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*TEATIME FOR FERRIS*

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You brew the tea in my only pot, the one with the Japanese characters on the side. I got the set with three cups on sale because a store clerk broke the fourth, and besides, who would want a three-cup tea set?

It was perfect for us though, so I bought it. We drink out of the black cups and set the white cup in front of the empty chair which we call "Setting a Place For Bueller". We know he will come up in conversation.

Every time we have tea, you tell me I should see the movie. Now that it has worked its way into our tradition though, I don't really want to. If I see the movie, you will stop mentioning it and we won't need the white cup.

When I sit at your perfectly crafted table in this sun-drenched breakfast nook, I tuck my twisted foot behind the good one like flipping over a stained place mat. I know you notice, but you never ask about it until today.

You hold your teacup between hands hidden in the sleeves of your sweater and we look at each other for a moment. Medical terms hang in the air between us, but I decide not to bore you with words like neuromuscular or hemiparesis because we know each other too well for that dusty manila-folder talk. When you ask me why my foot is twisted, you are not interested in the tight tendons or delayed muscular development. You are interested in what makes me Lenore and what makes that different from your experience as Marina.

I sip my tea and think about where to start.

I remember not being embarrassed, I say. I remember having a headache from all the sun, playing in the sand with other girls and sliding down the orange tube slide with my legs thrust out in front of me. I remember looking at my white sandals and wondering why one of my legs drooped inward as I slid through the dark passage, but then I hit the ground and started running. This was back when I was not afraid to run.

But then I got older. I realized pretty quickly that people looked at me oddly when I ran, so I figured it was better to walk. Even then people would ask me "Did you hurt your leg?" or try to demonstrate my odd hopping gait as though it were funny. I became self-conscious. I stopped wearing sandals and started watching people's legs as they walked so that I could emulate them. The closest I could get was to straighten out my foot when I took a step, even though it would turn inward each time I took the next. I still straightened and it turned, and I straightened and it turned. I wasn't a very fast walker.

I got older and realized that other girls' skirts were getting shorter but I knew better than to think I could pull it off. By this time, I had become an observer of others and had developed a working knowledge of other people as components of some alien machine. In a cold, logical way, I understood that other girls had a full range of movement and as a result they were carefree. My knees were slightly bowed and of course there was my foot, so I understood that I would have to approach things differently. Teenage girls complain about damaged goods, but when you have to dress your pepperoni like it's veal, it pays to be a good spin doctor.

Determined to remain beautiful, I dressed in long, simply cut dresses in dark reds and solid black. To me they were stately, like the Queen's ships. I moved slowly and deliberately, never running to catch a cab or gesturing too fiercely. While I didn't fool myself into believing that other people overlooked my condition, I could see a sort of comfortable acceptance in their eyes because I was fulfilling the role of Dignified Cripple. They knew where to place me in the world.

The men who agreed to date me treated me with respect but never as a sexual being. I saw that it made them uncomfortable to think of me in that way. We went to movies together, but they would look at other girls' chests, other girls' legs. I was their eunuch; they wanted real bodies.

Even now, people still treat me that way. When I go out for dinner with a man and he touches me too personally, others get offended as though he were touching a child. It's never indecent or even adventurous, just the way we hold hands or the way he brushes my hair out of my face. People look disgusted or embarrassed when I try to see past my own castration and become a woman. They can't handle it. Somehow, this one physical flaw stands between me and the whole world and it gets to the point that I want to shake the sanctimonious looks off their faces and scream.

"I'm real! I'm human! The machine works! And I like to fuck!"

You laugh at this. You shake your head. You say you don't mean to laugh it's just that you're so funny and it's so true and thank you for saying it.

No problem, I say. I sip my tea and ask if we'll finally watch Ferris Bueller's Day Off.

If we do that, you ask, what will we do with the white cup?