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## Something Like Sugar

### Abstract

When we arrived at Tawny's farm around three in the afternoon, I was already praying to sweet baby Jesus that my tampon wouldn't leak. I didn't have another one and couldn't ask Tawny without her making a big deal about it in front of the rest of the crew. No other girls had detassled that day, either, which secretly made me proud. Not everyone's cut out for walking fields plucking corn tassels in the July heat. Not that I was particularly suited, either, 13 and a girl at that -- I just didn't like being left out, plus the prospect of my own money was promising.

### Keywords

innocence, farm, adolescence



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## Something like Sugar

by Brandi Homan

When we arrived at Tawny's farm around three in the afternoon, I was already praying to sweet baby Jesus that my tampon wouldn't leak. I didn't have another one and couldn't ask Tawny without her making a big deal about it in front of the rest of the crew. No other girls had detasseled that day, either, which secretly made me proud. Not everyone's cut out for walking fields plucking corn tassels in the July heat. Not that I was particularly suited either, 13 and a girl at that—I just didn't like being left out, plus the prospect of my own money was promising.

A few of our crew—mainly from the local junior highs and the high school in town—had gone to Tawny's place to recover after work because our fearless crew leader offered the closest air conditioning that didn't belong to someone's parents. When I crawled out of the back of the van and stepped into her gravel driveway, I converted to Christianity. *Please let nothing be showing, please let nothing be showing* was all I could think. I could already imagine Tawny's taunting. At least it was only Shifty behind me, and although there was something wrong with that kid, ultimately he was kind enough not to talk.

Tawny waved us across the driveway to the nearest pen. Wiping dirt from

the van floor onto my jean shorts, I trudged along behind the rest of the group and stood next to Tanner as we looked past the wood rails. Inside the pen were three cows, two pigs, two sheep, and one goat. At the sight of them, Shifty's grin went as wide as Nebraska. "A goat!" he said. "Can I ride it?"

Tawny threw her head to the side and spat, "Oh lawd, Shifty wants to ride the goat!" She thrust her pelvis forward a few times. Everyone busted up laughing and even Tanner—who had a crush on me and usually tried to play it cool—started making pumping motions with his groin. Shifty looked like a thermometer—you could see the red rising up from his neck to his cheeks and over his albino-white eyebrows to his forehead. His eyes shifted to the side and he smiled a secret smile, making me wonder if, in fact, he actually did want to fuck the goat. Tanner had told me about a kid on the crew from Quakerton, the juvenile detention center, who was on probation because of what he'd done with a cow.

"True story," Tanner had said, pulling his eyebrows high. Whenever he did that, the whiteheads on his forehead twitched in unison.

As the laughter subsided, the grey sweatshirt I had tied around my waist in case of a leak started to come loose. I yanked at the sleeves, pulling them tighter.

"Shit, Shifty," Tawny said. "You boys want to learn something about riding, you stick with me. I know a thing or two." Again with the pelvic thrusts.

"Oh yeah?" Tanner challenged.

"Shit yeah. Just because I'm old"—Tawny was in her thirties—"doesn't mean I don't still know how to give it to my husband."

Tawny was a poor man's Meryl Streep, darker hair and teeth with the regularity of railroad ties except for a canine that jack-knifed sideways. Thick through the cheeks and thighs. What I mean is, not one of us wanted to picture her taking it from her husband. Ever.

"We do things you all ain't even heard of yet," she continued, looking around at each of us. I squinted at her with a nervous smile. The others fidgeted.

“I can even do the splits, used to be a gymnast.”

“Nuh-uh.” This time it was Shifty.

“Oh yeah? Watch.” And with that, Tawny pitched a leg forward and slid her tennis shoe out on the grass till her crotch was on land. Her grin was frightening as she stuck one arm straight up in the air.

“Taaa-daah! Bet you boys thinking ‘bout how you can get someone’s ankle behind your head like that, now aren’cha?”

I looked at the ground. Grass had never been so interesting. I stared straight down until Tawny huffed her way into an upright position. One of her dirt-encrusted, mangy children ran up and attached itself to her leg like Velcro. I wondered who in their right mind would let Tawny procreate and kinda felt sorry for the kid, Tawny being its mother and all, but the kid looked so vacant and unhinged that it made me nervous.

“Now who’s thirsty?” Patting her own ass, Tawny unhooked the child and began walking from the pens to the farmhouse.

The best thing about Tawny’s house, as far as I could tell, was the kittens. An old Tide detergent box sat in a living room corner, kittens inside it mewling like wildfire. I wandered over and leaned in to look, feeling the tampon slip as I did.

The kittens—must’ve been around five or six—were all curled up around each other like a colony of maggots. They were grey with white spots, white with grey spots, mostly grey, or mostly white. Tawny’s child appeared out of nowhere and reached in to grab one, handing me the kitten.

“They’re babies,” she said. I nodded.

“I’m gonna have babies someday too,” she continued. I faked a smile as wide as I’d ever smiled because the thought of this kid’s kids and those kids’ kids—in their future double-wides—filled me with despair. I looked down at the mostly grey kitten it had given me, which bawled through tiny, angry fangs. Standing, I clutched the kitten tighter and walked into the living room, where the rest of the crew was sniffing around, checking

things out—miscellaneous hunting knives, a mitten, cartons of multicolored drinks with foil lids. Pieces of an erector set thrown together in a grime-coated pile.

I sat on the floor tucked into a corner, the crown molding sticking into my lower back, making sure not to sit on my sweatshirt just in case. Cradling the kitten in my lap made it easier to pet behind its little ears, under its pink chin.

Tanner sat down next to me in a green chair with strained patches of now-yellow fabric. His butch hair cut and stark blue eyes gave him the look of an eager animal. The chair squeaked under his weight as he tilted back and looked around him.

“Well, we gonna put a movie in or something?”

Tawny was leaning in the doorway as she spoke, the child around her leg again.

“You guys ever seen a triple-X?” I looked up from the kitten. Tawny detached the child and was striding to another Tide box in the corner, this one filled with shiny black VCR tapes.

“Jesus, you’re kidding, right?” Tanner looked at me, concerned about my reaction.

“Nope, bet you boys never seen one before neither.” Shifty’s thermometer flushed to his hairline. The other boys hooted and hollered as she pushed the VCR lid down, pressed play.

On the screen were two naked people buttfucking. I wasn’t really sure of the exact mechanics of buttfucking, but I guessed this was it. I glanced around for the kid, who was nowhere in sight.

“Oh!” Shifty groaned and covered his mouth. Tanner started laughing and shaking his head from side to side. Neither of them took their eyes off the screen. I had never wanted to go home so badly in my entire life. Suddenly I was very interested in the kitten in my lap.

“Now that’s not the type of pussy you’re playing with there, Amber.” Tawny

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guffawed like a trucker and everyone followed, all eyes on me and the kitten. I looked up but right back down again. The cat needed a name, I decided, my eyes suddenly wet and itchy.

“Aw, Amber’s got a cute pussy,” Shifty chimed up. More guffaws.

Something like Sugar, I decided, or Rainbow, Sweetpea. Something innocent and good, like when Mom bakes chocolate chip cookies on a Sunday for no reason.

The light shifted, a dull orange coming through Tawny’s window. Sweat and dirt were starting to wear on our now-dry skin, so we loaded ourselves up in the van for the ride to town. There were no windows in back. I made sure to climb up last so Tanner couldn’t stare at my ass and sat on the cold, corroded metal floor, my head jerking like a dashboard doll’s once we hit the highway. It was silent. I was tired.

Something hit my chin and I jerked awake. We were still a few miles before town, and the boys were throwing things at me, trying to see what would land in my lap. A Snickers wrapper, a Pringles can lid, several soda cans. I pressed my eyes shut harder and feigned sleep, thinking about the child, the girl. She must’ve been around five. I was thirteen. I wondered what would become of either of us, of anyone who came from a place like this. I shivered, weak. My tampon had leaked, felt different than the sweat down there. I no longer cared.

*Brandi Homan is the author of the poetry collections *Bobcat Country* (Shearsman, 2010) and *Hard Reds* (Shearsman, 2008). This is her first published story. Probably, she loves you.*

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