THE HUSTLE



Part 3: The Window

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Chapter 3: The Window

The text came in at noon on Friday. Two words on his lock screen: *I'm done.*

Vince read it from the garage. Folding chair angled at the street, the Zippo in his right hand, the wheel turning under his thumb without catching. He looked at the phone. Looked at her duplex — the clean half, the window boxes, the swept step. The curtains drawn.

He'd given it a week. She'd lasted six days.

He typed back: *Okay.* Sent it. Set the phone on his thigh. Lit the Marlboro that had been waiting between his fingers since the text buzzed.

The quitting was the play. Always had been. You let a woman like Megan walk herself into a room she shouldn't be in, let her taste something she can't untaste, and then you let her try to leave. The trying was where the leverage lived. She'd sit in that duplex for a week with the photos and the knowledge that men she couldn't control had documentation of things she couldn't explain. The quitting wouldn't hold. It never held. He'd watched it work before — the other one, the tan woman, two years back. Same quit. Same week. Same door she walked back through with her chin up.

He scrolled to Dale. Typed: *She quit. Expected. Give her a week. Nobody touches her, nobody goes near her, nobody says a word to her. Wicks especially. I handle it.*

Dale's reply was three seconds: *Bet.*

The noise complaint turned over in his gut — a reflex now, the same way a man with a bad knee feels weather coming. January. The concrete. The mattress seams. Ninety days because a pretty girl in a duplex didn't like bass on a Tuesday. He looked at her curtains.

He could still see Tuesday's run without opening a file — grey sports bra dark with sweat, those tits slamming the fabric mid-stride, the bounce he'd been filming from the garage for six months, puffy nipples printing through the wet cotton when she hit the cold air at

the end of Maple. She was in there telling herself she'd walked away clean. The self-image. The composure. The altitude. The tits that started the whole machine.

He called Wicks.

"She quit," he said. "You don't go near her. You don't talk to her. You don't drive past her house slow. You stay angry and you stay invisible. I need her scared, not threatened."

"She can't just—"

"She can do whatever she wants. For now. I'll handle it."

He hung up. Texted Tyler: *Cabin owner pushed the job a week. Scheduling thing. I'll let you know.* Then, separately: *Game's off this Saturday. Dale's got something.*

Two minutes. Tyler's reply: *No problem. Let me know on the cabin.*

Vince flicked the Zippo open. Closed it. The garage smelled like old oil and cigarette ash and the summer heat baking the concrete. Across the street, her curtains stayed drawn.

He had the library. Dale's phone video — her on all fours in the clamp light, pale back arched, the white thong string splitting those cheeks. Then the later frames: her bare tits hanging heavy and conical under her while Dale's dark cock filled her mouth and spit stringed off her lip. The kiss: blue eyes half-shut, tongue out, fingers in grey hair pulling him in. The facial — cum striped across that magazine face, lashes stuck, those same blue eyes staring past the lens like she still couldn't believe the room. Wicks's footage was worse for being worse: shaky, too close, the swollen pink mounds filling half the frame, the waxed bare seam of her pussy when she turned, pink and tidy until the lights and the hands made it swell. Three SD cards from the DSLR held the clean versions of all of it — dress, bikini, topless, nude — every frame sharp enough to jerk to, and he had. Six months of street work sat under those cards: the grey sports bra mid-stride, those tits fighting the fabric with every bounce, sweat dark between them. And he had her quit — her own decision, freely made, which meant she was afraid of exactly the right things.

She told Tyler on Saturday morning. He was at the kitchen table with his laptop open, scrolling job postings like a man trying to outwork a problem. He'd already told her about Vince's texts — game off, Dale had something; the cabin pushed a week. The kitchen had the leftover quiet of a Saturday that wasn't going to pay.

"I'm done with the games," she said. Standing at the counter. Coffee between her hands. "I want my Saturdays back."

Tyler looked up. The screen cast blue across his face. "Tonight's already off."

"I don't mean tonight. I mean all of them."

He closed the laptop halfway. "What happened?"

"Nothing happened. I'm just done." She drank. The coffee was lukewarm. She'd been standing there for ten minutes working up to the sentence. "I don't want to be in that house anymore."

"Did someone—"

"Nobody did anything. I'm tired of it." She set the mug down. "I don't want to pour drinks for men who look at me like I'm on a menu. I don't want Wicks breathing on me. I don't want to walk home smelling like their house."

Tyler was quiet. His thumb traced the edge of the laptop. The number was in the room — the Visa minimum, the power bill, the truck payment, the rent — but he didn't say it. He said: "What about the money?"

"The cabin pays. Your real work pays. We'll figure it out."

"Megan, in the last three weeks we've cleared almost five grand between the game and the cabin. That's—"

"I know what it is."

"—that's the difference between drowning and breathing."

"Then we'll breathe slower." She held his eyes. The conversation had a floor and she was standing on it. "I'm done, Tyler."

He watched her for a long moment. Something in his face — the project manager calculating margins, weighing the number against whatever he saw in hers. Then his shoulders dropped an inch and he nodded.

"Okay." He opened the laptop. "Your call."

She'd expected a fight. She'd prepared for the fight — the numbers, the logic, the careful argument that their finances couldn't survive losing the income. She'd rehearsed Tyler pushing back, and she'd rehearsed pushing harder. His agreement landed wrong. Too easy. Like a door opening onto a room she hadn't checked.

She went to the sink. Washed the mug. Watched water spiral down the drain.

Done. The word lodged under her sternum and stayed there, whole, undigested. She meant it. She meant it the way she'd meant *never again* at the kitchen sink three days ago, and the meaning was the same temperature — warm in daylight, cooling toward dark.

The days pressed in without a single word spoken.

Sunday she walked to the mailbox and Wicks's Civic was parked across the street from Vince's house. The engine off. He was sitting in the driver's seat. He didn't look at her. Didn't wave. Sat there with his window down and his stained fingers on the steering wheel and his face pointed at his own phone. But the car was there. Sixty feet from her front door at ten in the morning.

She took the mail inside and locked the door and checked the lock twice.

Monday she came home from the grocery store and found a cigarette butt on her step. Marlboro Red. The brand Vince smoked. It could have blown from his driveway. It could have been anyone's. She picked it up with a paper towel and threw it away and washed her hands and the filter left a yellow stain on the towel.

Tuesday. Nothing. The nothing was worse — a held breath she couldn't hear the end of.

Wednesday Vince texted: *Just checking in. Hope you're good.* She didn't respond. An hour later: *The guys are upset. I'm keeping them calm but they feel like they got cut off. Wicks especially. I told them to leave it but I can't promise.*

She read the text three times. Turned the phone face-down. Picked it back up and read it again. *I can't promise.*

She went for a run. Four o'clock. The route she always took — down Ridley, left on Maple, the loop through the park, back along

the creek path. Headphones in. The late-afternoon heat heavy and still, the air tasting like hot asphalt and mowed grass. She ran harder than usual. Trying to shake something loose — the knot in her stomach, the feeling of being watched from a parked car, the Marlboro butt on her step.

She was on the creek path — the straight quarter-mile stretch, no houses, old poplars throwing long shadows — when Vince stepped out from the bench at the halfway point.

He was sitting when she saw him. Elbows on his knees. The gold chain visible at his collar. He stood as she approached — not blocking the path, off to the side, hands visible. A concerned neighbor. A man who happened to be at the park on a Wednesday afternoon.

She pulled one earbud out. Her chest heaving. Sweat ran between her breasts and she could feel her sports bra straining with every breath, the dark patches spreading.

"Hey," he said. "Didn't mean to startle you."

"You didn't." He had. Her pulse was already high from the run and the sight of him spiked it further — the deep-set eyes, the stubble, the way his gaze went to her chest and stayed there for one second too long before climbing to her face. She smelled him in the clean air — cigarettes and something greasy underneath. "What do you want, Vince?"

"Just wanted to talk. Off the record." He stayed where he was. Hands easy at his sides. "The guys are angry."

"You texted me that."

"I'm telling you in person because a text doesn't cover it." He scratched his jaw. The stubble rasped. "Wicks is furious. He keeps saying she doesn't get to just walk. Dale's quieter about it but Dale's always quieter about it."

"They'll get over it."

"Maybe." He shrugged — the shrug that looked like agreement and felt like a fist closing. "They've got photos of you, Megan. On their phones. Wicks has video. Dale has — you know what Dale has."

The sweat on her skin went cold. The creek beside her sounded like static.

"I'm keeping them in line," he said. "I told them to leave it alone and they're listening to me. For now." He rubbed the back of his neck. "But these guys — they did time, you know that. They're not the kind of men who get cut off and shrug. I'm trying to protect you here."

She gripped the earbud cord. Her hand was shaking and she wrapped the cord around her fist to hide it. "Protect me from what?"

"From nothing, if I do my job." He met her eyes. The deep brown, heavy-browed. The face of a man who'd been reading her since she moved onto this street. "I'm just being honest. These guys know where you live. They know your schedule. They've got enough on their phones to make your life very complicated. And I'm the only thing standing between that and you."

She stood on the path with sweat cooling on her arms and the creek running and the poplars casting shadows that moved when the wind moved and the man who had photographed her naked telling her he was her shield.

"I didn't do anything wrong," she said. Quieter than she meant to.

"Nobody said you did. I'm just telling you how it is." He took a step back. Creating space. Being reasonable. "Go finish your run. I'll handle them. Just — don't disappear on me, okay? If I can tell them there's a plan, they'll stay calm."

He walked away. Down the path, toward the parking lot, his thick shoulders square, already done with her. She watched until he was gone.

She didn't finish the run. She walked home. The front door. The lock. The deadbolt. The chain.

She sat on the couch in her running clothes with the sweat drying on her skin and the sports bra still dark with it and the fear settled into her — not the sharp fear of a threat, but the steady one. The fear of men who had photos of her body and knew her address and did time together and were angry.

Vince came to her door on a Thursday. Late afternoon. Tyler at work. She'd known he was coming the way you know weather — the

pressure dropping, the air changing, the inevitability of something overhead.

She opened the door on the chain. His face in the gap — the slicked hair, the stubble, the gold chain.

"I've got something for you," he said. "A way out."

She looked at him through two inches of open door. Then she unhooked the chain.

He stood on her step. She stood in the doorway. He didn't come inside and she didn't invite him.

"I talked to the guys," he said. Hands at his sides. "All week. They were ready to — they were angry, Megan. Genuinely angry. They felt like they paid for something and it got taken away."

"They paid for poker and drinks."

"They paid for you." He said it flatly. The directness was the cruelty and the courtesy. "They know it and you know it and pretending otherwise doesn't help you right now."

She pressed her lips together. The taste of coffee and something metallic.

"Here's what I got them to agree to." He pulled a pack of Marlboros from his pocket. Tapped one out. Held it without lighting it. "One more Saturday. One night. You come to the house, you're the entertainment at the game — lap dances between hands, a strip tease for the table, look-mostly — and then you walk out and it's over. Permanently. They leave you alone. I leave you alone. You never see any of us again."

The word *entertainment* landed hard and stayed — cold weight she couldn't shift.

"What does 'look-mostly' mean, Vince?"

"It means what it sounds like. They look. Maybe they touch — shoulders, waist, nothing crazy. You dance, you strip, they play poker, you go home."

"And the photos?"

"You walk out with the SD cards. All of them. Every card from my camera goes into your hand at the door. And I wipe the phones in front of you — mine, Dale's, Wicks's. You watch me do it."

"You can recover deleted photos."

"You can." He put the unlit cigarette behind his ear. "I'm not going to lie to you about that. But the cards are the originals. The phone copies are compressed shit — thumbnail quality. And these guys aren't tech people, Megan. Wicks can barely send a text."

She leaned against the doorframe. Her arms crossed over her chest — the instinct, the posture, the armor — and the compression shoved her tits up hard against the fabric, the heavy shape announcing itself in the gap of the doorway whether she meant it to or not. Vince's eyes dropped there for half a second, collecting, then climbed back to her face. "Why would they agree to this?"

"Because I told them it's this or nothing. And something is better than nothing for men like Dale."

"And Tyler?"

"Tyler doesn't hear about it. He doesn't know. You go, you come back, Saturday night is Saturday night."

"The safe word."

"Same as always. You say last call, I stop everything. That hasn't changed and it won't change."

She looked past him. The street. Her car in the driveway. The mailbox. Ridley Street in late afternoon — the sprinklers, the parked cars, the above-ground pool two doors down. Ordinary life on an ordinary block, and behind her the wedding ring in the ceramic dish and the thirteen hundred dollars in the gym bag and the days of parked cars and Marlboro butts and a man on a creek path telling her the men with her photos were angry.

"One night," she said.

"One night. And then it's done."

She knew the pictures wouldn't really be gone.

She also knew that three men who did time together had naked photos of her and video of Dale's cock in her mouth and Vince lived three doors from her front door and Tyler was gone every Friday through Sunday and the police report she could file would start with *I voluntarily went to his house and removed my clothes for money.*

"Saturday," Vince said.

"Saturday." She stepped back. "And then you're gone."

"Gone." His hands up. Open palms. The reasonable man. The deal-honorer.

She closed the door. Leaned her forehead against it. The wood was cool and smelled like the lemon cleaner she used every Monday. The ordinary smell. The careful life.

She was buying her way out. One night. The last night. She'd walk in, do what they wanted — dances, a strip, whatever *look-mostly* meant in a room where the definition had been written by the men doing the looking — and she'd walk out with the cards and the wiped phones and the knowledge that it was finished.

The cost was one more Saturday in that basement.

She could survive one more Saturday.

Tyler drove up Route 11 on Friday afternoon with his duffel on the passenger seat and the voltage tester rattling against the console. The same cabin. The same hollow. Eight hundred dollars and a summer of contracts if the owner liked the work.

But first: Vince's kitchen. The settle-up.

He'd texted Vince that morning — *Heading north. Can I swing by for the cut?* Vince said come by at four. Tyler pulled onto Ridley at 3:55 and parked in Vince's driveway.

Inside, the house was the house — wood paneling, stained carpet, the permanent smell. Vince was at the kitchen table with a beer and a roll of cash.

"Slow night while you were gone," Vince said. He peeled three hundreds from the roll. Set them on the table. "The guys were off their game. Nobody was feeling it."

Tyler took the bills. Folded them into his front pocket. Three hundred. Less than half of what the first two nights had paid. "Megan said it was fine."

"It was fine. Just quiet." Vince tilted his beer toward the counter. "Hey — can you grab me the opener? Drawer by the fridge."

Tyler walked to the drawer. Opened it. Rummaged past twist ties and takeout menus. "Not seeing it."

"Other drawer. My bad." Vince stood. "I'll get it. Hold on — check this out while I'm up." He went to the counter where the camera sat

on its strap, the LCD screen on, a thumbnail gallery visible. "Got some shots from last weekend. Nothing crazy — just the guys playing, some candids. Thought you might want to see."

Vince tapped the screen, scrolled to a middle frame, and turned it toward Tyler. A shot of the poker table — chips scattered, Dale's cigar in the ashtray, Wicks mid-laugh. Normal.

"Not bad, right? I'm thinking about setting up a real game night. Proper league. Charge an entry fee."

"Yeah," Tyler said. He was looking at the screen. "Looks good."

"Hang on — let me find the opener." Vince walked out of the kitchen. Through the living room. Tyler heard the bathroom door close.

The camera sat on the counter. Screen on. The thumbnail gallery open.

He didn't mean to scroll. He was going to set it down, pocket his three hundred, and drive north to the cabin. That was the plan.

He scrolled.

Warm light. A white sheet on a curtain rod. The basement, dressed like a studio. The shapes in the frame didn't mean anything for a second, and then they did, and the meaning was Megan.

The Christmas dress. Cedar Heights, two years ago, three glasses of champagne, his hands on her before they'd even found the car. Here it was on a stool in Vince Barella's basement: black, short, her legs crossed the way they crossed when she knew the hem was doing too much and she did it anyway. The V of the neckline poured her tits forward — that heavy pale shape he'd buried his face in on their own sheets, the cleavage a dark line you could lose a mouth in — and someone had lit her so that was the whole photograph. She was smiling. Not the coffee smile. The half-smile she made when something was funny and she hated that it was, the one that meant she was already in on it. Aimed at the camera. Aimed at Vince.

He looked until looking got worse than scrolling.

White strings. Two triangles that had already lost. Her tits spilling out the sides, the inner curves fat and pale against the cotton, and through the thin fabric the nipples he knew by mouth — that swollen, pillowy punch, the raised areolas, the exact shape that

printed against his chest when she rolled onto him in the dark and wouldn’t let him turn a light on. He’d asked to keep this. A picture. Just one. Phone held close, promise he’d delete it, lights off if she wanted. She’d said no like he was asking her to do something cheap. And here it was anyway, lit, her chin up, those pale blue eyes bright, her mouth set in a no that the rest of her had already stopped voting for. He could see the weight of her. He could see how the triangles cut into the undersides and still couldn’t hold her. He was hard. In this kitchen, with Vince down the hall and three hundred dollars in his pocket, he was hard looking at a photograph of his wife in a bikini she’d never worn for him.

His thumb jerked.

All fours. The chaise. Her back bowed, that round pale ass up in the clamp light, the dark mole on the left cheek he’d put his mouth on in the shower without thinking about it for years. The thong a white string splitting her. Knees apart. And between them, through cotton gone translucent, her pussy — the lips swollen the way they got when she’d been wet for a while, the slit showing, a dark bloom where she’d soaked the fabric. She was wet in the shot. Not posed-wet. Actually wet, the way she got on her back in their bed when he found the right angle, except she was on her knees in a basement and the camera was right there, filling the little screen with his wife’s pussy through a scrap of white. He could practically smell her. He couldn’t, the LCD was plastic and Vince’s kitchen smelled like beer and old grease, but his mouth filled anyway with the musk of her when she was like this, and he had to swallow before he could move his hand.

The triangles were gone.

Her tits bare in that light, heavy, high, the conical jut of them that still didn’t make sense on a chest that full, pink tips dark and tight like a mouth had already been on them. He knew the weight of each one in his palm. He knew the faint freckles across the tops. He knew the face above them — he’d kissed it that morning, or a morning like it, dark hair and blue eyes and that mouth — and in the photograph that face was watching the lens with her nipples hard for a room that was not their bedroom. The light wasn’t for her face.

The light was for her chest. Whoever was holding the camera had understood the assignment.

Nude. All of her, finally, the way he'd never been allowed to keep. Standing. Turning. Then her feet apart on the concrete and the waxed smooth mound he only saw with the door locked, and below it her pussy open to the lens, pink and tidy and then not tidy at all — lips thick, split, shining, wet painted down the insides of her thighs. Eight years of that being his. Three feet of basement air between it and a man who smelled like motor oil.

Tyler's thumb left a smear on the screen. He wiped it on his jeans. It didn't matter.

Then Dale.

Dale's mouth on her. Dark lips sealed around her nipple, her breast disappearing into him, her back arched so hard she was putting it in his mouth. Her fingers in the grey hair, pale, gripping his skull. Tyler knew the sound she made when he did that to her. He could hear it off a still frame. He could see her face tipped back, the composure gone, and the worst part wasn't Dale's mouth. It was her hands holding him there.

He scrolled because the alternative was making a noise.

The kiss. Her face tipped up into Dale's, his big hand in her hair, her mouth open, and her tongue — he could see her tongue against Dale's, the wet shine of it — and her other hand on the back of his head pulling him in. Sunday night that mouth had been on Tyler's mouth saying *fine, same as always.* In the photograph she was kissing Dale like she wanted him closer. The shutter had caught the pull. You couldn't fake the pull.

He went past it.

Dale's cock filled the next frame — dark, thick, veined, the head already wet, bigger than the picture wanted to admit. Then Megan, on her hands and knees beside it, pale cheek an inch from the shaft, those bare tits hanging under her, heavy and conical and in the shot like they belonged there. The contrast made his stomach drop and his cock throb in the same pulse. Next frame: her lips stretched around it. The head gone inside her mouth. Her cheeks hollowed. She was sucking. Spit bright on her chin, a string of it from her

lower lip to the shaft when the angle changed. His wife. Kneeling. Doing that.

There wasn't a frame after the last one. He stopped because the gallery did.

Her face. Cum across it — a stripe on her cheek, her pretty mouth glazed, her chin wet, a lash of it caught in her lashes so those pale blue eyes were wide and stuck and looking through the lens like she still couldn't believe what the room had made of her. Below, soft-focus and obvious, her tits hanging used, nipples still tight. The face he kissed good morning. Dressed in Dale.

Tyler set the camera down. His hands were steady. His vision was very clear and very narrow, like looking through a pipe.

He heard the bathroom door. Vince's footsteps. He stepped back from the counter. Picked up his duffel from the floor where he'd dropped it.

Vince came back with the opener. "Found it. Hiding behind the—" He looked at Tyler. "You good?"

"Fine." The word was a flat surface with nothing underneath it. "I gotta hit the road. Two hours to the cabin."

"Drive safe." Vince walked him to the door. His hand found Tyler's shoulder — a brief grip, man-to-man. "Good work up there. The owner loves you."

Tyler walked to the truck. Set the duffel on the seat. Sat behind the wheel. Started the engine. The F-150 backed out of Vince's driveway and turned north.

Behind him, Vince stood in the doorway. He waited until the truck was out of sight. Then he walked to the kitchen.

The camera was on the counter. Powered down. The strap coiled beside it — not how he'd left it. He'd left it powered on, the gallery open, the strap draped across the lens cap. Tyler had set it down carefully. Had coiled the strap like a man putting away evidence he shouldn't have touched.

Vince picked it up. Turned it on. Scrolled to the last image viewed — the facial. Cum striped across her cheek and those full parted lips, chin glossy, pale blue eyes wide through stuck lashes, bare tits hanging soft and heavy in the bottom of the frame, pink nipples still

tight from the room. The frame Tyler had been looking at when he'd decided to stop.

He set the camera back. Lit a Marlboro. The bait was taken.

Tyler drove north. The F-150 ate Route 11 in the long light, the shadow of the cab stretching east. He drove at the speed limit. He drove with his hands at ten and two. He drove like a man who was holding a container of acid with both hands and any sudden movement would spill it.

The images kept coming. He couldn't stop them. The bikini shot — her nipples pressing through thin cotton, the wet strip between her thighs transparent, clinging. His wife's pussy documented through fabric so thin it was confession. The topless frames — her bare tits in studio lighting, the puffy nipples hard and flushed, tits he'd been waking up next to for eight years lit for men who paid for the privilege. Three times he'd asked her for a photo. Three times she'd said no. Not even for him. Not even with the lights off and the phone held close and the promise he'd delete it. And these men — these men got the full library. Got her nude, legs apart, her pussy wet and swollen and shining.

The kiss. She'd kissed him back. He could see it in the frame — her hands on Dale's skull, her mouth open, her tongue. The pulling. She was pulling Dale's face toward hers. That was voluntary. That was choosing.

Dale's cock in her mouth. He kept coming back to that one. The size of it — thick, dark, veined, bigger than anything Megan had ever — bigger than him, by the kind of margin you couldn't rationalize away. Her lips stretched around it. Her cheeks hollowing with the suck. His wife, his wife, kneeling on a chaise in a basement sucking a fifty-five-year-old man's cock while cameras rolled.

And the cum. The cum on her face. The blue eyes through streaked lashes.

She'd told him *fine. Same as always.* She'd lain next to him Sunday night and given him the lap-sit version and jerked him off while the truth sat three houses away on an SD card.

He pulled over at a rest stop an hour north. Cut the engine. Sat. The hollow was another hour further — the dead zone, the cabin, the eight hundred dollars, the wiring he was supposed to care about.

He was hard. The knowing made him sick. He was hard because his wife had another man's cock in her mouth in photographs that existed and the photographs were in his head and his cock was responding to images of his own wife's infidelity with a specificity that made him want to put his fist through the windshield. He gripped the steering wheel. He didn't touch himself. The not-touching was the only dignity he had.

She quit. She quit the arrangement because these things happened and she couldn't face going back. The logic was available and it was poison because it was almost right. She'd quit because she was ashamed of what she'd done, and the shame meant she knew it was wrong, and the knowing meant it had happened — all of it, every frame. Her mouth. Her hands. Her moaning face and her wet pussy and the cum painting her like she belonged on a website.

He sat at the rest stop for forty minutes. Then he started the truck and drove.

He didn't go to the cabin.

At the junction where Route 11 forked — north to the hollow, east to the county highway that looped back south — he turned east. The decision was less than a decision. He was already turning before the turn signal clicked. The F-150 swung onto the county road and the cabin disappeared behind him.

He called the owner from his cell at a gas station in Millbridge. "Got held up. Family thing. I'll be there Saturday morning — first thing. I'll work straight through Sunday to make up the time." The owner grumbled. Tyler apologized. Hung up. He was not going Saturday morning. He knew that while the phone was still in his hand. The call bought him Friday night. Saturday he would deal with Saturday.

He drove south. Back toward Ridley Street. Back toward the house three doors from his, where the cameras were and the chaise was and the white sheet hung from a curtain rod.

He parked the F-150 three blocks away, on a side street behind the elementary school. Cut the engine. Locked it. He could not go home. She was in the duplex. She thought he was two hours north in a dead zone with a voltage tester. If she saw the truck on Ridley, the night became a conversation, and he did not have a conversation. He had photographs.

He slept sitting up. The seat back. The duffel for a pillow. The school's sodium light through the windshield, orange on the dashboard. He woke with a stiff neck and the taste of the rest-stop coffee still in his mouth and the images waiting for him like they'd been sitting in the cab all night.

Saturday. He drove to the diner on Route 9. Eggs. Coffee that tasted like the pot. He sat in a booth with his back to the parking lot and did not look at his phone because looking at his phone meant looking at her name. He went back to the truck. Sat. The day was hot through the glass. He cracked the windows. A mower started somewhere. A kid yelled. Ordinary Saturday, three miles from the block he could not be seen on.

If the quit was real, she would stay inside. Saturday was still when that house ran. He would watch their door. If she stayed, he would know one thing. If she walked, he would know the rest.

The shame of the wanting was already on him. He could feel it — a film, greasy and warm, covering the rage, making the rage slippery, making it hard to hold. He wanted to see. The wanting was the worst thing about him and he was waiting for dark so he could do it.

Saturday evening. 7:45. Tyler stood in the shadow of the duplex two doors past Vince's, wearing dark jeans and a navy t-shirt from his duffel. The streetlights were on. The air smelled like charcoal and cut grass and the above-ground pool's chlorine.

He watched their step.

Megan came down it in jeans — dark wash, fitted — and a black top he recognized, high at the throat. A jacket. Flat shoes. Her hair down. She looked like she was going somewhere ordinary. She looked like she was wearing armor. He knew what the armor was losing against anyway: those heavy tits compressed under the high

neck, the raised areolae that would already be announcing themselves if the fabric were thinner, the long volleyball legs the denim only traced. The camera had shown him the bare versions. The bare versions walked inside her clothes toward Vince's porch light, and his cock thickened in his jeans while the rest of him went cold.

She didn't look toward the school. Didn't scan the street. She walked the ninety seconds to Vince's house with her hands in her jacket pockets and her chin up and she knocked and the door opened and the light inside swallowed her.

He stood in the shadow and watched the door shut. Then he walked back to the truck.

Sat behind the wheel. Doors locked. The bass reached him anyway, faint, three blocks of ordinary night between him and it. Ten minutes. Twenty. Thirty. A porch light. A dog. He had seen her walk in. That was the thing he had come to know, and knowing it did not tell him what to do with it. The wanting sat in the cab with him and did not get smaller.

He got out. Walked the three blocks.

She'd dressed for survival.

Standing in front of the closet at six, she'd reached past the denim skirt, past the Christmas-party dress, past anything that announced itself. She pulled the dark-wash jeans — the fitted pair from Cedar Heights, the ones that cost two hundred dollars when two hundred dollars was a Saturday brunch and a bottle of wine. They sat low on her hips and held her close, the denim thick enough to be between her and whatever hands arrived. A black top — fitted, long-sleeved, high-necked. No V. No lace edge. No cleavage visible. A top that said *I'm here because I have to be* and nothing else.

She pulled her leather jacket off the hanger. The one that cost four hundred dollars two years ago and had hung unworn since they moved to Ridley Street. She put it on and the weight of it on her shoulders felt like something she'd forgotten — the woman who wore good leather to bars where men bought her drinks she didn't need and looked at her like she was the reason the room existed.

That woman. The one who lived before the duplex, before the Visa, before the basement.

Flat shoes. No heels. She wanted to be able to walk out fast if the walking-out was necessary.

Hair down. Minimal makeup. The French perfume — a spray at her wrists, her neck. The last luxury.

The ring sat in the ceramic dish by the door. Among the keys and loose change. She looked at it. Didn't touch it. Walked past.

Outside, the air was warm and thick with summer. She walked the ninety seconds with her hands in her jacket pockets. The leather creaked softly with each step. Vince's porch light was on.

She knocked. He opened the door. His eyes dropped — the instinct, the inventory — and found jeans and a high neck and leather and nothing worth his time. Something crossed his face that might have been amusement.

"Come in."

The house. Cigarette smoke, the carpet, the wood paneling. She took the air through her teeth.

The living room was the living room. The poker table was there — the same felt, the same mismatched chairs — but it was dead. No chips. No cards. Dale stood at the far end of it anyway, occupying the space like the furniture still belonged to him, cigar going, thighs planted. Those dark eyes finding her the way a scope finds a target. Wicks beside him, leg bouncing, grinning with all his bad teeth. His gaze went to her chest first and found nothing and his expression soured for half a second before the grin came back.

"She's wearing a jacket," Wicks said. "A fucking leather jacket. Like it's October."

"So?" she said. "I like it."

"You looked better last time."

"Last time was last time."

Vince closed the door behind her. She heard the lock turn. The sound ran through her spine. *Locked in. The deal was words, and the man who said them had the only key.*

He walked her to the bar. His back to the room. Voice low.

"Same deal. Last call. You say it, I stop everything."

"I know."

"The terms are what we talked about. You do the entertainment — the dances, the strip — and you walk out with the cards and the wiped phones. One night."

"One night."

"You're buying your life back, Megan. Ninety minutes and it's over."

She nodded. He handed her a glass. Gin. She took it and the first sip burned and the burn was welcome.

The basement stairs were to her right. The door was open. The light below was warm — the clamp lights, the same triangle of warmth she remembered. That room. The chaise. The sheet. Dale's mouth. The cameras.

"We're downstairs tonight," Vince said.

She looked at him.

"The game," he said. "Private. Like we talked about." He tipped his chin at the open door. "Camera stuff's put away. You can see for yourself."

The photo room. He was taking her back to the photo room and calling it a game. She drank. Set the glass down.

"Let's get it over with."

The basement. Cooler than upstairs. The dropped ceiling tiles grey above them, the concrete floor under her shoes. The clamp lights threw their triangle of warm white, illuminating the center of the room — a poker table dragged into the light, four chairs, the felt. Not the living-room table. This one. The couch angled into the far corner beside the window wall — one arm near the glass, the other pointing into the room — a folded blanket draped over the far arm. A Bluetooth speaker on the workbench, bass thudding low. A card table with bottles and glasses. The ashtray. The workbench itself in the corner near the window, a row of drawers beneath it, tools hanging above. The garment rack pushed to the wall, empty. The white backdrop sheet hung limp, unused. The changing curtain in its corner. A spare folding chair against the wall near the stairs.

No tripod. No DSLR. No chaise. No propped phones that she could see. The space where the camera had stood was just floor.

The men came down behind her. The weight on the stairs. Dale's mass — each step deliberate, the wood groaning. Wicks quick and light. Vince last, pulling the door closed at the top.

She stood in the warm light and breathed through her mouth and the gin burned low and stubborn in her gut. The missing cameras were the proof. She made them be the proof.

Vince dealt. The game began.

She poured. Heavy for the men — the routine she'd learned over three Saturdays, muscle memory now, though the word *hustle* was a memory she couldn't touch without flinching. Gin for herself.

One night. The cards. The phones. Done.

The countdown ran in her head like a clock she couldn't turn off. Every minute survived was a minute closer to the door.

Dale won the first hand.

"Dance for me," he said.

The word landed. Dance. She'd agreed to dances on her step, in daylight, with the chain still on the door. Down here it was a man telling her to start.

"I don't dance, Dale."

"Dance for me." Same temperature. He hadn't heard a no. He'd heard a delay.

She looked at Vince. He was watching the cards. Ninety minutes. Look-mostly. Then out. She set her glass on the card table. Walked to the space between the poker table and the couch. The warm light found her. She felt it on her face, on the black fabric across her chest, and she felt the three of them find it with her.

"Jacket off," Dale said. Low. Flat. Stating. Waiting.

"The jacket stays."

He looked at her. Not at the leather. At her. The cigar between two fingers. The dark eyes that had been on her tits through a high neck since she came down the stairs.

"Jacket off."

When we were inside. She'd kept the question shut for two weeks. Robbery, she let herself think now. Beating someone. Worse.

Whatever it was, they'd done it together, and tonight she was alone in a basement with all three of them.

She unzipped it. The sound was too loud in the concrete. She shrugged it off her shoulders and hung it over the back of the spare folding chair by the stairs — carefully, the way she'd hang it in the closet at home, because the jacket had cost four hundred dollars in a life where four hundred dollars was a decision about a jacket. She walked back to the warm light. The black top underneath, fitted, long-sleeved. No V. She'd chosen it for that. It still showed them the shape. She knew. She'd known in the mirror at six. She crossed her arms and uncrossed them because crossed looked like hiding and hiding looked like an invitation to take more.

She moved. Hips first — a slow roll, weight shifting onto one thigh, the other leg straightening, the denim pulling tight across the seat of her ass and up into the seam between her legs. She felt her tits move inside the high neck, heavy, a half-beat behind her shoulders. She felt the jeans show them the full seat of her, the long volleyball line of her thighs, the narrow waist they'd been waiting to get their hands on. Wicks made a sound in his throat. She kept her face pointed at the far wall and thought about the pictures. The phones. The door.

Wicks whistled. His leg bounced faster.

"Jesus Christ. Look at that ass. Dale — are you seeing this? The jeans are painted on. She's got a high neck like a librarian and an ass like—"

"Wicks." Her voice came out dryer than she felt. "I'm right here."

"I know you are, sweetheart. That's the whole point."

Dale watched without expression. His cigar between two thick fingers. His dark eyes tracking her hips. She felt the track. She always felt it. The difference was she was moving on purpose now, and the purpose was his.

"Slower," he said.

She slowed. Faced away from them. The back of her — jeans, waist, hair falling between her shoulder blades — and nothing to look at but the dropped ceiling and the knowledge of their faces behind her. Last call sat against her teeth. She swallowed it.

Stopping a dance forfeited a night. She turned again. Dale's eyes hadn't moved from where she'd been.

"That's the dance," she said. It came out thinner than she'd meant.

"Play the hand, Wicks." Dale, level, to the table.

The poker resumed. She walked to the card table and drank. The gin was warm. Her face was warm. She could feel the heat in her cheeks and hated that they could see it.

Dale won the next hand. "Lap," he said. One word.

She walked to his chair. The size of him filled it — two hundred and fifty pounds, thighs wider than the seat, the gold chain at his throat catching the clamp light when he breathed. She'd sat on this man before. Upstairs. A skirt. A favor. She knew what was under her before she turned.

"Look-mostly," she said. To Vince. To the room. "That was the—"

"Waist is fine," Vince said. Easy. Already dealing. "Sit down, Megan. We're playing cards."

So that was the deal's shelf life. One dance. *Sit down, Megan*, like she worked here. Arguing was how she found out what this room was with Vince against her.

She turned. Lowered herself onto Dale's thighs.

The mass of him. She sank into it — heat, certainty, the denim of his jeans and the denim of hers, and then the ridge. She felt it the second her weight settled: thick, already hard, running from the base of her spine up the cleft of her ass through two layers of fabric. The same cock she'd had in her mouth two weeks ago. The same one on the printout behind the curtain. It pulsed against her. She bit the inside of her cheek.

His dark hands found her hips and settled there. Proprietary. The stained fingers curling over the waistband of her jeans, thumb along the seam, her pale forearms braced on the chair's arms because she needed somewhere to put them that wasn't him. She could smell him this close: cigar, the warm musk of his skin, something denser underneath that filled her nose and sat in the back of her throat. Her French perfume was going thin against it. Clean notes drowning.

"Sit back," Dale said. Into her hair. His hands on her hips pulled once, seating her harder on the ridge.

She sat back.

His hips shifted beneath her — once, slow — and the ridge ground against her and the denim made a soft, dragging rasp. The friction went through her pelvis like a struck match. She tried to sit still enough to starve it. Her nipples had gone tight inside the high neck; she felt them drag on the cotton with every shallow breath, two points the fabric couldn't hide if anyone looked, and everyone was looking. Between her legs, under the jeans, she was starting to get wet — a warm slick she could feel when she pressed her thighs together on his lap. She caught herself doing it. Thighs locked on Dale. She stared at the poker table, at Vince's hands on the deck, at anything, and waited for the next hand. *Almost done.* The word last call was still in her mouth. She drank gin off the card table instead, leaning for it, and the lean put more of her ass against him. He made a sound. Low. Satisfied. She sat back like she'd meant to.

Two more hands. Vince won and asked for a close pour — she stood beside his chair, grateful for the standing, and poured, and his hand found her hip, the rough pad of his thumb on the strip of skin above her waistband where the top had ridden up. Two seconds. His thumb traced a slow arc on her bare hip and the calluses scraped and she felt the scrape in her teeth.

"You're doing good," he said. Quiet. For her. The handler. The man who'd built the stairs.

She didn't answer. She finished the pour.

Then Wicks won.

"Lap dance," he said. Immediate. His legs spread, his bony knees sharp through his jeans. Patting his thighs with stained fingers. "Come on. My turn. I've been waiting, I've been so good, Dale got the real one, I get— come here."

"Wicks." Vince, mild. "She's coming."

She walked to his chair. Turned. Lowered herself onto his lap.

He was all angles. Narrow thighs, restless, the jitter running through his legs into her. She could feel him shaking. His erection pressed against her hip through his jeans — small, insistent, blunt,

nothing like the thick ridge she'd just left, and somehow worse for being so eager, a man leaning through a doorway he'd been waiting behind. His hands landed on her waist. Clammy. Thin-fingered. The grip too hard, the tremor running from his fingers into her ribs. Menthol on her neck. Then her ear. His mouth close enough that she felt the heat of the words before she heard them.

"You smell like money," he said. His Adam's apple worked. The grin stretched across the bad teeth. "Feel that? That's because of you. That's been because of you since the first night."

"I felt it." She stood the moment Vince started dealing. Walked to the card table without looking back. Poured herself another gin. Her skin crawled where his hands had been — the clammy print of them on her waist, the menthol still in her hair. She drank. The gin didn't do enough.

Then Vince won a hand and instead of a dance or a lap, he looked at her and said: "We've got an outfit for you back there." He nodded toward the changing curtain. "Go put it on."

The curtain. Last time. The photo on the shelf. The woman on her knees. She looked at it and her stomach dropped.

"I'm not going back there."

"It's a change of clothes," Vince said. Mild. Already stacking the cards. "That's the strip. We talked about a strip."

"I can do that out here. I have clothes on."

"Curtain, Megan." He tipped his chin at it. "You want the night over, you keep moving."

Dale's cigar glowed. He hadn't said anything. He didn't need to. The chair, the heat of him still on the backs of her thighs, the way he watched her not walk.

She looked at Vince.

"What outfit?"

"You'll see."

Sent, like staff. She could walk herself over or be helped over.

She picked up her glass, drank what was left, and went.

Behind the curtain she was alone.

The propped mirror. The bare bulb. The same space she'd changed in three weeks ago — same concrete smell, same shelf, same bare wall. But the garment rack was empty. No robe. No bikini on a hanger. What was waiting sat on the shelf: a sports bra and a pair of runner's shorts. Both still had store tags.

She picked up the sports bra. Held it up in the bare light. Looked at the tag. Looked at the size.

A size too small.

The brand was the same one she wore on her morning runs — the same cut, the same seaming, a different color. And the size was wrong. Wrong in a way that wasn't a mistake. Wrong in a way that was a sentence: *I've been watching you run past my house for six months and this is what I see.*

She stood in the changing space and held Vince's sports bra and the ice of it spread through her stomach. He'd bought this. He'd gone to a store and looked at sports bras and chosen this one — this size, this cut — because the version of her that lived in his head was the one where the fabric was losing. The morning runs. The folding chair in his garage angled at the street. His dark eyes on her chest when she jogged past, tracking the bounce and the strain. He'd been taking notes. And tonight he'd dressed her in them.

The shorts were the same. Tiny runner's shorts, high-cut, the kind that showed the underside of her ass when she bent to stretch on the front step. Tags still on. Bought for her. By the man who lived three doors away.

Then she saw the photos.

On the shelf, propped where she couldn't miss them. Two of them.

The first she recognized: the same photo she'd found behind this curtain last time. The previous woman — tan, on her knees, Dale's cock down her throat, mascara running in dark tracks down her cheeks, eyes up. The photo that had made her wet and sick at the same time. The photo that had walked out with her that night and stayed in her head for the two weeks between. *Was this left here for me?* She'd asked herself that two weeks ago, standing in this same

spot. The ambiguity was Vince's. Could have been careless. Could have been placed.

The second was new.

Her own face. Her own mouth. Her own stretched lips and watering eyes. A printout — not a phone screen, a physical printout on glossy paper — of the photo from the solo night. Dale's dark cock between her lips, the contrast filthy and clean at once. Her cheeks hollowing. Spit stringing from the corner of her mouth. Her blue eyes wide through wet lashes. Below the frame line: the pale heavy hang of her bare tits, soft conical weight, pink puffy nipples caught mid-sway and slightly soft-focus — unmistakable, trademark, the reason the camera existed.

She stared at it. At herself. At the woman on her knees with a cock in her mouth who was also the woman standing in a changing room holding a too-small sports bra. The heat came before the thought — involuntary, deep, a pulse between her legs that she couldn't stop and couldn't explain and didn't want to examine. The same heat from last time, but worse, because the woman in this photo was her. That was her mouth. Her spit. Her eyes.

She put the printout face-down on the shelf. Her hand shook.

Was this left here for me?

She knew the answer now. She just couldn't say it aloud.

The trajectory was clear. The previous woman went from a glamour shoot to Dale's cock in her throat. Megan went from a dress on a stool to Dale's cock in her mouth. And now she was standing in a changing room about to put on a costume these men chose for her, and the trajectory pointed to one place.

Then Wicks — specific, unbidden. Two weeks ago, on the solo night — Dale's cock in her mouth on all fours — Wicks had crouched behind her and put a finger inside her — thin, bony, hooking up against that front wall — the first penetration by any man other than her husband since she'd married Tyler. The flash ran that forward into full sex: his cock instead of the finger, the bad teeth close to her face, the clammy hands on her hips, the menthol breath and the jittery thrusting and the running narration. The flash unsettled her in a way that went past revulsion into something that tasted like panic.

She pulled the thought apart. Replaced it with a plan.

If I can make them cum with my hands, they're done. Men who've cum don't want more. Wicks would cum in thirty seconds. Vince would take longer but he'd get there. Even Dale — even Dale's body has limits. I jerk them, they finish, I walk out. Handjobs. That's all. I can do handjobs.

The plan sat in her chest like a fistful of rope. She gripped it.

Last call. The word sat against her teeth. She could say it right now. Walk back out in her own clothes. End the night.

She set it down. *The photos are on the SD cards and their phones. The men know where I live. Vince is three doors from my front door. The crew is angry and reachable and I am alone on this street. If I walk out now, I've done nothing and gained nothing and the photos still exist and the men are still angry.*

She peeled the store tags off the bra and the shorts — snapped the plastic ties, dropped them behind the shelf. Evidence of purchase. Someone had stood in a store and bought these for her.

She kicked off the flat shoes and set them under the shelf. Took off her jeans, folded them, placed them on the shelf beside the photos. Her top. Her bra — folded, stacked on the jeans. Her own clothes under the men's costume, the neat stack of a woman who still folds things in a room where the folding won't matter. She put on the running kit.

The sports bra was obscene. Her breasts compressed into fabric that had no chance of containing them — the swollen pink mounds visible through stretched cotton as sharp points, the upper swell of each breast bulging above the neckline in a soft, heavy spill, the underside of each threatening the hem with every breath. The shorts rode up to the crease of her thighs. The elastic dug in.

She looked in the propped mirror. The sports bra losing. The shorts riding up. Pale blue eyes, dark hair, her tits shoved up and out until the cotton went thin at the nipples. The woman who jogged past his garage at seven in the morning, except the lights were on her now, and the clothes were his, and in a minute she had to walk back out to the men who'd already had her on her knees. She looked like what they wanted. She squared her shoulders anyway.

She walked back out.

The room went quiet.

She stepped into the warm pool of the clamp lights wearing Vince's running kit and three men stopped what they were doing.

Wicks's chair creaked as he half-stood — a swallowed noise in his throat, recognition and hunger colliding, the imagination outrun. "Oh my God. Look at her. Vince — look at her tits in that — look at the fucking — the *nipples* —"

Dale leaned forward. His cigar forgotten in the ashtray. His eyes went from the sports bra to the shorts to the bare strip of stomach between them and settled there, on the pale skin above the waistband, the narrow waist, the soft trail of freckles that disappeared into the elastic.

Vince said nothing. He dealt the next hand.

She stood in the clamp light while they played it. The shorts had crawled into the crease of her ass on the walk out from the curtain. She could feel the elastic there, a thin wet line. The sports bra cut with every breath, the upper swell shoving over the neckline, pale and public. Wicks's cards were still face-down. He was looking at her stomach the way Dale was. Vince turned a card. The snap of it carried.

Dale won.

"Dance," he said.

She came around the table. Stopped in front of his chair. Close enough that the cigar smoke sat on her tongue, close enough that his knees bracketed her calves. His face was level with her chest. She felt his breath warm the cotton.

She moved.

Hips first — a roll toward him that put her tits in his face, then away, the too-small band riding up and dragging the weight with it. She felt them shove against the stretched fabric, heavy, a half-beat behind her hips, the neckline losing another inch. The freckles on her stomach passed under the clamp light and vanished into the waistband and came back. She turned. The shorts gave up what

they'd been holding: the underside of her cheeks, pale, the elastic a string now. Wicks made a wet sound through his teeth.

"Jesus. The shorts — Vince, they're in her ass, look at the—"

"Play your cards," Vince said.

She rolled her hips again because standing still in his breath felt like refusing. Her hands found her own waist. The sports bra rode down on the next pass and her tits shoved up over the neckline, the swell of them going soft and public above the band, and she felt Dale look at that and keep looking.

His dark hands found her hips.

Heat. Size. The cigar-smell of his skin. His thumbs settled in the hollows inside her hip bones and pulled her a step in, until her thighs brushed denim and her tits sat in his breath. She felt the exhale through the cotton — warm, damp, aimed at the place the bra was failing.

"Dale."

His right thumb hooked the hem.

"That's not—"

He pulled.

The band slid down over her breasts and settled underneath them. The elastic held. Her tits spilled free above the fabric — bare, heavy, the puffy nipples hard in the cool air — and the band sat under them like a shelf, pushing them up, pressing them together, holding them high and firm. Cool basement air licked the newly exposed undersides; she felt every freckle there announce itself. Her shampoo lifted off her skin into the cigar haze — clean, expensive, wrong for this room — and underneath it the warmer smell of her own chest, sweat and heat.

Her hands came up. She caught herself — the pale weight filling her palms, hot — and covering shoved them together into a cleavage the bra had been too small to make, and Wicks groaned like she'd done it for him. She dropped her hands.

"Dale. The bra."

"Leave it."

Wicks sucked a wet breath through his bad teeth. "Jesus — look at 'em. Look at those fucking tits sitting up like that—"

She left it.

The shelved weight pulled at her posture. Every breath made the pale flesh shift over the band. Dale's eyes were on the undersides, on the way they sat up because he'd put them there. She stood in it. Playing along. The thought that came with the air on her chest was ugly and she kept it: if they were looking at her tits they would finish in her hand. She needed them to finish. She stood in the clamp light with her breasts out and let them look, and when she shifted her feet the lining of the shorts clung, wet, a small filthy secret against her pussy.

She walked to the card table. Poured gin. Drank. The glass gave her hands somewhere to go.

Behind the curtain she'd made a deal with herself. Hands. Get them off. Walk out. Wicks would go in half a minute; she'd felt him shake on her lap an hour ago, leaking through denim at the idea of her. Vince would take what he was given and call it even — he liked the appearance of a deal. Dale was the one her mind kept snagging on. Even Dale's body had a limit. She'd told herself that with the printout face-down on the shelf and her own clothes in a neat stack, and it had felt like a plan. Standing here with her tits out and the shorts already soaked, the plan was thinner. She was going to offer it anyway. Last time had been Dale in her mouth, Wicks's finger, the photos, the week of being afraid of her own street. She could still taste all of that if she let herself.

She was wet. The line she was about to give them would sound like she wanted this. She needed it to sound like that. Last call sat against her teeth. She swallowed gin instead.

She turned back to the room with the glass in her hand. The band cut under her bare tits; she felt them move when she breathed — heavy, free, indecent — and the tiny shorts were damp where her pussy had soaked the lining. She tried for the bartender voice. It came out thin.

"You guys have been so good tonight," she said. Breathy. Trying for generous and landing on scared. "And I'm so turned on right now that I'll tell you what — we can break the no-touching rule. I'll jerk off the winners of the hands."

She watched the felt go still. Wicks's leg stopped bouncing. Dale's eyes went from her chest to her face. Vince set his cards down and looked at her with something she couldn't read and didn't want to.

"Deal," Wicks said. Fast.

Dale said nothing. He picked up his cards. But the corner of his mouth moved.

The game continued. Barely. Each hand lasted two minutes. Each hand had a winner. Each winner got her.

Dale won first.

She set the gin glass on the card table — the click of the base on the wood louder than it should have been — and stood there with her hands empty.

Dale had already pushed his chair back. His legs open. The gold chain sitting in the crease of his neck. The dead cigar in the ashtray. He looked at her tits, then at the concrete between his boots.

"Come here."

She walked. Her tits bounced once, high on the band, and Wicks's breath punched out of him. She stopped between Dale's knees. His breath warmed the skin under her breasts. Close enough that if she leaned she'd be in his mouth. The ridge in his jeans ran thick along his left thigh, a shape she knew from two weeks ago, from the printout, from the dark behind her own eyelids on Thursday when Tyler was asleep and she had no business remembering it.

"On your knees."

"Just hands," she said. Small. To him. To the room. "That was what I—"

"On your knees."

Her shoes were behind the curtain. The stairs were past three men. *Get down before he says it again.*

She lowered herself to her knees between his spread legs. Concrete, cold. His thighs on either side of her shoulders, denim and heat. Her tits hung over his lap, nipples an inch from the fly. She could smell him this close — cigar, the warm musk of his skin, the trapped salt of a cock that had been hard since she walked out of the curtain. The button of his jeans sat in front of her mouth. She looked at that.

Dale's dark hand settled on her shoulder. Heavy. Holding her there. His thumb scraped the side of her left breast, callus over the freckles, and she made a sound she hadn't meant to give him.

"Unzip me," he said. Low. Almost amused. "I want those shaking while you stroke it. Get it out."

The side yard — narrow, unlit, dead grass and a coiled hose. Tyler moved along the foundation, his shoulder brushing the vinyl siding. The basement had a window — small, ground-level, set in a concrete well that collected leaves and cigarette butts. The glass was dirty, clouded, but the light from inside came through. The hopper was cracked open a finger's width. Sound seeped through: muffled bass, the scrape of chairs, a woman's voice he knew.

He lowered himself into the window well. His boots crunched on dry leaves. He knelt. Pressed his face close to the glass.

Megan.

Running clothes. The creek-path kit, the one he watched her tie her shoes in on the front step while the coffee was still going — except the bra was a size too small, cotton stretched shiny, her tits shoved up and out over the neckline in a pale spill the band couldn't hold, nipples punched through hard enough to read through the dirt on the glass. An hour ago she'd walked over in a high neck and her leather jacket. Now this. Vince's basement. Dale in the big chair. Wicks talking. Vince dealing. His wife in jogging clothes that were losing.

He had come here for the rest of it. He was getting it.

The band was under her breasts now. She'd left them out. Pale, heavy, sitting up in the clamp light, and she was pouring a drink with them like that, the bartender turn of her wrist, the same wrist that set his coffee down Saturday morning when she told him she was done with the games. She wanted her Saturdays back. She didn't want to pour for men who looked at her like a menu. She had meant it. He had watched her mean it.

Her voice came through the hopper in the warm tone she used on waiters. On his friends' parents. On anyone she was being pretty and polite at.

"You guys have been so good tonight. And I'm so turned on right now that I'll tell you what — we can break the no-touching rule. I'll jerk off the winners of the hands."

Tyler went still.

That was her. That was the voice. Generous. Breathy. The one that meant she had a room and she was charming it. *I'm so turned on right now.* Megan. Who slept in his t-shirts. Who wrinkled her nose at Vince's carpet. Who had told him no every time he'd asked for a naked picture of her — three nos, a little laugh like he was being ridiculous. Who had lain next to him last Sunday and told him Dale won a favor and she'd sat on his lap and his hands had gone up her thighs and that was all, and then she'd put her hand on Tyler in the dark and he'd believed her.

The camera had shown him her mouth on Dale. He'd told himself that was a thing that had happened to her. A night that got away. She had quit. She had stood in their kitchen and quit.

She was offering. She sounded like she wanted to.

What else. The cabin weekends. Every Saturday he'd been two hours north in a dead zone believing she was pouring drinks. The photos on Vince's camera — was that the whole night or the part someone bothered to shoot. Had she been on her knees in this room before. Had she liked it. Was she liking it now. The shorts were dark between her legs where the light caught. He could see that from here.

His cock was thickening in his jeans. He hated it and it kept going.

Dale won. Dale — the man from the table, the fifty in her pocket, the thigh she'd sat on while Tyler stacked chips and called it the hustle. The man from the stills. His wife walked to him. Knelt between his legs. Tits hanging over Dale's lap in the dirty glass, the face Tyler kissed in the kitchen over a recipe, down there, looking at Dale's fly.

Dale said something. Low. The hopper ate most of it.

She unzipped him.

The zipper was warm. She drew it down. The rasp filled the space between his knees. Denim opened. Dark hair, the thick base of him already shoved toward the gap, and she had to reach in with both hands to lift the weight of it free.

It came out heavy. The head cleared the fly and the whole of him settled in the air between her tits and his stomach — long, dark, veined, a slow shine already bright at the slit. Her pale hands on it. Fingers that would not meet. The same cock that had been in her mouth two weeks ago. The same cock that had striped her face with cum when she said last call. She was putting it in her hands because she had offered. Because the plan needed him to finish.

A nipple dragged the open teeth of the zipper. She flinched. Kept hold.

Wicks made a wet sound in his throat. "Oh my God. Look at it in her hands — she can't even close her fingers. Those tits hanging over it, Dale, look at her, she's—"

"Play the hand," Vince said.

Dale didn't look at Wicks. He looked at her face. The gold chain sat in the crease of his neck. The dead cigar in the ashtray. His dark eyes waiting to see what she would do with what she'd asked for.

She stroked.

Root to head, a tight dry pull. Her fist climbed and dropped. Fast. Get him off. Get him done. She turned her face half away so she wouldn't have to watch the dark head disappear into her pale fist and come back shinier.

Dale's hand covered hers.

Stopped her.

"Slow," he said. "You're pumping like you want it over." His palm was huge over her knuckles. He dragged her fist down the length of him, base to ridge, and up again, and the bead at the slit smeared across her thumb. "Spit on it. Both hands. Don't look at the floor. Look up at me."

She swallowed. Leaned. The band under her breasts pushed them forward until they nearly rested on his thighs. She gathered spit and let it fall — a clear string from her lower lip to the dark

head, breaking, running down the shaft into her fist. Wicks groaned like he was the one in her fists.

She put her other hand on. She had to. One fist at the base, the other working the head, the spit making a soft wet cling every time she crested the ridge. She looked at it because he'd told her to. Pale fists on dark meat. The veins standing. The head swollen darker, wet now, sliding through her grip with a sound too wet for the quiet. Her tits shook the way he'd asked. She felt them — heavy, free, the nipples grazing denim on every downstroke.

Dale settled back into the chair. Watching her face.

This is working. He's close. Keep going.

Vince turned a card. The paper sound was very small under the wet one her hands were making. Wicks's cards were still face-down. His watery eyes were on her chest, on the way the weight bounced on the band, on her pale fists climbing that dark shaft.

"Jesus, her nipples — they're dragging his jeans every time she — Dale, you seeing this, she's soaking those shorts, look at the crotch, you can see it from here—"

Dale's breathing changed. A slower pull through his nose. His hips rocked once, a small push up into her fists, and she felt him thicken. She went faster. Both hands, wet, the head shining, her shoulders working. The plan had a shape: this, then Wicks, then Vince, then the door.

He didn't cum.

His cock stayed hard in her hands, heavy, pulsing, the edge sitting just out of reach. His dark eyes stayed on her face. Patient. A man who had all night.

Vince set a card down.

"That's me," Wicks said. Too loud. Already half out of his chair. "That's mine. I won. Come here — come here, sweetheart, come here—"

She looked at Dale. His cock stood out of his open jeans, wet from her spit, a thread of it hanging from the head. Still hard. Still waiting.

"Go on," Dale said. Almost amused. "He won't last thirty seconds."

She let go. Stood. Her knees had gone stiff on the concrete; the blood came back in pins. Her tits bounced and Wicks made the same sound he'd made when she walked to Dale. Two steps. The clamp light moved across her chest. She stopped between Wicks's knees.

He already had himself out. His skinny hips shoved forward on the chair, his stained fist working the shaft in quick jerks, a wet bead flying off the head before she'd even knelt. Menthol on his breath. The Adam's apple jumping. His watery eyes went from her face to her chest to her hands and couldn't pick.

"On your knees, on your knees, oh my God, look at those things, they're right there, they're—"

She knelt. His thighs were nothing like Dale's — bony, denim loose, a jitter she could feel through the floor. His cock stood up from his fist, pale, average in the shaft, and then the head: a swollen mushroom crown that flared wide, the ridge a thick lip, the slit already pouring. She took him out of his hand.

The strangeness of it landed in her palm. The width of the head versus the thinness under it. The way the ridge caught under her thumb. She closed her fist around the crown because that was the part of him that was a problem, the part that would finish him, and he barked a sound that was almost a laugh.

"The head — she's got the head, Dale, look, she's squeezing it, oh fuck, her hand's so small, those tits hanging right there, I need to —"

His bony hands came off the chair arms and found her.

No asking. Both palms, shaking, closing over her breasts, fingers sinking into pale flesh, lifting, pressing them together, his thumbs dragging across the nipples until they tightened into points against the stained skin. He made a noise through his bad teeth. He squeezed again, harder, and she made a small sound, and he heard it and squeezed a third time.

"Soft — they're so soft, I knew they'd be, I knew from the first night, Vince, you seeing this, I've got my hands on her tits and she's jerking me, she's actually — the nipples, look at the nipples, they're like —"

"Wicks," Vince said.

She shut as much of him out as she could. Fast strokes. Tight on the head, the ridge popping through her fist on every pass, his precum making it filthy and easy. His hips jerked. He couldn't hold still. The chair legs chirped on the concrete. His fingers stayed on her breasts, kneading, shaking, one nipple trapped between two stained knuckles, and every time her fist climbed the crown his grip tightened like the two things were wired together.

He was close. She could feel it — the stutter in his hips, the way the head swelled even wider, the high broken sounds stacking on each other. *Thirty seconds. Dale said thirty seconds. Then Vince. Then Dale again. Then out.*

"I'm gonna — I'm gonna — don't stop, don't you fucking stop, look at her, she's gonna make me — those tits in my hands, I'm gonna paint 'em, I'm gonna—"

Vince turned a card.

"I got this one," Vince said.

Wicks's mouth stayed open. His hands stayed on her. "Vince — I was — she was about to — Vince, come on, I was right there—"

"Rules," Vince said. He pushed his chair back. The gold chain at his collar caught the light. "Come here."

She pulled her hand off Wicks. He made a wounded noise. His cock stood there leaking, the bulbous head shiny, his bony fingers still cupped under her breasts like he could keep her by holding them. She had to lean back to get free. His thumbs dragged off her nipples at the last inch and the air on them was worse than his hands.

She stood. Walked. The two steps to Vince's chair felt longer than the ones to Wicks. Her palm was wet. The lining of the shorts clung. She was going to the safe one. The calm one. The one who'd stopped on a word and put a blanket around her shoulders and told her she'd done well. If she could get him off, he was done. One down.

She knelt between his legs.

He already had himself out. Held loosely in his stained hand. She reached for him expecting something she could cover. Her fingers wrapped it and kept stretching.

Wide.

The girth filled her fist before she'd gotten halfway down. Blunt. Dense. Dark from the year-round tan, the foreskin half-back, the head a thick blunt cap under it, nothing like Dale's length, nothing like Wicks's strange crown. This was width. A cock that made her hand look small in a different direction. Hot against her palm. A slow heavy pulse.

She stared at it. The arm of his chair. Comfortable. That was all he'd ever taken. The safe one, and this was what he'd been keeping in his jeans while he dealt and nodded and honored the word.

Vince watched her face do it. The smirk sat at the corner of his mouth.

"Yeah," he said. "That's what you think it is."

His other hand came up and covered her left breast.

The whole of it. His palm was rough and oil-stained and warm, and her tit filled it and overflowed it, the nipple caught under the base of his thumb. He squeezed once, slow, testing the weight, and made a sound in his chest that wasn't language. His gold chain swung forward and tapped the back of his own wrist. He thumbed the nipple and watched it tighten and thumbed it again.

"Been thinking about these," he said. "Six months. Every time you ran past the driveway."

She stroked him. She had to. The plan. The width dragged through her fist and her fingers ached around it. He hardened further in her grip, swelling against the already-impossible girth, and she felt her own pulse between her legs answer it and hated the answer. Why was he doing this. He'd been the one. The blanket. The *done, we're done.* His stained hand on her breast and his cock stretching her fist and the deep-set eyes on her mouth like he was deciding something.

"Vince." Small. "Hands. That was what I said."

"You're doing fine." His thumb rolled her nipple. "Keep going."

She kept going. His breathing changed — slower, through his nose, the Marlboro smell coming down to her off his shirt. His hips shifted on the chair. She could feel him getting close the way she'd felt Wicks, a thickening, a hold in his gut. Then his hand left her

breast and found the back of her head. Rough fingers in her hair. Pressing her face toward his lap.

She pulled her head back. Kept stroking.

"Vince—"

"Suck my balls and I'll cum," he said. Low. Just for her.

She hesitated. His hand stayed on her head. The weight of it. The direction of it. The safe one. The man who'd stepped back the second she said the word. And now this — his cock in her fist, his stained fingers in her hair, asking for her mouth on something the offer had never included.

If he cums, he's done. One down. The plan works if they cum.

She lowered her mouth.

Warm. That was the first thing — his lap, the skin, the dark hair at his groin against her cheek. Tobacco-sweet. The living smell of a man who'd been hard watching her for an hour. His balls were heavy in the loose skin, drawn up some already. She took one into her mouth and it was alive on her tongue, warm, and she sucked, a wet sealed sound, and felt it tighten.

Vince grunted.

Low. From his chest. The first real sound she'd heard out of him all night, and it went through. His fingers flexed in her hair. His other hand came back to her breast and held it, thumb working the nipple in time with her mouth, and her tits pressed his shins, pale against the stained denim, and she sucked again because the sound he'd made was the sound of a man about to be finished, and finished was the point.

Wicks was talking. She let it be noise. Dale was silent in the big chair. Vince's cock jerked in her fist.

He came.

It was working. He was finishing. She could get through this.

Hard. His hips shoved up off the seat and his cock pulsed against her fingers, thick ropes landing on her wrist, her forearm, the concrete between his shoes — hot enough she heard the first stripe hit the floor with a soft spat. His hand gripped her hair for one second, hard, involuntary, and then released. His thumb froze on her nipple. His chest worked. The gold chain rose and fell.

She pulled back. His ball left her mouth with a wet sound. She stayed on her knees with his cum cooling on her wrist and his cock softening in her fist and his stained hand still cupping her breast like he'd forgotten he was holding it.

Wicks laughed, high, bright with envy. "He painted her — look at her arm, she made him, Vince, you lasted what, a minute, look at her mouth, she had your balls in her—"

"Wicks." Vince's voice was rough. He took his hand off her chest. Leaned back. Eyes half-closed. His cock lay thick against his thigh, spent, a last slow bead at the slit. The smirk was gone. What was on his face was simpler. Done. For now. A man who'd just come in front of the room.

She wiped her hand on her thigh. The cum streaked. The heat of it stayed.

One down. The plan is working.

She looked at Dale.

He was still hard. He'd been watching. His cock stood out of his open jeans where she'd left it, darker now, a slow drip from the head onto the denim of his thigh. His dark eyes on her face. On the shine on her lower lip. On Vince's cum on her wrist.

"Come here," Dale said.

"Nobody won." She stayed on her knees at Vince's chair. The bartender voice, trying for the rule. "That was — winners of the hands. Vince just—"

"We're past poker." Flat. Almost amused. "Come here."

The cards had been the leash. If the cards were done, the leash was gone, and the room would take whatever it wanted next. Wicks still hard in his chair. Dale still waiting. Get them off. Fast.

She walked. Knees complaining. The two steps back felt like going under. She knelt between his spread legs. His thighs closed a little, bracketing her. The gold chain. The dead cigar. The cock she'd already had in both hands, waiting like it had all night, because it did.

She wrapped him again. Both hands. Wet from Vince's cum and Dale's own precum, the slick filthy, the sound louder. She worked him. Her tits shaking. She put her back into it because this time he

had to — he was thick in her fists, the veins standing, his breathing gone deep, his hips pushing up to meet her.

"You're close," she said. Breathless. Trying to make it true. "Dale. You're close. Just — let me."

He watched her face.

She went faster. The slick drag on every crest. A thread of spit and cum swinging between her fist and the head. His cock pulsed, swelled, the edge right there, right there, and she heard herself make a small encouraging sound that belonged to a different woman, a woman who wanted this over, and his hips pushed, and the edge stayed out of reach.

His patience ran out in his hand. His voice stayed quiet.

His dark fingers came forward and cupped her face. Firm. The thumb found her lower lip and pressed it open, dragging the lip down, holding her mouth that way. He tilted her face up. The head of him filled what she could see — broader than her mouth wanted, shining, a bead gathering at the slit, the smell of him right up against her open mouth: cigar on his clothes, the wet of a cock her hands had failed.

"Dale." Around his thumb. "Just hands. That was what I—"

"Mouth on it."

The head nudged her open lip. Hot. Slick. Waiting.

Last call. The two syllables sat behind her teeth, in the space his thumb was occupying. She could still say it. He would stop. Vince would make him stop. The night would end and the cards would stay in Vince's pocket and the phones would keep what they had and she would walk home with Vince's cum on her wrist and Dale's cock unspent and the week of being afraid of her own street would start over.

I've already jerked all three of them. I've sucked Vince's balls. His cum is on my wrist. If I stop now I've done all of that and the photos stay with Vince. I'm past the point where stopping saves me anything.

She let the word go.

Her mouth opened. The last inch was hers — the lean she didn't plan, the tongue that made room. The head pushed in.

Stretch. Immediate. Her lips went tight around the dark ridge and the taste of him spread over her tongue, bitter at the slit, then warmer, skin and spit and the leftover of her own work. Heavy. The weight pressed her tongue flat. Spit welled and ran from the corner of her mouth in a thin string that swung and broke on her left breast, a clear line over the nipple. She made a sound around him. He exhaled through his nose.

"Yeah," Dale said. Quiet. Certain. "That's better."

He fed her another inch. She took it. The ridge slid back over her tongue. She gagged when he found the halfway point — a thick wet choke that slapped off the concrete — and her eyes watered and the curtain photo came up behind the tears: the woman on her knees, the stretched mouth, the same cock. That woman. Her. She gripped his thighs through the denim and stayed.

"Look at her," Wicks said. His voice had gone high again. "Look at those lips around it, Dale, she's — her tits, the spit on her tit, oh my God, she's sucking him, she said hands and she's sucking him, look at her face—"

Dale's hand moved from her jaw to her hair. He gripped. He pulled her down onto him and let her up and pulled her down again, and the wet sound of it filled the basement, filthy and steady, her breasts shaking on every stroke the way he'd wanted when this was supposed to be a hand. Her jaw ached. Spit ran. She was on her knees at the poker table with Dale's cock in her mouth and the plan was a thing she'd had at the curtain. What she had now was the night. Finish it. Get the cards. Get the phones wiped. Get out.

He used her mouth. Deep enough that she gagged, then shallow enough that she could breathe, then deep again, and she heard herself whimper around the shaft, high, involuntary, and the whimper made his grip tighten. Vince was quiet in his chair. Spent, watching. Wicks couldn't stop.

"Her eyes are watering — Dale, her eyes, she's taking it, she's actually taking that thing, I can't — I need — Vince, when's my—"

Dale's hand slid from her hair to the back of her neck.

He stood.

His cock left her mouth with a wet sound and a string of spit that broke across her chin. She stayed on her knees, mouth open, looking up at him. He was enormous from here. The gold chain. The open jeans. His cock heavy and shining, standing out of the dark of his fly, her spit on it. He didn't bother closing anything. His dark hand stayed on the back of her neck, the palm covering it, and he lifted.

"Up."

"Dale — I can finish you here. I can — just sit. Please. Let me stay—"

He walked her.

His hand on her neck was the steering. She went. He moved and she moved with him, one palm's worth of pressure, like she'd been his to walk around for years. Bare feet on concrete, tits out, spit on her chin, Vince's cum drying on her wrist. His cock bobbed ahead of her, wet, not put away. She saw where he was taking her before they'd crossed the room. The old couch against the wall. The sag in the middle. The blanket over one arm that she refused to look at.

"Dale."

He sat. The springs complained under his mass. He spread his legs, his cock still hard and wet from her mouth, and his hand on her neck put her down between his thighs. Knees on the floor. The same pose as the table. Different furniture. His cock in front of her face again, waiting. She knew what the couch meant. The couch was where the mouth stopped being the point.

Behind her: the scrape of Wicks's chair. Quick uneven footsteps. He'd been waiting for someone to move so he could follow. He dropped onto the other end of the couch. The cushion dipped. His knees spread. His cock was in his hand before he'd settled, the bulbous head still shiny from her, still unfinished.

She was kneeling on the concrete between them. Dale to her left, thick and dark and patient. Wicks to her right, already leaking onto his own fist. Her ass faced the room. Faced Vince. The tiny shorts were the last thing she had on below the band.

Wicks's bony hand found her hip.

Then the waistband.

He hooked it and pulled.

The elastic left her ass. Cool air on skin that had been covered. He dragged the shorts down an inch, two, over the pale of both cheeks, the small dark mole high on the left coming into the light, and she felt the air find the top of the cleft, and his stained fingers were shaking on the fabric, peeling, and his voice went high and happy at once—

"Vince — her ass, I'm taking these off, look at it, I'm gonna—"

"Wait." Her voice. The bartender warmth, thin, cracking. She caught at the shorts with one hand and they were already halfway down her cheeks. "Don't. Leave them. I'll — I can do both of you. With my mouth. Stay like this. Please. I want you in my mouth. Both of you. Just like this. Don't move me. Let me finish you like this."

Wicks's hands kept going for one more inch. Then Dale's voice, low, from above her:

"Leave 'em. You heard her."

Wicks left them. Bunching under her ass, the elastic cutting the tops of her thighs, her cheeks bare to the room. He made a frustrated sound and sat back, cock in his fist, waiting.

She was still on her knees on the floor between them. She turned to Dale, to the wet dark head of him still shining from her, and took him back in before the words cooled.

From the window, Tyler watched his wife on her knees in front of Dale.

Her head was moving. The bob that only meant one thing. Dale in the big chair, gold chain, jeans open, and Megan's mouth on him — the mouth that said goodnight in their kitchen, down there, working. The cock from the camera, live now, dark against her face, wet, disappearing and coming back. Spit on her chin in the clamp light. Her tits still out, shaking with it.

He had told himself the stills were a night that got away. A thing that had happened to her. She had quit. She had stood in their kitchen and quit. An hour ago she had offered her hands in that warm waiter voice and he had gone still in the leaves listening to it.

This was her mouth.

Megan, who gave him this in the dark and always came off him before he finished — a little shake of her head, her hand instead, eight years of that, and he'd stopped asking. And here she was taking Dale under the clamp lights like she had a rhythm for it. Like the photograph had been practice.

Did she like it? The stills had looked like she liked it. This looked like she liked it. The offer had sounded like she wanted to. If she had offered hands and gone to her mouth, what else had she given them on the Saturdays he was two hours north. What was she going to give them next?

His cock was hard in his jeans. He hated it and it kept going.

Get her. The thought was simple. Go in. Stop this. Take her home.

He backed out of the well. His hands scraped the concrete. Along the foundation, around the corner, the porch, the door. He was going to open it. Walk down there. Pull her off Dale's cock and get her out of Vince Barella's house.

He gripped the knob. Twisted.

Locked.

He stood there. Weight on the balls of his feet and nowhere to put it. Three men on the other side. Dale, who filled a doorway. Wicks. Vince, three doors down from their duplex, the man who'd put cash in Tyler's hand and left a camera on the counter. His wife on her knees among them with her tits out. His own cock pressing the denim he'd have to explain if he went through this door. The stills he'd scrolled and said nothing about. The truck parked streets away because he'd told her he was at the cabin.

He couldn't build the version of himself that kicked it in. That man would have to look at her and say he came to save her. That man didn't have an erection. That man hadn't watched her unzip Dale and stayed in the leaves.

He let go of the knob.

He walked back to the window.

The table was empty. The couch. Dale at one end, Wicks at the other, and Megan on her knees between them, her head dipping toward Dale, then turning. Her hand on Wicks. The shorts were

down — bunched under her ass, pale cheeks in the light. She'd added Wicks while Tyler was standing on the porch with his hand on a locked door.

Her voice came through the hopper. Warm. Breathy. The same tone as the offer. He couldn't make out the words. She sounded like she wanted to be there.

He knelt in the well. He stayed.

Dale's cock filled her mouth again. Wet. Heavy. The taste she knew. She took him as deep as she could manage and her hand found Wicks without looking — the slick crown, the thin shaft under it, already leaking onto her fingers. A wet gluck when she dropped on Dale, spit sealing, small and filthy between his knees.

Mouth. Get them off. Don't let them move you.

Wicks's bony knees boxed her right shoulder. Menthol and bad teeth and a wet noise he kept making in his throat. Dale's dark hand rested on the back of her head. Weight. The gold chain. The open jeans. Her tits hung over his lap, the band under them doing less work now that she was on her knees; they swung when she moved, nipples dragging denim.

She worked Wicks while she sucked Dale. Fast on the head. That was the part of him that would finish. His hips jerked. His fingers hovered, wanting her hair, her chest, anything.

"Dale — look at her go, she's got you in her mouth and she's jerking me, those tits swinging, oh my God, I need — I need her to —"

She pulled off Dale. A string of spit broke across her chin. She turned.

Wicks.

His cock stood up from his skinny hips, the crown flared and shiny, bigger than the rest of him, waiting. She had held it. The head pushed her lips wide on the first inch — blunt, the ridge a thick lip — and caught the inside of her lower lip and then the roof of her mouth and there was no room. Width. All at once. She whimpered around it, high, and his whole body jumped.

"Oh God — oh fuck — her mouth — Dale, she's sucking me, she's actually — look, look at those lips around the head, it's stretching her, it's—"

His hands landed in her hair. Bony. Clammy. Trembling. He pushed. The crown scraped past her palate and her eyes watered and she took it, a wet slurp as the ridge passed, and she sealed on it. That was all there was room to do. *If he came he was done.* His thighs shook against her shoulders. Menthol breath, short and punched. The Adam's apple jumping every time she dropped.

His stained fingers left her hair and found her chest. One hanging breast, then the other, squeezing while she sucked the head, his thumbs dragging the nipples until they tightened against the nicotine-yellow skin. He made a noise through his teeth. She whimpered around him, and he heard it and squeezed again.

She sucked the head. Her tongue worked the slit and he barked a laugh that broke into a groan, and his fingers tightened on her tits, and she felt him swell against her teeth.

"I'm gonna — don't stop, sweetheart, don't you stop, those eyes looking up, those fucking tits in my hands, I'm gonna fill her mouth, Dale, I'm gonna—"

Dale's hand closed on her hair from the other side.

He pulled her off Wicks. The crown left her lips with a wet pop. Wicks made a wounded noise. His hands stayed on her for a second, then slipped. Dale turned her face. His cock was there, darker, wet from her, a bead at the slit. He put her back on it.

"I'm not done."

He pushed. Past where she'd been keeping him. Past the halfway point, the head finding the back of her throat, and she gagged, a thick wet choke that carried, and he held her there. Two seconds. Three. Spit ran down her chin onto her left breast and swung. When she tried to turn toward Wicks his fist kept her.

He let her up enough to breathe and put her down again. Up. Down. The wet of it steady now, her tits shaking, her jaw aching around the thickness of him. Wicks's cock twitched in her fist, unfinished, the head slick with her spit now, and he was talking, he

was always talking, and she shut as much of it out as she could and stayed on Dale.

"Her throat — Dale, I heard that, she's taking it, look at the spit on her tit, I'm still — I was so close, let her come back, let her—"

"Easy," Dale said. Not looking at him. Looking at her eyes.

Footsteps behind her.

Concrete. Slow. A boot scuffed.

The workbench drawer scraped. Bottles knocked. A dull, rubbery thud on wood. The drawer rolled shut.

Dale's fist had her. She heard Vince's boots. Then the smell of him — Marlboros, the greasy heat of his skin — and his voice, low, from right behind her ass, where the shorts were still bunched, where the room was.

"I've got something that'll help."

His hand settled on her lower back. The rough palm. The calluses. Pressure: forward. Down.

She pulled off Dale. A gasp. Spit on her lip.

"Vince." Breathless. Small. "Wait. Let me finish them here. They're close. I can — my mouth. That was what I said. Don't—"

"On the couch. Hands and knees."

Dale's cock stood in front of her face, shining. He looked at Vince over her head. Then at her.

"Up."

He stood. The couch rose under his mass, springs creaking. His cock left her mouth's reach and he walked — around the arm, along the floor, to the end that opened on the rest of the basement. Jeans open. Gold chain. Waiting.

Wicks didn't stand. He scooted down the cushion toward that same end, skinny knees sliding, cock in his fist, making a lane along the seat, his watery eyes bright.

"Vince, what've you got, what is that, is that — oh my God, look at her ass, those shorts, they're already—"

Vince's hands took her hips. Turned her. Lifted.

She put a knee on the cushion.

The old fabric, rough under her kneecap. The other knee. Ass up. Palms down for a second on the cushion, the sag in the middle,

another creak.

Vince was behind her. The heat of him against the backs of her thighs, his belt buckle cold on her skin. A clink as he opened it.

In front of her: Dale. He sat. The couch took his mass again. He spread his knees and the dark wet head of him was at her mouth, waiting, and she leaned down and turned — a twist through her waist — and put her head in his lap. His hand found her jaw. A wet seal, then the extra inch. On her knees, ass up for Vince, her mouth full of Dale.

The turn dumped her tits toward Wicks.

He was right there, on the cushion beside Dale, skinny knees open, and her breasts spilled across his lap, heavy, the band doing nothing. One nipple dragged the wet crown of his cock. He jerked like the touch burned. Her hand found him underneath them — the flared head, slick, buried in the pale weight of her. She held him. Stroked. Her tits moved over him when she did.

His bony fingers slid in around a breast, lifted it, dragged the nipple down his shaft, and let it drop so it slapped against the head.

"Jesus — they're on me, Vince, her tits are on my cock, look, they're just — they're spilling all over it, I can feel her nipple, I can —"

Vince behind her. The buckle. The gut. His zipper, a short rasp.

The shorts.

His fingers hooked what was left of the waistband — already down her cheeks, bunched at the tops of her thighs — and pulled.

"Vince—"

Past her hips. Past both cheeks. To her knees. The elastic snapped against her thigh. Cool air on her pussy. She whimpered around Dale's cock.

From behind she was open. She could feel it — the air, the light, her pussy gone puffy and parted, slick, a thread of it clinging to her inner thigh, trembling, then breaking and running. The smell of her cut through the cigar and the concrete, sharp, her own musk, wrong for this room.

Wicks's voice cracked.

"Vince — look — her thighs, the slick on her thighs, fuck, you can smell her from here, look at her pussy, she's soaked, she's been soaked, look at her face on Dale's cock while you—"

"Wicks," Vince said.

Something pressed against her pussy.

Cool. Smooth. Thick.

She tried to look back. Dale's fist in her hair kept her on him.

"Vince. What is—"

"Easy." His voice, behind her, close. "It's a toy. Take it."

A toy.

A toy. A toy is not a man. Nobody is inside me.

The head of it parted her. Slow. Her own slick giving way in little cling-and-release sounds, filthy and small. The shaft followed. A wet seating as it bottomed, cool silicone warming as it filled her, impersonal, mechanical, and her hips pushed back onto it anyway, a small roll, and she gasped around Dale, a muffled whimper, and Dale's grip tightened in her hair like he'd felt the sound through his cock.

Full. Stretched. The plan could still be the plan.

Vince worked it. Slow strokes. In. Out. The toy dragged out wet on every pull, loud with her slick, shameless. His other hand on her hip, steadying her. She sucked Dale and held Wicks and the toy moved in her pussy. Weight on her tongue. The bulbous head hot in her fist. Silicone stroking where she was wettest. She moaned around Dale's shaft, low, involuntary, and the vibration went through him, and he exhaled through his nose.

"Yeah," Dale said. Quiet.

"She's moaning — Dale, she's moaning on it, the toy's in her and she's moaning, her tits are on my cock, they're all over me, Vince, go deeper, she's taking it, she's—"

Vince went deeper. The toy seated. A wet kiss of silicone against her, held, and her knees slipped an inch on the cushion. Wicks's hand tightened on the breast he was holding. She heard herself make the sound again, higher.

The shorts, bunched at her knees, caught as Vince worked. He tugged them lower, past one calf. She kicked the other leg free. The

elastic snagged her ankle and then it was gone, dropped to the cushion beside her knee, and she was bare from the band down, on her knees, ass up, her head in Dale's lap, her tits spilled over Wicks, the toy fucking her. Gin in her blood. The edges of it easy.

Vince's rhythm stayed slow. Each stroke seated deep, and she heard herself moan again, and her knees slipped wider on the cushion.

Finish them. He's helping. Get Dale off. Get Wicks off.

Then the toy withdrew.

One motion. Out. A schlick, louder than the rest, soaked skin separating. Empty. She heard it land on the cushion beside her knee — silicone on fabric — and the empty made her whimper, a stupid small noise, and she started to pull off Dale to say something, to keep the room where it was.

Dale didn't let her. His fist in her hair held her in his lap. He kept her mouth on him.

And something else pressed in.

Hot.

Live. The silicone had been cool going in. This radiated. Skin. The hands on her hips gripped harder — both hands, rough, stained, the short thick fingers digging in above her hip bones — and the head of him, blunt, broad, thicker than the toy, pushed her lips wide. She stretched around him. A burn, then a give, her pussy gripping the ridge as it popped past, and the sound it made was a deep suck, her own slick taking him, shameless. He fed her an inch. Another. The foreskin slid against her inner walls — the same skin she'd felt under her fist at his chair — and a pulse started inside her. His pulse.

Vince.

The safe one. The blanket. The man who'd stepped back on a word and told her she'd done well. His cock in her. The width she'd held in her fist, the one that had made her hand look small, opening her from behind while she was on her knees with Dale down her throat. He'd said it was a toy. He'd said help. Same as the other two. Politer about it.

He pushed. Another inch. The thick base of him stretching her wider, and then his gut came against her ass, a slap of skin, seated,

and she was full. Wider than the toy. Him.

The two syllables formed.

Last—

The L against the roof of her mouth. The breath she'd need. Dale's cock was past her tongue, his fist locked in her hair, holding her down in his lap, and what came out was a groan into his shaft, muffled, wet, that could have been anything.

Vince's hands stayed on her hips. He kept his cock inside her. He drew back — a slow wet drag, her pussy clinging — and pushed deeper.

She tried again. A fragment. A shape in her throat. Dale's hand put her down on him and the word turned into sound, and the sound went into him, and Wicks was crying out from the cushion,

"Vince — you're in her — you're actually in her, Dale, look, he's fucking her, look at her taking that thick fucking — her face, her face while he—"

He kept that pace. The same one he'd used with the toy, except this was him, live, his stomach meeting her ass on every seat, the gold chain at his collar tapping her spine in time. Hairy stomach, belt open. He found an angle — the front wall, a spot that went through her — and her vision thinned at the edges and a moan tore out of her around Dale's cock, high, helpless, and her hips pushed back for the next one.

The SD cards. The phones. The week of being afraid of her own street. If she stopped now she kept all of this and lost the door.

Truth was, she wanted the next stroke. She caught herself waiting for it, hips loaded, ready to go back for more. All week she'd been afraid of the photos, the crew, the street. Full of him now, she found the real thing to be afraid of: she liked it.

The fullness. The heat. The way it felt, which was good. That was the problem. The wanting went through her like a flush and she stayed where they had her — on her knees, ass up, her mouth in Dale's lap, her tits on Wicks — and Vince's thickness dragged that same spot again, wet, deep, and she stopped trying to speak.

Vince pulled out of her.

The empty made her whimper into Dale's lap, a stupid small sound, her pussy clinging after him, a wet cling that ended in air. His gut left her ass. The gold chain at his collar stopped tapping her spine. She stayed where she was — on her knees, ass up, her mouth on Dale, her tits spilled over Wicks — and the empty kept going.

Dale's fist loosened in her hair.

"On your back."

"Dale." Off him, spit on her lip, the bartender voice down to almost nothing. "I can finish you like this. My mouth. You and—"

"On your back."

His hands found her hips. Vince's too, from behind, stained and certain, turning her. The cushion scraped her knee. She went. Shoulder blades on the old fabric. The sag under her spine. Ceiling tiles above her, grey, water-stained.

The band under her breasts pushed them up again. They sat there in the clamp light, heavy, nipples tight, shaking from the turn. Cool air on her wet pussy. Her knees were still bent. She was on her back on Vince's couch with her shorts gone and three men around her.

Wicks was still at her head. Menthol. Bad teeth. His cock still wet, the crown shiny, hovering over her mouth. His watery eyes went from her face to her chest and couldn't pick.

"Oh my God she's on her back, Dale, look at her, look at those tits sitting up, her legs, you can see everything, she's — put it in her, put it in her, I want to watch it go in—"

Vince stood at the side of the couch. Close. The heat of him. His cock still hard, still wet from her, standing out of his open jeans. His stained hand came down and covered her left breast, the whole of it overflowing his palm, and he squeezed once, slow, and watched her face.

Dale stood from the end.

The couch rose. He moved between her thighs — the mass of him filling the space Vince had left, gold chain, open jeans, his cock dark and heavy and shining with her spit. He pushed her knees apart with his own. His hands were huge on the pale of her inner

thighs. He looked at her pussy the way he'd looked at her face when she was on her knees at the table. Appraising. Certain.

He notched against her. Huge. Blunt. Slick with her.

"Dale—"

He pushed.

The head of him spread her. Wider than Vince at the first inch, and then the length started, and she felt herself take him and keep taking him, the dark shaft feeding into her inch by inch while she watched — pale lips stretched around him, clinging, a slow wet sound as each inch disappeared. Halfway and she was full. He kept going. Her mouth opened. A broken whimper. His hips met hers and the whole of him seated, a slap of skin, deep enough she felt it high, behind her navel, and she cried out, high, and her nails found his shoulders through the shirt.

He filled her. Dark buried in pink. Cigar on his clothes. The heat of his stomach. His heavy-lidded eyes on her face, watching what this was doing to her.

"Yeah," he said. Quiet. Certain.

He drew back. Her pussy followed him with a soft filthy kiss of wet skin, clinging, and he drove in again, and the sound of it was shameless, and she heard herself moan, and Wicks groaned like it was him inside her.

Wicks's bony hands held the sides of her face. The crown pushed at her lips. She opened. He shoved in — the blunt stretch, the ridge catching her lower lip — and his hips jerked, frantic, and the two of them were in her at once, Dale's length burying her to the hilt, Wicks's head filling her mouth, and Vince's thumb rolled her nipple and she whimpered around Wicks and the whimper made him shove deeper.

"Dale — look — she's taking both of us — she's — oh God, look at her face, those lips around me, you're in her, you're actually in her, I can see it, I can see your cock in her pussy, it's stretching her, she's—"

Dale's hands moved to the backs of her knees. He pushed them toward her chest. The angle changed. The depth changed. She cried out around Wicks — high, raw — and Dale fucked her like that,

folded, his mass over her, the chain tapping, every stroke a wet smack against her, and she was looking up at the stained ceiling and then at him, at the dark of his throat, at the place where his cock was going into her, and her tits shook on the band, and Vince's stained fingers squeezed in time with Dale's hips.

Last call. The two syllables. She could still make them if Wicks came out of her mouth. She did not make them. And underneath that, worse: she was wet around Dale, soaked, and every stroke dragged a sound out of her she would have paid money not to make, and the sound kept coming.

Dale's rhythm was steady. Deep. He was in no hurry. Wicks was the opposite — bony hips stuttering at her face, the crown popping past her teeth, menthol breath punched out of him, his stained fingers in her hair, talking through it, always talking.

Vince watched. His gold chain. His cock. His hand on her breast. Six months of the driveway in his thumb.

"Wicks," Dale said. Not looking at him. Looking at her. "Easy. You'll get yours."

He fucked her through that. Another stroke. Another. She moaned around Wicks and her hips lifted to meet Dale and she felt the lift happen and hated it and did it again.

Then Dale pulled out.

The empty was worse this time. A wet suck, her pussy open, clenching on the leaving. She whimpered. Wicks pulled free of her mouth with a pop, a string of spit from her lip to the crown, and she lay there on her back with her knees still up and her tits still shaking and nobody inside her, and the empty felt like falling.

Dale stood. His cock stood with him, dark, soaked with her, a thread of it hanging from the head. He looked at Wicks.

"Go on."

Wicks made a noise that was almost a laugh. He was already moving — off the cushion at her head, around the couch, skinny and fast, his cock in his fist, the head flared and dripping. Vince's hand left her breast. He stepped back one pace, still at the side, still in the room, his wet cock standing out of his jeans. Watching.

Dale sat. The end of the couch. The springs. He spread his knees. Waiting.

"Up," Dale said. To her. "On your knees."

Vince's stained hands helped. Her hips. The turn. Palms on the cushion. Knees. Ass up. The band hanging her tits toward the fabric. She was on her hands and knees on the old couch and the men closed in from both ends.

Dale came over onto his knees in front of her. The mass of him filled what she could see. Gold chain. Open jeans. His cock in her face, dark, soaked with her, a thread of it hanging from the head. He took her jaw. Put her on him. A wet seal, and the taste of herself spread over her tongue, salt-sweet, unmistakable.

Wicks behind her. She felt him there before he touched her — the skinny heat and the jitter. His bony hands on her hips, gripping too hard, clammy, shaking. His thin thighs against the backs of hers. The head of him — that head, the one she'd held, the one she'd had in her mouth — notched against her open pussy.

"Vince — Dale — I'm gonna, I'm gonna put it in her, look at her ass, look at that little mole, I'm gonna—"

He pushed.

The crown went in and the ridge dragged, and the shove sent her forward onto Dale. Dale's hand on the back of her head met it and held, so she was full at both ends at once, Wicks's skinny hips flushing her ass, Dale's cock at the back of her throat, and when Wicks pulled back Dale's grip kept her where she was until the next thrust drove her onto him again.

She whimpered around Dale. High. Surprised. A pitch she hadn't hit on Vince, hadn't hit on Dale, thinner, and Wicks barked a laugh that broke into a groan and did it again, and the ridge was inside her, a thick lip, and when he pulled back it caught.

It hooked — he was leaning over her, driving downward, the angle deliberate.

Every stroke: the blunt crown dragging her front wall, the ridge pulling forward on the way out, pressing on the way in, a slick rhythmic sound where he stirred her, and her mouth making the wet gluck of being pushed onto Dale. His average shaft came out

shining. Strands of her clung to the mushroom tip before he shoved back in. The ugly part of him. The part she'd noticed in her hand and tried not to think about. Working her from the inside. Driving her onto Dale. Dale's fist answering, putting her back.

She gripped the cushion. Her back arched. Her hips pushed back against Wicks and the pushing was hers and she couldn't stop it, and the push put her deeper on Dale, and Dale took it. Menthol and the smell of her own pussy off the cushions, sharp, shameless. Wicks's skinny body slapping against her, a light wet smack, nothing like Dale's mass, nothing like Vince's gut.

Vince's cock found her right hand. She closed on it without looking. The girth. The foreskin. He was still wet from her, still at the side of the couch. He made a sound in his chest, low, and his stained fingers settled at the back of her neck, just there, while the other two moved her between them.

"She's wet — Dale, she's soaking me, I can hear it, listen, listen to that, her pussy's making that sound on my cock, the head's catching, I can feel it catching, she's — oh God she's pushing back, she's pushing back onto me, look at her, look at her fucking back, I'm shoving her onto you, Dale, look at her mouth—"

Dale's fist in her hair. He didn't look at Wicks. He looked at her eyes, when they were open. His cock heavy on her tongue. The gold chain. When Wicks thrust, Dale held. When Dale pulled her down, Wicks met her.

The ridge dragged again. Again. She heard herself go high, a thin sound around Dale, and her knees slipped wider, and Wicks's bony fingers dug into the pale of her hips, and he found the angle he'd been hunting and stayed on it, frantic, the crown rubbing that same spot — catching, hooking, a blunt drag Dale's length had slid past and Vince's girth had only filled — and every shove rocked her onto Dale, and the pleasure stacked on that ugly head.

The skinny one. The mouth. That ridge. I'm—

It was coming and she tried to stop it. Bit the inside of her cheek. Dug her nails into the cushion. Thought about the Visa bill, the cold concrete, anything. The fighting wound it tighter. By the end she wanted it more than she wanted it to stop.

She came.

It started deep and spread. Her thighs locked. Her spine arched. A broken cry tore out of her into Dale's cock, muffled, vibrating through him, and her pussy seized on Wicks's ridge in pulses she could hear — a filthy wet kiss on every clench — and she pushed back onto him through it, which put her throat on Dale, which made Dale's grip tighten. The pleasure was enormous. The horror sat in it. Wicks. The bad teeth. The menthol. The hands that made her skin crawl. And it was the head of him doing it, that flared mushroom crown she'd held in her fist and taken in her mouth, hooked on the spot the other two hadn't stayed on, and she was coming on it, clenching on it, her tits shaking under her, and she could not make it not be true.

Wicks felt it. The squeeze. His whole skinny body jumped. His voice cracked up into a question, frantic, delighted, like she'd picked him:

"You — you're cumming? On me? On my cock? Dale, look at her, she's — sweetheart, that was me, that was the head, you feel that, you pushed back, that was you, you wanted it, you chose — tell him, tell him you came on me, you like it, you like my—"

She couldn't tell anyone anything. Dale's cock was in her mouth. What came out was the cry, high, broken, and Wicks heard it as yes. He whimpered — ugly, thin, a sound that didn't belong next to Dale — and the clench pulled him over. His hips stuttered. The talk broke.

"Oh — oh fuck I'm — I'm gonna — she's squeezing me, I can't —"

He came in her.

Hot. Deep. The ridge pulsing against the same wall it had hooked, a thick twitch she felt from the inside, his skinny hips flush and shaking, a high broken noise punched out of him as he dumped into her in spurts she could count. Heat spreading. Filling. The evidence. His bony fingers dug hard enough to bruise and he shoved through it, still in her, still talking once he had air:

"I made her — Vince, I made her cum, she came on me—"

Wicks. That cock. The one she'd dismissed. The ridge that caught. She came because of that, and he was coming because she

had, and the heat of him was inside her now.

He fucked the last of it into her. The smack of his skinny hips driving her onto Dale. Her cry going ragged around him. Vince's cock jumping in her hand. Dale's grip in her hair, holding her on him while she shook, while Wicks pulsed, while the leak of it started down her thigh, warm.

Wicks stayed in her. Still talking. The stream finding a new shape, bigger, stupider, like the cum had convinced him of something:

"Dale, you saw it, she didn't do that on you, Vince, she didn't — it was me, the head, she loves it, she loves *me*, look at her, we should, we should date or something, I'm not kidding, a girl cums like that on you that's a girlfriend, that's — sweetheart, say it, you like me, you can say it, I already know—"

Dale didn't answer. Vince didn't either. She couldn't. His cock was still twitching in her and the word girlfriend was in the basement now, and Wicks was waiting like she might nod.

From the window, Tyler saw her back.

Arched. Pale. The sports-bra band still on, her tits hanging under it, heavy, shaking, the nipples he'd put his mouth on in their kitchen pointing at Vince's old cushion. She was on her knees on the couch. Wicks behind her, flush to her ass, bony hips snapping, and Dale at the other end, gold chain, her head in his lap.

They were fucking her.

Wicks's hips were driving into her, the slap of it coming through the glass, and that was a cock in his wife, Wicks's cock, Wicks from the table who talked through every hand and laughed too loud at Dale's jokes. Inside her. Fucking her. Dale filling her mouth while he did it. Three doors down from their duplex. On Vince's couch.

The cracked window let the basement through. Bass from the speaker. Springs. Skin. And Wicks, too loud, the way he'd been too loud since the first Saturday, the words arriving in pieces through the open gap:

"—came on me — Dale, look — she loves it — girlfriend — we should date — sweetheart, say it—"

Her voice under it. High. Broken. The sound she made in their bed when she was close, and she was making it around Dale, and Wicks was the one in her, the one claiming it.

She came. He could hear that she came. On Wicks. That mouth. Those teeth. That skinny, jittering body on Megan's back. She was above him in every way a person could be above someone, and she was coming on him anyway.

Get her. The thought was still there. He'd already tried. The door. The locked knob. The man who would have kicked it in was not the man kneeling in dead leaves with his forehead on dirty glass, watching two men from a poker night put their cocks in his wife.

His hand was in his jeans. He didn't remember the zipper. His cock was in his fist, hard, wet at the head, and his fist was moving, and he hated the moving, and he didn't stop. Megan. The mouth that said goodnight in their kitchen. The mouth that always came off him before he finished, a little shake of her head, eight years of that. Down there. Full of Dale. And Wicks behind her, in her, fucking her, talking about dating her like she'd picked him. The stills had been her mouth. This was her pussy. This was her making a noise he thought he knew, for them, and his hips were already jerking into his own hand.

Silent. Mouth open on the glass. The orgasm tore through him in the well, leaves crunching under his knees, his cum hitting the inside of his fist, hot, then cooling, and he kept looking. He could not look away. Wicks was still talking. Still in her. Still saying *girlfriend*, *date*, *say it*, like he could talk her into it. Tyler's forehead fogged the pane. He stayed.

Vince let go of her hand.

Two steps back. Three. The heat of the clamp lights on his chest, her wet still on his cock, standing out of his open jeans. Dale had her mouth. Wicks was still buried in her, skinny ass flushing, the talk going and going. He turned his head.

The window. Ground-level, dirty, the well full of leaves. And in the glass, lit from below by his own basement: a face.

Tyler.

Forehead on the pane. Mouth open. Eyes on the couch. His right hand in his jeans, denim bunched at the wrist, the motion unmistakable even through the smear. Breath fog. Cigarette butts around his knees.

Vince held his phone at his ribs. Angled. Screen dark. No sound. Megan on her knees, pale back, tits shelved on the band, Dale's dark hands in her hair, Wicks's skinny hips at her ass. And above the couch, small in the dirty glass: her husband. Open mouth. Hand in his jeans. Watching.

One shot.

He put it in the locked album. Pocketed the phone. Grinned. Wicks was coming off her now — a wet sound, her pussy clinging, a string of him following the crown out of her — and Vince stepped into the space Wicks left.

Wicks staggered.

Jeans around his thighs. Cock shining, shrinking, dripping her and himself onto the concrete. He found his game chair and dropped into it with his mouth open, stunned, and the talk started again before he'd sat all the way down.

"I made her — you saw it — that's a girlfriend, that's — she came on the head, I'm telling you — Dale, what if she's pregnant, I came in her, I dumped it, what if I got her pregnant, I'd marry her, I would, I'm not kidding, a girl cums like that and you knock her up that's a wife, sweetheart, you hear me—"

She felt him leave. The empty. His cum already in her, warm, a slow leak down her inner thigh, and the empty after that ridge was a stupid ache. She shifted once after him, chasing it, before she caught herself. She stayed on her knees. Dale's cock heavy on her tongue. The band hanging her tits toward the cushion. Ass up. Open.

Vince's gut found her ass. The gold chain. Marlboro and oil. His stained hands on her hips, the same hands from the driveway, and the blunt head of him notched into the mess Wicks had left. Girth. The foreskin. He pushed.

She whimpered around Dale. Vince filled her in one thick slide, stretching what the ridge had hooked, and her sound went high, and Wicks laughed from the chair like it was for him.

Vince fucked her. Slow. Deep. Soaked and shameless, Wicks's cum making the slide filthy, a soft schlick on every stroke. His gut slapped her ass. His stained fingers dug into the pale. Dale's fist in her hair held her on him, and every time Vince drove in she was pushed onto Dale, and Dale took it, certain, the gold chain at his throat.

"Soaking," Vince said. Low. To the room. To her.

She moaned. The moan surprised her. It kept happening. Vince's girth dragged her open, thicker than the ridge, packing her, and Dale's taste filled her mouth, and her tits shook under her, the puffy nipples tight, grazing the cushion when Vince bottomed out. The leak of Wicks ran down her thigh and Vince packed it back in. She heard herself go continuous — a keening, open sound around Dale, threaded through the slap of Vince's hips — and she let it.

"That's the sound," Vince said, low behind her. Just for her. "Knew you'd make it."

Almost done. Almost—

Vince's stained hand left her hip and covered her breast. The whole of it overflowing his palm. He squeezed. His thumb rolled the nipple. She pushed her chest into it. She hated that she did. She pushed back onto him anyway, which put her throat on Dale, which made Dale's grip tighten, and Wicks was talking from the chair about dates and girlfriends and a baby and marrying her, and she wanted Vince to keep doing what he was doing. *Don't stop.* The thought was hers. It stayed. Some part of her was supposed to be screaming. She listened for it and heard the wet slap of Vince's hips and her own voice keeping time.

Wicks had left his chair. He crouched at the side of the couch, jeans hobbling his knees, and got his face level with hers, and his clammy hand cupped her cheek while Dale rocked into her mouth. "So pretty," he breathed. Menthol, close. "So fucking pretty, sweetheart. You're perfect — I could make you so happy, I swear—" He kissed her shoulder, wet and quick, like he was stealing it.

Dale's free hand found Wicks's shoulder and put him back toward his chair. Wicks went, and the talking went on from there.

From the window, Wicks was off her. Vince had taken his place — the shoulders, the chain, the driveway. His neighbor. Inside his wife. Fucking her now. Dale still at her face. Her tits swinging under her with every thrust. Her voice coming through the cracked glass now without breaks, a moan that didn't stop, and Wicks's crowing from somewhere off the couch, a new shape to it:

"—pregnant — I came in her — I'd marry her — that's a wife—"

Pregnant. Marry her. Vince's gut hitting her ass. Vince in her now. Dale in her mouth. Wicks talking about a baby like he'd put one in her. Tyler's hand was still in his jeans. Wet. He was hard again, or still, he couldn't tell. His fist moved. The denim was already cooling from the first time and he was doing it again, watching Vince fuck her, watching her back work, listening to her sound like she wanted it. Get her. His cock jumped in his fist instead.

He came a second time. Thinner. Wrung. His mouth open on the glass. His jeans soaked. He stayed anyway.

Dale's rhythm changed.

Deeper. His patience had run out. He gripped her hair hard and used her mouth, his cock swelling on her tongue, the musk of him packing her nose — cigar, sweat, the salt of her own pussy still on him from earlier. She gagged. The gagging was wet. Vince kept fucking her through it, thick, relentless, and she was full at both ends and leaking Wicks down her thigh and the sounds she made had no words left in them.

"Swallow it." Dale. Low. His cock deep. "When I come. Swallow it."

She didn't pull off.

He came.

A growl rolled out of Dale's chest, low and long, and his fist tightened in her hair. "Yeah," he said, thick. "Every drop."

The first pulse filled her mouth — thick, hot, bitter, flooding her tongue, pooling at the back of her throat. She choked. Her throat

worked. The swallow went down with a gulp she heard inside her own head. The taste coated her teeth, her sinuses, the soft tissue at the back. He pulsed again. She swallowed again. Each one easier. The ease sat in her like a bruise.

Tyler. The bedroom. His hand on the back of her head and her coming off him, every time. I don't do that. You know I don't do that. Eight years. Never. Not with him, not with anyone. And Dale's fist in her hair, and Dale's cock, and the first swallow of her life going down because he'd told her to.

Dale pulled out. A wet pop from her lips. A string of spit and him breaking across her chin. He stepped back. Looked at her mouth, at the swallow still working in her throat. A slow nod. Then he was done with it.

Vince was the last.

He pulled out of her. The empty made her whimper, open, ass up, Wicks's cum and her own slick shining on her thighs in the clamp light. Vince's stained hand gripped one pale cheek and spread her. She heard him stroke — the wet fist on his cock, fast, her mess all over him. His other hand stayed on her ass, the thumb in the crease, holding her where he wanted her.

He came on her.

Warm stripes across both cheeks. Thick. Running into the crease. Pooling in the small of her back. The last pulse jumped and a glob of it hit her asshole dead-on — that tight pink pucker he'd been holding open — and clung there. The smell of it rose immediately, cutting through cigar and menthol and the French perfume she'd put on in her own bathroom. His grunt was low. Satisfied. Then, rough: "Yeah. All over that pretty ass."

Wicks, from the chair, still going:

"That's — that's her, that's my girlfriend, Vince, she came on me first, you saw it — what if she's pregnant, I'm serious, I'd marry her, I would — sweetheart, tell them, tell them you felt it, just say it once __"

"Wicks." Dale. Low. "Enough."

The stream stopped. Wicks's mouth stayed open. Nothing came out of it.

Vince's stained palm rested on the cum he'd put on her, a brief press, like checking a mark.

The basement was quiet. The clamp lights hummed.

She stayed on the couch. Wicks's cum inside her. Dale's cum in her mouth, the taste in her teeth, her sinuses, the back of her throat. Vince's cum on her ass, cooling. The sports bra band still under her breasts, shelfing them. The shorts on the cushion somewhere behind her. The leather jacket on the spare chair by the stairs.

She breathed. The couch smelled like old cigarettes and sweat and she could smell herself — the musk of sex, the salt of cum, the clean note of the French perfume underneath all of it, fading, losing to the rest.

Done.

The word came from the same place it had after the solo night — flat, final, carrying nothing but survival. She meant it. She'd survived. The composure was gone. The voice was gone. The woman who'd zipped the leather jacket two hours ago was not walking back out of this room.

Under *Done*, something else sat. The empty between her legs. The ache. The men pulling off her and the stupid pulse that wanted them back. She would not look at it. She put *Done* on top of it and pressed.

Vince appeared with the blanket. The rough wool. He draped it over her shoulders and the covering felt like something she'd been owed for hours. It also felt like the end of it, and the end of it made her throat tight in a way she would not examine.

She pulled it around herself. Her legs shook when she tried to stand.

In the window well, Tyler watched the movement slow. The men pulled away from her — one, then another. She was on the couch. A shape brought something to her — dark fabric, a blanket — and draped it over her shoulders. The men were still in the room. Still moving. Voices through the glass, too low to separate.

He'd seen enough. He'd seen more than enough.

He pulled himself out of the concrete well. His knees ached from the dirt. Dead leaves stuck to his jeans, to the wet denim at his thighs. His hands were shaking. The night air hit his face. Side yard of Vince's house. Dirt under his nails. Wet denim cold against his thighs. The truck was three blocks away and he still couldn't stand what he'd watched — couldn't put it next to the woman he knew and make the two fit.

He walked to the truck. Got in. Sat behind the wheel. Started the engine. Drove north.

Vince opened the camera drawer. The SD cards — three of them, small black rectangles. He set them on the card table in a row.

"These are yours," he said.

He picked up his phone. Showed her the photo gallery — thumbnails from the solo night, small and sharp: her bare tits in the clamp light, the puffy nipples lit pink; her on her knees with Dale's dark cock stretching her mouth; the facial, blue eyes through streaked lashes, cum gone matte on her cheek. She flinched from each one and still saw them. He selected all. Deleted. Showed her the empty folder. Then the recently deleted folder. Purged.

"Dale."

Dale pulled his phone from his pocket. The same process — gallery, select all, delete, purge. His face gave nothing. He set the phone on the table.

"Wicks."

Wicks fumbled his phone. His stained fingers shaking. His gallery was the fullest — he'd been the most prolific shooter during the solo night, every angle, every pose. He deleted. Showed her the empty gallery. Put the phone away.

"We're done," Vince said. He looked at Dale. At Wicks. "Right?"

"Done," Dale said. Low. He stood — his mass rising from the couch, his cigar from the ashtray, his jacket from the chair. He looked at Megan once. The look was different from the one in the basement after the solo night, when she'd been moving toward the

stairs and his eyes had said *paused.* This look said something she couldn't read and didn't want to.

Wicks had his jacket on and he was not at the stairs. He was looking at her. The watery eyes. The mouth already going.

"Sweetheart — wait, we should, we could go out, I'm serious, that was real, you came on me, that means something, I could call you, we could—"

"Wicks." Dale. Same low voice. "Let's go."

"I'm just saying, if she wanted, if she ever wanted, I'd marry her, I told her, I—"

"Done," Vince said. Not to her. To Wicks.

Wicks's mouth stayed open. He looked at her anyway, all the way to the stairs, like she might change it. She kept her fist closed around the cards. She didn't give him anything.

They went up. She heard them — the footsteps, the front door, the car doors, the engine pulling away.

Vince walked her upstairs. Through the living room — the poker table, the bottles, the stain on the carpet. The house that had been the house for every Saturday since this started.

At the front door he stopped. His hand on the knob.

"You're out," he said. "That's it. They're gone."

She looked at him. The slicked hair. The gold chain. The deep-set eyes that had been watching her since she moved onto this street. She couldn't tell if he was lying. She couldn't tell if it mattered.

"Goodbye, Vince."

"Goodbye, Megan."

She walked out. The screen door banged behind her. On the porch she shrugged off the blanket and left it over the rail — his house could keep it. The night air hit her and she could smell herself — sweat and sex and cigar smoke and cologne and the musk of three men's cum and underneath all of it, faintly, the French perfume she'd sprayed a lifetime ago.

She walked home. Three houses. The sidewalk under her bare feet — she'd left her shoes in the basement, she realized. The leather jacket was zipped over her bare skin, the SD cards in her fist.

The concrete was warm from the day's heat. The streetlights threw her shadow long.

A night breeze moved her hair across her mouth and she tasted Dale's cigar in it — trapped in the heavy dark strands, riding home with her. Under the jacket her bare ass still felt the cooling map of Vince's cum. She kept walking.

Halfway home it came back — that ridge, the catch of it — and her pussy throbbed once, hot and ready, like the night was still going. She stopped on the sidewalk. Three men's cum drying on her skin under the leather jacket, and her own want beating in her like a second pulse, and the disgust she felt at it was bigger than anything she felt at them. She walked faster.

Inside the duplex. Lock. Deadbolt. Chain. She stood in the dark hallway and her legs gave out and she sat on the floor with her back against the door and the SD cards biting into her palm and she breathed. Ten breaths. Twenty. The dark house quiet and Tyler's boots gone and the wedding ring in the ceramic dish.

The SD cards were on the nightstand. Three small black rectangles. She looked at them in the dark.

Done.

Tyler arrived at the cabin after midnight. The hollow was black — pines close, no moon. No light in the owner's window — already asleep, or past caring. He'd driven the two hours in silence, no radio, the window down, the night air on his face. His jeans were stiff where they'd dried.

He let himself in with the key the owner had left under the mat. The cot in the kitchen. He lay down without undressing. The ceiling was rough-hewn beams, the kind of wood that smelled like the forest it came from.

He didn't sleep. He lay in the dark and the images came — not the photos from the camera, the view from the window. The shapes through dirty glass. His wife's body in warm light. The dark hands. The sounds through the foundation.

He worked Sunday. The rewire — pulling old knob-and-tube, running new Romex through joists, the precise work that required

his hands and his focus and gave him eight hours of not thinking. The owner paid him in cash and told him the next property was ready when he was. Tyler shook his hand and drove south.

He was home by four. The F-150 in the driveway. His boots on the step. His key in the lock.

Megan was at the kitchen counter, cutting something. Tomatoes. The knife was steady. She wore a faded t-shirt of his, cotton shorts, bare feet. Hair up in a messy knot. No makeup. She looked like a Sunday. She looked like his wife.

Under the knotted hair and his t-shirt he still saw the clamp-light version — bare tits shelved on that too-small sports-bra band, the puffy profile tight, Dale's dark hands on her hips. The cotton shorts hid nothing from the part of him that had watched her waxed pussy take three men through dirty glass. She looked like a Sunday. She looked like the woman in the photographs. She looked like both at once and the overlap made his mouth go dry.

"Hey," she said. Without looking up.

"Hey." He set his duffel down. "How was your weekend?"

"Quiet. Watched a movie. Did laundry." The knife kept moving. Even, measured cuts. "How was the cabin?"

"Good. The owner wants another weekend."

"That's good."

He walked to her. Kissed the top of her head. She didn't flinch. She didn't lean in. She held still — the way you hold still when someone touches a bruise — and then she kept cutting tomatoes.

When she shifted her weight at the cutting board, a deep leftover ache answered between her legs — present, the ghost of being stretched. His mouth on her hair found shampoo and underneath it, faint, a cigar note the shower hadn't fully killed. She kept the knife moving.

"I'm going to shower," he said.

"Okay."

He walked down the hallway. Behind him, the knife on the cutting board. The sound of normalcy, performed.

In the bathroom he turned the water on and sat on the edge of the tub and put his face in his hands. The images. The sounds. The

glass. His hand in his jeans.

He didn't know why she'd been there. He didn't know the deal — the terms, the release, the cards, the phones. He didn't know she'd been buying her way out. He knew what the photos on the camera showed and what the window had shown and what her body had done and what his body had done while watching. That was the complete inventory of his knowledge and it was enough to destroy everything and it was nothing close to the whole truth.

He got in the shower. The water was too hot. He let it be too hot.

They ate dinner at the kitchen table. Chicken and rice and a salad with the tomatoes she'd cut. A glass of wine each — the $6 bottle they always bought, the one she used to call "an apology to France." They talked about the cabin, the owner's next property, the dental group that had finally paid. They didn't talk about Saturday.

Neither asked what the other had done. Neither volunteered. She reached for her glass and he reached for his and their knuckles didn't touch and neither of them corrected the miss.

He did the dishes. She dried. Their elbows touched at the sink and neither pulled away and neither leaned in.

Bed. His arm across her waist. Her back to him. The dark.

"Goodnight," she said.

"Goodnight."

Two liars in the same bed. Each grateful the other hadn't asked. Each carrying a Saturday they'd never share. The dark held what their mouths wouldn't.

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