

BECKY MARGOLIS

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*WEATHERIZATION*

(an excerpt)

Once Candy began working at the battered women's shelter she wouldn't let me fuck her anymore. What she wanted to do now was watch reality dating shows and tell me about chicks getting beat up. Not exactly my idea of a good time, not every night. But what were my options—crash at my mom's place? Go to karaoke night at the Shanty? So I told Candy she was beautiful, which was true, and kissed her neck, and when she started to cry I just said, It's a sick world, it's a sick, sick world. Because what else could I say?

“Where the fuck are all these flies coming from,” Candy said.

“There's gotta be something rotting around here,” I said.

But we couldn't find the source. The garbage can in the kitchen was closed and there was no old food lying around. I checked under the bed and between the couch cushions. I pulled the fridge away from the wall and looked behind it. Even so, the flies seemed to be multiplying. I could only swat about three a day. They were evolving; they were smarter and faster, this generation. “This is Darwinism at work right here,” I said.

“What it is, is nasty,” Candy said. “I want you to get rid of them.”

So the next day I picked up a pack of those sticky fly strips to tack up to the ceiling. I hung all eight of them in her apartment and they coiled down like party streamers. “Surprise,” I said when Candy came home.

Every afternoon I inspected the papers and found four, five, six—more flies than I'd realized were here—stuck to them. This was satisfying, updating the daily death count, thinking about how long it would take those captive flies to starve.

Before the women's shelter, Candy worked with me at Albertson's. She'd been a cashier; I was a stocker. Back then I'd just come home from my one sorry semester in Missoula. I was part-time at Albertson's and taking a few classes at Northern, though that

didn't end up panning out either. One day Candy said to me, "Do you want to come with me to get my nipple pierced? I'm freaked of needles." She pointed down at her breast like an invitation.

She seemed intriguing, bold and fearful at the same time, so after work I walked with her downtown and held her hand, while she lay down in the piercing chair. When she took off her shirt I didn't even look—just a quick glance before they put the clamp on, her nipples pointing skyward like little erasers.

At the end of that summer my mom got back together with Greg, her crazy-ass boyfriend—literally, the dude heard voices—and he was a royal pain in my nut sack. I'd wake up to hear them throwing dishes at each other in the kitchen; once he set my shoes on fire. So I moved in to Candy's place and it worked out just fine. I mean, she had a real decent apartment—nicer than anywhere I'd ever lived—and we split the rent and had sex every night. After her nipple healed Candy would ask me to play with the ring. "Look, it's fun," she'd say, twirling it between her thumb and pointer. Sometimes I'd catch her absentmindedly fingering it while she talked on the phone or read a magazine, and all I could think about was that ring catching on something—her shirt, her fingernail—and blood spraying out like milk.

On Fridays I had community service. Last year my buddy Chris and I got pulled over on the way to Great Falls and the cops found our weed. They didn't find the mushroom caramels; all in all, it worked out okay.

(continued in the upcoming issue)