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The Naked Truth

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I'm standing in front of my bathroom mirror, naked. Most people, having just gotten out of the shower, just quickly pass by the mirror on their way to the door, not giving it a second glance. I mean, you're naked. Who wants to see that? Unless, of course, you're a girl, then the answer to that is 'everyone'. But me, I'm going on a good ten minutes now, just staring at myself. I wanted to get a good look, to scrutinize every inch of my skin, much the same way an artist would size up a subject.

That was exactly what 20 people would be doing to me in less than 12 hours. You know that recurring nightmare where you wake up stark naked in class, unable to do anything about it, too scared stiff to move? Well, that nightmare was to become my job. My editors saw a posting online seeking a nude model, and thinking it would make a good story, signed me up to pose for ArtUS 330: Life Drawing. If you ask me though, it's just a poorly disguised attempt to get me naked.

Nevertheless, here I am in front of the mirror. And there is ample room for improvement. I think about doing something to my body. Anything. Perhaps I should shave something. Maybe a quick thousand sit-ups.

Besides taking the longest shower of my life last night, I haven't done much to prepare. The only advice anyone could give me, which came from the class instructor, Hans Habeger, was to stretch thoroughly before I came to class. What for? I wondered. I thought I'd be holding still-poses while students sketched, not working out for them. And if there
is one thing I'm good at, it's sitting still. I do it for hours at a time in front of the television. Not a problem.

But now, as I'm walking into the College of Design, I'm second-guessing my no-shave decision. I arrive at the classroom and peek inside. Hanging from the ceiling are six track lights, all focused on a point in the middle of the room, presumably where I'll be posing. Twenty or so easels are arranged in a circle around the spotlight. It couldn't be any more intimidating.

From the hallway, I watch some students filter into the classroom, giant posterboards under their arms. It's hard to make eye contact with someone who'll soon see you naked. God, I'm nervous.

"Brett, what are you doing here?" someone behind me says. I turn around at the sound of my name. It's my neighbor. My female neighbor. Of course she's taking this class. Fantastic. I sheepishly babble something about the humiliating world of student journalism.

"See ya inside," she says with a sly grin. Yes, of course she will.

A few more students straggle into the classroom, and finally Habeger arrives. We walk in together. Habeger pulls a dark red curtain shut behind us to block the view of anyone out in the hall. The instructor leads me to a closet within the room, a place for me to disrobe. I'm glad I'll be able to take my clothes off in private. Something about being in that spotlight, awkwardly hopping around trying to pull off my socks doesn't seem right.

I step inside the dimly lit closet and shut the door. It's cramped. Four skeletons are leaning up against the walls. I think they may be looking at me.

I have a choice between two robes. One is a plain dark blue. The other is multicolored and a little flamboyant. I go with the flamboyant. Why the hell not?

I step out of the closet wearing nothing but the robe and a nervous smile. The students are all sitting at their easels, waiting. I walk to the center of the room, under the bright lights, and listen to Habeger explain my pose. It's a new one—one the class hasn't yet drawn. An image of myself naked, in some deranged Twister position, pops into my head.

But instead, the pose is rather normal—I'm supposed to sit on a table. Left arm back. Right arm resting on my right leg. Dangle my right leg over the edge of the table. Left foot under right leg. Back slightly twisted. OK, got it. Sort of like a senior picture pose but with slightly more bikini zone exposed.

The instructor looks at me expectantly. "What? What are you looking at? I wonder. Oh yeah. The nudity."

"Now?" I ask. He nods. I take a deep breath, close my eyes, and drop the robe.

I open my eyes. Nothing. Nada. No gasp of amazement. No jaws drop. No one even flinches. In fact, the students themselves seem to hardly
Thank You
Iowa State students for a great year!

At the Memorial Union, we're happiest when our meeting room schedule is jam-packed, when entertainment events are crowded, when study spots are occupied and when folks are all over the building, relaxing with friends and having a good time.

So, believe us when we say it's been a happy year for us!

To those who will be back, have a good summer.

To our graduates, the very best wishes!

notice me.

It's not the reaction I expected. I thought there'd at least be a snicker. Instead, the students are just looking at me, and some of them aren't even doing that.

I climb on the red-matted table, get into position, and start posing.

You know, you never completely get over the fact that you are naked in front of a bunch of strangers. Not for one moment. That little voice in my head keeps screaming, "Hey dumbass! Your clothes fell off. You're not supposed to be this way!" But, wanting to be the best damn nude model I could be, I stay in it.

At first, it's not so bad. I mean, at least I am sitting down. I do my best to not make eye contact with anyone, as it might throw us both off our games, but it is hard. When all eyes are on you, it's hard not to stare back.

Feeling pretty good (physically) at this point, I settle in for the duration. It's not so bad, I think to myself. Once I get comfortable, it's almost too easy to zone out.

About five minutes in: The entire left side of my body falls asleep. Not wanting to break my pose, I pretend not to notice it. I can't feel it anyways.

About seven minutes in: I begin to itch. I have no clue why I itch so much. I didn't itch at all before getting naked, and now I'm itching like I've got lice or something. It's taking all of my modeling prowess to not scratch these annoying bastards. I'm starting to regret this.

About an hour in: I am finally allowed to take my first break. I can barely move. Everything is either asleep or itching. I hop off the table (in the classiest way possible when you are showing a circle of people your ass) and grab my robe. My entire body is numb. Why didn't I stretch?

After five quick minutes, the posing resumes. This time, I'm ready for the itching and anything else my body can throw at me.

A half hour later and I'm choking back the tears. I am noticeably trembling, as I can't bear to stay still for much longer. I don't know how these models do it. My growing respect for them
is overshadowed by my growing need to weep uncontrollably.

I will say, though, that sitting still for three hours gives me plenty of time to think. I am seriously considering a career change when Habeger says I can break my pose. My shoulders slump. Relief floods my body. I try to will my legs into working but get no response. Not wanting to stay on the table any longer than I have to, but having no choice, I wait a few painful moments for my limbs to regain feeling. Now that the class is over, I'm no longer a nude model—I'm just a naked student splayed out on a padded table in the middle of an extremely well-lit room. Gathering myself, I gingerly hop off the table, hobble to the closet, and change back into my normal clothing. I thank the instructor for such a wonderful experience and take a minute to look around the room at the sketches. Most of them are amazing; it's a wonder how these students can draw so well in so little time. It's definitely weird looking at myself nude, even when it's a drawing.

As I limped back down the sidewalk leading from the Design building, I feel a multitude of different feelings. One is a sense of pride that I actually did it. I was stark naked in front of a bunch of people. Another is a feeling of disbelief that I'd gone through with it. But probably the most intense feeling is the painful pins-and-needles sensation that is surging through the entire left side of my body.

Thanks a lot, journalism. That career change is looking pretty good right now. I wonder if it's still too late to become that doctor my mom always wanted....Yes. Yes it is.