

Woods Park

By Timothy Totten

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Edmund J. Aldrick was in hell. Not literally, there was no fire or brimstone, but hell it was nonetheless.

How he'd come to this was a blur -- a jumbled mess of fragmented memories. He thought about it a lot. Would this still have happened if he'd never gone to Woods Park? He had no answer. Why wonder what could have been, worry about what is.

Edmund turned and faced the door. Through that door was death. There was a monster in Woods Park. A creature of darkness. It would not stop until its needs were satisfied. Edmund doubted if it was even possible to satisfy the monster.

Knowing full well what awaited him on the other side of the door, Edmund opened it, and stepped through it.

1

Edmund J. Aldrick was really good with computers. Geek, nerd, techie, whatever you wanted to call him, he probably wouldn't have been offended. Unless you called him an asshole.

For what it's worth, Edmund wasn't an asshole. He was a pleasant guy. He may never have been captain of the school football team, but he hadn't been a depressed loner either.

These days Edmund, whose middle-name was Jonas, much to his embarrassment; was an independent contractor. He worked setting up computer labs, corporate networks, server farms, and anything that might remotely have something to do with computers.

His job often involved travel, and this was no exception. For the next 18 months, Edmund was to live in Woods Park. A tiny little village on the outskirts of nowhere, with a single general store which also acted as post office, gas station and liquor store. If that wasn't bad enough, the store was actually attached to a second building which served as the village restaurant and pub.

Other than the connected store-bar, the town consisted of houses, trailers, tents, and all forms of low-density residential housing imaginable. There may have been a single duplex, but Edmund figured that probably didn't stop people from renting out their basements, if that is, they weren't growing pot in them.

Then there was the school.

It was actually a fairly modern building, not more than 30 years old. The school administrator had told Edmund that the original school had burnt to the ground (along with most of the town) in the 70s.

For the next year and a half, it would be Edmund's job to set up a brand new computer lab, and school network which would connect all of the computers in the school together.

Edmund had faced worst challenges. There had been the government office where he had to sign untold amount of paperwork just to step foot in the place. The amount of red tape he'd had to cut through to get that job done had made him swear to never work for the government again.

Yet here he was, about to do a fairly long job for a government-run school. Life can be funny sometimes.

2

The well tanned man sat in his lazy-boy chair, smoking a John-Player-Special and drinking some crap beer his hippie sister had picked up at the store. Some guy was pretending to be a comedian on the television. The tanned man didn't think he was doing a very good job, as he wasn't very funny.

There was a knock on the door.

"Coming", yelled the tanned man, who promptly got up from his chair.

He walked over and opened the door, standing outside it was a little blond-hair white-boy who looked like he couldn't be much more than 20. He was dressed nicely, and held out his hand toward the bigger man.

"Hi there, I'm Edmund Aldrick, I was told that you had a place to rent?"

The tanned man grabbed his hand and smiled back, "Well! Glad to meet ya Ed! I'm Darl Fitzpatrick, and yeah that's Darl with a dee. I think I may got something that will do ya just fine, come on in."

Edmund hated being called Ed, but Darl seemed like a nice enough guy, so he shrugged it off and stepped inside.

Darl led Edmund to a set of stairs that led into the basement.

"Hope you don't mind the mess, just me an' ma sis live here, and we don't do too much in the way of cleaning," Darl apologised.

Edmund laughed, "No worries man, I'm a bachelor, my own place back in the city is no Taj Mahal either."

The basement had a shared laundry room (which was in a fairly unkempt state) and a door leading to the "suite".

Now calling this place a suite, was kinda like calling an old outhouse a "bathroom". It may share some similarities, but isn't really in the same class. There was a bathroom, of sorts, it had a toilet and a small sink, with those annoying two faucet setups, one hot, one cold. There was no tub or shower.

Darl seemed to sense what Edmund was thinking, as he said, "You can use the shower upstairs, no worries man."

Edmund just nodded as they continued the tour. The rest of the suite was one big room. The side of it closest to the bathroom had a small sink and counter. On the counter was a microwave, and a hot plate. There were some make-shift cupboards attached to the wall above the counter. On the floor next to it was a little bar fridge.

Across from the kitchen corner was a home-made closet setup. Wooden shelves to store stuff, and a rail (possibly the handle from a long broom) to hang clothes on.

Moving over from the closet-corner, in toward the middle of the room, was the main "living area". It consisted of a couch, an ancient-looking coffee table, and an even older-looking television set perched on a milk-crate.

"Where do I sleep?" Asked Edmund.

Darl slapped himself on the forehead, "Oh yeah, I totally forgot that part, watch this!"

The tanned man walked over to the couch, pulled the cushions off, and folded out a squeaky hide-a-bed.

"Tada!" Exclaimed Darl, a big grin on his face.

Edmund just laughed, shook his head, and said, "how much you want?"

Darl leaned against the hide-a-bed, "Five hundred a month."

He waited for Edmund's shocked expression before continuing, "I'm just shitting ya. This ain't yer big city where people charge half a K for a little shithole like this. Nah man, two hundred bucks, everything included. When it comes to food, beer, dope, whatever, we're good about sharing, so if you want, we can go together on that kinda stuff."

Edmund laughed again, and held out his hand to shake, "You've got yourself a deal Mr. Darl Fitzpatrick."

3

The first night in a new place is always a bit weird. This time however, things seemed to be pretty good.

Edmund sat on a big couch upstairs with Darl and his sister, Clo. They were playing a game of poker on a coffee-table that didn't look much better than the one in the basement.

"Next time ya get beer, could ya get something a bit more normal? Like Bud or somethin'." Darl said to his sister, smiling as ever.

Clo stuck her tongue out at him then replied, "If you don' like my brew, get your own swill. Budweiser ain't beer dear, it's canned cat piss. At least this stuff tastes like beer."

Edmund took a sip of his beer, it was good. Some little micro-brewery, apparently brought in from his own home-town. Amazing he hadn't tried it before coming to Woods Park.

Clo finished her bottle, then looked over at Edmund. "My big brother had an Irish daddy, yet he somehow managed to miss out on the good-taste-in-beer gene. I've often wondered if momma hadn't been fucking someone else, like how I was conceived."

Darl, still smiling, retorted, "Not all of us are bastard offspring from our whoring squaw mother's many affairs. Just you darlin, just you. I am a proud and true Fitzpatrick, I can feel it in my bones."

"You can feel it in your boner you mean, that's the only Irish thing you've got."

They both laughed at that, Edmund joined in, not to be rude, but was a bit uncomfortable with this unusual pair of half-siblings.

A few hours (and a couple of cases of beer) later, the trio was sitting on the floor next to the couch. They were onto the latest game of poker, this time, Darl had upped the stakes.

"I think we should play strip poker." He'd said. Clo had rolled her eyes and groaned, and Edmund had thought maybe this wasn't exactly how he'd expected to 'get to know' his landlord.

Now however, three-sheets-to-the-wind, and wearing nothing but his underwear and a pair of socks, it didn't really seem to matter.

Darl had the most clothes of any of them, he was still wearing his dirty jogging pants. They looked like they should have been thrown in the wash a few days prior.

Clo on the other hand, hadn't had much luck in the game, she was down to a single sock. Why she'd taken her undergarments off before her socks, was a mystery to Edmund, but he wasn't exactly complaining.

Again, as though he could read Edmund's thoughts, Darl spoke up, "I think she's-a cheatin' personally. Trying to shed all her kit for the new-comer."

Clo rolled her eyes (again), "don't you listen to that bag of lies, it's him that cheats, he just likes to see his pretty sister naked."

Edmund wasn't sure what to think about either of these two odd-balls, but at the moment, it didn't really seem to make much difference. Beer and boobs made a nice combination.

“And don’t think you’re getting any pussy from your lil sis neither you drunken Irish wanker.” As drunk as she was, Clo wasn’t slurring her speech.

Darl laughed (he seemed to do that a lot), “Screw you. Ha! No, you can have your fun with Eddie here, I’m sure he’d love to plunge his pecker into your stinky twat.”

Edmund cringed. If anything was worse than Ed, it was Eddie. Once more, he didn’t say anything. As drunk as he was, he still felt like Darl was just being a joker. Still, the idea of ‘getting-it-on’ with Clo was certainly not an unattractive one. She definitely wasn’t an unattractive one either, and Edmund was fairly sure it wasn’t the beer goggles telling him that.

“Before we do anything else, I need a line!” Clo suddenly exclaimed.

Darl nodded in agreement, “fuck yeah!”

Edmund had no idea what they were on about. That is until Clo produced a small wooden box that was apparently filled with various drugs and drug paraphernalia.

Clo took a little baggie from the box, and dumped some of the contents out on the table. Then she took a razor cutting blade out of the box and started cutting up the white powder.

Darl looked over at Edmund, “this ma friend is as near as you’re gonna find to pure Colombian in these parts. Best damn coke you’ve ever tried.”

“Actually, I’d like to abstain from that thanks. It’s not really my cup of tea.” Edmund said quietly.

Darl smiled, “Sure thing boss, but you’re missing out. This shit is what makes life worth living.”

Both Darl and Clo took turns with a small cut straw, and snorted a couple of lines of the crystalline white powder. Clo looked over at Edmund. “If you don’t want to have fun with the nose candy, how about some bedroom action?”

Darl laughed (again) and Edmund swallowed hard.

Clo didn’t wait for an answer, she got up, walked over to Edmund (still wearing nothing but that single black sock), took him by the hand, and led him to the bedroom.

No, this ‘*first night*’ was definitely a bit weird, but it was also completely awesome.

4

Being back in school again was a bit strange for Edmund. He'd graduated from high-school four years prior, and had sworn to never return. That was one of the reasons he'd skipped on college or university and gone straight into business. Being a self-taught computer expert had its advantages.

Today however, he was back in school. This time he was one of the '*weird adults*' that the kids all gawked at as they went about whatever it was that kids did in school these days.

Edmund didn't really mind that much. The initial weirdness factor had worn off about the time the administrator (an overweight man named Ralph) introduced him to the person he'd be working with for the next 18 months.

Sara Summers was the school's new computer teacher. Unlike Edmund, she had gone on to university. She'd graduated only six months before she'd been offered a job in Woods Park.

Sara had never even heard of Woods Park, let alone considered moving there. But a job, a real job, in a real school. It's what she'd always dreamed of doing. So here she was.

Also unlike Edmund, she planned to stay awhile, and had invested in a small trailer not far from the school. Then again, in a town the size of Woods Park, nothing was too far from the school.

As soon as he saw her, Edmund J. Aldrick knew he was in love. Sara Summers was a tall, shapely woman, a few years older than himself. Her platinum blonde hair seemed to shine like gold, even in the dull fluorescent light inside the school. Combined with her deep blue eyes, Edmund found her mesmerizing. Enough so, that he had completely zoned out upon first seeing her, until Ralph coughed, looked at him with a bit of a wiley glint, and formerly introduced them.

"It's nice to meet you Mr. Aldrick, I look forward to working with you." Had been Sara's brief statement.

Edmund barely knew how to reply. He certainly looked forward to working with Mr. Summers, but didn't want to sound too -- well, overwhelmed. Overwhelmed was in fact an accurate description of Edmund however, and it was well into the day before he had managed to say more than two or three words at a time to her.

By the time the lunch bell rang, Edmund had calmed himself enough to actually hold coherent conversations with his new found soul-mate. Suddenly the image of the dark-haired beauty he'd slept with last night popped into his head. '*Shit, how the hell am I going to deal with Clo?*' He realized he'd almost spoken his thoughts out loud, and quickly regained his composure.

"So, how long have you been in Woods Park?" Edmund asked, mentally kicking himself for asking what seemed like such a trivial question.

Sara looked over at him from the staff table, "Two months so far. It's my first real job. I'm totally excited. I can't wait until we have a proper lab set up."

Edmund was about to continue with the small talk, when he saw a group of kids walking toward a table where a couple of other kids were sitting alone. Normally this would not be setting off alarms in Edmund's brain, but he recognized the look of the kids at the table as the shy geeky types. He also recognized the group coming toward them as trouble-makers, bullies, clicky-types.

Sara must have noticed his gaze had shifted, because she turned and looked over at the two converging groups. "Uh oh, looks like Deid and her gang are about to start trouble again."

Edmund's voice showed concern, "Aren't you going to do anything about it?"

Sara looked back at him, "Until they actually do something, I can't do anything. For all I know, they might just walk right on by. I doubt it, but it's possible."

The group didn't just walk on by. Instead, the apparent leader, the girl Sara had called Deid, walked over to one of the kids, started taunting him, then picked up his lunch and dropped it on the floor. The rest of the standing kids started laughing.

Sara got up and walked over to the group, "Deidrie, Arnold, Kenneth, Marco, Lucy, I want you all to report to the Principal's office, now."

The nasty kids glared up at Sara, then sulkily marched out of the cafeteria. The direction they turned wasn't toward the office though, it looked like they were ignoring Sara's instructions.

Sara just shook her head and came back to the table.

"Deidrie Renolds is one bad egg. Keep an eye on her, she's nothing but trouble."

A short time later, Deidrie re-appeared, without her gang, and sat at a table alone. She'd only been sitting for a minute or two when the man Edmund had been introduced to as the Vice Principal came and sat next to her.

Sara was eating her lunch and talking about the plans for the computer lab, and while Edmund was listening, he kept half an eye on the young girl and the VP. As much as Edmund disliked bullies, he was more worried about the way the VP was talking to her. Talking and looking. Looking straight down her shirt anyway.

The girl couldn't have been more than fourteen. The man could easily have been her father. The way his eyes kept moving to the girl's chest made Edmund feel rather ill. Then he saw something that made him want to '*do something*' (he just didn't know what). Before getting up and walking out of the cafeteria, the VP (Dave? Dan? Derick? Something with a D and not Darl) had reached over and rubbed the girl's butt.

Edmund was out of words. He wanted to say something, to do something, to stop whatever sick games it was VP-with-a-D was playing with a misguided-but-otherwise-innocent little girl.

Sara had noticed he wasn't paying attention to what she was saying and glanced over to where his eyes were looking. All she saw was Deidrie Renolds sitting at a table, looking rather sulky.

"What's the matter Edmund?" Sara asked.

Edmund stuttered, "Um, uh, oh never mind. I'm having school flashbacks again. As you can imagine, I was the bullied one when I went to school."

Sara nodded. "I know how that goes. I wasn't exactly Miss Popular in school either."

The rest of that day, Edmund worked quietly. He was still enamored with Sara, conflicted about Clo, and disturbed by what he'd seen in the cafeteria. Still, he couldn't bring himself to say anything about any of it.

There was way too much going on inside his head to make sense of any of it. It was just a jumbled blur.

After work, Edmund returned to his new place of residence (he wasn't sure he was ready to call it home, not quite yet.) Darl was sitting in the lazy-boy chair, watching some sit-com that really wasn't Edmund's cup of tea. Clo was sitting on the couch, bent over the coffee table, snorting more lines.

Edmund joined her. This time, he did partake in the '*nose candy*'. It was awesome.

5

Woods Park Primary-Secondary School was a long-established institution. It had once served all the grades from Kindergarten to Graduation. These days it didn't reach for quite so lofty goals. Instead it was K-10. After grade 10, students had to be bussed to Lakeview High, in the (somewhat) nearby town of Lakeview, only a 45 minute drive away.

Ralph Longdale was School Administrator. Technically he was a member of the School District, but he'd been assigned to manage WPPSS for the last five years.

However, while he worked for the School District, and reported to them directly, he was not, as it were, the first-in-command at WPPSS. That position lay with the Principal.

Principal Joan Curtis was commander-and-chief of the school, and she made sure everyone knew it. She wasn't about to take orders from no grey-haired, overweight bureaucrat, whose only experience in the field of Education, was going to Business School 30-someodd years ago.

As much as she resented Ralph's appointment to the school, she did give the man credit for some of the work he'd done. Helping convince the School District to give Woods Park enough funding to build a brand new computer lab, and set up all the rest of the school's computers in a proper network, well that was commendable.

Not all bureaucrats were completely useless after all.

Joan had been at WPPSS for going on twelve years. It had been her first assignment as a Principal. Previously she'd been Vice Principal at Lakeview High. Before that, a teacher in Lakeview. All-in-all she'd been actively involved in Proper Education for over 20 years.

She didn't like to admit it, but Administrator Longdale was actually only about ten years old than she was. Didn't look it though. Longdale may as well have been in his 70s for the way he looked. Not a very healthy man. Smoked too much, probably drank too much too.

Such is life.

Now Douglas Irons on the other hand, was as healthy and fit as a marathon runner. Which wasn't surprising, as he did run marathons, among other things.

Along with his new role of Vice Principal (which he'd obtained last year, after the previous VP left town suddenly) Doug was also the Physical Education teacher.

He loved P.E. He loved the sports, he loved the challenge, he loved the competitive nature, but most of all, he loved hot sweaty kids.

There was nothing quite like watching a group of mid-grade girls in the shower. Girls old enough to have begun to develop breasts, but not so old as to be driving cars yet. That was the best age, although he watched them all.

Not that they knew he was watching of course. He had little nooks and hiding spots where he could peer over at them. Spy-holes and locked closets, oh his observation points were many.

On top of the live viewing, which he couldn't do all day of course, he had his trusty collection of hidden cameras he'd set up in the change room. Motion-activated cameras, oh you

wanna believe it. He caught everything in nice sweet Hi-def digital glory. Oh, his collection of videos was extensive, and beautiful.

At the moment he was watching a particularly good-looking Grade 9 girl getting changed. She was a bit older than his 'perfect age', yet at the same time, she was gloriously beautiful, and (this was the best part) willing to play along with his games.

Deidrie Renolds was 14 years old, quite athletic, and also quite well-built for her age. Her supple breasts were round and pert, she was tweaking her hard nipples, and playing with herself. If he didn't know any better (or had actually been able to think straight) he might think she'd been putting on a show for him. Of course, that was impossible. There was no possible way she could know about his cameras. No possible way.

Douglas Irons came about the same time that the girl in the video did. He turned off the computer, and went to bed.

'Oh Deidrie, the fun we shall have.'

6

Edmund felt like God.

He could do anything, be anything, know everything. He could solve all the problems in the world, and be done in time for tea. World peace? Piece of cake.

Clo and Darl (who'd joined them shortly after Edmund had started partaking) were laughing. "Man, you have no idea." Darl said. Or was it Clo? Doesn't matter.

Time itself seemed to bend to his will. Edmund was Master of Time. Lord of Time. Hell yeah, he was The Doctor, and these were his faithful companions. The coke? The coke was the TARDIS. Or maybe just the space-time vortex. Yeah, that was more like it.

In the 21 years of his relatively short life he'd never felt this good. Not ever. It was beyond amazing, it was truly a religious experience. He was one with God. And oh God, was it good. Fucking good. Almost too fucking good.

It was 3am when the coke ran out. By 4am, Edmund was sitting shivering on the couch. By 5, he'd gone downstairs to his room to try to get some sleep. His brain on the other hand didn't seem to want to sleep. He felt like he was sinking into the bed. Falling deeper into a dark cold place. He really wanted another line. That would make it all better again.

It was after 6 before he fell asleep.

The alarm clock went off promptly at 7. Time for work Dear Edmund, time to face reality.

7

The next two months went by in a blur. For the first week or so, Edmund had gone cold turkey on the dope. Then temptation got the best of him, and he dove right back in, nose first as it were.

His life at home (and yes, he now considered Darl's place to be home) was a wild and ever-exciting adventure. Booze, coke and plenty of sex. Clo saw to that. Edmund was now pitching in for the dope. What was a few hundred quid here or there. Nothing compared to the feeling the dope gave him. What was money, to a God?

As for his house-mates (he know longer thought of them as landlords), Edmund hadn't really been too surprised the one night he came home and found Darl and Clo going at it on the couch. At one time in his life, he'd have been disturbed, disgusted, outraged, whatever. Now, hell, what did it matter. Incest is best, right? He'd undressed and joined in.

At work, things were going great (other than the occasional night like the first-time, where he'd gotten no sleep at-all, those days sucked).

His working relationship with Sara had grown into a real friendship. One that Edmund still wanted to bloom into something else, but on that front he hadn't gotten together the courage to bring it up with her.

He'd quickly discovered that working for Ralph Longdale was like working for Adolph Hitler. Ralph wanted things done his way, or the highway, and had a rather iron-fisted way of controlling the situation. The only times Ralph seemed to back down was whenever Principal Curtis was around. She had a way of making Herr Longdale turn into a snivelling coward.

Then again, seeing the authority in Joan's eyes and hearing it in her voice, Edmund had no intentions of crossing her any time soon.

He'd also been watching Doug Irons (he'd finally gotten the VPs name down pat) and the more he saw, the more he was disgusted by the man. Still he said nothing.

Not every day, but every few days, Doug would come and sit next to Deidrie, usually when her friends weren't around. His cheesy smile, his guttural laugh, it made Edmund sick. Worse was how his hands seemed to like to touch her body, in places that no grown-man's hands belonged.

For the first month, Edmund had just shrugged off Doug's affections for Deidrie. For while it may have been gross and wrong, Deidrie was just another bully herself, and deserved whatever she got. *Right?* Who cared if some creepy bastard was grooming her, probably with a lot worse in mind down the road. She had it coming. *Didn't she?*

As much as he'd tried to convince himself, after a month of watching and doing nothing, he couldn't take it anymore, and he himself had started to befriend the troubled girl.

At first Deidrie wanted nothing to do with him. Sara had told him "You're a sweet guy, and I'm glad you think you can help rehabilitate that bully girl, but personally, I don't know if she wants to be rehabilitated."

Edmund thought that Sara was probably right, but what Sara didn't know is that Edmund wasn't really trying to *fix* the broken girl, but to get close to her in order to stop the monster that was Douglas Irons.

After a while, Deidrie had actually allowed Edmund to act as her friend. She tolerated him at least, even if she did call him Eddie. God how he hated that. Still, she was just a girl, and a mean-natured one at that, what more could he expect.

A week before the knock on the door, Edmund had seen something that had almost send him over the edge. He'd been walking from the main school building to the out-building that housed the school's existing computer lab (if you could call it that, there was a reason he'd been called in after all) and he'd spotted movement by the side of the building. He'd glanced over and saw, Doug Irons and Deidrie Renolds, locked in a passionate kiss. Tonsil tennis, tongue wrestling, whatever kids were calling it these days, it didn't look beautiful like the movies, it looked *wrong*. Wrong because it was Douglas fucking Irons kissing a 14 year old girl behind the school where he worked. A guy who was supposed to be a role-model for these kids, instead, using them for his own gratification.

It had taken every ounce of Edmund's self control (which these days, the coke had lessened greatly) to keep from storming over and kicking Doug's teeth in. This wasn't the right time, not yet anyway. When he brought down Doug Irons, he wanted to make sure Doug never got back up again. He'd clenched his teeth and continued on his way to the class-room.

Neither of the kissing lovebirds noticed him at all.

For her part, Deidrie actually enjoyed the attention she was getting from two grown men. Dougie (as he'd told her to call him) was a pure gentleman. Sure, he liked to play with her boobs and rub her bum, but hey, what guy wouldn't want to? As for Eddie (and he didn't like to be called that, so she did it even more), he seemed like a nice-enough guy. His interest in Dougie made Deid wonder if Eddie was actually her friend, or if he was more interested in her play-toy teacher.

Deidrie put on many shows for Dougie. She knew all about his hidden cameras. Her friends Arnie and Kenny had found them while they'd been sneaking around the girls bathroom. Sure, she had no proof the cameras belonged to Dougie, but he was the most obvious choice. Most of the kids, especially the girls, knew he was into them. It was as obvious as a pile of steaming shit on a church floor. Why the other teachers hadn't caught on was beyond them.

She knew at least one adult had his suspicions.

A week prior, she'd seen Eddie glaring at her. Well, not at her so much, as at them. That was, at her and Dougie, who'd had his lips mashed against hers, and his tongue swirling around in her mouth, wrapping itself around her own tongue.

Eddie had glared like there was no tomorrow. She'd been surprised when he just walked away. She'd thought for sure he was going to storm over and break them up. She was glad that he hadn't. As much as it was a bit weird, she was enjoying Dougie's kiss. She wished her parents gave her as much attention as Dougie did.

8

It was half-way through his third month in Woods Park before Edmund gathered the courage to *talk* to Sara.

“See, I consider you a friend, and I love working with you, but there’s more to it than that. I’d like to be more than a friend. If you hadn’t noticed, I’ve been enamoured with you since we first met. I... I just thought you should know.”

Sara smiled, “I had noticed. I wondered when you were going to say something. I was going to wait a bit longer before I brought it up myself. If you’re asking me out, Edmund Aldrick, the answer is ‘yes’. I will go out with you.”

Terms like going-out made Edmund think he was back in school. Well, he *was* back in school, but not in quite the same way. He’d thought about this for a while, and Sara needed to know the truth. He didn’t want to go into this with secrets in his closet. Well, at least not this secret.

“There is one thing you need to know.” Edmund looked down before continuing, “I’ve been sleeping with my landlord’s sister, you know her, Clo.”

He was waiting for her shocked retort, instead, she laughed full-heartily. He looked up and saw she was grinning, ear-to-ear.

“Oh, you silly boy. I’ll blame it on your youth, but there’s lots you need to learn about me.” She laughed again. “I’m a firm believer that the age of monogamy is well over. And good riddance to it. Polyamory and swinging, those are the in-things these days. Hell, I’d not turn down a tossle in the bed with you and Clo. Hell, her red-neck brother could join in too for that matter. I know they’re more than your garden-variety siblings.”

Edmund stood dumbfounded. Over the last two-and-a-half months, he’d gotten to know Sara fairly well, but had no idea she was so open-minded about things like this.

“So, you’d be open to, well, an open relationship?” He asked quietly.

She continued to laugh, “of course dummy, not only open to it, but rather expected of it.”

Edmund thought for a teacher, her grammar could use some improvements, but he wasn’t about to point that out right now. No, at the moment, he was too dumbfounded to know exactly what to say.

Sara didn’t need words. She leaned over and planted her lips directly against his. Her hot wet tongue slipped into his mouth, and his whole body began to tingle. He closed his eyes and just soaked up the feelings of utopia that were radiating off her. This was heaven.

That night he went to her house.

They both might have been open to love and play with others, but for one night, all they wanted, was each other.

It had started with a fine dinner (she cooked, his culinary skills were not the greatest) and a bottle of vintage wine.

Her *house* was not a luxury condo, by any stretch of the imagination. No, it was an old 14-wide mobile-home, with enough additions to more than double the original size of the trailer.

However, compared Darl's place (at least in terms of cleanliness), Sara's home was the Sistine Chapel.

One of the many additions was a large master-suite, with a huge king-size bed with silk sheets. Edmund had been about to ask her why a single woman needed such a big bed, but then remembering her lifestyle, realized he was probably not the first man to get between those sheets.

Laying naked, snuggled against her warm body, Edmund was lost in a daze of ecstatic euphoria. They'd come together (in more than one way) and now both lay, still awake, but in a state of complete peace. All the problems and troubles that had been bothering Edmund lately seemed distant and foggy. Best left there for now.

Slowly, Edmund drifted off to sleep. Sara remained looking at him, a smile on her face, and a warmth in her heart. She'd had many men, and nearly just as many women, but this one, this man, whatever it was he was keeping from her still, he was unique. Magic. She didn't know what to call that feeling. She thought it might just be love.

9

Over the next few days, Sara continued to see Edmund. They alternated between his place and hers. They'd had a few group sessions with Clo and Darl. Fun and games, plenty to go around. Still, both of them felt there was something special between the two of them. Something neither of them had known before.

Through all the fun, Sara had declined the offer of free coke.

"I don't need drugs to make me feel good, I just need good people, good food, and good sex. Don't forget the sex, it's important now." She'd laughed heartily.

Edmund respected her views, but that didn't stop him from partaking in the nose candy. Hell, he'd even gotten to the point where he could sorta control the evil curse known as '*shrink dink*'. And boy, when he did overcome it, sex while high was euphoria unlike anything he'd ever known before.

One evening after getting back from work, Edmund came in to see Darl and Clo sitting quietly (and more disturbingly) and sober on the couch. They looked like they had been waiting for him. Darl looked up when Edmund walked into the room.

"Hey dude, we got some bad news. Our momma's in the hospital over in Glensmore, and she might be dyin'. We're gonna hafta take off for a few days, maybe longer."

Edmund nodded solemnly. Darl continued, "would ya mind taking care of the house by yerself while we're gone? Feel free to party, just don't fuck it up any more than it already is, kay?"

"No problem D. I'll take good care of it. You two have a safe trip, and my prayers are with you and your mom." Edmund replied earnestly.

That actually got a small laugh out of Darl, "Thanks for the sentiment, but as an atheist, I don't think all the prayin' in the world is gonna help momma. She's had a good long life, screwed every guy that walked her way, and never set foot on the damned reserve since she was old enough to run away from home. She held herself together when daddy died, and helped us make it through that as well. She's done good for herself, and she's been as good of a mom as she knew how. What she needs now is her kids to be with her for the end."

Edmund nodded again. Darl and Clo got up and walked to the door. Darl grasped Edmund's hand and then embraced him, like a brother. Then he walked out the door. Clo looked at Edmund, tears were in her eyes. She grabbed him and kissed him deeply, then hugged him even tighter than Darl had, before following her brother out the door.

The door closed, and Edmund made his way to the couch and sat down. He hadn't realized how much he'd bonded with his new friends over the last couple of months. Sure, he'd partied with them, even had sex with them, but it was only now he realized how much he really felt for them. Sure, they might not be perfect, they were drunken coke-heads who frequently had incestuous sex with each other, but they were still people. Good people.

Edmund thought the world needed more good people.

The next day, Edmund told Sara about Darl and Clo's trip to the city of Glensmore (a good four hours away, only about an hour from Edmund's own home town), and about their sick momma.

Sara had comforted him, and told him, "life will bring what it brings, sometimes good, sometimes bad, and rarely what we expect."

Words of wisdom.

All day he found it hard to concentrate. His thoughts were a jumbled mess, and nothing really seemed to make sense. It was like being in a dream, but one you can't wake up from. He hated days like this.

At the same time, Sara was a glowing star amidst the frozen darkness. She kept him going when it seemed nothing else could.

"I have an appointment in Lakeview this evening, so I'll be fairly late coming over. Hope you're okay?" She'd said to him.

He nodded, "I'll be fine, no worries. I'll see you later."

They kissed, and she walked out towards her trailer, while he made his way back to the house he now called home.

Edmund was half-way through the 8-ball when the knock came. Knock knock. Knocking on heavens door. 'Must be Sara back from Lakeview', he thought.

Edmund got up and went to answer the door.

10

It was Deidrie. She was alone, and had tears in her eyes. She looked up at Edmund and in a quiet voice asked, “may I come in?”

Edmund ushered her in, and showed her the couch. She sat down with her head still bent toward the floor.

“I went to Dougie’s house tonight.” She faltered.

Edmund sat down next to her and held her hand.

“I... I had planned to give him a blow-job. Nothing more. That was what I had planned. Oh God.” She broke into a sob.

Edmund was without words, he didn’t know how to reply. He hadn’t even heard the rest of her story yet, but he had a horrible feeling he knew what was coming.

“He told me to get undressed. He wanted to see me naked. That asshole has seen me naked plenty, he’s got videos you know. He showed them to me. I’d guessed a while ago the cameras were his. I...”

Edmund patted her hands. He was beginning to shake, a painful anger growing within his heart.

Deid continued, “I did as he asked, I stood before him, naked as the day I was born. I asked him if he was ready for the best blow-job he’d ever had. He... he didn’t answer me.

No, he didn’t answer. He just kept staring at me. At my body. It was like he was under a spell or something. Maybe possessed. Demons and all that? My momma talks about demons. She says there are demons all around us, every minute of the day. She must think I’ve got my fair share, as I’m not her good little baby girl anymore.”

Deidrie stopped for a moment, then asked, “Do you have some water or something I could drink?”

Edmund shook his head clear of the internal fury building inside long enough to nod. He got up and went into Darl’s kitchen. While he was pouring her a glass of water, Deid continued her story.

“I never thought I’d meet a bigger asshole than my daddy. I guess I was wrong. Daddy likes to drink a lot. When he’s drunk, which is most of the time, he’s mean. He beats the shit out of mommy all the time. I don’t get much sleep, as I can always hear him pounding on her, and she’ll be crying and yelling at him.

When I was old enough to bleed, if you know what I mean, daddy figured it meant I was old enough to beat too. He likes to use his belt. It’s a big nasty leather one, with metal holes. It fucking hurts.”

Edmund had gotten back to the couch and handed Deid the glass of water. She drank deeply, looked up at him for a moment, then looked back down again before continuing.

“But nothing that my crazy mum or drunked-up dad have ever done to me, hurt as much as what Dougie did tonight. It wasn’t painful so much, as it was terrifying. I’ve never been more scared in my life. I’d put up with another lifetime of my daddy’s yelling and belt to never have to go through that again.” She began to sob again, her shirt was beginning to stain with the

wetness of her tears.

The fury building up in Edmund's mind was nearing the point where he wouldn't be able to control it any further. He didn't know if he wanted to hear the rest of her story or not, but knew he was going to anyway.

"So Dougie took off his pants, I figured he'd decided it was time for the blow-job I'd promised. Then he grabbed me. He threw me to the floor. I yelled at him, and struggled, but he held me down. He had a look in his eyes, it scared me. I told him I didn't want this. Then he... he..." Though big sobs Deid was only able to finish with, "he was inside me."

Edmund held the girl as she cried on the couch. His own fury had reached a point where he knew exactly what must be done. There was only one possible solution now. Only one thing to do.

"We're going to kill him."

The plan was made hastily, but it was a good plan. One that Edmund was sure would work.

Deidrie was going to go back to Doug's place (this was the most dangerous part of the plan as far as Edmund was concerned, but necessary nonetheless.) She would tell the rapist-teacher that she wanted another go, but to make it more exciting, she wanted to *do it* outdoors.

If he agreed to go with her (and to that, Edmund was convinced he would), then she would lead him to Spot's Point (what a silly name for a place) on top of the hill on the north side of the village. Spot's Point was in a quiet, secluded chunk of forest. It had been used for years by teenage lovers, and tonight it would serve as the last place Douglas Irons would ever see.

Edmund stood in the shadows, next to a tree, waiting for Deidrie and Doug to arrive. Boy would *Dougie* be in for a surprise tonight.

Even though it was mid-summer, Edmund was shivering. He didn't know if it has nerves, or withdrawal. He knew he wanted a line. No time to worry about that now. He'd seen enough CSI to know that fingerprints can be lifted from clothing, so he was wearing a pair of gloves. The fact that they were rubber kitchen gloves (he'd found them under the sink, although he'd never seen Darl nor Clo use them, they weren't exactly neat-freaks) did seem a little funny, but hey, when you're working on a tight schedule, you use what you can find, right?

Thinking about schedules, Edmund started getting a bit worried. How long had he been out here waiting already? He wished he'd put on his watch. What if something went wrong at Doug's place? What if Doug didn't want to come? Worse, what if Doug had decided that rape was better in the luxury of his own home? Suddenly, having sent Deid into that monster's den seemed like a really foolish idea. What had he been thinking? For that matter, what the hell was he doing trying to take out Douglas Irons himself? Wouldn't it have been easier just to call the cops? Fuck. Things were starting to get jumbled again. *This is not the time for this shit!*

He snapped out of his panic attack the moment he caught movement from the corner of his eye. It was Deidrie.

Doug was with her.

Deidrie started dry-humping Doug, and moved down his body toward his pants, which she unbuttoned. Edmund knew it was all a show, but he'd already seen enough. If he was going to do this, he had to do it now.

The original plan was to rush out and shove Douglas off the side of the cliff. Quick, simple, no fuss. But somehow it also seemed, well, *dishonorable*. Edmund didn't quite know why he was worried about *honor* when it came to a man who raped little girls, but somehow it still seemed important to him.

So when he stepped out of the shadows and intoned, "Hey Asshole!" it was a toss-up which one of them was more surprised.

Douglas whipped around in a hurry, just in time for his face to be introduced to Edmund's rubber-covered fist. The big man stumbled backward, then regained his balance and

rushed Edmund, ramming his knee directly into Edmund's stomach.

Edmund went down. *No, no, no, no, no! This is not how it's supposed to happen!* The pain was screaming in his guts and he was out of air. To be defeated now, it was unthinkable. Not only had he completely fucked up the plan with his *honorable* intentions, but now he'd probably end up dead, and Deidrie would be raped and possibly murdered by this sick fuck.

This was not how it was supposed to end.

Edmund glanced up to see if Doug's boot was coming in for the kill, but to his amazement, saw Doug stumbling around with his pants around his knees. Of course, Deid had unbuttoned them!

Edmund found himself suddenly re-energized, he got up, rushed the perverted PE teacher, and shoved him backward toward the cliff.

Douglas Irons stumbled, twisted and tumbled over the edge. Edmund managed to regain his balance before falling himself. He looked down. At the bottom of the cliff, lay a body. Blood was gushing from the large hole in the body's chest where one of the sharp jagged rocks had thrust threw Douglas Irons' body.

Douglas Irons was dead.

12

Edmund and Deidrie made their way back to the house. Edmund's heart was thumping in his chest, threatening to break out. His head was pounding, flashes of light and heat making him dizzy every minute or so.

Douglas Irons was dead.

And he was responsible.

It felt overwhelming. Wonderful, horrible, amazing, terrible, but more than anything, overwhelming.

He'd committed the ultimate sin. Broken the most important commandment.

But he'd done good hadn't he? He'd stopped a monster, a killer of innocence. That must be worth something in the *Good Book*, right?

When they got into the house, Edmund went and sat on the couch. He was still lost in a daze of what had happened just a few minutes previously. This was too much. *Holy fucking shit.* Way too much!

Deidrie snuggled up next to him, and put her arms around him. He barely noticed, his own arms remained dangling by his sides, like limp spaghetti noodles.

The girl began to kiss his face. Up and down his cheeks, over to his forehead. He didn't try to stop her. He didn't know what to do anymore. What was right? What was wrong? It seemed so blurred now.

Deidrie grabbed his head and turned it towards her own, before planting her lips directly onto his own. He felt her hot tongue slide into his mouth, and still he did nothing.

Actually, that's not true. The feelings he was getting may have been mixed (*this is wrong! but it's her choice you dummy! still wrong! who cares!*) but the physical reaction seemed automatic, beyond his own control.

Deidrie unlocked her lips, then pushed him down onto the couch. "No, we shouldn't..." he started to say. Deidrie put her finger to his mouth and said, "Sshhh, quiet you. My first-time was forced, against my will. This time I want it on *my* terms."

Edmund, his mind filled with confusing and conflicting thoughts, did as she said. He would offer no more protests. He was tired of making decisions, of making choices. *Let her be in charge for once in her life.*

When it was done, they lay together on the couch in silence. Their clothes were scattered all over the floor. Edmund made a mental note to clean that up before Darl and Clo got back. Then he laughed. Deidrie looked up at him and smiled, shaking her head at his sudden outburst of laughter.

"What the fuck?"

The voice came from the door.

Sara was standing in the doorway.

13

In the weeks and months that followed, Edmund still found himself in a daze. A blur. A jumbled mess of fragmented moments.

The *official* story on the death of Douglas Irons was *fairly* close to the truth. The newspapers back in Glensmore (the nearest place big enough to warrant a printing-press) had reported that according to the police reports, Douglas Irons (who unbeknownst to the school, had been a dangerous child predator) had lured a 14-year-old girl out into the woods, where he'd attempted to rape her. During her attack, the girl had shoved 35-year-old Irons, and he'd lost his grip and fallen off the cliff. A search of Irons' house had revealed he had thousands of videos of the students of Woods Park Primary-Secondary School in various states of undress. They also found his journal, in which he'd written about the victim repeatedly, going so far as to say how he'd planned to get her to sleep with him.

The evidence had spoken for itself, and no charges were laid against the girl, who was instead lauded as a hero for defending herself against a man who no-doubt would have killed her out in those woods.

There were only three people in the world who knew the complete truth. Four if you included Douglas Irons himself, but being dead, he wasn't about to spill the beans.

Edmund had continued to work for the school, his involvement and improprieties were kept secret by the only two who knew about it.

Sara kept her mouth shut, for as she'd told him, the school needed him, and she liked the sex. Still, she never looked at him quite the same way again. The magic spark, that twinkle of *something different* she'd felt for him, was gone. That didn't stop her from having plenty of sex with Edmund, and often with his incestuous house-mates as well. There were two things that mattered to Sara Summers: her career and sex. As long as she had those, everything else was secondary.

Darl and Clo had returned a few days after the events of that strange strange night. They'd read about Irons' death in the paper. Edmund had nodded and muttered something about *who'd have guessed he was such a sicko?*

As had been expected, Darl and Clo's mother had passed away. Edmund had comforted his friends in their time of mourning. Little did they know they were comforting Edmund as well, but for a completely different reason.

Edmund had thought that after that messed-up night he'd call it quits on the nose candy. Well, life can be funny sometimes, as his use seemed to increase instead. Soon over half of his pay-cheques were being sunk into the baggies of white powder. Some habits are hard to break.

Edmund may have thought that with Douglas Irons gone, his involvement with Deidrie

Renolds would be over. Well, Deid had other ideas.

She'd told Edmund that unless he continued to sleep with her whenever she wanted, that maybe, just maybe, people might start finding out certain things about their favorite computer wiz.

He'd complied with her wishes.

All in all, things were certainly not where Edmund J. Aldrick had thought they would be half-way through his term in Woods Park. No, they weren't even close.

Edmund J. Aldrick was in hell. No, there wasn't any fire or brimstone. No horned devils with pitchforks. But there were monsters out there. Demons even.

Yeah, there was one big nasty demon living in Woods Park. Edmund laughed at the image that popped into his head with that thought. No, that demon wasn't just in Woods Park, it and its many cousins walked on every corner of the Earth. How a sphere could have corners, Edmund didn't know, he laughed again.

The demon's name was Obsession.

Douglas Irons had been obsessed with kids, and control. He'd lived (and died) thinking that controlling kids, getting exactly what he wanted from them, was the most important thing in the universe. Douglas Irons had been possessed by Obsession.

Ralph Longdale and Joan Curtis were obsessed with control as well. Not as dark and twisted as Doug's version, but control nonetheless. They both wanted *Power* and resented each other for what they saw as unwarranted competition. Ralph Longdale and Joan Curtis were possessed by Obsession.

Darl and Clo Fitzpatrick were obsessed with each other. They routinely broke one of societies last remaining taboos: incest. Yeah, their obsession was rooted in love, but was fueled on by booze and dope. They'd let their sibling love turn into an addiction of its own. Darl and Clo Fitzpatrick were possessed by Obsession.

Deidrie Renolds was obsessed with attention, love and control. The three things she didn't seem to receive from her parents. Hell, her mother upon hearing about what Douglas Irons had done to Deidrie, had stated simply, "well, that's what you get for dressing like a whore." Her father had just swore at her and said she'd probably brought it on herself. Deidrie had been ignored most of her life. When she wasn't being ignored, she was being yelled at or beaten. So, she'd become a bully. Monkey see, monkey do. She had no faith in any gods, nor in people. Her '*friends*' were just more people to be used for her own gains. Her newest friend, the one who'd helped her get vengeance against yet-another-user, now he was her toy. Her plaything. She could do whatever she liked with him, and there was nothing he could say or do about it. That feeling made her feel like a god. Deidrie Renolds was possessed by Obsession.

Sara Summers? Oh beautiful Sara. So pure, so good. It was hard to believe that someone as wholesome and good-natured as Sara, could be afflicted with obsession. Yet even she was not immune to it. For Sara Summers was obsessed with her career, and with sex. She'd dreamt about being a teacher since she herself had been in elementary school. She'd

also been sexually active nearly as long. As long as she had her career, and sex, nothing else really mattered much. Sara Summers was possessed by Obsession.

And Edmund? Edmund Jonas Aldrick? Edmund was obsessed with filling the hole in his soul. He was obsessed with the high that he got from cocaine. He was obsessed with the relationships he had with other people. Sara, Darl, Clo, hell even Deidrie. He needed them. As much as he needed the drugs, he needed his *friends*. He needed to be close to other people. Whether that meant partying with them (drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, and using copious amounts of cocaine in the process), or having sex with them, or just being around them. It didn't really matter. Nothing really mattered anymore. He'd always had a hole in his soul. Having killed another human-being (as justified as he might have believed it to be) had just widened it. Of all the people in Woods Park, it may be that Edmund J. Aldrick was the one most possessed by Obsession.

15

So here he stood, looking at the door. He had a choice. He could turn around, walk away, get into his car, and drive off into the sunset. Never return to Woods Park.

A part of him really wanted to do that.

To leave it all behind, to run away. *Why the fuck not?* Isn't that what all the celebrities do when their shit-storms hit? Run away and check themselves into rehab. *Right?*

He could be free from this place, free from the dope, free from the hypocrisy... oh he could be free. He wanted to be free. He really did.

Edmund J. Renolds opened the door, and stepped inside, closing it behind him.

-1

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