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The Contest // Carter Staub

Each spring, my father goes to Bike Week in Daytona Beach. I remember this from my childhood; he is giddy when Bike Week is near, when he can load up his three motorcycles into his trailer and drive down.

He gets out his ratty bandana—never cleaned—and ties it around his head.

He puts cigars in his mouth and doesn't smoke them, just chews and gums it.

A mixture of curiosity as to what he does there and an added want to be by a beach, my mom and I flew down to meet him one year. We pulled into a motel-like building, and my father ran out to greet us, all-clad in leather and beard.

The first night there we went to the street where the main Harley Davidson store was. Along the street were vendors, food, Bud Light signs, girls in bikinis and shorts that said "Hottie" or "Ride me", etc. However, the most dramatic decoration was the motorcycles lined up for miles all along the road. The scene was strikingly beautiful; most expensive bikes had their proud fathers or mothers standing nearby as people gazed and looked, ready to answer questions or talk bike talk. Timid in my black ballet flats, shorts and light colored top, an outfit very appropriate for any other place, now I stuck out. I was incredibly self-conscious, and not that anyone was really judging me—but I felt some sort of biker peer pressure.

I bought a Harley Davidson t-shirt that was a bit too revealing.

The following night, my father introduced us to the main street downtown, nearer to the beach. It was dirtier and more compact. There were drunk people everywhere. Luckily I had had a few beers back at the motel, was wearing my leather boots, light-colored jeans and that same tight Harley tee. Hell, I decided not even to shower that day. I was feeling good and ready to go. We walked around, browsed t-shirts and shot glasses.

We were going into one of these outdoor bars as I passed the bartender to my right, who was standing on a stool, wearing

booty shorts that said “Miss Bitch” and a push up bra. Men were standing behind her to get a look every time she leaned over to hand a beer to the next customer. My mom, dad, and I, then came upon an empty stage and a whole crowd of men. I was wondering what was going on, when my father started laughing. “Carter,” he said, “you will never again in your life see this many men waiting together for anything.”

And he was right; these men were practically drooling. Some had cameras already pointed at the stage, ready to go.

My mother covered her mouth and gasped. She glared at my father “We do NOT need to be seeing this. For goodness sakes, Woody.”

“Ah come on, she’s gotta see it sometime.” They were talking about me, 19 years old and naïve as hell.

“I have to see *what* sometime?” I was worried. This must be something bad; did I want to see this with them? Would this be like watching *The Titanic* with my parents when I was 8-years old?

“This is a wet t-shirt contest, Carter,” my dad said.

Great. I thought. But I laughed it off. “Well, OK—guess we’re gonna watch it.” I made a promise to myself—I was going to watch this. With my parents. And I was going to survive.

The first girl came out. She was drunk and fat. The men poured water on her white shirt and she started hollering and laughing, jumping up and down with her hands in the air; I tried to play it off as if I had seen this before. I didn’t want people looking at me funny, like I didn’t belong in that crowd.

Her breasts hung a little bit, which was definitely normal for her age. It was weird at first. But they were breasts. I’d seen them before. What was more disturbing was the way the water illuminated the rolls in her stomach. And every time she rubbed her breasts together her stomach would roll around as well. She would grab her breasts so that she had a little water in her hands and then throw it out onto the crowd. They loved it. Except for the people with video cameras, of course, and they hid their technology from the droplets, eager not to miss a moment of her rolling body and cellulite.

I tilted my head to the side and watched the woman gyrate

around, seemingly happy for the attention, seemingly happy to be wet and exposed. Watching her was depressing and exhilarating at the same time. In a minute, she would get off that stage, put her clothes back on, and walk away. All this would have been five minutes of utter rebellion, of utter exploitation, and she would return to her life. I wondered if I could ever do that. And if I did, what would that mean? Would I be completely insane? Or would it have been a rush—?

When she left the stage, I knew that I would never see her again. She probably tripped off the stage, and her group of girlfriends caught her fall. Together, she and her girls would go to a bathroom, remove her soaked shirt, put her bra back on, and then a motorcycle shirt on top of that, and head to the bar for another drink. Later tonight, she would drunkenly fall into her bed like the rest of us, savoring the last few moments of this vacation, before heading home to her boyfriend and five screaming children.

But I remember all of them. The woman after her had small breasts and the next was much older, her breasts hung down a bit farther than the others. Of course, they saved the best for last. She clearly worked with the company and was about 22. Her breasts were the smallest and she was the skinniest.

I wanted to leave by that point; I didn't want to watch any more of it. I hated it; this last girl was too hard to watch. As the water rolled down her body, she mechanically rubbed her nipples to make them harder in such a way that made me sad. It was depressing, to have a girl pleasuring herself when she did not want to be. Systematically, she would work her A-size breasts in her hands and squat on the stage, close to the end. Men reached out at her, grabbing and wanting. It was terrible.

I looked at my parents then—and I could see that they were ready to go too. My dad looked most upset; he said "Come on, let's go" and we wandered through the crowd, sliding between the mesmerized audience members, him holding onto me a bit tighter than usual and helping me through. My mom held my hand from the back, and I helped pull her in the same way that I was going.

We didn't stay long enough to ever find out who won,

instead, we sat at a table. I crossed my boots under my chair and slowly placed my head in my hands; I looked at the table.

It was silent for a while, but my dad finally said:

“That is just so sad isn’t it?”

I nodded, still looking at the table. I couldn’t look up to see my parents’ faces. I looked terrified probably, but I was trying to hide it. My mom said:

“Let’s go back to the hotel. I think we’ve seen enough, don’t you think so sweetie?” My dad stood up in agreement. We headed back together to the car and then to the hotel. I didn’t say much, as I was just thinking about that first woman on the stage and what her life was like off of it.

I couldn’t picture it.

When I went to sleep, I thought about my own life. I thought about what would get me on that stage.