

Quality Time

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“Holy crap.”

I stood in the doorway of the Magic Tower, a popular porn shop, and watched my mother practically run in, like she'd been let out for recess at elementary school.

Inside the double oak doors, generic white tile accented the antique white walls. The store felt like a warehouse of stolen goods, where shady dudes came to discreetly purchase the products. No one made eye contact in the quiet atmosphere. I passed a discomfited couple examining lubricants, and circled around a Dungeons & Dragons nerd. The nerd gave me the willies. He looked passive-aggressive: someone who'd gotten a lot of shit in high school, and now could smother offenders in their sleep.

Mom wandered farther into the store, absorbed in her quest, and passed the rows of video racks that featured improbable dicks and silicone stacks. Displays of lingerie, games, and magazines were organized in the middle of the store. She giggled over the greeting cards that edged the magazines and were sectioned

off under “Playful,” “Naughty,” and “Get Well.” Greeting cards? My mind boggled at the thought of a pop-up penis equipped with a speech balloon, wishing the viewer good health.

The southwest corner of the store specialized in alternative sex devices (“Double Delight,” “Yankee Doodle Dandy”), soon followed by columns of bright boas and brilliant strands of beads. Exhibits of lubricants and body sweets were stacked across the aisle: gummy thongs and whipped cream, tasty body frost and gumdrop nipples.

But the walls—oh, the walls!

Dildos covered them. Every shape, size, color, and texture, and the antique white seemed an odd contrast to their content. Some were small as a pen, and others the size of flashlights. Glow-in-the-dark, neon, metallic, textured—truly, the variety overwhelmed me.

Mom made a beeline for the dildos.

“Wow!” she exclaimed. “Look at this one!”

To my horror, she didn't keep her voice low. Instead, she grew louder and insisted

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that I look at this one. She held up a six inch dildo shaped as an elongated silver bullet.

Gleeful, Mom tittered. "Looks like a Thermos."

My eyes widened in shock—I made a silent vow to get rid of my own Thermos at home. Mom flitted back and forth between the fake penises, like a child in a candy shop who can't decide what to buy with her limited pennies. She held up various specimens and debated about what she fancied:

"Oooh, green. Oh, wait, it looks like gangrene."

"Light blue? No, it looks like it was sawed off a corpse."

"Eww. Red looks infected."

"I don't suppose hot pink would be so bad."

Aahhhh! It was a nightmare come true. Customers crept by and gave my demented mother a wide berth while she made her selection. Mom grabbed a shopping handbasket and rifled through the body sweets ("Check out these gummy penises. Aren't they hysterical?"), and lingerie ("Sweetie, what about this one? It's not quite like butt floss").

I wandered after Mom, dazed by the sex-crazed whirlwind she turned out to be, but careful to keep a certain distance between

us. After the sudden metamorphosis, I wasn't ready to be associated with her. Furthermore, I couldn't reconcile her excitement with how I'd been raised. As I grew up, we didn't talk about sex. My mother's idea of sex education hadn't even broached the birds and the bees.

Instead, when I turned eighteen, she belatedly asked if I had pubic hair yet. Totally normal development, she assured me. And I knew why I bled monthly, right?

A college course in human sexuality cured most of my ignorance, and personal experience fixed the rest. However, I didn't expect my mother to follow up on a friend's recommendation, and was surprised when she decided to browse the Magic Tower on our way to a movie.

Mom had finished shopping, and I loitered by the cash register, where she paid for her items. Laid-back and genial, the clerk grinned knowingly at Mom and her pleased smile. The total for the hot pink dildo, some lingerie, and body candy: an astronomical \$126.12.

As we left the Magic Tower and approached the car, Mom turned to me.

"Honey, why didn't you buy anything? Didn't you find anything interesting?"

