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White Room.

By Megan Danaher

I was sitting in my home in Washington State when I received a call from a coworker of mine about the market going to shit and how we had lost it all. I remember him telling me to turn on my television in my Seattle three-bedroom house, and the news of the market collapse hit me like a freight train. Later that night, I used what few dollars I had left to book a flight back to Nashville. The next morning my Mother waited soberly for me at the airport. Her hands were clasped tightly in front of her, and her face seemed stretched awkwardly between a place of disappointment and relief. We drove home that night in silence, I knew I had let her down. I was

her rock, I helped her stay afloat and pay the bills... that guilt was something I just could not face up to.

That was four months ago.

###

“Steven, can you grab that loaf please?” My Mother asked as I came to.

“Uh, yeah sure,” I said, as I reached up and took down the bread. We were out on the monthly grocery run, something that my Mother thought would help rehabilitate me from being the jobless lump that I was becoming. I placed the loaf into the cart and we continued our trek through the store.

As we turned the corner, my Mother’s eyes lit up as she locked eyes with an older woman with striking green eyes and brown hair.

“Patricia? Is that you?” the woman asked as she came up and gave my Mother a hug.

“Larissa! I haven’t seen you in a couple of months! Where have you been? France?”

“No, I went to Norway for a stay, I heard the spas are wonderful this time of year.”

Larissa walked back around her shopping cart, as she looked to the shelf and grabbed a jar of peanut butter and placed it in her cart.

I eyed the peanut butter cautiously as I shifted the cart to the edge of the lane. “Mom, who is this peanut-eater?” I asked, leaning against the handrail of the cart.

“Oh, Steven, this peanut-eater is Miss Larissa Roland. We went to high school together, back in the day,” my mother said laughing and returning to my side. “Her family always held the best parties and did amazing things for the community. Sorry about that, my son is allergic to peanuts.”

My interest peaked. *This woman has money, in a world where everyone is lacking, I need to know more about this curious woman.*

“Patricia, you have done well for yourself. What a handsome young man you’ve reared,” Larissa said as she looked me over.

I could feel my stomach tighten uncomfortably.

“Oh, yes, he is! He was doing well for himself before the—” my Mother began.

I cut her off. “I just wanted to come back home to spend time with my family.” My eyes darted to look down at my Mother. “Say, Miss Roland, would you be opposed to getting a coffee sometime?” I asked.

My mother looked at me, surprised.

“Well, I don’t see why not. I don’t have anything planned.” Larissa grabbed her purse and fished out a business card. “You can send me an email with your information, and we can set a time.” Larissa handed me her business card.

I looked over the dainty, but beautiful craftsmanship of this small slice of paper. *What happens next?*

My mother cleared her throat. “Well, we should get going. I have some braised lamb chops tonight, but it was really nice catching up with you, Larissa.” They hugged once more, and we moved away from Larissa.

Before we turned the corner, I looked back once more, trying to capture what it was I was feeling towards this woman, but there was nothing but a hunger. Some may call it lust, I called it desperation.

###

My mom’s house was always somewhere that was warm, welcoming and inviting, but by god, was her attitude something to behold. She stood behind the sink peeling potatoes, and I could see, based on the look on her face, she was pissed.

I had to burst the bubble of anger here. “What is it, Mom?” I asked, deadpan.

She set her knife down on the cutting board and looked at me. “Why did you ask Miss Roland out?”

I maneuvered myself around the counter so that I stood feet away from her. “You know, back in Seattle I had an older mistress,” I lied through my teeth, “and I found Larissa to be quite... attractive.”

My mother stared at me with eyes I had not before seen, then slowly she turned back to her potatoes. “Don’t involve me in this. Let it be known that I do not approve.”

I nodded my head slowly. *I didn’t quite approve of that myself, but desperate times called for desperate measures.* I wanted to say something to my mother to tell her that I was more interested in this woman’s money than I was her body, but which one sounded worse? Not quite knowing, I wiped my hands off with a dish towel and walked out of the kitchen and into the living room. I pulled out my Blackberry and the business card out of my back jean pocket.

I opened up the email app and drafted a message.

Dear Mrs. Roland,

It was really nice talking and meeting you today, I hope this email finds you well. I was hoping that we could go to Java Bean this Thursday at 4:00 pm. If this sounds like a good time, please respond and we can meet then.

Best Wishes,

Steven Carson,

I read it over once, perhaps twice, then sent the email and closed the app. *Was that the right thing to do?* I couldn’t tell, but I knew that she had the one thing I needed, which was her money.

####

Java Bean was a place of my childhood. The rustic atmosphere and tables that dwindled between vintage and the new age. There were three baristas behind the counter and five patrons within the restaurant. I sat at a window seat, able to look out onto the city street and see the looming Blue Ridge Mountains. Coming up the street was Larissa Roland, dressed in rustic mountain clothing that had a clear high dollar price tag.

I sat up in my seat and watched as she entered the cafe, and looked around for me. She finally laid eyes upon me and smiled lightly as she made her way to my table. “You’re here early,” she observed as she set her handbag in an empty chair across from me.

“You actually came,” I quipped back.

She smiled. “I wanted to see if you would actually pursue me, unlike other men who just give a passing glance.” She took a seat and looked at the menu. “I think I’ll just get a dark roast, with a splash of creamer.”

“Sounds like a fair decision, no sweetener though?”

“No, not good for you. It’s a drug, don’t ya know.” She said as she smiled lightly. A waitress made way over to the table with a menu in hand. She took her order, but I was truly tuned out. I think Larissa ordered a scone with her coffee? But I actually couldn’t remember.

Before I could even realize, the waitress was back with her scone and coffee.

“Where were you living?” Larissa asked as she cut through my smog-filled brain as she took a sip of her coffee.

“Uh, yeah, I was living in Seattle until the market crashed, then I moved back with my mom to kind of ‘recoup my losses’, I suppose,” I said, almost too honest.

“The market crash affected all of us, there’s no shame in that.” She paused. She eyed me for a minute then smiled. “How old are you, Steven.”

I was taken aback by the question, I didn’t know if I should say my actual age or-- “I’m 27.” I didn’t see the harm I guess.

“Well, I am 62. I just can’t help but wonder why someone as young as yourself would be interested in a woman like myself.” She took another bite of her scone, then a sip of her coffee, her eyes rarely leaving my own.

“Older women are more mature, and have a sort of grace about them, something about it; draws me towards you.” These words left my lips without any noticeable thought behind then, but they looked to fit like a key. Larissa’s eyes smiled as she looked away, happily.

“I haven’t heard words like that since my late husband passed.” She took a deep breath as she pushed the bare plate away from her. “Would you like to come home with me? I have something stronger than coffee for us to drink there” She asked as her hand rested upon my own, tenderly.

I suppressed my reaction, but smiled, “but of course.”

###

I sat in the passenger seat of her Range Rover and felt smaller than I had ever felt before. The large pines surrounded the vehicle as we moved farther and farther into a place I had never ever seen before. Slowly, the hills and topsy turvy turns turned into gravel pain. Then as I looked up from my phone. We were there. It was a huge sprawling house, some would have even called it a mansion.

“What a house you have,” I sputtered out, as I felt true astonishment exit my lips.

“Yes, my husband had this house built for us in 75’,” she paused, “I don’t think I would ever truly want to live anywhere else.”

“I wouldn’t either,” I said, as I exited the car, and was met by a butler wearing a worn down tuxedo.

Larissa came up behind me, and put her hand on my shoulder, “this is my butler, Jameson. He’s been with me since before I can ever remember, deaf as a doornail though.”

I nodded my head as I turned away from Jameson’s piercing glare. He made his way to the car and hopped in. Larissa and I entered the house.

###

“You know drinking is actually wonderful for your health?” Larissa laughed as she leaned back on her chaise lounge.

“I could tell, you look as beautiful as any woman I have ever seen.” I slurred as I sat on the floor and poured myself another glass.

The room we were in was massive. There was a moose head on one wall, and the other wall was a collection of wine, larger than even the most prestigious French 5-Star restaurant. The floor was carpeted and there were two chairs; a chaise lounge, and a leather sofa. The sofa, however, could not handle the drunkest side of me right now.

“Oh shut up!” She laughed, as she finished off the last of her glass of wine.

“Let me be serious for a moment,” I started, “where did all of this money come from?”

“Well, it came from a lot of hard work, and business relationships that had gone south. Men in and of themselves are a very profitable business venture.” She said, very matter-of-factly.

“What exactly does that mean?” I asked, sitting up to meet her eyes.

“Oh, it’s nothing for you to worry about...” She trailed off. “I just can’t help but shake the thought of why someone as handsome as yourself would be interested in me.” Her eyes were abnormally steady, and trained on me.

“Like I said I have interest in older women, I don’t see what’s so--” I tried, but she swiftly cut me off.

“I was truly beginning to think I could have found someone to have as my own...” She said as she stood up, and walked over to the small bar within the room.

“What are you talking about?” I tried again as I tried to stand, but my legs would not cooperate with me. Larissa looked down on me, her faded blonde hair hiding her eyes. She motioned her hands once, and Jameson came into the room. “What are you doing?”

The man walked into the room and looked to Larissa and down to me. Larissa signed something to him, and from his pocket, he pulled out a pair of handcuffs and began to walk towards me.

“Wait, Larissa, please no...” My throat burned. *How could things so drastically change?* I turned onto my palms and pulled myself away from the approaching man.

“I’m sorry Steven, how I would have loved for you to have been my sugar-baby...” She turned and looked down at me once more then left the room.

As Jameson approached me, I knew that if I couldn’t get up, I would be trapped, and what would happen to me next was something my fevered brain could not even imagine. My back up against the wall, I pulled myself up finally to my knees, and from there I stood. Dizziness overtook my senses, but I knew I must push through, for the sake of my own life, and I managed to knock back the older man, and leave the room through the other door.

Stumbling through the halls of a house I had never been in before was harder than anything I had ever done in my entire life, but with my hands and a will to live, I made my way through the house to the garage which we had entered before and encountered two cars. Loud footsteps echoed behind me. The keys I knew were the things I needed if I was going to escape

from this hell. There was a box on the wall, beside the lightswitch and as I opened it, I slammed the door shut behind me. I opened the range rover door, started the engine, then drove.

###

It had been 15 hours since I had been at that awful estate. Lighting a cigarette, I looked out of the motel window and caught a glimpse of my reflection. My hair was flat against my head with sweat, thick brows furrowing, and thick-lensed glasses fogging in the humid Georgia air.

A knock on the door startled me as I turned and clenched the pistol in my waistband. *Had she finally come from me after all this time?* I approached the door checking the peephole, keeping my breath level.

It was the butler.

Opening the door, I was met face to face with the man who had threatened my life.

“What do you want?” I asked as I looked past him and into the dimly lit hallway.

“Larissa wants to talk to you,” he said as he struggled to speak properly.

“I don’t know what kind of people you *freaks* are, but I want nothing to do with you. You two were going to kill me. I know it.”

“No, no, no, it’s nothing like that at all. She wants to say to you that she’s sorry.”

“Well, let her know that I don’t care and I don’t want to hear it.”

“I’m sorry that it has to be that way...” he said as he trailed off.

“What way?”

And before I could even piece together what was happening to me, he pulled out a syringe and jabbed it into my neck and loosened the fluids within.

That son of a bitch.

#

“Baby sugah, wake up!” Larissa said.

The world was shaky at best as I squinted over and over again trying to steady my eyesight as I pushed myself up on dry palms. “What do you want from me?” I sputtered.

“I wanted to try and explain myself for what I did to you,” she said, resting her finger under my chin.

My eyes burned as I glanced around but soon felt my wrists burn and ache. I looked down as I noticed that my hands were cuffed together, and in my palms was a large wad of cash.

“Well, this is a nice sentiment, but why?” I asked, as I finally reached peak alertness.

“That is what you wanted from me, right? You lost your money in the stock market crash, as most of us did... But where I was looking for a partner, you were looking for money,” she said as she motioned to Jameson. “Let him out.”

Jameson approached me with a set of small keys in his hand, and as he bent down, I cringed at how close he was to me. I wanted out of there, but the amount of money... *enticed* me.

“How much is it, since the jig is up, and all,” I asked, removing the rubber band from around the money.

“Why don’t you see for yourself,” she said as she took a seat at the generic office desk.

Her eyes watched me carefully, but I hardly noticed. As I unfurled the bills, in the middle of all of the money there was a dollop of peanut butter.

My eyes widened, but before I had a thought to throw the money as far away from me as I could, my throat began to close and I could feel myself dying for air.

“What the—” I managed but my blood pressure was falling fast... *how had she known.*

“This isn’t my first rodeo, Steven. You underestimate what I am capable of. Shame your mother will never know what happened to you,” she trailed off, as she stood wiping her hands off. From her large fur coat, she took out a package of peanut butter cookies and took one out.

My lungs burned and dizziness took hold, I was going to die, and there was nothing I could do but watch as Jameson and Larissa picked up the poisoned money from off the floor, and walked to the door.

“Good bye, Steven,” Larissa said, as she tucked the wad of bills into her pocket and walked towards the door, from the white room with black curtains.