

# Lucas Is Sitting on the Bed

Wearing a completely unexpected expression—pity. Can that be right? What the hell? A deep swallow of Cuervo sandpapers my throat.

I go over to Lucas, drop down on my knees, rest my hands on his legs, look up into his eyes, “Lucas, will you please tell me what’s going on?”

He doesn’t answer right away, and for some stupid reason, that makes me think there’s hope for us. But when he finally speaks, his voice

is ice. *When you first told me you were a virgin, I didn’t believe you. Not a lot of those around, you know? But when I figured out you were telling the truth, I totally wanted to pop your cherry. You were my first virgin, and you’ll probably be my last. Because . . . sorry, but virgin sex really isn’t very good.*

I jerk my hands off his legs, wobble to my feet. “F-fuck you! I c-c-can’t believe tha’sh all I meant to you.” One more gulp and I repeat, “Fuck you!”

# The Kids

Are in the living room, watching  
the boob tube. They don't see  
me slip down the hall, and that's best.

I go into Iris's room. Top dresser  
drawer, beneath her underwear—  
yech!—there's a navy blue sock,  
where she stashes her cash.

I watched her do it once when  
she was too drunk to realize

I was standing right there. Sure  
enough, it's here, stuffed with sex  
money. I count out two hundred,

which doesn't include whatever

Walt paid her. Screw it. I take  
the whole wad—four hundred

sixty-nine dollars. In its place,

I leave a note: *Not even close  
to what you owe me. I hate you.*

“Bye, Gram,” I call, eyes stinging.

I ease out the door, into velvet  
night, chasing a glimpse of freedom.

that empty space inside. I lead her to my disheveled bedroom. “Sorry it’s so messy,” I whisper, pulling her into me. “God, you smell good.” Like baked apples. Not like flowers. Don’t want to smell those. They remind me of death. Ronnie rises on her tiptoes, lifts her slick, honey-sweet lips to meet mine. It’s the sweetest kiss ever, but it soon becomes more. I lock the door, guide her to my bed, and for maybe the very first time, sex is more than getting off. This time, sex feels like love.

# With or Without Condoms

(Because after all, we don't have to have sex *every* time we see each other, do we?)

I'm hoping to see Andrew today. Saturday, so no school, and I'm done with my chores.

I've just got to come up with the right little white lie. Or big black lie. Whatever.

Mama seems kind of suspicious lately.

I think what they say about being in love

is true—some inner glow becomes obvious to everyone around you, even those

you most want to keep solidly in the dark.

“So, Mama. Shania and I are doing

an English project on *The Lord of the Rings*. She invited me over to work

on it. Would that be okay?” Shania is, like, my only friend. I've known

her since she moved here in second grade and her family joined Papa's church.

Whitney

## Fighting “Night Time”

Pretty name for the hideous pukes  
and soaking sweats of withdrawal.  
I understand I have to go through it.  
Die if I don't. Maybe die if I do.

I don't want to die. Do I? Fuck,  
what if it's better than living half in,  
half out of this world? Goddamn Bryn!  
Bastard turned me into a zombie.

So why do I sit here, crying to see  
him? Why do I love him so much?  
He cheats. Lies. Lied about everything,  
from start to now. I know it. Don't care.

I want to be with him. Want to make  
love with him. Even though that means  
waiting my turn. He has other girls.  
Other zombies. Killing time in cheap

rooms like this one. Sometimes he comes,  
rewards them like he rewards me,  
with junk and beautiful sex. Sometimes  
other men come. That sex is never

## It Takes Three Tries

The first says he's not going to Vegas.  
The second one just says, *Fuck off.*

The third, a beefy guy with bad teeth,  
looks me up and down. *You running away?*

I had an hour at lunch to figure out  
a good story. I use it now. "Not exactly.

He flashes his rotten smile. *Not exactly?*  
*What, exactly, does that mean?*

"See, my parents split up, and my mom  
moved me to Elko so she could live

with her boyfriend. I hate that bastard. He . . .  
he . . . you know." I look down, acting

all embarrassed. "Anyway, I just want to  
go home to my dad's. He lives in Vegas."

*Old story, kid. But what the hell?*  
*I'm going that way. Hop in the cab.*

We climb into opposite sides of the semi.  
The trucker swallows some sort of pill,

starts the engine, and as he turns onto  
the highway, I say a little prayer of thanks

for my rescue. But we don't get all that far  
before rescue becomes something else.

*Don't suppose you have any money?*  
asks rotten mouth. Considering

I'm wearing nothing but a light blue,  
pocket-free shift, and carrying not

a thing, the answer should be obvious.  
*Diesel's getting awfully expensive.*

"Sorry. No. Stupid me, I forgot  
my backpack. Wish I could help."

*Well, there are other ways a girl  
can help out a guy. You know?*

Mr. So-not-nice trucker issues an ult  
Oral sex or a very long walk to Vega

Stupid me. But it's not really anything  
new. At least I don't have to kiss him

### Search



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The second one just says, **Fuck** off.

**Before I Can Answer**  
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just one **fucking** second. . . ."

**Whitney: Fighting "Night Time"**  
Page 527

I don't want to die. Do I? **Fuck,**

**I'm Not Stupid**  
Page 529

A **fucking** gorgeous, sweet pimp,

**It Isn't Far**  
Page 540

No fight left in me. **Fuck** me. Kill

**Air!**  
Page 541

Get the **fuck** out of here, you son

**Cody: How Do I Find Myself Here?**  
Page 559

stop Cory from **fucking** up. He was

**That Includes Ronnie**  
Page 561

Not a **fucking** loser like me.

# He Tries Another Tack

I watch as his whole demeanor softens,  
like gelatin on a hot plate. *Matthew,*  
*the truth is, I'm worried about you.*  
*I'm not sure you've really processed*  
*Luke's death. It's been almost six months.*  
*Don't you think it's time to move on?*

That fist of pissed again, only this time  
it smashes me square in the face.  
“Dude, I *have* **fuck**ing moved on.  
I don't call him to dinner anymore.  
I don't think I hear him coming in  
the back door. I hardly ever dream

about how he looked when . . .  
when I found him. But if you mean  
I should accept what happened,  
you're out of your mind!” Winded,  
I catch a breath, realize I've been  
yelling, lower my voice. “I never will.”

Mr. Carpenter studies my face, and  
what he finds there—truth, that's all  
he can possibly see—seems to make  
him sad. *I'm sorry you feel that way,*  
*Matthew. But what happened to Luke*  
*wasn't God's fault. Why blame him?*

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Not a **fuck**ing loser like me.
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**Fuck**ing Great
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“Dude, I have **fuck**ing moved on.

## I'm Supposed to Meet

My latest acquaintance soon. Don't know if I can make it three blocks without a little help. Please, Lorenzo, score! I'm getting so low. It's only

been a few hours since my last visit with the Lady, but I'm shaking like it was yesterday. Just a small fix for now. If Lorenzo doesn't come through,

maybe Bryn will show. I only know I've got to stop the knotting in my belly. Ah! Better. Have to go while my brain can still tell my feet to walk. Three blocks.

Lorenzo! Right on time. Fine quality in a dealer, right? Sexy. Look sexy. Forget the schoolgirl part. This guy isn't shopping for innocence. "Hey, doll.

Find what I'm looking for?" He smiles, takes my hand, slides it down into his pocket. Not one bag. Two. And, farther down, something else.

No problem. It's part of the deal.  
*My guy says dis stuff is pretty good.*  
*You wanna pay for one and fuck for one, or what?* We start to walk.

I have a little cash stashed. Don't tell Bryn about my "extra" deals. A little extra cash for a little extra service. "Sounds good." Meth or no meth,

though, we have to go quick. I'm on Bryn's clock already. "Before we start, show me the stuff." He does. It isn't white or even brown. "What's this?"

*You never seen black tar? Baby, it's the best. Believe me, those b in Mexico know their shit. Now over here. Take a taste of this.*

I've heard of black tar Mexican. Never tried it, but guess I'm gonna. Ol' Lorenzo gets a ride around the w Doesn't take as long as I thought.

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## She Stumbles In

Around nine. Worry turns to relief. Then I take another look at her—hair mussed, makeup smeared, clothes wrinkled and buttons undone. Relief explodes into anger.

“Where the fuck have you been?” I sound like a crow. “You scared me shitless.”

Alex remains placid. *Been taking care of business is all. Someone’s got to.*

It’s more than a little bit obvious that the day’s “business” included more than stripping. The smell of sweat and sex hangs in the air, a storm cloud.

“Alex, what have you done? You’re not turning tricks like some hooker, are you?”

A strong memory of Iris stumbling in after dark, perfumed in sex, surfaces,

swims into blurry view. Goddamn it, no! “Please, Alex, tell me you didn’t.”

But she doesn’t deny. Won’t say I’m wrong. *It’s okay, Gin. . . . It’s not so bad, really.*

*I mean, the sex isn’t good, but it’s fast, and all things considered, the pay scale*

*isn’t bad. Fifty bucks for under ten minutes’ work? Three hundred an hour!*

*Shit, girl, that’s attorney wages, and you don’t have to go to school—*

“Stop it! We don’t need money that bad. I’ll get off the rag and we’ll go back to stripping.

“Lydia can have her cut. We were doing okay like that, weren’t we?” We were, damn it!

Finally Alex deflates just a little. *Sit down. Please? There’s stuff you don’t know.*

Like how she knew all about Lydia’s escort service before we ever got here. Like how Lydia

never invited her to “come stay any time.” Like how when we talked about running away, Alex

called Lydia and set the whole thing up. Like how Lydia promised to keep her mouth

shut, as long as Alex went to work for her. Like how Alex’s not-stepdad *did* call,

looking for her. But Lydia denied knowing a thing. So Alex owes her, big-time.

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at four bucks a gallon. Fuck it! I’m



First Things First

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the dealer draws twenty—fuck!—



Caller ID

Page 413

into my gut. Cory! Little fucker



I Also Worry

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it. Fuck. Where the hell’s my stash?



She Stumbles In

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“Where the fuck have you



The Chiefs Kick Off

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later. Fuckers better step up to the line



Sometimes Misty and I

Page 485

in Ronnie’s medicine cabinet. Fuck.



Sometimes Misty and I

Page 485

of shit. Necessity is a motherfucker.



Dan Has Done This Before

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His Answer

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Zero hesitation. Why the fuck



His Answer

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he simply shatters. Fuck it!



Lucas Is Sitting on the Bed

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to my feet. “F-fuck you! I c-c-can’t



Lucas Is Sitting on the Bed

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more gulp and I repeat, “Fuck you!”



I Stumble Out the Door

Page 297

staring at me with—fuck that!—pity.



Déjà Vu Strikes

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“Get the fuck away from me.”



Déjà Vu Strikes

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What the fuck did you say?” A sudden



The Door Slams Behind Me

Page 308

longer than rape. Fuck! My eyes

# Alex and I

Are hanging out downtown,  
scoping out people, scoping  
us out. I take a deep drag off

a bummed Kool, cough like a  
dweeb on the exhale. "Does  
your stepdad have a girlfriend?"

Alex keeps watching people  
walk by. She rarely looks you  
in the eye. *Nah. No one special,*  
*not since Lydia boogied on*  
*down the road. Guess he has*  
*fuck buddies, though. Why?*

"I dunno. It just came to me  
that maybe he and my mom  
should hook up or something."

She doesn't miss a beat.  
*You kidding? You don't*  
*like your mom or what?*

I laugh. "Not much, actually.  
But she's easier to deal with  
when she's got a man in her life."

*Really? Seems to me life is a lot*  
*easier without getting attached*  
*to someone. Too complicated.*

"God, do you know my mom?  
But she thinks having a guy  
around makes her important."

Alex snorts. *How old is she,*  
*anyway? Sounds like she*  
*still plays with Barbies.*

"I doubt she ever played with  
Barbies. Just a shitload of  
Kens." And Sams. And Bills.

But, as much as I think Alex  
is pretty okay, I'm not about  
to share too much information

about Iris and how she brings in  
cash. Besides, maybe Iris would  
stop tricking for the right guy.

Maybe if the right guy came along,  
we could live a nice, normal  
life. However that's defined.

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- Smacked Down**  
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**fuck** buddies, though. Why?
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all she said was, That's **fucked** up.
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barely coherent. **Fucking**
- The Game Hasn't Started Yet**  
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ten. I flip one card. It's a three. **Fuck.**
- Not Sure**  
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who in the **fuck** you think
- Cody: Falling Apart**  
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just one more **fuck**ing day.