

PLEASURE PARTY

HUGH O. SMITH

A group of women come together for a fun and harmless Pleasure Party that turns into a hostage situation when one of the partygoers snaps...

The ordeal tests each woman as long buried secrets and lies come to light as they each endure the struggle to survive the terrifying ordeal.

Chapter 1

It began with a shrill, angry voice that shot barbed and poisonous words through the room causing hands occupied with drink glasses and finger foods to freeze mid-way to waiting mouths. Almost as one, the small group of women turned and stared, wide-eyed at the source of the commotion, a furious dark-haired woman standing by the open door. Her hands were smoking grenades at her sides and her mouth was set in a grim line. She spoke again and her deep, Brooklyn accented, cigarette rasped voice pulled apart the words and reconstructed them with drawn out vowels and hard g's.

“What the hell are you doing here, you whore?”

Not sure if the words were aimed at her, each woman present mentally searched through guilty memories and catalogs of sins for a reason why the angry, red-faced woman would call her out. Finding plenty, but none that the woman would know of, they each looked around, relieved, for the target of the new arrival's rancor.

The party was thirty minutes old and had been gathering steam slowly. Its gears turned slow, grinding revolutions, not yet fully lubricated by the oil of liquor and shared camaraderie. Strangers and near-strangers gathered and formed small groups, chatting amiably among themselves about the common denominators, husbands, and children. As the minutes passed and they grew more comfortable with one another they nonchalantly picked up the catalogs their hosts strategically placed around the room, leafing through them together and whispering conspiratorially, giggling like schoolgirls.

The new arrival's voice was a knife in the heart of the burgeoning party. Conversation died and those holding catalogs put them down guiltily, like a young son caught red-handed with dad's Playboy collection.

"I know you heard me, bitch," Laura Mancuso said through gritted teeth. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

The door leading from the kitchen into the living room swung open and a curvy redhead, one of the hosts and owner of the home, emerged from the kitchen. Her ample rear held the swinging door open and smiling, she backed carefully into the living room holding a pitcher in each hand.

"Okay ladies, I've got sangria, come get it while..." Kristen Zabo turned to face her guests, stopping in mid-sentence when she saw the enraged Laura standing in her doorway. Her smile disappeared, and confused, she gazed around the room.

A tall and pretty Black woman bumped the door a moment later and also backed into the room, laden with yet another pitcher and a large tray of finger foods.

"Ahhhh yea ladies, it's on! You're about to taste my famous crab cakes, it's time to get this party start..."

She looked around at the silent guests and her smile also disappeared, replaced by the same uncomprehending look her best friend wore.

“Um, Kristen, what’s going on?” She asked the redhead.

Kristen shrugged as best she could, burdened as she was with the pitchers.

“Bianca, I have no idea.”

“Wanna know what’s going on?” Laura shouted, pulling on the hem of her too-short dress, wobbling from foot to foot drunkenly. A few stray hairs covered her eyes and she brushed them out of the way, annoyed.

“That bitch over there on your couch is a fucking whore!” She pointed, and the accusation flew from her finger like a lightning bolt from a vengeful God, landing directly on a beautiful young brunette seated on the tasteful couch in the middle of the room.

Veronica Castillo hadn’t been a part of any of the small groups formed during the party’s slow start. One of the last to arrive, she’d entered almost hesitantly, helped herself to a bottle of sparkling water and then sat by herself. One or two of the attendees noticed her and smiled but most of the women paid her no mind and soon her face lost its anxious look, and she relaxed, sipping her water contentedly as if she’d just then made up her mind to stay.

She’d been the first to see Laura when she arrived. She noticed the doorknob turning with no result, as if the person on the other side pulled when they should have pushed. A moment later the knob turned again, the door opened and a frustrated Laura staggered inside. Veronica’s blood ran cold and she caressed the crucifix around her neck even as she fought the instinct to find the back door and run far and fast, away from the obviously drunken woman. She wasn’t afraid, but she knew how and when to pick her battles and this was not one worth fighting. She averted her

eyes and prayed that Laura would pass by without seeing her, giving her the opportunity to slip out unnoticed.

Laura lurched into the house, glaring at the doorknob as if it had somehow wronged her, tugging absentmindedly on the hem of her short black dress. She glanced around at the décor, quickly taking in the furnishings and the art on the walls, smirking as if she'd judged the home and found it not up to her standards. Her silent critique over, she focused her attention on the other guests, her eyes hovering through the crowd landing on each woman like dark ravens on a carcass. Veronica sat, stoic and motionless, watching Laura's appraisal and awaiting the inevitable explosion. Soon the dark eyes landed on her, but only stayed a moment or two before they darted off again. Veronica dipped her head and the hope flared that Laura hadn't recognized her. When she lifted her head again, Laura's eyes were firmly on her and a cold fury had entered and turned them into slits. Then Laura spoke, her words traveling over thousands of cigarettes so when they emerged they were shrill and rough all at once.

With all eyes on her, Veronica rose slowly from her seat on the couch, a reddening face the only sign of emotion. She looked at her tormentor with large liquid eyes and shook her head.

"It's good to have someone to blame, isn't it Laura?" She said. Her voice was low and lyrical, sweetened with a slight accent that lent extra strength to her calm words.

"Who else should I blame? Who broke up my home? You, you whore! You!" Laura screamed, underscoring her words with jabs of her bright red manicured fingernails.

"I have a name."

"I know your name. It's whore. I said it loud enough, didn't I? Want to hear it again? Whore, whore, whore, whore! Or maybe you like slut better? Slut, slut, slut, sluuuuuuut!" Laura leaned forward as she shouted and droplets of spittle rained from her lips.

Veronica raised her bottle of sparkling water as if to throw it at her tormentor but she seemed to think better of it and calmly placed it on the coffee table.

She took a weary breath and said, “Call me what you like Laura, but I’d rather be a whore and a slut than a frigid alcoholic degenerate bitch!”

Veronica drew the phrase out as if doing so gave each word extra power to hurt and maim.

Frigid.

Alcoholic.

Degenerate.

Bitch.

Laura’s dropped her Hermès purse on the carpet and took a step toward the younger woman. Her steps, for all their murderous intent, were unsteady and she stumbled and almost fell. She caught herself and took another step. Just then, one of the guests, a plump Black woman, broke off from the group and moved in between the combatants.

“Laura, is it? Laura, can we just calm down a minute,” The woman said. Perfect makeup accentuated wide hazel eyes and full, lush lips. She turned the full wattage of her beautiful smile at Laura, as if breaking up fights was an everyday occurrence.

“I’m sure it’s not that bad, let’s just…”

Laura peered at the woman. “Who the fuck are you bitch? I don’t know you, get out of my face.”

The woman’s beatific smile never faded. I’m Jessica, I’m the party planner, remember? I gave you the invitation, I saw you at the school picking up your grandsons and I invited you to…”

“I don’t care, get the fuck away from me.”

Laura shouldered past Jessica and took another unsteady step toward the center of the room where Veronica stood defiantly. Almost as one the women around Veronica hurriedly moved to the other side of the room.

Bianca rushed to get in front of Laura and Kristin moved quickly to intercept Veronica.

“Ladies, ladies,” Kristin said, “Can we just calm down please, this is supposed to be a party.

“Fuck you and fuck calm,” Laura said. “I never would have come if I’d known you invited that...that no good slut.”

“Like I said, I’d rather be a slut than a degenerate alcoholic cold fish,” Veronica shot back. “What’s an ice queen like you doing here anyway, this is a pleasure party, you know, sex toys. You have to actually like sex to...”

“Yea I’m sure you know about parties right, since that’s what you and David did for two years behind my back.”

“Any time away from you was a party for him,” Veronica shot back.

Laura’s face tightened. “That’s it, I’m going to kill you, you whore, I should have beat your slutty ass a long time ago.”

Laura took a step toward Veronica with fists clenched tightly and murder in her eyes. Her next step was unsteady and the next unsteadier still. She would have fallen if Bianca hadn’t held her arm to steady her.

“It’s a pleasure party, not a fight party, that’s next week,” Bianca said, trying to lighten the mood.

Laura scowled and Bianca quickly released her grip on her arm. No one as much as grinned at her joke and she continued in a sterner tone. “Remember this is Kristin’s home so let’s show some respect please.”

Veronica sat, embarrassed, but Laura remained standing, staring at the younger woman with undisguised hatred.

“You killed him, you killed my David,” she said. “I hate you.”

Veronica stood up again quickly, her own fists balled up and her body tense.

"Your David? Your David? How do you figure he was your David? You ignored him, when you weren't treating him like crap. He wasn't your David anymore, he stopped being your David a long time ago."

“You...Fucking...whore...I...I...” Laura’s face was a mask of rage and pain and her knife slash mouth opened and closed but no sound was forthcoming. She picked up her purse and stalked out in a rage, slamming the door behind her.

CHAPTER TWO

Kristin Zabo pulled up to her son's school and looked around in vain for a parking space. School wouldn't let out for another twenty minutes, but as usual there were no spots to be had anywhere close to the Oak Street Academy. The usual clique, the Professional Moms, as Kristin and her best friend Bianca called them, were already there hogging the few choice spots with their oversized German engineered SUV's. They huddled together in front of the school like a team, dressed similarly in designer track suits and tennis outfits, although as far as Kristen knew not one of them knew the first thing about tennis or any other sport except the American Express lift. She cruised around for a few minutes more looking for a spot, finally finding one on a street about three blocks away. As she walked toward the school, the Professional Moms noticed her and almost as one, they waved their insincere beauty queen waves and tried to rearrange their botoxed faces into smiles. She returned their fake smiles and waves with ones of her own, then crossed and took a seat on one of the faded green benches across from the school's entrance.

The bench sat under a huge oak that spread thick, gnarled branches far over the street. Legend had it that the school's founder, Mrs. Dorothy Parks, planted the tree on the day in 1943

the school opened its doors. Mrs. Parks, a retired schoolteacher and widow, watched helplessly as her sons went off to fight in world War II. Her daughters, spurred on by the example of Rosie the Riveter, became factory workers producing goods for the war effort. Told she was too old to work in the factories but desperate to do something, anything to help, Mrs. Parks volunteered to babysit the neighborhood children whose fathers were fighting and dying on far off Pacific islands with unpronounceable names and whose mothers left home early each day for the factories. As the conflict dragged on and more and more women began working in the factories Mrs. Parks' home soon grew too small to accommodate all their children. Rather than turn away even one child she used every cent of her life savings to buy a small plot of land on Oak Street with two small but serviceable buildings and turned them into a day care center. Her small day care became so popular that what she intended as her small contribution to the war effort blossomed into a full-blown business. Mrs. Parks continued working in the day care center after the war and until her death in 1956. Mrs. Parks' daughter, then her granddaughter, took over, expanding both the schools boundaries and its reputation. Seventy years after Mrs. Parks opened its doors, parents jostled and schemed to begin their children's education in the little school she founded. It had long since changed its name to the more impressive sounding Oak Street Academy but everyone still called it by the original name Mrs. Parks gave it, Candyland.

Kristin's seat gave her a clear view of Candyland's fenced-in playground and she watched the school's only male instructor, Mr. Hector, play a raucous game of tag with a group of screaming preschoolers. Hector was the school's newest teacher, a twenty-something ex-Marine who seemed to have more muscles than brains but he was gentle and patient and had quickly become a favorite with the children. A favorite with the mothers too, Kristin thought as she watched the Professional Moms ogle Hector with undisguised lust. She quickly grew tired of

watching them and dug in her purse for her iPhone and opened its e-book application. She'd bookmarked her page in the latest Sean Harmon novel and couldn't put it down. The author lived in their neighborhood and his son, Lee was good friends with her son Steven.

"You're not fooling anyone you know," Kristin's best friend Bianca said, as she took a seat next to her on the bench a few minutes later.

"What are you talking about?"

"Please, girl. I see you, sitting here pretending to mess with your phone when it's obvious you're checking out Hector's fyne ass."

"Oh please. I was not checking him out. I leave that to the Professionals over there. I was reading Sean's new book." She held up the phone so Bianca could see.

"Whatever, girl. Denial's not only a river in Egypt."

The women laughed together and then sat in silence watching the scene in the schoolyard.

"Well, he is hot." Kristin conceded after a moment. "Maybe I would have a chance with him, Hispanic men seem to like a woman with a little booty on them. God knows the white men don't seem to know what to do with it. I know my ex didn't."

"Yea well Stan didn't know how to handle a lot of things. Anyway, that's crap, Ed's friend Frank loves you. He asks about you all the time and he's as white as they come. Milky even."

"You mean your husband's stinky, hygienically challenged friend Funky Frank? No thanks, I'll pass," Kristen said, wrinkling her nose.

"Okay, okay, he might be a little ripe," Bianca conceded, laughing. "Anyway, you get my drift, there are plenty of guys who would love to date you, white, black, Hispanic and everything in between. You're a white girl with curves and booty, and a natural redhead at that. We should make a website for you or something."

“Yea, husbanddumpedmeforayoungslut.com. I bet that’d get a lot of hits.”

“Yea, but you’re not bitter, right?”

“Screw you,” Kristin said, laughing.

“Such language,” a voice said from behind them.

Kristin and Bianca smiled at the new arrival and scooted over to make room for her on the bench.

“No thank guys, I’ll stand,” Jessica Walters said.

“There’s plenty of room, Jessica,” Bianca said.

Jessica paused and eyed the bench as if doing mental calculations involving the space on the bench and the proportions of her big backside.

“No thanks,” she said again, looking uncomfortable.

“Hey,” Kristin said, changing the subject, “We have the invitations.” She took the stack of envelopes from her purse and handed them to Jessica.

Jessica glanced at them and smiled her approval. “They look great,” she said. “Now who do you guys think we should hand them out to?”

“You’re the party planner,” Bianca said. “You tell us.”

Jessica stared at the women across the street for a moment.

“Well,” she said, “The thing with a pleasure party is that you never know who might come. The woman you think is a freak might be a total prude and the one you think would faint dead away if they even saw a sex toy might be a huge freak, so you can’t go by looks alone. I say we just go hand them out to whomever and see what happens.” Jessica glanced at her watch. “If we’re gonna do it we better hurry before the bell rings and the kids come running out like bats out of hell.”

She divided the invitations into three stacks and gave one stack each to Kristen and Bianca and together the women walked across the street.

A few minutes later they returned to the bench, smiling, just as the bell rang and the children poured outside like ants from an anthill.

“Good job, ladies,” Jessica said above the joyful screams of children happy to be free for the day. “I gave out all of mine.”

“So did I.”

“Me too.”

“Do you really think they’ll come?” Kristin asked.

“They’ll come,” Jessica said. “A girl’s night out with food, some alcoholic beverages and sex toys is a winning combo, watch and see. Oh, there’s Brianne, I have to get her to ballet, see you later girls.”

“I wish I could be as confident about this as she is,” Kristen said as they watched Jessica hug her daughter and make her way to her car.

“It’ll be fine,” Bianca said. “What could go wrong? Like she said, liquor, sex toys and food, in that order. Shoot, if someone invited me to a party like that I’d be there in a hot minute girl.”

Kristen grinned at her friend. She loved that Bianca could see the bright side of anything. She on the other hand could find the clouds on a sunny day as her ex-husband Stan was fond of saying.

“Hey, don’t look so depressed,” Bianca said, seeing her face. “Wasn’t it you who had this idea? Have a pleasure party you said, we can make a little extra money you said, it’ll be fun you said.”

“You’re supposed to be my best friend, you know I don’t have any sense, why would you listen to me?”

Bianca scooted closer to her friend and put a hand on hers.

“You’re full of shit, you’re a college professor for God’s sake!”

“Community college,” Kristin corrected her.

“See, there you go again, putting yourself down. You need to stop it girl, get some confidence.”

Kristin sighed. “It’s hard when you had someone putting you down for the last ten years,” Kristin said.

“You’ve been divorced for a year honey, it’s about time you put that behind you. This party is just the thing. It’ll go great, I promise.”

Across the street, Bianca’s younger son Christopher spotted them and made a beeline for the bench. He kissed his mother, said hello to Kristin, then sat on the bench and immediately became engrossed in his hand held Nintendo DS game.

“Even if it doesn’t work out, it won’t be a total loss. You can play with the toys yourself,” Bianca said under her breath so her son wouldn’t hear. “Shoot you haven’t had any since forever, I know you need some.”

“Toys?” Christopher asked. He paused the game and looked up curiously.

“That he hears,” Bianca said. “I scream for him to clean his room and he’s deaf but this...no honey, not kids toys, toys for...ahem...adults.”

“Oh, boring,” Christopher, said, going back to his game.

Kristin shook with silent laughter and Bianca pushed her playfully.

“I’m glad you think this is funny.”

“Don’t worry, you know kids, he’s probably forgotten all about it already.”

“Mommy, what kind of toys do adults play with?” Christopher blurted out. Kristin and Bianca looked at one another and went into fresh gales of laughter while a puzzled Christopher shook his head and went back to his video game.

“Mom, are you okay?”

Kristin and Bianca looked up from their laughing fit to see both their second graders standing in front of them. Kristin’s son Jordan and Bianca’s son Max stared at their mothers as if they had six heads.

“Are you okay mom?” Jordan asked again.

“I’m okay honey.”

“What’s so funny?” Max asked.

“The adult toys,” Christopher said matter-of-factly, without looking up from his Nintendo.

At the mention of the toys, Bianca and Kristin broke out into fresh gales of laughter while the boys stared.

“I blame you for this,” Bianca said.

“Oh please, he’s already forgotten about it.”

“Right. Until we’re at Thanksgiving dinner and he tells my in-laws that mommy plays with “adult” toys.”

“Oh, speaking of in-laws I saved an invitation for Gloria.” Kristin dipped her hand in her purse and handed the invitation to her friend.

“Keep it,” Bianca said, making a sour face. “Ed already told her about the party and now she can’t wait to come.”

Kristin said nothing but she knew better. Bianca had a strained relationship with her mother-in-law and that was probably why her husband Ed asked Bianca to take her along, hoping that this would help them to become closer. Kristin liked Gloria, she seemed nice, but for some reason she couldn't figure out, Bianca believed Gloria hated her.

"Is Will coming too?" Kristin asked.

"He is," Bianca said with a sigh. "You know Gloria doesn't drive so he's driving up from New York. He's going right back to Westchester, though, thank God."

Will was Gloria's husband and Bianca's father-in-law. Kristin had met him a few times and he was a lot of fun to be around. A retired judge, Will was an old school gentleman and very flirty; she couldn't understand why Bianca seemed to dislike him almost as much as she disliked his wife.

"Are you ever going to tell me what's up with you and your in-laws?" Kristin asked.

Bianca sighed and said nothing.

"Well?"

"Nothing's up, I'm fine with them."

"So you're okay about bonding with your mother-in-law over giant dildos and cock rings?"

Kristin asked as they rose and began walking toward their cars.

Bianca said nothing. She stared at the boys running and playing ahead of them.

"It's okay if you don't want to tell me," Kristin said after another minute had passed without Bianca saying a word. "Just forget I asked."

"No it's not that...it's just...I..."

"It's okay, really, you don't have to say anything I'm sorry I brought it up."

"I fucked my father-in-law."

Kristin stopped in her tracks.

“What?”

“I slept with Will, Kristin.”

“Damn. I mean...damn. Holy crap...does Ed know?”

“No. how could I tell my husband I slept with his father?”

Kristin said nothing. The boys were almost a block ahead of them and she started walking again.

“You must think I’m a huge whore,” Bianca said.

“Nah,” Kristin said, “I always thought you were a huge whore, this only confirms it.”

The two friends walked together, laughing nervously.

“Okay, fine. I get that you're uncomfortable around Will, but not Gloria. Does she know?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think so.”

“So what then?”

“Remember about two years ago when Ed and I were having problems?”

“I remember.”

Kristin thought back to when Bianca first moved into the neighborhood. They’d only known each other a few months when Bianca confided that her and her husband had recently been through a crisis in their marriage but were working through it. The two friends had spent many an evening on Kristin’s porch during that time talking and bonding over iced tea and shared marital strife. Kristin has never asked any details about the crisis and Bianca had never volunteered any information until now.

“This was just before Ed got his promotion at the law firm. We’d just moved from New York to New Jersey. He’d been working so hard for months, there were times he’d fall asleep at

the dinner table, that was, when he was actually home for dinner. When we bought the house it needed some work so Will volunteered to do the work for us. He's pretty good at that kind of stuff so we were glad to have him help out. He practically lived here for weeks doing the work.

“One night Ed and I had a huge argument. He said I'd been acting different and asked point blank if I was seeing someone.”

Bianca paused, tearful at the memory.

“I should have denied it, but I didn't. I was just so lonely. I wanted him to hurt like I did, so I confessed that I cheated on him. He flipped, Kristin, I'd never seen him so angry.” Bianca paused and tears welled in her eyes. “I thought he was going to hit me and you know what, I would have deserved it. I was so scared, I was going to tell him the truth, but I just couldn't do it. How could I tell my husband that I'd slept with his father? So I lied and said that I saw an ex and slept with him one time. I said that it didn't mean anything, I was just lonely. He just glared at me like he wanted to kill me and walked out. He just...left. I didn't know what to do, I texted him, called him for hours, no answer.”

Kristin swallowed hard and looked down at her feet.

“Did you ever find out where he went,” she said in a whisper.

“No. I never did. But when he came back he was so calm it was almost scarier than when he was mad. He said he forgave me and we needed to maybe find a counselor and work some things out. Then he told me he loved me and things were going to be okay. Then he kissed me and went to bed. I don't understand it. His wife told him she'd slept with another man and he just...went to sleep.”

“That was a good thing, right? Maybe he went somewhere to clear his head?”

“Maybe. I never asked him where he went that night. He was gone for hours, I think he drove to New York and told his mother everything, he and Gloria are pretty close.”

Kristin cast her gaze to the ground.

“Um...so that’s why you and Gloria don’t get along? You think she knows what you did? Did she ever say anything?”

“No, she never said a word. But I’m pretty sure she knows. She’s been acting funny ever since. I can’t explain it, but it’s like she knows and wants to say something but Ed probably made her promise not to.”

Kristin said nothing.

“Great, now I’ve made you depressed,” Bianca said, “I’m sorry.”

“No,” Kristin said, “It’s not that. It’s just that Ed...Ed...” Kristin looked at her friend. Bianca’s pretty features were twisted with worry and regret. “Ed is a good man Bianca and he loves you. Be thankful. He probably just went out, had a couple of drinks and thought things through. Be thankful, most marriages wouldn’t have survived. Mine sure didn’t.”

Bianca exhaled. “You’re right. I tell myself that all the time. It’s just that...I feel like there’s something I don’t know. Like there’s a piece of the puzzle missing and it drives me crazy.”

Bianca’s boys began a loud argument in the car and she knocked on the windows to quiet them.

“Let me get outta here before they kill each other,” Bianca said. She started to walk away but stopped and turned back. “I’m glad I told you Kristin, thanks for listening, and thank you for not judging me. I love you, girl.”

“I love you too.”

The friends hugged and a smiling Bianca started her car and took off down the street, shouting at her warring children.

Kristin smiled and waved as Bianca drove past and walked to her own SUV where Jordan waited patiently, engrossed in his own Nintendo DS game. She made sure he was buckled in, started her car, and put it in drive. Tears blurred her vision and she put the SUV back in park, wiped her eyes, and wondered for the thousandth time why she hadn't told Bianca that she knew exactly where Ed had gone that night and who he'd talked to. More than talked. Much more than talked. She wanted to unburden herself of the terrible secret but she knew she never would. Kristin sighed, put the car in drive once again and headed home.

Chapter Three

“Okay ladies, the drama portion of the evening is over,” Jessica joked, breaking the stunned silence. “We have good food, we have plenty of liquor, let’s get this party started.”

She grabbed a pitcher, poured drinks, and handed them to the subdued women. They’d all watched Laura slam the door as hard as she could, then listened as she stomped down the driveway, slammed her car door and burning rubber as she sped away.

Bianca followed Jessica’s lead and began pouring drinks and passing around platters of finger foods. Veronica was still seated, motionless, but suddenly rose and ran through the kitchen and out onto the deck. Kristin and Bianca exchanged looks then Kristin followed her outside.

“I’m sorry,” Kristin said, “We didn’t know...” she said when she caught up with the sobbing Veronica.

“It’s not your fault,” Veronica said. “Willows is a small town, it was bound to happen sooner or later. I thought I was prepared for it. I had so many things in my head to say to her but...but when I saw how angry she was, I just couldn’t...the words...”

She hung her head. “I never wanted to have an affair with David or anyone. I always told myself that’s the one thing I would never, ever do.

Kristin hung her head.

“I guess I needed someone...good,” Veronica continued. “And David was a good man, you know? He was the nicest, most generous human being I’ve ever known, but he was so sad. He never once complained, but everyone knew that woman beat him down Kristin. She treated him like dirt and he didn’t deserve it.”

She sat and Kristen sat next to her and held her hand.

“God, what these women must think of me.”

“I’m sure they don’t think anything,” Kristin lied.

“Riiight,” Veronica said, teary-eyed.

“No one’s perfect Veronica, trust me, we’ve all got our...skeletons.”

“Not like this.”

“You’d be surprised,” Kristin said under her breath. “And for what it’s worth, I’m not judging you and neither is Bianca.”

“Then you’re the only ones. They’re all probably wondering which one of their husbands I’m going to sleep with next.” She said, sighing.

“Shoot, maybe a few of them are hoping you’ll take their husband off their hands. Have you seen some of those guys?”

Veronica smiled. “Thanks Kristin, you’re being really sweet about this and I appreciate it but I think I should just go.”

“You’re not going anywhere except to the bathroom to fix your makeup, then you’re getting your butt back out here and buy so many sex toys you won’t need a man anytime soon. That’ll put these broads’ minds at ease.”

Veronica laughed and dabbed her tears with a tissue.

“I really didn’t plan on coming. The last thing I wanted was to sit in a room full of women and be judged.” Her shoulders slumped and fresh tears tracked through her makeup. “It’s just been so long since I had a girl’s night...I just... I really wanted to come and have a good time. I think I should go though. If I stay your whole party will be ruined.” She sighed. “Who am I kidding, it probably is already.”

“I don’t care. Please stay.”

“You’re sweet Kristin, thank you, but I’m just gonna freshen up and leave before I cause more trouble. Just show me where the bathroom is and then I’ll leave.”

Kristin sighed as Veronica rose. “I wish you would stay.”

“Kristin,” Veronica said softly. “Would you stay if you were me?”

Kristin sighed in resignation. “No,” she admitted, “I guess I wouldn’t. C’mon, I’ll show you where the bathroom is.”

Kristin showed Veronica to the restroom then returned to the party, happy to see that with Veronica and Laura absent and drinks present the ladies were looking much less stunned and had resumed talking among themselves. Bianca and Jessica noticed her and motioned her into the kitchen.

“Is she okay?” Bianca asked.

“Okay as she can be I guess. She just got called a slut and a whore in front of a room full of strangers. She’s freshening up and then she’s leaving.”

“I feel terrible,” Jessica said. “I don’t know why I gave that Laura woman an invitation. It’s all my fault.”

“Girl please, how were you supposed to know she was a nutcase? Bianca asked.

“I suppose,” said Jessica. “Well maybe a little drama will help to break the ice.” She picked up a pitcher of margaritas and put on a big smile. “Okay ladies, let’s get this party started,” she said as she walked back into the living room holding the pitcher high.

As the kitchen door swung shut, Kristin looked at her friend. “Let’s throw a pleasure party you said,” she said in a high mocking voice. “We’ll make some money you said, it’ll be fun you said.”

Bianca laughed. “You worry too much. You heard Jessica, a lil’ drama is good for sales.”

“I wonder if that’s what she’s gonna say when these broads start slamming each other across the head with my furniture like Hulk Hogan and the Macho Man.”

“Hulk Hogan and the Macho Man? Girl you need to get up on your wrestlers, that was like, twenty years ago.”

“You get the point,” Kristin said, exasperated. “It’s gonna be a disaster, I just know it.”

“You’re my best friend Kristin, but I have to tell you, you can be a downer. You worry too much.” Bianca said as she removed trays of appetizers from the oven.

“And did you see your mother-in-law’s face? She looked mortified!” Kristin said.

Bianca’s demeanor changed and her face fell. “Yeah, well she’s the one who invited herself along, I didn’t tell her to bring her happy hips all the way from the Bronx and crash our party.”

As if on cue, the kitchen door opened and Gloria, Bianca’s mother-in-law breezed in.

“Well that certainly was an auspicious start,” she joked. “And I thought the Bronx had drama. Now I see why you and Ed moved here, Bianca.”

Kristin smiled at the older lady’s joke but Bianca had no response. She continued to pile appetizers on trays, looking uncomfortable.

“Do you girls need any help?” Gloria asked, after a moment’s silence.

“No...” Bianca began.

“Yes,” Kristin interrupted her friend. “Could you please take these out to the ladies, Gloria?”

“Sure honey.” She took the trays and disappeared into the living room.

“Do you need any help?” Bianca mimicked her mother in law.

“She just wanted to help,” Kristin said.

“No she didn’t, she just...she just wanted to show me up. I don’t know why I said yes when Ed asked me to bring her along.

Kristin went to her friend and gave her a hug. She could feel the tension in Bianca’s body.

Hell...a minute ago I was lecturing you about being a downer, now look at me.”

“Listen, remember when we met Jessica in the mall a month ago and decided to throw this crazy party, what did we say we were going to do, no matter what?”

“Have fun,” Bianca replied unenthusiastically.

“Have fun,” Kristin repeated. “If we’re not going to have fun then we might as well tell everyone to go home. I don’t want to do this if you’re not having fun.”

“You’re right,” Bianca said, smiling. “I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to say sorry, let’s go out there and sell some big ol’ donges.”

Bianca laughed. “To hell with that, let’s go out there and buy some big ol’ donges.”

They trooped into the living room where their guests were being seated and a freshened-up Veronica stood talking to Jessica.

“Thanks for inviting me but I’m gonna go,” Veronica said to Jessica. “She turned to Kristin and Bianca, “I’m so sorry, I wish I could...”

“Where do you think you’re going, you whore?” A familiar voice said from the front door.

“Oh, hell nah,” Bianca said under her breath.

“Laura. I’m happy you decided to rejoin us.” Jessica said in an unconvincingly cheerful tone. “Veronica was just leaving and we were just about to begin, if you want to take a seat, we’ll...”

Laura glared at Jessica as if she were something distasteful on the bottom of her shoe.

“Fuck you, you fat bitch, she’s not leaving.” Laura said, glaring at Veronica. “Sit down *putan*, I’m not done with you.”

Veronica shook her head in disbelief. “I don’t have to take this.” She walked toward the door.

“Really? You’ll take whatever the fuck I tell you to take whore,” Laura snarled as she pulled a shiny revolver from her purse and pointed it at Veronica’s chest.

Veronica stooped in mid-stride and her olive complexion went deathly pale.

“Yea, I thought so,” Laura said with an evil smile. “Now sit the hell down.”

THANK YOU so much for reading this excerpt of *Pleasure Party*!

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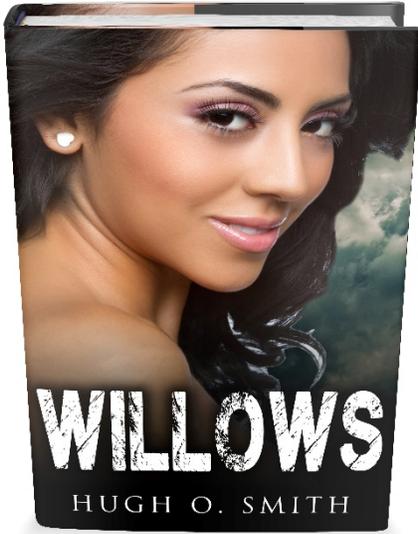
I truly hope you enjoyed this excerpt of *Pleasure Party*; I'm excited for you to read the entire book! But, until that's out, I hope you enjoy ***SOC CER MOM***.

Thanks again,

Hugh

Other Books by Hugh O. Smith

WILLOWS



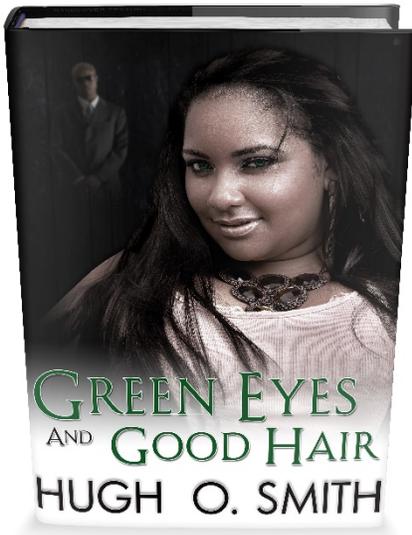
Marcus has found the love of his life. Tami is everything he could ask for and more and he can't wait to settle down and start a family in Willows, the small suburban town they were both raised in. Their plans are derailed by Tami's secrets. Secrets that turn their quiet suburban existence into a powder keg of lies, lust, and depravity. Marcus' plans for a perfect life is twisted into something unrecognizable and he learns that sometimes, even faith and love aren't enough to save you.

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Tony is young good-looking and successful, the ultimate ladies' man. Everything about him, from his clothes to his apartment, to his uber-confident swagger is designed to be a trap for the women who catch his eye. Tony has no immediate plans except to advance his career and continue with his playboy ways. Then one day he meets Olivia, a beautiful plus-size executive, and he sees a way he can do both.

Olivia is new in town, but certainly not new to the ways of the player. She knows that no man can treat her the way she deserves so she doesn't even try to find one. As far as she's concerned, life is just fine without the encumbrance of a boyfriend or husband. When she meets Tony, she sees him for exactly what he is, a playboy looking for a good time. She's wise to his playboy ways but still, she wouldn't mind spending a little time with him.

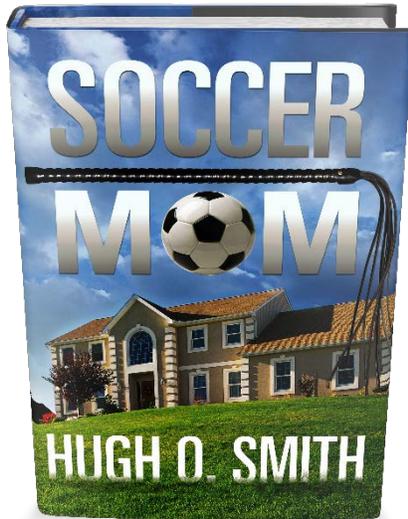
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hugh O. Smith is the author of *WILLOWS*, *GREEN EYES AND GOOD HAIR* and the novella *SOCCKER MOM*. His short fiction story *SOUTH SOUTH BRONX* appeared in the Zane anthology *Caramel Flava II*. Hugh is a contributor to the writing site *TheWriteLife.com*. Originally from Jamaica, Hugh credits his Jamaican upbringing and its rich storytelling tradition for his writing inspiration. His website is www.hughosmith.com

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