

PISCES

It's been a shit job, shit pay, shit bosses, shit coworkers. Everyone always has to shit.

Luckily, I found out why early on, like two or three weeks in when Ms. Marla asked me to help her make the instant coffee for the break room. I went to get the cauldrons to boil the hot water and she rolled in there, holding the outdoor hot-water hose between her bright flavor-of-the-month acrylic nails like one handles a diaper, and poured it directly into the coffee dispenser.

“That takes too long,” she added dryly, eyeing me as I put the cauldrons away.

We waited in silence as it filled; only the water had to say *shhhhhh*. When it was full, she turned off the tap and told me to put the hose away while she “tinkled” in the bathroom before everyone else “stunk it up.”

Never drank the coffee after that.

I put up with the job, at first, for the pussy. I'd never had the pleasure of knowing a woman in high school, for various reasons. Then all my friends with the grades or the money went off to college. I had the grades, good enough, but my dad had already given up his musical career for alcoholism. No one wants to hear a violinist with a tremor. My mom, too proud to ask for help, found a job at a grocery store and moved to her own apartment the day after I moved the tassel. Most kids got money for their graduation present.

Those college friends of mine started coming home and telling me about all the pussy they were getting. This was back in the 80s where baseball cards and bushes were in style. They talked about all the different ones they'd collected...Landing Strips, Martinis, Dirty Martinis, Lightning Bolts...

My mouth would be salivating. I thought, I never knew hair could make me so horny! They praised all the tight pussies they'd stuck their pricks in, lamenting all the loose ones.

It's them who said it...I would never.

But I wondered to myself, should I just fuck my cousin's friend, red-haired Leo, who used to say, "You're so pretty, Salvatore" as he ran his fingers through my curly black hair...just to know how it feels? I'd also heard (as well as surmised) that an asshole is tighter than a pussy.

It never came to that. I got this job at a fruit warehouse, a produce company you would call it, just so I could have the money to take a date out for dinner. I imagined rolling up a fork-full of pasta and nice red gravy, putting it on a piece of garlic bread and stuffing it into a pretty mouth. After I shook hands with the rotund, gray mustachioed hiring manager, I imagined the fantastic scene ending in loud moans that interrupted the classy ambience of the Italian place. My hand was shaking with excitement as I filled out the direct deposit slip.

But I never took anyone my age out because this Hawaiian 40-year-old named Shelly started sharing cigarettes with me and telling me what it meant that I was a Pisces.

She said, "You go with the flow too much."

I swam right into her bed. An excited, scared little minnow, I was. After work, we'd drive a good fifteen minutes down the road from the warehouse because the manager had a thing for her and I was only 17 at the time. (You're wondering about the math...I was a gifted kid in elementary school and skipped a grade). We'd pull off at the park-and-ride. I'd park by the entrance, close to the north-bound exit. She'd pull up in her pick-up, slow enough for me to get in without ever stopping—like one of the conveyor belts at work, where we'd pick off the rotten or underripe fruit before it made its way down the line toward public consumption.

We'd go southbound to her apartment. The first night, she told me all about her horrible ex and outlined where the horrible, big bruises had been. All that was left were horrible tattoos. This show-and-tell required Shelly taking off her clothes. There I was, still wearing white, juice-

stained overalls and a baby blue hat that said Pinkelman's Produce, sitting on Shelly's ratty corduroy couch, tracing the hair from her arms to her nipples with my eyes and trying to guess what style was hiding under those cotton panties.

She wouldn't stop talking about herself, even as I got involved. I wondered to myself, is it just in the movies where everything stops and there's some kind of gravitas to these things? She was unzipping me and kissing me and defrocking me, all while telling me the circumstances of each of her DUIs. Running her hand up and down my leg, she said, "When you're going just down the street is when they get you. I've driven 40 miles hammered and gotten away Scott-free."

I couldn't help thinking about how sad and pathetic her life was, especially compared to my own. Poor and directionless, maybe, yet still on the verge of happening.

Shelly went on talking. She was complaining about her ten-year anniversary party when I lost my virginity. I almost said "bush" out loud when I felt its shape against me. But was it tight? What was loose? Could it feel looser because my dick was smaller? I needed to see a line-up to make sure I could accurately interpret my findings.

One thing was certain. Those middle-age breasts had ripened to perfection! When I squeezed them, I imagined a beautiful, orchestral promenade of the watermelons at work, let loose and let free, tumbling down the conveyor belt toward me.

"These would get ten dollars apiece!" I marveled happily.

I tried to explain what I meant. She said, "Don't talk about that place here."

When we were finished, she awarded me a carton of Camel menthol cigarettes. It was her brand, the kind she bummed me at work when she convinced me to pick up smoking. "That gives you an extra five-minute break every couple hours."

“What if I just take the break to get a little fresh air?” I’d asked her.

“That’s not allowed. I knew one girl, she lied about smoking cigarettes and did just that. One day, our dickweed boss happens to join her out there, but he’s all out so he asks to cadge one. She freezes up. Gone the next day. Plus, I got menthols so you won’t even smell like smoke.”

For months, I was parking and riding, smoking menthols in the morning to freshen up for work and scrubbing the dried cum off my stomach in the work bathroom with an extra hairnet. I heard so much about Shelly, every story from her life passing over me like water. She never asked me to respond or remember, only to hold it in my thoughts until the mint, gray smoke trailed out the window.

The only request I made of her was to shave her pussy hair into different shapes. Sometimes, I would get depressed watching a million cherries rolling past me, all the exact same, and think about quitting to find something I really wanted to do. Then I’d think, “Well, Shelly hasn’t done the heart shape yet. I wonder if I can get her to dye it red.”

Shelly’s long gone now but I still think of her sometimes. Mostly, I just think about when she offered me that first cigarette. I told her, “I heard if you smoke menthols, you can never go to space.”

She’d laughed at me so cruelly. It took me years to understand why.