

Marianne Mckey

PICTURE

I still have that naked picture of you on my phone. I look at it all the time. It helps me remember. When I babysit the neighbor's kids, and we're at the park, I look at the naked picture of you and smile. The kids think it's because of the glorious mud-pie they've made but really it's because your foreskin droops like a heavy shawl and I'm remembering the joke we made about how easy it is to give you hand-jobs.

"Look!" the children cry.

"I know!" I say, all smiles, not looking up from your picture.

Andrew Marvell has a poem called "The Definition of Love." It's about how the greatest love is not between man and woman, or child and parent, but between soul and body. In the poem, Marvell explains how in this temporal life our body is a cage for the soul. We unfortunate sinners never truly know love—pure, magnanimous, unconditional love—until our soul escapes its cage and finds its place in heaven. Our earthly inclinations of copulation are simply lustful impulse. Our parental inclinations of protection are merely animal instinct. We are dirty and disparaged creatures that live and breathe and create disgust. We aren't valuable until we are, in fact, decaying, and worms are eating our toe nails. It is then that the beauty that was inside us, which was never really ours in the first place, floats away to a place our bodies only dreamed of and finds everlasting peace.

Two hours before I took your picture, we were eating cheese-snacks shaped like fish and we were sad. The artificial flavor clung to the roofs of our mouths in large chalky lumps. It stuck to our throats as we tried to force a swallow.

I said, "No crumbs in the bed!" and you threw a fish-shaped cheese-snack on the pillow in mock spite. We laughed so hard it brought tears

to our eyes. What kind of tears, we couldn't say.

I have your picture, a clitoris, and a little machine that goes buzz. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. When it doesn't, I miss you and I'm lonely. When it does, I miss you and I'm lonely.

Two hours and thirty minutes before I took your picture, you used your six digit confirmation number and checked into your flight online. You looked up at me from the computer and half smiled. When I didn't return the smile, you suggested we get a snack.

I took your picture so that I could keep something of you here with me to remember you by.

In ancient Mayan culture, mirrors were thought to be portals for the soul. In prayer, the mirror would help guide the soul from a body to a deity and back. This is one of the origins of the superstition about how breaking a mirror causes bad luck. The possibility that the mirror might be transmitting a soul at the time of wreckage puts the soul at risk. A broken soul is bad business. So, when the Spanish came and brought with them Catholicism, with all its hocus-pocus and ritual, some of the old world superstitions of Mayan life carried over as the natives forcibly were assimilated.

At first, I only got to see the parts of you that everyone got to see. Your neck. Your forearm. Your ankles. Then I got to see places only certain people got to see. Your knees on the days you wore shorts. Your lower stomach when you stretched and your shirt rose slightly. Your hairy toes the times I watched you put on shoes. Then I got to see places that only five other women and your mother had ever seen. I saw the place on your upper thigh where your skin turns pale and soft and reddish. I saw the place on your stomach where your black hairs become long and curled and private. I saw the place where your upper half meets your lower half and you become a whole person, no longer segmented by shirts or briefs or socks. That night, when I took the naked picture of you, I got to see more of you than anyone had before. I got to see you as one continuous body.

That is something we forget when we have clothes on. We try and

pretend we can be segmented. That there are tiny pieces that make us who we are and that they can be pulled separate from each other and can stand alone and still be us. Well it's not true. We are one whole thing that must be accepted as such.

Or rejected.

I don't let people touch my phone out of fear they might snoop and find your picture. However, that doesn't mean I haven't shown you off. On those lonely nights, when I want something to be proud of, I'll turn to my friends and say:

"Look! Look how big his penis is."

And in a fit of female camaraderie, we'll all giggle and then start into a long conversation about sex and past penises and womanhood.

Your picture brings us together.

Older film cameras use mirrors to capture an image. This is where the idea about cameras stealing souls comes from. Unlike in prayer, the soul is stuck in the tiny plastic box—unable to make it to the heavens or back home. In certain smaller, more religious and secluded towns in Mexico, it is illegal to bring a camera into a church.

In the picture, your body is long. It stretches the length of the bed. You are resting your head on the pillow I sleep with. Your hair is ruffled. Your cheeks are slightly red. Against the paisley comforter, your body looks solid. Whole. Your right foot is curled around your left calf, causing your legs to form a 4, and your right knee to jut off the edge of the bed. Your hands are tucked behind your head. Your elbows pointing out.

In your elongated state, an arc forms on your abdomen marking where your ribcage stops and the small slope of your stomach begins—concave and smooth—running all the way down to your soft pelvic bones. Your penis is resting along your inner thigh, partially erect, and your testicles are tight with giddy embarrassment. You expected the click of the shutter, but your smile is calm and natural. You stare at the camera-phone, at me, satisfied.

I have your picture. Your soul. I am your heaven. We've found a

loophole in fate. A fate we didn't believe in in the first place. We found a loophole in superstition. A superstition that was never ours to begin with. However, we are still caught. We are bound to a modern system that can condense thousands of miles of distance into a few seconds of reverb on a video chat. As I tell you about my day, I can see in the reflection of your glasses that you are touching the place on your screen where my lips are, slowly dragging your finger tips along the pixilated image. We call this affection.

Seven weeks after I took your picture, you picked me up at the airport. We kissed. I could taste you. For a few moments your saliva remained separate. Cooler, wetter, sweeter. It lingered on the smooth inner-walls of my cheeks and settled on the back of my tongue. Then it just became mine—warm and slightly viscous.

As we pulled apart, I lifted up your arm and pressed my nose against your armpit. I could smell you. Yesterday's Old Spice and the hot dampness of an un-air-conditioned subway ride. A pungent, sour musk both disgusting and inviting—the kind that reminds us we're only animals. I liked it. It was just how I remembered.

Marianne Mckey is a young writer enrolled in The New School's Master of Fine Arts program, concentrating in fiction writing. She is from Gainesville, Florida, but lives in Brooklyn, New York. Her work can be found at *FictionFix.net* and *The Los Angeles Review*.