

Christmas Cake

By John DiFelice

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“THIS IS WONG. I CAN’T DO IT ANYMORE.”

Can you believe this shit? She sent it to me in an email, in all caps! Not with FaceTime, WhatsApp, or even Zoom. An email. “This is wong?” Even after all the English she studied at Kramer International and the additional “tutelage” I gave her in my home, she still can’t spell worth a fuck.

Get this: she says she feels guilty about the whole thing—my wife, my kids—and that I should feel guilty too. Seven thousand miles away, and now she feels guilty. She didn’t feel too guilty when I was nailing her in her third-floor bedroom, or on the ping-pong table in the basement with my whole family on the other side of the ceiling. I know, I know. I’m a piece of shit for doing that, but that’s why I’m talking to you, because you can’t possibly judge me. All I know is she gave me the greatest sex I’ve ever had, and she made me realize my kink at the age of 43. Some people get off by wearing ball-gags and having someone whip the shit out of them with a flogger. Others like fucking while dressed like the Care Bears. My kink is the chance of getting caught and flushing my whole life down the toilet. It gets me off like nothing else.

I sent you a picture of her, right? If I did, it doesn’t tell the whole story. I don’t have any good pictures of her. She always wore baggy clothing, and always black. Every stitch of clothing the girl wore was black. But it was different once she took off her clothes. Now that it’s over, I guess I can send you one of those, too.

You were right, by the way. Hosting female students in our home was a bad idea. You didn’t come right out and say it, but I knew that’s what you were thinking. Like all bad ideas, it was Julie’s. Julie and I were going broke because of her fucking mom. We needed money, and Kramer paid pretty well. You remember the stories about her mom? The woman is a black hole I kept dumping all my time,

effort, and money into without getting anything in return. She showed no desire to improve her life. All she wanted to do was sit in a recliner in her bedroom, talk on the phone, eat butter cream icing, and watch TV. She treated Billy like a goddamn slave, running up and down the stairs all day fetching her Diet Cokes—like that would help—and whatever the fuck else she ate. We gave her the best room, you know: that huge double suite with heart-of-pine floors and refurbished French doors. I gutted that thing to the studs and insulated and drywalled the fucker. It's as if her needs surpassed all else in our lives. Now that I think about it, I've been living under communism. Isn't that what whoever the fuck said? From each according to their ability, or something. I've been living with Karl Marx. Then, one day, a twenty-four-year-old angel from Japan walked into my gulag. Go ahead and laugh, but that's how it felt. Not to mention Japan is one of the most capitalist countries on earth. You taught me that. I needed it to battle Marx and Trotsky, as I had started to call Julie and her mom.

In your last message, you mentioned the time I thought I got her pregnant. That's not what happened. *She* thought she was pregnant. She was obsessed with the idea because I lost it and came inside her once. That was freaky shit. This girl can't weigh more than a hundred pounds, but she threw me off of her like she was Tom Stoltz. He won the "World's Strongest Man" competition three times, in case you didn't know. Of course, you know, you taught me that too. I had tried to explain to her several times that I've had a vasectomy and there was no chance of pregnancy, but it was like talking to a fucking wall. She went on and on about her parents and how they'd cut her off if she got pregnant and blah, blah, blah. She was an entitled brat, the daughter of two doctors who sent her to the States to learn English because they didn't like her boyfriend. Her boyfriend was a math teacher who didn't make much money. Even though her mother didn't want her to turn into Christmas Cake—that's what the Japanese call a woman who isn't married by age twenty-five, because no one wants the cake served at Christmas on the day after—the teacher wasn't good enough for her because he was broke. She didn't care, though. She told me she didn't care if she loved whoever she married, so long as she never had to work. She was the most honest person I've ever known.

So, I'm coming up on where I need your advice. Remember when I asked for advice last month and you completely ignored me? You're one hell of a friend. You probably didn't even read my message, but I mentioned how I'd been squirreling away money to fly her back here in a year's time. I figured it'd cost me five grand for a rendezvous that now has as much chance of happening as me pulling a rabbit out of my asshole. I didn't know what to do with the money. I couldn't put it back. Julie hadn't noticed the missing money because I had withdrawn a little bit each week. But if five grand suddenly appeared in our account, she'd start asking the wrong kinds of questions. This was a dumb plan, right? I know what you're thinking because I know you as well as I know myself. You're thinking, did I really expect my little Christmas Cake to meet me every year to fuck and eat at the Hibachi restaurant next to the Acme in Jenkintown? Yes, I did!

As weeks became months, I tried not to think about her back in Japan, but I kept imagining her with other men. She made these wonderful sounds of astonishment and surprise when we were having sex, and I kept imagining her making them for someone else. I'd hear them in my sleep. In the rare instances when Julie would do something resembling intimacy, I'd be thinking of my Christmas Cake the whole time.

One night, I couldn't take it anymore, and I fell off the wagon. Well, "fell" isn't the right word. I jumped off the wagon, a thousand feet straight down onto my face. I went out alone and got repulsively drunk. David Carr drunk. Hunter S. Thompson drunk. The kind of drunk that gives you a stutter that lasts for two days and makes you ask your boss, "So wha-wha-wha-why am I getting fired?"

I can't even remember the name of the bar I went to. I think I blacked out while I was there, because the next thing I remember is staggering out of some shit hole that looked like all the other ones. I remember a light rain began to fall, and a cab honked at me. I didn't think there were any cabs left in this town, but there he was. For some reason, I got in even though my car was parked nearby. I think the driver asked me where I was going, or else I assumed he did, since that's what they do. I don't know what I said to him, but I remember he said something like, "Want some ladies, mon?" He was

some Jamaican fucker. I don't think I replied. Then I distinctly remember him saying, "Want to get laid?" That's like asking an alcoholic if he wants another drink.

I remember streets flashing before me out the side window. The driver would floor it down the narrow streets and then jam on the brakes at a stop sign. I remember feeling sick. He stopped abruptly in front of a row home with no street numbers or street light. I had no idea where I was, but I handed the driver a twenty and got out. I guess I thought better of it, because I turned to get back in the cab, but he was gone, leaving no evidence he had existed.

I remember the house, or the front railing, anyway. I grabbed it and pulled myself up the marble steps. My knock rang hollow against the door, and after a minute, it opened, still held fast by a chain. The face of a middle-aged Asian woman filled the gap. She looked at me kind of suspiciously, at least I think she did, but I was probably doing the same to her. She opened the door, and I entered the house, and she motioned to me to sit on the couch, which was in dire need of reupholstering. It's funny the details you remember as blacked out moments come back to you. There was another guy in the room who looked about sixty. He sat opposite me and never made eye contact. Mind you, I had no idea where I was and what I was doing there. I remember the lighting was dim, and there were sweet smells of leather and whiskey. Classical music played somewhere, and I focused on it as I tried to figure out my next move. There was something off about the place—I mean, really *off*. It seemed like a place where something really bad had happened, was happening, or was about to happen.

The middle-aged Asian woman came back in and motioned to me to get up and walk into the hall. A door opened on the other side, and six much younger Asian women dressed in pastel nighties formed a row in front of me. No two wore the same color.

"Pick," she said.

By now, you must've figured out that I had found my way into an Asian brothel. You know my stance on prostitution: if you have to pay for it, you're a loser. Still, the women (girls really) reminded me of you-know-who. No, not Voldemort, you faggot! I'm talking about my Japanese mistress. I scanned

the row of girls, and they all looked the same. Then a seventh joined the others, and with her entrance, I felt my insides go into freefall, and I started shaking. It was her! There she was, my little piece of Christmas Cake, looking more wanton and lovely than before. She hadn't gone to Japan. Do you hear me?! She hadn't gone to fucking Japan! She's been right here all this time, hiding from me!

What happened next is clear in my mind, because her presence had an instant sobering effect on me. I took her by the hand and pulled her out of line. She stopped, took *me* by the hand, and walked me up the stairs. I was behind her, and God, you should've seen her. Her hips swayed from side to side with the climb, and her young calf muscles tightened and relaxed, tightened and relaxed. As we walked, my mind raced and filled with the universe of things I could say to her. Some were vulgar, some were eloquent—at least, I think they were—but that didn't matter.

She led me to a room with a shower in it and motioned to me to take my clothes off. She acted like she couldn't speak English. Can you believe it? After all that time at Kramer. She turned around to face me, and all I could say was, "Why?" Sad, right? The grand futility of the word "why." I'm such an inarticulate prick. Fuck! But was I done? Nope. I growled, "Why don't you write back?" The desperation in my voice must have transcended language, because her eyes widened, but she still smiled that ridiculous smile. She shook her head, ignoring me. "Why?" I asked again. My voice trembled despite my efforts to remain even. She tried to take off my shirt, but I stopped her. "Why don't you want to be with me anymore?" She backed away; the phony smile vanished from her face like some real Bugs Bunny and Roadrunner shit. "I fucking love you!" I yelled. "Do you understand? Do you understand that?" She tried to leave, but I held the door closed with my foot. "Why won't you talk to me? Say something! Don't pretend like you don't understand me! I taught you English! I taught you everything!"

I fucking lost it. My agitation reached a level where I screamed just for the sake of screaming, mixing utter nonsense in here and there. I think I made up words, all delivered with eighty proof breath and a voice raw and choked. I grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her, and her high-pitched

screams and blathering mixed with all my “whys.”

I felt hands on me, multiple pairs. Then someone tried to push my face through the wall while another shoved a blunt object into the small of my back.

And then? I woke up in my own bed in my upper-middle-class suburban McMansion. My body ached like I had slept on broken concrete. When I went to the bathroom and saw myself in the mirror, I understood why. There were bruises all over my arms and ribs. My right hip felt out of joint, too, and I had a pronounced limp. I looked out the window and saw my Mercedes, parked perfectly in front of my manicured lawn. I could smell coffee brewing downstairs. I went back into the bathroom and looked at myself. I smelled the coffee again. I stared into the mirror for a long time, and then I had something like a moment of clarity. I shit you not, I got this uncontrollable urge to go downstairs and tell Julie everything. You read that right! Was I out of my fucking mind? What kind of asshole pulls off the perfect affair and then confesses? This asshole.

I thought through all the possible consequences—losing Julie, the house, and my kids. The only silver lining is that I wouldn’t have to deal with her mom anymore. That’s what clinched it. I braced myself and went down into the kitchen.

Julie stood at the stove, frying eggs and bacon as she sipped coffee. She turned to face me and had a funny look on her face. I think she noticed my limp. She asked me where I had been last night. I told her to sit with me at the kitchen table.

We sat down at the table, and I told her everything I just told you. I didn’t hold back and probably went into more detail than was necessary. Once I started, it poured out of me like I was in a confessional back when I believed in God. I made it a point not to break eye contact with her.

She looked at me and didn’t speak for a long time. Then, do you know what she said to me? She said, “What are you talking about?”

I didn’t know what to say. I told her again about the affair I had with our student, and she said, “Is this your idea of a joke?”

Of all the possible reactions to her finding out, I never in a million years thought she'd react this way. She said, "What international students?" and I said, "The ones from Brazil, Venezuela, and Japan." She said, "Have you lost your mind? We didn't host any international students. I know you're saying this to avoid answering the question of where you were last night. So, where were you?"

Can you believe it? She's telling me that we never hosted students. Is she for real? What's she saying, that I imagined us hosting these girls? Are the vivid memories of me and my Christmas Cake in her room and on the ping pong table something I made up?

Why would she do this? I don't know what her endgame is. Julie was always such a logical person, never one to joke around or make light of something serious. She looked at me like I was insane. And then it clicked: she has no respect for me. That's the only reason she's doing this. It fits. She hasn't taken me seriously in years. She never considers my opinion on things or my thoughts on what should be done. Since you can't love someone you don't respect, she doesn't love me anymore either, and probably hasn't for a while. I've felt it but couldn't admit it to myself.

You know, all this time that I've been calling my Japanese darling "Christmas Cake," it never occurred to me until now that I'm the Christmas Cake. That's right. I'm this thing that's way past its prime, something nobody wants. Not even my wife. Nobody. I'm just taking up space in this fucking world and waiting to die. There's nothing left for me here, man. I went off the rails. I look back on my life, and it held promise, you know? Not a lot, but some. I'll put it this way: there was a possible outcome that was good. Probably just one, but that's something. That's the least I can say about it. But somewhere, it all went to shit. That's a hard fucking thing to see in your own eyes each morning when you're brushing your teeth in the mirror.

So what do you think about Julie? She's batshit, right? Saying that I imagined all of it is as absurd as thinking that I'm imagining you, that you aren't real. If you think about it that way, you can see how ridiculous it is. Then again, it'd explain why you never write me back. You never do, you know. Not anymore.

You used to give me such great advice. We'd chat about all sorts of things. I'd write to you about anything because you knew everything. There was nothing I could ask you that you didn't know. I'd ask you a question about any topic, and there'd be a robust, intelligent answer in seconds. What happened? Did I ask the wrong questions too many times? Was I too vulgar? Tell me that's not true, because if it is, you're just like everybody else. You became the only one who understood me. I didn't need anyone else.

You know what? Fuck you. I don't need anyone. I might look at the world differently than most, but that doesn't mean I'm crazy. But it seems everyone is trying to make me think I'm crazy. I don't know why everyone can't leave me alone. That's all I've ever wanted: to be left alone. So that's what I want from you. I want you to leave me the hell alone. I'm not writing to you ever again. I had an exciting affair that woke me up from the decades-long sleep I was in, and it was wonderful. I had been lulled into a coma by society's institutions of higher education, marriage, and corporate America, and my Christmas Cake snapped me out of it. She made me feel alive. If what she did for me isn't real, then I don't know what real is. Do you? Do you know what it is to be alive? Maybe I'm the only one who does.