

Denver wakes up this morning and pulls his sheets back to reveal that his feet are still there. He flexes the big toe on his right foot and sees that the big toe on his right foot flexes. He lets out a breath he was holding. Still there.

Knock-knock. He turns to his alarm clock and sees that it is 1:09 PM. He is not late, but his alarm didn't go off. Stupid thing. Denver gets out of bed and walks over to the kitchenette, to the freezer. Reaching past the loose ice cubes and bloated cans of Pepsi, he pulls out a premium pepperoni Hot Pocket. He feels the chill on his bare chest as he closes the freezer.

Knock-knock. Someone's at the door and it's probably Conrad. It only ever is. Denver thinks about the cold Hot Pocket for a moment, then presses it onto the counter. He looks down at his feet and sighs. He glances back to the door.

Knock-knock. Denver backs away from the door as he opens it. Conrad stands there with the tips of his sandals on the threshold. His eyes flick to Denver's bare chest and then back up to his face. Conrad's eye twitches as he squints at Denver.

"Mornin', kid"

Conrad isn't much taller than Denver, but he fills up the frame with his off-white wifebeater and thick arms. He holds out a stack of envelopes with a key sandwiched between his thumb and the papers.

"You left yer key in the mailbox again," Conrad says, gruffly. "Yer lucky. Some of the jerks I know woulda tried to sell it back to ya."

Neither man laughs at his joke. Denver grabs the envelopes and slips the key into his palm. He reads the front of each envelope: Temp Agency, Congressman, Senator, Congressman, Congressman, Domino's pizza. He moves the stack to check that his feet are still there. They are. Conrad's slides are still there.

"Hey, Den," Conrad starts, "How's the job search going?"

Denver crosses his arms over his stomach feeling suddenly cold. "It's, um. It's going."

"Whatever happened to, uh," Conrad indicates to his own shirt, "CVS? Coupla weeks ago, seemed like—"

"It didn't work out."

Conrad lets a soft grunt. Denver begins to press the key into his forearm.

"Look, if this is about this month's rent, I think I have it, I just..." He looks up at Conrad.

“I can get it to you.”

Conrad heaves a sigh. “Kid, I’m tryna look out for ya.”

Denver doesn’t like it when Conrad calls him kid. Denver gets smaller.

“I’ll let you pay this month’s rent with next month’s, but you gotta find a job.”

“I—”

“And keep it.” He wears an expression that could trim hair. “You can’t be standing around all day, staring at your feet.”

Conrad turns to leave. He shouts after himself: “And stop leaving your key in the mailbox!”

Denver closes the door and leans against it for a moment. He drops the mail in the pile where he always drops his mail and tosses his key on top. He looks over to the stupid alarm clock that didn’t go off. It’s 1:16pm, so he is not late yet.

Denver walks over to the bathroom and turns on the shower. He takes a deep breath and shucks off his boxers. Denver steps in. He doesn’t have the time to wait for the water to heat up, but he waits anyway, watching the water hit a stain right in front of him. He rubs it with his toe to make sure it’s not something he did. The water warms up, but not enough.

It is 1:31 PM. He will have to leave soon, especially since he doesn’t have a car to drive to the supermarket. He eats a steaming Hot Pocket with one hand and uses the other to rifle through his clothes. He is looking for his nice polo shirt, the navy one he wore last time. It turns out to be next to his bed. He bunches the polo shirt up from hem to neck so he can pass his head through in one quick motion. He does the same to the legs of his slacks. Just in case something were to come out different on the other side. He smooths the wrinkles down to his waist, down to his ankles. He opens the closet.

Sitting there, on the floor, is a pair of shoes: brown leather, grey laces, simple and flat. He looks at them. They look back at him. They’re shoes. He is almost certain that they are not alive. Almost. Denver closes the closet. The warped mirror-door reflects back two fleshy stumps. Denver can’t help but to look down.

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Denver sits in the manager’s office of the Supervalu. He still feels the manager’s warm, moist handshake on his fingers. Denver cradles his palm in his lap.

“So, if that sounds good to you... I suppose I have a couple of questions,” says the manager, shifting in his swivel chair. “Why do you want to work at Supervalu?”

Denver, after a moment, looks him in between the eyes.

“I see myself as a people person. I want to... put good into the community. I think I could do that here.”

“I like that,” says the manager. Denver knew he would. The manager turns towards his computer screen and reads further. He says, “Hm, it says here that you worked at a TJ Maxx from the beginning of the year until about a month ago. Why’d you leave?”

Denver pauses. He’d rehearsed this. “I didn’t like the workplace environment.” The manager furrows his brow. Denver continues, “It was very competitive. People would quit all the time. I want to get to know my coworkers. Some *consistency*.”

The manager looks through him, to a point behind his head. Denver suppresses the urge to check his feet. The manager’s forehead shines with sweat.

“Well, many of our associates have been working here for years,” says the manager. “If there’s one thing we in the supermarket industry have, it’s *consistency*.”

Denver focuses on a rivulet on the manager’s nose. “And food.”

The manager chuckles. “In *abundance*. Everybody needs to buy food, which is why grocery stores are a good business. Even with Amazon and digital marketplaces coming and putting brick-and-mortar retailers out of business, people will always fundamentally *need* grocery stores. We are in a great position to benefit from that.”

Denver nods.

“Of course, that doesn’t mean that we at Supervalu aren’t doing anything to accommodate the times. Far from it! As a national chain, we are *expected* to follow the national shift to online, and as such, we see a lot more pick-ups and order-style shopping than we used to. It’s more work, but it’s what the times call for.”

Denver knows they’re there, but he wants to make sure. He nods.

“You see a diverse crowd when you’re working in customer service. Especially in *this* part of town. But if you’re anything like me, you’ll relish the experience of helping somebody. When I graduated high school, I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life. I was *totally* directionless.”

Denver hasn't seen a high school in many years, but the manager speaks in protracted words, like he's talking to a child. Or a freak.

"But then, I got a job working in a supermarket, and I put my mind to it to become what you see today! General Manager at this very Supervalu. Twenty-five years, and I wouldn't trade a *minute* of it."

Denver nods, but he wants to look at his feet. Just to check. He only wants to confirm what he already knows.

"How does that sound to you?"

Denver gives a weak grin. The manager tilts his head slightly.

"I think that's all I wanted to ask you for the interview. Was there... anything you wanted to ask me?"

Denver looks up and not down. "Um," he says trying to remember the question, but he has a lot on his mind, or a little on his mind a lot. Managers always expected questions. "If you could describe this job in three words, what would they be?"

Denver is glad when the manager twists his face in concentration. Good question. Perhaps he could—

"Well, I suppose I would say *challenging*."

The manager looks directly at him. Denver gnaws on the word.

"*Fruitful*."

Denver bites hard the inside of his cheek.

"And hell, since you mentioned it, *consistent*."

Denver needs to look, needs to check, he needs to see them there.

"Anything else?"

Denver shakes his head. He just needs a little check-see, that's all.

"Nope," Denver says with a disheveled smile.

Just a glance.

Neither man moves.

Just a moment.

The manager blinks.  
Just to check.

Nothing happens.

A dewdrop drips towards the manager's eyebrow.

And then a Pepsi cracks. He knows but he can't know, he can't. He just can't. What if they're gone, what if they've been stolen? Just check on them, really quick, just look. *Look.* Denver please, just—

Denver looks down.

There they are. Feet. Two of them, in light blue foam flip flops. The nails are the kind of short that comes from trimming them too close. The toes have brown-blond hair dusting the knuckles. There's a prominent vein on the top of the left foot. He'd know these feet anywhere. They're his.

The manager follows Denver's gaze down and sees his feet. Denver catches him tightening the corner of his mouth and flaring his nostrils before turning back to the screen. The manager starts to type something. He says, "I'll put in the order for the background check. If that goes smoothly, you'll be contacted and told when to start. Try to wear something similar to what you're wearing now."

He gestures to Denver.

"Except something closed-toe."

Denver thanks the manager and leaves the Supervalu. He walks home, the sun on the back of his neck. When he reaches his apartment, he quickly slides off his shirt and pants and gets into bed, shoving his legs under the covers. He looks down.

Two smooth little peaks appear at the foot of his bed. Two little peaks where feet should be. Two little bumps, two little mole-hills. Not body, but geometry. He flexes his big toe on his right foot and sees that the right peak sways. He pulls the sheet back to reveal what he already knew.

Still there.