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The worst thing about New York City was subways. You had to sit down on plastic that was warm from somebody else's bottom, and with only one layer of cloth between because what you wore to work in 1968 was polyester mini-dresses so short that they stood out like a lampshade. I tried to convince myself there was no way to get pregnant from a subway seat, but by my third work morning I was riding standing up and swinging from a vertical pole that was foul with dried bits of who-knew-what.

I had not been looking forward to the subway trip home, and then after that the two-block walk past grimy bums and obscene graffiti to the one-bedroom apartment I shared with two girls who also were fresh out of Smith College. We had taken jobs together in this single-girl mecca in order to seek better-quality husbands.

Being young in the sixties was confusing. We had grown up in ponytails and poodle-skirts, looking forward to the perfection of marriage, and we had chosen Smith to land Ivy League husbands. I recall that in Freshman Biology class we were taught about pregnancy and the right trees to choose when we were on tree-planting committees. Then in our senior year, and all in a moment, we found ourselves marching to protest the war and insisting on civil rights and equal careers. The war protests had become so

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disruptive that most colleges closed early that spring. While our horizons were expanding, our clothing was shrinking to the point where my friends and I had learned to keep one hand free to ensure panty-coverage.

I had ridden to my third day of work on the subway, swinging from a dirty pole, but that same afternoon I was unexpectedly riding in a gray Rolls Royce with an elderly chauffeur in a gray peaked hat. The car's interior smelled like rose-scented polish. Its leather back seat was soft and deep, and having one layer of cloth between seemed fine when a contact-pregnancy here was going to result in a blue-blooded baby.

The car had slowed to a crawl. There was dim noise outside. All the windows around me were frosted opaque and etched in graceful curlicues. The richest American under the age of forty didn't care to see outside.

"I'm sorry, Madam. There are protests in Central Park."

The voice that seemed to come from everywhere was Mr. Peters, a tall man of robust physique who had touched his cap and introduced himself as he had held open the back door of this car. His hair was the same dove-gray as the car, as was his hat, as was his fine-twill uniform that was splendid with buttons and epaulets.

The richest American under the age of forty didn't care to see outside, but I did. I slipped off the seat and crept to kneel and peer through the glass partition that separated back from front. There, far ahead, was the car's long hood with its Rolls Royce angel, or whatever that was. The glass partition rolled down like a window. Now I clearly heard the chanting.

"They are diverting traffic, Madam. You will be required to use the service entrance."

"Mr. Peters? I've never met Jack Richardson. Can you tell me anything about him?"

He hesitated. I realized then that I was likely not the first girl to have asked him that question. He said only, "I'm sure you understand, Madam."

I did understand. He couldn't talk about our mutual boss, although if

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he could talk he might have said something useful. He was kindly enough to feel bad about that.



Dozens of Smithies had applied for this job when Larkin International recruited on campus. None of us had heard of Larkin. But it was located in lower Manhattan, the job paid a thousand dollars per month, and it was – get this – programming a computer. Larkin was installing an IBM 360 that took up one whole floor of a building. A computer turned out to be burnt-orange boxes on a raised floor so they could run cords beneath. A dropped ceiling allowed for extra cooling.

There were eight beginning programmers in our Cobol class, three of whom had been recruited at Smith, but five of whom were Dartmouth boys. That was nice. I realized as we were getting acquainted that all of us had chosen screwy majors because in 1964 we had been told that liberal arts was the best way to go. By 1968, we all were wishing that we had majored in something useful. No matter, the chatty instructor told us. Computer programming needed just a logical mind and an English-based language that was easy to learn, and research was showing that our very majors – Art History, Greek Mythology, Romantic Poets – would be great preparation for computer programming.

We were given a tour of the computer on our second morning there. It was tape drives the size of upended beds, card readers the size of Chevrolets, and a monstrous small house called a central processing unit. The future was looking large and bright.

Our third day at work was our first day of Cobol classes that were scheduled to run for a month. At three o'clock that afternoon, my new boss came and hunkered down beside me. He murmured, "Do you have a moment?"

My time was his time, so of course I had a moment. His office was on

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the floor above, overlooking a maze of cubicles. Eventually I would be out there somewhere. He led me in and closed the door and gestured at a guest chair as he sat down. He looked at me. I looked at him. I guessed him to be about thirty-five, with thinning hair and a wedding ring. Here was one less available man. This need to work while I sought a spouse was a tragic waste of the final minutes when I was still sufficiently lovely to attract a first-rate husband. I could see in his face that I was still beautiful. But age twenty-two was around the corner.

He said, “Do you know who Jack Richardson is?”

“Richest American Under the Age of Forty.”

That had been the Time magazine caption crowded like blocks in the lower right corner of a cover that bore his face in such close-up that the name of the magazine obscured part of his forehead. He had beautiful gray eyes that met your eyes, glancing sideways from beneath female lashes. He looked very young and very smug, and when you read that cover article you understood why he was smug. His father had just unexpectedly died and left him such a substantial fortune that he was the Richest American Under the Age of Forty at only twenty-six. Twenty-six! You can imagine the excitement that magazine had engendered two years before when it had landed like a guided missile in the husband-hunting enclave that was Smith.

My boss – his name escapes me now – was saying, “Larkin is Mr. Richardson’s investment company. He – ah – he likes to get to know some of his new employees. He would like you to join him for dinner.”



The service entrance to Jack Richardson’s building was a square of gritty delivery yard with insufficient space and dignity for Mr. Peters to comfortably park that car. All the sidewalks in New York City bore a layer

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of worked-in grime that was disgusting if you tried to guess what mixture of shit and snot and vomit could have produced such uniform filth. I was avoiding thinking about it now, but during my first days in New York I had been so shocked to see how dirty it was that I had tried to analyze the filth so I could make some kind of sense of it. That silver Rolls Royce was absurdly out of place beside rusty barrels of smelly trash. Traffic was thick only inches away as cars were diverting from Fifth Avenue. Dimly you could still hear chanting.

Mr. Peters opened my door and offered his hand in a gray leather glove. I placed my hand on his gracefully, feeling like a genuine lady. He and I had been cheerily chatting, so the fresh sight of his face arrested me. Now he looked grim.

What I said to him was what I was feeling. “Thank you, Mr. P! This is an aventure!”

From sophisticated lady right back to kid. “Aventure” had been among the first words out of my youngest cousin’s mouth. It had been so oddly mature, and so cute, that all the cousins used it now for unexpected big events that elicited a toddler’s pure delight. English had needed a word for that. What I wanted to say to Mr. P., but didn’t, was that I might be naïve, but I was not stupid. I understood that a boy of twenty-eight would be a cauldron of raging hormones. But this was my aventure, not his.

I was thinking about what I should have said to better comfort Mr. Peters as I passed through service corridors to the building’s thirties-vintage foyer. Every bit of the brass decoration there bore a polish so bright you could have checked your teeth in it; every serving man wore creased black pants with a maroon jacket and a maroon-and-black hat. Gold braid was thick on epaulets and knotted all around the hats. There were six men standing there in a row with gloved hands clasped behind their backs as they watched the demonstration across the street.

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I had been told to give my name to the penthouse elevator man, but all four elevators were open and empty. I cleared my throat, loudly. It turned out that the penthouse elevator was the larger one on the end.

I still was thinking about Mr. Peters, and thinking how self-important I felt that my name had been recognized by the elevator man. But as that room that even held a small sofa began to rise with both of us in it, I found that he wouldn't meet my eyes. He even seemed to be blushing a little. Like Mr. Peters, he saw me as a lovely young thing going willingly up to the penthouse to be ravished because the richest American under the age of forty could buy anything.



The elevator opened into an enormous room that seemed dark, although it was full of light. Nothing in it was of more recent vintage than 1930 except its owner, who sat in an enormous armchair beside a gigantic fireplace that was dwarfed by the immensity of this room. The owner, too, was so oversized that the whole room seemed to be out of kilter. Jack Richardson was six feet, eight inches tall, a fact that we Smithies had found so delicious that someone had circled his height in ink in the dog-eared copy of that issue of *Time* that had lived on the coffee table of the little side-parlor of Northrop House during my last two years at Smith.

The elevator door closed, but I just stood there, hearing classical music light on the air and looking vaguely around the room. The owner said at length and without looking up, "Give me a moment." That chair was likely where he spent his days, surrounded by valises and papers.

Even from up here you could hear the chanting. I stepped to the old-fashioned casement windows that ran along one wall of the room and found a view that I could not have conceived was possible in New York. An immensity of sky, with below it treetops and lawns as far as the eye could see. I dropped the satchel that was the current fashion. We were too young

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and carefree for purses. Filling the street far below me were cops, and facing them, spilling into the street from the park, was a messy, chanting mob.

“Hey! Hey! LBJ! How many kids did you kill today?”

Over and over. The words never varied. It occurred to me that the election was only four months away now, so they had better enjoy their chanting while they still had a convenient president. “Hey! Hey! Humphrey!” wouldn’t have the same ring. “Hey! Hey! Nixon!” was worse. I could see from the demonstrators’ signs that they seemed to be protesting some Dow executive who lived in this building. “Better Living Through Chemistry,” one banner said, with an ugly skull and crossbones. Dow made some of the napalm that was being used to defoliate Vietnam, which fact made grotesque a happy slogan.

Standing there felt like playing hooky from school. I glanced at my Mickey Mouse watch that was all the college rage that year, a nod to childhood from far enough away that on a woman’s wrist it looked ironic. At the same time, wearing it felt like a refusal ever to entirely grow up. Mickey’s hands were on the nine and not quite the four. I was here a whole hour before quitting time.

“Hey! Hey! LBJ!...”

There had been race riots in Harlem in ’64 so dramatic with fire on the evening news that my mother had tried to talk me out of taking this job in New York City. By now, of course, the news had moved on and all you saw on TV every night was long grass blowing in propeller wash as stretchers carrying dying boys were loaded precariously into helicopters. The murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. had started a round of fresh riots in the spring, but people had figured out by now that every ghetto would erupt just once. After that big one, later riots were going to be just minor noise. So as cities across the Midwest blew up in rage at the loss of their sainted leader, it seemed that everyone around me was feeling not panic, but something like relief.

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I had grown up in small-town New England. The race riots and then the Vietnam War had landed in my life as calamities from nowhere. As I stood there, it occurred to me that racial issues seemed to be subsiding and the Vietnam War would eventually end, but in the years to come there likely would be many more unexpected disasters. The future was looking unsettled and violent.



I was so preoccupied with trying to make a chant out of a future President Humphrey's name that I didn't realize that my ultimate boss had been speaking. As my mind was waking up to the fact that he was saying something behind me, I heard him add more loudly, "I can see your ass."

I did what you would have done. I yanked the back of my skirt and spun around. For the first time I really looked at his face, which was amazingly young and on the edge of smiling. I suspected that I was not the first girl who had stood there gazing out his windows and been told that her dress was too short so she would turn and face him. And I was thinking, too, that if I had known that a day begun in an upper west side brownstone was going to end in a penthouse evening, I never would have worn this dress that left three-quarters of my thighs exposed and bore such a minor food-stain that I had decided it still was better to wear than the only other clean dress in my closet. I wouldn't have worn this watch, either. I covered it reflexively with my other hand.

"Come here."

I moved to maybe ten feet away from him. Papers lay in his lap, forgotten, and his foot dropped from the opposite knee as he looked intently and almost levelly into my eyes. I assumed that every other girl had flinched, but I would not flinch. This was my aventure, not his.

He didn't flinch, either. Instead, he glanced and took a toothpick from the little box on the table beside him, stuck it into his mouth, then leaned

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to pick up a manila folder from the floor. He had piles of files all around his chair, and deeper piles on two side-tables. Many more files were in open valises that were probably out of his reach, but maybe not. His arms were amazingly long. I backed up a step.

His foot returned to the opposite knee in order to create an impromptu desk. He was reading what was inside his folder. He frowned, chewing on his toothpick.

“Bobbi Christian? Christian?” That’s your actual name? Sounds like a stripper,” he muttered to himself. Then he blurted, “You majored in Religion?”

He looked up at me and seemed to realize that he was being impolite, even despite the chasm that yawned between the richest American under the age of forty and a Smithie he was about to deflower. He leaned and groped for a big floor pillow that was an amazing distance away, and he plopped it onto the floor-pile of folders beside his chair.

I moved and sat down on the pillow, facing him to remain demure, and after just a micro-instant of beginning automatically to sit cross-legged, I folded my legs up neatly beside me and tugged at my dress for a bit more coverage. From there beside his chair, the chants were dim traffic noise.

He had gone back to reading what was apparently my Larkin application file. He looked down at me, a relative position of our heads that seemed to make him more comfortable. He took the toothpick from his mouth and said conversationally, “I was a fucking altar boy.” His voice was so young that you expected it to crack. And it occurred to me that his ease with “fuck” was the same sort of gesture as my Mickey Mouse watch: it made him feel both as old as a grown-up and as brattily young as a boy. It kind of let him go either way. I began in that minute to feel the tiniest sense of unity with the Richest American Under the Age of Forty, which was a good thing because of what he said next.

“I still pray a lot.” He glanced down at me as he said it, looking pleased.

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He had a way of sliding his eyes under what were impossibly long, dark lashes and looking at you from the corner of his eye; it was the same look that Time photographer had caught. He went on, “I pray every morning and every night. The first thing I say when I wake up is, ‘Good morning, God. Will you please fucking kill me?’ Then I remember you’ve got to talk to God in His own language. I say, ‘Oh, sorry. Dear fucking God, please fucking smite me.’”

His appalling words and the bland way he said them were so shocking that my vision went black. His face came back spottily as he was saying, “Do you want to know what I pray at night?”

I began to say, “No.” But from somewhere came, “No fucking way.” It was the first time in my life that I had said or dreamed of saying that word.

He smiled. His smile became a grin showing perfect teeth and he said, “Cock.”

I said, “Cock.”

“Cunt.”

“Cunt.”

“Pussy.”

“Pussy.”

“Asshole.”

“Asshole.”

But he was hijacking my adventure now. As he began to say, “I’m going to fuck your...” I broke in and said, “Not if I fuck yours first.” Again, no idea where that had come from. I realized at once it was anatomically impossible, but he laughed out loud. I laughed a little, too.

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By dinnertime we were casual friends connecting on a personal level, so I no longer worried that he would try to use me and toss me like a Kleenex. He was taller than I was by fourteen inches, but he seemed to be accustomed to the fact that everyone around him was going to be shorter. He had perfected a way of speaking loudly enough that I could hear him, but softly enough that no one else could.

As he gave me a tour of his enormous and quaintly ancient penthouse, we began to share the little things that everyone uses to get acquainted. He told me he chewed toothpicks because he was having trouble quitting smoking.

“It’s a good thing you’re quitting! Kissing a smoker is like licking an ashtray.”

He gave me what I was coming to think of as his “Where the hell did she come from?” look. He said, “I’ve never had complaints.”

“Well, you’re rich and famous and cute. But all that will get you only so far.”

I noticed that there were lots of people who ducked out of sight as we appeared. Maids in black dresses with white aprons and hats. Men scurrying after them in black suits. There even was a butler in a swallowtail coat

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and a stand-up white collar and white tie who appeared and waited for his boss to look at him. Then he said, “Dinner is at your pleasure, sir.”

By that point, my boss was holding my hand. It seemed to be a way to orient our bodies so we could efficiently move together, and perhaps it also was his way to bridge the social gulf between us. He was talking about this penthouse that he had purchased with all its contents from a lady who was “eighty-two years old, but she looked a hundred” for a price that took fully into account the fact that it would have to be gutted. He also told me, sounding pleased, that her son had been furious to learn of the sale, but Larkin’s lawyers had made sure the woman was independently certified to be sane both before and after the transaction. He added, “Now I’m negotiating on the floor below. I’m going to need staff quarters.”

We talked about horses at dinner. We both had grown up on Morgans. He described his ancestral Virginia estate where he was breeding Morgans now, and I told a story about my attempts to drive a sleigh across untamped snow that made him laugh. He seemed to like to laugh, and I liked playing with making things funny.

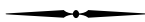
He was amused to discover that I was left-handed. He dined with his left hand palm-down on the table rather than properly in his lap, which I seemed to recall from some forgotten source was polite if you were European. Girls looking for a first-rate husband were avid to remember such details. We talked our way through several courses. I assumed that each was the end of the meal, so by the time our duck a l’orange arrived, I was feeling crammed with food. I picked at it politely. He said, “You’ll get used to six courses.”

I glanced at him then, and was rewarded with that sliding of his eyes to me. What had seemed to be smugness on the cover of *Time* now seemed more to spring from a need to engage the world while he still kept it at bay. It was another kind of “fucking” Mickey Mouse watch.

I had heard a possible future in his telling me I would get used to his

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lifestyle. Then his left hand turned palm-upward. He glanced at it, then back at my face. I lifted my right hand and placed it on his left, and it lay there softly for a moment before his fingers closed on mine.



By the time we were back in that gigantic parlor, I was head-over-heels in love. How could you not be in love? I was learning how to make things funny without being obvious about it, so more often now I hit a perfect pitch that had him laughing and had me in rapture. I was telling him about my high school party to which the whole class had decided to come, a hundred tipsy underage girls and boys draped together in a darkened room, so many people and with music so loud that my father had sat by a kitchen window, muttering to my mother that he was going to jail and this was the worst night of his life. He could see our driveway from where he sat, so he was the first one to spot the police cars.

I was learning how to signal that something was a punch line, a lifting of my voice and a pregnant pause. He chuckled as he dropped into his chair. He said, “Do you like brandy? Or would you rather have sherry?”

I liked sherry. I never had tasted brandy. I said, “brandy’s fine.” I added, “I’m still stuck with a pillow?”

“Would you rather sit in my lap?”

I dropped to the pillow without further comment. Then the butler arrived with brandy, and his boss asked him to move a side chair closer to his chair so we could hold hands. It occurred to me for the first time in a whole lifetime of feeling awkward about it that now I was delighted to be left-handed.

We talked about religion. My having majored in it perplexed him. He was no longer using “fuck” to me, and I was respecting his need to establish a distance from his concept of God. I liked the brandy. After four different wines at dinner, I was ever warmer in the glow of feeling so much in love

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with the richest American under the age of forty and the sheer perfection of my adventure. I was beginning to think that, sure, we were likely to end up in bed. I had come close to it with other boys, but I had saved myself. Tonight was the night.

He poured us more brandy from a crystal decanter that glittered in the room's soft lamplight. I squinted at my watch and realized that it was almost eleven o'clock. Could that be possible? It was. I had been here for seven hours! Was I going to be paid overtime? Might I take tomorrow off? The brandy was so good that I kept enjoying fresh tastes of it.

He was telling me an altar-boy story that began with his playing with a censer and nearly burning down the vestry, but progressed to an edge where he mentioned his parents and stopped talking. This had happened more than once, and it reminded me that he had been orphaned at twenty-six. He had been not much older than I was now. There were portraits of what he said were his parents over the fireplace, the only portraits in the room, and perhaps the only things he had added when he had moved in here briefly to plan the renovation.

For hours I had been trying to think of ways to make myself feel closer to him. His fame extended beyond Smith College, to the point where he owned a common name. "Jack" was for the youth of America as singular a name as "John" or "Paul." Just my thinking his name put more distance between us. I had been trying to come up with a way around that, and by dessert I was thinking of him as "Richie." That worked! It was a play on his last name and his status, and it cheerily seemed to make light of both of them. Before we even were back in the parlor, I was thinking "Richie" when I looked at him. Problem solved. I was ever more deeply in love.

I hadn't gotten around to telling Richie that his name was no longer Jack. After four glasses of wine and two snifters of brandy, I was losing track of many things. He had moved on to describe for me the elegant elevator lobby to come, and the fact that this front room would be his office.

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“We’ll build it so the next owner can turn it back into a parlor when I move out.”

“But Richie, this is perfect! You’ll never move out!”

His hand tightened on mine. I took a quick look at his face, now grim, and hurriedly tried to get away, but he pulled me across his lap and held me face-down there with ridiculous ease. He said, “What do you know. I really can see your ass.”

I was kicking, pounding a fist at his leg, trying to pull down that stupid dress, but he calmly put one of my arms behind him and caught and held my other wrist. I was still in love, and I found this situation to be unexpectedly titillating. I said, “Please let me up.”

“What did you call me?”

“I’m sorry. Let me up.”

“Hmmm... No.” He whacked my bottom with his open hand. Just one layer of cloth between.

It never would have occurred to me in my life that spanking could be foreplay, but the fact that it somewhat hurt made more intense those shocking sexual feelings. He hit me again, harder. That hurt more, but at the same time it had me squirming. I almost said, “I’ll race you to the bedroom,” but doing that seemed to be too forward. He let me up. As I stood away from him and caught sight of his face, I realized that he was as turned on as I was. He was slipping forward a little in his armchair and sliding his zipper down. He said thickly, “Get your cushion, baby.”

This was no part of my adventure script. I was thinking, well, the bedroom would be better, but maybe he had left it messy. I started to say, “You know, it’s a pretty thick carpet – ”

But he was hormonally demented. He leaned and grabbed that cushion and threw it down before him as he snapped, “Do it!” with a dismissive contempt that tipped me right back out of love. I stalked to the window and grabbed up my satchel and stabbed the heel of my hand at the elevator

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call button. Nothing. I banged and banged it with my hand. This adventure was entirely over. Then I heard him say from behind me, "It's disabled." He added more gently, "Come back here."

"No!" I shouted, fighting tears. I could see now that falling in love with him would be insane for a girl like me. I was outclassed, and we both knew it. He could turn on a dime and give you nine cents' change. He held all the power. Being nice was his choice. He could just as easily not be nice, and I knew I never could live with that.

I kept hitting that disabled call button until I heard him on the phone behind me. He was calling for an elevator operator. Then he called for a car and driver. I drew a deep breath and let it out. I glanced behind me and saw him standing somewhat awkwardly from his chair. The elevator was starting to move, but I hit the button one more time for luck.

From behind me, Richie said in a completely stupid, just-like-a-man sort of way, "I'll pay you a thousand dollars to stay."

To me, a thousand dollars was a whole month's salary. To him, it was less than carpet-lint. I spun and snapped through my teeth, "You know where you can put your money!" As I turned back to the elevator, I was adding, "You'd better roll it really tight." Deep breath. "Because you're such a tight –" The elevator door opened. It made enough noise so he likely didn't know I hadn't said that last syllable. Already I was regretting this ending.

It was a different elevator operator. This one ignored me altogether. I was out of breath, trembling, crying.

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It took me two weeks to quit my Larkin job. I had to go through a grieving process, first mourning all my little-girl hopes that I would find my perfect mate in New York; then mourning my thrill at finding a job where I was set to learn the Career of the Future; then finally trying to put away my Richie adventure that was ashes in my mouth.

Having each of my roommates immediately take a turn with Richie didn't help. Carol was gone for just one night, but she didn't show up the next day at work. When Liddy and I got home that evening she was humming in her bubble-bath. Liddy was pulled from Cobol class the next afternoon, and this time I saw it happen. She was away for two nights and the day between, and when she returned they were a secret sorority of which I never could be a member.

They had no idea that I had been there first. I had given them some easy excuse about having had a drink after work that night to reconnect with an old Dartmouth boyfriend. At first they hinted with shared smiles that my orientation at Larkin was about to happen, and it was going to blow my mind; but then soon Carol was away for another night. A few nights later, it was Liddy. They were the lucky stepsisters. I was Cinderella.

The fact that the jerk had so easily moved on from what to me had been an epic evening cemented my iron certainty that I had done the right

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thing in walking out. My eyes were open now to the number of pretty girls there were at Larkin, and I realized he must use his business as a pool from which to fish for conquests. The fact that many people seemed to know about that, and not even the victimized girls seemed to care, was horrifying to me. This was 1968, the future was here, and the primary beneficiaries of women's liberation were turning out to be rich men.

I was trying to stick it out through Cobol training. I wanted that credential for when I moved to Boston. So I swung from filthy subway poles, I stalked right past all the bums and graffiti, but I understood now that there were two New Yorks. Having seen both, I wanted no part of either. And sitting next to Carol in Cobol class, hearing her humming beneath her breath what I knew was Richie's classical music, was so distracting that I soon gave it up. I realized one afternoon that I couldn't pull my mind together enough to flowchart the problem on the sheet before me, and I stood up without prior thought and grabbed up my satchel and walked out. It took me a few wrong turns to find the stairs that led to my boss's office, but I went up there and knocked on his door. When he called, "It's open!" I walked in and quit.

"Is something wrong?"

"No. I just really hate computers. Programming. Whatever this job is."

"Oh. Well, you agreed when we hired you that you would give us two weeks' notice."

"What about one week? Is one week enough?"

He said it was. Then midway on my last afternoon, he appeared again in Cobol class and hunkered down beside my chair. This recalled to my mind so forcefully the way my Richie adventure had started that I choked on immediate, violent butterflies.

"Do you have a moment?"

I stood up numbly. I knew I would not be back. I had come to think of

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those Dartmouth boys as friends, but I didn't deserve to say goodbye when I was skipping out after just four weeks.



There turned out to be an executive suite at Larkin. It was deeply lush and profoundly quiet. A young woman sat at a built-in desk with four closed doors around her, each of which had a brass nameplate. One of the office suites belonged to Richie, which shot my theory that he worked from his penthouse. Not satisfied with letting me just quit and leave, he likely had ordered me up here to fire me.

“Miss Cavendish?” my immediate boss said politely to the girl at the desk. “Mr. Armstrong is expecting Miss Christian.”

I had met Ted Armstrong during orientation. I knew him when I saw him again, a fidgety guy of maybe thirty, thin and clumsy in the way of someone who probably felt as out of place as I did, running his fingers back through his hair and reluctant now to look at me. At orientation he had sat with each of us to make sure we understood secrecy rules that had made no sense to me at the time. Boy, did those rules make sense to me now. I sat down in a guest chair. He still said nothing. Then he stood and turned to look out the window.

“Well, goodbye,” I said after a moment. “I get why we had to sign that secrecy stuff. Don't worry about me! The farther I get from Jack Richardson, the better.”

He turned then and seemed to look at me. He had brown eyes set so close together that it was hard sometimes to see where he was looking. He cleared his throat. His Adam's apple bobbed as he said, “Larkin is offering you an executive position. Assistant to the Chairman of the Board. You'll be making forty thousand dollars a year.”

The weight of his words made me sag in my chair. Forty thousand

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dollars was what men made who supported their families very well. I never had imagined that even by the end of a successful career I could make so much money.

He went on, "We're still defining your duties. We'll be happy to have your input."

I said softly, "You can't be serious. Why me?"

Ted focused on me then. He said, "He can buy what he wants. He wants you."

I was starting to stand before I knew I would be standing. I was looking at nothing, groping toward the door, knowing only that I couldn't breathe and I probably wouldn't be able to breathe until I was all the way out in the street. There likely were termination papers that I should sign before I left, but they could mail them. I was not going back.



On the day before my move to Boston, I woke up realizing that since I never would be coming back to New York City, I ought to see the front of Richie's building. I was thinking that if I replaced my having entered his building through chants and garbage with an image of it from the front, then I might be able to soften the edges of what still seemed to have been simultaneously the best and the most awful night of my life. I had decades ahead in which to remember my little brush with wealth and fame. I needed to put a better face on it. Since I was avoiding the subway now, it would mean a twelve-block walk each way, but I had nothing else to do. I had packed, I was bored, and I didn't want to hang around and meet my replacement in the event that she might move in a day early.

The girl kindly taking my place on the lease was another of Richie's Larkin girlfriends. The fact that this seemed to Carol and Liddy to make her an even more ideal roommate was beyond incomprehensible to me. Richie had a harem. It seemed to me that he preferred Liddy, who three

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times had been taken to dine in private restaurants so ritzy that regular people never heard their names; but he was not ignoring Carol, which awkward fact didn't seem to bother Liddy.

They believed that I was moving to Boston to date my fictitious Dartmouth boyfriend. I had made up sufficient details that even I had come to believe in him, so Liddy and Carol felt free to tell me all about dating the richest American under the age of forty. I wasn't what he wanted. They could see that now. I listened to The Beatles and The Righteous Brothers. The Richest listened to classical music! I liked being outdoors. The Richest stayed inside. I wasn't his type. Too bad for me.

It was a hazy August morning, too warm for taking such a long walk. I dressed for the trip in old sneakers and shorts and a tank top that I realized only after I had gone a couple of blocks had become too small. I was getting stares, and a few of the homeless men sitting in squalid nests against buildings called to me. I wished now that I had brought a map, but I thought I knew where Fifth Avenue was. The graffiti and the smells and the filthy sidewalks and all the homeless people camped out were appalling to someone who had grown up as I had, riding horseback on forest trails. Once my horse and I had surprised a turkey that was – I swear to you – the size of a piano. It had trotted on ahead of us for quite some distance before it found a large enough break in the brush.

Breathing air that was so full of grit that it worked in under your hair and nails made me gag whenever I thought about it. This need to breathe filth was another of the many things about New York City that I was trying to avoid giving mind-space. I had been so eager to move to New York! I had been planning the move ever since *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. I had for years been certain that New York City would be my great adventure, my shining future.

It was hard to determine from the Central Park shade which building across the street held Richie's penthouse. It was only when I spotted that

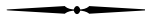
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maroon doorman's uniform on someone who came out to sign for a package, and then I noticed far above what looked like Richie's casement windows, that I guessed which building had to be right. I found a bench and sat to rest before my long walk back.

It was a very clean building. Clean maroon awnings on the lowest windows, a clean maroon shelter so Richie could get to his car at the curb if it might be raining, clean beige stone for the facing, and a sidewalk that looked to be devoid of the grunge that coated most New York sidewalks. Brass hardware so bright they must polish it daily. Just... clean.

It was late morning, I was hungry, and I had brought no money. As I stretched the backs of my legs by hooking my heels on the bench's arm, I noticed Richie's Rolls Royce stopping at the end of that shelter. A maroon doorman hurried out to open the door. And there was the richest American under the age of forty in the flesh, coming briskly from the building and ducking rapidly into his polish-scented back seat. I watched them drive away. He had a lunch date.

My return walk was a dismal trudge. I felt as if I had pulled off the scab of a troublesome wound that had at last been healing. Liddy had talked about having sex with him when they dined in private restaurants. They've got restaurants with beds? There was so much about New York City that I could not stand, but still so much that seemed odd and worth exploring. Now I never would have that chance.



Rounding the last corner and seeing Richie's Rolls Royce parked in front of our building was an event so peculiar that at first my mind had trouble processing it. Had I mentally transposed the car? Liddy and Carol had gone to Bloomie's with money from Sir Bountiful. It was likely that they weren't yet back, so he was waiting for them. Two at once this time?

After briefly considering looking for another way to get into what was

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still my home, I stalked rapidly down past the first two buildings. Admirably, I passed that car without kicking it. I did, however, turn on the steps and stick out my tongue. I hadn't meant to do that, but once it was done it didn't seem to be enough, so I also jabbed my nose with my thumb and waggled my fingers before I went inside. He couldn't see me through those frosted windows, and screw him, anyway. I didn't care.

I was standing in front of the fan with a towel to wipe sweat when the door-pull clanged. If it had been Richie, I wouldn't have opened the door, but I could see through the fisheye that it was Mr. Peters. It was odd that I thought of him as a friend when I had met him only once, but he was old and dear and he had seemed to like me. It was nice to be able to say goodbye.

Mr. Peters was holding in an awkward hug what he told me was four-dozen red roses in an enormous crystal vase. I blurted, "Mr. P.? It wasn't you I stuck out my tongue at, you know."

"I understand, Madam."

"Don't they smell good! The girls will love them. I'd hug you, but I need a shower." I took the roses from him, and I nearly dropped them. Four-dozen roses in a crystal vase were heavy. He helped me ease them up onto the end of the kitchen counter.

"Mr. Richardson asks that you join him, Madam."

I looked at Mr. P. blankly.

"He is waiting in the car."

I had been thinking about the fact that if I left my friends while Richie still was using them, I was abandoning them to spinsterhood. They needed to employ their beauty while they still had it, to find likely husbands. And now he wanted to talk to me? Fair enough. I would have a few things to say.

I swiped away as much sweat as I could in ten seconds, then I grabbed my satchel and followed Mr. P. out the door. I remembered only after I was down the steps to go back inside and lock our apartment. Mr. P. opened

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the back door of the car and offered me his supporting hand, but I was dressed nothing like a lady so I just ducked and slid in onto the seat.

Richie seemed enormous in that car, glancing sideways from under his lashes as he packed up the folders he had been using while he waited. I edged away from him so quickly that poor Mr. P. couldn't close the door. I moved in just enough. He closed it. Mr. P. was getting into the driver's seat as I said to Richie under my breath, "Move the car. Please. You don't want them to see us."

He touched a button beside him and said, "Central Park." Then he closed his valise and sat back somewhat sideways with one arm along the seat back, looking at me. He was dressed amazingly casually, in a black T-Shirt that said on the front, "Rock On Dartmouth Winter Carnival 1961." What was he thinking?

The rose-and-polish smell in this car was more like rose-and-spice, and I realized now that it was Richie's smell. Either he just naturally smelled gorgeous, or he had found the world's most perfect cologne. He was looking at me, no doubt taking in the sweaty hair in a ponytail, the sneakers with holes and the cut-off shorts. And – oh no! – the grubby, wet and too-small tank top. It occurred to me that he might see my nipples. I hollowed my chest and glanced down. Maybe not.

He said, "Please come back and work for me."

"No. And please, please leave them alone. You've got a whole building full of girls. Liddy and Carol are my friends. Please."

"Are you jealous?" he asked lightly.

"Are you insane? Of what?"

He really had meant that as a question. He looked a bit crestfallen, an almost imperceptible drooping of his shoulders and eyes and chin. Then he brightened as a new thought came to him. "If you'll come back and work for me, I'll take them out to dinner and give them gifts and tell them they're too good for me."

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“You don’t even know you’re disgusting, do you? The way you live is disgusting!” Then I added, “Can he hear us?”

“Only when you shout that I’m disgusting.”

“Oh. Sorry. Look, what they want is husbands and babies. You’ll never marry someone like us. Please, Richie – !”

“You did it again.”

“Did – ?”

“What did you call me?”

I moved tighter against the door. “Don’t hit me.”

He smiled a little. His face was so young! He was like a twelve-year-old in a man-suit. He leaned and touched something, and a wooden partition slid up between us and Mr. P. Then he patted his lap, looking at me sideways. His face was oddly both annoyed and playful.

“Let me out of this car!”

“It’s locked. You can’t unlock it.”

I said through my teeth, “You are not my boss. Let me out!”

He was crestfallen again. He said, looking past me out the window, “I’ll leave them alone. I just took them out to learn more about you.”

“But you had sex with them!”

“I have sex with everyone.”

“You – ?”

“Do you know what’s great about sex?” He moved his eyes to my face. He said as an aside, “This is how much I feel connected to you. I’ve never said this to anyone else. What’s great about sex is you forget for a minute who you are. You can lose yourself in it.”

I saw him again a little bit as the Richie I had fallen in love with that night. I said, “Why would you need to lose yourself?”

“Please work for me.”

“No hitting.”

“No hitting.”

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“No sex, either.”

“Why not?” he asked in the tone of a twelve-year-old being denied dessert.

“Look, this isn’t going to – ”

“Just be my friend! I’ve got no one to talk to. The only real friend I have lives in the South Atlantic Ocean – ”

“In the ocean?”

“You and I really connected.”

“You hit me!”

“You enjoyed it.”

“I did not!”

His hands were clasped in his lap. He was studying them. He said, “People think if your family’s wealthy and you’re quiet, you must be a snob.” He glanced at me. “I’ll bet you have a normal family. Two children in a ranch house. A cocker spaniel.”

“Collie.”

“I’ve never had a normal family. I was raised to know that anyone who seemed to like me was trying to get something from me. The worst part is, that’s been mostly right.”

“I’m sorry.”

“My dad moved me to New York so I could learn about money. I had a normal apartment downtown. People stared because I’m freakishly tall, but I was nobody. I could be with people. Then my dad died. The only family I had. I was finally getting to know him. He never had time for me before, but now he thought he needed to teach me. Then he died.”

Without thinking, I reached for Richie’s hand.

“He had a team assembled. They thought it was a good idea to make me famous, so now I can’t go anywhere. I can’t meet women unless I hire them.”

Why was he telling me all this? I had thought when he first began this

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speech that he was slickly playing on my emotions, but I was thinking now that he was too young to be slick. It was his wealth and fame that made you see him as more calculating than he probably was.

“All the boys at Andover had nicknames. They called my roommate “Pudge.” He was skinny. They didn’t call me anything. I was already too tall, and my dad had guards around me so I wouldn’t be kidnapped.”

“But isn’t ‘Jack’ a nickname?”

“You’re the first person ever to come up with the perfect insulting and degrading nickname. Only a real friend would do that.”