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Lindsay Hunter tells the stories no one else will in ways no one else can. In her down and dirty debut, she draws vivid portraits of bad people in worse places. A woman struggles to survive her boyfriend's terror preparations. A wife finds the key to her sex life in her dog's electric collar. Two teenagers violently tip the scales of their friendship. A rising star of the new fast fiction, Hunter bares all before you can blink in her bold, beautiful stories. In this collection of slim southern gothics, she offers an exploration not of the human heart but of the spine; mixing sex, violence and love into a harrowing, head-spinning read.

Daddy's

By Lindsay Hunter



We play truth or dare and it keeps getting worse. I run down the driveway and back up again with a hot dog in my teeth and my bikini bottoms in a wedge, I am on all fours, my naked butt in the air, a turd-like swirl of toothpaste on the small of my back, my best friend Jessica licking it off and gagging, I am dared to eat one of the twins' boogers. This I don't do. I take one look at it, dark red in the center, both dry and glistening, and I run to the bathroom and lock myself in.

Peggy's mom's soaps are shaped like seahorses; the one in the bathtub dish has been worn down into a featureless grubworm. I hold it in my hand, its underside slick and cold, while the other girls knock on the door, say, Come on you don't have to eat it, and Shelley wiped it on Peggy's brother's door so don't worry, and, from Jessica, You're being boh-ring.

After I hear them walk away and pad down the hallway, I come out. Peggy's brother's door is open slightly, I can hear the low tones coming from his television. The last time I was over at Peggy's he'd woken me up and I'd had to step over the other girls as he led me into his room and then he just held my hand, rubbing my knuckles with his thumb so hard that the next day my knuckles were red and chapped and my mother rubbed Eucerin on them for a week. That was all. He'd held my hand and then he'd dropped it and opened his door, waited for me to leave, and then closed it behind me. In the morning we ate cereal across from each other and he told Peggy he'd farted into her box of Corn Pops.

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Lindsay Hunter lives in Chicago, where she runs the flash fiction reading series, Quickies! Her short fiction has been published widely online. *Daddy's* is her first book.



Hey, Peggy's brother says. Come over here.

I hear Grace say, I am seriously going to vomit, which means the game is still going on. I knock on Peggy's brother's door and then, when I hear one of the girls coming down the hallway, I duck in and shut the door gently behind me. Peggy's brother is watching *The Shining*, waves of blood rushing down a hallway, two dead girls laying askew. I'd watched it many times at Peggy's house, and it had always seemed funny, too dramatic, we roared with laughter at the little girls asking Danny to come play with us, forever. But here, in Peggy's brother's room, it is suddenly terrifying. Danny's face frozen in fear, the stifling browns and gold of the hotel, Danny's mother's crowded, gnashing teeth.

My face is hot, I feel goldfish in my stomach and I trip on a basketball making my way over to him in the dark room. He laughs quietly. There's nowhere else to stand but in front of him, stretched out on the bed, his feet crossed at the ankles and sheathed in white gym socks.

Sorry, I say, for blocking your view.

It's no biggie, he says. He takes my hand again, pulls me onto the bed next to him, and we lie like that, side by side, looking up at his ceiling, at the flickering pattern the leaves make on his ceiling, at the flickering blue light between each leaf.

Have you heard of fucking? he asks, raising his voice over Danny's mother's screams.

I think so, I tell him.

Good, he says.

Oh, definitely, I say.

After a few minutes he reaches down, pulls my nightgown up. I'm going to look at you, he says. I hear the toilet flush, try to keep my voice as quiet as possible when I say, Okay.

He doesn't pull my underwear down like I thought he might. Instead he uses two fingers to yank the crotch over to the side, and I have to open my legs a bit wider. I can feel the breath from his nostrils down there, he is taking deep, calm breaths. It smells a little, he says. Not a bad smell, but definitely a smell. An odor, really. But again, not bad.



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In the living room the girls say Where the h-e-double-hockey-sticks were you? and You missed it—Grace and Peggy just touched each other's boobs for fifteen whole seconds, and It's your turn—Truth or Dare?

When I leave, Danny's father is limping through a snowy maze.

over with it. He locks eyes with mine, and I feel dared, I recognize the dare whirling behind his eyes, feel his heartbeat pick up against my thigh, and then he is lowering his head, I see the heart-shaped bit of his scalp at the top of his head, I feel his soft lips, hear the same smacking kiss of his mother used to place on my forehead at night, hear him say, I just really wanted to kiss it. And then he lets my underwear go, lets the crotch snap back in place, he pulls down my nightgown, says Don't step on my magnifying glass on your way out.

Oh, good, I say. That's good.

Hang on, he says, and jumps off the bed, pushes things around on his desk. Danny's father brandishes an axe, smiling, laughing. When Peggy's brother comes back he has a magnifying glass and a flashlight, and when he is next to me again he pulls the panties over with one hand, holds the magnifying glass in the other, bites the flashlight between his teeth. He prods a little, the way my mother does to her pizza dough on Friday nights, then pulls the two folds apart.

Wow, he says, the flashlight bobbing up and down. It's so ugly, but in a very great way. You know? I want to look at it forever.

The flickering pattern on the ceiling flickers faster, the wind picking up and faintly whistling, and I remember my dad telling me at breakfast that it would rain tonight, folding one corner of his paper down to look at me, then snapping it back up once I'd said, Oh, really? Oh yes, he'd said, we are going to have quite a storm.

It's this thought, the thought of my dad in his work clothes in our yellow kitchen this morning, reading the paper, letting the dog lick bacon grease from his fingers, that makes me want, more than ever, to get out of Peggy's brother's room. I have to go, I tell him.

Wait, he says, holding me by the hips, spitting the flashlight over the side of the bed and tossing the magnifying glass