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HENRY

I am not the girlfriend type of guy.

I want to get it out there and be completely honest.

I am not the girlfriend type of guy.

I won't: hold your hand, buy you flowers, have dinner with your parents.

I will: kiss you until your legs collapse and you beg me to lift you up and start all over again.

I'm sorry if that hurts your feelings, ladies, but you should know exactly what you're getting into.

It's only fair.

#

INT. – BACKSEAT OF MY CAR, SATURDAY NIGHT, LABOR DAY WEEKEND

I am bored.

HER

And I was like, really, you like my hair like this? On top of my head?

ME

(blank stare)

HER

Because I think it looks better in braids. I know that sounds so third grade, but it's true!

ME

(blank stare)

HER

Don't you agree, Reinaldo?

ME
(even blanker stare)

HER
Reinaldo? Hel-lo?

I forget she is talking to me because my name is not Reinaldo. It's what I told her my name is, though, so it makes sense she's calling me that. I try for a few seconds to remember her name – Marissa? Marisol? Something with an M? – but I can't. I suddenly wish I hadn't suggested our leaving the party to be alone in my car. It's much easier to tune someone out in a large group. But here we are, in the back of my Jeep. I think about how many girls I've been with in this very same position. Our legs are touching and even though it's the time I would normally make my move, I have a gnawing feeling this is not going to happen. Whoever this girl is sitting next to me, she seems incredibly...young. But it's still worth a shot.

HER
Did you hear a single thing I just said?

ME
Maybe you should take your dress off – it's really hot in here.

HER
(giving me a look I don't even have to describe)
You are a pig, Reinaldo! A pig!

She slams my car door behind her as she leaves. Loudly. I am slightly upset. Not because I liked her (she was boring) or because she thinks I'm a pig (I am) or even because it's pretty clear I'm not getting any tonight; I am upset because I can usually pick them pretty well. Girls, that is. I can see a girl and know within seconds what her deal is. What she

likes and what she hates and whether she moans when she's being kissed. It's a talent I have. Some people are good with numbers. I am good with women.

Just not this one. The Hello Kitty hair clip should've tipped me off.

I get out of my car and light a cigarette. I don't smoke often but when I do I like to enjoy it. Savor the moment. It's dark, but not too dark. Even though I'm standing in the parking lot I can hear the noise coming from inside the hotel. Music. Dance music. You should know that I love to dance. Love to dance. Not professionally or anything, but in a club where it's loud and crazy. That's one of the reasons I love parties. I like to have a good time. And there's nothing wrong with that – despite what anybody says.

This particular party is a Sweet Sixteen for a girl who goes to my high school. Usually when I crash Sweet Sixteens, I like to go where no one knows me and I can pretend to be someone else entirely. I get a rush from sneaking into a party I wasn't invited to and dancing. Well, not just dancing. Finding a cute girl to hook up with and hopefully making a little mischief in the process. Escaping the monotony of life for a few hours. Duke and Nigel (my co-crashers) have never understood this about me, and they probably never will. They just think crashing parties is fun. They don't know firsthand the need to escape. To flee. To invent fake names and fake pasts and know that someone, some girl, actually believes it all. This makes me feel powerful. It also makes me kind of an asshole, but I don't really care. Sorry.

This is probably why I love movies so much. The idea of transforming into an entirely different person on screen than who you are in real life. You would think that'd make me a wannabe actor, but I'm not. I do want to study film in college, though, and write screenplays. Like Charlie Kaufman or Alan Ball or Joel and Ethan Coen. I want to

make movies, to create something from nothing. Every day I imagine my interactions as part of one big script; I see things as if my whole existence is on film. I've been this way for a while now, and I can't imagine changing anytime soon. I want to be a writer so I can hide behind a computer or even a pen and paper and make decisions by myself. Without anyone interfering. Without anyone saying No.

Inside, it's as spectacular as a Baz Luhrmann film, only made entirely of horny sixteen year-olds. The guys here look so tiny, like miniature men. Did I ever look that small? Granted I'm barely two years older – but somehow I skipped that awkward phase of pimples and wispy mustaches.

I was not officially invited to this extravaganza, but since most everyone here goes to East Shore, I am known. Duke and Nigel are too (slightly less than me, but still). Truth be told, it's a pretty chill setup. The girls seem ready to party, the music is nice and hip-hoppy, and the food smells good. Not a bad way to close out the summer. The fact that school is starting up again next week makes me wanna hurl, but I'm not going to think about that right now.

I head over to a table covered with a bunch of snacks, shrimp, and napkins. And mini quiche. People love mini quiche. This is when my buddies approach me.

DUKE is just over six feet tall with lots of brown hair. He's built, plays football, and he's pretty smart despite talking like he's a character in a Judd Apatow flick.

NIGEL is short-ish, black, and always dressed up. He plays the cello like a pro even though Duke and I are the only ones who know he can play at all.

The three of us have been inseparable since we were twelve. We started crashing Sweet Sixteens last year, when Duke turned seventeen and got a car. (Don't judge – there's not much else to do on Long Island.) I got my cousin's hand-me-down Jeep about three months ago, on my seventeenth birthday, and now we alternate driving so we can (try to) drink.

Nigel and Duke are more talk than anything, really. They've never had girlfriends and they usually mess things up even when they do get the chance to score – not that it happens often. I, on the other hand, seem to attract more girls than any one person should. They cling to me like barnacles. I kind of dated someone once (the closest thing I've had to a girlfriend, anyway) but it was a long time ago and the relationship, if you can even call it that, ended badly. Since then, I like to fly solo.

NIGEL

Yo, Henry, how'd it go?

DUKE

Get any tail?

Only Duke would use the word "tail" in reference to women.

ME

(eating a pig in a blanket)

Not yet, gentlemen. But the night is young.

DUKE

You're cool to drive, right?

ME

I'm cool. Why, what's up?

NIGEL

(pointing to the bar a few feet away)
Look how stocked they are!

It's true. They have all the fancy stuff. The bartender, though, seems like a total bitch. I doubt she'll be lax about serving us. (Tonight, Nigel's folks – our usual supply – locked their liquor cabinet, so we're on our own.)

A few girls pass by and giggle. I give a little wave. They run away.

ME

You can try, dude, but it's never gonna happen.

NIGEL

I like a challenge.

DUKE

Your mom likes a challenge.

NIGEL

Shut up.

DUKE

Let's make a bet, Henry: if we can get the bartender to serve us, then you give us each five bucks.

ME

No.

NIGEL

Oh, come on. It's all in good fun.

ME

How about this: if you get her to serve you, you each give me five bucks for gas, seeing as how I picked your asses up and drove you here.

NIGEL

Ha. No.

ME

Okay, how about this: whether you get her to serve you or not, you'll each still give me five bucks for gas.

DUKE

I don't like that bet.

ME

It's not a bet. I need the cash. This is my way of telling you.

DUKE

Fine. Just don't drink, okay? You need to drive us home.

ME

Deal.

NIGEL

My brother knows a guy who used to date this girl named Leslie, who maybe went to middle school with the bartender. I think her name is Stacy. Or maybe Sapphire. If that's not an in, what is?

ME

You're right. She'll totally serve you once you mention that.

Not.

Duke and Nigel slip away and I am left standing alone at the hors d'oeuvres table.

This is not, in my experience, such a bad place to be.

"What's with all the quiche?" asks a voice from behind me.

I turn around and there is this girl. She looks around my age but the closer I examine her, the more I realize she is not a girl. I mean, she is but she isn't. She's a woman. She has dark brown hair and perfect skin. She is beautiful.

ME

Do I know you?

HER

I don't know, do you? (She picks up a mini quiche and takes a bite. She swallows but crushes the rest in a napkin, tossing it into the garbage.) Gross.

ME

I've never seen you before.

HER

That makes sense. I just moved here.

I cannot take my eyes off her. The way she walks is not walking. It's gliding. I can see every line and curve of her body. I want her immediately. But it's more than sexual. It's something I can't describe.

Across from us is a tiny alcove with a window overlooking the hotel grounds. She sits on the ledge.

HER
Care to join me?

I am suddenly so glad that nothing happened with whatshername in my car because then I would not be experiencing this right now. Whatever this is.

We sit for what feels like a long time. Normally I have a routine:

1. Compliment
2. Flatter (which is similar to #1 but more over-the-top and typically involves physical contact)
3. Get It On

It's like this: girls like when you take charge and tell them what you want. And what they want. I am great at the art of seduction (whatshername being an exception). What I am not great at is the follow-through. I don't hook up with the same girl more than once. It's too complicated. Too much work. Too much responsibility.

I stare at this gorgeous creature beside me and wonder what she looks like minus her dress and plus me on top of her. I begin to plan my attack.

HER
I guess you're the silent type.

ME

Not usually. But you've got me speechless.

HER

(laughing)

Oh. I see. Speechless, huh?

ME

Well. Kind of speechless.

HER

I bet you say that to all the girls.

ME

No. I don't.

HER

Sure. So what's your name, stranger?

Something about her makes me want to say Henry Arlington. But that is completely against the Crasher Code (which Duke, Nigel, and I follow strictly). Rule #1: Never tell a girl your real name. And even though I have this sudden urge to be, well, honest, I know myself. Honesty is something I will probably regret.

HER

I didn't realize that was such a hard question. (She reaches for her purse, as if she's about to leave.)

ME

Henry.

I don't know why I say it, but I do.

HER

Good name. Classic. Nice to meet you, Henry. I'm Garrett.

Unusual, but it suits her. Garrett. She looks right at me when she says it, too, which both unnerves and exhilarates me. I feel...naked. (I'm not, but I could be wearing absolutely nothing and I wouldn't feel any more vulnerable than I do right now.)

Garrett crosses her legs and her dress rides up just enough to show off how amazing those legs truly are. This is about the time I'd normally say that my car is parked close by and casually mention how comfortable the backseat is. Now, though, I can't bring myself to do anything that will imply I'm less than a total gentleman.

GARRETT

So, how do you know Erica? Our dads went to grad school together.

Erica. Erica. Who is Erica?

GARRETT

The birthday girl? (Dramatic Pause.) Erica Warner? (She looks at me skeptically.) Are you supposed to be here?

ME

Hmm?

GARRETT

Were you invited?

ME

Depends on what you mean by invited.

GARRETT

I guess by invited I mean that, you know, one day you opened your mailbox and there was a really fancy invitation inside, addressed to you, inviting you to come and celebrate Erica's Sweet Sixteen.

ME

Interesting.

GARRETT

So were you?

ME
Invited?

GARRETT
Yes.

ME
Absolutely not. You have great eyes. They're so...

GARRETT
Blue?

ME
Yeah.

GARRETT
I get that a lot.

ME
I can see why.

GARRETT
Because they're blue.

ME
Right.

I wait to see if she'll leave, but she doesn't. She smiles.

GARRETT
I feel like I know you from somewhere. (She laughs, and the sound makes me happy. I am thankful she does not have an annoying, Taser-worthy laugh.) Gosh, that makes me sound crazy, doesn't it?

ME
No. I don't think so.

I've never believed in energy or vibes or any of that bullshit, but just being near this girl puts me at ease. All of a sudden I cannot seem to stop myself from talking.

ME

Did you have a nice summer? What did you do? I work at this little movie theater in Huntington. Do you like movies? Where are you gonna to go to school?

GARRETT

Whoa, there! Calm down. (She puts a hand on my knee. I know immediately this is not a sexual move, but one of concern. Still, when she touches me, something sparks between us.) Are you okay?

ME

Yeah, sure. I guess.

I wipe my forehead. It's dripping with sweat.

GARRETT

You don't look so great, Henry. Let me get you some water.

At the same time she gets up, Duke and Nigel practically crash into me. They're both breathing hard and their eyes are everywhere.

NIGEL

We gotta go, dude.

ME

What?

DUKE

That bartender. Man. We gotta go.

ME

What happened?

DUKE

(looking behind him)

Can we talk about it later? Like, when we're far, far away from here?

NIGEL

It's a 69, Henry. A 69. With booze.

I stand up immediately. A 69 with booze is Crasher Code for getting caught stealing alcohol. (We call every emergency a 69 with [fill in the blank] because, you know, it's funny.) Normally, I'd have no problem getting the hell out of here with D & N, but I think of Garrett and realize I don't want to leave. I consider tossing the keys to Duke and letting him drive my car home.

DUKE

Dude, what is your problem? Let's go!

If I tell them I want to stay, I'll have to explain that it's because of Garrett. And if I want to stay because of Garrett, they'll assume it's because I want to Get Freaky with her, and one of the cardinal rules of the Crasher Code is No Hos Before Bros. I could attempt to explain that I have never felt such an immediate connection with anyone in my entire life, but that would make me sound like a total loser and it would be against both the Crasher Code (punishable by death or, at least, social genocide) and my own personal code. No girlfriends. Ever.

Suddenly, Garrett is back, holding out a glass of water for me. She acknowledges Duke and Nigel with curiosity.

GARRETT

Is everything all right?

I debate whether or not to ask for her phone number. How can I pull that off with Duke and Nigel standing right here? I suddenly wish they would just go away. Vanish. Garrett looks genuinely concerned; I am not sure how that makes me feel.

DUKE

Well, hello there, my dear. My name is Charlie von Huseldorf and I come from money.
Oil money. What's your name?

GARRETT
What?

Then we hear a voice. "That's them, over there!" We turn and see the bartender coming
toward us with two security guards. Big security guards. They do not look happy.

NIGEL
(grabbing my arm)
Now!

ME
(to Garrett)
I'm sorry. I've gotta go.

GARRETT
But –

DUKE
Later, sexy!

We run out of the hotel lobby and into the parking lot. I don't hear anyone following us
but I also don't turn around to look. I spot my car and click it open. We pile inside.

NIGEL
Man! That was close.

DUKE
Nice going, douche monster. It was all your fault anyway.

NIGEL
It definitely was not my fault. It was yours!

DUKE
Maybe it was your mom's fault.

NIGEL
Shut up.

I start the engine. Duke selects a synthy electropop album we all love, Owl City's Maybe I'm Dreaming, and rolls down the windows until the air conditioning kicks in.

We drive for a few minutes until our breathing is steady. Then the inevitable questioning begins.

NIGEL

So...who was the chick? She was hot.

DUKE

Really hot. I'd bang her.

NIGEL

You're not exactly picky.

DUKE

Well, I wouldn't bang your mom.

NIGEL

Ouch.

DUKE

That's what she said. Last night. When I banged her.

NIGEL

Lame, dude. Lame.

DUKE

(To me)

What did you tell her your name was?

ME

I forget.

DUKE

Shut up. You're not gonna tell us?

ME

It's not important.

NIGEL

It's totally important! What's with you?

ME

I dunno. I just feel weird.

DUKE

At least answer us this: did you guys fool around?

I should just say No. I mean, nothing happened. But I feel so strange about the whole thing that I choose to remain silent.

DUKE

I knew it! Dude. We want details, my man. Details.

NIGEL

All in good time, Duke. (He leans forward to pat my shoulder. Nigel knows when not to press an issue – a skill Duke most definitely lacks.) Henry will tell us when he's ready.
Right, Enrico?

I ignore the question. I cannot stop thinking about Garrett. There has only been one other person in my entire life who, even though she's gone, I think about constantly. My mother. I haven't seen her in five years. As I get lost in the music and the speed of my car on the highway, I wonder if Garrett will be the second woman who will leave me and never look back.