

The Shoebox

“Come on!” Stevie called to his friends Caleb and Seth as he bounded up the front steps of his family’s small tri-level home. They caught up to him as he unlocked the door.

Stevie had told his fellow two seventh graders he had some cool things to show to them after school that day. The invitation came during lunch as the three stood isolated in a corner of the field after their release from the cafeteria. Stevie was tight-lipped about details, but he alluded to what he had shown the pair last summer. The boys didn’t share any afternoon classes, so they didn’t have the opportunity to pressure him to reveal more before the end of the school day.

What Stevie had shown them that summer before was that he had discovered a vantage point from which he could spy through the windows of the McKay’s house without being seen. Danny McKay was a classmate, but it wasn’t him Stevie spied on: it was Danny’s older sister Maddy, who was a high school junior. With the hot summer nights, she left her curtains open, and Stevie watched her change for bed whenever he was able. He, of course, told Caleb and Seth of his discovery.

One night under the guise of a sleepover with the boys sleeping in a tent in the backyard, the three snuck over to the McKay’s house to watch Maddy undress. Although by their age they’d seen pornography that was infinitely more graphic, this was the first live girl’s bared breasts they’d seen, and that raised the level of their titillation accordingly. (Unfortunately for them, the windowsill limited their view to above the waist.)

The boys escaped detection that night, but Stevie was soon caught by Mr. McKay on another evening. He dragged Stevie, stammering lies and excuses, by his shirt collar into the McKay house where Big Steve, Stevie’s father, got a rude phone call. Big Steve was at work and couldn’t come to pick him up, so his mother came to the McKay house to collect Stevie. Caleb and Seth didn’t see him for the rest of the summer, and when they reunited at school that fall, Stevie refused to share any details about his punishment. His mouth drew tight, and his eyes looked elsewhere when the friends asked about what had happened, so they left it alone.

When Stevie alluded to Maddy McKay at lunch, therefore, both boys were intrigued. Seth was a little concerned about getting caught doing whatever Stevie had in mind. Seth realized that it was blind luck that the trio weren’t found stalking Maddy and only Stevie suffered any consequences. Still, the sexual lure was too strong for Seth to ignore. Caleb wasn’t nearly as reflective as Seth. His mind moved more to the pragmatic. The fact was they *weren’t* caught last summer, so why should he worry about something that *didn’t* happen? Besides, if it was half as good as seeing Maddy (or part of her, anyway) naked, it was worth the risk – perhaps even double the risk since Stevie said there were two things he wanted to show them.

After unlocking the door, Stevie led the pair inside. The house was dark, but they could see fine in the entryway with the light from the open curtains in the adjacent living room. That room as well as the kitchen and dining room were on the entry level, but Stevie went to the bottom of a small stairway leading up to the bedrooms.

“Come on,” he said again and went upstairs. The boys followed dutifully.

Stevie paused briefly on the landing, then led them into his parents’ bedroom. With the curtains open, the room was well lit. The floor was a light faux wood laminate, and the room was dominated by a king-sized bed. It was covered with a floral bedspread and bookended by nightstands replete with lamps. There were throw pillows at the headboard. A tall dresser stood opposite the bed on the

same wall as the door, and another lower dresser with a mirror attached led to the master bath doorway.

At first, Caleb and Seth hung back in the doorway silently overwhelmed by the sanctity of the room. Stevie, however, walked forward and sat down on the nearest edge of the bed, the one closest to the bathroom.

“This is my mom’s side of the bed,” he announced as he pulled open the drawer on the nightstand. He put his hand inside and paused, looking over his shoulder and grinning at his two friends. As his hand reappeared, he gave a dramatic flourish. “Ta-da!”

In his fist was a vibrator about twelve inches long in total, but equipped as it was with kind of control handle, the “business” portion was more like seven. It was mostly pink with a bulbed head reminiscent of a penis. Around the shaft was a sheath of clear plastic with two rows of raised nobs. There was an ancillary arm that branched from the main shaft. At its end there were two pieces of silicone that looked like bunny ears.

“Whoa, what the fuck?” said Caleb as they stepped closer; their trepidation gone.

Seth asked, “What is that?”

“What do mean? It’s a dildo. You’ve never seen a dildo before?” said Caleb.

“Of course I have. I meant why does it look like that? Aren’t dildos supposed to look like rubber dicks or something?”

“You can be such a baby, Sethy-boy.”

Stevie sat grinning, still holding the vibrator aloft like he had pulled it from a stone. “That’s nothing,” he said. “Watch this.”

He flicked a switch, and the vibrator thrummed to life. The ring of nobs moved back and forth along the shaft, the bunny ears flapping while the whole device vibrated quietly.

“Holy shit,” said Caleb, “look at that thing!”

Stevie made an adjustment of the controls, and it began pumping furiously, motor whining.

“Can I see it?” Caleb asked.

Stevie switched it off and handed it to Caleb. The latter admired its heft as he inspected it more closely. He wrapped his fingers around it.

“This thing’s got some serious girth,” he said. “Is that why they call your dad ‘Big Steve?’”

Stevie didn’t answer.

Caleb turned to Seth. “You wanna hold it?”

“No,” said Seth. “I don’t feel like it.”

“Why not, Sethy-boy? Does it scare you?”

“Dude, that thing is Stevie’s mom’s. It’s ... it’s,” he struggled for a way to say it had been inside her, but all he could muster was, “it’s *hers*.”

Caleb slid his hand slowly up and down the shaft, pausing to feel the raised nobs. “What does your mom even need this for with your dad around?”

“I guess he’s not around enough,” Stevie said.

“Oh yeah,” said Caleb, still admiring the vibrator, “he’s a trucker, ain’t he?”

Stevie nodded.

“When’s he coming back home?” asked Seth, trying to hide his nervousness.

“Sometime today, but don’t worry. If he comes home, we’ll hear him.”

“How about you mom?”

“She’s not off until five.”

“This thing is so cool,” said Caleb. “I can see why a chick would dig it.”

Seth winced a little from Caleb trying to depersonalize the vibrator by saying “a chick.” They were talking about Stevie’s mom.

“A chick?” asked Stevie. “Looks like you dig it, too. What are you gay? Are you thinking about that being stuck up your ass?”

“No, I’m thinking about it in a pussy.”

“Caleb! Come on, man! You’re talking about the dude’s mom!”

Seth’s exclamation left them in silence, until Stevie reached forward and took the vibrator back from Caleb.

“It is pretty cool,” he said. “That’s why I thought you boys might like to see it.” Somewhat reluctantly he put the device back into the drawer and closed it. “The other thing’s even cooler, but it’s not in here; it’s down in the garage.”

Stevie got up and moved to the other side of the bed.

“What are you doing?” asked Seth. “I thought you said it was in the garage.”

“It is, but to show you I need to get something first.” He opened the drawer on the other nightstand and retrieved a small key ring. Stevie shook the keys. “These.”

He walked around the bed, and the boys shuffled out of his way to let him take the lead. They followed him back downstairs and then into the kitchen and down a second set of stairs leading to the garage. The garage was directly under the bedrooms. It was empty of cars, and each of the double doors fed its own grease spot on the concrete floor. Overhead, each door had its own opener. On one wall was a rack of yard tools and some dormant bicycles and golf clubs. The other side held a workbench with a pegboard filled with hammers, saws, pliers, and wrenches. Next to the workbench hulked a metal, double-door storage locker. Around the two handles was a short chain and padlock.

Stevie advanced with the keys in hand and unlocked the padlock. He set the chain on the floor, removed the key, and placed another key in the door lock.

“What’s in there? Your dad’s porn stash?” Caleb asked.

Stevie didn’t answer as he twisted the handles and swung the doors wide. Inside appeared nothing exciting. Some overalls hung from hooks, and a pair of work boots sat underneath them. A roll of plastic sheathing leaned upright against the other side. There was also a spray bottle of cleaning solution with a gallon refill jug next to it. On the shelf there was a box that had “duct tape” printed on it. Next to it were three shoeboxes neatly stacked on one another.

“No. No porn this time.”

“Your dad probably just uses his phone.”

Seth winced again at his friend’s lack of tact.

Stevie strained on his tiptoes to reach the top shoebox. He brought it down carefully, almost reverently, then sat down cross-legged on the concrete floor. His friends followed suit.

“No porn this time, but something even more exciting.”

He reached under the lid of the shoebox and produced a nickel-plated, snub nosed .38 revolver. He held it by the grip with his index finger inside the trigger guard.

“Whoa, a gun!” Caleb felt excited. “Holy shit, that’s cool!”

“A gun?!” Seth was terrified. “How can you be so stupid playing with a gun? That’s how people get shot.”

“No, it’s not loaded.”

“But how do you know?”

Stevie pulled the ejector rod and released the cylinder, allowing it to fall open. He pointed the gun at them to show that the cylinders were indeed empty. He raised the cylinders to his eye and looked at the boys through them before spinning it like he was playing Russian roulette, then snapped it closed again and locked the ejector rod back into place. Now he pointed the gun at the golf clubs and pulled the trigger. The cylinder rotated as the hammer moved back. The hammer suddenly sprang forward with a loud click that made Seth jump.

Stevie waved the revolver over his head like a lasso. He lowered it, leveling it toward Seth briefly before resting it in his lap. Seth winced and turned his shoulder protectively when the gun was pointed his way.

“Cool!” Caleb said. “Can I see it?”

Stevie handed him the gun, and Caleb examined it resting in his open palm. “Heavy,” he said. He raised the revolver, took aim at the golf clubs, and pulled the trigger. It was harder than he expected, but the hammer snapped with its satisfying click. He pointed the gun at Seth and pulled the trigger.

Seth raised his hands protectively. “Goddammit, Caleb! Don’t point that fucking thing at me! What if there’s still a bullet in it?”

“Oh, Sethy-baby. You saw it was empty.” He got an idea. “Are there any bullets, Stevie?”

“There’s a whole box of them.” He removed the lid from the shoebox and revealed a box of cartridges as well as a red, oil-stained rag.

“Goddammit, Stevie! Don’t you give him a bullet, or I’m gonna tell someone.”

“Relax, Sethy-boy. I’m not going to give him any bullets. Besides, my dad probably counts them and knows how many there are.”

Caleb sat enthralled by the weapon. “Maybe we should shoot Sethy-boy here and take one of those shovels and bury him in your backyard,” he said without looking up.

“Goddammit, Caleb! That’s not funny.”

Stevie laughed. “I said relax, Sethy-boy. I told you no one’s going to touch the bullets today. I’m hoping we can find some other bullets somewhere, so my dad won’t know. Then maybe we can

sneak the gun out to the woods behind the Grover's place and shoot it there. You guys know if we can buy bullets?"

Seth tried to change the subject. "What's in those other boxes? What's in the one that says 'duct tape' on it?"

"Duct tape, just like it says. That and a bunch of rubber painting gloves."

"That's a shitload of duct tape," Seth observed having successfully calmed himself. "What's in the other shoeboxes?"

"I don't know what's in the bottom one, but that middle one, the next one, is full pictures."

"Pictures?"

"Yeah. Photographs."

"What, like old pictures of your family?"

"No, they're of people I don't know."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll show you." Stevie stood and pulled down the next shoebox. After he sat again, he set the box on the floor and slid it to Seth. "See for yourself."

Seth took off the lid and found the box was full of Polaroids of people he'd never seen before. Each person was illuminated by an uncomfortably bright light, and none looked happy.

"This is kinda weird. Why wouldn't he just use his phone?"

"Huh?" Caleb roused from his fascination with the gun.

"This box is full of pictures of weirded-out strangers."

Keeping his right hand on the revolver, Caleb thumbed through the pile. "So what's in that other box?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Stevie. "I only found what the keys unlock yesterday, and I didn't have time to check it out."

He got up and went back to the locker. Grasping the box, he slid it on the shelf toward him.

"Wow, this sucker's heavier than I thought."

As he was sitting back down on the floor, he lost his grip, and the box dropped to the concrete and dumped like a load of gravel. Only it wasn't gravel that rained down: it was human teeth – incisors, molars, canines, bicuspid, shiny white teeth and dingy gray ones, teeth with fillings and teeth with crowns – so many teeth they seemed impossible to count, clattering and dancing on the concrete.

"What the fuck?" said Caleb. "I thought your dad's a truck driver."

"I don't get it," Seth said. "What does it mean?"

Before the boys could venture any guesses, the light on the garage door opener above them switched on, the chain engaged, and the door began to slowly lift.