



Busted

By Christy Shick

"The breasts are for the baby.
The ass is for the man."

Funmi Ononaiye 1964-2023

Most days I'm alone in the apartment on 106th Street – just me and Jonah who at eighteen months walks himself, mostly, to our playground in Central Park, then we eat Bamba and read Curious George before he naps. And all is well until my husband gets home – the weight of him, his darkness.

"You need to think what are you doing with your life, Christy. What are you doing?" He scolds me. Crushes me.

"I can't do this anymore."

I tell him I'm moving out with the baby and begin to live for Sun-

day nights – my night when I leave the baby at home with him and catch the 2 train at Broadway and 96th, transforming to something resembling my former self by the time I get off at 14th St. and walk across town to the Black and White, a rock and roll bar on 10th Street with weekly readings based on themes announced the week before – "drunk all day" or "who's your favorite band and why?"

Those themes have become my carrot, writing and revising throughout the week while Jonah naps – stories about hangovers and infidelity, about my failing marriage.

I bare my soul to these strangers on Sundays, sopped in Black Label. Smoking spliffs. Free in my refuge.

My church.

But this week, hunting for restaurant work and much-needed move-out money, I've been training at a pub in midtown and haven't had time to write, scribbling notes on a bar pad and shoving them into my apron pockets. This week's theme is getting busted. And man, do I have stories.

Hauled into jail from my dorm room for stealing a credit card. Guilty.

The next year caught in the back-seat of a coked-up driver who tried to flee the police. They let everyone off except me.

A motorcycle cop chased me down the sidewalk in Santa Barbara, unpaid traffic tickets and weed in my pocket.

And that's just in this country. Handcuffs. Speed chases. Strip-searches. Hitchhiking home from that jail in Murcia.

Still, I think everyone will expect those kinds of tales. So, I'm writing about going from a B-cup to a DD when I was pregnant, my breasts swelling week by week like thriving watermelons — getting busted! I want it to be funny, comic relief from the heavy male gaze that works like an undertow in the piece.

But Sunday has come, and I'm stuck at this training shift that won't end, until I can finally grab a taxi, organizing my crumpled fistful of notes — anecdotes and punchlines, sexy confessions, wrinkled papers on my lap as we cruise down 2nd Avenue. And I decide to wing it.

I've seen a burst of stand-up lately — Gilbert at Caroline's, The

Rejection Show at PS122, which is a performance space now. Cartoonists from the New Yorker, writers from Comedy Central and SNL took the stage with their rejected works, and one woman sticks with me now — hilarious and disorganized, messy hair and ordinary clothes, talking about growing up in the Village.

I'm still in my work uniform when I arrive at the Black and White.

Even if I bomb, I think, I have credit with the regulars. Right? I have props in my purse, at least, my bra from that year and socks to fill it. And Dan, the bartender. We made out once.

I told him I might be a terrible mother for leaving my husband.

His blue-gray eyes laid on me. "I wish my mom was a passionate writer like you," he said, resigned and matter-of-fact. "My mom killed herself." Then he leaned over the bar, tall and young and beautiful, and kissed me.

Each week I come home later and later, climbing into bed next to my husband, if I'm not too drunk. Once, I fell asleep on the bathroom floor after puking my guts out. "Don't forget the baby," he said when he found me there at 5, before leaving for the hospital.

When Jonah woke up at 7, I was

still there. "I'm sorry, baby."

I manage to down a couple whiskeys before Brian calls my name. It's an unusually packed room tonight — even the owner's here, which makes me nervous. He's young and cool. And hot, with big brown eyes that see into people, that see into me as I step in front of the microphone.

"I didn't have time to write this week." I tell them, stepping into the golden glow of stage lights like a warm bath. "But I have a topic I couldn't let go."

There must be fifty people gazing up at me from chairs and booths and barstools, while I talk about times I felt humiliated by men who wanted bigger boobs from me. "I'll buy you a set." I've heard it more than once. "You'd have the perfect body if you had bigger breasts."

"You could be a 10!" Comments like that really stick with a girl.

Luckily, I was a springboard diver throughout high school and college, in a swimsuit more often than not between twelve and twenty. And I've had great lovers. I know how little breasts have to do with it.

Still, when mine swelled to a C, then a D, then, a DD, and my hormones swelled with them, I found myself locked in the bathroom masturbating everyday.

Unfortunately, my husband is not one of those great lovers.

But he's not one of the gross ones either.

All my years envying my more ample sisters came to a halt, as the boob men emerged throughout Manhattan, literally drooling and tongue-wagging at my voluminous mounds that

clopped like sweaty camel humps through Tompkins Square. Like Milkhounds, the men sprang before me, oblivious of the twenty-pound belly that bounced beneath, or the what-the-fuck eyeroll judging them above. Ensorcelled. Like big thirsty babies.

"Sorry." I tell the audience, while pretending to hurl. "Remembering this one guy just made me vomit a little in my mouth." I look at them.

"Wait. Are ass-men doing the same thing behind my back?"

I get a few big laughs as I ramble on, put the bra over my clothes and stuff six pairs of socks into it. "Still not enough! I mean look at my tiny ass. I'd fall over with that load on now." Who needs it? "The need for a bra, the lewd attention. The need for a bra!"

Between laughs is excruciating. The waiting audience. I think about Gilbert. About stand-up comics who make careers of humiliating themselves. And I'm trying to find a way to end it when Brian leans in with an actual cane, threatening to pull me off stage.

"If I were still a DD, you'd let me stay up here all night!"

One last big laugh before I promise the room never to come without writing done again and get a generous applause. I haven't been this embarrassed since middle school, rushing to the bar to collect my whiskey and head out for a smoke.

"I like listening to you rant," Dan says, and his sad eyes follow me out the door.