

-SYLVIA-

I don't want to know where Dave got the truck he's parked outside. He didn't have it yesterday, and now he does, and I don't care why. I just wanted to move the last of my stuff out of the old apartment.

The couch where she spent the last year and a half sits empty and half-pulled away from the wall where it leaves a big clean-spot stencil of its silhouette against the wall.

Empty cans and plastic one-use dinner trays along with full trash bags and an overflowing ashtray sit unattended to. This is my last cleanup.

I don't know how I did what I did for so long.

No, I do. I had to.

Dave has broken a sweat. He heaves heavy breath as he tries to move our old bookshelf. I point to the den.

"Everything in here we can sell. Except for the couch. I'd feel safer-nah." He cuts himself off.

"You'd feel safer what?"

"No, nothing."

I want to know what horrible thing he may be holding back from offending me.

"No, tell me. You'd feel safer doing what with my mother's old couch?"

He rolls his eyes quick, with a kind of cough.

"I'd feel safer burning it."

Maybe I should feel angry. I don't know.

"Besides. Most of this junk I can't sell."

OK. Now I'm angry.

"This was her stuff her whole life long, Dave."

"Well apparently her whole life of getting new stuff ended after 1993."

"Shut up, Dave. Sale or no, we've got to clean it all out."

I walk back over to the couch and push it back a little further to see the whole silhouette of where the couch was. It reminds me of how cameras use to work; the earliest ones. The way they would capture the silhouette, light and darkness of everything coming through the lens and everything was in black and white.

I get close to the couch. It smells. It smells like stale food, cigarette smoke and stagnant body odor. Dave is right. We might as well burn it.

He's also right about the stuff in this apartment.

All the old junk, like our throw together out of the box coffee table, or the old ass TV from before I was born.

“Are you ready to talk to Arthur?” He asks me.

That's a weird fucking question.

“Why do you ask?”

“You know; you helped him do the crime. You got a lot of money out of it. Aside from that you're in love with him.”

Ah, yes, love. That wonderful floating cup found hovering somewhere between days of being preoccupied and hating life.

“I just don't want him to see me now, like this.”

“OK. If you don't mind my asking how exactly is 'Like this?'”

“Beaten. Weak.”

I look around the room at all the useless crap left from my dead mother.

“I can't do this right now. There's just too much junk that I don't know what to do with. Let's focus on my stuff. I'm taking all of it. We can come back next week. It will be a day or two late, but the landlord can suck my balls.”

“It's so weird when girls say that.”

I look back at the den. Everything in place except for the pulled away couch and her. I swear it hasn't hit me yet. I know she's dead but something deep inside of me just hasn't come around to that fact yet. No matter what I try to tell myself there's a part of me expecting to see her and then go right back to normal. I head to my room and grab my camera to take a snapshot of the Den. Dave was looking out the window to the street below, and the shot

totally worked. It looks sad, and desperate. The room, and just the way he was looking to the street empty and longing, even though I don't think that's what he was thinking.

“Come into my room.”

We spend the rest of the day packing and boxing the crap. Dave says nothing except to ask what box I should put my stuff in. We move up and down the stairs into the cold outside and back again as we load all the boxes of my belongings. Part of me, the same that's not really accepting mom's death just feels the confusion of leaving the place behind. It's like it can't be. What else have I got? Never the less over the four hours of up and down trips most of the major stuff is packed, boxed stacked and moved down to the truck and it's ever sagging suspension. I don't know what I'm going to do with what was moms. I don't think it's a big deal. It will just be thrown away. Let the landlord take it. I don't give a fuck.

I lock the door to the place, and head down to the truck. In the time to do the work the sun has set, and it dark and even more cold street side. Dave and I step in the cab, still not even considering talking, and I close my eyes as we head to the post office; The last stop on the trip.

I haven't checked the mail in a couple of days, so I'm not surprised when I pull out a big pile of bills and junk mail.

I rifle through them, just to clarify who's going to be bugging me about overdue rent and utilities.

Dad. He sent me a letter.

That same spot in me that doesn't know that mom's dead, and that can't find a reason to leave the old place, now it lights up with a clear destination.

Dad.

I have to find dad.

-DAVE-

She's been at my pad a week now. It's getting weird. The school and her work told her to take the week off and get things together since the death. She still made me drive her out to the kennel twice in the late night hours. Why she had to do that she didn't explain.

I've been a horrible host. I stay out late and leave early. Just can't be comfortable around her. So I stay out of her hair, and no matter how long I'm gone she'll still be up, waiting for me to get back. Am I married?

I can't believe she's using my bathroom now. She walks around my place in just a towel. It's wrong. Not right. She's just a kid.

Fuck. Lord God; why did you have her move in with me?

I really really want to know.

Making matters worse has been Arthur who's been having a straight paranoid stint since the robbery and the fire.

He's taking it out on me too. On the phone I get lunatic accusations that I hang up on and then an hour later I get wordy, lengthy apologies that I coddle to. Also he tries hitting on me. What I'm doing at the time, my favorite sports, What I'm wearing, would I ever do it with a guy if he and I were stranded on a desert island.

I'm making millions of dollars because of this guy. I have to force myself to get over his gay fixation on me in order to function as a partner. That I have been especially good at. I've moved out and sold most of the swag online. We've pulled out six million dollars on the whole. Six. Million. Dollars. Two mil a piece isn't too bad. I'm not going to be dumb and buy a bunch of shit to get myself caught. My wealth is undercover. It always has been. Still, what I really want is out of my reach. How, I wonder, can I get my hands on the doomsday fund?

Sylvia wants to go to the strip club tonight.

I don't get girls, man.

She wants to meet up with Arthur. She has big plans. I call the tough guy and he says sure, whatever and that he'll be there.

When we get there I see him from across the room. He's handing out dollars, and

he's unbuttoning his shirt.

Oh, God.

He's got to be coked up. Nothing I can do but try to settle him down. I take Sylvia by the hand, and head over to him. One of the bouncers works his way through the crowd and pulls on Arthur. The bouncer pulls him over to speak into his ear forcefully. Arthur pulls back to retort.

“Let me get this straight, man. A woman with huge boobs can go all the way topless around here, but a completely boobless guy like me HAS to keep my shirt on? What fucked up bullshit is that?”

I check the dancer that Arthur is trying to grope. It's Jessica. Oh, shit. She's not even trying to smile. I can tell how pissed she is. We get towards the commotion and I call Jess by her stage name.

“Hi Dave. Hello...” She stops short.

“Syl” I clue her in.

“Sylvia! Hello, Sylvia. Look I'm kind of busy with this jerk right now.”

“That's what I wanted to say. He's a friend that I'm meeting here. Can you cut him just a little slack?”

Arthur starts messing with the bouncer.

“Come on you Neanderthal shit pile!”

Now I have to jump in.

“Arthur!”

He sees me.

“You shut the fuck up, you understand me?”

Jess asks the bouncer to step back. I step up.

“Who the hell do you think you are? You don't cause any trouble here. I have friends here.”

“Look, Ken, I'm sorry, man.”

“Fuck you, you're sorry! I'm the guy that told you to come here. If you act like a shit, suddenly shit's on me. This I don't need.”

“Like I said, I'm sorry.”

“You don't apologize to me, idiot. Apologize to this fellow here, and to Audrey.”

“OK, then. Guys look, I'm sorry just a little wound up.”

I start to button up his shirt while Jess AKA Audrey goes back to dancing.

“You look like crap.” I tell him

The bouncer leans into me.

“Can you keep this guy under control?”

“Yeah. I promise you. No more trouble.”

“Good.” The bouncer leaves as Arthur shoos off my hand from his buttons.

“I can do it, man, you're not my mom.”

He turns and walks back to a table. Oh, fuck. She's here. That Martha girl is here. When Arthur slides in on the table he puts his arm around her.

The two of us approach and Sylvia speaks up immediately.

“What's Martha doing here, Arthur?”

“Martha, Arthur.” he says. Then turns to Martha. “Hey, say that really fast: Martha Arthur, Martha Arthur, Martha Arthur, Martha Arthur. I only just noticed that. Kind of a tongue twister.”

“It sound's like you're saying 'Mother.’” says Martha.

“Yeah. Other mother!”

Sylvia's more mad for being ignored when she pipes up again.

“I thought this was going to be the three of us talking about business and stuff. Let's not mess around, Arthur.”

“Hi Ken.” Martha says.

Sylvia turns back to me like on a pivot.

“You know her here?”

“OK. This is not about me. Have a seat.”

Sylvia scooches into the booth. Just as I slide in next to her Jess comes over in topless red-hot fury;

“I don't know you, douche bag, you are just lucky that you happen to be friends with Dave.”

“Oh, we're a little bit more than friends, hon.”

Jess and Sylvia look at me snap fast.

If only I hadn't missed his head when I had the chance.

-ARTHUR-

Everybody looks so sexy. Oh my god, I feel so sexy.

Love the music love the women, the guys. It's just a hip, happenin' time.

Dave sips his vodka martini. He's slipped the stripper girl a fifty to sit with us. They seem very friendly.

"So Audrey" I say "You and Dave know each other?"

"Yeah. We were in the same halfway house/convent/orphanage thing together."

"Wow. That is a long way."

"Yeah. But totally embarrassing. I had this crush on him way back when. Then this, this big thing happened to him and I didn't see him again."

"Big thing?"

"Yeah, Arthur. It's a real short story, and I still don't tell it, OK?" Dave says. He's snippy tonight. Audrey starts back in.

"Yeah, so anyway, what happened was he came in one night...what? Two years ago?"

"Yeah. Must have been. I turned 21." Dave responds

"OK, so he looks at me and I'm like 'Dave?'"

"No. No. It was me. I was like Jessica."

"No you weren't."

"I totally recognized you first."

"Yeah. Well you didn't say it first."

"Yeah. Whatever. Tell your story. Tell your story."

"Right. Yeah. Thank you. So I'm like 'Dave?' and he goes 'Jessica?' I flipped out. He was just about to buy a lap dance off of me too. Awkward, right?"

"Did he get the dance anyway?" I ask.

"Yeah. He did, pervy bastard."

With a smirk and nod, Dave confirms while taking another sip of Vodka. Audrey and I are chuckling as I feel Martha's hand come up to my leg, stroking it softly.

A tall black girl walks up from behind Ken and puts her hands on his shoulder.

"OH! Raven!" He goes. "I didn't know you were back. I thought you were headed to San Diego.

I feel Sylvia's hand on my other leg.

"That was like a month ago, you know." Raven says.

"A month? Really? "

"You so strange."

They're both stroking my legs. They both know what the other is doing.

"Look. I got to work tonight but call me later."

"Yeah, sure." Dave responds with what sounds to me like patronizing.

Martha reaches over to grab Sylvia's arm by the wrist. She's digging her nails in. I know it.

"You got my number, right?"

"Yeah. Sure. I mean, Jess has it so if I don't I...No. Yeah. I have your number."

I pull Martha's hand off telling her quietly "No." she recoils. Raven walks away as Jess leans toward Ken.

"She likes you."

"She LIKES me?" He says emphasizing the verb action.

"Or she likes ME?" He says emphasizing the possessive noun.

"She likes YOU."

"Oh. OK. I was wondering."

The song overhead coming to an end is 'Keep the heads ringin' by Dr. Dre.

"That's it. I'm up on main stage." Says Audrey. "I got to go do my last dances."

"Hey, Thanks. Great talking to you. Want to get some coffee when your shift is done?"

"That's forty minutes."

"Hey. We can wait. Got nothing else planned."

"Sounds good."

When Jess turns her back Martha slides out suddenly holding out some money at me with a scornful kind of look.

"I'll be right back."

It's the three of us now.

"Gone finally."

"Oh, Sylvia." Dave says "forgot you were here."

"Ha, ha, ha. Asshole. I have big news you know."

Martha was trying to entice me, I guess. Tonight I have to pay back a favor. Tough for her. The three of us spread out a bit more to look like we're talking business. I wink at her

"What's on your mind, Sylvia?"

"My mom died last week."

"Yeah. I'm sorry to hear about it."

"Right. Well, my dad is still around and I'm going to need some money because I'm going to go find him."

"When are you planning to do this?" Dave asks

"Christmas break. All I have to go on are some old envelopes of his. He works construction. This means he travels a lot to different sites. Where he is now exactly I don't know."

"What's his fall-back address?" Dave asks as if that even means anything.

"What? There is none. He works on the road."

"How's that possible, I mean he mails you all the time right? How do you mail back?" Dave finally strikes a point.

"I e-mail him. That's the only address of his that works reliably. Before that all the letters came and went only through my mom. That's just the way the system worked. By the time I started handling all the mail he was moving all over the place. So I would just e-mail him back."

"So you can't find him?" He goes.

"I will find him."

"With what?"

"With all the money I stole to help you, and you." When she points it is derisive.

Every once in a while it comes back to me how we all have each other by the balls.

I peer up, over and across the bar. "Whole lotta love" by Led Zeppelin is rolling on. Martha puts some dollar bills down her shirt and lays down on stage for Jessica who is dancing front and center.

"Hey, Dave, could you get her back here? She's just trying to pester me."

"Who Martha?"

"Yeah. She's being obnoxious."

I move my head with a quick slight jerk and Dave takes the hint to retrieve the goth girl.

So I slide back in to Sylvia who sips her nearly untouched screwdriver.

"You remember that if you did the job for me that I promised to take you."

"Arthur, I've been a real bitch to you recently. I know. But maybe not now. I'm just really confused, and I don't know...hurt. This is... This is--"

I whisper "Shhhh" and gently kiss her neck. She melts in my hands like chocolate.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to

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