

28. TOO FAR OUT

Rose brought me to a party that made me remember one of our first outings together. That time I had been in fear of my body. Now I was in my element. I watched a couple of dudes roasting chickens on a spit. One pulled out a giant knife and cut off a couple of pieces that he tossed to the pit bulls. They feasted on the scraps that he threw them.

This was not a place for hesitation. You had to throw yourself completely into the murky current. Sink or swim. I wanted to rest upon my last vestiges of conscience. But I could feel that I had already consented to a dark order. I would accept whatever happened. I would take my pain without shirking.

Rose had presented me with scenario. I wanted to resist her predictions for me. But this was not the place. Nothing would help me brace myself. I was done for.

“Do you have a buzz yet?”

“It’s coming!”

Still, it was a lot more difficult than I thought. I wasn’t good at letting go. I seemed to notice the monster at every corner. I didn’t want to get pulled into a bedroom and let the inevitable take me over.

“Whoa!”

“What is it, Chloe?”

“I’m flying?”

She appeared sympathetic, “You don’t have to stay. I thought that this might be too much.”

“I’m OK.”

Was I OK? I felt whiplash. The car had come to too quick a stop.

“I want to get out!”

But there was no getting out. I needed to play along.

“Chloe, where are you going?”

“I just need to walk around.”

“We can go home. You don’t have to stay. I can get you a ride.”

“I’m going to live! I need to do this. Get me another drink.”

She wanted to take care of me.

“You’ve had enough for now. There’s still a lot of night to come.”

Indeed there was. I needed to descend into the menagerie. There were fascinating stories to come.

“What’s your name?”

“Chloe!”

He had trouble focusing. I did what I could to make up for his rambling.

“I’m Kevin.”

“Cool!”

“Yeah, cool.” He drank from a flask that he carried in his pocket.

“Want some?”

“Maybe, later.”

“How old are you?” He stared into my eyes.

"I'm eighteen."

"Hope so. 'cause you look mighty young!"

I forced myself to smile back. He was posing for me, shaking his body back and forth.

"You dig!"

I smiled.

"You know, doll, I'm special."

"Cool!"

"When I have sex, I see the Virgin Mary!"

"Yeah!"

"I do. Like a vision. Some kind of miracle."

It seemed like a total contradiction to me. But I listened. I needed to distract myself.

Kevin was totally elsewhere. Try as I might, I couldn't bring him back to the world. I let him float off. When he was totally zoned out, I walked around.

"Maybe we should go."

"I'm here for you, child." Rose was really doing her best to help me out. For once, she wasn't off in her world.

She continued, "I can get that ride that we've been talking sovereignty.

I don't know who it was who drove us. But I made it back. I had no trouble sneaking into my room. I hated it. But it was a whole lot easier than I had thought

I reviewed what had happened. I imagined that I had brought Kevin back with me. I wanted to be a part of one of his visions. He had been through a lot. But he didn't let himself get down. He sought a miracle to comfort his restlessness. Lying next to him, I would have felt lifeless. Nothing could have waken me from the dead.

"Baby, come on! Wake up!"

I could feel someone nudging me. It was the light of day. It was still early. I made an excuse. I got up and went to the bathroom. Then I got back into bed for a few more hours of needed rest.

It was Saturday. No school meant that I could make my own rules. No doubt, Bill and June had plans. Shopping. Josh was going to be away with a friend. The house was mine alone.

What had I gained by such an easy victory? After breakfast, I stretched out on the couch to watch TV. This wasn't my style, but I welcomed the freedom. Maybe I wasn't going forward, but, at least, I wasn't heading in reverse.

My Pyrrhic victory clearly took shape. Why would I even want this house full of useless bric-a-brac? What good was a big screen TV without anything interesting to watch? All these odds and ends would never sustain me. There was no art here, all vanity.

I was an unforgiving deity looking down on my lost children. When will they ever learn? Do I have to send down some massive plague to bring them all to their senses?

As much as I tried to escape the watchful eyes of June and Bill, their empire spoke of their present reign. I could hardly wait for these walls to crumble around me. This place was already cursed. There was no salvation within these confines.

I looked to sunnier climes. Where would I find rescue? Was I damned force to fend for myself among the untouchable caste? Did I bear a mark that condemned me for eternity?

I tried to make June's mirror my own. I had my own dreams. All she had to do to make

up for her doldrums was head to the mall and pull out her credit card. I was not given to such material rewards.

When my parents returned, they had no idea that I had usurped their sovereignty. Even if I couldn't rule over this kingdom, I could find a world more suitable to my customs.

Enough time had passed that my parents deigned to commute my sentence. I was allowed to go out with *normal* boys. I really believed that no such thing existed. My well being would be better served by chasing down ghosts in haunted houses. But I decided to play along.

Bill and June still had rules. I could only go to public places, and I would be under a strict curfew. But this was an order that I could live with. I again submitted to the domain.

Lou was in my math class. And he seemed impressed enough with my wizardry.

"You like horror movies?"

I wasn't a big fan. But I thought what the hell. How bad could it be?

The plot revolved around an advertising exec who had been falsely detained in a mental health facility. At least, I felt that I could identify. Of course, the film maker took it upon himself to show racy images of girls in skimpy costumes being tortured by the obedient staff.

"Do you really enjoy this kind of stuff?"

He didn't hear me. His eyes were transfixed on the screen as he drooled over his popcorn. He nosily sucked from his drink as he found particular gratification in these lurid scenes. Just as long as he didn't try to touch me, I felt safe.

After the movie, we went for pizza. He stuffed the slices in his mouth.

"Didn't you eat dinner?"

"I'm on the track team. I burn all those calories."

I congratulated him, "You are fortunate."

He smile. He took it as a complement.

"I really like you."

"Great!"

Maybe if I was one of those girls in an asylum, I might be more compliant to his misplaced advances.

I added, "That movie seemed so unrealistic."

He was staring at me, "You have the most amazing eyes."

"Fantastic." I was working to get him talking about the movie. I continued, "The plot made no sense."

"You're analyzing things too much. I don't really like girls who try to control everything. Sometimes you just have to have fun."

I nodded, "Yeah, I know what you mean."

"I know that things like that happen to people. They did such a great job portraying all the fear."

I wondered if lover boy had any idea what real fear was. I wanted to be the torturer, and I envisioned him as the perfect victim.

He focused on me, "Why are you giving me that strange look?"

"Oh, nothing. I just think that I understand now what you were saying. It would be really cool to imprison your enemies in a place like that. You could work them down step by step."

Indeed, I was scaring him a lot more than the movie.

“Chloe, you’re a really cute girl and all. More than that! But I just don’t know. I thought that we’d be perfect together. But you really are a freak.”

I wanted to stick out my tongue and make a really bizarre face. “You are going to die, mush-mouse!” I didn’t say a thing. I just stared straight ahead.

“Chloe, are you OK? Can I eat your pizza?”

“Knock yourself out!”

Bill was waiting when I arrived home, “Did you enjoy yourself?”

“I felt like I was at a prison camp.”

“Chloe, why do you exaggerate about everything?”

“It’s called coping.”

It’s just that I wasn’t coping. I let it slide. This wasn’t the worst night of my life. But there had been barely a glimmer at the end of the tunnel. I welcomed getting home and being back in my bed. Maybe I should have stuck with Rose’s parties.

I could sense a vain overconfidence overtaking me. And I didn’t want to give in. I couldn’t go back to living my old life. There was too much on the line. I hadn’t really recovered my sanity. I had simply learned how to fake it better. I went through the motions and understood that disaster was just around the corner. It wasn’t as if Bill and June had let me off the hook. They were just giving me a long enough rope to hang myself.

I didn’t want to give them the needed ammunition, but something told that I couldn’t hold out forever. If this was the prelude to a showdown, so be it. I just needed to make sure that things happened on my terms. I wasn’t even old enough for a learner’s permit and I already recognized with certainty that I couldn’t live her anymore. I had done what I could to keep the balancing act going. But Adam had introduced that unforeseen factor that finally upset the apple cart. Now, it was beyond my control.

It was late. I wanted to sleep. I had been lying on my bed all restless. I couldn’t settle down. When sleep finally did hit, I tossed and turned. Dreams faded in and out.

I was again with Adam. I knew that this feeling was going to come back. And here it was again. This time, he wasn’t only on top of me. He was suffocating me. I started choking. I couldn’t catch my breath. He made it impossible to scream out. His grip was getting more intense.

“Chloe, you can’t do anything about this. Even if you scream, no one is going to hear you.”

I tried pushing with all my might. He remained on top of me. My arms were flailing as I tried to make contact. He was having the time of his life. He smiled in glee.

“Little girl!”

The bed was quaking. He kept up with his attack.

I wanted to ask him why he was persecuting me. He could tell what I was thinking. This inspired him more.

Everything was so murky and indefinite. As I struggle, it seemed that I pulled hold of an electrical cord. Somehow, it came apart and ignited around me. A line of flames started to shoot through the house. The whole place was going up in a fireball.

He did what he could to rescue himself. He just left me lying here helpless. The door was closed. The house exploded with the pressure and blew out all the windows. But the fire

had not completely engulfed the room. I looked down, and there were smoke all around the bed. But no flames. The flames had traveled out of the room. Blasted into the rest of the house.

I felt as if I was being lifted in the air. I was still choking, but Adam was nowhere to be seen. I tried to hold still. I thought that might save me.

When I woke up, I was drenched in sweat. It was dark. I hated the fact that I had felt so weak. Adam completely overpowered me. Down deep, that ghastly presence haunted my soul. I couldn't break down the feeling. It was real. Even if he wasn't with me, I knew that he was somewhere. Smug. Unrepentant.

In the bright morning light, the dream faded. I couldn't let it overtake me. This was my cue for a new distraction. Rose and I planned some craziness. I needed to put everything out of my mind. I was ready to walk the wild side.

"What did I tell you?"

I didn't want her to be right.

Even if she had planned every detail to a t, it was inevitable that in Rose world the wheels would eventually come off the wagon. What had started out as fun turned into a panic night.

I had hopped into a car with the idea that I was going to get a ride home. I was suddenly being sucked into a vortex without any escape. I had no idea where I was.

His name was Lance. He was a friend of Rose's. That's all that I knew. It was his place. It freaked me out. He made it so easy.

"Do whatever you want. If you want to get high. If you want to hang around. If you want to crash."

It was scary. He was giving me an out. I never had to go back to Bill and June. There had to be a catch.

I asked timidly, "What do you want? Do I have to sleep with you? Do I have to turn tricks?"

He was pouring a drink for himself. "Chill out, babe! Have fun!"

It made no sense. Why me? What did he want from me. I never felt so totally vulnerable.

"You've been taught to be afraid of life. Everything doesn't fit in your Suzy Homemaker instruction manual."

I sat there staring into space. He was offering me freedom, but I had no idea what to do with it.

"I can sleep here?" I wondered. "Where?"

He has a quick reply, "pick a room. Find an empty bed."

I was still afraid, "My parents. I live at home."

"That's totally cool.". He tossed his hair. "You want a hit.". He passed me a joint. I took it from him.

He started kissing on me. I just let go.

"This is not me.". I pushed him away. He seemed unaffected by the rebuff. He took a sip from his whiskey.

"Have some more!"

I took the joint back from him. I was trying to mellow out. But the image of my parents kept coming back to me. I was only feeling more paranoid.

“I need to go.”

“It's all good!”

There were no boundaries. Everything was running together. I couldn't handle all of this at once. I realized that I didn't have a ride home. I just needed to leave.

“Babe, you got to be careful. It's dark out there.”

He seemed in no shape to drive. And I wasn't going to make it home by clicking my heels together. I was stuck. I threw my hands in the air.

“Girl, you're asking for too much. Enjoy yourself.”

But I really didn't know how. Life has snuck up on me. I wanted Lance to be more for me. But he was no magic man. He was just some guy babbling on next to me. Now, there was no way to make it back without getting caught. I needed a chariot.

I thought about finding one of the empty beds. But what could I tell Bill and June: that I overslept. I wasn't even supposed to be out of the house. Damn! Lance was handing me a gift. I could end my association with Bill and June for good. There was no way. This was more like a horror movie. I started running. Off I went!

I hit a cross street and got my bearings. I knew where I was headed. I crossed the railroad tracks ten minutes before the train. I still had time.

When I was finally up the stairs, everything was still dark. They were all in bed. I was safe.

I realized that My parents' strict hold over me had finally ended. I wasn't ready to run away. But I realized that I had opportunities. I wouldn't have to wait until I was old enough. The locks had finally come off of the doors.

“Chloe, we heard some weird noises last night.”

“I didn't hear anything.”

“Were you all right.”

“I've been having some bad dreams.”

June put on her concerned face. I played along. If this was what it took to keep peace in this place, I'd do what she expected.

“Have you ever thought about talking to someone?”

“A dream doctor?”

“Chloe, I'm serious. The world is so complex these days. I don't think that I could survive. What with boys and drugs and serial killers. It's a madhouse.”

I wasn't sure what to answer back to her.

“I think that it's a good thing that you learned your lesson. I'm sure Keith is a very nice boy.”

“I'm sure that he is too. He's just not my type.”

“What's all this stuff with type? You're not marrying the boy. Have fun while you can!”

“Sure, Mom!”

She didn't know the half of it. But I could only guess what she had been up to in her heyday. Her imperious manners and rude wit must have stood her in good stead in the love's battles. I wasn't going to let her relive her conflicts through me. Her past was hers not mine. I was having enough trouble sorting out things around me. I hardly needed more interference.

I wanted to make sure that I wasn't warming to her pretenses. She did this all the time.

Once she had cornered me, she struck.

“I have to go do homework!” I made a quick exit.

“Remember what I told you.”

I again felt like I was in the interrogation room under the bright lights. My alibi had worked for the moment.

An observer might question my easy dismissal of poor June. After all, she played the part of the caring parent so well. I knew that it was a front. June was insipid. I had tried to work with her. But she was only whipping me into shape. And after every workout, I was tuckered out.

Upstairs, I had difficulty focusing on my work. There were too many distractions. I wasn't learning anything. Just going along with the role playing. I had done it for years. School hadn't taught me anything that I couldn't learn on my own. I didn't want to sound like a brat, but I understood something about the mysteries of the world. The teachers were zombies just like their charges. I needed to escape before I surrendered my soul,

Rose queried me, “Are you really thinking about running away?”

“Lance made it so appealing.”

“He's always been my safety-valve.”

“How does he manage? Does he sell drugs?”

“He make it seem that way. But I really think it's family money. He doesn't have the nerve to be a gangster.”

“He's too much of a hippe.”

We both laughed.

When the lunch bell rang, everyone jumped up to go to their next class. I just sat there. I stayed in the room until everyone was gone. The kitchen workers continued their clean up. No one realized that I was still there. Even Rose had returned to class.

I told myself that I wasn't feeling well. It had been a hectic few days. I felt that I was losing my grip. I'd get June to make some excuse for me. For now, I was out of there.

My humble bike transformed into a motorcycle. I would soon be long gone. I kept riding and didn't look back. I didn't have a plan. I had no one to help me. I had no money. This wasn't going to work.

I wanted to go over to Lance's. He'd invite me into a wonderland. I'd give in to all his vices. It wasn't just easy; it was way too easy.

There was a lot that I needed to figure out. Things weren't going to sort themselves out on their own. I just felt numb, unable to take the first step. I ended up back at the house. Fortunately there wasn't anyone there to bother me. I just lay on my bed and looked at the ceiling. My eyes traced the shadows.

I considered an escape to Lance's. Sure I could survive there. But could I be myself? I couldn't imagine lulling around smoking dope all the time. I was never one just to vegetate. I needed more of a challenge. It wasn't as if I cared about anyone in that house. I couldn't imagine caring.

Maybe Lance could take me on a romantic adventure. We'd pack up his old jalopy and head out towards the West. Maybe California. We could surf on the endless beaches. We wouldn't have a worry in the world. Sure, this would be my answer.

I could imagine him backing out at the last moment. He'd talk a good game. But in the end, his dream would dissipate in the multi-faceted crystals of his pleasure palace. He had everything that he could ever want. His dreams were his reality. So he had no reason to go anywhere else. He just sat there getting high.

I wasn't going to be one of his hedonistic concubines. I wanted something more out of life. It wasn't only a matter of escaping Bill and June. I wanted to do thing on my terms. I needed something more to motivate me. I hated everything about my world. But there was no simple path that was going to make it all make sense.

Rose would have settled with the automatic escape plan. She would have given herself to Lance's world. She already did. In her world, there were so much hardship that she needed let off steam. And then she just headed back into the mess. I couldn't follow her example. She could offer me a different vantage point. But we were too different. She could talk about leaving, but she found enough of a rush in her present. She inspired me, but she showed me no clear answers

Sure enough, Bill and June couldn't leave well enough alone. They had to create a new crisis.

"Bill and I think that the place is vulnerable to burglars. There may have been a number of attempts to get in the basement door. Bill says that the hinges on the door seem loose. And we never even use it. For our protection, we're going to seal it up."

"I never saw anything like that."

"Are you doubting your father. Go down there and look!"

"I do want to see what you're talking about."

"I'm not just making a fuss over nothing."

I didn't want her to suspect me. I acted curious. I pretended that I wanted to help. And that was that. I felt like the mouse whose escape hatch was being closed up. I was being made a permanent prisoner in here,

"He's even considering an alarm system."

My time was running out. Pretty soon, they'd have me for good. I didn't want to let that happen. If they were going create a security system to frustrate me, I would have to figure out a technique to thwart them. More than keeping intruders out, they were all about keeping me locked inside. I was surely the inmate in a prison camp. I would discover a way to break out!

"Bill, I'm not sure that the system is burglar proof."

"It's not all wired up yet. It will be."

Bill thought of himself as the head spy in a worldwide operation. He was ready to net some big fish. I had been complacent. I took them for granted. And they had snuck up on me. Now they were ready for some real blood. I had few options.

There were so many flaws in their system. The master spy was going to be defeated by the super thief. I felt extra confident that I would find success.

My first test was to figure out how to get through the door. This was going to be harder than I thought. I couldn't do it in a day. I had to make it look secure if Bill decided to inspect it. At the same, time, I needed to guarantee free passage for myself.

Bill and June had protected themselves so well that they were no longer part of reality. They had always existed in this dream world. Their feared assailants were hardly as formidable

as the impediments that they had placed in front of their own development. But I watched them hit those speed bumps again and again. If they could blame anyone, I was front and center.

“Chloe, I used to have all kinds of dreams for myself. And then I became pregnant with you.”

Josh was never the source of her misery even though he was older. It was all my doing.

“I fear that you’ve made me sick with all your worry. Your mischief always seems to draw me to the brink.”

The brink now was the alarms going off. That would confirm that her dread was real. It was like Bill’s tirades again Mexicans. It allowed him to be the asshole at work. He could lord over his workers as if they were simply part in a car transmission.

Beyond their privileged friends, no one really crossed the barrier that they set. Ultimately, no one wanted to. They fostered their own loneliness. They couldn’t even tell the difference. If June didn’t have her shopping circle, she’d be dead to the world. But she kept up the facade. At their worst, they were the intruders gnashing their teeth in the darkness. It was lucky that they could even penetrate their own defenses.

I needed to test out my method. It was a real pain opening that door again. I almost needed a couple of more tools. But I made due with what we had. My father understood cars, but he was no great shakes as a carpenter. I found success in rigging the door.

The security system was going to be a little harder. I needed to learn everything about its operations. I became as expert as the installer. Maybe this was my calling. I was sealing Bill and June in their own cells.

Even though I had the key to getting back in, I figured that this was truly my chance to get out for good. I realized my parents’ intentions. If Bill ever caught me messing with his toys, he would go ballistic. A simple suspicion was going to be enough to send him over the edge. I didn’t envy seeing that wrath.

I truly romanticized my stay at Lance’s. He was Rose’s friend, someone who I barely knew. But I was ready to toss my fate in with his nefariousness. He wasn’t just the guy from the other night. He was a legend, the promise of a life time. Ultimately, the guy wasn’t that different from Adam. And I had never seen his dark side. I naturally assumed that he was always his jolly self.

I showed up at Lance’s. I was hoping for a good time. I thought that I’d shack up there for a while. He’d be my ticket.

The front door was closed. Last time it had been wide open. It ought to have been a sign. I knocked anyway. I heard noises inside. But it took a while for someone to come to the door.

“What are you doing here?”

“You said any time!”

“Not a good time.”

“What?” I felt the breath knocked out of me.

“My old lady’s back in town. You’ve got to hit the road, little girl. Come back when she’s gone.”

“When’s that?”

“I dunno’. A week or two. Ask Rose. She’ll know”

He wasn’t going to whisk me off into the California sun. I felt as if I had shown up at

the house of one of my teachers. He was playing adult on me.

“Go away, little girl.”

It wasn't as if I made it all up. He had been so receptive. Maybe, he wanted me to sleep with him. I wanted to believe that I was ready. But his *old lady* would have showed up no matter what. I still would have been out in the cold. He wasn't going to turn over her for me. For all that I knew, it was probably her house. That was why he was always in like Flynn.

It didn't take much to end my stupendous dream. I had left the house with the intention of not going back. I would have to crawl like a worm just to ingratiate myself to the new Moloch. The system did what Bill never could. It claimed invincibility. I paid fealty to its order. I just used its intent against it.

I opened the door without a hassle. The alarm was a new wrinkle. I knew its insides like the back of my hand. But Lance had got me flustered. I did my best to recover my wits. I stayed cool. I was the perfect safe-cracker.

I had won back what was always mine. In getting back to my room, I was reclaiming the twisted reaches of my soul. I had made an effort to escape. This was my reward.

My sleep was again unsettled. The new villain of the piece was Bill. I had previously experienced this nightmare. Now, it was even more perverse. He assumed the role of Adam. This was so much more intense. I knew that he was in the house. I felt that he was punishing me for messing with his security system. He had his hands around my neck, and he was cutting off my air. I coughed. I did what I could to fend off his attack. I could sense his viciousness, a cruelty without bounds. Had this been the emotion that had always tainted me. I was living with a killer.

In the morning, Bill had the strangest pallor. I wanted to know for sure that I had been lost in my dreams. But his eyes seemed to betray the reality.

“Bill, are you all right?”

He looked back at me, “I told you never to call me by my first name.”

Was he teasing me, or was he really angry? I hardly knew. I watched him head off to work as I ate my breakfast. I guess that he was a little late because of his misadventure of the night before.

There was a marked reluctance as I rode to school. I hadn't wanted to return to this place. I had done my utmost to chart out a new way. If only they would throw me out, that would be my solution. Try as I might, I was always the model student.

Rose followed up on my visit, “Lance said that you came by.”

“Yeah!”

“That guy's a freak. Something like Bluebeard.”

“Does he have a dungeon.”

“He might as well. When Jane's away, there are all kinds of girls drugged over there.”

“It seemed like he was on his best behavior for her.”

“I'm not sure. I half-figured that she might have encouraged the worst in him.”

“Rose, that's wishful thinking.”

“You were the one who wanted him to take you on a caravan journey to paradise.”

“I just need to get away from Bill and June for good. They've got a security system to monitor me.”

“I knew that was coming. They’re looking for evidence to trip you up. At my place, they just assume that I’m guilty and punish me accordingly.”

“I feel as if all the parents are working together. Part of this giant conspiracy.”

“If you can find out more about it, tell me.”

I knew that Rose was never going to leave. Despite all the shit that her parents put her through, she was caught in her cycle. She’d push it to the limits only to get them angrier at her. And they’d punish her outrageously. That would only give her the justification to push out more. But she’d always crash in flames before she ever had the chance to recognize really what was going happening to her.

She didn’t have the nerve to leave for good. That was why she was secretly glad that Lance didn’t amount to much for me. I should have realized as much. He was there to get us high. He wanted us all fucked up. That was that. He acted as if he was telling us something about the world. But he was just one of them. A different kind of gatekeeper. He didn’t need a security system. He had already measured the perimeter of his property. And he patrolled in the mind. It was brainwashing.

I saw it as worse than Adam. Adam was out of my life. But Lance wanted to get inside my hand. I had been a willing victim.

For all my trying, I had only become skilled at manipulating a security system. It was all about knowing Bill and June. But that was nothing new. And my dreams of paradise were fading before my eyes. I couldn’t take the pressure. And I couldn’t stay inside my cell. I needed a permanent escape.