

THE TENANT

"I'm hooooome," I called for the third time. And for the third time, no one answered.

I can't believe the gall of my mother. I'm gone for the whole summer, she swears up and down how she can't wait to see me, like it's gonna be the biggest thrill of her year... then I show up exactly when I told her I would and she's not even home.

Typical.

I made my way back to my room, letting a little nostalgia hit me. Mom had gotten the house in the divorce, so even though my room at my dad's new house was practically twice the size and I had my own private bathroom, this was still My Room. All my pictures hanging right where they had been, my stuffed animals laid out on the bed, my glow-in-the-dark star stickers still clinging to the ceiling. My muscles remembered the feel of home as I flopped down on my bed.

Only...

What the heck was that sound?

I almost didn't notice it, but the house was silent and I couldn't help but notice it. Was it... music? It was maddeningly indistinct, but it felt like there was for sure some kind of beat to it. Not steady, but recognizable. Not repetitive, but rhythmic. I think.

Whatever. I started texting my bestie, told her how I was back and how my stupid mother couldn't bother to be here. We went back and forth about our summers, made some plans to hang out when she got back from her family vacation. She had to go, so I was back to sitting here alone.

Then I heard it again. I'd been hearing it the whole time, honestly, but the distraction helped me ignore it. I heaved a sigh and hopped up to figure out what my mother had left making the offending noise.

After several minutes of going in and out of every room, cocking my head every which way, pressing it to walls and listening at windows, I finally determined it had to be coming from the basement.

Only... the door was locked. From the other side. What the heck? I gave it a few bangs, but it didn't budge. On my third try, I backed up to really give it a ram.

Then it opened, and I burst right through and into the bare chest of a total stranger.

Lucky for him he had good footing and he had fifty pounds on me; he stumbled back a step and grunted in surprise. Me? I just screamed, because there was a strange man standing shirtless in my house.

There was a long moment of him trying to calm me down and me trying to shriek loud enough to pop his ear drums – and then coming up behind him I saw my mother.

"Mari – sweetie, relax. Everything's OK," she said soothingly, interposing herself between me and the intruder.

"Who the hell is that?!" I demanded, pointing behind her.

She folded her arms reprovably. "This is our new tenant, Trevor – and please watch your language, dear. I think you owe him an apology."

I took a moment to try to make sense of this. New tenant? Watch my language? Apologize! “What is going on, Robin?! You totally bail on me and all of the sudden you show up with this stranger and want *me* to apologize?” I put my hands on my hips, more than matching my mother for attitude. “Are you banging him?”

Behind her, the man just laughed at the suggestion. Robin turned and apologized on both of our behalves. “She’s not normally like this – she’s a very good girl most of the time. Just... could you excuse us, Trevor?” I saw her mouth *I’m so sorry* to him after. The nerve!

“Sure thing, Robin.” He gave me a once over that frankly creeped me out a bit, then shut the door and left me alone with my mom.

“Mind explaining to me why the hell there’s some guy living in our basement?” I demanded. I remembered, vaguely, that my parents had had tenants down there when I was little, but that had been a long time ago. What could she be thinking?

Robin sat down at the kitchen table, and grudgingly, I sat down across from her. “Honey, you know that the divorce made things a little tighter around here, and I had to find a way to bring some extra money in. Trevor’s a very nice man, I assure you. You’re perfectly safe.”

“Well gee whiz, that’s a load off. Did you actually vet this guy, do a background check, get references and everything? Or do we have the son of the zodiac killer in our basement?”

“Of course I did, Mari.”

“Great. So... are you?”

“Am I what?”

“Oh please, Robin. I’ve been home for over an hour and when I finally find you, you’re downstairs with hunky Trevor. Dressed like *that*.” I pointed accusingly. Then, as I looked longer... “Wait, are those my clothes?”

It was a rhetorical question – they most certainly were. A pair of my designer skinny jeans, my magenta blouse, even my platform sandals. The nerve of this woman! And who did she think she was fooling? Sure, I guess my mom looked good for her age, but passing herself as a twenty-year-old? As if.

“First off, can we dispense with the ‘Robin’ thing? I’m your mother, dear. Second off, yes, I borrowed one of your outfits. I was doing laundry, and I needed something to wear. We’ve been the same size for years, you know.”

“Well great, just help yourself. Anything else you need?”

She just eyed me evenly, doing that thing she did where she thought if she was silent long enough I’d break and confess something. I was spared the full routine, thankfully, when the dryer beeped in the laundry room.

“Would you mind getting that dear?”

“What? Why should I have to do *your* laundry?”

“For one, I’ve done your laundry since the day you were born. And for two, it’s not my laundry. It’s Trevor’s.”

I blinked. “You’re doing his laundry?”

“I was. Now you are.”

I couldn’t help but laugh in the smuggest way I knew how. “In his wildest dreams.”

“Mari, this is actually very good timing. I’ve been thinking it over, and honestly, it’s time for you to be chipping in a bit around here. I know you said you were going to get a job this

summer, but your father tells me that didn't happen. And if you're not going to school, and you're not working, and you're not paying rent... I need you to take care of things around here for me."

My jaw dropped lower and lower as she continued. "But... but... that's so unfair!" I protested.

"Get yourself a steady income, and then we can talk about lightening your responsibilities in my house. Until then, your job is taking care of our tenant."

"But it's not even your laundry! Why in the heck are we doing this man's chores?"

"Well, Little Miss Safety First, would you rather we give Trevor free roam of the upstairs?"

"I... well... no, I guess not."

"I thought not. Now since the basement is missing some basic amenities, we have to take care of them. It's nothing major, but I do expect it to be done, and done well. Do you understand me?"

"Fine. Sure. Great. What the hell ever."

"Language, Mari!"

"Since when do you care if I swear? And that's not even swearing!"

"Trevor doesn't like it. And we're still in the process of making a good impression. Now chop chop on that laundry, Mari. It's not going to fold itself."

I fumed. I seethed. I snarled. (Inwardly. Actual snarling would be weird.) Then I got up and went to the laundry room and began folding the contents of the dryer. There was a load in the washer waiting to be moved, and two more bags waiting to go.

That was how I spent my first evening back home. Folding Trevor's clothes. It was a Sunday; Robin said since she was home, she'd make his dinner tonight, but normally that would be my job too since the basement didn't have a kitchen.

I glared. She just went right on cooking. I hadn't ever in my life known my mother to cook. I watched her head downstairs in my skinny jeans, my cute little top, steaming plate in hand. She was down there for two hours before she came back up with the dishes, which I was left to take care of. She walked right by me without a word, smiling at nothing.

And through it all, there was that goddamn noise.

I swear, I dreamed that noise. I heard it all night long. I heard as I got up and did my workout, while I took my shower, while I got dressed, while I made Trevor's breakfast.

That's right, I'm apparently this Trevor guy's live-in chef now. Robin had left me a note explaining that he worked from home, and all the things I'd need to do. Breakfast was up first. There was a list of his likes and dislikes vis-à-vis food, but I wasn't playing that game.

"I hope you like cold cereal," I said as I let myself down. I had a key now – a key, to get into my own basement. The place was fairly Spartan, just a few basic pieces of furniture scattered across the expanse of space. The walls were unadorned, the floor bare concrete save for a small and shabby rug in front of the sofa. No pictures of family, no goofy lava lamps, no never-opened-action figures. It was a space with absolutely no personality at all.

Trevor was sitting on his couch tapping away on a laptop. He looked up as I spoke. "So you're Robin's daughter."

"Or so my birth certificate claims, but I'm not convinced." I stood in front of him holding out the bowl of raisin bran I'd poured for him. He didn't take it.

"You're pretty like her, you know." He looked me over way too familiarly. I didn't give him the satisfaction of flinching. Guys did it all the time, and the last thing I wanted was for him to feel like he could make me uncomfortable in my own house.

"Gee thanks, asshole. Mind taking your breakfast so I can get on with my life?"

"A pretty girl like you ought not to curse, you know. It's unbecoming." After his rebuke, he folded down his laptop and finally accepted the dish, eyeing it with distaste. "Not much of a cook, are you."

"You're welcome to do lunch yourself," I shot back at him, then made to head back upstairs.

"Did you spit in it?"

My eyes narrowed. How the hell did he know? I tried to play it sarcastic instead of risking a guilty-sounding denial. "Sure did, put in a big ol' loogie, just for you."

He just shrugged it off. "Do you have anything I need to worry about?"

"Just HIV, herpes, little bit of halitosis. The three H's, nothing dangerous."

He took another bite nonchalantly. "Sarcasm doesn't become you either," he said around a mouthful of bran flakes.

"Yeah, cool, whatever," I said, bored already of his company. I turned to go, but Trevor stopped me.

"Don't leave – you'll need to take the dirty dishes with you, won't you."

I sighed, annoyed that he was right. He slowly began picking at his cereal, obviously not in a rush. "Say, while you're down here, go ahead and put my laundry away," he said, gesturing to where it still sat neatly folded in the basket I'd put it in last night.

"Put away your...! No chance, jerkwad." I almost told him to go fuck himself, but... well. No sense being actually offensive about things. He just needed to know the score.

He shrugged, and resumed eating his cereal. The nerve of this man! Demanding I do his every chore? Frankly, I was a little offended he'd not bothered to put it away himself after all the time I'd spent folding it.

Things belong in their place. Man, that was bothersome. How was that not driving him crazy? The longer I stood there, the more it ate at me. The basement was so spotless that having this one thing just lying there was frankly maddening. Finally, I just gritted my teeth and stormed over. "Fine, you slob. Have some self-respect, would you?"

I carried the basket over to his dresser and began putting each item in its proper drawer. I could feel him watching me, but I wouldn't be deterred. Let the perv get his jollies watching pretty young thang do his chores. Biggest thrill of his pathetic life.

We finished around the same time. I snatched his bowl out of his hand and was halfway up the stairs before I remembered what I'd meant to ask him when I came down. "And what is that noise? You... you hear that, right?"

“What, that?” He pointed, and I saw in various places around the room there were black boxes fastened to the ceiling with brackets. “That’s just my white noise machine. Blocks out all that irritating background noise, lets me concentrate.”

“Well it’s *really* annoying. I can hear it upstairs.”

“You’ll get used to it. Your mother did. Trust me – before long, you’ll be thanking me for it when you see how much clearer it makes everything.”

I shot him a bratty look, then went back upstairs. Lunch was served in silence, just me standing off to the side waiting for him to give me back his plate. In the afternoon, he rang a bell to summon me. (That’s right, my mother had given him a frickin’ bell to ring, like I was the concierge at a hotel.)

“Yeah, what do you want?” I yelled down from the top of the steps.

“Come down here. I’m not going to raise my voice,” came his barely audible reply.

With another sigh I made sure he could hear (which was neither swearing nor sarcastic, so let’s see our picky tenant complain about *that*), I made my way downstairs. “OK, you got me. What.”

“I need the trash taken out. I would have thought it was obvious to you at lunch when I saw you noticing that the can wouldn’t quite shut, but you didn’t come back for it.”

Trevor pointed, though he didn’t really need to. The truth was I had noticed, and it had annoyed me. A man couldn’t live in such plain conditions without the one thing not in its place sticking out like a sore thumb.

“You can take that out yourself – it just goes out to the can next to the garage. Don’t need me to get you access or anything.” I pointed to the exterior door that lead out to the back yard.

“Well yes, that’s true. It’s just that your mother insisted on it. I assumed you took similar pride in your housekeeping.” He didn’t bother looking where I was pointing.

“Yeah, well you assumed wrong.”

“I suppose so.”

I shook my head and went back upstairs. How could anyone be so lazy? So demanding? Would he have asked me to take out his trash if I were Robin’s son and not her daughter? Unbelievable. In fact, I should tell him so. I’ll go right back down there and tell him.

I waited for Trevor to look up from his laptop, but he didn’t. He gave me less notice than he would a fly buzzing around the room.

I cleared my throat. Still nothing.

I folded my arms impatiently and waited.

And waited.

Oh screw it, it’ll be faster just to take it out than it will be to wait for him to pay attention to me. Though why he wouldn’t look up was beyond me – I know he’d been checking me out earlier, and I was damn cute.

“Was there anything else you needed?” I asked when I returned to put a new liner in his wastebasket. Not that I cared, but I didn’t want to be summoned again like I was his maid or something.

“That will do for now,” he said without looking up.

Robin got home from work early enough to make him dinner. I'd already been laying out ingredients, but she insisted on doing it. "Understand, he likes things a certain way," she said. I hung out with her and helped out a little. Not that I cared about how Trevor liked things, but if it kept me from getting my mom chewing me out or Trevor treating me like some dim-witted serving girl, then fine.

Robin had changed when she came home, out of the pantsuit she wore to the office and into a breezy little summer dress. It wasn't immodest or anything, but it certainly seemed nicer than was merited for making and serving dinner to our tenant.

Maybe she had a little crush or something? Gross.

She was down there waiting on him for almost two hours. Sue me, but I tried to eavesdrop, see if I could confirm my mom was getting shtupped by this guy or what. Still, quiet as they were, those damned white noise machines made my task impossible. Incredibly distracting, even though I really didn't want to hear them going at it. Really.

Didn't stop me from trying though.

"Trevor said you did a serviceable job today," she said when she came back up to deliver me his dishes, smiling like it was report card day and I was the neighbor's dorky kid she was always comparing me to uncharitably.

"Gee whiz, thanks."

"That wasn't a compliment, Mari. 'Serviceable' only means you did the bare minimum. I expect better of you. Trevor expects better of us both."

I slowly tried to pick my jaw up off the floor as she walked away. She went straight to bed.

The next day, I woke up almost dizzy. My body felt perfectly well-rested, relaxed and energized; meanwhile, my head felt like it hadn't had a moment's peace in a week. It was that damned noise, that's what it was. I got ready for the day, hearing it all the while, and when I brought Trevor his breakfast – eggs and toast today, that ought to shut him up – I resolved to ask him about it.

"I prefer not to be pestered while I'm eating," he interrupted mid-way through my sentence. I didn't know what to say to that, so I just stood there waiting for him to finish. I admit it, I stared at him to make him uncomfortable, figuring it might help him hurry up.

Turns out he could play that game too, and he stared right back. Not just at my face either, but all over. It didn't actually make me uncomfortable in the usual way, like when some creeper leers too hard. If anything, it just made me feel... I didn't know the word, exactly. I kind of liked the reminder that I was young and hot, but somehow, his look also told me I was...

Nunnish? I felt like I was the one who was ashamed of my body, covering it in bulky t-shirts and loose-fitting capri pants. It was like his gaze were accusing me of hiding myself.

Man I couldn't wait to be done dealing with this guy.

When he finally finished eating, I took back the dishes and silverware. "Great. Now can I ask you a question?" I stopped myself short from adding a *your majesty* to the end. No sense nettling him with more sarcasm and having him narc on me to Robin again.

“Hmm, not right now. I’m busy.” He opened up his laptop and went back to doing whatever it was he did. When I just stood there gaping at his dismissiveness, he relented – somewhat. “I’ll make time for you later. Just try not to be a bother while you wait.”

“And what am I supposed to do, just stand in the corner?”

“If you like. Feel free to make yourself useful, though.”

I almost asked him what the heck that was supposed to mean, but he’d already said no questions. So instead I looked around and considered what needed doing.

I spent the morning sweeping and dusting the basement, trying to draw as much attention to myself as possible. I figured if I was annoying enough, he’d pay attention to me. At first I was kind of angry about the whole thing, but I saw him frowning at me once and made myself chill a bit.

Shortly after Trevor finished his lunch and I finished the post-lunch clean-up, he finally folded down his laptop. Then he went to the bathroom while I stood there waiting. As he sat back down on the couch, he was just about to get back to it when he finally noticed my plaintive stare and stopped himself.

“All right, Mari. What is it you wanted?”

“I just had a question,” I said, unable to keep the frost out of my tone.

“Yes, you established that. Out with it now, I have things to do.”

“Why does my mother dress up for you?” I blurted.

Wait, that hadn’t been my question!

He nodded though, as if this was exactly the one he’d expected. “Ah, yes. Your mother is an attractive woman. I’m sure she enjoys the attention that gives her, just as you must when you decide to make yourself presentable.”

“When I...!” I planted my hands on my hips. “And what’s wrong with the way I look!”

“If you’re going to be allowed to fritter away your time down here, I need you to keep a civil tone.”

“I... yes, all right.” I took a slow breath to calm down. “So. What’s wrong with the way I’m dressed?”

“Mari, like I already told you, you’re very pretty. It’s not my place to criticize you for refusing to let anyone see it. You do make quite a lot of noise trying to get the attention for it anyway though, don’t you. Now, is there anything else, or can I resume my work?”

He didn’t wait for me to respond, so I just shook my head and started up the steps. As I reached the landing, I stopped and turned back to him. “Could you *please* turn that white noise off?” I tried to sound as pleading as I could.

“No.”

Robin was happier with me that night, though I wouldn’t exactly call it happy. I tried to explain how he’d basically told me to dress sexier, but as she grilled me, I had to concede that it wasn’t precisely what he’d said. She reminded me that I didn’t have to wait for a big night out to dress decently, and teased me that she shouldn’t be getting more use out of my wardrobe than I was.

Then she finished doing her makeup and brought Trevor his dinner. I was asleep before she came back up, my dreams blocked by the inscrutable white noise machine. Getting ready that morning was practically an out of body experience. As relaxed as I felt, my brain was basically on autopilot.

I made Trevor a western omelets for breakfast. To be honest, I didn't even think I knew how to dice an onion, much less make a whole omelets. But that's what I did, wondering distantly where I picked up that know-how. Maybe home ec hadn't been such a waste after all.

Trevor seemed satisfied with it, making an appreciate face as he dug in. It might have been at me and not the omelets, though; I'd taken his griping about my outfit to heart and aimed to be beyond reproach. No more bullshit about not deserving his attention.

Today, I was wearing a beige pencil skirt and a nice tight sweater. It wasn't slutty, but especially with the push-up bra I was wearing under it, he had a much clearer idea of just how "pretty" I really was. I smirked as I saw him staring right at my chest for a few minutes. Then he told me not to smirk, so I stopped – but I still did it in my head.

"Doesn't it bother you that your place is so... barren?" I asked conversationally as he finished up.

Today, luckily, he didn't make me wait four hours for an answer. "I'm not really a feng shui kind of guy. Why, how did you decorate your room?"

"I dunno, just with personal effects and stuff. Pictures of me and my friends, knick-knacks from when I was a kid."

"All right then, we can make that your project for the day."

"Uh, make what my project for the day?"

"Decorate."

Can you believe this guy? Not enough that I wait on him hand and foot, cooking and cleaning – now I need to spend my day blinging up his boring-ass bachelor pad? "How exactly would you like it done, and what's my budget?"

"Just how you said, with pictures of you. If there's any cost, I'll add it to this month's rent check."

I was about to make a plea to get out of this lunacy – decorate *his* apartment with pictures of *me!* – but then I thought about how my mother would react to it. Trevor's butt would be kicked to the curb in a hot minute and I'd finally be done with all this.

Plus, as a minor added perk, he'd never be able to claim I wasn't attention-worthy then, not after this.

It was with that spirit that I retrieved my selfie stick and got to work. That whole morning, I took so many pictures of myself I had to delete every other pic on my phone to make room. Some of the shots were just mundane, smiling at the camera in a cute outfit, some "deeper" ones of me sitting outdoors somewhere with my hair blowing in the breeze. I mean, I made sure I still looked good, of course – I didn't need another lecture on that – but I didn't over-do it.

At first. Then I thought about his refusal to appreciate me.

I started getting more risqué. Shirts that hung off one shoulder, exposing the top of one breast. I busted out my scissors and made myself a couple pairs of short shorts out of some old jeans I didn't wear much any more. One of them I kinda over-did it, my butt cheeks almost hanging out the bottom, but I reminded myself this was for a noble cause and grinned at my

camera. By the afternoon, I was going back and forth between showing off my bikinis and swimsuits and just plain doing teaser poses in my underwear.

I even served him lunch in those skimpy shorts and a bikini top, just to mess with him. Pervy prick couldn't stare hard enough – pretty sure I could've had a bag over my head and he wouldn't have noticed anything but the D cups I was sporting so prominently.

That bastard would never know what hit him when my mother saw all this. I headed out to Walgreen's and printed the whole batch. It ran me a serious bill, but Trevor had said money was no obstacle. More or less.

Back home, I went down in the same outfit as before – no sense making him think something was up by going all tame all of the sudden – and got to work. By the time Robin got home, he had an entire wall devoted to pictures of yours truly. It wasn't pornographic or anything, but it was damning, and it was impossible to miss.

I played the doting daughter while we made him dinner (Robin helpfully showed me how to cook a steak to his precise specifications). When she went down there (wearing a skirt and one of my backless tops that wouldn't show half the skin I had with him, the prude), I just sat at the kitchen table and waited to hear her shrieks of rage and horror at this man wallpapering her basement with pictures of her twenty-year-old daughter.

Minutes passed. No shrieks.

So I waited. And waited. Alone in the kitchen, with nothing but the scent of seasoning powder and that horrid white noise for company. It was late before she came back up, and I was almost asleep with my head on the table.

"Honey, are you still up? I would've thought you went to bed already, considering how early Trevor likes his breakfast."

"I know, I just... I dunno."

She sat down across from me. "I'm actually glad you're still up. I saw what you did today, and I have to say, I'm very concerned."

You darn well oughta be – your tenant's treating your daughter like his own personal pin-up girl. Out loud, I just said, "Oh? Why's that?"

"I know this is a delicate subject honey, but I think it's important we discuss it frankly. I... I'm worried you're going to bother our tenant."

I was too thunderstruck to respond. For the first time that day, I was glad there wasn't a camera pointed at me to catch the stupefied expression on my face.

"You see," Robin continued, "you're a very attractive girl. He knows that, and I know that. You have every right to show off your body, and Trevor appreciates it, he really does. But he also works from home, and he can't have you down there throwing yourself at him. Do you understand?"

"Robin! Geez, haven't you ever heard of victim-blaming? Rape culture? Don't you think you're missing the point here?!"

She regarded me patiently. "And what point is that, Mari?"

"That your sleaze ball tenant asked your daughter to pose in a bunch of skanky pictures for him to decorate his apartment with! That you're making me do it as a condition of living here! That none of this is my fault!"

“I see. So Trevor told you that you had to take pictures of you modeling your underwear for him.”

“Well, he didn’t come right out and say it exactly.”

“Oh, then those beachwear pictures must have been his idea. Is that it?”

“I mean... well, no, but...”

“And the poster-sized image of your naked hip visible above the suds of your bubble bath? Was that me and Trevor that made you do that?”

“No,” I mumbled sheepishly.

“That’s right. Now when you go down there tomorrow, I want you to think hard about how you plan to correct this situation. Are you going to be a sulky little tramp, or are you going to be a good hostess and do as you’re told?”

I looked down at the table in embarrassment for how childish I’d been. “Good hostess, I guess.”

My mother stood up and gave me a peck on the cheek. “That’s my girl. Now get some sleep – I want you looking bright-eyed and bushy tailed when you report for duty tomorrow, understand?”

“OK.”

“Especially if you’re going to be so free about showing off your tail,” she joked, patting my shoulder as she walked away.

Truth be told, up until the moment I handed Trevor his breakfast – a soufflé, today – I couldn’t have told you what I was wearing, I was so out of it after another night of that noise. I know I dressed myself and all, but I still felt oddly relieved that I hadn’t taken mom’s joke to heart and come down clad in another slutty little outfit.

Today I was mostly covered. A blouse, a nice tartan skirt that I’d gotten a little too tall for since I’d last worn it a number of years ago, and a pair of stockings that covered most of my legs so it wouldn’t be too revealing.

“I’m sorry if I made you uncomfortable with the pictures,” I said. He seemed to be more willing to converse during meals, so I seized the opportunity. Best to just address the elephant in the room – the whorish, half-naked elephant – and down-play the whole thing, move on with matters. Trevor wasn’t going anywhere, so I may as well make my peace with it.

“No problem. Some of them are a bit tasteless, but not all of them.”

“And I know how refined your taste buds are,” I joked. Ugh, and what a lame joke. Trevor seemed to think so too, and just grunted to acknowledge I’d said something.

“So... you want me to take them down?” I offered. I mean, I hoped not and all – it would be almost as much work as it had been putting them up, and besides, it was nice being appreciated.

“They’re fine. Seemed to please your mother, at least, that you’re trying to be accommodating.”

“Did...” No. Don’t ask that. “Did they please you?” I asked anyway.

“Some. I’m really not much for pictures. I prefer the real thing.”

I bit my lip. Was he saying... “Are you saying you want me to... pose for you? Like that?” Not that it was an offer. I was curious. No way could I come down and parade around for him in my swimsuits, in my bra and panties. Not even if he said please, probably.

“You’re not far from it now, Mari. Come here.” He snapped his fingers and pointed to the floor in front of him. I moved to the spot, just to show him I wasn’t too uncomfortable to be close to him.

“For instance, I noticed that’s a rather short skirt you’re wearing.”

“Yeah, so? I’ve got the body for it, don’t you think? And I like the attention.” I do? I mean, I guess I did. I’d just said so to him the other day. Hadn’t I? Or had he said it? Someone had said it. Either way, it was true.

“I gathered that you like attention for your body when you covered my wall in photos of it. But tell me, Mari... are you wearing panties under that skirt?”

I frowned. Of course I was. Wasn’t I? I concentrated, tried to see if I could feel them. It was hard – I mean, have you ever tried to *feel* if you’re wearing underwear just standing in place? It’s not easy. “I... um... I’m sure I am. Why would you even ask that?”

“You don’t sound convincing at all. And I asked because I noticed you’re not wearing a bra.”

I squeaked. I’d never before in my entire life squeaked, but that’s what I did when I realized I’d come down into Trevor’s apartment wearing a thin white blouse, my breasts completely free.

Can he see them?

Of course he can, he’s staring right at them.

Is he... offended? Impressed?

Aroused?

My inner monologue had no answer to that. I just stood there and let Trevor ogle my chest. I could feel my nipples hardening, tenting out the thin fabric. He could see that too, I was sure of it.

“I... must’ve forgotten it. I do that, once in a while. It happens.” It had in fact never happened before, not beyond that dream everyone has at some point about riding the bus naked.

“So you dressed in that, and expect me to believe you forgot your bra *and* your panties? Or are you wearing them? I suppose we never did determine for certain.”

I wasn’t sure. From the way he was looking at me, the intensity of it, his hand resting on his knee only inches away from my leg... I was getting wet. That much was sure. If this kept up, I’d solve the mystery of questionable panties if and when I felt the moisture trickling down my thigh.

“I... I don’t know,” I admitted. “Do you... want to check, maybe?”

“And if I check, what will you do for me?” he asked. For a moment, my brain spun its wheels in the mud trying to puzzle out why I would do something for him in exchange for him looking up my skirt, but then, I remembered that we’d established I liked the attention. It was only logical then that he’d interpret it as doing me a favor.

And boy would he.

“I could... take more pictures. Sluttier ones. Fill the other walls with them.”

He shrugged. "Like I said, I prefer the real thing."

I smiled. "Well, I could give you that too."

"Give me what, exactly?" He stroked his chin.

"The real thing. My body. My breasts. My butt. My vagina. Whatever you want."

He shook his head. "Mari, if you're trying to seduce a man, do make an effort to speak the language of seduction."

I clenched my jaw for a moment. First he complains about me using profanity, now he wants me to talk like a hooker. No pleasing some people, I tell ya. "Sorry, Trevor. I meant that you can have my big tits and my nice round ass and my wet pussy. For whatever you want."

As long as he was current on his rent, anyway; we weren't running a homeless shelter here. This was just my job after all, just doing what needed doing to pay my way.

Trevor's hand raised and his touch alighted on the bottom of my skirt. He couldn't have been more than a few inches from my pussy. I'd just trimmed it last night before bed, darnit, and I *had* to know if it looked good. I was certain it did, but it didn't *feel* like it did until I had his eyes on it, approving of it. Telling me I'd done my part as his hostess.

He lifted, slowly. An inch. An inch and a half. Almost two inches. That much more again and he'd know if I was covered or not. I could feel myself trembling. *Keep going, Trevor, you bastard. Look at my pussy!*

Then he dropped it, and my skirt fell back into place. Had he seen it? I didn't think so, but maybe from that angle...? "Well?"

"I decided I'm not interested right now. That will be all." He handed me the breakfast dishes, and without another word went back to his program.

I curtsied. I don't know why, but I did. Then I almost ran up the stairs, all but threw the dishes in the sink, and launched my body into my bed and my hand under my skirt.

I hadn't been wearing them after all. A fact I verified continuously, orgasm after screeching orgasm as I plunged my fingers and eventually my dildo in and out of my soaking wet snatch until my cell phone alarm reminded me it was time to make our tenant lunch.

I tied my blouse underneath my boobs, leaving it parted to show maximum cleavage, and raised my skirt a few inches. If he exhaled too deeply, he'd blow it away enough to see my pussy. If he inhaled at all within ten feet of me, he'd smell it.

Instead, he just had me stand off to the side while he ate, then dismissed me without a second thought. Like I was the least interesting sight he'd ever seen.

What was I doing wrong?!

When my mother came home that night, I decided to ask her. Robin had known him for twice as long as I had, and sure, she was old and clueless about almost everything, but maybe lurking in her brain was the perspective I needed to get the attention I so richly deserved.

I'd barely gotten done asking her how her day was when Trevor rang his service bell. I literally ran to the basement door to cut her off, dashing down the stairs so fast I almost fell. "You rang?"

"Oh, I thought I heard your mother come in," was all he said without looking up.

"I did," her voice came from behind me, as she descended calmly and – dare I say it – gracefully. She walked right up beside him, just out of his peripheral vision. It was like she was poised to be as near as possible without distracting or annoying him.

How on earth did she expect to make Trevor check out her tits and ass like *that*? How could I share DNA with someone so impossibly dense?

The ensuing awkward silence made it clear he didn't want me at the moment, so with reluctant steps I ascended the stairs and left them to it. I called down after a bit to ask if I could bring them anything, but Trevor said he'd ordered out. I'd sort of forgotten he had that option, and just hoped he didn't start doing it for breakfast and lunch.

Eventually, I conceded that I needed my rest to be in top shape for tomorrow's labors, but instead of going to my bedroom, I went to my mother's. She was involved in this, in Trevor's practically criminal refusal to appreciate all my body could do for him. Honestly, how had the woman signed a lease that didn't have clauses in it to cover this kind of thing?

It was well after midnight when she came in, humming a little tune to herself as she flipped on the light and awakened me, startling us both.

"Sorry, Robin. I just wanted to talk to you. You've been hard to get ahold of this week."

She sat down on the bed next to me. I could smell the sex on her. "But you understand why, right sweetheart? Why I do it?"

I nodded. "Of course. We have to take care of our tenant." Just to emphasize my point, I repeated it a few more times. My mom joined me in saying it, and we chanted it together for a couple minutes. When we were done, she and I shared a little smile like we hadn't done in years. Maybe she understood more than I thought she did.

"So what did you want to talk to me about, Mari?" she asked.

"Well... you know, sometimes I guess I just still need a little advice is all. I remember how you always used to reach out to me about how you'd gone through what I was going through, and I know I wasn't always chill about it, but... well, I guess I was hoping it wasn't too late."

She squeezed my hand. "Never. I'm your mother. You can talk to me about anything."

I nodded. "Well... it's about Trevor, actually."

"I figured. You've been awfully preoccupied with him this week."

"I know. I'm trying to take my responsibilities seriously, like you said. Pull my weight around here. Only..." Lord, it was too embarrassing to admit to out loud.

"Only what, dear?"

I licked my lips a few times, trying to muster the courage to say it. "Only... I can't get him to make use of everything I can do for him. It seems like all I do is bring him meals and do odd jobs for him."

"Mari? I can't help you if you want tell me what's really bothering you."

Just like that, the floodgates were opened. "It's just I want to take care of him so badly. And I know I can do so much for him – not just the cooking and cleaning and the chores and the pampering and the decorating, but... woman things."

I stood up, and in a rush stripped off all of my clothes to help make my case. In moments I was completely naked, my sexy, needful, incredibly *useful* body there for anyone who wanted to look in to see. Was it awkward? Maybe it should've been, but after spending some time with Trevor, I think she understood.

"I have this amazing rack, these legs, this booty, all just waiting to be taken advantage of, but he acts like they don't exist! Do you know what I could do for him? I suck cock so well

I've literally had guys shoot across the room. These tits – do you know I had a guy in high school offer me a thousand dollars cash just to look at them once? But does Trevor want to treat them like a soft fleshy playground? Hell no! I practically throw myself at him, and what does he do? Wait for you to come home. What's wrong with me, Mother? What's wrong with me?"

Robin held me for a long time after that, stroking my hair and murmuring soothing words into my ear. She told me that I was amazingly sexy, more so than she'd been at my age. That any man would be lucky to get his hands, or his mouth, or his cock, on my tits. That my ass was practically a walking advertisement for the joys of doggy style. That I had the kind of face a man couldn't look at without thinking about his cock slamming home between my soft pink lips. A pussy that, if it was anything like hers, didn't just fuck a man – it *milks* him.

After a good long bout of this encouragement, I indeed began to feel better, and finally got myself back under control. "So... so why doesn't he want me? Why does he choose you, Robin?"

Robin just smiled and shook her head. "He doesn't, sweetheart. He chose you from the very beginning. Since the day Trevor moved in, he's been training me, so that I could help train you."

"What? No way. He didn't."

She smiled and shook her head. "A few days after he moved in – a week or so ago, I guess, though boy does it feel longer – he sat me down, and told me about how he'd almost picked a different house."

She changed her voice, doing a funny little impression of our mutually beloved tenant. "You're a very lovely woman, Robin, but truth be told I prefer more conventional fare. It was when you were showing me around the upstairs and I laid eyes on all those pictures of your daughter that I decided this was where I had to be."

"Trevor said that? Really? You're not just saying that to make me feel better?"

"He really did. Wouldn't stop going on about how impressed he was with your tits, dear." She took one ample titty in each hand and gave them an appreciative squeeze, and I just grinned.

"So then why hasn't he touched them yet? Why is he refusing my service?"

"He's not, dear, but you're a young woman. You don't understand what service really means. To you, 'pulling your weight' meant doing the absolute minimum to get what you needed. Right?"

"I... I..." It was true. All I'd been thinking about was how easily I could skate by and let my parents do all the real work of providing for me. Taking the easiest possible route to getting Trevor's cock in me.

"And with Trevor, how have you been offering yourself to him? On *his* terms? When *he* wants your pussy? Or have you been trying to push it on him when *you* want your cunt filled?"

"Oh my goodness!" I non-swears (just in case Trevor might hear me through the floorboards). "I was, wasn't I. That wasn't serving at all, that was about being serviced! And he tried so hard to be patient teaching me, letting me wait around, show myself off, all so I could see I needed to be there when I was wanted. I'm so embarrassed!"

“Mari,” Robin interrupted. “Mari, look at me. It’s all right. Nobody thinks less of you. He told me that you’d probably need some time to figure things out, and he was right. Of course. You haven’t disappointed anybody, understand?”

I nodded, sniffing.

“Good. Now you get those fingers out of your pussy so it’s good and ready for when Trevor needs it, understand?” I blushed and gave an awkward laugh; I hadn’t even realized I’d been doing touching myself the whole time we’d been talking.

Then, for the first time since I was a little girl, I curled up in bed beside my mother. She really was lovely, and I could only hope I’d still look that sexy when I was her age, that Trevor would still have a desire to make use of me. I wondered if he’d ever want to watch Robin and I touch one another. Go down on each other. Perform for him together, just for his viewing delight.

I hoped so. My mom was a pretty great lady, all things considered. She deserved to serve Trevor just as much as I did. I gave her a kiss just to see what it would feel like, and for several minutes, she and I made out right there in her bed, both of us imagining Trevor was there watching us, his cock growing until he told us how he wanted us to get him off.

“Get some sleep, Mari,” she said at last, patting my ass gently. “Trevor wants you at your best tomorrow.”

I nodded. “Good night, Mom.”

“Good night, dear.”

I fell asleep the moment my eyes closed, adrift on a sea whose waves were made of some inaudible sound, trembling and thrumming through my entire body and breaking over and over on the shores of my mind.