

Heels.

by Caitlin Spivey

Why am I attracted to this girl?

She's beautiful. Only five foot four, but still looks skyscraper tall thanks to those skinny greyhound legs of hers. She told me she used to dance, then giggled and said she hadn't since she was five years old.

God, she's tiny. I walked her home and she jumped two steps up her porch so she could be taller than me, and then she leaned forward to hug me. Even with all that, even with the distance, even with her still wearing her book-bag, my elbows crossed as I hugged her. Tiny. Maybe I'm just big, but still, there's no denying that she's small. Tiny, like a child.

There is something childlike about her.

The night I met her—but that's wrong. We were in a class together, so I'd known her before. I'd seen her and wanted to talk to her, but never got a chance. It wasn't a big deal. But the night I really *noticed* her, she was all done up. Not like a child at all. She wore a black pencil skirt, a trim little black cardigan with a lacy, almost revealing collar, and these shoes. It was the shoes that got me. Red patent leather heels, four inches at least. She wore them like they were nothing. (She told me she'd worn them to dance in a show.) I was able to see maybe a foot of bare leg: smooth, pale, muscled, skinny calf that disappeared under that black skirt. God bless the inventor of pencil skirts, though. It was tight enough that even though I was deprived the pleasure of looking at her skin, I got the full effect of her shape. I was more than able to visualize those long thighs. More than imagining them under the skirt, I could see them pulled apart, wrapped around me.

The rest of her fit this image too. She has these long, pretty fingers with long, clean nails, and I wanted them raking across my back and tangled in my hair. I looked at that skinny waist (I probably could have put my big hands on either side and touched thumbs and

forefingers) and I knew that if I wanted to, I could pick her up with ease and throw her down on a bed—and I knew she would like it.

I knew, by the way she held her pen between her fingers like a cigarette. Her eyes were on the paper in front of her most of the time, but every now and then she would look up, just with her eyes, and see me looking at her and smile. It was a dangerous smile. She knew what I was thinking, and she wanted me to keep thinking it.

I got to have a conversation with her that night, too. So I asked her, what were the heels for?

“I’m trying to get my boyfriend’s attention,” she said.

There were a lot of things I wanted to say, but I didn’t. I just laughed and smiled and looked back at the paper we were supposed to be workshopping. Whoever she was dating must have either been a huge prick or gay if he didn’t want to fuck her the moment he saw her. It just seemed like the proper, masculine thing to do.

We were sitting next to each other at that point, which had both problems and benefits. I was closer to her, which I simultaneously wanted and was wary of. My staring was much more obvious because of the angles, but we were talking to each other so my looking at her was not out of place. But she didn’t seem to notice. She was wrapped up in my story, staring at it, flipping the pages, running her finger over the text. She only looked up at me a few times, a bright look in her eye.

But I had to know more. The things I had wanted to say had to be said, even obliquely. So I sent her a message demanding an explanation. What was the *purpose* of those heels?

“What do you mean by ‘purpose’?” she responded. “Are you referring to the aesthetic effect of wearing heels on the way a woman’s body looks, or my motivation and the goal I hoped to achieve by wearing them? Or perhaps we could explore the psychological implications of increasing my height through heels and what that does or tries to do to my social position, and the paradoxical relationship between heels being a symbol of power for women in the workplace and also an indicator of instability and weakness.”

She was messing with me. She wasn't a writing major, she was a literature student. They always picked words apart like that. She wouldn't have done it with most people, though. They probably would have given her slightly terrified looks and quickly made some excuse. I just had to smile. I apologized for poorly defining my question and specified my interest in why she wore them.

She said she hadn't been kidding. She had been trying to get her boyfriend's attention. She explained her situation to me. I knew it wouldn't last long. She felt she was being ignored, and women never like to feel ignored.

I told her that her heels had been successful in getting my attention, at least, and after that heels became kind of a joke for us. I sent her a picture of some stripper heels I found in a porn store. She wore these boots to class the next week with a higher heel than before and a wicked point on them. I tried to find her eyes to share a little smile with her over them, but she didn't look at me until halfway through class. She seemed a little more awkward than before.

We walked to my car when the class ended and stood talking for awhile. She wanted to sit down but said that trying to jump up onto my trunk would be a disaster, so we went to the library. We talked about nothing. I can't remember any of it. It was just talking.

We had climbed up a hill to get to the library, and when faced with going down it, she stopped and took her boots off. She stood barefoot on the cold pavement, chilly October dew settling on the ground already at that hour, and smiled.

I didn't know what to say, so I just shrugged and chuckled. She slung the boots over her shoulder and started walking again. She was still walking up on her toes, delicately picking a path across damp asphalt and dirty sidewalks. She tried to cut a corner too soon and had to cross muddy earth at one point, but she laughed and seemed to prefer it to the concrete.

"I'm really a flower child at heart," she said.

I believed it.

This was when she jumped up her porch stairs and I hugged her from below.

She didn't wear heels the next time I saw her. It was probably too cold. She was wearing a sweater and a scarf and a jacket and still shivered. I gave her a story to read, one that I thought needed work. She told me to leave in everything I'd wanted to take out. She asked me if I wanted to take the copy back, and I told her to keep it so she could frame it.

"Why would I frame it?"

I didn't have an answer, so I laughed and shrugged. Then I coughed.

She walked me back to my car.

"I think you could be dangerous for me," she said.

Dangerous, huh?

"Don't get the wrong idea, now. I want to be your friend and I want to use you, but I'm not stupid enough to fall in love with you. It would be easy, but I won't."

I laughed at her. I wouldn't let that happen.

"What have you got to do with it?" she said.

Third parties made it difficult to keep names straight.

"Your third party has no bearing on my emotions. But don't worry, I'll wax taciturn rather than instigate any mistakes for you."

She'd have to try her worst.

"But I won't. I think you're being an ass now."

(That was unexpected. I wondered if there was a female equivalent of emasculation.)

It would make things easier for her, anyway.

Pause. Who thinks before they speak?

"Ah, none of it's easy. I do it to myself. Sometimes I think it gives my life more depth, but it doesn't. I'm sorry I called you an ass."

And then I realized it. Here was the modernist epiphany. She chose her words just as carefully as any writer. She played her life like a story. The only problem with that was this: life doesn't stop at the end of a pretty, artistic moment. Something has to come afterwards, but no one ever writes that.

She must have gotten tired of wondering what came next.

