

ABOVE THE STRIP

From the window of Finn's hotel room high above the Strip, I watch the sun slide behind the mountains. Backlit navy blue sky, a strip of bottom-lit orange-pink hovering over the crest of the mountain range, black night in the valley. I'm glad I got to see the sunset's quiet fireworks before Finn's gaudier display cornered my attention.

Time crawls when I wait for Finn, then suddenly runs out when I hear his key in the lock. Time did the same thing every Sunday during football season when I was in law school. I gave myself weekly breaks to watch all the games they televised. I would sit for hours, mesmerized by the intricate choreography of offensive and defensive plays. When eventually I stood, I was so stiff it took a few seconds for my body to remember it was supple and only 24. Those Sunday afternoons seemed to last forever and then, in a heartbeat, the last seconds on the game clock would tick down to zero and I would have to shake off the reverie and go back to real life.

My brain occupied a different plane during those weekly breaks. Its operations were more somnolent, more diffuse, less conscious and linear. Without thinking, I learned a new way to see and evaluate, one grounded not in cold mental contortions, but in action and reaction and beauty. Football taught me to look at the core rather than only at the periphery. The dazzling skill players were in the end less important to the ultimate outcome of the game than the workhorse players who, play after exhausting play, controlled the line of scrimmage. Watching the line was almost always the way to predict who would win.

Finn is a professional football player. He is a wide receiver, completely dazzling, completely arrogant. He knows he's extravagantly talented, one of the anointed few, and someone to whom no normal rules apply. He's not my kind of human being. But when I watch his games on TV or see his face above mine as he moves inside me, I'm as mesmerized by him as I was by the Sunday afternoon games his predecessors played a decade ago. When he leaves and I go back to my real life, my body protests as creakily as it did then.

The ribbon of sunlight above the mountains is almost gone, now as much recollected as seen. I leave the window slightly open, but draw the tissue-thin white inner curtains, which billow toward me on a sudden breeze. I still have my clothes on. I haven't taken off even my light coat, although the hotel room isn't cold and I've been waiting in it for nearly an hour. Finn likes to undress me. When he comes in the room, he will smile, kick the door closed behind him, and peel off his own clothes. His body will be beautiful, even the new bruises from this afternoon's game somehow adding to his beauty. He'll walk over to me, still smiling, and completely enclose my head in his huge hands. He'll tilt my face up, look knowingly and confrontationally into my eyes, and bend to kiss my already open mouth. I will try to press myself against him, to move faster, to touch him everywhere, but he won't let me. He wants me, but he likes holding me off, reminding me that I want him more.

He'll take off my coat, then my sweater, then my many-buttoned blouse, stroking, kissing, nibbling each newly uncovered area of skin. I'll remember that I have to wait. He's in charge and he doesn't need me. Once, I pulled off my own clothes and jumped into his arms. We made love, but then he left and I didn't hear from him for two months. I've learned to stand patiently, meeting his eyes when I can, while he unhurriedly pulls off layers. I've worn a lot today and he'll be happy. Finally, I'll be naked, too. Time, which will have been crawling, will speed up. I will throw my arms around his neck; he will pick me up and slide into me. One of the white curtains will billow and graze my back; the room will be dark, but Finn's eyes will be shining.

He will walk us the few steps to the wall, the curtain yielding to him as he passes. Pressing me against the wall, he will press himself against me. I will want him to go on forever. He will go on until he's satisfied. I will be swirling in a blizzard of pleasure. I have to remember sex with Finn or anticipate it in order to have any conscious thoughts about it at all. In the moment, it's all sensation. All action and reaction and beauty.

If I'm lucky, he will carry me to the bed when he's done and lie down next to me. We may sleep or he may caress me slowly, absently. If I'm not lucky, he will be wired and we will have to get dressed and go down to the casino, where we will play high-stakes blackjack and everyone will stare at him. At one or two in the morning, he will want a colossal steak. I will cuddle next to him in the booth, taking occasional bites off his plate, while people fawn over him. We won't talk much. In public, he's not mine and I'm only an accessory, not a real person.

Finn's not mine in private either. When he plays in Oakland or San Diego or even Denver, he usually calls me and I meet him, in Las Vegas if he has time, otherwise in whatever city he's playing in. I'm not his only West Coast accessory, and he doesn't always call me. He knows I don't reflect as well on him in public as my more beautiful and showy counterpart. I'm sure she's equally available to him, but she must not be as good a fuck. If she were, he'd never call me.

I met Finn when the law firm where I'm a partner did a deal for his team's general manager. The deal team got invited to the GM's box for a game and treated like royalty (which turned out to be in lieu of prompt payment of our bill). The royal treatment included introductions to a few money players, those who could be rounded up post-game and coerced into pressing the flesh for promotional purposes. Finn loves limelight; I doubt he was hard to coerce. Like the three or four other players with him, he was fresh from the game – no helmet, but full pads, dirty, grass-stained uniform, glistening skin. He commandeered my eyes.

I know from watching his games on TV that Finn is 6'5" and he weighs 233 pounds. I know from looking into his eyes while he undresses me that they are brown with gold sparks and his eyebrows are black and thick. I know from having my hands in it that his hair curls in soft handfuls. I know from kissing it that his skin is hot and smooth and smells like freshly ironed white cotton shirts. My commandeered eyes have plenty of company: Finn besieges all my senses.

He walked into the GM's box at the game, shook hands all around, smiled a lot, and accepted congratulations as if they were his due. Maybe in response to a stunned (or less subtle) expression on my face, he looked at me meaningfully. Ridiculously, I gave him my business card, unable to think of any other way to suggest he touch me again without embarrassing myself in front of my partners and associates. Less than twenty-four hours later, he was in my bed. I've been at his beck and call ever since.

My friend Jenny recently got married. She's happy, so now she's sure everyone should be married. She thinks Finn treats me like shit and she can't understand why I let him. She's seen him play football on TV and she gets the attraction, but she thinks I should demand more from him. I can't imagine what more could be better than what I already get. Finn floods me and washes out everything else; he takes me away from self-awareness and self-direction and competition. He is my break, my guilty pleasure, evidence perhaps of a flaw in my character. But I live most of my life doing my part on the line of scrimmage. I know what matters. Finn is only a spectacular starburst on the periphery; he won't in the end determine the outcome of the game.