



Nancy Madore

ENCHANTED AGAIN

*Erotic
bedtime
stories
for women*

Enchanted again

More Erotic Bedtime Stories for Women

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I dedicate this book to Michael number twenty-seven.

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BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Birds of a feather
flock together
and so do pigs and swine.
Rats and mice will have their choice,
and so will I have mine.

Pansy's spine arched reflexively where Jack's hand gently prodded her forward, and a shudder crept menacingly along the length of it. She stepped timidly into the room ahead of him, hardly mindful of her actions or the events that were unfolding around her. She seemed more in a dream than real life, detached from the events as a figurine in a game of chess. For the moment at least, she felt more like a spectator than a participant.

The instant that Jack shut the door behind them, however, Pansy suddenly snapped out of her dream state and came fully alert, and even the air all around her seemed to crackle with life. Jack, too, abandoned his cool demeanor and was seized with a violent passion, grasping a fistful of Pansy's hair and jerking her head around so that her face was directly beneath his, with her lips parted for his approaching kiss. Pansy awoke to an explosion of sensation, and she clung to Jack frantically as he captured her lips in an all-consuming kiss that devoured the last of her reserve. She pressed her body against his with a sigh, causing him to kiss her even more passionately. His hands began moving deliberately over her clothing, finding buttons and zippers and clasps as he expertly removed every stitch without ever interrupting their kiss. Pansy was stripped to the skin before she even realized what Jack was doing, and though she normally had reservations about having her body so utterly exposed, Jack's unyielding, take-charge manner left her with no time for objections—neither uttered nor even imagined, for that matter—and no choice but simply to enjoy the wonderfully vulnerable sensation of simply submitting to another's pleasure. Pansy felt a slow, languid tightening in her womb that pulsed outward, causing the flesh between her legs to tingle and swell and moisten.

Once her clothes were removed, Jack took hold of Pansy's hair again and gently pushed her head down toward the floor. She twisted awkwardly at the waist at first, but then bent her legs and moved on to her knees, supposing that he wanted her to take him in her mouth, but he kept pushing her down even farther, until her elbows too rested on the floor. With a mixture of apprehension and delight she succumbed to the position and waited breathlessly for what he would do next. She was keenly aware of the dirty hotel-room floor where she waited on knees and elbows, but it only seemed to accentuate the moment, making it all the more thrilling. She had only the briefest of seconds to consider any of this before she heard a long swooshing sound from behind her where Jack stood. Even as her mind was registering the sound of his belt sliding out from his belt loops, Jack swung it around with vigor and landed it with a loud, resounding crack across the underside of her buttocks. The sound rattled her eardrums with a peculiar ring before the sting of the blow struck her consciousness. There was a subsequent volley of lashes that followed, some four or five at least, before she managed to cry out. She was stunned by how much the blows smarted, and all of her desire of just seconds before seemed to freeze in that instant. She made an effort to get up.

Jack held Pansy down with one hand on the small of her back, but he did not immediately resume the

lashes. Instead, he positioned himself so that he was straddling her, with one leg on either side of her and he grasped her hair again and gently pulled her head back so that he could look down into her face.

“You can’t leave before you get everything you came here for, Pansy,” he said in a surprisingly composed voice. He paused to scan the contents of the floor all around her and picked up something near her leg before continuing in the same matter-of-fact tone. “And whether you realize it or not,” he said, “this is part of what you came here for.” At this point he began, ever so gently, stuffing Pansy’s panties into her mouth. Her eyes grew even wider at this, so he explained, as if as a side note, “This is just to cut down on the noise. Okay?”

There was nothing in Pansy’s experience to come close to preparing her for the sharp thrill that shot through her when she heard these words from Jack, so, without even considering what they meant, she found herself vigorously nodding her head in agreement. Jack kept pressing her panties between her lips until her mouth was forced wide open. She continued to stare up at him in wide-eyed astonishment.

“Now, Pansy,” he resumed calmly, “you have done nothing but put yourself down all the way over here, remember?” Pansy merely stared at him.

“Remember?” he repeated more forcefully. She nodded, but only because she realized he expected her to.

“Good,” he said. “I’m glad you remember that. Because that is what you did. You said awful things about yourself. Think about it. You said all those things because deep down you want to be punished. He looked down into her face expectantly after saying this. With one hand Jack held Pansy’s head back so that he could see her face. With his other hand he began to gently caress her cheek. Pansy’s mind was starting to work again. She tried to recall what she had said. It was not unusual for her to put herself down; she did it continually. But her mind balked at the idea that she wanted to be punished. On the contrary, she had always believed her self-deprecating comments were designed to forestall others from drawing the same conclusions. When she was hard on herself it seemed others were prompted to contradict her.

Jack could see by her expression that she was considering what he had said, so he continued. His voice was soothing. “When you’re punished for something you don’t like about yourself, it makes it better. For some reason these words sent conflicting sensations simultaneously rippling through her; one of panic, the other of arousal. “You’ll see,” he concluded, keeping a tight hold of her hair to keep her from squirming as he picked up the belt and resumed the quick, steady lashes over her buttocks and thighs.

Stinging pain and mortification came in a brutal downpour that lasted for several moments; long minutes where Pansy forgot her arousal and her nudity and her guilt and every other thing that had been a part of her consciousness before. Initially she felt something akin to hysteria, and was even overcome with an urge to erupt into wild laughter. But quickly her laughter turned into sobs, and the hysteria faded away in the sharp reality of the all-consuming pain and heat spreading through her. At one point she became immersed in her efforts to escape the lashes, but upon the realization that she could not evade them she gradually accepted them, and in the end she was consumed with merely enduring the harsh onslaught with the anticipation that it would eventually come to an end. And although she had ceased her efforts to escape, her hips bobbed and jiggled rebelliously, seemingly

an effort to predict where the next lash would fall and futilely attempting to dodge her assailant's level eye. The skin of her backside burned hotter and hotter with every blow and Pansy could do little more than squirm and cry out in muffled sobs. The beating continued until Pansy was conscious of nothing but the searing pain that lit up her flesh like wildfire.

Then quite abruptly the blows stopped, and Jack dropped the belt on the floor beside her. Pansy's eyes were still wide and frantic, and her hips continued to move in the rhythmic motion of her struggle. She was breathing heavily from her exertions and her gasps for air mingled with her muffled sobs. Jack pulled her head back again until her eyes met his, and she suddenly became still and ceased her crying. Even her tears seemed to halt on her cheeks. They stared at each other for a long moment. She felt as if he was observing her from within. He leaned closer and tenderly kissed her wet cheek.

"You took that well," he said gently. Something within Pansy jolted, but outwardly she merely continued to stare silently into his eyes. His other hand began moving lightly over her blazing haunches. She couldn't contain a slight moan when he touched the tender flesh. There was a strange combination of disbelief and acute attentiveness all around her and she struggled to ascertain what was real. Jack caressed her bottom thoughtfully, moving his fingers tentatively over the rising welts on her flesh. Very leisurely he let his fingers roam all around the area, and eventually he slipped a finger between the two round mounds of her buttocks, sliding it up and down along her crack. He slowly continued guiding his finger up and down; extending the span with every stroke until at last he reached her labia lips and pressed a few fingers into their silky folds. His fingers slipped in easily and Jack thrust them in and out brusquely, reveling in her soaking wetness, and accentuating the slopping sounds to add emphasis to his next remark. "You see," he said, "how much you wanted that?"

Pansy simply stared up at him. She felt as if she was drugged. Her flesh ached more acutely where he fingered her playfully than where the swollen welts still raged. She felt a slight tugging in the back of her head where he still held her by the hair. "Do you see that, Pansy?" he asked her again.

She could not speak through the panties in her mouth. The pain of the lashing was subsiding into a achingly hot tenderness that pulled at her womb and spread warmth throughout her lower body. Slowly she nodded. This simple admission caused her swollen sex glands to contract. Jack felt the contraction with his fingers.

"You're really a very good girl," he said huskily, causing more of the little contractions, and making her engorged sex sting. Jack's fingers moving in and out of her only managed to tantalize, not satisfy. "We could take your punishment one step further, Pansy," he murmured. Her eyes were still fixed on his, and they widened slightly when she heard his words. "This time it's up to you," he assured her quickly. Her eyes bored into his. "I know your bottom hurts," he continued. "I can see that it hurts because it's so red and hot and swollen." Again he caressed her burning flesh. "But in order to get the full amount of pleasure—to get what you need from it, Pansy—you have to want it. You have to want it so much you'll beg for it." Pansy closed her eyes when she heard this. She dreaded what she was about to do even though she had no doubt that she would do it. How could she stop this now? Wasn't she already here, naked, on her hands and knees, getting carpet burn on a dirty hotel-room floor, with a virtual stranger, having already given him more of herself than she had ever shared with her husband? The most difficult part—the part where she'd agreed to come here with Jack in the first place—was over and done. To stop now would be to go home with all the guilt and none of the satisfaction. She could do no less than to see it through to the end.

Besides all of this, Pansy had never been so aroused in her life, and she knew that some small part of her really did want this. She opened her eyes. Jack was still watching her intently. She nodded her head in the affirmative. She saw him smile and felt a brand-new thrill of fear. He carefully removed the panties from her mouth. "Well?" he prompted.

"I...want it," she said, self-conscious. Her mouth was very dry.

"Ask for it."

"Will you punish me again?" she asked, feeling her face burn. But her eyes didn't look away from him.

"Beg for it, Pansy."

She paused only a moment before continuing awkwardly. "Please...Jack...please punish me again. Punish me harder this time!" And suddenly she meant it. Her hips were already swaying back and forth in anticipation of the blows to come.

"It will hurt more this time, Pansy," he said, looking to subjugate her a little more with every word. "Your flesh is raw from the punishment I already gave you. Are you sure you want more?"

Pansy faltered, recalling the pain. Jack smiled to see her hesitation. He wanted her broken. She began to tremble. He waited patiently for her answer.

"I'm sure, Jack," Pansy said after another moment. And all of a sudden, she was sure, even yearning for what was to come. "Please, Jack, please! I need you to punish me some more." She was overjoyed when she saw that he was pleased by her words.

"It will be good after, Pansy," he told her, stuffing the panties back into her mouth. He paused to touch her face affectionately. "I promise you that."

Her sex felt as if it was consuming her. She braced herself for the blows to come. He had not lied. The pain was twice as intense when it was inflicted on her raw flesh. Her hips bounced and jerked miserably as the blows fell over them and the flames of pain licked up along the length of her. She cried out and thrashed with all her might, knowing no one but Jack could hear or see her, and that pleased him to see her so. In her wild abandon and absolute suffering she felt as if she was being released from something terrible, even though the incredible pain and heat was virtually consuming her.

Pansy was nearly beside herself by the time the second beating finally stopped and Jack threw down the belt for a second time. Without a word he immediately began removing his clothes. Her hips continued to rock back and forth and she moaned absently. She had rested her head on her arms, and gradually became quiet as it occurred to her that the worst was finally over. Her buttocks were rutted and inflamed and quivering. Her mouth was still held open wide with the panties. When Jack approached her she looked up at his hard, throbbing sex in wonder.

"Keep your head down," he said hoarsely, adding approvingly when she complied, "Good girl. Now bring your hips up nice and high for me...higher." He guided her hips up so high that she was obliged to unbend her knees and distribute her weight between her hands and feet. "That's it," she heard him

murmur, and at long last she felt the hard length of him slide easily into her aching hole.

“Mmmhhh,” she moaned, shuddering, and she heard his responding moan mingled with laughter.

“I’ve never seen anyone need a spanking that badly,” he said, driving into her with hard and rapid thrusts. “You must have been really bad to need all that punishing.”

“I...am,” she tried to tell him though her words were garbled. She enjoyed these kinds of demeaning innuendos while in the throes of passion, and wanted to encourage him to continue in the same vein.

“Did you need to be punished because you’re an adulterous whore?” he asked, pounding himself even more violently into her. He found this kind of talk exciting, as well.

“Yes!” she cried unintelligibly, slipping her fingers over her clitoris.

“That’s it,” he coaxed when he noticed her arm reaching between her legs to touch herself. “No need to be shy with old Jack. I know what cheating sluts like you like even better than you know yourself. He could see his words were exciting her even more. He wanted to hear more of her replies. “Have you ever been spanked like that before?” he asked her.

“No.”

“Your husband doesn’t spank you like you deserve?” he queried, thrusting harder and harder.

“No,” she choked out again.

“But you deserved it, didn’t you, Pansy?” he asked.

“Yes,” she cried out. Her fingers were enthusiastically rubbing her clitoris.

He grasped her bright-red buttocks and began roughly kneading them with his hands as he continued to batter her with his thrusts. “You can still feel it, can’t you, Pansy?” he asked her, knowing full well by her moans that she could. She responded in the affirmative. He squeezed her buttocks harder. He saw that she liked these painful reminders by the way her movements became more and more frantic with every squeeze from his prying fingers. Seeing that she enjoyed it, Jack became increasingly cruel with her. “You’ll remember it tonight, too, when you fuck your husband, won’t you?” he asked her and when she paused over the reminder of her husband, he repeated, “Won’t you, Pansy?” It was at that moment that she climaxed, ironically, while she was crying out that she would indeed remember this later that evening when she was in bed with her husband.

Almost immediately after the last waves of pleasure passed, Pansy felt a peculiar detachment from Jack, even though he continued to drive himself into her, all the while telling her what a “cheating whore” she was. She kept her head down and pushed her hips toward him, hoping he would finish quickly. “Oh, yeah,” he groaned. “Push that pussy out for me.” And with that she at last felt him erupt inside her. Her arousal was fading fast now, with morose quickly following on its heels.

Jack remained joined with her for much longer than she would have liked him to, but finally he pulled himself out of her and went over to the bed and collapsed on top of it. She stood up, unsure of what to do next. Awkwardly, she pulled the panties out of her mouth. She realized that Jack was still watching

her when she heard him laugh. This pleased and annoyed her at the same time.

She moved with controlled calm, aware that just beneath the surface there was—lying dormant until she was alone—a wealth of recriminations and anguish over what she had just done. For the moment she walked around in a kind of daze, picking up her scattered items of clothing and clumsily putting them on. Jack merely watched her quietly from the bed.

When she was fully dressed she faced him self-consciously. In spite of her jumbled emotions she managed an awkward laugh. She waited for him to say something.

He surprised her with, “Are you okay?”

This seemed too personal somehow, so she brushed it aside with a small wave of her hand and in a shaky voice she replied, “Of course.”

He saw her discomfort. “Look, Pansy,” he told her. “I want to see you again. I like you. I know it got a little...well, let’s just say I lost my head.”

In spite of her regret Pansy felt a brand-new kindling of desire from his words. “I don’t know, Jack,” she said hesitantly. “I’ve never done anything like this before, and I feel...I feel—” She stopped, at a loss for words.

“You enjoyed it, Pansy. There’s nothing wrong in that.”

“I know,” Pansy answered quickly. She did not want to think about the things they had done and she certainly didn’t want to discuss them. “It’s not that. I mean...it’s...I don’t know what it is. I need to think.”

“I want to see you again, Pansy,” he repeated. He suddenly seemed terribly vulnerable to her.

“I have to go,” she said. She approached him on the bed where he sat watching her and lightly kissed his cheek. She wasn’t sure what else she was supposed to say or do. “Bye for now, Jack,” she said.

Once she reached the shelter of her car, Pansy slumped down and let out a long, shaky sob. She was at once assailed with so many conflicting sensations that she couldn’t even pinpoint what she actually felt. Overall there was a sensation of distress so potent it fell over her like a dark blanket of misery. She wept bitterly for several moments and then her tears stopped abruptly. As she forcibly resumed the familiar activities of her life, like turning the key in the ignition and shifting the car into Drive, she determinedly fought the revulsion that was steadily creeping over her.

“It’s going to be okay,” Pansy said out loud. “It was a onetime thing that I won’t ever do again.” She tried vigorously to pinpoint what it was that was bothering her so much. Certainly there was no love lost between her and her husband, and even more certainly there had been no real wrongdoing on her part, especially in light of her husband’s many indiscretions. And yet, this was the first time she had ever been unfaithful to him. Even so, she could not believe that the simple act of adultery, committed within such a marriage as theirs, could bring about such anguish. She was actually feeling afraid; but of what? Images of her affair with Jack kept tumbling into her consciousness and, though she recoiled at the reminders, when she forced her mind to receive them she found that they still had the power

arouse her. Yet this realization only seemed to make her feel worse. How could she have allowed herself to be treated that way? How could she have begged for it like she did? She could still feel the wetness of her panties from having held them in her mouth for so long and her revulsion and fear returned. Was she depraved?

On a deeper level that she could not yet dwell upon, Pansy faintly acknowledged that she had never felt such pleasure as she had with Jack. She continued to scrutinize her feelings over the matter as she drove home, struggling to achieve some sense of calm before having to face her husband. This mere contemplation of her husband brought forth such a sense of panic that she nearly lost control of the car. Her mind had only to mingle the thought of her husband with the memories of that afternoon and it put her in a state of absolute terror. She knew well how abominable the things she had done with Jack would be to her husband. Were he to find out, he would most certainly destroy her. This, then, was the primary source of her fear. Anger came at her from every direction at the realization. Yet she whispered frantically, over and over again, "He must never find out!"

When at last she arrived home, Pansy appeared calm, except for a slight trembling. She entered the house tentatively. Tom was there. She could hear his voice, loud and argumentative, as he shouted objections at someone, most likely over the telephone. She was still steeped in morbid fear and regret and longed for a hot shower. She dreaded seeing Tom more than usual, but oddly enough, the sight of him as she paused in the doorway of his office, slumped in his chair, angry and arrogant and bitter seemed to fully exonerate her of any culpability. She struggled to wipe the grimace from her features as she stared silently at him, recalling absently how her mother once warned her that frowning might make her face stay that way. She intended to move away from the doorway before capturing his attention but, like a bystander at a gruesome accident, she couldn't seem to pull herself away.

"Tapes malfunction every day," he was saying to the person on the other line.

Especially when you're around, Pansy thought.

She reflected that she felt different. Perhaps what she had done today had changed her somehow. But if she had changed, Tom had not. He was the same self-absorbed, miserable bastard. He looked up suddenly, barely registering her presence before proceeding to look through her as if she were no more than a picture on the wall.

"Yeah, yeah," he said into the phone. "You act like this bum deserves the royal treatment of something. He's the scum of the earth."

Innocent until proven guilty, Pansy thought.

Tom slammed down the receiver suddenly and immediately launched into a tirade, addressing her seemingly, but nevertheless oblivious of her.

"Goddamn paperwork is going to keep me up all night," he said. "They need to decide if they want me to sit around dotting i's and crossing t's, or if they want me to get out there and serve and protect." This was a familiar theme for him, but by now it was glaringly plain to Pansy that by "dotting i's and crossing t's," Tom was not referring to some pointless red tape but, rather, he spoke of the actual tasks involved in investigating a crime—tasks which Tom felt he was above having to perform. He relied solely on his instincts when he decided whose rights to violate, and those instincts had been schooled

over the years with the various prejudices he had acquired, all of which he considered “intelligence and which rarely coincided with the evidence that kept cropping up to make him look bad. The appropriate processing of evidence was a thorn in his side, and those who pressed for details were, to him, troublemakers.

Pansy knew from experience that Tom particularly disliked being disagreed with.

She warred with the muscles in her face that were reflexively assuming an expression of acute contempt. “They don’t appreciate you,” she muttered perfunctorily, but her lips and tongue cringed over the words, and they came out sounding like an accusation.

“Damn right, they don’t,” he said, looking directly at her then, perhaps to see if there was any insincerity in her remark; for if he had any sense of reality he would never be able to trust such a comment. He got up and stretched. Pansy’s eyes moved over him, noting with loathing the way his ill-fitting uniform emphasized the unsightly bulges that stretched out across his abdomen and hips, giving him an androgynous appearance from the waistline to his thighs. She wondered if he had ever actually physically pursued a suspect and then, quite unexpectedly, a small snort of laughter burst from between her lips. She immediately covered over it with a cough.

Feeling compelled to say something in the silence that followed, Pansy asked, “Is this the same case you’ve been working on all week?”

Tom let out a long sigh. “Yeah...the Foreman case. This new jackass at the D.A.’s office keeps sending it back to me...finding things to nitpick over.” Pansy had no doubt that the “things to nitpick over” were really holes in the case—holes that the former district attorney would have ignored, pressing forward blindly only to push for a plea in the end. That way everyone came out a winner. Everyone except the accused, that is—if he or she was innocent. And what were the chances of that?

“What’s the matter this time?” Pansy asked, stalling until she could find the right moment to escape. She wondered that he didn’t notice how different she was. She was certain she must look different. But then, even she couldn’t identify what it was exactly that had changed about her. All she knew for certain was that she had changed. She shuddered. Tom went on, oblivious of any change. He was oblivious of her, she realized suddenly.

“This D.A. actually accused me of harassment!” he said, thrilled for an audience to talk to, even if it was only Pansy. “He just won’t accept the fact that the guy is guilty.”

“What did he do?”

“He killed his wife!” Tom said, looking at her as if to say, How do you like that? “He killed his goddamn wife!”

She wondered. It was one thing to accuse someone of murder; it was another entirely to prove it. Coming from Tom she found it hard to believe. She felt an instinctive aversion to the positions he took on nearly everything now. She wondered about this new district attorney. She secretly admired him. So, he refused to play ball? Well, that was refreshing. Although, she knew from experience that the D.A. would eventually come around. They always did.

She watched Tom, mesmerized, as he poured out his troubles with the case to her. She struggled to find any redeemable qualities in him but failed. She wondered why she married him. Poor, impotent, misunderstood Tom! She pitied the people he came up against, and another wave of fear and dread came over her. Thank heavens he hardly ever noticed her. He had no inkling whatsoever that less than an hour earlier she had been in a hotel room, groveling on her hands and knees, begging to be beaten with a belt.

Finally Tom wound down enough for her to make a graceful escape, which she did with a sigh of relief. A sense of guilt lingered over her, gaining strength with each little pang of discomfort that reminded her of her time with Jack. She pondered over the guilt for a moment; she thought she had gotten over that in the car. It occurred to her that the guilt was for herself, not Tom. The love between her and Tom had been gone for many years now, but she had stayed, and this suddenly bothered her. Yet how could she leave? As inept as he was at everything else, Tom did manage to somehow keep a roof over her head. She was certain she could not manage as well on her own. Things were difficult enough as they were. It seemed to her that this was an impossible world to survive in all alone, and it seemed more difficult every day. In the event of a divorce, Tom, with his connections, would see to it that she got nothing. She would have to start over from scratch. Who would take care of her? She thought about Jack and shuddered. There was nowhere for her to go.

But the thought of Jack lingered and grew stronger. Little flashbacks of what he had done to her kept playing themselves out in her mind, giving her almost as much pleasure as the actual events had. The memories sent simultaneous surges of shock and excitement through her. But what shocked her the most was Jack's interest in her to begin with. Why had he chosen her? She knew there was nothing remotely outstanding about her. Most men didn't even notice her. She had never possessed any one particular characteristic that drew them to her, but then again, she didn't feel she was especially unattractive either. There were things that she saw in herself that she felt were overlooked...perhaps Jack saw these things, too. She recalled how persistent he had been with her when they met. He had approached her quite unexpectedly in the coffee shop just around the corner from where she lived. She had gone there every morning for years, and then one day he was there. She noticed him immediately because he was the first patron of the bustling little shop ever to notice her. His eyes were always on her when she happened to glance at him, and he smiled unabashedly when she caught him staring. It was Pansy who would, at these moments, look quickly and guiltily away.

It took only a few mornings of this before Pansy and Jack began exchanging small greetings of acquaintance, such as a smile and nod of the head, or a quick "good morning." Pansy was curious about him but had no thoughts of satisfying her curiosity. Soon Jack began talking to her while they waited together in line, which he would unapologetically saunter into at whatever place Pansy held her. He did this so casually that no one thought to question him, least of all Pansy. He would lean in and say confidential things in a low voice meant for her ears only. Sometimes he made comments about the other customers in the shop and other times he would tell her little things about himself. The comments, made in hushed tones, seemed inordinately intimate to her and she became more and more certain as the days went by that he was propositioning her. Yet she couldn't quite believe this could be true, and later, reflecting upon it, she would actually laugh at herself. But the next morning there Jack would be, standing so close that she could feel the heat of him as he commented on something so innocent enough in and of itself, but in a tone and manner that once again had her pondering over his meaning.

One morning Pansy impulsively voiced her conclusions about his behavior.

“Why are you flirting with me?” she asked him.

“I don’t know,” he admitted with a laugh. “All I know is that I want to do things to you.” Those words spoken in his low, determined tone while his eyes were boring into hers, had been her undoing. Although she managed somehow to resist a few more of his advances, she knew the moment he had uttered those words that she would not be able to rest until he had done whatever “things” it was that he wanted to do with her. And aside from her bursting curiosity over what those things might be, the fact that he wanted to do things at all, and that his mind had even conjured up the things to begin with, had been a copious feast for her undernourished sense of self.

Pansy stood under the hot water in her shower as her thoughts volleyed back and forth between Jack and Tom, exhausting her with the conflicting feelings both men aroused. She felt a kind of ecstatic horror when her fingers first identified the welts Jack left on her buttocks and thighs, which brought with it a wave of exhilaration so unsettling that she had to brace herself against the wall of the shower to keep from falling down. God forbid that Tom should come rushing to her aid if she did fall, only to discover those welts. This brought her thoughts back to Tom with annoyance. And all of these sentiments only left her feeling more confused when she reluctantly turned off the quickly cooling water and stepped out of the shower. She dried off and shrouded herself in her most matronly nightgown.

For a reprieve, Pansy’s thoughts wandered to the case Tom was working on. She wondered about the man he accused of murder and she found herself once again ticking through Tom’s many faults. It annoyed her that he could sit there and complain about having to produce more evidence when he was so likely in the wrong. Once she might have debated the matter with him; but now she knew only too well what it would cost to disagree with anything he said. Tom did not like to be crossed. He could never bear to have any negative suggestion made against him. Strange then, how casually he was able to point his finger at others, especially when he had the power to actually destroy their lives when he did so. She thought about the man who Tom was so rigidly pursuing. Tom had ranted and raved about the difficulties he was having with the case, but he had never mentioned a single fact that proved the man had committed murder. Did the man he accused really kill his wife? Was Tom actually right for once? After all these years with Tom, Pansy had difficulty imagining Tom being right about anything. How could he be? He had absolutely no relationship with the truth. He despised all forms of it, and even lied to himself, regularly and perpetually. He rarely looked at any single thing objectively. But thinking of Tom for too long acted on Pansy’s mind like a depressant. She forced him from her consciousness as she nestled down in their bed, where she let Jack once again creep into her thoughts.

Pansy asked herself what it was about Jack that caused her to think of him so often in the short time that she had known him. He was the opposite of Tom in every way. Lean and strong, with raven hair and coloring to match, he was all at once to Pansy beauty and danger and excitement. Dark and baleful, it was difficult to know what he was thinking. He did not whine and complain, as Tom often did. He was mysterious and perhaps a little treacherous. But to Pansy’s mind he could not be cruel or evil. He was not empty; he was closed, and there was a difference. Tom, for all his ranting and raving, hid a hard, malicious soul. Pansy laughed at herself suddenly. Here she was, defending Jack, as if it mattered. She would likely never hear from him again. Or worse, she would see him at the coffee shop and he would completely ignore her. And yet, she wondered. How could their experience together have

changed her so much without having any effect on him?

Pansy was still awake hours later when she heard Tom approach their bedroom, but she quickly rolled onto her side, facing away from his side of the bed, and feigned sleep. Tom shuffled around in the dark room, clumsily undressing. The bed groaned under his heavy weight. Pansy sighed.

Suddenly and unexpectedly Tom's hands were all over her, tugging at her nightgown awkwardly. Surprised, Pansy sprung around and rolled onto her back before his hands could reach her swollen buttocks. She wondered over his untimely advances. He had not touched her in months. Perhaps he had sensed a change in her after all...

Tom was still struggling ineffectually with her nightgown, so Pansy raised her hips to make it easier for his bungling hands. When she was bared from the waist down, she mechanically raised and opened her legs for him as he approached. He began thrusting himself at her, doubly annoying her because, as usual, he had made no preparations or allowances for her to accept him and, even worse, he wasn't even anywhere near the point of entry where he was blindly and stubbornly jabbing forward. Was he ever able to get any single thing right? she wondered with exasperation.

Pansy reached down and grasped hold of Tom's penis with exasperation, maneuvering it so that at the very least it would have a place to go when he thrust forward again. The lack of foreplay did not overly disturb her because thoughts of Jack had kept her in a continuous state of arousal and wetness since she left him. Tom groaned in surprise when he felt how wet she was. He automatically assumed that he was the cause of her excitement; just as he automatically assumed it was her own failure when it was otherwise. But he was genuinely pleased by her wetness, whatever the cause, and it increased his excitement as he began pounding himself into her. This conclusion to the events of her day had a strange effect on Pansy. Thoughts of her affair mingled with her absolute hatred for Tom to create an effect that suddenly seemed terribly exciting. She moved her hips rhythmically beneath him so that her clitoris rubbed against his body, further surprising and delighting him. "Pansy," he moaned, slowing his thrusts and switching gears suddenly from merely using her body to making love to her. She preferred the feeling of being used by him, however, and his sudden gentle lovemaking quieted her passion considerably and, even worse, brought out more feelings of guilt. It occurred to her that her feelings were always subject to the actions of the people around her. She tried desperately to simply enjoy the rare moment of mutual goodwill between her and her husband, but it was no good. She was too aware of the man that Tom was, panting and sweating copiously from the simple exertions of ordinary lovemaking while his flab battered her from above. She bit her lip and wished for it to be over.

At the coffee shop the following morning Jack strolled confidently into line next to her, standing so close that his hand could lightly brush the small of her back without anyone around them noticing. She was shamefully relieved and delighted to see him.

"I can't stop thinking about you," he murmured, leaning in so his warm breath touched her ear as he spoke. As improbable as his words seemed to her mind, her heart clung to them fiercely.

"Me, too," she whispered breathlessly. Her heart pounded. Why me? she kept wondering.

“This afternoon,” he said.

“Oh...I don't know...” She paused. So soon? The welts still hurt. And while the memories kept her in a constant state of arousal, the thought of actually doing those things again frightened her.

“This afternoon, Pansy,” he repeated more firmly. A thrill shot through the center of her.

“Okay,” she agreed with equal parts exhilaration and apprehension.

She walked around the next few hours in a fog. She could think of nothing but seeing Jack again. She whiled away the hours in a fever, trying to occupy the time in between. One of the things she found to do was to bring her husband and his cronies lunch at the police station.

Pansy's excitement was palpable when she stepped into the precinct where Tom worked. He had been pleased by her generous offer to bring him lunch, but did not wonder too much over it, taking it in stride as his due. It didn't even occur to him to wonder if her exuberant smile and starry expression was for anyone other than himself.

Pansy tried to appear unperturbed, but her mind had difficulty staying on what she was doing. Tom and his friends noticed this only so far as the inconvenience they felt that their sandwiches were a bit mixed up. Pansy merely laughed when they pointed out her mistakes. But in a sudden instant her laughter died and her face went slack. The men around her did not even notice the alteration in her expression, preoccupied as they were with getting their lunches in order.

Pansy's gaze landed on a photo lying on Tom's desk. Jack's face stared up at her. A strange sense of unreality came over her. Random thoughts flitted through her mind as she struggled to achieve a blank expression. After several moments she attempted to speak.

“Who's that?” she asked no one in particular, pointing at the picture of Jack.

“That's him,” Tom replied with his mouth full of food. A clump of something greenish in color flew from his mouth and landed on Jack's face. “That's John Foreman, the wife killer.”

“Oh,” Pansy said. Of course it is, she thought. She had a strange urge to throw her head back and laugh hysterically.

“Tried to make it look like an accident, but I have no doubt he killed her,” her husband continued. As she looked at her husband she distracted herself by wondering why he always began a new sentence after taking a huge bite of food. She looked again at the picture of Jack. The green glob on his cheek made him seem rather pitiable. Thoughts raced through her mind. One carried the realization that this was not coincidence that brought her and Jack together. And yet, her heart rejected this.

Still, the more serious issue was that Jack was accused of murder. She wondered why this wasn't her primary concern. If it were anyone else but Tom accusing Jack perhaps it would bother her more, but knowing Tom as she did, it was hard to give the accusation credence.

She was less than an hour away from her meeting with Jack. What if Tom was actually right for once? What if Jack really was a killer? Was it even safe for her to meet him alone in a hotel room? No one else in the world would know where she was. Thoughts kept pouring through her mind in frantic

disarray. Always uppermost among them was the question of why Jack had pursued her to begin with. ~~Had he approached her because she was the wife of his accuser? What did he ultimately want from her?~~ This, more than anything else—even the potential danger she was in—filled her with an overwhelming sense of despair. She sat down in a nearby chair, suddenly weary. All of the energy and happiness of only moments before had vanished.

Tom and his companions had continued talking, oblivious of any change whatsoever in Pansy.

“He’s a clever one,” Tom was saying. “I’ll give him that. Always covers his tracks.”

“You’ll get the bastard,” one of the others chirped in.

Pansy only half listened, concentrating all her efforts on breathing evenly. It was a struggle to remain composed. She tried to soothe herself out of the overwhelming confusion. Why should she care what Jack’s motives were in seeing her anyway? What was he to her? But an all-consuming sense of hopelessness enveloped her. Nothing good ever came to her. Everything was suspect. She looked at Tom with perverse loathing. Everything associated with him brought her anguish, she thought unreasonably. She wished fervently that he was dead. As was her habit during these crucially unhappy moments of her life, she distracted herself by pondering her husband’s existence, finding comfort in conjuring up reasons why Tom might in all likelihood die an early death. It seemed not only probable but inevitable. There were so many factors in favor of it, and it gave her hope to go over them methodically and analytically. Why, his very position as a police officer was purported to put his life at risk, although Pansy could not imagine him ever being heroic or anything like that. More likely his arrogant disregard for the rights of others would eventually anger someone enough to provoke violence. But there were many other risks to Tom’s life that she had found to deliberate over. On that occasion, as she watched him practically inhale his sandwich, she found herself wondering how it was possible that Tom’s arteries, which by now had to be lined with numerous residual coagulations from years of habitual ingestion of every sort of saturated fat, never managed to halt the flow of blood and end his miserable life. How much longer could they hold out? Even as she thought these thoughts, she noticed all around his desk evidence of his slovenly eating habits, including several stale donuts and wrappers from fast-food restaurants. And yet, there he stood, ranting and raving like a healthy young toddler; pudgy and dimply and ruddy. His continued good health seemed a personal affront to her.

Pansy glanced at the clock and wondered what she should do. It seemed obvious now that Jack was only using her, but she still wanted to see him. Once again she blamed Tom, who had created in her such a desperate hunger for affection that she would crave the touch of any man who would have her. She couldn’t bring herself to listen to Tom and the other overstuffed peacocks of his precinct for another instant so she abruptly stood up and left the police station.

Although Pansy counted numerous reasons not to, she found herself hastening to get to the hotel room Jack had reserved for them, and when she arrived she was breathless and trembling with desire. In her present state of mind she wondered if she should even mention what she had discovered. She was terrified of losing whatever it was that brought Jack into her life, and suddenly it didn’t matter what it was. She was deeply troubled as she tapped lightly on the hotel-room door, and in the next moment when she looked into Jack’s dark, troubled eyes she started to cry.

“I was at the police station before I came here,” she blurted out. “My husband is a cop. But you already knew that.” She sobbed miserably as the words spilled impulsively from her lips.

Jack didn't move or speak. He only smiled. Pansy was taken aback by this at first, but then she felt relieved. ~~She couldn't have borne it if he had made up an obvious lie. She stopped crying and looked at him.~~ Ruefully she succumbed to the slight pulling sensation at the corners of her mouth and dumbly returned his smile, but she said, "You have nothing to say?"

"What would you like me to say, Pansy?"

She would have liked him to say that he actually liked her in spite of everything else. She would have liked to hear that he had enjoyed being with her the day before and especially that he wanted to be with her again in the future. "Why?" she asked him. She was terribly afraid he would say the wrong thing.

Jack laughed at her. "Would you believe me if I told you that my dealings with your husband are purely coincidental and have nothing to do with us meeting each other?"

"No," but she was pleased by the manner in which he asked her this.

He moved closer to her, approaching cautiously. "Would you believe that I saw you with him once and couldn't get you out of my head?"

"Definitely not," she replied with outright laughter this time.

He became serious all of a sudden, standing very close to her and looking down into her face. He reached out a hand and lifted a lock of her hair. He held it a moment, seemingly studying it. Pansy was absurdly flattered by the gesture. She waited breathlessly for what he would do or say next.

"Would you believe..." he continued contemplatively as he played with her hair, "that I thought you deserved a little happiness being married to a prick like him?"

"Well, maybe you thought that...but I find it hard to believe that was your reason for...being with me."

"Does the reason matter so much?"

She paused, afraid to fully expose herself to him. "No," she sighed. "The reason doesn't matter. Only that you actually want to be with me, and not just for revenge."

He dropped her hair suddenly and grasped her hand, placing it firmly over his groin. She quivered when she felt his hardness. "Does that feel like revenge?"

"Because my husband can never find out about us," she continued.

A small, almost imperceptible change came over Jack's face when she said this. All the humor left his expression and he looked at Pansy with a mixture of irritation and indifference. The irritation did not bother her half as much as the indifference. She wished they could put this behind them and begin on a different note.

"Look, Jack," she began.

“What if I told you that your husband is going to find out about us?” he said spitefully. “I mean, what am I supposed to do with the video of us if I can’t show it to your husband?”

Cold steel seemed to close over Pansy’s heart when she heard his words. It was suddenly difficult for her to breathe.

“You’re lying,” she choked out.

“Am I?”

She looked around the room. There was no evidence of a camera anywhere, but she realized it would most likely be hidden. It occurred to her that both hotel rooms had been secured by Jack before she had arrived.

“I’m leaving.” But she couldn’t bring herself to move. Her eyes were wide with fear.

“Pansy, Pansy, Pansy,” Jack said then, all of a sudden smiling again. His anger had abated as quickly as it had appeared and he was once again good-humored and charming. “You’re so much fun to tease,” he said smoothly. “There’s no video of us. I wouldn’t want to be caught in a video like that any more than you would.” He began to laugh wholeheartedly, as if at the absurdity of her believing such a thing. But Pansy was deeply shaken.

“I don’t like that kind of teasing,” she said, upset. Her excitement had been squelched as thoroughly as embers doused with ice water.

“Then you shouldn’t be so naive and trusting,” he said with cheerful finality. The subject was abruptly closed and Jack was determined to move past it. He approached Pansy again and this time he put his hands on either side of her face, holding her just below the jawline in a firm but gentle caress. Her breathing stopped at the intense longing that came over her from this simple contact. She gazed up at him in abject adoration mingled with anguish. He appeared to her as a sumptuous feast, perhaps a poisonous feast; but like an animal, wild and starving, she would devour every last morsel to his gluttonous death. Jack saw the blatant hunger in her eyes and it caused the blood to rush to his groin in a violent surge. He continued to stroke the sides of her face with his thumbs. “Should you?” he whispered huskily.

Pansy was beside herself with a wish to appease him. “No, I guess I shouldn’t,” she whispered back although she had forgotten the question. She felt weak and somewhat foolish, too. She vaguely wondered if Jack found her lack of self-control contemptible. But at that moment, there was such a look of tender passion in his eyes that it startled her. She looked away from him, saying, “I feel like a fool.”

“You’re no fool,” Jack told her adamantly. He held her face in both his hands and forced her to look at him again. His expression was grave. “No woman has ever revealed her feelings so openly, right there on her face, with me before, Pansy,” he told her. “It’s truly humbling, and I’m the one who acted like a fool.” Pansy was stunned by Jack’s admission and silently waited for his next move, floating helplessly in a deep sea of arousal, and knowing no relief without him.

Jack continued to lightly caress Pansy’s face as he went on talking to her, moving leisurely over her

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