

Manstress Diaries

**A novel:
Darrell C. Scott**

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DEDICATIONS

Superwoman: Thank you for being my rock. Without you, none of this would be possible. Thank you for the unconditional love you nourished me with for 25-years and counting. And though at times I take it for granted, thank you for knocking down barriers, so that I do not have to. My heart beats for you unconditionally. I love you, mom.

SirChristopherVisuals: For you, there is a passion that burns inside my heart with the life of an eternal flame. You are the first person I think of when I wake up and last person I think of at night. Your patience, encouragement, creativity and most importantly, your love, bring light when there is darkness and peace when there is chaos. I love you, pop

Pops, big bro, and my Aunt Chilli: Thank you for your continued love and support of the years. This project would not be possible without you guys serving as the foundation of my support system.

@its_jerry97: My cousin and my best friend. Thank you for your effervescent spirit! You have brought me so much laughter and real conversation over the years. You have been one of my biggest supporters and sources of inspiration. Keep that hustle.

@Dra_boogie: I owe you a car wash!

“Fly abandonedly into the sun.
If you should return to me,
We truly were meant to be.
So spread your wings and fly,
Butterfly...”

-Mariah Carey

The Closet

Hoe -Tale

Blurred Lines

Crossing Lines

Bad Decisions

The Warning

The Agreement

Triggered

Instagram Flexxxx

Man's Best Friend

Ghostin

The Widow

Stay The Night

Walk of Shame

Baggage

All I Want For Christmas

The Ultimatum

Don't Forget About Us

West Dallas Street

Broken

Break ur Heart Right Back

When Love Calls

Looking In

Bitter

Manstress Diaries

The Closet

I've always liked older men.

Normally, when you make a statement like that, people assume you have daddy issues or that you're on the prowl for a sugar daddy. I don't have the balls for that, although shopping at the Galleria or strutting down the palm tree-lined streets of Highland Village (which is kind of like the Rodeo Drive of Houston), would be a lot more fun on someone else's dime.

My affinity toward older men started in middle school. Well, I wouldn't say it started (I've come to understand that the attraction was always there, lying dormant, waiting until I was old enough to know what the word gay means. Remember High School Musical? Troy Bolton, AKA Zac Effron? Yeah. He was cute, but I was more interested in seeing what his dad (Coach

Jack, AKA, Bart Johnson looked like without a shirt. Blue eyes, dirty blonde hair to suggest he had an edge and shaped like a dad that played basketball in college.

Remember “Baby Boy?” Most people lust after Jody, better known as Tyrese. Nah, I was into the man playing his stepdad, Melvin (Ving Rhames). The one who was in the kitchen cooking breakfast butt-ass-naked and drinking all the Kool-Aid. Prison muscles, tattoos, built like a football player, (not the big burly linebackers, but the quarterback), full goatee and a 5’o clock shadow. Mmmm, aged and a little rough around the edges. That’s how I liked them.

I would later find myself wondering what it would be like if I was the love interest in these love stories. I remember thinking how I’d rather have the attention of those guys than any girl I knew at school. That’s when I fully realized my unusual attraction toward other men. Something about the thought of being held by an older man felt safe. Soon after that, I learned that Google Images has pictures of all sorts of fine, naked older men. And by older, I mean at least 20-years older than me. I googled so much, I discovered gay porn. “It was a whole neeeew wooorld!” (in my Aladdin voice).

At times, after the deed was done, I was disgusted with myself. But I would grow out of that phase. After that, I discovered the gay chatrooms that dominated the early 2000’s. A few scrolls past daddies with big chests and full beards, and they soon finagled their way onto my playground. Some of you may remember the G.Y.C or Adam 4 Adam. I was always browsing, but never acting on any of my homoerotic impulses. Hell, I didn’t know how. I always felt like I was doing something wrong. Something shameful. Yet, it felt as natural as any straight man lusting after breasts. All the while, I stayed with a girlfriend on my arms all through junior high and high school, but I digress.

During my Sophomore year in high school, the iPhone was only three-years-old and had taken the mobile phone industry by the balls. The App Store changed not just the tech game, but the gay hookup scene was flipped upside down. In came the infamous... Jackd and Grindr, the virtual playground of choice for *men seeking men*. I'd mention Craigslist, but that's where weirdos, serial killers, and pedophiles like to play... allegedly. For some odd reason, the black gays flocked to Jackd and the white gays played on Grindr. It was almost an unspoken rule at the time.

I got my first iPhone when I was 15. A sleek and glossy iPhone 4. And so, long story short, I downloaded Jackd. Jackd is where I met my first, a Spanish-American guy named Rick. Rick was a mere leaf on a tree. When the wind blew hard enough, he would surely go with it. Rick was 19 at the time and hanging on to his college ball player label by 1/10 of a point on a 4.0 grading scale. Something like that. I was never good at math.

Because of the age gap, I didn't give him any more of a reason not to take me seriously. I didn't want him to see me as some cliché high schooler, who was still getting grounded for high school drama like missing curfew and getting bad grades in math. Lame. I had to be "mature". More mature than I was capable of being at that age. And so, I did what I did best back then. Lied. We've all told a lie at least twice in our lives. Some lies are potentially more dangerous than others. The ugliest lies tend to steer us into complicated situations and inevitably, internal suffering.

I told Rick that my parents pretty much let me do whatever I wanted and that I was 17 because I had convinced myself that saying I was 18 would have been pushing it a bit. He never questioned me, though. I thought it was because I was really convincing but now,

not so much. Reflecting on it, I should have run from a grown man willing to “date” a 17-year-old. But hey, if Mariah Carey doesn’t know numbers, then why should I? Did that make me complicit in my own molestation? It’s still molestation in the eye of the law, right? I don’t know. I’m no lawyer.

My birthday rolled around and that’s when things got interesting. I can still say it is the bleakest birthday of my 25-years of strolling around without a clue. I had been carrying the closeted homosexual burden for about a year at the time. I managed to snag my first boyfriend thanks to Jackd, and still maintain a heterosexual charade for my friends and family. With my knack for lying, I thought I had control over everything. Nobody suspected a thing as far as I knew. During school hours, I was dating a girl named Melanie, a biracial girl with long hair and sassy. I had a whole routine.

After my track coaches blew the final whistle for the team to hit the showers around 5 p.m., I’d kiss Melanie goodbye, then dart across campus to freshen up in a restroom that was almost always empty around that time. After, I’d hop in the car with Rick, who Melanie believed to be my cousin. It worked for a while until Progress reports rolled out. When my parents saw all the A’s printed on that thick green piece of paper, were stained by the letter D, my life was over. They confiscated my glorious iPhone 4 I begged them to buy me for Christmas and imprisoned it inside the junk drawer in their bedroom.

My weekends in front of the 65-inch TV screen in the upstairs theater room with surround sound, catching up on *Pretty Little Liars*, *Sex and the City* and *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, was over “dot com” (as Tamar Braxton would say). My relationship with Rick would suffer from neglect and I worried he would

likely move on in my absence. On top of that, I wasn't allowed to participate in track which meant my chances at qualifying for the Regional track meet were as my mom put it, "*ain't gonna happen*" if I didn't get that damn math grade up before they mailed out the final Report cards for the grading period.

None of that mattered. My birthday was the exception to the rule (in my naïve opinion), and so I figured I should have my phone and all the freedom in the world on my birthday. Sure, I would have to sneak down the stairs in the morning while my parents were sleeping and steal my phone out of their drawer without them noticing, but it hardly seemed like a challenge. My dad's snoring was sure to mask any noise I could possibly make in the effort of being stealthy. He only ever snored like that when my mom slipped a little something extra in his drink to help him sleep.

All the stars were aligning in my favor. Getting caught would have its consequences, but I had convinced myself of a lie: *Mom and dad want me to have a good birthday. Having my phone would ensure that. Therefore, they wouldn't mind. Hell, they're probably planning to give it back to me for my birthday anyway.*

After saying repeating it in my head a few times I believed it was the truth, knowing damn well that it could all blow up in my face. Still, salvaging what I had left with Rick was more important. For some reason, I've always been utterly submissive in relationships. I was very much all about doing what it takes to please my man. In most of my dating experiences, it was obedience. I didn't mind the headache. Rick talked a lot about a future where we both would move to California and start a life together. He would become a big-time filmmaker and I would be free to train for the Olympics. The way he used to describe it, made it sound like a fairytale. My very own love story. I was

and still am very much a believer in a Cinderella Story and Prince Charming.

That said, getting my phone taken was literally the worst thing that could happen. Stealing the phone was a success, though. When I got home after school that day, I wore an unbuttoned red Polo shirt, pinned with dollar bills from friends and a smile. My mom, however, sat at the bottom of the stairwell, wearing her power suit and a scowl. *Remain cool, calm, and collected.* I remember thinking. “Heyyyy, ma!” I said, trying to pretend as if I had done nothing that warranted the soul-crushing glare she was laying on me.

“Where is your phone, Khai?” My mom was never one to beat around the bush when she was pissed. I lied, of course, and told her I didn’t know. She hollered for my dad. He got all up in my face asked the same question while he placed his thick hands on my small shoulders and gripped them like a stress ball.

“Y’all had it. The last place I saw it, was in the drawer.”

At that point, my mom decided to negotiate with me. She said she would look around for the phone one more time, and she had better find it, or, “Ima have ya ass on the bed in silky underwear!”

My dad stood behind her, holding a thick orange extension cord that belonged in the garage and not on my ass. My mom made no empty threats. I had to do something. I was not about to be like my brother when my dad stuffed a sock in his mouth and my mom whooped his ass with a fat switch for trying to hide his Report card. No, ma’am. I wasn’t there for it.

She had me stand still next to the dresser while she and my dad looked around the room for it. They were all under the bed and peeping behind the headboard, searching high and low for my stolen phone. My heart was palpitating, but I managed to keep a poker face and

shrugged every time she took a second to glance at me and raised her brow. My dad lectured me background about lying. All I did was nod and said, yes sir, when I felt it appropriate. Finally! My opportunity arrived to salvage the crisis. They both went into their bathroom and checked the drawers and in the closet. So, I took the phone out my duffle bag and tossed it across the mahogany wood flooring and it slid underneath the dresser.

I cringed at the thought of the scratches that would be on it later, but it was desperate times... They emerged from the bathroom and my mom told my dad to check the junk drawer one more time. This time he looked behind it. It was a solid wood piece with brass accents and handles and a white marble top they bought while in Korea during their military years. The legs were shaped like the flexed paw of a lion with brass claws that gave the illusion that they were digging into the floor.

The sharp tips taunted me and the more I stared at them, the harder it became to stand. As my dad was moving the dresser, the light exposed the shadow that was hiding my phone and my mom spotted it. All hell broke loose after that. I had a grin on my face and was eager to gloat.

“Told you so!” I said, with my chin in the air. My dad shook his head. “So, you mean to tell me if I turn it on and go through the messages, there won’t be any from today?” Time slowed for a split second and my head was spinning like the something out of “The Starry Night” before my heart fell to my feet and my body was thrust headfirst back into real-time. Damn near fainted. With eyes big as Krispy Cream donut holes, I said, “Nope. Not a one.”

I was bluffing. It failed. Miserably. My dad turned the phone on and demanded I unlock it. For half a

second, I ransacked my brain for ways I could wipe the phone clean with what little time I had to unlock it with him hovering over me. "WHO. THE HELL. IS RICK!" I was determined to deny it until all four wheels fell off the wagon, going uphill with a load of river rocks.

"Just my friend."

"You sure he's just a friend?"

"Yes, sir." I said through the lump forming in my throat. My mom snatched the phone and read my dirty text messages to Rick aloud. It was embarrassing as hell. They sounded so much better in a text than read aloud. That's for sure. My dad asked me repeatedly, "Go on and say it, you're a faggot!" To which I just kept saying no. I wouldn't say it out loud. Not to him.

"Fuckin' flower child! Own up to your shit!" Next thing I knew, he had launched himself at me, slapped me so hard, speckles of light danced behind my pupils. He was in my face and I was cornered. My head banged against the wall when he head-butted me like a stranger in the street who had just hit on my mom. My flank grazed the corner of the dresser where the junk drawer lived, causing a stabbing pain in my side that lingered for several minutes. An aged photo hanging on the wall of my parents holding hands and kissing on a yacht in Miami dug into my scalp.

My face twisted up and I closed my eyes. I couldn't make eye contact with my dad. I thought if I clenched them together hard enough, the tears, and the shame that tugged at the apex of my heart would cease. It didn't. It only intensified and birthed one of those silent cries that leave you gasping for air as the ache in your throat chokes the life out of you.

"Eric! Please!" My mom cried. His eyes were beaming through mine like lasers. I broke out in tears and kept saying, "No! No! No!" As if I were trying to

convince myself. My mom finally pleaded for him to put me down long enough to irritate him. When he did, he stormed out of the room. My shirt was all twisted up, a few of my dollar bills were torn and I just sat there on my knees in total disbelief. Nothing could have prepared me for that moment, but it would have been nice to have at least seen it coming.

My mom embraced me and kissed me on the forehead, falsely reassuring me that everything was alright. There was no evidence to prove that. She swore that my dad was only angry because of the lying. "We always knew you were...that way." Something about the way I carried myself and my obsession with Carrie Bradshaw and Mariah Carey had everything to do with it. She said that they just hoped that they were wrong. I couldn't respond because I thought it ridiculous. Can't a guy watch *Sex and the City* and idolize one of pop's most notoriously glamorous divas and not be gay? My mom walked me upstairs where I would find that my dad had taken all the doors off their hinges in my room, including the bathroom! He insisted that they had given me too much privacy... Still makes no damn sense today.

What hurt the most, was seeing my mom cry. It made my stomach hurt. I couldn't bear the sight of my mother's pain. Especially when I was the cause of it. After that, my dad made me call Rick and tell him that I was not allowed to see him again. I was relieved that he didn't answer, even after 3 attempts. "Leave a voicemail!" My dad ordered. I would see Rick for a few weeks after that, but I had hope that I could fix it later when things cooled down.

My driver's test was 2-days away and my mom had convinced my dad to give me one last lesson. I had to ask her to do it for me because I was afraid to ask myself. After my coming out, he just isolated himself

from us. He'd sleep all day in the guest bedroom and would leave to go to work around 6 p.m. 3-days out of the week. My mom spent most of her time in her office and I hid upstairs in my room as long as I could. I'd only come out to eat and do my chores. My brother had moved in with his fiancé, a year before my life went to shit and I grew to resent him for it. I had no one to talk to, so it was just my mom and I sitting at the dinner table most days, talking about everything but what really mattered.

Usually, we used my mom's Escalade for my lessons, but this time, he decided to pull out his 99 Corvette. It mostly stayed in the garage. I would say it collected dust, but he cared for it like it was his child. He had just installed brand new Goodyear high-performance tires. The black paint was so shiny it looked wet and the bold yellow letters on the tires, made my heart race. I couldn't believe he was about to let me drive it. "Are you sure about this?" I asked. He nodded and started typing a message to my mother on his phone. He frowned at it momentarily, as if he was unsure if he should send it or not.

"Don't be all timid and taking forever to turn like you always do. I don't have time for it today. I'm tired." He said, just before I heard a swooshing from the message being sent. That was the friendliest he had been in a while, so I let it roll off my back and laughed. He didn't. He just stared blankly out the window. It was a nice spring evening, with low humidity, so he told me to drop the top. We were pulling out of the neighborhood when he said "Let's do something different today. Turn left."

Normally we turned right and drove down the back road to Walmart and back. The rumble from the exhaust was exhilarating. I had never been behind the wheel of something with so much power. It was getting

dark as we drove down the eerie backroad about 5-miles from the house. My dad had the radio tuned to Majic 102.1. Maxwell "This Woman's Work" was playing quietly in the background. It made me think about how odd my parents had been acting toward each other. So, I figured I'd ask because if they were talking divorce, I wanted to know sooner rather than later.

"Everything alright with you and mom?"

"You need to stay out of grown folks' business, boy. I perched my lips refocused on the road. The clouds were threatening to dump a shower on us, and I had never driven in the rain in a car like that.

"I think I'm good," I said.

"Good?"

"Yeah. Looks like it's about to rain, and I don't feel comfortable driving your baby in it, to be honest."

"Can't be a sissy all your life!" He said. "Alright, pull over here." He pointed at the side of the road. I did as he instructed, and we swapped seats. As soon as he pulled off, the sky was purple, and a heavy rain began to fall. The way it hit the windshield, you would have thought someone was dumping a garbage bag full of skittles on the car. The revving engine resonated on my back as it vibrated the seats and my dad turned the music up louder, so loud, it was deafening. I remember reaching for the volume knob only to be thrust back in my seat. I was begging for him to slow down and before I knew it, I woke up 3-days later in Memorial Herman Hospital with a shiny laminated band on my wrist and my mom at my bedside in tears and a firm grip on my hand that told me she would never let go.

My mom hardly cries. I knew it had to be something terrible for her to be balling the way she was. I couldn't believe it when she told me my dad died. It was surreal, like a lucid dream. Just a few moments

ago, we were just together and he was breathing. Now, he was gone. I scanned the room to avoid eye contact with my mother. There was no sign of relief in her grieving eyes and face. Only devastation.

I didn't know where I was going to go, but I had to get the hell out of there. I couldn't breathe. I pressed that damn call bell at least 50-times until the nurse showed up and sedated me. My mom and I stayed home for about two weeks after that. No more, no less. I'll never forget the day she snatched the blankets off my shivering body, flicked on the lights and told me I was going back to school. She was fully dressed in her power suit with her hair all done up in a tight bun.

"The show must go on, baby. The world doesn't stop just because you need time to cope with your hurt feelings."

Her eyes were unreadable. It was the toughest love she had given me, but it was the reality of the situation. She had a family practice to run and I had an education to get. We still had to survive. All I could do was nod and say, yes ma'am.

On my first day back, I skipped track practice to catch an Uber to see Rick. I was still trying to maintain some order. That turned out to be a mistake. Uninvited and unannounced, I stood outside Rick's door. Knock, knock, knocking. Hope burned like fire in my chest, that he, would not be as deceitful as I hoped him not to be. I didn't want him to be responsible for damage that I feared would never fully be repaired. He did not answer the door. I called. No answer. Instead, I got a text.

RICK I'M IN CHURCH!

ME: Prove it! Send me a photo!

RICK: No. I'm done bro. You doin too much.
Acting childish!

He claimed to be at church, so the driveway should have been empty. Yet, there was an unfamiliar gray Camaro parked in front of the garage. Still, there was no sign of the Nissan Altima he and best shared. It gave me a small glimmer of hope.

But it kicked. Kicked, kicked, like an unborn child. My gut ached and my eyes watered. I knew something was not right. If he wasn't home, then why was the A/C unit screeching and rattling inside his bedroom window? He was always saying they wanted to cut down on the electric bill. Running the A/C in an empty home hardly seemed like the way to go about it. I called repeatedly. As expected, he didn't answer. I pressed my ear against the dusty hardy-planked wall and held my unsteady breath, listening for the truth. I listened and prayed that I wouldn't hear what I thought I was going to hear. The pounding in my chest was deafening, but I was able to mute its, thump, thump, thumping, for a brief moment. And a brief was all I needed.

Voices... I heard Rick's. It was deep, gravely and wrapped in familiar warmth. Then, the voice of a stranger. I couldn't breathe. An ongoing Final Destination-style 20-car pileup was taking place in my mind. Millions of irrational and destructive thoughts, bred from a place of hurt and betrayal, crashed into each other without mercy. I couldn't move. Moans of pleasure enraged me. And so, I found the biggest stick I could find in the yard underneath a massive pine tree that stretched over the driveway and jammed it repeatedly into the A/C unit until it started hitting high notes like Mariah Carey. Briefly, I fantasized about them both dying from heat exhaustion or something. I was dizzy and short of breath running back to my car and there, in the middle of the pinecone covered

driveway, I collapsed. With the neighbors as my audience, I wept so hard my throat throbbed.

The strained relationship with my dad, eating at a vacant dinner table, witnessing my mom's heartbreak, and feeling every bit of its crumble. After that, I spent 2-years of changing in a separate bathroom before track practice, so that the other guys wouldn't get the chance to second guess changing in front of me... All of it, for nothing! I wanted to hide.

Rick made a fool of me, and I made a fool of myself. I wanted to believe Prince Charming was real. But in a world riddled with drugs, sex, murder, Jackd, and Grinder, holding on to optimism like that, is easier said than done. After Rick's little stunt, I decided that maybe some men aren't made for relationships. They're made to be played. For years after that, I was hooking up every chance I got. 7 or 10 guys in a week. I was having hot-boy summers before Meg the Stallion could coin the term. I thought my heartbreak story ended with Rick. Nobody was allowed to get close.

It was all fun and games until I played with the wrong one and fell stupid in love with an adonis named Terrence. Two years have flown by since my days with Terrence without stopping for me to take a beat. Meanwhile, I remain stuck here in my loveless suburban condo battling self-pity from my memories of love unrequited.

Hoe -Tale

I met Terrence in the summer of 2016. We should have followed the rules of hookup culture. No. Strings. Attached. Night fell and it was time for me to treat my reoccurring nightmares with sex, as the prescribed medication it was pretending to be for me.

Mesmerized, the first time I looked into his green eyes...We stood before each other in a filthy Palace Inn Motel in a questionable part of north Houston: Somewhere off 1960 and 45-Greenspoint, or "Gunspoint," as some like to call it, about to sin. I had strayed too far from the suburban safety of The Woodlands. Courtesy of the infamous, Jackd. Jackd is an app where I and many others like me, visit frequently in search of a quick fix. It's a virtual black hole full of half-naked bodies and damaged goods Admittedly, it is not the most effective way to find love...if that's your thing. It used to be mine back in my Rick-days. When I was with Rick, I was but another hopeless romantic

looking for love that conveniently led with sex on the first date. On our first date, he took me to see the remake of *Alice in Wonderland* and told me that he wanted to make movies like that one day.

He was so passionate about it, it made him excited. I believed in his dream and we were in the bathroom stalls after that, making very bad decisions with our phone cameras. Spoiler, we were not making anything remotely respectable as *Alice in Wonderland*. And that was pretty much our relationship. Sex, lies, and videotapes. When it got old, I guess he looked for a new co-star. I've come to expect that sort of inconsistency after that. In a world riddled with hookup culture and *no-fucks-given* attitudes, romance is pretty much a thing of the past.

Terrence and I never had a first date. We did not get to spend the night before, anxiety-burdened and pondering over how good or tragic things could go. We did not get to romanticize about a happy ending in which a beautiful relationship blossomed, and about how we would spend our days traveling and sipping fine wine while someone serenaded us in an Italian accent on a gondola ride through the romantic waters of Florence Italy. We were as far away from Italy as you could get.

An open gravesite of dead roaches and ants resided in damn near every corner of the room. It reeked of cigarettes and stale cheeseburgers and the AC blew hot air. As much as I love to deny my stuck-up tendencies, at that moment, I was well aware that random sex in a cheap motel was beneath me. None of it mattered because Terrence stood before me with his black square-cut tank looking like it was painted on. I loved the way it hugged his chest and complemented his golden skin as it radiated under the dim lights. With one of those strong jawlines you only see in magazines, he formed a sly smile.

This was the sort of distraction I needed to keep my dark cloud at bay. It was dense with unexplained night terrors, obsessive thoughts, and the occasional shakes when driving in the rain. It made me want to lock myself in my closet and never come out of the house. Sex was my outlet for when my cloud was becoming too dense. I had to have him. Granted, I would have him. Soon. He sported a diamond-encrusted watch, which nearly blinded me when the light hit it just right. His golden Cartier Love bracelet could have been a sign of wealth or a front. I had no way of knowing. Although he seemed so together, something about him whispered scum bag in my ear. It was likely because he was the one to blame for having brought me to that grungy ass hotel. His place? Not on the table. My place? Not on the table.

He reached out to pull my slim figure towards him. His gold rings and a tasteful gold chain pressed up against my bare chest. A brief chill amongst my waist made me jolt, but only a little. I licked my lips as I admired how the outline of his pecs seem to thrust forward through all of the fibers in his shirt, daring me to touch. What really drew me to him was the way his masculine gaze was peppered with a taste of unapologetic sexuality and maybe a hint of narcissism. I wasn't sure, but he seemed like the kind of guy who would fuck you good, and leave you hanging high and dry with a wet ass and fucked up credit. I took one look at him and wanted to taste him.

"So, wassup witch, playa?" He said, his voice was deep and naturally sensual. "I don't have a lot of time." He slid his shirt up the muscled ridges in his stomach, to reveal a large sculpted chest, with a tattoo of a maleficent viper. The way it slithered up and down his torso, had my eyes scanning down just how far the snake would lure me... Maybe it was the size of his

arms and the sensuality in his voice, but something about his aura suggested he was a man's man. Maybe even... Charming? Dangerously so. To this day, I cannot take that away from him.

"I dunno, you tell me," I said, trying to be nonchalant like I wasn't itching to be with him in every way possible. I nearly choked on my own words from trying so hard. He was the fairest of feats I had ever laid in bed with, and that by no means, was an easy crown to dawn (if you're catching what I'm throwing). I was prepared for this to be the experience of a lifetime. As he laid on top of me and encircled his tongue behind my ear, below the lobe and down the side of my neck, he paused to look into my eyes.

Quivering, I tried to follow the rules of hookup culture: little to no eye contact, don't ask questions, wear a condom, and most importantly, no kissing. It was all for nothing because he broke all the rules when he placed two slow kisses on my unsuspecting lips, igniting a lust so ravenous, I was compelled to kiss him back, returning illusion of passionate love.

"Ima make you mine." He whispered in my ear. His warm, modest, Jack Daniels-scented breath, sent welcome chills down my neck.

I knew better than to believe that bullshit. But it still turned me on. And so, he went on to ravish me like we had known each other for years. He was selling a fantasy because that's how he preferred to get off. It was fine with me. It would have been selfish of me to have denied him the pleasure he was seeking. You can imagine my dismay when his phone started ringing. The first and second time, he let it go to voicemail. But the third time, he jumped up so fast from in-between my cheeks, he had to have been light-headed for a moment.

"Everything alright?" I asked. He looked at me and shook his head as if burdened with the stress I had not

the age or experience to understand. Meanwhile, I eyed in-between his legs. It was starting to look more like a gummy worm the longer he stood there swiping on his phone. Whoever had been trying to reach him must have been fed up, because when he called back, I heard it go straight to voicemail. Then, there was a hallow and rapid knock at the door. "Jasmine!" He said in a harsh whisper as if we weren't the only two people in the room. It all went by so fast, because the next thing I knew, I heard a nagging voice piercing through the walls.

"Terrence, Mothafucka! I know you're in there! Open this damn door!" I rummaged around on that nasty ass motel floor and grabbed my belongings. I was about to high-tail it out the front door, when he grabbed me by the collar of my crisp Polo dress shirt and snatched me back so fast, my eyes danced around like a camera out of focus.

"The fuck iz you doin'!" It had been knocking on three-days since I actually achieved more than 3 hours of sleep. I was irritable enough as it was, his pronunciation choices were disrespectful to me at that point, and none of the mess that was unfolding was helping my headache at all. I had come in an effort to force my body to sleep. Sex usually exhausted me so much that even my nightmares couldn't wake me. I can't say it was, R.E.M. because I always woke up the next morning, groggy and wore out as if I hadn't slept at all. But it was sleep, nonetheless.

"Leaving! Where the hell else would I be going?" I yelled back. "Not my woman. Not my problem. I did not sign on for this shit."

"You ain't going out THAT door!" He insisted. I looked around the room confused as hell. Was there a back door or something I didn't know about? "There's only one way out. And that's exactly where I'm going."

You've already been caught, so I meannnnn...What's the point of all this extra?"

"Just hold on a sec, playa." he pleaded. He looked so terrified and beautiful at the same time. I almost felt bad for him. If the eyes are indeed the windows into the soul, there was the most curious view of a desperate and troubled little boy in his that made me willing to toss what little morals I had to the wind out of pity. He released his grip on my collar, walked over to a duffle bag he had stashed under the bed as if he had nowhere to be and pulled out a bottle of Jack that had maybe one good shot left in it. I guess he figured he needed it, before opening that door and dealing with what was clearly, a scorned black woman. And she had every reason to be as angry as the blood vessels popping out of her neck suggested. The moment I opened the door, all hell broke loose.

"Jasmine! Whatcha doin' here!" He yelled from the other side of that dreadful spring mattress. He was acting like a fuckin' coward.

"I came to say goodbye! I'm going back to Chicago and I'm bringing Dwight with me!" She yelled back. Even with her mangled auburn-colored weave draping over her petite shoulders and the straps of her tattered red mini-dress, Jasmine was still radiant. Stressed out and scorned as hell but still beautiful. Her lightly bronzed skin and her hazel eyes were captivating me from the distance. Who cheats on a woman like that? I looked beyond her to see a drizzle wet the ground and a red Impala parked under the one street light in the parking lot that actually worked.

"Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!" I heard a little boy call from the back-seat of the Impala. "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!" A little mixed-looking boy emerged from the car. He had to be around seven or eight-years-old.

“Get back in the car, Dwight!” Jasmine yelled. Terrence put his hand on his forehead as if he had a killer headache. “That is MY boy! You can’t take him!”

“You lost that right when you blew off the custody hearing for a piece of ass and party favors!”

She pointed at me with her squinted evil eyes and rolled her neck as I was coming through the door. Then she pulled a bottle of pills from her purse and launched it at him. He ducked and the bottle hit the wall with a hollow clack and rattled like maracas. I tucked my head and zipped my lips. I was just about to take off sprinting to my car when “Wham!” A loud thud ricocheted off the walls carried out the doorway. Imagine my shock when I turned to see Terrence out cold on that dirty ass carpet. Jasmine did all but run my little ass down in the doorway with a bulldozer to get to him. The little boy came running to his dad’s aid in a stream of tears.

It was heart-wrenching. The poor little guy probably thought his dad was about to die before his innocent little matching blueish-green eyes. Apparently, they had a protocol that usually worked for this sort of thing because the son instinctively darted toward the mini-fridge for some ice-water and dumped it all over his dad’s face. Meanwhile, Jasmine continued to slap him in the face and demanded he wake up.

“Not again, you son-of-a-bitch! Don’t do this to us again!” She screamed out in rage-full tears. I could see her face was blood red from the parking lot as I made my way to my car. Trying to escape. I’m no good in emergency situations. I get all jittery and short of breath, to the point I would need medical attention myself. It’s the whole reason nursing school never worked out for me. There was a whole lot of screaming for help going on between the two of them. I figured there wasn’t too much I could do but call for some

professional help on my way out, and maybe the Maury Show.

I'm sure had I gone over there with a pathetic attempt to perform CPR, his wife would have mauled me and left me for dead in a ditch somewhere. Or, I'd get all choked up and faint my damn self. I panicked and did the absolute worst thing one could have done during these "Stay Woke" times. Called 911. I was thinking that at the very least, they could get the medical attention he needed, but I was dead wrong!

I stuck around to watch from the safety of my car. After about 15-minutes, a police car and an ambulance pulled up to the scene. One of the officers rushed to the scene while one searched Jasmine's car for no apparent reason.

Another one of the officers pulled the little boy away from Terrence's side, kicking and screaming. That's when I realized I had made matters worse. Paramedics jumped from the sides of the truck and darted towards him.

"Please! Please! Don't take him! Don't take my son!" The woman cried. The officer put the boy in his cruiser and after necessary but degrading groveling on her hands and knees, he allowed her to get in the backseat. The cruiser pulled off and it started pouring down rain! Terrence had finally come to and at the right time. The paramedics stepped away to give him some space. Several of them asking the stupid question:

"Are you alright, sir?" He stumbled around, trying to find his balance before finally falling to his knees, with hands of prayer raised to the heavens begging God for mercy, as he witnessed his son be driven away in the backseat of a police car.

"Is that your Impala?" one of the officers asked. He glanced over at the car and nodded his head. As his hands were held high, the men in blue cuffed his wrists.

I could hear the revving engine of an old Crown Victoria, which grew fainter as it sped off into the distance and the sounds of raindrops falling from the rooftops pounding the pavement. Suddenly, it all seemed to be happening in slow motion. What an ugly sight it was to see a 40-something-year-old man in hysterical tears. Droplets of dirty rainwater poured relentlessly from the leaking roof and on to his face. Guilt compelled me to leave the safety of my car. I could not stand by while they took him to jail and it all have been my fault.

I sprinted from my car to the entrance of the hotel room. "Get. The Hell—Out!" He snapped at me as I was approaching the scene. I must have startled the officers because they were quick to draw their hands back to the guns tucked in their holsters upon my abrupt arrival. I stopped dead in my tracks and put both my hands in the air. The rain, drenching my clothes. My heart was pounding and for the first time, I realized just how much danger I had put myself in. I shouted that I was unarmed and that I was the one who made the call.

"I'm his therapist!" I blurted out. "He needs medical attention!" I would have reached for my work badge, but I had been watching too much shit on Youtube about cops murdering people and I'm one of those people who are quick to jump to the worst-case scenario. Whether my fear was rational or not, I wanted to avoid giving them any reason to think I was a threat. I was and never will be in a mood to become another face for the Black Lives Matter movement. "Step away, sir" one them said. His hand was gripping his holster with force and he arched eyebrows dared me to make one wrong move.

"Check my pockets, please!" Their white faces eyed me in disbelief. I couldn't imagine how they could look

at me and think I was a threat, but I can only imagine the amount of fear they might battle with daily, with having to enforce the law in a world where we are being taught to not trust men in blue no more than politicians.

I knew fear can make people act irrationally at times. But had I been shot, not even I, with my privileged and sheltered suburban kid lens, could justify or even begin to understand why. I was dressed in labels, as Carrie Bradshaw liked to call them. My nails were freshly manicured, and my naturally soft-spoken voice couldn't have been any less intimidating, even while yelling. I was no threat, but they had no way of knowing. My thumbs trembled and I broke out in a cold sweat as I invited them to search me. Who knew what that would bring? A face full of concrete? Bludgeoned to death with a club? Or shot in cold blood? The news had me thinking the worst.

"Please!" I begged.

"Hey! I think I got something!" One of the officers called from behind the bed. He was holding a bottle of pills in the air. "Looks like prescription Xanax! No name on the label." All I could do was shake my head and drop my shoulders. We were surely going to jail.

Blurred Lines

Weak knees and all, I kneeled to offer Terrence a helping hand. Years of elite track and field will do that to you. Part of me was expecting a thank you for having called in a favor from my mother to have him admitted to the psych hospital she often referred her patients to. I had to convince the officers that this was a suicide attempt and that he needed help. Not jail. Even with the smudges and dirt on his face, and the pungent stench of alcohol and dead-beat dad on his breath, I could still appreciate his beauty. All of it—wasted.

When I reached out for his grimy hands which were covered in dried-up traces of alcohol and tear stains, he shoved me away so hard, I nearly fell back on that rank ass carpet.

“What part of get the hell out did you not understand!”

Raising one brow and folding my arms, “Make me.” I said. He fumbled around on the floor some more,

before rising to his feet. “Don’t trrrrry me, bruh.” He said, his speech slurred heavily and his head swaying to the right and then to the left.

“I just saved your ass! Apparently, there’s a warrant out for your arrest. The leeeeeeast you could do is let me help you and maybe say thank you. The whole paramedic crew stopped dead in their tracks as if they were about to place bets. I did not know him from a can of paint, but after seeing a man lose his son, I figured he would need somebody to just be present. The paramedics convinced him to get in the truck and I hopped right in along for the ride. He ignored me the whole ride to the hospital. I wanted to ask him about where the hell he got Xanax from, but it wasn’t the time. Patients come to my office all the time, totally dependent on that stuff. God knows what reason he had to be on it.

When we arrived, Terrence was sitting up on the stretcher on the back of the truck refusing to go inside. He insisted that he was fine and that he would call someone to pick him up. “It’s either the hospital or jail,” I said. Wrinkles formed in his forehead, “I’d rather take my fuckin’ chances” The fact that he’d risk going to jail was enough to convince me that he was a lost cause. Eventually, he conceded and the men escorted him to the ER waiting room. While he checked in and waited for one of the doctors to do an assessment, I made a stop by the food court and grabbed some square-cut pineapples and a pack of Nutty Buddy Bars from the cafeteria. I hadn’t eaten much of anything all that day.

When I got back, Terrence was missing from the waiting room. I hurried out the sliding doors and found him outside sitting on the curb. A tall skinny man was standing near him carrying a briefcase in one hand and holding an iPhone to his ear with the other. He stunted in a dazzling Dior suit. I knew it was Christian Dior because I spotted the gold cuff links, with the iconic

CD initials engraved in them as I approached the scene. He had creamy skin and looked to be mixed with Indian and something else, maybe black or Cuban.

“You look a mess,” Terrence called out to him. He was sitting just outside the entrance to the emergency room, holding a bag of ice to his forehead.

“You get all cleaned up for me?” The man said. He stepped onto the back of the truck and I got a glimpse of his shiny pair of Louboutin loafers. They were black with the signature Lou- Spikes spiraling over the toecap. Tasteful. They were a classic. I had a pair just like them. Red with gold spikes. Worn once when I hooked up with a lawyer who invited me to a country club, only to show me some vacant area behind all the machines in the laundry room and drop his load in me. I formed a fake smile as the man narrowed his gaze at me.

“And you are?” he asked. Sassy bitch he was. His attitude suggested that he was judging me and so I did what I always did. Pretend to be unbothered. I sat down on the curb next to Terrence and crossed my legs. This time, however, I wanted him to see my red Giuseppe sneakers. The two gold metal plates that wrapped around the top of the shoe, bounced the moonlight off their glossy surface and made me proud. “I’m a friend,” I said, knowing damn well all of a few hours ago, I didn’t know his first name.

“And you are?” I sassed back.

“Jarvis. His—sponsor.”

I couldn’t believe it. A man like him, a sponsor? He seemed so—together. Then again, I briefly thought Terrence was charming in a weird I don’t give a fuck kind of way. What did I know? Not a damn thing. I guess it’s true. You can never know what demons people are hiding from a single glance at their red bottoms. We’re all fighting something. Chasing, something.

Longing, for something. And that unsatisfied hunger influences our actions every day.

God knows what Terrence had going on and how long it took to drive a man to drink his life away, or whatever substance abuse problem I assumed he had going on.

"You can just leave, Jarvis. The both of you, actually!" He snapped, "I'll call an Uber."

"Then why would you have me come up here and waste my time, Terrence?"

"Wait, you told him to come here?" I interjected.

"Yeah. I got the messages right here. Not that I need to show you. He rolled eyes at me and shook his head. It was clear that Jarvis had built up some sort of immunity to Terrence's episodes, because his deep brown eyes only looked at him with what seemed like endearment and empathy, instead of shock and disappointment. He stroked his trimmed goatee and took a deep breath. "Substituting one for another? You know you can't recover that way." Terrence kept silent and avoided making eye contact with both of us. Out of shame or annoyance. I wasn't sure.

"I'll take it from here, Mr. uh-hh..."

"Khai," I said. "Right." He said. "Looks like you've got your hands full." The judgment behind his eyes clearly recognized me for the mess I was. I realized I looked ridiculous holding my plate of pineapples and Nutty Buddies. Labels be damned. That was my cue. I had done enough. I had no business there. Terrence may have broken all the rules back at the hotel, but me calling the police which resulted in his son being taken away, inviting myself to his trip to the emergency room and talking to his sponsor, I had re-written the rules.

It was dark and I had no way to get home. My car was still back at the hotel. I called an Uber back and sat

in my car for over 30-minutes trying to muster up the strength to pull out of the parking lot. The rain was still coming down heavy and it was pitch black outside. Only one of the three streetlights in the parking lot worked and it flickered, spending more time off than it did on. I was damp, cold, humiliated and sexually frustrated.

The rain eventually died down to a drizzle and I was able to get on the road with fewer nerves. I spent the drive home in silence with not even the steady blow from the air-conditioning as my soundtrack. I always liked to take the back roads home. There's something nostalgic and calming about the tree-lined roads and bluebonnets in the pastures when spring was in full effect. It was always quieter than the main freeways and less crowded in terms of traffic, better suited for my little problem with anxiety.

I was the only car for as far as my eyes could see. 30-minutes in and my eyes were heavy. I got a glimpse of them in the rearview mirror and wasn't surprised to see they were suffocating in barbed wire veins of red. They were begging to close for just a moment. The lines began to run together until it was all one big illuminated, yellow blur. Thump-Thump. Thump-Thump. Thumping, my tiers went as they veered on and off the rumble strips lining the side of the road. Before long, my head became a block of led and planted itself onto the horn. My eyes shut and all I could feel was the sway of my car shifting back and forth. My tires let out warning screeches as the Lane Assist tried pulling me back on the straight and narrow. Money well spent.

If you have experienced sleep paralysis, then you know exactly how I was feeling. Fully aware of what was happening, but incapable of moving a muscle. This induced a state of panic. The most silent and helpless

form of panic one can ever experience. It's like I was listening and visualizing my death as it was happening, and I was unable to do anything to stop it. Something straight out of the Dexter Morgan plastic-wrap playbook.

Images of a winding back road and pouring rain flashed in and out my mind with each crack of thunder. My mind imagined the endless yellow lines ahead of me, but my hands were not steering and my foot was not in control of the gas. I did not recognize this road and it was evening instead of night. Things were not making sense. I had seen these images before in a reoccurring dream but none of it had any meaning to me.

A puff of warm fermented breath passed behind my ears and across my nose, and a young boy's voice, crying: "Wake up, daddy! I'm scared!" The thunder cracked once more, and it all faded to blackness again. Only the sounds of the crying boy remained. Tears fell from my sealed eyes. I was preparing for the worst. Those expensive ass computer systems could only do so much and were reaching their limitations. I heard a long honking from what sounded like an 18-wheeler getting closer and closer. I squirmed and squirmed in my mind helplessly as if tied to a railroad with a runaway train headed my direction. My mind willed my body to move something. Anything! But nothing worked!

Just as my car was veering off into the oncoming lane and the wailing horn was at its peak, I came to and was able to grip the wheel and swerve into the grassy pasture. My heart was thrashing behind my chest, trying to escape its boney prison and my arms were shaking as I held a death grip on the wheel. I couldn't move. This time, by choice. I needed to catch my breath. After several nervous minutes, I exited the car and assess the damage. There was nothing but clunks of

mud and grass wedged between my tires and fenders, but I still had to call a tow truck to pull me out of the mud.

It took 2-hours before anyone showed up and I didn't make it home until a little after midnight. After a hot shower and picking over my fruit salad and baked chicken mom brought to the office for me because she knew I still used my oven for decoration, I crawled into bed. Maybe I should have popped the Xanax my mom prescribed for me, but I feared the side effects, so I kept them locked away in my medicine cabinet. A glorious California King hugged my body with silk sheets, and 8 fluffy pillows and a warm weighted mink blanket that my mom bought in Korea. It had been in the family for over 15-years. Sleep? I would never know it. Every night, a nightmare. I usually like to scribble little details about my dreams in my journal to interpret them later but there is one that I always try to forget. It's this reoccurring one that I was terrified of what it might lead to if it dared to explore its origin. Too much blood, too much rain.

I would stare at the ceiling and fantasize about what it was like to sleep peacefully. An hour went by and my eyes finally shut. Just as I felt myself drifting. I saw a blinding light shine behind the blackness of my eyelids. I thought about Terrence. A replay of his desperate hands reaching out in-between the pouring raindrops towards the flashing red and blue lights as they pulled away with his son. Something about it was familiar. The lights flashed and flashed behind my eyelids with complete disregard for my need to sleep. Terrence's deep, but weakened voice pleading, only to fall upon deaf ears, made me identify with his feelings of failure. I would lie awake that night, tossing, turning, tossing and turning, and glaring at the clock as what remained of the night seemed to fly by. I remained with

my eyes peeled open, forced to look into the mirror of yesterday and try to piece together the origins of my madness. Then, trying not to remember when things became too vivid.

I wanted to log on to Jackd, get my fix and call it a night, but the thunder outside my widow punked me. I settled for porn, a bottle of Stella Rosa and two shots of Vodka. Most nights, I still lie awake thinking of that day. If things had worked out with Terrence, I would have probably had a very different night. The fact that I was still thinking about him was weird to me, but I tried to ignore it. Still, my little hoe-tale and lost battle with blurred lines will forever be marked as the beginning of a tumultuous series of bad decisions that would ultimately result in my self-ruin.