

Exposed

MICHELLE SOUCY

This should have been a clue, an omen. One of those. Our neighborhood friend, when we were kids—eight, nine—shouted when we were playing in the attic above the wood shed, “Who wants to take their pants off?” Jason shouted this as if we were at a pep rally, although there were only three of us in the room. Then he looked at me out of the low corner of his eye, like a pitcher expecting me to steal a base. But I was sitting cross-legged on the dusty floor, pretending to count the cash in our money box, pretending I was terribly, seriously busy and hadn’t heard the question. My older brother Joe was embarrassed, karate-kicked Jason to change the subject. Certainly not to defend my honor, no. No way. But to imply: how stupid, paying attention to the sister. Acting like she matters. Then Joe climbed down our secret back entrance to go get on his bike, and Jason’s jeans were off. He skipped around me in the attic with a dark-pink erection. At the time, I thought, that’s just how his looks. I didn’t know there were erections. I thought, his is different from either of my brothers’. It sticks up, pointing. Bounces like a suddenly-abandoned seesaw when he runs. But I ignored Jason. I made an inventory of our candy stash. Then grabbed the broom and swept up some of the junk, the nails and sawdust and cobwebs. I looked out the dingy window and wondered aloud if Joe was trying out the new bike ramp.

“Want me to put mine on top of yours?” Jason asked, matter-of-factly. He swiveled his hips near mine, admiring his jiggling penis.

“Um . . . no thanks,” I said with red cheeks.

“What you’re supposed to do, I’m supposed to pee on yours. I saw my dad doing it.”

“Gross,” I said, and decided that this was the moment to make my escape. I hid away the money box and climbed out the back window as swiftly as possible. Trying not to get splinters in my pink palms, I scrambled down the secret ladder we had found and placed there. Jason climbed down after me with his jeans back up and buttoned.

“I’ll beat you to the office!” he said.

I hopped off the ladder, running almost before my feet touched the ground, and I beat him to our treehouse office in the apple tree.

I could run back then. Wow, could I run. My legs were like a creamy little colt’s. I could always beat the boys at running.

Back then, they could never catch me. □