

The crush.

COMING OF age stories are a dime a dozen. This is a story of not coming of age.

Codell's mother forgot her laundry detergent. On the floor of the laundromat, she found some left-behind soap, nuggets of gold when you only have enough quarters for the washing machines, but not enough for soap from the vending machine.

Away from Codell and his mother, a woman in her late twenties folded clothes. "What are you staring at, boy?" said Codell's mother. "You're drooling." Codell blushed.

"What ridiculous eyelashes," she added. "Who wears lashes to the laundromat? Looks like she took a eggbeater to her hair." She shook her head. "Spindly legs."

She started her first load of clothes with the found detergent, left for home to fetch her Tide, and left her son to safeguard their laundry. Over the rumbling washers and dryers, a transistor radio played the Temptations' "I Can't Get Next to You:" *the things I want to do the most . . .*

A heavy clang sounded from outside. The woman folding laundry swiveled toward the window, knocking her stack of folded clothes to the floor. She frowned and bent low to pick up her wash. She wore a loose V-neck.

Something quickened inside of Codell. He stepped to her and gathered up her laundry. "Why, thank you!" she exclaimed. For no reason that he knew, he stood close to her, aware that he was close to her and aware that she was aware that he was close to her. Her face seemed to tell him that she heard his heart beating, that she felt the

clamminess of his hands, that he exuded some kind of aroma. But she did not move away and seemed to treat him kindly. "How nice of you to help me."

"You're welcome." It was reflexive, what his mother had taught him, and it was all that he could say, not knowing what else to say. She inclined her chin, her lips parted as if to join her eyes in laughter. He yearned for her to take him seriously, yearned to be a person that he was yet to be.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Codell."

The washing machines were loud. "COD - el? Like the fish?" She tilted in to him.

"Co-DELL, like co-OP-erate."

"How old are you, Codell?"

"My birthday was last week." His voice was flat.

"So much fun!" She clapped her hands. "What toys did you get?"

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His manliness washed away with the Tide, Codell lugged his mother's clothes basket on the way home. He couldn't understand. *How could something so important to me mean so little to you?* Her words replayed in his head. They came from her heart, or whatever organ occupied that place within her.

"You need to start using that deodorant I gave you," said his mother. "I can smell you from here."

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