It was an impossible balance, but I had to try. I was sure she thought I was little more than a brat.

"I'm sure it wouldn't. I'm sure you could take big bites out of me now, you big lug." She turned her face to me.

"You want to see my tits, is that it? You want to see them?"

I nodded in mock eagerness. She couldn't help giggling.

"Well, then say that, buddy," she said. "Don't go on with some ridiculous Freudian infant breast feeding scenario. Don't tell me cheesy stories how you're looking out for my comfort when all you really want is to see my tits."

"Well, for starters," I said.

Her faced turned more serious. "For starters?" she said slowly.

I returned her stare. I nodded, this time without any hint of mockery or humor.

"Why are we here, Owen?"

She had me there. Why were we? My heart sank. I had nothing in response.

"Why did you want me in bed with you?" she asked.

"I don't know. I just never want this night to end. But I don't know."

"Are you that horny that you need to see your mother's tits, 'for starters'? You haven't had enough fun this summer—you think I don't know about all the girls—you need to play games with me?"

I shook my head.

"Well, then what is it?"

"I feel very close to you now," I said quietly, and I almost heaved with all the emotions swelling inside me. I knew what I was saying now was absolutely the truth. This woman and I were meant to be together somehow. I'd never felt so in tune with anyone before. I just wanted to be with her.

"What? Turn down the music," she said.

I turned down the music.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I said I feel very close to you. I have . . . I don't know. I just need to be here with you."
That softened her. "I feel the same, sweetheart, but . . ." She seemed to be struggling what next to say. "Oh, what the hell," she said and she sat up. She reached behind and almost instantly the bra was tossed to the floor.

They were jutting out, gorgeous and full. I couldn't believe a forty-one year-old woman's tits could be so firm and pert. They swayed somewhat, but hardly moved as she breathed. It was unbelievable. My only regret was that I couldn't see them in a full light. The blue tinge of the TV was everywhere. The nipples were definitely darker, but I couldn't tell whether they were brown, or blood red, or pink. I wanted to move closer.

"You're beautiful," I said.

"Thank you," she said and scooted down to lie flat again. Her tits jangled and jumped as she did. She pulled the blanket over her chest. "Okay," she said. "That's that. That's all you get. That's for starters, that's for enders, that's forever. Nothing more. Do you understand?" She wasn't looking at me. She was staring straight up at the ceiling.

She was having a conversation with herself, I thought. She was telling herself about limits, reminding herself of who she was and who I was.

"Please let me touch them. Please," I said, hoping to press her while she was still engaged, and maybe even a little uncertain, in the middle of this inner conflict.

"No," she said.

"Please."

She said quietly, "You'll want to suck on them after that. No."

"But you just said I should ask for what I wanted and not play games."

"Yes, I want you to be direct, but that doesn't mean you'll be rewarded by getting something I have no intention of giving you. All you need to know is that I've thought about it, and the answer is, No."

"No?"

"No."

"Then let me just hold you," I said.

"Hold me?"

"Yes, you know, cuddle with you."

She laughed now. "You're going to cuddle with me, but not touch my breasts, is that the deal, the new line in the sand?"

"Well, I mean, my arm will touch them, probably, but, you know, not my hand. I mean, it's not the same thing. It would be like collateral damage, you know."

She laughed. "Owen . . ."

"Or you can rest on my shoulder, whichever you're more comfortable with, you know? Then, they'll be up against me, but I won't be touching them, okay?"

"Where does it end, Owen?"

"That's it. I promise. There's nothing more—"

"Like this? Is this what you want?" she said suddenly. She grabbed my arm, and with strength I would never have given her credit for, she pulled me on top of her.

I was lost for a split second. We were a tangle of limbs and pressing, very warm flesh. I was completely discombobulated, but realized soon enough where I was. I was lying between my mother's spread thighs, my chest mashing down hard against her marvelous tits, my cock pressed against her soft mound. We seemed to have fused together when, just five second ago, the distance between us had felt like light years.

I couldn't help gasping as I looking down at her beautiful, but heart-wrenchingly grim face.

"Go ahead," she said, somewhat breathless herself now. "Kiss and suck all you want." I began to lower my head. She grabbed my head. Her hands were trembling. "Just one thing," she said. "Listen."

I slowly nodded.

"Listen carefully. Just one thing. Your underwear stays on and so does mine. You even think about that, I will kick you out of this bed. Got it? I will kick you out of this house. I'm not sure I could forgive myself or you. You got me?"

I nodded.

"Say it," she said.

"Okay, I get it," I said softly. "Our underwear stays on."

She released my head and stopped me again just as I was about to kiss her for the first time on the mouth. She shook her head. "Not that either. I don't ever want our kisses to be weird. That's just something I don't want to do. This isn't some one-night stand, my love. We have the rest of our lives together and I never want us to confuse this with our real life."

I lowered my head, thinking about her tits, her neck, her jaw, her sternum, her ass, her everything. Anything I could get away with I would. I would be a looter at GameStop taking advantage of a natural disaster, civil order askew, chaos reigning. I would take every liberty she granted and those she might not have ever anticipated. It had just dawned on me that my mother didn't much like talk and negotiations. She'd wanted action, and when she saw that I was too chicken shit to make the first move, she'd taken matters in hand, literally, and pushed along the program. I was grateful to her. Or maybe she was just messing with me. Or maybe she had no idea what the hell she was doing. I certainly didn't know. I didn't give a shit. She was under me, as vulnerable and as open as any woman pinned down by a man.

She was mine.

Forcing a gasp from her, I started to suck on her tits directly, big mouthfuls with tongue lapping and running circles around her nipples, first the right and then the left like a parched man at a desert water hole. The response of her nipples was excellent. She obviously had sensitive tits. They grew erect almost at touch and seemed to dance and tremble in my mouth. I kept sucking. No more games, I kept telling myself. No more fucking games. She moaned with each lick and flicker, loved when I opened my mouth as wide as possible and sucked in almost half her tit, dragging it up before gently lowering it flat again. I could feel her undulating underneath me, moving her hips, could feel the heat now pressing and pushing up against my cock, which

remained somewhat flaccid, probably still in shock at recent developments, but I took my time. My cock would make its appearance when it was ready. It was just starting to catch up. Now these fantastic tits and her elegant neck were more than enough to keep my attention.

As I licked and sucked, and groped and fondled, she kept whispering, "Don't leave any marks, baby. Try not to please."

"No marks," I gasped. "No marks."

She groaned in a way she hadn't yet, and I was puzzled for just a second when I realized that my cock was very erect now. It was absolutely gorged in lust and huge in seeking access to her. I'd been riding her, rubbing and pushing at her soft channel between her thighs without even knowing it and my cock was pulsing with need for her. I felt her hands at my ass, guiding and pushing me into her, trying to manipulate my movements, using me to get off. Have at it, I thought. Enjoy. And then I thought, hands on ass is in-bounds. If she could do it, so could I. I didn't hesitate. I reached down and grabbed her upper thigh and then reached underneath to the mashed down flesh of her ass. She tried to shimmy away, but I held her tight and I could sense she was about to protest, but I whispered thickly in her ear. "Your hands are on mine. You're grabbing me."

I reached down now with the other hand lower, between her now constantly writhing and sweaty globes and pulled her up, ass, thighs and all, more tightly against my cock. We seemed to be struggling against each other, escaping and capturing, gripping and grabbing, riding and rubbing.

A new sensation. I felt the back of her frantic hand flat against my stomach, at the band of my underwear. "Go ahead," I groaned. "Go ahead and grab it."

I could feel her hesitation, wanting to, but not able, and I released one of her ass cheeks and grabbed at her hand to help it along. She tried to pull it away but I held it firm. With just pro-forma resistance from her, I guided her hand lower, past the band, and to my straining cock just waiting there. I lifted my pelvis a few inches to give her hand some room. As if by instinct she simply circled it and squeezed.

"Oh, God," I moaned.

"Uhhh, nice," she hissed.

She squeezed harder, squeezed and gripped. There wasn't enough room for her to stroke, but she seemed to be rubbing herself with the back of the hand that held me in a death grip. Her hips began rotating now in tiny, tiny circles. She was whimpering.

"Let me touch you, please," I groaned.

She knew exactly what I meant. "No," she said.

I tugged her nipple in my teeth, pulling her whole left tit up. I released her nipple.

"But you're touching me," I said.

We slowed down a little.

"It's different," she said weakly.

"It's not."

"It's very different," she said, this time with more confidence.

"Then let me take my underwear off."

"No. I told you—"

"Yours stays on, I get it. We're not going to have sex, but I just can't take it anymore. Please. Let me take mine off," I begged,

She kept squeezing me.

"I'm taking them off, okay? I'm taking them off."

She kept stroking and squeezing.

I started to tug my underwear off. Her free hand instantly took to the barricades. She held my underwear up.

"Let go, come on, just let go," I pleaded, mouth full of tit.

I pulled at my underwear again. She didn't relent.

"This is crazy. I'm dying here," I said.

She nodded. It was a quick nod, and I have no idea whether she was agreeing that we were dying in our frustrated, but quite satisfying, state of dry and not so dry humping, or whether she'd acquiesced to the removal of my underwear, but I tugged and pulled and slowly, and then more, her hand seemed to give way. I pulled my underwear off, using a foot to dig and drag them away.

My cock was free. And before she could reach up and resume her grip and control of it, I pressed the length of the shaft right where I wanted, and moaned into her chest. It was one thing to feel her heat and slight dampness covered by my underwear, but now naked skin on her, I could feel that the gorgeous woman was a sticky, burning mess. Her thong had ridden high and its thin strip was lodged right between her vulva, her pussy lips lewdly splayed open and more than receptive.

As if in embarrassment at these new sensations, she turned her head away and bit her knuckle as I started sawing my way through her barely covered cunt. It was slow and delicious, the underside of my cock growing stickier and hotter by the second. A long minute seemed to pass as we absorbed ourselves in these most intimate of intimate contacts and we were both grunting with pleasure or discomfort before she said, "Just stop. Please. Just wait. It's really starting to hurt."

She pushed up against me, and I hovered above her on my knees and hands as I felt her fiddle down below, her thighs coming together and away from me and she seemed to be kicking away at the sheets, the bed bouncing with her efforts. She scooted under me again. The whole thing had taken just a few seconds, her movement like those of a graceful ballerina, so unlike my awkward earlier efforts to remove my underwear. As I lowered back atop her, I felt her warm, lean legs pressed together. I waited a second for her to open for me, make room for me, but she looked up and shook her head.

That's okay, I thought. That's okay. Just a matter of time. Like on the dance floor. Do what you did on the dance floor. I lowered my thigh between hers, and was greeted with her wetness and warmth and the almost ticklish touch of her pubic hair. I pressed my cock into her hip.

"Just like on the dance floor," I whispered down to her. "Remember how good that felt?"

She nodded and reached down for my cock, her thighs relaxing and relaxing and letting my thigh sink deeper down until my knee was resting on the mattress. I tried shifting my other thigh, but her knee, the scarred knee, jerked up and blocked me. I cursed myself. I'd moved much too fast.

"Hey, be careful," I said.

"You be careful," she said and wagged my cock as if for emphasis.

I smiled and she couldn't help grinning back at me.

She released my cock, quickly brought her hand to her mouth and slobbered on it. She reached down and grabbed my cock again and began stroking.

I moaned at the slick wetness of her touch and couldn't help from fucking in and out of her fist.

"That's it, baby," she said. "That's it."

That was her plan, I thought. She would just jerk me off, make me come on her stomach, or if she was feeling really generous on her tits, and . . . my fucking motions in her fist increased. Pull it together, I screamed at myself. Think. Think.

But, like everything tonight, it was her actions that gave me an escape route. The poor thing's beautifully long legs had wrapped around my thigh and she was trying desperately to achieve her own release. It felt wonderful—she was as sticky and burning as before and her delicate folds and soft, downy hair were mashed tightly against me—but I could tell immediately that she was getting frustrated. This wasn't working out nearly as well as she'd anticipated. A thick, hulking, even if muscular thigh, is a very poor substitute for the sort of instrument she needed right now. In her hand, and totally at her calling, she held that very instrument, made perfect through millennia of evolution for what she needed, and it was wasting away all that perfection fucking her hand while all the time she was pointing it and rubbing its head just inches from where her body really wanted it. And hadn't she just had it there, rubbing and riding its full length against her. I mean, that thin strip of lacy thong had hardly been a formidable obstacle. I could have easily pushed past it, flipped it aside, but I hadn't. I'd followed her rules to the letter. I'd been good. I was a good boy. I could be trusted. It was all so pointless and futile.

All these thoughts and more went through my mind as I tried to keep myself from coming in her fist, tried to buy myself more time to find some new tack when I felt her legs relaxing their tight grip around my thigh. She was trying to be sneaky about it, I could tell, hoping somehow I wouldn't notice. I almost felt sorry for her, but kept pretending that I was lost in my fucking motions. Her thighs began opening wider and I raised myself a little to give her more room.

Still holding my cock, she looked up at me, knew now I knew what she was up to, and I rose even more. She hesitated for just a split second before continuing. Her knee brushed by mine as she inched it away and finally it was outside my waist. I took her hand away from my cock and slowly descended to top her.

"Be good, baby," she said. "Please be good."

I lowered my cock to touch the softness of her there at her core and it felt like throbbing heat rising up from a furnace. I removed my hand.

I began sawing at her again.

Bare skin on bare skin.

"I love you," I whispered to her. She nodded. Her eyes were moist and wide open, looking right at me. She bit her lip. I lowered my face to hers. She tried to turn away, but I found her mouth and I kissed her fully on the lips for the first time. She kept trying to resist, but I kept pressing, she kept her mouth shut tight, but my lips were on hers, and soon she returned the kiss. Our tongues slowly entwined and started a delicate little duel. It was time I thought, as her tongue started stabbing deeper and deeper into my mouth. I had to have her. I didn't give a shit whether she was still conflicted, what the fuck she wanted. It didn't matter. I would never be able to live with myself if I let this opportunity pass.

I pushed down with my hips, pushed her thighs even more open with my knees and reached down between us. A smaller hand half-heartedly tried to stop me, the last remnants of her defenses, as it were, but I grabbed my cock from her hand and pushed my cock down, between her silky folds where the swollen, almost clenched entrance of my life was waiting.

I pushed in, slowly and we both gasped as the gorged head of my cock popped in. Applying just the gentlest of pressure I kept pushing, squeezing more into her, could feel her inner thighs trembling and straining with helpless grudging against my crude demand to have all of her. I pushed in more firmly. She tried to twist away, all the while whimpering, "Oh, no, oh, no, oh, no, Owen. Don't! please. Don't, baby. Oh, please, no."

Then her body, as if in shock, relented and we groaned loudly into each other's mouths. I kissed her hard, relishing her, my life, every cell of her.

I was fully inside, those final delicious inches and all, buried in her, bottomed out, my balls resting unsteadily and trembling between her sweat-streaked ass.

She released my mouth and moaned, "Oh, my God. Why? Oh, why? Oh, please, Owen, oh, please."

I started fucking Kirsten Hansen, my mother. I didn't wait. I found her mouth again, and kept fucking. Her hips and thighs gripped and squeezed and twisted and slapped underneath me. There was nothing grudging from her now.

It took great concentration. I was no virgin, but it had never been like this. My mother's body received me with a full sheathed tightness that put to shame all the teenagers before. Her body seemed to be begging and weeping for me to be inside and to remain inside. She was almost as tight at the deepest strokes shoving up into her as she was at her swollen opening coming out. And the heat. She was burning inside, as if suffering under the spell of some primal fever.

"Oh, Owen," my mother kept groaning. "Oh, Owen, oh, Owen, oh, Owen, so good, baby, so good."

I would not last long, I knew, and I couldn't help it. Without warning, my movements, her twists and turns, everything picked up speed, driven by its own volition, was being rushed to its demented ending by its own twisted logic. We rutted and strained against each other. She was moaning things, things I heard and which registered, at the time, but words and sounds I could never be able to articulate later. I seemed to be almost floating with the intensity of the physical sensations, and all the while my mind held much more firmly in place

the realization of what I was doing, the significance of it, the grounding of it: I was fucking my own mother and nothing felt so right in my life.

I began pounding into her, the mattress creaking loudly with each thrust as it gave way, again and again, to our combined weight. She was matching my movements, opening herself for every little bit of contact, leaving nothing to chance, being just as greedy and hungry as I.

It was too much. I couldn't hold out.

She felt me freeze, and I shoved balls deep into her, and we both screamed.

"Oh, fuck, fuck, fuck," I groaned so deeply from within that I thought my heart would stop. "Oh, mother, mother, mother."

"Oh, baby, oh, baby, baby, oh, baby," she was babbling. I could feel her tears streaking against my cheeks as I kissed and loved her.

Gushes seemed to be bursting out of me. . . . Three. . . . Five, six. Just bursting.

I held tight against her. It felt thick and so beautifully wicked as if we had just rooted out the very foundations of the world.

[***]

In the morning, just a few hours later.

A note on my night stand under my phone, in her neat, tight handwriting, read:

I've gone to meet your Dad and Ellie in Boston. We'll see you in a few days.

I will cherish last night more than you will ever know.

I love you, Owen.

Mom

I held the note. I curled up in bed with it, and I shut my burning eyes.

Last Summer Ch. 02

byblueboar©

Prologue: This will make little sense without reading "Last Summer" first.

[***]

"I need to talk to you about something."

My sister Ellie walked into my room, without knocking. I ignored her. I was sitting on my bed, cross-legged wasting away the afternoon playing the latest Call of Duty. In fact, my plan was to waste away as many of the next 20 or so afternoons as I could before I returned to school in mid-January. My parents were scheduled to fly to Australia the day after Christmas and would be gone for almost three weeks. My sister spent most of her time at her friend's house and when she was around she rarely bothered me. It was a big house. It would be nice to unwind a little.

"Owen."

"Shouldn't you be in school?" I said, not looking at her.

"We got out early today. Finals start tomorrow," she said. Ellie was a senior in high school. She usually had better manners. I made a mental note to keep my door locked and shut at all times now that I was back home.

"Turn off the game," Ellie said.

"As if. I just passed this stage and I'm—"

"Please, Owen," she said and I was startled. I looked up. The look on her face confirmed the sad, scared and very troubled tone of her voice.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Nothing . . . no, everything is." She was crying.

I put my controller down. "Hey," I said. "What's wrong with you?"

She sat at the edge of my bed. "There's no way of saying it nicely, so I'll just say it."

"Say what?"

"Mom's having an affair."

I stared at her for a second, my mind scrambling to reboot. I'd just returned home two days ago, after several grueling finals and a couple of ghastly papers. I hadn't slept much, hadn't eaten well, and I still hadn't shaved the more than two weeks growth on my face. This was the last thing I expected or needed to hear.

"What are you talking about?" I asked hoping I was coming across as alarmed, but not furious, even though I wanted to scream.

"Don't be mad it at me. Dad told me last night. He thinks mom's having an affair."

"Dad said that?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Wow. Last night you say?"

"Yes."

"Did he say with who?"

"Who cares with who. Someone in her office probably. God, she's having an affair. Isn't that enough?"

"He said that, someone from her office?"

"Owen, what the hell? Why do you care about the details?"

"Because I can't believe this. Mom—"

"Aren't you sick to your stomach?" she asked, now a little annoyed herself. "I mean, I didn't sleep at all last night."

"Well, I'm sorry. You just sort of dropped this on me," I said, getting up to turning off the TV. I put away the video game. "I don't know what to think. I . . . I don't know. I just can't believe this."

"Neither can I. I wouldn't have ever believed it, but, I mean, Dad wouldn't just say it if it wasn't true."

"Yeah, that . . . God . . . He must know something. Okay."

She nodded. She was already looking better. She'd gotten it off her chest, had told someone, and somehow, for her, that made it better. Then I realized why she was telling me. Of course. The poor kid has finals this week and she didn't need wild and disturbing distractions like this. She wanted to do well. I couldn't believe my father had been so thoughtless. What a moron! I mean, she had acceptances from several great schools, all involving her playing on their basketball teams, but the school she really wanted to attend, Swarthmore, hadn't yet replied. She wanted a strong showing this semester to buttress her application there.

"Alright," I said. "Well, listen, obviously, you know, you've got to focus on your finals. I'll talk to Dad. I'll try to help him."

She got off the bed. She sighed, taking a deep breath. "Thank you. I mean, I really want to try to help, but . . . it's just this week. I can deal with it after finals. I'll help you. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know, but you just don't worry about it. Go study. Don't worry about it."

"Thank you." And despite her obvious hesitation she reached forward and gave me a quick hug. "Eww," she said. "You're stinky. Shave and shower, you're disgusting."

She left, still holding her nose in her mock prissy sort of way. It was a pose she'd been favoring this past year, my mother had told me. It annoyed.

[***]

I was waiting in the kitchen pretty sure it would be my mother who returned home first. My father would probably arrive later. He was still at the University, either giving a last final or grading papers. He'd be all done after today, he'd said last night at dinner.

My mother walked in.

"Hey," I said.

My mother smiled at me. The smile was neither overly friendly nor overly hostile. It just wasn't genuine. It looked like a smile used by someone who had a lot of practice smiling for a living. She seemed distracted. It hurt to see her smiling like that. I didn't wait for her to take off her coat. She had just taken one arm out.

"Dad knows you're having an affair," I said staring at her.

Her coat dropped to the floor.

[***]

My father came home half an hour or so later. His tired look turned to alarm when he saw my mother standing in the kitchen, all color drained from her face, just two awful red speckled splotches on each cheek.

"Hey," he said. "What's wrong with you?" He gave me a quick nod of acknowledgment, mixed with confusion.

"Why don't you tell me?" my mother said. "Why don't you and your son tell me, what's wrong with me?"

My father looked at me, but I tried to avoid his eyes, then he turned to my mother.

"What are you talking about?" He said, unwrapping his scarf, taking off his ridiculous black fedora.

"I'm talking about this affair you've been telling everyone I'm having."

"Oh," my father said and put a hand out to the counter for support. "Where's Ellie?" he said.

"Ellie's at Jessica's," she said. "They're studying."

My father nodded. He turned to me. "Owen, could you please go upstairs, or I don't know, go for a drive or something."

I took a step to leave.

"You're going nowhere," my mother said turning to me. "Sit your ass at the table."

"Kirsten," my father said. "I don't want—"

"I don't give a shit what you want. I don't give a shit what either of you wants right now."

My father glared at me. "We're not going to talk about this in front of Owen. We're—"

"Why not? He knows everything. Ellie told him. He confronted me the second I got home. You know, he's watching out for the Hansen family honor."

My mother sat down across from me at the table, but refused to even look at me.

My father rubbed his eyes with one hand. "This is ridiculous. Owen, would you—"

"Why do you think I'm having an affair?" my mother asked.

"Fine," my father said. "I'll tell you. Do you really want it like this? In front of your son? If you don't care—"

"Why do you think I'm having an affair?"

"Sheera Ackerman—"

"What!" my mother screamed. "Sheera Ackerman!"

"I saw her on campus yesterday—"

"On campus?" she asked.

"She was doing some research or something. I've no idea. Whatever. We bumped into each other and you know we just started talking."

"Right. You just started talking."

"I asked her how she was and she naturally asked how you were, how everything was going. I said you were doing great and that you were really busy, you know, setting up the new office in St. Louis, how you'd been away almost every weekend since you guys sold the company."

"And she said, 'What new office in St. Louis?'" my mother said, doing a very nice impression of Sheera.

"Yes. That's exactly what she said. She said she'd heard . . . she knew nothing about any expansion in St. Louis. She said that that sounded ludicrous to her."

"Ludicrous," my mother said, rolling the word around in her mouth. "Of course, 'ludicrous'. That would be the word she used. Why not? And the fact she's not with the company any more, hasn't stepped in for even one hello since August, that didn't enter the balance in your sudden realization that I must be a slut if Sheera Ackerman implies I am, right?"

"Of course, yes. Yes. I mean, of course, I thought about that. But she said she still talked to people at the company—"

"Which people?" my mother pounced. "Who's she talked to?"

"Kirsten, I can't . . . I'm not trying to get anyone in trouble. Sheera said this was confidential and—"

"Are you out of your fucking mind? You're accusing me of cheating and . . . who . . . did . . . Sheera . . . say . . . she . . . talked . . . to?"

"Kirsten—"

"I swear to God, Nick, I will divorce you tomorrow. I will call my lawyer tomorrow. Tell me right now!"

"It was your CFO, okay? Gavin your CFO."

"And?"

"And that's it. She didn't say anyone else."

"What did Gavin my shit-fuck CFO say to Sheera?"

"Well nothing. I mean, you know, Sheera said he'd never mentioned St. Louis, and he would have if there was anything happening there."

"That's it. That's why you think I'm having an affair?" she said.

"Kirsten—"

"Why didn't you talk to Owen? He's seen me when I've been down there. Why didn't you ask him if he thinks I'm having an affair?"

"This is ridiculous. Why would I want him to think about you that way?"

"Oh, but it's okay for Ellie to think of me that way?"

"I just needed someone to talk to. I didn't even intend to say anything. It just came out and . . . this is ridiculous."

"It is. It is. This is ridiculous. Do you want to come with me right now? To my office? Come with me, and do you want to see all the documents and leases and employment agreements having to do with St. Louis? Let's go, come on."

"Kirsten, oh, my God. Enough. I'm sorry, okay. I'm sorry, but—"

"Let's go. Obviously, Sheera Ackerman's word is a lot more important than mine. She can bullshit with you for a couple of minutes and you start seeing purple pigs flying. I—"

"Kirsten, it wasn't just Sheera. I mean, I've looked at your tablet, you know, and—"

"Oh, so now you're snooping around in my tablet. Why not? Why not? Did Sheera advice you to do that? Sheera's says so, so you've got no choice, right?"

"Just—"

"Have you been, you know, checking out my underwear in the hamper too? Looking through my perfume and makeup, double checking my credit card records?"

My father shook his head and quietly said, "There was nothing in your tablet about St. Louis. That's all I'm saying. I expected to see, you know, something, an e-mail or a document, some reference and there's nothing. It just seemed odd for something that's supposedly consumed you for months."

Mom stood rim-rod tall. She walked straight to her briefcase still on the kitchen counter. Swiftly and without a hint of nerves, she pulled out the tablet. She started tapping away at it.

"Nothing? You said you found nothing?" she said. She stuck it under my father's face. My father flinched.

"Supposedly? Odd? Nothing?" she said.

My father glanced down. His eyes seemed to widen. "I didn't see any of this yesterday," he said even more quietly than before. She kept swiping away at the screen. She didn't stop. He looked up at the ceiling and sighed.

She pulled the tablet from under his face and held it to her chest as she crossed her arms, putting her weight back on one foot

She said, "Well, Nick, you know, in the real world, you know, outside of your beloved University, there's something called business secrets and strategy. I'm the head of the company and this tablet is important not only to me, but to Multi-State. I have files and e-mails in here, encrypted with encryptions and passwords you would have no clue about, lots of stuff competitors might be interested in if they got their hands on this. There's a world in this tablet you know nothing about except me and Mult-State's people. And I answer to the Multi-State CEO, not to Gavin, my CFO. That's not the way it works. He answers to me. I don't answer to a little twerp like Gavin. What he knows about the company could fit on my pinkie. We don't run that place like when Sheera and I owned it. Got it? Multi-State's public and . . . Why am I even telling you any of this?"

"I'm sorry," my father said, his voice quivering now. He tried to touch her shoulder. She jerked away. He said, his voice breaking, "Please forgive me, Kirsten. Truly, I'm so sorry. Forgive me. Please."

They looked at each other level now, my father just a bit shorter at 5'9", and I wanted to scream at my mother to do something, to touch his arm, to offer some consolation, anything to help the poor guy out. He was strangling in a tangle of rope of his own making, he'd obviously made a mistake. Accept his apology. You've won. Be gracious.

But instead, my mother turned to me. "You," she said. "Mr. Beard Boy. Do you have any questions for me, anything you want to know while you two big tough guys have me here at your mercy?"

I shook my head.

"Get up," she said, still looking at me. "You're coming with me."

I stood and looked over to my father for guidance.

"Kirsten, where are you going? We haven't even had dinner." my father said.

"Fuck dinner," she spat. "I'm packing it in. That's it. I'm quitting."

"Kirsten—"

"Why the hell am I working?" she asked the kitchen walls. "I have enough money, more than the kids and I will ever need. Why am I spinning wheels like some idiot?"

"Kirsten, what do you want me to do here? Enough, please. Let's talk. I made a mistake, a terrible, awful mistake, but—"

"Come on," mom said to me. She put on her coat. "Get dressed. I have a lot of stuff in the office I need you to pack up. Make yourself useful for once."

"Kirsten—" but my mother was already at the door to the garage and out. I followed to the door. I grabbed a random coat hanging in the closet.

My father was right behind me. I put on my boots.

"Owen," my father said, pleading, weakly grabbing my arm. "Please talk to her. Please. Talk some sense into her. Tell her I don't want her to quit her job. This is insane. She'll listen to you."

I sort of nodded, mumbled an "okay," went out the door. I found my mother in the passenger seat of her car. The garage door was already open. The car was already running.

I got in the car. I shut the car door. We backed out of the driveway. I put the car in drive. We started down the hill leading us out of the cul-de-sac.

My mother looked at me.

She brought her trembling hands to her face as she burst into tears.

[***]

I thought we'd be driving, but at the last minute my mother said we'd fly to St. Louis to get me settled into my new apartment. I had to be in school the first week of August for football camp and I was already a couple of days late. The delay was prompted by my father's need to take over a late summer class at the University from a colleague whose wife had suffered a stroke. The plan had been for him and me to drive. After he was forced to back out, I'd insisted I could do the move on my own—the apartment was fully furnished, after all—but my mother told me to stop with the martyr act. She would accompany me. She said it would have to be just a couple of days later so that she could wrap up a couple of loose ends. The transition after the sale had gone really well—she'd been working twelve, fourteen hour days for more than a week, and now only little hiccups needed to be addressed.

The hour or so flight had been fine, and I was pretty sure my mother chose to fly rather than drive because she wanted to minimize time we'd be alone. Obviously, we hadn't talked about our night together—I'd barely seen her since—but it was all I could think about. It pervaded my every waking moment and it took weird turns and angles in my dreams, almost all of them nightmarish and bloody. I was absolutely miserable. Of course, she could see it—even my father had asked me more than once whether I was okay—but she refused to let herself or me be in any position or situation in which we could acknowledge, let alone discuss, what had happened. She would even be long gone in the morning when I'd try to catch her early at breakfast and she would go nightly to her bedroom directly upon coming home late from work. More than likely, I told myself, she was coming to St. Louis to clear the air and to talk about it, finally, to tell me she loved me and to make herself feel better that everything had returned to normal so that we could all get on with our lives.

"Return to normal." Can you return to normal after something like that, something so intense and personal and, of course, depraved? The fact that we'd broken every convention, moral precept and common decency, committed a sin so fundamental and obvious that even the religious texts hardly feel the need to address it in detail meant nothing to me. I didn't believe in God, had no desire to murder my father, and I thought it would be insane to want to impregnate my mother.

In the abstract.

I knew all this in my rationale mind. Who didn't know it? But I kept stumbling up against the specifics, what I'd actually experienced with her and wanted more than anything to experience again and again and again. It had been so fucking good. Even sitting next to her on the flight, I struggled mightily to keep my eyes off her neck and face. Anything more, like looking at her tits in her tee-shirt or legs in her jeans, I was sure would bring the plane crashing down in some form of cosmic corrective. That was the problem. I couldn't look at her without thinking of how her tits had melted into and tasted in my mouth that night. Couldn't think about her without an almost visceral reminder of the smooth texture of her skin and the unbelievable tightness of her pussy. Couldn't talk to her without the sound of her voice triggering the sounds and words she'd said as she gasped and screamed when she'd climaxed. Almost as much and probably more, she was so wonderful. I was fascinated with her. No one had ever engaged me like she had. It had been magical. I thought I'd known her, but it was clear I'd just barely scratched the surface. I was obsessed with her, and wanted more of her, and she obviously regretted it terribly, despite what her note had said.

We landed and soon I was grabbing my two heavy duffle bags from baggage at Lambert. Left with little more than cursory small talk, we walked out of the crisp coolness of the airport and seemed to hit a wall of suffocating air as we stepped into the steaming sauna of St. Louis in early August.

We hailed a waiting cab, and the driver—some middle-eastern looking guy with a bushy mustache—took one of my duffle bags and stuffed it into the trunk while I handled the other one. I simply shook my head at my first impulse to shove the poor bastard to the ground for his obvious stares at my mother's legs and ass as she hurriedly took a seat in the back where I joined her just a few seconds later. Soon we were on 70, merged onto 170 and headed south. The conversation during the drive involved the driver's attempt, in a thick accent, to tell us about St. Louis—"It's nice city, just be careful. Some places dangerous"—and my mother's genuinely alarmed observations about the humidity and heat.

Past the inner suburbs of St. Louis, and we were at my building a couple of blocks off campus in less than half-an-hour. I'd found the apartment last spring after I got sick of the high-school-like gossipy-gossipy world of the dorms. I'd just wanted to be alone, no more distractions, and despite Seth Ackerman's insinuations and assumptions I had no desire to join a frat. Guys my age made me laugh.

We got out of the cab, the driver eager to help with the duffle bags. He kept smiling at her, but my mother was already walking into the building. I paid the driver, he looked disappointed, and I left him.

My mother insisting, we took the elevators to the third floor—"no way in hell am I walking up those stairs in this heat." Three doors down from the elevator I held the door open for my mother and she stepped in.

"Oh, my God," she said. "Turn on the air-conditioning. It's death in here. This is unbearable. You have air-conditioning, don't you?"

"Yes," I said and walked to the thermostat. She wasn't kidding. I was already sweating. The temperature read 94. I turned it on, set it for 68. The air soon kicked in.

"Room 303. Not bad," she said nodding as she slowly walked around. "Not bad at all."

I watched her. She was wearing a red v-neck ribbed tee-shirt with the Wash U. crest on it, and rather faded Levis, one hand in her back pocket, and very comfortable, worn tennis shoes. Her carry-on bag hung lightly on her shoulder. The tee-shirt and jeans both fit her really well, especially the jeans, and I had no idea how old they were. They might have been as old as I. If someone had walked in, they could easily have assumed that she was the student moving in or that we were a couple . . . The idea made me feel giddy. The idea of her and I living here together this year. Hanging out, just she and I, experiencing dinner together nightly, going to bed and waking up together. It was a gorgeous idea, but she wasn't twenty or even twenty-five and some girl I'd met and fallen in love with last year in my history seminar. She was my mother.

"God, you sure you turned on the air-conditioning?" she said.

"Yes."

"Well," she said turning to me. "I like the place. I'm a little surprised." She smiled and said, "Good choice." Our eyes locked for a split second and we both seemed to know exactly what the other was thinking and wanting. She quickly motioned to the duffle bags on the floor. "Take those to the bedroom. Let's get you unpacked before I pass out."

She put down her bag on the kitchen counter and wiped her forehead. She walked to the refrigerator and opened the freezer door. I grabbed my duffle bags and turned once more to watch her as she stood in front of the refrigerator. Reaching into her pocket, she grabbed a black elastic and put her hair up in a short pony-tail. Without once looking over at me, she said. "Go on, Owen. You've seen enough. I don't have all day."

[***]

When she saw me just standing at the doorway a few minutes later watching her as she unpacked, folded and filled my closet and dresser with the contents of my duffle bags, she shoo-shooed me away again.

"Just go do something," she said, real annoyance in her voice now. "I hate it when people just watch me when I'm doing something. Don't you have to set up your laptop? Go report to your coach or your captain or whatever."

"I already texted the coach and told him I was in town."

"God, I can't believe you'll have to practice in heat like that tomorrow. I can't believe I'm doing this in this heat."

I wanted so much to joke, "Well just take off your clothes," but I knew that would destroy whatever residue of unmotherly feeling she might have, if she had any—it was too soon, she was still too wound-up. Maybe later. Maybe never, something inside me screamed.

"I can help, if you want," I said.

"I'll be done in less than an hour. Just go." She looked up at me, her face quite red and softly said. "Please, Owen."

Her "please" pleased me. The softness in her voice even more. It was the first time since our night she'd hinted at feelings between us. It was an acknowledgement. She was asking me for a favor not as her son, but as something else.

Feeling a little better, I left her, plopped on the couch, turned on the TV, flipped through some channels and stopped at a "Survivorman" rerun on the Science Channel. I watched as Les Stroud suffered through his own heat stroke in a jeep while trekking through the Kalahari Desert and wondered whether I should get up to see if my mother was okay. But I could hear her humming along, singing some sappy song. She did not want my company. That couldn't have been made more obvious.

About 45 minutes later—just as she'd said—I heard her walking out of the bedroom behind me. I turned on the couch and watched as she went to the kitchen counter and grabbed her bag. She heaved a deep sigh. Face red and puffy, hair pulled back, in those tight-fitting jeans, she looked so full of life, so earthy, so fuckable.

"Well," she said looking at her watch. "I've got about two and a half hours before my flight. I need to shower. Think of somewhere to catch a quick bite to eat before I leave."

I nodded and she went into the bathroom without a second glance.

I felt a burning in my face and I had to blink rapidly for several seconds. Forget fuckable. It was obvious she had no desire to even talk. She wanted away from me as quickly as possible. Not only had I lost a great friend, and an incredible lover, it was looking more and more as if I'd lost my mother.

[***]

I vowed to confront her as soon as she got out of the bathroom. It was totally unfair for her to be treating me like this, as if I was a little kid and worse a burden she had to unload before she could get on with the important things in her life: her husband, her daughter and her work. But then I knew, deep down, that I'd always been an outsider in the family, the odd man out. She was treating me the same as she'd treated me all my life. Our night together had been an aberration. Nothing more. A strange, odd catastrophe had befallen her, but she was resilient. She would recover. The woman had never been comfortable around me. Maybe I was a little too much like her, too prone to being sullen, too cynical about others.

Screw it, I thought. Am I crazy? Why am I doing this to myself? Go get something to eat with her, see her off in her taxi and it would be done. Why would I want some ridiculous confrontation? See her safely off and that was that. I would never think about her again. Such bullshit. But then why had she written the note if what had happened that night meant so little to her? I was sure it had meant something. Maybe it had, maybe that night had opened some fissure in her life, but it was obvious now she'd ruthlessly shut that fissure and would never let it open again.

The door to the bathroom opened and she stepped out, rubbing dry her hair with a big towel.

My breath caught.

Un-fucking-believable.

She was wearing a blue and white striped mid-drift tank top and light gray, almost bluish yoga pants. Both very tight, hugging and gripping to her every curve, the yoga pants clearly sheer and clearly leaving little to the imagination. They were indented into her pussy with what had to be nothing less than determination as if they had been pulled up real tight to show off.

I tried hard to be silent, but I must have spluttered or made a noise. "What?" my mother asked looking up from under her towel.

"Nothing," I said and swallowed.

Maybe my mother was schizo, maybe she just liked playing games with me, maybe this sort of flaunting turned her on and she needed it to launch her to the next stage. I had no idea, and I didn't care. I simply looked at her. It was all I could do not to run to her and grab her. That's not what she wanted to now. She wanted to make me look at her. I did and nothing more. I simply looked at her.

"Decided what to eat?" she asked.

"Pizza, sandwiches, Afghan, Mexican" I said not knowing, really, what the hell I was saying. "I don't know. There are plenty of places nearby."

"That's a good idea," she said. "Order something up and have them deliver or, better, go pick it up. I feel so cool and refreshed. I don't want to go outside in that death out there. Get me a salad. You know, whatever." She waved her hand flippantly towards me at the "whatever".

She turned lightly, her pants ridiculously pasted like a second skin into the crevice and onto the mounds of her full, luscious ass. She stood there like that for long seconds. Then she returned to the bathroom with her towel. This time I didn't hesitate.

I got up, walked to the bathroom and stepped in. It was still steamy from her shower.

She looked up from the mirror and seemed surprised. "You ordered already?" she said.

I shook my head and licked my dry lips.

"Well, go and do that, if you don't mind, dear. I'm hungry."

"Later," I said.

"Later?" she said, and God damn me if she wasn't teasing.

"Oh, mother," I groaned and she shrieked as I pulled her to me.

"Owen," she said, protesting and tried to twist away. "Go order, baby."

I kissed her neck, grabbed one of her tits, reached down between her legs and she squirmed.

"Owen," she gasped.

I had to feel her pussy. She hadn't let me that night and I'd regretted it terribly. My hand skirted under her pants, stretching the delicate fabric. She had nothing underneath! No wonder her pussy had seemed to be winking at me. She was bare and shaved. Completely and freshly shaved. Incredible! She'd just shaved! Right now, in the shower, not fifteen minutes ago. Oh, God. This was all premeditated, I thought. She's known exactly what she's been doing. Oh, I loved her so much.

I pushed my hand lower. Her thick, fleshy vulva quickly enveloped my middle finger. I massaged for just a second, gently getting the feel of her, gently nudging at what I hoped was her clit, before shoving my finger inside.

"Oh," she moaned.

I needed to fuck her. I needed to fuck this strange phantom-like creature before she decided it was time for her to go, before she changed her mind, and—poof!--dematerialized.

With my free hand, I pulled and ripped at my buckle, my shorts, my underwear. Everything fell to my feet. My cock sprang up.

I could hear myself breathing, could hear her whimpering as my finger plugged into her sopping, sucking wetness again and again.

I tugged, and pushed down her yoga pants. Her beautiful ass shimmied and twisted to help me. They simply peeled away down, trapping her knees together.

I grabbed my cock, pushed it between her ass cheeks and then lower.

She gasped as I pulled my hand away from her pussy.

I shoved where my finger had been, and we both screamed as I could feel her being turned outside in as my cock stretched her open.

Groaning, she slapped one hand against the mirror for support.

I pulled almost all the way out before shoving it back in, even harder, this time much deeper. She screamed even louder. I stopped.

I held still for a good half minute to keep from coming right away. The shock of it, yet again. Never in my life. So fucking tight. She turned and pushed against me, but I held her firm.

Just the sound of our breathing.

"Oh, mom," I moaned.

Slick now with her juices, I started fucking her, each stroke getting smoother and smoother, deeper and deeper.

"Owen, Owen," she groaned, fucking back, shoving and twisting her bubble ass blatantly against me.

"Oh, I missed you," I moaned. "I missed you, I missed you. God, I love you."

"I know," she said. "I know. Me too. How I missed you. Oh, I missed you."

I held her sweaty, full hips as best I could and I fucked wildly into her, and realized one of my hands, the middle finger, was still slick with her juices. I pushed my middle finger into her mouth, pulling her head back to me as if I'd hooked her.

"Ow-nnn," she mumbled.

"Now you know," I babbled. "It's so good. Now you know what I know."

"Now, I know," she gasped, licking round and round my finger. "So good, baby. So good."

"Oh, fuck," I yelled.

I was going to come. It just couldn't be helped.

"Fuck me, baby," she mumbled, licking and pulling at my finger, trying to tear it off my hand. "Fuck me till I die. Oh, Owen, fuck me."

"Ahhhhhhh," I groaned and slammed into her one last time, and she squealed as I pushed violently into her and jammed into what felt like very little room to jam.

Frozen against her, I pulsed and gushed and pulsed and gushed. I never wanted it to end.

"I love you," she cried out as her pussy clamped and convulsed all around and about, squeezing and massaging from the gorged head all the way down.

I thought I would collapse.

"I love you. Oh, Owen, I love you. I love you," she kept saying as she shook and trembled, and I knew it was true.

I stepped away from her and she gasped as my cock plopped out, bringing with it a torrent of my come.

I turned her around and kissed her full on her trembling mouth, pushing her back higher onto the sink. I knelt and peeled away the yoga pants completely. Rising, I pushed her legs open and she moaned, "Oh" when she looked down and saw my semen still dripping out.

I shoved into her oozing pussy and she screamed my name.

I lifted, carried her out of the bathroom, her arms and legs wrapped powerfully around me, her head draped like a sleeping child's on my shoulder.

She missed her flight and saw me off early the next morning to football practice, where I surprisingly didn't die in the horrible heat and from dehydration—the sixth, final time, I'd come practically dry inside her, I was utterly spent. I felt tired, really sore, and a bit out of shape, but I held out just fine, probably better than most of the guys there. But then they weren't still going on strong with the high of having fucked their mother all the night before.

I had hoped she'd still be at the apartment waiting for me when I returned two hours later from practice—she'd said she wouldn't be, but I'm a hopeless optimist in that way—and when I realized she had, indeed, left I started panicking. In fear and dread, I searched my bedroom for another good-bye note or any indication of the sort she'd left after our first night. There was none.

There was nothing from her, no hint, no call, no text, no e-mail, nothing until three nights later, on Friday night, when she called and asked whether I was home, did I have any plans. I was confused and asked her what she was talking about. Look out your window she said.

And there she was. Outside my building in a taxi waving up at me.

She said she would love to come up, but didn't want to disturb me if I was busy. And the tone, the teasing. I buzzed her up.

I opened the door and there she was in a light, flimsy summer dress, her hair like some sexy 60s dancer and held up by a matching green head band. I grabbed her, pulled her in, planted my mouth on hers just as she began to yell and walked her back and back and back into my bedroom, all the while caressing and grabbing at her tits, her ass, her pussy, anything I could get my hands on.

Searching behind me, I sat on the bed and hugged and caressed her ass, pulling her to my face as I pulled up the hem of her dress. She had underwear on this time, but barely, the thong just covering her puffy pussy. She screamed, genuinely alarmed, and tried to push me away when I dug my mouth onto her mound.

"No, Owen," she moaned. "No, baby, not that, please. It's just—"

But I was already lapping away at her, had already pulled her thong aside, and was dragging my tongue between the full, pulpiness of her lips and gently nibbling. Soon she was writhing in my hands, her ass clenching and trembling, and helplessly pushing her pussy against my mouth. After a particularly harsh shove of my tongue and a high-pitched squeal from her she grabbed my head and pulled at my hair. She was pulling hard. It hurt, but she was desperate.

"Just fuck me," she gasped. "Use my pussy, baby. Just fuck me hard. That's why I'm here."

I pushed her onto the bed, struggled and tugged at my shorts and turned to top her. She was more than ready, her legs open wide and her eyes looking wildly up at me in anticipation, tits and bodice of her dress, head band and thong and all, everything askew and slutty.

I shoved it into her and moaned as I watched the baby blue of her eyes roll up into her skull.

She visited the next weekend and the one after that, almost every weekend that semester. If I could, I'd borrow someone's car and pick her up at Lambert, otherwise she just took a taxi to the apartment. As soon as we got in, or I greeted her at the door, we'd tear at each other's clothes, quickly undress and then take and give pleasure, sometimes brutally, but mostly softly and lovingly.

I fucked her on the couch, on the floor, against the refrigerator, in the shower and more than once on the balcony outside. We marked that apartment marvelously. I found that she loved her pussy licked—she resisted like crazy as she had the first time I'd pressed her, thought it was just a little too perverse for me to be doing that to her, but she soon relented and towards the end we'd sometimes spend half-an hour or more in a 69 moaning embrace. It was about then too that she introduced me to what she called tantric sex, where we'd be coupled and hardly moving, simply listening to music, her music, surrounded by candles, kissing softly and looking into each other for an hour at a time before the sensations and licks became too much and we'd erupt into a violent, throbbing finish.

It goes without saying, of course, that it wasn't all just sex, although most it was. We'd go out to eat, even go out to prospective office space for her company, take wonderful walks, and simply kiss in the park, totally anonymous, totally together, totally at ease.

I was in love.

[***]

"What have I done?" my mother kept moaning.

I was just driving down the semi-rural road, no destination in mind. My mother had stopped crying about a minute ago, but that part had been easy. She'd gotten it all out, the anxiety and tension she'd been feeling since I'd accosted her in the kitchen when she'd just arrived home from work. Her interrogation of me after that, again and again, for precisely what Ellie had said my father had told her. Her ruthless calculations and inferences. I was left awe-struck by the speed and power of her mind under such stressful conditions. But it

was obvious she had it all worked out before my poor father got home, knew exactly what she'd say and how she'd say it. She'd probably anticipated his every word and action. It was a brilliant and frightening ambush. I couldn't help it. It turned me on. I would have given anything to fuck her right now.

There were bright gold Christmas lights and decorations draped tastefully on all the big houses as we reached a more residential area. A light snow was falling.

There would be no fucking tonight. Probably never again. Now the hard part would begin.

"Dad believes you, you know, that you're not having an affair," I said. "He feels like shit."

"Oh, my God. Are you listening to yourself? Believes me? Affair? This is a million times worse than any affair. I'm fucking his son, our son."

"It's not worse than an affair. I mean, you still love him right? You're not going to divorce him, are you?"

She turned and studied me for a long moment. "You sit there and you tell me you don't feel any guilt about us? You don't feel bad at all for your father? What sort of monster are you?"

"I don't think of it like that."

"You don't."

I shook my head.

"Well, of course, you wouldn't," she said. "Oh . . . What do you think about it then? How do you not feel any remorse?"

"I just don't see how it has anything to do with him, you know."

"You're fucking his wife and your mother, asshole! What else can have anything more to do with him than that?" I stopped at a light. I turned to her. "You're still having sex with him, aren't you?" I asked.

"What?"

"Well, it's all out in the open now, I mean just what I said. Are you still having sex with dad?"

"Owen, shut up," she said dismissively.

"It's a simple question. Are you having sex with dad?"

"Go," she said motioning to the light. It had turned green.

"Mom, I'm not trying to be prurient. I'm—"

"Prurient'. Is that a word you learned from your SAT prep way back? You just keeping it in reserve to spring on people you want to impress?"

"Mom—"

"Who the fuck says 'prurient', anyway?" she said, with a bitter laugh. "Why not say 'pervert' or 'sicko'?"

"Fine. Fine, I'm not trying to be a pervert. Is that better?"

"Yes, much better."

"Well?"

"Pervert son of mine, I'm having sex with your father. Satisfied?"

"Even after us?"

"Yes, even after our filth."

I let the insult ride even though it hurt terribly. Filth. I had a feeling there would be many insults coming my way during this drive. That's how my mother got when she was deeply upset. She simply lashed out. Almost blind. And I couldn't blame her. We were both responsible, me just as much as her. In fact, it was deeply satisfying and I took some pride that she wasn't blaming herself, entirely, that she saw me as an equal co-conspirator, just as guilty as her. It made what we'd done a lot more intimate and meaningful. There was nothing one-off about us.

I asked, after a minute or so of silence, "Well, then, if you're still having sex with him, how does that change his life? I mean, as a practical matter. I mean, like I said, you still love him, don't you?"

"Yes, Owen, I love him."

"And you don't plan to leave him, do you? You know, divorce him or anything?"

"No, I don't intend to divorce him."

"Well, then, how is our being together worse than you having an affair with someone you might wind up falling in love with or leave him for? That's an affair. That's not us."

"Owen. I'm your mother, that's why it's worse. That's why it's the most awful thing I could have done to him. Didn't you hear me in there? Didn't you listen to all my lies? Did you not see how cruel I was to him?"

"What lies? You're not having an affair and you are setting up an office in St. Louis. So far as it mattered, you told the truth."

"I've barely touched St. Louis. I've spent all my time with you down there—Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Let me get this straight. For you, us, you and me together, it really doesn't matter all that much to you, does it?"

"How can you say that?"

"I'm not saying it, you are."

"I didn't say anything of the sort. I said, so far as it affects dad's life, as long as he never knows, you and I are not an issue."

"Just park somewhere," she said. "You're starting to swerve. You're going to get us killed. That might be the answer."

I took a right off a main road and I parked the car in a quiet little road leading to a half-finished subdivision. My mother's eyes were shut and her head was leaning heavily against the headrest. I turned off the headlights.

"How many girls have you slept with?" she asked, her eyes still shut.

"I don't know. I mean—"

She slapped her forehead, laughing bitterly again. "That's all I am to you. I'm just some older broad you're banging."

"No, no, no. What are you talking about? Since this summer, since us, is that what you're saying, you're the only person I've been with. The only one."

"But you—" She was looking at me, probably trying to see whether I was telling the truth.

"You asked how many girls I slept with in my life, not whether I've been cheating on you."

"Owen, it just can't continue. It just can't. It's so wrong. I feel so dirty. I can't believe we're even debating it. It's got to stop."

"I don't feel dirty and I don't want it to stop."

"Owen, we have to both agree to this. You have to promise me. I have to have you agree with me."

"You do what you want, I'm not agreeing to that."

"But—"

"I'm just not."

"Okay," she said leaning forward. "Let's just talk practicalities. You're in some practicality phase in your life, now, it seems, right? That's all you've said to me. Practical this, practical that. Okay?"

"Fine. Tell me what's wrong with us together, as a practical matter?"

"Well, for one, that you're talking about "cheating" on me. Don't you know how crazy that is?"

"Why is that crazy?"

"Because you're not even twenty, kid. You need to be with girls your own age."

"Why?"

"This is insane. How do I get through to you?"

"Mom, I'm not looking to marry you or something. We're not going to start a family."

"No, we're not," she said. "I have a family."

"But—"

"But that's just it, though, what if your soul mate is out there just waiting for you and you miss her because of me. Don't you see how awful that would be, as a 'practical matter'?"

"Mom, if you're saying you're keeping me from finding the woman who will have my children, that's crazy. Like you said, I'm not even twenty. I want to go to medical school. I probably won't get married until I'm, I don't know, at the earliest 27 or 28."

"You're going to be a very bad man, Owen Hansen. Very bad. You can rationalize anything. I can't believe you think like that. I can't believe you're my son. You're lucky you're my son. I can't believe I was fucking such an asshole."

"Yeah, yeah, that's great. I'm an asshole. I'm dirty. I'm filthy. I'm a fucking pervert."

"Owen . . ."

I turned to her. "I'm being realistic. You want to know practicalities. I'll give you practicalities. I did better, much better, this semester than I did last year. I played better football. I was more focused. Just a 3.6 last semester, but straight A's this. Everything's clicked like crazy."

"Because of me?"

"Absolutely, because of you."

"No—"

"You bring out the best in me."

She started crying again, much more softly. "Owen," she moaned.

"And I didn't waste any time this semester fooling around, you know, chasing this girl or having to play head games with that one. I've never felt so focused."

"Owen."

"It's simply the truth."

"You did great without me before, baby. I have nothing to do with it."

"You have everything to do with it."

"You want us to continue, then?" she asked, sounding exhausted and frightened. "Even after seeing your father like that today. Seeing what this is doing to me. You want to continue?"

"No, I don't want to continue, not if you're going to be miserable. I don't want that."

"We need to both agree to this Owen. I love you too much to just . . . God, listen to me. I can't believe we're even talking like this."

"Mom, I—"

She turned to me. "You have to know something, Owen."

"What's that?" I asked, a little unsettled by the look on her face.

"Your dad left his first wife because she was cheating on him."

I was lost for a few seconds. "I didn't know that." I said. "I thought—"

"No, we never told you or Ellie because we didn't want you guys to feel negatively about your half-siblings."

"Well, that didn't work too well. The bobbsey twins despise us."

She winced. She hated when we called dad's twins "the bobbsey twins" even though she'd started it.

She said, "They think your dad just left their mother for a younger woman, you know, that he was fooling around with one of his students and knocked her up, that I stole him from them, you know. I doubt they know that your dad and their mother were more or less separated when your dad and I met. The twins had just turned five at the time."

"Why didn't dad ever say anything? I mean—"

"Because we didn't want there to be more bad blood than there already was. You know, your poor dad worked his ass off to get tenure here. They only took him on as an assistant professor even though he'd just gotten tenure in Minnesota. They had him on probation even after he got tenured here. My God, he just stopped wearing suits and ties to his classes a year ago, he was so scared the school would think he was slacking or maybe taking advantage of students, who knows? Just about everything he made went to pay child support for years and years and . . . believe me, it wasn't easy. I'm sure we would have had more kids, but it was impossible."

"Well, obviously, you helped him."

"Sure, I did. I did everything I could at the start. That's why it was so hard starting the company with Sheera. It took a good five year for that to get off the ground. We were just nothing secretaries with a couple of stupid contacts and well you know the rest. I mean, I transcribed medical records for years on the side to help pay for everything."

"I remember that, all those little cassettes lying around the house all over."

"Yes, you slobbered over more than one little cassette."

"I wonder what those medical records looked like after I got through mauling them."

She smiled and touched my face. "Just listen," she said. "Okay? Just listen. It would kill your father if he knew I was cheating on him, too. It's already happened to him once. And if he found out I was cheating with you, it would be . . . I feel sick just thinking about it."

"I don't see him finding out."

"One way or another, if we keep this up, he will. He just will. Look how crazy he got just on Sheera's stupid speculation and not finding anything on my tablet. Imagine, if he saw you looking at me weird, or caught us . . . I don't know, kissing. He's never stopped feeling guilty about being with me. He's always known it was crazy, with us fifteen years apart. You think he doesn't feel bad how people look at us sometimes. And then his son . . ."

"I get it. I understand."

"Do you? Do you know how what you and I are doing could destroy everything? Not just your father, not just me. Not just even you. Think about poor Ellie. It's just too . . . I mean, how can we rationalize it when so much is at stake? How can we be that cruel, so selfish to people we say we love?"

"We're careful. I mean, we haven't, you know, been together in the house since the first time. I mean . . . I don't know why things can't go on just like they've been going this semester. I mean, not as frequently, obviously, but, you know. . ."

She shook her head and leaned back against the seat again. I watched the snow fall. We'd been out here now for almost an hour maybe. I could hear my ears ringing, could feel my heavy breathing, the sudden sharp cold of the sweat on my back and under my armpits. My forehead felt clammy and I noticed now too that my hands were trembling.

It hit me. My body had known long before I did. I was losing her. The person I made happier and who made me happier than anyone had, anyone I could ever imagine would. She was lost.

My mother asked somewhat absently, it seemed, just to fill the silence, "How many girls have you slept with?"

"You mean, in my life?"

"Yes, in all of your almost twenty years. How many?"

"About eight, maybe."

"About? Maybe? You've forgotten some of them?"

"There might be one or two times I might forget. It was no big deal, believe me."

She turned to me. "I can't understand how you're so casual about it."

"That's just the way things are now. It's rare to get serious about someone. You just get stoned or drunk and hook-up. The girls seem to want it that way even more than the guys."

"Right. I've heard about that. All the 'Hook-ups.' 'Booty Calls.'"

"Yeah, something like that. How about you, were you a virgin when you met dad?"

"No."

"Who was your first?"

"Some creep from high school. He sort of took advantage of me—"

"You were raped?"

"I was stupid."

"He raped you?"

"No, what did I just say? I thought he cared about me when it should have been the most obvious thing that he didn't. No one else had ever paid attention to me, so I just sort of—"

"But you were a great basketball player."

"Girls basketball. Do you think anyone cared then about girls basketball? Do you think anyone cares now?"

I saw her point, but said nothing.

She continued, "I was just too big and we were too poor, so it wasn't like I was anything special. No one really asked me out. I was pretty anonymous and so this loser must have seen that, asked me out, took my virginity on the fourth date, and never talked to me again."

"Are you serious?"

"Of course, I am."

"Do you and dad, you know, I mean, so you guys have sex a lot?"

"Owen, please."

"No—"

"It's none of your business."

"Well, like what, once or twice a week?"

"No, Owen, not once or twice a week."

"Well, I mean—"

"Once a month, maybe. Okay? Is that what you wanted to hear? I cannot believe you're comparing yourself to some 57 year-old guy. You're quite the stud there. It's just . . ."

"Well, I just don't get it then."

"Get what?"

"Our having sex is even less relevant to him than I first supposed. He's not with you for sex. He's way past that, it sounds like. He's with you for your love and affection, right?"

"Owen, will you just stop? I can hardly think here."

"Mom, what really matters to him is that he knows that you'll be with him for the rest of his life. Will our being together change that? How does it change that? It probably makes that stronger. Are you going to abandon him and run off with me if he had a stroke tomorrow?"

"I cannot believe you. Who the hell did you take after?"

"You know I'm right."

"You're not, Owen. You have been and will never be more wrong in your life."

"So how many guys have you slept with, then?" I asked turning on the headlights and getting into an empty drive-way before I put the car into reverse. I straightened it out and took a left at the main road. The snow was coming down more heavily. I accelerated carefully.

"Mom?" I wanted my question answered. I needed to know.

"God help me," she said, "You're my third."
"Just three guys? That's it?"
"That's one too many . . . Slow down."

[***]

I could see my father's relief when my mother and I returned home empty-handed. No boxes from her office, no nothing. If my mother hadn't been next to me I'm sure he would have given me a high five for having done such a good job of talking her off from the ledge.

It seemed the poor guy had gone out himself while we were gone and gotten sushi and rolls for dinner, piles and piles of it, my mother's favorite. When we walked in he was setting the soy sauce and pickled ginger on the table. He looked up, swallowed, and continued, setting the plates and napkins and opening our bottles of Sapporo.

Watching him, seeing everything he'd done already, my mother started crying again.

"I'm sorry," she said to him. "I'm so sorry for being so hysterical."

She reached for him.

He joined her and held her tightly to him. He was now crying too. "No. No. I don't know what got over me. I just . . . I feel awful. Please forgive me, Kirsten. I'm the one who's sorry."

They kissed hard and held each other just as Ellie walked in the door. Seeing them, she dropped her backpack and she ran sobbing to join them, coat still on, snowflakes still clinging to it. The three held each other as they shook and heaved.

I turned to the sushi and started dividing it, poured out the miso soup and reached for the rice.

In bed that night, I didn't sleep. My parents, I was sure, had long ago finished their make-up session of love-making, and I was happy for them, and disgusted with myself for even thinking about it, that it even registered, for feeling jealous, for feeling sick and so fucking exhausted.

I was grateful that the two would be leaving in a few days for the other side of the world.

[***]

Ellie and I dropped off my parents at the airport and were returning home. Traffic was ridiculous coming down here and it looked even more horrible now.

"You didn't have to come," Ellie said. "I would have been fine by myself."

She would not have. Like my mother, she wasn't a very good driver, got really anxious in heavy traffic.

Sometimes, the two were so absent-minded, so anxious, their driving bordered on reckless. Red lights and stop signs took on relative terms. I knew my parents had been relieved I'd be driving today.

Ellie continued, "But thank you for doing it. It really made mom and dad happy."

I nodded, looking in the rearview mirror to change into the left lane. I took a quick glance over my shoulder and made the lane change. Several cars honked.

"That was scary, though, wasn't it?" she asked.

"Nah, just push on in. You just can't hesitate. Once you commit, just go."

"Mom and dad, dummy. I mean, you know . . . that was scary."

"Oh, right. Well, I was never as convinced as you, if you remember," I said and turned on the radio.

She turned it off.

"Come on, Ellie, give me break. I really don't want to talk about this, okay? Everything's fine now, you know. It was just a big misunderstanding. They're happy. You're happy. We're all happy. We're a big happy family."

"You don't sound very happy."

"That's right Ellie, I was dying for mom and dad to divorce."

"No, no. Not that. Why aren't you happy?"

"About mom and dad?"

She shook her head. "About anything. Lately, you're always so . . . I don't know . . . pissed off."

"Not enough sex, I guess," I said.

She laughed. "Yeah, right. I mean, God, in high school . . . whatever. I'm sure you have plenty of sex."

"I'm sure I do." I turned on the radio again.

She didn't turn it off this time, but she did turn down the volume.

She said, "No. Really. I mean, if I were you I'd be the happiest person in the world."

"Why is that, Ellie?"

"Well, you're a guy for one thing. The whole world is tailored for your pleasure. You do what you want, when you want, and no one can say a thing to you. That's pretty cool."

"Yeah, that's right, Ellie, you're living some Victorian nightmare, poor girl. Mom and dad have Heathcliff waiting around in the wings for your arranged marriage after I get everything when they die."

"Oh, you know what I mean. Don't be so cheesy. It's different, you know. Girls and boys."

"Not really Ellie. Maybe through the spectrum of high school, it seems like that, but believe me there are plenty of girls just like you out there who are doing anything and everything they like and no one thinks less of them."

"Bullshit. A slut is a slut is a slut. That's true now, 200 years ago and 200 years from now."

"You want to be a slut?" I asked smiling.

"Of course not, asshole. I . . . I don't know."

"What don't you know?"

"Never mind," she said and looked out her window before facing forward again.

"You started this crap." I said.

She turned to me. "I'm just saying, you shouldn't be so unhappy. You're smart and handsome and every girl I know would kill to be with you."

"Don't change the subject to me. Let's talk about you. What's troubling you?"

"That you're so unhappy."

"Ahhh, nice. You and mom, that's right. You guys have sure perfected the turn-around retort."

"Ha! Ha! Well, mom's pretty cool. I'm leaning at the feet of a master, right?"

I nodded.

"I can't help it you've never gotten along with her."

I nodded again. "No, you're right. That's not your fault or hers or anyone's. It's mine."

"She just wants to be taken seriously, and I don't think she thinks you respect her."

"Please—"

"Owen—"

"Is that right? She doesn't think I respect her?" I said, pretty annoyed.

"Yes."

"Well, I respect her a lot. I think she's brilliant and wonderful."

"Well, why don't you tell her that?" she said pointing a finger at me. "You never tell her how much you love her."

"I'll have to do that. You're right."

"I bet you it changes everything," she said.

"It might."

"No, I'm serious, it will. It will change everything. You have no idea how much mom admires you. I just think she's intimidated by you. I think you intimidate her more than anyone."

"Give me a break, Ellie."

"I'm serious. You're cool and we're all just so nice. You're popular and mom, dad and I are just geeks."

"You're popular, Ellie."

"People like me, sure," she said brightly. "But I'm hardly popular. I mean, look at me. I'm smart and geeky and tall. Not a great combination for a popular girl."

Ellie wasn't exactly pretty, but she was hardly unattractive. Where I looked a lot like my mother, Ellie's face combined features from both our parents, but mostly from my father. She had brown hair and brown eyes. She had a more smudgy, less defined look. She just seemed to have no chin and a lot of teeth, the poor kid and her lips lacked that full pulpiness you like to see in a girl. Her body . . . looked fine, just not very defined. She just looked really young still.

To be continued...