

Jubilee by Kristin Valdez Quade (2013)

When Andrea pulled into the dirt lot by the orchards that adjoined the blueberry fields, she saw she'd timed their arrival just right. Where the farm workers normally parked their beat-up sedans and rusting pickups, the Volvos and Mercedes and Audis were lined up, a faint scrim of dust from the dirt drive on their hoods. Usually Andrea was embarrassed by her mother's old Chrysler with its missing wood panel, but today she parked it among the luxury vehicles with a sense of vindication.

"Nice rides," said Matty, nodding appreciatively.

"I told you. They own everything." She gestured at the trees and at the sky, too, as if the Lowells actually did own the whole wide world. "Like three hundred acres. Practically this entire side of the river. Apples and pears and blueberries, too."

For several years, the blueberry industry in California had been expanding, and the Lowells had been early adopters. In honor of their eighth annual blueberry party, the field workers—a few of whom Andrea had known her whole life—had been given this Saturday off, paid. "Wouldn't want the guests in their pearls to have to pick alongside Mexicans." She snorted, picturing the Lowells' friends in their Brooks Brothers chinos and silk skirts and strappy heeled sandals making their way down the rows.

Matty shrugged. "I wouldn't mind a paid day off."

"You'd have to have a job first," said Andrea, then glanced at him, worried she'd offended him. Andrea wished he'd shaved that wormy black mustache or had at least put on a button-down. But whatever, she reminded herself; she didn't actually care what the Lowells thought.

Andrea had dawdled in a gas station off the highway so they wouldn't be on time. She'd bought Matty a forty—rather, he bought it with his fake ID and she paid—then lingered, trying to distract him. "Imagine the kind of guy who thinks Sexxx Juice is going to improve his prospects," she said, flicking a plastic bottle of pheromones. She was always bringing up sex around Matty so she could demonstrate how cool she was with it. At the magazine rack, she dragged on his arm, trying to look game and easygoing as she pointed out features in men's magazines. ("Guys really think that's hot?" "Yes," Matty said.) Finally, though, Matty had pitched his bottle—still half full—and asked if they were going to this party or not.

Technically, Andrea had been invited to this party. Rather, her parents had been invited. Technically. But she was certain that the Lowells didn't actually expect them to come. After all, they'd never been invited before. This invitation—letterpress-printed on thick, soft paper—had been a gesture of goodwill, and not even that, Andrea was sure, but something the Lowells had felt they had to do, given that her father would be there anyway, with his taco truck.

The truck was a highlight of this year's party, according to the invitation: "Tacos provided by our own Salvador Romero and his El Primo taco truck!" And there, instead of blueberries on sage-colored sprigs, was the truck itself: a festive little line drawing debossed in red and yellow.

The taco truck was a recent acquisition. Andrea's father had saved for four years, plotting, cobbling together loans (including a pretty substantial one from William Lowell), driving the family crazy with his exuberance. The truck would pay for itself, he said, would give him something to do. All week it was shuttered, parked in the driveway while her father worked as a supervisor in the Lowells' orchards, and on the weekends (up at four-thirty as usual) he drove it to the park, where he served egg burritos and cokes to young men famished after their soccer games, tacos and tortas to families out for a stroll. Her father never said so, but Andrea suspected from her mother's strained silence on the subject that the taco truck wasn't as lucrative as he'd hoped.

"Are they kidding?" Andrea said when she heard the Lowells were hiring her father for the party. "You'd think they'd want something fancy."

"Oh, you know these wealthy people," said her mother, shaking her head in bemusement. "They get their ideas."

Her parents had been delighted to see the taco truck featured on the Lowells' invitation, and had gushed about how touched they were to have received it. Her mother turned the invitation in her hands and shook her head in wonder. "They didn't have to think of us, but they did."

Andrea was hijacked by the image of her mother in her teal dress with the gold chain belt, trailing the Lowells all over their party. "You're not considering going, are you, Mom?"

Hurt flashed in her mother's face, and Andrea bristled at the Lowells for causing this hurt. "I work on Saturdays," her mother said stiffly and dropped the invitation in the trash. Later, in spite of herself, Andrea had plucked it out and squirreled it away in her room, saving even the envelope

(yellow lined in red—why was she so impressed with the invitation?—she *hated* that she was so impressed).

Well, if the Lowells wanted Mexicans at their party, that's what they'd get.

The day was not ideal for an outdoor party, Andrea saw as she unstuck herself from the driver's seat. The leaves of the apple trees were dusty silver in the hot afternoon light, and a breeze stirred the dry soil. "You won't believe these people," she told Matty, shutting the car door. And she told him about the framed photograph she had seen in their kitchen: the redheaded brother and sister as children in their green velvet coats, the Eiffel tower lit and snowy, behind them. "Can you believe that? Matching coats! And for her, white gloves! What a waste to bring little kids to France. They probably planned the whole trip just for that picture, just for one stupid picture of their kids being adorable in Paris."

"Annoying," conceded Matty.

"Tell me about it. They probably read *Madeline* every five minutes. They probably couldn't stop themselves."

Andrea still remembered the children's expressions: the older boy flashing a showy television-child smile, Parker scowling down at her patent leather toes. This was years ago; Andrea had come with her father when he'd stopped by to pick up paychecks. She remembered the kitchen, too, large and gleaming, the row of pale green porcelain bowls as thin as eggshells stacked in the open shelves. Mrs. Lowell had given Andrea three warm ginger cookies wrapped in a napkin, which Andrea had made last for over a week, tasting in the increasingly stale nibbles the calm and security and beauty of this home.

"I'm pretty sure Parker Lowell isn't even that smart. She's too sweet to be smart." Andrea fingered an aching pimple on her forehead.

"Do you think she's easy? In my experience lots of rich girls are easy."

Andrea ignored the pang in the center of her chest. "I'm pretty sure she only got into Stanford because she's a legacy."

"So why are we here?" asked Matty. "If you hate them so much."

Matty was here because Andrea had strong-armed him into coming; she intended for people to assume he was her boyfriend. And he owed her, anyway, for the essays she'd written for his classes at Chico State.

And why was Andrea here? Driving, she'd felt full of the brazen courage she would need to crash this party. She would show up full of breezy,

sparkling confidence that would startle these people. Yes, Andrea was an equal now, a *Stanford* student, poised and intelligent, no longer just the daughter of one of their laborers, no longer an awestruck kid worshipping their cookies, and if the Lowells wanted to trot out her father and his taco truck to provide a little kitsch for their party, then they'd have to do it in front of her. By her very presence here today, she would prove to them their snobbery and make them ashamed of their entitlement and their half-hearted acts of charity towards her family. Admittedly, her plan was vague, but it involved making Parker eat a taco in front of her. And she would have Matty at her side, handsome bad-boy Matty Macias, whom she'd loved since eighth grade. Matty, with his gelled hair and warm, thick-lashed eyes and the cords of his scapular showing at the neck of his t-shirt. Matty would not fail to disconcert.

"We're *here* because I was invited. I can't just snub them. Parker and I are *classmates* now."

Andrea smoothed the wrinkled back of her new sundress (J. Crew—the most expensive dress she'd ever bought, and she did not intend to keep it; the tag still hung, scratchy and damp now, down her back, and she hoped, should Matty touch her, that he wouldn't notice it).

"Just, you know, be polite," Andrea told Matty.

"—the fuck?" he said, shooting her an irritated grimace. "You think I'm an idiot?"

"I just think you're not used to being around people like this."

Andrea strode past him, clutching the invitation. Only now did it occur to her that maybe she ought to have brought something—flowers? Wine? Already she could hear the sounds of laughter through the apple trees.

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Andrea hated it, the constant alert hunger for every possible chance to move up in the world. "So and so's lazy," her father would tell Andrea's mom in the evenings. "He should just go back to Mexico. Work hard, get ahead. Look at me."

Over and over, the same conversation. "You should talk to Bill about law," her father would urge, pronouncing his name *Bee!* "Maybe he could help you."

"He doesn't practice," said Andrea.

"Still," said her mother, "it's nice to show interest."

“We’ll have to get the girls together,” William Lowell had said after Salvador told his boss with tears in his eyes—Salvador’s eyes had filled just relating the exchange—that Andrea had been accepted at Stanford. “Maybe lunch at the house and they can swap notes.” But though William asked after Andrea (Salvador was always sure to tell her when he did), and remarked over and over how wonderful it was that she’d gotten in, and on full scholarship, too, they never did get the girls together. And thank goodness; it would have been strange and awkward. As children they’d played together on a few sporadic summer afternoons—Andrea remembered running after Parker through the orchards, bashful and grinning—but the girls hadn’t seen each other in years, not since a brief chance hello when Parker was home from prep school.

Stanford, Stanford, Stanford. There were weeks last summer when Andrea couldn’t sleep, so thrilled was she by the sense that her life was blooming into something marvelous. She’d tremble in bed, eyes darting around the dark familiar shapes of her room, which was really just an alcove off from the kitchen, amazed that she would actually be leaving this home she’d known her whole life: goodbye to the rippled linoleum, goodbye to the Aladdin-print curtain that was her bedroom wall, and beyond it, goodbye to the refrigerator’s intestinal gurgles. Oh, the success and wealth and greatness the future held for her! It actually made her breathless to think of it. Parker Lowell was the single blight on her joy. During freshman orientation, as Andrea was herded through White Plaza with others from the Chicano student association, she found herself looking with dread for Parker among the clumps of happy milling students. It was only a matter of time, Andrea knew, before they ran into each other at a party or on the Quad, and when they did, Parker would smile and make small talk and, through her very graciousness, expose Andrea as she truly was: cheap, striving, unworthy. Maybe, thought Andrea, Parker would get mono.

But campus was sprawling and Andrea’s freshman dorm mercifully distant from Parker’s. The first quarter passed, and nearly the second, before Andrea saw her, in the winter production of “Once Upon a Mattress.” She’d sat tense in the audience, searching the actors’ faces, and felt oddly thrilled when she finally spotted Parker. As Parker, lady-in-waiting to Queen Aggravaine, curtsied and twirled and warbled on stage, Andrea considered pointing her out to her roommate, but didn’t.

Her whole life Andrea had been subjected to her parents’ slavish interest in the Lowells’ affairs, so she shouldn’t have been surprised that all through freshman year they kept her apprised of the Lowell family news. “I really don’t care,” Andrea said, but she listened anyway, thinking as she did that

there were lots of interesting things she could tell them about power structures. They reported how the Anjous and Pink Ladies were faring, and on the Lowell boy's job in the governor's office, and then in the spring they called with the news that brought Parker lower than any bout of mono ever could: Mrs. Lowell had left her husband for their landscaper—their twenty-eight year old *female* landscaper—and William Lowell, apparently unable to live for twenty seconds without a wife, had started up with the widow of his roommate from Exeter.

Andrea had been shocked. In the face of her mother's shock, though, she'd feigned total equanimity; "No one's really straight," Andrea explained, "not one hundred percent."

And so it was that the Lowells, poised and affectionate and photogenic, now found themselves cut down by a crisis that had all the elements of a joke, and it seemed to Andrea that the balance between them had shifted. In Andrea's mind Parker underwent a faint oxidation. She took on a patina, for the first time, of vulnerability. Again Andrea found herself seeking Parker on campus, this time so she might extend her hand in friendship.

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When they stepped into the clearing between the orchards and the rows of highbush Jubilee blueberries, Andrea saw that her father's taco truck had inspired a whole Mexican theme. Gone were the sun-faded Porta-Potties and the water truck; in their place, the Lowells had erected a tent festooned with fluttering *papel picado* flags. Elderly people in pastels sat in the shade and the younger people stood around drinking margaritas. White tablecloths rippled in the hot breeze. In the center of each table sat a little piñata on bright woven fabric.

And there, at the edge of the party, was the taco truck itself. From where she stood, Andrea could see her father's arms handing full plates out the sliding window. She remained out of his line of vision. He'd be surprised and proud and pleased to see her here as a guest, would probably think Parker had invited her personally, but she didn't feel like getting into explanations. And she didn't want to establish herself as the daughter of the cook, at least not yet.

The truck *did* look festive here, Andrea saw with disappointment, against the backdrop of trees. A colorful hand-painted sign announced a pared-down, classed-up menu: Kobe beef, wild-caught salmon, free-range chicken, and vegetarian, all on blue corn tortillas.

"A vegetarian on a tortilla," said Andrea. "Ha."

"Funny," said Matty. He scanned the crowd. "They know how to do it up."

Tacos were not the only option: caterers in white shirts presided over a vast spread of fresh, colorful food. Tin buckets were lined up on another table, a grosgrain ribbon tied around each handle. Already several beautifully dressed children were in the blueberry rows, picking.

And now, turning toward Andrea, in a floral shift and Converse sneakers without socks, was Parker.

In one hand she swung a bucket, and in the other, she held a massive sloshing glass of wine. "Andrea?" She tilted her head, her red hair shining in the sun and slipping over her shoulder. "Your dad didn't say you were coming. It's so great you could make it!"

Was Parker going to hug her? Yes, she was. Andrea put her arms around Parker, and there was nothing casual about it, nothing breezy. Andrea pulled away too soon, terrified Parker would feel the price tags.

"So," Andrea said, tongue-tied. She brandished her invitation. "Do I need to give this to you?"

Parker looked at the invitation but made no move, and Andrea also looked at it, large and clumsy in her hand. Stupid, to think she might be required to present it like a ticket. She waved it at the party and the field and the orchards. "It all looks great. I haven't been out here in years."

Parker stuck her hand out at Matty. "Parker. Great to meet you."

"Oh, sorry. This is Matty." Andrea smiled at him in a way that she hoped looked affectionate and familiar and somehow also conveyed the sense that they were having lots of spectacular sex.

"Matthew," said Matty.

An awkward moment passed. Andrea smiled woodenly; Matty jingled the coins in his pocket with one hand and thumbed the edge of his repellant little mustache with the other.

Andrea had imagined cornering Parker next to the truck, plying her with tacos, which Parker, too polite to refuse, would choke down in class-conscious misery until she was sick. Absurd and far-fetched, yes, but Andrea had gotten a grim pleasure from the image. Now, though, she felt pathetic for even thinking it.

As if reading her mind, Parker ran her hand through her hair, glanced at the taco truck, then back at Andrea. At least she had the grace to look

uncomfortable. "It's so great of your dad to be here. His tacos are awesome. I ate like six already."

"Yes," agreed Andrea. "They are pretty great." How many times were they going to say *great*?

A gold Tiffany's heart dangled at Parker's throat. Something about the necklace combined with the Converse suddenly enraged Andrea. "Man," she said, "I was really sorry to hear about your parents splitting up. I mean, it must have *really* turned your world upside down."

Parker shrugged, but her throat beneath the gold chain splotched red. "They both seem to have gotten over it." She jerked her thumb at one of the clumps of laughing adults. "My dad can't keep his hands off Judith."

And indeed William Lowell had his arm around the thick waist of a beaming woman who could only be the widow. She was short-haired and mannish, an Hermès scarf tied in the collar of her striped Oxford. It was no surprise she wasn't as pretty as Elizabeth Lowell, Andrea supposed; William Lowell had been burned by beauty. Still, she felt obscurely disappointed by the widow, as though William Lowell had been guilty of a lapse in taste.

"Funny, I hardly see you at school," said Parker. She smiled. "We must travel in different circles." Parker turned to Matty and said seriously, "Andrea is *super* smart."

Matty snorted. "She thinks so."

Andrea bristled. Parker didn't know how smart she was. Parker didn't know one thing about her.

"Seriously, I hear you're doing really well. Your dad tells my dad."

The thought of her father bragging about her was horrifying. Every term this year, Andrea had received honor roll certificates from the Chicano, a student association, which had made her proud until she realized they were just part of all the extra efforts made on behalf of minority students: the special dinners and study breaks and offers for faculty mentorship with junior faculty eager to bolster their tenure files. Still, she'd sent the certificates home to her parents, who didn't know the difference. Now, though, she had a hideous vision of her father flapping the flimsy sheets in William Lowell's face, William Lowell's indulgent smile. William Lowell didn't brag to Salvador about Parker's accomplishments, you could be sure of that.

"Last time I was out here in the blueberry field I was nine, I think," said Andrea. "You were here, too. Do you remember?"

Parker shook her head.

“Why would you? Long time ago. It was summer, which is probably why we were both there. You were picking blueberries for your mom, and I wanted to help, too, so Isabel—Isabel Gutierrez?—you probably don’t know her, she worked here for years, she and my mom are still friends—gave me a bucket. And I was out there picking away, happy as can be. Then your dad came down the row and saw and yelled for me to stop.” Andrea laughed heartily, mirthlessly. “He was worried about child labor laws! Wouldn’t want anyone to come by and find a little Mexican kid picking blueberries!”

Parker tipped her head, laughed uncertainly. Her entire face was pink now. “Sounds like maybe he was being a little too scrupulous.”

Andrea shrugged. “No big deal. I’ve just always remembered it. You kept picking. It wasn’t child labor for you. You were just getting some berries for a pie.” She smiled.

“Ah,” said Parker. Even her flushed face irritated Andrea. What was she, some swooning Victorian?

“Well, pick as much as you’d like today.” Parker nodded at the children in the rows. “Today we’re even allowing child labor.”

Parker politely extricated herself, and then she was off to charm other guests with her straight teeth and easy personality. Matty stood watching her, jingling the change in his pockets.

“Would you just be still for one minute?” Andrea snapped.

“What is with you?” Matty asked. “You’re fucked up, you know that? You’re fucking obsessed.”

Andrea turned on Matty. “Do you know how much all this is worth?” Oh, yes, Andrea had Googled the land appraisal—she knew.

Matty gave her one long disgusted look and then headed for the beer.

Andrea nearly ran after him—but to what? Grab his hand, beg him to support her? She winced sourly.

Andrea had finally run into Parker at a party at one of the co-ops in the spring, in that lull after midterms and before finals. Andrea had arrived with some dormmates, who, once they’d all swigged their punch, had gone off in search of weed, leaving Andrea swaying at the periphery of the party. It

had just stopped raining, and in the backyard several people were naked and dancing a formless hippie dance in the mud, ruining the lawn, which is what Andrea was watching—arms crossed critically as she envied their lack of self-consciousness—when Parker Lowell came up behind her and circled a thin arm around her neck.

“Andrea!” Parker cried and thrust her friend forward. Parker was drunk, drunker than Andrea, eyes damp and unfocused. “Meet Andrea! Andrea, this is Chantal. Oh my gosh, Andrea and I have known each other practically our entire lives. Our dads work together.”

Chantal had glitter on her cheekbones and smeared black eyeliner. But it was Parker Andrea was staring at. “Imagine,” her mother had told her just days before, “that entire family, ruined.” But Parker didn’t look like someone whose world had fallen apart; instead, she looked breathless and happy. She was leaner now and wore thrift store corduroys and a boy’s AYSO soccer shirt, through which her braless pert nipples showed. Her bare face shone from dancing, and at her temples, Andrea could see veins blue through her nearly translucent skin. Andrea wanted to speak privately to Parker, to tell her how sorry she was, how shocked they’d all been. She’d touch that lovely arm, speak sincerely, and they’d understand each other.

Instead, Andrea gestured at the mud dancers. “Insane, right? You couldn’t pay me to do that. Not in a million years.”

“Oh, I don’t know. It seems kind of fun to me,” said Parker.

Feeling drab to her core, Andrea searched for something else to say but came up with nothing. Couldn’t she even stand like a normal person? Parker and Chantal stood close with their arms looped around each other’s waists, and their intimacy looked so natural that Andrea felt a pang. “I just meant they’re probably getting mud in their cracks.”

Chantal laughed, but Parker fixed Andrea with sincere attention. “What are your summer plans? Heading back home?”

“I’m not sure yet. Probably I’ll find an internship.” Andrea was heartsick at the thought of the months that lay between her and the start of the next school year: the chilly, buzzing shifts at Safeway, the hot Stockton nights. Most internships were unpaid, she’d learned, and she didn’t really know how to go about finding them anyway, so she hadn’t even looked. “You?”

Parker laughed. "I'm totally embarrassed, but I'm just going to hang out." Her eyes flicked away; she was, it seemed, genuinely embarrassed. "Travel some, maybe. Mostly hang around home." She laughed nervously. "I figure I'll have to work the rest of my life."

Hope glinted in Andrea's chest. Maybe they'd get together this summer; maybe, with nothing else to do, with her college and boarding school friends off on their European tours, Parker would reach out. Already Andrea knew that wouldn't happen.

Chantal was looking at Andrea. "What does your dad do again?" she asked Parker.

"He's a farmer." And Parker's voice was so easy, so unselfconscious that Andrea knew she believed it.

A fierce rage rose from nowhere and spotted Andrea's vision. A farmer! As if her dad was Old MacDonald milking his cow. As if the Lowells were all out weeding in their overalls! William Lowell had a law degree, for god's sake!

Later, she would kick herself for not calling Parker on her shit, would cycle through all the things she might have said: "Parker's dad owns farmers." Instead, she'd smiled hard and bright until the terrible conversation wound down and Parker and Chantal melted into the crowd arm in arm.

So, yes, this was Parker's crime: thinking her dad was a farmer. Now, while a three-piece mariachi band struck up at the edge of the clearing, Andrea watched with loathing as Parker greeted her guests. Where did this anger come from? Andrea wasn't one of these strident activists, with eagle eyes sharp on the lookout for injustice, leading grape boycotts and bus trips to Arizona. She wanted to become a lawyer, and not a civil rights or immigration lawyer, either. She wanted to be a lawyer in a slimming wool suit riding the elevator to the top of a New York skyscraper.

Yet you mentioned the Lowells, people who'd only been kind to her family—it, was, after all, a *nice thing*, hiring her father's taco truck—and suddenly she was outraged. Andrea didn't blame the Lowells, not really—they couldn't help being who they were, having what they had. They weren't even snobby. And technically Mr. Lowell sort of was a farmer. Except, of course, she did blame them, and it didn't matter that she knew it was unfair. Why did she want to embarrass Parker, dig into that rich guilt that was so ripe and close to the surface? Andrea flexed her fingers,

imagined sinking them into flesh that would give as easily as the skin of a browning pear.

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“Wine?” offered the waiter at her elbow. “This is a Sauvignon Blanc from the Pink Motel Vineyard in Napa.”

“Oh,” said Andrea. “Okay.” She drank it down quickly, then exchanged the glass when the next waiter came by.

She was hungry, and the smell from the taco truck was delicious. But she felt stuck here on the edge, without another person to walk with. Under a swinging piñata, Matty was chatting with an older couple, not caring, apparently, that in his t-shirt and work boots he looked like an employee. He should be right here, talking to her, laughing at what she said; that had been the whole point of bringing him.

Waiters supplied her with wine, elaborately speared vegetables, savory little puffs. And a be-ribboned bucket. She was warm, and the wine made her tight-faced and loose-limbed and tipsy. She didn’t know if the bucket was to keep, but she’d just decided she would keep it anyway when she felt a nail scratch her gently at her neck.

“Tag’s out, honey.” It was the widow.

Andrea clapped a hand on the nape of her neck.

“You’re a friend of Parker’s? From school? Bill pointed you out.”

“I must have forgotten to cut it off.” She felt the miserable heat rise in her face.

“Don’t look so worried, honey.” The widow gave her a friendly scratch on the back and winked. “I won’t tell. We’ve all done it. It’s a nice dress.”

Andrea smiled, and it felt so good that she realized it was the first genuine smile she’d smiled all day. “Thanks.” The widow’s hair was coarse and thick, a raccoon’s pelt. It wasn’t her fault she wasn’t as pretty as Elizabeth Lowell. “My dad’s the taco guy,” she confessed.

“I just met him! Lovely man. He must be so proud of you.”

“Oh, well,” said Andrea modestly, but she couldn’t stop the grin from creeping in. “Lots of kids get in.”

“I’m glad Parker has a friend here.” The widow sighed, sipped her wine. “I guess the situation can’t be anything but awkward.”

“Oh, I know,” said Andrea. “The power dynamics—”

“Between you and me, it’s a mess. I don’t actually know what I’m doing playing hostess. I don’t even know most of these people.” The widow withdrew a tube of lipstick from her pocket and smeared it on thin, tense lips.

“I think you’re doing a great job,” Andrea said.

“Both kids are angry, of course. It’s worse for Parker, though, being the youngest.” Parker and her father were standing arm in arm, entertaining a laughing crowd, and the widow watched them as she talked. When she sloshed some wine on her shirt she swiped at it without looking. “She keeps calling her parents to scream at them. She accuses her mother of being—of sleeping around. And she doesn’t think much of me. She told her father he was pitiful and desperate.” She laughed once, sharply. “She got both of us with that one.”

It was impossible to imagine Parker raging at anyone. She certainly didn’t look angry with her father. She was smiling pinkly. Mr. Lowell kissed the silky top of her head. It was like a Ralph Lauren ad. That’s what this party was missing: a camera crew. Briefly, Andrea wondered if Parker’s mother had taken the Paris picture when she moved out, or if it was still in that gleaming kitchen facing the widow, as she made her mayonnaise casseroles.

Andrea was startled and flattered and uncomfortable to be let into the widow’s confidence, and her heart went out to her. “It must be so hard for you. Is it hard for you?”

“Do you know, he says he isn’t sure he’ll even divorce her. Doesn’t want to leave her in the lurch, he says.” The widow’s laugh was brittle, a little unhinged. It occurred to Andrea that she was drunk. “He’s too good, that man. But he’ll come around. Parker scared him to death with that little pill stunt. I told him that was the point. I know. I was young, too.” The widow smiled brilliantly with magenta lips and played with the tails of her scarf.

That pill stunt. “Yes,” said Andrea.

“I told him she should have a summer job, keep busy. My kids have always had summer jobs. I bet *you* have one, don’t you?”

“What pills?” Andrea’s head was cottony and the buzz of the wine drained, leaving a heavy, hot remorse. “We’re not actually that close. I didn’t actually know about the pills.”

“You get selfish if you don’t work, I told him. If you never have to think about anyone else. It’s not her *fault*, but that’s what happens.”

“Was she really so unhappy?”

The widow tipped her head and looked at Andrea as if for the first time. Her lipstick was thick, waxy and dry. “She’s quite a performer, your friend.”

“No,” said Andrea, with sudden savage energy that took her by surprise. “She’s *not* a performer.” Who did this widow think she was, spreading the Lowell gossip at their own party? She was an ugly, hateful woman. “For the record,” she said with indignation, “the Lowells were the most beautiful family I have ever seen.”

“Ah. I see,” the widow said lightly. “I hope you’ll be more discreet than I was. Do tell your dad how much I enjoyed his tacos. Excuse me.” She gave Andrea’s back another little scratch and moved unsteadily off.

And of course this was how it was supposed to go, wasn’t it? Andrea would glimpse Parker’s unhappiness, see their broken family, and feel grateful for all that she had. Then she’d know, truly *know*, that money doesn’t buy happiness.

Well, she did feel terrible, so there. She was swollen with shame, her upper lip damp as though it was actually oozing out of her. And yet, at the edges of all her sorrow and remorse, a piece of Andrea rankled irritably against the demands Parker made on her pity. And she was obscurely jealous, too, as if with those pills Parker had established once again her supremacy over Andrea.

Andrea accepted another glass of wine.

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Parker and Matty were talking to each other, Matty leaning forward in that posture that meant he had designs on her. Of course, he did. But Andrea didn’t care about Matty just now.

“Parker,” she said, generous, repentant. She composed her face into a semblance of sobriety, because what she had to say was important.

Their smiles vanished.

“Oh, *what* now?” asked Matty.

“I was talking to your step-mother—”

“She’s not my step-mother,” Parker said warily.

“Your dad’s girlfriend.” Andrea laid a hand on Parker’s bare arm. She could feel the tiny golden hairs, the warmth of her skin, and affection welled in her. “She told me that you tried to kill yourself. And I just wanted to say I’m really, really, really sorry.” Why couldn’t she get the tone right? She really was sorry. “And I really, really, really hope you don’t.”

Parker flushed so red that her eyelids pinkened, too, and Andrea wondered with a bleak horror if the girl was going to cry, here in front of everyone.

“You hope I don’t kill myself? Well then, in that case.” Parker’s eyes were radiant with anger. “Why are you even *here*? You think I don’t notice you hate me?”

Matty grabbed the edge of Andrea’s sleeve. “I think it’s time for us to leave.”

“Parker, I’m just trying to be nice.”

“Andrea.” Matty put his arm around her, just as she’d always hoped he would. “Come on.” Andrea shook him off.

And then the door of the taco truck swung open and her father descended the steps. He was wiping his hands on a towel, and his gaze snagged on Andrea. Suddenly a terrible thought occurred to her, that if Parker chose, she could have her father fired, all because Andrea came here today. Her blood became very still and very cold.

He came toward them, smiling quizzically, head tilted. Andrea grinned, bright and tense, waved. She held the grin, looking, no doubt, maniacal, but she didn’t know what else to do.

“I’m sorry,” she said to Parker. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry. This had nothing to do with my dad. He didn’t even know I was coming.”

Parker looked slapped. “You think I’d get him fired because of *you*? Fuck you, Andrea. I *like* your dad.”

“I’m sorry—”

“Just shut *up*, Andrea.” Matty’s tone was urgent, and it was this urgency, and the look of embarrassment on his face, that frightened Andrea, made her understand how far she’d gone.

Andrea turned on Matty. “Where do *you* get off? *You* said Parker looked easy.”

Her father sped up. He gripped Matty by the shoulder. "Is he bothering you?" he asked Parker.

Matty widened his soft eyes in surprise.

"God, no," said Parker.

Salvador searched Andrea's face. "Is everything okay, *mija*?" Andrea averted her eyes from her father's urgent face in time to see Parker and Matty exchange a look, hold each other's gaze. She saw them decide among themselves to protect her.

Parker smiled resolutely. "Everything's fine, Salvador. Your tacos are amazing."

Her father wouldn't be so easily reassured, Andrea knew, but he also wouldn't argue with Parker. But Andrea didn't stay to find out. She turned and ran into the apple trees. She slowed when she could no longer hear the sounds of the party, then walked deeper down the rows. The branches were covered in tight little green apples, hard and fierce. She ripped one off and threw it against the trunk, missed. It landed dully in the mulch.

God, how she'd wanted to get together with Parker for that lunch last summer. How she'd wanted to sit in that kitchen, eating vanilla ice cream topped with blueberries from those fragile green bowls. Feet swinging from the bar stools, she and Parker would marvel at how much they had in common. How funny they hadn't been closer all these years! Of course, when the invitation never came, Andrea hadn't been a bit surprised. She imagined how it went: William Lowell suggesting it and Parker Lowell dismissing the suggestion, horrified by the prospect of starting the school year saddled with Andrea.

"You are the leaders of tomorrow," the university president had told them in September at their freshman convocation. Even then Andrea had known that he hadn't meant her. "Look around you. Look at yourself. Every one of you has the unique talents that this world is waiting for." Probably he even believed it. But Andrea knew that whatever she was granted in life would be granted as a result of her wheedling. She'd forever be checking ethnicity boxes, emphasizing her parents' work: farm laborer, housekeeping. Trying to prove that she was smart enough, committed enough, and pleasant enough to be granted a trial period in their world. Yes, she'd make a success of herself, more or less, but her entire life she'd be gushing about gratitude and writing thank you notes to alumni and rich benefactors and to the Lowells.

* * *

Mr. Lowell hadn't actually yelled at her that day she was nine. He'd called out, "Stop, stop, stop, stop!" as he jogged down the row toward her. Then he'd slowed and said more gently as if approaching an escaped and not entirely tamed pet, "Hi there, honey." He'd taken the scratched five-gallon bucket from her hands and thanked her for help and he gave her the cold coke from his lunch cooler, settled her on the tailgate of his truck until her father emerged from the trees. Before that, though, before Mr. Lowell found her, Andrea had been alone in the row of Jubilee blueberries, the leaves rustling and shining over her head.

Seek, pluck, seek pluck. The percussion of the berries as they dropped into the bucket. Andrea's head was pleasantly hot and fuzzy with the soft sense of calm and focus, the absorption in her task. The firm warm berries between her thumb and forefinger, the sweet burst on her tongue, the scent of the sun and soil and leaves.

Jubilee, she said, the word as mild and sweet as the blueberries themselves. Jubilee, jubilee, jubilee. Through the rows, she could hear the indistinct voices of the other pickers and the burble of the irrigation system.

She was covering the entire bottom of the bucket, a single even layer, and then she'd form the next layer and the next until the entire bucket was filled with that fragrance and sweetness and heft. She forgot there were other people around, and as the leaves rustled and the light scattered over her, she forgot herself, too.