

Homelands Pt 2 Ch 01

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Frank receives a reward from Brianna.

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Silas' costume parties were not your typical costume parties. The men who'd come as centaurs had physically transformed so that they actually had the lower body of a horse. Women who came as angels had feathery white wings and halos, while the devils had leathery black wings, horns, and tails. I saw at least one genie whose body seemed to be made of nothing but smoke from mid-thigh down. To be sure, some of the guests wore more conventional attire, but even they were far from ordinary looking. If you took any single one of the guests and placed them in a mortal party, they'd absolutely steal the show.

I hardly spoke to anyone. But then, there wasn't a lot of conversation taking place. Everywhere I looked, there were threesomes, foursomes, and moresomes.

The air rang with the music of sex. Grunts, moans, sighs, and muttered curses. Skin slapping against skin and telltale slurping sounds. I drew a deep breath and the sweet yet pungent stench of perfume, sweat and various other bodily secretions filled my nostrils.

It wasn't with any of my five natural senses that I realized just how unusual the party was, though. The world around me hummed. Just walking about, taking it all in, I felt my Libido quiver. Once, when I walked too close to a cluster of carnality, a blue bolt of sexual energy would jump off one of them, arcing across the empty air to strike my bare skin. I'd experienced the electric ecstasy before, but only up close, from a partner who I'd assumed had done it on purpose. I'd never seen it randomly strike out at passerby like that. Their frenzied efforts could almost lead one to experience a contact climax the way one could get high simply by being in a room where other people were smoking up.

For a time, I contented myself with that vicarious pleasure, because I couldn't help but feel like that cartoon coyote when he ran off a cliff but didn't fall until he looked down.

I had no business being invited to this party. Silas had yet to grant my request for asylum. And he had plenty of loyal subjects who went their entire lives without ever attending one of these things. Mostly minor nobles, sure, but I was in no better standing than they.

"Hey there," a soft voice called from the shadows under one of the arched doorways that led back into the palace. "Fireman."

I walked across the courtyard towards the voice, adjusting my suspender straps. The entirety of my costume consisted of them, a pair of black silk boxers with flames emblazoned on them, thick boots, and the characteristic helmet.

When I was a half dozen paces from the doorway, one of the women in the nearest mound of flesh peeled herself away, stood up, and reached out to take my hand.

From the shadows, I heard the rumbling growl of what had to be the largest wolf the world had ever seen. It snapped its jaws, and I felt the reverberations in my bones.

The naked woman who'd reached for my hand pulled back, shoulders hunched, and after a few cautious steps, turned about and hurriedly walked away.

Had I thought the air charged with sexual energy a moment ago? For the briefest instant, I felt nothing but a slight autumn chill, smelled nothing but the rank stench of sweat and dead, rotting leaves underfoot. My Libido went cold.

"Sorry," the voice said, sounding soft once more. "I saw you first."

I forced a chuckle.

But the woman who stepped out into the night took my breath away, and I almost forgot about that haunting growl. Just like that, I was under the spell once more.

Her skin was the lightest blue, her hair dark indigo. The difference in shade made for almost as deep a contrast as with women who had very fair skin and black hair, like my mother. That was a look that had always held great appeal for me. This woman's coloration was like an exotic take on a familiar favorite.

Her full lips were purple. Her big, round eyes were the same color, and so bright they almost seemed to give off their own light.

For just a moment, I wondered how I hadn't noticed them when she'd been standing under the arch. Then they dimmed and they were ordinary eyes once more. Well, not ordinary. I didn't know many women with purple irises. But they no longer emitted light.

She had a delicate bone structure, with a thin nose, high cheekbones, and sharp chin. Her lashes were long and full. Amethysts dangled from her ears, set in intricate silver. They were the same color as her lips and eyes.

My eyes made their way down past her neck. She had an extreme hourglass figure. A waist so small that I was sure that if I wrapped my hands around it, I could touch my thumbs together beneath her navel while pressing the tips of my other fingers together above her tailbone. Despite that tiny waist, she had breasts larger than cantaloupes, broad hips, and full, shapely thighs. My cousin was one of the only women I'd ever met who could claim the honor of a waist that small, and she certainly didn't have curves like that.

The exotic beauty wore a loose-fitting black camisole, black panties, and a string of purple beads tied around her waist. A few additional strings of beads clacked about her thighs. I guess they were meant to be a skirt, but they didn't cover much. Her bare thighs would scarcely have been any more exposed if she hadn't bothered with anything between waist and ankles save her panties. Her pretty little feet were adorned by purple crystal heels.

The heels were easily six inches tall. If I hadn't augmented my height, she'd have stood a good two or three inches taller than me.

The woman held her hand out and said, "I'm Lily."

"Frank," I said. "A pleasure to meet you, Lily." I kissed her hand.

"You're new around here."

"Yeah. Refugee. From the Third Autumnal Court. Hoping to be granted asylum."

She planted one hand on a hip, and raised a cocktail glass that hadn't existed a moment ago to her lips. The liquid inside might have been some kind of wine, but if so, it wasn't one I'd ever seen. Neither white nor red, it was light blue. "So if you haven't even been granted asylum yet, how'd you get invited to one of these little shindigs?"

I offered a faint shrug. "His majesty sent me to live with this family. Suspected the father of plotting against him. Turned out he was, and his wife and daughter either were too or simply weren't going to let him go without a fight. They seduced me, cuffed me, and, well, I don't know what they planned to do from there, but it wasn't fuck me, and it didn't look likely to be pretty." I paused, remembering what it had been like to devour two women at once. And to smash the father's face into a bloody pulp with

one punch when he came home. I'd never considered that our powers could just as well be used for something like that. And would prefer never to have to do so again. "The story doesn't end well for them." Or for me. Nominally, at least, I'd Devoured those two women in self defense. Or at least under circumstances that led me to fear for my life, correctly or not. But since then, I'd thought more than once about doing so just for the rush. I'd nearly retched each time the thought came to me, but the fact that I had at all made me rather uncomfortable. "Our majesty was rather pleased with the outcome though."

"But not pleased enough to grant you asylum?"

"I'm to go live with another family of suspected dissidents," I said.

She studied my face, presumably looking for a reaction. Finding none, she said, "Maybe you've proven yourself too useful?"

"That's a terrible thing to say. I'm sure his majesty intends to grant my request once I've adequately addressed his legitimate concerns."

She laughed, laying a hand gently on my upper arm. "I get it. Don't worry, he's plenty preoccupied just now. Can't imagine he's eavesdropping on any conversations."

I scanned the courtyard as if looking for someone more interesting to talk to. Not that I was. But I thought it might be useful if she thought so.

Her Libido first receded then swelled. She reached out, took my hand, and, without waiting for a reaction, led me inside the palace. "I could feel you from across the garden, you know. You weren't one of the minor nobles in the Third Court. One of the big families. What is it, the Orwins and the Farriers?"

"My mother is an Orwin, my father a Farrier," I said. "Where are we headed?"

"Have you ever been with a moonlit woman?" she asked.

"Not yet, no," I admitted. For that matter, I was only pretty sure that when she referred to herself as moonlit, she meant that she was from the Shadowed Glade of the Moon.

"Well," she said, sipping her drink. "I've never fucked a fireman. So that works out."

I spun her around, pinned her against the wall, and kissed her deeply. As I did, I threw all my energy

at her defenses. She was strong. So strong, I thought there was no way this would work. But after a few moments, either I broke through or she stopped resisting on her own. It was small enough, but as intended, she experienced an orgasm.

"Just a little something I picked up from my cousin," I said as I pulled back.

Though Brianna had come close to managing that a few times before, the first time she'd actually brought me to climax with but a kiss had been after I'd arrived here. There was no need to mention that though. After all, I was supposedly trying to escape her, not meeting with her every few days to deliver updates on my progress.

"I wish I could say I'd learned all the lessons my family had to teach before my own exile," she said. "I'm afraid I was something of a disappointment to my father."

"Ah, but how much less interesting would the world be for our kind if not for girls with daddy issues?" I asked.

A look of shocked indignation briefly passed over her face. But her Libido told a different story. "And do I take it, then, that you've no hangups about your mother?" she asked.

I offered her a brief grin. "Touche."

"So, don't you want to know *why* my father was disappointed with me?"

"Not really," I lied.

Lily huffed in exasperation. "You really know how to charm a girl, huh?"

I took her hand in mine, ran my fingers lightly over her palm. She fought to hide a shudder, and failed. "Honey, if I was trying to charm you, you'd know it. Besides, I think it's you who's doing the pursuing here."

If she noticed the complete disconnect between my words and my actions, she didn't say so. "You've no idea who you're talking to, do you?" she asked, with a wry smile.

"Maybe I do. Maybe I don't. Maybe I don't much care."

She stepped closer to me, laid a hand on my bare chest. "Well, all right then. It'll be a nice change for me. To be able to be just some girl."

"Yeah, yeah. I'm sure it's a huge challenge for you. Cause, what, you were on the fast track to becoming queen, when you gave it all-"

Whoops. Too far.

For a moment, I thought sure I'd get to see just how big that wolf had been.

Lily sighed. "Can we just skip the rest of this ritual and get to the part where you're inside me?" Blushing, she added, "You'll have to forgive me. I tend to be a bit blunt."

"No apologies necessary," I said.

I led Lily back to my room.

How she walked in those heels, I have no idea.

She tasted the way I imagined potpourri might taste. Not as sweet as most of the women of my family, but still unlike any mortal woman. And well worth savoring.

Though she was certainly strong, she was weaker than Brianna. Maybe on par with my mother or Iva. More aggressive than either though. At first, I wasn't sure if I liked that or not, but as the hours wore on, I found myself leaning more and more towards yes.

Eventually, we collapsed alongside each other, panting. Our hands roamed over each other's bodies a while longer before clasping together and falling between us.

"You were amazing," I said.

"Me? You're a fucking god. Silas better watch out for you."

I laughed. "Not hardly, I'm sure."

She rolled her head to the side, smiled at me. Her eyes were otherworldly. But then, everything about her was. "Okay, so I was obviously being nice. Of course, you can't compare to him. But you were good."

I cleared my throat. "Weren't kidding about the blunt part, huh?"

A faint smile formed on her purple lips.

I raised her pale blue hand to my mouth and kissed it. "So, where do you stand in Silas' court? Don't tell me you're a distant relative?"

She laughed. "No. I'd be long gone if I were."

"None of his family is left?"

She hesitated. "Well, there's his sister. Not that you heard that from me. Most people don't know about her. He doesn't let her out much. Too afraid someone will Devour her. But every so often, he invites one of us to have a threesome with him and her. Usually just his Shadow, Alice, but I've had the pleasure once myself."

Jack-fucking-pot. "But he's Devoured the rest?"

She nodded. "Mostly, yeah. Some died before the purges began a few months ago. I hear one of yours did for his daughter. They say he was never the same after that."

"I see."

Lily's voice went grave. "I'm not going to regret telling you that, am I?"

"No, no no. I swear. I've crossed one too many monarchs."

"Good," she said. "I'd hate to have to Devour you."

"Curiously enough, I'd hate that too," I said.

"Well, then I'm sure we'll keep that little tidbit between us."

"Naturally," I said.

"You think I won't know if you tell anyone. But I will."

I laughed. "I won't. I promise."

The lie came so easy, it surprised me. But it seemed to convince her.

Or so I assumed, since, a few moments later, I was in her mouth.

The sun was not just up, but fairly high in the sky before we finally decided to sleep.

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After Lily left, I showered. But I did not linger, as good as the warm water felt on my aching body. Brianna would want to hear the news about Silas' sister straight away. And after all of my cousin's promises about how richly she'd reward me if I brought her something useful, I was looking forward to seeing how she'd react to this.

As if pushing through a heavy curtain, I moved through worlds. There had been a time not long ago that such an act would have left me doubled over, panting for air.

Back before I'd Devoured two women.

Women who'd merely sought to protect their family. Yes, there was a plot against the king. And there was a case for self-defense, what with the way they'd restrained me. But even so, it wouldn't do to lose sight of just how I'd come to be so powerful. If I wasn't careful, I might find myself looking for a situation that would "force" me to Devour again.

I wouldn't let myself become that.

With a shudder, I straightened my back and made for the court room. I found Brianna there, sitting atop a new throne. It was carved from marble, with graphic images of men and women coupling. Few enough of whom appeared to enjoying themselves.

Last I'd seen the court room, she'd still sat atop the gilded oak chair that had served for generations. It had been beautiful and majestic, and surely more comfortable than this cold hard thing. But there was no question that her new throne sent a powerful message.

A minor nobleman whose name escaped me was prostrated before her, his hands in shackles behind his back. Dom stood behind the man, face impassive. He clenched and unclenched a fist that I'd almost failed to notice was not flesh, but stone.

Good to know I wasn't the only one who was getting more comfortable with his powers.

Brianna looked up at me. "Well, isn't this a pleasant surprise." She flashed a brief, thin smile. "Hello, Frank. Have you got something to report then?"

I nodded.

"Dom, finish up here, will you?"

"As you wish, my liege," he said.

Brianna climbed down from the throne. She wore a loose-fitting brown dress with a heavily embroidered red vest sewn into it. It was pleasant enough, but probably the least revealing thing I'd ever seen her wear. On the other hand, her best asset had always been her face anyway. At least in my mind. But all the same, there seemed to be a message in that too. Like she was making a point of the fact that she didn't need to reveal her body to make men's mouths water and knees wobble.

And she didn't, truth be told.

Her skin was like porcelain. Despite its fair hue and her red hair, she had not a single freckle on that gorgeous face of hers. The diamond-stud protruding from one nostril seemed almost dull in comparison to her large, green eyes or her impossibly white teeth. Her cheekbones were prominent, her jaw delicate, her ears slender and elfin. Her hair, currently tied up and just a bit off to the side, was thick and vibrant.

She padded over to me on her bare feet, took my hand, and led me to a small sitting room separated from the main chamber by a velvet curtain. Inside, there were stand-up mirrors in either of the two corners nearest the main chamber, and a heart-shaped bed, piled high with red and pink pillows and covers, against the far wall.

Brianna took a seat on the bed, and patted the thick quilt beside her in silent command. I sat down. She took my hands in hers. "Let's hear it."

At first, I was nervous about how I'd manage to avoid telling her too much about Lily. Or whether I'd be able to. Which I probably wouldn't have been, had she been interested.

But thankfully, she wasn't.

I wasn't sure why I felt guilty about breaking my promise to Lily. I hardly knew her. But, nonetheless, I did. And being able to leave her name and most details about her out of my report somehow assuaged my guilty conscience a little.

Unfortunately, I didn't have much more detail to offer about the woman my cousin was interested in. I

knew of her existence and that was it. Lily hadn't even been able to give me a name. Or had chosen not to, more likely.

Still, as disappointed as she'd seemed for a moment, when it became clear that I'd told her all I could, Brianna kissed me. Almost affectionately.

If the intent had been to disarm me, it had succeeded. If not, then it would appear I understood my cousin even less than I thought I did.

"I can't tell you how pleased I am, Frank," she said, sounding very much as though she meant it. "And I have *just* the reward for you."

"Oh, and what's that?" I asked.

She smiled, leaned in close, and dropped her voice to a whisper. Breath warm against my neck, she said, "Something you'll never forget again."

"Again?"

"Mm-hmm," Brianna said. She gave my earlobe a light nibble before leaning back.

With a great effort of will, I managed to get a few cylinders of my brain firing again. "We're talking about restoring memories?"

"That's right, cutie," my cousin said. "One in particular. A memory that was not just placed under a veil, but sealed away in a vault."

My head spun. I had no idea that was even possible.

Suddenly, I wondered how many *other* parts of my life were not just hidden from me, but going to stay that way no matter how much energy I harvested.

"You're going to like this one," Brianna said with a giggle. Then, raising her voice, she asked, "Isn't that right, Aunt Ellen?"

The curtain eased back and my mother walked in.

It had only been two weeks since I'd last seen her, but I felt like I was seeing her for the first time in years. Her raven tresses, snow-white skin, full red lips, and big brown eyes were captivating. She

certainly wasn't as pretty as Brianna, with her soft cheeks, broad nose, and obvious signs of maturity. But this, her true face, was so much more beautiful than the one she'd worn in the mortal world, it was almost hard to remember that this woman and the one who had raised me were one and the same.

At any rate, if Brianna looked best from the neck up, it was the exact opposite for my mother. Her waist was a few inches wider than my cousin's, yet her figure put the queen's to shame. Curves like that just weren't found on women that were otherwise so thin.

And, unlike the queen, she wore an outfit that made sure that you'd notice precisely that.

Her full thighs were mostly left exposed by her white opaque knee-high stockings. The stockings were attached to a red silk garter that perfectly matched both her lips and her panties. Her enormous breasts were brought to full prominence by her tight white bustier, a garment that had been patterned with red hearts to match the rest of her ensemble. Tying it all together, she wore a red choker and red patent leather heels.

"Hi, honey," my mother said as she draped herself in my lap, sitting sideways across my thighs. "I've missed you." She planted a soft kiss on my cheek. "I hope you're being careful over there."

"I missed you too, Mom," I said. Then added, "I am. As much as I can be. I promise."

"You better be," she said. "I won't forgive you if something happens to you."

Won't forgive *me*?

Of course, it wasn't like she could say that she'd blame Brianna. Not with the queen sitting right beside us. But her words had sounded more sincere than not.

Nonetheless, by way of response, I kissed her. Not the lustful kiss of foreplay, but the tender kiss of lovers reunited. It was intoxicating.

On the one hand, I very much wanted to fuck her brains out right then and there, without wasting any time on pleasantries.

But on the other hand, the simple little kiss felt perfectly appropriate, and I didn't want to do anything to cheapen the moment.

I heard the bed creak and felt it rise as Brianna's weight, such as it was, departed. I opened my eyes briefly and saw her come around to stand in front of me, looking down at the heartfelt reunion with a

bemused grin. After a few moments, she gathered my mother's inky black hair up in her delicate fingers.

I took that for the signal it undoubtedly was and broke the kiss off.

"Now, you mustn't blame your mother for holding out on you so long," my cousin said. "It's going to take a lot of effort to open the vault back up. More than she could manage on her own. More than even I could, probably."

"I'm sorry, baby. I've wanted to give this back to you for so long. But without her majesty's gracious assistance, I simply couldn't." Mom's eyes were wide and vulnerable.

"It's okay," I said. In truth, I didn't really know how to respond, since I had no idea what memory they were going to return to me. But I couldn't bear that look in her eyes, her palpable fear at the thought that I might be mad at her. "I understand."

"Please don't hate me," she said, running her hands through the short tufts of my hair. "It was your father's idea to do this to you in the first place. As I guess you're about to see. If I could have convinced him to help me undo it, I would have. You have to know that. But you know how stubborn your father can be once he puts his foot down. Like he thinks it's an affront on his manhood to back down, even if he comes to accept that he was wrong."

I kissed her nose. "It's really okay."

She hesitated a moment, staring at me. At last, she said, "I hope you still think that after we're done."

"Oh, he can't possibly stay mad at you, Aunt Ellen. You know that," Brianna said.

I was pretty sure she was right.

I hoped so, at any rate.

"Shall we begin?" my cousin asked.

My mother sighed and bobbed her head in assent.

Four hands pressed their fingers against my scalp. I gasped as I felt them sink past the skin. It was like my skull offered no more resistance than the surface of a pool of water. Yet, though there were now twenty holes in my head, I felt no pain.

When the memory returned, vivid didn't begin to describe the experience. I relived it.

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I sat in the living room with my computer in my lap and my headphones on. But no sound was coming through them. I'd had the movie I was watching on pause for a few minutes now, while I tried to overhear the conversation my parents were having in the kitchen.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that Dad stood with his back against the kitchen counter, and Mom was pressed against him. His hands were wrapped around her tiny waist.

But that made no sense. My mother's waist was anything but tiny.

Two very different images of both my father and my mother seemed to be flickering in and out of view. Or, rather, the realistic images, the ones that were so familiar, were flickering in and out of view. The other images, the ones that looked like they had obviously been based on my parents but were still quite alien to me, seemed much more stable.

Both versions of my mother were short and had exceptionally fair skin and dark hair. But for one, that fair skin was completely unblemished and entirely too firm and youthful. Her lush, vibrant hair had only the faintest hints of gray, when it should have been limp, dull, and generously shot through with silver. Most strikingly, the fantasy version of my mother had to weigh half as much as the other one.

The two versions of my father were not quite as different. For one thing, even the idealized version of him still looked to be a good deal older than me, whereas the alternate version of my mother could have been in her twenties. For another, even the ordinary version of my father was in decent shape. Not nearly as fit as the other one, but the difference was still much smaller than between the two versions of my mother.

My mother had taken on a figure that no woman could ever have come by naturally. For starters, the aforementioned waist. Admittedly, even the sexy version's waist wasn't actually *tiny*. There were women with smaller waists, if not a great many of them. It just looked comically small because of her figure. Her breasts were the size of watermelons and her hips were probably twice as wide as her waist. Then there was her ass. Good lord, her ass. It was huge, smooth, and too well shaped not to have a good layer of serious muscle beneath, but looked like it still had to be nice and soft.

I was basing that on the fact that Dad had the hem of her negligee hiked up, and since she wasn't wearing anything but a thong beneath it, when he gave her glorious white orbs playful little slaps, the

resulting jiggle was visible even from the living room.

Mom whimpered softly. "Honey, stop. Frank's just in the other room. What if he sees?"

"He's on his computer, and he's got his headphones on. The house could be burning down around him, and he might not even notice."

"Well, that's kinda true," she agreed. "But still. I'm sure he glances up every once in a while. And when he does, he doesn't need to see my fat ass hanging out in the open!"

I wasn't so sure about that last part, though they were more than a little right about the first bit. Ordinarily, anyway.

"Wait, you *don't* want him to see that?" Dad asked.

"Of course not! What are you talking about?"

He let the hem of her negligee fall back down, covering her gorgeous humps.

My breath caught. I knew I should feel terrible about thinking such thoughts. But that body was unreal. It was like I wasn't even lusting after her at all, in a way. A little pathetic, sure, in the same way beating off to erotic cartoons was pathetic. But the woman in the kitchen was so far removed from reality that it hardly felt like there was anything particularly immoral or incestuous about the thoughts I was having.

Except, of course, I knew better. That was just what I wanted to believe. Whatever she looked like, this was indeed my mother that I was drooling over.

"So you don't like the idea of your sons lusting after you?"

"We've talked about this," she said.

They *had*?

I almost dropped my laptop.

"Well, see, that's the funny thing," Dad said. "We did. And I *thought* we agreed that we were waiting until Nat comes of age."

Waiting...for what? What would change in three years, when Nat turned eighteen?

Mom spoke slowly, drawing each syllable out. "And. That's. Changed. How?"

"You tell me," Dad replied.

Mom pulled away from him, crossed her arms under her heavy breasts. One leg slipped back behind her, and she rested all her weight on it as she arched her back to glower up at my father. That did wonderful things to her taut ass cheek.

"Honey, if you're trying to say something, just go ahead and say it," she said.

Dad laughed. "Okay." He paused, gathering his breath. "I know that you've been fucking Dom for the past two weeks."

If this were the cartoon Mom's otherworldly figure almost made it seem to be, my jaw would have hit the floor and my eyes popped out like telescopes.

For a split second, I thought maybe I hadn't heard him right. But I was sure that I had. It wasn't impossible that I could have misheard the name. Don could easily be mistaken for Dom. But I didn't know anyone by that name, and even if Mom and Dad did, given the context, there was really only one thing that made sense.

My father had just accused my mother of having an affair with her oldest son.

After a minute or so, Mom sighed and said, "Actually, it's been more like five months, not two weeks. But then, we were being a lot more careful at first than we have been lately. I told him he was going to get us caught, but you know how well he listens."

Dad laughed. "Is that all you have to say for yourself?"

"Um," Mom said, looking down at her bare feet, "no, I guess not. I have to admit, it was a lot more fun doing in secret than it would have been if I'd asked your permission first."

My father just shook his head, a bemused smirk on his face.

What. The. Fuck.

When Dad had said they were going to wait until Nat came of age, he must have meant precisely

what I thought he meant. Nothing else made sense, given the rest of their comments.

Nothing else explained why his reaction was the same it would have been if Mom had decided to buy a bigger television than they'd agreed to get.

"I *tried* to stick to our agreement. I really did. You don't know how many times I've been tempted to seduce him over the past couple years. How badly I wanted to make his eighteenth birthday special. Or his twenty-first. I didn't do any of those things. But then, when he was home for Christmas this past year, he started pursuing me," she said.

Because, of course, that made it okay.

And wasn't that *just* like Dom. It wasn't enough that he got everything he wanted from Mom, and got every girl he wanted besides. No, he had to have *that* from Mom too.

Realizing what I'd just thought to myself, I winced. What was wrong with me? I should be on the brink of vomiting, not adding "Fucked Mom before me" to the list of reasons why I resented Dom. How did *that* compare to the fact that he hadn't had to pay for his first car but I did, or how Mom hadn't seemed to notice that if things kept going as they were, I just might graduate from college before him, even though he was two years older than me?

"Now, admittedly," Mom said, "I *might* have encouraged him more than I should have. But, really, dear, you had to know when you asked me to wait until Nat turned eighteen before taking any of our sons into my bed that I'd never make it, right?"

The fact that she'd said "any" of her sons did not escape my notice.

Dad leaned down, ran his hands through Mom's gorgeous hair, and planted a kiss on her forehead. "I suppose so. I wanted to believe that you'd wait, but yeah, I guess I knew you'd slip up sooner or later." He chuckled to himself. "The real question is what to do now."

Mom looked down at her feet, one of which was nervously trying to bore a hole into the tiles beneath her. Her teeth dug into her full lower lip. Slowly, she looked up at Dad through her lashes, head still bowed. "Well, now that the cat's out of the bag-

Dad frowned.

The words all but tumbled out of her mouth, she spoke so quickly. "I mean, can you imagine how he'll react when I tell him that we have to stop now, that we have to wait three more years before we

can do it again? He'll have none of it. And when you tell Dom, 'Not now,' he doesn't hear, 'No.' He hears, 'Keep pushing. I'll give in soon.'"

Ain't that the truth.

"So we'll just have to seal his memories in a vault," Dad said. "Unless of course you've changed your mind about letting my mother come live with us? Maybe I wouldn't mind if I didn't have to make do with only seeing her and my sister a few times a year."

Mom's lips tightened. "It's not that I'm trying to keep you from-

Dad sighed, cutting her off with a dismissive wave of his hand. "No, I know, I know. Of course you don't want her living with us. For lots of reasons, none of which have anything to do with what we're talking about now. I get it. Probably even agree. Would be nice if she lived closer to us instead of down in Jersey, but I'm not sure even I want her under the same roof as us. But in less than a year, we'll have three sons who are of age, and I'm supposed to just sit back and watch you have all the fun you want, while all I get is a few quick tumbles at the holidays?"

"Well," Mom said, rubbing Dad's upper arm, "maybe just Dom. I mean, I haven't even touched Frank yet. And you know he won't make himself impossible to resist."

"Does that just mean that you've already fucked him, but you haven't let him talk you into being careless enough to get caught?" Dad asked with a hint of amusement.

"No, I really haven't. I mean, you're right, if I had, you probably wouldn't know. Frank's...different."

I really wish she hadn't said that in the same tone of voice as she'd use to describe someone with a learning disability. Which, come to think of it, she'd once thought I had.

It seemed to me that if your first son was so possessed by the devil that it never occurred to you that maybe, just maybe, it was possible for a child to sit still for a few hours without crying or throwing a tantrum or setting anything on fire without said child being autistic or something, perhaps it wasn't strictly necessary to later tell him that you'd had him tested. Not that I was bitter or anything.

Mom covered her face with her hands. "I don't know. God, this is sick. I can't believe I'm trying to explain why I *haven't* had sex with my son."

"We're not back to playing that game then, are we?" Dad asked.

Mom lowered her hands slowly. They came to rest on Dad's chest. "It's just that Dom is so relentless. And I knew he wouldn't tell anyone. I can see that Frank wants to. But I really did want to behave myself, and as long as I don't let myself have too many drinks when Frank's around, that's possible. It's not easy. At all. But it's possible."

My heart accelerated at that.

But at the same time, it was almost more depressing to know that she was attracted to me. If I'd just been a bit more proactive. Story of my fucking life. I wasn't entirely passive when it came to women, but I was far more so than I'd have liked to be.

Dom, on the other hand, not only struck up a conversation with every halfway attractive woman he met, he did so whether or not she was, at that very moment, with a guy who was very obviously her boyfriend. It had gotten him into more than a few fights, sure. But he'd come out of most of those in better shape than the poor would-be knight in shining armor. And, more importantly, though his obnoxious ways had earned him a few bruises, they'd also gone the other way more often than I wanted to believe was possible.

On top of that, he'd even slept with one of my girlfriends.

Not to mention a few of Todd's. Who were entirely too young for him.

When I took intro psych last semester, I'd thought to myself more than once that Dom was a man with an id but no ego or superego. He wanted, he took. Consequences be damned.

Even though he was exceptionally smart, it was still very much an open question whether he'd ever graduate college, because it was completely beyond his ability to choose studying or writing a paper over going out and getting drunk and laid. He couldn't live within a certain distance of high schools anymore, because one of Todd's girlfriends decided that the only way to convince Todd not to dump her was to bring charges against his older brother. Sure, what they'd done wouldn't have been a crime if she'd been born a mere month later than she had been, but still. Call the law arbitrary if you want, it wasn't like he didn't know she was underage, and what that could mean.

Yet none of that seemed to prevent him from impressing most women. Sure, there were some who saw the same jackass I did when they looked him. But far fewer than made any sense to me. I just couldn't understand what was so sexy about my brother, the convicted sex offender and small time drug dealer, a guy who seemed to be well on his way to racking up an impressive amount of debt from student loans without a degree to show for it. He wasn't ugly, sure, but he wasn't the best looking guy alive either, so that couldn't be it.

Nevermind the stupid sorority girls at his stupid party school though. How could our *mother* look at him and see the same charming ne'er-do-well?

Granted, Mom only knew half the trouble Dom had gotten himself into since he'd gone away to school, because half the time, he'd call me to come bail him out just to avoid her disappointment. But that didn't really matter. Even if Mom knew every single thing I'd helped him cover up, it wouldn't matter. She knew enough of the worst of what he'd done.

Thinking back to intro psych, I guess it was no wonder I'd been attracted to my mother even before I'd seen this fantasy version of her. Which I realized now that I had been. It wasn't exactly Oedipal, since I wasn't jealous of my father. But Mom had always treated Dom differently, and even before I'd known they were having an incestuous affair, there was still a sense in which she'd acknowledged him as a sexual being in a way that she didn't seem capable of doing with me. We never had a conversation about being safe or anything. Which maybe was because she knew I was responsible, or because there was less reason to worry about the son that was always in a committed relationship rather than bringing a different girl home every night. But I couldn't help feeling, on some level, like it was because my mother just wasn't capable of putting the words "sex" and "Frank" in the same sentence.

After all, if the reason Mom never talked to me about practicing safe sex was because she trusted that I was responsible, why was it that when I first went away to school, she'd told Dom that she expected him to call me at least once a week to check in on me? As if *Dom* was some kind of role model. If she knew that I now called *him* every week to make sure he wasn't in financial or legal trouble, how would she react to that?

I pushed those thoughts away.

Mom had said all I needed to hear. So what if she didn't realize what a fuck-up Dom was. So what if I felt compelled to help him out whenever he needed it, because I knew that whatever else I could say about him, if I ever had needed him the way Mom seemed to expect me to, he'd do the same. Or do his best to, until some girl came along and distracted him. I couldn't really blame him for that, and I couldn't hold it against Mom that she was attracted to him instead of me, because it wasn't *instead* of me. It was in addition to. All I had to do was stop being so timid.

I forced myself to tune back in to the conversation taking place in the other room.

"--then we're going to lock both their memories away in vaults and we're really going to try to behave ourselves until Nat comes of age, okay?" Dad was saying.

"We?" Mom asked.

Stroking Mom's hair, Dad said, "As a gesture of solidarity, I won't lay a hand on my mother or sister until that time either."

Geez. With all my obsessing over my mother and my brother, I'd almost let that go by unnoticed. What was wrong with our family? And was it really the whole damn family?

Aunt Cindy was not an unattractive woman, for her age. But Grandma Kaitlin? Unless, of course, she was hiding a fantasy version of her somewhere, as my mother apparently was. Which I guess would have been no less absurd.

Mom nodded. "Okay. I guess, in that case, I really can't complain. I know that won't be any easier for you than it will be for me to resist Dom."

"So, we're agreed? Once more with Dom, and one time with Frank, and then that's it, right?" Dad asked.

"Yes, honey," Mom said, before going up on her tiptoes to kiss him on the cheek.

After hearing that, I felt an urgent need to run up to my room and jerk off. Several times in a row. But I waited a few minutes to avoid being conspicuous.