

"Four weeks," Caden mutters as the gravel crunches under his tires, the cabin's wooden sign swinging slightly in the wind. He parks, kills the engine, sits for a moment staring at the pine trees crowding the driveway. The tour contract is signed, the advance spent. A short drive from Denver, no distractions. Just the work.

The glove compartment clicks open with a dry snap. He tosses his phone inside without looking — he's done this enough times to know the angle — and shuts it with his elbow. The Instagram post is already live. A shot of the cabin's driveway, pine needles scattered like confetti, captioned: *Four weeks. No distractions. Just the work.* His brand isn't built on inspiration. It's built on systems.

Inside, the cabin smells of old wood and the faintest hint of mildew. The standing desk converter waits by the window, already assembled, its height perfectly calibrated. The content calendar dominates the far wall, color-coded and precise: demographic data (blue), historical argument (red), biological empiricism (green), aspirational close (black). Four movements. One keynote.

Above the monitor, a sticky note. His handwriting, two months ago, when the line came to him at two in the morning. *The body has its own politics, and they precede yours.* He's said it in public a handful of times since. He doesn't look at it. He opens the laptop.

Browser tabs sprawl across the screen. *Declining Fertility Rates: Female Workforce Participation vs. Civilizational Replacement.* A PDF of a 1973 study on epigenetic triggers in mice. A spreadsheet tracking the correlation between urbanization and testosterone levels. He minimizes them all and opens the folder labeled *Tour Drafts*, then *Keynote 4.2*, then *Structure*.

The first sip of coffee hits his tongue cold. He'd forgotten to drink it. Caden blinks at the mug, then at the screen. The cursor blinks back. He exhales through his nose — a habit Petra calls his "data reset" — and rolls his shoulders. The flannel drags across his neck like a blade of grass drawn too slowly. Not painful. Just there. Unignorable. He scratches at his collar, then goes back to typing.

By the third hour, his wrists have become a problem. The cuffs keep brushing the desk, the sensation sharp enough to pull him out of focus. He pauses mid-sentence, fingers hovering over the keys, and stares at the frayed edge of the fabric. It wasn't new. He'd worn this shirt every winter for five years. The wool blend hadn't changed. But his skin has decided to report every thread like it's breaking news.

Caden flexes his hands. The laptop hums. Outside, a branch taps against the window in a rhythm that almost matches the pulse in his temples. He adjusts the cuffs, rolling them once, then twice. Better. Not fixed. He takes a sip of the now-room-temperature coffee and grimaces. Back to work.

The historical section demands precision. He'd built his brand on this — demographic collapse framed as math. The numbers didn't lie. Neither did the flannel. It keeps insisting. At some point,

he gives up and unbuttons the cuffs entirely, rolling the sleeves to his elbows. The air is cool against his forearms. A relief. A distraction. He types faster.

The coffee maker gurgles. Caden leans against the counter, staring at the dark liquid pooling in the carafe. His wrists still tingle. He turns his hands palm-up, examining the skin. No redness, no rash. Just the same pale, lightly veined expanse he's seen every morning for thirty-two years.

He pours the coffee black, no sugar, the way he always does. The first sip hits his tongue with the same bitterness, but the heat registers differently. A topography of sensation — the initial sting, the slow spread, the aftertaste lingering like a footprint. He sets the mug down harder than he means to. The sound is crisp, almost brittle.

Data point one: tactile sensitivity increasing. Possible explanations: stress response, sleep deprivation, latent viral infection. He pulls up a browser tab and types *sudden heightened tactile sensitivity* into the search bar. The results are a mess — fibromyalgia, neuropathy, autoimmune conditions, all buried under forum posts about anxiety and bad mattresses. He closes the tab. Not enough signal. Not yet.

The work won't write itself. He cracks his knuckles — another habit Petra calls his "biological reset" — and returns to the keyboard. The cabin's silence stretches around him, broken only by the tap of keys and the occasional groan of old timber settling into the cold. He works until the words blur, until the laptop's fan hums louder than his own thoughts. No distractions. Just the work.

At midnight, he shuts the laptop with a quiet click. The screen goes dark. The cabin doesn't. The pine trees outside cast long shadows across the floorboards, their shapes shifting in the wind. Caden stands, rolling his shoulders, feeling the stretch of muscle that has been still for too long. The air smells of coffee grounds and the faintest trace of pine resin from the firestarter he'd used earlier.

He pours out the cold coffee, rinses the cup, the water temperature sharper than usual, more informative. He flexes his fingers under the stream, testing the sensation like a tongue probing a loose tooth. Too hot. Or maybe not too hot, just *defined*, the heat carving distinct borders where it usually blurred into background noise. He runs through the possible causes the way he runs through anything anomalous: altitude, dehydration, the dry air, fatigue from the drive. Each explanation is plausible. None quite settles it. He assigns the most probable cause — dehydration, likely — and moves on, because that is what you do when a dataset doesn't yet have enough points to form a trend.

The sheets are cold. He slides between them, the cotton whispering against his skin like a breath held too long. The pillowcase presses into his cheek with an almost clinical precision, each thread registering as a separate point of contact. He lies still, arms at his sides, staring at

the ceiling's exposed beams. Data point two: tactile sensitivity persists in absence of visual stimuli. Possible explanations: neurological, not dermatological.

Sleep comes in fits. The flannel pajama pants — another winter staple — brush against his calves with the same insistence as the shirt sleeves earlier. He shifts, rolls onto his side, then onto his back again. The mattress beneath him feels suddenly uneven, as if he can map every coil beneath the foam.

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Morning. The shower hisses awake before he does. Caden stands under the spray, eyes still half-shut, letting the water pound the stiffness from his shoulders. It is too hot, or too precise. The droplets register individually now, each one a needlepoint of heat mapping his skin with clinical accuracy. He adjusts the knob by fractions, chasing the usual blur of warmth, but the water refuses to blur. It carves. He shuts his eyes and lets it happen.

The towel is worse. Rough where it should be soft, the fibers suddenly articulate against his palms, like they'd decided to introduce themselves properly for the first time. He rubs at his arms — too hard, too fast — and the friction burns. He drapes the towel over the rack and leaves it there, still damp.

Training. Nine years, six days a week. The sequence is automatic: mat unrolled, hands flat, spine straight. Caden inhales through his nose, exhales through his mouth, and begins the first movement. His body knows the shapes even when his mind wanders. Downward dog. Plank. Push-up. The floor presses back against his palms with newfound insistence, the hardwood grains announcing themselves like they'd been waiting for his attention.

Halfway through the third set, something shifts. A presence low in his abdomen, a weight that hadn't been there yesterday. He pauses mid-push-up, hovering above the mat, and frowns. It doesn't hurt. It just... is. Occupying. Like he'd swallowed a marble and forgotten to spit it out. He lowers himself slowly, testing. The weight rolls with him, settling deeper as he presses his hips to the floor.

Muscle pull, probably. Or the altitude. The cabin sits at six thousand feet — plenty high enough to throw his hydration off, tighten things that usually stay loose. Caden pushes back up, ignoring the new pressure. He finishes the set because he always finishes the set.

But the weight stays. Through the lunges, through the squats, through the final cool-down stretch where he folds forward over his knees and feels it press against his thighs from the inside. He straightens too fast, and the room tilts. Not dizziness — displacement. Like his center of gravity had recalculated overnight without consulting him.

Caden presses a hand to his stomach. The skin feels normal. No swelling, no tenderness. Just him. And yet. He pokes experimentally at the space below his navel. Nothing. Then he twists to

reach for his water bottle — and there it is again, a subtle rearrangement, as if something had slid gently to the left to make room for the movement.

He drinks. The water is cold, sharp, almost loud in his throat. Caden sets the bottle down carefully, watching the condensation bead and slide. Data point three: internal displacement. Possible explanations: dehydration (again), delayed muscle soreness, the shitty cabin mattress. None of them fit quite right.

The laptop screen glows back at him. He pulls up the biological empiricism section. The cursor blinks, impatient. His fingers move before his brain catches up, transcribing the numbers, the correlations, the hard edges of cause and effect. This was the part he likes: the clean lines, the unassailable logic. No room for ambiguity.

The warmth in his abdomen persists. Not pain, not discomfort — just presence. A quiet occupation. He shifts in the chair, adjusting his hips, and the sensation rolls with him, settling deeper. Probably just the seam of his jeans digging in after hours of sitting. He ignores it. The sentence demands his attention.

He writes the signature line. He reads it back. He keeps going.

By noon, the dampness arrives. Subtle at first — a slickness where fabric meets skin, barely noticeable until he leans forward to reach for his coffee. Then undeniable. He pauses mid-sip, frowning. The mug hovers halfway to his lips as he catalogs the new variable: heat, moisture, localized to the pelvic region. Chafing, maybe. Or sweat. The cabin's heating is erratic at best.

He sets the mug down and flexes his thighs experimentally. The warmth spreads, clinging. Not sweat. Something thicker. His fingers twitch toward the waistband of his jeans, then stop. Irrelevant. The data doesn't care about transient physiological noise. He goes back to typing.

Then his left hand drifts down to his crotch — the same unconscious reach, the same casual adjustment.

He goes still.

His fingers are against something wet. Folded. Wrong. He knows what he's touching. He knows it from outside experience, from textbooks, from a decade of citing it in arguments about fertility and civilizational decline — as a biological category, something that applied to other people's bodies and not his. Entirely theoretical, until right now.

He pushes back from the desk so fast the chair wheels screech against the floorboards. His belt buckle clatters as he tears at it, jeans shoved down past his hips in one sharp motion. He looks down. From this angle, all he can see is the swell of his lower abdomen, the curve of his thighs, and — protruding slightly — a prominent nub of flesh nestled between folds that hadn't been there yesterday. Not gone. *Transformed*. His breath hitches.

Caden grabs his phone off the desk, thumbs the camera open, and holds it below his crotch. The flash lights up the cabin's dim corner for half a second. The screen shows him the image before he can brace for it: a vulva, unmistakably female, swollen and damp. His thumb hovers over the delete button. He doesn't press it.

He sits back in the chair, phone still in hand, and stares at the laptop screen. The cursor blinks mid-sentence. The last typed words read *epigenetic triggers in mammalian sexual differentiation*. His mouth twitches. He closes the laptop.

Standing is different. His hips roll slightly wider with each step, the absence between his legs shifting in a way that makes his breath catch. The dampness lingers, the friction of cotton against sensitive skin sending little shocks up his spine with every movement. He makes dinner mechanically — rice, beans, bacon — and eats it standing at the counter, chewing slowly. The flavors are sharper now, the spices brighter, the texture of the rice grains distinct against his tongue.

Caden rinses the bowl and sets it in the sink. His reflection in the window above the faucet is the same as ever — same sharp jaw, same dark circles under his eyes — but when he turns sideways, his silhouette has softened somehow, the angles of his hips less severe. He touches his stomach again, pressing lightly. The warmth beneath his palm is undeniable.

He opens the laptop once more. The browser autofills *sudden sex reversal* before he can finish typing. The results are a mix of medical case studies, TERF forums, and bad sci-fi plots. None of them match what is happening to him. He closes the tab.

The pressure arrives like an afterthought — a dull insistence low in his abdomen that refuses to be categorized as anything other than what it is. Caden exhales through his nose and pushes back from the desk. The bathroom door swings shut behind him with a click that sounds louder than it should have.

He stands there, one hand braced against the sink, staring at the toilet like it is an equation he's avoiding. The logistics are straightforward. The execution isn't. He unbuckles his jeans with stiff fingers, pushes them down just far enough, and hesitates. The new geometry demands attention. He sits.

It is wrong. The angle, the expectation, the way his body refuses to follow thirty-two years of muscle memory. He stands abruptly, the toilet seat clattering up behind him. Fine. He'll do it standing. Like always.

The first attempt is a disaster. The stream hits the bowl's rim and splashes back onto his knees before he can adjust. He hisses through his teeth and steps back, wiping at his legs with the back of his hand. The second try — angled forward, hips tilted — works, mostly. He pulls his boxers up automatically.

The dampness is immediate. A wet patch against the soft tissue, the cotton cold and close. He pulls the boxers down. He gets toilet paper and presses it against himself, carefully, working until the paper comes away dry.

He turns to the sink. The water is too cold, too loud against the porcelain. He scrubs his hands raw, watching the suds slide down the drain. He brushes his teeth with mechanical precision, spits, rinses.

The bedroom is dark. He strips to his boxers and slides between the sheets. The damp spot on the fabric presses against his thigh, cold and undeniable. He shifts. It doesn't help.

Sleep refuses to come. Every small movement sends awareness ricocheting through his body — the brush of fabric, the weight of his own hips against the mattress, the way his knees now seem to press together naturally where they used to fall apart. He lies on his back, arms rigid at his sides, and counts the exposed beams overhead.

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Access the next section on [Patreon](#), or this section with images of Caden at work, transformed and examining the results.