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Drew

The first time I saw her she was dancing, no, not just dancing, something else. She was fucking flying, communing with the music like it was in her blood cells, rushing, pushing, flowing through her veins. I was at Bonnaroo, well, sort of. I wasn't sleeping in the dirt, sweaty and camping like she probably was. I was staying in an air-conditioned tour bus and living like a rock star. I was there because it's something you do when you're in college. You drive eleven hours with your rich friends. You leave the pressure of being a senator's son at home. You remind everyone not to take your picture if you're holding a joint, and then you get high and drunk and you listen to the music and make the memories that last a lifetime.

When I saw her, it was the last day of the festival, really late in the afternoon, maybe even evening and the sun was dipping low, spilling out all hot and yellow over the horizon. I was in some VIP viewing area, drinking a beer out of a plastic cup, surrounded by guys in khaki shorts with strait haired blonds swaying in front of them or pressed against their laps. I was drunk. Not ugly, sloppy drunk, but my guard was down. She was maybe 60 feet away, to my left and in front of me, not in VIP. It was stupid hot out. Sticky hot, the air heavy and warm when you it pulled into your lungs. It didn't stop her though. She was dancing, full on.

She was the opposite of the girls I knew. The girls I knew were linear. They were straight up and down, thin and pretty. They were like porcelain dolls. Small, delicate, dainty girls who wanted to be charming accessories. Girls who made you feel like they didn't sweat, let alone shit. Girls who played tennis and golf and talked about other girls and clothes, and manicures, and diamonds. Girls who had coming-out parties and wore headbands. Girls who looked like my parents and wanted my parents' life.

This girl was not linear. She was round, soft, plush, so fleshy. I saw her from behind first. She was wearing jean shorts that were a little too tight, so her flesh puckered at the waist. Just tight enough that I could see the full cut of her ass as she rocked her hips. Her top was this light-weight sexy hippy girl top. The kind of top that ties behind your neck. Her shoulders were bare, tan, kissed with pink from being in the sun all day. Her dark hair was tied up in a bun, minus some sweaty strands that had escaped and were plastered to her neck. There was a small tattoo or birthmark behind her ear. I couldn't tell which from where I was standing. Her arms stretched above her head, her shoulders rolling to the rhythm of the music. Languid fucking movements, Jesus. When she circled in place, turning so she was facing me, I finally saw her face. It was as though the music owned her, possessed her features and overwhelmed her. Her eyes were closed, and she was biting her lower lip. She also wasn't wearing a bra, and she had real tits, big enough that going braless bordered on obscene. A sliver of her round belly was visible at the hem of her shirt.

Watching her made my chest ache, it made my mouth wet and my dick hard. I didn't even know who was playing anymore. I wanted to be closer to her. I wanted to be on her. To kneel in the dirt in front of her, cup her ass in my hands and rest my cheek on her belly. Don't get me wrong. I wanted to do all kinds of things to her, with her, but I had this overwhelming feeling that pressing my face against her hot sweaty body would make me feel calm. I never feel calm. And all of this, watching her, wanting her, it was completely inappropriate because I was standing with my arm around my date for the weekend, Candice Huffington.

When the song ended, I shifted my weight and quickly adjusted myself, hoping no one would notice that I had a raging hard on. My movements jostled Candice, and she looked up at me, smiling, completely unaware. I attempted to smile back, but it didn't quite happen. I was disgusting. I mean, sure, Candice was not my girlfriend. Not even close. She was a girl I met at my parents' country club. She was nice, like all the other blonds in the VIP section. She giggled at my jokes, was concerned I was drinking too much and wore a strand of white pearls to Bonnaroo. What was up with that? My parents liked her. I liked her, basically. I invited her, with my friends, but I hardly knew her. I'd fucked her though. Just once.

Fuck.

I was disgusting, an animal, no control.

I glanced back to the dancing girl. She had a bag on her shoulder, and she was talking to a girl standing next to her, she told her something, and then she moved to leave. I leaned over to get closer to Candice's ear, "I gotta go." I grumbled. Smooth, as usual. Candice looked at me quizzically, her pale eyebrows pinched. I shook my head and leaned in again, "to the bathroom." She started to gather her things like she was going to come with me. I shook my head no. "I'll be right back."

She smiled. She always smiled. I was a dick.

I strolled towards the back of the VIP section in the direction of the bathrooms. I could still see the girl making her way through the crowd. She moved quickly and strategically with no fear, owning her trajectory through the hoard as if the seas parted for her. I knew I was going to follow her; that was my intention. The only question was if she would head towards her camp, the restrooms, or the food venues. Obviously, the restrooms would have allowed me to utterly avoid suspicion, but honestly, I didn't care that much either way. When she headed for the food and drink, I barely glanced behind me to see if anyone was watching. Once I got close to her, ten to fifteen feet behind her, I let her set the pace, and watched her hips sway as she walked.

It had rained the night before and there was mud everywhere. She didn't swerve to avoid the puddles. She just tromped right through, letting little speckles of dirt stick to her shins and calves. I was glad she wasn't prissy. She didn't look prissy. I followed her lead, my steps sinking each time they hit the muddy ground. She kept her bag close to her hip, holding it with her hand, and I couldn't help but think that it mattered, that whatever was in that bag, money or whatever; she needed it. I didn't know that feeling. Money came easily to me. I was born with it, and I would most likely die with it. Everything I had was replaceable.

She got in line at a stand that sold Philly cheese steaks, and I felt a tinge of joy that she wasn't a vegan or a vegetarian. It's not that there is anything wrong with people who fight for animal's rights or choose vegetables as their mainstay because they think it's healthy. But I didn't want her to be that. I wanted her to be untethered, wild, and vast, like her dancing. I didn't want her to be clean or fearful. I wanted her to be greasy and rich. I wanted her dangerous. I wanted her to skydive. I wanted her to be the girl who sits on the railing of the balcony on the hundredth floor, the girl who jumps with you, not before or after you. I wanted her to be gluttonous, to be messy.

I lingered back a bit, glancing around to make it look like I was undecided about what to eat. I was really wondering if I should get in line behind her. I didn't feel all that hungry, but the smell of the sizzling meat wasn't unappealing. Normally, with any other girl, I would have engaged sooner, but with this girl I kept wondering how you feel about the guy that hits on you when you're in line for a cheesesteak? Do you think the guy is a turd? What if his breath smells of beer and other sundries? Are you repulsed by him?

Frozen by anxiety, I let myself watch her again. From where I was standing, I could see that the markings behind her ear were a tattoo. Small and unobtrusive, a constellation of asterisks. She looked around, scanning the crowd as if she was searching for someone. Who? An icy tightness constricted my chest. I considered she might be waiting for a guy. Her boyfriend? Sheer jealousy propelled me forward. I crossed from where I was standing to get in line behind her. From this close, I could smell her. Three days baking in the hot sun wasn't good for anyone, but her odor wasn't rank. She was musky, earthy like the woods, a simple, soft human scent that made me want her more.

There were three people ahead of us, but for me they weren't people. They were increments of time. Each person represented a couple, maybe a few minutes, which meant, best-case scenario, I had nine minutes to make an impact. Nine minutes to get her to notice me. Nine minutes to strike up a conversation so valuable that she would want me. Or at the very least, nine minutes to earn myself a tenth minute. She continued scanning the crowd. She looked over her shoulder in my direction. It was my opening. No gimmicks, just conversation. Deep breath.

I looked right at her, the words about to drip from my tongue, and then I saw recognition in her eyes. She pressed up on her tiptoes bouncing, waving her hand in the air, bouncing. Oh God, tits. I didn't want to embarrass myself by having her first exchange with me be my eyes molesting her, so I looked at my feet.

"Joe-joe! Joe-joe!" She hollered, still waving frantically. A very tall, gangly guy with a neatly trimmed beard and mirrored aviator sunglasses brushed past me. He was good looking in a grungy, fashion-y way, not great looking, but man enough. His arms wrapped around her, and he lifted her from the ground. She wrapped her thighs around his waist, squeezed her whole body against him.

"God, I missed you," she cooed, and I tasted vomit at the back of my throat. She was supposed to be mine, but apparently, I didn't have nine minutes. I didn't have any minutes. She already belonged to some dude with shaggy chestnut hair and leather bracelets. I lingered for a moment, gnawing the inside of my cheek. He released her, returning her to the ground but continuing to hold her hand. Once they turned their attention to what they were going to order and share, I fucked off.

I strolled through the crowd toward the campgrounds. There were people everywhere, and it was an eclectic group. Lots of regulars, everything from preppy frat boy types like me, to hippie types like her, but there were also crazy motherfuckers. People covered in neon paint. People in full-feathered Native American headdresses. People on stilts. People in tutus and sailor costumes. I hated them all. I wanted to snarl, to growl. I wanted to be rabid. My brow furrowed, and I clenched my fists. I needed to break something. Fuck someone up, get fucked up, get fucked; something. What I really wanted was to punch my fist into his neatly trimmed jaw and watch the impact in slow motion, like you do in the movies. I wanted to see his whole face crumple, as if it was going to permanently lose its shape. I wanted to see the blood on his lips, the shock and awe in his eyes. I wanted him to be afraid of me. I wanted him to piss himself when people said my name. But that shit was way the fuck out of proportion, considering I'd never even spoken to her.

So, I tried to breathe. I leaned my back against a tree and then I let myself slide down until my ass hit the ground. I rested my elbows on my knees and held my head in my hands. The ache that claws at your face right before you cry crept into my cheeks. I closed my eyes and pressed my palms against them. I swallowed and sucked the emotion down. There was no way I would go all weak over some hippy chick that I'd never even spoken to, no way. I thought about

going back to VIP. Candice was probably wandering around looking for me. I could go back to her. She'd let me fuck her again. I knew she would, but I didn't want to. Fucking Candice was cold. She spread her legs and welcomed me, and she made enough noise to seem like she wanted me, but her eyes were empty. Fucking Candice was a lie. A dirty lie. Candice wanted to be the girl dating the senator's son. Going back to Candice wasn't an option. So, I just sat there, sat there till it was really dark out.

After a while, a group of geeky looking assholes congregated around one of those one-piece benches and a picnic table off to my left. I could see them because they had a lantern, but I was pretty sure they couldn't see me. There were five of them, but one stood out as their leader. He was a boney dude with hard, thin features. He looked crooked, gnarly, like a kid who wore a trench coat to high school, a kid no one liked. Or maybe a kid whose life's mission was to hack into the CIA. He didn't look like a good kid, but not bad either, just unwanted. The others were also variations on this theme, they looked like dudes that loved girls who played video games.

They were smoking cigarettes. I didn't smoke, but it seemed like something to do, so I got to my feet. These kinds of guys weren't usually down with the likes of me. I was too clean cut for their tastes. I reminded them of the footballer who gave it to their girlfriends' in high school. I reminded them of the money their parents didn't have. I was that bullshit jock, that asshole frat boy who had it easy, who didn't know what it meant to survive on the outside. They didn't know shit. For most of us, there was no inside, no in crowd. We were always alone. Always unsure and unsupported, following all the rules because we didn't have a choice. But it didn't matter. Not to punks like this, and honestly, I deserved their hate. I had done it all, pissed in their water bottles, thrown them in dumpsters, taken their little sister's virginity. All to be cool.

Still, I approached them, cocky, smirking. I wanted to feel the rush of control. I wanted to eat their discomfort. Their conversation halted as I hoisted myself on to the table and rested my feet on the bench. They smelled homeless, but after three days in the mud, the dancing girl was the only one who didn't.

"What's up dudes?" I tossed the words at them. My voice was steady and deep, overtly confident.

A small guy with acne and spikey hair at the end of the table rolled his eyes, and the leader who was sitting with his hands on the table by my hip shook his head, raised his eyebrows in sarcasm and said, "Not much man. Can we help you?" It wasn't a warm and fuzzy welcome, but I didn't want it to be.

"Oh, ya know," I jostled his shoulder and felt him tense up, "I was just sitting over there enjoying the fanfare, when suddenly I had an undeniable craving for a smoke, and well, wouldn't you know? Here you are, smoking." I smiled a tight-lipped smile.

He glanced at his friends. I noticed his hair was greasy and felt the rumble of something secret. Something they knew, and I didn't, but I didn't care that much. He looked back at me, crossed his arms over his chest and smiled. The smile of a trickster, curled lips, all teeth. "Sure, dude. Twenty bucks." He said it casually. No fear. I had no power over him.

"Twenty bucks?"

"Yeah, man. Cigarettes are precious cargo in this joint. And honestly, I'd rather give them to hot chicks than to you." He pulled the pack out of his pocket and tapped it against his palm. He had a long angular nose that was crooked like the rest of him. "So, if you really want one, you're gonna have to pay for it."

“Fuck you, man. That’s sexist.” The geek chuckled, and for a split second we were friends. I sighed and shook my head as I pulled my wallet out and handed the guy a twenty. “More where that came from. Right?” I Smirk, our friendship ended.

He scowled at me and tugged a cigarette from the pack. I took it. “You want a light?” he asked. Instead of answering, I bent towards him, cupping my hands to protect the lighter from the wind, which had picked up a touch since the sun went down. It took a couple of tries for the lighter to catch. It didn’t bother me. I liked the zippering sound of the flint wheel. Eventually, the flame glowed hot, and I sucked in air, igniting the cherry tip of the cigarette.

I knew immediately. My very first drag was like acid. It burned my throat and smelled like gasoline. But I couldn’t be the loser twice in one day. So, I stood up, took a second drag, exhaled and said, “Thanks for nothin’, Dude.”

I had been drinking and smoking weed all day, that plus whatever those assholes doped me with was a lethal combo. I started to get dizzy a few minutes after I walked away. It seemed like everything around me sped up while I slowed down. I walked into people. Colors raced by me, blurring my vision. I was hot, really hot. I pulled my polo shirt over my head and when the air hit my chest, I freaked out. I thought I was naked. I felt the air on my balls. But when I looked down, I was still wearing my shorts. People near me were talking and laughing, and their voices were shrill. I tried to cover my ears, but I could still hear them. The anger from earlier percolated under my skin, and I clawed at my chest. I had to get away from the people, but they were everywhere. I thought of the tree from earlier. I thought of Candice. I thought of the girl. I wanted the girl. I remembered stumbling along looking for her, and then there was nothing for a while.

Well, not nothing, shards of something, but nothing decipherable. So many sounds, but more than anything flashes of moments, frozen images in time. Bodies, sweaty and swaying to the music. Someone dancing with a glow stick. A paper plate on the ground. Blood all over my hands. Water spilling over my face and shoulders. The moon. Vomiting. The moon again.

Finally, clarity started to descend. I was on the ground. My neck and shoulder were cricked funny, and I had a skull-bending headache. I heard laughing. Something tickled my abdomen. The acrid smell of vomit filled my nostrils, and there was throbbing. My hands were throbbing. More laughter. And voices.

“On his face.”

“Totally, man.”

“What should I write?”

“Ass.”

“No, Dickhead.”

Something fluttered against my forehead, the same tickle I had felt on my abs. It was calming, like when my mom tickled my back when I was a kid. More laughter and clicking. Clicking? No, a shuttering. My brain rattled. I knew the shuttering sound but couldn’t place it. It was a bad sound. The shuttering was a camera phone. Whoever they were, they were taking pictures. I tried to open my eyes, but it felt like they were glued shut.

There was a new voice. She was angry, “What’s wrong with you?”

“Just harmless fun,” one of the voices sneered.

“This is what you call fun? Degrading another human being?”

“Whatever.” I could sense eyes rolling. I would have done the same if I ran into the goody two shoes who was currently acting as my savior.

“I have an idea, why don’t you take your fun elsewhere before I call the cops.” Her tone was unwavering; there was nothing empty about her threat.

“We would be long gone before they got here,” a different voice chided.

“Okay, no problem. Let’s test your theory,” and then I heard dialing.

“Bitch.” someone spat, but they were moving away, feet shuffling.

I pushed myself to stir. A girl I’d once dated, Molly? Meghan, maybe? I couldn’t remember. Pretty though, a strawberry blond, curtains matched the drapes, if you know what I mean. Anyway, she had made me go to a yoga class with her, and the teacher’s instruction came to mind, “Slowly, very slowly, bring life back into the tips of your fingers and the end of your toes. Circle your wrists, your elbows, awaken your knees, your calves, and when you’re ready, roll onto your right side into a fetal position, this is a safe space, a position that nurtured you for nine months. Finally, with great care, come to a seated position.” Her voice had been so calm. One of the most calming sounds I ever heard, but when I broke up with that girl, I never went to yoga again.

My body felt heavy, unruly, but I managed to sit up and when I opened my eyes, the dancing girl was squatting in front of me. It was almost dawn, so the light was funny, and my vision was blurry. I shook my head, thinking maybe I was imagining her, placing her face over the actual woman who had come to my rescue. But when I opened my eyes again, it was still her face, her pouty lips, her big dark eyes full of concern. Embarrassment caught in my throat, and I couldn’t speak.

“You okay?” She asked, her voice soft, even calmer than the yoga instructor. I nodded. “You want water?” I nodded again. She opened her bag and pulled out a water bottle, her water bottle, not a disposable one. She handed it to me. I wrapped my fingers around it. I was slow and uncoordinated. My body felt swollen, like it was made of bread dough. I sucked hungrily at the bottle’s plastic nipple, and when I returned it to her, it was almost empty. She didn’t seem phased. She just took it from me and put it back in her bag. “I’m gonna find you help, don’t move.” She started to stand.

My embarrassment quickly obliterated, replaced by panic. It didn’t matter that Bonnaroo had a “No Questions Asked” policy. A senator’s son doesn’t show up at the medical tent. Period. Before she was standing, I managed a horse, “No.” She squatted again and looked at me quizzically.

“No?” Her voice had a very physical presence, a righteousness, like a soldier.

“No,” I said again, this time stronger.

“You can’t get in trouble,” she argued more gently, touching my leg. Her touch exploded on my skin, rippling aftershocks up my thigh and into my chest.

“I’m fine.” I shifted and attempted to stand, but I was weak, and she had to help me to my feet.

“You’re not fine. You don’t look fine. That hand looks bad.” She nodded toward my left hand. It was black and blue in a couple of places, pretty swollen, and there was crusty brown blood on all my knuckles. I had punched something. Hard.

“It’s fine.” She was not convinced. “Thank you.” I mumbled. She looked at me, searching my face, trying to understand my behavior. There was nothing else to say. How could I have her now? Who would want the guy that stood in front of her? She was still looking right at me. Still searching my face, her hands still on me from when she helped me up. I shifted my weight backwards, and she dropped her hands. I cleared my throat, tried to smile and said,

“Really, thanks.” She nodded. *Goodbye dancing girl.* I turned and started walking slowly toward my tour bus. I could hear that she hadn’t moved, but I didn’t look back.

“Wait,” she called out. I stood still, but I didn’t turn around. She jogged over and stopped so that she was once again standing in front of me, facing me. There was something in her eyes that I was unfamiliar with, something decent. She opened her bag again, took out a green bandana and poured the last gulps of water from her water bottle on it. She then braced her left hand against my temple and used her right hand to rub the wet bandana against my forehead. She was trying to wipe away the vandalism, trying to make it so what happened to me wouldn’t be as visible. I wanted to cry. At first, she wiped gently. Worry filled her face, scrunching her features. She pressed deeper, rubbing hard.

“It’s permanent marker,” she sighed. I looked away, swallowed and looked back.

“You reap what you sow, right?” I meant it as a joke, but it came out wrong. It wasn’t snide, it was sorrowful.

She searched my face again, and then to my surprise she hugged me. I was tense at first, but when she didn’t let go, I relaxed into her. I was so exhausted but not because some assholes doped me or because I had something profane scrawled across my forehead or even because she had a boyfriend. I was exhausted because I spent so much time trying to get it right, trying to be the son my father wanted. Her head rested against my bare chest and just like I thought, me against her and her against me, it was like a salve. It was like the bronchia in my lungs were truly functioning for the first time, like I’d never taken a real breath before. Everything in my body relaxed. I pushed my nose into her hair and pulled her tighter to me. My heart was pounding against her ear, screaming, see me. It was too much, too raw, too real. I bit my lip hard.

When we separated, she reached up and ran the back of her hand across my jaw line. It was personal. Intimate. She was kind. I mattered, and she didn’t even know me. “Maybe, you’re right,” she said softly like we were kissing. “Maybe you reap what you sow, or maybe the world is just full of assholes.” When she dropped her hand, I knew for sure. I could never have this girl, and not because she had a boyfriend. This girl was bigger than me. She was better than me. I didn’t deserve this girl.

I stepped back. If I couldn’t have her, I had to get away from her. “I gotta go.” The words came out hard, cruel even. I tried to soften it, “I... a, um... I’m sure my buddies are wondering where I am.”

“I could help you back to your site?” She offered.

“No, I got it. I’m good.”

She offered me the bandana, “To cover your head?”

“It’s okay. It’s fine.” I deserved to be branded, even if she didn’t want me to be.

She pushed the bandana into my hand. “Just take it.”

I did. I stuffed it into my pocket. I wasn’t going to argue with her. I stepped to the side, preparing to walk away, but then it occurred to me I would never see her again, that I didn’t even know her name. I had to touch her one more time. I wanted to kiss her, but I couldn’t, so I grabbed her waist pulled her to me, pressing my lips against her neck. The tone between us shifted quickly. A tiny shudder escaped her lips. I didn’t expect it, and I reacted before I could think, shifting my lips, taking her earlobe between my teeth and pressing my thigh between her legs. The second shudder was deeper, more growl, and I growled back. My own sound shook me. There was heat coming off her and I wanted so much to absorb it, to run my hand up her thigh and slip my fingers deep into her wetness, to make her shudder over and over again until there was nothing left. But I couldn’t. I would not take this girl, poison her with my shit. I

wanted to know that I had left this girl intact. I wanted to know that she was out there, that something good, something whole and normal existed.

“Fuck...” I pulled back, ran my hand through my hair, started backing away, still facing her. “I’m sorry... God, I’m so sorry.” I was shaking. She just stood there. She didn’t smile or try to play it off like it was alright. She didn’t say anything. She just watched me. She looked sad, her face still. I turned and kept walking. I walked straight across the site.

I passed through the campgrounds and didn’t stop to take a breath until I was standing beneath the Ferris wheel. It was turned off, so it felt creepy, like a ghost town or a post-apocalyptic world. It wasn’t really light out yet, and everything was still. I pulled the green bandana from my pocket, held to my nose and wished it to smell like her, but it didn’t.

When I got back to the tour bus, there was a sock duct-taped the door and my buddy Pete was sitting on the ground. I’d known Pete most of my life. His dad was a corporate lobbyist for big oil, so we were both prep school brats together in DC. We didn’t mean to go to the same college, but it ended up that way, and then it was like a done deal, same frat, same friends, lifers. People often thought we were brothers, but we really didn’t look alike. Pete was blond with brown eyes and brown facial hair. I had dark hair and green eyes, but we were built similarly, tall, athletic, nothing that says obsessive body builder, but nothing that says couch potato either. Pete was just my family and people could tell. He was the guy I’d call if I needed help to get rid of a body.

“Jesus, Drew. What the fuck, man? Where have you been?” He was never one to pull punches, and I respected him for it.

I didn’t have an answer. I didn’t want to talk about what happened, so I rubbed my face with my hand for a second and then asked, “Where’s Candice?”

Pete nodded towards his Land Rover. “Sleeping, with Kates.” Katie Sullivan was our third. We grew up with her too. She was a year younger than us and an athlete who could whip both our asses in all things, particularly tennis. I swear if she could have pledged our frat she would have, just to remind us who was boss. She was good people, oddly stiff and very controlled but good people. “She’s pissed, Dude.”

“Candice?”

“No, man. That one’s like all worried and shit. Katie’s pissed. She’s more familiar with your...” He paused, searching for the right words. “Shall we say, extracurricular behaviors?” Our entire life Pete made a constant joke out of the PR spin machine that was my life. “She had to take care of Candice all night. It was not cool, dude.” He paused, smirked, and pointed towards my face, “Although I think that shit on your forehead might help your case a little...” He snickered.

“What’s with the sock?”

“Conner.”

Conner was the other friend we’d come to Bonnaroo with. He was another of our fraternity brothers. Pete and I had met him as pledges. We trusted him because when we were pledging, he was always the brother who stepped in when he felt shit was going too far. He was a funny guy, the kind of guy everyone liked, the ladies included. The entire ride down from DC, Conner kept making “If the tour bus is a’ rockin’ don’t come a knockin’” jokes, and apparently he wasn’t kidding. I sat down next to Pete and leaned against the bus. He looked at me seriously, “You look like shit, Dude. You okay?”

I nodded, and then we were quiet. Pete always seemed to know when to be still and when to push. The bus door inched opened and a petite olive-skinned girl with black hair emerged. She

was moving slowly, stealthily sneaking out. Pete and I watched her. She looked disheveled, there was red lipstick stain around her mouth and her mascara had smeared and run. I realized we needed to say something or else we were going to startle her.

“Hey,” I said quietly. The girl jumped, dropping the bus door so that it slammed. So much for not surprising her. She looked at Pete and me for a split second and then ran off toward the other campgrounds. A groggy Conner appeared in her place, hollering after her, “What? No breakfast?”

We laughed.

And then it was time to go. Time to pack up the Land Rover and leave the dancing girl behind.

