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the End)

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Your Name Here _____ · Cris Mazza
(novel excerpt, from near the end)

April 20, 1980

Shit . . . 4:15 a.m. I can't remember. God. But there's a feeling of something I'll never forget.

The hot tub. The steam. All my clothes still on. Really? No, my clothes were off. Had to be. A sleeve with silk lining? No. Hot boozy water boiling around me in the dark. Absolute dark . . . ? No. . . . Alone, again, this time? No.

But my clothes are wet, in a pile over there. I had to put them back on that way. Cold and clammy, but better than wearing any of their clothes and have them coming around asking to get their shirt or pants back. What the fuck was Cy doing there? No one told me it was a double date—but with only three people. Or were there more? Was Kyle there? Or was it a whole-station party? No. No. No. Someone strung red and blue Xmas lights all around and had them plugged into a thing that makes them go with the music. I was watching. Figuring it out. One string was the bass. One the vocal. All mish-mashed. I was staring up. I was being fucked. Wet pants still tangled around one ankle. Wet shirt under my back. Glass of wine poured out over my face. Wake up, little girl! Who said that? An open-handed slap. Do it, show it! The Xmas lights going haywire like a special show to greet Santa as he climbs down the chimney. His grand entrance. Someone lifting my head. Watch him do it. My neck ready to snap in half. Holding someone's ankles, one in each hand, on either side of me. Then turned like a pancake. Like a Polish sausage on the grill. Being pulled up by my hips, like a cat, like a rag doll, my head and shoulders stayed heavy on the floor. Someone laughing. The carpet smelled like wet wool. Someone singing happy birthday. I waited through all the endless happy-birthday-to-you verses to find out whose birthday. Happy birthday dear _____ (your name here). Did I ever find out? How many to-you verses are there? My arms in wet sleeves. My shirt thrown up over my head. My back cold. Where was that silk-lined coat? Even colder down on my butt. Something wet . . . and cold. What is it what is it what is it? Someone's crazy voice wouldn't shut up.

Shut her up.

Just frosting for the cake, Sweetheart. Wanna suck?

Nipple in my mouth filling me with whipped cream.

Oh. . . . It was Haley's coat, not mine, but that was another time . . . not so long ago . . . when her cowgirl scent from a coat wadded around my head overpowered that same smell of booze and smoke. . . . If I'd had the coat last night . . . could it have also overcome the woolly smell, their slimy sweat, the grass, the smell of pussy on someone's hand, the cream in my mouth . . . ? Spitting sound of whipped cream sprayed into the air, then landing around me with the soft plopping sounds of wet snow falling from trees.

How's that feel?

Like I gotta take a shit.

Someone thought that was hysterically funny. Someone holding my butt cheeks apart. The whipped cream melting and running down the crack. Someone shaking the can. Someone kneeling on my hand. Someone fucking my asshole. Someone slapping my thighs. How many of them were there? Lying on the floor feeling like I had to take a dump. Did I ever go into the bathroom? Once I did . . . a long time ago . . . another different time . . . after he said I looked like a boy. . . .

I don't remember ever being on my feet. Did I crawl around all night, slide on my stomach, slither out of the hot tub like evolution? Or was I dragged from place to place by one ankle? Probably not. I don't have rug burns. But a few bruises. And dried blood. Blood turning black around the corners of my eyes, in my ears, and, mostly, in my nose. That's where it had to come from. But I don't remember how I got the bloody nose. One of those spontaneous combustion bloody noses?

Maybe if I try to remember the beginning. . . . I never should've had those joints by myself before I even got there. Met Al at his office. Working late, he said, so just meet him at the station and we'll go from there. No ride in his sports car, though. Instead: the elevator upstairs. All the way. To the penthouse. The door already open. Did a dozen people jump out and shout surprise? It was someone's birthday, wasn't it? Or was that just Al shouting as we came through the door. Golden already there, sitting in the huge swivel chair.

When did I say okay? When did they ask? There had to be a moment. No one held me down. We passed the weed between the three of us until I lay flat and they finished it together, over me, silently, just the music, the only music I remember, The Doors from six or eight years ago, Light My Fire. What were they looking at? Not really me. But my eyes were shut most of the time, opened to slits now and then. Their faces flickering blue and red. I'd probably already drunk, in an hour, more bourbon than all the other booze I'd ever had in my life. Maybe an exaggeration. Felt like it, though. One of them touched my shoulder—his hand

rough like sandpaper, made me feel I was velvety smooth . . . and he was scratching the delicate surface of me. But when did I get undressed . . . or lose my clothes . . . my wet clothes . . . who took them off? Nothing was ripped. Not a button missing. I probably did it myself. Between hits of the joint. Possibly forgetting they were kneeling on either side of me. Forgetting they were there, except to take the joint from their hands when they passed it . . . until I just receded, faded back, and I was already undressed. The music ended. Someone went to find a new tape. The other stayed, the rock-rough hand still on my shoulder, my upper arm, and he said something like “You can really be a woman, twice the woman, tonight, if you want.” I do remember the if you want. I remember saying, “I’m not a virgin.” When the other came back, the one who’d stayed said, “Let’s go.” And they bent over me, each taking a nipple and sucking.

All that after I’d already been in the hot tub. Did I trip? Fall in? How much had I drunk before that? What happened before the tub—before the drugs and whipped cream and fucking . . . did we talk? I want to feel like I didn’t say anything.

I also never said anything to Haley. It’s not necessary to talk to say goodbye . . . as long as you both know you’re saying it. . . . I’m sorry, Haley . . . I admit it, you didn’t know, I fucked you over, maybe I deserved this. . . . But we did have to say goodbye. Not saying it is the best way. I mean not out loud. Meaning it, showing it, that’s different. Goodbye can be soft, slow, warm-water smooth, weightless, graceful, gentle as a first touch if you don’t try to say or explain it. She would’ve understood . . . wouldn’t she?

But I landed in that hot tub like a crashing cinder block. Shouting. Yes, I guess I used my voice. Just “Hey—” The music was so loud. Maybe every time I said anything, none of us heard it.

Oh shit, I remember something else:

Al said, “Kyle says you’ll go along. Won’t kiss-and-tell. You want to get somewhere here, don’t you?”

God, did you say that, Kyle? Why?

And Golden: “You and Kyle? I knew it, dammit, the lying bastard. You’re fired!”

Got a promotion then was fired . . . all in ten seconds. But Al said, “Wait, she’ll atone for that. He couldn’t offer you a party like this, huh, Sweetheart?”

Is that when I went into the tub? Or when I got the bloody nose? And what about this nail polish? Black. Fingers and toes. One did the feet, the other worked on my hands. Not very steady, the polish all over my cuticles, smeared on my knuckles. Done after the first bourbon bottle had been emptied, probably. Or was that the

bottle which got spilled in the tub? Or . . . did the tub smell like hot whipped cream? Maybe the nail polish is smeary because I was shivering. Or because maybe I kept jerking my hands and feet away. The one at my feet pounded on my leg with his fist then turned around, sat on my knees. I could still rock my feet on my heels from side to side. Laughing. Was I laughing? Or gasping. Where'd you get this, where'd you get this, it's—

Haley's. Black nail polish. The acrid smell of it taking the place of any cowgirl perfume which might've been lingering for months in the red and blue air. Didn't I once lay my head on the breast of her coat and cry? When was that?

I did cry. That's right. Because I lost my contact lenses in the hot tub? Or when the burning end of the joint they were passing fell onto my stomach? Or when I opened my eyes and saw Cy's purple face screwed shut, his white hair, and realized it was his dick in me?

He'd finished the polish on my feet. Then they almost had a fight. With him still in me. Al wanted to put a black nail-polish mustache on me. And started to. But Golden didn't like it. He said, Whadda ya think I am, a goddamn fag?

Keep your wig on. We're just playing around.

WE? She ain't doing shit. You gotta real dud this time.

I heard she was better than this.

Well, at least she's gotta couple'a holes. Make the best of it.

Sweetheart, wake up. Is she dead?

Corpses don't moan. Listen to that. She likes it.

Let her like me for a while.

Let me get a squirt, will you?

You had one.

Hours ago. God, listen to that juice. She loves it.

Sweetheart? Honey?

Sweetheart, honey, sweetheart, baby, bitch, cunt, darlin, honey, sweetheart . . . never once my name. . . .

3 May 1989

I want to get out of here, I don't know where . . . fly somewhere. . . . Can I get to the bus depot through the window? Or the police . . . should I go to the police? But when they ask, "What happened?" what'll I say? I was raped . . . and hurt . . . and there was blood . . . at one time there was

blood, but it must've gotten washed away. Now my body just aches. Like a white-knuckled fist that can't be pried open . . . I have to tell the fist to relax, I have to instruct each piece of myself separately . . . relax, toes . . . relax, knees . . . relax because we have to go to a party soon, Garth's party. . . . How can I go to his party when this has just happened to me? I can picture myself swinging a baseball bat in a circle and bashing everyone's head who's too close to me. There'll be party conversations, loud enough to hear but far away, voices in a black cloud, making me unable to see who might be speaking to me:

What's new?

I think I was raped.

You *think*?

Well, you see, it was ten years ago, and I may've said yes. If I did—I raped myself. Maybe I didn't know what I was saying yes *to*. Not to what they did . . . not to *them*. Never to *them*. . . .

But what if I did say yes . . . dirty pig, fucking *whore*. . . . *No*. I'm not, I didn't, I couldn't have . . . not Corinne Staub . . . *you* knew me, Kyle. I wouldn't've said yes . . . but did I say *no*? Why not? What kept me from saying *no*? Could I have said *no* with a broken jaw? Where's my broken jaw? Isn't this when it was broken? Why didn't I feel it as I was writing it all down right afterwards? The way I feel it *now*—it's my jaw I hear crying . . . it hurts . . . *hurts*.

Of course, look outside, you fool, it's raining. And you're grinding. You're not even asleep, and you're grinding your teeth. Maybe Corinne needs to be put in rubber headgear to keep her from hurting herself. To keep her from saying *yes*. Ever again. To help her bounce when her head hits concrete. I kicked the night guard under the desk a few weeks ago. Every time I see it, I think: "A fighter lives here." Not a very good one.

Why me, Kyle, why'd they want *me* at their party? They'd never done more than shove empty coffee cups at me, or lists of crossed-out ideas. I was part of the woodwork, the plastic table top, the newspapers and tabloids stacked on a chair. But *now* what am I?

You're a successful news anchor . . . and you're Garth's lover. . . . Are you both at once? . . . And remember, there's a party tonight.

Will you be there, Kyle? Will you be one of the ones I smash with a baseball bat or one of those I stare at with moronic eyes as I cling to Garth's arm and wonder what the hell will happen to me when he leaves. I knew it

would happen eventually . . . I knew I wouldn't run away from it. I thought. . . . What did I think? What the hell was I *thinking*?

Monday, April 23, 1980

Déjà vu. Kyle on the air alone. No sign of Golden. No His-Pal-Al hanging around. One thing is different this time, though: this note—found it taped to the door with my name on the envelope, saying Adcock wants to see me ASAP. Kyle's handwriting. All the possibilities keep running through my head, but there really is only one probability: I'm going to be railroaded out of here just like Haley was. But I can't go face Adcock until I talk to Kyle.

later

Now he says I have to figure out what to do. He said to wait here—Adcock's already gone to lunch so I have time to think about it. He said it so low and steady, almost calmly, hard to believe we'd been shouting across the table, standing, circling, always keeping the table between us. Only once did his eyes and face show any sign of softness—not when he left, but when he first came in and I was sitting here with his note. He said, "I heard about it," and touched the back of my head as he went around the table. That started the fight, and ended any comfort I might've gotten from him, because I had to know how he heard. And he had to know what I'm going to tell Adcock. Claim rape or harassment, which one? he said.

Could I claim rape? Was it? I never intended it to happen. Luckily I barely remember, although I can still feel it—sore and chaffed, inside and out. But I didn't want to think about what to legally call it. I wanted to cry for a little comfort—don't you owe me that? This thinking just makes it all come back . . . they lapped and pushed at me like dogs, cheered each other on, but how could it be rape? I never actually said no or stop.

Still, the legality—that's all he wanted to talk about . . . that and what I would say to Adcock. But my voice was like repeating gunshots, and every time it was my turn to speak, I said, how did you know?

Finally he said, "Well, I knew about your date, didn't I?"

"And that means you knew what would happen?"

"I knew enough to make a pretty decent guess."

"But you're the one who said I should go, you said—"

"I tried to call the cops last night."

"Why?"

"To report a rape. So they could stop it from going on or going any further. I wanted them to be caught. But the cops wouldn't come. So I had to let it happen."

"Let it happen?"

"Look, Corinne, they've been fired. I decided I wouldn't just keep my mouth shut this time. I called Adcock over the weekend and told him something had happened, told him what was going on and—"

I stood up. "I can't believe this. You knew. You knew. And all you did—"

"At least I did something. What did you do? You went along. Why didn't you stop them? You could've left. Just walked out the door. I thought you'd have more self-respect than that! You let it happen."

"Me? I—"

"Damn you, if someone thought you were a thief, would that make you steal? When someone thinks you're a slut, do you have to turn into one?"

"I'm not! I didn't let it happen. It just happened."

"You can't tell that to Adcock. What a cop-out. He'll fire you. Look, they're gone. That's been taken care of. What're you going to do?"

"What should I do?"

"Well, think about it . . . yes, you should feel wronged . . . deeply wronged . . . but what if you claimed it was rape. . . . You know how awful that would be: a court case, giving testimony, all the rest. . . ."

"But I won't get fired if I say it was rape—"

"That's right. You would still be here . . . where you could think about it every day. And everyone who looked at you would remember it . . . every day. Wouldn't that be nice?"

"I don't know, I don't know, I don't want to think about this. I don't even know what happened. I can't know what to do till I figure out what happened."

"That's not a good idea."

"Why?"

"You don't want to know. But you know what you should do? Don't make any statement to Adcock. Just go up there and quit. Better still, send a letter of resignation. Right now."

"Just quit? What'll that prove?"

"It doesn't have to prove anything."

"Maybe I don't want them to get fired for just having a drunken party . . . maybe I want them to be fired because . . . because of what really happened!"

"What good will it do? It's over."

"That's all you can say about it? You knew about it!"

“I did what I thought was best.”

“Yeah, and you thought it was a good idea for me to accept that date too! Maybe what I think is best is to tell Adcock that you knew so much about it because it was all your idea!”

I wasn't even close to the exit, in case I really was going to dash out and run to Adcock with that story. Kyle was closer to the door. His face changed color. Something drained out of him. More than just color. “You need to think, Corinne,” he said softly. “Before you do anything, just think. I'll leave you alone to think.”

So here I am thinking. But pretty soon, too damn soon, I'm going to have to be finished thinking and go out that door knowing what I'm going to do and what will happen to me.

still 3 May 1989

The thing is, maybe I'll never remember what it was I had decided to do when I left the conference room that day.

Should I start another letter . . . am I ready to talk to you now? Dear Kyle, Now's when I should call you. Now's when I should kill you. The journal ends here. My hospital bill says I was released April 26, three days later. That's when I should've called you—instead of taping the notebook closed and sealing it in a vault. I remember when they brought me my stuff from the hospital safe—still confused, disoriented, they were still asking me my name and who was the President and what year was it—I nearly ripped my shoulder bag apart searching to make sure the notebook was still there, but didn't open it when I saw it safely tucked in with the tabloids and magazines. Then, the heart-lurching panic when I realized I couldn't go to the bank immediately—had to turn the cab around in mid-block and send it back to my apartment where the earlier two notebooks were stashed in a drawer, praying to myself, *Please don't let my mother have already emptied the drawers and packed them in boxes and loaded them in the moving van*, and I guess I was mumbling or groaning, clutching the shoulder bag against my stomach, the driver asked if I was okay, if I wanted to go back to the hospital, but I just said, “Go, keep going,” through clenched, wired teeth. Said nothing to my flabbergasted mother—bursting in, blasting back out—she thought she was going to come get me from the hospital later that afternoon. By later that afternoon, I was dozing in the fleecy warm weight

of two or three pain killers, dreamless, numb. I'd known so clearly that I had to get rid of the journals—without knowing *why*. Just an instinct, like knowing to put food in my mouth, to curl up when I'm cold, to sleep when I'm exhausted. I didn't know, though, I didn't know. I didn't know what had happened, Kyle, I didn't . . . my eyes wouldn't even focus and I couldn't tell left from right; I didn't know if I'd seen you 3 hours before, 3 days before or 3 months before. Some frantic primal urge just said run and don't look back. You see, Kyle? I was still protecting you. This time from myself.