

# Peach (2)

*by* Claire King

I don't see him all day, he's up in his office with the air-con cranked up, working on his papers. But then around 5.25 he starts up like a teenager - sprays on cologne, brushes his teeth, so when she gets in from Kroger he'll be fresh for all the PDAs. He brushes his teeth with hot water; I've seen him. What is that?

Ugh, whatever. She's, like, eight years older than me, and he's getting ready to retire. It's disgusting. Way to go, Dad, Mom would be so proud of you.

They love it when I 'stay over at my girlfriends'. Petting in privacy in the den, eating take-out, watching her belly grow round. He bought me the car when they found out she was knocked up. My consolation prize.

Today it's the gas station guy. He was a way down the list but he's easy-pickings. I'm early parking up, so I get a soda and stand out front looking like some kind of hooker. But the night's warm and there's a stand of gardenia right by me. Smells like heaven.

He's here at last and playing Springsteen. His eyes light up like a kid on Christmas day when I slide in beside him. He's pleased to see me, all right. Damn it, though, he's taking me to Joe's bar on Lafayette and Tenth. Shit, Joe's seen me here before with the biology teacher that gave me herpes. Nice twist on sex education, you asshole. But Joe's OK. He looks at me funny, then turns away, shaking his head a little, and pours the beers.

I'm a virgin, I tell Gas Station Guy. They love that shit. He holds my hand. He has stubby, rough little fingers. Good. Then I drink my beer and shut up. Gas Station Guy can talk for both of us. I guess not many people listen to him.

Tomorrow morning I'll tell him I'm feeling sick. Headache. He'll give me Tylenol. I'll tell him I don't remember a thing. Then he'll tell me nothing happened, that I was a little drunk, couldn't say where I lived, passed out. The usual. I'll thank him. Then he'll leave for work early, tell me to make myself breakfast, close the door behind me. I

won't eat a thing in his crumby kitchen. Gross. But I'll help myself to a little souvenir. I'm a collector.

