

Muched by an Angel by Jay Philia

“It ain’t much, but it’s honest work.” Liam smiled, and he and Bess both laughed at his reference to a once-popular meme. Liam had just given Bess a tour of his dairy farm.

“This is where Bess is going to intern?” asked Annika.

“Mhmm.” muttered Reese.

“It’s...quite small,” said Annika. It was an understatement, given that Liam and Bess were standing around Liam’s only remaining cow.

“Great things can grow from small sources,” said Reese. They were sitting on beams in the upper portion of the barn, invisible to the humans below. Reese reached into the breast pocket of her ruby-red blazer and pulled out a cigarette. She lit it and produced a breathy puff.

“And why are we here again?” Annika asked, accepting Reese’s offer of a puff. “It would take a miracle to save this farm, and angels—”

“Can’t perform miracles, mmhmm,” said Reese, finishing Annika’s thought. “Not directly anyway. See, you’ve got the whole manual down pat. Pretty soon you’ll be supervising me.”

“Not likely,” Annika tutted through a clipped British accent. She puffed again and passed the nicotine stick back to Reese.

“We can’t perform miracles,” Reese continued. “But we can help to...facilitate them. In this case, we’ve got a miracle of science, nearly on its way. And this young one here, she can perform a miracle, if she can learn to live in the real world and not just in a book.” Reese pointed to the twentysomething Bess, whose burnt auburn hair was cinched in a tight bun. Bespectacled and bearing a clipboard tight against her chest, Bess stared gravely at Liam and wrote down everything she deemed important.

“So, putting theory into practice, is the lesson?” asked Annika.

“In a way, yes. Yes indeed. Sound familiar?” Reese raised her eyebrows at Annika, and the two of them laughed as Reese put out her cigarette.

“So, with my practicum underway, I can finish my Animal Husbandry concentration this semester, and then I’ll be on track to graduate a semester early.”

Bess looked the paragon of perfectionism as she said these words. Her MacBook, balanced across her tweed-skirted crossed legs, showed a color-coded spreadsheet. In the chair next to her sat an open datebook dappled with fluorescent highlights. Next to her, atop her advisor’s desk, sat a metal water tumbler whose size seemed to suggest utility not as a hydration device but rather a blunt instrument.

“Well Bess, I’m mighty impressed already. I doubt you’ll be needing much guidance from me,” said the person sitting across from Bess.

“Thank you, Dr....I’m so sorry, I don’t think I caught your last name?” said Bess.

“Oh, please, call me Annika,” said Annika. Bess blinked.

“Uh, sure,” she said. “Thank you, Annika.”

“You’re most welcome, Bess. So tell me, how is your practicum going? I know you said you had your first visit but, how did it go? How did you feel about it?” said Annika. Bess paused.

“It went...fine. It’s...quite small,” Bess said. Annika smiled.

“Well, as a mentor of mine once said, great things can grow from small sources,” Annika said.

“Mm,” Bess almost seemed to scowl before catching herself. “It’s just that, there’s only one cow. One. On the entire dairy farm. That’s...it.”

“You sound frustrated?” Annika asked.

“Well, it’s just that...how am I supposed to learn how a dairy farm is run? With only one cow?” Bess said. This time it was Annika’s turn to pause. For just a moment, Bess felt that her new academic advisor was looking imploringly at a third person standing in the corner. A person who wasn’t there. Or at least, whom Bess couldn’t see.

“Bess, you are a fabulous student. Truly phenomenal,” Annika started. Bess smiled. She of course appreciated the compliments, but had long ago gotten used to receiving compliments from people overseeing her. They were not as useful to her as the results of her own hard work.

“This, practicum...I would really encourage you to lean into it...” Annika continued, and Bess cocked her head slightly. Since when did she not lean into her academics? Surely Annika knew this, even if she had only just met her. After all, she had emailed the woman an annotated copy of her CV and transcript.

“By that I mean...Bess, I know you know this, but. The real world is messy. Unpredictable. All of the lessons you can learn from your books and your courses are great, truly, they are. And they help people make decisions and change the world. But in the real world, in, say, this practicum, many things might be surprising, or disappointing, or not quite what you expect. And choosing to show up and do the work—which I know you’re clearly good at—but doing that even when the work isn’t what you expect, or perhaps not what you’d hoped, the value of doing just that, *that* I think is a lesson in and of itself. One worth learning.”

“You’re right...Annika,” said Bess, whose use of a mentor’s first name felt like wearing a sweater backwards. “I’ll put my best foot forward.” This she said more from a respect for authority than belief in the sentiment.

“That’s the spirit,” said Annika, British accent vibing particularly well with her verbiage. “Just lean in, and tell me how it goes next week.”

“So today I thought you could help with the milking,” said Liam. It had rained earlier in the morning, and the mud-littered road squelched underneath their feet as Liam and Bess made their way to Liam’s barn. Liam was wearing a green and taupe flannel atop a pair of worn blue jeans. His black hair, cinched in a bun not dissimilar to Bess’s, had rogue bangs that crossed his forehead at 10 and 2. Bess had not really noticed it the other day, but Liam was handsome. As if to prove it, Liam chose that moment to smile sweetly, a sparkle catching one of his dark brown eyes. “Have you ever milked a cow before?” Liam asked.

“No, never. Sorry,” said Bess. It was rare for something to be new for her.

“What are you sorry for?” said Liam. They had reached the barn and he was unlatching the gate.

“Nothing, I just. I’m usually more prepared,” said Bess.

“Well, you’re here to learn new things, so maybe it’s a great thing that you’ve never milked a cow before. I’m really looking forward to showing you. Here, Lucy Moo is just down here in this stall,” said Liam, and before she could stop herself, Bess let out a loud laugh. Liam had forgotten to mention the name of his only cow on his tour last week, and Bess hadn’t thought to ask.

“Sorry,” she said again. Liam stopped in his tracks.

“Hey, again, nothing to be sorry for. We like to have fun here, Lucy Moo and I. And we want our guests to have fun, too,” Liam said, then proceeded to show Bess to Lucy Moo’s stall. “And yes, she is named after Lucy Liu, my childhood actress crush.”

Bess smiled. She and Liam made their way to a small alcove of the barn with a gate and plenty of hay. In the corner, a large, sleeping cow lay sprawled across the floor.

“Hey Lucy! Good morning Lucy! Oh my goodness, your udder is quite full, isn’t it?! Well Miss Bess is here to help you today, Lucy! Good old Lucy Moo!” said Liam, as he patted the cow on the back. The cow mooed loudly and awkwardly got up from off the ground.

“Oh,” said Bess. “I thought cows slept standing up, like horses.”

“No!” said Liam, gently but excitedly. “For deep sleep, they sleep just like us, lying down. But unlike us they don’t have to get up early to get to work!”

Bess smiled. It was a dumb joke, if you could even call it that, but she knew that Liam was trying to make her feel more at ease, which she appreciated. She decided to reciprocate by asking questions. Liam seemed to like talking. The sparkle returned to his eyes whenever he got to answer a question.

“So how old is Ms. Lucy Moo?” asked Bess.

“Come, we need to grab a milking bucket,” said Liam, leading Bess out of Lucy’s room while she helped herself to a breakfast of hay. “Um,” Liam paused, deciding on the

bucket. “Here, could you wash this? Get the full experience,” he said, pointing towards a sink and scrubber. Bess was happy to oblige. At least she was being useful.

“How old is Lucy Moo...” Liam tutted. “I would say 20. Yes, around 20, because she was born when I was just in elementary school, right around the time the *Charlie's Angels* films came out,” Liam said and grinned.

“20?” said Bess loudly, over the roar of the water and the screeching of her scrubbing. “That's quite old for a cow, isn't it?” Liam's smile faltered.

“Yes, it is,” he said, and grew silent.

“I'm sorry, I didn't mean to,” Bess started. Bess saw the look on his face when she said sorry, and proceeded to say “sorry,” again about saying sorry before she could stop herself.

“Nothing, nothing to worry about,” said Liam. He sighed, and all of his energy seemed to drain out of him. He seemed in that moment far older than the sprightly 30 years Bess had just deduced him to be, and much older than he had appeared mere minutes ago when he met Bess at her car. “I know you can tell how poorly I am doing, as a dairy farmer. Having one cow is not a...financially viable form of existence. I had to sell off all of the rest of my cows, just to be able to survive. I sold them to be killed, you know. Which happens all the time in dairy farming. Did you know most dairy cows are killed before they are even five years old? Obviously they can live much longer than that.” Liam nodded towards Lucy Moo.

“My father, he knew the business side of things. He could figure everything out,” Liam continued. Bess shut off the water and started drying off the bucket, trying to make as little noise as possible. She wasn't counting on Liam being so vulnerable, certainly not on her second day.

“When my father came here from Vietnam, he dedicated himself to working hard for his family,” Liam continued. “He wanted to be a different kind of dairy farmer, where we cared about the animals that we had. My dad never sold an animal to be slaughtered just to make a dollar, and he somehow made it work. Well clearly, I haven't been able to do that. I'm, I'm sorry Bess. I really hope you learn something valuable here. When they said a student was looking for experience, I turned them down at first because I didn't think there would be any valuable experience for you here. I hope there is, but if there isn't, I'm sorry.” Liam looked at Bess directly in her

eyes. She could see sparkles swimming in his eyes. His whole body tensed up, and she could tell he was trying to stop himself from crying.

Bess wanted to walk right over and hug Liam, but wasn't sure if that would be inappropriate. Her new advisor's words suddenly echoed throughout her head, as if Annika were right there in the barn with them. *Lean in!* Bess swore she could hear them spoken aloud, clipped British accent and everything.

Suddenly Bess snapped to it, willing herself to do what felt emotionally right, even if there was a rusty file folder somewhere with a typed-up policy prohibiting what she was about to do.

"I'm s...I mean, I'm appreciative of how hard this must be for you," said Bess, hugging Liam without warning and catching herself before she could say the "s" word. "And I really am excited to be here, I know I can learn something," she said, almost believing what she was saying.

Liam returned the hug, more forcefully than Bess was anticipating. She found that she didn't mind, though. She never really had found time to make romance work in her life. She could make straight A's and put a roof over her head, but she couldn't make dating work on top of that. Liam's embrace made her realize just how strong he was. His biceps bulged underneath his flannel, and Bess suddenly felt safe in a way she hadn't in years. An external safety. It wasn't her running herself ragged, being the exceptional overachiever, that was making her feel safe. It was the warm embrace of—

"MOOOO!" came a noise from the back of the barn. The embrace broke immediately and both Liam and Bess laughed.

"That would be Lucy Moo!" said Liam, stating the obvious. "Her udder is very full, I think she's ready for this!" he said, wiping a tear from his eye with one hand while grabbing the pail Bess had been drying with the other. "I'll show you how to milk a cow!" said Liam, trying to return the room to emotional normalcy.

So to milking they went. For the first ten minutes, Bess was truly quite awful at her job. For the first five minutes, she couldn't make anything come out of the udder, despite the depth of its fullness and the ferocity of her attempts. Liam was simply doing something with his hands and fingers that Bess couldn't imitate with hers. Then, for seemingly no reason at all, she got it. With a *spurt!* that ended in a *thud* as milk hit metal, Bess was able to express what seemed like a dew-drop's size of hot, white liquid.

“There you go! Great job, Bess! See, I know you could do it!” said Liam. If he felt any exasperation for what Bess felt was a deplorably slow start, he didn’t show it. His eyes were lit up again, not with tears but excitement. He even patted her on the back. “Now do it again, we need to empty her udder so she can feel relief.” Bess was sure her success had been a one-trick wonder, but lo and behold she was able to repeat the movement—at once simple and complicated—and a *spurt-thud* of milk discharged itself from Lucy Moo’s teat and into the bottom of the pail. The drop was much larger, and Lucy even lived up to her name and let out a moo.

“Yes, just like that,” said Liam gingerly. Bess continued, and after what felt like forever she even seemed to get into a rhythm.

“So, it is a relief for them, like I’m not hurting her?” asked Bess after a particularly strong discharge of milk and another moo from Lucy.

“Oh yes,” said Liam. “They need to be milked, every morning, rain or shine. They just get so full and plump, every day, without fail. I remember when I was young and my ba and I—that is, my dad—when we’d get to playing cards late—we didn’t really have money for video games or anything—well, their udders were just so full, I can’t imagine what it feels like for them.”

Bess couldn’t imagine either. As she got into a rhythm she imagined what it must feel like for the cow. To have your body fill up with a substance, to feel so full, and then to finally have relief. But to be dependent on another person for that relief? That’s what really made Bess think. She had always been so self-dependent. It wasn’t anyone else who had gotten her the good grades and the meager but manageable apartment in a safe part of town. She had gotten them—for herself, by herself. Her parents had never been there for her, other than in the perfunctory ways even the most mediocre parents are: she’d been born of course, and had had a roof over her head for nearly 20 years. Other than that...

“Not much, of course, comes from any one cow. But some. And every drop counts. And again, she produces constantly,” Liam continued.

Bess was learning how much he liked to chat. It must get lonely up here, all alone—well, with no other humans, that is. Bess floated in and out of concentration in listening to what Liam was saying. She didn’t ignore him, *per se*, but he did seem to chatter in a loose, stream-of-consciousness way, which allowed Bess to get lost in thoughts of her own.

Like how Lucy Moo produced every day. Bess was certainly used to that. But what she produced took so much mental effort. Not to mention emotional stamina. Whether it was the TA work she took on, dealing with needy undergraduate students who appeared to have missed out on basics in both literacy and manners. Or the classes she took as a student herself, which required hours of reading, writing, note taking, and more. It was meaningful, of course, and she had a real drive for it. She'd always had an urge to produce, to excel, to get things done and be of service. But boy, did Lucy Moo seem to have it easy. There was no doubt that she punched above her weight class—producing milk daily in her second decade on this earth. She was certainly providing a service—making milk that nourished bodies. But she seemed to do so effortlessly. Unconsciously. She didn't wake up in the morning and have to decide—every day, and without fail—to X out of YouTube and be productive. Lucy Moo's body just...was productive. Rain or shine.

Suddenly, Bess found herself with a sharp pain in her gut as she realized that she was jealous of Lucy Moo. Jealous of a cow. For the cow served a purpose—a true, undeniable purpose that helped people—but the cow didn't have to go through all the bullshit of grading exams and writing midterms that Bess did. All of Bess's going and going, her perennial commitment to being the Energizer Bunny meets Elle Woods meets Hermione Granger, all of it had allowed herself to focus on what to do rather than reflecting on *what* she wanted to do and *why* she wanted to do it. It was a painful moment, and she nearly started to cry when she realized Liam had stopped talking and was staring at her.

“Slowing down? Are your fingers sore?” he asked, voice soft and gentle as always.

“Oh, no, sor—er, whoops I just got to thinking about something, that's all,” she said, stopping herself from saying sorry.

“No worries, no worries,” said Liam. “This bucket is almost full, and I think Lucy is pretty much empty. She doesn't produce as much in her old age, but we will milk her again at the end of the day.”

“She's milked twice a day? She gets a lot of attention then,” said Bess, surprised at how she had expressed a full bucket's worth of milk.

“Oh yes, she's a good girl and deserves it. Aren't you, Lucy Moo?” said Liam, patting Lucy lovingly on the head. As Lucy Moo let out a moo, Bess found herself jealous of a cow for the second time that morning.

“Good morning, Bess! I’m glad you’re here, I have some wonderful news!” Liam was offering Bess an even more vibrant smile than usual, and he had a spring in his step that caused her to struggle to keep up with him on their trek towards the barn. The sun cast a powerful, muggy glare over them both, and Bess suddenly felt warm in her spring jacket. She noticed with a smile that Liam was dressed only in jeans and an undershirt—bulging biceps unburdened by fabric and free for all the world to see.

“Oh?” was all she said in reply, nearly out of breath given Liam’s frantic pace, and also not yet fully awake—she had been up past two grading papers again.

“Yes!” said Liam, further quickening his pace. This would’ve frustrated Bess had it not been for the pleasing view this uptick afforded her: a frenetic, rhythmic jostling of Liam’s denim-draped derriere. Like two firmly packed grapefruits, Bess wasn’t quite sure how Liam’s pants fit, nor how she hadn’t noticed this before. Then, in a sudden panic, Bess remembered that this was a professional situation, and simultaneously realized that Liam had been explaining something to her.

“Er, sor—er, whoops, I, what was that?” she said, suddenly pissed at herself for appearing so out of it.

“No worries, no worries,” said Liam. “Did you have your coffee this morning?” he added, laughing. Bess simply laughed along with him. She actually prided herself on being able to get by without the stimulant, but tended to avoid saying as much for fear of coming across as odd or arrogant. “I said, I’ll show you what I mean—it is great news for the farm!”

They were at the entrance to the barn now. As Liam unlatched the gate, Bess noticed a hot pink piece of paper hanging against a side door.

“What’s that?” she asked, straining to read what it said.

“Oh, nothing, nothing, it’s not important now!” said Liam, ushering her inside.

Once inside the barn, Bess immediately noticed a change. The main part of the barn was as oversized and cavernously empty as it had been when she first toured. But immediately to the right side of where they entered, Liam appeared to have set up several tables, atop which sat multiple glass bottles of various sizes—some as small as

test tubes, and a couple that were taller and wider than the size of Liam and Bess combined. Those beakers—for that’s what they appeared to Bess to be—each had a table of their own, and were indeed nearly as tall as the barn itself. Each beaker was graduated—marked with white equidistant lines along the side. Bess knew they must be for some sort of scientific experiment, but couldn’t fathom what that might be.

“What is all this?” she asked. Liam was standing there beaming, watching her try to piece everything together.

“This,” he exclaimed, “is what’s going to save my ba’s farm!” Bess must have looked skeptical. “Let me explain,” he said, walking over to the tables. Bess followed skeptically.

“A little while ago, actually, just before you started, actually, this is why I allowed you to come, because I changed my mind, like I said I know things were not going well for me,” Liam said. Bess braced herself. Liam’s manner of speaking could be as circuitous and long-winded as the essays she had barely finished grading last night. Liam once again seemed to sense Bess’s emotions.

“Anyway,” he breathed. “Let me start over,” he paused to smile. “A while back, I get a letter from the government saying that my farm qualifies for an experimental new treatment that they are offering to struggling dairy farms. At first, I am suspicious. There are so many scams these days! But I had several phone calls from representatives and checked official government websites. It’s legit! And so this is what has allowed me to hold onto hope, this is what made me say yes to you coming to help me for your practicum! If I thought my farm had no chance of success, I wouldn’t have wanted you to waste your time. But now, the farm can go on!”

Bess smiled at Liam’s contagious excitement, yet marveled at his ability to use so many words and still communicate so little.

“So what kind of treatment is it, exactly?” she asked.

“Oh, yes! Good question!” Liam smiled again, or, to put it more accurately, smiled wider—Bess had not really seen him stop smiling the whole morning, except for a brief wavering of his lips when she had pointed out the pink slip on the door.

“So it is basically an experimental medicine to help cows make more milk. Like, a lot more! And it has already been through rigorous testing, don’t worry, I wouldn’t do anything to endanger poor Lucy Moo!” he said.

“So why do they need more testing?” she asked.

“Well, they kept talking about replication, you know, just to ensure that everything worked consistently in different circumstances so that they can make sure the product is the best quality before they put it to market! It’s actually, you know, it’s the government that is helping but they are partnering with a private company.” Liam took another deep breath; he seemed to barely take in oxygen while he offered his explanations, so high was his excitement.

“I see,” said Bess, whose incredulity had started to fade at the mention of the word “replication.” If the scientists behind this were talking about replicating results, then they were likely both serious and competent.

“And the beakers?” she began.

“Those are to collect the milk, to test it, you see?” said Liam.

“That’s space for an awful lot of milk,” she said, pointing towards the two tubes that towered above them. Liam laughed.

“Yes, it is! But they said that this is standard issue for all the farms participating. They didn’t seem to care that, for me, it’s just Lucy Moo here. I’m sure most of the other farms have much more cows and will need the storage.” said Liam. Bess nodded.

“So, is Lucy already producing a lot more?” she asked. She then saw a flicker of Liam forming a frown for the second time that morning, only for it to be replaced by a smile once again.

“Oh no, the experiment hasn’t started yet. Someone in a van came and delivered all of these tubes yesterday, but they said they would have a more senior person come later and give detailed instructions of how to give the treatment to the animal, and, you know, give us the actual treatment, the new medicine.” Liam finished talking and just stood there smiling. Bess had a sudden urge to kiss him. She exhaled deeply instead.

“Well anyway, that’s the good news! We better—” at just that second, a *MOO!* erupted from the other end of the barn. Liam and Bess laughed. “Just on schedule!” said Liam loudly. “As I was saying, we better go and milk Lucy Moo!” Liam turned and walked quickly towards his cow. Bess followed, sharing two heady feelings: a cautious gratitude towards the prospects of Liam’s future in farming, and a burgeoning lust,

which was buoyed further by watching his butt jiggle mercilessly beneath his jam-packed jeans as he strutted towards Lucy Moo. Once again, Bess couldn't help but feel jealous on behalf of a cow. She knew she had just met Liam, but she wished that he could get as excited about her as he did about this cow. A thought flitted into her head for just a moment: *maybe he could?* But then she dismissed it, just as his butt disappeared from view and he entered Lucy's stable. She shook her head, took a deep breath, and climbed back into her professional persona and through the doorway so that she could milk a cow.

"I'm from the government and I'm here to help."

Bess blinked, and gave a silent thanks that her Reaganite father wasn't there to hear those words. And upon further reflection, she was glad her Reaganite father wasn't there to sully the mood, for she was quite sure that the old man wouldn't much appreciate the person the words came from. She was a brash, boisterous black woman wearing a ruby-red blazer. She had introduced herself simply as "Ms. Reese," and explained to Liam and Bess that she was a senior person with the state's Division of Dairy, tasked with facilitating the region's Bovine Experimentation project. It was a week after Liam had first told Bess about his good fortune, and Ms. Reese was there to instruct them on how to administer the doses.

"Now remember," said Ms. Reese, one hand holding the smallest of the milk containment beakers, the other pointing at it pronouncedly. "Tomorrow morning when you go to milk Miss Lucy Moo—" at this, the woman bent her head and wheezed out a deep chuckle. "Love that name! I just love that name." At this, Liam smiled appreciatively, while Bess tried to hold on to her patience. "So anyway, with Miss Lucy Moo tomorrow, you *must* remember to collect at least a minimal sample of milk before you administer any of the doses! You must! This is for control, right? We have to have a control sample. So do that, then just send that to us straightaway, mail it to us, so that we have the control and we know that you've done that. And that's actually how you'll get the first check for participating in this study, once we have a control sample. And you'll want that money!" at this Bess could see Liam's eyes widen a little. "Then what you'll do is—and listen honey the timing is important here too, alright—so then, 24 to 36 hours after you've taken the control sample, you'll need to start administering the doses, alright?" Ms. Reese nodded at Liam and Bess, who nodded back.

"OK, yes." said Liam.

“OK good,” said Ms. Reese. “And then so you’ll start with dose 1A on day one, 1B on day two, and so on. The milk production will increase gradually. And remember, each dose is administered in the fleshy part of the backside, ok? Just don’t get kicked!” she said, bending backwards to let out another hearty laugh. Liam joined in gingerly, while Bess managed to cough out a couple of polite chuckles. “Now, very important,” said Ms. Reese, leaning towards them and lowering her voice. Bess could swear there was a glow about the woman, even though they were standing in the shady barn. She chalked it up to the woman’s exuberant personality, and the fact that Bess was once again running on fumes.

“Never, ever, ever, administer more than one dose a day, understand?” said Ms. Reese.

“Would...would it kill Miss Lucy Moo?” asked Liam. The rain was coming down full force that day, and Bess had been sad to see that he was fully covered, poncho and everything. Ms. Reese paused before answering his question.

“No. No, again, this is very, very safe. But this is more about control, again. We’re asking everyone to follow the same steps at the same time, or at least, in the same order. A few folks we’ve had to throw out their results and start over again because they get impatient, you know, they’re in a desperate situation. And yes, I suppose, if you sped up the administration of doses you could create a production velocity that would reap you more money from the milk sold than from the experiment itself, and yes, I suppose some rules are meant to be broken...” at this, the woman stopped talking and seemed to stare off into the distance at nothing in particular.

“What do you mean?” asked Bess. It seemed to her a bizarre, frankly outrageous statement for a government official to make.

“Oh nothing, don’t mind me. I’m getting too old for this, you know?” she said, leaning back and wheezing out another laugh. Liam again laughed with her. Bess pointedly did not.

“Anyways. Bess. Liam. So lovely meeting the two of you!” she said, shaking both of their hands as she did so. “You’re both very cute! Oops, did I say that!” she said, laughing again. This time even Liam seemed a bit uncomfortable, though he laughed nonetheless.

“Now remember, get a control sample tomorrow morning, or none of the results will be valid!” said Ms. Reese, before turning around. Liam and Bess walked with her to the front of the barn, and offered to walk her back to her red Cadillac, but she said she had a “nasty habit” she had to partake in and didn’t want it to sully them. Sure enough, once down the road a ways, Bess saw the woman take out a lighter and light up a cigarette.

“What an odd woman,” she said to Liam.

“Yes,” he said. “But very enthusiastic!”

Reese and Annika were driving down the road from Liam’s farm in the red Cadillac, passing a cigarette back and forth between them and listening to an AC/DC song about not following the rules playing on the stereo.

“You chose this song on purpose, didn’t you?” asked Annika.

“Honey, you know I can’t control what these mortals play on the radio,” Reese said sternly. “But I like it,” the senior angel added with a smile.

“So, what then, I mean why are we here to help them? It seems like everything is set? Even with the bank breathing down Liam’s neck, now that they’ve been awarded a role in this experiment, what could go wrong?” asked Annika. Reese just nodded, smiled, and smoked, her hands on the wheel. The rain had let up just as she was leaving the barn, allowing them to let the top down and feel the wind hit their faces. As AC/DC sang about tough breaks and regulations, a chill snaked down her spine the likes of which she hadn’t felt since she was human. “Something...bad is going to happen, isn’t it?” Annika said.

“Now you know Those Above Us don’t tell me these things,” Reese said, passing the cigarette to Annika. “But honey, it does seem the writing is on the wall, literally in this case.” Annika knew instantly what she was referring to. The pink slip nailed to the side door of Liam’s barn.

“But, can’t he show them the fact that he’s in this study?” she said.

“Honey, listen,” said Reese, pointing to the radio. AC/DC sang about men in suits always following rules. “That’s what they’re up against. They’re not gonna budge.”

Reese took a sharp curve and Annika held on tight, realizing only then that she was pulling up to the building where her office was housed. They had already made it back to campus—it seemed that not being able to be hurt or hurt others made Reese a bit of a speed racer.

“Well, here you are, honey,” said Reese, putting out the shared cigarette.

“But wait, Reese, what do I do? I know I can’t tell her what’s going to happen—”

“We don’t know what’s going to happen,” Reese said.

“I know I can’t tell her what’s *likely* to happen, but, what can I say?” she said.

“Honey, I can only guide you so far, but here’s what I know. Those Above Us want us to guide her. She’s going to soon face a choice, about a sacrifice that she has to make—”

“A sacrifice?!” Annika said, nearly panicked.

“Not, not that kind, honey, don’t worry; not the ultimate sacrifice,” said Reese, and Annika calmed herself. “She will soon be at a crossroads. She’ll have to decide to move on and have everything go back to normal, or have her life change in a big, big way. If she decides to make a sacrifice, she’ll find that she can get what she needs, but maybe not what she thought she wanted.”

“Alright,” said Annika, opening her car door and stepping out.

“Tell her,” continued Reese, pausing for a moment. “Tell her that the rules aren’t always meant to be followed.” At that, Reese motioned for Annika to close the passenger door. She did so, and Reese cranked up the tunes and roared out of the parking lot and back onto the highway, leaving Annika alone to prepare for her weekly check-in with Bess.

Bess couldn’t believe what her academic advisor had just said. Mostly because it echoed what she’d heard earlier from the senior staff member of the Division of Dairy.

“What do you mean?” asked Bess. She had cinched her hair in a bun, but it was not staying in place as neatly as she liked it. She had forgotten her water tumbler at home

and, since her practicum hours with Liam had gone long today, she hadn't had time to grab her MacBook and day planner. Nor had she had time to change, so instead of wearing her usual blouse and skirt, she was in farm-appropriate gray sweatpants. If she was honest, she was nearly at her wit's end. The past week had been midterms. That meant Bess had been deluged by overanxious undergraduates snatching up her office hours—time that had always been rightfully theirs in theory, but in practice had been a meager allotment that allowed for Bess to catch up on her own work. This, coupled with the fact that her physical attraction to Liam had evolved into something more psychologically pressing, meant that Bess had been losing sleep at night. Which also meant that, for the first time in Bess's life, her coursework was sinking slowly but surely from the early and exceptional category into the past-due but passable one. The only other time this had started to happen—during a ninth grade run-in with pneumonia—a teacher had given her a stern talking to, and she had learned to tune out her body's needs and burn the candle at both ends in order to stay exceptional. She had earnestly been hoping for another such talking to now, which made it all the more dismaying for her to hear her academic advisor say “not every rule is meant to be followed.”

“What I mean, Bess, is that...Look, I can see that you're...” began Annika, trying to find the right word.

“Struggling?” suggested Bess. Annika had been trying to avoid that word in particular, but it worked.

“Sure,” Annika said. “Look Bess, sometimes in life, we get so wrapped up in what we think we need in order to succeed, that we forget about what we actually need. We confuse wants and needs. What we need, ultimately, is to be loved, to feel safe, to feel needed. So, with Spring Break officially starting tomorrow, I would urge you to be gentle with yourself. Forget schoolwork for a while. Are you still going out to the farm for your practicum?”

“Of course,” said Bess, without hesitation.

“Well, then consider leaning into the personal side of it,” said Annika.

“What do you mean?” asked Bess, and, before she could help herself, her cheeks blushed just a tinge. Annika smiled, and Bess could tell that she could tell.

“Well, Liam, he's a handsome fella, isn't he?” asked Annika. Bess almost gasped. The whole conversation felt wholly inappropriate. Yet at the same time...

“I...I mean, I guess, I hadn’t really noticed,” said Bess, whose blush grew as she crossed her legs.

“Oh, you’re right, you’re right. Quite silly of me to ask, really. Not appropriate, I’m sure. But listen, Bess, you remember the advice I gave you at the beginning of the semester, no?” asked Annika.

“To lean in?” said Bess.

“Yes, well, I just want you to know that I support you however you decide to lean in, in ways big or small, in all aspects of your life, alright?” said Annika, leaning forward and talking more softly.

“O...K,” said Bess, uncertain.

“This, this schoolwork. This...*work work* that we all seem to live and die by, there’s things more important than that. Sometimes life can change in an instant, and when it does, what’s more important than anything else is that we choose to be the biggest person we can, alright?” said Annika. For a split second, Bess could swear she could see a glow coming off of Annika, not unlike the glow she thought she saw coming off of Ms. Reese this morning. Then she blinked and it was gone.

“Sounds...good,” said Bess.

“Well, then, up and at ‘em.” Annika dismissed Bess with a smile and gentle arm gesture.

It was an odd moment. Bess felt more like she was being preached to than given sound academic counsel. But, as she left Annika’s office—a rush of disjointed nakedness flooding her as she went to grab all her usual supplies that weren’t there—she began to reflect that maybe this was the advice she needed most of all. She just wasn’t sure how she should begin to follow it.

Bess had to swerve suddenly to avoid an oncoming vehicle. Rain pummeled her windshield and her wipers could barely keep up. She felt like she had narrowly avoided death, and if she wasn’t so focused on straining to see, she would have flipped the bird to the other driver, who was lugging a small horse trailer. It had been the only other

driver on the road Bess had seen, so savage was the storm raging overhead. Bess had had half a mind to turn around and return to her cozy bed, but something was tugging at her to keep her appointment with Liam at her regular hour. If nothing else, she knew Lucy Moo would be there, waiting to be milked.

She drove down the dirt road, praying not to get stuck in the mud. Finally, she made it to the spot where Liam usually met her for their morning rendezvous. She couldn't spot Liam anywhere. She chalked that up to the rain. Usually he would go outside and meet her, rain or shine—jacket or undershirt. But today's skies were so fierce that she didn't hold it against him that he decided to wait in the barn. She certainly knew her way to it by now.

She stepped out of her car with a *squelch!*, and indeed each subsequent step through the muck produced an eerie, oozing, sickly *squelch!* sound. She thanked herself for investing in galoshes just for this practicum. A walk that took her five minutes in the sun easily took her ten in the rain and muck, enough for her to get thoroughly drenched in spite of her rain poncho and for her to nearly have to abandon one of her galoshes.

The storm's gushing gales persisted, such that Bess was grappling at unlocking the gate before realizing it was already unlocked. This struck her as odd.

"She's older now, of course! But back in her day, Lucy Moo was a bit of a wanderer, so I always keep the gate locked. Even if it's just for five minutes, I lock it up! Just to keep her safe."

Liam's words echoed across Bess's memory as something lurched in her stomach. Something suddenly felt deeply, deeply, wrong. A flash of lightning struck, a boom of thunder just behind. The illumination drew Bess's eye's to something she hadn't noticed before: a second piece of pink paper, tacked on just next to the other one. She could easily make out the three words up top: **NOTICE OF EVICTION.**

Her heart dropped into her stomach. Fragments of her brain were sending her signals she didn't want to believe. She was partially piecing together what was happening, partially drowning in undefined dread. She opened the unlatched gate and entered the barn.

The first thing she noticed was the emptiness. It somehow felt more cavernous than usual, even though it looked the same. All of the graduated tubes still stood atop their

tables. The rain thudded against the barn at all angles, making it feel like she was barely more protected from the elements than she had been just a moment ago.

“Liam?” she said, softly at first. “Liam!” she called out again, louder. No response. She began walking towards the back of the barn. She felt like she shouldn’t call out again, as though she would disturb some menacing force that slept in the shadows of the barn’s rafters. Walking as softly as she could in her mucked up footwear, Bess slowly made it to Lucy’s stall. She braced herself for whatever ghastly sight she might find, only to find, upon peering over the gate, nothing at all. Somehow, this was even worse.

“Lucy Moo?” she said. Dammit if she hadn’t grown attached to that silly old cow. Unlatching the gate, she entered and walked around the small, hay-packed space. Nothing. She took a deep breath and realized that, if she wanted to find out more—and really, she *needed* to, then she would have to go inside Liam’s house. Liam had not invited her in before, so it felt quite invasive. But she suspected that, however dread-filled and disappointed she was feeling right now, Liam likely felt a thousand times worse.

Turning on her heel, Bess made for the exit, swiftening her steps to match the urgency in her heart. She opened the barn gate and received a merciless pelting of precipitation.

“Fuck,” she said, to nothing and everything in particular. She ran towards the house and made it faster than she was prepared for. Should she ring the bell? Knock? Trounce right in?

Th-shud! Th-shud!

Her knocks were softened by her wet knuckles, and were most certainly drowned out by the storm. She took a deep breath and opened the door, finding it unlocked. She stepped in and closed it as fast as she could to keep the elements out.

Inside Bess found a tidy home. To her left sat a kitchen, with a small, circular table and four chairs, an old, white fridge, and a sink with a single dirty pot sticking out of it. In front of her sprawled a long, thin living room, replete with gingham-blanket clad couch, a rabbit-eared TV, and a particle board coffee table. At the end of the living room stood three closed doors, behind one of which, Bess imagined, must be Liam.

Taking off her boots and rain poncho, Bess walked through the living room, noticing the smattering of **PAST DUE** marked envelopes strewn across both the kitchen and coffee tables. A wave of sadness flooded over her. She knew more than any of his creditors how hard Liam worked, how honest he was. On the wall adjacent to the door there hung a series of black and white photographs with Vietnamese people in them. Bess surmised it must be Liam's relatives. She suddenly felt like an invader, violating someone else's space. But she also knew she wasn't going to turn around now. It felt like abandonment on her part.

Going the full Monty Hall, Bess picked a door at random. Knocking on the first door and, receiving no response, she opened it.

Behind the door sat Liam in the fetal position, hands squeezed around his knees, wearing only his undershirt and a pair of boxers. He was sobbing audibly. Bess walked towards where he sat—on the floor near the foot of his bed—but it seemed to Bess like Liam had barely registered that she was there. In fact, she wasn't sure he *had* registered it, when all of a sudden he said, through tears and not a little bit of snot, "They took Lucy Moo!"

Bess bowed her head and frowned. It's what a part of her mind had been trying to whisper to her, but what the other part of her mind didn't want to believe. Without any further hesitation, she got down on her knees, scooted closer to Liam, and hugged him.

Just like their last embrace, Liam reciprocated her hug with a sudden, startling force that Bess once again found comforting. Liam had barely stopped crying to give Bess the news about Lucy, and now he cried hard and then harder still. Bess couldn't help but squeeze back near as hard as Liam, and, as an image of Lucy Moo's stupid-cute face graced her mind's eye, she started to cry near as hard as Liam too.

They sat there, swaddled and sobbing in each other's arms, until the sobbing gave way to sighing that, inexplicably, gave way to laughing.

"Why are you laughing?" asked Liam, with a smile.

"Why are you laughing?" asked Bess. They unspooled from each other and looked at each other's faces. Liam started to blow his nose into his undershirt.

"Eww, Liam that's gross," said Bess. "Here, let me," and she began to rifle through her pockets for a rain-spared, still-dry tissue. She procured one with surprising

speed, but not in time to spare Liam's shirt. Liam blew his nose and discreetly disposed of the soiled tissue.

"You're so sweet," said Liam, looking into her tear-reddened eyes with his own.

"You're so...wet," she said, noticing how much her rain-stained self had dripped over him.

"That's because you're all wet!" Liam said, still with a smile. Bess smiled back. She felt safer than she had in a long, long time. She leaned towards him.

Suddenly, they were kissing. Gently at first, then harder and breathier. Suddenly, they stopped.

"I'm sorry, I know I shouldn't..." Liam started to say.

"No, more. I want more," said Bess. Liam obeyed. They joined again. Mouths connected. They embraced. Hands fumbled. Liam took off his sticky shirt. Bess removed her sopping gray sweatshirt, revealing a lanky T-shirt with her university emblem on it. Liam all but licked his lips at the sight.

"Feel them," said Bess. Liam did so, cupping his hands around Jess's relatively small breasts. "You like that, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes," breathed Liam. Then, "What do you like, Bess?"

"This," she said, finally getting her hands on Liam's ample butt. She groped and squeezed his fleshy mounds with wild abandon, until she noticed that he was at full attention, cock tenting his blue boxers.

"Sorry," he said. "I'm so horny."

"There's nothing to be sorry about," she said. She stripped herself of her shirt, drenched cloth sticking to drenched skin. She threw the shirt on the ground with a loud *splat!* She started to take off her pants when, midway through disrobing the twice-as-heavy clump of rain-soaked fabric, she lost her center of gravity and fell back down on her butt.

“Bess!” yelled Liam, alarmed. He crawled towards her and helped her escape the offending article of clothing. Bess leaned in close to Liam for another kiss. They barely kissed for a moment when Liam stopped them and said,

“May I suck them?” He was looking directly at Bess’s breasts. She blinked. She knew some guys had a breast thing, and that indeed some sucked on breasts. But she’d also heard that most guys were bad at foreplay, wanting to jump directly to the main event. She guessed that, in this as in so many ways, Liam wasn’t like most guys.

“Suck me, Liam,” she assented. He delved into her, lunging head first into her chest before carefully, carefully, clamping onto her nipple with his mouth, sucking in with force but avoiding the use of any teeth. She moaned audibly.

“Sorry!” he said, stopping immediately, a panicked look splashing across his face.

“No, Liam, it feels...good,” she said, bending forward to invite him to continue. He did so. Bess reached forward and grabbed his underwear-clad cock. He twitched but didn’t stop sucking on her tit. She took one hand and reached underneath the elastic of his waistband. Flesh against flesh. His hard, hers soft. She started to stroke the shaft up and down and he moaned his approval, still sucking on her tit. His other hands wandered, reaching her backside, soon squeezing and groping her as much as she had done to him.

They repositioned themselves to get into a better rhythm, him sitting on the bed, her standing above him. It was an unusual tableau but neither seemed to mind. Bess started to finger herself, and both her and Liam started to grunt more than moan. After a while, their rhythm crescendoed. With a breathy *splurt!* Liam busted a large gob of his cum into Bess’s hand, and Bess came into her own.

Bess sat down on the bed, while Liam stood.

“Come, let’s both shower. We can get wet so we can get dry,” he said. He had an exhausted, satisfied smile on his face. They walked out of the bedroom, Bess noticing for the first time a *Charlie’s Angels* poster on the wall. Upon entering the middle door, which held the bathroom, Liam started to say “we can either each take turns or,”

“Let’s shower together,” said Bess.

The shower, if anything, turned out to be a hotter, even more meaningful experience for them. They took it slow, and washed each other, focusing on their favorite, round

parts of each other. After it was over, they dried each other off and Liam gave Bess some clothes to wear. They returned to the bedroom and started to snuggle.

“I wanted to do that for a long time,” said Liam. His arms were wrapped around Bess, his little spoon. “I think you did too,” he added. Bess thought for a moment.

“Yeah, I guess I did.”

“I’m sorry we didn’t go all the way, if that’s what you wanted,” said Liam. Bess paused for a long time. Then,

“No, what happened, I enjoyed it. And I... I’ve never gone all the way before,” she said. This time it was Liam’s turn to pause.

“I haven’t gone either. Gone all the way.” Liam made a noise, almost like gasping for air, or gulping. But didn’t say anything else.

“Have you ever been with anyone? Done anything...sexual?” asked Bess.

“Yes,” said Liam. Bess’s heart sank a little. “Have you?” he asked.

“No,” said Bess. “I’ve never done anything...before today.” Another pause.

“Are...you glad you did what you did?” asked Liam.

“Yes,” said Bess, immediately. “And I’m very glad I did it with you.” Liam practically purred at that.

“Me too,” he said.

Bess awoke to the sound of sizzling. She flailed a bit to determine that Liam, indeed, was no longer in the bed. Climbing out, she walked over to the kitchen.

“Good afternoon, Bess!” said Liam. He was standing at the oven, frying pan in hand and bedecked in a schmaltzy apron that literally said “Kiss the Chef!”

“What time is it?” she asked.

“Two o’ clock!” said Liam, pointing to a black cat shaped clock. “I’m making us eggs,” he added. Bess smiled appreciatively and pulled up a seat at the small table. A thick stack of papers caught her eye, labeled: **MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING: BOVINE EXPERIMENTATION PROJECT**. She started to read it, not noticing Liam’s frown.

Liam walked over and dished out some eggs for the both of them, placing the leftovers on the stove before sidling up besides Bess.

“Please Bess, don’t read that. It’s over. I couldn’t stop them from taking Lucy Moo, and now...there’s nothing to experiment with. They took Lucy Moo because I couldn’t make enough money, but without Lucy Moo, I won’t be able to make any money. So within a matter of days, they’ll seize the whole farm. It’s all over. So please, let’s just enjoy each other’s company.” said Liam. He didn’t shed a tear, but it would’ve been less sad if he had. The look on his face was hollow, like there was nothing left in him but despair.

Bess, meanwhile, was busy cross-referencing various sections of the MOU. Liam scowled a bit but just started to eat his eggs. Then after her sixth or seventh checking of a back-index, she slammed the whole thing down, with enough force to frighten Liam into dropping his fork onto the floor.

“Whoops,” she said.

“No worries,” said Liam, getting up to wash his fork.

“Liam, I...I can’t do anything about Lucy Moo. And I really am sorry about what happened to her.” said Bess. Liam said nothing, his back was turned away from Bess as he scrubbed.

“But I do think...there is a possibility I can save the farm,” said Bess. Liam turned off the water and rubbed the fork dry.

“How?” said Liam. His face was rather sullen, almost angry that Bess wasn’t joining him in his despair.

“Look,” said Bess. “I know how much this farm means to you. Or, I should say, I can only imagine how much this...your Ba’s farm means to you. But hear me out. I can’t, obviously, guarantee that anything will work but. Just listen, ok?” Liam sat down and nodded.

“OK,” he said.

“So,” began Bess, presuming her professorial demeanor. “As per paragraph three of section eight, you technically don’t need to collect milk from a cow, merely a mammal. And, as that,” Bess stopped herself here from saying *crazy* “interesting woman from the Division of Dairy stated yesterday, you could actually make more money simply selling the milk—if you had a large enough quantity of it—than you could by even taking part in the study. Furthermore, according to appendix 12, humans have actually been a part of this study, albeit at first by accident. But it proves it’s safe for them. Us. For humans.” Bess stopped talking. Liam’s eyes widened.

“What are you saying?” he said, slowly putting his fork down.

“I’m saying,” Bess said, taking in a deep breath. “I’m saying I...want...can...I’m saying I want to be your test subject. I want to produce the milk for you so that you can keep your farm.”

They sat in the silence for a while.

“That’s crazy,” said Liam finally. “You can’t do that.

“Why not?” said Bess. “I want to.” Liam just shook his head.

“What would happen to you?” he said, a look of concern on his face.

“Well, according to diagram 17, I...would become quite large and...lactate. A great deal.” said Bess, showing Liam a logistical graphic of just that.

“Enough to save the farm?!” he said, brows furrowed and voice rising in pitch.

“Well, that’s where section four, and the government person’s...diatribe, comes in handy. See, if I were to inject all the doses at once, or at least, in one day, then yes, I could become even larger than this diagram,” said Bess.

“It’s...it’s contradictory,” said Liam, clearly struggling to get his words out. He had all but given up on his eggs. Bess hadn’t even touched hers.

“What do you mean?” said Bess.

“Either it doesn’t affect you very much, which means it is safer for you, or it does affect you a lot, which makes it enough to save the farm, but it harms you.” said Liam. “Why would you even want to consider doing this?”

Before she could begin to stop herself, or even realize she was doing it, Bess began to cry. Liam clearly didn’t see it coming either.

“Sorry, sorry,” he said, not knowing what he had done but clearly feeling in the wrong.

“Because I hate my life,” said Bess. “I fucking hate it. And I didn’t realize I hated it until now. I don’t want to go into Animal Husbandry. Or Biology. I certainly don’t want to go into academia. I’m so fucking sick of academia. I’m sick of having to feel exceptional to feel normal. To pretend to be superhuman just to not feel like a waste of space. I hate it.” Bess started to sob and put her head down on the table. Liam scooped over to her and wrapped his arm around her.

“I’m sorry, Bess,” he repeated. Bess took a deep breath.

“It’s not your fault,” she said. “But. This is something...I want to do this. This will help save your farm, and I really like you, Liam.”

“I really like you too, Bess. But—” Liam started to say.

“And I want to do this for me, too. I. This will help you, but it will also be...an experience for me. It will help me think about, maybe taking a different path in life. Or in the very least, give me a mental and...very much physical break from the path I’m on now.” There was another laborious pause.

“Are you sure this is safe?” asked Liam.

“Yes,” said Bess. If Liam had known Bess better, he might have been able to tell that she wasn’t quite sure of herself at that moment. But he didn’t, so he couldn’t.

The two of them stood in Liam’s barn, not fifteen minutes after their conversation. The rain had miraculously stopped but the barn was still quite cold, so Bess had on some sweatpants and one of Liam’s button up shirts that she thought she would merely take off once she got to a certain size. They had gathered next to the tables,

and had unsheathed a sealed case of 13 small needles, each attached to a miniscule vial.

“OK, so, you’ll need to administer these to me, one after another, into my butt, OK?” said Bess.

“If you’re sure,” said Liam, who had still not fully come round to the idea, but was admiring Bess’s butt.

“I’m sure. And here, they’ve got some alcohol swabs included, so give it a liberal wipe, OK?” she said.

“OK,” said Liam. Bess pulled down her gray sweatpants to expose her red panties. They were the same ones she had just soiled with her own juices mere hours ago, but also the only ones she had brought. And she didn’t much care for the idea of wearing Liam’s boxers.

“OK, let’s get started,” said Bess. Liam tore open the alcohol swab and rubbed it all over the fleshy part of Bess’s cheeks. He tossed it onto the table and then grabbed the first of needles, unclasping its casing.

“Do you want me to warn you or—” Liam started to say.

“Just put it in,” said Bess. For whatever reason, she needed this. Now.

“OK,” said Liam, and stabbed her butt with the needle. It hurt.

“Ouch,” she said.

“Sorry,” said Liam.

“No worries. Again.” she said.

“So soon?” Liam’s brow furrowed.

“Yes, one right after the other. And make sure to squeeze the tips so that all the...contents flows in.”

“OK,” Liam said again. He grabbed needle number two, uncorked it and stabbed it. Bess winced again, but then quickly told him:

“Next!” Uncork, stab, Next! Uncork, stab, Next! Liam did a rinse and repeat, until Bess’s ass looked like a pushpin.

“Uh, OK, one more,” said Liam, after what felt like hours of stabbing and squeezing.

“Uh huh...” whether it was the effects of the test substance already working, or merely the fact that she had been jabbed in the butt 12 times, Bess was clearly starting to feel a bit off.

“Bess, really, you don’t have to do this,” said Liam.

“Next!” she practically screamed. Liam sighed, and didn’t even bother to say “OK.” He grabbed the final needle, uncorked, stabbed, and squeezed.

“OK,” said Bess, breathing heavily. “Are they all in me, all empty?” she said.

“Yes, Bess,” said Liam, double checking.

“Good. Now, please get these needles OUT of my ass,” she said, with an exasperated laugh.

“Of course!” said Liam, plucking each one carefully and placing them back in the case. The two just stood there for a second, Bess breathing heavily.

“Phew,” she gasped suddenly. “My ass is so hot,” she bent down and removed the sweatpants from her legs, tossing them cavalierly to the side, leaving only her red panties. The rest of her butt was nearly as red as the lace.

“Ughh,” Bess.

“What’s wrong?” asked Liam.

“Nothing, I, ughh..” Bess said, then suddenly, with a noise like water filling a balloon, Liam could see that Bess’s butt was...growing.

“OHmygod, Bess, your butt!” he said, pointing.

Her butt, reddened by all the needle jabs, was indeed swelling larger. It was a slow but noticeable expansion of flesh, up and out, causing her red panties to appear smaller and smaller by comparison.

“Did you know this would happen?” Liam asked, concerned, but more than a little bit aroused.

“No, but ughnnn, it feels so goooood,” said Bess; with each verbal elongation, her butt swelled larger still, becoming rounder, fuller, plumper. It was quickly surpassing what Liam had seen anywhere else in real life, and then, anywhere else on the internet. Then, without warning, with her ass the size of two beach balls, the swelling suddenly stopped.

“Uhh. Slap it,” said Bess.

“What?” Liam said, staring at how deeply her panties had managed to tuck themselves between her cheeks, like a piece of red floss.

“I want you to SLAP my ASS,” said Bess, with no small amount of authority.

“Yes ma’am,” said Liam, a smile appearing on his face. He shook his hand gingerly and then landed with a firm *whap!* across Bess’s right cheek. His slap sent a shockwave of ripples across the oh so many pounds of flesh.

“Oh yeah,” said Bess. She was bent forwards now, both hands on the table to support her great increase in weight. If it hadn’t been for her angle, Liam probably wouldn’t have noticed the...

“Is that a mole?” Liam pointed towards a nub just above Bess’s butt.

“I...obviously cannot see back there,” said Bess. “But I don’t have a mole, no, I...” Bess steadied herself, and then, with a sudden *fwoof!* a burst of black sprouted out from where the mole was.

“It’s...my god, Bess. It’s a cow’s tail!” said Liam.

“A what?!” said Bess, not entirely pleased by this development.

“Yes, it’s, it’s exactly that!” And it was. Right above Bess’s massive glutes, a thin, muscular tail extended outward, ending in a floofy patch of black hair.

“Ugh, I have a headache,” said Bess. She shifted her weight and unintentionally *whapped!* Liam in the face with her tail.

“Shit!” shouted Liam. It was the first time Bess had heard him curse.

“Are you O—ohohohoh,” said Bess, rubbing her head. “It hurts, it...” she lifted her hands up immediately.

“What’s happening, Bess?” said Liam, but as soon as he said it he could see. Poking out of her hair were two, triangular shaped protrusions. They slowly seemed to be growing, curving outward, then inward, becoming “Horns!” said Liam. “You’re growing horns!”

“Well fuuck,” said Bess, slurring her speech. “I didn’t expect that.”

“Are you alright, Bess?” Liam asked. He was right beside her, arms on either shoulder.

“Yes, I...” Bess started to talk. She stopped. Then she started to breathe heavily.

“Talk to me, Bess, what’s happening?” asked Liam, a sparkle of concern in his eyes.

“I’m...grooowing,” said Bess, and Liam could see that it was true. Finally, finally, her breasts—Liam’s favorite part of Bess’s amazing body—had started to swell. Up and out they went, becoming rounder as they plumped. They were quite modest to begin with—no larger than an A cup, really. They were A cups no longer, within seconds pushing past B, C, and D. Indeed, her breasts were now starting to strain at the very fabric of Liam’s taupe and green flannel shirt that Bess had donned earlier.

“Should I take this off?” asked Liam gently, rubbing the shirt with the back of his hand.

“Please,” said Bess. “It’s rather ti—” with a *ping!* the uppermost button of the shirt sprung from whence it came and flew across the barn, never to be seen again.

“Oh my,” said Liam, whose dick was fully straining his boxers again.

“Hurry,” said Bess, “I’m getting biiii—” before Bess could finish saying bigger, another *Ping! Ping!* unleashed two more buttons of the shirt, with Bess’s breasts heaving upward and outward with an audible sloshing noise.

“Rip it off!” said Bess. Liam went to obey, but before he could, a fusillade of *Ping! Ping! Ping! Ping! Ping! Pings!* erupted, and what remained of Liam’s favorite shirt lay stretched in tattered pieces on either side of the canvas that was Bess’s bosom. Bess moaned a sigh of relief.

They were luscious. Bess’s breasts were easily the biggest boobs Liam had ever seen in his life. They were round, supple things, with areolas the size of coasters and nipples as big as thumbs. What’s more, they were clearly beginning to produce...

“Milk!” said Liam, eyes wide as saucers. For a moment, in an unconscious homage to a cartoon caricature, his tongue literally hung out of his mouth.

“Quick,” said Bess, “get the beaker. We have to save the milk.”

“Bess,” said Liam. “Forget the farm, I don’t need the farm. I need you.” A sparkle of light caught his eye. It caught Bess’s, too.

“Oh Liam. I need you too!” The two leaned forward and kissed each other. It caused a spark that sent both of them reeling—literally. Bess, turned on by Liam’s kiss, started to grow again. Her ass swelled as she moaned uncontrollably, the growth faster than ever before. Her butt doubled in size in the span of a few moments, gaining the girth of two exercise balls. She promptly collapsed under the weight of herself, bringing Liam tumbling down with her.

She was sprawled on the floor of the barn now, propped up by her gargantuan glutes. Liam, who had fallen on top of her, stood up to reveal to Bess the arm-sized erection he had been sporting.

“I need your milk, Bessie,” he said, sporting a sobriquet to match her burgeoning appearance.

“I need you inside me, Liam,” said Bess.

They obliged each other. Liam dove headfirst into Bess’s blossoming bosom, grabbing onto a teat with his mouth and sucking in hard. The milk gushed—fast. His mouth filled with hot, creamy liquid straight from the source and he groaned in pleasure, dabs of pre-cum staining his boxers.

“Get IN Liam,” said Bess, body electric with horniness. Liam did as he was told, using his bulging biceps to rip the red panties off of Bess, flinging them across the barn. Taking off his own underwear a bit more gently, he grabbed Bess by the back and, mouth still firmly planted on a gushing teat, entered her with his throbbing, leaking cock.

“YES!” yelled Bess. “Fuck my pussy!” It was a straightforward command, and Liam was happy to obey. He started thrusting inside of her, meanwhile sucking mightily on her massive teat, which was spewing more milk than he could fit in his mouth at a time, even when sucking at a breakneck pace.

“Harder, harder!” Bess boomed. Liam needed the volume, as the constant sloshing, gulping, and moaning coming from her boobs, his throat, and his mouth created quite the symphony of sounds. He thrust faster, deeper, harder. Bess moaned more.

“More, moore, mooore, Moo, MOOOOOO!” Bess stopped speaking intelligibly, and started simply mooing. Not simply. Loudly. Urgently. Painfully, pleurably, powerfully. She mooed with every fiber of her being, and Liam knew it meant “MORE!”

So he gave her more. He thrust more, he sucked more, he fucked more, he tweaked her other nipple with his hand—that got a response— MOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

They were approaching it, it was coming soon. They both knew it. Somehow they both felt that crossing to the other side would result in something unprecedented, something irreversible. But they both wanted it. Both needed it. So they thrust, and suckled, and sloshed. And then,

“MOOO, MOOO, MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” Bess wailed a deafening moo as Liam contracted and shot the largest load of his life deep inside of her. He released his vise-like oral grip on her spewing teat simply to breathe, when—in a flood of her pussy juices—he felt an otherworldly rumbling. In a short break from mooing, Bess gasped, a tight, almost panicky inhale, and then it started.

Her breasts, which had been spewing milk constantly before, started gushing at nearly twice the volume. Rivulets of cream geysered forth in an arc of misty froth. Her breasts, which during their coitus had stopped growing, oozed forward like bread rising in a time lapse video.

Except it wasn't stopping. Her growth, while slower than before, seemed all the more urgent given her already great size. It was like a slow-moving pair of blobs, each attached with a dairy-based fire-hydrant. Already, Bess's breasts were close to matching the size of her amazing tuchus. She was already approaching the diagram that Bess had shown Liam earlier, explaining the furthest end of the size scale. Except, again, it wasn't stopping. The growth continued. Not only this, but she seemed to want—no, *need* the growth to continue.

For while Liam had shot his load and was firmly settled into his refractory period, Bess was back to mooing, and indeed, orgasming. Every few Moos, she would let out a guttural, heart-wrenching, loin-churning, mega MOOOOOOOOOOOO! And the floodgates would open again, unleashing a blast of both pussy-juices and even creamier, heavier milk from her cowgirl udders, which had now left the size of human proportions and could properly be categorized as somewhere in the very small car category.

And it still wasn't stopping. Liam, torn between panic and hyper arousal, was still catching his breath, while Bess's motor was still running. MOOOOOOOOOO! GLUSSSSH! SPLASSHHH! The human cow would moo as if through a loudspeaker, unleash a rainstorm's worth of cum, and then paint the barn wall's white with her hot, sweet, cream. Over, and over, and over again, rising and rising and rising, approaching sizes Liam had never dared dream of.

Suddenly, after a particularly heavy splash of pussy juices that nearly swept him off his feet, Liam's refractory period fractured and he ran towards the source, determined to have another go.

MOOOO! GLUSSSHHH! SPLASSSH!

The orgarms seemed to be quickening in pace, and Bess's boobs were far too big to reach now—each the size of a BMW. But that pussy, if he could have one last go at it.

MOOOOO! Bessie belted, and Liam braced himself between her legs, as a flood of pussy juices spewed forth. Milk rained from above and he held his tongue out, invigorated. Finally reaching her precious hole, he grabbed on tight to two nearby blobs of boobflesh, accidentally expressing some milk in the process. He entered her, as she had begged him to, and, despite the steady rivers of cum whooshing out of her every several seconds, he used his biceps to thrust into her, faster, deeper, harder.

They connected again. Though they couldn't see each other face to face, they connected. They somehow felt this would do it, though do what they didn't quite know. Bess tried to limit her orgasms to allow Liam to thrust more easily, though in truth she had long ago lost all control over the situation. And she really rather liked it that way. Liam used every ounce of muscle at his disposal to thrust as best he could, despite the overwhelming deluge of pussy juices and milk showers. Finally, he was ready. He let out one. More. Volley. Of. Thrusts. And then.

UUGHHHH!

SPLAAAAAAT!

MOOO!

GLUSSSH!

SPLASSSHHHHHHHHHH!

GLOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOORP!

So many things happened, all nearly instantaneously. Liam let out an animalistic moan as he once again came, somehow producing even more cum than he just had. This triggered the biggest orgasm yet for Bess, who let out a truly thunderous moo, followed by a flood of pussy juices so great Liam had to hold on for dear life to his clasps of boobflesh; he nearly even orgasmed again from the sheer pleasure of the flooding. Then, sheets of milk shot forth in unceasing cascades from Bessie's teats, whose growth suddenly exploded—more, more, more, bigger, rounder, plumper—not stopping, when suddenly

CAWOOOOOSH!

The breasts outgrew the barn itself, sending all four walls and rooftop crashing and splintering at once. The barrels-worth of milk that had been blasting the inner-sides of the barn roared outwards in all directions, creating a temporary moat of milk around the collapsed structure. At that, Bess's growth stopped.

It was over. All of it. The panting, the sucking, the fucking. The life Liam had always known. The body Bess had always known.

“Bess, you ok?” asked Liam. He heard a soft, but warm moo from way up above. He sighed. He didn’t know what to do now.

Suddenly, a light appeared above them both.

Bess, whose day had certainly been filled with stranger things than this, still gawked at what she saw. It was her academic advisor, Annika, floating above her, in the sky, a halo around her head.

“Bess, I don’t think you ever clued into this, but, I’m no academic advisor. Not a good one, anyway. Do you know what I am?” said the floating woman.

“An...angel?” said Bess. Below, Liam couldn’t quite tell what was going on. He thought he heard a conversation, but one side of it still seemed to him to be just moos.

“Always a clever girl, you are Bess,” said Annika. “Bess, you made quite a sacrifice today, committing your body to science, to someone else, to love.”

“It didn’t feel like a sacrifice,” said Bess.

“That’s what made it pure,” said Annika.

“What...what happens now?” asked Bess.

“Well, that’s up to you,” said Annika. “I reckon you have enough milk in your system right now to feed an army. A peaceful army, I hope.” Annika made a knowing look. “When you get back down to size, so to speak, you are of course free to go back to your old life...” Bess groaned audibly, causing her barn sized boobies to jiggle. Liam looked concerned but said nothing. He seemed to sense something above him—in more ways than one—was happening.

“Or,” said Annika. “You could continue this life with Liam—who, by the way, will eventually understand your moos. If you do, you will serve a purpose with your body, in lieu of your mind. With your newfound ability, I’m confident you could save Liam’s farm. Again, Those Above Us don’t let us angels know the future. But, I’m as certain as I can be that you have enough milk in your system right now to rescue him from ruin. I’m also confident that that brain of yours—if you’re willing to use it—but not overuse it!— then you could find a way to duplicate the formula that led to your growth in the first place. Maybe even make it more efficient—less pokes in the keister next time.”

At this, Bess chuckled, which to Liam sounded like a moo, and which caused another rippling of her massive mammaries.

“ Again. It’s up to you. You can return to academia and lead a life purely of the mind. Or, you can live out your life here, on the farm, growing, being milked by Liam, shrinking down, and then growing again. Leading a life of the body. The choice is yours.”

“Well, I think I know which choice I’m going to make,” said Bess, but, blinking but once, she found the angel had already gone. Bess smiled.

“It’s a bit much,” she said, slapping her tiddies and letting out a loud moo of pleasure. “But it’s honest work.”

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