

FREYA & JAKOB

SEXY

—Hey, Freya says, into the phone. She looks out the the window. 5:30 pm and it's already almost pitch black outside. She hates the way Daylight Savings Time draws an early curtain on the fall.

—Hey, Jakob says.

—What are you doing?

—Making spaghetti.

—Mmm delicious.

—Yeah, right?

—Yeah. So what else are you doing tonight? You want to come by later?

— I can't, he says. —Thomas and I are supposed to be getting together tonight, remember? We've been meaning to listen to some of those recordings we made?

—Oh, she says. —Yeah.

—We've been meaning to do it for a while, Jakob says, but I kept having to put him off. It's been weird, trying to adjust to working forty hours a week again.

—Sure, sure, Freya says.

Jakob stirs his spaghetti with a wooden spoon.

—Listen, he says. — It shouldn't take us too long. He's going to be here around seven; we'll probably be through by ten or so. If you wanted to come over.

—I wouldn't want to intrude, Freya says.

—Pshaw, Jakob says. —You wouldn't be intruding. I think he'd be glad to see you; he likes you. And of course *I'd* be glad to see you. Sweet cookie bear.

—Mmm, Freya says, noncommittal.

—Are you my sweet cookie bear? Jakob says.

She pinches the bridge of her nose. She's not really in the mood for the cutey-cute stuff tonight. —Yeah, she says.

—You're, I don't know, she says. She churns the air with her free hand.
—You're my big panda man.

—Yeah, Jakob says, and the simpering tone in his voice makes her want to cringe. —Big panda man.

He tests a piece of spaghetti; it's still a bit too firm. —So what do you think? he says. —Coming over?

—Sure, Freya says. —Around what, ten?

—Sounds good, says Jakob.

—Alright, I'll see you then.

—Cool, Jakob says.

—Cool, Freya says.

—Bye-bye, cookie bear, he says.

—Right, bye, she says. She hangs up and sighs.

In the bathroom she looks at herself in the mirror and frowns. She thinks *fat*. She thinks *sweet bear*, and all she can envision is some hulking, lumbering beast.

She pulls her Guns N' Roses T-shirt over her head and looks at her belly. She puts both hands under it and lifts. It has a weight in her hands like so much dough; it disgusts her. She releases it and feels it fall back into place. She lifts her breasts, tries to imagine them as high and firm. Tries to remember the last time she really felt sexy.

She remembers the summer, when Joshua had his intense focus turned on her. She felt sexy then, kind of, although she also felt awkward, as though she had forgotten how to be the target of male attention. How to use it to her advantage.

He stopped flirting when summer collapsed into fall, and so that period now seems like an anomaly, a brief burst of flame that illuminated the cold surroundings for only a moment before winking out, leaving her only with a sense of the true size of the expanse she's mired in.

She knows why he stopped. She's not a fucking idiot; she can see what's right in front of her. She sees the way he is around Denise, the way he leans in towards her. She sees in it the fucking goddamn victory of twenty-two over twenty-nine. It annoys the shit out of her. Every week when she makes up the schedule she has to resist the urge to put the two of them on completely different shifts, separating them like an enraged parent spraying horny teenagers with a hose.

Maybe she shouldn't be looking to Joshua for that sort of affirmation anyway. After all, she has Jakob. Her big motherfucking *panda man*. And she loves Jakob, she does, and he compliments her on her looks and all that, like a good boyfriend, and it should help, but it doesn't. Not usually. In a way she doesn't trust his praise. She suspects that he maybe offers it out of habit, or, worse, out of duty, because it's what's expected, and because it's easy enough to give. He fucks her regularly enough, but same thing there: she can't be certain that it's not just automatic, a part of his routine.

This is part of why she wants him to be rough with her. She wants to know that he's not just fucking her to be *nice*, because he thinks she *wants him to*. What she wants is for him to be fucking her because he's completely, helplessly drawn to her, because he has no other course of action available. She wants to be certain that if she said *no* he would still fuck her. She wants to know that she can still drive a man to that point of desperation.

She wonders if she can. Her sexiest clothes don't fit anymore. Her tattoos have begun to go unfocused at their edges. She blows a big kiss at her reflected self. She waits to feel some response. Anything.