



Mairead Case

MAGIC

Scott was a fag and I wasn't eating, so most days we skipped gym and went to the diner instead. Like I love you, kind of. I ate hamburgers and he skipped the showers. We knew when the good pies were delivered and the crane machine got filled. Beth was our waitress and sometimes her nails were red, sometimes pink. She let us ash in coffee cups. Comped our cheese fries.

I brought Ziploc bags full of Mom's yogurt wrappers, because Beth's church was having a drive. For every three dozen, rinsed clean and smoothed out, some place in Africa got a cow. Then the yogurt company sent you a little gold pin with an udder hanging from it. Beth pinned those below her nametag. She had four dangling udders plus six customer service stars, so sometimes her right tit sounded like a bunch of kids in music class.

I watched Scott blow smoke out, watched the blinds cutting slats across his forehead. Smiling, Scott looked like himself as a four-year-old. His hair smelled like Camels and menthol. I could see the paint chips in it. Light green and ivory. He grabbed my thigh like old ladies do hands, when they're telling a story. "Angela knows we'll do it," Scott said. "It's her birthday."

Angela and Scott and I were friends since junior year, since that retreat where they made us cry on purpose. We laid in each other's laps to watch TV, smoked and talked about smoking, and once we spent three hours hot gluing plastic toys to park benches. Mostly we ate, drove around and ate again. Usually Mom was awake when I came home. She'd kiss me, smell my hair and raise her eyebrows. "Not mine," I'd say, "I love you," and then she'd nod and go to bed.

Scott lived alone, futons and a card table, so we bribed our way into Maureen's. Maureen was round and quiet. She wanted



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about anything else. colors snaking. It felt like church, like you didn't have to think arms. Noise and jangle, like you could close your eyes and see pushed play while Angela slid down the wall, hugging her upper "Music?" someone asked and the air was cloudy and hot. I deep, stomach in and ribcage out, up like something blooming. small and hoped something left through my nose. Scott sucked it around the room. I never felt anything anyway, so just toke I picked wax drips off the tablecloth. One girl passed an apple in the window. The candles were cheap and Angela sprayed, so We had a cake, an ice cream one from a bakery with neon behind her, snapping gun and bra straps

firecrackers, and crushed Scott into a hug. The girls vamped and she had a doggie bag. "What is up?" she said like everybody came around eight. Angela wore heels and pink,

ankle. I didn't like those girls, but they were in all the pictures. shinguard seam still pressed in. Dirty little moons behind the booth, hair gummy with sweat and hairspray, calves with the silver, to take her for tacos after practice. I pictured them in the Scott told Angela's friends, the soccer team, navel rings and and after that it was breadsticks and marinara cups all the time.

coupons. We used up the medium-size pepperoni right away, herself gray, so Dad gave her an apartment plus a book of pizza store at the mall stopped carrying his shows. Maureen cried and they took some good vacations, then last winter the video monkeys and totem poles and oceans. He was famous for a while Maureen's dad had a show on the travel channel, a show with awful but we never said it.

Things like what you do with the last egg. Her cookies were people to like her, so spent a lot of time memorizing little things.

Then somebody knocked, so Scott shotgunned his can, wiped the tears and stood to answer. There was a man outside. He had no shadows on his face, a badge, smooth cheeks, quiet eyes and a big gold watch. "Music's too loud, kids."

Angela's face looked like three Xeroxes in a row, a copy of a copy of a copy, ink still drying. She bit her lip. Dude turned to her, unpocketed his flashlight.

"ID, lady?"

She nodded, got the fake out of her right bracup and handed it to him. Meanwhile Scott touched my shoulder, gave me a CD. It had "Magic" scrawled across the silver, and then I got it.

When the song started, Magic crouched, then pulled up on Angela and her shaking ankles. Suddenly she got it, too. Scott smiled around his tumbler. It was Maureen's favorite, said "Everyone Loves an Italian Girl." Maureen was Irish.

I sat on the couch and my head got thick. I thought about that article, about the woman that was so fat and didn't move she grew into her cushions. She had a heart attack and the paramedics couldn't move her without ripping skin. Magic had freckles and patches and moles. I was weirded out by the folds in his lower back, the smeary shards of glitter. He cupped his dick a lot.

I wanted to giggle and press ice into his side, but I kept watching the girls, like how you turn around in a movie theater. No one was touching or drinking, everyone's hands in mouths and on laps and cheeks and knees. Mouths moving like fish. You want, we want something final or permanent or perfect but nobody knows how. The VCR clock blinked, red and out of sync with the song. Maureen's dad got it from a pledge drive.

shook hands. Finally Magic turned to me. "Have a good night, lady." We without.

next to lighters, a marshmallow cereal bobblehead and Maureen's on a hipbone. He found his badge on a box of Nag Champa, Cigarette. A kiss to the girl blurring in the corner, three fingers figuring she owed him anyway. Magic sighed and stood. Then "Hzzp, Angela's asleep," I said and Scott shrugged, had been. I didn't answer or move.

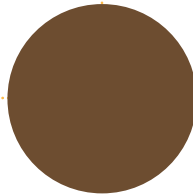
dripping slightly and darker brown except for where his fingers hair, saw Magic, gave me a look. Did you fuck? Bag in his hand. When Scott came back, it was still raining. He rang out his door and suddenly my stomach felt gluey. The cake, probably.

Justed his chin. "But it doesn't make rent." Magic looked at the I saw his eyes on the screen. "You play football?" "Yeah," he said. "That's cool. My name's weird, too." He didn't ask what it was and "Is your name really Magic?" He smirked. Fuck. "No. George." touchdown. I thought about swimming pools.

fingertips. I was supposed to do something. Men in gold made a long and square, with veins like telephone cord and squared-off fingers. I watched Magic's hand on the pillow. It was He wroled it, tossed the plate and moved closer. Cheerleaders tongues.

roses were crumbling and sugary red. Leaves like limp green out of silverware, so I took one plate to cut, one to scoop. The "Sure." The cake was soaked into its cardboard and we were reserve.

Instead I asked if he wanted cake, instantly hating how motherly it sounded. That was hard work, darling. Got to keep up your



Eventually, everybody but Angela got bored. The girls took their Kools to the porch, phones pulsing like glowworms, feet easing from tight shoes. My grandmother wore shoes that high. They gave her flats in the coffin, but the tendons had already atrophied.

The chair legs touched down and Angela's hair fell forward. Magic pushed it back again, wiped something on his waist. He whispered something to her. They went into the bedroom. "Do not get anything on my bed," said Maureen. "Anything."

Scott opened a window and the air came in, air mixed with rain and the sulfuric tinge of cigarette lighters. He pushed ON and we got blinded by the newsdesk glare, sudden and white. Baby gorillas. Trucks on a soccer field. Miss America with nine fingers and a big heart. The reporter's daughters was on the porch and I glanced from her mother to her and back, both with shoulders squared and shiny, tiny teeth blaring. Clavicles like pipe.

Angela padded back. She had hair in her face, a five-dollar-bill and a slight slur. "Scott. Scott." He looked up. Her eyebrows were raised, his carefully plucked and penciled. Money held out. "I need condoms."

Suddenly Scott looked sad maybe, or disappointed, but "okay," he said. "I'll get you a box." Angela padded out and Scott stood up, tossed the remote, left. I wished he had a collar for me to straighten.

Twenty minutes later, Scott wasn't back and Maureen was asleep in the chair. The bedroom door opened and the couch made a soft noise when Magic sat down. His face looked blue in the glow. There were pants, and girls snoring.

"Touch of the boring in there," he said and then I felt sorry, like I should apologize for how young and stupid we were.