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There is an old woman standing impatiently at the dirty counter, trying not to touch anything. Huge rings cover all of her fingers. Her painted on makeup like frosting on her pale wrinkly skin. The bright red nail lacquer shines as if it is still wet...a juicy match to the lipstick applied in an exaggerated pout on her age shrunken, barely-there lips. The clerk rings up the five dollar gallon of wine and forty-five dollars worth of instant scratch off tickets. She pays with credit, a platinum card obviously, and she practically throws her card at the clerk. The clerk places a cheap ball point pen with a well chewed cap on the counter next to the receipt. The old woman looks down her nose at the pen as she gets her own fake-gold plated pen from her purse to sign. As she gathers her lottery tickets she steals the clerk’s pen as well, stuffing it all into her obnoxiously large handbag. She picks up her nightly bottle, exiting the store like a movie star, down the red carpet to her rusty late model Buick.

The man with the mean eyes and the faded carhart jacket sets his twelve pack of beer on the counter before the clerk has finished with the older woman. She is of no consequence to him for he is a man and she merely a woman. His eyes travel from the clerk’s young perky breasts shown off nicely by the stretchy v-neck shirt she wears, down to her shapely hips and back to her chest. He asks for a pack of Marlboros. She turns to retrieve the pack giving him an unobstructed view of her round behind and tight jeans. As she places the pack on the counter he says that he wanted a hard pack, just so he could look at her from behind again. His fantasy is interrupted by the bell on the door and a figure wearing all black.

The man-child has a tattoo of a black star on the side of his neck. The holes in his ears stretched wide with large metal hoops show the color of the skin behind. His hair, artificially black, spikes of hardened gel pointing toward the midline of his cranium and then straight up to the sky, a perfect profile of Mount Fuji on his head. He walks without fully picking up his feet, his shoes looking over-large because of the narrowness of his ankles. His jeans are of the type that rockers from the 80’s lived in. Full of spandex and painted on over the underlying thinness of his legs. The ankle opening is so small that zippers had to be incorporated to get your foot out of your pants. But these are worn down low like the over baggy pants of the 90’s, belted securely around the roundest part of his buttocks with a wide black belt, the leather of which barely visible under the silver metal decorating it. He browses the dog-eared rags on the magazine rack as he drinks a 32 ounce soda through a straw like a toddler with a sippy-cup staring at a television set.

A small child is jumping up and down at the side of a tired looking woman holding a sleeping infant. She stands in line next to the greasy deli counter, ignoring its contents which have a sickly pale cast like food gone bad. The child wants a candy bar, which he has already picked out. It is just right over here, he assures her. It would only take a second for him to show her, if she would only just come look. The woman waves the child’s requests away and stares into space, waiting to pay for the milk and a loaf of bread she carries with one hand. She has counted out the change in her purse ahead to make sure she could afford to get both. The man with the beer and the wandering eyes leaves and the mother struggles her milk and bread up onto the counter. The infant in her arms awakens from the jostling and starts to cry, as the other child runs in circles around his mothers legs. The
woman smiles at the clerk when the girl asks how she is doing this evening, as if to say to the girl, “you don’t really want to know”.

The clerk sorts the change on the counter into her drawer. “Have a nice night”, said as an afterthought to the woman’s back as she drags her bags and children out the door. The clerk checks her cell phone and texts her boyfriend, then she stares out the window into the artificially illuminated night. She thinks about how much she has saved up this past year so that she could go away to the big university. This coming fall she is really going this time...really. Then maybe she will be free of this town...Maybe...someday.

Adrianna Schommer