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Cousin Pam & the Want Ads

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Laura Minor

COUSIN PAM & THE WANT ADS

He came to me recently,
 the man from the want ads in 1995.
 My second cousin was a friendless lesbian,
 and I said *I would*
 if *she did*. She wasn't well,
 Parliaments and fried okra for breakfast,
 set me up with a job caring for her ex-,
 now with MS—once pushed me
 out of the way to see a starlet on tv.

Scott, the date, was okay,
 a metal screen-print artist who liked *The Simpsons*
 maybe a goatee—
 I was scared and young
 and extremely curious about others.
 But I went. I want to trust,
 and he was quite nice,
 took me to meet his friends. They
 were on meth, and the rooms
 were unnerved. A woman
 with two front teeth missing—
 a blowjob joke I didn't fully get.
 A man who pulled his shorts aside
 in the hallway to illustrate his nudist beach,
Black Beach? He was tan.

I wanted to grow into a home
 I never felt I knew. The armoire
 in the living room. My date's

own work, two intricate metal
panels engraved, a lock. I had to ask.
He asked me if I was sure. I wasn't
sure. It was filled with sex toys
I'd never seen before. I asked
about something like a jewelry pouch
and I suppose that is what it was for—
he told me that you pull
the string tight to make it hurt.

Nothing about this was like
The Simpsons. I must've said
something along the lines of getting back
to my cousin, her loneliness, my newness
to everything. I left and tried to find my car
because I must've parked down the block,
and even in a small California suburb,
I was lost—until I was in a sunflower garden
someone must've grown
for the gullible believers of love,
lost oasis of spikes still trusting the sun.