

Chasers, Chased

The white boar's thick hands thumbed through the packet—taxes-thin paper delicately separated by his grandfather fingers. They were grandfather fingers from his grandfather, soft and wrinkled below and bony above and the only way he'd ever known fingers to be on grandfathers. That he had them so young was a fluke. He felt he shouldn't be doing this.

The ballpoint overdid it at first, dripping a fat ball at the beginning of the signature line. It followed through, smooth and guided by his hand. He glanced at the scrap again to be sure. An impeccable match, but not so close as to arouse suspicion. He reshuffled the papers, each adorned with three differing names, signed all in different styles and gestures. He had used all different pens, even once one which had run out, purposefully scratching in annoyance, and then finishing the last two letters in a brand new ink. Small peg teeth bit his lower lip; it was all eerily premeditated.

"Tam?" he rapped gently on the shut restroom door. The whimpers had quieted down, and he worried, "It's done; they're all signed."

The door creaked open. Tammy emerged—black and white furred but scraggly with stress, her false cups jostled loose and pointed in unnatural directions. The skunk's snout was reddened, but all tears had been washed clean.

"I'm sorry," she covered her chest in both arms' embrace, staring fixed at the dormitory's worn tile floor.

"No need." Val resisted the hug from her, turning her with the same care and precision he'd forged the signatures with, "Just turn them in during morning hours. Like normal."

“Tammy?”

He looked, predictably, not exactly like his profile photos. His expression was entirely different. Of course, she had expected this. She expected surprise, the squint, that look of searching for her Adam’s apple, and that look of distaste disguised in politeness, straight-faced, as he discovered her pair of stripes, white-on-black.

“Hi,” she smiled, standing. She was probably taller than he was expecting too. That was an aesthetic choice she had learned about early—how the men preferred their women not to be able to look them in the eye.

“Wow, I, well,” he stalled. They always stalled. He rubbed the back of his neck, behind one ear (afraid his peers would hear of this date?). “You look a little different from your profile. I mean, you’re a lot taller than I thought...”

“I know, sorry,” Tammy pinched her opposite paw, “I put the height in, but pictures don’t really show it good.”

“Um...” he had glanced down, temporarily sidetracked by her rather large breasts, the tops of which crested like hills out of her beaded pink blouse, “You look nice though.”

“Oh, thanks,” she blushed, her pink nosetip pinking more. “You’re more handsome than your pictures.”

He laughed; trailing laughter. Nervous? No doubt. She’d claimed to be a mink Moreau, but without any choice. Her true species resulted in either no messages, or the floods of insulting ones from anti-furs.

I mean, think about it: Would you date a skunk?

“So,” Roy toyed with the sleeve of his dress shirt, “what, ah, what do you do?”

Tammy tried to enjoy herself, aware of the glances. Especially aware of Roy’s. He was paying an inordinate amount of attention to her boobs each time she shifted in her seat. She told herself a pervert wouldn’t be a problem.

“I’m a photographer.”

“That’s a job?” Roy slurped coffee. His sleeve was still very tantalizing, apparently.

“Yes. I mostly work freelance.” She made herself smile. “Baby portraits a lot of the time, but the Star hires me a bunch for front-page articles on Sundays. They always want good color photos for that.”

“And you like it?”

“Yeah—just wish there was more of it.”

“Doesn’t pay, eh.”

“Enough—but sometimes I go almost a whole month without a...” Tammy sighed, “I dunno. Why are we talking about pay? I want to hear about you. What’ve you been up to?”

Roy’s chair screeched as it was slid under the window-side table; he had risen with great speed, a stilted nervousness.

“I don’t know if this is such a great time for that.”

“What?”

“I really should go...”

“But we just ordered! Are you okay?”

“No.” The weathered wood of the entryway scraped as Roy shoved the door open—activating the coffeebar’s “ding!” bell above, “And *you’re* not either.”

The door clanged back shut. Tammy sat still, Roy’s coffee still steaming and her Kalua shake sweating tense bullets.

Are you okay?

No. And you’re not either.

Tammy’s rounded snout, gentle and embellished with a pink button of nose, crinkled and changed. She snorted to keep the liquids from flying out every orifice, her lips drawn back and displaying her needle-like teeth, whitely-tense gums.

“F—” she began again, choked, “Fuck you too, Roy.”

“I... think I know him.”

Tammy selected a bottle from the cooler, eyes smiling at the cool glass and attractive bighorn sheep decal on the colorful cap.

“So what.” She prised the cap off hungrily, “Screw ‘im.”

“That can be arranged.” Val jutted his lower lip out, “He works in the mail room, right under me.”

“Oh please would you.”

“Tammy, you know I’m a believer in nonviolence.” he eyed her, about to flick the bottlecap like a paper football towards the dingy park trashcan. “But if it helps I can ride him a bit.”

The stars mutely giggled, their lights jostling as thin wisps of cloud passed by.

“Val, Val, Val...” Tammy hiccuped. “Why don’t you date?”

White nose twitched, flicking away a hoverfly. He sipped gingerly at his drink.

“I would date, but I’m not. I’m just not looking. I’m content with being a single independent man, who don’t need nobody.”

“Shoot.” She pushed his shoulder, “And you’re a hot piece of tail, too.”

Val laughed, bubbles and sprayed foam decorating his chin.

“Well—I’ve never heard it put that way. You surprise me.”

“What about that’s ‘surprising’?”

“That you called me a ‘hot piece of tail’; You don’t talk like that.”

“I don’t curse. ‘Tail’ isn’t a curse word. I would be weird if I said a hot piece of... of a.”

Valerian chuckled, wiping water that he’d sprayed from his glass off of his chin.

“What?”

“Tammy, you are adorable.”

“Adorable-adorable or condescending adorable?”

“Adorable-adorable. Stop seeing the douche.” Valerian sipped again, pinkie out, “There are better men out there, trust me.”

After the ball dropped Tammy made her first mistake—she went to the restroom.

At first all was well in that no others were there. Too busy to take a piss, though half of the partying throng probably ought to considering the twenty-plus ounces of Champagne coursing through their blood and swept by their belabored kidneys. But there was Tammy, used to being careful, thankful for the privilege of using the urinal-less set of stalls.

It’s possible to remain responsible while drunk and Tammy could do so. The cogs were slower, but they turned, green lighting only when her forearms were panted squarely on the handicapped-aid rails and winter skirt draped squarely about her ankles—hiding the laced black flats with the cherry rhinestones on the buckle. The instantaneous relief of removing half the alcohol from her system almost masked all perception she had of the three sets of staggering heels upon the tiles, echoing with slurred giggles.

The greatest trouble with remaining responsible while drunk is the high likelihood of being in the presence of irresponsible drunks. In fact, that’s the greatest risk of the drink—those who do not know the drink well and let it become an excuse to be their uninhibited, shitty selves. If the fire-and-brimstone preachers had anything right, it was that there’s a devil that can come out of us, and so easily. And we’re terribly eager for it so long as it doesn’t let on it’s a devil.

So to Tammy. She was leaning heavily on the stall wall, dizzily regaining footing in the new type of intoxication—door unlocked and swinging open. The three women gaze up, each in their own time, tipsiest last and with the loosest neck.

The soberest returns to her plum-hued lipstick, half of it smooched across her chin from sloppy stranger-kissing, to be reapplied. The drunkest is too drunk to decide if she's going to puke in the sink or not. It's the drunk one, but not too drunk, who finally says something.

"Hey," she snorts, her nose wrinkled with insult, leaning bare arms over the sink nearest the door. It takes a second, but Tammy recognizes the poison tainting the cruel blue of her eyes and the arch of her penciled eyebrows. The trouble is, discerning what idea of her is what has become offensive.

"Lookit this, Em, Emileeeeeee. Look what we got here."

"Holy shit, Mae, it's just a tranny," Soberest sneers, looks up from her plum a moment.

"Excuse me?"

When Tammy speaks, all three pause time, no breath and their wobbling ceasing. It's but a moment. They fix a half-second look, chin-down, eyes big and doey, jaw loose and lips popped apart as if a magazine cover is about to be shot, and each of them is the same, idiotic idea of "oopsy-daisy" sexiness.

In other words, a look of shock that this thing would dare speak up. A look of blame.

Responsible drunk or no, it's difficult to control the tongue when anger ignites the B.A.C. of over .08. Maybe later at the E.R. Tammy would realize it was dangerous to open her mouth being who she was. What she was. At least to them, in that dingy bathroom at the pub, twenty minutes after the ball dropped with Champagne devils running amok; all of our devils, everywhere.

Tammy could squint as she liked, but she still couldn't see it. "It" being how much more

female she'd come off after the doctors sliced into her drugged flesh. A few pieces of skin removed here, a bit of saline pouch added there—and poof, womanly curves. But it didn't seem worthwhile.

This mirror told neither truth nor lies; the eyes were the only interpreter of what she looked like. Tammy's eyes told her exactly what she was—woman, dick and all. She was nude before her full-length mirror hanging on the closet door. Aside from wishing the bruises had healed faster from her cheeks and arms and that her ankles didn't blimp with bitty fatty bulges, she thought herself alright.

Hell, everybody has body issues. Her fur coat covered most everything, even naked. Her hair white-and-black striped spilled over her shoulders and back, not quite enough to fall over her pink nipples—which hid amongst milky chest fur anyhow. Only a bud of penis peeked out from the bush, almost cute. Almost—since penises were always fairly ugly things. Not detestable—just ugly. Like baby robins. *Uuuuuuugly*. But always tolerable.

Tammy liked the way her tail swished behind her like a permanent train. The long strands of tailbrush were immaculate and silky. They followed her tail's movements like streamers. Soon she forgot about the potential marker lines dotting her body, trimmed by an imaginary surgeon. She played her tail about, seeing what it could do, with giddy grin.

There was a knock on the front door.

“Oh crap,” Tammy ducked for her jeans and blouse, lying crumpled on the floor by the mirror. “Hold on! I'm changing!”

It was Valerian, with Roy slumping along behind him. Roy was the antithesis of the white

boar, and certainly less presentable than on that first date—a small and scrappy, tanned human. Hair sheared paper-thin. An attempt at a mustache on his upper lip, his nose hooked over it to give it a villainous slant. Long, bunched and oversized hoodie hiding his gangly form. It was a wonder the great Val deigned to even know this scruffy customer.

“Oh, hey,” Tammy beckoned them both into the first room of her apartment—a combination of living room, kitchen and dining room that the skunk had also wedged a small officey nook into. Somehow. “Sorry I boogied out last time—I’ll show you the work today.”

“It’s fine—“

“No, no it’s not. I’ve been out of the hospital for weeks, there’s no excuse.”

She plumped herself onto the loveseat.

“So why’s Roy tagging along?”

“He’s not,” Roy grunted, shuffling near the long single-seat, but not sitting. Valerian joined Tammy on the couch.

“Roy wanted to apologize,” he smirked. She didn’t miss the sharp huff Roy responded with. “And we can look at the work after. Roy?”

“Goddammit Val.”

“Roy.”

“Look Tam,” Roy’s eyes were skittish, sketchy. She leaned forward, paws together on her lap, sensing the gap in power his discomfort had left and rushing instinctively to fill it. “I didn’t know you were, er, that way. I said stupid shit without meaning to.” He slackened his shoulders,

finally. “I’m fucken sorry, okay? What more do I need to do?”

“Nothing. Just don’t say such barf again.” Tammy smiled, with all the pleasure of a lapcat.

“Would either of you like a drink?” She said after a beat, turning to the boar and the boy in turn.

“I don’t drink,” Roy grumbled. His hands were deep in his hoodie’s pocket.

“I know that. I have Dr. Pepper if you want that.”

“Oh.” Roy said little else. As Tammy returned from the fridge with the drinks he accepted the can and glanced about with it sweating and unopened. Val cracked the top off of his bottle of lager with no effort, sniffing the gray miasma that drifted forth before motioning to the studio’s door.

“Now I think we should see what you’ve been up to. These last batches are for the Festivus article, yeah?”

“I have these. I’ve also got a set of five for something secret.” She winked.

“Secret, eh?” Valerian swigged. “I might need to be intoxicated for this.”

“Not that kind, you perv.”

“Well, you did wink at me. What am I to think after that?”

“Oh sure, blame the victim.” She stuck her snout up as she pulled the door open to the darkened studio. Roy tried, poorly, to hide his curiosity at the red light emanating from within.