



JUST FOR YOU

Kim Johnson

Christmas morning, after they had opened presents, while Beatrice was in her room half in and half out of a sweater her aunt had given her, her mom walked in, put Beatrice's stocking on the dresser, and went back downstairs. Beatrice wasn't surprised.

Everyone was coming to their house for dinner this year and right now, as a price tag scratched her skin, her family was down there in their pajamas, defrosting shrimp and stirring collard greens. She had been excused, briefly, to get dressed. But she wasn't getting dressed—she was trying on her sweater, so when her mom dropped the previously forgotten Christmas stocking on her dresser, Beatrice was reminded to "make it snappy." Instead, she abandoned the sweater and stood there in her off-white bra while she upended the felt stocking on her dresser. There was the usual stuff—cheap toys from fast food places, fruit-flavored lip balm, a tiny chocolate nut-cracker, a purple toothbrush and some paste, and a pair of earrings attached to a plastic card. Clinging to all these trifles was a strong unfamiliar smell. Wrapped up in a piece of sticky wax paper held in place with a sticker that read "Just For You," was a bar of soap. It was the source of the smell and a fountain of astonishment and pleasure for Beatrice. It wasn't ordinary soap, run-of-the-mill IrishIvoryDialSpringLever grocery store soap, it was soap from the *mall*. From one of those odoriferous, teenager, smelly stuff stores at the mall, with all those col-

ored bottles. The kind of store Beatrice never went into. But, apparently, her mom had went in, and when she came out, she had this oversized, soft, smelly bar of glycerine soap, and she put it in Beatrice's stocking. Crystallized in the yellow glycerin was a palm tree forever waving indolently in the breeze and at the base of its trunk floated brown cubes representing sand. The cloying smell Beatrice was now able to identify as "tropical." She smelled bananas, coconuts, lemons, waves and womanhood. The soap was so soft if you held it in your hand it left your palm sticky, so big it wouldn't fit in a soap dish, and so special Beatrice carefully rewapped it in its wax paper, replaced the "Just for You" sticker, and shut it up in her underwear drawer. Two weeks passed, two weeks of tropical scented panties, until Beatrice finished her bar of Ivory.

Finally, one night, she took the soap out of its drawer and used it. It got sudsy and cloudy and there was a gentle storm on the beach as soon as the water hit it. The shower stall filled with the aroma of fruity adolescence. Beatrice was in heaven. She smelled different, not like everyone else—she smelled like soap from the mall.

Beatrice's joy was short lived, however, as the bar shrunk considerably with each use. By Tuesday it fit perfectly, like grocery store soap, into the dish. By Thursday night, she estimated she had at least two showers left with it, but when she rubbed it into her wash cloth, the fronds from the palm tree snapped off, the great trunk splintered and separated from its yellow background, the cubes of sand washed down the drain.

By the time Beatrice turned off the water, all she had left were a few slimy green and yellow chunks. After she dressed, she gathered the pieces carefully from the shower floor and put them in her hand. She raised them to her nose and inhaled deeply. Bananas, coconuts, lemons, waves and womanhood. She threw away the remnants, then went into the linen closet for a bar of Ivory for the next morning. She unwrapped the bar, the same kind her two year-old cousin used, and put it into the soap dish.