

Molly

by Ivan Reyes

PART I

Molly stared at the woman behind the desk with a headset attached to her head, and sighed. A tall man that Molly knew as Mr. Anderson walked through the large glass double doors, walked over to where Molly sat, her legs dangling off of her chair, he knelt down and placed his large, hairy hand on her knee and said, "You ready to go, Molly?"

She nodded. He said, "Good girl," and took her by the hand and led her out of the office. "Have a good day, Mr. Anderson," said the woman behind the desk wearing the headset.

The doors opened and they went down some stone steps, Molly heaving slightly as each step landed a little farther apart from each other than she had anticipated upon looking at them. He still holds her hand as they walk across the recreational area, past the handball poles and hopscotch tiles. Past the window, now shuttered, where lunch is normally served out of. They arrive at the building wherein his class is at and he leads her up the stairs that lead to the heavy, metallic door, which he opens, a cool burst of air meeting Molly as she crosses the threshold into the unfamiliar, alien classroom which had different posters than her previous classroom, and a different smell even. "This room smells like a hospital," she thought.

Mr. Anderson let go of Molly's hand and she became aware of the fact that it was her hand again. She opened and closed it. "Pick a seat," said Mr. Anderson, making his way to the front of the class, sitting on his desk and crossing his leg over the other casually. He gestured to all the students. "You can sit wherever you like." Molly looked about the room, and saw some friendly faces, some blank ones, and some which looked like they might bring about trouble for her. This registered unconsciously within her. There was an empty table near the back of the class. That's where she sat.

"Class," projected Mr. Anderson from his deep, barreled chest. "This is Molly. Say, 'Hello, Molly.'" They did. They chanted her name in unison. "Molly is the newest member of our class. And, I want to remind everybody that this is an honors class. And that means that we set an example that the entire school follows. We are the standard for performance, as well as behavior. Does everyone here understand me?"

"Yes, Mr. Anderson," the classroom wailed.

"And we're going to be very nice to Molly, aren't we?"

"Yes, Mr. Anderson."

"Nicole, where were we?" said Mr. Anderson, pointing to a little girl wearing braces and pigtails.

She looks up, bemused and befuddled, blinks and says, "You were going over quotients and dividends, Mr. Anderson."

"Very good," says Mr. Anderson. "Who can tell me what's a dividend?"

A small army of hands shoot skyward, including Molly's. Molly answers correctly and the entire class is enchanted. "Very good," says Mr. Anderson and walks over to his dry erase board. Nicole glances over to Molly, Molly notices and looks down at the notepad on her desk. She takes out a pencil from her backpack and begins to draw on the notepad. Mr. Anderson with an almost otherworldly apprehension of the goings on within his classroom tells Molly to put away the notepad. "We are not drawing right now, OK, honey? Right now we're all listening."

"OK," says Molly and puts away the notepad and pencil.

"Good girl."

Recess began and Molly sat by herself on a bench underneath a tree. After school, the bus took her home. Her mother greeted her when she walked through the door. "Hello there, sweetie, how was school?"

"Mom," said Molly, winding up for one of her famous polemics. "It was awful!"

"Why?" asks her mom, sliding over a granola bar and a glass of cold diet root beer across the table. Molly began fidgeting with the granola bar wrapper.

"Because, mom, they took me out of my class." Tears began welling up in her eyes. "They said I couldn't go to Ms. Terrence's class anymore where all my friends are and that I had to go to Mr. Anderson's class where I don't know anybody. I hate it, mom! I'll never see my friends again because Mr. Anderson goes to lunch and recess at different times as Ms. Terrence!"

"You'll make new friends, honey."

"I don't want new friends, mom. I want MY friends," said Molly and began crying.

"Molly, they put you in a different class because you're too smart for your old class." Molly took a sip of her root beer, with small tears rolling down her rosy cheeks. Her mother continues, "I promise that you'll make new friends, and forget all about it."

"I guess."

PART II

The Los Angeles sun shone down from space on a blistering day. Molly was taking a shower. She put on her lipstick, and lotioned up to smell nice for work. She grabbed her keys and walked out the door, tapping her pockets to make sure she had everything she would need. She was a pornographic actress of some notoriety. She also had sex in exchange for cash, without cameras, as bills suggested. She did what she needed to do. Living alone in Los Angeles is no easy feat. It became even more challenging the higher up the economic ladder you climbed, and she had all the pressures weighing on her of a large, three-bedroom house in the hills. She rose to the challenge. Along with her sex related endeavors, she had a keen prescience for smart investments. At this point in her career, she only had to work perhaps three days out of the month to pay all her bills, and perhaps three times a year as a prostitute to fund her future growth.

It didn't bother her, being a prostitute, because she genuinely liked sex, most of her clients were charming types who were simply too busy to hold down a woman, and she could reject any client she chose, if she deemed them unworthy of her, something she was accustomed to doing on a very regular basis, however it didn't exactly make her feel extraordinary either.

PART III

She was born and raised in New York. She was moved into advanced classes in the fifth grade, and developed a slightly crippling loneliness, and her grades immediately began suffering. However, once she was befriended by a boy named Hunter, things began turning back around. He had shoulder length blonde hair and large teeth. They stayed close all through fifth grade.

They changed schools in the sixth grade, and started middle school. They could no longer remain friends. Social pressures pulled them apart. Though they tried to salvage at least some part of their formerly blossoming friendship, she was far more popular than he was, and neither of their developing adolescent sensibilities, hyper-aware of the opinions of others, could withstand the incongruity. Their co-familiarity was relegated to waving to each other as they passed shared hallways. But by senior year, they didn't know each other anymore.

High school was a breeze for Molly. Great things were expected of her.

Then, one day, both of her parents died in a car crash. Her being eighteen, she did not require any sort of guardian. After she graduated, she moved to Los Angeles. Her goal was to be a stand up comedian. She began frequenting the comedy clubs, just to soak it all in.

She sat in the back, and watched all the comedians fraternize with each other after their sets were done. She asked the bartender how she could get on stage. "Open mics are on Thursdays."

She bombed on the first open mic. She didn't have any material written, she went on stage for forty-seven agonized seconds then stumbled off stage. She thought the comedy would flow forth from her throat like dulcet music and that she would be instantly recognized as a comic genius, which was not the case. She came back next Thursday with some written material. She did better, however, she still did not satisfy the three minute time allotted to her. She went off stage after two minutes and five seconds. "That's all I got, folks, I'm Molly Hanes!" She began writing material in coffee shops. She found the energy there conducive to her creative powers, and if she bought a cup of coffee upon first arriving she could get free refills as long as she was there. When she could afford it, she also bought herself a scone. Sometimes the employees there would buy her her scones, because they realized she would refrain from buying them only after checking her bank account. She was a warm and wanted presence. She huddled up in the corner, where she could plug her laptop in, and if all the seats which offered electrical outlets were taken she would hunker down in a booth and write jokes on her phone.

She eventually wrote herself a solid fifteen minutes of material. She built off of that. This took her over a year to accomplish, and sometimes people would offer to buy her jokes, and she declined their generous offers. "Sorry, I need all my material right now," she'd say. She switched jokes in and out depending on the crowd's response. Eventually she could read a crowd, and she had memorized enough of her own material, so that she could change her set on the fly if she needed to. The manager of the club, Vance, approached her one day about becoming a regular. She took the offer, and was guaranteed three nights a week, three fifteen minute slots. She updated her Instagram account, with a selfie taken outside the club with the club's neon sign visible above her, the caption reading: "I'm a regular, bitches. Catch me here Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at eight, don't snooze or you will lose."

After her performances she had drinks with all of the other regular comedians there. They offered her their protection, because

her set depicted her falsely as promiscuous (though the fantasy and desire for promiscuity did exist within her) legions of desperate men would approach her after her set, offering to buy her a drink. But with a posse of alpha, macho comedians at her disposal, most men were simply afraid to breach that entourage. She began drinking more, and this led to sleeping with a lot of her friends. An older comedian advised against this kind of behavior, asserting that a lot of these comics were actually very sensitive, though they masqueraded as cold, hungry, thick-skinned tigers. She slept with the older comedian and he told her she would make a great actress. In her mind, this man had a strong sense of what Hollywood wanted, having secured various spots as a side character in a few sitcoms. She quit the comedy club soon thereafter, and began working as a waitress at a jazz club, Supe. She got to take home a to-go box full of food every night that she worked. It was an upscale place and the food wasn't cheap. The owner was also from New York and took a shine to her. He felt comforted by her presence. He felt they both shared the New York sharpness, as opposed to the oblique warmth of people from Southern California. She got an agent and began auditioning, though the auditions caused her more heartbreak than she had initially anticipated.

Four years passed, waiting tables until she eventually became floor manager. She was in charge of all the waiters and busboys and girls, and she wrote scripts when she wasn't at work. The scripts all got rejected. This was not quite as excruciating as auditioning because the meetings were nonexistent, and the disapproval was distant, remote.

She kept a picture of her mother and father on her nightstand and it gave her strength. She liked to sleep with the younger members of her staff. She earned a reputation, which she cherished. Because, she didn't have to do any work to get at what she wanted. All the confident, virile young boys already were privy to try to impress her, and the shy boys revered her and stayed on their best behavior at work. Her enjoyment of sex was already in the air, and there wasn't any effort required by her for it to be put in the air.

Arthur was a new hire who went by Art, he was asian and had his arms tattooed completely. He was six foot, and had long hair which he wore in a bun. Molly told him to stay after his shift was over so she could finish updating his information on the work computer. She brings him home. He laments sleeping with her. She laughs and asks why. He has an audition the next day, he says.

"What kind of role is it?" Molly asks.

"It's for a porno," Art says.

"Oh," she says. "Is that something you normally do?"

"Nope," he says. "It's a first for me. A buddy told me about it, and I needed the cash."

"Well you're certainly well suited for the part."

"Thank you. They're looking for women, too. They want all new faces. I bet they'd love you."

"Oh?"

She gets the address from Arthur, and calls them. They tell her to show up at noon. She does. They love her. They give her the part. They tell her to come back in a week, they'll do her makeup and wardrobe. "Just show up, and don't have sex with anyone until then."

She finishes the shoot, and they pay her \$1,000.

She keeps her job at Supe. She gets an agent. She wants to do more shoots. Her agent's name is Marty. Eventually she books more and more gigs, and she can quit Supe. One day after a shoot, the director hands her a business card.

"They want to get ahold of you. Call that number, if you're interested."

"Doyle, tell them to go through my agent."

"It ain't a porno. It's a different kind of gig, kid," says Doyle.

"Different? How?"

"Look, the guy knows who you are and he's taken a liking to you. Give him a call, if you're interested, or don't. Whatever. I got no horse in that race. I was told to give you the card, which I did. I'm going to lunch now. See you around, Moll."

"See you around."

She arrives at the address they gave her. The evening is descending and soft impressions of stars are starting to emerge. The clouds are turning purple, and the ocean is getting dark. She pushes the button on the intercom and the thick, steel gates open up. The house is shimmering in the nighttime like a crystal stuck into the earth. She pulls her Jetta onto the property. She rings the doorbell, Glenn opens the door.

"Close it behind you," he says, walking away from her, she closes the door behind her as advised by Glenn, and she begins to follow him down the foyer. His face is handsome and studious. He is wearing a suit, and house slippers. He turns a corner and walks over to a bar. Molly stops in the living room, or at least what she presumes is a living room, and he asks her what she wants to drink.

"What're you having?" she asks.

"A whiskey neat."

"I'll have the same."

He walks towards her, with a drink in each hand. He hands her a glass, and sits on the couch. She sits down next to him, placing her drink on his coffee table. He drinks his whiskey in one deliberate gulp, places the glass next to hers, and picks up two remote controls.

"Is there anything you'd like to watch?" he asks. "I have Hulu, Netflix, all the services."

"Is there anything you have in mind?" she asks.

He uses one remote to turn on his television, and the other to turn on his Blu Ray player. "I've got a movie all queued up, if you don't mind."

"By all means."

"It's called Yojimbo. It's a movie about a wandering swordsman. How does that sound?"

"It sounds delightful."

"What are your interests? What's your thing?"

"My thing?"

"Yea, your thing," he says. "My thing is movies and whiskey. I have over ten thousand Blu Rays, and that whiskey I gave you costs five thousand a bottle."

"Oh, wow. I dunno, I guess I don't know what my thing is yet. I thought it was comedy. I loved comedy when I was in high school." She smiles and looks into his brown eyes. She takes a sip of her whiskey. He begins to kiss her shoulders and neck.

"Keep talking," he says.

"But that didn't work out like I hoped. Then I wanted to be an actress. That didn't work either. Then I wanted to give writing a shot."

"What did you write?"

"I tried writing movie scripts."

He lowers the shoulder straps of her dress and exposes her breasts and begins kissing them. "Don't stop talking," he says.

"So I guess I don't really have a thing."

She gets dressed when he falls asleep, on the bar there is an envelope with her name on it. She takes it and goes home. She doesn't count it until she gets home. It contained \$5,000.

PART IV

"Molly Hanes!"

"That's me," said Molly, standing in a row, waiting for the gym teacher to arrive.

"Come with me," said the school's police officer.

Sunny grabbed Molly's arm and said, "You better not tell them that I got you that weed! Don't rat me out! That's totally not cool if you do, Moll."

"Don't worry, Sunny. I won't say anything." Sunny's face grew sullen and sad as she observed Molly walking away with the police officer. When they arrived at the principal's office, there was another police officer waiting in there. Molly kept her cool. The principal

looked absent, distracted by what paperwork was strewn across his desk, none of it looked like it related to Molly.

"Molly Hanes," he says, he smiles paternally. "Look, this isn't easy for me to say. You're going to be taking the rest of the day off. Your parents have passed away. They were involved in a car accident. I'm sorry for your loss. Do you understand what I've just told you, Molly?"

Yes, she did understand. No, she didn't understand. Understanding just didn't apply. Why had he asked her that? Does he think she's stupid? Was this a dream? Was she asleep? This couldn't happen to her. It couldn't be real. Not really real, at least. No, she didn't understand.

"No, I don't understand," Molly said.

"Your parents were pronounced dead on the scene," said principal Duggins.

"What?"

Principal Duggins lets out a long, sad sigh. "Look, I'm very sorry, Officer Wilcox will provide you with any more information you need. Grab your things, he'll take you home."

She didn't have any questions for Officer Wilcox. A detective was waiting in his car when she arrived home. He asked her a few questions and left. The funeral was three days later. The only other family who came to the funeral was her grandmother. A stroke had confined her to a wheelchair, and also left her unable to speak.

PART V

A month later, Glenn gets back in touch with Molly. Once again she takes the job.

"Marty, I'm going to be taking a few months off."

"I dunno if that's a good idea right now, I've got a lot of buzz built around you. Girl next door types are big right now. Big, big, big. You know how fast these trends can change, in this industry. It might be latinas next month, or busty girls. You gotta strike while the iron's hot."

"No, I'm taking three months off. Fuck the buzz. I'm not worried about it. I think that marijuana business I invested in is about to blow up in a big way. They just got Rosario Dawson to sponsor them."

"OK, then, hon, enjoy your time off. I'll keep the buzz going till you get back. I'm your number one fan, OK?"

"Bye, Marty." She hangs up.

She is on a plane to Paris. She lands and goes to her hotel. She goes to the Louvre and visits the Eiffel Tower. She drinks wine as the sun sets, eats fresh baguettes. She drinks in all the cafes she sees. She meets strangers and spends days away from her hotel. Smoking weed and drinking good wine. She rejects every man that tries to sleep with her, although she longs for a true and sincere sexual connection. After a month, she goes back home, informing no one, simply updating her Instagram account with a selfie of herself at an airport, with the caption: "au revoir sweet paris," to which all of her new friends commented with surprise, sadness, and crying emojis.

PART VI

Sunflower asks for extra dressing, and extra chicken on her salad. Molly says, "I'll have the same."

Sunflower is a new face on the scene. Eighteen, so she only has a few scenes under her belt. Her nineteenth birthday is fast approaching. Molly will be forty-one two months after Sunflower turns nineteen. "Who's your agent?" Molly asks.

"Marx."

"Ohh, he's a good one, hold onto him. He can take you places."

"Oh, I don't think I'll be doing this much longer, I just want to raise enough to get me through school back home, there's a community college I want to go to."

"What do you want to do?" Molly asks.

"Well I did want to be a teacher, but I'm thinking now maybe I just want to major in art."

"You sound like me."

Sunflower looks meekly down at her salad.

"You shouldn't be ashamed of what you do," Molly says.

"My parents disagree," Sunflower says. "It is a bit shameful, isn't it?"

"Well, yea, but a lot of things are shameful. There are more things that should be shameful, that are perfectly acceptable in the public's eyes. So what's the difference? Who knows? Besides, your parents are just worried about you. They won't care once it's all behind you."

"You don't know my parents."

Molly shudders, she wonders why after all these years it's still with her.

"So I'm guessing art is your thing," says Molly.

"I'm not sure. What's your thing?"

"I love the arts. Music, films, paintings, whatever. Whatever it is that drives the creative impulse fascinates me."

"Oh, yea?"

"I dunno, kinda, I guess. I'm not good at painting, but I love going to museums. It's something me and my father used to do, we'd go to the museum and then he'd get me a scone. It's stupid I know."

"It's not stupid. I love going to museums."

Molly continued, after taking a sip of her mimosa. "At first I just liked spending time with my dad, then eventually you start to notice things in the paintings you didn't always see. They'd become more real. Maybe at one time, it'd just look like a painting of a forest, but then it starts to look like the artist's sadness. Or maybe their happiness, or their sense of wonder and otherworldliness."

"I know what you mean."

"You do?"

PART VII

They split a scone for desert.

"Thanks for splitting this with me," Molly says. "I'm way too full for the whole thing."

"No problem."

They take a walk down the street, the sun is slanting warmly on them and all the buildings.

"Did you uber here?" Molly asks.

"Yea."

"Me too."

"Do you enjoy what you do?" Sunflower asks.

"Yea I think I do. Don't you?"

"I don't know. I like the attention. I like feeling sexy. I like the sex. It just gives me a bad feeling. Like something bad will happen to me, eventually, if I don't quit soon. You seem to be perfectly fine, though."

"It's just not easy being a woman taking her hand at being successful, honey. Seems like people want you to feel uncomfortable one way or the other, unless you're in the kitchen making dinner and popping out babies. What we do is a bit unorthodox, but at least we're appreciated. Don't you feel appreciated?"

"I do."

"In our business, women reign supreme," Molly says.

"But we're still getting paid by a man."

"Not always. I guess my point is that, every job has its thing. I know some girls who did this and then tried to have, quote unquote, normal lives, they had a bit of trouble doing that. Certain businesses didn't want to be associated with them. Men freaked out once they found out about their past. And what I told them is this, you didn't arrive at the decision to do porn easily. We all thought about it long and hard before we did it. We knew the consequences. Don't turn your back on that part of yourself. Fuck the businesses that don't want you. The men who don't want you are weak. Stay true to yourself. If you have that mindset, you'll be fine no matter what."

They share an uber home.

PART VIII

When the plane landed back in Los Angeles, she checked her Instagram. She had about one hundred more comments on her airport selfie she took back in Paris before leaving. She also had a new follow request. It was someone named Hunter. She didn't know a Hunter. She looked at his profile. She didn't recognize him, but he was cute. She accepted his follow request, but didn't follow him back. He sent her a direct message almost immediately.

"Thanks for accepting!" he sent.

"Do I know you?"

"That's OK, I didn't expect you to remember, we were friends way back in grade school!"

They met up for lunch.

When she arrived at the place, he was already seated. As she sat down she said, "What the fuck are you doing in LA?"

"Everyone said you had moved out here to try to make it. I was always envious of that."

"What are you going to do?"

"I just got a job at a Starbucks."

"I just got back from Paris this afternoon," said Molly.

"Paris, wow, what do you do?"

"I do porn."

"Yea, I know."

"Then why did you ask?"

"Kind of unavoidable I guess. It would've felt strange not to ask."

"That's fair."

"I don't care. What's fun to do here?" asks Hunter.

"Everything, it just depends on what kind of fun you want to have."

Their food arrived, two plates of tacos.

"What kind of fun do you recommend I have?" Hunter asks.

"I don't know, don't be weird."

PART IX

They went to the Santa Monica pier, walked along the shore. He bought a shirt at one of the local shops, to commemorate their day spent together.

"That's so corny," she said

"It's good to be corny, it keeps you happy."

"How does that work?"

"I don't know. It just does." He went home and she went home, they texted each other the next day. They agreed to meet up that night, and go have sushi and drinks. The night was light on sushi and heavy on drinks. Molly wore a little black, sequined dress and Hunter wore a polo, jeans, and baseball cap, and leather jacket, he had on a necklace with a piece of quartz attached to the end of it.

PART X

Molly's two months were up. She had been getting more and more emails from her agent, the offers were still coming in. Hunter comes out of the shower while Molly is on the bed checking her laptop and emails. He puts his arms around her.

"Does Marty still want you to come back to work?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"You don't have to work, do you, you have stock in that marijuana business, right?"

"I still have to work, if I want more than what I have now," Molly said.

"What's wrong with what you have now?" Hunter asked.

"I want more, that's all."

"You deserve more, then."

Hunter starts getting dressed. "I'm going to work now, should I come back here afterward?" he asks.

"Yea, sure, if you want to," Molly says.

He puts on his Starbucks hat and grabs his keys. "Alright I'll see you later," he says.

PART XI

"It's not going to work," says Marty. "Look he's a nice kid and I'm pulling for you, but I'm telling you right now it's not going to work. It never works."

"How do you know that?" says Hunter.

"Because I've seen it a thousand times already. You take some time off, you meet someone, and then, boom, reality hits when they have to go back to work," Marty says.

The music was loud and was irritating Molly.

"Do we have to talk here?" Molly says

"I didn't pick this place," Marty says.

"Who did?" says Molly.

"You did," says Hunter to Molly.

Outside it was cold, so Hunter put his brown leather jacket around Molly's shoulders. The music reduced to a persistent, rhythmic hum.

"I'm glad you found love, but the offers are coming in and they're perfectly fine waiting for your hiatus to end, Molly. This means they're interested. Do you know how many models get rejected, Molly? A lot. Like, so many, that we should take their waiting as a very, very good sign, a very lucrative sign, Molly. We can't sleep on this." Marty takes a sip of his cocktail.

Hunter grabs Molly and says, "Look, you have to do what you have to do. Don't let me stop you."

Molly says to Marty, "How many jobs do you have lined up?"

"I could have you booked till next Easter."

PART XII

"So you just don't care then?" Molly says.

"I'm trying to be supportive," says Hunter.

"Why not be supportive of US?" says Molly.

"I am trying to do what seems best for you!" screams Hunter.

"Since when do you know what's best for me? Since when do you presume to know me? We were friends in the fifth fucking grade, Hunter. That was so fucking long ago."

"Then why am I here, Molly? Why are we screaming?"

"I don't know, maybe this is a mistake."

"Just make up your mind, then! If you want me to leave, I'll drop you off, grab my things, and you'll never have to see me again, Molly. If that's what you want. I'll do it. I can do it, Molly. I can do it for you, if that's what you need."

"I don't want to fight!" screams Molly.

"We're not fighting, Molly."

"Yes, we are, Hunter."

"No, we both want the same thing, we're just frustrated, this isn't a fight."

"Yes, it is, Hunter."

PART XIII

Molly dialed Hunter.

"Whats up, Moll?"

"Nothing I just dropped off Sunflower and there's a few things I needed to go over with you."

"Ok, well I have a minute, just stop by my office."

Hunter's office was always cold, it was grey, and he had a large painting hung up by Charles Ginner, it was a reproduction but a very good one. It was a present from Molly, it cost her 500 dollars. It was to celebrate him being her agent for one year. Marty had passed away seven years ago, a sudden heart attack which surprised no one, because he ate like a pig and drank excessively, there was a rumor that he had also been doing coke, and men of that age should not be doing coke under any circumstance. Hunter stepped in to fill his place. He filled his shoes nicely. Marty had all of Molly's important contacts in one filing cabinet, so it was not difficult to sort things out after his passing.

"Whats up, Moll? Want something to drink?" he asked.

"I'll have a whiskey neat."

He pours the drink.

"I want to cancel my appointment with Mister Anton this evening," Molly says.

Hunter slides her the drink.

"Molly, that's a one-hundred-thousand dollar ticket. We've never had a client this big. This'll break us up into the next echelon."

"That's why I want to cancel it, Hunter."

"Molly, you do this every year. You say you want out, and I understand, but now is not the right time. I know that, you know that," Hunter says.

Molly drinks the whiskey in one gulp. "I'm just so bored of it all. I feel BORING."

"Look, I'll cancel it if you say the word, but if you do this job, it'll open us up to the world's biggest clients for our type of services. Then you do maybe five more jobs, maybe four, and you can open up that comedy club like you wanted and retire."

"Fine I'll do it. What about you though, if I open up that comedy club you won't have me as a client anymore," Molly says.

"I've got more high end clients than just you, Molly, I haven't exactly been slouching over here. I've got big things planned." He smiles confidently.

She puts her glass on his desk, "Fine, if you say so. If all else fails I'll let you be a doorman at my club."

"Bullshit, doorman. Bartender is more my vibe." He winks at her.

"I guess you're right, dearest Hunter."

"When am I not?"

"We'll see, I guess."

"I guess so."

PART XIV

A picture of Molly's parents sits on a table next to her bed. She had a stroke six months ago and the doctors believe she might go at any moment. "You have a visitor," says the nurse, and a young dark

haired man walks in holding flowers. He places them on the table next to the picture of Molly's parents. "I'll get you something to put those in," says the nurse.

Butch picks up the picture of her parents and asks, "Are these your parents? They look so happy."

Molly nods.

"How are you feeling, sweetie?" Butch asks.

"I'm alive," she says. "How's the club?"

"It's good. Adrienne is doing a good job managing the place in your stead. You made a good choice in him, Molly."

"I knew he would treat you all well."

"He does, Molly. Is there anything I can get you?" Butch asks.

"No, I feel fine."

"I brought a movie for us to watch."

They watched it. Butch left when it was over. Molly fell asleep. She died in her sleep. There was no one around who she knew. The nurses called the mortician to retrieve her corpse.

PART XV

They pull into the parking lot of the museum, the trees are bare, the cold winter has taken their leaves, they make a jagged web of a skyline.

Molly's dad gets out of the SUV. Molly watches him walk around the front of the vehicle. He opens the passenger door and puts his arms under Molly's and lifts her out. He places her gently on the tarmac.

Holding hands they walk across the parking lot and reach and walk up the stairs that lead to the entrance of the museum.

Molly's dad is starting to feel high from the edible he ate back at the house. He timed it perfectly. They pay for two tickets, Molly's dad hands Molly her ticket, and she places it in the front right pocket of the pink, flower-print dress. They walk into the museum and Molly is excited by the bright lights very high above, which temporarily blind her, she hasn't ever seen any other lights like

these anywhere else, they are fixed into a gold plated contraption, and they seem heavenly. They walk on, past a small cafe situated in the corner of the lobby. "We'll go there on our way out," her father reassures her.

The first room they walk into is filled with Charles Ginner. This is her favorite part of the museum and they walk through it twice each time they come. Then they look at the Van Gogh room, then the Rothko room. Then Stanley Spencer, Theodore von Hoslt, Helen Frankenthaler, Elizabeth Forbes, Alfred Sisley, and on and on and on. Molly's dad felt very high at this point.

Molly felt as if her head had been filled with a hundred different tubes of color, and shaken until her world was a comfortable fantasy. As they neared the end of the museum, the fantasy waned and ebbed. Before they left they visited the Ginner room once more, this was like a palate cleanser for Molly and gave a clean finality to the entire visit. Then they went to the cafe and her father got her a scone and hot chocolate. Molly's dad drank a black coffee, and also ate a scone, so that he'd be good and alert for the ride home.

They went home silently, enjoying each other's company, both reverizing in some sweet golden autumn.

Getting ready for bed, Molly wondered where her parents went off to before dinner, but when they came back they were more relaxed and seemed happier, so it didn't matter all that much to her.

Molly's dad cracked the door.

"Have a goodnight, sweetie," he said.

"Have a goodnight, daddy," she replied.

"Did you have fun at the museum?"

"I had fun at the museum, daddy. Did you?"

"Of course. We always have fun, don't we?"

"We do."

"I love you," he said.

"I love you too, daddy."

"I'll always love you. No matter what."

"Me too, daddy." He shut the door. She lay in the darkness, hearing the muffled chatter of her parents speaking in the hallway.

It was soothing for her to hear them banter. She hugged her stuffed rabbit and slept and dreamt that someday she'd find herself in a house as large as the museum they'd been to, surrounded by as many paintings as there were there, and in the dream she had there was also a cafe where she got a hot chocolate, with a scone.

