

A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is lying on her stomach on a thick, white, fluffy rug. She is wearing a dark, possibly black, spaghetti-strap top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. Her hands are resting on the rug, and she is holding a small, clear, faceted glass object. The background is dark and out of focus.

lauren's
black
box

arnica butler

lauren's
black
box



arnica butler

LAUREN'S BLACK BOX

A HOTWIFE NOVEL

By Arnica Butler

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CHAPTER 1

He saw them, immediately, when he walked in.

He took the guy to be another personal trainer, probably a specialist in basketball. He was noticeably tall, and it was more than just the typical illusion created when anyone stood next to the petite Lauren. His arms were long and stacked with the kind of non-bulky muscle that came from being agile and quick, and his hands were large and crisscrossed by bundles of veined fibers that would make palming a large ball an easy task.

He was also very, very black - and that was also not an illusion created by his presence in contrast to the Scandinavian palette of Jason's wife: ice-blond hair, pale blue eyes, porcelain skin tinted to a sandy-rose color by years of constant outdoor activity (conducted safely beneath an eternally refreshed layer of SPF 60+ sunscreen). She was in her gym branded, midriff baring top, hot pink sports bra very much visible and very tight shorts.

When he saw them in a corner of the gym, talking, he was struck by the thought that they looked just like a couple. The kind of hot couple, opposite in appearance and sporty by nature, that would have hot sex together, combine to produce perfect children, and probably also make excellent amateur porn.

They were obviously hitting it off, whatever their relationship to each other was. Lauren's large mouth was open wide, her nose wrinkled up so that her strangely attractive large nostrils flared, and her big, almond-shaped eyes scrunched up into crinkled lines.

He ducked into the changing room and opened up his locker for the first time in many months. He wasn't sure what motivated him to do this: he had a free membership there as part of Lauren's perks, but he wasn't a gym guy, and so rarely used it. He also hadn't come here intending to work out, but rather to see if he could get his wife to come home early, a task that could not be done via phone, because she was scrupulously adherent to her employer's no-phone policy while she was with clients.

He smiled at the contents of his locker: Lauren, always quietly "supportive" of him going to the gym, had washed his workout clothing and folded it neatly, along with a clean towel, over a pair of shoes she had purchased specifically to leave in this locker.

Go get 'em tiger was scrawled on a Post-It note stuck to the shoes.

Why was he changing into the gym clothes? He didn't know. Nor could he really account for the way he slinked into the gym strategically, moving behind weight machines to block Lauren's view of him, and made his way to a little-used corner, where he settled onto the bench of a machine he did not have a clue how to use. Or why he spent the next thirty minutes observing his wife from a variety of machines that he likewise had no idea about.

She was still there, chatting with him, when he left the locker room. Smiling, talking. Talking a lot.

Lauren had a way of touching everyone she talked to, so it was not necessarily indicative of anything out of the ordinary that she put her hand out on the man's wiry forearm as she was speaking. But the sight of her pale hand against the rock-hard darkness of his skin burned into Jason's retina, searing straight through him. A pleasing queasiness deep in his groin snaked around for a few minutes before his cock began to stir to life.

So he sat, legs propped up on the machine to hide his erection, and watched as they circulated through the machines. They were taking turns on them, making Jason think vaguely that she must not be busy at the moment. He knew he should go over and make his presence known, because he was, to be fair, being a little bit creepy.

Just as soon as his erection faded, which wasn't happening any time soon. The elixir of jealousy and vague fantasy, the kind of banal masochism that he assumed was the appeal of his dark fantasies about his wife, was too strong. Images began to blossom in his mind, none of them helpful. In the meantime, Lauren continued to chat, to toss her ponytail, to crinkle her nose and smile, and to touch the man everywhere.

She was flirting with him.

She had to be.

The queasiness, cold and reptilian, grew, pushing outward, into his chest. He was starting to sweat a little, and a cool bead raced down his spine just as his wife crouched, laughing, next to a weight machine that the black guy was using, and ran her fingers along the underside of his thigh.

A puff of air left Jason's lips, an incomprehensible syllable of nonsense, as though someone had punched him in the gut.

This wasn't really *happening*, was it?

And then, the whole bubble exploded, as Lauren stood up, still smiling, and, as if she had known he was there all along and chosen the moment herself, looked right at Jason.

She cocked her head to the side and squinted, never losing her smile. Then she raised her hand and waved.

Not the actions of a woman who had just been caught flirting, very physically, with a co-worker, by her husband, who she should not have expected to be there at all.

Jason, engineer by trade, began to analyze, taking the whole scene apart piece by piece. The task diverted blood from his cock, at least, and by the time that his wife came walking over swiftly, smiling, ponytail bobbing, he had at least reduced his erection to a manageable state.

He did not, however, have his own cover story. An explanation for why he was "working out," instead of going over to talk to his wife.

He did not want to creep her out. That was a no-no.

"Hey," she said, still smiling. Her eyes scanned the machine he was on, and a flicker of confusion entered her expression. "What are you doing here?"

He pushed with his legs, because that seemed like the thing to do on that machine. It was, however, set at an extremely high weight, and he had to strain to straighten his legs out.

Lauren looked at the machine, alarmed, as he spoke, groaning a little.

Whatever. Lauren liked his sense of humor. Or so she said.

"Safepro has a safety problem," he groaned, and slowly, at great expense to the integrity of his muscles, lowered the weight, as Lauren folded her arms across her chest and shook her head. "So I have the afternoon off. I thought I would come steal you," he said, and gulped for some air. Should he try to push the weights again? No sense looking like a pussy. Also, he needed one more second to figure out what he was going to say...

Lauren put her hand down on his shins, her face terse behind a forced smile. "Don't," she said quickly. "Don't... do that..." She pulled the pin from the weight stack, and pushed against his feet when the whole contraption began to fly upward with the force he was applying. "You aren't even using this correctly," she cautioned, smiles returning.

Then she looked back. "Uh..." she began.

"I saw you were working with, uh... somebody," Jason blurted, and he felt a little lame. "So I didn't want to interrupt."

She was turned back toward him now, still smiling, still relaxed. "So you thought you'd break your femur instead?" she joked. "I'm almost done with Andre... were you thinking of stealing me away?"

Andre.

"Is he new?" Jason inquired, trying to ask with neutrality.

She was already checking back on Andre, and she said, "just a minute," before jogging over to him.

Jason dropped his feet to the floor on either side of the bench and scowled as his wife went back to chatting with *Andre*.

*

"Okay," she said, after skipping over to Jason. She looked at her watch. "Oh, honey, sorry, I've got another client in thirty minutes. The whole afternoon is booked."

"The whole afternoon, huh?" Jason said. His tone was somewhat playful, somewhat serious.

Lauren looked at him strangely and shot her thumb behind her, in the direction of Andre, who was retreating to the locker room. "Yeah. I've got Rick's clients today. He's sick. Remember?" She turned back toward where Andre had been, and then back to her husband. Then she laughed. "Oh, you thought Andre was... what?"

"New instructor," Jason volunteered cheerfully. He was fully capable of making fun of himself when he had been an ass. Crawling through him was a sense of relief, but there was an aftertaste of disappointment. Everything he had just witnessed: his wife's pale hands on Andre's thighs, the smiles and ponytail tossing, the brief but intimate touches, all made sense. And not particularly jealousy-inducing sense. Just plain, old, boring, run-of-the-mill sense.

Lauren put her full lips, striated in some way reminiscent of Michelle Pfeiffer, together, and shook her head disbelievingly. "Aha. And I was just caressing his thighs," she said, touching Jason's arm, "and touching his chest." She ran her fingers over his pecs.

He was, in a rare moment, taken completely by surprise. It wasn't like Lauren to make that kind of joke, and she had no way of knowing that

it was the kind of joke he *longed* for her to make, and perhaps even be serious about...

"Uh... yeah," he said.

Lauren gave him a snort. "And you thought, he must be a new, hot, tempting instructor..."

Jason's mind drifted into a hazy, muffled area, and Lauren's words poured through him, firming his cock.

"...because no *black* guy could possibly be *my* client," she finished.

Jason shrugged.

"Racist," she joked, very quietly. Then she grinned. "But no, he isn't, he's Rick's," she said, shrugging.

Lauren's gym was expensive, and her personal training was high-end and specialized, and she specialized in training female skiers. So none of these assumptions, Jason felt, had been particularly out of order on his part.

"He's just a little tall for skiing," he joked. "And sort of... masculine, if you're trying to pass him off as a woman."

Lauren blinked, looking suddenly very serious. "Masculine? Him? I hadn't noticed."

"What *were* you doing, by the way, touching his thighs like that?"

Lauren blushed, unmistakably, and then recovered. "Just had to, you know... show him where his, uh... gracilis muscle is."

Jason was certain this was an actual muscle, and certain that Lauren had in fact been doing that very thing. "Sounds dirty," he said.

To his surprise - real, stunning, paralyzing surprise - his wife moved closer to him, dropping her hand down to the front of his thigh and dragging her fingers lightly along it, upward, until they grazed his balls and encountered the pulsing turgidity of his cock. "It's right here," she murmured, her voice full and throaty. "For reference."

Her eyes dropped to his groin when his cock pulsed against her hand, and she seemed pleased.

"Gotta run," she said breezily, stepping away. "See you at home?"

"Uh-huh," Jason said weakly, watching her retreat.

*

The feeling lingered, all the way home, into the shower. Jason jerked off, staring at the tiles, his mind replaying the images he had seen, building

on them, making Lauren's hands wander up Andre's gracilis muscle and beyond, dipping into his shorts, grasping his cock, pulling it out and stroking it, looking over at Jason and smiling as she did so.

They might have gone further, Lauren sliding to her knees, her eyes affixed to the bulging member in her hand, big mouth opening wide, creamy drops of precum landing on her lips before she gobbled the purple, swollen bulb of meat...

But he came, so he tried to go about his business and put it out of his mind.

The fantasy was not new. It had been there, inside of him, his entire sexually mature life. It had just never *boiled* in quite the same way.

And then there was the matter of Lauren, and her own past history with a boyfriend who had evidently had the same fantasy. In her telling of the story - a sparse, non-linear, montage of half-formed thoughts that she did not like bringing up - Chance had told her about his fantasy, and she had even been willing to give it a try, but her ex had become obsessed with it, talking about it so much that she eventually broke up with him.

And if there was one thing Jason wanted more than his fantasy to come to life, it was for his marriage to Lauren to stay intact.

Lauren was the hottest girl he had ever dated. Blond, blue-eyed, her face filled by large and expressive features that fought for the attention of men, each of them flawed to perfection, the concert of them stunning, Lauren had a very "hot face" that would have been appealing on an ordinary body.

But Lauren also had the kind of body that would make an average face appear attractive. She was petite, but athletic, with perky breasts and a tight stomach. But the real kicker was her ass, which was the best ass he (and, as they usually admitted, almost any man he knew) had ever seen in person. It was round, it was tight, it was a perfect size. It was *arresting*, from every angle. Lauren's ass drew the eyes, and very often the entire man, to her everywhere she went, like a big magnet picking up shards of metal.

She was also incredibly fun, and positive, and Jason liked the messy, intuitive nature of her mind. Lauren was a never-ending puzzle to him, because unlike most people and all machines, you could put the same input into her a thousand times and get something different in response to each occasion.

Like today. It wasn't as if Andre was the first black guy she'd ever come into physical contact with, and it wasn't the first time Jason had tried to pour a nice sexual syrup all over the encounter for the sheer fun of it.

It was, however, the first time Lauren had *bitten* and joked back.

Jason, unlike Lauren, was not an intuitive thinker. He was an engineer, and so truly believed that deep down, somewhere, buried in a hidden "black box," there was a set of rules that - if he could access it - would allow him to not only understand what had made Lauren flirt back, but replicate the process.

He sat down at his computer and stared at it, which was his version of a "process."

But then, as he usually did, he thought it over and came to the same, inevitable conclusion: in a risk/reward matrix, potentially upsetting Lauren was not worth toying with this idea. He didn't know what went on in her mind, but he did know that talking about the subject of this particular fantasy stood a good chance of causing her to get cranky.

And anyway. It was just a fantasy.

Lauren was a fantasy, all by herself, and a real life one who he was lucky enough to be married to.

He pulled up his email, opting for responsibility. And soon the incident was pushed to the back of his mind, where it lived, always present, but buried under a pile of other everyday things.

*

He ordered dinner from a healthy place down the street that made salads overflowing with all kinds of superfood, and yet actually tasted good. Lauren loved it, and he could live with it, and all was well when they ordered from Green House because they had a tacit agreement that Lauren wouldn't talk about organic food and he therefore wouldn't roll his eyes and deliver a robust lecture about why they were a waste of money.

Six o'clock came and went, and so he collected the food, and put it in the fridge, and poured the wine. At seven, he texted Lauren, but got no response, so he finished off two glasses of wine by himself. He was calling her, mildly irritated, and somewhat aroused, the demons of his fantasy climbing along the alcohol ladders he had thrown to them, when Lauren eventually walked in the door.

"Sorry," she said, surveying the scene in the kitchen, her phone in one hand, the keys in the other. She shut the door, smiling. "I should have texted you." She entered, tossed the keys on the counter, and climbed onto a high chair to lean on her elbows and peer into the wine bottle.

Jason drew a few flowcharts for himself in his mind, and grumbled inwardly: if she received his text, as she obviously had, why hadn't she texted back? It didn't make sense, but he knew that Lauren did a lot of things that didn't necessarily make sense to him.

Ask her about it? Or let it go? It was always the same dilemma.

"I got your favorite from Green House," he said, turning toward the refrigerator.

But Lauren had unfolded her legs and dropped to the floor, and was now walking around the large island toward him. "Oh, yeah?" she said, her tone playful. She was dragging her left hand behind her, her fingers running over the marble.

Jason felt something like a glitch travel across his face, unable to make up his mind about what expression to be wearing. Lauren was always starving when she came home from work. Lauren loved Green House. She didn't move from her chair and walk toward him and say things like, "oh, yeah?" when she got home from work.

His hand was still on the door of the fridge, but he didn't pull. Lauren moved closer, her eyes fluttering up and down, her lips parted into a coy smile. She put a hand on his chest, sending an electrifying thrill through him.

Her hair was still in a ponytail, wisps of ever-escaping fine blond strands stuck to her jaw and her forehead. The faintest whiff of her sweat reached his nostrils, shrouded in lavender from her deodorant and the intense, sports laundry soap she spent a fortune on for her workout clothes.

She was wearing a hoodie, not the gym-branded midriff shirt she had been in earlier, and it was open and loose, revealing the hot-pink sports bra that squeezed her breasts and pushed her light-colored flesh into two supple globes. Her small nipples were erect, pressed against the fabric, and in the shadows of the hoodie, he caught a glimpse of her smooth stomach.

Even if they had been married for quite some time, Jason still found himself blathering sometimes, his senses overwhelmed by the promises of Lauren's perfect body: the softness of her skin, the heat between her legs,

the hard feel of her buttocks against his palms while his cock sank into the velvet of her pussy. "Uh..." he said, listlessly.

He had some questions. Like why she was wearing only a sports bra, why she didn't want dinner, why she was late, and, still lingering, the question about the text message.

But Lauren's hand, radiating an elixir of raw sexual energy into his chest, was moving, drifting down, scorching everything it touched.

"I'm not super-hungry right now," she said. "For salad."

Jason's eyes went wide. "Um... okay. That's... unusual..."

Lauren pushed closer to him, her hand slipping into his shorts, finding his cock with practiced ease. It came to life in her hand, twitching spasmodically, catching up on the time lost to his surprise.

"What, uh... got into you?" he murmured, as Lauren grinned and drew her fingers around the tip of his dick, her skin sweeping over his crown, her eyes still on his.

She kind of shrugged, and smiled. "We had some unfinished business," she said.

And then Lauren, too, was drifting, her head no longer reaching his jawline, her breasts in their pink bra sinking away, out of sight...

His shorts were going with her, and his mouth was open, about to say something, when her fingers closed around his cock. Her other hand went to his right thigh, tracing along the same line as earlier in the afternoon. A dam broke loose in his mind, his thoughts from earlier rushing into his bloodstream and his cortex.

Jason heard himself shudder as he exhaled, his mind spinning wildly with confusion as his private fantasies collided with real-world behavior from Lauren that was... that was...

She was smiling up at him, her eyes locked on his, and her tongue made contact with the crown of his cock as his dick elongated in her hand. Her free hand moved up the front of his thigh, tracing the now-memorable gracilis muscle, until she veered toward his balls and grazed them with her fingertips.

Her lips closed around the head of his cock, and she began to work her way along his shaft, her tongue swirling, her mouth wet and hungry.

A number of thoughts flashed through his mind, in no particular order. He was glad he had jerked off earlier, Lauren wasn't a random-blowjob-giving kind of girl, the gracilis muscle didn't even sound real, her

mouth was almost to the base of his cock, she had somehow read his mind and she was going to make him pay for it...

But Lauren continued to suck on his cock, looking at him in the eyes, and between the wandering, alternating massage of her tongue and the pressure of her cheeks, the scrape of his cock against the softness at the back of her throat, and the resurfacing of the images he had conjured when he jerked off in the shower, it was only a few minutes before he dropped his hand to the back of her head and tugged at her hair. "Babe," he said, in a strangled voice, "I'm... going to..."

Lauren retreated, letting his cock slip from her mouth and closing her hand around it to pump it. She wasn't into swallowing, so this was her common method.

But she pumped, leaving the crown of his cock close to her lips, so that it grazed them as she worked on his dick. He balled his fist up in her hair and groaned. "Babe," he said, but by then it was too late: he could feel the cum unfurling, boiling over.

Lauren pumped with her hand and let the semen spill, some of it landing on her lips, some of it splashing onto her bare skin, on the sports bra, on her hoodie. Her tongue left her mouth and lapped at his dick, splashes of cum beaded on her cheek and her collarbone.

His body jerked as she swept her tongue over his cock, taking some of his cum with it, smiling. "Wow," she said, grinning. "Somebody was even hornier than I was."

Jason was dumbfounded, his abdomen spasming a little as the last waves of his orgasm sputtered through him. He stared at Lauren as she stood up, a finger swiping at the cum just below her lower lip. She closed her lips around her fingertip, her eyes boring into his disbelieving stare.

He tried to gather his thoughts, to think of something to say, and was about to repeat what he had said earlier, when Lauren caught him, again, off-guard. Completely.

"Well," she said. "I guess you'll just have to return the favor."

He didn't need to be told twice, even if the rational part of his brain was working on the problems, the dissonance of what was happening. His body, his reptilian, sex-seeking mind, had no such problems; he was moving with her, pushing against her, pulling her shorts to her ankles, helping her get onto the counter.

The wine spilled, the bottle rolling precariously on the counter, but there was no stopping him now as he lifted her ankles, twisted together in her shorts, and hooked them over his shoulders. He lowered his body, squatting uncomfortably, to get closer to her bared pussy.

The scent of her excitement rose up to his nostrils, punching through the vague scent of sweat - sweet and distinctly hers - that lingered between her legs after a workout. The cloying odor of her juices seemed to pour out of her, and he had only a moment to look down at the bright pink flesh that blossomed beneath her neatly trimmed, almost-white landing strip to see that it was glistening and engorged.

But Lauren was pulling herself toward him with her legs, and also had her hands in his hair, so he had only one place to look within moments: up to the wisps of velvet-soft blond hair, beyond to the expanse of pale skin, the mountains of her breasts in the confines of her sports bra, and then to her eyes, hovering above it all, as the tart, slippery nectar of her pussy spilled into his mouth and down his chin.

Her flesh seemed especially hot on his lips, and her clit was fat and hard, almost foreign to him as it slid from his tongue in the slick, overheated velvet of her folds. He at last tamed it, pressing against the tight nub of flesh, working against it rhythmically, watching her face as she squirmed and mewled.

Lauren was not herself, he thought, but there was no way to interrupt it, or make sense of it. She pushed his face into her pussy hard and ground against him, and came in no time at all, tossing her head back, sending the wine bottle crashing to the floor, as she screamed loudly.

Her thighs tightened around his head like a vice when he tried to keep going, and he could feel the pulsing of her orgasm from deep within her, sending rivulets of cum washing against his chin, her flesh burgeoning against his mouth.

"Oh, God," Lauren said, squeezing him tighter and pushing on his forehead with her hand. "Stop, I can't..."

He tried for some more, wanting to suck her clit between his lips, to feel her body heat up again and go stiff with another orgasm, to taste some more of her overflowing pussy. But Lauren was pushing him insistently, her body shaking, her pussy too sensitive for more at this time.

He backed out from under her ankles and she slid off the counter, her hair mussed, a smile on her lips. She shimmied back into her shorts,

sending another wave of her sweet-scented pussy juices up to him, intoxicating him all over again.

"What...?" he asked, staring at her.

She leaned toward him to kiss him. The acrid scent of his own cum, dried to her cheek, mingled with the scent of her pussy. Another thought-image escaped, flashing through his mind, slamming into his core as a cold-sweet pain: *what if that was another man's cum?*

Lauren shrugged. "I guess I was just really horny," she said, pushing her hair back.

Jason was still, disbelieving, empty of all thought and only a man of pure, raw feeling, so he said nothing.

Lauren smiled again. "Must have been all those hot, new clients," she said, before kissing him lightly on the cheek, and trotting away to the stairs. "I'm going to go take a shower."

And then she was gone.

*

She returned, freshly showered, smelling of her most citrusy soap, her hair damp. She had changed into a pair of very short, tight-fitting workout shorts and a loose t-shirt that fell perpetually off one shoulder. It was made of a thin fabric that allowed him to see the contours of her breasts and the pert eraser-tops of her nipples. "Now, I'm starving," she said, sliding alongside him to get to a basket of fruit. She bit into a grape and peered over his arm, a hand moving playfully over his back.

That was all very Lauren, very normal.

Jason, in a daze, had taken the salads out and cleaned up the spilled wine, replacing the bottle with a fresh one. The taste of Lauren's pussy was still in his mouth, but he didn't really want to wash it away with wine just yet.

Lauren picked up a salad and a fork and took them to the small table where they usually ate, next to a window piled so high with plants that they could barely see outside.

"Uh..." Jason said, coming over with his own plate.

Lauren stabbed at her salad and then held the fork up in front of her mouth, waiting for him to speak.

"That was... unexpected," he finally said, making Lauren grin and pop the salad into her mouth.

She chewed. "Don't start over-analyzing me," she said, after swallowing, smiling again.

"Me?" Jason replied, mocking himself. He piled his own fork high with salad. He'd chosen the most filling one, which came with blue cheese and blackened chicken and was almost satisfying enough to constitute a meal. He looked up at her. "I'm just wondering if I can replicate those circumstances..." he said.

It was a play on a long-running joke they made, at his expense, and maybe deservedly so: he tried, Lauren noted often, to engineer everything. There were many aspects of life where this was a useful trait, and many in which it didn't really matter - they could engage in a lot of sports together and each get their own kicks (Lauren's, adrenaline, and his, the gear). But occasionally his analyzing drove the intuitive, fun-seeking Lauren bonkers.

Hence the joke.

Lauren grinned non-committally and brought the wine glass to her lips. To his astonishment, she took a large sip - very unlike her in the middle of the week.

"Hmm," she said.

Jason was, at this point, hanging on her every word. They were off-grid now, way beyond the usual and expected exchanges that transpired between them on an unremarkable weekday night. Lauren didn't tease or flirt or come home and ask him to return the favor of her fantastic, unbidden, un-foreplayed blowjobs.

"Maybe it was something about your new clients?" he ventured. Why not? She knew he was joking, they were making another joke.

She took another sip of wine, smiling. Swirled it a little. Gave another non-committal "hmm." Except this one was more like a vague growl from the back of the throat, more inviting than the one before.

"Well," she said. "I've got Rick's clients for the next week, so..."

Jason's eyebrows shot up. "Oh," he said, excitement uncoiling in his stomach, his heart sputtering a few beats before racing wildly, more wildly than he really wanted. He felt the very uncomfortable sensation of adrenaline gushing into his veins, the energy making it almost impossible for him to hold still.

Easy, buddy, he told his heart. And that went for his dick too, and his blood pressure, and his balls.

And his dirty, dirty mind.

This is a no-fly zone, his rational mind screamed at him. *Abort.*

They did not joke about this. Or talk about it.

She was grinning devilishly. She nibbled on a forkful of salad, tipping her head to look at him out of the side of her eyes. She seemed - *seemed* - to be trying to lure him into saying something here.

"Is that what's gotten into you?" he asked, his voice rough and staccatoed. "Rick's clients?"

She shrugged, her eyes still dancing wildly. Tempting him?

What was going on?

"Not *all* of Rick's clients," she said slowly.

She was watching him, waiting for his reaction.

She set the fork down. Picked up the wine. Her foot found his leg beneath the table and traveled along his calf.

He cocked his head.

"Any one client in particular?" he asked, what seemed like far too late after her comment. His chest felt tight. His fantasy - some element of it at least - was actually playing out, right in front of him, and he couldn't think straight. He didn't know what she was up to, and as her foot moved up, dragging along his upper thigh, then back to his knee, then back again, her toes curling around the bulge of his balls, he increasingly couldn't remember why he was... resisting it...

"It's mostly just Andre," she said, breathily. Her foot rubbed his cock, and a knowing grin appeared on her lips. As his dick pulsed to life, he saw that she was delighting in what she was doing to him.

"Andre," he repeated, stupidly.

"Something about him," his wife was saying, unbelievably, incredibly. She looked up at the ceiling and moved her wine glass, swirling the liquid before taking another sip. Half the glass was gone now, and an amount like that, poured on Lauren's low-tolerance and kale-heavy diet, was going to have her drunk-ish within minutes.

Lauren became more feline, more pliable, more wild, when she drank.

"Something about Andre?" he said, his mouth feeling useless and disconnected from his body. Did Lauren know what she was doing?

"He's just so... tall. And muscular. And.... dark," she continued, her eyes glinting. Beneath her foot, Jason's cock was hard and throbbing. She curled her toes again, raking the underside of his dick, making him pulse again.

He was dumbfounded. So he sat there, staring at her, unable to move.

Then she set her wine glass down. Her eyes drifted to the table, as if she could see through it and was looking at his engorging cock. "Hmm," she said. "You still kind of owe me one."

It made no sense, of course, and he should have seen the aftermath coming. But when a woman as hot as Lauren says you owe her something sexual, you just do what she says. What was he supposed to do? Resist her?

She started to eat her salad then, while he stared at her. She grinned as she chewed, moving her foot around between his legs, the heat between them building with every passing second, until Jason felt sure that he was inside a pressure cooker. Sweat had broken at the nape of his neck, his cock had robbed the rest of his body of all blood flow, and he could barely hear anything but his own heartbeat, crashing away in his ears.

Lauren finished her salad, and then pushed the plate forward to lean her elbow on the table. She brought her hands to her face, her fingers fluttering flirtatiously over her lips. "Well?" she said.

A beat passed between them, and it suddenly felt several dozen degrees hotter in the room.

"Are you going to just sit there?"

CHAPTER 2

Coffee was already brewing, and Lauren was out of bed when Jason woke up the next morning. Humidity hung in the air with the scent of her shampoo, so she had already showered.

There was nothing odd about that, but he rolled over and groaned in disappointment. He had very much hoped that this morning would be a continuation of last night, with a nice, quick, morning fuck to start the day. He very much enjoyed those mornings, rolling over, still half-asleep, digging into the too-warm, slightly damp recesses beneath the covers, finding her body, and sinking into it.

He got up, ruffled his hair, and trotted out to the kitchen, where his wife, dressed in her gym shirt and black leggings, smelling heavily like laundry soap, was chopping vegetables to put into her lunch. "Hey," she said, with a smile.

A smile that was ordinary, not especially different from any other smile she gave him any other morning. A knife of disappointment, disproportionate to the event, tore through his chest. He had wanted more, a continuation of the creamier, sexier Lauren that had been spilling all over the place last night.

He moved around the counter and pushed her hair from her neck to kiss her. "That was a really hot night last night," he murmured, his hand sweeping over her stomach.

He felt it travel through her: a slight tremor, a stiffening. She turned toward him, smiling still, and kissed him on the cheek. "It was fun," she said. She sounded genuine, but distant. And then she wriggled out of his arms to go to the fridge.

Jason's mood soured slightly. He took a slice of red pepper from her pile of vegetables and popped it into his mouth. "Why are you up so early?" he asked.

She was pulling a jar out of the fridge, one of her many green liquid concoctions. She turned toward him, her ponytail swinging. A grin, a slightly disbelieving crinkling of her eyes. "I always get up at this time," she said, making a face.

Or was it his imagination? She set the jar of green stuff down and looked for something else. "I have some of Rick's clients again today,

remember?"

Jason leaned on the counter and munched on a red pepper, hoping that he would be able to shut himself up. "Oh yeah," he heard himself saying, while the back of his mind flashed warning signs helplessly. "Andre again?"

Lauren didn't turn around. "I guess," she said neutrally. She was scanning the fridge for something, her voice distracted.

Jason was moving toward her, his fingers reaching for the sliver of bare skin above her tight pants, his mind already blossoming with the memory of the slippery feel of sweat between her buttocks. He trailed his fingers down to her shapely ass, getting no reaction from her. "So does that mean I can look forward to a repeat of last night?"

Lauren turned quickly, expelling air through her nose, her lips forming a smile, but not a generous one. It was the "dismiss-my-horny-husband" smile. And she prickled somewhat.

Too far. He always went too far.

"Don't get ahead of yourself," she joked, but there was a very serious tone beneath her comment, and she moved, by micrometers, away from his fingers, until he wasn't touching her anymore. "Come on," she said, pushing him gently, acting playfully but stiff underneath that veneer. "I have to get going, stop eating all my lunch."

He abandoned his approach. It had been fun, but Lauren was done with it, whatever *it* was. He would have plenty of time to think on "duplicating" whatever had gone into last night, but now wasn't the moment.

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Jason stood in the quiet of the kitchen, staring at the door after it closed behind Lauren.

Tick, tick, tick, he began to analyze her behavior. Sure, any man would say that it was impossible to understand the mind of a woman, but Jason secretly believed he would someday get to the bottom of it. At least to the bottom of Lauren.

By itself, outside of the context of last night, Lauren's behavior this morning was not out of the ordinary. It was, in fact, totally normal for Lauren. He made advances to Lauren almost all the time - how could he

not? - and Lauren rejected about 85% of them, and almost 100% of them in the morning after she had already gotten dressed for work. This was the calculus, and while he would have preferred that Lauren agreed to have sex with him every time he tried, even he had to admit *that* would be excessive.

So nothing personal, nothing unusual, nothing particular special about this very typical rejection.

Somehow, though, after all of the arousal and teasing and Lauren's near-*predation* last night, it stung this morning. The stiffening of her body, the edging away.

He ran his fingers through his hair and shook it vigorously, before heading back upstairs to take a shower. The cold pain of rejection snaked through him, feeling remarkably similar to the sweet pain of jealousy.

He knew better, he thought, as ice-cold water poured over him, eliciting not even a shudder from him. It warmed quickly, and he turned around beneath the oversized shower head, feeling his cock getting hard, refusing to look at it or move his hand there to masturbate. The longing built, the pressure getting uncomfortable and then painful, as he thought of Lauren's two personalities from the last twenty-four hours.

But he *knew* better than to play in that sandbox, and so all of this was his own fault. Maybe Lauren had been drunk, maybe she had said some things she hadn't meant... but the story of her ex-boyfriend had always hovered in the background of this fantasy, waving Jason off, making it a no-fly zone.

He had no one to blame but himself.

Except...

Why, then? Why had Lauren come home so horny, why had she played with these ideas? Why had she gone along with it - prompted it, really - if she felt that way?

He had always suspected that there was more to Lauren's story about Chance, but like so many things with Lauren, she made several claims, all of which he suspected to be true: one, she didn't like thinking about or re-hashing things from the past that didn't matter anymore, and two, she didn't really know how to explain it anyway.

So he had put his fantasy into a dark box, where he suspected it would always live.

Until now.

CHAPTER 3

"So... is that really a thing?"

Kimbie was doing that thing she did, which if someone had asked her honestly, Lauren would have said was all part of her hyper-sexual cheerleader-bimbo act. Her eyes got big, and she made a childish face, folding her hands over her knees in a gesture of obscenely incongruous virtue. "Like, there are guys who are really into that?"

Lauren was glad she was drunk, because the twisting inside her chest was less palpable. A conversation like this would have made her embarrassed any other day of the week - especially in front of Jayce, who she really liked.

She laughed, trying to seem carefree, which was surprisingly easy because she had indulged in smoking a joint with Kimbie, and now that she had stopped coughing, it was going pleasantly to her head. "What do you mean, is that really a thing?" she said, her voice froggy. She rolled her eyes at Kimbie and glanced over at Jayce.

It sent an immediate chill through her. He looked *wildly* uncomfortable.

She passed the joint to Kimbie's boyfriend-of-the-moment, who was shaking his head. "No way, man," he said. "That shit is fucked-up."

Kimbie slid off the couch and folded her legs up beneath her, making her tight, white dress scoot up to the very top of her thighs. Lauren's eyes darted to her legs, confirming that Kimbie was, as usual, not wearing any underwear, and then she moved them quickly back to Jayce, who she was pleased to see was not looking at Kimbie's crotch.

He still looked uncomfortable, though, like the air was getting backed up in his chest.

"Oh God," Lauren said. "Let's change the subject."

"No, nah, nah, man," Kimbie's boyfriend said, shaking his head and drawing a huge puff. "You gotta... explain that shit..."

"...I want to hear *more*," Kimbie said, turning her head up to look at Jayce. "Don't you? Jason?"

He seemed to snap out of his reverie. "Uh..." he said.

"Kimbie, drop it," Lauren said. She meant to be forceful, but the pot had really gone to her head and she sounded childish and playful instead.

"He doesn't want to hear about... ex-boyfriends..."

"But you didn't *do* it, did you?" Kimbie said, using her most excited cheerleader voice. Her eyes were lighting up. "You broke up with him. So... no biggie. I just... like, what did he say?"

Lauren grabbed the joint as Kimbie's boyfriend passed it toward her and took another hit. "Yeah, exactly, Kimbie, that's all there is to the story," she said.

Kimbie looked at her pleadingly.

Lauren glanced at Jason. But he reached forward and took the joint from her fingers. "I'm cool with it," he said, in a tone she really couldn't judge.

She laughed, but that didn't put them off. Kimbie started whining, doing her whole thing, and pretty soon everyone was egging her on.

"You guys, it's not even much of a story, you've built it up so much. Jesus."

"Okay," Kimbie said. "Just... so, what, he was just like: I want you to fuck other guys and I want to watch? Like that?"

Lauren shrugged, feeling suddenly defeated. "Pretty much."

Kimbie did her wide-eyed thing again, for the whole room, and then dove back in. "And you said....?"

Lauren looked at her venomously. "Like *you* never had a guy say this to you. Kimbie."

Kimbie had been through more guys than Lauren could have recalled if there had been a million-dollar prize for it. A fair-skinned Indian, Kimbie had a slender, jaw-dropping build, straight black hair, smoldering brown eyes. She was also extremely flexible, physically and sexually. She was a university cheerleader for the basketball team, and she liked black guys. And they liked her.

Kimbie cracked up. "I swear, Lauren. I have never heard a guy say this before."

"It's a thing," her man-of-the-moment said suddenly, his face lighting up like he had just remembered something. He pointed at Kimbie. "Thing is, you only do black guys. This is a thing white guys always doin'. My brother had some married chick hook up with him like that."

Kimbie looked at him disbelievingly. Then she looked at Lauren. "You are *fucking* with me. Who was this?"

Lauren shook her head.

"Mike?"

"Oh God, please," Lauren said. She waved away the smoke in front of her, and then waved some more, as if she could wave the conversation away.

"That redheaded guy!" Kimbie offered breathlessly.

Lauren looked at Jason and rolled her eyes, hoping he was ignoring all of this. He was looking at her far too seriously.

But as if sent by heaven, just as Kimbie got rolling through the very short list of Lauren's boyfriends, the doorbell rang, and more people showed up, and so the conversation, thankfully, melted away.

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Until the car.

"So... this ex-boyfriend thing," Jason said.

Lauren felt a terrifying drop in her chest. She looked over at Jason.

They'd only been dating, officially, for a few months. She met him in a psychology class that neither of them seemed very interested in taking. He seemed older than he was - not because of appearances, but because of his seriousness - and she had been intimidated by talking to him. But they had been assigned to a project together, and really - unexpectedly - hit it off.

She really, really liked him. She liked him enough that she had begun to consider things in her past that she might want to hide, or at least evade. And he liked her enough to go fishing for those things. It was a tricky, unexpected situation: she hadn't had any serious boyfriends, and certainly none of them had seemed particularly interested in digging into her past. She had, therefore, never given any thought to what she would say to new boyfriends about past boyfriends; how she would explain them, and the breakups that came with them.

She had certainly never given much thought to how she would explain Chance.

"Look," she said. "This was just... like, so long ago. I wish... Kimbie hadn't brought it up."

She deflated as she said this and turned away to look out the window.

"I'm not... judging you. I promise. I actually just... want to hear the story."

She looked back at him. He seemed really sincere. He put a hand on her knee. "I get that you had boyfriends before," he said. He smiled. "You're *reasonably* hot."

Lauren knew this was a joke. She was never delusional about her looks; men flocked to her wherever she went. She knew it was absurd for anyone to think she hadn't had her share of weird boyfriends, of unhappy endings, of experimentation... but, as usual, when she wanted to explain her feelings, she was unable to get her thoughts organized. Or sort through her feelings in a way that she could explain to someone else. Thinking of Chance made her *feel*: a rush of adrenaline, suffocated, angry, euphoric, excited, disappointed. Explaining any of that to anyone, let alone Jason, who was almost mechanical with his thoughts and feelings, seemed impossible.

Lauren started to feel a tightness in her chest that came along with being cornered into explanations of things that she deemed "fuzzy."

"Look... it was just this guy Chance, okay? And he... you know. Wanted to do that. And I didn't. And that was... like, it."

He started the car, and began to drive. She knew that he knew there was more to the story. He always did.

"Lauren," he said, after they went a few blocks. "I really, really like you. You know?"

She looked over at him.

"I just want you to be able to tell me about... you know. Anything. Past boyfriends. And not feel bad about it."

Tightness, claustrophobia, annoyance, frustration.

"That's really all there is to the story."

He looked over at her, saying nothing, but his expression told her the truth: he wasn't buying it.

"She put a hand up to her forehead, flustered. She exhaled. "Okay, look, it was a little more than that. Okay? I actually didn't really... like, I didn't mind it, you know? The suggestion. This was a long time ago. I even... I guess I was even kind of into it." She laughed, trying to make it sound funnier than she actually found it. "I even made out with another guy once. With him watching."

Arousal, excitement, thrill.

She looked out her own window, watching his reflection in the glass.

She couldn't get a read off Jason. He seemed disturbed. But he kept driving, stiffly, and when she didn't talk, he looked over at her.

"Really?" he asked.

"I know," she said, laughing again, almost as emptily. She didn't know what he thought of that; she couldn't guess what he would think of something like that. Would he think she was a huge slut? That wasn't an impression she wanted to give him.

Quickly, to get off the subject of her own feelings, she switched to Chance. "But then... yeah. He just... got so obsessed about it. You know? Like, he wanted to talk about it *all* the time, and he wanted me to talk about it *all* the time. Until I just got... it just got weird, you know?"

The feelings got darker, sharper, and she felt suddenly overheated. She reached over to the controls and turned the cold air on high, blasting frigid cold into her face. It was December and they were in a deep, unusually cold winter even on the plains.

"You okay?"

"I just feel a little carsick," she said quietly.

"I'm sorry if this bugs you, I'm just asking because I got curious."

"It's fine," she said, forcing a smile. "It's just... it got really weird. Really fast. With Chance." She adjusted the air so it was blowing on her face. Her forehead felt peculiarly cool; she must have been sweating slightly. "I guess... guys who are into *that* are sort of wacko about it. Anyway. It doesn't matter. I finally broke up with him, because it was just, like, all he wanted to think about."

Jason didn't say anything to this right away. When he did, he gave a nod and said, "okay," in a tone that he used when he was going to do something. And Jason always did what he said he was going to, which was something Lauren really liked about him.

Kimble thought Jason was boring. Kimble recoiled from anyone planning anything, ever, and she was about as wild as someone could be.

But the thing about Jason was that he was *not* boring. He was reliable. He was methodical about some things. He didn't have the same kind of fun that Lauren did, but Lauren was the kind of person who could accept that other people's ideas about "fun" might be different than hers.

They could still have a good time together, say, skiing. But while she was there for the thrill of the unexpected and the rush of adrenaline that she got when something went unplanned and unexpected, Jason was there to

figure out the mechanics of his skis and try to make zero performance errors. Did it matter that they weren't in it for the same reasons, if they were both having a good time?

Not to Lauren.

So Jason moved on from the conversation about Chance, and Lauren was happy leaving it there. Because there were a few other things, somewhere in that mix, and she didn't want to get into *them*.

But Jason didn't ask, and so she never did.

It was like taking a sudden turn in the trees, avoiding a fall off a rock face, or slamming into a tree: there wasn't any point thinking about all the things you didn't smash into.

That was Lauren's motto.

*

She never got the guy's name.

It wasn't the first time she'd seen him at one or another of Kimbie's parties. Every time she had seen him, he had exchanged a look with her, and it had made the air between them actually shimmer in the heat. Lauren could actually *feel* something travel through her, almost like he had licked the inside of her. Like her eyes were somehow drawn together with her pussy by some invisible string that he plucked when he looked at her, and it kept vibrating, purely sexual, right through her core.

He was "tall," but that was about as descriptive of one of Kimbie's partygoers as "black." Kimbie got around the sports circuit, and she didn't care who knew about it or what they felt about it.

Black guys *loved* Kimbie. This was a thing you could actually see with your own eyes, so there was no point pretending it wasn't true or that it was somehow a racist stereotype. Black guys just literally dropped everything they were doing to go "talk" to Kimbie.

Short on talking, this usually signaled that they would disappear somewhere for what Kimbie was long on.

Which, again, was all fine with Kimbie.

"I don't know if it's the same for *everybody*," Kimbie had explained. "But once *I* went black, there was *definitely* no going back."

Chance had proposed it to Lauren at one of Kimbie's parties. Casually, with his hands all over her. *Remember what we talked about?*

That guy's been looking at you all night. What if you just flirted with him?

Why had she done it? She didn't know. She couldn't even explain why she was dating Chance. The sex was good, but, beyond that, there wasn't a ton between them. He was kind of an asshole, and so there was a constant challenge to navigating him, to keeping his attention, and that was something new for Lauren. Most guys were happy that she even talked to them, but she never really felt like Chance was *arrested* by her in the same way.

"That guy over there is checking you out," he had whispered in her ear. Then he bit into her earlobe slowly, at first tickling, then strengthening into a pain that made her mouth fall open in a small gasp.

He had mentioned the fantasy before, and she had listened, but she had just brushed it off as drunken blabbing, nothing he was serious about. No guy had ever said to her that he wanted her to have sex with *another guy*.

"He does that," she had told him. She was teasing him when she said it, playing the game he seemed to want to play. It was fun, and it drove him wild, and it captured his attention, so she did it. That was the only explanation she really had for it. Also, it seemed appealing, doing something taboo, doing something dangerous and unexpected.

And then there was the other matter, the weird, confusing secret she kept in her own heart and didn't tell anyone: she thought about Kimbie's entourage of black guys, and she thought about them in graphic terms. She had seen one of them through a crack in the door, naked, his erect cock enormous between his legs, and she had been unable to stop imagining him. Fantasizing that *she* was the one on the bed that he was staring at, that *she* was the one who fifteen minutes later was screaming wildly, that the hard, loud pounding in the bedroom had been that guy fucking *her* instead of Kimbie.

But she was also - and this was the part she didn't like to share - *afraid* of Kimbie's friends. Afraid of the way they were so much bigger, so much darker, so much more *sexual* than any white guys Lauren had ever met. She approached them the way she approached jumps she was too afraid of, a longing inside of her, laced with fear, the promise of an intoxicating high somewhere in the mixture. And then she pulled away from them at the last minute, like she did with anything she didn't feel like she could handle.

There weren't many things like that on the slopes, and there weren't many things like that in real life, that Lauren circled and moved so close to, her muscles soaked in that sensation of *wanting* to do something, but fearing it enough that it made her back away, again and again.

She had been pretty drunk, for her. And she had just lost a slalom race because a tricky turn had beckoned her the same way, and she had been too afraid to attack it. Chance had seemed disinterested in her for weeks, and now he was back in her command. All of these things made her stand up, walk across the room, and start talking to him.

She didn't even manage to get out a full "Hey," before he was speaking.

"Seen you here before," he said. His voice was, as expected, baritone and rumbly, and something about it moved a sexual sensation from her tailbone to her throat. He was looking at her like she was the only person in the room, but also like he was going to eat her, and that, too, was thrilling. Burning against the left side of her body was the energy from Chance, whose stare she couldn't see, but definitely felt. "You seen me, too."

Someone bumped into her from behind just then, and she was pushed against him. His cock was firm, and the contours of it were almost unbelievable, even if it was fully hard, which she knew it probably wasn't. The shape of it was against her hip and her abdomen. The rest of him was rock-solid, and he didn't move, so she was crushed into him for a moment.

"Yo, man," he said, his face annoyed, and his large hand pushed the drunken invader away. The kid was a large, hefty white guy with a shell-shocked look on his face and a sunburn from his collarbone up, probably a linebacker.

When he brought his hand back from pushing that guy, he rested it on her shoulder. It was heavy, and she could feel an unusual strength in it. Warmth poured in from his hand, down her shoulder, spilling across her torso and then converging at her hips, slowing into the triangle of her pussy. She was wet, she could feel it, and something inside of her felt like it was clawing at her womb like a caged animal.

So the truth was, she had never, *ever*, wanted to fuck anybody more than she wanted to fuck that guy, at that moment. Her eyes felt heavy, and she blinked slowly: during that brief curtain of darkness, she imagined him lifting her up, somehow pushing away her jeans and panties, and setting her

on his cock like a rubber doll, grasping her hips and just *fucking* her senseless with the huge dick that was unfurling against her hip.

His hand moved from her shoulder to her neck, his thumb grazing the soft indentation of her throat. "That your boyfriend over there?" he asked, without looking in Chance's direction.

"Uh... kind of," she mumbled. She was staring at his mouth. She had never kissed a black guy before. In all honesty, she had never let one touch her this closely, even if she had wanted to, out of curiosity more than anything else. But the fear had always held her back, and now it was creeping up her spine again, pulsing beneath his thumb on her throat, combining with the raw arousal inside of her and making her feel like she might pass out.

"He ain't gonna start a bunch a shit, is he?"

He was smiling, like he knew something. He didn't care, his face was saying, if Chance started a bunch of shit or not.

He moved his hand from her throat, very slowly, his fingers traveling over the bare skin above the collar of her shirt. His eyes followed, and he sucked his full lower lip beneath his top teeth as he watched his own hand dragging between her breasts, down her abdomen, making her muscles ripple.

"You're pretty fit," he commented, his hand still moving. It was over the bone of her mound, and an ache spread out through her groin, deep into the center of her body. "I like that."

He worked his hand between her legs, his strong fingers spreading open once he was nestled in the center of her legs. And then he leaned down and kissed her, his big mouth consuming her.

Sexual energy traveled in both directions, like red-hot wires full of electricity, from his hand on her pussy to her mouth, where his tongue was probing, teasing, exploring, controlling her.

This went on for a while, and she got lost in the moment, however long it lasted. But reality came crashing through suddenly when his hand started moving between her skin and her jeans, where it felt *good*, as good as his skin would probably feel beneath her own hands, lying over the top of her body.

But she pulled away, and he gave her an insistent look, pulling her toward him. "Let's go to Kimbie's room," he said.

She looked over at Chance then, and saw the expression on his face. There was something she didn't like in it, something that yanked her out of the moment.

And with that removal, the guy she was making out with seemed suddenly too big, too scary. Too tall, too athletic.

Too... *black*.

"Um," she said, backing away, shaking her head. "I can't do this... sorry. I'm... I have a boyfriend."

He took it in stride, which was one thing she remembered in precise detail: his face, as she backed away, and he turned to follow her, his eyes focused over her shoulder at Chance, and the haughty chin tilt, the knowing smirk. "Right," he said.

She turned, then, and left through the kitchen door, passing Chance without speaking to him.

*

Jason had asked her about Chance a few other times, and she'd given him *most* of the story.

It was true that Chance had chased after her, that he had told her how hot that was and it was exactly what he wanted. It was also true, as she'd shared with Jason, that Chance started being obsessive about it, urging her to flirt, and make out, with almost any guy they ran into at parties. It was true that he wouldn't stop talking about it, true that this made her uneasy and eventually she basically ghosted him.

It was also true, even though she hadn't mentioned this to Jason, that they had left the party and gone back to his place to have really, really, hot sex. It was true that she often thought about the unnamed black guy when she was fucking Chance, superimposing a different memory over the real one: a different look on Chance's face, for one.

It was true that she had bailed at that moment more because she felt overwhelmed than anything else, and that she thought about that missed opportunity a lot, usually with some regret.

And it was also true that because of this experience, she backed out in the future on a lot of other opportunities with some of the very attractive black men that swarmed around Kimbie and her parties.

This was all very hard for Lauren to articulate, especially to Jason. It was just a soup of feelings and instincts, of coincidences and associations, of bad and good and out-of-control feelings.

She *wanted* to fuck a black guy. She was afraid of fucking a black guy. She was, in reality, afraid of even saying something so incredibly un-PC to herself. She was annoyed with herself that she had so many fly-bys, and bailed at the last minute, and that now she was married and so it was all off the table, forever.

A thing she had never conquered.

And then there was Chance: she had *hated* the look on Chance's face. She *was* turned on by Chance watching her. She regretted not taking the chances she'd had. She didn't like how obsessed Chance became; it creeped her out. She had masturbated more than once to that same idea, though, because in some, other, controlled dose, it turned her on.

How could she put all of those thoughts, and the physical feelings that went with them - because Lauren was mostly guided through life by what she intuited, and that usually happened somewhere in her body, not in her mind, as she saw it - into a summary for the left-brained, precision-loving Jason?

And anyway, by the time they had enough intimacy in their relationship for her to be sharing all of that with Jason, she was committed to marrying him.

So it had all been irrelevant.

And like a tree she had avoided, or a gate she had missed, or a cliff that she had dodged at the last minute, it disappeared behind her, and she tried to put it out of her mind.

But it wasn't really, exactly, that kind of thing.

So it festered, or burned slowly, somewhere deep inside of her.

And then Andre came along.

CHAPTER 4

He hadn't done this kind of thing for ages. There was a certain allure to it, a kind of sticky, sweaty, back-alley sexual feel to it as he did it, hunched over his laptop on the too-soft, enormous dark green velvet sofa they had inherited from Kimbie.

He was no noob when he went out searching; he had the lingo lodged in his head from many a foray into the hotwife lifestyle searches. Some things had changed, and there was definitely more of it, but it didn't take him long to get to the good sites.

How had he begun? Maybe he had been looking for porn, but porn wasn't able to satisfy this craving. Erotic books, maybe? There was a lot more of that now.

But Jason was an engineer, and his current situation registered with him as a problem. So however he had gotten to it, it was no surprise to him that he had landed on a forum, and that the Q&A page was what had sucked him in.

BigBlackLifestyle, the site was called. He got there by way of a single post, and almost passed the whole page over, because that wasn't *specifically, really*, what he was into.

The first night he had just lurked, reading through the comments and posts, finding, as he had before, back when he and the internet were much younger, that there were an astonishingly large number of men like him.

At first, he felt about it like he had in the past: this was all interesting, but it wasn't *him*. He was a fantasy guy, not one of "these" guys. The sort of person that wanted to read about it, imagine it, fantasize about it. But not the kind of guy who would actually take steps toward doing it.

He was not, in his narrative, a guy like Chance.

He read through all the forums: the forums for "wannabes;" the forums for the women, the forums for cuckolds and stags, the forums for beginners and bad experiences, the "wanted" forums. During the first visits he still felt like an outsider. A poser, a person lurking in on the passionate discourse of people who were obsessed with something, when he was merely "interested."

Lauren did this kind of thing, he reasoned. She spent a lot of time on ski forums, imagining some hobo life as a ski instructor in wild, exotic

locations. Being a nomad, living half a year in Patagonia or New Zealand and then the other half in Norway, among the scent of thawing sweat ground into expensive ski gear, five people to a tiny apartment with the vibe of a student dorm.

He had discovered her search history, and she hadn't denied it: it was all just fantasy, a nice dream that she had no intention of pursuing in real life. "It's just... like... another life. A different one I could have had. Sometimes I like to peek in on it."

Jason remembered this a few days into his indulgence. Maybe that was what put him over the edge, made him leap into actually posting it. Because he had never really given Lauren's having said that much thought before then, and yet there was something very critical embedded within it.

Lauren always claimed to live with the motto that a missed gate was a missed gate, and it always would be, so there wasn't any point looking back.

And yet her little hobby was exactly that. Looking back, on a regret, or a missed possibility. A missed gate. She liked peeking in on what her life might have turned out like.

And if that was something that Lauren really *did*, Jason reasoned, then maybe her past with Chance was not as permanent of a turn as Jason had always believed it was.

Or at least, that's how his thinking went.

So, after a few weeks of pure lurking, he finally wrote his own post in the wannabe forum.

I've had this fantasy since before I met my wife, but I never thought about sharing it with any girlfriends or acting on it. When my wife and I were dating, the topic came up at a small party at her friend's house. She told a story about an ex-boyfriend who had asked her to make out with another guy, and it seemed from the story that he (ex) was trying to coax her into the lifestyle.

Anyway, she told the story, and then we got interrupted, and when I asked her about it afterward, she told me that her ex-boyfriend had gotten really obsessive about it, and it hadn't felt right, and she had

broken up with him. basically, what I got out of the story was that she thought her ex was a creepy jerk and she was really put off by the whole thing

So of course I never brought it up with her.

But something happened recently that makes me think she's not sharing something, maybe she's more open to it than I thought.

I don't want to miss an opportunity, but I also don't want to risk making her feel like her ex-boyfriend made her feel. I guess I just don't know what to do

That was how it began. The responses came pouring in, most of them supportive. He hadn't expected them to say anything different; he could have guessed what people would write without confirming it for himself with the post.

THE most important thing in the lifestyle is COMMUNICATION, so that's what I recommend to you. You have to talk to her. Just say what you're saying here be honest tell her that you dont want to upset her or be like the ex-boyfriend

IMHO there is probably a lot more to that story like the boyfriend had some other qualities she didnt like and that was the last straw. She's married to you so she likes more stuff about you I hope. Test the waters, tell her its something youre worried will freak her out and she can say no and you wont bring up again if she feels really strongly about it. YOu never know til you try!

And then, after a bit, maybe a week after he posted his question:

Can I ask you what changed?

What do you mean?

[But something happened recently that makes me think she's not sharing something, maybe she's more open to it than I thought.] What was it?

Jason hesitated before replying. Reading every post caused a cool, uncomfortable ache to spread out from his chest, sending an electrical, thrumming unease to crawl around at the back of his neck, in his ball sack, low in his belly, squeezing its discomfort around his heart that was beating too rapidly.

She works as a personal trainer, mostly female clients, he typed.

His fingers floated, suspended, over the keyboard, as he considered whether or not to be more specific about her clients. It was silly: he had an anonymous account, this was the internet, there was no way that this one, simple clue would lead anyone to him or his wife... and yet, something about typing the words "specializing in skiing" felt dangerous and wrong.

And yet it had a seductive, dangerous taste to it. It pulled at him. It was a detail, something about her, and he *wanted* to share it, just like he *wanted* to share a lot of things about his wife.

Why?

She specializes in training for a specific sport, so she usually only deals with white women, he wrote.

That seemed good enough, a little dangerous, enough to push the beast that wanted to share down for a bit.

One day she had a really ripped black guy as a client. I showed up at her gym unexpectedly and saw them together. I thought he worked there or something. She was touching him and seemed like she was flirting. Then I found out he was a client she was taking on because his trainer had covid. But the thing is, she got kind of playful about it, and then when she came home that night she got pretty wild (initiated sex with a blowjob, totally different than usual). But then the next day she was stand-offish about it. I feel like she

was getting off on that scene with the client... but then I didn't want to push her on it.

He stared at his reply after he wrote it, letting it sit there, unposted, on the internet but not really. A profound desire to post it was traveling through his muscles, squeezing his chest, bringing a rush of blood into his semi-hard cock.

But it was pathetic, wasn't it? Pouring out his feelings on an internet forum instead of to his wife?

He stood up, glancing at the clock on his screen with bleary eyes to confirm that he had at least an hour before Lauren got home, and walked into the kitchen to make himself a drink and ponder the question.

He must have read the clock wrong, because he heard the garage door as he poured the wine. The stove clock read something different to him when his eyes shot at it, and from there he acted robotically, methodically, sweeping up his glass of wine and walking quickly back to the couch.

The decision was already made, already stored in his fingertips. He hit enter with his pointer finger, and then closed the window and shut his laptop, all in a fluid motion that came to him as easily as if he did it all the time. Only his heart, pounding heavily and rapidly, betrayed the intensity of the moment.

Lauren was actually *late*, he noted, as he heard her trot into the kitchen and toss her keys on the marble countertop with a clang. Time had gone by so quickly that he hadn't even noticed: it was dark outside, it was 9:14pm.

"You're home late," he said, his voice high and cheery.

Lauren furrowed her brow as she hefted a bag of vegetables onto a stool. "Didn't you get my texts?" She looked around him, leaning slightly to the left, her eyes taking in the dark house, no lights on. It piqued something suspicious inside of her, he could tell, because it flitted across her features and kept her eyes slightly squinted. "What... are *you* doing?"

The very bad adrenaline, as Jason thought of it - the kind he hated, the kind that poured into his arteries in situations where he did not have complete control or any chance of mastering all of the working parts, the kind that Lauren loved and fed off of, because Lauren liked being slightly out-of-control and escaping the forces of nature - started to drown him internally. His forearm twitched, and a rigidity that made him feel suffocated and shaky started creeping out to his limbs.

Jesus, Jayce. It's just a post in some corner of the internet Lauren will never find.

"Uh," he said, putting his hand to the back of his head and rubbing his hair, which he knew made it stand up straight and scruffily on top, which he also knew Lauren found attractive. He looked back at the dark living room, and it glared at him with menace. It certainly *looked* like he had been up to something.

"Just reading emails, stuff for work. I lost track of time. *Why* are you so late?"

Lauren found it all very fishy, he could see that on her face. She leaned over to the wall and smacked the kitchen light switch. "I should have sent you an email," she quipped.

And then she dove into the grocery bag, pulling out a container of some expensive-looking, bird food snack. "Did you eat?"

He watched her hands with a vague sense of horror throbbing away, attenuating with each pulse. Lauren opened packages like a maniac, ignoring perforations and cut-in tabs, giving anyone watching the impression that all the contents would explode into the air and rain down all over them.

But it never happened. Everything shook and looked dangerous for a second, but in the end, nothing ever went flying, and so it was, maddeningly as ever, with this container, even though she opened it while it was upside down and caught it as it slid down her shirt, only one of the morsels escaping, which she caught in one hand.

She tossed the container on the counter. "Wasabi pea?" she asked.

The terrible feeling was gone, the adrenaline draining away. Lauren put a pea to her lips and grinned before - very sexily, if that was possible with wasabi peas - crunching it with her shiny white teeth. "That really scared you, huh?"

A flash of undiluted fear ripped through him, as, for a second, his mind made the mistake of thinking she was somehow talking about the drama that had played out in his own mind: the post, the darkness, the taboo little activity he had been indulging.

But she wasn't. *She* was talking about the dangerous way she had opened the peas.

"It's terrifying," he said, maybe too insistently. It sounded off, too aggressive. Lauren squinted and ate another pea.

Then she sighed, her cheerful, let's-move-on sigh. Something he really liked about her was that she didn't have time for drama about dumb shit. "Did you eat, though?" she asked. "I didn't. I'm starving. I was soooo hoping you'd have something made." She looked at him, and moved close to him, letting her arms drop onto his shoulders.

Her mouth flickered a little, he thought, when she felt his cock against her thigh. "I was so hoping it would be something *filthy*," she purred. She giggled a little when his cock flexed, but he was adrift in a sea of confusing thoughts and couldn't be sure if he was imagining this or not.

"Cheesy... full of cured meat... something absolutely horrifying.... that Ragu in the microwave thing you do..." she continued.

She bit into his earlobe.

And then she slipped away from him, headed to the fridge.

His head spun for few beats, and the intoxication she had left on him dissipated.

Lauren is not talking about the same thing as you think she is, he told himself, for perhaps the millionth time in their marriage.

"Mish-mash?" he asked, clapping his hands together. "I can do that."

Lauren grinned and tossed her head back to look at him upside-down as he walked behind her.

"You are my hero."

He put his lips on hers and let his hands wander over her hips, the roundness of her bottom beckoning him, full and firm against the outside of his palm.

"Whatever Lauren wants," he said. "Lauren gets."

CHAPTER 5

It was the kind of thing that later, some people might wonder about: the timing of it, the threads that bound each individual event to another, in a web of coincidences and happenstance that a mystical person might call fate. A person who didn't know Lauren very well might think she would be the sort of person to see a mystical connection in all of it.

But a person who thought that about Lauren would be all wrong about her.

She *was* intuitive, but not *flaky*. Events ran into each other, and tied other events together, and if a pattern emerged at the end of it, then that was what it was. A pattern that you could only see behind you, over your shoulder, fading into the past.

It was Andre who set most of these events in motion, in the end, but not in a way that anyone could ever attribute to *fate*. Or a plan. But in retrospect, it would certainly look *weird*.

"You *cook*," Lauren said, her voice calibrated to the perfect blend of harmless, flirty disbelief and professional humor, a knack for which had secured her a very high-paying job with elite clients. "Gourmet meals? Or are we talking... microwaved Ragu on pasta?"

Andre gave her a look; she laughed. "It's something my husband makes. He calls it mish-mash."

Andre shook his head and made no comment on her husband, which was something she liked about him, but couldn't figure out. She couldn't tell what was behind it. *All* men flirted with her, to some extent, and so she mentioned her husband frequently, just to have all the cards on the table. But with an opportunity like this one in front of them, most guys took the opportunity to playfully bash "her husband."

Most guys would have said, "That's disgusting," at the very least.

But Andre didn't behave like that. He reached up for the pull bar and started his next set of exercises. On his last rep, he looked up at her. "I am talking, I am a culinary *artiste*."

"Okay," Lauren said. "Now you just sound a little gay, honestly."

She could make this joke because she knew with 100% certainty that Andre was not gay.

He was hard to figure out, but not gay.

Because he *was* flirting with her. Just in his own way.

Andre shook his head. "Nah. See, that's a mistake a lot of dudes make." He stood up, pulling his phone out of his pocket. A feeling, somewhere in the neighborhood of attraction and slight fear, washed over Lauren in a wave each time he stood up, his full height never ceasing to impress her. She came up just below his pecs. Andre extended his arm to show her the screen of his phone as he swiped away. The scent of his sweat, mingled with a very pleasant deodorant, wafted into her consciousness and played the same old tricks on her.

She fixed her eyes rigidly on the screen of his phone. "You make a fancy dinner for a nice lady, you're in the door," Andre explained, settling on the pictures on a food website.

A hot shudder traveled through Lauren, and her lower belly came to life with a viscous flutter.

"Right? See... you know what I'm talkin' about. I just made this..." he showed her a delicious-looking Asian dish.

"Huh," she said. "Did it work?"

Andre smiled wryly and tucked his phone away, declining to answer her specific question. "It's something you might like, actually. High-protein, a whole bunch of green shit, all that."

"You have one more set here," Lauren told him, and he sat down, but not before doing a thing that she found vexing and strangely attractive, where he puffed up, almost confrontationally, and then did what she asked, with a blend of flirtatious flippancy that, again, she didn't know what to make of. He clapped a fist into his open palm and snapped his fingers as he did.

"But it tastes good," Lauren prompted, smiling again.

Andre gave her an incredulous look and began his set.

She put a hand on his shoulder, repeating in her mind that it was, in fact, a professional thing to be doing, because she did, in fact, want to explain something to him. Professionally. Under her hand, his muscles moved, hard and packed with potency.

"So right here," she said, happy to hear her voice sounding calm and natural, "I'm feeling almost like.. a vibration, when you're pulling down. You're relying too much on this muscle here..." she took a moment to trace his acromion muscle, enjoying the feel of it beneath her fingertips.

Which was wholly inappropriate.

Thank *God* Rick was coming back soon.

"...and you should be using these muscles..." she moved her fingers over his ribs and to his incredibly hard abdomen, "to take some of the pressure off it. Otherwise you're going to get a strain. We can do a few with low weights more slowly and focus on it."

"Hmm," Andre said, in a tone that allowed her to take the comment in a variety of ways: that was interesting, he was saying. Or: that was an interesting way to touch me.

She stepped back. "So, where do I get these tasty, healthy recipes that make all the women swoon? I'll recommend it to Jayce."

Andre put his hands on his knees and looked at her in the mirror, like he had a smart remark to make. Then he grinned, as if thinking better of it. He fished his phone out again and pulled up the site, then handed her the phone, before reaching forward to lower the weight on the machine.

She glanced at the webpage. Andre could have taken the opportunity to ask her for her number or her email, to send her a link, but he didn't. That was the kind of thing that had her unsettled: she would, of course, have said no, because she followed the company policies carefully. Her job, in fact, had been previously vacated by a trainer who had not followed those rules.

But clients always *tried*.

Except Andre.

"Oh... this is just on.. BBC?" she said.

Andre again looked like he was going to make a joke, but didn't.

"Lifestyle section," he said. "Makes you look like a pro."

She handed the phone to him and waited while he put it away and got ready to do the next set. She placed her hands on his shoulders again, thumbs aligned with his acromion muscle. Another wave of arousal washed over her, and she noted the light flush on her cheeks in the mirror.

"Still seems, if you don't mind me saying, a little... you know..."

He raised his eyebrows.

"*Fancy*," she said.

Andre began his reps without saying anything to that, and she focused on the movement of his muscles. "So, I'm going to really work my fingers into this muscle group, it'll be kind of uncomfortable," she said.

Andre, as usual, did not make any of the typical comments in response that male clients often did. She had comebacks, and it didn't bother her, but it was just... interesting, she supposed.

Maybe he *was* gay.

"...there, so... feel that? That's *really* working, carrying a lot of the force. Do another rep..."

"Damn, girl, that is *really* violent," Andre said, grimacing.

Lauren smiled at him in the mirror. "So I'm going to leave my fingers there, to remind you to try and shift the muscles you use, *away* from this group. I want you to engage your core as you pull down, try to pretend you don't have this muscle..."

"Dang," Andre said, as she pressed harder.

"I'm going to push harder, the more you use it," Lauren told him, smiling. "There you go... see how you can actually redistribute the load to your larger core muscles? That's what you want to try to do, here while you train, until it becomes muscle memory and you automatically do it when you use this muscle group in the real world. Do a few more reps?"

Andre did, and she smiled at him between glances at his muscles rolling beneath his gray shirt.

Rick will be back, she told herself, in seven days or so.

"That's great."

*

It wasn't until the weekend that she thought of it again.

Jason was out on a bike ride, but he was street biking, and that wasn't her thing. She couldn't keep up with him on his insanely expensive road bike, and she just wasn't into the mechanics of biking as much as he was. They had fun mountain biking together: he could be content with his love of the mechanics of his bike, and she had an ample dose of chaos and adrenaline to deal with. But the road biking bored her.

She went for a run, just to keep her weekly cardio minutes afloat (running also bored her: she liked her mind making crucial, split-second decisions constantly or else exercise was a chore), and developed a sudden, profound hunger in the shower.

So she thought of Andre's recipe, a savory, Mamie-looking dish that, to her best recollections, she had most of the ingredients for.

Jason's laptop was still on the kitchen counter: he had left it there to show her something that morning. For ease of sharing electronics, all their

computer passwords were the same, she pulled up a search engine and typed in, quickly and haphazardly, "BBC Lifestyle."

Maybe she had mis-typed. Suggestions appeared immediately, and, always one to avoid typing anything extra if she could, Lauren clicked on the first one without looking at it carefully. She turned toward the sink while it was loading, poured herself a glass of water, and turned back.

She actually moved around on the landing page for a few moments, her eyes trying to find the anchor she had expected, a link to recipes or a picture of food. But the images, and the words, that were reaching her eyes had nothing to do with food, or "lifestyle" as her consciousness had expected. And yet they did have to do with Andre, in some vaguely related way, and because Andre had given her the idea, and she was now here looking for something because of him, several minutes went by before she registered that she had simply been taken to the completely wrong website.

She looked up at the address bar and read and re-read, until she finally understood: the "c" was missing.

She was at "Lifestyle."

She reached for the mouse pad and moved to the back button.

The words and the images on the screen were still jumping at her, though.

Big.

Black.

Big.

cock. BBC. Forum. Looking for playmate.

Pictures.

She moved the cursor around on the screen, her mind hovering in a place between confusion and shock, and giddy interest. But when at last she entered the taboo-looking site, it was through the "pictures" portal.

Lauren ingested information in a way that Jason had told her, many times, was absolutely ludicrous. School had never been her strong point, which wasn't to say that she wasn't smart; she was, but following things in a neat, orderly line was not her style. Her anatomy classes, for example, had been exquisitely painful. Her eyes bounced around, reading parts of stories and clicking through links, bouncing from this section to that section, her brain forming a tapestry of ideas, kind of like a collage.

She ended up reaching for a stool with her foot and not realizing that she had done so. She sat, skimming through the site, diving into rabbit-

holes, averting her eyes from some of the more explicit pictures, widening them as she absorbed the information.

The real BBC Lifestyle section was forgotten, and so were her plans for lunch, even her hunger.

And then she heard the clacking of Jason's bike shoes on the cement of the still-open garage, and she was yanked from the collage of thoughts with a jerk.

A high - a lot like an adrenaline rush - coursed through her, hot and titillating. It felt like she was getting caught doing something very, very bad, and the feeling had an echo inside of her somewhere...

Jason's footsteps were coming closer.

She closed the window, felt the mild shake in her limbs that preceded a sudden grasp of control over herself, and shut the laptop with a slam.

The slow-motion took over next, and her motions became fluid, her mind sharp: she spun around and turned on the faucet, putting her glass beneath the stream, raising one hand to her neck to feel for what she knew to be true: a very fine film of sweat had developed along her hairline.

The door opened while she watched the trees above the fence, noted that they were swaying violently. She heard Jason's shoes clack on the tile, she made a mental note to delete the internet search history, she swallowed the ice-cold water, and turned to look at Jason.

He was standing with one hand on the door handle, looking discombobulated. "Did you get my messages?" he asked, a sour tone in his voice. He was still out-of-breath.

In the way that Lauren saw things all at once, and not piece-by-piece, the whole story flashed into her head. She pushed her hair back from her face.

"I wanted you to come pick me up," he said, reaching for the garage door switch. A plastic trash can skidded across the floor just as the door began to close.

Because of the wind. And her phone was... in the bathroom...

"It's crazy out there," Lauren said, and drank another large gulp of water. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand as Jason pushed the door closed. "I'm sorry, I went for a run."

Jason bent over to take off his shoes. "I almost died on that stretch of Ward," he said, bent over. "A street sign blew all the way across the street. It could have taken someone's head off."

And then, as if on cue, the electricity went out, and Lauren was saved from immediate discussion by Jason rolling his eyes and throwing open the basement door dramatically to trot downstairs and do something Lauren barely understood with his servers, which had begun emitting a loud, awful, tone.

CHAPTER 6

Jason went to take a shower, so there was plenty of time for her to think, alone, and calm her giddy nerves about what she had seen, and the guilt about not getting any of Jason's messages. Luckily for her, she was notoriously bad about responding to texts, and her missing them was perfectly believable because she ran with a music app that didn't allow notifications and almost always turned the volume off on her phone out of professional habit.

While Jason was showering, she swept into the kitchen and in a series of moves that were, to her, surprisingly adept, she deleted the history of her accidental foray into the Big Black Lifestyle page. Then she headed back to the bedroom, something gnawing inside of her. She sat on the bed, her short, ice-blue bathrobe tied loosely at her waist, her chest almost bare, her legs crossed, the material of the robe barely grazing her bottom.

Jason emerged from the shower and played with a few light switches. "Power's still off," he grumbled.

He was running a towel haphazardly through his hair, the rest of his body naked, as he stepped out to the sink vanity.

Lauren was surprised by where her mind went, that her eyes fell to his cock and stayed there until he turned around, still drying his head, and she looked at his firm ass while he found a toothbrush and started brushing his teeth.

She was looking at *him*, and she knew she wanted *him*, even if all the thoughts in her head and the heat between her legs had been brewed up with a mix of different things. Jason was at the forefront of her mind; Jason was who was here right now.

He saw her in the mirror, and she saw the movement of his cock just beneath the edge of the vanity when he understood that she was watching him from the edge of the bed, sexual thoughts in her head. She ran a hand along the hem of her bathrobe, from the collarbone to her navel, back up again, and smiled.

He turned, his face a little disbelieving, toothbrush still in his mouth.

But what his mind was not comprehending, his body had interpreted readily in his own favor: his cock, a decent-sized, beige-pink muscle with a slight and very pleasing crook at the end, was engorging, lengthening in

unconfused spurts, and she could see his muscles tensing, longing, taking on the shape and contours that remembered gripping her, holding her, fucking her.

He pulled the toothbrush from his mouth and hesitated only a moment more before turning to the sink and spitting, then looking back at her, a moment of confusion making him look back and forth from her to the sink. He ducked and turned on the faucet to rinse his mouth - an unfortunate, if interesting, event had taken place one time when he had just brushed his teeth and then ate her out - and then he turned around again, wiping water from his mouth.

Bingo.

Lauren lay back on her elbows and smiled at him. He was now hers, and she could feel that complete control of his attention almost as if it were a real force, pouring out of him like white light in some stupid comic book movie, straight into her body. She always felt it click, when he tipped over and into the full realm of her control: Jason was only thinking of one thing now, and it was her.

She uncrossed her legs, feeling the ripple that traveled through his body almost as if it was in her own. He started walking toward her, dropping the towel on the floor.

"There's not much else to do then," she said.

Or maybe she didn't. It didn't matter.

Jason moved toward the bed and she stayed sitting up on the edge. She could see that this threw him: it wasn't the usual sequence of events, the motions that they went through when they were going to have sex. He stopped before he was too close to her, clearly confused about what was happening, thrown off by her change in demeanor.

She reached for his cock, watching her hand close around it, enjoying the hot, smooth feel of it. She liked the sound that left his mouth, an exhalation, a complete surrender to whatever she was going to do. She pulled gently to make him walk toward her, and then she looked up, smiling, as she brought his cock close to her lips, teasing him for a bit before she rubbed his crown over her lower lip.

She dropped her eyes as she opened her mouth for him and took his cock inside of it, and before she knew it, they were closed. She swirled her tongue around his head inside her mouth, feeling the strain of the vessels embedded in his flesh as they made him come even more to life.

She looked up at him, saw his open mouth, his eyes consumed by the physical pleasure she was giving him, thoughts disappearing from his head.

And then she began to suck him, really working on his dick, making more of an effort than she had in a long time. Her eyes eventually closed, and her thoughts took a turn at some point as her jaw worked hard and she strained to accommodate as much of him as possible. She didn't *exactly* imagine sucking off another guy, didn't *exactly* create a mental image of another man's cock – bigger, longer, *blacker* – in her mouth. But the thought was there, like a rip tide, and if she went too close to it, it grabbed her ankles and pushed her violently in the direction of obscene thoughts.

Jason pushed her onto the bed and they scooted back, feverishly pawing at each other, and he seemed hungrier than usual, invigorated. Sex had slowly been drained of its vigor, she realized, but it had happened in degrees and she, at least, had not really understood what had been missing. But it was *this*, the absence of *this*: heated, dizzying, mindless physical passion.

Jason pushed her arms to the mattress and fucked her like it was the first time in years, or maybe the first time at all. She wouldn't be able to think, later, of why it was so different, why the bridge of her nose tingled wildly after she came and sat up too suddenly.

But as Jason was on top of her, inside of her, even while her eyes were looking right at him, the riptide pulled her away, again and again, to think about how a man like Andre would feel inside of her, stretching her open, touching her in new places, slamming against her ass and her thighs. The ideas twisted inside of her, almost like they were given physical form, a girth of their own, and she could even feel their imprint deep in her abdomen.

And so she knew, in the darkest parts of her heart, that some component of her orgasm was formed in those thoughts.

But thoughts...

Thoughts were just thoughts, right?..

CHAPTER 7

In the beginning, he had gone to the forum every other day, doling his visits out to himself at times that were totally safe (Lauren was at work, and he was at home, and he had nothing else to do). By keeping his visits categorized as a reward for himself, he managed to keep his fantasy compartmentalized in a place where he felt like he had control over it.

And that was how Jason operated: he was an organized person, a methodical person, and the sort of person who never, ever, procrastinated something or prioritized fun ahead of work. He was, among his colleagues, a very typical engineer, with a typical engineer's personality: things worked if you adhered to formulas and constructed a way for them to work.

Never in his life had his grip on self-control slipped so drastically, and so quickly.

The strict timing of his visits to the forum was maintained for only about two weeks. It didn't help that Lauren had, for whatever reason, become - or at least, it seemed to him - more sexually charged than usual. And it didn't help that this seemed to coincide with Lauren's taking on of Rick's clients.

Specifically, Rick's male clients.

Specifically, the very athletic, very large, very black Andre.

It was on his mind every moment of the day that another task didn't require his full attention. In the car, while exercising, while staring at the TV screen and "watching" TV with Lauren - not a common activity, to be sure. He thought about his posts, he blazoned the replies across the ticker-tape of his thoughts.

And then, unable to really believe it himself, he began to go to the forum at *other* times.

Dangerous times.

While Lauren was home. While she was in the shower, while he was working in his home office. While he was seated in the overstuffed armchair with his computer on his lap, and Lauren was in the living room with him.

He started to enjoy the danger of it - and this was something that was not like him, ordinarily. It was more the sort of thing that Lauren claimed to enjoy (and evidently, actually did): he began to like the uneven staccato of

his heart, the rush of cold-tingly adrenaline, the ragged breaths that he had to tamper down. He got erections, too, and at first it seemed easy enough to blame it on the material at hand, but then it seemed to also stem from the proximity of Lauren, the doing of something taboo, the fact that he was indulging his fantasy and might get caught by her at any moment.

And he didn't want that. He knew that he definitely didn't want that. He had imagined what would happen if Lauren found out how much time he spent on this forum, if she saw what was on it, and he didn't like the thoughts he came up with.

He began to post, tentatively at first, and then more boldly. It was the sort of forum that required some form of identity verification, so it was not as wild-west or trashy as, say, a Reddit forum. And there were no trolls, no nasty commentators. When he confessed his desires to share his fantasy with his wife, people cheered him on and offered helpful advice. People sympathized with his problem when he wrote about Lauren's bad experience with her ex-boyfriend. Jason wasn't the kind of person who really liked community, of any sort: not clubs, not his colleagues, not online "communities."

But he was starting to like these people.

The posts turned into long threads, and conversations between him and other users that he couldn't wait to get back to.

He knew, somewhere deep inside, that it was only a matter of time before he got caught by Lauren, but he ignored the red, blazing warning light in the corner of his eye. Again, this was unlike him, but he justified it to himself as an opportunity to satisfy at least some part of his fantasy without upsetting his wife.

And then one day, it happened.

The old expression of having one's heart stop was the sort of thing he, probably like everyone else, read and accepted as meaning "got really scared," and for Jason, it entailed, as an idea, the feeling of adrenaline rushing through his veins and surprise. He had never thought that a person might actually feel like their heart stopped.

But when he became aware, on a Thursday evening, that Lauren was in the room with him, and that she had been in the room with him for some unknown amount of time - for she had to be, because of where she was

standing, if only that amount of time had been the amount of time it had taken her to cross the room.

It was actually the scent of her that reached him first. She was fresh out of the shower, smelling citrusy and soapy, and beneath those strong artificial smells, like her own wet skin. The scent made its way to him long before he processed it at a conscious level and turned around to look behind him: by the time he did, she was *right* behind him, one hand and a towel in her wet hair.

And that was when his heart stopped cold in his chest. There was a moment, which felt a lot like a free-fall, in which he was a man without a heartbeat, and the stillness of his blood made him feel temporarily dead. His eyes moved to her face, capturing in an instant the slightly parted lips - the mouth, agape, her eyes, fixed on his computer screen. She looked surprised, confused, *shocked*.

"Hey! Oh, hey," he mumbled, speaking much too quickly. His left hand reached behind him and slapped the laptop shut.

It's okay, he thought, his heart stuttering back to life, and then beating much too quickly. He racked his visual memory for what had been on the screen at the time Lauren had entered. *Just text, it was just text, she would not have read it, or been able to read it all so fast...*

Lauren did not react to him slamming the laptop closed in a way that he would have expected, and it would haunt his thoughts for a long time thereafter. She hadn't asked him what he was doing, or made a joke about porn, like she ordinarily would have.

Instead, she looked about as frozen as he was. She stared for a moment, and then turned away quickly, as if she wanted to un-see whatever she had seen. She flipped her head upside-down and wrapped the towel around it, and then she turned back. "Hey," she said, in the meantime. "Hey, I was just... uh... wondering what you maybe wanted to, uh..."

"I just have a few things I have to finish up for work," he said, much too quickly. He sounded guilty, to his own ears, and likely to Lauren's. "It's -"

"Yeah. Okay. Great. That's fine. You, uh... should, you want to finish that up before dinner?"

Jason hesitated too long, and he could see that Lauren was rattled by it.

The hesitation was a period of time in which he tried to *think*: what was more believable? Finishing this "stuff for work" right now, or was it in his best interests to bet that Lauren *had seen* the site, and so that it was therefore also in his best interests to *leave* the computer, and his "work," and go have dinner now?

He tried, as he was weighing these two options, to conjure an image of the site in his mind. Was there anything that Lauren could have read, anything printed too large, anything at all?

"Yuh-hey-uh," he said, idiotically, more than anything to fill the time and end the now-increasingly awkward pause. "I...uh..." he turned toward the laptop, looking at it as if he expected it to have something to say for itself, or an opinion about what he should do. He scratched the back of his head ferociously, and then wished he hadn't: it was a tell-tale tick of his and actually made it impossible for him to play any kind of game with Lauren that required keeping a secret. "It's... I don't know... doesn't really mat-"

"It's okay, you know what?" Lauren interrupted. She seemed jittery as hell. "I am going to... I just remembered, I want to cook this, um, thing. It's a new recipe. So I actually, I'll probably... yeah, need to go to the store. So just... you finish up now, and I'll... go cook."

Jason nodded, his chest too tight to move air through his throat, and his head spinning too wildly to think of anything to say, anyway.

"Cool. Okay. Like, say, seven-thirty?" she asked, already backing out of the room.

Backing out.

It delivered, whether it was true or not or intentional or not, the distinct impression that Lauren did not want to turn her back on him.

And then she left.

Jason stared at the door that she partially closed behind her, leaving it, as was Lauren's style for some reason, all but closed, one bizarre inch remaining. He was glad that he could hear her, though, that he could hear the door to the garage hissing closed, the sound of the garage door rumbling away until it closed fully.

When he let out a deep exhale, it felt like he hadn't breathed that entire time. He pivoted in his swivel chair, and stared at the closed laptop, not daring to open it and see for himself what Lauren may or may not have seen.

The feeling of being caught was, in reality, far more uncomfortable than the feeling he had imagined when he imagined being caught: it was intense, suffocating, and again, peculiarly cold.

He sat with it for a few moments, spiraling into a blackness of mood as he wondered if he had just irrevocably damaged his marriage.

But then he gripped himself, mentally, firmly, and decided to see for himself if there was any way she would have recognized what the site was, or if this was all just a deeply paranoid response to what had happened, and what he was doing.

His hands shot out to pry the laptop open, and he closed his eyes for a disorienting, nauseating second, before flipping his lids open and staring at the screen.

It was just forum, a sea of text, but there were some fairly racy avatars present on the screen. They were small, because he liked his text pages zoomed far out, to read everything in large chunks. A lot of the guys liked to post using a profile picture with their own wife's, or girlfriend's, pussy taking up a large part of the picture.

But was that all that much different than what you would see anywhere else on the internet? he wondered.

The only other damning - maybe - thing was the webpage logo, blazoned at the top of the page in black and white letters, Big Black Lifestyle.

But what would that possibly have meant to Lauren? The font was a little ragged, and it wasn't immediately obvious, he reasoned, what it even said.

He stared at the screen.

In all likelihood, he thought, Lauren had seen the page and taken it to be yet another one of his "geeky forums," as she called them (Lauren was, unlike Jason, Very Offline, as opposed to Very Online. The only thing he had known her to use the internet for was to check the snowpack and to look up recipes that tried to convert vegetable matter into edible food).

Lauren *hated* forums, and she always rolled her eyes at him when he talked about them.

So that was probably what she had seen: just another wall of text, a bunch of lewd avatars (the techy sites he frequented were awash in hugely dorky guys who had a tendency to love pornographic images in any

situation, so he doubted that the avatars would have really caught her attention).

He hoped.

And so... it was all very reasonable to assume that Lauren hadn't seen anything, or thought anything, about any of it.

He was the one who had acted like an idiot.

He shouldn't worry about it. Right?

Behind him, in the silence, a clock ticked so faintly he usually didn't hear it. His stomach still felt cold and twisted.

Why did she look so shocked, then, Jayce, old buddy? the paranoid voice in his head yelled loudly.

He stared some more.

And then, not even realizing what he was doing until he was already doing it, he did something that he knew was a signal of obsession, which was dangerous, but he justified it discretely to his paranoid brain by reasoning the following: it didn't matter, because Lauren either knew, or she didn't.

His reaching out to the people on the forum, as a knee-jerk reaction he hadn't even thought about before he began performing it, had no bearing on what Lauren thought or didn't think.

Shit. I think my wife just caught me on this forum. Any of you who know my story, what do you think I should do?

He typed.

He waited.

He shut his computer down and went to the bathroom.

Lauren came home, and he sat in his office with his heart pounding. He wasn't an idiot, and he didn't need advice from anyone - in fact, he knew what they would say, in the end, and he knew they were right.

Communication was the key to everything.

He almost stood up to walk into the kitchen, to go and see if Lauren had anything to say to him.

But if she hadn't seen it, then he would be ratting himself out, and probably lose his single outlet for this consuming fantasy.

He sank back into the chair.

And opened his computer.

Uh-oh. What happened?

She came into the room while I was on the site, and I didn't know she was there. When I turned around, she seemed really disturbed/shocked. But she didn't say anything, and then I slammed the laptop shut.

"and then I slammed the laptop shut."

Smooth. Do you know if she saw it? Does she know what it is

She saw it. But now I don't know if I should ask her if she SAW it, saw it, or what. I don't want to rat myself out. Basically I am doing everything I can to NOT make her think of her old boyfriend and the bad vibes she had with him

Bro, communication is key. I think you better say something

shit man i dont know. tell us how it goes

Lauren called out from the kitchen.

Which was also not really Lauren's style.

He would have to come back to this later, feed his paranoia on the site. In the meantime...

He sucked in a deep breath of air and stood up.

He had to try and figure out whether or not Lauren thought anything was up.

Or not.

CHAPTER 8

She ran a stop sign at the end of the street, which, thankfully, marked the intersection of two quiet, suburban roads in a neighborhood with almost no children. But she pulled the car over anyway, and gripped the steering wheel for a few moments, her foot smashing the brake and clutch, the car still in gear.

The initial shock of seeing Jason on the website had sent her into actual shock: she had made decisions robotically, and she could remember all of them, and what she had said, and how she claimed to be going to the store, but she remembered all of it like it was something she hadn't actually done herself.

Shit. Shit, shit, shit.

She tried to link everything together to the best of her ability, but that was never her forte. She thought she had erased her history of that site, and she had never again used Jason's computer to look for it.

But he had found it, and it was there, on his screen. She recognized it with ease.

Or had she? It couldn't have been her guilty conscience, fusing with some other, similar-looking website, that was creating this nightmarish illusion?

Could it?

Or had she simply fucked up (most probable) some aspect of erasing her history that could not fool Jason.

Jesus, she didn't know. She let him handle all that crap. She had never cared, and she had barely listened when he explained it to her. It put her to sleep. She didn't have anything to hide, she always complained, when he started nagging her about security and tried to make her use some kooky search engine instead of Google.

Now she wished she had listened.

"Shit," she repeated.

Jason was a better, more organized thinker than she was, better at connecting the dots, better at seeing the picture from start to finish. What would he see? He would see that his wife was visiting a website called "Big Black Lifestyle" and that she had begun doing so - however sparingly - after she had taken on Rick's clients.

Specifically, Rick's very large, very well-endowed (she could deduce this, based on the evidence she saw in the gym) black client.

The same client who had asked to continue training with her one day a week even after Rick returned.

She didn't go back to that site *a lot* or anything.

She went there tentatively, she flitted around it, never really posting, never really reading. She wasn't lurking, because that would imply that she stayed long enough to observe things in great detail. She went in more like a butterfly, tasting a few flowers, doing it quickly, moving on quickly, and then, as if someone was watching her, leaving abruptly.

So what would Jason find? Nothing.

There was a website called Big Black Lifestyle, and nothing else, and if he asked about it, she would just say she had landed there by mistake while looking for *BBC Lifestyle*.

He would ask why.

Would he ask why?

He would.

And she would lie and say someone *other than* Andre had recommended a recipe.

She would say, "someone recommended a recipe."

It was not the full truth, but it was *a* truth.

Except.

Except... did he have some kind of extensive history of what she had done or something?

She didn't know.

"Ugh," she said, as her distraction led her to let her foot slip off the clutch and her car lurched forward, stalling. (Lauren had paid extra to get a new Golf with standard transmission, because she, like any *real* skier who was not a bum, knew that standard transmission on a vehicle like a Golf, with excellent winter tires, was far more useful to a ski commuter than any SUV).

She sighed and restarted the car, then drove around the block, feeling composed enough that she would drive safely, but forgetting entirely that she had said she was going to the store.

When she went into the kitchen, she remembered.

Jason was still in the office.

Her stomach lurched, a wave of nausea rising up through her. It was a familiar feeling, a rush of adrenaline. She had to wait, let it pass over her, and then she would be in control.

Jason had either seen or he hadn't, and he would either say something or he wouldn't, and that would just be what it was. The initial wave of nausea crested, and it rolled over her.

The rush of adrenaline, the one that gave over to a high, the one that receded and left in its place the feeling of tunnel vision, of control, of mastery, always began, curiously, at her back, just below her shoulder blades. It was cold and electric at first, and then it tingled, hot, fast-moving, and crept up over her shoulders and into her chest, along her spine, into her limbs. It left her body feeling like it was floating, moving ahead of her thoughts. She felt that now: it was the thing that let her move her legs before she really saw something with her eyes.

And that was all this was: a blind corner that she was traveling toward very fast. Jason would appear and she would know what was on the other side. But she was filled with that liquid that made her a great athlete, and so she did what she always did: she disconnected some part of her mind that cluttered her decisions, that saw too far or not far enough.

Jason would do what he did, and she would feel her way through it, and that was the only thing she would see.

But the seconds elongated when she was in this place, stretching into hours.

"Hey," she yelled, the thought of doing so having never reached her consciousness. "I forgot to ask you. What do you want to eat?"

Jason appeared a moment later. Something was off about him. He seemed to have jogged to the kitchen.

"Huh?" he said.

"I forgot to -" Lauren made a sharp turn, remembering what she had actually said when she'd left before.

No matter.

" - get the grocery bags," she finished, reaching for them from the small, built-in table to her left. "But I realized, I didn't really ask you if you wanted to try this at all. It's, uh... udon noodles and mushrooms, some kind of like, caramelized thing. With Napa cabbage."

These words traveled to her husband, and oddly seemed to make a wall that gently impacted him, pushing his entire torso rigidly back. He

blinked. "Uh... okay?"

"Okay. Well..." She held up the empty cloth grocery bags. "I'm off, then. Need anything else?"

He looked around. It was an odd thing for him to do. Jason made lists, because he didn't like cluttering his mind with this stuff. "Check the list, I guess."

She smiled. It was an ordinary, familiar exchange.

"Kay."

And that was all that happened. When she got back, he came out and put his hands on her hips, kissed her neck, all of it familiar, while she sliced the mushrooms.

And they didn't say anything about it that night. Or the next day.

So she put it out of her mind.

Or tried to.

CHAPTER 9

"Long time, no see," Kimbie said, tossing her purse into an empty chair and collapsing into hers. She had, as usual, enormous and expensive sunglasses on, and an incredible blowout going. Time had been kind to Kimbie: she was still in possession of her incredible abs, which she was showing off in a halter top beneath a tight-fitting sweater with faux fur at the collar. She pushed her sunglasses up on her head when the waiter came by. "Hell-o," she purred at him, flashing a smile, that, like everything Kimbie did, somehow seemed like an invitation to sex. "I need a huge glass of water, cutie." She fanned herself theatrically when the kid - probably barely twenty, took off for her water, grinning from ear to ear. "I am so fucking *hot*," she said.

"That's an understatement," Lauren told her, grinning.

"No, actually *hot*," Kimbie complained.

"We could go inside -"

"No way," Kimbie said quickly. She reached for the drinks menu and surveyed the patio. "I'm already breaking one rule, I don't need to get shit for anything else."

"Well, take off your sweater," Lauren said, laughing. She dipped her straw into her own drink, a rum and diet Coke, and sipped. "The guys would appreciate it."

Kimbie glared at her and reached into her enormous handbag to pull out a hat with a visor. "I can't have any sun on me," she said, annoyed. Kimbie was obsessed with keeping her skin as light as possible, which in her case was a lovely shade of pale coffee that Lauren had never seen turn, as Kimbie called, darky-dark. She put the visor on and squinted at Lauren. "What are you drinking?"

"Rum and diet Coke," Lauren said.

Kimbie sighed. "God. I guess I'll have that, too."

Looking like Kimbie did not come free, and while Lauren wasn't nearly as crazy as she was, they made good drinking buddies because neither one of them suggested high-caloric drinks or asked any questions about diet sodas.

Kimbie held the drink menu up in front of her face anyway, because she liked to pore over all the drinks she couldn't have. "So? What did you

need to talk about so desperately that you called me, at last?"

Lauren bristled: Kimbie always had everything all sussed out. She stabbed at the ice in her drink. "Can't I just want to see my good friend?"

Kimbie let the menu tilt away from her face and flapped it lazily. "Sure," she said sardonically. "But that isn't what this is." She made a serious face, one that anyone else might have interpreted as her actually being mad, and then broke into laughter, reaching across the table to squeeze Lauren's arm. "Girl, I'm just fucking with you. I am more than happy to hear any sordid details of your boring, boring married life. Or maybe you just want to hear all about how fun it is on Tinder... hmmm?"

Lauren rolled her eyes. Kimbie didn't need Tinder: she was on display at every basketball game for all the players, and anyone in the audience, and any of the management, to see. She didn't do "dates," anyway. Kimbie was the epitome of "free spirit," or, as some might say, "slut."

"Uh," Lauren said, and was grateful that the waiter came by to take Kimbie's drink order at that moment. It bought her some time to think about how she would introduce the topic to Kimbie. It wasn't like she hadn't thought about it, it was just that thinking ahead about things she wanted to say seemed to make communicating them more of a hassle for her.

Kimbie watched the waiter retreating with a smile on her face.

"Not your type, I thought," Lauren said, when Kimbie turned back to her.

Kimbie shrugged. "I don't want to *marry* the guy," she said. "He's cute, though."

"He's like, twelve."

Kimbie rolled her eyes. "He's serving alcohol," she said dismissively. Then she leaned forward with a gleam in her eye. "But enough about Stan, there. What is up with *you*?"

Lauren fell back in her chair. "God," she said. "Can't I just want to hang out?"

Kimbie sipped her drink and blinked slowly. She knew better.

"Okay," Lauren said, smiling and looking down at the drink menu, which she began to trace the shape of with her fingers. "So... I sort of got this, um... problem. Well, not *problem*, really. Maybe. Not like, a huge problem, just..." she looked up at the umbrella thoughtfully.

"Oh, Jesus," Kimbie said, falling back into her own chair. "I'm going to get wasted sitting here waiting for you to *start*. I have training tomorrow morning, so move it along."

Lauren glared at her, playfully.

Kimbie waved her hand in a "get-it-going" gesture. "You have a problem, it's a man, you don't know what to do... am I close?"

Lauren crumpled a little as she sighed. "Not *exactly*," she said. "It's like... okay. Hard to explain. It's... so I got this client, while Rick was out with covid -"

Kimbie gently pushed herself away a little. Lauren had no doubt it was an involuntary reaction. Kimbie had covid tests every day, and while she wasn't the type to worry about the disease, she lived paycheck-to-paycheck and didn't save anything, and missing games was a gamble for her - there were always new girls coming up through the ranks who wanted her place, and could probably get it.

" - and so I had to take his clients, and there is this one guy..."

Kimbie leaned on the table and waved her hand the same way. "So you have a guy, he's a problem, you don't know what to do," Kimbie said. "Is he hot?"

Lauren leaned her head back and groaned. "That's not... look, it's more complicated than that -"

"Uh... it's not, really," Kimbie said dismissively. "Is the guy hot?"

Lauren expelled some air at the umbrella. "He's... kind of, yeah... yes. But that isn't..."

"And you would fuck him?" Kimbie continued, playing with her straw in her ice.

Lauren was still looking at the umbrella. She shook her head, smiling, annoyed, and groaned again. "I'm... Kimbie, I'm married -"

"That's the problem," Kimbie said. "I *been* saying."

Kimbie had moments of dropping into a black vernacular that made Lauren cringe a little, but she figured Kimbie knew what she could get away with.

Lauren tipped her head back to look at Kimbie. "It's not *that*," she whisper-yelled.

This made Kimbie extremely pleased. She squirmed in her seat and leaned forward again, her concerns about covid, like her concerns about

almost anything, having disappeared from her mind completely. "Do tell," she said, grinning.

Lauren hesitated, looking at her menu. This was probably not the right avenue, not the person to talk to. Not if she wanted any real, solid advice. A flash of insight came to her: she had probably decided to call Kimbie because she was looking for approval, because if there was one thing Kimbie would approve of, it was sex. The circumstances of that sex - infidelity, danger, betrayal, kink - were all irrelevant to Kimbie.

But the insight flashed Lauren by, and she was on to the next thing. "Uh, look. It's just that he, uh... okay, it's sort of complex. Do you remember, um, well you remember my ex, the one who -"

"Chance," Kimbie said.

Lauren blinked at her.

Kimbie shrugged and pulled on her straw. "Just guessing."

Lauren narrowed her eyes.

"Come on," Kimbie exclaimed. "It's only your *only* ex-boyfriend that you would be talking about. Yes, I remember Chance. Watch-you-fuck-a-black-guy-Chance -" Kimbie cut herself off and her eyes popped wide. "Oh, my!" she practically yelled, before clapping her hand over her mouth.

Lauren waved her hands over the table, trying to dispel whatever Kimbie thought she knew as if it were a thick fog that had somehow gathered over their table. She shook her head. "Don't... get ahead of the story -"

"But this guy *is* black," Kimbie said excitedly. "The client. I'm right. Am I right?"

Lauren could not find the words to stop her from talking or answer the question.

"And *you* want to sleep with him!" Kimbie concluded. "Are you going to? Wait, have you?" She squealed and balled up her fists. Then she put a hand out and squeezed Lauren's. "I am so excited for -"

"Kimbie!" Lauren said sharply. She waved her hands again. "No. Not... okay, no. I haven't done anything with him..."

"*Yet*," Kimbie said, leaning back triumphantly. "But you *want* to."

Lauren sucked up the remainder of her drink and stared at the table. She hoped the waiter would come back soon. "That's... okay, *not* totally, exactly, what I -"

"You *do*," Kimbie interrupted, her jaw dropping open in shock. She leaned back in. "Oh my God. I was just fucking around. You actually *do*."

Lauren felt herself blush. She shook her head vigorously. "No. Okay. No, so... it isn't that -"

"Okay," Kimbie chanted sarcastically.

"It's... so this guy, you know, he gave me a recipe... or he told me about a recipe. This was like, a while ago..."

Kimbie tipped her head to one side and closed her eyes, emitting a snoring sound from her nose.

"Shut up," Lauren told her. "It was from BBC Lifestyle or something," she continued. This made Kimbie's head snap back up and a big smile appear on her face.

"...and so I typed it in, you know, on the laptop, and somehow I get to this -"

"BBC site that's not about cooking?" Kimbie guffawed. "Man. That is *hilarious*. This guy has some *cojones*. Ten points for originality." She rolled her eyes and cackled. "BBC Lifestyle," she mocked.

"No, Kimbie, shut *up*. Look, BBC Lifestyle is a thing, it's a section of the British Broadcasting Company -"

"Sure," Kimbie said, grinning lasciviously.

Lauren sighed, exasperated. "It is. Anyway, that is *not* what came up."

Kimbie made an exaggeratedly shocked face. "No."

"Ugh, Kimbie, you're so annoying. What came up, instead, is this site called, um... Big Black Lifestyle -"

"I'm *so* shocked," Kimbie said, grinning and sipping her drink. She spun as she did and waved at the waiter. "We are going to need more of these," she explained to Lauren.

The waiter was over at the table immediately. Lauren fumed at Kimbie as she ordered. Why did she have to be so *right* about things all the time? And so annoying about it? Why had she *called* her?

"Bring us two," Kimbie told him. "Each." She grinned charmingly. "It's that kind of party."

Kimbie turned back to Lauren after watching the waiter leave, her eyes on his butt, and lifted her eyebrows in expectation. "So?"

"I... don't..."

"Your big, black friend with his big, black cock told you to get on the internet and look for BBC Lifestyle... stop me if I have something wrong, here... and you ended up -" Kimbie gasped and covered her mouth, mockingly, " - on a website called Big Black cock Lifestyle. So far, that's what you said."

"Not Big Black cock Lifestyle," Lauren hissed. "Big, Black Lifestyle."

Kimbie blinked, and stared back at Lauren. "*Right.*"

"See, this is the thing. Okay? So pay attention. I put *in* 'BBC Lifestyle,' right? On the computer. And I've done that on, like, my phone... and I get to BBC, the real BBC, not this... you know, other site."

Kimbie lowered her eyelids, like they had gotten very heavy.

"So like... what I'm trying to say is that the computer at home, it suggested this, and I just clicked on it. And so, okay, like I go to this site, and it's a forum -"

"About big, black, cocks -"

"Kimbie, Jesus, will you shut up?"

Kimbie held her hands up.

"Anyway, it's a forum, right? About... you know, like, what Chance was into. So like, all these guys who are *married*, and want their wives to have sex with -"

"Oh," Kimbie said, lifting her head from her hand, which she was leaning on, pretending to be falling asleep. "*Lifestyle*, lifestyle. *Not* black cock. Got it." She yawned theatrically.

Lauren held her hands out. "Okay, but... the thing is..." She felt like all of her ideas were crashing together now, and she couldn't figure out how to explain what she wanted to. "So, I looked at it, and I started thinking about, you know... Chance, and this guy, and... you know..."

"Big black cock," Kimbie said, nodding. "*I know.*" She turned and dug into her purse, pulling out her phone.

"Kimbie," Lauren said, but then wondered why she cared. It was actually a surprise that Kimbie didn't know about this site. Probably because she wasn't married, and that was probably the only reason why.

Kimbie smiled and raised her eyebrows as she swept her fingers over the screen.

"Okay," she said, setting it down with a picture of a black cock on the screen, face-up, making no attempt to hide it from anybody. "So, this

guy sends you to this site, and you have a look around...?"

Lauren's eyes were drawn to the screen, and she had trouble tearing them away. She didn't know if it was out of horror that Kimbie would be so brazen (nothing new there), or out of fascination. "Yes, but -"

"And you start thinking about his cock..."

"Kimbie, no, that is not why - I mean, yes. That happened. But then *something else* happened and that's what I need to talk to you about."

"Please say this will involve you gronking this guy. Or just, anything interesting happening in this story at all."

"The thing is," Lauren said, plowing ahead, "I walked in on Jason one night -"

Kimbie held up her hand. "Please do not tell me if he was whacking off -"

"No, and, but he was *on this site*." Lauren gave Kimbie a moment to interrupt, and when she didn't, she continued, wary. "And so at first I was like... oh, shit, you know? Because I never delete my history, and he knows I have this guy as a client, because he walked in on a session with him... and so I'm thinking, Jason found this in the history and now he knows... you know, that I was looking at this. Right?"

"Okay," Kimbie said, twisting the straw in her fingers, her interest renewed.

"So I thought, oh shit, he's going to think..." Lauren waved her own hand in the way Kimbie had been doing, to get to the end of the story faster.

"You want to do this guy and be a hotwife or something," Kimbie said. "And... so?"

"So he didn't say anything about it, and so I didn't either, because, you know..."

Kimbie shrugged helplessly. "Not really," she admitted.

Lauren sighed. "Okay, so... I'm feeling guilty about it, like, forever. And then, I start thinking about telling him what happened, you know, just to clear the air, so he doesn't think this was like, something I was seeking out."

"God forbid."

"And then I got to thinking... *why* did the search thingy suggest that to me? You know?"

Kimbie blinked slowly again, emulating extreme boredom. "*That's* what you thought about? God you *are* -"

"Kimbie, think about it for a second."

Kimbie lifted her drink and sucked up the last of it. "I don't like thinking. I don't *do* thinking. Please do it for me."

"Well... why does your browser suggest things, you know? Like, differently than what you type in, or trying to finish your, whatever you're typing?"

Kimbie shrugged again and rolled her eyes.

"Because *you've been there* before."

Kimbie made a snoring sound again and leaned on her hand. Lauren rolled *her* eyes.

"I'm sorry," Kimbie said. "Was that it? I don't get what I'm not getting."

"I was thinking, it was me, right? And that Jason was on that site because *I* went there, you know? But, what if...?"

Kimbie looked at her for a moment, following her hand as she waved it in circular motions away from her face.

"Elves did it?" Kimbie said, when Lauren didn't finish.

"No, dummy. Ugh. What if *Jason* was the reason that my search took me to that site? Because *he* was on it? *Before* me."

If the other parts of the stories had dragged on their way through Kimbie's mind, this made its way through her brain with lightning speed. She whooped, and smiled widely, and clapped her hands together. "Who!" she said. "Jason? That is... well, no, I can see it. I guess. Anyway, great news for you." Kimbie settled both of her elbows on the table. "So you gonna do it?"

"*What?*" Lauren said. "Kimbie, no. That's... I don't even know if that's what happened."

"But you wish it was," Kimbie said.

"No, I -"

"You wish it was, or you wouldn't have called me about it. You-wish-it-wa-as," Kimbie chanted. "It seems like it is." She nodded sagely, as if she had actually just considered the matter profoundly. "It all adds up. Dang." She reflected on something for a moment. "So... what *are* you gonna do? Please say it's him."

It was Lauren's turn to shrug.

"You want to do this guy, or what?"

Lauren looked to the side and frowned.

"Like, if you weren't married. Or you had permission, or whatever. Would you do him?"

"I don't... know. You know?" She looked back at Kimbie. "I'm like, I have no idea what to think. I don't want to open that door and have things be like... with Chance. You know?"

"Uh-huh. And what else? You're attracted to this guy, right?"

"Look, that's - that's like *the* biggest thing. I can't just... get that out of my mind."

"Being attracted to him? Or what?"

"That... thing with Chance, you know?"

"Oh, God," Kimbie sighed. "But let's say, that isn't a thing. Just, straight up: would you *do* this guy?"

Lauren's stomach turned, cool and pleasantly unpleasant. A throb of sexual energy pulsed inside of her. She shifted in her seat. "*That* isn't the question," she said.

Kimbie squealed. "You *so* would," she said. "He's hot. Is he hot?"

"Kimbie,"

"Girl, *what* is your problem? You can say a guy is hot or not hot, it's not like his dick is going to land in your cha-cha just because you *think* about him. Anyway," Kimbie waved her hand at Lauren. "You would, I can already tell. So *now* you just are thinking: could you actually do it? You know, if this is like, Jason's little secret. Right?" Kimbie put her hand out and stole Lauren's lime, biting into it. Lauren's mouth puckered, and watered. Kimbie was a person of extremes.

"I don't know."

Kimbie laughed. "I do," she said. She shook her head. "Honestly, dude, I don't understand your hang-up."

Lauren sighed loudly. "Ugh... my hang-up is..." She shrugged. "I don't know. Like, I don't want to *say* anything to Jayce -"

"Hold up a second, does Jayce know the whole story about Chance?"

Lauren looked up at the umbrella. "Kind of?"

Kimbie held up a finger. "Kind of, like what?"

"Just... I told him about Chance, is all. You remember that night at your house, when we talked about this?"

Kimbie rolled her eyes. "Do I remember a conversation? Hmmm..."

Lauren sighed again. "Well, we did. And so he asked me about it, and I said, yeah, like Chance really drove me crazy and I told him I hooked

up with a guy and then Chance started getting all obsessed about it, and that's why we broke up."

"Hold it. So Jayce thinks you broke up with Chance about this?"

"I mean... yeah, I guess. I mean... yes, if he remembers that conversation, and if he's the one... who, you know..."

"Oh, he remembers the conversation," Kimbie said haughtily. "Don't be *stupid*. Guys always remember shit like that. Only thing they *do* remember. What I'm saying is, you probably scared him off the whole thing. You know?"

Lauren sipped her second drink. The ice had melted slightly, and she was annoyed at Kimbie for ordering so many at once. It was all going to her head, and she was going to feel terrible, and possibly have no way to get home. She set the drink down with a thud.

"It could be that it wasn't him at all," she said.

"Yeah, okay," Kimbie said. Then she made a face. "God, Lauren... what *is it* that you want, here?"

Lauren put her hands on her face and shook her head vigorously. "I don't know!" she complained.

"Jesus," Kimbie said, stealing the lime from Lauren's second drink. "I will never understand you. Just... you know, *decide* what you want. You don't want to have hot sex with a black guy, at all, then okay. Just leave it. And if you do, then go ask Jason if that's his website and if you can fuck this guy....?"

"Andre."

"Hot. Yeah, and then, you know. Just *do it*. Viva la France or whatever."

Lauren chewed on her lower lip.

"That's so bad for your collagen."

"That's such b.s.," Lauren shot back.

"I read it in a magazine," Kimbie said, laughing.

"That - now I *know* it isn't true," Lauren told her. "Seriously, though, I need you to game this out for me. I need... like... to make a decision. I think about this way too much."

Kimbie tsked and rolled her eyes. "White. People. White-ass, prude-as-fuck married people living in the suburbs." She shook her head. "Look. I'm not an expert on this subject... well, on the subject of marriage." Kimbie made a face and a sound like "ick," while flinging an invisible substance

from her fingers. "But I think... like, am I the first person you called about this?"

"You're the only person I would even *tell* this too."

"That's right," Kimbie said. "And why is that? Because you wanted someone who would say what *I'm* gonna say, which is this: is this guy into doing you?" She snorted uproariously, because she knew it was a ridiculous question, and continued. "And then, you're obvs into doing him, and so just ask Jason, 'hey, babe, was this your website?' And he'll be like, 'Well, Laurs, uh, flub flub flub some-boring-shit,' and then you go, 'it's cool, I want to bone this guy, so do you want that, too?' and he'll be like," at which point Kimbie stuck her tongue into her cheek, to mimic a blow job.

Lauren smirked. "It's not - what is that, even?"

Kimbie waved a hand at her. "Just... cock. Look. Just *ask* him, quit wasting everybody's time with this shit."

"But what if it *wasn't* him?"

"Then tell your little... story you have there, about the cooking show or whatever. No harm, no foul."

Lauren folded her arms. "And if it *was* him?"

Kimbie lifted her hand to flag down the waiter. "Then *I* have no idea what the problem is. Do you?"

The waiter came over and smiled adoringly at Kimbie. "Hey, can I ask you a question?"

Kimbie grinned and leaned back in her chair. "Ask me anything you like, baby."

"Oh, my God," Lauren said, putting her hand to her temple.

"Are you a cheerleader for the -"

"Nope," Kimbie said quickly. "And I am not here, and I am not having drinks in a public place." She winked at him. "Got that? Now, I have a question for you -"

"Kimbie -"

Kimbie pointed a beautifully manicured finger at Lauren, which the waiter followed with the interest of a well-trained dog. "If *she* wanted to fuck some black guy in front of you, what would you think?"

"Jesus, Kimbie," Lauren groaned.

The waiter laughed nervously and took Lauren's empty glass from the table. "Uh..."

"You would be like, 'no way, ew, please don't do anything like that?'"

The waiter shook his head and loaded Kimbie's empties onto his tray. "Not *exactly*," he said. "Uh...I'll be right back, ladies."

Kimbie looked over at Lauren triumphantly.

"Oh, my God, Kimbie," she said, her face heating up.

"You are such a prude, Lauren, I swear to *God*." She looked through the door, into the restaurant, to where the waiter was doing something behind the bar and talking to the bartender. "Tee-hee, look at the little bugger, he's having the *best* day, look at him, oh... oh... you have some fans now..."

Lauren put a hand up to the side of her face and scrunched down, her face burning, because the bartender had looked up from what he was doing, right at them, and grinned, lifting an empty glass in their direction.

Embarrassment crawled through her, but she also got a funny little kick out of it. Like she always did, usually when Kimbie was around, whenever she dipped into being more like Kimbie - more slutty, more attention-seeking. There was a part of her that got warm and hungry when she did that.

And another part of her that clenched up, and hurried to avoid what she was heading toward.

Kimbie chewed on her straw, which she had rescued from the empty drink at the last minute. Lauren stared steadfastly at Kimbie while she smiled and curled her fingers in a slow wave for the two guys, flitting one foot flirtatiously. "I would do *him*," she said. "Even though he's a white guy."

She smiled and waved, and then turned her attention back on Lauren. "I have been telling you for like, ever, that you need to go black." She flicked her fingers again, this time in Lauren's direction, one of Kimbie's sassier moves. "And you didn't listen to me, and you didn't get it out of your system, so now, here you are with a problem, non-problem." She shrugged. "Should have listened to me."

"You said once you go black, you never go back."

"God," Kimbie said, taking a sip of her drink. "*Everybody* says that. And they say it for a reason." She looked at Lauren, who stared back, dumbfounded. "Is that what you're all worried about?"

"Huh?"

Kimbie shrugged. "I dunno. Some married fucking problem. You'll never go back?"

As so often happened when Kimbie's at-once juvenile and incisive observations hit a nerve, Lauren felt a wave of resentment, and a desire to deny what Kimbie was saying, swell inside of her. But beneath it, somewhere deeper, a familiar throb of longing also swelled.

Which one was it?

"I *love* Jason," she said, defiantly. "This isn't... about that."

Kimbie was shaking her head, leaning back with her drink, putting on a flirtatious show for the bartender and the waiter, who seemed to still be talking about them from behind the bar. "Girl," she purred, her eyes on the two young men, "I do not *even* understand what the problem is, then."

Lauren stared at Kimbie, deciding to change the subject. Kimbie wasn't even a really good friend, if friendships were to be judged by reliability, emotional support, or anything that normal women seemed to value in friendships. They didn't have much in common anymore, and Kimbie didn't play any of the sports Lauren did, and vice-versa.

So why, of all the people she could have confided this to, had she called Kimbie?

"I don't know why I tell you stuff, sometimes," Lauren said, quietly.

Kimbie snorted, and dragged her eyes away from the bar for a brief moment to say:

"Oh, yes, you do."

CHAPTER 10

Haven't posted in a while and I'm hoping to get some thoughts about this.

Okay. So here goes:

After L came in and saw me on the site (see my previous post), she didn't say anything and she didn't really act weird. I think I'm being paranoid. It all blew over, this was weeks ago and nothing came out of it.

So I'm back where I started. I actually got kind of hopeful in one way that she might say something, because it would be a conversation starter. I still don't know what to do. I want to talk to her about it but I don't want to freak her out. I know you guys say just communicate, but this thing with her ex boyfriend keeps me from doing it.

the ex puts a different spin on things, but I say, you aren't going to get anywhere unless you talk to her and make her aware that you're thinking about this. Put the ball in her court, say something like, I'm willing to be open to someone outside our marriage if you're into that, here's why, I didn't bring it up before because of your ex-boyfriend. Tell her you won't talk about it if she doesn't want to. it's a big step but you have to take it and then be willing to wait it out

Okay, I've been lurking for a while, thanks everyone for all the good advice regarding my previous posts. Updates on L:

Last week Tuesday she sends me a text and she says she's going to be late, she's going to run over these clients with the other trainer. Okay. But she gets home

really late (10pm, she leaves work at 5) and when she gets home she's all horny again.

(Don't get me wrong, this is great)

But then I can't stop thinking about it. It's just feeding the beast. I almost broke into her phone to see who she called, I have these ideas, like I'm going to follow her and see where she went. It's messing with my head. I don't want to violate her trust but I get so close to doing it. I'm being exactly the guy she doesn't want me to be, but she doesn't even know it

Jason stared at the replies to his latest post.

The community on BBL was really great, and they'd been a big support to him, but one user who gave him a lot of advice at the beginning of his adventure seemed to be growing impatient with him, in much the same way he was growing impatient with himself.

It seems like you just keep saying the same thing over and over again, asking the same question, hoping for a different answer. Sounds to me like you either need to talk to her about it or try to put it out of your mind. You can just hang out here with all the wannabes and hope for the best, but nothing is going to happen by itself. (Unless you want her to cheat on you: it's an option)

Maybe that *was* what he wanted, he thought sometimes. It took the heat off him, and it held a perverse excitement in its own way.

But when he thought about Lauren betraying him like that, the hurt was more painful than the heat. And, to make matters worse, he got a bad taste in the back of his throat, for being such a pussy that he couldn't even get up the balls to *talk* to her.

He looked at the clock. Lauren would be - should be - home any minute.

He imagined himself going to the door, putting his arm around her, having sex in the kitchen, and then spilling his guts, and the excitement of it

built up inside of him, pouring through him as adrenaline and testosterone, puffing up his chest, filling his head with an elixir of power and arousal, like his friends said they felt when they'd done coke. He felt superhuman.

And then, an image of Lauren's face, full of disappointment or disdain, shimmered over the surface of these fantasies, absorbing all of that energy, deflating him, until a hollowness filled the vacuum, cold and malignant.

He slammed the laptop closed for the hundredth time, and went to take a shower he didn't need, to clear his head, and probably whack off, before Lauren came home and he acted like a bumbling fool in front of her again.

CHAPTER 11

Girl, you need to CALL ME

The message from Kimbie was two days old; Lauren didn't know why she hadn't returned it. Being friends with Kimbie, at this stage in life, when Kimbie was still on the dancing and cheerleading circuit, like she was twenty years old, was like having a hot coal in her hands. She didn't like too much contact, and she couldn't be sure if it was because Kimbie's life appealed to her or frightened her.

Probably both.

At any rate, Kimbie texted things like this as if they were matters of great importance, and half the time, she just wanted to tell Lauren about some celebrity gossip or team drama, or worse yet, share gossip about people that Lauren did not know at all.

Of course, the other half of the time, Kimbie had something important to say. Somebody had died, or she had wanted to give Lauren a free ticket to something... it was dangerous avoiding her altogether. But the text was burning on Lauren's mind as she checked her appearance in the locker room before heading out to the floor of the gym. She had a cancellation today, and so had some free time, and she normally would have spent that time doing her own workout to get it out of the way, but she felt like hiding in the locker room, staring at her phone, thinking about texting Kimbie, and then deciding not to, after all.

She sighed, looking at her screen for the seventh or eighth time that day. Finally, she typed:

*Sorry I didn't get back to you. Working until 5 tonight,
call you then?*

She put her phone in her locker. Most likely, Kimbie would have forgotten whatever she wanted to say. But a funky excitement crawled around in her stomach anyway - it was strange, like the excitement of meeting a new guy or something, and it stayed with her as she bounced out into the gym, determined to work out hard and forget about all of this nonsense.

She started on her usual circuit, working out her legs. Ski season was coming fast, and she wanted to be in top form. She wasn't getting any younger, but her students were, and she hated feeling wobbly the first few weeks on the slopes, especially because she was an advanced, private instructor, and that kind of thing didn't go unnoticed by her clients, who all seemed to have the same goal: to take down Bob's Bumps, a narrow, lengthy stretch of moguls nestled in thick forest and on, depending on who you asked, a nearly-illegal incline almost the whole way. At least ten people a season went home in an ambulance because of Bob's Bumps, and while it was more about skill than brute force, it wasn't the kind of place you wanted to feel your thighs burning until you were done.

"Damn, girl," a familiar voice said behind her. "That's more weight than I use."

She already knew it was him, and the dying embers of her post-Kimbie excitement were kicked into a raging firestorm by the time she lowered the weights properly, gently, and looked behind her.

Andre had gone back to training with Rick, she thought, her heart beating rapidly. And Rick was... not usually here at this time.

"What...?" she said, smiling broadly to hide her feelings, which were all over the place. Andre made her jittery, but not when she was there to train him. Some kind of professionalism took over. Now, it was gone, and she kept her hands firmly on the bench because she was convinced they would start shaking if she took them off.

He leaned on the top of the bench back and looked down at her. "Miss me yet?" he asked.

She grinned, and faced the weights again, trying to think of a pithy reply. She started her next set, much too early, and her legs burned; it was terrible form. "Of course," she said, cringing inwardly at how stupid that sounded.

Andre came around the leg machine and took a seat on the one next to it. He was a large guy, and he took up a lot of space, which was something that Lauren hated to admit to finding attractive. It was so *base*, and yet something about it squeezed on her inner organs in the same disturbing way that everything Andre did, did.

"I miss *you*," he said, unscrewing his water bottle. His eyes drifted unapologetically over Lauren's body, lingering on her thighs, focused on her ass and her hips. "I mean, I miss your *examples*. If you catch my drift."

What Lauren caught was the edge, the flow of things, and she pushed hard to lift the immense amount of weight she had given herself. "Rick's got pretty good form," she joked, her voice a little strained as she worked.

Andre tipped the water into his mouth, not taking his eyes off her. "I'd rather be watching *your* a -uh, form, though," Andre said. "No offense to Rick."

Lauren put her eyes back on the weights and shook her head gently. Andre had a way of making comments like that - the sort that were definitely over some line, the kind of thing that wouldn't fly in a Sexual Harassment In The Workplace seminar - but managed to do it without it being... well, as creepy as all that.

Her chest felt warm on the inside, and she felt heat creeping into her cheeks. It was more from her embarrassment at the way Andre made her feel than from anything else, but she was glad that she seemed to be working so hard, and that the flush, if visible, would not be so obviously because she was attracted to him.

"What are you doing here, anyway?" she asked. "I thought I'd have you out of my hair now that Rick's back."

Her tone was flirtatious, but the flirtatiousness was deniable. She had mastered the art of talking to men that way a long time ago.

Andre grinned. For some reason, he made her think of a dangerous animal, and she could almost hear him growl, as he said, "Can't get rid of me that easily."

He stood up, abruptly, and touched his water bottle to her arm as he walked away. "Changed my time," he said. "See you around."

Lauren finished her set, taking her time, so that she had a legitimate reason to stare ahead of her, and say nothing.

But in her lower abdomen, the serpent-like heat that Andre stirred up coiled and stretched, and spread through her body, dangerous and unwanted, thrilling and hot.

*

"Listen to me," Kimbie said, without dispensing a greeting when she answered the phone. "I have to go to rehearsal, but listen *up*. You need to get on that site you showed me."

Lauren stammered a little. "Huh... uh, what?"

"The site. The, you know..." Kimbie's voice disintegrated into a series of giggly moans and sing-song hums, overlaid by a male voice, all of it sounding very sexualized, before she said, "You keep all that going, I'll come by, you hear?" Abruptly, her voice became serious. "The *site*," she said impatiently. "The one with the big, black, cock?"

Wherever Kimbie was - probably a corridor at the stadium - there was a loud echo, and deep male voices whooped and repeated this last phrase while Kimbie clicked and, Lauren had no doubt, showed some leg for the interested parties.

"Are you there?" Kimbie demanded impatiently.

"I... yeah, I'm here, but..."

"I have to go. But I am telling you, you have to get on that site," Kimbie said, sounding rushed.

"Kimbie," Lauren sighed, assuming that Kimbie wanted her to look at hot guys. "I don't want to look at pictures of -"

"It ain't even like that," Kimbie said, in one of her Black English spasms. "Real quick," she said, and Lauren wasn't sure if she was talking to her or someone else. "I went on there myself because, well... anyway, you gotta go to this section called, like, I don't know, noobs or something." She lowered her voice and spoke in a ragged whisper. "I am *telling you* you need to read this shit - OKAY! - Laurs, I gotta run, I'll call you, just go there... Tanji, Tanji, Tanji wait a minute honey..."

Kimbie's voice trailed off into a cacophony of people talking, because she often forgot to actually turn off her phone. Lauren hung up when it became apparent that nothing was going to be that interesting - which wasn't always the case.

CHAPTER 12

Paranoia didn't describe it. Paranoia was, for one thing, anxiety about things that weren't actually happening, and Jason was *sure* that things were actually happening.

Paranoia also didn't capture the way he felt about it: anxiety, sure, and an inability to focus on anything else. But the feeling that slithered through him as he waited for Lauren to come home these days was not just anxiety, even if it contained shades of nausea; it aroused him, it made him giddy.

It was also sinking him into a dark and terrible place, like a weight on his ankle that was just ever-so-slightly heavy enough to take him down, inch by inch, from the clear upper waters, to an ever-darkening twilight zone, where every day was just a *hair* darker than the day before.

He knew that if he let it go on, and did nothing, he would eventually end up swallowed by the darkness. If he thought about the situation intellectually, and managed to excise his feelings from the thought process for a moment: did he *really* want his wife to cheat on him? The answer was no. And thinking of it as a real, true event plunged him into an icy darkness for a moment: if he thought of all that real, true-life cheating entailed, the betrayal clawed at him from the inside out and consumed him with despair.

But a cartoonish version of it - some cropped, edited picture of it, in which all was sex, and his imaginary sex, to boot - a place where he had control over *how* Lauren cheated, and why, and when - then that was different. That was like the perfect amount of alcohol: euphoria achieved, no hangover., no headache.

It was the inexplicably delicious elixir of jealousy that kept him from confronting her. He enjoyed it, even if it drove him crazy. He wrote about it on the BBL forum - not because he was actually seeking advice, which for the most part, everyone had ceased giving him. He just enjoyed telling the story, obsessing over the details, re-living the hit of jealousy that it gave him, over and over again.

Immediately after the incident when Lauren had seen the screen with the BBL forum on it, things cooled, enough for him to believe that his experience *had* been one of paranoia. Lauren, after all, didn't take a huge interest in what he got up to on his computer, because 95% of the time, it

was related to his work or his "dorky" hobbies, or was some computer game that involved system simulation, which Lauren found exquisitely boring.

So he had eventually felt saved from that scare, from the sense of impending doom he had felt, that Lauren had found out about him, and would be repulsed by him and his fantasy, which was the sort of thing that he could never, ever take back.

That was the thing that stopped him, every time he considered following the advice from his "friends" on the forum: sure, he could try talking to Lauren about it, and sure, she probably wouldn't get a divorce over it. But if she *was* horrified by it, then there was no way to ever remove that from her mind.

But after this period of cooling, Lauren began to do strange things. At first, he chalked it up to his own delusions: she came home later than expected, and she seemed hornier than usual when she did. That was purely confirmation bias: he had a fantasy about her with other men, he *wanted* to see something there that wasn't.

But then, these coincidences began to add up. They began to be more frequent, more intense, more obvious, less deniable even when he made his best efforts to explain them away.

She started spending more time at the gym, saying it was for her personal workouts.

"You seem to be hitting it pretty hard," he commented, when she headed to the gym on a day she normally took off, to do a light hike or something less demanding. "Should I be getting worried?"

Lauren - the Lauren he thought he knew - would normally have rolled her eyes, or taken a big swig of water from her water bottle before saying, dryly, "Season starts in like three weeks, babe."

Instead, she stopped what she was doing, turned around, and stretched out her arms very fetchingly on the counter, almost as if she was flirting with him.

"Worried about what, honey? Some tall, handsome stranger I might be going to see? Someone who works out at the same time as me, who I just like to run into?"

It was serious-sounding enough to make Jason stop in his tracks, unable to answer for a moment. Lauren let it simmer between them for a moment, without breaking character, just long enough for Jason to feel like

he was in free-fall, finally and without a safety harness, to his imminent doom.

She winked, and retreated from atop the counter, grinning. "Sadly, no," she said, and Jason's heart steadied into a more human pace. Lauren put something into her gym bag and lifted it to rummage through it on the counter.

"That's a pretty hot new outfit you got, there," Jason continued, when he finally found his voice.

And why? Why did he keep pressing, as soon as he felt buoyant again, like he was rising back up to the clear and sunny place in the waters of his marriage, where Lauren was his wife and did not make jokes about infidelity, and only tried, but failed, to make jokes about flirting with other guys? Why did he start actively swimming in the other direction?

But the outfit *was* "pretty hot," and that was not his imagination, or a confirmation bias, or anything paranoid. The leggings were short, and white, and carved into the crack of her ass like a thong, only a narrow strip of opaque material that, unlike the rest of the fabric, was not semi-transparent. Plastered to her shapely bottom and thighs, the getup made it almost impossible not to stare at her ass, and he had a hard time believing that wasn't true of any guy who saw her walk by. A white crop-top that suspended her breasts in two round, soft cups, and sliced alluringly over one shoulder while leaving the other enticingly bare, composed the other "half" of the get-up.

Lauren never, ever dressed like that to go to the gym.

She looked down at herself after he said this, as if seeing it for the first time, and shrugged. "This old thing?" she said, coyly.

"Do you even have underwear on?" he asked, his tone more serious than he had imagined it coming out.

Lauren looked at him like he was an idiot. "Of course not." She turned and lifted one hip higher than the other, drawing her finger over the taut curve of her rump. "Can't have lines." She smiled, meeting his eyes, and then turned slowly around. "Come to think of it, though, I *do* have a lot of offers to use the machines ahead of people who are waiting for them."

"Guys," Jason said, almost robotically, his stomach feeling like it was shivering.

"Oh, that's why I'm going *today*," Lauren said, cheerfully, slinging a white, gauzy "jacket" over her shoulders. It was less of a jacket and more of

a sexy obstacle to try to sneak a look at her bare skin through, operating more like lingerie than anything functional.

She smiled at him, and it seemed like just a beat too long between her saying this, and her dismissive, sly grin. "I'm just getting ready for ski season," she told him, in a not very convincing tone. "And anyway, I have some extra sessions during the week, so I missed a few workouts. I *need* the outfit."

Jason stared at her. "Huh?"

"Saves time silly," she said, approaching him to kiss him on the cheek, and walk breezily by, bag slung over her shoulder. Her hair was loose - that was another thing - and she tossed it to look back at him as she opened the garage door. "Guys really do let me cut the line, if you can believe it."

And then, without any indication that she was joking - like "old" Lauren would have done - she stepped through the door and went on her way.

She had come home three hours later, during which time Jason was supposed to be working but had not been - he worked from home when he wasn't physically needed at the testing sites. It wasn't an unreasonable amount of time to be gone, he thought, having calculated and recalculated with each passing ten minutes, what she could be doing. It took twenty minutes to drive there, ten minutes to chit-chat, and then... hours of working out. Steadily. No talking to anyone.

For sure.

In that time, he'd had time to go over every slice of their conversation, and plenty of time to ruminate on one thing.

She breezed past the office with no more than a "hey, babe," and immediately got in the shower.

It was not crazy, he thought sulkily, for her to do that.

In fact, it was almost proof that he was being crazy. After all, if Lauren was having an affair, she would surely be smart and sneaky enough to take a shower before she came home.

Right?

He went to the bathroom after a while. "That was some workout," he said, trying to sound casual. He opened a drawer to make it look like he had some reason to be in there, and moved his organized containers around without aim.

He glanced up, hoping to get a glimpse of Lauren through the glass of the shower door, but it had already steamed up, and he could see only the blurry outlines of her smooth skin against the dark background of the tiles. He would just have to use his imagination to see the water snaking down her back, rolling between her thighs, making a journey he would love to take his tongue on, a journey that he likes to imagine another man enjoying, pausing, like a fat drop of water, at the crest of her nipples, before snaking down and converging on the tiny line of fine, wispy blond hair that led to the firm, pale outer lips of her pink pussy.

He was overcome, irrationally, by a desire to step into the shower with her, still clothed, and slip his fingers into her folds. What did he want to find there? Some tell-tale looseness, a slick remnant of another man's debasement of her? Did he want to feel with his fingers that the tightly bunched flesh of her cunt was now ragged and burst, pummeled while she was "at the gym" by a foreign, dark cock that was far bigger and more destructive than his own?

"Workout?" Lauren said, and then quickly, with a smile that he could hear but not see through the steam, "Oh, *right*. Workout. Yeah, definitely. It was."

The sensation of his heart beating erratically was now becoming familiar to Jason, so that when it did, this time, he managed to keep himself from clutching his chest. The sound in the room seemed to transform, and a high-pitched ringing crept into it, like a shadowy monster of sound in a horror movie.

"How come you have so many new clients?" Jason blurted, after a long pause. That was the question he'd been turning over and over in his mind, the question he wanted the answer to. More male clients? That Andre character he had seen?

"What?" Lauren said.

"New clients, you said you got some. Rick still out or something?"

"Oh," she said, like she had no idea what he was talking about. "No. Rick's back." She leaned over the built-in bench in the shower and a bottle fell to the floor, echoing with the thump of empty plastic. "Hey, can you see if there's any shampoo under the sink?" she asked.

He found it, and walked happily to the shower. It was one of those luxury models, with a large floor area and a showerhead hanging from the ceiling, a built-in bench and acres of expensive, glassy tile. A large pane of

glass that was not a door divided it from the rest of the room, more psychologically than really. He was happy to have a reason to lean in, handing her the shampoo, bracing himself against the clear glass divider, and to steal a glance at her shiny, wet body as she turned around in the falling water.

"So where are these new clients from?" he asked.

"Thanks," she said, taking the shampoo. She smiled at him and poured some into her hand without looking away. "Lots of questions," she said, in a teasing voice.

Jason narrowed his eyes.

"They're just new clients," she said, still teasing.

"Hmm," he said, ruffled. "New clients you don't seem to want to talk about."

She shrugged and brought the shampoo to her hair. Even wet, her hair was light blond. She worked the shampoo through it, her breasts lifting slightly with her arms, nipples mysteriously erect beneath the snaking rivulets of hot, soapy water.

And then, suddenly, she murmured, at the same time that she opened her eyes and looked directly at him: "I'm not really in the business of talking."

The statement was so un-characteristic for Lauren that it paralyzed him. It hit him in the chest with a cold clang, a sensation similar to being called out on a very serious lie, or maybe of catching someone else in it. And yet there was no lie – not on his end – and Lauren's words held no special meaning, hid no special truth, were not, in and of themselves, anything extraordinary. She *wasn't*, literally, so much in the business of talking.

But she was looking at him, her gaze steady and a clear invitation to something hot. The same look that had come into her face and her eyes that afternoon that she had given him a blowjob, out of the blue, and they had had such hot sex. He knew, without dropping his fingers to her pussy, that she was wet and excited, that she wanted him to fuck her.

And so he moved in on her, into the shower, acting with more sexual aggression and energy than he had felt in years. He was still clothed, and the water soaked him as he passed under the shower head. Lauren had no comment for this, no giggle, no laugh. Her body slapped into the wall, her eyes never leaving his.

She helped him take off his clothes, and together they tossed them onto the floor in wet slops. His socks were still on, and he was grateful for them as he hoisted her and pushed inside of her, fucking her against the tile wall without slipping, without thinking, as they usually would have, of the inconvenience and logistical nightmare of fucking in the shower.

He thought of none of these things as he stared back at Lauren's unflinching, hungry gaze. All he could think about was the feel of her body, how silky and wet her pussy was after he pushed through the rubbery skin of her outer lips, and the distraction in her gaze.

Behind her eyes, her thoughts were somewhere else, even if she was looking right at him.

The thought of it made his cum boil, and leaned against her forehead, panting with exertion and not wanting it to end. "I'm going to come," he breathed.

She tightened her very strong legs around him and pulled on her crossed ankles against his butt and thighs, her body sliding up and down on the tile. Her eyes closed, and as he braced himself against the wall, trying not to come, Lauren rubbed herself against him violently until her pussy burst in hot liquid and clenched around him in waves of muscle spasms.

Only then did he let himself go, looking at Lauren's screwed-up eyes and open mouth, wondering what she envisioned, what she was thinking of, that had made her come so violently.

She kissed him as she dropped her legs to the floor. He was dizzy, disoriented, and had to keep both hands on the tile to steady himself as his cock flopped wetly out of her.

He panted against the wall as she slipped under his arm. When he turned toward the shower head, she was under it again, smiling, face turned up to the falling water, which rolled down on either side of her head. "That was fun," she said, smiling.

And then she turned, slowly, getting back to her shower.

Jason kissed her as he left, staggering a little, both from the physical exertion – his thighs burned from holding her up – and the frantic, disjointed thoughts that fought for space in his mind. The same way that they had lately, every time that he and Lauren had this new, hot sex.

Because he wanted to know, and yet did not want to risk disturbing, what was in her mind. What had ignited Lauren? He knew what lurked in his own, raw hunger, what dark thoughts he nurtured and dared not share.

The intensity of his arousal came from the suspicion, the nagging feeling that Lauren wasn't telling him something, that maybe, just maybe, she had been doing something else at the gym.

But it took two to tango, especially when the sex was that hot...

So where did Lauren's passion come from?

The knot in his stomach grew, and made him nauseated. He collapsed on the bed and stared out the window, while Lauren turned and turned in the shower, loud crashes of water announcing the rinsing of her hair, over and over again.

He got dressed, and went to the kitchen, putting himself to work, his mind reeling. He knew he should get some balls, talk to her, say *something*...

And yet he didn't dare.

So he would get on BBL again, he thought, wincing at the element of himself that he found pathetic. He knew there was no more advice to be offered there, no way out of this maze except to either confront it or live forever in this soupy, gut-wrenching fantasyland where he couldn't even be sure of Lauren's thoughts.

And yet... maybe that was all he wanted. It wasn't all that bad.

Lauren came into the kitchen in a pair of very small white shorts and an almost translucent white tank top. She smiled and kissed him on the cheek, stealing a piece of broccoli from his cutting board.

"Stir-fry?" she asked, and she seemed...

Delighted by stir-fry.

Present.

Happy.

Don't, Jason told himself solemnly, *rock the boat*.

Not yet.

Maybe ever.

CHAPTER 13

There were black boxes, in AI. Deep Learning required such a thing. It was how human minds worked: stuff went in, and what happened to it was largely unknown. In the end, it shot out coherent material: carrots are vegetables and these things are motorcycles, not people. It was a problem that computer engineers worked on tirelessly, but it was, in the end, the sort of heeby-jeeby shit that Jason couldn't stand, because he couldn't stand *not knowing*.

Engineers knew what they put *in*, and they knew what came *out*. But as far as what happened inside, it was a total unknown.

Women, but in particular Lauren, were a black box, and while his entire life had been a slow and painful coming-to-terms with that, Jason had never really gotten around to *accepting* it.

And so, one day, out of the blue and when he least expected it, he found himself staring at the output of one such black box. Vaguely, he knew what had gone in. He could see, on the screen of the phone, what had come *out*.

But what? What had happened inside of Lauren?

Hey. Andre and I are going out for drinks later.

Jason stared at the text on his screen until his eyes burned and the words dissolved. When he blinked, the contrasted image of the screen was imprinted on his eyelids, the words glaring purple in an orange miasma.

*Andre and I are going out for drinks
Andre and I are going out for drinks
Andre and I are going out for drinks*

The cold feeling began, as it always did, in his upper abdomen, crushing his chest, squeezing his heart with a fist of ice that pumped relentlessly and much too quickly, then irregularly. A wave of intense nausea rushed over him, and poured from his temples as ice water, and then it was gone. Somewhere in all of this nausea and cold, his cock had engorged, and pressed against the fabric of his suit pants.

He was at work, for chrissakes, thirty minutes away from an important meeting with clients.

With a flair that he later regretted for it being over-dramatic, he tossed his phone in a drawer and slammed it shut: now was not the time to respond to his wife, not the time to send any of the millions of follow-up questions he had, not the time to let this obsession spill into his mind.

It was not the time, either, to have an erection in a lightweight suit that would not hide it in the least.

He gathered his presentation packets and his work laptop, and breezed into the meeting room, taking a seat long before it was due to start. He didn't have to present until the end, and the rest of the time he would be seated. Twenty minutes into it, the discussion of safety features and testing of the product would be un-sexy enough to kill his erection, and technical enough to take his mind off it.

And it worked. Somewhat. He managed to get through the meeting, and his portion of the presentation, in fairly good shape. But as if they had been carved into the back of his eyelids, the words were there each time he blinked, and Lauren's sexiest voice whispered next to his ear over and over again: *Andre and I, Andre-and-I, AndreandI*. His phone was there, in his desk drawer, possibly accruing more messages from Lauren.

More details.

Or not.

This was madness. This was madness unlike anything Lauren had ever done before.

Or was it? Had she gone out for drinks with people from work before? Other clients? He racked his brain but couldn't think of when that had ever happened. It seemed antithetical to what she did for a living, off. And why just the one message? Why not a question, about whether or not that was okay?

If she was trying to cheat on him with Andre, he thought, almost regretfully, she wouldn't have sent him a message with Andre's name, a message that would so obviously be interpreted the way he was interpreting it now.

And if she was going out with Andre in a platonic way... then, what? Wouldn't she have included other people, or asked about it?

In his linear, analytical way, he set up matrix after matrix of possibilities, trying to get to the solution that rendered *this* result, this

absurd result that made no sense. As if she went out with Andre all the time, or as if she knew that he wanted her to go out with Andre.

And there he was, back at the impossible: that Lauren was somehow reading his mind, or that he was somehow influencing her behavior through... what, magic?

Not magic. Jason did not do magic. So how, then?

A very terrifying cold pain burst in his chest, sinking through him, freezing him in his chair.

"Jason?"

Someone was talking to him, and their voice seemed to come from a long, long way off.

The only other possibility... was that not magic, but his own words, had influenced Lauren. That she was reading what he had written in the forum.

He suddenly felt so stupid, so anxious that he might burst. This was the sort of failure of the imagination that made terrible accidents happen, and in retrospect, like all failures of that type, it was so obvious how it had happened that he wanted to slap himself.

"Jason." The voice was sharper now, and it yanked him back to where he was: in a meeting, at his job, answering questions.

"Uh... yeah," he said, rifling through his folders, mind racing. "I, uh..."

Todd North, who was sitting next to him, edged away. "You look sick, man," he said.

Jason put a hand to his head.

Someone made a joke about Covid.

"It's just... stomach," Jason said, feeling actually nauseated. "It set in... suddenly." It was all he could get out.

Had this really happened? Had his wife actually read his posts on BBL? All of them? He scanned his carefully filed memories for what he had said, what he had mused about, what he had suggested.

"I'm so stupid," he whispered, leafing through the plastic-encased reports.

Everyone was looking at him.

"I ate... mussels for lunch..." he said, sweat building on his forehead. "I have to..." He stood up. Most of the room was staring at him, with a mixture of amused and anguished faces. The testing ground supervisor, a

blue-collar guy who had worked his way up over thirty years and was overweight and had gotten a medical exemption from vaccination, was looking at him in horror. Jason lifted his hand. "It's not Covid," he said weakly.

They laughed uneasily.

"I think I have to..."

"Yeah, go, man," Todd said, reaching for his reports, and then, as if suddenly thinking better of it, jerking his hand away. "I'll cover your, uh.. reports."

He moved clumsily around the table, muttering half-finished apologies, and staggered into the corridor. He did actually feel sick, and for a moment he wondered if he was. But that was nonsense, as were the mussels, and now that he thought about it, Todd had to know that: he had popped into his office while he was eating a salad.

But this was all meaningless nonsense to him at this point. He walked quickly, almost running, as soon as he rounded the corner, and burst into his office, shutting the door too forcefully, shaking, it seemed, the whole building.

Oh well.

He threw his drawer open and stared at his phone, where a red light blinked slowly, notifying him of more messages.

His hands shook as he unlocked his screen. They were all from his wife, a train wreck of messages - Lauren liked to send things in small chunks, one sentence per text. She had waited for half an hour after her first message. Then fired off, in quick succession:

Hello?

Text me when you get this so I know you did

Going to Heron's

You should come meet us there

He stared at the phone, his mind blank - *completely* blank - for the first time in decades. The only thing in his head was a fuzzy noise, increasing in volume, matched to a distilled, screaming feeling. But what was the feeling? Anguish? Confusion? Arousal? Actual food poisoning?

It could have been any of those.

His hand trembled as he typed several messages, deleted them, then rewrote them, then deleted and tweaked them.

He started to call Lauren, then sat there, sweating, his thumb hovering over the call button.

Call Lauren and say *what?*

What the fuck was happening?

"Okay," he said, setting the phone down. "Okay." He put his hands to his temple and leaned on his desk on his elbows, staring at the screen, re-reading Lauren's words.

It could be anything, he told himself. Anything at all.

It was probably nothing. He was paranoid, or optimistic, depending on how you looked at it - depending on how *he* looked at it.

But no matter how he looked at it, it just didn't add up. The only way it added up was if Lauren was, in fact, doing something that she couldn't possibly be doing.

He exhaled sharply and looked up at the ceiling. "Okay," he said.

A light above him was making a buzzing sound, so low and quiet that he never would have noticed it under ordinary circumstances, but now he did, and it drove him mad. A bead of sweat rolled down his cheek.

Get a grip, he told himself.

He typed a reply and stared at it, trying to game out all of the scenarios that could be possible in this situation. He wanted control over it. But there was no way to get that, now. He should have talked to Lauren about this, or he should have... what? What if she *had* been reading his posts?

He pulled up the BBL forum, and started reading through his posts, as if they would tell him something, or maybe to verify that he hadn't said anything or suggested anything crazy, or that would make Lauren think he was obsessed. If she was reading it, which was a big "if."

But his words blurred together, and his thoughts would not form. The only true, sure thing was that something was heading toward him, and there didn't seem to be a good way to figure it out before he got there.

He went back to his text message screen.

I don't know how to tell you what to do, Lauren's voice said to him, floating up from a thick fog of memories, unbidden, seemingly unrelated. She was rosy-cheeked when she said it, her white-blond hair in braids that

hung from beneath a white helmet, her face filled with her particular kind of carefree, adrenaline-soaked glee. *You just have to... you know, go.*

That was when she had left him at the top of Bob's Bumps, yelling back, as she bounced through the moguls like it was child's play, "*You got this!*"

He had hiked back up to where the run veered off from a wider, less terrifying run, and skied down that way instead.

What time?

He stared at the message, seeing a vision of an Air Ambulance landing for him, and then, sucked into a vortex that *seemed* like the "you know, tunnel," that Lauren claimed existed, pressed his thumb to the screen. And sent it.

*

Heron's was an upscale bar downtown, almost exactly halfway, time-wise in rush hour traffic, between his work and Lauren's. It was a place that had been swallowed up into the trendy bar and restaurant ring that wove through the ever-multiplying stadiums and concert halls in the downtown core, and which remained there, despite its refusal to do anything new with itself. It was neither classy nor trashy, not dark nor light, and nothing particularly interesting could be said about it except that it was always peculiarly occupied by a wide range of people: lawyers dribbled in from the nearby courts, sports fans dribbled in from the stadiums, young people brandished newly-minted IDs alongside the grizzled PIs and ambulance chasers, and overly-sequined, first-time symphony and opera-goers glared at the husbands they had dragged to the arts as they guzzled pitchers of Bud Light before the 730 curtain-up for *Hamilton*.

Almost everybody in the city had been in there at least once, and almost nobody was a regular. Everybody knew of it, everybody had had a drink there, but nobody was a regular, and no one had anything much to say about it one way or the other. It was just Heron's, never crowded, never dead, paneled in wood that still retained, if you sought it out with your senses, the baked-in scent of a million cigarettes. The decor reminded Jason

of a library, though he could never have explained why: there were no books, or even green lamps - just the suggestion that there should be.

Heron's was a place where you met people before moving on to something else, because everybody knew where it was and nobody hated it, and so the choice of Heron's was vaguely ominous to Jason, as if "something else" were already implicitly baked into the evening's itinerary.

It was a Thursday night, so the crowd tilted young, and there were no games or performances anywhere downtown that night, so the crowd was also seemingly there to meet up and move on to the same sort of thing that now lay ahead of Jason and Lauren and Andre, not as a certain destination, but a kind of vague wish, if all went well.

Parking had become something that could only be described as a very expensive total bitch in that area, and so he had to walk quite a way, in the unusually hot evening, and arrived with his suit jacket slung over his arm and his shirt clinging to his skin in the faintest sheen of sweat. He was grateful for the heat, because it would explain the sweat.

It was billed as a sports bar, and a first-timer might think it was a hole-in-the-wall, because the first compartment had a very small bar with brass handrails and old men hunched over the counter, looking as though they were missing an appendage without cigars in their hands. But doorways led to stairs that led to the basement, or to a warren of rooms that had been tacked on over the decades in a series of mergers and real estate acquisitions, and, Jason was sure, renovations that were not especially up-to-code.

They were not in this first small area, he knew without looking, because no one stayed there for long. The place was pretty hopping, for ten-to-seven (he scowled as he checked the time, he was late, on top of the sweat). He squeezed between clusters of obvious coworkers, then among tables with first dates, and into a back room with another bar, where he suspected he would find them, and did.

He stopped in the doorway, taking in the scene for a moment.

Lauren was dressed in something typical for her: a short jean skirt that was maybe a shade trendier and younger-looking than her actual age normally allowed for - because of her small frame and level of fitness, she could - and often did - shop in the juniors section for some of her clothes. She had worn a tight, periwinkle colored shirt, one that he had complimented her on several times: it came just to her shoulders, revealing

her skin from the collarbone up, and clung to her figure, highlighting that a layer of smooth, perfect skin overlaid her athletic frame. It was especially lovely where it clung to her breasts. Her hair was down, shiny and freshly washed, and she had taken a great deal of care with it - straightening it, so that it lay smooth and gloriously silky, parted in the middle.

Andre was casually dressed in jeans and a purple, trendy shirt that looked impossibly expensive, very hip, very black somehow, and which, Jason noted with a wrenching twist in his stomach, did not have the slightest trace of dampness on it.

He wasn't one to dwell on fashion, but he felt out-of-place.

Oh well.

Andre was talking, and Lauren was smiling broadly at him and nodding her head. It was jarring to see, in the same way that seeing them at the gym had been jarring: she looked perfectly comfortable standing at the bar, one foot on the lower rung of a high chair, talking to Andre, who was seated, his huge thighs spread wide, his chair facing Lauren. Again, the sensation that he was spying on another couple washed through him, and he felt unbalanced, like he might sway like a drunk if he started walking.

He might have stayed there, blocking the doorway, in a no-man's-land of what-the-fuck for all of eternity, wondering what the hell he was doing - or even turned and walked out, because the scene was so disorienting, if Lauren had not, at that moment, looked over and seen him.

She raised her hand and smiled, waving at him, and though he was looking at her - rigidly at her - he could see in the periphery of his focus Andre's dark face looking slowly in his direction. His stomach came alive with a flutter, and stars briefly encroached on his field of vision, but he stepped forward, a blur of comments from the BBL forum and private pep-talks filling his head with noise. *Be fucking confident* was all that emerged.

"Hey man," Andre said, extending his hand, as soon as Jason was within a few feet of them.

Lauren had turned and put her hands on his shoulder, making it impossible for him to shake Andre's hand. She had a wild look in her eyes but a calm set of features. "You're late," she said, her voice high-pitched and odd - almost giddy. "I was starting to worry." She turned to Andre. "He's big on promptness."

"Parking," Jason said, sighing loudly, extending his hand past Lauren's warm body, which he was grateful to feel against his skin. "I had

to walk from 16th."

Andre had grasped his hand with his enormous paw, which was dry, warm, and shook firmly, but the crushing power of it seemed to buzz through his skin. Jason shook back firmly, looked him in the eye, and did his best to sound confident. "Hey. Jason. Lauren's husband."

Confident about what, he wondered. The room was spinning around him. He still didn't know what Lauren was doing, he still didn't know what this was, he wanted to ask her - and yet he was grateful that Andre was there and he had an excuse not to.

He sounded okay, he thought. Stiff. And weird. But okay.

Andre smiled broadly and turned to the bartender, raising a hand to order.

Jason's eyes wandered down Lauren's body; she was taller than usual, and some tan suede boots that came to her knees - sexy as hell, a pair he had never seen - explained why. He squinted mildly when he looked at her face, wondered if she was also wearing new lingerie.

But that was crazy.

He squinted a little, asking her a silent question. Would she get it? *What is this?* he implored.

What would the first pair of panties peeled away from her by another man since her wedding day look like?

"Get 'cha?" Andre said, turning back to Jason. He was leaning on the bar, his massive forearm draped from edge to edge, wiry fingers hanging casually on the brass railing. They looked monstrously large. His other hand was dipping into his jeans.

"Uh, beer's good."

"Craft shit?" Andre quipped.

Jason shook his head, scanned the tap quickly, glanced at Andre's drink - a mild-colored lager, and asked for a Sam Adams.

A momentary snake of horror wound through him, remembering a Dave Chappelle skit, and the heat that always rose to his neck whenever he stepped in some potentially racist quagmire - easy to do these days - crawled up to his jaw.

But Andre just ordered the beer, without comment, verbal or otherwise, and the feeling quickly faded. As Andre handed the beer to him, and Jason took it, he realized suddenly that he had absolutely no idea what was happening here, no way to direct it, and no way to *control* it. He was

sitting at a bar now, with a black man and his wife, and all the elements of a fantasy he didn't dare speak up about, laid out in front of him as if they were about to interact in some unstoppable chemical reaction.

Or maybe he was just here, joining his wife, who was having a very neutral drink with a man who happened to be black, at the world's most neutral bar.

Was he losing his fucking mind?

For a moment the entire scene seemed so surreal, he was almost certain he would wake up in a pool of drool, face down on his desk, having actually passed out in his office with stomach flu. Maybe he did have Covid. Maybe he had been intubated and this was his coma.

But Lauren piled herself up into her chair, crossed her shapely legs, and leaned her head against Jason's chest, and she was very, *very* real. He stole a glance at her face again, and she smiled.

Like the devil. There was something off in her smile: something unusual, too maniacal, too knowing.

It cut through him, as if someone had stabbed him through the abdomen with an ice-cold poker.

Or was it hot?

He felt hot. Suddenly, irrationally, very hot. He lifted a hand to his collar.

Every thought he tried to complete slipped through his fingers. Any ideas he had of trying to get a grasp on this - whatever it was - disintegrated in their nascent, wildest stages. He felt like he was in a VR movie, an observer who could not do anything but watch it all play out, in whatever magnificent horror it chose to.

He was sure that actual vomit was burning at the back of his throat. He was also sure that his cock was hard.

Andre took a sip of his beer and looked at them expectantly over the rim of his glass.

Jason heard himself talking. "So... you come here often?"

Andre smiled at this and set his glass down. "Heh," he said.

This prompted Andre's gaze to drift to Lauren's face, and an unsettling look to take shape in his features. Jason felt a ripple travel through Lauren's body.

Lauren stared back at Andre for what seemed like a full minute, and then she looked up at Jason. There was, in her eyes, a glint of very Lauren-

like mischief, one that he saw very rarely, an expression that turned him on profoundly, but which now also terrified him, because somewhere in its many unusual and foreign layers, there seemed to be something malevolent, out of place. More dangerous than usual. It was the equivalent of yelling back, "You got this!" as she disappeared down Bob's Bumps, maker of paraplegics, leaving him at the top to fend for himself.

She leaned close to Jason's ear. "He knows," she said, her voice and her eyes cat-like, rumbling like a purr, half-closed in a personal, unsharable pleasure.

Jason made a noise similar to Andre's "heh," with his lips pulled back into what he suspected looked like an expression of extreme pain, the kind of face he made when he gave himself brain freeze. He reached for his beer and took a huge gulp of it, his eyes darting to look at Lauren, who seemed...

Placid? What was behind her eyes at this moment? Something fevered, something scared, and yet all of it melting and converging on that peculiar, aggressive calm she possessed so utterly when she was doing something that she was very good at.

Skiing.

She never acted like *this* in a bar, doing... whatever this was.

And what did that mean? It turned over and over in his head, its promises like a warm tongue working through his testicles and his cock, its potential hazards clawing at his internal organs. *He knows.*

"Look," Andre said, sitting back, and looking at them as a pair again. He met Jason's eyes, then Lauren's, then settled somewhere between them. "Lauren here told me about this, and I gotta tell you," he looked at Jason again, and laughed softly, "I was all-in on trying to get at her. No offense, man. But you know. Your wife is hot as balls, can't be the first time. So this is weird, I gotta say. But I heard of it before. Sounds to me like everybody gets what they want in this deal." He shook his head. "I just don't want any kinda drama, man. I do not *need* any kind of drama."

Jason studiously set his beer back down, glad that his hand wasn't shaking. He shook his head, sending the already swirling thoughts spinning in a blizzard of torment and arousal. "Nobody wants any drama."

This made Andre break into a wide smile, and then look back at Lauren. He sucked on his lower lip and smiled again, now as if he and Lauren were the only ones in the room. He reached for her knee and drew a

few lazy circles on it with one finger. Jason stared at his hand on his wife, saw the wildfire of goosebumps spread down her neck and across her shoulder, felt her breath leave her ribcage in a silent gasp.

His cock throbbed. The experience seemed out-of-body, but this was *his* wife, it was his place to put his fingers and make goosebumps ripple over her body. But the hands on her leg were not his, they belonged to another man. The contrast in the size of them, in the color of them, made it impossible not to feel a break with his own reality.

"I explained that we were just going to meet today," Lauren said quickly, tearing her eyes from Andre's and looking up at Jason. "Because, you know..." her voice drifted off, her eyes dropping to his fingers.

The thought remained unfinished.

"Uh, yeah. That's good. That's cool," he babbled.

But as he said this, Andre's fingers moved slowly up her leg.

Lauren looked at him again, and he felt like it was an assessment.

Andre's fingers were on her leg. He was not misunderstanding that.

From the soup of thoughts in his mind, a phrase from the BBL forum percolated to the surface of his consciousness: *the ball is in her court now*. It wasn't from his own posts, but from another guy from the "wannabe" section.

But looking down at Andre's fingers, even with these thoughts swarming his mind, he found himself powerless to act. In fact, no matter what he was *thinking* as he watched the dark, wiry fingers move over Lauren's porcelain flesh, closer and closer to the hem of her jean skirt, closer and closer to the softest parts of her thighs, the inner-thigh flesh that felt like silk - his feelings were of a different nature. He was almost willing those fingers to keep climbing. Each portion of an inch that they traveled up intensified the throb deep in his gut, an icy-hot monster that was growing, consuming him from the inside out.

Lauren, for her part, was not stopping him. She was still looking at Jason, smiling, *daring* him, it would seem.

He inhaled, slowly.

And did nothing.

Lauren seemed to take this as a signal of some kind. Her lips turned up in a brief, frightening smile, the kind of smile she gave to wild ideas just before she went for them.

For a moment, it seemed like the world around them had dissolved. They all seemed to have forgotten where they were, that they were surrounded by people. Lauren inhaled sharply when she did breathe, and her eyes were on Andre's fingers, too - as if she didn't know what to do about them, how to stop them, what to say.

How far would it go?

The spell lasted however long it did, but it was Andre who, with a grin, slowly withdrew his hand, and spun slightly toward the bar, still looking at Lauren, to order a drink. Jason looked at Lauren's face; her parted lips, her eyes vacant and lost, her pupils melted into pools of sexual arousal that drowned the limpid blue of her eyes in wild, hungry blackness.

Andre ordered another drink, and Lauren blinked, shaking her head slightly. Andre nodded at her, a shorthand for asking if she wanted a drink, too, and she said, "Sure."

At that moment, the bar seemed to get louder, and more packed, though it might have just been the illusion of returning to reality from the previous tense moment. Patrons jostled against Jason, pushing him closer to Lauren, and his thigh into Andre's knee. Andre didn't react until he had Lauren's drink in his hand and was sliding it over to her. "Man, just so it's clear," he said, jokingly, in a way that actually put Jason at ease, "I ain't into any dick."

Jason shook his head. "Nope, me either," he agreed quickly. He may not have known what was going on otherwise, but he did know *that*.

"He just, uh... wants to watch. Right? The first time?" Lauren said. She drank half of her drink in a few swallows, uncharacteristic for her. She looked at Jason for agreement, as if any and all of this had been planned between them, and Jason could have strangled her, or fucked her, or kissed her feet passionately and worshiped her.

To Jason's surprise, Andre reached out and put his hand on her wrist, pushing the drink down to the bar, gently. "Slow down, there, girl," he said. It was a gesture that plucked a highly erotic chord inside of Jason, and he moved slowly to the side to avoid Andre getting any idea of the erection it was generating.

"I'm nervous," Lauren said, laughing. Nervously.

Andre tipped his head back and looked at Lauren, tapping his fingers lightly on the rim of his glass, as if he didn't believe such a thing was

possible. And then, the thought working through his mind, he seemed to like the idea of it, the weakness in it, a soft place that he could attack.

No, Jason thought. He was imagining things. His heart was beating way too fast.

Andre looked back and forth, from one to the other. "Y'all do this a lot, or what?"

Lauren smiled mysteriously and shook her head slowly, her eyes beckoning Andre, but somehow, slyly, the look was meant for Jason. He could feel it.

Lauren leaned toward Andre and put a hand on his neck, her lips very close to his ear. Jason watched, paralyzed again, all except for his insides, which seemed to be made of snakes. Her mouth moved, the crowd got louder, and she spoke a single, long sentence, her lips turned in a filthy smile.

Jason watched as whatever she said penetrated Andre's mind. His eyes were on her legs, then her breasts, hungry, clearly undressing her in his mind. They went a little wide, but the surprise that made them do that amused him, and he seemed to fill with even more confidence, then, and when Lauren sat back in her chair, he sucked on his lip again. "All right. I can help with that," he said, looking only at Lauren.

Jason was, at that moment, actually about to puke. He could feel it. "I gotta..." he said, holding up a finger. "Had to piss all the way here," he mumbled, as he took off in the direction of the bathroom, but it was possible that Andre and Lauren didn't hear him. He looked back, as he rounded the corner. They were talking, smiling, absorbed in each other, almost as if he wasn't even there.

*

When Jason came back - without puking - Lauren and Andre were both standing next to a small table up against the wall, pushed there by the mass of people now filling the bar. He pushed his way through the crowd, his eyes on the two of them: Lauren's face was only inches from Andre's chest, and Andre had one hand resting on her hip - casually, as if he did it all the time. They were talking, eyes locked, a faintly sexual smile on each of their lips.

It was what he wanted, Jason reminded himself, as the image burned inside of his chest.

They looked at him and smiled when he arrived next to them. Jason slid in behind Lauren, his hand on her waist, above Andre's. He leaned against the wall.

"That's better," he said lamely.

Andre was still looking at Lauren, a smile on his lips like he knew something Jason didn't. But Lauren looked at Jason and smiled. "Yeah. Yeah, well... we better..." She looked back at Andre, and was in the process of saying, "Maybe get home, work and all that..." as Andre maneuvered himself closer to her, his hand moving up to her waist, forcing Jason to retreat, to move back as Andre pressed Lauren toward the wall.

She bumped against it as Andre said, "Yeah. That's okay." But he was moving in a very different way, always closer to Lauren, who seemed to be paralyzed by his stare.

Because of the way people had crowded that section of the bar, Jason was pressed pretty close to them, and a wall of people, immersed in their own conversations, surrounded them. The moment, in which Andre and Lauren looked at each other intimately, seemed to last forever, and it wasn't until Lauren's mouth opened slightly and her chin dropped forward so that her face was pointed directly at his chest, that Jason realized that something else was happening.

His eyes swept around, not knowing where to look, the realization that something was happening between the two of them coming to him like swoops of a hawk around its prey. There was no space between Lauren's jean skirt and thighs, and Andre's jeans. The skirt had climbed up her leg at a lopsided angle. There was a motion in all of it - a steady, slight, almost undetectable rocking. Lauren stared at Andre's chest, her eyes, again, dark and lost. Her right arm, which had been on his forearm, dropped limply to her side, and Jason followed it to her thigh. Her muscles were strained, tense, but then disappeared in a fold of denim material. Another swoop: her skin was damp above her upper lip.

Jason had only just begun to put it together when Lauren's right hand shot up to Andre's forearm and her nails dug into his flesh. Andre tipped his head to her left side, and Lauren turned her head toward Jason. The curve of Andre's body opened up to give Jason a view to Andre's right arm on the far

side of their bodies: the forearm between them, the tendons straining against his flesh, a glimpse of black skin against white.

He jerked his eyes to Lauren's face. She lifted her gaze to meet his; her mouth was open in a mixture of surprise and pleasure, Andre's jaw moving next to her ear... it was only in the split second before her eyes squeezed shut and her mouth opened wide, a small whimper escaping her, that Jason fully realized what what was happening.

The scent of his wife's pussy wafted to his nostrils at the same time that her thigh spasmed and Andre put an arm up to steady her. She bit into Andre's bicep, her eyes hovering over his muscle mass. She opened them, and looked at Jason, sending a frisson of violent, scathing heat through him.

As she shuddered away, climaxing, Andre kept saying something to her in her ear, and Jason boiled with a desire to hear it. He boiled with a desire to stop this, but it was already done. And he boiled with a desire for it to go even further. In the end, he simply stared.

He heard Lauren gasp, shuddering a final wave of climax from her body. A new sentiment seemed to wash over her eyes, almost afraid. Andre pushed away, and Jason made a gesture with his head that was meant to tell Lauren it was okay.

She looked shocked, still staring at Jason as if to confirm that what had happened had in fact happened.

Andre's hand slid from under her skirt, but he leaned into Lauren's body with his hips, only distancing their upper torsos, and only a little. Lauren rolled her head along the wall to look up at him, still stunned.

Jason smelled the strong, tangy flavor of her arousal before he saw Andre's fingers. They moved up, and his breath froze in his lungs, turning to ice crystals that stabbed him painfully, sweetly, exhilaratingly, as he anticipated but did not quite believe what would happen next.

He watched as Lauren, seemingly guided by something telepathic, or maybe Andre's words, let her jaw fall open, so that Andre could put two shiny, wet fingers into her mouth. She closed her lips around them at the first knuckle, and he pushed them gently in, fucking her mouth slowly a few times with his fingers.

And then he removed them, and smiled. Turning to Jason, who had turned into a statue, he smiled. "Thing about tiny little girls with tight little pussies like hers," he said, "is they can always take a whole lotta cock." He dropped his hand and yanked on Lauren's skirt to straighten it out, and then

pushed himself away from her using the wall, making Lauren stumble a little. Andre was looking at her, and she was staring blankly at him. "So don't be scared about it, baby. It ain't never worked out any different than that for me."

He smiled, and Lauren continued staring, dumbstruck, her mouth open slightly.

"You like that, give me a call. I'll make you come ten times a night." He turned his head slightly to look at Jason and grinned again. "Be in touch."

And then, smooth as fucking ice cream, Andre picked up his beer from the table, and left.

Pretty much everyone got out of his way as he did.

They stared at him leaving, Jason watching his dark head and shoulders as they seemed to surf through the crowd, until he went through the doorway. His head was reeling, and he was almost afraid to look at his wife, to confront her and the reality that his fantasy had just become reality. In a way.

When he did finally look at her, she also tore her gaze away from the doorway, like she, too, was afraid to confront what had just happened.

But once their eyes met, that sentiment evaporated. The air practically incinerated between them, and he could tell that Lauren was as aroused as she had ever been. He seized her hair and pushed her against the wall, kissing her. The taste of her own juices was strong, still clinging to her lips, pockets of pure nectar coating her tongue as he explored her mouth viciously, seeking every drop of evidence that another man had placed the evidence of her sexual pleasure, and debasement, inside her own mouth, after fucking her with his fingers.

"Let's go," he breathed, unevenly, when he finally came up for air.

Lauren nodded, her expression still somewhat stunned, but her eyes hungry and her hands on his forearms like they had been on Andre's, digging in.

*

The walk - and it was more like a run - back to Jason's car - was surreal, a moment that seemed to be taken out of the pages of some

historical fantasy, a re-enactment of when they first got together in some ways, but more of a fictionalized, HBO version, in which everything was sharper, more arousing, more of a high, than it had ever been.

There was a brief and garbled discussion about Lauren's car, the details of which Jason wouldn't remember until the next morning, and in short order they were walking, sometimes running across streets to make the green lights, toward his car. They held hands.

Jason looked back at Lauren often; she seemed alternately stunned, and then wildly, incredibly sexy. Inside his body, his pulse raced, and that intangible "something" of mutual arousal - assured, intense, sexual desire between the two of them - was present in every exchange.

It was exhilarating, and tormenting. It seemed to pass in seconds, and yet each of those seconds seemed to take hours. His cock was so hard it hurt; when a thought strayed to think of it, he imagined it splitting, like a bratwurst, and a visceral gut punch would follow that vision, as he remembered, with clarity, over and over again as though it were the first time: his wife had just been finger-fucked by another man not a foot away from him.

He opened the door for her, and she got in, her jean skirt riding up just below her thighs. He spotted her underwear; cream-colored, a darker cream stain spreading from the center, shiny patches of her sweet juices coating the insides of her upper thighs. Visible proof that this had all, truly, happened. The sweet aroma of her excitement reached his nostrils just as he closed the door.

He was parked in a very public parking space: it was crowded, atop a hill, and his car was literally at the crest, in the very center. People were coming and going everywhere, but even so, he entertained the idea of throwing back Lauren's seat and jumping over to her side. He was that wildly excited.

He looked over at Lauren, and lunged at her to kiss her, tasting her juices still in her mouth. The image of Andre's fingers between her lips surfaced, blinding him to what was actually before his eyes, and the memory of it stabbed through his chest. Painful and sexy, the cold, jealous heat of it knifed through him.

"What was *that*?" he said, setting himself back down in his seat. He put the car in reverse, and looked over at Lauren, who had a hand to her

mouth, fingers touching her lower lip, her eyes vacant, as if she herself had just woken up from a dream and was pondering if it had really happened.

"That was hot," Jason said, quickly, fearing that the blankness of her expression betrayed regret. The idea that it did, however, also titillated him, and he turned his head to back out of his parking space and get *moving*, moving in the direction of home, or a hotel, or an abandoned lot, or a field, to fuck. Anything else was far from the forefront of his mind.

"Jason..." Lauren said, still looking at him, fingers still feeling her mouth.

She didn't finish her thought or turn away; she just kept looking at him. He glanced over at her when he could, and each time, when he met her faraway look and wondered what was behind it, it only added fuel to the fire that was consuming him.

What was the sentence that Lauren didn't finish? Was she sorry? Did she love him? Had she just realized that she wanted another man more than her husband? Did she feel guilty? Or unsatisfied, wishing she had taken things further?

And then, most disturbing of all: *why* had she done this? Because, even though he could barely keep the car on the road, let alone maintain a coherent thought, there was always a flutter of unfinished thoughts kicked up in his mind, and the one that came closest to being complete was this: what was Lauren doing? Cheating on him? Humiliating him, on purpose? Or had she simply, magically, tapped into his fantasy without him telling her about it?

And why did it matter?

He was getting onto the freeway now, and he reached across the car to put his hand on Lauren's thigh. "Baby," he said, "That was so hot. That was... so, so... *hot*."

"I... that all happened so... fast," she said, a note of uncertainty in her tone. But she seemed to awaken then, shaking her head slightly.

He glanced over at her. Her spirit seemed to have re-inhabited her eyes, and they had dropped from the non-existent point in the distance that she had been unfocused on, to his lap, where they surveyed the contours of his cock. He looked down, briefly, and saw the stain of precum that had spread in a small circle in the center of his suit pants.

He was driving - and he would remember this later, the inarguable danger of it all - and yet he couldn't tear his eyes away from Lauren for

more than an instant. Between his glances at the road in front of them, he watched her face as it changed: from stunned, to guilty, to surprised, to knowing. And then, at the same time that her body shifted in the seat so that she was turned toward him, her lips turned upward and a gleam inhabited her eyes, and she seemed to be smiling, knowingly - scarily, if he had to be honest - as she reached over to touch the shape of his cock through his suit.

Her touch electrified him, and he almost jerked the steering wheel. "Lauren," he breathed. "Jesus, hold on."

But her fingers moved in a slow, circular motion over the stain of precum, sending light vibrations over the crown of his dick that traveled, like red-hot heat along a wire, directly through him to some base of sexual pain and arousal at the base of his cock and inside of his balls. He felt an instant of nausea so strong that he thought he would actually vomit, and then a sort of kick through his chest.

He got off on the next exit, Lauren's hand still massaging his cock, her eyes now on his face, on his reactions, lit up by a dangerous hunger. He knew where he was going; all he had to do was get there.

It was ludicrous, what he was doing, but he did it anyway: he had been to a supplier's warehouse on this road only a handful of times, but the isolated yard around it had popped into his mind as if he went there every day. It was insane to be unable to wait any longer than that: they would have been home in twenty minutes. But he couldn't wait.

Lauren didn't ask any questions, either; she only grinned when the car wobbled violently through potholes in the dirt lot leading to their destination. She looked up, and around, and seemed to know what they were doing there, and it seemed to make sense to her, too.

He parked the car and stared ahead, into the windshield. His thoughts - if he was having anything that could be called "thoughts" seemed to come to him from a far-off place, and they crashed into his raging feelings, scattering in every direction. He wanted to pry into Lauren's thoughts, ask her what the fuck was happening here, open up the black box of Lauren's decision-making.

But those thoughts were feeble, and they washed out to sea in a mere instant. He looked over at her, and she was already coming toward him, the heat of her eyes and her obvious arousal engulfing him.

He grabbed her by the back of the head and kissed her forcefully, something that might have been out-of-order at any other time, but Lauren

responded with as much violent intensity as he delivered. From there it was like some fevered, adolescent dream: he banged his shin violently on something and then caught his shirt on the emergency brake and tore it; Lauren wriggled out of her panties, giggling.

He hopped on top of her, reached down to push her seat all the way back - it slammed with a wrenching clang that ordinarily would have made him cringe - and then he threw the back of the seat down with the same, graceless, dangerous carelessness. Lauren was working on his suit pants, her fingers nimble and quick, then warm and strong around his cock, getting him out just enough for him to enter her pussy. It was hot, sloppy wet, and the viscous slipperiness that engulfed his dick came alive with the infusion of the knowledge that this wetness was present because of another man.

The memory of Lauren's face, the sweat that formed on her temple and her upper lip, the vacant gaze as she lost herself while *Andre finger-fucked her* overpowered him for a moment, and he almost lost control.

But Lauren had not come yet, and so he steeled himself, grasping for any thought that might defend him against coming too soon. Lauren grabbed his shoulders and worked herself against him, her body filled with a needy aggressiveness that might have disturbed him, had he not wanted her to come so that he could let go.

It was the kind of sex that had disappeared completely from their lives long ago, the kind of thing that arose from undiluted, chemical, arousal.

Lauren's eyes were on his, locked with his gaze, and he knew what he was looking at: the way pleasure bubbled to the surface of her face, the dilation of her pupils.

But Lauren's thoughts were somewhere else, not with him, and the longer she looked at him, staring through him, the more he thought about the very thoughts he didn't want to think about.

But at last - and this was just a very short time, ultimately, though it was a struggle for him - he felt her pussy seize his cock, and then the welling up of hot liquid that turned her silky interior into a sloshy pool of flesh.

She screamed, and opened her mouth, and he came, looking into her eyes that did not seem - entirely - to be seeing him.

After the last shudder of Lauren's orgasm drained away, rippling through her thighs, she lay beneath him, panting, her eyes still unfocused and her thoughts distant. The air between their bodies was as humid and hot as a tropical jungle, and sweat had dampened both of their shirts.

Lauren's eyes drifted back to his face, visibly pulling reality back into her mind, before Jason's eyes. His cock was softening inside of her, and slithered from the wet mess of her pussy.

Lauren broke into a smile as she looked around her, like she was seeing the inside of the car for the first time, and she laughed, pushing gently on Jason's chest to get him off her.

Clumsily - because there was no other way to do it - Jason tried to roll back the way he had (apparently) gone in, but the man who got himself into crazy positions to have sex was no longer inside of him. He apologized and smiled, making Lauren laugh again, as he opened the passenger side door and stumbled out of the car. An attempt to simultaneously pull up his pants resulted in him dipping a knee into a small puddle, making Lauren gasp and cover her mouth.

"You okay?" she asked.

Jason shook his head and grinned, holding up a hand to wave her off. "Got it," he said, and stood up, casting a look around the industrial lot - which now seemed very, very *un*-secluded - and then he jogged around the car to get in on the driver's side.

Lauren was cracking up when he dropped into his seat. "Oh, my God," she said. "I can't believe we just did that."

They laughed together, but the smile faded almost instantly on Lauren's side of the car. She pushed her jean skirt down, and then looked at him again. She put a hand to her head as she pulled on the seat back handle to jerk her seat up. "Oh, my, God," she said. "I can't believe I just *did that*."

His head was still spinning, the glow of sex still muddying his thoughts, a ringing in his ears distorting the sound. His knee felt cold, he glanced down and saw that he had scraped a worn patch into the upper thigh of his suit, probably when he fell.

Jason was not a huge talker, but he wasn't the tongue-tied type, either. Looking over at Lauren, though, he found himself unable to speak for a moment. Was it because this was a dream, and he didn't want to shatter it, and wake up? He knew it wasn't an actual dream; it was too raw, too

satisfying, to be that. But where would things go from here, if he spoke? What was it that he even wanted to say?

They sat with that odd silence for a moment, Lauren looking out of the windshield with the kind of expression that she gave to things she was surprised by, things she wanted to try, things that confused her but which she - unlike Jason - didn't feel the need to sort out, piece by piece, component by component. She often left him behind on a cliff somewhere moments after she looked at something like this: where Jason wanted to calculate where he would end up if he tried something, Lauren often abandoned any attempt of such an exercise and just "went for it."

He sensed just that sort of difference between them now, and it activated an intense seizure of fear deep inside of him. It crawled out of his belly and grabbed him by the throat. The fear was momentary and all-consuming. A tremor traveled through him, and he waited for Lauren as though he were actually waiting for her to dive away into something that he couldn't get her back from: a cliff, an abyss, a dark lover.

But she gave herself a sudden, quick shake of the head, as if flinging some bad idea from her mind the way a dog would shake off water, and when she turned back to him, the look was gone. Jason's terror receded like a far Northern tide, in a single wave it was sucked away and the ambiance of excitement returned.

"Jason?" Lauren said. "Say something."

"Can't believe that you just had sex in the parking lot of Western Metals?" he asked, the joke already prepared, in case of emergency, in the slurry of thoughts that he had almost formed on the way here.

This made Lauren laugh, and he was relieved. "Well, that..." she said. She lowered her eyes. "I mean..." she sighed, her exasperated sigh for not having, nor wanting to search for, the right words. "I didn't mean for that to get so... you know."

His chest started feeling compressed again, excitement pushing on it from the inside, fear kicking back from outside. "Lauren, what, uh...?" he asked.

Lauren put a hand out to his thigh. It seemed, as she did it, like an affectionate gesture, not meant to arouse. But as soon as she touched him, the heat of her hand ignited him, and she seemed to feel it as well: it traveled through her, causing some change beneath her skin, in her eyes, in

her mouth, that signaled, in the subtlest of ways, a rekindling of that extreme arousal they had shared just moments before.

"Don't be mad at me," she said quietly. Her hand moved on his leg, and he dropped his eyes to watch it as she stroked his thigh. Disbelief held his gaze there: they had *just* had sex, she was *just* cooling down from her orgasm, this couldn't be an overture for more sex. And yet it had that feel. His heart protested feebly, kicking against his chest, but his cock had other ideas, and twitched between his legs.

Lauren looked up at him and so he met her gaze. "You remember that night I walked in on you and you had... so actually, before that... this all started with..." she made a sound of exasperation. "I don't know where to start," she said, impatiently.

Lauren never knew where to start.

A dark echo growled somewhere in his mind: Lauren also rarely knew where to stop.

But that was another danger for another day.

"You remember that site you were on?" she said, leaning back toward the window, her hand falling away from his thigh. She put her other hand to her hair and peeled a strand that had clung to her face with damp sweat away from her cheek.

It hit him with a clang, reverberating coldly inside of him. It was like getting caught red-handed at something, even if he hadn't had the experience in decades.

"Anyway," she said, something about his reaction assuring her that he did, in fact remember it. She sighed again, annoyed by the tedium of explanations, as she always was. "I... so Andre told me about this recipe, and then I found that site when I, you know, went looking for it. Because it was on BBC-something. So I thought *you* had found out that *I* was looking at it, you know, and then Kimbie for some reason went on there reading all this stuff and that's when she told me... anyway, I read your posts. At least I think they're yours, and then..." she sighed again, playing with a long strand of hair. She twisted it and brought it to her mouth, the way she sometimes did with braids. As soon as it touched her teeth, though, she made a face, like she always did, and pulled it away.

Jason was trying to put her mangled puzzle pieces together, but simply couldn't, so he waited.

"So I thought, you know... after some of the stuff you wrote, I guess I wasn't *100%* sure it was you, but I thought... I don't know. I would see. What you thought." She paused and chewed on her hair again, this time unconsciously.

She dropped her hair suddenly and turned to him. "But then... it wasn't my first idea, you know, to... go that far. I wasn't even going to tell Andre, I was just going to..." she sighed again, looking up at the ceiling, exasperated by her explanation. He put his hand out on her knee, hoping it would tell her it was okay, hoping she would finish that sentence.

"But then," she said, veering off to another part of the story. "I don't know. I was trying to get you somewhere where we would just be flirting. Originally. And it just..." She held her hands out, palms open, in a gesture of not knowing what had happened.

Black box.

"Lauren," he said. His voice sounded ragged. His breathing was still compressed by the erratic pulses of his expectant, excited heart, and the fear that surfaced inside of him if he didn't keep a foot on it. He couldn't understand Lauren's story completely, but he couldn't ever understand most of Lauren's stories completely. "It's... okay." He sounded shaky to himself. His cock was still twitching to life, elongating, pulsing against his suit. "It's... it was hot. It was really hot."

Her lips parted and a puff of relieved air escaped her lips. Behind her eyes, the gleam he so mistrusted flashed and then disappeared. "So you liked it?" she said. It sounded more like a statement than a question, the contours of her tone part-disbelieving, part thrilled.

Fear leapt up again in his chest. He liked it, yes, he wanted to say.
But...

But what?

But he didn't want to say that, to say that he wanted more, without wrapping some kind of safety net around it. He didn't want to close the door on it either. He was gripped by a paralysis, the freeze of indecision that he knew could be deadly: but which way should he step?

He took so long to answer that Lauren started to look worried. Her brow began to furrow, and her eyes got dark. "Didn't you?" she asked.

"I loved it Lauren," he said quickly. "I just... I'm just..."

"Surprised?" she asked, with a smile.

He exhaled sharply. "So surprised," he said. "Look..." He turned to face the windshield, and adjusted himself into his seat, hands to the steering wheel. "I can't think straight, right now. I can't... understand what you said, how this happened. But let's get out of here at least."

This made Lauren giggle, and put her seatbelt on. "God," she said. "I hope they don't have CCTV."

They did, but Jason didn't feel like it needed to be mentioned. As long as nobody stole anything tonight, no one would ever look at it again, but that wasn't the kind of joke Lauren needed right now.

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"We need to talk," he said, as soon as they had entered the kitchen through the garage door. He had been thinking how to re-start the conversation, to push it in the direction he knew it needed to go, and how to do it without crumpling everything. He hoped his tone was right, but he knew it didn't matter if it was or not: he had to know what had just happened, what Lauren had put in motion, what she *intended* to put into motion.

She went around the island and opened the fridge, scanned it, sighed. "Do we have any wine or anything?" she asked. "Oh." She took a bottle out of the fridge and set it on the table, put left her hand on it and stared at it, without making an attempt to pour any.

Jason approached her slowly. He felt a little silly, like he was walking toward her like she was a wild animal, but he couldn't help himself. She seemed so unpredictable now.

Or maybe she always had been, he thought, with another throb of fear that, like so many before it that evening, crashed through him and ended as an ebb in his genitals, arousing and painful.

"So you went on the forum," he began for her. "And you figured out... it was me."

"It *was*, wasn't it?" she said, looking up at him quickly.

He nodded.

"And then... you... what?" he continued.

She shrugged and looked sheepish. "I thought... I don't know what I thought. I wasn't really thinking. Andre... I mean, he's always there, at the gym. You know. Flirting. With me. So... I just thought... I'd see. What would

happen. Surprise you, I guess. Like, it seemed like you were... *never* going to bring it up, and then - I even thought about writing to you, you know, there. And saying, dude, just tell her. But everyone told you to do that. So I just decided..." She was looking at the wine bottle, peeling away the label. "It just happened like that, today. Like, Andre said, 'we should go get a drink,' and I... thought..." She looked back up at Jason. She shrugged again. "It was just... a perfect opportunity. You know? Like, everything fell into place, and I was just like, 'sure, we can go for a drink, and you know I'm married, so it has to be... like *this*.'" She looked back down at the wine bottle. "And then I told him."

"You told him?" Jason said, slowly. "Like, told him what?"

Lauren smiled, the devilish smile erupting on her lips. "I said, 'if you want to take me out and have a drink, that's fine by my husband, but we have an arrangement.'"

"But we didn't, we don't," Jason said. "Have an arrangement."

Lauren looked up at him. "But you *wanted* one."

That was true. But it somehow felt... fucked up. And not. He was really proud of Lauren, really *thrilled* that she had done this, and yet something, far down where he couldn't really grasp it, slithering out of his hands every time he tried, there was something that bothered him.

"Or didn't you?" Lauren turned suddenly and retrieved two wine glasses from the cupboard. She set them on the table and played with the stems with her fingers, thinking. "I didn't expect him to... you know. *Embrace* it like that."

"So now what?" Jason asked, his voice almost a whisper.

Lauren met his eyes, her fingers still on the stems of the glasses. She twisted the one in her right hand. "We don't have to *do* anything," she said quietly. "I could just say... it didn't work out."

Jason stared at her. The disappointment that her statement wrought inside of him felt like an empty hole blown through his chest. And yet that same, shapeless fear was nagging him, telling him to say, *yeah, we better just wrap it up there...*

"I don't understand," he heard himself saying, his mouth so far ahead of his thoughts that it almost sounded like another person was in the room. "What changed. I don't understand that... I never wanted to talk to you about this because I just thought, after those stories about Chance -"

"I don't know how to explain it," Lauren said, cutting him off, her tone resolute. He had heard this before - a dismissive finality in her voice that meant her decision had been made. Made, probably, in her very disorderly way of thinking, but it also meant that Lauren had, in corporate parlance, finalized it. She was not one for going over the decision-making process again.

"Why Andre?" he said, after a minute of silence.

Lauren opened her mouth, and then she tipped her head and grinned at him, a little sheepishly. "You tell me. Why Andre."

Jason cocked his head.

"You're on a site about... you know, guys like Andre. So... I don't really know, you know. Why? It's something... you remember Kimbie, right?" She didn't wait for his answer, of course he remembered Kimbie, and she knew it - she went out with her every now and then and Kimbie was hard to forget. "She was always telling me to, you know, try it. With a black guy. And I never did. So I guess... when I saw you were interested in it, like that, then I was like, okay, because I guess I regretted not... trying it out. Or something. It's not...easy to explain."

A ball of panic, pure and furious, was beginning to collect, drawing bile and adrenaline from his body, spinning into a growing mass in his abdomen. He could feel it, but he couldn't name it, and he didn't want to reflect on it too deeply, let it control him.

"Okay," he said, like he was about to lay out a plan. But he had no plan. He had no idea what to do. "So...?"

Lauren bit into her lip. "Tell me what you want," she said.

But she said it like she already knew it. Because she did. She knew what he *wanted*, that sexual, perverted part of him. What he didn't know - and couldn't find out, not without revealing what he didn't even know how to summarize for himself - was what he *feared*.

Maybe they were the same thing.

They were the same thing to Lauren, he knew that.

Now it was just a question of whether he would have the balls to let her do what he feared her doing, and if it was really what he wanted.

"I want..." he said, the shakiness returning to his voice. "I want... look, you know what I *want*." He sighed, feeling like he sounded like her now. "I just... want it to be what you want."

This, he realized as he said it, was true. Mostly. Or it was completely true, but not the entire truth. He wanted her to want what he wanted, which was, he knew, something different. He wanted her to want what he wanted and nothing more, he wanted her to want to fuck Andre because it was hot, because the sex was incredible, because it turned *him* on, because she couldn't control *herself* - and yet he couldn't imagine the pain of his control slipping, then burning, through his fingers.

What if she had sex with Andre, and the adage was true?

"What is it that *you* want?" he asked, when Lauren looked at the wine glasses again and twisted the one in her left hand in a slow revolution.

She could have said anything. What could she have said in that moment, that would have been the perfect thing? He would never know.

Her face changed. It was a tiny change, a thing no one else might have noticed. There was a hardening to something, like a switch had been flipped and Lauren had made a decision, and that rippled up through her skin and manifested as a strange shape to her mouth, a glimmer in her eyes.

"I want to try it," she said.

In her voice was a timbre, an adrenaline-fueled toothiness, that he had heard before. Her eyes were lit with that dangerous quality that always lurked inside of her, was always there to be kindled, that only needed the right temptation to coax it into a flame that consumed her attention and all of her passion.

It just... usually came in the form of doing something in *sports*, not sex.

The ball, a forum contributor's words came to life in his head as a voice, *is in her court*.

She had just slammed it back to him.

He gave her a look, one he could not be sure of. He might have felt himself smile. Inside, he was twisted into a pretzel. "Okay," he said. "Okay. What does that look like?"

"See, this is the thing that makes me... I don't know. Worried."

"What?" Jason asked this honestly; he really didn't know what she meant by that.

"Okay," Lauren said, imitating his voice. "'Okay...!' It just sounds like you are... not actually into it. You know?"

Jason had really appreciated a Jerry Seinfeld stand-up set he had watched recently, at the end of which the comedian had riffed for a good

five minutes about all the brimstone and fire that had been rained down upon "his tone" since he got married. "It's my *tone*," he said, hoping the joke they shared would work its magic.

"I'm..." Lauren suppressed a smile, "being serious here, Jayce."

"Lauren, I am being serious, too," he said quickly. "I *am* into it - you know that, you said you read the posts I made, you said so..." He cut himself off. He was becoming impatient, as often happened - though usually about far less consequential things - with Lauren's cluttered thinking. If anything was making him hesitate, it was his feeling that Lauren was about to tread into an activity that he himself did not control, and could not control. But that wasn't something he really wanted to say to her, all desire for the much-heralded "communication" of the BBL forum aside.

A dark thought found a way into his consciousness: surely Lauren herself had thoughts about this that she was keeping secret, hiding from him; and she would, no matter how they talked about it. They could talk into the next lifetime about how they "felt" about doing anything, and neither one of them would understand the other's real feelings: did Lauren understand what he liked about road biking and skiing? Did he understand what she liked about adrenaline and unplanned, death-defying stunts? He could say: "Lauren likes this because she says x, y, and z about it." But that was all. He didn't *feel* the understanding, any more than she did.

These thoughts went through his mind quickly, in the space of seconds.

Lauren folded her arms and took a deep breath in, the way she did before she did something, by Jason's judgment, very dangerous.

The knot in his chest grew, and he found it hard to breathe as he waited for her to speak.

When she looked up from the wine glasses, he could see that she had made up her mind.

"I think, if I'm going to do this, I need to do it... by myself first."

Jason blinked slowly. He had no idea, really, what he had expected her to say. Her response hit him like a literal ton of bricks, slicing the world into two misaligned segments for a moment visually, squeezing the air from inside of him, sending a flare of dull pain everywhere. A tinny ringing crept into his hearing, and below the high pitch he could actually hear the valves of his heart in his ears.

"What?" he said, stupidly, more like a reflex than a thought.

Lauren balled up her fists and set them on the counter. It was a strange, out-of-character gesture, and it jarred him. But she released them quickly, watching them, and then she began to speak. "I just don't think I can do, you know, two things at once, like... ugh, I hate to even say this, but I have like..." she moved one hand rapidly in front of her stomach, "anxiety or something, about sleeping with... you know, a guy like Andre."

Jason blinked slowly. "A black guy?"

Lauren made a sound and covered her face with both of her hands. "I know, it sounds -"

"Look, Lauren," Jason said, moving around the counter to put an arm on her shoulder. "If that's what this is about... then, you know... that isn't what's, um... that's not what I'm... that's not the big thing I'm into."

Lauren dropped her hands. Jason felt good. This was good. They were really sharing, and now he had found the solution to the problem. Score one for those guys on the forum, they knew what they were talking about. Communication *was* the key to everything.

"I just went on that forum because... I don't know. It had the best information about the lifestyle. It doesn't have to be... Andre."

Again, maybe he had been looking ahead too far, anticipating what he thought Lauren would say based upon what he knew about her. Maybe he just expected her to say something that he wished he would say, maybe he got carried away by his own fantasy. Maybe he had too strong a belief in his own influence, not enough of a belief in Lauren's will. Or Lauren's secrets - he had definitely underestimated those.

Lauren's hands were suspended partway to the counter, her palms up. Something was wrong, Jason sensed, before she even spoke. This was not the face of a woman who was about to say, "Why didn't you say so?" with a big, hearty smile.

Deep down inside, he must have wanted that so badly as to expect it, and so he was well and truly floored when Lauren said, with a hint of disdainful disbelief in her voice that cut through him:

"It's what *I'm* into, though."

"Oh," he said. "Oh. Okay."

"Otherwise... what's the point?" Lauren asked.

She nodded her head as she said this, and Jason knew enough about that nod to know it contained a kind of finality in it. Lauren had made up

her mind, and she was going to do something. Something she specifically found challenging.

"I thought you said you never... you know, hooked up with a black guy," Jason said, unsure himself of why he was saying that.

Lauren looked at him pointedly. "I didn't," she said, her forehead wrinkling in confusion. "That's... why."

Why, what? Jason wondered for a moment.

But only a moment.

Everything came into focus for him suddenly: Lauren's demeanor, the hard set to her eyes, the hint of what he took for malice in her expressions: this was a completely different game for Lauren than it was for him. This was Lauren, challenging herself to do something she had chickened out on, Lauren determined to see if she could do something.

Lauren leaned on the counter on one hand, fingers turned back toward her body. "Is that a problem?" she asked quietly, understanding creeping into her eyes as well. Lauren was no dummy: there was no high-powered, analytical calculus going on her head, but she *got* things just as much as he did. She was seeing something about his desires the same way he was seeing something about hers. The only problem was: there was no way of knowing if they were seeing the *same* things in each other that were really there.

"It's not a problem," Jason told her. "It's just... uh, unexpected." He reached for her hair and tucked it behind her ear. A feeling, one that ran through his gut and clenched his balls, and then lingered, painfully, in his abdomen - the same feeling he had as he watched her tiny frame disappear over a cliff, ostensibly in free-fall - gripped him tightly. "I don't have a problem with Andre," he said, when she didn't say anything immediately.

She put her hands up to his arm and held his hand between hers. "If I'm going to do this," she said, "I need to do it, like, on my own first. I can't, you know, deal with both things at once."

Jason nodded. He could hear himself saying something like, "that's okay, whatever you want," and it all sounded very good, and very right. The right thing to say.

And if it was what he wanted, this seemed like the only path to it.

As a man who spent his life evaluating the safety of dangerous materials, he could not help but think immediately of the risk. He wanted, desperately, to strike some kind of agreement with Lauren: if she did this

with Andre alone, would she guarantee that she would then do it *for him*, with him present? It was too much to ask, too like her ex-boyfriend Chance; too needy, too emasculating - and yet, he knew in his heart, it was the guarantee he *actually* wanted.

Lauren stood on her toes to kiss him, and they began to make out, hands everywhere, leading to sex, and it should have wiped his mind clean. But as they stumbled into the living room, and he pulled her by her legs toward him, sheathing his cock in her still creamy pussy, ripe and swollen, an epiphany came to him:

It was the *result* that he wanted, not the guarantee that he wanted.

As Lauren often said: you can't get an adrenaline rush without thinking, for at least a second, that you're going to die.

God, Jason, he remembered her saying, laughing, *that's what adrenaline* is.

CHAPTER 15

Thanks for getting back to me, man, Jason typed.

it's like I said, L found this website and she's been reading all my posts. This turned out to be a good thing, but I still need to hash my thoughts out and I can't be honest if I know she's reading it

Dude I'll tell you right there, it sounds like kind of a problem. How many times have I told you, communication is key?

Let me just tell you what happened.

L was reading these posts, and then one day, out of the blue, she texts me saying this guy, A, the black guy, is going out for drinks with her and do I want to meet them at the bar? I didn't know she'd been on here reading this stuff, that she knew who I was, nothing. It just seemed weird, but also too good to be true. So I go there, and he's there, and L leans over to me at some point and says, "He knows." And so I figure it out, because he's saying things like, I know what this is, I've heard of it, I don't want any dick, etc. And I just went with it because A) I was shocked and B) this is my actual fantasy and I can't believe it's happening

Then I feel sick, I'm actually going to puke. I go to the bathroom, I come back, and they're mashed up against a wall. And then this guy just finger-fucks her RIGHT THERE in the bar. She just lets him, she comes, and he puts his fingers in her mouth and says, call me if you want to do this thing (or something like that).

So we go home, we have the hottest sex in the car on the way, and we talk about it, she tells me how she was reading this forum, and I tell her this is hot, and everything seems to be falling into place. But then she hits me with this: "I want to do this the first time by myself."

And so I press a little, and she says, yeah, she's never had sex with a black guy but she wanted to, and she just can't do two things at once. So I get it, she's sort of afraid of fucking a black guy, and I say, "It doesn't have to be this guy," because that's honestly not the biggest part of the fantasy to me. And she says:

It is for me. Or what's the point?

So we have sex again, and it's hot, and I'm thinking the whole time: I'm getting everything I thought I wanted, but something seems not right about it. I don't want to un-do the progress I've made, and I feel like it's either, let her do this her way or she won't do it at all. But I don't know if I can handle it.

He debated about sending the message. After all, he didn't want to know what someone else thought about Lauren, he wanted to know what *Lauren* thought about him, and Andre. He wanted to know what process was going on in Lauren's mind, not what she spit out after it went through there. And he knew, when he managed to be rational, that he would never be able to access that, any more than Facebook engineers would ever know how their own fucking ads worked.

But he had to do something, even if it was just feeding his own beast.

He sent the PM, grateful that he could fool himself into believing that maybe, just maybe, someone would have the answer to his questions.

First of all, let's start with what's good. This is what you wanted. You wanted to approach the subject with

her, and she took control and just DID it, which is unheard of for a lot of guys, so what's to be upset about?

The best advice I can give you is this. It's the same thing I've been saying: this is all about her. If you make it about yourself, you're going to have problems. So if you have to let her go fuck this guy without you the first time, and that's the only way she'll do it, then you just have to suck it up and let it happen. Or you have to bail on the whole thing.

Set some ground rules before she goes. That's all you can do.

I guess what I'm worried about is that she does it and then she doesn't want to do it again with me there. Or maybe he doesn't. We can make all kinds of rules but that seems like something you cant make a rule about in advance

Yeah I see the problem with that. No, you can't make that a condition. You can tell her she has to be back by a certain time, has to tell you everything, can't do certain things (lol...why)

You gotta decide: do you want this or not? This is all about taking risks. You seem like a risk-averse guy. Maybe it isn't for you. But you cant do it without a lot of risk

She gets it more than you do: what's the point, otherwise?

IMHO she sounds fucking hot as hell and I bet if you do this its gonna pay off, but that's just one man's opinion

Okay man. Thanks.

Where did you leave it, btw?

Jason stared at the last response from his internet "mentor," and wondered what to write back.

He typed, and then erased, and then typed again:

She's doing it.

Because... that was what they had already agreed on.

The output was what he wanted, after all.

Somewhere deep inside, though, he knew that what he wanted was something he couldn't have: a way of seeing inside that black box of Lauren's mind and feelings. In Lauren's case, mostly feelings. The levers and throbs and gut instincts and desires that had molded her actions: he wanted to know what they were.

And he couldn't have that.

A deeply depressing thought that occurred to him all the time hung about like smog, permeating everything he tried to think and feel: he would never be satisfied, because he could never have what he really wanted.

CHAPTER 16

Thing about tiny little girls with tight little pussies like hers, Andre's voice repeated in Jason's head, almost like he was there in the room with him, is they can always take a whole lotta cock.

He picked up his phone again, and re-read Lauren's message, the curve of each digital letter sharp like a scythe, slicing through him.

He came in today and we made plans for tonight. I'm headed to his place after my last client... I think this is it. Still good for this?

Beneath her words, offset slightly, was his own response, which he could barely remember typing.

*I'm still good if you are. I just want you to be happy
I love you*

*I love you too. I'll call you on the way.
I'm excited*

Me too. Call me

Lauren's last message was sent only twenty minutes before, but those twenty minutes had ticked by with an excruciating slowness that had stretched out into what seemed like days. His chest was on fire with the feeling of having held his breath the entire time.

Lauren's expression of excitement should have put him over the moon, and he knew it. He knew that he was finally getting what he had believed that he wanted, and he knew that whatever he was feeling now was just the angst of having put into motion something he knew he could not completely control - and that his lack of control was probably, deep down inside, at least a part of what he really wanted, the risk that he wanted to take.

But having set it all in motion now, and having to wait, felt like it was literally killing him.

What did guys do, he wondered, while their wives were off with other men? He had a hard-on that wouldn't go away, but masturbating, strangely, seemed impossible, and he only considered doing it in a haze of other murky thoughts. He sat. He checked his phone again and again.

He was supposed to be working, so he was logged on to his computer and ready to answer a call if it came for him, but that would only fill time until 5:30pm. After that, he would have nothing to do but wait. Wait for Lauren's call, then wait for Lauren to come home, wait to find out if she still loved him, or if she had been seduced permanently by Andre, and his undoubtedly huge cock, and his dark powerful build.

He wanted Andre's address. It had occurred to him, minutes after sending his text, that he didn't even know this guy's last name. This big, athletic black guy who could easily overpower his wife, and he didn't even know who he was. He had finger-fucked her in public, and he couldn't even come up with the guy's last name.

Thing about tiny little girls with tight little pussies like hers, Andre's voice repeated, unbidden, is they can always take a whole lotta cock.

Jason groaned and checked the time again. Not even a minute had gone by as he sat there, tormented by these thoughts.

They had agreed on this more than two weeks ago. The ball had been put into Lauren's court, and he had expected things to happen quickly.

But they hadn't. With the ever-present mysterious workings of Lauren's interior, the idea had gone in - and no output had been returned. At all. Days dragged by, and she said she hadn't seen him, or the timing hadn't been right, or that she had "sort of chickened out." He had liked that time, liked the constant teasing, the constant danger. Maybe he had begun to believe that Lauren wouldn't actually go through with it - a feeling that filled him with relief and disappointment, both of them so extreme they choked the life out of him.

His private chats on BBL had reassured him that this was all part of the game, but he had found a way to read something twisted into everything they said. In the end, he knew that it was his frustration with one undeniable fact: if he wanted Lauren to do this - and he did, he really did - then he had to let it happen, and just let the chips fall where they may.

But what if something went wrong? What if Andre was some kind of psychopath? What if Lauren's "tight little pussy" couldn't actually "take a

whole lotta cock?" Or what if it could, and what if she came home to him, never to be satisfied with him again?

And there was the disappointment, the pure visceral one that he felt ashamed of having, of wanting to *see it for himself*, not the second time around, but there and then. It was a picture he couldn't get out of his mind, a desire to see Lauren's pussy - her pale outer lips, so neatly organized around her very pink, taut, clean, orderly cunt, a part of her that was like everything else about her smooth and fresh, winter-colored and pristine - being filled by another man, and not just any man, not just any cock.

He knew, or he thought he knew, why she wanted to do this alone the first time, and he had come to terms with it, had to risk it, if he wanted her to do this at all. But no matter what his mind said, his body hummed with fear and loathing, resentment, excitement, pain, anger, jealousy, rage, and mad, wild, love. The mix was awful, like a high that was too powerful.

He paced. He stopped by the hallway bathroom to stare, neck bent at a sharp angle, into the toilet bowl, because he had felt certain that he was going to vomit. The feeling went away, replaced by electricity traveling on his skin, all over his body, lingering most strongly on the damp, pre-cum smeared crown of his dick, on the taut, sore skin of his balls.

As he left the bathroom, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror - and the wild-eyed man on the edge who stared back wasn't someone he recognized.

He poured a drink but never drank it, turned on the TV but didn't watch it.

What was Lauren wearing to go see Andre, he wondered. This vexed him: was she going to show up there in her workout clothes? Did Andre like that sort of thing, the way he did? The sweet smell of sweat that gathered most strongly between her legs, mixed with her excitement, a slight stickiness to her skin? Probably.

Or would she shower? Did she have something in her locker at work, like those mysterious new boots she had worn to the bar? Would she dress up in some short skirt, or wear those white leggings that showed her ass off?

And how would Andre fuck her? Gently? Face-to-face? Or hard, from behind? Or would she get on top of him and ride him wildly, like she was sometimes inclined to do?

She had promised to tell him all of this, but somehow he knew it would be a poor substitute for the real thing, like scraps thrown to a dog after dinner - especially given the frustratingly staccato, haphazard way she had of recounting events - and it burned inside of him, arousing and humiliating at the same time.

He forced himself to pretend that he was watching TV for ten minutes without looking at the phone, but he failed, his eyes going to it, his fingers tapping the screen so the clock would stay on, counting every excruciating minute for him.

Six o'clock came and went, and then twenty more minutes. His arm began to hurt, his fingertips straining against his will, wanting to call her, to text her, to remind her of his presence, to call everything off...

But that would be silly. She needed, as she had said, some space to do this. She didn't want him to be like Chance, untrusting, controlling, obsessed. She wanted him to trust her: she hadn't said this specifically, but he knew it to be true. And so he waited.

When his phone rang, it vibrated beneath his fingers and he stared straight ahead, his heart in his throat. This was it, he thought. She was calling, and he had no other option but to answer the phone and let her do what she was going to do. Once he answered, and said goodbye, this was the point of no return.

"Lauren?" he said, answering after three rings, filled with a sudden panic that he would actually miss her call.

She had a sexy voice, sexier than usual. A sexy giggle. "I can't believe you didn't have your phone in your hand," she said. "Hmm."

"I did," Jason said quickly, "I just..." he stopped himself from explaining further; Lauren was making a joke, she was laughing.

"I'm running late," she said. "Just leaving the gym now."

A knife twisted in Jason's chest, and his cock lengthened, fully hard in seconds, making him wince in some deep, unknowable place. "To go to Andre's," he said, his voice lower and more whispery than he wanted.

"To go to Andre's," Lauren repeated, in a low voice. Then, jarringly, she asked, very cheerily, "So what are you doing tonight?"

Vomiting, pacing, wringing my hands, sitting in the dark with an erection and Andre's voice on endless replay telling me about your tight pussy, while he actually pounds it and I wait to hear about it later?

"Ha-ha," he said.

"No plans?"

"*Lauren.*"

"Just checking!" she laughed.

"What are you wearing?" he asked, and then wished he had said something more profound.

"I'll send you a picture," she said, a grin evident in her voice.

Jason exhaled. He was past the point of being able to sound smooth. Lauren sounded so carefree, so in control, so... *not nervous*.

"You don't sound nervous," he said, when Lauren didn't speak for a while.

"*You* don't sound nervous," she said. She sounded genuine. Jason was taken aback, and opened his mouth, but couldn't think of anything to say back to that. Did she *want* him to be nervous?

"I am nervous," she admitted. "Actually."

The door was open for him to say something now, and if not now, maybe never.

"Jason?"

"I'm nervous, too," he blurted. "I'm so... I can't think about anything else. I can't..." he scratched his eyebrow, which was attacked by an itch so strong it felt like a needle being pressed into his head. Another itch surfaced on his neck, and he clawed at it. Jesus, he thought. He was really fucking losing it.

"Jason," she said, her voice sexy and pleading. "I've got it all arranged, he's waiting for me -"

"Look. Lauren. Okay... okay. It isn't..." he looked up at the ceiling and sighed, and another violent itch made him swat at his neck. He was sweating. "It isn't *exactly* what I want, you know that. But I want you to, you know, get what *you* want. I guess. I'm willing to risk it. It's... I sound nervous because I am, it's risky, you know? But I have to trust you. And I do." He exhaled loudly. "So."

There was a long pause, and Jason felt throughout it that he was falling. His stomach was in his throat, vomit threatened again to erupt from the back of his throat where it bit at his larynx.

"That's what I thought you'd say," Lauren said, a very pleased tone in her voice.

Jason felt whiplashed by confusion, maddening, uninterpretable confusion. "He's waiting for me, baby, and I'm running late -"

A pause lingered in that moment. He knew, later, that it could not have possibly endured for the eternity that he thought it did, but it seemed to swoop in like an actual monster, growing, sucking the air out of the room until he felt like he was pressurized.

"-so you better hurry."

"What?" Jason almost yelled. He felt like Lauren had handed him a ball of wax and expected him to make a lunar module out of it. "Lauren, what?"

But Lauren was gone, and his phone was vibrating quickly, twice, in his hand, as he pulled it away from his ear to stare at it, and confirm that in fact, his wife had hung up on him long ago, and was now sending him a text message that contained nothing more than a link.

CHAPTER 17

He shouldn't have been driving.

That was the only coherent thought that made its way into his consciousness, through the frenzied sludge of emotions and adrenaline, as a fully-formed idea.

He was not in an appropriate state to be driving a motor vehicle. He felt like he was in one of his frequent dream/nightmares, in which he was, for some inexplicable reason, operating a very large vehicle from the back seat, unable to see clearly, unable to execute turns in time, unable to reach the brake - and, as in those dreams - his only thought about it was, "what the fuck am I driving like this for?"

Lauren had texted him an address and a link to a map with directions from their house. He was now listening to the voice guidance with the phone in his hand, eyes more on the screen than the road.

He was, in every way, *out of control*.

Lauren was out of control.

Or better stated, Lauren was out of his control. Out-of-bounds. Off-piste. Somewhere in an avalanche warning zone.

But out of control was a place that Lauren inhabited, quite comfortably. Lauren was most *in* control when she was out of his control, and there was an allure ensconced in that truth, though one that he preferred not to hold on to, for too long, because it was like acid on something else he felt deeply but which slipped through his fingers when he tried to hold it and assess it.

He was cussing prolifically at every person or vehicle or insentient streetlight that dared to delay his getting to this address - this address, where something alluded-to, something known and unknown, was *maybe* going to happen. A treasure, marked by a fat red pinhead, that he wanted and did not want.

He tried calling Lauren back, but she didn't answer. He screamed more profanities when she wrote him a text, that read, very dangerously while driving through an intersection:

Just come.

The address was an apartment complex downtown. It had a vaguely familiar feel to it, but from somewhere in his past that was soaked in alcohol. Maybe a party had happened here. Maybe he had just driven by at some point.

He tried calling Lauren again, no answer. Aggravated, he stood in front of the front door, scanned the mailboxes, stared at the intercom and tried to find a match, an apartment number, and almost started screaming because he didn't know anything but the apartment number.

An attractive pair of girls, immersed in conversation, glared at him as they pushed through the door. He made no attempt, as he usually might have, to look like he was a legitimate neighbor, and caught the door with his hand, throwing it back with a bang as he stormed inside.

703.

He pushed an elevator button, lost his patience instantly, and whirled to go up some stairs.

He climbed them in a blur, not even feeling exerted.

What else is there to do, standing in front of a door, but to knock? He looked warily at the doorbell. Something about ringing it seemed foolish, though he couldn't say why.

There was no immediate answer to his knock, no movement from inside. He leaned toward the cold metal door, and heard nothing inside: no moans, no music, no squeaking springs.

A vision of himself leaning against the door with his ear to it at the exact moment someone opened it, like the overused gag from the movies, made him jerk his head back and stand, staring, at the door, for what seemed like an eternity.

He lost patience, reached out, and punched the doorbell.

Footsteps. Light, feminine footsteps, the sound of heels on a hard floor.

He exhaled with relief when the breeze of the door opening picked up a strand of Lauren's hair and carried it gently to the side. She was fully dressed, but not as he had expected: a slouching, off-the-shoulder red shirt, made of a very thin material that revealed her sexiest black bra (one she rarely wore, because Lauren was a sporty girl who usually wore sporty clothes), and very short, tight, tan skirt let her sculpted legs run wildly to a pair of red heels that he now remembered she had purchased on a vacation in Mexico and never worn since.

She followed his gaze to her feet and lifted her right foot, rotating her shapely ankle to give him a little show. "I thought I'd dig these out," she said, casually. When he jerked his face up to look at her - in disbelief, more than anything - she was smiling. "Remember that time in Mexico?"

They had fucked in a cabana on the beach, and she had been pretty wasted. Wasted enough to take off all her clothes except those shoes, and sit on a low cupboard of some kind, with her legs spread open, one heel propped on the cupboard, the other dangling playfully down.

It *was* a dream, Jason thought woefully. The car, the shoes... the... everything. A dream. He would wake up any moment.

Lauren reached for him, clutching him by a fistful of the t-shirt he was wearing. She pulled him in, saying something to him like, "come in," but he barely registered it. His mind was already leaping ahead, into the apartment, the vague familiarity of it nosing through his thoughts. But why? Part of the nature of dreams? Or a real memory?

His eyes moved around, looking for Andre, as did his ears, seeking the tell-tale sounds of another person's presence. But as they moved down a long corridor and into a tastelessly decorated living room - black pleather couch, huge TV screen, oddly feminine piles of throw pillows and blankets in garish colors - only one thing became clear to him.

Andre was not here.

"Lauren," he said. "What the hell is going on? Where is... this?"

"I knew you wouldn't remember," Lauren said, her mysterious tone infuriating him so much, so suddenly, that he almost felt like grabbing her by the shoulders and shaking her.

She turned sharply and disappeared into a kitchen with a buffet window, opening the refrigerator like she lived there. "Want something to drink?"

"Is this Andre's place?" he asked, looking around. It wasn't any stupider of a question than anything else he could think of to say.

Lauren laughed, popping a cap off a beer and setting it on the counter for him. He was standing outside of the small kitchen, which was decidedly not the kitchen of any man he'd ever known.

"This is Kimbie's place, silly," she said.

Kimbie?

What the fuck did *Kimbie* have to do with any of this?

Lauren leaned on the counter between them and clinked a glass of white wine, which she seemed to have produced from nowhere, against the green glass of his beer bottle. "He's not here yet," she said, matter-of-factly. "But he will be."

Jason narrowed his eyes, and the effect that this had on Lauren was to make her grin. She put a hand out to him and opened her mouth, an explanation obviously forthcoming. But her phone buzzed, and she reached for it, tucked into a minuscule back pocket on her very short skirt. Holding the wine in one hand, she held up the screen and scanned it with her eyes. "Oh shoot," she said. "He's here now."

She typed with her thumb and then looked up quickly at Jason.

"I wanted to have some time to explain," she said, her finger hovering over the "send" icon. "But he's already here. So..."

She waited, looking at him, while he stared back at her, his mouth hanging open, his mind absolutely devoid of any thought.

"You want me to have him come up?" she asked, waving the phone in her hand teasingly.

She waited. She pressed the icon and set her phone down. She walked around the counter, put her arms over his shoulders, and hopped a little to kiss him - on the cheek.

"I changed my mind," she whispered in his ear. "I want you here."

And then she slinked around him, her eyes on his, as he reached numbly for one arm, which slipped away from his palm like shifting sands.

She opened the door and stepped out. He heard this; he didn't see it. He was staring uncomprehendingly at the wall in front of him, a framed poster of Chauncy Billups the only - weird - decoration.

"Hey," he heard his wife say.

And then the deeper male voice, barely audible because it rumbled so low. "Hey, girl."

*

Andre whistled as he stepped into the living room and surveyed it. Jason had located a stool, just in time, and placed it beneath his sinking torso just as his knees buckled, so he looked, he hoped, like he meant to be there, propped up on a stool. "Hey, man," Andre said to him.

He did not seem as surprised that Jason was there as Jason himself was.

Warm breath came from nowhere, grazing his left ear. Lauren had leaned over the counter to speak close to him. "I'll explain," she said. Her other arm pushed a beer toward Andre, who took it with a nonplussed expression that could have been meant for the brand of beer or the fact that he was being offered the sexual favors of another man's wife and *also* a beer.

Lauren left the kitchen and stepped past Andre, drawing a hand over his stomach as she did, in a fleeting caress. "It feels really quiet in here," she said. "My friend told me to put some music on, because the walls are paper thin."

Andre looked at Jason, and Jason shrugged, because nothing else occurred to him. This made Andre smile, strangely, before taking a sip of his beer and turning around to look at Lauren.

She was bent at the waist, peering into Kimbie's stereo system, and doing it with an obvious desire to display her greatest assets. Her skirt rode up high on her legs, and a sliver of black panties peeked from between her thighs.

Jason stared at that scene, pondering the way that the sight of the small patch of black fabric nestled between Lauren's legs was so much more arousing because of the fact that he knew that Andre was next to him, staring at it in the same way, thinking the same things that he was. He stole a glance at Andre, who happened to be glancing in his direction. He expelled air through slightly pursed lips and shook his head slightly, an obvious appreciation of Lauren's very hot ass, stacked upon her slender but sturdy legs, all teetering on the slutty heels.

As if she knew they were watching - or maybe because she did - Lauren lifted one ankle and kicked it out slightly, like in a dance move, before crossing it on the other one as she lifted her torso and put her hands on the console. "I don't really..." she said, fiddling with some dials that didn't seem related to the stereo.

But who was looking at anything that Lauren was *doing*, or cared about it? Surely Lauren knew that, too. There was a pleasing but unpleasant dissonance in the fact that Lauren was doing this at all: it wasn't like her to put on a silly show like this.

But then, when was Lauren ever in this situation?

He felt the presence of Andre keenly: so much of him, large and dark, hulking with sinewy muscle, eyes now turned back toward Jason's small, blond, very hot, as yet *unadulterated* wife. The image he had concocted, of Andre's cock splitting apart the taut pink flesh that formed Lauren's pussy, flashed through his mind, and then began to stain his vision, until it was all he could see. He blinked, trying to get it out of his mind, so that he could see what was actually before him: Lauren's ass, and Andre, sipping a beer while he stared at it.

But that vision was not so very unreal now: it was, in fact, seemingly within minutes, going to be very real. Its proximity seemed like a monster in the room with Jason, breathing, lurking, growing in the shadows.

Music blasted through the speakers suddenly, and Lauren turned it down immediately, saying, "Jesus," before turning around. Something black - not quite rap, not quite R&B, rattled on beneath too-heavy bass, the words un-hearable. "That all right?" Lauren said, turning around.

Andre had his beer halfway to his lips, and he looked over at Jason. There was a moment of shared camaraderie between them, at the inherent absurdity of Lauren's question - the kind of thing only a woman would wonder about, at a moment like this. She could have put on the theme songs to children's programming for all they cared, their exchanged look said. *Women.*

Lauren walked over toward the counter, slowly, her eyes moving back and forth from each of them to the other. She reached between them to pick up her wine glass, and looked at Andre as she took a sip.

For a moment, Andre was absorbed by Lauren, and it was the first time Jason had ever seen what happened to him under the presence of Lauren's attentions, happening to another man. It was mesmerizing, seeing that Lauren, with her chin tipped down slightly, and the tractor beam of her ice-blue gaze hovering over her inviting, large pink mouth, was not a metaphysical apparition that only he could see or feel: Andre was just as sucked in and kneecapped by her as he was.

But he broke with her gaze for just a moment, even as his hands reached toward her elbows, to look over at Jason. He laughed - a brief, uncomfortable laugh, the only sign Jason had seen of anything slightly uncomfortable in him - before turning his attention back to Lauren.

His hands closed around her elbows and pulled her toward him, directing one arm toward the counter to set down her wine. "That's a hot

little shirt," he told her, moving his hands to her waist, fingers searching for a way beneath the transparent fabric.

Jason was frozen in place, beer hovering between his thigh and his mouth, legs spread to keep him balanced on the surprisingly tiny stool.

Andre bent over Lauren to kiss her as he seized her waist in his huge hands beneath the shirt, almost picking her up to bring her mouth close to his. Her feet lifted from the ground, the shoes dangling over it for a moment, before he set her gently back down, his jaw working hard against her lips.

"Mmm," he said, backing away from her, his hands still moving around at her waist.

Jason studied Lauren. She seemed stunned, her eyes a little lost inside themselves, but only momentarily. The faint sheen of lip gloss she had applied - red, to stain her lips more the color of her shirt - had been thoroughly removed, and now her lips were their natural color, the contours of them blurred by Andre's kiss, something wet and out of place about her open mouth.

Andre worked his hands under the shirt and lifted it up, pulling it over Lauren's head as she lifted her own arms and let him undress her. The gauzy red fabric fell to the floor, and Lauren's small, firm breasts jutted into the air, only the lace-edged black cups between her nipples and Andre's thumbs as his hands seized them, cupping them, drowning them with his sheer size.

He played with her breasts for a while, watching his hands as he moved them around like silly putty, weighing them, fondling them, rubbing his thumbs over the growing pebbles beneath sheer satin cups. Then he seized Lauren's mouth with his again, plunging his hands at the same time into her bra, pushing down on it. The fabric tore loudly, and a strap snapped and then crumpled on Lauren's shoulder, sliding down her back, dangling for a moment before the entire structure of the bra failed and the lace and satin fell between their bodies.

Andre released her mouth and moved his hands to her hips, walking her back toward the couch as he looked down at the bra peeling away from her breasts. Her nipples were erect and swollen, and he had somehow caught her wrists on the way down, so that her arms were pushed against her tits and ribcage, making them plump up, turning up toward him, at attention.

"I know, I know, I said I'd go nice and slow, but you been teasin' me a long time now, girl," Andre said. Lauren was looking up at him, her expression changed: she was not afraid, not stunned, but seemed instead to be sinking into a mode of concentration. "I'll slow it down," Andre said, as Lauren's legs ran into the side of the couch. He reached behind her neck, and pulled her to his mouth again, kissing her violently.

Lauren's fingers went to Andre's chest, and clawed at his shirt. Jason was on the edge of his stool, a feeling gripping him like he should get in there and push Andre off his wife - she seemed to be unable to breathe, like she was getting mauled, almost. She lost her balance as Andre pushed into her, and her knees gave out, making her drop to the arm of the couch and sit on it. Andre followed her, the only sound, other than the low music, being the wet slops of their kisses, driven almost entirely by Andre.

He bit into her lower lip as he released her mouth, and pulled on it gently until it slipped from his teeth and snapped back into place on Lauren's face. She was breathing in short, panicky breaths now, her chest moving up and down in a way that it rarely did - Lauren didn't get out-of-breath no matter what insane aerobic feat she had just performed. And yet she bordered, now, on hyperventilation.

Her hands were still on Andre's shirt, balled up with the material clutched in her fists. He pushed down on her forearms, and her fingers snapped open and dragged down his abdomen, coming to rest at his jeans. He left her hands there, and looked down at her as he lifted his arms and reached behind himself to grab the back of his shirt.

Lauren stared at him, hands frozen, as he took off his shirt. Jason felt like he himself had disappeared somewhere, into the woodwork, and that was strangely fine with him, though another part of him ached for Lauren to look over at him, to seek out one final nod of approval, or to tease him, or maybe just to prove to him that she remembered he was there.

But her eyes were on the black skin unfurling before her as Andre's shirt went over his head and fell to the floor. Not a bulky man, Andre's back and shoulders were more immense than Jason would have figured, and perhaps that was what Lauren was staring at. Her hands were still on the belt, where Andre had left them, fingers poised to remove it but not yet moving.

"Why don't you get that out, baby. See what you're working with."

As he had been, back at the bar when he had first met Andre in this particular context, Jason was thrown by Andre's way of speaking to his wife: it titillated him, it fascinated him, and it frightened him. Maybe because Lauren's reaction to it was not what he expected: she simply did what he said, her eyelids slightly heavier, his brash talk working more like a hypnotic or a sedative.

Lauren's fingers began to move first. Andre put a hand to her head and played with her hair, letting it sift through his fingers to fall back against her shoulder, while she stared up at him, caught by his gaze, her eyes unmoving in their submission.

She unthreaded the belt without looking away, and then dropped her eyes to focus on the button and the fly, before lifting them to look over at Jason as the jeans opened and the bulky contours of Andre's cock spilled out, wrapped in black silk boxers, a mass of pulsing, hard meat inside.

Andre pushed the jeans down to below his hips and let them slide to his knees. "Take it out," he coaxed.

She gave Jason a fleeting look, and he was grateful it was fleeting because he could feel his face and it seemed to be molded into an expression of mouth-breathing stupidity that he could do nothing about. Her eyes traveled back to the huge lump encased in black silk, and Jason felt as if he was inhaling knives as her fingers curled around the hemline, paused for a moment that seemed to drag on for an eternity, and then gently, slowly, tugged on them until Andre's cock sprang loose and jutted into her chin, pouring out from beneath the curtain of black fabric, dangling, semi-hard and growing, between his legs.

Lauren froze, her hands still clutching the boxers, just below his balls, which grazed her knuckles. Andre's cock throbbed and lifted, the bulging crown sliding across the top of her breast, then her collarbone, then her throat, as it engorged and began to point straight in front of him. Lauren stared at it, mesmerized, as it did.

"Grab it, baby, don't be afraid," Andre urged her, reaching his right hand down to push the boxers to his jeans, taking his growing erection in his left hand to steady it.

Lauren stared at his cock while her right hand lifted, and her pale finger closed around the smooth, dark purple shaft before her eyes. As her hand wrapped around it, it pulsed, and when her fingers were fully closed

around it - her middle finger and thumb still separated by almost a quarter of an inch, her eyes went wide and she jerked her gaze up to Andre's face.

Jason shifted in his stool, ready to jump in - to do what, he didn't know - but Lauren looked alarmed.

Andre put a hand down to Lauren's wrists, moving her hand back and forth to get her started. "That's it, baby, ain't no thing, just big. You remember what I told you, though girl, you little tiny girls can take the biggest cocks."

Lauren was moving her hand along Andre's shaft now, staring at his cock and her own hand, almost as if she couldn't believe what she was doing. Then Andre brought his own hand back up, and guided the head of his cock to her lips, dragging it over them, making Lauren's gaze travel up to his eyes, then back to Jason's.

She stared at Jason directly as she opened her mouth - hesitantly at first, and then wider - and then, suddenly, the purple flesh was disappearing between her lips. Her jaw stretched wide, her eyes moved in front of her. But the image of her blue eyes hovering over Andre's cock was burned into Jason's retina forever: he could only see what was happening *through* the filmy ghost of that image.

Andre sucked in his breath and put a hand on Lauren's head. When she seemed to go as far as she could, and her nostrils flared as she struggled to manage breathing, he pushed gently on the back of it. She still had her hand wrapped around his cock, between the base of it and her lips, and she started to suck on that length of it, her head moving back and forth in tandem with her hand. The sticky slurp of it echoed brutally in Jason's ears.

"That's good, baby, that's nice. You got it. Keep on going, do it nice and slow."

Lauren sucked, and Andre stared at her, and this went on for quite a while.

"Take that hand away, baby," Andre said, reaching for Lauren's wrist.

She pulled back, gasping, spit smeared around her lips and running down her chin. The faint line of black that she put artfully beneath her blue eyes, so subtle that Jason often forgot she even did it, had smeared into a trashy smudge.

She looked up at Andre, and dropped her hand to his thigh, before lunging at his cock with an open mouth, a determined look on her face.

"That's it," Andre said, as she gagged a little when his cock brushed into the back of her throat. He put his hand behind her head and pushed her gently into him.

Her eyes glistened as water filled them and the surface wobbled for a moment, then spilled out as a fat teardrop onto her cheek, and another inch of Andre's cock pushed into her throat. She tilted her head more, and Andre pushed in deeper, before he pulled her back by her hair and held her head by a fistful of white-blond while she panted heavily.

It was Lauren who moved in again, her eyes on Andre's cock, swallowing him very quickly to the point they had left off, pushing herself to swallow more. She was still inches away from the base of his dick, so deep that she couldn't breathe through her nostrils anymore, and her jaw was stretched open, her lips a taut, thin pink line around his flesh. Her breasts bobbed as she sucked, and the well-contoured muscles of her abdomen flexed and strained against her skin as she worked hard at her task.

The cold, horrid feeling in Jason's abdomen twisted and clawed as this played out on repeat several times, tears spilling out of Lauren's eyes, her mouth greedily gobbling at Andre's dick, his hand pushing her further and further toward the base of his dick. At last, he held her away from his cock with a hand on her head as he moved his hips away, shaking his head. "Gotta slow down, girl," he said.

Lauren leaned toward his cock, trying to swallow it again, and he let her lunge for it but held on to her hair. When she couldn't reach it with her mouth, she lapped at it with her tongue, swirling sloppily around his crown, flitting the wet muscle of her mouth over the ridge and the veiny bottom of his shaft.

"She's wild," Andre said, with a backward glance at Jason.

Jason sipped his beer and straightened up on the stool, which was wildly uncomfortable. As Andre pushed Lauren back gently, and she fell onto the couch, bringing her hands up by her head with a devious smile, he stood up and moved to a chair on the other side of the room that faced the couch.

While Lauren squirmed on the cushions, Andre removed his jeans and boxers completely, watching her. She pushed her feet against the arm of the couch to scoot along it, and her tan skirt rolled up around her waist, baring her black panties and the contours of her sculpted ass.

Andre bent at the waist, one hand on his cock, stroking it lazily. He grabbed her right ankle and pulled it to the left. "Turn around baby, get that ass in the air for me," he told her.

Jason watched as Lauren, smiling, obeyed, turning onto her stomach and lifting her ass up, scrunching backward so that the black fabric of her thong, framed by her round, firm buttocks, was centered perfectly for Andre's viewing pleasure.

"Fuck, that's a nice ass," Andre said, moving both of his hands to Lauren's butt and kneading her cheeks aggressively. He hooked a hand underneath the thong nestled in her crack and pulled it away from her skin gently, before letting it snap back in place. He used two hands to jerk the fabric down to mid-thigh, as he got down on his knees behind her.

With both hands back at Lauren's ass, the thick web of his fingers covering almost her entire buttock, he pulled and kneaded while he stared approvingly at Lauren's tiny pink asshole, and the burst of pink petals cracked open beneath it.

And then, he moved his hands down to her thighs, gripping them tightly, as he dove in to eat her pussy.

Lauren was on her forearms, looking back at him, but she reacted violently, turning her face toward the other arm of the couch, mouth open. "Oh!" she moaned, and then seemed unable to make another sound.

The low music disappeared to a bass line beneath the squelching sound of Andre's tongue and lips as they sucked and licked Lauren's pussy, which seemed to get wetter by the second, until a sound of churning butter was all Jason could hear beyond the squeaky, panicked gasps of his wife.

"Uh, uhn, uhn," Lauren gasped, and her white skin puckered sharply beneath the steel of Andre's fingers as her thighs strained against his grip. Her feet, still encased in her sexy red shoes, stuffed up against the armrest of the couch, tried frantically to move and twist but were trapped. She began to buck against him, and when she could not do that, she arched her spine and threw her head back, sending her hair flying in a beautiful arc above her head. Her tits bounced and she seemed possessed as she let out a high-pitched wail for what seemed like a full minute before screaming loudly, tensely, as she came.

The wet sounds of her pussy intensified, and her creamy cum spilled down her thighs. Jason could smell the scent of her now, all the way across the room.

Andre kept going, even as Lauren struggled to climb away from him, squirming in anguished pleasure as he continued to assault her clit with his tongue in those over-sensitive moments after an orgasm. She at last relented, dropping to her chest, head turned toward Jason. Her eyes met his for the first time, but she seemed to be off in another world and not see him at all.

Andre drew his tongue - impossibly pink and bright in contrast to his dark lips, from her pussy to her ass, and with a grin, began to tease her asshole with it. He played with his tongue in her ass for a few moments, and Jason held his breath, wondering if this was leading to something that Lauren would object to - or not.

"You sure you don't wanna change your mind, baby?" Andre murmured, then moved his tongue around in a circle, tracing the contours of her hole.

Lauren twisted her head to look back at him, using her right arm to push her hair away from her face. "It's too big," she panted. Her eyes flicked to Jason, and a sliver of fear glimmered in them.

"She's not into that," Jason said, a flutter of panic in his chest.

This made Andre grin, smugly, like he knew better than that, and from experience. But he rolled onto his heels and stood up, smacking Lauren playfully on the ass as he did. "They always say that at first," he said, to no one in particular. "But okay, let's take one thing at a time. You ready for it, little girl?"

Lauren stretched out on the couch and rolled over to look at Andre from her side. Her hair was sticky with sweat at the roots, and mussed on the right side where she had rubbed against the couch when she came. Mascara and eyeliner had dripped even further beneath her eyes. The panties were just a scrap beneath her knees now.

And Andre was only just getting started.

He had his cock in his hand again, lazily moving his fingers along the immense length. Jason watched his wife's eyes as they drifted to his member and glazed over, focused on it.

"You ready for it?" Andre repeated. Then he looked over at Jason. "This place got a bed in it or what?" To Lauren, with a grin: "Don't wanna get cramped up."

She lifted a hand, and Andre took it, pulling her easily up to sitting, then to standing. Lauren looked dazed, and when she stood up, her hand

still in Andre's, she had an imbalance to her that Jason rarely saw. She stepped out of her panties, and wobbled a little as she did, looking uncertain of her bearings.

She looked at him, and held out her free hand. Jason stood to take it, but it slipped out of his reach as Andre jerked her toward him and kissed her violently, before pushing her toward the corridor ahead of him.

So Jason followed Andre's naked form, with his wife ahead of him, visible only as a sliver of blond hair beyond Andre's bicep, a scent, and a giggle as she rounded the corner.

Andre turned her around and began kissing her again as soon as they entered Kimbie's room, which was fairly small, because the bed was so enormous. Jason had to squeeze by them to get in, and he knocked them a little, so Lauren fell onto the bed. As he rounded the foot of it, she tossed her head to look over at him.

"You okay?" he asked her. Lauren moved her head in a nod, but her expression remained the same, a little stunned. She rolled her head to look at Andre. "It's so big," she whispered.

"We'll take it nice and slow," Andre said. "You'll see, baby doll."

Jason had sunk into a wicker basket chair that was overflowing with perfumed clothing and a variety of other objects that avalanched under his weight and sent him sinking slowly to the floor, magazines and feminine garments pouring over his shoulders. He moved out of it on his knees, staring at the bed and his supine wife.

He was acting on instinct, divorced entirely from thought. It was a strange, twilight state of mind to be in, one in which he did not see himself as an actor but did as a participant, and the only thing he knew to be really real was the erratic beating of his heart, the break inside of it raw and screaming and somehow invigorating. He was as aroused as he had ever been in his life, and something felt terrible about that. But it was unstoppable.

He stopped, kneeling on the far side of the bed by Lauren's head, and put his fingers to her hair. Instinct drove him to lean over and kiss her, to drag his lips over her ear and whisper, "It's okay, baby, I'm right here."

Her mouth tasted like her pussy, traces of the metallic flavor of her ass mixed in like touch of spice, and she kissed him back hungrily. Jason could feel her body moving, forward and then back, as Andre pushed her by the legs - almost like a wheelbarrow, so that she was angled diagonally

across the bed. The mattress moved beneath them as he hefted his considerable weight onto it.

Jason moved his left hand to Lauren's breast, and kissed her neck, licked her earlobe, tilting his head so that he could see Andre, whose long arm was extended to the center of Lauren's legs, slowly toying with her pussy, making it expel a sticky sound as he played in its soaked layers.

Lauren's gaze drifted away from a fixed point on the ceiling to Andre, and then she strained to lift her head and look down at what he was doing.

Andre glanced at Jason. "She like to watch," he said, his Black English accent suddenly strong, a complete element of his speech. His eyes went to Lauren's face and he grinned. "I had you," he said, and the meaning of this was a mystery to Jason for a beat, until he realized it meant something like, "I had you pegged."

"You that kind of girl," he said, grinning. "Hold her up, then, she wanna watch."

Instinct, again, took over: there was no other way that Jason would have done what he did. He climbed onto the bed, kicking off his loose pants, pulling his shirt over his head from the back, and then lifting Lauren by her shoulder to rest her on his stomach. He leaned against the headboard, cradling Lauren's upper torso, his fingers seeking out the eraser-like nubs of her nipples and rolling them between his fingers subconsciously.

All of his attention was on her body, rolling away from him in all of its pale splendor, parting at her legs into two long ribbons of pure, white skin. Between her legs the inviting pink of her taut gash, glistening with her cum, held him transfixed as Andre's dark, thick cock hovered near it.

He moved her legs like props, spreading them open wide. Lauren lifted her arms and hooked them around Jason's neck, her gaze on Andre, a faint smile on her lips. Instinct again moved Jason's hands, and he slid them down her ribcage, making her stifle a giggle and jerk a little, and then to her spread legs. He caught them just above her knee, and pulled on them, very gently, until they spread open, and lifted. Her heels came away from the bed and dangled over her folded thighs.

Andre pressed his lips together, and then licked his lower lip with satisfaction, lining his cock up with Lauren's pussy. She whimpered in pleasure as he dragged the fat end of his dick through the slippery ripples of her pink flesh, settling on her clit, which he massaged by moving his dick

expertly with his fingers. Jason felt Lauren's body reacting as he had never felt it before: she stiffened everywhere, then spasmed with each pass over the face of her clit, her heels bouncing in jerks each time he hit the right spot. She mewled and twisted her head on his chest.

"She ready now," Andre said, seeming as if he wasn't speaking to anyone at all but himself.

Jason stared at his thick black cock as Andre aligned it with the entrance of her pussy. He pulled her legs apart a little more to get a better view, and his eyes stung at the sight: the fat dark head covered all of her vagina - the inner lips, her clit, all the moist pink places that always seemed so perfectly tight.

"It's so big," Lauren whispered again, staring. Her fingers were moving absently on the back of Jason's neck. His gut twisted painfully.

But when he looked down at Lauren's face, he saw that her eyes were steadfast on Andre's cock, a look of keen interest and determination on her face.

Andre dropped his hand to her pussy and put his thumb on her clit. "Here we go, baby. Now you gonna know what you been missin'."

His words knifed through Jason's chest, but it was far too late to stop any of it now, and he knew that, so all he could do was stare as Andre moved his hips forward, and his cock began to press into Lauren's flesh.

Lauren gasped, and her fingers dug into the back of Jason's neck. For a moment, the rigid, fat column of Andre's dick seemed to bend, compressing against the force of Lauren's tight hole. Her mouth fell open, Jason's heart screamed, her fingers dug in deeper, and then, with the sound of a splitting melon, it pushed inside of her.

"Oh, my," Lauren grunted, and lifted her head to stare at Andre's half-embedded dick. Andre scooped his hands under her bottom and lifted her, pulling her pussy onto his cock, tugging her gently from Jason's hands. He put his own hands down to hold himself in place as Lauren's pussy gobbled the rest of Andre's dick, her knees bent toward her head.

"See there, that's right," Andre said, jerking her hips hard, pulling her onto his dick, embedding his cock even deeper. All the shapes and colors of Lauren's pussy had been stretched into a strained pink line, like her lips had been earlier, when she'd tried to take all of his length into her throat.

Andre began to fuck her, holding her by the hips and slowly drawing the cream-coated, slimy length of his dick in and out of her pussy very

slowly at first. Her pussy crackled stickily, and Lauren just breathed in sharp gasps, her mouth open, her eyes staring at Andre's dick moving in and out of her.

He noticed the lump beneath her tender abdomen after a few slow thrusts, and it drew his eye away from the damage of her stretched pussy - it was the end of Andre's dick, which curved up sharply, rolling beneath her skin as he pummeled her inside-out.

And then he began to fuck her for real. He grabbed her hips and moved his as well, pushing her back as he drew out, and then thrusting forward while he slammed into her. Each thrust slapped against her ass, and her pussy spurted, crackling and flubbing wetly. Her torso dragged across his chest and then back up again, a limp doll, her hair getting damp and sticking to his chest.

She began to squeal, and then her back arched up and away from his chest, as Andre continued to pummel her hard, his own expression locked in his carnal desires, eyes on his cock shredding her pussy. Lauren gasped for air and mewled, then started to yell, almost as if in pain.

"Are you okay?" Jason asked her, in a fevered whisper, unable to take his eyes off Andre's sawing cock between her legs.

She answered by squealing and then shrieking, and her pussy exploded wetly, as she came, her whole body stiff for a moment before collapsing into waves of attenuating shudders. Jason's hands had moved all over her body, unconsciously, and they were on her throat and her breast as she came, the tension in her body shaking under his palms. Feeling the pleasure racing through her while he knew, could see, could feel that another man's cock was still inside of her, made stars of unconsciousness threaten the periphery of his vision, and his heart felt like a kicking horse in his chest.

Andre grinned down at Lauren. "That's a good girl, see I told you." He slowed his rhythm, and let Lauren's legs splay open. Her skin was damp, and her limbs shook, as her hands slipped from Jason's neck and her eyes glazed over. Andre continued to fuck her, which made her whimper with the weakest of protests, not even as much as she had done before on the couch, while his cock rubbed against her fucked-out clit and drove her wild.

Lauren's back, moving with the rhythm of Andre's thrusts, slid, lubricated by the sheen of sweet-smelling sweat that covered all of her skin,

over Jason's cock, and like some kind of freak hand job, the motion was going to make him come.

"I'm gonna get her all ready to go again," Andre said. "And then I'm gonna fuck her full of cum." He looked up at Jason, who was wincing with the many discomforts that now plagued him: he was so close to coming himself, his wife was a limp piece of flesh in his arms being hammered by a black man, who was now grinning at him, almost sadistically, as he told him that he was going to fuck her full of cum.

Jason looked down at Lauren, whose eyelids were heavy and whose facial features now seemed slack, even though mewls of pleasure were purring at the back of her throat. Andre fucked her slowly until Jason began to feel the reawakening of her arousal in her arms and her torso: her fingers dug into his skin again, her bottom began to buck up from the bed. She opened her eyes wide to look up at Andre, and then at Jason.

"Oh yeah, now she ready," Andre said, grinning. He started to fuck Lauren hard, slapping into her ass. "She's squeezing my cock nice and hard now. That's good, baby, squeeze it. Oh fuck, that's so fucking tight."

Jason imagined the tightness of Lauren's pussy, when she squeezed hard, as her climax built up. He knew the feel of it, and the fact that Andre was feeling it now made a cold lump travel down his esophagus. His balls were aching, and his cock screaming, even as he could feel his own release boiling up, straining against the vessels in his dick, nudged ever-closer to climax by the slippery silk of Lauren's back as it dragged over him via the motion of Andre's fucking.

"Get ready baby," Andre said, reaching down and grabbing Lauren's hair to lift her head so that she could watch him fuck her. Lauren pushed up on an elbow and stared as Andre slammed into her, wet splats of flesh echoing around the room. Lauren was mewling, her mouth open, her body wriggling.

Andre groaned, and thrust hard and deep into Lauren, making her gasp. He grunted and then slammed a few more thrusts into her, his eyes cold and hard as he came, spewing his seed deep into Lauren's pussy. Each hard, spurt-filled thrust sounding sloppier than the last.

Jason's own building release had been cut off when Lauren's body was lifted off his cock. The steady rhythm of Andre's thrusts no longer moved him steadily to the end, but Lauren's slippery back grazed the tip of

his dick randomly, sending an excruciating pain of incompleteness through him with each stray graze.

"Uhn, fuck, baby, I need a break," Andre said. Lauren, unsatisfied, was trying to climb onto him as he attempted to rest back on his heels. He looked over Lauren's shoulder at Jason, with a smile that was almost nervous. Lauren straddled him and her fingers appeared between their legs, groping frantically for Andre's cock.

"No wonder you need a pinch hitter," Andre said, just before Lauren attacked his mouth.

Jason stared at the scene in front of him, at the unbridled hunger that Lauren was displaying, in disbelief. "She isn't done with you yet," he said, almost mechanically. Did he say this because he was disappointed? Or thrilled? Or was he just stunned, or afraid that what he was seeing was exactly what he had feared all along - and yet had never really believed would actually happen?

Lauren stuffed Andre's cock into her pussy and rocked her hips against him, even as he tried to gently push her off. White cum oozed between their legs, pouring over Andre's balls, coating Lauren's thighs. "Holy," Andre commented, and he murmured something about needing a break again, but Lauren was relentless. She threw her head back and bobbed enthusiastically on Andre's cock, until the latter seemed to give up on the idea of taking a break and held her by the waist and shoulders so that she could go to town on him.

Jason was still resting against the headboard, his cock nearly bursting, staring at the back of his wife as she rode Andre in a frenzy that so completely absorbed her she did not even seem to be in the room. Andre caught Jason's eye at one point and he arched an eyebrow as if he couldn't believe Lauren himself.

"Oh," Lauren moaned, her hips moving faster. "Oh God, just a little bit more, I'm going to come again, oh!"

When she climaxed, she plopped hard on Andre's cock, and his balls squeezed like flattened, purple eggs with a loud spurt, just before she tipped forward to lean her head on his shoulder and her arms slid to her sides, limp. She mewled as Andre jostled her a little to turn to the left, then pushed her down to the bed to Jason's right side.

"Jesus," Andre said, to no one in particular. He looked at Lauren, then to Jason with a grin. "Looks like maybe you been a little unfair to

somebody there," he said, shifting his gaze back to Lauren. "You better give that man some attention. Go on, girl." He grinned again, scooting himself out from under Lauren's shiny, fetid thighs, reeking of astringent cum and the sweet tones of her own juices.

Every part of Lauren was slippery now: her pussy sloped as she moved, her whole body like a liquid, turning over slightly on her side. Andre dragged her by the legs so that her cheek slid along Jason's torso, until she was lying against his hip, her wet hair sticking to his thighs, his burgeoning cock, slimy with pre-cum, just inches from her mouth. But her expression, too, was slippery: there was a foreign, unsettling look in her eyes, and a desire that Jason tried to pin down but could not.

Was Lauren hungry now for just *any* cock, or was it for pleasing Jason? Or was she obsessed with Andre's cock now, and obeying his commands to get more of him? Could Jason even know?

She smiled, and the smile was as slippery as her thighs. Her right hand floated down to his dick and grasped it at the base, squeezing hard. She opened her mouth and treated Jason to a laugh that could have meant anything - anything that he wanted, anything that he feared.

As she twisted her head toward her husband and pushed up on her left arm to guide his cock to her mouth, Andre moved her body around at Jason's feet. He couldn't tear his eyes away from Lauren's shiny face, the mania in her eyes, the smears of her makeup in her sweat and tears. Her skin smelled like Andre's saliva. When she placed Jason's cock in her mouth and sucked at his dick, her lips felt swollen and sloppy, her motions haphazard.

And that was because Andre, who, it seemed, had not needed much of a rest at all, had turned Lauren on her side and propped her butt up on a pillow so that he could play with her ass and her pussy. Lauren held Jason's cock in her hand and sucked, but as Andre continued to finger her, she became distracted and let his cock slip from her open mouth as she tried to look down at what Andre was doing.

She went back to sucking on Jason, but almost as an afterthought, her steady rhythm interrupted endlessly by a gasp or a glance down at Andre, who had one finger moving in and out of her ass now.

"Baby," Jason said, putting a hand on Lauren's head without any pressure. He wanted to keep her mouth on his cock: he was so close that the

pain was all-encompassing now. But he wanted Lauren to *choose* to suck on his dick, to choose it *over* Andre's finger sawing in her eyelet.

Lauren released him again to howl, and then she stared in front of her vacantly with Jason's cock in her hand. Her lips grazed his crown, and her body jostled. Just as Jason averted his gaze to look at what Andre was doing, her hand clamped hard at the base of his dick, quashing the boil of cum that had been just about to gush through his dick. The pain of it kicked back through his abdomen, all the way to what felt like his tailbone, a hollow pain that made him groan and lean over his wife's body as if someone had kicked him in the nuts.

When he looked up at Andre, the man had two fingers side-by-side pointing from his huge hand, and he was plunging them into Lauren's ass, a squelching giving sound to the motion of his fingers through her tight sphincter. "I wanna fuck this ass so bad," he said. "You sure you ain't into it, baby?"

Andre looked at Jason at this point, as if Jason could overrule Lauren, and he just gave Andre the only look he could in return: the pain that racked him had not subsided, but Lauren's lips had closed lazily around the crown of his cock and she was sucking noisily on his dick again, interrupted by the distraction of Andre's fingers in her ass.

"That's okay," Andre said, when Lauren didn't answer but moved her head in a vague, negative motion. "You'll come around." He looked up at Jason and grinned. "She'll come around. I know the type."

He slapped Lauren quickly on the ass with his free hand, twice in succession, playfully. "Get to work on that, baby, turn over, you havin' a hard time concentrating."

Lauren rolled onto her hips at Andre's insistence, holding onto Jason's cock the whole time. Now on her knees again, she dedicated herself to her blowjob in the more traditional position.

Andre watched, his fingers buried in her ass, no longer pumping her, but moving his fingers inside of her - Jason could see by the strained muscles and tendons on his forearm - and, whatever he was doing, making Lauren mewl loudly, the vibration of her cries massaged Jason's crown as she sucked.

"Oh, baby," he said, bending forward, clutching her hair, as he started to come. Lauren sucked up to the last second, but lifted her face to look at him just as his cum shot from his dick. Thick ropes of it splattered

across her chest and throat before she gasped, then turned her head down to take him into her mouth as the next few spurts shot out.

Jason was groaning, but he could barely hear himself. Lauren's tongue swirled around his cock as she licked and sucked up the cum that had escaped her lips. She worked her way down his shaft, and lapped at his balls. Jason stared at her, and then at Andre, whose eyes were on Lauren's ass. "Oh fuck, that's what I like, that's why I like to get some ass, she's clamping down so hard, fuck that feels so good baby, come on, let me have a little piece of it."

Jason put his hand on Lauren's head and tilted it so that he could look at her face. She was panting, a frenzied look on her face, cum dripping from her chin, saliva shiny all over her face. He was about to say something reassuring to Lauren, who he felt sure did not want to try such a thing, because she never did with him. But her eyes were fevered and wild, and she seemed to look past him as she breathed: "I want to try it. I want to see if I can fit it."

"Lauren," Jason said, his voice hollow. He didn't want to stop her: the idea that Andre's hardening cock was going to plunge into her ass made his own cock throb with newfound, seemingly impossible enthusiasm. But he wanted her to... what? Think? Consider it for a moment? Say something *other* than what she said...?

Andre was focused now, lifting Lauren's hips with the fingers still embedded in her ass, so that she slipped down Jason's legs as she scooted back to get her ass up to where he had lifted it. Lauren's arms dragged behind her body, her fingers sliding down Jason's legs. She looked up at him, her mouth open, and he could not read what he saw there: she didn't look like his wife at all.

Andre slid his cock, hard again, into her pussy and pushed his hips forward a few times, his fingers still embedded in her ass. Jason stared, his mind floating away from his body, his cock twitching to life again on his thigh, while his mind attempted to make sense of what he was seeing. They were now beyond even his wildest hopes for this fantasy, and he felt untethered because of it. Danger was everywhere, and he could feel it, but he didn't know what kind of danger it was.

When Andre pulled out of Lauren's pussy with a sloppy squelch, and lined his cock up with her ass, Lauren rose up onto her hands, and flipped

her hair to look back at Andre. She was panting in a determined, athletic way, her hips squirming.

"Just relax, baby, and it'll slide right in," Andre breathed.

Lauren whipped her head around and looked at Jason just as a wet, almost crunchy sound announced Andre's cock passing through her eyelet. Her mouth fell open in disbelief, and she stared at Jason as though he had surprised her - though he couldn't tell if it was a good or bad surprise. She stayed like this as Andre pushed slowly inside of her.

"Relax, there you go, it only hurt if you fight it, there you go."

Lauren looked up, her eyes meeting Jason's. "He's... oh, my God..."
"You're doing good, baby," Jason said, reaching out to touch her cheek.

When Andre's hips came to rest gently against her bottom, his cock deep in her ass, he grinned, and patted her on the right buttock. "That's it, girl, see, now it's good," he murmured. "Just relax, it's all good from here."

"He's in my ass," Lauren said, her eyes on Jason but unseeing.

Andre put his hands on her hips and looked at Jason, then grinned wickedly. "Now she startin' to like it."

He fucked her for a while, slowly, never pulling completely out. Then he began to withdraw completely, a slurpy exhalation and then a wet smack announcing the exit of his cock and then its plunge back inside of her.

Lauren continued to stare, open-mouthed, her whole body caught up in whatever she was experiencing, which was hard to read. She began to moan, and then to buck against him, grinding her bottom back against his hips.

Andre swept an arm under her chest and leaned back on his hips, pulling Lauren onto his lap, his dick still inside her ass. He pressed her back against his chest, constricting the movement of her torso, spreading her legs open with his own thick thighs.

Lauren's swollen, cream-filled pussy broke open before Jason's eyes, the petals engorged, the normally tidy shapes a mess of pearly cum in thick patches and reddened, disordered flesh. Her hole was loose, a blackness oozing cream, surrounded by the ribboned pink of her stretched-out lips.

Beneath her abused pussy, Andre's thick snake, shiny with her cum, curved backward and then forward, as it disappeared into her ass. Lauren's head was tipped back on his chest, and she moved her hips to try and fuck

him, but Andre kept her under control, seizing her with his thick arms and pressing her to him.

Jason sat up, zombie-like, staring at Lauren's pussy. His hand seemed to float of its own volition, independent of his control, forcing him to tuck his legs under him and get on his own knees, scooting closer to the entangled pair. He slipped his pointer and index finger into Lauren's folds and she gasped as he ran them over her clit.

"Oh fuck man, yeah, make her come, she's squeezing my dick so tight. That's so fucking hot," Andre said. One hand moved to Lauren's throat, the other squeezed her right nipple, rolling it between his fingers. Jason looked down at the mess of Lauren's pussy and found, in the super-slick heated liquid of her cunt, the hard knob of her clitoris. He caught it gently between his thumb and middle finger, and tried to find the rough patch of sensitive nerves beneath the hood of it.

He felt like he was fumbling with the pussy of a different, new woman: the slop of Lauren's pussy felt foreign, even if it was, ultimately familiar. He had never pleased her this way before, and certainly not while she was propped up like a sexual puppet with another man's cock deep in her ass.

His hand occasionally scraped the hard, slippery surface of Andre's cock, but he didn't care: soon he was massaging Lauren's clit with his pointer finger, and her gaze was on him, her mouth open, amazement swirling behind the hungry insanity in her eyes.

He kept his eyes on hers, zoomed in on the changing look in her features as she became absorbed by the physical and was no longer thinking of anything except the climax that she was struggling to reach. Andre's lips and tongue came into the frame of her face from time to time, sucking at her skin, licking her neck. Jason's fingers moved slowly at first, enjoying that her torture - and pleasure - was being prolonged. His fingers could feel the mounting pressure inside of her, the electricity and the strain that was growing, driving her to sweat and mewl and squirm on Andre's cock.

Andre was smiling, his mouth open against her neck, when he felt the first jerk of her limbs against them both. Her mouth opened wider, and her eyes seemed to get swallowed entirely by her pupils in an instant. "Jason," she whispered, squeezing her eyes closed for a moment. "Don't stop."

He slowed his fingers, and then paused, her clit almost bouncing between the tips of his fingers, and watched as Lauren opened her eyes and stared at him. The need in her eyes was as bottomless and consuming as he had ever believed he could see in her, a mirror of his own for the first time ever.

A satisfying thrill he had not expected traveled through him.

"Please," Lauren croaked.

He pinched her clit, and rubbed slowly, as she stared at him, begging with her eyes.

He pressed against her clit and rubbed, and her chest heaved with a strange, rattling sound before she screamed.

Andre grinned and pushed her head to his face, smiling against her cheek, as she opened her mouth and screamed. He used his right arm to lift her and bounce her on his cock while Lauren howled in pleasure and her pussy squirted and oozed, adding to the sound of splatter as Andre's cock sawed in and out of her ass.

Eventually her climax subsided, and she started to go limp, bouncing with less enthusiasm. Jason let his hand fall to his own cock, and Lauren's eyes closed, like she might have passed out.

Andre tossed her onto the bed next to Jason, who was paralyzed with the shock of what he was witnessing. Lauren fell onto her stomach like a limp rag doll, and Andre quickly turned her around, pushing her onto her back and carelessly tossing her legs to her left side, pushing them up to her face.

Jason edged away to give him room, and his eyes caught a glimpse of Lauren's gaping ass just before Andre pushed his dick inside of her again and began plunging relentlessly into her, while Lauren stared at the ceiling with vacant eyes, moaning, until Andre yelled and thrust in deep, depositing another load of cum into Jason's wife.

He fell onto his side, stretched out alongside her, after Andre pulled out and rested back on his heels, panting, shaking his dick a little with one hand. Jason pushed Lauren's damp hair back from her face and looked at her, but she was off in another world, even when her eyes passed over his gaze. A shudder gripped her suddenly, and he looked down the length of her body to see her squeeze her legs together and turn her body toward him, exhausted.

Andre got up and left the room; Jason heard a beer bottle cap being removed.

He was facing Lauren now, and she had put her hands against his chest. Her legs were entangled with his, and his cock scraped her belly. The feel of her slippery skin, the pervasive, filthy wetness everywhere, made his dick hard enough to fuck again, but Lauren seemed listless and worn-out.

He touched her hair and kissed her forehead. Lauren's heavy eyelids struggled to stay open.

"Oh my God, Lauren," he said, tasting salt and the sweetness of her pussy on her lips, his cock flexing in response, slipping over her hot, damp skin. "That was so hot. I'm so proud of you."

He was whispering, one ear listening for Andre, unsure of what the other man had in mind from here on out. In the living room, the music was still on, so he didn't know where Andre was.

He appeared in the doorway, still naked, holding his own beer. He surveyed the scene for a moment and then looked at Jason. "Man, if you all gonna go for more, I gotta have a nap or something." He laughed, as if this had always been intended to be a joke. "Aright," he said, as if this was a natural outcome of the sentence before it. "I'm gonna bounce, then. Y'all know where to find me."

Lauren rolled lazily over to look at Andre, who smiled at her, in a way that was both friendly and wolfish. "You a *crazy* hot girl, Laur-en." He shook his head and looked at Jason, a mix of disbelief and admiration on his face. "I'll let myself out."

Lauren rolled back to face Jason and they looked at each other in disbelief as the door opened and closed. The disbelief faded from Lauren's face, as did an emerging giggle.

Between them, the mood suddenly became very serious, superheated, alive with arousal again. Jason's cock was pulsing wildly against Lauren's body. He kissed her again, sweetly at first, but when her mouth moved against his with what seemed like rekindled energy – even if it seemed incredible that she might still be hungry for more – he started in more forcefully, exploring her mouth with his tongue, thinking of the way her lips had stretched to accommodate Andre's cock. The tastes of cum and pussy and sweat bloomed on his palate in surprising places, only to disappear again to the pure, raw taste of her lips, like a lava lamp of filth inside her mouth.

Her hands moved down his chest, her body pushed against his, and she mewled softly. Her fingers closed around his cock, he stopped kissing her to look her in the eyes, to verify what he already knew to be true, that she was beckoning him to fuck her yet again.

He rolled on top of her, and her fingers tugged his cock with them, aiming it at her pussy. She pushed her hips up to get him inside of her, which he would not have been able to do without looking down, because her pussy was such a slimy, wet, fleshy mess that he could not find anything in it with the tender, painful, over-fucked tip of his cock. A shudder traveled through him as he sank into the wet, used mess of her body, and Lauren squirmed beneath his weight, moaning.

“Are you too sore?” he whispered into her ear, unsure of what he would be able to do about it if she said yes. He pushed up on his elbows to look at her face, and when she didn’t answer with words – just a slight movement of her head, both yes and no – he began to move his hips. Slowly, careful to move inside her battered pussy as gently as possible.

She was so wet that there was hardly any friction at all, but to his pleasant surprise, as she began to warm up again, her pussy clenched tightly around him still. He fucked her gently, and her eyelids were heavy – she seemed to be drifting off into a sleep of overpleasured exhaustion. But she wrapped her legs around him, and then, after many minutes, began to squirm.

“Come on,” Jason told her, licking her earlobe, pleased with the way her body seized around his cock and she began to grind her hips against him. “Come for me one more time.”

It was, in a way, the most vanilla sex they had had in a long time: eye to eye, connected in an emotional, heated exchange between their eyes and their lips that had faded long ago, along with the intoxicating intensity of “falling in love.” He had never really believed a moment like that would exist between them again, and he knew that Lauren hadn’t, either.

But it was also the most dirty sex they had ever had, in spite of the missionary position, the eye contact, the simplicity of its execution.

When Lauren came, her pussy went into spasms that were strong but seemed exhausted, almost as if her body could not handle another orgasm. She didn’t scream, she only opened her mouth and froze her expression, and he let her climax fully before he at last let go of himself, hammering into

her pussy, her soaked tissues squelching and spurting, until he added yet another load of cum to her body.

He collapsed on top of her, fingers in her hair. When he caught his breath enough to lift his head and look at her, her eyes were closed and she had a faint smile on her face. She seemed to be asleep, her cheeks tinted pink and rosy, only the smudges of black on her cheeks marring her angelic face.

“I love you, Lauren,” he said, his lips hovering over hers.

Her eyes tried to open, and she murmured something that seemed to contain the word “love,” but in the end, she drifted back into her dreams.

*

“Oh, hell no.”

Jason had been aware, vaguely, that someone was entering the apartment, but he had been unable to pull himself out of his own half-sleep. Kimbie’s voice preceded the gentle click of the door to the bedroom closing.

He lifted his head and looked around the room. The smell of sex was heavy and pervasive. Lauren was still asleep, exactly as she had fallen into her slumber, one arm flung across her middle, face-up. He nuzzled her ear. “I think Kimbie is home,” he said, his eyes searching the room for a clock of some kind.

Lauren stirred and mumbled, and it seemed as if she wouldn’t wake up, but then her eyes flew open and she pushed herself up on her elbows. “What? What time is it?”

Jason sat up with her, kissing the back of her shoulder along the way. Behind the door, music – which had long ago ended – started up again.

Lauren put her hand on her mouth, the wrist twisted at an awkward angle, her elbow resting on a lifted knee. This was a gesture she made when she was thinking how best to handle something, or when she was mortified. She looked at Jason with amazed and pleading eyes. Then she laughed.

“My clothes are all in the living room,” she whispered, laughing.

His were, too.

There was a knock on the door, and then it opened. Kimbie’s long, tanned arm came through a crack, with a yellow dishwashing glove on her

hand. She dropped a pile of clothes on the floor and then drew back behind the door, laughed, and then closed it.

“Oh my God,” Lauren said.

They looked at each other. It felt a lot like being back in college, having done something stupid at a party. It felt strange – out of place and time, like they were play-acting at being adolescents – and yet it also felt invigorating.

When they finally sorted through the clothes – not everything of Lauren’s was there, most notably her panties – and put them on, Lauren took a deep breath and smiled before opening the door. Jason reached out and wiped at the mascara streaks, but they didn’t budge: they were dried to her face. It was a glorious and un-seen trashiness, and Jason, unbelievably, felt his gut twisting and knotting into an arousing coil.

Kimbie was standing in the corridor with a drink in one hand, laughing at something in her living room. She turned when the door opened, and Jason and Lauren, holding hands, stumbled into the brightly-lit rest of the house. Lauren pushed her hair back with one hand and smiled sheepishly.

“Girl,” Kimbie said. Her eyes narrowed when she looked at Lauren, asking a question, her chin tipped down. Kimbie looked to Jason, then back at Lauren.

Lauren pushed ahead, pulling Jason behind her. When they reached the living room, they saw that there were a few black, huge guys seated on the couch. They were playing a video game, and looked up absent-mindedly at first.

“This is Lauren and Jayce,” Kimbie said, her eyes laughing as much as the tone of her voice, as she looked Lauren up and down. “They’s just borrowing my pad for a little...” Kimbie had her fist under her chin and fanned her fingers out as a substitute for saying what they were there for. Her eyebrows were arched expectantly.

The guy closest to the corridor redirected his attention back at Lauren, and smiled, nudging his friend with an elbow and jerking his head in their direction.

“So?” Kimbie said.

“I need some water,” Lauren told her, and Kimbie raised her eyebrows, setting the drink in her hand, her face still inquisitive. She was obviously dying to hear what had happened, and exercising some mild

discretion – a first for Kimbie – in the event that Jason was there for some other reason, like that Lauren had chickened out.

The guy on the far side of the couch, who was back to playing his video game, a smile on his face, threw a glance in their direction. “Y’all here for an affair or what?”

Kimbie’s tongue, pink and busy, was running along her very white teeth as she grinned at Lauren.

“Something like that,” Jason said.

Kimbie whooped and clapped her hands together. She sized Jason up anew, an expression of disbelieving appreciation on her face. “Dang,” was all she said. Then, coyly, her eyes darting to the couch, she purred, “You can stay a little longer...”

Jason pulled Lauren in close to him and edged toward the door. “I think that’s enough for one night,” he said.

“We, uh... fell asleep...” Lauren said. “It’s...” she waved at the room behind her.

They laughed as they stumbled to the door.

“I’ll call you,” Lauren was stuttering. “Sorry about the, uh...”

Kimbie rolled her eyes and snorted, grinning. “Yeah, call me,” she said.

“Oh, come on, baby, stay!” one of the guys said, from the couch, his eyes on Lauren.

Jason had a pang of crazy, wild, impulse - a pull to do that very thing.

And then it faded, rapidly, and he nudged Lauren out of the door. It was enough for one night.

CHAPTER 18

Lauren was walking with a noticeably altered gait when they crossed the parking lot. The sight of her movements, altered, however minutely, by the soreness that had to permeate her every hole, made arousal flare up in Jason's blood. He didn't have enough in him for any immediate antics, he sensed, and that was probably for the best.

Lauren's car was parked only two cars away from his - and they both had tickets fluttering in the light breeze. She fished her keys out of the purse she had snatched on her way out, while Jason followed closely behind, his mind on her body and her slightly rigid movements, an indicator of the diffuse soreness, the imprint that Andre's manhandling had left on her.

She looked over her shoulder and held her hand out toward the car, which snapped him out of his reverie. He reached gently for her shoulder. "Oh, no, you don't," he said, and steered her toward his car.

She didn't resist, just smiled and let him open the door for her, and then she dropped into the seat and crumpled against the closed door, exhausted.

He put her seatbelt on, and she dozed while they drove home. When they arrived, she was still inert, slumped with her head against the window, but as he went around the car to collect her, she woke up and looked confused about where they were.

She took his hand and let him help her out of the car, placing her other hand warmly against his bicep. "I'm so tired," she told him.

There were a thousand things he wanted to do, still: questions he wanted to ask, feelings he wanted to pry apart. A black box that he wanted to crack open and see inside of. But he knew that he would have to wait, that he would have to let Lauren rest.

He guided her into the master bath, and she let him peel her clothes away. She seemed like she did when she had way too much to drink, but she wasn't drunk, he knew that. She let him lift her blouse over her head, slide the skirt from her hips. His hands moved over her body, feeling the patches of stickiness on her thighs, her back, her neck - places where cum had smeared on her skin or been rubbed into it, where sweat and spit had dried to her thoroughly used body.

The most powerful smell was a diffuse one: sex. Mostly the scent of her pussy, undertones of astringent male cum piercing its sweetness. Her hand fell limply to her side, the small diamond of her wedding ring - carefully set in a protective clasp that would not catch on anything - flashed on her finger.

He helped her into the shower and used a loofah to wash her off, and Lauren was unusually supple and pliant in his hands, turning for him whenever he moved her, closing her eyes when the water fell on her head, smiling when he brushed his lips over her shoulder.

"Are you sore?" he asked, after practicing silently to keep the giddiness out of his voice. Whatever had happened in Lauren's mind, he did not want her to associate him with Chance. But his cock was another matter, and it pulsed against her abdomen when she smiled and nodded, her head still under shower water.

He gently dried her off and helped her into bed - by then she was drowsy and nearly falling asleep. It was almost five in the morning. He lay stretched out next to her, facing his wife.

She stirred suddenly, and opened her eyes. "Jason," she said. "Everything is okay, isn't it?"

He kissed her. "I love you, Lauren, I told you, it's all okay, it was so hot," he murmured. He was more tired than he had realized, and his words came sluggishly.

"I just wanted to make sure you were really into it," she said, after a long pause. "That's why the..."

She seemed to drift off, mid-sentence.

Jason kissed her forehead. He stared at her for a long time, and his cock came back to life, but Lauren was asleep by then - for real - and so he stared, until, at some point, he fell asleep.

EPILOGUE

She told him the story, the next day. It came out in few sentences, like a practical summary of a very long book, missing everything that Jason really wanted to know. The forum had made her decide to invite Andre for a drink, to take the plunge and tell him what Jason wanted. But after that, her own thoughts seemed to be a mystery even to herself. She had decided to go ahead and do it, and she had been intending to do it with Andre by herself. When she talked about it, it seemed like a thing she had wanted to conquer: a fear, a particular run or trick, a new sport.

So what had changed, inside the mind of his wife? Or in her heart, or wherever the seat of her feelings and desires lived?

"I know, I know," Jason said softly, playing with a strand of her blond hair in one hand, the other resting and lightly caressing the trim of her landing strip, the smooth skin around it, dipping into the liquid that had pooled in the folds of her pussy, after they made love, slowly, carefully; Jason trying to avoid exacerbating the soreness that still bruised her body. "But... what did you *think*? What changed your mind? Don't get me wrong, I'm glad you did..."

Lauren's closed eyes opened, and she turned her head on the pillow to look at him. She rolled over, curling her arms beneath her head like another pillow.

He could see into her eyes at that moment, he realized, as deeply as he would ever see into Lauren. Her teeth had emerged to bite gently on her lower lip, like she had a secret that she was finally going to divulge. Even as his heart cried out for it and his guts twisted with the possibility of knowing it, he felt, curving under that desire, like a current of air, the hard truth - that he would never *really* know any more than that, no matter what she said.

But the distant look was gone. Lauren's eyes, limpid and impossibly pale, reflected that her mind had come back to this place, and this moment, and that she was here fully.

"I love you," she said simply.

As if that was the answer to everything.

For a moment something raged inside of Jason, the fury at the unknowableness of the woman he loved, at her inability to explain

anything, at his inability to understand.

But then, almost as quickly as that instinct surged, he realized that Lauren had done exactly what he had wanted her to do. Somehow, as frustratingly simple and impossibly complex as it was, as impossible to analyze and break apart into its components as it might be, she had given him the answer. The interior of the black box, an elegant algorithm that no one could map:

She loved him.

Who the hell, in computer science or cosmology or theoretical physics or cognitive science, knew how love worked, anyway?

It was a mystery, and that was probably what it would always be.

END

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