

## Orchid on a Plate of Refried Beans

Short story by Allison Fine

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She was a savvy girl. Her parents had trained her that way. She was thinner than all the other girls her age. She had tiny breasts, well formed. She was like the hybrid flowers her father raised in the greenhouse next to the garage. Her name was Orchid.

Her father was watching her. She moved across the expanse of lawn like a deer; her long hair trailing in the air, her head held higher than it should be. She was a proud woman. Her father taught her to be that way. Her mother watched helplessly, pride wounded by her husband early in the marriage. The mother hadn't bothered to notice. There was too much money flying about, too many clothes; too many distracting elements. Orchid was one of them.

Orchid never did any housework. She had her own horse named Buster, and all her spare time, until recently, was taken up with caring for Buster. Buster was black and a little crazy. He was punk. Orchid loved how she could make him submit to her will. Her will was her most prized possession although secretly she loved her small hips and long torso. It made her father sweat and breathe heavily. She wondered if he yearned for her. She hoped he did. It gave her power and she liked that kind of feeling. He was totally helpless around her; she could get whatever she wanted. Orchid wanted everything.

Strangely enough, she yearned for something else too—perhaps to be denied. She thought denial would make her even stronger; she would have to struggle against it. But nothing was ever denied her. She was an only child.

Orchid's father wished that his wife were more like Orchid. He even visualized a life with Orchid and he married. He never told anyone this. It wouldn't do. His family had never been incestuous. They were too rich, and everyone knows the rich don't do incest. At least, he didn't. He had fantasies of taking Orchid in the greenhouse, among his prize orchids.

What an irony, he thought, Orchid among the orchids. She was fifteen. He didn't do it.

Many times she tried to entice her father. She wore tiny little T-shirts that showed her flat belly and the gold naval ring she had gotten when visiting her cousins on Martha's Vineyard the summer she was fourteen. Her father looked at her belly and sweated. He hated how he felt around her. Sometimes he even got an erection. At these times he would rush away from her in a haze and go take a shower.

"Daddy," Orchid said in her best seductive voice. "Look at my ring." She would play with her naval ring, moving it around, touching her belly, looking up at him with her huge, liquid-brown eyes.

"Stop it, Orchid. You know that makes me sick."

"Why?"

"It just does."

"It just does, why? I don't understand."

"Look—we're different generations, that's all. In my generation women didn't mutilate their bodies."

"You call *this* mutilation? I could get a clit piercing or something—"

"Orchid—I've warned you—don't use that language around me." He was carefully watering the plants.

"Clit—Clitoris—Penis—they're just names for things we all have."

He turned to her, feet planted, heart pounding, head in the air.

"Shut up."

The watering can was turned to the ground—he was watering his shoes.

"Daddy—you have no sense of humor."

She pouted, almost cried, but not quite, and glided out of the greenhouse. He was always this way—she just could not quite get him around on the sexual point. She wanted him to admit he wanted her and be done with it. Submission was everything. He was a hard case. She conceded she might have to give up and look elsewhere. She was already thinking seriously about his junior partner in the business.

She wanted her father to give her the male point of view; talk about penises and vaginas and breasts. She wanted him to dissect sexuality, give it a name and a flavor. Come to think of it, what *was* his point of view? She tiptoed back into the greenhouse. He was busy trimming and cutting.

"Daddy—"

"Not now, I'm busy."

"Daddy—please."

He turned toward her, his eyeballs looking angry.

"What is it?"

"What is your sexual point of view? What turns you on?"

You little vixen, he thought.

"What kind of fucking question is that?" he shouted.

"God, I just hate your attitude."

"I'm sorry—I said the "f" word." He looked down in shame. "But, how many fathers you know talk about sex with their daughters?"

"I don't know—what's wrong with it?"

"You should talk to your mother."

"Mother? She hasn't had sex in years."

He looked up in shock.

"What?"

"I mean—" Orchid realized what she had said. Oh my God, parents are sickening, she thought. Life is repulsive.

"Mom—I mean—this whole thing—it's—never mind."

"No kidding."

"What do mean, no kidding?"

"I mean, my sex life is none of your damn business. Now get the hell out of here."

"Maybe you see prostitutes or something."

"What?"

"Well, you have to get it somewhere, right?"

Where the hell does she get her ideas, he thought with agitation growing, from movies? He thought about the call girl he used to see regularly in New York whenever he went into the city on business. He hadn't seen her in two years. I think she got busted. Anyway, she wasn't a prostitute; she was just trying to make some money so she could go to law school.

"Look Orchid, this line of questioning is going to get you nowhere. Why don't you go in the house and play with your—naval ring or something?"

"Are you inviting me to masturbate, dad?"

He put his scissors down. Something inside of him wanted to grab the scissors and cut her little nipples off, some part of him wanted to shove his dick inside her ass until she cried, some part of him realized that this part of him was totally unacceptable to the other part of him. He picked the scissors up again and moved toward her.

"Now listen..."

She laughed. Now she had him. She always knew at these points that his breath was quicken, she could almost imagine his heart jumping inside his chest, and she could see him sweating. She had him. He was out of control. It was at this very exact moment that she would turn on her sweetest, girlish voice.

"Oh, I am so sorry daddy—I just wanted to learn about sex before I make a mistake."

She walked up to him and put her girlish arms around his chest, hugging gently, like his little girl.

"Okay sweetheart, but don't they teach sex education in school?"

"I want the real thing, daddy, sex education from the source, and the source is you." She slid her hand up to his chest, feeling the prickly hairs sticking out of his shirt.

"You are so hairy." She placed a small, delicate little hand on his chest, feeling the hairs.

He pushed her hand away.

"Stop it. Go to the house."

"Okay." Contritely Orchid moved away from Daddy and glided out of the greenhouse, triumphant and small and strong and sweet: powerful. Daddy was in her pocket.

It was at these times her mother would be in the kitchen, absently looking out the window, wondering if the gardener had got all the weeds, talking on the phone, washing some vegetable in the sink. Her conscious mind left her body thirty years ago and never came back.

In the place of a mind we have a facsimile of a humanoid of the female persuasion, Orchid observed. Yuck. Orchid allowed her thoughts to slide out of

her brain and onto the fake marble counter like mud or manure oozing out of a potted plant as she grabbed a vegetable from the colander in the sink.

"Are you going over to see Buster today?" Mommy asked. She was on the phone of course, pretending to listen to her friend babble on, running water in the sink, unloading the dishwasher. Mommy was multi-tasked.

How can she do all these meaningless tasks simultaneously? Orchid thought. I guess it's her brand of synergy.

"Mommy? Are you a Gemini?"

Her mother looked up from the phone.

"What? I've got to go Janine—Orchid wants my attention."

"I don't want your attention—go back to your conversation," Orchid intoned as she opened the refrigerator and inspected its contents.

Babble, babble, babble and her mother finally hung up. Orchid slammed the refrigerator shut.

"Now. What is it?"

Orchid grabbed a carrot.

"Stop it—I need those for tonight's dinner."

"Tough."

"What do you want now, Orchid? Did you go see Daddy in the greenhouse?"

"I saw him."

She lifted her belly shirt and started touching her tiny, perfectly formed breasts. Her mother glanced over. She simply could not understand Orchid's exhibitionism.

"Put your shirt down."

"Why?"

"Civilized ladies don't undress in the middle of the day."

"When **do** they undress?"

Her mother turned off the water in the sink. She presented her carefully formed, exasperated face to Orchid.

"Orchid, can't you see that I'm busy?"

"This is busy? Why can't Opal do that stuff?"

"Opal's off today—it's Saturday, remember? You should really go see Buster. He misses you."

"How do you know he misses me?"

"He's your horse, Orchid, and you used to ride him every day after school, even in the mornings before school. You couldn't stand to stay away—"

"Okay, I'll go see him. Now tell me, are you a Gemini or what?"

"What's this got to do with anything?"

"Gemini's can do about five things at once, that's why."

Her mother leaned against the sink and wondered if there wasn't something missing in Orchid's development. Maybe they hadn't done Montessori long enough, piano lessons were a fiasco, she hated gymnastics. Getting her the

horse was Bob's idea and it was inspired. Orchid and Buster bonded. The horse seemed to wake something human in Orchid that hadn't been seen previously. Maybe it was love. Maybe Orchid was human after all, and not some weird, mutated hybrid that didn't have capacity for feeling, her mother thought.

She had found pornographic material underneath Orchid's bed when the girl was only nine years old. That was when they sent her to see Bob's college buddy Van, the shrink. Never mind that Van had once been investigated for inappropriate sexual conduct with several female patients; he was exonerated. Anyway, seeing Van didn't do much good. Mommy couldn't really see a change in Orchid's behavior, but the pornographic material disappeared and she never saw it again. Orchid had stashed the material somewhere else and never told anyone. It was hidden underneath a haystack outside Buster's stall. The young stable-boy found it and enjoyed it. Repeatedly. Orchid felt it was important that she take her sexual education seriously. It was obvious her parents couldn't do it. They were incapable of recognizing sex as an integrated part of every day life.

Orchid, of course, had no problem with that. She got together with a group of her friends and formed a club called "Day Girls." No one knew why it was called "Day Girls", but that was the name that Orchid gave it and she was the leader, so it stuck. Meetings were spent undressing and exploring each other's bodies in great detail. Once that was done, they, that is Orchid, was eager to initiate new people into the club. Perhaps those of the male species.

Orchid convinced one of the boys in her class to attend a meeting. Eddy was clueless but game. They, that is Orchid, ordered him to take down his pants, which he did. Orchid then orchestrated the series of movements that led to Eddy sprawled flat on the floor attacked by four fifteen year-old girls. It was hard to maintain any kind of curiosity or even titillation around all those girls poking and prodding him like a science experiment. He ran out in disgust, vowing to warn all the other guys to stay away from Orchid and her "girls."

"He's only fourteen—what do you expect?" Orchid announced at the next meeting. There was a great deal of brouhaha concerning the future of Day Girls. "He's not ready to take the plunge," she intoned, "forgive the pun."

"I just hope he doesn't spread this around school, Orchid. It could be bad for our reps," Melody ventured.

"Our **reps** could use a little revving up, for God's sake," Orchid retorted. "We **want** reps. Otherwise, what's the point?"

The girls looked at one another and then back at Orchid. She was the leader. They were just clueless geeks seeking a little joy in life.

"O.K. fearless leader, what next?"

"We need a Mission Statement. Something frightening and exciting at the same time. Any thoughts?"

"Sex is an everyday event. We, the Day Girls of Walter Clayton High School declare our freedom to explore—what? Any thoughts?"

"Our vaginas!" Melody blurted out. The girls laughed in embarrassment.

"Too clinical. A Mission Statement has to be Universal in nature," Orchid declared.

"How about, Orgasmic Rights?"

"Yeah...yeah.." Orchid said in thought, "Orgasmic Rights. Our Orgasmic Rights are to be expressed every day in every way."

They all did the hand gesture Orchid had taught them—a short wave with a twist.

"Now. Let's go down to the kitchen and eat."

Eating ritual for the girls was listed in the Mission Statement as one of the primary Orgasmic Rights. They pulled everything out of the fridge and plunged into the mess, creating various kinds of combinations that made her mother cringe and swoon with nausea. Thank God Mother had a Stock Club meeting on the afternoon Day Girls met. It was such a bore to see her mother stalking around the kitchen, watching them. She was jealous; it was obvious. Orchid loved making her mother jealous. It was a clear sense to her that power resided with youth and beauty.

The girls put Vodka, orange juice, passion fruit and Kool Aid in the blender, turned it on and poured the concoction out into wineglasses, passing a glass to each girl.

"To youth and beauty," Orchid spoke.

"Age sucks!" one of the girls added.

The girls laughed, drank and shuddered. Orchid was always willing to go further than any of them dared to go. Naturally, they were all young and beautiful, no denying it. It was just that—some kind of nagging feeling was in the back of their minds; not in Orchid's however. She was cool and calm and she didn't give a shit. Why should she? She knew she was a keeper and any guy would be lucky to have her. Plus, she had no doubts that a certain kind of beauty would be hers for life. That understanding gave her confidence that other girls didn't have. And, let's face it, there was always Daddy. He would be certain to leave her something after he died, and while he was alive she could always count on him to be there for her monetary desires and needs. It was blood money and she knew its power.

Melody had to go home. She always had to leave club meetings early. Melody's parents expected her home and there was an unspoken knowledge that Melody would follow the family history and attend M.I.T. to study engineering. She was the oldest and a girl so she had to stand in for the token son as three sisters followed her in birth. It was a role she embraced; albeit with trepidation. She was taking life seriously; there wasn't time to mess around. It was important to keep the grades up and the studies progressing. And, there was also the sexual factor. Melody was attracted to girls more than boys, yet she didn't want to rock the boat by revealing to the club that she was a lesbian. She wasn't ready to come out. Deep down she was sure Orchid would welcome it as she welcomed just about anything. Orchid declared her belief in diversity often. Melody just wasn't ready to test Orchid's tolerance level, even though being gay wasn't the

stigma it used to be and it was politically correct to be gay if you wanted to be. Melody just wasn't sure if she wanted to be gay and be Orchid's friend at the same time.

"I got to go," Melody said abruptly and downed her drink, feeling the rush of the stuff moving through her system. It was as if drinking could wash her cares away and make her tender, sweet and something else she thought she wanted to be but what that was she couldn't say. Was Orchid an alcoholic? Melody felt she could become one, if she wasn't one already. It wouldn't take much.

"A drink a day keeps the demons away," Melody shouted as she slammed her glass into the sink.

"Yeah," the other girls concurred. Orchid moved toward Melody in that gliding way of hers.

"The damage has already been done, Melody, so go home and study. But come back to us." Orchid touched Melody's hair ever so slightly. Melody shuddered. Something about Orchid gave her the creeps.

"Right. Anybody need a ride?"

The other girls looked to Orchid for approval. Orchid shook her head.

"We have more work to do, Melody. See you next week."

Melody went out the door with a sense of dread. Something told her she wouldn't be coming back. She really needed a group of lesbians to communicate with, and Orchid was creepy as hell. The club had gone beyond adventure—it was moving into some kind of exploration that she didn't want any part of; maybe

murder or something equally horrid. She got into the Jeep Cherokee her father bought her for, cranked up The Indigo Girls and drove off.

Orchid glided into her mother's bedroom. It smelled like perfume, baby powder and sweaty socks, probably daddy's. She looked at all the perfume bottles on mother's vanity. Boring. Didn't mommy even do interesting underwear? Opening the dresser drawers, the swish of tissue paper revealed bras and panties, slips and stockings neatly wrapped, categorized, inventoried and alphabetized. It was just too dreary. When she thought about, it was even creepy. If her drawers were that neat, what was going on in her mind?

Next club meeting Orchid brought up the subject of ennui.

"I am so damn filled with ennui, aren't you?"

"What is ennui?" one of them asked timidly.

Orchid ignored the question.

"Where's Melody?"

"Melody isn't coming anymore," Jenny looked down as she spoke.

"Why not?"

"Because she's a dyke, that's why."

"That's so politically incorrect," Jenny retorted.

"So what?" Orchid said. "She could give us reports from the Gay Front. I want you to call her up and tell her to get over here right now. We may need her angle. Immediately!" Orchid was used to her orders being obeyed.

The girls look up at her, but no one moved.

"Why are you all just sitting there?" Orchid screamed.

Orchid's simply not in touch with reality, Jenny decided. If Melody didn't want to come, then she didn't want to come.

"What's the big deal, Orchid? Is this really a problem?"

"No telling who might tell, you think?"

"Melody won't say anything, her parents want her to go to M.I.T."

"True."

"Girls—she has **no right** to just drop us with no notice, no explanation.

Get her on the phone."

"Orchid—get over it."

Orchid thought for a minute. Okay. She was over it.

"Fine. Let her off the hook. I want to reveal your next assignment."

The girls took out their little "Day Girls" notebooks Orchid made them buy and waited breathlessly, pens in hand, for the next assignment from Orchid's twisted mind.

"Our next assignment is to seduce our Daddies."

"Huh?" the group expressed shock in unison.

"You are going to seduce your Daddy; put the sexual moves on him, make him sweat and pant and get an erection, then embarrass him and threaten to expose him."

"Are you writing a book or something, Orchid?"

"Get a clue, Ray Ann."

There was a pregnant silence, something unusual for these girls. They simply could not get it. It was not in their repertoire, and thank the Lord for that. It was the first sign of many that Orchid was clearly losing her leadership capabilities and going wacky. Still, they couldn't really do anything about it. Perhaps it was magical, the mystical thing we call charisma or whatever. Orchid had it. Her will was everybody else's command. Even her parents seemed brain-dead about it all. Ray Ann put her head in her hands.

"I think I have a migraine."

"No you don't, Ray Ann. Now come on geeks. This is an assignment that could change our lives forever."

"I don't want to change my life forever," Christy spoke up, which was unusual for her. She was always the shy, awkward one with nothing to say.

Orchid looked at her with disdain.

"There are those that are destined to follow the boring pathway of sameness, ugliness and conformity, and then, there are those who know the adventure of fear and distaste. Which are you?"

Christy was confused by the question and did not answer.

"I don't like fear," Laura revealed.

"Neither do I. I don't get off on it."

"It's just adrenaline girls—the cerebral cortex doesn't know the difference between excitement and fear, and fear is just a name we give to that feeling—that rush—the unknown moment of total chaos—"

"Forget it, Orchid, I'm not interested in 'making my father' as you put it. It's sleazy, sickening and completely off the wall." Lauren stood up. "So go figure something else to get our adrenaline up."

Orchid stood at the head of the group in the playroom next to the stuffed dolls from her childhood. Enshrined on a rocking chair was Raggedy Ann and on the bookcase Poor Pitiful Pearl. There were Mindy, Baby Betsy and Barbie next to Bear, Elephant and a formless blob that had once been Humpty Dumpty who had comforted her through many a daunting night.

"Ever since my twin sister died in her sleep as a baby, I have felt this sense of dread."

"You had a twin sister?" Ray Ann asked in shock.

"Yes. We were very close—identical, in fact. In identical little cribs side by side. She died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. I was only six months old. After that, my mother ignored me. The maid took care of me. I think my mother felt it was my fault, or maybe I should have been the one to die."

"I doubt that, Orchid. I'm sure your mother felt grief about your sister, but she didn't blame you. What was her name?"

"Rose. Rose and Orchid, my father's two favorite flowers."

There was a thud of silence in the room. Each girl felt responsible for Orchid in some odd way. Clearly she was experiencing a grief process of some kind and she needed their help, even if she couldn't admit it. They had absolutely nothing to give her.

"I got to go." Laura grabbed her backpack.

"You just don't like being confronted with the ugliness of my past, do you?"

Orchid demanded.

"That's not it—I just—" Laura wrenched her arm from Orchid's grasp and ran down the stairs. Thank God, she thought, air, trees, wind. It all felt better than that stifling energy inside Orchid's house. Her playroom was like a hothouse. Orchid had been a hybrid too long.

The other girls started to leave as well. Orchid thought they were all inadequate anyway and who cares? If the whole story was a fabrication, so what? It served them right. She found vindication in making them feel bad and sorry and confused about something, even if it never happened. She didn't need their approbation. What was a lie, anyway? It was just the truth on another level of understanding.

Orchid hardly noticed the girls leaving until she looked up and noticed the room was empty. Looking down at the street from the window she saw a storm starting to blow in. Wind made the tree branches move; rain started to fall in angular slashes against the window. Rain always made her want to jump off a cliff or something.

"Orchid!" Mother's voice ripped at her from the bowels of the kitchen.

"Come down here right this second and clean this mess up!"

Orchid was contrite as she entered the kitchen. Some sort of power mass had been moved inside of her, and she no longer felt that gliding force moving

through energy, moving through air. It felt more like heavy metal being ripped apart by the winds of emotional hell.

"Where's Daddy?" she asked Mommy as she looked at the pile of dirty dishes strewn all over the kitchen.

"At the office, Orchid. Get a grip and start cleaning up this mess, young lady."

"Fine." Orchid turned on the sink and slowly rinsed dishes, wiped the counter, loaded the dishwasher.

"When is Daddy coming home?"

"Dinner. I have to go out for a while—clean this kitchen up and then go over to the barn and check Buster."

"Can I take the Jeep?"

"I'm taking the Jeep. You can take the Lexus. And I want you back by dinner, Orchid, no excuses."

"Yes, mother."

Orchid washed the same plate over and over. It was clean. It was too clean. She was too clean, or not clean enough, she wasn't sure. She heard the garage door's electronic hum and heard her mother roar off in the Jeep. There was a CD on the counter next to the little TV. Orchid popped it into the player next to the TV and washed some more dishes.

*"I'll just keep falling in love till I get it right.."*

The plaintive country voice wailed into her heart and made her cry. Tears mixed with pain mixed with dishwater and she felt much better. Joy was overrated.

Somehow the kitchen got cleaned just as Daddy breezed through the door. Orchid rushed to him, her heart brimming with newfound pain and angst, anxious for Daddy to see the depth of her feeling, to know her transformation process. As she rushed to him, he was caught off balance and dropped his briefcase, papers flying, to the floor.

"Orchid, for Christ's sake, watch what your doing." His voice was mad, really mad. He had not been charmed by her sudden distress, the emotional trauma that she thought showed plaintively on her little face; the trembling that made her feel weak.

"I'm sorry Daddy."

Mother swooped in from her errands, hugged Daddy, picked up the briefcase and glared at Orchid. It was the unspoken rule: Daddy had to be made happy when he came home from a hard day's work.

"It's all right dear," Mommy said kissing Daddy's right ear. Then she turned an evil smirk to Orchid.

"Did you go see Buster like I asked you to?"

"I didn't have time. I just now finished cleaning the kitchen." Daddy went into his hideaway Den leaving her alone with the Witch Mother.

"You can go after dinner."

"Fine. There's stable hands there, Mother. That's what we pay them for."

"Why did we buy you the horse, then, Orchid? So you could let him sit by himself in a stable being cared for by strangers?"

"How does the kitchen look?"

Mother Witch gave it a cursory glance.

"Fine."

Orchid was so desperate for praise of any kind. It was not forthcoming.

Mother Witch moved to kiss the air next to Orchid's cheek.

"Why don't you go up and do your homework? You have school—"

"I—"

"Oh, and by the way, Daddy and I are doing a kind of "couples weekend retreat" upstate this weekend. We'll be leaving Friday and be back Sunday night."

"You're leaving me all alone, without anyone?"

"Oh, get over it Orchid. You've been alone before—lot's of times."

"I know, but—"

"Orchid. This is important to Daddy and me. Now don't give us a problem about it. You can spend time with Buster, or invite one of your little friends over."

Her little friends—Orchid flinched at the phrase. The little friends that left her high and dry—the traitors—the ones that—well, she had her little spiritual epiphany with out them, that's all that counts.

"I had a kind of—"

"Orchid—you need to go upstairs and get the homework done."

"I will, but—"

"Don't argue with me," Mother Witch intoned, her voice like the wrong song, like the singer of witchcraft off-key, a singer of mean, horrible—

"Orchid, **please go to your room.**"

"What did I do?" Orchid wailed. "I didn't do anything wrong!"

"Daddy!" With Mother yelled. "Daddy—come in here. Orchid's—"

"Shit," Orchid heard her father swear from his Den. "What now?"

At this moment Orchid's epiphany crashed into sudden realization that Life as she knew it was Over. It was Done. She could no longer glide into and out of people's consciousness like a deer. She had become a gnat, a moth, some ugly insect about to burn a shitty death, smoking on the flame of unrequited desire. Her whole being longed to be One with the Universe, to be Whole, to be in Goddamn control of everything at all times, to be God, to hate her parents, to destroy them and completely ruin their lives. It was all so simple, why wasn't it happening?

Orchid called upon all the literature she had ever read to come up with suitable phrases to explain the anger rushing through her at that moment. She couldn't recall a single thing.

"I just don't understand why you can't give me what I want!" Orchid screamed, standing in the middle of the kitchen, her body rigid and streaming with tense, taut animation. She was shaking. She thought the ground might be moving under her feet. Mother Witch picked up a dishrag from the floor and hung

it on the refrigerator handle. How could she, thought Orchid, at an earth shattering moment like this?

Daddy was mad as hell.

"What the **hell** do you want from us, Orchid?" he screamed.

Everything stopped. Daddy never screamed. Witch Mommy stood still, anaesthetized by the entire sequence in her usual brain-dead stance.

**"I want my twin sister back!"**

Mommy and Daddy looked at one another. She has really gone off her rocker, their looks said.

"You—you never had a twin sister, Orchid," Mommy said in a quiet voice.

"I didn't? Well, never mind, then." Orchid walked out of the kitchen.

"She's nuts. We need to get her evaluated."

"She's just playing a game, Bob, and you fall for it all the time."

"Listen, Jan, this shit is not a game—the girl is plain out to lunch! Why can't you face it? She and those damn teen-aged vixens she hangs out with are plotting to rape somebody or murder somebody or both."

"Don't be ridiculous. Boy, you lose your perspective when it comes to her. I guess we should have more kids."

"What's that got to do with it?"

Mommy sighed, resigned, and rooted around the kitchen aimlessly, pursuing a boring task that would occupy the part of her psyche that wasn't feeling too well right now.

"You need to face reality, Jan—our little girl needs help."

"I refuse to put her in that category."

"What category?"

"The category of the insane."

There was silence. Once the word "insane" was spoke there was an energetic field shift—suddenly the dreaded moment had come. Orchid was insane. They both knew it. It was a plain fact. They had outed her. They had no plans to do anything about it.

Orchid flopped onto her bed and opened her journal.

"Dear Phallic Presence:

Well, Witch Mommy and Daddy are suitably played out. What losers. I let them believe that I want my dead sister, wherever she is. I don't think she is dead. I think they put her away somewhere, some kind of institution where no one can see her because she is ugly and retarded. One day I will visit her and set her free. The world hates the stupid. Right now I am tired and just want to rest. Love Orchid."

She signed her name with "x's" and "o's" and lay down on the bed, resting her head on her arm, looking over at the wall. There was a picture of Alice falling through the tunnel, her curly hair flying out behind her, and a small photo her grandparents on their yacht "The Dingbat." Grandpa was smiling with his big teeth and white hair. Nanna was looking out to sea, her back to the photographer. Both of them looked the part of vital, youthful seafaring seniors.

Both of them were dead. Grandpa got cancer and Nanna died of a brain tumor. Their deaths were ugly and totally uninspiring, but they left Daddy a pot of money. Orchid couldn't figure out why he was still working and what he did with the money. Daddy wouldn't let her go to the funerals. She stayed home when Nanna died and smashed all of Mommy's porcelain collection. Daddy was furious.

Daddy peeked in on Orchid asleep a little while later. There was such a sweetness to her when she was sleeping. He just couldn't handle what an evil little bitch she was when she was awake. Maybe he ought to call his friend Van again. Mommy glided past him to their bedroom, triumphant.

Perhaps it **was** best to lock Orchid up, Mommy thought. She needed her power back. Orchid had usurped too much of it. Mommy began to feel her husband looking at her again. Her breasts perked up a little, the sagging stomach and hips started to pull in. He noticed and followed her gliding into the bedroom. They shut the door. Sounds of lovemaking permeated Orchid's dreams.

The next day Orchid willingly offered to take care of Buster. She even rode him for several hours around the paddock. Buster was so glad to see her that he didn't try pulling any of his usual tricks. She was glad to see him. It was lonely without friends. The "Day Girls" had frozen her out. They all refused to talk to her at school. Orchid decided to take the high road and glide right on by them.

One evening, after a particularly heavy day of rejection, Orchid offered willingly to make dinner. She could see the surprise in Mommy's eyes. It was so easy to surprise Mommy.

She had planned the meal for days and knew just exactly what point she wanted to make. Before she started in the kitchen she spied Mommy stalking around the greenhouse, peeking in at Daddy. This was a new pastime of hers, peeking at Daddy when Daddy wasn't looking. Orchid glided invisibly past Mommy into the greenhouse where Daddy was, as usual, trimming, picking and watering his babies.

"How're the babies today, Daddy?" Orchid breezed into his right ear.

"Fine." He didn't look up. "Aren't you supposed to be making dinner?"

"Yes," Orchid answered, diffident. "I was wondering, though—"

Daddy looked at her with regret. It was such a distraction from his flowers to deal with Orchid's morbidity and constant demands.

"Yes?"

"Well, could I—could I—"

"Orchid, I really don't have all day."

"Could I please, please, please have **one** orchid—for something special?"

He contemplated. One orchid for something special. What could that be?"

"You're not going to feed it to that horse of yours, are you?"

"Of course not, Daddy." She giggled, hoping he wouldn't try to probe further. "I just—"

"Here." Daddy handed her a beautiful baby. It was light purple at the edges moving into deeper purple around the center. It vibrated with force; a purple bit of ecstasy in her hand. She held it with reverence. Orchids held magic, she knew, and the magic was with her. It was something sacred.

"Thank you, Daddy." Orchid ran off to the kitchen humming.

Mommy watched her go with curiosity and walked over to the far side of the greenhouse, continuing to spy on Daddy through an open window. He was singing some song to himself; Neil Diamond or something equally horrible, she couldn't hear what it was. She tried leaning further through the window to catch what he was singing and knocked over a pot. The crash made her jump.

"What was that?" Daddy yelled. Mommy ran back to the house, hair flying, hoping Daddy would catch a glimpse of her bright, blue broom skirt darting through the trees.

This is downright pathetic, Mommy thought, spying on my own husband, but kind of intriguing too. After all, life is boring. It needs a little spice once in a while. Orchid was in the kitchen making dinner when Mommy ran in breathless. Mommy grabbed a glass of white wine and decided to sit in their bedroom looking out the window. That was the sort of thing creative women did, didn't they? Drink white wine and look out the window. In her new found freedom, Mommy thought she might do that; do nothing while looking out the window drinking white wine. It made her feel literary.

"Wine, mother, in the afternoon?" Orchid asked pointedly.

"Yes, dear," Mommy answered and glided out in her best imitation of Orchid. Orchid permitted herself a moment to smile. Things were unraveling and she liked it. Part of the meal, which was Mexican Chicken, was nearly done. She just had to finish the refried beans and the salad.

Daddy came in from the greenhouse and washed his hands in the sink.

"I'm taking a quick shower. Call me for dinner." He kissed Orchid on the forehead. She kissed him back on his nose. Daddy went off humming. The hum of the house is moving up a notch or two on the scale of human sacrifice, Orchid thought chopping carrots for the salad.

There was Jan on the bed, drinking a glass of wine. Daddy took the wine from her hands, lay next to her and kissed her breasts.

"Sweetheart." Mommy and Daddy embraced, kissing with passions that came from jealousy, confusion, contempt and fear. All those emotions they had buried so long ago, now swept up into the heat of sex and desire and animal survival. Lovemaking was brutal and intense; it was over soon. They both were panting with rage and unrequited needs. Neither knew what the other was feeling. It was best that way.

Orchid heard the sounds from the kitchen; her mother's little yapping dog-like noises and her father's grunts and groans. It made her totally ill.

Still, it's better than having them walk around in the usual cloud of frustration and repressed anguish, thought Orchid as she washed and chopped the garnish.

Orchid finished the refried beans and put them on the ornamental plate, nicely spiced. She took the orchid Daddy had given her, crushing it gently over the beans, leaving small bits of petal, stamen and pollen floating over the top of the beans. It symbolized Daddy and Mommy's newfound sexual growth. She was so glad she was able to open them up and save their marriage. Perhaps her calling was to be a kind of spiritual marriage broker—a sexual healer. This thought made her feel wonderful inside. So wonderful she allowed herself a few glasses of Mommy's white wine before dinner.

Dinner was finished. Orchid washed her hands, set the table and called upstairs.

**"Dinner!"**

"Okay.." came Daddy's voice. He was still trying to recover from the orgasm.

Mommy and Daddy came downstairs like a king and queen, but feeling like naughty children sneaking something bad. Orchid sat herself at the head of the table, Daddy took Orchid's usual seat and Mommy sat across from them both. Orchid passed each plate around the table, laden with food.

The parents dug in.

For several minutes they did nothing but eat.

"This is good, Orchid. Good spices in the chicken. Excellent meal," Daddy said, mouth full. "And, what's the bean dish?"

"Orchid on a plate of refried beans," Orchid smiled as she took a sip of wine from her glass. "How do you like it?"

"You put my orchid on your beans?" Daddy choked. Something started to rise inside of him, a vibrating pain in his chest. Orchid always had a way of—

"Daddy..."

"Flowers are edible, Bob. Now shut up and eat," said Mommy, and that was that.

"Yes. Flowers are edible," Orchid repeated. She and Mommy looked at one another for a tiny second. Orchid's future was assured.

The End