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It had been seven months since he showed up on my doorstep with a duffle bag over his shoulder and the warm greeting of: *Hey, I'm your kid.*

“How old are you?” I asked. The idea of me having a kid (or more) out there wasn't a surprise.

“17.”

“Hmm.” I crossed my arms in front of my chest and gave a good look at him. “You Lisa Norwicks's kid?”

“No.”

“Mary Saucony's?”

“No.”

“Sara Rosenb—”

“Kate Engleman's,” he said. “Are you letting me in or what?”

“Oh, shit,” I said. “Yeah, Late Kate.” I didn't mean to smile. “That's what they called her back in the day. How many brothers and sisters you got now?” I laughed, and then opened the door wider to let him in.

He didn't answer my question. “You got a spare bed?”

“Just a couch.”

I didn't doubt he was my kid, not one bit. He was handsome and he was smart. He signed himself up for school, and I'd seen him reading books a few times. He played guitar too—*that*, he didn't get from me—and he didn't talk much. It worked.

About a month in, he started bringing girls over. I never saw them, but I could hear them moan. Yeah, he was my kid, alright.

They weren't always the same girl, I could tell. But one was over a lot more often than the others. See, there were some who made those quick, classic little whimpers, another who sounded like she was birthing a baby elephant, but this one, boy, she wouldn't make a sound. In fact, she had him moaning. Their sex was nearly silent, but if I listened really closely, when she finished, there was this deep exhalation of her breath. I couldn't fall asleep until I heard it.

“So you, uh, going back home for Thanksgiving, or you's staying here?”

“I'm not going back to Egg Harbor,” he answered. *And you can't make me*, I heard, but I never wanted him to go.

“Do you cook?” he asked Thanksgiving morning, “or got a sister's house or somewhere to go?”

“Nah, kid,” I said. “Sorry.”

“It's cool,” he answered. “I've got a friend who might come over. She'll cook for us.”

She was short and dark. Maybe Indian. I didn't catch her name.

“Hey, tell her we like our turkey with cranberry, not curry,” I whispered to him while she cooked alone in the kitchen.

“Funny,” he said, but he didn't smile.

We watched the game. Within minutes, my one-bedroom apartment had become a sauna. I opened the window, but was still sweating. I needed another cold beer.

“Ready?” I asked him, lifting up my empty bottle.

“Sure,” he said.

I walked in the kitchen and grabbed two more beers from the fridge. I jumped when I saw her. I had forgotten she was there. She was chopping peppers. I'd never seen anyone chop so fast. She didn't even breathe. I stood there, watching her. She could feel it. She stopped and met my eyes.

"Impressive," I said.

She deeply exhaled. "Thanks," I think she whispered.

I hastened out of the kitchen. She kept on chopping.

"Here," I said as I put both beers in front of him. I headed toward my bedroom.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Just call me when it's ready," I said.

I could see my pit stains in the mirror. I sat on my bed and ran my hands through my hair. I tried to understand what I was doing. *Why am I in here and not watching the game?—These walls are extremely thin—What if she moves in here? It might be very cramped—How many kids did Kate Engelman have by now?—I should change my shirt.*

He knocked on the door. "It's ready."

We served ourselves from the kitchen. She sat next to me on the couch in front of the coffee table, and he pulled up a metal folding chair across from her. We started eating. She took tiny bites.

"It's good, right?" he asked, looking at me to agree.

I found a hair in my stuffing. "Yes," I answered. I kept eating. I hadn't noticed how long her hair was before. She was nearly sitting on it.

We finished in silence. "I need to grab something," he said. "I'll be right back." He got up and walked into my bedroom where he kept some of his things.

Here we were, she and I, alone on their couch—my couch.

"You're very quiet, aren't you?" I asked her. I swallowed. My mouth felt dry.

She acknowledged that I spoke by nodding, but she didn't answer. She was not the curly-haired blonde I had imagined when I heard him moaning through the walls, but I knew it was her; I could feel it. I took a deep breath. She looked at me. I wanted to hear her breathe again. I wanted to do what my son—if that's what I would call him—couldn't. I wanted to make her make noise.

He walked back in with a tiny box and handed it to her.

She smiled and opened it. It was a pink guitar pick with an A on it.

“If you teach me how to cook, I’ll teach you how to play,” he said.

She stood and gave him a quick kiss.

His eyes watered when I told him to leave. I blamed it on the guitar. He said he wouldn’t play in the house, I said he had to go.

She helped him pack. They sat on the couch together until he had to catch his bus. He didn’t say goodbye. From the window, I watched them walk as far I could see. They held hands in the snow.

She left her glove. I ran it out to her. He snatched it and turned away. The bus pulled up. He let go and slipped the glove over her cold hand. “I love you,” he said. He got on the bus. She watched the bus until it was too far to be seen.

She turned and looked at me still standing there. “No!” she shouted, and ran away.

Her voice was beautiful.