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JOHN LOCKE

NY TIMES BEST SELLING AUTHOR



bad doctor

a Dr. Gideon Box Novel

Bad Doctor

a Dr. Gideon Box Novel

by

John Locke



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BAD DOCTOR

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Personal Message from John Locke:

I love writing books! But what I love even more is hearing from readers. If you enjoyed this or any of my other books, it would mean the world to me if you'd send a short email to introduce yourself and say hi. I always personally respond to my readers.

I would also love to put you on my mailing list to receive notifications about future books, updates, and contests.

Please [click this link and introduce yourself](#), so I can personally thank you for trying my books.

John Locke

*New York Times Best Selling Author
#1 Best Selling Author on Amazon Kindle*

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Bad Doctor

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Epilogue

Introduction

I

I'M DR. GIDEON Box.

If you're coming after me, don't do it in a hospital.

That's my domain.

And don't piss me off in the real world and expect a smooth hospital stay in the future, because I have a long memory, and no one is exempt. If you're not a patient but your loved ones are, I'll harass *them*.

Before you bully me in a bar, embarrass me on a date, or refuse to replace the shitty car you sold me, think about this: you'll never be more vulnerable in your life than when you're spending the night in a hospital. You're out of your element, drugged, and totally dependent on our schedules and personnel. When you're here, you're *not* family. You're prey!

Your wife just had a procedure and needs her sleep?

Good luck with that.

I'll swing by the nurse's station, make a notation on her chart. Every two hours someone will be in her room, waking her up, changing her IV, moving her around. If you're not guarding her closely, I might slip in her room, flip her on her side, lift up her gown, check out her ass. Or maybe I'll feel her up while pretending to listen to her heart with my stethoscope.

Don't get me wrong. I have no interest in your wife's nude body. I'd only view or touch her because I can, and because it's another way to beat you.

You get what I'm saying?

Don't fuck with me.

I DIDN'T KILL Joe's mom last week.

I *could* have killed her, but one glance at her chart told me the hospital didn't need my help. Her catheter should have been removed a day earlier. Since it wasn't, I figured the nurses forgot it.

I was right.

Like ventilators, catheters are breeding grounds for infection. Sixty-five thousand patients a year die from infections caused by these two pieces of equipment.

I never knew Joe's mom, but thirty years ago Joe and I were on the sixth grade track team. A half-dozen of us were in the showers after practice the day Joe smacked my ass with a wet towel. I ignored it, but he kept smacking me. The others taunted me to do something about it. When I confronted Joe, he beat the shit out of me.

Picture me in a fetal position on the floor, clutching my stomach in agony. Now picture Joe and his friends pissing on me as a group, drenching me from head to toe.

Laughing.

Like I said, I didn't know Joe's mom, and didn't kill her.

But I let her die last week from an infection I could've prevented.

I'M NOT AN angel of mercy. I don't kill random patients.

I've got a list.

If you're on my list, it means you've done something I refuse to forgive. It's probably something minor to you, something you forgot long ago. But like the Stones said in the second best song the ever recorded, *time is on my side*.

Like everyone else in the world, you and your loved ones will eventually get sick or have an accident. And when you do, you better not come to *my* hospital, because I can kill you, maim you, infect you, humiliate you, frighten you, aggravate you, and generally fuck up your life in a thousand different ways.

Want an example?

I bet you didn't know that every year three hundred hospital patients burst into flames during routine operations.

Three hundred!

You think all those are *accidents*?

Thirty-six items in a standard operating room can explode under the right conditions. What I'm saying, I can turn your chest into a fireball using nothing more than an alcohol swab and a hot cauterizing device.

So don't piss me off.

And tread lightly, because I'm tightly wound. Every day it takes less and less to piss me off.

I'M THE LAST guy you want to meet in the hospital—and *not* because I'm a vindictive son of a bitch.

I *am* a vindictive son of a bitch, but the reason you don't want to meet me is I'm your child's last hope for survival. When they wheel your kid into *my* operating room, it means his problems are so severe no one else can perform the surgery.

That's because I'm the most technically gifted congenital/cardiothoracic surgeon in the world.

That's right, in the *world*.

Think I'm bragging?

I'm not.

I take no pleasure in being the world's greatest surgeon.

Someone in the world makes the best flapjacks. Someone else is the best seamstress. And someone owns the world's biggest ranch, truck, or penis.

I'd rather be any of them.

Especially the guy with the biggest penis.

But it's my job to be the best surgeon.

My skill is my curse, and forces me to work in hell, under excruciating pressure. I say that and you think, yeah, there probably *is* a lot of stress in what I do, operating on infants and children.

No.

You think you know, but you don't.

You have no idea.

Want a glimpse into my world? That's me in the operating room, standing in the corner, crying silently so the others won't know. They think I'm psyching myself up for the six-hour procedure I'm about to perform.

See that tiny blue object on the table, surrounded by two highly-skilled nurses, a pediatric anesthesiologist, and assisting surgeon?

My patient, Lainey Sue Calfee.

Five pounds, less than a month old, structurally abnormal heart. It would take five minutes to tell you what's wrong with her, but she'll be dead by then. And anyway, those are only the problems I know about. You can bet I'll find more bad news when I open her chest in a few minutes.

I always do.

What you need to know about Lainey is she's not going to make it.

It's okay, I already told her parents.

THAT'S ME AN hour ago, approaching the conference room to meet Lainey's parents, Jordan and Will Calfee.

Of Calfee Coffee.

As I enter, Jordan and Will are on the sofa, grim-faced, holding hands. Nurse Sally's in the straight-back chair, giving me the evil eye. Security Joe's standing at the doorway.

As always, I nod at Security Joe and say, "Are you feeling okay? Because you don't look so good."

As always, he ignores me.

Jordan and Will jump to their feet, searching my eyes.

If my eyes could talk, they'd say I'm dying inside, thinking how the Calfee's lives will change forever when I kill their kid on my operating table.

Nurse Sally hates me. She's black, two hundred fifty pounds, her age a complete mystery. Could be forty, could be sixty. She's a wonderful, caring person, my polar opposite. She visits the parents before they meet me, warns them about my notoriously foul bedside manner, and attempts to calm them down after I leave.

Security Joe is early-forties, former Marine, big, tough, freaky quiet. The kind of guy you expect to see guarding the president.

Joe's chief of security, here to guard me from possible assault. He blends into the background, always ready to step between me and an angry parent. While Joe couldn't care less if I offend the parents, Sally constantly wants to slap me up the side of my head for doing so.

I'd love to have Nurse Sally's attitude, and probably would, if I had her job.

Or *any* other job.

I'm not asking for sympathy, but imagine if your job required you to do something that made you physically and mentally sick every time you did it. I know you can't relate, and there are no good examples, but you know that chalky stuff you have to drink the day before getting a colonoscopy? It tastes like hell and makes you shit for twelve hours straight?

Let's say your job was to drink that chalk every day of your life.

You'd like to quit, but you're the only one in the world who can do it, and every day you don't drink the chalk, a child you've met will die.

That's a lot of pressure.

After a few years, it gets to your head.

Makes you do crazy things in order to cope.

So that's what I do, perform one or two of these horrific, impossible operations, then go bat shit crazy and run out into the world and do stupid, dangerous things, like breaking into people's houses when they're on vacation, and assuming their lives.

THE CALFEES ARE a young, pretty couple, with tons of money. This situation with Lainey Sue is probably the first bad thing that's ever happened to them that couldn't be solved with cash and a phone call.

After failing to find reassurance in my eyes, Jordan falls into her husband's arms and sobs.

I'd love to give this couple hope, but like I said, I don't get the easy cases. When I get the call means a child's condition has passed critical. It means hope has left the building.

Like most dads before him, Will says, "We want Lainey Sue to have the finest treatment available. Spare no expense. Money's no object."

This probably impresses Jordan, but in my experience it's complete and utter bullshit.

After the fact, he'll complain about the bill, the access, the forms, rules and regulations, the nurses in the recovery unit, and everything else that inconveniences him in the slightest. He'll threaten to sue me and the hospital over our fees.

After all, I killed his kid. Why should he pay me two hundred grand?

Or I saved his kid, which means I did my job, like the world's greatest plumber does his job unclogging the family toilet.

So sure, the hospital and I deserve *something*, but two hundred grand?

How can we possibly charge two hundred grand for a days' work?

In most cases it's not even their money at stake, it's an insurance issue. But he'll threaten to sue over the deductible, or the coverage, or the out-of-pocket, or the increased future premium assessment.

Before the operation we're all supposed to hold hands and be friends. Afterward, he won't give a rat's ass about me, or what I had to go through to save his child.

And neither will Jordan.

I don't say any of this to the Calfees, which proves I'm getting better at these parent conferences despite the stack of complaints in my personnel file.

"Everyone says you're the best," Jordan says. "I know it's bad, but you'll save Lainey, right? You will, won't you?"

When they beg, it's like I'm drinking the chalk. I'll need a toilet soon.

Jordan pulls away from her husband and gets right up in my face. Could there be any emotion on earth more raw and heartbreaking than a mother's love for her dying child? Jordan's red eyes and white cheeks are love's battlefield. When she speaks, her hot, sweet breath fans my lips and fills my nostrils.

"Please, Dr. Box."

Despite the dire situation, despite Jordan's considerable beauty, wealth, and status, I see exactly what she wants me to see.

She's a good person.

By extension, her husband and daughter are good, worthy people.

Of course, I already know this.

She grips my wrist. "I need to know there's hope."

I glance at Nurse Sally's baleful look before responding. She's Mike Tyson in a dress, only angrier.

Sally's told me time and again the moms need something to cling to. Something to get them through the multi-hour ordeal that lies ahead. But I won't give any parent false hope. Sally knows this but the look in her face says she's ready to leap across the room and royally fuck...me...up.

I ignore Sally's look as I always do, and tell Jordan what I tell all the moms.

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Calfee. There’s no hope. You need to spend the next few hours adjusting to life without Lainey Sue.”

Jordan backs away slowly, drops to the couch, stunned.

Nurse Sally shouts, “*Oh no, you didn’t!*” And comes out of her chair like a rocket. She launches a meaty fist toward my throat. Joe steps between us, catches the blow on his forearm, and ushers me from the room.

I DON'T HEAR what happens next, but the routine's always the same. The dads get angry. The mom cries. They demand to speak to the hospital administrator, Bruce Luce. They want a replacement surgeon, refusing to trust their child's operation to one who's already given up.

Bruce is on standby when I meet the parents, so he shows up quickly, finds Nurse Sally hugging Jordan to her ample bosom, Security Joe staring straight ahead with dead eyes while Will curses and threatens to physically assault me.

Bruce says, "We warned you in advance Dr. Box has a terrible bedside manner. He's a genius, not a communicator. But remember, he's never lost a patient at this hospital, or any other."

"Never?" they say.

"Around here he's called 'The Miracle,' and for good reason. Thirty-two hopeless cases. No fatalities."

"I don't like him!" Jordan says.

"I don't either," Bruce says. "In fact, I hate his guts. But he'll find a way to save Lainey."

"How could he stand there and say there's no hope?" Will asks.

"It takes the pressure off him to be perfect."

Nurse Sally pipes in, "The truth is Doc Box ain't fit to be in the company of man nor beast. The good Lord pulled every ounce of useful goodness outta that man at birth, and stuck a lump of coal where his heart should be."

"But?" Jordan says.

"But he's the one you want in that room with Lainey, because he never gives up. He'll fight the devil to save your child. And he *will* save her. But after he does, leave him be. Don't go looking for him. Don't try to thank him."

"Why?"

"This ain't a celebratin' sort of man. You've seen him at his best, not his worst. Trust me, you'd do well to leave him to his lonely miserableness."

Jordan and Will grudgingly sign off on the surgical procedure, and for the next six to eight hours I reside in hell.

Of course, Lainey Sue died.

LAINY SUE DIED several times on my table, but with her walnut-sized heart in my skilled hand she came back to life again and again. You'd think this kid was Joan of Arc, the way she fought so valiantly! I got into it like I always do, hurling blood-curdling insults at my colleagues, my hospital, Lainey Sue, her innards, her parents, and even Calfee Coffee, which I actually like.

By the time it was over the nurses were sobbing with joy, and I'd gone through my entire repertoire of oaths and cuss words at least six times, having used them in every possible combination.

My hands were cramped beyond use, my nerves frayed, and the tendons in my back and neck were twisted and gnarled like Gordian Knots from the mental and physical exhaustion that came from total concentration while standing in a precise position for hours at a time. Like always, the pain in my head felt life-threatening.

On the table, Lainey Sue was resting quietly, pink and fit.

Nurse Janet gushed, "What an amazing little girl! She absolutely refused to die!"

To me she said, "I'm filing a grievance against you for sexual harassment and verbal abuse."

"That's ridiculous," I said. "You've worked with me before. You know how I am."

"Never again. I'm done."

"We just saved a life here. Do you really care about a few cuss words?"

"You're getting worse."

"How?"

"You're a complete psychopath. You called me the C-word. You barked like a dog."

"Which C-word?"

"All of them. You called me things that didn't even make sense."

"I was in a zone!"

Nurse Margaret said, "She's right. I've never heard such vile language. You should be ashamed of yourself!"

She shook her head. "And the things you said to that poor child? And the *names* you called her?"

She crossed herself.

Then said, "You cursed like a drunken sailor, speaking in tongues."

HOURS LATER, DESPITE the warnings, Jordan Calfee tracked me down in my office, threw her arms around me and said, “Omigod, you saved my daughter’s life!”

Jordan had looked beautiful that morning. But now, standing in my office, she was positive and radiant.

“Dr. Box! Gideon! You’ve given us a beautiful, healthy baby to raise!”

“Who let you in to see me?”

“Your secretary.”

“Lola? Seriously?”

“Your fee, whatever it is, isn’t enough. How can I possibly repay you?”

She seemed sincere.

I said, “Would you consider a blow job?”

Jordan paused a moment, as if her ears momentarily betrayed her. Then she slapped my face full force, stormed out of my office, and reported me to Administrator Luce. She followed that up with a written statement to the hospital’s board of directors, effectively earning me a four-day suspension and six months’ probation.

We all would have preferred a harsher ruling, but there were two patients in the queue who would die if I’m not on duty when they’re strong enough for surgery. One is Lilly Devereaux, whose parents Austin and Dublin, offered to donate a wing to the hospital if I save their child’s life.

Since Lilly’s surgery will likely take place in five to seven days, the board voted to suspend me for four days, which would give them time to bribe our existing nurses to work with me, or hire new ones away from our competitors.

Secretary Lola said, “Now you’ll have time to see Shelby Lynn.”

“Who?”

She handed me a letter and said, “It’s from the stack of fan mail I placed on your credenza last month.”

“I’ve got fan mail?”

“You do.”

I look at the letter. “You’ve read this?”

“I read them all. It’d do *you* good to read them, too.”

“Why’s that?”

“You’re loved by many.”

“Right.”

Lola shrugged, left the room. I sat down, read the letter, then went home and booked the next flight to Cincinnati.

1.

Cincinnati, Ohio.
Thursday, 9:15 p.m.
Firefly Lounge.

“*DUDE!*” WILLOW SAYS, approaching. “Where’ve *you* been all my life?”

She stops two feet away, wearing a smile and very little else.

“Glenlivet 21, thirty bucks a shot, right?”

I glance at the dark amber liquid in my glass, then back at her.

She says, “We don’t serve many of those. By the way, I’m Willow.”

“Chris,” I say. “Chris Fowler.”

She laughs. “We don’t use last names in here, Chris.”

I nod.

“You’re in the chair,” she says. “Will I do?”

“Sure.”

Of course she’ll do. Willow’s by far the class of the place. The problem is she knows it.

She flashes me the smile that earns more in tips than hookers get for a toss. It’s a spectacular smile, well worth the fortune her parents must’ve spent on braces a few years back.

I wonder how proud they’d be to see Willow giving lap dances.

She hikes a leg over mine, taking care not to injure me with her five-inch stiletto. Her pantie blood-spatter red to match the shoes, hug her crotch so tightly they could pass for spray-on. Her cropped tee is bright white.

She’s on my lap now, facing me, our eyes two feet apart. Mine black, hers, goldenrod.

I sip my drink. “Want one?”

“What, a Scotch?”

She laughs. “I wouldn’t know it from lighter fluid.”

I place the drink on the table beside us.

Willow says, “You want me facing, or turned away?”

“Facing. I like your smile.”

“Then we’re good.”

She closes her eyes half-mast, pouts her lips, shows me her sultry look.

“You ready?” she purrs.

“What, no music?”

“DJ’s cuing it. I could’ve waited another thirty seconds, but you’re too cute. One of the other girls might’ve stolen you.”

Right, stolen me.

Because I’m so cute.

To keep the conversation going I ask, “What do *you* drink?”

“Vodka cranberry.”

“Can I buy you one of those?”

“Not here. You know, it’s—”

“Against the rules?”

She laughs. "Against the law, actually."

"Why's that?"

"I'm underage. For liquor, anyway."

"Seriously?"

"I know," she says. "Weird, right?"

The music starts. Willow arches her back, lifts her chin, lowers it, raises it again, licks her lips seductively, then removes her top.

"Show time," she says.

She puts her hands high over her head and gives her tits a shake. Then leans into me, brushes her nipples across my lips and says, "You like that, sugar?"

"I do. Thanks."

She gives me an odd look and does that boobs-across-my-lips thing again, expecting me to kiss them, but I don't.

I picture her ten minutes from now, telling her friend, Cameron about it. She'll say, "See that older guy in the corner? Black jeans, t-shirt? I was grinding him just now, really working it. I rubbed my tits in his face and asked if he liked it, and guess what he said?"

Cameron will shrug.

"He said, 'Thanks.'"

They'll laugh, probably snort a line.

Cameron will ask how much I tipped.

"Two hundred."

"No shit?" Cameron will say.

Next time they come out, I'll completely ignore Willow and signal Cameron to come over. They'll exchange a glance, but really, what can Willow do? She can't claim I'm her customer if I ask for someone else.

It's just that no one, especially Willow, expects me to ditch her for Cameron.

If Willow's a solid eight, Cameron's a barely-five. But she'll do her best, and hope to earn Franklin, or at least a Jackson. I'll compliment the hell out of her, act like I'm really into it, then I'll pretend to have an accident. They love it when that happens. Builds their confidence, makes them feel sexier than the others.

I'll tip Cameron four hundred for a twenty dollar lap dance.

All part of the plan.

Cameron will tell Willow I came in my pants and gave her four hundred bucks.

Willow won't understand. She'll flirt, try to get my attention. But I'll ignore her, break her confidence.

Women want what they can't have. Even dancers like Willow, who think they're hot shit.

The music ends, and I hand Willow the two hundred.

She smiles and says, "Thanks, Jimmy."

"Chris," I say.

Willow smiles and tosses her head the way pretty women do when they know you want them. She walks away, confident my eyes are on her ass.

Thanks Jimmy, she'd said, all matter-of-fact.

Like it's every day she gets two hundred bucks for a lap dance.

In her mind she's got me right where she wants me.

I can't wait to see her face when she hears about Cameron's tip.

2.

“OH MY GOD, you were incredible!” Willow gushes, three hours later. “Best sex I ever had!”
I’m lying.

I mean, yeah, we had sex, and I did my part, but Willow was barely involved.

She’s lying on the bed, on her side, her back toward me. When she’s sure I’m done, she moves forward till I slide out of her. She sits up, wipes herself with the bed sheet, and turns to watch me remove the condom and set it on the nightstand.

She regards it with disgust. Then gives me the same look.

Makes sense.

She’s eighteen, I’m forty-two. It *is* disgusting.

From her perspective.

I prop a pillow beneath my neck and settle in to relax, but catch her looking away, and take the opportunity to suddenly lift my head and kiss her boob.

She recoils when she realizes my lips touched her skin. Now she’s glaring at me to show how she feels about the unwelcome assault.

I lean back onto the pillow and stare at her in the lamplight. This is where I’d tell her she’s beautiful, if I thought she gave a shit what I thought.

She *is* beautiful, though.

“Mind if I light one?” she says.

“I’d rather you didn’t.”

Willow frowns. She’s not happy, but she’ll get over it. She’s two grand richer than she was ten minutes ago.

“Is this what you do?” she says.

“What?”

“Go from club to club, trolling for sex?”

“I would if I could. But my wife rarely leaves town.”

“She’s not coming home tonight, is she?”

“No. She won’t be home till noon tomorrow.”

“You don’t act like a first-timer,” she says.

“I’ve been to clubs before, but never asked anyone to follow me home.”

“I’m honored,” she says, sounding anything but.

Willow’s making small talk, waiting it out. She’s been paid a huge sum for ten minutes of talk and five minutes of sex. She figures I expect an hour for my cash, and she’ll mentally calculate it before attempting her escape.

“You got a boyfriend?” I ask.

“Yes.”

She’s telling the truth. She and Bobby Mitchell live together in an apartment on Dillingham. She doesn’t know I know this. Mitchell is a local tough guy. Hangs out at Shady’s Bar & Grill, a block from their apartment.

“You love him?” I ask.

She frowns. “Can we talk about something else?”

She regrets fucking me. Wishes she could just leave and put this behind her. But two grand’s a lot

of money for her to ditch me less than twenty minutes into the date. And even though she hated every minute of the sex, it's crossing her mind this could be an easy way to make some serious co whenever my wife's out of town.

"I've never done this before," she says.

"I believe you."

I *do* believe her. Willow doesn't fuck well enough to be a hooker. As a lap dancer she earns enough to put gas in her car, food and drugs on the table, keep Bobby happily unemployed, the bills paid, and the landlord at bay.

Which puts her head and shoulders above the women I've dated.

She may be a lap dancer, but she's classy. She only wound up in bed with me because I manipulated her. I kept flashing money and pressing her buttons and managed to turn the entire evening into a competition between her and Cameron, one that Willow's ego refused to let her lose.

"I shouldn't have done this," she says, gathering her clothes.

"You needed the cash."

She steps into her panties, pulls on her jeans, dons her sweatshirt.

"Bad decision," she says.

"Don't beat yourself up about it," I say. "It was only a few minutes out of your life."

"I could get fired," she says, trying to make me feel guilty. Like she's the first lap dancer who ever fucked a client.

She's dressed now, sitting on the bed, staring into space.

I know what she's doing, reliving the events of the evening, trying to figure out how it got to this point.

She turns to look me in the eyes. It's starting to hit her, the way I played her tonight.

"Nice job," she says. "Asshole."

"You're taking this awfully hard," I say.

"I feel like a fool."

"Willow. You're adorable. Sweet. Beautiful."

She says nothing.

I add, "This has been an honor for me."

"I hate myself," she says. "I want to vomit."

I sit up and say, "This is too much. I was hoping for an encore, but it's clear you've had a change of heart. How about you and Cameron switch places?"

Cameron jumps up from the over-stuffed chair where I'd paid her five hundred to sit and wait.

Willow says, "Are you *serious*? You want to fuck my *friend*?"

"I do."

"Then fuck you *both*! I'm *leaving*!"

To Cameron I say, "If you can talk your friend into waiting another fifteen minutes, I'll give you three thousand dollars. I would've given Willow the extra money, but she's had second thoughts."

"*Fuck you!*" Willow shouts. She grabs her purse, starts stomping off.

"Willow?" Cameron says, her voice pleading.

Willow stops, sighs, and turns around.

"What?"

"Please?" Cameron says.

Three grand's enough to change Cameron's life. For a woman with her looks, it's three months of lap dances. Willow knows this, and they're friends. But for Willow, it's just one more humiliation. Her cheeks are in flames. She's angry as hell. Had no idea I was good for another three grand tonight and realizes she just pouted it away.

When Willow speaks, it's to me. "You expect me to sit here and watch you fuck my *friend*? For more money than you paid *me*?"

"You don't have to watch," I say. "But you have to stay in the room."

Her withering look incorporates the full monty of teenage attitude. "You don't *trust* me?"

"It's not personal. I don't know you well enough yet."

"You just *fucked* me!" she says.

"Yes. But we agreed you only did it for the money. I'm not calling you a thief, but wouldn't you agree more women would steal a man's money than fuck him for cash?"

Willow's look says I'm a cockroach to her. She's furious. So pissed, her body's shaking.

Realizing how close her friend is to leaving, Cameron's in full panic mode. She crosses the floor and whispers in Willow's ear.

I know what she's doing, offering to split the money. Fifteen hundred for *not* having sex is a pretty good deal. Willow agrees, and reluctantly crosses the floor to the comfy chair. She curls up in it and flips me the finger, then leans her head on one of the massive arms and closes her eyes.

Cameron waits for all this to transpire, then turns toward me and approaches the bed. When she's three feet away she plants her feet and starts swaying slowly, from side to side, shows me a goofy grin, and starts to strip.

They all do that.

I don't care how old they are, first time a woman strips in front of you, she'll get a goofy grin on her face and sway her hips like she's moving to music.

Usually the routine works for me, but Cameron's all arms and legs, tall, and skinny as hell. Except for her hair, she could be Popeye's girlfriend, Olive Oyl. And though it's an odd comment to make about a lap dancer, movement doesn't become her.

So I focus on her hair.

Thick, shoulder-length, brown, with auburn highlights.

Cameron takes her sweet time letting me see what's under her clothes. That's fine, I need time to reload. When she's naked she motions me to lie on my back. When I do, she climbs on the bed, straddles me, and works me inside her. My first thrust forces a sound from her throat that's meant to be sexy, but puts me in mind of a cow caught up in a breached birth.

Willow laughs in the background, despite her anger.

I bite my lip to keep from sharing the laugh.

Cameron's short on experience, and her porn star imitation grates on me like Porky Pig reciting Shakespeare. But for no other reason than to piss Willow off further, I pretend I love it. I moan and groan, and thrash about under Cameron and carry on like she's the lay of my life. Of course, that encourages Cameron, who, bless her heart, starts getting into it. She makes a sudden awkward move and we disengage. Undaunted, she pretends she meant for that to happen, and throws herself on her back, spreads her legs wide and yells, "*Do me, Chris! Do me!*"

I scramble to my knees and notice her legs are so long they actually span the king-size bed! I focus on the triangle in the middle, and try to climb aboard, but she bucks her hips repeatedly. After thirty seconds of this bullshit, I press my hand against her lower abdomen and pin her to the bed long enough to get inside her. This time she emits a high-pitched wail and starts chuffing while flailing her long, skinny arms and legs in all directions.

Can you picture this?

It's like trying to fuck an octopus in a windstorm.

3.

WILLOW'S FALLEN ASLEEP, so you can imagine how big her eyes get when she opens them and sees the gun in my hand.

"What the *fuck*?"

"Time to shower."

She turns toward Cameron, who's sitting on the bed, naked, crying softly.

"What happened?"

"He stole our money."

Willow sees her open handbag on the bed. Her body tenses.

I thumb the hammer back, cocking the pistol.

"Don't do it," I say. "You're the intruder here."

I motion both women to get up and walk in front of me, into the bathroom. They do, and I turn on the shower and nod at Cameron. She gets in and stands in the center, under the running water. I tell Willow to remove her clothes, but she's decided to take a stand.

"You're not gonna shoot me," she says. "Not in your own bathroom."

I slap her face full force.

She shrieks.

I slap her again, and she puts her hand up in submission.

"Get your clothes off!" I yell.

When she's naked, I motion her to join her friend.

If looks could kill, right?

But they can't, so Willow steps into the shower.

It's a glass shower with a glass door, and I'm standing three feet from them, with the door propped open behind my back. Willow tries to whisper something to Cameron and I say, "I could kill you both right now."

They look at each other, sharing a brief moment of terror. Willow's mouth and legs are trembling. All the defiance she had earlier has leaked out of her like drool from a dying grandparent.

And yet she's resourceful.

"I need to pee," she says, figuring to split them up, maybe buy some time to make a plan.

"A drain's a drain," I say. "Pee in the shower."

I point to the facecloth on the shower bench. "Willow, bend over. Cameron, use the facecloth and soap her private area, hard. When you're done, switch places."

The women look at each other, and Willow says, "He's going to kill us."

Cameron says, "No. He's just making us get rid of the evidence."

"What evidence?" Willow says. "He used a condom."

"Still. There could be DNA. Hair, whatever."

"Cameron's right," I say. "Remove the evidence, and I'll let you go. You ladies weren't raped tonight, but I don't want you claiming you were. Consider it a lesson learned."

They soap each other down, then turn to look at me.

"Again," I say. "Harder, deeper. Or I'll do it myself."

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