

Old News
(An Excerpt)
By: Rachel Harris

It was supposed to be just like any other Friday afternoon. Becky and I had stolen a few of her mom's cigarettes, skipped our last two classes, and walked down to the community college to check out guys. The weather had just taken a turn for the chilly, and every time the wind blew at us, a gust of freezing air went straight down between my boobs.

“Becky, we should have worn jackets. My guh-zoon-guhs are going to fall off.”

“No they won't? That shirt just shows off how huge they are.”

“But I'm cold.”

“Tell me that when you're sixty and they're saggy. Now, stop complaining.”

I groaned and crossed my arms over my chest as we walked. She looked at me from the corner of her eye and smacked my arms back down.

“If you've got them, flaunt them. You've got 'em, so?”

“Flaunt them,” I said, making sure to exaggerate my eye roll.

“That's right, D,” she replied, addressing me by my cup size. I looked down at my overexposed chest and tried to tug the shirt up without her noticing.

“Hey,” she knocked my face up with her index finger. “Chin up. College guys like confidence.”

“Whatever Captain Cosmo, did you read that in the most recent issue?”

She knocked my chin, harder this time, and kept walking. “Chin up.”

Becky was like that, always making sure that we were doing whatever it was to be “most appealing to the opposite sex,” or something like that. She wanted us to be ahead of the rest of the girls in our grade; like it was some sort of race. What to? I didn’t know. Becky and I have always liked to think that we didn’t compete against each other, but it is foolish to think so. Best friends or not, we were always somewhat poised for the other to fall on her face.

I pulled an old Bic lighter out from my cleavage and handed it to her as we walked. She lit two cigarettes and handed one to me.

“I swear to God, if you pull up that shirt one more effin’ time...” Becky said.

I planted my free hand at my side, held the other to my mouth, took a drag of the cigarette, and blew it at her.

“Tara, seriously. You have to take one for the Tiny Titty Team.”

“I know you’re obsessed, but shut up about my rack already. You’re making it weird.”

Becky is actually prettier than me; she just doesn’t exactly know it. She’s too busy obsessing about her lack of boobs, which is stupid, because the ones she already has are the perfect size to fit her tiny, fragile body. I was glancing at the clouds in the sky and enjoying a long drag from the Marlboro when her arm shot out and grabbed hold of me.

“What?” I said sharply, as I pulled my arm from her grasp. I rubbed the spot on my bicep where her hand had been.

“Shh!”

She pulled me toward an information kiosk and pretended to look interested in the papers posted on the bulletin board. I was just about to ask her what her problem was when she tilted her head toward the sidewalk behind the kiosk. I quickly looked and saw the reason for our

detour: two guys on long boards, heading in our direction. I stifled a giggle and joined Becky in looking at the ads. Nissan Altima, \$2500, OBO. Experienced babysitter, please call. Need computer lessons? Blah blah blah.

“Dibs,” I whispered.

“Whatever, Tara.”

“No, seriously. Watch me spit some game.”

“Don’t you worry, I will.”

I kept glancing up until the two guys were about to speed by us. I stuck my hand in my back pocket and prepared one of my most well-rehearsed smiles. I was forming some terribly adorable thing to say when--

“Hey, nice board,” she said, one-upping me, and locking eyes with the boy closest to us. Leave it to Becky to play up ‘board’ as an innuendo.

He offered me a small smirk, but nodded at Becky. They passed and she looked at me and shrugged. The light butterflies in my stomach momentarily became torpedoes.

“What the hell was that? I called dibs.”

“Well, didn’t seem like you were doing anything about it.”

“I was formulating.” I slugged her arm as I watched them finally disappear into the parking lot. I glanced at Becky, but she was just staring at the bulletin board.

“Hey, hello? Becky, you in there?” I flicked her ear. She swatted me away.

“Whatever, old news,” she said. I started to protest, but she kept talking over me. “D, did you see this one?” Her finger was glued to an ad that read: Nude sculpture model wanted. No experience needed. Must be 18 or older. Will be compensated. Please call Bill.

I laughed. “Yeah, so?”

“You should do this,” she said, tapping the paper.

She had to be shitting me. There was no way on Earth I was going to get naked for some random guy named Bill.

“No, really. Tara, do it,” Becky continued.

“Uh, no,” I said and started to walk in the direction of the closest picnic bench.

“What? This is a great idea. You’ve got the body. And he’ll pay you,” she hollered at me.

I quickly scurried back over to her and told her to keep her voice down.

“Still no. And, you know Becky, just in case you’d forgotten, I’m not eighteen...”

“So? Lie. It’s not like he’s going to ID you.”

“What if he kills me or something?”

“Ugh, Tara. He’s not going to kill you. It’s just an ad on this bulletin board; it’s totally legit.”

“Since you’re so keen on the idea, why don’t you do it?”

“You’re such a chicken shit. I knew you wouldn’t do it,” she shrugged.

“I just have a brain, thank you very much.”

Becky stuck her cigarette in her mouth and started to flap her arms as if they were wings. Then, she chanted ‘chicken shit’ and clucked repeatedly until at least four people stopped and were staring at us.

I could feel the color crawling across my skin; the flush reaching my cheeks, my neck, and of course, my breasts. I tore the paper off the bulletin board. Fuck that, I’ll show her ‘old news.’

I folded it and stuck it down the front of my shirt. "I am not a chicken shit."

Becky smiled and threw her arms around my shoulders.

Late Sunday night, Becky and I sat on her bed, after having eaten six cupcakes each. I was picking blue nail polish off of my fingers, and Becky was practicing her signature. My entire body has been tense since I called Bill a few hours ago. He sounded nice enough. We chatted awkwardly for a moment before he started asking me questions. Was I eighteen? Yes (I lied). Was I comfortable being nude for an extended period of time? Yes (I lied again). Was I busy on Monday? No (I lied a third time).

"So, you don't think he's hot?" Becky said.

"Definitely not. He sounded like he was in his sixties or something," I paused, "Oh, and by the way, I still hate you."

"Hey, you didn't have to call Bill. It wasn't like I had a gun to your head or something," she said, rolling on her back and pointing the pen at me.

"But you were cluckin' around like an idiot. It was the only way to get you to stop."

"I didn't think you would actually call...but, you know what I bet? I bet you actually want to do it. That it makes you all horny or something."

I told her that she was a moron and she replied by asking me, the one who had made the phone call, who the real moron was.

"Shit. I wish I hadn't said I would do this. Think I can just bail?" I said.

"Dude! He's going to pay you three hundred dollars! Obviously don't bail."

“Why do I ever listen to you, with your dipshit ideas? This is super-slut behavior,” I rested my forehead in the palm of my hand.

“Oh, c’mon. It’s not that bad,” Becky said.

“What business do I have getting naked for some guy who I don’t know and then getting paid for it? Oh my God, I’m totally a prostitute. I’m a sixteen year old prostitute.”

“Tara, it’s not prostitution, it’s art.”

“So, I’m an artistic prostitute?”

“No, D. You’re not having sex with him, so obviously you’re not a prostitute. Just be happy that you are hot enough to be sculpted and get over it.”

“Okay, well in case I go missing, his name is Bill Robinson. And he lives a few blocks north of the mall.” I didn’t just want, but I expected, Becky to stop rewriting her own name, and take this down. But, it was Becky. And she didn’t.

“Uh huh. All righty. When are you going over there again?”

“Tomorrow. I’m just going to ditch school. Will you cover for me, if anyone asks?”

“Sure,” Becky said, but I knew she wasn’t really listening. I glared at the back of her head. My stomach turned over. I had the same feeling I get when I’ve had one too many burritos at Taco Bell. Or, maybe it was the cupcakes. I repeated the phrase *you’re not going to vomit* over in my head more times than I can count. My breath caught in my throat then, and I felt like needles were poking the back of my eyeballs. I blinked repeatedly, refusing to allow myself to cry with Becky.

“Hey, Becks?”

“Hmm?” Becky said, as she got off the bed and walked toward the light switch.

“Will you come with me tomorrow?”

“Not a chance,” she said, flipping the light off.

“Bitch,” I said into the darkness.

“Love you.”

I literally had to pry my hand off the doorknob as I left Becky’s house for the bus stop. I was wearing baggy jeans and a hooded sweatshirt. The fabric sat on my body in such a way that I was certain this Bill guy would take one look at me and decide that I was too unfortunate to be sculpted. Maybe he would send me home before I even had to remove my clothes.

He’ll just send me home, I thought. Yup, just right back home. Maybe I’ll even be able to get back to school by lunch. No harm done.

I took the number six bus all the way to the mall. I followed the directions he had given me until I approached a house that I am certain was his. If I had not literally been shaking, I bet part of me could have appreciated how nice the house looked. There was a small front porch, with a swing. The shutters were red, and all of the blinds on the front windows were open. There were sculptures hidden amongst the landscaping; some looked like geometric shapes that had just been tossed together, while others looked like small animals. There was even one that looked like a fairy.

I was pretty sure I could have still run away at this point. Except I wasted the few precious moments I had being distracted by their custom mailbox (which, might I add, really looked like a giant paperclip. Maybe it wasn’t supposed to, but it did). In the exact moment I

decided to head back for the bus, the front door opened. I jumped back, hitting the recycling bin that had been left at the curb, spilling part of the contents in the street.

“You must be Dee? I’m Bill,” he said, approaching me as I scrambled to pick up the water bottles and newspaper.

Bill did not match his voice, which was deep but still gentle. His hair was pulled back into a ponytail that was longer than my own. He had a bandana tied around his head, and wore hiking boots that were covered in multicolored splatter marks. He was thinner than I had imagined, younger too. Maybe in his forties instead of his sixties. I would have to remember to tell Becky that even though he wasn’t hot now, I’m pretty sure he was once.

“Yeah, yeah. Dee, that’s me,” only Becky could have appreciated how clever I thought I was being when I told Bill that was my name. Nude model? My name is Dee (just like my cup size)? C’mon, that shit is hilarious. Or, at least it was until I was standing here looking at Bill. Even in his bandana and splattered shoes, he seemed too upstanding for some single-syllable, reference-to-my-boobs type name.

Bill reached out and shook my hand. “Well Dee, I appreciate you coming by. We’ll head back to my workshop and get started.”

I swallowed hard, cursed Becky’s existence, and followed Bill into the house.

It smelled like plaster and fresh fruit as soon as we entered. I could taste both on my tongue; the plaster was chalky, and the fruit was sweet.

“Hey honey? Dee’s here!” Bill yelled, through a doorway, “my wife,” he said to me, using his thumb to gesture into the room where she must have been.

Then, one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen came to join us. She looked like she belonged in one of Becky's magazines. She had long hair that flowed over her shoulders. She was wearing an apron, and was holding a knife in one hand and half of an orange in the other.

"Dee, so nice to meet you. I'm Katherine I would shake your hand, but..." she gestured to her own. I smiled and nodded. "Have you had breakfast?"

"No," I would have thrown up anything I'd eaten at home. So, instead, I drank two glasses of water and called it a meal.

"Like some? I'm trying to make fruit crepes. Not sure how they'll turn out, but if you're brave, you might be in luck," she laughed. I laughed with her and told her I would love some. Bill told me to follow him; Katherine would bring the food back when it was ready. He used air quotes when he said ready, but I wasn't sure why.

We walked down a hallway into the last room in the house. There were three skylights and windows lining almost every wall. There were tarps strewn about, tools and buckets sitting on tables and hanging on the walls where there were no windows. The floor was covered in splatters the same color as the ones on Bill's shoes, which made me feel at ease. I can't explain why.

"Ever done this before?" Bill asked. I shook my head. He spent the next twenty minutes explaining what it meant to do what he called 'life-casting.' The gist of what he said was that I still was going to have to be naked, and that that was what mattered. I guess there were also a few little bits about being covered in some sort of goo (which he didn't call goo, but that's what it basically was), and then being covered in strips of some sort of material, and then having it peeled off. But, really, I was just focused on the whole getting naked thing.

“All right Dee, there is a screen over there, if you would feel more comfortable changing behind it. We’ll get started when you’re ready,” he smiled at me. I nodded quickly, and then walked behind the screen.

I had started to tremble again, and I was making myself take deep breaths. Bill was going to be the first person, who wasn’t Becky or my mom, to see me naked. I tightly clamped my jaw down to keep it from chattering and was about to run out of the workshop when I heard Becky’s voice in my head “If you’ve got them, flaunt them. You’ve got them, so?”

“Flaunt them,” I said.

“Sorry?” Bill said from behind the screen. I clapped my hand over my mouth, not having intended to say that out loud. I laughed awkwardly and said it was nothing. I quickly yanked the sweatshirt over my head, which pulled the rubber band from my hair. I took off my jeans and underwear next. Lastly, I removed my bra, which looked cute when I bought it, but now, after too many washes, it had lost its form. I took one last deep breath and stepped out from behind the screen.