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## Keaton: Why I Can't Buy Drugs in Alchua County

### WHY I CAN'T BUY DRUGS IN ALACHUA COUNTY

Kymerly Keaton

Three and a half minutes before we get thrown out of Gyration X because my friend Briana kisses the dancer on her lap, Tanzy is on her hands and knees in front of me, wearing a black leather G-string with faux zebra trim, rolling her head with her eyes closed. Her preternaturally blond hair swishes against my lips, and when her head is down I can see that with her back arched this way her tan ass looks round and perfect, all the tiny flaws smoothed by her position. Even though I am fifteen pounds away from perfection and prefer to have sex with the lights off, I want to be her, shed fat and inhibitions and shiver onstage with the attentions of all these hot eyes.

Tanzy's knees flatten the dollars I have laid on the stage as she moves closer. Her lips twist in a nasty smile that manages to be both sexy and cruel, and then she bends down and mouths my left breast so delicately that she could be a ghost, intangible as rumor. At first it's as if she is sipping at my nipple, and then she nips and twists, and I wonder again if the dancers are as bold with men. Someday I'll have to ask Keith. Someday I'll have to come clean.

Tanzy lifts her head and stares at me.

So you're Jess, she says, from three inches away, you're the one.

I have less than a second to wonder what kind of crazy stripper talk this is before Tanzy puts her arms on my shoulders and swings her ten pounds of hair back and then forward; her hair covers both our faces, tents us in a safe, scented, private space. I turn my head sideways to see how Briana reacts to Tanzy practically in my lap, but Bri has her own lap full of Athena, and then I can't see through the heavy blond curtain, and then Tanzy grabs my chin and forces my face forward. Our foreheads touch. Our lips are an inch apart, her long nails pinch my skin, and I am more intimidated than turned on.

Four four eight—two three four nine, she breathes, right into

my face. She smells outrageously of mint and chamomile, like she's been steeping in Sleepy Time tea backstage.

It seems stupid, insulting to tell her that I only come to watch, to be immoral support for my lesbian friends. And to score drugs from the bar manager.

Oh, I'm not—

She releases me and flips her hair back into place, rocks back on her ass, flips an ankle around my neck. Everyone can see us. Everyone is looking. Men have moved closer to watch Tanzy work me; I can feel them stare as if glances had tongues and touch, and suddenly I am tingling, tight nipples and all, for the first time tonight. Please, god, I think, please don't let this end. In the chair beside me Briana laughs out loud and says Baby, I fuckin' love you.

You don't get it, Tanzy says. Still in her stripper voice, something she bought along with those six-inch spike heels at an expensive boutique, something that comes in Husky or Breathless.

Shut up and listen, she says. I'm fucking your husband. Call me tomorrow and I'll prove it.

She repeats her number, asks me if I have that, and before I can change my tune from But I'm not a lesbian to But I'm not married, Tanzy's ankle is gone and she is five feet away arranging herself for another sucker with a fistful of dollars. She knows what poses make her perfect. She knows how to spread and flex and stretch, how to present, how to arrange and exhibit, and I want to learn this, want to look like this, want men to look at me the way they look at Tanzy.

I repeat Tanzy's number to myself and look around to see if anyone is still watching me, but the audience has slipped away. The lack of attention feels draining, depressing, like when I eat too much X and I'm waiting, hoping, but the last pill doesn't get me high.

Before I can reach into my purse for a pen Briana laughs, says I know, I know, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, ouch, and then we are both marching quickly, bouncer-speed, towards the side door.

Outside, I glare while Bri lights up a cigarette, wipes a hand across her forehead, feigns exhaustion.

What? she asks me. She kissed me first. All I did was kiss her back.

Briana is the kind of person to give in to the power of a moment; her philosophy pretty much allows her to sacrifice an entire evening for a single kiss. Her lipstick is smeared and her tight skirt is still hiked high on one thigh. I reach down and straighten her out. We are in an alley beside the club, facing a closed door with no handle.

You silly dyke, I tell her, you got us thrown out before we found drugs. It'll be a month before they let us back in here.

A couple of weeks, she says, at most. Even we can wait that long, can't we?

I put a hand on the obnoxious pink stucco of the club, close my eyes, try to feel the music beating inside of it like an electric, amplified heart. There is no vibration, nothing to make my heart beat faster. I need bright eyes and a racing pulse, I need rose-colored glasses. I need to feel the dizzy energy that seems to bring chemical clarity. I open my eyes and breathe in the soft early spring of Central Florida. I look at Bri, see that she knows the answer to her own question.

No, I say, no, we cannot.

Especially if Keith is really cheating on me. I'll need K to accept it, roofies to sleep, and X to want to go on. That might get me through the first day without him.



When Keith calls me I want to ask him if his skin aches because it hasn't pressed against mine for thirty hours, if his flight was bearable, if he'd enjoy his trip and play in the snow if I was with him. I want to tell him to pick a sexy verb and let me use it in a sexy sentence. Your turn, I want to say, my turn, your turn, switch back and forth until we are both wet, warm, languid. Satisfied as much as we can be this far apart.

But tonight it is as if three years of paranoid fantasies have come true.

So this girl I met at a club says she's having an affair with my husband, I tell him.

I'm tired of this, Jess, he says. I'll say this one more time. I have never cheated on you. I will never cheat on you. I might leave you, though. There's getting to be a lot of bullshit.

Part of me is relieved that this old issue will keep him from asking questions about the girl, the club, the circumstances I'm not ready to share. Part of me realizes I've blown it. He hates it when I do this. Hates it that I don't trust him. He might even think I've made this up.

No bullshit, I tell him, I'm just telling you about my night. Are you sure you're not fucking someone else? She seemed pretty sure.

I don't know how far I can push him before he hangs up on me, leaves his hotel room, camps out in the bar, and turns off his beeper. I have been known to beep him every ten minutes when we're fighting and he won't answer the phone. Keith doesn't believe me when I explain that all my bad behavior is compulsive and automatic, something I can't seem to change. He thinks I can do anything I want to do, tomorrow, yesterday. I am afraid that if I stay with him long enough he might convince me.

I told her she must have it wrong because I'm not married.

That's right, he says, you wouldn't tell her she must be fucking nuts because your man loves you, wants you, doesn't have any desire to stick his dick in anyone but you.

His tone excites me. He's angry, the feeling heavy enough to travel the distance between us and still have substance when it reaches me. I bury a hand between my thighs and cross my legs.

If I had a dick, I say, that's exactly how I'd feel about you. Why don't you tell me about your dick?

Don't get off on this, he says. I'm serious. I think you're always worried about me cheating on you because you're the one with the guilty conscience.

That ruins the moment, I tell him.

What moment? Have you ever cheated on me?

I hesitate before I say no, just long enough for him to notice.

Are you sure? he asks.

If watching strange women dance almost-naked under pulsing pink neon doesn't count, I'm sure. I don't say this. Keith doesn't know about the men's club.

This isn't a difficult question, Jess.

And fantasies don't count, right?

Answer me.

No. I haven't.

But you must think about it. How close have you come?

Why does he say this? What do I think about? What do I want?

Because if you didn't think about it, you wouldn't worry about me. It's yourself you can't trust.

I love it when I have to accept your whack logic, I tell him. I uncross my legs and flip off the phone with my now-free hand.

We are silent for three heart-beats longer than is comfortable. I promise myself that I will make him break the silence. Beat-beat. Beat-beat.

I love you, I say.

I love you.

Can we forget this? Can we—

I want you to marry me.

My eyebrows move upward, my eyes sting, tear from opening so wide.

Or I want to move in. One or the other. I want that level of commitment. I want to be around all the time so that you know your bullshit fantasies are just bullshit.

I make a small noise, a stutter of an exhale, to let him know that he can't possibly expect me to talk, to respond to this. I think about the drugs, all the nights I've had the lesbians, other cooks from the restaurant where I work, miscellaneous servers,

sometimes strangers, tripping, rolling, high on GHB, all K'd out, sleeping on my couch, my floor, in my bed. As long as I never ride my motorcycle fucked up, Keith doesn't disapprove, sometimes he even joins us, but will he want it where he lives?

He reminds me that he's home in three days.

Get laid, he says.

I make the oh-I-can't-speak noise, only louder this time, hard enough to start choking.

Try someone else out. Shave your legs, use condoms, get this out of your system. When you pick me up at the airport I want to be yours and I want you to be mine with no bullshit.

Are you or-elsing me? I ask him.

No, he says. But only because my balls aren't quite big enough to give you an ultimatum.



Tanzy directs me to park around the corner from her apartment and then meets me by the bike, her hands clasped in front of her as if she is going to pretend that she's shy. She stares at my motorcycle, cocks her head and looks at me, then nods, as if suddenly something makes sense.

Does that get you attention from lots of boys? she asks. She looks cute and friendly with not much make-up, baggy jeans, tight half-sweater; her boobs and flat stomach are probably always on display.

It got me the boy I have now, I tell her.

Keith makes a living designing graphics for high-end Web pages, but once a month he teaches a motorcycle safety course for beginners. I took his course about three years ago. Twice. I fell in love with Keith's garage before I fell in love with Keith; he has eight motorcycles from six countries, three continents and five decades. I've been riding ever since, picking from his garage for our weekend rides. Keith is my motorcycle hero. I want to be just like him if I grow up.

You look good on it, Tanzy says, really good. It does amazing

things for your butt.

Tanzy is so astute.

On the motorcycle correct posture puts my ass in the air, tilts it so that it's curved into a plump heart. Anyone behind me can almost but not quite see my crotch. Before I purchased my baby I rated every brand of Japanese sport bike for horsepower, brakes, reliability, comfort, and price. And then I made Keith stand behind me, beside me, in front of me, and tell me which one looked the best. The Ninja won the ass contest. Damn, baby, he'd said, they are going to look at you and think I'd fuck her if I could only catch her.

Please, I think, please please don't let him show up today.

The plan is for me to hide in Tanzy's apartment and wait for Pitt to show up. In her world, that's what this man she thinks I'm married to is calling himself. When I think about how this could go down my stomach feels like it's being dragged behind a ski-boat across a shallow reef.

Listen, I say, all my friends know just where I am today. I'm supposed to call them as soon as I'm done here.

I think about telling her I have mace in my purse but no cash, that I'm not even carrying an ATM card, but that seems over-the-top insulting.

Tanzy laughs and tells me not to worry.

Just come in and hide, she says. I want you to see him. I want you to see his face.

I'm really not married, I tell her, and my boyfriend is out of town.

Oh sure, she says, that's what he's told you.

He's registered at the hotel in New York, I tell her, I've called him there.

And I have. But only on his cell.

I end up perched on top of the dryer, Indian-style, as if I am meditating on the meaning of life or considering the existence of God instead of camping out in some stripper's laundry room, in the pitch black, nose almost touching the dusty slats of the louvered door, waiting to see if I am insane. This is moronic.



This is demeaning. Keith is in Albany, teaching state employees how to design rudimentary Web pages. I am positive that he is faithful. I am wrong and twisted to doubt him.

I can see into the sunny kitchen perfectly. I can see Pitt enter the apartment. He is pale and blond, tall. Intent and serious. More than a little sexy. He could easily play the villain in a James Bond film, minus the bizarre disfigurement.

I can watch them talk; I could probably listen. But it doesn't matter what he says to Tanzy or what she says to him. It doesn't matter that my legs are falling asleep and that I have to pee. It doesn't matter that when I tell Keith about this episode he will freak and Baker-Act my ass.

All that matters is it isn't Keith.

Not him. Not even close, I tell Tanzy after Pitt leaves.

You're kidding me, she says, her pretty face blank. That fucker.

Why exactly did you think I was his wife?

He broke up with me, she says, he just fucking dumped me. And he said that it was because of his wife. Because of you. It must be my mistake. Maybe he pointed to some woman behind you. Maybe there's another Jess.

Right, I say. He identified me by name?

And pointed you out in the club. It must just be my mistake. Now I'll have to find out who his wife really is.

So why did you tell me? I mean, why did you want to confess to this guy's wife?

I wanted him back, she says, or I wanted him in trouble. I'm not sure. I need a fucking drink.

I need to ride away on the Ninja, leave my obsessions and paranoia and distrust, escape this apartment into fast air.

Hey, Tanzy says to me before she closes the door, be careful, okay?

When I frown my confusion at her, her eyes harden and she looks away.

On that motorcycle, I mean.



Sometimes working with your best friends gets to be a bit much.

Keith will hate you forever, Briana says.

She looks up from the big silver bowl where she is turning romaine, croutons, parmesan, and Gin's homemade dressing into Caesar salad. I splash au jus over a small mound of roast beef and use my flat spatula to toy with the meat when I should just leave it alone, let it cook in its juices peacefully. The grill hisses and sizzles and hums loud enough so that I can't hear Briana's tongs scraping against the bowl, can't hear the printer spit out its tickets. The expo screams about an eight ounce filet, black and blue, solo, and I move away from Bri and towards the meat door of the fridge.

Her opinion about fidelity isn't something I trust entirely. All of her lesbian relationships are so much looser and hipper than anything I want. Half a dozen women moving in and out of each other's houses, swapping partners at parties. Orgies, I'm sure, when we have the right kinds of drugs. Probably in my bed while I'm passed out in the other room.

It's gotta be a trick, she says. I don't believe that he's just hoping that this last taste of freedom will make you want to commit.

Keith isn't like that, I tell her. He's not manipulative. And he knows me. He always says he knows me better than himself. Maybe he's right. Maybe this is what I need.

I consider the best case scenario, reach for our steak marinade, juice up the filet and grind fresh pepper blend onto its surface. I use my fingers to work the mess, massage the meat, and as I do this I start to make lists of men who I might fuck this week. The list just isn't that long, only three juicy fingers worth.

Forget it, Bri says. Heterosexuals can't handle this kind of open relationship. If you do this it will come back to bite you in the ass.

Maybe, I say. But I'm not the kind of person to say no, now am I?

I've never seen it, she says. Wanna fuck?

I'll consider it, I tell her. I'll put you on my list.

We get a little busier, but not so much that we need to call Gin in from the prep room. Bri seems to realize that I don't want to talk about Keith anymore. I enjoy moving together, working in concert without conversing, without thinking, moving efficiently, letting my hands and body do my job. I love the kitchen, love almost everything about my job. Unless I'm hung-over I even enjoy the heat.

I've always hated dealing with customers, so when I'm called out to talk to one of them I'm wary and grumpy. I put on a clean apron and my tall, stupid hat and roll down my sleeves.

The host points out the man who wants to praise me. I walk right up to the table, and Pitt is there, all alone, looking even sexier now that I am not looking at him through slats. Slightly more villainous, too.

I knew it had to be you, Jess, he says. On the grill today. Sauté, right? What an amazing steak. Perfect. The outside is seared, hard, peppery. And the inside is cool. Soft and rare.

I'm glad you enjoyed it, I tell him.

His eyes are pale – blue pretending to be gray.

You're an amazing chef, he says. I'd love to watch you cook sometime.

How do you know my name?

We have a lot of the same habits, know some of the same people. I've seen you here and there.

He lifts his coffee cup. He sips and sets it back on the table, never takes those eyes off of me.

Maybe I'll see you tomorrow night, he says. He leans back in his chair, crosses an ankle over a knee. Casual. With a half-smile that manages to look just too sexy to be sinister.

How's that? I ask. Where exactly do you know me from?

You usually go out, right? On Friday? To Gyration X? To Ellipsis?

Have we actually met?

I'm introducing myself now. Derek Pitt.

I can't even think of something semi-intelligent to say.

I know you're busy, he says, it's okay. Go on back to work.

I make a quick move towards his empty plate, to pretend there is a reason I am here. The steak is completely gone; there are only tracks where he dragged it through its sauce. He moves his hand toward mine, fast enough to touch me as I move the plate away, but stops with his fingers just an inch from my wrist. I want him to touch me. I will scream if he does.

I move quickly back into the kitchen. I want to look over my shoulder, but if I do he'll see my face, see what's going on there.

I pull the expo away from the plates she's garnishing with chopped parsley.

The one-top in smoking, I say. I need you to very carefully watch and see what kind of car he drives. Just go clean the brass or something as he's leaving and see what his car looks like.

Jesus, Jess, what the hell is wrong? she asks me.

Briana appears, asks what's going on.

That guy, I tell them, he thinks he knows me from somewhere. He's hitting on me and he creeps me out a little. I just want to see what kind of car he drives in case he's following me around.

Watching me, I think. How long have his eyes been on me?

Do you have a stalker, Jess? Mandy grins at me and wipes her hands on the apron tied around my waist before she leaves the kitchen.

He seems to know an awful lot about me, I tell Briana. He knew I'd be cooking today. He knows my name and where we go out. He says we have mutual friends.

You do have a stalker, she says.

I'm not listening to her. Not really.

He makes me weak in the knees, I say. He makes me buzz. There's some strange anatomy between my stomach and my clit that's boiling right now.

Oh, Christ, Jess. You are such a fucking freak.

It's a full rolling boil, I tell her.

Let's see, Bri says, just as Mandy swings through the door, should you fuck him, or should you call the cops?

You can't call the cops, Mandy says. This guy is a cop.

We both just stare at her.

White Caprice Classic with a couple of antennas and a DARE bumper sticker, she says.

Holy shit, I whisper.

This is exactly what I say four hours later, after my shift, standing in my own kitchen. In my absence, someone has washed all the grimy dishes that were in my sink this morning. And put them away. In the right places, no less. The red number on my digital answering machine is zero. When I left there were two messages from Keith. When he's out of town I never delete them just in case I need to hear his voice.

Above the answering machine, my calendar is flipped over from February to March; it was not that way this morning. The pin that holds it in the wall is still in its single hole. Right there on the calendar is my work schedule for this week. Tuesday prep, 1pm. Wednesday pizza-salad, 4pm. I was late because of my adventure at Tanzy's apartment. Thursday, today, sauté. Friday, sauté, 9:30 am. Gin usually gives Bri and I Saturday off, takes the day off herself. We usually need time to recover from our Friday nights.

The calendar also tells me that Keith flies in Saturday afternoon. In forty-eight hours I am supposed to be all his.



Friday night the pre-going-out phone call to Keith goes like this:

No regrets or recriminations? I ask.

None, he says. I absolutely promise. As long as you are mine when I step off of the plane.

And you're not going to sleep with anyone up there?

Silence.

I'm sorry, I say. I know it's completely unfair. I haven't even decided to do this.

Do it, he says. I am going to say this one more time. I have no desire to sleep with anyone but you. I am not going to sleep with anyone but you. You are the one who has commitment issues.

I love you, I tell him. I love you so fucking much.

I can see him looking at me with those wise eyes, later, if this falls apart, or even if it doesn't. I hate those wise eyes. I hate thinking that he's smarter, more experienced, better than me. I'll give him up in a heartbeat if I ever start to believe that.



Gin, Briana, and I buy our drugs in bulk. We do too many to be able to afford ten rolls at a time, or a couple of Ketamines. For example, if we buy four hits of X we'll probably pay twenty-five dollars a pill. That's pretty harsh for a four-hour high. We eat probably three or four or five a piece once or twice a month. On average. When we buy more than twenty at a time, the price slips down to somewhere around ten. We always try to buy at least twenty rolls.

And that's just Ecstasy, which is all we have left on this Friday night.

We don't have our dealer's home phone number; we always call to see when he's working and then meet him at Gyration X. Even if we could get in, I don't want to go anywhere I might see Pitt, not even for drugs. I do not know what to do about him yet.

Like he doesn't know right where you are, Gin says. He's probably watching us right now. His eyes are all over us.

She doesn't realize how much that turns me on.

We split our last two pills three ways (half for Gin, half for me, and one for Bri) and head out to a club, not Ellipsis, but some new rave club with DJs spinning house, trance, and jungle

in three different rooms. Temporarily, we decide, we will buy a little supply, pay premium club prices, just to get us through. We will buy X only; I won't purchase K or GHB from a stranger.

Bri and I leave Gin at the bar and move off to try and find a dealer. It's easy. You look for the little girls with lollipops and giant pupils and ask them where to buy. About one in four is fucked up enough to tell you the truth, especially if your pupils are giant, too.

Bri is blowing up full-bore and I am laugh-out-loud happy, my pulse mated with the music. I am in love with this music, with the fact that I can't hear myself think. We move through the crowd, Bri cutting a path, me behind her with an arm wrapped around her waist. We can't help but dance a little, but not too much, because we miss Gin. We never take her to buy the drugs. She owns the trendy bistro; she can't afford any trouble with the law. And we'd need her to hire us felons back the instant we got out of jail. Or rehab. Or both.

Until tonight this has always been a joke, a good-luck ritual that was supposed to keep us safe.

If you have to be arrested, I suggest you try it on X.

The money changes hands in a stall of the women's restroom. I make the buy from a girl with dyed black hair in pigtails while Briana hovers outside. The dealer tells me to enjoy and leaves before me. When the stall door closes I slide the lock closed before I place the ten pills into my purse. Everything is absolutely fine. Our evening can really begin.

And then I hear Briana laugh, and I realize that I have heard that laugh before, three days ago when this all started, when we got thrown out of the strip club.

I open the door to the stall and there are three men there, wearing dull-colored sport jackets and boring ties. Briana wears one on each arm. And Pitt, of course, is there for me.

If I close my eyes I can bury this panic, feel the drug still working, know that everything is going to be okay.

The dealer, I say to Pitt. Another woman in this town working for you?

The other cops are cuffing Briana.

Tighter, she says, oh, tighter.

I am not cuffed. Instead, two hands hover a hairs-length above my naked arms, make the distance between us an erotic tool, then descend. My skin wants them, and Pitt's hands are stronger than I expect.

Behind me, he pushes me out of the ladies room, through the crowd. I smile, I do not struggle, I walk with him. And I realize, in one of those Ecstasy-induced epiphanies, that the last three days are not about my commitment phobia, not about Keith.



A woman on a motorcycle is an easy target, Pitt tells me, an easy ticket. You never carry guns. You're never hopped up on something that will make you violent. You're a polite, middle-class professional. You don't challenge our authority. You never even talk back.

We are parked inside some kind of van with hard bench seats and a partition that turns this space into a box. He sits on one side, I am on the other, with five feet between us. I am forward. I am daring. I am going to be just fine. I am still rolling, of course. I stare right back into those pale eyes.

Tell me, I say. I want to hear it. Why are you watching me?

Jess, how can I not watch you? I have to follow you. I've absolutely had to. In my dreams I see your hair hanging out from underneath your helmet. Light brown and streaky. Flying. Flying straight out.

I decide to change the subject.

I lied when I said I've never seen you, I tell him.

I dare to find his eyes. He can see nothing but me. My lips, my trembling hands, my skin-tight pants. I am fucking gorgeous tonight. His eyes touch all of my body and try to slip inside. His mouth seems stuck in that half-smile; I have the urge to lick those lips.

That's the flaw, I think, for the Bond movie. A villain who



can't move his mouth any other way but this. Does the girl in the white bikini ever want to fuck the bad guy?

I saw you at Tanzy's. I know you told her we're married.

Listen, he says. I didn't want it to seem like I was stalking you. I asked her to tell you that. I set that up. I wanted you to know that I was here. That I was watching. I wanted you to think about that before we met. I thought you'd enjoy that. Was I wrong?

You did my fucking dishes, I tell him. You were in my apartment. You saw my calendar. That's how you knew I was on the grill yesterday.

And that's how I know your boyfriend is still out of town.

Jesus, I say.

It's not like that, he says. I saw you in the club with the motorcycle helmet and I stepped outside to see what you rode. The next time I followed you. And then I found out where you live. Work. Play. Who you play with. Finally, what you do that's illegal. Simple steps. Textbook surveillance. It just seemed like part of my job, part of what I do every day.

You could have been there when I was sleeping, I say. You could have seen me in the shower.

I haven't, he says. I haven't touched you until tonight.

Stalker chivalry, I think.

He moves to me, kneels on the floor, looks as if he wants to take my hand. Says:

You're so good. You're so amazing. Fluid, graceful. I never get tired of watching you move. You turn corners like a falcon diving. I can hardly keep up. Do you know what you look like on that bike?

I've suspected, I say.

The motorcycle is my secret weapon. Sometimes I ride without the heavy jacket, in just a tank top, and I love the stares. I love being something strange, exotic, automatically attractive. It's like stripping, except I only show my perfect parts, so I'm stripping in safety, knowing that all those eyes can't help but approve. In the best moments I feel bullet-proof.

I feel bullet-proof now, only two hours since that little half a pill went down my throat. I am going to get myself out of this.

I move my hands down to Pitt's, move them into his grip. It's easy. My body wants to do this. I move my knees apart, pull him very slowly towards me. He closes his eyes when his body touches my thighs. I am rolling just hard enough to really want him there, to want to wrap up the feeling I get when I kiss him, take it out later, chew it like caramel, get it stuck between my teeth.

But his tongue is strange in my mouth. It takes me a second to think about that, to remember not just who he is, but who I am, and why I am here.

One night, I tell him. You get one night. I can't offer you anything beyond that.

I don't know, he says. If I agree to that, it will just be because I need you so badly. I don't know if I'll accept that tomorrow.

I move a finger to his ear, trace tiny X's up and down the lobe.

I am hypnotizing you, I tell him. You are going to let Briana go. You are going to take me to my apartment to get some things. I will follow you back to your place and we will have our night. We'll talk about tomorrow tomorrow.



He is in his big white-whale car, the engine running, the window down, watching me slip into jacket, then helmet, then gloves.

There are three things in my head as I dress for the ride to his place.

One: There is a chance that Briana and I will go to jail. She'll have to understand, I think, the woman who will do just about anything for one kiss.

Two: I'll probably never buy drugs in this town again. I may not ever do them in this county, and no one will want to do them with me.

Three: The Ninja is a 600cc motorcycle, potentially a racing bike, with an after-market pipe, a K&N air filter, and a tooth removed from the rear sprocket. Keith did all this for me when I told him I wanted to be able to outrun the crotch-rocket morons who hang out in the Taco Bell parking lot, the boys who have bragged, on occasion, about outrunning police cars. I've always thought that they were morons to even try this.

When Pitt takes off I know that his eyes are on his rear-view mirror, watching me. I nudge the bike into gear and exhale slightly. I wish I could turn the headlight off. I wish I was in full leathers instead of these silly vanity pants. I wish I'd had race training.

I remember my promise to Keith never to ride the bike under the influence. Especially X, he'd said, because your eyes won't quite focus correctly, and you'll be overconfident about every turn you take.

I let Pitt go a half block, and when I see his brake-lights, I take off in the opposite direction. I crank hard on the throttle and squeal away, throw my weight forward to avoid a wheelie. I will not look behind me. It will take him some time to react, to turn that huge car around. This is my neighborhood and I can only hope I know it better than he does.

Second gear, third gear. I am about a half mile from I-75. I brake hard and downshift, turn left, just fucking shove the bike down to make it corner faster. I can feel him back there, with his wide cop-tires, his flashing lights. A huge engine.

And a radio.

I stay on the new road only a block before I cut left again. This time when I downshift, the engine screams louder than usual. I am at redline, and I have to slow down. I've never taken a corner like this.

I look in the rear-view. Nothing yet. I try to feel his eyes, feel that stare. I have been kidding myself, about a lot of things, but mostly about how people look at me on this motorcycle. I've ignored the fact that there are disapproving glares, that some men hate me for being able to ride this thing. For daring. I think

exotic, they think whore, or maybe they don't think at all, just see me and feel angry, impatient, infringed upon.

The highway is only a block ahead. I look back and see headlights, coming straight down the road. The headlights did not turn the same corner I did. That means that he is not back there, or that he knew I was headed for the highway all along.

I choose south, because the next exit is only two miles away. Since the bike accelerates faster than the car, I might be okay. North is disaster, a fourteen-mile stretch before another exit. Plenty of time for him to make up the distance between us.

I take the entrance ramp so fast, push the bike over so far, that I scrape my fucking knee against the tarmac. It feels like a living creature underneath me, licking and scarring the fake leather of my pants.

I roll on, running through my gears faster, more efficiently, than I ever have. The highway ahead of me is a canvas of darkness streaked with colored lights. I reach a hundred, move into the middle lane to pass some traffic, reach a hundred and ten, now in the left lane.

I look behind me, but the headlights only get farther away. They are blurry anyway, and at a hundred and twenty I realize that it's safer not to look back.

At a hundred and thirty I have to duck behind the fairing, press my breasts against the gas-tank, peek over the instrument cluster. Even with a full-face helmet, my eyes start to tear.

The next exit is half a mile ahead. I skip it. I push up past one hundred and forty. I will push this fucking bike all the way up to redline, maybe beyond. If I go fast enough, maybe the wind will shed my clothing, strip me right down to naked. If I go fast enough, who can stare at me then?

The next exit is two more miles away. I will take it. The airport is there. I will try to hide the bike, I will sit in the terminal, naked if I have to, for twelve or fourteen hours. I am going to meet that plane.