

Mere Humanity (U0328)

Thecla had to piss since her shift started. But she still had five minutes to go. Maybe it was some type of torture to put a clock on the factory floor—twenty minutes to freedom, fifteen minutes, ten—each minute seeming to double in length. She'd never had a job before. Perhaps this was a mistake.

But Paul, that transcendent Apostle of the Risen Christ, changed her life. For hours she sat, days on end, listening to him talk about Jesus Christ and his gift of eternal life. She could nearly recite each sermon from memory, though she'd only heard them once. One night he changed her life forever when he said, "There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female. For you are all one person in Christ Jesus". She understood that to mean she could choose her own destiny. Once betrothed to a successful stockbroker, herself bound to her noble family, she was free from all societal bonds while wrapped in the cloak of the Christ. But not free to use the restroom any time she pleased. "Just five more minutes," she thought.

They traveled the countryside, she and Paul, preaching their gospel together. Though Paul had other followers come and go, she always stayed closest to his side, so much so that others would, from time to time, whisper. "If in Christ there is no male or female, I shall live as a male to quiet these rumors," she decided. For did not the Lord himself say, "Every woman who will make herself male will enter the

Kingdom of Heaven”? Who would see her as a true apostle if they thought she was trying to woo the great apostle? The talk would have end.

Now, she had earned a certain freedom, from convention and family, wealth and politesse, sin and death. Hers was a life of meaning. But a little easy money would come in handy now and again, maybe a handout or two. After all, weren't they allowed something for imparting eternal life upon those to whom they preached? The Apostle wouldn't hear of it. He insisted “we wear ourselves out earning a living with our own hands.” For all their gifts in Christ, he and his followers were not to be a burden to anyone or expect a handout from anyone. He himself was a tentmaker. Raised a woman of means, she had few marketable skills whatsoever. She was educated in homemaking, if even that. Apostles were to earn their own keep in the world--somehow.

“That's fantastic,” her manager said when he hired her. “Really. I think that's a great sentiment. Understand that I admire that Paul guy and all. I really do. Heard great things. Met him once. And you seem like a great young wom..., person. But if anyone here finds out about you, why you look like a man when you're a woman, they won't get it and they won't care what you have to say. They won't like it. You can cut your hair and let your face grow, but some folks will see that as a betrayal—

like your lying to them. So I need you to keep your head down and your mouth shut, got it? Otherwise, you'll be out of here and I might be close behind you.

“Cause, you see, this isn't just about you. If you don't work out here, I can never hire anybody who doesn't conform to the equipment they have in their pants. 'Cause you're not a man, so you cant' go where men go. And no one will let a man, like they think you are, go where women and girls go. And that's on me. Got it?”

Sort of, she thought. Workplace politics were unknown to her, but she needed the job, so she 'got it' as far as she felt she needed.

The bell sounded for break and she couldn't wait to get to the restroom. As it was her first day, she knew enough of the factory floor to know where the bathrooms were. She nearly waddled down the floor toward the women's room. As she reached with both hands to push open the door she paused and whispered to herself, “You can't go where women go.” Then she repeated, “No male or female.” But was this factory in Christ, or somewhere out of the city limits?

“Hey Peachfuzz, where ya goin'?”

Arms still outstretched, Thecla's blood slowed in her veins. “I know ya's new here an' all, Peachfuzz, but the men's room is over here. There might not be any women on the floor, but they'll throw ya in the pokey if ya go in the women's pisser. “

She gave a nervous, low laugh and smiled, “Yeah, of course. I really gotta pee, ya know? My eyes are turning yellow.”

It was Henry, one of the old guard at the factory. And this *was* her first day at the factory. Oh yeah—and they all thought her name was Theodore, a play on her middle name Dorothy, but no one called her either. Peachfuzz, another man named Doug called her first. In her new, sexless existence she let the hair on her face grow without shame, and it came in sparse, soft and blonde despite her jet-black hair. And the moniker stuck, at least for the first four hours of her first day on the job.

Slowly her arms lowered and she found herself ambling toward the men’s room. “Here, you better go in fronta me. Don’t want ya pissing on my leg!” as Henry slapped her on the back.

As soon as she got in, she had to stop. The line in the room itself had stopped. ‘Good thing ya don’t have ta take a dump,’ Henry explained. “Ole Joe up there broke the stool last week and they ain’t fixed it yet.” He pointed to a corpulent man standing next in line to the two operating urinals in the room.

“Screw you, Hank,” the big man responded.

“Ya gotta go up to the second floor if ya need to take a crap,’ Henry continued. “But that takes another five minutes up and back. Then ya ain’t got no time for a proper crap, right?”

“Yeah, right,” Thecla forced. “But maybe I should run up there. I really gotta go, ya know?”

“Nonsense,” Henry laughed. “Hey, y’all. Let the new guy up there first. He might piss himself. And nobody wants to stand next to that all day!” The restroom erupted in laughter. Yet Thecla continued to protest.

“No, I couldn’t...no, I really need to go...” If she could get to a stall anywhere, she wouldn’t have to reveal her secret. No one would be the wiser and there would be no trouble. But trouble was coming as sure as the storm that breaks the oppressive heat with sudden cool. Thecla noticed the barometric change in the room. All eyes bore a frozen stare upon her.

“What’s wrong with you, boy? Y’afraid of somethin’?” Henry’s tone got serious for once. He walked up so close to her face she could easily smell the chew in his mouth. “Naw...there’s somethin’ definitely wrong with you though, ain’t there, boy?” With that Henry took his right hand and wedged it between Thecla’s legs. She whimpered. “That’s what I thought. Boys! We got ourselves a problem here. Hold her up agin the wall.”

Doug, standing behind them, asked, "Whadya mean, 'her'?"

Pointing with his left arm, Henry said, "HER! Peachfuzz there!" Doug and another man robotically took Thecla by the arms and held her against the wall. Henry maniacally scratched his head beneath his brown and yellow mesh-back baseball cap. His breathing was shallow and now he was shaking his head. "Nope, I knew it awright. There was somethin' wrong with you." Walking up to her, he grabbed her pants by the pockets and pulled them down in one motion. Then he stood nose to nose again and whispered, "Herrrrrr..."

Licking his lips, he forced his hand again between her legs. "Nope. Nothing there. Ya like that, my hand up there? Is that why you came in here? To look at some junk during the break? Betcha like that, don't ya? Maybe you go into boy's restrooms and diddle them at the urinals. Is that what you do, sicko?"

Thecla swallowed, shaken, "No, you don't understand. I don't even think of men like that anymore. I'm not interested in boys. I've given my body to God..."

Henry put his right hand in her face and shoved her head against the wall. "So you're some kind of lesbo but you're telling me you're some kind of angel or somethin'? You don't make no sense. Ain' no way God made ya like this. He made

men and women. Don't know what you are. Maybe ya just didn't have a real man in yer life." He took her right hand in his left and forced it between his own legs.

"It's not like that," she cried. "In Christ there is no male or female. I made myself male to live the gospel as Christ Jesus taught his own disciples. 'When you make the male and the female one and the same, then you will enter the Kingdom'".

"Are you telling me Jesus was a girl? I never read nothin' like that. You tellin' me he walked into bathrooms to diddle little boys? Don' think so. Boys," Henry spoke with a smile, "let's send this 'male' into the 'kingdom'." With that, he grabbed the carpenters' knife in his pocket and slit Thecla's throat.

She shuddered and shook, silently until, blood soaking into her overalls, she went limp and crumpled to the floor.

"Take this piece a...," he exhaled through gritted teeth, "into the ladies' room and throw her in a stall. Give the 'king' a porcelain throne and let God take care of her. Then we gotta get back to work. After I take my piss."