

JAKOB & FREYA

YIELDING

He sits at the table in her kitchen. He chats with her about her day, listens to her complain about the usual work tensions with Don, watches her prepare food. She slices potatoes and tumbles them into a pot of quivering water. She shreds a sphere of cabbage.

He likes watching her cook. He's no good at it himself. For him, cooking usually means slotting a frozen pizza into the oven, or tearing open the packet of seasonings that comes with his noodles. So he likes watching Freya reach directly into a hot skillet to fluff a heap of sizzling cabbage by hand. Contained in the gesture are a whole set of skills about which he knows nothing.

He thinks he'd be afraid to reach into the pan like that. But he knows that Freya has tough hands. He remembers that when they first began to touch one another he felt surprised at the hardness of her fingertips, at the way her palm and the ball of her thumb would not yield to his touch. His hands, by comparison, seemed babylike, and he began to wonder what makes hands different. Is it simply a matter of genetics? Or does it have something to do with the work one does through a lifetime?

The ingredients come together into a potato and cabbage stew, and Freya leaves it to simmer. She grips him by the muscle that joins his shoulder and his neck, and she moves it back and forth until a tension in it releases. —Ah, he says.

She presses her thumbs into aching spots behind his jaw and at the base of his skull.

—I love you, he says.

—You're a dork, she says.

—Yeah, he says dreamily.

—Hey, she says. —Have you heard about this new movie, *Secretary*?

He thinks. He remembers reading about it in the paper, some sort of S/M office comedy. —Yeah, he says. —It looked kind of interesting.

He gets hints, sometimes, that Freya has an interest in S/M. They've been having sex for over a year now and she's never broached the subject with him, not explicitly, although she often encourages him to be rougher. *Less lovemaking; more fucking*, she said to him once. And he has tried to oblige. He has trapped her between the wall and his body. He has bitten her in place of kissing her. He has held her wrists down against the mattress and forced himself into her.

He's not sure that he fully understands the rules of these moments. He knows that her struggling must be a kind of play-acting—after all, she's stronger than him, she could escape his grasp if she really wanted to. Hell, if she really wanted to, she could probably put him in the hospital. (Fletcher once darkly hinted to Jakob that at least one former boyfriend required stitches after some altercation. Jakob's never asked Freya to confirm this.)

—I have off on Saturday, Freya says. —You feel like going?

He's intrigued: maybe going to this movie would be a way to start a conversation on this topic. But his intrigue is eclipsed by the matter of money: he's unemployed, and he's begun to put things like groceries on his credit card to make the last of the money in his checking account stretch out a little bit longer. He knows he shouldn't ring up the credit card too high, and so he's been budgeting very carefully, and he's reluctant to cough up the dough for a movie.

—I don't know, says Jakob. —You know that I'm worried about this whole *money* thing...

—For fuck's sake, Freya says. She takes her hands off of him, and stomps across the room. She comes back a minute later and throws the Yellow Pages onto the table in front of him.

—If you're worried about money you get a job, she says. —Like the rest of us stupid fucks. You call the goddamn temp agency and you set up an appointment.

—But I-- Jakob says.

Freya gets the cordless telephone and drops it on the table next to him. —You wouldn't come to Texas with me when my goddamn *dad died* because you were watching your *money*. OK. That's fine. But I at least want a boyfriend who will go to the goddamn movies with me. I work fucking *forty hours a week* so that I can go out and *have fun* on my days off. Now I want to see you pick up that phone and I want to see you *call the goddamn temp agency*.

—Hey, Jakob says. —Hey. You can't just stand there and *tell* me to do something. I, I, I'm a grown man. I can make my own decisions about things.

—That's right, Freya says. She exhales, hard. —That's right. You can make your own decisions. That's true. But let me *impress upon you* the importance of thinking *very carefully* about how you'll make this *particular* decision.

Jakob opens his mouth, but he doesn't say anything. He looks at the phone book. He wonders whether temp agencies would be under T for Temporary or E for Employment.