“Okay,” I heard dad say, “so it was a bad idea to go.”

“Yes,” she agreed, “a very bad idea.”

And if I wasn’t supposed to have been asleep I would have gone along with that myself. I was curled up under the coats in the backseat, breathing really deep and slow. But I was listening, and I had to listen hard because they were talking so softly, especially him. Dad never yells, even when he’s giving you heck for something.

“It’s going to be all right, Lorrie,” he said but I could tell he didn’t believe it and if I could tell—

“You’re such a shit,” she said, “such a fucking shit.”

I think he said “okay” but I couldn’t hear because of the noise the wheels were making. She gave a mean laugh and I started shaking because I’ve heard that laugh, plenty of times.

“I can’t get their faces out of my head,” she said, “all those stupid, asinine faces. It was like I lifted up my skirt and pissed in the punchbowl.” We hit a rough spot in the road. “—show them for laughing.”

“No one was laughing,” he broke in, “get that straight. No one was laughing.”

“They were laughing,” she insisted, “like a bunch of hyenas.”
“Jesus Christ.” He lit a cigarette and right away she opened her window so I snuggled deeper into the coats.

“Elizabeth is such a bitch.”

“She is not a bitch,” he snapped, “she’s a good friend, she cares about you—”

She cackled again. “More like she cares about you. She’s wanted into your pants for years.”

“That’s enough.”

“Fuck her and her precious party.”

I wanted to kill her then. For what happened at the party, for embarrassing us so bad and for what she was doing to him now. I could have told him it was no good trying to talk to her, no use telling her please, please stop. My back started itching. It always does when something bugs me.

“Why are you doing this? What sort of pleasure does this kind of—of assassination give you?”

“You’ve talked to the shrinks, kiddo,” she said sweetly, “you should know by now. I’m a psychotic bitch. You should have me locked up. No one would blame you the least bit. Especially after my latest little performance. I think it was my best yet, don’t you?”

“No,” he muttered, “no, Lorrie.”

“I hate you,” she said. “I hate you and I hate little Pete and his blond hair and big, watery eyes and his stuffed walrus and if you ever leave me alone with him—”

“—no, no—”

“—do it again, only maybe this time you won’t come home in time to…” I couldn’t hear the rest because he was pulling over to the side of the road and stopping.
He was crying, bent over the steering wheel, twisting it so hard I could hear it squeaking between his fingers. My back was burning, I couldn’t keep still. I sat up and she turned around and looked at me and I swear to God her eyes were shining.

“Wakey, wakey,” she said and grinned at me and I started hitting her, hitting her as hard as I could and she didn’t do anything, just sat there and let me until dad grabbed my hands and pushed me back down onto the seat.

“See,” I heard her say, “he’s learning what it’s all about. Welcome to the real world, sonny-boy.”

“I HATE YOU!” I screamed. “I HATE YOU AND I HOPE YOU DIE!”

“Pete,” dad whispered, “don’t.” He was trying to reach out and pinch my lips shut but she was holding on to his arm and grinning that crazy grin of hers.

“Let him go,” she told him, “it’s music to my ears.”

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