



**SEX
VIOLENCE** A NOVEL

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They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

—Philip Larkin

The Lake

This girl I hardly knew, taller than I was
and skinny, who made us boys
puff ourselves up and show off how far
we could throw rocks, or how many times
we could skip stones across the choppy water;
this awkward kid I'd never really spoken to
asked me one afternoon to swim across the lake with her.
We were sitting on the dock. It was chilly, but I said
I would do it, though the other side was hazy—almost
out of sight—and it would take us until dark
to make it there and back. So we dove in and started off
slowly. As we swam, mostly breast stroke, she talked
about the lake, how old it was, what sorts of creatures
lived there now, how it had changed
over its lifetime, the depth of its ice
in winter, how the fish huddled down on the bottom
between the ice and mud. And then she asked me
what I knew, and I had to say, *Nothing in particular.*
And then, despite myself, I made up a story
about the stars: I heard myself singing a song
I made up as I sang, about the constellations,
and soon she was singing with me. We reached
the middle of the lake, out of breath but singing,
and realized the other side was too far. We treaded
water there, then turned and headed back, quiet now.
We were tired. We climbed out and walked our separate ways
home through the dusk light to our families
in silence. No goodbyes. And we never spoke again.

—Michael Hettich

PROLOGUE

You'd think the most fucked-up part of the last year would be the moment when I read this and thought, "Yeah, that. That sounds like the way to go."

The northern side of Pearl Lake is unusually deep, due to its formation during the time of the Ice Age. It is near this point that the lake links up with the Beauchant River, which has been used as a logging route since the last century. However, not all of the intended cargo made it to a lumberyard destination; many of these logs sank into the cold abyss. An intrepid diver would find many of those tremendous logs still at the bottom of the lake, in a kind of graveyard to industry. Abandoned and untouched they remain, as any microorganisms that might decompose them cannot survive at those temperatures and depths.

You'd think that would be my low point. Not even close.

CHAPTER ONE

When I came out of the Connison gang shower, Collette Holmänder was waiting for me. She was standing in the hallway, her long red hair splashing down her black jacket and white shirt, her red knee socks on her pretty legs beneath her little black skirt. Even though Remington Chase was a vaguely religious boarding school, the girls' uniforms were unreasonably sexy—practically porn fantasies.

“Check out Evan Carter, skipping chapel!” Collette said.

“So are you,” I answered, all annoyed, because she'd caught me in nothing but flip-flops and uniform pants (unreasonably dorky, think dipshit caterer). While my body's not deformed or anything, I'm not one of those douchey guys who struts around shirtless. But it could have been worse—for Collette, at least—as Connison was a boys-only dorm, and lots of guys went around in just towels, sometimes less.

“I don't get you, Evan,” Collette said, walking toward me. “You're weird.”

“Thanks,” I said, pushing by her, digging through my shower stuff for my room key.

“No, really.” She was following me. “You run superfast, but only, like, 50 percent of the time.” Now, as if to live up to this accusation, I was walking pretty fast. But she kept up with me, her shoes clacking on the linoleum way too loudly.

“And you ace every test in chemistry but flunk everything else,” she added, when we got to my door. Her fucking perky-cocky voice echoed in the empty hallway.

“So?” I said, putting my key in the lock.

“Plus, you're decent-looking, but you won't even talk to Farrah no matter how much I tell you that she wants you to ask her out. Now the chapel skipping? What could all this mean?”

I had nothing to say about what this all meant, but that didn't matter. Collette Holmänder was the kind of girl who asked you a million questions and then didn't give you time to answer half of them. The kind of girl who wouldn't stop getting in your face when she wanted something. The kind of girl sent by her friends to feel out if a guy liked them. I hated that kind of shit, as a rule. If I'm looking to hook up, I don't need any help. I've got my own tested methods, and they didn't include messenger chicks like Collette Holmänder.

“Farrah *always* goes to chapel. She might think you're avoiding her.”

“I *am* avoiding her,” I said turning to stand in the doorway. “Her boyfriend wants to smash my face in, remember?”

“I told you, they broke up,” she said.

“Try telling him that,” I said. “And what the hell are you doing here, anyway? No girls allowed beyond the common room.”

“Then let me in, dummy,” she said, standing on tiptoes to look behind me.

So I let her in my room, against my better judgment. Collette and my roommate, Patrick Ramsey, had hooked up last year, but now they hated each other. (This was before my time, but he made sure I knew his hookup history as soon as we became roommates.) He called her firecrotch and she called him needledick and it was fucking uncomfortable.

On top of that, Collette was always pestering me about Farrah, who supposedly liked me, for no reason other than I sat by her in Spanish and I was the Fucking New Guy at this incestuous little prison of a boarding school forty-five minutes south of Charlotte, North Carolina. Apparently, for Farrah, the fact that I had a Yankee accent and shaggier hair than every square-faced Southern boy she’d grown up with made me thrilling and exotic. Or just more thrilling and exotic than Tate Kerrigan, her asshole boyfriend, who used entirely too much hair gel and who remained obsessive about Farrah to the point where he had nearly punched me out one night outside the dining hall because he’d heard we’d done a Spanish project together in the common room at Fountaineau, the junior girls dormitory.

So this was the context when I found myself cornered in my own room by Collette Holmander. Who was pretty foxy, actually. If you had to be cornered by a girl while skipping chapel, Collette was a good candidate for the job. Still, I was a little surprised. Messenger chicks don’t usually help themselves to the guys they’re sent to check out.

Collette kicked the door shut, grabbed my towel and

shower kit, and dropped them on the floor. She was so close to me that my whole body popped up in goose bumps, which was embarrassing enough, but things got worse below the belt when she reached over and touched the necklace I wore. It was this flat silver circle on a silver chain. My mother gave it to me when I was eleven, the week I went to Scout camp. She died five days later.

“What is this?” Collette asked, her voice soft, her eyes locking on mine. I could smell her perfume. Or whatever it was. She smelled like a vanilla milk shake.

“Nothing,” I said, swallowing hard. “My mom gave it to me. It’s just a circle.”

She reached behind me and turned the lock on the door. Her other hand still on the silver circle.

“Collette . . .” I started, not sure what to say.

Then she rose on tiptoes and kissed me.

So. All right. This was the first thing about Southern boarding school I could recommend. Alone in my room, with a cute girl who had nice boobs and made all the moves and blew my mind with her long jump during track and called my douchebag roommate a needledick.

“Did you just shave, Evan?” she whispered.

“Yeah.”

“It smells awesome.”

There was probably ten more minutes of chapel. But I didn’t want her to go. She was wrapped around me, my hands on her ass over her skirt, her boobs smushed against my chest and her hair everywhere in a big awesome mess. I thought about the box of condoms stashed in a duffel bag in my closet. The only other redhead I’d ever been with was the Cupcake Lady

of Tacoma, which sort of thrilled me and freaked me out at the same time. I wondered if I could even get Collette's clothes off in time.

But then she stepped back. Straightened her skirt and hair, pulled up one knee sock, checked her watch. "Chapel ends in four minutes. I'll come by tomorrow."

"Here?"

"Has to be here," she said, kissing my lower lip one last time. "Mrs. Herst patrols Fountaineau during chapel, but Mr. Feining always gets coffee in the canteen. And if you tell anyone about this, you will never fucking see me again. I mean it."

Then she whooshed out, and I stood there trying to get my dick to calm the fuck down.

I was lucky Collette had a sense of time, because a few minutes after I'd gotten my wood to deflate and put on my shirt and tie, Patrick Ramsey came back to the room. I wasn't particular about friends, as I've attended six schools nationwide since age thirteen, but Patrick Ramsey wasn't anyone I'd pick to hang out with. Patrick Ramsey—he told me everyone called him The Rammer—was a huge, muscular guy, with a face like a spiral-cut ham. He was from Georgia, where his parents owned a bunch of factories, and he played football in the fall and wrestled in the winter and took off sports in spring, because that was when he dedicated himself to "finding some ass to nail."

But as I transferred to Remington Chase at the end of January, I didn't have much choice where roommates were concerned. My father's job took him between Charlotte and London, so boarding school was his magnificent solution to his

absence. Not that Adrian Carter had ever been really present in any sense since my mom died. My father has a Ph.D. in applied mathematics, but his specialty is computer science. What this meant out in the world was that he either taught college classes or pimped out his skills to companies (or both). What this meant to me was that he hardly spoke or did anything that didn't involve his laptop.

Patrick was now looking at me strangely, and I panicked that he knew what had happened with his ex-girlfriend. But he just smacked on a ton of aftershave and told me to clear out.

"You're sexiled, Carter," he said. "Jenna's coming over. I made it happen during chapel. You really underestimate chapel, dude. It's where The Rammer gets all his ass."

I hated the word "dude" as a rule, and I wouldn't have believed anyone would ever talk about themselves in the third person until I met Patrick Ramsey. Though I didn't mind being sexiled. I could barely sleep on the nights Patrick whispered to some dumb chick on his phone while he yanked it. At least when you got sexiled, you could get away from that shit, sit in the common room doing homework until your roommate finished his blue-balls session. But now I just nodded, trying not to smile. Because as far as I could tell, The Rammer knew fuckall about the value of chapel.

"And fucking cut your hair, dude!" Patrick yelled as I headed out. "Everyone thinks I'm rooming with a fag!"

In these modern times, there are three types of guys who use the word "fag." The first have been ignorantly brought up. The second never get any chicks anyway. And the third are secretly gay themselves.

If I didn't hear him coo into his phone in the middle of

the night on a regular basis, I might have put Patrick Ramsey into all three categories at once. He was from *Georgia*, for one thing. And I doubted most girls found it too appealing how he went around insisting people call him The Rammer, which, in addition to the whole “find some ass to nail” comment, wasn’t exactly heterosexual, either. But girls are weird. I’m always amazed at the shit they put up with for a little attention.

It should be said that though nowhere as muscular as Patrick Ramsey, I am a decent-looking guy: black hair, brown eyes, almost six feet tall, skinny-but-okay build from track and swimming—when I could manage the timing of both sports with all the moving around. And this, along with the fact that human beings are fascinated with novelty, might explain why though I had my share of problems being the Fucking New Guy, getting girls was never one of them.

I’m not being conceited, though it might come off a little dickish. I realize common sense would tell you that getting chicks and being the Fucking New Guy don’t necessarily go together. But the novelty thing—it goes a long way for girls. Just go into any mall, where 99 percent of the stuff is for women. Girls are endlessly fascinated with trinkets. Cell phone charms and hairbands and rings on their toes and scarves in the middle of summer and whatever the hell else. I never get over how much junk girls drag around, like those flea market people who haul all their shit around in conversion vans. Bracelets rattling on their arms and earrings up and down their ears and a million things crisscrossing over their shoulders—purses and book bags and backpacks and bra straps and tank tops and necklaces.

But it wasn’t just being new and shiny that made me successful with chicks. The selection of the target also was important. For example: Farrah. Farrah was cute and interested in me, but that didn’t make her a good target. It wasn’t that I had high standards or anything. I just looked for Girls Who Would Say Yes.

Not Yes to giving me phone numbers or hanging out. That was a Yes I knew Farrah, with all her rings and her long blonde hair fluffing up everywhere, would happily say.

I mean, Yes to getting naked—or at least naked enough. Yes to sex. Because I didn’t live anywhere for too long and didn’t have time to mess around going on a million dates or whatever. I’ve got a profile of the Girl Who Would Say Yes, and Farrah, with her redneck ex-boyfriend and gold crucifix necklace, didn’t fit it.

Really, the best you could hope for from a Farrah type is if you endured some spectacular nightmare prom scenario where you rented a limo and a tux and suffered through a million pictures with her friends and her parents and went out for dinner and danced with her and then at the end, maybe, just maybe, you’d get a handjob out of the deal. And Farrah looked like the kind of chick who’d keep all her damn rings on while she did it.

Even though I look fairly normal myself, Girls Who Would Say Yes tended to be left of normal. A left-of-normal girl doesn’t care what you look like, beyond that you aren’t a hunchback or covered in acne. Because for a left-of-normal girl, it’s all about her, anyway. These chicks have certain, obvious quirks. Piercings, tattoos, hair dyed a color never intended by nature. Or—this sounds horrible and probably would put mothers everywhere on high alert—a really short skirt or low-

cut shirt. Because left-of-normal girls aren't allergic to risk. Gothic or artistic hippie chicks were often a good bet. Though sometimes I picked wrong and got a girl too far down the dial toward crazy. Like stalking crazy. But then my dad would make us move, and it wouldn't matter anymore.

So the next day during chapel, when Collette Holmander came to Connison, I was waiting for her, happy that I'd barely done anything to get her in the first place. Though Collette herself was somewhat left-of-normal, actually, compared to other girls at Remington Chase. Maybe I'd just failed to recalibrate left when I crossed the Mason-Dixon.

Collette was from Boston. She swore a lot and constantly got demerits from Ms. Stahlman, the girls track coach. Plus she was a redhead, which, since *The Cupcake Lady* of Tacoma, I couldn't help but find attractive.

I locked the door and Collette flopped against me on my unmade bed and we made out until her shirt was off and I was so hard I was almost sick to my stomach. But before I could test the idea of where she was on the sex thing (I usually started with this basic hand motion toward the belly-button area and then just a little lower toward the edge of the panties, as if to acknowledge they were there, as *Girls Who Said No* were always touchy about things going in that direction), Collette just shoved her (ringless) hand down my pants and jerked me off. Then she popped up and put back on her clothes.

"Chapel ends in four minutes," she said, running out the door before I could even move.

These secret chapel make outs went on for a couple of

weeks. It was dangerous, because Patrick could have come in at any time, and I didn't want to imagine what he'd do if he found me with the one girl at Remington Chase who wasn't afraid to curse him out across the dining hall. So I couldn't talk to Collette except during chapel or at track practice, when I'd see her doing the long jump and get wood at the sight. I could barely look at her at all without getting wood, to be honest.

One night I went to dinner with Patrick and one of his friends, a tall blond guy who played basketball, whose name I instantly forgot except for the fact that it ended in III. (People at Remington Chase tended to have fancy names like that, even if this asshole looked about as aristocratic as the guy who changed my father's oil at the Mercedes dealership in Charlotte.) III was nice enough but sort of interchangeable, in the way all The Rammer's friends were. Bulky, athletic, sort of dim. Focused on giving each other shit and getting drunk and doing things like sitting around in someone's room and talking about all the pussy they wanted but instead of actually getting up and doing something about it, just watching crap old movies like *Apocalypse Now* or *A Clockwork Orange* over and over, rewinding the super-insane violent parts and spitting chew into soda bottles and farting, all activities to ensure no females would ever come near them. Some of these guys had girlfriends, but they seemed uninterested in crossing the regulated sex divide Remington Chase had built up around the dorms, like it was more fun to hang out with each other and call each other a fag every second, which was crazy to me, since all their male bonding was highly gay, in actuality.

"This is one hell of an impressive debut, filled with a pervasive undercurrent of fear, tension, and uncertainty you get from staring down into the deepest, darkest, coldest lake. *Sex & Violence* deserves shelf space alongside the classics of adolescent-themed fiction."

—Andrew Smith, author of *The Marbury Lens* and *Stick*

"*Sex & Violence* is an absolutely unrelenting look at life after physical and emotional trauma. It's dark and sometimes painful to watch, but it hurts even more to look away. Evan's story will sit with me for a very long time."

—Trish Doller, author of *Something Like Normal*

"*Sex & Violence* is never what it seems. It never goes where you expect it will. It is funny, scary, brutal, and tender. It is an honest meditation on masculinity. And, it's all delivered through the eyes of a damaged genius of a boy, Evan Carter, who you hope so hard will be okay."

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"This is an important contribution to YA lit, on par with coming-of-age classics like *Rats Saw God*."

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