

Chapter 4: The Room

At ten to one he was still awake, and at one he quit pretending.

Megan slept on her side with her back to him and one hand under the pillow, the way she'd slept since the first apartment, since the futon. Her hair had come loose from the knot and lay across his side of the mattress. He could smell the shampoo on it. Under the shampoo he kept smelling the other thing, a dry stale note that might have been in the pillowcase or might have been in his head. He had smelled it on Sunday when he kissed the top of her head over the tomatoes. He'd been smelling it ever since.

He sat up. Found his jeans on the chair by feel.

"Where are you going." Into the pillow. Barely a question.

"Can't sleep. Gonna clear my head."

"Mm." She shifted. "Don't buy a house."

It was an old joke. When he couldn't sleep he drove, and when he drove he ended up in neighborhoods like the one they'd left, slow past lit kitchens and two-car garages, and once, a year ago, he'd come home at three and told her about a Tudor on Linden with a For Sale sign and she'd laughed so hard she cried. *Don't buy a house*. He stood in the dark with his jeans half buttoned and the joke went into him like a nail.

"I won't," he said.

He took the truck keys off the hook so the keys would be gone if she checked, and put them in his pocket, and went out the front door and down the step and didn't go to the truck. Ridley Street at one in the morning was sprinklers ticking somewhere and a dog two yards over that barked once and thought

better of it. The air was still warm from the day. He walked. He knew how long it took because she'd said it on the first night, on this sidewalk, his hand on her back: *Ninety seconds. I could do this in heels.*

Vince's house was dark except for the front window, where a television threw blue light against the curtain. Somebody sitting up. The Ram in the driveway with its rusted wheel wells. The garage door down for once.

Tyler went up the two steps and hit the door with the side of his fist. Three times. Hard enough to hurt.

He heard a chair creak. Footsteps that weren't in a hurry. The deadbolt turned and the door opened and Vince stood there in a white undershirt gone yellow at the neck, the gold chain lying in his chest hair, gray sweatpants, bare feet. His hair was combed back wet like he'd just done it. He looked at Tyler the way he'd look at a delivery he'd been told was coming.

"Took you a while," he said.

Tyler hit him in the mouth.

It was the first time he had punched a man since the eighth grade and it landed better than it had any right to, a short right hand with his weight behind it, and he felt Vince's lip go against his teeth and something give in his own knuckles. Vince's head went back. He took one step into the house. He didn't fall.

Tyler went in after him.

The second punch was worse. Vince was already inside it, his shoulder turned so Tyler's fist slid off the meat of it, and then Vince was against him, chest to chest, the smell of him all at once — cigarettes and old sweat and the greasy sweetness of whatever he put in his hair — and a hand caught the back of

Tyler's neck. Tyler drove a fist into his ribs. It was like hitting a sandbag. Vince grunted and hooked a bare heel behind Tyler's knee and they went down together through the doorway onto the carpet, and for one second Tyler was on top and swinging, and then he wasn't.

He never saw how Vince did it. His right arm was behind his back and his face was in the carpet and there was a knee between his shoulder blades with two hundred and twenty-five pounds sitting on it. His wrist was being turned toward his shoulder. The pain in his elbow was high and clean and total. He bucked once and it got worse.

"There it is," Vince said. Above him, a little out of breath. "There you go."

Tyler bucked again.

"You can do that," Vince said. "I can do this." The wrist went up an inch and Tyler heard himself make a noise into the carpet. "We can do that all night. Neighbors'll love it."

The carpet was damp under Tyler's cheek, or his cheek was wet. It smelled like beer that had been spilled and dried and spilled again.

"Breathe through your nose," Vince said. He was talking low now, close to Tyler's ear, the way you'd talk to a horse. "You're gonna feel like you can't get air. You can. Through your nose. That's all you gotta do right now. Nothing else."

Tyler breathed through his nose. The carpet. The beer. Vince's breath, cigarettes, blood. He could hear the television, a man selling knives. Somewhere under the pain and the rage a calm cold part of him that had once run project budgets noted that he had walked ninety seconds in the dark to do this and had not thought one step past the first punch.

"You want to know what I did inside," Vince said. "Ninety days. Mostly this. Guy wants to swing, you let him swing, then you sit on him till he gets bored. You bored yet?"

Tyler didn't answer.

"You're getting there."

The knee stayed. The wrist stayed. Tyler felt it leave him the way water leaves a sink, all at once at the end. His free hand opened on the carpet. His legs stopped.

Vince waited another ten seconds anyway. Then the pressure on the wrist eased, and the knee came off his back, and Vince stood up with a grunt and a crack of one knee and walked away from him. Tyler heard the kitchen faucet run.

He got himself up onto his knees, then onto the couch because it was closest. His elbow throbbed. The knuckles of his right hand were split across two of them and already stiffening. Vince came back from the kitchen holding a wad of paper towel to his mouth. When he took it away to look at it there was a bright split in his bottom lip and his teeth were pink.

"Good one," Vince said. He sounded like he meant it. He folded the paper towel to a clean side and pressed it back. With his other hand he took his phone off the arm of the recliner and woke it up and thumbed through something. "Okay. Here's the part you came for."

He held the phone out.

Tyler didn't take it. Vince didn't move it. After a while Tyler looked.

It was dark, the photo, mostly warm brown shadow, the clamp lights blown out to white at the top edge. The basement couch. Megan on her knees on the cushion with her back arched and her hair in Dale's fists, Wicks behind her, his skinny

hips tight against her ass. Tyler knew it. He had watched it. He had watched it from —

Above the couch, in the dark rectangle of the window, there was a face.

Small. Lit from below by the basement light so the eyes were holes and the mouth was a hole. Forehead pressed on the glass. One shoulder dropped, the arm going down out of the frame, and enough of the arm in the frame that there was no other way to read it.

He had not heard anything. He'd been sure of that, crouched in the leaves. He'd been sure of it on the drive north and on the cot in the cabin kitchen and every night since. *Nobody knows I was there.* He'd held on to that like a railing.

"Took it from inside," Vince said. "You were right there. I could've waved."

Tyler's mouth was dry. "Delete it."

"Here's how it goes." Vince sat down in the recliner across from him, slowly, the paper towel at his lip. "You tell her about Saturday. Whatever you want to tell her. You say Vince did this, Vince did that. Fine. Then I walk over there with this, and I tell her you set it up. The whole thing. From the gas station. That you've been sitting in my kitchen getting a cut of your own wife. And she looks at the picture." He turned the phone so the screen faced Tyler again. "Go ahead and tell her the real story. Then look at your hand."

The face in the window. The arm going down.

"I didn't set anything up," Tyler said.

"I know that. Who do you think she believes?"

Tyler sat on the couch with his split knuckles in his lap. The television sold knives. On the wall Vince's mother smiled at a picnic, or a wedding, somebody thirty years gone.

What came out of him wasn't the question he'd walked over with. He'd walked over with *what did you do to her*. What came out was smaller and worse.

"Why was she even there?"

Vince looked at him.

"She quit," Tyler said. "She stood in our kitchen and quit. She said she wanted her Saturdays back. I didn't fight her. Why was she even there?"

Vince took the paper towel away from his mouth and looked at it and put it back. When he talked again his voice had dropped half a step, gone slower, the voice from the gas station on Route 9, a man explaining something obvious to someone who was about to agree.

"She came to me," he said.

Tyler didn't move.

"Week after she quit. She knocks on my door on a Thursday afternoon. You're at work. She doesn't want to pour drinks anymore, fine, she's done with the poker, she's done with the table. But she's been thinking about the basement." He shrugged one heavy shoulder. "One more night. Just the guys. No game, no you. While you're up north. And she asks me to keep it from you. That's what she asked me for, man. Keep it from Tyler."

"Bullshit."

"Okay."

"That's bullshit."

"Okay," Vince said again, the same way, and waited.

And Tyler sat there and the waiting did its work, because he had been there. He'd been in the leaves with his forehead on the glass. He had seen her offer them her hands in that warm waiter voice — *I'm so turned on right now* — and he'd seen her go down on Dale with a rhythm, and he had seen her on her knees with Wicks behind her and heard what she sounded like when she came. He had heard Wicks say it, through the hopper: *You came on me*. Nobody had been holding her down. Nobody had to.

"Women like her get a taste, man," Vince said gently. "Ask her yourself."

Tyler looked at the carpet between his shoes. There was a dark stain there the shape of Ohio. Ask her himself. He imagined it — the kitchen, her face, the question — and he could not get past the moment where she answered it.

"What do you want," he said.

Vince took the paper towel off his lip for good. The bleeding had mostly stopped. He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, and the chain swung out from his chest and hung there catching blue light off the television.

"The cabin," he said. "Guy who owns it is underwater. Way under. He's got four properties and the bank's about to take two of them. He's insured on that cabin like it's the Taj Mahal. He wants the new copper gone. Spools in the shed, the service cable, the runs you pulled. All of it walks one night, he files a claim, the insurance buys it all again at retail plus labor, plus whatever else he says was in there."

"He paid me to put it in."

"And now he'll pay you to take it out. Funny how that works." Vince smiled, and the smile pulled at the split and he

stopped. "You know every run in those walls. You labeled the panel. You could do it in the dark. Pull it, haul it, I know a yard'll take it no questions. You keep forty percent, and I delete the picture in front of you."

"Why doesn't he do it himself?"

"Because he has to be two hundred miles away when it walks. He's at his sister's in Pennsylvania with a receipt from a restaurant. Copper walks, it's some tweakers from the next town. Happens every week up there." Vince sat back. "I got a utility trailer you can borrow. Wednesday night. You go up after work, you're back by morning."

"And if I say no."

Vince lifted the phone an inch off his knee. That was all.

Tyler thought about the money first, and he was ashamed of the order. The games were over. The cabin had been the only thing on the calendar and now the cabin was this. There was a notice in his desk drawer with a number on it that he hadn't said out loud to anyone. There was three hundred dollars left of the three hundred Vince had paid him on Friday. Forty percent of a cabin's worth of new copper at scrap. He'd know the weight. He'd pulled it. He could do it clean and fast and be on Route 11 headed south with the trailer riding low before anybody in the hollow turned over in bed. It was his site. His wiring. Nobody would do it better.

He noticed that he was already planning the pull order and stopped and couldn't stop.

"Wednesday," he said.

"Wednesday." Vince stood and went and opened the front door for him. The night air came in. "Put some ice on that hand. Tell her you caught it on a box."

Megan's soreness was mostly gone by Tuesday, which was the strange part. It had been there all day Sunday, a deep stretched ache when she sat, when she stood up from the cutting board, a reminder that went off without warning like a phone in another room. Monday it was lighter, a tenderness. By Tuesday it only came at odd moments — reaching for the top shelf, crossing her legs on the bus bench — and when it came now it came with a throb in it, one slow pulse, as if something down there remembered and wanted her to know.

She had stood in the shower Monday night with the water too hot and thought, with no warning at all, in Wicks's voice: *What if she's pregnant.*

She counted. She stood there with the water drumming on her shoulders and counted days on her fingers like a girl in a health class, and got a number, and the number was not a good number, and then she refused to count. She turned the water off hard and stood dripping on the mat and told herself the thing women tell themselves, that it doesn't work like that, that it almost never works like that, and she almost sat in the room with her all the way to bed.

That was the kind of thing she couldn't take anywhere. Not to Tyler, obviously. Not to a friend, because the friends were from the old life and the old life didn't have a sentence that started this way. She had the SD cards and she had the thing in her own head and she had nowhere to put either, and so by Tuesday afternoon, with Tyler at a job in Hartwell until six, she took the cards out of the nightstand to make sure they were real.

That was the reason. She said it to herself and it even sounded true. She wanted to confirm they were the originals,

the actual cards from the actual camera, and not three blank cards Vince had handed her for the ceremony while the real ones stayed in a drawer. It was a reasonable thing to check. It was the kind of thing a careful person checked.

She got the laptop. Sat on the made bed with her back against the headboard, the shades down against the afternoon, the house quiet in the particular way it was quiet when she was the only one in it. She found the card reader in the junk drawer, the one they'd bought years ago for a vacation camera, and she slid the first card in, and the folder opened, and there she was.

The first frames were the dress. The Christmas dress on the stool, her legs crossed, that half-smile she could remember making and could not now explain. She clicked through them with the arrow key, one, one, one, and the camera had been on burst, so the frames moved like a flipbook when she held the key down — the lean coming forward a degree at a time, the hem climbing, her own face sliding from the practiced smile into something looser as the sequence went. She knew she should close it. She told herself she would close it after the dress. She reached the end of the dress set and did not close it.

The bikini. The white strings that had already lost before she tied them. She watched the burst where she'd turned, the triangles sliding on the wet cotton, the frame where the fabric went translucent and the pink underneath came through, and she felt the first of it move in her, low, a tightening she tried to ignore and then stopped trying. The next card held the chaise. On all fours, facing away, her back in that deep arch Dale had told her to find. The mole on her left cheek, lit. She looked at the woman on the screen the way she would look at a stranger — the pale heavy swing of her own breasts under her, the

soaked cotton gone to glass — and she could not reconcile the woman arching on the screen with the woman sitting on the bed in an old t-shirt, and the gap between them was where the heat lived. She knew that now. She'd learned it two weeks ago behind the curtain and she was learning it again. The woman on the screen was wanted the way she had not let herself be wanted in eight years, and the woman on the bed could watch her be it with the shades down and nobody to see.

Her free hand had gone flat on her own stomach without a decision. She noticed and left it.

The top coming off. The frame where the strings went slack and her hands were still at the back of her neck and the room had gone, you could see it in the men's blurred edges at the sides of the shot, silent. The frame right after, her chin up, her tits bare in the clamp light and her face not knowing yet what the next hour was. Then the kiss. Dale's grey head, her mouth open under his, her fist in his shirt. The caption her own body wrote looking at it was not shame. She waited for the shame and it didn't come, or it came in a second layer, under the first thing, which was heat.

The hand on her stomach moved down.

She let it. She watched herself kiss a man she'd never have crossed a parking lot to meet, and her fingers found the waistband of her sleep shorts and slid under, and the first thing she felt was heat — a damp heat that had already come through the cotton before she'd touched anything. She'd been wet since the bikini. Since the chaise, maybe. She touched the outside of herself with two fingertips, lightly, the way you press a bruise to see if it still hurts, and her hips lifted off the duvet half an inch on

their own. She told herself, from very far away, that this was insane.

She pushed the shorts down to her thighs. The laptop tipped and she caught it and set it on the mattress beside her hip, angled so the screen faced her, and she sat there with her shorts around her thighs and her knees open on her own made bed in the middle of a Tuesday afternoon and arrowed forward.

The next card was Dale.

His cock beside her face, dark and heavy against her cheek, the frame catching it before she'd turned toward it. The picture couldn't give her the weight of it and her memory gave it anyway — how it had rested on her cheekbone, warm, heavier than she'd thought a man could be, the slow pulse in it against her skin. She held the arrow key and the burst moved: her head turning, her lips parting, the broad crown at her mouth. Then in it. Her own lips stretched round and shiny around him, her cheeks hollowed, her eyes lifted to someone out of frame.

She drew one finger up through herself, slow, from the bottom, gathered what was there and spread it over her clit, and the sound it made was small and wet and mortifying in the quiet room. She did it again. The little slick click of herself against her fingers, louder than she'd have believed, and under it the whir of the laptop fan.

The taste came back to her in her mouth before it came back to her in her head — salt, skin, a bitterness at the very tip, the heat of him heavy on her tongue — and her mouth actually watered, and she swallowed, and that was worse, because swallowing was what she'd done. The ache at the corners of her lips. The ache in her jaw on the walk home. The low sound Dale had made, a man pleased with a purchase. She could almost smell

that basement — the hot dust of the clamp lights, his cologne gone sour with sweat, the damp in the cinderblock — and she could smell herself for real, rising warm and musky off her own fingers, and the two crossed in her head until she couldn't keep them apart.

She pushed two fingers inside. She was swollen and soft and so wet they slid in to the knuckle without a catch, and she curled them the way she'd never once let herself do with the lights on and ground the heel of her hand down on her clit and rocked. The bed creaked. On the screen her mouth worked down him frame by frame, and her hand found the rhythm of the burst without asking her, her own wet sounds filling the room in time with it.

Somebody is going to see this, some part of her said. *Somebody already has*. She waited for it to frighten her. It made her clench around her fingers instead.

She found the facial. The last frame the card had of that night. Her own face, decorated — a thick white stripe across her cheek and the bridge of her nose, a drop clinging to her lashes, more glossing her lower lip, her mouth still half open as if she'd been about to say something. The blue of her eyes gone bright and strange, staring somewhere past the lens. She had never seen that face. Never once in a mirror: slack and glazed and greedy, a woman who had just been used and was waiting to find out if there was more.

She looked into her own eyes in that frame and she came.

It took her from the inside out — fingers buried, heels digging into the duvet, her head knocking back against the headboard, her thighs clamping shut on her own wrist. She heard herself, a long broken *oh* and then another, the headboard tap-

ping the wall, *tock, tock*, and she kept her eyes open, she made herself, she kept them on the woman with Dale's cum on her face while it rolled through her in waves that pulled her hips up off the bed one after another. She was saying something. *Oh God*, or *oh fuck*, or only air.

It went on longer than she wanted it to. When it finished she was breathing like she'd run, and the laptop was hot against her hip, and her hand was still between her legs, slick to the wrist, two fingers still inside her, and the woman on the screen was still looking past the camera, decorated, caught.

She shut the laptop.

What the fuck. She said it in her head and then, quietly, out loud to the dim room, "What the fuck is wrong with me." Her hand was still there. She took it away. The house was quiet. Somewhere down the block a lawnmower started and ran and stopped.

She should destroy the cards. The reasonable version of her, the one who folded her clothes in a neat stack even in Vince's basement, knew the only safe place for the cards was snapped in half and in three different trash cans. She had told herself she'd do it the first night. She slid them out of the reader instead, three small black rectangles, warm from the laptop, and she put them back in the nightstand under the spare phone chargers where they'd been, and she lay down on top of the made bed with her arm over her eyes until the lawnmower was the only thing in the world.

Wednesday morning she took the trash out and Wicks's Civic was across the street from Vince's house.

Engine off. The same spot as the week she quit, when the car had sat there like a held breath. Vince's garage door was up

a foot, the way it was when somebody had been in there late. She stood on her own step with the kitchen trash bag in her hand and looked at it, and Wicks looked back at her through the windshield and lifted two fingers off the top of the steering wheel. Not a wave. An acknowledgment. *I see you seeing me.* His face behind the glass was doing the thing his face did, the grin that was always a little too wide, and then he put the car in gear and pulled away slow down Ridley and turned at the corner and was gone.

She stood there until the bag got heavy in her hand.

They were supposed to be gone. That was the deal, that was the whole deal, that was the thing she'd walked out of that basement barefoot carrying like a prize: *you're out, they're gone.* Vince had said it at the door with his hand on the knob. And here was Wicks's Civic three doors down on a Wednesday, and she couldn't make it mean nothing, and she couldn't make it mean something she could do anything about. She put the trash in the can and went inside and locked the door and stood with her back against it, and after a minute she made herself move.

She didn't tell Tyler about the car. She couldn't tell Tyler about the car without telling Tyler about everything the car was there about, and so the car went where the rest of it went.

He'd been wrong since Sunday. She'd expected the opposite — expected him to come back from the cabin lighter, the money in his pocket, the summer of contracts in front of him — and instead he'd been somewhere behind his own eyes all week. He went for his night drives. He came back from one Monday with his knuckles split and crusted and said he'd caught his hand on a box at the Hartwell site, and she'd taken

his hand to the sink and run water over it and he'd watched her do it with an expression she couldn't read, something that was close to grief, and she'd thought: *he knows something is wrong with us. He can feel the shape of it even if he doesn't know what it is.* She'd done that to him. She'd put the thing between them that he could feel and not see. The marriage was rotting from the inside and he was walking around at one in the morning because he could smell it.

She decided on Tuesday night, watching him sleep, that she was going to tell him. Not the sanitized version. Not the lap-favor version she'd given him after the solo night. All of it — the photos, the deal, the basement, the men, the thing she'd learned about herself on top of their made bed with the laptop hot on her thighs. She was tired of being two people. She would rather be the woman who'd done it and told the truth than the woman who folded her clothes in a neat stack and lied. She'd tell him Wednesday. After dinner, when he was home from Hartwell, when the dishes were done and the lights were low and there was nowhere for either of them to go. She even knew the first sentence. She'd been saying it to herself for a day. *I need to tell you about Saturday. About all of it.*

She made a real dinner Wednesday. Chicken thighs the way he liked them, the crispy skin, the lemon. She set the table. She was drying her hands when his truck pulled in, and her heart was going hard, and she had the first sentence ready in her mouth.

He came in already talking. Keys, the duffel, a job that had run late and another one tomorrow — the cabin owner, the old service that had to come out before a Thursday inspection, he had to go up tonight, he'd be back by morning. He said it fast,

moving, not quite looking at her, pulling a clean shirt off the drying rack. There was something wound tight in him that she read as the job, the money, the pride of real work. He kissed her cheek on his way past and smelled like the day.

"Tonight?" she said. "I made —"

"I know. I'm sorry. It smells incredible." He was already at the door with the duffel. "He needs it out before the guy comes Thursday morning. It's eight hundred I'm not gonna leave on the table." He stopped with his hand on the knob, and for a second the wound-tight thing in him showed through, and he looked at her like he wanted to say something else. "I'll be back by morning. Save me a plate?"

The sentence was still in her mouth. *I need to tell you about Saturday.* She looked at him standing in the doorway with the duffel and the clean shirt and the split knuckles and the thing behind his eyes, and she thought, *not like this, not with one foot out the door, it'll keep one more night*, and she swallowed it the way she'd swallowed so much by now that swallowing had its own muscle.

"Save you a plate," she said. "Be careful."

He went. She stood in the kitchen with two places set and the chicken going cold and the first sentence dissolving back into all the other things she wasn't saying.

The hollow was exactly as dark as he remembered. Two hours up Route 11, the last twenty minutes on roads that lost their lines and then their shoulders, the pines coming right down to the gravel, and then the dead zone where the phone gave up looking and showed him the little airplane. He'd made this drive three times now. He knew the mailbox with no name,

the turn, the long rutted track to the cabin with the new wire in its walls.

He backed the borrowed trailer up to the shed and killed the headlights and sat for a second in the dark and the quiet with the engine ticking.

It was his wire. That was the thing he kept coming back to on the drive. He'd pulled every foot of it. He'd stood on a ladder in June heat and fed the home runs and labeled the panel in his own block printing — KIT, BATH, BED1, the handwriting he used on everything. There was a kind of insane logic to it being him. Nobody else would know the shed held two unopened spools because the job had been over-ordered. Nobody else would know the service cable ran up the outside of the stud bay instead of inside it because of a knot in the sill plate. He could do this in the dark and he half had to, because the only light he let himself use was the headlamp, turned low, a dime of yellow on the work.

He worked. The shed first, the easy money, the spools and the leftover THHN and a box of fittings that would scrap for nothing but weighed something. Then the service cable, which he'd set with his own hands and now stripped out of the staples one claw at a time, the cable coming off the studs with a sound like tape, coiling heavy over his shoulder. He carried it to the trailer and laid it in and went back. His knuckles ached inside the work gloves, and his right elbow, still sore from Vince's carpet, caught on every coil. He'd found a rhythm, the pull and the coil and the carry, and the rhythm was good, it was the one clean thing in weeks, his own competence in his own hands, and he was most of the way through loading when the night at the end of the track turned white.

Headlights. Coming up the rutted track slow, bouncing, two beams swinging across the pines.

He stood in the shed doorway with a coil of his own cable over his shoulder and watched the lights come, and he understood all at once: *two hundred miles away. Pennsylvania. His sister's. A receipt from a restaurant.* Nobody was supposed to come up this track tonight. The owner being two hundred miles away was the entire reason this was supposed to be clean.

The SUV stopped thirty feet off with its brights on him, a county star on the door. A deputy came around the light with a flashlight already up, saying *hands, let me see your hands*, and then behind the first set of lights a second set turned up the track, slower, with a bar across the top that was dark now and then, as he watched, was not dark.

The red and blue washed the pines and the shed and the trailer full of bright copper, and Tyler stood in it with a coil of wire on his shoulder, and the first thing he thought, absurdly, was that he'd labeled the panel in his own handwriting.

Vince said — the words got as far as the inside of his teeth and died there. Because saying Vince meant saying the photo, and the photo meant the window, and the window meant the cabin trip that was a lie, and all of it unspooled from the first word and there was no first word he could say that didn't end at his wife on her knees in a basement. He set the coil down. He put his hands where the deputy told him to put them. The cuffs went on cold and his split knuckles sang when his wrists came together behind him, and a young deputy with a soft face recited the words everybody knows from television, and the radio on the older deputy's shoulder read back the plate on the trailer, and the older deputy said to nobody in particular, *owner*

called it in from out of state, said nobody's supposed to be up here, and wrote something on a pad.

They walked him to the cruiser. They put a hand on his head so he wouldn't hit it, the way they do. Through the back window he watched a deputy walk the length of the trailer with a flashlight, the beam running over the coils and the spools, his copper, his handwriting out there somewhere on a panel in the dark, and he thought about the F-150 and realized they were going to take the truck too, and then they did — a flatbed came within the hour, he watched it from the back of the cruiser, watched his truck winched up onto the bed at an angle that looked wrong, looked like an animal being dragged, the truck he'd refused to sell because it was the last evidence his life had once been bigger than this street.

The holding cell at the county building was cinderblock painted the color of a bad tooth, a steel bench along two walls, a toilet with no seat, and a man asleep sitting up in the corner with a jacket over his face. They'd taken Tyler's belt and his laces and the three hundred dollars and his phone and given him a receipt for all of it, which struck him as the funniest thing that had happened in his life, a receipt, and he'd had to work not to laugh because he understood that laughing in here was the kind of thing that got noticed.

He sat on the steel bench with his laced-less boots loose on his feet and his elbows on his knees and he did not sleep. They'd given him his call at booking. He hadn't called Megan. He'd called the only number that knew why he was up here, and Vince had picked up on the second ring at three in the morning sounding wide awake, and said, *Sit tight*, and hung up before Tyler could ask him how he'd come to be awake. The

night went by in the fluorescent hum. Sometime toward morning the man under the jacket woke up and took the jacket off his face and looked at Tyler with the frank unbothered curiosity of a man for whom the room was not an emergency.

"You're new," the man said. Not unkind. He was maybe fifty, gray stubble, a drinker's nose, forearms gone soft over old muscle. "First one?"

Tyler nodded.

"They'll call your name when somebody comes. You got somebody coming?"

"I think so."

The man grunted and settled back against the block. He was a regular, Tyler understood — he had the ease of a man in a familiar waiting room, a DMV, a clinic. "Violated my paper," he offered, to the ceiling, like it was a thing worth sharing. "Pissed hot. Thirty days, probably. Could be worse." He looked over. "What'd they get you on?"

"Theft," Tyler said. The word was strange in his mouth. "Copper. Off a job."

The man laughed, a wet comfortable laugh. "Everybody and his brother. Price it's at? They oughta put a cop on every empty house in the county." He seemed to approve, almost, as if Tyler had chosen a respectable trade. Then, idly, filling the gray hour: "Who's coming for you?"

"My neighbor. He's posting it. Vince — Barella."

The man's head turned. Something sharpened behind the drinker's face.

"Barella," he said. "Vince Barella. Greasy hair, gold chain, drives a Ram now?"

Tyler sat up a little. "You know him."

“Did ninety with him. Last winter, down at Middlesex, fourth floor.” The man said it the way you’d place a mutual acquaintance at a party. “System’s small. Do enough time, you’ve done it with everybody. Hell of a thing, what put him in. Some neighbor called the cops on his party — he’s having people over, music, whatever, and some neighbor calls it in, and he’s on paper, so the cops come and they don’t just tell him to turn it down, they get to look around. And they find his old man’s shotgun in a closet.” He shook his head, grinning at the stupidity of it, the pure dumb luck. “Felon in possession. His dad’s gun, been in that closet probably twenty years. Didn’t matter. He’s on paper, there’s a gun in the house, that’s a felony. Ninety days for a party.” He whistled low. “Dumbass. You don’t keep a gun in the house when you’re on paper. That’s the one thing. That’s the only thing.”

“A neighbor called it in,” Tyler said.

“Some neighbor. Noise thing. One o’clock on a weeknight, I think he said.” The man shrugged, done with it, the story told. “He came out thin. Lost his truck while he was in, they took it for the payments. He was pretty quiet about all of it, Barella. Not a talker. But he knew exactly who made the call, I’ll tell you that. Guys like him remember.”

The man put the jacket back over his face.

Tyler sat with it. It didn’t go anywhere in him. It was a felon’s bad luck with a gun he shouldn’t have had — the kind of story that was told in a room like this to pass a gray hour, a cautionary thing, *you don’t keep a gun in the house when you’re on paper*. Some neighbor, somewhere, on some weeknight, had called about a party. The world was full of neighbors who called about parties. What stuck, the only thing that

stuck, catching on the cold calculating part of him that had surfaced on Vince's carpet with his arm behind his back: Vince was on parole. Vince was a felon on paper, and a felon on paper went back inside for a gun in the house.

They called it a little before ten. *Calloway. You're bonded out.*

Vince was in the lot in the flat late-morning light, leaning on the Ram with a cigarette, like a man waiting outside a school. The split in his lip had scabbed over dark. When Tyler came out through the glass doors with his belt in his hand and his laces loose and a manila envelope holding his phone and the three hundred dollars, Vince looked him over once, the way you'd check a car you'd lent out, and flicked the cigarette and got in. Tyler got in the other side because there was nowhere else to go. The cab smelled like smoke and the pine tree hanging off the mirror.

Vince didn't start the truck right away.

"You were awake," Tyler said. "Three in the morning. You picked up on the second ring."

"I sleep light." Vince thumbed the Zippo open against his thigh and snapped it shut.

"Deputy said the owner called it in. From out of state. The guy who hired me called the cops on me."

"Guy's underwater. Guys underwater do what they gotta." Vince shrugged. "Maybe he got cold feet. Maybe he wants his claim with a name on it. You want to sit in a county lot and work out who called who, go ahead. Or you want to get home and get your story straight before she starts asking. Your pick."

Tyler didn't answer.

"So listen to me, 'cause I'm only doing this once. Guy don't want a trial. He wants his check. A trial, people start asking what was in those walls and what he paid for it. So he goes to the prosecutor and says he made a mistake. You two had a deal on the old wire, he got the night wrong, sorry for the trouble. It goes away." He put both hands on the wheel. "After Saturday."

Tyler looked at him.

"You tell her it was you," Vince said. "All of it. The poker, the little shorts, the cabin weekends. Your idea. You wanted to see her with other guys and you didn't have the balls to ask, so you came to me." The Zippo went still in his fingers. "Then Saturday you walk her over. Not the basement. Upstairs, my living room, the table, same as the first night. You sit in your old chair and nobody deals you in. And she don't pour drinks and go home this time. She comes over dressed for it, and the guys get her. All of her, on the felt where you won your money. Dale's been on me all week about that mouth. Wicks won't shut up about how she came on him." His tongue touched the scab on his lip. "And me, I been patient with your wife a long time. Saturday I'm done being patient. There's things she never let you have. I'm gonna have them." He looked at Tyler. "No glass this time. You're close enough to smell her. She's gonna look at you the whole time she's taking it, and you're gonna let her see you like it."

Tyler felt it move in his jeans and hated it, and hated that the cab was small enough for Vince to know.

"No," he said.

"Yeah, you are."

"No." It came out too loud for the cab. "I'm getting a lawyer. I'll tell them everything. The claim, the trailer, who sent me. He's committing insurance fraud and you—"

"Tell them what?" Vince turned in the seat to face him. "Your neighbor made you do it? I didn't call you. You called me, from in there, to come get you. You got a text from me says copper? A voicemail? You got anything?" He waited. Tyler had nothing. "He paid you, it's in your bank. Your printing's on the panel. Your truck's on a flatbed with his cable in the trailer. And your story is the guy who bailed you out put you up to it." He laughed through his nose. "Public defender's gonna love you. He'll tell you take the plea before you finish the sentence."

He shook a Marlboro out of the pack on the dash, lit it, and cracked his window an inch.

"How much you have on there? Seven hundred pounds? New cable, two spools still in the plastic. That ain't a misdemeanor, pretty boy. That's felony weight. That's state, not county. County I can tell you about, county's ninety days and baloney sandwiches. State's a year, two, more if he says you took twice what you took. He will, 'cause it's his claim and every pound is money." He blew smoke at the crack. "Guy like you up there. Them teeth. Them soft hands." His eyes went to Tyler's split knuckles and stayed there. "You'll make friends."

Tyler's mouth had gone dry again, the way it had on the carpet.

"And she's down here," Vince said, to the windshield. "What's that duplex run, nine hundred? And you got what I paid you Friday and not a dime behind it. I watch that street. Nobody comes to see her. Nobody's car is ever in your driveway

but yours, and yours is on a flatbed." He tapped ash. "She's got me. Three doors down. I'd look in on her. I'm a good neighbor."

Tyler's hand found the door handle.

"Go ahead," Vince said. "It's six miles. I'll be knocking on your door with my phone out before you hit the highway. Save you telling her yourself."

The handle was cold. Through the glass the county building sat in the flat light, the flag hanging dead on its pole. Tyler sat with his fingers on the handle and saw it all the way through. Megan opening the door in his old t-shirt. Vince's thick thumb waking the screen. Her face finding the window, and the face in the window, and his arm going down out of the frame. His fingers came off the handle one at a time.

"She'll never buy it," he said. "She knows me. I've never once said anything, not one time, about wanting—"

"About wanting to watch her get fucked?" Vince grinned around the cigarette. The scab on his lip split a little and he didn't care. "Lotta guys do. It's a whole thing. Websites. Guys put their wives up there, guys write in about it. Lotta them want a black guy doing it, that's like its own section. Tell her look it up. She'll find ten thousand of you." He knocked ash off on the window frame. "And the guys still think you're some card player likes to watch. That holds. Tell her that was part of it for you. Being nobody in the room."

"You said she came to you. She went back on her own." Tyler made himself look at him. "Why would she ever believe I set it up?"

"Cause she wants to." Vince took a long drag and let it out slow. "I watched her walk home Saturday. Barefoot, holding them heels, hair all over the place, walking like she just got

off a horse.” He said it the way he’d tell you what was in the shed. “Woman walks home like that, she needs it to be somebody else’s idea. You hand her that, she’ll thank you for it.” He started the Ram and it shuddered under them. “And Saturday you don’t gotta act. You sit in the chair and you get hard. I got a picture says you can do that part.”

Tyler looked at his knuckles.

“Okay,” he said.

“Didn’t hear you.”

“I said okay.”

Vince put it in drive.

Vince dropped him at the corner of Ridley and Vine, out of sight of the duplex, the way you’d drop a man you weren’t supposed to know. “Monday the owner makes his call,” he said through the window. “You get through Saturday, this is a bad week you had. You don’t, it’s a felony and she gets the picture. Put ice on that hand again, it looks worse.” And he pulled away.

Tyler walked the last block in the noon heat. A sprinkler. A dog behind a fence. He let himself in and the house smelled like last night’s chicken and the two places were still set on the table, one of them with a plate under plastic wrap, saved for him. It was almost noon. He was hours past *back by morning*.

Megan came out of the bedroom in her running clothes, her hair up, her face already moving toward relief and then toward alarm, and he gave her the lie he’d built on the walk from the corner, because he’d had a night on a steel bench and the ride back in Vince’s truck to build it. The transmission had gone on Route 11, an hour north, in the dead middle of nowhere. He’d had it towed to a shop in Millbridge. No signal up there, she knew that, he’d had to wait till morning to get a

ride down with the tow guy's cousin. The shop was waiting on a rebuilt transmission from a yard out of state; two weeks, the guy said, maybe three. He heard himself say it, clean and detailed, the detail that sells a lie, and he watched her believe it because she had no reason on earth not to, and he hated the specific competence he was discovering in himself, the ease of it.

"You should've called the second you had signal," she said, taking his hand again, the split knuckles. "I was —" She stopped. "I thought something happened."

"Something happened to the transmission." He made himself smile. "Four grand, probably. Perfect timing."

She didn't laugh. "Four thousand dollars, Tyler. How are we —"

"I'll figure it out." He said it too fast.

She held his ruined hand and looked at it and he thought for one second that she could see all of it in his face, the cell, the cuffs, the flatbed, the window, and then she just pressed her lips together and let his hand go and said she'd heat him a plate.

He went to the bedroom to change. He took the folded charge papers out of his waistband where he'd carried them against his skin the whole way home, the arraignment date, the case number, his own name in a government font, and he opened the bottom drawer of the desk and lifted the old debt notice and slid the new papers underneath it and closed the drawer. Two sheets of paper now, in the dark, stacked. He stood there with his hand on the drawer front for a second. Then he went and ate the plate she'd saved him and told her the chicken was even better cold, which was true, and she watched

him eat it with an expression he couldn't read and he couldn't read it because he was busy not letting her read him.

She started it Thursday night, because Wednesday had been stolen and because she couldn't carry it another day.

The dishes were done. He was at the table with a beer he wasn't drinking, turning the bottle a quarter-turn at a time on the wood, and she'd rehearsed the first sentence so many times that when it finally came out it came out flat, worn smooth, a stone she'd been holding in her pocket.

"I need to tell you about Saturday," she said. "About all of it. The real version. And I need you to let me finish before you say anything, because if you say something in the middle I won't get through it."

Tyler stopped turning the bottle.

"Okay," she said, mostly to herself. She was standing at the counter with her hands behind her holding the edge of it. She'd decided she would stand. "You know how I told you the games were — that I quit because I was tired of it. That part's true. But there's —"

"I know," Tyler said.

She stopped.

"What?"

"I know, Megan." He was looking at the bottle, not at her. "You don't have to do this. I already know."

The floor of the thing she'd been standing on wasn't there. She heard her own voice come out small and careful. "You know what."

"I saw the pictures," he said. "On Vince's camera. He left it on the kitchen counter when I went over for my cut, and I

picked it up, and I —” He turned the bottle. “The dress. The bikini. The rest of it.” A pause. “All of it.”

He let the word sit there so she’d understand it was not a sanitized all.

“That Saturday. I knew you were over there. I didn’t go straight up north.” His eyes stayed on the bottle. “I came back. I was at the basement window, down in the well, in the leaves. I watched.” He swallowed. “Enough of it. More than enough.”

He said it the way you confess, low and even and wrong, his eyes down, and she stood at the counter and felt the ground she’d walked over for three weeks reorganize itself under her feet, every stone turning over to show its wet underside.

“You were at the window,” she said.

“Yes.”

“The whole —” She couldn’t finish it. The things she’d done in that basement, the things she’d told herself no one who loved her would ever see — he had seen them, from the leaves, through the glass, and come home and said *how was your weekend* over the tomatoes, and let her cut herself in half all week keeping a secret he already knew the shape of. The horror of it was so large she couldn’t find an edge of it to hold.

And then, while she was still inside that, he said the rest. And the rest was the thing that broke the night in two.

“I set it up,” he said.

She heard it and didn’t understand it. “You —”

“The whole thing. From the start.” He turned the bottle a quarter-turn. “The game. Getting you in that room. The outfits — I pushed the cutoffs, you remember, the first night, I pushed them. The cabin weekends, leaving you here alone on Saturdays — that was —” He stopped. Started again. “I wanted it. I’ve

wanted it for a while and I didn't know how to say it, and Vince — Vince gave me a way to make it happen without having to say it. It's a thing, Megan. Other guys want it too. Look it up if you think I'm crazy. The guys don't know I'm your husband. They think I'm just some card player who likes to watch. That was part of it too. Being nobody in the room. Being a stranger watching his —" He didn't finish that one either.

The kitchen was very quiet. The refrigerator cycled on.

"Say that again," she said.

"I set it up, Megan."

"How." It came out of her flat. "You and *Vince* —" She couldn't make the two names sit in one sentence. "When?"

"The gas station. That first week." He didn't look up. "He saw how I looked at you. He's not stupid, Megan. He knew what I wanted before I'd said it to myself. I just let him run it."

She didn't say anything after that for a long time. Her mind was doing the thing it did, the fast cold sorting, except now it was sorting backward, taking everything she'd carried as her own crime and moving it under his name. The pitch at the kitchen table, *you're hott, Megan, you walk into a room and men forget how to count* — she'd thought that was Tyler being Tyler, selling her a hustle; now it slid under the new heading and became something she didn't recognize. The cutoffs he'd pulled out of the closet. *We need this*. The denim skirt — *that's apparently the whole point of me* — and his silence. The basement pitch, Vince with the bikini on the rack, and Tyler's four words to the floor: *It's up to you*. She'd stood in that basement waiting for her husband's voice to arrive and protect her and it hadn't come, and she'd spent three weeks thinking the failure was hers for needing it, and now the four words turned over and showed

her their underside: not a man who'd failed to protect her. A man who'd been giving her permission. *It's up to you* had meant *yes*.

And the quit. She'd quit, and he'd folded so fast, *okay, your call*, and she'd thought it was defeat, the money winning, and now —

"You let me go back," she said. Her voice had gone to something she didn't recognize. "I quit. I stood here and I quit, and you — if you wanted it, why did you let me quit?"

"I didn't make you go back." He finally looked up at her, and his eyes were wet and she hated that they were wet because the wet made her want to go to him. "You went back on your own. That's the —" His voice caught. "I watched you go. I watched you walk over there in your jacket and I thought maybe you weren't going to, and then you did, and I —"

"Stop." She put her hand up. "Stop."

She turned around and faced the window over the sink. The backyard was dark. Her reflection was in the glass, and his behind her at the table, two ghosts in the kitchen.

The confession was still in her mouth. She could feel the shape of it there, the first sentence and everything stacked up behind it.

Thursday, a week ago. Vince on her doorstep with the chain still on the door, offering her one more Saturday and then never again: the guys gone for good, the SD cards in her hand, every phone wiped in front of her. Before that, the week she'd been afraid of her own street. Wicks's Civic parked across from Vince's with the engine off. A Marlboro on her front step that she'd picked up with a paper towel. Vince getting off a bench on the creek path while she was still blowing

hard from her run, telling her the guys had pictures of her on their phones, that Wicks had video. *They did time, you know that.* She'd been going to tell him all of it. She'd been going to stand at this counter and say, they scared me, and I went back so it would stop.

She opened her mouth to say it and saw the basement window instead.

He'd been out there. In the dirt by the glass, he said, the whole night. He'd heard her use the bartender voice on them, the one she'd once used for tips, telling them she was so turned on. He'd watched her come on Wicks. *They scared me* would sound like a joke to him. She could see his face hearing it. She could see him trying to be kind about it, and that would be worse.

Under that was a question she couldn't look at straight. Had he known? The Civic, the cigarette, the creek path. Had that been part of it, part of what he wanted? Her stomach turned over. She pushed it against the edge of the counter until the thought backed off. It didn't go far.

She swallowed. It went down like a pill without water and sat in her throat, and then it was gone, and she knew she would never get it back up. Not tonight, not any night. The doorstep and the creek and the phones going blank one by one in Vince's basement. Hers now. She'd carry them around this kitchen the rest of her life, past him, past the coffee maker, past the dish by the door.

"Who are you," she said to the window. It came out quiet.

"Meg. I'm the same—"

"Don't." She shut her eyes. "Don't tell me you're the same person."

Behind her the chair scraped. He stood there. He didn't come to her.

There was a way she'd always ended arguments with him. Get up, rinse her own plate, leave the room. Megan ran water over the clean glass in the sink. She dried it and put it in the cabinet.

"You're on the couch," she said.

"Okay."

"The blanket's in the hall closet."

"I know where the blanket is."

A month ago she'd have told him to take the scratchy one, that he'd earned the scratchy one, and he'd have laughed. She went to bed.

She lay on top of the covers in her clothes, on her own side out of habit. The SD cards were in the nightstand under the phone chargers, a foot from her head. Down the hall the couch springs went when he turned over. The refrigerator cycled on. At some point she noticed she'd been biting the inside of her cheek long enough to taste it.

She kept trying to see him out there in the dirt, in the dark by the glass, and she couldn't get his face. Just the dark where his face should be.

Around one she heard him get up and go to the bathroom and come back. He didn't stop at the bedroom door. She'd have heard him.

She gave up at two. The house was dark. Down the hall he was breathing slow and heavy on the couch, finally under. She took the laptop into the bathroom and locked the door. She sat on the closed lid of the toilet with the fan on for the noise and the screen turned down as far as it went, and she typed it

with one finger. *husband wants to watch wife with other men.* She looked at it a long time before she hit enter, as if the search bar might tell somebody.

It had a name. It had several. *Hotwife*, which sounded like a reality show. *Stag and vixen*, which sounded like a pub. And the one that kept coming up, *cuckold*, which made her mouth go small and tight on its own, the face she made at a dirty joke at a work party.

The forums looked like every forum: usernames, little avatars, a pinned post of rules at the top. The men wrote the way the dads from her old gym wrote on the neighborhood board about a lost dog. *Long time lurker, first post. Wife (31) and I have been married six years. Sorry for the length.*

She read one with her hand over her mouth.

It finally happened Saturday. We talked about it almost two years and I honestly didn't think she'd go through with it. Hotel downtown, guy we met on here, older, good guy. I sat in the arm-chair by the window. She kept checking on me the whole time, every couple minutes she'd look over to see if I was ok and I'd nod and she'd go back to it. When he had her on her knees she looked right at me with him in her mouth and I swear to God I almost passed out. Never been that hard in my life. After she cried and then she laughed and then we went at it like we were 20. Thanks for reading guys.

Thanks for reading guys. She read it twice. Somebody had written that, then gone and made his kids' lunches.

She was appalled. She could feel it in her face, the lips pressing, the heat climbing her neck. And under the cotton shorts she was wet, and when she shifted on the lid she felt it, slick, and she sat very still and was appalled at that too.

There was a whole section for the other thing. Those men wanted something specific and said so: bigger than them, darker than them, a man who'd make them look small in their own bed. One husband wrote that the first time he watched the guy undress, he understood what he was there for. She read three lines and shut her eyes and saw Dale's forearm across her stomach, black against her white skin. The weight of him in her mouth. The way he'd said *women like you* in that voice, as if he'd been waiting his whole life to say it to her.

She opened her eyes and thought about the first night.

Vince's living room, a month ago, in the frayed cutoffs Tyler had pulled out of the closet for her. Dale had won a hand and pulled her down onto his thigh, and for three hands she'd smiled and poured while he got hard under her through his jeans. Then, at the end of the night, it had been Tyler's turn, the stranger across the table. She'd sat on her own husband's lap and he'd been harder than Dale. She had wondered about that for weeks. And at home in bed afterward he'd put his mouth to her ear, *every guy in that room wanted you*, and she'd come so hard she said it back to him in the dark. *They wanted me. All of them.* She'd been embarrassed for two days. She'd thought the room had done that to her, the strangers, the danger of it.

She put her hand between her thighs and pressed. She didn't move it, only pressed.

The armchair by the window. She put Tyler in it, in Vince's basement under the clamp lights, in a chair by the stairs where she could see him, and Dale on the couch with her, behind her, his hands on her hips. Earlier she'd lain in bed trying to see Tyler's face at the window and couldn't. Now she could. He was hard in his jeans, watching her the way the man in the hotel had

watched, and when Dale pushed into her, Tyler nodded at her. *Go on.*

She took her hand back like she'd touched the stove.

The nod. Nobody had given it to her. She'd made it up herself, on a toilet lid at two in the morning, and put it on his face. It was *it's up to you* again, the four words he'd said to the basement floor when Vince pitched the photos, except this time with his face on it, and it had nearly been enough.

She read until the window over the shower went gray. Then she closed the laptop and splashed cold water on her face and looked at herself in the mirror: the dark hair half out of its knot, the pale eyes red at the rims, her mouth pressed thin.

She went to him Friday evening. He was on the back step with a beer he wasn't drinking. She came out and sat on the step beside him, not touching, with her knees together and her hands folded on them.

"I want you to tell me what you actually want," she said. "Not the apology version. The real one." She looked at the yard. "If I'm going to understand any of this—" She stopped. "Just tell me."

He was quiet long enough that she thought he wouldn't. Then he put the bottle down between his feet.

"The first night," he said. "At the table. When Vince said nobody knows we're married." His hand went to the back of his neck. "I liked that. Being some guy. Nobody in the room knowing you were mine." He rubbed at his neck. "That's why I set it up the way I did. The guys still think that's all I am. Some card player who likes to watch."

"And the rest of it?"

"The rest of it was me. Vince helped. It was my idea." His hand was still on his neck. "I wanted to see you like that, and I didn't know how to ask you, so I didn't ask."

A screen door banged somewhere down the block.

"Saturday," he said, and his hand came down off his neck and lay on his knee. His voice went lower. "You on that couch with your hair in Dale's hands. On your knees. The sound you made with Wicks behind you. I was in the leaves with my face on the glass and I couldn't move. I didn't want to. I came twice out there, Meg. In the dirt. I didn't even—"

"Tyler." It came out sharp. "Please don't. Not like that."

He stopped.

She sat with her hands folded and her face burning. *In the dirt*. Her husband, in the side yard of that house, with his hand in his jeans like some man in a parked car. She wanted to be sick and she wanted to slap him. Underneath both, low and steady where she couldn't argue with it, she was warm. She pressed her knees together until they ached.

"No," she said.

He looked at her.

"No. I read those forums. I sat in our bathroom at two in the morning and read them. Those women post pictures of themselves, Tyler. Their husbands say *thanks for reading guys*." She heard how high her voice had gone and brought it down. "I'm not one of those women. I don't want to be one of those women. And that house." Her mouth tightened. "That carpet. Those men. You want me to go back there and do that on purpose, with you sitting there watching?"

"Okay," he said. "Then we don't."

He said it too fast and looked down at the bottle. His face went still, the way it went when the firm called about the lay-offs. It was the look of a man who'd been told a job had fallen through.

She looked at that face for a long time. She had done this to him, too, along with everything else. Eight years, and he'd wanted something so badly he'd built it in secret rather than ask her, because he knew exactly what her face would do when he asked. It was doing it now.

"One night," she said. Quietly, to the yard.

He looked up.

"One. This isn't a thing we do now. I'm not—" She pressed her lips together. "One night. And I set the terms."

"Okay."

"You're in the room. Not in the dirt, not at some window. If you want to watch, you watch with your face where I can see it." Her voice started to go and she pulled it back. "No coming home after and asking me how my weekend was."

"Okay."

"Is that all you're going to say tonight? Okay?"

Something like his old smile crossed his mouth and didn't stay. "I don't think I get to say much else."

"No. You don't." She looked back at the yard. "Will there be a camera?"

"I don't know. Probably. Vince has his phone out at everything."

She bit the inside of her cheek. The thought of it made her skin crawl, Vince's phone and his thick stained thumb, her on it. "Then I won't stop him," she said. She made herself say the next part. "You'll want to watch it again. After. Won't you."

He didn't answer, which was an answer.

"And after this, no more secrets," she said. Her own secrets sat in her mouth while she said it, the doorstep and the creek path, and she went on anyway. "We did it together. We don't pretend it didn't happen."

"No more secrets," he said.

"And one rule. Mine." She turned until he was looking at her. "If you stand up, I stop. If you get out of that chair, if you come toward me, if you decide halfway through you can't take it, I stop. Everything stops. That one's mine. Do you understand?"

"If I stand up, you stop."

"If you stand up, I stop."

She held his eyes until he nodded. Then she nodded back, and it was settled, and she sat in it with the yard going dark.

She'd expected it to feel like losing. It felt more like paying something off, like she'd found the one way she had to pay what was owed between them, and the way was to walk into the thing he'd wanted. That was obscene, and it was also a relief, and she couldn't get the two to come apart. Under both was the other thing from the toilet lid at two in the morning, the wet in her shorts over a stranger's hotel room. Her knees were still pressed together. She didn't look at why.

"Saturday," she said, and got up, and went inside. She left him on the step with the beer going warm between his feet.

Saturday afternoon she took the bus to the mall two towns over, where nobody knew her. She wore sunglasses the whole ride and felt ridiculous in them, like a woman in a movie about an affair.

The store was one she'd walked past a hundred times in her old life, with girlfriends, with shopping bags from the good department store, laughing about it. Pink light. Tables of folded silk. A mannequin in the window wearing three straps and a smile. She had always said something dry about that window and kept walking.

She stood in front of it for a while. Then she went in.

It smelled like vanilla and new fabric. The music was low, a woman breathing over a beat. Megan walked the walls with her arms folded, the way she'd walk through a car dealership, and felt her face getting hot under the sunglasses until she took them off and it got worse.

She'd thought about it on the bus. Not black. Black was the leather jacket zipped to her throat, the Christmas dress, the woman getting through something. Not white. White was the bikini on Vince's rack. Then she saw it on the far wall, and she knew it the way you know your own handwriting.

It was blue. Pale and clear, almost silver at the edges where the light hit it: the exact blue of her eyes. Tyler's blue. The first apartment, a sundress on a rack at a street fair, and him saying *that's your blue, Meg, you have to get the blue one*, and every year since, a scarf, a sweater, a mug, all the same blue, because it was hers. A lace bodysuit in it. She took it off the hook and held it up and it took her a second to understand what she was looking at.

The cups were open. They were made of lace, a heavy, scalloped edge, but the lace only went around. Where a cup should be there was nothing at all. It was built to hold a woman's breasts up and out and leave them bare, ringed in blue, like

something served on a plate. Below that it went sheer down the stomach, nothing but a blue haze, and between the legs—

She turned it over. She turned it back. It was open there too.

She hadn't known they made them like that. That wasn't true. She'd known. She'd just never stood in a store holding one.

"That one's gorgeous."

Megan nearly dropped it. The salesgirl was maybe twenty-four, a ring through her septum, hair dyed the color of a plum, and she was looking at the bodysuit and then at Megan with frank professional interest, as if Megan were a room she'd been asked to measure.

"I'm just looking," Megan said. It came out in the voice she used on contractors.

"Sure. It's from a little line out of Montreal, the lace is really good." The girl's eyes went to Megan's chest and stayed there without the slightest embarrassment. "You're not gonna want the medium, though. What are you, a thirty-two F?"

Megan opened her mouth. Shut it. "Thirty-four D."

"Oh, honey. No." The girl actually laughed, kindly. "You're wearing a thirty-four D. That's different." She reached past Megan and took a smaller one off the hook. "The band's what holds you up. In the open cup, if the band's loose, they just sort of sit there. You want them up." She held it against Megan's front without asking, the lace ring lining up over the T-shirt, and Megan stood absolutely still and let a stranger hold lingerie to her breasts in the middle of a store. "Yeah. That one. You'll look unreal."

"Thank you," Megan said, because she'd been raised to.

“Fitting room’s in back if you want.”

“No. Thank you. I’m sure.”

The girl shrugged, unbothered. “Special occasion?”

“Anniversary,” Megan said, and it came out so smoothly it scared her.

“He’s a lucky guy.” The girl was already pulling thigh-highs off a wall, nude, with a deep band of lace at the top. “These with it. Trust me.” Then, from a rack by the register, she lifted something cream-colored. “And if you want to wear it out of the house and not get arrested.”

It was a wrap dress, silk, the color of heavy cream. One tie at the hip. Megan held it and felt how little it weighed, and understood what it was for: one pull, and she’d be standing in nothing but the blue.

She paid in cash. The girl folded everything in pink tissue and put a sticker on it shaped like a pair of lips, and slid the bag across. “Have fun,” she said, and winked, and Megan said “Thank you” a third time and walked out into the ordinary mall.

Pretzels. The fountain. A mother with a stroller, a man asleep on a bench outside the Apple store. Megan walked through all of it with the little pink bag hanging off two fingers and felt like everyone could see straight through the paper. On the bus home she held it flat on her lap with both hands. A woman across the aisle smiled at her, and Megan smiled back, and thought, *you have no idea*, and was horrified by the little thrill that went down her back.

She dressed at seven. Tyler was in the living room. She’d told him he didn’t get to see it until the room did, and he’d said

okay, and she'd heard the TV come on and then go quiet, like he couldn't decide whether to watch it.

She showered first, too hot, the way she always did. Shaved her legs again though she'd done it that morning. Dried her hair and left it down, heavy, falling past her shoulders. Mascara, a little. The French perfume, the last bottle, at her wrists and her throat and then, after standing there with the stopper in her hand, between her breasts.

Then she laid it all out on the bed, the blue and the nude and the cream, and stood looking at it in her towel like it might do something.

The bodysuit first. She stepped into it and drew it up her legs, and the sheer part went over her stomach cool as water. She got her arms through the straps and pulled it up onto her shoulders, and the lace settled.

She looked down.

The girl had been right about the band. It ran snug under her breasts and pushed them up and out. The scalloped blue ringed each one where it met her ribs and left everything else bare, the full heavy weight of them sitting up high on that frame as if they were being offered. Her nipples had already tightened in the cool of the room, pink and swollen at the tips. She'd never in her life seen herself look like this. In a bra she was covered. Naked she was just naked. This was different. The lace said *look here*. It pointed.

She made herself go to the mirror.

A woman in blue lace looked back at her. Her own pale eyes over a body done up like a present. The blue matched exactly, the girl hadn't lied, her eyes and the lace the same cold clear color, so it looked like she'd been designed. Below the

band the sheer blue went down her stomach to a vee, and below the vee the suit simply parted and there she was, bare, pink, completely shown.

Megan turned sideways. The heavy profile of her breasts in the lace ring, standing out from her body. She turned around and looked over her shoulder: the lace cut high across her ass and left the small dark mole on her left cheek in full view, and she thought, very clearly, *Dale has seen that*, and something low in her went tight and hot.

She sat on the edge of the bed for the thigh-highs. Rolled the first one up over her foot, her ankle, her calf, smoothing it as she went, and set the lace band high on her thigh, and did the other, and when she bent to it she felt the open crotch of the bodysuit part around her. The cool air of the room touched her there.

She was wet.

She sat with her ankle on her knee and the second stocking half up and understood that she had been wet for a while. Since the shower, maybe. Since the bus. And in this thing there was nowhere to hide it. Every man in that room would be able to see exactly what she was.

You don't have to go, she thought. *You can take it off and put it in the bag and give it to the Goodwill and he'll understand.*

She rolled the stocking the rest of the way up.

The heels were the pointed three-inch black ones from the night she'd gone to Vince's alone, and she stepped into them and was suddenly taller and her legs were longer and the whole thing changed, her hips, her back, her breasts lifting another inch as she straightened. She stood in front of the mirror in the blue and the nude and the black heels with her hair down, and

her face looked like her face, and her body looked like something on the internet at two in the morning.

She tried to picture it. Vince's basement, the clamp lights, Tyler on the old couch against the wall. Tyler getting five minutes in and standing up, white, and her stopping, the rule working, all of them walking home together with nothing having happened but this outfit. She held that one a long time. It was the safest picture she had, and it didn't do a thing to the heat in her.

She picked up the cream silk and put it on over everything. Wrapped it across, drew it closed, and tied it once at her hip.

In the mirror she was a woman dressed for a nice dinner. Pretty. A little overdressed for Ridley Street. The silk fell to her knees and hid it all, and only she knew there was one knot between the room and the blue.

The ring was in the ceramic dish by the door, among the keys and the loose change. She stopped and looked at it. On the night she'd gone alone, she had picked it up and turned it in her fingers. Tonight she just looked, and left it, and her bare hand at her side felt like her hand.

Tyler stood up from the couch when she came out.

His eyes went down the silk and back up to her face, and he didn't know. She could see him not knowing, looking at a woman in a cream dress, trying to find the thing in it. She let him look for it.

"Come on, then," she said. She'd meant it to come out steady. It came out low. She opened the front door onto the ninety seconds of sidewalk.

They walked over together at a quarter to eight, the way they had the very first night. His hand found the small of her

back on the sidewalk and she let it stay. The block was doing what it did on a Saturday evening: a grill going somewhere, the above-ground pool two doors down with its filter chugging. The cream silk moved against her thighs with every step. Underneath it the lace held its secret, and ninety seconds of sidewalk had never felt shorter.

Vince opened the door. He'd shaved. The split in his lip had gone down to a dark line. He stepped back to let them in and the house was the house: paneling, carpet, the smell of cigarettes and fried food soaked into all of it. But the poker table was back in the middle of the living room where it had stood the first night, the green felt wiped down, the mismatched chairs pulled in around it.

"Well," Vince said. His eyes went down the cream silk and came back up slow. "Didn't think I'd see you in this house again."

Megan said nothing. The last time she'd stood in this house he'd walked her to the door and told her she was out. *That's it. They're gone.*

"I told the guys your friend here wants to sit in." He tipped his head at Tyler. "Pretty boy from the first nights. Told 'em he heard what you been getting up to down in my basement and he asked could he come watch." He looked at Tyler, and nothing showed on his face. "They're fine with it. They think it's funny." Then, to Tyler: "Your old chair."

Tyler went around the table and lowered himself into the chair on the far side, facing the bar, the one he'd won money in. Nothing in front of him. No cards, no chips. Only the bare felt.

She poured herself a gin at the counter. Drink one. She drank an inch of it, set the glass down, and felt it go warm through her chest without loosening anything.

At eight there was a heavy tread on the front step. Vince opened the door and Dale came in sideways through the frame, the way he had to. She smelled him then, the stale cheap cigar on his clothes, and saw the scarred knuckles on the doorjamb and the dark veined forearm under the rolled sleeve. His heavy-lidded eyes went first to Tyler and the bare felt, and then, slowly, to her. Wicks ducked in under Dale's arm, already grinning, his watery eyes dropping to the cream silk and climbing back up.

Vince shut the door behind them. She heard the deadbolt turn and seat home with a heavy clunk, and for a second she was cold all the way through. Locked in. Three men who'd done time. She picked up the gin and held it in both hands until it passed.

"Knew you'd come back." Wicks came straight at her across the carpet, delighted. "I said it. Didn't I say it, Dale? I said she'd be back."

"You said a lot of things," Dale said.

Vince took the head chair and settled into it, spread, centered.

"Pretty boy's sitting in tonight." He said it flat, to the room. "Heard all about our bartender, didn't want to miss the show. Asked real nice could he come watch." He looked across the felt. "Ain't that right?"

Every face turned to Tyler. Megan watched him sit there in it. Then he nodded, once, at the table.

"I knew it." Wicks slapped the felt. "First night I said is he gay, and Dale said he looks like a cop, and I said no, he's a freak. Look at him. He's a freak. Came to watch." He said it with real admiration, as if Tyler had turned out to be a genius.

Dale didn't laugh. He looked at Tyler a long moment, the cigar turning once between his fingers.

"Man knows what he likes," he said.

Vince dealt. The cards went around the table as a formality and nobody looked at them. She poured for Dale and Wicks, heavy, out of a habit she couldn't switch off, and set Dale's glass at his elbow. He didn't touch it. He laid his hand face up on the felt without looking at it, and looked at her instead.

"Untie it."

The room went still.

She was standing at the end of the table between the bar and Tyler's chair, where every one of them could see her. Her hand went to her hip on its own and found the knot, a plain single tie she'd made in front of her own mirror two hours ago, and stopped there.

"You haven't even touched your drink," she said. Her voice came out cool and clipped, the voice for a man who'd tracked mud on her floor.

"Untie it," Dale said, exactly the same way.

"What's she got under there, Vince?" Wicks was bouncing in his chair. "You know, don't you. Look at him, he knows. What's under there?"

She looked across the table at Tyler.

He was gripping the arms of the chair. His face was white and his eyes were on her hand at her hip, and he didn't move. She waited for him to. One second, two. The knot was one

knot. Once she pulled it there was no tying it back with any dignity, not in this room, not with these men watching. She thought of the salesgirl holding the lace up to her chest in the pink light. *You'll look unreal.*

Tyler stayed in the chair.

She pulled the tie.

The silk loosened. It opened down her front and she felt the air of the room come in against her skin before the fabric had even left her, and then it slid off her shoulders and down her arms and pooled on the carpet around her heels.

Nobody said anything. The room had gone quiet the way it had for the bra the first night, except there was no tank top under it this time, nothing under it at all.

The pale blue lace. Open cups framing her bare breasts and holding them without covering — the lace ringing each one, nipples exposed and tight in the room's air, the heavy round weight of them sitting high and full in the frame, the puffy pink tips already drawn to points. Sheer blue over her stomach. Open at the crotch, the lace edges tracing down her hips to bare skin — her pussy visible through the gap, the neat pink seam of her, the lips already flushed, and under the French perfume the warm musk of her cutting the cigarette smell. Nude thigh-highs. The pointed heels.

Her arms started to come up across her chest. She stopped them. She made herself put them down at her sides, and stood there, and let them look.

The silence held. Dale's heavy-lidded eyes took their time with her — head to heels and back, slow, a man surveying what he'd come to collect. Wicks's mouth was open and for one full second nothing came out of it.

“You wear that for us?” Dale said.

“The lace,” Wicks managed. His voice had gone high and thin. “The lace matches her — Dale, her eyes, it’s the same blue, who does that, who thinks to — and her pussy, you can see it, the lace just stops, it’s right there, Vince — look at her tits, the cups aren’t covering anything, they’re holding them up, the nipples are right there—”

She didn’t answer. She stood in it at the end of the poker table and let them see her. Vince had his phone in his hand, held at the table’s edge, the dark lens aimed at her, filming. She saw it. She held the look a second, thought of Tyler, and turned back. He would want the footage. That was the reason she’d settled on during the sleepless hours and it held, for now.

Tyler’s hands closed on the bare felt where cards should have been. She watched him see the blue — the color she’d bought with cash for a room like this, on her body with other men in the room for the first time — and something moved in his face and she waited for him to stand up. The rule she’d given him on the back step, the one thing that was hers: *if you stand up, I stop*.

He didn’t stand.

She lifted her chin.

Dale came around the table. The mass of him crossing the room at a pace that didn’t acknowledge hurry. He stopped in front of her.

“Turn around,” he said. “Let him see.”

She turned. His dark hands found her waist and he completed the rotation himself, slow, the room watching the full circle of her. His thumbs traced the open-cup edges from underneath, followed the lace where it curved below her bare

breasts, and then his hands climbed. He cupped both from below — dark rough fingers on porcelain, scarred knuckles against pale skin — and lifted. The full heavy breasts rose in his palms and he held them, the weight spilling over his fingers, and then he let go. They dropped, settled, and the bounce was visible across the room.

Wicks made a sound from his chair.

“Can I — let me touch,” he said. Half out of his seat. “Just the lace. Let me feel the lace, I just want to—”

“Wicks.” Vince. One word, from the head of the table.

“I just—”

Vince looked at him. One second. Wicks sat down. His leg jackhammered under the table and his Adam’s apple jumped.

Dale’s hands stayed. His thumbs moved to her nipples and dragged across them, the rough scrape of calluses over both tight points, and then he circled them, slow, watching her face while he did it. She stood rigid and tried to keep her face still. She could feel the grain of his thumbs on her. His breath was warm and stale with cigar, close enough to taste, and his gold chain swung forward and touched the top of her breast, cold, and she shivered and hated that he saw it.

His hand slid lower. Down the sheer lace over her stomach, the heat of his palm coming straight through it, and then off the lace and onto her. His rough fingertips found the lips of her pussy and pressed, and held there. Then his thumb drew one slow line up through the seam of her, parting her, and she felt how easily it went. She felt how wet she was.

He brought his hand up between them and turned it in the light. His dark fingers shone.

"She's ready," Dale said, flat, to the room. "She's been ready."

She bit the inside of her cheek. From his chair Wicks made a noise that cracked in the middle.

Dale put his wet hand on the back of her neck. "Come here."

He didn't wait for her to come. He pulled her in by the neck and put his mouth on hers. For one second she held her lips shut against him, stiff, the way she'd hold still for a stranger's kiss on the cheek at a party. His thumb pressed under her jaw, and her mouth opened, and his tongue came in.

He kissed like he did everything, like it was already his. Heavy and deep and wet, no hurry in it, his mouth so much bigger than hers that it covered hers completely. He tasted of cheap cigar and bourbon. She made a small shocked noise into him. His tongue pushed against hers, slow, thick, and pushed again, and she felt her own tongue move back against it before she'd decided anything.

Stop that, she thought. She didn't.

Her hands had gone up against his chest to keep him off, and somewhere in the kiss they'd stopped pushing and curled into his shirt. He felt it and made a low sound in his chest that she felt more than heard, and his other hand came down off her breast and between her legs again. Two thick fingers slid along her, through her, wet, the sound of it obscene in the quiet room, and her hips rolled forward into his hand.

She hadn't told them to. They just did.

The kiss went sloppy. Open-mouthed, spit on her chin, her bare breasts crushed flat against his shirt and the buttons pressing into them. His chain was caught between them. Her breath

came hard through her nose. She was kissing him back now, really kissing him, her mouth working under his, a soft greedy moan coming out of her that she heard as if from across the room. He sucked her bottom lip into his mouth and let it go wet, and she chased his mouth when he pulled back an inch. She actually chased it.

“Jesus Christ,” Wicks breathed. “Look at her. Vince. Look at her go. She’s eating his face.”

The words came through to her and she opened her eyes.

Over Dale’s shoulder, across the felt, was Tyler. He was gripping the arms of his chair, his face white, his eyes on her mouth. Her mouth was still open. It was wet, her lips swollen, and Dale’s fingers were still moving between her legs, and her hips were still moving on them. She couldn’t make them stop.

Heat poured up her throat into her face. She dropped her eyes. She did not stop kissing Dale when he took her mouth again.

When he finally let her go she was breathing like she’d run, her lips throbbing, her chin wet. He looked at her mouth a moment, satisfied, a man looking at work he’d done. Then he took her by the hips and turned her around, her back to the table, to show her to the room from behind.

“Oh, look at that ass in the lace,” Wicks said. “You can see everything. You can see the little mole. Vince, are you getting this?”

Dale sat down in his chair, spread his knees, and patted his thigh.

“Lap.”

She crossed to his chair and lowered herself onto him facing out, facing Tyler across the felt. His arm came across her

waist — dark forearm over pale blue lace, the contrast stark in the overhead light. She was on Dale's lap with her breasts bare and framed and the open crotch putting bare skin on rough denim, her pussy on the seam of his jeans, nothing between them. His cock was waking under her. She felt it — the slow thick hardening against the backs of her thighs, the heat through the fabric, the ridge swelling against her bare lips.

She kept her spine straight. She watched Tyler.

She understood, sitting there with Dale's heat under her and his arm across her waist and his cock stiffening against her, that she was braced for it — that some part of her had come here expecting he would stand, that he'd watch for two minutes and the chair would spit him up and it would stop. She watched his face. His hands on his own knees.

He didn't stand. A muscle in his forearm twitched and his fingers pressed the felt and he stayed where he was.

"She's somewhere else," Dale said into her hair. Amused. His hand spread on her stomach. "She's not even here. She's over there." He meant Tyler. He meant it the way he could mean it — a woman distracted by the quiet voyeur across the table.

Wicks leaned from his chair. His stained bony fingers found her hip — clammy, cold — and she flinched. His hand stayed. He traced the lace edge.

"That's why he watches. He knows he can't — look at her on you, Dale, and pretty boy just sits there with his hands on his knees." His fingers crept along the lace band toward the open crotch and Dale's hand came down and closed around Wicks's wrist without looking at him and moved it back, and

Wicks laughed, nervous, and sat back. "I just wanna feel the lace."

"Wicks," Vince said.

She reached for the bottle. The bartender instinct — something to do — and the stretch lifted her breasts in their frame and she felt the room track the movement. She poured gin into her glass on the felt. Drink two, and the last. The warmth spread and loosened the top layer and she told herself that was all she needed.

Vince dealt another hand nobody looked at.

Dale shifted under her. The ridge of him had been pressing thick against the backs of her thighs through his jeans for two hands now, and she'd been sitting on it with her spine straight, the way you'd sit on a church pew. She felt him look past her, across the felt, at Tyler.

"Pretty boy came to watch," Dale said. "Can't see shit from over there."

Wicks cackled. "Give the man a seat, Dale."

Dale stood up, and she went up with him because his hand was flat on her stomach. He turned her by the hip and took the back of her neck in one big hand, not hard, just certain, and walked her around the end of the table. Her heels wobbled on the carpet. She felt every eye in the room on her bare breasts moving as she walked, felt the open lace part between her legs with each step, felt the cool of the room there where she was wet. Tyler was getting closer. His face, his hands on the chair arms.

Dale stopped her beside Tyler's chair, close enough that her hip brushed his shoulder.

"Knees."

She didn't move. For a second she stood there next to her husband in nothing but the blue, and looked down at the dirty carpet, the beer-colored stain by the chair leg, and thought, very clearly: *not on that*.

Dale's hand on her neck pressed down, once, gently.

She went down. The carpet was rough and slightly damp under her knees. Her heels dug into the backs of her thighs. Her bare shoulder settled an inch from Tyler's knee, so close she could feel the warmth coming off his leg through his jeans, and she could hear him breathing. Fast and shallow, through his nose.

Dale stood over her. He undid his belt slowly, the buckle clinking, the leather sliding out of the loops, and she watched it because it was in front of her face and there was nowhere else to look. The button. The zipper, loud in the room. He reached in and brought himself out.

She'd had him before. She knew the size of him. It didn't help. Up close, under the living-room light, he was enormous: dark and heavy and thick as her wrist, veins running down the shaft, the broad head swollen and slick at the tip, already leaking. He held it at the base and let it hang there an inch from her lips, heavy enough that it bobbed. The smell of him filled the small space between them, cigar and musk and hot skin, the smell of a man who'd been hard under her for twenty minutes. Her mouth watered. She hated that it did.

"Mouth on it," Dale said.

She looked sideways and up, at Tyler.

He was right there, a foot away, looking down at her. At her face, and at the cock in front of her face. His fingers were dug

into the chair arms, and his jeans were tented hard. He didn't stand up.

She heard herself before she knew she was going to speak.

"Should I, pretty boy?"

It came out low and soft, almost sweet. It wasn't her voice. It was the voice of some woman in a forum post at two in the morning, and it had come out of her own mouth, on her knees, a foot from her husband. Her face flooded hot. She kept looking at him anyway.

"Is that what you came for?" Quieter. Her lips nearly brushing the head of Dale's cock as she said it, so close she could feel the heat of it on her mouth. "You want to watch me put it in my mouth?"

"Oh my *God*," Wicks said from across the room. "Did you hear her? Vince. Did you hear what she said to him?"

Tyler's throat moved. He swallowed, and swallowed again, and then he nodded. Once, small, his eyes never leaving her mouth.

Something in her low belly turned over hard.

She turned back to Dale and opened her mouth.

She took him. Her pale hand at the dark base, her mouth stretching around the broad head. The taste spread over her tongue — salt, bitter at the slit, then warmer, skin. She sealed on him and worked down the shaft and the wet sound of it filled the small space between the two chairs. Spit gathered and ran from the corner of her mouth in a thin line that swung and broke on the top of her left breast. She took more. The head found the back of her throat and she gagged — a thick wet choke that slapped off the walls — and her eyes watered and

she held him and bobbed and the sounds she made around his cock were small and obscene and continuous.

Wicks crouched by Tyler's chair on his heels, close enough that his menthol breath touched Tyler's arm. Grinning. Pointing.

"You ever had a woman like this, pretty boy?" Right at him. Nasal and happy and cruel. "Look at the size of what she's taking. You and me together wouldn't make that. Look at her lips, the way they stretch — she's gagging on it, listen, hear that sound? That little choke? That's why he watches, Vince. I'm telling you."

Dale's hand settled on the back of her head. Dark fingers in her dark hair, the weight of his palm setting the pace. She took him deeper. The wet sound crested the head on every bob — a soft suck, then a slurp as she pulled back — and her breasts swung in the open cups, the heavy weight pulling, nipples grazing her own forearms on the downstroke.

She heard herself — the wet seal of her mouth, the small choking note when he pressed deep — and she kept going, dutiful, her hand working what her mouth couldn't reach, and Tyler's knee was warm against her bare shoulder. She didn't look up at him. A bitten sound left her around Dale's shaft. High. Small. The kind of sound that escaped when something pushed past the point where she controlled the noise, and Wicks heard it and pointed at her face.

"There — hear that? She made a sound — sweetheart, do that again, do that sound—"

Dale pulled out of her mouth. His cock left her lips wet and shining, a string of spit stretching and breaking across her chin. He looked at her — the wet mouth, the heavy breasts,

the blue eyes looking up — and he pulled her up by the wrist. She came off her knees, unsteady, and he walked her around the table to his chair, his hand on her arm, his belt open, his cock still wet from her mouth, and he sat and the chair took his mass.

Nothing to move aside. The lace was already open for him.

Dale took her by the hips, his dark hands spanning her waist so his fingertips nearly met at her spine, and lifted her like she weighed nothing. He turned her to face the room. Her heels left the carpet. She was looking across the green felt at Tyler, and she felt Dale settle her over his lap with her thighs spread wide over his, and she felt the heat of him underneath her before anything touched.

Then the head of him touched her.

It was just resting there, pressed against her, broad and blunt and slick, and it felt so much bigger than it had looked. She grabbed the arms of his chair. Her thighs were shaking.

“Sit down on it,” Dale said behind her.

She didn’t. She held herself up on her arms over him, the head of his cock just notched against her, and stared at Tyler across the table and couldn’t make herself move. *You don’t have to. You can still stand up.*

Dale’s hands tightened on her hips and drew her down an inch.

The head pushed into her.

Her mouth fell open. The stretch of it was immediate and enormous, the blunt crown spreading her open around it, and she’d been wet for an hour, soaked from his fingers and his mouth and from kneeling there with him in her mouth, and it didn’t matter. He was too thick. She felt her lips stretch wide

around the head and hold there, tight, burning a little, and a high thin noise came out of her that she'd never heard herself make.

"Oh, there it goes," Wicks breathed. "Vince, look at her face."

Dale let go of her hips.

He didn't push. He sat back and let her hold herself up, his cock inside her just to the ridge of the head, and waited. She understood what he was doing. He was going to make her do it.

Her arms were trembling on the chair arms. She looked at Tyler. He was gripping his own chair hard, leaning forward without seeming to know it, his eyes on the place where she was spread open over Dale's lap. He looked like a man watching a car go off a bridge. He didn't get up.

She let her arms bend.

She sank. Slowly, an inch, and the shaft followed the head into her and the stretch doubled, and she gasped and stopped. Then another inch. He filled her in a way nothing ever had, so thick she felt every vein of him dragging against the inside of her, and he kept going, deeper, past where Tyler went, past where she'd thought there was any more of her. She heard herself making small helpless sounds with every inch, *oh, oh*, and couldn't stop them. Her thighs gave out the last of the way and she dropped the rest of the way down onto him all at once.

She cried out. It rang off the paneling.

She was sitting on him. All of him was inside her. She could feel the head of him pressed up somewhere deep that made her whole belly clench, and his heavy balls against her, and the rough denim of his open jeans on the backs of her thighs.

She could feel her own pulse beating around him. She couldn't move. She sat there impaled in her blue lace with her mouth open and her bare breasts heaving, and she was looking straight at her husband.

"Look at that," Dale said, low, satisfied, behind her ear. Not to her. To the table. "Took every inch."

Wicks was half out of his chair. "She's gonna feel that tomorrow. She's gonna feel that for a *week*—"

"Sit down, Wicks."

Dale put his hands back on her hips and lifted her an inch off him, slow, the whole thick length of him dragging out of her, and then let her drop.

She cried out, high and raw, a noise she'd never once made for Tyler, and Tyler heard it, a foot of felt and an ocean away, and she watched him hear it.

"Slow," she said. Clipped. The composed voice, cracking. "Just — slow."

"All of it," Dale said. "Pretty boy's watching you."

She looked. Tyler across the table. His hands on the bare green. Something in his face between pain and the thing she'd never be able to ask him about, and he was not standing up.

Dale's arm came across her waist. His other hand reached between her thighs from the front, dark fingers parting the lips of her pussy where his cock disappeared into her. He held her open. For the room. For the camera. For Tyler.

"She's on him," Wicks said. He'd come around to Tyler's side, bending to see across the table. "She took the whole thing — Vince, look between her legs, he's spreading her, you can see where it goes in, look how wet she is, it's running down him—"

"Soaked," Vince said. An observation.

Dale lifted her by the hips. Up — the wet sound of her rising off an inch of him, a slick separation — and then down, the full seat again, and the chair creaked and her heels caught the rungs.

“Up,” Dale said. And she rose. “Down.” And she sank. He said it the way he said everything — stating what was going to happen, his hands guiding her hips, his dark cock working in and out of her with each word — and she obeyed, stiff, doing the job, her breasts shaking in the frame with every stroke.

“He’s bouncing her,” Wicks said. “Pretty boy, she’s riding Dale’s cock right in front of you — you hear that? The squelch every time she drops? That’s all her.”

She could hear herself around him — the slick clutch on the rise, the deeper sound when she sank, a wet slap every time her ass met his thighs. Her wetness had gone past hiding, past denying. The smell of her rose off Dale’s lap in the room’s heat, sharp and unmistakable, cutting the cigar. The lace frame held her breasts just enough to amplify the bounce, and they swung with every stroke, nipples tight, and the room tracked the movement.

Dale’s rhythm was steady. Each rise showed an inch of him glistening — dark, thick, veined — before she dropped again. The chair creaked under them in a steady complaint. She could feel his cock deep in her on every seat, the head pressing a spot high inside that made her thighs shake, and each time she tried to slow the drop his hands brought her down at his pace. The sound of the ride — the wet slap of her ass meeting his thighs, the squelch of her pussy stretching around him, the creak of the chair — filled the room over Wicks’s voice.

She gripped the arms of the chair and rode him stiffly, the composed face holding by a thread, and the pleasure kept building against the stiffness — his thickness dragging sensation out of her on every stroke, the treacherous heat between her thighs getting worse with every drop.

“Let me up,” she said. Quiet. “I need—”

“I’ll tell you when,” Dale said.

His hips drove up. She dropped. The chair complained under them. The wet sound carried and Tyler watched her take it across the bare felt and she watched him watching and the chair held him.

“Over the table,” Vince said.

She came off Dale with a sound — the thick shaft dragging out, her lips clinging, a wet sucking release as the head pulled free, and she stayed open for a second, swollen and gaping, before her body closed. His cock hung dark and shining with her, a string of her slick stretching from the head to her thigh before it broke. Still hard. Still unfinished. Wicks said “Look at — Vince, look at her, she’s—” and she stood on legs that trembled and Vince pointed the phone at the table.

She looked at the felt. At Tyler beyond it. Her hands found the table edge and she stopped.

“I can’t—” Quiet. To nobody. To the felt. Her fingers on the wood.

Vince said nothing. Dale’s hand settled on the small of her back and pressed, and she bent forward over the end of the table, forearms down, facing Tyler’s chair. Her breasts hung in the open cups and swung when she settled. She put her cheek on the old green and Tyler was right there, directly across, a foot away.

Wicks came around behind her. She felt his hands at the lace band of her right thigh-high, the stained bony fingers.

He peeled it down slow.

“Look at these legs,” he said. Quiet. Reverent. Rolling the nude nylon down her thigh, her calf, off the pointed heel. “The marks the lace left — little red lines where the band was, like somebody drew on her.” Then the other thigh-high, the same, slow, his shaking fingers tracing the marks on her skin as the nylon came away.

He took the two thigh-highs. He looped the first around her right wrist, snug against the bone, and tied it to the front leg of the table — Tyler’s side. Then the left. She felt the nylon pull taut and the knots cinch and her arms stretched forward across the felt, bound, her hands inches from Tyler’s shoes.

“Don’t—” she said. Into the felt. The word died before it finished.

She was tied. Bent over a poker table with her wrists bound to its legs, in a room where the deadbolt had turned behind her an hour ago, with three men who’d done time for things she’d never asked about. She could not get up.

“She can’t get up now,” Wicks said. Almost tender. “Can you, sweetheart.”

She turned her face on the felt and looked at Tyler. He was right there. His eyes on her bound wrists, on the nylon knotted around them, inches from his shoes. She saw him see the fear and she saw it cost him.

Tyler’s eyes dropped to her bound wrists. His chair creaked under a shift that went nowhere.

The fear came clean and cold: tied, locked door, ex-cons, her hands lashed to furniture. For a few seconds why she’d

come fell away and she was just a woman bound in a house she couldn't leave. She breathed on the felt. She looked at Tyler's shoes and then at his face and the face was still there.

The fear found nowhere to go. Her hips jerked toward the felt and away from the locked door and her wrists tested the nylon once, a small pull that cinched tighter, and she breathed on the felt and let it.

Wicks dropped to his knees behind her.

Through the open crotch, where the lace parted and left her bare, his mouth found her from behind.

His stubble scraped the inside of her thighs. His lips were chapped and his breath was menthol cigarettes and heat, and his tongue was wet and clumsy and eager, dragging flat up the length of her. He found her clit. She jerked against the knots.

"Wicks—" Muffled by the felt. Something that started as a refusal and came out too breathy to pass as one.

He moaned into her. His mouth sealed on her pussy and the vibration traveled through her and her hips bucked and the nylon bit her wrists. He lapped at her clit in fast sloppy circles and his stubble burned the tender skin and his hands shook on her thighs and he talked into her between licks, the words muffled and wet:

"You taste so good — sweetheart, you taste — God, you're dripping, I can feel it on my chin, I can smell you, you're so — I wanted this, I wanted to taste you since the first time you walked in here—"

She didn't want it to feel good from him. From any of them, but especially from Wicks — the jittery mouth, the stained fingers, the man who'd been turning her into a show since the first night. And it felt good. His tongue was artless

and relentless and he found a rhythm on her clit that made her thighs shake, and she bit the felt and her bound fists clenched and unclenched at Tyler's shoes.

His stubble was everywhere. Rough on the inside of her thighs, rough against her lips where they'd swollen and parted, rough on the hood of her clit when his chin moved and the friction sent a jolt through her that pulled a whimper out before she could swallow it. The sound of his mouth on her was wet and loud and obscene — a sloppy, devoted, continuous licking and sucking — and the room could hear it and she could hear it and she hated him and her hips pushed toward his face anyway.

The locked door, the knots, face-down with a mouth on her she couldn't see — and her hips pushed toward his face anyway, a small roll against the nylon, and the fear and the pleasure sat in the same body and neither was pretending the other wasn't there. His tongue pushed inside her. Short, blunt, curling. She gasped and his hands tightened on her thighs and he ate her — devoted, starving, months of wanting concentrated in his tongue and his shaking fingers.

"Move." Dale. His voice low, coming closer. The scrape of his belt. "When I'm done with her. Not before."

Wicks pulled away with a wet sound. She felt the air find her where his mouth had been, cool on the slick, and heard him stand and heard the jitter of his boots — "I was just — she was right there, she tasted—" — and Dale said nothing and Dale's heat replaced the smaller man behind her.

His hands settled on her hips over the lace. He stepped between her spread thighs. She felt the blunt head of him against her — right where Wicks's mouth had been, slick with spit and

her own wetness — and this was his second time inside her tonight but the angle was different and the power of it was different. Tied. Face-down. Him behind her. The whole table between her and anything that could stop it.

He pushed in.

She was wet from Wicks's mouth and from the ride and from everything the night had been pulling out of her, and Dale slid into her deep — the long heavy seat of him filling her past where familiar ended — and the table rocked forward on the carpet with the first full stroke. Toward Tyler. She slid on the felt and her bound hands jerked toward his shoes and the table scraped and stopped and Dale drew back and drove in and the table rocked again.

"Elevator, you'd stand in the corner and hold your purse," Dale said. Behind her, over her, his dark hands spread on the pale small of her back, his hips working. His voice never changed. "Parking garage, you'd already have your keys out." A stroke, deep, and the table rocked toward Tyler. "Your daddy'd have something to say about me at his dinner table." Another. "And tonight you're tied to a card table with your own stockings, and me in you to the root."

The words landed in her stomach. In the shame and the heat under the shame. The visual she couldn't see but could feel — his dark hands on the pale of her skin, his dark cock feeding into her from behind — and the truth of it, the precise humiliating truth.

He fucked her with the table rocking. Deep strokes that moved furniture. The felt scraped under her cheek. Her breasts hung in the open cups and swung with every drive, nipples dragging the green fabric, and the friction sent a current

through her that met the fullness of him and built. The rhythmic slap of his hips meeting her ass. The wet sound of his cock in her, louder now, shameless. The scrape of table legs on carpet. The smell of cigar musk and her arousal, sharp and unmistakable, filling the room.

"She's soaking," Wicks said from somewhere behind them. "Listen to that. The table's rocking — she's sliding toward him and back. Pretty boy, she's getting pushed right at you."

"She can take more," Vince said, from the head of the table.

Dale gave her more. His hands clamped on her hips and he drove harder, rougher than in the chair, a man who'd been inside her once already tonight and was done being careful. The table rocked forward and she slid toward Tyler and back. Muffled sounds came out of her into the felt, pushed out on every stroke. It was deeper this way, his whole weight behind it, the angle finding the back of her and pressing there. Tyler's shoes were inches from her fingers. Under the cigar and the sex she could smell him, soap and clean cotton.

"You hear her," Dale said, low, to Vince. "That's what she sounds like when she gets fucked right."

Vince's chair pushed back.

She heard him come down the long side of the table, not hurrying. He stopped at the edge of the table right beside Tyler's chair, so close his hip was at Tyler's shoulder. He held the phone out sideways without looking.

"Wicks. Keep it on her face."

Wicks scrambled for it.

She had to roll her eyes up to see Vince. Dale was still moving in her, the table still rocking, and every stroke slid her face across the felt toward Vince's belt. He was already undoing it.

“Wait,” she said into the felt. “Not— both of— wait—”

He put his hand in her hair. Not rough. He took a fistful at the back of her head and lifted, so her face came up off the felt, and held it there while Dale fucked her from behind. With his other hand he took himself out.

She knew the size of him. She’d had him in her fist that last night in the basement, and her hand had looked small around him. Up close it was worse. Not long like Dale, but thick, obscenely thick, uncut and dark, the foreskin drawn back off a broad swollen head that was already wet. He held it an inch from her lips. She could smell him, sharp and male and unwashed.

“Six months I watched that mouth,” Vince said. Low, conversational, the way he’d tell you what was in his garage. “You on your step every morning with your coffee. Blowing on it.” His thumb moved in her hair. “Open.”

She pressed her lips together. She was looking past him, sideways, at Tyler. A foot away. His eyes were on her mouth.

Dale drove into her, hard, and the stroke shoved her forward onto the head of Vince’s cock. Her lips parted on it before she’d decided anything, and Vince pushed in.

He filled her mouth all at once. The girth of him spread her lips wider than Dale had, so wide the corners stung, and her jaw went open as far as it would go and there was still more of him. Salt and skin and the faint smoke taste of his hands. She made a choked noise around him.

“There. Look at them lips,” Vince said, pleased. “I knew they’d stretch like that.”

"She can't even close her mouth on it," Wicks said, half out of his chair with the phone held out. "Pretty boy, look. Both of 'em. She's got both of 'em."

Then they found the rhythm between them, and she had no say in it at all.

Dale drew back and drove in, and the stroke pushed her forward down onto Vince's cock. Vince held her there by the hair while Dale drew back, then pushed her back with his hips, back onto Dale. Back and forth between them like that, impaled at both ends, the poker table rocking under her and creaking on the carpet. She couldn't brace. Her wrists were tied. She couldn't pull her head back, she couldn't close her mouth, she couldn't do anything but take it from both sides at once. Spit ran out of the corners of her mouth and down her chin onto the felt. The sounds in the room were obscene: the wet slap of Dale's hips on her ass, the slick choked noises of her mouth on Vince, the table legs knocking, Wicks breathing hard behind the phone.

She'd never been so full of men. She'd never been anything like this.

Her eyes were watering. She looked sideways over the thick dark shaft in her mouth, at Tyler. He was so close she could have touched his knee with her tongue. He was staring at her stretched lips and the spit on her chin, breathing through his teeth, and he didn't stand up.

It started low in her and she couldn't get ahead of it.

Dale's cock dragging deep in her and driving back. Vince's cock filling her mouth to the back of her throat. The felt rubbing her bare nipples raw where she slid on it. The nylon biting her wrists. Tyler's eyes. It gathered in her belly, hot and heavy

and climbing. She tried to breathe through her nose and ride it down and couldn't get the air. Then Vince pushed her all the way down until her nose was in the coarse hair at the root of him, and held her there, and Dale drove in at the same moment and held deep. She was pinned between them, stuffed at both ends, unable to move or breathe.

She broke.

She came with her mouth full of Vince and Dale buried to the root behind her. The cry went into Vince's cock, muffled and high and cracking, and her throat convulsed around him, and her pussy clenched hard on Dale again and again, rhythmic, helpless, the spasms shaking through her thighs and her bound arms. She couldn't make a sound that got out. It all went into him. Her eyes stayed open, streaming, on Tyler. Her brow drew together the way it only ever had for him, in the dark, in their bed, and now it was happening in a lit room with two men inside her and a third filming her face.

"Oh, she's coming," Wicks said. "She's coming on both of 'em. Look at her throat, look at her throat going—"

"Feel that?" Dale said, behind her, to Vince. Low, satisfied. "Squeezing me like a fist."

Vince held her down through it. It went on and on, wave after wave, each one smaller and each one still there, and she whimpered through them around the cock in her mouth, and her fingers opened and closed at Tyler's shoes, and the shaking wouldn't stop.

When it eased, Vince let her up.

She came off him gasping, a string of spit from her lip to the head of him, her face hot and wet. He held her up by the hair a moment and looked at her face like he was checking a

job. Behind her Dale pulled out slow, and she felt the empty, and felt him step back. He was still hard, slick and dark with her. He hadn't finished. He could wait.

"She came," Wicks said, amazed. "In front of pretty boy. Did you see her face? Look at pretty boy's hands."

"Yeah," Vince said. "She did." He let go of her hair and her cheek dropped back to the felt. His cock stood out from him, shining with her spit. "We're gonna want it wet."

She didn't understand what he meant. He walked away toward the kitchen.

Tyler watched his wife come a foot from his face.

He'd watched it through dirty glass that last night — a shape in warm light, a sound muffled through a foundation. That bore no resemblance to this. This was her cheek on the felt and her mouth falling open and the particular way her brow drew together that he knew from the dark, from years of the dark, the one expression that was only ever his — happening now in a lit room with Dale's hands on her and Vince in her mouth and his phone in Wicks's hand and her wrists tied to the table where he'd won money the first night.

He was hard. He'd been hard since the silk hit the carpet. The strain in his jeans was past discomfort into something that pulsed with its own rhythm, and he sat with his hands crushing his own knees and didn't touch himself because touching himself would have been crossing her line, and her line was the only structure still standing in the room.

The photo. The copper. The paper in his desk drawer. Vince's lie — she came to me, she asked for this — and the scripted words Tyler had spoken in their kitchen, words that tasted like someone else's language. He'd told himself the

duress was the reason he was in this chair. Watching his wife's face a foot away, her brow drawing together on another man's cock, he could no longer locate the line between the duress and the wanting. If Vince had torn the photo up in front of him and said go home — if the paper vanished and the charge dissolved — he was not sure he would have stood.

He hated that. He sat with it.

She lay with her cheek on the felt, catching her breath, the taste of him still in her mouth and the last of it still running through her thighs. Across the room she heard a cabinet open in the kitchen. A drawer. His boots came back and she heard a cap flip, the small plastic click.

Something cold touched her. Not where Dale had been. Higher.

She jerked against the nylon. For one second she didn't understand, and then she understood completely, and her whole face went hot. Vince's slick thumb was pressed there. *There*. On the one part of her she had never let anyone look at, let alone touch, the part she washed quickly in the shower with her eyes on the tile.

Tyler had tried once. Years ago, in the first apartment, in the dark, his hand sliding down and his fingertip barely grazing her there. She'd caught his wrist and said "*Tyler*," sharp, and rolled onto her side away from him, and that had been the end of it. He'd never tried again. She'd never even said the word for it out loud.

Now it was under the living-room light with her ass up over a poker table, three men looking at it and a phone filming it, and Vince's thumb circling it slow and cold and wet.

"No," she said into the felt. "Not— no, not *that*—"

His thumb pressed. She locked rigid, every muscle in her clenched at once against him.

She was tied and he was behind her and his thumb circled, patient, working the ring with cold lube, and the sensation was intimate and obscene and nothing in her experience had prepared for it.

"Nobody's ever been in here," Vince said. Low. Close. His other hand on her back, holding her down. "I can tell."

She clenched against him. Involuntary. Her whole body resisting the intrusion. His thumb stayed — circling, pressing — and the lube warmed and the pressure was constant and patient and then the give. His thumb slipped past the ring and she gasped, sharp, her back arching, her wrists pulling the nylon taut.

He held it there. She breathed around the intrusion. The pad of his thumb inside her, the stretch burning in a way that radiated through her hips, a new sensation she had no map for. He circled, slow, working the muscle from the inside, letting her learn the feeling.

"Her face," Wicks said. Close. "That's her ass. Pretty boy — she's never — look at her face, look at her hands—"

Vince replaced his thumb with two slick fingers. Slow. Working her open. The stretch burned deeper — heat radiating through her hips and down into her pussy where the empty pulse still throbbed from Dale. She breathed through it. Short sharp breaths, her cheek grinding the felt. His fingers scissored gently and the burn flared and faded and she opened for him against every instruction she'd ever given herself.

His fingers withdrew. The blunt head of his cock pressed against her.

The girth. The width she'd held in her fist that last night, the cock that had made her hand look small. Hot. Broader than his fingers, broader than his thumb, pressing against the ring. She clenched and he waited.

"Here comes the fat part," Vince said.

She breathed. She tried to let it. The head pressed and the ring stretched — wider, the foreskin sliding against the tight muscle — and then the give, the ridge pushing past, and she cried out into the felt. Low. Broken. A sound she'd never made. His cock entered where nothing had been. Inch by inch. The girth widening her in a way that rewrote every sensation she knew — wide, wider, muscles stretching to accommodate him, the burn fading into a fullness that pressed against nerves she didn't know existed. Deep. Aching. The pressure radiated into her pussy and up through her stomach and the ache pulsed and the pulse was warm.

Another inch. She felt the foreskin drag against the ring on the way in, a wet friction that was different from anything vaginal — tighter, more intimate, a sensation that lived in the nerves and the shame simultaneously. She could feel him in her stomach. She could feel the thickness pressing the wall between her ass and her empty pussy, and the pressure on that wall sent a bloom of heat through her she wasn't ready for and couldn't deny.

He worked himself into her an inch at a time, his stained hands spread on her hips, the Marlboro smell of him filling her nose — cigarettes and motor oil and the greasy heat of his skin. He gave her three seconds between inches, holding still while her body adjusted. His gut met her ass when he seated, the press of warm stomach, and she dropped her forehead to the

felt and the sound she made was continuous and had no shape and she couldn't stop making it.

"Look at that," Vince said. Seated in her. "Whole thing."

"Pretty boy," Wicks said. "You seeing this? She took it. The whole thing. In her ass. That's Vince in her ass and she took every inch. And pretty boy just sits there." He looked at Tyler. "You seeing her face right now?"

Vince drew back. Slow. The drag of him pulling out lit every nerve ending along the way, a deep wet friction that made her fingers curl against the felt, and then he drove back in and she moaned — loud, a sound that filled the room — and the ache had become heat, and the heat was close to pleasure and getting closer with every stroke. The fullness pressing against the membrane that separated her ass from her empty pussy, and the pressure there was exquisite and terrible and she let the moan come out of her because there was no holding it.

"Listen to her," Wicks said. "She's moaning. She's moaning on it. That's Vince fucking her ass and she's moaning like—"

"Wicks," Vince said. And kept moving.

Wicks crouched by Tyler's chair.

He dropped onto his heels beside the man who didn't speak and he pointed — not at Megan, at Tyler — and his voice went tight with delight:

"Look at pretty boy," Wicks said. "Look at him. He's loving it. Look — he's not gonna say anything. He's just gonna sit there. 'Cause he loves it." He leaned toward her. "Look at pretty boy."

She turned her face on the felt and looked.

Tyler was hard. She could see it — the strain in the denim, thick against his thigh, impossible to hide and he wasn't trying.

His hands were on his knees and his eyes were wet and bright and on hers and he was not standing up. He was not going to stand up.

It was true. What Wicks said, in a way Wicks would never understand. This was the thing she'd read about at two in the morning on a forum with her heart hammering. The thing Tyler wanted and couldn't say and she'd come to do for him. She was looking at the proof — the visible undeniable proof straining against his jeans — and the proof looked back at her with wet eyes and didn't move.

She let go.

She felt it happen. Something that had been braced all night — waiting for him to stand, waiting to be rescued, waiting to be able to say afterward that she'd been willing and he was the one who stopped it — that thing let go. A door falling shut behind her. He wasn't going to rescue her because he didn't want to be rescued from this. Neither did she. The knowing settled through her and her hips softened onto Vince's cock and her mouth opened and the first sound she chose to make — not pulled, not forced — came out of her low and long, and it was aimed at Tyler.

Wicks came around the table to her side and knelt — his face level with her breasts where they hung in the open cups, his bony frame at her ribs. His stained fingers slid down her stomach and between her thighs from the front.

He found her clit. Slick — from Dale, from his own mouth on her earlier, from everything the night had drawn out. His bony fingers circled, fast, shaking, the nicotine-stained tips on the swollen nub. Then two fingers pushed up inside her pussy while Vince's cock filled her ass.

The sound she made was long and formless and she didn't try to shape it.

Vince in her ass. Wicks's fingers in her pussy. She could feel both through the thin wall between them — Vince's girth pressing against Wicks's knuckles, the two of them filling her from opposite sides, and every slow stroke Vince made pressed Wicks's fingers deeper and every curl of Wicks's fingers made her clench tighter around Vince.

"She's squeezing," Wicks said. His face pressed against her hanging breast, his stubble dragging her nipple. "I can feel him through the wall — she's so tight, both of us in her at once — you like that, don't you." He curled his fingers and she moaned into the felt and his grin pressed against her skin. "Both of us. You like both of us."

"Wicks," Vince said. Behind her. His cock stroking slow in her ass while Wicks's fingers worked her pussy. "You feel me in there?"

She moaned. Her forehead on the felt and Tyler watching from a foot away. Vince's girth and Wicks's fingers and the wall between them and the sound she made was continuous and she had stopped bracing, stopped fighting, and she let him watch her make it.

They untied her.

Dale at one wrist, working the nylon knot loose. Vince pulled out of her slow — the drag of his girth reversing through the ring, an inch at a time, and she gasped at the withdrawal, a small punched sound, and then the empty hit and she whimpered into the felt. Vince at the other wrist. Both knots undone. Her arms came free and the blood rushed back into her hands and she lay over the table for a moment, breathing, her

fingers tingling, her legs shaking, the slick of lube and her own arousal cooling on her thighs.

Vince walked to his chair at the head of the table. The best seat. The chair he'd taken the first night and never gotten up from. He sat and spread his knees and his cock was still hard, still slick from her, standing out of his open jeans, and he said one word.

"Here."

She pushed herself off the felt. Her legs didn't work properly — the knees buckled and she caught the table edge and stood there for a moment, breathing, her hair in her face, her own wetness and lube still cooling on the inside of her thigh. The room tilted and righted.

She crossed the room to Vince on feet that didn't belong to her, the pointed heels wobbling on the carpet. Each step she could feel the ache — her pussy swollen and used, her ass stretched and tender, the lube and the wet cooling between her thighs. She stood in front of his chair and waited because she didn't trust herself to lower onto him without falling.

He turned her. His stained hands on her hips, spinning her so her back was to him, facing out into the room. Facing Tyler. He brought her down.

She sank onto him ass-first. The girth re-entering her — the ring stretching open around the head, the foreskin sliding past, the shaft filling her inch by inch — and the re-entry was a long broken sound that came out of her in pieces, high, helpless, because she'd taken him already and the muscle remembered and opened faster this time and the fullness was enormous and immediate. She sank and sank and the sound contin-

ued and his hands guided her hips down and the last inch seated him deep and the gold chain pressed cold against her spine.

“God—” she said. The first word since the turn. Involuntary. Torn free. She sat all the way down onto him and his gut pressed warm against her lower back and his thighs were wide under hers and his cock was deep in her ass and she was seated in his lap, impaled, facing the room, facing Tyler.

“All the way down,” Vince said. Low. Into her hair. Pleased.

Her thighs spread over his. Her head fell back against his shoulder. The blue lace was soaked and twisted, the cups still framing her bare breasts but barely — the lace askew, nipples tight and jutting, the heavy round weight of them sitting above the ruined frame. Through the open crotch her pussy was exposed to the room — swollen, puffy, flushed a deep rose-pink from Dale, from Wicks’s mouth, from the whole night. Wet. Slick tracing the inside of her thigh. She could feel the air on herself, the cool on the hot slick skin, and she couldn’t close her legs with Vince’s thighs under hers and she sat there and let them see her.

“She took the whole thing again,” Wicks said. On his feet, circling, his eyes locked between her spread thighs. “Her pussy’s right there — look at her, she’s so swollen, she’s soaking, it’s running down her thigh — Vince, she’s dripping on your jeans — pretty boy, she’s sitting on Vince’s cock in front of you and her pussy is just — it’s right there—”

Vince moved in her. A slow stroke — lifting her an inch by the hips and pulling her back down — and the girth dragged through the ring and pressed against her empty pussy from behind and she moaned, loud, aimed at the ceiling, and her pussy ached for contact, swollen and wanting, and the ache transmit-

ted through and squeezed Vince and he exhaled through his nose.

He did it again. Slow. Each stroke different: the first was the drag, the ring gripping his shaft on the way up; the second was the drop, the fullness hitting bottom and the chain pressing cold against her spine; the third was his angle shifting, his cock finding the front wall and pressing until a moan tore out of her that was lower than the first two, aimed at nothing, forced out by how good it felt. Her bare tits bounced in the ruined lace and her spread pussy glistened in the light and the smell of her cut the cigar smoke.

“She wants more,” Wicks said. “Her face is doing that thing — Vince, look at her face, she’s riding you down—”

Vince filmed over her shoulder, the phone steady, his other hand on her hip.

“Bring his chair over,” Vince said.

Dale took the back of Tyler’s chair in one hand and dragged it — Tyler in it, the scrape of wood on carpet — around the end of the table and set it beside Vince’s. Close. Close enough that when her hand went out it landed on the wooden arm of Tyler’s chair and gripped. The arm of the chair. Where Vince had set her the first night — courteous, clean-handed, the arm and nothing else. Her fingers closed around the wood and held on.

Tyler was beside her. His arm inches from her hand on the armrest. She could smell him — soap and cotton and the sharp salt of sweat — and she held his chair and looked at him and he looked at her. She was seated on another man’s cock with her pussy bare and swollen and exposed through the open crotch and her breasts ruined and displayed, sweat on her face and

stuck hair across her cheek, and she looked at Tyler and his face was a thing she'd carry.

She could feel Vince shift beneath her. A small adjustment of his hips, his cock pressing deeper, and the movement sent a pulse through her that made her gasp and grip the chair arm harder. She was aware of how she must look from Tyler's chair — the spread thighs, the swollen pussy glistening between them, the lace bodysuit darkened with sweat, and Vince's hands on her hips while his cock disappeared into her from behind. She looked at Tyler and she didn't look away.

Dale knelt between her spread thighs. He was still hard. Still unfinished. Patient through the entire night, holding himself back, and now he was kneeling between her legs and his cock was dark and heavy and shining with her from the table. Long. Veined. The head broader than Vince's, dark against the flushed pink of her pussy, and he held himself at the base and put the head against her and looked at Vince over her shoulder.

"Both of us," Dale said. "You feel that."

He pressed the head in.

The sensation of a second cock entering while Vince was still inside her overwhelmed the breath she was trying to take. Dale's head parted the swollen lips of her pussy — she could feel the stretch widening as he pushed, slow, and the pressure between him and Vince doubled and her mouth fell open and no sound came for a second, just the held breath. Then the sound came — a cry, high and raw and continuous, pulled out of her on the slow entry, because Dale kept pushing and the stretch kept widening and she could feel both of them, Vince's girth pressing against Dale's length through the membrane, two cocks filling her from opposite sides.

Dale gave her another inch. Then another. The room was silent except for her — the sound she made, the wet sound of his entry, and the creak of Vince's chair. She gripped the arm of Tyler's chair and watched the edges of the room go white and come back. Two men inside her at once. The fullness redefined everything she'd ever understood about full. Dale's dark hands held her thighs wide and his length slid deeper and each inch made the sound she was making louder and she couldn't stop it.

"Ain't no room left in her," Vince said. Under her. Into her hair. Blunt.

"They're both in her," Wicks said. Close, circling, his watery eyes wide. "Look at her hand on his chair — her fingers, how tight she's holding — they're both in her at once, Vince is in her ass and Dale's in her pussy and she's holding onto pretty boy's chair—"

Dale seated deep. His hips met her thighs and he was all the way in, dark hands on her pale knees holding them wide, and she breathed through the stretch in sharp shallow gasps — two men filling her, the pressure between them enormous.

"There," Dale said. Low. The fit. "That's how she takes two."

"Tight," Vince said. Under her. His voice strained. "I can feel you against me."

Her hand gripped the arm of Tyler's chair until her knuckles ached. Tyler's hand gripped the other arm. An inch between them. Neither crossed it.

"Can you feel them both?" Wicks said. To her. His voice high. "Can you feel — sweetheart, can you—"

Dale and Vince found a rhythm. Offset — never matching, one driving in while the other drew back, so she was never

empty and never settled, the two of them rocking her between them in a syncopation that kept her gasping. Dale's length and Vince's girth working her at once, the wet slap of Dale's thighs against hers and the deeper sound of Vince's slow stroke beneath her, and the room smelled like a room where sex had been happening for an hour — sweat, lube, cigar musk, the sharp wet salt of her arousal cutting through all of it, saturating every breath.

The seesaw did something to her she hadn't expected. Every time Dale pushed in, Vince drew back, and the shift of pressure stroked a place that made her vision white out, and then Vince pushed in and Dale withdrew and the pressure reversed and she was caught in a loop of it, rocking between them, her mouth open, the sounds continuous.

Her breasts shook with every alternating stroke. The ruined lace had given up framing them — the cups shifted, the blue just decoration, her bare tits bouncing free, nipples tight and dark from the night's use, and every stroke from Dale sent a ripple through them that she could feel in the skin and the weight. The sounds from between her legs were obscene and layered — the slick sound of Dale's cock in her pussy and the deeper, wetter sound of Vince in her ass, both audible, both continuous, and underneath them the creak of Vince's chair.

She started talking. To the only name she had.

"Is this what you wanted to see," she said. Her fingers bloodless on the arm of his chair. Her voice cracking on the third word. "Pretty boy. Is this it. You wanted to watch me get fucked by two men, Dale in my pussy and Vince in my ass, and I'm so wet I can hear it. Look at me." A gasp broke the sentence open and she held it together. "Pretty boy. Don't you dare. I can

feel them both through the” — Dale drove in and the word dissolved — “it’s so much, I’ve never been this full in my”

“Somebody ought to send this to your daddy,” Dale said, his dark hands spreading her pale thighs wider while he drove up into her. “Show him where his girl ended up.” His dark fingers dug into the pale of her hips, holding her open while he fucked into her alongside Vince. “Two of us in her, and pretty boy over there taking notes.”

“She’s doing it for him,” Vince said. Under her. His cock slow in her ass, his voice low. “Every word.”

“She’s telling pretty boy to watch,” Wicks said. Marveling. “Telling him to look at her while they’re both—”

The sentences gave way. The two rhythms rocking her broke them apart: “Pretty boy — look — Dale in my — both — oh God” and then single words, and then the words stopped and only sounds came out of her, high and broken and aimed at Tyler, her hand locked on his chair, her bare tits shaking with every stroke.

Both men kept moving. Dale’s slap and Vince’s deeper stroke beneath her, and her cunt cutting the cigar smoke, her own musk sharp at Tyler’s elbow. Her mouth hung open. Her eyes stayed on him. She moaned and the moan was aimed at the man in the chair and he watched her face and his hand gripped the other armrest an inch from hers.

Wicks leaned over the arm of Vince’s chair.

His face found her breasts. His mouth closed on a nipple — the tight pink point, swollen from the felt and the air and the night — and he sucked, hard, his bony hands bracing on the chair arm, his stubble scraping the pale skin around the puffy areola. She cried out. The suction pulled her nipple long,

the sensitive flesh stretching between his chapped lips, and the sensation shot through her and met the fullness of the two cocks inside her and compounded it. He released and took the other one — lapping, sucking, his yellow teeth grazing the puffed edge — and he talked into her skin between mouthfuls, the words vibrating against her wet nipple:

“You’re shaking — sweetheart, you’re shaking all over, your tits are shaking, your nipples are so hard in my mouth — God, they’re so swollen, they’re puffy, I can feel them tighten on my tongue while they’re both in you—”

His mouth pulled the nipple again — a long suck, his cheeks hollowing — and she felt the pull radiate down through her stomach to where Dale and Vince met through the wall, and the three points of contact overwhelmed her: Vince’s cock in her ass, Dale’s cock in her pussy, Wicks’s mouth on her breast. Three men on her at once. Her hand gripping Tyler’s chair. The overload went through her and her “pretty boy” lines broke apart entirely:

“Pretty — I can’t — all of them, all three, pretty boy, I—”

Sounds. The rest was sounds.

Wicks lifted his mouth from her breast. Spit shining on her nipple, the pink tip reddened from his stubble. He straightened and stepped around to the other side of Vince’s chair, where her face was turned. He had himself in his hand, the flared crown shiny, leaking. He held it at her lips.

“Open up, sweetheart,” he said. His voice shaking. “All three of us. Open up and take all three.”

She looked at the crown an inch from her mouth — the bulbous head, the slit beading — and she opened.

The mushroom head pushed past her lips — the ridge catching her lower lip, the blunt width stretching her mouth wider than the shaft would — and the taste of him spread over her tongue: menthol and salt and the bitter of precome. Her throat was full of sound, the moans vibrating around his shaft and making his hips jerk. Dale and Vince were still in her, still rocking her between them, and she was full everywhere. Every opening. Three men in her at once — the thing she'd imagined beside her sleeping husband and been horrified she'd imagined.

She couldn't breathe through her mouth. She breathed through her nose in sharp bursts timed to Wicks's thrusts. The ridge of his crown dragged the roof of her mouth on every pull and the blunt head bumped the back of her throat and she gagged — a thick gluck — and the gag vibrated through Wicks and he groaned and pushed deeper. The taste thickened. Spit ran from the corners of her mouth, down her chin, mixing with sweat and precome. Dale and Vince kept rocking her and every thrust from below sent her forward onto Wicks and every stroke from Wicks pushed her back onto the two men filling her. She was being moved by all three of them, pinned.

Three sounds layered over each other — the slap of Dale's thighs, Vince's deeper stroke beneath her, the sloppy suck of her mouth on Wicks — and underneath it all the creak of Vince's chair. Her eyes opened on Tyler. He sat in his chair with his hand gripping the arm an inch from hers.

"All three," Dale said. Below her. Driving up.

Wicks went first. Because Wicks always went first.

He pulled out of her mouth with a wet pop, a string of spit stretching from her lower lip to the crown, and he finished on her face and her framed breasts. The first rope hit her cheek

— warm, thick, landing across the bridge of her nose and the cheekbone — and she flinched and the second caught her chin and ran down into the hollow of her throat. He aimed lower, his bony hand working the shaft fast, and striped her left breast — a white line across the bare nipple and the pale skin — then her right, cum hitting the lace and the swell of flesh above the cup, and he crowed the whole time, high and delighted, his hips jerking, the sound of a man who'd been waiting for this since the silk hit the carpet.

She could feel it on her. Warm, then cooling. The weight of it on her cheek. The wet of it on her nipple, running into the lace. The smell — salt and menthol and musk — joining everything else the room held. She kept her eyes open. She looked at Tyler with another man's cum on her face and two men's cocks inside her and she didn't wipe it off.

Dale was still in her pussy. Vince still in her ass. Both working. The rhythm unbroken. Holding her between them while Wicks's cum dried on her. She could feel the rhythm rocking her, the wet sounds from below, and the cum sliding down her cheek toward her mouth and she let it.

The faucet opened. Wicks stood there with his spent cock in his hand and his cum on her face and the stream poured out:

"That's my girl — you came on Dale, I saw it, that was me, I saw it first — Vince, she came on the table, what if — what if she's pregnant, a girl takes it like that, no rubber, that's a wife, that's a girl you — I'd marry her, I would, I said it before and I meant it, you came on me last time, remember, you came on me first before any of—"

And then the line shifted and the words came out of him the way they always came out of him, the mouth that couldn't

hold anything, pointing at her cum-streaked face with his stained finger:

"I been wanting you since winter," Wicks said. "Since winter. Since Vince showed us them pictures — you in that sports bra, remember, Vince, from his garage, the one where she's bending over — since winter I been—"

"Wicks." Vince. One word. Flat. From under her. And it stopped Wicks's mouth like a hand over it.

She heard none of it. Full of two men and past words and the sentence washed through her — *since winter, pictures, garage, sports bra* — syllables in the stream, nothing to catch on.

Tyler heard it. *Since winter. Them pictures. His garage.* It went past him into the noise and was gone. He had no winter to put it against.

Her second orgasm started deep and climbed.

It came up through both of them — through Vince's girth in her ass and Dale's length in her pussy, through the place where they pressed against each other, through the rhythm that kept rocking her — and it was harder than the first. Deeper. She felt it building from a place below her stomach, a gathering heat that pulsed in time with both cocks, and when it broke it broke everywhere. She arched off Vince, her spine curving, her thighs locking on Dale's hips, and a squeal tore out of her that cracked into a whimper and the whimper kept going.

"Here it comes," Dale said. Flat. His dark hands holding her thighs open while his cock stayed buried. "I can feel it."

Her pussy clenched around Dale — rhythmic, involuntary, hard enough that she could feel the grip and release, grip and release — and the clenching squeezed Vince through the membrane and Vince pushed deeper and the deeper push made her

clench harder and the loop had her, both men in her while she came on them. Her fingers dug into the arm of Tyler's chair hard enough to creak the wood. Her eyes found his and held. A rush of her wet around Dale, visible, running down between them, the smell of her coming sharpening through the cigar and the cum and the sweat, and the sounds she made were high and helpless and continuous and she kept making them.

"Both of us," Vince said. Under her. His voice strained for the first time all night. "She's squeezing both of us."

The orgasm rolled through her in long waves. Her thighs trembled against Dale's ribs. Her tits shook in the ruined lace. Her mouth stayed open and the whimpers came in pulses, one for each clench, and Wicks pointed at the mess between her legs — "Look at her, look at what's coming out of her, she's soaking both of them" — and she shook between the two men and her eyes stayed on Tyler and the shaking went on.

Tyler's cock pulsed against denim.

No decision. No touch. He came the way she had — seized, overwhelmed, a response that bypassed every part of him that made choices. His cock throbbed hard against the inside of his jeans, three pulses, four, and the heat spread and the wet spot bloomed dark on the denim and he sat perfectly still. His teeth stayed shut. His face stayed still. His hands stayed on the arms of the chair. The wet spot was the only evidence.

Wicks saw it.

"Oh, no way. Pretty boy just blew in his jeans. Look at him. Didn't even touch it. Sat there and went off." He was nearly crying. "Dale. *Dale*. Look at the spot on him."

The room laughed. Dale's low rumble, Wicks's high cackle, Vince's short exhale under her, his gut shaking against her back.

Tyler sat in it with the dark wet patch spreading across the front of his jeans and the laughter going over him, his hands trembling on the arms of the chair, and he didn't look away from her.

She heard them laughing at her husband, and something in her gave way.

All night she'd held herself still under it, being done to, being looked at, a woman things happened to. It went out of her now like a held breath. What was left was hungry. It was greedy and wet and shameless, and she didn't know it, and it was her.

She took hold of the arm of Tyler's chair with her right hand, put her left flat on Dale's broad sweating shoulder, and pushed.

She lifted herself an inch off Vince, and felt both of them drag inside her at once: Dale's long shaft sliding back through her pussy, Vince's thick root pulling at the stretched ring of her ass. Then she dropped back down. The cry that came out of her rang off the paneling. She did it again, harder. She ground down until Vince was buried to the hilt in her ass and his coarse hair scratched her, and rocked her hips forward onto Dale until the head of him pressed somewhere deep that made her eyes roll, and back, and forward. She was working herself on both of them, using her husband's chair to do it.

The laughter stopped.

Dale went still where he knelt between her thighs. He looked up at her from under his heavy lids, sweat standing on his broad dark forehead, and the corner of his mouth moved.

"Well," he said. "Go on, then."

She went.

She rode them. Her hair was stuck to her wet face and neck. Wicks's cum was drying tacky on her cheek and the corner of her mouth, and when she licked her lips she tasted it, salt and bitter, and moaned. Her tits bounced out of the open lace with every drop, heavy and flushed pink across the top, the freckles on her chest standing out dark against the flush, her nipples puffed and swollen and hard as knuckles. Her thighs were spread wide around Dale's hips, the nude stockings long gone, her bare pale knees shaking.

The sounds were filthy. The slap of her ass coming down on Vince's lap. The wet sucking pull every time she lifted off Dale. Her own breath, high and fast, catching into little cries she didn't try to hold. The chair creaking under all three of them. The room stank of it, cigar and sweat and spilled gin and sex, and her own scent cutting through all of it, sharp and sweet, the smell of a woman so wet she was dripping.

She looked down at herself and saw it.

Dale's cock, black and slick and enormous, sliding out of her and back in. Her pussy stretched pink and swollen around him, the lips thick and flushed dark, clinging to his shaft on every upstroke as if they didn't want to let go. A ring of white froth where he went in and out. And just below it, Vince's root, thick as a can, disappearing into her ass, the tight pink ring of her stretched shiny around it. Both of them inside her, one above the other, so close together that every time she bore down she could feel them rub against each other through the thin wall of her. They pressed together on a place in her that made the room go white at the edges.

She had never seen anything like it. It was her.

"She's doing it herself," Wicks breathed. He'd come around close with the phone, crouched by the chair, so close she could smell the menthol on him. "Look at her go. She's fucking 'em. She's *fucking* 'em, Vince." His stained fingers came out shaking and found her nipple and pinched it, rolled it, and she gasped and ground down harder. "Oh, you're so pretty. You're so pretty like this, honey, you're the prettiest thing I ever saw, look at you, look at your tits bounce—"

"Pretty boy." She was staring straight at Tyler. At his white face, his wet eyes, the stain on his lap. The words came up out of her before she knew they were there. "You see me? Do you see what I'm—" She dropped onto them and lost it in a moan, and found it again. "Look. Look at them in me. Both of them. They're so big, pretty boy, they're so much bigger than—" She cut it off with a cry. It was true and she'd said it and she couldn't take it back. "I want them to come in me. Both of them. I want you to sit there and watch them fill me up—"

Tyler made a sound. Small, in his throat. His hands came off the chair arms and closed into fists on his knees, and he stayed in the chair.

She found a muscle low in her that she'd never used in her life and clenched it on the downstroke. She held it and squeezed, and felt Dale's thick shaft swell inside her.

Dale grunted. His big hands clamped on her thighs.

"She's milking me," he said. Not to her. To Vince, low, almost wondering. "Doing it on purpose."

She did it again, and again. Bore down and squeezed and lifted and dropped, and Dale's hips came up off his heels, and his head went back on his thick neck, and the gold chain swung against his chest.

He drove up into her once, deep, all the way, and held, and came.

She felt it. Every bit of it. A long low groan rolled up out of his chest and into her, his cock thickened and jerked hard against her walls, and then the heat. The flood of him deep inside her, pulse after pulse, so much of it, so hot she could feel it spreading. She ground down on him through every throb with her mouth hanging open, wanting it, milking it out of him, a high helpless sound for each surge. Dale's fingers dug into her pale thighs so hard she'd have the marks for days.

"There," Dale said when he could talk, spent and low. "That's mine. All of it. You'll be walking it home tonight."

He pulled out slow. She felt the fat head of him drag free of her swollen lips with a thick wet sound, and then his cum came after it. A heavy warm rope of it slid out of her and ran down over Vince's root and onto the chair, white against her pink.

"Oh my God, look at that," Wicks said. "It's pouring out of you, honey. Look at it all. That's so much, raw like that, that deep, you're gonna, I'm telling you, Vince, that's how she gets a—"

"Wicks."

Vince lifted her off his lap.

She whimpered at the loss of him, the sudden empty ache in her ass. His stained hands turned her by the hips and bent her forward over the arm of his own chair: her stomach on the worn padded arm, her ass high in the air, her face turned toward Tyler's chair beside it. He stood. She heard his jeans shift and felt the heat of his gut behind her. She reached out without thinking, caught the arm of Tyler's chair, and held on.

Tyler was a foot from her face. She could smell him under everything, the soap on his skin and the wet of what he'd done in his jeans.

Vince pushed into her ass again.

Her ring was so raw that every inch of his girth came in separate. She cried out with the first inch and pushed back against him before he was halfway in.

He stopped.

She didn't. She shoved herself back onto him with her hand braced on her husband's chair and took the rest of him herself, the whole fat length, until his gut pressed flat against her ass and his balls were wet against her pussy. Then she pulled forward off him, almost to the head, and shoved back again. And again. Faster. She fucked herself on him. Her ass slapped back against his belly, the soft heavy sound of it filling the room, Dale's cum dripping out of her pussy onto the carpet between Vince's boots, her breasts swinging under her in the ruined lace a foot from Tyler's knee.

"Look at this," Vince said behind her. His voice had gone rough for the first time all night, ragged, his breath coming hard. "Look at her. Look at the clean girl from across the street."

She pushed back harder.

"Cuts that grass in them little shorts. Gets the mail." His hands found her hips, his thumbs pressing into the dimples above her ass. "Won't look at me in the driveway. Six months. Look at her now." He watched himself vanish into her. "Slamming that ass back on me."

"She's slamming it," Wicks said, crouched with the phone almost under her. "Dale, she's slamming back on him. Look at her ass, look at it bounce, look at her *face*—"

She was past hearing any of them. There was only Vince's thickness dragging through the raw stretched ring of her, in and out, the deep heavy ache of it turned to something so much better than an ache. And Tyler's face. His open mouth and his wet eyes and the arm of his chair under her hand, the wood warm and smooth from his grip.

"Pretty boy," she gasped at him. "Pretty boy, I'm gonna—watch me, I'm— *oh*—"

She came again. It was sharp and sudden and it ripped through her. Her ass clamped down hard on Vince's girth, her pussy clenched hard and squeezed more of Dale's cum out of her, and she cried out right in Tyler's face, her fingers digging into the arm of his chair. She kept fucking back onto Vince through it because she couldn't stop. Every thrust dragged the orgasm out longer, and it went on and on.

That was what broke him.

Vince's fingers dug into her hips and he dragged her back onto him, all the way, as deep as he could go, and held her there. He came in her with a long rough groan, deep and shuddering, his cock throbbing thick and hot in her ass. He filled her where nobody had ever been. She felt every pulse of it, the heat of it spreading deep inside, his whole heavy body shaking behind her. He held her pinned down onto himself until there was nothing left in him.

"There," he said during it, quiet, still pulsing. "That's where it goes."

His palm pressed her ass once. Brief, firm, a seal.

He pulled out, slow, the last drag, her whimper at the loss, and sat back in the chair. His heavy hands found her under the arms and lifted her off the chair arm, and she came like something without bones. He settled her back against his chest, her head tipped onto his shoulder, her thighs across his, and she let him, because nothing in her would move.

Decorated. Wicks drying white on her cheek and her chin and the top of her left breast. Dale's cum still seeping out of her, warm, running down the inside of her knee onto Vince's jeans. Vince's cum deep inside her, where she'd feel him tomorrow and the day after. The blue lace was soaked dark and twisted, the open cups shoved aside, the color of her eyes gone to a wet rag. Her perfume was somewhere under the cigar and the sweat and the sex, very faint. A fine tremor ran through her thighs and her hands and wouldn't stop.

Her right hand was still on the arm of Tyler's chair.

She held it while the room came back around her: the paneling, the felt, the woman smiling in the frame over the couch. Wicks zipped. Dale ashed his cigar into an empty glass. Behind her Vince's breathing slowed.

She let go of it last. After her knees would hold her. Her fingers came off the wood one at a time.

She found the cream silk on the carpet and tied it closed over the ruined lace. Tyler found her shoes.

They walked the ninety seconds home with his hand at the small of her back, the same spot as always, and neither of them said a word.

Across the street, in the garage, Vince played it back.

The silk coming off. The blue. Her hand on the arm of the husband's chair. Both their faces in the frame at the end. He

watched all of it, and then Wicks's voice came out of the little speaker over her sounds, *since winter, since Vince showed us them pictures*, and his own voice, flat: *Wicks*.

He stopped it. Dragged it back ten seconds. Played it again.

He sat with his thumb on the Zippo a long time, not lighting it.

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