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Sexy, at the Greyhound Station

By Julia Smillie

The air conditioner inside the station is unequal to August's grip outside. The building is warm to its very foundation. Waves of damp heat rush through the room every time the doors swing open. The ticket line doesn't seem to be moving, held up at the front by a pale teenage girl. She wears flannel pajama pants and clutches a furry zebra-striped pillow. Behind her is a small woman, thin and wiry, impatience sparking through her limbs, maybe not much older than the pajama girl but with a face pulled tight and set hard. As she stands in line, her boyfriend sits in a row of seats nearby, his arm slung across the back of the chair next to his. Short and round, he looks like Super Mario from the video games.

The woman turns to her boyfriend, her hand coming to rest on her belly, where a small, insistent rounding is the only hint of her condition. Her hair is pulled into a messy ponytail and on her neck, in ink dark and muddy, is the word "sexy" in cursive, letters curling toward her nape.

At the front of the line, the clerk, a beleaguered-looking woman with dark skin glistening, explains something to the teen, who bites her lip and stares off to the side.

"This place is a joke," the boyfriend calls out from his seat. He tries to cross one leg over the other, but his thighs are too wide, his calves too short and his ankle slides right off the opposite knee. The tattooed woman fans herself with a Western Union wire form. The pajama girl takes her ticket from the clerk, and the woman steps forward to the counter. She turns to the boyfriend. "Get on up here," she says, and he does. Neither of them has any luggage.

She slides her papers across the counter at the clerk, who barely glances up before shaking her head. "Can't help you," the clerk says, her voice a flat, straight line. "Not 'til I get all the passengers ticketed."

The sexy woman juts her pointy chin out a tad further. "I need to pick up some money," she says. "I've been waiting for an hour."

"Over an hour," the boyfriend says.

The clerk sighs. "Fine." She her eyes and pulls the paperwork across the counter towards her. "But you'll need to step aside while I process this so I can keep ticketing the passengers."

"This is ridiculous," the boyfriend says. His stomach, wide and tight, brushes back and forth against the front of the counter. "We've been in line forever."

The clerk looks up from the form and raises one thin eyebrow. "And you're gonna wait longer if you keep that up."

The sexy woman narrows her eyes. Her hand moves to the tattooed place on her neck, fingers scratching distractedly at the letters. "You don't have to get smart," she says. Then she adds: "Fat ass."

The boyfriend smiles. "Fat ass," he repeats.

The clerk pauses, screwing her mouth to one side. She looks at them, then at the line behind them, snaking its way towards the doorway. She looks at all the people trying to get out. Out of the heat. Out of St. Louis. Out of here.

"Step. Away. From. The. Counter," the clerk says again. The boyfriend's smile vanishes. He steps to the side, impossibly light and delicate on his fat feet in his fat white sneakers. The woman with the sexy tattoo shakes her head in disgust and brings her hand from her neck to rest on the swell of her stomach. She turns to the next person in line.

"I fucking hate St. Louis," she says.