



Editors' note,

We are claiming stake to our portion of the Internet. This excellent collection of fiction wrote its charter, set sail, and settled in thoughts for the gorilla press's second issue, Exposure. Crafted from a word, built in a scale of time, and founded on these pages.

Thank you to all our contributors, and

Thanks for reading,

thegorillapress

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Camera Obscura

Christopher Francis Heinrich

His cellphone sang. "One love, one blood, one life. You got to do what you should."

It was Kate, the photo editor. She didn't say hello.

"I can't use your pictures," she said.

"What?" Toby's voice was higher pitched than he had intended. He took a breath. "I'm sorry, but I thought they were good. Why can't you use them?"

"The Saturday package is about homelessness and what the city government and everyday citizens are doing to fight it. Our job is to put a face to that enemy, a face that captures all the suffering and deprivation it causes. Your pictures don't do that. No one is even going to believe these men live on the streets. Washed faces? Collared shirts? Clean shaves? My stepson doesn't dress this nice, and they're supposed to be the bums."

"They said they wanted to look good if they're going to be in the paper. I thought the homeless deserved that little dignity at least." Toby stressed "the homeless" instead of "bums" and hoped Kate would notice.

"You don't understand. We want to touch people's hearts. We want them to demand change. No one will care if the face of homelessness is healthy, clean and well-fed. This is a daily newspaper, not some high school yearbook. You fought for this assignment. Now go out, and do it right," Kate hung up.

Toby gave a full sigh that the others at the bar noticed.

"I need to go and take more pictures," Toby explained when Jason turned. "Apparently the men at the YMCA aren't 'homeless' enough for the Herald."

"That sucks," Jason said. "Happy hour ends in twenty minutes."

"I'll make it quick. I just wish they'd told me when I turned in my pictures. No one deserves a new assignment on Friday night. God, it's been such a long week, too," Toby sighed again even though he had their attention. "Do any of you have any idea where I can find the 'real homeless?'"

"Highman Park," Anna said without hesitation. "If you drive by too slow, guys will rush your window asking for change. Be careful, though. I hear a lot of gangs and drug dealers hang out there, too."

Toby had never been to Highman before, and Anna gave him directions. No wonder he didn't know the way. It was on the west side. He preferred to avoid that part of the city.

He finished the rest of his micro-brew in two long gulps before leaving the bar. What Kate had said was true. He had fought for the story. When Toby picked up the photography assignments that morning and read that Rachel Emans had the front-page homelessness package while he was left with the profile of the local driftwood artist, tentative headline "One man's garbage..." he went straight to Kate's office. If she had been surprised when he walked in without knocking, she didn't show it. She glanced up only briefly from the pictures and papers on her desk before returning her full attention to them. Toby, however, was impressed by the audacity of his entrance. He understood it as evidence of his zeal for the assignment. While waiting for Kate, he

considered his argument.

“This may be presumptuous of me,” he carefully began when the editor finally looked at him and held her gaze, “especially since I’ve only been here a couple of months, but I think I deserve the homelessness assignment. I don’t think anyone else on staff cares more about the homeless or can show the same compassion for them in their photographs.”

Kate made no reply but to take a sip of coffee and lean back in her chair, but Toby felt himself getting into a rhythm and his voice gained strength.

“You know how some people take up environmental causes and plant trees or run across the country to raise cancer awareness? Well, my issue is homelessness. My senior year at State I was president of the Homelessness Action Front and led some of our biggest campus awareness campaigns. We chalked facts about homelessness on all the sidewalks and collected signatures to force the city council to increase funding for social services. I wrote editorials for the student paper about the incredible rates of mental illness among the homeless and their drastically shorter life expectancies. I wanted everyone to know that homelessness matters. This isn’t just another assignment for me. This is my passion.”

Kate took another sip of coffee. Then she picked up her phone.

“I need you in my office now, Rachel,” she said. Waiting for the senior photographer, Toby could hardly stand to stay still. He knew the story was his. He just needed one final push.

Rachel knocked before walking in, and Kate told her, “The rookie wants your assignment today because he thinks he could do a better job than you.”

Turning back to Toby, Kate said, “Tell her why.”

Rachel gave a wry grin as Toby began, but he didn’t notice. He was concentrating on everything he had learned in his Advanced Public Speaking class.

“With all due respect, Rachel,” he said, “do you know what it’s like to be homeless and spend the nights outside and carry all your possessions with you everywhere? I do. I spent a week in solidarity with the homeless when my club slept in front of the school library last spring. We only had coffee and day-old doughnuts for breakfast every morn-

ing and peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches for every other meal. We couldn’t go into our dorms because we were homeless, so we had to shower in the gym locker rooms. I understand the homeless at a personal level, and I think that’s imperative to doing this assignment right. Don’t you?”

“What do you think?” Kate asked Rachel after the briefest possible pause.

Rachel shrugged.

“If he wants it that badly, he can have it. I’m waiting on a call from Thomas to finish that story on illegal dumping by Agrochemical. If he calls, I need to be there immediately. The suits have been such a pain in the ass with scheduling an interview and tour of the plant that I won’t get a second chance at them.”

Toby let a smile break across his face, his first front-page assignment, and for a major weekend package. That was something to celebrate. After giving them both the most gracious thanks possible, he had rushed from the office to get started. Toby checked first with Ericsson, writer of the package’s lead story, and he sent Toby to the YMCA. Ericsson had met a few sources there and thought it would be an easy start and safe since it employed security. He told Toby that if he hurried, there still might be a few people at the free breakfast.

When Toby arrived, there were no more than ten men sitting at long tables in the poorly lit cafeteria. The guard sitting casually at the doors told him they were free to stay as long as they wanted so long as they didn’t make any trouble for each other or the staff.

“Just give a shout if they start causing a commotion or you see them with any alcohol or drugs or weapons,” he told Toby with a smile and patted his Billy club.

Toby assured the guard there would be no trouble and no need for the help but thanked him.

Toby walked over to a slight man, sitting silently against the wall and staring toward the distant windows, first.

“Hello. I’m Toby with the Herald,” he said as he put his hand out. “You mind if I sit with you for a little while? Ask some questions?”

The man didn’t look up, and the guard shouted from across the room,

speaks, and when he does, it doesn't make any sense."

Toby glared and made sure the guard was looking before he very deliberately sat down next to George. Toby tried to introduce himself again. George didn't even turn his head. Toby asked what the YMCA had served that morning and tried to joke about how stale the doughnuts were, but George only leaned forward to watch birds flying outside the windows. Frustrated after several more minutes of silence, Toby walked to the man sitting at the nearest table.

"Couldn't get anything out of George, could you?" the man said with a grin that made Toby's fists clench. "I wouldn't feel too bad about it. He doesn't talk to anyone."

"That doesn't mean he's any less of a person," Toby said without hesitation.

"Oh, I never said that. He may not be as interesting as some here, but he's a lot better than most. At least he's never been to prison."

"Yeah? Have you?" Toby had never met a convict before and felt excited.

"I've made some mistakes, but the Lord knows that I've taken my punishment like a man. Now, I'm just trying to do right by Him and get back on my feet."

"Like how?"

The man looked hard at Toby. "Who are you asking all these questions anyway?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Toby. "I should have introduced myself. My name's Toby. I work for the Herald, and I'm on assignment."

"Oh yeah?" the man said, the large smile returning and showing off missing teeth. "You here to write a story about me or something?"

"Almost. I'm a photographer. You mind if I take your picture? The article's going to be on the front page tomorrow."

"That sounds great." He was positively gleaming now. "Of course you can take my picture. Come on, let's move over there by the window. I always look better in the sunlight. How do you want me? How about sitting? I look kind of funny when I'm standing. I got shot in the leg in 'Nam, and I've kind of leaned to the right since then. Maybe if I had my hand on a chair or something, like that portrait of Washington, no one would notice."

"Hey, Dennis," another man shouted as they passed. "What are you doing with him?"

"I'm getting my picture taken. I'm going to be in the Herald tomorrow. Front page," Dennis shouted back.

"In that jacket? You'll be the city's most famous bum," the other man laughed. Toby flinched.

"You're right!" Dennis said when he looked down. Grabbing Toby's arm, he said, "Give me a minute. I need to wash and put on something nice. Maybe that shirt I wear for job interviews. Do you think that would look good?"

Dennis came back fifteen minutes later. Every line of dirt on his face was gone, and his hair was combed neatly to the side. Toby felt as though he were at an advertising shoot instead of a homeless shelter. Dennis eagerly followed Toby's every suggestion to turn his head to better catch the light or to rest his chin in his hand, but he could never look serious for more than two seconds.

"I just can't," Dennis laughed after failing for the fifth time. "This is too great. I'm having too much fun."

Toby nodded with good humor and bit his frustration back. He was supposed to look somber and aged beyond his years but he was acting like a child.

Soon enough the other men in the cafeteria drifted toward Toby and Dennis and started asking questions. Then they were all clambering for portraits of their own and hurrying to change and shave. Toby only barely left the YMCA before lunchtime and the newcomers started to ask what he was doing with the camera.

By the time Toby parked outside Highman Park, the sun was just above the horizon. A chill pierced Toby the moment he stepped out of the car. It was colder than he had expected for an early October evening. Colder even than the week of solidarity, still, not enough to make him shiver. He had forgotten gloves, though. It hurt when he kept his hands out of his pockets too long, and his fingers were stiff and clumsy as he handled the camera, checking the body and lenses. To warm himself, Toby stomped his feet and breathed into his cupped hands. Jason had ordered a pound of French Fries before Toby had

left. He hoped he would be back before they finished them, even if the last few were lukewarm.

He could see how Highman might be nice for a walk or picnic in the afternoon for those who lived in the area, but it was ill tended. The grass hadn't been mown in weeks. There were tracks of bare dirt where people worn down their own paths between the designated gravel trails. He could see, too, how drug dealers would appreciate the thick bushes. There was plenty of privacy in Highman.

A quick look through the park and he would be done, Toby promised himself. He was losing daylight, and the temperature was dropping. It wouldn't matter if Toby found someone, and it was too dark to take his picture. Then Kate would just have to settle for one of those he had turned in earlier. And they were fine. They may live in shelters now, but those men had lived on the streets. They knew the suffering and indignity of being homeless. They deserved to be on the front page as much as anyone Toby might find tonight.

Toby started jogging to ward off the cold. The special had been Irish Coffee. He should have ordered it. With no certain destination he took turns indiscriminately. There were no fountains or statues or tennis courts or any landmarks whatsoever to mark Toby's way. Every few minutes he would pause to make a quick check of the area for homeless, but he always found that it looked entirely like the last part of the park he had stopped. He doubted he could easily retrace his steps and find his way back. Toby pushed on.

Coming around a turn much like the last, Toby skidded on the gravel, barely stopping. Standing in the middle of the trail, not more than ten feet ahead, were two African-American men. They were tall and wore dark, down-filled coats that disguised whether they were thin or fat or even carrying guns.

Don't think like that, Toby told himself. That's racist.

He opened his mouth to say good evening, but it caught in his throat as both men slid their hands into the breasts of their coats at the same time, their faces hard. Toby tried to smile, but it felt wrong.

The one with a scar running from the base of his jaw to the corner of his lips spit and took a step forward.

Toby turned, and hurried back the way he came from. He thought he could hear a bitter laugh and the second man begin to walk. Toby ran. Another turn. Another. Nothing looked familiar. Toby thought he passed that tree minutes ago.

Through the obnoxious odor of cheap alcohol and vomit, Toby remembered his assignment. He stopped and turned in every direction, looking for the source. Getting down on hands and knees, Toby found the drunken deep underneath one of the few shrubs whose leaves still clung to the branches. It was impossible to estimate an age. Toby would have guessed 45 but would not have been surprised if the answer were 30 or 60. A fraying wool cap covered the hair, but an unruly beard was streaked with white, gray and a pale brown. The coat had once been a rich brown but was sun-bleached from years of use and stained dark by drinks spilled that night. The soles of the shoes were only kept on with duct tape.

Even with the full force of his creativity, Toby could not have imagined a more appropriate scene. Here was Kate's "real homeless." There could be no better demonstration of the urgency of their situation or the need for action now to save them.

There was a twitch. Toby jumped back, but that was the only movement. The sun was sinking. Toby had little time before it was completely dark. He set to work. He stepped back for a few wide-angle shots. He doubted Kate could use them. It was nearly impossible to distinguish anything, but they set the tone, how easy it is to miss the homeless among us. They're invisible to the rest of the community. Toby thought it would be funny if Kate saw the pictures and asked why he had taken them. He would relish the chance to point her blindness out to her. It would be politically incorrect, but if only they could print the pictures with the caption "Can you find the homeless person in this photograph?" to show the community its own blindness.

There was a sound. Faint, some distance away. Toby lowered the camera to his chest and listened. Are there two voices farther up the path? He switched lenses quickly and laid down for a better angle and close-up. He was relieved that the first shots were crisp. Despite the failing light, the details were clear. Long shadows cast by the low sun turned

matter the size, no matter the depth, was clear. The thick lines around the eyes and across the forehead had a gravity earned by years of rejection. It was a face that had known suffering intimately and endured. The leaves of the shrub rustled when Toby got up after the final shot. The subject's eyelids drooped open.

"Hey," he slurred. A line of drool of began to run from his mouth. "Could you give me a little help?"

"Sorry," Toby said. "I don't have any change."

"You don't have nothing for a cold vet?"

The voices were growing more distinct, and Toby's voice grew more rapid. "Sorry, I really don't have anything. Maybe the YMCA could help you out. They might have a bed or blanket or something for you." "I don't need their rules. I'm free here." He grunted. "Didn't I see you there earlier? Weren't you the one with the camera?"

Toby was stuffing the camera back into its case and only glanced down briefly before looking up the trail again. There might have been something familiar in that profile, but he wasn't sure.

"You're wrong. I don't remember you."

"Huh." The man gave a wet belch and rolled to face the other way. Toby could make out individual words and took off at a sprint.

His breathing came in gasps, and the backs of Toby's legs burned. The camera bag was bouncing wildly, bruising his hip. He didn't dare look back.

Another turn but the gravel was loose. Toby's feet slid out from under him. His hand was just fast enough to cover his face before he hit the ground and rolled. No time to concentrate on the bright pain in his ankle or searing on his palms. Toby scrambled forward on hands and knees until he was running upright again.

The trees and bushes were thinning. Toby could see the parking lot, not more than a hundred meters ahead. A final surge and Toby was leaning, panting, against the hood of his car.

"Hey, boy." The smooth bass voice came from behind Toby. "Why'd you run off like that? That was rude."

Toby rolled onto his back like a defeated dog. It was them.

"We just wanted to make your acquaintance," the one with the scar

kind in the suggestion. "My name's Michael. This shit's Damon." The smaller one smiled, and Toby saw gold teeth. "What's yours?"

"My what?" Toby's voice squeaked.

"Your name, dumb ass."

"Toby." It squeaked again.

"Toby, huh? Well, now that we know each others names, that makes us friends, don't it?"

"I guess so."

"And friends share. Right?" They were within arm's reach now.

"I guess so."

"So why don't you share whatever that's in your bag with us?"

Toby tried to step back but only pressed himself flatter against his car.

"That's a fine car you have. What about sharing your keys with us, too?" The shorter one spoke for the first time. His voice was coarse, malicious, like it was used to telling jokes that ended with a kitten being flayed.

Toby opened his mouth. To reply, to scream for help, he didn't know. No sound came from it. It just hung loose.

Another car pulled into the parking lot, and a uniformed officer sauntered out. The two stepped back.

"How you boys doing tonight? Have any trouble?" he asked, swinging his flashlight between Toby, still tight against his car, and the two blacks.

"No trouble," the taller one sneered.

"And you, sir?" the officer asked holding the light steady on Toby.

"Any trouble?"

"No." Toby's voice still squeaked.

"Good." There was a note of finality in his voice. "How about you all keep it that way and move along."

The black men slouched back into the park, and Toby's hands shook as he tried to key in the door code. He only managed it on the fourth try.

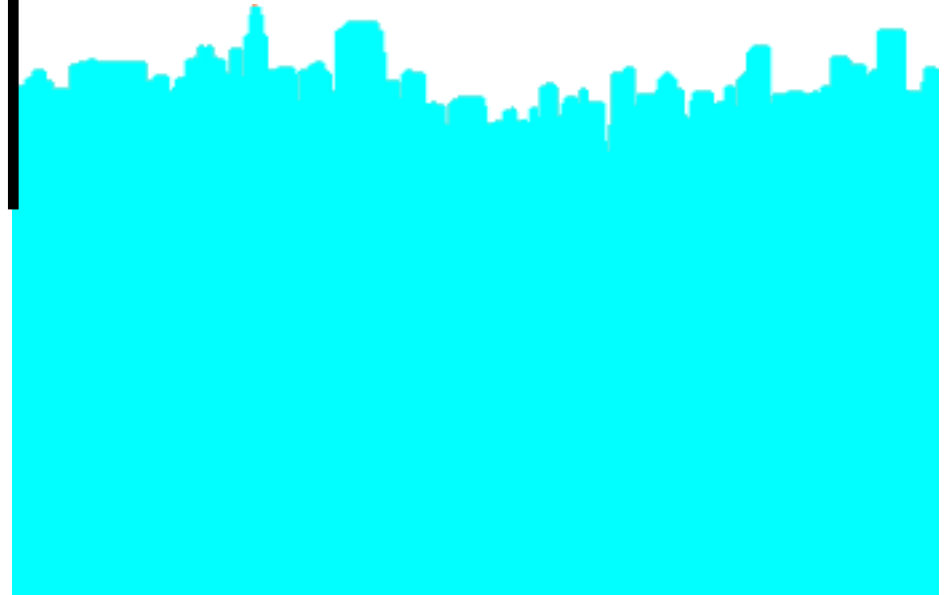
"Be careful," the officer said just before Toby closed the door. "There are some bad people out here. It's no place for a man like you."

Toby nodded quickly and sped away without looking back.

* * *

Kate called too early the next morning.
 “Last night’s pictures are brilliant. They were everything I hoped for.”
 “Thanks,” he managed, still fuzzy from the night before. Anna had taken his keys just after ten, and he hadn’t stopped drinking. She had driven him home around midnight.
 “I think they could really make a difference. Good job.”

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The Jinnee in the Elevator

Mira Martin-Parker

I love my job. I love the silence of the office. I love the expensive computers and copy machines, the security doors, and the special magnetized passes we have to carry around so we can get in the building. I love it that my paycheck is automatically deposited into my account every two weeks (they even pull out money pretax for my transportation and medical expenses). I love it that we have Global Volunteer Days and Hawaiian shirt Fridays and that we celebrate Cinco de Mayo in the lunchroom with Margaritas and chips and salsa. I love the fact that everything's new and clean, and that someone comes in at night and takes away my recycling and empties my trash. And I especially love it that I have my very own cube. I love my cube. I love my job. I love it I love it I love it.

I know, I know—you think I'm nuts. What's so great about having some stupid corporate job? How dull. And being excited about

having your own cube, talk about pathetic. It's probably a politically incorrect company too. You got that right.

And, trust me, I certainly do realize that I'm lamer than lame, that I'm working for the devil, that I'm selfish, that I'm "one of them," that I've sold out, and so on. Nonetheless, I still love my job. It feels so good, just like a manicured lawn in front of a middle-class home on a silent tree-lined street, where everything is lawful and calm and predictable, everything is cushy cushy toe-wiggling good.

But today I ran into a little trouble on the elevator. I was going down to the ground floor, on my way to get coffee. I stepped in and pushed the button, the doors closed and I was alone. That's when he appeared. He was sitting on a gorgeous floral Shiraz carpet and floating around in the center of the elevator. His skin was blue, like lord Krishna's, and he had a big purple turban on the top of his head, fastened in the center with a large red jewel. He was bare-chested, wearing voluminous silk trousers, and he had his arms crossed in front of him in classic jinn fashion. The skin on his face was bright as the morning sky and he had heavy black eyebrows and a pointy, Salvador Dali mustache. As he hovered around in front of me he leaned his head back and laughed and laughed.

"Girl, who you trying to fool?" he said with a heavy drag queen accent. "Look at you, in your little jacket and skirt outfit, trying to look like you're somebody important."

My cheeks turned red and I could feel blood rushing up to my ears. The elevator stopped between floors.

"I know you," he continued, still laughing like a madman. "I know all about you and your people and your past and I'm going to tell everyone all about it. That's right, little princess, I'm going to tell everyone—all of your precious coworkers—who you really are and where you really come from? Boy, won't they be surprised!"

I didn't know what to say so I just stood there staring.

"I'm going to tell them why you don't put pictures on your desk like all the others. And why you don't eat in the lunchroom, or take personal calls, or go out for drinks on "fun Fridays" like everyone else? Ha ha ha. I'm going to tell. I'm going to tell. That's right, little girl-

friend, I'm going to tell everyone."

This outrageous encounter was completely unexpected. I had been taking the elevators in the building regularly ever since I first started my job a year ago and have never had any difficulty. In fact, I have always been impressed with how quickly they come and how they are never out of order. (At my last job, the elevators were always getting stuck between floors, sometimes trapping people in side for hours. I even remember once two people had to be rescued by the fire department.)

Luckily I'm somewhat familiar with Jinnees, having read about them in the Arabian Nights, so I was able to draw upon this knowledge to help me out of my predicament.

"Um, well, with all due respect," I said, going out of my way to appear subservient, " isn't there something I can offer you in order persuade your Excellency that I am in fact worthy of kindness rather than torment? Isn't there something I can do to change your most honorable and respected mind as to your chosen course of action? I have many skills, many good ideas, some cash in my wallet."

He continued hovering about in front of me and appeared to be engaged in deep reflection. After several seconds of pondering he finally spoke.

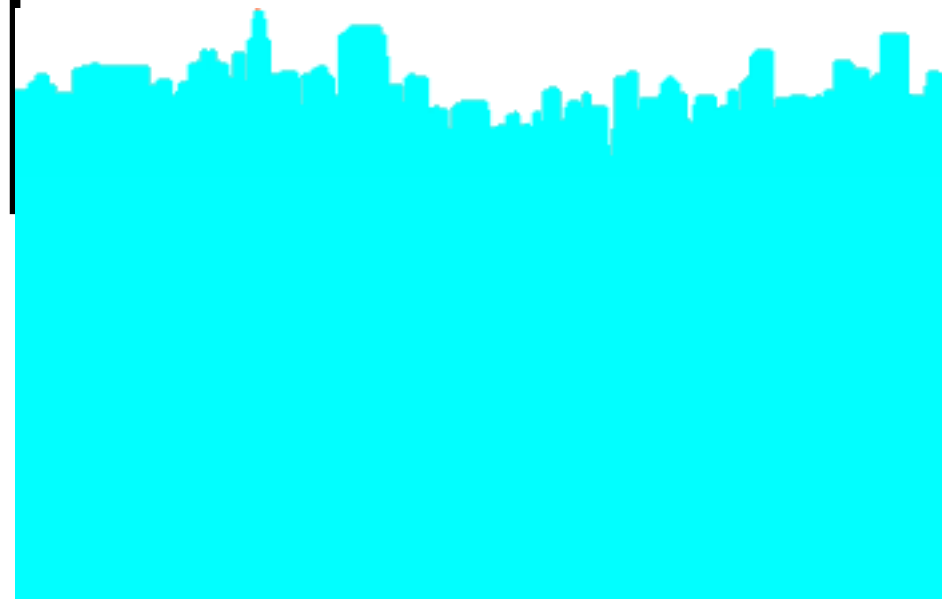
"Well, perhaps there is a little something you can do for me. A new fast food place just opened in the food court across the street and I've heard several people in the elevator say they do a delicious Philly cheese steak sandwich. If you brought me one, with a diet Coke and a bag of chips, I may consider withholding from your colleagues any information regarding your unsavory past."

"I will gladly get you lunch, oh Most Special One." I said, adding a deep Russian bow. "I will do it right now, if you will only permit me to leave this elevator."

Just then he disappeared in a puff of smoke, leaving a slight hint of sulfur in the air, and the elevator began to descend. Once at the ground floor, just before the doors opened, a voice came from above me.

"Be sure to grab some extra napkins, princess. I'm a very messy girl."

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lauren_mountain
Emily Vieyra

I erased the jpegs from Lauren as soon as I found them in My Pictures. Rory labeled them lauren_mountain, lauren_gas_chamber, lauren_cathedral, lauren_louvre, lauren1, and lauren2. I deleted all but lauren_mountain, which I renamed faggot. My swollen feet ground into a crunchy patch of carpet near the computer. The Lauren gallery made the skin around my bloodshot eyes twitch. I expected to forget, but I couldn't get my heavy eyes to shut to the girl.

I had a boy instead. I named him for my favorite letter of the alphabet. My belly was still a mountain and extra ducts sprung from browned areola when Rory and I brought him home during an ice storm to a small apartment that got a lot smaller whenever Jay got hungry. And a lot wetter. 'Don't Forget about Yourself!' commanded my water bottle, in large typeset that faded from royal to baby blue in the dishwasher. Jay's hunger cries drenched the front of every shirt

I owned, the wet spots dried into white flower-shaped crusts. He ate during at least ten minutes of every hour. My three-pound uterus dropped down to two ounces in tandem with his sucking. When he latched on, the milk letting down pulled like threaded needles through my pencil-eraser nipples. Jay inhaled each bulging, milk-hardened breast in turn, and exhaled off much softer and smaller mounds, asleep. I always smelled of bathwater and cream. Bathed or not, Jay smelled like the freshest air from the Swiss Alps. The rest of the apartment smelled of Mountain Breeze air freshener and feet.

Jay's skin cells turned over so fast, he changed shape from one moment to the next. He doused fifteen diapers and seven onesies daily. The spiked icicles on the guttering melted into the shape of very weak EKGs. Jay surged through his hourly feeding schedule through the spring. Random babies crying in church made milk spring through my dress fronts. On Easter, the aspergillum's cool droplets didn't touch me. How did water get so sacred? Water doesn't keep Jay alive. At the other end of the pew, a few flecks sprinkled the face of a shiny redhead, lauren2's double. As soon as she crossed herself, nothing but her crossed my mind until after the consecration. Talk about take this, all of you, and eat it. Talk about this is my body which will be given up for you. Talk about do this in memory of me.

Coming back to the apartment after church didn't help, either. Rory's dial-up modem announced his presence from the locked bedroom and made my skin crawl. I took the land line off the hook to interrupt the garbled chirps. The chatter of a fingered keyboard replaced the dial tone. More chirps turned into furious mouse clicking. Then snapshots of people behind the door, so many hits for "teen" and "wet" shuttling along a bandwidth, cuing warm, worthless splashes onto the carpet like escaped mucous from a sneeze.

I multi-tasked, too. I chewed Jay's tissue-paper nails back to his fingertips and stared at the locked door until it cracked open.

"Since when is she coming here?"

"Since she texted me yesterday. She said you haven't answered your cell."

"Jay is always eating."

“From your tits, not your hands.”

“I have to concentrate.”

“Oh, yeah, right. Talking makes it crawl back up?”

“Not crawl. Climb. When the milk lets down it feels like it’s from a long way up.”

“You’ve traded tits for brains?”

“You’re just jealous because they’re not for you anymore.”

“Speaking of not sharing. Those weren’t your pictures to delete.”

“She’s not your girlfriend to have.”

Lauren and I went skiing with her high school youth group back in Iowa. Back when my nipples were the frosted orange color of Apple Jack. I’d never done it before. The poles felt like weapons at my sides. From the ski lift, Lauren called for me to go down the first slope together, and I ran to her and slid in out of the lift bench on slick ski pants. The youth minister’s wife took three pictures of me at the ski lift. In the first, I am half-sitting on the bench, poles poised at my hips. In the second, I have slipped from the bench and Lauren holds my poles. In the last, I am hugging Lauren’s legs and suspended almost a foot off the ground. The poles are gone. I knew it couldn’t last. I kept the pictures of us in a desk drawer under a mountain of papers. I kept the lift tag adhered to my coat zipper for an entire year until Lauren puked on it after Winter Formal.

The night before Lauren comes, I doze on the couch in six brief intervals, and let the television snow all night into the darkened room. There are little waning gibbous moons under my eyes the day Lauren comes. I smear Naked foundation over violet bags flecked with burst capillaries. I smooth a bandanna skirt over a naked stomach. The only uncrusted shirt in the drawer hangs rushing waves to cover it. Jay finishes breakfast early and drifts off, so I dig through some piles in the bedroom and just uncover a developing envelope of photos interspersed with scuffed negatives when Lauren pushes an apartment doorbell that I don’t know exists.

Everyone else simply knocked at the door. Sunlight dances around the rim of the peephole as I peer into the hallway it gives

Lauren’s head a blushing halo. Through the concave lens, she looks heavier than I remember. Her hair is longer. Her cat eyes stare into the peephole for a moment. Before she steps inside, she slings the thick braided strap of a manual focus camera about her neck. As she fidgets with the lens, I notice she has chewed her nails back to the fingertips.

“No one’s ever done that before,” I say, gesturing beyond the door-jamb, toward the mailboxes and the well-hidden doorbells.

“You haven’t had any visitors?”

“I mean the ring.”

Lauren looks at my hands, confused.

“The doorbell ring.”

“I have one just like it is why.”

Rory is behind me, I can feel it, but I don’t turn around.

“Hello, he’s rooting for you.”

“He’s sleeping for me. Goodbye.”

“So how was your internship?” he shoots past me.

Lauren gives him a tight-lipped smile. She doesn’t answer. She turns back to me.

“Um, so. Long time.”

“So. Long.”

“So how is it, everything?”

I open my mouth a little and don’t answer. Then I hear little smacking sounds. From where I stand I can see the bassinet rocking a little.

Jay noshes, lips flanged and chest heaving against mine, as three of us talk for an hour. Rory refills my water bottle twice. When Jay baby starts on the left side, it is white holes and Stephen Hawking with hydraulics and bling. All through my foremilk it is black lights revealing alien leavings on abducted skin. Jay sighs in time with his vigorous suckling and his eyes roll back in his head. I break his suction with my finger and burp him to recent UFO sightings acknowledged by the Mexican government. I readjust my Boppy and rub my nipple across Jay’s cheek and lips to wake him for the right side

and Amanita muscaria trips. By the hindmilk of the right side and the latest explanation of the Elohim, Jay falls asleep again, smacking about once every ten seconds just as a reflex. When I send Rory out for diapers, Jay's lips slide down my gleaming nipples. A white stream flows slowly from his open mouth and wells in one of his chin folds like melting snow. He sighs, a small meow at the back of his throat. After a change, I place Jay in his crib, sloshed, and notice Lauren beside me ogling him, just eating him up with her eyes.

Fair enough. He eats me enough.

She watches his sleeping silence as though it speaks to her, head craned forward and eyes wide, as though she can hear something no one else can. She adjusts the camera lens, and over the side rails of Jay's crib her shutter clicks away. Her hair slides over one shoulder and its layers wave flames that point toward our feet. She steps back and changes the flash bulb, reconsidering her subject.

"I didn't see before. 'Got milk?'" Lauren reads from Jay's fourth one-sie of the day, which had survived the last change. "No," she answers softly, blushing toward me. She sets her camera down on my desk, its strap dangling over the edge. I know she won't ask, so I lay it all out for her.

They are perked up, refilling with milk behind these trap flaps, firm but not hard to the touch. Whenever I unhook the black panels, the bra draws a bold black circle around each one, like some piece of dominatrix gear. When engorged, if I look at a picture of Jay or think about him long enough, the milk spurts out. I can fill three cups with what I can pump in fifteen minutes. It stays fresh three times as long as cow's milk, without refrigeration.

Each wow opens Lauren's eyelids wider.

The day after Lauren comes, Jay sleeps through one of his hourly feedings for the first time. Out of habit, I lunge for the transcendent dolphin calendar, which functions as Jay's baby book, to make a note of it.

Lauren coos, inflection rising at the end, her long vowel landing somewhere between an interrogative sentence and a protest. "You

keep a calendar for him?" she enjoys her disbelief for a moment.

"You're such a mom now."

Suddenly I cannot decide if this is good. Or what I was before this. The dolphins dive off the wall and plunge onto the unswept kitchen floor, every month a slippery creature bound to fall dripping and deliberate from a high place. My face is hot. Penne-style rolls of duct tape on the kitchen wall puff their barrel chests unabashedly, exposed by the leaping dolphins and a thousand little reminders. I carefully put my own chest forward, tossing the hair behind my shoulders in waves. Lauren follows each one out and never takes her eyes from the crests.

Lauren blinks long and straightens her back. She sits across from me and readjusts the part in her hair. She shakes her head slowly.

"So you're not mad at me about Rory anymore?" Her head stops oscillating, cocked at a fifteen-degree angle. About a year before Jay was born, Lauren's number kept showing up on the caller ID, but she always hung up when I called her back. After a while I stopped calling her.

"You've known him longer than I have. I don't even know what all happened between you. But it didn't change him. He's the same as far as I can tell."

"He's grown up a little since he peed on my tent at Daisy Hindman. Not a waterproof tent. But since I've known you he has changed. Whenever he wanted to do anything, I would ask him about you. Then he wouldn't do anything. I would only talk about you. I think he's jealous."

"Of me?"

"Like me."

"But the hang-ups. Lauren. You hung up."

"Who's hung up?"

The next morning I root through the mountain of papers to find the envelope I stashed before Lauren arrived. We litter old photographs across a chipped picnic table that barely fits on the half-rotted deck. "I can't believe you keep all this stuff around. This is Mount Crescent,

that time...you actually have a picture of Joe's wife taking a picture. What are you doing in this one, jumping on me?"

"Holding your legs to climb back onto the lift. You took my poles, see?"

"Did you really think you could hold on till the top?"

"Something like that."

"You did go down at least once, though."

"The black slope. By accident."

"Most accidents happen on purpose."

"I just wanted to look over the side, not fly down it. But my skis slid too far and then I couldn't go back. So I bent my knees a little and sucked a lot of air on the way down. You were probably drinking something warm in the lodge by then."

"Mmm. Remember that hatchback we saw on the way there? 'Show us your Tig Ol' Bitties!?' It took me a few seconds to get that."

"Then you ate it up with a Spoonerism."

"I could never resist a clever invitation. Speaking of, let's go someplace."

"I can't leave now."

"Come just this once. Rory can feed him just this once."

She wants to take me skiing, for old times. Just this once. You can feed him just this once. Rory just glares at me. We pack the car and Lauren drives. The slopes are practically deserted. I groan to my chest.

"Nursing pads. I forgot my nursing pads."

Lauren sighs and turns the car around.

When we get back, Jay is still asleep. "I'm going out," Rory announces.

"So I guess we're staying in."

The line between discomfort and pain has never been more distinct. Chapped nipples are uncomfortable. Bleeding ones are painful. A poor latch, uncomfortable. No latch for three hours, painful. Pangs shoot and ricochet in a valley of cleavage. Every mammary gland screams once, then throbs. Bra cuts. Breathing hurts. Deliver me

from mastitis. Lauren reaches for my manual pump on the kitchen counter and holds it to the texture and shadow of my chest. Blue veins traverse the rock-hard mounds, glinting from liberal applications of lanolin. My nipples have all but disappeared.

But I don't express the milk with my hands. Or position the cold plastic of the nipple adapter against skin to feel forced air rushing around the plunger, tugging streams into a waiting plastic bottle. Lauren helps me with my coat and my sweater. She unlatches my right flap, reveals a fountain. Then I feel something soft, filling with something warm. My hands slide down Lauren's cherry hair. She can swallow for a while. The thickest, the hindmilk, comes last with the most fat and nutrients that Jay needs.

I want to ask Lauren how was NASA? Europe? Instead I ask, How about the left side? Places are never as important as the bodies they host.

The more drunk from them, the more they produce. Breasts are economic that way. Supply and demand. Easy to express. Easy to digest.

It's different with a girl. Lauren doesn't grip a handful as Rory or Jay has. She knows breasts aren't handles to hold on to while you're driving or drinking too fast. They are more like levers to change gears, to signal a slow lift to the top of a mountain.

Show you're clever. Use a lever.

I can see the summit when I cup my hands over my eyes and squint. Milk pulses out to the beat of my heart. It baptizes the genuflecting Lauren. It drizzles dolphins beached on the linoleum. Deserted peaks are within sight. She pats the lift bench, saving it for me. I hold tight to the poles. Lauren is taking me to the very top.

I close my eyes and she smiles at me from the computer screen.

I should send her a jpeg. It will last longer.

My pencil-eraser nipples thread sinuous warmth through Lauren all the sunless afternoon. I allow my tapered majesty to air-dry afterward, as always poles erect to guard the shaded hush of the apartment. Before they ever filled a mouth, they erased a thousand words.

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EXPOSURE

