



Only The Neck Down
Reagan, David

Published: 2006

Type(s): Short Fiction, Science Fiction, Sexuality

Source: <http://futurismic.com/category/fiction/>

Also available on Feedbooks for Reagan:

- *Solitude Ripples From The Past* (2008)

Copyright: Please read the legal notice included in this e-book and/or check the copyright status in your country.

Note: This book is brought to you by Feedbooks.

<http://www.feedbooks.com>

Strictly for personal use, do not use this file for commercial purposes.

License

"Futurismic is a free science fiction webzine specialising in the fact and fiction of the near future - the ever-shifting line where today becomes tomorrow. We publish original short stories by up-and-coming science fiction writers, as well as providing a blog that watches for science fictional news stories, and non-fiction columns on subjects as diverse as literary criticism, transhumanism and the philosophy of design. Come and imagine tomorrow, today."

This work is published using the following Creative-Commons license:
Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 Unported

You are free:

- to Share — to copy, distribute and transmit the work

Under the following conditions:

- Attribution. You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribute this work: What does "Attribute this work" mean? The page you came from contained embedded licensing metadata, including how the creator wishes to be attributed for re-use. You can use the HTML here to cite the work. Doing so will also include metadata on your page so that others can find the original work as well.
- Noncommercial. You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- No Derivative Works. You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.
- For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is with a link to this web page.
- Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.
- Nothing in this license impairs or restricts the author's moral rights.

Only The Neck Down

Adrianna loved cool fall evenings without a hair-disturbing breeze — perfect weather for donning a warm and fuzzy sweater. She picked the pink one, a recent thrift store find, because it was a size too small. Fashion's winter weaponry could be just as devastating as short shorts and a halter top.

She examined herself in the mirror, starting at the floor and working her way up. Nice feet, well proportioned. In the summer, she was fond of sandals and holographic nail polish that shimmered with rainbow colors on each of her toes. Her tight, denim jeans highlighted long legs that tapered up to perfect thighs and hips that showed her femininity without flaunting it. She twisted at the waist, pleased with the firm swells of her rear. Fifteen miles a week on the treadmill were doing their job.

Her waist was still thin, her stomach tight. And here — she couldn't help but smile — came her perfect tits. She gave them a little bounce, admiring the way they filled out her sweater, free of constricting undergarments. There would be some boys becoming men, and vice versa, on the way to her appointment.

This didn't offend her, even from those who stared with frank lust at her carefully presented lushness. It was the ones who seemed to do the mental math trying to figure out how many beers they would need before sleeping with her that bothered Adrianna. Not that she blamed them, or even ruled them out as potential lovers. Of the five men she'd slept with, three had alcohol on their breath. Two others had been too drunk to do more than fumble blindly.

She ran the comb through her thick bangs once more, delighting in the lustrous shine that came from constant conditioning and hundreds of brush strokes every day. She kept it short in the back to accentuate her graceful neck. Adrianna hated to admit it, but she looked as good as she ever would.

She fastened all three locks on the apartment's front door and scanned her surroundings. It wasn't the worst neighborhood, but the garbage in the street and weathered buildings showed it wasn't the best. Mainly wage slaves who resisted sliding into sorrow and took a modicum of pride in their property, even if it was rented.

"Adrianna!" Her roommate Rosita appeared, almost flying up the steps. She was a maniacally happy, lifelong cheerleader, and regular user

of home-cooked exuberants. In school she studied dance as a minor and football players as her major. “Where you bouncing, all tramped out? You going on a first time interface with some hapless man-child?”

Adrianna had no intention of telling her the truth, no matter how close a friend she might be. They both came from the same border town, and they were both the first in their families’ histories to go to college. Tonight’s errand would be a secret for one, and only one. Adrianna even hoped that in time she might forget and make it a secret for none. *If it weren’t for the money...*

“Yeah, I’m starbucking it with a one-Ram mind. He doesn’t know that all we’re doing is studying for the Genetic Fabrication midterm.”

The lie placated her roomie, who stared blissfully at the moths fluttering in the porch light as dusk turned to dark, tapping her left foot and humming a pop tune under her breath.

“Don’t stand out here for too long or the weirdo in 7C will come out and bother you,” Adrianna said.

Rosita snapped back to life. “I found this absolutely amazing new lipstick you simply have to try.” She introduced a little head bob to match her bouncing foot.

“You know I don’t wear makeup,” Adrianna said, peeved.

“Yeah. Why is that?” Rosita started hand jiving against both thighs. The drugs had obviously destroyed her perception, but Adrianna still felt a sharp anger in her chest.

“I don’t want to talk about my cosmetics right now,” she said.

Rosita wasn’t listening anymore; she danced to a song only she could hear. Adrianna shrugged and went down the stairs. Her friend was trapped by her own circumstances, including accidental insensitivity.

There were over a hundred women at the casting call, and as soon as Adrianna walked through the door, they all turned and looked at her. She felt her heart stop — every erg of energy drained from her body in a hundred different directions. The competition; though most were in such a sad state they would never make it into an audition.

Adrianna’s heart started to beat as stares turned into frowns and most women looked away. They all knew she wouldn’t be here if her body wasn’t 100 percent natural (network regs), and Adrianna knew there

weren't better bodies than hers, merely differences in taste. Still, if she had seen a face she knew, she would have turned and fled.

Sure, a lot of girls at school did it, but few to none would admit it.

Most of the women spent their time eyeing the floor, though a few stared at the filth on the waiting room televisions. The high-definition cum-edies the networks aired on late night had never appealed to Adrianna, though their ratings were consistently in the top 100. She caught a glance of the OrifiCam and shuddered.

Those were the shows that drew big advertising dollars, from beverage conglomerates to beer companies, energy collectives and politicians. Crap funding shit in an excretory cycle. Adrianna worried her glancing involvement meant she was flushing her life away, but she couldn't let doubt interfere. She wouldn't let herself be degraded by it, even if she might be contributing. Her parents had always encouraged her to rise above it, into space, or at the very least an arcology in one of the few remaining Greenbelts.

The money would mean she wouldn't have to work her senior year. She was on the cusp of graduating with honors, which would assure her entry into a graduate program and from there — who knew? — maybe a seven-figure job in obstetric genetics, molding beautiful girls and handsome boys who would never know the sting of Beauty.

Adrianna couldn't stand another year, or worse, a lifetime of serving food in the diner, or manufacturing O-rings for the space dwellers, or giving herself to every pervert with a good credit rating.

Time passed.

Numbers were called.

Adrianna became intimately familiar with the cracked tiles of the floor. A secretary called out again and again, before finally, "Number 58."

Adrianna rose and presented her papers, a ream of release forms with black holographic boxes disguising her proper name. She wouldn't be here if not for the anonymity. Only a district judge could break the seals should a civil case ever arise from a contract dispute, though it hadn't happened yet.

"Please step through the door. The casting agents will be waiting for you."

Adrianna walked into the next room and the door slid shut behind her. Two men and a woman sat at a table, all dressed in the latest styles: brightly colored synthetics with their network's shows playing on the

lapels. On one man's shoulder, a woman was taking on two men and cracking jokes when her mouth wasn't full. Adrianna looked away.

The woman said, "I'm Patrice Laurens, Casting Director, and these are my assistants, Watts and Jeff." Watts was scrawny and balding, while Jeff was an obvious Beauty user, with a face so perfect it had to come from a box. "They both suffer from SOS, or Sexual Overstimulation Syndrome, so impressing them will help in persuading me. Now, disrobe."

Adrianna took a deep breath and forced herself to stand tall. She had unconsciously ducked her head, letting the bangs fall over her eyes. Trying to hide her face, the plain, boring and in-the-wrong-light ugly face. For a second, she was tempted to take any money she made here and buy Beauty, the real thing, not the knock-off shareware they sold in back alley pretty-ups.

Full lips, sculptured cheekbones, a nose that didn't look like a squashed shrew with a broken spine, all were within easy reach. All she had to do was drop out of school and prostitute herself fully to Beauty. It wasn't the initial cost; it was the upkeep that drove men and women to bankrupt themselves physically and financially.

She lifted the sweater over her head, wishing she could leave it there to hide her face while exposing only her body. But that wasn't the way it worked. She stripped until naked, staring at some imaginary point over and behind the agents.

Lasers shot from ten angles, measuring her body and storing her unique physical parameters. Adrianna noticed Watts injecting something into his neck; she recognized the green pentagonal packaging of Hardnow. He dropped his hand into his lap and out of sight. Sure, the drug would allow him to have forty orgasms a day, but it would burn him out in a few years. Her stomach clenched with revulsion.

"Bend over," Patrice Laurens said. Her no-nonsense approach proved she had done this many times before. Adrianna complied, and Patrice said, "Now spread your cheeks. Wider."

Adrianna did as she was told; her stomach felt like it was in a vise. She was free to leave at any moment, though she would have nothing to show for the experience besides a new kind of humiliation. She had to stick it out for the money. And it wasn't as though humiliation was such a stranger.

The lasers continued to dance over her body.

"Stand straight. Computer: depube."

A foot square opening appeared in the floor and a machine emerged.

"Avert your eyes," Patrice ordered.

Adrianna looked away and felt warmth around her groin, then a second of suction. When she looked down, all of her pubic hair was gone. "Hey!"

"Just part of the process. Either get out, or stop complaining and lie down on your back, legs spread." Both men now had a hand out of sight, each unashamed of the rhythmic motion of their shoulder.

She almost left right then... but school... her career... Beauty.... A spasm ripped through her stomach — something had to give — and Adrianna vomited. Her dinner made a sad puddle of half-digested noodles and protein sticks; she would have fled the room if her knees weren't so shaky.

"Computer: cleanup." Patrice didn't flinch, though Jeff's hand made a sudden reappearance on the table. Watts' sped up. Adrianna's stomach did another flip-flop. She forced down the taste of bile.

A hatch in the floor opened and a hose emerged, swaying back and forth sucking up the mess. Adrianna watched it with a dark dread, certain Patrice was going to make her fornicate with the machine. In a way, she no longer cared if that's what it took.

She suddenly understood how people could have sex on camera. One small step at a time, each one taking them farther away from self worth. When you stopped caring about yourself, you were primed to do anything. She understood desperation more sharply than ever before. And she understood why there had to be laws to protect those like herself.

The cleanup hose retracted into the floor, and she took a deep breath; it felt like she might have gotten over the hump. The worst wasn't as bad as her imaginings, though it could have been.

"Are you ready to go on, or should I call in the next girl? There are quite a few you know." Patrice frowned with impatience.

Adrianna took a deep breath and lay down on her back. Slowly, she spread her legs.

The following ten minutes of posturing didn't register in Adrianna's mind. For those few moments she was a soldier, following orders and forgetting her individuality.

“You may put your clothes back on. Number fifty-eight, get dressed, and defrag your thinking,” Patrice snapped.

Adrianna’s gaze wandered to Watts, who was slumped back in his chair, twitching from Hardnow withdrawal. It hit her that she was standing naked in front of them. She snatched up her clothes and hurriedly dressed, with her back turned. She knew it made no sense, but still she did it. Adrianna wished she’d worn something less revealing, something baggy and formless, like the nun’s habits she’d seen in movies.

Patrice whispered to Jeff, and finally she leaned over and shook Watts by the shoulder. He roused from his stupor and cracked a lascivious smile.

“It looks like we’ve made a decision, number 58. We’ll offer 28,000 dollars for three years exclusive rights, everything from the neck down,” Patrice said.

For a second it hurt like never before, more than the unmasking at a freshman costume party, more than the drunken man-child who’d jokingly asked if she minded wearing a bag over her head, even more than seeing her face first thing every morning. It passed, and Adrianna had never been so glad to be plain looking. The money would get her through the last year of school. Beauty would have to wait, but she suspected she would never get hooked on that trend. She’d find some fellow Professional who wasn’t hung up on looks and settle down. If they were lucky, they’d be licensed for space; if really lucky, a child.

“Yes, that will be fine,” she told Patrice. “That will be just fine.” As simple as that, she no longer “owned” her body. A week from now a Professional would digitally paste on the head of a woman with natural beauty. The composite might end up as a walk-on love interest in a comedy, or being sodomized by a beer bottle in the “Feels Great, More Filling” campaign, or used for virtual surgery in a federal medical school. Possibly all of them.

Adrianna no longer had any say in the matter. She couldn’t even show her body to a lover, though that hardly mattered.

The only thing left was her head. She couldn’t believe she’d never seen that was the only part that mattered. The next year would be hard, even with the money, but the possibility of graduating with honors now existed, and Adrianna knew she would succeed. Three years from now she would be a Professional, and she could find herself a good man.

She exited through a back door, overwhelmed by joy at this discovery; it was like eating a handful of exuberants. The door opened into an alley so people wouldn't be seen leaving the auditions, which made Adrianna laugh. She didn't care who knew, because it didn't matter. Selling her body had freed her mind.

She decided to spend a little of the money on a Professional haircut. The bangs had to go. It was time to make eye contact with the world and hold it.

Adrianna couldn't wait to get to a mirror and look at her own face.

She knew it would be the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen.

Loved this book ?

Similar users also downloaded:

- "*Pagan Passions*", Randall Garrett
- "*Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*", John Cleland
- "*Venus in Furs*", Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch
- "*The Kama Sutra*", Vatsyayana
- "*The Little Lady of the Big House*", Jack London
- "*The Awakening & Other Short Stories*", Kate Chopin
- "*Lady Chatterley's Lover*", David Herbert Lawrence
- "*The Monk*", Matthew Lewis
- "*The Right People*", Adam Rakunas
- "*Ulysses*", James Joyce



www.feedbooks.com
Food for the mind