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Marsha Koretzky

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Attachments

by Marsha Koretzky

They stood on a cherry-wood mount under a naked lightbulb. Bossie and Bessie, the star attraction of Gus's Cider Mill Museum.

This was my first time. My mother was afraid of Gus and made me swear never to go to his crazy museum. But she was playing mah-jongg when Stewie Fleishman dared me to sneak over there with him at the exact same moment he'd been magically transformed from the bothersome boy next door into something completely different. Before, whenever I'd taken Stewie up on one of his dares—to eat carpenter ants or mud soup or dog food or to stick two peanuts and a raisin up my nose—it had been to show him up. But this time, I watched Stewie push up onto his toes and wipe his hands on his shorts, and Gus's seemed like the only place I'd ever want to be.

I'd prepared well for the trek, brushing my hair with baby powder because Judy Hunter swore that made it shinier, spraying my sister's ugly-smelling deodorant all over the bathroom, and slipping two tampons into my pocket because even though I didn't know exactly what they were for, I knew they were somehow important, grown-up lady things.

The museum was in a dark, ramshackle, low-ceilinged barn that squatted along the other side of a highway I wasn't allowed to cross. Inside, Gus's Cider Mill Museum smelled of old hay and fermented apples, but, more than anything else, of a lonely old man's dirty socks.

Stewie and I paid our dimes and got plastic cups of store-bought cider that we had to finish before

entering the museum. Gus spat through clacking teeth and warned us about no touching. And then there they were.

Bossie and Bessie were surrounded by a weird collection of old junk. Brown and beige photographs in cracked frames, the subjects sitting stiff and unsmiling in high-necked collars buttoned tight. A chipped replica of Michelangelo's *Pieta* on a low side table. The Virgin's nose was broken, and someone had painted Jesus's hair yellow. Weak light came from a lamp that flaked dust and paint, its shade resting askew over a plastic hula dancer. She was wearing a dirty crepe-paper grass skirt and a pink lei that just covered the twin brown balls of her breasts.

Bossie and Bessie stood on their four hind legs, their chests attached from just below the neck to the bottom of what must have been their one shared rib cage. The calves' forelegs were tangled together as though they were slow dancing. Bossie's head was arched back, and he stared at Bessie with glassy, brown eyes. But Bessie, at the moment of her death, or perhaps at the artistic whim of the taxidermist, had stretched her head sideways as though trying one last time to escape her too-loving brother. Her tongue was black and flopped out the side of her mouth. I could see the white around her irises.

"Wow...cool," skinny, frizzy-haired Stewie Fleishman whispered through wet lips.

"Yeah, wow," I sighed, feeling his palm, sticky and heavy, and gripping mine.

