

Hangry by M. Wolff

Maddy situated herself in the bathroom stall, hands shaking with nerves and anticipation. She was eager to dive right in, but she took a little moment to enjoy the fact that she was about to eat. She'd been carrying the dull ache of deprivation around for so long it seemed impossible she could finally satiate herself without the judgement of her classmates.

She savored at first, eating slowly--luxuriating. The flavors hit her tongue and sent contented, euphoric messages to her brain. And every tense muscle in her body began to relax.

The dainty bites, however, were quickly subverted by her deeper appetites. Food was torn, crammed and engulfed, barely masticated. Oddly, the more voracious she became the calmer she felt. The feeling she had was almost floaty, and it reminded her of the ninety-minute spa massage she won for the top SAT score at Franklin High. The spa was at a nice hotel, soft music played, and a kind-faced woman took away all her earthly worries using just her hands and some lavender oil. And at the end of it, her tender voice whispered, "Ms. James, take your time. Your robe is here, whenever you're ready." Now, in the dorm bathroom, she had the same feeling. She was "Ms. James," on the table again.

She was so overcome with bliss she slipped down the tile wall to the floor of her stall, wanting to be closer to the ground, maybe even take a nap. She nearly completely forgot who or where she was. So, when the door to the bathroom swung open, and she heard the tap of her classmates' flip-flops on the tile floor, she was catapulted from her ecstasy into terror.

Maddy knew there was always the possibility of someone walking in on her, but due to its inaccessibility and rumored shower spiders, this was the least popular bathroom in Hartfield House. She immediately felt cornered in her stall and pulled her feet and her food up onto the

toilet trying to make herself invisible. Their footsteps seemed to be coming right for her, but they stopped at the sinks outside her stall. Quietly, she inched forward peeking through the crack in the stall door so she could just make out Saskia and Gemma. Their toothbrushes hung from their mouths, their hair piled up on their heads both haphazardly and perfectly.

Maddy crouched higher up on the toilet seat, shame rushing to her cheeks like a poison. *Had she stupidly felt good a few minutes ago?* And, as she watched her two classmates, brushing, spitting, putting in their various dental appliances and examining their scant acne, she wondered what it would be like if her insides matched her outsides, a normal girl, with normal appetites.

She was lost in watching the two girls when a sound pulled her back into the moment. She heard something drop and realized she had dropped it. The severed human arm, a morsel she had bitten off and was saving for later, lying on the tile by her feet. It was delish two minutes ago and now it looked strange and horrifying on the stark white of the ceramic. And she quickly shifted the mostly eaten cadaver on her lap to quickly pick up the arm—unsure if the girls had seen it yet.

“Hello? Is there someone in here?” Saskia called in a blasé tone while Gemma pushed open a stall door somewhere to the left of her. Then she opened the stall right next to her. Maddy could hear Gemma’s feet walk over to her stall and stop right in front and squeezed her eyes shut with the irrational hope of disappearing.

Gemma pushed on Maddy’s door, locked. “Who’s in there?” Gemma called. “Just tell us who it is, so we don’t think it’s a dude snuck in here.”

“Just call the RA.” Saskia said.

“No,” Gemma pointed to the underneath of the stall. Then whispered, “I’m gonna take a look.”

“Gross, I’m not getting on the floor to look under a toilet stall. “I’m done in here, anyway. Let’s go.”

But Gemma was not done and Maddy could feel the hot tears forming on her cheeks as Gemma’s knees hit the floor and she saw her hand grab the bottom of the stall door. The animal in her wanted to grab that hand and pull her in still struggling, blood pulsing through her veins. But Maddy didn’t do anything with abandon. High school and college, so far, had been an experience of denying desires that got stronger every day. Now faced with this situation—a quickly-thawing med-school corpse on her lap—she had very few choices.

“It’s Madison James,” Maddy’s voice trembled. “Don’t come in here.” Gemma’s hand disappeared.

“What’s going on in there? Why didn’t you answer us? Why are your feet up there?” Saskia asked.

Gemma pointed to a smear of blood left by the arm hitting the floor. Saskia nodded.

Maddy waited anxiously, staring at the stall door, unsure what to say to make them go away, when Gemma’s manicured fingers slid under the door holding a tampon.

Maddy overjoyed, had to stop herself from laughing as she said, “Thank you!”

“Oh my god, it’s nothing. We’re all women here,” Said Gemma. “Right?”

“Yup,” Maddy tried her best to sound nonchalant as she lowered her feet, trying not to drop the cadaver. “Dying to get out of the spider bathroom.”

“Right,” Gemma said. “Though, honestly, I don’t know why it gets such a bad rap. It’s really clean and I haven’t seen one spider.”

Maddy waited for a long, loaded minute wondering if they were waiting for her to come out. Even if she left the stiff on the toilet, her clothes were badly bloodstained. So, when she heard the two girls headed out of the bathroom, she collapsed over the ribcage relieved. The

shame and fear had been exhausting. But, after all the trouble she had gone to, she felt like she had to finish eating everything. And so, she spent her Saturday night crying over the entrails of a man she would only know as Male 2569.

The next morning, her roommate Kelsey nudged her awake with a cup of coffee. She didn't know what time she had come in, but she guessed it had been well after midnight. Kelsey, a petite girl with glasses, was standing above her in shorts, sweaty from a run. She was holding her own coffee and an almond croissant. Though barely awake, Maddy couldn't help noticing the croissant was crumbling on her comforter as Kelsey plopped down beside her, unbelievably alert.

“What time is it?” Maddy asked.

“It's almost ten,” she said.

“Shoot!” Maddy shot up in bed.

“Yeah. It's like I don't even know you anymore.”

Maddy sighed, “I must have needed the sleep.”

“Sure, but I didn't want you to lose the whole day—”

“Yeah thanks, I have an Organic Chem test tomorrow.”

“I know. So...” Kelsey said popping the last of the croissant into her mouth. “What the hell happened to you last night?”

The night came flooding back to Maddy and she winced with shame. “I uh—what do you mean?”

“You were gonna meet me and Carlos at The Vanguard and you never showed.”

“I wasn't feeling well.”

“But you came into the room at like two AM.”

“I, um. I spent some time in the toilet.”

“Oh.... That’s—I’m sorry.” Kelsey brushing a sweaty lock from her forehead and looked at Maddy sympathetically, “Nuff said. I didn’t mean to give you the third degree.”

“I understand. I told you I’d be somewhere... I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I just... sometimes I feel like I wouldn’t know if there was something up with you.”

“Nothing’s up with me,” Maddy wondered if she had oversold it and she could see Kelsey was still a little bummed. “What is it?”

“I’m, honestly, a little disappointed. I thought maybe you had some huge problem we’d solve together. I don’t want to be the only one with stuff.”

“Oh, I have stuff. Trust me.”

“No, you don’t,” Kelsey pouted. “You’re perfect.”

Kelsey went to take a shower while Maddy got dressed so they could head to the library together. As she put on her shoes, Maddy kept replaying a conversation she had with her mom. It was before the car accident, so she must have been fourteen or so. She’d been standing in the doorway as her mom chatted, on the porch, with her Aunt Ruby. Maddy remembered the smell of the grass and the evening fog rolling in over her neighbor’s rapeseed field. Her mom sipped home-made hard cider and joked with Aunt Ruby that the women in her family had, “A craving.” At the time, Maddy had tuned it out, thinking it was another gross overshare, or a reference to Maddy’s own emerging sexuality. But in the months since she’d graduated high school and come to Worthington College, she’d felt this appetite grow in her like a second person. It was contrary to who she was and what people expected from her. She was still doing well in school and showing up for her clubs, but she felt possessed and wondered if what her

mom had called “a conversation” was actually a warning. Yet another reason she wished her mom was still around.

By the time she trailed Kelsey out of Richmond House, Maddy had shaken off her sleep deprivation and was ready to study. The crisp morning was nice as they walked across The Quad toward Lowell. It was Late November and the smell of wet leaves and rain struck Maddy as almost overpowering. And, she wasn't certain, but she thought underneath the leaves she could pick up subtler things—squirrel's nests, the odors of people walking by, the smell of coffee brewing in the hipster coffee shop two blocks away, dog poop. It was actually distracting, but she told herself she was deluding herself; she didn't have bionic smell—*it was just wet grass*.

About halfway across the quad, Maddy heard a door open behind her and turned. Two campus police officers, one male, one female, exited Richmond House and began following her and Kelsey. The officers walked quickly as though trying to catch up to them.

Maddy felt her body suddenly clench up tightly. She was so stiff it was hard to walk. And her heart took off racing, so quickly that she wondered if Kelsey could see it beating in her coat. She knew the police might have already found out it was her who stole the cadaver and she wanted desperately to bolt. All her blood rushed to her legs and suddenly Maddy felt that she could run faster than she ever had in her life. The impulse to run was so overwhelming, she had to make small fists willing her pace to match Kelsey's, which was painfully slow.

She kept her head down and listened to their radios getting louder and louder as they started to get close to her and Kelsey. She could smell the two officers; the coffee on their breath, their deodorant.

She started to have more sinister thoughts—she wondered what their screams would sound like if she turned right now and attacked. Would they be as scared as she was at this

moment? These darker thoughts, though horrible, seemed to alleviate Maddy's fears a bit. She felt temporarily stronger and more in control. So, when they rounded the corner of the English department, she was almost disappointed when they turned right, and she and Kelsey continued straight.

The two girls made their way down the cobblestone path toward the library. As they approached, they noticed a young man on the steps leaning casually against the rail. He wore an expensive cardigan, made to look working-class, and an enviable case of bed-head. Maddy thought he was named Asa and there was a decent amount of talk on campus about him—the type of things you'd expect to hear about a guy who looked like he could front a boy band.

Maddy had long since learned to avoid guys like him, especially if they looked as moneyed as he did. But as they passed, she suddenly felt sure he was staring at her. And when she looked up and was met with a penetrating gaze so deep it paralyzed her. She had to force her way up the steps. It was so brazen, so intimate; it made her feel as though he had spent the morning waiting there for her. And despite herself, Maddy felt a charge shoot down her body like a volt and linger—even after she could hear him behind her being joined by the actual girl he was waiting for.

When they entered the building Maddy began peeling off her winter coat, but Kelsey just stared at her asking pointedly, “What was that all about?”

Maddy shrugged, but she was sure she had stared back at Asa with all the same intensity—and not for the reasons Kelsey suspected. She was staring because she could smell him. It was an irresistible smell, not like cologne or boy. The closest comparison was to rare prime rib. He smelled like food and it lingered in her nose as Kelsey continued, “You know who that is, right?”

Maddy nodded, “Asa?”

“Asa Hughes, they’re kind of big family on campus.” Maddy nodded, but she still wasn’t getting it. “I’m pretty sure they’re from Missouri, Mads.”

Maddy suddenly realized she knew exactly who his family was. Hughes was a big name in St. Louis. They ran a large, privately-owned chemical company whose influence could be felt all the way up in Rolla, where Maddy was from. Half the trucks that barreled down I-44 said Hughes on the side. And they had adopted a conservation area near her house, a riparian forest that she had walked and played in at least a thousand times growing up. “Hughes, Yeah. I know them.” She said. “I mean, I’ve heard of them.”

The girls finally found a spot in the crowded library. Maddy opened her lap-top but found she was already tired and overwhelmed. She’d never really been distracted the day before a test. But there was so much consuming her thoughts, now. And all her preoccupations, both alluring and scary, were way more captivating than chemistry.

There were the Campus Police. She didn’t know if they’d found out about the missing cadaver yet, but they would eventually. And maybe it was her paranoia, but given all the chatter on the officer’s radios, it seemed like there was more going on than usual.

On top of that, memories the night before kept flooding back. They were patchy recollections, which made her anxiety free-floating and ill-defined. *She remembered moving quickly through darkness. She had moved very fast, somewhere...the Arboretum. She remembered running through the park and it into the woods beyond with the bones. She definitely had the bones. She had buried them like a dog.*

But the most distracting thought, the thing really fogging her brain, if she was dead honest about it, was the look Asa gave her. She kept revisiting it, it was the most intense feeling she had ever had around a boy. And it was more than just his smell, or the intensity of his gaze. It

was his shamelessness. It seemed like he did whatever he wanted. Which was beguiling for Maddy, who never did anything with complete abandon.

On Thursday she was called in to see her Organic Chem professor, Dr. Grant, in his office. He was a kind-faced man who she respected tremendously. But when she started at Worthington, she was warned that Professor Grant was famous for making pre-med students change majors. Maddy had found him to be nothing but fair and invested, though she suspected it helped that they were both from rural Missouri. It was an area that didn't send a ton of kids to college let alone to a place like Worthington. And, maybe she was projecting, but she always felt like he understood the working-class stock she came from and what an alien she must have been—studying in July instead of swimming in the quarry.

But the look on his face when she came in was of utter disappointment. Dr. Grant showed her brusquely to a pair of ancient club chairs in his cramped seating area while a male TA looked intently into a computer screen at his desk. Then he tossed her a packet which she silently flipped over and stared blankly at the percentage in a square box on the upper righthand corner—62. There was a bunch of columns with breakdowns comparing her to the rest of the class, but that number, sixty-two, was lodged in her throat like a tumor.

“Look, Madison, you were grossly unprepared for this test. And I wouldn't normally call a student in for flubbing a test, but I guess—I expected better.”

Maddy just shook her head, she hated this feeling.

“I'm not going to ask you why this happened. I doubt you'd tell me anyway. But I guess I'd like to make sure that you know why you did so poorly.”

“I do.” The look of concern in his face was devastating.

“I see,” he said. “Look, I don’t know you that well, but I’m pretty sure this is out of character. Is it something the University could be helpful with?”

Maddy shook her head.

“Well,” the professor clapped his hands together. “I suppose that’s it. Oh…” He seemed to remember something and handed her a card from his back pocket. It was still warm and had the direct line and email address of: *Dr. Wendy Snyder, Psy.D.*

“Is this your wife?”

Professor Grant nodded, “She’s just one of the many mental health professionals on staff here… I happen to think she’s the best. And, it goes without saying that, everything you tell her is confidential. She can’t even share it with me.” He sensed her apprehension and continued, “Look, Madison, this is a challenging program. The stress can get to even the best of us.” He smiled and looked at Maddy in a way that told her he was talking about her.

“It won’t happen again, Sir.”

“Okay, that’s good news. Because I know you’d like to go on to Med School.”

“Yes, Professor Grant.”

“Phelps County could use another doctor.”

She forced a smile, then asked, “Is that it?”

“Uh, one more thing,” he added. “There’s something missing from the medical school building, and I know you work the desk there on the weekends. You didn’t see anything, did you?”

“No!” she feigned surprise. “What’s missing?”

“I’m not at liberty…”

“Of course,” she said rising to leave. “Whatever it is, I hope it turns up.”

Maddy found herself taking an odd route back to Hartfield House, and when she arrived at the vacant steps of the library, she realized she'd been hoping to see Asa. She wanted to be close to him again. To smell him, to flirt with the idea of tasting him. And when she realized her motives, she was so horrified by her own line of thinking she said, "No!" out loud. And a man exiting the library froze, unsure if he had done something wrong. Maddy reassured him by pointing to her head, "Ear buds," she feigned, though her ears were clearly empty.

She met Kelsey in the cafeteria, grabbing the rarest roast beef sandwich she could find. She picked at the middle while Kelsey went on about Statistics 161 as she slurped her soup. Before remembering to ask, "Oh, how did it go with Professor Grant?"

Maddy just sighed and shook her head.

"That good, huh?"

"I wanted to crawl out of my skin. I've never gotten a D before."

"You didn't even fail!"

"Ha!" Maddy finally just took the top off and bottom of her sandwich.

Kelsey eyed the pile of meat on her plate, before saying, "Hey, Maddy, you know I'm here if there's something you want to talk about, right?"

"There's nothing to talk about. I know how to do this. I just keep my head down and work twice as hard as I have been."

"Okay, but you have to go to a party tonight."

"Did you not hear what I just said?"

"Yeah, I did. I'm just choosing to ignore it."

"Kelsey, I'm on an academic scholarship."

“This is an invite... I can’t even believe I got for us. It’s the Arts and Letters club—”

Maddy’s thoughts immediately drifted back to Asa. “And they’re taking over Toad Hall. It’s gonna be sick. Two DJs, a bunch of upperclassmen—”

“Can’t you go with Carlos?”

“He’s spinning, that’s how I got us in. Just say yes, and then tomorrow we will study all day.”

“I have to work at nine AM tomorrow.”

“That’s not six AM, Maddy.”

“Two hours. In and out.”

“I can’t believe you never partied back in Missouri,” Kelsey said sarcastically. “You’re so good at it.” Maddy couldn’t help smiling.

Rigby Hall was colloquially referred to as Toad Hall because of its large stone building that dated back to the 1700s, and because it conveyed a certain high-minded charm. Everything, from the rugs to the books on the shelves were far flung artifacts; everything curated in an homage to world travel or, a regressive nod to European colonialism.

It housed four clubs: Fine Arts, Letters, History and Civics but was more famous for having three secret passageways, known only to a select few within the clubs. And for owning one of Hemingway’s old desk chairs. Both of which cemented its reputation for hedonism.

Maddy and Kelsey had only looked in the stained-glass windows in passing. So, when they walked in the large foyer and were greeted by a large bronze figure of the hall’s founder, Curtis Rigby, dressed in lingerie and a tall, damask pope’s hat, it seemed like a good omen. They were also comforted by how warm and threadbare the whole place seemed. Despite its rep, it was actually really cozy.

They followed the cries of revelers into the party's inner sanctum, the Great Hall. A long, arched-ceiling room with paintings of notable alums. And Carlos, Kelsey's boyfriend, stood on the far side spinning. He was hard at work making the party bump with remixes of 90s alt music, and didn't see them walk in. And Kelsey visibly reacted to Saskia and Gemma leaning on his table in their expensive mini dresses.

"I think we're underdressed," Kelsey said, suddenly uncomfortable.

Maddy also reacted to seeing them, but overcoming it, grabbed her friend's hand and said, "You look amazing."

"Really?"

"Totally, you look hot." Almost on cue, Carlos looked up from his records and spotted them. He quickly put a record on, and leaped over the table, almost hitting Gemma in his haste, and raced across the floor toward them.

"Kelsey!" His whole face was lit up as he finally pushed his way through the revelers. He grabbed Kelsey in a bear hug. "You guys made it!" he said excitedly. "Awesome. You been here long?"

"No," Kelsey said. Her insecurity had totally vanished. "We just got here."

"Let me get you guys a drink. What are you drinking?"

"I'll take a beer," Kelsey said.

"Maddy?"

"I have to work tomorrow."

"Okay, a nice cold coke for Maddy," he said. Then he looked over at his booth. They could all hear his song was winding down. "I gotta put another song on first. You pick it, Kelsey."

"Really?" she said.

“Hell, yeah,” he said heading back. And she followed him through the crowd, turning back once to say, “We’ll be back with your drink in a sec.”

Maddy knew they’d be a while and looked around for a place to sit down. She was suddenly overwhelmed by the smell of all the hot moving bodies in the room. Anxious now, she looked for Kelsey and Carlos in the crowd. That’s when she saw one of the two campus police from the other morning enter and walk over to the DJ stand looking to talk to Carlos. It was probably a just noise complaint, but it made Maddy nervous. And as the officer waited for Carlos to return, she did a casual survey of the room. Making Maddy quickly, but subtly, backed into an alcove off the Great Hall where she could see a cluster of worn, leather seating.

She turned into the candlelit room to find the love seat occupied by three very pretty young women, juniors if she had to guess. She didn’t feel like they went to the school. And somewhere a man’s voice crooned— “All of Me,” the old jazz standard. She thought he must be lying across the chesterfield, because she couldn’t see him, yet.

“Take my arms, I want to lose them. Take my lips, I’ll never use them.”

As she rounded the couch, she could see it was Asa, shirtless, wearing just a club scarf and laying across the girls’ laps. He was singing happily to the ceiling with a drink in his hand, “*You took the part that once was my heart, so why not take all...*”

He, suddenly, shot up off the couch and stared at Maddy, with the same intensity he had outside the library. *Was that for her, or was that his thing?* The women he was with turned as well, wondering who had so wholly stolen his attention. And Maddy, in jeans and her best church blouse was not what they were expecting.

Maddy suddenly felt ugly and clumsy, as she fumbled back the way she came. But then it hit her nose—his smell. She could smell Asa thick like fog, his smell permeated the room. It was stronger than she had remembered from the library. It hit her nose and went up to her brain like

an explosion. And she didn't know how or when, but she knew she wanted to taste him. It was primal and so strong an impulse that it seemed God-given, natural—something that was meant to be. She couldn't imagine a world where she was not absolutely created to eat him. Yet her shame and mortification won over those instincts, backing her out of the room.

She exhaled as she returned to the party. The campus cop had left, and Kelsey and Carlos were looking for her with a Coke. She sipped it pretending to smile as they talked, telling her a story she didn't hear—she was still with Asa on the sofa. She knew she was starting to rationalize something horrible. And why? His family's noxious chemicals, all the girls he surrounded himself with but didn't seem particularly attached to? *Shirtless with a stupid scarf, who the hell did he think he was—*

She didn't know how much time had passed as she stood there thinking but she was interrupted by a voice behind her, "Hey."

She turned and Asa stood there in a half-open button-down, looking at her through tousled hair. She looked for Kelsey and Carlos, but they were gone. She couldn't be sure if they had told her where they went, she had been so deep in her thoughts.

"What's your name?" He asked.

"Me?"

"Yeah, I'd like to know your name."

"Madison James," she said nervous of the desires was activating. "Maddy, for short."

"Maddy, charmed. I'm Asa Hughes. What year are you?"

"Freshman."

"Oh, I can remember being new here like it was yesterday. Can be... disorienting."

"Um— yeah, sometimes." Maddy was surprised by how genuinely charming he was.

"Can I show you around the place?" He sounded so nice, so sincere as he took her hand.

“What about your friends?” Maddy asked, uncoupling their hands.

“I have a lot of friends. And I try to be attentive and gracious to visitors. I am one of the hosts of this party. But I’ve never seen you here before. So, it’s actually my responsibility to show you around a little. Would you enjoy that?” Before she realized it, Maddy had nodded.

As Asa led her out of the Great Hall, she could feel a foggy uncertainty engulf her. She didn’t know where she was going literally or figuratively, but she was sure his smell was leading her like a siren onto rocky shore.

They crossed the foyer and headed up a dark stairway lit only by a lantern, in a niche, halfway to the top. She was unable to see Asa in front of her, and he reached back for her hand. She could feel it beside her own before he even touched her. It was warm and so close. She let her own hand dangle inches from it, taking the opportunity to close her eyes and inhale him deeply. She wondered if this would be the best part of her evening, the sweet anticipation of getting what she’d craved for so long. The foreplay of the hunt. She felt floaty again, like she had in the bathroom. She could run away, she could devour him – she had dominion over whatever happened here in the dark. And when he reached back and found her hand she yielded it to him, giddily.

They reached the top, and she was able to make out a dimly-lit mezzanine filled with bookshelves and worn oak tables, dead ending at a suit of armor which Asa seemed to be heading towards. She could see the heft of the tall ax in its hands. She remembered hearing about battles in the Late Middle Ages. Dull blades sliced into soldiers but didn’t kill them. They died later of their wounds. She imagined this axe cutting into the side of a man, like a heifer hanging in a butcher shop. *Perhaps*, she thought, *she had missed her era.*

“This,” Asa explained. “Is a suit of armor worn in the battle of Agincourt.”

“Henry V.”

“Yeah, maybe? It belonged to one of the club’s founders, Sir Gideon Blake.” He poked the helmet which closed with a clank. Maddy let out a squeal. She couldn’t believe how cavalier he was being with the ancient armor, till he set her mind at ease—

“It’s fake. Sir Blake had it made in the fifties. Japanese steel. In fact, Sir Blake isn’t even a knight. He’s not even British.”

“Things aren’t always what they seem,” said Maddy in a sultry voice that surprised even her.

“No,” agreed Asa, pulling a lever behind the armor to reveal—

Maddy clapped giddily, “The secret passageway. It’s real!”

Asa nodded gallantly and extended his arm, “After you.”

“Oh, okay,” Maddy said. She felt her way into the dark hallway. The door on the other side was clearly shut, and the only light was tiny floor lights placed strategically to prevent tripping. She felt her way along the wall. Asa closed the door and was soon behind her. She could feel him near her, getting closer and she could smell him like she was tangled in him.

It hadn’t occurred to her before, but now, alone in the dark passage, Maddy couldn’t help but wonder why he was bringing her here, alone. She had been so obsessed with her own vile motives it had never occurred to her that he might have something heinous of his own in mind. She suddenly felt naïve—she had been so flattered and so hungry. But now she felt sure he might try to compromise her somehow—or actually attack her. The thought actually tickled her a little. She imagined stalking him live ripping the life from him and calling it self-defense. Then again, she’d have to leave his body, but there would be the satisfaction of acting from her instincts—and some tasting for sure.

However her bubble was quickly burst by the sound of revelers outside the passageway fumbling with the armor, and it was with some disappointment that she realized that the setting was not quite as intimate as it felt.

Quietly feeling her way, along the stone wall she felt a corner and realized she'd likely reached the end. She stopped, expecting Asa to fumble into her, but he didn't he came just inches from her and stopped. She wondered if he also felt the strange electricity moving between them, it was almost crackling. And then he pressed his body around hers and she drifted into his warm smell enveloping her. Visions of hedonistic pleasure flooded her thoughts. She imagined herself attacking, ripping, gorging on this flesh only inches from her. *Now. Now. Now.* And then a door creaked open, and she realized that he had been reaching around her to get the door handle. And just like that, they were in another hallway—well-lit and painted blue.

Asa smiled back at Maddy and offered an arm, helping her out of the passageway. It was all still very charming, but she saw in his smile a hint of something she was hoping to see. There was an undercurrent of deviance she recognized as her own. He led her down the blue hall and around the corner, both of them were smiling now, for very different reasons.

He stopped in front of another door, this one thicker, like an exterior door. "Where are we now?" she asked, feigning concern. His tone was reassuring, but his smile was unmistakable as he said, "Game Room." He opened the door and turned on the light above a staircase leading down into what looked like an upscale basement. She smiled back so brazenly she wondered how he wasn't concerned for his safety, but he somehow wasn't. She almost felt sorry for him, and his testosterone-fueled naivete.

They descended into a red brick room with two antique billiards tables, a ping pong table and darts. There were more sofas, and a closet or maybe an old maid's quarters off the main area. She couldn't tell.

“What’s your game?” he asked.

“Honestly, none of these,” she said.

“Me neither,” and he rolled a ball across the billiards table toward her and smiled.

“Does anyone ever come down here?” she asked.

“It’s not really a Game Room crowd.”

They both smiled.

“I should probably get going,” she said. She wasn’t sure why, because she didn’t move.

“Oh, Maddy,” he sighed. “What is it about you?”

He looked almost pained. And she couldn’t help smirk at his wasted sympathy, as she feigned vulnerability, “I don’t know what you mean.” Her nostrils flared with his delicious scent, her teeth gnashed underneath her lips, sharp and unwieldy. She was ready and looked across the table one last time to meet his deep grey eyes.

Or were they darker? They suddenly looked different, more sinister.

He must have been a good ten feet from her but, in a flash, he jumped bouncing off the ceiling and suddenly knocking her to the ground. Grappling with Asa on top of her, he seemed to be frothing, as he plunged his teeth, sharp and bared, into her shoulder. She screamed out loud from the pain and managed to grab his face. And she held it just inches from her chest as she struggled to bring her knees up between them.

Maddy kicked Asa across the room into the brick wall on the other end. He howled in pain and surprise, arching his back as he fell limply onto the Turkish rug.

She scrambled to her feet and assessed the deep the wound on her shoulder. She was bleeding badly, but she saw him rising, disoriented, and begin to shake it off. Asa seemed to be wondering how his date had managed to kick him so hard. And looked at Maddy for the first time that evening with cautious reservation. She stood across the room from him, locking eyes,

ready to attack. Then reared back in anticipation of him being in striking distance. He leapt again towards her, but before he had left the ground, she had pounced, knocking him out of the air and onto the billiards table. Smashing the brass lamp and making it blink, maniacally, above them as they fought on the table.

He managed to get over her and throw her off the felt onto the corner of a nearby coffee table. Her ribs ached as she landed hard against the glass and metal. But she rose quickly, leaping towards him and sinking her teeth through his wool sportscoat and into his shoulder. The smell of his blood in her nose, she could taste him, but it wasn't the meal she had hoped for. And as they fought on the table, biting and thrashing, trying to get their teeth into one another, she realized, it had become pointless. Her deep attraction to him was not as prey but as family. Whatever monster she was, she'd found another. And while both their hungers burned, unsatisfied, inside them, the excitement of finding each other seemed to outweigh their malady—though neither of them was able to back down.

Then, there was the loud squeak of the old brass hinges on the door at the top of the stairway. Asa and her both froze looking at each other warily. And from the top of the stairs a shaky voice rang out.

“Maddy? You down here?” Kelsey shouted. She sounded very worried. Maddy badly wanted to reassure her friend, but she couldn't be discovered down here like this. Asa, reading her mind, silently covered the blood on the parquet floor with a worn area rug and pointed toward the other room. They silently slunk into what turned out to be the maid's room and locked the door. As they heard Kelsey's feet come halfway down the stairs, and continue, “Maddy!” Before realizing the light was broken and turning back up the stairs.

Asa and Maddy listened from the other side of the old maid's room door for Kelsey's footsteps to fade and the door to close again. When she had gone, he smiled, which broke into a laugh.

"What?" Maddy said horrified.

"Come on, it's not funny to you."

"No," she said, wanting to lick her wounds but being too self-conscious for it.

"You were gonna eat me, too."

"Perhaps," she said. "But I've been given an "out" here. I'm horrified about what I was gonna do."

"This isn't a totally tragic turn of events," he said, standing and brushing himself off. "I mean, I think we've both made a welcome confidante."

"I don't think you and I have much in common."

"Wait! you're judging me? You were going to legit eat me."

"Well, maybe." she said defensively. "This just isn't, you know, the type of thing I do for fun."

"Are you saying you're better than me?" he pointed to the wound in his shoulder.

"Yes." Maddy rose and brushed herself off. She was upset as she unlocked the door. "I can't explain why. I have to go now."

"I'm not going to apologize for being on top of the food chain."

Maddy hurried across the Game Room to the stairs, feeling horrible about herself. But as she reached the top of the stairs, she stopped. The amount of pleasure he represented to her at that moment was hard to walk away from, especially stacked up against her old hunger and deprivation. And she turned and looked back.

Asa was standing confidently at the bottom as though he knew she'd look back, "You'll come find me." He said. "You know, when you're ready to start living."

Maddy hurried to the end of the blue hallway and, finding a service door off the kitchen, flung it open to find she was by the Rigby's back dumpster. As the cold air hit her wounds, she remembered how bad she must look and tried not to let anyone see her as she raced between streetlights, through the dark, unlit areas of campus toward home. She stuffed her cold hands into her pockets. Surprised, she felt something inside and dug out the card Dr. Bates had given her for his wife, Dr. Snyder. The white paper glowed like moonlight.

On Monday morning, Maddy met a warm-looking woman in her forties with a flattering long dress and a sweet face. She introduced herself and asked Maddy to sit on one of the identical comfy chairs opposite her own.

"Which one?" Maddy asked.

"Whichever one you like," she responded. "It's not a test."

Maddy sat. "This okay?"

"Sure. And you can call me Wendy if you like."

"Okay, Wendy. So, what happens now?"

"Well, first, there are some preliminaries I have to get out of the way. This, your sessions, are totally confidential," she said. "However, anything you might say about an endangered minor I would have to report."

"Oh," Maddy replied. "Of course. Right."

"Great. Also, if I feel you are a danger to yourself or others, I would have to notify the authorities."

Maddy could feel a giant lump in her throat. She wondered if Wendy could see how tense she felt. She felt sweaty. *Did she look sweaty?*

Wendy looked at her, as if getting down to business, now, and said warmly, “So that’s out of the way. What brings you to my office today, Madison?”

Maddy looked at her for a long time, it was as though she’d lost her train of thought. Then said, “Sorry, um. I’m here because, uh.” She stumbled, finally saying, “I—I have an eating disorder.”