

Marion, Texas

by Johnny Dantonio

Marion had decided to stop whenever she came upon Amarillo. It was close to two a.m. when she pulled into the motel parking lot. Momma, read the nametag on the woman at reception. Her face was illuminated by a TV. Her hair curlers were illuminated by the lone desk lamp behind her. The two women hardly said a word as Marion slid two twenties from the waistband of her mesh shorts. Momma responded with a key.

The room was on the ground level. Marion was exhausted. She didn't even bother to turn on the light when she entered. She slide off her shorts. Her shirt. Her bra. She laid on the bed overtop the comforter.

A low echo came from a conversation in the room next door. Perhaps a truck driver on the phone. The voice was at first inaudible. Marion's hearing sharpened to the tone.

"Go northwest on one thirty six, about seventeen, eighteen miles once you're out of here. It'll feel like desert. You'll see three white silos next to a iron barn-type place. That's it there."

Marion rolled onto her back. She closed her eyes and slowly began to breathe out of her nose. Her tongue comfortably sat on the bottom row of her teeth and pressed to the roof of her mouth. She spread her legs apart to cool the warmth generated from the drive.

"There'll be a white neon welcome sign above the door, door with a bit of a tiny window on it. Three knocks with a closed first on the iron door. Then three taps with the tip of your pointer finger. It'll take about a minute but you'll hear it unlock. I think they do it with a remote control, because no one is going to be behind the door. Just

this concrete hallway and a little of that neon light getting in. Walk down it."

She tilted her head back and pushed her jaw toward the ceiling to adjust herself. She kept her eyelids closed. The air conditioning in the room kicked on and blew across her skin. Her lips opened at the center. She began to breathe deeper through both her mouth and nose now.

"With every step away from the door it gets a bit darker. You'll go about ninety feet and turn right. They'll be this wooden door frame covered with a black curtain and that's the room there."

Marion wondered if moving onto her stomach would mute the man next door. Her breasts pressed to the polyester of the comforter. Her posterior now benefited from the cool of the ac. She gently pushed her hips down into the mattress.

"Now, I never seen it less than about fifty perfect full, but no one will look up or anything. They'll be three rows of old, blue movie chairs. 8 chairs a row, maybe. Padded butt and back, metal frames, shared arm rests. No light gets back there except the one above the stage, pointed at the girl. She'll be tied, gagged, mascara dark beneath her eyes."

Her arms sprung with chill bumps. She moved them beneath her body. Her flat hands rested on the inside of her hips. Her idle fingertips grazed her inner thighs. She arched her back.

"She is positioned to where she has to face out towards the crowd. Eventually, they bring out a guy to drag the tip of a knife down every inch of her body. He wears a mask the whole time. Makes her spread her legs for it. Throws her neck back when the point circles her nipples."

Marion clenched around her middle finger and then rejoined it with the others. She applied a delicate pressure in a small circular motion. Her eyes never opened.

"Makes her suck on the blade a bit then tells her to stand and turn around. Cuts off the wrist ties then puts that knife inches away from her face, right between the eyebrows. He'll stay just like until everybody's gone. She'll reach back and spread, and that's the green light. First row gets up first, right to left. Just like communion."

