Will I Ever

By Hunter Sometimes

I was running out of options. For the past three hours, we'd been sitting on Ryan's living-room floor chugging beer and playing "Never Have I Ever." The booze had punched gaping holes in any sort of personal information filter I possessed. I already had revealed that I had never tasted ketchup, snorted coke, or seen a girl naked. I couldn’t think of anything else, so I said, “Never have I ever come standing up.”

Before I said that, we were all laughing together. But now, after trying to outdo everyone, they laugh at me. Even my boyfriend Damon laughs, though he sounds like someone choking on mouthwash after trying to gargle.

Directly across from me, Ryan gets up on his knees and slams his hands down on his hideous lion-leg coffee table.

“Never?” Ryan says. “You’ve seriously never gotten off standing up?”

A single arching brow frames his left eye. He stares at me, and my finger traces the rim of my beer.

I realized my just-shared secret years ago when—per my masturbatory ritual—I lay down on the floor of my tub-shower combo, its cold porcelain stinging my back. From that angle I would see all my leftover brown hairs clinging to the tub walls where the water rarely hit. The beige porcelain would warm against my body, and I would close my eyes. Just like that.

But that night I had just watched a porno online. It exhibited some generic frat boy in the shower. He was jerking off under the water, but he stood with a wide stance with one arm behind his back like he was in the military.

“I should try that,” I thought.
So I stood up in shower with the hot water hitting my back. I closed my eyes and concentrated. I thought of the guy in the video and mimicked his motions. Slowly my arm got tired, and I switched from my right to my left. Still nothing. When my left arm tired, I switched back to the right and made my arm sprint like a marathoner in his last hundred yards. Except I fell flat right before the finish line. I was left with a red penis and a swollen arm.

“Shut the fuck up,” I say to Ryan. “I bet I’m not the only one.”

I look at our group, circled around the coffee table. All the guys drink from their red cups, a gesture that signals they finished the race. A couple of girls drink, too. I didn’t know girls could do it standing up, but girls aren’t exactly my forte either.

“I guess you were right, Trace,” Ryan says to me. “You’re not the only one, but a couple of my girls have two legs up on you.”

He high-fives some girl wearing a long t-shirt as a dress and heavy eyeliner that makes her look like she’s constantly squinting. She’s totally the dirty type.

“Ih, so who’s next?” I say.

The squinty-eyed girl snickers.

I hide behind my beer cup, tilting it back until my vision is restricted to the foam sloshing against the cup’s walls.

Damon appears to have stopped his choked laugh, but now he just stares at his half-empty beer. He’s probably sifting through memories of sex and trying to recall what position I was in when I came. It’s one of those things nobody ever notices until it gets mentioned. Then Damon slowly turns his head towards me and puts his hand on my knee underneath the table. He whispers, “We’ll work on it, baby,” into my ear. It feels like he’s sitting me down to give me a masturbation intervention.
“So…” Ryan says. “Never have I ever come while doing a handstand and eating pancakes.”

Everyone cracks up, and it feels good to have the collective drunken attention diverted.

When the party ends, Damon and I say goodbye to everyone and get into my old black Escort. I hand Damon the keys because he’s the lesser of two drunks. As he drives, he taps his thick fingers on the steering wheel.

“Is this my fault?” he finally asks.

“What are you talking about?”

“Am I not doing it right?”

“Babe, it has nothing to do with you. I shouldn’t have said anything.”

He tries to say something else, but I shush him. We both laugh.

“Let me see those lips,” he says in the playfully demanding voice I’ve heard many times before.

I look at him and make the shushing noise again. He smiles and watches my lips as they protrude.

“So cute.”

I turn up the radio, and some sad country song about being drunk and alone plays on the radio. The drunken part I definitely can identify with, but I reach over and grab one of Damon’s hands. It feels like I’m holding a large bear paw.

I think back to when Damon asked me out on our first date about eight months ago. We met online, and I feared his judgment when we saw each other outside of a screen for the first time. I remember riding the escalator up to the mall’s cineplex. Masses of people waited in line
for tickets and sat around in the lobby. Damon was the one with the bright guava T-shirt. We
were both excited and unsure. It almost feels like nothing has changed since that day.

When we finally get to my apartment, and I can’t wait to crash into my cold bed. When I
strip down to my green bikini briefs, though, Damon stops me from lying down.

“Don’t get in bed,” he says. “I want you to try.”

“Try what?”

He starts kissing my neck and slowly works his way down to my chest, then belly button.
My head falls backwards, and my eyes shut. He leaves a faint trail of saliva down my body, and
the whirling ceiling fan turns each kiss into a cool nip.

I grab onto one of his shoulders.

“I don’t want to.”

He doesn’t stop though.

“I can’t do it. Please, baby. Stop.”

Down on his knees now, he tries to put me in his mouth. My legs tremble slightly. I push
on his chest and take a step back.

“Why can’t I do it, babe?” he says.

“I’m… just too drunk right now.”

Damon gets up and walks to the bathroom.

I follow and watch him pull his toothbrush out of my medicine cabinet. He brushes hard
and fast with a taut forearm. Blue foam bubbles from his lips and drips down his chin. He spits
the foam into the sink, and there are rusty swirls in the droplets. His gums outline themselves
with a thin strip of blood.
I move to retrieve my toothbrush, but my hand hits one of the shelves. A small bottle drops down into the sink, sounding like a baby’s rattle.

Damon picks up the orange tube and blue spittle drips off of it. He tries to read the bottle, but the label is torn off.

“What are these pills for?”

I’m too drunk to lie or make up an excuse, so I shake my head with my eyes wide open. I take the bottle from him and replace it in the cabinet. I don’t tell him why I have them or why the doctor gave them to me. The medicine-cabinet door swings around, and its magnet clasps connect and click shut.

“I’m really tired,” I say. “Let’s go to bed.”

I turn off the light, and we both shuffle our feet on the carpet, groping for the bed in the dark.

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“Thanks for inviting me to your party,” I say to Ryan. “I’m sorry I made an ass of myself.”

He leans over the food court table with a wide, goofy smile, like he has an orange slice behind his teeth. He moves his feet under the table and bumps my shopping bags, full from a friendly day of retail therapy.

“Do you honestly think anyone remembers or even cares? I never even noticed it when we were dating.”

I look down at my plate of mall Chinese food that I had stopped eating because the grease made my chest hurt. Little chunks of rejected bourbon chicken float in the thick brown sauce,
some of them chewed a little and spit back out because they felt like rubber bands between my teeth. I swirl my rice in the goop, then look up at Ryan again.

“Damon won’t leave me alone now,” I say.

“Does he even know we dated?”

“That shouldn’t matter.”

“Why are you holding back from him?”

Ryan picks up his massive pepperoni-stuffed stromboli. He sinks his teeth into it and orange grease splatters down onto his plate.

“Waffs stoffing you?” he says through a mouthful of bread and cheese.

I think of Damon, his spiky black hair, broad shoulders, smooth face and cute smile. I always think he looks sexy, especially when he hasn’t shaved for a couple of days. He’s seven years older than me, and that’s been an issue for everyone except me. When he drives me around, I always find lone gray hairs glittering in the sunlight even though he dyes his hair. I never tell him because then he’d fix it, attempting to disguise the fact that he’s thirty. But I want him just the way he is.

“I don’t know,” I say. “I’m totally attracted to Damon. It’s not him. I don’t know what it could be. I didn’t realize I had a problem until your party. That night, Damon tried to get me to do it, and he’s been trying ever since.”

“Well, ‘a’ minus ‘b’ equals ‘c,’” Ryan says.

“What?”

“If Damon isn’t part of the problem, then you’re the problem. Duh.”

Now I see why Ryan failed calculus three semesters in a row.

“I don’t understand how it’s a problem.”
“You have to take *charge*, man. It’s like what I just learned in my science class about variables and controls. Right now, you’re the variable because you’re up and you’re down and you’re everywhere, especially since your accident—“

“This has nothing to do with that.” I start to pick up my bags. I don’t want to hear anymore.


“What?”

“All I’m saying is that you can’t be the variable; you need to be the control. Because when you’re the control, you’re *in* control.”

“I think you’re going to fail that science class.”

We laugh.

“I do need to go, though,” I say. “I have to get to Damon’s because we’re going to one of his friend’s houses tonight.”

I give Ryan a hug. He’s clueless, but he gives the best non-advice.

He walks away slowly because of his stiff left leg. His knee won’t bend, and he always hobbles on it like a peg leg. As I watch, it feels like a stone has lodged in my throat, and it’s hard to swallow the sight of him. I turn away quickly.

I parked at the other end of the mall, so I have to walk past all the countless shops again. Grit from the floor crunches underneath my flip-flops as I walk. I always forget how disgustingly dirty this mall is until I’m in it, although it works as a quick fix for my need to spend some money. Two shopping bags weigh down each of my arms. They’re filled with jackets and sweaters and scarves and hats. I’ll never be able to wear them. Even though it’s winter now, Florida will never get cold enough to warrant anything I purchased. I just have an obsession with
winter clothing because I love the idea of bundling up, having clothes that envelope me in a fashionable, warm hug.

I start to notice all the stores I never pay attention to. Most of them have generic or stupid names like “Fashionista” or “Trendy Gurlz.” One of the stores is a men’s big and tall warehouse. I go in out of curiosity. Large bins are stacked along thin aisles. It looks like an oversized person hoarded clothes for years. I find it hard to move in between the rows of bins, and I chuckle as the many gorilla-framed men sidestep down the aisles, bumping into countless piles of T-shirts I could probably use as tents.

When I get to the end of an aisle, a clerk stands over me. He’s about a foot taller than me and blocks me from getting any further. His hands are folded behind his back. His chest puffs up and the muscles look rock-hard. His nametag sticks out, which says “Jeoffery” and has a thin line of rainbow colors along the bottom edge.

“We don’t carry twink size here,” he says and points to my extra-small tee. “Run along.”

I find my way out of the maze of bins and don’t even look at any more shop fronts. Sticky with embarrassment, I try to get out of the mall as quickly as possible. When I make it onto the asphalt parking lot, I laugh at myself.

I find my Escort after pressing the panic button and remember what Ryan said to me today.

“Control.” The word slips off my tongue.

I start the car, and the engine hums. My hands slowly grip the steering wheel at the proper “10 and 2 o’clock” positions. The wheel feels electric under my sweating palms.

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After Damon’s friend’s house party, we drive back to my apartment. From all the rounds of beer and secondhand smoke, I smell like a bar’s ashtray.

“Babe, I’m going to take a shower,” I say.

“Okay, I’ll follow you in there. I need to poop first.”

“That’s gross. I don’t want to smell that.”

“But I gotta, babe.”

In the shower, I lather some shampoo and wash my hair. I hear Damon shuffle into the bathroom, and the plastic toilet lid clanks open.

“No peeking,” he says.

“Never,” I say, smiling behind the curtain.

I wait a few minutes and think, This is going to be good. I jerk back the curtain and scream, “Boo.” Stool-flavored air blasts my face.

“Hey,” Damon yells, his face torn between laughter and discomfort.

I only get a split-second view before I pull the curtain closed again, but I see Damon differently. Sitting there naked, he looks like the most vulnerable of creatures, like a cat caught in a downpour.

After he flushes, he pulls the curtain back and gets in the shower. The toilet smell slowly dissipates in the steam.

“You little jerk,” he says and smiles.

He gives me a hug from behind and starts kissing my neck. I close my eyes, and he rubs my body with the bar of lavender-scented soap. Before I know it, he’s on his knees. I realize what he’s trying to do, but this time I go with it.

“Do it,” he says.
I stroke myself, starting slow but gaining speed. Then, the big-and-tall clothing man pops into my head. Control. Then Ryan’s orange-peel smile. Control. Then wet cats. Control. My arm starts tiring. I grab onto the rail on the shower wall.

Keep going, I think. Keep going.

I close my eyes and try to imagine a porn scene, any porn scene, that will get me through, but my legs start shaking. I look down at Damon and he looks bored, like he’s waiting for the train to come. My legs tremble so badly that I can’t stand up anymore. I have to stop.

“Baby, I’m sorry,” I say through heavy breaths. “I can’t.”

I get out of the shower and wrap myself in a towel. My reflection stares through the medicine cabinet’s mirror, and I imagine the pill bottle inside. The cabinet door swings open. A creamsicle-orange pill drops into my open palm, and it tastes bitter going down.

I look behind me. Damon stands in shower, naked and wet. Droplets of water cluster on his chest hair stubble.

Probably shouldn’t have done that, I think.

Damon follows me into the bedroom, and I lie down on the bed facing away from him.

“What did you just take?” he says.

I only have about fifteen minutes before the chemicals take effect. Damon flips me on my back so he can look in my eyes.

“I was giving him a ride home after we visited our families for the holiday,” I say.

It was right after Thanksgiving two years ago. It had been raining that day, and the roads were wet. I drove my dad’s truck up the interstate on-ramp with Ryan in the passenger seat. As I turned the steering wheel with the road’s curve, my tires hit a shallow puddle. The tail end of the truck hydroplaned, and the vehicle spun around and off the ramp. I remember screaming “Oh,
shit” as I futilely slammed the brakes. The truck began rolling down the hill. Ryan’s side collided with the ground first as we rolled. We were upside down, and the roof dented in. My hands were locked onto the wheel. My side window shattered, slinging glass and mud into the truck.

Then we stopped. The truck was right side up. Ryan’s legs were trapped between his seat and the crunched dashboard. I saw something splattered across the windshield, but I couldn’t tell if it was blood or mud. My door was stuck, so I crawled through the empty window frame. I was in the bottom of a ditch. The rain drizzled on me, and I looked up at the road. Water spewed off my lips as I screamed, giving a jagged shape to the sound.

“I lost control,” I say. “I could have killed him.”

I look at Damon. He touches my arm, but… silence. He waits. And it feels like a flood pounding down on my stomach, filling up my limbs. My waterlogged organs bloat underneath my skin, and my body feels so heavy. The flood fills up to my head and slams into the backs of my eyes. None of the water escapes, though. It just rages behind my eyes, which feel like portholes on a sinking ship.