

THE CONTACT

Part 10: The Reservation



Sire Rickenbach

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Chapter 10 — “The Reservation”

The week after his wife came home wearing another man on her tongue and told him her mouth belonged to someone else now, James Whitfield went to work every day and ate lunch at his desk and ran his three-mile loop in the cold and lay in their bed at night listening to the woman beside him breathe, and did nothing about any of it. He cycled.

She's escalating the game. That was the first reading. The photograph was foreplay. The mouth rule was foreplay. She was pushing to see what he'd take and she'd pull back when she got bored and this was still theirs — the dirty talk, the telling, the voltage she brought home. Testing. It lasted until he remembered the gold chain in her clutch with the dried cum on the *B*, and the underwear on the tile soaked through from inside, and the fact that she'd walked into their kitchen on a Monday morning smelling like his apartment and sex and looked him in the face and smiled the real smile and said *you like it when I'm naughty though — right?* and he'd nodded. He'd nodded.

She's punishing me. The second reading. For what? For the mediation, for *insecure*, for the armchair, for every time he'd followed instead of fought. For the time she'd said *who are you texting* and he'd said *Tom Brewer*. For every version he'd picked from a menu Ray put in front of him. At least punishment had a logic — a purpose, something she was working toward. But punishment required a crime she knew about, and the crime she knew about was that he'd coordinated with Ray before Dayton, which was the smallest lie in a house full of them.

She thinks I want this. The third reading. She'd said so herself, Sunday morning, straddling him, rocking against him, her dark eyes steady — *it's okay to want this*. And the sick part was that she was right. His cock answered every escalation the way a dog answers a bell. She'd sent a photograph of Ray's cum leaking out of her over a plug that wasn't theirs — larger than anything they owned, brushed silver — and captioned it in their private voice and he'd gotten hard enough to drive nails and jerked off to it after drawing a line all evening and stepping over it, and then she'd come home and kissed him with Ray on her lips and told him her mouth was Ray's now and rolled a condom onto him and finished him with the photo open on the pillow beside his head, and the orgasm had been shattering, and the condom had gone on the nightstand beside the photograph like a still life of his position in his own marriage.

She's falling for him. The fourth reading. The one that sat in his stomach like something swallowed wrong. The fond foreplay on the couch at the dinner. The Spanish that broke through. The necklace she wore for Ray and hid from him. The overnight she'd come home from with belt marks on her wrists and another man's cum between her legs and a lie about Diane. The way she'd said *Raymundo* in their bed telling him about Dayton, and his cock had leaped and his heart had cracked and neither reaction was available to him in the presence of the other. She'd stopped needing his permission

or his framework or his stag shield or any of it, and what she needed now was an ugly fifty-three-year-old man who never swallowed a question.

She's testing what I'll allow. The fifth reading, the closest to the truth and the furthest from the answer, because every version assumed she was reacting to something he'd done or something he was. Five doors he tried and five doors that almost worked, and the sixth — the only one that fit all five — he never touched. He went around it without seeing it. He went around it every day.

He went to work. He ran the audit. He ate the dinners she made. He said *I love you* before bed and meant it and she said it back and her eyes were warm and steady and he couldn't tell what was behind them. He held her at night and she let herself be held and her skin was clean and her hair smelled like her own shampoo and sometimes, half-asleep, she'd press her ass back against him and make a small sound and his cock would harden against her and neither of them would do anything about it, and he'd lie there in the dark with his hand on her hip and his erection against the woman he'd been lying to and think: *this is what you chose*.

At Meridian, Jenna moved through the days like a woman who'd set a timer and was waiting for it to ring.

She was not guilty. The guilt had burned off sometime between Ray's apartment and their kitchen, replaced by something cooler and more patient. She'd spent months ashamed in private. The shame had been the pillar holding up the structure of a wife who'd done something regrettable for a husband who'd asked, and it was gone now because the structure was gone. The husband hadn't asked. The husband had been told, and chosen, and lied, and she'd fucked and sucked and trained and confessed and taken Plan B and sat in a mediation room and said the word *insecure* about her own marriage under fluorescent lights, all of it on a foundation she'd trusted, and the foundation was a man who'd known the whole time and kissed her goodbye every morning and said nothing.

So no — she wore the plug to work on Tuesday.

Ray's. The large one. Brushed silver, bigger than anything she and James had owned, the one she'd walked out of his apartment still wearing and hadn't given back. She did it at the bathroom mirror with one foot on the tub edge, the glass still faintly fogged from a shower she'd taken too hot. She watched her own face while she worked it in. The widest point stretched her and she winced, small, private; then the rest of it slid and the base seated and a sound left her that she did not let get past her teeth. Full. Occupied. The dense weight of him sitting inside her while she stood in her own bathroom on a Tuesday morning, bare from the waist down, watching the woman in the glass take it. His plug. His size. She stayed there a breath longer than she needed to, clenching once around the silver just to feel it answer, and then she reached for the dress.

Grey wool, belted tight at the waist, hem just above the knee. No bra. The wool was thick enough that she was only a suggestion until she moved, and then the belt pulled and

the fabric shifted and the weight of her tits moved unstrapped underneath, and anyone watching would see it. She felt the plug the second the heels went on — a deep occupying press that changed her walk before she reached the stairs. In the elevator it had a pulse. On the fourth floor it was a second heartbeat she was carrying through a building still doing the math on ninety seconds between elevators.

Looks came at angles. Not professional. Not direct. The quick drop-and-recover of people who'd built the rest from imagination. Weather. She'd been walking through weather since she was nineteen.

None of that was enough.

She was crossing toward the glass conference rooms with the Ashford folder under her arm when she saw him holding the door. Evan. Winter intern. Twenty-two, three months out of a campus career fair, still wearing the tie he'd bought for the interview. He looked at her the way twenty-two-year-olds looked at her: chest, hips, face, floor, ears already going pink. Cute. Useless. A look like that didn't touch her. She needed him wrecked.

The folder slipped.

She let it. Papers fanned across the carpet at his feet and she made the small embarrassed sound she used on men she was about to be kind to, and then she bent.

The wool climbed the backs of her thighs. She felt it go — cool hallway air on skin the dress was supposed to keep — and she stayed down a second longer than she needed to, reaching, gathering, the plug shoving forward at the new angle so hard she had to breathe through her mouth to keep her face still. From behind her the hem had lost. A pale sliver of both cheeks was out in the fluorescent light, high and bare where the dress had ridden up, the start of the split between them just visible, the wool bunched like it had given up. She knew that view. She had been watching it do this to men for fifteen years. She was doing it on purpose now, in a wool dress, with Ray Vogler's plug seated in her, to a boy who still had a backpack under his desk.

She heard him forget how to be a person.

Not a word. A small punched sound. The door slipped his hand and bumped the frame. When she glanced back — once, just enough — his mouth was open and the pink had gone scarlet all the way into his collar and he was staring at her ass the way a man stares at something that has taken the thought out of his head. He tried the papers. His eyes went back. He tried her name and got the first syllable and nothing after it.

"I've got it, Evan." Warm. Easy. She straightened and the dress fell and she was a senior analyst again, folder against her chest, and she thanked him and kept walking and felt him still looking, helpless, the whole way to the corner. She could have turned around and found him in the same place. She didn't need to.

The shame and the heat arrived together, fused — the same compound she'd recognized in Anand and in James and now carried without bothering to hide it. She was wet. She could feel it, a warm slip along the plug, and the fourth-floor carpet under her heels suddenly seemed very long and very public.

She took the long way past the glass conference rooms on purpose. Each heel-strike nudged the silver deeper. She clenched on it and on the want and had to sell the hitch in her step as the dress. She turned the corner and let the air out through her mouth, smiling at no one, and when she sat and crossed her legs the plug trapped deep and she smelled herself under the shampoo — faint, private, unmistakable if anyone had been close enough. She opened the Ashford Phase II deck and typed a number she'd already verified twice.

She was watching James. He came home from work and kissed her cheek and asked about her day and she told him about Braddock's quarterly review and he told her about Tom's variance report and they made dinner and they were good at this, practiced and fluent. Underneath, she could see him working a problem he couldn't solve — the anxious rhythm visible in his eyes, the way something would pass behind them when he looked at her across the kitchen. Want, confusion, suspicion. She'd give him the warm smile and the banter and watch him grab the nearest reading, and she'd think: *you're still not there*.

The question she carried was simpler than any of his readings and harder than all of them together: *does he have a floor?* Was there a point — a line, a word, a photograph, a night — where James Whitfield would stop adjusting and start telling the truth? Where the cost of the lie would exceed the cost of the confession? Where he'd look at her and say the thing he'd swallowed at the airport and at the sink and on the couch and in the car and in their bed every night for four months?

She didn't know what she wanted the answer to be. She knew the direction: more.

Her period came on Saturday.

She told him in the kitchen. Morning light, window behind her, the thin sleep dress she wore when the house was warm enough — cotton washed so sheer it had given up, nothing under it, the faint pink of her nipples sitting obvious in the backlight. And her ass. The dress didn't cover it so much as admit it: high, full, bare cheeks glowing through the weave, the cotton tucked into the split of her so you could see the dark line running down between them. When she reached for the carafe it lifted and settled, one cheek then the other, heavy and soft and completely uninterested in being decent at eight in the morning.

The same sun came through between her thighs. She'd cocked a hip to pour and the light laid her pussy on the fabric in silhouette — plump, dark, the neat strip above, the seam of her lips drawn in a single unmistakable shadow, like the dress had gone transparent just there to be cruel. She was pouring coffee when she said it.

“Got my period this morning.”

She didn't look at him. She didn't have to. The relief moved through him before he could get in front of it — a loosening in his shoulders, a long exhale he tried to pass off as a yawn, his hand opening on the mug handle — and when he looked up, she was watching him do it in the microwave door.

“Good,” he said. The wrong word. They both knew it.

She turned around. Facing him, the cotton hid even less, and his eyes dropped before he could stop them. She watched him look. Her mouth softened into the smile she’d been using to end conversations since she was nineteen.

“You’ve been counting,” she said. “Since the photo.”

The admission came out flat. He was past small lies. “Yeah. I’ve been counting.”

“Me too.”

“Tell me you took something.” Rougher than he meant it. “After. Tell me you—”

“I didn’t.” Simple as answering whether they were out of milk. “I didn’t take anything, James.”

He set his mug down and heard it click on the counter.

“I knew the odds,” she said. “Before I ever asked him to. I checked. I was pretty sure how it was going to come out.” She turned her mug in her hands. “You spent the week sweating the last few percent anyway. I watched you do it.”

“The rule was he doesn’t finish in you.” His voice had gone quiet. “That was the whole—”

“The rule.” She smiled into her coffee. “I’ve been thinking about the rule. I don’t think you made it so I’d keep it, James. I think you made it so I could break it — so you could stand there hating it with your heart pounding and cum harder than you cum any other way. I put that photo next to your head on Monday, baby. You lasted about a minute. In a condom. Looking at what he left in me.”

“That’s not—”

Her eyes dropped. He was dressed to run, and the tights hid nothing.

“You’re hard right now,” she said. Delighted, and a little sorry for him, and the sorry was worse. “In the kitchen. Asking me if another man got me pregnant.”

He didn’t look down. He didn’t have to.

“You didn’t want me safe, baby.” The warm voice. The morning one. “You wanted me almost. The condom that almost holds. The guy who almost pulls out. Your wife, almost—” she patted her stomach once, lightly, over the thin cotton, “—almost. That’s the room you live in. I just redecorate it.”

She rinsed her mug and set it in the rack. “It came. You’re off the hook.” A pause, almost kind. “We both are.”

She crossed to him and kissed his cheek — dry-lipped, sisterly, close enough to his mouth that he could feel the warmth of it and get none of it. His hand came up to her hip, light, careful. She let it rest there for a second.

She was almost to the doorway when she stopped. “Although. Isn’t it funny.” She turned, and her voice had gone quieter, like she was confessing it to the room more than to him. “Some small part of me is a little disappointed.” His face did something. She laughed once. “Don’t look at me like that. I said *small*.” And then she was gone.

On the stairs she let herself feel it. His face when she’d said *I didn’t take anything*. The tights. The way he’d stood there and taken all of it, and gotten hard, and asked her

nothing else. And her own voice in the doorway — *disappointed*. She hadn't known that was true until she'd heard herself say it. Another probe, another nothing: no floor. She pressed her thighs together on the landing, warm through, and wasn't sure anymore whether she was hoping to find one.

He stood in the kitchen alone. Upstairs, the shower came on. He stood at the bottom of the stairs and listened to it and thought about going up — the steam, her in it, saying — what. She'd already answered everything.

He put his mug in the sink. On the fridge, the calendar with her mother's May flights circled in red. He looked at March without deciding to. Counted forward without deciding to. Landed on the fifteenth — a Saturday. Nothing special about it. Nothing at all.

He went for his run. Her milk voice came with him the whole loop — *I didn't take anything, James* — and the tights were a problem for the first mile. She was right about the rule, right about the breaking, right about what made him hardest. That was the part he couldn't outrun: she was right.

Ray Vogler sat at the table by the window of his apartment on a Wednesday afternoon and admired his own work.

The numbers: the woman who had filed a formal harassment complaint against him — the complaint that had put a written warning in his Cortec file, the complaint her husband's fingerprints were all over — had spent a night in his bed. She had straddled him in a folding chair and called him a creep and worked herself on his cock until neither of them could hold still. She had gotten on her knees on his carpet and sucked him off with mascara running and a gold chain that said *Blondie* at the hollow of her throat, and she had smiled while she did it. She had asked him to finish inside her for real and counted the pulses and held still for a photograph afterward. She had eaten peanut butter on his counter at 3 AM, bare except for the chain and the plug, and told him things about her husband that her husband would never hear from her own mouth. She had gotten on her knees in his kitchen the next morning and sucked him off for his camera and told the lens: *my husband gets a performance, and you get the truth*.

He could still feel last Sunday in his hands — her ass filling both palms on his folding chair, bare cheeks spreading as she sat down on him, the hot slick fist of her pussy taking him while she called him a creep to his face and fucked herself deeper anyway. She'd smelled like sex and his cologne. When she came she'd gone tight in fluttering pulls he felt in his teeth, and she'd laughed into his mouth like she'd won something.

And she had thanked him for telling her.

The husband, meanwhile, had been handled without a single threat fired. At the benefit bar Ray had given him the version that let him decide, and the kid had sent his own wife up to the suite. The threats are over. The bluff had been called in a parking garage and Ray had folded, and folding was the smartest thing he'd done all year.

Appetite was a wider road than leverage, but appetite wasn't what had closed Sunday. She'd come to his door furious and he'd given her the truth and pointed it at the man who'd been kissing her goodbye every morning since November. He hadn't persuaded her of anything. He'd just been the only one in her life willing to say true things out loud — the useful ones, eighty percent of them — and her husband had handed him that advantage and gift-wrapped it.

He poured a Jameson and didn't touch it. Through the sliding glass door the parking lot sat in pale March light, the rented Buick in its second space with salt stains from February.

He owed her ideas.

At 3 AM in his kitchen — peanut butter and Jameson and the woman he wanted standing barefoot on his linoleum — she'd laid out the program — keep putting her husband in front of things he had to choose around, raise the price every time, until lying cost him more than telling — and he'd said *I have ideas* and she'd said *not at three in the morning*.

Now he actually had to have them. Which was no hardship. This was the part of the job he'd have done for free. He could sit at this table all day and dream up ways to raise the husband's price, and every scenario he built ended in the same place — her — and building them was the fun part. Three years he'd imagined her with nothing to go on but want. Now he had material. Her on her knees on this floor Monday morning, yesterday's skirt hiked, looking up into his camera with her mouth full of him before she showed it off and swallowed. Her at this counter at three in the morning, naked but for the chain and the plug, eating peanut butter straight from the jar like she paid rent. Ideas. He had ideas all day.

He pulled up a fresh note on his phone and started typing.

Sunday barbecue at the Whitfield house. I bring the meat.

He laughed — a bark that came up out of his gut — and then he thought about it for real.

Their backyard. Him at the husband's grill in khaki shorts he didn't own, gut resting over the waistband, spatula in one fist, explaining ribeyes while the husband stood by holding a bowl of potato salad he'd made himself. Jenna in a sundress, barefoot in the grass, handing Ray a beer with her fingers cold off the bottle. Corn on the cob. The herb garden. The fence with the one new board the husband had plainly fixed himself. The neighbors waving like Ray was a man who got invited to things.

Why stop there. His face on their television — a profile between hers and the husband's, *Who's watching?* — and the husband pretending not to see it every time the TV came on. A key on Ray's ring, eventually. Letting himself in. Knowing where they kept the good olive oil. A spot in the fridge door that was understood to be his.

The daydream went along great until he got to the end of the night and found the problem: nobody was paying. Jenna stood on the porch next to the husband and waved, sundress catching the porch light, and the husband waved too, and everybody was

happy. That was the obscenity — no price anywhere. The husband got to keep his wife and his fence and his potato salad and smile about it. A fantasy with no punishment in it was just a cookout, and nice afternoons were for men with fences.

Deleted.

Share her. Once. Somebody who'd pay for the privilege.

Doyle was the obvious choice. The board member. Sixty-six, florid, four scotches deep by the salad course, the hand that had found her thigh at the gala like a tablecloth made a man invisible. Doyle wanted her the way men want things they can't afford, and men who want things they can't afford will do anything.

He built it. The suite at the Worthington, fourteen, the window wall and the city below. Jenna in the midnight blue with the slit, backless to the base of her spine. Doyle in the armchair with his scotch, not believing his luck, already looking for the catch the way old men did when a thing they'd wanted for years turned out to be available. And Ray directing. That was the charge of it — Ray saying what happened and her doing it. *Show him.*

The zip coming down an inch at a time while an old man forgot to drink. The dress pooling at her heels and her stepping out of it — stockings, the chain, nothing else, her tits bare and her ass catching the light, already wet enough that it showed on her thighs. Doyle made a sound like a man taking a punch. Her eyes never left Ray's face. That was the part that mattered — not the old man's stare, but the way she waited for Ray's voice. *Good girl. Now come here.*

Her on her knees between Ray's feet, Ray's cock out, her mouth sinking down it slow and wet while the old man watched from six feet away with his hands trembling on the armrests. The sound of it filling the suite — wet, obscene, her humming around him. *Touch yourself*, Ray told Doyle. *Don't you dare get up.* The old man's fly open, his thin old cock in his fist, and Jenna sucking Ray like the audience made her better — deeper, wetter, spit shining on her chin, pulling off to smile up at Ray with swollen lips — *does he like it?* — and Ray's hand in her hair, deciding. Deciding everything. The supply in a room full of demand.

It worked for a good ten minutes of imagining. It worked as long as Doyle stayed in the chair.

Then Ray's mind said *your turn* to the old man, and put Doyle's florid hands on her hips, and the whole thing went up in smoke. His gut went hot. He was back at the gala table — four seconds, one flat syllable, the hand gone. *Mine.* The word from the hotel, the first pulse, the simplest thing he'd ever felt. In his own fantasy, in a room he'd built and was running, he couldn't let another man touch her for ten seconds.

The joke was not lost on him. The only version that worked was the old man watching — which wasn't sharing, it was a show, and it was the husband's whole life with a different man in the chair. He was asking the husband to do every night what Ray couldn't do once in his own head. Ray would put Doyle through the window wall, and fourteen floors was a long way down.

Deleted.

Dress the husband up.

He didn't get past the header before the picture started, and the picture was funny enough that he let it run. The little outfit — black, white apron, the frilly cap thing, stockings with a seam up the back, heels the husband would break an ankle in. Makeup. A wig, dark, because the hair was a problem, and the name came with the wig like a gift with purchase: not *Blondie*. *Brownie*. He barked another laugh, alone at the table, loud enough to carry over the lot.

It was a cartoon, not a plan. But the cartoon had a floor show under it, so he let it run.

The husband mincing around his own living room in the outfit, fetching — the man was already a fetcher, condoms, lube, his own wife; this just gave him the uniform. The cage on his little dick, pink, small, its little key on the same chain as *Blondie* at her throat. The plug — her plug, the medium, the one that had lived in her — worked in slow while Jenna watched from the couch in a robe, legs crossed, and seated while he served drinks. *Brownie, bring us another bottle*. The husband curtsying. Jenna's mocking laugh.

Then the scene went where scenes went. *Brownie* on his knees between Ray's feet, lipstick on — red, crooked where the husband's mouth had trembled putting it on — and Ray's cock heavy on the painted lips. The husband's mouth doing the first ten minutes so the last forty were Ray's: the hesitant tongue, the gag at the head, Ray's hand on the wig, *easy, Brownie*, Jenna leaning forward with her robe open, watching her husband learn the shape of the man who fucked her. *Get him nice and hard for me, baby. That's it*.

The bed. Jenna on her elbows and knees, just enough room for *Brownie* under her — his painted face six inches from the action, his tongue on her clit while Ray took her from behind, Ray's balls swinging over the husband's mouth, and every few strokes Ray pulling out and dragging his cock across that painted mouth, wet from inside her, before pushing back in. The husband licking what swung. Cleaning what dripped. Maybe, at the end, Ray finishing in the painted mouth — a load the husband had to hold and show — or the wig askew and the husband bent over the end of the bed, hole presented, losing the last virginity in the house, while Jenna held his face and told him he was doing so well.

But then the thought came out of nowhere and stopped him: *fuck. What if James actually liked it?*

He sat with it a second. The thing was, it was possible. More than possible — it was the man's whole track record. The armchair. The couch. A photograph of Ray's cum leaking out of his wife, absorbed in total silence. Every door the husband had ever been pushed through, he'd come out the other side hard.

Once you saw it, the whole scene rearranged. The husband's face was wrong in every version — the face of a man having the best night of his life. The cage straining. The man leaking through pink plastic with the wig over one ear, grateful, thriving, and

Jenna watching him thrive and loving him for it. The whole production — Ray's cock, Ray's balls, Ray doing the actual work — reduced to content. A show staged for the man in the maid outfit.

And the truth was Ray didn't even want to fuck him. The painted mouth, the wig, the last virginity — none of it stirred him. It only worked as punishment, and punishment the man enjoyed was just labor. Especially if he liked it. *Especially* then. You couldn't emasculate a man who got off on it. You could only employ him. Ray would be the hired cock, the trapped one, sweating through somebody else's fantasy while the husband took it all in with his eyes shining. If that was higher than James's floor, then Ray had no interest in finding it.

Deleted. He'd rather keep the man in a chair.

He sat with the empty note and the untouched Jameson and looked at the parking lot. Zero for three — one dead at the porch, one on his own temper, one on the bottomless room. The strange thing was he felt fine about it, because not one of them had been the thing he actually wanted. They'd been a closer selling past a close that had already happened. He had Jenna in his bed. He had the husband off the field. The program she'd designed was better than anything on his list because it came from inside the marriage, from a woman who knew every wall in it and held the wrecking bar.

What he wanted was small and stupid and not a strategy: He wanted to sit across a table from her in a restaurant.

Not a conference room with a speakerphone and a deck. Not a hotel bar with a spreadsheet as cover. A table with a cloth and a wine list and a candle and her face across from him in whatever she wore when she wanted to be looked at, and the room full of strangers — the handsome woman and the big man, the mismatch that was the funniest and hottest fact of his year — and nobody's husband in the equation.

She'd refused him in the conference-room doorway the week after Dayton. *Dayton got out of control. I need a minute.* She'd said it clean, boundaried, the propriety landing like armor, and he'd taken the refusal and the not-asking had been harder than anything physical he'd done that week, because the dinner wasn't a step in a plan. It was the thing he wanted for himself. To be seen with her. To occupy the same room without a spreadsheet or a husband or a pretense, and to let whatever that was exist where other people could look at it.

He could frame it as the program. He was good at framing. The public date was real leverage on the husband — his wife with Ray in a restaurant, visible, occupying the social space reserved for couples, the thing that could not be explained away as a professional dinner if anyone who knew them walked by. That was the pitch. The pitch was true enough. The pitch was also a wrapper around the wanting.

He picked up the Jameson and drank it. The burn sat behind his sternum.

He opened the bedroom drawer. Second from top, under the folded undershirts. The white teddy was still there — sheer lace, the small satin bow between the cups, the thong back. He'd never washed it. The fabric still held something of her, faint now, a

ghost of her shampoo and the warm musk he'd pressed his face into on a hotel bed in Dayton while she slept. He lifted it and breathed in and the scent was almost gone and the wanting was not.

He put it back. Closed the drawer.

He pulled up the other app on his phone — the one he'd been running since November, the one he'd told her about in the suite. The color-coded calendar with its little windows. Her next one opened the week of the fifteenth. Saturday the fifteenth. He'd been watching the pattern for four months; he could have drawn it from memory. He picked the date the way he'd pick a closing date — for the number that mattered most, even if he couldn't say that aloud.

He finished the Jameson and sat in the quiet of the apartment that smelled like carpet cleaner and other people's dinners, and let the question sit where it always sat — *would she still want you with no husband to aim it at?* — and never answered it, the not-answering the only honest thing he did.

Thursday after six. The fourth floor was mostly dark. Jenna stood at her desk finishing the Ashford disbursement summary, the monitor's blue glow on her pretty face, the navy pencil skirt and tucked white silk top she'd worn all day, nude heels back on — she'd slipped them off under the desk an hour ago and put them back on when the floor emptied. Five minutes later she heard his footsteps in the corridor.

Ray came through her office door the way he came through every door — shoulder-first, filling the frame, the width of him preceding the rest by half a step. He closed it behind him without asking.

"Blondie."

She didn't look up from the screen, but the corner of her mouth moved. "I'm working."

"You were working. Now I'm here." He lowered himself into one of the narrow guest chairs — the kind Meridian furnished for analysts, designed for people sixty pounds lighter than the man compressing it — and the frame protested and he didn't seem to notice. The overhead fluorescent was unkind to his face: pockmarks deeper in the flat light, jowls heavier, grey hair thin enough at the crown to show scalp.

"So," he said. Comfortable. Settled in. "How'd the picture go over?"

She looked at him then. "The picture of your cum leaking out of me?"

"That's the one."

"He didn't say anything." She set her pen down. "Not that night. Not the next morning. I came home with you all over me and kissed him hello and he took it. I put the picture on the pillow next to his head and jerked him off in a condom and he lasted about a minute." She tilted her head. "I'd bet my wedding ring he touched himself to it first. Alone. In the dark."

"Jesus." The grin came slow and wide. "And?"

“And nothing. He swallowed all of it. You should have seen him — he just stood there and adjusted. Your word.” She recrossed her legs and let him hear the whisper of the wool. “Oh — and I told him my mouth is yours now.”

Ray’s eyebrows went up.

“If he wants it, he has to ask you. Nicely. I made it up on the spot, Monday, telling him about your kitchen — and he didn’t argue. He never argues. That’s the whole problem, Ray.”

“Your mouth is mine.” He tasted it. “And if he asks?”

“Then you get to decide. That’s the point.”

“The kitchen video’s been getting me through the week, by the way,” he said. “Fifty viewings, easy.”

“Good,” she said. “Keep it in your pants a little longer.”

Because that was the program — her design, his kitchen, three in the morning over peanut butter and Jameson: keep putting James in front of things he had to choose around, raise the price every time, until lying cost him more than telling. Ray’s job was to keep raising it, and to make sure she enjoyed the work. Ten days in, all they’d learned was how much he could absorb. The photograph, the telling, the kiss with Ray still on her tongue, the rule about her mouth — he’d taken every one of them and said nothing and come home and made dinner. No floor. He hadn’t come clean about any of it.

So: further.

“I want to take you to dinner,” he said.

She looked at him. “Dinner.”

“A real dinner.” Patient. Letting the silence do the work the way he always did. “A table. A bottle of wine. You across from me where I can look at you. No spreadsheets.”

“Ray Vogler.” She sat back. “Are you asking me on a date?”

“I’m asking you on a date.”

“And my husband?”

“Tell him, don’t tell him — hell, have him come sit at the bar and watch us, I don’t care.” He spread his hands, palms up. “I want the dinner.”

“That’s the pitch.”

“That’s the pitch.”

“What’s under it?”

He didn’t look away. “Under it is that I’ve wanted to sit across a table from you for three years and you said no once and I’m asking again.”

She almost smiled. Caught it. But the corner of her mouth moved, and he saw it, and neither of them pretended he hadn’t.

“A week from Saturday,” he said. “The fifteenth.”

She didn’t need a calendar. The fifteenth — dead center of her next fertile window. He’d been counting her cycle since November; he’d told her so himself, in the suite, like it was something to be proud of. They both knew what the date was.

She took it anyway.

“I pick the restaurant,” she said.

“Done.”

“Bellini’s. James knows it — client dinners, he knows the bar, the layout. There’s a mirror behind the bottles that shows the whole dining room. It’s perfect.” Ray’s eyes sharpened. He’d asked for a dinner; she was already three moves past him. “He’ll come. I won’t invite him — I won’t have to. I’ll tell him where and when and he’ll show up on his own, because he can’t help it. He’ll sit at the bar and watch us in the glass.”

“And I’m supposed to act like he isn’t there.”

“You’re supposed to be on a date with me. A real one. The kind where you don’t look for anyone’s husband.” She smiled, slow. “We’ll pretend he’s not there. Maybe he confronts us. Maybe he goes to the bathroom and jerks off.” A shrug, sweet as anything. “We’ll see which.”

“I can do that.”

“And after dinner?” he asked.

She held his eyes. The room she’d built went further than a restaurant, and the further part she kept to herself. Let him wonder about it all week.

“After dinner, you do what I tell you.”

“Yes ma’am.”

The fact that she was building it — assembling her husband’s humiliation piece by piece in her own office, on her own time, at the desk where she’d written compliance reports and year-end reviews — was doing something to her she hadn’t fully expected. Her pulse had climbed during the pitch and hadn’t come back down. The heat between her legs had been there since the plug went in at seven that morning, but it had sharpened while she talked, while she laid out the parts — and it wasn’t only the design. It was him. Ray, after six, filling her guest chair, his plug seated deep inside her, the two of them planning a date in front of her husband like it was a procurement timeline. The wrongness of the pairing had its own current, and she was standing in it.

She stood up from the desk. Walked to the door and locked it. The click was loud on the empty floor. She closed the blinds.

“I’m wearing your plug,” she said. Matter-of-fact. The way she’d say *I’m wearing the navy skirt*. “The large one. Since seven this morning.”

His breathing changed. Deeper. The big chest expanding, his shirt pulling taut.

“Show me.”

She turned away from him. Faced the desk. Her hands went to the waistband of the pencil skirt and she worked it up, slowly, the navy wool gathering at her hips and climbing past the tops of her thighs. No stockings. No underwear. The skirt bunched at her waist and she was bare from the waist down in her own office.

She reached back with both hands and spread her cheeks for him.

Fluorescent light caught the silver base seated deep between them — his plug, bigger than anything she and James owned — and around it she was pink and swollen

and shining wet, her trimmed landing strip neat above a cunt that had been quietly ruining her underwear-free afternoon. The smell hit the small office when she opened herself: sharp musk under clean skin, unmistakable. She heard him inhale — low in his chest, involuntary, a large man losing a small fight with his own discipline.

“Somebody liked my plug,” she said over her shoulder, warm, almost sweet. “You’ve been thinking about it all day. Haven’t you.”

His hands were on her — both palms covering her ass, engulfing, rough fingers replacing hers, spreading her wider — and his thumb pressed the base of the plug and rocked it. The plug shifted inside her with a thick, intimate *tock* of pressure, and wetness ran down onto his knuckles. She braced against the desk and her head dropped and she moaned into her forearm, louder than she meant to, and bit down on her own skin.

“Not today,” she said. Her voice steady, her legs not. “You don’t finish today.”

“Jenna.”

“Not until the fifteenth. I want nine days in you. Everything you’ve got — I want all of it that night.” She didn’t say where. He didn’t ask. She pushed back against his hands and felt his cock through his trousers, heavy and hard against her ass, the ridge of him thick between her cheeks alongside the plug. “Save it.”

He laughed. Low and genuine and surprised, and his hips pressed forward and she felt the full length of him trapped against her through fabric and the wanting pooled low behind her navel and squeezed.

“That’s a lot to ask, Blondie.”

His hand left her hip. She heard his belt, the buckle, the zip. Then he was bare against her.

She looked back once because she wanted to see — his cock thick and dark in the office light, the heavy vein along the underside, the head flared wider than the shaft already wet at the slit, the ugly beautiful size of him framed by open trousers and a gut that made the whole thing look obscene against her narrow waist. He stroked once along her cunt, splitting her folds, and her wet painted him shiny to the middle of the shaft with a soft clinging sound.

“Fuck, Ray—”

He pushed into her in one stroke.

The head forced her open around the plug still buried in her ass — two thick pressures at once, front and back, so full she whimpered into his palm when he clapped his hand over her mouth. Her fingers scrabbled at the desk edge. He gave her the rest in short shoving inches, each one making a wet *schlick* as her pussy took him, until his gut pressed her cheeks and she could feel the plug’s base mashed between them and his cock throbbing against it through the thin wall inside her.

“Saturday,” she managed against his palm, laughing breathlessly at herself for still talking logistics while she was getting fucked. “Everything. I want to feel you for — *ah* — I want a week of you leaking out of me.”

“You’re going to.” His mouth on the back of her neck. Breath hot. The office smelled like her now — cunt and wool and the animal heat rolling off him. He fucked her in short deep strokes that slapped softly against her ass — *pat, pat, pat* — knocking the pen cup sideways, the coffee mug sliding. “I’m going to fill this pussy until you taste me in your throat.”

“Don’t finish. Not today.” She pushed back onto him anyway, greedy, the plug making every thrust feel wider. “Save it for me. Be good.”

He drove deep and held. She felt him throb — fat, insistent pulses against the plug — and his breathing went ragged, and then discipline seized him: the pause, the hiss through his teeth, the slow withdrawal. Her cunt clung and released him with a wet suck, and she gasped, empty of cock and still full of plug, clenching on silver hard enough to make her knees dip.

He stepped back. His cock stood out of his open fly shining with her, dark to the root, the wide head twitching in the air and tapping his shirt once where it reached. The smell of what they’d done hung between them. She looked at it — at him denied, held to her ask — and the rush that went through her was warm and fond and predatory.

“A favor to myself,” he said, stuffing that wet cock back into his trousers with both hands, wincing. “I’ll be better on the fifteenth.”

His handprint was on her ass. She could feel the heat of it — the span of his palm and four thick fingers pressed into her skin, pink now, purple by morning. She pulled her skirt down. Smoothed the wool. Picked up the pen cup and set it right and looked at him.

“Saturday the fifteenth,” she said. “Seven o’clock. Don’t be late.”

He stood. The guest chair expanded with relief. His hand was steady and his eyes were not.

“Blondie.”

“Hmm?”

“Whatever you’re building around this dinner. Whatever you’re going to do to him.” He put his hand on the door. “I’m in.”

She held his eyes and gave him one nod. He opened the door and left and his footsteps faded down the empty corridor and she leaned against the desk where he’d had her and pressed her thighs together and let the aftershock roll through. The plug shifted when she moved and the absence of him inside her was a specific, physical thing — a change in pressure she could feel in her pulse.

Her phone buzzed. James. *Hey. Picking up Thai on the way home. Green curry or pad see ew?*

She typed back: *Green curry. Extra spicy. Love you.*

She meant it. Both parts.

Tuesday evening. She made pasta — the hand-rolled kind, the two-hour version with the flour on the counter and the dough resting under a towel and the kitchen

smelling like garlic and good olive oil. James sat at the island with a beer and watched her work — just Tuesday, just her back to him, just the cold bottle in his hand.

She was in cutoff sweatpants slung low on her hips and a cropped long-sleeve, bare midriff, bare feet on the cold tile. Her hair was up in a clip, loose pieces falling around her jaw, and when she reached for the pepper grinder the crop rose and he could see the line of her waist tapering above the low waistband and the shadow of the dimples at the small of her back and his mouth went dry. She was the woman from the bar in Austin, reaching for something in his kitchen, and she always would be.

The cutoffs had ridden up. He could see the lower curve of one cheek tipping out, flour dusted along the side of her hip, the soft crease where thigh began. She stayed facing the pasta machine one extra crank longer than she needed.

The photo was on his phone. He'd opened it that morning before his run — opened it most mornings, and done more than look. Her wrists bound behind her with Ray's belt, the prints raw and red. Her thighs spread on a couch that wasn't theirs. Ray's cock lying spent beneath her, and his cum sliding out of her in a slow white rope — over skin stretched pink, over the silver base of the plug, the big one, the one that wasn't theirs — pooling on him. No face. She'd framed it down to evidence on purpose, and captioned it in their voice — *Ooops* — the tongue-out, eyes-crossed voice, the voice that belonged to their marriage, sent from another man's living room at one in the morning. And now she was three feet away, humming at the pasta machine, flour on her hip, and the woman in the photo and the woman in the cutoffs were the same woman, and the flour and what the photo showed were the same color, on the same skin.

The looking hurt in a way that was half anger and half something he could only feel below the belt. He took a pull of his beer and said nothing.

"I have something to tell you," she said, working the dough through the machine. Her back was to him. The crank turned and the sheet came out thin and perfect, and her bare shoulders moved under the cropped fabric, and the cutoffs sat below her hip bones and her ass pulled the cotton tight and he was looking at her and thinking about Ray's hands on her and hating himself and not looking away.

"Ray asked me to dinner."

The sentence landed. He kept his face still. "Dinner."

"A real dinner. A restaurant. This Saturday." She turned the crank and the pasta came through, long and even. "He asked after Dayton and I said no. I'm done saying no. So." She turned around. Flour on her hip. The same spot, the same dusting, the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen in his life making him food while she told him she was going to dinner with the man who'd been inside her. "I'm going."

"Okay."

"It's the last of his asks for a while," she said. The warm voice. The girl-next-door voice. The one she'd been deploying since high school and knew exactly how to aim. "He gets his dinner. He gets to sit across a table from me and feel like he's earned

something, and then I come home to you. I'm done for a while after this, James. I've been hard on you and I know it."

She came around the counter and stood in front of him. Her hands were dusted with flour and she put them on his thighs and her face was level with his on the stool.

"I never know what's too much, though. You know that? There's no map for this, baby — I'm making it up as I go. The photo. The thing about my mouth. All of it." Her thumbs moved on his thighs, small circles. "But then I watch you. In the kitchen the other morning — I told you I didn't take anything, and you got hard in your running tights. At eight in the morning. Every rule I break, every time I just — take charge, decide something —" the smile, a little sheepish, like confessing to a speeding ticket, "—you answer. Your body answers. So I keep going. I think you need me to keep going." She leaned in and kissed his forehead. "This is for you, James. All of it. I need you to know that."

She smelled like garlic and clean hair, and her dark eyes held him, and the warmth in them was real. She was telling the truth and lying with the same mouth, and the cruelest part was which parts were which: *I never know what's too much* was true, and *your body answers* was true — he could feel it answering now, under her flour-dusted hands — and the lie was in *for you*, the two words that turned it into a gift, the frame around all of it.

"This Saturday," she said. "I go to dinner with Ray. I let him buy me a nice bottle of wine and tell me I'm beautiful and feel like a man who matters. And then I come home to you."

"Where."

"Bellini's."

His stomach turned. He knew Bellini's. He'd taken clients there. The mirror behind the bottles that showed the whole room if you knew where to sit — he'd sat on that stool waiting for a partner who was running late.

"I'll text you from the restaurant," she said. "The way we texted from the conference that started this all, right?" The conference texts — the thread he knew was forged, Ray writing as her husband, the thread that had started all of this — and she was invoking those messages as tenderness. He held his face still and the knife went in sideways. "And then I come home. To you. The way I came home from the airport."

"You remember the airport?" Her voice went lower, fond, the crank turning slow. "You at the gate. The way you looked at me coming through — like you were going to eat me alive right there in arrivals. And then home, and the counter." She glanced up at him. "That was the best sex of our lives, James. I mean that. Whatever got us there — it got us there."

The arrivals gate. Her bag hitting the floor. Walking into him, searching his face for the look from the recording. He'd given her the best version of it he had, and the terrible thing was that the want hadn't been manufactured. She was offering that homecoming

now — the charged, consuming version of herself, aimed at him — and telling him it was the best sex of their lives with flour on her hands.

“I never thanked you for it,” she said. “For any of it. For being the kind of man who could ask for something like that. Most husbands would rather die than say it out loud. You said it.” The crank turned. “You opened that door, James. And you’ve held it open for me ever since. I know what that takes.”

“You’re welcome,” he said. The words came out steady. He was getting so good at this.

“And Ray.” She laughed once, shaking her head, flour white on her wrist. “He’s crude. He’s a pig. He’s — god, he’s *Ray*. And he has a way of satisfying me that I don’t even—” she stopped, smiled down at the dough, “—well. You’ve noticed. You always notice.”

“So let him have his dinner. Two hours of feeling like a man. And then I come home and show you what it does to me — the way I did after the airport. The way only you get.”

“Saturday night is yours, James.”

He wanted to believe her. He wanted it more than he’d wanted anything she’d offered in months — the simplicity of it, the wife coming home to the husband, the game mostly put down for one night. She was standing between his knees with flour on her hands and her midriff bare and the cutoffs low enough that the waistband of her underwear showed — thin cotton, the pale blue ones, the ones from before any of this — and she was his wife and she was going to dinner with Ray Vogler and she was offering him the homecoming.

“Okay,” he said.

She kissed him. Flour-dusted fingers on his jaw, her mouth warm and tasting like the sauce she’d been testing. He kissed her back and his hands found her bare waist and the skin was warm and smooth and his thumbs rested on the bones of her hips and for a few seconds the five readings went quiet and there was just her. Jenna. The woman from Austin.

She pulled back. Tucked her hair behind both ears — the tell, the one that meant she was pleased with herself. “Now help me with the sauce.”

“I’m supervising.”

“You’re useless is what you are.” She flicked flour at him.

They made dinner. They drank wine. They sat at the small table and she talked about Braddock’s review and he told her about an intern Tom Brewer had blamed for sending the wrong deck — the same intern who’d left six weeks ago. She laughed for real, head tipped back, and he wanted to hold this version of the evening in both hands and never let Saturday arrive.

After dinner, in the kitchen doing dishes, his mind went to work.

Bellini’s. The last stool in the far corner. The mirror. He knew the layout — the wine-bottle divider between the bar and the raised dining area, the gaps between the

bottles you could see through, the way the bar was dark and the dining room was warm and bright and from a dark room you could see clearly into a bright one. He'd sat at that bar before. He knew how the room worked.

She hadn't invited him. She didn't have to.

He told himself he needed to see. The necklace she hadn't told him about. The underwear that contradicted her story. The "Diane" that turned out to be Ray's apartment. Every version she'd given him for months had been a curated performance — the telling, the texting, the voice memo, the photograph — and the screen was always between him and the truth. If he sat at that bar he'd see the unperformed version. What she was with Ray when she believed nobody else was watching. Whether the warmth was real or whether it was something she put on for him the way she put on the smile.

That was the reason he'd take to the stool. The reason that wore a tie.

The other reason — the one that had been half-hard since she said the word *Bellini's* — was that he wanted to watch his wife on a date with another man.

He dried the last plate and put it in the cabinet. She was leaning against the counter behind him, arms crossed, watching him with the warm steady gaze.

"Come to bed," she said, and he went.

Ray didn't touch himself for nine days.

He'd been jerking off to Jenna Whitfield roughly once a day for the better part of the last few months — to the conference, to her throat, to the sound she'd made when he pushed into her ass in Dayton, to the helpless sound he'd made saying her real name and the way she'd gone still under him when she heard it. The not-touching was labor. He woke hard every morning, the sheets damp, and kept his hand where it was.

He'd started the pills on Monday of the date week. Zinc, lecithin, an amino acid combination the forums swore by — ordered from three different sites, plain packaging, thrown away immediately. The directions said take with food. He took them with coffee. The forums said coffee helped, which was probably nonsense, and the fact that he'd looked it up twice told him enough about his own condition.

The condition was that she'd asked. *Everything you've got — I want all of it that night.* Said bent over her own desk, his plug in her, looking back at him like the ask was nothing. And the whole business was simple: you found out what they wanted and you delivered it in a volume that made the competition look sick. If Jenna Whitfield wanted a load, Jenna Whitfield was going to get a load. Nine days of it, the kind she'd feel for a week after, the kind that didn't fit in a woman. She tied her husband's off in a knot and set it on the nightstand. Ray's was going to need a bucket.

He sat through an Ashford progress call on Wednesday with his cock heavy against his thigh while her voice ran through disbursement timelines on the other end, and the distance between her professional clarity and the wet choking sounds she'd made on his kitchen floor two and a half weeks ago was enough to make him grip the armrest and hold.

The pressure built day over day. By Thursday the ache was physical, constant — a heaviness that sat with him at the desk and in the car and in the shower where he stood under the hot water and did not reach down. Friday at 6:40 AM he stood in the shower with his cock heavy and dark and leaking a thin clear string onto the tile without permission, and he counted to sixty with his fists braced on the fiberglass wall and did not wrap a hand around it. Somewhere in another zip code she was probably putting her hair up for work. He said her name once, quietly, like an idiot, and shut the water off cold.

That afternoon a bead of pre-cum appeared on its own while he sat at the table thinking about her mouth, and he wiped it off and went back to the remediation email he'd been failing to read for forty minutes.

Nine days banked. He'd had her ass first, in Dayton, before the husband ever got near it — that was his, and it stayed his, whatever happened. The rest he didn't plan. She was building something for Saturday; he could feel the shape of it under everything she'd said in her office, and not knowing the shape was half the fun.

Which didn't stop him from guessing. Her under the table halfway through the second bottle — the cloth over her shoulders, his zip down, her mouth on him slow and deliberate while the server asked about dessert and he discussed the tiramisu with his hand in her hair under the linen. He gave that one a full cigarette's worth of attention. Or the parking lot after: her in the back seat of the Buick, windows steamed, the car rocking on its springs hard enough to set off alarms, and the husband finally standing up out of the dark and coming to the glass to watch — close enough to fog it — while Ray kept her face turned to the window so the man could see her eyes.

Who knows what would happen. That was the thing about her now — the room she'd build would beat anything he could sketch at a card table with a whiskey in him. His job was to show up loaded and be more than whatever she'd drawn. He'd always been better in the room than on paper.

The teddy was still in the second drawer. He opened it Saturday morning — a glance, not a ritual — and the ghost of her was fainter than last time, and the wanting underneath it was louder.

He showered. Shaved carefully — the jaw, the throat, the loose skin where the razor caught. Put on the best thing he owned: a dark sport coat that wouldn't close over his gut, a charcoal shirt fresh from the dry cleaner that would be damp at the collar by dessert, dark trousers. He looked at himself in the bathroom mirror — the pockmarks, the heavy jowls, the pink scalp under thinning grey hair, the gut resting over a belt buckle that had lived in a different hole ten years ago — and he did not pretend to himself that he looked good. He looked like what he was: a large man in a jacket that didn't fit him. But the woman he was taking to dinner wasn't any woman. It was Jenna Whitfield. He'd spent three years watching better men fail at her — fit men, tall men, men with titles — and she'd said no to *him* on company letterhead. And that woman had sucked his cock on her knees in this apartment's kitchen, had called him *papi*, had asked

him to finish inside her, and she'd done it looking the way she looked. The distance between her and him was the charge. It had always been the charge.

He got in the Buick. The steering wheel was cold under his hands as he drove.

She'd been in the bathroom for forty minutes. James sat on the edge of their bed with a beer going warm in his hand, listening to the hair dryer, the water, his wife getting ready to have dinner with another man, and read the same paragraph four times.

Then the bathroom door opened and she came out in the dress, and he put the beer down.

Black. Long sleeves. A high neck that covered her to the collarbone and hid nothing — the dress so tight over her tits that the neck was a lie, the full weight of them shifting free under the fabric when she walked, her nipples standing out hard against the black when it pulled. No bra. He could tell from across the room. She was going to dinner with Ray Vogler in a dress that made her tits the first thing every man in that restaurant would look at, and his cock was hard before she reached the mirror.

The slit ran up her left thigh, and when she walked it opened — a sheer black stocking, a band of bare skin above it, the small metallic wink of a clip — and closed again. The heels tipped her hips forward and her ass out, and the dress pulled so tight across it that he could see the cleft of her through the fabric, the whole round weight of it shifting with every step. There was something deliberate in her walk, a care under the sway he couldn't place. His wife. Dressed for another man. He was fully, achingly hard.

She leaned into the dresser mirror to put in her earrings — small gold drops — and the dress went tight across her ass and the slit slid open to the stocking top. Her eyes found his in the mirror and held them — dark, amused, knowing — while she took her time with the backing. She turned and checked the back view over her shoulder and liked what she saw. Her eyes were done dark. Her mouth was dark red and precise, and he had the thought he always had with that color — what it would look like smeared. What it would look like wrapped around another man's cock.

"How do I look?"

"You know how you look."

"I want to hear it anyway."

"Like the only thing anyone in that restaurant is going to look at all night."

She smiled at him in the mirror — the real one, the crooked one — and took a thin gold choker from the dresser and fastened it at her throat. He watched her fingers work the clasp and thought about the other gold. The gold word. The one he'd found in her clutch with Ray's cum dried on the *B*, and never seen since, and never once asked about. Neither of them had ever said a word about it.

"Reservation's at seven," she said. Like he might need it. Like he'd asked. He hadn't asked.

"It's just dinner," she said, and picked up her clutch. "He eats. I eat. He pays. I come home."

“That’s the whole menu.”

“That’s the whole menu.” She crossed to him — perfume, skin still warm from the shower, and under it, faint, the smell he knew best: her own, the one that meant she was already wet under the dress. She was going to dinner wet, and she’d done it on purpose.

“You’re going to think about it all night, aren’t you.” Her hand found him through his jeans — one slow stroke, and his hips jerked — and she smiled at what she found.

“God. You already are.”

“Jenna.”

“What are you going to think about?” Lazy, possessive, her hand still moving. “Me across a table from him? This dress?” Her mouth came near his ear. “Maybe I’ll let him kiss me. Right at the table, where everybody can see. Would you like that, baby?” He didn’t answer. His cock did, against her palm. “Maybe I’ll let him put his hand up my dress. In the middle of the restaurant. Maybe I’ll let him—” she smiled against his cheek, “—well. I’ll tell you when I get home. Every detail. The way you like. And then I’ll take care of you. That’s the deal.”

She squeezed him once through the denim and let go, and he had to lock his knees.

“Don’t touch yourself while I’m gone,” she said. “I want you exactly like this when I get back. That’s mine tonight.”

She kissed him — careful of the lipstick, a dry press at the corner of his mouth, close enough that he felt the heat of her and got none of it. “I’ll text you.”

“I know.”

The word was right there — *don’t* — sitting on his tongue like a pill. He washed it down with warm beer. “Have fun,” he said.

She stopped at the bedroom door and looked back at him — the dress, the choker, the dark mouth, all of her — and her face opened for a second, just his wife looking at him, the way she looked at him on Sunday mornings. Then she was smiling. “I’ll be worth the wait,” she said.

He listened to her heels down the stairs, the door, the car. He gave it fifteen minutes, standing in the kitchen, telling himself he was going to drive by — just drive by, just to see the lot — and knowing it for the lie it was. He knew the bar. He knew the mirror. He knew the last stool in the dark corner, where the counter met the wall.

He took his jacket off the hook and locked the door behind him.

Bellini’s had been on the corner of State and Chestnut for a decade — an Italian place that survived by doing two things well: the short rib ragu and the wine list. One long room. The front third was the bar: dark wood counter scarred from years of elbows, stools in cracked burgundy leather, and a large old mirror stretching the full length of the wall behind the bottles, so anyone sitting at the bar saw the room behind them in the glass. Behind the bar, a divider of open wine cubbies — bottles racked sideways, labels out, gaps between them wide enough to see through — separated the front from a raised dining area two steps up at the back. The dining room was warmer

and brighter: small tables, candles, white tablecloths. Along the back wall, a long padded bench seat where couples sat side by side facing out into the room.

Jenna and Ray were already seated when James walked in.

He'd timed it — fifteen minutes after the reservation, a gap wide enough that they'd be settled, the wine ordered, the room already rearranged by her presence before he came through the door. The cold March air followed him inside. He wore a dark sweater under a jacket and he moved through the bar without looking toward the dining room, went straight to the last stool at the far end, where the counter met the wall and a single brass fixture cast more shadow than light. He sat with his back to the dining area. Ordered a bourbon, neat. Let the glass sit.

The man on the stool beside him — bald, mid-forties, a loosened tie and rolled cuffs that said sales or marketing and a Friday that had bled into Saturday — had been talking to the bartender before James sat down and didn't stop. "Black dress," the man said. "Back bench. Tell me you see her."

James looked at the mirror.

He'd worked this out years ago, waiting for a partner who was running late. The bar was dark. The dining room was bright. From the bright room you couldn't see into the dark one as well — not faces, not features, nothing but the vague shapes of bottles and a dim brass glow. From a dark room the bright one lay open. His back was to them. A stranger in the dining room would have to lean forward, squint through the wine gaps at a row of unlit stools, and decide to look — and nobody did that over dinner. He was invisible to anyone who wasn't looking for him, and nobody was looking for him.

She was on the bench against the back wall, facing the front of the room, and the man at the bar was right about her — every man at the bar was right about her. The room had already turned. A man at the next table had stopped listening to his own date. A woman two tables back kept glancing over.

The dress he'd watched her climb into an hour ago. He'd stood in their bedroom getting hard while she put it on; now a room full of strangers was getting the show. The slit climbed her left thigh and opened on the sheer stocking when she crossed her legs, candlelight catching the sheen. Her arms were slim in the tight sleeves, her tits high and full under the black fabric, the weight of them readable from thirty feet, her ass full and round and taking more than its share of the little bench. Her mascara was heavier than she ever wore it for him. Her mouth was dark red and precise. She looked expensive — the thought came unbidden and shamed him — rented by the evening, like something a man with more money than anyone in this room would have on his arm. She'd dressed for the man beside her. James had watched her do it. And every stranger in the room had felt it happen.

His hand tightened on the bourbon glass. His wife. Thirty feet away, looking like a supermodel, seated next to Ray Vogler, and his cock stirred against his thigh and his stomach turned.

She shifted on the bench and the dress gave up the truth of her. The black fabric pulled taut across her ass — and God, that ass, the full high round of it seated on the leather, cheeks thick enough that the dress had to split its attention between them, the deep soft cleft eaten by expensive fabric and still obvious. A server walked past her shoulder and lost the thread of whatever he'd been carrying. James's mouth went dry. That was the ass he'd gripped in their shower that morning, the one she tucked into his lap on Sundays, the one that had made a man in Dallas say something stupid to a conference table — and now it was parked beside that same man who had no business touching it and knew it and didn't care, and James wanted to put his face against it and wanted to drag her out by the wrist and could not tell which want was louder.

"Everybody sees her," the bartender said. A woman, mid-thirties, sleeve tattoo running from wrist to shoulder, already pouring for a server. "Reservation's under Ray Vogler. Party of two."

"And then that shows up." The bald man jabbed his bottle at Ray's reflection. "I mean — look at her. Now look at him. That's not a date. That's a, whaddyacallit. Hostage thing."

"Could be money," the bartender said.

"Yeah, could be money. Could be anything." He drank. "But that ass, man. In that dress. She walked in right past me and I about dropped my beer, I'm not kidding. Every guy in here watched her sit down and then looked at his own wife and felt bad about it. And she sits down next to Shrek."

"She's married," the bartender said. She didn't look up from the glass she was drying.

"How do you know that?"

"Ring. Left hand. You could see it from space." She set the glass on the rack. "He's got nothing on his."

"Oh, so she's stepping out." The bald man sat back, pleased, like a crossword had come out. "Okay. Okay, that I get. Some poor bastard's at home right now with the game on thinking she's at book club." He laughed into his beer. "Book club."

James's thumb was on his own ring. He took it off the glass.

The bald man turned on his stool. "Hey. Buddy. You seeing this?" He waited until James looked at the mirror — at his wife, at the man beside her. "Back bench. Black dress. What's your read. Money?"

James's bourbon was at his lips. He finished it. "I don't have a read."

"He doesn't have a read." The bald man turned back to the bartender. "Everybody's got a read. That's what a bar's for."

James said nothing. His bourbon was half gone and he didn't remember drinking it.

"What gets me, though," the bald man went on, leaning forward on his elbows, "is she's — look at her. She's comfortable. She's not, like, putting up with him. She's sitting there like she wants to be sitting there. And that doesn't — I don't get that."

“The money ones you can tell,” the bartender said. She watched the room with one eye while she poured. “She’s on her phone all night. Watching the door. Laughing late.”

“This isn’t that,” the bald man said.

“No.” The bartender looked at the bench a moment longer. “She’s touched his arm twice. She’s listening to him.”

“So what is it, then? He’s funny? He’s a sweetheart?”

The bartender shrugged. “Or he’s hung like a horse.”

The bald man barked a laugh loud enough that a woman down the bar looked over. “That’s it. That’s gotta be it. Look at him — nothing on that guy is working. So *something’s* working.” He pointed his bottle at the mirror, delighted with himself.

“Luckiest fat man in Columbus. Swinging a baseball bat under that table.”

“Some women,” the bartender said, and moved down the bar.

James looked at the bourbon. They were guessing, and they had it exactly right. He’d seen it on a laptop screen in November and on his own couch in their living room. He’d watched his wife wrap two hands around it and run out of hands. He’d watched his own brand of condom stop halfway down it like a sock on the wrong foot. The two strangers were laughing about it on a hunch, and the only man at the bar who knew for sure was the one who’d measured himself against it and lost. He couldn’t say a word. He sat there with what he knew and his thumb back on his ring.

Ray was on her left. A dark sport coat that would not close over him. Charcoal shirt, collar open, grey hair combed and already damp at the temples. He was vast beside her in a way that made the bench look temporary — his shoulders wider than the backrest, his gut pressed against the table edge, thick fingers wrapped around a wine glass that disappeared in his grip. He’d made an effort. The effort was visible, and it had not helped. He sat wide, permanent, taking the space allotted to two people and finding it about right. Next to Jenna — next to anyone — the mismatch was so stark it read as a statement, and every stranger in the room was building a theory about what the statement said.

Jenna tipped her head back and laughed. The real one — the full-throated one that showed her delicate neck and made her shoulders shake. James felt it land. That laugh belonged in his kitchen, and she was aiming it at someone else. Ray had said something — James couldn’t hear what through the bar noise — and she’d lit up for it, her hand going to Ray’s forearm on the bench, resting there, casual, easy, familiar, as if touching this man’s arm was something she’d stopped thinking about.

Ray’s arm went up along the back of the bench and came down around her shoulders, heavy, and she settled into it without looking. She turned her face and kissed him — quick, at the corner of his mouth, the kind of kiss you give somebody you’re going to kiss again in ten minutes — and went back to her wine. Ten minutes later she did. Then again when the bread came, a small one, her fingers on his jaw, laughing against him at something he said.

“Hostage thing,” the bartender said, passing.

“Yeah, all right,” the bald man said. “Shut up.”

She found his shape within a minute.

Not his face — the dining room was bright and the bar was dark, and she couldn't have made out features at that distance through the wine gaps any more than a stranger could. But she wasn't a stranger. She'd spent a decade learning his silhouettes, and she knew which stool he'd choose the way she knew which mug he reached for first, which side of the bed he slept on, how he stood at the kitchen counter when something was eating him. The last stool. The dim corner. And there he was — a still shape against the brass fixture and the backlit bottles, the posture she could have picked out of a crowd of a thousand: shoulders set, head slightly forward, trying not to be seen. Anyone not looking for him would never have found him. James, who assumed nobody was looking, was right about every person in the building except her.

One glance through the wine bottles. A silhouette confirmed. She turned back to Ray and the menu and the bright warm room and did not look again through dinner.

What moved through her was not the program. Not the cold curiosity she carried on weekdays, watching James across their kitchen for signs of a floor. This was the fantasy she'd built in the dark of their bedroom months ago — a Saturday, a restaurant, Ray across the tablecloth, strangers filling in the wrong story while her husband sat in the right one — and it was alive now, breathing, and the thing that lit in her was want. Not want for Ray alone and not want for James alone but want for this — the full room, the three of them in their positions, the public dinner with the wrong man and the right man watching from the dark, and the gorgeous, terrible thrill of being at the center of all of it.

She was wet. She'd been wet since she'd walked in — since the plug shifted with every step and the set she wore beneath the dress meant she could feel the bench leather through sheer stockings.

She picked up her wine and drank and her hand was steady and her thighs were not.

“You're staring,” she told Ray.

His eyes had been on her since he sat down. Neither performing, nor calculating — just looking at her when no one was keeping score. Three years across conference tables from this face and he still had not gotten used to it.

“You look better tonight than any night I've had you.” Low. Pleased. Flat, like a fact — the true ones didn't need selling. “And I've had you in a hotel suite, Blondie. In my bed. On your husband's couch. You've never looked like this.” He shook his head slowly, a man being shown a trick he couldn't work out. “It's because you dressed for me. I can tell the difference.”

“Don't let it go to your head,” she said, smiling into her wine — and over the rim her dark eyes caught the candle, a spark of pure mischief in them, and she watched his eyes drop to her mouth. “I dress up for dates.”

A server materialized beside the table. Ray ordered without looking at the menu — the short rib for both of them, a second bottle of the Sangiovese, sparkling water. He

ordered the way he did everything: directly, with no interest in whether she'd been consulted. The server looked at Jenna. Jenna looked at Ray.

She didn't like being spoken for. She never had. She'd spent three years correcting this particular man — the complaint, the boundaries, the surname instead of the name.

And still. It wasn't a gesture when Ray did it. It was the voice — the flat certainty of a man who had decided, who had never once asked a room's permission — and something in her answered it before her pride could get a vote. The same thing that had emptied her head in a glass conference room when he'd dropped a pen and told her to get it. The same thing that had sat her back down in his apartment when she'd arrived with a speech and her keys in her hand. Her body heard his authority the way it heard a hand on the back of her neck: it went quiet, and it warmed.

And tonight it had an audience. James in the dark, thirty feet away, reading the exchange — watching another man order his wife's dinner, watching her let it stand. She kept her eyes on Ray, and let it build.

"You ordered me the short rib," she said.

"I ordered you the short rib."

"I might have wanted the fish."

"You don't want the fish."

"Your jacket doesn't close," she said.

"It closes."

"It has never closed. It's a structural issue, Ray."

"The jacket fits fine." He spread his hands, palms up — a salesman's gesture, expansive, unapologetic. "The man is oversized."

She laughed, and his face did the pleased thing, and she picked up her wine, and the server left, and across the dark bar her husband had just watched another man order dinner for his wife without asking.

The food arrived. James watched the plates go down in the glass behind the bottles — white porcelain, wine refilled, candles burning low — and the intimacy of the meal hit him harder than anything she'd done on her knees.

She fed Ray from her own fork. The tines went to his mouth, his lips closed around them, and she watched his face while he chewed and the smile she wore was the one she gave when something pleased her genuinely, not the polished version she carried to client dinners. She wiped sauce from the corner of his mouth with her thumb. He caught her wrist and kissed the thumb and she laughed — short, surprised — and the sound didn't carry across the bar but the shape of it was enough. Two people sharing food at a table. The fork going back and forth. The easy routine of a couple who'd done this before and expected to do it again. It was worse than the blowjob or the video or the sound she made in the dark bedroom when she told him about Dayton, because those required a framework and a kink to metabolize, and this was just dinner. A woman and a man. Having a meal, seemingly in love.

“She just fed him off her fork,” the bald man said. “Put the fork in his mouth and watched him eat it. I’ve been married fourteen years and my wife doesn’t look at me like that over takeout.”

“That’s how it goes,” the bartender said. “First they stop looking at you like that.” She moved down the bar. “Then they start looking at somebody else like that.”

James’s phone lit on the bar. *Jenna* 🍷.

The short rib is ridiculous — you’d love it. Home later. xx

He read it while watching her tear bread and hand half to Ray, and the warm lie on the screen and the truth in the glass existed simultaneously and his cock was hard.

The thing Ray wanted was exactly this.

Not the plug, nor whatever other plans she might have — this. A table. A tablecloth. Wine he’d chosen and bread she was tearing with her fingers and the full weight of a Saturday evening in a room full of people who saw them together and made of it what they made of it. The dinner she’d refused him in a conference-room doorway the week after Dayton, when the asking had cost him something and she’d said no with warmth that had stayed with him longer than a no should.

He did not look for James. She’d told him not to, and he’d listened and nodded and not asked which stool — her voice crisp and precise as if briefing a client — because knowing would make him want to turn, and turning would end the thing he was actually here for.

Because the instruction was the excuse. The reason was his. He didn’t want to find the husband in the dark. Finding him would make the evening hers again — the program, the price, the design — and not finding him let Ray pretend, for the length of a dinner, that it was a date. That she was across from him because she wanted to be. That the laugh and the candle and the wine were for him.

The question sat where it always sat, and he let it sit: with no husband in the dark to aim it at, would any of this be his? He was afraid he knew. The man at the bar wasn’t the audience tonight — he was the reason. The warmth she brought to this table had been built for a stool in a dark corner, and if the stool were empty, Ray was a fat man eating short rib across from a woman who had once filed against him.

Ray tore bread and drank wine and listened to Jenna talk about a variance in a Phase III filing, and the ordinary sound of her voice across a tablecloth was the thing he’d wanted longer than he’d wanted any of the rest of it, and he did not examine it further.

He set down his wine glass, and under the tablecloth his right hand found her knee.

She was talking — something about a colleague’s misread of a secondary endpoint — and her voice didn’t change, but her thigh tensed under his palm, one quick involuntary clench. He moved higher. Past the hem of the dress. His fingertips found the top of a stocking — sheer, tight — then a small metal clip snug against her thigh, then

the strap above. Stocking, clip, strap. Under a restaurant dress. With her husband somewhere in the dark.

Her hand found his wrist under the cloth. “Ray.” A whisper, her eyes straight ahead, her smile still on for the room. “There are people—”

“Open your legs.” Quiet. Conversational. A man commenting on the wine.

She held his wrist. Her pulse was in her throat. The server was six feet away with the second bottle. Her husband was in the dark with his bourbon. The man beside her was waiting, patient, his hand warm on her stocking. “You’re out of your mind.”

“Open them, Blondie.”

She let go of his wrist. Under the tablecloth, where no one could see, her knees parted — an inch, then another.

“Good girl.” So quiet she felt it more than heard it, and the words did what they always did — the noise went out of her head like a room emptying.

His fingers moved past the clip onto bare skin, and he stopped — half a second, surprise getting past the mask before he smoothed it — because there was nothing over her. Nothing. Her pussy bare against his palm, warm, slick, the folds already swollen, and when he pressed flat and parted her, his middle finger sank into heat that clenched around him in welcome. She was soaked — running onto his hand, wetter than any woman he’d ever touched — and deeper, his knuckles bumped the plug’s base, seated snug between her cheeks. She heard him inhale through his nose, slow, like a man nosing a glass of something expensive.

She shifted — a small lift of her hips that fed him deeper — and the plug shoved forward inside her ass as his fingers curled against the front wall of her pussy. Her clit throbbed against the heel of his hand. Somewhere under the tablecloth there was a faint wet sound, too small for anyone but them, and the risk of it made her wetter. For a second she smelled herself rising, sharp and shameless, and the exhibition of it — James in the dark, a server six feet away — made another warm rush spill over Ray’s fingers.

In the glass behind the bottles, James saw the half-second. The face-change. Then Ray’s right forearm began working in a steady rhythm under the cloth. James didn’t know what Ray had found. He knew what the surprise on his face meant — something he hadn’t expected, something that pleased him — and the not-knowing was worse than knowing. His grip tightened on the glass. His cock pressed against his thigh. He didn’t move.

“Tell me you see this.” The bald man leaned forward, elbows on the bar. “His right arm. It’s under the cloth. It’s just — under there.” He looked at the bartender, then back at the mirror, like it might have stopped while he wasn’t watching. It hadn’t. “And look at her. Nothing. Her face says she’s deciding between the tiramisu and the panna cotta, and she’s holding onto the edge of that table like it’s a roller coaster.” He drank. “That’s a woman getting fingered under the table in a packed restaurant and not letting one soul in that room know it. Am I crazy? You see this, right?”

“I see it,” the bartender said.

“Jesus,” the bald man said, to nobody, and drank.

At the table, Jenna leaned close, her lips almost touching his ear, her voice a breath and nothing more.

“I put your plug in at my house. One foot on the tub, in my bathroom, thinking about your hand right where it is.” She let him feel her smile against his skin. “I’ve been wet for you since before my husband finished his beer. Fuck, Ray. The things you do to me. Nobody else has ever —” her voice went shaky as his fingers curled — “nobody.”

She pressed down onto his hand, slow, hidden under the linen.

“This is yours,” she whispered. “You know that? What you’re touching. My tight wet pussy, my fat ass — yours. My mouth too — that’s yours, you know that. He has to ask you for it now.” Her smile widened against his ear. “Everything you want. It all belongs to you.”

His hand tightened on her thigh. Then his fingers went back to work — thick, patient, wet enough that even under linen there was a faint soft sound, *tick-tick*, only for them.

She held still. Breathed through her mouth. Every crook of his fingers shoved the plug in tiny greedy nudges. The couple at the next table discussed the Dolomites. Jenna’s left hand gripped the edge of the table.

“Don’t you dare stop,” she whispered. “You’re going to make me cum at this table. In front of everyone. And I’m going to hold still for it — fuck — keep going.”

Ray’s answer was his hand, pressing deeper. When he lifted his wine later he would smell her on his own fingers and drink anyway.

She glanced at the nearest table. The woman was cutting fish. The man was nodding along. Nobody was looking. Nobody except the shape at the end of the bar who she was not going to look at and who was reading every movement of Ray’s right forearm in the glass he thought she couldn’t see.

Then Ray’s left hand came up and turned her face toward him — his palm on her jaw, his fingers in her hair — and her right hand came up to his face as their mouths met. Long, open, slow enough that neither of them was pretending it was for anybody but each other. She felt the dining room’s attention land — a couple three tables over stopping mid-sentence, a woman near the window nudging her husband — and for half a heartbeat the exposure pressed against her skin like heat, and then she leaned in, and the kiss went deeper, and she tasted wine and the ragu’s rosemary and his mouth warm and unhesitating and the pleasure of it ran straight through her.

When they broke apart his left hand slid from her jaw to the back of the bench behind her. Her right hand lingered on his cheek, then dropped to the edge of the table and gripped.

James saw his wife sloppily kiss another man in a restaurant full of people. The jealousy was simple, ancient, and it had no kink in it at all. Her mouth on Ray’s mouth. Her hand on his face. The ease of it.

Then her left hand released the table edge and went under the cloth into Ray's lap.

She found him immediately — a thick ridge trapped down his trouser leg, the head flared and distinct even through wool, a warm wet spot already blooming where he leaked. She squeezed, and he pulsed against her palm. She worked him in slow strokes that made the fabric whisper, thumb rubbing the wide head through cloth until the wet spot spread.

"You're making a mess in your nice pants," she breathed near his shoulder, sweet as a compliment. "Should I stop?"

He didn't tell her to stop. His left hand stayed on the back of the bench. His breath thickened once, then leveled. She smiled at her short rib and kept stroking him while a server cleared plates, and the smell of his lap — skin and laundry and the animal heat of a hard cock under cloth — rose when she leaned in to reach him better. She could feel James in the dark corner decoding every shift of her arm and the charge of it — performing for him, meaning it — ran alongside the current Ray's fingers were pulling out of her.

James read the steadiness and the faint movement of her arm and his cock strained and his throat went dry.

"Her left arm," the bald man said, leaning forward. "Under the cloth. That's a handjob. I am sitting at a bar watching a woman give a man a handjob over the short rib ragu." He looked down the bar at James. "Tell me I'm not seeing things."

James didn't answer.

"This guy," the bald man said to the bartender.

"And his right arm's been going for five minutes," the bartender said, not looking up. "I'd say they're even."

James drank his bourbon. The glass was empty. He didn't signal for another because signaling would mean looking away.

She was close. He knew her face. He'd studied it since Austin — the way her lips parted, the way her throat tightened once, the way her nostrils flared on the exhale, the specific sequence of small muscle movements that meant she was climbing toward the edge and fighting to hold still. He'd seen that face in their bedroom, in their shower, on the couch with her eyes closed and her hips moving against his hand, and he knew what it looked like when the fight was almost lost, and he was reading it now through a gap in wine bottles and the knowing was intimate and the intimacy was unbearable because it proved he was right and it proved he was her husband.

Thirty feet away, Jenna came on Ray's fingers with her face held almost still.

The fight was for the room — for the server pouring wine four feet from her elbow, for the woman at the next table who might look up. Under the cloth there was no stillness at all. Her cunt seized on his thick fingers in hard milking pulls; her ass clamped the plug; a hot gush wet his hand down to the wrist and darkened the bench leather under her. She bit the inside of her cheek and a tiny helpless sound still escaped

through her nose — *nnnh* — swallowed immediately. Her clit jumped against his palm through each wave.

James can see my face, she thought, dazed and precise. *He knows that I'm cumming on Ray's hand like a little slut in a black dress*. The thought was as intoxicating as Ray's fat cock in her hand.

The knowing was part of the coming. She rode the long rolling waves without opening her mouth, left hand still stroking Ray's cock through his trousers in shaky rhythm, strangers seeing nothing, husband seeing everything. When it loosened she was breathing through her nose and her thighs were trembling under the cloth and she smelled like sex under perfume — unmistakable if anyone had been close enough.

Ray felt her come. The clench, the heat, the flood. He eased his hand from under the cloth and picked up his wine glass and drank without changing expression. He'd brought her off in a room full of strangers and held his composure while she lost hers. The color on his throat, above the collar, was the only tell.

James saw the orgasm move through his wife's face — the jaw, the nostrils, her right hand digging into the cloth at the table edge, the discipline of coming without opening her mouth. A stranger wouldn't have known. James knew. He'd known that face for a decade and he was reading it through wine bottles and she was coming on another man's fingers and the knowing was the most erotic and the most annihilating thing that had ever happened to him.

Jenna's left hand came out from under the cloth and settled on her own thigh. She picked up her wine with a steady hand that was a lie, composed, easy, as if the last five minutes had been about the ragù. His cock ached against his thigh.

"I need another drink," the bald man said.

They sat in silence — two men at a dark bar — and then James's phone lit up.

A text from *Jenna* 💞. The lock screen showed the wallpaper — the tongue-out, eyes-crossed selfie she made only for him, the face she'd been making since they started dating, the face from before any of this.

Dinner's going well. He's being a gentleman — don't laugh. Miss you. xx

He read it with the phone angled to his chest, and then set it face-down on the bar — and caught the bald man watching him do it. Watching him hide a phone like a man with something on it.

"Bad news?" the bald man said.

"No," James said.

The bald man looked at him a moment longer — the stillness, the empty glass, the long hour of him — and let it go.

The door opened and a man came in shaking cold off his jacket — not rain, just March — and James's stomach dropped before the man had taken two steps. Kevin Foss. Three years at Hadley & Morrow, two desks down, until he'd left for device sales and a German car. The last time James had seen him: the Hadley Christmas party, two years back, Foss four whiskeys deep, finding Jenna by the coat check and telling

her — warmly, loudly, one hand on the wall above her head — that she was the best-looking thing in the building, and that if she ever got tired of the quiet guy with the spreadsheets, she knew where to find him. Jenna had deflected him so gracefully that Foss had walked away happy. James had watched it happen and thought nothing of it. Nothing at all.

Of all the bars in Columbus. Of all the nights.

James turned his face an inch toward the wall. The bar was dark. Maybe dark enough.

The bald man waved him over. “Kev. You’re late. Doesn’t matter, sit down, look—” He tilted his bottle at the glass. “Back bench. Black dress. Tell me you’ve ever seen anything like that in this town.”

Foss looked. Foss looked again. His eyes went wide and a grin spread across his face — slow, full, delighted. He smelled like he’d started somewhere else.

“Holy shit,” Foss said. “That’s Jenna Whitfield.”

“You know her?”

“I know her *husband*. Three years at Hadley.” Foss dropped onto the stool on the bald man’s far side, close enough that James could hear every word. “Every Christmas party she walks in like that and every guy in the office is trying not to look at her ass in front of his own wife. Me included.” He squinted at the reflection. “And that’s not him. No way. Husband’s a skinny guy. Spreadsheets.”

“Told you,” the bald man said to the bartender. “Ring on her, nothing on him. She’s stepping out.”

“I told *you*,” the bartender said.

“On *Whitfield*.” Foss laughed, delighted, and slapped the bar. “With *that*.”

Then his eyes moved down the bar and stopped on James. His head tipped. His mouth stayed half open on the next joke while he worked it out — the face, the sweater, the dark corner. He looked at the reflection, back at James, down at the phone lying face-down by James’s hand. His mouth closed. When the grin came back it was meaner. He picked up a menu and didn’t open it.

“Whitfield,” he said. Quiet.

“Foss.”

“I thought that was you. Swear to God.”

“Small bar,” James said.

“Wait.” The bald man looked between them. “You two know each—” and then it assembled, the watching and the last name. “Jesus. That’s your wife?”

Nobody answered him. That was the answer.

The bald man sat back on his stool. The grin was gone. “The texts,” he said, remembering. “All night. Your phone kept lighting up. That was her. She was texting you. From the table. While he—” He didn’t finish it. “And you don’t have a read. I asked you your read. An hour ago. And you just — sat here.”

“Does she know you’re here?”

Nothing.

“Does he?”

James stared at the glass. In it, Jenna was saying something to Ray, leaning close, her right hand now resting on his thigh above the tablecloth, casual and warm. She looked happy. She looked like a woman having the best date of her year with a man she wanted to be having it with.

The bald man picked up his beer. Set it down again.

“Look, I’m just a guy at a bar,” he said. “I sell cardiac devices and I’ve had three beers and none of this is my business. But I watched the whole thing. The dinner. The fork. And I’m pretty sure your wife was jerking him off under the tablecloth while he fingered her — in a restaurant, in front of forty people. And you sat here in the dark and watched it in the mirror and took her texts and never moved.”

“It’s a work thing,” James said.

The bald man looked at him. “A work thing.”

“It’s a client dinner. It’s complicated.”

“A client dinner.” The bald man said it back to him, flat. “With the handjob.”

“It’s not—” James stopped. There was no version of the sentence that ended anywhere good.

“So you’re either not much of a man. Or you’re into it.” He shrugged. “And either way I’m not sure what to say to you, brother.”

The question James had lived inside for a year — asked to his face, by a stranger with no stake in the answer, and he could answer neither way. He sat on his stool and the silence filled the space between them and the bald man let it, and James didn’t try again, because there was nothing to say that didn’t prove the second half right. The first half was what he’d been fighting since the conference. The fight was right here — the empty glass, the ache between his legs, the bourbon he couldn’t taste. His wife had fed another man from her fork and come on his fingers and texted her husband warm lies from the same table, and now she was leaning into Ray with the evening’s settled ease, and James was sitting in the dark proving the stranger right with every minute he didn’t stand.

Jenna and Ray stood from the bench. Together. His hand on her lower back, guiding her toward the rear of the dining room — past the last table, toward the hallway where the restrooms were. The dress moved on her with every step, the slit showing the stocking, the fabric pulling across her hips, and James saw her walk away and then she was gone around the corner and the glass couldn’t follow.

He couldn’t see the hallway. The angle was wrong, the reach of the reflection ended at the bench, and they were gone.

“The pair of them,” the bald man said. “Together. Restroom.”

“There’s a single at the end of that hall,” the bartender said. “Lock on the door. They’re not the first.”

Five minutes. James counted them against the brass fixture above the till, the empty glass between his hands, every second another small confirmation of the stranger's assertion. The bald man filled the silence — her mouth, against the wall, the locked door, both still dressed — and Foss sat with his arms crossed, patient and amused, his eyes on James's face as if studying something he intended to describe later. The bartender poured someone else's wine. James sat in the dark corner with his cock pressing against his thigh and counted and did not stand.

Ray came back first, adjusting his collar. Jenna thirty seconds after, touching her hair. The dark lipstick she'd had on all night was gone. She sat down and said something to the server and the server brought coffee, and her face had color high on her cheeks and her eyes were bright and James forgot how to swallow.

"Lipstick's gone," Foss said. He leaned toward the glass like it might show him more and laughed through his nose. "All of it. Gone. You don't get that from the short rib, buddy."

Five minutes in a locked bathroom. The lipstick wiped clean. His mind built what the glass couldn't show him — her on her knees on tile with Ray's cock in her mouth — and he could not stop building it and could not make himself leave.

"I ordered you a coffee," Ray said when she sat.

"You ordered me a lot of things tonight," Jenna said, and sipped it, and the corner of her mouth did the thing. "And I did every one of them. Keep this up and I'm going to start liking being told."

"Going to?" Ray said.

Jenna smiled into her coffee.

The phone lit on the bar, face-down, a thin glow against the wood. He turned it over. Her name. Her face.

Almost done here. Heading home soon — I have a surprise for you. Go up to bed, lights off, don't peek. xx

He read it while, thirty feet away and two steps up, Jenna put her phone down and picked up her coffee and leaned into Ray and said something that made him laugh, the low rolling laugh that carried through walls.

She was texting him from the table. Warm small lies sent across the room while the opposite played out behind the bottles — her hand on Ray's thigh, her mouth recently full of a man who was not her husband, her instructions arriving on his phone with kisses while the truth sat in his lap, hard and ashamed and unable to look away.

He got hard watching his wife lie to him. The hardness proved the stranger right about option two, and he could not make himself stand up.

James signaled the bartender for the check.

Foss stood when James stood. He put his hand on the bar, blocking the path without aggression, and leaned in close enough that the bald man couldn't hear.

"Whitfield." Low, beer on his breath, the grin still on. "Three years I watch her shoot guys down at those parties. Me included. Me *especially*." He shook his head.

“And she goes in the can with *that* guy and comes out with her lipstick gone. She blew him. In there. Come on. You know she did.” He dug a card out of his jacket and clicked a pen and wrote on the back of it, slow, tongue in the corner of his mouth. “And you’ve been sitting here the whole time with a hard-on. No — hey. I’m not judging. Swear to God. Whatever you guys got going.” He slid the card across the bar. “But if it’s a thing. If you’re into it.” He tapped it twice. “Call me. I’m in a lot better shape than that guy, I’ll tell you that.”

James looked at the card. He looked at Foss. “I’ll be sure to lose it,” he said. He picked it up between two fingers and put it in his pocket and walked toward the door.

On the sidewalk, in the cold, he threw the card in the first trash can he passed.

Through the gaps in the wine bottles, Jenna saw him go. She wasn’t looking for the glass — she was looking directly through the divider at the dark bar, the same sightline she’d used to find him an hour ago, and she saw his silhouette pass the brass fixture and move along the stools and push through the door and disappear into the cold. She’d expected triumph — the program working, the weaker man leaving, the evening executing exactly as she’d drawn it. And the triumph was there, real, warm. But alongside it, uninvited and unexamined, a pull — something that tugged at the base of her throat when his shape cleared the doorframe. She didn’t look at it. She turned back to Ray and picked up her coffee and smiled, and the pull stayed where she’d left it.

James walked two blocks to his car. The cold hit him and the air tasted like March and his legs felt wrong, too light — he’d been on that stool for over an hour without moving. He got in. Started the engine. The heater blew cold and then warm and his hands on the steering wheel were shaking and he gripped until they stopped.

He drove home through the empty streets with the heat on and the ache between his legs and the stranger’s question sitting where answers were supposed to go. He pulled into the garage. He went upstairs. He got undressed in the dark bedroom and got into bed and turned off the lamp and lay still and waited.

His phone lit on the nightstand.

Just said goodnight to him in the lot. Kissed him on the cheek like a lady and watched him drive off. On my way to you. xx

He read it twice. The cheek. The lot. He’d seen the bench and the hand and the coffee and the lipstick gone, and he’d left before the end, and this was the end she was giving him: Ray in his Buick, pointed the other way. He put the phone face-down and let himself believe it, because believing it was the only way the next part was his.

After everything tonight — the stranger’s question, Foss, who now carried what he’d seen, the lipstick gone, the fork and the laugh and the long kiss the room had seen — after all of it, he let himself want this. Not the airport version — not the dropped bag and the walk into him, the reunion, the wife. The other version. The one from the videos, the one he’d only ever seen through a screen or heard through her retelling: loud, unguarded, past herself, past English, the Spanish coming out of her like it lived somewhere below her marriage. The version Ray got. The version that performed and

meant it. His wife like a pornstar — in their bed, for him, aimed at him for once. She'd never given him that. Not once. Whatever she'd done at the restaurant, whatever she'd done in the bathroom, she was coming home, and the surprise was for him, and he let himself hope the surprise was that. The hope sat in him alongside the shame and the arousal and the ache, and he held onto it because it was the only thing in the dark he could hold.

He didn't peek.

She came through the front door alone.

James heard the key, the latch, the click of her heels on the hardwood — measured, deliberate clicks, spaced the way she spaced them when she wanted to be heard. The house was dark except for the light above the stove, the amber glow she always left on when she went out, and from the bed he could see nothing but the faint stripe of it at the door's foot — the stove light carried up the open stairwell. He was where she'd told him to be. Lights off. Don't peek.

His cock was hard against the mattress. It had been hard since her last text — *I have a surprise for you. Go up to bed, lights off, don't peek* — and the word *surprise* had settled in his gut and not moved. She'd promised him the reunion. The homecoming. The way she'd come back from the airport, the bag dropped, the walk into him. Maybe her mouth. Her mouth that he hadn't felt in months, that he'd stopped counting the months on because counting made the number worse.

"James?"

Her voice from below. He didn't answer.

"Come down here."

He got out of bed. Boxers and a T-shirt. Bare feet on the cold hallway floor, then the stairs, each step carrying him down toward the amber light and whatever she'd planned for him. The living room was dim — the floor lamp behind the armchair casting its warm pool, the rest in shadow — and she was standing in front of the couch in her coat and her highest heels and her hair was down around her shoulders and the lamplight turned her gold.

"Hi," she said.

"Hi."

"Did you peek?"

"No."

She smiled. The real one — not the performance smile, not the one she gave servers and colleagues. The one that made her eyes narrow and her mouth go crooked and reached something old in his chest. "Good boy."

She unbuttoned the coat. Slow, one button at a time, holding his eyes. Let it slide off her shoulders and caught it and draped it across the arm of the couch. Underneath: the dress. Black, fitted, long sleeves, a modest neckline that only made the body beneath it

louder. The slit up the left thigh showed stocking and a metallic clip and skin above the clip.

She crossed to him. Hands on his chest, pushing him backward until the backs of his knees hit the armchair — his chair, the leather one — and he sat. She straddled him. The slit fell open across his lap and her bare thigh pressed against his and the stocking was smooth under his palms and she settled onto him and the weight of her was warm and close and her perfume was faint under the wine on her breath, and underneath both something male and chemical that was not his.

She kissed him. Deep, slow, her tongue finding his. Wine and espresso and under the espresso something fainter — salt, musk, a taste he almost knew. His hands went to her waist, then lower, under the bunched hem of the dress, and his fingers found the edge of the stocking and the garter clip — cool, metallic — and then bare skin above it. Bare thigh. Bare hip. No underwear beneath his fingertips, just her, and his fingers slid between her legs from behind and she was slick — not damp, not aroused, *slick* — heat and wet coating his fingers instantly, and the sheer amount of it told him what the dress had not: she'd been like this all night. Through dinner. Through whatever had happened in the restroom. Through the drive home.

"I wore this under the dress," she said against his mouth. "All night. At the table. For you."

She pulled back. Stood. Reached behind her and found the zipper and drew it down in one smooth motion and the dress pooled at her heels and she stepped free of it and what was underneath stopped him.

It was nothing he'd seen before. Not the black lace anniversary set — something new, something she'd chosen. A black strappy bodysuit: the bra cut open at the cups so her breasts spilled free through the frame of the straps, nipples bare and stiff and framed in matte elastic. The bodysuit was cut high on her hips and open at the crotch — the straps splitting below her navel, leaving her sex uncovered, framed in black and glistening in the lamplight. Sheer thigh-highs clipped to the bodysuit's built-in garter. The heels. Her fair skin warm against the black.

She turned once, slow, so he would have to look at her ass — and there it was, the problem and the masterpiece, bare cheeks framed by the high straps of the bodysuit, full and high and round, fair skin against the black straps, the open crotch straps splitting underneath so that when she bent a degree to free the dress from her heel he saw everything: the plump lips of her pussy glistening, the silver wink of the plug between those cheeks, the deep cleft he had watched other men lose sentences over. His cock hurt. That ass had ended conversations in grocery stores. Tonight it was dressed like a gift she had wrapped for just for him and set in his living room.

"I picked this myself," she said. "Thought you'd like it."

He looked at her and the looking was something his whole body did — not his eyes scanning her but his lungs forgetting to work, his hands going slack on the armrests, his mouth drying. Her tits moving with her breathing, nipples tight and dark in their black

frame. Her waist narrowing between the straps. Her hips, the ass that made men at a bar put their drinks down and discuss. Her sex bare and swollen between the split straps of the bodysuit, glistening, her landing strip trimmed above it. She was the woman he'd married and she was showing him what she wore for another man and his cock hurt.

She came back to him. Straddled him again in the armchair. Ground against him through the cotton of his boxers, the bare wet heat of her against the fabric, her tits in his face framed in the black straps. She rolled her hips slow and deliberate and the friction pulled a groan out of him and she smiled — small, pleased.

"I have a surprise," she said.

She slid off his lap and knelt between his knees. Her hands slid up his thighs to the waistband of his boxers, and she pulled — slow, watching his face — and he lifted his hips to help her, and his cock came free, hard and flushed, standing against his stomach, and the cool air hit it and then her breath did.

"There it is." Warm, appreciative, like greeting an old friend. She wrapped her hand around him — no latex, just her, warm and sure — and stroked once, slow, base to tip, and watched his face while she did it. "God, look at you. So hard. Is this all for me? All night, thinking about me?"

"Jenna—"

"I know it's been forever since my mouth." Her hand kept working him, lazy, perfect, and she dipped her head until her face was right there — her breath washing over the head of him with every word, her lips an inch away, parted and wet-shined. "I know what you miss. The way I'd take you down. All the way. You were always so loud for me, baby. So good." Her thumb circled the head, once, and his whole body locked. "I want to taste you. I've been thinking about it all night."

She looked up at him then — her dark eyes huge, her tits bare in their black frame below, her hand never stopping — and the mischievous smile spread, slow and knowing, the one that meant she was already three moves ahead. "Do you want it? Tell me. Tell me you want my mouth."

"Please." His voice cracked. His hands went to her hair and she let them. "Jenna. Please. I want it."

"Mmm." She lowered her head. He felt the heat of her first, then the barest brush of her lips — so light he could have imagined it — and then her tongue came out and hovered, so close he could feel its warmth, and his hips lifted off the chair toward her mouth —

"But, don't you have someone to ask?"

"Ray?" she called toward the hallway. Loud enough to carry.

James's hands froze in her hair.

The cologne hit him first — sweet, chemical, too much — and then the footsteps, heavy, the tread of a very large man on hardwood, deliberate and slow, coming up the hall. The side door swung and settled. It had been off the latch — he understood that

now. A man who'd been waiting on the porch in the March dark. *Kissed him on the cheek like a lady and watched him drive off.*

Ray stepped into the living room and the room got smaller. The sport coat was gone. The charcoal shirt was open at the collar, the sleeves shoved to his forearms, sweat shining at his temples, gut first through the hallway frame — a man who had been invited and knew it. He took in the scene — James in the armchair, Jenna kneeling between his legs in the straps and the stockings — and the expression on the heavy face was pleased and expansive and entirely unsurprised.

“Evening, James,” Ray said. The voice easy. Warm. “Sorry about the entrance. She insisted on the drama.”

“What —” he said.

“Shh.” Her finger on his lips. Her face close. “This is the surprise.”

Jenna was still kneeling between his knees. His cock was still out, aching, untouched since her hand had left it. She looked up at him and her eyebrows went up — a small prompt, patient.

“Ask him nicely, baby.”

James looked at Ray. The man stood just inside the room with his hands loose at his sides, watching, the small eyes missing nothing.

“Can my—” His voice came out wrong. He made himself finish. “Can my wife suck my cock?”

Ray looked at him for a long moment, the way he looked at a lowball offer — a number he was going to enjoy declining.

“Not yet,” he said. Easy. Final. “When I’m done with it.”

Jenna’s hand squeezed James’s thigh once — sympathy or punctuation, he couldn’t tell.

Ray moved into the room without hurry. He didn’t ask where to sit. He took the far end of the couch — the grey sectional, the spot where the cushion compressed under him, where he’d sat months ago at the dinner — and the couch listed toward him under his weight and he spread his knees and put his arm along the back, settled across the end of their couch like he’d bought it.

“Here’s the thing, James,” Ray said. Genial and practiced, his voice in the low confident gear that closed deals and calmed rooms. “You’ve got the most extraordinary woman I’ve ever put my hands on. She’s in your house, in your chair, wearing that for you. You know what that makes you?” He scratched his jaw, taking his time with it. “A man who knows what he has. A stag. The guy who can sit in a room and let other people see what he’s got, because it’s still his at the end of the night.” He settled deeper into the cushion. “So relax. Enjoy this. You’ve earned it.”

James felt the word slide into place around him. *Stag*. The framework he’d been hiding behind since the airport, the dignity he’d borrowed and restaked at every escalation — the mediation, the benefit bar, the living room months ago — and here was

Ray handing it to him again, and the frame was rotting and James took it anyway because the alternative was standing in this room without it. “Okay,” James said.

Jenna watched him take the word. She watched the way his hands went still on the armrests and his shoulders dropped half an inch and the shield settled over his face, and inside the shield the man she’d married — careful, proud, unable to stop this and unable to stop wanting it — and the sight of him reaching for the stag frame stirred pity and affection and the cold curiosity of the program: *how far, James. How far will you go tonight.*

She stood. Crossed the two steps to Ray on the couch, her heels clicking on the hardwood. She sat beside him and his arm came down from the back to her shoulder — heavy, proprietary, settling on her like it already belonged there.

She kissed him. Not like the conference room, not like the office. Slow and soft, her hand on his jaw, her mouth opening against his, and she laughed — a small, bright, giggly sound against his lips, almost shy — and his hand went into her hair and she leaned into the broad mass of his chest and the gentleness of it, the playful fondness, did to James what every explicit act in the armchair had not. It made him feel replaced.

She pulled back and grinned at Ray and said something low — James caught “*missed this*” and the rest was murmured into Ray’s throat — and Ray’s big hand found her breast through the open cup and his thumb drew a slow circle around her nipple and she arched into his palm and made the sound she made when something surprised her with how good it felt, the quick *ah* that was half-gasp and half-laugh, and she grabbed his wrist and held his hand there.

“Good girl,” Ray said. Low. His thumb circling.

She looked over her shoulder at James with her eyes bright and her face warm. “Come sit with us.”

He didn’t move.

“James.” Softer. “Come on.”

He got out of the armchair. Sat on her other side on the couch. She reached for his hand and laced her fingers through his and squeezed, and the squeeze was real and he was holding his wife’s hand while another man’s hand was on her breast and both gestures occupied the same woman and he couldn’t make them fit in the same frame.

She turned back to Ray. Her fingers slipped free of James’s. “Let’s get you out of this,” she said, low, and her hands went to Ray’s belt. “I’ve been thinking about this all week.”

“All week?” Ray said.

“All week.” She took the belt in both hands and worked the buckle — the leather, the slow pull — watching his face while she did it, and Ray watched her back with his arm along the couch. The zipper sighed down. She reached in and worked him free, and there it was — thick and dark and flushed, the head swollen wider than the shaft, a heavy vein running the underside, already wet at the slit.

Jenna hummed low in her throat — appreciative, filthy, genuine — and wrapped both hands around it.

They didn't close.

"God," she said. "I forget. Every time, I forget how much of it there is." She stroked him once, slow, base to tip, her thumb dragging through the bead at the slit and spreading it down the shaft. "Both hands, baby, and there's still—" she stroked up, "— more."

Her left hand found James's. "Hold my hand," she said — soft, wifely, obscene — and he laced his fingers through hers while her right hand stroked another man's cock, slow and deliberate, and the casual division of her — one hand for her husband, one for the cock she couldn't wrap — was the cruellest thing she'd done all evening.

Pre-come welled from the slit and she smeared it down the shaft with her thumb until he shone. "He's been leaking since dinner," she said. To James now, warm and confiding, her hand never stopping. "I felt it under the table. All through the short rib." Up close he smelled like skin and sweat and the restaurant still faintly on his clothes, and under that the blunt musk of a cock that had been denied for days.

"Look how dark he gets when he's hard," she murmured, almost giggling, then bit her lip. "God. I'm sorry. I'm not sorry."

She leaned up and kissed Ray — open and wet and slow, her tongue sliding against his, a string of spit stretching between their mouths when she broke it — and her hand never stopped working him. When she looked back at James her lips were shinier and her eyes were bright.

"You know what he did in my office?" Jenna said. To James. Her voice easy, warm, the telling voice — the same soft tone she used in bed at night, whispering the things that made him grip the sheets. "The mediation. The Dallas complaint, Braddock, the eight weeks of probation hanging over the whole deal — the morning of *that*. He walked in and closed my door." She squeezed Ray and he grunted. "I lifted my skirt at the bookshelf and showed him the plug. The medium. The one I'd been wearing at my desk like a good girl. And he said *on your knees, Blondie*. And I said *please let me suck your cock*. Those words, James. *Please*. In my own office."

"She begged for it," Ray said. Low, easy, his hips making small rolls into her grip. "On her knees in that skirt, looking up at me. I tried to finish on her tits and she knocked my hand away and put me back in her mouth."

"I swallowed every drop," Jenna said. She looked at James. "And that night I kissed you goodnight and you didn't taste a thing."

"You kissed me goodnight," James said. Flat. "With—"

"With his cock still on my breath. Yes."

James's cock throbbed against his boxers. His hand tightened in hers.

"Tell him about Dayton," Ray said.

She grinned. "You tell him. It's your story."

“After the video,” Ray said. Looking at James. His hand slid from her breast down to her bare thigh, idle there, his thumb tracing the line of her stocking top — her right hand never leaving his cock, her left still laced with James’s. “The one she sent you. The one that stops before anything interesting happens. I pulled her off my cock, put her on the bed, and ate her. Her pussy first. Then I got my tongue in her ass.” He watched James’s face. “You know about Dayton. What you should know is what it was for her. Nobody had ever been there, James. Not you. Not anyone. She’d been saving it — training for it, the plugs, the patience, all of it for you — and she gave it to me. First. She was begging before I ever touched it. I took your wife’s ass before you ever got near it, and she—”

“I called him *Raymond* when I came,” Jenna said, and her grin went fond. “The full name. In Spanish. *Raymundo*. Past English. I’d never — it just came out of me.”

She leaned up and kissed him again — slower, sloppier, her mouth open and her tongue working — and James watched a thin line of spit slip down Ray’s chin and his wife chase it with her mouth, and his cock ached against his boxers and his hand stayed laced with hers.

Then she looked at Ray — something private passing between them, a look that held an entire hotel room and an entire night — and then at James, and her voice went quieter. The telling voice, but warmer now, almost confessional.

She spit on it first — leaned over and let a string of it fall from her lips onto the swollen head, and worked it in with her thumb, slow, until he gleamed. “You remember the conference?” she said. “The first night. The hotel. The first time anything ever happened with Ray. The texts I sent you from the hotel. *Just my hands, James. Nothing else. Nothing past that.*”

She stroked him slow, her eyes on her husband.

“I meant it, James. God. I was so nervous. My hands were shaking when I opened the door for him. I was never going to do more than that — my hands, in the lace, for the texts. That was the agreement. Hands only.” She kissed the underside of Ray’s shaft, her lips dragging up the vein. “And then he took it out. And I saw it. And I couldn’t help it. Nobody asked me. Nobody told me. I got on my knees in the anniversary lace you bought me and I sucked Ray Vogler’s cock because I wanted to. Because I saw it and I needed my mouth on it. That was the first night, James. That was the first time.”

She looked at James with her chin wet. “The husband who asked. That’s how I remember it, James — you asked, and I went. And now look where asking got you.”

She was performing the version. The texts she’d sent, the husband who’d asked — the story James had built and maintained and hidden behind. And the private delight of it, the thing she held behind her eyes and let none of it show, was that she knew now. She knew the texts were Ray’s. She knew the asking was forged. And every word she spoke to James was the lie he’d manufactured, fed back to him in her warmest voice while another man’s cock was in her hand. James heard nostalgia. She tasted irony.

“And now I’m going to remind you how I sucked him that first night,” she said. “Watch, baby. Watch and remember.”

He didn’t need to remember. He’d watched it the first time — live, on a laptop screen, from his office — and come before Ray did. She knew. She was going to perform it for him anyway.

She leaned down and took the head in her mouth.

Salt and skin hit her tongue first — his pre-come bitter-slick — and she moaned around the flare of him because the head alone stretched her lips tight and she loved the ache of it. James leaned closer before he knew he’d moved. The wet thick *shluck* of her mouth sealing behind the crown landed in him from six inches away. She took him deeper and gagged and pulled back with spit stringing from her chin to the slit and went deeper again. *Gluck. Mmph. Shlp.* Tears started at the corners of her eyes and she didn’t wipe them. Her jaw stretched wide, her cheeks hollowed, and she looked at James while she did it.

“You like watching me try to fit this in my mouth?” she asked, pulling off just enough to speak, a rope of spit swaying. Her voice was warm, filthy, surprised at itself. “He’s so thick I can feel my lipstick dragging. Listen.”

She sank again on purpose so the room got the wet *glk* of him pushing past her tongue.

Ray’s hand left her thigh and gathered her hair. “Look at your wife, James,” he said, almost conversational. “She’s choking on me in your living room because she wants to..”

“He tied me to the couch at his apartment,” she said, pulling off, spit-shiny, mascara starting to track. “The belt — you saw the marks. He fucked my face and I couldn’t set the pace and I *loved* it.” She kissed the head, lingering, tasting his pre-come and the salt of himself, and the ghost of her own mouth from the restroom. “He told me by morning I’d have been fucked in every room. And I was.” She took him back in and went deep, the wet *glk* of him past the back of her tongue, and her hips rocked against the couch cushion — soft wet friction — mixed with the wet rhythm of her mouth.

She pulled off and kissed the shaft, ran her tongue along the underside, and took him back in again — deeper this time, her throat working around the crown, and then pulled off gasping and stroked him slick with her spit and took him back once more, each pass wetter and slower than the last, each time his hips rocking off the couch, until the spit was running down her chin in a steady stream and her fist was following her mouth in a loose, sloppy rhythm and the sounds filling the living room were sounds that belonged behind a locked door. She looked at James — chin wet, eyes bright, beauty and filth on her face at once — and winked.

She pulled off him, gasping, spit stringing from her lip to the head, and reached for James’s hand — the one she’d been holding — and lifted it and pressed it into her hair, on the back of her head.

“You do it,” she said. Breathless, warm, her eyes on his. “Set the pace for me, baby. Push me down on it.”

James’s hand sat in her hair like a thing that wasn’t his. The thick waves damp at the nape, her scalp hot under his palm.

“Jenna—”

“Do it.” Soft. “I want to feel you do it.”

He pushed. Slow, tentative, his hand trembling — and her mouth sank onto Ray’s cock, deeper than she’d been taking it, and the wet *glk* of her throat opening around the crown came up from between Ray’s legs, and Ray’s head tipped back and he groaned — low, guttural, unguarded.

“Oh, that’s it,” Ray said, his voice gone rough. “That’s it. Your husband’s running it now.”

James pulled her back by the hair — her mouth coming off with a slick *pop*, spit flooding down her chin, her eyes streaming and bright — and pushed her back down. Again. Again. He found a rhythm, slow and deep, and she let him have it, her hands braced on Ray’s thighs, her throat working, gagging, taking it, the sounds obscene and wet and continuous. She was bent over his lap with her husband’s hand driving her head onto his cock and she was moaning around it — actual moans, vibrating, filthy.

“She loves this,” Ray said, his chest heaving. “She loves giving up control — trust me”

And the worst part — the part James couldn’t look at — was that his hand had stopped trembling. He was good at it. He was setting the pace of his wife’s mouth on another man’s cock and he was good at it, and his cock was so hard it hurt, and every time he pushed her down and heard her throat open he hated himself a little less and wanted it a little more, and the two things were the same thing.

“I can feel you twitching,” she said to Ray. Running her thumb over the slit. “You’re about to give it to me.”

“I am.”

“He’s been saving something for me,” Jenna said to James, lower. She took him back in, deeper, her throat working, mascara running, her hand squeezing the base —

Ray’s hand closed over James’s in her hair and took her off him — pulled her up and then down from the couch to her knees on the floor between his knees. His cock slid free shining, a thick strand of spit connecting her lip to the head before it snapped.

“Not yet,” he said. Rough. His chest heaving. “Not down your throat.”

She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. Looked up at him from between his knees with her lips swollen and her chin wet. “Saving it for something?”

“For your husband to see.” He looked at James. The small eyes were steady, almost kind, and the kindness was worse than cruelty. “The bedroom’s upstairs?”

Jenna looked up at Ray from between his knees. The shift was visible — she had been running the room, steering the evening, and this was the first time he’d taken the wheel from her hands.

“It is,” she said. Quiet.

“Then that’s where we’re going.” He looked at James. “Bring the condoms — for you, not me. Extra-tight, right? Your brand.” Something moved at the corner of his mouth. “Some lube. And a towel.”

His hand was still in her hair. “And you.” His voice dropped. “Stay down there. Keep sucking. Slow. You don’t stop, and you don’t finish me — you keep it wet and you keep it slow while I get things ready.”

Jenna’s answer was to lean back in and take him down again, slow, her eyes on his face.

James was still on the couch. His own supplies. Carried up to his own bed for another man’s use. The condom fetch from the dinner months ago — except then Jenna had sent him warmly, and this was an order from a man whose cock was still wet from his wife’s mouth.

He stood. His legs felt like they belonged to someone else. Behind him the wet sounds started again — slower now — and didn’t stop. Upstairs — the bedroom first, the nightstand drawer, the box of extra-tight and the bottle of lube, and then he stood in the doorway of the room he shared with her holding them. His hands were shaking. The box rattled. *Put them down. Turn around. Go downstairs and tell her it’s over.* But downstairs was Ray and Jenna and her heels and his heavy tread already starting up the stairs, and the voice inside James that said *stop* was quieter than the one that said *you need to see what happens next*. He took a towel from the en suite and set the box and the lube and the towel on the nightstand — his nightstand, his side — and stepped back and waited for them.

Ray came in first, Jenna behind him, her hand resting on the small of his back as she guided him through the doorway. He looked around the room — James’s alarm clock, a paperback facedown on one nightstand, beside the condom box and the lube James had just set there, a lamp with a green shade. The reading glasses on the dresser. The framed photograph of the two of them at a wedding, laughing.

Her sheets, he thought. Her book on the other nightstand. The water glass with the lipstick print at the rim. He was in the last room that wasn’t his. He wondered what it was like to wake up here — her reaching for the water in the grey light, the alarm she probably hit twice. The ordinary parts of her he’d never had and wanted with something that had nothing to do with the cock that was hard against his thigh.

He sat on the right side — James’s side — and kicked off his shoes, peeled his socks, then stood long enough to work the shirt the rest of the way open and shrug it off and shove his trousers down — the dark wool pooling on the floor beside the bed with the belt still threaded through the loops — and sat back in his boxers. He pulled those off too. Naked. The body underneath exposed: broad fleshy shoulders, the chest hair thinning and grey at the sternum, the gut hanging pale and prominent, ruddy skin that had never apologized for itself. His cock standing thick and dark from his body, the pre-

come beading at the slit. He settled back against the headboard, massive and unclothed on another man's side of the bed, and the frame groaned under him. His bare feet on the sheets were pink and wide and hairy and they occupied the space where James's feet had lain every night.

"Go open the blinds," he said to James. "And put the lamp on."

James hesitated. The window behind the bed, above the headboard, faced the neighbor's house — the Dentons' — and across the dark gap a window was lit, the shade up, a warm rectangle twenty feet away.

"Their shade's up," James said.

"Do what Ray says." Jenna, standing in the doorway in her bodysuit and her heels.

James crossed to the window. Drew the cord. The blinds clattered up and the neighbor's light fell across the bedroom floor in a yellow stripe. He turned on the bedside lamp and the room went warm and exposed. Across the gap the Dentons' lamp made a bright rectangle. Anyone standing there would see into this room — Jenna in the lit doorway in open-cup straps and heels, the gut and grey chest hair of the naked man on the bed. James's stomach turned. His cock throbbed anyway.

"The jewelry box," Ray said. He nodded at the dresser. "Jenna — go get it. Put on the necklace. Show him what you wear for me."

Jenna went to the dresser. She opened the wooden jewelry box — the one she kept rings and bracelets in, the one James had searched in the dark weeks ago looking for the chain he'd found in her clutch with Ray's dried cum on the *B* — and lifted the gold necklace from its place.

The word caught the light first. *Blondie*, in looping gold script, delicate, the kind of nameplate girls wore in high school. Except the name on it was his. Ray's name for her. The one she'd corrected for three years — *Jenna*, flat, every time — until she'd given it up in a Dayton hotel room with his cock in her ass. And now it was in gold.

"I gave her that," Ray said. From the bed, his cock in his fist, watching James watch her. "After Dayton. Little box, no note. She didn't put it on for a while. Carried it around in her purse like a secret. Didn't throw it away, though. Did you, Blondie."

"No," Jenna said. Quiet.

"And then the benefit." Ray's voice was easy, savoring, a man laying out a hand of cards. "The midnight dress. She put it on underneath, where nobody could see, and wore it all night — with you at the table, James. Sitting right next to her. I found it with my fingers before I ever saw it — felt it at the back of her neck in the crowd." He stroked himself once, slow. "I came on it that night. On the word. She was wearing it when I did."

Jenna's flush climbed her throat above the gold word.

She fastened the chain while he talked — small, steady movements, the clasp, the settle — and the gold word came to rest at the hollow of her neck between the bodysuit's straps, and she turned to face both of them and the chain gleamed against her fair skin.

“What’s it say?” Ray said.

Jenna’s fingers touched the word at her throat. “Blondie,” she said.

“And are you Blondie for me?”

“Yes,” she said. No hesitation.

“You ever Blondie for him?” A nod toward James. “For your husband?”

Jenna’s eyes went to James — a flicker, there and back. “No,” she said. “Never. He’s never had that.”

“Good girl.”

It landed in James like a dropped glass. He’d heard her correct the name a hundred times — *Jenna*, flat, final, in meetings and at dinners and anywhere a man tried it. She’d never let anyone have it. And now she was standing in their bedroom in another man’s gold, saying she was Blondie for him — for Ray, for his use — and never for her husband. There was a whole self in her that James had never reached, a self that lived behind a name she’d refused him and given to Ray Vogler, a self that existed for another man’s gratification and wore his word at its throat and answered when he called like a pet. And the worst of it was that James had never known to want it. He’d never known it was there to be had.

James watched her. The box he had opened. The necklace he had held in the dark and said nothing about. The man who’d put the cum on it, in his bed, stroking himself at the sight of her wearing it. He stood by the window and the performance of not knowing cost him something in his throat he could not swallow.

“Beautiful,” he said.

Ray crooked two fingers at her — once, lazy, proprietary. “Come here.”

She came to the bed. Ray reached for her and she went — to her hands and knees on the mattress, facing the headboard, the chain swinging between her breasts. Ray knelt behind her and his enormous hands gripped her hips and pulled her back against him. He ran one hand up her spine, pressed between her shoulder blades, and she arched — back dipping, ass rising.

“James.” Ray didn’t look up from her. “Come here. Come look at this.”

James came to the side of the bed. Close. Closer than he’d ever been to it.

The bodysuit’s open crotch framed her from behind like a filthy valentine. The plug’s silver base winked between her cheeks — the same brushed metal James recognized from the 1:07 photograph, the plug that wasn’t theirs. Below it her cunt was swollen and bare and trailing a clear string onto the sheet. Her ass — full, high, fair skin against black straps — up and presented in their marital bed.

And Ray’s cock, in his fist, right there — the wide head dragging up her slit, wetting itself, an inch from where she opened. This close, James could see everything. The heavy vein on the underside. The shine of her on the head. The way her lips parted and clung when Ray dragged it through them. The way her cunt fluttered, empty, waiting. He could smell her. He could see her pushing back already, asking without asking, and Ray not giving it yet.

“Look at her,” Ray said. Almost conversational. “You see how wet she is? She sat across from me at dinner like this. Dripping. The whole meal.” He notched the head against her hole and held it there, and Jenna moaned into the sheet. “She’s been waiting all night. Haven’t you, Blondie.”

“Yes,” Jenna said. “God — yes—”

“Come here,” Jenna said to James. Soft. She extended one hand toward the headboard. “Come sit with me for this.”

He moved to the bed. Sat against the headboard, close enough that her face was near his thigh. She reached for his hand and he gave it to her.

Ray waited until James was settled — patient, notched, holding himself there while she got her husband into position. “Breathe,” he said. Not gentle — practical. He pushed.

The head opened her with a thick wet *squelch* and Jenna’s grip crushed James’s hand. She whimpered, high and bright, eyes flying wide. The plug made the channel narrower; she felt every millimeter of that flared head shoving past the pressure in her ass until she was stuffed in both places and making a broken little squeal into the sheet.

“Oh — oh God — Ray — with the plug I can feel you *everywhere* — fuck, don’t stop—”

He gave her the shaft in short heavy drives. Each stroke ended with the soft slap of his gut and hips against her ass — *slap... slap... slap* — and the cling of her pussy dragging him on the backstroke. From the headboard James could see her face going slack with pleasure, the chain swinging with her tits, the arched line of her back — and past that, nothing. Her raised ass and Ray’s bulk hid the act itself; what reached him was the wet drag of the backstroke, sound without the sight of it.

“You’re so fucking tight,” Ray said, thumbs digging dimples into her hips. “Plug’s crushing me. This pussy’s mine tonight — say it.”

“It’s yours — *ah* — it’s yours, it’s yours—”

“Whose cock is that?” Ray drove in harder, the slap louder. “Say whose.”

“Yours — Ray’s — Ray’s cock — *fuck* —” She laughed once, helpless, forehead dropping to James’s thigh. “It’s so deep — James, baby, he’s so deep — you hear that? How wet I am? That’s him. That’s what he does to me—”

“She’s loud tonight,” Ray said to James, over her, the way men comment on weather. “She get this loud for you?”

James didn’t answer. Jenna answered for him — “No — *fuck* — no, I never — I don’t—” and the sentence broke apart into a moan as Ray bottomed out and held, grinding, making her feel the plug and the cock as one impossible fullness.

“Never what?” Ray said. “Finish it.”

“I never — I don’t get like this — *ah* — not like this — not for—” She pressed her mouth to James’s thigh and bit gently through cotton, and the moan came through the fabric, muffled and continuous.

James held her hand. Each stroke rocked her toward him and away. And the thing he couldn't stop seeing — the thing that kept arriving no matter how he turned it — was how far past him they'd gone. This wasn't the telling. This wasn't the dirty talk in their dark bedroom, the careful versions she brought home to him. This was her live and unguarded and three feet past anything she'd ever given him — the woman from the videos, the one who said *papi* and meant it — except she wasn't performing. That was the part that kept knocking the air out of him. She was acting like Ray's pornstar, and she wasn't acting. She was like this. For Ray. In their bed.

“James — stay with me — I want you to hear what he does to me—” She lifted her face from his thigh, wet-mouthed, eyes bright and half-crazy, and looked back at Ray over her shoulder. “Fuck me harder. Fuck me like you own me — James, watch — watch what he—” and Ray drove in and the words dissolved into a high bright cry.

“You hear your wife?” Ray said. His voice was strained now, the first crack in the composure, sweat running down his temple. “She's a fucking dream. She's the best I ever—” he pulled back and drove in, and Jenna squealed into the sheet. “Tell him. Tell him what you are.”

“I'm his,” she sobbed into the cotton. “I'm his, I'm his, I'm his little slut” and the rest was Spanish, fast and broken and past her, and the smell of her cunt and the old life replaced by raw sex rising off the bed, and James held her hand and felt her come close without falling, whimpering, running wet onto their sheets.

Ray stilled inside her. Looked at James on the bed.

“James,” he said. Flat. “You're in the way. Go get yourself a chair. Down the hall — I saw your office on the way up.”

Jenna squeezed his hand once. Then let go. He stood and walked down the hallway in his boxers and his T-shirt to the second bedroom — his home office, the room with the oak desk he'd refinished by hand, the rolling chair he sat in for audits and dark evenings gripping the armrest while he listened to sounds through the wall — the bed frame finding a rhythm, her gasps muffled in a pillow, the low moan that got away from her, the name she bit off before it finished. *Say no. Walk past the chair and down the stairs and out the front door.* He wheeled the chair out. The casters whispered on the hardwood. His hands were steady and his cock was hard and he hated both facts equally.

Behind him, in the bedroom, Jenna felt Ray pull out of her. The emptiness was sudden and enormous. He gripped her hip — “Up here. On top.” — and he settled back against the headboard and pulled her onto him, and she climbed on, straddling, her knees spreading over his thick thighs, sinking down onto his cock with a slow exhale that was half relief and half greed. On top now, riding before James even made it back down the hall.

James came back. He saw her from behind — her back arched, the bodysuit's straps framing her narrow waist, her ass rising and falling on Ray's cock, and from that low rear angle the stretch of her around him, the wet shine on the shaft on each lift, Ray's

thick thighs and pale gut around her, his big hands on her hips. She was making soft, rhythmic sounds on every downstroke and she didn't stop when Ray pointed at the foot of the bed — "There." — and James set the chair where Ray pointed — foot of the bed, five feet back — and sat down.

"James," she said. Looking at him over her shoulder, her hips still moving. "You know what week it is."

"I know," Ray said. Below her. Not slowing. "I've been counting."

James had been counting too. Since the photograph. Since the period two weeks ago — the relief he'd felt and the shame of the relief and the arithmetic he couldn't stop running. This week. Dead center.

"You should probably put a condom on him," James said. The words came out thin.

"No." Ray. Flat. His hands tightening on her hips. "No rubber."

Jenna looked at James. Her brow softened — not apology, not guilt, something older. She was still rising and falling on Ray's cock, and the sounds between them — wet, clinging, bare — were the sounds the condom had always prevented.

"Baby." Warm, almost sweet, her hips still moving. "Condoms don't work on him. You know that. We've tried." She smiled — small, wicked, fond. "Your extra-tights barely got halfway down him. And the ones that did—" she rolled her hips, slow, deliberate, making him feel it, "—shredded. Every time. He's too thick for them. He's too thick for anything that fits you."

She turned back to Ray and put her hands on his face and kissed him, and James sat in his chair five feet away.

"At the restaurant tonight," Ray said, his eyes half-closed under Jenna's mouth. "In the restroom. She got on her knees in a room with a lock on the door — just her and me and the tile. Put that mouth on me and I didn't let myself finish. You know why? Because I wanted this. I wanted to finish in your bed. Where you sleep."

Jenna sat up on him, riding slow, hands braced on his chest, and looked at James in the chair.

"It's true, baby. All of it." The telling voice, warm and low, her hips never stopping. "He took my hand and walked me to the back and locked the door, and I was on my knees on the tile before he even had it all the way out. I had him in my mouth and my hand between my legs and people were walking past the door — twelve feet away, ordering dessert. I was gagging on it, baby. Loud. I couldn't help it."

She rolled her hips down onto Ray, slow and deep, and her eyes fluttered and came back to James.

"I wanted to swallow him right there. He wouldn't let me."

"Because this is better," Ray said. His hands spanned her waist. "This is so much better."

"And you know what I thought about, on my knees in there? You." A small, wicked smile. "You always wanted something like that, didn't you. Spontaneous. Dangerous. Somewhere we could get caught. You used to float it — the what-ifs, in the dark,

remember? And I never did. I was always too careful with you. Too proper. I never once said yes to it, baby. Not once in our whole marriage.”

She leaned down toward Ray’s mouth, then looked back at James.

“And with him I can’t say no anymore. That’s the difference. That’s the whole difference. Saying no to him has just gotten too hard.”

James had floated it once, years ago — the what-if, the somewhere-dangerous, the risk of getting caught — and she’d laughed and swatted it away, and he’d stopped floating it. He’d counted the five minutes at the bar. He’d seen the lipstick gone. And now she was telling him she’d given a restaurant bathroom the thing she’d never once given him, and he had to sit in his chair and receive it like news.

From the chair, James watched. And from the chair, the watching changed. Ray put him to work.

“Hold her ankle.” Ray rolled Jenna onto her back beneath him — one motion, the mattress shifting under his weight — and her legs fell open and his hips settled between her thighs and the angle needed adjusting. James stood from the chair and crossed to the side of the bed. A stag would have asserted himself — said *mine*, taken her back. But Ray’s voice did something to him, flat and certain, the voice of a man who had never once been told no successfully, and James’s hand was already reaching for her ankle before his head had voted on it. He was answering with his cock now. His cock had been answering all night. He took Jenna’s ankle above the strap of her heel, the bones delicate under his fingers. He held it where Ray placed it and the position deepened and Jenna cried out — a short, high sound — and James held her ankle while another man pushed deeper into his wife.

Ray fucked her in long, deep strokes, James’s hand on her ankle holding her open for it. “That’s it,” he said. “You feel that? You feel how deep I go when your husband holds you open?”

“Yes — *fuck* — yes —” Jenna’s head tipped back. “Deeper — *Raymond* — deeper —”

“Look at her, James.” Ray’s free hand gripped her ass, spread it, the flesh heavy in his palm. “This fat ass. I’ve been thinking about this ass all week. Tell him, Blondie. Tell him who it belongs to.”

“You — it’s yours — *ah* — my fat ass is yours, Ray, all of it —” She was babbling now, her hips rolling up to meet every stroke, wetter with every word out of her own mouth. “James — baby — hold me open for him — hold my leg just like that — I want him deeper — I want — *fuck* —”

“You’re so good at this,” Jenna said to James. Quiet, between breaths. She was looking up at her husband holding her ankle and her face was soft and measuring at once. “You’ve always been so good at doing what needs to be done.”

Ray pulled her up onto him again — his hands on her waist, hauling her into his lap — and she was on top, leaning forward over him, and her hair was down in her face

and Ray wanted her mouth on his.

“Hold her hair back.”

James gathered the thick blonde waves in his fist — the way he’d gathered them a hundred times, over the toilet when she was sick, out of the wind on the pier at the shore — and held them behind her head, and Ray took her jaw in one huge hand and kissed her.

It was deep and open and sloppy — his tongue pushing into her mouth, her moaning going straight down his throat on every pump from Ray’s thick cock in her tight wet pussy — and James held her hair back so another man could kiss his wife properly. Six inches from his face. The wet sounds of it. Her spit and Ray’s, a string of it slipping down her chin when Ray finally let her breathe.

“Again,” she gasped, and Ray kissed her again, messier, and she ground down on his cock while they did it, and James’s fist stayed in her hair.

“Fuck,” she said against Ray’s mouth. “Fuck, I love your cock. I love — *ah* — is this what you wanted, daddy? Hmm? Me on your cock while my husband holds my hair?”

“You’re a filthy girl,” Ray said, and it sounded like a benediction.

“I’m *your* filthy girl,” she said, and kissed him again, and James watched her tongue and hated how hard he was.

“I think I’m losing my mind,” Jenna whispered. To no one. Her head tipped back in James’s fist and her hips were grinding down on Ray and her eyes were half-shut and she laughed — one syllable, bright, incredulous — at herself, at all of it, at the absurdity of her husband holding her hair so another man could kiss her while he made her come. “I think we’ve all lost our minds and nobody’s going to say it.”

James let go of her hair. Stepped back from the bed, crossed to the chair, sat down. Each task lower than the last and he did every one and his cock ached in his boxers and his jaw was so tight his teeth hurt. *This is mine. This bed is mine. She is mine. Stop this. Walk out.* His legs didn’t move. The arousal and the shame were fused in him and stopping felt worse than staying.

Ray was looking at James in the chair. He thought of the water glass on Jenna’s nightstand, the reading glasses on the dresser, the photograph of the two of them laughing — and this lean man watching from his own desk chair, gripping the armrests hard enough to whiten the webbing between his fingers. *Would she want you without him to aim it at?* The question didn’t set aside tonight. Tonight it drove. If the husband was the condition of her wanting, then Ray would make the condition absolute — he would reduce the man in the chair until there was nothing left of him but the watching, and then he’d see what she wanted.

He pulled out. Settled back against the headboard and looked at James.

“There’s no stag in this room, James.”

Jenna went still on the bed, catching her breath, the chain dark with her sweat against her breastbone.

“A stag shares his wife because he’s proud,” Ray said. His voice flat — not cruel, not theatrical, a verdict read aloud. “And you’re proud, James. I’ll give you that. But that’s not the difference. The difference is the firsts. I had her bare first. I had her ass first. The Spanish, the name she wears at her throat — all of it first, all of it mine. And she did half of it behind your back and she loved it.” He looked at James across five feet of lamplight. “And you found out about every one of them and you got harder. Every first I took. Every lie she told. Every time she snuck out or came home wearing me — it just turned you on more. Didn’t it?”

He didn’t wait for an answer.

“I’m looking at the man who sat in that same armchair downstairs — when was that, months ago? — and watched me fuck his wife bare on his couch and came in his own fist watching it happen. Who hosted me for dinner in this house and watched me take her on that couch, on her hands and knees, while you sat in your chair. Who sent her up to a hotel suite at a charity benefit with his blessing.” His voice didn’t rise. “Who got a photograph on his phone at one in the morning — my cock, my cum leaking out of his wife, a plug that wasn’t his — and didn’t say a single word about it.” He paused. “Who heard her say *Diane* last Sunday and held the door for her — and she came to me. Who carried his own condoms and lube up those stairs tonight and opened the blinds when I told him to and held her ankle and held her hair back for my mouth with his own hands.”

James’s pulse was hammering. His cock was hammering. Every word was true and every word struggled to live inside the stag version, the story James had authored. The worst part was not Ray saying it. The worst part was that Jenna was hearing it, and nothing in the list was news to her, and Ray was assembling evidence she already held into a shape James had been trying not to see. He wanted to stand up. He wanted to shout that the armchair was different, that the photograph was a test and he’d passed it by saying nothing, that the hosting was strategy and the benefit was an arrangement he’d agreed to — but every defense was the admission the indictment already named: that he had done all of it. And his cock was harder than it had been all night and the hardness was the proof.

“You’re a wimp, James.”

The word went through him. His cock kicked against his boxers and his face burned and the arousal and the shame arrived together, fused, and he could not split them.

Ray turned back to Jenna and pulled her toward him and pushed back into her — one thick stroke, all the way, and she cried out — and fucked her slow and deep while James watched from the chair, her tits swinging, the chain swinging, her moans punched out of her on every stroke. Then he pulled out. All the way. Jenna whimpered and pushed back after him, her cunt open and wet and empty.

“Ray — no — *papi* — put it back — *please*—”

“Jenna,” Ray said. Not looking away from James. “Say it. Say what he is.”

Jenna was watching James’s face. She saw the flinch — small, immediate — and she saw what followed: the kick of his cock against the cotton, visible from across the

room, involuntary and damning. She'd expected to feel the program advancing, the next step clicking into place. What she felt instead was the specific sight of James Whitfield — the analyst, the runner, the man who built oak desks with his hands — sitting in his office chair while another man said what he was and his cock answered before his mouth could. And the seeing of it cracked open a place in her she'd been holding closed.

Behind her, Ray dragged the head of his cock through her folds, not entering, and she pushed back for it and he held her hips still.

"Say it," Ray said. "Say it and I'll put it back."

She looked at her husband.

"Wimp," she said.

She said it warm. The way she said *I love you*. The way she said his name in the morning. She gave the word the sound of her kindest voice, and she watched it go through him — the wound and the arousal, the shame and the heat.

Ray pushed back into her — one slow, thick, balls-deep stroke — and she moaned, long and low and grateful, filled again.

"There's a word for what that makes him," Ray said, fucking her slow now, his eyes on James. "It's not *stag*. It's cuckold. Say it, Blondie. Say it and I'll keep fucking you."

"Cuckold," she said — and Ray drove in deep and held, and she sobbed with it, full.

"And I love you, James. And I want you to watch what happens next."

His cock throbbed. His mind burned. He sat in the chair.

Ray pulled her toward him on the bed — she went, on her knees, facing him — and he kissed her once, hard, and then his hands found the plug. He gripped the base between his thick finger and thumb and twisted. Slow. The widest point stretched her on the way out and she whimpered into his mouth — a high, thin sound — and the plug came free with a soft, wet release, slick and shining, and he set it on the nightstand beside the lube.

She was empty now. He could feel her feel it — the small shift of her hips, searching, the whimper still in her mouth.

"On your knees," he said against her mouth. "Hands down. Ass to me. Face the chair."

She turned — slow, a little shaky — and settled onto her palms and knees with her ass to him and her face toward James five feet away. Ray took his time arranging her: a hand between her shoulder blades, pressing her down until her cheek touched the sheet; his thumbs spreading her wider; her knees nudged apart another inch with his. Her ass to the headboard now, to the open blinds and the Dentons' window across the gap. The bodysuit framed her from behind — the straps splitting around her hips, the sheer stockings taut on her thighs. Without the plug her ass was open and visible and the ring

still working, pulsing on empty air, glossy. Below it her sex, swollen and bare and slick. Above it the dip of her lower back, the chain at her throat.

Ray didn't touch her yet. He let her wait there — presented, open, her face turned toward the chair — and stroked himself slowly behind her, and let the waiting do the work.

“Look at her, James.” His voice was low. “Look at your wife. Ass up, face down, wet down her thighs. You know what she wants right now?”

James didn't answer.

“She wants me in her ass. In your bed. Say it, Blondie.”

“I want it,” Jenna said into the sheet. Muffled. “I want your cock in my ass — Ray — please — I've been thinking about it since Dayton — in our bed — with him watching—”

“Not yet.” Ray pressed the head of his cock against her ring and held it there, not pushing, just resting the blunt heat of him against her, and she pushed back for it and he drew away an inch, and she whimpered.

“Ask me properly,” Ray said.

“Please — *please*, Ray — fuck my ass — fuck my ass in front of my husband—”

“The lube.” Ray's eyes came up to the chair. “Hand it here, cuck.”

James stood. His legs were unreliable. He took the bottle from the nightstand — his nightstand, his side — and crossed to the bed and put it in Ray's open hand. Close enough to see the head of Ray's cock resting against his wife's ass. Close enough to smell the sex on both of them. Then he went back to the chair.

Ray dripped it down her cleft and worked it with his thumb, pressed the thumb in slow while Jenna moaned into the sheet, then slicked himself, taking his time, his eyes on James the whole while.

Ray pressed the head of his cock against her ass. She reached back — wrists still free — and gripped the sheet. James watched from the chair — her reaching hand gripping the sheet, her face changing, mouth open, eyes wide — the press itself hidden from him behind her own body. Ray pushed. The head breached her with a dense greased shove he could hear and not see. She cried out bright and shocked and hungry, the cry climbing and breaking.

“*Oh* — oh God — oh *fuck* — you're in my ass in our bed — James, he's in my ass —”

“Breathe,” Ray said. He held still. Just the head inside her. His hands on her hips, thick fingers pressing dimples into her fair skin. Sweat running down his temple. Eyes locked on where they met. “I've got you.”

She breathed. The ring worked around him — clenching, releasing, learning the width — and the stretch bloomed into pleasure that made her moan long and low, shameless. “It's so — *mmh* — it's so much. I can feel all of you. Don't you dare be careful.”

He gave her ten seconds. Then he pushed deeper, shaft feeding into her in slow thick inches, the intimate squelch of lubricated bare skin filling the bedroom, and Jenna pushed back to take him like she was starving for it.

He was in the marital bed. The sheets under his knees were cotton-soft from washing. The alarm clock on the nightstand behind him ticked in the silence between her moans. He was balls-deep in her ass in the bed where her husband slept, and the domesticity of it — the book, the reading glasses, the lamp's green shade — sat on him as conquest, quieter than the sex and heavier.

“James.” His voice was strained. “This. I had first. In Dayton.” He drove deeper and her face went into the mattress. “You spent three weeks training her with the plugs. Every night, the patience, the lube. And I took it first.”

He pulled back slow and drove in again, and Jenna's moan came up out of the mattress.

“And bare, James. That's the part you don't—” he hissed through his teeth as she clenched around him. “You ever had her bare? Anywhere? Her pussy? This?” He drove in again. “No. You never have. Nobody had, before me. And I'm in your wife's ass with nothing on, and she's so hot inside, James. She's so tight and so hot and I can feel every ripple of her. Every clench. You've never once felt your own wife bare. And you'll never feel this.”

He bottomed out. His hips seated against her ass, the full length buried, and he held there without moving — Jenna full and trembling, her husband in the chair.

“You know what I got written up for in Dallas,” Ray said. His hips starting to move — slow, the full stroke, the withdrawal making Jenna whimper and the re-entry making her moan. “Told four colleagues that somebody needed to tell that woman's husband that ass was wasted on one man. I said it at a vendor mixer and she filed against me and I deserved it.”

He pulled back. Drove in again. Wetter now, the lube and her arousal mixing, the smell of sex thick in the room.

“I was wrong, though,” Ray said. “I know that now.” He looked at James. “It's not wasted on one man, James. It *is* for one man. Just not you. Whose it for, Blondie?”

Jenna's face turned on the mattress. Her eyes found James through the curtain of her hair, and she was being fucked in the ass by Ray Vogler in her marital bed and the man she'd filed a complaint against was inside the place her husband had trained her for, and the pleasure was enormous and the shame was braided through it and neither one was winning.

“You, Ray, my ass is just for you.” she said into the sheet. “Don't hold back.”

Ray pulled out of her. Her whimper at the sudden loss was sharp and small. He leaned to the floor, hooked the heap of trousers closer, worked the belt free of the loops — the sound of the leather sliding through the loops. Jenna heard it and something in her stomach dropped and tightened. His apartment. The same leather. The same promise.

“Give me your hands,” he said.

She put her wrists behind her back. He wrapped the belt twice — snug, the buckle cold against her inner forearm — and pulled the tail through his fist, and her shoulders drew back and her tits pushed forward and the chain swung free and she was bound and his.

The leather smelled like his trousers and his skin. When he yanked, her shoulders locked and her tits swung and the chain clapped lightly against her sternum, and the first stroke back seated deeper than she was ready for. She squealed into the sheets and then moaned like she'd been paid for it, muffled and continuous, and behind her the wet slap of his hips on her ass went faster — *slap-slap-slap* — until the room was only leather and skin and her voice breaking against cotton.

He fucked her harder. The belt yanking her back onto every stroke, her face pressed into the bed, her moans muffled and continuous. The deep wet slap of his hips against her ass, the slap of his gut against her lower back, the leather creaking, her clipped cries punching through the cotton — the room was thick with it. The smell had changed — sex and sweat and the mineral salt of lube and something sweeter, her arousal flooding out of her pussy while her ass was occupied, running down the inside of her thigh.

“That’s it,” Ray said, rough, the composure gone now, sweat dripping off his jaw onto her back. “That’s it. Take it. Take all of it. Your husband’s right there watching you take my cock in your ass. You feel him watching?”

“Yes — *fuck* — yes — he’s right there — James, baby — look at me — watch what he does to me — watch me take it—”

“She loves this,” Ray said to James, panting, his hips never stopping. “You see it, right? Your wife. Bound with my belt. Getting her ass fucked in your bed. Moaning like that. She fucking *loves* it.”

“Yes — God — yes — I love it — I love his cock in my ass — *papi* — harder — don’t stop — don’t you dare stop—”

And under the noise, for Jenna, the quiet came. The belt holding her wrists, the cock driving into her, her husband’s eyes on her face — and the noise in her head went out like a room emptying, the white quiet, the good-girl quiet, the place where there was nothing to decide and nothing to hide and nothing to be but his. She’d been chasing it since November with her own hand and never caught it. It took a man who’d take it.

Ray fucked her through it — relentless, the belt creaking, her arms pulled taut behind her, her ass red from the slap of him, the chain swinging wild under her. “You’re going to cum,” he said. Flat. Certain. “You’re going to cum from this. My cock in your ass and your husband watching your face. Aren’t you.”

“Yes — *fuck* — yes — I’m going to — don’t stop — please don’t stop—”

“With your husband right there. Watching. Say it.”

“With my husband right there — watching — while you fuck my ass — James — baby — *watch me* — watch me cum on his cock — it’s so — I’m so close — *papi* — please — please let me—”

He slowed. Deliberate, cruel, the strokes going long and slow and deep, and she sobbed into the sheet and pushed back for more and the belt held her where he wanted her. “Not yet,” he said. “Not yet. I want you crazier than this.”

James watched from the chair. Her — bound, wrists behind her back, her body shaking with each stroke. Ray behind her — massive, sweating, ugly, relentless, his hips and gut working behind her raised ass, his grey chest hair matted dark, his face slack with effort. And his wife’s voice into the sheet — *oh — oh — oh — papi — harder — please* — prayed into the cotton. He was so hard it hurt. His hand had found his cock through the boxers and he was stroking without deciding to start and his eyes were wet and his throat was closed and the chair was the loneliest place he had ever been.

He had never tied her up. It had never once occurred to him to try. And here she was, bound with another man’s belt in their marriage bed, being fucked in the ass, sounding like she was being taken apart, sounding like she loved being taken apart. And his hand moved on his cock in time with another man’s strokes, and he hated it, and he didn’t stop.

Ray pulled out of her. Slow. The withdrawal drew a whimper that trailed into a gasp when the head came free, and her ass was open and used and glistening and she was trembling on her knees with her wrists belted behind her back, her chest and head still resting on the bed.

“James,” Ray said. “Bathroom. Warm washcloth. Bring it to me.”

James looked at his cock — thick, slick, darkened to a deep wine. At Jenna’s face on the bed, turned toward him, watching.

“Go,” Ray said.

James stood from the chair. The en suite was six steps away and each one was a step he hated himself for taking and couldn’t make himself not take. He turned on the hot water and the pipes were the most ordinary sound in the world and he was standing in his bathroom running water to clean another man’s cock. The cloth warmed under the tap. He wrung it out. His reflection was in the mirror — boxers, T-shirt, the line cut deep between his brows, eyes already dull with the decision: bring this cloth back, use it, sit down and wait for whatever came next, because that was what he did now. That was what he was.

Behind him, through the doorway, the bed creaked, and Jenna moaned — Ray’s low voice saying something James couldn’t hear, and her answering sound, wet and continuous. Ray wasn’t waiting for the cloth. Ray wasn’t waiting for anything.

He brought it back. Up close Ray’s cock smelled like Jenna — her cunt, her ass, lube, sweat — thick enough that James tasted it on the back of his tongue without touching. The shaft was dark and slick and still half-hard, the head wine-dark and filthy with her.

James stood at the side of the bed with the warm cloth in his hand and didn’t move. The water was already cooling against his fingers. This was the task. His head said no.

Said stop. Said *this has gone too far — all of it — put the cloth down and walk out.* And his cock throbbed in his boxers, and his feet didn't move. The head and the cock had been having this fight all night. The head had lost every round.

He held the cloth out to Ray. Offered it. The easy version — Ray could do it himself, and James could go back to the chair, and the night could stay on the right side of the line James couldn't name.

Ray didn't take it. He looked at the cloth, then at James, and something moved at the corner of his mouth.

"No," Ray said. "You do it." Not loud. A man used to being obeyed. "Clean it. Get me ready for her."

James moved to the side of the bed. Ray shifted his hips toward him. James cleaned his cock with the warm cloth — careful, the shaft thick under the terry, wiping the residue and the lube — and the work put his face close, closer than he'd ever been to it, and he made the mistake of looking. The width of it. The weight of it lying heavy against Ray's thigh. The thing that had just been inside his wife's ass.

Ray caught him looking.

"Careful," Ray said.

James's hand went still, the cloth halfway down the shaft.

"You've been looking at it all night," Ray said. Easy. Almost idle. "Every time I pull out of her, there go your eyes. And now you're down there with your face a foot off it, taking your sweet time." Something moved at the corner of his mouth. "Don't get ideas, James. That mouth of yours doesn't go anywhere near it. That's your wife's job."

He couldn't speak. The heat climbed his neck into his face, and Ray watched it climb, and the watching was the worst of it.

"Yeah," Ray said, almost to himself, reading him. "That's what I thought." He let James's face burn a second longer. "Finish it."

And James did — because Ray had told him to, because doing it was easier than standing there under Ray's eyes. Jenna watched from where she lay, her wrists bound, her eyes on her husband cleaning another man's cock so it could go back inside her. She watched his hands — gentle, precise, the same hands that sanded wood and fixed the fence — and the gentleness of his hands doing this task undid something in her she couldn't undo.

And there, for the first time, was the pity — a small clean thread of it, arriving uninvited: her husband's careful hands on another man's cock, his face set, doing the task well because he did every task well. But it came braided with the heat — Ray's voice, flat and idle, ordering her husband around his own bedroom like staff — and the two of them together made her wetter than either would have alone. Her hips made small, empty circles against the mattress. She pressed her face into the linen and felt herself pulse on nothing, and she didn't know which of the two feelings she was feeding.

"Good boy," Ray said.

Good boy. Not *good man* — the two words from the porch months ago, the sign-off between men parting as equals. *Good boy.* The downgrade was deliberate and James heard the distance between the two versions. He dropped the washcloth on the floor beside the bed.

Ray turned back to Jenna and hauled her hips up and entered her pussy bare — one thick stroke, no warning, and she cried out into the linen. Wetter, louder, the slick bare contact of skin on skin, and James stepped back from the bed and returned to the chair, and Jenna moaned into the linen, long and low, and her bound hands opened and closed behind her back as he filled her.

Ray fucked her slow and deep, the belt still holding her wrists, her face turned toward the chair. “There,” he said. “There’s my girl. You missed this. Tell your husband you missed it.”

“I missed it,” Jenna moaned. “James — baby — I missed it — he’s so fucking big —”

“Look at her,” Ray said to James, his hips working, the wet slap of it filling the room. “Look at your wife. I think she liked watching you do that.”

Ray pulled out of her — slow, the wet sound of it — and turned her onto her back beneath him. She went easily, boneless, letting him arrange her. He unwound the belt from her wrists — the leather leaving red impressions she’d feel tomorrow — and kissed the marks one by one, and dropped the belt on the floor beside the bed. Then he settled between her thighs, his gut pressed to her stomach, his chest hair against her tits, and pushed back into her in one long stroke that made her cry out. Face to face. Her legs came up around him, her ankles at his back. He fucked her in long, full strokes, and every stroke bottomed out and made her gasp, and her freed hands came up to his chest, then his face, and she moaned into his mouth when he kissed her.

James stood from the chair. He crossed to the side of the bed and reached for her — for her hair, her jaw, the side of her face — meaning to turn her mouth toward him, meaning to be in this, meaning to take some part of his own wife back from the man inside her —

“Ah ah ah.” Jenna caught his wrist. Her fingers wrapped around it, gentle and absolute, and she looked up at him with her lips wet and her eyes bright. “You need to ask Ray. Remember?”

James stood there with his wrist in her hand, his cock aching inches from her face, and the asking was the price and they both knew it.

He looked at Ray — behind her, inside her, his hands on her hips, his eyes patient. The big man was sweating and his cock was bare in James’s wife and James had to ask this man for his own wife’s mouth.

“Can I—” He stopped. Started again. “Can she—”

“Say it,” Ray said. “Straight. To me.”

“Can my wife suck my cock.” Flat and broken.

Ray looked at him. Slowed his rhythm. The consideration on his face was genuine.

“Here’s how it works,” Ray said. “You get her mouth. Through a condom. She doesn’t taste anyone but me from now on.”

James went to the nightstand. Took a foil packet from the box. Extra-tight. His brand — the brand that fit him and strained past capacity on the man inside his wife. He pulled down the waistband of his boxers, rolled the latex on, and came to the edge of the bed.

Jenna turned her head to him on the pillow and took him in her mouth through the condom. Latex. Warmth muted to a dull pressure. The taste of rubber and a ghost of her own spit. Above her, Ray’s bare cock drove into her cunt with a loud wet *squelch* that made the bed answer. Two sounds filled the room at once: the muted rubbery *shh-shh* of her lips on James’s condom, and the filthy skin-on-skin slap-and-suck of Ray fucking her unprotected — each of Ray’s drives rocking her mouth down James’s cock, the slap-and-suck reaching James from an arm’s length above her.

“That’s it,” Ray said, driving into her. “Suck your husband. Suck him while I fuck you. You like that, Blondie? Two cocks?”

She pulled off James, gasping, spit slicking the reservoir tip. “Yes. Fuck. Yes. I love it. I love his in my mouth and yours in me—” Ray drove in and the word broke into a moan. “Yours is better. God. Yours is so much better.”

“Your husband’s listening.”

“I know.” She looked at James, chin wet, eyes bright. “I know he is. Aren’t you, baby. You’re listening to your wife get fucked bare while you get a condom blowjob. And you’re so hard. You’re so hard it hurts, isn’t it.”

She lifted off James long enough to speak, her hand working him through the latex. “I can feel everything with him,” she said, looking up at Ray, then at James, tender and pitiless. “Bare. Every ridge. Every vein. He’s—” Ray bottomed out and she whimpered. “And I can barely feel you through this. I can barely feel you at all. I’m sorry. I’m not. Listen to us. Listen to the difference.”

She took James back in. Ray fucked her harder on purpose so the bare wet sound drowned the latex one, and she moaned around her husband’s cock in time with the other man’s thrusts.

It didn’t take long. It couldn’t. She stayed on him, her lips working the base through the latex, and James felt it build and couldn’t stop it and didn’t want to stop it, and she must have felt it coming because she moaned around him and took him deeper, and James came into the condom with a broken sound in his throat — half groan, half protest — his hands in her hair, her mouth never leaving him, Ray still fucking her from behind while she took it.

She pulled off him slow, peeled the condom off with two careful fingers, and tied it. The knot made a pathetic little balloon of white. She reached over and set it on the nightstand beside the lamp and the lube and the plug — the ritual, performed by her this time — and looked at it and then at James, and her mouth did something pitying and aroused at once.

“That’s where yours goes,” she said softly. “You know the deal.”

“Back in the chair,” Ray said. “You got yours.”

James went back to the chair. Spent. Softening. He sat down and watched.

Ray fucked her deeper now, slower, deliberate, his full weight settling over her, and every stroke bottomed out and made her gasp.

“Look at your husband,” Ray said. His hand came up to her jaw and turned her face toward the chair.

“Ray hasn’t finished in over a week,” Jenna said. To James. Her voice catching on the rhythm, her face held toward the chair by Ray’s hand. “Nine days, baby. I asked him to save it. For tonight.”

“I told myself—” Her breathing going ragged, the strokes deepening. “I told myself not inside. Not this week. That was the one line I—” Ray drove in deep and she gasped. “The one line I was going to hold.”

Ray’s hands were enormous on her waist, the thick fingers spanning her. He was thickening inside her — she could feel the shaft going denser, the head swelling against her deepest wall.

“Inside,” she said. The word torn out of her. She was looking at James when she said it. “Please. I want it inside me. I want you to cum in my pussy while my husband watches. Ray. Please.”

“This week?” Ray’s voice strained.

“Yes. Don’t pull out. I know what week it is. I want it anyway. Fill me. I need it.”

Nobody said pull out.

His rhythm changed. Deeper, slower. His face changed above her — Jenna could feel it, the way his breath shifted and his grip tightened and the composure fell away from him. What was underneath was raw and wanting and it wanted *her*, specifically. The moments when the salesman disappeared and what was left was a man who’d rearranged his entire life around having her.

“Jenna,” Ray said. His voice rough. Close to her ear, so only she could hear. “Tell him you love me.”

She went still under him. She could feel both men waiting — Ray above her, his heartbeat thick against her chest, and James in the chair, frozen.

What are you really asking, she thought. And she knew the answer: he was asking for the thing he could never buy and never engineer — the word, said in front of the man it would cost the most, true enough to cut. And the terrifying part was that it *was* true — not the love of rings and Sunday mornings and hand-rolled pasta, but a love that lived in her body and answered to dominance and fed on shame.

“You feel that?” Ray said, driving into her, louder now. “You feel me getting close? Nine days, Blondie. Nine days and it’s all going in you. You want it?”

“Yes. Fuck. Yes. I want it—”

“Then say it. Tell him. Loud. I want your husband to hear it.”

She looked at James — her face turned to the chair, her eyes wet, her mouth open —

“I love you,” she said. To Ray. Loud. Shouted, the word torn out of her.

“Again.”

“I love you. I love you. *Papi. Te amo.*” And the rest was Spanish, fast and broken and past her, and Ray fucked her hard through it, and the bed rocked, and James sat in the chair and watched his wife tell another man she loved him, in two languages, while he fucked her bare in their bed.

It went through James like a blade. She’d said it to Ray — looking at James, her face soft, her eyes wet, her voice broken open — and it looked like lovemaking, and it was also real. That was the blade. It was also real. Some part of her meant it. He could see the part. And the part was enormous, and it had never once been his to see.

Ray let go.

The first pulse hit her deep and she cried out — raw pleasure, not pain — the involuntary sound of a woman feeling a man unload at the end of her. Heat bloomed behind her navel. And it didn’t stop. The second pulse followed hard on it, thicker, and the third made her whimper and her eyes go wide.

“Oh my God — Ray — there’s so much—”

It was already overflowing. Every pulse forced more of him out around his shaft with a heavy, wet, audible *push* — thick white cum squeezing out of her around him, running down the crease of her ass, pooling on the marriage linen under them. She tried to count and couldn’t. Four. Five. A sixth pulse made her moan loud and shameless, her cunt grabbing him, milking him, while fresh seed poured out of her. Seven — she lost the number. The smell hit a second later: mineral salt and raw sex, steamy, flooding the bedroom. Her thighs were shining. And still he kept pulsing, hands locked on her, gut tight, fucking tiny aborted thrusts into her as he emptied a week into a married cunt that could not hold it.

“I can’t — it’s still coming — James, look, I can’t hold it—” She was laughing and moaning together, stunned, ecstatic. “Fuck. Fuck. There’s so much cum in me—”

She came mid-spill. The orgasm tore through her in waves matching his pulses — her cunt grabbing, milking, another rush of their mixed wet squeezing out around him — and she turned her face toward the chair with her mouth open and said it in broken English first, then the rest: “I’m cumming — I’m cumming on him — *papi — sí — todo — dámelo—*”

Brief. Clipped. Desperate. The analyst gone. The girl who loved being filled left shaking on a cock that was still twitching leftovers into her.

The room settled. Breathing. The creak of the bed. Sweat and sex and the bleach salt of him and the musk of her, heavy in the air.

“James,” Ray said. His voice thick. “Come here. Hold her open. Look at what I did.”

James stood from the chair. His legs were unreliable. He walked to the side of the bed. *Stop this. Say no.* His legs kept walking.

Ray lifted himself off her — his cock slid free, softening, spent, coated white — and a heavy pour followed it immediately, a continuous seep that made a wet sound on the sheet. She settled onto her back, legs falling open, chest heaving, chain catching the light, face damp and finished and still hungry-eyed. Cum pooled between her thighs, ran to the crease of her ass, spread on the marriage linen. The sheet was already ruined.

“Hold her open,” Ray said from James’s side of the bed. “Look.”

James’s hands went to her thighs. He pressed her open. Her pussy was dark pink and gaping, cream-flooded, open and pushing more of Ray out in slow globs. The smell made James’s eyes water. His cock, spent and soft, gave one weak, aching kick anyway.

Jenna watched him look. “Hi,” she whispered, raw and quiet, almost tender. “That’s all him. Inside your wife.”

On the nightstand beside the lamp and the lube and the plug, the tied condom sat with its pathetic little balloon of white. Jenna looked from it to the lake between her legs and her mouth did something pitying and aroused at once, and James had to look away to keep breathing.

Ray settled onto James’s side of the bed. Two pillows there — he pulled one behind his head. He pulled Jenna up the bed onto her own pillow on her side and put his arm across her waist.

“Guest room’s down the hall,” he said. To James. Not a suggestion.

James looked at Jenna. She was on her back, her hair spread on the pillow, Ray’s arm across her waist, his cum still leaking from her. Her eyes found James’s and what he saw in them was something he couldn’t read — too many things stacked, none of them simple. Pity. Arousal. Sorrow, maybe.

She didn’t say stay. She didn’t say go.

He took the other pillow — his — and walked down the hallway. Closed the guest room door behind him. Got into the narrow guest bed in the dark and pulled the unfamiliar covers to his chest and listened to the silence through the wall. Nothing. No voices, no laughter, no movement. He lay in the guest bed and his cock was soft and his hand was dry and the readings cycled through him — *she’s escalating / she’s punishing me / she thinks I want this / she’s falling for him / she’s testing what I’ll allow* — and none of them fit and the sixth reading never came. He pressed his face into his own pillow on the unfamiliar bed and closed his eyes.

Jenna lay awake and listened to the house.

Ray was asleep. Or nearly — his breathing had gone heavy and even, and his arm was across her waist and his body was a furnace against her back. She’d turned onto her side after James left, settled into the curve of Ray’s body with her back against his chest, and he’d pulled her close without waking — on James’s spot, on James’s extra pillow, his bare feet tangled with the sheet, and the weight of him in the bed was a different gravity. The sheets were ruined beneath her. She could feel it — the wet, the

cooling. His cum was still inside her, warm. She was not answering the question tonight.

When she shifted, his cum moved inside her — a warm thick slide that made her breath catch and her cunt give a sleepy pulse around the memory of him. She was still open from it. Still wet down to mid-thigh where it had dried sticky. The physical fact of being filled in her own bed while James slept down the hall sat in her as heat and as warning at the same time.

Through the wall: nothing. James was in the guest room. She'd watched him go without a word — no fight, no question, no syllable of protest. She'd designed the evening for this. Built the room. Cast the parts. Told Ray to wait on the porch, told James to go up to bed, staged the coat and the dress and the armchair and the couch and every rung. And it had worked, and it had gone further than she planned. The going-further was Ray's doing. The allowing-it was hers.

She'd told herself she would hold the fertile week — the one boundary she'd keep for herself. And then Ray had been inside her and the week he'd saved was in him and his face had changed and she'd said please and meant it, and the volume had been staggering, and she'd come with him. None of it was the program. It was her. Wanting him.

And she'd told him she loved him.

That was the one she couldn't put down. It had come out like dirty talk — shouted, coaxed out of her, in two languages, while he fucked her through it. That was how he'd asked for it: as talk, as part of the fuck, a filthy thing for her husband to hear. And maybe that was all it was. But it hadn't felt like talk when it left her. It had felt true — not what she had with James, but the other kind, the kind that lived in her body and answered to him — and she didn't know what to do with that.

Did Ray believe it? He'd asked for it like a man who needed it and would never say so, and he'd cum like he believed it. Did James? She'd said it to Ray looking at James's face, and James's face had done something she'd never seen before — he'd believed it, some part of him, she'd watched him believe it.

And did she?

She didn't know. She was afraid to know. The not-knowing sat warm in her like the cum still inside her, and she pressed her face into the pillow and didn't answer it.

She pressed her hand to her belly. Dead center, this week. No Plan B in the nightstand, none in the cabinet, none planned.

She'd watched James clean Ray's cock. The image she couldn't put down — her husband with a warm washcloth, gentle and precise, wiping another man's cock so it could go back inside her. She'd watched him take the word. *Cuckold*. In her own voice, in the voice she used for love. She'd watched him ask Ray for her mouth and heard his voice crack on the asking. She'd felt his cock through the condom — muted, distant — while Ray was bare and alive inside her, and she'd said the comparison out loud. She couldn't take that back.

She'd gone looking for James's floor. She'd been looking since the photograph, since the mouth rule, since the night at Ray's apartment when she'd sent the picture and waited for the explosion that never came. Every test had come back the same: compliance. One more rung descended without protest. She hadn't stopped Ray from sending him to the guest room, and James had gone.

The floor she was approaching was not his. It was hers. She could feel it — a point where watching him comply would stop being information and start being something she couldn't carry. Where the pity — which was real, which had arrived somewhere between the washcloth and the silence in the hallway — would outweigh everything else. She wasn't there yet. But she'd felt the edge tonight. The moment James went — no fight, no word — something in her tipped toward a limit she hadn't known she owned.

Ray stirred behind her. His arm tightened across her waist. His mouth, in half-sleep, pressed against the back of her neck, and the warmth was real and the man behind her wanted her in ways that had nothing to do with the program — ways that lived in a 3 AM kitchen and peanut butter from the jar and a look that held no audience.

She listened for James through the wall. Nothing. She listened for his breathing, for the creak of the guest bed. What she couldn't hear she had to imagine, and what she imagined was a man lying in the dark reeling.

She closed her eyes. The warmth inside her was not going anywhere. The morning would come and James would be in the guest room and Ray would be in her bed and the sheets would be evidence and the condom would be on the nightstand and the chain would be at her throat, and she would have to face all of it in the grey light.

She'd gone looking for his floor. She was afraid she was going to find her own first.

She pressed her face into the pillow beneath her — her pillow, the one that smelled like seven years of their marriage in the cotton, and now like Ray's skin where his mouth had been at her neck all night — and she held still.

She did not sleep.

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