

Hank Kirton

Reunion

“Y’know why you’re doing this?”

“Why?”

“Because you’re a filthy sewer-hole.”

“Okay.”

“So, why you doing this?”

“Because I’m a filthy sewer-hole.”

“That’s right. Now, look in the camera and say, ‘Mom, I’m a filthy sewer-hole.’”

“Mom...”

“Look in the camera.”

“Mom, I’m a filthy sewer-hole.”

“That’s right. Good. Now, open your mouth.”

* * *

Webster, Massachusetts

Ben Henderson stood at the window, sipping a tepid cup of Sanka, watching for snow. A storm was coming and the tombstone-colored sky looked set to unload. The air outside was charged and tense, as if impatient to turn.

He’d volunteered to pick Amy up at the airport but she’d already arranged for a rental car. She was finally coming home after three missing years in California.

During those years, all Ben and Ruth had gotten from their daughter was one Christmas card without a return address and two brief, awkward telephone calls telling them she was “fine” and “doing good,” that she was, “making money” and would “visit soon.”

Ben felt anxious and distracted, as if he’d be meeting Amy for the first time rather than greeting the daughter he’d known and loved for twenty-one years.

Ruth came into the living room and said, “Might be a good idea to



bring in some extra firewood.”

Ben nodded.

“I said it might be a good idea to bring—“

“I heard you,” Ben said. “I’ll do it.”

He carried his cup into the kitchen, dumped the last of his Sanka into the sink, and then returned to the window.

* * *

“What’s your name, sweetie?”

“Cherry Meadows.”

“Well, hello there, *Cherry Meadows*.”

“Hi.”



Hank Kirton

“Do you know what we do here?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Yeah? How does that make you feel?”

“It turns me on.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I’m getting so wet and horny right now...”

* * *

Amy Jill Henderson drove her rented Infiniti slowly, sipping her second Dunkin’ Donuts coffee and wishing she’d had the guts to smuggle her stash onto the plane. Coffee was a poor substitute. Her mind still felt sluggish and stark - a gray space drained of shades. Her weariness was an ache, a weight. She hadn’t been up this early in years. She lit the last cigarette she’d be able to smoke all day.

It was eight-thirty, Sunday morning. When she passed the *Welcome to Webster* sign, she felt a ripple of excitement move through her and her eyes began to shift from the windshield to the side windows, taking in an edged procession of mournful childhood landmarks.

The neighborhoods were deserted - the lawns dead and frozen. Her Infiniti was the only car on the road and she felt safe and protected within the moving metal shell of music and heat.

She passed her friend Mary Sousa’s house, where she’d seen Mr. Sousa put his fist through the wall during a fight with Mary’s mom while she and Mary were trying to play Candyland on the living room floor.

There was the section of sidewalk where she’d sprained her arm falling off her first two-wheeler. She passed the alley between the 7-11 and a ramshackle wooden fence where seven-year-old Billy Persky had pulled down his pants to show a fascinated, six-year-old Amy her first real penis.

And then there was her parent’s house. *Oh God*. She pulled into the driveway, stopped, and stared at her old home. It looked different, diminished, like a flawed drawing copied from a treacherous memory. She suddenly realized it had been painted a different color – from blue to yellow - and this realization energized her a little. They’d both changed.

She finished her final cigarette, stubbed it to death in the ashtray.

When she opened the car door a freezing breeze slapped her and she emitted a shocked, “*Jesus!*” and stepped into the wind. Three years in LA had weakened her resilience to the arctic bite of winter in New England.

A shrill voice said, “Hiiii!”

Amy walked toward her mother, holding her coffee cup with both hands.

* * *

“Do your parents know what you do?”

“No. Oh, shit no! Are you crazy?”

* * *

Even before Ben Henderson watched his daughter climb out of the car, his wife had opened the front door. He felt the cold draft and could almost see his hard-earned heat being sucked into the stratosphere.

“Hiiii!!!” he heard his wife shriek, trundling across the lawn with her arms outstretched like a big awkward bird. He watched mother and daughter embrace and then quickly moved to his recliner by the woodstove. He turned on the television and then flapped open a section of the Sunday paper and pretended to read. He could feel his heart working.

* * *

“So, Cherry, where you from?”

“Massachusetts, originally, but I live in East Hollywood now.”

“Oh yeah? Did you grow up in a small town or a city, like Boston?”

“Small town, definitely.”

“Were you a good girl or a bad girl in school?”

“Bad girl, definitely.”

“Were you a cheerleader?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Yeah? I bet you were one hot little cheerleader. Did you ever fuck any of the football players?”

“Oh yeah.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I fucked them all.”

“*I fucked `em all!* Ha ha ha. No shit. Hey, would you give us a little cheer?”

“What? Oh, no!”

“Aw, c’mon. Why not?”

“No, that would be just... way too embarrassing.”

“Aw, just a short one. A little *sis-boom-bah...*”

Laughs. “No! Look at me, I’m blushing!”

“A little *rah-rah-rah?*”

“No, really, I can’t. I’m sorry.”

“What a rip. Well, let’s get started. Step into my office.”

* * *

Hank Kirton

When Amy walked through the door, she was hit with a broken muddle of emotions. Only the outside of the house had changed and she felt herself slipping into the past, becoming a shy little girl again. She also felt a tinge of residual teenage anger. How she had hated living here toward the end.

Her mother said, “For God’s sakes, Ben. Put down that paper and say hello to your daughter.”

Her father slowly lowered the paper. He forced a smile. “Well, hello there, stranger.” He folded the paper, tucked it under his arm and stood up. He placed one hand on her shoulder. “Nice to have you home,” he said.

“Thanks, Dad.”

“Aw, sure.”



They looked at each other for a few silent seconds, and then he lowered his eyes, turned, and knelt by the woodstove. He opened the stove and began rearranging the logs with a poker. “Hope you brought an appetite,” he said. “Your mother’s making meatloaf with all the trimmings.”

“Sounds good,” she said.

“Yes,” her mother said. “Meatloaf, mashed potatoes, mushroom gravy, green beans with slivered almonds, Poppin’ Fresh crescent rolls...”

“Sounds good,” she said again.

“Yes, all your favorites. I remember how much you liked my meatloaf. Would you like something to drink? Oh, I see you have coffee.”