

Excerpt:

I turn on my TV and fire up the PS4, then go downstairs and throw some pizza rolls in the toaster oven because Becky didn't make dinner tonight. She usually does. She's no gourmet chef, but she's a decent cook, and I don't mind eating her food. (^:

I holler up the stairs, "Becky?"

She don't answer. Maybe she's pooping, LOLz. Bathroom door ain't closed, though, when I look up the stairs.

I crack open a beer. When the toaster oven dings, I scoop those bad babies onto a plate, grab a paper towel, and then carry them upstairs to my room. Worst thing about pizza rolls and Hot Pockets is, if you cook them till they're done, they're hot as frig-ging lava.

Becky comes out of her room and passes mine on her way to the bathroom. She closes and locks the door. I start Call of Duty, and it's still loading when she comes back out of the bathroom and knocks on my door. It ain't closed, so she pushes it open.

She's got her arms crossed over her tits like she does when she's uptight about something. "What's up?" I say.

"I found your tee-shirt between the washer and dryer, so I washed it and brought it up this morning."

"Cool, thanks."

She's all fidgety and won't look me in the eye, so something's up.

Eating pizza rolls on a piss-stinking mattress ain't the most appetizing experience. But I eat them anyway.

I say, "What's Aiden doing? Ain't seen him yet."

"He's playing with his cars you got him," she says. "When I brought your shirt in, I couldn't help but see your bed was stripped. And why."

"Yeah. So?"

"So? It makes me... concerned." She tosses her head, not to get her hair out of her face—it's tied back as usual—but because she's gearing up to make some point or say something unpopu-lar.

"Hey, I couldn't help it. I didn't wake up. I washed my sheets. What are you so concerned about?"

Her lips get tight when I raise my voice. I don't much care. It's not like I pissed HER bed.

I toss the controller on the wet spot, then mute the TV. "Well?"

"Look, Russell, you know what it led to last time."

"Yeah, and I was living at home then. You remember what that was like for me. I ain't wet since I moved in with you."

"Not that I know of." She gets that snooty high and mighty look.

I want to shove the remote up her goddamn nose. "That was years ago, Becky. I've changed. I'm better now."

"How do I know that? All I know is what you did."

"But I didn't do it to you, did I? I never done nothin to you." I hurl the remote into the closet. It hits the back wall, and the bat-teries pop out.

"Calm down, Russell," she says, pressing the air with her hands like she does when I get worked up. "You're right, I'm sorry." She always says that too, but it's just to talk me down because I

make her nervous. But why shouldn't I be pissed? How come I can never express myself when I'm mad?

"I gotta get my sheets." I push past her, out the door, and go downstairs. In the kitchen I unlock the basement door and stomp down the rickety steps. The cellar smells musty. Like I said, it's an old townhouse, with stone walls and a concrete floor all cracked. Damn cold on my sockfeet. My sheets and bed pad and blanket are wadded up on top of the dryer. Becky does that if I forget to empty it when my stuff is done. I scoop them up and then head back upstairs.

Becky's still standing there, hugging herself. "Here. I'll help you."

I turn around and get in her face. "I don't need your help, Becky. I can do it myself. I been doing it since I was seven years old, remember?"

"All right. I'm sorry. I just... never mind."

She walks out the door but comes right back in.

"No, I'm not going to let this go," she says, fists on her hips. "This isn't just about wetting the bed. It's about that, that... dis-gusting rug you made. Cat skins. God, Russell, that's so sick. I had no idea you still had it. Thank goodness Aiden didn't see it."

"And what if he did?" I say. "You think I would have told him what it was made out of? Jesus, Becky, gimme some credit."

"I don't care. I don't want that thing in my house. Get rid of it."

"I live here as well as you do. It's not like you own the place. I pay rent too."

She huffs. "Sometimes."

"Oh, fuck off, why don't you? I'm workin. I been workin. Just because I don't got a good job like you don't mean I ain't pitchin in."

"Look. I think it's time you moved out on your own, Russell."

I blink at her, shaking my head. "What?"

"You heard me. Aiden's four years old. He needs his own room. He can't sleep in my room forever, especially with Mike spending nights here."

"It ain't my fault you can't screw with Aiden in the room."

"Russell!" she hisses.

"What!"

"Keep your voice down," she says, shoving the door closed. "It's not about me and Mike. Aiden's getting too big for his tod-dler bed. You know that. He's growing like a weed, and even a twin bed won't fit in that room. Where's he supposed to sleep?"

I lay a folded hand towel on the wet spot, make the bed on top of it, and then stretch out on it. She stands there, waiting for me to say something. She pisses me off. Ignoring her is the best I can do.

"Don't go quiet on me, Russell. I'm trying to have a conversa-tion about something important. Do you understand why I think it's best that you move out?"

I snatch up the controller and press start. The game begins, but I can't hear it because I muted the TV, and I can't unmute it because I flung the remote in the closet.

Becky steps closer. "If you got something to say, then say it. Stewing about it won't do any good. You know what it leads to."

"Who are you, my fuckin mother?"

She grabs her head with both hands, spins toward the door, then turns back, curling her fingers into claws and showing her teeth.

“You’re a dick, Russell. You either move your pissy mattress to the basement or out of the house, take your pick!” She rushes out, and I can tell she wants to slam my door, but she don’t. I do. And yell, “I hope your car’s fixed, because I’m driving mine tomorrow. Bitch.” I put the remote back together, then pick up the controller, but my hands are shaking, and I don’t feel like playing no more. Don’t feel like finishing my pizza rolls. What I really need is a smoke.

I fish in my jacket pocket for my Camels only to find my last cigarette is broke in two.  
FUCK! FUCK, FUCK, FUCK!

I crush the pack and throw it on the floor. I dress, grab my coat and gentleman’s hat, then descend the stairs by threes and fly out the door into snow like freaking cottonballs.