

Reverb

He was handsome. Projects boy. Ghetto boy. Hair parted and sectioned off in those twists a lot of them are wearing now, sort of like little knots all over his head. But neat. Striking. I was waiting at the stoplight, watching him through the window on my way to the interstate this afternoon; he was walking and they seemed to suit him, those twists. They seemed just right with his burnished-oak skin and cheekbones, Lord have mercy, high and honed, enough to shatter your heart.

He stayed on the sidewalk, walking north toward the sign that said Isaacson Homes, his leather jacket puffed out by a sudden gust of wind, looking tall and taut and toned in his loose but not baggy, obscene jeans. He kept his eyes focused straight ahead, matching the single-mindedness of his stride. Purposeful. Maybe even a little menacing. But not pumpy, not sloppy. There was a rhythm to his steps like a pulse, something I could feel under my skin, drumming strong enough to force its way through my window. I shifted, my right foot pressing lightly on the brake, all at once aware of the friction of my control-top panty hose against my crotch. I sucked in a breath as I turned my eyes to the stoplight, excited, embarrassed. He was less than half my age; he was K.T.'s age I'd bet, but still I looked back at him. I turned back to the stoplight then back to him. Stoplight, him. Stoplight, him. Hoping to catch his eye, and praying I wouldn't at the same time.

When the light turned green, I pressed down hard on the gas, catching up to the projects boy then leaving him behind. Even when I was bearing down on the entry ramp for the highway, when he was nothing more than a speck in my rearview mirror, his rhythm still sounded in my ears.

At home, late, I pulled David down on me and we made love. It was fierce and fast, almost animalistic, like we wanted to leave each other bruised, bitten, battered. I've never been into rough stuff, not even when I was first married to Nathan, and we were barely in our twenties and couldn't wait to get at each other every night, before the barriers

that rose up between us made us turn our backs to each other. Tonight I ended up on top of David, imagining that his soft belly was hard under my fingertips, harder than his heavy thighs that supported me. Imagining myself closer to the way I used to be, the fluid arch of my back, that moment of catching my breath as I'd feel my breasts rise. David trembled when he came, and in the involuntary shudder that shot through me, I flashed back to that sensation in the car. The stoplight. The projects boy. The panty hose. And I came, too.

Afterward, David and I lay side by side, barely touching, both of us breathing hard, but especially him. "I don't know what got you all hot and bothered tonight," he gasped, wiping fat beads of sweat from his forehead. "But I liked it." His salty lips felt like sandpaper on mine when he kissed me good night, and his chest was still damp when I leaned into him and closed my eyes.

K.T. avoided my eyes when she walked in the kitchen, and for a moment I felt a twinge of guilt, afraid she'd heard David and me last night and I'd been found out. Like our roles had been reversed. That feeling's been striking me more and more since the divorce, since she's developed a figure, curves to go along with her height and her attitude. She's not a child anymore, and David is a permanent part of our lives now. She might not like it, but she has to accept it.

"You better hurry if you're going to eat before you go," I said from my seat at the table, my edginess making me more abrupt than I intended.

"Not hungry." She stopped in front of the window over the sink, and I could hear David's car backing out of the driveway, could imagine the look on her face as she watched it.

"At least have some juice then." I rearranged the sections of the paper, reached for David's coffee cup and my own, stood to take them to the sink.

K.T. was still looking out the window, her back to me. "You could do better," she said finally, her voice even and cold.

“I’m sick of this, K.T.,” I said, clattering the cups in the sink, my voice rising without my wanting it to. “Sick to death of it. You won’t even try to meet him halfway, to give him a chance.”

She turned and looked me in the eye, her upper lip curled in eighteen-year-old contempt, the spitting image of her father. “Why should I?” she said, the flat harshness in her voice stinging me like a slap.

I’m not sure whether her words or the sound of the door slamming set it off. But the ringing in my ears lasted all the way across town.

I saw another one today, this time when I turned onto my street, coming home from work. He was right in front of me, walking to a car parked across from my house, taller, bigger, heavier; more of a man than the burnished-oak-skinned boy.

This one was the color of bittersweet baking chocolate, and he moved toward his car unhurriedly, sauntering toward its dark windows and shiny chrome wheels as if he had all the time in the world to get where he wanted to go. He didn’t have those twists either; he barely had any hair on his head at all. I neared him on the street, slowing down. He pulled a tiny phone from his pocket, and right as he reached the door to his car, about to open it, he turned and looked dead at me with a knowing smile.

I pulled in the driveway behind K.T.’s car, a used Toyota that Nathan gave her for her sixteenth birthday, and through my rearview mirror, I watched the boy with the shaved head and satisfied smile drive away. I hurried in the house, light-headed and just about out of breath once I climbed the stairs to K.T.’s room, where I stopped in front of the door. The smell of sweat and leather hung in the air, and I stood there for a long time, trying my best to hear something stir. I waited, straining to hear the rustle of sheets, the hushed, breathy murmur of K.T.’s voice on the phone. But the only thing that echoed in my ears was the beating of my heart.