



# Seventh Circle

*I would like to thank my mom and dad for getting through this one. They've read everything I've written, even the most messed up and horrific stuff. This is the first thing I've ever written where my mom got halfway into it and said, "I couldn't finish."*

*I would also like to thank Jared Miller and Isla Tarleton for being the first to read the newly edited version.*

*Aubrey Flowers is responsible for making my vision of the cover into reality. Her abilities are a large part of why this managed to come out. Thank you to Karmen Krueger and Dasha Vernet for being my final beta-readers.*

*Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful partner who cuddled me for an hour or so while I read the entire thing out loud. They have been wonderfully supportive of me during the entire process despite how jealous this story makes them. If you're reading this, I love you so much. Thank you all so much.. I like to market myself as being fairly independent, but none of this would have been possible without my friends and fans pushing me up and motivating me to be the best I can be.*

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## Mia

Heaven first bestowed the angel upon me at a party just a week or two after the beginning of my first semester in college. She came through the crowd, seeming to appear from nowhere, then coming face to face with me. The sea of people blurred into oblivion, like a camera losing focus on the background as the subject came into view. The noise of the hip-hop beats, binge drinking, dab-pen hits, and obsessive vaping going on around me disappeared into nothingness. The woman that floated through the crowd to appear before me and Richard was gorgeous; gorgeous was an understatement, for her very presence seemed to stop time itself. I wasn't sure if Richard seemed to feel the same way, but her perfect, blue eyes pierced through people like stars igniting the black night sky with brilliant lights.

"Have you met Mia yet?" Richard asked. I had met him in an Intro to Psychology class in my first week. We sat together and heckled the entire duration of the period, much to the dismay of our professor. At the end of class, he confided in me that his parents were going out of town and he would have the house to himself.

"I want to take you under my wing," Richard told me. He said with a hint of boyish fascination that there would be lots of liquor and cute girls. I wasn't much of a party person, but I was a new kid in a new town, so making friends was in my best interest. With the slightest bit of reluctance that often came when trying a gross-looking mystery meat that smelled oddly appetizing, I managed to drag myself to his party.

Richard was a bitch in the truest sense of the word. From what I could tell by the interior of his house, he was born to rich parents that most certainly spoiled him to the ends of the earth. His JUUL, Xbox One, new iPhone, and relatively new Jeep screamed the same message. The lisp that crept through the corners of his voice when he wasn't consciously trying to hide it added to the obtuse quality of his personality. That's not to say he wasn't a nice guy or anything, but more so to say he was a rich and snobby weasel that bordered on being unlikable just because of his money. He had a habit of popping Xanax and told me that he could hook me up with anything that I wanted. Richard had what felt like a strange bit of sympathy for me from the very beginning, to the point where I couldn't tell if he was

only hanging out with me because I was the shy, nerdy kid with no friends to speak of.

“No, I haven’t,” I said shyly. Her crystal blue eyes were entrancingly beautiful, capturing my gaze for far too long, to the point where I felt uncomfortable staring into them. The winged eyeliner surrounding each eye made her appear all the more angelic, but outside of that, she wore no makeup and did nothing to hide the freckles dotting her cheeks and nose. Her facial features were soft and not overly defined. She had short brown hair that almost looked like an auburn shade in the orange lighting of the room, and with her hair length, she could’ve passed for a boy.

She wasn’t what most men would consider traditionally attractive. She had a rather modest appearance that was a stark contrast to the skimpiness and curves of the other girls at the party. I doubted that many other people were drawn to her like I was, but I thought she was hypnotizing. It felt wrong to objectify her, to put such focus on her appearance. I wasn’t this shallow, not usually at least. Looks were just in the flesh. I usually felt uncomfortable even glancing at strangers, much less practically salivating over a girl I didn’t even know yet.

“Nice to meet you,” she said, flashing a little grin at me and extending her hand outwards. Her eyes gleamed at me as she waited for me to shake her hand. Her voice was velvety and deep, but still retained a sort of feminine quality. From then on, each word, phrase, and sentence that escaped her lips was smooth and like music to my ears, as if she had been rehearsing what to say.

I took her hand in mine, instantly feeling the electricity that came with her touch. We held eye contact for what would have been an awkward amount of time had she not been so beautiful. It was the type of touch that midnight poets would pretentiously obsess over for the entirety of their careers. Love at first sight wasn’t real, but damn, this felt close.

“Well, fuck you then,” she said, trying her best to hide a smile, but her dimples made it much too obvious. It was contagious.

“What?” I looked behind me to see if Richard had heard, but he had disappeared into the crowd.

“I’m kidding, relax,” she said, and we both laughed, only mine felt more forced and unnatural than hers. Her laugh was blissful and bubbly, matching perfectly with her voice. It is rare that one could describe a laugh

as being truly attractive, but hers was. It was musical in pitch and never seemed to devolve into sharp breaths or snorting. She laughed in such a way that you could tell she genuinely found you funny; a hearty laugh that came deep from her belly. My every action was beginning to feel robotic. Every breath I took, every word I said; it all felt like it needed to be scrutinized.

“Michael, right?” she asked, breaking the fit of laughter.

“Yeah, how’d you know?”

“We have English together,” Mia said, tucking a tuft of her hair behind her ear and then sort of tilting her head downwards, looking up at me for a moment as if she was waiting for my next awkward response.

“Oh, yeah, I remember,” I replied with a nervous chuckle.

“You should say hi sometime,” she cooed, scooting a little closer to me.

“I’ll try my best.”

“You know, you’re really awkward,” she said, pausing for a moment, “but in a cute way. You don’t happen to have a phone, do you?”

“I do, why?” I asked, dumbfounded by the question.

“So I can give you my number, stupid!” she said teasingly.

I wasn’t really popular with the opposite gender, so having a woman so openly hit on me felt strange. If someone ever flirted with me, it was always in a situation that was initiated by me; I was shy and generally quite socially awkward, which certainly didn’t help my case. I was stunned at the idea of her even beginning to think of giving me her number.

“Here,” she said, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a tiny slip of paper. Had she been preparing for this moment? How had she even known I was going to be at the party? She didn’t pull a pen out, she just had the slip of paper ready for me. I never thought anything of how prepared she was for this moment. I held my hand out as she deposited it into my palm, letting her nails graze my skin. I couldn’t help but wonder if this was some cruel joke.

“Don’t wait too long to text me,” she said, softly winking at me as one of her friends came through the crowd of people.

“Mia!” the girl barked, “let’s go! Chick-fil-a or bust!”

Mia looked back at her friend, smiled at me, then put her hand up to her ear and mouthed out “*CALL ME!*” Her friend, who I would later learn

was named Breanna, took Mia's hand and pulled her away, leading her through the crowd and out of sight.

### **Benzodiazepines**

In truth, it took much too long for me to find the confidence to dial her number. As soon as I snuck back into the dorm room and dove underneath the covers, I pulled my phone out from my pocket and added her as a contact. In a typical, saccharine fashion, I put her name in as "Mia" with a heart emoji next to it. For a moment, I bashfully considered sending her a quick text, but as it was approaching two in the morning, I thought that I would seem like a creep in doing so. Over the course of the next two days, I regularly found myself thinking about the girl from the party. She was elusive to me. Even though it felt as though she was throwing herself at me and was interested in me, something still felt weird. It had to be a joke, right? I wasn't that attractive or interesting. What point did she see in talking to me?

It wasn't until the second night that I actually made a move. Even though it was a Monday, Marcus, my roommate, decided to leave me and visit his girlfriend on the other side of campus, which made me more than a little bit lonesome. I would have to see her in English on Tuesday, and more than likely, she would be offended by my lack of an advance. I didn't want her to think I was ignoring her.

With shaky hands and a nervous sigh, I opened my phone and went to her name.

"Here it goes, Awkward Michael to the rescue," I muttered to myself, then pressed the call button. The phone hummed with the song of the ringing. It kept going for nearly twenty seconds, leaving me to believe she wasn't going to answer. I almost considered pressing the end button. *Who the hell still used their phone to call? Everyone just texted.*

Finally, I heard a beep, and then Mia's voice.

"Papa Joe's, how can I help you?"

"Mia?"

"Janet? Marty? Who are you people?" she called back. I laughed harder than I should have at the Spongebob reference.

"Hi, Michael," she said finally, "you're old-fashioned. I expected you to just text me."

"Sorry, I guess," I replied with a chuckle.

“No, no, it’s endearing. I like it.” I silently fist pumped.

“You’re not so bad yourself,” I said clumsily. I heard her quietly giggle.

“Thanks, Mikey, but I have a question.”

“Why do you need to make me anxious like that?” I asked. I barely knew her and even then, she had the power to make my heart stop. I was putty in her hands.

“It’s what I do to boys that like me,” Mia chirped.

“Who said I liked you?” I teased, “I don’t even know you.”

“Why are you so shy?” she asked. Time stood still. In a way, I almost felt disrespected by her forwardness. No one had ever asked me why I was the way I was; most of my friends merely respected the fact that it had always taken me awhile to completely open up, yet no one ever seemed to confront it. It wasn’t that I was ridiculously anti-social or riddled with anxiety; more so that I was just a tiny bit hesitant to talk to people I didn’t know very well. In just seconds, she had taken the conversation from playful teasing, down into the nether regions of my being. She was truly something else... or perhaps I was already becoming obsessed.

“I guess that’s just the way I’m wired,” I spoke softly to her in a voice that was barely above a whisper.

“Everyone is the way they are for a reason, whether they are aware of it or not,” she said.

“There’s not really just one reason. I guess I sorta grew up in a small town. My family... We were really, really, *really* poor. I was an only child. I was always the nerdy kid who got left out. I didn’t have many friends growing up, much less a girlfriend-”

“Wait, really?” Mia interrupted with a quiet gasp. I wasn’t sure why, but butterflies seemed to flutter around in my stomach.

“I’m sorry, go on,” she said.

“It’s okay,” I said, my smile creeping into my words, “I guess I got lucky. I had nothing tying me down back home: Being the nerdy kid paid off. I got a 1400 on my SAT, 30 on my ACT, and held a 4.0 pretty steadily in high school. I ended up with an academic scholarship and now I’m here.”

I wasn’t damaged goods by any means, and I certainly didn’t intend to just drop everything on her, but she was completely silent, listening to every word I said and taking them in like each was precious and should be guarded at all costs. At the same time, my mind flashed back to my

experiences using Tinder and occasionally talking about myself to random strangers, where if I said just one thing that was wrong or unattractive, the girl I matched with would stop responding or caring. Mia seemed completely invested in my every word. For once, I felt like it was okay for me to mess up around a woman.

“Well, I’m happy about that. I’m happy I met you,” she replied somberly.

“I’m happy I met you too, but I have a question for you,” I said, mostly disregarding her compliment but secretly loving it.

“Yes?” She asked. I hesitated.

“Why did you give your number to me?”

“I thought you were cute,” she said sheepishly, “does it bother you that I decided to talk to you?”

“No, it’s just-”

“Just what?” Mia countered back, seeming a little offended that I would even ask.

“It just feels like you could do better,” I stammered.

“Really? Who would be better?”

“Thank you but-”

“It’s not a compliment. Seriously, describe this ‘better person,’ Mister ‘I’m-not-good-enough.’”

“That’s not what I’m saying. Mia, you’re beautiful. I know it sounds weird, but you’re... you’re an angel. You could have any guy you want.”

“So what’s wrong with wanting to talk to you then?”

“Nothing, I just-”

“Michael, I get what you’re saying. Stop overthinking it. I like you. I’ve dealt with a lot of guys who are... well, as conceited as it is, *boring*. They wanted sex because they thought I was hot. For a while, I always thought it was my fault, so I gave them what they wanted. Through each failed, piece-of-shit relationship, I was always giving. They were always arrogant, asshole jocks who felt like they could do whatever they wanted to me. I don’t want that though. It’s too shallow. I haven’t dated since high school because of it. So, I thought I would go out on a limb and talk to you. That’s the reason I was even there last weekend. I wanted someone who felt... right. And as weird as it sounds, when I shook your hand and met you, you felt right. It was fast and deep inside of me, but I went with my gut, and I’m happy I did. You seem like you really are listening to what I’m



saying whenever I speak. You seem like you care. I don't know you well enough to say much else, but I want to, Mikey." It was hard to find words to respond to her with.

For a brief moment, I felt completely blessed to have her. She seemed absolutely perfect. I felt lucky in a way that I had never felt before with a woman.

"I want to get to know you too. You just... are really awesome, all around. It's just surprising to me, you know?" I added nervously, "Maybe I beat myself up too much."

"You definitely do."

"I know," I mumbled.

"Well, stop it. I like you. You don't have to worry about anything, I promise."

"Thank you, Mia, really."

"Mikey?" she said.

"Yes?"

"I'd love to keep talking to you, but we both need sleep. It's getting late," she said. I was a little sad that it was going to be over so soon but I felt a new form of confidence. Someone really beautiful and genuine actually wanted me. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that I wanted her too. I didn't want her in a sexual way, (as wonderful as it would be to lose my virginity to her) but in the purest and most wholesome way imaginable. I wanted to hug her, to talk to her, to hear her, to be with her, and to just have her in my life. For once, someone was interested in me and I was interested right back.

"Hey, Mikey," she said, interrupting my silence.

"Yeah?"

"You should come sit next to me in class tomorrow."

## **Deuteronomy**

To say I was falling for Mia would be an inherently misguided assessment of my feelings. Not to say it wasn't true, or conversely, to say I was "in love" with her, but the hearty sensation of her filling my thoughts spread like an infection, to the point I was almost unable to think of anything else. Falling for someone also has a subtle implication that one is descending with grace. I wasn't falling slowly; more so, it was a steep plummet down an icy slope that ended in a pool of water that made me feel as though I was drowning in my feelings. I wasn't merely descending, I was free falling at the speed of light through space. I felt it every time she smiled at me or texted me after class to say hi.

With every intense affection, at least in young, budding, love, comes the lingering sensation of jealousy. On occasion, I would be leaving my final class of the day and catch her talking and laughing with a male friend or even Richard, and feel that dense, sinking feeling in my chest. Whenever this happened, I tried my best to let her text me first, which she seemed to despise, resulting in us not messaging each other until later than usual. At around eight in the evening after a long day of not texting, she would cave, and finally text me a meekish "hi." When she was a little upset, she always removed capital letters from her sentences for "dramatic effect."

At first, I was simply too awkward and too insecure to be able to completely conceal my anxieties and not let them impact my actions; unfortunately, whenever she would say hi and we got deeper into conversation, all of my worry melted away.

In English class, which was on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, Mia and I constantly sat together. When we weren't in class and I wasn't in a jealous spell, we were texting in an endless conversation. This went on for the better part of two and a half weeks until she called me quite randomly one night. Conveniently for me, my roommate was absent from his bed.

"Mikey," her voice called before I could even manage a response.

"Hey," I said back.

"What are you up to?"

"Just, uh, lying here."

She paused for a moment, as if she was delicately choosing her response from a supply room full of them.

"I'm lonely," Mia said softly.

“Me too. I guess I always am, just a little bit.” I didn’t think about how pathetic I sounded.

“Aw,” she said, letting out a soft chuckle, “that’s so sad. You don’t deserve that.”

“You don’t either. You deserve good things, Mia.”

The noise she made in response could best be described as her smiling. I could hear her exhale through her nose and then her face curve into a grin. We both were silent for a moment, taking in the sanctity of the moment.

“I have a random question,” she asked.

“I have a random answer,” I responded. Her wit was beginning to rub off on me.

“Okay, there’s a reason for it, but what kind of music do you listen to?”

“I haven’t talked to you about it?” I asked, shocked that it had never even come up. I was passionate about music, to say the least; I listened religiously to 80s New Wave and goth bands. In a world full of Xanax-popping SoundCloud rappers, hip-hop-infused country, and bubblegum pop, my tastes were odd and didn’t really match with popular opinion. It also suited my ego to pretend that my music taste made me unique. Most of my music listening happened late at night, in the dark, and with headphones. It felt rare that I actually shared it with anyone, but even still, if there’s one thing I could talk about endlessly, it was music.

“Never,” she replied.

“Don’t laugh at me, please.”

“Please don’t tell me you’re a Johnny Rebel fan or something like that,” she said half-seriously. My mind flashed back to the country singer’s voice crooning out, “Hail to the N. Double A. C. P.”

“I like a lot of New Wave. You know, like Gary Numan, New Order, Joy Division, Peter Murphy, The Cure-“

“I fucking love The Cure,” she interjected.

“Really?”

“Yeah! *Why Can’t I Be You* is probably my favorite,” she added. I had long since overplayed the song on late night drives around my hometown by the time I graduated, but there was something immensely relieving to hear that we had a similar music taste.

“I’m burnt out on it. The music video is so stupid though,” I said. I felt a little worried that I was making myself sound like a nerd. Chances were, she had never seen it.

“I know, right? I swear to God, every time I see that intro with the lips-”

“It looks like a vagina,” I said, to which Mia laughed much too hard for what the ‘joke’ was worth.

“Like you would know,” Mia teased. My heart stopped. What she said wasn’t mean per se, but it stopped me in my tracks. There I was, talking to a girl much more experienced than me. I was still a virgin, obviously, and had never even managed to get my first kiss. I imagined that guys probably fell head-over-heels for her, and Mia embraced that; there was no doubt she was more experienced than me, both romantically and sexually. For some reason, this tugged on my nerves: the idea of someone else having their way with her bothered me.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I asked. Once again, she had caught me off guard.

“I mean, you’ve not lost your v card, have you?”

“I haven’t, but that doesn’t mean I haven’t seen one at least.”

“So, you’re saying you’re into porn then?” she deadpanned.

“Well, not exactly, I-“

“Awe, that’s cute,” Mia flirted.

“How?” I demanded, my face starting to turn red. The humiliation was crushing, but at the same time, I felt that I had to roll off of my stomach and shift my pants around.

“You’re getting all flustered. It’s okay. Sex isn’t even that great.”

“Really?” I asked.

“I guess all the sex I’ve had has been... meaningless. Everyone I’ve fucked hates me now or I hate them. There’s no love.”

“Do you think it would’ve been better if you loved them?” I asked, not really having a good response. “I’m sorry” felt too sheepish, and using it as an opportunity to flirt felt inappropriate.

“Miles better. I’ve read a lot of things about girls giving themselves to their boyfriends and feeling so safe and protected. I’ve never felt that way. It always felt wrong, cold, and like I was being used,” she said, allowing her voice to become quieter towards the end of the sentence. While it was true that I desperately wanted to lose my virginity, I still

wanted to make someone feel that for me. I wanted to make sex special with whoever I did it with; I didn't want it to be wrong or cold. I was dumbfounded as to what to even reply to her with.

“I want that too.”

“One day, Mikey. One day for us both,” she said. As she said that, I began to crave her again. It wasn't a conscious effort or anything that I would describe as impure or “unnatural.” My lust for Mia never became something that was particularly driving or overwhelming. The only significant change that our conversation made was that with the feelings of adoration came a deep-seated desire. I wanted to make love to her. I wanted her to be mine. I wanted to love her and have her love me too. Something told me that she felt the same way about me.

## Inhale, Exhale; Keep It Simple

Our first date came as naturally as our conversations, but surprisingly, I was the one who proposed a “movie date.” It was slightly out of character for me and seemed to be a bit of a role reversal for us, as Mia was usually the more spontaneous one between the two of us.

And so, I found myself in one of the female residence halls on campus at around 9:30 in the evening. Mia’s dorm room was on the third floor, in room 322. I stood alone in the hallway for a moment, taking a deep breath before knocking on her door. I could distantly hear the sound of *Thank You* by Dido coming from a speaker. From what I could tell, it was the original, not the sample from that one Eminem song.

When I finally knocked, I heard a voice that wasn’t Mia’s squeal, “He’s here.” There was a series of quick footsteps that followed this until I heard someone lean against the door with a soft creak. The air was silent for a moment as I felt a person staring at me through the peephole, then the door slowly was pulled open, and a blonde-haired girl popped her head through.

“Are you the lucky guy?” she asked, trying her best to hold a straight face.

“Is that what she calls me?”

She rolled her eyes, then opened the door wider for me to come in. The girl nodded, then allowed me to enter. The room behind her was dark, with the curtains drawn and all of the lights turned off. A small, plastic, water speaker was on the floor, sputtering with the soft beats of indie music and sending multi-colored rays of light across the walls and ceiling. She was wearing grey sweatpants, a shirt that read *Gas Monkey Garage*, and reeked of cheap perfume. She looked me up and down, huffed, and then finally spoke.

“So, what are your intentions with Mia?” she said, a hint of anger rising into her voice. It threw me off, sending me into a series of incoherent mumbles.

“I’m just messing with ya,” she said, letting out a laugh that sounded like a dying hyena. I shuddered at the sound of it.

“I’m Breanna, by the way, nice to meet you.” Breanna softly smiled at me, offering a tiny wave. She was clearly just as awkward as I was. I wasn’t sure if I liked her.

“Michael,” I replied, offering an uncomfortable and forced smile.

“No, your name is Mikey and that’s what I’m going to call you, okay?”

Before I could say something funny in response, the bathroom door came swinging open, and in marched Mia. It wasn’t uncommon for her to look gorgeous, but she had dressed perfectly. She was wearing denim overalls and a white T-Shirt underneath. The overalls squeezed around her figure, muting her curves and the shape of her body. There I was going again, objectifying her.

“Hi,” she said modestly.

“You ready?” I asked her.

“Yep,” Mia replied. Something about her seemed a little off, as if she were nervous about something. She was already being less spontaneous than usual.

“Have fun, you two. I’ll just be here... minding my own business, being a housewife... I guess,” Breanna whined as the two of us walked into the hall, shutting the door behind us.

She seemed oddly contemplative on the way to the movies, quietly looking out the window at the passing houses. This lasted the entire ten-minute drive, until I broke the silence in the parking lot.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, looking over the passenger’s seat to her face, which had fallen with her obvious mood change.

“Nothing,” she mumbled. Her eyes looked dreary and sad, almost like those of a puppy.

“That’s not true,” I replied, unbuckling my seatbelt and popping the car door open. She followed suit, returning to her silence as we entered the lobby of the movie theatre, surrounded by a sea of families and college kids. She huddled close to me, eventually wrapping her arm around mine. As we approached the ticket booth, she moved her hand and grabbed mine. An overwhelming electricity coursed through my hands, then it went up through my arms and shoulders, before finally manifesting itself in my heart. With Mia, it was the first time I had experienced something so extreme for a person of the opposite sex; it made it hard to focus on the fact that I had thrown down twenty-five dollars and asked for two tickets.

She softly elbowed me in protest, but did nothing as the cashier took my money, and the two of us moved through the lobby to the theaters down the hall. Neither of us really watched the movie and we didn’t talk at all,

instead holding hands. I thought about her, and from what I could tell, she did the same about me. Halfway through, she shivered, then pulled the armrest in between us up, before nuzzling herself into me, huddling into my warmth. I couldn't help but feel like I wanted to do more for her. Words weren't enough. I didn't pay attention to a single detail during the entire movie.

For a brief moment, I felt like I belonged completely in a moment in time. I knew she was desperately sad for a reason I probably wouldn't ever figure out, and that she was just compensating by cuddling against me, but I loved every second of it. She was amazing and made me feel like things could be okay, even if not today.

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The movie ended a little past midnight, leaving the two of us to ride home in the silent darkness.

"Did you like it?" I asked, not completely sure how to best approach her.

"It was okay. I didn't pay attention, really," she said. The sound of her voice in the darkness was incredibly relaxing. *God*, I was falling for her fast. She stared out the window at the distant street-lamps.

"Me either."

"I'm happy I got to spend time with you. It always makes me feel better."

"You never told me what was wrong," I countered back, pulling into the parking lot of her dorm.

"Do I have to?" she said. I pulled into a parking spot and then turned the car off. Almost instantly, she shoved the door open, ignoring me completely. For a moment, I thought she was going to storm off, leaving me alone in the darkness.

"Please," I replied, undoing my seatbelt, "I wanna make sure you're okay".

Mia stepped out of the car and quickly walked around to the driver's side, then tugged on the handle, opening my door. She extended her right hand out to me, then pulled me to my feet, until we were face to face. We looked into each other's eyes for what felt like too long, but I knew what was coming before she even did it. She wrapped her arms around the back of my neck, and brought her lips to mine, thus becoming my first kiss. It



was a soft, open-mouthed kiss that I can only describe as feeling like the feathers of angels grazing my lips. I was in absolute bliss, making the moment feel like a thousand eternities. It was wet and suffocating, but not necessarily in a bad way. It was a moon shaped pool that I could reside in for the rest of time. I was shocked (as usual) by her forwardness, like usual, but this time, her lips literally seemed to steal the words from my mouth, until she finally pulled away, looking me in the eyes again. She softly smiled up at me.

“I’m okay, I promise,” she said, “But I don’t want to ruin tonight. Can I talk about it next time?”

I nodded, still focused on her lips.

“Do you want another kiss?” she asked. Before I could reply, she softly pecked me on my lips, then pulled away and grabbed my hands. Almost immediately, I was longing for more.

“I’ll text you later, Mikey,” she said.

## Galatians 5:19

The party invitation came informally from Richard in our Psychology class, who had been skipping class for the greater part of the time since I had met Mia. He told me passively that there was a “real banger” going on that Friday night at a condo near Worm’s Head Lake. WHL, as he referred to it as, was amazing for parties, and he also told me there would be “metric fuck-tons of beer.”

Not knowing what else to do, I decided to invite Mia. We had barely spoken since our last date, and I was a bit worried that she had lost interest in me or I had somehow made her uncomfortable. The second that I asked her, she replied with, “ABSOLUTELY!” in all caps. When I told Richard over text, he almost immediately called me.

“Hello?” I called out.

“You’re going to get laid,” he snapped back.

“What?”

“The fuck you think is going to happen?” he replied, “there’s going to be beer, empty rooms, and you’re pretty much already dating her. I’d bet money she’s going to get in the mood. If not full on sex, it’s gonna be pretty damn close.”

I was appalled, but any sort of intelligent response to Richard escaped me. I didn’t really see Mia in an over-sexualized way; that’s not to say I wasn’t deeply infatuated with her appearance, but my affection for her seemed to run deeper than anything sexual. The thought of having her take my virginity was surreal, to say the least.

“I dunno,” I said nervously.

“She would be your first, right?” he asked excitedly.

“Uh..., yeah, she would.”

“Why are you backing in on yourself, dude? That’s a fucking score! Look, I’d love to talk, but I gotta get going on this stupid ass fucking Advanced Stats Homework. Anyways, bud, I’ll take care of condoms. Don’t you worry about that. Just enjoy it while it lasts,” Richard barked like machine gun fire into the phone, then hung up. What was that supposed to mean: “enjoy it while it lasts?”

“Jesus,” I mumbled to myself. Sex was something that had always seemed out of my league. When I was younger and going through puberty, I was desperate and hungry for sex, as any teenage boy would happen to be,

but my reserved nature made it impossible for me to keep up with the few friends I had. I was a late bloomer and almost always had to listen to other people telling me about how they had sex, which made me uncomfortable and jealous, often prompting me to rarely say little more than one word in response. I was always the odd one out in my circle of friends.

I couldn't even properly fathom walking into a pharmacy and buying condoms. Spending ten minutes looking for a reliable condom in the back corner of Walgreens would be embarrassing enough, but taking it up to the front register and feeling the scrutiny of some old lady as she muttered "have a nice day" would be downright humiliating.

On top of that, when it came to sex itself, I didn't know much of anything about it. Sure, I had seen porn - who hadn't? I had been told before by Richard that the body simply knows what to do, but his sexual advice was usually followed by him complaining that he could never last very long during sex. Keeping this in mind, I spent a little bit of every night in the days leading up to the party reading blogs and tips. I didn't think she would actually try to have sex with me, but in the freak occurrence that she did, I wanted to be ready. Beyond the little bits of research I did on what to do in the situation, sex took a backseat in my head. It was like it was hard to comprehend that I might lose my virginity to her. It didn't feel real.

It didn't occur to me that it was actually real until a few minutes after Richard had picked me up at my dorm and we were going to pick up Mia. We came to a stop at a light.

"Hey, I got you a present," he said with a sly grin. I looked at him nervously from the passenger's seat. He smiled, then reached his hand into a compartment on the door and pulled out a plastic bag, tossing it into my lap. I dug into it, finding a tiny platinum cardboard box of condoms and a silver flask. I recoiled almost instantly.

He nodded to the flask then spoke, "You like bourbon?"

"Yeah..., but why?"

"Confidence," he replied with a wink and a toothy grin.

"Thanks, dickhead," I said, chuckling softly.

"Just go slow. Beer and liquor makes you sicker. Don't puke on her."

"I know, I know," I grumbled.

"Open those and put them in your wallet," he said, "girls think it's trashy when you pull a box out. Trust me, been there, done that." I glared at

him, not having any real response like usual. I tore into the box, which was marked “TROJAN ECSTASY” and had a little subtitle that read, “feels like nothing’s there.” There were three condoms inside, each of which I jammed into my wallet behind a group of one dollar bills. Richard reached his hand over, grabbed the box, then opened his window and threw the box out into a ditch alongside the road, just as we turned onto the road leading to Mia’s dorm.

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I took it upon myself to climb out of the car and ride the elevator to the third floor, rather than bluntly text her that we had arrived. If Richard was right and the two of us were going to end up doing the deed that night, I wanted to at least be a gentleman. I knocked on her door, remembering that we had said we would pick her up at around seven o’clock. I was a bit late, at 7:05, but I didn’t think she would mind. Only a few seconds after I knocked, the door swung open, and then I came face to face with Mia. She had a way of dressing I had noticed that wasn’t very feminine or overly stylish. Mia always seemed very modest with her clothes, and that night wasn’t much different. She was wearing a white David Bowie T-shirt that read “Rebel Rebel” in red text and black leggings that complimented the shirt. As usual, she greeted me with a shy smile.

“Hey, you ready?” I asked.

“Yeah, what time is it supposed to start?”

“Seven, I think,” I replied, not commenting on the fact that it was a party and it didn’t really matter when we showed up.

“I guess we can just be fashionably late,” Mia said, then stepped out into the hall, closing the door behind her.

“I’m sorry I’ve been weird about texting,” she mumbled as we stepped into the elevator.

“It’s fine, really. Has everything been okay?”

“I’m okay and all, I was just worried that... uh, that you-”

“That I was weirded out?” I asked.

“Yeah, that,” she said glumly.

“It’s okay, everyone has their moments. I would hate for you to be weirded out when I get in a shitty mood.”

“Yeah,” Mia said half-heartedly. I turned around to look her in the eyes, which were widening with a hint of sadness.

“You never told me why you were in a bad mood though,” I answered back as the elevator doors came whirling open. Mia turned her back to the door and started to slowly move away from me.

“Can I talk about it later?”

“Fine, but you have to tell me eventually,” I called back.

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I had only been to one party in my entire life, and that was the same party where I met Mia, but even still, it was fairly relaxed by comparison; Worm’s Head Lake was about an hour’s drive away from the college and only had a handful of large vacation homes, which in the middle of October, were completely empty. In turn, this meant that there had to be literal pounds of weed, gallons upon gallons of beer, and at least two hundred sweaty, horny, stoned, drunk college people flocking in and out of the house where the party was. Even as we pulled up the road and parked along the side, where there were a couple dozen other cars, the intense beat of electronic music rippled through the air.

Since we had left the dorms, Mia had shed away her hints of anxiety and sadness, and was beginning to act more like herself. She would laugh at me and Richard’s jokes, bob her head to the music, and by the end of the ride, her hand was intertwined with mine in the backseat. She held onto me as we climbed out of the car, where the smell of weed was already permeating the air like a thick mist.

The inside of the house shook with the beat, the music floating around and loosely riding on the drums themselves. Each drum beat seemed to harmonize with the movement of bodies in the humid air, forming a relationship that only broke at the end of each song, before forming again about thirty seconds into the next. A wave of humidity and heat seemed to punch the three of us in the face as we went through the door. Smart LED strips were positioned in every doorway, pulsating and changing from aqua-blue, to violet, to blood red, to white, and then to neon green. Cigarette, vape, and blunt smoke darted through the air like fog machines at a concert.

The party was like entering into a whole other world. With the deafening beats, flashing lights, dance circles, kegs, and overwhelming heat, I could barely keep track of what was going on or where I was. Richard eventually disappeared into the crowd. The smell of sweat quickly

overpowered all else. After a few minutes of stumbling through the crowd and looking for people we knew (which consisted of almost nobody), Mia finally tapped me on the shoulder and mouthed something at me.

“*WHAT?*” I shouted at her over the music.

She mouthed it again.

“*WHAT?*” I repeated. She smiled at me and shook her head, then put her mouth closer to me and yelled into my ear, “*THIS KINDA FUCKING SUCKS.*”

“*YEAH! I CAN'T DO PARTIES.*”

“*ME EITHER.*”

“*WHAT?*” I yelled out. She covered her mouth to laugh, then took my hand again, dragging me through the crowd and to the stairwell. I blindly followed, passing couples that were making out on the stairs. We climbed to the third floor, where the beat was only a deep rumble in the floorboards and there were only a handful of people floating through the halls. A few of the bedrooms were populated by people playing spin the bottle and smoking weed, so we went until we found one that was completely empty. Mia flipped the light switch, sending dim, smoky light through the room, then closed the door.

“It’s too fucking loud down there, dude,” she said.

“Yeah, and hot,” I added, taking off my jacket and throwing it on a chair in the corner of the room. I felt moist with sweat. At that moment, I became overly self conscious at the possibility of me having pit stains. I never had a problem with them before, but right then and there, I was worried about them. She sat down on the bed, then looked up at me with a straight face.

“Hey, Mikey?” she called out to me.

“Yeah?”

“I just wanted to say.... Thank you. I’ve been a little weird lately. It means a lot that you’ve been so caring. Not many guys would do that for me,” she said, then grinned up at me.

“That’s awful of them. I thought it was common courtesy.”

“You’re one in a million.” she shook her head, “And I’m more than happy I have you.”

“Awe, Mia, I’m happy I have you too,” I said gleefully, inching closer to her, then finally sitting myself beside her. We had a moment where we stared into each other’s eyes, just absorbing each other and loving the

moment we were sharing. My entire body began to feel in love with her, and I'm sure that she felt the same. I was so entranced in the moment that I couldn't prepare myself for her spontaneous kissing on my lips, kisses that traveled down to my neck, until she spoke again, whispering into my ear.

"Michael, do you remember how I said that all of the sex I've had has been meaningless?"

"Yeah, I do," I said in a hushed voice.

"I don't think it's going to be that way with you." Like when I had first met her, everything became quiet; from the chattering of people downstairs, to the music.

"Do you mean...?"

"Yes," was all she said.

What happened next is hard for me to remember or pinpoint. One moment, we were kissing and grinding against each other, and the next, she was taking her clothes off. I vaguely remember seeing her panties and bra, which were purple lingerie, and then I remember thinking that I wasn't the only one who was planning to have sex. It was odd how she had planned to fornicate with me in the exact time and place where I planned to do the same with her, but perhaps it was a sign that the two of us were becoming symbiotic and one.

In truth, our bodies sliding and grinding against one another was something that felt natural, as if the two of us were made to be that way. I had read horror stories about awful sex, erectile dysfunction, and one person finishing before the other, but the entire time, we were in harmony. From our positioning, to our kisses, to our thrusts, to the frantic beating of our hearts. There was a moment where the two of us stopped, Mia looked up from beneath me, then smiled and softly gasped out, "I love you, Mikey." It was bliss. I finally felt as though I belonged. If I could be locked in any particular moment in time, it would've been that one. We said very little to each other the entire time, we just became lost in a blur of feeling. We were no longer two separate people; we were a union of movement, of passion. The world was pink and every sound besides her gentle moans and my gasps for air faded away. As soon as I became aware of that, all of the feeling in the world was gone, and we were lost in a series of instinctual motions. *This is what bodies are for.* When we were finished, I held her tightly in my arms, in disbelief that my first time could be so wonderful, almost as if it were too good to be true.

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Richard was far too intoxicated to drive the two of us home, so we called for an Uber, which arrived only half an hour or so after we had sex. The price was ridiculous, according to Mia, but she was more than willing to pay for it. I was too exhausted to offer anything but “thanks” in response. A black SUV with tinted windows, black rims, and a cross on the license plate came flying down the street, stopping for a moment in front of the condo. Mia looked at me, shrugged, and then I waved my arm to flag it down, to which the driver responded with a small honk.

The two of us climbed into the dark backseat, and we were greeted with a gruff “Salutations” from the driver. I could barely see him in the darkness, as he was wearing all black and had a cowboy hat on. From the gentle blue light that emitted from the console on the dashboard.

“Mr. Hammelton?” Mia asked with a gasp, just as we started to turn around.

“I’m not your teacher, Mia, call me Mark,” he replied. I shot Mia with a curious glance.

“Mr. Hammelton, I mean, Mark, is a family friend. Michael, meet Mark. Mark, Meet Michael. Mark, when did you start driving for Uber?”



## Male Hymen

A few weeks after our first time together, Mia called me at around two in the morning on a Friday night. The annoying ringing of my phone jolted me into consciousness; I sighed, and then put the phone up to my ear.

“Hey, did I wake you up?” she called through the phone

“Kind of,” I groaned, jerking myself upright and holding the phone closer to my ear.

“Baby, I miss you right now,” she moaned into the phone, her voice barely above an impassioned whisper.

“Remember how I said I was housesitting?” She had mentioned it a few days beforehand that she would be taking care of her parents’ house that weekend. Like a fool, I hung up the phone, went down to my car, then took the half-hour or so drive to the house.

When I finally arrived, there was a faint red glow pouring through the windows and filling the night time air; it created a mood that was both eerie and alluring, as if I was climbing into the den of a siren. As soon as I put the car into park and looked at my phone, I saw that I had another text from Mia.

“I’m downstairs. The doors unlocked, baby ;)” it said. Mia had never, ever resorted to pet names with me, not until that night. I couldn’t place my finger on exactly why, but it distantly made me uncomfortable. It was already three in the morning and everyone was asleep. In the horror-movie scenario where some psychopath had kidnapped Mia and was going to use her to kill me, no one would ever know. My parents certainly didn’t know where I was and my roommate was asleep when I left. I chuckled at the absurdity of myself.

I leisurely strolled up the driveway, then up a neat stone path that led to the doorway of the one-story suburban home. A gentle nudge of the door handle revealed to me that it was indeed unlocked, and as soon as I entered, the overwhelming aroma of black licorice tickled at my nostrils. Across the floor were dozens of rose petals.

For a moment, I felt like the star in some overly romantic novel, as it was clear that Mia was most definitely going out of her way to make the experience as sensual and over-the-top as possible, but it was transcending sweet and going into territory that was almost cliché. As I followed the smell and the rose petals deeper into the house, I soon found that the glow

that was penetrating the air were dozens of red scented candles that Mia had put on plates across the house.

The trail took me straight down the hallway, past the empty bedrooms, and finally, to the laundry room, where there was a closed doorway that led to a tight basement staircase. The smell of black licorice grew even more intense, almost to the point of being nauseating, until I went through a second doorway at the bottom of the staircase. This door was crafted from a sort of heavy stone, and upon closer inspection as I tried to shove it open, there was an engraving that was essentially an O with an X through it, and then a second circle going around that. Did they have some kind of family insignia?

I shoved the door open by pushing all of my weight against it, which brought it swinging open with an incredible grinding sound. Directly in front of me was a brick wall that wrapped around the staircase. I turned right and went around the structure to see the space that Mia had prepared.

There were six mattresses in the tight space. Three of them lined the back wall, and another three filled the space directly in front of the back three, creating a sort of mat that went from wall to wall. More candles in front of the mattresses gave the room a red glow that wasn't diluted by any natural light. A brown, wool blanket covered Mia's wriggling naked body. Faint, dissonant moans escaped her mouth as she played with herself, seeming to be lost in a separate world of pleasure. I approached her; her vibrant pleasure and ecstasy were practically infectious, leading me to sit beside her on the edge of the mattress. Almost instinctively, I moved the blanket and cupped her breast with my hands, massaging the skin, running the tips of my fingers over her areolas and grazing her nipples. Her hips bucked in response, tossing the blanket to the side, revealing her perfectly shaved body.

She kept her eyes closed, never verbally acknowledging my presence. It was almost as if she was so deep within herself that she had transcended any form of verbal communication, resorting instead to grunts, moans, and jerkings of her body. Mia wriggled against me as I massaged her breasts. Before too long, I stripped naked and threw my clothes into a corner of the room, wishing to join her in her state of ecstasy. I felt lost in time, as each passing second seemed to last years. Finally, I leaned down over her and planted a kiss on her lips, slipping my tongue inside of her and letting our bodies meet for a moment that felt far too short. As I pulled

away, she wearily grabbed my wrist, then pulled me closer to her.

**“Fuck me,”** she growled into my ear, then put a hand on my abs and shoved me into the mattress in front of her. Her eyes snapped open and a fire seemed to fill them. Whatever impression I had that she was in a state of uncontrollable bliss slipped away as she started to take charge. She mounted me, leaving an inch or so between me and her entrance. Mia used her hands to guide me into her vagina, and slowly, I entered her.

“Shit, I don’t have a condom, wait!” I gasped out.

The second before the chaos began, I was confused by how artificial it felt. It felt cold and plastic, not wet and lukewarm like it had felt last time. Granted, I wasn’t wearing a condom, so that might’ve been why, but even so, for that brief moment, the change was disconcerting. I pushed myself deeper into her, the stiffness of her insides seeming completely unnatural. After the entire length of my penis was inside of her, I did the instinctive thing that pretty much was the makeup of all sex, regardless of with who or what position: I pulled my dick back to thrust into her once more. Doing this naturalistic motion is something I will always wish I could have avoided. Why the fuck did I have to think with my dick? Why couldn’t I have just stayed home?

There was a pain that I can best compare to a whittling knife being used on each side of my penis. I pulled back slow enough to feel the skin being separated, and then instantly stopped at the tremendous pain. I could feel blood beginning to leak itself out from the newly formed holes on my penis. My pounding heart was already beginning to pour all of the blood from my erection inside of her. I cringed and groaned. What the fuck was happening? The layers of skin on my dick were being torn off, shedding away like someone was peeling the skin off of a chicken.

“Fuck! What the fuck?!” I whimpered out, a cramp burning in me as I held my awkward positioning, unwilling to go back outside of her and also terrified to thrust back in.

“Mia, get some fucking help! Please, goddamn!” I growled at her. The pain was blindingly white and immobilizing. There was something lodged inside of her that was cutting into my appendage, that much was clear. Mia barely reacted, instead opting to stare at me as I grunted in agony.

“For the love of fuck, Mia, please. God, god, god, god, holy fuck, please help,” I cried out. Even in the red glow of the basement, I could see blood start to dribble its way along my half-exposed cock. She gazed down

upon my penis and then started giggling like a maniac. It was the same way that she laughed at all of my jokes, but instead of being flattering, it felt insulting.

“Please, fuck, fuck, get off! I think we should call an ambulance,” I begged, still not processing that she wasn’t going to get help, much less what she had just done to me.

“Shut the fuck up, you useless sack of shit!” she barked at me, then started mashing the bottoms of her fists into my chest, like a gorilla pounding the dirt of its enclosure. It knocked me onto my back; I was too weak and overwhelmed with pain to react. She laughed at me again, then spat a glob of saliva into my eyes, just to watch me suffer. She made a triangle with her hands over my stomach, then used it to slowly push herself off of me, shredding the skin even further as we separated. I could barely help but watch as she used her legs to pull herself up, taking a small flap of the skin on my penis with her, blood dripping out from her vagina and spilling onto the mattress. The flap of thin skin slapped against the ground with a wet smack, leaving blood on the cement floor in front of the mattresses.

I couldn’t even focus on the skinless remains of my dick; I was losing too much blood. She marched up in front of me, squatted, then used her fingers to dig inside the corners of her vagina, pulling out the device and letting it fall to the ground. From what I could tell, it was made from clear plastic that had turned red with blood, and she had shoved it inside of herself like a tampon. I hadn’t done anything to her. I felt like I had been a great boyfriend.

She looked down at the blood-covered piece of plastic, then grabbed it with her right hand, laughing maniacally at the very sight of my injured body.

“Go ahead, Mikey, crawl for help,” she said with another laugh, smearing some of the genital blood across her naked body. And so I did, moving out from my fetal position and using my hands and knees to bring myself down to the cement. Everything was becoming blurrier by the second. One moment I was on the mattress, the next, I was halfway across the room, dragging my legs(which didn’t seem to be working properly) across the cement, scraping them and making the blood trail behind me even bigger. Everything burned. Nothing was beautiful and everything hurt.

Just as I got to the stairs, she spoke again.

“Awe, wook at deh wittle babhey!”

“Will you please.... Get the fuck away from me?” I mumbled incoherently.

“*HEY! I LET YOU FUCK ME!*” she shrieked. I was too exhausted and out of my body to tell from which way she came sprinting at me; the only thing I was completely aware of was her foot making impact with my ribcage. She kicked me and kicked me, over and over again.

“*THIS-*” she screamed. With every kick, she said another word. More blood leaked out from my ruined genitals each time.

“*-IS-*” another kick.

“*FOR EVERY-*” this one knocked the wind out of me. I closed my eyes and just let each kick take me, my nerves becoming unable to respond to the vast amounts of pain.

“*-TIME THAT I LET A MAN USE ME!*” she shrieked, finally stopping the kicking. She had pushed me against the brick wall. My eyes didn’t feel like that could open anymore. Every part of me hurt.

“*THIS IS FUCKING REVENGE,*” Mia roared in celebration. There was a moment in which the room was silent, before I heard her bare feet bring her closer to my face, then she kicked me again, slamming my head into the brick wall. Then everything became washed over in black.

## Persephone

The demon's voice knifed itself into my ears as I regained consciousness. The blood was smeared in a trail across the ground to where I was lying. My neck, head, ribs, waist, and legs all hurt so intensely that it was difficult to move. I grunted incoherently at her in pain, my eyes not really able to focus on her. The back of my head was throbbing in agony from where she had slammed it into the wall. A glance down revealed that my penis was basically unrecognizable in a combination of blood, veins, and shredded skin. In fleeting grasps of consciousness, the only things I could focus on were the pain and that I was losing a lot of blood much too fast. The next time I woke up, I could see a small mass of flesh that hurt to look at. I wasn't able to comprehend that she had sawed off the meat of my penis when I was unconscious, leaving just a stump behind.

Mia was curled into the corner on the mattress, with her cell phone nesting itself between her naked shoulder and her head. She was speaking in a hushed voice, tears leaking out from her eyes. Even in the darkness, I could see the blood splattered all over her; on her stomach, her breasts, her hands. My mind flashed back to a CNN news report about "anti-rape devices" that were designed to severely injure rapists; I wasn't a rapist.

"Please send help," she softly wailed, "he's hurt." From where I was lying and in my damaged state, I could faintly hear someone with a deep voice reply to her.

"He tried to force me," she replied, "but I fought back."

*You bitch!* The entirety of my being wanted to scream out, but I was far too weak. Why had she done this? What did I do to deserve it? She had consented, I had heard her tell me to take her. The feeling of her breath on my neck as she asked me to fuck her had cemented itself in my brain. I mumbled a slur of swear words to myself, and she responded by looking back up at me with fake tears trailing down her face. Just before I passed back out, I could've sworn she grinned at me.

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The next time I woke up, I was lying in a hospital bed, staring at the bright sunlight cutting in through the window. I was barely aware of the pain in my crotch, but the headache made it near impossible for me to look back up. I had vague memories of being carried out of Mia's basement by a group of paramedics and policemen. Where was she? What had she told

them? From what I could gather, there was no one in the room besides me; no one to know that I had woken up. A quick glance down revealed that my clothes had been replaced by a white hospital gown. I was numb between my legs, and the very thought of seeing what was left of my private parts disgusted me. I drifted in and out of consciousness for a while, until I saw that the light drifting in the window had disappeared and been replaced with darkness. A moment later, the door on the other side of the bed came swinging open, and then the room's lights turned on, filling the room with a jarring, white tint. A bald man with a small mustache and a lab coat marched into the room, then came alongside the bed.

"Hey. Michael, how are you feeling?" he asked, his eyes darting back and forth nervously, almost as if he wasn't completely sure how to speak to me. In truth, what was I supposed to say? How was one supposed to even respond after having their dick cut off by their girlfriend?

"I feel like shit," I muttered out to him, "Is it gone?"

"Well, no," he said, his face falling into a frown.

"Basically," he continued, "Most of your penis was severed and you lost a lot of blood. We were able to perform minor reconstructive surgery--"

"Please, for God's sake, can I still piss?" I asked, absolutely mortified.

"Yes, you can, just like before. You'll undoubtedly have some discomfort for a little while, and getting erections again will probably take a few months, but unfortunately, any form of pleasurable intercourse will most likely require a prosthetic. There are a number of options through plastic surgeons and skin grafts, but before you even consider that, you need to give your body some time to heal," he said with no emotion whatsoever. I started tuning him out as he explained how much Percocet I was required to take and he told me the name of a clinic that was a few hours away where I could get plastic surgery. After he had finished firing off information for what felt like days, he finally said, "But before you do anything related to that, there are a few men from the police department who would like to speak with you. Do you feel well enough to answer questions?"

I helplessly glared up at the doctor, knowing very well that refusing wouldn't help me. I vaguely remembered Mia saying something about me forcing her to have sex on the phone, but that seemed like such a far-away distant dream that I wasn't sure if it had actually happened. Only the pain brought me back.

It was still hard for me to completely process what had been done to me. I loved Mia. I truly and totally loved Mia. I gave her my heart, my first kiss, my virginity, and for some insane, bullshit reason that I couldn't possibly fathom, she had maimed me, and as if that wasn't enough, she had called the police and told them I had forced myself on her. She was trying to accuse me of rape, and by the ruined state of my penis and obvious signs of a struggle in her basement, there wasn't much telling me that she wouldn't get away with it.

Soon after the doctor had left, two police men stormed into the room. One was a thickly built, bald man. The other was a pedophile-mustached man with a comb-over, to cover what I assumed was a bald spot. The bald one held a clipboard and a pen in his hands, presumably to take notes on whatever I said.

"Michael, I'm Officer Cranston," the one with the pedophile-mustache said, raising his eyebrows and then approaching the bed.

"And I'm Officer Paul," the bald one said, "I'm sure you know why we're here."

I tried to hide my blush and the fear in my eyes as Officer Paul took a seat in one of the chairs in the corner of the room.

"No, actually," I said, thinking back to some of the internet articles I had read about what to do if a cop pulls you over and asks if you know why they stopped you. I had always heard that admitting guilt was never a good idea.

"Do you remember much of what happened two nights ago?" The one who had introduced himself as Officer Cranston said.

"Yes. I went to my girlfriend's house," I replied.

"Do you remember what time you got there?" Officer Cranston asked.

"I'd say around two AM, maybe," I said, trying to avoid eye contact with the two agents.

"Why did you head over there?" Cranston asked. Paul looked up at me and waited for my response.

"She called me. She said she was lonely. I remember thinking it was weird because she called me baby. She never ever does that. We never were a pet name couple. She wanted me to come over so badly that it was strange. I don't know why I did it, honestly. I was so tired and didn't even wanna leave home," I replied, firing off my responses like a machine-gun, obviously rambling to the point where my story sounded like bullshit. Even



still, Officer Paul sat silently in the corner, writing down every word on his clipboard.

“The two of you had safe, consensual sex with a condom prior to this, correct?” Cranston asked.

“Yes, we both weren’t ready for kids. We wore a condom, I swear,” I stammered. I hadn’t even considered wearing a condom that night. It had all happened so fast that I hadn’t even brought any.

“Did you wear a condom when you had sex that night?”

I looked around, trying to figure out how to best word it.

“No, I guess I forgot to bring some-“

“Then you must’ve not been very afraid of getting her pregnant. It must’ve not been a very big deal if she got pregnant or not,” Officer Cranston interrupted.

“No, no,” I replied anxiously, “I didn’t expect us to have sex.” I wanted to punch myself immediately after I said that. It wasn’t even that I didn’t expect it to happen, but I didn’t fully process it when it was happening.

“Would you describe it as something that was spur of the moment?” Cranston asked after a long pause.

“I guess so,” I said, knowing that he was beginning to push me into a corner.

“So she called you to come over at two AM, and you didn’t know why?” Cranston interrogated. In truth, I knew instinctively that something sexual would happen, but she never explicitly said on the phone “come over and have sex with me.” She did tell me to fuck her, but it was so sensual that I could have imagined it.

“Well, I guessed she was in the mood-“

“But you still didn’t bring a condom?”

I felt like a child being helplessly thrown around in the wind. Cranston and Paul were picking me apart, and there was little that I could do to defend myself. I certainly couldn’t lie, but the truth wasn’t making me look any better.

“No. Why are you asking me this? Why are you two even here?” I asked. I knew the answer, but it horrified me to the point where the gravity of the situation was too much for me to understand or truly comprehend.

“We’re here,” Paul sharply interjected, “because you’ve been accused of rape by your girlfriend and her family. She’s looking into pressing charges against you.” I glared at him coldly, any intelligent response far beyond me

at that point. They had hammered the point home, burying me so deeply in my grave that it felt inescapable.

“Thank you for your time, Michael,” Paul said, then climbed to his feet, quickly hurrying to the door without even looking in my direction.

“Do you have any questions for us?” Cranston asked, beginning to move towards the door.

“No,” I muttered, “thank you.”

“Also,” Cranston said, just as he had turned around, “we took the liberty of towing your car back to your dorm. Good luck. We’ll be in contact soon.”

\*\*\*

A day later, when I was finally released from the hospital, I headed back to the dorm, ignoring the stares of strangers. Word had clearly gotten out to the general public that I had been accused of rape. I was too exhausted, emotionally and physically, to properly react. I had already missed class on Monday, and having to come up with an excuse as to why seemed impossible. How was I even supposed to get a lawyer? What would my parents think? Would they even believe me? What would happen when Richard and my roommate found out about my accusations? How would I even explain it to them? All of these questions fluttered around in my mind on the ride home, to the point where they became such a burdening weight on my conscience that all I wanted to do was to sleep away the pain and confusion.

Unfortunately, as I came to my door room, I found a piece of paper that had been slid under the door. With a sigh after I had opened the door, I glanced down to read it. When I had finished, I pulled my phone out and dialed my mother’s number.

“Hello?” she asked, clearly nervous at the very sound of my voice.

“Mom, I’m coming home.”

# Expulsion Notice!

Dear Michael [REDACTED]

In light of recent public accusations that paint the entirety of the university in a negative light, [REDACTED] administration has elected to expel you from this academic institution. This school does not tolerate violent criminals, and should never be expected to. Due to how late your expulsion has come in the 2018 Spring Semester, we will be unable to refund you for your classes or any expenses. You will be expected to be out of your dorm room by the 15th of April at 12:00 PM, and any form of resistance will be met with legal action and an escort by campus security. We ask that you please refrain from returning to campus. Each of your professors has been notified and does not expect you to return to class this week. We have also given the local police department permission to search and investigate your dorm room for evidence pertaining to the case. Finally, CollegeBoard has been notified, and the outcome will most certainly impact your ability to enter into other academic institutions across the United States.

Sincerely,

Douglas Brown

[REDACTED] University

[REDACTED] Lane

[REDACTED] North Carolina, [REDACTED]

## Epilogue

Years after I had been buried and my corpse was rotting beneath the ground, my parents found a letter in their mailbox. It had been a very long time since I was anything but a story from college. My life was reduced to that one moment. I became a definition. Maybe the letter was spent out of spite, maybe it was a prank, or maybe Mia finally was beginning to feel guilty. In truth, it didn't matter. The damage was already done and my reputation was soiled. I wasn't even there to defend myself.

**Dear Mikey,**

**It's been a while since I last saw you. How have you been? That was rhetorical, I don't really want to know. I'm sure you found out pretty quick after everything happened that the charges were dropped because of a lack of evidence. I went after you for long enough for the police, my parents, and the university to find out, just long enough for the right amount of damage. I didn't want to hurt you- Okay, that's a lie, but it's not because of anything you personally did. I've been hurt a lot by men taking control of me, pushing me under their fingers, taking advantage of me, and just using me.. For once, I wanted to have someone beneath me, someone who I could have wrapped around my finger like a little doll. You were perfect for me to take it out on. All of the pain I felt from other people, it just worked so well for me to take it out on you.**

**You were shy. You were inexperienced. You were nervous. You were.... Well, a loser. I gave your life meaning, I could tell how happy I made you. I must admit, I started to like you a little bit. My facade wore a little thin and mixed in with who I really am, but I didn't give you my number because I thought you were cute, or anything above just "okay-looking." I wanted to hurt you right from the beginning. Everything I did, I did just because I knew it would get you to reach in closer to try and get me. I played the quirky, crazy girl-act really well, if I do say so myself. I had you interested in everything I had to say. From when I talked about virginity (everything I said was true in that case), all the way up until I acted all depressed. You fell for me SO deeply. You wanted me so hard. I don't think I even knew that I really cared about you until the end, but even then, I was willing to make that**

sacrifice to let my demons out. I decided to let you have a good memory of your first kiss and your first time. I didn't want either really (I think I'm more into girls, at this point.)

Everything went too well, and you fell for it like a fucking idiot. It was a bit tough to muster that "I love you" and I had to practice having sex with random guys that I picked up at bars to be able to figure out how to fake an orgasm and make someone believe me. It's easier than I thought, but I wanted to be sure. I was a bit amazed you never really caught on to how much I cheated on you. It's a bit hilarious, honestly.

I had to make sure that my parents left town, which was easy, considering they leave a lot in the spring for business trips and what not. I told them the same story I told the police, that I didn't want to have sex and you raped me in my basement. I told them that I was made a bit nervous by our phone call, so I put that thing inside of me just in case you tried something. Lo and behold, you did try something, and look where we are now.

I used you as a punching bag. You became the embodiment of every boyfriend who tried to push me into sex. You became the embodiment of every creepy stare, every creepy comment from my father, every guy at the club who got a little too close, every guy sending me dick pics at midnight, every person who made me hate myself. I didn't see Michael as I watched your life get torn apart. I saw everyone else who had hurt me, and I won't lie, it felt amazing. I laughed, I giggled, I smiled, and I danced (to The Cure, if that says anything at all.) And right as the chaos began, I gave the sob story that I didn't want to hurt my ex-boyfriend anymore than I had, and of course, the legal aspect of what happened crumbled. You probably won't get into a college ever again (you can thank the liberal college institutions for that) and you probably won't be able to piss ever again without thinking about that night, but oh well. Sometimes, you just get bad luck. That's what happened to you, Michael. I don't hate you or harbor any ill will. You just had bad luck, you decided to fall for me, and you felt the consequences. Maybe someday, someone will be able to deal with your shyness, your nerdiness, your lack of experience, and now, your micropenis. Who knows?

Have a nice life, Mikey,

**Your love,  
Mia**

**P.S.**

**I won't lie, it was really hard for me to see you bleed like that. I didn't know that someone could bleed that much from somewhere that was so small.**

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