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Chapter Eleven: 2pm (pps102-109)

Craig shows Sophie the attic

AZ/KF: Craig's attitude to Sophie is not just lust. He has dated a couple of girls before, and his relationship with them was pretty much pure desire, but he feels a bit differently about Sophie. He is fascinated by her altogether—although getting into her pants is still a priority.

AZ: Keep in the foreground Craig's infatuation for Sophie and all the things he admires about her.

AZ: What does Craig want for Christmas? What does Sophie want for Christmas?

2 p.m.

Let's see him again

Craig was thrilled to see Sophie again. He had been captivated by her at his mother's fortieth birthday party. She was pretty in a dark-eyed, dark-haired way and, although she was small and slight, her body was softly rounded—but it was not her looks that had bewitched him, it was her attitude. She didn't give a damn, and that fascinated him. Nothing impressed her: not Grandpa's Ferrari, nor Craig's football skills—he played for Scotland in the under-sixteens—nor the fact that his mother was a Q.C. Sophie wore what she liked, she ignored “No Smoking” signs, and if someone was boring her she would walk away in mid-sentence. At the party, she had been fighting with her father about getting her navel pierced—which he completely forbade—and here she was with a stud in it.

It made her difficult to get on with. Showing her around Steepfall, Craig found that nothing seemed to please her. He quickly realised that silence was as near as she got to praise. Otherwise, she would utter an abbreviated put-down: “Gross,” or “Dumb,” or “So weird.” But she did not walk away, so he figured he was not boring her.

He took her to the barn. It was the oldest building on the property, having been constructed in the eighteenth century. Grandpa had put in heating, lighting, and plumbing, but you could still see the elaborate woodwork of the roof. The ground floor was a playroom with a billiard table, a bar football game, and TV. “This is an okay place to hang out,” he said.

She pointed to a raised platform. "What's that?"

"A stage."

"Why do you need a stage?"

"My mother and my Aunt Miranda once produced *Anthony and Cleopatra* with a cast of four in this barn."

"Strange."

Craig pointed to two camp beds. "Tom and I are sleeping here," Craig said. "Come upstairs, I'll show you your bedroom."

He ^climbed the ladder to the hayloft. There was no wall, just a handrail for safety. Two single beds were neatly made up. The only furniture was a coat rail for hanging clothes and a cheval mirror. Caroline's suitcase was on the floor, open.

"It's not very private," Sophie said.

Craig had noticed that. The sleeping arrangements seemed to him to be full of promise. His older sister, Caroline, and his young cousin, Tom, would be around, of course, but nevertheless he was enjoying a vague but exciting feeling that all kinds of things might ^{such as?} happen.

"Here." He unfolded an old concertina screen. "You can change behind this if you're shy."

"I'm not *shy*," she protested.

"Good." He sat on one of the beds. "It's quite comfortable—better than our camp beds."

She shrugged.

In his fantasy, she would now sit on the bed beside him. In one version, she pushed

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JT: When Olga arrives she relates to Miranda as if they had not met up for coffee that morning.

him backwards, pretending to fight with him, and having started out wrestling they ended up kissing. In another scenario, she would take his hand, and tell him how much his friendship meant to her, and then she would kiss him. But now, in real life, she was neither playful nor sentimental. She turned away from him and looked around the bare hayloft with an expression of distaste, and he knew that kissing was the last thing on her mind.

“Where’s the bathroom?”

“Underneath, at the back of the stage. There’s no bath, just a shower, but it works all right.”

“How great.”

She went down the ladder.

Well, he thought, we’ve only been here a couple of hours, and I’ve got five whole days to win her round. *Is he always this self-confident?*

He followed her down. “I’ve got one more thing to show you,” he said. He led the way outside. *Let us know he's winning his hopes by finally getting her excited about something.*

They stepped into a big square yard with one building on each of its four sides: the main house, the guest cottage, the barn and the three-car garage. Aunt Miranda’s Previa and Craig’s father’s Mercedes estate car were parked near the back door of the house. Craig led Sophie around to the front door, to avoid the kitchen where they might be given chores.

They went inside and up the stairs. In the old part of the house were three small bedrooms and an old-fashioned bathroom. Grandpa’s suite, with a bedroom, dressing room and bathroom, was in the new extension. Craig tapped on the door, just in case Grandpa was in the room. There was no reply, and he went in.

He walked quickly through the bedroom, past the big double bed, into the dressing

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IT V. good here and elsewhere on teenagers, young love and fumbling etc.

room. He opened a closet door and pushed aside a row of suits, pinstripes and tweeds and checks, mostly grey and blue. He got down on his knees, reached into the closet, and shoved at the back wall. A panel two feet square swung open on a hinge. Craig crawled through it.

Sophie followed.

Craig reached back through the gap, slid the closet door shut, then closed the panel. Fumbling in the dark, he found a switch and turned on the light, a single unshaded bulb hanging from a roof beam.

They were in an attic. There was a big old sofa with stuffing bursting out of holes in its upholstery. Beside it, a stack of mouldering photograph albums stood on the floorboards. There were several cardboard boxes and tea chests, which Craig had investigated on earlier visits and found to contain his mother's school reports, novels by Enid Blyton inscribed in a childish hand "This book belongs to Miranda Oxenford age 9½", and a collection of ugly ashtrays, bowls and vases that must have been either unwanted gifts or ill-judged purchases. Sophie ran her fingers over the strings of a dusty guitar: it was out of tune.

"You can smoke up here," Craig said. Empty cigarette packets of forgotten brands—Woodbines, Players, Senior Service—made him think this might have been where his mother began her addiction. There were also wrappers from chocolate bars: perhaps plump Aunt Miranda was responsible for those. And he presumed Uncle Kit had amassed the collection of magazines with titles like *Men Only*, *Panty Play*, and *Barely Legal*.

Craig hoped Sophie would not notice the magazines, but they caught her eye immediately. She picked one up. "Wow, get this, porn!" she said, suddenly more animated than she had been all morning. She sat on the sofa and began to leaf through it.

Craig did not know where to look. He had been through all the magazines, though he

Shouldn't he be bursting with enthusiasm
at revealing to her this secret place?

was ready to deny it. Porn was a boy thing, and strictly private. But Sophie was reading *Hustler* right in front of him, scrutinizing the pages as if she had to take an exam on it.

To distract her, he said: "This whole part of the house used to be the dairy, when the place was a farm. Grandpa turned the dairy into the kitchen, but the roof was too high, so he just put in a ceiling and used ^{the} space above it for storage."

She did not even look up from the magazine. "Every one of these women is shaved!" she said, embarrassing him further. "So creepy."

"You can see into the kitchen," he persisted. "Over here, where the flue from the Aga comes up through the ceiling." He lay flat and looked through a wide gap between the boards and a metal shaft. He could see the entire kitchen: the hall door at the far end, the long scrubbed-pine table, the cupboards on both sides, the cooking range at this end, and two doors on either side of the range, one leading to a big walk-in larder with marble shelves, the other leading to the boot lobby and the back entrance. Most of the family were around the table. Caroline was feeding her rats, Miranda was pouring wine, Ned was reading the *Guardian*, Lori was poaching a whole salmon in a long fish-kettle. "I think Aunt Miranda's getting drunk," Craig said.

That got Sophie's interest. She dropped the magazine, came over, and lay beside him to look through the gap. "Can't they see us?" she said.

"Have a look, next time you're in the kitchen," he said. "You'll see that there's a ceiling light right beside the gap which makes it difficult to make out, even when you know it's there."

"So, like, nobody knows you're here?"

"Well, everyone knows there's an attic. And watch out for Nelson. He'll look up and

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Craig says to Sophie that a girl at a party said he was a good kisser and can he show her. I think it's too soon for this. Would he be that rash, just when he thinks he has finally gotten her to talk to him in a non-surly way? It's a big leap! She's sent out no signals. And the result is exactly what you'd expect: she holds up her hand to repel his advances. So maybe he doesn't say it? Or, at the least, realizes immediately what an impetuous idiot he's just been, blurting this out (stupid! stupid! stupid!) and kicks himself for it after he gets the brushoff.

cock his head, listening, as soon as you move. He knows you're here—and anyone watching him will catch on."

"Still, this is pretty cool. Look at my father. He's pretending to read the paper but he keeps making eyes at Miranda. Yech." She rolled on her side, propped herself on her elbow, and fished a pack of cigarettes out of her jeans pocket. "Want one?"

Craig shook his head. "You can't smoke if you're serious about football."

"How can you be serious about football? It's a game!"

"Sports are more fun if you're good at them."

"Yeah, you're right." She blew out smoke. "That's probably why I don't like sports. I'm such a spastic."

Craig realised he had broken through some kind of barrier. She was talking to him at last. And what she said was quite intelligent. "What are you good at?" he asked.

"Not too much."

"Once, at a party, a girl told me I was a good kisser."

"Oh?" She seemed interested. "What do you do?"

"I could show you."

A look of panic crossed her face. "No way!" She held up a hand, as if to ward him off, although he had not moved.

"All right, don't worry," he said, trying to smile to hide his disappointment. "I won't do anything you don't want me to, I promise."

"It's just that I've got this boyfriend."

"Oh, I see."

"Yeah. But don't tell anyone."

“What’s he like?”

“My boyfriend? He’s a student.” She looked away, screwing her eyes up against the smoke from her cigarette.

“At the university?”

“Yes. He’s nineteen. He thinks I’m seventeen.”

Craig was not sure whether to believe her. “What’s he studying?”

“Who cares? Something boring. Law, I think.”

Craig looked through the gap again. Lori was sprinkling chopped parsley over a steaming bowl of potatoes. “Lunch is ready,” he said. “I’ll show you the other way out.”

He went to the end of the attic and opened a large door. A narrow ledge overhung a drop of sixteen ^{or so} feet to the yard. Above the door, on the outside of the building, was a pulley: that was how the sofa and the tea chests had been brought up. Beside Craig, Sophie said: “I can’t jump from here.”

“No need.” Craig brushed snow off the ledge with his hands, then walked along it to the end and stepped two feet down on to a lean-to roof over the boot lobby. “Easy.”

Looking anxious, Sophie followed in his footsteps. When she reached the end of the ledge, he offered her his hand. She took it, gripping unnecessarily hard. He handed her down on to the lean-to roof.

He stepped back up on to the ledge to close the big door, then returned to Sophie’s side. They went cautiously down the slippery slope of the snowy roof to its edge. Craig lay on his front and slid over the edge, then dropped the short distance to the ground.

Sophie followed suit. When she was lying on the roof with her legs dangling over the edge, Craig reached up, held her by the waist, and lifted her down. She was very light.

"Thanks," she said.

She looked triumphant, as if she had come successfully through a trying experience. Perhaps she's not as confident as she pretends, Craig thought as they went into the house for lunch.

This works fine.
My one suggestion would be
to keep his infatuation, all the aspects
of her which he admires, more in
the foreground.