

# WINNERS

BY ISAAC BYRNE



**Winners**

**By Isaac Byrne**

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First Edition, 2020

The years preceding the creation of the Lottery had been calamitous. For decades, scientists had warned of the dangers posed by humankind's reckless disregard for the earth, and finally, only surprising to those with the capacity to be surprised by scientific fact, those predictions came true. Massive hurricanes and polar vortexes ravaged both coasts and continental interiors. Colony collapse disorder and increases in severe weather wreaked years of famine. Oxygen deserts, deforestation and biome degradation caused the mass extinction of millions of species. The spread of warmer habitats paved the way for disease-carrying mosquitoes to plague new regions. Rising ocean levels washed away coastal metropolises. America had it better than many because it possessed great wealth and power, but it was nevertheless ill-equipped to withstand a veritable siege by tens of millions of refugees from nations that did not.

Drastic measures had been necessary. Somewhere, among all the reforms and projects drafted to save mankind from the folly of generations past, came the Lottery.

Chanda tried to ground herself with all this as she glared resentfully at her phone and the lack of instant messages. There were, she conceded, bigger problems one could have than hers.

After her fitful night's sleep Sunday night, she immediately realized what she'd done. The evidence was literally right in front of her face: her vibrator sat out on her nightstand, accusing her silently. Chanda threw it in its drawer before an over-thoughtful parent treated her to breakfast in bed and had their recently restored delusions of their daughter's innocence shattered all over again. Then she saw she'd slept until almost noon, so her parents would both be long gone to their respective jobs. If they'd popped in to say goodbye, they'd already seen it or not seen it, and she decided to believe the latter.

Still, it had been almost twelve hours now, and Aaron hadn't so much as sent her a text.

Had it all been a dream? There had been some shockingly erotic ones the past couple nights. The conversation was still there, though, doing its darndest to make her blush to her core. What had she been thinking? Sending a boy a picture of her still-drying vibrator in the middle of the night! It was the sort of behavior usually reserved for losers and losers only.

Well, no. A loser would have invited her winner to watch her use the thing.

Nonetheless, he hadn't responded. Had she freaked him out? He was, after all, a card-carrying member of We're All Losers. A WALflower might have some hangups about women's sexuality. Their own, too. Or had he really failed to realize what she'd sent him? It was hard to think someone could be that dense, or that bad at basic googling. Maybe he hadn't been curious enough to bother. Maybe he thought she'd been teasing him. Or even that she was gross.

That last one stung more than it should. The first time Chanda had ever let her guard down enough to be a little sexual with a guy and she'd scared him off.

She told herself that maybe Aaron was simply busy, and to give it some time. After all, it was her senior spring break, which meant she had no school, no friends, and no plans. In fact, after taking Bumper for a nice long walk (and mercifully not running into anyone she knew from school), she was even able to remember that if she never heard from Aaron at all, that would be fine, too. Their paths had never even crossed beyond incidentally prior to Friday. It wouldn't be the worst thing if they didn't cross again.

And if she was still hoping to at least get a reply, she could forgive herself for that, too.

The afternoon passed in an attempt at a more familiar and less mortifying pleasure, curled up on the sofa with one hand on Bumper and the other holding open a book, *Long Time Coming*. Her grandmother had gotten it for her for Christmas, a memoir about a young woman named Nafeesa who had marched through a charred hellscape after her home was destroyed in the Great Fire, then the challenges of surviving in an Angolan refugee camp. She'd started it back in January, but with the Lottery looming on the horizon, she hadn't been able to subject herself to a book full of so much strength in adversity. Every page shamed her. Now, Nafeesa's struggles were riveting.

At least, they ought to be. She really was eager to read it, and when she could make herself focus on Nafeesa's journey, she was. It was only that as the hours passed, the reality of last night's episode at The Grand River 16 was finally sinking in.

Oh, Brandy. Transformed by that prig asshole Ezekiel Boecher from a woman with the biggest heart of anyone Chanda had ever known, into a whorish parody of Christian conservatism. One chance encounter in the first 72 hours after the Lottery, and already Chanda couldn't imagine being able to face her again when the next... oh god, *quarter million* hours had passed and her friend was restored to herself. She threw her phone across the room in disgust upon seeing that figure on her calculator.

Whatever was left of that self, anyway. But last night, that new version of her friend had sexually assaulted her in public, and whether or not there had been parts of it that, yes, had aroused her in some weird and surprising ways, that didn't change what it was. After all those years, would Brandy even remember it? Would Chanda?

Every time her attention strayed, she remembered it again. The taste of her friend's tongue in her mouth. The scent of that pussy in her face. The fear, the thrill, the relief and remorse warring for supremacy when she realized Aaron had come to her rescue.

As a dream, it had been smoking hot. But as a memory, it was only a reminder of how much she was lacking Nafeesa's strength and courage and hope.

It was not long after that thought first crystallized that she heard her phone buzz across the room. Hopping over Bumper's fuzzy, recumbent body, she pounced on the thing, relieved that finally, Aaron had decided to—

Tiffany?

She swiped open their conversation. The last thing Chanda had texted to her had been Saturday morning, a query about what was happening with her, where she'd wound up. When no answer had come for two whole days, she'd assumed that text would be the last words the two ever shared. Tiffany hadn't merely been won, after all; she'd been bought. Auctioned girls seldom landed close to home (or at least, the Powerball-grade pots like Tiffany's didn't). That text had been a long shot when she'd sent it, but she'd still had a sliver of hope at the time that one of her friends might have had the same luck she'd had.

Tiffany: *sorry for the delay [panda emoji]*

Tiffany: *lol the morning after drawing day and you all ready had free time to sit around texting your friends? your winner is a fucking moron*

Chanda smiled. That sounded like her friend. The emoji, the trash talk, the horrible grammar... there was definitely some of the real Tiffany on the other end of this text.

Chanda: *omg where are you??? I didn't think I'd ever heard from you! what's going on???*

It was hard to sit still as she waited for a reply, but luckily Tiffany wasn't splitting her attention between five conversations like she often did. Or used to, before.

Tiffany: *Pretty sure I'm not in Clark any more Toto*

Tiffany: *But so far doing pretty good...?*

Tiffany: *hbu? Who's the lucky fuck who won the powerballs?*

Chanda: *um, actually... I sort of... didn't get won?*

She hooked the neckline of her shirt over her nose while she waited, an old nervous habit. Part of her almost hoped that whatever Tiffany had been through, she lacked the capacity for bitterness or envy.

Tiffany: *stfu*

Tiffany: *no fucking way*

Tiffany: *Chanda Brighton is no a fucking survivor*

Chanda: *It's true! I swear!!!*

Tiffany: *I don't believe you. Your winners got some weird game or something where he's got you pretending to be free or something*

Chanda: *No pretending, I promise! I guess everybody thought I was such a long shot that nobody bid on me? I dunno!*

Tiffany: *Prove it*

Chanda frowned. How the heck could one prove that they were really themselves and not a brainwashed version of themselves pretending to be themselves? If some guy wanted to do that – and who the hell could imagine why they would – they would be indistinguishable. The loser would have all her old life’s memories, quirks, appearance, even her clothes if he desired it so.

Bumper, less concerned by such considerations, rolled over on his side with a weary grunt. And there it was.

The dog didn’t bat an eye as his picture was taken with Chanda in the background. Tiffany, still skeptical, responded after a moment with a demand for proof that the picture was current, which soon netted her another one with Chanda in the same pose, only this time flipping the camera the bird. Left-handed, per Tiffany’s request.

*Tiffany: well fuck a duck in a truck your really a survivor!*

Chanda smiled. Men could have any of a thousand fetishes or mind games to play with their winnings, but the one thing they simply did not do was send them home to veg on the couch with their parents’ dog in sweatpants and a baggy t-shirt when they could be breaking them in.

*Chanda: I told you!*

*Tiffany: You get ahold of anybody else? I haven’t heard from them or anything but that might just be because they though I was long gone*

*Tiffany: And no fucking internet here [rage emoji]*

Chanda shared what little she’d learned. She was sparing with the details about her encounter with Brandy, but at least passed along that she’d been won by Ezekiel and the general nature of her transformation. Mya had been won, though she hadn’t learned by whom. Then she linked her to the site where Kelsey was for rent, which pretty much told that whole story as far as she was concerned. Then Krystal’s situation, too, as well as those of a few other women she’d seen at the movie theater whom she knew Tiffany had been friends with.

*Chanda: But what about you?*

It had been hard not to demand answers sooner, but if her friend wanted gossip, it was the absolute least Chanda could do to provide it. She couldn’t quite make herself ask directly how the auction had gone. It was too horrible to look at the hateful word to fathom texting it.

*Tiffany: Honestly? real talk?*

When she didn’t continue, Chanda affirmed that yes, she wanted the unvarnished truth.

*Tiffany: It’s fucking AWESOME*

But again, Tiffany’s text wasn’t appended. So there it was. However much of herself Tiffany had been allowed to keep, they’d decided that she was going to love what

happened to her. Chanda supposed that was about the best case scenario. Getting to keep your personality intact, and being made to enjoy the ride. Considering what Brandy was going through, probably some sort of horrible self-flagellation and oodles and oodles and divinely imposed guilt for her wanton (implanted) urges... maybe Tiffany was the lucky one, all things considered.

Chanda: *Well I'm glad you're having fun, Tiff.*

That was the best she could manage. But Tiffany had always been better at reading subtext than she was at writing the text itself, and challenged her.

Tiffany: *I'm serious! It's really cool here. The dude who won the auction is fucking LOADED. My parents are set yo*

Tiffany: *And this place is Tight. I got my own suite, stocked bar, indoor pool, private tabbing salon, got our own badass chef and everything*

Tiffany: *Got my own budget for clothes and accessories – \$10k baby*

Tiffany: *It's fucking tits srsly*

Tiffany: *\*tanning*

Chanda: *I knew what you meant*

When she put it like that... it actually sounded pretty swanky. Chanda didn't share so much in her friend's materialism, but still, everybody liked to be pampered. Nevertheless, it was sort of leaving out some details.

Chanda: *Where are you even? UAE? lol*

Tiffany used to joke, half-heartedly, that she'd end up in the United Arab Emirates, slave to some would-be sultan who fetishized hot busty American blondes. After all, Mya's sister Jessie had wound up in a harem in Bahrain. But with the sort of palace she was describing, maybe she'd been close to the truth?

Tiffany: *Lol not quite – I'm in Emory*

Chanda: *What?!?! Like, 30 minutes away Emory?!*

Tiffany: *No, Emory Iran*

Tiffany: *Of course close Emory dumbass*

Chanda: *That's amazing! I thought for sure you'd wind up somewhere far away!*

Tiffany: *Ya no shit me to*

Tiffany: *O*

Tiffany: *\*o*

Before Chanda could even ask, Tiffany made the offer she'd been hoping to hear – and even with the conditions she'd been hoping to have included.

Tiffany: *I got guest privileges pretty much 24/7 too – you should totally come hang out sometime*

Tiffany: *Dudes got plenty of losers so unless he needs me for a quickie (hasn't yet) I can basically do whatever I want as long as I'm handy*

Chanda: *omg yes!!!*



Her enthusiasm was only partially feigned. The idea of hanging out in a harem, however lavish, put her ill at ease. But the mere notion that she might get to keep her friend in her life after all? It was well worth any paltry discomfort, and she could always walk out if it got to be too much. She was a survivor.

Chanda: *when is good?*

Tiffany: *Um, I'm an unemployed high school dropout loser, so how about whenever o'clock next Anyday*

Tiffany: *Fuck I'm free right now if you want*

Chanda: *squee [dancing panda emoji] [dancing panda emoji] [dancing panda emoji]*

Chanda: *oh shit – I don't have a car though. Mom and Dad will be home in a couple hours, though. Hook me up with your addy and I'll borrow a car*

Tiffany: *Don't sweat it I can send a limo*

Chanda: *lol only a limo? I was anticipating a helicopter ride*

Tiffany: *Serious – we got a driver. she does our errands, basically everyone's bitch*

Chanda considered. She'd not had a curfew since she'd turned sixteen, and her parents trusted her with good reason. Yeah, they would probably be a little jittery about having their daughter run off to some random rich dude's house in Emory, but it was Tiffany's new pad. They'd just have to get used to it.

Still, maybe better to leave a note than send a text.

Chanda: *How soon can your bitch be here? Do I need to bring anything?*

Tiffany: *Gurl please I sent her your way the second you convinced me you survived lol*

Tiffany: *Wtf else could you possibly have going on [panda tongue out emoji]*

Chanda: *oh wow! Well let me get ready, and I guess I'll see you soon!*

Tiffany: *Don't get too ready – don't want you trying to steal my place [panda heart emoji]*

Chanda hastened upstairs to freshen up. She didn't care about making a good impression on Tiffany's winner – in fact she hoped not to meet him – but still, Tiffany was the sort of girl who you didn't want to look schlubby around. She scrawled a quick note on the dry erase board magneted to the side of the fridge that said she was out with friends and would be back late, then darted out front to wait for her ride. It was a breezy day, and all those leaves that had never been raked up after last fall's first early snow were free to scatter around the neighborhood. One of her neighbors walked past, his German shepherd eagerly leading the way, though they paused to sniff and ogle the young woman, respectively. Chanda rewarded the former with a pat on the head, and ignored the latter with a glare at his departing back.

Her phone buzzed again, and her expectations on sender were once again reversed from the actuality.

Aaron: *Heya*

That was it. “Heya.” No apology, no explanation, not even a very belated guess at the identity of the object he’d initially failed to identify in the pic she’d sent last night. She very nearly left him on read, but at the last moment caved. Better to deal with this now so she didn’t have it hanging over her head bothering her while she was with Tiffany. Especially since if her friend sniffed out this little secret of hers – the sort of tawdry thing she’d always had a nose for – she’d have to handle it with the girl looking over her shoulder. She’d rejected this jerk who’d asked (demanded, really) that she go with him to sophomore homecoming under Tiffany’s judging eye, and by the time Tiffany had been satisfied enough to let off the pressure, the guy had been openly crying.

Though for making her wait all day for a “hey,” maybe Aaron deserved the same. Bah.

Chanda: *Hey*

There. See how he liked it.

Aaron: *How are you feeling today? Last night was pretty Next Level, I know.*

*And having you ignore me all day didn’t help, you turd,* she typed, then erased. She supposed opening with concern was sort of sweet. Sort of. Maybe his heroic stand against Ezekiel had made more of an impression on Aaron’s experience of the evening than her awkward nocturnal text flirtations.

Chanda: *I’m doing OK, I think. Lot to process.*

Aaron: *Yeah, I can only imagine. [frown emoji]*

Aaron: *Anything you want to talk about?*

Aaron: *I know I’m probably not the right person, but I’m happy to listen if you want to talk, or vent, or whatever.*

Chanda’s eyes narrowed. No acknowledgment of that pic? It was still there on her screen, a mere few lines up. If she zoomed in, she could clearly see traces of her vaginal fluids on it. It wasn’t one of those obvious phallic-shaped ones, but still. He’d had all day to solve the puzzle, and instead chose to... be *nice*. Concerned.

Was it some kind of game to reel her in? Could he be–

She stopped herself. It was time for her to start curbing her mistrust of the male sex. Somehow she had survived Drawing Day, and while she’d never planned for this future, here it was, and she couldn’t be mean to what seemed to be a nice guy simply because of what was between his legs.

Her eyes narrowed further, only this time it was directed inwards. Such thoughts shouldn’t evoke a reaction. Yeah, yeah, maybe he’d been her knight in shining armor – twice – but still. Get your crap together, Chanda. Surviving means *not* going all boy-crazy.

As she was halfway through a text taking him up on his offer to let her unload (and without skanking out this time), her ears picked up the sound of an approaching vehicle. Glancing down the street, sure enough, there was a huge stretch SUV coming down the block. The windows were tinted so she couldn't see anything of the interior, but still, it was too conspicuous not to be Tiffany's ride.

Chanda: *Oh! my ride is here. Is it cool if I text you later tonight?*

Aaron: *I'm working 6-12, but I'll be up after that for a bit.*

Aaron: *Got a fun evening planned for yourself?*

The car pulled up, glossy black paint job dazzling in the afternoon sun. The rear door on her side swung open slowly enough that it was clearly automatic. The limo she and her friends had taken to the winter formal had had doors like that. Like then, it made her feel like a celebrity. She hopped in immediately. It was incredibly spacious, cream-colored leather seats and upholstery, with seats along the rear and left sides. In fact, the right side door through which she'd entered seemed to have a panel that folded down for more seating. There were two sunroofs letting light stream in, and mellow music playing over the speakers.

"Afternoon, miss," came a woman's voice from a speaker. The driver, certainly, though there was an opaque glass panel between them, so Chanda couldn't see anything of her. "Why don't you get settled and buckle in and we'll be on our way."

"You got it!" The car shifted into drive, locks clicking automatically, and off they went. She quietly ignored the request to settle in, crawling around looking for more extras. If Tiffany's winner was as rich as she'd implied, this ride had to be loaded. She discovered a hidden panel behind the seat next to her that revealed a recessed set of shelves, though there was presently nothing on them. The presence of an empty wrapper labeled as having once contained trail nuts suggested an unstocked snack locker. Darn. Could there be a bar? Vehicles like this had those in movies and on TV. She kept searching.

Then her phone buzzed, and she settled into place to fish it out.

Aaron: *Well, I guess your ride got there, so hopefully I'll get to talk to you later. I hope your evening is awesome – I think you're way past due for a relaxing night out.*

The posh car had gotten her endorphins flowing, and she let herself smile at his attempt at sweetness. For a moment, the prospect of inviting him to come along was tantalizing, but it was still Tiffany. If any of her other friends had somehow remained themselves and wound up in such a position, she'd go ahead. But not Tiff. Aaron didn't deserve that. Still, Clark and Emory might be neighboring cities, but in this part of the world, that still meant a bit of a drive. The car didn't seem to have much else to play with, so she figured she may as well fill the time.

Chanda: *It got here, but I got time yet before I get there, if you're not busy.*

Aaron: *It's cool – if you're out with people, I don't want to distract.*

Chanda: *Actually, I'm in a stretch SUV getting driven around like royalty lol*

Aaron: *Uh... is that normal for you?*

Aaron: *I didn't think your family had that kind of money but I guess I didn't really know*

Chanda: *What, do I look poor or something? [glare emoji]*

She giggled at the prospect of making the poor guy squirm a little. Sure enough, it seemed to work.

Aaron: *Oh gosh no! I didn't mean anything by it!*

Aaron: *I guess you just get a sense of who the rich kids are and I never put your name on that list?*

Aaron: *I don't even know what I mean. But I'm sorry if I offended.*

Chanda: *I was only fucking with you. [evil grin emoji]*

Aaron: *lol mission accomplished. Considered me with-fucked.*

Chanda: *[evil grin emoji] 10 pts for meeeee [evil grin emoji]*

Aaron: *So then what's the deal with the ride? (or was that part of the joke? slow on the uptake today I guess...)*

Chanda snapped a quick selfie and another one of her forward view. The car was still moving slowly, though the windows were so dark even from the inside that she could barely make out the world beyond. She sent them off to Aaron.

Chanda: *Visiting my friend Tiffany*

Chanda: *She was lost at auction, but I guess her winner kept her as is (more or less).*

Chanda: *Some rich guy who I guess has a bunch of losers around his mansion, so she's got time and money and all? I dunno, doesn't sound too horrible considering*

The car took a hard turn, and she nearly slipped into the next seat. Maybe she should get her seatbelt on after all. The socket was buried in the seat a bit, so she was still struggling to get it clipped into place when she saw Aaron's reply, and froze.

Aaron: *omg get out of the car NOW*

What? What was he—

Aaron: *Tiffany is NOT your friend any more get out NOW*

The seatbelt slid back into its original position as she released it. Chanda found herself trying to penetrate the tinted glass between herself and the driver, but she was as invisible as ever up there. Her fingers raced through her reply.

Chanda: *What r u saying?*

Aaron: *I've read about this*

Aaron: *trust me*

She frowned, her heartbeat accelerating. What was he talking about? Her own mind was racing too fast to hold a thought in her head. Could he be trying to pay her back for her teasing?

Chanda: *You're freaking me out*

Chanda: *0 pts awarded, uncool*

But he'd been typing even as she replied.

Aaron: *I'm dead srs – guys buy women, use them to lure in other women.*

Aaron: *Usually younger ones who haven't been lotteried yet*

Aaron: *They use the trust the loser's friends have in them to reel them in and then they disappear*

Aaron: *I'm not kidding please please please get out of there*

Aaron: *Where are you I can try to come find you*

Panic was sinking its claws into her heart. She had indeed read about something like Aaron's scenario. It had been anecdotal, and some time ago, but he was right. She took a couple deep breaths. Hyperventilation was something she could not afford right now. Rationally – as rational as she was capable of being – she tried to analyze her situation. Best case scenario, Tiffany had been honest, and she was off to visit her friend at her winner's harem mansion in Emory. Worst case scenario, she was being abducted for human trafficking, and her friends and family would never see her again. One of very few fates she could think of worse than losing.

She pressed her face to the glass, but could still only make vague outlines of houses, trees. At least they were still in neighborhoods, not out on the highway yet. She tried to roll down the window, but it was unresponsive.

"Um, hey – could you unlock the windows, please?" she called out, trying to sound as innocent as possible.

"Don't be silly. It's in the 40's out there. You'll freeze," said the same woman's voice over the intercom.

The voice had a point, but Chanda had no way of knowing whether it was an honest reply or part of something sinister. Darnit, she needed them to reveal something, so she could go back to feeling at ease. She scooted up to the side seat position closest to the driver. "So... how long have you been, um, working for..." She realized Tiffany had never given her winner's name. "For your boss?"

"I'm a loser, not an employee, and it's not safe to be talking to the driver, miss. Now please put on your seatbelt. We'll be there soon enough."

Again, a fair point. But her gut was still clenched tight. Should she just jump out the next time they stopped? Yes. Yes, that was the thing to do. Sure enough, it wasn't long before the vehicle made a rolling stop at an intersection. As casually as she could, Chanda gave the door handle a tug.

Locked. Right. Most cars automatically locked the doors when they were in drive. Though she couldn't help but notice that the lock had receded into the door and seemed to have no means of being unlocked. No button, no way to grab it and pull it up. Unless the driver unlocked the doors, she was stuck.

Yet still, part of her mind whispered reassurances that this wasn't what it increasingly seemed to be. It was all too easy to listen to those whispers. They were a lot less terrifying than the other voices, screaming to do anything to escape.

If the driver had noticed her working the handle, she didn't mention it. Chanda didn't bother trying another conversation. The woman would only tell her to shut up and buckle in—

Of all things, *that* was the detail that jogged her memory.

Chanda grabbed a seatbelt near her and tugged. But rather than connect it across her lap, she plugged it into the nearest vacant seat's socket. Without her hip in the way, it connected easily. Then in the next moment, a motor whirred and the seatbelt tightened until it was pulled taut between the socket and the slot from which it came. She pressed the release button, but it did nothing. The belt was tight.

Had she been sitting there, she'd be trapped. That was what she'd read – trick seatbelts that automatically tightened, but if the passenger tried to release them, loosen them, even to simply squirm out, they got even tighter. Mya had sent her the article, one of countless instances of her valid but exhausting fear-mongering about the hazards of being female. One might think that the Lottery would preclude the need for men to steal women, but no, it had only meant they had to act faster, get more creative.

But now, what to do about it?

Her phone buzzed, but it was only Aaron, asking if she was still OK. She had no answer for that. "Can you unlock the doors? I actually want to get out," she announced.

"Relax, miss. We'll be there soon."

"Open the door *now*," she insisted, wishing her voice wasn't trembling so much.

"I was told to deliver you. I can't disobey my winner. Sorry, miss." There was no remorse in her voice, though. Of course there wasn't. Either the woman had had her capacity for commiseration removed on her Drawing Day, or she was too numbed by the circumstances of her own lot in life to have any pity left over for Chanda.

She tried the door handle again and gave it a harder shove. No sense being coy about it any more. It didn't budge. She tried every window, but they were all locked tight. Shit.

She dialed Aaron's number. Two heads were better than one, right? She ought to be called her father, but Aaron was sitting at his phone right now. Not having to explain the situation could save precious seconds that might make all the difference.

"Chanda! Are you OK? What's going—"

"You were right. I'm stuck in here. The doors are locked, windows locked. They won't let me out. I don't even know where I am. All the glass is tinted almost black. What do I do?"

Aaron froze for what felt like an eternity, but in her adrenaline-flooded state, was probably mere seconds. "Do you have anything you can break a window with?"

“What, like I carry around a brick in my purse?”

“Well look around. Is there anything in the vehicle you could use?”

A few glances confirmed the negative. “No. I could try... hang on.”

She put her purse against one of the windows, made a fist, and pounded it as hard as she could. It hurt like hell, and worse, she'd barely felt the window budge. She gave it a few more poundings, but her knuckles were hurting already. She gave a few tries on the divider between her cabin and the driver's, even kicking it, but still didn't get anywhere.

“That's treated glass, miss. You're not going to be able to break it. Please calm down. We'll be at our destination soon. This will be better for you if you don't put up much of a fuss.”

“LET ME OUT OF HERE!” she shrieked. But the only response came from Aaron on her phone.

“You have to stay calm, Chanda. Shit. Shit shit shit. OK. There has to be some way to... the sunroof? I thought I saw a sunroof in the pictures. Are those locked?”

“What, like they installed trap seatbelts but forgot to seal the sunroof?” she snapped. Still, she gave it a try, but the release button did no more than the door handle. “It's locked. Nothing.”

“But... maybe...” Aaron seemed at his wits' end, but she'd already had a thought of her own and stuffed the phone in her purse. The tinted glass was all super-strong, yes, but the glass in the sunroof was transparent, like any other window. After a brief consideration, she lay down on her back on the seat. Yes. This was the best shot she had. She raised up her feet, practicing her aim a few times. When she was pretty sure she had it, she tucked in her legs, then thrust up as hard as she could.

The glass shattered, much of it exploding upward but some raining down into the vehicle. Success! She swept at the jagged edges with her purse the best she could, then stood up into the frigid wind and all its sweet free air.

She recognized where she was immediately. North Main, Clark's economic center. Strip malls and fast food joints lined both sides of the busy four-lane street. It was near rush hour, and traffic was thick. Perfect.

“HELP!” she shouted. “HELP! I'M BEING KIDNAPPED! MY NAME IS CHANDA BRIGHTON AND I AM BEING KIDNAPPED! I AM NOT A LOSER AND THIS IS NOT A PRANK! I AM BEING—”

The car swerved to the far-right lane and lurched to a halt. The cars behind them honked as they were forced to screech on their brakes. Chanda screamed as her body lurched into some of the remaining glass in the front edge of the sunroof, where evidently some glass still remained. She collapsed into the car, where the door was already swinging open.

“Get out,” said the woman's voice. This time, Chanda did as she was told.

Aaron arrived in under ten minutes. Chanda was still sitting in the diner, tucked into a corner facing the door warily, sipping at ice water and trying to ignore the searing pain in her belly. The cuts weren't deep, but they burned like crazy.

She wasn't sure which was more surprising, that Aaron's instinct was to greet her with a hug, or that she'd already been out of her chair and ready to receive it. Her breakdown finally came, and his arms were all that held her up as he wept unrestrainedly into his shoulder.

He took her first to the hospital. She barely remembered the trip aside from her intense preoccupation with making certain the doors were all unlocked. The doctors did a scan and assured her that there was no broken glass left inside her, only some surface tissue damage, and bandaged her up. There were a couple minor scratches on her cheek as well, but the bigger cuts on her abdomen were nevertheless clean, and if she followed the doctor's instructions there ought to be little to no scarring.

Aaron offered to leave while they were inspecting the wounds, since it entailed taking off her shirt, but Chanda seized his hand and asked – pleaded – that he stay. If he'd left her alone in a strange room with a strange man, she might have had a full-blown episode. He turned his back respectfully, but she didn't let him release her hand. As for the hospital staff, she couldn't help but notice they directed most of their explanations to Aaron, but their core assumption was only laid bare when they asked him how he'd like to settle the bill.

"I'm a survivor," she said, causing the receptionist's head to pivot. It was easy to forget losers existed when handling transactions. "He's not my winner. He's my friend. And here." She passed her card through the slot.

"Oh. Really? Well then."

And that was that.

"Do you want me to take you to the police station?" Aaron asked quietly as he drove out of the hospital parking lot.

Chanda hadn't thought of it until that moment. Hadn't thought much of anything, really. She'd lived in dread of the Lottery, and had thought she knew what fear was. But today... that had been terror. She had been more frightened than she'd known it was possible to be. Her hands wouldn't quit shaking, quite, and while she was vaguely aware of how wooden she must seem from the outside, inside her guts were still being twisted in knots.

"I don't know. Should I?" she managed.

"It's up to you. I understand if you don't. I'll support you either way."

"I just... why would she..." She cried again for a while. Finally, she simply pulled out her phone and brought up her conversation with Tiffany.

Chanda: *How could you do that to me?*



It was pointless, she knew. Tiffany wasn't Tiffany any more. But right then she didn't care. She hadn't expected a reply, but received one promptly.

Tiffany: *Nothing personal babe [winking panda emoji] can't blame a loser for trying*

Chanda gaped.

Chanda: *Nothing personal? YOU TRIED TO ENSLAVE ME*

Chanda: *HOW MUCH MORE PERSONAL CAN YOU GET*

Tiffany: *shrug*

Tiffany: *can't be personal if I'm not a person, right?*

Tiffany: *Krystal told me you survived. Then I saw the footage on somebody's instagram from last night at grand river*

Tiffany: *Figured it was still worth a try. Master would lose his fucking shit if I hauled in a girl with a body like yours*

Chanda read her words aloud to Aaron, who listened but said nothing.

Chanda: *what would have happened if I hadn't gotten out of the car?*

Tiffany: *I can send another if you wanna find out*

Chanda slammed the block button, then deleted Tiffany's contact from her phone.

"Can you take me home?"

"Already on our way there."

It was going on ten when Aaron pulled into her driveway. She supposed they'd been at the hospital longer than she'd thought. Aaron offered to walk her to the door, but she brushed it aside.

"You've done enough for me already. I swear, I ignored you all through high school, and you've saved my bacon three times in four days. Thank you, Aaron. Really. I don't even know what the words are to thank someone for what you did."

He looked uncomfortable at the directness of her compliment, but nonetheless pleased. "Anybody would've done the same."

"Nobody else did." She cracked a thin smile. "You know, one of these days we'll have to see one another on a day that isn't one of the worst of my life."

"Thanks. That's nice of you to say."

She put her hand over his on the shifter. "I'm serious. This is definitely the most screwed up way I've ever gotten to know somebody, but I think of you as my friend. Heck, you're probably the best friend I have left."

"I..." He shook his head. "Thanks. Again."

"What? What were you about to say?"

He shook his head. "It's nothing."

"Aaron..."

He read the warning in her voice. “OK, OK, fine. I was only going to say maybe you should take it easy for a while.”

“Meaning what?”

“Meaning... maybe let’s give you some space and then decide if you want to do this, ya know, friends thing.”

Her hand released his. “Oh. Wow, yeah, of course. I don’t know why I assumed... you’re totally right. I mean, just because you were nice to me, sure, that doesn’t necessarily mean you...” *Like me*, she’d been going to say.

“Chanda, wait.” He hit the lock button, but when she gasped, he quickly undid it and apologized. “Sorry. Shoot, sorry. Come on, let’s talk outside.”

Outside felt better. It was chilly, breezy, but it calmed her nerves a bit. Despite her having refused Aaron’s offer, Chanda found him walking her to her front door nonetheless. “I do like you. OK? Really. But you’ve also been through a hell of a lot, and I don’t want you to feel like we need to, like, hang out, or whatever, because of it.”

“I don’t get you,” she said as they reached the front porch. “You say you like me, but you don’t want to hang out with me. You say you think I’m pretty, but... last night, I... and then you didn’t even...”

Aaron stepped in as she turned away from him, placing firm hands on her shoulders. That felt good. She remembered the hug when he picked her up that afternoon. That had been good, too. Was this what it had been like for her parents’ generation? Touching someone without being afraid they were sizing you up to see how much to seed your pot?

“I just don’t want to take advantage of you, Chanda. That’s it. If you like me, awesome. But you’ve been through hell, and I’m not going to let all that horrible shit make you do something you would regret.”

“Aaron, I was asking you to hang out sometime, not father my children.” She didn’t move away from his hands, though. She went on with a little grin, the first time she’d been able to smile in hours. “Besides, what makes you so sure I’d regret it?”

“I... Oh, wow. No, I didn’t mean you’d regret *that*, not as in... geez. No. Oh gosh.” He caught himself stammering, realized she was teasing him again, and chuckled it off. The two stood there in the soft glow from where the entryway lamp leaked out through the frosted glass window in the front door.

“You could kiss me, if you want,” she said, wondering even as she said it where it had come from.

Aaron took another step closer. He was only a little taller than her, but enough that she tilted her head up in invitation. Her eyes slid closed. Her imagination showed him leaning down, tilting his head, and...

His lips pressed against her forehead. They lingered for a moment, but only a moment. Then he stepped away, squeezed her shoulders, and backed down the steps.

“Let’s give it a few days, OK?”

“Oh. Yeah. OK.” She watched as he went back to his car. As he opened the door, she called out. “Aaron?”

He looked over to where she was silhouetted against her house. “Yeah, Chanda?”

“Can I still text you?”

She could barely make out the smile that crept onto his face. “Any time.”

That night, her dreams were again commingled with snippets from the day. Unlike the night before, there was nothing sexual about them. Yes, she had long been attracted to Tiffany, but nothing about that day had been sexy in any way whatsoever. At least that horrible incident with Brandy had had its moments, sort of. But today...

Yet when she woke up late that Tuesday morning, Chanda was surprised at how calm she felt. Maybe it was years of anticipating being made a man's unwilling slave, or perhaps it simply hadn't sunk in yet. Or maybe she'd learned something from Nafeesa after all. Whatever the case, she decided that it would be a fine day to stay in and unwind. She finished up a couple of her dad's incomplete spring cleaning projects, reshelfed the box of books and personal effects she'd packed up for her parents to donate after Drawing Day, took Bumper for another long walk, even got a nice long workout in for herself.

It never ceased to amaze her how much exercise really made her body and mind feel right. It gave her time and opportunity to try to process the night before. The more she thought about it, the more she realized that Tiffany had only done what Brandy had done. Or rather, their winners had done it. They were men – awful, disgusting, perverted, tyrannical men. Tiffany's had used a more elaborate method – and that dreadful car! – but their goal was the same: sexual conquest of the otherwise unattainable. It wasn't Tiffany's fault, or Brandy's fault. So she could waste her life hating and fearing the minority gender, or she could start acting a little smarter and try to move forward.

As she pushed her body physically, it engendered a sense that if she could make it up that hill, she could survive the outside world, too. Nafeesa had endured worse. Many women had, and did. So could Chanda Brighton.

By the time she was showering off after, her mind was already moving on to the prior day's lesser event. She wasn't surprised that Aaron hadn't contacted her. He'd been pretty clear that he meant to give her space. How could any guy be that sweet? Raised in a generation of boys who'd been told they were entitled to unprecedented dominion over women, how had she stumbled across someone as respectful and considerate and just plain fucking *decent* as Aaron Eichhorn?

He was right, though. It was obvious even to her that she was crushing on the guy like crazy. Aaron wasn't conventionally hot, but he was cute, in a sort of effeminate way. In fact she enjoyed that trait in men. Slender, with round cheeks and a slender jaw, chestnut hair hanging in soft curls down his neck. Hazel eyes. Long, slender fingers. She definitely liked his hands.

Plus, he was Aaron. Not merely the only male WALflower she'd ever met, but he'd come to her rescue not once, not twice, but *three times*. He'd been incredible. Selfless, even. Should she ask him out? Chanda had no idea if they'd have any chemistry, but part

of her simply wanted the opportunity to thank him for his heroism. At length. Great length.

But what if it was simply hormones? What if years of denying herself a man's touch was coupling with the sexuality crackling in the air to make her have these feelings? Maybe Aaron was right, that she was confused and upset and not acting rationally.

But how to clear her head?

Could... could she... hook up? With someone? That was what it was called, she was pretty sure. It was a thought she'd never entertained before. Men had been frightening, ticketing time bombs waiting to go off in her pot. But now... the bombs had been defused. No. The bombs had exploded, all over her helpless, innocent classmates. But nevertheless, they were no longer a threat. Just guys, no different than guys had been since the dawn of guydom. She'd wondered from time to time if her attraction to women had been born simply because they seemed comparatively safe. Only after the past few days, it was clear that wasn't the case any more either.

*You can't do that*, she told herself. She kept telling herself that even as she made a fresh social media profile, her old one having been been frozen for 30 years as of Drawing Day. It was a laughable measure on the part of the companies, as if women would wake up from decades of slavery and want to hop right back on facebook to touch base with their old buddies. But it was something they could keep from their winners, and she supposed that when they woke up at 48, it would be nice not to have their accounts clogged full of lewd selfies. So she'd frozen it, same as most of her friends.

In fact, many of them were already active with new profiles themselves. The guys didn't need to set up new ones, but they had to reconnect with the losers' fresh accounts. Most of her requests were accepted within minutes, or even seconds. After a brief hesitation, she went ahead and added Aaron as her winner, per the lie they'd agreed upon after the incident at the movies. She half-expected a message from him saying hi or cracking a joke about the perversity of the whole situation, but other than confirming her selection, there was only more silence. By mid-afternoon, though, she was reunited with most of the senior class, and busily devouring the news about who had been won by whom, gleaning what she could of the losers' new lives.

It shouldn't have been so surprising how surprising it all was.

Missy Adler, a sweet girl with huge beautiful eyes Chanda knew from her honors classes, had a fresh profile clearly fabricated at the direction of her winner, Ian Lengies. The new profile pic was, aptly, a shot of her in profile. Naked. Well, no, she was wearing a pink dog collar with a leash hanging down from above her in the image. Her mouth was open, panting. Her breasts were concealed only by the position of her arms, planted in front of her on the floor in front of her empty dish. The name "Fluffykins" was

stenciled on the side of it. It narrowly skirted the lax guidelines facebook had established for posted images in the post-Lottery world.

Chanda had known Jessalyn Lewis since kindergarten. She'd never much liked her; she was a gossip and a tattletale in one, an insufferable suckup not to be trusted with so much as the time of day. Her new profile picture looked to have been simply ported from her old account, a shot of her and some friends at the winter formal. Her winner, however, was listed as Lamarcus Trueblood. Chanda remembered hearing – from Jessalyn, in fact, who also had the character flaw of talking too damn loud – that Lamarcus's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday was on Drawing Day, in fact, rendering him eligible by mere hours. *Happy birthday, from your adoring baby girl Jessalyn! I hope I'm the best birthday present you ever get!* read her birthday message on his wall. It was the only such post there save for another one Carly Gerasimenko, whose profile also listed Lamarcus as her winner. Chanda supposed his other friends had been too busy to sit around on social media that day.

Courtney and Cara Cousins were, ironically, twin sisters. They'd moved to Clark the same year the Lottery had been established after their old hometown had been wrecked by a tornado. Their father was one of the social studies teachers at Clark Middle School; Chanda had learned the states and capitals from a catchy little song he'd taught them. Now Mr. Cousins' daughters were, for the first time in their lives, separated, though according to the caption on a picture posted on Cara's page, they were closer than ever. The picture showed Cara's lips pressed against those of another woman who was almost entirely clipped out of the photo on the right side. A quick click over to Courtney's page confirmed Chanda's suspicion, where the other half of the picture showed Courtney kissing a mostly-unseen woman to her left. Mr. Cousins had reacted with a sad emoji to both.

Josie Olivier had been won by her boyfriend since sophomore year, Mason Gallagher. That brought a smile back to Chanda's lips. It would be better if she'd not been won at all, of course, but at least–

Nope. Her profile picture showed her kissing Mason on the cheek, and was dated last Thursday. But the newest post showed her naked, like Missy, except the technicality of her modesty was preserved by the presence of a big piece of construction paper that mostly covered a pair of breasts almost as big as Chanda's. On it was written in what had to be her own handwriting, *I'm sorry I was such a selfish cunt! If I ever left you with blueballs, you're entitled to one free blowjob from yours truly! I used to think I was such hot shit but now I'm only a stupid whore! <3 Mason!*

Samantha Guthrie had been won by Marshall Tobin. Their wedding photos were already uploaded. Gina Rivera and Sharise Freedman had been won by Nick and Josh Mahaffey, setting their years-long feud aside in the name of sister-slavery. Raven Choi had been won by some 30-something-looking guy Chanda didn't recognize, but some

google fu confirmed that the man lived next door to her parents. Hayley Boles' winner was left anonymous in her profile, but the *I LOVE GREGG* tattoo that now covered the majority of her back in the topless sideboob-revealing picture pretty well spoiled the mystery.

Dorothy Criss, a loose friend of hers and the senior class vice president, was now the proud property of Blake Goodwin-Mentzel, whom she'd rejected to four separate dances. In a post dated mere hours before Chanda read it, Dorothy wrote, *It feels like all I've been able to think about since drawing day is killing myself. I don't know if that's me, the real me, or something he put in my head. It doesn't matter. It feels real. I finally asked Blake today if he would let me put myself out of my misery, but he said that until my time was up, I was his. So I'm going to be the best little whore for him I can to see if it changes his mind. I don't even know why I'm sharing all this except to commiserate with my fellow sufferers. Maybe he's making me do that, too.*

*I hope you're fairing better, ladies.*

Chanda closed the app.

"So what are you up to tonight?" her mom asked when she came home from work.

"Staying home. Maybe forever."

Her mom pulled her in for a long hug and planted a kiss in her hair. "Sounds great to me."

It was three more days before Chanda invited any contact with the outside world. After a message from Krystal asking if she'd be up for a threesome or just hanging out, she'd shut off her messaging on her phone. *Long Time Coming* returned to her bookshelf, finished. Her room was spick and span, drawers and closet reorganized. She binged the first two seasons of *Surviving*, a drama she used to watch about a loser whose winner died the night of Drawing Day before he had established his legal successor. Lexi was left with limited mental capacity and an oppressive lust for men that frequently compromised her resolve never to be taken advantage of by men again.

One week of survival under her belt and Chanda couldn't imagine how she'd ever found this dreck compelling. It was so... innocent. It depicted a version of the Lottery that had been run through filters to make it seem less objectionable to the network censors. Winners were protective of their losers. Losers – at least the major characters – possessed an emotional range and level of autonomy vastly beyond anything Chanda had witnessed from her classmates. The prettier girls were somehow *more* influential than their less Hollywoodized peers, rather than the more likely scenario in which they were modified into the most depraved and fetishized versions of themselves. Every few episodes the writers forced in some ham-fisted reference to global calamity with the unspoken but almost visibly winked-at assertion that these women's sacrifices were the only thing keeping it from happening there in Goldcrest Hills.

About the only thing it got right, in Chanda's own limited experience, was the guilt.

In the first season in particular, a significant portion of Lexi's story arc centered around her inner conflict around her interest in Cory. He'd been her ex-boyfriend already before Drawing Day (the operative *ex* on account of her infidelity with Tycen). Somehow Cory quickly lost interest in his loser, the beautiful and adoring Akshi (which Chanda had considered unrealistic even when she'd first watched this as a 14-year-old). But as Lexi realized she still had feelings for him, she flip-flopped for the entire 40-hour run time of those two seasons over whether or not it was a betrayal to survivors everywhere to provide sexual gratification to a man.

(Spoiler alert: Lexi caved, because of course she did, because ratings existed and her actress Jennica Benoist was looking to transition to the big screen. That didn't happen until after season 4, when Lexi "committed suicide" out of grief over Cory's rejection, except it naturally turned out that Akshi had poisoned her to protect her claim to her winner. Then this most recent season Lexi returned (\*sarcastic gasp\*) because the poisoning had only put her in a coma, though it was really because *Some Like Them Smart* had flopped at the box office.)

In any case, Chanda could empathize about Lexi's turmoil. It had been a week since Brandy and Ezekiel at the movies, most of a week since the Tiffany situation, and her anxiety had diminished enough that normal life – if there was such a thing any more



– was climbing the ranks of her priority list. She spent hours that Friday drafting texts to Aaron, the iterations waffling between casual greetings, asking him to hang out, asking him on an explicit date, or flat-out telling him to shove his gentlemanliness up his butt and come take advantage of her.

All of the tactics she considered were ultimately aimed at that last objective anyway. Which, she reminded herself as she deleted yet another unsent composition, wasn't at all in the survivor spirit.

She tried to imagine herself a week ago, hunkered down with her friends, dreading the inevitable Drawing Day announcement and not daring to hope for the miracle of survival. If that Chanda could see her now, edging herself on and off for days at a time and wishing a boy she hardly knew would give her some sign of his interest... that Chanda would slap her upside the head. She had *survived*, for crying out loud! The percentage of women who survived the Lottery was dismal, and while there was no means of scientifically adjusting the statistics for the more conventionally beautiful ones like herself, her story was clearly an anomaly. Was she really going to squander her freedom throwing herself at some silly high school boy?

No matter how gallant.

No. She wasn't lowering herself to this. She was Chanda freaking Brighton, and while she did her best to stay humble, deep down she knew full well she was the jewel of Clark High. If Aaron was man enough to reach out and ask her out, maybe – *maybe* – she would consider throwing him a–

Aaron: *Hey, I guess it's been three days, huh? Still want to go out?*

Chanda: *Sure! What'd you have in mind?*

It was the nicest she'd ever dressed up for a rendezvous at the Frostop. On the one hand, it did soothe her nerves to be somewhere familiar. In a small town like Clark, there weren't many places open past ten, and with the spring weather working overtime to remind everyone winter was over even if summer wasn't yet here, it was a fine night to be at the drive-up diner. The only alternatives for a meet-up this late were the 24-hour Denny's on the west side of town that she doubted had ever passed a health inspection, and the Grand River 16, which she'd had more than enough of for a while. As an employee of the establishment, Aaron likely had, too. So if they weren't going to simply meet up at one of their own houses, the Frostop was as good a place as they were apt to find.

On the other hand, meeting up at one of their own houses would have been nice.

They'd decided to drive separately, or at least, Aaron had. She wondered if he was still thinking about the last time he'd dropped her off, when he'd declined her offered kiss. Maybe he really wasn't attracted to her?

With a final once over in her rear view mirror, she had to hand it to herself, any man who wasn't attracted to her looking like this wasn't attracted to women period. She was wearing a dress she'd never worn before, wine red with a black belt that made the bodice cling quite fetchingly. The square neckline revealed a great deal more cleavage than she normally allowed for, more than most women even had, a thin line between two plump breasts. The skirt wasn't short, nor was it tight, but it was a good deal closer to being described as short and tight than it was either long or billowy. Her makeup was on point, her lipstick the same red as the dress, and her black mane of hair practically gleamed in the headlights of the car behind her. After spending days lounging around looking like a slob, it felt good to remind herself who she really was.

It was bold. She knew that. After all, Aaron had only suggested they meet up to talk, hang out, and here she was undeniably accoutered for a date. But she reasoned that as far as the rest of the outside world was concerned, he was her winner – and the outside world would definitely be here. They'd expect her to look nice for him, and think it strange if she didn't. So at least she had that as a fallback excuse if he took issue.

His car was already parked in one of the spaces under the Frostop's long awning, along with dozens of others. It was in the low 50's and still, so between the nice spring weather and the winners still not tired of showing off their prizes, most of the patrons of the Frostop were out of their cars and milling about the outdoor tables as the staff in their sky blue shirts scurried about trying to figure out where to deliver orders. Aaron, she saw, was waiting in his car. He looked up from his phone, startled, when she tapped on the glass.

He hastily rolled down the window. "Chanda! Hey, sorry I was..." He finally turned his head enough to get a look at her. "Oh wow. Gosh. Sorry, that's... I wasn't... Just, you know. Wow. Not like, bad wow, but I mean—"

“Thanks. Mind if I...?” She gestured to the passenger seat.

“No! Come—” His voice broke, and he visibly winced in embarrassment. “Come on in.”

She went around to the far side, then had to wait until he realized he needed to unlock it. Just as she was about to step in, she heard a voice from behind her. “Chanda! Oh hey, wow! Your titties look absolutely rocking in that slutty little dress!”

It was none other than Mya – or someone who had once been Mya. This girl was clad in a sheathe of thin pink spandex that might have been intended as a top for a taller girl. On Mya, it only barely covered her nipples and failed to cover her underwear, revealing the bottom inch or so of a gauzy purple pair of panties. Or maybe a thong. Chanda couldn’t tell. Her platform sandals were adding so much to the compact Latina girl’s height that she was suddenly taller than Chanda, who could only guess how the girl could walk around in such things. It all clung to her so tightly and covered so little as to give the impression that if Mya so much as sneezed, it would collapse into a ribbon around her waist in an instant. More to the point, the vacant expression in Mya’s wide brown eyes gave the impression that if it did, she wouldn’t care in the least.

“Mya, hi. Um, you look nice, too,” she lied.

“Huh? Oh! Sorry, Kenny calls me Mimi.” Chanda suppressed a glower at her friend’s unseen winner. Their friends had teased Mya for years about having been given a stripper name, but apparently it wasn’t strippery enough for this jerk. “But I know, right? He lets me wear the cutest little outfits!”

“Lets you’ is one way of putting it,” Chanda muttered dryly. She’d already discovered on facebook that Mya had been won by Kenny Kirshner. She barely knew the guy, but seeing what he’d done to her friend told Chanda everything she needed to know about him. Mya was pretty much what all of their circle of friends had expected to become. Namely, a bimbo. If there was some nuance to it beyond the apparent, it hardly mattered. Mya was gone, and only this stupid slut remained.

“So hey, is this your guy? He’s so super cute!” she cooed, bending down and peering through the windshield at Aaron. For his part, he waved casually, letting Chanda deflect this on her own. After a few seconds of Mya failing to notice, Chanda directed her attention to where her dress had slipped down beneath her left breast. The girl giggled and half-heartedly tugged it into place. The tug already looked practiced.

“Um, yep. Sure is,” said Chanda, not sure how she felt about that lie. Especially to someone who’d once been a close friend.

Mya and Chanda had been assigned as locker partners in middle school. They’d copied one another’s homework, loaned each other pads in emergencies, learned how to apply (and mostly how not to apply) makeup together. On Career Day in eighth grade, Mya had given her speech on how she wanted to be a biological research technician, like her mom. As she finished, one of the boys in the back had called out, “Do they let losers

go to college?” Chanda couldn’t remember who it had been any more. Maybe Kenny. In any event, no doubt Mya didn’t remember any more either. And he’d been right, after all. The closest Mya was going to come to biological research now was a great deal of practice in making babies. Maybe their teacher owed the guy an apology for sending him to the office.

“Hey, do you guys wanna hang out with me and Kenny? Oh! Double date! How fun would that be! I *love* having fun!” Mya clapped her hands together giddily.

“Oh, I dunno, I’m sure Aaron would, um, rather have me to himself,” she replied awkwardly, praying he couldn’t hear their conversation.

“Um, not to tell you your business, but, like, shouldn’t *he* get to decide that?” Mya gave her seemingly daft friend a pitying look for her oversight in judgment. “Come on, just ask him! It’d be super crazy fun, like old times! We could like, talk about stuff, or have a threesome, or a foursome, or um, whatever’s after a foursome...” She squinted, trying to remember the word “orgy.” Or maybe trying to count to five.

“I... I’ll ask him.” Chanda motioned for Aaron to roll down the car.

“Say, winner of mine,” she began dryly, “how would you like to hang out with Kenny Kirshner and Mya Barrios?” Mya was watching, but she couldn’t see Chanda’s face give him a hard suggestion of her preferred answer.

“Maybe later,” he said after lowering his window so Mya would be able to hear him. “It’s good seeing you though, Mya. You look great.”

The girl literally hopped up and down with delight at being the recipient of a superficial compliment from a boy. “Thank you! My sister was all ‘you’re covering up too much Mya’ but I was like ‘nuh uh I don’t wanna get arrested for being super slutty in front of everybody and get stuck in jail and not even get fucked or nothing for days and days and make Kenny mad at me for being a stupid bitch.’ And she’s all ‘but I can’t even see your tummy or any side boob’ and I’m like ‘but you can totally see my panties in this’ – you can see them, right Aaron? – and she was–”

Chanda interrupted. “You talked to Jessie?” That was surprising indeed. Not only had Mya and Jessie not been close even before her sister’s auction three years back, but she’d been bought by some guy who ran some business in Bahrain. She’d only been back to visit once and it had been mortifying seeing what had become of her. Jessie’s transformation was one of few Chanda had dreaded even more than what had become of Mya. Jessie knelt whenever a man was in the room. She couldn’t be forced to put on clothes beyond a bunch of piercings and the various translucent gauzy things she’d packed. She’d eaten out of a bowl on the floor, without using her hands. The poor woman wouldn’t – couldn’t – even talk unless she’d been directed to or was answering a question. It was slavery of the most abject sort.

“Oh yeah! Yeah, her winner won, auctioned actually, a new girl this year, this crazy smoking hot chick named Lily, or that’s her new name anyway, and so he sent

Jessie home for a couple weeks while he breaks her in, so she's staying with Mom and Dad. But they get suuuuper creeped out by her so they left to visit Abue and Tito, so Kenny and I got the house to ourself for a whole week! Isn't that amazing?! I mean, except for Jessie, but she's like barely even a person so it doesn't really count."

Chanda's chest tightened, imagining what a new winner, drunk with all his power, might be doing alone in the house with Mya and her biddable big sister. It was too awful to imagine. "Well, there you have it," she said quickly. "But, um, I'll see you... later."

"Oh gosh totally later! Oh, and hey, Aaron – do you have a crush on me? Like, the old me?" she asked with bizarre casualness. Where had that come from? Of all the things for this simple-seeming girl to maintain curiosity over.

He looked to Chanda, then back, but evidently decided to simply be honest. "Yeah, a while back, I guess. You sat by me in a couple classes junior year, and you were always really nice to people." He shrugged. Chanda flashed him a small grin. That was sweet.

"Cool! I totally thought you did. So yeah, Kenny told me to tell you that you're totally on my swap list, so, ya, any time, Aaron!" She waved so vigorously that she nearly flashed her boobs to him, then another of those reflexive tugs back into place before she skipped away to find her winner.

Aaron's eyes were as big as baseballs. "Uh..." was all he managed as Chanda settled into the car.

"I'm over here," she remarked dryly as his gaze followed Mya. He winced and turned to face her. But she was smiling as he did. "It's OK. She's a cutie. I get it."

"Do I even want to ask what a swap list is?" he muttered sheepishly.

"I'm pretty sure the term speaks for itself. Gonna take her up on it? Boy, would Kenny feel stupid when you're having a blast with Mya and he's busy icing his balls after I show him what I think of his taste in women."

"Hey, you know I would never..."

She waited, but he didn't elaborate. "What? Have sex with Mya?"

"Or anyone else who wasn't... who didn't..."

"Aaron, I was only teasing. I think you've proven you're one of the good ones by now." She saw he'd already ordered a couple of root beers for the two of them and helped herself to one after a brief word of thanks.

"Well, while I have you fooled into thinking I'm not a misogynist, I may as well tell you that you look incredible, by the way. I didn't expect you to, you know, dress up and all. I hope I'm OK."

He was wearing a button-up shirt and blue jeans, but Chanda could certainly tell he'd spent some time on his hair and his body wash had filled the car with its aroma. But it smelled good, and she appreciated that he'd taken some extra effort. It made her feel

less self-conscious about being at the Frostop dressed like she was on her way to somewhere elegant.

“How dare you.”

“You’ll take my compliment and you’ll like it, loser.” She laughed, but nonetheless he hastily added, “OK, enough role play for one night.”

So the unofficial date commenced. They ordered food, he asked her how she’d been doing, she glossed over her surprising resilience to traumatization and talked about how it felt rewatching *Surviving* as an authentic survivor.

“I can’t believe you actually watch that show,” said Aaron in between bites of his cheeseburger.

“What? I’m not saying I think it should win awards or anything, but it’s not any worse than most teen soaps.”

“No, I know that. I mostly meant that we’re all drowning in Lottery drama in our real lives, but you decided to go and seek out more of it in your entertainment, too.”

She was distracted for a moment by wondering whether Cerina was merely grinding on Mike’s lap, or if her skirt was up in the back and they were actually having sex right there at their table at Frostop. “Yeah, I dunno. I think maybe I thought it would be easier to look at the fake stuff than the real. If that makes sense.”

“No, I get that. Heck, maybe I should start watching that, too.”

She wadded up the wrapper from her own burger and shoved it in the empty plastic bag hanging from the shifter. “Having a hard time with things, too?”

He chewed for a long while before answering, and from his eyeline, might have been wondering the same thing about Cerina and Mike. “It hasn’t been the best week,” he said simply.

A pang of guilt hit her. She’d been so wrapped up in her own troubles, she hadn’t even asked how he’d been doing. “Anything you wanna talk about?”

“I... nah. It’s nothing compared to the week you’ve had.”

“It’s not a competition, Aaron. We’re both allowed to have lousy days. What’s going on?”

“Well...” He looked down. “I lost my job the other day.”

“What?!”

“Yeah. I, um, was supposed to work Monday, but...”

“But...?”

“But... you know. The thing. With your friend.”

OH. Monday! “But you spent the whole night taking care of my whiny butt. Oh crap, Aaron, I’m so sorry. If I’d known, I never would have asked you to—”

“You didn’t ask me to. And that job sucked anyway. I was going to quit at the end of the summer.”

“Well still. I’m so sorry. You really didn’t have to do that.”

“I know. But I wanted to. What was I gonna say, sorry about the attempted kidnapping, but suck it up because the corn isn’t gonna pop itself?”

She laughed. “When you put it that way...”

“But yeah. My parents are pissed, because I couldn’t tell them the real reason I got fired. But maybe it’s not even that. Like, ever since last Friday, they’ve been... I dunno. Distant.”

“Why, what happened last Friday? I mean, other than Drawing Day, obviously.”

“Just that.”

She cocked her head to the side. “I don’t get it. Why are your parents upset? You’re a boy.”

“Guilty. But I mean, I didn’t win anybody. They don’t even know that I didn’t seed anybody. I know they really wanted grandkids someday, even if they never explicitly made that my responsibility, but now...” He shrugged. “They both came from big families and all, so it’s a thing.”

“Oh. Wow, yeah. I guess I never really thought about it like that.” It seemed kind of obvious, now that he’d said it. But she’d never had any close male friends, and hadn’t ever given the male perspective on it all much thought. No winning meant no desterilization meant no children. For girls, there was no choice in it all; it had never occurred to her to think about guys who wanted to have families someday. “I’m sorry. So you never wanted to have kids yourself?”

“I mean, if things were how they used to be, sure, maybe I’d have done it someday. But not with the world like it is.”

“I mean, you could have seeded some girls, then left them like they were though, right?”

“If I left them like they were, then my parents still don’t get their grandkids.”

“I don’t follow.”

Aaron sighed. “Suppose I do like you say, win some poor girl but leave her personality alone. But in that case, she’s still not interested in me, just like she wasn’t before. Or she decides she is, but then it’s only because I... I dunno, showed mercy, or however you want to put it. Either way, a relationship with a woman who’s only into me because she was coerced doesn’t appeal to me, and I’d sure as heck never want to bring children into such an arrangement.”

Chanda wasn’t sure she saw it that way, but it was clear he’d given it some thought. Regardless, she certainly wasn’t about to rebuke a guy for *not* playing the Lottery. “You know, I would totally hug you right now if it wouldn’t be super awkward. Not because hugging you would be awkward! No, I mean, you know. The car. Like, physically.”

“Verbal hug acknowledged and received.” He glanced around. “Say, I think I might want some ice cream. Trying not to over-do the comfort food, but ya know, first firing and all. Want some?”

“Sure, I never say no to ice cream. Obviously.”

He arched an eyebrow. “Obviously? Chanda, you’re hardly overweight.”

Sheesh. Did he think she was that insecure? “Yeah. I know. I meant *these*.” She gestured to her chest. It occurred to her as she did that it may be the first time in her life she’d ever directed a guy to check out her boobs. Not that she usually needed to. She had to hand it to Aaron, they were displaying themselves awfully proudly, yet she’d only caught him looking twice.

“Oh. I didn’t know that, ah, ice cream boobs were a thing. I mean if I had, I would have had some waiting for you when you showed up.” She threw her head back and laughed at that one. He leaned back into the car as he exited. “What do you want me to get for you?”

“Oh, I can get my own.”

“You’re sure?” He looked around. “It’s a little wild out here tonight.”

She rolled her eyes. “I think I can handle it.”

Chanda walked almost fifty feet from the car before a guy she didn’t even recognize slapped her on the ass in passing.

“Damn, buddy!” the guy exclaimed. He didn’t even have the grace to hustle away. He looked around the right age to go to their school, but she didn’t recognize him. If he were a year older or younger, it wasn’t really surprising. “Bitch looks classy as fuck, dawg! Like a slutty secretary or something.”

“Don’t touch her,” spat Aaron, snarling, even before Chanda could say about the same.

“Hey, I’m not looking for handouts or nothing, friend. Just sayin’, babe looks even hotter than before. You ever looking to pimp that shit out man, you look me up, ‘cause I’d give good money to tap that.” He pulled out his wallet as he spoke, revealing only a single bill. “Tell you what, I got twenty bucks right now if I can motorboat those titties of hers.”

Aaron looked like he was about to throw down. Not only was Chanda not looking for guys to fight over her, she didn’t relish the prospect of having to help clean up poor Aaron after this brute mopped the floor with him. This boy was going on twice his size, and while most of it was flab, plenty of it wasn’t.

“Sorry, but Aaron says it’s two hundred to motorboat my titties.” She was channeling Akshi’s casual deference hard. “Maybe find a cash machine. Or get a job, whichever.” She shrugged.

The boy hadn’t missed the gleam in Aaron’s eyes, but decided to redirect his scowl to Chanda rather than escalate things with her winner. After all, if he kicked



Aaron's ass, he'd never get to lay a finger on her. Everybody knew you didn't burn bridges with the Powerball winners. "Maybe I will, Chanda. It's still Chanda, right?"

"Still Chanda."

The boy gave Aaron a nod, then waddled away without any further antagonization.

"I told you you should've stayed in the car," he grumbled.

Chanda put her hands firmly on his shoulders and gently spun him face to face with her. "Look, Aaron. I appreciate you defending my honor and all, but I can really take care of myself. I mean, if I get kidnapped again, sure, but a pat on the butt I can deal with."

"But—"

"The fact that you were here meant it was *only* a pat on the butt. Remember the movies last weekend? Without a winner, even a fake one, that guy would have thought he could do anything he wanted to me." It would be cold consolation that she could press charges later. "But with you, I'm coveted property – the whole point being guys will mostly leave me alone. So play the part, keep it cool. Heck, you can even enjoy it a little." She narrowed her eyes. "A *little*."

"Enjoy it?"

God, it was too easy to make him flustered. And too adorable. She eschewed her grasp on his shoulders for one on his hand and began leading him to the ordering window. At first it was almost more dragging than leading, but he didn't resist for long.

"Welcome to the Frostop, how can I help you," droned the tired-looking man behind the glass. The sexually charged atmosphere of the winners and losers thronging the place seemed to have no effect on him.

"Hi! My winner would like to order for the both of us," she told him.

The employee looked to Aaron, who was himself looking at Chanda agog. "I would?"

"Sure you would. Come on, tell the nice man what I'll be eating tonight."

"I... OK. Um, I'll have the mint chocolate chip, and she'll have... uh, I don't know what you like."

Oh good grief. A guy copped a feel and he was ready to throw down, but ask him to order her dessert and suddenly there was no more machismo in him. "I like whatever you order for me," she said, trying to sound as merry as possible. That was how losers sounded, right? Merry?

"OK. Uh, I guess... you're not allergic to anything, are you?"

*Seriously Aaron?* "Nope. No allergies. I actually like nuts." There, let him deal with childish double entendre. Holy crap, this was liberating. For once there was someone more uncomfortable about losers than she was.

"Sure. Rocky Road then for her."

“Oh gosh, I love Rocky Road!” she said with heavily exaggerated enthusiasm. To him, the only one in earshot who knew she wasn’t sincerely his loser, it probably sounded more sarcastic than anything. But that was fun, too.

“Seriously, or are you...” He sighed, seeing the impish twinkle in her eyes. “Right.”

“But I have to watch myself,” she told the guy as Aaron paid. “He says he’s worried I’ll get... what was it, Aaron?”

“What was...” His eyes widened. “No. I’m not worried. I’m not—”

“Ice cream boobs,” she finished.

The man behind the counter grunted and slid over some change, already done with them. Aaron gave her an exasperated look, but she could tell he was enjoying it on some level. She had no real experience flirting, but if that was indeed what she was doing, she was enjoying it immensely.

“Chanda fucking Brighton,” came a voice from behind her. She recognized it even before she turned. Jake Mulholland, one of the few guys in school who was attractive enough that she’d considered letting her guard down. According to his facebook profile, he hadn’t won anybody in the Lottery. Maybe now that they were both single (and free-willed) she could see if—

“I’ve wanted to fuck her since like eighth grade, man,” Jake said to Aaron, dissolving her attraction in an instant. “You are one lucky mother fucker, Eichhorn. Seriously, hats off to you.”

“Oh. Thanks?” said Aaron. He shifted a brief pointed look to Chanda as if to reassure her that he wasn’t going to overreact. She gave a curt nod. Though Jake wasn’t making it easy to maintain the sentiment.

“I mean it. This chick was a bona fide ice princess. Far as I’m concerned, you’re an American hero, dude. I wouldn’t want to live in a world where a girl this hot died a virgin.”

Chanda doubted that had ever been on the table – and as far as she was concerned, still wasn’t – but was having too much fun watching Aaron sweat his role in their little charade to break it up. Jake was popular, and that social gap between them was having its usual effect on the WALflower. Aaron didn’t want to engage in this conversation, but he didn’t want to drive off the cool kids either. She’d seen it happen a thousand times. Once upon a time, Tiffany had practically weaponized it.

Aaron tried to smile. “Yeah. She’s, um, really pretty, all right.”

“Pretty? Man, those tits are the stuff of legend. Don’t tell me she doesn’t look amazing naked. They don’t sag too much, do they? That big, I know they can sag, but it’s never how I pictured them.”

“I... we’re just getting ice cream,” said Aaron nervously.

But Jake tapped him on the chest reprovingly. “Nah, man, they’re backed up as hell. Guess they lost half their staff after Drawing Day. I’ve been waiting ten minutes already. C’mon, hop a squat. Sit with me a bit.” He gestured to a nearby table.

Peer pressure did its work, and Chanda followed at Aaron’s side. It was sort of backwards, really. For all Jake was talking about how hot she was, he was barely even looking in her direction. When Aaron didn’t say anything, she decided to press the issue herself. “Come on, Aaron. Do my tits sag too much?”

He gave her an exasperated look; she hoped he’d find this funny later. She was about to lose it herself. “Um, no. They’re... they’re great.”

“I knew it. Fuck, I knew it.” Jake sounded relieved. His spank bank could remain stuffed full of quarters with her bust impressed upon them. “So hey, tell me all about the new and improved Chanda. You won the Powerball, man. You owe it to all of us who didn’t.”

“I’d... she’s... you know. Um, about the same. Right...?” He looked to Chanda.

Oh, why not throw him a bone. He was probably nervous to say something that would make their story hard to keep up. Or afraid to sound as misogynistic as Jake was, as if she didn’t trust his good-guy cred by now. “Yeah, mostly the same. Still live with my parents – for now. Memories intact, personality mostly the same. I mean, as far as I know, right? Boys will be boys, after all!” She forced a giggle that she hoped didn’t sound too patently fake. Jake laughed along with her. “But you know, a few little quirks. A fetish or two.”

“Oh yeah? You got a fetish?” Jake brightened, but he still looked back to Aaron immediately. One week in, and he’d already learned not to waste his time conversing with losers. “What’s her deal?”

“That’s sort of personal, don’t you think?” Aaron mumbled.

“Can’t be personal if she’s not a full person any more, right?” Looked like he and Tiffany read the same asshole newsletter. “C’mon, I’m not trying to bust your balls, or be one of those douchers who’s pestering you for free action or anything. She’s all yours. Just be a guy and let some of that divine light surrounding you shine down on us poor sinners.”

A Frostop employee – this one a girl, and a pretty one, so no doubt still too young to have been won yet – stopped by and dropped off Jake’s dinner. He barely looked at her or it, though. Aaron looked to Chanda, who took advantage of the momentary distraction to mouth *Enjoy it* to him, then winked with the eye that was concealed from Jake’s position.

“She, um...” His mind was racing. Chanda told herself that no matter what he said, she wouldn’t tease him later. She was the one putting him in this awkward position, so if he was going to tell Jake that she liked to perform oral sex, or was some kind of exhibitionist or something, she’d play along so long as it didn’t get out of hand.

She'd already shown him her vibrator, after all. He was due the chance to air out his own libido a bit.

"She gets hornier the longer you make her wait," he blurted.

"She what?" Jake almost spurted out a bite of his hot dog as he guffawed at the response he'd been given. "Dude, that's hilarious! Oh my god, that's perfect! She made all us guys wait for years, and now she gets the ol' blue balls herself. That's fucking brilliant! So what else? Once she gets herself all worked up, what's she gotta do to work it off?"

Aaron squirmed a bit in his seat, looking pleadingly to the order window as if trying to summon their ice cream to give them an excuse to get out of there immediately. But there was no such luck. So to her surprise, he suddenly turned to her. "Chanda? Why don't you tell him?"

It was her turn for shock and discomfort. "Me? But, I'm sure you'd explain it so much better..."

"That's an order," he said firmly, giving her a little smirk. Had that been how she'd looked at him? Hmmph. It was decidedly less cute on him.

"Oh, OK. I'd be happy to, um, tell him about my... my fetishes." Her mind was racing, and she was trying not to be too obvious about stalling for time. In her desperation, she blurted out the first thing that came to mind. "I can get off just from having my boobs played with!"

Her fists locked on the hem of her dress. It was the only thing keeping her from clapping a hand over her mouth in sheer mortification. How the heck had *that* been the first thing that popped into her head?!

"Well that almost feels like a given," said Jake to her chest. "Rack like that, seems a waste not to. Of course, man can't live on boobs alone."

Chanda despised that song, but she couldn't say that in the present situation. Aaron replied for her. "Yeah, I agree. That's why I did the other one, too. Tell him, Chanda."

"About the other one? You're sure?" She eyed him hard.

"Oh, this is gonna be juicy if even a loser can blush that hard over it. C'mon, Chan. Hit me with it."

She was almost grateful for his jerkwad commentary to give her time to come up with something else. Luckily, she'd recently been exposed to ample fodder for the imagination for exactly such a question. "I love it when a man tells me what to do. The bossier, the better. I get weak in the knees just thinking about what an obedient little loser I am."

Jake almost choked on his mouthful this time, but came up laughing. "What, like Amber from *Surviving*?"

Shit. "No, not like Amber from *Surviving*," she snapped, feigning insult.

“I’m pretty sure that’s a direct quote,” Jake countered. “Like, Lexi is telling everybody about how glad she is to have her free will back, except obviously she’s not, or not yet anyway, and then Amber says that. I’m like ninety percent sure.”

But Aaron covered for her. “What can I say, I’m a fan. Not saying the *show* should win awards or anything, but it’s at least as good as any teen soap, right?”

“Right,” she said, willing her cheeks back to their normal color.

“That’s cute that you let her still get self-conscious like that. Nice touch, seriously,” Jake said. “Anyway, yeah, that’s cool. Nothing wrong with the classics. Every now and then you see guys letting their losers stay, like, aware, you know? Turns my stomach, man. These ladies are doing the world a favor. Least we can do to make it as fun for them as possible.”

“Yeah. I mean... yeah,” managed Aaron.

“I’m serious, man. Some guys are real assholes about it. If I’d won somebody, I’d make sure she loved every minute of it. None of that sadistic shit you see some guys...”

He pointed to where Dorothy Criss, vice president of their class, was sitting atop another table on the far side of the parking lot. She was wearing a bikini, and looked every bit as miserable as a girl wearing a bikini in this weather ought to and then some. Chanda couldn’t make out the tattoo on her stomach, but it was definitely a word, and definitely new. She was all by herself, glowering at nothing, and when she saw Chanda looking, her hand moved between her legs and stroked her sex. The dejected look on her face didn’t change.

The same disaffected man who’d taken their order approached the table, a plastic dish of ice cream in either hand. He set them on the table in front of Aaron and Chanda without another word.

“Hey, I’ll let you two go have your fun. Good on you, Aaron. You take care of her. She might have been frosty, but she was always nice about it. See you guys around.” He shoved his food into the paper bag it had come in. “Oh, and Chanda, pinch your nipples for me.”

Her jaw dropped, but he plainly expected her to do it. After what she’d said, why wouldn’t he? Jake grinned as she hesitated, but there was nothing for it. She let go her grip on her dress, raised her hands to her breasts, and—

Aaron cut in. “You don’t need to do that, Chanda.”

Jake chuckled, gave Aaron a final respectful nod, and walked away.

Why hadn’t he let her do it? All these years with these boobs, and when she finally gets a chance to have a little fun with them...

But he was right. *Geez, Chanda. Get a grip on yourself.*

*No, not like that.*

Back in the car, she apologized immediately, and was even able to laugh about it all. Aaron did, too. “I should have just told him to go away,” he said.

“No, it’s fine. And I’m sorry if I teased too much. I was only playing, I swear.”

Aaron shook his head. “No, don’t. I didn’t know what to say is all. Sorry if I, you know, said something... not right.”

“Same,” she said, cheeks coloring. “I was trying to think about the sort of thing a guy – not you, but like, most guys – would do. If they won me. That’s all.”

“Yeah, you probably got it about right. Probably. I mean, I didn’t... I wasn’t...”

“I know.”

An excruciating lull followed, the two of them both sitting in the car, picking at their dishes of ice cream, saying nothing. They were both certainly thinking an awful lot of things, though. Aaron switched on the radio, and she was content to let his station of choice fill the silence.

“I’m sorry if I made life awkward for you,” she said eventually. “I know pretending to win me is probably pretty awkward. Especially since we didn’t think out our story at all up front.”

“It’s OK. It’s definitely made me more popular. I think I’ve gotten like a hundred new friend requests since last weekend. Not sure I ever wanted to be popular, but I guess it’s not so bad.”

Chanda didn’t ask how many propositions he’d received from other guys who wanted to buy or trade time with her. Some Powerball winners wound up having to move, change their phone number and email address and everything, to escape people begging them for charity.

“Yeah. But yeah, so... maybe, ah, we should talk about... us. Not *us*, *us*, like there’s an *us*. But like, our story about *us*. So next time a Jake comes along, we already know how to act, what to say. Would that be OK?”

He thought it over throughout the course of a spoonful of mint chocolate chip. “Yeah, I guess we probably should. My friends have all been curious, but I haven’t known what to say.”

“So what *have* you said?”

“I told them I wanted to keep it secret so that they won’t tell my parents. I think they think I’m a big hypocrite, because of the WAL thing, and that’s why, but either way, it’ll be good to have something to tell them.”

“Yeah. Sorry about all that. Probably not how you figured you’d be fighting the patriarchy when you joined WAL, huh. But hey, let’s get real about our fakeness.” She forced what she hoped was a bright smile, deciding to act excited about the ruse rather than keep feeling awkward about the lie. Maybe it’d help Aaron feel less weird about it, too. “So we’ve established with Jake that I’m a submissive who likes having her boobs touched. What else is there to us?”

“What do you mean? What more does there have to be?”

“I mean, guys write pages of all the little instructions and details they want installed in their losers. Mr. McSwain uses it as a writing prompt for the guys in his credit recovery class. Nobody would believe you’re the one man in the world who only wants a girl who really loves groping herself when you tell her to, full stop.”

Aaron grinned in his bashful way. “Yeah, probably not.”

“So what else is there to me? What kind of weirdo am I?”

“Was wondering that myself,” he mumbled, but seeing her expression, he added, “Sorry, just that you seem awfully eager to imagine life as a loser.”

“Well sure, when it’s pretend. Then it’s like we’re writing and starring in our own little spinoff of *Surviving*. It’s theater. I promise I won’t actually invite you to enslave me.”

Finally he laughed. “OK. So let’s turn it on you first, because it’s going to be harder for you to play your part than me mine. There’s a reason they call us winners and you losers, after all. Sitting around with a smug grin is a lot easier than...”

He didn’t finish, but the two both reflexively looked out through the windshield. There was Mya making out with Kenny right next to Hanna making out with Henry. Ali was hand feeding Eric some little chunks of fried food. Paige wasn’t doing anything overtly sexual, just eating across the table from some guy Chanda vaguely recognized from school, but her micro bikini would have gotten her kicked out of the community pool for sure. It appeared the staff of the Frostop were less discriminating.

“Yeah. All right. So let’s start with how I dress. I think I look pretty decent tonight.”

“You look better than—”

She swatted his shoulder. “I’m not fishing for compliments. I only meant I dressed nicer, showing more skin. So I guess you must’ve told me to go sexier, but not *too* sexy. Not skanky.”

“Sure. Whatever you’re comfortable with.”

“OK. So what about behavior? Come on, work with me here. We need to make this believable, after all.”

“Believable?”

“Sure. Your friends know you pretty well, I assume. They must have some idea about your likes and dislikes. Maybe turn-ons, turn-offs, too. So what can we sell?”

He sighed. “OK. So what you said to Jake is probably fine as a starting point. That’s the sort of thing most guys do. I want you to finish school, or at least high school, so you can maybe go to college with me in the fall...”

“Ooooh, where we going?”

“I don’t know yet. Probably Eastern State.”

“Go Bobcats.”

Aaron grinned. "Let's see. My loser would be sweet, casual friendly... more of a girlfriend than a... you know."

"Sex slave. If you're old enough to own one, you're old enough to say the words."

"Right. A... sex slave."

She made a point of crossing her legs toward him, and was pleased he noticed. "So what sort of girlfriend do you want?"

"Come on!"

"What? I'm only asking because—"

But Aaron trampled over her protest. "You can't take a guy on a date and try to trick him into explaining what his perfect girlfriend is like! This is like one of those love tests in the articles my mom reads!"

"I'm sorry, 'love test?'"

"Yeah, like she'll ask my dad all these questions that are supposed to show if they have a strong relationship but really it's making him tell her what he wants."

"But I *am* asking you what you want."

"I know!"

"Why are you making this so hard!"

"Why are you being so *easy!*"

Her jaw dropped in shock. Easy? Never in her whole life had anyone ever called her that. Never even thought it, probably. Jake hadn't been wrong that she kept guys at two arms length.

Luckily for him, Aaron reacted before she could. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. You're definitely not easy. I'm just nervous, and this is all a little much. I'm the only hetero guy in WAL, and now suddenly I have an insanely gorgeous woman asking me what kind of sex slave slash girlfriend I'd like her to be, and I'm kind of... um... kind of..."

"Kind of what?" Chanda frowned at his sudden silence. "Aaron? You're kind of...?" Slowly, she realized he wasn't looking at her any more, but past her. She turned, slowly, almost expecting to be tricked.

There, pressed against the glass of the passenger side window, were breasts. Bare. Two dark brown nipples were squashed flat in spite of how very hard they were. Chanda squealed in alarm, but that only made their owner pull back and giggle hysterically. Without fanfare, her old friend Mya climbed right into the back seat. And right behind her was Kenny.

She recognized him better from seeing him up close than she had from his pic online. Mya's loser profile listed him as her winner, but his privacy settings kept her from seeing anything but a grainy thumbnail of him in what looked like some kind of ugly Christmas sweater. Face to face, she could place him. He was in one of her classes. Mr. Corley's, where she'd fainted last Friday. He was a pretty unremarkable looking guy,



medium height and build, curly brown hair, a bit of a gap in his front teeth. Nothing special. Nothing, that is, except the girl waving her sumptuous ass in his face as she climbed in ahead of him.

“Sup, Eichhorn. Been wondering when I’d finally see you two out and about.” He held out a hand knuckles-first, and after a brief pause, Aaron provided the obligatory fist bump. “Powerballers for life, eh man?”

“Good to be us,” Aaron managed.

“You know it. Mimi told me she saw Chanda here, got all excited about it, so I figured we’d come say hey. Looks like I forgot to make her stop caring about her old friends. Ah well. I guess it’ll fade eventually.”

“Oh gosh, I hope not! Chanda’s the best!” Mya grinned at her. Chanda tried not to think about those incredible breasts beneath that spandex joke of a dress she was wearing.

“Uh, yeah. Same here,” Aaron mumbled at Kenny. “But we were sort of in the middle of something here, so if you don’t mind...”

“No, I get it. But you got another thirty years for that. I wanted to get things rolling now.”

“What... things?” Chanda asked.

Kenny looked momentarily irked to be asked a question by a loser, but he answered it, albeit to the other male in the car. “Mimi said you used to have a thing for her. Can’t blame you. Obviously I did too, eh? But I thought maybe—”

“I don’t want to swap,” said Aaron curtly, seizing Chanda’s wrist.

“Sure, sure. I wasn’t asking you to. Hell, I get it. Anybody you swap with, you’re trading down. Good problem to have.”

“Then what do you want?”

Kenny looked further affronted, but he seemed to be trying to keep it in check. “Thing is, I’m leaving for the rest of the weekend for some stupid family thing. I guess my uncle’s in the hospital or something, and we all have to go see him. Whatever. Anyway, Mimi here isn’t exactly hospital-visit material, and I definitely left her too dim to be able to function on her own. Didn’t I gumdrop?”

“You sure did!” She giggled hysterically. “I tried to make a sandwich for him the other day, and I forgot to read stuff again—”

“Forgot how to read, you mean.”

“—right, and I used sour cream instead of mayo, and then I gave it to him, and he got SO mad he spit it out and I had to clean it off the floor and everything!”

“Yeah. What she left out is that she also left the cheese slices in the wrappers. And put uncooked popcorn kernels all over it for some dumbfuck reason.”

“Oh yeah, that too. Like you always say, I’m good for only one thing.” She nodded her head gravely.

“Pretty much. So yeah, I thought maybe since she and Chanda are buds, and since you used to wanna stick it in her anyway, you could keep an eye on her for me. That’s all. No strings attached. Not saying I’d mind any gratitude, but I’m not demanding anything.”

Chanda and Aaron shared a long look. Mya filled the silence with enthusiastic clapping. “Yay! Sleepovers!”

Aaron replied first. “Ah, earlier she said her sister was visiting? Couldn’t the two of them just...?”

But Chanda shook her head. “Jessie isn’t exactly in a position to help. Honestly, with Mya gone, I – we – if it’s OK with you, um, sir? – should look in on her, make sure she’s still in one piece.”

“So you’re cool?” pressed Kenny. “Not trying to be a dick or anything, but I gotta leave in the morning and I don’t want to just pre-order a bunch of meals to be delivered to her house.”

“And prolly a bunch of dildos, too, ‘cause you made me such a fucking horny needy little slutty slut,” Mya entreated him.

“Pretty sure even your little puss can’t go through a dildo a day, babe.”

The two of them were now simply looking at Chanda and Aaron, waiting for a reply. Aaron, really. Chanda tried to convey her desire with her eyes, and was relieved that either he was adept at eye language, or he’d been going to agree anyway. “Sure. Why not. The more, the merrier, I guess, right?”

Yikes, he was a lousy winner impersonator. Chanda would need him to work on that. Or maybe her need for a man to protect her from grabby assholes would pass soon enough that he could phone it in for a couple weeks and they could move on. It sure didn’t feel like that was the direction her world was going, but maybe.

“Cool! Glad we could work it out. Say, you wanna take her with you tonight? Save me a trip in the morning, and my parents are already sick of accommodating us.”

Again, he voiced Chanda’s unexpressed wish. “Oh. Sure, I guess. Yeah.”

“Great. They’re saying we should be back Monday, Tuesday at the latest. I know you got school, but loser girl there can always babysit her loser friend while you’re out. She seems like she’s still got at least half a brain in her head.” He turned to Mya. Her expression was a curious mix of sin and innocence bordering on the beatific. “All right, babe. I’m leaving you with your buddy Chanda and Aaron here. I want you to be extra good for him, and do as you’re told, OK?”

“OK!”

“I mean it. I want you to be as good for him as you are for me. Understand?”

“Yeppers!”

He crooked his finger. “Now come on over and gimme a kiss goodbye.”

The finger gesture was probably all he needed; the moment he beckoned, she was launching herself onto his lap. The cramped confines of Aaron's car were no impediment to her sluthood-enhanced agility. Her thighs straddled his, hunching over to lower her lips to his. Her kiss was *loud*. Sloppy. Needy. She guided his hands to her breasts with her eyes closed, a part of the same new reflexes that reminded her she couldn't show too much of her boobs too often in front of too many people. As Kenny casually lowered her pink top over those shapely brown boobs of hers, she released his hands to get to work flipping up her dress over her ass. A thin purple ribbon between her ass cheeks and the pink spandex garment bunched around her waist were the only thing covering her as she humped herself greedily against her winner.

Sophomore year, this same girl had gotten so nervous about her first date that she had thrown up twice, once before he picked her up, and once at the restaurant. Now, Mya was shamelessly pleading for this unremarkable boy to think of a use for her body, any use at all, so long as it gave her the opportunity to pleasure him, regardless of the two people in the front seat watching her, each trying to mask their appreciation for her body.

At some point Kenny broke it off. He had to remind her he was leaving, but she still tried to crawl out behind him. Finally he explained that him leaving meant she couldn't come with. Then she started crying, then panicking, then finally resorting to mere sulking when Kenny ordered her to stop the first two things. With a final wave to Aaron, Kenny swaggered away, full of so much confidence that Chanda was certain that the boy believed he'd bought a hookup with her for his generous gift of the horny dimwit in the backseat.

Chanda reminded herself that she was not for sale, then reminded her friend to put her dress back on right.

It was quickly agreed that Chanda would take care of Mya for the weekend. It wasn't that she didn't trust Aaron around her. That would have been unfair of her. She trusted him as much as she trusted herself, which was to say if he succumbed to the temptation, not a soul in the universe would be able to blame him. Except, probably, for the two of them. Objectively, however, blaming someone for taking advantage of Mya would be like faulting someone for picking up a suitcase full of cash left unattended on the sidewalk. Sure, it might not be the right thing to do and there may be consequences down the road, but only a liar would claim they wouldn't do it.

No, the real reasons were more mundane. Aaron's parents, for one, were convinced their son had sat out the Lottery, and there could be no hiding Mya in their house for a weekend. The loser was as subtle as a jackhammer. Mya would receive a warm welcome from Chanda's family, as she always had. Her mom and dad were actually pretty cool about it. She explained about Mya's situation and her condition, and while neither looked what one might call comfortable about having this young woman in their home, they weren't about to be cruel to their daughter's erstwhile friend either.

(Chanda took a moment before entering the house to remind Mya once again that she was not under any circumstances to flirt with or otherwise offer herself to Mr. Brighton.)

(Or Mrs. Brighton.)

(Or Bumper, just in case.)

Nonetheless, it was a long night.

"Chanda?" came a muffled voice from the floor beside the bed.

"Two in the morning," grumbled Chanda.

"The floor is hard," she whined.

"I know, but we can't leave you on the couch," Chanda mumbled, thinking back to when Mya had unceremoniously stripped her skimpy dress off in the middle of the living room when that had been tried, "and we can't put *me* in the living room," referring to when she'd come to check in on her after brushing her teeth and found Mya masturbating with the handle of Chanda's hair brush, "so this is how it has to be."

"Why can't I get into bed with you? We used to do that before we were losers. 'Member?"

"We just can't, OK? Go to sleep."

Chanda had just managed to banish the image of her completely naked friend and replace it with fences and sheep.

"Chanda?"

She groaned. "What, Mya."

"I'm cold."

"I offered you pajamas. You have three blankets. What do you want me to do?"

"My skin gets itchy when I cover it now."

“Well I can’t do anything about that.” Nobody could.

“We could cuddle.”

Chanda’s fists clenched around her own blanket, and not merely because she was annoyed. “No, we can’t.”

“Why not? You look so nice to cuddle with.”

Chanda sighed, and at last rolled over to look down at Mya’s space on the floor. The only illumination in the room was the night light Mya had pleaded for after the lights shut out. Whether Kenny had felt the need to make her afraid of the dark or it was a side effect of something else, Chanda couldn’t say, but it was new. At their slumber party the previous week, the night before Drawing Day, it had been Mya who’d wedged her clothes under the door to block the light from the hallway. This Mya’s clothes couldn’t even cover her own body.

Nor, Chanda saw, could her blankets. Mya was lying on her side, her head propped up on one hand, the other idly fondling an exposed breast. Her legs were spread wide, giving Chanda her first real view of Mya’s vagina, pink and glistening. Her smile widened in time with Chanda’s eyes.

After a moment, and then another moment, Chanda remembered she’d been about to say something. “You can’t get into bed with me, Mya. I’m not trying to be mean, but... you just can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because you can’t.”

“I get that, but why?”

Chanda grit her teeth. Mya was worse than Annie, the three-year-old daughter of her mom’s coworker that she babysat for sometimes. Had Mya talked like this when she was three? Was Annie going to eventually revert to this same point when her pot was won?

“Because you can’t be trusted.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’re a loser.”

“But *you’re* a loser,” Mya pointed out.

Chanda was tired enough that she almost corrected her friend by reflex. Almost. “And I don’t trust myself, either.”

Mya didn’t ask what trust had to do with it, mercifully, and soon Chanda was asleep again. But when she woke up the next morning, Mya was gone.

Her first reaction was to panic, like she’d been watching someone’s dog and it had escaped the yard. But Mya wasn’t a dog. Which made her escape both less and more alarming.

Sure enough, Mya was downstairs eating breakfast with her parents. She was wearing her same dress from the night before, and her dad’s cheeks colored even as

Chanda came into the room. Uh, oh. Mya waved exuberantly and mumbled a greeting around a mouthful of eggs.

“Morning, sweetheart.”

“Hey dad. Thanks for feeding her.”

“My pleasure.” His blush deepened, perhaps at his phrasing. “Actually... can we talk for a sec?”

Chanda nodded, then followed him out into the living room. He didn’t sit. “I don’t think it’s a great idea for Mya to stay here,” he said softly.

“Oh god. What happened?”

His whole face puckered at the question. “Well, see, she... she hopped in the shower with me this morning. And I was still waking up, and she was behind me and I thought it was your mom at first, and... Don’t make that face at me, you’re the one who brought a loser into the house!”

To be fair, her horrified expression was due as much to the idea of her mom and dad showering together as it was to what had actually happened. But still. “Oh gosh, I’m so sorry. And please stop the story right there.”

“Done.” He looked quite relieved himself.

“Your eggs are getting cold, Chanda Panda!” called Mya from the kitchen.

“But Dad, where am I supposed to put her? I can’t just let her wander the streets like this! She’ll get kidnapped and disappear, like—” She stopped that sentence hard. Chanda hadn’t told her parents about Tiffany, and didn’t mean to. “Like you hear about on TV.”

Her dad was too flustered by the morning’s events to catch the verbal slip. “I can put you two up in a hotel for the weekend, if you want. If you’re comfortable with that. Remember, she’s not the Mya you know any more. You’re not obligated to—”

“Yes I am.” The declaration was fierce. “There but for the grace of God go I, right?”

A thin smile returned to his sour face, and he pulled her in for a hug. “You listen too darn well sometimes. I love you, sweetheart.”

“I love you too, Dad.” She hugged back for a bit. She might be old enough to be won at auction, but Dad hugs still felt good. “But you don’t need to get a hotel. We can stay at Mya’s place. I’ll take her over this afternoon.”

“Not to push you out the door, but since I do enjoy being married to your mom and pretty much all of my future plans involve remaining so...”

“Right. After breakfast?”

“After breakfast.” He fuzzed her head, and she made herself a plate of eggs.

“Your dad is surprisingly hung,” Mya said as his car drove away from her house. She was still waving goodbye when she said it. “Like, I couldn’t get too long of a feel for it, but your mom is a super lucky loser.”

“My mom is not a loser, and please don’t talk about my dad’s junk,” Chanda snapped, marching Mya up the front walk.

The Barrios house was quintessential small town charm. Much of it was new or recently expanded; Jessie’s auction had been a significant boon to the Barrios family’s property value. Ivy grew up the trellises beneath the upstairs windows. Flowers were beginning to bud in their beds lining the sidewalk, the driveway, the mailbox, the birdhouse, the front garden, and the shrubberies. An honest-to-god white picket fence, merely knee-high so as to make sure the house still seemed inviting, wrapped around the front yard. It was all kept in shade by a huge maple tree whose leaves had finally sprouted so thick that it almost looked like it was showing off.

Which, she reflected, Mya seemed to be doing as well. “Pull your skirt down,” Chanda muttered, looking around to see if anyone was watching. She didn’t see anyone, which was good, because her command was interpreted as one to completely lower her outfit. Chanda hastily corrected it, then dragged Mya to the front door.

It was locked. Moreover, Mya didn’t seem to know where she’d left her key. “How do you not know...” Chanda remembered who she was talking to. “Forget it.”

“Forget what?”

It was a joke she’d heard Mya make before, only this Mya wasn’t being funny. “Is your sister home?”

Mya shrugged and rang the doorbell. When no one answered, she banged the knocker. “Not sure,” she concluded when nobody answered it. “We told her not to answer the door so she wouldn’t get taken by a solicitor or something. So let’s see, she’s either taken, or...” She stroked her chin, trying to ponder out the alternative.

Chanda rolled her eyes and pounded a fist on the door. “Jessie! Jessie, I know you’re in there! It’s Mya and Chanda! Open the door!”

It took a couple minutes and several patient reminders from Mya about how Jessie was a loser now, so she might be fucked up and not act like she used to, but finally the door opened.

There was Jessie.

“Welcome, Chanda. Welcome, Mya,” her sister intoned in a low voice, bowing deeply. And what a bow. She was wearing next to nothing, merely a rather skimpy pair of white satin panties that were very visible behind a rectangular film of some diaphanous blue material suspended from a silver chain slung around her hips. She was topless from the waist up, save for the jewel-encrusted piercings in her ears, nose, navel, both nipples and her right eyebrow. Chanda wondered if they were real. They looked real, but she was no expert.

Mya brushed past her. “Hey Jess. We’re crashing here while I wait for Kenny to come home, OK?”

Jessie's only response was to bow again and back out of the way until her ass was pressed into a corner of the entry hall, as obsequious and forgettable as possible.

The first time Chanda had walked into this house, she'd been a sixth grader. Mrs. Barrios had been out front, watering the plants. Mr. Barrios had been asleep in front of the TV, and Jessie had been in her room playing her music way louder than Chanda's own parents would have tolerated. When Mya banged on her door to demand she turn it down so they could hear one another speak, Jessie indeed turned down the music, but only long enough long enough to tell her little sister that if she banged on her door again, she'd shave her head in her sleep. Then the door had been slammed in their faces, the music went up – louder somehow – and the girls had spent the afternoon on their phones, texting one another from across the room and giggling hysterically at the inconvenience. Jessie had been in high school then, rendering her impossibly cool and untouchably menacing to the middle school girls; reprisals had been out of the question.

Now, Chanda was pretty sure she could hang her jacket over Jessie's face and still find it there when she left for school Monday morning.

"Whew. I can't believe I'm still wearing last night's clothes. This is, like, the longest I've worn the same outfit since I got won." Mya wrinkled her nose. "I'm gonna take a shower and put on something cute."

"Sounds good," Chanda replied.

"Wanna come?"

She pivoted. "Come... what?"

Mya giggled at her friend's obtuseness. "Come shower with me."

"Um, no thanks."

"Oh come on, you haven't hardly touched me since Kenny won me, and I'm sooooo horny and you're sooooo hot and just *pleeeeeease...*" She thrust her lower lip out.

"Mya, I can't."

"Why not? Did Aaron say you couldn't? I didn't hear him say you couldn't."

"No. I can't because we're friends, and... just... it wouldn't feel right."

"How will you know how it will feel unless you try me out?" One of Mya's full hips cocked to the side.

She could. Chanda knew she could. And she knew it would feel incredible. Mya was reprogrammed to be a thing of pure sex, providing pleasure by the same instincts she used to breathe. The girl could see her evaluating it, and in her delay, slowly peeled down her little pink dress, heedless of her big sister standing by in the corner. She never broke eye contact, her pleading eyes threatening to suck Chanda in.

Maybe she should just do it. No way she was going to be able to withstand a whole weekend of this. Get it over with, and enjoy herself. After all, like Aaron had said last night (and had been meant to soothe his own conflicting feelings on agreeing to take custody of Mya, but wasn't untrue), there was no reason not to be nice to her. It wasn't



her fault she'd been remade into this, and it would be cruel to mistreat her on account of it. Clearly the lack of sexual expression was upsetting her. It would be an act of mercy. Benevolence.

God, and that body...

But no. Fair or not, Aaron would think less of her when he found out what she'd done. To the rest of the world, Chanda was simply another loser, and if she fooled around with Mya, it would be as natural as the wind blowing. But Aaron would know. Chanda wouldn't tell him, but Mya had less than no filter, and if she didn't get the chance to tell him herself, she'd tell Kenny, who would certainly bring it up when he made his patch to Aaron for a turn at Chanda.

Maybe... if she and Aaron both... Argh, why did he have to be such a gentleman!

"No thanks, Mya. I'll be down here catching up with Jessie."

She frowned. "Why? Jessie's basically a sexy houseplant."

"Just go, OK?"

Mya's nostrils flared petulantly. "Fine." With that, she stormed upstairs. Chanda watched her every step of the way, and imagined it for a moment after she was gone.

She turned to the elder Barrios sister. "Come sit with me, Jessie."

Jessie obeyed. One could probably summarize every minute of Jessie's loser life with those two words. Chanda took a seat on one of the sofas in the front room. This space had always seemed purely decorative. No one ever sat in it or did anything in here so far as she could recall. The couch cushion felt stuffed, firm, new. A few specks of dust had had the audacity to land on the end table in Mrs. Barrios' absence, but otherwise, the room was fit for pictures, and little else. Jessie knelt down in front of her a few feet away.

"On the couch, please. It's weird enough with you..." Topless. Bejeweled. Blank. Subservient. "... like this."

"As you wish." Jessie rose with fluid grace and took a spot on the couch. Still kneeling. Good enough.

"Can I ask how you've been?" Chanda probed. She and Jessie hadn't interacted much even before all this, but it felt rude not to at least be polite. Part of her hoped a little civil human interaction might provide a little comfort to the woman trapped inside the new Jessie. If there were indeed anybody still in there.

"Of course," answered Jessie.

Chanda sighed. "How have you been?"

"Well." She managed to bow, even in her awkward position.

"I guess what I meant was, what have you been up to on your visit home?"

"Nothing."

"You must have been doing *something*."

“Mr. and Mrs. Barrios instructed me not to do anything bad during their absence. I reflected that they would dislike all the things I normally do, so I have done nothing.” Mr. and Mrs. Barrios, she’d said. Not Mom and Dad.

“What’s ‘nothing’?”

“When they left, I bid them farewell at the door to the garage. I was still there when you and Mya returned.”

Her head snapped back. “What? How long was that?”

“They left on Wednesday.”

“Jessie, that was three days ago!”

“Wednesday evening,” Jessie supplied, which Chanda took as the closest thing the woman could do to correcting her.

“You’ve been standing in the hallway since Wednesday.”

“I left to hydrate myself, to remove makeup to prevent skin damage, and to use the restroom.”

“Still!” Chanda analyzed her statement. “Wait – you didn’t *eat*!?”

“Mr. and Mrs. Barrios think the manner in which I am instructed to eat is bad.”

“Holy... come on, we’re putting some food in you, and that’s that.”

“As you wish.”

Despite Chanda’s best efforts, Jessie still insisted on eating her food off of a bowl on the floor. Mya had told her about this from Jessie’s other post-auction visit home, but she’d never been able to bring herself to come see it firsthand. She wouldn’t even use her hands except to support herself. Jessie bent low and ate like an animal. When she finished, she droned a “thank you” and promptly cleaned up her face in the sink.

“So... this is how it is for you every day?”

“No. But I do not speak of my life at my master’s house.”

It took another command to get Jessie to join her back on the sofa in the front room. (Chanda had tried to get her to sit at the kitchen table, but that seemed also to be against whatever rules carried over from her new home to her old.)

“Jessie, do you remember your life here? Like, when you were... normal?”

For the first time, her response was not automatic, though when she spoke, it was in that same emotionless tone. “I remember it, but not as... memories? The images, words, familiarity is there, but is stored more like knowledge. Facts memorized. Multiplication tables, Mrs. Barrios’ maiden name is Estremera, Mya Barrios stole my favorite barrette when she was seven and lost it on a field trip, states and capitals. Things I know, but I know that they are no longer memories. Shadows, more like. Shadows some other life, rendered by the light of my master’s intervention on the walls of my cave.”

Chanda wasn't sure what to say. After seeing Jessie eat off the floor, she'd sort of written her off as practically bestial, but once she opened up, she was actually... eloquent. It encouraged her. "So do you remember the way you acted before?"

"In that same way, yes. Innocent. Angry. Simple. Afraid," she added with a small frown, "especially at the end."

"Do you..." She suppressed a shudder as the frown vanished, her moment of unease gone, slavery reasserted. "Do you think you could act like the old Jessie? Just while you're here? To make it less weird?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Barrios asked the same, and I told them the same. I can play that role, within the limitations of my master's wishes."

"Do you still have to eat... like that. Dress like that."

Jessie nodded. "Among other things. But I will try my best. Know that Mr. and Mrs. Barrios were gravely disappointed by my efforts."

Chanda could imagine that asking for their daughter and getting... this... well, no wonder Mrs. Barrios had left town. She made a mental note to visit them sometime, once Mya and Jessie were back with their winners. Maybe it would do them good to have a normal girl in the house for an evening. Would that she could do more.

"Try that, then. And it's OK if it's not perfect. I know you're not really Jessie any more."

If she'd expected any sort of adjustment, those expectations were dashed. Jessie held her obeisant posture, did nothing to cover herself, changed in no way except to adopt a thin, banal smile. If Chanda could focus on her face and not the rest of her body – which wasn't easy – she could picture Jessie sitting there posing for a picture, trying to look happy-casual.

A creak echoed through the ceiling as Mya turned off the water. "Looks like we need to brace for Hurricane Mya soon," Chanda said with a sigh. "This is going to be a long and lonely weekend."

"Her winner's not coming to use her? Kenny seemed pretty eager so far this week." Her tone and cadence were slightly more natural, but there was no reaction to the reality of her sister being some little creep's sex toy.

"Kenny's out of town until early next week. We told him we'd take care of her for him, since now she's got all the self-control of a butterfly with ADD."

A chuckle! She'd forgotten what Jessie's laugh sounded like. "We? Who's we? You and your winner?"

Chanda nodded. "Aaron. Eichhorn? You probably wouldn't have known him."

Jessie shook her head, her myriad piercings catching the late morning light and throwing sparkles across the room. Chanda couldn't help that her eyes were particularly drawn to the two on her nipples. A pair of tiny rubies adorned either end of the bar.

"Nope. Don't know him. How is he? How's it been losing to him?"

It was a bit unlike the old Jessie to be showing any interest in her little sister's friends, but Chanda excused it. This was the closest she'd come to girl talk since texting Monday with Tiffany, which probably didn't count. In fact...

"Jessie, you can keep a secret, right? And I mean the real you – the *new* you, that is. As in, if I order you not to tell anyone something, you won't."

"Unless my master wishes otherwise. Honestly, these days I don't do much gossiping, as you probably guessed."

Chanda smiled at the attempt at humor, perverse though it was. "OK. So to be clear, don't tell anyone this, especially Mya. OK?"

"Sure. Or if you prefer a more authentic response, I obey."

She actually did, it turned out. Chanda leaned in, keeping her voice low. She could hear the hair dryer running in the upstairs bathroom, but still. "OK, so... ready for this? I actually... survived."

Jessie arched an eyebrow, the jewels on the accompanying ring glimmering in every color of the rainbow. "But you just said your winner's name was Aaron."

"Yeah, but that's the thing. It's not. Nobody won me. I guess everybody thought I was such a long shot that nobody wound up taking it." Her lips pursed involuntarily at the sound of her own hubris in saying the words aloud. "Too good to be true, except it is. Hard to believe, right?"

"That... is hard to believe," said Jess after a moment. "So then who is Aaron Eichhorn?"

"He's nobody. I mean, he's Aaron, but he's nobody to me. A friend, I guess. Well, maybe more than that – OK, definitely more than that – but nothing official." She caught herself babbling and took a breath. "Anyway, he said he'd pretend to be my winner so people don't abuse me like I'm, you know..."

"Like me and Mya."

"Right. Sorry."

"No apology needed. I'm used to it, and Mya will be soon." Jessie adjusted her posture, but only to spread her legs a bit wider and folder her arms behind her back. She was practically thrusting her chest in Chanda's face. No. She *was* thrusting her chest in Chanda's face. But it didn't seem purposeful. Merely a practiced pose like the last. "Interesting. So of all the men you could have picked to be your fake winner, why this Aaron? This more than friend but less than nobody."

"Right place, right time?" Chanda shrugged. "I don't know. He was there for me. Stood up for me. A few times now. Phew, when I tell you about the week I've had, you're not going to believe it."

"I'm not sure I believe what you've already told me," Jessie answered.

“What? You mean about the—” Her words caught in her throat at the sound of the bathroom door opening upstairs. Footsteps, then Mya’s door opening and closing. She resumed. “You mean about Aaron? Or... I’m sorry, I’m not sure where I lost you.”

“How many students attend Clark High School?”

“Huh? Um, around three thousand, I think. Why?”

“You asked where you lost me. Focus. So let’s posit that roughly half of those students are male. That makes for fifteen hundred males. Fifteen hundred males, times five tickets, makes for seventy-five hundred tickets for the pots of fifteen hundred women. With me so far?”

“I think?” She was double-checking the math, but it sounded right.

“Of those fifteen hundred males, roughly what percentage of them want to fuck you?”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m asking how many of your classmates think you’re fuckable. Are you too biased? Should we ask Mya?”

“No, I’m not... I don’t know. All of them, I guess?” She made a face. It was pretty gross whenever someone reminded her of how many guys she went to school with had some mental image or another of her stored in their spank bank. “A handful of gay guys, maybe a few who don’t like white chicks or big breasts or something? I don’t know. But most, for sure.”

“We can’t mathematically account for individual taste, but I think it’s fair to say there’s between zero and two more conventionally beautiful pots at that school. Hell, my auction made the second most money of any girl in my class, and let’s be honest, I’m definitely dragging down the room’s average hotness level.”

“What? Jessie, you’re totally—”

“I don’t require reassurance, trust me. But let’s conservatively call it eighty percent of your class that wants to fuck you. I doubt it’s that anywhere near that low with those tits, that face, that ass, to say nothing of that wall you put up that has to have guys going nuts wanting to tear it down. But we’ll lowball it. Eighty percent of fifteen hundred is twelve hundred, representing six thousand tickets. Follow my math?”

Chanda took a moment. “Sounds right.”

“It is. Now if only one percent of those represented thought to ‘squander’ a ticket on you, that still leaves a dozen tickets in your pot.”

“What are you saying, Jessie?”

Mya interrupted, yelling from upstairs, “Chanda! Wanna come help me pick out what to wear? Or should I bother getting dressed?”

“Get dressed, and figure it out for yourself!” Chanda barked back. “And... find something really, really hot. Take your time on it and really do your breast. Err, best.” She was interested in this talk, and Mya’s presence would ruin it.

Jessie waited until after Mya's squeal of excitement subsided to respond. "You said it was hard to believe that nobody bid on you. I'm trying to illustrate how unlikely it is. Kenny and Mya were over the other day and I overheard him sharing an article with her – not that she could read it any more – in which the Associated Press reported a girl in Cincinnati whose pot was seeded, by itself, by more than sixty percent of all tickets in her school. At Clark, that would be over four thousand tickets. I don't recall Kenny saying how big her school was."

Records for the Lottery were usually studied as percentages rather than numbers, since getting fifty tickets in your pot at some podunk school in Kansas could be proportionately huge, while getting fifty at some gigantic school in the city would be fairly commonplace. Data was controlled entirely by the Lottery Bureau, but they released a lot of it, especially all the data on funds raised for public works, presumably to ease anxieties of bereaved parents of girls.

Chanda googled *cincinnati loser pot seed record* as Jessie spoke, and the article came up immediately. According to the Bureau, this girl had broken the Ohio state record, and came in fourth nationwide. With the pictures attached, Chanda could see why. The young woman, Analeigh Mollen, was crazy hot in all those typical ways. Huge breasts, thick blonde hair, pretty face, long legs, round butt. Apparently a straight-A student and amateur singer-song-writer, her mother claimed in a comment, probably bitterly. Maybe proudly? Everybody's family felt differently.

"See? That girl isn't any more attractive than you. Maybe her female classmates were a bunch of uggos, but still, sixty-five percent."

"Sixty-seven point four four," Chanda corrected, holding up her phone to Jessie, who immediately turned away and closed her eyes. Right. Because of course she was denied access to smartphones. "But I'm definitely not as hot as that girl. She's a goddess."

Jessie sensed the phone's withdrawal, and her gaze returned with a leading look. "Uh, huh."

"I'm not...!" Chanda glowered, though it was sort of flattering. "What's your point with all this, Jessie?"

"I'm only saying that your body is a commodity, one highly sought after, and one that was recently up for sale. And you really don't find it strange that your blonde counterpart scored over two thirds of all votes in her entire school – which again, had she gone to Clark, would mean a full five thousand votes – and you netted zero? Not a single one?"

"Of course I find it strange! That's the whole point, it's *strange*. A statistical anomaly. One in a million, or whatever." Chanda shrugged uncomfortably.

"I don't know what the odds are, but... it's pretty damn unlikely."

"You sound like you're trying to say something. So come out and say it."

“I’m merely suggesting that it might be *more* likely that you’re not a survivor at all. That—”

Mya thundered down the stairs and honed in on their location immediately. She’d chosen a pair of denim shorts that Chanda recognized as having recently been a pair of skinny jeans, cut off now more like a bikini than normal shorts. Her top was something Chanda didn’t recognize, a thin flannel garment that ended just below where it was tied off beneath her breasts, which it was barely trying to conceal. From the abundant jiggling that accompanied her hasty arrival into the room, she definitely wasn’t wearing a bra.

“Tada!” Mya exclaimed, spinning in place for them. From how low the shorts rode, Chanda added to her surmise that Mya also wasn’t wearing panties. “Cute, right? Kenny helped me pick it out.”

“I’ll bet he did,” Chanda replied dryly.

Mya looked over her guest’s outfit. Gray leggings, a loose-fitting sweater. “And Aaron’s really OK with you wearing that?”

“Obviously, or I wouldn’t be wearing it.”

Jessie said nothing. Good.

Chanda talked Mya into binging *Surviving* with her as a way to pass the day. The sexually charged teen drama probably wasn’t the best choice when she was trying not to notice her friend’s casual groping of her breasts during hotter scenes, the scent of Mya’s constant arousal filling the room as the day dragged on, the sight of her sister half-naked on the bean bag chair in the corner. Still, it meant they didn’t need to talk, which was for the best.

What had Jessie been saying? Her thoughts kept returning to it as Lexi lived out her own survivor adventure on the screen. Season 3 introduced Tiara, who had survived by being declared dead – a twist Chanda found poetic, though it was lost on Mya – following a suicide attempt the night before Drawing Day. She’d been resuscitated, and over time grew to appreciate some of the “perks” of losing even as Lexi waxed feminist and tried to have Tiara’s survivor status revoked and entered in that year’s Goldcrest Hills Lottery. The sniping was strange, since by the current season the two were best friends, but those early days had been difficult.

But what had Jessie been saying?

Yes, the math was against it. Chanda had known that from the beginning, if not with so much analysis. She recalled Kelsey saying something the night of that last sleepover about how many tickets would seed Chanda’s pot. After the bets were settled on how much Tiffany was auctioned for, Chanda, Brandy, Tiffany and Mya had all joined in teasing her by placing bets on how many tickets her pot would rake in. Tiffany had come in lowest at four hundred, while Kelsey had gone highest with three thousand.

(Now Kelsey was a call girl, pimped out for a set hourly rate. Her facebook wall had been flush with guys bragging that they'd already fucked her, some of them raving about what a great lay she'd been, with others sneering that she hadn't turned out to be such hot shit after all. Chanda suspected most of them were full of shit.)

Still, if she hadn't been won, then what? A mistake? She supposed it was possible. The Bureau agent outside the gym had seemed certain, but perhaps there had been some sort of glitch in their system. Perhaps the procedure required her to be conscious, so they'd deposited her in the nurse's office to recover, then checked the wrong box in the system or something? It seemed far-fetched, but she granted, it was less far-fetched than the ravenously horny boys of CHS one and all passing up on the opportunity to turn her into their plaything. If she'd ever doubted that, what she'd seen this past week had crushed any such misperceptions.

Maybe that was how she ought to start thinking of it then. Not luck that nobody had wanted her, but luck that nobody had gotten what they wanted. Human error was, after all, a fairly common occurrence. She'd heard her parents complain a thousand times over family dinner about the careless mistakes their coworkers made, and occasionally even admitted to one or two themselves.

There. Weird comment resolved.

So why was Jessie still giving her those occasional sidelong looks?

Shortly after dinner – Jessie eating off the floor, and Mya picking at it the way a deranged chauvinist had programmed her to watch her calories – Chanda's phone buzzed.

Aaron: *How's it going over there?*

Chanda: *OK? We're watching Surviving, trying to pretend things are normal*

Aaron: *Sounds decent enough. You need any relief? I can take a shift if you want to get out for a while.*

Aaron: *If you trust me to, that is.*

Chanda smiled at the screen. He really was too sweet by half, recognizing what he was asking, doing the thoughtful thing in the most thoughtful way. She really hoped their first official date went well. She really, really wanted to hit it off. A week ago, she'd been facing the worst day of her life, and now she was on the cusp of what may be a fairy tale romance. It was too good to be true, almost. Hard to bel–

She typed the words even as they crystallized in her head.

Chanda: *You won me, didn't you.*

Aaron: ?

Aaron: *Does that mean come over, or no?*

The phone tumbled from her hands. Her head was swimming. No! No, it couldn't possibly be... but her brain was already compiling evidence faster than she could beg it



to stop. *Think, Chanda.* This had to make sense. So far, nothing since last week had, but this... there was something there beneath the surface of the water.

The fainting last Friday in school. She never fainted. Then who woke her up, revealing himself as her savior, but Aaron. He was with her when the Bureau agents turned her away. Then the next night at the Grand River 16, again, she had this wildly erotic, humiliating encounter with Brandy, and again, who was on hand to come to her rescue but Aaron. Had she had the idea to name him her winner, or had he? But that wouldn't matter if he'd won her. If he'd won her, then all of her ideas were his anyway. That same night, she'd sent him a picture of her freshly used vibrator. Chanda Brighton, who'd been reminded of her reputation as an ice queen a dozen times in the past week, sending a boy she barely knew a lewd pic.

That was when she'd started fantasizing about him. What kissing him would be like, if fooling around with a boy would be as fun as she'd imagined it being with a girl, whether it would still feel as good as a survivor instead of the legendarily heightened pleasure centers most losers enjoyed. Then the nightmare with Tiffany, and with her life in the balance, she trusted herself to Aaron "Who The Hell Are You" Eichhorn? Not her parents, not the police, but Aaron?! How could she have thought she'd bounce back so quickly from such a harrowing ordeal as that if not for the Lottery Bureau's tentacles sunk into her brain to beguile her of her earned anxiety – all at the behest of another entitled male. And after that whole episode, their unofficial date had been cut short right in the middle of her feeding him ideas on what kind of loser she'd like to be. Obedient, huge hypersensitive breasts. Yeah, like she would *ever* think something like that if a man hadn't put it there!

But his response that night after he'd saved her, again, had been to tell her to cool down, give it time and let it flourish. Which didn't make sense. That was the flaw in her theory. A hottie who survived was no more likely by Jessie's math than a winner who didn't make use of his winnings. Maybe that was his thing, though. He was a member of the WALflowers. She'd confirmed that herself, locating his picture in her junior yearbook. It was his only listed activity. Could it be that that was his kink? Girls who didn't even know they didn't have free will?

No. She'd know. Wouldn't she? How could she not? Mya and Jessie both recognized that they had undergone a change in their own ways, clueless and detached respectively. But was that guaranteed? By all evidence, winners could do anything they wanted to the minds of their losers. All she had to do was point to poor Dorothy Criss, chastised to the brink of suicide.

Her parents would have noticed though. Wouldn't they? They'd have to. They knew her better than anyone. She might have said Brandy or Kelsey, but they weren't reliable witnesses. Not any more. But no way her parents wouldn't have said something if they had a suspicion that their daughter wasn't their daughter any more. Except she'd

been holed up in her room watching TV and reading most of the week. And masturbating a lot. That too was different, though there was also a lot of fresh fodder for the imagination.

Chanda frowned at another buzz from her phone. If she were a loser, she would *know*. She'd have to. She was being paranoid. After all, lots of things didn't fit this theory. Aaron couldn't have predicted that incident with Ezekiel or the kidnapping attempt, so if his plan was to ingratiate himself as her savior, he'd have to be in collaboration with both Ezekiel, whom he had publicly shamed, and Tiffany's anonymous winner, whom he'd kept from acquiring a fresh loser. Fat chance of either of those.

Other things. His reticence to touch her, or even flirt with her. The Bureau agents confirming she hadn't been won. That nothing in her memory had thus far seemed compromised. That whole shadows-on-cave-walls thing Jessie had said? Chanda hadn't experienced anything like that. She took a deep breath, allowing herself to relax. If she were a loser, no way she'd be able to fool...

Suddenly, she flashed back to her conversation with Tiffany prior to being picked up by that stretch SUV. Chanda had told her she had survived, and Tiffany had demanded proof she wasn't punking her. She recalled her frustration in that moment, with that question put to her.

At the time, she had reasoned that if a loser was pretending to be her old self, as Tiffany had accused her of doing, she already had right there in her head every tool she'd need to pull off the ruse. She could fool the entire world. And there, as Mya giggled at Lexi feigning amnesia to get out of answering a question about her affair with Dalton, was the extension of her reasoning. She knew how to be herself so well, she could not only fool everyone around her. Chanda could even fool herself.

*Why* was a question she had no answer for. That lack of answer was the only thing that stopped her from running out the door screaming, making for the bus station and never looking back. Well, either the lack of answer, or Aaron's programming in her head, stopping her from doing so in order for her to sit back and be molded into his perfect loser girlfriend. It could be either. She pleaded with fate to make him what she'd thought he was. She wanted that so badly! He'd been such a sweetie, and he was so cute, and she'd been wanting him to touch her so bad...!

But did she really? Or...

It was dizzying. Every possibility was twofold, every forward-looking plan a double-edged sword. If she pursued Aaron now, in spite of these suspicions, it would confirm she was truly his loser. If she didn't then she was indeed a survivor, but she was throwing away the only truly nice guy she'd ever met. A woman could go her whole life without finding someone that decent. That kind. That patient.

Or was he simply that twisted and manipulative! Round and round it went.

She picked up her phone and read the most recent text he'd sent, a simple ...? to pressure a response. Chanda gave him one.

Chanda: *Sorry, got to a good part! Anyway, all I meant was you won me, so it's "officially" your call. But I got things well in hand here. We're all having a good time hanging out, so feel free to enjoy your night loser-free*

Her eyes were already narrowed in suspicion of whatever he was about to reply with. Jessie's look lurked in the corner of her vision.

Aaron: *Well if you ladies are having a nice time, I'll stay out of the way and keep from making things weird(er)*

Aaron: *But text me if you need anything, OK? Even just a food run or something.*

Chanda: *You're too sweet.*

And maybe he was. Chanda would never let herself find out, if she could help it.

If Aaron was going to force her to be his obedient, busty, adoring loser, so be it. But if so, her life was over anyway. And if he wasn't, she was never going to voluntarily give him the satisfaction of any one of those qualities. Either she was done with Aaron, or she was done with her old life.

Whichever it was, it meant there was no more need to worry about his opinion of her.

"Jessie, come stand in front of me."

The woman rose to her feet so gracefully, Chanda wondered how much practice it had taken. The old Jessie had been on the school dance team; perhaps she had pleased her master with how quickly she'd trained herself. Mya looked between the two of them curiously.

"Mya, stand next to her."

Her face brightened. "Um, did Aaron...?"

"Stand. Next. To her." She snapped her fingers, pointed to the spot on the floor.

There they were. The Barrios sisters, pliant and ready. Everything taken from them except their winners' new outlets for gratification. Namely, to provide pleasure, and to be admired and used for what they had been made to be. Chanda could watch movies and compel dialogue with them until she was blue in the face, and it would mean nothing to them. This was the only mode of friendship they still recognized. It would be a kindness.

And if she was deluding herself for selfish reasons... well, it wasn't like it would hurt them, nor was Chanda the one who'd turned them into this in the first place.

"Are we gonna...?" Mya's eyes brightened.

"Take your shirt off."

Mya looked to Jessie, then to Chanda. "You mean me, or...?"

Chanda sighed. How on earth did this imbecility make it onto so many winners' turn-on lists. She waited for Mya to realize that Jessie was already topless, and had been

so for days. Years, in fact. Then, with a giggle, she got to work, fumbling with the knot joining the two sides of the shirt together until finally it came loose. She shrugged it off, preening and waiting for Chanda's next command. That she was a woman – loser or survivor – didn't seem to occur to her. Someone was finally telling her to do sexy things, and that was all it took.

Those breasts. No. Fuck that. Those *tits*. In the occasional fantasy she used to let herself have about her friends or other attractive women, they called them *tits*. Breasts nourished babies. Boobs stood in as punchlines. *Tits* were for sex. And these tits... they were sexy as hell.

She'd seen them even before. Years ago when they'd had the same gym class. Once a couple summers back when they were changing for a pool party at Krystal's house. A week ago, at the slumber party at Tiffany's, when they'd all just said fuck it to notions of the modesty they'd all been about to lose and changed there together. And last night, pressed against the glass of Aaron's car.

But never before had she been allowed to stare at them. Ogle them. Lick her lips, squeeze her own *tits* in vicarious admiration, and leer shamelessly. They were gorgeous. Chanda didn't know why guys got so excited over size. She might have a few cup sizes on Mya – who herself had one or two on Jessie's perky little set – but Mya's were shaped exactly right. Perfectly round, chocolate nipples perfectly centered, like god was an art student practicing drawing circles in all his most pleasing shades of tan. The little mole on the underside of her left was like a sample in miniature. The both of them rose and fell with breathing that was quickening in pace by the moment.

Then there were Jessie's. Chanda had no choice but to hand it to her master; the jewels worked. Every part of her was a decoration. The silver and gemstones piercing her were further ornamentation, but no more and no less than the flesh beneath. It summoned the eye, then lended permission to stay for a while in this museum of carnally inspired vistas. Even as Mya looked increasingly ready to hyperventilate if she didn't get some actual attention, Jessie was carved in stone, her face blank and passive, staring past Chanda, or through her, the effect being to force her to look elsewhere. Which brought her back to those two cute little tits.

“Your turn, Chanda!” exclaimed Mya.

Chanda disregarded the order. Whether she was a loser or a survivor, she wasn't about to subordinate herself to this unfortunate airhead. Whatever she'd said to Aaron, she *wasn't* a submissive. She wasn't. That had only been a dream last night. Dreams weren't real.

“Mya, were you ever... attracted to me? Before this?”

“Sure!” She nodded vigorously.

“Really?”

“Yeah! Last night at the Frostop you looked super cute. I totally would have fucked you with Kenny right there, and—”

“No. No no no. Ugh.” Chanda rose to her feet and put a finger to Mya’s lips, both silencing her, and rewarding herself with an immediate kiss, wet and slow on her fingertip. “I meant,” she went on in a more intimate tone, “before you were won, did you ever.”

Mya shrugged. “Nopers. Why, did you?”

Chanda stepped closer, their chests touching gently. “I did. I always felt weird about it, like maybe it was only because men were so scary or something. But I did, for a long time.”

“Man, and people think I’m a dummy *now*. I coulda maybe made out with the hottest girl in the whole wide world and I didn’t because I was a stupid straight girl!” She still hadn’t let that finger leave the vicinity of her lips, though.

“You’re still sweet, Mya. Not in the same way, but still sweet.”

“No, I mean it! Like, I wasn’t into you like that, but I was always super jealous of you. You’re like unfair hot. Like crazy porno hot, but like, not fake like a porno. Like what porno hotties wish they really looked like. But hotter.”

The flattery was working, at least a bit. Emboldened by it, she set to work on Mya’s shorts. The button, the zipper. Then came the best part, the immensely gropy effort required to drag that ultra-tight fabric over her butt and her hips.

There were conflicting reports of whether the Lottery Bureau could achieve physical transformations. They weren’t listed as a package, but so many girls turned up the next day with different color or style hair, fresh tattoos and piercings, Or as Mya was presently displaying, vaginas as smooth as glass. That was definitely new. As recently as last Friday, Mya had possessed a thick patch of pubic hair on her mound, as had the rest of them. Except for Tiffany, that is, who’d had it trimmed in the still partially recognizable shape of a heart. Probably a gift for her ex-boyfriend. Now Mya’s bald pussy was a gift to Kenny, and presently to Chanda.

She remained in a crouch from where she’d lowered Mya’s shorts. Pantiless, as she’d suspected, and somehow even wetter than she’d spent all afternoon imagining. “Let’s see yours, Jessie.”

The elder Barrios sister sensed, somehow, that she was meant not to undress, but rather to be undressed. She held her position as Chanda shifted over to her. The easy way to remove her panties would be to take hold of the string over either hip, right beneath the chain holding up the translucent fabric half-concealing her. But that wasn’t what Chanda wanted, and since Jessie wanted only to be what Chanda wanted, that wasn’t what she did. No, she reached under that wisp of material and sunk her fingers inside the waistband right there in front and took her sweet time easing the panties down.

Jessie was shaved, like her sister, except where Mya sported a bare brown patch of inviting skin, Jessie had a tattoo, some symbol she didn't recognize. It had struck her earlier that a proper harem slave ought to sport some sort of brand or otherwise have herself marked as property. Here it was, a few stray lines right above her slit, which looked every bit as ready as Mya's.

"Oh my gosh, Jessie got a tattoo...!" Mya gasped. "Mom and Dad are totally gonna be so pissed!"

"Does it mean something? It looks like a word, or letters maybe. Or is it just decorative?"

"*Ghamad*," Jessie said simply.

"*Ghamad*. What is that?"

"It is me. My true self. What I became when I ceased to be Jessie Barrios."

"Does it mean something?"

"It means 'Sheath.'"

Chanda didn't even have a dick, but that was still hot as hell. She shuffled backwards until she hit couch, then collapsed on it. Simply looking at these two was tiring. She needed the support. "Come here. One of you on each side."

The girls obeyed. Because of course they did. A bimbo and a sheath. What else would they do? Jessie knelt on her left, and Mya followed her big sister's lead on her right.

"I... I want to suck on you," Chanda managed. This all felt like it was some elaborate joke to embarrass her into confessing her most closely guarded fantasies, but she had to push through that. They weren't Aaron. These girls were losers, like her. Maybe. They would never deliberately embarrass her or reject her or deceive her.

"Me first!" exclaimed Mya. And for the first time in her adult life, there was finally, blissfully, a tit in her mouth. It didn't feel quite like Chanda had imagined. Yes, she had tried licking her own nipples in the past, but it didn't do much other than give her a sore neck. She hadn't taken notes. But Mya's tits were warm. They were heavy, but not as heavy as her own. Chand's fingers, her tongue each discerned subtle textures beneath the surface. They were as pliant as her warped loser mind.

At some point she discovered a nipple ring in her mouth, and only then did she realize Jessie was joining in. For some time, she swapped back and forth exploring the differences between what each girl had to offer. She laughed to herself at the realization that she really did prefer the bigger pair. Her whole life, she'd resented guys for their preoccupation with her big tits, and they were right, the bastards. Though those *noises* Jessie made when her nipples were targeted... it was such a rush, hearing those little half-moans, the gasps of surprised elation. Like every time Chanda swirled her tongue around a nipple with its faint metallic tang, Jessie seemed to be shocked anew at how fucking good it felt.

Of course, the sisters weren't simply sitting there shoving their tits in her face. It started with mere pawing, Mya's little hands roaming around the front of her, caressing, exploring. At some point her sweater was lifted over her chest, and those hands made contact with skin. Then they went inside the cups of her bra, and...

"Oh *fuck* keep doing that, whoever's doing that," Chanda moaned around a mouthful of tit. Mya's, she thought, but whenever she wasn't zeroing in on a nipple, it wasn't always obvious.

The pinches became tweaks, became tugs. It felt divine. Was that how she was making them feel? She reached behind her and unclasped her bra, letting the sisters slide it off her shoulders. Then it got *really* good. Would it feel better with their mouths? If only they would...

Oh. Yeah.

"Suck on my tits," she breathed.

Jessie complied immediately, gliding off the sofa cushion and draping her front half across Chanda's thigh so she could cup her left breast in both hands. Chanda willed the girl's mouth to her nipple, but instead she began on the underside, like a tease, only it still felt amazing.

"Me too?" asked a breathless Mya.

Chanda gave her friend's cute round bubble butt a prodding smack. "Now, Mya."

The girl squealed and bent over, throwing herself mouth-first into her right nipple. About ten seconds later, Chanda's thighs trembled as she came.

When her eyes opened again The sisters had pulled back slightly, looking down at Chanda's half-naked body as if with concern. "You OK, Panda?"

Chanda nodded groggily. "Yeah. Very OK."

"May we continue?" asked Jessie softly.

Right then, Chanda could have kissed the woman's master. Exactly right. Desirous, deferential, generous, patient. As patient as Chanda's own vibrator, ready to sit back and wait for her to want more pleasure for as long as it took. She accepted the momentary reprieve to let her head clear, and only then did she realize...

She'd just come from having her tits sucked on. Like she'd told Aaron. Oh god.

Maybe she should just invite him over and be done with it. She was a loser, and she'd get to experience that loser love of her winner's wiener, per that stupid song that all the boys used to sing on the playground to tease the girls. Or maybe she wasn't a loser, and she was just horny, and he could help with that. They could sit around the Barrios house all weekend and fuck and suck these losers until they collapsed, or got tired of it.

As Mya slid a hand gently between Chanda's legs and began to massage her sex through her leggings, she had a hard time imagining getting tired of this. Nobody had ever touched her like that before. God, why hadn't she let them? Jessie's stupid math

said all these millions of guys wanted to. Some girls too, no doubt. It was so fucking *good*.

She brushed the hands aside and stood up, her backside to her playmates. “Strip me.”

“Who?” asked Jessie behind her.

“Both.”

Chanda folded her hands behind her head, seizing two thick handfuls of her raven black hair as the Barrios sisters obeyed. It took some coordination, Mya pulling too fast on her side, having to wait for Jessie’s methodical approach to keep up. Their mistress obliged them by stepping out of her leggings as they reached her ankles. Both girls’ hands trailed back up from that point over calves, thighs, hips and ass until they sank into her panties. She’d chosen her sexiest pair for today, some part of her already considering that morning that she might be having someone admiring them later in the day. Mya and Jessie’s cooing, the kisses they planted along either hip as they wrapped themselves around her legs, might have been admiration for her taste, or maybe the other losers were simply as horny as she was and were excited to be given access to her pussy.

She didn’t see who it was who slipped their tongue between her legs; her eyes slammed shut in ecstasy. Whoever it wasn’t stood, kissed her forcefully – so Mya, probably? or maybe Jessie could tell what she needed – and guided her down to their mother’s spotless sofa ass-first, their sister trailing Chanda’s pussy all the way. The lips pressed to hers soon found their way back down to her tits. When she took a glance, it still told her nothing about who was licking her where, nothing but a blur of black hair and smooth bronze skin.

Mya and Jessie took turns eating her out and pleasuring her elsewhere all through that night, sometimes simultaneously forcing both their mouths between Chanda’s wide-spread thighs to try to compete for a place at her clit. It was counterproductive to the required finesse, but the rush of their enthusiasm for eating her pussy more than made up for it. She eventually summoned the presence of mind to offer to reciprocate, but Jessie firmly declined, and Mya insisted that “oh gosh I could suck every bit of you for a million bajillion years and never stop wanting more.”

Chanda generously allowed her to get a start on that.

She woke up sometime in the middle of the night to find Mya snoring softly into her tummy and Jessie sleeping nearby in the lotus position. Somehow. There was a spark inside her that wanted feeding, to wake them up and get back to it, but this time she suppressed it. For now.

She padded silently up the stairs and made her way to the shower. Another benefit of Jessie’s auction, the deluxe four-jet system was incredible. Chanda had only used it one other time, the morning after she’d crashed here after a party when she’d



been too drunk to drive home. It felt as wonderful as she remembered, streams rinsing from above and all sides of the shower but the one with the door. It washed away the spit and sweat and... she didn't know the word for all the juices that leaked out of the girls' pussies. Was that cum? Did girls have cum, too? In any case, it rinsed away the evidence of what she'd done, but not the memory. Nor did she want it to.

Should she feel guilty for using them? There didn't seem to be any cause for remorse. Certainly neither of the sisters had complained. If, in thirty years, this was the great slight they wished to redress, they were welcome to, but by all accounts all three of them had enjoyed themselves tremendously. Maybe not so much Jessie, or Ghamad, as Chanda was starting to think of her, but she wouldn't have enjoyed her usual activity of standing in a corner staring at the floor, either. At least this way she got to be a part of things. In fact, the longer Chanda stood in the shower, the more concrete her designs of bringing the sisters in here with her in the morning grew. Soon, Kenny would steal his Mimi away from her and her big sister would have to go back to her new home. (At one point that morning, Jessie had been able to cite the exact number of hours and minutes until her flight left for Bahrain. There had been no clock in the room.) But for this weekend, she had them do whatever they wished.

For the two verified losers, their wishes were quite clear. To pleasure Chanda in any way she desired.

As for Chanda herself, the more the shower rinsed away the evening's delights, the more it brought her back to that moment right before she'd finally discarded her inhibitions. Her pondering produced nothing she hadn't thought of already, and left her no more certain than she'd been. She was either a secret loser, destined to fall in love with Aaron and fuck him as devotedly and vigorously as Mya and Jessie had done with her tonight; or else she wasn't, and could fuck or not fuck whoever she wanted, and was trapped in the infuriating circumstance of very much wanting Aaron to be the first.

She had wondered so many times that night about how much better it all would have been with him there. How he would blush and stammer as Chanda ordered Jessie to suck him into readiness. (If it took any coaxing at all. But it would be fun to watch her do it.) His transition from anxiety over touching her, to excitement, to desperation once she gave him a taste, and then another. She would let him begin his fantasy with his old crush Mya, but as Chanda stood by, touching herself, playing with her big tits and her dripping wet cunt (a phrase of Mya's that had decidedly worked for her), he would brush her aside and throw Chanda to the bed, leap on top of her, and show her how much better a cock felt than mere fingers.

The water began to grow less warm, and in time, there was nothing to do for it but twist the knob and let it all stop. Just as well. All this sex was making her feel like a big fat loser. Not in the normal sense, even, but in the antiquated one her mom sometimes used from before the Lottery. It was usually something she muttered under

her breath while reading the news about some politician or another. Chanda remembered as a girl, maybe seven or eight years old, as her mom explained to her that loser didn't used to be a derogatory term for "woman." It had once meant a person who had made bad decisions. A screw-up.

Chanda felt decidedly screwed up.

It was the Lottery's fault. Her whole life, every source of fear, every instance of mistrust, every inclination to that sudden and impotent rage had been the Lottery's fault. It had made her fearful of almost half the global population. It had been the reason her friendships with women always made her a little bit sad, knowing they were all of them doomed to end on a predetermined Friday in her senior year of high school. It was the reason for that sad tinge to her parents' voices when they told her they loved her. It was the source of her bitterness towards every good thing that came of depopulation, and why she'd never been able to dream or hope for her future.

And now, all of those feelings had been hung, fairly or not, around Aaron's neck. Either he was a kind and decent guy who'd gone out of his way to protect her, or he'd been tending to his own property. Either he was shy and nervous and maybe even a bit intimidated by her, or he was having fun watching the seed in his pot flourish. Either he was sitting at home hoping she wasn't crushed by what had become of her loser friend, or he was sitting at home waiting for her to break and invite him to claim them both.

Chanda could never know, because now the Lottery had taken even that – her certainty in what was and wasn't real. Something she hadn't ever even known she could lose.

She toweled off, but didn't bother getting dressed. Naked felt good right now. Downstairs, Mya woke with a start as Chanda gently shook her shoulder, but she followed as obediently as she fucked. Chanda led her back to her room, where she climbed in on top of her, clinging like a bird gripping a branch in the storm. Mya was asleep again in moments. For Chanda, respite was a long time coming.