

# The Understudy

## Bruce Peterson

“No.”

My boss Heidelman looked up at me like he was trying to figure out which one of us was crazy. “What was that, Peterson?”

“I said, ‘no.’” Every eye in the meeting room was suddenly on me. Whatever I was doing, it was working so far. Or blowing up catastrophically, which, at that point, what would be the loss?

Time to see if the advice from that pompous jerk Vic was worth a damn.

I pressed my attack. “Respectfully, sir, Daniels doesn’t know the first thing about this project. Not to speak ill of the man,” I noted, pointedly avoiding looking to where he was sitting, glaring as nonchalantly as a man could when his underling was trying to steal a major account right in front of the execs. “He’s good in the field, but you want a field man when you’re staking out a field. We already own this one.”

Heidelman stroked his chin. “No offense, Peterson, but... why you? You’re a project coordinator, not a manager. Maybe you’re right about Daniels.” The glare redoubled. “That still doesn’t mean you’re the logical choice.”

I swallowed down the river of panic threatening to vomit across the room. “I’ve been there since day one. I know the terrain. I know the people.” I placed my palms on the table and leaned in. “Hell, you’re sending me because I woke up this morning with only one thought in my head: I’m going to make this company, and everybody in this room, rich as hell. So all you have to do is put my name on it, stand back, and let me.”

That was as specific as I made my pitch. As specific as I could, considering I’d walked in here with no plan at all. I’d worked up the nerve to demand the floor, but after that, I figured Daniels would smack me down and I’d shuffle back to my seat and be fired for arbitrary causes within the week.

Instead...

After a moment of waiting to hear if I had more to say, all eyes slowly shifted from me to Heidelman. Nobody objected. They only wanted to see if the boss was as sold as they were.

“Thank you, Peterson. We’ll talk it over, and let you know.”

I held my pose for a moment, looming over the entire room somehow, but at last stood. There was an audible trace of people catching their breath from the weight my withdrawal lifted. “Keep me posted.”

I somehow made it back to my office before I fell on my knees and (almost) fought off a panic attack. What on earth had I just done? Me, Bruce Peterson, the man who apologized to his dentist for forgetting mint. Then today, charged up from a few glib

words from the jerk who'd landed every part I'd auditioned for in community theater, I storm the board room and demand the world without so much as a shred of justification as to why they'd grant a three-level promotion to the guy who'd stood in the background of Daniels' presentation.

Oh god, I was going to get fired. Jessica would leave me – probably cheat on me again first – and then take our daughter and leave. I'd be an unemployed thirty-six-year-old man struggling to make child support payments, and I'd never find another woman like Jess even if my career rebounded.

What on earth had I been thinking?! That was the worst advice I'd ever been given!

The phone rang. It took three rings before I was confident I wouldn't drop the receiver. "Peterson."

"Hi, Bruce. Heidelman. When can you leave?"

"I packed my bags before I left home this morning," I lied.

A dry laugh. "I bet you did. Don't let me down."

"You have nothing to worry about. I'm on the job."

Damn. Maybe that advice hadn't been so bad after all.

## Jessica Peterson

Ten weeks in Dubai. Christ, my husband had hardly left New York state, much less flown to the far side of the planet. One day he comes home from work with this cockamamie story about demanding a promotion, and before I know it, he's out of my hair for the whole summer. If this promotion worked out, maybe we could talk about counseling. Otherwise, I had a handsome young buck waiting in the wings, Derek. Even if I didn't wind up needing him, it wasn't a bad way to spend a summer.

I should say, I suppose, that I do love my husband. Most of the time, anyway. Not that he makes it easy. Bruce had shown so much potential back when we first met that I'd gone ahead and taken the plunge. After all, he was a good-looking guy, or he had been thirty pounds ago. MBA from a good school, a respectable family, and lord knew he'd never mistreat me. (What was he going to do, trade up? Ha!)

Back then, I'd thought that Bruce being a born people pleaser was one of his best traits. If I said I was hot, he ran to the thermostat and then fetched me a sweater. Headache? There would be aspirin in my hand before I could wince. The new pool in the back yard had taken exactly two hints. It wasn't that I was breaking him. No, breaking him would imply he was resisting. Two was simply how many hints before he realized what I wanted and decided he'd be happiest if he got it for me.

(That I looked damn good in a swimsuit didn't hurt.)

Unfortunately, what I hadn't counted on was that in his professional life, those same instincts had made him, basically, a spineless boot licker. He didn't make waves, didn't ask for more than he was given, didn't negotiate. Bruce had dead-ended in his early thirties, which meant that if I stayed with him, I was going to do the same. It was a bitter pill.

I did miss him sometimes during that summer. Between how busy his work was and the time difference, we hardly spoke. I suppose I was pretty busy, too – not like being a mom isn't a full-time job. Our little Kaley was eight now, almost nine, with all the playdates and funtivities that come with summer break. My niece Natalie was over quite a bit, too, struggling with my sister's recent divorce of her father. We'd always been close, so now I was getting to be a second mother to her, too, and learning a lot about what I had to look forward to when Kaley grew up. Bruce's absence was almost a blessing, in that way. Getting to be just us girls took me back to younger, more care-free days.

And then suddenly he was back.

I'm not joking. One day, with no warning at all, the front door opened and there he was. It was literally sudden. Bruce was back, and...

He was something else too.

Some of it was obvious. He was *in shape*. The broad shoulders beneath his jacket, the tightening of the skin around his neck and jaw, and what I would later appreciate as

a real hardening of all sorts of muscles I then could only notice weren't buried under love handles. Not that he was ripped, exactly. Just... put together *right*. A man who took care of himself. Who regarded his body as an asset, one he meant to put to good use. It came with a new haircut, a striking new suit, and...

Something else.

Natalie and I had been in the middle of doing some online shopping, looking to get a few outfits to really grind my sister's gears while still keeping her within the bounds of good taste. I stared in shock; I think Natalie felt it, too. He was her godfather, and they'd always been close. My husband set down his suitcase near the door and walked calmly into the middle of the living room, a thin smile on his lips. Pleased, I hoped. Err, I mean, I thought.

"I need a kiss from my wife." That was it. No greeting, only that simple request. Or was it a demand? No, not quite, only...

I ran to him and threw my arms around his neck, kissing him like I had when we were in college, back when a stiff breeze could turn me on. His hands were firm on my waist, holding my body against his as we, to be frank, made out. Right in front of Natalie. I didn't care. My husband was home, and his first words to me had been exactly the right ones.

"You're early!" I exclaimed.

"Nonsense, I'm not a moment too soon. Come on, we have reservations at The Vine at seven. Just enough time for you to clean up and put on something attractive in time for our date. I can't wait to see what you pick out. Far too long since I've seen my beautiful wife at her best."

"We... we do?" That he was here, that we had plans – and what plans! the Vine! – it was a lot. But... should... should I be offended by the way he'd put it? Flattered? I honestly wasn't sure. It was so straightforward that it put me completely off balance, to the extent that all I could think was that my husband was back, and he was looking incredible, and he'd somehow gotten reservations at one of the best restaurants in the city, and he wanted me to look good. What did I say to that? *No, I'd rather sit here with Natalie and online shop for mini skirts*. He'd made exciting plans and wanted to spend time with his wife.

"I can't wait." I kissed him again, beaming.

"Good. Don't." He patted me on the butt, and it was decidedly firm enough to be a nudge in the direction of our bedroom. So unlike him! And so very...

Something else. I hurried to the bedroom.

"Hi, Uncle Bruce. You look... wow," I heard in my wake.

Bruce picked out my clothes that evening.

Not *technically*, I suppose. As I milled about the closet in my towel, however, he called out to me. “Something red.”

Telling me what to wear was not something anyone had done since I’d been a child. Certainly not my meek husband. Still, I didn’t feel like having a shouting match. Red was one of my favorite colors, so it’s not like I objected either. If it was entirely out of character for him, taking such an interest in my attire, I decided it was welcome. I spent half an hour waffling between outfits sometimes. To have him actually have input for once was... refreshing.

“Don’t be shy about the cleavage, either. I really did miss you,” he followed a few minutes later.

My eyes bulged in the direction of the door. There he was, hugging his daughter and greeting his niece, meanwhile casually clarifying that he expected a good look at their mother’s/aunt’s breasts. This was *not* my husband! Bruce, who said “please” when he asked for sex. This man, wearing his new and improved Bruce suit (and how!), was not timid. He wanted me, and if he wasn’t being crude, he was making sure I knew it. It was...

Mm.

I came out wearing a little red dress I hadn’t worn since before Kaley. I was a bit more woman than I had been then, but mostly in the way my husband had specially requested. The dress was tight and a bit short. In truth, I’d only held onto it because it was the sort of thing that you couldn’t donate to Goodwill. Not unless they’d added a Hot & Horny Housewife section to their stores.

Kaley sat on her father’s lap, arms wrapped around him adoringly as he and Natalie browsed something on her tablet. They both looked up when I came in, though. “Dang, Aunt Jessie...!” she exclaimed.

“Tell mommy how pretty she looks,” he instructed Kaley, who complied readily. I *did* look good. I’d made sure of it. Short of a trip to the stylist, this was as good as I got. The dress, yes, but with heavy mascara and heavier lipstick, both red as the dress itself, and my tallest heels. I hadn’t worn these in forever – in fact, given their color, I might well have bought them to go with this dress for all I remembered. They couldn’t even see my underwear, but it was a hell of a sight, too. If Bruce played his cards right, I might even throw him a bone and let him take a gander.

“Nattie sweetie, do you mind watching Kaley?”

“I have a date, remember?” she said apologetically.

“No need. I hired a sitter. In fact...” The doorbell rang with perfect timing. Was all this even real? “Ah, I thought I’d heard a car door.”

“When did you have time to hire a sitter?” I asked, drifting to the door in a fog.

“My secretary took care of it. It’s Daniels’ daughter – he offered her up to suck up to the new boss.”

I stopped at the door. “New boss?” Wasn’t Mr. Daniels like two steps *above* Bruce? I was sure of it! And what had that been about a secretary?

“The door, darling.”

“Oh. Right.”

I’d met Daniels a few times at office functions, on those rare occasions when Bruce had managed to score us an invite. He was a good-looking man for his age, and the girl on the other side of the door was a testament to those fine genetics. Light brown hair, perfect complexion, and not a bad little body on her either. The way she was dolled up in a cute skirt and tight sweater, to say nothing of her exquisitely done makeup, I would have thought she was on her way to a date, same as Natalie. She looked to be only a little younger than me, just enough to be conspicuously younger, everything still high and tight. The sort of girl some women wouldn’t trust alone with their husband. Luckily for me, I had Bruce, who’d never had the sack to so much as scope out another woman since he’d married me, much less flirt with one. The very idea of it was...

Suddenly, I found myself glaring at her. “Come on in.”

She replied to my husband, however, all the way across the room. “Thanks, Mr. Peterson. You have a lovely home.”

He nodded, and with a gesture, I understood that I was to instruct her in necessary child care routines and emergency info. Meanwhile, Bruce and Natalie went back to whatever they’d been talking about. More shopping, if you could believe that. I could hear her laughing as I tried to force introductions between Kaley and this stranger, Dina, she called herself.

“Oh, and lest I forget, let me give you my number, just in case. Text me if there’s anything you need, all right, Dina?”

“I have your husband’s number already, Mrs. Peterson. Don’t worry.”

Don’t worry? It was that reassurance that made me worry. What exactly had Bruce been up to the past two and a half months?

Once Dina had sufficiently distracted Kaley with conversation, I returned to the living room. “Ready, hon?”

“For a wife so stunning, I’d be crazy not to be,” he answered, taking his feet and joining me. I even got another kiss for my troubles.

“And Nattie, don’t worry, we’ll take another look later on, OK? I had my eye on–”

“Actually, Aunt Jessie, Uncle Bruce gave me a few pointers, and I... well, I guess it’s all taken care of now,” she said, cheeks flushing somewhat.

Natalie? Discussing fashion with Bruce? I did his laundry. The man wore so much khaki he was practically a cartoon character. Either way, we didn’t have time to get into it, so for now, I blew her a kiss and let Bruce guide me to the driveway–

“Is that *Dina’s*?!” I exclaimed, gaping at the Porsche in the driveway.

“Came with the promotion. Heidelman agreed it’s important for upper management to project success, so I let him butter me up. Come on, get in. I’ll tell you the interesting parts on the way.”

I squeaked as he slapped my ass commandingly. But I got in the car, and I listened. It was...

Something. Something else.

Details were scant, and there was such a dizzying mix of false modesty and raw bravado that it was hard to decipher what was said. My best read of things was that my husband had talked his way into a shot at a big contract, knocked it out of the park, then been handsomely rewarded. He had Daniels in his pocket, and by extension his daughter, who had been interning on the job, classic nepotism. More than two months, he'd been on the far side of the world with that savory little tart. Then he brought her into our home, left our daughter in her care. That he was so brazen about it was my only reassurance that nothing could have happened between them.

Not that I had room to blame him if he did. Ugh, there was even a quiet part of me that almost hoped for it, just so I could show that little bitch that Bruce was *mine*.

When I asked about his fitness, the hair, all those distractingly enticing parts that helped keep me so off-balance, he acted like he didn't know what I was talking about, dismissing my insistence that he looked better – so much better – by saying that he took care of himself, and was glad I'd be doing the same.

Be doing? Did he mean *had been* doing? Or should I...?

The next morning, I re-enrolled in a gym.

Not that it was because my husband said I should. He hadn't. I don't think. No, there were two reasons. For one, it was only fair. He was doing all this work to make himself look good for me, and it would be selfish not to reciprocate. Especially with those veiled suggestions that he wanted me to. (If they were veiled. Does "you look almost as sexy as when we first met" count as a suggestion? An insult? A compliment?)

For two... I needed the stamina.

When we returned home from the restaurant, me a little tipsy, I stumbled a bit in the driveway. It was the shoes more than the wine, honestly. Still, Bruce simply swaggered over and slung me over his shoulder. I realized immediately that I should say something, demand – ask? – him to let me down. This dress was arguably too short standing upright. Slung over Bruce's shoulder as I suddenly found myself, I was flashing my panties to anybody who cared to look. Inside, whatshername the slutty babysitter giggled at the sight of us, or of my nearly bare butt, then said something to Bruce, some compliment about how strong he was. The girl was gushing with feminine admiration. Kaley was in bed, she assured us.

Bruce said not a word; he simply carried me into our bedroom and fucked me within an inch of my life.

No. That's not quite right. He told me how he wanted *me* to fuck *him* within an inch of my life.

Our love-making had always been routinely intermittent. Once a month or so, one of us would finally get bored enough of masturbating to finally admit we needed the other. At least, that was my process. For Bruce, it took a similar time frame to work up the nerve to ask me, taking my infrequent requests for infrequent interest. Then, if I



were in the mood, I'd lay on my back, spread my legs, and he'd thrust until at least one of us came. He didn't say anything if I still needed my vibrator after.

I did not need my vibrator that night.

It was the strangest thing. I did ninety percent of the work, climbing on top of him and bouncing away on a cock I'd forgotten how much I missed – no, needed – while he lay back watching me. Normally I didn't go for a lot of breast play. It didn't do much for me, and Bruce had frankly shown little aptitude for stimulating them. That night, he simply took hold of them and toyed with my body. He barely made eye contact, fascinated by his wife's long-neglected tits flopping up and down as she rode him to exhaustion, a strange little smile coming and going on his face.

That smile was strangely motivating. It told me I was doing something right. It validated me. When it slipped, it told me I needed to try harder, so I'd shove my boobs in his face and slam my pussy down on his cock so hard that my ass cheeks clapped.

I don't know how many times I came. Lack of practice, really; the only counting I'd ever needed to do before was either to one or zero. If I took too long recovering, Bruce gave my butt a slap to spur me back into action. It was pushy. Even selfish, yes. It was just that it was so goddamn *hot* though! I prayed it wasn't a phase even as I wondered how long I could handle this Bruce reborn.

"You were *amazing*," I said, again, as I panted, sweaty and cummy and exhausted beside him some time later. It felt like days.

"I missed you," he answered. My pussy clenched around nothing. It missed him too.

"Do you think we woke up Kaley?" I asked with a nervous giggle. I'd been pretty damn loud for a while there. And then for another while. And another. There was no way she hadn't heard something. She might be due an awkward talk about special hugs in the morning.

"I'm sure Dina has things well in hand. She's good with kids. Better with anticipating my wants, and I think it was clear I didn't want to be disturbed."

I sat up suddenly. "Dina? You mean... is she still here?!" Had a total stranger just heard me come my brains out?!

"Of course she is. She doesn't have a ride home, and I didn't tell her I was done with her yet."

"Ride home?" I groaned. Seldom in my life had I been less interested in giving someone a ride somewhere. Nevertheless, there was a part of me looking forward to seeing the envy in her eyes when I came out to ferry her home.

Bruce, however, simply sat up, placed a hand on my chest, and firmly pressed me back to the bed. "I'll be taking her. You get some rest. You'll need it if you're going to try that again when I get home from work tomorrow."

Had I imagined that "if?" Because it had sounded exactly like a "when."

“Just call her an Uber, dear. You don’t have to leave.” *Please*, I thought. This man... this was not the same Bruce I didn’t need to worry about tripping into bed with some young hot babe. I couldn’t tell him that, of course. I wasn’t sure I could tell him to do anything, at this point. Besides, I wanted *more*. I wanted that every freaking night.

He was already standing up, however, rounding the bed to come around beside me. Was his cock bigger? I was imagining it. It only looked that way because I was horny, and because he’d lost a little weight. I was eighty percent sure. Seventy, anyway.

“Nonsense, Jess. Now come on and suck your hubby clean so I don’t reek so much of fresh sex when I go out there. Girl’s got a hair trigger as it is.”

His cock moved toward my mouth, and without knowing what my other options were (did I have any?), I opened wide and accepted him. Never in my life had I tasted my own pussy on my husband’s cock before. Hell, I hadn’t given him a blowjob since before Kaley had been born, I’d wager. He didn’t linger, only long enough for me to slurp our cum off of him and give him a decent semi.

Wait, what had that been about a hair trigger?

“Get some sleep, sweetheart. I’ll be back later.”

Later? As the door closed behind him, I sat back up. Not “in half an hour,” but “later?” He wouldn’t really... would he? I couldn’t lose him, not to Daniels’ skanky little brat.

So yeah, I called the gym. Three gyms, actually, until I found one open twenty-four hours that could process the membership over the phone. I couldn’t sleep until I did. Then I broke off things with Derek with a text. I was extra cruel, to make sure he never tried to bother me again.

By the time I crashed, though, Bruce still wasn’t home. I’d have to be on my game from now on.

## Natalie Cothran

“You are not leaving the house in *that*, young lady,” my mother said, hands on hips.

“In *what*, Mother?” I demanded.

“Are you joking? You have to be joking.”

“Why do I ‘have to be joking?’ I happen to think I look good.”

“You look like a hooker.”

“Oh my god, my own mother is slut-shaming me. I know back in your day—”

“Back in *my*...!”

“—any time a woman displayed her sexuality, it made her a whore. Here in the twenty-first century, however, we have a little thing called feminism. You should google it sometime.”

*Feminism* was probably pushing it. I did like how I looked in this, though. It was so unlike me! The ruffled purple skirt gave a good idea of how my ass was looking these days, which was to say fine as hell thanks to the red vinyl high-heeled boots and a few hundred hours of cardio. The top... I mean, I guess it was technically a top? It looked like a bra, sinfully tight red lace that was only barely dense enough to conceal my nipples, with a couple pathetic inches of fabric trailing down from it. Somehow the straps made it even sluttier the way they kept sliding off my shoulders, a frequent reminder that only my boobs held this thing on. The straps were ornamental. Like I was, in this outfit. There was exactly enough fabric to let me give my mother a look like she was an idiot for acting like it wasn't a top. They'd sold it as one, anyway. So technically it wasn't underwear, even if there was no way to squeeze any underwear beneath the thing.

Too bad Matt would never get to see me in it, but I'd broken up with him the day I'd bought it. It was like Uncle Bruce had said, these were clothes you only wore for someone worthy. It was actually for this exact moment I'd bought it. Two weeks of waitressing right here, but it was hands down the sexiest thing I'd ever worn. Making her see that I was a grown woman capable of making my own decisions about my wardrobe was a large part of its appeal.

There was another part, though, that was... something else.

“Call it what you want, Nat, but no daughter of mine is going to step out that door and let the whole world see her walking around in a bra and a mini skirt.” *Micro* mini skirt, I mentally corrected her. “Honestly, I don't even know what possessed you to—”

*Knock, knock, knock.*

The man knocking didn't wait for us to answer the door. I knew exactly who it would be. He was early, but only just, ten minutes ahead of the one-hour window he'd given me for pickup. He'd told me to wear one of the new outfits he'd suggested. It felt sort of weird, coming from Uncle Bruce, since Mom was basically right about the vibe I

was putting out. Still, he'd been right, too. Mom had *hated* the outfit I'd tried on last night, and that had at least covered most of my chest. If I breathed too hard in this thing, a nipple was going to break out. Again. I'd gotten practiced at tucking it back in. It was almost habit already, though I'd realized it sort of gave the impression that I was playing with my boobs.

Whatever. Uncle Bruce was my uncle. He didn't think about me like that. Though wearing this, I guess it wouldn't be the weirdest thing in the world if he did. Not like I hadn't noticed that he'd come back from his trip to Dubai looking damn good himself. I didn't have a crush or anything. That would be super weird. I wasn't blind, though.

"You're early," I said, twisting one of my legs back and forth at the toe of my boot.

"She looks nice, Heidi." That was it. Four words, said to my mother. Did he ignore me on purpose? Well, no, I guess he noticed me because he paid me a compliment, but he said it like I wasn't there. Part of me was indignant. Part of me, though, wanted to kiss him – on the cheek, obviously – for coming right out and forcing Mom to acknowledge my appearance as a positive.

I guess it didn't *force* her, per se, but what was she going to say to that? The way he said it, there was no room to argue. I looked nice, fact, period end.

"She has the figure for it," my mother answered grudgingly. My heart sang to hear her admit it. *Choke on it*, I thought at her. *That's what you get for leaving Dad*. "Still, it's a bit much, don't you, um... don't you think, Bruce?" She lowered her eyes.

"Only on someone who lacks the figure for it," he countered. Uncle Bruce liked my figure! Why was *that* exciting? It was, though. It felt so... objective, coming from him. "Come on, Natalie. We're leaving."

Uncle Bruce didn't wait for permission. Not from either of us. He simply turned and walked back out the door.

"Wait!" Mom yipped. "Where are you two going, exactly?"

It was then I realized he'd never told me. As I hurried after him – as much as I could hurry in these boots – I decided to let him respond. Mom darted out behind us, evidently anticipating the same.

"Bruce?" she tried again as he opened his car door. "Where, um, where are you taking her?"

"I haven't decided yet." With that non-explanation, stated in a way to leave no doubt he resented being asked to explain himself, he climbed into the car. I did the same in the passenger seat. Geez, this skirt was short. Mom glared as it exposed my panties, but then rushed around to Uncle Bruce's side of the car and tapped on the glass frantically.

He rolled it down, plainly annoyed. "If you don't want to wash it, Heidi, keep your hands off. I won't warn you again."

She recoiled, stung. "Sorry. I, err, just wanted to know when to expect her back."

“When I’m done with her.”

The engine started.

“Oh. All right. Um, you two... have fun, and Natalie, try not to...”

Whatever else she said was lost. Uncle Bruce was already pulling out of the driveway and down the street. Rather than acknowledge the way he’d completely humiliated Mom, however, he regarded me with a small smile. Nothing said. Only the smile.

It made me feel good, not only because I was alone in a car with a hot guy (even if he was my mom’s sister’s husband) (which wasn’t technically a relative, if you thought about it, I told myself again). It was also nice to have things back to normal with Uncle Bruce, peas in a pod like when I was a kid. Ever since that time summer before last when I’d been visiting Aunt Jessie... I shuddered at the memory. I’d been in the bathroom, changing out of my swimsuit after hanging out in their pool all afternoon. Suddenly Uncle Bruce opened the door, and there I was topless and dripping wet. I hadn’t handled it well at all. He’d gone ghost white, stammering apologies as I screamed at him and called him a pervert. I know he hadn’t meant to, but still, I’d been freaked out. I’d even told Aunt Jessie about it, and she’d made him sleep on the couch for a week, she’d said.

To think, at the time it had made me feel powerful. Looking at Uncle Bruce now, wearing the hell out of his suit and not in the least put off by my hookertastic outfit, it was hard to imagine I’d once felt like I had the upper hand on him.

I blushed, suddenly, caught off guard by my own mental phrasing and the idea of having my hands on Uncle Bruce.

“Thanks again for the male perspective on the outfits,” I said after a while. Where were we going? This wasn’t the way to Aunt Jessie’s house. “My mom hates them, but I think they’re really cute.”

I waited for him to agree, or chide me for going too far, or admit how grown up I looked. Instead, he merely glanced at me out of the corner of his eye – was he making eye contact, or was he looking at...? no, that would be too weird – and replied simply, “You’re welcome.”

I frowned. Uncle Bruce was my uncle, but he was still a guy. I’d sort of expected him to compliment me, or make one of those awkward uncle lines about how I was all grown up. Something. I decided I wanted it. “Do you think this is OK to wear, Uncle Bruce? Honestly.”

“You’re a bit old to need someone to tell you how to dress yourself, but if you need it, I can provide guidance.” He gave me a sidelong glance. “For today, that’s acceptable.”

Acceptable? That’s it? “Oh. I can... I mean, if you have ideas, you can... or, well, I guess it’s better if...” I caught myself stammering and rolled my eyes. *Way to act like a*

*grown up. Twenty years old and you're babbling like a schoolgirl. Good thing you have this body or he'd still think you were one.* "Thanks," I said at last.

Hang on. Did I just invite my uncle to dictate my wardrobe? That was...  
Something else.

He kept driving. I still had no idea where we were going. It didn't matter, I guess. Anyone could take one look at him and see that Uncle Bruce was a man who clearly knew what he was doing. Still, I was pretty bad with long silences, so it wasn't long before I broke it.

After all, I still hadn't gotten that compliment. The harder I worked for it, the longer he denied me my prize, the more I wanted it.

"Do you think I'm pretty, Uncle Bruce?"

We pulled up to a red light, and my uncle finally turned to face me. He didn't look me over, didn't even glance down to where my panties were surely visible in this stupid tiny skirt. Just looked hard at me. Through me, maybe.

"I know what you want me to say, Natalie, and I'm not going to play that game. I really will not. You know what you look like. You know what people think about what you look like."

"But I'm not asking people. I'm asking *you*."

He shook his head. "All right. You want to know what I think, Natalie? Be sure, because I'm going to be honest, and you might not like what you hear."

I frowned. Why wouldn't he think I was pretty? I was definitely hotter than Aunt Jessie. She'd always said that the person who's more confident in their appeal controlled the relationship, and nobody had ever doubted she had him wrapped around her finger. Still, something in those firm gray eyes made me need to hear what he had to say. "I want to know."

The light changed, but Uncle Bruce didn't even look up, and once he began speaking, I didn't dare interrupt him. "I don't think you're pretty, but not because the reason you're afraid of. A woman's appeal to me isn't superficial. It's in the whole of her, of what that woman does for me. Physically, yes, emotionally as well, but also quite literally in what she does for me."

I meekly pointed up at the light, but he disregarded it. A car behind us gave a little honk, but received the same non-response. "You, Natalie, don't do anything for me. Why would you, after all? You're my niece, not some lovestruck teen desperate to impress an older man. Are you?"

"Yes," I agreed automatically. The car behind him had laid on the horn by now, but it meant nothing to either of us. Then I realized what he'd asked, how I'd answered, and shook my head, but he was already going on.

"Fair enough. So if you are, that outfit is a good start. You do have a nice face, great body, and you could probably do a decent job at satisfying a man like me. So if you

want to, do it, but if you don't, don't lower yourself. Channel the confidence it took to put on that trappy little outfit into actually satisfying more than a man's eyes, and you may find he'll describe you a great deal more flatteringly than merely 'pretty.'"

The light turned yellow. Uncle Bruce returned his attention to the road; the flashy sports car coasted nonchalantly through the intersection. No one else made it through. Several cars behind him roaring angrily.

Two intersections later, my hand took his from the wheel and put it on my thigh. I didn't expect his grip to be so automatic, his response so... entitled. Like he'd expected it. Like he was disappointed I'd failed to act for so long, but was reassuring me that I'd done the right thing, however slowly.

My eyes squeezed shut as his pinky grazed the front of my panties. A ghost of a touch only, but... wow. Did he even mean to? Could he feel how wet I was? Did he realize these were the same skimpy pink panties he'd told me to buy?

Without even realizing it, I squeezed my thighs down around his hand, but he pulled back immediately, then slapped the top of my leg. "Don't be greedy, Natalie. Keep them spread."

I spread my legs.

A motel. That's where we wound up going. I stood there beside Uncle Bruce while he paid the clerk. The expression on the greasy little jerk's face spoke volumes about his assumptions. What an idiot. Like I was some cheap hooker, off to service my john. A guy like Uncle Bruce would never settle for some two-bit street walker.

"Are you sure this is... I mean, you're my *uncle* and all, and..." I mumbled as we walked up the stairs to our room.

"You can change your mind whenever you want, Natalie. Mine is made up. Unless you say otherwise, I'm going to take you to our room, and give you a chance to make good on your word."

My word, as it so happened, was that I could do things for him that Aunt Jessie couldn't dream of. I had no idea what kind of things Aunt Jessie did for him, frankly, and I'd only ever had sex with one guy before, my high school boyfriend, and it had been about four minutes of awkward and unsatisfying thrusting before he had to rush home before curfew. Something told me a man like Uncle Bruce expected more.

I glanced around warily before stepping in, as if the paparazzi were following my uncle and waiting to catch us in the act. Naturally, there was nobody. Only, when he guided me into the one-bed room with his hand on my butt, I realized the nerves weren't about anything outside.

This was insane. Like, objectively insane. I couldn't do... whatever I'd promised I was about to do. Could I? He was my mom's sister's husband! Which didn't make him blood related, as I'd pointed out when I suggested he have sex with me. (Or had he suggested it?) Plus, he was *married*. To my *aunt*!

My Aunt Jessie, who'd intimidated me since before I'd even hit puberty with her beauty, her commanding persona. Even her body, frankly. Yeah, I'd grown into mine, and while my boobs weren't as big as hers, they were still pretty darn nice. Let's just say I got noticed. Still, Aunt Jessie had always felt like this unattainable standard, and now...

I could fuck her husband, her sexy, commanding husband. And there was nothing she could do about it.

Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and looked up at me expectantly, and I realized this was actually happening. Oh gosh. What was I supposed to do?

I reached for the clasp on my bra. A moment later, I remembered this slutty little number wasn't my bra. No clasp. Fighting down a blush of embarrassment at my misstep, I shrugged the straps off my shoulders. They fell off like they'd been waiting for the opportunity. I pulled my top down rather than up, which I don't think I'd ever done before in my life. Why did I do it like that? Did my boob look better hanging down when I bent over than they did thrust out when I stretched up my arms? Had I done it the wrong way?

Oh god, I was topless in front of Uncle Bruce.



Uncle Bruce didn't say anything. He only gave this almost imperceptible nod, and I heaved a sigh of relief. "Um, my skirt now...?" What was going on? I was *never* this nervous about this stuff.

He sighed, as if mildly annoyed. "Fine, come here." Uncle Bruce snapped his fingers, pointed at the ground next to him. Without thinking, I scampered over to where he'd pointed, wobbling and jiggling like wild in these idiot heels. Uncle Bruce didn't seem to mind; he simply took my skirt in both hands and jerked it down. I stepped out of it awkwardly in my boots. Nothing but panties and the boots themselves now, and the panties only barely. These were nearly a thong, baring hips and most of my butt.

I twirled to make sure he could see that. Would he like my ass? I hoped he would. In these high-heeled boots, I knew it looked killer. I'd checked. Maybe I'd been thinking about this even before I left home.

God, I was a slut. I was so lucky to have a guy like Uncle Bruce who didn't judge me for it. So long as I was useful.

Suddenly I froze at the feeling of a tongue – not hands, not even lips, only a tongue. It started at the base of my left butt cheek, then slowly dragged upward along the slope of me until it met the waistband of my panties.

"Did... did you just lick my ass?" I asked. Was that normal? Was I weird to think it was weird? Uncle Bruce sure looked like it was the most normal thing in the world.

"Have you ever sucked a man's cock?" No need to answer such a dumb question, I guess.

I nodded. "Yeah. A handful of times."

"Not a boy's cock. A man's."

"Oh." I hadn't even known there was a difference, that's how inexperienced I was. I could only imagine what a man like Uncle Bruce would teach me. I shook my head bashfully.

"Well then, Natalie. Here's your audition."

Uncle Bruce stood up and calmly unfastened his belt. After unfastening them, a little shake was all it took to send them to his ankles. I could see a swell in his underwear, and a moment later, I saw the cock itself. It was red, almost purple, veins visible across its surface. Big. It suited him. And *hard*. Because of me. Which suited me.

I knelt down in front of him as he sat back down, leaning back on his palms. I squirmed as my butt touched the cold vinyl of my heels. Here goes. If I did this right, I'd be on my way to being every bit as much of a mature, in-charge woman as Aunt Jessie. I leaned forward and gave a slow lick up the length of him.

"Thank you for being so cool about this, Uncle Bruce," I murmured.

He pulled my head forward and impaled my face on his dick. "You're welcome."

## **Bruce Peterson**

“Can I visit this weekend? Or, um, we could do the motel again,” my niece asked hopefully.

“Saturday,” I answered. “Eight o’clock.”

“I can’t wait!” she squealed. Before she left the car, she leaned over and kissed me, her tongue ramming into my mouth with amateurish vigor. I could taste my cum on her breath. She’d managed to swallow most of it, to her credit.

When I’d had my fill, I shoved her back with a hand on those incredibly cute tits of hers. She strained to keep her lips on mine as long as she could, then at last accepted her dismissal and let herself out of the car. Her skirt had ridden up so high that I could see the wet spot on her panties. I didn’t wait for a goodbye; I simply pulled out of the driveway and onto the street without acknowledging her frantic wave goodbye.

I made it around the corner before I pulled over and let out a primal scream, banging my fists on the steering wheel in the release of hours of pent-up terror.

I’d done it. Holy fuck. Sure, I’d been practicing for months, but some part of me hadn’t really believed it. After all, it could have been nothing more than lucky accidents and impoverished locals eager to ingratiate themselves to the American in his business suit. Daniels had always been a suckup to anybody on a hot streak, and his daughter... well, with eight billion people on the planet, surely some of them had to be hot sluts who had a kink for domineering bosses. Had to happen to somebody, right? Then back home with Jess, I’d considered maybe she was playing along, getting her kicks role playing a wife whose purse didn’t contain my nuts.

Once in a while, I’d even gotten the trick to work on myself, forgetting that I was a mediocre nobody pretending at confidence like John Wayne wished he’d had.

Then I’d had my spoiled, gorgeous twenty-two-year-old niece dress up like a whore and blow me in a sleazy motel, and then thank me for the privilege and plead to get another opportunity. There was no explaining that away.

It worked.

Once I was sure I wasn’t going to have a panic attack, I put the car into drive and made my way to the playhouse. Sure enough, the troupe was in. Six years I’d been coming here, and we seldom varied rehearsal times. The company car slid in between Ellie’s minivan and Vic’s Subaru. Part of me wished I could see their reactions to the perennial understudy sitting there in a brand new Porsche, but there was no need. More than a little gauche besides. The only thing separating status symbol from signifier of a midlife crisis was my deserving demeanor.

My timing was perfect. Sheer dumb luck that Natalie’s slobbery blowjob had lasted the exact right amount of time. Given the hour, I’d been hopeful for this kind of entrance. This was about when we usually wrapped up. In my \$3,000 suit (which I

would go to my grave not telling my wife about) and a less pricey but still pretty pricey haircut, heads turned. Practiced at deflecting interest now, I gaze through them. Man, even Lauren and Kelly, the college theater majors who'd joined up for the credit hours.

*Don't flinch. Don't ever let them see you flinch. You're in control of this. You're in control of everything now.*

Vic's jaw dropped as he saw me. "Bruce? Oh my god! Look at you!"

I stopped a short ways away and jerked my head. *Don't open with verbal orders. Build to that.* Sure enough, Vic complied, and the small group he'd been chatting with didn't. Act like you're a superior on a mission, and people behaved like you're a superior on a mission.

"So you're back, huh? We all thought you'd..." He didn't finish, but I knew what he meant, at least in the general sense. They'd thought my wife had made me give up community theater, or that she'd divorced me and kicked me out of the house, or that I'd killed myself. Something like that. Heck, maybe he'd really meant they hadn't thought about understudy Bruce at all. That was more likely.

"I'm not rejoining," I said. He nodded, like that was a perfectly logical reply. God, it was almost too easy sometimes. "Actually, I only came back because I wanted to thank you for that advice you gave me before I left for Dubai."

"You were in Dubai?" He blinked. "What in the hell is in Dubai?"

*Never answer questions. Act like they don't have the right to question you. Get them accustomed to only hearing what you want to say, not what they want you to say.* "It paid off, what you said. Took some practice, and there were some rocky moments, but I understand now. Thank you."

Vic scrunched his face. "Advice? What are you even talking about?"

"You don't remember? The ensemble went out at drinks that night right after the casting list went up, and I was slotted as understudy? Again? And I said I felt insignificant, and you said... well, anyway, I only wanted to say thanks."

"Wait, you mean all that horse crap about projecting confidence and sticking to your guns?" Vic laughed, his stage laugh to reach the audience in the back row. "Holy hell, Bruce, I was being sarcastic! Please tell me you didn't go out and buy this knockoff suit and gel up your hair because I told you..." He shook his head, chuckling. A calculated chuckle.

Sarcastic? Man, was I stupid. Was he really that good of an actor that I couldn't tell sarcasm from sincerity? Or that bad? That rock hard pit I'd formed in my stomach to steel me through every social engagement I'd had these past months turned to jello. Fake. It was all fake. *I was fake.*

Oh god, worse than fake, I was...!

Something else.

My mind recanted my recent sins, a litany of selfish, entitled misogyny. I'd bullied my wife into sex and tried to give her a complex about her looks. I'd cheated on my wife with the daughter of my former boss. And with my secretary. And with my niece! Oh my lord, Natalie, what had I just—

That smirk. The smirk on Vic's face as he saw my confidence melt. It was the same smirk Daniels had flashed me when I'd demanded the floor at the Dubai pitch. The same smirk I'd knocked right off his face and then ground into dust as I fucked his daughter like she was part of my benefits package in the hotel room right next to his. Dina wasn't quiet when she came.

I caught myself right in time, just as I was reaching up to loosen my tie and start the slow process of worming out of this fraud of a suit. No.

My wife and I had had the best sex we'd had, ever. If she wasn't enough for me, that wasn't on me. Dina, Jane, they'd tided me over when Jess wasn't there for me. Natalie... Her spit was dried on my cock along with a ring of that whorish lipstick I'd told her to wear. They all of them felt like they'd been lucky to have me. Shit, they *had been* lucky to have me.

I deserved it. We'd all wanted it, and I'd taken it. I hadn't made anyone do anything, and everybody was free to walk away whenever they felt like it.

I'd simply have to make them understand they didn't feel like it until I was done with them.

Summoned by Vic's laugh, everyone was watching us now. So rather than reply, I cupped the man's stubbly chin in my hands and steered his eyes to mine. In an instant, they were darting every which way, unable to handle going toe to toe with real resolve. I patted his cheek pityingly, shook my head, and turned away. Whether he'd meant it or not, I'd understood something he never would. I walked away from him, and away from the sad, weak Bruce Peterson who'd whined in self-pity to this loser in that other lifetime.

After I passed Lauren and Kelly, I paused. Without turning my head, I said evenly, "Kelly, Lauren, I want you to come with me."

They shared a look between them, and Kelly answered, "Why would we go anywhere with you?"

My head swiveled, but not enough to look at them. "Help me practice my lines." I didn't wait for a response. I left the two nubile coeds in my wake and strode out of the theater. After a moment, I heard them following behind me, but I didn't acknowledge it.

"Is that your car?" came a woman's voice behind me as I approached the driver's side door.

I turned to where the girls had followed me, sheep after their shepherd. *Give direction. Don't offer alternatives. Take charge.* "Get in. I'll give you a ride."

With no backseat, the girls wedged themselves in side by side in the front. Lauren draped her long legs over her friend's. "You cleaned up good, Bruce."

*Don't acknowledge compliments. A compliment is only them realizing something about you that you already knew.*

Kelly was the first to break the silence. "So... we couldn't help but overhear you and Vic. What the heck was that advice he gave you, anyway?"

*Give them nothing. Demand everything.*

I smiled.