

AMERICAN AS APPLE PIE

Saturday

“Rae,” I said to my friend when she picked up her phone, “The girl’s mother just called.” I was having an anxiety attack. “As I was finishing the kids’ breakfast.” It was Saturday morning.

“She did? Oh, my God,” Rae said. This was the latest news of my husband, Scott’s affair with a sixteen-year-old warehouse worker named Rosie.

“She wanted to talk to her daughter,” I said. “I told her I had no idea where her daughter was, but she insisted that Rosie told her she was watching her boss’s kids today. Scott told me he was going to hang out with the guys and go to a basketball game; he’s a better liar than Nixon,” I’d wedged the phone between my chin and shoulder as I rinsed a breakfast dish in the sink.

“The little snake. I hope he gets arrested,” Rae said.

“When she finally figured the two were off somewhere together, she said that it was against the law and that her husband would be furious. I was so stunned when she said that I said, “Perhaps just frightening Scott would be enough.” I loved my husband, and I didn’t want him arrested.

“Good thinking, girl.”

The kids were outside playing on the monkey bars and jungle gym, the baby, Corey, was in a playpen with toys and I watched them through the kitchen window. “I can’t wait until he comes home. Should be real interesting.”

“What are you going do?” Rae said.

“I don’t know. I’m still in a state of shock. I have a hair appointment this afternoon. Should I cancel it?” I asked.

“No, go. You need it. I’ll watch the kids. What time?”

“Two.”

At the hairdresser’s I let the stylist cut my hair into some new bob. I looked like one of the original Beatles right off the Ed Sullivan show, but the hairdresser said it was the latest look.

“Wow,” Rae said when I returned home. “You did it. It’s adorable.”

“Why do women always get their hair cut when they’re upset?” I asked.

I made the kids cocoa and that evening, after they were bedded down, Scott came home.

“I really like her,” he announced.

“Oh, really?” I said. She’s sixteen.” Scott was thirty-one, but I didn’t remind him.

“She’s very mature. What the hell did you do to your hair?”

Then the phone rang and when I answered it was the girl’s father. I signaled Scott to go pick up the extension and I stayed on to listen.

“I could have you arrested,” the father said, “but I don’t want Rosie to go through the embarrassment at school. I spoke to her and she begged me not to. Keep away from my her or I will.” I smiled as I eased the receiver down.

When I reported all this news to Rae, she said, “I wonder what Scott will do. God, this is one big soap opera, Jill.”

“Scott said she’s sixteen, not under, which is legal.”

“Leave it to him to check the Massachusetts rules.” Rae shook her head in wonderment.

#

Tuesday

I had to go solicit ads or donations to honor my friend, Polly Michenberg, who died of breast cancer four years ago. She had three little children and went to the doctor when she was breastfeeding the baby and said she felt a lump. Dr. Shapiro examined her and said it was a clogged node, but she insisted that he reexamine her, and then Shapiro decided, “Polly I feel a tumor.” My friends and I all took turns taking her to Dana Farber, washing her hair, and baby sitting her kids, until she passed away and now once a year we have a gala event and raise money in her name for breast cancer. So on Tuesday I went to the first place on my list---D’Oreo’s, an Italian restaurant located in a strip mall on the busy route with the shopping center. My kids were with the college girl next door playing with Play-Doh and watching *Sesame* Street with plans for McDonald’s and it was windy and rainy. I asked Sal D’Oreo, a big guy with black hair, if he would buy an ad in

Polly's event book or donate dinner for two. He was very nice and said, sure. The cocktail lounge in front was humming and while I waited for D'Oreo to go in back and write me a check, I stood by the bar.

Three guys in trench coats were standing at the corner of the bar drinking beer. One of them winked at me and asked if I wanted a cocktail.

"No," I said. "I can't drink when I'm trying to sell advertisements. Thanks."

"Oh, that's what you're doing," he said. "We're salesmen too. What's your name?"

"Jill."

"I like your hairdo, Jill. Real hip. I'm Bob. This here is Roscoe and Eddie, my buddies. We work for the same company, selling walk-in tubs for geezers."

"Oh, really?" I said and smiled at him. "I wasn't sure about my hair."

"Looks good on you. You have a pretty face."

"Thanks," I said and blushed.

"Why don't you come along with me while I drop my friends off so we can talk after and I can get to know you better," Bob said.

After I swallowed hard, I said, "What about my car?" waving to the outside.

"You can pick it up later," Bob said.

Just then the restaurant owner came out and gave me a check for an ad as well as a gift certificate for two. "Thanks so much; it's very generous of you," I said.

“My brother’s girl died of breast cancer last year. I know.” He shook his head and his eyes drooped in sadness.

I asked, “May I leave my car in your parking lot for a bit?”

“No problem,” he said.

“No one will bother it. Come on,” Bob said with a warm smile.

So I got into a car with three men I didn’t know. Every lecture my parents had ever given me, every lecture I planned to give my kids started pounding in my head:

Don’t talk to strange men.

Why was I doing this? But then, I already knew. I was lonely, needy, desperate, hurt----the whole bag of reasons.

“I don’t think this will take too long,” Bob said. I slid into the front seat next to him. In the back Roscoe and Eddie smirked at each other.

“You okay?” he said, glancing at me.

“I’m fine,” I lied.

“You sure?” He was kind of cute with dirty blond hair and dimples. “You should put your seatbelt on.” I heard the automatic door locks

I shook my head and looked out the window. The road was lined with Target, Home Depot, and fast food joints. “Where you from?” Roscoe asked. He had a black mustache and an accent I couldn’t place.

“Oh, I’m from Underhill.”

“Real nice area,” Roscoe said. He shrugged at Eddie as if to say, “Wouldn’t you know?”

Yes, I like it there.”

Rain splattered on the road. What had I been thinking? If I tried to jump out, I’d get hurt, or I could wait for a red light and then I’d get soaked. I could just tell Bob to stop, that I’d changed my mind. My stomach felt queasy. Trees, grass, and a teenage kid standing in a brown leather jacket, smoking a butt. My heart pounded, but I sat still.

The car was a late model and dark green; the ashtray overflowed with wads of gum and crumpled candy wrappers. Bob was older than me but not by much. In the back seat, Roscoe and Eddie were whispering.

Bob dropped off Eddie first. He was heavy-set, carried a folded newspaper, and lived in a house with a white picket fence. We hadn’t exchange one word. He waved as he mucked across his front lawn.

We drove on, into another suburban neighborhood. I began to relax a bit. It really looked like he was taking his friends home. I sat in my red plaid cape with my short brown hair framing my face. The cape had a trench coat fabric inside so it was reversible. I kept questioning my decision to get in the car. Maybe it was because Scott had disliked my new short haircut and Bob had thought it was hip. Maybe it was because of the sixteen-year-old. Maybe I was pissed and didn’t care. I touched the unbuckled seat belt and held the door handle. Maybe I was losing my mind and someone would lock me up, Frances Farmer style, in a mental hospital on a hill. All curled up in a corner. Finally, Bob stopped in front of another clapboard house.

Roscoe leaned forward and grabbed the front seat. His eyes narrowed conspiratorially.

“Just some advice,” he said. “You shouldn’t take car rides from strange men. It’s very risky. You’re lucky that Bob here is a good guy.” I felt ashamed and embarrassed. But said nothing. Then he got out.

Bob smiled at me to prove he was a good guy and we drove for a while. “Do you want to go to a motel?” he asked.

And wasn’t that where we had been headed all along? In fact, it was the gentlemanly end to the story. “Why not?” I said, though I hadn’t thought it through. I’d never strayed from Scott, but now he had it coming.

Bob drove to a motel with a neon sign saying “Vacancies.” Shaking, I followed him inside. He paid the man at the desk. The room had no personality. The furniture was dark veneer and looked like Formica. A white band of paper had been wrapped around the toilet seat to show it had been cleaned and not used. Plastic liners were inside all the waste paper baskets and there weren’t enough lights. A still life watercolor of fruit in a basket hung over the bed, which had a sea-foam-green quilted bedspread. I wondered how many bodies had been in the place. The bed had clean sheets and two lamps on either side of matching night tables. I wanted to go into the bathroom and wash myself. Rinse my mouth. I was too shy to utter a word, too electrified by my actions. Bob started to unbutton his shirt. His chest was hairy and he had a slight pauch. He threw his clothing over a chair. I got undressed and slid into the bed as quickly as I could. His body was different than my husband’s. Scott was six feet one inches tall. Bob’s newness made me nervous. He had a broad chest and was shorter.

“Do you do this a lot?” I asked, pulling the sheet over my breasts.

“Sometimes.” He turned and touched my arm.

“I don’t.” As if I were Girl Scout of the Year. Big deal.

We kissed and for a while he kept his hands above the blankets. He was a good kisser, and I began to relax. Then we started to fool around. I got excited, thinking maybe that Bob could take me places Scott never had. I wanted violins and fireworks. When he put his hand in the cleft of my ass, I pushed his hand away. He muttered that he was sorry. Then he stroked my pussy and made me wet.

He used no protection and I was too nervous to say anything. I felt as if I was throwing the dice at the craps table. When the lovemaking was over, I was disappointed. He came quickly, before I was ready. The whole encounter wasn’t as wonderful as I’d wanted it to be. It hadn’t been worth it.

“Does your wife know you cheat?” I asked.

“I don’t think so.”

“Do you love her? Why do you do this?”

“I don’t know. I just do. Sometimes men want a change.” He touched my shoulder and ran his finger gently up the outside of my neck. When I was eight years old, my Uncle Max used to say that my neck was the sweetest part of me.

“Like a habit?”

“Can I see you again?” he asked, touching my arm again. Then he kissed my neck, softly.

“Okay,” I said. I thought he was attractive and enjoyed his tenderness. Maybe he would make me feel less lonely. “My husband has long hours and I have young kids.”

“I’ll come to see you.” As he cupped my chin, he kissed me.

“Don’t come when my husband’s home. He works some nights.”

The next day I was walking in the parking lot of the grocery store with Rae, while she pushed her daughter in a stroller and I told her about Bob. “He’s cute.”

Rae was excited about what I’d done. “I can’t believe you slept with him.” She smiled and shook her head. She was happy and stunned.

Then we looked up and there was Bob in his car, staring at me.

“Oh, my goodness. That’s him, Rae.” I walked forward, leaving Rae behind. “What are you doing here?” I asked.

“I came to see you. I looked you up in the phone book.” He sat in his front seat with the door open. He was hot, no doubt about it. He was wearing a white shirt, unbuttoned at the collar. “I’m a salesman so I know my way around, figured you were here when I didn’t see your car at your house. Nice thing about my job is I make my own hours.”

“Come to my house after seven. My kids will be in bed and my husband will still be at work.” I said this without hesitation.

“I’ll see you then.”

Rae and I kept walking. “He’s good looking,” she squealed.

“Shut up. I told you.”

“What are you going to do?”

“He’s coming over tonight.”

“To your house?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, God, I can’t stand this.”

“Neither can I. I think I’m flipping out.”

That night Bob and I sat at the kitchen table, each of us on one of the long wooden benches on either side. I’d bought the table and benches from the lady who’d owned the house before us. It was dark wood and fit in the space. Bob drank a cup of coffee and wadded his gum into a napkin. The kitchen had a green indoor-outdoor carpet that I planned to change. We made small talk as if we were old friends. Finally, we went downstairs to the finished basement and I opened the door to the honeymoon suite, named for my friend, Maggie, who had gotten married and had visited with her new husband. It was decorated with dried hydrangeas and a flowered bedspread. Very romantic. I turned off the lights in the bedroom and left the light on in the hall in case my kids woke up. We lay down on the bed and started to make love. I got on top of him and that excited me. Then he got on top of me. The sex was a little better as we got to know each other.

“Are you sure no one will come?” Bob asked.

“It’s okay. He’s at work until ten.”

We lingered. I asked him what he liked. Bob told me sometimes he watched porno movies on TV.

“You like that stuff?”

“Yeah, I read *Penthouse* too.”

“What a riot. Scott gets *Playboy*. Have you ever done it with two women?”

God, Rae would flip at this suggestion, I thought.

“No, but I want to.”

Then I got nervous and made Bob get up and leave. “I’m afraid he’ll come home and find us.”

“I thought you said he works.”

“I’m a mess from this. Don’t worry. Just go.”

Rae was eager to hear all the details when we met at the shopping center the following day. “Tell me everything,” she said as she pushed the stroller. Her daughter had a pacifier stuffed into her mouth and I pushed the cart in Stop and Shop. My kids were at various places-- preschool and playgroups.

“We did it in the honeymoon suite,” I said as I threw a box of spaghetti into the basket.

“Oh my God, in the honeymoon suite. How funny!” Rae said, looking at me as though I’d thought up an outrageous idea.

“Where else was I going to take him? To my own bed?”

“I see your point, really,” she agreed. Smiling, she shook her head, trying not to giggle.

“I’m going to buy a sexy teddy or something at Victoria’s.

“That’ll be fun,” she said. Take a picture before he comes with your cell.”

“I don’t know about that.”

“Aw, please. Pretty please.”

“This is not some show, Rae. Get your own lover.”

“Now, there’s a good idea. Maybe I will. I just want to see how yours works out.”

“You may not approve.”

“I already don’t,” she laughed, but I love hearing about it.”

“Would you ever do a threesome with us?”

Rae’s eyes grew wider and she squealed, touching her middle, “Not before I drop five pounds! My husband would die if he knew I was even considering such a thing. You are a bad influence, girl!”

We laughed and I hugged my best friend.

#

Friday

When Bob returned a few nights later I had on a royal blue bustier and a garter belt and fishnet stockings under my robe. I thought he’d like it because of what he had said about reading *Penthouse*. The kids were bathed, fed, and asleep and I had put on bright red lipstick and high backless heels with blue marabou feathers. I looked trampy, if I said so myself. My new name could have been Trixie.

“Wow, you are hot tonight,” Bob said when I unveiled my outfit downstairs in the honeymoon suite. He lay down on the bed and said, “Get over here, you little slut.” I could tell I was a hit.

He kissed my breasts, which were half popping out of the bustier. I straddled him and the marabou heels fell on the floor with a thud. The light from the hall cast a shadow on the bed. I bent down and started to open Bob’s fly. I figured men liked this sort of thing. I tried to do a good job. Bob was moaning.

When I stopped for a second to catch my breath, I looked up, and there was Scott staring in the window of the honeymoon suite. It was a small window that had a pretty café curtain on it and the sides were held back with two purple ribbons. My husband’s eyes were staring me right in the face as I dropped Bob’s penis.

“Oh, my God, get up,” I yelled. “He’s here. He saw us.”

Bob leaped from the bed and grabbed his shoes and tried to zip his pants up. I ran into the half-bath and tore off my outfit from Victoria’s and stuffed it under some towels in the linen closet. Then I threw on my robe. The shoes with the marabou feathers lay on the floor by the bed like evidence at a crime scene.

My husband entered the honeymoon suite, eyes burning, and threw a punch at Bob who staggered backwards as his nose dripped blood.

“You son of a bitch,” he yelled. “Get out.”

“Hey, you broke my nose,” Bob screamed.

“I’ll break some more bones if you don’t get out of here.”

With a hand over his bleeding face Bob ran up the stairs. I stood looking at Scott in my robe with red lipstick smeared on my face like paint.

We listened for Bob's car backing out the driveway.

"I can't believe you brought a strange man into our home," he said.

"Well, I can't fuck in the warehouse like you do because I have children to watch."

We just stood there like two foolish people. Scott said, "Why don't you ever wear that kind of outfit for me?"

"I didn't know you liked it."

"It didn't take you long to figure it out with this new guy you've probably known for what, three days?"

I blushed. Maybe it felt safer with the affair, like living out a fantasy. "I'll be happy to wear sexy outfits for you, Scott," I said with a big smile.

"Go wash your face, Jill. Your lipstick's all meshed up."

He slept on the couch in the family room that night and I went upstairs and washed my face in the master bathroom.

The next day Scott left for work early and I got the children dressed and fed them breakfast. Three kids all in my twenties had been my goal. I'd made it by twenty-nine. I deposited the baby, Corey, at the day care and Dylan, the toddler, at his playgroup, and Samantha at prekindergarten for a few hours and then reported to Rae. She was

speechless. As she stood in the parking lot with the stroller, her daughter chewed on a biscuit.

“What now?” I asked her as if she were my psychotherapist. I was wearing my old comfortable jeans, a faded jean jacket, and felt exhausted.

“I wouldn’t do anything, if you really want to know. Pretend nothing happened. Go on normally, cooking supper, taking care of the children, American as apple pie,” she advised. She wiped her daughter’s mouth and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “Be pleasant, wear those designer jeans you bought at Bloomie’s, make sure the kids don’t cry much, and talk about current events,” she continued.

“You think that will work?”

“Listen, he’s as guilty as you are. Him and his damn high school girl. Give me a break,” she rolled her eyes heavenward. “He can’t say anything because he’ll incriminate himself. I’d just drop it. Point made. Score even. Now go back to your charming loving family, house on the cul-de-sac, king size bed, two car garage and long driveway, and your pile of gifts under the tree at Christmas.”

“Yeah, you’re right. American as apple pie.”

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Wednesday

The day was bright and I put on my designer jeans and high heels and made sweet and sour chicken, a recipe that Rae had given me while we were walking the kids.

“I’m telling you, he will love this and it only has four ingredients. A sure bet,” Rae had said, in her Brooklyn accent.

“Sounds like a winner. I love easy,” I had said when she listed the ingredients and told me how to make the chicken, shaking her curly brown hair for emphasis.

I had soft music playing when Scott came home for dinner.

“How was your day?” I asked when he came into the kitchen.

“Okay,” he said as he sorted through the mail.

We stared at each other and didn’t make a move. The children were in bed and the night was quiet.

“Ready for dinner?” I asked as I put the fresh bread on the table where Bob had sat drinking his coffee.

“Do you think we should talk?” he said.

“Sure,” I said and waited for him to start.

“What’s with that guy?”

“I doubt he’ll be back after you broke his nose.”

Scott smiled slightly.

“What’s with Rosie the warehouse worker?” I asked.

“I think her father put the kibosh on that fling.”

“But you still work with her?”

“I’m getting the new store in Marlborough, so I won’t even be seeing her.”

“That’s good.”

“He bent down and kissed me. “I’m sorry for this mess. It’s my fault. I was overwhelmed with having three kids and needed an escape. I want us to do better. It was so unfair to you, Jillie. You’re my sweetheart and I love you. I want you to wear that outfit you had on last night.”

“Now?” I asked. “I have everything ready.”

“I guess we should eat, but then I want you to dress up for me. What did you make?”

After he ate the salad, I served the sweet and sour chicken. It glistened on the plate, a deep amber color and smelled fragrant. Scott couldn’t stop talking about how good it was. I started to get embarrassed and wanted to change the subject.

“Sam drew a wonderful picture at school today,” I said. “The teacher says she has artistic talent.”

Scott smiled and said, “She got it from you, Jillie.” He looked at me with that curl hanging in the middle of his forehead, kind like James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

“Thanks.”

“Now go upstairs and surprise me,” he said. “But first come over here and give me a kiss.”

I planted a big fat smooch on his lips.

“What else do you like? I didn’t know you were such a player,” he said.

“Well... maybe we can be more adventurous.”

“Oh, adventurous, is that what you want?” Scott said, rubbing my bottom. “I’ve got some ideas.”

“Let’s explore them,” I said, teasingly.

“I like your style,” he said, ruffling my hair. “You’re mighty cute in that new do.”

“Oh, by the way, I baked.” The crust was tan and the aroma wafted through the kitchen. “Want some now or later?” I asked, placing the warm dessert on the table.

American as apple pie.

