

Because He Likes It

Destiny Bickel

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Summertime. 84 degrees. I'm awake, alone. The heat in my room is stifling; the air conditioner's broken. The numbers on the digital clock next to me look almost ominous as they glow 4:15 AM. I sit and wait for it, bracing myself. I know what woke me up. I don't want to admit it, but I do. The phone rings again, piercing the silence. I cringe. I know who it is, and I don't want to answer, but I have to. I just have to.

"Heeeeeeyyyy!" His voice. His stupid, stupid voice, like one gigantic, dissonant chord. Those who don't know him like I do wouldn't notice, but to me the babble that escapes from his lips sounds like a cacophony of broken sounds. "Took you long enough to answer!" he says. Again, those who don't know him like I do would think he is teasing, but I know better. He had me strictly trained to always, always, *always* pick up before the second ring. And if I didn't, I'd get on his bad side. If I got on his bad side, I was in for one of many carefully disguised blows to my self-esteem. He wove them into the conversation as if it were no more than a rug: if I caught on, all he'd have to do was start over.

"You're coming over tomorrow, right?" I know it's not really a question. It never is. It's always a demand. I don't have any choice but to tell him yes, "yes I'm coming over; I'll be there around noon. "Good. And wear that cute little black skirt. I don't like you in jeans." Bam. There it was. One of those blows. At this point, I should get mad at him for insulting me. But I don't, because he'll lie and tell me that he was just kidding; he

didn't mean it, even though he always does, and then later he'll say something even worse. He makes me listen to him talk about god knows what for another two and a half hours before he finally lets me go to bed. I fall asleep hoping never to wake up again.

Flash forward four hours. I'm in his room. I'm wearing the shortest skirt I own—you could hardly even call it that—because he likes it. High heels—they add a little height—because he likes it. Dangly earrings—they contour my jawline—because he likes it. Pin straight hair. Too much makeup. Push up bra. Because he likes it. Kissing him the way he likes, touching him the way he loves, letting him put his hands all over me. I don't want it at all, but I know that if I suffer through this for a little bit longer, he'll leave me alone. Later, he'll tell me how his ex-girlfriend was skinnier, prettier, and better at this than me, but I won't mind, because when I'm done I won't get another phone call like last night for a couple of weeks. It may not be a lot of time, but it's still time that he's not in the picture.

Even though he begs me to stay, to watch Spongebob cartoons with him, to play video games, to watch movies, I leave, reveling in the satisfaction that for one minute the tables have turned and I'm the one in control of the situation. The summer sunshine casts short shadows in front of me as I walk home, happily thinking all about the two weeks I will have to myself. I'll hang out with my friends, finish reading the books I started two weeks ago, go out to eat with my mom; the possibilities are endless. Then it hits me. The crushing, crippling feeling in the pit of my stomach as I realize what just happened. I feel dirty, like a million showers will never ever be enough. Hot tears start to roll down my

cheeks and I watch them drip down onto the concrete, making a little trail behind me as I find my way home. Maybe, I tell myself, somebody will come across it and follow it, and underneath this big, horrible, mess of a girl...they'll find me. The real me. The one who didn't take any crap from anybody. The one who wouldn't let anyone tell her what to do. The one who wouldn't, under any circumstances, let anyone do what he did to me.

I come home. The house is still empty, still dark. My room is still a mess from when I had to rush out the door earlier because I woke up late and he called demanding to know where I was. I turn on the TV and plop down on the couch, but I'm not even paying attention to what's going on. I feel more alone than I have ever felt, because I don't even have the real Me to keep me company. I haven't even been able to hear myself think ever since he started doing this to me a couple of months ago.

Right then, right there, I decide that enough is enough. It's about time I found the girl I used to be. I pick up the phone. I punch in the number. Four rings. He answers. The biggest smile creeps across my face as I say, "Hey. We're through." And that's all. The next thing he hears is a dial tone. The next thing I hear? My. Own. Thoughts.