

Underwear for Conformists

You call home and your youngest daughter answers. She's four. She still thinks the receiver is a toy. "Hi, Daddy," she says softly. She's looking at your picture on the wall, the way she does when she's on the phone with anyone. "Cake!" she squeals. The receiver hits the floor. You say hello a few times, but no one responds. You hang up.

You're in the small office that three salesmen share in the back of the building. Known affectionately as The Boiler Room, though it's more like a broom closet. No windows. The walls are dingy yellow because the owner smokes wherever he wants, regardless of Nevada state law.

Today is your daughter's birthday. You're late for the party with your mother-in-law, your sister and her three kids, and the new neighbor with her five-year-old who puts everything in his mouth, including your dog's shit pile. That was somehow your fault, even though they called your dog over to play. You should have trained him not to relieve himself outside.

At this point, your wife would be filming a video of the party so she could prove you weren't there most of the day. More evidence that you're inadequate as a father and husband: the kitchen cabinet you never fixed and feeling-up her sister on Christmas Eve. They're sisters. They were wearing matching red reindeer sweaters. After five shots of 151, you thought she was your wife. Or so you convinced yourself while trying to block out your wife shrieking the next morning. Sister-in-law and nephews not at party. Their gift delivered Sunday by husband.

Despite it all, you wish you were home. But if you don't meet the month's sales quota you won't be able to pay for pre-school. The same school your other two kids attended that ensured they got into the private school your wife is convinced will lead to a good college, guaranteeing your kids will do something more meaningful with their lives than you have.

Since high school, you've worked in the electronics store your father's friend owns. Before that, you ran rides at the state fair so you could see exposed, upside down breasts. Now you sell at least four televisions a week to pay the rent, utility bills, and your wife's department store credit cards. Just before your twenty-year reunion, you were promoted to manager and got a 5% raise on top of your standard 10% commission. A guy at your reunion said, laughing, "Hey, man—remember that lame-o T.V. store you used to work at?" You laughed, then picked up a cigarette butt out of the ashtray and dropped it in his beer while he wasn't looking.

The guys in your old band all went to college, but your dad let your trust fund ride on black and never won it back, which is similar to how he lost your mom. She lives on a beach in Florida now with her new boyfriend—an orange guy named Don who thinks underwear is for conformists. You don't like him because he massages your baby sister's shoulders too often. When he wears shorts, his ball-sack hangs out. He makes a grunting noise drinking water. If he is drunk, his beer dribbles down his chin and collects in clusters of beads on his two-tone gray goatee.

Jaime, the new receptionist, walks in and sits on the edge of your desk. She probably got rejected at the bar last night and wants your attention. You ignore her, but you know it won't last long because she's wearing your favorite skirt with the double bubble ruffle. Short, hot-pink. You complimented her on it when she first started working there—four months ago. She wears it now whenever she wants you inside her. You tell her you're busy. Even though you kind of are, you're testing how bad she wants it because you'd rather not go home smelling like her pussy with a house full of family and friends. But ramming your cock inside her would be a nice tension release before having to deal with your mother-in-law.

Jamie leans across the desk to grab a Post-It pad and pen—shoving her cleavage in your face. She smells like sour beer from the night before. You imagine one of her friends bumping into her and spilling Bud Lite on her bulging breast muffin tops. You're not sure how old she is. She thinks she looks younger than she is. But the Vegas sun marks women in ways you can read like tree rings. She scribbles a note on the pad, then peels off the top Post-It and sticks it to the desk just below your line of sight. You resist looking at it while you finish filling out last week's expense report. She shifts impatiently so you read it: I'm really wet, it says.

She spreads her legs further apart. "Do you like my note?" she asks.

You slide your right hand up her skirt to the top of her thigh and apply pressure—balancing yourself as you stand up. She's not wearing underwear.

She wraps her arms around you. "You like?" she asks again.

You pull her hips toward your pelvis and press against her. You nuzzle her neck—stale perfume; Jasmine and Orris behind her ear.

"Yes," you whisper, then let go and back away.

She's startled and drops her legs. One of her heels hits your desk drawer. A metallic reverb masks the first ring of your phone. You pick up on the third. It's your wife.

"Are you coming or not?" she asks. "We're ready to open presents."

"On my way," you say. Hanging up quickly, you grab your keys and flip the light switch.

"Hey!" you hear Jamie yell from where you left her in the dark.

Passing through the showroom, you think how good you're going to fuck her tomorrow.