

Pretty Legs

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She speaks at me in a tone I have heard before; it does not contain true emotion, at least not to the learned ear. It is a matter-of-fact voice, sure of every word that is said, as though anything but this, the truth, would be naïve to even consider. She uses this voice when she answers questions in school. Not only does it convince her listeners that she knows exactly what she’s talking about, but she uses it to convince herself. I hear her start to say the word, but she catches herself before it slips—“disadvantaged” she says. She knows I hate that other word, and I thank the little bit of grace she granted me by not saying it.

She gets up and starts pacing around the floor. She always does this when she’s thinking. I wish it were that easy to get up without making such a scene. I want to grab her, hold her, explain to her that it’s going to work itself out. That I can do so much on my own. But I can’t. I’m stuck on this damn bed, this memory foam prison, forced to comfort her with my eyes and my words but not my hands. I’ll always need someone.

It’s not like I’ve never thought about it before. Ever since I hit puberty I’ve thought about girls, but then I look at my body and I realize how useless I would be if it ever happened. Every year since middle school, some asshole has asked me if I can get it up, thinking he’s really hilarious and original. Of course I can get it up; that’s not the problem. It’s the physical act of sex that always seemed impossible to me. Getting myself onto the toilet is a struggle, so I can’t imagine sex is much easier. I have these visions of pulling off some intense Kama Sutra shit but when it comes down to it, I could never actually do that. I would just lie there in the bed, a warm

corpse ribbed for her pleasure. Or at least until I got off. And then she would get off of me too.

The first time we did it, I knew I was nervous, but with good intentions. But she was stark white and her eyes just kept darting around the room. I wanted to ask her what was wrong, but I didn't want to seem like I noticed. So my mind and my body played dumb, and she sat on my crotch the way a skittish equestrian mounts a new horse.

When we started, I didn't realize how many nerves I possessed. It felt great, but I felt sad because I looked up at her face and realized how much she was trying to enjoy it, but wasn't able to. She wouldn't even look at me, so I tried to avert my eyes too. I found a particularly interesting starburst on my stucco ceiling to focus on. It felt so damn good, though. How could she grimace the way she did? Maybe it was the fact that I could only slightly move my hips in a pleasing way for her. Maybe it hurt her wonderfully warm, pink, sensitive insides. Or maybe it was because she was with me.

When it ended, I wasn't sure how long it had been, but it didn't really matter. It was over, and I would be lucky if I ever would experience it again. We sat in silence for an hour after it happened, studying my stucco starbursts like mute sailors studying the constellations.

"I don't know why you're making such a big deal about it. I didn't do it to hurt you, I was just cold." "I'm not mad at you for wearing the hoodie. I'm not." "Then why are you so upset? I said I'm sorry, I just didn't think it would be this big of a problem." "It's the principle of the matter, though. Of all the hoodies you could have worn, it had to be his. I just don't see why you wanted to wear his hoodie." "It's not like I asked specifically for it. He could hear my teeth chattering and didn't want me to get sick. He just had it lying in his car, and I was so cold. I thought you would have preferred me to wear his hoodie and be warm instead of not wear it and get sick." "Why didn't you bring your own jacket, though?" "I just didn't think about it, I guess. It was warmer when I left, but it just got so cold once the sun went down. I just didn't think about it..." "When do you ever?" "What?" "Nothing."

High school is the terrifying, grueling, selectively parasitic relationship between student and world. The walls have holes that see your striking grins and hear your screaming groan. High school over flows with these pieces of shit who think that slow movement always equates to a slow mind. People who think that they need to speak slowly to me because I stagger down the hallways with my metal assistant. People who tell their friends of their heaven-granting activities that consisted of stepping slightly to their left when I came down the hall. People who make themselves paper crowns because they offered to hold down the button of the drinking fountain for me. People who see my clumsy walking as an opportunity to write off their required community service hours on "Helping the Needy". These people feed off my disparity, convincing themselves that they are giving me a hand up, while they are actually using my face as their personal stepping stone.

People like this exist. But not everyone is like this. And some of them really love me.

Every week I go through it, and every week I expect improvements. But they don't happen. I have these nightmarish dreams where my progress is chartable and the numbers seems to match up with my mindset; I dream that I can take three steps before tiring and giving up. I don't dream of miracles, I dream of possibilities. But I don't get them, I never get them. I still support my full weight on the doctor and when he tells me he's going to let me go, I have flashes of fear that pass through my brain and seem like plausible outcomes. I could compare it to learning to ride a bike without training wheels, but I haven't ever personally experienced that. He slowly backs away from me, and I feel myself becoming personally responsible for each pound of my weight. Jesus, please don't do this to me. He doesn't want to help me, he wants to make a fool of me. I'm not a circus animal. He tosses me the occasional peanut, that I unthinkingly devour. Wait, I think it's going to work this time. I feel really in-control right now, I think I finally get it. I just need to work at it. It kind of hurts, I know my muscles are too stiff for this. But I can keep going, it's not that bad. I just need to find that

balance that she always talks about. That balance I see so evidently when she walks. God, she's so lovely when she walks. I sometimes watch her feet move, because I am convinced that she can glide without ever touching the floor. She just floats on that indefinable space between the ground and my eyes. I could never look as in control as her. She possesses a control that I will never have or be able to imitate.

"What do you mean you've never listened to the Beatles? They're great, you have to have heard at least one of their songs." I can see her face contort and her eyes look, as if she's trying to recall a specific instance of when she could have heard them.

"What songs are they popular for?"

I tried to think of the most popular Beatles' song I could. "All You Need is Love," I blurted out.

Her eyes widened. "I know that one! It was on that one Target commercial," her voice trailed off and turned into a humming version of John's lyrics.

"Yeah, but that's not really their best song. At least I don't think it is."

Her face cracked into a grin. "Then why did you tell me that one?" She was laughing at me. I didn't really know what was so funny.

"I don't know, I just told you the first song that came to mind."

She was still laughing. I could have counted her teeth if I wanted to, but I didn't have the patience. "What do you think the best Beatles' song is, then?"

What was the best Beatles' song? I tried to scan my brain of all the songs that popped into my head. "Will you hand me my vinyl tote?"

"Can you just tell me which song it is you like best?" Her voice and patience was waning.

"I will, I just want you to listen to it." She let out a sigh that segued into a yawn. She gingerly handed me the plastic tote full of all of the warped vinyl I had been able to get my hands on over the past 17 years.

"I don't know why you're so insistent on keeping these things lying around," she tries to explain to me for the one-hundredth time.

"Sh, you're going to miss it." I place the record onto the turntable next to my bed. I put the needle into the last chunk of ridges on Side A. It starts off with a crack, but then I hear John's ghostly voice abrupt.

'She's not a girl who misses much. Doo doo-doo doo doo-doo, oh yeah...'

I hear the silence that surrounds us; she has stopped talking, waiting for my reaction. She wants reassurance that she's made the right choice. I know she won't get that from me, but I know I'll try to give it to her anyway. I nod at her, because it's what she's looking for.

She thinks I understand, and she is happy. She smiles at me, and I notice that her eyes are still bloodshot. But they have dried. She leans her face into mine for a kiss before she remembers what she has just done. She leans down to give a hug instead. The hug is warm like meat that has been left out too long.

She'll call her friends before she even leaves my driveway, and they'll console her. "It was the right thing to do, I'm sure he understands that." "He'll find someone more like him and you'll find someone more like you." "I mean, he can't expect you to take care of him forever. You're young, you shouldn't have to worry about this now."

I wish I could pace around my room to think. But I have physical therapy tonight.