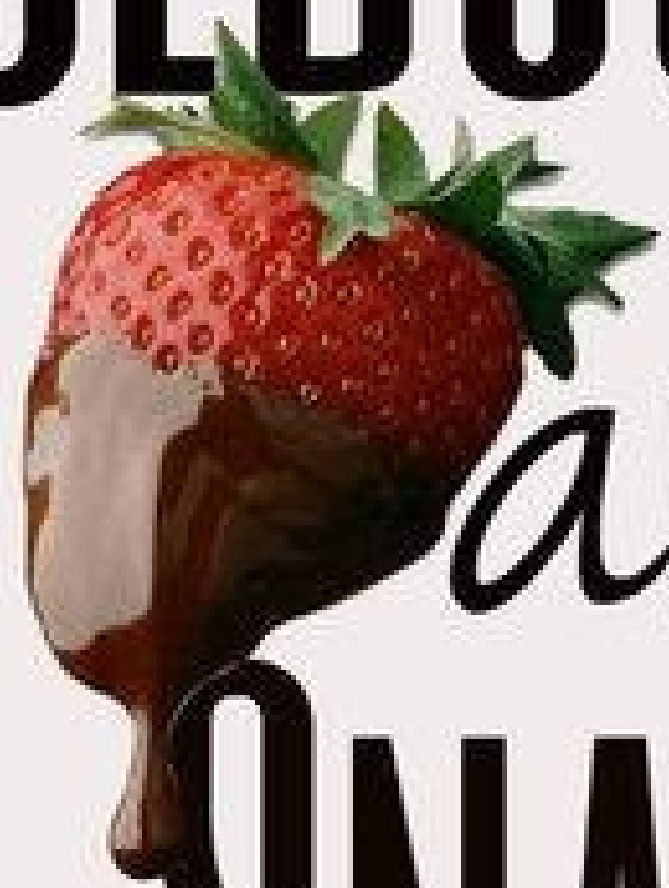


Life is what you make of it. If you've made yours
out of vodka, chocolate and vibrators...so be it.

SEDUCTIONS

Tara Siver



and

SNACKS

Seduction and Snacks (Chocolate Lovers #1)

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Contents

1. Arby's Anyone?

Hello, my name is Claire Morgan and I never want to have children.

For those of you out there who feel the same way, is it just me or does it seem like you're in the middle of a horrible Alcoholics Anonymous meeting whenever someone finds out you never want children? Should I stand up, greet the room as a whole, and confess what brings me to the seventh circle of hell I constantly find myself in? It's a house of horrors where I'm surrounded by pregnant women asking me to touch their protruding bellies and have in-depth discussions about their vaginas. They don't understand why the words placenta and afterbirth should never be used in a sentence. Especially over coffee in the middle of the day.

You know what brought me to this decision? The video we saw in health class in sixth grade. The one set back in the seventies that had some woman screaming bloody murder with sweat dripping off of her face while her husband lovingly pat her forehead with a towel and told her she was doing great. Then the camera panned down to the crime scene between her legs: the blood, the goo, the gore, and the humungous porn bush that now had a tiny little head squeezing its way out. While most of the girls around me were saying, "Awwwwwww!" when the baby started to cry, I looked around at them in revulsion muttering, "What the hell is wrong with you people? That is NOT normal." From that moment on, my motto was: I'm never having children.

"So, Claire, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

"I'm never having children."

"Claire, did you choose a major yet?"

"I'm never having children."

"Would you like fries with that?"

"I'm never having children."

Of course there are always those in your life who think they can change your mind. They get you married, have a baby, and then invite you over expecting you to be overcome with emotion when you take a look at their new little miracle. In truth, all you can do is look around at the house they haven't had time to clean in six weeks, smell their body they haven't had time to bathe in two weeks, and watch their eyes get a little squirrely when you ask them the last time they got a good night's sleep. You see them laugh at every burp and smile at every fart. They manage to bring poop into every single conversation, and you have to wonder who the crazy one really is here.

Then you have the people who believe your flippancy is due to some deep, dark, secret issue with your uterus that you're overcompensating for, and they look at you and your vagina with pity. They whisper behind your back and then suddenly it turns into a horrible game of "Telephone," and the whole world thinks you have life-threatening fertility issues where pregnancy will cause your vagina to spontaneously combust and your left tit to fall off. Stop the insanity! All my bits are in working order and as far as I know, I don't have exploding vagina syndrome.

The simple truth is I just never thought pushing a tiny human out of me that turns my vagina into something resembling roast beef that no man would ever want look at, let alone bang, was a stellar idea. End of story.

And let's face it people, no one is ever honest with you about child birth. Not even your mother.

"It's a pain you forget all about once you have that sweet little baby in your arms."

Bullshit. I CALL BULLSHIT. Any friend, cousin, or nosey-ass stranger in the grocery store that tells you it's not that bad is a lying sack of shit. Your vagina is roughly the size of the girth of a penis. It has to stretch and open and turn into a giant bat cave so the life-sucking human you've been growing for nine months can angrily claw its way out. Who in their right mind would do that?

willingly? You're just walking along one day and think to yourself, "You know, I think it's time I turn my vagina into an Arby's Beef and Cheddar (minus the cheddar) and saddle myself down for a minimum of eighteen years to someone who will suck the soul and the will to live right out of my body so I'm a shell of the person I used to be and can't get laid even if I pay for it."

It just stands to reason that after all the years of preaching I did to everyone around me about how I was never having children, I was the first of my friends to have one —much to their horror, which I was highly offended by. I mean really, any idiot can raise a child. Case in point: my mother. She was absent the day they handed out parenting handbooks and instead turned to the age old, brilliant wisdom of Doctor Phil and fortune cookies to educate me, and I turned out just fine. Okay, maybe that wasn't the best example. I'm not a serial killer, so at least I have that going for me. More on my mother later.

I suppose saying I hate children is a little harsh, considering I'm a mother now, right? And it's not like I hate *my* kid. I just strongly dislike *other people's* dirty faced, snotty nosed, sticky handed, screaming, puking, shitting, no-sleeping, whining, arguing, crying little humans. Give me a cat over a kid any day. You can open up a bag of Meow Mix, plop it down on the floor next to a bucket of water, go on vacation for a week, and come home to an animal that is so busy licking it's own ass that it has no idea you were even gone. You can't do that with a kid. Well, I guess you could, but I'm sure it's frowned upon in most circles. And if my kid could lick his own ass, I'd have saved a shit load of money on diapers, I can tell you that.

To say I was a little worried about becoming a mother given my aversion to childbirth and children in general is an understatement. They say that when you have your own child, the first time you look into his or her eyes you will fall instantly in love and the rest of the world disappears. They say you'll believe your child can do no wrong, and you will love them unconditionally right from the very first moment. Well, whoever "they" are should seriously limit the amount of crack they smoke and stop talking out of their ass while their Arby's vaginas are flopping around in their grandmothers' panties.

The day I had my son I looked down at him and said, "Who the hell are you? You look nothing like me."

Sometimes it isn't love at first sight. "What to Expect When You Weren't Expecting to Get Knocked Up That One Time at a Frat Party" and the rest of the all-knowing baby books like to leave that part out. Sometimes you have to learn to love the little monsters for something other than the deductions they provide you. Not all babies are cute when they're born no matter how many new parents try to convince you otherwise. This is yet another lie the half-baked "theys" lead you to believe. Some babies are born looking like old men with wrinkled faces, age spots, and a receding hairline.

When I was born my father George took my hospital picture over to his friend Tim's house while my mom was still recuperating in the hospital. Tim took one look at my picture and said, "Oh sweet Jesus, George. You better hope she's smart." It was no different with my son, Gavin. He was funny looking. I was his mother, so I could say that. He had a huge head, no hair, and his ears stuck out so far I often wondered if they worked like the "Whisper 2000", and he was able to pick up conversations from people a block away. During my four day hospital stay, all I kept doing whenever I looked at his huge head was speak in a Scottish accent and quote Mike Meyers from "So I Married an Axe Murderer".

"He cries himself to sleep at night on his huge pilluh."

"That thing's like Sputnik. It's got its own weather system."

"It's like an orange on a toothpick."

I think he heard me talking about him to the nurses and formulated a plan to get back at me.

firmly believe at night in the nursery he and all the other newborns struck up a conversation and decided it was time for a revolution. Viva la newborns!

I knew I should have kept him in my room the whole time I was there. But come on people, I needed some rest. Those were the last days I would ever get to sleep again, and I took full advantage of it. I should have kept a better eye on which kid they put his bassinet next to at night though. I knew that little brat Zeno would be a bad influence on my kid. He had “anarchy” written all over his face. And who named their kid Zeno anyway? That was just asking for an ass-kicking on the playground.

Gavin was quiet, never fussed, and he slept all the time in the hospital. I laughed in the face of my friends who came to visit and told me he wouldn't be like this once we left. In reality, Gavin did the laughing, waving his tiny little fist of fury in the air for his brothers in the Newborn Nation. I swore I heard, “Infant Pride! Baby Power!” every time he made noises in his sleep.

The moment I got him in the car to go home, the jig was up. He screamed his head off like a wild banshee and didn't stop for four days. I have no idea what a wild banshee was or if they even existed, but if they did, I was sure they were loud as fuck. The only good thing about this whole ordeal was the fact that my kid refused to leave my body via my lady bits. No roast beefy beaver for this woman. All the baby books written by women who had the most perfect birth experience in the world said you should talk to your child in the womb. That was about the only piece of advice I took from those things. Every day I told him if he ruined my vagina I would video tape his birth and show all his future girlfriends what happened to your who-ha when you had sex, ensuring that he will never, ever get laid. Fuck playing Mozart and reading Shakespeare. I went with the scared straight method.

All my threats to him in the womb paid off. He sat there with his arms crossed for twelve hours and refused to move down the shoot. This was perfectly fine by me. C-section, here I come. I would go through having my gut sliced open again in a minute if I could skip the whole baby part and just go through the four days at an all-inclusive location that served you breakfast, lunch, and dinner in bed, gave you a twenty-four hour morphine drip, and sent you packing with a thirty-day supply of Vicodin.

Before I get too excited thinking about legal narcotics without the ear-bleeding scream of a newborn, maybe I should go back to the night that got me into this mess. My horoscope that day should have been a warning of things to come: “You'll score a bunch of great computer gadgets and jewelry from your neighbors, who happen to die when you go into their house, shoot them, and take all their things.”

I don't know what it should have been a warning of, but come on! Does that not have “bad omen” written all over it? The one and only time in my life I decide to have a one-night stand so I can finally give up the V-card, I get pregnant. I'm telling you, the universe hates me.

I was twenty years old and in my second year of college, well on my way to a degree in Business Administration. Aside from the constant ribbing from my best friend Liz, on the state of my virginity, my life was good. Well, college student good. I didn't have VD, none of my friends had been roofied, and at the end of the semester, I had avoided needing to sell my organs to science to pay for food and pot.

Let me just say I do not condone illegal drug use in any way. Unless it's an all natural herb that doesn't make me feel guilty for eating an entire box of Peanut Butter Captain Crunch while watching hours of The Joy of Painting with Bob Ross. “Oh green water, oh that's pretty, and a happy little tree right over there.” It also chills Liz out during finals so she isn't screaming and climbing the walls like a rabid howler monkey. Remember that whole “Hugs not Drugs” shit they tried to cram down our throats in high school? We fooled them. You don't have to choose. You can totally have both and not die. But seriously, kids, don't do drugs.

I remember that night fondly. And by fondly, I mean with bitter resentment toward all things alcoholic and with a penis.

2. Beer Pong May Cause Pregnancy

It was a Friday night and we were spending it the usual way - at a frat party with a bunch of drunken frat boys and sorority freaks of nature. I really don't understand how Liz managed to drag me to these things week after week. These were not our people. Our people were back at the dorm listening to Pink Floyd, "The Darkside of the Moon" and watching *The Wizard of Oz* while arguing over whether or not the last season of Dawson's Creek jumped the shark. (Pacey and Joey forever.) We did not belong with the crowd of trust fund babies that thought student loans had something to do with a foreign exchange student. As we made our way over to a portable bar on one side of the room, I could hear two completely wasted tools argue back and forth about who paid more for their Coach purse and who slept with the most guys last week. One of them claimed she was ashamed she brought the other to the party since she was wearing a pair of Louboutin's that were "so last year". These were the future leaders of our country, ladies and gentlemen. Christ, I felt like I was watching a live scene from "Heathers" ("I brought you to a Remington party and what's my thanks? It's on a hallway carpet. I got paid in puke."). Thankfully Liz interrupted me before I handed one of them a cup of liquid in a drain.

"Oooh what about that one? He's cute. And he has good teeth," she announced excitedly as she tipped her head towards a guy in a sweater vest manning the keg.

"Jesus Liz, he's not a horse," I moaned, rolling my eyes and taking a sip of luke warm beer.

"But you could ride him all night long if you play your cards right," she said with a creepy used car salesman wink and a nudge with her shoulder.

"I'm concerned about you Liz. I really think you spend entirely too much time thinking about my hymen. You're secretly in love with me aren't you?"

"Don't flatter yourself," she replied distractedly as she scoped out more guys. "Come to think of it, I did bat for the other team in high school after one of Tom Corry's Friday night parties. We never got past second base though. Someone knocked on the bathroom we were in and it suddenly occurred to me that I liked penis," she mused.

I stared at her profile like she had two heads. Or her hand in a vagina. Why is it that I'm just now finding out my best friend went through a lesbian phase? Every time I look at her now I'm going picture vagina-hand. A little hand that looks like a who-ha chasing me around the house and watching me while I sleep. Vagina hand is always watching. Vagina hand sees you.

Liz looked beyond my shoulder and then leaned in closer. "Two tangos staring at us at your six."

I rolled my eyes again and sighed at the attempt Liz was making to be covert.

"Five bucks says free drinks will be ours if we play our cards right," she said conspiratorially.

"Liz, we're surrounded by kegs of beer and we were handed a plastic cup when we walked in. I'm pretty sure that equals free booze," I told her, holding up my red Solo cup in front of her as a reminder.

"Oh shut it. You're ruining the moment. If we were at a bar right now, they'd totally be buying us drinks."

"If we were legal."

"Details," she scoffed with a wave of her ominous vagina hand.

She fluffed up her hair, and then pulled the front of her shirt down lower so she showed enough cleavage to blind a man.

"Liz, if you sneeze there's going to be a nip slip. Put those things away before you poke an eye out."

"They're coming over!" she squealed, batting my hands away as I tried to pull her shirt back up

cover the twins.

“Jesus, is there a homing beacon on those things?” I muttered. I shook my head in amazement at the power that was her boobs. “Your tits are like Bounty. The quicker dick picker upper,” I muttered and I finally turned around to get a look at who was coming over. I’m pretty sure to an outsider I looked like Elmer Fudd when he saw Bugs Bunny dressed up like a girl and his eyes popped out of his head and his heart stretched out the front of his shirt. If the music weren’t so loud you would be able to hear
“ARRROOOOOOGA!”

“Hello there ladies.”

Liz not so subtly elbowed me when the one that looked like a linebacker spoke. I briefly raised my eyebrows at the shirt he wore that strained against the muscles of his chest and read “I’m not a gynecologist but I’ll take a look.” My attention immediately focused on the guy standing next to him with his hands in his pockets. The long-sleeved t-shirt he wore with the sleeves pushed up to his elbows hugged his body nicely and I could see the subtle outline of muscles in his chest and arms. They were nothing compared to Hooked on Steroids standing next to him, but they were perfect to me. I wanted him to turn around so I could see how great his ass looked in the well-worn jeans he had on. Unlike a lot of the college guys around here who were going through some sort of weird Justin Bieber hair phase, this guy kept his light brown hair cut short, with just enough length on top for some messy spikes. He wasn’t too tall, wasn’t too short, he was just right. And just... beautiful. I wanted to punch my own face for calling a guy beautiful but it was true. He was so pretty I wanted to frame him and put him on my nightstand in a totally non-creepy, non-Hannibal Lector skin-suit-wearing kind of way. He looked bored and like he’d rather be anywhere but at this party. Before I could introduce myself and tell him he was my soul mate, someone bumped into me roughly from behind and I stumbled forward, smacking gracefully into his chest and spilling my beer all over the floor at our feet.

Holy hell he smelled good. Like boy and cinnamon and a tiny hint of cologne that made me want to rub my nose in his shirt and take a deep breath. Okay, so that might have thrown me back into creepy territory. I didn’t want him to start calling me the shirt sniffer. That’s a nickname that just doesn’t go away. Like vagina hand.

His hands flew out of his pockets and grabbed onto my arms to steady me while I was busy trying not to motorboat his tee shirt and flee the scene in mortification. I heard the sound of cackling laughter behind me and turned to see that one of the Heathers was responsible for my graceful entrance into this guy’s life. It turns out slamming into someone is hilarious and her equally offensive twin joined in on the finger pointing and laughing.

What is this, a bad teen movie from the nineties? Did they expect me to cry and go running out the room while dramatic music played over my exit?

"Jesus, what's your damage Heather?" a masculine voice said irritably.

Their laughter immediately stopped and they looked behind me in confusion. I whipped my head around and stared at the guy in awe, noticing that I still had my hands pressed against his chest and that I could feel the heat from his skin through his thin t-shirt.

"Did you just quote 'Heathers'?" I whispered. "That is my favorite movie ever."

He looked down at me and smiled, the piercing blue of his eyes boring a hole right through me.

"I had a huge crush on Winona Ryder before the whole shoplifting thing," he said with a shrug, his hands still wrapped around my upper arms.

"My name isn't Heather," a whiny voice protested behind me.

"Wow, Winona Ryder," I stated with a nod of my head.

Jesus, I had absolutely no game. Being in close proximity to a guy this hot turned my brain to mush. I just wanted to hear him speak again. His voice made me want to take my pants off.

"I kind of have a thing for quirky, intelligent, dark-haired chicks," he said with a smile.

"Why did he call me Heather? He knows my name is Niki," came the shrill voice from behind me again.

I'm a quirky, intelligent, dark haired chick! Me, me, me, pick me! And who the hell keeps whining and ruining my perfect moment? I will cut a bitch.

"Um, hellloooo!"

The man of my dreams broke eye contact with me to look over my shoulder. "Niki, your voice is making my ears bleed and killing my buzz."

I heard her huff and storm off. At least I think that's what she did. I was still staring at this guy and wondering how soon was too soon to drag him into a spare bedroom. He looked back at me and removed one of his hands from my arms to brush my bangs out of my eyes with his fingers. The simplicity of the action and the ease in which he performed it made it feel as though he'd done it a thousand times before. I wanted to slyly give Liz a big cheesy grin and a thumb's up but she was busy talking to this guy's friend a few feet away.

"You want to go refill your drink, maybe play a game of beer pong or something?"

I want to reach in my pants, pull out my virginity, wrap it up and put a bow on it. Or maybe stick it in a gift bag from Target and give it to him like a present with a nice card that says "Thank you for being you! Just a little virginity to show you my gratitude!"

"Sure," I replied with a shrug, totally playing it cool. It's probably best to play a little hard to get. You don't want to look too eager.

"Oh God, don't stop," I panted as he kissed a trail down my neck and fumbled clumsily with the button of my jeans. After five rounds of beer pong and hours of talking, laughing and standing so close to him that it soon became impossible to refrain from touching him, I forgot the meaning of "hard to get". With a boldness I could only achieve through copious amounts of alcohol, I wrapped a hand behind his neck after losing the last round, pulled him to me, and kissed him with everything I had. I was in front of all the people still left at the party that hadn't yet passed out in a pile of their own vomit. I grabbed his hand and dragged him down the hallway and shoved him into the first room we came to. I hoped Liz would have been close by to give me some sort of encouragement or last minute pointers about what I was about to do, but she disappeared after I announced to the room that she would be giving free PAP tests at the end of the night with her lesbian approved hand.

As soon as we got into the dark room we attacked each other. Sloppy, drunken kisses, hands groping all over the place, slamming into random furniture as we stumbled and laughed our way to the bed. I tripped over something on the floor that may or may not have been a person and fell backward luckily onto the bed, dragging the guy right along with me. He landed roughly on top of me and it felt like the wind was knocked out of me.

"Shit, sssorry. You'kay?" He slurred as he pushed himself up on his arms, taking some of his weight off of me.

"Yep, good," I wheezed. "Now take your clothes off."

I was so buzzed I almost laughed when he dragged himself off me and took his pants and boxers/briefs off. The moonlight shining through the bedroom window provided just enough illumination for me to see what he was doing even though the alcohol coursing through my veins made him look like he was on a tilt-a-whirl. He pushed everything down to his ankles without bending his knees, then stood up and shuffled back to the bed. Thankfully, the miniscule part of my brain that hadn't yet been taken over by beer and tequila shots reminded me it was never a good idea to laugh at a man when he took his pants off. It was just so funny though! I've seen plenty of penises before, just not in living color and two feet from my body. That thing stuck straight out and was pointing right at me. I swear in my head I could hear the penis talking.

"Aaarrggg, ahoy me matey, thars a great grand vagina over yonder."

~~Penises talk like pirates when I'm drunk. Probably because Liz calls them one-eyed snakes. And pirates wear patches and only have one eye and...holy shit, Captain Hookpenis was coming closer.~~

I should probably focus.

He crawled on top of me and kissed me, his scallywag bumping into my leg. This time I did laugh, pulling my mouth away from his and giggling until I snorted. I was drunk as shit, thinking about walking the plank and there was a penis smacking against my thigh in a strange bedroom that may or may not have a dead person on the floor. How can you not chortle like a schoolgirl at that shit? He was oblivious to my convulsions of laughter as he moved his head to the side and kissed my neck. And Jeeeeeeesus if that didn't sober me up long enough to realize how good it felt.

"Ohhhhh yesssssssss," I moaned out loud, surprising myself that I'd actually vocalized the words that were sloshing around in my fuzzy, beer-addled brain.

His lips moved up to the spot right behind my ear and when his tongue slid lightly against the skin there, it shot a tingle right between my legs that surprised me. My hands moved up to clutch onto his hair and hold his head in place. I didn't really think anything about this night was going to feel good. It was all about getting this crap out of the way, enjoying myself was a small perk I didn't expect. After a few minutes of fumbling with my jeans, he finally got them unbuttoned and yanked them down my legs, taking my underwear with them. His hands slid up the sides of my body, taking my shirt with them until it was pulled over my head and tossed in the general direction of my jeans. The liquid courage reignited long enough for me to take off my bra and fling it to the side, the sound of the material smacking into the wall making me realize I was now lying on a bed completely naked with a guy kneeling between my legs, staring down at all I had to offer.

Oh my God. This is really happening. I'm naked in front of a guy. Am I really going to do this?

"Jesus, you're so fucking beautiful."

Yes, the answer is yes! If he keeps talking to me like that he can stick it in my ear.

He let his eyes roam over my body and then quickly yanked his shirt off and threw it across the room. My hands automatically reached up to his chest so I could touch him as he sunk back down on top of me. His chest was hard and his skin was smooth. I touched every inch of him I could reach. I wrapped my hands around the back of his neck and pulled him down to me and kissed him. He tasted like tequila and sunshine. Despite our inebriated states, I was enjoying his kisses. Now that we were naked and in bed, they weren't so frantic. They were actually soft and sweet and made me sigh a little into his mouth. He pulled one of my legs up and wrapped it around his hip and I could feel the head of his penis right at my opening.

Oh shit, this is it. This is really happening. And why am I talking to myself when I have my tongue in someone's mouth and he's getting ready to stick his penis in me?

Oh my God ...

Even though I was drunk as a skunk at the time, I still remembered what happened after that. Less than two seconds later he was inside me and I was waving good-bye to my virginity. I wanted it to last forever. I saw stars, came three times that night and it was the most beautiful experience of my life.

Yeah right. Are you kidding me? Have you lost your virginity lately? It hurts like a mother effin' and it's awkward and messy. Anyone that tells you she had anything even close to resembling an orgasm during the actual event itself is a lying sack of shit. The only stars I saw were the ones behind my eyelids as I squeezed them shut and waited for it to be over.

But let's be honest here, this is exactly how I expected it to be. It's not his fault it wasn't anything to write home about. He was as sweet and gentle as he could possibly be with me considering the amount of alcohol we consumed during the night. We were both drunk as hell and I lost my virginity.

to a guy whose name I didn't know because I didn't want any distractions and I didn't have time for a relationship. With the state of my virginity out of the way, I could focus more on school and my career and Liz would stop treating every party we went to like a meat market. It went exactly according to my plan. That is, until my period was a week late and I realized I ate an entire loaf of bread and seven sticks of string cheese while I sat at the kitchen table looking at the calendar and wishing I'd paid more attention to math in kindergarten because there was no fucking way I counted right.

3. Have You Seen This Sperm Donor?

Sometimes I blame my lack of desire to have children on my mother. She wasn't a bad mother, she just didn't really know what she was doing. She realized early on that living in a small town out in the country wasn't for her and that sitting around day after day watching television with my dad and dealing with a sassy pre-teen wasn't all that she wanted out of life. She wanted to travel, go to art shows, concerts and movies, she wanted to be free to come and go as she pleased and not have to answer to anyone. My mom told me once that she never stopped loving my dad. She just wanted more from him than he could give her. They divorced and she moved out when I was twelve to get a condo in the city about thirty miles away. I never felt like she abandoned me or anything, I still saw her all the time and talked to her on the phone every day. And it's not like she didn't ask me to go with her when she moved out. She did, but I think it was only because she felt like it was expected. Everyone knew I would choose to stay with my father. I was and always would be a daddy's girl. As much as I loved my mother, I felt like I had more in common with my dad and it just seemed natural that I should stay with him.

Even though she didn't live with us, my mother still tried to nurture me as best she could. Her parenting skills weren't all that great to begin with though, and after she moved out, they pretty much turned into one big train wreck. Regardless of what people might think, she really did love me; she just acted more like a friend most of the time than a mother. Three days after she moved out, she called and told me that according to something she saw on Oprah, we needed to do something like altering so that we could forge a stronger bond between us. She suggested getting matching tattoos. I reminded her that I was twelve and it was illegal. I have enough "Chicken Soup for the Soul" Mother/Daughter Blah, Blah, Blah" reference books she's given me over the years to open my own bookstore and have been tagged in one too many photos of her and I on her Facebook page with the caption "Me and my BFF!".

People thought it was strange the way the three of us lived, but it worked for us. My dad didn't have to listen to my mother nagging in his ear all day long about how he never took her anywhere, and my mother was free to do as she pleased while still having a close relationship with us. Some people just aren't meant to live together. My parents got along much better when there was a twenty-five minute car ride separating them.

Aside from the advice she received from bad talk shows, my mother used the "Parenting with Idioms" book to raise me. Every piece of advice ever given to me was in the form of a one-liner she read in a book or heard Paula Dean use on the Food Network. Unfortunately, they never made sense and were never used in the correct context. When you're six-years-old and you tell your mother that someone at school made you cry and she replies with, "Don't pee down my back and tell me it's raining," you sort of learn to handle things on your own and stop asking for her advice.

When I found out I was pregnant, I didn't immediately have dreams of being some independent woman's lib, equal rights, "I don't shave my legs because the man won't keep me down" type of person, perfectly content to do things on her own without the help of anyone. I'm not a martyr. As stubborn and self-sufficient as I was, I knew I would need help.

As soon as I took eleventy-billion home pregnancy tests, after drinking a gallon of milk so I would have enough pee for all of them, I realized I needed to hunt this guy down. Of course, this was after I Googled "milk and pregnancy tests" to make sure I didn't just spend thirty-seven minutes of my life staring in horror at positive pregnancy tests littered all over my bathroom that may or may not be correct because pasteurization messed with the hormones in your body and created a false positive.

It doesn't, just in case you were wondering.

I was a twenty-year-old full-time college student, and according to my mother, “You don’t have two nickels to pull out of a duck’s ass with a penny in its name.” My dad, George, worked the same job he had since he was eighteen and made just enough to pay his bills and help me with my room and board. Thank God my dad’s best friend Tim was right all those years ago. I was smarter than I looked and received a full ride to the University of Ohio, so I didn’t have the burden of student loans or grants. Unfortunately though, that meant I went to school full time and worked my ass off, taking twice the course load as other students, leaving no time for a job and no money saved.

In some ways I took after my mother. I wanted more out of my life than waiting tables at Foster Bar and Grill where I worked all through high school. I wanted to travel, work hard and one day own my own business. Unfortunately, life doesn't throw curveballs; it throws an eight pound, one ounce infant at your face when you're looking the other way. Life is a vindictive little bitch. I was smart enough to know I couldn't do this by myself and wanted more than anything to keep the inconvenience of my mistake away from my dad for as long as possible. Any other woman would probably call her mother to cry and plead for help as soon as the stick turned pink, but at the time, I wasn't in the mood for my mother to tell me that “Rome was not built with two birds in your bush”. That left me with the person who helped put me into this situation. Unfortunately, I had no idea who the guy was I slept with. I was too mortified by my actions that night to ever repeat the performance so I knew without doubt Mr. Beer Pong was the father. I just had to find him. Who the hell gave a guy her virginity and never even bothered to ask him what his name was?

Oh yeah, that would be me.

The first day I decided to try and find him was spent talking to every single dumb jock that lived at the frat house where the party occurred. No one there had any clue who I was talking about when I tried to describe this guy and the friend he had with him that night. It could have been due to the fact that everyone I talked to smelled like a brewery and stared at my boobs the entire time I was there. Or maybe it was because I wasn't fluent in stupid. Really, either option was viable. On the way back to the apartment I shared with Liz, after my hunting expedition, all I wanted to do was kick my own ass. The morning after when I woke up, I felt silly admitting that the feel of his arm wrapped around my waist made me sigh a little. I should have stayed. I should have waited until he woke up, thanked him for a good time and put his number in my phone. But as much as I itched to run my fingers through his hair or slide my hand down his cheek, I knew I couldn't. At that point, I couldn't afford any distractions in my life and that's exactly what he would have been. If we were together, stone-cool sober, I knew I could have easily lost myself in him and forgot everything I had been working toward all my life. I found it was much easier to brush something off and say you did it because you were drunk than admit you made a mistake. I didn't think sleeping with him was a mistake really, just the way I went about it and my actions the next morning. Instead of sticking around, I slithered out from under his arm and the warmth of his body and thought about how bad it would have been if I woke up next to some ugly troll. At least he was hot as hell in the light of day, and I didn't have to perform coyote ugly and chew my own arm off to get out from under him. I threw on my clothes as fast as I could and left him naked and sound asleep in bed. No one moved as I stepped over the lifeless body, spread throughout the house and performed the morning-after walk of shame, out the door and into the bright morning light.

I turned around a total of six times to go back to that house and wait for him to wake up. And each time, I talked myself out of it with the same argument. I used him to finally get rid of my stupid virginity. Did I really want to know why he did it? I was definitely not the best looking girl in the place. People tell me I'm cute and I guess I probably am, but what exactly did he see when he looked at me? Maybe he could just tell I would be a sure thing that night. I'd rather remember him as the sweet, buzzed, hot guy who rid me of my virginity and made me laugh. I didn't want to know if he would

some skeezy womanizer that was sleeping his way through the student directory, and I was just lucky enough he finally made it to the M's.

When I got home that day, Liz made me retell the story over and over so she could squeal and tell me how happy she was for me and that it was no big deal she struck out with his buff friend because she found some guy named Jim who was all alone at the party and it was love at first sight.

Her squealing and patting on the back continued until five weeks later when she came home from class and found me sitting on the bathroom floor surrounded by little white plastic sticks that all said "Pregnant" on them, crying hysterically with snot running down my lip as I rambled incoherently about milk and cows taking pregnancy tests.

For two months Liz helped with my crusade to find this guy. She never got his friend's name either because as soon as she made eye contact with Jim "the rest of the world disappeared" or some disgusting shit like that. We contacted the admissions office and we poured through a dozen yearbooks in the hopes that we might recognize him in one of the pictures. We even tried locating the skanky chick Niki that slammed into me, with no luck.

Did these people just appear out of thin air or something? How is there no fucking record of their existence at this school?

Liz even tried talking to the guys at the frat house herself, taking Jim along with her, but she didn't have any better luck than I did. She did however come home completely trashed because every guy she talked to made her and Jim do a shot every time they said the word "goat testicles". Honestly I have no idea how that word came up in their conversation so many damn times. Do you have any clue how annoying drunk people are when you are forced to be sober? Especially drunk people who are in love, touchy-feely and quoting Walt Whitman to each other while you've got red, puffy eyes from crying, haven't showered in four days and just got done throwing up the contents of your stomach because you saw a commercial about goldfish - the crackers, not the real fish. But those damn things looked so much like real fish all I could think about was swallowing a live, slimy goldfish that stared at me with its beady little eyes before I put him on my tongue.

I knew the chances of me finding this guy were slim to none. I couldn't very well move into the frat house and be the boys' token pregnant roommate in the hopes he would one day come back the night before the child I was carrying was in college and possibly living there himself.

I also couldn't hold off on telling my dad any longer. I saw the campus nurse that morning and she confirmed with a blood test that I was pregnant, and going by my calculations of the one and only time I had sex, I was thirteen weeks along.

Now, I'm all for a woman's right to choose. I believe it is your body and do with it as you may and blah, blah, blah. With that being said, as much as I dislike tiny little humans, I could never get rid of my own flesh and blood, by abortion or adoption. It just wasn't something I was personally comfortable with. So, with Liz holding my hand, I took the chicken shit way out and told my dad over the phone.

Let me explain something about my dad. He's six-foot-four, two hundred and fifty pounds, has tattoos up and down his forearms of snakes and skulls and other scary shit, and he always looks pissed off at the world. He scared the shit out of several boys in high school when they knocked on the door and my dad would answer. When I came to the door, they'd tell me they thought my dad was going to kill them and I'd reassure them that no, that's just the way his face always looks.

In all honesty, my dad was a nice guy. He got his tattoos when he was young and in the army and he always had a scowl on his face because he was exhausted. He worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week for months at a time before he got a day or two off. He wasn't big on talking about his feelings or being affectionate, but I knew he loved me and would do anything for me. He was a great guy, but he was still a force to be reckoned with and God help the person who ever hurt his little girl. L

started spewing Chuck Norris quotes in high school and replacing Chuck's name with my dad's. She did it so much that I find myself doing it from time to time. He reacted to the pregnancy news pretty much like I expected him to.

"Well, I'll get your room ready so you can come back home when the semester is done. And if you find this guy in the meantime, let me know so I can rip off his balls and shove them down his throat," he said in his usual deep, monotone voice.

If you spelled George Morgan wrong on Google it didn't say, "Did you mean George Morgan?" she simply replied, "Run while you still have the chance."

After the semester ended, I applied for a leave of absence with the school so they would hold my scholarship. They would only keep it active for one year before I would have to reapply. I never intended to be away from school that long, but I also never intended on a baby completely fucking up my life. Er, I mean, bringing me years of great joy.

For the next six and a half months, I worked as much as my growing stomach and cankles would allow so I could save plenty of money for after he was born. Unfortunately, in the small town of Butler, there's not much to choose from employment-wise that would pay well. Unless of course you wanted to be a stripper at the town's one and only strip club, The Silver Pole. I was approached by the owner at the grocery store when I was seven months. In the middle of the cereal aisle he told me there were plenty of patrons in his club that thought the pregnant body was beautiful. If there weren't children around at the time, I would have told him off. Oh, who was I kidding? If Jesus himself was standing next to me, I would have still told that douche bag that if he ever came anywhere near me again I would rip his dick off and choke him with it. I would have apologized to Jesus before leaving though of course.

On the bright side, the president of the Butler Elementary PTA was standing there with her six year-old and heard every word. I guess I shouldn't hold my breath waiting for the invitation to join. Huh? Shoot. Now where am I going to find the will to live?

With my pregnant stripping career over before it started and my proverbial tail stuck between my legs, I groveled for my old job as a waitress at Fosters Bar and Grill. Luckily, the Foster's still owned it from when I worked there in high school, and they were more than happy to help me out considering *my situation*.

When people in a small town talked about you to your face, they whispered the words that they believed might offend someone if they were to overhear your conversation. In my opinion, they should be whispering words like "fuck", "anal sex" or "Did you hear Billy Chuck got caught with his pants around his ankles down at the Piggly Wiggly with his dog Buffy?" Whispering the word "situation" kind of defeated the purpose. I whispered random words all the time just to mess with them.

"Mrs. Foster, the *bathroom* is out of toilet paper."

"Mr. Foster, I need to leave *early* to go to the doctor."

I talked to Liz every single day after I moved back home, and she kept up her search of the missing sperm donor when she had time. Her family was from Butler as well so she came home to visit me as often as she could but towards the end of my pregnancy, she just didn't have time to make the three and a half hour drive as often. Her professors convinced her to double up on her course load so she could graduate a year early with her degree in Small Business, majoring in Entrepreneurship with minors in Marketing and Accounting. With her full-time studies, part-time internship with an at-home consulting firm and her blossoming relationship with Jim, I knew she had a lot on her plate and didn't begrudge her any of her successes or happiness. I was a big enough person to admit that I was only a tiny bit jealous. Liz and I always talked about owning businesses together. About how we'd rent out buildings right next to one another with a door that led into both and how we'd live in a loft upstairs and throw awesome parties every weekend. We also dreamed about both of us marrying our

of the members of N'Sync and living a life of polygamy with our new band N'Love.

~~Fingers still crossed on that one.~~

In all of our talk about the future, Liz never really cared what kind of business she ran, she just wanted it to be hers and be in charge. I always knew I wanted to own a candy and cookie shop.

As far back as I can remember I was always in the kitchen covering something in chocolate baking cookies. My dad always joked that I could never sneak up on him because he could smell the chocolate on me from a mile away. I was pretty sure it leaked out of my pores at this point. I was so happy that my best friend's dream was coming true. I tried not to dwell too much on the fact that my dream was going on the back burner until God knew when.

I missed seeing Liz every day once I moved back home, and I was sad that my future needed to be put on hold, but nothing was as depressing as going into labor on my twenty-first birthday. While all of my friends celebrated their twenty-first birthdays by drinking every alcoholic beverage on the menu, sitting on the floor of a public restroom while singing along to the music piped through the speakers and then hanging out of the passenger-side window of a car on the way home screaming, "I'M DRUNK FUCKERS!", I was stuck in a hospital trying not to punch every twat nurse in the face that kept telling me it wasn't time for my epidural.

I decided then and there that someday, I was going to be a labor and delivery consultant. I was going to stand next to every single woman in labor and every time a nurse or a doctor or hell, even the woman's husband said something stupid like, "Just breathe through the pain," it would be my job to squeeze the living fuck out of their reproductive organs until they were curled up in the fetal position asking for their mommies and I'd say "Just breathe through the pain, asshole!" And anyone that gave the new mother a dirty look after an eight pound, one ounce bloody, gooey, screaming pile of tiny human was cut out of her stomach when she asked her father to grab the bottle of vodka out of her overnight bag because, "morphine and vodka sounds like a stellar way to celebrate the birth of my spawn," would get their McJudy glare smacked right off their face.

And I guess that brings us up to speed.

The next four years were spent working my ass off trying to make enough money to set aside for my future business, while raising my son and trying not to sell him to gypsies on a daily basis.

After a while, the search for Mr. Cherry Popper fell by the wayside as life got in the way. It didn't mean I never thought about him. Every time I looked at my son, I couldn't help but think about him. Everyone told me that Gavin looks exactly like me. And I guess he does to an extent. He has my nose, my lips, my dimples and my attitude. But his eyes were a whole other story. Every single day when I looked into the crystal blue pools of my son's eyes, I saw his father. I saw the way the corners of his eyes crinkled when he laughed at something I said, I saw the way they sparkled when he animatedly told me a funny story and I saw the sincerity in them each time he brushed the hair out of my eyes that night. I wondered where he was, what he was doing and if "Heathers" was still one of his favorite movies. Every so often I would be struck with a sharp stab of guilt at the fact that this man would never get to meet his son, but it's not like I didn't try. There's only so much I could do. I wasn't about to put out an ad in the paper that says, "Hey, world! So this one time, at a frat party, I was a total slut and let a stranger go where no man has gone before and now I have a son. Won't you please help me find my baby daddy?"

Jim became more of a permanent fixture in my life as well as Liz's. I probably talked to him on the phone as much as I did her. It was a no-brainer that the two of them would be Gavin's godparents. They spoiled him rotten and I liked to put all the blame on Liz for the mouth on that kid. I didn't think anyone screamed louder than I did when I found out Jim asked Liz to marry him and that they were going to move to Butler to be closer to her family and me. As soon as they moved back, Liz began tirelessly working and researching for the next few years to get a solid business plan in place. She to

me a few months ago that she finally figured out what she wanted to sell, but she didn't want to tell me until she was certain she could do it. After that phone call, the most I saw of Liz was a blur as she ran from one appointment to the next. She was constantly on the phone with realtors and banks, running back and forth to her lawyer's office to sign paperwork and making daily trips up to the county courthouse to get all of the small business forms completed. I reluctantly agreed during a night of girl-time after five too many dirty martinis, that I would help her out on a part-time basis as a consultant. I think my exact words were "I love you Liz. And I love vodka. I shall hug you and squeeze you and caress you Lizdka." Liz considered that a yes.

All Liz told me about the job was that it could be considered sales and I would have a blast doing it. Being a bartender, I considered myself pretty damn good at sales.

"What? You say your wife dumped you for a woman in her book club? Here, try a bottle of Patrón."

"Oh no, your best friend's neighbor's ex-wife's dog was hit by a car? Here, Johnnie Walker should do the trick."

Liz liked to make even the most mundane things suspenseful and wanted to keep me in the dark and surprise me about what I would be selling. And since I was drunk at the time, I would have agreed to sell do-it-yourself enema kits and she knew it. I worked a few hours almost every night at the bar after Gavin went to bed and made some money putting together candy and cookie trays for parties around town but I could always use the extra cash, so I was okay with it as long as helping Liz out didn't cut into my time with Gavin too much.

Tonight was my "orientation" so to speak. I was going to tag along with Liz to one of her engagements so I could get a feel for the business. Jim was watching Gavin for the night so I offered to drive, dropping him off when I picked Liz up.

They met us out in the driveway as I pulled in. Liz was lugging the biggest suitcase I had ever seen behind her and shooed Jim's hand away when he tried to help her heft it into my trunk. I should have taken Jim's knowing smirk when we pulled away as a huge red flag. In my defense, I don't guess I thought out much. I assumed we would be selling something like candles, Tupperware or beauty products; all things that Liz loved. I should have known better. Or paid closer attention to the words "Bedroom Fun" stitched into the side of the suitcase in pink, elegant script.

4. Sex and Chocolate

"He was my favorite uncle. Good old Uncle Willie. I sure am gonna miss him."

I rolled my eyes and drained the last of my beer, listening to my best friend Drew on the bar stool next to me try to pick up one of the waitresses.

"Ooooooh, you poor baby. You must be so sad," she told him, eating up all of his bullshit and running her hands through his hair.

"I'm devastated. Practically horny with grief."

"What did you say? I couldn't hear you over the music," she shouted.

I snorted and looked over her head to make eye contact with Drew, giving him a look that clearly said "I cannot believe the words that are coming out of your mouth."

With a kiss on his cheek and a smack to her ass, they parted ways and he swiveled around on his bar stool to take a swig of his drink.

"Your Uncle Willie died two years ago. And you hated him," I reminded Drew.

He slammed his beer down on the bar and turned to face me.

"Have you forgotten the awesomeness that was "Wedding Crashers", Carter? Grief is nature's most powerful aphrodisiac, my friend."

Drew had been my best friend since kindergarten, and yet sometimes, the things that he said still amazed me. The fact that he was a good friend and was here for me in my time of need helped me overlook his obnoxious and man-whorish behavior most of the time.

Drew flagged the bartender over and ordered up two shots of tequila. At this rate I would be going home on a stretcher. My organs were going to start shutting down from liquor running through my veins instead of blood and I'm pretty sure there was a little person in my brain whispering the words to "Ice Ice Baby" and messing with my vision.

Drew and I both worked for the same automotive plant and were recently transferred from the plant in Toledo to the one a few hours away in Butler. We shared an apartment together in Toledo, but after two years of listening to him bang his way through the white pages, the yellow pages, and eight business directories within a ten mile radius, I decided not sharing a small space with him anymore was a necessity. I still had a ton of unpacking to do in the small ranch-style home I was renting and was starting to regret letting Drew convince me to drown my sorrows in the bottom of a bottle. He knew me too well though and knew that if I was at home, I wouldn't be unpacking. I'd be sitting there alone, staring at a picture of my ex wondering why the hell I wasted so many years with her.

The bartender poured the shots, letting them overflow and Drew grabbed them both, handing one over to me and raising his in the air. I reluctantly did the same with mine and tried to focus on holding my hand steady while the room tipped sideways.

Drew's empty hand flew out and grabbed onto my elbow, yanking me upright and spilling some of the shot on my hand.

Oops, guess that was me tipping, not the room.

"Before you face plant off your stool, fucker, I'd like to make a toast. To my best friend, Carter. May he never fall victim to another two-timing, gold-digging whore."

We downed the shots and slapped the glasses on the bar.

"Thanks for not fucking her buddy," I mumbled, trying not to slur.

"Dude, first of all, I'd never fuck any girl you were even remotely interested in, let alone dating for a long period of time. And second, I could never accept a proposition from that skank. I would never do that to my penis. He's done nothing wrong and doesn't deserve the punishment of her vagina."

I sighed, smacked my elbows on top of the bar and rested my head in my hands.

"My poor penis. I should buy him a gift," I muttered to myself.

~~Finding out my girlfriend of two years was cheating on me two days before we were supposed to move here together and start a new life was a huge pain in my ass. And my penis.~~

Drew's grief counselor, the waitress, walked back over to console him and interrupted my pity party. At the same time, a rush of air surrounded me as someone quickly walked by, their shoes clicking on the hardwood floor. I breathed in right at that moment and the smell of chocolate overwhelmed me and instantly transported me back in time to five years ago.

"Mmmmm you smell so good. Like chocolate chip cookies," I muttered with a raspy, hung-over voice as I pulled her incredibly soft body against my own.

Wow, she doesn't have any bones. Like, at all. Where the fuck are her bones? Am I still drunk? Did I sleep with a blow-up doll? Again? I peeled my eyes open one at a time so the rays of sun shining in the room wouldn't make me go blind. Once my eyes adjusted to the light, I looked down and groaned. Nope, not drunk, just hugging a pillow. I let go of the pillow, rolling over onto my back and flinging my arm out to the side of me to stare up at the ceiling.

She was gone. And I didn't even get her name. What kind of a dick was I? She wasn't too interested in knowing my name either though, so I guess we were even. As drunk as I was last night, I could remember every single second. I closed my eyes and pulled to mind how great her ass looked in those jeans, the smell of her skin, the sound of her laugh and the way her body felt like it was made to fit against mine. I scanned through every memory I had, but for some reason, her face just wouldn't come into focus no matter how hard I tried. God dammit, how was I going to find her if I couldn't remember her face and didn't know her name? I was the king of jackasses. I knew she was beautiful even if I couldn't remember everything. Her skin was soft and her hair felt like silk and her lips on my face could make me whimper like a girl. And best of all, she made me laugh. Not many girls made me laugh. They never got my jokes or were too uptight for my sense of humor. But she got me.

Last night obviously wasn't my best performance. I hope to God I didn't have whiskey dick and was able to at least get it up and keep it up. Shit. She probably ran out of here as fast as she could the morning because I sucked so badly. I never had a one-night-stand before; I didn't know what the protocol was for something like this. Would it be wrong for me to hunt her down? Even if she wanted nothing to do with me ever again, I needed to at least apologize for my God-awful skills last night.

And truth be told, I just wanted to see her again. I wanted to know if she was real or if I just imagined how perfect she was. I grabbed the pillow and brought it up to my face, breathing the smell of chocolate in deep and smiling. I might not have remembered everything, but I remembered her smell. It was like hot chocolate on a cold winter's day, chocolate cake baking in an oven on a rainy afternoon...

Oh my God, I sound like a chick. I need to watch some ESPN and get in a bar fight, pronto.

The sound of the toilet flushing in the connecting bathroom had me bolting upright in bed. Holy shit! Was that her?

I swung my legs around off the bed and started to get up right when the door opened.

"Fucking hell dude, don't ever sleep in a bathtub. That shit is for the birds. My ass is killing me." Drew complained as he shuffled over to the bed, turned around and let his body fall back onto the end, settling after a few bounces. He threw his arm over his eyes and groaned.

"Why the fuck does morning have to come so early?" he whimpered.

I sighed in disappointment, holding the sheet in place so I could lean over and grab my jeans that were crumpled on the floor with my boxer-briefs still shoved inside them.

"I'm never drinking again," he promised.

"You said that last week," I reminded him as I flung the sheet off of me so I could put my pants on. What. The. Fuck?

"Oh shit. Fucking shit. Mother fucking shit balls."

~~This can't be good. This really, really cannot be good.~~

"What are you whining about over there, Nancy?" Drew asked as he removed his arm from across his eyes and sat up.

"My dick is bleeding. Drew – MY DICK IS BLEEDING!"

I was screeching like a girl. I knew it, he knew it, pretty soon the whole house would know it. But my dick was bleeding. Did you hear me? My fucking dick was fucking bleeding. FUCK! It's not supposed to bleed. Ever.

I thought I was having a heart attack. I couldn't breathe. I didn't know much, but I did know the rules about owning a dick. Rule number one: It should never bleed. Rule number two: There was no rule number two. IT SHOULD NEVER FUCKING BLEED.

Did I sleep with a nutcase that decided to carve my dick like a jack-o-lantern while I slept? Or maybe her vagina had teeth. My dad used to always tell me when I was a teenager to stay away from them, because they bite. I thought he was kidding. Oh God, I can't look. What if some of it is missing?

"Calm down. Let's assess the situation," Drew said, crossing one leg over the other and folding his hands on his knee. "Have you noticed any of the following: unidentified discharge, burning sensation when you urinate, lower abdominal pain, testicular pain, pain during sex, fever, headache, sore throat, weight loss, chronic diarrhea or night sweats?"

He sounded like a fucking commercial for syphilis.

"Eeww dude, no. I just have blood on my dick," I answered irritably, pointing to the problem but refusing to look.

He leaned over and looked down at my lap.

"Looks okay to me," he said with a shrug as he stood up. "You probably just bagged a virgin."

I sat there with my bloody, non-chlamydia infested dick flapping in the breeze and my jaw hanging open.

A virgin? That can't be right.

I glanced back down in my lap and took a closer look. Okay so it wasn't the bloody slaughter originally thought I saw. My dick hadn't been Texas Chainsaw Massacred. There were just a few pin streaks. I wore a condom though. How in the hell does something like this happen? You use those God-damned things as water balloons in middle school and couldn't get them to pop even if you threw them at a bed of nails. The one time you need them to stay in one piece they decide to say "fuck this shit". It was like condom anarchy.

But more importantly - Holy hell! Why would she let me take her virginity? Why in the fuck would she give something like that to me when I was completely shit-faced and couldn't even make it sort of enjoyable for her? What an epic fail. I probably ruined sex for her forever. She's probably thinking right now "Seriously? That's what I waited for? What a joke."

"I have to find out who she is. I need to apologize," I mumbled to myself, standing up and pulling my boxers and jeans on.

"Whoa, dude. You didn't even get her name? Wow, you're kind of a dick," Drew said with a laugh walking over to the bedroom door and opening it.

I threw my shirt over my head and then followed behind him, hopping on one foot to slide my shoes on.

"Thanks for making me feel a whole lot better Drew. Really. You're a stellar friend," I said sarcastically as we maneuvered our way through a house full of passed out drunks.

"Hey, it's not my fault you banged and bailed bro," he stated as he took a giant step over a naked chick wearing just a sombrero and opened the front door.

"I didn't bang and bail. In case you failed to notice, I woke up alone in bed this morning."

"With a bloody johnson," he added, walking down the steps of the porch.

~~"With a fucking bloody johnson," I repeated with a groan. "Shit. I have to find this girl. Do you think it's wrong for me to ask your dad to use his private detective resources to find out who she is?"~~

Drew's dad opened his own PI agency a few years ago when he decided following the rules of the police department didn't fit in with his busy schedule.

"Are you asking me if it's ethically wrong or if I think it's wrong? Because those are two very different questions my friend," he replied as we crossed the street and got into his car parked by the curb. If only Drew took after his father in some way...

"I have to find her Drew," I said as he started up the car.

"Then find her we shall my little virginity thief!"

"We never found her, did we big guy?" I muttered to Drew, who I assumed was still sitting next to me.

"Are you speaking to anyone in particular or do your shot glasses usually respond?" replied in a very un-Drew-sounding voice.

"Now, if you'll direct your attention to the one Claire is holding, that is called the Purple Pus Eater. It has four speeds: Yes, More, Faster and Holy Shit Balls. It's also got a g-spot stimulator that is sure to tickle your fancy. Could you hold it up a little higher so everyone can see, Claire?"

I shot Liz a look that clearly said "bend over so I can shove this thing up your ass sideways" before I raised the rubber penis above my head with absolutely no enthusiasm.

The living room full of completely trashed women screamed in excitement and bounced up and down in their seats when I raised my arm, like the thing I was holding above my head was the actual penis of Brad Pitt. It's plastic, people. And it's filled with double A's, not sperm.

"Go ahead and pass it around for me, Claire," Liz said sweetly as she reached into her suitcase for yet another rubber rod.

I held my arm out lifelessly in front of me for the drunk-ass sitting closest to grab, but she was too busy complaining about how her husband's spunk always tastes like garlic.

Please God don't let me ever come face-to-face with this man, I beg of you. I will look at his crotch and see cloves of garlic popping out of his dick.

"Yo, Lara," I called, trying to get her attention so she could take this dildo out of my hand.

"Claire, remember to use her Bedroom Fun Party name!" Liz reminded me in a sickeningly sweet voice that was starting to make my ears bleed.

I gritted my teeth and imagined raising my arm back up and chucking the fake phallus right at her forehead so she would have a permanent dick head mark right in the middle of her face that people would point and laugh at. Is that a birthmark? No, it's a dick mark.

"Excuse me, *Luscious Lips Lara?*" I enunciated politely while trying not to vomit in my mouth.

Really, was it necessary for everyone to come up with a stupid ass nickname for themselves? That was the first thing Liz made everyone do when they got here. Come up with a sexual nickname for yourself using the first letter of your first name. And you were only allowed to call each other by those names all night.

Luscious Lips Lara, Juicy Jenny, Raunchy Rachel, Tantalizing Tasha

Who thought up this shit? Oh, that's right, Liz - my former best friend. The one who decided to start a sex toy business without telling me so she could con me into working for her.

She should have let me come up with the names. Twat Face Tasha, Jizzbucket Jenny, Loose Labia Lara...those didn't make me want to jam a pencil in my eye.

Liz finished up the rest of her stupid party while I imagined I was doing anything else but this, like getting a Brazilian wax, water boarded by Navy Seals or my big toe shot off at close range for

gang initiation. Any of those would be preferable to talking with complete strangers about lubrication, nipple clamps and anal beads.

I gave her the silent treatment as we drove to the bar an hour later. I was offered an extra shift tonight that I couldn't pass up and Liz was going to keep me company in between customers. I should just open the car door and throw her out of the moving vehicle for what she did to me tonight, but I didn't want to ruin someone else's car if they ran her over.

"You can't ignore me forever, Claire. Quit being a dick," she complained.

"Speaking of dick...really, Liz? Sex toy parties? At what point in our friendship did you think I would EVER want to sell Pocket Pussies for a living? And another thing, Pocket Pussies? What kind of man needs something called a Pocket Pussy? Do men really need to release their seed out into the wild so much that they need to stick a fake vagina in their pocket that they can whip out at a moment's notice?"

Liz rolled her eyes at me and I resisted the urge to reach over the console and punch her in the vagina.

Pussy Punch: when a Twat Tap just isn't enough.

"Claire, quit being such a drama queen. I don't expect you to sell my sex toys forever, just until I can hire a few more consultants. Think about it Claire, this is the perfect opportunity for us. What was the one thing you noticed that was missing from this party tonight?" she asked, turning sideways in her seat to look at me as I got off at the exit for the bar.

"Dignity," I replied flatly.

"Funny. Snacks, Claire. Well, good snacks at least. They had bowls of chips and store bought cookies and enough liquor to choke a horse. These are women with money, Liz. Money they don't mind throwing away on Pocket Pussies for the husbands they don't want to screw anymore or clitoral stimulators for the "friend" they know whose husband has never given them an orgasm. What goes better with sex than chocolate?"

Sex and chocolate. My chocolate. My chocolate-covered yummy goodness that I couldn't sell as often as I liked because as a single mother working in a bar, it was hard to market yourself. The majority of people I was surrounded by cared more about who was buying the next round than what kind of desserts to have at their next party.

"The building I rented has the potential to be turned into two separate spaces. One of them with a kitchen," Liz continued. "A very large kitchen where you can perform your magic and when women book their parties they can order dessert trays at the same time."

I took my eyes off of the road long enough to look over and Liz, expecting to see a sarcastic smile on her face and waiting for her to say "Just kidding! Wouldn't that be great though?" When none of that happened and she just sat there in her seat staring at me expectantly, I blinked back tears that I hadn't even realized were forming in my eyes.

"What are you talking about?" I whispered shakily in the dark car.

"Okay so I did something big. Something that's probably going to piss you off because you're going to think it's charity or pity, but really, all I did was get the ball rolling. The rest is up to you," she explained. "I've looked everywhere for a building for my business and everywhere I see is too big or too small and way overpriced. My realtor called me a few weeks ago and told me the owners of Andrea's Bakery right on Main Street came into some money and wanted to sell their space as quickly as possible, retire and move to Florida. It was like a sign, Claire. The price was right, the location was perfect and it's exactly what we always dreamed about, minus the whole Justin Timberlake penis time share. With one sheet of drywall, we've got enough room for two connecting businesses: my sex toys and your desserts."

I bit my lip to stop myself from crying. I never cried.

"But I really wanted to share JT's penis with you," I told her with a sad look, trying to take the seriousness out of this situation before I started to ugly cry. No one likes an ugly crier. It's uncomfortable for all parties involved.

After a few minutes of neither one of us saying a word in the dark car, Liz couldn't take it anymore.

"Will you say something already?"

I let out a huge breath and tried to calm my racing heart.

"Liz I don't...I can't believe you...the money..." She put her hand on my arm as we pulled into the parking lot of Fosters.

"Don't turn into a pansy-ass on me just yet. Take some time and think about it. You know the trust fund my grandfather left me has been eating its way through my pocket so we're not even going to discuss money right now. Talk it over with your dad, come and check out the kitchen at the store and then we'll talk. In the meantime, you're going to get your hot little ass in that bar and serve me up some cocktails. I've got some new products to test out on Jim after your dad picks Gavin up later," she said with a wink before getting out of the car.

I sat there for a few minutes after she got out wondering what the hell just happened. My best friend was always a force of nature, but this just defied logic. Did she really just tell me she bought me a business? With every step of my life I felt like I'd made wrong turns. Nothing was going the way I planned. I wanted this more than anything, but part of me was afraid to really get my hopes up. What if she knows though? Maybe good things were finally going to start happening in my life.

I glanced at the clock on the dashboard and realized I spent entirely too long sitting in my car and now I was late for my shift. I ran through the parking lot and threw open the side door, tying my little black apron around my waist as I went. Mr. and Mrs. Foster have seen one too many episodes of True Blood and recently decided we should adopt the same uniform as Merlotte's. Tiny black shorts and tiny white t-shirts with the word "Fosters" stamped across our tits in green. It could be worse. At least I don't have to make sure I'm wearing enough "flare" or sing some demented version of happy birthday with the rest of the staff. "Happy birthday to you, with beer goggles on you don't look like you should moo, happy birthday dear random stranger who's dressed like a hooker, happy birthday to you!"

I ran behind Liz already seated on a stool at the bar sipping her usual drink of vanilla vodka and Diet Coke and waved to T.J., the bartender I was taking over for tonight. Thankfully the men didn't have to wear the same uniform. I didn't think I could handle seeing a couple of these guys in tiny shorts with their hairy balls popping out of the leg holes.

On a slow night, I would have just hopped my ass up onto the bar and swung my legs around to get behind it, but the place was packed tonight. I had to do it the right way and go under the hinge lift-top part of the bar at the opposite end. I jogged past some poor drunk schmuck that held his head in his hands, moaning, and made a mental note to call him a cab if he was here by himself.

Once I was behind the bar and got the skinny from T.J. on the customers here tonight and what they were drinking, he left to go home and I got to work getting refills for the regulars. One of the waitresses brought in an order for ten shots of the cheapest whiskey we had. I rolled my eyes and went to the end of the bar where we kept all of the whiskey. What is wrong with these people? Cheap whiskey equals a bad hangover and having the craps all the next day. I started lining up the shot glasses on my tray when I heard the drunken moaner speak.

"We never found her, did we big guy?"

Oh Jesus. I hate the really tanked ones. I hope this guy isn't a crier. He sounds pitiful. And if he pukes on my bar I'm going to rub his nose in it like a dog that shit on the carpet.

"Are you speaking to anyone in particular or do your shot glasses usually respond?" I asked.

without looking up as I added a few more shot glasses to the tray and reached under the bar for the bottle of Wild Turkey, trying not to make gagging noises as I unscrewed the top and the disgusting smell wafted up to my nose.

I saw Return of the Living Drunk whip his head up out of the corner of my eye while I filled the glasses.

"You know, the first sign of insanity is when inanimate objects talk to you. Or maybe it's the first sign of alcohol poisoning," I mused to myself.

"Who the hell is ordering that rot gut? They're going to have the shits all day tomorrow."

I laughed that even drunk, he was able to come to the same conclusion as me. Picking up the tray of shots and a bowl of lemon slices, I turned around to tell him so - and stopped dead in my tracks at the sight before me.

What. The. Fuck?

I felt the tray full of glass and booze tipping out of my raised hand but there was nothing I could do to stop its descent to the floor. I stood there like a statue, staring straight ahead as the glasses shattered around my feet and liquid splashed up onto my legs.

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