



MBARRASED

UDE

EMALE

BY C.M. NOE-FLORES

ENF: Embarrassed Nude Female

By C.M. Noe-Flores

© C.M. Noe-Flores 2014

[1 The Bus](#)

[2 The Beach](#)

[3 The Shore](#)

[4 The Museum](#)

[5 The Street](#)

[6 The Store](#)

[7 The Concert](#)

1 The Bus

It was unlike anything I'd ever worn before. The pink top and bottom looked like any old bathing suit from the front. But the backside, the backside was entirely new to me.

I turned again to view myself in the mirror. It was a Brazilian cut, not a thong, not even close, but small, smaller than I'd ever worn. Funny how an inch or two can make it feel like everything is hanging out.

When I bought this, the cashier eyed me for a nanosecond before pinning me for wholesome and asking if I wanted a gift receipt. And although I refused, all week I considered giving it to one of my friends, sure one of them would be courageous enough to wear it. They call it a cheeky bikini. I doubt any of them have actually worn one before and I'm sure they'd be surprised if they knew *I* bought one. I'm the last one they'd expect to wear something so revealing.

Telling my parents I was going to the beach felt dishonest. It was true, but it wasn't the whole mischievous truth. Thank god they didn't ask who I was going with. I don't think I could've lied directly like that. If they had asked, I just wouldn't have gone at all. But they didn't. So I packed my things.

I grabbed a tote and threw in a faded yellow towel, tube of SPF 50, phone, earbuds and my floral print wallet. There was an inflatable beach ball in my closet but I wouldn't need it. Standing in the doorway, I was acutely aware that I was missing something. Oh yeah: clothes to wear over my bathing suit. I stepped over to my closet and stopped in front of the sliding mirror door. This outfit, no matter how radical to me, was expected at the beach. But I could think of a few other places where it'd be less appropriate.

Shivers ran through me. I left the clothes in the closet.

Music played from the living room television. My father was most likely sitting in an armchair with his back to the door. My mother was in the kitchen at the counter, reading another romance novel. My naive father once snuck up behind her and started reading aloud over her shoulder. He only got through one sentence, a dirty one. It was the only time I'd ever seen my mother blush. She snapped the book shut and scolded him for saying that in

front of the child; me. My father, equally embarrassed, pretended her books didn't exist from then on.

I strode through the kitchen wearing my new bathing suit and nothing else. I did not stop. My tote was over my shoulder, pushed back so that it would cover my scandalous bottom. "Mom, I'm going now, bye."

"I still think it's a little late for the beach," she muttered without looking up. There was no need for further conversation. Her face was so deep in the book she had probably already forgotten we exchanged any words at all. I crossed into the living room and snuck up to the door to the garage.

My hand was on the handle when my father said, "See this concert they're talking about? The philharmonic, they'll be playing in the concert hall just a few blocks from here."

I spun around to hide my backside, but he hadn't turned from the television. I was safe. "Oh, cool Dad. Well I'm going to the beach now."

"If I had my gold card I'd take you myself but it's airing live on channel eight tomorrow. We should watch it."

"Yeah Dad, okay. I'll see you later." I stepped into our garage. The juxtaposition of my air conditioned home and the sauna-like atmosphere of the garage made my head spin. I opened the garage door, letting in a blast of fresh air. The neighborhood was fairly quiet. A few mowed their lawns. Some gardened. A couple kids played kick the can.

My tote bag slid off my shoulder. I held it inches above the ground and eyed the garage wall. Lawn mower, basket full of footballs and basketballs, hula hoops, bucket full of chalk, roller blades on s-hooks, folded tarp and some car parts. I reached into the tote, pulled out some cash and tucked it into my top.

Goosebumps spread across the flesh of my arms, my shoulders, my back and my exposed cheeks. I placed the tote against the wall with all the other junk, let go of it and walked out.

The bus stop was only half a mile down the road. I tried to time my walk with the lawn mowers so I wouldn't pass too close to any of them, but I didn't do the best job. I was unaware that Mr. DeSoto was out mowing. He must of been cutting on the side of his house when I made my original surveillance. Now he was heading straight for the street, where he'd turn my way to cut along the edge of his lawn. I considered crossing the street to

avoid him, but that would be strange since we were family friends. Besides, it's not like he wouldn't see me from across the street. I decided to grit my teeth and pass him head on.

As long as he didn't turn his head back after passing, he wouldn't see my racy behind. Mr. DeSoto had known me most my life, even babysitting me a few times growing up, so a turned head from him was unlikely. I was more like a daughter than a neighbor. Still, walking around wearing only a bathing suit was weird enough for this neighborhood, especially since he'd never seen me in one before.

When Mr. DeSoto saw me, he smiled and waved and for one dreadful moment I thought he was going to stop the lawnmower and attempt to chat. Maybe he saw the look in my eyes and decided against it because he sped back up to his normal pace. I waved back and passed, instinctively putting my hands behind my back to help cover my rump. I didn't have the nerve to look back and see if he looked.

I found myself in something of a trot, trying to get away. I had only been out of my house a minute and I was basically caught already. I could only imagine what Mr. DeSoto might say to my father. 'That daughter of yours sure has grown. Saw her the other day, walking 'round the neighborhood in her skivvies.' My trot accelerated to a sprint. I was eager to get out of my neighborhood. I passed a couple of young tan gardeners who looked and whistled. Catcalling. I forgot about catcalling. I hated catcalling. And yet, I continued to run.

Luck at last. Nobody was at the bus stop. I sat down on top of my hands because the seats weren't the cleanest. Shaking my head, I realized I really hadn't thought this through. Originally, I had planned on walking the two miles to the beach. But the area had a strange mix of good and bad streets. One block was nice enough to erect a fancy concert hall and the next was riddled with sex shops and drug dealers. The chances of some creep chatting me up non-stop within my personal bubble was pretty high.

Public transportation would only be marginally better. But at least other people would be around, including the bus driver. I pulled my fare out from my bikini top and fanned myself with it. The result of running a quarter mile in this heat was looking and feeling like a melting popsicle.

The bus appeared, chugging down the street. I didn't wave it down, thinking it might pass and I'd shrug and say 'oh well' and go home. But it

squealed to halt all the same. When the door opened, the old earth colored driver looked at me a little longer than I thought was normal, but it was an expressionless look, as if the bus had already shown him everything humanity had to show and he was no longer phased by anything.

Once on the bus, I almost instantly regretted everything. It was crowded, as beachward buses always were, especially on a sunny day like today. A bearded man with a Chihuahua in his lap offered me his seat but I refused. I normally didn't have a problem with the sanitation level of bus seats, but I normally didn't have so much exposed skin that would be in direct contact, and with heavyset riders squeezing in on either side, I didn't think I'd be able to fit my arms at my sides to sit on my hands again. Still, it was tempting to take the seat, an easy way to hide my backside. Instead I had to stand and do my best to inconspicuously cover my bottom.

Most riders on the bus were getting off at the beach and yet I was the only one wearing a bathing suit with no covering. Now that I thought about it, I'd never seen anybody ride the bus in just a bathing suit. There was something very crude about it.

The bus accelerated and inertia nearly knocked me over. A man's hand on my back held me up. A wavepool of sensations rolled through my body, with the man's hand at the epicenter. I quickly grabbed ahold of a handle for support and the man pulled his hand back to himself. Now, holding the handle, I only had one hand to cover my butt.

How could I forget about the limitless supply of creepy men that public transportation supplied? The eyes of these men found me immediately and stuck to me. My skin was getting warm from embarrassment. Please don't blush, I told myself, not now.

Teen boys on the bus were less brazen. Their eyes would dart over to me only for a moment before returning to the friends they talked to. Once enough time had passed, they would risk another quick peek.

There were families on the bus too and for this I felt vulgar. I wanted to turn around and apologize, *I didn't normally do things like this. I'm so sorry your child saw my cheeky bikini.* I found slight comfort in reminding myself that they were going to the beach anyways, where they'd see loads of women in bikinis, some showing even more skin than me.

Some of the creepy men were clearly trying to make eye contact with me. I stared out the window, ignoring them. We were heading down Canal

Street, which ran all the way to the beach. It was so named for the canal that zigzagged around it all the way to the ocean.

The concert hall was passing by now. It had been built as part of an attempt to draw wealthier folks into the area. I'm not sure if it's considered a success, for right across the street is one of the lowest income neighborhoods in the city. If anything the concert hall has probably only helped increase class tension. It's hard for me to hate it though because my father loves it. We don't go much because it's expensive, but when you turn sixty-five you get a gold senior citizen card permitting free admission, something he's really looking forward to.

A group of kids played baseball in an alley next to a sex shop. This was the low income, sometimes scary and usually depressing part of Canal Street. I was glad I didn't walk. In front of the sex shop was a bus stop where a bald, squinting man stood with his hands in his pockets. I had a tough guy demeanor that was common for this area and I didn't think much of it, but then he got on the bus and started squinting in my direction. He said, "Hey girl, you look real nice." I kept my eyes fixated out the window but I could feel his gross glare. He said, "Where you heading to?"

When I ignored him this time, he put his hand on my shoulder. I nearly jumped back, pushing his hand off. I wish I had just told him to leave me alone. Why is it so hard to be rude to people even when they're a bother? Instead I said, "Huh? Oh, I'm meeting my boyfriend at the beach."

"Boyfriend eh?" he said. His tone was mocking. I thought a boyfriend mention might make him stop, but I guess he considered it a challenge because he stepped closer. "I'm meeting some cool guys at the beach too. And we have drinks so you know, you should meet up with us and have a real good time." And while he said it he looked down at my backside and I was mad at myself for giving him the opportunity to see me like that and I was mad at myself for not bringing my tote with my earbuds so I could have a real reason not to hear him and I was mad at myself for feeling powerless on this bus full of people and this one man, this one creep.

There were other creeps on the bus but he was the Creep. That's what I wanted to call him, Creep. But all I said is, "I'll ask my boyfriend."

The Creep kept talking but I just nodded and looked out the window. At this point the day seemed like a big mistake. What was I doing out here, dressed like this, alone, with no phone? By the time the bus reached my stop, the Creep looked pretty annoyed. *Like I care*. He had no right to be

annoyed at someone for not wanting his attention. Once the doors opened, I just about ran off the bus. I heard the Creep call out a name on my way out. I'm not sure what it was, but it's safe to say it was derogative.

The beach bus stop was right in front of La Reina de la Playa, an art museum I hadn't been to in years. A lot of fully clothed tourists were coming in and out of La Reina de la Playa. I also saw people with the same destination as my own, wearing skimpier clothing, but still no uncovered swimsuits. Across the street from La Reina de la Playa was the crowded boardwalk, and beyond that was the beach.

I stood almost hopping, waiting for the walk sign at the intersection with my hands crossed behind my back. The road to cross to the boardwalk had five lanes and was technically a highway, so jaywalking was out of the question no matter how many times it crossed my mind. Someone nearby said something to me. I looked over and was ever so grateful that it wasn't the Creep. I was sure this man was giving unwanted attention just the same, but I couldn't help but smile in relief that it wasn't the Creep. Realizing I might send the wrong signal, I quickly shook my head and forced a grimace. The man laughed a kind of nervous, confused laugh at my apparent craziness. Fortunately, the walk sign flashed walk and I ran.

Across the road, the boardwalk was full of tourists and street vendors selling hotdogs and hamburgers, overpriced fruit on account of the drought, paintings and pictures from unknown artists, spray painted t-shirts, freakshow tickets, weed illegally and weed pseudo legally from medical dispensaries. Artists did acrobatics for tips, improvisational raps, and caricatures. There were also homeless people with torn cardboard signs asking for weed, homeless people with signs asking for money, homeless people with signs containing witticisms and a homeless person vending signs for other homeless people. He sat on the ground next to his signs, proud of his meta joke contribution to the boardwalk. None of the homeless paid much attention to me. The boardwalk was full of all types of people, including other women wearing only their bathing suits, *finally*. Maybe the homeless men that lived here didn't so much as glance my way because they were jaded to the sight of swimsuit clad woman. Could that be the answer? Flood the world with nudity and we won't care about it anymore. We won't care to hide it, we won't care who sees it and nobody will care to see it.

I had been coming to the boardwalk since I was a child, but in my current state I found it frighteningly strange, different and fresh. It was packed with people and although a few were donning their swimsuits, I still felt uncomfortable, scandalous, and the object of many gazes. I saw a character I had seen nearly every time I came to the boardwalk; a tall dreadlocked roller skating beggar who always carried a boombox on his shoulder. I called him Dreads, in my head, that is, I never actually said anything to him. I doubted he would recognize me, not just because he was always high on something, but because I was normally so uninteresting, a grey smear against an overcast sky. Dread's appearance made me realize I could see someone else I knew there, someone who *would* recognize me. A minor panic alarm buzzed in my chest.

I picked up my pace heading towards the sand. My flip flops were slowing me down so I kicked them off, but only got a few feet before realizing how stupid that was. I went back and grabbed them and was very glad I did once my feet hit the hot sand. Flip flops back on.

A cool breeze swept the shore and touched inches of my body it had never touched before. It was a big beach, about a hundred yards to the water. The water too, was crowded. But these people were all in swimsuits. And for the first time since I got on the bus, I let my hands go from behind my back and rest at my sides. How silly I must have looked running through those crowds covering my bum. I looked over my shoulder back at the boardwalk and saw a disheveled clown facepainting children next to a woman collecting money from tourists taking pictures of her bikini clad dog reclining on its back in a puffy red cushion. Maybe I didn't look silly at all.



2 The Beach

I made a decision. I wasn't going to cover myself with my hands again. I'd been to this beach countless times and had seen plenty of women in smaller bikinis than mine. Yet no matter how many times I thought this, it did not ease the beating of my heart or the slight shaking of my fingertips. Massive crowds of beach goers were only tens of yards away now. I was in as much danger of being seen by someone I knew here as I was on the boardwalk. I swear I almost turned back right then at that thought.

But I was too close. I passed an outcropping of short walls where graffiti artists sprayed away. This was where the beach crowds started. My fellow sunbathers were upon me. I noticed some men watched me as I passed but they did that to every girl in any bathing suit and at the beach the gaze lost much of the creepiness it carried on the bus.

I found an empty spot but I didn't have a towel and the sand was scalding so I just stood there looking down the beach. Heat waves distorted the farther beach goers, melting them into a soup. I'm sure others were wondering why this weird lady was awkwardly standing there all alone. My ass felt like a billboard for the world to see. Once when I was in Vegas, this prostitute was hanging around the hotel pool in the tiniest bikini I had ever seen; thong in the back, slightly more fabric in the front, and a top that hardly even covered her nipples. She just waded through the pool alone, waiting for a potential client to come talk to her. I wasn't entirely sure she was a prostitute, but it was what made sense to me at the time. Now I'm not so sure. Maybe she was just like me.

I was getting even more anxious from just standing. There was emptier beach space behind the crowds. I hopped back and kicked off my flip flops. With closed eyes, I did my best to meditate the pain of the hot sand away. Concentrate.

My feet slid to second position. My arms raised up to form a circle horizontal with my shoulders. I attempted a pirouette, not super graceful in the sand, nor very comfortable. I paused. A couple beach goers had already taken notice. I felt my face warming. I prayed I wasn't getting noticeably red as I tried pirouetting again. Focus on the dance and you won't be embarrassed. Bare assed. How mature of me. Concentrate.

I finished with the worst *jete* I'd done in my life. The sand must've absorbed most of my jump and I had little time to extend my legs before landing. Despite the finale, somebody actually clapped. Never before had I used the term mortified to describe my emotional state, but this was it, or close to it. It's hard to pinpoint the exact name for the emotion I was feeling, anxiety, shame, horniness, embarrassment, a mix of many things, eating a bag of Halloween candy all at once, enjoying some of the flavors but disliking others and ultimately getting sick from consuming so many sweets. The sickness was regret, or rather a looming fear of regret, the regret I would feel tomorrow. This wasn't me. This bikini was meant for someone more exciting and careless, someone who didn't think about consequences and lived in the present, someone passionate and reckless, not me.

When the applause, if you can call one person clapping applause, subsided, I almost played it cool by taking a bow with a flirty smile. But the thought of bending over in this bathing suit was too much. Instead I stared straight ahead at the ocean like a robot as I walked forward, found some cool damp sand where the waves washed up and sat down.

The sun was getting ready to dive into the ocean and my big day at the beach turned into me playing with a big pile of sand in front of me, the soothing feeling of sand pouring through my fingers, massaging the cracks in my skin. I kept moving back as the tide rose. Not too far away, a boy and girl were building a sand wall, fighting the tide, always a losing battle. They had little seashells decorating the top of the wall, something I did as a child as well. When the water washed the seashells away, the game was over.

The first time I got up to move back, the boy looked up at me and since then, he glanced my way every few seconds. I hung my head between my legs and laughed. The most attention I got today was from a ten year old. Not that I wanted attention. I didn't know what I wanted.

"Hey girl, wow! Beautiful girl like you sitting all alone? Where's your boyfriend?"

I looked up at a man thin as a pool noodle wearing an American flag speedo and carrying a matching motorcycle helmet. His leathery skin sagged in all directions. The sight of him was so jarring that I almost forgot that he asked me a question. I managed a shrug.

"Wait a second girl," he said looking both ways. "Are you of age?"

Although definitely a creepy thing to say, I tried to play it off with a loud, “Hah. You’re silly.”

“There it is. What a great smile. Mmmm yeah, show them pearly babies off.” And with that he took off. I watched him go down the shore and start talking to a group of highschool girls. He sounded like a salesman, the way he talked. When the girls saw him they screamed and laughed and demanded they take a photo with him. I found myself smiling, he wasn’t selling anything. The beach was a strange place full of strange people and here I was, plotting my next move.

It probably wouldn’t be a good idea to go swimming alone in the ocean at night, so I stood up to get in before the sun sunk any further. I had somehow forgotten about my extra cheeky bottoms until I started to wipe sand off. I’m sure I looked like one of those postcards in beachshore gift shops, the ones with topless models wiping sand off their bums, except I wasn’t topless or as attractive. Still, it was a sight I was embarrassed to be displaying, so I stopped wiping and started sprinting towards the water, a mist of butt sand trailing behind me.

The water had been heating up in the sun all day and now the air was cooling faster than the water could, making it the perfect time to get in. The waves washed up pretty far on the shore and you could wade out quite a while before it got too deep. I made my way past the crowds to where the water came up to my shoulders. The only others out that far were some boys, body surfing off small waves. My father taught me how to body surf when I was eight. I took to it really well until a decent sized wave crashed on me, sending me tumbling underwater and cutting my shoulder on some coral. The scar is still there. They didn’t let me body surf for a whole year after that. ‘It could’ve been your head!’ my father had said.

I scanned the horizon for a suitable wave. It wasn’t long before I found one I liked approaching fast. I kicked off the ground towards the shore and started swimming, the wave just behind me. My speed increased as the wave lifted me. I stretched my arms out straight in front of me and did my best to become a surfboard, an oddly shaped, less hydrodynamic surfboard. It certainly wasn’t as easy as back in my flat chested youth.

The wave dropped me off among the crowded swimmers, not as far as I hoped. I would’ve done better if I had kicked off just a split second later than I did. I stood straight up in the waist high water and felt a cold breeze

where I didn't expect it, my boobs. They were exposed. The water friction pulled my top down to my waist. I shot down into the water and readjusted myself, then scanned the area. None of the other swimmers were staring at me. Had any of them seen? So many people wore sunglasses at the beach. You could never be sure where they were looking. I suspected that was a competing reason for wearing sunglasses to the beach at all.

Discomfort prompted me to reach down and tug on my bottoms. My brief physical exertion had given me a wedgie. A wedgie in this bathing suit was pretty much a thong, but my lower half stayed underwater and while body surfing, the wave covered it. Nobody could've seen since the wave covered my bottom. The wave covered my bottom hmm, I had an idea.

I strode out beyond the swimmers to my wave catching spot and started to shiver as I pulled off my cheeky bikini bottoms. I balled the suit up in my fist and stood for a few moments looking out over the water at all the other swimmers. I felt water flow between my legs with a freedom I had never allowed. I looked down and saw my own bare self. I could barely make out my toes, half buried in sand. Any farther distance than that was a murky blue. Anybody here could be naked underwater and nobody would know as long as they kept a few feet away from everybody.

"Hey there," came a man's voice from behind me.

I snapped my head around. He was about ten feet away. Sunglasses rested in a nest of short brown hair. The shades had spent most the day protecting the skin around his eyes, the only part of his face that wasn't as pink as the bikini bottom in my hand.

"I saw you body surfing," he said. "You looked good out there."

You looked good? Does that mean he saw my innocent breasts bounce up out of the water? All I mustered was a, "Thanks." My mind was fixated on the issue under the water. My lower body was pulsating. The sunburnt man said something else but I couldn't hear it over my heart pounding. I lifted my leg up and tried to get it in my suit but a mischievous wave threw my balance and my head went under for the briefest of moments. I gave up on putting the suit back on and stood straight again.

"Are you okay?" the man said coming closer.

A mild shriek emitted from my mouth, an overreaction for sure. The man seemed perfectly harmless and his concern after my self-dunking was sincere. Some other swimmers looked my way when I yelled. I was so embarrassed I covered my mouth with my hand. Nylon rubbed my mouth

and chin. Oh no. I had covered my mouth with the hand holding my bathing suit. I practically guffawed and shot my hand back into the water.

His smirk was instantaneous. He turned around. "Sorry, didn't realize you were...adjusting. Those waves can be brutal, especially to women."

I slipped my bottoms back on saying, "Yeah, yeah." Apparently my vocabulary had been reduced to 'yeah' and 'thanks'.

The man said, "Well hey, my friends and I are having some drinks down there. He pointed to a handful of guys and girls under a couple umbrellas down the shore. "I saw you swimming alone and thought I'd invite you." Somehow he was blushing through his sunburn. "Whenever you want, no pressure, we'll be there awhile." He started walking towards his group of friends, passing closer to me on the way. I noticed his eyes dart down at my bottom half when he was close enough to see down there, only for a moment, guess he couldn't help himself. "See ya," he said.

As my pulse returned to normal, my mind was finally able to process the scene that just occurred, the things he had said right before I attempted to re-suit myself, he was kind of nervous. If only he knew how nervous I had been. He had blurted out a few questions back to back. *Do you body surf often? You seem pretty fit. What's your secret?* Obviously flirty. I wasn't even that fit really. He was already a dozen feet away but a sudden urge to redeem myself made me call out, "I'm a dance instructor."

The man searched around for the source of the voice. He looked back at me.

I repeated, "I'm a dance instructor. That's my secret."

He laughed. Oh jeez, I was pretty sure I just made myself look like even more of a doofus. "Good to know," he called back. "Maybe later you can show us some moves."

"Maybe," I said. "I'm going to catch a few more waves first." He nodded and continued his slow trek back to his friends. It was the coveted meet-cute you see in so many romantic comedies. And what if I did follow up on the man's invitation? I'd have a few drinks. Maybe they're fun and I enjoy myself, maybe not. He invites me back to his place. He'll say *didn't you bring any real clothes?*

It would've been a good time to head home. I had a little excitement now, don't be greedy. But my body was still tingling which turns out to impair my judgment. This time I checked my surroundings first. Nobody in

my immediate proximity. I pulled off my bottoms and felt the cool water again flow freely.

A solid candidate appeared in the ocean, a large moving lump of water, something as a child I had called *a monster wave*. I wasn't sure I was ready to do this. I looked towards the shore. There were people ahead of me. If I fell short like my last surf I'd end up amidst them, bottomless. I was going to do better than that though.

I bent my knees, preparing for the kickoff. The wave was almost there. Don't kick too soon. Wait for it. My chest was thumping. Oh no! There was a fatal flaw with my plan. I wouldn't be able to swim well with my bottoms in my hand, unable to cup the water properly. Plus someone might see the suit once my arms are extended in the surfboard position. The wave was upon me. I shoved my bottoms under my top and kicked off. I swam my hardest and felt the wave take me.

I was gliding without a single worry in the world, including the worry that the water friction on my breasts might do worse than pull my top down this time; it might send my bottoms for an oceanic voyage. I laughed at my earlier thought that nudity should be commonplace so that it wouldn't be a big deal. If that were the case, I wouldn't have been able to derive so much pleasure from this. My bare bottom, covered only by a few inches of foamy wave water, passed through the asteroid belt of swimmers still going strong. Too strong in fact. When the wave finally released me, the water was only a couple feet deep.

Careful not to stand up, I examined my body. Of course my top had been pulled down. I fixed it underwater, but there was a problem. Where were my bottoms? Panic was a musician plucking a harp inside my chest. It was the same harp that played when one was in love, and although it was intense staccato throbbing right now, I had to admit there was still something pleasurable about this panic. I scanned the surrounding water and down at the flock of swimmers. My suit must have been pulled off around there. Would I have to swim around those people in a desperate search for my bottoms, always making sure to keep more than a few feet from any one person? It sounded like some perverted video game.

I looked back at the group of beer drinkers my new friend was apart of. He forgot to tell me his name. *Shades, that's what I'll call him*. Between Shades and his friends and myself, I saw my bottoms, floating casually among a patch of seaweed closer to the shore. I crawled through the two

feet of water on my hands and knees. Waves came in and out but I kept my eyes locked on the suit. If someone walked by right now, they'd see my bare ass clear as day through mere inches of water.

The wave fully retracted, leaving me with a bathing suit even more unique than the one I came to the beach in. I had done my best at covering my sensitive areas with the nearby seaweed. I even tried to pull it around my waist so that, from a distance, one might think nothing odd of my new swimwear. I glanced around. Nobody was looking at me, good. There was Shades and his friends again. Shades saw me looking his way and waved. They all waved. How I managed to wave and smile despite the dread I felt inside is something I still awe at to this day. Thank god they didn't come my way.

The next wave arrived and my seaweed was quickly dispatched with. I grabbed my bottoms and sort of slunk forward on my butt until I was back in slightly deeper water. As soon as there was enough space for me to slip my bottoms back on, I did. At this moment I felt the ease of a bed after a long day's hard work. I tried to float on my back and relax but I was still in the part of the shore where the waves were turbulent, so I started towards my wave catching zone, where the waves weren't breaking as much. Maybe I could relax there.

The water was just a little too rough to float on. I stood on my toes and eyed the pier in the distance where I had once caught a baby shark. That's what my parents had told me anyways. They were known to lie to my child self, usually for the betterment of my imagination, in the same vein as Santa Claus. I didn't know what baby sharks looked like back then and we let it go back in the water after we took a photo. The photo was lost before I was old enough to really develop a good enough memory of it. I've always been skeptical about the baby shark ever since.

Swimming towards the pier, I was no longer some weird woman alone, wading in the water. I looked like I was swimming with a purpose. Maybe I was meeting someone at the pier. Maybe I was exercising. Maybe I was taking my entire swimsuit off.

I pulled the string on the back of my top and yanked it forward off of my body, then tugged the bottoms down. I held one piece in each hand and kept moving towards the pier in a breaststroke so as to keep my cloth filled hands in the water. A warmth coursed through my body that contradicted

my lack of clothing. Wasn't the original purpose of clothes warmth? And here I was, warm once they were removed. Another reason for clothes was probably protection from the sun. I wondered at what point the distortion in purpose occurred. When did it stop being about warmth and protection and start being about hiding from others? Did a group of cave people shed their winter clothes and suddenly find nudity vulgar? Maybe a long winter had repressed them sexually, perverted their minds, and when Spring came, parents for the first time were concerned with the way young men looked at their daughters. So they asked everybody to keep their clothes *on*. The leaders, fathers of course, enforced their newfound prudery. The second distortion came years later, at a time when the group had all the food and water and shelter that they needed. Bored, one of them altered an outfit, probably with the intention of making it more efficient, and inadvertently gave birth to fashion, along with jealousy and envy over material things.

I did my best to keep my distance from other swimmers, but I found myself allowing a shorter and shorter distance between them and I. Every passerby was a rush, shooting out ripples of nervous pleasure. But each subsequent time, required I get a little closer for the rush to kick in. This was bad. I had never been addicted to anything in my life. It was a mere glimpse into a world I had never come close to understanding. A sympathy for drug addicts, gamblers and perverts flirted with my mind.

I shook it out and held my hands in front of me underwater. I opened my fists and watched my bathing suit pieces float out, inches above my palms. Those two little pieces of fabric were so important yet so vulnerable. Floating there in the open ocean, though just inches from my hands, they might as well been blowing in the wind near the edge of a cliff of a bottomless pit. The light tingling sensation prickled inside my belly.

A monster wave crashed onto me and I went tumbling underwater. I popped back up gasping for breath, reminded of my childhood body surfing near death experience. There was a split second where survival distracted me from the panic of the situation at hand; finding my bikini. I searched frantically for my top and bottom and nearly exhaled my lungs out when I found them. They hadn't gone far. I grabbed onto them, held them close to my body, squeezed them tight, but I didn't put them back on. Having the bikini back was like sobering up at a party you're not ready to leave. I let go again. This time for a little longer. I was facing the shore, leaving me vulnerable to any wave that wanted to come by and tear away my tiny

pieces of dignity. Just the thought, the potential for this disaster, intensified the sparking in my body. It was like the fluttering sensation of young love we call butterflies in the stomach. It was a bit lower than my stomach, closer to my bladder. It didn't quite feel like I had to pee but it wasn't far off. It was akin to the initial free fall of a roller coaster.

I continued to release my suit pieces, letting them float away or be hit by a wave before coming back to them, grabbing them, letting my heart pace return to normal before doing it again. I even started swimming away from the tiny bits of nylon, getting farther and farther each time, but always keeping them insight.

And all along, I was still moving closer and closer to the pier.

The tall wooden posts holding up the pier were covered in jutting nails, so I kept my distance. I heard a man was bit by a shark around the pier a few years ago. A great white! I'm not sure if it was true though. I had never seen a shark out here in my life, and the one I supposedly caught as a child doesn't count since I don't know if that even happened. Rumor was a few years ago, the shark had been agitated by a fisherman's hook. That at least made sense. I knew sometimes fishermen hooked swimmers. There weren't any fishermen on this side of the pier at the moment so I figured I was safe.

The ground was rougher over here, less sandy, a lot of rocks. A plan began to form as I rubbed my feet against a sizable stone, a shock of pleasure ringing out from the tip of my toes to the nape of my neck. I plunged underwater, lifted the stone and tucked my top and bottom under, then set the stone back on top. I emerged and caught my breath, used my feet to feel around and make sure everything was secured, then went under again just to double check with my hands.

It was safe, secured. I was sure of it. I looked out over the long stretch of water I had covered, and decided I'd make that same journey again, only with my hands empty.

Every stroke I took further from the pier sent a shiver through my body. I was too far. I should turn back. Just a little farther, another bolt of pleasure. That was enough, the sun would be setting soon. But I went farther. And farther. I swam by groups playing volleyball, drinking beer, body surfing, couples playing catch, hugging with a quick smooch here and there, a couple surfers almost hit me riding by. They came the closest to me

and probably would've been able to see me through the water if they weren't focused on the few feet directly ahead of them. For everybody else, I tried to leave just enough water between us to make my body a murky and unclear blob of skin, a far cry from the pink bikini that probably illuminated an extra couple feet in the water, but who among these strangers would remember what I wore last time I passed them?

My pruning body soaked up the world. It was not them who might see me naked. It was my bare body tingling with excitement on the fringe of seeing the world for the first time.

I saw Shades and his group of friends laughing about something someone said. I was going to make a point to wave to them, so risky, but then I saw somebody I didn't want to see, the Creep from the bus. And he was talking to Shades and his group of friends.

I had been sure to keep the water covering myself, but now I slunk even lower, so that my eyes were just above the water like a crocodile. I didn't want the Creep to see my face. Trying to keep your eyes just above wavy ocean water is a recipe for lots of salt water in your eyes.

Instead of hanging out to wait for the Creep to leave and for my salty eyes to turn as red as those of the boardwalk doctors, I started to breaststroke back to the pier. My adventure had been nice, pleasant, thrilling. But it was time to get back to real life. The sun was setting and the crowds had thinned. The crowds meant safety to me, and I wanted to leave while they were still here and before it got dark. The Creep was the reality check I needed.

The distance between the pier and I, between my bathing suit and my naked body tantalized me. How far I was from being proper. Ridiculous scenarios started playing in my head, like a shark attack forcing everyone to run out of the water, or a looming tsunami pulling the water far out and leaving me exposed on the barren sandbar.

On the way back, I even said hello to a few passersby. "Nice surfing," I said to a curly haired teen on a boogie board. He said thanks, peering under the water at my wibbly wobbly body. I thought he was too far to be able to see more than a hazy monocolored shape. But being on his boogie board, he was a little higher up than your average swimmer. Maybe at his angle, he could see more than I thought. Probably not, but who knows. I swam away on my downhill roller coaster.

The pier was just yards away. I remembered the pole that I had hid my suit near and approached it with caution, for there was a fisherman on my side of the pier now. I felt the ground getting rocky beneath my feet. This was the spot. No. It couldn't be the spot. I couldn't see my suit. I felt around with my feet. It felt just like the stone I had used. I was sure it was the stone I had used. I went underwater and lifted the stone up. Nothing.

I came up with the most intense panic yet, a hurricane mixed with that strong surge of butterflies exploding around my bladder. I scanned the surrounding waters, looked at the shore and out at the ocean and saw nothing floating anywhere. Except seaweed, there was plenty of that floating around. I craned my neck to see the top of the pier and the one fisherman, a little farther down. I thought of shouting to him, asking if he had seen a bathing suit floating around, or had maybe hooked one in his line. No, I thought, that's ridiculous.

Nobody hooked my bathing suit. I knew what happened. And I should've known better. Of course my swimsuit got loose. The water eroded the sand around it, nullifying my security measures. The same way the crashing waves always dislodged my sandcastle seashells, the current had stolen my only cover.

I swam back out again to where I had first entered the water, my body shaking with pleasure and fear. This was real. There was no going back. There were a few blocks separating my nude self from my home and I had no idea how I would get there.



3 The Shore

Someone had stolen my flip flops. I was certain of it, staring at the empty spot where I left them. The sun had set and the beach was a lot less crowded. I was quite cold, crouched in the shallow ocean water. It always seems no matter how warm the water is going in, it eventually gets cold, like it slowly permeates your skin until it touches your bones, which have no tolerance to anything below body temperature. Also, the beach would be closing in a few hours. Security guards probably had spare towels or knew where to get them. I could just wait for the closing guard to drive by and wave him down. It's just one person seeing me naked, not bad for the amount of risk I put myself in that day. But the beach wouldn't close for a while and the water was only getting colder. I tried to remember how cold it had to be for hypothermia to be a possibility but high school first aid was a blur in my mind. No, I didn't think I'd get hypothermia, but I'd be more pruned than a raisin, coming out of the water like an eighty-year old.

A second wind lifted my spirits and ended any deliberation. I was ready to make a run for it. I was shaking, either from excitement or the cold, probably both. I moved towards the shore, gathering as much seaweed as I could as I went. The water level lowered and I got down on my hands and knees, crawling in the water.

I waited, my heart pounding. A couple got up from their matching beach towels holding hands and walking off towards a nearby fruit vendor. I did not see their dog, chewing on a bone, sitting a few feet from their towels. And so thinking this was the best chance I'd have, I took three slow breaths to prepare myself. *Go!*

I couldn't move. My nude body stuck in the sand. It was in my head. It was nerves. It was fear. I thought about the looming security guard. I thought about all the seaweed in my hands. I thought about my increasingly pruned body. I thought I might be stuck in the sand forever. But I had to go. I had to. I had to.

My body lunged out of the water. My hands plastered the seaweed to my body as best I could on the run, creating a whole new style of bikini. Frilly. Lots of holes. Could I pull it off in this dim lighting? I ran past couples kissing on the sand. I ran by drunken groups of friends celebrating their mutual interests. I kept my distance from that one particular group of

friends, but for all I know they saw me hustling and trying to keep my stuff together from a distance. I couldn't tell who saw or didn't see my flopping seaweed covered breasts and slick behind. I hoped nobody saw, and it certainly was possible, what with the darkness, the drunkenness and the horniness of my beach co-inhabitants.

I reached the empty towels of the couple I had spied. I grabbed the closest one to me and began to wrap it around my body but I couldn't get it all the way around. It was snagged on something. A grrr erupted from the ground beneath me. The couple's small Boston Terrier tugged at the towel. I tugged back but its tiny razor teeth were firmly implanted. I let go of the towel and the Terrier fell back on his rump pulling the towel over himself. I grabbed the other one and ran away, only getting a few feet before the dog caught up with me. This time I was ready. Instead of wrapping the towel around my body, I held it above my head, hoping wind resistance alone would hold my seaweed bikini up. I ran straight for a changing booth, the yipping Terrier right on my heels.

The graffiti walls were now full of teens and hippies smoking weed. I made it by the wall without any hoots or hollers and entered the changing booth. Maybe they hadn't seen me. Or maybe one did and is now desperately trying to convince skeptical friends that a naked woman had just run by them, 'Dude, I think you should pass the blunt, there was no naked chick'.

My musings were interrupted by barking coming from inside the booth. The faux bamboo walls didn't go all the way to the floor so the Terrier stuck his head right under and barked and barked until I finally yelled back. It retreated but only a few feet, where it continued its aural barrage.

I wrapped the towel around my body, leaned against the wall and closed my eyes. I could run home like this. The dog wouldn't follow me the whole way would it? On the wall to my right was a showerhead. A sudden heightened awareness of my sea salty stickiness overcame me. I unwrapped the towel, hung it over the wall and turned on the faucet.

The water wasn't warm but it did its job, quickly wiping away the sand and grit and shame. Wait. Shame. This is the part where I expected to feel shame, but I felt none. Only excitement. Only joy. Where was the post naughty adventure remorse? The regret?

This was dangerous. I wasn't supposed to feel so good about doing things like this. It was a recipe for a relapse. I saw a future of increasingly more perilous situations, escalating to a red and blue climax and resolution behind bars. Consequences. I would probably lose my job, my career. What jobs could sex offenders work? I shook my head. That was irrelevant. I wouldn't get caught because I wouldn't do it again. Besides, I didn't mean to do it today, not entirely. And if I *had* been caught I wouldn't have gotten in trouble. I was sure women lost their bikinis to lecherous waves all the time. No big deal.

I turned the shower faucet off and reached for the towel. But it wasn't there. No no no no. I dropped to my knees and looked out below the door. It was gone. In the distance I saw that damn Terrier. I was sure the dog must've somehow taken it but there was nothing in its mouth. Next to it walked a woman and sure enough, the towel was in her arms. Of course. The yelping dog led her right to it. "I need that towel! Please. I need that towel!" I yelled. But she either didn't hear me or she ignored me. And what did I expect? It was her towel. I was the thief. She probably thought I was just another boardwalk weirdo.

Soon she was definitely out of earshot. I cursed myself for not trying harder. I knew I was in the wrong for taking the towel but if I had explained myself she would have understood. What would have happened if I had yelled out, 'I'm naked! Don't leave a defenseless woman alone in the nude on a beach full of creeps!'

A sinister thought ran through my mind for the first time, that maybe I didn't want this adventure to be done, that my unconscious mind purposefully put little effort into calling to that woman. And maybe I didn't really do as good a job at securing my bikini as I could have. There were bigger rocks around. No, I pushed these thoughts away. I couldn't believe that. And yet, I seemed so scared by the idea of it. Perhaps fueling the whole concept was the tingling sensation growing in the pit of my stomach as I realized I had to venture out once again in the nude.

Sleeping in the changing booth slash shower was out of the question. The sand would get real cold in the dead of night and the ground wasn't sanitary. I'd most likely wake up sniffing with a cold and an STD. *Okay, so maybe that's an exaggeration.*

There was another problem. My parents. I'm an adult and I stay out late but if I'm not coming home I usually let them know. I'm sure they've been texting me asking when I'll be back in. It's not the biggest deal, I've gone out late without telling them before but I don't want to worry them. Maybe, maybe this is exactly the type of scenario they should be worried about. No, I'm a grown woman. I shouldn't even be living with them.

My seaweed bikini had torn up under my feet during my brief shower. It was rendered useless now. I would have to go nude, completely nude this time, with nothing but the shadows to hide me.

I opened the booth door and peeked around at the boardwalk, still alive with people. It was also lined with street lamps. It'd be hard to get too close without being spotted. That's what I get for doing this on a Friday.

The clown I saw facepainting children was still there, only he wasn't facepainting anybody anymore. He sat in his chair with his head in his hands, verging on sleep. Wait, maybe he was asleep.

Rather than think too much and miss an opportunity, I crept out of the booth and started along the dark sand towards the face painter. I made sure to stay at least thirty feet from the boardwalk walking parallel to it, out of the streetlamp light's reach.

My body was drying against a warm summer night breeze. I had never experienced a breeze like this, against all of my body. It made it that much more exciting seeing all the boardwalkers only thirty feet away, still shopping, walking, holding hands, eating ice cream. Their numbers had dwindled since daylight, but it was still enough that I moved with extreme caution.

I crouch-walked up behind the face painter's cart at the edge of the sand. He was asleep. He must've been homeless too. He didn't even take his clown makeup off before going to sleep. I overheard a man ask a woman if she wanted her face painted. I shrunk down as best I could behind the face painter's cart, my chest pounding. Then I realized it was said as a joke and the woman laughed it off. The couple kept walking down the boardwalk, oblivious to my presence. Next to the cart were a few yogurt containers. They had lids on but paint on the sides revealed the colors they contained.

I grabbed the black container and the blue container and started off back into the sandy shadows, feeling like I'd committed the most debased crime I'd ever commit stealing from that desperate man. I stopped and

turned back, remembering something I had noticed. The man had a hat for collecting tips in front of the cart. No, *this* was the most debased crime I'd ever commit. I went back and reached my arm out from under the cart and grabbed two quarters out of his hat, promising to myself that I would come back some day clothed and pay this man much more for his trouble.

Money in hand, I found a spot behind a palm tree to begin my transformation.

The paint felt like ice flowing over my body. You could've scored an orange with my nipples, they were so hard. I had to be careful with the paint. If I was too sloppy it'd be obvious I was just a naked woman in bodypaint. But would it really matter? A cousin of mine used to buy the swimsuit edition of *Sports Illustrated* every year. The release of that issue always seemed to coincide with our family trip and my cousin had no shame looking through that mag during every car ride, dinner outing or tourist attraction. The body painted swimsuits in those were probably as good as they get and yet they still were obviously naked ladies in paint.

Black helped. The black paint was a lot less revealing. I fashioned the upper half into a tank top. The edges around my shoulder ended up pretty blurred especially under my armpits. I tried holding my arms straight out on either side until the paint dried. If my adventure was a movie my high school drama teacher would've yelled out *Biblical allusion alert*, *Biblical allusion alert!* The idea of naked painted me somehow symbolizing Jesus in that moment really cracked me up. I bent over laughing and couldn't hold my arms up anymore. So the armpits were pretty smeared but I could work with that.

There was very little blue paint in the other yogurt cup, just enough to make some short jean shorts. The blue was definitely more vibrant than any jeans I'd ever seen, but I was hoping to stick to the shadows, where the details of my outfit would be lost anyways.

The truth was I had no mirror to see how my work of art actually came out. For all I knew, there were gaping holes on the back of my painted black tank top and half my ass was exposed.

One of the girls sitting against the graffitied wall smoking a joint had torn jeans and a giant loose tank top exposing her lacy black bra underneath. Maybe I looked something like that. I could only hope. A burst

of air escaped my lungs in the form of a chuckle. No, I probably looked like a naked painted woman.

The paint was dry within a few minutes and I was ready to make my way across the boardwalk, which was more lit up than any other street in the city. That was it, I only had to cross the boardwalk once, then the worst would be over. I watched and waited for an opening. As a teenager, I would play Frogger in the arcade down the block on this very boardwalk. It was all training for this moment.

It was time. I clenched the stolen change in my fist, took a deep breath and stepped into the light.

A couple was walking down the boardwalk holding hands, talking. The man looked frail compared to his large, both in height and width, date. The woman said, "I don't understand what she's thinking, calling me every day as if we're still friends. She doesn't get that it's over." Out of my peripheral vision, I saw the man's head turning as I passed. The woman said, "Hey are you listening to me?"

I dodged into a shadowy building door frame across the street and exhaled. I looked back and saw the man still looking over his shoulder in my direction as the woman next to him chatted away.

I'm not sure how much he saw. While I was in the light, I had taken a good look at my front. From my angle, my nipples, although cold and hard, looked reasonable enough. It just looked like I had a tank top with no bra on. False. My bottom boob was more obvious, but because it was black paint, the black crack created by my resting breasts was somewhat hidden. My blue bottom was probably the real problem. I was wishing I had just used the black paint for the top *and* bottom. It would have hid my butt crack much better. At least I was recently waxed. There would have been no hiding the front sporting any sort of fuzz. Then again, instead it looked like I was donning quite the camel toe.

I started down the empty street away from the boardwalk and peeked around the corner to find exactly what I was looking for; a pay phone. There was a problem though. A young man in a hoodie leaned against the chain linked fence right next to it. He looked like your Hollywood stereotype drug dealer. I like to assume real life stereotypes are the opposite from time to time. Maybe this guy was just waiting to be picked up by his mom.

Light flashed behind me. I spun around quickly to see who snapped the photo but there was no one. I looked up at the windows of the surrounding buildings. Nobody. The only sound was the mumbling of boardwalkers down the block. I was scared. Then the sky crackled with thunder.

Really? Draught was the hot topic all summer and tonight it decides to rain. It was exactly the kind of fortune that could make me reevaluate my beliefs on destiny. There *was* a god and he's a perv. Of course it would rain the one night I was trapped outside with nothing but a thin layer of paint between pedestrian eyes and my most private flesh.

A decision needed to be made. I remembered seeing another phone booth a block over. But it was on the boardwalk. My thoughts were racing. I wasn't sure what was real and what was fantasy. I imagined walking home in the rain slowly, the paint washing away and leaving a trail for all to follow and find my nude self.

Another flash of light. This time I was looking down the street past the boardwalk to the ocean and saw the lightning bolt itself. The light made a fool of my disastrous paint job.

By the time the thunder struck, I was running back to the boardwalk. I needed to get to the phone before the rain. I tried to stay close to the walls of the closed down shops, most of which had sold t-shirts during the day. If only just one had stayed open late, how easily I could've snatched an oversized shirt and made my way home confident in my coverage.

My breasts were flopping in a way they can only do when you're topless. Still, most people were in groups or couples and paid no attention to me. But some heads were definitely turning. Goosebumps spread over the skin of my body. *What a unique fabric texture.*

I made it to the phone booth, cursing myself for not checking the forecast this morning. In my defense, I really wasn't planning on being out this late...naked. The phone booth was somewhat tucked away in a recess of the building so that I could at least be semi concealed by shadow. I still felt exposed as people walked by and now and then did a double take when they saw me.

My first quarter didn't take. Don't do this to me. I tried it again and the booth swallowed it this time. The phone was ringing. I practiced in my head. *Hi Mom, I know it's late, but could you come pick me up? I left my phone at home by accident so I'll just be waiting on the corner of Canal*

Street and Ocean Drive. Also, I don't have any clothes on. I banged my head against the phone booth. My bathing suit was stolen by a turbulent wave and my bag and towel must have been stolen by a beach goer. Why don't I have someone with me? Oh, my friends left early and I thought I'd get a little more sun before I went home. I lost my suit after they left. Yeah I know, I'll never go in the water and leave my stuff alone again.

"Hello."

"Hi Dad."

"So you finally called. We were starting to get a little worried."

"Well don't forget I'm a grown woman. But yeah I figured you'd be worried, that's why I'm calling. I'm just out with some friends. I think I'll stay with them tonight, so I'll see you tomorrow. Love you, bye."

Clink. The conversation was over. My decision had been made. I didn't have money for another call. What had I done?

I felt the first drop of rain just as a lightning bolt branched into the ocean. In the brilliant flashing light I saw the face of La Reina de la Playa museum with the empty bus stop in front. For a second I thought about sleeping under the bus stop canopy like a homeless person, maybe I could scrounge some newspaper together from the trash to cover myself, but then a much better idea popped into my mind, just in time for the downpour.

I threw discrepancy to the wayside and ran straight down the center of the boardwalk towards the museum in the pouring rain. My breasts were flopping and the paint was washing away, streaks running down my shins. Fortunately, the other boardwalkers were also scrambling, looking for some cover. Most of them missed me entirely. I noticed a few had found cover under closed shop overhangs and they watched me blur past them. How obvious was I at this point? No time to figure that out. My paint was wearing down. I was starting to see my nipples clearly on my breasts. The museum was near.

Instead of heading for the front, I ran towards the alley around the back. There wasn't anybody hanging around the museum, which was good, because I was pretty much clean of any paint now. I realized someone who might've seen me might also follow me. And here I was, alone in a dark alley. I prayed the rain was dense enough to have significantly impaired the vision of those I passed.

A nearby dumpster thumped and I sprang back like a cat. A skunk crawled out from under and I relaxed. Skunk, better than a man. I was cold and anxious to follow through with my plan, and not wanting to be skunk sprayed, I was now doubly motivated to get going with it. The fire escape ladder hung a few feet above my head. The bars would be wet. I ran, jumped and grabbed onto the bottom bar, gripping it as tight as I could and pulled the ladder down with my weight.

I hit the ground hard. A little wind knocked out of me but I got up and kept moving. I climbed the ladder and made my way to the second floor of the museum. From there, I approached a window and jimmied it open. No alarms yet. Lucky me. I couldn't see the room I was getting into, but I didn't care. I put my right leg in first and reached around to get a firm footing. Once I did I brought my other foot in, then my body.

Apparently, my footing was not firm enough. As soon as I moved my weight off the window sill, I slipped and fell inside the dark room. I didn't hit my head hard, but I hit it hard enough to expedite sleep mode. I passed out and dreamt I was at a high school talent show. I was doing my dance routine fine except that every time I did a pirouette, an article of clothes fell off. This was unfortunate because the routine was to end with a slew of pirouettes. I paused, afraid to perform the finale. My teacher stood on the side of the stage, shouting for me to do it. I felt the eyes of every classmate on me. I felt a mix of emotions and red hot warmth in my body. I felt awake.



4 The Museum

Sunlight shot through the open window I had fallen through the night before. I had slept through the night and awoke like a jack in the box. I was naked in an art museum and I was covered in white powder. A torn open bag of flour rested on the edge of a countertop. It must've broken my fall. I was in a kitchen. La Reina de la Playa had a small art deco styled cafe on the second floor. The doors to the cafe were a few feet from me. That would not be a good way to exit, too many people. I climbed up onto the counter and looked out the window I came in from. I was sad to see the face painter setting up his cart in front of the museum, reminding me of the crime I committed. And for what? A worthless call home. Passing the face painter was Dreads on his roller blades, bopping his head and pointing up ahead. He was pointing at someone else I knew, the thin leathery American flag speedo man, getting off his motorcycle. He was wearing the same speedo again, somehow he actually rode his bike that way. He highfived Dreads as he passed. All the times I had been here growing up, I had never really thought about this place as a community, only as an object for my leisure, the beach. But of course it was, an amazingly unique, fantastic community. Then I saw the metal ladder. It had been put back up. My heart nearly stopped, there was a lock on the ladder now. I crouched down on the kitchen counter and hugged my knees to my chest.

I could just wait there to be found, try to get some kitchen staffer to take pity on me. With my luck it'd be some horny kid, first week on the job. He wouldn't be able to pull his eyes away. Oh jeez, what was I doing, fantasizing again? This was serious. But I couldn't help it.

How much time did I have before I'd be found? Wait! I *could* go through the cafe. The kitchen was empty, so it must be closed. Otherwise I would've been caught already. I almost wished I had been. Finding me unconscious nude would have probably drawn the most sympathy and gotten me home safe and in the clear. I ran to the door to the cafe and peeked in. Nobody there. The lights were off. The room was empty of any tables or anything. It looked like they were getting ready to renovate it. Darn, I would've easily turned a tablecloth into a makeshift dress, but no such luck.

I tiptoed across the room to the far glass doors, leading into the museum. Maybe it was early enough that the museum was still closed. There was usually a fashion exhibit, maybe I could grab an outfit from there and casually walk out of the museum after it opened. Museum light poured through the glass doors. I was pretty close to them when an elderly couple walked right by. I dove behind the wall next to the doors.

My knee scraped a little on the cafe rug but I was otherwise okay. I peeked around the edge and got a better look out the glass doors. The museum was open, just not the cafe.

The large room outside the cafe was full of paintings. If I remembered correctly, this whole floor was paintings. In other words, I'd be out of luck finding clothes.

Straight across the open space was the elevator and staircase. I was pretty sure the fashion exhibit was downstairs. The museum wasn't super busy, but the first floor would have more people, since it was closest to the entrance. Going down there completely nude was a huge risk.

I was pretty sure the third floor was ancient art. If the cave painting exhibit was still going on, I could snatch some loincloth from a cavewoman mannequin. The third floor was split into a bunch of compartmentalized sections, so it'd be easier to sneak around and hide. Once again, I'd have to act like some sort of naked spy, ducking and dodging out of the sight of ordinary people.

Wait, I had an idea. I ran back to the kitchen. The flour. I picked up the entire bag and poured it over my head, covering myself head to toe. I started to walk back into the cafe when I realized I was leaving white powder footprints. That was no good. I wiped my feet along the carpet until they were clean.

I snuck up beside the glass doors leading to the museum and watched as a family with young children passed. Oh boy, of course there were children, this was a museum. My stomach sank at the possibility of becoming an accidental sex offender. But was it accidental? Couldn't I wait in the kitchen and try to explain to the staff? Couldn't I flag someone down and ask for help? No. No, I pushed those thoughts away.

I saw my opportunity, a gap in museum patrons, and bolted from the doors and beelined for the door to the staircase across the room. I timed it perfectly. The big empty space was just that, empty. But just as I

approached the staircase doors, they started to open from somebody on the other side.

With nowhere to go, I jumped into the nook created by the elevator doors. I stuck my hand around the wall and pushed the elevator call button. Flour fell off my trembling arms as I waited for the elevator. A small group of middle aged folks all wearing sweaters came out of the staircase and just stopped in the middle of the room, looking at a map, deciding what to do. If they looked my way, they'd see a powder white naked woman, terrified, against the grey metal elevator doors.

BEEP went the elevator, in my head louder than any elevator beep ever. My heart almost exploded realizing there could be people in this elevator. The doors dragged open. Nobody. I lunged behind the control panel and smashed the close doors button.

I didn't dare look back to see if the indecisive group had seen me. I didn't have much time to ponder it anyways. The elevator was rising and I'd have to figure out how to hide on the next floor in a matter of seconds. The doors could open to a huge crowd for all I knew.

Ding! The doors separated and I clung to the wall just in case. Phew, nobody at the doors. But I did see a young hipster couple discussing an Ottoman rug hanging on the far wall. I slunk out of the elevator and tiptoed my way towards the caveman exhibit. It was on the opposite side of the room, a long journey, through a zigzagging ancient Greece section. I was half way through it when I heard talking coming around the corner. I was prepared.

I hopped over the felt rope barricade and found a place between two armless statues. Hopefully, armlessness wasn't a requirement. I struck a pose, my hands at my hips, my back arched slightly, my chest out. I was close to the wall, as far as I could be from the path.

The talking was coming from the hipster couple I saw earlier. They came around the corner arguing about who sold the best pizza in town. They stopped and glanced at the statues and surrounding artifacts, but it was clear they were more into their conversation than the art. It sounded like one of their first dates. They made sure to look around as they talked, but only for appearances, to create the illusion that they were interested in the surrounding art. By the time they left, the bearded male had accepted that he'd have to give his asymmetrical date's choice pizza parlor another chance. Date number three perchance?

I was about to move on when I heard more voices, lots of them. “Next up students, we’ll see some artifacts from ancient Greece,” I heard a familiar voice say. I started to tremble at the herd of footsteps coming around the corner. It was a school class, with their teacher and a museum tour guide, who was none other than my neighbor, Mr. DeSoto.

My trembling intensified. This would give me away for sure, so I closed my eyes and concentrated. How stupid of me. Mr. DeSoto had worked here for as long as I remembered. How didn’t I think of it? Well, nothing I could do about it now. Relax. He’s giving the tour, probably not looking my way. I kept my eyes shut but cracked them just enough for me to see. Mr. DeSoto was looking my way. He had his hand out, gesturing in my direction, then he turned to some pottery and talked about that.

There see, he wasn’t really looking *at* me. There was nothing to fear. It was just nudity no different than the statues standing next to me, except breathing. I slowed my breathing, tried to inhale shallow, minimizing my chest movements. Mr. DeSoto had moved on with his presentation, but not all the students had. Many of the boys looked over with an interest that was missing with the other exhibits. Don’t tremble, concentrate on nothingness. The eternal black void. There are children staring at your butt naked body. Darkness, emptiness, nothingness.

Mr. DeSoto and the teacher were moving on to the next section, but some of the boys hesitated, soaking in the view as much as possible before they had to leave. The rest of the group was almost around the corner when they finally ran to catch up, save one small boy who stayed behind. He wore a backwards cap and glasses and carried a cup of water in his hand that he kept taking sips from. He was staring straight at me, mesmerized. Had he figured it out? One of these things was not like the other.

He lifted the felt rope and ducked under it. Every muscle in my body froze and the panic musician came back in an attempt to shatter my insides. The boy crept forward. How old was he? Please be at least thirteen. Be a short post pubescent teenager, pretty please. An adult would know right away, but a kid? Maybe I was just the most realistic statue he’d ever seen. He’d go home today with a newfound appreciation for Greek art, thinking they displayed a level of artisanship in sculpting he had never thought possible. Or he knew I was real, or at least suspected it. If he got close enough, he’d see the many ways I differed from the other statues. The faint hairs on my arms, the dimple on my thigh, the scar on my shoulder, the

mole next to my belly button. I debated whether or not to run if he got any closer.

“Jason!” came the call of the teacher, poking her head around the corner. “Get out of there!” And whatever Jason thought I was, it was discarded as he raced back to his teacher. She said, “If they catch you doing something like that we might not get invited back, do you understand?” Jason nodded and went around the corner to join his class. The teacher held back a second, looking at me, hopefully just checking that Jason hadn’t messed anything up. *Thank you teacher lady. You’re appreciated in more ways than you know.* I repressed the urge to give her a thumbs up until she went back around the wall to rejoin the class.

Next to the ancient Greece exhibit was the cave paintings exhibit, with a fake plastic cave and amateur imitations of cave paintings. I quickly found the female mannequin with her faux leopard print top and bottom. They were hard to remove, I almost tore them before realizing that would make them difficult to wear myself. As I tugged and pulled the top off of this giant jawed doll, I noticed a security camera in the corner. Oh dear. Was it all for nothing? I imagined a security guard in a closed room watching all my antics with his pants down. Others were probably on their way to arrest me right now. They’d have no problem handcuffing me, moving me, frisking me. Ahh, no time for fantasies.

I couldn’t do anything about the cameras. A neighbor of mine who owned a small convenience store had told me once that he doesn’t check the security cameras unless something happens, like a robbery. So there was that. And who knows, if someone *was* surveilling at the moment, maybe he’s not paying much attention. I needed something to hope for, no matter how improbable. My heartbeat returned to normal. Well, not normal, but it’s normal level of nude anxiousness.

The faux leopard skin top was off the mannequin and quickly over my head. The cavewoman bottoms were easier to get off. What unrealistically thin hips these cavewomen mannequins had. And this was the era when child birth was at its most primal and child bearing hips were probably at their largest. Oh those poor children and the misconceptions about cavewomen they’ll have. Maybe I shouldn’t blame La Reina de la Playa. It could be really hard to get mannequins without supermodel figures. Wait no, that didn’t make sense. This mannequin had a Neanderthal style head. No excuses.

A group of college age students were coming around the corner and I froze just as I got the loose fitting bottoms up. I looked at my foot posture, trying to imitate the other cavemen. My feet were still covered in white flour. Oh my god. All my skin was still covered in flour.

I dove into some fake fauna just as the college students looked over. They were laughing. Had they seen me? A cloud of flour dissipated in the air where I just was. I peeked over my shoulder back at them. They were pointing at the naked cavewoman mannequin I undressed. If that alone was drawing attention, maybe it was a good thing I hit the dirt. I mean, even without the flour, I'm not a Neanderthal. I'd be spotted in a second. A horrible thought shot through my mind. What if they couldn't tell the difference? *I'm hideous!* I giggled audibly at myself for a nanosecond before coming back to the seriousness of my situation. I listened for their voices, trying to gauge if they had heard me.

No. They were too busy chatting, quite loudly for a museum. Good for me. I watched them exit the exhibit, freeing me from my vegetative state. Up on my feet, I brushed off as much flour as I could.

Okay, it was time to get out of there. I held in my breath and made a decision. Confidence. Confidence would get me out of this. I walked out onto the main path and started towards the staircase.

It was working. I passed people and they looked at me. I just gave them a smile and a wave and kept moving. They were buying it. And why not? I was wearing the exact same outfit as they had seen in the caveman exhibit. I *must* be part of a special show at the museum, or maybe the host of the cave paintings exhibit.

As long as I stayed out of sight of the museum employees, especially Mr. DeSoto, I'd be fine. I reached the stairs and bolted down towards the first floor. Some people were hanging out in the stairwell chatting. I blurred by them. Wait, were they? I turned my head back as I passed through the door. It was the college kids who laughed at the naked mannequin just a minute earlier. They were looking right at me as the doors shut between us.

I hoped my nervous smile would incite them to take pity rather than sound any alarms. The shut chrome door revealed my reflection. I looked ridiculous. My seasalty hair was the only cavemanly thing about me. There were still a couple splotches of paint here and there. Most the flour was gone but not all. Oh, and the cavewoman bottoms didn't exactly cover all of my ass. So much for thinking my plan was working. Nobody would think a

museum worker was walking around with half their crack exposed. If the college students didn't say anything, any of the dozen or so people I passed on the floor above might. For all I knew there was a search for me going on right now. I felt panic and relief simultaneously. My journey was almost up. I couldn't go much longer without being caught.

I turned around to face the fashion exhibit. This year it was Elizabethan styles. Oh no. These dresses had corsets and ruffles and cloaks and this weird circular folded paper thingy that was sure to make me look like that sludge spitting dinosaur from Jurassic Park. But if I could only get one of them on, maybe I could get out the front doors. I stepped up to the closest mannequin, and started disassembling it. It was like a giant shoe with really long shoelaces tied into a knot. I ripped the neck cone of shame off completely. There was no way I'd walk out of here inconspicuously, but I'd try my best.

I almost didn't notice an elderly woman heading my direction. She was looking at the dresses closer to her as she walked. I didn't see any hiding spots so I crouched down thinking I might be able to hide behind these poofy dresses. Inspiration hit me. I could hide *under* these poofy dresses.

I lifted the mannequin's dress and crawled in. The mannequin had no legs. Instead, a metal pole went from a metal plate on the ground to the mannequin hips. A little bit of wireframe shot out around the hip to help shape the dress.

The elderly lady's footsteps were close. Her shadow blocked out the light coming from under my dress. I was in such a weird position, my neck against the floor and my ass half in the air. I was pretty sure my bottoms were rubbed almost completely off. If the elderly woman lifted the dress she'd get quite the view. My heart was erratic.

And then she was off to the next exhibit. I took no time to relax. The next person or couple or group or class could be right around the corner. There was no sexiness cramped up under that dress. I was tired of this museum. It was a cage compared to the freedom I had felt the night before.

I slid the dress off the top of the mannequin, some fabric tearing on the wireframe. The leopard print fell to the floor as I pulled the dress over my body. The corset was as tight as I'd imagined and I hadn't even tightened it. The dress still had a few inches to come down. I held my breath, but that just made my chest expand, so I let it out and just yanked

down, over and over. I heard tearing but oh well. I didn't feel any gaping holes and that was good enough for me. I left the exhibit and entered the main gala.

The museum was a lot more crowded now than when I first left the cafe, but that was a good thing. For once, I needed a crowd. They could cover me, draw less suspicion to me. I tried to hang around the biggest group I could find. They started looking at me, making faces. That's right, I'm a museum worker again, and maybe this time I could've pulled it off except for the tears in my dress and untied laces.

"Hello friends, may you enjoy the beauty of the Elizabethan times in the room just beyond that doorway there." I cringed inside at my atrocious playacting. Screw this. I lifted my dress up a foot so I could move quicker and hurried for the door.

The security guard's head followed me out, a quizzical expression on his face suitable for a cartoon character. I committed to my role, "Just going for a quick smoke break. Be right back."

The glass doors gave way to the warm breeze and boardwalk smell I had grown so accustomed to.



5 The Street

Free at last. The corset dug into my chest. Finally free. I could hardly breathe. Freedom. I walked along the crowded street attracting more looks than I had during my entire bare adventure. It was strange. The eyes were a restriction, enforcing my current apparel, my compliance with their social system, whereas the nude gaze would've been shock and awe, of envy, jealousy at my brazen, my bold break from their rules, my glory, my freedom.

There was something hard digging into my stomach. I reached into a small pocket and found an antique gold watch inside. Up ahead, a man was pulling a cart full of paints along the sidewalk. I did a double take. It was the clown from last night, the one I had stolen from and seen out the museum window this morning. He had finally changed out of his clown outfit, just plain old citizen face painter today. I tossed the watch in the back of his cart as I passed.

"Stop!" someone called from behind me.

I looked over my shoulder and saw the guard from the museum running towards me. What was the worst that could happen? I was a stranded woman in the nude, so I snuck in at night, stole an outfit once the museum opened and crept out. Wouldn't they understand if I explained myself? Wouldn't they? No, I convinced myself they wouldn't understand and ran off down Canal Street.

I wasn't the fastest runner and the 16th century dress wasn't doing me any favors. The guard was closing the distance between us fast. He caught up while I was crossing a Canal Street bridge. He grabbed the cuff on my left shoulder, spinning me around. The dress tore, my legs hit the short stone ledge and I fell into the canal. Now *this* couldn't have been intentional. My unconscious self wouldn't put me in that kind of danger would it?

My body plunged and to my shock, kept sinking. It was the dress, heavy with layers of fabric and wireframe. The corset was now the least of my breathing problems. I tugged in all directions and the old dress tore away like paper towel, thanks partially to the tears created when I first forced it on. Oh and I should thank the guard for the big rip he made while trying to stop my downfall. The dress was off, I was naked again,

submerged at the bottom of the canal. My lungs burned as I kicked off the bottom and shot towards the surface. I wasn't going to make it. I was. I wasn't. The sun hit my face. Thunderous was the sound of my gasp for breath.

I looked up at the sides of the concrete canal walls but didn't see the guard. The buildings were different too, and they were moving. No, I was moving. The current had taken me a block or two. Every couple of years a drunk drowns himself in this canal. There were certain parts where the current was notorious for holding people under. It was best I get the hell out of there. Up ahead I saw metal rungs sticking out of the concrete, a ladder. I sidestroked to the wall and prepared for impact.

The current slammed me into the metal bars. It took all my remaining strength to hold onto them as the current tugged my body away. My grip was slipping. I raised my knee and managed to get a foot on a bar. That was the turning point. I pulled my slick body out of the water, held onto the rungs and relaxed against the side of the canal.

A nap would've been nice. But it was still morning, my body was tired but not my mind. Besides, somebody would see me there eventually. That guard was probably gathering a search crew for me right now. Falling in the canal was big town news. I had to get out of there.

Ten rungs up, I peeked my head over the embankment. Fortunately, I wasn't in a crowded portion of the canal. Unfortunately, I was coming up in the sketchier streets. I considered for a second jumping back into the river and trying to come back up further down. If I timed it just right, I could come up not too far from my house even. If my lungs had hands they would've slapped me in the face and shouted *Did you forget we almost just drowned you damn idiot!*

I climbed out of the canal and crouched, still dripping wet. Ahead of me were a few small buildings, a pawn shop, liquor store, gas station and Dollar Discount store. Behind me, on the other side of the river was a four story apartment complex. Only a matter of time before someone looked out their bedroom window. It wasn't every day a naked woman climbed out of the canal. I ventured forward to take cover in the nearby alleys.

Around the corner of a gas station I found a nice shadowy spot, next to a dumpster. I could do without the smell but I wasn't exactly picky. I was out of sight of any windows and just wanted to sit down, lean my head

against the wall and take that nap. Yesterday I would have thought that disgusting, but today I didn't care.

Oops. I knocked over a red can. A gas can. Gas spilled out onto the floor until I picked the can up. At least I couldn't smell the trash anymore. There was a pickup truck parked on the other side of the dumpster, with a motorcycle and two more gas cans in the back. A toilet flushed. It came from a door right next to me, the gas station restroom. This guy had to go so bad he couldn't even properly cap his last gas can. Another sound came from the restroom, one that made it clear he wasn't done yet despite that first flush. It looked like this wasn't the best spot for me to rest.

Footsteps. And voices. Kids' voices. "I'm on Kyle's team."

"Nah man, you two aren't allowed on the same team. Remember last week?"

"Fine."

"I call pitcher!"

Oh god, the voices were getting closer. All my muscles tightened simultaneously. This was really bad. They were going to walk right by me. No flour could save me now.

Across the alley, a door opened and a heavysset biker walked out looking at a couple of magazines. He passed me, leaning flat against the shadowy corner of the dumpster, without even looking up from his magazines. The door was open. This was my chance.

I threw a rock over my head, over the dumpster and over the heads of the nearby kids. At least I hoped it went over their heads. "Hey, who threw this?" I heard one said. But by the time they turned back towards the dumpster, I had made it into the store, closing the door behind me.

Long rubber shafts, dirty magazines and tubes of lube. I was stark naked in a sex shop.



6 The Store

I was standing next to the checkout counter, empty save for a box of matches with an American flag on it. The door handle behind me rustled; incoming customers. I scrambled into the center of the room and dove behind a rack of videos and magazines as the door opened.

From between shelves I watched as a thirtyish couple made their way towards the videos. I started moving around my shelf, keeping it between myself and the couple. They had greasy skin and hair and reeked of cigarettes. They were just a few feet away from me, a flimsy rack of paper and compact discs between us. If one of them crouched down to grab something from a low shelf, I'd be caught. Imagine going to sex shop and finding a naked woman hiding amidst the shelves. I tried my best to stay silent.

It wasn't too long before they moved on, now interested in a table stocked with different scented lubes. Sorry bud, I doubt they have cigarette scent. On the bottom shelf of the racks in front of me, a magazine was sticking out in the back. I pulled it out and dropped it immediately in disgust. The magazine was titled *Jailbait* and it featured girls who looked way too young to be in these sort of publications. I fanned through some of the magazines on the bottom shelf. There were loads of similar titles there.

Footsteps thumped from the other side of the store. "Wait till you see this. You aint seen nothing like this." I had heard that voice before. They were coming my way. I turned to bolt out the door I came through, but the greasy couple was right in my path. There was another door across the room. It looked like a closet, my only hope.

I stayed low and waddled to the door. Over the past day, my stealth skills had improved dramatically if I do say so myself. The smoky smelling couple saw nothing as I entered the closet and shut the door as quietly as I could. I turned around and gasped. It wasn't a closet. Along the wall was a rack with shelves and on each shelf was a row of silicone asses. Some included the legs and backs of women, some were full body. They were dolls, sex dolls. Most of them were bent over or on their backs with their legs spread. It must've been the ultimate masturbatory sex toy.

A hand thumped the door behind me. The familiar voice was still talking to his patron, "This is the VIP area, where I house my most valued

products. Before we go in I just want to ask you some questions, because like I said, we cater to all types, fetishes, whatever gets you going.”

Oh jeez, they were about to come in. I looked at the rows of women. Some were stacked on top of each other. If I got under a few, I could probably blend in. No, I didn’t look like silicone, it would never work. Would it? The door handle started to turn. I had to do something quick.

They came in and I almost cursed at the source of the voice. It was the Creep from the bus. Did he own the place? Of course he did. He would. When I saw who he was speaking to, I was stunned. It was Shades, his sunburn had settled into a solid red. I bet the Creep told him all about this place yesterday at the beach and personally invited him over for a tour.

Shades walked up to the ass of a doll. His nervous smile revealed his slight discomfort here. He felt the doll’s skin. He did a couple awkward air humps in jest.

The Creep pretended to laugh. “Now they average at about five k per but it’ll be a little more for the younger models.”

Shades shook his head, “I told you already I’m not into that.” He looked down the row of asses until his eyes landed on one in particular. “Wow, this one looks more realistic than the others. Can I touch it?”

“Yes. That’s um...our newest line. Orjasmin 3. We only have the one right now. It’s a demo.”

“The skin texture is amazingly real,” Shades said, bending down to get a better look. “That’s the most convincing rubber pussy I’ve ever seen, not that I’ve seen many. It feels just right too.” His fingers went inside. “That wetness, wow.”

“Er yeah, state of the line self-lubrication. You know what, I’m gonna show you this model behind the counter. I know you said you weren’t interested but a lot of men aren’t until they see it. Once they see it they go wild for it,” the Creep said, reaching behind the counter and pulling up a full body doll of what was clearly an underaged girl.

I bit my lip to prevent myself from shaking in rage. Next to me was a cardboard box labeled ‘junk’. I fixated my eyes on it. Shades didn’t notice. He said, “No that’s alright. I’m sure I don’t want that.”

“What? But I saw you eyeing that magazine in the other room.”

“I didn’t know what I was looking at. It only caught my eye because it was on the floor. I’m serious, I’m not into that. It’s not right.” Shades turned to face the Creep, shaking his head. “The girls in the magazine, they

weren't really underage right? They're just young looking eighteen year olds?"

The Creep took a long time to formulate his response. "Well, you don't want me to ruin the illusion now do you?"

That was it. I reached into the junk box and pulled out a broken glass dildo. Perfect. I jumped down from my shelf and connected the glass with the Creep's skull. He bent over the counter in pain and I began to smack his sorry sack of a body with my pointy glass weapon. I swear I tried *not* to stab him and just bruise him up a bit. He was yelling out all sorts of excuses. "No no, stop, you don't understand, I'm in debt from the dolls. I'm not into kiddie porn but it sells for the most profit. I'm just trying to get out of debt..." He finally shut up, falling to the floor. Unconscious? Maybe. I didn't care.

Leaping off the shelf had caused a minor avalanche of silicone genitals from the higher shelves which successfully buried Shades. He needed help getting out but I wasn't in the mood. His eyes followed me out of the room.

Outside the sex shop, I ran back to my shadowy corner by the dumpster. Shades must've managed to get himself out, because he ran out of the store a few moments later looking around, probably for me. I kept the dumpster between us. He eventually gave up and started for the street. The gasoline tank was still by the dumpster next to me. That man was having one hell of a bathroom break. That's when I noticed the motorcycle in the back of his truck, it was the American flag speedo guy's bike. Was that his truck? Was he the guy in the bathroom right now? The thought of his American flag speedo at his ankles reminded me of the American flag matches on the checkout counter of the sex shop, giving me an idea. I had a sudden mood change and the smile to prove it.



7 The Concert

Orange light licked the skin on my arms, my thighs, my stomach, my breasts, my neck and my stolid face. I watched the blaze from the rooftop of an apartment complex down the street. I stood up straight, arms at my side, palms open, revealing myself to anyone who might look up my direction. But I was sure everyone was looking at the ball of plastic obsessions engorged in flame.

The Creep sat outside his shop, holding his head between his knees. Red flashing lights in the distance were my signal to leave. My fingerprints could be easily found but I wasn't sure it mattered. What's a little arson compared to child pornography?

I got on the ladder at the edge of the building. I had grown a lot more reckless over the past twenty-four hours and didn't even check the alley before I climbed down. When I let go of the ladder, I found a teen holding a basketball, staring at me. Did he just watch me come all the way down the ladder? He didn't say a word, stunned into a trance. I merely held a finger to my lips before heading off the other way.

Only a few blocks separated my home and my bare body. I didn't bother sticking to the shadows. I just ran, no longer caring who saw, a bar-back dumping a bucket of water behind a restaurant, a young couple doing dishes by the window, the group of teens playing baseball, a retail employee on a smoke break, sorry to interrupt your texting session.

I paused in an empty alley to catch my breath. In the distance, I could still see the dark smoke rising above the town. The fire was going strong, probably too powerful to put out, one of those fires that could only be contained until it finished burning what was already within its grasp. That store was done for.

Police sirens went off behind me. I spun around. Relaxed. I wasn't caught. A police cruiser was slowing to a stop on the street, waving down some pedestrians. The officer was questioning them.

I crouched and casually slunk back into the shadows. How careless of me. I was suddenly acting like the most confident nude woman on the planet while I was in the most danger yet. Stupid, stupid. Stay cautious.

A teen ran up to the police cruiser. He was carrying a basketball. It was *the* teen, the one that saw me clear as day. My stomach sank. Flasher.

Sex offender. Oh my god. I ran around the corner, nearly hyperventilating.

The shadow of a man crept across the pavement causing me to almost jump out of my skin, but then I saw him. It was the tall roller skating beggar from the boardwalk, Dreads. He looked at me in all my glory, but he didn't look me up and down the way you might expect. There was no threat in his eyes. Somehow I felt safe. He turned and pointed to a building far down the alley. It was the back of the concert hall.

Dreads skated towards it and I instinctively followed. A door in the back of the concert hall was propped open. Dreads must've thought that'd be a safe place for me. The only problem was there was an empty lot between me and the building itself. If that police car cruised on by while I was crossing the lot there'd be nowhere to hide.

But Dreads skated out into the road just as the police cruiser came by. He tapped the hood of the car and it stopped. The officers got out and started yelling at Dreads. For a moment I was afraid of what sort of brutality might ensue, but Dreads was harmless and the police officers knew it. Dreads started wagging his hips, dancing his dance, skating backwards, distracting the cops. They laughed as they tried to talk and wave him off the road.

I bolted across the lot not looking back. Once inside, I leaned against the wall and breathed a sigh of relief. What next? I figured there would be a coat room. Maybe within half an hour I could show up back home wearing my new fur. Since when did I become such a thief? Since I became a nudist.

The entrance I came in wasn't meant for patrons. It must've been an employee entrance. I had been to the concert hall a few times before but I didn't recognize where I was at all. It was dark though, so I wasn't too worried. I made my way cautiously down the hall. I turned a corner and found a door, opened it and went in. It was even darker in there. Pitch black. Oh well, at least there wasn't any danger of being seen here.

I took a step forward and almost fell as my foot went down farther than I expected; a step down. My foot made a loud bang and a deep male voice said from a few feet away, "Are you okay?" Oh my god. Rather than answer, I started down the stairs as quietly as I could while keeping a brisk pace. I must've entered the main seating area from the back. Yes, I could hear them now, the sound of a few hundred people breathing, waiting for a show to start. They didn't have to wait long. If it was this dark, the show was just about to start. In a moment the lights would go on and I'd be

standing among the audience with nowhere to go and nothing to cover myself. At the bottom of the seating I would hit the stage, and then I could go either direction to reach an exit. Why didn't I see a glowing red exit sign on either side?

I almost fell again when I tried to take a step and found that there were no more. The seating was a lot shorter than I remembered. The stage should've only been a few feet ahead. I took a few steps with my arms extended forward. But I didn't feel a wood stage. I felt cloth, large hanging drapes, the stage curtains. I didn't just walk through the audience. I had walked through the orchestra.

The curtain began to rise and the lights faded in. I was standing in the center of the stage. A communal gasp echoing through the theater. I sensed the television camera men's eyes widen, their lens focused. Would he stop rolling? No, it was not their job to make that decision. They would record the action. Someone else higher up would cut the cord and stop the show. But how long would it take that person? I felt the captive gaze of my audience in the theater and in front of their televisions at home all over the county and the millions of online viewers that would come later when this went viral. I felt all their views filled with shock and outrage and lust and envy. But I didn't look frightened or caught or like I wasn't supposed to be there. I was poised with my legs and arms ready, position one.

Whether or not the conductor saw me was irrelevant. I just know the music began to play. And I began to dance.

