

Private Browsing

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Abstract

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Private Browsing is a literary novel about 30-year-old Lauren Donaldson dealing with the death of her twin sister. Lauren learns secrets about her dead sister and struggles with the thought that something is wrong with her for not feeling the grief she expects of herself.

Private Browsing

By Scott Brown

1

“She’s here,” I called to Sherman, “And Jasmine’s with her.”

“What? No way!” Sherman opened the door before they were there and said, “Katie! Jazzy! That is so great!” He hugged each of them and shook the guy’s, Rob’s, hand, “Hey! I’m Sherman. Nice to meet you.” I hugged Katie. Jasmine hugged me really hard; like she rammed into me. Before even greeting me, Rob was like, “Oh, Shit! You do look alike,” then pretended like he didn’t know who was who, “Hey, Jazz, you’re sister’s place is really nice,” to me. Jasmine didn’t seem to notice, was looking at something else.

Sherman invited everyone to sit down.

“I need to go to the bathroom.” She pulled Rob partway with her and he handed her something before she walked down the hall.

As soon as she got back Rob said, “Looks like it’s my turn.” He took something from his pocket, probably a pill, and swallowed it. He looked over his shoulder and smiled.

I held Katie back and when Jasmine and Rob went to the couch I whispered at Katie, “What is going on?”

“I’m sorry, she kind of just invited herself and the guy, too,” Katie said.

“I didn’t know you guys were hanging out?” I whispered.

“I’ve been housesitting for her so we have been talking more and I was over there because she just got back. When I told her I was coming over she said that was good and that she should see more of you and said Rob would drive,” Katie said. I looked at Rob’s back, where his doughy body stretched his black, short-sleeve shirt.

“What?” I said, pulling Katie further down the hallway, just in case.

“I don’t know, it just kind of happened.”

“You’ve been housesitting for her?”

“Yeah,” she said, “She been going away a lot.”

“How come you didn’t say anything? And what did they just take in the bathroom?”

“I don’t know. Can we talk about this later?”

“Promise?”

“Promise,” she said.

The last time I had seen Jasmine was at dinner at Mom and Dad’s. She wore this tank top that basically had no back so it didn’t cover her bra. When I asked Sherman if I like that look he immediately said no. I told him it was all right, that it wasn’t a trap and said I didn’t mean with Jasmine, but in general. He conceded that in general he did like it. I really did mean it as a separate question. I know he doesn’t believe it, but then I asked him if he was attracted to Jasmine. He just looked at me like he was mad at himself for answering the first question. I said that we look alike and he is attracted to me so that means he should be attracted to Jasmine too. He said that’s different because he knows us. But if you just saw our pictures, I said, and didn’t know us. He said, but he did know us and especially me. Yeah, I said, but I mean, purely physical, since we are practically identical. He said we were fraternal. I told him to just answer the question. He finally said he could tell that Jasmine was

attractive, but not attracted to her. I am attracted to you, not your sister even though you look almost exactly alike.

They had moved to the kitchen already.

“Babe,” he asked, “Maybe you can set up some extra spaces for Rob and Jasmine?”

Sherman had a soup bowl overturned to keep his mixology book open. He came home the weekend before with a cocktail set with recipe book from TJ Maxx. He was so excited it was only \$15. I agreed that that was cheap.

The kitchen looked like The Muppet Chef had taken over. Sherman had splashed liquor and mixers everywhere. All the white appliances were spotted.

“You guys ready for some manhattans?” Sherman said.

Katie asked for a gin and tonic, Jasmine wanted a scotch and soda, and Rob asked if Sherman knew how to make a vesper.

Sherman said he was hoping everyone was into manhattans since that’s as far as he was in the book.

“Ha, Sherm! I’ll switch my order to that, then!” said Rob. Everyone else did too.

Rob was turning red and sweating a lot. I asked him if I should open a window or go out on the deck. But Rob pulled the towel from the oven handle and wiped his face.

He said, “Don’t worry about me; I’m just a sweater.” Then he put the towel over his shoulder.

Jasmine started singing, "When I walk away. When I walk away!" cracking herself up. Everyone else stared at her.

"What's that from?" asked Katie.

"It's Weezer. *Sweater Song*," said Jasmine.

Katie made a game show loser sound.

"Hey, remember when we were Big Bucks and a Whammy?" I asked Jammy.

We used to watch Press Your Luck all the time on USA and walk around saying, "Big bucks; big bucks; no whammies" over and over. We loved it so much that one Halloween I went as a Whammy and Jasmine went as Big Bucks, basically decorated cardboard boxes. I remember Dad told me that when you glue two pieces of wood together that the joint becomes stronger than the wood. I didn't believe him so we glued two pieces of wood together. He let me set the clamps. The next night, after it had dried, he had Jammy and I put on oversized safety glasses, and told us to break the board. We didn't know how so he told us to smash it on the ground. I went first, but couldn't break it. Neither could Jammy so we went into the driveway and Dad raised it above his head and slammed it on the concrete. The wood broke, but like he said, not at the joint. It was maybe that coolest thing I had ever seen.

"Big bucks, no Jammys," Jasmine mumbled.

"What?" I asked.

"Big bucks, no Jammys."

"I don't know what you mean," I said.

She seemed to be drifting off.

"What do you mean, 'Big bucks, no Jammys'?" I asked.

“That’s mean,” Jasmine said.

Liquor spilled over the side of the double-jigger Sherman had on the counter and he kept pouring adding to his pool.

“Jesus, Honey,” I said.

“I’m just trying to get the correct measurements,” Sherman said.

“Here’s a towel,” Rob threw the one from his shoulder into the slop.

“Maybe not that one,” I tried to tell him.

“What?” asked Rob.

“Maybe we could have used one of the grungy towels for that.” I said.

“It’s fine, Babe,” said Sherman, “A towel’s a towel.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” said Rob, “I just figured.”

“It’s nothing,” said Sherman, then to me, “Come on, don’t make him feel bad for trying to clean up our house. If anything we should pay him.”

“No, no, it’s fine. It’s just that we have other towels,” I said.

“Stop,” said Sherman.

“I’m just trying to clarify what I was trying to say, that one of those might have been better for this,” I said, “That’s all.”

Sherman shook his shaker with both hands, “Let’s just drop it.”

Rob slid down the cabinets like he was melting and sat on the floor. I kind of stared at him then Jasmine did too and they both started giggling. Katie rolled her eyes and went to help them up. She bought two counter stools they were right next to anyway and asked them if they wanted to sit on them and maybe drink some water. They took the water, but not the stools.

I asked if everything was all right; if I could get them anything, but they didn't seem to hear me.

"Good shake, Sherman," said Rob, leaning his arm on the stool's footrest. Sherman got all smiley and went to pour the first drink.

Katie said that they were fine.

"What's the drinks again?" asked Rob.

"Um, manhattans," said Sherman.

"You should probably not shake for manhattans," said Rob.

"Seriously, he makes best cocktails," Jasmine said. She slurred it, barely opening her mouth. She reached to grab the towel soaking up the liquor and flung it back onto Rob's shoulder. The damp corner smacked his back and shot a spray of whiskey and vermouth onto the floor and cabinets.

"Gross!" laughed Rob and wiped his face.

"Here," said Jasmine, "Don't go using it again and making Lauren mad."

She fumbled with and unsnapped the appallate on Rob's shoulder. She stuffed the towel under his appallate and snapped it back in place, slapping his shoulder like securing a clip in a gun.

"Ha!" Rob laughed and wiggled around like he was scratching his back on the cabinet and watching the towel wave. He and Jasmine took turn batting it like kittens. Rob got on his hands and knees and let the towel hang.

Katie looked at me like "what the fuck?"

"You look like an old lady breast cancer survivor," laughed Jasmine.

Rob gyrated his shoulder and swung the towel.

“I wanna suck your titty,” Jasmine said and lay on her back to take the damp towel in her mouth, “Ha, it’s whiskey! I’m a baby. Alcoholic mom!”

“Jesus, you guys,” said Katie and pulled them both up.

Sherman was doing his best to ignore them and was at counter-level for the most precise measuring view.

“Don’t spill, ha!” Rob swung the towel toward the drinks and he and Jammy laughed more.

“Are you guys on something?” Jammy looked at me and stared me down. Then she blew me a kiss.

I said we should go into the dining room and get started before everything got cold.

Jasmine said that they needed to go.

“What about dinner?”

“We gotta go.”

“Well, maybe you should stay,” I said, “You can have the bed. Sherman and I will take the couch.”

Sherman looked concerned.

Jasmine said they were going and didn’t need my bed.

Katie looked scared. “I can’t drive either,” she said.

“Maybe an Über?” I said, “Here, give me your keys.”

“We’re fine!” Jammy yelled, “Come on, Rob. Katie?”

“Can I stay here?” asked Katie. Sherman nodded yes.

“Oh, OK,” Rob stuck out his hand to Sherman as Jasmine pulled him to the front of the condo.

“Are you sure you’re OK to drive, Rob? I mean you are welcome to—”

“He’s fine!” Jasmine cut me off, “Bye, Sherman, thanks for having us over. Bye, Katie!”

Rob grabbed a chicken breast from the casserole dish with his hand as he passed and started gnawing at it like fucking Genghis Khan.

“Jesus. Come on, Jasmine. No one is fine. Let me call an Über. I’ll pay for it; put it on my account.”

“Don’t Über! We’re fine!” said Jasmine.

“I’ll just get one and you guys can eat,” I said.

“Don’t!” screamed Jasmine.

She pulled the towel from Rob’s shirt free, “Thanks for the nice towel!”

Jasmine threw it and I let it hit me, catching it as it fell to the ground.

I tried again to appeal to Rob, “The good boyfriend move is to make sure no one drives.”

“Boyfriend?” laughed Rob, “I’m not the porn star one.”

Jasmine started laughing too.

“Jesus, Jasmine! You’re dating a porn star now, too?” I said.

“Jazz, no please,” Katie followed after her. She slammed the door. I opened the door and let go of the towel. She was speed walking through the grass to the truck. I followed her.

“Come on, Jammy!” I said, “You’re both on something. You’re going to kill somebody.”

Jasmine said, “I don’t need sober to be that you’re a bitch.”

She jumped into the pickup and locked the door like I was a serial killer chasing her.

“You need to stay!” I pounded on the window.

She yelled through the glass, “How’d think I met my boyfriend porn star! Bitch! Bitch! Bitch!” and slapped at Rob’s arm to get him to drive. I jumped back to clear the thing racing away. Sherman, Katie, and I all looked at each other as the tires screeched down the road.

“What do we do?” said Katie.

No one answered, but eventually Sherman put arms around both of us and we walked inside.

He picked up the abandoned towel in stride without removing his hand from my back. I was crying. Katie was silent. In the foyer, he pushed the door closed and hugged me. Katie walked to the kitchen.

“She just makes me so crazy,” I told him, “She’s the only one that makes me seem crazy. I didn’t care about the towel. I wasn’t trying to be rude, but I sounded like a psycho. I don’t know why. I wouldn’t have said anything if it were anyone else so I sound like the crazy one.”

“You guys do that to each other,” said Sherman, “Do you think she was serious about the porn thing?”

“I don’t know,” I said, “She can fucking kill herself if she wants.”

2

Katie was supposed to be watching Jasmine's house, but she had to work late and asked me to stop by. Apparently Jasmine had had some packages stolen off of her porch and was concerned about one that came that day. I didn't have a key so first I had to go to Katie's (I had a key to her place) and search around until I found Jammy's key. Katie had said it was in the desk drawer, but it was actually hanging from a necklace tree. It was right in front of me, but I wasn't looking for it and was texting with Katie to try to figure out where the key was and I asked her if it had a keychain or anything and she described a leather braid so I took the one off the tree and sent Katie the picture and she said yes, that was it. I told her it was on the necklace tree and she said, "Oh, yeah, I hung it up there, sorry." She is smart, but so dumb sometimes.

Jasmine had taken off to L.A. for few days to see her boyfriend, who, if Rob is to be trusted, was a porn star, who, if Jasmine is to be trusted, she met while making a porn. I was supposed to check on the turtle, who she named, Tuxedo Junction, and water her plants.

I stopped by Fred Meyer to get a copy of the key made.

Jasmine's street was in an odd state between the new and old residents. The real estate in Ballard had been going up for awhile and the street was a throwback to desolation. There were some old, run-down houses, mostly which people were renting, and renovated houses new families had been moving into and fixing up. You could go down the street and compare the overgrown vegetation on one to the new paint and re-plantings of another. Jasmine's was one of the last on the street that still looked out-of-care. There was one other that was bad and always had a lot of

post-college kids lounging around. There were maybe two others that were kept up OK, but not the most beautiful in the world. There was a tiny park at the end and lots of big trees that people sometimes sleep in.

Jasmine had been renting a two-story bungalow, with the gable dormer windows, for years from some weird guy in Tacoma. After I first saw the house, and looked out of her bedroom window, the walls sloped with the roof, I searched the internet to learn that those windows were called gable dormers, and that the house was a bungalow. It was a beautiful house that had fallen to shit. I don't think that Jasmine was a bad tenant or anything, but there were things that were never really taken care of.

At the end of the walk I opened the compost bin and saw that it was empty so I carried it up to the house. On the porch I slipped. The stairs were in good shape and had that skateboard grip tape stuff on them. On the porch the wood was worn and sinking, covered in algae and slime and I lost my footing. I kind of twisted with one leg on the porch, hit my hip and soaked my butt in filth. I let go of the compost bin and it skittered to the house.

A few years before I'd bought a Groupon for a boudoir photo shoot session to surprise Sherman with for his birthday. I borrowed these ridiculous boots from Jammy. The boots had a 5-inch heel, but were cheap vinyl so had no support. The bed the photographer had in in her studio was higher than normal and she said she normally suggests that women take off their heels when getting off the bed, but the boots were hard enough to get on in the first place – the zipper was all funny and didn't go down quite far enough so I had to force my foot in and the zipper kept

getting stuck. The photographer said she had a stool and went looking for it, but I felt like a big, dumb, sex toy that couldn't get herself off a bed. How stupid can you get? I slid off the bed and of course, sprained my ankle really bad. I needed someone to drive me to the emergency room. I tried to call Katie, but she was at work. I couldn't call Sherman since it would ruin the surprise. I went through my whole contact list without anyone picking up so I called Jammy and she came to pick me up. She even drove my car and left hers there so I wouldn't have to figure that out later. She also brought a bag of edamame and a towel to wrap it in, and sweats and hoodie. She asked me if I wanted her to get a wheelchair and I said no, but wanted her to help. So she moved under me so I could hobble with her to the waiting room. She worked to distract me from the pain while we waiting for the doctor by coming up with cover stories about how I hurt myself: run over by a scooter, cutting too hard in a Storm open try-out, late night crime fighting super hero alter-ego, Abducted by stalker fan a la *Misery*. We finally settled on me slipping on her terrible front steps. After she took me home she went to Bartell's and came back with ice packs and heat packs, juice and an *Us Weekly*.

The photographer called that night and was very apologetic and said that my sitting was free of charge and that she'd taken the liberty of picking out some of her favorite shots and printing them for me and I of course was more than welcome to pick more, on the house. She also invited me back for another complimentary sitting and free prints once I was healed. I didn't realize that she might have been worried about a lawsuit. I thanked the photographer and asked her if I could give my complimentary sitting and corresponding free prints to my sister since she came to

my rescue. Of course, of course. I got my pictures back and some of them were really sexy. She knew how to pose me to hide things and she twisted me a few times that was so uncomfortable when she was taking them, but it made my boobs look huge. Jammy showed me hers. She had her stripper friends, from the bikini barista stand by her house, dress her up. They decided that heroin chic was over so they were going for meth chic. There is one where she is in a faded and tattered terrycloth bathrobe and granny panties with holes in them and somehow way hotter than any of mine.

Sherman really liked his pictures and said he wanted to frame one and put it up, but, um, no, we were not going to be the couple with erotic photography in our bedroom. He was pissed about Jammy's stairs, though. He kept calling and bothering her about the stairs and asked if the landlord was fixing them or not. Jammy, understandably, did not want to start making too many demands of her landlord that were based on a story she and I made up. Eventually, Sherman got so worked up he got Jammy to tell him the landlord's name. Sherman found his contact info, called the landlord, told the (fabricated) story and threatened to sue. The landlord hemmed and hawed for a bit, but did fix the stairs. The landlord had his buddy do it and it took months. The repair guy told Jammy to call him Hitter. When Jammy asked why Hitter he said that is what he has always been called.

"No story?" she asked.

Tons of stories he told her. "Don't worry," he told, "It's not from hitting women. Never done that, never will."

"But hitting on is a different story, right?" she said.

“Ha! Goddamn right! I like you Jammy!” he said.

Hitter came to Jammy’s house one morning a few days in without shoes on. When she asked him about it he said he didn’t like shoes.

“Isn’t that dangerous, working construction and all?” she asked.

“You’re not calling OSHA are you? Those goddamn G-Men: fucking hate workers. Man, if I want to have a little smokey smoke to relax myself before the grind begins and I happen to hit myself with my hammer that is my own goddamn fault and I ain’t got nobody to blame but myself and sure as shit don’t need some faggot in a tie and hardhat, excuse my language, Ma’am, and please, I don’t mean faggot as in gay, I ain’t gay, but these OSHA G-Men faggots need to stay the fuck out of my business. It’s legal now anyway.”

“Was it legal when you hit yourself with a hammer?” Jammy asked him.

“Ha, ha! I suppose you got me there,” he said.

I gathered myself up, wiped the algae-slime from my jeans and flicked my hands over the porch ledge. Right under me was the Amazon box, pretty much hidden from the street, butted against the porch’s half-wall. I wanted to shake the box and find out what was inside or put it through an x-ray machine. I wiped my hands the best I could on my jeans and picked up the box. I shifted it a little, not a full shake. The newly made key unlocked smoothly and the door swung open much easier than you’d expect from the decaying look. It feels too light for an outside door. I crouched to set the package down and found a big hole on the inside of the door. It didn’t go all the way through, but was cracked and splintered and exposed the

hallow chamber inside. It was probably supposed to be a bedroom door originally. I didn't know how Jammy felt safe in here without a real door.

In the freezer was a Tupperware container of cut-up shrimp like Katie said there would be. I took two pieces to Tuxedo Junction's water bowl to thaw in. After they were in, I remembered I needed to change the water and held the shrimp bits in my hand while I dumped and refilled his water.

Katie hadn't asked me to, but I figured I should walk around the house in case there were any plants to water.

Upstairs was so much nicer than the rest of the house, like she didn't want anyone to know. The hardwood was restored and was plenty of natural light.

The bathroom looked more like it belonged downstairs though. It had a window that had been painted shut and cut open. Many layers of paints peeled in large pieces together. I pulled one and it felt damp and rubbery, white on the outside and purple underneath.

I took off my coat and hung it on the unused towel hook on the bathroom door. The toilet seat was frigid when I sat down to pee and my wet jeans stuck to me. I rubbed my legs and touched the tender part of my hip and shut my eyes. Since I could reach the vanity mirror I opened it. She didn't have anything interesting, just makeup and bathroom stuff.

Sherman texted, "Still at work. Will try to be there in 45."

I pulled the bottle of aspirin down, and set it on the counter, "Can you stop at home and pick me up new pair of jeans y underwear" Then added in a separate text, "?"

“Yeah, What happened?”

“Fell in the mud at Jazz’s. I’m fine. Tell you at dinner.”

“OK. See U at dinner. More like an hour now.”

“OK.”

After a few minutes Sherman texted again, “Can you borrow some clothes from Jam? It’d speed this up.”

“Let me check. I’ll let you know.”

I opened the bottle of aspirin and saw it was the white acidic pill kind. I got the ibuprofen out and took the lid off and found nice little coated maroon pills. I shook one into my palm gulped it down dry, leaving the coating taste on my tongue. From the toilet I pulled shut the thick nautical drapes. I wiped and flushed and then stepped out of my wet, bunched underwear and jeans. I stood in front of the mirror in my short socks and sweater, like a 80’s jazzercising hooker. I decided to put on my trench coat and look like a flasher, which I did.

I stuck my head into the hall and checked the sightlines. I walked to her door without exposing myself to any second story neighbors and again checked her bedroom before entering it without bottoms. I would have wrapped up in a towel if I could find one. So weird. Where were all towels? I shuffled around heaps of clothes and books and library movies, holding my jacket cinched at the bottom. Her shades were open, but looked out to the backyard trees. Only the squirrels would see me and besides, I realized, I look like Jasmine and I am in here house, people would see Jasmine naked, not me. I let the jacket fall open and juttet my hip out, my shit on display.

Jasmine had a big closet in her room and used the linen closet in the hall as overflow. I went to her dresser for some underwear. People think borrowing underwear is so gross; I don't know, it washes the same as anything, I mean as long as they are not white. Why do they even make white underwear anymore? Why did they ever? The top two drawers were packed with underwear. I sifted through them for something comfortable, but found nothing. They were all super sexy. I didn't want Sherman to see them and know what kind of skimpy panties my sister wore. The she had a couple of pairs of boy shorts. I have never had a pair, but liked my boy short swimsuit. I stood in the window and I put them on; they were comfortable.

In her bedroom closet she had more party dresses than parties I had ever been to and jeans everywhere. She had jeans folded and hanging and crumpled on the floor. Pushed against the wall was a laundry basket with a rainbow of tights.

I sifted through the hangers and stacked jeans. I tried on a few which fit perfectly. I realized that didn't need to try anything on since they fit Jammy they would fit me, but I have never felt as sexy as when I was trying on things I didn't need to. I wanted to try all the clothes on, but stopped myself after a few more pairs. I remember how much I missed when we used to share clothes. I put on a pair of dark, low-rise jeans. They were the ones.

I texted Sherman to say I was borrowing clothes and I would just meet him at dinner. I still had like a half hour before I needed to leave.

I wandered to her desk full of troll dolls and angel trinkets and necklaces. She had band stickers pinned to the wall. It was the same desk she had growing up, but she had stripped the paint off and refinished it. She even still had the wooden boxes

we got at a craft show when we were little. And her computer. Holy shit! She must have only taken her iPad to LA. I opened the screen and it let me in without a password. She even had a file called passwords on her desktop. Holy fuck. I opened her email and just started scrolling. After five or ten minutes I found an email from *Fresh Girls Modeling Agency* that had a link to a scene. I opened up a new document and pasted whatever she had saved, some YouTube clip. Then I opened a private tab on her browser and copied the email link to it. A site called *Ass Mom* opened and wanted a user name and password. I went back to the email and found the gibberish name and password they issued and copied and pasted them into the boxes. Her video came up. She had used Lolly as her porn name.

Lolly was my nickname as a kid. On our ninth birthday the family was around the kitchen table and Dad went to the garage to get a Baskin Robbins ice cream cake from the freezer that said, *Happy Birthday Jammy and Lolly!* We'd been asking for the exact cake for months, but I didn't want to be Lolly anymore, I wanted to be Lauren.

Jasmine used a parrot-voice to say, "Lolly wants a cracker. Lolly wants a cracker."

I told her to shut up and Dad told her that was enough.

Mom and Dad said I could be called whatever I wanted and they went around the table and made everyone call me Lauren out loud.

Then they asked Jasmine if she wanted to be Jammy or Jasmine and she just said, "I don't care; Jammy's fine."

She used my nickname from when we were kids.

I watched Jammy's video. Holy fuck. I watched it until I saw her face then quit the browser. Holy fuck. My sister did a porn. I copied the link, username, and password in my phone. It looked so strange and conspicuous among my other notes that I opened a Huffington Post article and pasted it too. I moved the porn site info so it was interspersed throughout the article. On Jammy's computer I re-copied the YouTube link so if she just randomly pasted something it would be the last thing she actually copied. I deleted everything off of that document and quit it without saving. Holy fuck.

I was shaking when I closed the computer. I picked up the wooden box. She still had hers; I had no idea what I did with mine. They had hidden drawers where we used to hide our treasures. The front of the box looked like a log with the rest was squared off so it sat like a normal box. In the main drawer she had some loose stamps and mix-matched earrings. I set the drawer aside and picked up the rest of the box, tilting it to the side then forward until the tiny secret drawer knocked around and slid into my waiting hand. It was filled with a tiny baggie of white powder and a couple of pills. I set the secret drawer on the desk and sat down, staring at it. I jiggled it back and forth and rattled the pills. I reached behind the desk, between the desk and the wall, and felt around to see if the nail was still there. I couldn't tell so I moved the desk out, trying not to knock down the troll dolls.

Jammy had used her allowance to buy a cheap-ass Target G-string when we were 11, though not cheap by 11-year-old standards. She had to save a couple of allowances. She hid it behind her desk on a nail. Jammy had pulled it out far enough to hang the underwear on. She would wash her G-string in the sink by hand then

hang it to dry on the nail. She wore it every Monday and on special occasions. She said it made her feel excited for Mondays. Whenever she wore it she would also put a clean pair of her normal underwear into the laundry so Mom wouldn't get suspicious, though I couldn't imagine Mom keeping that close track of our clothes. Jammy had been doing this for probably six months when her jeans sagged a little bit and her G-string was riding up when she bent down to get something.

Mom noticed and yelled, "What are you wearing; let me see your underwear right now."

Jammy called her a pervert and told her she was not taking her pants off for her. Mom grabbed her jeans and said, "Now, Young Lady!"

Mom pulled the underwear up and said, "Upstairs, Now! Go change and bring these down to me. And if you have any more I expect them, too. Go!"

I was eating cereal. Jammy ran upstairs and Mom turned to me. "You, too," she said, "Let me see what you're wearing."

"Mom," I said, "I didn't do anything; it was Jasmine."

She said she knew, but wanted to see anyway. I pulled up the band of my little girl panties and she said OK.

Jammy stomped downstairs and handed Mom her G-string. She got grounded for a week and for a month had to show Mom her underwear everyday before she left for school.

The nail was gone. She must have fixed it when she refinished the desk.

I sat back down at the desk and dumped her drugs in front of me. I picked up the bag of what I assumed was cocaine, held it up to the light and flicked at it until it

settled in the bottom. I don't know why exactly, movies maybe. I lay it back down next to the pills and arranged them a little. I had one pill propped-up on another and took my phone from the bed. I took a close-up picture. I took another one. Then I backed out and took a wider angle. And another to make sure it was in focus. And some more, I don't know really, I just kept snapping.

It felt like I had gone so far by then so I opened Jammy's computer in private browsing again to her Amazon account. It was a spatula that had been delivered downstairs.

3

I barely made it through dinner. All I could think about was that movie.

I waited in bed until Sherman was snoring and took my phone and our iPad to the bathroom. I locked the bathroom door and sat on the toilet with the lid down, the iPad on my lap and the phone on the counter next to me. In a private browsing tab I typed the link from my phone. It couldn't open the page and I double-checked my transcription. It was right so I must have copied it to my phone wrong so I went to the *Ass Mom* main site and entered the password info. I got in. The first Mom was named Sandy, but she looked like a girl, posed in yoga pants and a pink sports bra, with the description, "This mom had just dropped her kids off before hitting the gym to get me off..."

I scrolled down the page of different mom girls laid out in the same way, but not my sister. I typed my own name, Lolly, into the search box.

In Jammy's big picture she was bare-breasted and eye-patched with the description: "I was sitting at my house on Halloween when one last trick-or-treater came to the door. No trick, her treat was my dick. This amateur pirate fuckstick Lolly Rogers got nasty when I told her that she could have the D. This chick couldn't wait to follow my treasure trail all the way to my long john silver. Seriously, you got to see how this chick sucked me off. Having one eye didn't stop her from finding my willy. She couldn't get enough so I fucked her every which way. She's a screamer, too. Check out this update 'cause this bitch cray."

I clicked on the video.

It started with a stripper witch and a stripper nurse walking to the front door of a house in bright afternoon sunlight. The women knocked on the door, waited a

second, looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders and left when no one came to answer. Jammy, in her pirate costume and eye patch, passed by them in the driveway as they left and she approached the door. She impatiently rang the doorbell before walking to the window and catching a guy sitting frozen in the dark with a different porn playing in the background. She knocked on the window with the hilt of her curved plastic sword until he looked at her. She finger beckoned him and rubbed on her hips then gestured to the front door. She walked right in, saying, "trick or treat."

The guy stammered, "a...a...a...treat?"

She grabbed his crotch and said, "I have to make sure this isn't a trick first."

He led her back to the couch, but the lights were on, the TV off, and a sheet was spread over the cushions.

It was time to, "see what she was working with," he said and pulled at the two triangles of her ultra mini which dissolved into a red and white pile on the floor. They kept kissing and he took off her black bikini top, getting it tangled in a plastic skulls necklace then stepped back and told her to take "them panties" off slowly. She tugged the band of her underwear down and exposed a glimpse of razor burn.

Jammy was on her knees wrestling with the belt holding the guy's cargo shorts up. He reached behind him for a pillow and dropped it next to her. While she situated herself on it he unbuckled the belt himself, revealing an almost completely hairless body besides a square patch on his dick. Jammy, still with sword in hand,

pulled the shorts the rest of the way off of his shaved legs and Tasmanian Devil thigh tattoo.

Jammy said, "Looks like I've unleashed the devil." I snorted.

She blew him audibly and her felt pirate hat knocked against his stomach, getting further off-kilter with each head bob. It was the first time I had the conscious thought that I might look like that, too. It didn't feel sexual; it felt like I just had the power to study myself with distance.

He palmed the hat and dropped it somewhere off-camera, leaving a red bandana on her head. She kept putting her hands in the way of the camera and he kept moving them and angling his body towards the lens. Finally, as he moaned, she rested the plastic blade near the base of his penis and looked up smiling.

When they started fucking she made pleasure sounding sex noises and her come started to coat his dick. He held her waist and distorted the edges of her *Tiny Dancer* tattoo, the ink rippling when he banged her. She got louder and he stopped to flip her over while she said, "Don't stop, don't stop."

When she was on her back I first saw the tattoo above her pussy. I put my face right next to the screen to read it. They stopped having sex and Jammy knelt in front of him with her mouth open as he masturbated. I scrubbed back in the video and paused, let it play and paused again, trying to freeze it so I could see what it said.

Through the many pages of photographs I couldn't get close enough. It was some arched writing, but too small to read. I didn't think it was English. When I

googled, "Jolly Rogers pussy tattoo," nothing came up so I tried, "Jasmine Donaldson pubic tattoo." Thankfully nothing.

I watched the video again before I went to bed.

I guess I watched it most nights until she died.

4

I found out a few weeks later. Dad called. It was 3am. I looked at the phone and saw that it was him. In a way I was expecting it; Jammy was always going to die before anyone else. I sat up in bed and Sherman did too and put his hand on my back. Dad said that Jasmine was at the hospital. He said he didn't think she was OK.

"Which hospital?" I asked.

"Swedish. The big one." He was holding together pretty well, coordinating and directing things, getting everyone to the hospital.

"Does Katie know?"

"No yet, I called you first."

"They said it was a car accident."

Jasmine had already been in Swedish's system and Dad was her emergency contact.

"You guys just get to the hospital," I said, "We'll tell Katie and bring her with us."

"Thanks, Lauren," he said, "I love you." I told him I loved him, too.

Sherman was already getting dressed when I hung up the phone.

"Should we call Katie first or just go get her?" I asked.

"Jasmine's in the hospital, right?" he asked.

"Yeah; it sounds bad. They said it was a car accident," I said.

"Let's go to Katie's," he said.

"It'll be quicker if we call her."

"Are you OK?" he asked.

“I don’t know. I just—let’s go get Katie. If I call her she might try to drive herself before we get there,” I said. Sherman asked if I was OK and I said, “yes.” I was tired and not feeling anything yet.

We took Sherman’s car and he drove fast. He usually doesn’t. I felt like we were in high school, our car making the going-too-fast-for-this-street sound. We didn’t say.

There was a moment sitting in there when all I could hear was the car, like white noise. It felt like as soon as I called Katie and went inside everything would start for real. I wished I had a choice, like I could call and wake Katie up and go to the hospital and find out Jasmine had died or not call and go back home and nothing would happen. I looked over at Sherman then I called Katie. It rang and rang then went to voicemail. I texted her, “please wake up,” then called again and she picked up.

She was groggy, of course, “Ello?”

“Hey, Katie, Sherman and I are outside, can you come open the door?” I opened the car door as I said this and looked at him as a signal to follow.

“What? Where?” she asked.

“At your place; we’re outside; can you come let us in?” I said.

“Why?” She was starting to wake up.

“We need to talk,” I could see the light turning on in her room.

“Who is it?”

“Jasmine.”

When she opened the door she was crying. She hugged me for a long time then Sherman then me again.

“Where is she?” asked Katie.

“The hospital; We don’t know anything else. Do you need some shoes or anything?” I asked.

“No, let’s just go,” she said.

“Let’s get you some shoes,” said Sherman walking into the apartment, “What else, some jeans? A hoodie or jacket or something?” She followed him without protest and sat on her bed and slid on the running shoes without tying them.

“What about some pants?” I asked.

She shook her head no. I took a pair under my arm if she wanted them later. There was a hoodie on the floor. Sherman picked it up, “Do you want this?” She reached out to take the sweatshirt and pulled it on over her head.

“Ok, got your keys?” he asked.

“Counter,” she pointed out of the room.

“And your phone? You got your phone still?” he asked and she held it up, “OK, I think we are ready then.”

Sherman got the keys off of the counter and held them up for Katie to confirm, “These are the keys, right?”

She nodded yes and he asked if she wanted him to hold her keys and phone. She said yes. I turned off all the lights.

Sherman drove and we sat in the back; Katie crying and sniffing and me holding her, leaning together.

Sherman let us out in the ambulance emergency area and went to park. I went to the desk and when they pulled up Jasmine's name they asked if James Donaldson was with me. I told her that he was my father and on the way. She apologized as she told me that she needed to speak to Jasmine's emergency contact. I told her Katie and I were her sisters.

"As soon as your father gets here, someone will be right out to talk to you," she said and Katie started crying again.

I called Dad. They were almost there. He was letting Mom off at the curb then parking. I told him to give his ID to Mom.

Mom came in, crying and hugging both of us, saying, "Girls. My babies."

I told her that the woman needed to see Dad's ID. Mom showed it to her and that seemed to work for her. The woman asked if Jasmine was married; Mom said no.

Then Sherman came in and he hugged Mom. Dad followed not too long after and hugged all. He wasn't crying then, but he looked sick. He was pale, like he could pass out.

"Daddy, why don't you sit down?" I led him to a chair. There were a couple of other groups in the waiting room in pajamas. The TV was on, playing infomercials with closed captioning.

Another woman came over to us and asked if Mom and Dad were Jasmine Donaldson's parents, then led them away behind the doors.

When they came back out both of them were crying. Jasmine was dead. The social worker explained that Jasmine was the passenger and the driver was

unconscious. They were waiting for him to wake up and had taken blood for toxicology. Since Jasmine had not potentially committed any crimes they did not take hers. It was a one-car accident; they hit a light pole on the exit from 99 at 38th, the Fremont exit. Jammy probably died instantly. She was pronounced dead by the fire department EMT at the scene.

They met a cop and the four of them had to go to the hospital's morgue to identify her.

They told us when they came back into the waiting room. I felt a lump in my throat, but did not start crying like everyone else, even Sherman. I was hyper-aware of everyone else crying; it seemed so loud. We took turns hugging. I closed my eyes and buried my face into their shoulders and made sure to sniff really loud and rub at my face.

Mom and Dad wanted everyone to come to their house so we went. Sherman drove Katie and me and Mom and Dad took their car.

They had converted my old room into a guest room with a queen bed and Jasmine's into an office with a hide-a-bed couch. Katie's was still basically the way she'd left it, though Mom had talked about making it a solarium. She had to tell me that it's a quiet place to relax. She said they might put in more windows (it was already the brightest in the house) and take everything out, but a simple chair or two and mats with a few plants. They hadn't done that yet, though.

We stayed up around the kitchen table and drank coffee and cried, they cried, I tried to look solemn, and told stories. Starting at 7:00 AM Sherman and I called our bosses and told them we couldn't come in. Everyone else did the same in the next

hour. All the bosses were kind, as you'd expect, and said, "of course, take as much time as you need; let me know if I can do anything; etc." Mom made us each eat a piece of toast. No one was hungry, but Mom said everyone had to eat at least one piece.

Sherman and I went up to my old room guestroom and tried to sleep. Katie went to hers, but after 20 minutes or so asked if she could sleep in with us. Sherman was on the outside so he climbed over me and against the wall. I lay in the center, Sherman between me and the wall, and Katie next to me, where Sherman had been. We cuddled together and she cried some more and Sherman left his hands on my back until sometime, we were all able to sleep for a while.

5

I finally slept for a couple hours that morning. I was used to Sherman's snoring, but Katie was snoring too and they were terrible together.

I climbed over Katie and took my phone off the dresser.

No one else was up. Mom and Dad's bedroom door was closed. I cracked the door and peeked in at them sleeping.

I went to the kitchen. There was still a half a cup of coffee in the pot. I swirled it around under my nose then poured it into a fresh mug. I microwaved the coffee while I rinsed the pot. The wet cold grounds dripped on me when I pulled them from the brew basket. I hurried them over to the compost bin on the counter. I began brewing a new pot and took the old warmed coffee from the microwave into the office with me and shut the door.

I was tired and waiting for Jasmine's death to hit me, but I still didn't feel much. It was sad; I just didn't feel sad. That was when I started checking in with myself pretty regularly to see if I felt sad yet. I didn't want to be this disgusting human and sister who was dead inside. Since I was not a wreck like the rest of the family I could still think straight. I could begin to work on the things you have to do when someone dies: credit cards, rent, Facebook.

I tried to be quiet going back in the guest room, but woke Sherman up.

"Hey," he mumbled.

"Hey," I whispered back, "How did you sleep?"

"Umm, I don't know. Not great."

"Yeah," I said "I'm gonna take your phone to get Jammy's landlord's info, OK? What was his name?"

“Goodall, I think. Sam or Mark or something?”

“Thanks, go back to sleep,” I said.

He moved closer to the wall away from Katie and closed his eyes.

I scrolled Sherman’s contacts and found a Scott Goodall: it was the closest I could find.

“Hello?”

“Is this Scott Goodall?”

“Yes.”

“Hi, I apologize if I have the wrong person, but my name is Lauren Donaldson and I am wondering if you might be my sister’s landlord, Jasmine Donaldson?”

“Yeah,” he said.

“Oh, god. Well, so the thing is that my sister died.”

“Oh my god! I am so sorry.” He said Jasmine had already paid for the month so we had that time to get everything out.

“I didn’t think I was going to have to go through this again,” he said.

“Tenants have died before?” I asked.

“Before Jasmine, an old woman lived there. She had lived there since I was a kid. My parents passed the house onto me and she lived there for years. Never any issues. Then after she died, Jasmine moved in and has lived there for like, I don’t know, eight, 10 years. We had talked about her buying it. She wanted to,” he said.

“It is a beautiful house.”

“Your sister was really great. I’m sorry. I can’t imagine what you must be going through. I will make sure to call before I show it to anyone.”

6

Somehow people started to hear. Katie woke up to a phone full of texts and missed calls. She was reading her phone when Bethany called and I don't think she meant to pick up, but she accidentally answered it so she tried to talk to Bethany. Bethany was close to Jammy and Katie knew her a little too. They were Facebook friends and had each other's phone numbers. Bethany told her that Tim was the one driving (they all work together) and that Jammy had the night off and a bunch of them had gone out the night before. Tim didn't drink at work. Normally they all have at least a drink or two on shift, but he'd drunk a bunch the night before and was feeling shitty. Jammy had come by early in the night with Cass and they left to meet some people in Georgetown. Tim was about to get off, it was slow so they decided to cut him early, but he didn't want to go out with Jammy and Cass because he still felt shitty from the night before. He said he just wanted to go home and watch Netflix. Apparently, around 1:00 AM Jammy texted him for a ride. She knew this because he texted a few other people, including Bethany to see if anyone else would do it. He even called the bar and asked Bethany to see if anyone was there that could pick up Jazz, but no one was. He told Bethany that he would do it then. He sounded totally sober, she said, just annoyed. He had gotten a DUI a few years ago so was pretty careful about it. No one knew what had happen to or had heard from Cass yet or knew what happened next, but there were supposedly only two people in the car.

7

At 7:00 pm it was drizzling and already completely dark. Neither Katie nor Sherman were anywhere close to Jammy's friend's shitty house. It didn't look like a party yet, anyway, well not like Jammy's friends' type of party; a bartenders and server party. Bethany had asked Katie if she would feel comfortable if they threw a wake-type party in Jasmine's honor. Katie agreed for the family. Then they asked if we would come.

I hate being early for parties.

I went back to the Anthropologie app on my phone and put a dress in my cart. Katie texted to say she was just leaving Edmonds. I texted Sherman and he said he was still downtown waiting for the bus.

In the fourth or fifth grade Jammy and I went for Halloween at Aaron Stewart's. Some of the kids began to try to flirt. We got there before the rest of the kids and started playing with a ghost decoration in the living room. The Stewarts had hung this little ghost with an off-weighted motor in it. It was sound activated so when you clapped or made a loud noise it would wiggle and make woo sounds. After it would stop Jammy and I would both try to be the first to clap and make it start again. Aaron sat bored on the couch across from us while we giggled. Later the Megans, Megan Hatch and Megan Black, came up to us and asked us if we were retarded because we were twins or just both stupid. When Dad came to pick us up Mrs. Stewart gave us the ghost to take home.

The Anthro app said U-Village was open until 9:00 PM so I went.

I wanted to be in something new. I showed the first woman who greeted me my phone and she led me to the area where there was a couple that looked pretty similar. We matched the name on the tag to make sure.

The fitting room girl hung a scarf over the door she said I might like. I asked her if I could keep the dress on to wear it out. She apologized and said she didn't have the sensor remover back there, but I could hand her the dress over the door and she could run it up front and do that while I waited then come back with the tags and give them to me and I could then take those to the register while wearing the dress. I thanked her and told her I would just take it off and buy it like normal then come back and put it on. She told me she would tell the front so they would know what I was doing and not think anything was fishy. Behind the door, I made a swimming fish movement with my hand.

We went to school with a girl named Abby Trout and in first grade we sat in a circle learning everyone's names. Someone got stuck at Abby and she made the swimming fish hand signal to prompt him. The kid said, "Shark."

My roommate freshman year was named Abby, too. When we talked for the first time that summer I asked her if she went by Abby or Abigail.

"Whatever you want, people call me both."

So I called her Abigail over the phone, but when we actually got to school it was obvious that she was Abby.

Later, when we knew each other a little I said, "No one ever calls you Abigail do they?"

She said since she was starting college she wanted to try to be Abigail. I told her that night Jammy wasn't just my sister, but my twin.

I texted Katie and Sherman again a couple of times, once after I bought the dress and was putting it back on, and again before I left the parking lot. I was just crossing I-5 when my phone shook in the cup holder. I tried not to read it, but it was from Katie.

At the light I read, "Here."

While I was reading it, Sherman responded and said he would be there in 30.

Katie was sitting on the steps when I arrived and a man and woman were out there with her, smoking. She said hi and waved. The wet grass overgrowing the walkway brushed my ankles and made me shiver. I asked how she was doing and sat next to her. She shrugged and offered me her drink. She had cried so much the past few days. I worried about her. The glass smelled like whiskey.

Katie introduced me to Bethany and Rich. She called me her other sister. We shook hands and they said they were sorry for me loss. I thanked them and thanked them for throwing the party.

Rich took the final drink from his beer and stuffed the end of his cigarette into the bottle. He offered the bottle to Bethany. She took a long drag, and tapped the smoldering butt into the bottle. It sizzled. Katie said she didn't want to sit out there like an asshole and asked if I was ready to go in.

All the people packed into the kitchen got quiet when we walked in. Skinny jeans, mustaches, and flannel shirts; Jammy's people.

Bethany began introducing me and they all hugged me and Katie. I told them it was tough, but I was holding up.

Rich asked if he could get me a drink, they were all drinking whiskey or rosé in honor of Jasmine. I confessed I didn't know she liked rosé. I did, too.

It was so quiet in the kitchen I could hear Rich pour my wine.

"Um, hello. Hey, everyone," I said.

I thanked everyone for being there and having this party for Jasmine and that I didn't think Jasmine would want us to be all sad and awkward.

Someone yelled out, "Hear! Hear!"

I said she wouldn't want us to mourn her this way. She'd want everyone to get wasted. I thought about the porn movie and I blurted, "And fuck!"

Someone yelled, "Fuck yeah! Jazzy!" Then everyone yelled and drank and the house got loud.

When Sherman showed up he put his messenger bag, with work computer, against the slipcovered-loveseat and draped his overcoat over it. I asked if he wanted to put his computer and coat in the car. He said it would be fine, that no one would take it, but I told him someone might puke on it. I'd put it in the car. He said if it would make me feel better. I would get all crazy about it if I didn't just do it.

When I was coming back inside there was a guy coming in for the first time. Rich saw the guy came in and looked shocked. Bethany waved meekly when the guy passed our group.

Rich whispered, "Oh my god, is that the porn star?"

The guy looked over his shoulder on the way into the kitchen and everyone looked away. I couldn't tell if it was the guy from the video or not. He wasn't as tall as the video guy looked.

There was a pirate hat and eye patch on the drink table that people were trying on and taking pictures with. Katie had it on and came over to me and put it on my head.

When Katie was really little, like two or three, she scratched her eye pretty bad and the doctor had to tape a patch on. It must have been around Halloween because Katie was crying that she had to wear the eye patch and we didn't. Mom bought Jammy and me each an eye patch to wear and help Katie feel better. Jammy wouldn't stop wearing hers, though, even after Katie didn't have too. When the elastic string broke I gave her mine and that eventually broke, too.

A few years ago Jammy started wearing them again. One of her friends, Hanna, is a leather person, whatever you call it, and she made her this fancy eye patch. Hanna wasn't there for the wake. I met Hanna once and she had on a traditional full leather Indian dress and headband. She didn't look very Indian. She said it took a long time to make, but was not wasteful because it would last forever. I said I would be scared to have clothes that last forever because that would mean that I couldn't gain any weight. She said she was very careful about only eating healthy things that enrich her body, mind, and spirit. Oh, I said. Yeah, I try to, too. When I asked her if she made her sandals she got all defensive and said that she is not a cobbler and people don't understand how hard it is to make footwear. Besides, she would prefer not to wear anything at all. When we got in the car, Hanna

shimmied back and forth on the leather seats. Jammy asked her what she was doing and Hanna said she loved the feeling of bull on bull. I told that to Sherman and he has a leather jacket and whenever he gets into the car he rubs his shoulders against the seat and says, 'mmm, bull on bull.'

Katie put the eye patch and hat on me. I turned to Sherman and said, "mmm, bull on bull," and Katie took my picture.

I heard somebody say real loud, "Shit, Man, She looks like Lolly Rogers!"

I turned around and asked the guy how he knew that. He was all stammering and didn't know what to say. He finally said she was pretty cool about it and a bunch of them even watched it with her one night. I realized I should also play dumb so I asked him what he was talking about and he stammered even more. He said the Lolly Rogers movie.

I said, "What? How did he know my name?"

He said, "What?"

I told him Lolly was my nickname growing up.

"Oh," he said, "I didn't know that."

Later I followed the guy in the kitchen and basically accosted him, "Are you a porn star?" I asked.

He said some shit like he was an adult actor, but the girls were the real stars. As canned and cheesy as it was, he said it with humility, like he actually believed it. I said I was Lauren, Jasmine's sister, and we went upstairs to talk. There were two bedrooms and a bathroom at the top of the staircase. One bedroom was closed and

the other was piled with clothes. It looked like a 70's basement. On a nightstand were a couple of empty beer bottles, a small pipe, and the biggest bag of weed I had ever seen.

He told me his name real name was Timothy. When he told me his stage name was Ethan because he wanted to represent his Jewishness and to break the stereotype of the nebbish, book Jew and be a role model I thought he was joking.

We sat squeezed together on the steps. I could feel his leg muscles.

He told me he was the one who did the movie with Jasmine. I didn't know what to say. He lived in LA so I thanked him for coming all this way for the funeral. He told me that the trip was already planned, and since they met, he had flown up here every three weeks or so. I had no idea. He thought they really had something. They made each other happy. I asked him if it bothered her that he had to sleep with so many women for his job.

He said, "Everyone I date says it doesn't bother them."

"I saw the movie," I said.

"What did you think?" he asked.

"It was...I don't really know how to answer that. She seemed...It seemed real for her," I said.

"It was. I think that's why it's the most downloaded *Sweet Salad* scene. That's why they keep asking her to come back," he said.

"What's *Sweet Salad*?"

“That’s just the name of the company. It is like a collection of sites for different things, like one for Asian, another for anal, your MILF, your teen, you know,” he said.

He told me they filmed it at a house, which was actually pretty common, a lot of shoots were at rented mansions. He thought it was for the site *Ass Mom*. MILFs with big asses.

I didn’t think she looked old enough to be a MILF. He laughed, of course she was old enough. In the industry chicks were either teens or MILFs. It might have been a teen scene he said, it didn’t matter. He knew Jasmine was trick-or-treating, though, because of the eye patch and sword play. I asked about that and he said she was giving him head and pretended like she was going to cut his dick off with a plastic sword and started laughing so hard, cracking herself up that he started laughing so they had to cut. That made her relax and the scene got really good after that.

I wanted to know if she was old enough to be a mom how come they didn’t have her trick-or-treating with her kids.

“You can’t have kids in a porn, even as extras. It doesn’t matter, though: girls do MILF scenes then teen scenes in the same day. Jazz didn’t look old if that’s what you mean.”

They are saying she had a big ass, though. He called it an “amazing, perfect big ass.” I flexed my glut muscles as he said it and pressed harder against him.

“So after the trick-or-treating...” I led. He sounded bored when we got to that part and said, “We basically start at it. Standard boy-girl. Blowjob, reverse cowgirl,

cowgirl, doggy, pop.” He had to tell me that the pop was the come shot. The rest I had seen. But I guess I had seen that part too. He said she almost swallowed the pop and I obviously didn’t get the importance of what he told because he explained that you had to show the camera the come then swallow it. When I asked him why, he just said that is what you do, but it was really important that time because she was supposed to say, “trick-or-treat” with it in her mouth before she swallowed. I looked skeptical so he told me to try it with my wine. I looked around for a sec, and obviously no one was around the stairs and took a small swig of wine and tilted my head back.

I gargled “Rickorneat,” then swallowed.

Timothy clapped and said, “It must run in the family.”

Then he offered to show it to me.

“What?” I said.

“My dick,” he said, “You’ve seen it in the movie right? A lot of girls that meet me are too shy to ask, but want to see it in real life.”

I sat there like an idiot then finally said, “Thanks, but no.”

I was at my sister’s wake.

It was a fucking weirdo porn guy thing to say.

He said that Jasmine was cleaning up from head to toe with baby wipes until he said they could take showers in the house. She didn’t know you could shower there. He gave her a hard time about it later. She just thought it was weird to shower at a stranger’s.

“But not weird to have sex there?” I said.

Timothy laughed, "That's what I said!"

I asked him how they started seeing each other.

"Well," he said, "For one, I asked about you." He said that if she could get me to do some scenes together we could make a lot of money. Hot twins.

She had to get on a plane to go back home, but he convinced her to have pancakes. He always wants pancakes after a scene, but can't because of the carbs. He gets two pancake days a month, his cheat days, and Jasmine was special and he wanted to spend the day with her. He'd to take her to the airport after.

He told me that he even told her that the best part of industry sex is not using a condom like you have to with civilians. I asked if they called regular people "civilians" and he was like, "Yeah, we do."

I couldn't think of a good way to ask, but I had to know. "What did the tattoo above her pussy say?"

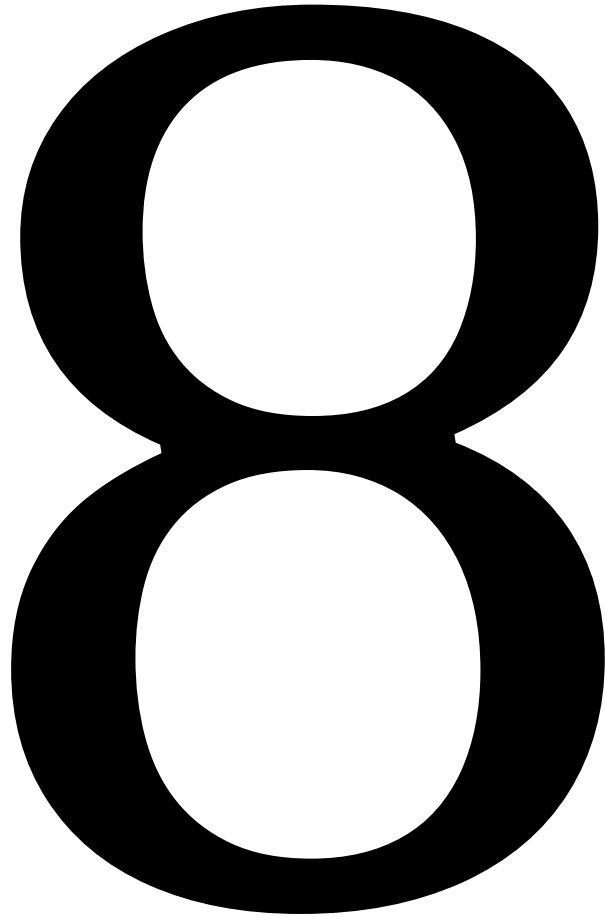
"It was...you know I don't remember exactly. It was a classic. Like Italian I think."

"Do you know the translation?"

"She wouldn't tell me."

"And you didn't google it or anything?"

"No, I guess I didn't really think about it too much."



I hugged Katie and asked her, "How are you doing?"

"Shitty."

"Ready to go?"

"No! I wanna still drink." Katie supported herself against a wall.

Sherman and I turned away from her. "Can you stay with her? Get her home or bring her back to our place? Someone needs to be with her, but I can't be here anymore."

"Sure, but are you OK? We can all leave."

"She said she wanted to stay."

"Hey, Katie. Why don't we all leave? You can stay with us and we'll get Señor Moose for breakfast," he said.

"No, Sherman! Stay and drink whiskey for Jasmine with me!"

"At least get her to drink some water," I said. He went to the kitchen.

I hugged Katie. "I'll see you later. Have fun with Sherman."

"Thanks for making him stay and drink with me," she said.

He came back with a water. "Why don't you drink this?"

"I ordered a whiskey."

9

The next morning I went out for coffee before Sherman and Katie got up. Katie was wrapped in a blanket on the couch drinking a coconut water when I came back with a cardboard tray of coffees.

“Morning,” I said.

She squinted at me through her wild hair, “Morning.”

“How you feeling?”

“Not as bad as I should. Sherm made me drink a bunch of water.” She peeked inside the blanket, “Thanks for the clothes.”

“You want coffee?”

“God, please.”

I sat down beside her. She rested her head on my shoulder, “You still want to go to The Moose for breakfast?”

“Sí,” she said, “But I’m not ready to move yet.”

“We’ll wake Sherm up when you’re ready.”

“Don’t do that. He can sleep as late as he wants.”

“He’d sleep until noon if he could.”

“Good,” said Katie, “I might take a nap then.”

She was silent and might have fallen asleep.

“Hey?”

“Yeah?” she mumbled into my shoulder.

“I need to ask you something.”

“What?”

“Do you know what Jasmine’s pubic tattoo said?”

“What!” she coughed.

“Timothy the porn star kind of said she had one.”

“How’d it even come up?”

“It just came up. It was a such a crazy conversation. He said we looked a lot alike and asked me if I had any tattoos.”

“He said she had a tattoo above her pussy, but didn’t tell you what it said?”

Katie looked straight at me, “Fucking weirdo.”

“He said he couldn’t remember. He was kind of dumb; I mean, he’s a porn star.”

“What else did he say?” asked Katie.

“He told me he had been seeing Jammy.”

“I knew that,” Katie said.

“Did you know they weren’t using protection?”

“Jesus,” she said.

“He said that was the best part of sex with industry people: you don’t have to wear a condom. He called regular people civilians. I can’t believe she was stupid enough to fall for unprotected sex with a porn star. It’s really not safe.”

“Jesus, Lauren. Leave her alone. I’m glad she was having good sex.” Katie leaned towards me and said like a challenge, “I hate using one.”

I couldn’t say anything. “Can I have some of that coconut water,” I finally managed.

She handed it to me, “But I always make him get me Plan B.”

“Jesus, Katie.”

We drank our coffee in silence.

“Is it because of Jasmine that you weren’t using one?” I finally asked.

“Goddammit, Lauren! Leave her alone. For once give her a break.”

“I am trying to understand.”

“There’s nothing to understand.”

I took another drink of coffee and we sat there a long time. I finished the coconut water.

“Want another?” Katie shook her head and I slumped back into the couch.

“I just wonder what that tattoo said.”

“Why do you care so much?”

“I don’t know.”

Katie started crying, “You should have asked her when she was alive then.”

“I know,” I hugged her.

She sniffed and wiped her face.

“I know,” I said again.

My phone started vibrating on the coffee table, but I let it go.

“Jesus, that is so loud,” she hiccupped, “Please turn it off.”

I picked up the phone, but didn’t recognize the number so I hit ignore and set it down.

“Who was it?” Katie sniffed.

“Don’t know.”

“Can I sleep more?”

“Whatever you need,” I said.

Katie had lay back down on the couch, facing the cushion. I put some Kleenex on the coffee table near her head and sat on the edge of the couch, scratching her back. My phone vibrated again.

“Lauren,” she whined.

“I’m sorry,” I said, “They left a voicemail.”

10

Mom was OK on the street and getting into Nordstrom's, but the first poor salesgirl that came up to us made her lose it. All the salesgirl did was ask if she could help us find anything and Mom started bawling. Everyone felt horrible: Mom for losing her daughter and crying in public and for making the girl who was just trying to help feel bad. And the girl for feeling like she made Mom cry.

"It's all right, we'll just need a minute," I told the girl.

I hugged Mom and she settled down a bit and left her to talk discreetly to the salesgirl.

I got close and said, "We will need some help, but my sister just died. She is probably going to cry again; I'm sorry. Don't feel like you have to help us just because you happened to be standing in the wrong place. If you want to get someone else we understand."

The salesgirl's eyes widened as I spoke. She began apologizing and scurried off. Mom was half-heartedly sifting through a rack. A woman about Mom's age dressed like a Condé Nast editor approached us.

Mom turned to me and whispered, "Are you sure you want to do this? You don't have to do this."

I nodded. The saleswoman told us her name was Nancy and asked us what we were looking for. Mom managed to tell her that she was looking for a dress for her daughter to be buried in. I rubbed Mom's arm. I said I would try it on since we were the same size. Nancy led us to the mirrored fitting lounge and told us to sit and relax. We sat on the leather club chairs and Mom held my hand while Nancy searched. The

first salesgirl came with glasses (real glass – from the eBar) of water and handed them to us like we were at a spa.

“Thank you,” we both said.

Nancy came back with some dresses, her arm through the hangers and hung them up on the nearby hooks. She came back with classy, fringy, flowy, hippy event dresses.

“Do you think you want to try any of these on?” She asked gently. Mom touched a cream one with her finger and sat down again.

I took the dress and Nancy led me to a room, “Come out whenever you are ready, Lauren. No rush.”

I put the dress on and waited. I checked my email then Pinterest. I checked myself in the mirror to make sure my face was somber enough. I dropped my shoulders and left the room.

“I really like it,” said Mom, “I think Jammy would have, too. What do you think Lauren?”

“Yeah, I think she would’ve,” I said.

We stood there staring at each other; not even Nancy knew what to do next. Mom stuttered, “Um, a...” and raised her hand just a little, “Lauren, Honey...would you mind lying on your back for a second?”

I turned to Nancy, “Is it OK?”

“Yes, dear,” Nancy answered.

I gathered the dress against the back of my thighs and sat down on the ground. I smoothed the back of the hem and lay back like I was finishing a sit-up. I

had crossed my legs at the ankle when I first went back, but decided that they wouldn't arrange a body with her legs crossed. I lay with my legs snugly pressed against each other, but Jammy would open her legs. As I relaxed and allowed a speck of light between my thighs I smiled a tiny smile. I quickly changed my face when I realized what I was doing. My eyes were closed the whole time so I don't know if Mom or Nancy noticed.

Mom said, "Please stand up, I'm sorry; I can't believe that I made you do that," and hugged me. She started to cry again.

"It's fine."

I apologized for the scene as Nancy led me back to the room. After Nancy rung us up for the dress she asked if she could hug us. Mom wasn't usually one to hug strangers, but she agreed.

"You're a good mom," Nancy told her.

11

I cornered the funeral home director and told him I had a question. He folded his hands in front of him. I saw the unbuttoned cuff of his white shirt under his suit.

"It's about seeing the body. Jammy. Of my sister," I whispered, "Can we go to your office?"

He motioned and began to walk next to me. He shut the door. I sat in one of the chairs that looked like part of a dinette set.

"I was wondering if there is any way that I could spend some time alone with my sister?"

"We have the family viewing scheduled tomorrow from 1pm-3pm."

"Yeah, I know, but I was hoping for some time with just us. We were twins you know." He looked at me.

"She was very beautiful."

"Yeah," I said.

"You can go in there anytime," he said.

"Could I come back later so my family doesn't have to wait for me and I can be alone?"

"We're open until 6pm. We have some 'private' signs. I'll put those out and you should be fine."

The next day at 3:30 Mr. Canty was walking through the lobby in his somber ill-fitting funeral director suit when I came through the door.

"Hello," he said.

"So I wanted to be with my sister's body alone like we talked about before."

“Yes, I’ll get the signs.”

“Same room?”

“Yes, It’s just there,” he pointed down the hall, “I’ll meet you there.”

Mr. Canty walked to the reception desk and talked to the woman seated there.

Jasmine Donaldson was written in white plastic letters outside the door. Mr. Canty approached with a private sign on a silver post in each hand. He set one down in front of Jasmine’s door.

“I have one more after this one, too,” he said, carrying the sign around the corner.

“So I can just go in?”

“Go ahead.”

He closed the door behind me. I looked into the casket, at Jammy lying there in one of her favorite dresses: a vintage black Yves St. Laurent. It was a beautiful knee-length A-line she found at the Salvation Army. She did the repairs herself. It was a little classy for her, but she would wear it for special-special occasions. Mom felt so bad about the Nordstrom dress she couldn’t stand to let Jammy be buried in it. This is better anyway. She actually wore it. She looked young lying there, younger than we were. I pulled out my phone and took a picture of her: young and dead. The phone made a camera sound and I jumped.

I don’t know how long I sat there waiting to feel all the grief I knew I was supposed to.

I went around the doors in the room and locked them quietly. I walked around her body a couple of times then stopped. I lifted the front of her dress above her hips and they had her in nude granny panties. I pulled them down and shuddered, catching my fingers on her stubble. I couldn't read the tattoo it was in Italian. Reception was shitting there so I could not get a decent signal to google what it meant. I had to hold the panties down to get a clear photo for later. I took a few more pictures then flipped her dress down and smoothed it.

I sat down and the granny panties really started to piss me off. She would never wear those. They must have put those on her because we didn't bring any. Jammy always talked about being a commando. She would want to be buried without underwear. I knew it. She would want me to do it. I stood up and lifted her dress again. Pulling wasn't doing it; the underwear was getting stuck on her butt. It took all the strength I had to push one side of her up enough to get the panties over her ass. Then I had to do it again from the other side. It was like sliding a couch then hitting a lip in the doorway. Her legs were so stiff and heavy it felt like she was fighting me. They just wouldn't give, but I worked the panties long enough to get them over her shoes and dropped them onto the floor.

I tried to put Jammy back to normal as fast as I could. Her arms, dress, and hair were all a little off from my efforts. I pulled the hem of the dress out from under her and tried to smooth and arrange her. I made little pulls on her dress to straighten it. I combed her short hair with my fingers. It was all passable, but not quite professional or sleeplike. I took pictures.

I was sweating.

I put the underwear in my purse and sat back down and waited to feel guilty for...I don't know how long.

I looked around the room unlocked the first door. When I tested the handle the door practically opened itself. Mr. Canty was standing right there.

"Oh!" I said, "You scared me. I didn't realize you were right there."

"I'm sorry," he said, "Mind if put the signs back now?"

"Sure. Just let me grab my purse and I'll be on my way," I said.

"No hurry."

I shut the door and hurriedly walked to the other doors, unlocking them before grabbing my purse. I passed Mr. Canty hauling signs on my way out.

12

At the gas pumped I sat staring at the underwear and Kleenex in my purse. I pinched them between my thumb and forefinger and held them away from as far as possible. I checked the side and rearview mirrors and looked behind me before getting out of the car. I left the door open and dropped the panties and Kleenex into the trashcan between the pumps. They didn't fall very deep.

When I was pulling out into the road I saw a group of maybe four or five middle school boys cutting through the gas station. I watched them in my mirror as I drove. They stopped at the trashcan.

"Oh, no. Oh, no," I said, "Shit, shit, shit."

I turned around on a side street. By the time I was back the boys had passed and were walking down the road in the other direction laughing and pushing each other. I went back to the gas station and saw the underwear still sitting there.

I emptied a half-full bag of almonds into the other trashcan. I turned it inside out and wore it like a glove to pick the underwear out of the trash. The bag bulged, but I was able to close the zip-lock seal and put it on the floor of the passenger seat.

The boys were gone. I sanitized myself and the steering wheel with Purell from my purse then drove away.

I pulled to the left curb about a half-mile from our house. I looked around, but no one was out. I cracked the door just enough to drop the underwear bag by the curb.

Sherman was re-watching *Golden Girls* from the beginning on Netflix in track pants and a Warrior Run t-shirt. He had signed up for the run and gotten the t-shirt, but never actually did the run because he had an emergency at work and had to go

in. I called it his “shame shirt.” He said that he deserved it because he had to go into work and had done all the training so the actual race was just like a victory lap and he was going to do it next year so he was going to wear it. He only wore it around the house, though. He was indignant with me, but embarrassed to risk someone asking him about it in public.

“Hey,” he paused the TV, stood, and hugged me when I came in the door, “How was it?”

“It was OK,” I said.

“Babe,” he squeezed tighter.

“I’m OK.”

“Can I do anything for you? Are you hungry? Want to watch something?”

“No, thanks, though. I’m fine.”

“Do you want to watch *The Girls* with me?” he asked.

“I think I might go for a run.”

“Do you want company?” he asked. I looked at how the t-shirt clung awkwardly around his emerging belly.

“No, stay here. I’ll go by myself.” I patted the small of his back.

“Are you just saying that, but really want me to come?”

“Enjoy *The Girls*,” I told him.

“You sure?”

“And the card attached would say, ‘thank you for being a friend,’” I sang.

He smiled and watched me go to. I went to the bathroom and washed the sanitizer layers off.

I changed into running clothes and went to the living room to stretch. Sherman was eating rice cakes from the bag. My tight pants and flexing in front of him there was a good chance Sherman would want to have sex later.

I stood up to stretch my quads and Sherman said, "I'm glad you are going for a run; I think you'll feel better after you finish."

I got up and put in my headphones without starting the music and tussled Sherman's hair as I passed.

"Have a good run," he said.

"Have a good sit," I said.

I walked down the steps, started my running playlist and began to run, backtracking down 59TH straight to the discarded almond bag. As I approached I slowed to bend to pick it up in stride. I raked my shellacked fingernails across the asphalt when I swept at it. I switched the bag to my right hand and checked my left for damaged nails. The shellac held up really well. I ran through the neighborhood squeezing the bag. After a mile I left my course and stopped in front of the trashcan in front of the library. Kids were skateboarding at the skate park kitty corner and people were scattered about in lying in the grass. I rested with my hands on my hips and tried to catch my breath. I looked straight into the garbage and threw the underwear in hard, snapping my wrist to make sure it made it to the bottom. It dropped down and I continued to slow my breathing and stare. Then I went to a bench across the street in the park to google her tattoo. *Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate*: Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.

A Questionable Poetics

Is Brian Fawcett hitting on the need for poetics here?

“The intellectual and cultural proposition underlying much of contemporary artistic theory and practice is that reality in art is secured by subtexts that trail meanings in all directions...These subtexts, almost never explicit, are believed to be accessible to the cognoscenti if not always to the general public...I have made the subtext of this book visible and literal to the best of my ability.”

Why is pleasure part not a serious thing to think about?

Why is the mind more important than the body?

Why is emotionally moving writing considered affecting, while most bodily moving writing is considered pornography?

Isn't the interweaving of mind and body the story of female sexuality?

Is this the one place where female sexual desire is most accepted: erotica of the mind?

Since I take my nephew to basketball games and his sisters Cirque de Solei I am reinforcing gender stereotypes? But he is not interested in Cirque de Solei and they do not like basketball. Maybe I should force them to do reverse-gendered things?

Which will help them more as they grow? Their uncle taking them to do things they want to do or their uncle teaching them lessons?

Can I repurpose Homer to talk about pornography in serious writing?

“For as I detest the doorways of Death, I detest that man, who hides one thing in the depths of his heart, and speaks forth another.”

Is masturbation self-contained sexuality?

Does everyone want to be a sex object *some* of the time?

Is the objectification of an athlete for what s/he can do athletically, without consideration for the totality of that person, different than sexual objectification?

Is projecting a sexual fantasy on someone actually the least of fantasies to project as it only requires the visible body while any other fantasies force invisible, emotional or intellectual attributes on another?

Maybe because of the history of women as objects?

Is the problem with this statement that real people are raped?

That women are raped more than men?

That their rapes are not thought experiments?

It feels different, doesn't it?

Am I aligning myself with the worst of humanity?

Were all the things I learned about sex from pornography necessarily wrong?

Is the most powerful thing about being in the majority is that my heroes don't have to look like me?

Can I pull from anywhere?

Is this possibly the most offensive thing?

Is this Imperialism?

Is this flaunting of power?

Is this being unimaginably out-of-touch?

Is this precisely why people may hate it?

Will people hate me too?

Why don't I feel like pornography is bad for me?

Do I not think it is bad for women?

Do I not think it is bad for a woman?

Do I not think it is bad for society?

Because I am a straight man do my sexual desires intellectually separate me from everyone besides other straight men?

Is it easier for a woman to hate this book than a man to hate this book?

Do I ignore the damage of pornography due to the pleasure it gives me?

Is it that simple?

Is it like eating dessert?

Even if pornographic actors are acting doesn't it matter that they are acting out something real?

Did it matter to me when I had never seen female desire in real life to see it enacted in pornography?

Did it poison me or teach me?

Is that a little dramatic?

Is anything in the world that either/or?

Will I be seen as a pervert?

Will I be seen as porn apologist?

Am I OK with that?

Can I handle that?

I already did it.

Are sexism and sexuality inextricable?

Am I forgiving of Marni on *Girls* because I think she is pretty?

Am I was unnecessarily private?

Is this my run against that?

Why was it disheartening to read in *The Vagina Monologues* about a woman who hated her vagina until a man loved it first, but I am OK with not feeling sexy until a girlfriend repeated her desire for my penis?

Is part of my interest in female characters their apparent need for outside validation?

Is the validation need stronger in women than men?

Is this all some made-up pseudo-science of gender differences?

Is this a list of things I have noticed presented as true?

Am I writing the most male book possible (in the worst kind of way)?

Did I need pornography to have any ideas about sex because I was a shy religion kid without any self-confidence around girls?

By reacting against my Christian upbringing and those beliefs I used to have, am I just latching onto anything contrary to that?

Is pornography a place for males to see female desire, even if faked?

Can I not say?

Can I just think?

Why ask answerable questions?

Is this Jerzy Kosinski passage relevant?

“Almost all of us on the jury were able to discuss and imagine how he had committed the crime and what had impelled him to it. To clarify certain aspects of his case, some of the jurors acted out the role of the accused in an attempt to make the rest of us understand his motives. After the trial, however, I realized that there was very little speculation in the jury room about the victim of the murder. Many of us could easily visualize ourselves in the act of killing, but few of us could project ourselves into the act of being killed in any manner. We did our best to understand the murder: the murderer was a part of our lives; not so the victim.”

Just answer them.

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