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The Green Hills Literary Lantern

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The Audition

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The big shot director is sitting tight and upright the way girls are told to sit but never do. Mom is angry or something. She put a lot of care into her appearance today, and he's not even looking at her. Men usually look at her. She makes money that way. Now it's all on me, and I'm not performing well. But it's hard to perform when I'm sinking into this couch. This couch is so low, it's hard to get up. Not that I want to, though I kinda do. I'm too close, leaning against him, I can feel his gross breath. Will it get all over me, like when I tell my older ugly she has bad breath, and she just breathes harder, grabbing me so I can't leave?

Mom says this is an audition. The biggest I've ever had. She says, "This could make us, honey. Be sexy." Her whisper is hot in my ear, her lips sticky. I hate that she's embarrassing. It disgusts me. She pushes me towards him again as he sits with his knees clamped together on the other end of the long couch. It's the color of perfect pineapple taffy. I fall against his fuzzy turtleneck. He smells like my older ugly's musty underarms before she started using deodorant.

What is sexy? Is this sexy—the strap of my polka dot halter falling off my shoulder? Mom used to say "That's just sloppy." Now she reaches over and pulls it farther down.

I try to sit up, but my head feels funny. They gave me soda so I could swallow some pill but it didn't taste sweet like soda usually does or even fake sweet like diet.

My pill had been broken in half, the rough end extra chalky on my tongue. It looked like the ones Mom takes except it was in a container, this little yellow thing, see-through and rectangular. I couldn't stop staring at it after the director placed it on the glass table. It glowed. I swallowed more of the soda, he gave me his glass.

"How do you like that soda, Samantha?" The director laughs his weird tickle laugh, squeezing my bare shoulder. I know it's not soda. He's strange. Funny accent. I feel bad because I haven't seen any of his movies. I'm not allowed. They aren't the kind of movies a young girl is supposed to see. But I wanted to see them before I met him so we'd have something to talk about. Mom said, "Don't talk, just pout." Mom usually hates it when I pout. But being sexy is doing what you're not supposed to.

"Hey, honey, I want to take some pictures of you," the big shot says, jumping up so suddenly that I fall against the end of the couch. He's so jumpy, he makes me jumpy. His pants don't fit right, they're too tight and bunched. He shuffles to the other end of the ginormous room, legs all stiff. He's definitely older than my mom, but it's hard to tell how old old people really are. I mean you can tell the really old ones like my great-grandma, who has to wear a diaper and smells like figs and snot, but the old who don't know they're old, who knows?

His hair is longish like the hair of pimply high school boys playing cool. Pimples are so not cool. I haven't gotten them yet. "It's coming though," my best friend Jill says. "When we're freshmen it'll happen, if not sooner."

Great, two years and I'll be a zit factory like my older ugly. That's why I've got to do this now. Whatever this is. I pull myself up, my head's still swimming. Is this the "room spin" my older ugly gloats about after "shot gunning" Milwaukee's Beast? I've only snuck half a beer before. It was nasty, the soda tastes a lot better.

Then Mom shoves me off the sinking couch. "Don't be rude, Sam, go over there." I catch myself from falling. I took gymnastics last year before Mom said it was too expensive.

"But Mom, I don't want to." I stare down at her popsicle bright lipstick. It's smeared and her high hairdo is flat.

"Go!" she hisses. "Don't you want to be in French *Vogue*?"

And I do or thought I did, but my mind is all bubbly now. I feel like I have chicken pox again. I know you don't get them twice, but it feels like that. I was so sick when I got them that Mom had to stay home from work for days to take care of me. It had been a long time since she'd been home so much. That time I had the pox, I was so fuzzy, like TV static when the stations go off the air real late at night. Because they do go off the air even though Jill says it's not true. It's true because I've been up that late. Mom "respects my independence" and treats me like a grown-up. "My little lady," she says.

Anyway, I feel the same way now. Fuzzy, not colored-in, wiggly lines. I guess getting me in the mood means getting me sexy. And sexy means taking my top off. Mom showed me how.

“That’s it,” he says.

I almost forgot he was here. Is Mom even watching? Am I doing it right? I can see her when he’s not staring at me but she’s out of it, blurred and buried in the couch. She’s in the same room but so far away. Wow, this room is monster big, but there’s so little in it—a couch, a table, some chairs you’re not supposed to sit on, and dirty pictures all over the place.

The house is a maze! I scoped it out as I was pulled from room to room when we first got here. But we’ve been stuck in the step-down living room for hours now, though it doesn’t seem like much living is done here. This room could be someone’s whole house. No one I know has a room like this. We could play kickball in here. The three amigos—Jill, me, and Chuck—and even Stacy before she turned into my older ugly—used to play with kids in the neighborhood. Now I’m too old for that but too young to do the older stuff yet, or so Stacy says when she’s extra sad.

I don’t feel comfortable. I don’t feel like me. I cover my boobs. It’s easy because I don’t have much yet.

Mom still isn’t watching me. She’s “sleeping it off,” laid out on the couch like those punchy morning cartoons where someone is seeing stars. She had a ton of soda. She started laughing and smacking her lips after the very first glass, popping another low button off her top. I guess that’s what she has to sleep off—the bubbles in her brain. Pop. Pop. Pop.

It’s my older ugly who’s always saying that anyways. “She’s sleeping it off again.” Rolling her eyes like she could see you out of her backside. Like she cares, because Stacy’s always sneaking off to go smoke funny cigs with her meatstick friends. Stacy never had so many boys as friends before she grew big ones. Ginormous.

Stacy was supposed to do this. Mom called her big and ugly last night after loads of screaming. You know, zee director sez he can’t work with her—all zits and tits.

Jill says Stacy’s going “nowhere fast,” but she just likes to say whatever she hears in the movies. She sees lots of movies. I saw *The Bad News Bears* on my birthday last year, but without Jill. She said I shouldn’t blow my birthday money on kid stuff. I still haven’t seen *King Kongor Bugsy Malone*. I hope Bugsy comes on TV soon, I love Scott Baio. I wish I got to go to the movies more, but Mom needs her make-up, heels, chemical peels, and whatever. That stuff’s expensive.

Mom wants to move to the Valley. We live in East Hollywood. She says the neighborhood’s changed. But I like it, I like learning new words, especially swear words. Like Puta!

The big shot is close-up ugly, far away fuzzy. He’s pulling my hands away from my chest saying, “This is art, Samantha. Don’t you want to be a part of art?” I keep putting my hands back. But they don’t work right. My fingers are icy. Besides everyone calls me Sam. No one ever calls me Samantha unless they’re mad at me or

want something.

The director is close, too close and his breath is super nasty, cig breath. Everyone I know smokes. Mom, my older ugly, crew cut Chuck, and even Jill. I'll probably smoke too someday. Nothing I can do.

I'm tired of fighting him. He asks me if I'm on the pill. But that's stupid, he should know, he's the one who gave it to me. I feel feverish. I need an oatmeal bath. It looks like woody puke, but it's soft to sit in even though my skin's not itchy or not itchy in a chicken pox kind of way. Through the glass porch doors, I see he has an outside tub. It might be nice to sit in that, but he'd probably want to sit in the warm water with me.

He has crooked teeth, he'd never be in French *Vogue*. They look like play teeth, the ones you buy for Halloween to look like a hick. The thought of Mr. Big Shot with hick teeth is so funny I start to crack up.

He says, "Good, good."

He doesn't know I'm laughing at him. So I laugh even more, my laugh is so wide, it feels like my head's cracking open. I'm not so scared of him now. French *Vogue*, yeah, then I could go to the movies whenever I want. Jill always leaves out the important parts.

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