
Lowrise[©]

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It was twenty to break time so I put down the acetylene torch and made for the porta-potties. Grimmel looked up from the drawings; he saw me walking around the steel sections and started his number.

"It's not time to stop yet," he said, lifting his chubby arm at me and pointing at his watch, like I didn't get it.

"So sue me. I gotta take a piss," I said, and went to the end of the yard, where the potties were lined up. Grimmel was still babbling about production, but I tuned him out. My focus was on her. I really didn't have to go, but it was the only way to get away for a minute without Grimmel chewing out my ass.

She was standing across the street. I could make her out through the dust barrier sheet and the passing cars and the twelve o' clock crowd working on their lunches. I walked out of the site and lit up a Camel, checking out the suits from the business district, her crowd. She was dressed in a J. Crew blouse and skirt combo, easy fitting, but tight where it mattered. I leaned against one of the fence posts and watched while she finished her frozen yogurt and chatted with the fat broad across from her.

I was on my third Camel, and the twelve o' clock crowd was thinning, scattering back to their offices with views of the Boston Harbor on one side and Fenway Park on the other. I peeked through a hole in the dust barrier and saw the guys walking back to the lowrise steel skeleton, back to work. I was starting to think maybe I read her wrong when she finally got up from the bench, threw the plastic cup and spoon in the wastebasket, and started for the crosswalk with her friend. She sashayed real slow across the street, and the light took a long, long time to change.

When she got to my side of the street she squealed.

Traffic started up just as she made it to the sidewalk; cars sped by in both directions, making a cross wind that made her skirt flap. She giggled while holding her skirt down, just above her upper thighs. I managed to see all that smooth, ash-nylon encased flesh while her friend watched. She was so wholesome that I got to thinking that maybe I was wrong, and had no business shooting for that.

But it passed, that moment of hesitation, and I got what I was looking for right after the wind died down and she got her skirt under control. She waved goodbye to the fat broad, then looked my way.

Her eyes were like emeralds when the light hits the right way. Even from twenty feet away I could read the ambition there, the hunger of the twenty-one year old college graduate working her way. Her body could be explained in one word: stacked. Top and bottom. She reminded me of the healthy chicks from Newton, the ones I dated when I went to Boston University. She shook her head at me, letting an amber-highlighted curl fall on her forehead. She let me drink up the vision one more second, and then she left, swung those hips the other way, to the law offices one block down. It was a second or two at best, but I knew she saw me. She knew I was a tall-six-foot-one-and that I had dark hair and a goatee.

Grimmel was already doing his number when I walked past him to the service elevator, but I wasn't listening. I was thinking of those eyes, and that curl hanging between them.

Grimmel came by to check on me a couple of times. I ignored him, but I could feel the pig's eyes on my back while I was welding strut sections together. Fat bastard's got a crew of ex-cons, junkies and alcoholics putting together this office building but he checks on me to see I show up late, or if I'm not working.

But I'm not like any of those guys. I went to college; for two years anyway, before I decided it wasn't for me, and that's the thing. I can't figure out what is for me. I've bounced around, done the whole gamut of blue-collar jobs, right up to what I'm doing. Hanging around long enough to get a feel for it, then moving on. Part of it dicks like Grimmel; people who jerk you around 'cause they got a job title that implies they can. That's just part of it; the rest I can't explain.

Before I leave this gig-as I know I will soon-I'm going to let Grimmel have a taste of my fists. What I'm sure I want right now is her.

I noticed her on Monday. I was up here on the third floor and saw her, holding the hand of a guy I thought was her father, till they stopped at the corner and kissed in a

way that had nothing fatherly about it. He had money all over him, literally. His suit hung on him like an old sack. Money or not the best tailor in the world can't hide a decaying body. I remember him dabbing at his bald spot with a silk handkerchief and grinning like an idiot at whatever she was saying. They walked across the street, with him hanging on to her waist like she was a lifesaver, and I knew she was working him like a puppet.

And strangely enough, it was after that revelation that I wanted her, more than anything. More than the issue one, volume two G.I. Joe comic book. The one I took a paper route for when I was ten, 'cause my mom wouldn't give me money for it. More than that sweet little coed from Brandeis College; the one I chased for an entire semester, and after I had her once, I didn't want anymore, 'cause she wasn't what I was looking for.

The rest of the week was the same. I'd made it a point to be near the intersection when she went by. She was good; she'd wait for the light, using up all those seconds after it had changed to green, and at the last moment she'd turn her head my way, just enough to let me see her profile and a glint of those emerald eyes. Then she'd go on her way, to let the old man worship her.

Yesterday I did a little overtime. I was still on the third floor when she went by, waiting for her ride. He came around, opened the door for her, and just before she eased into that Volvo, she looked up, right at me. Then she planted that sweet ass on that fine European leather.

Today was Friday, and five o' clock was coming up. No overtime today.

She was there when I walked out, aloof but screaming for attention. I lit up a Camel and leaned against a fence post, taking my time to light up and inhale. Then I just stared at her while she watched the passing cars. She looked my way once, quick, like she was looking at something past me, then turned her attention back to the street and the sluggish traffic. It was enough cue for me. I went over.

She paid no attention when I stood next to her, but I expected that.

"Boyfriend's late today," I said. It wasn't a question and she knew it.

Then she turned to look me over. I remembered then that I'd spent the whole day at a construction site and smelled like dead dog. Chicks can make you careless that way, but if she got a whiff of my scent she didn't show it.

"He's working late tonight," she said. Her voice was clear, but a little raspy.

"That's a shame," I said, "to leave you behind and stay in hi cubicle. Not right to you."

"Gotta make a living somehow," she said, not really defending him. She was looking straight at me now, and as good as she looked from a distance, she was something else up close. She was like those chicks in the Noxema commercials, so fresh and healthy-looking that anything next to them is a terminal case in comparison.

"Anybody can make a living," I told her, "not everyone can live it up."

She smirked, and shook her head in amusement, and that curl fell on her forehead again. "What does that mean?" She asked me with her head cocked.

"Everyone's gotta unwind sometime, you know?" I gave her a second throwing the hook. "Where do you go relax?"

"I usually go to the Black Rose, on Liberty Street. Around ten-thirty." She told me all this like she was reading a boring report and before I could think of a follow up a car pulled up alongside her. Not his black Volvo. A Toyota with three chicks inside. I stood there and watched her get in and drive off.

I couldn't tell yet if she was what I was looking for, but I wasn't going anywhere just yet, so why not try.

I went around McKinley Square before I found the place. I had to get around the undergrads from Northeastern University to get inside. It made me wonder if I'd run into someone I knew from when I was taking classes there. For some reason that bothered me. I didn't want to be recognized by anyone from the recent past.

After scanning the main room I found her upstairs, sitting by herself on a stool, resting her elbows in a high table. I went over.

"What are you drinking?" I asked her.

"Midori melon works for me. With ice," she said.

I went to the bar and got her drink and a Rolling Rock for me, and took the stool across from her.

"Thanks," she said after I handed her the drink. "What's your name?"

"Ken," I told her. "What's yours?"

"Stacey," she told me, then sipped from her drink for a minute. She put it down and asked me, "What is your real name?"

That really didn't shock me; it just meant she was an old hand at this kind of game. It made want her more. "I just told you," I replied, a little more defensive than I wanted to come out. I'm used to chicks finding out about stunts like that, but not till afterward, when it's time to move on. Looking back I'd say she neatly cut off an escape route for me. "What makes you ask me that?"

She shrugged, took another sip from her drink. "A girl has to be careful who latches onto her."

"Like that old geezer latching on to you?" I knew I was hurting my chances, but I couldn't resist sticking it to her. She looked at me, her eyes matching the cool green of the Midori. "He's a different kind. He has to hold on to something or he sinks. You can swim, but you have no direction."

After that I didn't bother with the usual lines. We were both way past that. "What about you? What do you do when you see me coming your way?"

She replied with another question. "How often do you do this Ken?"

"How often you go along with it?"

She laughed. Her teeth could be the after picture in whitening toothpaste commercial. "We aren't going to get anywhere tonight this way," she said, real soft. One good thing about this place was the music. No techno music blaring; just smooth jazz, low enough so we didn't have to shout at each other, and perfect for this scene.

"Where do we want to get tonight?" I asked her. We didn't bother with double-meanings anymore, and three Rolling Rocks and four Midori's later we were riding the red line back to her place.

We were exploring each other's mouths as soon as she closed the door behind us, and tripped on God knows how many things on the way to her bedroom.

After it was over I found I wanted her again. And again and again.

After the fourth time we lied quietly on the bed. With the sound of breathing and nothing else I started getting uncomfortable. This was the time when they talked, when they wanted to know about how many I'd been with, about heartbreaks, the time when they went looking for scars in the soul, but she was content to lie there, uninterested. It bothered me.

"Stacey?" I asked, breaking the silence first.

"Yeah?" She answered lazily.

"Nothing. I thought you'd gone to sleep."

"Nope."

"You were lying so quiet..." I prompted.

"No. Just lying here."

"Alright. I thought-"

"Ken, honey," she started, "if you got something to say, say it. If you got one more left in you, roll over and use it, if not, let me rest. I have to spend the entire day with him tomorrow."

I leaned on my side to look at her. She was lying on her back, hands laced behind her head. Her breasts and stomach were dark contours; inviting, but I was afraid she'd slap my hand if I tried.

"Ken?" She asked me softly.

"I hope you don't mind me not showing you the way out, but I'm comfortable, and I don't want to change positions. Besides, it's not that hard to find." I looked at her shifting positions, getting under the covers. All the anger, stupid indignation, confusion, the sudden jealousy, must have stunned me, 'cause I don't remember getting dressed in the dark. I was reaching for the doorknob when she spoke again. "I'll see you when I can get away Ken. Goodnight."

I walked out without replying, and slammed the front door on my way out.

I resisted the impulse to do it all say Saturday, but Sunday night I called her. No answer. I didn't leave a message either.

Monday noon she didn't show up at the park to eat lunch, or walk by the site in the afternoon. Couldn't reach her at home that night either.

Tuesday was the same, but I got her on the phone that night.

"Hi. What are you doing?" She asked once she verified it was me.

"Nothing."

"Good. Come over then," she said, and hung up. No preamble to what would happen once I got there, no goodbye, nothing. I went anyway, of course.

She greeted me in a robe, her hair still damp. She guided me into the bedroom, casually talking about how busy she'd been the past three days. It was the first time I saw her apartment; it was chrome fixtures and colored leather contrasting with white walls. I didn't get to admire it. The lights went out and we were back to Friday night, and I willingly let her get me there. Three times, till we were lying side by side in silence again.

"Where've you been?" I asked, pretending to sound uninterested.

"I've been busy. With him," she answered just as carelessly. She waited a few seconds before saying, "He says he's in love with me."

"Who?" I asked, knowing damn well who.

"You know who. The old one with the Volvo," she answered. From that answer I knew she had her eye on that car; she could smell the leather seats. "He says he'll take care of me."

"What are you going to do?" I asked her. I heard her shifting in bed, her body making soft rustling noises against the sheets, then I felt her hand on my chin.

"You shaved your goatee," she told me coyly. I had, and forgot all about it, and now felt myself blushing, and felt her breath on my neck. "He's all by himself tonight," she said, taking little nips at my jawline. "He's working late all this week. I made sure of that over the weekend."

Even though I was expecting this in a way, to actually hear it, was scary.

"Stop it," I said, not really meaning it.

"It'll be easy. I got keys to the place. You do the rest," she said, working her way down my chest.

"No!" I whispered, feeling a part of me going hard, and another going soft inside me.

"Just make it look like a break in. Break a window or something," she said huskily, under the covers near my crotch by now. I marveled at her knowing the right name for it, this girl who had never seen the inside of a jail, save in movies.

Mustering whatever little I had left of my free will and instinct of self preservation I pushed her away. She made a surprised grunt in the dark while I grabbed my clothes and escaped her lair. She might have been laughing as I ran. I'm not sure.

The next day I was restless and erratic at work. Grimmel cursed my existence for every mistake I did with the thickness of the connections I welded, and I couldn't even hear him. My attention was on the street, on whether she would cross it to have lunch at the park, and whether I would run away or go to her if she did.

I wandered around the city all that evening, wondering what was the pull she was exerting on me, why I wouldn't stay away from her, even as my steps guided me to her doorstep that night.

The scene of the previous night repeated itself, and this time I was sure I heard her laugh as I ran away. When I got to the first intersection I realized I was out of breath. I'd been running. That and I also grabbed her shirt in the dark instead of mine.

The next day I walked out of the site for good after I hit Grimmel. Fat bastard got in my face once too many times, poking his fat finger in my chest and warning me if I fucked up one last time he'd skin me. I twisted his finger away, breaking it in the process, then I clocked him in the chin.

More restless wandering, pointless self-exploration, only to end at her apartment again. I fought my conscience one last time, saying no again.

The next night, Friday, one week after we started our dance, I let her finish what she started Tuesday night, and agreed to her solution. I didn't stay there very long after that. She told me we had to act fast. He'd been talking about wedding plans.

That was an hour ago. On the way I stopped by the lowrise site and picked up an eighteen-inch piece of rebar. A quarter-inch in diameter. Perfect.

Now I'm inside the offices of Jensen, and Folter, attorneys-at law. From the far end of the hall I can see the office with the lights on, the fourth one on the right.

I don't know which one's harder to believe; that the old bastard actually willed a

chunk of his estate to his 'dear and beloved assistant,' or that I'm actually standing here, about to walk into a gig I won't be able to walk out of, like I've always done before.

And yet, I can't feel too bad for the old man. He fell under the same siren spell I did, doesn't know any better than I do. And she's safe; back at the apartment, waiting for me to tell her that her old man is lying in his office with his skull blasted open and his brains all over his degrees on the wall. I can't understand why I won't leave right now. Or is this what I've been looking for all along?

It's the third time I've taken a step to that office, then stopped to consider. On one hand, go through life like a fish in murky waters, just like she described me. Or I could hang with Stacey for a while, if that's her real name...and besides that...goddamn it! How long will it be before she starts scouting construction sites, looking for my replacement?

THE END