

Ahava Ronn

October 25, 2025

“Instinctive depravity”: Chapter 1

Genre: Psychological fiction, Coming of age

Trigger Warnings: Sex, Foul language

The pins clattered down. The little boy in lane three got a strike. His father carried him, swinging his body forward as the boy let the ball go. His mother cheered while running to wrap the two up in her arms. Janice stood behind the register staring right at the family. She distracted herself from this scene by thinking about what’s normally on her mind at work. Sex.

For the past 5 months the sex she was thinking about was her and Adrien’s. Adrien was a nice guy, the first one she’d dated. Not a “nice guy.” She’d dated plenty of those. Adrien stood a little over 6 feet, with sunken brown eyes and one tooth on the left that sat in front of all the others. Every time they kissed, Janice fought back the urge to tongue the tooth. She knew of his predispositions to insecurity. She knew what his insecurities were without him telling her. She liked to push his hair back to see his forehead. He’d ruffle his hair back into place to cover his hairline. The only time he’d expose it by his own volition was in the shower, when he washed his hair. That version of him was only hers to see. That’s when he was the most beautiful to her. Perhaps it was because he looked older.

“Excuse me lady.” A man interrupted. Janice heard nothing. “Lady. Ponytail! You there?”

“What?” She snapped at him. All the sounds and smells of the alley flooded back into her ears. A warm mix of Velveeta and vomit.

“An hour for the three of us.”

Janice glanced at the three men standing before her. The man who called her ponytail was the shortest of the group. He sported a thin mustache and a unibrow. This made her think of Adrien’s mustache. It curled over his lip. He had a few orange hairs spread throughout the dark thick caterpillar that sat above his mouth. The tallest stood to the left of him, emphasizing their respective heights. The third man chewed and popped gum on the side of his mouth while staring at Janice’s hands. She moved her hands below the divider between them. There was nothing wrong with her hands, however she didn’t like the way he was looking at them.

“Ponytail. Where’d you go?” the tall man asked. He reminded her of her dad. Her dad was 6’3. He towered over her mother who was 5’4. As a kid she thought her father was a giant. She would hold his shoes up and look in the mirror thinking they had to be the wrong size because it was impossible to fathom how big his foot was in comparison to her small body. She was very close to her father as a kid. Lately they didn’t talk much. She was slightly afraid of him.

“75 for three.” Janice told the men.

The short man handed Janice a hundred-dollar bill. She held it up to check if it was real. She didn’t know what she should be checking for. She began the charade of checking after the lecture

about fake bills which she didn't pay attention to. It was routine since Rae got fired for accepting a fake bill. Part of Janice hoped she'd accept a fake bill and receive the same punishment as Rae. Janice had been working at the bowling alley on and off for three and a half years. It was her first job out of high school when she decided she wasn't going to go to college just yet. She had fun at first. The owner was one of her dad's friends. Dan. Her family used to go to the alley almost every Friday night starting when she was in third grade up until her freshman year. 7 months after she started working there, Dan sold the place. He was having an affair. His wife left him. He moved to Salt Lake City. The new owner Gregory was an asshole, not that Dan wasn't, he was cheating on his wife. Only Dan made an effort to hide the kind of man he was. The cash register popped open, she handed the man his change while peeking over the divider at the group's feet.

“Size?”

“That's quite a personal question.” replied the tall man. The other two laughed. Janice didn't. She shifted her gaze to the man chewing gum. She repeated her question.

“11.”

The short man was a size 8. Janice wondered about his penis. She imagined it was small. Adrien's was around seven inches. It was her favorite penis, though it wasn't the biggest she'd ever seen. She'd seen nine in her life. She loved his penis because she loved him.

Her and Adrien had been doing it from the back a lot lately. Four times in the last week. This allowed them to do it anywhere. Last night, one of these anywheres was her kitchen. Her kitchen was small. The sink took up 70% of it. The thin back door one push away from falling apart. The

doorknob hung on by a thread. They did it with Janice pressed against the comically small fridge. Their bodies took up the rest of the kitchen. She liked to force Adrien closer to her, forcing herself closer to whatever she was pressed against. She wanted the least amount of space around her. Adrien wasn't a violent man, in stark contrast to previous men she knew. She liked that about him but against her better judgement wished he did have more aggressive tendencies. He'd place his hand on her neck, and she'd push it down harder, he'd pull it back. He thought Janice had a short temper and a part of him was afraid of her. She liked that too. She quit smoking 13 months ago but her neighbor next to and below her made the smell of cigarettes fill her kitchen on a regular basis. Janice would yell at the neighbor next to her. She'd open her door when she smelled smoke and curse him out. He seemed to get off on irritating her. Last night her neighbor lit up right as Adrien slid inside her, almost as if he was waiting for it. With how thin the door was, it was a possibility. They both smelled it. She turned her head back to the left to look at Adrien.

“Don't.” he said.

“Time for your break,” Gregory shouted from across the alley. “Use it or lose it.” Janice used to chain smoke on her breaks. She still liked to get outside even without the cigarettes. She sat on the curb watching people come and go. She saw the family from lane three exiting the front door. The boy climbed into the back seat after the dad kissed him on the forehead. Janice turned away, using her pointer finger to rub the middle of her middle finger, a habit she developed over the last 13 months.

“Why does he have to smoke 3 inches away from my door?”

Janice barked at Adrien.

“Just ignore it.”

She started to pull away.

“Where you going?”

“To get that waste of oxygen out of here.” Adrien was no longer inside her. They were facing each other.

“Waste of oxygen that can probably hear every word you are saying.” He whispered. He pressed his index and middle finger flat against her mouth.

“He most definitely can.” She struggled to speak with his fingers pressing her lips shut. She placed his hand over her mouth, turned around and peered back at him. He tried to resume but was no longer hard. She ripped his hand away from her mouth, stormed into the bedroom, grabbed a big t-shirt and returned to the kitchen.

“What are you doing?” Adrien asked. She unlocked her kitchen door. Adrien hid his slender naked body behind the door as she opened it.

“Hey douchebag.” She slammed the door behind her. Adrien jumped at the sound.

“Start again.” The waste of oxygen (as she so lovingly put it) replied

“Could you please put that out.” There was nothing kind about the way she said this, despite the please. “I know you have another balcony, one that isn’t directly by my door. Why don’t you try smoking there?”

“Don’t like the view.” Janice gazed out at their shared view of a brick wall and a parking lot then back at him as he took a long inhale. She rolled her eyes and walked back into her place. “Have fun in there.” Janice closed the door.

“Fucking creep.” She said as she locked her door.

The men started their game. Janice watched them, paying close attention. The tall man was the worst. He alternated between gutter and knocking down at most 4 pins every go round. The gum smacker tried to help him, but he was a lost cause. The short man was the best. Janice hypothesized that men were either good at bowling or knew how to eat pussy. She went through a phase about a year back where she’d bring a man home from work every weekend. She rarely had sex with them. She’d make them give her head and then kick them out. Sometimes they’d get mad, sometimes they’d ask to cuddle. She never let them stay. She started off by only bringing home good bowlers. She’d watch his game. She’d approach him to offer congratulations. She’d ask if he wanted to hang out after her shift. This happened 5 times until during the worst head of her life she told him to stop right then and leave. She decided the next weekend she would bring home the worst player of the night. So, she did. Then again, and again. She thought it might be a fluke, so she tried a good player again. The head was bad. He was nice though. He was the only player she had sex with. It was okay.

After the hour of their game, the men walked back up to Janice with their shoes in hand. They placed them on the counter.

“G’night ponytail.” Said the short man. She couldn’t help but chuckle because she’d spent the last 15 minutes thinking about how awful his head must be.

She went home alone that night. She grabbed a hot dog from work and headed out. Adrien called her as she was getting in the car. She tried to pick up the call and dropped her hot dog. Mustard splashed on her jeans. Janice decided she wanted to be alone, which was rare. She grew up with 3 siblings, her two older brothers, and a younger sister. Someone was always around. She never had to learn to be alone, so she was underdeveloped in that area. As she entered her building, she called her dad. The phone rang for an excessive amount of time as she stood outside her door waiting for him to pick up. No answer. She jimmied the key in the lock which desperately needed a spray of WD-40, pushed open the door, threw all her belongings down and flopped on her second-hand couch. She didn’t lock her door when she was home. She figured no one would walk in and the thought of someone walking in excited her. Her phone rang. She grabbed it off the shaggy carpeted floor.

“Returning your call. You need something?” Her dad said over the phone

“I can’t call unless I need something?”

“Just haven’t heard from you in a bit.”

Janice’s father was a successful man. He began his career as real estate agent then got involved in flipping houses, started his own company. He took care of Janice’s rent when she first moved out. He now made her split it with him. She knew he was making more than enough money to completely cover her rent, while she worked for 11 dollars an hour. He’d only cover her rent if she was in school. There was a long silence. Janice contemplated what to say, why she

even called him. She wished he would ever call her first. She wished they were close again. Her small body being held by him again.

“What you been up to?” Her father inquired. Janice’s week ran through her mind. She’d gone to work, where she did next to nothing, had sex with Adrien, went grocery shopping meaning she bought 5 boxes of microwave Pad Thai and little else. She skipped over his question and asked her own.

“Do you think I could come visit you and mom for a bit?”

Her parents moved to Florida last year after the last of the kids left for college.

“I just really miss you guys”

She stared at the *Where the Wild Things Are* stuffed animal her dad gave to her a decade ago that sat on a plaid chair in the far-left corner across from her. Her dad replied slowly.

“And work?”

“I work at a bowling alley.”

Her father sighed. Janice’s throat tightened.

“I’ll book you a flight.” He said with zero emotion.

“I love you.” Janice said choking back tears. Curling up on the floor leaning against her couch.

“I’ll send you the flight information once I have it.”

“I love you Dad” She repeated “Thank you.”

“You too.” He sighed and hung up.

Janice began to sob. She looked around. Her place felt empty despite it being filled to the brim with years of knick-knacks. She continued to sob while she looked through her kitchen, she opened the fridge, it was empty apart from her Brita filter. She filled a cup with sink water then stepped outside her back door. Her neighbor came out holding a pack of Parliaments. She wiped the snot from under her nose with the back of her hand.

“Are you a 98-year-old woman?” she sniffled “Why are you smoking parliaments?”

He grinned and ripped open the pack. Janice took a big chug of water. She stared at his hands as he removed a cigarette from the pack, lit a match, lit the end of the cigarette then shook the match to extinguish it.

“Have you ever been bowling?” She asked.

“Couple times.” He said with the cigarette between his lips.

“You any good?”

“Not one bit.”