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(LAY BY CATHLEEN ALBERT

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Luke found Jenna with her legs spread in a sundress as she performed her usual magic of turning mud into gold. The late afternoon light fell on the red clay sliding up her wheel. Her calves shone. When he came closer, Luke saw that she had shaved her legs and put on some sort of oil to make them gleam. Her feet were in their sturdy sandals, but she'd painted her toenails Fire Engine Red. Later, he found the bottle on the nightstand.

Jenna never painted anything on herself.

What she looked like when she woke up was how she'd look for the rest of the day. Her eyes were her eyes; that was it. She let her eyebrows be even though they were struggling to meet, and she allowed the rest of the hair on her body to grow as well. Sundresses showed off the brown hair that curled, like small birds' nests, under her arms. Until that afternoon, her calves had been covered with dark curlies of hair, which she didn't hide in colored tights the way some women who shopped at the co-op did.

Jenna didn't like to wear tights or pantyhose or underwear. She walked around at home with her muff exposed. She'd even driven to the Dairymart in nothing but a sundress and sandals. If Luke reminded her to put on some panties, she'd tug on these big cotton things as if she were being asked to wear a diaper, as if she were a naked baby who longed to run free. "Oh, you shaved," he said carefully.

She kept her head down, working. "Yeah, I got tired of it," Jenna sighed. Apparently, she didn't like how the pot was coming because she sat back and let the wheel spin the clay into nothing. As he chopped up carrots and zucchini for dinner, Luke tried to imagine Jenna shaving her legs, then deciding to paint her nails. She must have gone out to get the equipment. Baby Oil. Nail polish. What went through her head? I'm bored, I think I'll paint my toenails red. Maybe she'd gone a little stir-crazy. They didn't go out much, and he was at work ten hours a day. Luckily, nothing was irreparable. She had bought a small bottle of nail polish remover too; he'd found it in the medicine cabinet behind the Melatonin.

Next to Jenna in bed, Luke lay on his back breathing slowly in through his nose, out through his mouth. Breathe in calm. Breathe out tension. Before he'd gotten to his fifth cleansing breath, she'd slung one of her legs over his.

"Goodnight," Jenna said, fists curled under her chin.

He patted her thigh, then found his hand going down to the oily calve. It felt luxurious, glamorous. Luke caressed it, caressed her, roused Jenna out of her sleep kissing her all over until she moaned deliciously.

"I'll be right back," she said, hurrying to the bathroom.

As soon as she slid onto the sheets again, Luke held her legs in the air and pushed inside. He thought of

those red toenails sticking out of spiked heels and let out a deep groan.

"That was great," Jenna said afterwards.

"It was great," Luke echoed her, his voice high with surprise. He had really gotten off, rocking deeply into her body. He even felt the rubber dome of her diaphragm. Maybe it was all right then: the gleaming skin and red toes. Maybe she had wanted to give him a treat, and that wasn't so bad. They'd been together for two years, lived together the past year and a half; it seemed reasonable that Jenna might try to spice things up a little.

The rest of the week went by peacefully, but on Friday she showed up at work. Jenna never came to his office. She hated the smell of paperwork, and the cubicles made us look like trapped rats, she said. But there was Jenna, her hair in a sleek, elfin cut, which framed her face. Her eyes looked darker and bigger.

"Are you wearing make-up?" Luke whispered.

Jenna wrinkled her nose. "Do you like it?" she said, putting her hands up to her hair.

"Very stylish." He thought of the braid as thick as rope down the back of her neck. Now there was nothing. "But I have to . . ." He looked vaguely at the piles of papers on his desk. "I have to finish what I was doing."

"No problem." She leaned in to give him a kiss. When he put his lips to hers, she slipped her tongue in and out of his mouth. With a toss of her hand, Jenna bounced out of the office.

Luke felt keyed up the rest of the afternoon as though he'd been drinking too much coffee, which he hadn't been. Coffee was strictly a weekend indulgence. On workdays, he stuck to chamomile, or Lemon Zinger if he needed a lift. Wine also was reserved for the weekend, but on the way home, he found himself stopping for a bottle of Cabernet. "You're kidding," Jenna said, leaving her wheel when he came in. "You going to wine and dine me, Mister?"

They started kissing as soon as the dinner plates—mushroom ravioli and broccoli rabe—were cleared, and they kissed their way to the bedroom. He threw her down on the bed and unzipped his pants. Jenna laughed. "Oh, my," she said. "Be gentle with me."

Within seconds, Luke had her sundress off, a pair of green and black underpants at her ankles. His shirt was still on, and his pants were around his knees. The two of them never approached sex like this. They always had all their clothes off, for one thing. His arms pressing on top of hers, he thrust inside. Jenna struggled, legs parted but feet bound together by the tight underwear.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," she said. "I'm not ready!" Luke held her beneath him, his eyes closed. He was all the way in and couldn't stop. She had to realize that. He couldn't.

Jenna tried to squirm out from under him, but he had her pinned. With a quick movement, she pulled her arms free and reached up, squeezing his neck. For a moment, his pleasure increased. The pressure only made him harder as though she were forcing him into a new shape. But he couldn't breathe, so he rolled off, panting. "Jesus Christ!" she yelled. "What's the matter with you?" Once he caught his breath, Luke leaned over to touch her, but she turned away. He felt awful until he understood what was going on with him. "I want us to make a baby," he said and lay back with a smile. That's what this was all about. He was moved by a primordial urge. He wanted Jenna big with child, her belly swelling as she squatted on her potter's stool, creating life out of blocks of clay. Luke stroked her back in slow circles as though he were stoking a fire. "You'd make a wonderful mother," he murmured. "Powerful, loving, giving."

"Let's just get some sleep, okay," she said, pulling the blanket over her head. Jenna must have been exhausted: she was still asleep when Luke left for work in the morning. When he came home that night, the wheel and kiln were gone although she had left everything she'd bought for their apartment: a plant-stand, a wooden heart, the woven rug in the entryway. He walked into the bedroom and saw the unmade bed, twisted sheets, open doors to the closet. Then he noticed the clumps of clay on the windowsill. Coming closer, he saw that they were people, red-brown people, naked, on their backs, on their stomachs, swollen and lumpy, their eyes closed, their mouths small holes. Jenna had formed them quickly—you could see her pinch marks—and hadn't bothered to fire any before she'd gotten someone—another man?—to cart away her kiln. Luke picked one up, and its head broke from its body. He tried to

	stick it back on, but the clay already had gone dry. He lay the decapitated baby gently next to its brothers and sisters. He knew that if he touched them, they'd all collapse in his hands.
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