

String Theory

720 words

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Matthew never liked his dad, so at Thanksgiving when his dad said something that set him off, Matthew decided he was going to hook up with his dad's new wife.

Her name was Veronica. She was in her 40's, spoke with a Tennessee accent, looked good (though not great) for her age, was nice but not *that* nice. You figured that could change.

It was going to be a challenge, for sure. Veronica had been married once before, talked about it candidly, said the guy became impossible. Then she floated around for three years and found Matthew's dad.

Meaning she was a loyal dependable partner, probably.

Matthew had youth and physical fitness on his side, had played lacrosse in college, but of course that didn't always matter. A woman who marries a guy ten years older very well might not be into one fifteen years younger.

The next time Matthew saw Veronica after Thanksgiving was a Christmas party down the block, the Stemphills, who Matthew had known his whole life. And man, there were Kim and Julie running around, all grown up and in from wherever they lived and looking great--and how could he have lost track of them. In fact a bobbing for Christmas gifts circle was being organized and Kim was pulling him in, all smiles.

But no--well okay, you went along with *that*, but there was work to do.

Veronica was helping Mrs. Stemphill in the kitchen, they were talking about a movie they'd both seen, and Veronica said Edward (Matthew's dad) doesn't like going to theaters anymore and Mrs. Stemphill agreed, people talk too much.

At that point Matthew grazed Veronica's backside on the way to the sink and said oops excuse me, and a minute later he reached around her for something, again making contact.

Then he went back out and goofed around with Kim and Julie and there were carolers coming down the block and it was actually kind of fun.

When they were leaving it was slippery and Matthew helped Veronica to the sidewalk, taking her arm and

giving her a Merry Christmas kiss on the cheek, adding in a subtle flick of the earlobe.

The next day his dad comes by the apartment. He said Veronica wasn't offended you brushing up against her, but it was good she told me.

Matthew said she wasn't? She did?

We're all human here, his dad said, we all have our needs. But you need to take it easy, Jesus . . . And if that *wasn't* what was going on, then forget what I just said.

Okay, Matthew said. I mean something I'd never ask in a million years about Mom. But how is she in bed?

She's great, insatiable, his dad said.

And you're like--up to the task?

So far. And when you're not, you improvise. You know what I'm saying.

And like, last night? Anything happen?

Oh absolutely. She said she was invigorated at the Stempills', all that good energy. Something that drew me to her in the first place. A straight shooter.

Sheesh, Matthew said.

All right then, his dad said. Wanted to clear the air. Some day you might be in my position, have a better handle on it.

It required a bit of snooping on the routine until

Matthew was able to corner Veronica in the supermarket parking lot.

Dad says you're insatiable, he said.

It took her a second. Oh your father, she said.

Funny thing, he said, I wanted to make it with you.

That was my mission. Now I'm not so sure.

How entirely bizarre.

Cause I didn't like the guy. Now I like him a little better.

He takes excellent care of me, she said.

Okay you put it like that, you throw down the challenge flag. I might be back to Plan A.

You're amusing, she said.

What I don't-didn't like about Dad wasn't just Mom.

It's a balancing act.

You mean you can't fix normal? You're an optimist. I'm starting to see what appealed to Dad.

My husband and I, we had a cursory bedroom connection.

So you're making up for lost time.

The greater point, your father has honest eyes. I am fortunate.

A trickle-down effect.

One might say.

Matthew said, Back at the party . . . sounds stupid, it
crossed my mind to find a closet.

I've never done that, she said.