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1

TEN DAYS BEFORE THE POLICE CARS CRUISED SILENTLY down the driveway at August House and we all became a national news story, Jasper picked me up at the ferry in Vineyard Haven.

“There he is,” Jasper called, slouching elegantly against the driver’s side door of the Mercedes in sunglasses and a crisp white button-down rolled to the elbows. He looked like a magazine ad for a cologne called Entitlement. “What’s up, Linden?” He grabbed my duffel, tossing it carelessly into the back of the forest-green coupe. “I thought you were coming in last night.”

The buttery leather of the passenger seat was cool through my T-shirt as I slid into the car. “Ferry was full,” I lied. In fact, one of the other checkers at the grocery where I’d been working since June needed a shift covered, and even though I was technically done for the summer—the dorms at Bartley opened in two weeks—I wasn’t in any position to be turning down the cash. It wasn’t the first money-related fib I’d told Jasper, or any of our friends from boarding school in Northampton. And, in all likelihood, it wouldn’t be the last.

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Jasper shrugged, incurious. “Well, I’m glad you’re here, anyway. How’s your foot?”

I wiggled my pale, skinny-looking ankle, just recently liberated from its fiberglass boot. “Still attached.” Then, not particularly wanting to talk about it, I raised my eyebrows. “What about you? Summer as dire as you thought it would be?”

“Total fucking snoozer,” Jasper said, peeling out of the parking lot. “Every day I think about committing a murder just to spice things up.” He glanced at me out of the corner of his eye. “I’ll try to control myself now that you’re here, I guess.”

“Gentlemanly of you.”

“Yeah, well, I’m a gentleman.”

We cruised through Vineyard Haven, passing mom-and-pop clam shacks nestled between luxury boutiques and Michelin-star restaurants. I’d been to Martha’s Vineyard once before, as a little kid; some guy my mom was dating at the time had a summer rental in Edgartown and invited us out for the weekend. I think he was auditioning to be my new dad and spent forty-eight hours calling me *bud* and trying to convince me to toss a Frisbee around with him. In retaliation I accidentally-on-purpose stepped on a jellyfish and spent most of the weekend reading waterlogged mysteries under an umbrella, scowling as hard as I possibly could.

“How was the internship?” Jasper asked now, turning down the volume on the radio. The Mercedes was glamorously vintage enough that it didn’t have Bluetooth, static crackling intermittently as we reached the outskirts of town. It was more rural here than I remembered, dense woods out one window and long

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stretches of beach out the other, the haunted Gatsby green of summer exploding all around us.

“What?” I blinked. “Oh, it was fine. Also extremely fucking boring.” That was an invention too, an internship at a law firm in Post Office Square back at home. It was a stupid lie, the kind of thing that was easily fact-checked, but back at the beginning of the summer, Jasper kept making noise about coming to visit me in Boston, and it helped to have an excuse about why I was too busy.

We pulled off the main road and cruised for another ten minutes down a winding dirt lane, the occasional flare of sunlight sneaking through the dense, leafy canopy overhead. Every once in a while we passed what I assumed were private driveways, but for the most part the effect was more *remote wilderness* than *island paradise*. I was just starting to wonder if maybe I’d misunderstood what he’d said about his parents’ place being at the beach when all at once the landscape opened up and there it was, standing tall and grand and enormous against the shocking blue sky.

“So,” Jasper said, “this is August House.”

“Uh.” I cleared my throat. “Sweet.” Over the last few years I’d gotten pretty good at not acting impressed by other people’s giant houses, but I had to work to keep a straight face as he pulled into the circular drive, crushed seashells crunching under the wheels of the convertible. August House was a massive old white-shingled situation with a wide wraparound porch and a second-floor balcony and an actual, honest-to-god turret, plus a widow’s walk up on the roof. Hydrangeas lined the walkway in an explosion of pink and blue and purple. An American flag flapped cheerily in the breeze.

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I tried not to gape as I climbed out of the passenger seat, Jasper killing the engine and tucking the keys up under the visor. “Leave that,” he said when I reached for my duffel. “Dean will bring it up.”

I had no idea who Dean was, but I slung the bag over my shoulder anyway and followed Jasper through a white wooden gate and past a meticulously tended vegetable garden off to the side of the house. Out in the backyard was a giant bean-shaped pool flanked by a neat row of wooden lounge chairs and a covered patio housing a table with seating for twelve at least. A gap in the tall green hedges led to a staircase directly down to the beach: I could hear the waves crashing, smell the sharp brine of the ocean.

“Linden is here,” Jasper announced, opening a second gate onto the pool deck.

Wells saluted from the water, where he was floating on an enormous inflatable raft shaped like a unicorn, his pale skin gone summer tan. “Hey, bro,” he called, “what’s up?”

“Not much.” I grinned. Jasper’s brother had graduated from Bartley two years earlier, back when we were freshmen. He was a business major at Harvard now, though according to Jasper, he spent most of his time getting drunk at the Owl Clubhouse on Holyoke Street. “Nice ride.”

“Thinking about entering her in the Head of the Charles this year,” he replied, then nodded at a guy sprawled on a lounge chair in a pair of lime-green swim trunks. “That’s Doc; he lives down the beach. Doc, Linden; Linden, Doc. Linden’s first name isn’t Linden. Doc’s first name isn’t Doc.”

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I looked across the patio in not-entirely-pleasant surprise. “We . . . actually know each other,” I confessed.

“I mean, not formally.” Doc extended a smooth brown hand in my direction. “What’s up, dude?”

“Oh shit,” Jasper said before I could answer, “that’s right, you guys are both lax nerds.” He grinned. “There’s definitely a joke in there about like, sticks and balls or some fucking thing, so just pretend it was funny, okay?”

“We always pretend you’re funny,” Doc reminded him, but his dark eyes were on me as we shook. “You still starting for Bartley this fall?” he asked. “I heard you busted your ankle back in the spring.”

“Oh yeah,” I managed with what I hoped was a casual shake of my head, “for sure.” Doc was a star attackman for Ashcroft, a boarding school down in Rhode Island; he’d basically crushed us in last year’s championship game, and that was when I’d been in the best physical condition of my entire life. The thought of facing him on the field after a summer spent hobbling back and forth to physical therapy made me feel slightly queasy. “It was no big deal. All good now.”

Jasper nodded at his twin sister, Eliza, who was sitting at the patio table along with a redhead I didn’t recognize, a hand of gin rummy laid out between them. “You guys know each other too, right?” he asked.

Eliza waved from across the yard. “Oh,” she called, “Linden and I go way back.”

“Old friends,” I agreed. In fact, we’d only met a couple of

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times before—once when the Kendricks had come to Bartley for Wells’s graduation, and another time when she’d taken the train out to stay with some friend of hers in the girls’ dorm and tagged along with us to a party. She lived at home with her parents in Connecticut, I knew, and was some kind of northeast horseback-riding champion. Last year Jasper had a photo pinned to his bulletin board of his whole family at one of her meets, Eliza in the full outfit with the breeches and helmet and everything like she was a nineteenth-century British archduke, but right now she was wearing sunglasses and a gingham bikini, her dark blond hair just skimming her shoulders. I glanced at her, then back at the others. Glanced at her again.

“I’m Meredith,” the redhead volunteered pointedly.

Jasper smirked. “And that’s Meredith,” he admitted, and I waved. “Come on,” he continued, “I’ll give you the tour.”

I followed him across the patio, past an outdoor kitchen with a built-in grill and through the sliding glass door into the cool, quiet house. “Meredith’s parents used to have a place nearby, but they sold it last year,” he informed me, “which means she’s been at our house, like. All. Fucking. Summer.”

“Uh-oh,” I said with a laugh. His voice suggested either a decades-long blood feud or a vacation hookup gone bad. “Did you guys, like . . . ?”

“Oh, *fuck* no,” Jasper said, like the very thought of it had his dick shriveling up in horror. “She’s had a boyfriend since the Stone Age. And they’re both idiots.” He shrugged, reaching down to pet the golden retriever snoozing in a monogrammed bed near the mudroom. “This is Whimsy,” he told me. “Come on, this way.”

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I'd had it in my head that beach houses were sort of scruffy, full of cast-off furniture and yellowing sci-fi paperbacks, but the Kendricks' looked freshly renovated, with huge picture windows framing a view of the ocean and an open kitchen that would have made my mom weep with pleasure. Right away I was worried about spilling something, even though I wasn't holding anything I could possibly spill.

Jas led me through the dining room and into the living room, past an actual library with built-in bookcases lining the three walls that didn't look out over the garden. And it all just kept going: we passed a study and a sunroom and a den with a projector screen, the sectional so wide and deep I had to physically stop myself from face-planting directly onto it and passing out until school started. August House was the kind of place where any number of people could stay for an indefinite length of time without anyone noticing—not like the apartment I shared with my mom back in East Boston, where my aunt Rosie had come to visit over Christmas and left her bras draped over the shower-curtain rod for days on end, the scent of her perfume hanging thickly in the air.

We traipsed up a flight of steps and down a long hallway, then turned and climbed another staircase that doubled back on itself until finally we got to a bedroom with walls that curved gently on two sides—the turret room, I realized, the one I'd seen from outside.

“Sorry it's so small,” Jasper said, though it was bigger than both my room at home and the one we'd shared freshman year at Bartley, when we'd first been roommates. “Meredith is hogging the good guest room, since, you know, she lives with us now.”

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I shook my head. “Dude, it’s fine.” The bed was an intricately carved four-poster, the duvet cover a cheery blue-and-white stripe. A quartet of framed botanical prints hung on the far wall.

“They’re poisonous,” Jas said when he saw me looking at them.

“Huh?”

“The plants,” he explained, gesturing with his chin. “Foxglove, hogweed, hemlock, stinging nettle. Those drawings are all over the house. My mom bought this whole collection of them from some botanist’s estate sale in Newport, then got them home and some friend of hers was like, *Hey, dumbass, you realize the unifying theme of those flowers is that every single one of them is extremely fucking lethal.* But by then she’d already paid her decorator to come and hang them.” He shrugged. “Anyway, your bathroom is around the corner. Just be careful because you have to hold the flusher down an extra minute if you take a shit.”

I nodded. “Thanks for the tip.”

“No problem. Meet you down at the pool.” He shut the door behind him, his footsteps thundering down the narrow staircase. “Glad you’re here, dude!”

Once he was gone, I looked at the plants for a moment longer, telling myself there was no reason to feel the tiniest bit creeped out by their graceful leaves and delicate, dangerous flowers. Then I changed into my bathing suit and headed downstairs.

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2

JASPER'S PARENTS TOOK US ALL INTO TOWN FOR dinner that night. "Last one into the car is buying lobsters!" Mr. Kendrick called, putting one foot up on a kitchen chair and bending to tie the laces on his boat shoes. I liked the Kendricks: They had a matched-set quality to them that made me think of the lovebirds our downstairs neighbor, Mrs. Le, kept in a cage in her dining room. They even sort of looked alike, tall and thin with the kind of casual tans you get from morning tennis and the occasional afternoon drive with the top down. Both of them looked extremely hale.

We were tromping out to the cars when Mrs. Kendrick put a hand on my arm, pulling me back into the tidy mudroom away from the others. "Linden, honey," she said, "I just wanted to tell you how glad we are that you could come stay. And to thank you for being such a good friend to Jasper."

"Oh yeah, of course," I said quickly. "He's a good friend to me too."

Mrs. Kendrick nodded. "He went through a lot this year," she

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continued. “I mean, we all did, obviously, but—” She broke off, letting go and waving her hand like she was batting something away. “Anyway. I’m being maudlin. We’re happy you’re here.” She patted my shoulder. “Let’s go eat fried fish.”

“Okay,” I said, a little confused. I knew there’d been some drama at the Kendricks’ last year—Jasper’s dad had gotten sued, I was pretty sure, though I wasn’t sure why or for what and hadn’t wanted to ask too much about it, even though obviously I wondered. But as a general rule, I tried not to ask my friends from Bartley too many questions, in the hope that they would take the hint and return the favor. “Yeah. Thanks for having me.”

Dinner was at a seafood shack called Red’s that Mrs. Kendrick had been going to since she was a little kid—the kind of dive that rich people on vacation can’t get enough of, with colorful Christmas lights hung on the wall behind the bar and the smell of cornmeal batter thick in the air. They didn’t take reservations, so we sat on a bench outside for half an hour while Wells napped with his head back against the faded red shingles and Jasper and Eliza complained about the wait. Meredith was texting furiously, her red hair like a theater curtain around her face. The sight of her thumbs flying over the screen reminded me I’d forgotten to let my mom know I wasn’t dead at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, and I was pulling my own phone out of my pocket when Eliza looked at me suddenly, like she’d just remembered I was there. “So, Linden,” she said, “you’re from Boston?”

I nodded, knowing she’d assume Beacon Hill or Comm Ave, or maybe someplace like Brookline or Arlington that wasn’t actually Boston at all. “Born and raised,” I admitted.

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“Are you obsessed with Tom Brady?”

“Fuck Tom Brady,” I said without thinking, then whipped around to look guiltily at Mr. and Mrs. Kendrick. “Um. I mean—”

But Mrs. Kendrick only smiled. “Fuck Tom Brady,” she echoed primly, and everybody burst out laughing; after a moment, I started laughing too.

They were easy to be around, the Kendricks. Don’t get me wrong, my own mom was great—it’s not like I was Harry Potter, living alone under a staircase and waiting for Bartley’s answer to the Weasleys to come rescue me—but I’d always kind of wanted to be part of a big family, especially one as golden and unencumbered as this. It was easy to imagine the five of them rolling matching luggage across the tarmac en route to a family vacation in Mallorca or sitting around the tree drinking fancy champagne on Christmas morning. Gliding sleekly through life like a fleet of tidy sailboats, no drag on any of them at all.

“So what’s the prognosis, Linden?” Mr. Kendrick asked once we’d finally been seated and ordered our dinners. It was loud in here, the dull roar of voices and laughter and clanking beer bottles echoing off the wooden-plank walls and sharply pitched ceiling. The Doobie Brothers crooned over the speakers behind the bar. “Are we going to see you tearing it up out there in the fall?”

“Dad,” Jasper said, shaking his head. “He doesn’t want to talk about—”

“No, it’s okay.” I nodded. Six months ago I’d been hooking up with a senior from Bartley named Greer, who had a crooked incisor tooth and the softest hair I’d ever felt on a human person. One Friday night in March we’d driven into town to see a movie

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at the second-run theater, and on the way back a deer jumped into the road. Greer swerved and hit a tree instead, and I came to in the passenger seat a couple minutes later with a motherfucker of a concussion and a right ankle smashed to what could politely be called smithereens.

At least, that was what we'd told everyone had happened.

"Prognosis is good," I said now, smiling gamely: another lie. The prognosis was middling at best, but that wasn't the kind of thing that people want to hear when they ask you about a sports injury, and it definitely wasn't something I wanted to announce. I hadn't talked to anybody about it—not even Jasper knew—but I was at Bartley on a full scholarship, the terms of which dictated that I maintain a 3.5 grade point average and play two-season lacrosse every fall and spring. To put it more bluntly: no lacrosse, no scholarship. Not to mention the glaring fact that if I had any hope of being scouted by colleges, I needed to be back on the field in September, just a few weeks away, not hobbling through my workouts and wincing in agony at every drill. Thinking about it was the kind of thing that had me waking up in the middle of the night, sweating through my sheets, so mostly I tried not to think about it at all.

"Well," Mr. Kendrick said now, "I'm glad to hear it. God knows we need you if we're going to finally beat Andover this year."

"I'm working on it," I promised cheerfully. Mr. Kendrick grinned.

Our food came just then, a mountain of shrimp and scallops and oysters, whole lobsters with little ramekins of butter for dunk-

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ing and plastic bibs to wear over your shirt. I went to work on a paper boat of fish and chips while Jasper told a long and convoluted story about a kid we knew from school who'd sunk his entire trust fund into a hydroponic weed operation, and I tried not to notice the same thing I'd noticed about a lot of my friends from school, which was that they could be total douchebags to service staff. Meredith in particular was doing that thing people do when they've never had a job waiting tables, asking for one thing at a time so the waitress had to make a million separate trips to get them for her: first tartar sauce, then lemons, then a stack of extra napkins. It reminded me of that picture book my mom used to read to me, about the mouse who gets a cookie and then wants a glass of milk.

"Could I get some more seltzer?" she asked now, rattling the ice in her mostly full cup. Then, once she had it: "Whoops. A slice of lime for it too?"

"Sure," the waitress said, smiling tightly. She was about our age, with curly blond hair pulled back into a complicated, tricky-looking braid. Her uniform tank top was made to look like a jersey, with *Red's* scrawled in looping script across the back. "Anything else?"

Meredith smiled an airy smile. "That's it for now," she said, "but I'm sure I'll think of something."

"I'm sure you will," the waitress agreed. "Just shout."

Once she was gone, Jasper shot Meredith a look across the table. "Was that really necessary?" he asked. He looked personally affronted, though I suspected it had significantly less to do with

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the demands themselves than with how cute the waitress was. Jasper had always liked blondes.

“What?” Meredith looked at him blankly, then glanced down at her French fries and frowned, waving her hand to get the waitress’s attention one more time. “Sorry!” she called out, though she sounded the opposite of remorseful; for the first time, it occurred to me that she might be doing this—whatever it was she was doing—on purpose, and not just because she was an oblivious princess. “Ketchup!”

This time, though, the waitress shook her head. “Sorry,” she echoed, somehow managing to mimic Meredith’s tone of voice exactly. “We’re all out.”

Meredith looked at her dubiously. “All out of *ketchup*?” she asked.

The waitress shrugged. “Wouldn’t you know it,” she said, “somebody else just got the last bottle.”

I blinked at the waitress, quietly impressed. I’d worked in restaurants every summer before this one—you can’t wait tables in a fiberglass boot—and I knew that feeling intimately, the deep and abiding urge to tell another person to go fuck themselves. I’d never actually had the balls to do it, and technically, this girl wasn’t doing it either; still, she was a hell of a lot closer than I’d ever been. There was no way whatever was happening between them wasn’t at least a little bit personal. “Dude,” I muttered to Jasper, “why do I get the feeling this conversation isn’t actually about condiments?”

Jasper rolled his eyes, then turned and smiled crookedly at the waitress. “Don’t ask.”

“Here,” Eliza said once the waitress was gone, then turned to

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the table behind ours, touching a stocky retiree gently on his sloping shoulder. “Sorry,” she said sweetly. “Would you mind if we borrowed your ketchup?”

The man looked surprised for a moment, then smiled at her, his jowly face openly appreciative. “Honey,” he said, handing over the bright red squeeze bottle, “you can have whatever you like.”

3

“YOU GUYS UP FOR ICE CREAM?” MRS. KENDRICK ASKED as we headed out into the muggy parking lot of the restaurant. I felt myself perk up like a little kid at the offer—the shop was only a few doors down, and I could smell the cold vanilla sugar from here—but Jasper shook his head.

“We’re going to go meet up with some people on the beach,” he replied, which was news to me. “We’ll see you guys at home.”

We stopped back at August House to drop the car, then tramped out through the yard and down the sand about half a mile or so to where a group was already gathered around the orange glow of a bonfire. It was a pretty night, the setting sun streaking the sky in purple and pink and navy. The brackish smell of the ocean mixed with the sharp, woody scent of the smoke.

“There they are!” Doc called when he saw us. He’d swapped his neon bathing suit out for a hoodie, though it was still pretty warm even at nine o’clock. “Was wondering if you all were going to show up or what.”

“Obviously,” Eliza said, popping up on her toes to give him

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a hug. I rubbed idly at the back of my neck, swallowing down a sudden flicker of jealousy. “We like to make an entrance, is all.”

“He’s just hoping we brought more booze,” Jasper said, dropping a scratchy-looking wool blanket onto the sand.

“I mean,” Doc said with a lopsided grin, “that too.”

We settled in. Wells unzipped the nylon cooler he’d carried down from the house, passing out beers like a tall, skinny Santa Claus. Jasper introduced me to a bunch of his Vineyard friends. The whole thing was a little too sprawling and relaxed to qualify as an actual party: people coming and going, groups spreading out and breaking up before wandering back together again. We ran into a couple of underclassmen from Bartley whose parents had a place in Chilmark; a girl Meredith and Eliza knew from their yoga studio stopped by with a bottle of fancy tequila. The fire spat and crackled, glowing sparks flying up into the air.

“You’re quiet,” Eliza observed, strolling up beside me with a beer bottle dangling from her fingertips, clinking the neck of it softly against mine.

I shook my head. “Just taking it all in.”

“You are, aren’t you?” She raised her eyebrows. “Better watch what I say.”

“Why,” I asked with a grin, “were you planning on confessing to something?”

“Maybe.” Eliza winked.

Maybe. She was a beautiful girl, Eliza. I was just trying to work up the stones to ask if she wanted to go for a walk when I heard a familiar voice behind me: “Michael?” it called, and I whirled right the fuck around. Nobody but my mom called me by my

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first name—nobody, that is, except one person, and there she was, coming out of the darkness like an apparition from an entirely different world.

“Holiday,” I said, feeling deeply and immediately like I’d been caught doing something I wasn’t supposed to be doing. My mom had worked for Holiday’s parents since we were both little kids, cooking their meals and cleaning their bathrooms and accepting their deliveries at their enormous Victorian house in Cambridge. My first memory was of Holiday accidentally slamming my fingers in the door of their linen closet, both of us screaming bloody murder. The ring finger of my right hand was still kind of weird and crooked at the tip. “Um, hey.”

“Hey yourself.” She wrapped me in a tight, unselfconscious hug that smelled like farmer’s market bar soap and a little bit like weed. “What are you doing here?” she asked, letting me go and smiling over my shoulder at the group.

“Just, uh, staying with some friends from school,” I said, motioning vaguely behind me at Eliza and Jasper and Meredith, who were looking at us curiously. Holiday barely had time to offer them a friendly little wave before I ushered her down the beach, lest she expect me to do anything insane like introduce her. “You?”

“My folks have a place here,” she explained. The breeze was blowing her dark, curly hair all around, and she gathered it up in one hand for a moment, like she was trying to see me better, before letting it go again. “I’m surprised your mom didn’t mention it, actually.”

My mom *had* mentioned it, I remembered suddenly: “You

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should text Holiday,” she’d said when I told her I was coming to stay with the Kendricks; then, when I hadn’t answered: “Michael? Are you listening to me?” I’d grunted a noise of acknowledgment and then immediately forgotten, the way you don’t bother to store information that has no bearing on your actual life.

“Yeah,” I said now. “I’m surprised she didn’t too.”

Holiday nodded. She looked older, which I guessed made sense since I hadn’t seen her at all in the three years since I’d started at Bartley. She was also a full click prettier than I remembered, but it made me feel weird and honestly kind of perverted to notice that, like trying to get a secret look at your cousin in her underwear at your grandparents’ house over Thanksgiving break. Not that Holiday was walking along the beach in her underwear. She wasn’t even wearing a bathing suit. She was dressed in a loose-fitting black overalls—type situation made out of linen or something—the kind of getup our art teacher, Ms. Singh, would have worn to teach us about Dadaism in an overly enthusiastic tone of voice. Her lipstick was very, very red.

Neither one of us said anything for another moment, a pause that went on just slightly too long not to be weird. I racked my brain for a non-douchey way to bail out. It wasn’t that I wasn’t glad to see her, exactly—she’d been my best friend, until puberty—but I’d spent the last three years at Bartley doing everything humanly possible to separate my home life from my school life, and a thing I remembered very clearly about Holiday was that back when we were kids, she’d been the kind of person you could always rely on to say the quiet part out loud. I could just imagine it now: *Hi, I’m*

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Holiday Proctor! Michael's mom washes my unmentionables for a living. I'd worked too hard to fit in with these people. I'd worked too hard, period, to risk her messing it up.

"Well, it was cool to run into you." I reached out to touch her arm in a friendly way, only I kind of accidentally punched her instead, like we were on the same high school football team in 1950. Fuck, I needed to get out of this conversation. "I guess I'll see you around," I said at the same time that Holiday said, "We should get coffee and catch up for real."

"Oh!" I froze. "Um, yeah, totally."

"I mean, only if you want to," she said, looking at me a little strangely. "No pressure, et cetera."

"No, no, that sounds great," I lied. In fact, it did not sound great—it sounded awkward and boring and like a waste of an hour I could otherwise be spending at the beach or in the pool or taking a particularly luxurious bathroom break—but then I thought about what my mom would say if she found out I'd blown Holiday off after all this time, and found myself nodding like a dashboard bobblehead doll on a particularly bumpy stretch of road. "Day after tomorrow, maybe?" I hoped the whole thing might slip her mind by then, though it seemed unlikely. Holiday had always been like an elephant that way: she never forgot.

"Sure thing." She smiled, toothy and sincere. "Let's do it."

"Who was that?" Jasper asked when I rejoined the group. They were sprawled in various states of repose on the blanket, passing around a flask that Wells had pulled out of his hoodie pocket.

I shook my head. "Just somebody I know from home."

"Long-lost love?" He waggled his eyebrows.

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“Fuck you,” I replied. I wasn’t sure which one of us he was making fun of, Holiday or me, or if he wasn’t making fun of either one of us and I was just being touchy. I glanced uneasily over my shoulder, but Holiday had rejoined her friends down at the far end of the beach. She was probably just as glad to be rid of me as I was of her, I reassured myself: after all, nobody in their right mind wanted the son of the household help crashing their tony beach vacation. And granted, Holiday had never once treated me that way in all the time we’d spent together, but what did I know? I hadn’t talked to Holiday in years. “Our moms know each other.”

Jasper nodded distractedly. I was worried he’d press me, but he didn’t seem to care, handing me the flask and taking a hit from the joint that Wells was holding out. “Sit down,” he instructed. “We’re playing Lies.”

“Okay,” I said with a laugh, the liquor burning in my throat and chest. “What are the rules, just lie your fucking face off?”

“Exactly,” Eliza confirmed. “We used to do Two Truths to go along with it, but that got boring, so we trimmed the fat.”

“Very market-focused of you,” I said.

Eliza smiled. “Thank you.”

“The trick is to make them believable,” Jasper explained, a halo of smoke around his face. “So, for instance, if I were to say, *I saw Wells jerking off to a picture of a prominent Republican senator in women’s underwear*, you would say, *Yeah, that seems legit*, and—”

“Fuck you,” Wells said, but he was laughing. “I’ll have you know he was wearing a suit, like a gentleman.”

“Best lie wins,” Jasper said cheerfully. “Doc, you start.”

Doc nodded. “Let’s see,” he said, leaning back on his palms

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and crossing his ankles, his canny gaze flicking around the circle before finally lighting on me. “When he’s not getting his ass fully trounced at lacrosse, Linden lives a double life back in Boston as a part-time hot dog vendor at Fenway and an extra in Masshole movies directed by Ben Affleck.”

I burst out laughing along with the rest of the group, trying to ignore the embarrassment and annoyance flaming in my face. Doc was kidding around, obviously—that was how the game worked—but hadn’t Jasper just said the whole point was to make your lies believable? Also, fuck that guy! He’d beaten me at lacrosse *one time*. Still, “I actually work the drive-through at a Dunkin’ Donuts in Dorchester,” I corrected as good-naturedly as I could manage, reaching for the flask and wondering for the hundred thousandth time if that was how I seemed to these people, like some sweatsuit-wearing stereotype. If it was how I seemed to Eliza. “Have some respect.” I turned to Jasper. “So what, it’s my turn now?”

We played a few rounds, Eliza accusing Jasper of sending dick pics to the perpetually sweat-stained woman who airbrushed souvenir T-shirts at a kiosk in town and Wells suggesting Doc sat down to pee. When it was Jasper’s turn, though, he didn’t hesitate. “Meredith,” he said grandly, turning to where she was perched on a hollowed-out log, scrolling her phone industriously; I wasn’t sure if I was imagining that something in his voice suggested he’d been waiting for this opportunity, had perhaps even orchestrated the entire game with it in mind. “*Meredith* spends her days desperately trying to avoid getting chlamydia from her cocksmaack boyfriend because, apparently, she’s too stupid to cop onto what everybody else with two brain cells already knows, which is that the only

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