

Words: 1000

Next Week

He sat on the floor with his legs tucked underneath his body, his feet folded together and his weight entirely held up by his right arm. He played with his truck. His mother's friend gave him the toy a while ago and he liked to play with it on the carpet in his mothers room. It swerved and skidded in the soft, pile of the carpet as it sped through the sharp corners of the

icy road in the Alps. The snow fell and then melted slightly and then fell again, creating layers of the most slippery surface. No one else was brave enough to drive this route on the highest road in the world, but someone had to haul these Ferrari 458's. Last time he did it, they were so impressed he made it without any damage, they just gave him one. He jumped right into it and drove home as fast as he could.

"Mom, what's the highest road in the world?"

She didn't say anything.

"Mom?!?" he shouted.

She still didn't say anything.

"MMMMMMOOOOOOOAAAA," he screamed so hard his voice cracked.

She came running out of the bathroom wearing a dirndl skirt and a bra. She wore red lipstick and eye makeup and no shoes. She fixed her right earring with both hands. "Jesus, Gab, what is it?"

"What's the highest road in the world?" He said without looking up from his truck. He absentmindedly blew raspberries in the air and screeched as the truck turned.

"I don't know, hun, I'm late as it is."

"Yes you do."

"No, Gab, I don't know."

"Comeon."

She walked passed him and around the bed to her closet.

"Probably in the Alps or something, I don't--SHIT," she screamed. She picked up one of his other cars and threw it across the room. "Gabriel, how many goddamn times do I need to tell you to pick up after yourself."

He jumped up straight, eyes wide and mouth open. "I'm sorry mommy. I'm sorry." He ran up to her and hugged her. He buried his face into her soft belly and wrapped his arms around her waist, clasping his hands above her left hip bone. "I didn't mean to hurt you." She smelled like soap and flowers.

She breathed out slowly and leaned over and kissed the top of his hair. "It's fine. It didn't hurt. Just please clean up after yourself. I'm just late already and this guy . . . I don't know, he's fine I guess, but he just keeps texting me about it. I don't even really want to go. I'll probably be home early, maybe even before you go to bed, but you be good for Ms. Nori. She said you could stay with her tonight. You listen to her and go to bed when she says so. But I'm sure I'll be back before then. I'm just getting a drink with this guy and that's it. I probably won't even see him again."

"Can we go to the restaurant? Can we go to the place with the hamburgers and the toys and the playground? Can we go together?"

"Baby, maybe next week. Work is so hard right now and money is tight and we just can't afford it. But maybe next week. And maybe next week we can go to the woods. You remember me telling you about the woods from when I was a kid?"

Gab nodded.

"You remember me telling you about the sounds surrounding you and the silence. The movement and the stillness. You remember that right? Maybe next week we can go there, too."

Still holding on to her, Gab looked up and said, "What happened to Bruce. I liked him. He gave me toys."

"Yeah, baby, I liked him too, it's just that . . . I don't know hun. He must not have liked me. Maybe, he didn't think I was pretty enough."

"I think you're pretty."

She bent down and looked him in the eyes and smiled. She kissed him on the forehead and pulled back and rubbed the lipstick off his forehead. "Thank you."

Ms. Nori tucked him into a hastily made bed on the couch. As she turned off the light, Gab said, "Ms. Nori? Shook-DEE-aw."

She laughed lightly. "For what Mr. Gabriel?"

For making me dinner and letting me stay here until my mom comes home and everything that you do."

"Such a polite young man you are. Your mother raised you right, didn't she? Good night, sweet."

"I am going to stay up until mom comes home. She told me she would be home before I go to bed."

"Mmmm," she said as she walked into her bedroom and shut the door. She turned on the tv and Gab could hear the faint laugh track through the door and see the flickering of the light thru the crack.

Gab struggled to keep his eyes open in the dark. His head rested on the pillow and his body rested straight out like a plank of wood. He stared up at the ceiling counting the tiles. He noticed the patterns of the bumps on each tile. They mixed and swirled in the darkness and slowly hypnotized him. His eyelids grew heavy and he quickly closed them. He saw the swirling bumps on the back of his eyelids and then again in his dream.

Some time later, Gab woke up from laughter coming from the hallway. It came out high pitched and loud and then stifled. It was his mother's. He sat up and looked at the door, knowing it would open up and she would sweep him up in her arms and kiss him on the forehead and carry him to his own bed. He heard a door open and then close and then a man's laughter.

Gab laid back down and closed his eyes and imagined the sounds of the woods around him until he fell asleep for the rest of the night.

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