

Getting Put On

by Melissa Ann Chadburn

There are times when I run out of places to sleep. I thought my whole life that god gave up on me. The newspaper bin is where I go when I'm desperate. In the center of town there's a large bin for recycling newspapers behind a Mobil gas station. The first time we went in there all of our friends had gone home for the evening. Allie and I were sitting on the corner chatting trying to fill up time. We acted casual but knew we had nowhere left to go. We were hoping someone older would stroll through that had a parentless place to sleep. We saw a cop car coming up the street. Casually Allie stood, looked at me, "Five-Oh."

I got it. I walked beside him. We acted like we were going on a slow stroll with patient measured steps and pensive faces. We walked to the back of the Mobil station, saw the large green metal gate. He opened the gate, and I stepped inside. I was unsure. Inside it was a bin filled with newspapers waiting to be recycled. He quietly shuffled the papers around, arranging a clean top layer and then he motioned for me to sit. I did. He covered me up with another layer of newspapers and then snuck beside me. It was cold so he held me close his arm around my waist, his hand crept up my shirt and cupped my breast. We did all this without speaking. My mind was racing but I kept quiet and pretended to sleep. When I looked up I saw small veins of ice cream caked down the inside wall. I didn't want to think about what was lurking below us.

Cockaroachcockaroachcockaroaches I thought, and not the small ones but the big kind you spot on the sidewalk. Their thin long disc-like bodies fluttering about maybe a long tentacle slowly titillating my arm or cheek or eyelid as I pretended to sleep. I pretended to have night terrors. I let out a slight moan and squeezed Allie closer. I needed him to be close.

I learned early on about the difference between girls and boys. The difference between girls and boys is how you get put on. I don't want to brag but I want to be as honest as possible, so I will tell you

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I'm an extraordinary 13-year-old. I spend a lot of time on the streets with other kids whose parents don't care. Not to say that my mom doesn't care. She cares very much, too much, but she also locks me in closets so I run away to punish her. On the streets I play mom to boys and sometimes men up to ten years older than me. I watch over taggers and petty gangsters. On nights during one of my mom's many cooling off periods, I go to Westwood Village, the college town bordering UCLA. I sit at the Carl's Jr. drinking a small cup of fast food coffee smoking Djarum 500 clove cigarettes.

If you look out the window you'd see lights from the movie theatre on the corner. There are cars and big white busses with orange and yellow stripes. The college kids walk around owning this neighborhood with their school paraphernalia. "Go Bruins!" in round bubbly letters at every corner. Every day carries the cheer of a sporting event. The guys I watch over, they're different. Mismatched, the children of movie stars. They range in age from thirteen to twenty-four. They wear well-pressed baggy pants, ironed white T-shirts. The girls are punk rock, vintage dresses, white powder on their faces dark eye make-up, black lipstick, torn fishnets. This is the part of town where you could take a bus in any direction to their rich neighborhoods, or my working class neighborhood. That's what brought us here. My eastbound bus status gives me street credit. I met these rich kids because I found mostly it was rich people in Los Angeles that let their kids hang out all night. I was always a chameleon I learned how to fit in well with whoever I was around. I mostly watched. I watch them do drugs, snorting coke off the plastic table-tops through a straw or smoking weed in the nearby park.

We go to the park when someone is gonna get put on. If it's a guy, I sit on a giant elephant shaped slide, made of smoothed out stone, my Doc Martens propped against the inside of the trunk slope of the slide while the guys circle each other, one kid in the middle of the circle posturing back rounded, elbows up. They look like boys imitating gorillas imitating vultures, circling. Then suddenly the first blow comes. If the kid is bold it's a direct face to face, if he's new in

the crew, young and needs to prove his abilities it came from behind. I begin counting 1-2-3 until I hit 30. Smoking and counting, with an air of disinterest. At 30 they stop. The swarm dies down. The punches turn into hugs. The guy from the center is bloody. He lay slumped in the corner, his nose and eyes always the mushiest part of him. Wet gobs of blood. Sometimes an eye already swollen half shut. Almost every time, as if part of the ritual, he says, "Ahhh man I think you broke my nose." Most often it isn't broken. Zoso, who at 24 is the oldest of the guys, takes credit for any of the serious damage. But that's how the guys get in.

If a girl wants to get put on it's a different story. The guys run a train on her. The girl walks straight forward ready, or sometimes drunk, slowly, eyes to the ground. The guys all start modest, hands in pocket, feet shuffling dirt. It happens in the elephant. I can't watch. Especially if the girls are really drunk, it makes me hate them. By them, I mean the girls and the boys but mostly the girls. It reminds me of my mom. Little punk rock versions of my mom.

These girls want nothing but acceptance and are willing to give away so much. This ritual usually takes much longer. They start with drinking. Something hard like Jagermeister. I sit on a bench facing the swings. When the process starts the girl props herself up on the elephant. You could tell the virgins from the ones that had done it before. The older more experienced girls prop themselves up backward like a kid hopping onto a kitchen counter. The virgins climb forwards pushing their weight up and clambering onto the elephant one leg at a time. So exposed. They don't know.

When I see a girl climb up on the elephant I leave my bench and go to the swings. I sit on the swing that's lowest to the ground. The swing for grown-ups. Sand sifts in and out of my shoes. I don't wear socks. I could feel the sand sifting in and out and between my toes. I look over occasionally and see the line form. From where I'm sitting I can make little things out and fill in the blanks. One guy leaves the elephant another one unbuckles his belt. He doesn't have to bother because his pants are so big they fall off his flat hips. He does it anyways. Some take off their boxers some walk forward with

their cock hanging out the slit in front. The guy waiting next in line warms himself up. Spits on his hand, strokes himself. He wants to appear big. He jokes awkwardly while he's waiting with the other guys in line. For them to fuck a girl in they would maybe pump twice.

These boys are too young to really efficiently have sex. Well, this was only true if Zoso wasn't there. Most of the time he doesn't participate but occasionally he'll take an interest. From my spot on the swing I imagine them pulling her closer to them, a waif of a girl, tiny bones, they'd tear a hole in the crotch of her fishnets and take her from there. Like I said, sometimes she's a virgin, sometimes she had already been molested, most of the times she's one of the guy's girlfriends and already slept with most of them. The only bit that seems impossible to imagine is if Zoso did it. He's big, already a man. The rest of the guys barely had pubes. It's a small leap between a finger and a dick when it comes to young boys my age but not with Zoso. He's tall and olive skinned and hairy. It's rumored he even has kids. I look at the moon. I try to swing towards it curling my feet behind me and then shooting my legs forward keeping my toes pointed. I want to shove myself higher and higher to the moon. Sometimes I get so high I'm afraid the chains around the swing will wrap themselves around the pole. That's when I let my feet touch ground.

