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## FACE TIME

Kate Bullard Adams

Lindsay's sitting across from me, beautiful as sin. Distanced by my desk, I look at my youngest child with the analytical eye I usually reserve for patients, sizing up the brow in need of Botox, the face that's begging for a lift. But with Lindsay, there's nothing I would change. As good as I am with a knife, I know better than to mess with perfection. And Lindsay's as close as you're going to get.

"But, Dad," Lindsay is pleading—Don't scrunch up your forehead like that, I want to say. You'll pay for it later—"it's no big deal. You do it all the time."

I nod, forced to confirm the disagreeable fact that, yes, this is indeed what I do all the time—perform mostly unnecessary surgery on people who have more money than sense. "But that doesn't mean I like it," I counter. "And that doesn't mean I'm going to perform a totally unnecessary procedure on my own child."

What Lindsay wants is minor—a little silicone in the lips that could already serve as the 'after' version of a less fulsome 'before,' the lips that are an exact replica of Linda's, whose mouth I used as a model even before I married her. Overall, our three children are distinct in appearance—different heights, different body types, different features—but they've all got the luscious lips that, from the moment I met her, had me hanging on their mother's every word just to watch the movement of her mouth.

"It's not like I just want to pretty up my face," Lindsay continues, arms folded, looking every bit the college kid still being held to a curfew. "This is for a job. A really good job."

Lindsay's right, it is a really good job. A top New York modeling agency is close to offering a contract, but they'd like to see a little more height in the upper lip. "The upper lip, it makes or breaks the bottom third of the face," they've told Lindsay. "And right now it's breaking yours." That remark makes me want to break their faces, give them all the fat lips they want. How

dare they talk to my child like that. How dare they talk to any healthy human being like that. They're the ones who started it all, I say to myself, staring at Lindsay's flawless visage. They're the ones who turned a perfectly decent profession into a freak show. I used to treat people with birth defects, people who'd been burned or mutilated, people who were in pain. What I did was about medicine, about healing. What I did was an honest day's work.

"Really, Dad. Don't you think this is kind of hypocritical?" Lindsay's eyes have narrowed in an expression that, to a surprising degree, reflects the disdain I've just been feeling. "I mean, it's not like I don't know what you do to Mom. I'm not blind."

In an instant my own eyes narrow and my muscles tense and I lean forward, elbows gouging the arms of my chair. "What are you talking about?"

"Get serious," Lindsay says, and there's a distinctly nasty elevation of the upper lip in question. "All of us know. Just because we were kids doesn't mean we didn't notice when her chest...exploded. Or her hips shrunk. Or her wrinkles disappeared." Lindsay laughs, a snide bark. "How dumb do you think we are?"

I've been trying to hold Lindsay's gaze, to play dumb myself, but I can't keep it up any longer, and my eyes drop to the photos on my desk. They're all pre-op: Linda before the implants, when her breasts still showed the tug of nursing babies; Linda before the lipo, when her hips still gave you something to hold; Linda before the face lift, when life was still allowed to make its mark.

I've never told her how I feel about all of this. Maybe she remembers my disbelief the first time she mentioned wanting a little 'touch-up.' And maybe she remembers my trying to ignore her first hints about a tummy tuck. But I've never told her the disgust I've felt every time she's brought up 'one more little tweak.' And I've never told her how dirty I've felt every time I've given in to her coaxing. And I've never told her how every time I've operated on her, after she's been wheeled off to recovery, still

woozy from the happy juice, I've gone to the lavatory, turned on the water and crouched in front of the toilet, doubled over with dry heaves, my stomach empty because I haven't been able to eat. And how I've then sat on the john, put my head in my hands and cried heavy, disfiguring tears at the whore that I've let myself become.

Now, sitting opposite Lindsay, my fingers locked in a futile clasp, I shake my head slowly and let out a deep, empty exhale. I take one last look at Linda, the picture that shows her coming home from the hospital, still wearing a maternity dress, cradling newborn Lindsay in her arms. I raise my head, look into my child's face. My eyes linger for a last second on the lips that are so like Linda's. "All right, son," I say. "I'll do it."