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Boothgirl

YOU DON'T LIKE to rent tapes to play at home. There's no thrill in that. Every girl you know has done that at least once. You get off going to the video booths at Sunrise Arcade, Route 2A in Ampersand Falls. It seemed daring the first time you did it, and it has never stopped feeling that way.

In artsy R-rated movies with erotic content, they show the woman naked presenting herself to a seducer. They show foreplay that's either meant to be awkward or pass as adventurous. They may show tight closeups of the woman's body and they might even show her seducer's ass. But there's a fadeout as the sex begins. You don't see the lovers again until morning. The woman's nudity then is never as flattering as it was during the seduction. She makes attempts to cover up with the sheets. She's disheveled, and he's a little distant. They're in an inexpensive hotel room. When she walks across the floor to the bathroom, she does so without grace. She takes heavy steps and appears a little wobbly on her feet. She's not a kitten anymore. She's a cow. She's heading for the pisser and the only question is will she close the door behind herself. (You hate these movies but you watch them on cable late at night, wishing you could go to the booths to watch something real.)

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The video booths at Sunrise Arcade are on the second floor. The staircase up is narrow and littered and it is not good to meet anyone coming down the stairs. The men coming down the stairs come down the stairs at a fast clip, almost running. At the top of the stairs is a large room with black walls and a row of black lights overhead on a low ceiling. Porn movie posters are on the walls. The booths sit in the center of the room like an island of doors, four doors on each side. One of the doors has a sign that says, Personnel Only. This door has a different kind of knob on it—one that locks from the outside. Behind this door is not a television screen and machine that takes five-dollar bills. Behind this door is a bank of VCRs connected in some smart way to the eleven televisions in the eleven peep booths.

You bring along a smart little flashlight the size of a pen. Just one AAA battery inside. You always have a notebook. You are Boothgirl and you are a poet. MFA from Wadsworth University. A few dozen publications in small but respectable literary journals and a chapbook entitled *Crooked Cleavage Blues*. You're always able to get some writing done in the booths—mostly revision work. That's rare for a writer to find—a place to revise. You don't push it. You bring along one poem. Take it apart a few times in the booth, half-watching the video that's playing.

The men standing outside the booths always seem surprised to see you there. A girl. Mostly they ignore you. Pretend they don't see you. Some of them will nod to you as they nod to one another, but that's it and you don't know what that nod means. Never any conversation. You want to tell them, confidentially, I come here to write. And to play with myself—like you.

Boothgirl earns a living teaching freshman composition and, when you're lucky, an introductory course on literature—The Modern Novel, The American Short Story.

Inside the booth. Fasten the hook-and-eye latch. Insert a five-dollar bill in the machine, and in a few seconds a video will come on. You love most of all the movies of Wax Williams, and it's a special treat to find one showing in the booths. But that's rare. Usually playing are unknown performers. Obscure titles. Lowdown productions. Amateurs. Videos that nobody buys.

A pretty woman with bad skin is sitting alone on a hotel bed. Only the bottom of the seascape above the bed is visible. The fixed shot appears designed to capture the loneliness and horniness of the setting. You feel stupid for noticing such details, but you want to find some deliberate creative thought behind each video. After ten seconds pass, you conclude that the only reason why this woman's legs fall below what can be seen by the camera is because she must have bad legs. You don't want to wait to see this woman's heavy legs flailing in the air while some fatty humps away on top of her. You advance the channel to a gay video. Two slim men stand side by side, masturbating, kissing, giggling. You watch, wondering how long it will take them to start blowing each other. You won't be able to watch much of that, you think. At one time you wanted nothing more than to see that, but once you had, you were bothered. To your mind, men didn't do it right, which was a big surprise. You had expected to learn new techniques and to witness a love for the act and a level of professionalism that you weren't always able to muster. What you saw in your first boy-boy video was disappointing. One guy closed his eyes too tight when he did it and the other guy hardly ever took it in his mouth—it was more of a hand job with some weird licking. You had figured that gay guys were the only ones who gave earnest blowjobs. Wrong.

Boothgirl takes out a notebook and begins to write:

Girls like you aren't born until
highschool. Born at sixteen years old.
You give birth to yourself, you

glamorous creature, you beautiful girl.
But you're so young. Baby woman. You
just started menstruating. You like it.
You like menstruating—you are that
young. Last week your pee-pee had been
an inert slit. Now it's an open mouth, a
gaping open wound, dripping. A
weeping eyesocket with no eyeball. And
hairy. Always wet. Slick. Touch it.

You estimate the dimension of the booth to be four feet by six feet. The walls are painted flat black, and the only lighting in the booth is a forty-watt recessed bulb in the dropped ceiling. The television screen is twenty-seven inches. The television sits in the wall about chest high. There's a thick plexiglass protecting the television screen. Guys cum on the plexiglass. Some of them wipe it off and toss the used tissue and napkins from fast food restaurants and donut shops on the floor. There are built-in seats in some of the booths. They're a bit low for sitting comfortably, but they're at the right height for you to get a leg up.

Boothgirl tells the class, Question every word, every choice. You tell them, Complete poems are sometimes not quite really done. You tell them, You can love a word and find that you have to part with it in the end.

All through high-school your panties were perpetually wet. Soaking wet. The only time your panties were dry was when you weren't wearing them. You thought about sex all day long and masturbated constantly. You looked at porn and read erotica. You liked porn better. You stole three XXX videos from the adult section of the video store, and hooked up the family VCR to the old black and white TV in your bedroom. You faked being sick for a week so you could stay home alone from school and watch these three tapes all day long over and over.

Your first time at the booths you saw nobody, but you knew that you weren't alone. The next time, there were three men standing outside the booths. They each stood alone, but your instinct told you that they had arrived together, all in suits and ties – working men from the offices downtown. Finally they each entered separate booths. The doors from a few closed booths opened then and the men in those booths stepped out and began jiggling the handles of the occupied booths. Some of those doors opened, and the men stepped in. Then you had a stupid realization – something you should have understood before you ever stepped into Sunrise Arcade. Men came to the booths to meet up with other men. It was a cruising spot. They blew each other in the booths.

You went to Tijuana once for spring-break and saw a donkey-show. Everyone was talking about the donkey-show, You gotta go see the donkey-show. And there were so many strip-joints and hookers all over the streets. The donkey-show was at a dirty club that was more like a barn. The show was a woman fucking a donkey. It was insane to see. So loud. Screaming loud. You felt sorry for the woman and sorry for the donkey. People watching, drunk, whooping so loudly, and the donkey was just crazy. Hay on the floor. The woman was pulling on the donkey's tail and his cock, and then she swung herself under the donkey and this old guy strapped her ankles across the donkey's back and guided the donkey's cock into her. Fucking crazy.

Not just damp or moist or humid but slick. Slippery. Syrupy. So you touch it. You rub the middle finger of your left hand against your clit. Then you slide your hand under your panties. Put your pencil behind your ear. You think, rub my hole. And you slip your middle finger inside. Rub. Finger. Finger in your hole. Christ. You feel your whole body heat up. Dark booth. The movie on shows two girls sharing a doubleheaded longdong, their legs like mating scissors.

You like to compare yourself to the women in the videos. You could be truthful with yourself and very objective in seeing that most of these women were built in a way that you weren't. They were almost all very skinny and with big, fake tits. You didn't hold that against them, didn't look down on them for getting boobjobs. Augmentation. Forgetting the tits and the skinny waists and tiny asses, you think your face compares better to almost every woman that you've ever seen in an adult film. You had better hair, too, better styled, at least. Hop, skip, and jump. You could be one of these women. These women like sex and so do you. They had no inhibitions – look at what they did for a living – and you were as close to having no inhibitions as a woman can get and not be in porno.

Boothgirl writes in a little notebook:

The little girl in the picture stood a few feet from her mother with her hands on her hips, just like her mother. She had inherited her mother's facial features and many of her mannerisms. She always listened closely when grownups were talking – she liked hearing what they said, and she used her new words with her playmates.

It was like you had a fever. Your teenage pussy was on fire and you felt your face getting flushed and you sweated too. You couldn't wear makeup most days because you sweated so much, and makeup seemed to make things worse and cause you to sweat more and break out. One day a pig of a boy called you a sweaty bitch. And another boy named Michael Glass stood up for you. He said, Girls don't sweat; they glisten. Oh, you wanted to take Michael Glass home and watch dirty videos with him and fuck him. You wrote in your journal, He has to get inside my wet hole. Michael Glass. My drenched twat. My hot cunt. Michael Glass.

Some days you felt silly being there. In a booth. A poet with a notebook and a pencil, come to revise a work in progress and look at a few dirty movies. Five dollars for every fifteen minutes.

One day in your junior year you wore no panties to school and a short skirt. You could feel how wet you were. Dripping. Dripping pussy. Slippery wet. You wanted to open your legs and let every boy in class fuck you. You took a desk in the back of the classroom and sat in such a way that your skirt was not under your ass. Your ass and wet pussy were right on the chair and the chair was still warm from whoever had sat there during the period before. You could squeeze the muscles in your thighs and ass and feel the lips of your vagina pucker against the warm chair.

And Boothgirl cums. Forget the pre-historic notion that promiscuous women – especially professional sexworkers, strippers, hookers, porno queens – are not orgasmic. Boothgirl is orgasmic. Multiply so. You feel it in the soles of your feet if you're standing. You feel it deep in your still-virgin anus. Your forehead. Your ears. Across your chest. Your puffy nipples. Running up your throat.

You hadn't even menstruated once and you were in the tenth grade. Late bloomer. No tits either. Then when you started getting your period, it didn't come every month. You got it like once every three months, and your friends told you that you were lucky. But your periods hit hard. Not cramps, more like a weight pulling on your pussy. Your legs went numb when you stood. But you liked it. You liked getting your period. Your mind was crazy with thoughts of fucking boys. You ate like a pig. Salty stuff. Sweet stuff. You just wanted a boy in your mouth.

You had a dream about being naked in a booth, so on your next visit you took your clothes off and stood naked in the tiny booth. It did not turn you on. You decided to stay undressed until you

could understand why you weren't turned on. You lit a cigarette—your first in the booths. Fifteen minutes passed. Your television screen went blank. You were going to feed another five-dollar bill into the machine, when you realized that the absolute silence in your booth meant that none of the other booths were occupied. You had a sudden urge to step out of your booth, naked. The thought seemed to be an instruction—a dare—from your dream. You undid the latch on your door and opened it. You stepped slowly out of the booth and walked quickly around the perimeter of the empty arcade.

You heard about Wax Williams from some boys in your algebra class. His cock was as long as his arm and he made porno movies. You stole a copy of the *Well-Hung Jury* from the video store and watched it every day after school. You thought of nothing but Wax Williams all day long. He was from Ampersand, Massachusetts, a college town.

College was freedom and boys who kept their mouths shut and knew better than to talk about girls behind their backs. College boys, you found, would do what you told them. All the girls in your dorm were horny all the time, so you didn't feel like a freak anymore. Your first roommate wanted to kiss you, but you said, no thanks. You said, I'm strictly dickly, and the girl laughed, so you kissed her anyway and then you let that girl eat you out all night long.

Boothgirl makes a list of other places she could go: apartment, a bar (any bar), cemetery (that's a place for poets to go and write), library, shopping, the park, gym, coffee shop. You have to be somewhere.

You wonder now if you'll ever get out of Ampersand. You'd come as a Wadsworth freshman. You stayed to get an MA in creative writing, to work with Jeff Hector and edit his literary journal,

Folded, Stitched, Glued, and become one of his lovers. Then you'd stayed on after finishing the writing program. You taught freshman composition at Wadsworth and at a community college a few towns away. Then Wadsworth expanded its graduate writing program and began offering an MFA in creative writing. So you enrolled in the program again and started fucking Jeff Hector again. He has a long and very thin penis—just like a pencil—because he's such a writer.

You give your class writing exercises, prompts, to get them started. Nobody knows what to write about. Write about what you know, you say. Or write about something you don't know. You have them stare at photos and write on a sheet of paper without looking at what they're writing. You tell them to begin their stories at the end of one day and end them at the beginning of the next day. You tell them to take a familiar, time-worn phrase and substitute a key word in that phrase to make a new epigram. There's no place like _____. _____ is where the heart is. The heart is a lonely _____. Your students look at you and then look at one another, suppressing their shrugs. You want to give up on them. Finally you say, Just write something that I can grade.

You were good at figuring out which guys had big ones. You could just tell. A knack. You were hardly ever wrong. And you were lucky in your fucking. You never attracted any freaks, and you never got hooked up with boys who weren't strong enough to get dumped. You fucked whomever you wanted without regret or complications. You had a perfect knack for finding the ideal, well-hung, disease-free guy whenever you needed one. And it always went the same perfect way for you. Meet a guy. Catch his eye. Lure him from his friends (or girlfriend). Take him someplace and give him the fuck (or suck) of his life. Then part with a happy farewell. The guys always left when you wanted them to, and they always came back when you wanted them to. None of your

girlfriends had this luck. They all had bad dates with pricks who charmed the hell out of them, screwed them (usually poorly), then lingered in their lives in complicated ways. Stood them up. Cheated on them. Or, the complete reverse, they dated guys who didn't know thing one about how to seduce a woman. Guys who dated them and dated them but never put the moves on them. Guys who then couldn't get the message that they didn't want to date a man ad nauseum, but that now their opportunity to get laid had passed. And these guys didn't go quietly. These were guys with heartaches that they couldn't heal and lusts that they couldn't implement. These guys wanted girls out of their league, and they thought the best way to win these girls was to ingratiate themselves. These guys went bald and had little dicks. These guys illed women and gave them gonorrhoea.

Boothgirl writes:

She was good at judging knobs. She could predict what kind of knob a guy had before he whipped it out. She could look at guy and know in three seconds if he had a big knob or not.

You would say that yours was an imaginative and varied love life. Rich with Richards, Bills, Tonys, a few Bruces. You fucked half a hundred guys before you were eighteen, didn't get a single STD. No crabs. Not even a raw pussy. You had a cast iron pussy. Built to withstand lots of activity. Resilient to disease and baby-making sperm. You're not afraid of big cocks. No. Listen: Put three fingers in my pussy now. Sorry, my hand is already there. Yes, those are my fingers. You'll find a battery-operated phallus in a shoebox under my bed. Load it with fresh, longlife D-batteries, also in the shoebox. Ivory-shaded dildo with imitation foreskin. A little cold on initial entry. But warms up quickly – physical principles of friction. That's what it's all about.

You hear a man enter the booth beside yours. You hear the machine accept his five-dollar bill. You hear his television come on to the same movie that you're watching. You hear the man advance the channel past three other videos. He turns the volume up very loud. The bass soundtrack vibrates the plywood walls separating your booth from his, and above the volume of groan and the bass soundtrack you hear a hum and suddenly a large drill bit comes through the shaking wall followed by a penis. You look at this cock sticking into your booth. Then you look at the video on the screen. Girl-on-girl. Already you're writing about this cock. Purple. Bruised-looking. Old. The oldest cock you've ever seen. Fifty, sixty years old. Big. Purple. Can't forget that it is purple. You remember reading once that steroid users have purple skin. This cock looks like it's been through a war. It's sticking through the wall. Half hard. Alive. You'd have been less surprised if this thing had entered your booth through the television screen. That wouldn't have been scary. Through the wall the man says, Come on, man. Come on. And you say, What? though you hadn't meant to speak at all. Then the cock disappears and you can see the man's eye through the hole and then his mouth. He says, A girl. You say, What the fuck? And he says, Get the fuck out of there. He's mad, and his anger makes you want to laugh. He pounds a fist against the thin wall. You unfasten the latch, open the door, and make your way to the stairs. On your way out of the store, you stop to look through the discount bin of previously viewed tapes. They're all marked down in price. Two for one. \$9.99 and up. You buy *DormitOrgy*, *A Tale of Two Titties*, *Cuntraption*, and *Pornacopulia*.