

WHO WOULD NOT?

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The woman awakens to suffocation, straining to breathe the humid summer air. The first moments are quick and fretful. When the panic passes, she is once again aware. She is sitting on her porch. A tent of a dress covers the mound of her body. A three-wheeled electric scooter—the *Celebrity 3000*—is parked beside her chair. A 30-inch, aluminum, trigger operated *E-Z Reacher* leans against her thigh, and a dozen yards away, two bright and blonde teenage girls in vivid dresses walk the tree-lined street. The woman stills, watching, as the girls laugh at their words, their hands waving as they speak. One of the girls wears a white blouse and a pink, knee-length skirt with a small flower print. The other wears a sleeveless, light blue dress with a horizontal pattern. They don't see the way they are alternately splashed with sunlight and shade, but the woman is watching, as if she might fathom a mystery.

The girls don't notice the woman on the porch. They don't see the mannish haircut, the sores on her legs from poor circulation. They don't understand the misery that has made its way up the wooden ramp to knock at the woman's front door. They don't know the hours of silence that beguile the woman like a drug. The woman asks herself: Who would not follow these girls? Who would not be attracted to the vivid colors of their dresses, the charm of their laughter, the quickness of their hands as they speak? Who would not leave her burden on the porch and walk beside these girls for a moment? Who would not overlook their inexperience, their silliness, and laugh with them for just one sunlit afternoon?

At night the woman dreams of her body growing larger and larger, until she's immovable and absurd. The EMT's come to her in her dreams. They are young and crisp in their white shirts and navy-blue pants. They are capable, professional, uncritical. They come to rescue her, but they cannot find her, because she's lost within her immense self. She imagines the blue lights of the ambulance flashing intermittently on their worried faces. She runs fretfully inside her own cavernous body, empty and untethered. The EMT's call to her, searching, but her soul has become an orphan in a teeming city. Her body is foreign—distant and unmapable.

In her sagging chair on the porch, knowing the truths that dreams reveal, the woman watches the girls move up the street, and she longs to follow them, to the sure and compounding blessing of their lives.

She closes her eyes, steeled for a hopeful moment. What is not essence falls away. The remnant is what she's been forever, what she will forever be. Gliding through splashes of sunlight, recalling gratitude, she reaches to

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understand two girls walking in summertime. She glimpses the fountain of the girls' health and color, but she overlooks the simple truth: that theirs is a mystery as deep as her own. The body's taut ties draw her back. When she opens her eyes once more, the girls are gone, and she admits her burden, her duty to familiar and darkening heaviness. ☹️