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Concessions

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CONCESSIONS

MARIAN
CROTTY

As much as Ricky couldn't claim to love me, I'm the one who sees him sleep, and he's a screamer. The kind with nightmares telling you something not so good about his childhood, but I'm quiet, same as him, when my fingers get twined up like a claw. Nobody thinks there's something off about him, but with me it's obvious. I'm thirty-four and I can't stand up straight. Can't run. Can't open a pickle jar. When Ricky wants to fuck me, he's got to carry me up a whole flight of steps to the bed. Before I ever show him my tits, the man is breathing funny.

At work, he's a cliché. Mr. College Athlete. Mr. Young Denzel. Twenty two years of fast-twitch muscle. Behind the concession stand, everybody wants to talk up his body and how good they'd be to him if only he gave them a chance. When I excuse myself to wipe the blue slime from under the ICEE machine, they think I'm nervous because every one of them figures me for a virgin.

I get my stool in front of the counter and edge the rag along the metal seam where the blue syrup dries in puddles, my hand back and forth real slow until the stuck-on sugar loosens. The bleach strips the pads off my fingers, but wearing gloves won't work. My hands don't move like that.

"I bet he's hung how I like," I say, which, unfortunately, is not as true as you'd think. "Bet he's got something good down

There's a beat where everybody slows down and wants to consider if somebody has done me the favor of fucking me after all, but I do not look up. I can picture what they are: Miss Amy trying not to drop the box of Snickers she's shelving, and little blonde Lou-Ann giggling into her Seventeen Magazine's No-Tan Tips.

"I'd be happy to investigate," Miss Amy says, punctuating the syllables to make it dirty.

"I know it," I tell her, and I'm careful, getting up from my stool.

In the walk-in, I stand under the cool air vent. Back here, it's mostly hot dogs and fountain drink syrup, but it always smells like cilantro. I press my back against the metal wall and lift up my shirt, fold down the top of my bra to let my breasts breathe until my nipples go hard. Last night, in his sleep, Ricky reached for me. I could hear his teeth grinding, a high-pitched, nails-against-the-chalkboard kind of squealing, and so I put my swollen knuckles up to his jaw and rubbed until his mouth opened and his muscles went slack, and then he was awake, and I was in his arms, his smooth chest against my bare back, two sets of legs bent at the same awkward angle so we'd fit together.