

Caitlin's Boots

by Mark Reep

Telan's roommate says Papa Razzi's homeless, probably a convicted ped-ass too. Telan prefers to imagine good light, a window that opens. Chloe says fine. Look, at least admit the darker likelihood of nicotined walls serial killer-papered with every girl who's ever gone to Chaney. Well, the hot ones. Like us. Chloe laughs like a boy. Telan says shut *up*, here he comes.

Today he's got a new line: Child, where'd you get those *boots*.

Chloe rolls her eyes.

Telan says they were my sister's.

He nods unsurprised or unhearing. Grab a shot?

Why not. Telan puts her feet up on the table. Papa crouches, fires away. You got a buckle broke.

The sun's in Telan's eyes. I know, she says. They're beat.

He shakes his head. Just need some attention. I know your sister. She don't say much to me.

Everything stops. Telan's hands are someone else's. They slip her shades on, bring her beer.

He's still shooting. Saw you Parents Weekend. Hadda be her, looks just like you, right? Guess she's all you got, huh?

Chloe makes a noise. Telan's beer's warm. She drinks it anyway.

He straightens, lowers his camera, studies her. Hope you don't mind my askin', but the way you were sittin', nobody talkin'— Made me wonder, you know she was there?

Chloe says what?

His eyes are pale blue, watery, misaligned. You have to pick one. Telan says carefully: Is she on your card?

Chloe's staring at her. Papa looks pained. It ain't big enough, I got to clean it off, nights. I got her on my hard drive. I do. I ain't lyin'.

Some detached part of her makes a decision. Digs in her moneypocket, finds a crumpled ten.

Next time bring me an 8 x 10. Okay?
Telan, Chloe says. Telan waves her off.
He squints at the ten. Twenty I can do staples.
She doesn't understand. Oh: Staples.
He nods. It's farther, I gotta catch a bus. But Kinko's sucks.



Halfway across the bridge, Chloe can't stand it anymore. Telan.
What the *fuck* was that.

Telan shrugs. He'll leave us alone now.

Chloe stops, grabs Telan's arm. An Asian kid bumps into them.
Sorry.

Chloe says wait. So—

We won't see him again. And twenty's cheap.

Chloe stares at her. So no sister?

Just you, roomie, Telan says. Just you.

Chloe's not buying it, pulls her to the rail. You were *crying*. And you cry in your *sleep*. She lets go Telan's arm. You can *tell* me, you know?

For a moment Telan wants to. Really does. But if she does, she's not Telan anymore, she's the girl whose crazy sister killed herself, who's crazy now too, better keep her off the bridges...

A line of bikes goes sailing by. An auburn-haired girl's keeping up on an old mountainbike, a blue one, like Caitlin had. Chloe says *Telan* but she needs to see, steps down off the curb: *Caitlin?* And Caitlin looks up, and it *is* her, and she's smiling. Lifting one finger to her lips: *Shh...*

A horn honks, brakes squeal, Chloe's screaming, pulling at her. She's lying on the sidewalk. Her shin hurts. Her knee. Chloe kneels beside her. Ring of kids staring. I'm good, she says. I'm good. Her head's ringing. Where's my sketchbook.



I'm sorry, Chloe says. I get pushy. I'm sorry.

They're resting on the Harmon Museum's steps. Telan's shin throbs. It'll be an ugly bruise.

Not your fault. I thought—

(Caitlin smiling: *Shh.*)

What? Chloe says.

Telan shakes her head. Doesn't matter.

Chloe sighs. Scooches over, puts her arm around Telan. No. It doesn't. Just— Fucking pay *attention*. Okay?

Nobody's held her in forever. Telan wants to say something funny, wants to say thank you. She can't.

