

Tainted Love

Lydia Schengrund

I. THE TEQUILA—MANIFESTATION, USE OF MAGIC WORDS, MANIPULATION

It burned. Everything burned. My tongue, my throat, my stomach. They burned.

I handed the shot glass back to the bartender, miffed and unamused.

Sweaty bodies swayed back and forth to the rhythmic thumping of the walls, and occasionally a head of bouncing hair, glittering with the light, unveiled between the shadows. As my friends murmured around me, my measly, hour-old fries gradually lost my attention, which was replaced by the woman's loose movements, enticing me to join, but I ignored my desires and pictured myself on the floor with her to ease my imagination instead. I wanted to talk to her. I needed to. She was everything I've desired without knowing her.

Her aura reeked like a sauna of a Korn concert, where every metal-head craved her; her short skirt bounced against her thick legs with each slight movement, and her multitude of long earrings dangled and dragged across her shoulders. They wrapped themselves within her hair, which should've been my job at that very moment. With each glint of light that passed over her eyes, my mind refused to break free from the shackles of the freckles spackled around her dilated pupils. Men were hyenas surrounding her, waiting for their next chance, and I attempted to fight the

animalistic urge to join them, but the chemicals flowing through my brain convinced me otherwise.

"What is your name?" I approached her with an outstretched hand. She took it.

"Marsh-a." The letters dragged, her voice like black coffee from 7/11 that pulled me through each dreadful day with a hint of honey that did not belong. The staleness offered an odd comfort that I refused to wash out.

The warmth of her hands embraced mine. Her red lipstick begged to be smeared all over me, yet the stale scent of liquor reeked off her, an opposition from her rosy perfume.

"Who are you?" I whispered into her ear among the blaring sounds. She giggled. "What do you mean?"

"I'm sorry, but I couldn't keep my eyes off of you," I confessed, "Where are you from? Do you go here?"

She softly placed her hands onto my arms and said into my ear, "Yes, I go to school here. I'm in entertainment and media."

Her expression played a warm welcome that tickled my brain, something I had not felt in years. She was the one for me—and only me.

"Ah, well I'm Ben—Benjamin. Ben, you can call me Ben. I'm in screenwriting here."

She grinned at my stammering as her loose eyes attempted to shut, and she stumbled around, tripping over her own feet, but dug her nails into my forearms to save herself. My skin tingled at the sight of her disheveled hair and crusted makeup. My mouth watered.

"Are you okay? Do you need to sit?" I asked.

"No," her words dragged again, "I'm fine."

She rested her head on my chest, and her bodyweight sunk us towards the floor, but the sparks within my appendages and my eyes and my brain told me to enjoy what was given.

II. THE WHISKEY—LOOKING WITHIN, CONTEMPLATION OF MANY POSSIBILITIES

"I love you; I love you; I love you." I kissed Alfred, held his head up to mine in the mirror to show him who was boss, and kissed him again.

The real master was displeased with my clammy hands matting his fur down, so he jumped from my arms to leave dirty paw marks carelessly on my stomach, a sign of his ignorance. Marsha would be here any mo-

ment for our date, so I scrambled to find a wipe, to fix my hair, and to re-tuck my shirt. Beads of sweat lined my upper lip. Alfred circled back around to run his silky fur across my leg and to push his head into my shaking hands.

“Wish me luck,” I said as I cleaned my shirt.

He stretched, staring at me.

Marsha’s car groaned to a stop outside my window, and I rushed downstairs before she could text me. The stale scent of a skunk’s ass pierced my nose as I stepped into the car, and she turned down the blaring music as my feet clanked a few unexpected bottles on the ground.

“Hand me one, why don’t you?” She opened her hand on the center console.

“What?” I asked.

“A drink. Hand me a drink.” That hint of honey disappeared and left behind the old, stale coffee.

She clutched the bottle I passed her but refused to take it.

“Take one yourself,” she demanded.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, Jesus Christ.” She punched the gas out of the parking lot. “I wouldn’t be offering you one if I didn’t want you to have it.” The crystals hanging from her rearview mirror smashed into the windshield and rattled my eardrums.

I opened the drink silently, shaking worse than before, and took a sip as I side-eyed Marsha to please her, but she drove in silence, eyes locked on the road. Her silky hair reflected the soft night sky, and my hands twitched at the thought of touching it which was all I dreamt of in that moment. My heart pounded. The heavy bass rattled the car’s frame, but the worn speakers had reached their limits eons ago and produced a high, monotonous ringing, warping Hope Sandoval’s voice. Marsha’s drink was already halfway gone, yet I barely touched mine.

The bright moon chased the car and dimly lit the desolate fields of decaying weeds. The animals out there ran free, lawless and uncontrollable. I reached out to tap Marsha, to show her nature’s beauty, but her blank stare was a dead man’s.

I yearned to be out of this trap, to wander the untouched land, but Marsha’s soft touch against my arm soothed my racing mind. Finally, she turned down the music again.

“Did you want something?” she asked.

I placed my finger on the cold window. "Isn't it so pretty at night? Don't you want to be out there, running around?"

She grazed her thick metal rings down my forearm, tracing my veins, and curled her tiny fingers in between mine. The blood in my neck pounded, and my cheeks warmed, forcing me to close my eyes and succumb to this gentle moment.

"And what makes you say that?" she asked.

"I love the idea of being so free where we don't need to go to school and get a job. I mean, I'm sure it's not great out there either, but all these responsibilities we have – I hate them."

"I understand that. I'd love to be a bird, like a crow. They're so smart and like to have fun. It'd be like living life alone as a toddler, but you actually know how to take care of yourself."

"See? You get it."

Her intelligence hugged my brain, causing me to squeeze her hand tighter. I wanted to kiss her but suppressed the urge, nervous that she'd reject me, that I'd be a failure.

"Come up here," she said, "look at the stars."

She knocked me out of my delusion and had parked the car without my knowledge. Flat farm fields spanned across the earth, our location nowhere to be discovered. I climbed out and sat next to her.

The stars were veiled by the distant city lights. She drank from a new bottle and handed me one. I inspected it, imagining the burning sensations trickling from my tongue to my throat, and Marsha watched until I took a sip, although my unfinished one sat alone in the car. I winced.

"Just ease up," she said, "enjoy life. Do you not like to drink?"

I grinned awkwardly, diverting my gaze to the dried grass beneath us, and contemplated a decent answer.

"It's not that I don't like to drink." I dug myself into a hole that reached Hell, "I'm just pretty busy. I got class tomorrow."

She smiled. "Don't we all?"

I shrugged.

We watched farm lights blink across the sunken horizon for a moment's peace; I had to escape.

"What do you like to do?" Marsha broke the brief silence.

"Um, write plays and listen to music."

"Who?"

"I don't know. The Killers." My armpits were damp, and I hugged

my legs; I needed to leave. The fields called my name.

"They're good, their songs are good. A little too recent for me, though. What do you usually write?"

For the first time, a girl sounded interested.

I looked up at the sky, shaking. "Umm—" another slip of the mind "—They're mostly for class. Like, assignments and stuff. Nothing in particular."

"That's cool. Not many guys do that sort of stuff, ya know? It's nice meeting someone that does." Her voice softened. It was almost too comforting.

I forced myself to face her, and her gaze traced my body. She pouted for an inexplicable reason, eyes wide and glossy, the liquor leaking from her pores, masked by that rosy perfume from the bar. She must have cared about me, she really did.

"You are so cute, you know that?" she said.

A phrase unknown to me.

Words refused to come out. Instead, I stared with my mouth open, like a gazelle shocked that it was attacked by a lion.

Marsha pierced her nails into my cheeks, and I mentally begged to be freed from my awkwardness, but she kissed me despite it.

III. THE WINE—LOVE AND LOYALTY, NURTURING, SMOTHERING BEHAVIOR

Elise's hot breath tickled my shoulder as I, and only I, typed our script. The classroom's flickering lights drove me to insanity.

"Did you make sure that Scene One had active voice?" she pestered.

"Yes," I groaned.

"Okay, well, Lucy had to screw that part up, so now it's more work for us, all because she's some sort of English major."

I looked back at her, expressionless, and sipped my coffee. "Okay."

She huffed and crossed her arms, but I ignored her annoyance and packed up my backpack to escape her unwanted authority. She trailed behind me as I left the classroom.

"What are you doing tonight?" she asked.

Her braided pigtailed encouraged me to yank them off her head, as if they needed to escape her too.

"I'm hanging out with my girlfriend."

The taps of her shoes rattled my brain; The thought of Marsha's face calmed it.

She excitedly gasped. "Who is your girlfriend? I didn't know you had one!"

"Marsha O'Connor."

"Oh, really?"

She stopped in her tracks to continue the conversation, but I fled the building.

I opened a beer to calm my nerves before Marsha arrived. Alfred placed his head under my fingers to be scratched, but I preferred to pace the apartment to organize the trinkets on my shelves and to collect dust bunnies. I lit a candle, and I aligned the spines of my textbooks. My white dresser had a scuff mark, so I removed it before Marsha could discover it. The Cranberries vinyl I bought her peaked around a corner, so I tossed it onto my bed before it slipped my mind.

She strutted into my apartment and flaunted her new tarot card deck; each card featured a crow amid trouble. We eagerly sat at my dining room table as she provided a reading, accompanied by a gift of wine for her birthday. Her tiny nose and blushing cheeks captivated me, as did the glints of her jewelry. Tiny freckles on her face moved from her animation over these cards, and I wanted to kiss each one.

"And this card shows the empress and her crow." Marsha pointed to an incomprehensible card. "Basically, it's saying that if we stick together and work through issues, we'll thrive together."

Her eyes lit up, and she leaned over the table to kiss me. The strawberry smell of her wine flooded my nostrils, sweet and seducing. Her red lipstick was finally mine, and only mine.

"I love you so much, Ben."

Another phrase unknown to me.

Showed her around my apartment for the hundredth time as she gestured to each room and painted a picture of our future—for the hundredth time. She dreamt of gray walls and two children playing together with a dog. She gently held my hand and hugged my waist, and my vision clouded with tears.

"I have never met anybody like you," she said as she picked up a screenplay, smeared in Elise's bacteria, from my desk, "What is this one about?" She sifted through the pages.

I giggled, embarrassed, and focused on the ground. "I don't know, it's about some Oedipus remake. It was for class."

She read through it, smiling.

I wanted to ask what she meant by her original comment, but I repressed the urge, but it arose in my throat again, and a little grunt escaped, and she raised an eyebrow.

"What'd you mean by 'you've never met anybody like me?'" A bomb exploded in my stomach.

Marsha squeezed her arms around me and laughed. "You are so smart and talented, Ben. Everybody else is, so . . . meh. They're bleak. They're nothing like you."

My face fell hot, and I repressed the urge to kiss her again. Her lips begged for it. They begged for me. I craved them. The wine scent pecked me instead.

"I guess," I said.

She rolled her eyes. "You're ridiculous. You know it's true."

I dodged her compliments and sat us on my bed, and the vinyl poked me.

"Oh, I almost forgot." I presented it to her. "Happy Birthday."

Her face fell. Another bomb exploded.

"This is a joke, right?" she asked.

"What?"

"Where's my actual gift?"

I scanned my room for an answer. "What do you mean?"

She laughed mockingly. "You think I like The Cranberries?"

Images flooded my vision of her excited about an upcoming Cranberries concert. My throat tightened. A ball was stuck. I could not breathe. I could not swallow. Did my mind deceive me?

"I-I'm sorry," I said, "I thought you liked them—"

She left my room. I followed her.

"Marsha, I'm sorry. Do you forgive me?" I begged. My thoughts melted together into one fuzzy clump.

She packed her bag in deafening silence. My ears rang.

"Can you at least tell me what I did wrong?"

The apartment was empty. The chair was empty. The wine bottle was empty. It was my fault, like always. My fault.

I turned to the outside for an answer. A lone rabbit trekked through the snow.

IV. THE BEER—AUTHORITARIANISM, RUTHLESSNESS

The walls were gray. The couches were gray. Marsha ordered the carpet to be torn out. The landlord approved. Marsha perched beneath the high, reframed windows; golden light shrouded her like she was an angel. For the first time, she wore a white blouse, opposing her typical deathly atmosphere, and I swore she would have been the most beautiful woman in any crowd.

I sat next to her like a phytologist consumed by a newly discovered flower as she read Vathek unassumingly, my brain pestering me to feel her delicate skin. She was mine, finally mine, and no other man had the authority to lay a finger on her.

“We should redo the kitchen,” she eventually said.

The kitchen grasped by a finger onto its original self: dilapidated, withered. The time I had spent in there held onto countless memories of stress, solitude, and serenity. It served me well, and the thought of it changing pained me, but what was loved must go. I almost wanted to argue against the idea, but she knew better.

“What do you wanna do with it?” I asked.

She studied the area.

“New furniture, walls, you know.” She did not take her eyes off the book once.

I nodded. “Yeah, I think it would look better redone.”

My stomach growled. Eggs. Eggs sounded good. I placed a pan on the stove and set down a few utensils. Marsha slammed Vathek shut. Her heavy footsteps stopped behind me.

“Are you serious right now?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t realize.” I did not understand.

She scowled as she tossed the book onto the dining table and disappeared into the bedroom. My prize, I could not lose her. I followed her, apologizing, and she hovered in silence in the room, back turned.

“I’m sorry,” I repeated.

“It’s just fucking annoying when you’re inconsiderate of someone else’s peace.”

Tears threatened to fall. I could not displease her, my everything, she was so beautiful standing in my original room. My Marsha, only mine.

“I promise I didn’t mean to; I wasn’t thinking.”

She pointed to the door. “Get the fuck out.”

"No, Marsha, what's wrong?"

"I said, 'Get the fuck out.'" She played no expression.

The door slammed behind me as I left to sit on the couch. Marsha's blank stare cycled through my mind over, and over, and over. I glanced around the apartment, yet I could not process my surroundings, bewildered. I fell back on my screenplay for graduation, a dreaded project. As the words mystically appeared on the page without my functioning imagination, Marsha's anger haunted me. I paced around instead, tracing my footsteps from the dining room table to the couch, to the kitchen, to the bathroom. I picked up dust bunnies and cleaned scuff marks along the way. The floor was spotless. The carpet ran one way. I faced the bedroom door and whispered, "I love you."

Silence.

I poured myself a cup of coffee, opened a beer, and worked on the screenplay again. Lucille draws a gun.

A piece of hair floated onto my foot. I put it in the trash where it belonged. Alfred sniffed my toes.

I imagined breaking down the bedroom door, my hands twitching. No sounds, no words, nothing escaped that room. I quietly played music from our speaker and rubbed my forehead in frustration. I focused on the screenplay. Steve shoots Lucille.

My imagination was handicapped. I sat in a chair by the window to calm it. Snow floated down. Another lone rabbit.

The night sky swallowed the apartment, constricting the open space. Marsha appeared to kiss me goodnight, her breath stained by liquor and mine by coffee. I blushed, relieved.

V. THE VODKA—SUBMIT TO A HIGHER POWER, GATEKEEPING, EARN YOUR PLACE

The stale coffee cups piled up on the classroom desk as Elise's hot breath poured down my neck while we painstakingly edited our screenplay. I pulled my hair and broke my pencil's tip when Elise coughed on me. She apologized frantically, and her pigtails looked extra pullable, but I clenched a fist and said, "It's fine."

I tossed the coffee cups into the garbage, like how I cleaned up Marsha's smashed glass the night before as punishment for coming home late from class. Tonight, she texted me again, asking when I'd be home, but it escaped me when Elise dropped our papers.

The moon, high up in the sky, mockingly loomed over me, a tiny creature. A deer peered into the classroom, found nothing of interest, and ate the grass instead, something I'd rather be doing than this. Elise crawled around the floor to collect the papers, and I lifted my foot up an inch to step on her, but she caught me too quickly.

"You're not funny," she said, her voice grating.

"When did I say I was?"

She crouched on the floor with the papers hanging from her lanky arms. Her glasses hung crooked from her face, and I imagined myself crushing them to pieces.

"Have you been going to the gym?" More useless words poured from her mouth.

"I always go, why?"

"Oh. Are you sick?" she asked.

"No, why?"

"You look thinner than usual."

I grazed my protruding ribs. "Okay? I would never say that about you."

She scoffed and put our screenplay in her bag. "Whatever."

Music echoed down the building's hallway from my apartment. My body ached for my bed, but Marsha greeted me with a liquor-stained kiss and a hug from Alfred.

"Why didn't you answer me?" she asked.

I opened a beer and hunched over the dining room table, defeated. "I'm sorry, I forgot. Elise—"

"So, you're cheating on me, right?"

"No," I groaned.

"So, why didn't you answer?"

"Elise dropped our play all over the floor, and it distracted me."

The beer washed down like water.

She threw a bottle onto the ground. Alfred sprinted away. I dug my face into my hands, and my stale breath nudged for some food, or some toothpaste, but Marsha lingered in the kitchen waiting for an answer I had already given her.

"It's selfish . . . coming home this late, especially for not texting me. I would never do this to you and leave you worrying."

"You know I've been working on this project all semester, Marsha."

She laughed. My nerves ached. My brain ached. I clutched onto

another beer and rested my head on my arms.

"Don't you realize how tired I am putting up with your selfish behavior? You lie to me about where you are, and you come home late from being with Elise all night, and you don't—"

The words droned on, and I wandered into our bedroom, and Marsha trailed behind me like a rodent begging for food.

"—And all you do is spend your money on fucking coffee and shit for yourself and nothing on me—"

A teddy bear sitting on our bed from our arcade date smiled at me, needing a hug. I gently moved it to our desk.

"—Can you talk to me? It's like we don't have a relationship anymore."

Beneath the bear was a necklace I bought for Marsha earlier that day. I hid it in my hand, my back turned to her, and closed my eyes. Her words shot me like a million wasp stings. Can you talk to me? Can you talk to me? I bit my lower lip. The chain heated up from my grip, and I dropped it back onto the bed and sat on the edge, hunched over my beer, and sipped on it.

"No matter what I say or do, you get upset," I said.

"No, you don't try in this relationship."

She stormed out of the bedroom, and her wine glass hit the counter from the kitchen. I carefully placed the necklace back in the box and stuffed it in the closet.

When I entered the bathroom, she slammed the bedroom door and locked it. The mirror shook.

I picked at my blackheads in the mirror and noticed how my thinly stretched skin accentuated my cheekbones, highlighted by my paleness. I blamed it on the long winter, although this sort of skin tone never appeared.

The shower promised a moment of peace and clarity, as did the beer. I drank more. The coldness spread throughout my chest like two cold hands. I longed for Marsha's loving touch all over me.

I took off my shirt, and my mountainous ribs greeted me. I sipped on my beer again. Elise was correct, I was thin from the gym. Maybe she wasn't so dumb after all. I sipped on my beer again. The shower's steam consumed me. The water burned my scalp.

The couch was my Marsha that night, my one and only.

VI. THE RUM—A CHANCE FOR UNION, COMPANIONSHIP, DEPENDENCE

Marsha left for the evening, told me to go fuck myself, but I still had to complete that screenplay with Elise, the last person I desired to talk to, while accompanied by those fucking flickering lights. I opened a beer and sipped on it, the only substance in my stomach after a long day, and typed. Elise lingered in the chair behind me, mute. Mute like a fucking helpless animal.

She breathed heavily, and Marsha's voice echoed in my mind. The beer weakened my limbs. My brain was mush. The words on the paper were not coherent. I could not comprehend what I was typing. Each letter jumbled together, formed new words, until I had no imagination left. Elise's breath traveled down my spine. I hit the keys harder. Elise sniffled.

"Do you want to fucking finish this?" I snapped.

Her eyes widened. "Uh, sure?"

She sat in my chair and typed, and typed, and typed, yet made little progress. Backspace there. Delete here. New sentence there. One letter per minute. I lacked the capacity to lean over her and demand what had to be written. My hands shook. My limbs were weightless. I wanted to pull her pigtails. They were so pullable. So yankable. She sat there, back turned, unassuming and pathetic.

"Just fucking type, Jesus Christ, it's not that hard."

"I don't know what to write!"

"Well, neither do fucking I!"

My throat stiffened, and Marsha was there, screaming, telling me how it was all my fault. Everything I did was wrong, stupid. But she was so beautiful, so dainty, she was right. She was always right. I cried. I choked on my tears and let out a little welp. Elise turned around.

"Holy shit, what's wrong?" she asked.

I hid my face between my hands, ashamed, but the tears did not stop, they could not. I needed to escape.

"I—I don't know."

She watched me cry for what I assumed to be hours, yet it was only seconds. Patiently she sat there, quiet, and when I stopped, she asked, "Are you okay?"

Her eyebrows furrowed.

"No, I'm fucking not, can't you tell?"

Softly, she said, "You can tell me what's wrong. I'm here to listen."

I pulled my hair, and Marsha's voice scratched at the back of my brain. The exit was right there.

"I don't know. It's just—I don't know. I've just been having issues in my relationship."

The ground captured my attention. It was too painful to look Elise in the eyes. How could I have let her see me like this?

"Marsha's always upset about something, and I don't know what to do," I continued, "I don't know what to do, ever. Every little thing, she's upset. I just don't know."

"That's not right," Elise said.

"I guess so. She's the best I've ever done. In fact, she's the only girlfriend I've ever had. She's so pretty, I can't lose her." I finished a beer and stuffed it in my bag.

"It's not about looks."

I shooed Elise away. "Whatever." I packed up my bag. "Just save the file, and we'll do the last of the edits next week. I should go home."

It was abnormal that she sat there and decided to listen, like she was obsessed. It warmed my heart, really, as if she wasn't so annoying after all. I stumbled home in the nipping air. The falling snow softly joined the ground, consuming the city's sounds.

A wall of must and liquor hit me as I entered the apartment. Marsha laid face down on the couch and did not react to my presence. I dug a few coffee cups out of my bag and placed them on the kitchen counter. Alfred greeted me. Peace and quiet.

VII. THE GIN—VICTORY, CONQUEST, VENGEANCE

Elise and I edited the last of our screenplay at my dining room table without Lucy. Marsha's absence for the night allowed for ease of discussion and imagination.

"What do you wanna listen to?" I asked Elise.

"Anything."

Modern rock pleased me.

Elise studied the apartment, scanning from afar each crevice, corner, and crack. I forgot to dispose of the alcohol bottles and empty coffee cups which left a lingering stench, but it was Elise and amusing her was not an option, nor was it ever.

"I see that Marsha likes her vodka," she mentioned.

"That's both of us," I said, "Why does it matter?"

"It was just an observation."

"Would you like something?" I asked as I poured myself a glass.

Elise shook her head and typed. I bobbed my head to the music and sipped on my drink, watching from behind her. The guitar scratched my brain in the right spots.

"God, Billy Corgan's voice is so good," I said.

She said nothing. Her pigtails slid up and down her back as she started to bob her head to the music, too. She wore a white blouse, like Marsha, but it hugged her waist tighter. Her physique was tinier, lankier, more fragile, like a teensy mouse. I changed the music to Mazzy Star, Marsha's favorite. My drink washed down like water but burned like Marsha's words. I grabbed onto Elise's chair and swayed against it to the music.

"Can you stop?" She threw her hands into the air.

I laughed. "Do you wanna see the apartment? I can't write this shit anymore."

"Sure? Let's just get this done first."

"No, now."

The trap of my apartment tore me down.

I gestured to the kitchen. "We just redid this the other week. Everything is new." I turned to the living room. "We put in these white couches and chairs, and painted the walls gray – well, Marsha did. I just approved." Elise watched intently, amused. She followed me down the hall. "And this is our bathroom here, also redone, and our storage closet. And our bedroom's here. Small, I know, but everything's redone." The door was shut.

"Oh, how much did it cost?" she asked.

"I don't know, Marsha's parents paid for most of it."

Elise just listened. No comments, no backlash. Mazzy Star still played. I closed my eyes and leaned against the wall. The alcohol wrapped me in a warm, fuzzy blanket. I sighed.

"Do you wanna finish the play now? We're almost done." Snappy, she was. That little snappy girl.

"Wait, let me show you my room. Marsha designed it, I think you'll like it. It's girly."

She stood in the middle of my bedroom, staring at me, impatiently waiting to finish the play. I fucking hated those pigtails. They were so fucking stupid. I wanted to pull them. I needed to. She was everything I hated without truly knowing her.

She was a teensy, malnourished mouse that squealed and shook

in her tiny white blouse and her tiny black leggings. Her black hair swallowed her flushed face like a void. Pale eyes sunk into her tiny head. I needed something new. Something refreshing. Exciting.

I kissed her with my stale breath. She kissed back, dry and crusty lips. Her tongue lacked direction. I kissed her fragile neck. A relief. A prize. Fuck. I heard Alfred jump from the kitchen table, followed by a creak and a moan. But I did not stop. Alfred could watch. Alfred didn't know any better. Elise's few seconds of comfort convinced me of something so superficial that withdrew me from Marsha. Was it really beauty? Or was it compassion and love?

An empty coffee cup bounced off the floor behind us, and Marsha stood in the doorway.

"Can you at least fucking clean up the kitchen for once?"

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