

Fake Jewelry

Jessica Young

She'd been fucking Miles Austin for three months when he said it. They were in bed together. As soon as it happened, all that pretty, white magic began to flake off him like the skin of a false pearl, leaving behind a dented, ordinary bead. He'd run his large, manicured hands up the hourglass of her ribcage and breasts and exhaled in delight, "God, I love the way your skin looks next to mine."

Her eyes snapped open. She looked at her torso, a warm brown made darker by the shadows, over which his hands danced like albino spiders. He'd become just like the rest of them. Only her darkness aroused him; that brown-skinned, field nigger fantasy. His body taunted her, vibrant, rice paper white in the night, underneath her dark body, tangled between black bed sheets. Whether it was the sight of him beneath her that disgusted her, or the squeamish feeling from him rubbing against her insides, she didn't know. She knew only that in that moment he'd begun shedding shimmery imitation flecks of himself all over her. It always came to this; she'd been foolish to think Miles would be any different. She wanted the night over. She grabbed the headboard, tightened around him and began to bounce. He came faster when she bounced.

Deborah Burkett was a paralegal who worked for Miles at Hollis, Dyche & Austin: tall, quiet, with high cheekbones, a megawatt smile and a conspicuous lack of ambition. Every other paralegal was killing time before grad school, but Deborah had been hired at twenty-four, and remained four years later. Sure, he'd noticed her. She wasn't the fair-skinned, headband-wearing coquette marching through the revolving door. She was different. The legs had come first, long sturdy pipes that promised strength and grace. He liked her in trousers and pointy-toed shoes, but was driven to distraction by her skirts: short enough to display the calves of a dancer, tight enough to suggest the thighs of a climber. And she had this hair, a thick, kinky, shapely

afro; he daydreamed about how hair like that would feel against his chest, brushing between his legs. Of course he noticed her, but she, like others, was upwardly mobile, right? Then a year went by, and he realized she was the only girl still there who'd been there a year ago. He began to wonder if he could have her. Another year slid past them both as he watched her bending over to load files into a bag to take home; walking, with just the right rhythm and shake, to the copy machine; reaching across him for a napkin during a lunch meeting in the conference room. Why couldn't he have her? More time passed. Her left hand stayed conspicuously bare, her ambition conspicuously absent. If what they said about black women was true, she'd be the best lay of his life. He was cocky, he was curious, and he was bored. So, after four years of watching, elevator chitchat and harmless flirting, he pounced. He offered a friendly drink, and she smiled and accepted.

Two Hendricks and Tonics, please, he ordered.

Hendricks?

You'll like it. It's a good gin.

He ran the whole evening: Cabernet, perfectly grilled salmon, his finger firmly stroking her palm. The Scotch after dinner was bright and smoky, October in a glass. Then Deborah was home, laughing softly, her head swimming with alcohol and desire, watching Miles chew the buttons on her blouse open, running her fingers through his soft dark hair. She'd been seduced before. She didn't care about his race, his age (twenty years her senior), his position, or even his marriage. She enjoyed the trim athleticism of his middle-aged body and was grateful for what they offered each other: passion without romance, companionship without sentiment, sex without love.

And with one idiot remark he'd ruined what they were to each other, what she was to herself. He lay sticky and happy between her legs, moaning shamelessly. She hated his unapologetic desire for the black of her. She hated herself; when he returned, she would take him. He was all there was. He checked his pockets as he dressed, efficiently tucking in his shirt while stepping into his shoes. She lay back after he left, his kiss goodnight still moist on her cheek. She sighed, stripped her bed sheets and watched pearly beads of him mix with shower water and run down the drain.