

An excerpt from **The Ribs and Thigh Bones of Desire** by Sandra Hutchison

(from Chapter Two)

Back at the Asken house, now crowded with mourners trying not to chat too cheerfully over the food, Molly caught her mother examining pale David Asken with suspicion. Her mother had always seemed to like this young family across the street, to consider them the right sort of people, not too old-fashioned or Republican or anything. She particularly approved of the fact that Elaine had a job, teaching English at the local public high school. Now, however, Molly could tell that she suspected Dr. Asken of oppressing all the art out of his wife.

Molly thought it was more likely that her mother had oppressed any mention of art out of Elaine. Cassandra had hit the big time with an installation called *Puberty*, which had included a life-sized sculpture of Molly, twelve at the time, constructed entirely of tampons and feminine napkins – unused, thank God. This had been such a big hit that her mother had moved on to a series of papier-mâché portraits of women’s private parts she called *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*. Worse, her mother always made sure the local media knew about her new shows, and they delighted in giving full coverage to her exploits.

All this had often made Molly want to curl up in the fetal position in her bed rather than go to school. People assumed Shadbrook was an enlightened town because it was so close to UMass and the other colleges – and plenty of academics did live there. But the other people, the locals – farmers and factory workers and custodians and groundskeepers – wouldn’t be caught dead pretending to like contemporary art. At Shadbrook High School the kids had saluted her mother’s first show by passing her sanitary supplies in class and calling her Tampon Girl. She was grateful when her father took pity and got her transferred into a local boarding school as a day student. At Shadbrook Academy the rich kids thought it was cool to have a mom who was so open-minded about, like, sex, and Molly tried to act as if she thought so, too. She’d already learned the hard way that betraying embarrassment in high school was like jumping into a shark frenzy with a vein open.

But Molly was not particularly open-minded about sex. She was still only sixteen, and she had never felt an overwhelming urge to exchange bodily fluids with any of the boys she knew, even the ones she considered cute. And she didn’t appreciate it when someone assumed she must be hot to trot just because her mother had a bunch of giant vulvas lined up on a shelf in her studio.



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