Before the Fall (Pt. 1)

by Deborah Oster Pannell

The skinny one was kinda cute. He had this little mole over the left corner of his mouth that she just wanted to suck. She kept watching it go up and down as he talked, the way his full lips kept spreading and coming together. She really wanted to kiss him, but that was not gonna happen. The fat one wouldn't leave them alone long enough for her to make anything go her way.

No, she just had to sit here listening to their bullshit about what time was it, where was she when the guys came in, what had she been drinking and all this other crap. If they wanted to keep her sitting in this little room all night smoking cigarettes, that was fine with her, but she was so tired of their voices, she just wanted them to shut… the fuck… up.

This morning, Samantha had been complaining of stomach pains again. It's no wonder. All that girl wanted to eat was fruit loops. It's not like Ruby didn't cook for her kids. Just the other day she made spaghetti and hot dogs, Justin's favorite. She'd made enough to last a few days, but that kid's such a pig he ate enough for three people on the first night. She tried to teach those brats some manners, but with the shit they learn at school, it's near impossible to keep them on track anymore.

She tried to remember if Samantha had finished her homework last night. She had helped her with her spelling words, and then vocabulary. That part had been easy. Somewhere around the damn math questions, her memory got fuzzy, as it usually did around numbers. Besides, what was she, some goddamn tutor? Let the girl learn to count for herself. She needed to learn how things worked. Get up at six. School at eight. Two dollars for lunch. Five days a week. Three guys a night. Two fists in the gut. What was his name, Tex? Rex? Who the fuck knows? C'mere Moleman, I'll show you what I know. Just get rid of Fatboy here. He's really holding things

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back. You want some truth? I'll show you some truth. Just give me ten minutes, I'll have you begging for more truth.

Sure, I'll take another cigarette. And a pepsi. Yeah, fine, good. Anything to get Fatboy out of the room… Ruby felt her breath catch as Moleman sat down and drew his chair up close to hers. He was leaning in, right to her face. She could see that mole really clear now. It wasn't really round, it was more like a misshapen square, what did they call it, a trapezoid. Ha ha. Geometry. There was a subject she really understood. The shape of things.

Detective Newsome. Oh, nice. Well, Detective, here's your chance. You wanna kiss me? Ruby closed her eyes as his face moved in to meet hers, and she felt the press of his warm lips and the thrust of his tongue into her mouth. Mmmmm… Ow! His fingers dug into her left arm as he brought it back quickly behind her, bending her wrist backwards in a most uncomfortable way. And his hot breath in her ear, You wanna fuck with me? Is this what you have in mind?

Ruby did not like this at all, not one bit. She wasn't even getting paid for this shit. Suddenly she felt like she was going to vomit. She turned away from him just as the hot bile came bubbling out on a stream of chewed up donuts and splattered all over the floor. Tex, his name was Tex. That was his name, the bastard. He had brought that friend of his with him, the greasy guy with the long pony tail. She hadn't minded at first, but the greasy one had a really mean face, and no one had said anything about two guys. Funny how a bottle of Jack Daniels can make everything seem a little easier. Her head was cracking open now. Where was Samantha and Justin? No, she did not want another goddamn Pepsi, where the fuck were her kids? Newsome, you have such pretty lips. C'mere handsome, let me give you another kiss. And he's pulling my arm behind me again, and it hurts so much. My babies! Where are my babies?? Ruby screamed as she saw Tex and the pony tail heading out the front door with their sleeping bodies, and then the room started spinning and the bile was coming up again, but before she could feel it come

out, her head hit the metal table and the room went dark with a dull thud.