

Neighbourly Debts

Authors Note: The idea of this story was pitched by our Patreon Member Story Poll Winner - Ink Heart - Neighbourly Debts. I hope you all enjoy my writing of it.

Oakridge Lane

Sunday evening settled over Oakridge Lane with its usual self-satisfied quiet; the quiet of people who had done the right things at the right times and were pleased with themselves for it. Bins were back in. Lawns had been cut. The cars meant to be seen gleamed on the drives; the rest sat out of sight in garages. It was a street that believed in the suburban heaven of itself.

The Little house was the third on the right from the junction: white render, black door, window boxes of white geraniums Janet replaced the moment a petal browned. She had washed the sitting-room windows that morning, as she did every Sunday. Letting them film over felt like the first small step toward becoming the kind of household she refused to be. The glass was so clean now the room seemed to lean a little into the front garden. Janet stood in that brightness with a glass of white wine she had poured earlier than she meant to, and would almost certainly not finish.

At forty she was still the sort of woman other women noticed with a look of jealousy, while the men did a double take. She was tall, five foot ten in bare feet, with the kind of figure that made modest clothes into a losing argument: a narrow waist, heavy natural F-cup breasts, long legs, thick thighs, and a backside that was fat and round and firm no matter how carefully she chose a skirt. Her pride, though, was the hair. It was platinum, straight as poured metal, and it fell all the way to her waist; she had taken it down after her shower and it lay against the dark of her blouse like something she had paid for with more than money. Her eyes were blue-grey. Her mouth was full and set in that habitual pout that made strangers assume she was either about to speak or about to refuse them. People who didn't like her called the face mean-spirited. Janet had never wasted much energy disagreeing.

Behind her the house smelled of Sunday roast dinner and furniture polish. Her husband Carl was in his chair with the tablet still in his hands, the collar of his pale blue club shirt undone, blond hair thinning just enough that the lamp made it look softer than it was. At forty-six he was, by any ordinary measure, a successful man: the career, the listened to voice in meetings, the company car, the habit of talking about pensions and school catchments as if they were a moral position. He wasn't a large man. He stood at just five foot six and sat as if he'd learned a long time ago that taking up less space was the safer habit. Janet had married that mildness on purpose and didn't often let herself examine the purpose too closely.

Carl Jr, or Junior as his parents called him, was on the sofa with his phone, long legs folded up, blond head bent over the screen. He was almost eighteen, university in the autumn, fine-featured in a way that still made waitresses call him sweetheart before they caught themselves. He had his father's colouring and, when he was annoyed, his mother's mouth. The offer letter to his first choice university lived on the kitchen dresser under a Union Jack magnet, and the whole house orbited it whether anyone admitted that or not.

Janet wasn't looking at either of them. She was looking across the road.

Richard Long's house sat on Oakridge Lane the way a thumbprint sits on an otherwise perfect photograph; something you kept noticing even when you told yourself you were looking at everything else. The front lawn had given up years ago and hadn't been spoken to since. The trash can lived out front, rather than hidden around the side like everyone else's, and was always overflowing. Engine casings and car parts rusted in the open garage and along the edge of the grass; nobody on the street quite knew what he did, only that he came and went smelling of oil, and that the scrap yard down the valley seemed as good a guess as engineer. The downstairs window still had that crack in the corner from the spring, a silver fault-line that had been patched with tape rather than fixed.

Coming up the street now, too fast for a road that had children on it, was that car of his: an old dark thing with a dent in the rear quarter and a film of dust thick enough to write in. The exhaust gave a low, ugly cough as it swung onto his drive and stopped short of the garage, as though even the bricks would rather not be involved.

The driver's door opened and Richard Long unfolded himself out of the seat.

Janet's fingers tightened on the stem of the glass. He was enormous. Not necessarily in height, at six foot one of weathered mid-to-late fifties, black skin. But in sheer mass; built less like a man who trained and more like a gorilla that drank and worked. Bald head shining dully in the last of the sun. A heavy, hairy belly sitting over the waist of stained work trousers. Chest and back and arms thick with old muscle he made no effort to display, or to hide. He was a little ugly with it: heavy features, the face of someone who had stopped caring what people thought of him. He often had a beer in his hand. He never rushed. He never looked sorry for the space he took up. That unhurried confidence was, in its way, the most offensive thing about him.

Janet found him repulsive. She had never once pretended otherwise.

He reached back into the car for a plastic bag of takeaway and a four-pack of lager, shut the door with his hip, and went up the path without glancing at any of the windows he had to know were watching him.

"He's back," Janet said.

Carl didn't look up at once. "Who is?"

"Who do you think." Her voice had gone flat and sharp; the Sunday-evening version of the tone she used in shops when the girl on the till was taking too long. "Long! Look at his yard. Look at the car. This is supposed to be a family street, Carl. People keep standards. He's dropping the value of this place on his own."

Carl lifted his head. Through the glass, Richard was unlocking his front door, the plastic bag swinging, the cracked window catching what was left of the light. Carl's mouth tightened in that small, pale way it always did when the subject came up. Underneath it Janet recognised the old fear he dressed up as principle; the same fear that had been in him since he was a boy being shoved around by bigger, darker boys in a schoolyard he still hadn't really left.

“He should never have been allowed to buy there,” Carl said. “I said it at the time. Once you let one of them in, the whole character of the road changes. Look at the grass. That wouldn’t happen if it was one of us.”

Janet took a sip she barely tasted. “It’s the laziness more than anything. They don’t care, and they don’t want to care. He sits on that step in the evenings with a can in his hand as if he’s the one who belongs here. Have you seen the way he stares? As if the rest of us are entertainment.”

“He’s doing it on purpose,” Carl said. “That’s the worst of it. He likes making people uncomfortable. I saw him in the shop last week, walking straight down the middle of the aisle, not moving for anyone. I had to step into the cereals.” A short, humourless breath. “Forty-six years old, and I’m moving out of the way for a man who doesn’t even cut his lawn.”

Janet’s eyes stayed on the house. The heat in her chest wasn’t only disgust. She had been fourteen when her mother left, and the truth that arrived with the packed bag had been ugly and complete: a Black man at the warehouse, two years of a secret affair, and then she was gone, with nothing more than a short note for Janet and her father to try and find answers from. The neighbourhood had talked. The kids at school had made fun of her. Janet had learned to hold her face in a sneer so nobody could see the hole it left, and then she had grown up and married a safe man and raised an intelligent son and moved to a street that photographed well, as if a clean enough life could make the old story starve to death.

And still Richard Long was over there, taking up the view, as if the past had followed her in a dirty car and parked on the drive opposite.

“Mom,” Junior said.

Both parents looked at him. He had that gleam he wore when he was about to offer something he already knew would land.

“There’s a woman who goes over there,” he said.

Janet frowned. “What woman?”

“To Long’s.” He sat up properly, the phone forgotten against his knee. “Me and the lads have seen her a few times. Coming and going. Late, usually. White. Dirty blonde; not like yours. Cheap. Short skirts, heels. Last week she came out of his side gate and stood on the path fixing her hair like she didn’t care who saw her.” He chopped a hand across his own thin thigh. “She looked like a total slut... I’m not even joking.”

The sitting room seemed to take the picture and enlarge it. In Janet’s mind the woman was already a type: fake tan, a mouth full of gum, the sort who would climb into that filthy car and not even notice the smell of it. The sort who would let an animal like Richard Long put his hands on her and then walk back onto a decent street as if nothing had happened. The thought arrived with a physical recoil, sharp as spilled milk across a counter she had just wiped down.

“Language Junior!” she said. “A white woman... going in there?”

“That’s what I said. We didn’t know if you’d seen her.”

Carl set the tablet down on the arm of the chair. His laugh was small and ugly. “A hooker. It has to be. What other kind of woman would want anything to do with that disgusting pig.” He shook his head. “Why would a white woman ever see anything in men like that? It shouldn’t be allowed. Keep to your own. There are lines, and there have always been lines.”

Junior’s agreement came a little too quickly. “Exactly. It’s grim. He’s huge, he’s old, and he’s...” He hunted for a word he was allowed to use in the sitting room, glanced at his mother, and settled on, “He’s one of them. He’s black.”

His parents didn’t correct him. They never did when it came to this subject.

Carl leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and rubbed his thumb against his first two fingers in that cheap little mime of banknotes. “The only colour those girls know,” he said, “is green.”

Junior snorted.

Janet’s face folded in genuine disgust. “Carl. That’s gross.”

“I’m only saying what it is.” He sat back, satisfied he had put the thing in its proper place. “Money. That’s all it ever is for girls like that. You honestly think a woman like that’s going in there for conversation? For the décor?” He glanced at the window again; the dark house, the uncut grass, the ugly car hunched on the drive. “She takes what she can get and she leaves, and he sits there afterwards thinking he’s won something. They always do.”

Janet turned the wine glass slowly in her fingers. The geraniums on the sill were perfect. Her own reflection in the glass was perfect too, if what you wanted was a woman who looked as if she might refuse you a seat. Behind that reflection Richard Long’s downstairs light came on, a dirty gold square in the evening, and the idea of the other woman; white, cheap, dressed like a hooker, coming out of his side gate with her hair in her hands, sat in Janet’s stomach like something that had gone off. She did not feel pity. She felt a hard, bright contempt. What kind of female did that. What kind of standard, what kind of body, what kind of missing piece inside a person would let them lie down for a man like that: Black, rough, ugly, a gorilla in a house that did not belong on Oakridge Lane.

She thought of her mother before she could stop herself, and then she pushed the thought back into the place she kept it, the way she had been pushing it back for twenty-six years.

“If I ever saw a woman from this street going in there,” she said, quite calmly, “I would never speak to her again. I mean that. There are things you don’t come back from.”

“Quite right. Now, come away from there,” Carl said, milder now. “You will only upset yourself. He is not worth the attention.”

“I know exactly what he is worth,” Janet said.

Outside, Oakridge Lane settled into Sunday night. Across the road, Mr Long ate in his armchair in a house that did not match the street, and he did not look out to see whether the Littles, or anyone else, were watching. He already knew they were and it brought a smile to his face.

Blue Lights

It was only a few nights after that Sunday, late enough that Oakridge Lane had already mostly put itself to bed. Curtains were drawn. Drives were empty of anything that mattered. Janet had taken her hair down and washed her face and was standing at the dressing table with the last of her cream when the first bang went off across the road.

It wasn't a car door. It wasn't a bin. It was a hard, cheap crack that shoved itself through the glass and sat in the bedroom like a slapped table.

Carl sat up. "What the hell was that?"

Janet didn't answer. She was already at the window, pulling the curtain with two fingers the way she did when she didn't want the street to see that the Littles were looking. The second bang came before she had the gap wide enough, then a third, nastier, a shriek underneath it. Across the street, a dog started barking. Two houses along, a light snapped on.

Richard Long was on his front path. A dark heap at the bottom of the porch steps, one arm thrown out. The cheap lantern made a dirty yellow circle on the concrete and he was in the middle of it and he wasn't getting up.

"Carl!" Janet called.

He came to the window in his T-shirt, bare feet, hair flattened from the pillow, and stood behind her with his hand on the sill. Across the road the heap of a body twitched once and went still again. No sign of anyone else. Only the street, and the overflowing bin, and the man they had been watching for months as if watching were a civic duty.

"Jesus," Carl whispered. "Was that a gun? Has he been shot?"

"Don't be ridiculous... This is Oakridge."

But she'd thought it too. Oakridge Lane didn't have a language for a noise like that. Guns belonged to the news, to estates that weren't this one, to the sort of life Janet had built a white door against. And still the thought arrived, quick and ugly: of course. A man like that didn't bring a clean beginning with him. Gangs. Old debts. The kind of friends who arrived after midnight and didn't use the knocker.

Carl's fingers tightened on the sill. "Should we go check on him?"

He asked it, but he didn't move. Janet didn't either. The idea of crossing that road in her robe, of kneeling on Richard Long's filthy concrete, of putting her hands on him, made her stomach close. Let his own people come, if he had any.

"I'm not going over there," she said. "I'm not getting involved in whatever that is. If someone's shot him, Carl, we are not walking into the middle of it."

“He’s not moving... If he’s really hurt,” Carl said, “Then we have to call 911.”

He said we and reached for the phone as if the handset might burn him. Janet stayed at the glass. A dark patch was spreading by Long's head in the yellow light; it might have been blood and it might have been shadow. She hated that she couldn't tell from here. She hated more that a small, shameful part of her was measuring the stillness and asking whether it would even be a bad thing if it was.

It would be a bad thing because there would be police tape and the scandal in the paper would see the value of their road drop. And underneath that, older than the geraniums, a colder little voice that had learned its lesson at fourteen: men like that took what they wanted and left wreckage, and if the wreckage had finally come back for one of them, the street would be cleaner in the morning.

She pressed her mouth into a line and didn't give the voice the dignity of agreement.

Carl was already talking, too loud for the bedroom, the official voice he used when a meeting had gone wrong. “Police, please. And an ambulance. I think there's been a shooting. Oakridge Lane. The house opposite. A man is lying down on the path, and not moving. We heard loud bangs. Three or four I think. We haven't gone out to him. We don't know if it's safe. We didn't see anyone. I don't know if he's breathing. We're not going over there.”

Janet watched the path while he gave the number and the name and all the little clarifications of a man who wanted it on record that the Littles had done the correct thing from behind glass.

“They're coming,” Carl said, as he put the phone down and put his arm around his wife at the window.

It took minutes that felt like a held breath. Other curtains found the same gap. A shape two doors down hovered and withdrew. Nobody stepped onto the tarmac. Oakridge Lane believed in calling the proper people and then staying out of the way, and tonight that belief looked a great deal like fear.

The first car turned in off the junction, blue light ran up the white render and across the ceiling and made the geraniums look sick. An ambulance followed. They went to him without the hesitation the street had offered. When they rolled him Janet saw the blood properly, dark against the concrete, and the awkward angle of one leg, and she put her hand to her mouth not from tenderness but from the sheer mess of it.

“Christ,” Carl said. “They'll have the whole lane sealed.”

Downstairs, the back door closed. Soft. The particular click of someone who didn't want the house to notice him.

Janet turned her head. “Junior?”

Footsteps on the stairs, then he was in the doorway in his jacket, blond hair flattened, breathing a little too carefully for a boy who had only come up to bed. He looked at the window, at the blue light on the ceiling, at his parents standing there in their night things.

"Where have you been?" Janet said.

"Park. With the boys." He swallowed. "I saw the lights when I came in. What's going on out there? Is Mr Long all right?"

Carl glanced at the glass and back. "We don't know. We heard bangs. He's on the path. That's all we've got."

Junior nodded too quickly, as if that were an answer he could live with, and didn't come any closer to the window.

Outside they were lifting Richard Long onto a stretcher. He was a huge mass, even horizontal, a dark slab of a man under a blanket, bald head turned, something white already pressed to the side of it. The knee looked wrong. She couldn't have named what was wrong with it; she only knew it didn't sit like the other one. They put him in the ambulance. One officer stayed on the path with a torch. Another was already knocking two doors down.

"They'll come here," Carl said.

"Let them. We rang. We did what we were supposed to do."

She let the curtain fall. The blue light still leaked around the edges. In the glass, for a second, she saw her own face: the face of a woman who had refused to cross twenty metres of tarmac to see whether a neighbour was alive.

"If he dies," Carl said, very quietly, "maybe we'll finally get someone living across there, who belongs on this road."

"He isn't our business," Janet said. "He has never been our business."

The thought she wouldn't say aloud sat with her anyway. *He hadn't been moving when they put him in the ambulance. The street might be quieter if he didn't come back.* She hated herself just enough for thinking it, and not enough to get up and look out again.

Morning arrived as if the night had been a rumour.

The tape on Long's path was still there when Janet took the recycling out, a thin police line that made the overflowing bin look suddenly official. The porch lantern was still on in the daylight. There was a stain on the concrete someone hadn't yet washed. Carl stood in the kitchen in his work shirt cutting toast he didn't want. Junior came down late, pale, and said he hadn't slept well, which Janet accepted because she hadn't slept well either.

The knock came at twenty past nine.

Two officers on the black doorstep, a man and a woman, not unfriendly, already tired. The woman did the talking. They were following up on the incident at Mr Long's address. They understood the Littles had been the ones to call it in. They were grateful. They had a few questions. And they needed to speak to Carl Jr, if he was at home.

Janet's hand tightened on the edge of the door.

"Junior? Why Junior?" She asked frantically.

"If we could come in, Mrs Little."

They sat in the sitting room with the Sunday polish still faintly in the air. Junior sat on the sofa where he'd sat on Sunday night, long legs folded, face arranged into the polite blank he used on teachers. Janet sat on the edge of her own chair and felt the house shrink. Carl stood behind her chair, one hand resting on her shoulder.

They had CCTV footage, the woman said. Mr Long kept cameras on the porch and down the side of his house, and while the pictures weren't perfect they were good enough. Several youths on the path. Fireworks pushed through the letterbox. A bang loud enough to bring him out of the house at a run. He came down the steps, went over, and hit the concrete with his head. His knee had taken the fall wrong also. He was in hospital; facing surgery on the knee and a concussion they were still assessing, and he was already talking about charges and compensation.

"The kids had the clarity to cover their faces... except one of them," the male officer said. He looked at Junior. "You looked back at the house when the others were already running. The recording shows you clearly."

The sitting room took the sentence and enlarged it. Janet heard her own blood in her ears. The thought arrived before she could stop it, mean and practical and entirely her: *why the hell couldn't he have just covered his face too.*

Carl made a small sound that wasn't a word.

"I didn't—" Junior started, and then the overprotected boy came apart all at once, the sweetheart face crumpling, the voice going high and wet.

"It was only a prank. I swear. We weren't going to hurt him. Everyone says he shouldn't even be on our street... we put fireworks through the letterbox, that's all it was. Just a prank. We didn't think he'd come running out like that. We didn't touch him. He came down the steps and he went over on his own. I looked back because I thought he'd get up and come after us. I didn't know he was actually hurt... Mom, I didn't know."

Janet stared at her son.

The story of the night rearranged itself in a single ugly slide. Not a gangland shooting. Not a debt from whatever life Richard Long had lived before he had moved into their suburban heaven. Her boy. Her almost-eighteen boy with the offer letter and the thin wrists, standing on that driveway long enough for a camera to spot him. The others had been clever. He had needed to be seen.

"You stupid little..." She stopped herself because the officers were in the room. "Do you have any idea what you've done?"

Carl's voice came out thin. "Is he really pressing charges? He's just a kid."

“That’s for him to decide,” the woman said. “Criminal damage. The injuries. Possibly more, depending how the fall reads and what Mr Long wants to do about it.”

Janet realised she had stood at her window last night, and wondered whether it would be a bad thing if Richard Long didn’t get up, and the whole time the reason he was down there had been under her roof.

“He didn’t mean it,” Carl said, already reaching for the tone that settled claims. “They’re good kids, just acting silly. We’ll pay for any damage. This doesn’t have to...”

“That’s not a decision I can make for him.” The police officer said, glancing at Junior, then at Janet, and something in her voice eased without quite becoming kind. “Look. Nobody here wants to see a boy’s future lost over one mistake. But it’s out of our hands once a complaint’s made. You’re neighbours. He’s in the hospital. If anyone’s going to get him to back down, it won’t be us.”

“You’re saying we should talk to him,” Janet said.

“I’m saying you’re neighbours,” the officer said. “Go apologise and check in on him. See if there’s anything you can do to make the peace before this thing gets to court.”

When they had gone, the house was very quiet.

Junior sat with his hands in his hair and cried the way he hadn’t been allowed to cry since he was small. Carl walked a circle from the kitchen door to the window and back, talking to no one about solicitors and first-choice offers and how an impending criminal charge can make universities withdraw their offers. Janet stood where she had stood on Sunday evening, looking at the stained concrete and the yellow lantern and the house that didn’t belong on Oakridge Lane, and the contempt in her chest had nowhere clean to land.

“If that man ruins this family because you wanted to impress your friends, I will never forgive you.” She told Junior.

Junior flinched as if she had hit him.

The Compromise

They took Junior with them because leaving him at home would have looked like they had something to hide.

Richard Long was in a corner bed with the television muted and his left leg braced and elevated, thick as a fence post under the sheet. Even lying there like this, he took up the mattress the way he took up a doorway. His face was weathered with age, bald, dark skin gone ashy under the hospital light, a heavy belly under the gown, arms still thick with old work. A bruise had bloomed across his brow and down toward the temple, split at the center with a row of stitches. He looked pissed off in the simple, undressed way of a man who had been put on his back and didn’t forgive the position.

Janet stopped at the foot of the bed and felt her face close. He was larger up close than he was from her window. Hair on his chest where the gown had opened. Knuckles like stones on the blanket. She found him revolting. She didn't look away fast enough to pretend otherwise.

His eyes went over the three of them and settled on her. Not long, but long enough for her to feel it. Down the blouse, the waist, the line of her hips in the jeans she had worn, then back up to her mouth. Then he looked at Carl as if the inventory had been nothing.

"You brought the boy," he said, turning towards Junior. "Good. What you got to say for yourself?"

Junior's voice came out thin. "Mr Long, I'm sorry. We didn't mean for you to get hurt. It was only supposed to be..."

"A prank." Richard didn't look away from him, eyes filled with anger. "Yeah. I heard that one already. Does this look like a prank to you, boy?"

Carl cleared his throat, interrupting the question. "We're glad you're all right. Relatively. The officers said the knee—"

"They cut it open yesterday. Torn ACL. I'll be in a leg brace for months. I don't walk my own house right. I don't stand in a shower without somebody there to prop me up. That's what your boy bought me." He tipped his chin at the stitches. "And this. Nice big ugly scar from the concrete..."

"We've spoken to the police," Carl said. "We're prepared to make this right. Damages. Medical bills. Whatever you need. Junior... he's eighteen in a month. He's got a place at Princeton in the fall. Something like this on his record, could really hurt his future..."

"If that had been a Black kid on a white man's porch," Richard said, "he'd already be sitting in a cell. We both know it. You people been watching me from those clean windows since I moved in. Wrong face. Wrong skin colour. This wasn't kids being kids. This was your street reminding me that black don't belong on it."

"That's not true," Janet said. It came out sharper than she meant. "It was stupid kids, making stupid choices. It wasn't a... it wasn't racial. We don't see people that way."

Richard's mouth moved, not quite a smile. "You don't see colour. That's cute. You stood in that window the other night and let me lay on my own path. I know who called it in. I know who didn't come over to make sure I was ok."

Carl rushed the cheque like a man putting a lid on a pan. "We'll pay. All of it. You don't have to worry about money."

"What, because I'm Black I need your cheque?" Richard's voice stayed low. "I didn't ask you for a donation. I asked why your boy still gets Princeton and all I get is a rebuilt knee."

"That isn't what he meant," Janet said.

"Then say what you meant."

Nobody did, for a second.

Carl tried again. "The hospital said you'll need help when you go home. We can hire someone. A professional carer. Cooking, cleaning, whatever the recovery takes. You won't have to manage that alone."

Richard looked at him, then at Junior, then, slower, at Janet again.

"Where's the justice in that?" he said. "Your family put me here. Somebody from your family pays the price."

Janet felt the look that time. It was not kind and it was not hidden. It went over her the way a man looks at a thing he has decided he can use.

"I don't want qualified and professional. I want her." He didn't raise his voice, he just nodded at Janet. "You come over. Every day. Cook. Clean. Help me with the brace and my baths until I can do it myself. I seen the way you look at my house. Now you can put the gloves on and come work your magic at mine."

"That's absurd," Janet said. "You can't seriously—"

"Those are the terms."

"Come on Mr Long, my wife isn't a home-help. That isn't a fair compromise," Carl said. "Name a number."

Richard reached to the tray table, thumbed his phone awake, and turned the screen. The porch. Boys running. One face clear as a photograph when it looked back: Junior, blond, uncovered, lit by the lantern.

"Or I send this and press the charges," Richard said. "Claim damages too. The knee. The head. Your boy can explain his broken Princeton dreams, to a judge."

Junior made a sound that was almost a word.

Janet stared at the screen, then at the ugly, stitched face above it. The tension in the little gap between the bed and her body was specific now. He knew what he was asking. She knew what he was holding. Carl had already started to collapse toward the only door that still had college on the other side of it.

"She'll do it," Carl said.

Janet's head turned on him.

Richard watched that too.

"Monday," he said. "When they send me home. Nine o'clock. Her. That's the deal. I delete the file when I walk without this thing." He tapped the brace. "Until then, I keep copies. And you keep me and my house running!"

Janet looked at her son. At the phone. At the man in the bed she couldn't stand to touch.

“Fine,” she said. “No more police and no charges. You delete the footage when you’re up and walking again.”

“When I say it’s done,” Richard corrected her.

In the parking lot Carl started talking and she told him to shut up. Junior sat in the back and cried without any noise, hurt at the idea he had caused his mom to become this man’s cleaner.

Janet got into the car with the terms already sitting in her lap, heavy as a body, and the knowledge that on Monday she was going to walk into the house she had spent two years feeling sick looking at.

Monday came in bright and ordinary, which only made it worse.

Janet stood in her kitchen in old jeans and a loose navy shirt buttoned to the throat, the sneakers she wore to the store on her feet and her hair pulled back in a tail that made her look younger and harder at the same time. Two casserole dishes sat on the counter under foil, a lasagna and a chicken pot pie, with containers of soup stacked beside them for his freezer. She had cooked all day Sunday, as if feeding the man might still count as having the upper hand.

Carl came down in his work shirt, knotting his tie as he walked, and stopped when he saw the foil. “You didn’t have to do all that for him.”

“I’m not going over there empty-handed like some hired girl he can boss around.”

Junior was already in the hall with his duffel. The summer camp trip had been booked before any of this existed, and Carl was dropping him at the station on the way to the office for an eight-forty train. He looked smaller than he had been in months, as if the last few days had taken something from him. When Carl took the bag from him, Junior came into the kitchen and stood in front of her as if he were still waiting to be grounded.

“Mom. I’m sorry. I mean it. I didn’t think it would lead to all this...”

“I know you didn’t mean it.” She smoothed his hair the way she had when he was ten. “Go. Be good... and have fun at camp. I love you.”

She kissed his forehead and he held on a second too long, and then there was the front door and the car and the kind of quiet a house only has after the men in it have left.

She was still at the sitting-room window when the hospital van pulled up across the street. Two men got Mr Long out of the back as if he were a piece of furniture that might tip, working around the brace and the crutch and the stitched brow, and he looked huge in ordinary daylight, ugly with pain and temper. They walked him inside and came out a minute later with the empty chair.

Janet had already picked up the dishes and crossed the road, catching the door behind them, before it could latch.

“Mr Long?” She called into the house.

His voice came from the front room, rough from the ride. “You coming in or you gonna stand on the step?”

She took a deep breath and went inside.

The smell hit first: old carpet, fried food, oil that had lived in the hall for years. It wasn’t a dump, not quite, but after her own house it felt like stepping into another decade. The beige carpet was worn dark where he walked. Dishes sat in the sink from before the hospital. Dead opposite the brown armchair, a sixty-five-inch screen; the only thing in the place that looked as if anyone had spent money on it.

She kept her face polite. It was a face she knew how to wear. Shops. School gates. Helen Park’s sitting room when the talk turned to sex, and someone waited to see if Janet Little would flinch. Polite was a door you could close from either side. In this room it did not hold. This was weeks. She could already hear herself wondering how she was supposed to get through them.

“I brought meals,” she said, and heard how thin it sounded once it was in the air. “Some for the fridge, some for the freezer. How are you feeling?”

He turned his head.

The contempt was plain and unperformed. Just a man looking at the woman from across the street as if she had been delivered to the wrong address. His eyes left her face. They went over the rest of her without hurry.

“The hell are you wearing?” He asked in a tone of disappointment.

Janet glanced down as if the clothes might have changed on the walk over. Navy. Denim. “I’m here to cook and clean,” she said. “What else am I supposed to wear?”

“I’ve seen you.” He didn’t bother sitting up any straighter in his armchair. “Them little BBQ parties. Girls’ nights at the other wives’ houses. You walk around this street like you don’t know what you got.” His gaze snagged, dropped, came back. “Don’t come in my house dressed like you’re the help... not with that hot body of yours hiding away.”

Heat went up her throat. Not embarrassment. Rage with nowhere legal to go.

“I beg your pardon?!”

“You heard me.” Still no grin. That was the worst of it. A grin would have been a man performing. This was a man issuing. “Get your ass back across the road and change. I better see some tits and ass when you come back through that door.”

The words landed in the shabby room as if he had thrown them. They sat in the air between the foil pans and the mantel and the window that looked out on Oakridge Lane.

“You can’t speak to me like that.” Her voice came out stern. The same one she used when she was putting her foot down with her husband. Or with Junior. Except this was neither of them. “I am not going to let you...”

“You want little Mr Princeton getting his perfect future or not?”

His voice went harder. There was no grin in it and no room beside it. Junior’s name didn’t need saying. The file didn’t need producing. Her pause and silence were all the encouragement he needed.

“Don’t argue with me, woman. And put some heels on while you’re at it. I want those long legs popping when you’re over here.” He tipped his chin at the mantel. “Spare key’s up there. You keep hold of it now... that way you can come and go whenever I need you.”

Janet stood dumbfounded. *He really means it*, she thought.

He was going to sit in that chair, and send her home like a girl who had failed a dress code. And if she refused, he would put an end to their little arrangement and call the cops once again.

She set the dishes on the side table, the foil straining in her grip.

“You’re disgusting,” she said. It came out smaller than she wanted. A protest, not a verdict.

“Clock’s running.”

She took the key off the mantel, and slid it into her pocket and headed back out across Oakridge Lane, her face hot and red with rage and embarrassment.

In her bedroom she sat on the edge of the bed and shook.

What kind of man did that? She asked herself.

What kind of filthy, low piece of shit sat in a broken armchair in a house that smelled of old smoke and told a married woman to show him tits and ass as the price for her boy’s future.

Pervert. Animal. Black filth. She ran the words through her head until they made a rhythm, the way she used to count sit-ups in the spare room when the other wives on Oakridge were still in their dressing gowns. *Pervert. Animal. Black filth.* Her mouth shaped them without sound. Her hands still moved toward the closet.

She told herself she was choosing the least of it.

The black shirt she almost never wore hung at the back, behind the blouses she wore to the shops and the pale jumpers Carl liked because they made her look like someone else’s idea of a wife. The fabric was cheap-slick, bought in a sale she had regretted before she reached the till. It opened too far if you forgot a button. She didn’t forget. She left three undone on purpose and watched, in the dressing-table mirror, the inner swell of her breasts push into the gap: heavy, pale, the faint blue of a vein at the inner curve, the lace edge of her bra a dark suggestion rather than a covering. The shirt became an argument she would never have made on her own street. An invitation she would have crossed the road to avoid.

The red skirt was worse.

It stopped mid-thigh. It had always stopped mid-thigh; that was why it lived in a bag at the back with the tags still in the pocket from the night she had worn it once and come home early. She stepped into it and tugged it up over the full, firm round of her ass. The material clung. When she turned, the mirror gave her the truth she had spent twenty years dressing around: the high, packed curve of it, the way the hem rode and then settled, the way her thick thighs made the little skirt look like a decision instead of a garment.

She pulled on sheer dark tights. The nylon whispered up her legs. She dug the black heels out of the back of the closet. Six inches. Worn once. Bought for an anniversary dinner at which she had spent the evening being looked at by men who were not Carl and resenting every minute of it. The leather was still stiff. The straps bit the same place they had bitten then.

When she took her hair down, the platinum sheet of it fell to her waist and made the whole outfit worse. It turned the black shirt and the red skirt into a costume. It made her look like a woman who had done this before.

She was five ten in bare feet. In the heels she was something else: a narrow waist cinched under all that chest, natural F-cup breasts heavy in the open shirt, long legs lengthened until the little red skirt became a problem rather than a piece of clothing. A mean mouth. Frightened eyes. A body that looked built to be stared at, as if the staring were the point and the fear were optional. She put her palm flat on the dressing table to steady herself and felt the tremor go up her arm.

For a second she heard Junior in the sitting room last Sunday night, the television low. Junior talking about short skirts and heels and the cheap blonde he had seen leaving Mr Long's house. Asking what kind of woman would go in there dressed like that. Carl saying hookers.

No. She was not like that woman.

She was doing this for her son. For her family. The outfit was just part of the compromise. If Richard Long wanted a show as the price of not destroying them, she would give him the least show she could stand and she would keep her name while she did it. She would walk in, she would get on with the tasks, she would walk out.

She locked her door behind her as she left once again. The spare key to his house, already in her palm.

Oakridge Lane at that hour was a row of windows pretending to be empty. Every one of them felt occupied. She didn't look up to check to see who might be watching. She walked with her eyes on the tarmac and felt, instead, how she moved: the unfamiliar pitch of the heels, the small necessary shortening of her stride, the red skirt hugging her ass with every step, the black shirt opening a fraction when she breathed so that the pale inner curve of her breast showed and then hid again, show and hide, like a filthy little clock.

A wife from the third house on the right. Crossing toward the man that did not belong here. Dressed like the woman her son had described as a slut.

The View He Paid For

Janet Little walked back into his house, determined to try and put a brave face on.

He was still in the armchair with the brace stuck out in front of him like a claim on the room, and for a second he didn't speak. He just looked, taking his time over the black shirt with three buttons gone and the pale heavy inner curve of her breasts in the gap, over the red skirt sitting mid-thigh and clinging when she shut the door behind her, over the six-inch heels putting a new line into her legs and the platinum hair down her back. The mean little set of her mouth was trying to pretend this was still a chore.

"Well damn," he said. "That's more like it."

Janet stayed by the door. The key cut her palm. She let it. "You got what you asked for. Where do you want me to start?"

"You can start by letting me look a minute." His voice had gone lower, unhurried, the voice of a man who had already won the first argument and was in no rush to spend the rest.

"You came back dressed like you finally understood the assignment." His eyes stayed on the open shirt. "Tits pouring out that thing like they been waiting for an invitation. Heavy, too. You walk around Oakridge buttoned to the throat like nobody's supposed to notice... but in here, that's the way I like them. Proud and out on display. That skirt ain't leaving much to guesswork either."

He tipped his chin. "Turn your hip a little, nah. Don't bother. I can see from here how it's hugging that ass. Fat. Firm. Moves when you breathe. Those long legs look even better in those high heels. Hot doesn't even cover it. You built like a problem, Mrs Little."

Heat went up her throat and kept going. It sat in her face, in the open V of the shirt, in the sudden awareness of her own nipples against the cup of her bra; not from want or enjoyment, but from the rage of being inventoried like meat on a hook. Her body had always been looked at. It had never been so blatantly leered at like this.

"Are you finished?"

"Not even close." He smiled with the side of his mouth. "There is no way that little white boy you're married to knows how to handle all that. No way he's clapping those cheeks the way you need it. Man that size, that polite way he looks at you like a prize he got lucky with. Tits and ass like that deserves more than missionary with the lights out... Come on, tell the truth, he don't give you what you want, does he?"

The words landed low, ugly, accurate in the way an insult is accurate when it finds the thing you have never said aloud. Carl's hands. Carl's careful gratitude. Carl's four inches and the way he always asked, always apologised with his body even when he was inside her. She shut the thought down hard enough that her jaw hurt.

"Don't talk about my husband." Her voice came out sharp. "And don't you dare tell me what I need. You have no idea what a woman like me wants."

Richard's mouth pulled into that thick, pleased smile, the one that sat wrong under the stitches, like he was keeping a secret just to enjoy it. His eyes dropped again, slow, from the gap in the shirt to the place where the red skirt strained across her hips.

"Oh, I've got an idea."

"You can keep it."

"Can I." Not a question. He shifted in the chair and the brace made its small, ugly sound. "You gonna give me a spin then, or you want to stand there looking sour all morning while those tits do the talking for you?"

"Go spin on this," she said, and regretted it as soon as it was out, because the laugh it got was real. Unforced. He liked the fight. She heard that and filed it too late. The shirt had slipped another fraction when she spoke; she felt air on the inner swell and didn't look down to confirm what he was already staring at.

"There she is." He let the laugh die on his mouth. "I knew there was a mouth under all that Oakridge snobbery. You can start in the kitchen. I been eating hospital food for days, dying for some proper home cooking. Heat up some of that lasagna you walked in here with. And bring me a couple beers."

"It's not even midday..." she began to argue.

"You don't tell me what time I drink in my house." His gaze climbed back to her face at last, unhurried, as if the rest of her would still be there when he wanted it. "You ain't my girl..."

He let the last word hang. Let it sit in the gap of the shirt, in the cling of the skirt. "Yet."

"Not ever," Janet said. She made it hard. She made it a closed door. "Let's get that straight while we're making lists."

"We'll see." A small tip of the chin, toward the kitchen, toward the rest of the morning.

"Kitchen. And don't bother doing those buttons up on the way. I already paid for the view." He said, motioning to his busted knee.

She went because standing there arguing wasn't worth being sleazed over. The foil pans were where she'd left them. She put the lasagna in his oven, found plates that didn't match, pulled two cans from a fridge that smelled of ketchup and old meat, and came back with a tray she refused to shake.

He was already pulling at the neck of his T-shirt with one hand, the other trapped by the way the brace sat.

"Hold up. Shirt's coming off before I eat. Summer in here's a damn oven and I can't get this thing over the shoulder without twisting the knee. Help."

"You can leave it on."

"I can call a number too. Take it off for me."

She set the tray on the side table and stepped in.

Up close he was worse. Heat came off him in a sour, lived-in wave, hospital soap failing on top of sweat and skin and whatever he'd worn in that van. She had to lean over the brace to get the hem. The cotton dragged up his heavy dark belly first, thick and hair-rough, soft over hard. The kind of gut that came from beer and appetite, and not from laziness, a dense pad of it sitting above the waist of his shorts.

Then the rest of him arrived in the same motion: a wide chest matted with coarse black hair, nipples dark in the thatch, shoulders that made the chair look rented, arms like they had been built for lifting things that did not want to move. He wasn't gym-made. He was work and appetite stacked on a frame that had never asked permission. The hair ran over his chest and down his forearms and made him look, to her, like something that belonged in the wild and not on Oakridge Lane.

She got the shirt over his bald head without touching more than she had to. Her knuckles still found him. Heat. Hair. The solid give of a pectoral under her finger when the cotton caught. She stepped back too fast. The open black blouse pulled as she moved and she felt her tits wobble, heavy, indecent.

Thank God Carl is smooth, she thought, and hated that the comparison had shown up at all. Carl's thin chest. Carl's polite, hairless body.

Richard dropped the T-shirt on the floor and took the tray as if she had been born standing there. He ate with the plate on his gut, the fork moving, his bare chest rising under all that hair.

"This is good," he said with his mouth full. "White-woman cooking. I could get used to this kind of service." A glance, slow, down the open shirt. "Tits in my face while I eat. Skirt that short. Yeah. I could get used to it."

"Yeah? Well don't. This is a short-term deal." She insisted.

He toasted her with the first beer anyway.

Janet took the empty oven dish to the sink and ran the water, then the cloth over the counters, then the worst of the dust along the windowsill that looked back at her own geraniums. He watched her work. She felt his gaze on her every time she bent and her red skirt rode. She could feel the hem climb the back of her thighs, feel the packed firm curve of her ass presented whether she consented to the presentation or not. His smile sat in the room like another piece of furniture.

"Skirt's riding up," he said, almost conversational. "When you reach like that I get the whole damn picture. That ass was not built for those jeans you walked in here wearing. Do it again."

"No. Quit being a pervert."

She did the other work instead and still felt exposed; tights stretching and shining when she knelt, breasts heavy and loose in the open shirt when she leaned, the platinum hair sliding forward over one shoulder so that the pale side of her throat and the start of her chest were a single unbroken insult. She wrung the cloth harder than the cloth required.

By the time the dishes from before the hospital were in the rack and the lasagna was off his plate, the morning had a shape she could stand. Comments. Looks. That disgusting smile while he stared at her like something served. She could hate him and still finish a room. She could wear this ridiculous outfit and still be Janet Little when she crossed back. The day had a back, and she told herself she had broken it.

She wrung out the cloth and turned, almost ready to ask if he wanted the bathroom tidied next, and found him watching her with a different kind of attention, less of the meal in it.

“I’m going to take a bath,” he said. “You’re gonna help me get in it.”

Janet stood in his kitchen with wet hands and the polite face already reaching for itself, and understood that the part she had just called finished had only been the easy half.

Dick

Janet ran the bath with the door half open. She gripped the edge of the porcelain, her knuckles white, telling herself that this was still just part of the agreement. Part of the job.

Carers do this, she heard herself saying. Hospitals sent people home with instructions and a family member learned how to work around a brace. She laid two towels on the closed lid of the toilet, checked the water with her wrist, and mapped the thing in her head so it would stay decent. Brace off. Jeans off. He could keep the boxers on and swing the good leg in first. She would hold his weight, get the injured leg up on the side of the tub, and then she would go back to the living room and wait until he called. She didn’t want to see him naked. She didn’t need to. There was a way to do this that kept everybody’s dignity in the room, and she was going to find it.

“Bath’s ready,” she called, her voice sounding fragile in the steamed air.

Getting him down the hall took both of them. He came on the crutch with his hand heavy on her shoulder, heat and that sour lived-in smell coming off the bare chest she had already uncovered, and the red skirt and the heels made her a stupid kind of scaffolding. In the bathroom he sat on the closed toilet while she knelt to work the brace. The straps were stiff. His knee looked swollen and wrong once it was free. She kept her eyes on plastic and Velcro and not on the rest of him.

“Trousers next,” she said, as if naming the steps would keep them ordinary. “You can leave your underwear on.”

“Whatever you say, Mrs Little.” He rumbled, with amusement in his voice.

She sat on the edge of the tub in front of him because that was the only angle that didn’t twist his leg, and her fingers went to his belt. The metal was warm from his belly. She got the buckle open, got the button, got the zip, and started the denim down over his hips with her face arranged into something professional.

But it wasn’t the cotton of underwear that met her eyes.

What surged out of the open jeans was dark, thick, and impossibly imposing. Even flaccid, it was easily double the size of any man she had ever seen. It was a heavy, falling weight; a wide shaft the color of polished, wet hardwood, mapped with thick, pulsing veins that spiralled toward a blunt, darker cap of a head. As she worked the waistband lower, inch by inch, the member continued to arrive, unfolding itself against his thigh with a gravity that seemed to warp the air around them.

Janet's mind stalled. For twenty years, her sexual world had been defined by Carl's modest anatomy; four inches of pale, polite gratitude, a thing she could cover with a few fingers and forget the moment the act was over. She could not make the scale of the thing before her fit into her reality. It was so thick that her first instinctive, panicked thought was to compare it to the circumference of her own wrist. It possessed a density and a droop that felt primal, as if it belonged to a different species of man entirely.

The smell of him changed at this range: skin, sweat, a clean animal musk that the hospital soap had not touched. *If it was like this soft, what was it like when he...* She cut the thought off before it could finish. It still left a mark.

"Oh my God." Her professional facade shattered. "You're not wearing underwear. What the fuck, Richard?"

He looked down at her staring at it. That was the worst of it; not that it was out and hanging before her, but that he watched her see it. Watched the way she stared at it. The smile that spread across his face was slow and victorious and had been waiting all morning.

"Richard's what people who don't know me call me," he said, his voice more commanding than ever. "You can call me Dick."

Janet couldn't move, her eyes were still locked on it. She couldn't seem to give them a different job. The thing lay against his thigh like a heavy claim, the shaft so thick the vein along the top of it looked like a ridge she could almost wrap her fingers around.

She heard herself whisper his name before she could stop her mouth. "Dick... Long."

When she finally dragged her gaze up, the grin was already there, wide and ugly and utterly pleased with itself. It was the look of a man who just laid a trap and watched his prey walk straight into it.

Disgust surged back in a hot rush and she used it like a handrail. "You could have told me you didn't have underwear on," she snapped, her voice trembling. "So I could at least have the decency to wrap a towel around you, or look away."

"Why?" He didn't cover himself. He didn't even shift. The jeans were still half down his hips, the dark heavy length of him hanging in the space between her knees and the tub, and he sat in it like a man sitting in weather. "We're both adults here. It's not like you never seen a cock before."

“Not...” She stopped herself. *Not one like this*, was what she almost said. She wouldn’t give him the pleasure of that sentence. “Not yours. And I didn’t ask to.”

“Look all you want. It ain’t gonna bite you,” he rumbled “Or be a prude, and look away... just get my jeans the rest of the way off so I can get in the water. Unless you’d rather sit there and keep staring. I don’t mind. Most women don’t get the full tour on the first date.”

She tried to shut out the sound of his voice, and pulled the jeans the rest of the way off with her face turned as far as it would go and still saw it in the edge of her vision: dark against his thigh, too much of it, a thick falling shaft with that flared head resting on muscle, impossible to put back into the category of medical.

Of course this animal would be built like this, she thought, a mixture of horror and fascination swirling in her gut. *A monster of a man, with a disgusting monstrosity of a cock.*

“Hold my shoulder,” she commanded, trying to reclaim some shred of control. “We’re doing this carefully.”

She got him standing. And standing was infinitely worse. On his feet the thing swung like a heavy dark pendulum between his thighs, possessing a length that defied her understanding of anatomy. The head of it hung far lower than she ever expected a man’s body to end, swaying with a rhythmic, hypnotic gravity.

She tried to ignore it, got his good foot over the rim, took more of his weight than she wanted; her open shirt crushed to the hair of his chest, her breasts flattening against him in the gap of the buttons, nipple and lace and pale skin all suddenly involved in the engineering of the manoeuvre, and eased him down into the water with his left leg hooked out along the edge of the tub.

The water rose around the heavy belly and the matted chest. Between his thighs the cock lay in the heat and looked even larger for being underwater: a dark blurred column, thicker than her wrist, the head a duller shadow at the end of it, and the ripples kept drawing her eye back as if the water itself were in on the joke.

“I’ll wait in the living room,” she said, desperate to escape the situation she found herself in.

“Bring me a beer first. Nothing like a cold one in the bath.”

When she returned, she had to lean deep over him to place the can in his hand. As she did, she looked over his shoulder and saw it again; magnified, glistening, and obscene beneath the surface. It looked like something out of a filthy piece of fiction, the kind of story she would have called depraved if she’d heard one of her housewife friends whispering about it. A married, respectable woman, simply did not have the vocabulary for that much cock. She set the beer down too hard.

“You can keep me company if you like,” he said, his eyes firmly between the open buttons of her shirt, and the cleavage of her big naturals. “Give me something to look at whilst I soak.”

“Not a chance,” she said, rolling her eyes in contempt.

She left him there and stood in the hall with her palm flat on the wall and her heart going stupid in her chest, telling herself she had seen what she'd seen and that seeing it didn't change a damn thing about who she was.

He called twenty minutes later, when the water had gone dull.

Getting him out was worse than getting him in. Wet skin, no jeans to hide behind, her shoulder under his arm and the swell of her breasts pressed to the hair of his chest while she hauled. He was far heavier than any man she had known. And when he stepped over and found his balance the cock swung with him, wet and dark and glistening, slapping softly against his thigh. She could feel the heat of it near her hip without even being touched by it.

She wrapped a towel around him but it didn't close properly. There was too much man. It slipped back open again, and her eyes went to it before she could stop them, a moment's hesitation before she picked the towel back up and looked up to see how he was watching her react.

"Little bigger than what you're used to, huh?" he drawled, his voice dripping with arrogance. "I can see the curiosity in your eyes, Janet. That husband of yours... what's he working with? Five? Six inches? Some cute little thing you can barely feel inside you?"

"Can you please just shut up." She begged, the words sounding more like a plea for mercy than a command. She hated him for the fact that part of what he was saying was true. Except he had actually overestimated the size of her husband.

She dried what she had to dry: shoulders, chest, the gut, the good leg, the ugly swollen knee as gently as she could. When he told her to do his hips she used the towel like a barrier and still felt the weight of him shift under it. Clean shorts were a negotiation. She got them to his knees and he told her to pull them up, and there was a moment when her knuckles brushed that thick soft shaft through the shorts and she jerked as if she'd been burned.

"Relax. It don't bite," he chuckled deeply. "Get yourself a proper feel if you're that curious. I know you want to."

"You disgust me." She spat back.

"Uh-huh." He leaned back, scanning her face. "You keep saying that. Your eyes didn't get the memo though. They tell me that you're starving for it."

She ignored his barb. She got the brace back on and got him down the hall and into the armchair. She found a fresh T-shirt and this time he didn't make her do it, only sit the cotton in his lap so he could finish the job himself. The morning's lasagna plate was still on the side table. The beers were empty. Oakridge Lane went on being Oakridge Lane beyond the dirty glass.

"I'd say that was a successful first day," he said.

Janet rolled her eyes, reaching for her own front door in her head.

“Wear something sexy for me tomorrow,” he ordered. “You did good with this. Don’t lose your nerve overnight. Tits, ass and heels again tomorrow! You know the assignment now.”

She was already at the hall when he spoke again, milder, which made it worse.

“When that husband of yours tries rolling on top of you tonight, you think about what you saw in my bathroom.” A small pause to let it sink in, his armchair creaking. “Might help you get there a little quicker.”

She turned in the doorway. The mean face was back, and under it she was still seeing the thing in the water.

“You’re disgusting. That thing is disgusting.”

Dick Long laughed in the armchair, bare-chested, braced leg stuck out into the room, and the laugh followed her across the road and all the way up her own driveway.

Janet stood under her own shower until the water ran hotter than was comfortable and tried to sluice the filth of the day off her body. But the house across the street wasn’t just on her skin; it was a suffocating presence inside her that refused to be washed away.

She could still feel his gaze. The way he had demanded she go change her clothes. His comments about her body as she tried to clean around him. That smile while he ate her lasagna and stared at her cleavage, as if she was the dessert.

She soaped her shoulders hard enough to redden them and still the images only grew more vivid. She saw his jeans sliding down. She saw that thick dark weight arriving inch by inch until her mind had nowhere decent to put it. She could still see the pulsing veins that mapped the length. She remembered the way it had swung and dangled when he stood, and the way the bathwater had made it look larger, like something out of a forbidden tale.

She hated the image. She hated him for smiling down at her as if he’d planted a seed of corruption. And most of all, she hated herself for the fact that no matter how hard she scrubbed, the image wouldn’t rinse away.

She was not turned on by it. She told herself that as a fact, the way she told herself the geraniums needed changing. She was shocked. Any woman would be shocked. What kind of female would ever want a beast like that between her legs, would ever look at an animal like Richard Long and feel anything but revulsion. A hooker. A woman with no standards. Not Janet Little, who had built this bathroom out of white tile and good habits and a marriage that smelled of fresh linen and stability.

“Think about what you saw in my bathroom.”

His voice arrived uninvited in her head, echoing in the steam. Janet turned her face directly into the spray, trying to drown out his voice and that sentence. Trying to wash the sound of him out of her ears.

Then, the sound of the front door downstairs. The jingle of keys. Carl's careful tread. A soft, polite knock on the bathroom door; the knock of a man who always asked permission, even in his own home.

"Janet? Can I come in?"

She snapped the water off, the sudden silence ringing in her ears. "Yes."

He stepped in with his tie loosened and the day still on his shirt, and he took the towel from the rail and settled it around her shoulders as if she might break. His fingers gathered a wet band of platinum hair and tucked it behind her ear. He had always touched her like that, like luck he was afraid to startle.

"How did you get on over there?" He asked softly.

The truth sat on the tip of her tongue, heavy and poisonous. She wanted to tell him that Long had treated her like a piece of meat. That he had spoken about her tits and her ass as if they were his personal property. That he had claimed Carl wasn't man enough for her. She wondered if she should tell him about the sight of Richard, completely naked and sporting a cock that made Carl look like a different category of man.

Instead she forced a smile, small and soft and practiced, because worrying him with the facts wouldn't make any of it easier to stand.

"I'm tired," she said. "And his house is as disgusting as you would think it would be. And he... he's hard work."

Carl's brow furrowed. "Hard work how?"

She paused long enough for the real list to pass behind her eyes, and then she put it back where he couldn't reach it.

"He's just not very civilised."

Carl huffed a quiet breath that wanted to be a laugh. "Well. We knew that just by looking at him, right?"

"Right."

He searched her face anyway. "You sure that's all? You look like something's sitting on you."

"Just the work. I'm exhausted."

"Not too exhausted, I hope." His smile tilted, shy and hopeful, and his eyes dropped over her chest. "Looks like the shower was agreeing with you."

Janet looked down, following his gaze. Her nipples were tight, dark, and agonisingly sensitive, standing out like hard peaks in the steamy air. They were reacting, pulsing with a need she refused to acknowledge. *The heat*, she told herself desperately. *The steam. The run of the water.*

It wasn't the other house. It wasn't him. It wasn't that thick, veiny thing waiting for her tomorrow.

Carl's hand came up and cupped her breast with that same careful gratitude he had shown her for years. His thumb finding the nipple, and the sound she made surprised both of them. It was small and involuntary, a moan she would have swallowed if she'd had warning. Encouraged by it, he leaned in and closed his mouth on the wet peak, gentle, worshipful, the way he always was, and once again, the voice cut through the tile as if Long were standing behind the glass.

"When that husband of yours tries rolling on top of you tonight, you think about what you saw in my bathroom."

His black cock flashed in her mind, timed with the pull of Carl's mouth. Dark, thick, hanging, impossible, the ridge of a vein she could still see too clearly. Pleasure went through her in a clean unwanted line and she grabbed for hate like a rail. She would not let that Black bastard into this. She would not let the memory of that monstrous thing she despised, write itself onto Carl's mouth.

She put her hand in her husband's hair, not quite pulling him off, and stared at the white wall over his head until the image shook apart.

"Carl," she breathed, her voice strained.

He lifted, lips wet, his expression already half sorry. "Too much? I just thought... you looked really horny..."

"I'm not. Honestly, I'm not." She lied, the words tasting like ash.

She wrapped the towel tight and kissed his forehead so the refusal wouldn't look like a verdict on him.

"Come on, let's go order pizza and have a lazy night cuddling on the sofa," she said, smiling gently at him.

She glanced into the mirror. Her face was flushed a deep crimson and her eyes were too bright, shining with an intensity she didn't want to study. She stared at the woman in the glass and told herself that the flush was the heat of the shower, that the brightness was exhaustion, that the low unwanted throb between her legs was not want and did not need to be named.

The Green Dress

Janet made Carl's coffee in yesterday's jeans and a pale sweater, the kind of clothes that belonged to someone who was going to clean and cook the filthy house across the street. She kept her back to him while he found his keys so he wouldn't examine her face, and see how she was already thinking about what outfit she would change into, once he had gone.

“You want me to pick anything up from the store later?” he asked, already focussed on the day ahead of him.

“I’ve got what I need, thanks. Go before you hit traffic.”

He kissed her temple, gentle as always, then he went through the garage and the car pulled out and the house went quiet. She stood in it for a moment with her hands on the counter and let the dread come up properly. Across the road the uncut grass and the ugly car and the man who had laughed her out of his house yesterday was waiting.

She told herself the same things she had told the mirror last night. Cook. Clean. Ignore the stupid, sleazy remarks. She was better than Richard Long.

In the bedroom she stepped out of the jeans.

The green dress had lived at the back of the closet since a Christmas party she had left early. It was longer than yesterday’s red skirt, which was the story she sold herself while she pulled it on: coverage, decency, nothing he could glance up. The half-truth lasted until she looked in the mirror. The fabric clung from breast to hip to the packed curve of her ass and kept clinging when she walked. The neckline dropped in a deep V that put her tits on a kind of display that the unbuttoned shirt had only hinted at; pale inner swell, the start of cleavage, the weight of them lifted and offered by a cut she had once worn for two hours and resented. There was nowhere for a modest woman to hide. When she breathed the V deepened. When she turned, the dress mapped the high packed curve of her backside as if it had been cut for his armchair instead of a staff party.

Heels again, because he had named them as part of the assignment; six inches, the same ones, the same new line in her legs, thick thighs sheathed, the hem of the green dress sitting lower than yesterday and still not low enough to make her safe. Hair down, platinum to the waist, because pinning it up felt like another fight she didn’t have the morning for.

Slightly longer. That was her reason. Anything to stop him angling for a look under a hem. The dress didn’t make her safer. It made her look poured into the problem he had already decided she was.

She took the spare key and crossed Oakridge Lane without lifting her eyes to the other windows. Every step in the heels announced the dress: the cling at her hips, her breasts wobbling, the packed curve of her ass moving under the tight fitting fabric. She told herself it was for the job. For her family.

He was in the armchair with the brace stuck out and a fresh T-shirt that already looked too small for the chest under it. He didn’t greet her. He looked, slow, from the heels up the green line of the dress to the V and the platinum hair, and the smile arrived like a man settling a bet with himself.

“Green,” he said, and the word was pleased. “You went shopping in your head last night, trying to decide which outfit would make me happy, huh?... That’s an effort, Mrs Little. Dress hugging that ass like it owes you money. Tits on full display, like they finally got permission to exist. Come in. Shut the door. Let me appreciate what you did for me.”

"I didn't do it for you." She heard how thin it sounded once it was in the room. "It's longer than the skirt. That's all."

"Uh-huh. Longer so I can't see up it. Cute. Still painted on though, and those tits..." His eyes stayed in the V. "I always figured those had to be fake. Woman built like you, street like this, tits that big and heavy sitting that high. Had to be expensive, I thought... but now seeing them like this, though. Wobbling as you move..." He gave a low considering sound. "I ain't sure they aren't some of the finest naturals I ever seen. Why don't you come here and let me squeeze one. Let me feel if they're real."

"Get lost." She sneered. "You disgusting Black pervert."

The laugh changed. It didn't get louder. It got interested. He looked at her as if she had finally taken a piece of clothing off that mattered more than the dress.

"There it is," he said. "That Oakridge racism. I knew you were hiding it under all that polite falseness you walk about with."

"I am not a racist." Her face had gone tight. "That's got nothing to do with it."

"Sure it doesn't."

"It's a fact." She heard herself reaching for the list as if numbered things could still save her. "You are disgusting. You are Black. And you are clearly a massive pervert."

He smiled and raised his eyebrows, slow, pleased with the word she hadn't meant to give him.

"So you think it's massive, huh?"

"Oh, for God's sake. You are impossible."

"Impossible, but I'm sure you could manage it," he raised his eyebrows at her, and smiled. "You think about me last night?"

"No! Why would I ever think of you?"

He watched her face the way he had watched her look at him in the bathroom.

"Not even when your husband kissed you? Not even when you lay awake, unable to stop thinking about the snake you saw in my bathroom? Don't worry, your secret's safe with me sugar tits... Your nipples already told on you yesterday popping through that little black shirt. I know what a woman looks like when her curiosity and arousal takes over."

"You don't know anything about me." She set her bag down harder than she meant to. "I thought about how disgusting you are. I thought about how I can't stand the sight of you. How you make me want to be sick. That's the whole list."

"Keep telling yourself that." His mouth pulled. "Enough with the flirting with me. You've got work to do. Go make me some strong coffee, then you can play housewife while I enjoy the view."

She put coffee on. She began cooking up some bacon and eggs, because the longer she spent in the kitchen, the longer she wasn't stood right in front of his perverted eyes. But he still talked while she cooked, sleazy and specific and new with it, not yesterday's script repeated. How the dress made her tits look like they were trying to escape. How the dress was so tight he could see the outline of each cheek perfectly. A woman who wore a thing like that to a man's house and then claimed she wasn't enjoying it was a liar, and liars were his favourite kind of Oakridge wife.

"I'm not your wife."

"Not yet," he said, mild as tea.

"Not ever," she turned with the pan in the kitchen doorway, looking over at him in his armchair, and let him have the mean face. "You keep trying to push me and I'll walk."

"You'll walk as far as Princeton will let you walk, and then you'll come crawling back begging for me to not press those charges." He lifted the mug. "Don't be scared to cook yourself some eggs... I like my women filled with protein and energy."

She plated the food, brought it, refused to lean farther than the tray required. He ate and looked down her dress between bites.

"White boy manage anything last night?" he said into the eggs, "or he just roll over grateful to co-exist? Thank-you kiss. Lights out... Man gets a body like that in his bed and still doesn't know what to do with it. I bet you haven't had a proper fuck in years."

"Shut up about my marriage. What Carl and I get up to in the bedroom, is none of your business." She snapped, a rage settling over her. But even as she said it, she did wonder about the last time they truly had a passionate night together. Her mind was drawing a blank.

"I'll take that as you've never had a proper fuck then." He smiled into the eggs. Yolk on the fork.

Janet decided to ignore his jabs. Concentrating on doing whatever bits of cleaning and tidying she could find for herself. Noting how the rundown place was a failed cause. Mr Long offered a running score from the chair.

"Shame about the longer hem," he said. "Yesterday I was getting thigh. Today I got to work for it. Still enough ass to keep a man honest. You keep shaking that thing whilst you clean and I'm going to start thinking you like my commentary."

She answered when she had to and let the rest hit the green fabric and fall off. That was the trick, she decided. He could throw it. She didn't have to catch it. She could stand in this house in this dress and hate him out loud and still finish the work.

By the time the pan was clean and the counters were wiped she had a thin bright feeling that might have been hope if she had allowed the word. He could be as filthy as he wanted. She was still Janet Little, and she was far stronger than this pig of a man.

She wrung the cloth out and almost believed it.

"I think it's time for a shower," he said.

She didn't turn at once. "You mean a bath?"

"I mean a shower. That tub damn near killed the knee. Leg perched on the side like I was trying to climb out of my own house. Could feel the strain it was causing. No. It's showers from here on." He tapped the brace with two fingers.

"And you're going to have to be in there the whole time. I slip on wet tile and I'm back in that hospital, and then we start this whole recovery from scratch again. Doctor already told me I'm not to chance it. You hold me up. You wash what I can't reach. You don't wait in the hall like yesterday."

The cloth went slack in her hands.

Yesterday had been bad enough. But she at least could wait outside whilst he bathed. The reality of this meant that she would be in there with him. Full assistance, start to finish. No escaping the water. The steam. That thing between his legs.

Dread went through her. She could hear herself losing the argument in advance, even as she began.

"I'm not getting in the shower with you... that's not necessary," she said, hearing the first crack in the winning feeling. "I can stand right outside. Just hold the rail. I'll be two feet away."

"Two feet away don't catch a two-hundred-and-thirty-pound man with a rebuilt knee. You're coming in, Mrs Little." He glanced at the green dress, at the V, at her face. "You can leave that pretty thing on the chair if you don't want it ruined. Or wear it in... I ain't particular."

Janet stood in his kitchen with yesterday's brave story already failing in her mouth, and understood that the part of the morning she had called a victory had only been the time he had given her before he named the next term.

Getting Wet

The bathroom was already loud with water when Janet stopped just short of the sliding glass door. She realised that her green dress was her next battlefield.

Steam had fogged the glass. The shower was running empty behind it, hammering tile, filling the room with heat. Dick Long stood outside the stall with his back half-turned, one palm on the frame, brace and jeans still on, waiting on her the way he waited on everything in that house: as if time belonged to him and she was late to her own humiliation. Janet held the shoulder of the green dress without knowing she had reached for it. If she stepped in like this the fabric would cling, go transparent, cling worse, and she would walk home across Oakridge Lane looking like the woman Junior had described from the sofa. If she took it off she would be in her underwear in a Black man's shower, stripped down while he watched her do it.

She stood frozen long enough for him to see the maths happening on her face.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” he said, not unkind, which made it worse. “You take that off or it gets ruined, and then you get to explain to half the street, why you walked home looking like you swam here. It’s a dress, Janet. It ain’t your dignity. Take it off before we open that door.”

“I can keep it on,” she whispered, her voice sounding small against the roar of the water.

“You can also be stupid,” he countered, his tone sharpening. “That green thing cost somebody a lot of money. Peel it off and stop pretending this is a debate.”

She turned her back to him to do it and still felt his eyes. The zipper at the side stuck for a second, then ran. She worked the dress down over her breasts and the cling of it over her hips and let it fall, and the air found her in pale bra and pale panties that had been chosen that morning as a compromise with herself, not as a show.

The bra was a losing battle; her heavy, natural breasts strained against the cups, the fabric stretched thin, barely containing the overflow of her flesh. The panties cut high across the rounded curves of her ass, the thin material straining over the mound of her pussy. Standing in the steam in her underwear, she was a vision of pale, trembling luxury: thick thighs, a narrow waist, and breasts that seemed to ache for release.

Richard had turned fully now. He didn’t pretend to look away. The smile was slow and appreciative and entirely without manners. His eyes travelled from her ankles, up her thick thighs, lingering on the way her panties hugged her mound, before settling on the heaving swell of her chest.

“Jesus,” he breathed. “That’s the body you walk around Oakridge wrapping up like a church social. Bra barely capable of doing its job. Panties sitting on that ass like they lost a fight... Tits like that should be illegal in a neighbourhood this quiet.”

He hobbled closer, on his one good leg. “You look expensive and filthy at the same time, and you ain’t even under the water yet. Come here and get these jeans off me. I can’t do the belt and the knee together.”

Janet felt the heat travel up her chest. It wasn’t arousal. But to be standing this exposed in front of someone who was not her husband, and hearing his lewd words, took its toll on her composure. She tried to shake it off. Reminding herself just how despicable this man was.

“Turn around,” she instructed.

“What, you’re too shy to see the goods now?” He taunted, his voice dripping with amusement.

“Turn around,” she repeated. “I’m not standing in front of you when you take that thing out.”

He turned and set both hands on the wall beside the stall, laughing once under his breath, and she stepped in behind him with steam on her shoulder and the spray still sealed

behind glass. She worked the belt, the button, the zip, and dragged the denim down from behind so she wouldn't have to face what she already knew was there.

It didn't matter. Even from the back the thing hung as the jeans cleared his knees, a thick dark weight swinging into the edge of her vision, heavy enough to see without looking for it. She kept her face at the level of his spine and got the jeans to his ankles and off the good foot, then the bad one, as careful as the swollen knee required, and the whole time it was just there, hanging, impossible not to clock.

She fumbled with the straps of his brace, her fingers brushing against the hair of his thighs. When the brace finally clattered to the floor, he stood before her completely naked once again. A hairy gorilla of a man shrouded in a veil of steam.

Janet slid the glass door open, and a wave of heat rolled out. She helped him to step inside, caution on the wet beneath his feet as he shifted his weight slowly, before he planted both hands flat on the tile under the spray. Janet followed him in, pulling the door shut behind them.

"This is how it's got to be," he declared, the water cascading over his broad shoulders. "I slip and I'm back to the hospital. So I'm going to hang on here, and keep myself propped up. And you can wash... It's safer this way."

Silence passed over them both, as Janet took in what he said in disbelief.

"Don't make a face, Janet. It's a human body. You washed your boy when he was little. You'd wash that husband of yours if he needed it. You signed up for this role, so stop acting like I invented soap and get on with it."

Janet reached for the washcloth, her mind racing. Her bare hands felt like a surrender, a decision she wasn't ready to make. But as she looked at the expanse of his back, and all that hair, she realized a cloth would just make things harder. She discarded it, lathering her palms until they were slick with white foam.

His back was a continent of flesh. Beneath the thick, dark layer of hair and skin lived a thick muscle, the kind of power that had lifted engines and broken things, a rugged strength that refused to be tamed by the polite sensibilities of the suburbs. She started at the shoulders, her palms sliding over the slabs of muscle on either side of his spine. The lather caught in the coarse black hair, turning it a shimmering silver before the water rinsed it dark again.

He was hot under her hands. The mass of him made her feel small in a way Carl never had, and she hated the observation for arriving at all.

"That's it," he muttered, not looking back. "Those hands ain't bad. Firm. Most women pat at a man like they're scared. You wash like you mean to get it done."

"I am trying to get it done... so I can leave," she reminded him.

"Uh-huh."

She went lower because the job had a map. The small of his back. The heavy spread of his ass, hair-rough, solid, a shape that had nothing to do with the gym and everything to do

with size. She soaped the cheeks thoroughly, knowing that leaving a single patch untouched would only invite another conversation, another challenge to her dignity. Down the backs of his thighs, thick as fence posts, then the calves. She was careful around the bad knee and felt him flinch once, then settle. Water sheeted off her hair and ran into her cleavage. The bra had gone translucent. She knew it without looking. The panties were like a second skin too.

“Other side,” she whispered. “Turn. Slowly.”

He turned with both hands still on the wall, and the stall became a different room.

His eyes came around with his chest. Janet felt the weight of his gaze like a physical touch, sliding down from her flushed face to the translucent cups of her bra. The wet lace was a useless veil, clinging to the heavy curves of her breasts and framing the dark, swollen circles of her nipples, which peaked hard against the fabric. His eyes tracked lower, tracing the line of her narrow waist to the panties that were now plastered to the plump, wet mound of her pussy.

Janet tried to anchor herself to the job at hand, and the safe geography of his body: the matted hair of his chest, and the heavy, powerful swell of his belly shining under the torrent of water. His thick arms remained braced against the wall, a position that offered the full, hanging weight of his masculinity to her without the need for a single gesture.

She vowed not to look at that thing between his legs, but her discipline was failing. In flickers of desperate, self-loathing curiosity, her eyes darted down. The cock was reacting to the heat, the attention, and the sheer electricity of a half-naked white woman soaping his ribs. It didn't just hang anymore; it began to lift, a dark, thick column of pulsing flesh that contrasted sharply against the pale, wet skin of her thigh as she stepped closer. The veins were standing out in high relief, ridging the shaft, and the swollen head was already darkening and glistening with his arousal.

She began to wash his chest, her movements hard and efficient, a frantic attempt to convince herself that this was all just the scope of being a carer. She worked under his arms, the scent of him rising in the steam, a raw, musky, animal heat that filled her lungs. To reach around the sides of his belly, she had to press her body flush against him, and for one searing second, her heavy breasts brushed against his belly. The contact was electric. She jerked back as if burned, blaming the cramped dimensions of the stall for the collision.

She moved to his arms, her hands sliding over the forearms where the hair was plastered in dark, wet streaks. Then she moved to the fronts of his thighs, and that was when the territory of avoidance simply ran out. Everything left to wash was the very thing she had been terrified to acknowledge.

It stood between them now, thick and wet and risen. It wasn't yet at a point of violent, bone-hard rigidity, but it had awakened. His balls hung full and dark, and every bit as impressive in size as the cock above. The sight of them made her mouth go dry, a sensation she desperately tried to label as revulsion even as her core throbbed.

She stared fixedly at the white tile over his shoulder, her breath hitching.

“You know what’s left,” he said, his voice dropping an octave. “Don’t develop guilt on the last stretch, Mrs Little. Wash it. Cock and balls. Get them nice and clean.”

"I don't need the commentary," she snapped, though the defiance was undercut by the tremor in her voice.

"Then stop stalling."

She soaped her right hand, completely overlooking the washcloth as an option. She reached out, and the first contact was a shock of searing heat and immense weight. Her pale fingers looked absurdly fragile against the dark, mahogany shaft; they looked too clean, too married, too innocent. As her fingers closed around him, she realized with a jolt of vertigo that they wouldn't meet.

She had known the size from looking, but holding it was a different, more invasive education. He was thick; not just thick, but as wide as a man's wrist, and longer in her grip than her mind could process. The skin was like heated silk stretched over a core that felt packed, dense, and violently alive. She slid the soap from the root toward the head, the white lather contrasting sharply against the dark skin, running in dirty little rivers over the thick vein that ridged the top of the shaft. As her palm passed over the head, it swelled further, blunt and hotter than the rest of him, and her thumb instinctively found the sensitive flare of the glans.

Monster, her mind whispered in a surge of self defence, trying to remind her of her disgust. But her body was measuring him with a hungry fascination. Carl was four inches of something she could cover and forget. This was a different category of existence. This was a fact of dominant nature.

The cock filled her hand and kept filling as she stroked the soap along the length. She told herself she was cleaning, but the distinction between washing and stroking collapsed in the slick, soapy heat. With her other hand, she cupped his balls, following his instruction to wash them too. The weight of them sat in her palm like a heavy, warm argument; tight, full, and radiating a heat that made her dizzy. She heard herself let out a sharp, shuddering breath, a sound of disbelief that she hated, but couldn't stop.

She continued to work the lather into the immense thickness of him, her palm sliding over the slick, hot skin. The white suds gathered around her wedding-ring finger, the gold band a jarring contrast against the pulsing darkness of his shaft, before the bubbles popped and vanished. Suddenly, the cock kicked; a violent, rhythmic throb that nearly jumped from her fist. It hardened the rest of the way in one surging motion, rising toward her stomach like a wet, dark club, glistening under the spray of the shower.

Even as she held it, Janet couldn't wrap her mind around the scale of him. It felt impossible, an anatomical anomaly that defied the modest reality of her marriage. She hated that her disbelief wasn't just mental; it had a pulse. It was a thrumming, visceral reaction that mirrored the heartbeat hammering in her own throat. She whispered to herself that she was revolted, that this was a chore, a medical necessity. But her hand betrayed her, traveling the length of him again and again, mapping every ridge and vein as if the act of cleaning had become a desperate attempt to memorise the feel of him.

"Look at you."

The voice was a low rumble that vibrated through the steam. Janet flinched, and her grip tightened instinctively, squeezing the engorged shaft. Dick let out a sound; a guttural huff that was halfway between a laugh and a moan of approval.

“Underwear soaked through,” he murmured, his gaze traveling slowly, possessively, down her body while she still held him in both hands. “Bra see-through. Nipples poking like you’ve been thinking about this very act, since you crossed the road. That body on display in my shower like it belongs here.”

Janet froze, her fingers still curled around his heat.

“Hands full of dark meat and your eyes hungry for it,” he continued, his voice dripping with a cruel, knowing satisfaction. “You biting that mean little mouth like you’re starving and ready to devour the main course.”

She hadn't even realized she was chewing her lower lip, her teeth sinking into the soft flesh in a subconscious attempt to stifle a moan. She let the lip go, a flush of heat spreading from her chest to her cheeks. She hated him; not for the filth of his words, but for the terrifying accuracy of them. He had seen right through the facade of the professional carer to the shivering, needy woman underneath.

“I’m just doing my job,” she snapped, though the words came out unsteady, breathless. She tried to inject steel into her voice, but it sounded fragile, almost pleading. “That’s all this is. Don’t flatter yourself.”

“Never seen anyone so dedicated to a job,” he replied, the steam and satisfaction thick in his tone. “You’re a natural, Janet. First time you wrap a hand around a real cock and you already look like you’ve been waiting your whole life for it.”

“Screw you.”

The words were a shield, but the impact was gone. She let go of him abruptly, as if the heat of his skin had finally burned through her resolve. She reached out and shoved the water off, the pipes knocking with a metallic clang that echoed the violence of her internal conflict.

She moved with a frantic, angry energy. She hoisted his good foot over the lip of the stall, taking the weight of his muscular frame against her wet shoulder for a fleeting, searing moment before parking him on the closed toilet seat. She threw a towel at his chest with a sharp flick.

“Dry yourself.”

She snatched the green dress off the chair and retreated into the hallway, pulling the bathroom door shut behind her with a definitive click. The cooler air of the house hit her damp skin, and instead of cooling her, it made the arousal more acute. She peeled the bra down, and her nipples were tight, aching points of sensitivity, standing erect as if they had a separate, rebellious opinion of the encounter.

As she slid the panties down, the fabric clung to her. The silk between her legs was not only wet from the shower spray; it was soaked with the thick, honeyed evidence of her own betrayal. She stood in the dim light of his hallway, completely naked except for the dress

clutched in her fist, her skin tingling. She began to recite a mental script, repeating it until it sounded like a fact: *That's not for him. Not for that slob. It's just womanly reaction to the steam and adrenaline.* She told herself the body was a stupid machine that didn't get a vote in the matter of the soul.

She pulled the green dress on over her damp, bare skin. Without the bra or panties, the plunging V of the neckline dipped dangerously low, exposing the swell of her heavy breasts and the dark, hard peaks of her nipples pressing against the fabric. She found a plastic bag under the sink and stuffed her wet underwear inside, knotting the plastic tight, as if she could knot the last twenty minutes of her life shut and bury them.

When she returned to the bathroom, he had the towel wrapped precariously around his hips, the predatory grin replaced by a look of smug ownership. She helped him into his shorts and the brace, her touch now cold and distant, refusing to offer him a single word he could enjoy. She tossed a clean shirt into his lap and turned to leave.

"Same time tomorrow," he called out to her back, his voice echoing in the hall. "Wear something red. Green was nice, but red's my color. It'll look good on you."

Janet didn't acknowledge him. She stepped outside and shut the door with a force that made the frame complain, the slam a final, desperate attempt to win an argument she had already lost. Oakridge Lane received her in a green dress with nothing underneath, carrying a knotted bag of evidence, walking home with her chin held high while her core continued to throb with the memory of him.

Red For Sin

The garage door groaned shut, the sound echoing like a gavel, leaving Janet in a silence that felt heavy and expectant. She stood before her closet, the navy dress clutched in her hand. It was a garment of invisibility; high-necked, modest, the kind of fabric that whispered of duty and domesticity. It was the dress Carl loved because it mirrored the version of her he believed in.

She held it against herself and saw the morning play out: she would cross the road looking like a rebuke, she would ask for the afternoon off, and he would keep her until the streetlights just to prove the red he'd asked for yesterday, wasn't a request.

Helen's weekly gathering, tea and sandwiches, and all the neighbourhood gossip, was at two. The girls would notice if she didn't come. They would notice more if she came late with an excuse that sounded like a secret.

She shoved the navy dress back into the darkness. I am not dressing for him, she lied to the empty room. I am managing a beast. The red was not a surrender; it was a tactical manoeuvre.

She reached into the back of the closet for the red dress.

Long sleeves, so she could tell herself it was still a respectable garment. The neckline was a hard V that didn't cover her breasts so much as put them up and together, pale and heavy,

cleavage sitting in the gap whether she liked it or not. Cutouts opened at her waist on both sides, two windows of skin she couldn't pretend weren't there. The skirt was tight through the hips and unforgiving over her ass; when she turned, the fabric showed everything the navy dress had been designed to hide.

She stepped into the matching heels and let her hair down. Platinum against red. In the mirror she didn't look like a woman going across the road to cook and clean. She looked like a woman who had picked a fight with her own story and lost.

Strategy, she told herself. *For Helen. For the time off. For not walking in there already dressed like a no.*

She took the spare key and stepped out onto Oakridge Lane. With every stride, the cutouts shifted against her ribs, and the tight hem of the dress worked over the swell of her backside, the fabric sliding and gripping in a way that felt like a hand groping her.

When she entered, Mr Long was perched in the armchair, shirtless and imposing. A glass of amber liquid sweated on the table, but his focus was entirely on her.

For the first time all week, he seemed at a loss for words. The silence stretched, as his gaze began a slow ascent. He started at the needle-thin heels, traveled up the straining line of the red skirt that mapped every inch of her thighs, lingered on the exposed skin of her waist, and finally locked onto the heavy swell of her breasts spilling obscenely out.

A slow, jagged smile spread across his face.

"There it is," he rumbled. "Red. The color of sin. It ain't never looked better than on that stacked body of yours."

He didn't move, but the intensity of his stare felt like a physical touch, stripping her bare beneath the silk.

"Come here," he commanded, the authority in his tone making her knees weaken. "Shut the door. Let me look at what you decided I was worth."

"I decided I had a red dress," Janet replied, her voice breathy, lacking any real conviction. "That's all."

"Uh-huh. Long sleeves so you can pretend this is a Sunday social. But a neckline that lets those heavy tits do all the talking." His gaze remained anchored in their cleavage. "And those gaps at the waist... just little windows so a man can feast on your skin without you having to admit you're serving it up."

His eyes drifted lower, lingering on the way the fabric strained against the lush, rounded swell of her backside. "Jesus, that ass is popping today. You walked across the street in that? I bet every husband on the block would have a fantasy he's too scared to tell his wife, if they saw you dressed like this. You wear it in my house, I got the only thought that matters. That's a wife who knows how she wants to be seen."

A scorching flush surged up Janet's throat, staining her skin a hue that matched the dress. "I'm here to work," she managed, though her voice lacked its usual steel.

“Then get to it. You can work and play the saint while those tits occupy my living room like they’ve bought the place.”

She retreated to the kitchen and prepared coffee and plated chicken and potatoes, clinging to the domesticity of the task as if it were a shield. Feeding him felt like the only untainted act left in her repertoire. She kept her tone measured, almost caring, asking about his knee and his sleep, her voice a soft, practiced melody. But the words felt fraudulent, tasting of copper and submission.

As she tended to him, she was acutely aware of the focus of his gaze. She didn’t pull away. She let him devour her with his eyes, knowing that any friction now would jeopardise the favor she wanted.

Mr Long took a single bite of the food, his attention never once shifting to the plate.

“You’re being sweet today,” he murmured. “It looks guilty on you, Janet. What are you hunting for?”

“I don’t want anything,” she lied, her fingers tightening on the cleaning cloth.

“You’ve been playing the dutiful little nurse for twenty minutes. Acting like you’re happy to be here... You ain’t dutiful, and you’re certainly not happy to be here. You’re a high-society trophy from Oakridge who put on my favourite color and started acting like she’s got manners. Quit the act and spit it out.”

Janet stood there, the red silk clinging to her like a second skin, the dress performing every vulgar function it was designed for. The request tumbled out, sounding fragile and rehearsed.

“Helen Park is having all the girls over this afternoon. It’s a weekly thing. Tea and catching up. Two o’clock. I need to leave around lunch. I’ll have the kitchen spotless and you’ll be set. I’ll be back first thing tomorrow.”

He didn’t respond immediately. He took a slow, deliberate sip of his drink, letting her linger in the silence. He watched her stand there; a vision of platinum hair and forbidden red, waiting on the man she despised for permission. The silence was a weight, pressing her down, making her feel small and exposed.

“You want a half day?” he finally asked.

“I want a few hours that belong to my own world,” she countered.

“Your own world.” A dark, knowing smile touched his lips. “And you wore that dress and my color to come beg for it. Smart... and naughty. I like it.”

“If you’re just going to say no, then say it. Spare me the sermon.”

“I didn’t say no.” He set the fork down with a metallic clink. His eyes locked onto the pale, heaving swell of her chest, as if he were reading the fine print of a contract. “I’m just saying it ain’t going to be free. You want to walk out that door at lunch? You earn your exit.”

The cloth twisted in her grip, the fabric biting into her palm. A mixture of indignation and a traitorous, humming heat coiled in her belly. "I should have known you'd have some depraved demand. You really are the worst."

"You knew I was the worst, and yet you crossed the road looking like that anyway. So here's the price." He tapped two fingers against the coarse denim of his fly, a lazy, rhythmic gesture that didn't yet disturb the fabric but promised a violent release.

"Those magnificent tits of yours. You drop to your knees, you clamp them around me, and you milk me until I finish. Then you can go sip tea with Helen and trade the kind of polished lies you women weave when the finger sandwiches arrive. That's the deal."

The television remained a dead, black mirror. The silence of the house was absolute, leaving no room for her to hide from the hunger in his voice.

"Are you for real? You really expect me to put my..." She choked on the words, the sentence dying in her throat. To speak the act was to invite it into her reality, to transform a threat into a tangible, physical event. "That is depraved. I refuse. I am not some hooker doing tricks for pay."

"You're a woman who's desperate for a few hours of freedom, and I'm a man who holds the leash." He said with certainty. "You don't have to accept the offer, Janet. You're more than welcome to stay here with me all day. I'm sure in this heat, I'll be in need of another shower..."

"I have a husband, Richard!" she whispered, a pathetic shield of a sentence.

"He ain't here. I am." He said, leaning back, his gaze raking over her with a possessive, animalistic intensity. "And we both know that soft little man of yours treats those tits like museum pieces; something to be admired, but never truly used. This isn't a riddle. You squeeze. You slide. I erupt. Then you get to leave and stroll across the street as if you're still the purest thing on Oakridge Lane."

Janet whipped her head away, unable to endure the sight of his triumphant expression while the mental images began to bloom. Through the grime-streaked window, her own white geraniums looked sterile and distant, a mockery of the domestic perfection she fought to maintain. The internal debate she was having was small, jagged, and devoid of the righteous outrage she felt she should be experiencing.

She had never performed such a thing with Carl. The thought didn't even occur to them; his frame was modest, his presence gentle. He didn't possess the sheer, overwhelming mass that demanded a tunnel of warm, yielding flesh to be contained. As she considered her options, she tried to convince herself this wasn't sex. This was merely a transaction of skin, oil, and pressure; a physical chore she could wash away with a sponge and a splash of expensive perfume before greeting her friends.

If she refused, she would be trapped in this house until dusk. And the afternoon would inevitably lead to the shower, and to that monstrous thing back in her soapy grip under the guise of 'caregiving.' Was enveloping it in the valley of her tits truly a greater sin than that?

She loathed the logic because it felt like a surrender. She hated that her mind was treating this like a business arrangement, the same cold pragmatism that managed the household budget and kept Junior's secrets tucked away under a magnet on the dresser.

She turned back to him. In a subconscious reflex, she crossed her arms beneath her chest, a movement that inadvertently shoved her breasts upward. The deep, shadowed cleft of her cleavage was now an open invitation, the dark inner curves of her breasts glistening with a fine sheen of nervous sweat.

She let out a long, shuddering sigh; the sound of a woman collapsing under the weight of an inevitable conclusion. She was already framing this as a singular anomaly, a one-time tax paid to keep the facade of her cleanliness intact for the women of her social circle.

"Fine," she breathed, her voice trembling. "Just this once. Do not mistake this for an invitation to demand this whenever you please."

Richard Long smiled from the depths of the armchair.

"I won't," he replied, his eyes locking onto hers. "Only when you want a half day."

The Taste Of Freedom

"Keep the dress on," he commanded, his voice a low, gravelly vibration that seemed to rattle in her chest. "I want to see that red silk strangled around it."

Janet stepped into the narrow space between his splayed knees. Kneeling felt like a formal surrender, a confession of a sin she hadn't yet committed, but standing was an impossibility. She descended slowly, the tight fabric of her skirt riding up her thighs, the neck of the dress already gaping open to reveal the trembling swell of her chest. Her fingers reached for his belt, employing the same clinical, detached professionalism she had used during the bath; a mental armour to shield her from the reality of what she was doing.

The zip hissed open. The denim was shoved down just enough to liberate him. He wasn't wearing underwear; he had been waiting for her, primed and ready.

He sprang free; a heavy, dark column of muscle, already engorged and pulsing. The head was swollen, and flushed a deep, bruised purple, with a single, glistening bead of pre-cum crowning the slit. Even after holding it in the shower, the grotesque scale of it still felt like a violation of the neighbourhood's unspoken rules. It was a weapon that had no business existing in the peaceful Oakridge Lane.

With a shuddering breath, Janet gathered the silk of her neckline, hoisting her breasts upward and folding the V of the dress around the shaft as best she could. The heat was instantaneous. The thick, veiny meat slid into the yielding channel created by her cleavage, the friction of the silk adding a searing intensity to the contact. The head of his cock shoved upward, punching toward her throat, finding no exit and instead pressing firmly against the soft underside of her chin. Fabric bunched and strained; it was clumsy, desperate, and utterly filthy.

“God fucking damn,” he breathed, his voice thick with satisfaction. “Would you look at that. Big cock disappearing under your dress. Those tits swallowing it whole. You were built for this, Janet. You were built for big black cock, and you spent all these years buttoned up like a Sunday school teacher across the street.”

“I was built for my husband,” she whispered insistently.

Inside the dress, her nipples had peaked into hard, aching points. She could feel them dragging against the silk with every movement, the sensation sending electric jolts straight to her core. Her breath came in shallow, jagged hitches. She told herself this was revulsion. That he was a monster. He was a filthy slob. She was simply buying herself some freedom. But the heavy, wet throb between her legs told a different story.

“Uh-huh. Tell me again how perfect you are for your husband, while you squeeze them tighter around my cock,” he grunted.

She clamped her breasts together, crushing the shaft between her mounds. The dress was a hindrance, the fabric bunching up and pushing the head of his penis against her jaw. He watched her with the detached intensity of a man observing a storm he had personally summoned.

“Get ’em out,” he ordered, his tone brooking no argument. “Those milk cannons didn’t put on a show this morning just to stay in jail. Take them out. I’ve got the good oil in the drawer here.”

“Oil in the drawer? You planned this,” she gasped, her heart hammering against her ribs.

“I live here. I plan everything. Tits out, Janet. Now.”

She hooked the V-neck aside, and her breasts spilled forward, heavy and pale, liberated from the silk. Her nipples were dark, turgid, and screaming for touch; the sudden rush of cool air hitting them felt like a brand of shame. He pressed a bottle of oil into her palm. She poured it with shaking hands, the liquid cascading down the inner slopes of her breasts, coating the hard peaks of her nipples and pooling in the deep valley of her cleavage before dripping onto the waiting, dark shaft beneath.

When she folded herself around him again, the sound changed. The dry friction of silk was replaced by a wet, filthy slap; a slick, sliding clap of flesh on flesh that echoed through the quiet of the house.

“That’s it. Milk it. Long, deep strokes. Look at me,” he growled, his voice dropping to a rough, animalistic rasp. “I want to see that uppity married face while you work your first Black cock. Pinch those nipples while you do it. Don’t you dare look at the wall. Look at me.”

She forced her eyes up to his. He looked utterly satisfied, his stitched brow furrowed, his eyes locked onto her mouth with a hunger that felt like it could consume her. Her fingers found her own nipples, twisting and pinching the oil-slicked peaks because he had commanded it, and because the hypersensitivity had become an unbearable itch.

His cock was scalding, a rod of living fire between her breasts. Even with both hands shoving her flesh together, she could barely contain it, stretching the pale skin of her chest

to its limit. With every upward thrust, the wet, dark cap of his head popped out, shining and glistening, kissing the air just beneath her chin.

She told herself this was not sex. She told herself the hardness of her nipples was oil and air. She told herself the throb between her legs was hatred wearing a pulse. Beast. Horrible animal of a man. Just until he finishes, she told herself.

The friction continued, a relentless, sliding rhythm that began to wear her down. Janet's biceps trembled, the muscles shaking from the effort of crushing her heavy breasts together to maintain the tightest possible grip on him. Despite her exertion, he wasn't close. She could tell by the steady patience of his breathing; he was savoring the sight of her struggle, the way her porcelain skin flushed pink under the strain.

"Are you even near?" she gasped. She hated the tremor in her voice; it sounded less like a question and more like a plea, a flicker of concern for his pleasure that betrayed her.

He didn't answer immediately, letting the silence stretch, letting her simmer in her own desperation. Driven by a sudden, jagged impulse, Janet lifted her chest off him. She wrapped one hand around the pulsing shaft, gripping the veiny meat tight, and slapped the heavy, wet head of his cock against her left nipple. *Smack*. Then the right. *Smack*. A lewd, beat of dark against pale, the oil spraying in tiny, glistening droplets.

"Keep doing hot shit like that," he growled, his voice vibrating with a new, dangerous edge, "and I might be soon."

She saw the power she held, and something inside Janet snapped. The internal war between her modesty and her desperation shifted, pivoting from stubborn refusal to cold, calculated performance. She needed him to finish, and she was going to make it happen.

"Oh," she breathed, and she felt the filth arrive in her mouth like a weapon she had spent twenty years pretending she didn't own. "You like that, huh? You like me smacking this thick cock on these big white titties?"

She did it again, harder this time, the impact making a wet, slapping sound that echoed in the quiet room. Oil flicked onto her chin; the purple head left a glistening streak of pre-cum across her nipple. She immediately folded herself back around him, working faster now. Her strokes became shorter, meaner, her breasts sliding over the shaft with a frantic, squelching intensity. The sound was filthy; a wet, sliding clap of flesh on flesh that filled the air.

"That's it. Talk to me. Don't go quiet and proud now."

"Your cock is so big," she said, and told herself it was a complaint. It still came out like a moan. "It doesn't even fit. You're dripping down my chest. You wanted these tits so badly, you can look at them while I get you off."

"Good girl. Faster. Squeeze the head every time it comes up."

She obeyed, shoving her tits together until the oiled shaft had nowhere to go but up through the tight pale channel, the head popping wet against her sternum. Silence would have left her with the sound of her own breathing, the shameful hum in her body, so she filled the room instead and felt, with a dirty little start, that the words landed.

“Is this what you’ve been thinking about, all these years?” she said, working him harder. “Sitting in this sad depressing chair watching my windows? Getting hard over the married woman across the street? Dreaming about the day you got these jugs wrapped around this beast?”

“Fuck yeah. Keep going.”

“You’re nothing but a pig.” She slapped the head against her nipples again, then folded herself back around him, faster. “A disgusting Black pig with a cock that’s the only good part about him. You like hearing that? You like me on my knees in this stupid dress saying it out loud? Your big black cock is the only part of you worth a damn.”

He groaned, low and ugly, and the sound went through her hands. That was the discovery: she could move him with her mouth without putting him in it. The hate had a use. She leaned into it.

“Look at you. Using my tits like my husband never could. Dripping on me like you already own them. Come on then. Finish. Paint me. Cover me in all that disgusting cum, and send me to my little tea party like the secret slutty Oakridge wife.”

“That’s it. That’s my girl.” He groaned between thrusts.

“I am not your girl.” Her voice shook and she made it filthier so it wouldn’t sound like something else. “I’m the woman who’s going to milk this thick cock until you make a mess, and then I’m walking out of here. So stop holding it and give it to me.”

Then the dynamic shifted. Her words took him right to the edge and something snapped inside him. He stopped letting her lead. He started thrusting.

It wasn’t her rhythm anymore; it was his. His hips punched upward off the chair with violent force, the brace on his leg creaking under the pressure. The thick head of his cock slammed, knocking her chin upward. She let out a sharp noise of protest, a strangled gasp that didn’t quite become a word. His hand shot out, fingers diving into her platinum hair, gathering the locks in a heavy, controlling grip. He yanked her head back, changing the angle of her body as if she were nothing more than a piece of living furniture. Her eyes snapped up, startled and wide.

The next thrust was a blur of motion. The oiled head slid up the center of her sternum and smacked directly against her mouth.

She opened her lips to tell him to stop, to tell him he was being too rough.

The thrust after that drove the head of his cock straight between her opening lips. It was too wide for the sound of complaint she had meant to make; it packed her mouth in one thick, stretching inch and then another, her lips dragged into a wet ring around the flare of it, her tongue pinned flat by the salt and the oil and the raw musk of him. The muffled noise that got out of her; surprised, choked, a moan she would have killed if she had been given a second, went straight into the shaft. She felt it travel. He felt it too.

He groaned. Pure animal triumph. As if he had been waiting all morning for that exact feeling, for her mouth to open on a protest and find itself full.

“Fuck yeah. Just like that, you slut. Don’t you dare close it.” His hand cupped the back of her skull so she could not retreat the inch that would have made it only tits again. “Tits and mouth. That’s the way a girl makes her man cum. You hold those big white titties tight and you keep that pretty mouth open.”

He began to fuck upward into her tits, and her mouth.

She moaned around the girth of him because there was nowhere else for the noise to go. The sound buzzed against the head. He cursed like it had been a skill.

“That’s it. Hum on it. Your husband ever fill that mouth, Janet? Ever make you drool down your own tits while he used you? Nah. White boy’s too small and polite for this nasty shit. But not you. You like being used like this, don’t you?”

Her knees ached on the carpet. Her jaw strained around a size it had not been built to take. The throb between her legs had stopped pretending it was hatred. It was a demanding, pulsing hunger, shameless, timed to the wet slap of his hips against the underside of her breasts, to the filthy little gluck her mouth made every time the head punched in and she failed to be ready for it. Spit ran off her lip and down the shaft and into the crushed valley of her chest, mixing with the oil, making the next stroke louder, easier, worse.

“Look at this. The perfect wife on her knees with a Black cock fucking her tits and mouth. You look fucking perfect like this. Let me see your eyes, while I use you.”

She looked because he had her hair. His face was above her, stitches and sweat and that thick pleased smile gone feral. She kept the pressure wrapped around him. She hated that she kept the pressure; her own hands serving her tits up as a sleeve, nipples screaming under her palms, the heavy weight of them used like they had been waiting their whole respectable life to be put to this.

Her desperate eye contact made him swell.

She felt it first as a warning kick of muscle under the skin, the shaft between her breasts turning meaner, thicker, the head in her mouth suddenly a tighter fit. His rhythm broke. The careful cruelty went. What replaced it was need.

“Fuck! Gonna paint those big titties,” he growled, voice ripped raw. “Don’t you stop. Hold ’em. Tongue out.”

And then he came in an uncontrolled eruption. He bucked hard, his body shuddering as the first pulse of his orgasm fired with violent force, a thick, searing jet that shot straight into the back of her throat. It was a shocking flood of heat, viscous and heavy, hitting her with such pressure that it triggered a primal gag reflex.

Before she could even process the intrusion, her throat constricted and she swallowed, the salty, alkaline sludge sliding down in a desperate, involuntary gulp.

She jerked back on instinct, her head snapping away, and the next rope of cum caught her across the face. It splashed over her eyelid, blinded her for a second, and streaked down her cheek in a hot, sticky line, ending in a heavy glob on her chin.

Richard roared. It wasn't a sound of love or intimacy; it was a loud, animalistic bellow, ugly with raw pleasure. His hips continued to punch upward, the armchair groaning and creaking under the violence of his release.

"Keep stroking that cock," he commanded, his voice ragged, stripped raw by the intensity of his climax. "Don't you dare waste a drop of it."

Janet obeyed, her fingers cramping but refusing to let go. She kept her breasts clamped around him, the valley of her chest now slick with a mixture of massage oil and the overflowing cream of his seed. He continued to erupt, spitting thick, white arcs into the air that rained down across her pale skin. The cum splattered over her nipples, soaking into the red silk of her dress which had been shoved aside, leaving the inner slopes of her breasts shining and dripping with his mark.

She felt every throb of his shaft against her; hot, heavy, and viscerally powerful. It was a level of masculine potency that made everything her marriage had ever produced feel like a pale imitation. The flood kept coming, striping her skin in opaque white lines, pooling in the valley of her collarbone, and hanging from her chin in a slow thread that she could taste with every ragged breath she took.

When the pulsing finally eased, Janet remained on her knees between his thighs, breathless and trembling. Her ears were still ringing with the echo of his roar, and her skin felt tight, coated in the cooling slime of him.

Richard looked down at her, his gaze devoid of tenderness, viewing her with the satisfaction of a man looking at work he approved of.

"Perfect," he rasped, his eyes tracing the wreckage of her composure. "Covered in my cum like that. That's exactly how that pretty, married face ought to look."

"You're a disgusting perv," she whispered.

Even as the insult left her lips, her tongue instinctively flicked out, tasting the thick, warm, salted residue remaining in the corners of her mouth. She felt a surge of self-loathing, not because of the act, but because she didn't spit. She savoured it.

"You did good," he said, his smile returning. "First taste of big Black cock. It won't be long before you're on your knees begging me to stretch that tight white pussy of yours."

Janet stood up without answering, her legs feeling like lead, shaking with a mixture of exhaustion and a lingering, humming arousal that refused to die. She walked toward the bathroom, her gait unsteady, feeling the wetness of him sliding down her skin.

The mirror reflected a woman she didn't recognise. Her hair was a wrecked nest, pulled and tangled by his fist. One eye was smeared with drying seed; her chin was glazed in a translucent sheen. Her breasts were a slimy mess of cum and saliva, her nipples glistening and raw, streaks of white cooling into tacky maps on her skin. She looked like a used thing.

Almost unconsciously, she scooped a smear of cum off her chin with two fingers. Before the thought could even form, before her conscience could intervene, she put her fingers in her mouth and sucked them clean.

She stared at her own wide, blown-out pupils in the glass as she swallowed. She whispered to her reflection that she had simply gotten carried away, that Richard was nothing more than a stupid animal with filthy habits, that this was merely the result of the summer heat and the bargain she had struck. It wasn't really her.

She scrubbed herself in the sink, washing until the water ran clear and the red silk of her dress was as decent as ruined fabric could be.

As she stepped back into the hallway, she looked like a woman who had been crying; or like a woman who had just done something so obscene she would never be able to admit it to another living soul.

He was still sprawled in the armchair when she drifted back into the room, his shorts dragged up high on his muscular thighs. The lazy afterglow of that roar was still etched into the lines of his face, a look of absolute conquest. Janet pointedly avoided looking at his lap, though she could still feel the phantom weight of his massive cock between her tits and in her mouth. She snatched up her bag and the spare key, aiming for the door with a desperate urgency, as if the mere act of stepping outside could scrub the filth from her soul and make her the perfect married woman again.

"Same time tomorrow," he called out.

She didn't stop. She kept walking, her heels clicking a frantic rhythm on the floor.

"Janet."

The way he said her name; low, vibrating, possessing, stopped her hand dead on the doorknob. She hated the reaction of her body, the way her core gave a traitorous throb at the sound of his voice. She didn't turn fully; she only pivoted enough to show him the sharp, mean line of her profile, hiding the wreck of her mouth and the lingering glaze of his seed on her lips.

"I hope you enjoyed the taste of freedom."

There was no sneer, no mocking laugh. He sounded like a man simply dismissing a neighbour after a mundane errand, as if the act of painting her face in his cum was a triviality.

She opened her mouth to snap something sharp; go to hell, don't you ever speak to me, that wasn't freedom, but the words died in her throat. They weren't useful. The "taste" he referred to was still there, a thick, salty residue clinging to the underside of her tongue.

She stepped out and slammed the door hard enough to make the frame groan.

Oakridge Lane was offensively ordinary in the early afternoon. The distant hum of a lawnmower, a car passing by at the junction, drivers who had no inkling of the filthy degradation she had just endured. She crossed the street with her chin held high, her act in full swing.

At home, she stepped into the shower, cranking the heat until the water was almost scalding, yet it felt insufficient. The taste of him remained in the back of her throat, a ghostly, alkaline presence. The scent of his musk and sweat sat deep in her platinum hair

where the water hadn't yet penetrated. She pressed her forehead against the cold white tile, and the morning replayed in her mind with violent clarity: the clumsy, erotic slide of her breasts, the slickness of the oil, his commanding voice ordering her to look at me, the stinging slap of his cock against her nipples, and her own voice; shameful and needy, and absolutely dirty. She remembered the sensation of that monstrous head shoving past her lips, the roar of his climax, the hot flood of cum, and the image of the woman in the mirror greedily scooping his seed onto her tongue.

Her hand dove between her legs, fingers finding her drenched pussy.

She pushed two fingers deep into herself, a needy moan escaping her that would have horrified any polite guest in her kitchen on a Sunday morning. She worked herself with a frantic, desperate hunger, devoid of Carl's careful, worshipful gratitude. This was raw. This was filth.

"You disgusting Black pig," she gasped, the insult acting as a catalyst. The words made her walls clench tight around her fingers. She said it again, louder, her voice echoing in the steam. She visualised that thick, vein-ridged cock sandwiched between her tits, the smile on his ugly face, and his promise to stretch her tight white pussy until she screamed.

The thought triggered a violent orgasm that buckled her knees. She gasped into the spray, her body shaking with a release so intense it felt like a seizure, sobbing into the wall that this pleasure wasn't for him.

"That was for me," she whispered, her voice trembling. "Not for him."

She barely made it to the bedroom, a towel draped haphazardly around her damp body. The clock on the nightstand showed it was nearly two, nearly time to head to Helen's. As she lay there catching her breath, her hands instinctively found her breasts, pinching her nipples, her fingers sliding down to the slick, humming heat between her thighs. Her mind drifted back to the armchair as if it were a magnetic pole. She replayed the things he had said, the way he had dominated her, and the way she had surrendered. She rubbed her clit furiously, the wet sounds of her fingers on herself, matching the wet sounds of her memory. She finished a second time, burying her face in her husband's pillow to stifle a scream, feeling Richard Long's phantom laugh echoing in the room even though he was across the street.

When she finally looked back at the clock, she had been masturbating on the bed for nearly an hour. The window for Helen's afternoon tea had well and truly closed.

She lay there, the cooling wetness of her own arousal on her fingers, the empty hours of the afternoon sitting heavy on her chest. Then, a thought arrived, clean and cruel: she had let Mr. Long use her as a toy, had submitted to his every whim and tasted his seed just so she could earn the "freedom" to go to tea; and she hadn't even gone. She had traded her dignity for nothing.

The realization made her clench again, a mixture of helplessness, shame, and fury.

She stared at the ceiling, mentally chastising the woman who had scooped cum off her own chin.

A one-time mistake. A momentary release. Never again.

I'm better than that. Better than him, she told herself, even as her fingers tightened on her nipple.

End of Part 1.

Part 2 Coming Soon.