

Dumpster Fire Hair Trigger

It started with a party. Isn't that how most of my disasters began?

We were all told to gather in a Villa apartment for a senior sister's birthday surprise. We had no details other than that. We all filed into the apartment and immediately noticed that the couches had been shoved against the walls and folding chairs were lined up around the room, creating a clear area in the middle of the living room. There was a knock at the door, and the girls who were in on the surprise made fake surprise noises as a man wearing a jogging suit and holding a radio in one hand sauntered into the room.

"Who's the birthday girl?" he grinned. Everyone shrieked as the

birthday girl walked hesitantly (but with excitement on her face) to the center of the room to meet this man.

His clothing was held together by snaps, and before I knew it, he had ripped off both his sweatshirt and his sweatpants. I felt myself go cold from head to toe, realizing that my instincts to be weary of this surprise had been correct. The stripper was there to perform for the sisters, and they were all for it. But the thought of some stranger touching me intimately and gyrating against my body made my body go numb and my thoughts freeze. My chest went tight, and my hands became clammy. I was transported back to my freshman dorm room, Ralph's voice in my head: "You're going to like this. Let's play."

I bolted for the bathroom and curled up on the tile floor as the squeals from the living room bled through the walls. My heart pounded against my ribs, wanting to escape my chest. I didn't blame it—I wanted to escape, too. I was afraid to leave the party because I'd be seen by the sisters, and that would lead to a myriad of questions. So I had no choice but to stay in that position, the cold tile on my cheek, the panic thumping in my chest as my present reality and moments with Ralph became fused.

He's blocking the doorway. I feel the tears slide down my cheeks onto the tile. No way out. Ralph's weight on me. I clench my hands tighter around my knees, making myself smaller, folding myself into nothing on the bathroom floor. Ralph's breath. Ralph's lies. I gasped for breath in the bathroom and shuddered, feeling the edges come undone as sexually suggestive language bled through the walls. I watched the streetlight outside the bathroom window. It was all

happening again—my body didn't know the difference between past and present.

I didn't notice that one of the sisters had slipped into the bathroom until I heard her speak, startling me back to the present.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

"Uh, yeah. I'm just not a fan of, like, random guys humping me," I said, running my hand through my hair, sitting up, and trying to look like I wasn't falling apart.

"Yeah, girl, I get it. That's why I came in here," she answered. I hadn't expected that someone else might feel the same way I did. We sat in silence until he left and then we escaped the bathroom.

"Where did you guys go? You missed everything!" a sister shouted.

"Yeah, it wasn't our thing," my co-conspirator answered for both of us. I was grateful for her.

I left, walking the length of campus back to my apartment. I knew Matt was at an event for his fraternity and wouldn't be around until later. I had left Sarah and Jessica behind at the party, and I was praying that Chrissy was out with her sorority sisters so I could have some time to myself.

When I got back to the apartment, my thoughts became too clear, the lights too bright, the noise in my head too loud. Was I losing my mind? How could I get so confused about what was happening around me?

I tried to go to sleep, but my brain wouldn't shut off. It wouldn't stop racing with Ralph's words, his head between my legs, his eyes