

From *#Horrible*

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## Bonbon House

#prostitution #brothel #pseudo-paedophilia #age play #rape #sodomy #dwarfism #unhealthy parent-child relationships #uncomfortable first date

He knelt as he took her small, malformed hand. She twisted her foot and pointed her toe to the floor perfectly, bringing a fist to her chin making her the picture of innocence. Lily wasn't the smallest woman there, nor the least misshapen, but his immediate infatuation was as certain as her soft skin against his. One glance to the madam confirmed the transaction and he left his credit card at the desk as Lily led him to her room.

The mint green door had a wooden plaque with *Lily* painted on it, surrounded by ladybirds. Inside it was a child's sanctuary. The oversized bed had white pillows and a pink duvet, all frilled and scented with the smell of talcum powder. A rounded wicker rocking chair in the corner was draped with synthetic sheep skin and seated a large cuddly panda with glass eyes. The rug at the foot of the bed depicted two tan horses gaily jumping a low hedge, the stallion on the grassy knoll behind them watching proudly.

Lily led him to sit on the bed and held her little arms out to him. He lifted her gladly by the armpits and set her on his knee. She nuzzled against his chest, the top of her blonde head beneath his chin, and began sucking her thumb. "Are you my daddy?"

"No, I'm not your daddy," he replied, cupping her body whilst his other hand rested on her small thigh. The tips of his fingers were beneath her pretty dress.

She giggled sweetly and took the thumb from her mouth with a *pop*. "Are you my uncle?"

He stroked her leg as he thought about that, her hairless skin supple and smooth. He brought his hand to her chin and tipped her head up with his knuckles, smiling down at her. "No. I'll just be your special friend."

Lily looked coy and mischievous, her finger touching her nose as she rubbed her feet together in flat white shoes. She slid out of his lap and stood primly, playing her fingers behind her back. "And I'm not supposed to tell?"

Another giggle, high and light, and she dropped down and scooted forwards to kneel between his feet. She began fiddling with a ringlet of her hair, winding it round and round. "What's your name?"

He began stroking her hair again, deciding that this slow pace must be normal for a first session. Lily needed to gauge the rhythm he wanted as much as he needed to feel out what she could best give him. He leaned forward and whispered his name against her lips before he kissed her.

The kiss was everything he had imagined it would be. She was slow to give him her tongue: nervous, shy, and cautious in a way that no woman had ever been. It was awkward to lean forward and keep kissing her like this, so he lifted her again, reluctantly breaking their mouths apart, and laid her down on the bed behind him.

Lily made hardly any indent and her legs tipped towards his hips where he was still sitting. He put an arm down and resumed their kiss. His hand found her thighs again, now parted meekly.

Anne's mother had told her to hide her little legs so frequently and forcefully that even years after her death, she couldn't bear to wear anything but long, billowing skirts and loose trousers for fear of the poisonous stab of guilt and shame that bloomed deep in her belly. Standing before carousel racks of clothes under harsh flickering lights, this aversion was only now turning out to be problematic for her.

Bonbon House did not provide a budget for costumes, as Anne was thinking of them, and insisted that each woman buy her own to create a consistent, fairy-tale believable character. So far she hadn't mustered enough nerve to pull out a hanger, let alone try on one of the short, sickly pretty dress. She couldn't afford to blindly binge-buy and the charity shops had already been rejected today. Anne wasn't a snob and had bought from those treasure troves of discarded memories and events before, but she had spent most of her life wearing children's clothes to look like a child. Now that she was only going to pretend for a few hours each working day at her new job, she didn't want to own anything that a real child had already been in.

Specifically: dresses. Bonbon House insisted almost exclusively on dresses. After several more minutes of queasy deliberation, Anne shut her eyes with a hard sigh and snatched down the dress. Then she moved about the other silver racks, found her size and repeated the act.

"Let go and let God," she murmured beneath her breath as she clutched at the synthetic fabrics. Four dresses in all, each of them sweeter and more girlish than the ones her mother had bought her for years. When she got back to her new home, she hung them proudly in the wardrobe.

Anne had never been inside a house that had been outfitted with 'little people' in mind, but then all of the rented rooms along half the street cycled through the same exclusive stature of tenants. There was at least one lightweight footstool in each room, the mirrors were low on the walls and all the furniture could easily be climbed onto.

She shared the house with two other women, both of them old hands at Bonbon House a hundred yards down the road, and she was grateful for their company. Not knowing the first thing about independent living, Anne was constantly going to them for advice about budgeting, cooking, and choosing clothes. They were sympathetic comrades.

She wished she had kept some of her clothes from before, but immediately after her inheritance had come through she had blown a chunk on new trousers, blouses, and coats, and then spent a day fumbling with the hems and sleeves. When a Save the Children plastic bag had been posted through her letterbox for her to fill, she'd jumped at the opportunity to clear out all her frilly dresses, bright skirts, and girlish hats in one go.

For the first twenty-seven years of her life she had lived as a child, and then had vowed not to do it another day. She consoled herself now that spending a few hours a day as a child was only to fund her real adult life.

*God has given me a life child, her mother had told her, and we'll not go against His will.* There was no father to stop her, so that had been that. When she finished public school each day, she was home schooled at the kitchen table. Her mother was careful to correct the great many lies she'd been taught: humans evolved from monkeys, vaccinations are safe without question, and floods in the Third World are caused by the weather and not God's wrath for their sins. Though she had learnt about marriage and 'saving herself' for her wedding night, she had been told very firmly that that was never to be for her. That was what adults did, and she was a child. Sex was what adults did.

How curious, she thought, that she had found such a confusion of these ideas on a job that she was perfect for. Anne wanted sex because she wanted to be an adult, and she had almost three decade's experience of being a child. Musing on this point as she admired her purchases in the wardrobe, she envisioned this being a great success.

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Bonbon House was a brothel of cultivated ordinariness on Chargrove Street, formerly standing as a small block of flats long ago converted. *For Rent* signs peppered the small gardens and low walls the length of the street, but there was never a room to let in Bonbon House. This thought occurred to David on his way to his sixth visit in so many weeks. As he walked out from town down to the middle of the street, he liked to see which rooms had become available and fantasised about what it would be like to move into one. He presumed that many of the girls from Bonbon House lived somewhere along this street, where rent was cheap and they were close to work. He wondered which house Lily lived in.

Today David was wearing a blue shirt and had remembered to put it on after shaving so as not to sprinkle the front with mousy brown clippings. His paunch had been shrinking, but his belt still sat beneath it and his jacket rested splayed about his sides. He'd trimmed his nails though hadn't done anything with the cuticles as he had been tempted. Lily's present sat in his pocket, nursed to warmth by his stroking hand.

There was a chill in the air and he wasn't at all surprised that it wasn't much warmer in the house when he stepped inside, making it unlikely that anyone would sweat. The building was a world apart from its exterior, with red crushed velvet curtains framing all the doors of the ground floor and pulled closed across the kitchen. The carpet was soft and though the rooms were small, its particular shade of beige against the brown islands of chairs seemed to open the space.

Patrice sat on a high chair at the mahogany table inside the door, the wood the same shade as her carefully piled hair. She set down her coffee when she saw David come in. Climbing down, she came to his side and looked up the three feet of distance between them.

"I could set my watch by you, Mr. Burne," she chirped with a smile. Her features were all squashed together in the centre of her face, a quality that made it immediately obvious why she was working the front desk. "Lily is just next door. Would you like to wait upstairs for her?"

"Yes, that'd be just fine."

Patrice didn't take David upstairs but went through the kitchen into the staff room. Lily and another woman were watching a David Attenborough documentary about the seasonal forests, their legs stretched out doll-like on the sofa. Slipping down, Lily smoothed down her powder blue dress and fluffed her hair before she left. As she climbed the stairs, her smile spread like boiling butter. David had told her two visits ago that he preferred her to come in to him more than he liked her to already be waiting there, and she preferred that too. Indeed, she was starting to find that she liked seeing him in general. She'd never found such a genuine connection with a man before.

After closing the door and finding David sitting on the bed, Lily ran to him with a squeal and leapt to hug him, feeling his big arms close around her body. At his touch, she felt a tingle of anticipation spread up her thighs. "I couldn't wait to see you again."

"I was excited too," he crooned, and she could tell he was. "I brought you something."

Lily's smile remained hitched in place but her voice slipped half an octave. She'd been brought things before, usually items of humiliation for their session. Dummies; face paint; a Barbie to hold clenched in her fist. "You did?"

He sat her on the bed and took the box out of his pocket. Taking her wrist, he slid the silver charm bracelet over her slim hand and watched her jangle it experimentally. "For my special girl."

She looked from the trinket to his worn face, her smile finally touching her eyes. It was beautiful. "Thank you ever so much."

"Can I have a kiss?" He put his hand on her leg where his fingers began running restless circles over her thighs. She jerked forward and pecked his cheek, playfully falling back into the role and giggling afterwards. He cupped her curiously bumpy head and eased her forwards again, slipping his tongue into her mouth.

Weary and content, Lily remained lying on her stomach as David stroked her, running his hand from the crown of her head down to the heels of her squashed legs, her knees proportionally too wide and her thighs too short. She mewled softly, eyes closed with genuine happiness. Her chest was still speckled red from orgasm and beginning to prickle against the sweat-warm sheets. David kept her in place with his gentle, quiescent strokes.

"I'd like to see you again," he announced, sensing that their time together had almost run out and that he'd have to leave and pay. He was using notes now, only paying with his card the first time. Patrice had quietly recommended against using it.

When David stopped stroking her, Lily rolled over to look at him, unashamed of her nakedness. "Next week again?"

He smiled in a way that he hoped was both shy and seductive. "Actually, I was thinking of somewhere out of here."

Lily's smile shrunk away and her pink mouth no longer seemed quite so pretty. That was an alien offer in context. "And go where?"

Sitting up, David scooped his boxers and socks up from the floor and began to get dressed.

"I was thinking The Old Oak. It does nice traditional pub food, and it's nicer than a lot of the restaurants in town."

Shuffling back to sit against the pillows, Lily pulled the quilt up over her modest breasts and rested her hands on her knees. "Why?"

David smiled over his shoulder at her. "Because I think we have something special." He got up to step into his trousers, wrestling the belt that had been undone in haste back through the loops. "So will you have dinner with me?"

She thought about it, glancing without conscious thought to the bracelet under the pink lamp on the bedside table. "I can meet you there at seven on Monday."

"You don't want me to pick you up?" A slight shake of her head and a slow blink. The restaurant was only a ten-minute walk from here. "Alright, I'll meet you at the Oak."

He finished dressing in silence whilst she stared blankly into the space between them. "I'm looking forward to it."

The glaze vanished and she smiled at him. "So am I."

\*

Anne was now Annie, and she'd dyed her tight ringlets a red that matched the icon of her new name. She'd also had her first complete wax which, though painful, she much preferred over her mother's razor and foam within a stubble-free week. She moisturised all over and covered herself in factor-forty sunscreen when the sun was bright to preserve the uniform paleness of her skin. This promoted a sense of purity, she'd been advised, though there was one coloured woman working at Bonbon house. There were no men save for the clients, though the madam could give anyone who asked the details of an exclusively male establishment that catered to men and women.

Her wooden name plaque had arrived today – a pine oval with *Annie* and pink butterflies painted onto it. There was a soft strip of Velcro on the back to put against the rough strip on the door when she started. She polished it needlessly and ran her fingers about its smooth edges, imagining claiming her room at the house with her devoted clients.

They would be gentle and slow, crooning loving words as they stroked her hair and pressed their hips against hers. She would be more than herself: she would be every fantasy for them, and they'd thank her with gifts and unending affection. Regarding her pretty dresses and holding her plaque, she had nothing to fear.

\*

Lily had dressed carefully on Monday evening. She had ironed and put on her dark jeans that hung straight and smart from her hips and a pretty blouse in deep blue. Her hair that spent so much time in pigtails and ringlets was now straightened and pinned back high on her head.

She had applied makeup sparingly, her eyes darkly pronounced only through thin, smudged lines of kohl. Finally, her shoes were a soft cross between trainers and shoes, comfortable but not overly casual, and she had of course remembered the charm bracelet. This was to be her first date in years, and the first with a client, so she had enjoyed the time agonizing over her appearance.

She had timed to arrive two minutes late at the restaurant and saw David already seated through the glass frontage. He had a long pink rose in a plastic tube on the table in front of him. Lily took a moment to savour the excited flutter in her stomach when she saw it then went inside.

David's face fell a little when he saw her approaching the table. "What are you wearing?" he murmured as he stood, pulling out her chair as a waiter wordlessly slipped a booster cushion onto it.

Lily felt the corners of her eyes grow hot but declined to respond, taking his offered hand to get up onto the chair. "I'm sorry I'm a little late."

"That's all right," David assured as he returned to his seat, and then held out the rose to her.

"I hope you like roses. I got you one because it's our first official date."

"It's lovely, thank you." She meant it as she took the flower, forcing the earlier moment aside. Setting it down carefully, Lily picked up her menu. "So what's good?"

David scrutinised the lists. "The lamb shank is excellent."

After reading over the blurb, she looked up and asked, "does it come as a light bite? I can't manage a big portion."

"I don't think it does." David turned the menu over to the brightly coloured back, where cartoon characters held up photographed plates of food. "You could have something from the children's menu. That would be a small portion. There's a nice chicken breast here."

After a few shocked seconds Lily turned over the menu and scanned the list cautiously, feeling him watching her. "Okay. I'll have the chicken from this side, and a glass of white wine."

He nodded, rubbing at his beard as he looked for something for himself. "Sounds good, and I'll take that lamb." After he had placed their orders with the waiter he smiled across the table at Lily. The place was steadily filling around them. "There could be a bit of a wait for our meals."

Lily took a gentle sip of her wine and smiled back, admiring his face in the light. "That's alright. I don't mind spending the time."

A self-effacing grin and David nodded with a motion over her head. "I meant, you don't have to stay at the table. There's a play area just on the other side of the room if you'd like. It would pass the time and I'd like to watch you."

There was absolute silence between them as she stared, waiting. Finally her smile fell its final inch and her face was left waxy and potent. "You must be joking."

David's grin melted away and he picked up the wine list, running a finger across his lips. "Yes, of course, yes."

She wanted to believe that, but they ate quietly.

\*

Stiffly posed under the covers, Penelope stared with a hot focus at the ceiling. She never did sessions in the evening and couldn't believe that she had let Patrice talk her into coming in for her regular client. Jack was old and got nervous easily, and she guessed he'd had some big argument with his wife because he had been quick and tactless, like a jackhammer. Usually he wasn't one of the rough ones. He was whistling in the shower now, taking far longer than anyone else would and using her shampoo rather than taking just the complimentary rinse.

Twisting to put her back to the bathroom door, Penelope took in how her dress lay like a rag over the high-backed chair in the corner. The spanking chair, as it was generally known here. She had come to hate that chair, and the dress hanging off the seat of it, and the fake sheepskin rug that

was at its legs. The water shut off and she closed her eyes, leaving them closed until she'd heaved herself up to sit and mustered a smile in time for the door opening.

Jack stepped out, flushed and shiny from the steam, the long hair that ran from the bald patch encompassing most of his head straggly and curled. He watched her in mutual silence as he got dressed, then came over to kiss her cheek still shouldering into his coat. "I'll see you in a few weeks, poppet." Penelope beamed and closed her eyes to crescents in sarcastic pleasure.

When he closed the door, she jerked two fingers at it and threw herself back onto the bed. Hissing at the petulant act, she bent her knees and split her legs to let cool air ease away the heat from where she was sore.

\*

It was awkward for Lily to fit her legs around David, but holding her straddled in his lap was his favourite position, and his enthusiasm made it easier to try to accommodate him. He had left her dress on, a lilac bridesmaid dress that had a gauze with a metallic sheen over the skirt. Her shiny plastic shoes were lined together at the end of the bed, but she still had her white knee socks on, now warm with sweat. David always took off her shoes before he undressed.

He kissed her cheeks and neck again, his breaths still coming heavily and a thin tremble running through his hands. "I don't want to leave you," he whispered earnestly, half gasping through his choked-up throat.

Lily's mind had turned to cotton from his touches, her mouth hanging open and her soft gasps coming in rhythm with his darting hands. It had never been like this with a client before.

"I don't want you to either." Her eyes slid open as she composed her thoughts. "I don't have another—anything to do now." She expected him to tense at the ugly notion that had nearly come out, but he didn't. "If you want to wait whilst I have a shower, we can go out and do something."

A deep purr of contentment rumbled up from his chest. "That sounds good. We could go for a walk, stretch our legs and take in some fresh air. Get dinner. Then maybe we could go back to your place."

She had totally regained herself now, though was still smiling. "Oh no, not my place." Lily tried to make it sound playful.

David rolled his eyes with jovial excess, lifting her from his lap and letting her down to the floor. "Alright then, my place. How's that?"

Turning around for him to unzip her dress, Lily gave a firm nod. "That sounds good, yes. I'd like to see your place."

He stood, stepping away from the bed and planted his hands on his soft hips. "Shall I shower first quickly whilst you're undressing?"

That suited her and he went into the adjoining bathroom. Every room had its own. They did good enough business here to afford it, clearly, and it was the final means of ensuring that none of the men ever met.

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They took the long way into town, enjoying the crisp air after coming away from the heady room. Lily was wearing a thick grey pullover against the chill and David had done his jacket up. He was leading them at a slow pace that accommodated her stride and took a route through the little park that stood closest to town. It was abandoned now that dusk was encroaching, with its play area turning to grey steel in the dimming light.

David stopped by the green gate, his hands in his pockets. Lily stood a little way back so she could see his face. "Shall we go on the swings?"

Lily looked through the narrow bars to the dark swings rising out of the woodchips. The rectangles of rubber at the bottoms of the chains looked cracked and cold. "Really? Why?" she asked in a high voice, though it was alien compared to the voice she put on for work.

"Just thought it might be fun. A bit of a laugh." He opened the gate. It squeaked as it swung and he looked at her expectantly. "Come on then."

She didn't feel she had much choice though she did linger outside the fence for a few seconds whilst he walked to the swing set. "You'll have to help me up," she announced, eyeing the height.

He did so with a smile. "I'll give you a few pushes to get you started." David didn't give her time to respond before pulling back the seat in one hand and thrusting it forward.

Gripping the freezing chains, Lily laughed despite herself, swinging her legs back and forth, leaning heavily with the momentum. She hadn't been on a swing in over a decade. It made her think of her mum who had moved north and left her when her dad died a few years ago. She had been managing though, and as was being demonstrated now, was even finding company and time to have fun.

"Higher?" David shouted over her laughter. He was still only pushing gently, more guiding the swing than forcing it higher, fascinated by how her bright hair fell and swayed across her petite shoulders.

"That's high enough!" she declared, throwing her body forwards again. "You get on and have a go!"

He kept taking and pushing the seat. "No, I like pushing you."

She laughed again though hoped he would change his mind. After five minutes it was clear he wouldn't, and she had stopped laughing. "That's enough."

"Oh just a little longer," he implored without breaking pace. His cheeks and ears had flushed pink.

Her body turned stiff, the joints of her fingers white about the chains. "That's enough, David," she repeated firmly. "Let me down."

An exasperated sigh and then he took hold of the rubber, walking forwards with it on the down swing. Lily slid off before he could take her waist, rubbing her hands to ward off the lingering chill. "I don't want to go out to dinner anymore. I'm not feeling well all of a sudden."

He knelt before her and held her shoulders sympathetically. "Would you like to come home with me? I'll give you a nice hot bath and a glass of warm milk. I'll take good care of you."

"No, thank you." Lily glanced around the park and saw that they seemed to be alone. It would be dark very soon. "Would you just walk me home?"

"Alright. I'll have to take you round my place some other time." David held out his hand, which she took, and led them out of the park and towards Chargrove Street. From there, she would have to direct them.

They walked in silence, and eventually Lily felt compelled to break it. "I've got a few days off at the end of the week. I could see your place Friday and we could spend time over the weekend," she blurted, struggling a little to keep up with his longer stride. He was walking quicker than usual, and she assumed it was because of the cold.

"I'll come around for you on Friday night, then," he replied with a grin down to her. "Make sure to wear something nice."

Aside from *goodnight*, this was the last thing he said to her that evening.

\*

Penelope was getting out tonight, and she was going to burn her name plaque doused with tequila at the side of the road. She had already stuffed clothes and the few photos she had started with into a carrier bag and tucked a tube of money into a half-empty bag of chocolate éclairs. It had taken her weeks to save enough, probably more than she would need, though she didn't know where she was

going yet. She would only know her destination when she bought her ticket at the train station, and it was safest that way.

So as not to arouse suspicion she had made sure that she was not in need of a wax for another few days and had a week of clients booked in advance. She had come into work early as always, changed in her room, and eaten the fruit breakfast she had brought in the staffroom.

There were two clients today with a long break between, and it was during those hours she was most worried about giving the game away. With the clients, even the frequent ones that were well-versed, she was confident she could act normal. She'd been doing this so long now she could fall into mindless autopilot and still make it interesting for them.

Usually, Penelope spent the time running over errands she needed to get done; what time she'd need to start preheating the oven so her chicken casserole was ready for the start of her favourite show; when Carl was next due round the house to collect their rent and his cut.

Today though, she was going to think of where she might be tomorrow; how she could get away if she was followed; what she'd tell the women's refuge about her fabricated abusive boyfriend to let her stay long enough to find a job and somewhere to live. All the possibilities. Her little head was growing full of them.

\*

Annie had decided not to be too precious about her virginity and to see it as the asset it was. She'd be able to pass as a supposed virgin for at least two weeks, even bleeding a little each time, before it became noticeable and she was just a pretend virgin to a new client. Her first time would be genuinely that, though, and there would be clients who would pay extra for the privilege. This meant she had to wait for the phone call telling her when she was to see the highest bidder.

When the call finally came, they also told her that the client was a known one and didn't like to use lubricant. He'd want to use her saliva, so unless she wanted it to really hurt, she should prepare herself beforehand with lubricant and not tell him. Annie decided to do this in her room as he wanted to first see her there, so she'd have time.

On Friday morning, she moisturised where waxing had left her skin feeling like a cold, plucked chicken's and ironed the white, empire-line dress she had bought for the occasion. It came to just above the knees of her twisted legs and had sugar-icing pink stitching. As requested, her hair was tied in pigtails and she wore white cotton knee socks.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, looking down at the horses in the cheap rug, she pretended she wasn't nervous for the sake of herself. It was going to start any minute now and then it would be over. The step into adulthood. She would have a thorough shower, then a second client, lunch in the staff room then her third client, and finally home for dinner and bed. She mentally walked through the sequence, passing the fogged unknown, to when she could go home.

The door opened. Annie sat straighter and placed her hands on her knees, trying to smile as she watched him enter. Nerves had quelled her excitement, but at least he looked like the handsome young man she'd envisioned. His suit was tailored and didn't shine, and the duffel bag in his hand was covered in expensive logos.

He sat on the bed and cupped her hair, his index and middle finger on either side of a pigtail. "Are you frightened, little one?" Annie tipped her head shyly, as she'd been practicing, and shook 'no'. She'd assumed and been told that most of the clients like to role-play during their sessions, and she'd spent time fantasising about being the cautiously consenting step-daughter or the child 'caught' masturbating by a family friend whom she secretly wanted.

Her eyes flashed hot with tears and the fantasy shattered when his large hand squeezed her head.

"Are you frightened Annie?" he pressed, the corners of his eyes tight and pink. She nodded and he let go of her head.

Eyes contracting to sharp flints and his trousers tightening with arousal, he purred to her vindictively. "I'm going to break you in, you little slut. Baby slut."

She shook when he reached beneath her dress to roughly pull down the frilly pink knickers

When he called her a 'good girl' from the doorway afterwards, she cried harder and retched.

\*

Lily had kept Thursday free for odd errands and had her hair dyed as planned on Friday afternoon. The question of what to wear had stewed into an anxious churning, and half an hour before David was due to arrive she was still looking into her wardrobe. Giving into the niggling voice at the back of her mind, she settled on a dress that she didn't wear much because it was too akin to what she wore at Bonbon House. It was a deep emerald with long sleeves and a short skirt that bounced out over layers of netting. It was another child's bridesmaid dress that she had altered. She combined it with inch-heeled shoes that just about fit her, though her toes didn't quite reach the ends.

Prompt as ever, David picked her up in his car and then drove them to a notoriously good Chinese take-away. She planned to have a little of everything he had, which looked to work out fine when she saw how large the silver foil containers were.

David invited her to look around his flat whilst he served their meals and cut up a French loaf, and she needed no encouragement. She had been as curious about seeing his home as he had been about seeing hers.

It was quite big, with unpolished wooden floors that clung wearily to an old shine but gave the otherwise modern flat a comfortably domestic feel. A big red sofa pointed at the wall mounted flat-screen television over a glass fronted fireplace, and an art-deco monochrome rug lay between. All the cabinets had glass doors, though the kitchen stuck out as an old model of indifference. Lily smiled at this typically male characteristic: that he'd rather spend thousands on speakers than spend hundreds on new cabinets. He was serving onto large black plates beside the gas cooker. He'd said he liked her dress.

"I'll give you the proper tour after we've eaten," David said as he took up both plates and carried them to the chic dining table. "Would you like a cushion to sit on?"

Lily's eyes were just about level with the table whilst if she strained. "Yes please." He fetched her one from the sofa and then placed her on it with a glancing but intentional stroke of her knees.

They talked about menial things, comfortably and quietly before a brief lapse into silence encouraged Lily to ask what she had always wondered about her clients, though she wasn't certain if she ever actually wanted to know. Though she played the part, she was sure that many of them still lusted after the genuine article. "Can I ask: have you ever really done it?"

David looked up from his greasy noodles. "Done what?"

She offered a smile to tell him it was okay. "You know. What we pretend to do at Bonbon House, for real."

His gaze returned to his plate and he was silent for what felt like a long time. Finally, he gave a nonchalant shrug with one shoulder. "No, I can't say I have. It doesn't really appeal to me."

Lily's fork paused in mid-air. "No?"

He sat back, thoughtful. "I mean, I've looked at some things, sure. That's how I found out about the house. I just don't want to be like that, you know?"

She did, and felt a flush of warmth at the confession. They finished their meals through smiles.

His bed was large with a metal frame, the sheets white and crisp. Lily was led atop the folded duvet at its end, her shoes arranged perfectly on the floor by the base. She sighed and gasped as David

touched her small breasts through her dress. She was glad that she had put clean underwear into her purse for tomorrow.

He pulled her skirts up and she groaned with anticipation. She didn't notice him hesitate.

"What's this?"

Lily didn't register his tone. "Oh, I'm getting a wax done on Monday fresh for work. You don't mind, do you?"

David's stare was fixed on the bristles. "Actually I do." He sat up and away from her, and when it had become apparent that she hadn't heard his quiet reply, he got up and went to the wardrobe.

"What are you doing?" she called languidly, running her own hands over herself in his absence.

He pulled long cotton socks out of their bundles and returned to the bed. "I'd like to try something. Sit up."

Doing so, she put her wrists together obligingly and watched as he bound them, her stomach fluttering with excitement. He tied her feet spread to the vertical bars at the base of the bed, then eased her back down again.

"Close your eyes."

Lily did and David left her. He went into the adjoining bathroom and returned with a pair of tweezers. Kneeling at the bottom of the bed, he pulled her underwear down to her knees and pushed her dress up. He placed the tips of the tweezers about a central hair and pulled.

She yelped and jerked, eyes wide. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Getting rid of your hair." He plucked another one. "I like you smooth."

Lily tried to squirm away, the joke gone too far. "Leave it. Let me up and I'll shave it off if that's what you want."

Another hair gone. "It'll still be there." Another. "All black and coarse." Another. "It doesn't suit you."

"I have hair." There was a rising note of panic now. "I'm an adult."

David's sudden glare froze her. When the shock had subsided and he had resumed mechanically tearing out the hair, she began to kick and thrash in frenzy. He slapped her legs and swore, and she muffled herself with the sock about her wrists as she tried to pull away the knot with her teeth.

Finally, one of her feet pulled violently free, and she sent her heel as hard as she could into his low, scrutinizing face. David shouted, recoiled backwards, and dropped the tweezers as his hands went to his nose. There was no blood.

Lily wrenched away from the other restraints with her bound hands, rolling off the bed and tearing out of the room. She felt lost but immediately ran for the front door. It was latched high above her head, and unlike home, there weren't a dozen brightly coloured footstools scattered about to help her. She cried again, jumping and reaching futilely.

David's hands were on her once more, but her dress tore dryly and she writhed free. She dove off randomly, finding herself in the kitchen this time. The bread knife was still out, the handle teasingly visible at the precipice of the sideboard. Lily jumped for it and knocked it down on the second attempt. When David grabbed her, it wasn't a conscious thought to stab him. It simply happened.

She dimly heard the wet peel of his abdomen splitting beneath his cry, not knowing how much injury she had done him as she ran back for the door.

Jumping and shouting, reaching again for the latch and feeling tears of frustration and fear peeling away from her eyes, it came to her slowly that the flat had gone quiet. Distrustful of the peace, she pressed her back and palms to the door, holding her breath to listen. In the kitchen, David grappled with the handle of the knife, his hands slippery with blood and numbing with shock.

By the door, Lily regarded the locked latch again and considered dragging one of the dining room chairs past David. She quickly rejected the idea in favour of phoning for help, which would bring a rescue immediately upon opening the door. It was a nightmarish thought that if she got out now, none of the neighbours would answer her cries for help. They might even watch her, like people hiding in their dark windows on Halloween from the roaming, pestering children.

One step deeper into the flat and a fresh wave of disorientation struck her when she realised she hadn't seen a phone.

She'd have to search his jacket for a mobile.

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Inside the cold station under the white, alien light, Penelope and Annie stood watching the board, holding their bags in front of them with both hands. The handles hadn't stretched, only grown warm and damp. The last train, departing to somewhere they'd never heard of, was leaving in ten minutes. They'd bought their tickets but couldn't afford to get Lily's, though they had been assured that there was plenty of room left. There was also another train leaving for the same place in the morning.

Lily wouldn't know where they had gone though. The minutes clicked by and still Lily didn't come. She'd said that if dinner with David was just as unsettling as her last dates with him, that she'd leave with them. They had a hunch it would be, and hadn't been comforted when Lily wasn't at the station. Three minutes left and they had to board now. On the train, they sat opposite each other and pressed their hands to the window, waiting and only breathing.

Lily did not come.