

Devil's Lettuce

By Haythorne

Hannah let Roy in through the back porch sliding door, which required him to scale the fence into her backyard from the alleyway. He gave her a look and twisted his leg to display the sizable gash on his calf. "Sorry," she said. "But it's just the only reason the HOA found out about us smoking last time was because the neighbors across the street ratted us out."

"Seriously?"

"What else do you expect from Mormons with two seven-year olds?"

Roy grabbed a paper towel from the roll above the sink, wetted it, and cleaned the wound. "This sneaking around better be worth it."

"I trust my bud-tender's taste more than almost everything."

Hannah beckoned Roy upstairs to her room, locked the door, turned the box fan to its highest setting, and faced it toward the open window. Roy sat on the beanbag chair beside her bed while Hannah rifled through her closet for a messenger bag slung around a hanger and emerged with an unmarked vial containing the pot she'd been hyping up for the past two weeks.

Roy was unimpressed. "An eighth between the two of us?"

Hannah shrugged. "When it's this good, you know for a fact it ain't gonna last under my supervision. Trust me though, you're not going to need more than a couple passes."

“Indica?”

“Damn right.”

“What’s the strain?”

Roy could tell Hannah was hoping he’d ask. “That’s the best part. You can help me come up with one. This nug came directly from my hook-up, who’s apparently becoming quite the horticulturalist. He said he’d let me name it as part of an early birthday gift.”

“You still haven’t told him you’re a lesbian, have you?”

“I shouldn’t have to,” she said. “Anyway, even if he were a woman, banging a bud-tender has too many risks. If it all goes south, I lose feeling comfortable in the closest dispensary to my house. That’s too precious to me.”

She opened the vial and put the rim to her nose. “And if the weed’s this good, I can’t lose it, either!”

Roy took a smell when offered. The eighth was mostly somewhere between herbal and piney, with notes of sage and pepper.

“We smoking from Dank Williams Sr. or Blazed Foley today?” Hannah asked, holding up two pipes.

“Blazed.”

Hannah packed the pipe. Roy, in the mood for music, opened Spotify on her computer and scrolled through several public playlists before landing on All Out 60’s, which Hannah scoffed at. “You’re such a predictable stoner.”

The shuffle function landed them first on Tommy James & The Shondells *Crimson and Clover*. Hannah took the first hit, swaying as the first verse rose from the speakers. “Good fucking song,” she said, her voice muffled by the smoke.

She passed the lighter and pipe to Roy when he sat down. He flicked the lighter’s flywheel, pulling its flame gently down against the weed as he inhaled.

His first hit felt harsh. He coughed. Hannah mocked him. “Didn’t realize I was dealing with such an amateur.”

Roy spoke between coughs. “That, or your so-called horticulturalist needs more practice.”

The gram didn’t last long, but Hannah was right. The high sent his body into an instant buzz. He felt warm, light. “I take back what I said about your grower,” he said. “This is something else.”

“You’re feeling it already?”

“I’m feeling something.”

Roy lay back. As the warmth spread outward toward his legs, neck, and legs, the heat in his chest intensified. Started to tingle. While pleasant, it was alarming. He unbuttoned another button from his flannel shirt and fanned his face.

Hannah leaned forward and breathed out. “Damn, Roy, that’s some serious chest hair.”

“What?”

“Is blond your natural hair color?”

“You hallucinating?”

Hannah reached into his shirt and ran her hand across what she saw. Each motion back and forth, bristling and flattening the hairs, sent a shiver down his stomach. He climbed up onto his elbows and unbuttoned his shirt more to get a better look. A cream-colored patch of fur had sprouted, and seemed to be moving past his hips. As the spread emerged from the bottom of his shorts and snaked beneath his socks, tickling his calves, he felt his feet swelling, his toes merging, growing plump.

A part of Roy knew this was unnatural, and that he should try to find a way to stop it, but with the body high settling him deep into the beanbag chair, he watched with passive amusement and curiosity. “As weird as it is,” he said to Hannah, “it feels kind of soothing!”

As the rhythm guitar came to the forefront in the second half of a Jefferson Airplane song, the volume seemed to triple. Roy's ears sifted through his hair as they grew upward, caressing the hem of Hannah's pleated skirt. She pulled it aside, her knuckles grazing their fur. "It's soft," she said. "May I?"

"Sure."

The two were idly transfixed, running their hands across Roy's cheeks, the soft, pink padding that rose and cushioned his palms. Even as his face reshaped into a snout, and his upper lip met with the underside of his broadened nose, neither could help strum at his new whiskers, so delicate in their response to the slightest stimulus. The sensations were so overwhelming he hadn't noticed the tail that began to bunch at the base of his spine. It wiggled beneath the pressure of his waistband, and only when Roy loosened his belt did it pop free.

"So what do you think we should call this?" Hannah said, once the changes had stopped. "Devil's Lettuce? White Rabbit?"

Roy chuckled. "Pretty sure those are all taken."

"McGregor's Garden? Rabbit At Rest?"

The day drew on. Hannah rattled off dozens of more clever names. Roy didn't want to leave. Didn't want to face how he was going to explain his new look to his boss, his coworkers, the chatty convenience store owner. But when he did leave, it brought him some comfort that he could easily vault the fence that had given him earlier trouble.