

J O E S I X P A C K

***SHE MADE
ME INTO MY
SISTER***

**“A Little Too Clever”
A Teens Transformed Story**



2006 Paperback Edition

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A LITTLE TOO CLEVER

Everything stopped. From the corner of my eye, I saw a blur. The first thing I heard was the loud, ear-shattering clang of the sheet metal. It sounded like a trash can struck with a baseball bat. What it turned out to be was my ex-girlfriend.

She had been thrown against the lockers that lined the hallways at my school, with the back of her head hitting first. Ashleigh then fell to the ground like a sack of dirt. I scanned the crowd, refocusing my sight to see what had precipitated this. I already had a good idea, and I was not wrong. It was Josh Farmer. He had a mean look on his sweaty, flushed face and turned to leave.

“You *asshole!*” Ashleigh cried from the ground.

That’s all I needed to see. Josh had slammed Ashleigh into the lockers for some reason, and his football physique had used every ounce of his animal strength to do it. There was even a dent left in the locker she had been thrown into. At that moment, I was convinced he had just broken a shoulder or something worse.

Then, for some stupid reason, I got in Josh’s way. Maybe it was instinct – at least I hope it was, because I’d hate to think I rationally decided to go up against the school’s human equivalent of the Incredible Hulk. Standing where I was, I made it so he was going to have to go through me to get away with this.

Which is exactly what he did, as he threw me – with one arm – back into the assembled crowd. Now back then, I wasn’t much of a wimp, as I played basketball and I was also on the wrestling team. But compared to Josh, I was just a leaf blowing in the wind.

And as I found my feet again, Josh turned around and had a second go at Ashleigh. He had barged back through the crowd and flipped her the bird.

“You’re fuckin’ *crazy* if you think I’m *fuckin’* gonna do what you *fuckin’* tell me to do!” He yelled. And with that bit of wisdom imparted, he left the hallway.

That was when I saw the streak of blood coming across Ashleigh’s forehead. That made me more angry than I’ve ever been in my life. Maybe anger is the wrong word. It was anger, fury, sickness and fear all at the same time. Josh hadn’t just hurt her, he had damaged her. He had made my Ashleigh bleed. I would have said and done anything to get back at Josh, and that’s how this all started. It was my anger that did this to me.

The first thing I did was to keep Ashleigh from getting up. She obviously had been hurt pretty badly, and the bleeding was starting to get ugly. I yelled at some other guys to go get the school nurse, and they scrambled off. Meanwhile, I stripped off my sweatshirt and bundled it up to apply to her forehead.

Ashleigh and I had gone out for almost two years, from when I was a freshman until the end of my sophomore year. We really were good together, and we liked each other a lot. And I’m not talking in terms of sex or anything. We just liked to spend time holding hands, going places and doing things. So after two years of non-stop togetherness, Ash kinda got burnt out with me. Technically, I had broken up with her, but that was only because I knew she was starting to see Josh. I didn’t want to have to wait for someone else figure it out



and make a big deal about it. I had already known she was drifting away from me anyway. And yeah, despite all that, I still loved her.

“Lemme up,” Ashleigh said, trying to get a foot under her. I just held her down and kept her from moving. She was hurt.

“Just wait for the nurse.” I told her. And when she looked into my eyes to see if I was serious, that bond of trust we had between us flickered to life again for a brief moment. She stayed put, completely putting herself in my hands. I missed her so bad.

It wasn’t more than a minute before the nurse showed up, bringing with her a few teachers and the vice principal. I was pushed aside as the hallway was cleared, and sent on my way to class. I don’t remember much else about that day. I don’t know how I made it through classes with all that rage flowing through me.



I do remember sitting in my Calculus class and watching out the window as an ambulance pulled up to the side of the school. I wanted to bolt from the room and run outside, to be there. But I just had to wait, and keep my seat.

Revenge fantasies consumed me. I wanted to tear Josh to shreds. I stewed in my own feverish dreams of annihilating him. Burning him. Shooting him. Skewering him. Running him down in a car. Any way to kill him in the most gruesome, painful, public way I could imagine.

When the bell rang, I went straight home, blowing off my friends. I was really far too wound up to be social. I wanted to lock myself in my room and just work things out on my own.

“Hey, *freak!*” My sister, Bailee, yelled at me when I stepped in the door. She was nibbling on a mint chocolate chip cookie, her favorite. “Mom wants you to clean up your room!” I didn’t much like my sister. She was a year younger than me and always took every chance she could to make sure I was kept miserable. “And your old *loser* girlfriend called.” She added.

I was a little shocked. Ashleigh had told me explicitly to stay out of her life. But maybe something had changed. Maybe she had come to her senses when I was there for her. I ran right up to my room and grabbed the phone.

“Ashleigh?” I said when she picked up. “Are you okay?”

“Can you come over, Wyatt?” She said.

I don’t remember if it took me more than a few seconds to run halfway across town to get to her place. What I do remember was that by the time I had gotten there, Ashleigh’s parents didn’t want me inside. They didn’t want anyone to talk to her, and thought I was part of the problem – what with me being a guy and all. I begged and pleaded, but there was no convincing them. I just had to leave.

“How’s your old girlfriend? Still *fat?*” Bailee said, as I returned to my house. She had no idea just how far her snobbery was pushing me. I just wanted to throw my fist right through her perfect face.

I just went back up to my room, fighting the impulses running through me, the ones that were begging me to release that anger on anyone and everyone.



After a minute, the phone rang and I grabbed it halfway through the first ring.

“Ash?” I said.

“Sorry, Wyatt. My parents are on the warpath.” Ashleigh said, apologizing to me. I felt like an ass for even feeling like she needed to be sorry for me. Not now.

“Whatever. I don’t care. Are you okay?”

“I’ll be okay.” She said. “There wasn’t anything serious to worry about. I had a few stitches in my scalp. Nothing big.”

“Stitches!?” I screamed into the phone. “That fuckin’ prick!” I was gritting my teeth so hard, my molars could have cracked in half.

“Listen, I need to talk to you. I’ll be back at school tomorrow. Can we meet up?”

I was there a half hour early. The grass was still wet as I waited behind the old boiler room for her to arrive. When Ashleigh finally got there, she looked bet-

ter than I expected. She looked perfectly normal, except for the addition of a baseball cap on her head.

"Stitches." She said, pointing to the hat. "They had to cut some of the hair away."

"You're okay, though, right?" I asked.

She made a good show of putting on a smile, but she really couldn't fool me. I knew it had hurt her, down deep inside. "I'm fine," she claimed.

"Is there anything I can do?" I said. It struck me funny that I was sounding so mature about the whole thing. I didn't feel very mature. I just wanted to go hit someone.

"I was hoping you could help me."

"Anything, you know that."

"I... I want to get back at Josh." She said. "He..."

"What do you want me to do." I said, not even waiting for the explanation.

"I'll do anything to get him."

"Well..." Ashleigh had a look of fear on her face. "I have an idea. I thought that maybe you... If you really want to help... I mean, if you're as angry as I am..." She was starting to blubber. She was definitely a little unstable, emotionally. "Remember when... I was just hoping that you... Since you live with her and all... I mean it's kinda weird..."

"Take a breath." I said, holding her by the shoulders. "I'll do everything I can. Just tell me what you want to do."

She regained her composure and brushed her hair back behind her ears.

"Okay. Sorry." She then took a moment to think out what she was going to say.

"The reason Josh and I were having a fight. I know he's been going out behind my back. He's been seeing girls. I've known that for a long time."

"Most of the school does." I added.

She looked at me with a brief look of shock, but it passed. "I guess it wasn't a secret then. But it came down at Todd's party at the quarry last week. That was when I caught him in the act."

"I'm sorry." I said, thinking it was the right thing to say.

"It was... He was... He was making out with your sister."

I guess she thought I'd be surprised, but I knew my sister Bailee's reputation pretty well. She was always bringing home a new guy every time she went out.

"Yeah, I thought she was seeing him." I answered. Of course, I thought she was seeing anyone with a pulse and a wallet. And I was probably right.

"So I told him to stop being so selfish. I told him I could be everything in his life if he just let me. Whatever he wanted in a girl, I could be that for him."

She sighed, heavily. "And he told me that if he wanted to screw other girls, he'd do it anyway, no matter what I wanted."

I winced at hearing this. It was so cruel. How could anybody have said this to her? To *my* Ashleigh?

She was just staring at the ground, now, lost in her own misery. "And that's when I told him to stop or I'd leave – and tell everyone why. He laughed, he dared me to do it, and then he threw me into the lockers."

A long silence passed as I digested it.

"My sister's a *whore*." I told her to make her feel better. Ash smiled weakly for a moment.

"She's also now Josh's new girlfriend." Ashleigh said. "Which makes her the most popular girl in school." She said with bitterness.

I always suspected that's why Ashleigh had left me for Josh. She wanted the popularity and the attention. She was a very pretty girl, and for Josh to want to make her his girlfriend wasn't a surprise. What always bothered me was why Ash had hooked up with him. She just liked being the focus of the school, I guess.

And Ashleigh wasn't wrong by saying my sister would now take her place. Bailee was easily the most beautiful girl in school. She worked hard at it, too. She shopped every damn day and was always dieting and working on her hair. Yeah, I mean she hated me and I hated her, but she was still a hot babe.

I honestly think she was pretty enough to be a model or an actress. I mean, Bailee being thin and blond, has an angelic face and is filled out in all the right places. All the boys drool and the girls are envious. She's a bombshell.

"So, I got a stupid idea." Ashleigh said. "You want to hurt Josh and I want to hurt Josh."

"Yes. More than anything."

"But, I was thinking..." She started to study the palm of her hand. "If we y'know, went after him, he's just too big to hurt... physically."

"Yeah. Even if we could break some bones, he'd just heal. Unless you're thinking... something more... permanent?"

"No!" Ashleigh said, surprised that I'd even suggest it. "No. I mean, sure, I want him to die, but not, like die *for real*."

"Yeah." I agreed, hesitantly.

"I was just thinking that he's such a big shot, always walking around campus like he owns the place. He's just a big guy who can push people around because they're afraid of him."

"He's the size of a house," I pointed out. He was already being scouted by big colleges. At six foot five and over two hundred and eighty pounds, he was already assured of a scholarship in football.

"Even someone like him can be made into some pip-squeak if we do it right." She looked me in the eyes for the first time that morning. "His reputation has to be ruined so badly no one even wants to talk to him again. I want him *radioactive*."

"Cool. What do you want to do?"

"I think I should set him up. Here's what I was thinking. I make up with him, lure him to a motel room or something, then get a camera and some gay guys..."

"Make up with him!?" I yelled. "He's just gonna hit you again!"

"As long as I can take him down a peg, I don't care."

"No!" I objected. "No way are you doing that. I'll go to your parents. I'll go to the school. I'm not going to let you do that!"

Ashleigh countered. "We need to trap him. I'm the bait."

"If you try and go out with him again, he won't even think twice about beating you even worse!"

"But you agree we've got to take him down, right?"

"Yeah, absolutely."

"We have to make him pay!"

"Pay *big time*."

“So, we need to do this!”

“I’m not going to let you put yourself in danger. It’s not going to happen.”

“Then what are we gonna do, Wyatt? We can’t let him just walk away from this.”

“I don’t know.”

Ashleigh then got a funny smirk on her face. “You could do it.”

“Do what?”

“You could make him pay and humiliate him into shame no one could ever recover from if you pretended to be a girl and then we’d destroy his whole conceited, jock life!”

“Humiliate, him, yeah!” I said, and then almost comically stopping when I realized what she had said. “But...”

“If it’s the only way, it’s the only way, Wyatt! You can lure him into our trap!” She then hugged me close and kissed me on the cheek. “Say you’ll help me, Wyatt!”

All she needed to do was touch me. I loved her so much. I guess I must have said yes or something. As to what I had agreed to, I wasn’t even thinking about that. Obviously.

“Okay, here’s what we do.” Ashleigh said, checking her watch. “After school, we’ll meet at my place. I’ve got this all planned. My parents will be out. See you then!” She said, before leaving for her locker. She did turn and wave at me with that smile on her face that I still saw in my dreams.

I didn’t actually think about what I had just promised to do until the fourth period. What was I, *insane*? Or was Ashleigh? By the time I was on the way to Ashleigh’s house after school, I knew I had to get out of this. I had already thought of a sly way of getting out of my promise.

That went down the tubes the second I went into her room. “Okay, strip down to your underwear,” She said to me. Whatever was on my mind evaporated in an instant.

“What?”

“Strip!” She said again. A pretty girl doesn’t have to tell me twice to strip, so I took off everything except my underwear. Ashleigh then stood directly in front of me and gave a good look over. “I want to see what I have to work with.”

“You could tell me that I’m just too big a stud to be ever mistaken for my sister and we could move on,” I said, half-kidding.

Ashleigh just grinned at the suggestion. “You’re about an inch taller than Bailee, but I don’t think anyone would really notice that.” She then started to stare at the rest of my body. “Weight loss, okay. What do you weigh?”

“155.” I said. Ash looked at me skeptically. “Maybe 145.” I revised.

“This Hollywood diet thing I found on the internet says it can take 15 pounds off in a week. If we take three weeks, we can have you down to Bailee’s weight easy.” She put some jugs of some tangerine-colored liquid and some boxes of dehydrated food by the door. “You take this stuff home when you leave, and don’t eat anything else, okay?”

“Okay.” I answered. There was no way I believed that was going to work, anyway.

“Great. Next thing is your hair.” She said. “We’ve got to get rid of all the stuff on your arms, legs and face.”

I didn't have much of a beard, but it was looking promising for the future. Heck, I was only seventeen, anyway. So Ashleigh gave me a couple of razors and showed me the way to the bathroom.

"Get it all," she said, "and then use this." She handed me a tube of cream labeled 'Vaniqa.' "This will keep the re-growth down to a minimum. I can get you more tomorrow."

Ashleigh then closed the door behind me and stayed in her room. "Run the bath with the stuff on the sink after you're done!" She shouted. On the sink was a container of bath beads. I never had quite understood what those were for, but I used them.

After about an hour, (forty minutes with the razors, ten in the bath, ten more to work up the courage to open the door as a hairless pink fool) I was ready for what Ashleigh had planned next for me.

"Okay." She said, upon seeing me. "I've got everything ready for the next step. First, you can wear this."

And with that, she handed me a corset. It was red, with some sort of boning in it to make it incredibly restrictive and stiff. I wrapped it halfway around my waist and asked where the other half was.

"That's the whole thing," she said, much to my disbelief. But ten minutes later, after she had tied the two ends together behind my back, I wasn't so much as amazed as I was writhing in agony.

"What..." I had to take a breath. "How..." Another breath. "Am..." Breath. "I..."

Ashleigh rolled her eyes in impatience. "Look, it will just take a few minutes to get used to. Okay? Take short breaths and don't get all panicky. You'll just need to draw more oxygen that way."

She then hoisted out something that looked like she dressed dolls in. It was pink, flimsy and tiny. "What..." Breath. "Is..." Breath. "*That?*"

"It's a leotard. Put it on so we can do your exercises." She answered.

"Exercises? In..." Breath. Cough. Wheeze. "In this stupid thing?"

"If we don't get you toned and built up, you'll never be able to trick Josh." Ashleigh said, making sure I didn't lose track of the goal.

"*Josh.*" I said to myself. "Show me what I have to do." I pulled the leotard on over my body.

"We've got to develop the legs and buttocks, while leaving everything else to become atrophied." She got her chair and started to bend her legs backward.

"I'll show you leg curls, crunches, step exercises and some Pilates."

"Sounds like fun," I mumbled.

"Don't be such a grumpus." She went through the entire routine and had me repeat it. It took about an hour. She watched me do it myself once, and she told me to do it every day for one hour before I went to bed. And most important, she said, not to do any other exercises at all. Reluctantly, I agreed. All I had to do was think of Josh tossing her across the hallway and I could agree to just about anything.

Whenever I tried to bend over, which was physically impossible because of the corset, Ashleigh just sighed. She didn't seem particularly impressed with the pain I was going through. "You have no idea the sort of discomfort girls go through just to look nice." She told me, indignantly.

"So, you wear a boned corset?" I asked her.

"Don't be silly." She replied.

Since we were done with this, I flopped down on her bed and took some deep breaths. Or at least I tried to. "Can we just watch some TV or something? I'm wiped."

"Sure, Hercules." Ashleigh said. She zapped on her set with the remote.

"I suppose I have to watch girly shows and soap operas now. I'll have to join Oprah's book club." I said, mockingly.

"Wyatt, you don't have to do anything you don't want to." She was serious all of the sudden. "I don't want you to do this unless you're a hundred percent into it. It's just going to get harder from here on out."

I had to make sure she didn't think I was wussing out. I really, really wanted to help her and get that asswipe Josh. And what was the worst that could happen? I took the remote from her and started flipping channels. "You get the Lifetime network on here, right? If there's a disease of the week movie, I'm wathcin' it."

"That's my guy." Ashleigh said. "Now sit straight up and don't slouch. Keep your knees together and your eyes straight forward."

I just sighed and did as she said.

There actually *was* a movie on, and we caught the last half hour. It was something about a woman being raped and looking for revenge by ruining the guy's life. It seemed oddly appropriate for the evening. I got my jeans and T-shirt back on over the leotard, because, well, because I didn't want to undress again. And the leotard over my hairless body was kinda weird feeling. Weird... but... interesting.

Once the movie was over, she flipped off the set and tossed the remote. "Time to teach you how to walk." She said, grabbing a pair of her high heels.

She handed them to me and I remember taking them like they were going to attack. "You want me to wear these?" I said.

"No, I want you to fry them up with butter and eat them," she said with a smirk. "See if they fit."

I grit my teeth and pulled my socks off. I slid my foot into the pump pushing with all my might. "You don't need these anymore, do you? I might just ruin them."

"Consider them a gift." Ashleigh replied. "Just what every boy needs. Do they fit?"

I got my heel tucked into the back of the shoe, but it felt like I had to fold my foot in half to do it. "Not really." I said.

"Then they fit like they do for every woman. They're perfect."

She had me stand up and pace back and forth several times, giving me some aching feet. My calves were working themselves into knots.

"Okay. So. Yeah." She said, on evaluating my walk. "Let's forget everything you know about walking. For heels, you have to walk almost on your tip-toes, take shorter steps, swivel your hips and let your arms float by your side."

I looked at her like she was insane.

"Um, we'll take it step by step over the next few days. We have three weeks." She said.

"Why three weeks?" I asked.

"That's when the prom is." She replied, like I should have already figured that part out by myself. "Let's do something else before we run out of time."

"Yeah, I don't want to waste any more time in making me a girl." I said, sarcastically.

Ashleigh shot me an angry stare.

I tried to laugh. "Sorry, no complaining, I remember."

"I want you to sit down at my makeup table," she said, pointing to it. "I'm going to show you how to make yourself all pretty, Wyatt."

I couldn't help but groan. But I sat down on the little padded stool, before a gilded mirror and a thousand little bottles and tubes.

"Oh, before I forget, chew this." Ashleigh said, handing me a small bottle.

"Bust-Up Gum?" I said, reading the label.

"It's Japanese. It'll make breasts bigger and fuller."

"I don't have breasts." I pointed out to her.

"That's why you need the gum – *duh!*"

I looked at the bottle and couldn't find anything that reassured me that it was in any way safe. "What if I don't want breasts?"

"You do for the next few weeks, so take it. It's gotta wear off after time, don't you think?"

I opened the bottle and chewed on a piece. "It probably doesn't work, anyway." I told her.

"Probably not, but it can't hurt." She then picked up a tube. "Pucker up."

I did, and she applied a clearish gel to my lips. It felt funny. Kind of cold and tingling at the same time. "What's this?" I asked.

"It's for your lips. Hydro-something. It makes them puffier by swelling them up a little. Wait like a minute or two and check it out." Then she picked up another container of something and started to dab it over my face with a piece of sponge. "Foundation first." She said, explaining it to me.

"Is this gonna be on the test?" I quipped.

"Yes." She replied. "Concealer." She showed it to me to remember it. She dabbed a little of that in the corner of my eyes with a tiny brush. She picked up a larger brush and started to go into my eyes with it. "Powder."

"Next, eyeshadow." She looked amongst her things for something she needed.

I gave myself a quick examination in the mirror. "Hey my lips!"

"See, it's kinda cool, huh?" Ashleigh smiled.

Looking in the mirror, my thinnish lips had puffed out fuller and thicker, just like she promised. "Weird." I said.

"Keep your eyes open and don't blink." She told me. "Stare up at the ceiling. I have to do the eye liner and mascara."

So I did what she told me and kept my eyes open and looking upwards. From my point of view, a large spider attached to a stick was being wiped along my eyelashes. "Ow!" I said, as it went into my eyeball. "Watch it!"

"Sorry." She apologized. "It's hard to do this on someone else."

"Be careful. That hurts." I looked in the mirror and saw a thick coating on each eye. "isn't that enough?"

"No." She answered. "Your sister likes it stripper thick." And then she spent another two minutes on the lashes. "I'm finished." She patted me on the shoulder. "Now, I'm going to pluck out some strays on your eyebrows."

"Pluck?" I asked, not sure what she meant by that.

"With tweezers." She replied. She then went to my eyebrows, and *yanked a hair out by the root!*

“Yagh!!” I screamed. “What was that for!?”

“I’m plucking your eyebrows into shape.” She said, “Like I said.”

“That doesn’t mean you have to pull them out of my head!”

“Yes it does!” She took the next few minutes and proceeded to pluck dozens more. It got easier as she did more, fortunately. “Okay, a little blush...” She said, grabbing another large blush and going over my cheeks. “And then the lips.” I puckered up again and she applied a glossy pink goop to my lips. “And teenage tramps like a little glitter, don’t they?” She then took another brush and put some glittery stuff on my temples.

“Are we done?” I asked.



It took her a moment to decide. "Okay, have a look, Peaches." Ashleigh said, pointing me back to the mirror. I had been avoiding it, fearful of the results. "Shit!" I yelled. "Holy shit!" I looked a lot like my sister. With the makeup on, I didn't just look "kinda" like her or "sorta" like her, I was unmistakably her. I had the same features. The high cheekbones, the little button nose, the big, innocent eyes and the smooth, creamy skin. I had always hated that boyish look about me, but now it became clear to me exactly why I hated it. I looked like a girl.

"Okay, open your eyes for a sec. I wanna put in contacts." Ashleigh told me. She took out a small case and sprayed some liquid in it. "Tilt your head back." She then put in some lenses. "I got these for myself a few years ago, but chickened out."

As I tried to blink my way back to seeing straight, Ashleigh stopped me from using my hands to rub my eyes. "You're going to ruin your makeup." She told me.

So as I sat there, trying to get the world back into focus, she put something on my head. "And this wig is the final touch."

So when my eyes finally started to work right again, I was even more frightened and shocked by what was in the mirror. It was my sister. Bailee was sitting where I was. It was her face, her lips, her eyes. Her blue eyes. And it was her hair. Her blond, straight hair. The reflection was Bailee, through and through.

I was afraid to talk, fearful that it was her voice that was going to come from my throat. "Shiiiiit," I whispered.

"I knew this was gonna work!" Ashleigh said, excited. "You know, we could just have you pretend to be Bailee. It's that close. What do you think?"

"Huh?" Was what I think I said. I was a little out of it.

"Okay, we have a lot more work to do." She then looked at the clock. "My folks are coming back in a few minutes. You better get cleaned up and head home," she said, dejectedly.

"I better." I said.

Ashleigh went to town on my face with some cream and a wet towel and we got everything off. She whipped the wig off and threw it in her closet, and I took the contacts out. I slipped out of the leotard and tossed it away. Then I had to deal with the corset. I reached around back for the straps and couldn't reach. "A little help?" I asked.

"No, don't take that off!" She said. "You need to keep that on for the next few weeks!"

"What!?" I cried. "Weeks?"

She put her hand on my shoulder and looked at me with those dumb big eyes of hers. "I can only do this with your help, Wyatt."

I grumbled under my breath, remembering that this was something I volunteered for. "I'll make up an excuse to get out of P.E., I guess." I answered, putting my T-shirt back on, over the corset.

She kissed me on the cheek. "Be back here tomorrow. I'll just tell my parents we're working on a project for school. Which is kinda true, I guess."

And then I gathered up my stuff, put my trainers on and left. At the time, I didn't even think of how Ash had assembled all of this stuff so quickly. Looking back, I should have been more suspicious, I guess.

Walking home in the dark, I was still in a bit of pain, and frikin' sore, but when I remembered why, I knew it was for the best.



When I got up the next morning, I felt like I had been beaten around the body with a two by four. But I didn't mind. When I got down to breakfast, I had already poured my bowl of cereal out before I remembered the diet. So instead, I poured a glass full of that strange diet juice for myself. Tasted like raw eggs and lemons. It was awful.

"Hollywood Juice Diet?" Bailee said to me as she passed by on the way out. "You weigh, like, one hundred and *nothing* pounds and you're on a diet? Oh my God, you are *such* a freak."

"Leave me alone." I replied. It was early. I wasn't up for insults for another hour yet. "Don't you have someone to do? I mean, something to do."

"Yeah, good comeback." She grabbed a tangerine from the fruit bowl on the table. "Har har har. It was so funny I forgot to laugh." Fortunately, that was the limit of our exchange as a car horn beckoned, causing her to skitter on out of the house. I wouldn't have been able to take much more of her razor sharp wit.

I decided it was probably a good idea to wear a button-down shirt to try and cover up anything that showed I had a corset under my t-shirt. And I fashioned a note for my P.E. teacher that said I was under a doctor's care and couldn't participate in class. I actually got my mom to sign it. I caught her as she was heading out the door, talking to one of her real estate clients on her cell phone.

She was far too distracted to even notice what it was. As usual.

When school started, I just tried to avoid Josh. Well, I always was avoiding Josh. It was a survival skill. Most everyone who knew what was good for them did the same. He was huge and had a hair trigger.

I did see in the hallway that he had my sister on his arm, just like Ash had predicted. It didn't take my sister long to move in, did it? Of course, this time, I didn't mind if she got swatted around. Just a little. Well, maybe 'swatted' is a bit harsh.

Lunch was a thermos of that juice drink, which I choked down. After that, I tried to meet up with Ashleigh. She brushed me off, and ignored me. At first, I thought maybe she was angry with me or something. But when I tried to ask her about it, between fifth and sixth periods, she just whispered "keeping up appearances. I don't want anyone getting suspicious."

I thought that was overkill, but I went along with it. After all, it was my ass in a sling if we did get found out.





We met at her house after school, just as we planned to do for about every day from now until we sprung the trap. “Welcome to Miss Ashleigh’s Ladies Finishing School for Wyatts.” She said to me when I got to her front door.

We walked right past her mom who gave me the evil eye. I knew her parents didn’t trust anyone after what had just happened to their daughter. I don’t know what she told them to convince them I was okay. And not only okay, but okay enough to be left alone for hours with her every night. But then again, Ash was pretty convincing when she wanted to be.

She immediately put me through the routine of doing my face, and I was trying to remember what she had done the previous night, step for step. It took me nearly two hours, but I eventually got it close enough for her to be satisfied. She had me do the contacts and the wig as well. It was pretty strange being my sister from the neck up. I mean, I pretty much looked exactly like her.

After that, she gave me my heels and I tried to walk in them a little. The first thing she had me do was adjust the way I was shifting my weight. Ash wanted me to put the weight on the balls of my feet, and not the heels. Which was a good idea, as whenever I tried to land on the heel, I twisted my ankle.

“I want you to use these every night.” She said, giving me two large, oversized boots. “Sleep in them.”

I examined them. “What are they?”

“They keep your feet pointed while you sleep. Over a few days, they’ll stretch out your Achilles tendon and make it easier to stand in high heels.”

“Great!” I replied. My feet were killing me. Any help I could get was much needed. “I’ll use them tonight!” Finally, some relief, thank God.

“So, I was thinking...” Ashleigh said, a little impishly. “Since we’ve established that Josh goes for girls who look, act and behave like your sister, I think we should use her as a template for you.”

“I can’t argue with that.” I answered. No, I didn’t particularly want to act like my stupid sister, but she was a really hot chick that guys like Josh couldn’t keep their hands off of. And if I wanted to get this done and over with, the only chance I had was to make myself as irresistible as possible.

“Today, the new thing is gonna be your voice.” Ashleigh announced. “We need to get you talking kinda chirpy... Kinda like your sister.”

“Ohmigawd, Ashleigh, like, my sister has a really, really, reeeeeeally weird way of taking n’ stuff, y’know?” I said. Hey, I had lived with her all my life. I certainly had picked up on how she talked.

She burst out laughing. “Okay, so you know what to say, but we’ve got to work on how you say it.”

“This where I have to make my voice higher, like Bailee’s, right?” I asked.

“Yep.” She confirmed. “You’re not going to try and get out of it, are you?”

“No, I was just waiting. I knew it was coming sooner or later.”

“Okay, so, here’s a recording of your sister doing her social studies oral presentation. I downloaded it off the school website.” She then clicked the mouse on her computer and it started playing.

Bailee's voice came from the computer. "Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson had totally different visions for America. Hamilton wanted an industrial society while Jefferson dre..." She stopped the recording.

"Okay, now you." Ashleigh said to me. "Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson had totally different visions for America."

I cleared my throat. "Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson had, like, totally, totally different visions for America, n' stuff. Even if they were, like, *freaks*."

Ashleigh giggled. "You already sound a lot like her," she said, not realizing it was an insult. "We'll have you talking like her in no time."

Was this good news?

Soon enough, we were done for the night, but I was assigned some reading from *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue* and *Elle* to get up to date on fashions and things. I had no idea where I was going to hide these magazines from my prying parents.

At home, I had my juice drink, ate my dehydrated dinner, and did my exercises. I read the magazines as I went to sleep, remembering to put my feet into the tendon-stretching boots. I locked my door to make sure no one would find me like this. Hopefully the house wouldn't catch fire tonight.



Getting up in the morning, I felt a lot better than I had yesterday. Still sore, but not so much. At least, until I got out of bed. Only then did I remember about the boots and I fell over head first onto the floor. A great way to start the day. I took off the boots and hid them away with the magazines and the rest of the stuff Ashleigh had given me.

As I got around to taking my shower, I saw Bailee arrive. She did this more and more lately. She was hanging around with a fast crowd, and I wouldn't be surprised if she were taking drugs or something. It was six thirty in the morning, and she was just getting in from being out all night. Maybe my Mom or Dad would "talk" to her about it, but she always seemed to get away with anything. Me, if I was ten minutes past ten getting home, I was answering a hundred questions and threatened with a grounding. While all Bailee had to say was that she was "sorry" and "it would never happen again." Twenty minutes later, she had changed and was out the door, meeting Josh in the driveway for a ride.

I had the juice thing for breakfast, and I



was off to school myself. It was sometime that day when I realized that the corset wasn't really bothering me that much anymore. Which was great, because that meant that I could stop wearing it.

"Hey, I think I can take this off now." I told Ashleigh when we met at her place. "It's almost loose."

"Yeah, we should take it off." She agreed. "But I just want to wash it. It smells pretty ripe."

"I need to put it back on?" I growled.

"How thick is your sister's waist?" She asked.

"I dunno. Yay big," I said, making an imaginary circle with my hands.

She then pointed to me. "So, how big is yours?"

I used my hands to compare the circle I had made with my midsection. "It's close enough," I decided.

"Close is gonna get us found out. It has to be perfect!" She demanded.

"Yeah, but how do we know when it's perfect? I say it's pretty close."

"I think you have a way to go."

"That's my point, how do we know?"

"Why don't you get a pair of her jeans? Just grab a pair from the laundry and see if you fit into them. When you can, we'll know when to stop."

I blew some air out of my lungs. "Sounds fair."

"Meanwhile, we can get this thing clean." She said, pulling up my shirt to get to the corset. She undid it, letting my midsection breathe for the first time in days. Surprisingly to me, it didn't really seem to want to. It kept its shape, which was strange. My sides pinched inwards, just like a girl's would. And my jeans had a few inches of slack. They were 30-inch waist pants. So while Ashleigh took the corset out of the room to go clean it, I undid the buckle on my pants and pulled it tight around my waist. It had three inches of overlap. I measured twenty-seven inches there.

I stepped onto Ashleigh's scale in her bathroom and saw I weighed one hundred and thirty one pounds. I had already lost five or six pounds in three days. Which was pretty good, I thought. My stomach was growling at me every day, but I could live with that for a while – this would be over before it drove me nuts.

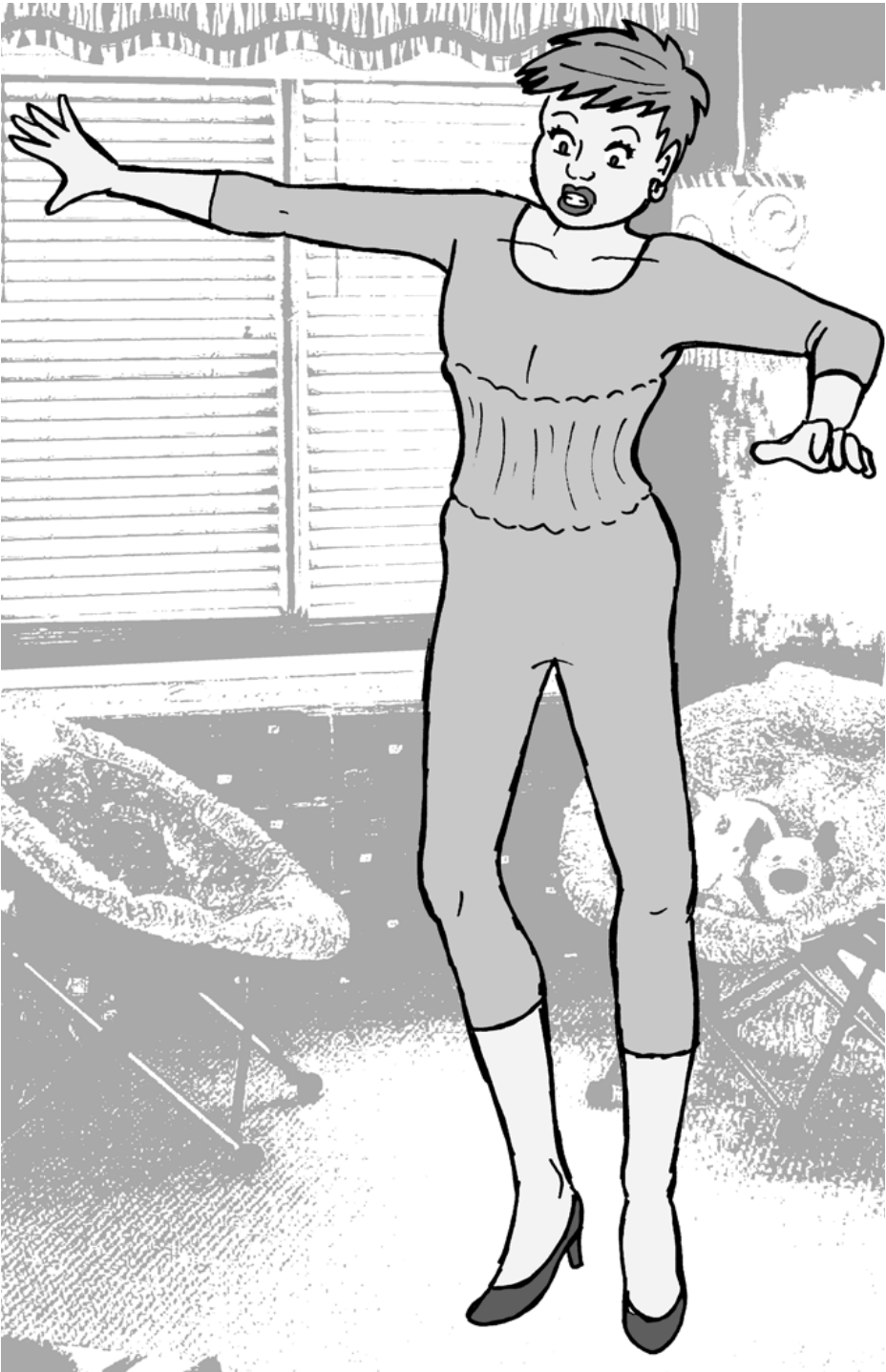
Without wanting to wait for her, I just went ahead and did my own makeup for the night. It took me about forty-five minutes, and I had to start over at one point, but I think I was beginning to catch on.

When Ashleigh came back, she had a mischievous look on her face and was hiding something behind her back. "Every girl grows up, Wyatt." She said to me. "And maturity is something every girl craves at a certain age. The need to be a woman, a real woman. And there's one thing above all others that they want. Most have to wait for mother nature. But today, Wyatt, I give you the gift that mother nature can't give you."

"Are you filming this, or something?" I asked. She was making quite a production of this, whatever it was.

"Today, Wyatt, you are a woman. I give you... your breasts." She said, producing a white shoe-box. She opened it up, and removed some tissue paper. It revealed a pair of women's breasts, as if they had just been plucked off some poor girl somewhere.

“What the hell? Where did you...” I then put those questions aside for a more important one. “Do you mean I have to wear these?”



"Wyatt, don't think of them as something you wear, think of them as your two new best friends." She smiled wide. "Because you're going to get to know each other real well over the next few weeks."

I didn't object. I was wondering exactly when we'd get to this point, it only seemed obvious that I was going to have to fake some breasts, so I just shrugged and did it. Ashleigh said she'd got some glue that I could use when we finally sprung the trap on Josh, but for now, I'd just wear them in a bra during our training sessions. Which is what I did.

It changed my center of gravity a bit, and my balance was way off when I tried the heels again. Just simple things like bending over were a new adventure as my fake chest had it's own agenda on where it was going and when it would stop moving. I was a long way from getting used to these things.

When I got home that night, and soaked in the bubble bath, I just started to laugh. How had I gotten myself here? It was pretty silly when you thought about it. But, all things considered, it was a labor of love. Not only to crush Josh but to be that close to Ashleigh. I had good thoughts that night as I did my exercises, read my mags and fit my feet in the special boots. I didn't even mind the corset, which was now even tighter around my waist.



As I rubbed the sleep from my eyes the next day, I finally remembered to take the boots off before I got out of bed. What was kinda weird was how my feet now just seemed to "relax" in a different position. They wanted to point down. In fact, it was a little uncomfortable to walk around with my feet flat, like normal. I guess that meant it was be working.

I snuck down to the laundry room and grabbed a pair of my sister's jeans, just like Ashleigh suggested. I tried to slip into them, but couldn't really do it. Forget the waist, I couldn't even get my legs into them.

Obviously, I still had a ways to go. My legs were too thick. I was probably going to need to lose all the weight I could, just like Ashleigh said. Looking at myself in the mirror, I thought I already looked skinny, but I guess I wasn't thin enough.

I had lunch at school with my bud, Derek. I had been kind of avoiding him the past few days. Kinda because I was mortified to be doing what I was doing, but also because I didn't want anyone too close to me right now.

"Hey, want my pork chops? I ain't gonna eat 'em." He said to me.

I just scoffed at them. "Do you know how many *calories* those are?"

"So, what's the deal?" He said, his eyebrows twisted in confusion.

"Deal?" I replied.

"Yeah, are you on some sort of diet or somethin'?"

"Um..."

"You look like you're getting thinner."

"I'm just trying to eat healthier."

"And you've shaved all the hair off your arms."

I could feel a bead of sweat drip down my forehead. "I... I'm trying to make weight for wrestling." I said. I quickly realized that didn't explain the shaving.

"Or swimming. I'm thinking about going out for the swim team, too."

"That's not until next year."

"Wanted to start early."

"And you know you're walking like a fag."

I'm sure my face went white. "Uh, what do you mean?"

"When you walk, your hips swish back and forth like a girl's." He took a bite of his sandwich. "You have a sexier walk than your sister does."

"It's a limp," I said. I was going to have to watch that.

"And where've you been lately? I haven't seen you in days."

I really had to think. I hated to lie to my friends, but they were bound to get suspicious, if they weren't already. "I've been grounded." I told him. "Dad caught me drinking."

"Oh, *dude!*" Derek said, slapping on my back. "Rough break!"

I went back to my thermos of juice stuff and tried to keep to myself for a while. "So what are you guys doing, turning yourselves into your sister? Yeah, I'm doing that, too!" I wasn't much for conversation right now.

"So, Eddie and maybe Rick are going out to the car show down at the fairgrounds tonight. I told 'em you could drive, but your Escort's in rough shape..."

"Actually, I can't go." I said, knowing this was going to be a problem. "I have to do some work tonight. I have a project. A school project. Gonna have to work on it late tonight." I probably should have said that with more conviction and looked Derek in the eyes, but I didn't.

"You're not *going?*" Derek said with surprise. "You're telling me you're not going." He rolled up his brown paper bag and crushed it into a ball. "Well that's just fuckin' great." Without looking back, he got up from the table and left the lunchroom. He dunked his bag in the trash can hard. He was really ticked off.

I could hear my stomach growl in anger as I finished that measly little juice drink.



The days started to blend together after that. I'd show up after school every day for my special "training." I went pretty much through a regular routine. I had to do my face, practice my voice, walk in the heels and work on my hair and nails. Every day, Ash would have a new "focus" for me to work on. Sometimes it would be vocabulary, sometimes it would be fashion, maybe music and other stuff. But as time went on, she was getting more and more specific about things.

"Today," she announced one day, "we're going to work on your friends."

"What have my friends got to do with anything?" I asked.

Ashleigh looked cross. "No, I mean your *new* friends."

Then I figured out where she was going with this. "Bailee's friends." I corrected.

"*Your* friends. Think of them as *your* friends." She got out the yearbook, and showed me their pictures. "You not only have to know who they are, but you have to get to know what's going on in their shallow little lives."

"Okay..." I said, trying to understand what she was saying, but failing.

"I bought this little device at Sharper Image. It taps a cell phone line, and you can listen into all their conversations."



“Look, Ashleigh, is this really necessary?” I had to know exactly why I was doing all this. “I’m only going to pretend to...” And then it hit me. I didn’t really know what the plan was, anyway. “Exactly what do we have planned anyway?”

“To trap Josh.”

“Yeah, but lay it out for me step by step.”

Ashleigh sighed and dropped down onto her bed. “Whatever.” She said, exasperated. “Here’s the plan, if you must know.” She brought out a notebook from under her bed. “After we get done with the training, we get your sister to leave town, suddenly. We then have you take her place at school...”

“Wait a second!” I interrupted. “What do you mean, take her place?”

Ashleigh looked at me like I was a moron. “Well, that’s what we agreed, right? That we’d just have you pretend to be Bailee.”

I wasn’t sure we’d ever “agreed” to this plan. But I had already gotten the sense that I wasn’t really being consulted about this. The whole plan was Ashleigh’s revenge, and I was just happy to be a pawn. Josh deserved all he was going to get.

“What we’ll do is find a way to get Bailee out of town for a few days, without anyone knowing. Then, we tell the school and everyone else that it’s Wyatt who’s actually left town. So then, you go to school in her place. You spend a day or two hanging on Josh’s arm, being popular and stuff, and then suggest to

him that after the prom, you have something special planned. We set it up so you lure him to a motel room, turn out the lights, and a bunch of guys we hire come in and strip down naked. Then we turn the lights on, snap some photos and stick them on the internet.”

“Shit.” I said, a little repulsed by the details. “Where do we get the guys?”

Ashleigh just waved that off as if it were nothing. “It just takes some money. We’ll hire them from a male escort service or something. Leave that to me.”

“I don’t think I can actually take the *place* of Bailee, Ash. I mean, pretending to be a girl is hard enough, but being someone else is going to be really... I mean, I think it’s impossible to really try and convince someone close. My parents would know, her friends would know, Josh would know...”

“They’ll know only if you give it away. I totally agree with you. It’s going to be difficult. But I think you’d be surprised what we can get away with. Think about it, how closely have you ever looked at anyone you know?”

I closely looked at Ashleigh. I knew her atom by atom. “When you’re in love, you notice everything,” I said.

“Oh, I don’t think so. How many times have you heard someone say ‘I thought I knew them, but I was wrong’? People really don’t pay that close attention to other people. They think they do, but they don’t.”

“I pay attention.”

“Sure you do. But most people, if they cut their hair you never pick up on it until someone tells you. On the other hand, if you had your teeth bleached, your hair dyed, and been working out, you would look totally different. Nothing like you used to. But you tell someone who you are and they believe you without even batting an eyelash. They just take your word for it.”

She had a point there. But that wasn’t what I was thinking about. “I’m not talking so much physically, but as personality, and behavior. They’d believe me because I’d act like me, and talked like me, and laughed the same way and all that stuff.”

She turned to me and touched her finger to my nose. “And that’s what we’re going to fix.”



A couple of days after that, I must have been as bored as hell, because I switched on that little device Ashleigh had given me. It worked kind of like a police scanner, scanning the air for a signal. It went up and down the dial a couple of times before it picked up our neighbor’s phone.

“Looks like Summer’s finally going to hit,” and “Lawn’s going to need mowin’ this weekend” were some of the insights from that conversation. Then I heard the unmistakable trill of Bailee’s ring tone coming from her room. She had gotten a call.

Sure enough, the little device found it, and I was listening in.

“...annot *believe* she would wear that to school. It was *so* five years ago.” I could hear Brittany-Anne say. “Who’s picking out her clothes, her *mom*?”

Janessa was so eager to talk she practically shouted Brittany-Anne down. “I know! I know! I know! I know, it’s like, ring ring, it’s the year 2006 calling!” They all shared a good laugh over that.

Bailee finally spoke. "This town is so *stupid*. If I lived in the city, I'd never have to worry about this. Maybe I should just get up and leave. Living in LA would be so much better for me."

"Ohmigawd, it would be so *cool*," Brittany-Anne said, "with all the parties, going to premieres, sunbathing on the beach..."

Janessa was just as enamored. "I want to get a job, like being a lawyer or a veterinarian or something, and have a really cute boyfriend with an apartment forty floors up, looking over the city, and a white BMW, and I'd have a dog, I'd call him Corky..."

Bailee interrupted. "All I want is just for someone to realize all the *potential* I have in me." She said, dreamily. "And if I have to leave this dumb little town I'll do it. You guys understand, right?"

"Yeah, sure." Janessa said.

"With you all the way." Brittany-Anne added.

"So why didn't someone tell Hannah I was going to wear my plaid skirt today? I thought I told you guys to *tell* her!" Bailee said, whining.

"You never said that to me!" Janessa said, defending herself.

"I know I told you, Brittany-Anne!"

"I would have told Hannah you were wearing the skirt if you had told me, Bee!"

Bailee was angry. "I told you guys just last week that Wednesday was my plaid day, and *no one* wears plaid but me on Wednesday!" She then quieted down.

"Because she was wearing her plaid skirt, and I was wearing my plaid skirt, and Josh was all like 'I like hers better than yours...'" She actually started to sob a little. "This was my plaid day, and it's my *special* day..."

I clicked off the scanner thing, and stuffed my face in a pillow. I was trying to stifle my laugh. I don't know why I found it so funny, but it seemed hilarious to me at the time.

By the time I had composed myself, they were on to another topic.

"Do you like gum?" Bailee asked. "Because I really like gum. It's so... *chewy*."

Janessa was in total agreement. "*Really* chewy."

I listened for a little while longer, but I was just breaking up and couldn't keep from laughing. I had to go out and do something before I completely lost it.

I called up Derek to see if he wanted to meet up. "Hey." I said, when he picked up.

"Hey." He answered.

"What's up?"

"Nothin'."

"Yeah." There was a long pause.

"Was gonna go do stuff. You wanna?"

It sounded like Derek was thinking about it. "Homework."

"Oh."

"Went to that car show." He said.

"Any good?"

"Eh. S'okay."

"Cool."

"Yeah."

So I was tired of this. "Gotta run."

"Huh?" Derek said, a little startled. "But we were talkin'."

This was a conversation? I had to cut it off. "Yeah, sorry. Later."

"Fine." Derek said, and he hung up.

I don't know what his problem was. I know that was just kind of how we usually talked, but it was just so slow and pointless. I turned on the scanner device and got back into Bailee's call.

"I'm thinking of wearing my platforms tomorrow." Janessa said.

Bailee said, "Platforms are going out *so* fast."

"I know, that's why I want to wear them, before they go *totally* out of style."

Well, at least it was more interesting than Derek.



So, it was Sunday, and I got out of my place as fast as I could. Ashleigh had promised something special today, so I wanted to be on time. At her vanity, I had my face done in about fifteen minutes, and got my voice training out of the way quickly. All the while, I was waiting for Ashleigh to finish up her household chores. Even though her parents were gone all day, she said we'd be taking up the rest of the day and she had to get them done now.

I could still smell the breakfast they had eaten that morning, bacon and pancakes. Oh, my stomach craved food so badly. That diet was making me crazy for food.

By the time Ashleigh was ready, I was waiting for her, watching a little figure skating on TV. 'Michelle Singer's Ice Ballet' it was called. Yeah, I hated it, but I was dedicated to my task. Total commitment.

"Okay!" She announced she returned. "Today's a big day!"

"So I gathered." I replied, waiting for her to tell me why.

"Today we're going on a field trip!"

I didn't quite digest that when I heard it. "You mean... We... Will... Go *out*?" I scratched my head. "*Outside*?"

"That's what it means." Ashleigh said. "It's time to take you out into the world."

"Out there? You mean like, in the car?"

"No. I mean, walking around."

"Somewhere I can't be seen."

"No, somewhere where you *can* be seen."

"But..."

"Listen, we've been working at this for almost a week now. It's time to get you some experience outside these walls. You can walk like a girl, dress like a girl and talk like a girl. We need to put it all together and see what happens in the real world."

"I can tell you what's going to happen in the real world! I'll be spotted! I don't even look the part!"

"You've been practicing for almost a week. You can walk like a dancer in four-inch heels. You can talk like a vapid airhead blonde. What are you *not* prepared for?"

"I just don't think I can do it." I said. Two hours later, I was being pushed out of Ashleigh's car at the Oak Pines mall, on the other side of town. I guess I wasn't going to get out of this.

I had on some of Ashleigh's things: a short gypsy baby-doll top to hide all the fake curves on my chest and the real ones on my waist, a pair of looseish jeans, three-inch stiletto boots, and a pair of huge-eyed smoke-tinted sunglasses perched in my wig.



As we walked away from the car, my legs just turned to rubber. I couldn't stay on top of my heels. I had taken no more than half a dozen steps before I was falling over and using the parked cars to hold me up.

"Stop fooling around, Wyatt." Ashleigh said, angrily. "People are going to pay more attention to you the weirder you act."

"I can't do this. I can't go in there." I said. I started heading back to the car, even knowing I couldn't get inside without the keys.

Ashleigh grabbed me by the arm and got me back up onto my feet. Her grip was getting tighter. "Weeks of preparing and all it takes is ten seconds for you to screw it up." She tugged my arm, causing me to follow her. "If you act normal, no one will suspect anything. The only attention you'll get is because you look good."

"I'm going to make a mistake, I know it!" I said, "and then everyone is going to..."

"Of course you'll make mistakes!" Ashleigh said, exasperated. "That's the point! You make mistakes, we figure out what to fix, and then we'll be okay. That's why this is a *test* run!"

Before I knew it, I was about fifty feet from the doors of the mall, in full view of a dozen people. My legs turned to jelly. I wanted to run away so badly.

"Everyone's staring!" I yell-whispered to Ashleigh.

"The reason you get stared at is because you look good."

"I'm going to make a mistake. I know it." I said. I tried to turn and head back to the car, even knowing full well that I didn't have the keys to get inside.

Ashleigh quickly grabbed me by the arm and pulled me back to the mall.

"The more you act crazy the more people are going to get suspicious." She said.

That wasn't much of a comfort. "Oh God, oh God, oh God..." I said repeatedly.

"Shut the fuck up." Ashleigh said, shaking me off her arm. "Just smile and *pretend* like you're not falling apart like a five year old child without their mommy, okay?"

As I passed through the giant sliding doors into the corridors of the mall, I tried to look as confident and serene as I could. I probably looked anything but confident or serene, as I was barely able to walk, and my eyes were darting left and right looking at everyone. I was convinced they could all see the obvious.

"Kill me, please kill me, please please kill me. Kill me now, kill me now..."

Ashleigh elbowed me sharply in the ribs. "I told you to shut up."

When we got to the main corridor, Ashleigh turned left and I turned right. I really wasn't paying attention, and nearly twisted my ankle trying to turn around and follow her. I probably looked like Jim Carrey doing a bit, throwing my arms and legs around to turn back.



“Smooth.” Was all Ashleigh said.

I tried to match the pacing and calmness in her walk, but I was paying too much attention to it and collided with a few people. “Where are we going?” I asked.

“You need to get some new clothes.”

“I guess that was a ridiculous question.”

“Yes. And by the way, even though you think no one can hear us, you probably should be using your Bailee voice anyway.”

“What-ever,” I said, using the voice. “This is so boring!”

“What?”

“Nothing. That’s just what Bailee would say.” I said. “I was just trying to be funny.”

"Well, if Bailee was bored, what would she do?"

"Tell everyone how bored she was."

Ash sighed. "Yeah, that sounds like her. Definitely." She tugged my arm and pulled me into a store of some type. It could have been one of a hundred stores in the mall selling clothes to trendoid teenage girls. Who knows, who cares. All I knew was that it was a lot of pink, and everything cost three times as much as it should.

"What do I need? What do you want to get?"

"What a strange thing to ask." Ashleigh said. "This isn't about getting something you need, it's about getting something you want."

"What do I want?"

"Shut up, and look at the clothes."

"I can see them fine. They're all over the place."

Ash rolled her eyes at me. "No. I mean, pick them up, feel them, hold them up against yourself in a mirror. Grab a stack and try them on. You know, the usual stuff a girl would do."

"For how long?"

"Just do it."

"This is going to take forever, isn't it?"

"It's going to take longer the more you whine about it."

I sighed and tried to figure out what to do with myself. Bailee was so big on fashion, it seemed kinda silly to even try to figure out what she was going to be looking for. So I used some of my male instincts and just spotted the hottest girl in the store and went to go see what they were looking at.

The big thing back then was track suits. These kind of velveteen outfits that looked like pajamas with a hoodie. I went over to go paw my way through a rack of them, and nearly seized up when I saw the prices. Five hundred dollars. They couldn't be serious.

But, this was fashion, and anything goes. And truth be told, once I knew it was five hundred dollars, I was kind of curious to try it on. I had never worn anything that expensive before, and I was curious to see what it felt like.

I took a few sets that were in my size – and I was totally guessing what my size was – and went into the changing rooms. I was in the room when it suddenly occurred to me that a bunch of smokin girls were probably just inches away from me, with nothing but a curtain to keep me from seeing what I had spent most of my teenage years imagining. I had to sit down for a moment to catch my breath.

"How's everyone doing in here?" I heard a woman say. "Just a reminder that there's a limit of five garments in the booth at any time and a five minute limit in the booth." I jumped to my feet, scared stupid that I was going to get checked on. I wanted to pick up everything I had brought in, and put it back.

Then I got paranoid that that was going to look suspicious. Then I started to think that trying the clothes on and taking this much time was going to look suspicious.

Ashleigh stuck her head through the curtain, which scared the crap outta me. She silently mouthed "get moving" to me.

I quickly changed into the track suit.

Slowly, oh was it slow, I emerged from the room and took some steps outside. I don't know why they put the mirrors out on the floor, but that where they

were. I had to walk all the way out there, take a look at myself and then return. I estimated the time I could accomplish this was about .042 seconds.

I got out to the mirrors and took a quick glance at myself. I thought I looked ridiculous. I took on half step back to the changing rooms and then someone said "hey Bailee" to my sister.

As I continued on, this person was persistent. "Fine, don't look at me Bailee." I turned the corner into the rooms and then realized exactly what was going on. She thought I was Bailee. The smart move would have been to keep moving, but I turned to look back at who was speaking. Dumb.

It was some girl from school. I had seen her around, and sometimes she hung out with my sister. I didn't remember her name.

"Uh... Hey," I said, trying to exit quickly. I continued into the changing rooms, thinking there was no way a girl was going to follow a boy into the rooms. They were off limits here. And if had been a boy at that time, this would have been a perfect plan. Instead, she just followed me.

"Pink's your color," the girl said to me.

"Pink?" I answered, a little offended. Then it came to me that I was in a women's pink track suit, pretending to be a girl. "Oh. Yeah." I added.

Ashleigh then hurriedly arrived, to my rescue. Or so I thought.

"Hey, Tanya!" Ashleigh said cheerily. "Here for the sale?"

"Uh, Bailee and I were having a private conversation, Ashleigh." Tanya said, rudely.

Ashleigh didn't budge or blink. "Yeah, Bailee and I are hangin' out today."

This Tanya girl looked at her incredulously. "You. And Bailee." She obviously didn't believe the story. "What *ever*." She just made a face and then continued on talking to me. "So I was down at the food court, and you'd never guess who I saw."

This was the point where I was supposed to guess.

"I... I don't know." I replied. How could she not tell I was a guy? She had to have been able to tell. I mean, I could barely talk. I knew she could tell. She could tell I was just faking it. Or maybe she just hadn't looked closely enough yet. I knew if I spoke again, I was going to blow it. If I shrugged or moved my eyes, she would be able to tell I was acting differently than Bailee. If it isn't obvious, I was scared out of my mind.

"*Curt Blundell*." Tanya said, as if it were the discovery of a lifetime.

"The quarterback who transferred out last year? He's *so* cute!" Ashleigh said, trying to force her way into the conversation.

Tanya just shot her a look and then continued to talk to me. "Oh my God, I think he's even more choice than he was last year!" She was swooning. "I'd totally do him." Tanya added.

"I would so totally do him." Ashleigh said. "Bailee?" She said to me, wanting my opinion.

The blood drained from my face. Were they seriously... Was I supposed to tell... Did they mean....? Yes. Yes they did. And they were waiting for my answer.

"I g... I g...g... guess." I replied.

Tanya interpreted that response to mean something more than it meant. "You haven't!" She said, her mouth agape. "Oh my God, you did! What's he like? Does he play rough?"

J O E S I X P A C K

***TWO
FORMS
OF ID***

A Web Classics Revisited Story

2007 Paperback Edition

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Chapter 1:

Is it Too Much To Ask?

It was so hot, you could have fried an egg on it. His forehead, that is.

Over in the corner of a dim office, a woman was punching furiously at her multiplexed office phone, hunting and picking for the right convenient preset to turn off that damn hold music. How had she turned it on in the first place? She was just trying for an outside line.

Her claw-like nails clacked and scraped on the flimsy plastic buttons, as she fruitlessly kept pushing and poking at random. The woman, who kept poking buttons with the persistence of a woodpecker, was somewhere in her mid-thirties. But she looked much older. She was not particularly attractive, being skinny and looking frazzled. Her stringy brown hair was her most recognizable quality.

The air above Harvey Angler's head was – if you looked closely – rippling with heat. That's how hot his forehead was. It wasn't because of the season, or because of the poor air conditioning in the cramped office, it was something on his mind. He was stewing over his incredible situation he now found himself in.

By the way, this is also something that you could have cooked on his forehead: stew.

The crackling sound of the muzak version of "Summer Breeze" piping loudly out of the phone's tinny speaker finally caused Harvey to momentarily ignore his problems and drop his guard. He took his fist and slammed it down on the phone like a hammer, causing the handset and base to bounce onto the floor. But at least the music stopped.

So he felt a momentary wisp of relief in this otherwise hellish day.

“You’re trying to get us caught, aren’t you?” The woman said, under her breath, hissing at him.

With those words, Harvey’s dark mood returned, twice as intense as before. But you see, it wasn’t really Harvey’s fault at all. It was his situation.

“Hello, Jean.” A stout man with horrible skin said. He had appeared out of nowhere. “Not having problems with the phone, are you?”

The woman gathered up the loose phone parts and clumsily dumped them on her desk. “No! No. No.” Jean Angler said. “My daughter is just a bit clumsy, you know.” She shot a look of anger at Harvey.

“Oh, so is this your daughter, Jean?” The lump of a man said.

“You haven’t met yet?” Jean straightened up in her chair to do the introductions. “Richard, this is my daughter. Honey, say hello to Mr. Rollins, the office manager.” Richard stuck out his hand and smiled broadly. Harvey got up and politely shook it.

“What’s your name, sweetie?” Richard said.

Harvey swallowed a truckload of pride, steadied himself and answered: “Christina.” He delicately cleared his throat and concentrated on sounding more effeminate. It was actually pretty eerie. He had the voice dead on. “My name’s Christina.” Harvey smiled through his anger and revulsion.

“Well, be careful with that phone, Christina. They’re not cheap.” Richard then turned to Jean with a smile. “What is it with girls and phones?” He laughed to himself at his own keen observation.

“Ha-ha!” Jean replied, trying to pretend it was funny. “Oh, yes. Kids. What’re you gonna do?” She smiled back in the empty, hollow way you do with tepid office humor, as she prayed this conversation would end as soon as possible.

“Who knows!?” Richard turned around halfway, preparing to leave the scene. “I don’t!” He continued to chuckle as he proceeded on his way. “Good to meet you Christina.” He added as he left.

“Yeah.” Harvey muttered. “Nice to meet you.” He plopped back down onto his butt and started to rebuild the momentum in his snowballing anger.

“Will you just take it easy, Harvey?” Jean hissed.

Harvey bounced up in his seat to tug the backside of his dress under him. As he did, strands from his long wig of mousy brown hair flew along his shoulders, held in place by a pink hair band. He continued to fool with his little-house-on-the-prairie dress and its stupid doily collars until he couldn’t bear to touch it anymore. A faint sizzling sound could be heard coming from his ears as his brain broiled in its own juices.

Jean’s face showed fear. “I need you to get yourself under control, Harvey. Don’t make me lose my job! We still have five hours to go.” She gently kicked him in the ankle, leaving a scuff on his white stockings.

Harvey’s mind started to misfire and sputter. He was barely getting through this as it was, and it was getting worse and worse by the millisecond. To keep himself from going mad – if he wasn’t way beyond that already – he reviewed the events that led up to this nightmare in the hope that he could now spot the exact moment where it all went wrong.



It was three weeks ago when he had first heard of Jean's problems at work. She was harping and whining on the subject incessantly. She was going to lose her job, no one liked her, no one respected her, the work was too hard, the air conditioning didn't work, blah, blah, blah.

Jean was Harvey's older sister. Much older. She was twelve years his senior, physically – but years behind in emotional maturity. It seemed to Harvey that she might never settle down and learn to take life easy.

His sister was the sort of person who should have never been entrusted with the responsibilities of a job, or even the responsibilities of dressing herself. She was a twenty-four hour a day basket case, a bundle of jittery, spazmatic nerves. One day, she would surely explode in a tangled mess of anxiety and paranoia.

But until that day, she was Harvey's own personal demon. He lived with Jean, in the house he had grown up in, as his parents moved away when they retired. For his part, Harvey had grown up the neglected one in his nuclear family, being too well adjusted to warrant the sort of attention his frazzled parents paid to the trouble-ridden Jean. But his parents had burnt out long ago. So now the problem had been dropped into his lap. He could deal with it well enough, as his resistance had been built up for many years. And he could tolerate her quirky, draining personality without too much strain on his life.

That was until Jean started in on her new job. How she got it, Harvey had no clue. And even though he was happy for her, he now had a whole new level of Jean's insecurity to cope with. Her complaints and worries about work were

always the same, and became like a mantra as she chanted and recited them at every opportunity. Harvey tried hard to console her, but he had run out of answers. He was reduced to pleading for sanity and calmness, only to be rewarded with Jean's list of problems once again. He begged her to stop. But it wasn't long before he found himself holding her when she started to cry. He promised her everything would be okay. And he promised her that he would "Do anything on Earth to help."

What would it take to calm her down? Harvey resolved to help her fit in at work. Yes, it was really going far above and beyond the call than anybody should have had to do on behalf of another grown adult, but she was his sister. He had to help her adjust.

He set to work on rebuilding his sister in the mold of a driven, professional businesswoman. Harvey was by trade an electrician, but his flexible schedule allowed him a lot of free time. It was needed. He chose Jean's outfits, drilled her on using business jargon and even wound up spending his nights finishing most of the work she was supposed to be doing. It paid off slowly – ever so slowly – in good performance reviews, compliments and even a raise. For the first time in a long time, Jean was settling in and calming down. And Harvey could relax.

For a minute or two. No sooner had the paranoia about her abilities left her when new worries burrowed into her head. She was obsessed with her inability to bond or socialize with coworkers. They were all mothers and fathers, raising families and talking about the tests and travails of being parents.

So here it was, April 25. Bring Your Daughter To Work Day. And here Harvey was, dressed as a young girl, pre-

tending to be Jean's daughter. This, despite the fact that he was twenty-four years old and holding an M.B.A. Why?

When Jean had first mentioned it, he couldn't even believe that she'd ever suggest such a thing. Pretend to be a girl to help Jean's social standing at work? Was she insane, or just oblivious to reality?

Neither. She did know one thing about her brother. He liked to dress.

He didn't do it often, but he never turned down the opportunity. Halloween, costume parties, Mardi Gras. Whatever excuse he could find, he was in a dress and on the town. Not that he was a habitual cross dresser. Harvey never felt any overpowering need to dress, nor was he sexually aroused by it. He just thought it was a kick.

Harvey may have been twenty-three years old, but he was in that small percentile of men who were fully gown at under 5'6". And he was very young looking. On a good day he could be mistaken for a college freshman, what with his beard never really growing in. So by pure accident, he discovered he had a useless talent he never before suspected a man could have. He could be a girl. A teenager, to be specific.

David Ibsen, a longtime friend of Harvey's was the first to spot it. He'd tease Harvey from time to time about his size and androgynous appearance, but never think twice about it. But a drunken bet made by David and his friends resulted in Harvey making himself up to be a teenage girl for a day. The bet was to see if he could be passed off in disguise for twenty four hours. Harvey collected some easy cash. He was unnervingly convincing as a girl. No beauty queen, mind you – more like a portly chess-club-loser type of girl – but the disguise was credible. Needless to say,

Harvey's friends were visibly uncomfortable and disturbed with his newfound skill. But Harvey liked the power of making his friends so obviously uneasy. That was the fun part about dressing up. There was no thrill from wearing womens' clothes, he just simply liked freaking people out. And he was quite good at it.

So it was armed with this knowledge that Jean had made her suggestion. Harvey would come to work in a dress and pretend to be Jean's nonexistent daughter, Christina. Jean had already bought the dress, the wig and the shoes. All Harvey had to do was put on his little-girl act and hang out all day at her office. This wasn't any big problem, was it? He did say he would "Do anything on Earth to help," didn't he?

Harvey was aghast. He hadn't suspected that his sister was so off the deep end. It was unbelievable. Jean apologized, and retracted her idea. He was right. It was silly and dumb. Then she just waited for the inevitable.

Two days later, when Harvey suck into Jean's room and opened a drawer of Jean's dresser, he found a note under the dress he wanted to try on. It read "Gotcha!"



"Harvey." Snap snap. "Harvey!" Jean snapped her fingers in front of his face again. Harvey broke from his shoe gazing to focus his glare on his sister. "The sandwich cart is coming by. Do you want a snack?" Jean asked.

Harvey said nothing, intensifying his glare.

"You hate me. You're going to hate me forever, aren't you?" Jean whined. Harvey clenched his jaw and sneered.

The cart wheeled on by, unmolested by the self-involved siblings.

“Hey!” Harvey yelled to the sandwich guy before he got to the elevator. “Do you have tuna?” He sprinted to stop the closing doors. “Tunafish?” He repeated. The man handed one over, and Harvey thanked him.

When he got back to Jean’s desk, she was pretending to concentrate on paperwork. “I knew you couldn’t stay angry all day. See? I told you you’d get used to it.”

Harvey talked with a full mouth. “I’m hungry, okay?”

“Whatever you say, sweetie.” Jean replied. “Who can understand teenagers, anyway?”

A large, balding gentleman with thick glasses stopped at Jean’s desk. He smiled and nodded a silent greeting at Harvey. “Oh! Is this your sister Jean?,” he said with sarcasm.

Jean’s head snapped up with alarm. It was her boss, Mr. Pickwick. “My sister!?” Jean said, with the typical sense of panic she infused into her speech.

“I was kidding, Jean.” Mr. Pickwick said.

“What?” Jean replied in distress. “What do you mean?”

Harvey stepped in to save her. “He was joking, *Mom*. Relax. *Mom*.”

Jean’s worried eyes darted back and forth between the two people. She was sure that this was going to get her fired. Right now. This instant. She’d be alone. On the streets. Lying in some dark alleyway. And then she finally caught on. “Oh. Sorry. Busy day.” She said. Harvey rolled his eyes.

“And what’s your name, little lady?” Mr. Pickwick asked.

A small bit of tuna caught in Harvey’s throat. He tried to make his coughing sound as effeminate as possible.

“You all right?” Mr. Pickwick asked out of courtesy.

“I’m fine.” Harvey said with a smile. He was going to have to pour on the charm. If he made a good impression here, it would certainly speak favorably of Jean to have raised such a delightful young daughter. “Thank you for asking.” He tilted his head to the side and put on his cheesiest aw-shucks little girl big-toothed smile. “I’m Christina.”

Mr. Pickwick held out his hand to shake, and Harvey grasped it lightly and limply. “I’m very pleased to meet you, Christina. Your mother speaks very highly of you. Can’t stop talking about you.”

“Really?” He replied to Pickwick. Harvey twisted his head slightly to peer at Jean. She blocked his stare with a manilla folder. “How nice of her.” He said, bitterly. For a moment, Harvey almost dropped the act. Then he recovered. “She’s just the greatest Mom in the whole world!” He said through his clasped teeth.

“How old are you Christina?” Mr. Pickwick asked for no apparent reason.

Harvey brought himself back to the task at hand. “I’m almost eigh...”

“Fifteen!” Jean interrupted.

Harvey’s head darted back at Jean. He so wanted to bean her. But this was no time to crack. He was here for one reason: to leave a good impression. “I’ll be sixteen in three mon...”

“Seven months!” Jean interrupted again. Harvey was wondering just how much of this story Jean had worked out in advance. Much more than she had let on previously, it seemed.

“Isn’t that like kids? Always trying to be a little older. And they grow up so fast.” Mr. Pickwick smiled at Jean. She

missed her cue to say something like “Before you know it, they’re all grown up,” or some other parental cliché.

“Fifteen, hmm?” Mr. Pickwick looked at Harvey with a critical eye. “You seem awfully mature to be only fifteen, Christina.”

Harvey coughed again, involuntarily. What did this guy know?

“Yes sir. Very poised for only fifteen.” Pickwick said, obviously contemplating something. “Jean...” He asked.

“Yes,” Jean’s overanxious voice responded, “Mr. Pickwick?”

Pickwick paused as he thought deeper. And paused. And paused.

Harvey decided he needed to bail out. Now. If he came clean, maybe they could just claim that this was a sort of practical joke. Ha. Ha. Everyone would have a good laugh. Maybe some stories to tell. Maybe some people would get fired and dragged out by security. Whatever the cost, it was now done and over. He reached for the seam of his wig to pull it off.

Mr. Pickwick finally finished his thought. “Has Christina ever done any modeling or acting?” He asked Jean, turning his attention away from Harvey.

Harvey discreetly pulled the wig back onto his head.

Jean looked as nervous as she had all day. And that was saying something. “Acting? What do you mean some kind of acting job, or was she an actress or or...” She went into the first stages of hyperventilation.

‘Boy, she’s good in a crunch,’ Harvey thought. He had little choice, so he stepped into the fray. “No. No. I’ve never done anything like that, Mr. Pickwick.”

Two Forms of ID

“Would you like to try?” Mr. Pickwick asked. “You’re very tall for a fifteen year old, which is what people look for in a model. And you’re so well poised, I think you’d make a great actress.”

“She’d love to!” Jean suddenly shouted.

Chapter 2: A Step or Two in the Wrong Direction

“What?” Jean said.

“You *know* what.” Harvey said with the greatest degree of gravity. He was at home now, so he no longer had to pretend. He no longer had to hold back.

Jean’s worried eyes looked at Harvey in despair. “I knew it. You hate me.”

“I don’t hate you, Sis. I just sometimes...” Harvey searched for the right words. “I sometimes don’t know what you’re thinking.”

“You hate me!” Jean wailed.

“I just said I don’t hate you Jean!” Harvey barked. He quickly got a hold of his emotions. It was a big mistake to yell at his fragile sister. She would always take it too hard and emotionally curl up into a ball for days. “Let’s just back track a little here, okay?”

“You hate me.” Jean repeated.

Harvey rubbed the temples of his head. “You were perfectly aware that I was pretending to be your daughter just for the day, and just to help you out, right?”

Jean nodded.

“And I was really uncomfortable doing this.”

Jean nodded again.

Harvey once more collected his thoughts and tried to frame his speech in the least threatening way. “So... why then, would you volunteer me... for a commercial... where I would have to go though even more... potential embarrassment... and discomfort?” Once finished, he awaited the response from Jean, knowing perfectly well he wasn’t going to hear anything he wanted to.

He felt the same, dreadful feeling he had spent years growing up with. Jean was taking over his life.

When he was younger, all he ever wanted to do was get out of this house. He just wanted to have a real life of his own. But Jean was so needy. She had to be constantly watched. The demands were incredible. And now, here he was, a grown man who's life was being taken over by having to look after his sister.

Jean pleaded. "You don't understand, Harvey." Harvey wholeheartedly agreed with that observation. "Mr. Pickwick's been having a tough time casting that spot for the commercial."

"I don't really care about that Jean..." Harvey tried to say.

"No! You... You see..." Jean's nerves started to kick in. "If I could get Christina into the auditions, Mr. Pickwick would love me for it! I might get a raise, a promotion..."

"There is no Christina, Jean." Harvey wanted to make this clear. "She doesn't exist."

"But..." Jean protested.

"She doesn't exist." Harvey said again.

"Glaucoma. He's got bad eyes. It will only be for a minute or two!" Jean's speech was sped up in fear of not getting it all out. "You just have to go and show up then you get to leave! See? See!? You don't understand! *You never listen to me and you never understand!!*"

Harvey reached inside his shirt pocket and picked a B-12 vitamin from it. He was going to need the strength. He swallowed it down with an audible 'gulp' sound. "Slow down. And try that again." He said, resuming his temple massage.

"Mr. Pickwick is nearly blind. He's got glaucoma. He can't see."

Harvey waited for the relevant part.

Jean concentrated, knowing this was her only chance she was going to get. "He never even saw you. He thinks you really are some cute fifteen year old girl." Jean saw that she had grabbed a sliver of Harvey's attention. "You go to the audition, the director gets one good look at you, and we go home."

Unbelievably, now that he had heard the explanation, he saw it's twisted, cruel logic.

"I can't do that again, Jean." Harvey felt the need to say it out loud, just to save face.

"Please, Harvey." Jean asked.

It was going to be just a few minutes. A few minutes out of the rest of his life. He could manage it. He could get his sister the promotion, the raise and the respect of her co-workers. He had to try. Against ninety-nine point nine percent of his better judgment, he had to agree. Which is why he found himself on his way to the audition the very next morning.



"You said it was going to be quick."

Jean barely even heard him. "Shush! We've only got a few minutes!" She then rammed a tube of lipstick into Harvey's lips. "Pucker like a fish."

Harvey grabbed Jean's arm and tore it away from his face. "Just give me a moment, all right?"

Jean almost opened her mouth to speak, but it quickly dawned on her that it was one of those instances where she had better do what Harvey said. She walked away without another word.

When he was a kid, Harvey would have killed to be in this spot. He had always been overshadowed by Jean and her needs. His parents rarely even noticed his difficulties with life. He had spent many night as a kid dreaming of the opportunity to go out in the world and make a name for himself.

He desperately wanted to become famous. Not that he ever really told anyone that. He was just a small-town kid with no real hopes of going anywhere. And he knew it. But still, in the back of his mind, he knew that fame was the only way he'd ever be able to show his family how special he was. But now, he was trapped in a lie, as if life were turning his dreams back on him and laughing. What did they call it? Irony?

Such a polite word for such a horrible feeling.

Harvey spun around on his stool to look at himself in the mirror. He had on his wig, the hair band, and a new dress from the costuming people. He did look like a young girl, he knew that well enough. But he had always thought he was kind of a dog – as a girl. His face was kind of chubby, his legs were thick, he had squinty eyes and thin lips. Sure, he could pass as an ugly eighteen year old, but as a cute fifteen year old girl? Mr. Pickwick must have been as blind as a bat.

Across the sound stage, the director huddled with his production assistant. “They’re all drama queens, Shana. Damn stage mothers.” He sucked on a cigarette. “I can’t use any of them. Is there anybody left on the list?”

Shana, a heavily made up woman of elusive but advanced age, checked her list. “Three more.” She stopped on one name. “And this Christina Angler girl. She’s the one Pickwick suggested, Luke.”

Luke the director peered over the tops of his sunglasses. "That's all?"

"That's the lot," said Shana.

Luke turned his head and eyes to the sky and waited for divine inspiration. None came. "Okay. Here's what we do. If none of these other girls pan out, we just cast the one Pickwick wants."

Shana was suspicious. "Are you serious? Did you see her?"

"I know. Arf. Escapee from the dog pound. But Pickwick writes the checks for this God-awful commercial shoot."

Luke pushed his glasses back onto his face. "And you can't go wrong casting the bosses' favorite, now can you? Let's just get this done and get the hell out of this town."

"Amen." Shana agreed. She turned to the remaining actresses. "Let's have the next one!"

Back with Harvey, Jean was licking her thumb and using it to scrub something invisible off Harvey's face. "Stop fussing!" She said.

"Stop rubbing your spit on me then." Harvey cracked.

Jean disregarded his request. "It'll just be a few minutes. You're the last one they'll look at. They've probably already made their choice by now."

"Good." Harvey said. "Just let me get out of this meat market! They want me just for my body!"

Jean played with Harvey's bangs.

"That was a joke." Harvey said.

"What was?" Jean replied. "Look, honey, just memorize the line, okay?"

"Pickwick picks the perfect peaches?" Harvey asked.

Jean nodded. "That's the one."



“Pickwick picks the perfect peaches!” The cute girl on the TV said. She took a big bite. “Mmmmmm! Peachy!” she further added.

“Dude, I can’t believe that’s you.” The guy sitting next to Harvey said.

Harvey couldn’t even look. His head was between his legs, sitting bent over on the sofa. It was the perfect position for a crash landing in an airplane, but it was only his life that was out of control.

Jean came into the living room with a bowl full of Bugles. “Did I miss it? I missed it!” Jean whined. “Did I miss it, David?”

David Ibsen, a good friend of Harvey’s, was sitting on the couch next to the distended man. “Yeah. I told you not to leave.”

“Jean?” Harvey asked from between his knees, “Why is David here?”

“Don’t mind him David, he’s just a little cranky.” Jean said, dismissing her brother.

Harvey’s upper half sprang up as if here a resurrected corpse. “Just a little!”

“Maybe you can reassure him that it’s not the end of the world if he helped out his sister and filmed a TV commercial.” Jean popped a crisp in her mouth. “And made thirty thousand dollars I might add.”

“I’m not complaining about the money, Jean.” Harvey said softly. “It’s the whole face-on-national-television-as-a-girl thing that’s got me kind of...” Harvey’s tone changed. “*Cranky!*”

“I didn’t know it was going to be a national ad, Harvey.” Jean said innocently. Harvey’s eyes would have burnt a hole through Jean’s head if humans had such powers.

David nudged his friend with his elbow. “I wouldn’t worry about it, man. That girl looks nothing like you.” Harvey looked at his friend suspiciously. David was watching the show. “She’s cute.”

Harvey was sure that was an unintended insult in some weird way, but he let it go. “They used computers or something.” Harvey muttered.

“No shit?” David said. “Wow. They can sure do miracles with computers.”

“They didn’t do that much. Just a good make-up job.” Jean interjected. “Good lighting.”

Harvey scanned the area for blunt objects he could club Jean with. None. He went back to an earlier question. “Why is David here?”

“David is here to take a look at the contract we signed.”

“We?”

“I signed. Minors can’t sign a contract.” Jean corrected. “David, did you read it?”

“What?” David replied, distracted with the TV show again. “Oh yeah. The contract.” David was a skinny man, about twenty-eight or something and had graduated from drinking buddy to good friends with Harvey some years ago. His hippie looks, complete with scraggly beard and sandals belied his true occupation. He was a lawyer.

David plucked the contract in question from between his butt and the couch cushion, where he had been keeping it. “It’s all on the up-and-up. It’s got no tricks or anything in it. It’s pretty fair.”

“It depends on how you look at that.” Harvey grumbled.

Jean was intent on pursuing her line of questioning. “So, what if they want to do more commercials?” Harvey’s head snapped to attention and gave her such a look.

“Well,” David said, pausing to sip his beer. “It’s a standard commercial contract. The producers of the spot – Pickwick Packing & Canning – have an option to make what’s known as a ‘callback’ where they can have Harvey come back to film another spot, but at twice the previous rate.”

“Come back?” Harvey said.

“Twice the rate?” Jean said.

“Twice the rate? Sixty thousand dollars?” Harvey computed.

Jean’s face lit up. “Sixty thousand!”

Harvey’s brief moment of happiness vanished when he saw the look on Jean’s face. It was a look of delight mixed with fear. “You know something, Jean.”

Jean’s face turned a deep red. “I got a call this morning when you were in the shower.”

Harvey didn’t need to hear any more. For the first time in his life, he ground his teeth. “David.” He turned to face his friend. “What happens if I don’t want to do another commercial?”

“Then you have a buy-out clause. You refund a certain amount of money and you break the terms of the contract.” David continued. “In this case, it’s five thousand dollars.”

“Shit.” Harvey cursed. “They’re vultures!”

“Hey, don’t sweat it, man.” David said. “I wouldn’t let anything happen to my pal.” He smiled wickedly and whispered. “Don’t let this get around, but I think of you as the kid sister I never had.”

“Shove it, fuckface,” Harvey growled. He looked at his hands as if they had an answer. “Five thousand.” He came to a decision. “Fine. I’ll do that.”

“Harvey!” Jean snapped. “Sixty thousand!”

“Forget it.” Harvey stated. “This ends now.”

“Nope.” David said, his face still pointed at the television. “Fraid not.”

Harvey grabbed a handful of his vitamins, slapped them into his mouth and chased it with some beer. “What?” He asked.

“To enact the buy-out clause, the parent and/or guardian of Christina Angler must make an affidavit as to Christina’s status.” David finally broke his attention from the set. “You know, like why ‘Christina’ is unable to fulfill the terms of the contract. But if Jean makes this statement – and presumably makes up a story – she could be sued for fraud. And you for identity fraud. And even if she tells the truth, it’s still fraud, and everyone goes to jail. Even me, now that I know.”

Harvey’s world suddenly became way more claustrophobic. “You’re telling me there’s no way out?”

“Nope.” David said simply. “If they want you, they can have you.”

Harvey turned to look at Jean again, and she already knew the question.

“They want you.”

Chapter 3: The Van

It was a long year for Harvey. That first callback wasn't so bad, but the second callback was too much. The third was impossible and the fourth and fifth had sort of been a blur to him. It was a very, very long year. But there were good things in his life, though. Jean had been promoted three times. She was still a basket case, but the higher up you move in a company, the more eccentric you can be. The higher she moved up, the better Jean fit in at work. At times, she almost seemed happy.

That didn't last very long, however. When tax time came, the IRS became suspicious of the money that had flowed into Jean Angler's accounts on behalf of the minor "Christina Angler." After all, you can't hide \$380,000 very easily. With that kind of money, Harvey had thought he was set for at least a few years, and he quit his electrician job.

But then the walls came crashing in. When they filed taxes, they had too much money to hide. The IRS demanded that the money go into a trust fund that only "Christina" would be able to access at age eighteen.

By that point, though, Harvey had already blown \$32,000 on a new car, and another \$20,000 down payment on a new condo. Which left him in the position of owing himself \$52,000

The money he had earned was essentially in an account that could never be touched. Not as long as reality continued to insist that there was no such person as Christina Angler to withdraw the money.

This left Harvey in deep debt, so much so that he had to find a way to pay it off, desperately. No job for an electri-

cian could pay enough to do it. Three years of jobs as an electrician couldn't do it. There was only one way to earn big money fast. It was back to work for Christina. This time, with David's help, they could craft a way for the money to go to Harvey's account, and keep him from going bankrupt.

Thus, the presence of Harvey Angler started to become more and more rare. More often than not, you could find him trying to squeeze himself into young ladies' jeans and practicing around the house in high-heeled shoes.

Often times, he'd even remain in his outfit long after he'd gone to an audition. Not because he was particularly fond of dressing this way, but because he was a little lazy.

Still, that was the easy part. The hard part was getting ready. On this particular morning, Harvey gripped the towel rack with his free hand as Jean grasped the wax on Harvey's forearm. And she pulled. Harvey cursed and swore as the ripping tore the hair from his body. His swearing reverberated on the tiles in his small bathroom. "Not fun." He growled, as he rubbed the arm with a towel. "Crybaby." Jean joked. A patented Harvey dead-eye stare told her it was not the time for humor. "Is that everything? Arms, legs, chest..."

Harvey was very sure that was everything.

"Eyebrows!" Jean remembered.

"Fuck." Harvey said. He dropped his shoulders and walked over to the chair in front of the sink. He sat, and awaited the next round of humiliation. His objections were minor, however, compared to the stink he had put up a year ago.

Because there had been a change. He was no longer pretending to be Christina to help his sister. He was doing it

now to keep himself from spending the next ten years in prison. If he couldn't come up with the missing money, he was done for.

"How much do you think?" Harvey said, pulling his brow around to visualize it.

"Not too much. Younger girls have thicker eyebrows, normally." Jean said.

Harvey wasn't sure. "Really?"

"I'm sure. They get thinner when they get tweezed over a lifetime."

"Let's get going, then." Harvey gripped the counter to prepare for the oncoming rush of pain.

After that, the hair would get colored, the skin exfoliated, and the nails lengthened. Jean would cut his now chin-length hair and mix up a tooth whitening treatment. And Harvey sat still for all of it.

This wasn't the first time he had done this. It was now a part of his weekly routine. Every Sunday was his "day of beauty." He had been through the routine half a dozen times now. He had to keep himself looking as good as possible, because this was now his full-time job. He was an actress slash model.

Running a circuit of talent agents, production houses and theater auditions, Harvey had become a local showbiz mainstay. Well, Christina Angler was how he was known around town, not as Harvey. He'd visit the crowded, cheap offices of theater professionals and sit in his seat while Jean filled out forms, and waited patiently to do his bit for a scout, casting director or just the chance to drop off his demo DVD.

Jean would drive him from audition to audition, trying get work with a growing sense of desperation. But since he

was well-recognized from his commercials, few wanted to cast the “peach girl” in another commercial. The same went for TV shows. Especially after meeting Harvey in person, and seeing how much help make-up and computer wizardry had done for Harvey’s career.

What remained for him were the leftovers.



As Jean parked the car in the lot, he turned to her brother. “You ready?”

Harvey checked himself in the rear view mirror. He took a deep breath. And let it go. “Yeah.” He whispered.

Mostly – though not entirely – for show, Jean held Harvey’s hand as she led him into the building. It was an old creaky why-isn’t-it-demolished-yet palace located in the forgotten part of the theater district. Inside, they were assembling the finalists for a children’s anti-drug performing troupe called “The Yes! to Life Gang.” They traveled the country, going from school to school giving ‘uplifting and inspiring’ motivation to a bunch of disinterested kids. It was hideous and sickening, but it was work. And it paid very well. It would singularly erase his \$52,000 debt.

Harvey reflected on the moment, realizing that his childhood dreams of fame were now so staggeringly perverse that it would take years of intense therapy to undo the damage. He’d have to just get used to the idea that this was his course in life for the immediate future. God help him if he should think too much about it, because he’d go insane in an instant.

Jean and Harvey shuffled into the theater, and found seats alongside the kids and mothers packing the first few rows.

One by one, the kids got up on stage and did a little song and dance number and then thanked “everybody” for “such a wonderful, fabulous time!” Gosh!

Harvey got up and did his bit. He did a little singing, a quick tap routine, a scene from Shakespeare and then thanked everybody and returned to his seat directly. Overall, his nervous voice was kind of deeper than he normally was able to keep it, and he wasn’t so good on his feet. And he was certainly the least enthusiastic ‘kid’ on stage. Honestly, he was ready to get out of here and go to the next audition halfway into his act.

So when he piled into the “Yes! to Life” van nine days later, along with the rest of the troupe for the four-month national tour, he was still a little confused. How had he gotten the job? Maybe he’d never know.

Jean had been there, and was actually crying for him as he was set to leave. She had hugged him like a mother would have, seeing her baby off on a long trip. It made Harvey feel extremely uncomfortable, but every real mother and father was doing the same with their kids as they bid farewell. So he kept up appearances.

He had to do some things he wasn’t proud of to get ready for the long trip. He couldn’t get away with growing a beard, so he had undergone some intense, day-long sessions of electrolysis to take care of what chin whiskers he had and his sideburns. He had been watching MTV for the whole week before the trip, so he’d at least have a clue as to what all the kids would be talking about.

For the last eight days, he had been talking at the highest possible pitch for all of his speech. He needed to make it a habit. And most embarrassing to him, he had to work on a new, imperceptible method to ‘conceal’ the family jewels.

It took a lot of attempts, a lot of duct tape, and a lot of pubic hair pulled out by the root. But eventually he had something close to undetectable.

Harvey had packed all of his three or four “girl” outfits he had, along with a hastily assembled array of grooming items & cosmetics. Jean had given him a few things as well, like a bag full of his vitamins and a portable video game. It was going to be a long four months, and he would be spending it with a van full of kids who were just about half his age. Harvey kept reminding himself that this would take care of his money problems. It would be all right soon.

The money would be sent to Jean, and she’d take care of the debts. All he had to do was survive. No matter how insipid the “Yes! to Life” message was, no matter how lame the show was going to be, no matter how vacuous the kids were, no matter how many times he’d have to sleep in this cramped van – he just had to survive. 120 days. That was all it was going to take. He was a grown man, after all. He could tough it out.

“Here we go, kids!” The troupe director said, grasping the handle to the van door. “We’re going to have a fun-tactular time!”

A slight sense of panic and a definite sense of dread took hold of Harvey as the door of the van slid shut. It clacked and locked, leaving him in total darkness with five little kids he had never met and thousands of lonely miles on the road were ahead of him.



When the door finally slid open for the last time four months later, Harvey had grown used to the metal door's rumbling, rolling noise, and used to the feeling he was being freed from a cave. He stumbled out and stretched out into the cool air of spring, blinking his eyes to get used to the sunlight.

"Christina!" a blonde girl with a bright smile called.

"Amber!" Harvey spun around and hugged her tight.

"You've got my phone number, right?"

"Christina!" a black girl joined in the hug. And an Asian girl joined in as well.

They broke after a long minute and then Harvey approached the two boys in the troupe and gave them each a peck on the cheek. "I had a *super* time!" He said.

A chorus of goodbyes and sad farewells lingered forever before the group finally broke up and went their separate ways. Harvey scanned the parking lot and found Jean. He sprinted across the lot with his bags in tow and embraced Jean as if she were a lost teddy bear. "I missed you so much!" Harvey said.

Jean was a little startled to greet this chipper, upbeat version of her brother. This wasn't the person she had dropped off here months ago. This person had changed. But Jean wasn't totally surprised. She had clues. Harvey would write every so often, and make the occasional phone calls. Jean realized over the course of several letters that a slow change had come over Harvey. After all, you can't spend four months on the road with five teenage kids and not try to build up a resistance to the energy and vitality of youth – because if you didn't, you might just find yourself giving in to it. And it was clear he had failed miserably to build any resistance.

Harvey leapt into the back seat of Jean's car, and started rifling through his bags. "I got you something!" he said. "Look!"

Harvey produced a snow globe with the script 'From beautiful snowy Utah!' written on the base. "I thought that might keep you thinking cool at work. Even though it's only March. Well, summer's only three months away! You can use it then. Do you like it? Isn't it cool?"

Jean wasn't used to not being able to get in a word edge-wise. "Yeah. Great, good. Thank you. It's real nice."

The months of closeness with a group of teenagers had definitely rubbed off on Harvey. His usual slow, sarcastic way of talking had now become a hyperactive talk-before-you-think speech pattern. As the car pulled out, Harvey twisted around in the rear seat and waved frantically at the people he was leaving behind. "Bye guys! Bye!" He called back, knowing full well they couldn't hear him.

The "Yes! To Life Gang" had a simple message, accurately encapsulated in their name. The performance was a musical play that lasted about twenty minutes. The story was very basic: A young girl was worried about her popularity. All her "so-called" friends were taking drugs, and she had been offered it many times. Then one day, a 'girl from the bad side of the tracks' pressures the good girl into taking a hit of ecstasy. Sure enough, her life instantly becomes a living hell and she nearly dies from overdosing. Then her real friends – the "Yes! To Life Gang" come in and help her get back on the road to recovery, turning her on to the vast pleasures of a drug-free lifestyle.

And slowly, it became clear to Harvey why he had been chosen for the part. He was the gloomy, sullen bad girl from the other side of the tracks. He was perfect to play

the villain, set against the sugary happiness of the rest of the cast.

“So did all the checks clear? I really hope they cleared because I worked really really hard and for a long long time and it was okay, but I wouldn’t want to do it again, although I liked seeing the country n’ stuff.” Harvey asked Jean.

“Yes. Everything’s taken care of.” Jean reassured. “The tax problems are behind us.”

“Oh my God, I was so worried.” Harvey tucked his shoulder-length hair back behind an ear. “It would have totally sucked to go through all this and not get the money, you know? You have no idea how worried I was. I mean, I was really really worried.”

“No, everything’s just fine.” Jean paused. “But there is something I have to tell you about.”

“Yeah, you mentioned it last month! On the phone? Remember? Vice President of Customer Experience! That is such a cool title!” Harvey bubbled.

Jean looked a little closer in the mirror. Did he have his ears pierced? “No, honey. That’s not what I meant.” Harvey didn’t act like the man she remembered.

After Harvey had figured out that he was to play the downbeat character in the “Yes! To Life Gang” show, it had started to bother him. He had never really pictured himself as a villain. He wanted to be the good guy. So, as the weeks went on, he started to work a little harder, and wanted to make a better impression. Soon, he was suggesting to the producers that he could play one of the regular parts if it was okay.

Eventually, the time came, and Harvey sung and danced his heart out. He did very well in his new role. So much so,

they developed a rotation. Every few days or so, he'd play the bad girl. But more and more often, he'd play "Angie," the girl who loved to do extreme sports in her drug-free lifestyle. Sometimes he'd play "Maya," the girl who loved to use her brain and be a top student. And sometimes, he'd play "Brittany," the cheerleader who wanted a career in fashion design.

Harvey was convinced he was showing his superior acting abilities in his girlish roles. Why, the very fact that he could now recite all his lines with a bright, earnest smile on his face and sing his songs with the inner glow of a born-again Christian was proof enough. It wasn't as if he had started to think a little like the super-happy characters he played in the show. It was acting, of course. All acting.

Harvey stuck his head into the front. "Can we stop somewhere to eat? I'm heck-a starved. You know what I haven't had for a long time? Pizza. They never wanted to get us Pizza. It was hamburgers, chicken and Taco Bell. Why didn't they want us to have Pizza? I mean, what's up with that!?"

"I have dinner at home." Jean said. "I wanted to make it a bit of an occasion."

"Okay. I guess I've had enough fast food to make me explode." Harvey flipped the long hair out of his face and began to play with the zipper on his jacket. Jean had to keep driving, but the more she looked at Harvey, the more things she spotted.

Harvey was wearing a purple cord jacket with a hood that had fake fur trim. It was popular with girls these days – trendy, almost. He was also wearing what were obviously girl's jeans, a shiny dark blue denim that had flowers stitched along the cuffs.

But what made the biggest impression on Jean was the definition in Harvey's face. Or lack of it. Gone was the puffy fifteen year old girl 'look' he had when he started. Months of dancing had slimmed him down and taken the fat out of his body. If Jean didn't know better, she'd have said he had lost his baby fat. He looked like a healthy, young and vibrant fifteen year old girl. And he was smiling. Smiling – it wasn't exactly what Harvey was known for.

It was so unusual a sight that she had forgotten to mention the very important thing she needed to talk to him about. Until it was too late.

"You must be Christina." The man in Jean's house said to Harvey when they got to the door. He was about six feet tall, dwarfing Harvey by seven inches. He had a satisfied smile on his face. "You're even more beautiful than your Mother said you were."

Harvey smiled politely, nodded, and then slowly turned on his heel to face Jean. Through his smile he asked in a very quiet voice: "Who is he, Jean?" The cold, dead stare Jean remembered from long ago returned.

"Say hello to Patrick, dear," Jean asked, "Don't be rude."

Harvey whisked back around and slipped back into sweetie-pie mode. "Hi, Patrick." He stepped forward, shook his hand and then stepped back again.

Patrick turned his attention to Jean. "Didn't you tell her, Jean?"

"Tell me?" A pit formed in Harvey's stomach.

"Well, Patrick and I..." Jean's famous nerves started to flare up. "You see, that is, I..."

"Show him the ring." Patrick said.

Jean haltingly offered her hand to Harvey for viewing. "Patrick and I are..."

Two Forms of ID

“Your Mom and I are engaged!” Patrick proclaimed with pride.

Chapter 4: Crossed Purposes

“Sometimes, Jean, I don’t know what you’re thinking.” Harvey said.

“How many men have ever proposed to me, Harvey?” Jean had obviously practiced the answer to this question. “I’ll tell you how many. One. Patrick. It’s my one chance at happiness. You know that.”

Harvey’s pretty head was spinning, shocked into near stupor. Everything he had planned on was falling apart again. He just wanted to get things back to normal. “Couldn’t you have just told him?”

“That I had a daughter who is really my brother and he’s touring the country in a children’s acting troupe to avoid fraud charges?” Jean reminded him. “He’d have had me locked up!”

Harvey was seated on “Christina’s” bed, in “Christina’s” room, looking at “Christina’s” things, scattered about the room. Apparently, Jean had redecorated Harvey’s old room as a cover for her story with Patrick. She had thought of every detail. There were posters, a closet full of trendy teen fashions, and a vanity in the corner. And everything was pink, hot pink or violet. Harvey surveyed the room and buried his head in his hands.

“Why did you have to say anything about having a daughter at all?” Harvey wanted to know.

“How could I have hidden that?” Jean replied.

“Can we at least tell him now?” Harvey said, in a whine.

Jean stared into space. She didn’t have a good answer for that one. “I don’t know. I think he really does love me, but

I have to be sure, Harvey. Otherwise, he might leave me.” Jean’s hands started to tremble. “You hate me, don’t you?”

If there was one thing that Harvey had noticed about his sister was her newfound sense of calm. He heard it on the phone when he called on the road. It grew stronger every time he had talked to her. Now, she seemed at peace, which was something he had always prayed she would find.

Maybe that’s what a relationship could do for her. It would help her find that stability she had been looking for for so long. And now here she was, her hands shaking and body shivering, about to lose all that she had gained.

Grudgingly, Harvey took her hand and tried to comfort her. “It’s all right, Jean. It’ll be okay.”

Jean hugged her brother, and Harvey hugged back. “I’ll tell him if you really want me too, Harvey. I can’t keep hurting you like this.”

Harvey held her tighter. “It’s all right Jean. I’ll be Christina for a little while longer. You tell him when you’re ready. Just remember, I’d rather it be sooner than later, okay?”

Yes, he knew it was a mistake. But he had no real idea how he could stop this freight train of lies now.



“How’s it feel to be sleeping in your own bed again, short stuff?” Patrick asked Harvey the next morning. Harvey reflexively twitched at the nickname.

“Great!” Harvey said brightly. Four months of being a “Yes! to Life” troupe member had left him with the innate ability to fake happiness without even thinking about it.

“It’s so great to be back home!” Harvey sat down at the table in a shapeless nightgown he had found last night in his closet. It had a pattern of tiny strawberries on it.

The sound of cereal spilling into Harvey’s bowl temporarily halted conversation. Harvey had correctly figured the “Boo Berry” cereal in the cupboard was for the child in the house. It was then that Jean appeared in the hallway in her robe, yawning and stretching. “You’d better get off to work, hun.”

“I don’t have a job anymore...” Harvey started to say before he realized who Jean was talking to.

“Ha, ha, ha!” Patrick chuckled. “You don’t have to go to work for a few more years, Christina, do you?” Patrick continued to chuckle as he rose and put on his coat. He walked over to Jean and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. “I’ll be back by five thirty. What say I pick up some pizza on the way home? We’ll have a party! Just the three of us!”

Harvey sat up straight in his seat. “That’d be great! I’d love that!” He was obviously too used to going along with the group.

“I’ll see you then, my lovely ladies!” Patrick said, as he left the house.

“Oh God,” Harvey said, the instant the door closed. “I don’t know if I can keep this up.” He got up to go to the fridge to get some milk. “Look at me. I’m eating kid’s cereal even. God help me.”

“What do you think of Patrick?” Jean asked.

Harvey spooned a couple of mouthfuls before responding. “I guess he’s okay. He seems nice.”

“Yeah.” Jean replied dreamily.

“Hey, why aren’t you going to work?” Harvey asked.
“Aren’t you going to be late?”

“I quit,” she responded.

Harvey coughed up a mouth-full of cereal. “You quit!?”
He cried. “What... What... But... I... But... the dressing up... the commercials... I did it all for... *Why!?*”

“Patrick’s got a good job. He makes a lot of money. More than I ever will.” Jean smiled.

“You were a *vice president!*” Harvey couldn’t believe that the reason he had to start dressing like this in the first place was now irrelevant. “You... You had everything!” He spooned up his last few bits of cereal. “You just gave it up?”

“Well... yes.” Jean said. “I want to be his full-time wife. And if I never see that grey, life-sucking office again, it will be too soon.” She smiled with satisfaction.

“Yeah. Okay.” Despite his shock at learning this, Harvey stifled a yawn and picked up the bowl. He loudly slurped down the remaining milk. “What’s he do?”

Jean looked nervous for a moment. “Sales.”

“Sales?” Harvey said, only slightly curious.

“So, Harvey...” Jean said, obviously leading into a subject she wasn’t eager to broach. “I think we need to keep working on our cover story until we tell Patrick the truth, don’t you?”

Harvey sighed, slumped in his chair and then nodded. “Yeah. I guess.”

“So let’s just get in the habit of using the right names around the house. Right?”

Harvey nodded again, a frown worked its way around his clenched jaw.

“Why don’t we try it,” Jean asked. “What’s your name?”

“Dead Meat,” he said.

“That’s right, honey. You’re my daughter, Christina.” Jean looked at Harvey cautiously, ready to spot the twitch or the flinch that would signal when he had taken enough of this and was going to fight back. “And who am I?”

“Jean.” Harvey said.

“Mother. I’m your *Mother*.” Jean decided to push it. “Or maybe you should call me ‘Mom.’”

Harvey slid his jaw from side to side, his eyes trying to not look at Jean. “Mom.” He snorted a blast of air from his nostrils. Quickly he got up and left the kitchen, leaving the mess of his bowl and spoon behind. “Moms do the dishes.”

“I don’t want this to ruin our relationship, Harvey.” Jean said, seriously. “I really treasure you as a brother.”

“What-*ever*.” Harvey replied. He went to Christina’s room, and slammed the door behind him. He flopped on the bed. He turned to dress himself for the day. He chose a pair of his favorite panties, some half-clean jeans, a simple pink cotton cami top and did his makeup and hair.

Still feeling frustrated, he flopped onto the bed again and dialed a phone number. “Hey, Amber! It’s me, Christina!” He said merrily. “I said I’d give you a call, right?”

Harvey’s mood brightened considerably now that he was talking to a friend.

“No, I just wanted to call. My, uh... Mom is being a *jerk*.” Harvey sighed. “So how’s it going with you?”



“Patrick’s home!” Jean called from the living room. “He’s got dinner!”

It had become a habit, Patrick arriving home with dinner. Jean just wasn't up to cooking, so it was left to 'the man of the house' to bring home something to eat, and it had been this way for the past two weeks – ever since Harvey came home.

Bursting out of his room, Harvey appeared at the front door to relieve Patrick of his bounty. In a flash, all the dozens of Chinese take-out cartons had been opened, and Harvey was busy dumping a bunch of rice onto his plate.

"Must be hungry!" Patrick observed. Harvey only nodded in response, because his mouth was too full to answer. "I brought you more videos!" Patrick said, proudly.

Harvey smiled and took the DVD discs politely. Every day after work it seemed, Patrick had a handful of DVD discs to give to Harvey. They were usually inane teen flicks that were devoid of any real entertainment. Harvey knew that Patrick was just trying to be nice, so he always accepted them gracefully.

He had stored up about twenty of them before Jean had insisted that Harvey actually watch one or two of them in Patrick's presence, so he didn't feel insulted. But after a few weeks, it was now routine for Harvey to spend the last hour and a half of the night watching one of the DVDs – just to please Patrick, and by extension, Jean. He looked at what he had been brought tonight, and decided that watching "13 Going On 30" was going to be the best of the bunch.

"Have a nice day, honey?" Patrick asked Jean.

"Just us girls." Jean replied. Harvey grumbled something to himself.

Patrick smiled back. “Good. Good. Christina...” Harvey looked up, ready to respond. “Just curious. When do you go back to school?”

“Mom wants to home-school.” Harvey grabbed a spring roll and nibbled. That was the response Jean and Harvey had worked out to that question. They had a whole bunch of cover stories by now.

“What about while you were on tour?” Patrick asked. “I’m curious. Didn’t you need to be in school then?” He further queried.

“They had a tutor for us.” Harvey spat out a little cabbage as he talked. It was true. He had earned a B in math and a C in English without even studying. It helped that he already had taken Advanced Calculus 325 and Creative Writing 402 in college. He wiped the half-chewed cabbage on his pants.

“Christina! Watch your manners!” Jean scolded.

“Muth-errr!” Harvey complained, spitting out some bits of food.

“Chew. Then talk.” Jean said forcefully. Harvey mockingly exaggerated his chewing motion in response.

Patrick chuckled at the mother-daughter interplay. “Well, it must have been a very interesting four months on the road.”

Harvey shrugged. An awkward silence followed.

“Umm....” Patrick was at a loss for conversation. “So nothing happened today?”

“Nope.” Harvey answered. He took his plate from the kitchen to watch TV.

Jean picked up her plate and followed, making a silent “follow me” motion to Patrick. She had something to say to Harvey, and she was going to need backup.

Although transfixed by the television, eventually, Harvey glanced to his side. “Yes?” Harvey said to Jean, noticing her presence in the room.

“Christina, I got a call from an agent.” Jean said. “They left a message on the phone.”

Harvey spun around wildly. He had been in this conversation before and it had gotten him into this mess. He wasn’t about to repeat it. “No you didn’t.” He said, forgetting to be the chirpy teen he was pretending to be.

“Somebody who saw you on tour. He said he was very impressed with your singing and thought you were a great dancer. Said he thought you could be the next big star. The next Emily Grant. He asked if you wanted to do some demos and send them to the record companies.” Jean nonchalantly picked out some glazed pork from a carton. “I called back and told him you weren’t interested.”

“Good.” Harvey said, sharply nodding his approval.

“Uh.” Patrick said, in a way that suggested he had something to add.

Harvey looked at him, stopping all chewing. Jean did the same.

“Yeah, well, I got that call too.” Patrick explained. “I thought you’d be interested.”

“Did you.” Harvey said, accusingly.

“I sent him your demo disc.” Patrick looked very embarrassed.

Harvey shivered. He remembered that he still did have a demo DVD, one that he had made just before he had left on the tour. And it was just probably lying around the house, ready for anybody to find it.

Two Forms of ID

Patrick continued, looking nervous. “I mean, your mom said that you had been looking for work for so long, and I figured...”

“You didn’t sign anything, right?” He asked.

“No, of course not.” Patrick replied. Harvey returned his attention to the TV set. Then he turned his death stare at Jean.

“And you?” He said to Jean.

“No.” She answered quickly.

“Fine then. There’s nothing to worry about.” Harvey said, before turning his eyes to the TV again. Without any legal entanglements, there was nothing to worry about. He was sure that any moment, either Jean or Patrick was going to say “But...”

Fortunately, “but” never came.

Chapter 5: Contraindications

“Harvey!?” David called from across the lawn. “Harvey!” Harvey, who was fidgeting with the lock to Jean’s front door, turned to see a man locking up his car. “David!” Harvey called, recognizing his friend. He ran along the walkway and tackled David in a bear hug. “Where have you been!?”

David had to find his feet again, knocked off balance by the embrace. “I’ve been around.” Harvey let go and started to guide David to the house. “I’ve been calling you and there’s no answer. I thought maybe your tour got extended.”

“Hey, well, I guess I should have called you n’ stuff.” Harvey said apologetically. “I’ve just been... occupied since I got back.”

David, now close up and personal with Harvey, noted that the man before him had undergone some drastic changes in almost every way. He barely even recognized his friend. His personality was definitely different, a lot more “up” than he thought Harvey was capable of.

Harvey must have just returned from some exercise or jogging, as he was wearing a ball cap, baggy sweatpants and a large loose t-shirt that almost fell to his knees. The shirt had the logo for the Powerpuff Girls on it. If he hadn’t seen this person at the front door of Jean’s house, he might have never made the connection to Harvey.

“Do you have another gig or something? Didn’t the money thing work out?” David asked. He wasn’t sure why Harvey was still pretending to be a girl.

“What?” Harvey responded. “No. I’m not working anymore.” He finally unlocked all the locks and opened the front door. “Mooo-oom! I’m home!” He called out.

David was a little startled to hear Harvey call out for his mother. She was living in Florida. Was she visiting?

“She’s not home. Cool.” Harvey went into the kitchen. “You want a Pepsi?” He asked on his way.

“Beer?” David replied.

“Sorry! The beer’s not mine! It’s Patrick’s!”

“Who?” David thought for a minute. “Oh yeah, Jean told me about him! Is he living here?”

Harvey returned from the kitchen with two cans of Diet Pepsi and tossed one to David. “That’s why I’m still doin’ this.” Harvey said, referring to his appearance. He jumped onto the sofa and curled his legs under him as he grabbed the TV remote. “They’re engaged.”

“Really!” David said with surprise. He was one of the many that figured Jean would spend her life as an old maid, clinging to Harvey’s side. “Dude! That’s good news. But why...”

Harvey was flipping through ten channels a second. “All he knows is that Jean’s got a daughter. He doesn’t know the rest.”

“Ohhhh.” David said, finally getting the picture. “I mean, you’re gonna tell him, right?”

“Jean’s going to. When she’s ready.” Harvey sipped his drink. “Which better be soon. Believe me.”

David popped the top on the can, and started to drink down the strange non-alcoholic substance. “Urf.” He said to the can. He wasn’t used to it. “Um. So... You gonna be okay?”

"I'll be fine. After six months pretending to be a girl, I can do it for a little while longer." Harvey said, finally stopping the channel flipping. He opened up the DVD tray and popped in a disc. "Have you seen this movie? I love it." As Harvey pressed play, "13 Going On 30" started on the TV. "I've seen this one at least... ten times now."

"No. I missed it." David said, dryly. "The money worked out okay?"

"The what?" Harvey replied.

David was a little worried. "The money for the trust fund?"

It took a moment for Harvey to catch on. "Oh..." It was coming back to him. "Yeah. The trust fund. That's all worked out. Sucks that I won't be able to touch it 'till I'm 18, though."

"You're 23, Harvey." David had to clarify.

"You know what I mean." He said, dismissing his error with the wave of his hand. He then decided to remove the cap he was wearing, which released his shoulder-length hair.

David nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw the lush, well-kept, feminine hair on Harvey's head fall to his shoulders. "Are you okay, man?" David had to ask.

"Yeah. Fine. Why?" An alarm went off on Harvey's watch. He stopped it quickly.

"You just seem... different." David was trying to say something very strange without sounding strange.

Harvey reached onto the table and stuck his fingers into a tiny bowl on the table. He found a few of his vitamins and popped them into his mouth and took a swig of the soda to wash them down.

David took a long look at that bowl. “Those aren’t your normal B-12’s are they?”

“Hmm?” Harvey said, not really listening. “I dunno.” He turned to show the incredulous expression on his face. “I’m not old enough to drive, you know.” He laughed. “So I don’t do a lot of shopping.”

David reached over and grabbed a few pills and took a look at them. “They’re awfully big for just vitamins.”

Harvey shrugged. “Started getting those while I was on the tour. Higher potency.”

David carefully examined the bowl full of various shaped and sized pills. “Mind if I try ‘em?”

“Okay. But don’t chew them – they’re gross tasting. Just swallow.”

“Thanks.” David said. Harvey’s attention was into the movie, and David pocketed the pills when he was sure he couldn’t be seen. “So, what’cha been up to?”

“Just stuff.” Harvey responded. Suddenly he remembered something. “Oh, man. There’s this guy.” Harvey said, before pausing to take a swig of cola. “This guy who keeps calling. He wants to sign me to a contract.”

“A contract? For what?” David was curious.

“Singing, jerk!”

“Singing?” David had to say, to make sure he heard that right. “As a girl?”

“This guy thinks I’ve got a great voice.” Harvey said, humorously. “No accounting for taste.” He seemed to ignore the more important part of David’s question. “He saw me on tour, and now he can’t stop trying to sign me.”

“Uh. Okay.” David needed to pause. “I was going to ask you about that. You’ve always had a high voice, Harv, but

right now you kinda sorta sound like a perky... cheerleader... or something.”

“I’ve been working on it!” Harvey said with pride. “I think I can still get it higher!”

“Good?” David replied, unsure that was the correct answer.

“Yeah, it’s good! The more range I have, the better I can sing.” Harvey took another sip from his can. “And it helps me pass, of course.”

“Okay.” David was more and more suspicious. “Pass?”

“As a girl – duh!” Harvey sprang up off the sofa. “I must stink. I’m gonna shower and change.” He tossed the remote to David. “You wanna do anything? Go anywhere?”

“You wanna see a game?” David asked.

“Yeah! Just give me a few minutes.” Harvey said, disappearing into the hallway.

David heard a few doors open and close before the shower noise began. He flipped through the channels until he just let it stop on some news program. He turned up the volume and checked down the hallway.

Quickly, he went to the front door to check and make sure Jean or Patrick weren’t pulling up in the driveway, and then he went into the kitchen. He didn’t know exactly what he was looking for.

David looked through all the cabinets and found nothing strange. Except for the Boo Berry. He moved on to the living room and opened the drawers and checked the shelves. He read through the book titles. He couldn’t find anything. He checked down the hallway and saw the bathroom door was still closed.

Carefully, quietly, he snuck his way down the hall, and abruptly stopped at the first door. Inside, the pink walls

and canopy bed made it clear there was a teenage girl living here. “Wow.” David muttered to himself. It was really authentic looking. The details were incredible. It really looked like Harvey was selling this “Christina” identity hard.

He opened up a drawer on the vanity, only to find a haystack of cosmetics. He moved over to the closet, and saw the small amount of clothing hanging there. Most of the clothes that should have been there were strewn about the room in chaos. He walked over to the bed, again checking for anything out of the ordinary.

David heard a loud gasp from behind him. He quickly turned to find Harvey standing before him in the doorway, naked to the world. David would have apologized, he would have come up with some excuse for violating Harvey’s privacy. But instead, he couldn’t tear his eyes away from Harvey’s body.

It curved. And not in the way a man’s body should.

The hips kind of flared. The shoulders were narrow. The neck was thin. His legs gently undulated in a very feminine shape. And where Harvey was trying to cover himself, he had very small lumps. On a girl, they would be called breasts.

“What!?!...” Harvey started to say.

David slowly approached Harvey and pulled Harvey’s arms away from his chest. He studied it and felt his throat go dry. “What’s happened to you, Harvey?” He croaked.

Harvey dove to avoid him, and grabbed a bed sheet to cover himself. “What do you mean?” He said.

“Harvey. What’s happened to your body?” David asked. “You’ve got...” He made the international sign for breasts by cupping his two hands.

“It’s just an infection.” Harvey said, trying to regain his composure. “Or something.” Harvey pulled the sheets off his bed to cover him more. “It’ll go away.”

“Harvey.” David said.

“It’s not your problem anyway. Why don’t you leave?” Harvey protested.

“Harvey.”

Harvey got loud. “Just get out! You’re invading my privacy!”

“*Harvey!*” David was louder.

Harvey slumped onto his bed. “I don’t know. I don’t know what’s happening. I... I... It started happening in Arizona. On the tour. It was just one day, I looked down and something had changed.”

“Has it gotten any worse?” David asked.

“Yeah.” Harvey turned away from David, so as not to look him in the eyes. “I thought it would stop. I thought it was the flu or a weird bug. But it seems to be happening faster, now.” Harvey seemed to be on the verge of crying.

“You need to see a Doctor.” David stated the obvious. “Right now.”

“I can’t see a doctor. Not like this.” Harvey said. “And I couldn’t tell Jean.”

David felt the vitamin pills inside his shirt pocket he had taken. “I think she knows.”

“What?” Harvey asked.

“I just don’t want you talking to Patrick or Jean about this, okay?”

“Why?”

“Just promise me, you’ll keep this to yourself, until I can check on something. Okay?” David grasped the small man by the shoulders. “Okay?”

Harvey looked up into David's eyes. "Okay."

"Good. I'll call you tomorrow morning. Just go on like normal, and wait for my call."

"Okay." Harvey sniffed. "Thanks, David."



David drove off that afternoon worried. He knew perfectly well what was going on, but he couldn't figure out the 'why' question. His best friend was being feminized, slowly and carefully.

"Feminized" – was that even a proper English word?

He had no idea of the details, but Harvey's world had somehow been cunningly manipulated, forcing him to make all the wrong choices, and forcing him to adjust to the impossible situation he was now in. And he was being made to adjust in a more permanent fashion than Harvey seemed to suspect.

When he had first heard of the 'Christina' plan, he had laughed hard and long. It was one of the funniest things he had ever heard. Now that humor had turned into horror. Harvey seemed more Christina than he did Harvey – just in body – and his mind didn't seem to be far behind.

It was Jean who was behind it. It had to be. She was the one with all these weak excuses to keep Harvey in skirts. How in the hell would she have ever gotten away with all the lies she's been telling Harvey? And this Patrick guy was in on it as well. He surely had something to do with it.

Did Jean want a family – and for some twisted reason decide to turn Harvey into her daughter? Did Patrick have some sort of control over Jean and Harvey? And why

didn't Harvey suspect anything? It was plainly obvious what was happening to his body. And he ignored it?

David pulled up to a forensics lab he used in some of his legal cases. Inside, he handed over the pills to one of his most trusted experts for analysis, and told him to "put a rush on it." David hung around for the results, knowing one thing for sure. They had estrogen in them. This was how Harvey was being changed physically. But mentally? Maybe it was drugs. Maybe it was hypnosis. Maybe it was something else.

When the tech came back with the results four hours later, David went over it in every detail. Sure enough, the pills were cocktails of estrogen and anti-androgens. There was a small percentage of human growth hormone, to accelerate the changes, and a smaller amount of progesterone for breast development.

David didn't find what he'd hoped he'd find. There were no trace of muscle relaxants, mind-altering drugs, or even sleeping pills. All these things did was alter the body's hormonal balance. The mental aspect of Harvey's change was still unsolved.

The next morning, he tried to call Jean's old number, but couldn't get through. It hadn't been disconnected, but the phone would ring once and then hang up making a funny clicking and humming noise. He knew well the sound. A caller ID block had been placed on his number. Someone there at the house didn't want him to talk to Harvey.

David parked his car down the street from Jean's house and waited patiently. A tall man in a business suit left around 7:45. That was probably Patrick, leaving Jean and Harvey inside. Soon after, David accidentally dozed off. He awoke sometime around two, cursing at himself for

sleeping. Looking at the driveway of the house, he saw that Jean's car was now gone. That meant that either Jean had left alone, or possibly both Jean and Harvey were gone. He waited a little while longer to pick up any more clues, but there were none forthcoming.

When David found himself at the front door of the house, he wasn't sure what to do. He'd have to tell Harvey about the pills, but after that, then what? If he was sensible, Harvey would leave with him right then and there. But if Harvey had been coerced in to staying, or if he didn't believe him, what was he going to do?

He rang the bell.

The curtain at the side of the door opened briefly, and the door started to unlock. "David! Why didn't you call?" Harvey ushered David inside. David stood there, contemplating exactly how he was going to say this. But before he could form a thought, he was attacked.

Harvey leapt up and wrapped his arms around him, screaming. "I'm rich! Two million dollars!" Harvey shrieked. David swam his way out of Harvey's hold and put him back down on the ground. He looked around to see the other people in the room. There weren't any.

Harvey, however, was hopping up and down with the goofiest look of glee on his face. "I'm rich!" He repeated. And he hugged David again. He had been into hugging lately.

"What!?" David needed to know what was going on.

"The contract!" Harvey said, still bouncing.

David's reply was to twist his face to indicate a lack of information.

"The record contract! The one I told you about? They want me to be a star!" Harvey caught his breath and pulled

the hair from his face. "They phoned me this morning. They like the demos I made so much, they're going to remix them and release them on CD!"

David was still unable to form a reply.

"Two million dollars!" Harvey said, emphasizing the reason David should be happy for him. "They're going to pay me two million! In advance!" Harvey started to bounce again, and David tried to hold him still.

"Harvey! I have to tell you something!" David tried to say.

"The contract is getting Fed Ex'd here by four! That's why I'm so glad you're here! I need you to be my lawyer!" Harvey was an uncontrollable ball of energy. "Can you check the contract!? I can pay you any fee! A huge retainer! We'll both be rich!"

"Harvey! They're turning you into a girl!" David said.

"I don't have to do anything! I just sign it and they release the CD!" Harvey went on.

David grabbed Harvey by the shoulders and shook hard. "Stop it!"

Harvey's face turned to shock.

"The vitamins are hormones! Jean is turning you into a girl!" David said firmly.

Harvey had no reply. He wasn't ready for that. His mind was away on vacation.

David lowered his voice. "Those B-12 vitamins. I had them analyzed."

"W-W-W" Harvey sputtered. "What...?"

"They're hormones. Estrogen." David wanted to be as clear as possible. "They're the pills they give transsexuals before surgery. Girl pills"

Harvey's eyes widened out as his mind was about to complete its 180-degree turn. "What?"

J O E S I X P A C K

***HE'S THE
WRONG
GIRL***

**“Office Chemistry” by Joe Six-Pack
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2006 Paperback Edition

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OFFICE CHEMISTRY

"Did someone leave their coffee here?" James called out into the office.

He looked around the drab grid of cubicles and got no response. One person gave him a whole half-seconds' worth of attention before going back to playing solitaire on her PC.

"Coffee? Anyone?" James said again. He held up the steaming mug to see if anyone recognized their ownage of this particular steam. "Left on the desk up here." Still no response. "Anyone."

James shrugged and sat down at the huge reception desk. First sniffing the coffee, and then sipping it, he decided it was okay to drink. According to a well-known but unavoidable rule of fate, no sooner had he taken a drink of the coffee than someone came around the corner to claim it.

"Wait! That's..." The look on the man's face was strangely earnest for such a minor problem. "Don't drink...!"

James swallowed and then looked at the man. "I did ask if this was anybody's coffee, Barry."

Barry, a thin man of forgettable features, was blanched. He looked like he wanted to object in the strongest way possible, but he was holding his tongue. James figured it was because he knew he hadn't a leg to stand on for claiming the coffee.

"Where's Sheila? This was for her." Barry said, looking around. "The coffee was for Sheila."

"Sick leave." James explained. "She called in today. Her mother's not feeling well, so she's flying out to spend a day or two with her."

"*Not here!?*" Barry said sharply, as if James were responsible for it. "What do you mean?"

"She'll phone in today for messages." James said, trying to belay Barry's obvious fears. "Meanwhile, I'll be picking up anything that needs attention to."

"That's why you're sitting at her desk!?" Barry objected.

James looked a little nonplussed. "That's why I'm getting some stuff from her email."

"This isn't good," Barry said to himself before leaving abruptly. "Not good."

"Do you want me to give her a message when she calls?" James asked as he walked away. He got no response. "Okay then."

He sat back down in Sheila's chair and began to sift through her email. Not her personal email, but all the business stuff. She was responsible for creating those spreadsheets everyone in the southwest region depended on, and he was going to have to do his best and make them on his own. He didn't like his chances, but he was given little choice.

Sheila was the lynchpin of the office, the most dependable person James knew. She was always at work, always pleasant, and even when swimming upstream against a torrent of requests, paperwork and deadlines, she still came through. All in all, she seemed to know more about running the business than the people who were running the business.

Too bad she was all business. Sheila was only able to talk about office stuff, and didn't seem to even have a thought about life outside it. She was such a

private person. She was someone James could easily see being a decent wife or mother, but Sheila never seemed to have any other life besides the office.

He still liked her and admired her, so he started to get to work on gathering the data for those daily spreadsheets. They'd be due in two hours, and he wanted to come through for Sheila's sake. He didn't want to leave a smudge on her record of dependability. For now, though, he had to man the big reception desk and pretend like he cared about the people arriving in the lobby. But when Sheila got back, and he could tell her everything was okay, he'd enjoy seeing that fleeting smile on her plain, spectacled face. And he'd be satisfied to make her happy for a moment.



Maureen Newell had just popped her head out of her office for a split-second, and just that quickly, her whole day was ruined. "Hello, Barry," she said to the man waiting outside.

"Oh. Hello, Maureen." Barry replied, looking worried. "Did you know James is at Sheila's desk?"

"He's filling in for her today, Barry." Maureen said, loathing the conversation already. Barry was a toad, who seemed to enjoy getting people in trouble. A tattletale. "He has my permission to be at her desk."

"Someone should have sent out a memo." Barry said. "At least seven days in advance."

That's what Maureen loved about Barry - there was no problem a pointless, paralyzing rule couldn't fix. "Is there something you wanted to talk to me about, Barry?"

"Oh." Barry said, coming back to his point. "I just got your tea for you, Maureen." He handed over the mug in his hands. "And I wanted to tell you that I respect you."

Maureen looked at him cockeyed. This was so far out of character for him, she could only be suspicious. Ever since he had gotten attached to the Huberson steamroller, he did little else but brown-nose his new boss. Max Huberson was skyrocketing through the company, getting promoted almost every other month or two. He was just a supervisor last year. Now he was vice president in charge of research and development, which made him the head of the division they all worked in. And Barry was going right along with him as his assistant. Maureen hated them both. Not because they were successful, but because they were successful and jerks to everyone.

But that was business for you.

"Thank you, Barry." Maureen said, accepting the mug. She checked to see if the tag hanging over the rim was her usual brand. Surprisingly, it was. "Was there anything else?"

Barry still stood there, waiting for something. "I think relationships are built on respect. Whether personal or business."

"I see," Maureen said, trying her best to end this. But he still stood there. "I'll see you later on," she added. Usually her broader, middle-aged physique and scowling wrinkles were enough to tell someone when the conversation was over. As office manager, she carried that kind of weight.

Barry remained in place. Maureen sighed and turned her back to him, sipping the tea. It was still a little hot. By the time she sat at her desk, though, Barry was gone.

"Shame he couldn't stay for lunch." She mumbled to herself.



At the sink in his bathroom the next morning, James tugged at the long strands of hair that were growing at the back of his neck. "Need to get that cut," he said to himself in the mirror. "Again," he added, remembering his last haircut was just eight days ago. He spied the time and rushed through the rest of his morning routine. Combing through his hair, he found it unusually thick, in addition to long. "Must have not washed it very well," he thought.

He wildly grabbed what he needed, stuffed it all in a briefcase, grabbed a coat and sprinted out the door.



As James hurried into the office to avoid being late, he stopped by the coffee machine for his usual cup a' joe. But the machine was out of order. "Hey the machine's not working," he said to his friend Alex as he passed by his desk.

"Nice tie." Alex replied.

James looked down. In his rush he had grabbed the exact wrong thing. A silk pink tie. A gift from his mother. "Whoops." He said.

"They're takin' the machine out of here today," Alex said, addressing the original issue. "They're gonna replace it. There's a thing about it in your email."

Sure enough, when James got back to his desk, there was an email from Barry, saying they were going to have an outside company provide coffee services every morning. James needed to fill out a form to put in his vote for what types of coffee to be made every day. The top three would be the only types brewed. Yet another victory for executive foolishness.

James wasn't too put off. Anything had to taste better than the greasy weak broth they previously made here. Especially yesterday's stuff. As bitter as anything he'd ever tasted.

"Hello, James. Good Morning," Maureen said, seeing him seated at Sheila's desk. "Don't let Barry catch you sitting here. He'll have a fit."

"God forbid." James replied.

"Nice tie." Maureen said.

"Is everyone going to give me grief about the tie?"

"No, I mean it. I like the tie." Maureen clarified. "Pink's your color. Not a lot of guys can wear it, but you can."

"Thanks. I guess."

"Good morning," Max Huberson said, entering the office. James straightened up a little in the presence of the executive. Maureen, unimpressed, took a sip of her tea.

"Morning." James and Maureen said almost at the same time.

"Morning. How's everybody feeling today?" Huberson seemed a little overly transfixed over Maureen sipping her tea. Then his attention shifted to James.



"Where's Sheila?" He said sharply, seeing James seated there.

"She's with her sick mother." James replied.

"Said she may be back tomorrow," Maureen added, "but she wasn't one hundred percent sure."

"So, James is taking her place?" Huberson said, angrier than he should have been. "And no one sent out a memo?"

Great minds think alike, Maureen thought to herself. Barry and Huberson were really two of a kind and deserved each other. "I told your assistant."

"Barry!" Huberson yelled across the office. "Barry!"

In no time, Barry scuttled his way to his bosses' side. "Yes, Mr. Huberson?" James and Maureen looked at each other, ready to see a rare, unexpected delight. The boss was going to chew out his assistant. In public.

"Did you know about this!?" Huberson said, pointing at James.

Barry fidgeted for a brief moment. "The information had been recently passed on to me..."

Huberson's face went beet red. "You know how this affects everything, don't you!?" He barked. "Of course you don't. You're too stupid."

No one said anything, but Huberson gathered his things and marched off to his office. "I need to have a discussion with you." He was halfway there before adding, "right now, Barry!"

James watched the two men close the doors behind them, fighting the urge to go and put his ear to the wall so he could hear it. "Wouldn't want to be him."

He said to Maureen. "Mr. Huberson can be a real animal at times."

"I suppose." Maureen said, sipping her tea. "I just feel sorry for Barry. I respect him." She turned to head back to her office. "Did I just say I respect Barry?"



James' attention quickly returned to other matters. He could just see a wisp of hair coming into his field of vision from above his eyes. His hair was just growing out of control, and he needed to get it cut today. At lunch, if he could manage it. But his usual clips place was at the mall, across town, near his apartment. Quickly, he flipped through Sheila's contacts and found the name of her stylist.

"What to do think?" The stylist asked him when she was done. "It makes you look younger, if you ask me."

James agreed. It was cut much like he usually had it, a part on the side and combed over his forehead, but the mass and thickness of this cut did make him look younger. "I like it." He said. He took another two looks in the mirror. This stylist was very good. "Hey, can I set up a regular monthly appointment?"

"How about weekly?" She replied.

"Sounds great." James answered, although he had no real idea why anyone would need to get their hair cut once a week.



It was the first day of the weekend, and James and Alex had gotten together to finish work on the motorcycle James had been working on for the better part of a year. A few more weekends, and it would finally be done.

"This is gonna be one nasty hog, dude." Alex said, wiping the grease off his hands with a rag. "I can't wait to see this screamin' down the interstate."

It had been a lot of hard work. James stood back to take a look at it for himself. It was a huge bike, an '88 Harley Touring with leather saddlebags. It was decked out all in chrome, with a black gas tank that was detailed with flames painted on the side. "It's sure going to be impressive." He said.

"Got that right." Alex agreed. "You gotta let me ride it once and a while."

James sighed and turned to his friend. He wasn't absolutely sure why he was going to say what he was about to say, but it just felt right. "You want it? Take it."

"What?" Alex said, shocked. "Don't fool with your pal, now."

"No, I mean it." James said, scratching his head. "I'm just not into it anymore. I mean, it was a great idea for a project... but now..."

"Now that it's over, you want to start another project, right?"

No, not really, James thought to himself. He had just gotten tired of the idea of driving a bike. It sounded good at one time, but he just didn't see the appeal in it anymore. It just looked so large and dangerous. He would never be able to handle that monster. Best to leave it up to a real man like Alex. "You got me," James lied.

"You're serious, now?" Alex said again.

"Yeah, I've just kinda had my fun with it. Time to move on." He scratched his chest. "Can you take it today?"

"Sure!" Alex said, already seeing himself riding it down the road. "I got my truck. I can take it."

"Good."

"And as soon as it's done, I'll let you have the first go at it."

For some reason, James was also picturing how good Alex was going to look on it, driving down the road. "Don't worry about it. Maybe you can just give me a ride on it sometime."



James sat at his new desk. The reception desk. Well, it wasn't formally his, but he had pretty much claimed it now. Sheila would be back at some point to take back control like only she could. Until then, though, it was his to use. James was sipping some of that delicious new coffee that they were now serving while flipping to the comics page of the newspaper when Maureen arrived.

"Hey! G'morning!" James said, cheerily.

"Morning!" Maureen replied, almost as enthusiastically.

"Wow! Did you get a tan?" James asked.

Maureen's skin was a few noticeable shades darker than it usually was. "You know, it's the strangest thing," she said. "My skin is just darker all over. All I did was a little gardening yesterday, and I got the best tan of my life!"

"Well, good for you, Maureen." James said with a smile. Behind that grin, he was wondering exactly what was causing him to be so energetic all of the sudden. Maybe that coffee had a few extra shots of caffeine in it.

"I like your hair like that." Maureen said, returning the good feelings. She, too, was wondering exactly where all this koom-by-yah attitude had come from. She hated Mondays. Normally she felt like biting the head off a small dog this early in the week.

James rolled his eyes. "I just cut it!" He said, exasperated. It was already coming down over his eyes.

"What, like last month?" Maureen asked.

More like this morning. "It just keeps growing."

Maureen was just in too good a mood to do much but complement. "Well, long hair suits you." She looked James over briefly. "In fact, I love your whole look."

James wasn't aware he had a look. The only thing he had done today was get rid of the tie and roll up the sleeves of his dress shirt. The sleeves were too long on this shirt and they kept covering his hands.

"Morning." Barry said, speeding by the two.

"Good morning, Barry!" Maureen said as bright as day. "It's going to be a great day!" Good God, what has come over me, Maureen thought.

James was massaging his chest through his shirt. "Maureen, do you think swelling in my chest is a bad sign? Do you think I should see a doctor?"

"You know, I was talking to Barry just the other day, and he was talking about his breathing exercises. Did you know he does Yoga? I found that fascinating."

"I mean, they're getting puffer every day. I even think they're starting to look like breasts."

"He does these types of exercises where he breathes in and out deeply to clear his mind. He said it helped him mellow out after a tense day."

"And they're really sensitive. I've put tape over the nipples so they can't keep rubbing against the insides of my shirt. That was driving me nuts."

"Mellow out. What a wonderful phrase. I think that's good advice. I think we could all try and mellow out a bit."

"So what do you think?" James asked Maureen.

"Oh, it's something to think about, that's for sure." She replied. "Anyway, I'll be in my office if anyone needs me."

"Yeah." James said, still poking at his chest. "I should probably see a doctor."



Barry was cringing. He was recoiling. He had just dropped the report on Maureen's desk. The report, which had left Maureen's office crisp and white was now soaked with red ink and had post-it notes exploding from its' pages. What had been all clean and pristine was being retuned as the Frankenstein's monster of in-house reports. And now, Barry was feeling like a weather man, reporting live from the heart of Hurricane Maureen.

"You do *not* honestly expect me *and* my department to be able to get this done by *Thursday*, do you!?" Maureen bellowed. "That is total *bullshit!*"

"We've already committed to Thursday, we can't push it back." Barry said. He tried his hardest to look determined, but his chinless face, balding head and english rim glasses didn't intimidate anyone. "There's no way to extend the deadline any further. Mr. Huberson is already putting himself out on a limb by giving you this much time."

"Mr. Huberson can take his report and *stick it up his ass*," Maureen said. "That brown-nosing sycophant will give us a *reasonable* amount of time to get this down, or I'll go in there *right now* and *ram* these revisions down his *cock-sucking throat*!"

"Maureen! *Please!* We have to get this done!" Barry begged – more for mercy than anything else.

"If I had every person on my staff working *twenty-four seven* until Thursday, we'd only get *half way* there! There's more chance of Mr. Huberson getting *laid* by the Virgin Mary than getting this report done by Thursday!"

Barry was going to give it one more try. "We *have* to do this, Maureen. There's no way out! This *has* to get completed! I'd like to give you alternatives, but there *aren't* any!"

"Bullshit! Huberson called the meeting, he can cancel!"

"That's just going to make him look bad!" Barry objected.

"*Look bad!?*" Maureen bellowed. "Look bad!?" Then she took a breath. And another. And another. She was trying to do those relaxing breathing exercises. "I just need to mellow out," she said to herself, "and treat people with respect."

Barry watched on as Maureen slowly, breath by breath, got her emotions down under control. She opened her eyes again and took another look at the pile. She started to flip through the pages. "The least we can do is try." She said.

"Huh what?" Barry said. Had he heard that correctly? "Uh... Yes. That's all we're asking."

Maureen scratched her chin. "I think if we use all our resources, we can... We'll have it done."

Barry wasn't certain he had just won the argument. He never won arguments.

"Great." He pushed his glasses back up on the bridge of his nose. "Good."

"We just have to mellow out and deal with what fate gives us," Maureen said, a slight smile coming to her lips.

"Work smarter, not harder," Barry suggested.

Maureen's lower left eyelid twitched. But she smiled. "I believe you're right, Barry. That's very good advice."



"This time, just buzz it," James said, resigned to get control of this hair problem once and for all. "Fire up your electric shears and mow that mess away."

The old man who was to cut his hair shook his head like a disapproving grandfather. "You really need to see your barber more often. You can't let it grow out of control like this."

"Yeah," James grumbled, knowing his last haircut was just a day ago. How was he going to budget this? He was paying more for people to cut his hair than he was for utilities.

"It's a nice head of hair, though," The barber commented. "Might as well enjoy it while you can, before it all falls out." He pointed to his own receded hairline as proof.

He would welcome that right now, James thought to himself. He might just like that option.

"So you going to college?" The barber asked.

"I'm thirty two." James replied.

"Oh. You've got a young face, there. Makes you look like a kid."

James looked up into the mirror to take a look. He did look younger. He had assumed it was the hair that was making him look this way. But maybe it was something else. His cheeks were higher than he remembered them, his lips redder and fuller. And his eyes were missing that world-weary appearance he had grown used to seeing in the mirror.

"You sure you're thirty-two." The barber said, skeptically.

"Yes." James said, a bit put off by the question. "I was thirty-one last year, and next year I'll be thirty three."

"Just never grew a beard, I guess." The barber said.

James looked at himself in the mirror again. That was what had been bothering him. He hadn't shaved in days. Why hadn't he noticed? In fact, there didn't seem to be any trace of hair on his face at all. This was insane. And it was the last straw.



"Maureen, I need to take a few hours off tomorrow for a doctor's appointment." James said, coming into Maureen's office.

Maureen was thumbing through a copy of *Vibe* magazine on her desk. She looked up briefly to register with James. "Nothing serious I hope."

"Uh, just... Just going to have something checked out. I'm probably overreacting."

"Mmm-hmm." Maureen was too busy reading her magazine to pay full attention. "Well, good."

"Thanks. I'll make it up with overtime this week, I'm sure. Any word on Sheila?"

Maureen decided to break the hold the magazine had on her. "She's saying it may be a while. Her mom is doing better, but she's going to need to..." Maureen was taking a look at James for the first time that morning. "You're trying something new today?"

James was tired of people commenting on his appearance. His hair was growing out of control, so he had tied it back in a pony tail, with a few loose hairs sweeping across his face he had to brush away every few minutes. And with the problem he was having with his chest, he had decided that wearing his shirt untucked and loose would be the best way to hide the severity of the swelling there. "Can't someone try something new without everyone making a smart remark?" He said.

"I was just going to compliment you on it. I think we should be allowed to dress how we feel. There's no need for a dress code around here. I'm probably going to ask Barry to see if he won't get rid of it."

"That's all I need, to get Barry on my case." James said. "Is it me or is that tan of yours getting darker?"

Maureen checked her arm. "I guess," she said. It didn't seem to be much of a concern for her. "I was going to ask, do you know where I can rent some old movies around here? Some old seventies stuff?"

J O E S I X P A C K

***CHANGED
AND
REARRANGED***

**“Wrongs Make Wright” by Joe Six-Pack
A Stories of the Supernatural Book**



2006 Paperback Edition

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WRONGS MAKE WRIGHT

A hotbed of intrigue, boiling emotions and powerful men, it was a dangerous place to be. Ambition ruled here, where the slightest mistake or capitulation to human weakness would destroy you. In this den of base instinct and cruel reality, there were two men who stood above the rest, puppet masters that manipulated the masses to unwittingly do their bidding.

That was the way fourth-period English class was at Middleton High.

And what made it worse was no one in the room was aware of it. Everybody thought this was just another dull class, three periods away from the beginning of the day, and the last period before lunch. They suspected nothing.

Matthew Wilke was a Sophomore, a 15 year old who was the top student in this class, and the top student in the school. Hell, the whole district. He was a young genius. His life was all about school. As such, there was no such thing in his life as 'free time.' He was either in class, hanging around teachers or studying at home in the darkness. He worked from dawn until late into the night seeking perfection in his knowledge.

Every night at two in the morning he would curse the onset of sleep, an inexcusable intrusion on his studies and a painful reminder of how susceptible he was to being just as ordinary as everyone else. Slumbering, like the common people. Sleep was the most egregious flaw of human design. It made his skin crawl.

His rival sat across from him in class, a 16-year old Junior by the name of Christian "Chris" DeVray. He was the cool, calm and collected kid who sat in the rear corner of the room, seemingly disinterested with being taught – but consistently producing top marks. He seemed a natural learner, never having to even spend a moment on homework or studying.

He was the sort of person who never really sat in a chair, he just slouched his way into it. His eyes never opened beyond sleepy slits. And he didn't talk a lot, he kept to himself and traveled his own path. In other words, every girl in school had a crush on the handsome enigmatic loner. But few were brave enough to ask for a date. And if they had, they would have been turned down. Chris' sublime tastes ran a little older than teenage girls.

Both Chris and Matthew were passing this class – as every other class they attended – with A plus pluses. And although Chris barely could be bothered to keep awake for the entire day, Matthew was using every ounce of his will-power at his disposal. Because he had one goal. Not only to beat Chris in any given contest, but for once and all demonstrate that he should be taking classes at the local college.

That was his big ambition. To dump these simpletons and go to college just like those young brainiacs he was always reading about. The ones who graduated college at sixteen, and got Ph.D's at eighteen. That was his place in life, and he knew it. If he could only convince the imbeciles who ran this daycare center they called a school.

"How is everybody doing today?" said a man in a beaten old suit. He had entered the room slightly nervous and flustered, obviously out of his element. "Can everyone take their seats please?"

He was instantly recognizable to the students as the Assistant Vice Principal, an older balding man who usually spent his time behind a desk. That he was here was an intriguing turn in an otherwise standard-issue day. It meant that something was up.

"I'm sure you notice that your teacher, Mr. Lumbregadious isn't here today." The man said. The class suddenly looked around, just now noticing that the teacher was indeed missing. They hadn't really cared enough to check. "Mr. Lumbregadious has been put in the hospital for some emergency surgery on his heart." He paused to let the expected shock and gasp for his teacher's well-being to pass.

The room was silent.

"Anyway, I'm sure you all wish him the best. So today, we'll be watching a video." He walked over to a waiting A/V cart and wheeled it in front of the class. "You'll have a substitute for tomorrow."

And with that, the class collectively checked out for the rest of the period. Cell phones were opened discreetly, notebooks were prepared for doodling and desk space was cleared for resting heads.



"Let's just face facts, Matt. You wouldn't want to." Chris said after class. He clearly wasn't delighted with the fact that he was having a conversation with this kid.

"Who says!?" Matt objected. "Besides, I'm not arguing if I would like it or not. What I'm saying is I could. The school counselor even thinks so."

"I'm not taking Mr. Ragweed's opinion for anything." Chris said, leery of bringing the sandal-footed hippie-child counselor into the discussion. "That's yer problem, Matt. You're always dealing in the hypothetical. You're never in the real world with the rest of us."

"Whatever." Was all Matthew could say. "All I know is I could teach that class just as easy as anyone else."

Chris wanted to drop the subject. "So you said a thousand times, Matt. I'm not arguin' that point, dude."

"You don't think I can, do you?" Matt cried.

"Look, I gotta get to my next class, Matt."

"I could! Why do they need to hire a substitute and waste taxpayer money! I could teach English better than anyone they're ever going to find."

"Great." Chris said, accelerating his pace to try and break from his preoccupied classmate. He was getting a little angry, and that bothered him. He didn't like getting wrapped up in bad vibes. They weren't even really friends anyway, so why did Matt keep hanging around?





“I know that lesson plan back and forth!” Matt said, sitting himself down at Chris’ table. He was interrupting a perfectly good tuna sandwich. It even had little bits of celery to give it some crunch. Now, his concentration broken, he could no longer appreciate it. Chris’ arms dropped in exasperation. He abandoned his food and excused himself.



“I’m going to go to the principal and ask! I really will!” Matt said, catching up with Chris between bells, two periods later. Chris ducked into his next class to avoid him.

He had a bad feeling that this wasn’t going to be the last he heard of this.

That was confirmed when he looked at the small window inside the classroom’s door to see Matt’s beady little eyes staring through it, while pointing at him.

“You think you’re better than me?” Chris would have heard him say if any sound could have gotten through the door.



Matt’s voice came from behind. “You still don’t think I can do it, do you!?”

It was after school, and all Chris wanted to do was get away. He tried to jump on a bus that he wasn’t even supposed to be on, but decided against it. Who knows where he was going to end up. On second thought, anywhere was better.

“*Fine!*” Chris barked uncharacteristically. “I bet you can’t tech English class! Is that what you wanted to hear!?”

“I knew it!” Matthew growled. “I knew it *all along!*”

“Oh, *man*, just leave me alone.” Chris begged. He broke into a rare gallop to get to his bus home and leapt for the door like it was a sanctuary.

Still, even as the bus pulled away, He could see Matt running pathetically alongside. His thin frame was not built for any physical activity beyond tying his shoes. He was a discombobulated mess of flailing limbs, dropping books behind him as he ran. “I’ll show you!! I’ll show you!!” He yelled in his nasal whine. “Just you wait! *You’ll see!*”



As Chris stepped off the bus the next morning, his 1/8-awake self proceeded on his usual trudge to his locker before classes begun, but was then interrupted. By screaming.

In the direction of the noise, he saw a crowd had gathered. It seemed to be watching something happening. Just another school fight? They usually didn't merit such notice. Despite that, Chris grumbled and headed over to investigate.

"Let me go! Take your hands off of me!!" Came a screeching voice at the center. Chris weaved and wove through the crowd until he could get a decent look. "I'll have you brought up on charges!"

Chris finally did get so see what was going on. The security officer who guarded this end of the East hall was holding a young woman by the wrists as she struggled to free herself. She was dressed in a somewhat dated and ragged pantsuit that was too big for her, and was in great danger of ripping it – or having it ripped for her.

"I'm the substitute teacher for Mr. Lumbregadious!" The woman cried. "This is no way to treat an adult!!"

Chris immediately realized who it was – then tossed the idea right out of his head for being truly ridiculous. A scant moment later, he retrieved the idea from the round file and examined it more thoroughly.

"You don't have the proper I.D., ma'am, and you cannot enter onto the school grounds," the security guard said, with little effort or emotion. Restraining the woman was not so hard as to cause him to even blink. He headed her out to the parking lot by practically picking her up and turning her in that direction. "Now, if you need to make arrangements, you'll have to call the district office. That's all I can help you with."

And with a hearty shove, the woman tumbled down the sidewalk on her heels, furiously trying to maintain balance. Almost immediately, the crowd of students swarmed around, threatening to instigate a truly uncomfortable situation.

"Back off!" Chris said to the mob, holding them off just by the conviction in his voice. "Let's get on to class." He said. And puzzlingly enough, the students immediately turned around and left as if nothing had happened.

"As for you," Chris said to the woman who was trying to get away unnoticed, "I think we have to get you home..." he intensified his tone, "...*Matt*."

The boy who was Matthew spun around in horror, nearly knocking himself out from under his wig.



Chris needed answers. "You honestly thought you could..." He paused. "Check that. What *exactly* were you thinking?"

"Nothin." Matt mumbled to himself. He really wasn't in a mood to talk. His plan never even considered that he would actually get caught. It was a perfect plan. And now that he was taking this cab ride home, he wasn't eager to say anything loud enough for the driver to hear.

"You didn't think you could actually teach our class, did you!?" Chris asked, knowing the answer.

Matt suddenly came to life. "See! You don't think I could!"



"Fuck." Chris muttered. "I don't fuckin' believe you."

"Well, I *can* teach that class!"

"You dressed up as a substitute teacher, were going to sneak into school..."

"It would have worked if that stupid rent-a-cop hadn't..."

Chris held his hand to Matthew's face to indicate and end to the debate.

"Dude, you're wearing women's clothes."

"Well I couldn't pretend to be a twenty-something man, so... the logical thing to do was..."

"Logical." Chris said to emphasize the word.

"Hey, if I had pulled it off, you would have said I was a genius." Matt replied.

"You're smart, Matt. I'll give you that." Chris said, shaking his head. "But you sure don't think things through, do you?"

"I wouldn't have had to do this if you hadn't forced me to prove my point!!"

Matt kicked Chris in the leg, like an petulant child. "Asshole!"

Chris used every bit of his energy to keep from doing something truly nasty to Matt. Because if he wanted to, he really could.

The taxi stopped in front of Matthew's house, and Chris was able to scrape together enough of his spare change and lunch money to take care of the cabbie.

"So, get out." Chris told Matt.

"Lemme check." Matt said, surveying the street for people. "Hokay." He said, consenting to idea. He tucked the heels under his arm and sprinted for the front door of his house, leaving Chris behind.

"You're welcome." Chris said to himself.

Matt fumbled with the keys and before he could stick them in the lock, the door opened for him. "And what exactly are you supposed to be!?" Matthew's mother said sharply, waiting for him.

"Mom!" Matt yelled. "But your car is gone! I didn't think you were home!"

"I took the car in to get fixed..." She replied, her voice dying off in a sea of unanswered questions. Like a lot of mothers, she decided to just skip over confusion and go directly to anger. "*Matthew Thomas Wilke!!* Have you lost your mind!?" She planted her hands on her hips as her eyes lit up with fury. "Your father is turning over in his grave!"

"But M..."

"I don't want to hear one word out of you! *Not one word!*" She barked. "You go right on up to your room and change!! An then, you better have one *good* explanation for..." She stopped for a moment. "*Is that my good pantsuit!?*"

Matt didn't answer as he schlepped on up to his room, humiliated.

Outside, Chris was waiting for Matt to come back out and help him with the fare, apologize, or at least wave him off or something. But it slowly became apparent that nothing like that was going to happen. Showing uncharacteristic impatience, Chris flipped open his cell phone and dialed Matt.

"*What!?*" A sulky, angry Matt said when he answered.

"Dude." Chris said. "Did..."

"Just fuck off Chris!" Matt yelled so loud Chris could hear it both on the phone and out the windows of the house. "You've really screwed up my life this time!!" And the line clicked dead.

This time? *"This time!?"* Chris yelled into the air. When had he ever done anything to Matt? He kept to himself, didn't talk much to anybody, and barely ever even exchanged so much as a glance with Matt. If Chris hadn't been checking his emotions, he would have crushed his little cellular phone with his one hand.

This wasn't the first time that little prick had made trouble for him. Matt had accused Chris of cheating on the first big test of the year, simply because Matt was too conceited to believe someone was as good as he was in English. The in order to secure a position at the top of the grade curve, Matt had even asked to see Chris's school records in an attempt to have him transferred to a less advanced class.

And now, this was all he could stand of Matt. This was the limit. He had put up with his shit long enough.

"Yes?" Matt's Mom said, as she answered the door.

"Mrs. Wilke?" Chris said. "Do you have a minute?"

Mrs. Wilke wiped her fevered brow. "This really isn't a good time... Aren't you... Aren't you one of Matthew's classmates? Do you know anything about..."

"This will only take a minute, Mrs. Wilke. I need to talk to you about Matt. Please pay attention."



It wasn't long before Matthew heard the heavy, measured steps of his mother coming up the stairs. He could only wildly speculate about the size of the ass—whooping he was about to endure.

When the knob turned on his door, his heart just stopped beating, and a deep chill went from his chest right through the pit of his stomach and down to his toes.

"Matthew." His Mom said, coming in.

"Wh... Who was that at the door?" Matt said, trying to delay the inevitable for at least another second.

"There was no one at the door. Don't try and change the subject." She walked over to Matt's desk chair and sat down. In real life it took no more than a second, but to Matthew it lasted hours. Hours to build up even more fright and fear inside.

She raised an eyebrow and smirked when she finally spoke. "Why have you taken off your lovely clothes, Matthew. Don't you like wearing them?"

"I can explain, Mom..."

"I don't want explanations." She cut him off. "Frankly, I have no idea how to handle this sort of thing." She let out a heavy sigh. "What would you do in my place? A son that has suddenly shown an affinity for wearing my clothes?"

"Mom, I don't... I'm not..."

"I'm not going to be interrupted again, Matthew. Is that clear?"

Matt nodded yes.

"Good." She crossed her legs and leaned back in the chair. "I've decided that the only way to deal with this problem is to see it through to it's conclusion."

"Wh.." Matt started to say, before the angry glare from his mother's two fiery eyes stopped him.

"Put the clothes back on, Matthew. If you're curious about this side of the fence, the only way for you to settle the matter is to experience your fantasy."

"My fantasy!?" Matt yelped in surprise. "I..."

"Zip it, mister!" Mrs. Wilke barked.

"B..."

"Zip!"

"U..."

"It!"

"D..." And Matt gave up.

His mother sported a triumphant grin. "Now get dressed. I want you to help me make dinner."

Matt groaned. It was going to take all night to get his mother to back off this crazy idea of hers.



And so it was early the next morning, that Matthew was deeply regretting that all of his arguments had been rejected by his Mother. She was strangely intent on seeing this idea through. Usually it wasn't that difficult to distract her, but despite several attempts, she remained quite focused on this task – the task of dressing up her son as a woman.

She wasn't going to let him out of this so easily. That much was clear to him now. Especially so, since his mother had woken him and dressed him this morning.

Matt's method of dressing yesterday was last-minute and haphazard, in stark contrast with the careful, patient, delicate and exhausting routine he was engaged in now. Fortunately, his smooth, young face required little in the way of shaving, but it did seem to warrant plucking. Lots of plucking. Painful plucking.

After his eyebrows had been ravaged into spindly little wisps, his mother started in with a home chemical peel that felt like a million tiny bugs crawling on his face. And after it got washed off, his face merely felt like it was burning like a pig roasting on a spit.

Seemingly content with the pain she had inflicted on Matt's face his Mom them moved on to his body. His legs were lightly hairy and would have required only a quick whisk with a razor, but Mrs. Wilke opted for a wax instead. Pain like that was never meant for a man to feel. Only the half of the species designed to withstand childbirth could do that on any sort of a regular basis.

That was nothing, however, compared to the embarrassment of having his mother dress him in her underwear, and shaping his stuffed cups to look more breast-like. It was a crushing blow to whatever budding sense of masculinity he was developing. And then, just to make sure that he felt just as bad on the outside as he did on the inside, his mother produced some sort of corset from the bowels of her closet.

Waxed, burnt and plucked, he then was stuffed like a sausage into the peculiar-looking garment and left to find his own way to breathe. Gasping for survival, his mother patiently waited before giving Matt a pile of pink to wear. Pink-tinted pantyhose went over his burning legs, providing a temporary coolness that felt good for now. A long, flowery calf-length dress which was suitable for costuming in a revival of "Oklahoma!" was draped over him. Mrs. Wilke then had Matt put on his wig of super-long, curly long brown hair – actually an old wig Mrs. Wilke used to use back in the seventies – and fit it in place.

Now feeling as low as he had in his life, his mother then handed him a nice pink pair of pumps for him to break his ankles in. Matt clumsily stuck his pink feet into them. After his mother had seated him at her vanity and given him a light brush of makeup and lipstick, "a weekend



look” she called it, an old set of silvery clip-on earrings, necklace, watch and bracelet seemed to herald the end of the procedure.

Matthew knew he had just these two days to either force his mother’s hand or negotiate his way out of this mess. He was lucky to have the weekend to come up with the brilliant and indisputable argument that he would need to get out of this mess. Just exactly how had this insane idea gotten into her head?



“What are these?” Matt asked after finishing the vacuuming and dusting.

“What do they look like?” His mother answered while watching television.

“They look like all those stupid women’s magazines you get at the supermarket.”

“Well, that’s probably what they are, then.”

“Well, why are they in my room?” Matt asked, afraid he knew the reply.

Mrs. Wilke chuckled. “For you to read.” She diverted her attention from the ice skating program to briefly look her son in the eye. “I want you to get familiar with all the things women have to go through. Those magazines are a good start.”

Matt sighed. “That’s all very nice and vengeful of you Mom, and I’m awfully happy that you’re getting a good laugh out of this, but exactly how long is this gonna last?”

His mother laughed at that. “Oh I don’t know... It depends.”

“Depends?” Matt said.

“Depends.” His Mom said again. And she returned to her TV. Matt knew that tone of voice. Once and a while, she’d get in this frame of mind where she was bound and determined to teach him a lesson. But she’d always back off before it was too late.

“All right.” Matt said, taking the magazines under his arm. “I’ll do what you want.” As long as he knew that his Mom hadn’t truly gone off the deep end, he’d make it through.



“So what about a name?” Matt’s mother asked over dinner. She was trying to make conversation rather than talk about how horrible the dinner Matt had prepared was. It had started out as a stew, then became a soup, then a soufflé, and finally declared a casserole.

“What about what?” Matt replied. he wasn’t aware of how bad his food tasted. All he could taste was lipstick.

“I’m not calling you Matthew. In that outfit, it’s ridiculous.”

“We wouldn’t want to be ridiculous now, would we?” Matt snapped back

“You just bought yourself another hour in that outfit.”

Matt tried to look angry, but instead he was a little relieved. That meant that the end was coming, at the very least.

"Now what to call you..." Mrs. Wilke pondered. "When your father and I were coming up with names..."

Matt tried to think. What was a kind of female version of his name? "Matilda."

"No..." His Mom went on, wincing at the thought. "Is was something..." She pointed her finger at him, as she remembered. "Erin."

Ugh, he thought. "That's stupid."

"What we can do is get you a little name tag, and put it on your dress. 'Hello, my name is Erin.' And you can wear that to school on Monday."

"Monday!?" Matt whined. "*A dress!?*"

"Eat your food." His Mom said with a hint of a smile on her face. "You take things too seriously."



Matt found himself going to bed that night in an old nightgown, and dressing back up in another goofy dress the next morning. His tasks that day were the laundry and organizing the kitchen. It was innocuous enough, and wasn't any big threat to ruin his weekend. Not any further than it was already ruined, at least.

He supposed that a lot of mothers with only male children probably have a little fantasy about having a daughter. Some might even have a complex about disciplining young boys by treating them like girls. Whatever the reason, Matt knew his Mom had too good a head on her shoulders to suspect any mental peculiarity. She was just having a little fun at his expense.

It still pissed him off, though.

He made quick work of his chores in the morning and veged in front of the computer surfing the internet for the remainder of the day. His Mom initially pressed him on reading the women's magazines, but eventually gave up on the topic. And by the time dinner rolled around, he was back in his old dirty robe, his face scrubbed free of cosmetics.

His mother made the food tonight, not risking another mistake by her son, and they were right in the middle of eating it in front of the TV when the doorbell rang.

"Hey, Matt." Chris said, standing in the doorway in that casual manner that Matt envied and hated.

"What do you want!?" Matt sneered. "We're *eating*."

"Yeah. Good to see you too, Matt." Chris knew coming here was a mistake.

"Nice robe. I just wanted to return this. You left it in the cab." He held out the English textbook with Matt's name scribbled on the front.

"Thanks a lot. I could have just gotten another one."

"Is this one of your friends, Matt?" Mrs. Wilke said, coming to the door.

"Hardly." Matt said, taking the opportunity to leave. He was quickly out of sight.

His mother wasn't expecting to be left alone with nothing to say, and tried to make conversation. "Do you go to school with Er..." She corrected herself. "...Matthew?"

"Just dropping by to return something. Have a nice night, ma'am." Chris said, turning to the street.

"I'm going to bed, Mom!" Chris could hear Matt's yell through the still-open door. "Shut the door! Chris has to go home now!!"

And Chris turned right back around to face an embarrassed Mrs. Wilke.

"I don't..." Mrs. Wilke said, stumbling for words to explain her son's behavior. "He didn't..."

"That's okay, ma'am. I've known Matt for a while now. I know how he is." His eyes suddenly latched on to the woman, causing her to stand, frozen in the doorway. "I need to talk to you about Matt."



"Are you up yet?" Matt's mother said, whisking the blinds open in his room. "You need to get up and start your beauty routine before you go to school. It takes time when you're a woman."

Matt's reality quickly flooded his brain. Here he was, Monday morning and his mother was still on the same kick she had been all weekend. And now, she was going to make him sweat by playing chicken with him.

He knew his mother and she'd push it to the absolute limit, and then back down at the last instant. It was just a question of waiting to see how far she wanted to push him.

"I hope you don't mind if I take the car today, I need to do some shopping downtown. I'll drive you in and pick you up after school. Is that all right?"

"Yeah." Matt replied. His mother was just full of herself these past few days, thinking she was pretty funny. Next year, when he turned sixteen, he'd finally get his license and a car – and he'd be able to rely on himself rather than his erratic mother to get around. She was just pretending he could drive. At least he'd get a ride today instead of the bus.

Matt stretched and rose from his bed, scratching himself and surveying the room. Sure enough, that pants suit was laid on a chair for him to wear. Matt snorted a laugh to himself. His Mom was going to try and scare him this morning.

"Better take your shower Erin, before it's too late." his mother said in passing by the door. Yeah, Matt thought, she's really taking this to the limit. Matt shrugged and took his shower and dressed himself in provided outfit. He also picked out the clothes he was really going to wear today, so as to save time. He twisted the wig of long brown hair on and headed out.

"Ready?" Mrs. Wilke said as Matt came down the stairs. "I thought since you looked so mature as Erin, I'd just call you my sister."

"Whatever." Matt said, waiting.

"And you should just call me Susan."

Matt was impatient. "Yeah. Okay."

"You know, I have the perfect necklace to go with those earrings. Wait here and I'll get it." His mother dashed past him upstairs. Matt looked at the clock, and they were actually running pretty late. If he was going to get to school on time, they'd need to travel at light speed. As it was, he was already going to be late for first period.

"Mom!" He yelled. "We're gonna be late!"

His mother was already down at the bottom of the stairs, holding out a necklace. "I said call me Susan, sis. Here. Lift your hair."

Matt pulled the long hair from his neck to make way for the necklace, which Mrs. Wilke tied around him. "There. That looks good. Take a look in the mirror. Tell me what you think."

"We gotta get on with this, Mom!" Matt whined. "I can't miss all of physics class."

"But you don't teach physics, Erin."

"Uh, I don't teach anything, Mom. I'm..." Matt then realized that she had picked up on what he was doing on Friday. He hadn't told her anything about trying to be a teacher. "What are you saying?" Had someone told her about what really happened on Friday?

"Well, as a substitute, you only need to..."

Matt cut her off. "Stop messing with me, Mom. What's the deal here?"

"I'm Susan, sis," his mother cut him off. "Get in the car."



Matt was begging and pleading. He was tearing at his mother's clothes, clinging like a monkey to her side. "*Please, Mom!*"

"Hush." She said.

"*I can't go like this!*" Matt cried, tear welling up in his eyes. "*Please, Mom!! Please!*"

"I told you – Erin – to call me Susan," was all his mother said.

It was just getting more and more real to Matt. His Mom was dead serious about dropping him off at school like this. He had asked her to turn back in good humor. Then he politely asked again. Then he impolitely asked, and then he demanded. Then he tried begging.

Now he was truly desperate. Did she not realize how this was going to ruin his life? Not in a 'teenage angst' my-life-is-over sort of way, but in a real, tangible 'ruin-my-reputation-for-all-time' or a 'tearing-the-fabric-of-the-mind' way.

"I don't know what you want to hear! Just please don't make me go to school like this!! *Please!*"

But it was too late. The car had already pulled up in front of Middleton High. Mrs. Wilke reached across the passenger seat and unlatched the door for her son. "Go on." She said. "I'll see you at four to pick you up."

Matt didn't budge. "Please," he said, in a sober, beaten tone of voice.

Mrs. Wilke unbuckled the seatbelt for him. "I'll wait here until you get inside. I don't want you to meet with any trouble before you get in." Still not moving,

Matt's Mom got a little more serious. "You can't be late for your first day, Erin. Get a move on."

With his body trembling, Matt stepped out of the car onto the sidewalk. His mother shut the door for him, and waved politely at her son. And then she waited for him to go into the school.

With the slowest, tiniest steps, Matt made his way down the walk way, hearing every scrape of his pumps against the cement as if they were being broadcast on loudspeakers. Where was that asshat rent-a-cop when he needed him?

He opened the door to the front office, where all late students reported, and went inside. Before he had to turn around the corner and formally enter the grounds, he took one desperate look outside again to see if that had persuaded his mother to pull away. It hadn't.

"You must be the substitute." Came a voice at the front desk.

Matt's spine locked up. He turned around anyway, resigned to the fact that his life was going to end very, very soon.

"Erin? Hi, I'm Carol, I work the front desk here. Welcome to Middleton." She held out her hand to welcome Matt. He handled it like a live grenade.



J O E S I X P A C K

***CITY BOY,
COUNTRY
GIRL***

A Tales of Transformation Story



2006 Paperback Edition

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CITY BOY, COUNTRY GIRL

My husband Richard Weinstein and I lived on the upper west side, where we had a nice brownstone we had been sub-leasing for a couple of years now. He was an investment banker, and I had my work at the radio station to keep me busy. Public radio, of course. I was twenty-four, and I had promised myself that it wouldn't be more than a year until I was ready to start a family. At least, by that time I would have accrued enough time for a few weeks of pregnancy leave, and we'd be well-off enough that I could hire a quality nanny. But even then, I had my doubts about that timetable. There was a very real possibility I was going to have to re-prioritize my whole lifestyle agenda.

Richard was also twenty-four. We both graduated college early, mostly because of our heavy prep-school credits, and partially because neither of us were comfortable in that adolescent setting of a university. I had grown up in Brookline, Mass. And he in Waterbury. So, although we lived in totally different worlds, we still had fallen in love.

We met at the Hartsfield, Atlanta airport while our flights were being delayed. We talked for what seemed like hours. In fact, it was hours, if I remember correctly. Those incompetent idiots at the gate counter couldn't get a plane out of there to save their lives.

As it turned out, Richard and I saw the world in much the same terms. We both saw life as the domain of predators. A shark tank, for lack of a better metaphor. If you weren't in on the kill, you were the one being killed. We were very practical people.

So we exchanged numbers, and we'd text each other from time to time. One night, I found myself screwed over into attending a formal function, and I needed a date. Richard seemed like just the sort of man I could use – not threatening, only slightly intimidating, and a fine prospect with a good future and wonderful table manners.

And it sort of grew from there. After we had been exchanging favors by being each other's date at company gatherings and other formalities, it seemed like we were more than compatible. Plus, after we were married, getting the brownstone was much easier. Our combined contacts and referrals almost made it too easy. We had the lease signed just hours after we returned from our working honeymoon. And we got a prime location for parking as well.

No, it wasn't in a very upscale neighborhood, but I have no doubt that we were well on our way.

It was just after the holidays when we got a letter from one of Richard's relatives. I was busy writing the thank-you notes for the Hanukkah gifts, and crossing off names from the gift list, when I found it in the mail. It was from Boregard, Oklahoma. My goodness. *Really*. Richard had relatives in Oklahoma. How *colorful*.

I gave the letter to Richard, who read it with a great deal of concern. "I have bad news, Janice. My Aunt isn't doing very well." He said, after reading the message.

"Oh, that's... how sad for her." I said to him.

"She lives by herself. After my parents passed away, I'm the only family she has left." He said. "And I think she's the only family I have left as well.."

I didn't immediately see the reason for concern. "And this affects me how?"

Richard's face was dead serious. "I made some promises..." He ran his fingers through his slicked-back hair. "I said I'd come if she ever needed help."

"You can *not* be serious." I said. "Just because she can't get out of bed, she expects you to completely put your life on hold for her? That's just selfish."

"When my mother was on her death bed, I made this promise to her. That if her sister ever needed my help, I'd be there."

"She can't hold you to that!" I told him. "That would never stand up in a court of law!"

Richard sat back in his chair, thinking. "I suppose you're right." He said. He got up out of his chair and removed his blazer. He loosened his red tie and walked over to the mantle, examining a picture of his mother. "But there are some things which go beyond legalities."

"They'll never give you that promotion if you just up and leave the firm." I reminded him.

"I don't think it would be more than a week or two. I've been working there without complaint for almost two years. I should be able to spend a little bit of that credibility."

"So you're actually going to go." I asked.



"I'll book a flight and leave tomorrow." Richard replied.

"Well, I think it's ridiculous. But I won't stop you." And besides, having Richard out of the area meant I could play the field. "Bring me back a souvenir. Maybe a butter churn or a banjo."

"Thanks for understanding, darling." Richard said, pecking me on the cheek. "Now I've got to get on the phone with my assistant to book the trip."



Richard and I traded messages for the next few days. I was worried that the house would feel empty without him, but I found ways to pass the time. I hadn't had a chance to go to the clubs for what seemed like years. The things they can do now with drugs are amazing. Even the smallest little hit will send you into ecstasy for hours. It was delightful.

But even after a week, I had yet to get a call from Richard. I had previously assumed he was busy doing whatever it was that he was doing, but now he was just being impolite. Finally, eight days after he had taken his flight out, he bothered to call. Eight days. Honestly.

"She's not quite an invalid, but she needs a lot of attention." Richard reported.

"I have your emails and your phone messages for you. Would you like me to forward them to you?" I said.

"I've had the town doctor out to look at her every day, and he tells me that he doesn't really know when she'll be ready to get back on her feet."

I was impatient with him. I didn't call for



updates on Aunt Daisy or whatever her name was. "Do you want your messages or not?" I asked.

"Janice, I can't deal with that now. I have to look after her."

"How much time could that possibly take? Surely you can just use a cell and your laptop..."

"Honey, thank you very much, but seriously, I have all I can handle, keeping the house and attending to my Aunt."

I just knew that his messages were much more important than he thought they were. His clients were not going to be ignored for long. "You're going to have to make some call backs soon, Richard. There are a lot of very important people..."

"And I promise I'll get back to them." He said, interrupting me rudely. "But for right now, my Aunt needs my help."

"So when do I tell people you'll be back home, honey?" I asked, making sure he knew I was not pleased with his attitude.

"Tell them I'll be home when my Aunt is out of danger." He replied, his tone less than cheerful.



It was two weeks later that Richard finally called again. Yes, I know I could have called him, but what would that have proven?

"It's two steps forward, one step back. She's really trying, but there's only so much progress one can expect."

"What does the old bag have, anyway?" I asked.

"Her name is Evelyn. My Aunt Evelyn. And she's only about fifty." He paused for a moment, probably trying to make me feel bad. "She has emphysema, complicated with pneumonia. It's very serious."

"Whatever." I said. "Your boss called yesterday, and wanted to know why they haven't heard from you in three weeks. What exactly do I tell him?"

"You can tell Pete that I have to take care of this house by myself, which means I do the cleaning, the cooking and washing. I have to pick up groceries, I have to pick up the doctor in town and I have to do everything else to keep this place from falling into disrepair. You can tell him that."

"You're honestly doing the cooking?" I asked. "I can't believe you just don't hire someone for that."

"There's no servants or maids around here, Janice. You have to do things here yourself. That's the way it is outside the city."

"It sounds *wonderful*." I had had quite enough of this. "Why don't you just tell your aunt you have a *life* you need to attend to, and you need to come back to New York. Promise her you'll return in a week or something. Tell her anything. *I don't care*. Just get back to work before something serious happens!"

"I know you mean well, Janice, but I can't do that. First of all, Aunt Evelyn is on medication, and isn't very lucid most of the time. Second, I have no intention of leaving this poor woman to fend for herself – and possibly die – just so I can return some insignificant phone messages."

"Insignificant!? That's not the Richard Weinstein I married! You know as well as I that if you show any weakness or lapse in focus, there won't be a job to return to!"

"That's still not as important as my Aunt's life." He said.

"Don't be so dramatic, Richard."

"I am n... Aaa... not being..." He coughed, after his voice had cracked in the middle of the word 'not.' "I am not being dramatic." His voice cracked again in the word 'dramatic.'

"Well, I certainly hope that emphysema isn't catching." I said. "Your voice sounds horrible."

"I'm fine. And emphysema isn't something you can catch." Richard was still trying to clear his throat. "I think it's just a minor infection. Just a cold. The doctor is giving me some stuff for it."

"Tell him to double it, because it obviously isn't getting the job done. Is he an accredited physician? What's his specialty? Did you get a referral?"

"I'll call you later, Janice." He said. I didn't know what had gotten into him. He was usually so much more practical than this.



It was late February before I heard from him again. I had already contacted a lawyer about divorce proceedings. I wasn't going to give Richard many more chances.

"She's showing some real improvement." He said to me. Obviously, he knew that I wanted him back home. He needed to give me good news. But I was suspicious he was just telling me what I wanted to hear. "She's able to walk around and her breathing is becoming less labored."

"Well, she seems to be doing better. I can't say the same for you. The firm has put you on indefinite leave." I told him. I expected anger from Richard.

"They did what they had to do." Was what I got.

"Maybe you don't understand me, Richard. You don't have a job anymore."

"If looking after family is going to get me fired, then as far as I'm concerned, those guys at work can go... They can go... Soak their head."

"Soak their head!?" I yelled into the phone. "Soak their head!? You just lost a job that paid you over a quarter of a million dollars a year, and all you can say is 'soak their head!?'"

"What do you want me to say, Janice? There's nothing I can do about it."

"Of *course* there are things you can do about it, Richard!" I told him. "You could simply..." I stopped myself from having the same argument with him again. "I just want you to tell me when you're coming home. It's that simple. I need you to set a date. Tell me what day you'll return."

He paused for a long, tense minute. "I... Just can't do that, Janice."

"For God sakes, Richard! How do you expect me to make it through without you? Forget about being there for your Aunt, what about being there for *me!*?"

"For you?"

"I can't do everything myself! I need to get money from the bank! I need your paycheck! I need you to make contacts through your network of clients! *You just can't do this to me!*"

"Please. I know it's been tough on you, and I'll smooth everything over when I get back. But I'm so close to getting Aunt Evelyn able to take care of herself. It won't be long. I can't leave now."

Fine. Frankly, I was *this* close to giving up on him. But he knew so many people that made for great contacts. It made my job as a radio segment producer so easy. And his membership at the downtown club was in his name. It would take me years to get that membership on my own. I couldn't just walk out on him.

"You sound like you've caught something." I said, trying to take the conversation back from the edge. "It sounds like a really bad cold."

"A cold?" He replied. "Yeah, I guess it's a cold. So you don't mind if I stay here until Aunt Evelyn is up and about?"

"I mind. I mind a lot, Richard. You're putting me in a very awkward position. I'm not your secretary, and I don't like making excuses for you." I said. "And frankly, this is pushing our marriage right to the limit. Right to the limit – do you *understand* me!?"

"Yes, I know, Janice. And I'm sorry. Truly sorry." It sounded like he was really trying to sound remorseful. Maybe trying too hard, if you know what I mean.

I was getting tired of making these calls and getting the same answer. I was just going to have to let him come home on his own. If he didn't want to come back, then I knew where I stood. "Richard, it's up to you. You need to find your priorities. Okay?"

"I know, Janice. This is hard on all of us. And I'll find some way to make it up to you."

Now we were talking. I could use a new car. Maybe redecorate the living room? Oh, I had such plans to make. "So, how bad is your cold?" I asked.

"Cold? Well, I don't know what it is, really. I sometime feel a little sick, and my voice is funny sounding, and I was in bed for a few days, but... I don't really think I'd call it a cold. More like a flu, but not really."

"You were in bed? For how long?"

"About three days. I had a really bad fever. I dropped a few pounds."

"Well, you could always stand to lose a little weight. If it's not a cold, what does that country doctor of yours call it?"

"He said it was just some sort of infection. He gave me some pills. And a couple of shots. It helps with the swelling."

"What swelling?"

"Oh, I've puffed up in few places. Especially my chest."

"Sounds like an allergic reaction. Are you allergic to anything?"

"Not that I know of. Listen, Janice I have to go now. Aunt Evelyn is calling me."

I sighed into the phone, making sure he could hear the displeasure in my voice. "Next time I talk to you, I want you to tell me when you're coming back."

"I understand." He said.



Well, around that time I got the promotion I had been waiting for, no thanks to Richard. I had been given my own program to produce, the morning drive-time news show. Oh, I had such good ideas. So far, it had been your typical NPR-type show. A little news, some interviews and then lame jazz in between. Well, I was really going to turn it upside-down. Who says you can't put celeb-

rity gossip on public radio? Maybe bring a little Howard Stern to the public airwaves.

I called up Richard to tell him the news. And maybe to rub his nose in it a little bit. Who needs a well-connected husband to succeed?



“Hello?” The voice on the other end answered. I didn’t recognize it.

Well, I thought maybe they had visitors. It was too young a voice for Aunt Evelyn. “Is my husband Richard there?” I asked.

“Janice?” The voice answered. “It’s me.”

I was dumbfounded. “Richard!? Is that you!?”

“Oh. My voice. It’s been a little strange lately.” He said. “It’s that flu I have.”

“So you do have the flu.”

“Oh, yes. The doctor told me I have a flu. So I’ve been in bed for the past week. But the doctor tells me I’m getting better.”

“Are you all right!? Do you need me to send a qualified physician? I can have you airlifted and sent to the nearest medical center right away!”

“It’s okay, Janice.” He replied. “I’m in good hands with Doctor Crumbpacker.”

“Crumbpacker? You can’t be serious. I’m calling the med-evac people right now.”

“No, really, Janice. I’m doing fine. Doctor Crumbpacker is very good. And he’s on top of everything. My weight loss is finally stopping and...”

I interrupted him. “How much weight have you lost?”

"I'm scared to check." He said. "Last I weighed myself three days ago, I was down to 137."

"You've got to be nothing but skin and bones!"

"I'm fine. I still have a lot of fat in a few places. My chest and my lower body look fine. And the doctor tells me my strength will probably come back."

"Richard, you're truly scaring me. This sounds like some sort of chamber of horrors."

"It's not as bad as it sounds. I can walk around in short trips, and Aunt Evelyn is taking care of me."

"She... *She's* taking care of... *You!*?"

"As soon as the doctor told me to rest, Aunt Evelyn was able to look after me. I guess it's that country spirit of pitching in when someone needs help."

"Is she fully recovered? That sounds suspicious."

"She's only up for a few hours a day, but she's definitely improving. I think having someone to care for has given her something to focus on. Maybe it's crazy, but I think me being in bed has helped her recovery."

"Well, that's something, at least." This whole episode was making me very nervous. I always get suspicious when a bunch of coincidences come together. Maybe that's the journalist in me, but I really didn't like the way this was shaping up. "About you, Richard. Is there anything you're not telling me? Please don't hold anything back. I really don't think this is the time to be keeping any secrets."

"Well, I'm feeling better every day. And the medication keeps me in a good mood."

"Medication?"

"I'm taking a lot of pills and getting a lot of shots. That's why I know the doctor is so good."

"What kind of medication is it, Richard?"

"I asked Aunt Evelyn, but she told me I didn't need to worry about it."

"And you trust her?"

"Of course I do. She's been like a mother to me since I got here."

I just couldn't seem to get Richard to break through. He didn't seem even *lightly* suspicious of what was happening. Shots, weight loss, forced bed rest, a suddenly mobile invalid. This wasn't right. And Richard wasn't seeing it.

"Promise me you'll stay in bed and take it easy, darling."

"I will."

"And just see if you can try and get a few more answers about what's happening to you."

He paused. "Okay. I'll give it a try."

"I love you." I said.

“I love you too, Janice.”

As soon as I hung up, I booked my flight for Oklahoma.



The flight from New York went into DFW. From there, I took an express flight to Oklahoma City. The only transportation from Oklahoma City to Boregard was by bus. Yes, by bus. Normally, I'd just get a limo for the day, but the trip was eight hours out to Boregard. I hap my laptop with me for the trip, and I caught up on my budget planning for the quarter. But just two hours out of the bus depot, the cell phone stopped working. No signal.

Fabulous. Now I was truly on my own. The battery on the computer gave out a while later, and I was left with nothing but the window to provide me entertainment.

I don't know if you've ever been out to Oklahoma – and I pray to God you have better sense that that – but it's flat. So amazingly flat. Miles and miles of flat.

I never even imagined you could have so much space in this country with nothing in it. No trees, no houses, no people. Just a road. Once and a while you could see a tractor.

Yes, a tractor! I had never seen one before. I'm not even sure what they do. But, they were there, driving aimlessly through fields of dirt. Maybe I was just here in the off season. Maybe it was a bad year for growing things. But for all I could tell, there was nothing but miles and miles of dirt stretching out for as far as I could see.

What a truly miserable place to live.

The bus stopped at something a lot like a restaurant, with vending machines that dispensed plastic-wrapped sandwiches. Barbaric. I had to drink out of an *aluminum can*.



Dreadful.

A few hours later, a few houses appeared on the horizon, and a gas station. The bus pulled up, and the driver announced that we had arrived in Boregard. I lugged my carry-on bag with me, and stepped outside into dusty wind. The bus closed the door and was on its way. And I was by myself in the middle of nowhere.

The roller wheels on my bag were useless in the rough baked dirt, and I had to drag it along into the gas station.



“Kin I help you, Ma’am?” The gawky man behind the counter said. The patch on his oil-stained shirt said “Jeter” on it. I kid you not.

“Well, Jeter, I was wondering if you could call me a cab.” I asked.

He looked at me like I was from another planet. I guess he had never seen a woman dressed as nicely as I was, in my business suit. “You’re not from ’round here, is you?” He said.

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m just here to see my husband. Maybe you can call me that cab, if that’s not too much time out of your busy schedule?”

“Well, we ain’t got no taxi cabs here in Boregard.” He said, adjusting his baseball cap. “Who’s it you come here to see?”

I had to translate the accent and the verbage before I responded. “My husband Richard. He’s visiting his Aunt.” I got the envelope out of my pocket to check the name. It was the envelope this Aunt Evelyn had sent Richard which started this whole mess. “Evelyn Johnson.”

“Oh, the Johnson place where old maid Johnson lives.”

“If that’s where Evelyn Johnson lives.”

“We just all call her Evie around here.” He said. He pulled up a sign that read “Closed” and placed it on the desk. He grabbed some keys off a pegboard and headed by me, out the front door. “But if you’re lookin’ to get out there, I can take you.”

“What will it cost me?” I asked.

He looked at me confused. “Cost you?” He asked. “I jus’ need to go pick up some fan belts from my pal Raymond out past there. I’ll drop you off on the way.”

“What’s in it for you?” I asked.

By that time, he was revving the engine in a rusted tow truck. “Git in if you’re a-comin’.”



I was let off at the beginning of a long dirt road, which this Jeter person assured me would end at Evelyn Johnsons’s house. “I can drive you all the way, if you needs me to,” he offered. I assured him I was quite capable of doing this for myself. It must have been three miles, but he turned out to be right.

Damn heels nearly killed me.

The house was a surprisingly large Victorian-style, aging badly. The place was probably white originally, but now had collected dirt, blown into the slats of wood siding by the winds which never seemed to let up around here. The house appeared caked with dirt.

I knocked on the door after struggling up the creaking old stairs with my bag. A woman answered the door. “Yes?” She said, a little scared. Then she gave a disconcerting smile. “Land sakes, you must be Janice!”

“Yes. And you are?”

She hugged me warmly. I’m your Aunt Evelyn!” She said. “Ritchie didn’t say you were coming, or else I’d have prepared a room for you.”

“I’m not staying,” I said, “and Richard didn’t know I was coming, either.”

“Well, you sure do know how to surprise someone. I saw you coming down the road, and I was worried you were lost or a car had broken down.”

“Where’s Richard?” I asked.

“He’ll be so glad to see you. He’s up in bed, resting. Did he tell you he’s had an awful time with the flu.”

“He mentioned it.” I took a skeptical look at Aunt Evelyn. She seemed to be as alert and healthy as any woman her age. It was hard to believe she had been sick at all.

I mean, it was *really* hard to believe.

“Can I see him?” I asked.

“Oh!” She said, embarrassed. “Where are my manners? Why don’t you leave your bag here, and we’ll go upstairs and see him. The dear should be done with his evening nap by now.”

I followed her up the stairs, and noticed how briskly she was moving. Some kind of miracle recovery, don’t you think?

It was a huge house, with far too many rooms just for one woman to use. The was kind of a folksy charm to the place. If this house had a little work, some paint and some decent landscaping, you might get some resale value out of it.

Except that we were out in the middle of nowhere.

Come to think of it, we were out even further than that. Even the people who lived in the middle of nowhere hadn't even heard of Boregard.

"Ritchie has had an awful time of it the past two weeks. He's just been so difficult." Aunt Eveleyn said.

"Yes, it must have been hard to take care of him while he was sick."

"Well, yes, it was a trial, but that's not what I'm talking about, dear. It's his ornery disposition that's been a problem."

I didn't believe she had actually just used the word 'ornery.' "He's been difficult?"

"I suppose you know, being his wife and all, but Richard can be downright stubborn sometimes."

Like when he's trying to take care of some old bat in Dumbfuck, Oklahoma? "Yes, he certainly can be that way at times." And frankly, I didn't like it. "I hope he hasn't been too much to handle."

"Oh, he was fidgety and fussy when Doctor Crumbpacker ordered him to get some bed rest, believe me." Her cross face then brightened. "But once he knew I was in charge, he eventually succumbed. Now he trusts me to make his decisions for him."

Yeah, he was like that when we first met. But after a while, he stopped trying to pretend he was in charge. I knew what was best for both of us. He could still be the boss at work, but I told him what to do at home. And we liked it that way. And he was perfectly fine with it – until he got that letter at least. I thought I had whipped all the backbone out of him.

Aunt Evelyn knocked gently on the third door she came to. "Ritchie dear, are you awake? Oh, I have such a surprise for you!" She opened the door and peeked through the crack. "Oh he's still sleeping. Give me a minute to wake him." She then entered the dark room and shut the door behind her.

I really didn't have time for this. That bus was due to come back through here soon, so I could get back to New York and run the production meeting on Monday. So, I needed to make my connections to get to the airport by midnight. I only had an hour or two. I needed to get his signature on a small pile of documents, get his PIN number for the debit card and the bank accounts. After all, I had bills to pay.

The door creaked open again, and the lights were on. I strained to see if I could see Richard, but Aunt Evelyn was blocking me. "Here's the surprise I promised you, dearest." She teased.

The door eased open and I could see Richard, and he could see me. And I could see that my husband, my strong, virile husband was laying in an old-fashioned canopied bed, dressed in a ruffled, cotton nightgown.



He raised his hands to his mouth in shock. “Janice!” He yelped.

“Hello... Um, Richard.” I said. The sight of him had taken my breath away. Not only was he dressed in women’s clothing, but he was resting with layer and layer of fluffy pillows and quilts.. His hair had grown a little, hanging from the back of his head. And his body, neck and arms looked bony thin. If I hadn’t been told that it was my husband, I might not have recognized him.

“Don’t look at me!” He cried. Childishly, he flung the covers over his head so I couldn’t see him.

Aunt Evelyn was angry. “Ritchie!” She yelled. “Don’t be a nuisance! Janice has traveled all the way from New York City to see you, and you will behave!”

The covers stayed up.

“Ritchie! *I said behave!*” Aunt Evelyn commanded.

And slowly, the covers dropped, but Richard turned his face away, so he didn’t have to look at me. “I don’t want to talk to her.” He said.

J O E S I X P A C K

***SISTERS
FOR THE
SUMMER***

**“Camp Counseling” by Joe Six-Pack
A Crossed Fiction Story**



2007 Paperback Edition

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CAMP COUNSELING

Brock watched the bus drive off into the woods, following the impossibly long and meandering route he had already experienced on the way in. He let out a heavy sigh in his chest and kicked some loose gravel. It was going to be a long summer. He turned around to face his obligation in life for the next two months: "Camp Na-Dle-O-Zhi-Tso."

At least that's what he thought it said. It was a moldy old wooden gate that proclaimed the name, and was well beyond need of repair. Brock continued to stand there, hoping that there was yet still some way out of it, but knowing very well that he was consigned to see this through. Literally. And anyway, he'd be hiking for days if he wanted to get out of here. There was no way back.

He was just a kid and was already locked into a fate of futility and lowered expectations. Brock didn't particularly like the world, and it didn't much like him. He had been assigned to this monument to decaying wood, insects and minimally edible food out of his debt to society. Brock was sentenced to 150 hours of community service by the court, and he had procrastinated long enough in doing it. The camp was the only way he was going to erase those hours before he had to go back before the judge.

Brock had been a foster kid, and a 'ward of the state' until he was twelve. At that tender age, he was able to save up some money from the various 'enterprises' he was involved in. A few dollars exchanged hands with the right people, and as far as the law was concerned, he was instantly sixteen. Which meant that the law was off his back for being a kid. He could now be on his own, and he could do what he wanted to do. But he hadn't waited long before he got in trouble again, and now the law was even harsher when you were an 'adult'. Now that everyone thought he was seventeen, being arrested while carrying a concealed weapon carried much harsher penalties.

He wasn't even sure the gun worked, he had never gotten bullets for it. Brock just carried it to look tough.

Brock did a lot of things to look tough. His bulky leather jacket, his sunglasses and his baggy pants all helped the image. No one questioned his assumed age. He even used a little bit of cigarette ash on his face to give him the appearance of stubble. It also made his cheeks appear hollow and his face angular. It was very effective.

So, Brock slung his sack over his shoulder and headed through the ominous gates. Maybe he could make a go of this. The little kids would probably look up to him. He'd be a big-shot. And he could play at being the cool, sullen loner he liked to think of himself as. Maybe this wasn't going to be so bad after all.

"What do you mean, there's no entry!?" Brock shouted at the meek, bookish lady who was behind the counter.

"There's no entry here." She said, looking at the entries for camp counsellors.

"Are you sure you're in the right camp?" She asked.

"Yes!" he shouted. "I got on the bus, they assigned me to this stupid camp, and now I'm here!" When he shouted, his deep 'tough' voice gave way to his true lighter tone. So he got control. "Camp nay-de-ze-so. Or whatever."

"You're not on my list. There's no Brock McCade on my list." The woman said, her nose in the air.

Brock looked around to see if anyone else was watching. "Check under Perry. Perry Campbell." He looked around again to make sure no one had heard his use his real name. "I'm supposed to be the camp counsellor in charge of recreation?"

"Oh, that's the problem." The lady said. "We already have two more of those than we should have." She shut the notebook she was referencing closed. "There must have been a mistake at the head office. I'll call." With that, she wandered away.

Brock unzipped his black, beaten leather jacket a little. It was hot, and he was already boiling mad. He hadn't taken three buses and spent the better part of two days to get out here into the wilderness to be sent home again. Sure, he hated the idea of looking after a camp full of kids all summer, but he had already committed himself. There was no return, mentally or physically.

The woman came back from around the corner. "Just what I thought, there's been a mistake."

"No shit, lady." Brock replied.

The woman raised an eyebrow at the language Brock used, but she otherwise ignored it. "They had us classified as a sports camp, but we're a crafts and activities camp for girls. That's why we have so many recreational directors." The woman smiled, satisfied in knowing she had gotten to the bottom of her problem.

"Great." Brock said, chock full of sarcasm. "And...?"

"Oh! Well, you're stuck with us until tomorrow, I'm afraid, that's when the supply van arrives, and you can get a ride back with them." The woman smiled, so pleased was she with her problem solving abilities.

"Look, lady, I have to be here because if I don't do my hours, I get thrown in jail, bitch!" Brock growled.

The woman's attitude turned nasty in a flash. "There's no need for language, young man! You leave tomorrow, I can't do anything else for you!" She crossed her arms. "Now please leave this window. Immediately!" When Brock didn't move, she reached above her head and found the handle to a rolling metal door that she pulled down in front of Brock. The window was closed.

Once he realized that there wasn't any point in standing there, staring at the metal door like an idiot, he made his way outside into the sun again. He looked around, seeing that he wasn't the first to have arrived. In fact, he may have been the last. Over towards the woods, a dozen smaller cabins had children walking in and out, unpacking and settling in. Towards the lake, the counsellors had all gathered, and were probably going over schedules and other stuff. Since he was a member of neither group, he decided to head off to the largest cabin, which he assumed was the kitchen.

Outside, an older woman of African descent was spraying down some large charred pots with pressured water. Brock walked up next to her.

"This the kitchen?" He asked.

"Mess hall." She responded.

"Where's the kitchen, then?"

"Inside."

"You fuckin' said this was the mess hall." Brock was confused. And when he got confused, he got angry. "Make up your mind, you fat whore!"

The woman, who would have been full within her rights to spray Brock with the hose in her hands, instead turned her back to him and continued on with her work.

Brock remained, cursing and shouting at the woman, but it wasn't making much of an impact on her. "Bunch of stupid cunts." He mumbled to himself. He figured that at a girls camp there would be nothing but crazy women around here running it. He was glad he wasn't going to have to stay here.

The door to the kitchen was open, but the room inside was empty. He just went inside anyway. There he did find the kitchen, but no food. It was closed. He looked around behind the counter for anything, but it seemed that everything edible was still in boxes and cans. He saw that a schedule on the wall indicated that dinner wasn't going to be served until six, five hours away. He left in a snit, cursing again at the woman washing the pots as he passed by.

Brock decided to kill some time and check out the lake, finding a small dock that was – at least for the moment – uninhabited. He dropped his large pack onto the boards, and sat on one of the pilings. He looked across a calm lake at least two miles wide. Some birds swooped around, skimming across the surface looking for food. The canoes tethered to the dock bobbed up and down slowly. It was a long way from the city.

"Fuck nature." He said to himself.

If he had grown up right, he might have gone to a place like this out of his own free will. He'd be one of those kids over there who had rich parents and easy lives. Miffy and Biffy over there had no worries, and no problems. He hated them.

God, he hated them a *lot*.

When he got back to the city, he was just going to have to tell the judge that the system fucked up, and he should get those 150 hours just for showing up. And he wasn't going to take any damn excuses. He checked his jacket pocket. Where were his smokes?

"Hi," a voice came from behind. Brock turned around quickly, shocked and surprised.

When he was able to see, he saw one of those stupid yuppie kids. She was maybe fourteen or younger, another obviously spoiled child from the suburbs. It didn't even occur to Brock that, in truth, he was only a year or two older in real age.

"I'm Arianna." She said.

Figures, Brock thought. She had curly blond hair that probably took her half the day to do, impeccable white shorts, the camp-issued shirt and clear plastic sandals. Once Brock had sized her up, he returned to his mood.

"What's your name?" The girl asked. Brock ignored her. "Are you a counselor?" She said. Brock sighed again, and gave her a look, to make sure that she knew he was able to hear her, but didn't care. "I like your hair." She continued to be a nuisance.

At least the girl had taste. His "biker" hair was his best feature. It was dark, greasy brown and fell to about his ears when he didn't have it tied up. He looked so handsome with it, it was unfair – and he knew it. "Fuck off." He mumbled to the girl.



"Hey, you'd better be nice to me. My daddy's rich!" She pouted.

Oh, that was perfect. That got Brock up and ready to show this prissy twerp that Brock McCade ain't the sort of person who cares about no silver spoons. He got up on his feet, and used his height advantage to stare down on her. He clenched his jaw, about to give the girl the verbal thrashing that she and her kind deserved, when he was kissed on the nose.

Brock's momentum was thrown completely off the rails, and by the time he had recovered only a half-second later, he was being pushed.

"Waaaaaargh!" Brock yelled, as he fell off the dock into the shallow water. *Splloosh!* The water wasn't deep, but it was cold. Brock thrashed in the unfamiliar environment. He hadn't ever swam, and hadn't even taken a bath in years. It took him an awkward minute to get on his feet. When he stood, he wasn't in more than two feet of water. But he was soaked like a rat. And just as he started to think about how his clothes were ruined, and if he had replacements, his sack came bobbing up from below.

"*Shit!*" He yelled to no one. Then he realized he had a target for his anger. That girl. "You fucking bitch! I'm gonna *kill* you!" He bellowed. He sloshed around, clumsily making his way to shore, and then once there, he scrambled madly onto the dock and ran at the girl, looking as fierce and angry as he had a right to.

But the girl stood her ground, not even flinching. She had a stupid smile on her face, as if she wasn't really here. As if she was just watching the scene through someone else's eyes. It stopped Brock's charge cold. He wasn't sure of what to make of this kid's indifference to her circumstances.

Girls. He hated girls. A lot of guys seemed to be struck stupid at the sight of an attractive girl. Well, in his opinion, girls weren't that attractive. Most of them were just grade-A number one bitches. Not that he was gay or anything. He wasn't. But at the same time, he just didn't see what the big deal was when it came to girls.

"You're all wet!" She said, pointing and giggling. Of course he was. She was the one who did it. Was she stupid? Was this some sort of camp for re-tards?

"I'm going to rip your fucking head off and shit down your neck!" Brock thundered. The girl continued to giggle. "I'm gonna tear off your fuckin' legs and shove 'em up your ass!" He boomed.

Arianna lost her balance, she was laughing so hard.

Brock didn't know whether to really haul off on this girl or to just admire her for guts. He diced to split the difference and spit on her.

"Hey!" She was angry all of the sudden. "Eww! That's so gross! You're mean!" Brock turned away and trudged back onto the shore. He didn't expect to hear the sound of the girl following him, but he did.

"What's your problem, anyway?" He cracked. "You stupid?"

"You need to get your clothes dry." Arianna said, noting the obvious. "And everything you have is wet."

Yeah? And who's fault is that? He thought. Brock didn't do anything but growl back.

"Unless you want to change out here in the open, you'll come with me." She smiled in superiority at Brock. "I've got a private cabin."

Brock was about to go into excruciating detail of how and where exactly she could shove it, but he did understand the problem. He needed to get out of the wet clothes. And since he didn't have anything else, he'd need a place to wait while they dried.

He gave Arianna a good long angry stare, to indicate he was pissed – but he was taking her up on the offer. Arianna turned and impishly skipped on ahead. Brock dragged his sopping wet bag behind him, and started to follow. But he decided to make sure she knew who was in charge here. “Don't fuck with me!” He grumbled.

Arianna continued on up a path, still skipping and humming. Brock found he had to pick up his pace to catch up. Looking around, he was glad to see that no one was watching. Who knows what kind of trouble he could get in for doing this.

Finally, he reached the front door, and followed Arianna inside. Once in, it took a minute for his eyes to adjust from the bright sun to the dark unlit interior of the cabin, but when he could see again, he saw a cabin full of twelve year old girls.

“Welcome to Jelly Bean cabin!”

“Fuck!” He said. “You told me you had a private...”

Arianna smiled. “I lied.”

Brock would have punched her right there, but the response of the ten or so girls would have been unpredictable. They'd probably call for help. He turned around and headed for the door. Before he could move, Arianna grabbed his wet pants and pulled them down to his ankles. “You're not going anywhere!” Arianna said, smugly.

“The fuck...?” He snarled.

The girls in the house all tittered and snickered, but Arianna shot them a mean look and they hushed immediately. It was obvious to Brock that she carried a lot of weight around here.

“Now, take your clothes off and give them to me.” Arianna requested. She held out her arms to receive the wet garments. The girls giggled again and Arianna quickly stopped it. “Knock it off!” She shouted.

Brock looked around for a minute, aware that undressing in front of a gaggle of twelve-year old girls was not proper thing to do, even for someone of his reputation. He pushed the pants down to his ankles, waiting for all hell to break loose. But when he looked up, he saw that the girls had all resumed whatever activities they were involved in before he arrived. It was like he wasn't even there.

He then removed his jacket and handed it to Arianna. “And...” She said. Brock then stepped out of his sopping wet pants, kicking them up into Arianna's arms. “And!” Arianna demanded. Brock removed his flannel shirt and surrendered it.

“And!” Arianna said louder. That was as far as Brock was willing to go. He wasn't going to budge. Arianna rolled her eyes in exasperation and dropped the pile. She grabbed his arm and led Brock through the cabin, to the very back where there was a private bathroom. She shut the door behind her.

She pointed at Brock's last remaining shirt. Brock wasn't going to give that up. Arianna stomped her feet petulantly, and then grabbed the shirt for herself. Brock was trapped. He couldn't really offer any resistance, without getting

into very deep trouble. He just remained still as Arianna fitfully tugged the shirt off of him.

Arianna appeared to be a little stunned when she saw his undeveloped, hairless chest. She got a funny look in her eye, but he didn't make an issue of it.

"Okay. The boots." Arianna crossed her arms.

Brock straightened himself against that. He crossed his arms and dared her to try. "Don't think so." He said. The boots were his favorite thing in the world. They made him. They were man's boots, big and heavy. He loved these boots. He'd die in these boots.

Arianna dropped to her knees and started to undo the laces. Brock pulled his feet back, and kept them from her reach. Arianna chased them, as he moved, but then gave up. She looked up at Brock with anger. Her face reddened and she looked like she was going to throw a fit.

"Rape!" She yelled, quietly.

Brock hesitated.

"Rape!" She yelled a little louder.

Brock realized the next time, she was going to be heard.

"Rrrrr..." Arianna started.

"Fine." Brock sat down on the toilet and started to undo his laces. It took him a while for the first one, as they were abnormally tall. They went clear up his calves. Arianna took the boot, and waited for the next one. As she held the boot, she tried to drain it of water, by shaking it upside-down. Brock, seeing this, dove to stop her – but before he could, the thing that he feared most happened.

The block of wood fell out.

Arianna looked at it, not knowing what to make of it at first. Why would someone have a triangular block of wood in their shoes? Then she figured it out. "It's a lift!" She giggled. "You wear shoe lifts!" She then held her sides, giggling like a fool.

Brock got up to leave, angrily swiping the boot, but fell over, losing his balance. Arianna was flat-out guffawing with laughter.

Brock reached for the door handle, but Arianna blocked him. She opened her mouth to yell. "Rrrrrrrraaaaaaa....!" She started to get louder as she stretched out the word. Brock took the boot and threw it on the ground with fury.

"Other one." Arianna said. Brock continued with the other boot. As he did, Arianna looked at the triangularly shaped wooden lift. If it was put in one way, it was only a couple of inches tall. Then the boot heel itself was almost a full inch. And if it the triangle was put in the other way...

"Stand up!" Arianna said with anticipation. Brock had just removed his remaining boot, and set it down. He looked up at Arianna with fiery hatred. He was had a severe handicap, and she was taking full advantage of all his weaknesses. She had no right knowing this. A man has his own business. Women were always sticking their noses in where you didn't want 'em. So, he hadn't grown as much as he'd wanted to. Big deal. Puberty hadn't kicked in yet, and he was patiently waiting for the day when it would boost him to his full, entitled height. It would come.

"Stand up!" Arianna said again.

Brock slowly – very slowly – stood up straight, trying to look mad. He was actually hoping to distract Arianna so that he could stand on his toes. But she wasn't fooled. She watched his feet carefully.

And when he had finished standing up, it looked like he still wasn't finished standing up. He was just barely eye-to-eye with the five-foot-three girl. Only moments ago, he had threatened her with his apparent five-inch height advantage.



Arianna covered her mouth with her hands, trying to keep herself from squealing with laughter. "I'm taller than you are!" She screamed with glee. "Well you've got shoes on!" Was Brock's defense. He knew how weak it sounded, but it's all he had.

Arianna wiped the look of astonishment and ridicule from her face, and unexpectedly turned serious. "I'm sorry. I won't laugh again. I'm really very sorry." Brock wasn't going to trust her newfound sense of respect. So he sat down again, not wanting to be ashamed of his height one second longer. He just sat there and stewed in his soggy boxers.

"Okay. You wait here and I'll set your stuff out to dry." Arianna said, leaving the room. Once she was gone, Brock could just hear her through the door. "Don't anybody go in there or I'll kick your butt!" She called out to the girls in the cabin.

The door then opened again, and Arianna threw him a blanket. She shut the door again and left without saying anything. Brock was left with a mixed opinion of the girl. Maybe she was really trying to help. *Maybe.*

It was a few minutes later when she returned. Brock had the blanket wrapped tightly around him, shivering slightly from the effect of cold water evaporating off his skin. Arianna entered this time with a little more caution, seating herself on the edge of the bathtub that sat across from Brock.

"So how old are you?" She asked. "Really."

She had an insight into people, that was for sure. But Brock didn't feel like answering the question. He kept his eyes fixed to spot on the floor.

"Have you ever kissed a girl?" She said. Brock didn't respond. Arianna kicked her feet in the air, idly. "Do you like me?"

Brock wasn't about to even address these questions. He just wanted out of here. In a couple of hours, the clothes would be dry enough, and he'd be gone. By this time tomorrow, this camp would be a memory. A forgettable one.

"I like you." Arianna said. "I think you're cool." She stood up again and headed for the door. "I'll let you know when the clothes are dry. I wouldn't leave this room unless you want a counsellor to find you." And she let herself out.

Brock turned his eyes back forward again, and slumped on the toilet seat. He pulled the blanket tighter and shut his eyes. He could hear Arianna outside, laughing and joking around with the other girls. But as he listened closer, there wasn't any mention of him. They weren't laughing about him. She acted as if the boy in the bathroom just wasn't really there.



He wasn't sure how much later it was, as he had fallen asleep, but he was stirred by the sound of a bell clanging. It took him a minute to figure it out, but he decided that it must be a dinner bell. The noise of the girls evacuating the cabin seemed to confirm it. Once he was sure everybody had left, he poked his head out of the door. The cabin was empty.

Wearing just his still-damp boxers, he tentatively poked his head outside, and saw that he had no one within sight. They were all going to eat. He gingerly walked out of the bathroom, and found his way to a side door, where his stuff

was drying. The sun was starting to set, and he figured that his clothes would get no dryer than they were right now. He picked out his usual outfit and put it on – along with his boots – and packed the rest of the stuff back into his water-logged sack. Now that he was back at his accustomed height, he felt more in control. He made his way back out to the common grounds, where he intended to find the lady who ran the place. He had to find a place to stay the night. When he got to the office, he found that metal door to the office, still shut tight. Everyone must be eating, he figured.

So he back tracked and went to the kitchen or whatever they called it, and decided to get something to eat before seeking out the lady. Inside the hall, he found a pile of trays, plates and a short commissary line. Brock grabbed a tray and slapped it down on the counter with attitude.

The lunch-lady looked up at Brock about to drop a ladle of something off-white onto his plate. Then she got a good look at her customer. “Oh, it’s *you*.” She said with sass.

Brock recognized her. It was that lady who was washing the pots earlier. “I’m sorry, but you’re too late. We’re finished serving.” She dropped the ladle back into the vat, and put her hands on her hips.

Brock hunched, ready to leap over that counter and take what he wanted. But just as he had built up the rage to do it, he got bumped in the side.

“Hi.” Arianna said, grinning broadly. “Dry enough?” She wasn’t waiting for a reply. Arianna offered her tray to the lady. “More?”

“Of course, child.” The lady said with a smile, looking not at Arianna but at Brock. He felt like ripping the woman a new one. But there were too many people in this room, and he was too far from home to get in trouble.

“Bitch.” He murmured. He left his tray and headed back outside. Arianna left hers behind as well, and followed. She quickly overtook Brock and headed to Jelly Bean cabin.

“Come on!” She said, motion him to follow. He took his time. When he got there, Arianna was already inside and returned to the doorway, with a handful of ‘Mounds’ candy bars. “I hope you like coconut. I don’t.”

She then left again, swiftly running back to the mess hall. Brock took the candy and tore them open. He was very hungry. He choked it down, eating the whole lot – despite the fact that he wasn’t much for coconut either.

As the group filtered out slowly from the hall, Brock waited outside to pick out the lady who worked in the office. He still needed a place to stay the night. On by one, everybody left, but the office lady wasn’t one of them.

He stopped one of the counsellors, a thin guy with a bad haircut. “Hey, where’s the lady?”

The kid was confused. “Lady?”

“Yeah, the lady who works the office. I need to speak to her.” Brock added.

The kid had a clue. “Ms. McMurtry?”

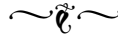
“Whatever her name is. The old bag who was in the office today.”

“Oh. She’s over in the camp across the lake,” the kid said, pointing in that general direction.

“What?” Brock shouted.

The kid was feeling a little threatened. “Um. Yeah, she works here before one, and then takes a boat to the scouting camp on the other side of the lake in the afternoon. She’ll be back in the morning.” He went on his way.

"Fuck." Brock muttered. He looked around and saw that the camp was now shrouded in near total darkness. Lights were being turned off. He didn't have much of a choice anymore. He walked out to the edge of the camp, dropped his sack and laid his head down for the night. For the next hour, he tried to sleep amongst the distant sounds of laughing children, bites of mosquitos the size of jet fighters, itching from his damp clothes that picking up every bit of dirt and clinging to him, and the gentle lapping of waves on the shore.



The birds woke him with loud, obnoxious mating calls. He figured these birds must have been in heat, they were so loud. Maybe it was because they were perched five feet from his head. He brushed himself off fruitlessly, grass and twigs still sticking to him. He was shivering from the cold. He didn't know for sure what time it was, but he figured it to be six or so.

He made his way back to the main camp area, and when he turned a corner nearly bumped right into Arianna. "You're up!" She said cheerfully. Brock mumbled something unintelligible but caustic back. He continued on his way. "Did you sleep okay?"

Brock wasn't taking questions. Arianna followed for a while, but eventually, she let him be and disappeared from the scene. He then found the front gate again, and planned on waiting there for the supply van that was supposed to take him back to civilization. He just hoped he wasn't going to get his ass thrown in jail.

The front driveway was undergoing a small renovation, with the old gate in the middle of being painted white. An abandoned ladder with a bucket of paint on it was resting against the welcoming sign. He dropped his sack, removed the precariously balanced paint and put it aside. He then rested his aching bones on the ladder. Sleeping in the wild doesn't do good for the back. It was a half hour later when he heard the bell again. It was time for breakfast to be served. His stomach growled. It needed real food. He hadn't eaten a meal for two days. Almost without noticing, he legs had delivered him back to the mess hall.

But he wasn't going to bother entering. He could see from just outside the doorway that that lunch-lady was there. He wasn't going to get served if he waited there a million years. When he turned around to leave, he bumped into Arianna again. Was she following him?

"You're hungry again, aren't you?" She asked.

Brock passed her on by, and headed back out to the gate area. It was best if he didn't think about food for now. He sat back down on the ladder, and leaned back in the sun. That's when the bucket of paint came down on him.

"Shit!" He yelled. "Goddamn it!"

The bucket hit him on the shoulder, and the paint ran down his back and then to the ground. His jacket was ruined, as was just about everything that he was wearing.

"Fuck!" he continued to curse. Hadn't he put that bucket aside? He then saw where it had stopped, leaking out a giant puddle of paint in which his sack rested.

"Oh fer...!?" Brock was out of expletives. "What the...! I'm gonna..."



He then spotted Arianna. She was obviously waiting for him to notice her. “Come on,” she said. “Let’s get you cleaned up.”

Brock thought it strange that she was around whenever bad things happened to him.

Back at Jelly Bean cabin, Brock had once more wiggled out of his ruined clothes and back into a blanket for warmth. Fortunately, the cabin was deserted during breakfast, or he’d be back in the bathroom again.

Arianna took his clothes and threw them into the sink, letting them soak in water. It was the best she could do, as a ready supply of turpentine was not the sort of thing you can easily find at a summer camp.

Brock was lucky, as his skin hadn't taken any of the paint, or else who knows what he would have had to do to get rid of it. And he still had his T-shirt and his boots. At least he thought he was lucky until Arianna threw some clothes at him.

"You can't stay in that blanket." She scolded. "You're going to have to put some clothes on."

Brock tried to disagree with her, but he couldn't come up with any reasonable arguments for staying wrapped in the blanket. For how long? Hours? A day? The blanket wasn't going to cut it.

But then he picked up the clothes Arianna had given him. The first thing he recognized was the bright blue polo shirt with the camp logo on it.

"No." Brock said. "No fuckin' way."

"Or what?" Arianna said sternly. "What are your options?"

"Maybe you could go ask one of the counselor guys for their clothes..." Brock asked.

"Hey, sir? Can I have some of your clothes?" Arianna mocked. "I've got this guy in on of the girl's cabins, and he's naked..." She trailed off, letting the absurdity of her words answer his question. The she looked around. "We've got a whole house full of clothes, and they're unfortunately all girls'. That's just the way it is."

Brock stood for a solid minute thinking about it. He removed his T-shirt, picked up the polo shirt and put it on. Alarming to him, it was a perfect fit. Arianna frowned. "Sunglasses." She held out her hand.

Brock yanked them off his head indignantly, squinting even in the dim light. He dropped them in the girls' hand.

"Boots" Arianna said. "You're too tall for a camper."

Brock spat on the ground. He then bent over, untied the laces, and stepped out of his special shoes. As he stood on the floor in his socks, he had to live with the silent, private humiliation of watching the girl in front of him become his equal in size.

Arianna took a pair of jeans from her bed and gave those to him instead. Brock was much more receptive to the jeans than the shirt. Jeans were tough and rugged. After he had them on, he would have been a little humiliated to know that the back pockets had red hearts stitched on them, if he had noticed. Brock then helped himself to a pair of all-white sneakers at the foot of Arianna's bed. They were a little tight, but he could manage.

"Stay there." Arianna said. She went into the bathroom, and returned with a washcloth. She wiped his face with the wet cloth, removing the last traces of his fake stubble. Standing back for a moment, she took in the whole picture. She shook her head.

She then went to her luggage and retrieved a long blue rain coat and baseball cap. Brock put them on and pulled the brim of the cap low. Arianna then took another look. "Okay." She said with no emotion. "Let's go."

"Go?" Brock said.

"Breakfast." Arianna said, leaving. "You wanna eat, right?"

If it were for any other reason in the world, Brock would have remained rooted to the spot, never to be moved by the forces of God nor nature. But his rumbling, growling stomach pulled him outside, leading him back to the mess hall. He pulled the raincoat tight, tugged the cap even lower on his head and hunched over to avoid anyone catching the slightest peek at the person inside the clothes.

Keeping his head tucked between his shoulders, he followed Arianna's feet as they quickly made their way to the kitchen. Once he had his tray and plate, he slid them along the counter, ready for the bitchy lunch-lady to give him trouble again.

"You're almost too late." She said.

Brock made a noise that could have been loosely interpreted as a response. Scrambled eggs dropped onto his plate, followed by two pieces of toast.

"Y'all gonna miss the best part of the day if you keep sleeping in like that, child." The lunch-lady continued.

Brock nodded his head a little. He then swiftly turned his back, and waited for Arianna to finish up. They then both turned the corner into the main dining area, where Brock was grateful that the place had mostly cleared out. He took a seat as far as possible from the nearest person, and hovered over his food to keep prying eyes away. Arianna sat down across from him, so as to further block any stares.

"Hey Arianna!" Brock heard from a little ways away. Instantly, a girl plopped herself down on the bench next to him. "Me and Michelle are gonna sign up for the painting classes, and we were wondering if you were going to take those too?" Brock couldn't see the girls from the way he was keeping his head lowered, but he could hear them clearly.

"Oh, please! Only losers take painting." Arianna said, dismissively.

"Oh, yeah. That's what I think." The girl answered.

Arianna sighed. "I'm taking dance, horseback riding and some pottery thing. Those are the classes that people with *culture* take."

"I was gonna take those too!" The girl said. "What a coincidence!"

"Me too!" Another girl said, arriving on the scene.

"Well, they're going to fill up quickly, so if you haven't signed up yet, I'd get moving!" Arianna said.

"You're right!" The girls quickly scrambled away. But no sooner had they left than another three girls ap-



proached.

"Arianna! What are you taking?" One said.

It was another ten minutes before Brock and Arianna were left alone again. The procession of girls asking for Arianna's approval seemed endless to Brock. He had finished eating in a flash, and was now staring into his lap, sitting there silently like a lump, nervously waiting to escape.

Once they were in the clear, Arianna escorted Brock back to the girl's cabin. There were a few girls milling about, but none of them seemed interested in Brock. A couple did still want to talk to Arianna, though.

Once she was free, Brock pulled her aside. "Look," he whispered, "I need to know when the supply van is coming, so I can get out of here." Brock looked around, anxiously. "The lady who runs the office knows who I am, and I'm not about to go back to her looking like..."

"Oh all right. You stay here." Arianna said, taking control. "I'll go check on the van. While I'm gone, you check on your... ugh... clothes." Then she galloped out of the cabin.

Brock quickly went to the bathroom, to see if the soaking had been successful. What he saw told him that the result wasn't perfect, but he could at least make do for the time being. The paint made it look kinda cool, he told himself. He took off the raincoat, grabbed the wet apparel and wrung it out. As he was doing that, he could see out of the half-open bathroom door into the cabin. He noticed a curious thing. Today, Arianna had dressed in red shorts and flip flops. She had combed her hair to the side and held it in place with a clip.

As he watched, some girls in the room were combing their hair the same way. One girl was fishing around in her bag, and retrieved flip-flops. And three others were also wearing red shorts. He shook his head, scoffing at the herd mentality of these girls. They all followed Arianna like lemmings.

"Who's jacket is this!?" A loud, scratchy voice said from just outside the bathroom. "And who's boots are these? Is there a boy in here?"

Brock froze up solid.

"No boys are allowed in the girl's residences!" The voice continued. As Brock stood there, petrified in the bathroom, he could see the figure of a middle-aged woman step into view, with her back to Brock. She carried the boots that had been drying on the front steps. "I better not find any boys in here!"

It was obviously a camp counsellor, and Brock figured that her age and tone of voice meant that she was in charge. If he was caught now, he was dead. Embarrassment aside, charges could be filed and almost certain jail time would result.

He had to think quickly. Looking at what he had in his hands, a pile of his clothes – men's clothes – he was about to be caught red-handed. He had no choice but to drop the evidence and scam. While the lady had her back turned, he snuck out of the bathroom, and quietly moved to the side, against a far wall, hoping to blend in with the background.

"I want answers! Who has a boy here in this cabin!?" The woman continued to press. Just as Brock had gotten to the wall, the woman turned and noticed the bathroom behind her. She strode in, and found the clothes. "A-ha!" She said. Holding the wet clothes, she brought them back out into the cabin for all to see. "Who's clothes are these!?" She shook them in anger. "I'm waiting!"



As Brock stood there, stunned, he saw the eyes of several of the girls look his way.

"Ms. Purcell, they're her clothes."

All the heads in the room turned. It was Arianna speaking. And she was pointing at Brock.

Brock swallowed heavily. Arianna crossed the shocked-silent room, and the only sound that could be heard were her footsteps hitting the hard wood floor. She stopped in front of Brock. She reached down and picked up one of his boots along the way, and held the huge shoe up in front of his face.

"These are her boots, see?" Arianna said.

"Arianna, this is no time for comedy!" Ms. Purcell barked. "Those boots belong to a man, and not to a little girl!"

Little girl!? Brock thought. Who the *hell*...!? Brock took a threatening step forward. Arianna leaned against him to stop from doing something stupid.

Ms. Purcell checked the clipboard she held and scanned it. "And what's your little friend's name?" The woman asked, trying to get a good look at Brock's face.

Arianna blocked her attempts gracefully. "Brittany."

The woman was instantly skeptical. "I don't think there's a 'Brittany' assigned to this cabin, Arianna."

"She's transferring." Arianna said coolly.

"I'll be checking on that." Ms. Purcell said, tersely. She got in Brock's face.

Brock kept the bill of his cap in between. "Brittany."

Arianna got in the way again, forcing the woman to back off. "You're an old, crusty bitch!" She yelled. "You go away and leave us alone!"

The rest of the cabin made an audible, collective, gasp.

Ms. Purcell tortured her face in a half-dozen different expressions of anger. But she didn't act on it. "I'm going to be watching you girls carefully from now on!" The woman bellowed to the rafters. "Whichever one of you is sheltering some trespasser... or vagrant... will be sent home, and... their parents called!" She took a menacing stance, staring at Arianna. "And there are no refunds! Do I make myself perfectly clear!?"

Arianna agreed. "Well, I can assure you, Ma'am, that Jelly Bean cabin won't be giving you any trouble. Because I won't be associated with anyone who breaks the rules."

Ms. Purcell gathered up Brock's clothes, sack and boots. "We'll be having our first classes in forty-five minutes, girls! I won't tolerate anybody being late!" She ignored Arianna's look of superiority as she left.

Brock tried to push Arianna out of the way, and go after her, but he immediately realized what a mistake it would be to try and stop the woman who was carrying his stuff away. He turned around and punched the log wall instead.

Arianna grabbed him by the shirt and dragged him away. "Now you've gotten me into real trouble! We don't have much time." She said. "We'll be in class in forty-five minutes."

Brock flew his arms into the air wildly as he was being tugged. "What!? Class!?"

"I checked on the stupid supply van. It comes at five in the morning. You missed it, loser." She let go, and allowed Brock get his balance. "So now, we have to work fast."

Brock was still digesting the part about the van. "The van left!?"

"Yes!" Arianna said, impatiently. "And it doesn't come back until Wednesday! You're not getting out of here for four more days." She turned her head towards two girls. "Shannon! Michelle!" The two girls quickly came to attention. Arianna ran over to them, and started to give directions. They nodded recognition, and scrambled out of the cabin. "I want donations! Hair clips, tweezers, anything!" The rest of the girls started to go through their things.

When she got back to Brock, she shoved him into the bathroom. "Look, I'm not taking any hooey from you." She said. He was too confused to really fight back.

The first sign that something was wrong was when Arianna took the cap off Brock's head and started to fluff out his hair. The next danger signal was when she started to pinch Brock's cheeks. "You're cute when you blush," Arianna said. She then left for a moment to take a look at what the girls had come up with.

A short girl with buck teeth was dropping a her contribution into a hat, with the rest of the stuff.

"Who are you?" Arianna asked the girl.

"Shelley." She replied.

"Well, Shelley. I don't think we need any dumb band-aids!" Arianna hissed, "What are you, retarded? Thanks, but no thanks, spaz." Arianna grabbed the hat and rifled through it's contents as Shelley slunk away.

She came back with a bottle and before Brock could see what it was, Arianna had his head pushed down into the sink. His hair was immediately immersed

in cold water, and Arianna ran her fingers thoroughly through his scalp. Brock tried to sit up, but Arianna held him down.

"This isn't going to hurt, you know," Arianna remarked. "And you need a good wash anyway."

"What! The... fuck! Are you... doing!?" Brock spat out, taking water up his nose.

"You're going to have to be out there with us in a few minutes, and you're going to have to look like you belong there!" Arianna said, with surprising vigor. "We don't have time to waste."

The water stopped running on Brock's face, and Arianna pulled a shower cap onto his head. Brock was sure she had gotten that backwards – you were supposed to put the cap on before you got wet. Arianna then pulled him back upright.

"Okay, don't move. If you do, this will burn through your skull," Arianna said, dipping a q-tip into the bottle. Brock tried to argue, but when she held the swab to his head, he stopped moving. Who knew what the girl was doing. Arianna carefully dabbed his eyebrows with the swab and then tossed it away.

Brock was staying rock solid still, causing Arianna to smirk. "Kidding!" She said. Brock snarled at her. Arianna then picked out two items from the pile. "I'm going to give you a choice. Mango or Strawberry." She held two tubes of lip gloss.

"The fuck you're putting that shit on my face!" Brock shouted. He pointed an angry finger at Arianna. "What makes you may think that you can push me around, you stupid little bitch!"

"Strawberry then," Arianna said, tossing the other back into the pile. "And I can do this, because otherwise, you're going to jail."

Brock gave Arianna a steely gaze, tensing every muscle in his body, looking as irate and dangerous as he could. Arianna pushed the tube of gloss onto Brock's lips, which he tried to move out of the way. He couldn't decide which was stupider, letting it be done to him or acting like a child in trying to avoid it. Finally, he relented, just staring above Arianna's head as he stoically took the shame.

"Now..." She said when she was done. "Nail polish." Brock reflexively curled up his fingers to hide them. "Will you just take it like a man!?" Arianna whined. "You're making this so tough!"

"You're not dressing me up like a little girl!" Brock proclaimed. "What's the hell's wrong with you, anyway!?"

Arianna gave up and released Brock. She sniffed, and her lower lip started to tremble. She turned around quickly, trying to hide her emotions.

Brock waited for her to bounce back, like she was surely going to do. She was a pretty tough girl, he thought. And she was probably faking anyway. Crying was the one trick she hadn't pulled yet. But as minute after minute passed, Arianna was still gently sobbing. A feeling started to creep up on Brock. He felt like shit. Sure, he'd made a lot of girls cry in his lifetime, but he had always been trying before. He wasn't trying right now. He was just acting like a baby.

"C'mon." He grumbled, touching her arm. "Let's go." He held out his hands, palms down. Arianna turned around to face him, still sad. She doubted his sincerity. Brock held his hands up higher and closer to her. "Get it over with."

She unscrewed the top of a nail polish bottle and brought out the brush. She held it still, seemingly expecting Brock to yank his hands back or curse at her again. But Brock kept his hands there, waiting.

"Don't wiggle your fingers." She said. Arianna took one of his hands and started to dab on the polish. Brock let out a nervous breath of air, and shrugged his shoulders in unease. He watched as finger by finger, a little bit of himself was leaving him. When Arianna had finished with the first hand, he looked at it closely. It wasn't like it was even attached to him anymore. It couldn't be his. He had manly, rugged hands that held hammers, tied rope and dug in the dirt. These were delicate hands, fair and fine, never having seen a day of work in their life.

Maybe he wasn't as tough as he thought he was. Maybe, he had been kidding himself with his age. He had told a lot of lies about himself, and he had started to believe them.

"Okay." Arianna said, finished with the fingers. "Now. Um..." She scanned the pile for the next item. "Here we go." She picked up something that looked like it was designed to pluck out eyeballs and slice them. She held it up to his face and flexed the handle. Brock flinched when he saw it move. "Eyelash curler, dummy." She put it to his lashes, as Brock slowly pulled his head away. "It doesn't even touch your skin, tough guy."

She did both lashes and then put the device back. "You wanna look?" Arianna said.

"Not really, no." Brock cracked. Arianna held up a mirror anyway. When Brock saw himself, he snickered. It wasn't like he had been transformed into a girl or anything, magically swiping his face away for that of a pre-teen princess. It was his face still his, just gussied up a bit. Although he did find it unsettling that the application of makeup on his face didn't make him look like a freak. The color didn't really look that out of place. He would have felt better if he looked worse. He turned around to look in the larger mirror on the wall.

"There's no way anyone's going to believe I'm one of you, you know." He said. "I know. It's a lost cause." Arianna smiled.

Brock examined himself closely in that mirror. The more he looked, the less he liked it.

Arianna then checked her watch. She put one hand on Brock's head, and directed it back to the sink. "Time's up." She said, mystifyingly enough. The water was turned back on, and his hair was rinsed out again. When the water was turned off, he tried to sit back up, but Arianna gently prohibited him. "Just a sec." She said.

Brock could feel her hand on his back, but then only felt a single finger keeping him down. Looking to the side, he saw that she was stretching her legs out the bathroom door, ready to bolt. She was trying to run. Brock's heart skipped. Something was up.

"Okay!" she said, quickly escaping the room, and slamming the door behind her. Outside, she braced it closed, and motioned for some of the other girls to help her.

"Aaaargggghhhh!" The girls heard through the door. "*Jesus Christ!*" Brock bellowed. The door handle shook furiously. The girls put their backs into it, as Brock started to pound on the door. Then, he started to ram into it with his

shoulder. *"Goddamn you fucking cunt!"* He hollered. The ramming against the door continued.

After five minutes, the obscenities had ceased, along with the pounding. The girls still waited a full few minutes before backing off.

The door swung open slowly to reveal Brock, just as Arianna had left him, but now with shocking blonde hair. He held in his hand the bottle that Arianna had hidden from him, a bottle of hydrogen peroxide.

"It's for a disguise." Arianna said, keeping a safe distance. "People might have recognized you."

"Yeh." Brock said. "That's what I figured." Arianna smiled. Brock didn't. "You pull shit like that again, and I'm going to take this pencil..." He held up an eyebrow pencil. "And see how far I can stick it in between your eyes." He stuck the pencil in his back pocket. "Anything else you want to do, or have you stopped fucking me over for now?"

Arianna looked him up and down. "Stand up straighter." She said. "Smile more." Brock did neither. She rubbed her chin. "Oh!" Arianna fiddled with something on her wrist and removed something. She tied it around Brock's wrist. "Friendship bracelet."

"Great." Brock said causticity.

"Let's get your hair dry." She got a hair dryer out of her things and motioned for Brock to get back into the bathroom.



"Michelle Volker." The counselor read off of her list.

"Here!" a voice said in the room.

Brock had made it through a couple of tests, being seen by the counsellors and other campers. No one seemed to react much at all to his presence which was both unsettling and comforting at the same time. It seemed to Brock that he wasn't in much danger of being caught anymore, but he was in danger of losing his mind.

He had tagged along with Arianna, following her to her first activity of the day, horseback riding. The class was packed, not surprisingly. You might have just as well named this magical princess pink pony class, Brock thought.

"Arianna Whittington." The instructor called.

"Here!" Arianna called out.

"Of the Southampton Whittingtons?" The woman inquired.

Arianna smiled smugly. "Uh-huh."

"Very good." She replied.

Brock was wondering what was going to happen when they found out he wasn't enrolled in this class, and he had to...

"Brittany Whittington!"

...leave or possibly even sneak out.

Arianna kicked Brock in the shins.

"Brittany Whittington!" The instructor called out a second time.

Brock then received another kick. "Here." Arianna whispered. Brock wondered what Arianna's problem was.

"Last call for Brittany Whittington!"

"Here!" Arianna called out, in a slightly different tone, to fool the instructor.

Brock wasn't at all sure what the kicking was for. It wasn't until they had gone through some basic orientation and had left the class to go to the stables, that he had put everything together.

"How did I... How did 'Brittany' get in the roll call?" He asked Arianna.

"Brittany Whittington is signed up for all my classes." Arianna said smugly. "I had Michelle and Shannon sneak into the office and add the name to classes, and to the list of kids attending camp." She smiled wickedly at Brock. "You're my cousin by the way. Cousins do everything together."

"You think of everything," Brock said coldly.

Arianna was having none of Brock's attitude. "Lucky for you." She paused.

"Hey, just what is your name anyway?"

"What?" Brock said. How had gotten this far without even saying his name?

"It's..."

Arianna interrupted. "Never mind. For now it's Brittany. You'd better get used to it."

"Believe me, I'll never forget it."

The horse riding class passed slowly, mostly just introductory lectures to riding. Brock wasn't even listening. He was too busy scanning the crowd for anybody paying too much attention to him. He spent most of his time hiding behind Arianna and anything else that would visually protect him.

Lunch passed with him sitting by himself in a corner. He didn't even try to sit with Arianna, as she attracted too many people. And after lunch, he sat through another ignored lecture in a dance class, where he went through the motions of stretching exercises. So far, so good. No one was paying much mind to him.

Brock figured that there just so many kids in the camp, that no one was really paying too much attention to him. After all, if anyone gave him a second look, it would be obvious who and what he was. It was just as plain as it could possibly be. He wondered how long he had before someone just looked at him for too long and realized it was a man in disguise. Or maybe that should have happened by now.

There was an afternoon "free period" where kids did swimming, boating, games and the like, but Brock spent it back in the cabin, killing time with a deck of cards.

For the afternoon activity, he had been signed up for Pottery. Which seemed to involve a lot of talking about what they were going to do when they finally given some clay to work with. Which hadn't arrived yet from town. Brock weathered that class without hassle.

After he had made it through dinner, he was grateful to find himself back in the relative safety of the cabin, where it appeared everybody was already in on the deception. Brock found himself the new proud owner of the bunk above Arianna, complete with his very own night shirt. It had a picture of 'Totally Spies!' on it.

As the sun set over the camp, and the shadows grew into night, the stars came out in the inky black sky. Crickets chirped in the cool night air, and the world seemed to slowly grind to a halt before it's inhabitants gave in to slumber.

Of course, Brock's eyes were wide open and stuck that way. Being alone with his thoughts was torture.

But he had another reason to stay up. At four forty-five, Arianna was woken by the sight of a leg dropping down from the bunk above.

"What're you doing?" Arianna asked. "You're not trying to leave on the supply van, are you? No one is going to take a twelve year old girl anywhere at five in the morning. And it's not coming for a few more days anyway, stupid." She lowered her voice a little, to make it sound more important. "I think you're stuck here for now."

Brock's leg dangled, then withdrew back up onto his bunk. Arianna closed her eyes and went back to sleep.

After the sun rose, Brock watched from his perch as the girls got ready for their day, feeling slightly put off. They didn't seem the least bit concerned with having a boy watch them dress and walk around almost naked. Of course, there wasn't anything to see, as they all were still too young. But Brock had at least hoped for some sort of token complaint, as it would have made feel a little bit more masculine.

After the girls had swarmed over the bathroom facilities, they left for breakfast, leaving Brock behind. He took a shower and got dressed, when Arianna returned to help.

"You can't wear that, dummy." She said, looking at him.

Brock squinted at her. "Huh?"

"Girls don't wear... Well *humans* don't wear the same clothes every day. I'll pick out something new, and then I'll do your hair and stuff." Arianna said, going through her things.

"Just forget it, okay?" Brock said, gruffly. "I'm hungry." He left without discussion.

Arianna came after him. "Hey!" She said, running to catch up. "I can't have my cousin making me look bad. I have a reputation to uphold!"

"Not my problem," Brock said, sinking his hands into his pockets. "Shoulda made me a distant relative or something."

Arianna stopped walking and stood still as Brock walked on. "I'm not kidding! Come back here *right now!*"

"Fuck off." Brock said.

Arianna's jaw dropped in disbelief. "Don't you take another *step!*" She shouted.

Brock kept on walking.

Over his meal of sausage & egg biscuits, he was trying to formulate a new plan. The camp lasted for six weeks, and it seemed that Arianna was intent on having him stick around for the whole time as her pet. What he needed to do was get back his boots – or at the very least get a hold of some real clothes – and hitch a ride out. He hadn't even ruled out just hoofing it and taking his chances in the wilderness.

Leaving the mess hall, Arianna was waiting for him. "What's your problem?" She sniped. "After all I've done for you, now you won't even talk to me!"

Brock just looked off in another direction as he went by.

"Of all the ungrateful...!" Arianna made an exasperated squeal. "No one does this to me!"

Brock shook his head as continued on. She really was just a petulant child.



Searching the camp, he eventually figured out where the counsellors, administration and staff were living – and found the rooms locked up tight. Assuming that the woman who took his boots still had them, it looked like he wasn't going to just be able to sneak in and retrieve them.

The bell rang out for the first activity period, and Brock dejectedly headed off for the stables and his riding class. He couldn't just hang out around camp – he'd be asked questions and probably sent off to some detention room or something. He didn't need that right now.

Riding class was still in the "what you need to know before getting on a horse" stage, so Brock kept himself at the back of the crowd, far away from the instructor and far away from Arianna. When the class was being shown how to "approach a horse," he could see Arianna smugly answering all of the instructor's questions and generally making a spectacle of herself. She was such a self-involved prima donna. Brock felt like going up there and giving her quick two-fisted lesson in humility.

Then it occurred to him: Horses. Escape. It was almost too perfect. A few hours on horseback, and he'd be to the interstate. That was his ticket out of this place.

Casually, Brock let himself drift away from the class a little, wandering out of sight. Once he knew no one was watching him, he opened a stable gate and clambered up onto one of the horses.

The horse broke out of the barn like a shot, right through the crowd, and into the riding pen. The students screamed and scrambled away, terrified. Brock enjoyed watching the crowd of stuck-up little twerps, knocking them over and then fleeing in panic. But riding horses wasn't like it was in the movies. He figured they handled like a car. But cars don't have a mind of their own. The horse was wild, and Brock found that he was just hanging on as it galloped around and around, looking for a way out.

It then found a break in the gates, and charged out of the pen at top speed, and into the woods that surrounded the camp. Brock was losing his grip slowly but surely, and it wasn't long before he was thrown to the ground. He hit the ground awkwardly. In agony, Brock rolled over, trying to take the weight off his side. In between jolts of pain, he saw the horse run away. Brock grabbed his ribs, convinced that they were broken, and rolled around in the wet leaves in torment.

A clamor in the distance started to get nearer. Brock could make out sharp whistling, and the instructor calling out.

"Salazar!" The woman was yelling. "Salazar!" It must have been the name of the horse. It wasn't any use. It was long gone.

Brock staggered to his feet, his sides splitting with pain, and headed off in the opposite direction. He couldn't get caught now, no matter how bad he hurt. Looking around, he really had no way to know if he was getting closer or farther away from the interstate. He just assumed that the best way to go would be away from the voices that kept following him.

Brock picked up the sound of running water. If it was a creek, then Brock's limited knowledge of the natural world told him that it would run into the lake. If he kept going upstream, that would at least have him going in the right general direction. Brock heard the sound get louder, and picked up the pace a



little to find it. His ribs were getting all knotted up with pain, but his hands couldn't locate a break under the skin. Maybe they were just bruised.

His next step in the wet, dead foliage of the forest floor suddenly gave out from under him. He slid down an embankment and lost his balance along the way. Brock's head struck something hard, and the lights went out.



A disconnected, hazy parade of memories followed. He remembered shivering cold, voices, being dragged along the ground, and then warmth. Voices were all around him. Whispering and snickering. The sound of the wind howling. A distant, muffled crowd.

Then there was the light. A singular, bright, light above him. It hovered there, shining down on him. It was all he could see for what seemed like hours. Time didn't seem to be passing. All he knew was that he existed. Where or how was beyond his ability to reason. Eventually, he could see that he was in a tiny room. There were things he couldn't make out all around him. Shapes and colors. All he could really see was the light.

"You tried to run away." A voice blew in his ear. "Why do you have to make this so difficult!?"

Brock recognized the voice. Arianna. He focused his eyes, squinting out the bright light. It was hazy, but it looked like her. And she had brought friends.

J A M E S J C R A F T

***GONE
GIRLY FOR
GOOD***

**“Big in Japan” by James J. Craft
A Tales of Transformation Book**

**Edited, additional material and
illustrations by Joe Six-Pack**



2007 Paperback Edition

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BIG IN JAPAN

“We’re what?” I stared at the record executive like he was a Martian, thinking his thousand-dollar suit was restricting air to his brain. The man smiled and repeated his words, “You’re big in Japan, huge in fact. Even though we aren’t renewing your contract here, our Japanese unit would be *more* then willing the sign you over there... that is, if you’re willing to go there.”

I looked at Ken, then at Murray, our manager, then back the Todd, the condescending “I know the music industry better then anyone” VP of Torsion Records, then back at Ken. He had that “maybe we should check it out” look on his face. Murray knew what we were thinking and nodded approvingly. I turned back to Todd, “so we do this and we might make another album, if we don’t then...” my voice trailed off.

Todd’s smile evaporated, “If you don’t go to Japan then you become another has-been, one-hit-wonder trying to shop their latest washed-up material around to other uninterested labels.” The words stung. He was basically summing up our entire music career in one painful sentence. We *did* have a big hit, six months ago. It *was* overplayed. Our CD sales and downloads *did* tank. The record label *was* going to drop us as fast as they could. We *could* shop our latest material around, but we’d look desperate, which we were, and they – the other labels – would know it. Pretty soon we’d have run out of money (if we hadn’t already), and we’d be back in Montana at the local feed mill, like we had started out. We knew the shelf life of a male pop duo was limited, and we also knew that if someone liked us somewhere... anywhere, we should go and be there. So if we were big in Japan, then that is were we would have to go.

Moments later we were all shaking hands, having ended our contract with both Murray and Torsion and signed a new contract with Torsion Records Japan or TRJ, without having had it looked over by our lawyer. We left the office tower and had our limo driver take us back to the hotel suite we had been calling home since last spring. Since Torsion had been footing the bill, we were essentially being evicted, which was okay, because TRJ had arranged for a first class flight to Tokyo later that night. We had just enough time to pack our stuff, call our families, instruct our lawyer to cancel the leases on our condo and the sports cars and SUV’s that we had acquired, and go out for a final night on the town.

With our suitcases already en-route to Japan, we packed some of our personal effects in a carryon bag and left in the limo, while we headed into our favorite club. The club was called *Rush* and it pretty much summed up our experience over the past year.

It all began when we auditioned for the reality show, American Superstar, and even though we only made it to the final ten, Torsion Records saw something in us that had potential. That and the girls loved us. Both Kenny and I were pretty good looking. Not in an overly macho way, but in a way that teen girls seemed to appreciate. "Boyish" is what Murray called it. We both quit our jobs at the feed mill and went to L.A., to begin recording the first single. We were to be known as the "Gnarly Boiz." Torsion had picked the name for us, and it was a stupid name, but we couldn't just go by "Mike and Ken," or so they told us. And so from there we got to here, in *Rush's* V.I.P. section buying a round of drinks for all of our "friends."



One such friend was a girl named Jo-Anne. She was originally from Montana too. We met at the DMV two weeks ago when I was getting vanity plates for my Lexus. I suggested that she come out one night for a couple of drinks. She had seen our video and loved our hit single, so it didn't take much to get her to join us in the V.I.P. section. We were with a bunch of girls that would do pretty much whatever we asked, and Jo-Anne pretty much fell in line. Needless to say, our "girls" made sure we were always

satisfied, but Jo-Anne had resisted providing sexual favors on that particular night. I was determined that I wouldn't leave for Japan without having had, at the very least, a blowjob from her.

Kenny and I were wearing our flashiest designer threads when we entered the V.I.P. suite. Our groupies were already there, and looking *fine*! I had given one of the girls a couple of C-notes to take Jo-Anne out and get her looking sexy. Now that I saw the results, I should have given her *five* C-notes instead. Not that Jo-Anne didn't look good... she did... but compared to the rest of the sluts that hung out with us, she looked positively dowdy.

She had already been drinking, and I could smell marijuana in the air. She was pretty loose, and after a couple of dances... and a few more drinks, she was all over me. Seated in a booth with two other groupies on either side, Jo-Anne moaned softly as I kissed her neck, running my hands up her black nylon covered legs, under her tartan pleated mini skirt, to touch her upper thighs. My other hand had unbuttoned her blouse and, as she had come to the club bra-less, was massaging her breast and fondling her nipple. She was putty in my hand, but she wasn't getting the point as quickly as I had hoped.

One of the other girls was also growing impatient with Jo-Anne's progress, and began to gently guide her. The naïve midwestern girl went through the motions of unbuckling my belt, unbuttoning my pants and fishing out my throbbing cock. Shyly, nervously, Jo-Anne responded to the other girl's instruction and was soon stroking my hard unit with her soft hand.

Then came my crowning achievement, as Jo-Anne fell to her knees and began to perform oral sex on me for the first time. I was in my glory. Me, the powerful music star, could turn timid women into wanton sluts at whim. She looked up at me as she brought me closer to orgasm. I smiled then turned to the girl that had guided her through her task and nodded with a smile. She knew what to do.

Seconds later the second girl had slipped out of her panties and moved Jo-Anne out of the way before lowering herself onto my lap. As she bucked and rocked, I looked down at the floor where Jo-Anne still knelt. She looked quite upset, knowing that I had had used her and then discarded her like a forgotten toy. The thought must have destroyed her, but it only made me feel more aroused.

When the slut I was fucking had finished, I buckled myself up and scanned the suite for Jo-Anne, but the ungrateful bitch had already left. *Oh well*, I thought to myself, *it was her loss. After tonight, it could be months before I was back here, and even after that, she'd be back. She needed me more than I needed her. And if she wasn't, then there would be some other girl for me to use.*

I found Kenny in another part of the suite, finishing up with a couple of chicks in a similar fashion to what I had just done. We said our goodbyes to

our posse, and headed for the airport. Soon we were seated in first class, (drunk but still drinking) flying to Japan to try and sing a few more songs and make a few more bucks before they tired of us like our American audience had.

Ken spent a sizable portion of the flight talking about how many hot Japanese chicks we were going to bang.

"I'm telling you man," he slurred after taking a sip of his bourbon, "those Japanese chicks *love* American men. We'll have to fight them off with sticks!"

It was hard to ignore the thought of screaming Asian girls in their super short skirts and super high heels clamoring over each other to see us. Maybe this wasn't going to be too bad after all. In fact... this might just be the best thing to happen to us... *ever*.



After getting through customs and immigration we were greeted by a flamboyant Japanese man that introduces himself as "Koshi," and who we would learn, was to be our guide, assistant and stylist while in Japan. It didn't take too long for both Ken and I to agree through shared glances that Koshi was as queer as a \$3 bill, as the saying goes. He spoke with massive lisp (even in Japanese you could tell) and dressed in a very androgynous pantsuit with very feminine collared shirt under it. Ken pointed out in the limo that the "dude was wearing makeup," referring to the subtle eyeliner and lip-gloss that Koshi wore. He had leaned over to whisper it to me while Koshi was gabbing away on his cell phone in Japanese, occasionally looking us over with a look of disappointment on his face. He almost looked offended. If I didn't know any better, I would have sworn he was complaining to the person on the other end how "straight" we looked.

The limo tore through the streets of Tokyo. We both couldn't help but be impressed by the sights that passed by our windows. The buildings, the neon, the people... it was just like any of the pictures or movies that we had seen. We saw plenty of good looking Japanese girls which only further boosted our over inflated egos. Kenny went so far as to roll down his window so that he could smile at a group of young women, dressed in what we would have called "Goth" clothes, back in the U.S. The girls smiled and giggled amongst each other as Ken winked at them.

"See man," he said as we continued on our way to wherever we were going, "They *love* us. We'll get laid every fucking night!"

I had to admit the thought was appealing. Very appealing. "Ken," I said to him, "this is going to *rock*."

“Hey, pull over here!” Ken yelled, opening the door and causing the limo to come to a sudden stop. He ran out up to a building and pointed at the window. It was a series of machines that looked like giant upright pinball machines. People were lined up like they were playing slots at Binion’s. “Pochinno!” Ken said.

“Pachinko,” I corrected. I followed him out of the car as he kept running along the sidewalk.

“They let you gamble all day long at these places, and just out in the open!” Ken yelled at me, almost drowned out by the noise of the street. “It’s illegal, and the cops can’t do nuthin!”

“Get back in the car, dumbass!” I yelled at him. It only caused him to continue further down the street, staggering drunkenly from side to side.

Koshi leapt out of the limo and begged us to get back in the car, waving his arms and gesturing flamboyantly. He was creating such a scene, I just decided to join Ken. We quickly ducked out and found a bar not far down the street.

We got good and sloshed in there. Some of things they served – have you ever had absynthe? – it was a wild spot. I was liking Tokyo a whole lot. “I’m never goin’ home!” I told Ken.

“I’m with you all the way!” He replied.

Eventually, Koshi caught up with us, and threw us back in the limo. We were too drunk to fight it or even know what day it was. After another half-hour of driving, we finally arrived at the offices of TRJ. They gave us a few cups of coffee to try and sober us up, and we were hurried into a conference room to meet with Hurato Muriata the Executive Vice President of TRJ, the Japanese equivalent of Todd, the Torsion VP back in the States.

Hurato was the stereotypical Japanese businessman, dressed in a very average-looking navy blue suit and smiling at us and asked bullshit questions about our flight, or if we had enjoyed our limo ride from the airport. I’m sure he could tell that we were both still quite buzzed, having just drank the city dry. He even offered us some Japanese beer. We didn’t want to be rude. And our buzz was starting to fade. So while we drank the cold brewskis down (and they were pretty good too) Hurato and Koshi took turns showing us data on the sales of Gnarly Boiz, and how the local media was buzzing with the anticipated arrival of the group. But then things took a very bad turn.

Hurato explained that when the single was released here, an error was made in the translation of our name. It would seem that the “Gnarly Boiz” had been inadvertently changed to... the “Girly Boys,” and before anyone noticed, the single had been released to the radio stations. Ken and I looked shocked.

“What?” I nearly spat my beer out, “Did you say... girly??”



“You’ve got to be kidding. How the hell could you guys screw that up?” Ken chided, “I mean... Girly Boys?? What the f... “

Hurato bowed, I guess in embarrassment. “We did not think you would come to Japan. Your image wasn’t as important to us as selling records.”

“But Girly Boys?” I yelled. It was kind of a sore sport with us. We weren’t exactly towering, hulking figures of manliness, but we were a long way from being confused with some swishy guy like... Koshi. “You gotta be joking.”

Hurato was facing the ground, still bowing. “It was a simple way to market you...”

Ken’s face was red with anger. “That’s no excuse! How do you idiots expect us...”

Koshi cut him off, “Before you pass judgment, you may want to look at the sales statistics,” he slid a sheet of paper over the table to us.

My look of anger and horror changed to one of disbelief. The numbers were amazing. We had done well with our first single in U.S., but it didn’t last long. The numbers in Japan were 50% higher, plus, they had released a techno-remix that sold almost as much as the original.

“Oh my god,” Ken mumbled. All I could do was stare at the paper. Hurato slid another paper over the desk. It was our contract.

“What’s this for?” I asked, “I can’t read this crazy-ass language.” I meant legal jargon, but I think he took it to mean the Japanese language. He wasn’t pleased.

Hurato's demeanor changed in a flash, from humble to hostile. "This is to remind you that you have been brought here to ensure the launch of the album is a success. We abhor failure, as I am sure you do also," Hurato said dryly, having lost almost all traces of his accent, "and I know you will agree, as you already have done in the signing of this legal document, to do whatever is necessary to ensure that the first album of the Girly Boys is a complete success."

"What do you mean... whatever it takes?" I asked.

"And why did you call us the Girly Boys... you're going to correct that, aren't you?" Ken piped up.

"In a manner of speaking," he smiled, "We do not have much of a choice but to use you. We have been told that we must use you, and so we *will* use you." He turned his back to us and examined a small framed picture on the wall. "But," He said, leaving that word to hang as a threat. "We believe that it is much too late to correct the name of the group, as the image has already been cast in the minds of the Japanese public..."



He paused as his smile grew wider, "...as we have already produced and released an animated video, starring anime female likenesses of you both, and we've used those same cartoon characters on the album cover, so it's really too late to suddenly say, *Sorry, we were mistaken, the singers are actually men.* You see, here in Japan, trust is very important, and they,

your fans, trust that what the animated character look like you do. They trust TRJ. We are worthy of their trust. So in order not to betray their trust, and dishonor yourselves and this company, *your* image will have to be corrected to match the image that has been formed in the public's minds"

I looked at Ken, he looked at me, and then we both turned to Hurato and Koshi, "Huh?"

Koshi took over, explaining that the contract that we had signed (without even looking over) contained clauses that gave TRJ executives the legal right to make temporary alterations to our appearance so as to aid in the marketing of the "product," which was our group. In short, the public expected Girly Boys to be, well... Girly. And so under his direction, with a team of hairstylists, makeup artists and wardrobe people, as well as two personal trainers to help us learn the fine art of being girly... *and* Japanese, we *would* do as we were told and we *would* be made to fit the bill as the "Girly Boys."

Kenny and I sat in stunned silence as we were driven to our apartment condo to get settled in. Even as we were shown around our expansive new digs, we were in shock as to what had just transpired. Less than twelve hours previous we had been on top of the world... and now it seemed that we were back on bottom. Maybe it was just the stun of trying to understand what had just happened, or maybe it was the drinking, but that was really when we should have backed out. We didn't.



The next day began early with our new trainers – a crusty old duo called the Ishikawas (I assumed they were husband and wife) who seemed to delight in our misery. Needless to say, they were to be delighted most of that day. They started by literally pulling our hung-over asses out of bed and throwing us into the showers. While showering, we were instructed to rub smelly white lotions over one another's bodies, including each others groins. When we initially refused, they reminded us that we were obliged by law to obey, and that if we didn't do as they said, we would soon be back in the U.S. facing a lawsuit from TRJ for breach of contract. It was humiliating, to say the least. We closed our eyes and proceeded to apply the cream to each other. I silently reminded myself that I was doing it for the money. I'm pretty sure that Ken was thinking the same thing. Without a doubt, it was the *gayest* thing that we had ever done, and I just closed my eyes and got it done as fast as I could. I prayed this was the last time I'd be this humiliated.

My prayers would *not* be answered that day.

The cream stung like hell, and burned our noses. At first we weren't sure what it was for until our body hair began to fall off in clumps and swirl down the drain. We looked at each other in horror, both of our expressions saying "*what the hell have we gotten ourselves into?*"

The trainers barked more orders at us to snap us out of the numbing stupor we were slipping into. We continued to wash ourselves off and exited the showers to dry off in big fluffy pink towels. Moments later, we were each taken by one of the Ishikawas to our respective rooms, where an outfit had been laid out for us. I was to be with Mrs. Ishikawa, or Ishikawa-san as I would eventually learn to call her, and Ken with Mr. Ishikawa. She scowled at me when I asked where my luggage was, "You sirry boy," she said in a ridiculously thick accent, "you should no arglue. You get dless fo crass light now and no talk." Already feeling forlorn and dejected, I chose not to fight. Instead I opted to slip into the pink high-cut panties that lay on my bed.

The crusty old woman almost smiled in approval before affixing silicon pads to my buttocks to fill out my hips and ass some. When they said they wanted us to look girly, they weren't kidding. More pads, which I was told were called *breast forms*, were affixed with some kind of acrid-smelling goop to my chest. I was then helped into a pink bra. I kept my eyes low, afraid that if I looked up, I might see my reflection. "Vely good sirry boy. You keep you eyes row rike plover girl" Ishikawa-san chirped from behind me. I couldn't get over the way she talked. She watched me put on the pair of girly hip-hugger jeans that had been on the bed, followed by a snug fitting pink tee shirt. With an approving grunt, she then led to me into our spacious bathroom and sat me before a brightly-lit vanity. Ken and Mr. Ishikawa were already there. Ken was being shown how to gel his long-ish hair



into a somewhat feminine style. He looked over at me with a terrified glance. Mr. Ishikawa barked at him to focus on his task. I could see fear in Ken's eyes... fear, and thin *eyeliner* around his eyes. Not only that, but his lips looked all wet and shiny... and a little bit... *pink*?

This was just nuts. I knew that the first chance any of these jackass executives saw us in these outfits, they'd scrub the whole thing. I mean, come on! They were just doing this to try and keep fleecing us for one more hit. We knew that and they knew that. This wasn't going to get any father than the next time that VP saw us.

"Mik-oh!" Mrs. Ishikawa barked at me, "pay attention. You must appry you makeup nicery now." She pointed at the counter top where an eyeliner pencil and tube of lip gloss lay.

Miko? I thought to myself as I picked up the pencil and began to outline my eyes, *who is Miko*? I concluded, incorrectly, that Miko was a very rough Japanese translation of Mike. I drew around my eyes and then turned to my instructor. She looked very displeased. Of course she *always* looked very displeased. She mumbled something in Japanese then handed me a special moist pad and told me to remove the eyeliner I had just applied. I looked back at my reflection and could understand why she was so displeased. It was so poorly applied that it was almost comical. My second try was not much better, nor was my third. Mrs. Ishikawa gave me a few more pointers, called me a "Sirry Boy" several times, and then watched as I tried again. I *was* getting better, but it would take until my sixth or seventh try (I lost count) until it actually met her standards. Then came the lip-gloss, which was super shiny with just hint of pink color, and some blush on my cheeks. By the time I had completed *those* tasks, Kenny





had finished and left the bathroom. *He must have caught on quicker than me*, I thought to myself as I was shown how to style my hair in a girly fashion.

It took several more minutes... maybe even more... for me to figure out how to style my longish, light brown/dusty blonde hair into a somewhat feminine, funky style. Finally Ishikawa-san looked like she had simply had enough, and ordered me out. Feeling beaten, I walked out of the bathroom to meet Ken in the living room, where Mr. Ishikawa had given him new shoes. They were wedge-heeled sandals with faux-cork soles that sloped up to about two and half inches at the heel. My pair would be exactly the same when my instructor handed them to me.

So, while I was struggling with my hair and face, Ken had been practicing his walk, under Mr. Ishikawa's watchful eye. Ken's extra time in his shoes gave him an unfair advantage as we walked together down the hall to the elevator. I noted that our jeans were the same, and while my tight tee shirt was pink with some kind of Japanese character on it in white, Kenny's was black with the same character in white. I must have tripped four times in a twenty-foot hallway, then again on the way to the limo, while Ken managed to make it all the way, with only a stumble or two.

We were driven to our culture, customs and language sessions that were designed to help us to understand the mindset of the "characters" that we were playing. At least that's what the Ishikawas said. They began with basic instructions on how to speak Japanese, and if we couldn't speak Japanese, they wanted us to fake an accent. Ken and I continued to be dumbfounded, as we progressed into our instructions on walking and composing ourselves like "goo rittrle Japanese girr" as the Ishikawas called it. We assumed they meant *good little Japanese girls*. Who had taught these people English? I hadn't spent much time amongst Japanese people, but the Ishikawas had the most bizarre accent I'd ever heard. It was way out there. They talked as if they were *trying* to mispronounce every word.

Anyway, all of this basically meant that we were to learn the finer points of what to do and what *not* to do in Japanese society. Our trainers called us by the names that the record label had given us (without asking for our input I might add). Ken was to be called Keiko, and I was to be known as Miko, which explained Mrs. Ishikawa's calling me by that name earlier that day. We continued to be paired with one of the two instructors throughout the week so that we might receive intensive one-on-one training in preparation of the early morning Photo Shoot that weekend. The CD release party was scheduled at the end of the following week. They were originally going to depict the anime versions of us on the album cover, but as they now had us in real life, the cover was to be changed. Of course, that meant that *we* had to be changed to resemble our cartoon selves, and quick.

It took a very long, very harsh week. Early morning starts, feminine underwear, girly jeans, wedge heeled shoes, language lessons, speaking and singing in a higher pitch, and being told to smarten up and act “ploperee” (which I assumed meant more *girly*). The Isikawas were relentless. Day after day it was the same things over and over again. So, exhausted and crushed from our training, we were finally delivered to the studio where the photo shoot was to take place the following Saturday. Ken and I were once again separated, taken by Koshi and his team to separate dressing rooms to be prepared for our first appearance as the “Girly Boys.”

After a seemingly endless morning in a salon chair, I emerged from my dressing room to see my singing partner standing before me. I almost didn’t recognize him. Ken was wearing a pair of black hip hugger flared jeans, with a studded black leather belt off center, hanging on one hip. On his feet were black boots with a chunky 3” heel and 1” platform sole. A really fuzzy black short-sleeve sweater was over his new white collared shirt, the collar having been left open and spread wide over the black fuzzy backdrop. His complexion was pale but fresh and clean, with thin black eyeliner and rosy blush. His lips were outlined with a dark red and filled with a lighter, brighter and super glossy blood red color. His short hair had been extended a little with short bangs hanging over his eyebrows. They had somehow made the brows look very thin and dainty, and the hairstyle was short and very funky. He could have easily passed for one of those goth freaks we used to make fun of in high school. Trouble was, I couldn’t tell if he was a guy-goth or a girl-goth... he could easily pass for both.

He blushed when he saw me, as if embarrassed. It was funny ‘cuz, I was equally embarrassed, and I must have also blushed deeply. We were both wearing our padding and forms and had been cinched in the right places to create a hint of a feminine body. I wore a pair of black Capri pants over white knee high stockings, encasing my hairless ankles and calves. On my feet, pink ballet flats. My shirt was a pink, retro-style, midriff cut tee shirt, that hung over one shoulder worn over a black padded sports bra. They had affixed dangling clip on earrings to my ears. Ken’s earrings were silver hoops.

My hair was also made longer with hair extensions, but was only down to my chin. It was blonde and frizzy, with long sweeping bangs combed over my left eye. Whereas the makeup artists had muted Ken’s eyes and emphasized his mouth, they chose the inverse for myself. My brows had been covered with some kind of wax, hiding them from view, (I could only assume they had done the same to Ken) only to be drawn back in as thin arches, my eyes outlined with thick black liner, drawn out at the sides. The lids swept with dark, then pale pink, then white shadow, the lashes – two sets of feathery fake lashes – were coated in thick mascara. They tickled my skin when I blinked. They brushed light pink blush onto my cheeks and painted my lips in an almost white, almost clear colored pale pink,



with several coats of gloss. As I stood before Ken, I couldn't help but stare at my reflection in the full-length mirror on the wall to the left of him. I was amazed at the transformation. I felt a stirring in my groin every time I looked at my subtle curves, pretty face... and those lips! *My god*, I thought in horror. *We* look like the girls we *thought* we were going to meet here in Japan! We look *HOT*! I looked over at my musical partner. We exchanged glances for a second, and I saw a little bit of a nervous smile form at the outer corner of his mouth.

I didn't dwell on it, as we were escorted quickly and quietly to the stage where the shoot was to be done. The set was plush and pink, with thousands of fuzzy pink black and white stuffed animals strewn about. The photographer spoke virtually no English, so Koshi was in charge of translating everything for us. Several times the photographer turned to Koshi or some of the stagehands with a smile or smirk, while glancing back at us, and said something in Japanese. Both Ken and I were pretty pissed about the whole ordeal. It was pretty obvious that we were being mocked. Everybody seemed to be in on a joke except us.

He had us pose in different locations and positions around the set, sometimes smiling and laughing, sometimes looking deadly serious. Other times we were told to try and look sexy, our lips puckered, our eyes low and smoldering. It was possibly the gayest experience in my or Ken's life... even more gay than the experience in the shower. I again prayed it would be over soon.

Truth was, it was just beginning.



Less than three days after the shoot, the single was re-released with a punchier techno beat. Ken and I angrily objected, saying that the music didn't represent at all what we were about artistically, but TRJ didn't seem to care. And after watching the numbers soar to number one on the charts, it was hard to stay angry. That, and TRJ had made sure to point out that they were well within their rights to modify the sound of the group. It was another of the many clauses in the new contracts we had signed. They were so happy with the results in fact, that they took the liberty of remixing almost *all* of our remaining tracks on the album. It really was a moot point.

Kenny and I spent the time between the photo shoot and the album release in an intensive regime of dance classes and singing in our high pitched voices, followed by culture and customs and language training, followed by more dancing and singing, then more culture, then more customs and more language. It was early up each morning and late to bed each night, followed the next day by more of the same. We were told that

it was the Japanese way... learn as much as possible in as short a time as possible. "It like clam school," Mrs. Isikawa said to me. I tried to tell her that it was "cram," not pronounced "clam," but she wasn't going to hear about it. She even had me say "clam" repeatedly to prove her point. Crazy.

After a one particularly grueling day, (I don't remember which one) we were lounging around our apartment, trying to relax and not think about what we were being made to do. They had informed us that we were to appear in costume on some Japanese talk shows to promote the album and sing our debut single after the album was officially released. Of course, as far as our instructors were concerned, we were not yet ready to appear in public as our girly selves... or as they put it, "You are far too ignorant, stupid and awkward to be privileged with the gift of appearing to the public of our country. Your foolishness and clumsy mannerisms may be worthy of vile American audiences, but here in Japan, a higher level of decorum is expected."

Ouch.

"I honestly don't know what they expect from us," Ken bemoaned, absentmindedly rubbing his eyebrows, or rather the freshly bared skin from where his eyebrow hairs had been painfully ripped earlier in the day, "I mean... I am doing my best here. It's like they're freakin' perfectionists, you know?"

I nodded, trying to hide the fact that I was grinning stupidly. Ken's newly waxed brows made him look chronically surprised. I marveled at how such a small thing, like thinner eyebrows, could change the whole appearance of his face. I was sure that my face was equally changed, as I too had undergone a similar procedure under Koshi's strict supervision. According to him, the makeup staff could save themselves almost an hour's makeup application time by giving us permanently arched eyebrows. It was all about efficiency, he told us. Neither Ken nor I were thrilled with the idea, as it was going to be hard to pick up Japanese girls when you had the same eyebrows as them. Not that we were being given many chances to even go looking for girls, what with our rigorous schedule and all.

"I know what you mean," I replied, "I think it's just the culture, you know? I mean look at the way they do everything... it's like failure is not an option, or whatever. It's probably why they make such good cars and stuff."

"Whatever," Ken sneered, "I know its just driving me nuts"

We were both dressed in the jeans we had been given that first day in Japan, with the tight low-rise waists and flared legs complete with girly short cut tee-shirt and cork soled wedge heeled sandals. We had given up asking about where our "real clothes" went, as Koshi would always fly into some unintelligible rage and storm away. There was no point in trying to get the answer out of him.

As for the shirts, we had learned that the Japanese characters on the shirts were our names... Miko and Keiko. Figures.

Also, the Ishikawas had given us new workout clothes for our training sessions. Girly, snug fitting track suits with white stripes down the sides. Mine was predictably in pink, and Ken's in black.

Kenny stretched, and then got up to walk to the counter to pour a fresh mug of coffee. A glimpse of something shiny caught my eye. I watched him carefully as he stood by the counter. The flash happened again. Ken caught me looking at his flat stomach, exposed by the short tee shirt. "What!?" He whined.

I looked closer, at his belly button, but Ken quickly covered it with his hands. "Did you..." my voice trailed off as Ken blushed and looked at the floor.

"The fake one they gave me keeps falling off in dance class," he began, slowly uncovering his pierced navel and shiny diamond tipped stud, "so they um..." His voice trailed off, as I looked closer. "And um... they..." he pulled his hair extensions behind his ears, showing the tiny silver studs in each lobe, "they did these too... while they were at it, I figured... you know... might as well."

It was obvious that he was feeling rather uncomfortable with the whole ordeal.

Well, we were both in this together. "Cool," I chipped, "Maybe I'll get mine done too."

His eyes lit up, "Yeah?"

"Sure, why not?" I replied, "I mean, we're supposed to be a duo, right? If it's good enough for you, then it's good enough for me." His expression changed to slight smile. "You know we always talked about piercing our ears back in the States. Lots of guys have both ears pierced. It's no big deal."



He smiled even bigger, “Yeah... you’re right.” We both knew that I was trying to come up with ways to justify what was happening to us.

Later it dawned on me that I was essentially volunteering to get my ears pierced just to make Ken feel better. But after all, Ken was my friend – my best friend – and here in Japan... my only friend. And if getting my ears pierced would help make him feel better about things, then it was a small price to pay.

So the next morning, after much thought and before anything was done on my hair or makeup, I told Koshi that I no longer wanted to wear clip-on earrings, and that he should pierce my ears like he had done to Ken. Koshi looked like a kid on Christmas morning, and without hesitation, called one of his beauticians over to fulfill my request. No time was wasted. It was as if he believed that my offer had a short expiration date. He was probably right. I closed my eyes in anticipation of what I thought would be a quick sharp pain in each lobe. I heard the pneumatic gun fire... three times, followed by quick jolts of pain in both the lower and upper part of my left ear. Then, a few seconds later, another three shots and complimentary pain in my right ear. I opened my eyes in surprise to see the shiny silver stud in my lower ear... right beside a second one... and a third one high in the top of the ear.

“Hey!” I whined, “What are you doing??”

But Koshi had already moved on to something else and was completely ignoring me. As was the hairstylist who was adding pieces of tin foil to my hair. She was chatting in Japanese with the beautician who was doing my nails. It seemed to be taking much longer than usual for Koshi’s staff to do our hair and makeup that day. They had *just* done my hair and nails a couple of days ago... and now again? I was a little confused. But everything would become clear as the finished me and led me to rear of the studio to wait for our limo. Koshi smiled as he said that I looked very nice for the album launch.

Shoot! I thought to myself, *the launch is today?*

We had been training so hard all week on how to act in front of everyone and I still felt woefully unprepared. My instructor, Ishikawa-san, basically said I was impossibly stupid and would likely never pass the test of the general public. “But,” she said, in broken English, “If in doubt... act like proper Japanese girrr and smy-oh and gigg-oh... and bow you head.”

Not exactly a glowing recommendation, but sound advice none-the-less. Ken’s instructor had basically said the same thing... *if all else fails, smile, giggle and look down shyly*. I was actually beginning to understand the way they talked.

I repeated this in my head over and over as I approached Ken standing with Koshi at the door, waiting for the limo.

Smile, giggle, look down shyly.

Ken was looking down, mumbling to himself in Japanese as I drew near. He was wearing a variation of the outfit he had worn for the photo shoot. Instead of the black jeans, he wore flared black leather pants, and instead of the boots with the 3" chunky heel, he was given boots with a four and a half inch wedge heel. His makeup was the same, but I could have sworn the padding they used to "fill us out" was much thicker, more noticeable. His hair looked just a little darker, and just a little longer, and his nails... now blood red like his lipstick... were nearly an inch long!

He stopped his mumbling and looked up with a smile when he noticed it was me.

"Hello," he spoke softly in Japanese, using a higher, sweeter tone of voice, "I am Keiko. I am honored to meet you"

We both bowed at each other and recited our mantra out loud in Japanese, "Smile, giggle, look down shyly."

We both broke into a fit of silly giggles, just as we had been trained to do. Still speaking Japanese, I complimented Ken on how nice he looked. Why not just go with the flow? He of course returned the complement. I too was dressed similarly to the photo shoot, with tight pink Capri pants instead of black, and pink platform suede mary janes instead of flats. As with Ken, I was convinced they were using more padding on me too, and I knew my hair was slightly longer and lighter and my nails were longer and pinker. The extra time spent on each of us was done to ensure that, as Koshi put it, we were "perfect."

The ride to the release party was much like our first ride into the city almost two weeks ago. We were both sitting opposite Koshi, who was once again chatting in Japanese on his cell phone. This time however, aside from looking completely different than we *had*, we were even sitting different... at least Kenny was.

I looked over at my musical partner to see him sitting very daintily, toes pointed downwards, heels lifted, knees together, hands neatly folded on lap, looking down at his legs. I stared at him in disbelief for some time before he noticed my gaze. His posture suddenly changed as he turned to me, "What?"

"Nothing," I chirped, "Well... not nothing... it's just that well..."

Kenny's expression became almost angry, "Wha-at??" he whined.

"You just seem to be taking this whole thing pretty seriously. You know? Like the whole way you're sitting and the way you talk and stuff. It's really... girly. That's all"

His angry look melted to a scoff, "Well Duh! It's *supposed* to be girly Mike. Haven't you been paying attention? We're the *Girly Boys* now Mike... the gir-rrr-lee boys. That's what we are. That's what the fans want,

it's what they expect." He turned away and gazed out the window, as if collecting his thoughts before turning back to me, "Maybe *you* aren't taking this seriously *enough* Mike. Did you consider *that*?"

I said nothing. It was really the first time Ken and I had disagreed on anything... ever. It stung a little that he thought I wasn't taking this seriously enough, though as I pondered it more it occurred to me that he *could* possibly be right. Maybe I *wasn't* taking this seriously. But then again, just how seriously *should* I be taking this all? Here I was, in Japan, dressed as a girl, on my way to release my newly remixed *techno* album. If you had told me this would happen even a few months ago, I would have laughed hysterically. The whole thing sounded ridiculous.

And yet... here I was.

The release party was pretty standard fare for a record company, and pretty much identical to what had been done for us back in the U.S. We



started on stage, lip-synching to our second single, then being introduced by the head of the record company, then were escorted by him and Koshi around the crowded hall to be introduced to dignitaries and executives. The primary difference that I could tell, was that the majority of the members of the audience were middle aged men in dark suits.

Hurato ushered us to the first group of executives. He made some sort of greeting in Japanese, and gestured to us. It was our cue. In synce, just like the Ishikawas had schooled us to say, we said, "He-ro, we are Glirrlly Boys."

With panic and anger in his eyes, he grabbed us both by the arms and dragged us away. "Do you have no shame!?" He growled. "Do you have *no respect!*?" Ken and I looked at each other in bewilderment. We were just doing what we had been told to do. "You disgrace your family and all of your country by talking like that! Your manner is so offensive to me and every Japanese..." And he was cut off by Koshi who quickly swept in and took Hurato aside for a moment.

They squabbled as they angrily talked, but I couldn't hear anything in the loud room. Our techno music over the speakers was drowning everything out. Ken tugged me on the arm. "What the hell?" He said. I shrugged. As I tried to figure out what the argument was all about, Koshi was pointing at a man in the crowd emphatically. He did so two or three times before Hurato could be bothered to look in the direction he was pointing, and when he did so, his expression changed. His anger was replaced by a look of pure fear.

He seemed to need to confirm whatever he had seen with Koshi, and then looked back over at us. He broke out into a sweat. I tried to see who they were pointing at, but I didn't see much. Just businessmen. And one person who was dressed a little differently. But I couldn't make it out. Hurato blocked my view, coming back over to us, dabbing his forehead with a handkerchief.

"You are speaking as your instructors have taught you?" He said to us. We nodded, unsure if it was the right answer. "That is good. Very good." He then straightened his tie and led us back into the crowd. I don't know if we ever figured out what the problem was.

By half way through the evening, both Ken and I were feeling pretty dizzy as we had been introduced to so many people, seemingly identical men in suits, and all of them had gazed upon us with the same leering smiles. "He-ro," we'd say. And then Koshi would whisper in their ears and they'd laugh hysterically. Neither Ken or myself understood, but we seemed to be going over pretty well. Still, dressed as we were, the laughing made me feel very awkward. Not to mention it was quite uncomfortable and exhausting, since we had to smile and giggle and act like we were so very lucky to make their acquaintances.

“Do they even know that we *aren't* really girls?” I whispered to Ken while we were being hustled from one group of men to the next. He simply turned to me with a bewildered expression and shrugged, before forcing a wide grin as we were again introduced. This time, however, the man we met was not wearing a suit. In fact, he was dressed quite fashionably in a leather jacket with a high neck sweater. I must have blushed, as I was quite embarrassed to find myself thinking that he was dressed rather well, if I had been a girl, I might have even thought him handsome.



I shook my head as Kenny finished being introduced. *I am not a girl*, I said to myself as he turned to me and smiled, his hand extended, “Danny Chano” he said. His forwardness caught me off guard. I blushed even harder, fumbling to find the words.

“My... Mee... Miko,” I finally spat out, taking his hand in mine for a firm shake. His eyes were locked on my own. I quickly remembered my training, and smiled, giggled then looked down.

“Danny is the most famous talk show host in all of Japan” I heard Koshi say in the background.

“And a very big fan of your work,” Danny added, “I can’t wait to have you...”

I coughed, and looked up; his eyes were exactly where I left them.

J A M E S J C R A F T

THAMES GREENE

by James J. Craft
A Tales of Transformation Book

Edited, additional material and
illustrations by Joe Six-Pack



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THAMES GREENE

The sign said it would be the finest master-planned community in the country. It was hard to argue. The builder controlled everything. From the roads coming into the new town-to-be, to the parks, commercial spaces, and schools... Everything was indeed “master-planned.” It was exciting to think that you could be a part of a new town that was being built from the ground up. That was exactly what Hank was thinking as he drove past the new development’s massive stone gates. He worked in the city, and true... City living did have its perks. It was nice to be so close to everything, but he knew it was no place to raise kids. There were so many bad influences. The air was bad. There was crime... Etc, etc.

Maybe Thames Greene was the answer... The answer to his question of “where to move so that will be better off?” The artists’ rendering of what the finished community would look like was exactly what Hank was hoping for; lovely brick homes on tree lined streets, kids playing in state-of-the-art recreation facilities, neighbors you actually wanted to meet. It was, in a word, perfect. That and the prices were right, very right. Better than just *right* – it was a bargain. Hank knew he could easily sell his old two-story row house in the city for far more than a house of twice the size would cost out here. And with the planned interstate bypass expressway extension and commuter rail-link, he and his wife could easily get in and out of the city. Worst case, it might take another 20 minutes. But those twenty minutes would well be worth it in the long run.

Ira thought the same thing. A co-worker had told him about Thames Greene. He had boasted about how fantastic his new home was going to be, and how cheap... make that inexpensive. Ira’s interest was piqued. He had spent the last few years in a modest town house in a nondescript part of the city while his executive counterparts hung their hats in large, opulent homes in affluent neighborhoods. He was, to be blunt, jealous. But his jealousy did not make him fool.

His wife had stayed home to raise the twins, Martin and Connie, hence they could ill-afford the house that Ira so longed for. Until now anyway. Housing prices in the city had doubled since they purchased it years ago. And his brother the realtor, insisted that if he ever wanted to sell, it would be sold in a day. These new homes were as nice as almost any of his colleague’s homes, and were certainly in his price range. Ira longed to finally have a house he could be proud of. One that he could invite people over to see. One that his associates might even be envious of. He could see it all starting to line up... All except one thing. How to convince his wife Marjorie. He pondered the angle. He hadn’t become an executive financier by allowing obstacles to remain in his way. There had to be an approach he could take.

His son Martin was starting to hang around with a crowd that both Ira and his wife concerned. He was slipping in school, talking back to his parents, staying out late, even smoking and drinking underage. To add insult to injury, he had no plans on what to do with the rest of his life. Ira had arranged an internship for him at his firm, but Martin had declined. He argued that “Just because you’re some big important business man, doesn’t mean that I have to be one.” Unfortunately Marjorie supported Martin on the issue, so Ira was forced to back out of the internship plan

he had made for his son at work... a source of great humiliation. Moving out of the city to a brand new town, with a brand new school, where all the kids could leave their old habits and stereotypes and cliques behind was exactly what was in order. At least that was what he would tell Marjorie in order to get what he wanted.

The Thames Greene sales center was a collection of seven homes, interconnected to the main office building, so that interested persons could browse through them all. Ira was in the second home from the end, called the "Empire A." It was a stunning two story that included a finished basement, and a master bedroom with adjacent bathroom that would rival a five-star hotel. Ira could easily see himself living in it. There were two other rooms on the floor. One for his daughter and one to possibly use as an office, as he was sure that Martin would want to live in the basement bedroom beside the oversized family room. His wife Janice would fall in love with the kitchen, and the dining and living rooms were perfect for entertaining. It was exactly what Ira had been pining for.

"Pretty nice huh?" Hank said to Ira as he browsed the model house next to the one he was determined to buy. Ira looked up from his brochure with a smile, "Yeah... I can't believe how nice this is... And the price..."

Hank laughed in agreement, "You got that right!"

Hank continued on his way back to the sales office. He was going to sign the papers right now. Joan, his wife, would understand. She wanted to move just as much as he did, and this was such a good deal that she would forgive him for not consulting her first.



The Thames Greene project manager watched the taillights of the last two cars disappear into the night. It had been another blockbuster day of sales. At the rate the units were selling, they would have to begin preparing phase two for development almost a full six-months ahead of schedule. On his desk were conditional offers from two successful inner-city men. Ira, and Hank all seemed to be more the anxious to move and the project manager would do all that he could to accommodate them. He had already called in extra crews and hired extra tradesmen from all over the state to keep construction on schedule. The last thing he wanted to do is get behind the proverbial eight ball. The big-wigs at LCI's head office in Virginia would not be impressed.

As it was, LCI's CEO was a little "disappointed" that the Thames Greene project wasn't yielding better results. Scott Penner was used to the company's other divisions, where a breakthrough in pharmaceutical science could net a double-digit return in no time flat, or he could boost the stock share by purchasing their nearest competitor. But being a land developer and home building was an entirely different bowl of wax, and even though LCI had hired the best and the brightest, they were experiencing some growing pains... To say the least. Still, Scott was confident he had made the right choice. He could have simply chosen to sell off the twenty-thousand acre plot of land, formerly known as the Thames and Greene farms. After all, no one in the executive office was even sure why the company had purchased the farms in the first place. Whatever the reason had been no longer mattered as the land had already been written off the books, meaning that any

profits made developing the property would be “found-money.” And with up to 5,000 new homes planned, Scott was certain that there would be plenty of it. He needed the boost in the profit margin as he continued to clean up the previous CEO’s mess. It was true, that his predecessor had returned the company to profitability from near ruin, but he had also left the company’s board of directors to answer for some big questions. Questions that everyone from the FDA and EPA, to the families of former employees of the company’s Edenwood division wanted answers to. The shoddy record keeping and entirely missing documents only compounded things. Something had gone on... Something was amiss, but what exactly happened was only known by one individual, and that individual had since been replaced by Scott Penner.



Joan Anderson was hardworking and level headed. She had spent the last 18 years at home, raising her and Hank’s children. She prided herself on being known as the “practical” one in the household, the one who kept everything running neatly and efficiently. As a mother, she was in her element. But once her son Julian entered grade twelve, it dawned on her that her baby no longer needed her as they once did.

So she re-entered the workforce. Not that she had to. Hank’s job at the plant paid well... Very well. But she had felt that her usefulness as a mother was nearing its end. And she *did* have a degree in nursing that she had worked so hard through correspondence school to get. And nurses were in demand. But getting back to the matter at hand...

Joan was caught completely off guard when she listened to her excited husband ramble on about the new house they had bought that day. They had bought!?

“We really lucked out!” Hank proclaimed.

“Wait just one second,” she said sternly, “There was no ‘we’ involved here. This was all you. You unilaterally decided to buy us a new house, in the middle of nowhere, away from all of our friends and family and our jobs and our kid’s schools and without even thinking to consult your wife first!?”

You big dumb muscle head! She thought to herself.

“But...” Hank tried to say.

“But nothing!” Joan snapped “This is, by far, the most impulsive, selfish, childish thing you’ve ever done Hank! I may be your wife, but should have the simple courtesy to ask me before dragging me and the family off to some God-knows-where cardboard cutout housing development!”

Hank’s heart sank. He had done all those things, but it was in everyone’s best interest. If only she knew what he knew, Hank thought to himself. He would have to do his very best to explain it.

“Honey, this is for the best, trust me. Our house is almost paid for, and its worth a lot more then what we paid for it.” He paused, watching her body language for a moment before continuing, “A *whole lot* more! We’ll get a brand new house in a brand new town, and have a pile of money left over when we’re done!”



Joan's brow furrowed, "Hank, why do we need more money. We've already got money."

Hank sighed, "But what if something happened? What if, say... One of us lost their job?"

"Hank dear, I can assure you that there's no chance of me losing my job. Those idiots would be lost without me," she rebutted. She thought about her job at the medical lab where she worked. *Them... get rid of me?* She chuckled aloud... But her facial expression quickly changed when she realized what her husband was implying, "Unless..." she gasped, "You lost your job?"

"No-no-no" Hank tried to keep his composure, "Not yet. Well I mean..." his voice trailed off as his eyes became misty. He took a deep breath before he continued, "You know things haven't been great..."

"But I thought it was getting better," Joan interjected.

"It was, but..." Hank sighed, "They're closing the plant at the end of the quarter. April 29th."

Joan could tell by the look on her husband's face that he was crushed. His job had been his life for so long, he had always taken such pride in his work. Immediately, she knew he needed comforting now, not chastising. She leaned forward and kissed him, then wrapped her arms around him, "Then we'll move to this Green place and we'll get through this," she spoke softly to him as she embraced him. She gritted her teeth as she cursed at herself for giving in. She hated to lose arguments.

"They did say that they were going to move some other divisions here from Cincinnati," he tried to sound confident, "and all of us with seniority will get first crack at any new positions."

Joan smiled at him, “and I’m sure you’ll be first in line,” she said, never believing it for a moment.

So that was that. Joan was just going to have to get used to the idea. Then Andersons were moving from their upper class neighborhood on the city’s upper west side, to Thames Greene, the new master planned community from LCI Developments.



In another part of the city, another husband was trying to convince his wife that the move to Thames Greene was for the better. So far, Marjorie Heath was proving to be something of a hard sell. She was perfectly happy in their middle-class town home in their middle class neighborhood. She was perfectly happy to take the bus to go shopping for groceries. She figured that her husband Ira should be perfectly happy too. The problem was, he wasn’t. Worse, he couldn’t just come right out and tell her that.



So after a half hour of convincing, Marj was starting to come around.

She could not deny the fact that the influences that were being introduced to Martin’s life were less than good. And it was also hard to deny that moving to a freshly built, sterile community far away from said influences wouldn’t be good for their son. Capitulation was not something that Marjorie took lightly, such as when she decided to abandon a promising career to be a housewife... But in this case, she knew that Ira had done his homework. She also knew that he wanted – secretly – to be like all the other guys at the office with their big, fancy houses. *Why couldn’t he just come right out and say it?* She wondered.



The next day, standing on freshly-turned earth, Alfonso watched his step as another giant cement truck wheeled past him. He trudged over to where he had left

his equipment and scratched his chin. He was at the construction site that would become phase two of the Thames Greene development, contemplating his best interest. Alfonso was the most respected, most talented, and oldest excavator operator on the site. He had seen and heard it all, and so when he heard the sound of his bucket scraping metal on metal he knew he had a choice to make.

The sickening scraping sound was fresh in his ears. He had heard the sound once already that day, on the neighboring basement he had just dug. He figured it was a rock the first time. Maybe some buried debris the second time. But what were the chances of it happening a third time? Obviously pretty good. There was no question about it in his mind. There was something buried here. All over the site, actually. He was running out of ideas. Especially when the side of the forty-five gallon drum he had uncovered was so clearly visible.

He could have called his foreman over, and by all rights he should have. But that would have slowed the whole thing down to a stop, and all eyes would be on him for having sounded the alarm. On the other hand, if he simply raised the bottom of the hole by an inch or two, no one would be the wiser. The gravel would get laid, the concrete floor would get poured, and whatever it was he had uncovered would never be thought of again. Besides, it was probably just some old empty fuel drum that some farmer who had owned this property had buried instead of disposing of properly. Crazy farmers, Alfonso thought to himself, always making trouble. And so, having convinced himself that it was in fact someone else's fault, the crusty old backhoe driver gently sprinkled an layer of soil over what would become the basement floor, then moved on to his next dig.



Four months later, holes that Alfonso had dug had been filled with poured foundations, and finished with carpeting and recessed lighting. Above them, beautiful homes now stood, homes that were all anxiously awaiting the arrival of their new occupants. It was moving day.

The street was busy... *very* busy. There were moving vans and rental trucks everywhere as new families hurriedly loaded their belongings into their new residences. Dunney Drive, the longest, widest street in the neighborhood, was crammed. Ira could barely navigate the wide rental van through the masses. He was headed to number 171, the house he had first seen at the sales center all those many weeks ago. His daughter Connie, was seated beside him excitedly scanning the new street that would now be called home. Marjorie and Martin followed him in family SUV. One-Seventy-One was the only house on the street with an empty driveway.

To the right of them, at 169, a moving van was in the final stages of being unloaded. It appeared to Ira that his neighbors at were to be a nice young family much like his. After backing the truck into his new driveway, Ira smiled as his new neighborhood quickly introduced himself and his son. Hank seemed to Ira to be friendly enough, and he had a son, Julian, that didn't look like a troublemaker, even if they were both wearing matching tank tops from "Cold's Gym." Ira was getting a good vibe already.

Julian Anderson was getting a good vibe too. As he looked to the house on other side of them where the Heaths were unloading their rented van. Julian flashed his best smile at the girl in the tight shorts that was carrying a box down the ramp and into the garage. She smiled back, but kept walking. This had some potential, Julian thought to himself. Definitely.

Ira had also seen the boy next door – what was his name again? – smiling at his daughter. Maybe his first impression had been wrong... But if was going to have some kid after his daughter, maybe it was it was better to have the boy living next door, rather than somewhere where he couldn't be traced. Besides, this boy's father looked like a reasonable guy, with a helluva handshake, *did he say his name was Frank, or Hank?*



Life had begun quickly in Thames Green, but after that first day, things progressed ever so slowly. It was the way of suburban life. Sedated and lethargic.

Hank's son, Martin, wasn't pleased to be living in Thames Greene. He longed to be back in the city with his pals. He spent his first week in suburban hell playing with his Superstation in the basement. He started thinking it wasn't too bad. The basement was well furnished, cool, and best of all, no one bothered him. But by the middle of week three, Martin was growing increasingly bored with his video games. He had tried to lounge around and listen to his MP3 player, text his old friends, but that got old quickly too. He had already rented almost every game at the local video store (which, by the way, sucked ass as compared to the one he used to visit back in the city). He had downloaded just about every rowdy punk rock song known to man, but those songs were only fun to play when his Dad was around. There simply wasn't anything to do but lie on the couch and watch a steady diet of Judge Jodie and Terry Stringer.

A new challenge for Martin was presented in the beginning of his fourth week in "the Greene" (which is what people seemed to smugly call this sterile urban prison). It was something he never expected to have trouble with.

Getting into his pants. His baggy jeans it would seem were *anything but*. It was like someone had shrunk them while he wasn't looking. That or he was putting on weight – which was highly unlikely. His stomach was still flat and his waist still looked slim, but then there were these damn pants. He cursed aloud as he tried to wiggle them up over his hips. It was always his hips as of late. The pants fit fine until he got to his hips. Damn stupid pants! How was he supposed to look dangerous in form-fitting clothes?

Connie was standing in the hall quietly chuckling as her twin brother cussed and fought with his denim pants. "I told you all those French fries would make you fat," she teased.

He could only turn and glare, "Shut up." He gave them another tug before collapsing onto his bed in defeat. "Dammit!" he cried aloud.

"I don't know why you're even wearing pants," his sister continued, "its like... Ninety out side." She looked down at her cute light blue shorts.

"But I'm not going outside" he chided, "and besides, I never wear shorts. Con, you know that." He resumed his seemingly pointless task of dressing from a horizontal position on his bed.

"Well... I'd let you borrow a pair of my jeans, but I'm pretty sure you won't want to wear them," she chuckled.

Martin only glared. "I'm not wearing girls' jeans. I'm not some kind of queer." He continued to fight the pants and get them over his thighs. He was grunting and growling in anger.

"Then I'll get you some of my shorts, then." She said merrily.

"Get out of my room!" Martin yelled.

Connie shrugged and walked away, listening as her brother cursed at himself, still losing the battle with his clothes. She made her way back to her new room, and was seated at her desk for about five minutes when she heard her brother at the door. "Gimme your damn jeans," he said. Connie smiled smugly and looked up, tossing the pair she already had ready for him.

A few minutes later, Martin was quietly slipping his twin sister's stretchy, low riding, flared legged jeans over his hips... With no problem at all! "Crud." He said to himself, angry that they did fit after all. *Maybe she's right about the French Fries after all*, he thought to himself.



Julian Anderson was getting restless. It wasn't his idea to move out to this burg. His life had been fine. He was the top jock in school, and had his little corner of the world by the tail. He was starting on the football, basketball and baseball teams. He was dating the hottest girl in school. And her best friend, too.

In class, he was the smartest kid in most of his classes. He wasn't a brain, but he didn't take those sort of classes. He knew the teachers, and they liked him. Some cut him breaks. That was just the way he was. Julian was the sort of kid who could charm the skin off a snake.

With so much going for him, he was crushed to leave his school. That was not just where he spent his days, but it was his private kingdom. He knew how to operate that place.

Now it was going to be a new school. With new kids and new teachers. He had no doubt he'd still be the fastest, strongest, best-looking guy there, but being the top dog was more than that.

He was going to need something cute to hang on his arm.

He got up and looked through his window, across the way at his neighbor's house, looking at the silhouettes in the window shades. Which one of them was her?

The best way to fix the problem was to be pro-active. If he wanted some eye candy, to pump up his profile, he was going to have to think big. Maybe two or three girls would be enough to show everyone what kind of man he was. And the girl who lived in the house next door was going to be his first conquest.





Later that day, Martin was playing *Stealthforce II* on his game console, which he had plugged it into the big screen TV he had *somehow* managed to convince his Dad to buy. Connie flopped down on the opposite end of the couch Martin was sitting on. She sat quietly, grinning stupidly at her brother. He wasn't able to concentrate, knowing what was surely coming. After a few minutes Martin finally turned to his sister with an angry sneer, "What's your problem!?" he growled. Connie simply looked him square in the face and continued to smile like a Cheshire cat. Martin's blood began to boil. He wanted to punch his infinitely annoying sibling in the shoulder, something he would have normally done and had been doing since he discovered he was slightly stronger than his twin. But instead, he simply threw down the game controller, stood up and started to leave the room.

This action caught Connie completely off guard. She had full well expected to be punched. Indeed, she even thought she deserved it. But Martin hadn't hit her. Instead he was simply going to leave. In *her* jeans, no less. She chuckled aloud, causing Martin to stop dead in his tracks, turning towards her in anger. However, his anger turned to something of a look of embarrassment. He blushed slightly as he looked down at his legs. Connie's pants were snug fitting, semi-low riders, with slightly flared legs. They were made of stretchy denim material that was unlike anything he had ever worn before. The jeans had actually expanded to take the shape of his body. And even though she was now mocking him terribly, the jeans weren't killing him like all the ones he had worn in the past few weeks. It was going to be hard for him not to want to wear them again. So he simply flipped his sister the bird and continued to storm off to his room.

Martin had always preferred tee-shirts and baggy jeans or cargo pants, with the belt somewhere around his thighs. It was an ensemble that had been wearing nearly every day for months, possibly even years. But now he was giving serious thought to why Connie's jeans fit so well. And hell, they felt better. Even his mother and father's curious eyes when they returned home from work that day could not deter him from doing what earlier that day he would have never even thought.

Ira rolled his eyes when he saw Martin's new choice in fashion. *This must be some kind of retribution*, he thought, *acting out to show he doesn't like living here*. Ira knew that Martin was not too pleased about moving out "The Greene" as people were referring to it as. He had taken away all contact with the bad influences that Martin had become so enthralled with, so this was the only way that his son could get to him – by wearing his sister's jeans. Ira furrowed his brow and grimaced as he passed Martin in the hall. He was determined to not let his son's antics get to him.

Truth be told, Martin did not yet realize his newfound pants were going to upset his Father; he was only interested in comfort for right now. "Can I borrow another?" he asked Connie sheepishly as he poked his head in the doorway. His sibling's jaw dropped. This morning he was dead set against wearing her stuff, and now... here he wanted more to wear. Smiling warmly, she nodded and told her twin that she would leave him some clothes while he showered. Martin's face lit up

as he skipped off to the bathroom, "Thanks Sis!" he shouted on his way. Connie just rolled her eyes, "boys" she muttered.

Skipped?



The next day, Julian Anderson was thinking more boyish thoughts. He had seen the cute girl that lived next door several times since the move in. Their parents had briefly introduced them to each other, but that was weeks ago. He made a concerted effort to be outside whenever he thought she would be. He even went so far as to remove his shirt so as show off his impressive, defined, chest. Julian had been "Mr. Popular" at his old school, and he had every intention of doing the same here in Forest Green or whatever this place was called.

But being Mr. Popular required him to have legions of adoring girls, which currently presented a problem, as he knew none. Little Miss Connie next door was important, as she would be the first to be infatuated with him. So when he thought he spotted her in his neighbor's backyard, he moved quickly. Slipping off his shirt as he slid open the patio door. Thank God they haven't built the fences between our houses yet, he thought to himself as he strutted proudly across the freshly laid sod. His prey was working in the garden, facing away from Julian as he approached. She didn't notice him standing there, which afforded the young jock ample time to take in the view of her very nice, round, and pert ass. The kind of ass that screamed to be slapped, encased in the tight stretchy beige material that her girly cargo pants were made out of. He could even see the tops of her white panties protruding slightly from the top of the pants. Sweet! He thought to himself as he cleared his throat. The helpless victim of his adoration turned around then stood up with a smile.

"Can I help you?" Martin asked.

"Uh... Er..." Julian sputtered a few times before regaining his composure, "I, uh... I... My name is Julian. I just wanted to introduce myself." He thrust out his hand in an effort to make it believable. Martin rose up from his position in the flowerbed and shook Julian's hand, "Nice to meet you." He smiled, "Do you normally sneak up on people when they're doing chores?"

Julian was cautious. he had the vague feeling that this kid was... Flirting with him? "Uh, no... Not usually" he replied. "So how do you like it here in the Greene?" he tried to make it sound like he was genuinely interested, even though he couldn't care less.

"It's okay," Martin replied, "But there's really nothing to do here. It's kinda boring." Realizing that he had just been caught working in the garden, not the most masculine of pursuits, he tried to cover. "Oh, uh, I've never helped my mother pull weeds before... Ever. But I'm sick of playing video games... And it's so boring out here... and all of my friends are back in the city... And a bunch of them have summer jobs, so I can't hang with them or chat with them online... So... You know..." He looked down at his sister's pants on his body. "Here I am."

"You like video games?" Julian asked innocently, cursing himself for furthering the conversation.

Desperate not to talk about his situation he responded enthusiastically, “Oh yeah! Before I moved here, I was the best customer of the video store down the street. I have them all!”

Julian didn’t doubt it. This loser looked like a total loner. But he was still his ticket to meeting his hot sister.

Martin paused, “Why, do you play?”

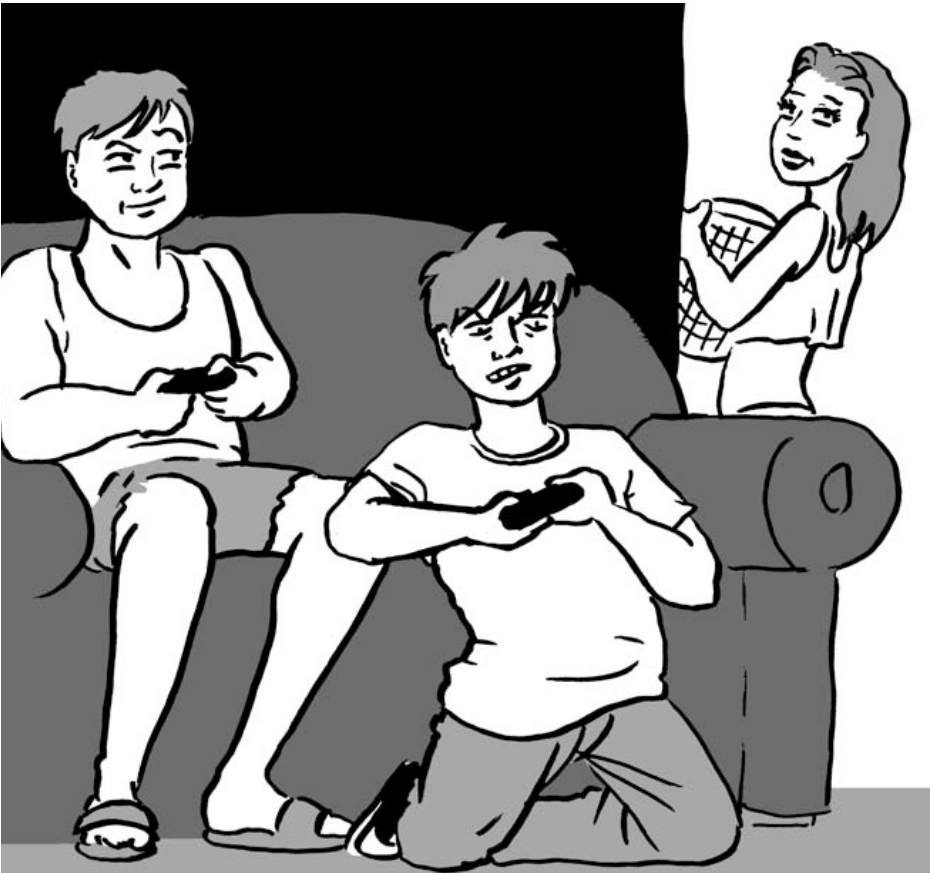
“Oh yeah all the time.” Well not really. His Dad had long ago told him that video games were a poor substitute for working out. “What kind of system do you have?” Julian inquired, again wishing his big stupid mouth would just shut up.

“I’ve got a PlayBox 500” the other boy in the tight girly jeans said.

Julian’s eyes lit up, “Really!? I’ve only a SuperStation 2. I’ve been thinking about asking my Dad for a PlayBox. Is it any good?”

Martin’s eyes lit up, maybe he was about to make his first new friend, “Totally! You want to see?”

Moments later Julian was playing BloodSport on the Heath’s big screen TV with his new friend Martin. As an added benefit, when Martin’s sister Connie came home from her job, she happened to walk right by them with what looked like a load of laundry to place in the bedroom next to where the boys were playing.



"Marty," she said as she walked exited the room, "I put some old stuff that I don't wear anymore on your bed. Let me know if anything fits." Martin blushed deeply and remained quiet, hoping that his new pal hadn't heard his sister, and hating her for trying to embarrass him.

Julian was too fixated on Connie's ass to fully comprehend what she had said. It didn't dawn on him until later that Connie's ass and Martin's ass looked almost the same. In fact, he thought Martin had a pretty cute butt.

He shook his head in disgust, *What the hell am I thinking?*



Ira was thinking about relaxing when he got home from work that day. He struggled out of his shoes, into his slippers and yawned as he headed downstairs to watch T.V. His hopes were dashed the moment he entered the basement family room. Martin, still wearing those *Damn Girly* pants, had hooked his gaming console up to Ira's prized flat screen TV again. To his left was the neighbor's kid. Ira paused for a moment, a noticeably gruff look on his face.

"Hi Mr. Heath" Julian smiled. Ira simply nodded, "Hey there." Martin continued to ignore his father, which made Ira's blood boil. But rather than make a scene in front of Julian, he decided to swallow his pride and go back upstairs to the living room. The TV was decidedly smaller, but so too would be the conflict.



Julian couldn't help but wonder if his new friend was gay... Not that it should that bother him. He was feeling a lot more open minded in the weeks that passed since he first mistook Martin for his twin sister. The two boys had spent nearly every hour of every day in the Heath's basement playing Martin's Game Box. Julian had learned quite a bit about his new neighbor and was beginning to understand Martin's reasoning for wearing those hip hugger pants like he did. That it just started out as a matter of comfort... And then, when Martin realized how much it was ticking off his father when he wore them, he had become determined to wear them *every* day.

Martin may have not been the most masculine guy Julian had ever met, but the kid had balls. When his dad virtually ordered him out of the pants, Martin upped the ante. He started to wear girly tops, and even girly under things. Well, at least Martin claimed to be wearing girls' underwear... Not that he was looking. But he *had* noticed the lacy waistband of the panties Martin was wearing when he bent over to change the discs in the Game Box console the other day.

Though Julian thought he understood, and liked the idea of getting adults to blow their top, he was in no hurry to join him. At least... He didn't *think* he was. Whatever quarrel Martin had with his Dad was between *them*. Julian and his Dad had a pretty good relationship. So good in fact that when the two macho men were chatting about Martin's choice of attire, Julian was surprised to hear that Hank seemed to share his son's thinking that such clothing looked quite comfy. Even days later when Julian was showing off his new stuff he had just bought, it didn't even phase

him. He had purchased hip hugging jeans and trainers with a slightly thicker sole and partially elevated heel. Well, Martin deserved a little support in his war against his Dad, didn't he?

In fact when Julian informed his father that he had purchased them the other day at that Langdale's store where Connie worked, using her employee discount, which made them less than half the ticket price... Hank simply said, "Cool"

With his father's semi-approval in his head, Julian would return to see Connie the next day. And the day after that. He simply wanted to fit in a little more with Martin, and he of course there was the opportunity to flirt with Connie. Of course, whatever Connie told him to wear, he did. And whatever he wore, Connie told him that it "looked great" on him. That's all that Julian needed to hear. He bought everything without even thinking. When a pretty girl tells you to buy something, he had no resistance.

He was also in no position to disagree with her opinion. She could have said he "looked great" in an oat bag and he would have bought it and convinced himself that she was right. As it was, when he bought the flared jeans and embroidered pastel shirts, he looked in the mirror and was compelled to agree. Not that such behavior was abnormal for him. He was never known as much of an independent thinker or trend setter, but rather as someone who carefully watched others and then took on their trends as his own. He had taken his queue from his Dad. Spot a trend, observe others reaction to it, and if it will serve you... Make it your own. The canvas shoes with the wedge heel was one such example. They had taken him some time to get used to... But Julian was managing. And even though the new pants were snug... Even a little bit tight fitting, they *were* extremely comfortable. Just like Martin and Connie had said they would be. Besides it really didn't matter, since Martin and Connie were the only ones that would see, since all they ever did was hang out together, play video games, watch music videos... Even occasionally go shopping and browse through the stores in town... *Oh wait a second*, he thought, *I guess some other people would see me*. Oh well.

What was I thinking about? His train of thought was so easily sidetracked lately. *Oh Yeah... Connie*. The fact that he got to talk to Connie was an added bonus too. She was the cutest girl he had seen so far in Thames Greene, and he was determined to start the school year with a steady girlfriend. So if he had to sacrifice some of his self respect by dressing like a queer... He would. Its not like they were painful or uncomfortable to wear. They were extremely comfortable. *Did I already say that?*



After a few weeks of Julian going over to Martin's house, Julian's mother finally insisted that her son invite Martin and his family over for a swim. Joan, Julian's mother, was eager to play hostess, and Hank was eager show off his new swimming pool. The buyout package from the plant had been more lucrative than he thought, and after he had heard the splashes and laughing from the people next door all day, he was convinced that he should have one too. Ira was not quite as keen about swimming. He wasn't very interested in going over to have a barbeque at the Anderson's either, but Marjorie was insistent. She was determined that her

small-minded husband would interact with their neighbors regardless of his misconceptions of what they might be like.

"You're the one who wanted to live here!" Marjorie pointed out. "And if you wanted to live in place that has better neighbors, then you have to be one yourself!"

Ira rolled his eyes and grunted. Even five minutes before they were supposed to show up, even after his wife had spent half of yesterday making snacks, Ira still actually hadn't consented to going. "If you want to go, go." He had said three or four times.

"We're all going." Marjorie insisted. "You'd be insulting our new neighbors if you don't."

"They don't care." Ira insisted. "You know how these things go. You girls will start talking, What's-his-name, Hank will be working the grill, the kids will be playing and I'll be just sitting around, bored as hell."

"Well of course you'll be bored, if you don't try and be friendly."

"The best kind of neighbor is the one who keep to themselves and doesn't bother anyone." Ira insisted.

"Sound wonderful." Marjorie stood directly in front of Ira. "Now get moving or we'll be late."

Begrudgingly, Ira capitulated, and indeed, he spent much of the night on the deck, nursing his beer by himself. Just as predictably, his neighbor ran the grill, swam and carried on with the kids.

Ira sighed as he watched. This "Hank" character was a real piece of work. He acted like he was God's gift to human kind. First, he had the nerve to tell Ira that he didn't have any beer around the house, because he had banned "unhealthy" drinks from his household. Fine way to treat a neighbor. Ira had to go home and get his own. And they weren't even grilling up meat. No, "Hank" said that they had all given up meat as a family. Ira hadn't even touched what he had been given – some sort of shish kebab with "Chik'n" flavored wheat gluten. Ira heard his stomach rumble in hunger.

Although Ira had to admit that whatever he was doing, it sure paid off. His wife was hot, and Hank himself had a very trim physique. Not an overly-built weight-lifter's look, but kind of like a triathlete or something. He didn't seem to have an ounce of fat on him. Ira could tell, because he was wearing a pair of those idiotic European swim trunks. Speedos. They left little to the imagination. He was only half-surprised to see that Martin was wearing something very similar, probably just to annoy him. But he was a little startled to see that both his son and Hank's son Julian were wearing similar super short, super tight, low-rise suits that looked like something out of his daughter's closet, not his son's. It made what Hank was wearing look tame.

As he thought about it, Ira did recall his daughter *had* been bragging about getting all of them into new suits, so he figured it must just be the style. Now that she was working at Langdale's department store, she had really been aggressive lately in shopping their clothes to everyone she knew. But Connie wouldn't lead the boys wrong... Would she? And so, feeling self-conscious and very much out of place, he pretended to suffer from indigestion and sat the swimming session out.



Another week passed, and Ira watched as Martin went over to Julian's almost every day to go swimming in the Anderson's pool. And when they weren't swimming, the boys were in the Heath's basement doing god-knows-what. Ira's fashion sense continued to send off alarms, as every time he saw the boys, they were wearing their tight pants with flared legs. Ira figured that Martin was doing it to push him, but that didn't explain why Julian was doing it too... Or Julian's Dad for that matter. Ira was convinced that Martin's most recent purchase of tight flared pants and calf-high black boots was meant to send him over the edge.

But although infuriating his Dad has been the original impetus for his wacky wardrobe that Connie had helped him to design, Martin was now actually starting to buy clothes purely because he *liked* them. Take for instance the boots with the tall four-inch wedge heel. After a few days, Martin had learned how to walk in them, by distributing his weight a little differently, with a slight sway in the hips...

Now he couldn't help but walk that way almost all the time. He wore the boots and pants with a long, snug fitting T-shirt hid most of the wide, black leather belt with a double row of silver studs across it, that hung across his hips. It was a good thing that Connie worked at Langdale's and could get him an employee discount on the new clothes he was purchasing lately. There was absolutely no way he could afford to pay full price, and there was absolutely no way he could get into his old stuff anymore. But then, why not just buy new, bigger pants? One reason was that his father was so strongly opposed to his new look, he was committed to sticking to his principles. His Dad was not going to tell him what he could wear. And the second reason was that Those baggy pants seemed to be going out of style anyway. Tight was in. At least, that's what Connie said.

Ira bit his tongue when saw what his son was wearing. He was about to ground the boy for a month when Marjorie calmed him down. "He's just trying to get to you dear," she said, "you're the adult here, don't forget to act like it. Just ignore



him. If he wants dress like *that* then just let him. He's only embarrassing himself." Ira would eventually relax and agree with his wife. Besides, he knew that the new clothes weren't cheap, and without a source of income, Martin's aggravating behavior would eventually come to a halt.

It had too.



Julian was headed in a similar direction, running out of money thanks to his new clothing habit. Julian was a bright kid, though, and instead of letting the inevitable bankruptcy happen, he had decided to apply to the local diner for a job washing dishes. He had Connie suggest what he'd look best in, and went to the interview wearing a tight-fitting semi transparent light blue colored top over a snug fitting black tank top to his interview. A tank top that had very thin straps on the top, almost like... What did Connie call it again? A camisole top? A 'cami'? It didn't matter; all he knew for sure was that Connie had used her employee discount to buy it for him so it had cost him practically nothing. And he wanted to look good for his interview.

Aside from his clothes, Connie had convinced Julian to use thin black eyeliner to circle his eyes. Julian had no intention of letting her talk him into this, as it was something that would have certainly gotten him beaten up back in the city. But Connie had convinced Martin that it would make his eyes "pop" and look more awake and attentive when he talked to the interviewer... And after she showed him how to properly apply it, Julian was powerless to resist. She was the cutest girl he in town. She might even be the cutest girl he had ever met. He would do pretty much anything she asked of him. He would wear these decidedly effeminate pants and girlish tops if she asked. He would wear girly eyeliner if she asked. He would even shave his legs and armpits for her if she asked.

Which is, of course, what had happened. When Connie commented that he would look so much nicer in his nice tight high-cut bathing suit if he shaved his legs and armpits... And chest... Just like Martin had done... Well, he did it without giving it a second thought. The feel of his smooth legs against his hands was on his mind as he sat with his hands in his lap in the manager's office at the "Diner on the Greene." He had worn a pair of shorts that day, with sandals, his new "fav" footwear. The shorts were short... Very short, and hung low on his hips much as his pants had. His hip. His wide, fat, hips. He pouted. He was so disgusted with himself for having put on so much weight. He had switched to eating only salads and fruit instead of his usual stuff. Even the health food his Dad had him eat looked heavy and fatty to him now. So was it a good idea to get a job in a Diner? Fatty food was something that would prove to be increasingly difficult to avoid if he got the job. But still, he would have to do it. *Being fat was gross!*

Waiting patiently outside the diner, Connie was contemplating her luck. She had always had boys after her before, but nothing could compare to this. Julian was a total puppy-dog. If she told him to sit, he sat. If she told him to jump, he would jump. If she told him to sit, he would sit. If she told him to wear cork-soled sandals, he would wear cork-soled sandals. In fact, he would wear almost whatever she told him to, and even though she knew he was trying to impress her so he



could ask her out, she couldn't help but feel their relationship was never going to amount to any more than a friendship. She had never really considered that she could be "just friends" with a guy, but then, Julian was different. She was reminded how different he was when Julian came out of the diner – after having got the job – and he was giggling like a bubbly, chatty girlfriend.

Of course he was excited. Everything had paid off. The clothes, the eyeliner, the manager even complimented him on his shoes. He was to get started the following week, and even though he was pretty sure the manager hadn't gotten his name right through the whole interview, he was excited to start working.



Julian's new job wasn't too hard, and he was quickly awarded with the one true joy of working. A paycheck. It afforded him the luxury of a mini-shopping spree, the likes of which made Martin insanely jealous. Julian's cart was filled with snazzy embroidered hip hugger jeans, new black flared pants for work, new shoes and boots and sandals and the cutest looking tops for lounging around.

Jealous? How could Martin feel jealous? His friend was breaking his back working hard labor. But it was starting to occur to Martin that what he really needed was a job, and fast. But no-one wanted to hire him. Maybe it was his look? It was a little bit... Well, different. It was only intended to irritate his dad. Not alienate his potential employers. He had dropped resumes all over the town to no avail, and was ready to give up, until...

One night, while watching Dime-elodeon, the kids network what Connie seemed to be watching *all* the time lately, Martin lamented his lack of meaningful employment. For her part, Connie was largely ignoring him, instead trying to focus on the newest episode of Spongebob.

She was perfectly happy watching her show, telling her brother to shut up, until something he said piqued her interest..."Maybe I could fill in for you one day, if you wanted the day off!?"

Connie turned and looked Martin in the eye, "Huh?"

"You know, I could take your shift at the store and you just pay me for those hours. You were saying you thought you were working too much anyway... Weren't you?" Martin said.

It *was* true. She *did* think she was working too much. The thought of spending the day reading 'teeny bopper' magazine, watching cartoons and playing in the yard *was* pretty appealing. She could even go hunting for her old collection of Bambi Dolls, something she had been meaning to do lately.

But it wasn't like her brother could just come in and do her work for her. It was the women's department, and Martin wasn't... Well, let's think about this for a minute, she told herself. She looked her brother over carefully. It wasn't like she interacted with the staff much at work. She barely even knew their names. Her manager was still calling her "Becky," after the girl who used to work her spot.

And the way her brother looked right now... He had already worn some of her clothes, after all... Martin would just need is a little makeup and some work with

his hair. And it's not like he had never worked retail before. He had, in previous summers, stocked shelves, and occasionally helped customers at the local hardware store back in their old neighborhood in the city

"Pleeeeeease!" he begged his twin.

"Tomorrow!" Said the TV, "Tune in for the all-day Strawberry Shortcake and Friends marathon!"

Well, that was the clincher. Connie just sighed, pretending to give in. "Fine", she moaned, "We'll try it... But if I get fired..."

Martin cut her off, "You won't get fired. I really need the money, you'll see!"



Martin was standing in the ladies' wear section of Langdale's Thames Greene store. Not one person had suspected that he was anyone other than Connie. She had helped him with his hair and makeup, and given him a pair of the tight black flared pants she usually wore with a nice casual top. Though he insisted on wearing his new wedge heeled black calf-high boots, the long legs of the pants hid most of them from view.

He had been practicing his twin sisters soft speech, slight lisp, and limp wrested hand gestures. He also practiced walking in short steps with a slight sway of the hips. In every measurable way, he was almost a perfect copy of Connie.

This is going to be sooooo easy, he thought to himself as he helped customers find the clothes they wanted... Or maybe at least the ones that Martin *thought* they wanted. It wouldn't dawn on anyone until a few weeks later, but 'Connie' was definitely pushing a lot more blacks and purples than she ever had.

A few weeks later? Well, Connie had less and less interest in her job. She had her little hobbies, like playing with her old toys she loved so much. Martin was happy to go in, so what was the harm?

"What's with all the black and purple she's selling?" one sales girl asked the store manager casually one day, "And what's with those boots she's been wearing?"

The store manager took it all under advisement. Connie was, after all, one of the better summer students he had hired. He certainly didn't want to do something to cause her to change her ways on sales.

At home, though, Martin made no secret of his filling in for his twin sister. He wanted his Dad to be extra pissed off... And this would really be feeding fire. His Dad might be forced to move the family back to the city... Back to all of Martin's friends. His lips curled at the outer corners as a smile formed.

"It's so easy." He said, "Everyone just assumes it's Connie. I even get hit on!"

Marjorie burst into laughter. Ira nearly choked on his mashed potatoes.

"It's illegal," Ira proclaimed, trying not to let his voice crack from the thick coating of potato that still lined his throat.

"Oh, it is not," his wife retorted, "There's nothing wrong with it." She turned back to Martin who was even more pleased that his mother was publicly disagreeing with his dad on the subject.

"In fact, maybe I'll come down and see you one day and you can fill me in on all the latest trends." She giggled.

Ira simply scoffed and went back to eating.

Connie mindlessly prodded her broccoli, "Can I be excused?" she whined.

"Eat your broccoli" Ira grunted.

"But mommmm, I don't wanna eat it... It's cold..." she paused, then lowered her voice, "and the new episode of Bambi Girl is on!"

Marjorie grinned, "It is?"

Connie nodded.

"Well let me put our plates away and we'll both go watch it," her mother said.

Ira shook his head, grunted disapprovingly, and continued to eat. *No wonder things are going to hell...* He thought, *I'm losing control of my family.*



Bambi Girl was huge... Ten years ago. Eight year old Connie Heath, at the time, had accumulated a massive collection of Bambi products. Now, the company that made Bambi was re-marketing it all to the next generation. Ten, twelve, and thirteen year old girls were buying Bambi dolls like they were going out of style. Bambi's new cartoon was a hit. And slowly but surely, eighteen year old Connie Heath was re-discovering her love of Bambi dolls.

Recently, she had spent hours with her brother in tow, digging through boxes in store rooms and closets, boxes and boxes and *boxes* of "Bambi-dolls" and accompanying clothes and accessories. She had amassed a gargantuan collection years ago, and never threw it out. Back when she was a little kid, she was so obsessed that her parents had worried about her growing up to be some kind of anorexic, image obsessed fashionista type. But thankfully they were wrong. Connie had turned out just fine. Although, she did like clothes... So much in fact that it was part of the reason she had applied for the job in women's department.

But she blamed her twin brother's increasingly appetite for her fashion advice for bringing back old memories of the thrill of dressing her dolls... And of creating new and different looks for them. She loved it. That had lead her to find the old boxes of "Bambi" in the basement, and brought them back up her room, just for fun. That and all the Bambi TV she had been watching. At least that's what she thought the reason was. Helping Martin and his friend Julian dress had been fun, but they were no substitute for dolls. Well, *almost no substitute.*

On one gray, rainy and cool Saturday afternoon Connie had the chance to *really* play with her brother doll... Also known as Martin. The Anderson's pool was closed, and Connie had the day off. The boys were bored, and Connie's desire to dress up her "dolls" was growing stronger. She had been playing with her "Pole-dancer-Bambi" all morning when Julian came over whining of boredom. Connie smiled. Julian was going to make it *so* easy for her. He had let his hair grow down into a kind of mullet –long at the back – short at the front, and after he and Martin visited the salon in town, had colored it with bright blonde highlights (hello paycheck!). Martin had added reddish highlights to his hair and hoped it would be

something his father would hate. Never mind that it might complicate his taking his sister's place at work – if she ever decided to come back.

"I know something fun that we can do" Connie said as her smile grew ever more wide.

"What?" The two boys responded, eagerly.

When Connie had finished dressing Julian, she allowed her "doll" to check himself out in the mirror. She even had him strut around the room in his new tricky shoes. He picked up on the proper way to walk in such shoes quickly, and from behind would have fooled just about anyone watching into thinking he was genetically pre-disposed to walking in such footwear.

She had clothed him in a pair of black-blue denim Capri pants that brilliantly displayed his smoothly waxed ankles and calves (why had he let Connie wax him again!?). He had absent mindedly ran his fingers over the smooth skin of his exposed legs (Mmmm... Oh yeah, *that's* why) while she had fixed his new frilly-sleeved peasant top in place before helping into his new peep-toe platform pumps.

Now, it was Julian's turn for makeup, as he watched with excited eyes... Eyes that Connie began to line with black liner, mascara, and just a little tiny hint of pale blue shadow. Then she applied the pink lip gloss to his mouth. He wasn't sure if this was a good

thing or not. He really wanted to impress Connie by letting her do this to him, but he was equally impressed by how "authentic" he looked, as was evident by the throbbing hard-on he had developed as he was watching the girl he liked transform him as she had. He just thanked god that they were safely behind the doors of the Heath household, as there was no telling how much he would have been teased and teased and teased some more. Not that he would have cared much.





Later that day however, Ira Heath had cared much. When he came home to see who he thought was Connie, dressed her dark skimpy clothes and heavy makeup, he began to chastise “her” for making such poor choices, and to think ‘seriously about the impact’ that this might have on her when she started school the September. After all, “How is anyone going to take you seriously in finance, when you dressed like *that* Connie!?” he asked heatedly.

The real Connie then poked her head out of her room, “Dressed like what Daddy?” Ira’s jaw fell to the floor, as Martin burst into laughter. Even Marjorie had to chuckle at her husband’s faux-pare. Martin then took it to the next level when he raised the pitch of his voice, posed femininely, and repeated his sister’s question, “Dressed like what Daddy?” he asked softly, “Like *this*?” he continued, twirling around to model his look for all to see.

Ira’s face turned red, and he stormed off to the living room for a stiff drink. *What the hell is Marjorie letting these kids get into!?*

Earlier in the day, while Julian was getting made up by his twin sister, Martin was getting a makeover of his own. It had started quite innocently when he noticed the ‘Help Wanted’ sign posted in the window of a new store in town. A new store that was decidedly out-of-place for a small bedroom community like Thames Greene. But there it was anyway, FUSE... The boutique for real rebels (well, kids that wanted to rebel against their parents, really). *And*, Martin thought cheerfully as he entered the store, *they’re hiring*.

Inside the store was a collection of all things goth and punk. Wall to wall black clothing with bright swaths of neon pink or lavender thrown in for good measure, and what looked like some kind of salon at the back of the store to boot.

“Can I help you?” a voice called from behind. Martin spun around to see a goth princess in an ankle length black dress and makeup in a morbid black and white palette, smiling... *Well kind of*.

“I...” Martin started, “I saw the sign out front says you’re hiring” he blurted.

The girl’s half smile turned to a half sneer, “Uh... Yeah. But I don’t think you’re the kind of person we’re looking for”

Martin looked offended. “Why not?”

The girl motioned at Martin’s clothes. Make that Connie’s clothes. Dress pants, with a button down blouse and a pair of boring flat soled walking shoes.

Another voice sounded behind him, “Oh, come come now Vega. Give the girl a chance.” Martin spun around... Again... To see a man with a very tall Mohawk and several piercing dressed in black jeans and a black shirt. “Remember how you looked before you came here to work for me?”

‘Vega’ rolled her eyes. The man extended his hand. “Dillon... But you can call me Dill” he smiled. Martin wasn’t sure how to react... So he blushed.

“Mar... Er, Connie” He fumbled.

Dillon chuckled, “Oh?” then smiled.

Martin felt flush. Why was he feeling this way!?

“Sorry. Connie’s my twin sister. I’ve been filling in for her at Langdales”

Dillon chuckled again, “Ah... And now you want to get a job of your own instead of mooching off hers.”

Martin nodded.

“But I do have to agree with Vega that if you want to work here... We’ll have to work on your image some.”

Martin nodded again, smiling, “Okay... What did you have in mind?”

Dillon silently gestured towards the salon at the back. “I don’t know. Let’s just see what happens.”

Dillon led Martin to the rear of the store, and asked, with a grin, “How far do you want to go?”

When Ira came home from a long day’s work, laboring his way through the door and to his favorite chair, he was incensed

too see what his only daughter had done to herself. Here she was, in some sort of crazy Halloween getup, wearing lacy black “foundation garments,” including a very constricting black satin corset, and short “Gauchó” pants over black knee high boots. Boots with a very skinny – very high heel and very pointed toe, and a simple black camisole of a top.

Her nails had been extended buy a quarter of an inch, and painted metallic purple and her face dusted with a light loose powder. Her eyes had been outlined with thick black eyeliner, mascara with a bit of purple eye shadow, and on her lips, a hyper-glossy clear gloss that made her lips “pop.”

‘Pop’ like her father’s veins did once he found out that ‘she’ was actually her twin brother.



J O E S I X P A C K

***HIDING
IN HIGH
HEELS***

**“How Not to be a Sissy” by Joe Six-Pack
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2009 Paperback Edition

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HOW NOT TO BE A SISSY

Program 001: Calming Sensations

It was too soon to tell if anything had really happened, but he had hopes. High hopes. However, when Vince woke up, he scratched himself like he always did back when they were in college, yawned and stumbled to the kitchen where he swallowed half a pint of milk straight from the carton.

Certainly, if he were going by that, Howard would have discounted any hope of the messages taking hold. He had been flooding Vince's mind with music, spiked with subliminal messages.

That was no big secret. Vince knew the music was spiked. That's why he was listening to what Howard had called "mega relaxing" messages. These messages had been playing as Vince slept, leaking into his mind. It took a while for them to really take effect, so Howard knew he would just have to wait a while longer to see if any changes were made. Still, he just wanted a sign.

Vince was his old college buddy, frat brother and long-time thorn in his side. He was just friendly enough to be called a friend, but so annoying and irritating that you wished he would just vanish or fall out of touch. He pushed the obligations of friendship to the breaking point faster than anyone Howard had ever known. Ol' Vince was a walking party, always up for anything that promised a good time – not surprisingly, that meant that he was always drunkenly balancing on the edge between having said good time and getting into big trouble. Now he had gone right over that line, in a rather spectacular way, and done himself in – big time.

He showed up late last night, desperate and pleading, claiming to be at the end of his rope. His suit looked like he had slept in it – for several days. A deal or some other such thing had blown up in his face, and now he had people after him. From the sound of it, Vince was fearing for his life this time.

He wouldn't discuss the specifics, but Vince was talking like a man under the gun in a very literal sense. Howard had never seen his friend like this before. Yeah, he got a little anxious from time to time because of the messes he'd get himself in, but now he was as nervous as a squirrel. His head was on a swivel, his panicked eyes darting left and right, and his whole body flinching at every little noise. Nervous sweat was pouring off his body. He appeared as frightened as a man could be.

Which gave Howard his opportunity.

When Howard graduated college three years ago, he had his diploma, and nothing else. He could find no work for his mixed majors of music theory and applied psychology. He hadn't exactly planned on those as majors, he just kinda wound up with them. At the time, he was pretty well convinced that he had just wasted five years of college and hundreds of thousands of dollars. Still, he had managed to put his odd skills to use by recording some subliminal message discs for his own personal use to help him sleep better at night and quit smoking. It dawned on him one day he could probably sell the discs and make some money. That's exactly what he would up doing, and now he made a tidy living from it.

The kicker was that his little subliminal discs actually seemed to work. He had testimonials from consumers to doctors that they did what they advertised. Which got his mind churning – what *else* could he do with them? How powerful *were* they?

Howard had always had that tiny corner of his mind that was been whispering wicked things to him – everyone does. There, in the night, alone with your thoughts, the strangest things can happen inside your head. Most ignore those voices. Unfortunately, Howard, for whatever reason, had started listening to the whispers. Listening very carefully. The things it said to him were so tempting. So tempting that he had even made plans. Detailed plans. Plans that waited patiently for execution. Waited for the opportunity.

He had never thought that he'd really, truly be able to follow through on them. In fact, the whole prospect did scare him quite a bit. He wasn't a man without common sense. Yet Howard was able to hang on to his strange little dream, and he had dispensed with his misgivings, and overcome his timidity. He just needed a subject.

So now, through unknown cosmic machinations, he had a subject. He was alone.



Alone in his own small house, out here on the outskirts of the city, away from the rest of the world. Isolated. This person was afraid, vulnerable, he was willing to do what Howard asked, and he wasn't going to be missed.

Howard examined Vince, standing ungainly in his underwear and frayed shirt. He still didn't see anything really different about him. He looked the same as he did when he turned up on his doorstep. "Listen to the music a little more, Vince." Howard said, handing him a new CD. "It'll help calm you down."

"Yeah," Vince said, still shaking a little bit from fright. "Calm me down." He checked the CD. It was titled "Program 002: Open to New Ideas."

Howard watched him slip the headphones back on. His plan was just beginning.

Program 002: Open to New Ideas**Program 003: Silk and Lace**

“Anything!” Vince insisted for the third time, “and I mean *anything*.”

Howard tried to make it look like he was trying to spontaneously brain-storm the idea he had already been planning for years now. “You’d do *anything* to hide?” He repeated what Vince had been saying zealously.

“Yes!” Vince declared again.

“So... How do you feel about a disguise?” He said.

“A disguise?” Vince said with interest.

“From what you’ve told me, Vince, these guys can get to you anywhere you go.”

“Right, right. These guys are... Connected,” Vince said, cautiously.

That meant the mob. Howard wasn’t stupid. “So if there’s nowhere you can go, you just need to disappear entirely.”

“Right. I’m following you.” Vince seemed ready for any suggestion, no matter how wild.

“The most reasonable thing to do would be to give you a new identity. A complete wash of the old Vincent Matinelli.”

“Yeah,” Vince’s expression brightened. He obviously liked the idea. “They can’t kill somebody that doesn’t exist.”

“Exactly. We’d need to give you a whole new name and identity. One that’s the farthest possible thing from who you are now.”

“Like a Mexican or an Italian guy or something.”

“You’re not Italian?” Howard asked. He could swear he was.

“Albanian.”

“Whatever.” Howard continued on his train of thought. “We’re going to need to do more than just change your backstory, Vince.” Howard hesitated for a moment knowing that this was going to be tricky. “I think for right now, we’ve got to take extreme measures until we can get you in the clear.”

“Extreme?” Vince said skeptically. “Well, extreme doesn’t bother me.”

“How do you feel about wearing a dress?”

Vince’s features were screwed up by the shock. His nose scrunched, an eye squinted, a corner of his mouth crinkled. “Uh, yeah. I don’t know, Howard. That’s...” He searched for the word. “That’s just... Dumb.”

“Not forever, of course, just a temporary disguise until we can get you someplace safe and set you up in a new life,” Howard said, reassuringly.

“But dressing as a woman is... is...” He was still hesitant. “Really... Bizarre”

Howard hadn’t won his argument, but the very fact that Vince was even debating the subject told him that his subliminal messages had taken root. No man would even stand for such a wild proposal as Howard had just made – but here Vince was, trying to think it through, as if it was realistic. All he needed to do was to keep it sounding reasonable enough. “Vince, the guy they are looking for can’t easily be disguised. We can have you grow a beard, but that takes time. We can dye your

hair or shave your head, but that isn't enough of a change. We need to do something extreme, and we need to do it now."

Vince shook his head and got up from his seat to try and end the conversation. "I don't know, Howard. I really don't know."

"Just think about it, Vince. You'll see my point." Howard said.

"I don't like it, Howard. I can't see myself doing that." He looked around as he walked back to the guest room. "Have you seen my headphones?" He asked.

"There they are." Howard pointed out with a smile. "And a new disc." He handed him a CD titled "Program 004: Embrace a New You."

"That's kind of a suggestive title, Howard." Vince said with a smirk.

"They're just titles."



Program 004: Embrace a New You

Program 005: Never Hold Back!

“Are you sure this is gonna work?” Vince asked.

Howard was terse in his response. “It’s not going to work unless you stop resisting it, Vince.”

They had been fussing for a while, trying to jam Vince’s body into some female clothing. Vince was a medium-sized man, about a hair under five eight, and in was in his late twenties. His body had been well maintained, and his muscles were big and noticeable. Howard was sure that was the way Vince liked it, being a ladies’ man and all.

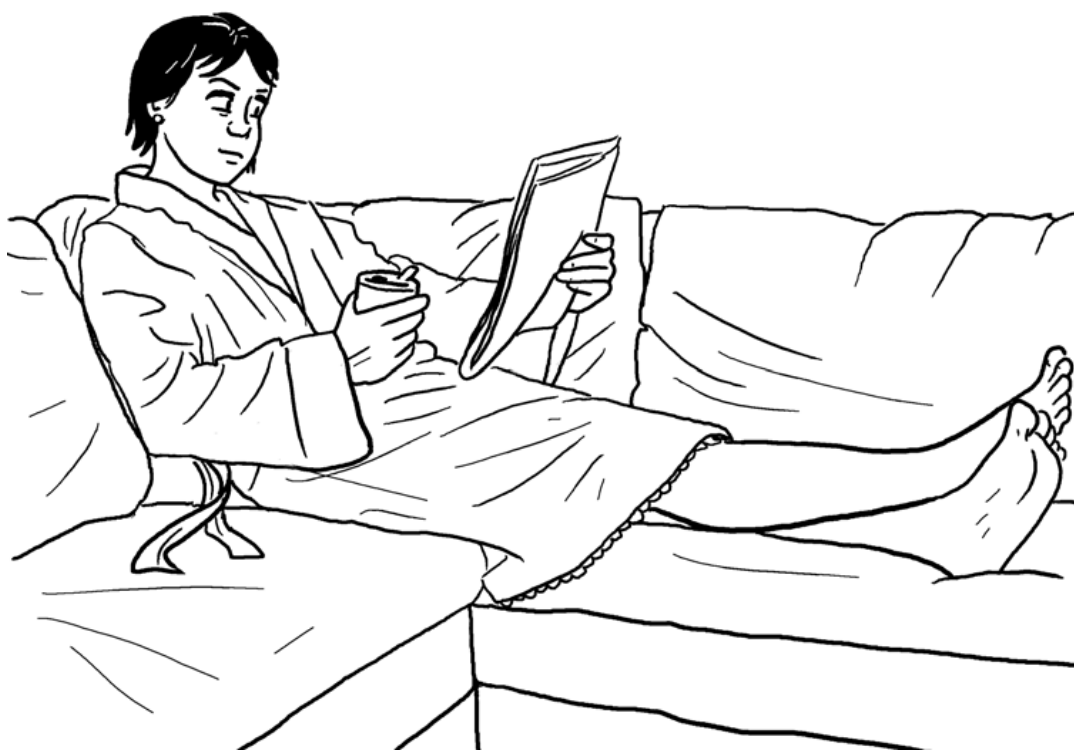
“But I don’t think I can really look like a woman. I don’t care what kind of clothes you dress me in.” Vince said. He had a point, too, Howard admitted. His friend was quite recognizable as a man in a blouse. But time would change that.

“Do you want to get caught, Vince? Is that it?” Howard wasn’t going to let Vince think about it too much.

“No, of course not. But why do I have to wear a skirt? Not all women wear skirts you know.”

Howard had to be clear and deliberate with everything he said. “We need to make sure that no one recognizes you. We can only do that if we go all the way.”

Vince reluctantly nodded comprehension. Somewhere in his mind, it had seemed like a plausible explanation. The music was working well.



Program 006: Why Fight It? / Why Not Try It?

Program 007: Trust

Vince was lying on the couch, reading and listening to his headphones. His silky pink robe was the only thing that indicated he was trying to disguise himself at all. “What’s this?”

Howard handed a large bottle of various pills. “These are some pills to help, Vince.”

“Help how? What do they do?”

Howard acted as if it were nothing. “These are oral glucocorticosteroids and anti androgens.”

“Gluko whats?” Vince asked, rightly puzzled.

“Never mind.” Howard said. Glucocorticosteroids, is what they were. He wasn’t lying. They were a type of medication that had among it’s many ‘side-effects’ a decrease in bone mass. Of course these particular derivatives wouldn’t leave the bones weak and brittle, but just cause them to soften and contract a bit. “I got them from my friend Dr. Earl Baumgartner. He works on experimental stuff down at the university. The point is that they will shrink your bones a little. About five percent. They’ll give you a more female size.”

Vince sat up, alarmed. “My bones? Shrink my bones!? That’s going too far!”

Howard rolled his eyes. “It’s the perfect disguise – no one would look for someone smaller than they used to be. People think it’s impossible. It’s only temporary, Vince.”

“How can that be *temporary*?”

Howard scoffed at Vince’s dismay, making it sound so trivial. “Well, when you drink milk your bones grow, right? So when we’re done with your disguise, you can grow your bones back to normal. You know that.”

Vince wasn’t absolutely sure – but he seemed to be think it was a reasonable explanation. After all, he trusted Howard. “I guess that makes sense.”

“Sure it does.” He patted Vince on his shaved knee, reassuringly. “Sure it does.”

Program D: The Stranger

It was a few nights later when Vince came into the living room, in his pink robe, looking very nervous. "I think I hear someone outside, Howard."

"You're imagining things," Howard replied. "We're in the middle of nowhere."

Vince backed away from the windows, behind the sofa. "No, I really think there's someone out there."

Howard sighed and put down the book he was reading. "I'll go check."

"No! It's too dangerous!"

Howard went to a desk and pulled out a pistol. "I'll take your gun, Vince."

"But be careful!" He was paralyzed with fear. *Why didn't he just go out there and deal with it himself?* He asked himself. *What was wrong with him?*

Howard went out the front door and wandered around for a minute before going to the window next to Vince's room and turning off the speakers that made the "bump in the night" noises Vince had heard. Taking a few steps away from the house, Howard pointed the gun in the air and fired off two shots. He then made sure to rub some dirt on his pants and on his shirt. He wanted to look like he had been in a bit of a scuffle. He then sprinted back and forth, working up a good sweat.

He then returned to the house, breathless and flush. Vince was there, his eyes wild with fear. "Was that a shot!?"

"This big guy..." Howard paused



to catch his breath. "This big guy. He was out there, and he tried to attack me."

"Did he have a mustache!?" Vince asked, with a clear notion who it might be.

"Yes," Howard replied, going with it. "Yes he did."

"That's one of the guys after me!"

Howard went to the kitchen and poured himself a drink, to make it look good. "That's what I figured." Howard drank his whole glass of whiskey on one dramatic gulp. "I shot him."

"Shot him!"

"I killed him, Vince. I carried his body into the dumpster and left it there. I don't think anyone saw me."

"We have to get the fuck outta here!"

"No!" Howard yelled. "We're not going anywhere, Vince. We stay right here. No one saw anything, and no one will suspect me. I'm a good citizen, I have no record."

"But what about me?"

"You're just a woman in my house. You have no connection to this."

"But what if they ask questions!?"

"We play it cool and take it easy. No one will even connect it to you or me."

Clearly panicking, Vince went for his room. "I'm getting out of here."

Howard blocked him with his body. "You stay put! I just shot and killed a man for you, and you owe it to me to keep your head and do what I tell you!"

The intensity on Howard's eyes seemed to have an effect on Vince. Never had he really thought of his old college friend as being so trustworthy and in command. But now, it just seemed obvious that Howard was the one in control of the situation. He backed away and calmed himself. "I guess you're right, Vince."

"Of course I am. Now take your pills and relax to your music." Howard said, putting his hand on Vince's shoulder. "Everything will be fine."

Vince nervously smiled back.

Program 009: Embrace A New Self**Program 010: French Lace****Program 011: Soft Surrender**

"You said this was temporary, Howard," Vince said, as he picked up the papers and cards on the table in front of him. He examined them all very carefully.

"Of course it is, Vince."

Vince turned to Howard, clutching the documents he had been looking at. "Then why did you get all of these records changed?" Vince held certificates, identification cards, social security cards, tax records and even credit cards. All of them looked perfectly authentic.

Howard slowed down his speech to be clear. "Since we know those guys are looking for you, and I've already killed a man, I think we may have to do this a little while longer than we planned."

Vince looked at Howard with anguish. His disbelieving eyes had a trace of mascara, making them look bigger. "How much longer?"

"Until the heat dies down," Howard replied, hoping he wasn't going to be asked what he meant by "heat."

"But why did you go to all this trouble for a new name?" Vince examined a credit card closely. "I already look like a lot like a girl because of those pills you gave me."

"Well, you're a little smaller, a little shorter. But you don't *quite* look like a real girl."

"Smaller? Shorter?"

"I remember when those sweats just stopped at your ankles, now they almost cover your feet."

Vince glanced down at his feet, the expression on his face making it obvious he hadn't realized that fact, yet. "How far do we have to go, Howard?"

"As far as we need to."

Vince looked nervous, but restrained. He was a far cry from the loud and



demonstrative man who came to his door not so long ago. “But I don’t want to *really* look like a girl, Howard.”

Howard got serious. “Both of our lives depend on it now, Vince.” He then scratched the stubble on his chin. “Or should I call you Georgette?”

“Couldn’t you have picked a better name? ‘Georgette le Criard?’ I don’t even know how to pronounce that.” He read the name on the ID card again. “And why do I have to be from France?”

“It’s harder to trace that way. If you’re a French national, those people after you won’t be able to trace your true identity.”

Vince tossed the documents on the table and got up. “This is nuts Howard. This will never work. I have to get out of here.”

“You stay right where you are! You lost your right to make your own decisions the moment you came through my door. This is my house, and these are my rules!”

“You can’t tell me what to do!” Vince shouted.

Howard no longer had any fear in confronting Vince. “I can and I *will*! I’ve *killed* a man for you, Vince, and now I’m as deep in this mess as you are! I’m not going to let you do something stupid and put my life in jeopardy!”

“But what you’re asking for is...”

“I’m not asking for anything anymore, Vince! I’m telling you! You’ll do what I want, and do it without making trouble! Don’t be so goddamned selfish! You’ve already messed up my life! Now you’ll help me fix it!”

Just like he expected, Vince’s resolve crumbled. “I’m sorry, Howard.”

“Sorry isn’t enough! You need to stop thinking about yourself all the time, and think about others! You’re ruining everyone’s life you’re touching! You’re a curse!” He drove it all home. He wanted to push Vince as far as he could. Those messages should have removed any resistance by now.

“I... I... I’m sorry, Howard. I really am.” Vince said, his voice breaking. “Oh God, I’m so sorry!”

“You don’t care about anyone but yourself!”

“Don’t say that!” Vince said, sniffing.

“Are you crying?”

“No,” Vince warbled.

“Well, it sounds like you are. You’re nothing more than a sissy inside, Vince. You deserve to be wearing skirts.”

“You don’t have to be so... So *cruel*!” Vince said, wiping away a tear.

Howard was delighted with this reaction. It was so feminine. “Are you really crying? You’re pathetic.”

J O E S I X P A C K

***I'M YOUR
DOLLY***

**“Barbie in a Box” by Joe Six-Pack
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2009 Paperback Edition

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BARBIE-IN-A-BOX

There it was – discarded, torn-apart and miserable. A small, brown cardboard mailer. Jessica knew it was due to be delivered to her place today. The trap had sprung, all while she was probably eating her sopping wet microwaved lunch at work.

When the mail arrived, no doubt her boyfriend received that package, and wondered why. He hadn't sent for anything. He rarely got any mail addressed to his name, whatsoever. Jessica could easily imagine that puzzled look on his face, puzzled like a dog. That wouldn't stop him from tearing right into it, where he would have found the CD.

As Jessica entered their apartment, she followed the tossed-aside packaging like a trail of bread crumbs. The box was at the door. The bubble-wrap was a few feet away, towards the living room. The plastic wrap of the CD was just ten feet from that. By the time she found the CD case at her feet, she was in the living room, seeing her boyfriend, passed out on the couch, the headphones from the player still on his head.

Of course he couldn't resist. He had just gotten a free CD in the mail. He had to listen to it. Besides, it looked like a heavy metal record of some sort. That was his favorite type of music. Ear-splintering, brain-jellifying heavy metal music. So he popped it into the stereo and cranked it up to 11.

Jessica set down her things from the office without waking him. She sat down on a nearby chair and watched his chest move up and down as he slept. That used to make her swoon, watching him sleep. She had thought he was an angel back then, way back when they had first met.

In a lot of ways, Tyler seemed almost heaven-sent. He was kind, thoughtful and warm. Still, he had that edgy nature to him that got him into a fight every so often. Somehow, she had found that machismo endearing. She had always fallen for dangerous men, but Tyler was the first one she had met with any sort of depth. His body wasn't much to get excited about, and his face was plain – but he was passionate. When he was focused and into Jessica, he was one-hundred-percent totally into her. When Tyler looked into her eyes, Jessica knew that she was the most important thing in the world to him.

But that was years ago. Back when Tyler had a real job and future. Back when he was chasing Jessica. Now that he had her, now that he had her place to stay in, now that he had her money to spend, the passion was gone. Long gone.

At some point, that couch started to become Tyler's universe. He got up to eat, to work at his 4-hour-a-week part-time job, and to go to the bathroom, and all those things, but then he had started to sleep on it overnight. More and more, Jessica was by herself in her bed at night. Totally alone. With that lump on the couch, she couldn't even invite someone over or pursue another relationship. Tyler was always in the way. Tyler was always home. On the couch.

For months it seemed, Jessica had been trying to work up the willpower to kick him out. She had first figured that he'd eventually get the hint, and take off. He



never seemed to. Now, it was like she just kept him around for a little bit of sex every so often. He wasn't that into her anymore, so it wasn't exactly fireworks, but it was enough to keep her from going crazy.

She had even started to rationalize a life where she kept her boyfriend out on the couch and just needed him from time to time. That was worth a few bucks in rent and food, wasn't it? Wouldn't any girl kill to have a live-in gigolo? Sure.

But she knew she was just lying to herself. As Tyler just stopped doing much more than going through the motions of a relationship, she started to hate him. Deeply. Why should he get to live off of her hard work? Once, he had a job like her, but he quit it. He said he needed time to “find himself.” Apparently, finding himself involved getting up at noon, watching hours of ESPN and getting drunk by four.

Jessica had reached her limit. Not only did she want him out, she wanted payback.

Then, one day at work, she found a piece of paper someone had discarded near her desk. It was a post-it with a website and the words “To deal with him” written on it. A little scribble of a man’s head with horns was drawn next to it. When lunch rolled around, she had to see what the site was all about. “Barbie-in-a-Box” was the address, as well as the name of the site.

Jessica wasn’t sure at all if the site was serious or not. After all, what they advertised was the most insane thing she’d ever seen anyone claim. Whoever these people were, they said that they had a “fail-proof method” of making anyone over into a clone of the plastic toy. “Designed for women or men,” the site said, “and they will never know,” it also promised. “By the time you get Barbie-in-a-Box #10, your worries will be over!” It said in big, red letters.

Then came the guarantee: “Your first Barbie-in-a-Box is free! If we don’t have them in pink panties in 48 hours, you pay nothing!”

She thought about it for a while. Of course it was a scam, but it did sound harmless enough to try. Then, realizing she had little to lose, she decided to take advantage of the no-risk money-back-guarantee, and fed in the information they needed. At least it would be good for a giggle.

So, just as they promised, the small package with the “introductory” CD had indeed arrived. Tyler had listened to it. Now she was going to see either how a man could be changed into a woman, or she was going to prove to herself just how gullible she was when it came to internet shopping.



One day later, Jessica woke to find no one in the living room. Which was odd, as her sedentary boyfriend had been there for a couple of days. Odder still, the shades of the room had been opened, letting in the bright morning sunlight into the room. Upstairs, she heard the shower start to run. That must have been where Tyler was.

She checked the time. It was seven in the morning. Maybe this was the one day a week he showed up at his part-time job? No, even then, he wouldn’t be up this early.

“No sense in sitting around all day,” was the only explanation she got from Tyler. She lost track of what he was up to, as she was too busy herself to take notice. All she had time to notice was that even before she was ready to jump in the car and go to work, Tyler was headed out.

What was he up to? “Need to get some stuff for dinner,” he said, as he ran out the door. Usually, dinner was Domino’s and a six-pack of Lowenbrau. This certainly was odd, Jessica thought to herself. Maybe he was having an affair?

Later that day, after she had come back from lunch, she found four voice messages from under her own number. She panicked, thinking the only reason Tyler was calling must be due to some disaster at home.

“What, what’s going on!? What happened, Tyler?” She said, breathlessly into the phone.

“Nothin,” Tyler responded, laconically, “just wanted to know what you’re thinkin’.”

Jessica was dumbfounded. Later that night, when she came home, she noticed that all the crap that had piled up around Tyler’s couch had been cleaned up. In fact, the carpet showed tell-tale tracks of a vacuum. There was also this strange smell coming from the kitchen. It smelled like food.

Dinner, as it turned out, was nothing more than macaroni and cheese, but it was more effort than Tyler had put into a meal in ages. “Did you put onion in this?” Jessica asked as she ate.

Tyler smiled and nodded. “And some extra butter. It makes it so much creamier.”

As Jessica ate her food, she let Tyler talk on about his day. She wasn’t really listening, as her head was awash in questions. Maybe Tyler was being nice so he’d break up with her. No, that was too hopeful. Maybe he was going to ask for money? Maybe he had been tested for STDs and was going to tell her bad news. Maybe...

Then a new thought struck her – ask him. “So what’s behind all this?” she inquired.

“Behind...” Tyler had to think about what she was talking about. “Oh, the dinner? I just wanted you to know I appreciate you, Jess.”

That pretty well convinced her that this was some sort of set-up.

“I’ll do the dishes,” Tyler said, without even hesitating.

Before she could even say otherwise, Tyler had gotten the plates and tableware gathered up, and was scrubbing them in the kitchen sink. Eventually, she snapped herself out of her dazed state of disbelief and went to go ask more questions. What she found was that he was already drying off the plates with a towel.

“Isn’t that your Pittsburgh Steelers terrible towel?” She asked, seeing what he was drying with.

Tyler shrugged. “Yeah, time to put it to good use. That’s what a towel is for, right?”

She had never even been allowed to touch it. He kept it in a glass case in the living room. “That’s the vintage 1970’s one that one you spent three hundred dollars on ebay for?” Jessica clarified.

“For that kind of money, you’d figure it’d do a better job.”

Jessica had to sit down.



It was the next morning when Jessica finally figured out what was going on. She was in bed, letting Tyler use her as an entertainment system.

At least, that's how she'd describe sex with Tyler. He played her body like the controls on his Xbox. He'd mash her breasts as if he were repeatedly trying some impossible 2-button combo attack.

But today, he stroked and felt her like she was a woodwind instrument. Jessica was in bliss, having her skin caressed as Tyler used the slightest touch of his fingertips skimming all over her body. Somewhere, he had also figured how to use his tongue in the most peculiar way. She wasn't even sure what he was doing down there, as she was too busy gripping the sheets and hanging on for dear life.

It was when she was coming down from one of these assaults on her senses that the funniest thought occurred to her. All this strange and wonderful behavior from her boyfriend started almost on the same day the "Barbie-in-a-Box" CD arrived.

Pinning it down more precisely, it began the very next day after the CD arrived. As she turned in her bed, she saw that same CD sitting in a player on Tyler's night stand. He had listened to it that first time, she assumed. But, had he had kept listening to it? Wait a minute...

Then she sat up in bed, shocked at what this must mean. She had just assumed that the whole "Barbie-in-a-Box" thing was a scam. Because it just wasn't possible to make a normal man into a woman. It was totally unbelievable.

"Tyler?" She said.

"Uh-huh?" He replied. He was lying next to her, his eyes staring up into the ceiling. She had expected him to be asleep, like men always are after sex.

Jessica squirmed under the sheets to find what she was looking for. "Would you put these on?" She asked, holding her discarded pink panties in her hand.

"Sure!" Tyler replied, enthusiastically. He sprang out of bed and started to slide them up his legs. "Wow, those are smooth, aren't they?"

"They look nice on you," Jessica said, barely able to say much at all. Her mind was locked up in shock.

Tyler checked himself out in the mirror. The little pair of panties strained on his bigger frame, especially with his still swollen member. But that didn't seem to bother Tyler. He turned left and right to see every angle. "They feel weird," he remarked, "weird, cool and thin." He then began to put his pants on, still wearing the panties. "Mind if I try them out for the day? I'm kinda curious to know what it would feel like."

"No, go ahead..." Jessica's voice trailed off as a mixture of excitement and amazement gripped control of her. She looked at the clock. It had been just 42 hours. They had him in pink panties with six hours to burn. Barbie-in-a-Box had a new customer.



Jessica didn't wait long. She purchased the whole "Barbie-in-a-Box" plan just minutes after Tyler had first put the panties on. Her finger trembled with

excitement as she clicked on the “Barbie-in-a-Box MtF Total Barbie Plus Plan.” She had to type her credit card numbers in four times into the website, she was so nervous. There was no hesitation to do it, she was just worried that they might reject her request or disqualify her in some way. Whatever it took, however much money she needed to spend, she was going to do this.

Maybe she’d need to ask her boss, Martin Comstock for a raise, or do some commission work. Still, she was all in. That night, as Tyler had dinner waiting for her after work, she thought about the possibilities. Jessica watched in quiet awe as Tyler came from the kitchen, wearing that goofy frilled apron that her mother had given her as a Christmas gift some years ago. She forgot she even had it. Tyler had even taken his messy mop of hair and tied it back into a stubby pony tail. One or two strands had broken free and he tucked them behind his ears as he welcomed her home.

He was already taking on girlish traits, and seemed to be totally unaware. How far could this go? Could he actually go all the way? Yes. Jessica was starting to think it wasn’t impossible.

With a sheepish smile, he pecked Jessica on the cheek with a quick kiss. “Kinda thought I’d try to make dinner again,” he said. “It’s been a long time since I made my famous chili, though. It isn’t coming out like I wanted. It’s now kinda turned into burritos. If that’s okay.”

He apologized and asked for her permission. Those were two things Tyler hadn’t done in forever. Whatever this “Barbie-in-a-Box” thing was, it was amazing.

“I’m sure it’ll be fine,” Jessica reassured him. Even if it wasn’t fine, she wasn’t about to say so. This was incredible. Moses parting the Red Sea was a miracle. This was a miracle plus one. As he turned away to back to the kitchen, Jessica noticed that besides the apron, he was wearing jeans and a t-shirt. He had rolled up the sleeves of the shirt to make it kind of a tank top.

The site had said that the plan would take ten shipments of Barbie-in-a-Box boxes, and maybe six to nine months for it to finish. At this pace, Jessica seriously believed that it might be done in a week.

Tyler watched carefully as Jessica ate her first bite of the burrito he had prepared. It wasn’t bad at all. When she caught Tyler staring at her as she ate, she didn’t know quite why he was so fixated on her. But then she realized that he was waiting for her approval. Waiting!

“It’s good,” she said.

Like a wash of cool air over Tyler’s face, he immediately smiled. “I’m glad,” he said.

Honestly enjoying her meal, Jessica watched as Tyler took small, awkward bites of his food.

“Don’t you like it?” She asked him.

“I’m feeling fat,” Tyler responded. “I’ve been wearing your panties all day, and it feels like I weigh a ton. I’m gonna put myself on a diet for a while.”

“If you say so, honey,” Jessica said, grinning with delight.

“Oh, don’t try to make me feel good. I know everyone thinks I’m chubby. Anyway, I’ve always wanted to drop about five pounds. I think a little bit of exercise would be good for me too. Do we still have that Ab-Kkwon-Do DVD around here?”

“I’m sure I can find it,” Jessica said, trying not to choke on her food from laughter. “So you wore the panties all day, huh?”

“Was I not supposed to?” Tyler looked shocked and embarrassed. He then started to get up. “I can go take them off...”

“No!” Jessica blurted. She then calmed herself down. “No, it’s alright. You can keep wearing them.”

Tyler sat back down. “Great! I’ve really got to kind of liking them,” he said. Realizing he had just veered into very strange territory, Tyler quickly changed the subject. “Nice day at work?” He asked, with his eyes averting hers. Was he blushing?

Jessica didn’t have to lift a finger for the rest of the night, as Tyler once again went about doing the dishes and cleaning the cookware. While he was doing that, she slipped onto the computer to check out the Barbie-in-a-Box site.

This was truly going to be expensive, but Jessica was now wholly persuaded it was going to be worth every cent. Turning miserable little Tyler into a sissy she-male was going to be a blast. One of the things that had captured her imagination was the “fully customizable options” she could select. There was a long list of personalities she could choose from, like “little fairy,” “pouty princess,” “bubbly bimbo,” and “slutty secretary,” Jessica had decided to stay with the original “Barbie-in-a-Box” package. She did splurge on a “happy home maker” add-on, and judging by the way Tyler was cleaning, it was already working. Plus, she could afford another option or two later, if she wanted.

Satisfied, she got up to grab a cookie from the kitchen. Tyler was there, drying the dishes with his old yellow towel, and dancing. He had his headphones on, and was dancing to the music, singing softly. In falsetto.

This was just Box #1. She had nine more to go.



A few days later, almost a week, and another plain brown box arrived. It was simply labeled “Box #2” and contained nothing more than a CD and a few bottles of pills. Without even really giving it a lot of thought, Tyler had ripped right into it, and popped the new disc in his player. He then proceeded to toss his old disc in the trash.

Allison watched in fascination. She figured it was some sort of message ingrained into Tyler’s brain, to dump the old disc. No sooner had he done that than he popped a couple of the pills down and swallowed them down with some water. Checking the bottle, she saw they were labeled “Crazy Slim 1000 Diet Supplement.” She thought about trying one herself, but the site had said that under no circumstances should anyone but the subject use anything inside the box,

and that all pills should “be kept from being handled by pregnant women.” That scared her enough to leave them alone – who knows what they were really doing.

Although, she was perfectly happy to let her little guinea pig keep taking them.

That night, Jessica was curious to try out a few new things. The site had told her that sex with “the subject” was going to be a radically changing experience, so she was very curious to see exactly what that meant.

When Tyler was finally ready to come to bed – his bed-time routine had been growing longer day by day – he was wearing her favorite pair of red panties.

Over the previous days, Jessica had come up with some very flimsy reasons for Tyler to continue to wear her underwear. It didn’t take much convincing at all for Tyler to slip into a new pair every day.

Jessica used the bed sheets to unveil herself, as she had decided to wear her sexiest negligee to bed that night, to tempt her increasingly sissified boyfriend. Sure enough, when Tyler saw Jessica’s curvaceous body, dressed in frilly, flimsy, delicate ruffles and lace, he stopped in his tracks.

“I love that outfit, Jess. You look so cute in that,” Tyler said before bounding into bed.

That was it? Jessica rolled over and wrapped her arm around to massage Tyler’s rock-hard shaft. Only what she found wasn’t hard at all. It was soft and limp. It didn’t take long for her to work Tyler rigid, but she was shocked she had to do anything at all. Usually when sex even crossed his mind, he went from zero to boner in nothing flat.

As Jessica could feel Tyler start to buck a little bit, he rolled onto his back and laid there, ready for whatever was about to happen.

It suddenly occurred to Jessica that she was doing all the work. Tyler was simply waiting for her to take him.

Just like a woman would.

She wasn’t about to pass this by, and hopped up on her knees to straddle him. As she hovered over him, she could hear Tyler’s shortened breath, as he made quick little gasps for air. Going with the flow, Jessica leaned over and licked one of his nipples.

Tyler moaned.

This was more than a “radically changed experience,” Jessica realized. This was almost total role reversal in bed. The truth be told, she hadn’t been this turned on since she was a teenager. This sort of power over another person was intoxicating.

She worked up to his neck and nibbled on it, just like men did to her. Tyler responded with a mix of giggles and heavy breathing. She then pinched the other nipple on his chest, which resulted in another moan.

“You like that, don’t you?” She said, teasing him. She took his hands and placed them on his chest. “Why don’t you try it for yourself?” Jessica helped him rub his aureole with the tips of his fingers, which started him writhing in ecstasy.

“Oh, that’s so nice...” Tyler said, languidly. “Sooo nice...”

"There you go, baby," Jessica considered her next move. She decided that since she was the man in this exchange, that she would do what Tyler always did. Interrupt his partner so he could get off. "Here I come, babe!" She said, abruptly.

Tyler jerked, bracing for something, and even tried to retreat from under Jessica's body. But quickly, she had set over him, and impaled herself on Tyler. She began rocking up and down, pushing herself onto him deeper and deeper. "C'mon, baby! C'mon!" She growled.

Tyler held his eyes tightly shut, until they sprang wide open. He was starting to come. "Uh uh uh uh uh uh oo oo oo oo..." he was saying in a tiny little voice. He gripped the sheets with his hands and started to pull them loose.

"Here I come!" Jessica said, loudly. She had always wanted to say that. With those words, Tyler finally released. It was like she was controlling him, telling him what to do and when to do it.

This was one crazy fuck, she said to herself. She rolled off from atop her boyfriend and laid on her back, pleasantly drifting in the afterglow. She looked over to Tyler, who had some strange combination of horror and bliss in his expression. He suddenly got to his feet.

"I have to go clean up," he explained. He grabbed a shirt off the floor, put it on, and walked to the bathroom.

He didn't even seem to care it was Jessica's peignoir he put on.



Some days later, Jessica had found herself more in love with Tyler than ever. It was amazing. Sure, manly men were still her first love, and there was no substitute for that. But if she had nothing more than this sissified boy for the rest of her life, she could be very happy.

Every morning, she watched in restrained excitement as Tyler picked out a pair of her panties and got dressed for the day. They were just part of his life, now. He wore the panties just as casually as he wore his old wrinkled boxers.

It even crossed her mind that she should just stop the process right now and live with Tyler as he was. But every day, something new came up in Tyler's evolving personality, and she just couldn't wait to see what was going to happen tomorrow.

Just as he had said he was going to do, Tyler had begun working out to the "Ab-Kwon-Do" DVD she had found buried under some stuff in the closet. He had done it for a few days before he complained of feeling "clumsy" in his workout sweats and T-shirt. When Jessica suggested wearing a leotard, he had little hesitation. He looked darling in pastel blue tights and white tennis shoes. He even added white sweatbands and a headband on his own. She took pictures to keep on her iPod, to remind her all day at work of the darling little sissy she had at home.

The diet was starting to work, too. He reported that he had lost seven pounds, and just in less than three weeks. He was certainly committed to it. Tyler hardly ever ate a meal that he couldn't finish in ten bites. Jessica was seriously worried that he

might be hurting himself, but the website assured her that he was well within the guidelines for staying healthy.

One day when she was at work, working on “employee interaction” with her manager Martin (in a closet), Jessica had neglected to check her phone as she usually did for the stream of messages Tyler left. But on this day, after forgetting to check for the first few hours and then not finding anything, she got worried. Usually, by this time, Tyler had left at least a message or two for her. At about eleven thirty, she began to get a little panicked and decided to give him a call.

“Uh, hi,” Tyler said, sheepishly.

“Everything okay, sweet cheeks? I haven’t heard from you all morning.” Allison said.

There was a pause. “I’m just a little busy, I guess.”

“What’s all that echo? Are you in the bathroom, Tyler?”

“Y... Yeah.”

“You’re not on the toilet while you’re talking me, are you?”

“Oh, no!” Tyler replied, aghast at the suggestion.

“Then what are you doing? I hear water running.”

“Just the bath.” Tyler had taken to baths lately, only taking showers when he was short on time. “Oh, shoot!” He suddenly blurted. “Ow ow owie!” He added.

“What in the world are you up to?” Jessica finally asked.

“Oh, I just got so sick of having all my hair caught up in those tights. But this is so much harder than it looks!”

“Are you... Are you shaving your legs?” Jessica said, trying not to sound shocked.

“Kinda?” Tyler replied.

“Don’t you shave another hair!” Jessica commanded.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry!” Tyler immediately apologized.

“No, don’t apologize, darling! I love that you want to do this, but I want to help you. I’m going to take an early lunch, and I’ll be there in twenty minutes! Stay right there! Okay?”

“Okay, Jess.”

Jessica hung up, and quickly manufactured an excuse for her supervisor as to why she needed to leave immediately. On the way home, she swung by the drug store to pick up a multi-pack of pink razors with little daisies on the handle, and some perfumed shaving cream. She then picked a brand-new epilator shaver, the type that plucked hair out by the root in the most painful way possible. She also grabbed a hot waxing set, and then some stinging alcohol to swab onto his legs. This was going to be fun.



On one of Tyler’s shopping trips, he had picked up a Wii gaming console. Jessica’s alarm at this seeming step backwards in his female development was assuaged



when he explained why he got it. It came complete with the Wii Fit pad, so he could exercise with the help of the Wii Fit software. There, he could compare his workouts with other users across the world.

Of course, subscribing to that service cost them a little money, so Jessica graciously allowed Tyler to subscribe if he just didn't mind canceling the ESPN sports package on the cable. Tyler agreed to it cheerfully. "Why I subscribed to that sports junk I'll never know," was his comment.

Setting up the Wii proved to be a task that stymied Tyler. This was same person, who, no less than a month ago had installed a digital video recorder and linked the HDMI and optical SPDIF through to the plasma to get true 1080p output in room-calibrated 5.1 surround sound. Today, he sat center in a bundle of tangled cables and started to cry.

“Don’t worry, sweetie,” Jessica comforted him, “we can get Oliver from down the street. He’s a whiz with home electronics. I’m sure he’d be happy to give you some tips.”

Tyler sniffled. “I’m sorry, Jess. I really thought...”

“I’m sure you’re doing your very best.” She said, sympathetically.

Oliver came around in a few minutes. He was a gangly young man of nineteen, who clearly had little interest in the world outside of gaming, computers and games you could play on computers. He wore lint-covered brown cords, a blue windbreaker and a thick pair of glasses. He abruptly took over the entire cable operation from Tyler who surrendered easily. “Show me what you’re doing,” Tyler asked. “I tried to plug that in to the TV, but it didn’t fit.” The frustrated boy took a seat so he could watch what Oliver was doing.

“That’s because it’s the power cable,” Oliver replied. After a few more exchanges that left Tyler feeling dumb and out of his depth, he quickly lost interest.

“Is it done yet?” Tyler asked eight times before being told it was. Oliver was giving Tyler some sideways glances now and then, wondering what exactly the story was with him. He remembered Tyler as an average guy, who was mostly unremarkable. He was usually unshaven, he wore cargo shorts and flannel shirts, and hung out with the other guys in the area who looked just like him.

But this person was at least fifteen pounds thinner, had hairless legs and little trace of a beard. The swagger and confidence that guys like him usually showed was gone, and Tyler was now looking nervous and unsure. He was also virtually sure that Tyler was not the sort of guy to be dressed in a tight shirt with a picture of Tinkerbell on it.

When the system was up and running, and Tyler was starting to play with it, Oliver turned to Jessica. “So... What’s the deal with him?”

“Oh, he’s just figuring things out,” Jessica said, cryptically. “He’s awakening to new truths about who he is.”

“Ooooookay,” Oliver replied, “so, does that mean he’s gay?”



Gnawing on a breakfast bar that looked to be made of particle board, Tyler smiled brightly when Jessica entered the room. Over the past few days, she had noticed the puppy-like behavior of Tyler, who seemed to always brighten up in her presence. He’d follow her around from room to room, and hover as she ate.

For now, she found it cute, but she also knew that after a while, it was going to get on her nerves. Hopefully the Barbie-in-a-Box people had thought of that.

“Can I get you something to eat, Jess?” Tyler asked, eagerly.

It was only six thirty in the morning, and Tyler was already wide awake. Jessica dreaded the possibility that the Barbified Tyler was going to be a morning person. Oh well, she could probably live with it if the rest of his transformation was as exciting as the first few weeks.

Jessica's stomach growled. "Um, the French toast you made yesterday would be..."

"Comin' right up!" Tyler said with a smile. He practically leapt at his frilly apron, which he looked for any excuse to wear. Maybe that was even why he had started to learn to cook. Just to wear a big girly apron.

"Hey, Jess?" Tyler said, as he cracked open a few eggs and whisked them up.

"Yes, sweetie?" Jessica replied. She peered in his direction, noticing he looked a little pensive and nervous.

"Um, I was wondering... Is it okay for me to be using your clothes so much?"

Jessica gasped. Things had been working so well. Now, he was showing hesitation. Thought. Awareness. She knew it was too good to last.

"What do you mean, Ty? Don't you want to?"

"It's not that, I just wanted to make sure that it was okay to be borrowing all your stuff all the time."

Jessica exhaled. This wasn't self-awareness. He was just being considerate. "We share everything, you know that."

"No, it's okay? Really?"

"Yes, of course."

"Really really reeeally?" Tyler said, squeaking out the word in a childish voice.

Wow, he was getting wimpy. "I said it was okay, honey pie."

"Okay," Tyler said, and went back to beating the eggs. He then looked back at Jessica. "Are you sure?"

"Again, yes!"

"Cool!" Tyler said, dropping the bowl on the table unfinished. He ran off, dropping the apron on a chair as he left the room. "Because I was really thinking that I wanted to wear..." His voice trailed off as he went down the hall.

Jessica wondered if he even really noticed that no one was hearing him right now. He seemed to be talking, just so he could explain this to himself.

Just two minutes later, Jessica heard the voice come back, still talking. "...with the workouts, I've just gotten so used to freedom of movement in the leotard, and everything I have is so thick and itchy and..." Realizing he was back in view of his girlfriend, he presented himself. "Is this okay?" He asked, biting his lip anxiously.

Although she was shouting a primeval scream of triumph inside, Jessica restrained herself, and as casually as was possible, glanced at Tyler and give a quick approval. "I said it was fine." Dressed in an old nightshirt-length t-shirt, Tyler didn't look drastically different, except that the shirt was so long that it nearly covered up the cargo shorts he wore, making it look like a dress. He had also exchanged his tired jogging shoes for a pair of yellow flip-flops.

"kay," Tyler said, as he went back to the eggs.

Jessica still couldn't believe it. He really was changing. He really was going to be a sissy. It was actually going to happen.



On the third month, another box arrived. This one was pink, simply marked "Box #3," and just as it happened last time, Tyler automatically opened it up and took possession of the contents without comment.

This box was much larger, and contained another supply of vitamins, a selection of new CD's, a DVD and a month's supply of freeze-dried food. Tyler stocked it all away as a very curious Jessica watched, trying to not look too interested.

But Jessica just couldn't help herself. "So, what's with all the food?" she asked.

Tyler answered like it was the most obvious thing in the world. "My Diet? Remember?"

"Right," she said.

"I'm going to try and drop those last five pounds once and for all." Tyler added.

"Good for you, honey." She patted him on the head for approval. "By the way, speaking of food, I could definitely go for something to eat." Tyler instinctively reached for his apron, but Jessica stopped him. "Not this time. We're going out for lunch."

"Out?" Tyler said, startled. He bit his lower lip in anxious hesitation.

"Is that okay, babe?" Jessica said. "You're not scared of going out, are you?"

"No..." Tyler said. "I just don't think I have anything to wear."

"That's so cute," Jessica said.

"What?"

"Never mind. We'll go somewhere casual."

Casual, as it turned out, was a small café with an outside seating area, right on the sidewalk. They were led to a table by a slightly scruffy waiter, who took several confused glances at Tyler, trying to figure him out. Tyler, for his part was too busy to notice, as he was straightening his shirt and jeans nervously. He wasn't expecting to be on display like this.

Jessica checked herself in her compact, making sure she had survived the brief trip from home, and found herself satisfactory. "Let me borrow that for a second." Tyler asked, and took the compact, checking his own face and hair as well. He played with a few strands on the sides of his head before he handed it back. "Thanks much."

Although Tyler was dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, he was not carrying off masculinity very well. His jeans were ironed neat, and he had rolled up the cuffs a bit to show off his bare ankles. He had tucked in his bright yellow t-shirt into his pants, showing off his trimmer figure. And his blow-dried and gelled hair wafted gently in the breeze.

If that weren't enough, Tyler also sat primly with his legs crossed knee-over-knee, like a proper lady. "Is the food here good? I've never been to this place before."

“Never?” Jessica said, mocking astonishment. “That’s hard to believe.” She knew Tyler only went to restaurants he could drive through.

Tyler didn’t even blink when Jessica ordered for the both of them. He sipped on a glass of white wine like he had been doing so for years, extending his pinky as he held the glass. They talked about small things, like the weather. Jessica tried to get Tyler to talk about his job, or sports, or politics, but he had no interest in any of those subjects. Then, when Jessica off-handedly mentioned a celebrity starlet scandal in the news, Tyler came alive.

“Oh my God! Can you believe her!?” That’s so outrageous!” Tyler said, “The first time I heard that, I said to myself, that’s just so impossible! I couldn’t believe it!” He gestured with his hands and leaned forward, perched on his elbows. Jessica could have just mistaken him for one of his gossiping girlfriends at that point.

“And then did you hear what she said yesterday!?” Tyler added.

Someone had been watching the daytime celebrity shows, Jessica thought to herself, as he went on and on. The food arrived, and Tyler was immediately more interested in Jessica’s grilled chicken than in the garden salad in front of him. “Just a bite,” he pestered, “I just want a tiny bite. One bite. Just one little bite.”

Jessica had heard that kind of irritating begging before, but couldn’t place it. Then it came to her: that’s what she had always done to her companions in a restaurant. Was she really that annoying?

After lunch, Jessica decided she should show her little sissified beau off to the town. Tyler had no realization of his condition, swishing around town life a fairy. People stared, some made cutting comments just on the edge of hearing, but Tyler didn’t seem to notice any of it.

If one were to guess without knowing, people would have just assumed he was flamboyantly gay. He gushed and giggled effeminately like any garden variety homosexual man. But Jessica didn’t mind. She knew that the crucial difference was that Tyler was wearing a silky pair of panties under his clothes.

They went to do a little window shopping, taking her boyfriend to all the places he hated to go: antique shops, dress shops, art galleries and they even stopped for tea. He loved every minute of it – and he said so. He thought a dress was “adorable,” and that a set of throw pillows was “to die for.” On the way home in the car he even made Jessica promise that they’d do it again sometime.

Which, of course, she did promise to do.



A couple of nights later, a Friday night, Jessica decided to have a little fun. After all, it was a Friday night, and looking after her sissy meant that she really couldn’t go out and enjoy herself like she used to. So she waited until Tyler was done with the dishes and invited him over to the couch to watch some rented movies.

She handed the plastic sack full of DVD titles to Tyler, who pushed it away. “Oh, I can’t decide, you pick Jess.”

Jessica pushed the sack back into his reluctant hands. "No, no. You always moan and groan when I pick. You choose." She said. Truth was, this was a test. She had gotten an assortment of movies from explosion-ridden action/adventure to fart-joke comedy and hardcore chick-flick. She watched at Tyler dumped the contents out onto the couch, where he sifted through them.

He tossed away Rambo and considered *Batman Returns* for a moment. He discarded that, and then looked at *Thelma and Louise* for a long few seconds before he put that aside as well. Jessica was disappointed, she was really hoping he'd go for the obvious chick flick. But then he picked up a film and started to get excited. "Oo! Oo! This one!"

Jessica took the DVD of "*Legally Blond*" from him and gave Tyler a skeptical look. "Are you sure?"

"I've been wanting to see this forever!" Tyler declared. "She is such an inspiration and role model!" He seemed to catch himself, and then added in a more serious tone, "An inspiration to women of her type, that is."

They watched it, with Jessica fighting off boredom for most of the film, but Tyler was on the edge of his seat, totally engrossed. He laughed at most of the jokes, but on a couple, Jessica noticed that he seemed to miss the humor. In fact, he asked Jessica to explain one to him, and once explained, he then laughed at it. At the finale, Tyler was hopping up and down in glee. Jessica was half expecting to belt out a "you go girl" any second.

They popped in a second film, "*The 40 Year Old Virgin*," and ten minutes into it, Tyler was out cold on the couch. Jessica let it play out, as she actually thought it was a pretty good film. She even considered buying it. Once the credits played out, she checked the time, and it was well past midnight. She stretched, and turned to check on Tyler, who was still sleeping.

He was adorable. He had curled up into a fetal position, and was hugging a cushion like a teddy bear. Tyler was once prone to sleeping with his mouth open and drooling, but now he slept with his lips closed and slightly pursed. In fact, it almost looked like he was puckering up for a kiss.

Jessica imagined those same lips smothered in glossy cherry red lipstick, scrunched up to lay a kiss on some ruggedly handsome man's stubbly cheek. It would happen soon, she promised herself.

Curious, she approached Tyler. His shorts had rolled up, revealing most of his smoothly waxed legs. He was using moisturizer now on his skin, and it was really starting to look smooth and soft like her own legs, as if they had never seen a single hair on them. She couldn't help but run her fingers along the shin.

Still asleep, Tyler recoiled slightly, giggling.

"Tickle tickle," Jessica whispered. "You really are turning into a girly little fluff ball, aren't you?" She said into his ear. "Soon you'll be living in your pretty little panties forever, Tyler. Soon, you'll be skittering around in a skimpy little dresses, letting men ogle you. You'll be such a sweet, darling little sissy for men. They'll just love you. And you'll love them, too. In so many ways."

She placed her finger on Tyler's lips, and to her surprise, his lips formed around the finger, and he started to suck on it gently. "Oh my God," she said quietly to herself, "what a little fairy you're becoming, Tyler. Your poor, stupid, fool."



The next day, when Jessica awoke, she was surprised to find Tyler curled up next to her. She had left him downstairs, so she figured he must have woken and come upstairs at some point during the night – and oddly, was considerate enough not to wake her.

Jessica checked the clock, and saw it was almost eight. A good time to get up on Saturday morning.

She jostled Tyler's shoulder. "Wakey wakey, sleeping beauty." Tyler, in another change to his usual habits, woke without complaint and sat up. He stretched his arms out in the air and yawned. His eyes then sprang open, and in a matter of seconds, he realized it was morning and it was time to get moving. He leapt from the bed and sped to the bathroom.

"Dibs!" He called out and slammed the door behind him.

Jessica was not pleased. She was quite used to getting the bathroom first thing in the morning, and her routine depended on a leisurely amount of time to do her stuff.

A half hour later, she was banging on the door. "Tyler! It's been, like two hours in there! Hurry up!"

"Just a sec!" Tyler promised, "I'll be out in just a sec!" Another half hour later, he finally emerged. "It's all yours, Jess!"

With eyes full of loathing, Jessica passed by Tyler, well beyond ready for her turn. "You need to do laundry today," she said, trying to inject his life with misery.

"I just did it yesterday!" Tyler complained.

"You need to either do it every day or get your own stuff. We don't have enough to share."

"You mean get my own panties?" Tyler said, aloud.

Jessica muttered a curse at herself for saying what she had. She had just pushed him into thinking about what he was doing. Sure, he had been wearing the panties on some sort of flimsy pretense of being romantic, but now she had forced him to consider it, passing it through his conscious mind.

Tyler pshawed the suggestion with a dismissive wave. "I still have plenty of my own boxers. Maybe this is time for me to stop, Jess."

Jessica panicked, realizing she had just blown it. Big time. Now, she had to pull out the big guns. With a sorrowful tone, she said, "don't you love me anymore, Tyler?"

"Of course I do, Jess! I love you so much!" He grabbed her and hugged her tightly. "I just think..."



“Do it for me, Tyler. Please? I love to think that a little part of my femininity is always with you.”

“Yes, yes! Of course I will, baby!” Tyler said, hugging even harder, “I’d do anything for you, you know that! I’ll wear panties with pride!”

Jessica kissed him on the cheek. "Thanks, honey. Why don't you go down and listen to your CD's and then we'll order some stuff for you online?"

"That'd be awesome!" Tyler replied with excitement. "I really do love you, you know."

"I know you do, sweetie."

After rushing to the Barbie-in-a-Box website, she found some help in the forums. They had many stories from other "BIAB" customers who did something similar. The solution was the same in all cases: just don't make it worse.

The programming, the forums said, would eventually correct any minor moments of "self-realization," just as long as the mistake wasn't repeated or a new one magnified the first.

Satisfied, Jessica went about her morning routine, and joined Tyler back in the living room. She found him seated on the beanbag, he eyes kind of spaced out, listening to his CD player. "Not going to use the couch?" She asked, curious.

"Ugh." Tyler answered, scrunching up his nose. "It smells! Next time I fall asleep on it, promise me you'll wake me up and not let me stay there all night. It took me a half hour just to scrub that stench off of me in the shower."

Of course it smells, Jessica thought to herself, it smells because you used to be such a slob! "Promise," Jessica said. She then had a flash of inspiration. "In fact, why don't we just get rid of it?"

Tyler agreed. "It's so old, and doesn't go with anything in this room. We should. We really should."

"No, I mean right now! Let's get it out on the sidewalk."

"Right now?"

"Right now!" Jessica declared. "Let's do it!"

Tyler got up, just a little uncertain of what to do or how to do it. Jessica pointed at one end of the couch, and said, "Go, lift that end, I'll lift the other and we'll take it out the front door."

Timidly, Tyler approached the end of the couch, awkwardly bent over and tried to put his hands under it to lift. He immediately abandoned the attempt, not budging the couch a millimeter. "It's too big, Jess!" He whined.

"What do you mean, big? You move this thing around all the time." Jessica said.

Tyler looked at the couch, reconsidering. "Well..."

Jessica bent over to lift her end. "Like this, watch me." She bent at the knees, placed her hands under the edge and lifted it easily.

Watching his girlfriend, but still unsure, Tyler repeated her motions at his end. He managed to lift it only about a foot, causing it to heavily tilt towards him. They made it half way to the door, before Tyler urgently called out, "Wait! Wait! I have to rest a second!"

Jessica sighed and set down her side with his, and watched as Tyler flopped over the arm of the couch, exhausted. She was pissed. Her boyfriend was acting like such a... Such a girl.

The realization suddenly brightened her mood. He was acting like a weak, helpless girl. She knew he was well able to lift this couch – heck, he used to drag it a foot or two towards the TV every single day, it seemed. She always had to scold him to put it “back where it was supposed to be.”

“Maybe we should call that Oliver guy and have him do this instead of us.” Tyler suggested,

“I think we can manage this. It’s just a little bit further.”

“I’m gonna call him.” Tyler said. He made looking like standing up was the mightiest struggle he’d ever waged, and walked over to the phone. After a quick conversation, he hung up. “He’s busy,” Tyler said with a pout.

A pout!

“Oh, I’m sorry Tyler,” Jessica said, “but just a few more feet and it’ll be out of here. Maybe this time, leave off the flip-flops.”

Tyler kicked off the shoes, and then lifted his end again. As they made it out into the hall, Jessica was under the definite impression that Tyler’s very last bit of manly strength were being spent on this task. It was amazing what those CD’s could do. It wasn’t as if Tyler was truly this weak, but he believed he was. He had been convinced that he was weak and useless, and he was unable to fight it.

When they got to the curb, Jessica dropped her half, and Tyler followed suit. That was followed by a sharp shriek, as Tyler threatened to shatter glass with his piercing yell.

He quickly started to jump and hop around. “I dropped it on my toes!” He cried. “I dropped it on my toes!” Then, Tyler dropped onto the sofa and started to rub his toes, whining and moaning.

“Oh, honey, are you gonna be okay?” Jessica said, instead of laughing. She came to his side and tried to look as concerned as she could.

Tyler looked like he was starting to fight back tears.

“Calm down, now. It can’t be that bad.” Jessica told him.

He was inconsolable. “It dropped right on my big toenail! It’s gonna get all black and die, and fall off! It’s gonna be so gross!”

“It wasn’t that heavy, Tyler.” She looked at the toe in question, and it wasn’t even red. “You’ll be fine.”

“It really hurts!” Tyler whimpered. “I don’t want black toenails!”

Inspiration struck Jessica. “Tell you what, I know a way we can keep that from happening.”

Thirty minutes later, with cotton balls in between his toes, Tyler was examining his freshly painted pink toenails. Without his shorts on, sitting in a pair of red bikini panties, he held his slender and hairless legs aloft, turning the polished nails this way and that.

“They look kinda girly,” he observed.

“Well, pink will hide the black if it happens. And I can’t paint them any closer to your natural skin color, I told you it was the closest I had.”

"I know," he said, holding his other leg up for examination. "And doing both feet evens it out, but I just think they look kinda... Effeminate."

"They're very appealing," Jessica assured. She kissed him on the lips and Tyler responded with little interest, keeping the view of his toes in his sights.

"Can I take the cotton out yet?" he asked.

Jessica stopped trying to kiss him, and backed away. "In a few minutes, babe." She then pushed him down and started to smother him with her mouth.

"Oh, Jess..." Tyler responded. He closed his eyes and threw his head back, letting Jessica do what she wanted.

She drove her hands under his T-shirt and started to pinch Tyler's nipples, which caused him to arch his back and twist around. He really enjoyed that, Jessica told herself. Think how much he'll enjoy that when he has breasts...

"I think Oliver likes you..." Jessica said, into Tyler's ear. "He asked me about you..."

Tyler didn't answer, he just kept greedily enjoying the touch of his girlfriend.

"Do you like Oliver, Tyler?" She asked.

Tyler bit his lip and nodded vigorously.

"That's good. I think he's adorable. Do you think he's adorable?"

Tyler started to nod again, but then he fluttered his eyes open and looked at Jessica with a quizzed expression. "What do you mean? What are you trying to say, Jess?"

"I just thought that..."

"You think I've turned gay!? Is that it!?" He scooted away from Jessica, and got to his feet. He had a look of indignation on his face. "I'm not gay! I'm not!" He said, resting his arms akimbo on his hips.

"I didn't mean it that way, Tyler!" Jessica said, trying to patch over things. "I just thought that he was adorable in a... Kinda... Kid brother sort of way."

"I know what you meant, Jess!" Tyler declared. "I thought we knew each other better than that!" He pulled on his cargo shorts, took the cotton out from in between his toes, balled it up and flung it lamely at Jessica. "I'm going out! Fix your own dinner!" He said, grabbing his flip-flops and leaving.

Jessica looked down at the floor, and stamped her foot. "Fuck!" She yelled. "I blew it again!"

She got on the web with the BIAB site, and they said that these sort of events can happen, and they had just the thing to fix the problem. For only \$199.95.



The next day, another box arrived at the apartment, this one addressed to Jessica, and the box had "Barbie-in-a-Box Emergency Care Kit" printed on it. She opened it, eagerly. She had come too far with Tyler to let it slip away from her now. She had grown quite accustomed to having a slightly sissified man around the house.

Tyler was nicer, more considerate, and fun to be with. He looked thinner, took some care with his clothes, and was becoming one great cook. No, whatever she needed to do to keep Tyler on the BIAB program, she was going to do.

Inside the box, was a small blister pack of two pills, a new CD, and a note.

The note simply assured her that even though the Barbie-in-a-Box accounted for occasional setbacks, the CD and pills in the box would re-enforce key messages and repair any damage done to the subject's psyche.

She waited until that night to spike Tyler's drink with the contents of the pills, and slipped headphones around his head when he passed out in bed. She then tried to fall asleep and hoped for the best.



Jessica was rewarded in the morning with the smell of coffee, bacon and eggs wafting in from the kitchen. She was motivated to get out of bed and follow the smell, as her stomach rumbled in anticipation.

She had thrown on a robe and was looking as one does in the morning – like hell – when she saw that she and Tyler weren't alone.

Dressed in his beloved apron and oversized T-shirt, (Jessica didn't see any trace of shorts) Tyler had a bright smile on his face. His headphones were resting around his neck. "Good morning sleepyhead!" Tyler sang. "Look who dropped in!"

At the table was Oliver, in his usual golf shirt and glasses, hunched over a plate of food. If he was feeling any discomfort being in the same room with a man who was proudly displaying pink painted toenails on his exposed feet, it wasn't visible, as he earnestly scarfed down the mound of steaming hot food on his plate.

"Do you like it?" Tyler asked Oliver.

Oliver replied with a muffled but enthusiastic "Mm-hmm!"

Tyler then quickly whipped up a plate and set it down for Jessica, who had spent some time trying to pat down her hair, but much like Oliver, the smell of the food washed away any distractions from her mind as she sat down to eat.

"Thanks for inviting me, Tyler. It's been forever since I had a real breakfast," Oliver said, after finishing his mouthful.

"No biggie," Tyler said, flushed like a teenaged girl. He bent an arm idly over head and cocked his hips saucily. "I'm just glad I could fill your tummy this morning." As Tyler put his headphones on his ears, he asked "Let me know when anyone wants seconds!"

In between blasts of wonderfully delicious food, Jessica idly thought what those CD's were doing to Tyler's pea brain. What kind of messages could make Tyler accept – and even delight in – being as swishy as he was becoming. The power in the BIAB program was truly amazing to behold. Just a couple of months ago, he was like any man, living in fear of showing even the slightest trait of non-macho behavior. Now he was unconsciously flirting with a young man by making him breakfast, and dancing gently to his music.

How far was this going to go, Jessica wondered. Should she be taking pictures? Selling tickets to watch?



Whatever had been in that emergency kit had done its work well. Jessica even thought to herself that maybe it was too good at “fixing” Tyler.

Because two weeks later, when she looked at her boyfriend, she was unable to reconcile him with the person who she had once met in a bar not just a couple of years ago.

Gone was the roguish, distant attitude and slightly unkempt looks that had captivated her. Now, Tyler had a guileless look on his face, his emotions as easy to read as a supermarket novel. He kept himself immaculate, shaving twice a day to make sure there was never any trace of stubble on his face – or anywhere else on his body, for that matter.

The big baggy clothes and dark colors he used to wear were a memory. Tyler now tottered around the house in bright colors. He had grown especially fond of yellows, reds and even pink lately. The giant shirt he had been wearing was gone, and now he was sporting tight t-shirts that ended just above his navel. His big, olive green cargo shorts had been discarded in favor of denim cut-offs, which he had cut himself, rather expertly. These cut-offs also seemed to be getting cut shorter and shorter every day.

Tyler’s all-terrain mountain-hiking-style sneakers had vaporized long ago, lost in the back of a closet or under a bed somewhere. Tyler was still wearing flip-flops, but rather than the plastic ones he had stolen from his girlfriend, he had now claimed Jessica’s second-favorite pair of leather-lined flip-flops, complete with sparkling jeweled straps.

He repeatedly claimed that he only felt comfortable in these particular shoes, and wearing his old sneakers hurt his “bruised” toes. Toes with polish that he had learned to paint, remove and re-paint. “To keep them clean,” Tyler explained. That didn’t explain why he had started to use reds and purples in addition to pink.

Other things had changed, too. Jessica remembered that the first BIAB CD was this heavy, heavy metal that shook the floor and rattled windows. It occurred to her that she hadn’t heard Tyler play that sort of music for a while.

She did remember that he had then gone through a brief period of metal-style ballads from bands like Heart, but even that hadn’t been played in weeks. Curious, Jessica stole a CD from her boyfriend to hear what it was, and found it to be Celine Dion.

Also, there was the matter of the DVD that had arrived in the last box. Tyler had pretty much ignored it for a week, but all of the sudden, he picked it up and started to use it. It turned out to be an exercise disc, with an impossibly bubbly petite blond jumping and dancing on screen, egging the viewer on.

The funny thing was, that not only did Tyler strive to exactly follow the instructor move for move, but he’d also developed the habit of repeating what the instructor

said, word-for-word. He was also imitating the same bubbly, sing-songy tone of her voice as well.

With all this odd – and delightfully entertaining – behavior, it was starting to pay off. The exercise, combined with the crash dieting and whatever other medications they had laced with special food with, Tyler had dropped incredible amounts of weight. He dipped down to under one hundred and forty pounds. By Jessica's count, he had lost over forty-five pounds since the BIAB program began. She was sorely tempted to try the food herself, even knowing the hazards. She had never heard of a more successful diet plan.

Jessica would ask Tyler from time to time about this diet, and he'd simply reply that he still wanted to "drop that last five pounds." He'd keep saying that, even after he had dropped five pounds. At this rate, he was going to be a walking skeleton, but the Barbie-in-a-Box forum was quite assuring that everything would be okay.

As she watched Tyler putter around the house, vacuuming and cleaning, she noticed that his occasionally exposed navel was smooth & taught and his belly was flat. She almost felt jealous of how easy it was for him to look that good. Almost.



It wasn't much later that, during the middle of a dinner of salmon, that Tyler suddenly opened a door for Jessica to push him right through.

"My eyebrows itch," He said. "I think I need to do something about my hair," Tyler then added, brining a long strand of hair into his view.

Jessica considered the statement on its' surface at first. She looked at Tyler's brown hair — hair that now extended over his ears and past the nape of his neck. He had been taking good care of it, and had been using Jessica's own shampoo, conditioner and ever her hair dryer to keep it neat. It was always combed in place, shiny and smelled slightly sweet. But she knew Tyler had a point, it was now too long to just take care of it himself. He needed a trim, and he needed some professional assistance.

It then hit her as to what that meant. "I could get you an appointment at my salon," she said. "We could get those wild eyebrows of yours under control, too."

Tyler rolled his eyes, "they're driving me nuts!" He said. "Sometimes I just want to pluck them right out with my fingers!"

Jessica kept eating, but she was shaking her head. He was just making this far too easy. "I'll get you an appointment for the works."

"Oh, thanks, honey!" Tyler burbled. "Are you sure they won't mind having a... Well, having me there?"

"They aren't just for women, Ty. They do work on everyone." Everyone who wanted to look like a woman, Jessica added, to herself.

She quickly set up an appointment at her usual salon. Of course, she had already been telling stories of what she was doing to her poor boyfriend, and all the girls were begging to get a look at Tyler. This was all going to work out perfectly. She

was now going to show off her pride and joy to her friends, and at the same time take him on giant step towards his ultimate effete fate.



Tyler was all ready and eager to go to his appointment when it came around a few days later. He hoped in the car like a happy puppy being taken to the park. When they arrived, Tyler took no notice that he was the only man in the entire place, and that all eyes were tacking his every movement.

Shannon, the girl who was Jessica's usual stylist, was the first to greet them, and led Tyler to her chair. Soon enough, his hair had been decorated with little foil wraps to highlight his brown hair. With his headphones on, Tyler smiled merrily as he listened to his music, and didn't say a word when they took his shoes off and started to file his toenails.

Janice turned to Shannon. "He wants to have his eyebrows done, too."

"You've got to be kidding me, Jess!" She said, finally free to talk with Tyler listening to his music. "How did you do it!?"

"Well, I have my ways. Women have always owned their man's toys. He's been bad, so now I'm taking his toy away from him," She said, with a cruel turn in the corners of her smile. It exposed the tip a single tooth, one that used to be a fang in a more primitive existence.

"You're just awful!" Shannon scolded. "What are you going to do next? Tell me!"

"Well, that's up to you. I think he'd look even better with a full body waxing. What do you think?"

"He'd never stand for it!" Shannon gasped. "No man would let it happen to them!"

"He's already let me do his legs," Jessica countered. "He cried like a little girl for a few minutes, but he got over it. Now he barely even flinches when he does it."

"You're lying! It can't be true!"

Jessica popped the earphones off of Tyler's head, and he took a moment to re-focus his eyes. "Hi, Jess!" He said.

"Tyler," she said, with a deliberate tone to make sure Shannon was getting all this, "we think you'd be a lot more comfortable getting rid of all your body hair. What do you think?"

"I guess." He answered. "Like doing my legs?"

"But on your arms, butt, back and chest."

Tyler's eyes lit up. "Oh, if you think it's be good for me, Jess."

Jessica turned to Shannon with a smug look. "We'll do it after your nails dry, cutie," she said to Tyler.

Tyler put his headphones back on and was back in his world of subliminal whispers and music. Shannon's jaw was agape. Her mind had just been blown clear away.



“This is a set-up, isn’t it?” She asked Jessica.

“Nope. It’s all real!”

“Naw, this can’t be true. I don’t believe it!” Shannon grabbed the sides of her head to keep things in place. “He was always such a macho jerk!”

“Now he cooks me my food, cleans the house and does the laundry. He even squeals like a teenage princess when I fuck him.”

“My God!” Shannon exclaimed, “you’ve turned him into a sissy, Jess!”

“Oh, I’m not through with him yet, Shan. I’m going to turn him into a giggling, simple-minded, over-sexed little sissy slave.”

“You wouldn’t! You couldn’t!”

“Just look at him, Shan. He’s going to be wearing a skirt in a matter of weeks. I’m not sure I could stop it even if I wanted to, and believe me – I don’t want to!”

“Wow!” Shannon said.

“Is that your boyfriend, Jessica?” another woman asked. It was Fiona, one of the regulars at the salon, to whom Jessica had told her wild tales of feminizing her Tyler. “If I didn’t see it, I wouldn’t believe it.”

“That’s my ex-boyfriend!” Jessica said.

“I’d say he was an ex-boy, too,” Fiona said, in a confidential tone.

“Not yet, but it’s going to happen.”

“Have you told him about you and Martin yet?”

“Shush, Fiona. I want to tell him when I’m ready.”

The small bell affixed the front door of the shop tinkled, and everybody looked to see who had arrived. In came the tall, burly figure of Nat McCain, smiling at all the ladies. He was Shannon’s brother, and well known to the girls. “Hey, there.” He said, ambling past the reception area and up to Shannon.

“Hi, bro!” Shannon said. Her hands were tied up, working on her client, so she stuck her cheek out for a kiss, which she got. Nat pecked Shannon in a brotherly way, his bristly dark beard stubble scraping her skin.

“Hey, sis,” Nat replied. He looked around. “Hey, Fiona. Hey, Jessica.”

“Hi Nat!” Tyler said, eagerly waving at him from the chair. He had removed his headphones upon seeing someone he recognized.

Nat paused, squinting with one eye, trying to recognize who was waving at him. He then squinted with the other eye. “Uh, hey.” He tried to place the face. “Hey.”

Although the Barbie-in-a-Box site said that by this time, Tyler should be able to endure this, Jessica was very hesitant in introducing – well, re-introducing Tyler to Nat. “That’s Tyler, Nat. It’s hard to recognize him when he’s got his hair being worked on.”

You could practically hear the crack in Nat’s neck as his head quickly snapped back to take a closer look. “Tyler?” He asked.

“Hi!” Tyler replied, sheepishly.

Nat’s process of thinking was visible on his face. His eye twitched when he verified that this was the Tyler he knew. The Tyler who he had beers with on Sundays, watching football. The same Tyler who once pancaked a guy with a single punch in that fight they got into down at the sports bar last year. It was the same guy who covered for him when he was cheating on his ex.

Jessica inserted herself into the conversation. “Tyler wanted to come down and have a day of pampering,” she explained.

Nat’s cleft chin trembled slightly when he examined Tyler. He had his hair wet and wrapped up in curlers, his limp wrists were holding up freshly painted nails, and his toes were stuffed with cotton balls to keep his polished toes clear while they dried. Nat’s brow furrowed when he noticed the highly arched and thinned eyebrows on Tyler’s face.

“What the hell?” Nat said, never one to hold back what he was thinking. “What’s with all the faggy stuff? Lose a bet?”

“I’m having the works!” Tyler replied, with a smile.

“Yeah, I can see that.” He turned to Jessica. “The fuck are you doing to him?”

“Tyler has a whole new outlook on life, and he decided he wanted a new look to go with it,” Jessica explained.

Nat looked at Tyler again, not only noting the beauty work being done on him, but under his clear smock, the tight shirt and shorts he wore, and the shaven legs he sported. “So, what are you? Some kinda buttfuckin’ tranny?”

Tyler just smiled back, not even batting an eye. It was like he hadn't even heard the thing Nat was calling him. "Do you like the color, Nat?" He asked, showing his fingernails.

Nat just sneered at Tyler, breaking into a demeaning laugh. "Pantywaist... Sissy... Faggot." Nat turned away and walked out of the salon.

There was silence in the room, as no one dared speak. Jessica looked at Fiona, who looked at Shannon. They all had an uncomfortable look on their faces.

"It was nice to see Nat again," Tyler said, still smiling. "I'm glad he thinks I'm such a sissy."

Jessica tried to make sense of that statement. "You don't mind that he called you a sissy?"

Tyler picked up his headphones, ready to listen to his CD again. "I think he was being very polite. I've been working on being a sissy, and it was nice of him to say so." He popped the headphones on his ears again.

Fiona and Shannon looked at each other in shock, and then at Jessica. "What was the name of that website?" Shannon asked.

"Write it down for me, too," Fiona said, handing Jessica a pen.



As soon as Tyler got through the door, he flopped onto the new plush chaise lounge Jessica had replaced the sofa with. "Thank God that's over. I have to get some housework done." He looked down at his toes, which were painted lavender. He casually looked at his fingers which were done the same.

"Do you like your nails, sweetie?" Jessica asked as she dropped the car keys on the table.

Tyler, wriggling his toes and fingers, took his time to reply. "Why did you let me do this, Jess? You shouldn't have let me do it."

"Oh, don't worry yourself about it."

"But it looks so..." He said. "So... Odd."

That statement sounded quite strange from the person reclined on the lounge, as that person had hairless legs, hairless arms and no trace of a beard. The skin was smooth and clear, probably due to drugs in that 'diet plan' food. This person also sported a freshly-styled head of long feathery hair, with pronounced bangs wafting above the eyes. His eyebrows also arched in a fine line that opened up his expression and made his face unmistakably delicate. Tyler's fingernails were the least of his worries.

"You look great. I think you make a fine sissy," Jessica said.

"Thanks, Jess," he said, glowing in the compliment.

Jessica put her purse away. "Besides, I wish my nails looked half as good as yours." Which was true, actually.

"You should book an appointment when we go back next time," Tyler said.

"I'll do that." Jessica smiled at the ease at which Tyler suggested his next appointment at a women's salon. "When we go do it together."



In the next several days, Tyler learned to take good care of his hair. He was easily able to keep it styled almost exactly like they had at the salon. His meager male groomsmen skills had flowered into a feminine beauty routine.

He moisturized his skin, he plucked his stray eyebrow hair, epilated his legs and the rest of his body smooth, and applied his girlfriend's spring-fresh deodorant to his clean-shaven armpits... With a little behind each ear. "Because Ollie liked the scent," Tyler explained.

He had even taken to using a curling iron to shape his hair when it went flat. Jessica was more than happy to share it with him.

In addition to her tools of hair care, Jessica also found she was sharing something else with Tyler. She discovered it one day when she was rearranging her things by her bedside table.

"Tyler, have you seen my... Uh, well, my vibrator?" She said, somewhat sheepishly.

"No, what's it look like?" Tyler replied.

"It looks like a vibrator."

"I haven't seen it. Did you look under the bed?"

"So you haven't seen it?"

"Well, if it turns up, I'll let you know."

Jessica regarded that whole conversation as odd, but she didn't think too much of it, until a day later when that missing vibrator turned up under the bed. Where she had already checked. Twice.

It took a while for her to put things together, but then she came to an obvious conclusion. The vibrator was never missing. Someone had planted it under the bed. Tyler.

"Honeybuns, I found my vibrator." She said, as they went to bed, a night later.

"That's great. Was it under the bed? I told you it was under the bed."

"It was under the bed, Ty. Right where you left it."

"Me? I've never seen it before! Me!?" Tyler said defensively and over-dramatically. "I never!"

Jessica took it in her hands and turned it on. The buzzing sound it made captured Tyler's attention immediately. His eyes focused on it with laser intensity. Jessica knew the truth when she saw the effect it had on him.

"You've been... Using it, haven't you?" She said, with a lascivious wink.

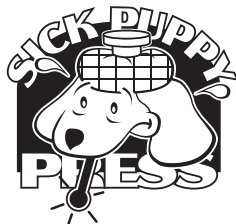
"No..." Tyler replied, with his answer fading off quickly.

She brought it closer to him, and Tyler inched backwards until he ran out of bed. "It seems to know you, honey." She placed it on his stomach, and almost at the instant it touched his skin, Tyler's eyes closed as he gasped.

J O E S I X P A C K

***HIS LIFE AS
A TROPHY
WIFE***

**“The Puppy Mill” by Joe Six-Pack
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2010 Paperback Edition

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THE PUPPY MILL

CHAPTER 1

As was the custom for Saturday night at the Pacific Grand Theater, the seats were crammed with Martians. From wall to wall, with barely enough room to maneuver down the aisles, Martians were dressed in silver jumpsuits, ray guns drawn, ready to for the show to begin.

The reason for this intergalactic incursion in this small, squalid theater in Los Angeles was the weekly showing of “King Kong Versus the Martians.” It was a horrible film, a truly terrible piece of entertainment that let the viewer stupefied at the level of its’ incompetence. It’s only entertainment value was as a specimen of horrible 1950’s B-film moviemaking.

It was such an acutely bad film that it had gained a following just on that single, sad, attribute. A big cult following, as a matter of fact. For the last two years, on Saturday night at 12 midnight, the theater showed the film to a group of crazed fans, who could recite every line in the film by heart. The crowd was well within the hundreds, all regulars.

In those two years, the moviegoers had tried to out-do each other every night. Maybe one would come with a home-made prop from the film. The next week, another would want to top him and arrive with a helmet made to resemble the one the Martians wore. Another would top that the next week. After two years of this, now the patrons would show up in full, elaborately made costumes. It had also evolved into its’ own live performance, as regular fans eventually were brought up on stage to act out the parts as the movie showed behind them.

One of the people who had been there from the very beginning was a struggling actress by the name of Sasha Davies. Sasha was senior in college back when she was killing a dateless night at the Saturday midnight shows, and was now the keeper of the website dedicated to the show. She also played “Wendy” the 12-year old girl in the film who takes in one of the Martians and shows them human kindness. She was one of the old-timers, at the age of 24, having been there from the first show. She enjoyed the sense of responsibility she felt as one of the organizers, and lived her whole week for Saturday night.

Which is why, when she met Nicholas O’Brien, she had a hard time explaining why she wasn’t available for dinner on the weekend. In fact, she had been seeing him for well over a month before she decided she had to come clean about her other life.

This was actually a relief for Nick, as he was sure that yet another girlfriend was going to break up with him. When he learned the reason why he was never able to get a hold of her at certain days and times, learning that Sasha was just out pantomiming a film was the least worrisome reason behind that behavior.

Nick was from the East Coast, having grown up in and around New York for a long time. But once his parents had passed away, he realized he had little to tie him to his home town. He decided upon trying his luck in Los Angeles as a TV writer. Work wasn’t too hard to find if you didn’t mind writing junk for fools. He did a few public

service spots, a couple of never-to-be-aired sit-coms and some other miscellaneous work before the Writers' Guild went on strike.

With no work, Nick's fortunes took a definite turn for the worse. A small check from the union at least kept him from starving. But that was all it did. As the weeks and then months went on, Nick found himself more and more dependent on Sasha for everyday living expenses. He was eating her food, using her car and living in her apartment most of the time. Finally, Nick suggested that they move in together.

Sasha took the suggestion as a positive step forward in a relationship, but with the strong suspicion that it was because Nick could no longer survive on his own. She knew she was right, but her emotions led her to let Nick move in.

Living together was easy. They had similar interests and liked the same music, movies and TV shows. Splitting costs between them worked better, just as Nick hoped. Things started to normalize, and he just had to wait until the strike was over. Things would get even better when that happened.

Meanwhile, Nick was pretty much powerless to resist his girlfriends' suggestion that he come with her to the Saturday night showings. He was a little nervous about Sasha's odd attachment to that movie and was content to let her have that part of her life to herself. But he capitulated.

Two months later, he was in costume and performing on stage just like Sasha. He had gotten into the event just as deep as his girlfriend.

In fact, when Sasha announced she had accepted a role in a downtown stage production, it was often Nick going by himself to the Saturday night shows.

Sasha was sick that she missed her very first shows at the Pacific Grand, but her dream was always to act in a big play, and she couldn't refuse the opportunity. She kept in touch with everybody else involved, and interrogated Nick about every last detail of every show she missed. Who had flubbed a line, who had the weirdest costume, who played which parts. She wanted to know every last bit of information.

Nick was happy to tell her everything he could. He knew how much those shows meant to her, and the demands of being in a stage production were stealing every last minute of her time. The truth was, he was starting to miss her. She wasn't home for more than an hour or two before she was asleep and up early the next morning. Sasha seemed to thrive on the work, but Nick was lonely.

Then came the stunner. The production Sasha was in was going to tour. A long six-month traveling show... In Europe. She would be able to fly back for a few days here and there... but...

Nick did what he thought a man should do. He told her to follow her dream. Sasha almost took it the wrong way, as he seemed so resolute in telling her to leave. But Nick told her in no uncertain terms why it needed to happen.

"It's what you worked for, it's what you deserve, and I'll be here when you get back." He said.

"I don't want you thinking I want to leave you." She replied.

"You're not leaving me. You're just going to be working for a little while," he held her small trembling hands firmly. "You know this will be worth it. You can't turn your back on this for me or anything else."

"You know I would. You know if you asked me I'd stay."

"I'd never ask you that. I'd never hurt you like that."

"I won't go. I'm not going to go."

Nick knew that if she didn't take this chance, she'd regret it for the rest of her life – and he'd regret being the one who stopped her.

"Maybe we shouldn't be seeing each other, then." He said, trying to sound like he meant it.

Sasha's delicate and beautiful face looked like it had shattered in horror. "What!? What are you..."

"I'm saying that if you think I want to be in a suffocating relationship like that, you're crazy." Chet was practically choking on the words, every sound stinging him as he spoke.

"Nick, you're kidding, right?"

Nick, wanting desperately to say 'yes,' said "no." He was pushing the love of his life right to edge. But it was for her own good. "I don't want some clingy girlfriend who can't support herself. Besides, I've been thinking that maybe we shouldn't be confined by this whole 'relationship' thing."

The life seemed to escape Sasha's face, and she dipped her head. Staring down at her shoes, she just said, "oh."

She was off and on a flight just two days later. Nick watched from the terminal as the plane pulled away, unsure if he had just destroyed the best thing that had ever happened to him. Not only was he feeling like some part of his insides had been ripped from him violently, but he knew the cold reality of the situation. Sasha was going to have to live out of hotels for a while, and he could no longer expect much money at all from her. He was going to need to find work.

With little but time on his hands, Nick looked for a job. He had little luck. He didn't have a very good skill set in the first place, and because of the strike, the whole entertainment economy was too depressed to be hiring.

Of course, he still had "King Kong versus the Martians." With so much idleness, it wasn't long before he had taken Sasha's spot in the group. He was even making costumes and



re-designing the website. After all, it was all he really had now of his girlfriend – besides the occasional text message.

One night, he did everything up special. He sunk his heart and soul into making a big splash at the show for that week. He made his own costume by hand, meticulously sewing it to match the 1950's original in every detail. He paid special attention to his stage makeup, doing it over and over again to get it just right. He ordered some boots and other accessories over the internet, and even found a wig just identical to the character he was going to play. Night after night, he practiced his role until he had it perfect. Nick was determined to be the hit of the show.

CHAPTER 2

Although he didn't know it, the first time Nick had met Roger Van der Slyke, he was wearing a dress.

Roger was in his early forties, with a little bit of grey at the temples of his well-groomed dark head of hair. He countenance and cool demeanor spoke of a man sure of himself and always in control. He gave every appearance of being cultured and refined. But that didn't explain why he was at this particular low-brow bar at two in the morning.

Mr. Van der Slyke was a man who could be easily described as handsome. He had the right amount of wrinkles in his face to make it interesting. He was ruggedly built, with strong, sharp shoulders that looked like he could carry quite a burden. Then, his slow, measuring gaze let you know he had you sized up and figured out before he even had spoken a word to you.

Dempsey's Bar was Nick's usual watering hole, and he was here on this night every week. Everyone knew him by name, and he knew everyone who came to Dempsey's. That's why Nick had spotted him immediately when he had come in. He had never seen this guy before, and didn't want to look like a weirdo, even to strangers. The man's presence made him more than a little uncomfortable. Especially as he was dressed.

Every Saturday, after the movie, the "cast" of the show and a few long-timers would come to Dempsey's to celebrate another fun night. They'd still be talking about the show, and still be dressed in costume. Which usually wasn't a big deal, as everyone in Los Angeles was used to the bizarre by now. A bar full of silver-lame'd jump-suited, green-skinned people wasn't really that out of the ordinary.

The problem for Nick was that tonight, he was in a dress. A silver-lame dress, with silver go-go boots, long green legs and shocking white hair down to the small of his back. He had decided to shock the group by playing the part of the Martian queen – and doing it convincingly.

The group was indeed surprised, not only that Nick had showed up in drag, but by being so good at it. Nick had the voice, the look, the mannerisms and the lines all down. They had never had a better performance in all the months and years they had been doing this show.

But, as many were saying under their breath, Nick was a knock-out.

Sure, he probably a little tall for the role, but his slender build, big eyes and boyish face looked great under the make-up. Plus, his long, shapely green legs were making most of the men in the show seriously reconsider their stance on heterosexuality.

To make the night even more interesting, Nick had spent the whole night in character, as the gorgeous actress Alexis Summers. Nick played it like he really was Alexis, in town for an "acting gig" and just "doing a job." He refused to answer to his name and would only speak as Alexis, down to her famously dramatic laugh and penchant for flirting with men.

But his friends all played along, even returning some of the playful faux come-ons and having fun with it. Everyone in the show had a blast with Nick's performance.

However, Nick suddenly realized how convincing he was when Roger Van der Slyke sat down next to him and started to talk.

"Haven't I met you somewhere before?" Roger said, "And if I have, how did I ever let you go?"

Nick suddenly sat up straight in his seat and inched away. "I'm not interested." He said in his regular, deep speaking voice.

Expecting more of an outraged outburst, Nick was surprised to see that the man's only reaction was to raise an eyebrow and let a smirk gradually crook his lips.

"Fascinating," Roger said. He laughed a brief, but genial laugh. "I hope you don't think I come on to all the men in dresses I meet."

Taken aback by his reply, Nick relaxed and smiled. "No problem," he said.

Roger then quickly excused himself and returned to his own table seat. Nick, for his part, barely even remembered the encounter at the end of the night, as it was one of a dozen passes made at him by other men. He also had a few of his own friends have a go at him after they had three or four drinks that night.

"I suppose I should take it as a compliment," he said before leaving for home. Nick had expected to have to deal with a few misguided guys that night, and he had fended them off like a seasoned pro.

Eventually, it was time to head back to the apartment, and Nick gave his friends a dramatically overdone air kiss as he left. It was everything he had hoped. He and his friends had a great laugh, he had been the hit of the night, and had successfully topped everyone else with his amazing impersonation. He had already conceded to do the same performance next week, and he was wondering if he could pull off this act again.

He was eager to get in from the cold air and get out of the incredibly uncomfortable boots by the time he had gotten back to the apartment. Checking his messages, Sasha had already left two. She was probably eager to know how the show went. How was he even going to tell her what he had done? Well, it was bound to get to her sooner or later. Heck, the guys at the show were probably already texting her about it right now.

Deciding to go all out, Nick got back into the boots and checked the make-up and hair. He set up a tripod and camera in front of Sasha's "King Kong vs the Martians" posters and struck a few poses as the Martian Queen.

"I knew I shouldn't have left you alone." Sasha replied by email when she saw the pictures. "I don't want you using my lipstick," she teased. Nick was eager to tell her everything that had happened that night, and went on in detail about every last bit of information he could recall.

"Sounds like you had the night of your life. I bet they want you to do it again next week." Sasha replied.

"Of course." He wrote back. "They need their queen."



A week later he was even better. He had the whole act down, and carried off his performance without a snag. They even applauded him when he was done for the night. He had never seen anyone get that kind of reaction in all the shows he had attended.

“That was crazy, dude,” one of the guys said to him. “You’re so good as a woman, you’ve messed up my relationships for the rest of my life!”

Nick had gotten a lot of comments like that all night long. But he was still having fun with it. Someone had even given him a bouquet of martian-green roses tonight. If he was going to have to come to each show as the Martian Queen, so be it. He was having a great time.

When the after-show party had broken up, Nick found himself not wanting to leave. He had grown addicted to the comments and compliments.

When he realized this, he was really quite embarrassed. Maybe he needed to take a break from this, after all. Just for a little while.



For Nick in the real world, work was still tough to find. It didn’t help that he was sinking so much time and effort into his performance at the movie show that his check on want ads often skipped a day or two. Or three.

But he did manage to do an interview or two a week. After all, it had been almost a month since Sasha left, and the bills still kept coming in.

Just as he had feared, the money needed to pay for rent and basic utilities, added to Sasha’s expensive living expenses in hotels, left virtually nothing for Nick. He was beyond struggling. Nick was practically destitute. He was selling some old CDs and DVDs to have enough money for cheap meals. He knew he had to do something, and it was going to have to happen fast.

It was time for him to consider taking whatever work he could find. Even minimum wage would help at this point. He resolved himself to just do whatever he needed to do to make it right. He couldn’t ask Sasha for more money, and being self-supportive was just the mature thing to do. Monday morning, he’d get it done. He’d rejoin the workforce.

Just after he had one more night as the Martian Queen.



There wasn’t more than one or two people left at the bar Saturday night, and Nick was finishing off his last drink of the evening. He was alone, all of his friends had gone home. That left Nick with his thoughts about getting work. He really did need the money, but he hated having to get a job. That was one of the reasons he was a writer. He just did what he needed to do, make a few jokes, write some trite dialogue and he got paid for it. He didn’t even have to go in to most places he worked for. He just sent them the scripts.

Now, that was about to change, and he was desperately trying to think a way out of it. That was when the bartender dropped off another drink.

“From the guy over in the corner,” he told Nick.

But by the time Nick had bothered to look in the corner, the man who sent the drink was sitting down across the table from him.

"I'm not who you think I am," Nick said.

"I think you're a man in green wig and tights." The man replied.

"Well then, I guess I am who you think I am."

He pointed at the drink. "I just ordered that for you. My mistake. I didn't recognize you."

"Do I know you?" Nick asked.

"Not really. I accidentally tried to pick you up a few weeks ago."

"You and about a hundred lonely guys at this bar."

The man offered his hand. "Name's Roger."

Nick shook it. "Nick."

"You must be a part of that midnight show they do around the corner."

"What if I said if I wasn't?" Nick responded.

"Then you've got some issues," Roger leaned back in his seat.

The two men had struck up an easy friendship. Quickly, Roger started in on his background. He was an executive at a local chain of hospitals, and was divorced. He and his wife hadn't gotten along for a long time, and had separated years ago, only making it official recently. He said it was going to hurt him at work, and was trying to drink away the sense of dread he had about losing his job.

Nick told him his own story about being out of work and his girlfriend half a continent away for the next several months. Both understood, and both were sympathetic to each others' plight.

"Does she know what her boyfriend is doing in his spare time?" Roger asked.

"She's the one who started this whole thing," Nick answered.

"Did she have anything to do with the costume? With the training?"

"Training?" Nick said. "No, this was all my doing. I'd be to embarrassed to ask anyone for help. Let alone a woman."

"If you don't mind me saying, and please don't take this the wrong way, you make one hell of a beautiful woman."

Nick batted his eyelashes. "Tell me something I don't know." He took a swig of his drink. "My mother would be so proud."

"You've really gone all-out." Roger said, looking Nick up and down. "Shaved your legs, can't see any stubble on your chin... Long nails..." He stared at the appearance of cleavage in what really wasn't Nick's bosom. "Quite a job."

"I've got a lot of free time recently."

"The dress fits you perfectly. Did you have it made for you?"

"I can sew. Learned in high school."

"High school?"

"It was either that or auto repair. The sewing class had much better looking girls in it."

"Gotcha." Roger smiled. "Another drink?"

"Better not," Nick shook his head. "I'm a bit out of it."

"You live far from here? I can drive you home."

"That's okay."

"If you're drunk, you really shouldn't get in your car."

"You were drinking, too."

"I've been having a little tonic water." Roger then lifted Nick's key in the air. "Besides, I stole these, and you're not getting them back."

Nick sighed heavily. "Fine."

"It won't be so bad. You ever taken a ride in a Porsche Carrera?"

"Lead the way," Nick said, getting up.



On the way home, once Nick had been able to give coherent directions, the two started to talk again.

"You can't be too sad about the divorce if you get to keep this baby," Nick rubbed his hands along the sleek, smooth leather seat he was in.

"It really doesn't make up for the loss of a companion," Roger said. "It's hard to snuggle up with a car at night."

"Did you love her?" Nick asked.

"For a while. But she had different interests. Especially when it came to men. The people I work for couldn't learn about it, so I tried to keep it quiet as long as possible. But it eventually came out. No I'm not going to get any farther up the chain. And forget about starting over. It's too late."

"Who do you work for that would care about a divorce?"

"St. McGivens Hospitals." Roger replied. "They own about a dozen hospitals in the area and in the state."

"Why would they give a damn?"

"Because they're majority owned by the Church."

"Oh."

"They've all heard about my marriage and how it went south. They know I was going to have to get a divorce, although I don't think they've figured out that it's actually happened. Sooner or later someone's going to invite my wife to a party or something, or drop by. Then they'll know. It's just a matter of time."

"The church guys don't like divorce?"

"Legally, they can't discriminate like that. In reality, though, no one has ever become an executive of that company who had anything less than a one-hundred-percent rock-solid home life."

"It's not your fault, was it? They can't blame you."

"They can and they do." Roger said, curtly. "It's their religious conviction. It's not like I can fight the word of God."

"That would pose its' challenges," Nick admitted.

"What about you? You a big B-movie fan?"

"Not really. Just something Sasha, my girlfriend, got me into."

"Why do you do it?"

"Oh, the people who come are really great, they have a lot of weird, funny ideas and..."

"No, I mean why dress up like this? Like a woman?"

Nick looked over at Roger to see what the expression on his face was. There was no malice or ridicule there. He seemed to really want to know.

"Well, I could have gone as one of the kids in the story, but I'm a few feet too tall for that. The only other major adult character is the Queen."

"You don't do bit parts, in other words."

Nick laughed. "I guess not."

The car pulled to the gate for Nick's apartment building, and Nick got out. "Thanks for the ride. Hey, do you come to that bar often?"

"Once and a while. It's on the way home from work."

"Well, we're there every Saturday night. You might even like seeing the show."

"Thanks. Maybe I'll drop by."

"Thanks again," Nick said, before walking to the gate. He punched in his code to open the door, not getting the response he wanted. He tried it again. And again.

"Having problems?" Roger called from the car.

"Must be hitting the wrong buttons." Nick replied. He hit another button.

"Hello?" The crackling speaker on the door said.

"Hey, this is Nick in 213. Your neighbor. The code's not working. Can you buzz me in?"

"It's three thirty AM!" The speaker replied.

"Sorry." Nick said. The door buzzed open.

As Nick headed in the door, Roger dashed in behind him. "Hey, hold up a minute. That isn't your stuff on the street, is it?" Roger pointed back out the door at a small pile of furniture and clothing placed on the curb.

"What?" Nick replied, straining his vision for a moment to see what Roger was talking about. "No... Aw, fuck!" He immediately recognized the things on the curb as his stuff. He dashed for it quickly, then realized that he needed to check the apartment as well. "Could you just keep an eye on that for a moment?" Nick asked Roger. "Just for a sec? I'll be right back!"

Nick reversed direction and ran up the stairs to his apartment, putting his keys in the lock. Or at least trying to. They didn't fit. "Goddamn!" Nick yelled. He struck the door with his fist and then grabbed his green-haired head in exasperation. "I don't fuckin' believe it! The locks are changed!"

Suddenly, the doorknob jiggled and the door cracked open, held in place by the security chain.

"What do you want, Nick?" The voice on the other side of the door said.

“Chet!?” Nick yelped, hardly able to believe who it was. “What the fuck!?”

Chet was Sasha’s older brother of 24, who Nick rarely saw. He rarely saw him because he couldn’t stand the guys’ guts. Neither could Sasha, for that matter. She barely even talked to him, except when she had to go to a family dinner or when Chet needed a few bucks to pay a “loan” off.

“You ask me? You’re the faggot in the dress.” Chet responded.

“It’s for the show, you asshole! Sasha’s movie show!”

There was a pause from Chet. “Look, all I know is that Sasha called me to get your stuff out of her apartment. Something about dressing up like a woman while she was gone.”

“She knows why! You’re making this up!” Nick kicked the door.

“Dude! She doesn’t want you here! I’m gonna call the cops, okay!? You’re trespassing!”

Nick was fiery red with anger. “This is my place! I’m gonna call the cops on you!”

“Not here, not now,” Roger said, suddenly appearing from behind Nick. He pointed around the hallway where all of the neighbors had stuck their heads out of their doors, curious to see what was causing all the noise.

Nick looked back at the slice of Chet’s face visible through the crack in the door. Chet quickly slammed it shut.

“Fuck!” Nick yelled loudly.

Roger put his arm behind Nick and started to escort him away. “We’ll sort this out in the morning. You can spend the night at my place.”

Without even breaking his eye contact with the door of his apartment, Roger led Nick down the hallway.

“Jesus Fuck!” Nick yelled out again, because he had to let the world know how angry he was.



Nick dropped the handset in the cradle of the phone. He had been calling people all morning.

“What’d he say?” Roger asked, from the couch where he was watching a football game.

Nick had just gotten off the phone with a lawyer, and was \$200 poorer for the consultation. “He said there’s not much I can do, unless I want to go to trial about it.”

“You should.”

“I’m not going to sue my own girlfriend. It’s her name on the lease.”

He had spent the night at Roger’s house, a surprisingly luxurious and large place. If one had used the term “mansion” they might have been overstating things, but not by much. It was unsettling to be in such a strange place under such stressful circumstances.

Roger took a sip of beer, “Have you been able to get in touch with her?”

"She's not taking my calls, and she's not responding to emails or texts."

Roger took a moment to look away from the TV. "I'm sorry."

"I'm not giving up that easy. I'm pretty sure that turd Chet is at the bottom of this. He probably fed her a line and got her to believe what he wanted him to. Now he's got a place to stay. The lying little pipsqueak probably thinks he's real smart. Well, as soon as I can get in touch with Sasha, we'll see who's smarter."

"Meanwhile, why don't you just take it easy," Roger suggested. He was lying back with his feet up on the coffee table. "This is getting to be a pretty good game. Have a beer."

"I guess," Nick said, moving over to the adjoining couch. He popped open a can and took a sip. "This a projection?" He asked about the TV? "60 inches?"

"102. And it's plasma. Biggest one they make."

"Damn," Nick said in awe. "You're not hurting for money, are you?"

"I do alright. Did you see this QB in college last year? They couldn't stop him. Now, in the pro's he can't do a damn thing."

"That's the transition to the pro game and the speed. Hey, maybe I need to start looking for a room right now. I'll probably have to get one of the guys to put me up for the night tonight."

"Stay here. I have a big house and I'm always having friends and associates over."

"I appreciate it, Roger, but we just met and I don't even know when I'll be able to get a place of my own. Thanks for the offer, but..."

"Yeah, I didn't think you'd go for it, but I thought I'd just put it out there."

"Again, I appreciate it, but I've got to make a go of this on my own."

"Understood." Roger took another swig of his beer. "Of course, if you're looking for work, I can help there."

"You're not going to offer me a job, are you?" Nick replied.

"No, I'm about to offer you a very serious proposal. I'm not kidding about this. It's going to sound weird, and I don't want to freak you out. But it's a very serious offer."

That sounded chillingly strange. Nick's eyes glanced over the room looking for an escape route. He didn't think he'd really need it, but he was already feeling a little creeped out. If Roger popped up with an axe, he knew where he needed to go.

"Shoot." Nick said.

Roger chuckled. "This is going to be difficult to even say." He cleared his throat a little. "You seem to have a talent for imitating women, Nick. You do a very good job. And I'm having women problems in my life."

Nick shivered involuntarily. He nonchalantly sniffed his beer for any drugs and checked his escape route again. He sensed trouble. Big trouble.

"I'm not sure how to phrase this without it seeming completely irrational, but..."

"You probably should stop right there, don't you think?" Nick suggested.

"I've been working up the courage to say this for the last day or so, so I'm going to finish." Roger took a deep breath. "I'd like to pay you good money to go out in public as my girlfriend."

"I gotta go," Nick said, getting on his feet.

“Look, I know it sounds stupid, but I’m really desperate.”

Nick grabbed his coat. “Thanks for the beer and a place to stay last night. I’ll pick up my stuff later.”

“Five thousands dollars for just an afternoon’s work. One time. A few hours at a basketball game and it’d be over with.”

“Hey, I’m sorry, dude – but that’s really nuts.” Nick slipped a baseball cap on his head and headed out the door.



Four days later, after staying on five different couches and not one step closer to getting in contact with Sasha, Nick’s initial brick-wall resistance to Roger’s proposal was now paper-thin.

Every time he looked at the ever-scarcer assortment of dollar bills in his wallet, he could only hear that figure again. Five thousand dollars.

After all, he was already doing an impersonation of a woman every week. Some of the newbies at the show didn’t even know that he really was really a guy. So it wasn’t like he couldn’t get away with it. How long is a basketball game anyway? Two hours? He’d be in and out in a blink.

Roger was a decent guy. He liked sports, bought the good kind of beer and...

Five thousand dollars.

It would sure solve a lot of problems. His aching back told him that one more night on a couch was going to be his limit.

“If I was going to do this – and I’m not saying I am – exactly what would we be talking about?” He asked Roger when he called him up.

Roger, sounding slightly stunned to even be discussing the matter, seemed to be less than totally prepared for an answer. “Uh... Well, I have these two tickets to the Lakers game next week. I got them from my boss, and he expects for me to bring someone.”

“Your wife.”

“No. He knows about me and Kathy. But I’ve been generally leading him to believe that I’m in another really serious relationship. Well, engaged, to be specific.”

“I thought you said that you were in trouble no matter what with a divorce.”

“If I can convince the higher-ups that my marriage never meant much, they could pull some strings and have it annulled. But I have to convince them that I’m on my way into a real, for-keeps marriage. Someone stable and down to Earth.”

“That would be the part I’d be playing – if I were to do this?”

“Why don’t you just get an actual, real woman to do this?”

“I don’t know a lot of real women, Nick. I’m sorry to say.”

“You could hire an actress cheaper than me.”

“And pay extortion for the rest of my life?”

“Yeah, I guess I wouldn’t exactly be making a federal case out of this, would I?” Nick realized.

“Right. As for what it would involve.... I uh...”

Nick interrupted. “I figure it’s just showing up for two hours, you be seen with me, we leave and that’s the story.”

“Uh, yes. I suppose so.”

“Do you have five thousand dollars to pay me?”

“Yes.”

“Will you pay me in advance?”

“Yes.”

“Can I pick out the clothes?”

“Y...Yes.”

“If I don’t think I can pull this off, can I back out?”

“Just give me fair warning.”

“When’s the game?” Nick said, not really even believing he was agreeing to this.

“Next Friday. That’s about... Eleven, no, twelve days away.”

“I need a place to stay while I work on this. I don’t want to have to get a hotel room for two weeks as I practice, and I sure as hell am not going to be in the same house as you.”

“I have a cottage out back. You can use that. It’s not part of the house, and you’ll have complete privacy.”

Nick let out a deep breath and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I don’t have a car. Can you pick me up?”



True to his word, Roger set Nick up in a small two-room cottage that was out behind the house. It obviously hadn’t been used in a while and everything had a layer of dust on it. It was furnished plainly, with simple tables, chairs and a bed.

After stewing for a few days, unhappy with himself and the very odd situation he now found himself in, Nick finally got around to the business at hand. He needed to make himself over as a female.

He asked Roger exactly what he was expecting.

“Something a lot like the woman you pretend to be Saturday nights.” Was the quick answer. “A nice sense of humor, a warm personality and a dazzling smile.”

Nick was a little leery that Roger was more than a little taken with the character he had been playing. But it was just two hours. The world wasn’t going to come to an end over two lousy hours.

Nick took examination of himself in the mirror. One of the reasons he had been bale to get away with his impersonation was his slender build. The other was that the Martian Queen was somewhat Amazonian in her proportions which suited him.

But now, he wasn’t going to have that to fall back on. He was going to have to look like a real woman in the real world. Whatever he chose, he was going to have to make sure his clothes covered him fairly loosely. A dress didn’t seem right to wear to a game. A

blouse or something was way too formal. After thinking about it for a while, he came upon a clever solution. He'd just wear an oversized, loose basketball jersey. It would cover his male body thoroughly and be appropriate to wear to a game. Simple and effective.

He'd get some tight jeans, and a pair of tennis shoes. Voila! Done. No sweat.

The next day, Nick went out and bought everything he needed. That included a dark blond wig that went down to his shoulders. The same place where he had gotten his Martian Queen costume thought nothing about selling him more women's stuff.

He tried it all on that night. It was not what he had hoped for. He originally thought that the combination of a big head of hair and ample bosom was enough to get the job done. The sight of himself in the mirror wasn't going to fool many.

Why could he look like a woman in the Queen getup and not in regular clothes? It wasn't the green skin, was it?

No. Or rather, a partial "Yes." Nick decided that it wasn't the green, but the skin. He showed a lot of leg in his Queen outfit, bared his arms and a deep valley of cleavage. He had to re-think his approach.

It went through a few versions and re-starts before Nick was satisfied with the result. Then, finally after five days of preparation, he was ready for Roger to see what he had done.

As Roger had said, he wanted a chance to back out of this deal if Nick couldn't pull it off. "It's probably more of a risk for me than it is for you," Roger quipped. He wanted to see the "look" while he could still gracefully get out of going to the game.

Seeing how this was still kind of a "rough draft" version, Nick didn't go too crazy getting ready. He knew that when he finally did go to the game, he'd have to be meticulously careful over every last detail. But for right now, he did the bare minimums. He lotioned up his skin, he shaved closely on his face and legs, applied the shaping undergarments, the padding undergarments, and finally the undergarment undergarments. He used a little bit of concealer to blend the edge of the wig into his scalp, and drew the hair down to frame his face. He put on his bra and used the pads he wore for being the Martian Queen, which Nick thought for some reason looked twice as big as they usually looked. It was probably just his paranoia about someone paying him to dress like this.

Nick also decided to invest in a pair of panties for this exercise, since the bottom half of his costume was going to be much tighter than his Martian dress. He always seemed to check girls out for VPL himself, so he was well aware that he'd better be showing some himself. Visible panty line, that is.

"All right, here we go," Nick announced as he came into the living room, ready for inspection. He was more than a little nervous. This whole exercise had started as a dress-up game, but it was beginning to feel a lot more serious. Besides, he really did need that money. He stepped around the corner, into full view. "What do you think?" He asked.

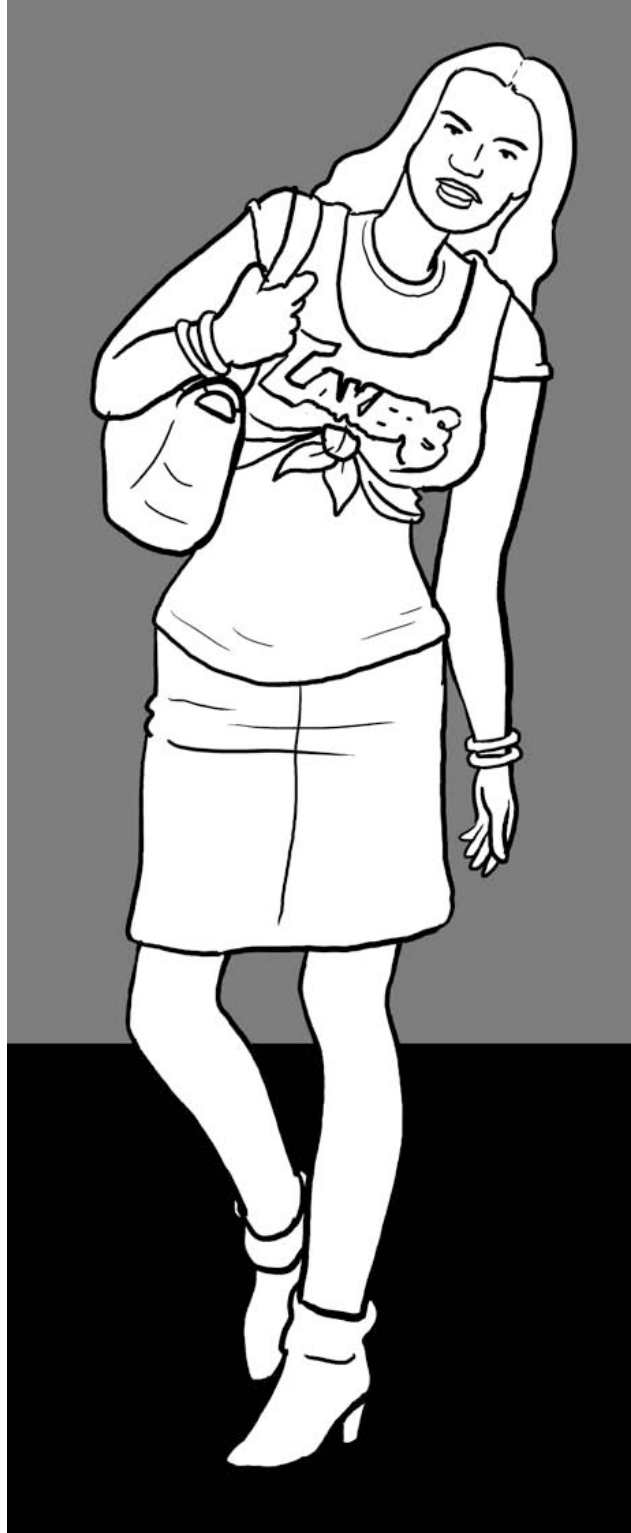
Nick had chosen an outfit that reveal the best parts of his body and conceal the worst. He had gone to a smaller, cropped version of a Laker Jersey, tied off in a big knot under his so-called breasts. The sleeveless top bared his shoulders and thin arms well.

This left his midsection without a top, but a purple t-shirt hugged his thin – even slender – tummy. His body then billowed out to show a seemingly well-developed and well-rounded butt. He wore a denim skirt that ended a few inches above his knees, and revealed his long and shapely legs for the world to admire. He wore a pair of brown leather two-and-a-half inch ankle boots which he had little trouble walking in.

“What can I say?” Roger remarked. “Wow.” He shook his head in amazement. “You look incredible. I think you could really break someone’s heart.”

Nick grimaced, knowing Roger was laying it on a little thick. Nick had spent enough time in front of the mirror over the past few days to know he didn’t make for a very attractive woman. There was something to be said for covering your face with green make-up – it hid quite a bit. With his mannish shape and features, he knew at best he looked like a the sort of woman who was going to have to get by on having a great personality.

“How did you get your...” Roger searched for a polite word, but then realized he didn’t



need to be polite. "How did you get your ass to look like that?"

"Padding. You can pad your butt just as easily as padding a bra."

"And your waist?"

"A body-shaper is taking down to twenty-eight inches."

"Absolutely amazing." Roger's eyes lingered on Nick, looking him from head to toe.

"I think it's still missing something," Nick said, nervously scratching his arm.

Roger leaned back to consider this, a look of concentration on his face. "Maybe. I'm not sure." He thought about it for another few seconds, and snapped his fingers. "Jewelry."

Nick nodded. "I just don't have the money to go out and buy a lot of stuff. Especially just for one night. Does it make that much of a difference?"

"It would be stranger to see a woman without some sort of jewelry on than with it."

Nick thought about it. "I guess you're right. I still can't afford it, though."

"I'll cover it. A ring, a necklace and a bracelet or two."

"And earrings."

"Ha. You're already spending money like a woman."

"And you're going to help me spend it. Let's go to the mall."

"Now?" Roger replied.

"Better sooner than later." Nick advanced towards the front door.

"Looking like that?"

"We probably should practice being a... Well, being a couple."

"Right now?"

"Don't chicken out, Roger. If you want this to succeed, we're going to have to work at it."

"I guess you're right." Roger went for his jacket and his car keys. "You should get your purse."

"I do believe you're right," Nick said. "We'll need to buy one of those, too."



The automatic glass doors to Woodfield Mills Mall whisked open and Nick tugged Roger inside. It was clear to Nick that his companion wasn't looking forward to this visit.

"So where's the closest jewelry store?" Roger asked, headed for a directory.

Nick led him away. "We'll just find it as we do a little window shopping."

Roger groaned.

Nick had been out in public several times in a dress, and he was used to the feeling of a skirt on his legs and the cool air passing over his exposed skin. He merrily clicked along the tiles in his heels.

Roger, meanwhile, had his head on a swivel and was looking every which way. "I don't think anyone suspects." He said to Nick.

"Of course they don't." Nick stopped by the window of the Coach store. "Half the women here look like overdressed drag queens anyway. I'm going to get a purse in here, bring your credit card."

"I've got five hundred in cash in my pocket."

Nick took a second look at the purse he had in mind. "We'll need the card."

When they finally arrived at a jewelry store, Nick was swinging his new bag back and forth under his arm. He was also sporting a nice new white leather jacket and had filled his new purse to the top with new make-up, hairbrushes and a sparkly pink cell phone. "Everything a real woman would need," Nick told Roger.

Roger knew this was neither the time or place for him to get into a fight about money. Nick pretty much had him over a barrel.

"I'd like to see your engagement rings," Nick said, in his most lilting female voice

The salesgirl's face immediately lit up. "This must be a very special day for you two!"

"You have no idea." Nick fed his arm through Roger's and leaned in tight. Then, he looked up, smiled, and batted his false eyelashes at him.

Roger's head jerked back in surprise. He then looked at the salesgirl. "You got anything used?"



Once the two returned to Roger's house, he made Nick promise to not lose the receipts for anything they had purchased. "Otherwise, I thought that went pretty well." Roger said.

Nick took off his small jacket and hung it up. "It took forever for you to loosen up," he kicked off his boots and went over to the kitchen for a beer.

Roger followed him. "I loosened up? When was that? I'm still scared stiff."

Nick held out his hand to show the ring on it. "I don't know why I let you buy me the cheapest ring they had. I'm beginning to feel like this engagement is a sham!"

"I'm sure your heart is shattered."

"My finger is shattered. This thing is way too tight." Nick worked it around his finger.

"It'll be okay tomorrow." Roger took an offered beer from Nick and popped the top. "But seriously, you do one damn good job of impersonating a woman."

"Well, that's nice of you to say so, but I made a ton of mistakes today." He popped his beer. "Did you see me get in and out of the car? I looked like a drunkard. I nearly fell off my heels a half dozen times. That guy in the leather store? He had me read all the way."

"Really? I thought we were great."

"We won't last half an hour unless we get a lot of practice in." Nick examined his beer can, and then put it aside. "Let's get started right now. From this moment on, you and I are going to be living together as a couple." Nick took an opened bottle of white wine

from the fridge and poured himself a modest glass. "Until we get home from the game, we're going to stay in character."

"Isn't that a bit extreme?"

"Yes, but if you say this is as important to you as it is, then spending the next..." Nick did the math. "56 hours as a couple will be worth it."

Roger took a deep breath. "No. I won't do it. You're fine as it is."

"I'll pull out of this deal right now."

"Okay, okay. Fine. We'll have it your way. We'll be a couple through the game."

"Good." Nick took a sip of his wine, leaving a red lip imprint on the glass. "Now, what do you want to have for dinner, sweetie?"

Roger rolled his eyes. "It really doesn't matter... uh...." Roger thought for a moment. "What should I call you, anyway?"

"Sweetie, honeybunch, dearest, babycakes, snuggle-wuggums..."

"No, no, no. The name. What's my fiancée's name?"

"Did you give them a name? The people at work? What did you tell them?"

"I... Uh... I guess I did." Roger scratched his chin. "I must have." Roger put down his beer and checked his PDA. "Let me check my calendar..." He scrolled through a few appointments. "Here it is. '7:30, Game with...' Oh yeah. Now I remember. Crap."

"What?"

"Game with Dee Dee."

"Dee Dee? Are you serious?"

Roger threw up his hands. "I used to have a girlfriend named Dee Dee... It was just the first name I thought of..."

"Whatever. It's just for show, right? I get to choose the last name at least. We'll go with Dee Dee..."

"Summers." Roger interrupted.

"What?"

"Dee Dee Summers. I had to give a name for picking up the tickets at the Will Call booth."

"When were you going to tell me this?"

"I was hoping never."

"Fine. Roger Van der Slyke, I'm Dee Dee Summers."

Roger shook Nick's hand. "Hi Dee Dee. How about we order out for dinner?"

Nick wrapped his arms around Roger's neck. "I think that's a wonderful idea, honey."

"You enjoy making me sweat, don't you?"

"Absolutely."



By the time the Friday night game came around, both Nick and Roger were feeling well prepared. Although Roger couldn't have been more uncomfortable with having a fake girlfriend, he eventually got into the swing of things. He even helped with the dishes as Nick washed and Roger dried.

"Are we ready to go yet?" Roger asked.

"Here I come!" Nick said, putting the final touches on. He looked even better than the first time, this time accented by some modest jewelry and more practice in the skirt and heels. The time had done him well, as he carried himself as convincingly as a man was able to. It was time to meet the boss.

"You ready?" Roger asked Nick.

"I'm as ready as I could possibly be. You nervous?"

"Extremely."

"So am I. But all we need to do is just not screw this up, and we'll be fine."

They drove the thirty-five minutes to downtown, then spent another hour finding parking. The center was packed tonight, full of enthusiastic fans. Nick looked like any other female fan, wearing team colors and showing a little sex appeal.

By the time they had gotten to their seats, Roger's co-worker was already waiting for them.

"Well, look who finally decided to show up!" said the man, good-naturedly.

"I forgot how bad parking was downtown during the game." Roger said, apologizing.

"Gene, this is my fiancée, Dee Dee. Dee Dee, this is the Senior VP of personnel, Gene Kramer."

"Ah, the famous Dee Dee. Good to finally meet you!" Gene shook Nick's hand. Nick made sure for his hand to be girlishly limp. "This is my wife, Margot."

"Hi Margot," Nick sang in his practiced female voice. "I love your earrings." In truth, they were a little gaudy, but Nick had learned that women always compliment other women when they meet.

"Hello, Dee Dee. I'm so glad we had a chance to finally meet Roger's elusive fiancée!"

Elusive? Nick wasn't sure how long Roger must have been telling them this story. It didn't really matter though. It wasn't going to be for long.

When they had exchanged pleasantries and settled into their seats, Nick whispered over to Roger, "Executive VP of Personnel? I thought we were meeting the Chairman of the Board."

"I guess they must have switched on me. We'll just go with it."

They all sat down to watch the game, almost sounding natural and relaxed. Roger less so than Nick. Roger was clearly sweating this one through. Nick was trying to stay chatty, and he was probably even a bit annoying at times. But that was in character for Dee Dee. Even when Roger and Gene went for food, Nick was able to bluff his way through a conversation about what seeds to plant for the upcoming winter.

By the end of the night, with both Roger and Nick desperately watching the clock tick down second by second, they felt free and clear. In fact, the pressure they had both put on themselves was probably much more than they needed worry about. There hadn't even been a hint of a problem.

As the buzzer sounded to signal the end of the game, the crowd started to filter out. The Lakers had lost by ten. "Well, you can't win 'em all," Gene said, imparting sage wisdom.

"I guess you can't. I'll see you Monday at work, Gene."

Margot leaned forward towards Nick, and Nick had to think for a moment why, but he quickly realized it was a farewell gesture. Nick leaned forward, too, as they lightly hugged each other. "I hope your garden comes out well in the spring!" Margot said to Nick.

"Yours too, Margot." Nick replied. "I'll see you."

"We'll be at the Anniversary Ball," Margot answered.

"I always look forward to it." Roger said.

"Can't miss it," Nick said. "Good-bye, guys!"

"Good night, you two!" Gene answered.

Once they were out of earshot, Roger grasped Nick by the arm, tightly. "Why did you say that!?"

"Ow!" Nick answered. "Say what?"

Roger had to shout over the din of the crowd. "That we can't miss the ball?"

"I didn't say that!"

"What!?"

"I said, I didn't say that!"

"Yes you did!"

"We'll talk about it in the car!"

By the time they did reach the car, both were so beat and exhausted that neither of them remembered to bring the subject up.

J A M E S J C R A F T

***MALE
MONDAY,
GIRL FRIDAY***

**“Hey, Cutie!” by James J. Craft
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2010 PDF Edition

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HEY, CUTIE!

Daniel James was an average guy. There wasn't much to note about him. He graduated high school smack in the middle with a pleasant 3.0 average, four years of college, masters of business degree, married the girl who seemed to like him well enough and then settled down at 22. He had an inoffensive house in the suburbs, a lawn and a nice beige car. He had a fish for a pet, because he certainly didn't want to seem like a weirdo who didn't have a pet.

The one odd thing about him was his wife, Kat, who was a notch or two better than what he deserved. Slowly, Kat herself had begun to realize that, and she had started to take to staring out windows and wondering what the world had to offer her beyond beige cars and gold fish. It wasn't the end of the road for them, still, Kat began to think about what was... Next.

Daniel really didn't have the qualities needed to know what "next" meant. He lived in a constant state of constancy, worrying only about what was in front of his face. He had taken a comfortable job in accounting in an average sized office for an average sized firm, and life had been... For him... About average. That was just fine. Daniel didn't push too hard, and in return didn't expect to be pushed too hard. He had kept himself below the radar and had moved up the ladder at an average pace after being hired fresh out of college. As one of the younger auditors the firm employed, Daniel's job consisted mostly of making sure that the branch office and adjacent plant were spending money efficiently and effectively. Sometime, Daniel would even forget what his company manufactured, because it was immaterial to his job. It didn't matter. All that mattered was doing his job, and doing it well... Or at least doing it well enough.

One Friday afternoon, however, Daniel's world began to take a turn when a new bundle of data appeared in his email inbox. It was from an unfamiliar auditor at another office of the company, somewhere out-of-state. He didn't even realize that the company had an office in Oakville... Wherever that was. But that didn't matter, he opened the email and started to read it. The note attached to the file read, "Due to unexpected fluctuations in seasonal employment, our supervisors require the Oakville



workload to be redistributed to other offices. Please refer to the attached spreadsheet and review the numbers, concentrating on any irregularities you may find. Once complete, forward it to your supervisor and delete this message for security purposes. Thank you.”

Although Daniel thought it was a little odd that the file had not come directly from his boss, in the end it didn't matter. Work was work. If he complained, he might be seen as a complainer. All that mattered was finding those irregularities. That was fine. Daniel loved finding irregularities. It was like a treasure hunt! Nothing was more thrilling for him than finding cost over-runs, under-runs, misappropriations and unaccounted expenses. Commissions, omissions and principle. It was such a rush. Not to mention a bit of a power trip, since he was essentially finding other people's mistakes... And/or catching people who were doing things they shouldn't be with company money.

A rush indeed.

Daniel set to work, opening the attached files and starting his examination. There was a lot of data contained in them, more than in the files he usually worked with. It would likely take him all day to do it, taking into account that he still had to fulfill his regular accounting duties. But after a few hours of delving into the ledgers and balancing out the different line items, Daniel realized why someone else had sent this to him to do. It was huge. And not just a little huge... A lot huge. It wasn't going to take him all day... It was going to take him all week! That is, if he didn't take it home to work on.

Daniel resolved to complete his work in record time. Perhaps this would be the opportunity he had been waiting for to show his superiors what he was really capable of. Not that he minded being average... It had served him well for the past twenty-nine years. It's just that being average was starting to feel a little bit routine. He had been thinking that it might be time for a change, and if his boss was impressed by how well he did this task, it might be the right opportunity to break out of his average mold and start to move up the ladder from average to just slightly above average.

So it came as a bit of a surprise to Daniel's wife when she came home that night to find Daniel on the sofa, staring at his laptop, going through pages upon pages of balance sheets and expense account reports.

Kat was the fundraising coordinator for a local hospital. She knew exactly how and where to find millions of dollars for the hospital's different projects – but ask her to look at a balance sheet and her eyes would glaze over. She often wondered what she had seen in the obsessive number-cruncher that was her husband. It seemed all too often that Daniel would much rather spend his time with a calculator and ledger than with her, and seeing him working from home now only affirmed her suspicions.

“What's for dinner?” Kat asked. She watched her husband comb over every line of every page with an animal-like intensity. I wish he would look at me the way he looks at those spreadsheets, she thought to herself.

“Can’t eat,” Daniel replied without looking up, “Must work.”

Kat rolled her eyes again and went into the kitchen. “You remember that we’re supposed to go to the Hospital’s Cardio-Unit Fundraiser tomorrow night... Right?” She called, as she looked through the fridge and cupboards for something to eat. A combined income of two-hundred-thousand dollars... And we’ve got nothing to eat, she muttered to herself.

She waited a moment for Daniel to reply before asking him again, “Daniel?”

Daniel was too busy with his laptop. He was narrowing the problems down to one particular area, a special project, referred to as ‘QT.’ The project was way over budget, and to make matters worse, it was expensing outrageous things, like chewing gum. How could you expense chewing gum? Not to mention an entry for “miscellaneous cosmetic items” and costing the company several tens of thousands of dollars... So far.

Looking further, Daniel also noted a link back to the same account. All of these expenses were all tied to contracts held by the firm’s biggest customer... Meyer Industries.

Daniel could smell blood. He was going to enjoy burying whoever was in charge of this project. All it would take was a few more items traced back to the project’s expense account the whole ‘QT’ project would be toast!

Toast? Daniel thought. “Toast... I... Smell... Toast,” he said aloud.

He looked up to see his wife, staring down at him... Nibbling on a piece of toast, “Earth to Daniel,” she said, “are you even listening to me?” She squared her jaw and squinted her eyes in restrained anger.

Daniel knew he had not been paying attention to his wife again, which was a pet peeve of Kat’s. She did not like being ignored. Daniel’s mind tried to shake off the numbers and cell formulas in his mind for a brief moment, so he could figure out something to say to Kat, and get out of the increasingly stern gaze that she was giving him. “Uh... I... Um,” he stammered. His brain locked up on him. Good job genius! he scolded himself.

“Oh never mind, Daniel!” she scoffed. “Just make sure you’re dressed and ready to go by six tomorrow,” she called out from the kitchen. She made herself another piece of toast from the stale bread she found. At least I’ll eat well tomorrow night, she thought to herself.



Daniel spent the rest of the evening and much of the early morning working on his little project. It was three or four in the morning before he finally closed the lid on his laptop and drifted off into a restful sleep. He dreamt about the person responsible for this ‘QT’ project and the commotion it would cause. There would be gossip. People would whisper to each other: “Did you hear about what they found?” “An accounting irregularity!” another would answer. “I hear they fired a guy,” would be another whispered com-

ment. “Yes, and did you hear who found it?” Daniel would reply – “I did!” He dreamt about getting a promotion. He dreamt of all manner of self-gratifying things before he heard the door slam the next morning.

He jumped up from his place on the couch, still dressed in his office clothes, and walked to the window, just in time to see Kat’s silver BMW pulling out on to the street.

He found a note on the fridge:

Daniel,

Gone shopping.

PLEASE be ready for the fundraising dinner tonight by five-thirty.

K

He tossed the note into the trash and scoffed, What does she think – I’m incompetent or something?

He sat back down on the couch with a cup of coffee and turned his computer back on.

“Daniel?” Kat called from the hallway, “It’s five after six, are you ready yet or what?”

Daniel grumbled and looked up at clock, where had the day gone? He wondered, I can’t go now; he thought to himself, I have to finish this report. It was critical to get it done now.



He heard heels clicking up the hallway to the den.

“Daniel?” she said as she poked her head into the room. Her face turned from disappointment to all out disgust, “Daniel? You’re not even dressed. You’re still wearing your... argh! Daniel I told you to be ready for five-thirty! This is very important Daniel!” She could hear the blood start to rush through the veins in her ears, throbbing like a stormy ocean. She looked up at the ceiling counting backwards to calm herself.

Daniel barely looked up from his laptop... She’ll get over it, he thought to himself.

“That’s it Daniel James. That. Is. It!” her voice was very low and very angry, “I can’t deal with you anymore. When you want to be a productive part of this marriage again, you let

me know!”

With that, Kat turned away and stormed out of the house. Daniel could hear the sound of squealing tires out on the street as she tore off in her beamer.

Women! he thought to himself, always making a big deal about nothing. You’d never catch me getting my panties in a knot like that. He chuckled to himself as he continued to type.

He knew the function didn’t start in earnest until seven-thirty. God knows he had been to enough of these fundraisers of Kat’s to know that much. He could finish up what he was working on here, shower and shave and still make it in time for dinner. Kat would be too caught up in her glad-handing and socializing to stay angry at him for very long.

And it was true, that when Daniel showed up at the banquet center that night, Kat was all smiles as she introduced her husband to the ‘who’s who’ of the city’s philanthropic set. It was pleasantries, handshakes, nodding heads and broad smiles.

When they got home however, things were a different story. Kat didn’t say one word to Daniel and spent the rest of the weekend in their room, with the door shut... While Daniel stayed in the den with his laptop. When Monday morning rolled around, they didn’t even bother to say goodbye to each other as they hurried out the door to work.



Daniel emailed his report to the associate divisional accounting manager first thing that Monday morning. It was no more than a half-hour later, when Daniel’s phone rang.

“Daniel?” the divisional manager asked, “Could you come to my office please. I have some questions about your report.”

Questions? Daniel wondered, About my findings? What could that mean? I was exact and precise in my findings... What could he possibly want to ask? Did I make a mistake? No, I checked those figures three times... I know they are accurate. Maybe he wants to congratulate me. Or promote me!

Daniel hurried through the maze of corridors and elevators to executive wing of the corporate office. The divisional manager’s secretary showed him into the office. Daniel couldn’t help but steal a glance at her tush as she walked ahead of him. What I wouldn’t do for an ass like that, Daniel thought to himself. To have a cute secretary at his beckon call, like all of the executives had, was always been a bit of a pipe dream, but maybe this was going to be his big chance.

All would be revealed as Daniel sat in his boss’s office.

“Daniel...” the divisional manager began, “You’ve done some good work around here over the past few years...” He paused for dramatic effect, know-

ing how anxious Daniel was, “but this time you’ve outdone yourself.” He smiled at Daniel as Daniel’s tense face relaxed.

Score! Daniel thought inside his head.

“You’ve found some pretty substantial irregularities in some expense accounts, and I want you to know that I am going to make sure that someone is held accountable for this. I, for one, am outraged.”

“Thank you Sir... It wasn’t much. I was just doing my job” Daniel was glowing.

“And what a good job you did.” His boss continued, “But I can’t help but wonder...” the Divisional Manager’s voice trailed off. Daniel started to panic. Uh-oh, he thought to himself.

“Uh... Wonder? What do you wonder Sir?” Daniel stammered, not wanting to let his panic show through. It wasn’t working.

“This is a delicate situation, Daniel. This ‘QT’ business could affect our quarterly statement quite badly. In this case, you should have come to me immediately and met with me face-to-face.” The manager folded his hands at his chest. “We work together as a team, Daniel. You need to understand that. Especially if you’re going to get anywhere in this company.”

“I guess they don’t teach that in accounting 101,” Daniel replied.

“I suppose not,” the manager replied. “Perhaps... I can’t help but wonder how much better it could be if only you had a little more executive training.” His boss continued.

Daniel nodded stupidly, not fully understanding what his boss was saying but pretending to follow along anyway.

“You don’t really know what I’m referring to... Do you Daniel?”

“Of course Sir... Training... I... Uh...” Daniel sighed, “Uh... No... I, uh... Not really, Sir”

“That’s all right Daniel. I shouldn’t expect too much of you... I mean... You did attend the local state school, did you not?”

Daniel just stared at his boss with a blank expression. Did he just insult him? That “state” school had cost him a small fortune to attend. He had worked his ass off to get through that “state” school. Just because I don’t come from some stupid rich family, he muttered internally, like some people... His face was starting to show just a hint of the growing anger he was beginning to feel.

“Oh don’t take it like that Daniel. The state run colleges around here are just fine. Its just... Lets be honest... They’re no Harvard or Yale, now are they?” his supervisor smiled.

Daniel blushed, “Well uh...” His boss did have a point there.

“Our firm has recognized that fact and taken appropriate steps to offer ‘supplemental’ training. Learning is a vital part of innovation, Daniel. And we’re committed to continuing that learning process. That’s why we feel we have to

‘augment’ what assets you already possess with ones that will help stream you into a new and exciting career field.”

Daniel smiled, “A promotion?”

“It would be premature to call it that Daniel. Advancement. Call it job advancement. But I can guarantee that if you accept what I am about to offer, it will lead you some very new and unexpected changes in your life, both professional and personal.”



“Well... I am interested,” Daniel tried to play it cool. “If you think it’s worth my time sir.”

“It’s called ‘Corporate Understanding Through Inspired Employees’. We offer it as an after hours course for employees that we feel would best be served by it, and I believe that you are the ideal candidate for being enrolled.”

Daniel’s mind was racing. This must be a management grooming course for specially selected candidates, he thought to himself, and they want me to be in it!

“I’ll do it!” Daniel blurted out, blowing his cool demeanor in seconds flat.

His boss’s eyes grew wide for a moment, “Are you sure Daniel? You haven’t even asked me for any details on the program.”

“I’m sure I know what’s involved. It’s exactly what I’ve been looking for Sir. I’m honored to be given the opportunity.”

His supervisor cracked a smile. A big, honest smile. He even looked like he was trying to fight back some laughter, “Oh I’m sure you think it is Daniel. I’m sure you think it is.” He paused to pull a sheet of paper out of his desk, signed it and handed it to Daniel, “Give this to Rhonda. She’ll make sure you get set up in the course right away. The course runs each Friday for three hours, and it’s a concurrent thing. So try to absorb as much of what we are trying to convey to you as possible – as quickly as possible. Okay?”

Daniel nodded, grinning, “Thank you Sir. You won’t regret this” he said as he turned for the door.

“No, Daniel, I’m sure that I won’t,” his supervisor grinned back.

Daniel headed to Rhonda’s desk. All of the different managers’ offices had their secretaries out front in a common area, as if they were showing them

off. There was no doubting that that his divisional manager was the winner, or at least a runner-up. Rhonda was one of the hottest girls on the floor.

Nervously, he handed the paper to her, and as she glanced at it, she glanced back at the paper.

“Are you serious?” She said. “Well, whatever the boss wants,” she raised her eyebrow in skepticism. Daniel chatted her up for a moment, learning that she had just recently become the divisional managers’ personal assistant. He day-dreamed naughty thoughts as she spoke, watching her red, pillowy lips form shapes.

“I better get your papers,” she smiled as she rose from her chair.

Daniel’s heart raced, as Rhonda went to filing cabinet and bent over to grab something from the bottom drawer. The auburn haired beauty looked up and smiled at him, catching his gaze, and seemingly enjoying it. “Here it is,” she said.

Daniel blushed as she handed him the package. If only he wasn’t married, he thought to himself. Rhonda explained what would be required of him, and he tried his very best to pay attention, but the way she smiled at him with those full shiny lips, the way she played with her glowing hair, the fact that her low-cut top allowed perfect viewing of the inside of her breasts... Not to mention her brief skirt and legs that went on for miles... He was, at best, distracted. At worst, turned on. As she spoke, Daniel dreamt about being an executive himself, and having a hot assistant like Rhonda working for him.

Having a hot secretary might not sit too well with his wife though. Their relationship was already strained, somewhat. Having his very own personal sex-pot assistant might only make it worse. Or maybe it would be better.

Kat was a successful career woman, and enjoyed an enormous social circle that kept her very busy. Daniel never cared much to be going out to all those charity balls and silent auctions. He would rather keep working on his laptop – as was evidenced this past weekend. Daniel knew that taking this executive training program was going to be scheduling issue. It got even worse when he read through the package, and realized it was six months long. It was at night. On Friday of all nights. That was Kat’s big social night. All of her gala, get-togethers, socials, balls and what-not was on Friday nights. This was going to be a pretty big scheduling problem, but if she loved him, she would just have to deal with it. This was, after all, as his boss had emphatically put it, ‘a life changing opportunity.’



When he got home that day, Kat was predictably pissed. She stormed out of the room, shouting, “Just do whatever you want Daniel! You always do anyway!” Daniel heard the bedroom door slam loudly behind her. “I’ve had it!” She shouted from behind the door. “I’ll just go alone!”

All in all, Daniel believed he had really gotten off pretty easy. He expected a lot more drama. He shrugged, popped open a beer, and headed for the den. His laptop was waiting for him with a whole new challenge for him. He wanted to have all his work squared away before his first class.

ORIENTATION

The week passed slowly, but finally Friday night arrived. Daniel didn't even bother to go home that night. He grabbed a bite to eat in the cafeteria instead, and headed to the classroom in the basement of the corporate office.

The class was a strange mix – to say the least. At the front of the class, sat two very attractive ladies, well, bimbos as Kat might say, in tight fitting outfits cut to display their best assets. Their hair was big and their makeup heavy. Daniel thought

they looked familiar, but he couldn't think where he had seen them. Maybe in the executive offices as secretaries?

Sitting behind the very sexy ladies were three people in semi-casual attire. The problem was that Daniel couldn't discern if they were particularly masculine ladies... Or particularly feminine men. Each was wearing clothing that seemed suitable for either. And each had a particularly androgynous hairdo. They might have possibly been wearing a touch of makeup too. He had heard of so-called "metro-sexuals" before, maybe that's who these people were. Or they were just flamboyantly gay.

How odd.

Fortunately, in the row in front of Daniel, were a couple of guys he could relate to, who immediately turned around and introduced themselves to Daniel as Miles and Eugene. Miles was a slightly overweight dark-haired man, while Eugene was taller, a little older, and slightly balding. He had actually met Eugene once or twice upstairs. They worked on the same floor, and he seemed like a nice enough guy. Both appeared to be just a little older than Daniel, but he couldn't be absolutely sure.



The middle-aged female instructor took attendance with each person raising their hand as their name was called. Daniel learned that the two women at the front were named Candy and Trisha, while the three androgynous members of the class were Chris, Pat, and Carey... Was it "Carey" or was it "Kerry?" Either way, their names were little help in determining their sex.

"Welcome, everybody!" The overly-enthusiastic instructor began. "Good to see our regulars, and since this is the first session of the new term, that means new students, and I'd like to welcome our newest student – Daniel."

He gave the rest of the class a casual wave as they turned to look at him.

"Great!" The instructor said, "Super!" The woman turned a page in her teaching manual, paused for about thirty seconds as she read it, and then continued. "Okay. Since it's Daniel's first class, we have to start out with a little orientation. For the rest of us, this will be a great refresher."

She flicked off the lights and turned on an overhead video projector and shone it brightly on the wall. A piercing sound that threatened to shatter glass came from the speakers, the quickly died out.

"Sorry! Sorry!" The instructor apologized. "I still don't get the hang of this equipment." She fiddled with some controls that Daniel couldn't quite see, but eventually a sort of white-noise sound pervaded the room that seemed to just melt into surprisingly beautiful tones. Daniel wished he had something like this at home to help himself sleep at night.

"Welcome to your first night of training," a voice spoke. Daniel looked at the screen and saw that a woman was on, speaking. "The first thing to cover in your orientation is the very important subject of discrimination. As you know, this company has no tolerance for discrimination. Any preferential, oppressive or abusive treatment of a co-worker or outside party is grounds for dismissal. This means discrimination based on race, age, physical abilities, mental abilities or most importantly gender abilities."

Daniel was trying hard not to nod off. He supposed this was all just for legal reasons, but did they have to make it so boring?

"Let's focus on gender discrimination. The differences between our genders are..." Daniel was losing it. "...fairness in the workplace..." he was just blinking in and out now. "...transgender issues..." With those words, Daniel was down for the count.

He woke up when that high-pitched tone came from the speakers again, snapping him back to attention like his pants were on fire.

"Sorry! Sorry!" The instructor said, again. "Now – just to review, this company has no tolerance for discrimination. You should evaluate people on their ability to comprehend direction, their ability to contribute to a team, and then the functionality of that team."

"Some quick review questions. Daniel," the instructor said, shaking the sleep from Daniel's mind. "If, without your consent, a co-worker touched your breasts, would it be inappropriate?"

“Yes.” Daniel said.

“Good. Say you wore a tight skirt to work and a manager patted you on the butt. Would that be inappropriate conduct?”

“Why would I be wearing a skirt to work?” Daniel chuckled as he glanced at the faces of his fellow co-workers. He had figured that they would all join in his chuckling.

They didn’t.

“It’s just a hypothetical situation Daniel,” the instructor said in a serious tone.

“Oh,” Daniel’s tone changed, becoming much more down to earth, “So it was my manager did this?”

“Yes.”

Daniel tried a second time to get a rise out of the class. “How short is the skirt?” He joked.

The class remained silent. Tough crowd, he thought to himself.

“Ankle length,” the instructor said, checking her notes.

“Oh, okay... Then that would be inappropriate?” He half answered/half asked.

“For sure!” One of the girls up front blurted out. “Who would wear an ankle-length skirt these days?”

The class burst into laughter.

Daniel shook his head. That made them laugh?

“Very good Daniel. Lets move on then to our next topic,” the instructor said. “An introduction to employee obedience.”

Daniel couldn’t believe his ears Obedience? What kind of the hell kind of course was this?

The instructor continued with a new video that lasted for about an hour, and fortunately was a lot more sensible than the title. It mostly focused on the responsibilities of employees and how these responsibilities were structured. Just when Daniel thought that things were settling down, the class was then subjected to a bizarre twenty-five minute video on the “importance of poise and posture in the workplace.”

And Daniel had figured that “obedience” was the most bizarre topic they could teach.

They followed the video with a discussion on what they had seen. Daniel wanted to ask what relevance any of this had in making them better potential executives, but he bit his tongue. The girls in the front seemed to know all of the answers, and giggled loudly whenever they spoke.

The final hour was spent on strategies for improving morale in the office.

What a ridiculous waste of time, Daniel thought to himself. He would spend the weekend thinking about whether or not he should march back into the divisional manager's office and voice his opinion about the relevance – or lack thereof – of the night school course.

Which is exactly what he did.

Daniel did his best to bridle his temper, and remain calm and sensible, but he was sure doing a lousy job of it. Daniel nearly lost it more than once in the short five-minute conversation, which he immediately regretted. He had ranted, working up a good sweat, and had lost his focus completely. It was not a professional display.

His bosses' reaction was to send him to the company nurse, as he didn't think Daniel "looked too good." So, not wanting to stir the pot any more, he agreed. After all, maybe he could get some days off or skip the next class.

He had talked with the company nurse just once before, and although she was as hot as they come, she was bitter and angry most of the time. Still, as long as he didn't open his mouth, he could just sit still and watch her very shapely body.

Once she brought his information up on the computer, her cold, professional demeanor changed from hostile to helpful. She confirmed with Daniel that he was in the Corporate understanding program.

Daniel looked blank.

"Corporate Understanding Through Inspired Employees?" she said.

Daniel nodded, "Oh yeah... Right, of course." he said, "Exactly"

She then asked Daniel a series of questions about his home life, his thoughts on work and other things that didn't seem to make any sense to Daniel – no sense at all. But after a half hour, the nurse informed him that he was suffering from mild depression. They agreed that it might be caused by his wife's bullish behavior and his stress of adjusting to night school. She insisted that she administer a 'mild' antidepressant to him. What she failed to mention was that the antidepressant was in the form of an injection.

On his way to the elevator, Daniel rubbed his sore rump, but within a few minutes, Daniel's mood started to improve. Maybe that stuff could do him some good.

His view on the whole night school issue began to change too. If his boss wanted him to take the course, then he would take the stupid course. After all that's what a good little 'obedient' employee would do, he chuckled to himself.



The following Friday, the class was more of the same, and the same frustrations returned. It just all felt like a grand waste of time.

Daniel was fuming about it over dinner at a small banquet for the children's hospital's emergency room. It was another one of Kat's social-climbing charity dinners. Something about raising money for a new emergency room piece of equipment – some scanning thing or other. Kat was busy hob-knobbing, so he struck up a conversation with whoever would listen.

As he was speaking, it suddenly dawned on him how poor his posture was. He straightened his spine and pulled back his shoulders – like they had suggested at class. It felt good to finally use something from his night-school course in the real world, for once. After he had been doing it for an hour or two, it seemed natural and comfortable.

Funny thing was, the very act of talking to people seemed to wear on him. Coming up with topics and driving a conversation just seemed so draining. For the rest of the night, he simply enjoyed listening and smiling. Even a well-placed nod, looking deeply into the eyes of the person speaking and dropping a laugh after a comment made conversation go so much better.

The following Monday, a lazy morning at the office was interrupted when a fellow coworker asked him to grab him a sandwich. Daniel's first reaction was to tell the jerk to take a flying leap – but something inside his head told him that he should be a team player. That moving up in the world was a team effort. That he should obey the command.

ObeY the command? What was he thinking?

“Uh?” Daniel just looked at his cohort, “Are you serious?”

The co-worker just laughed. “Never mind,” the man said as he smiled.

Later that night, when he told Kat the little anecdote, she just said, “I’ve been trying to teach you to do what I ask for years, maybe this class will be good for you after all.” She chuckled. Daniel just rolled his eyes.

By the time Friday rolled around again, Daniel wasn't feeling much like going to night school. His first two classes had been such disappointments. He hadn't learned a single new business strategy, just stupid things like posture (which reminded Daniel that he was slouching) and so-called obedience, and the newest thing, called “moral strategies.”



At home, he was sitting on the couch, trying to convince himself that he didn't need to go. He sat up straight and took a sip of his coffee.

Kat was working late that night, so Daniel helped himself to a frozen dinner, one of Kat's expensive frozen diet-plan dinners, before heading to night school. He still didn't really want to go, but he knew his boss had recommended him personally for the course, and the last thing he wanted to do is piss his boss off.

Apologizing for being late, Daniel found a seat in the classroom. The instructor quieted the noisy class down and began the night with a long video on the importance of appearance in the workplace. Daniel couldn't help but think that the video was a little outdated, though the actresses seemed to be wearing current clothes and hairstyles. It was odd that all the actors were women.

The class then did an exercise on "coordination." Daniel struggled, as the assignment was to use pictures of different women's clothing as the articles to match. When Daniel asked the instructor why they didn't use men's wear, she replied that women's clothing offered more variety of texture shape and color than men's clothes.

Daniel cursed at himself under his breath. Another wasted night.



Six days later, Daniel was standing in front of his closet, wearing only his boxers, staring at his assortment of clothes. Kat walked by and rolled her eyes, "Forget what you were doing?" she quipped.

Daniel suddenly shook his head, as if awakening from a dream, "Uh... No... I was just, uh, thinking... About what to wear today."

Kat clipped an earring in each ear and gave her husband a strange look, "I've never seen you take more than ten seconds to pick an outfit Daniel."

Daniel nodded, "Yeah... I know... I just..." he went back to staring into the closet, "I just want to be sure that I match, that's all. You know... That everything is coordinated."

Kat burst into laughter, "Yeah... Sure." She checked her hair in the mirror before leaving the room, "I bet you're real concerned about that."

Daniel just ignored her. He actually was feeling quite stressed about picking out the right combination to wear to work. What in the hell is wrong with me? he wondered. He had never fretted so much about what to wear. It was like everything in his closet looked... Wrong.

It went like this every morning for the rest of the week. Endless indecision in front of the closet. Eventually Kat just ignored him, after she had run out of jibes and jabs. She figured if Daniel was actually more concerned about dressing better, than that was probably a good thing. Just as long as he didn't waste money on a new wardrobe of Italian suits.



Friday morning came around again. Daniel got up a half hour earlier, so that he could take extra time to pick something to wear. That was his new routine.

He did, after all have class that night, and didn't want to be singled out as the only one not paying attention.

Kat continued to ignore him, as tempted as she was to say something.

At the office that day, Daniel's boss greeted him as he came in the door, and immediately asked him to get him a cup of coffee.

Daniel gave him an 'are you serious?' look, and wanted to tell him where he could stick it. But instead, just whined, "I just walked in the door, do you mind getting your own? I haven't even taken off my coat."

His boss sighed and headed off to the coffee maker, shaking his head as he walked.

What a weird thing to ask, Daniel thought of his boss's request. It worried him that his boss expected him to get him coffee. What was it with the office lately, anyway? Could no one get their own coffee? Their own sandwiches? Even worse, it worried him more that deep down inside, he really felt he should have done what they asked.

The class that night began with a discussion on coordination. Everyone was evaluated on how well their outfits coordinated.

Predictably, the people sitting at the front of the class fared much better than those sitting at the back – like Daniel. He had worked hard to make sure he would escape any criticism of his clothes, but he just didn't have much to work with. Khakis, white dress shirts, blue dress shirts.

The instructor mused that it might be time for 'some people' to start buying some new clothes, motioning with her eyes to the back of the class as she spoke, which caused Daniel to groan inside. It was the last straw. He was going to have to take care of the problem, and have something to coordinate – an idea that stuck with Daniel the following week as he made his way to the downtown mall to pick up a 'few things'.



At the class the following Friday, things began uneventfully. That was fine for Daniel, as he received no further comment on his clothes. That felt like a small victory. A small coupon book was waiting for him on his desk. The top one was for a 75% discount at a local salon. He picked it up, looked around, and didn't see anyone claiming it or even acknowledging it. He pocketed the coupons and reminded himself to give them to Kat later.

They started with a long exercise on 'vocabulary for success.' The exercise wasn't what Daniel thought it would be. He was expecting to learn all that empty corporate lingo like "empowered" and "pro-active," and his personal favorite "synergies." But instead of learning newer and bigger words, the instructor was teaching the class that 'keeping it simple' was better than using big words. Daniel thought they sounded ridiculous as they practiced saying phrases that ended in terms like 'yeah, sure' or 'I guess so.'

Were these puzzle pieces ever going to make a picture? He had taken some baffling courses in college, but there was always some hope of connecting up all the threads. This class just had him confused. He assumed that it was the product of some committee thinking, where everyone making the course threw in one thing and didn't care if it all made sense or not.

The instructor moved on to a round-table 'coordination' discussion... Again. This week however, Daniel fared much better, getting complements for his new dress shirt, worn with a belt that matched his shoes and snug fitting pants. He chuckled to himself, satisfied.



The class then did a hands-on coordination exercise using a cart filled with clothes. Each student had to choose the proper outfit combination and present why it matched to the rest of the class. Daniel, Miles and Eugene struggled more than other students, as the cart seemed to be loaded heavily with women's clothing, something that the three men didn't seem to be able to get into. They actually didn't even want to touch the stuff until it became clear they really didn't have a choice.

After coordination, the class watched another video on poise and posture.

Before the video began, however, the instructor took a moment to ask who in the class was wearing their 'shape up shoes'. Most of the hands in the class went up, except for Daniel. "Shape up shoes?" He asked.

The instructor would fill him in while the others watched the video. He was taken aside, and in hushed tone the instructor explained herself. 'Shape up shoes' were essentially a pair of loafers with a one-inch lift insert. She told him that the shoes would help him improve his daily posture and that he would be expected to wear them to work from now on.

Daniel wondered how the heck 'posture' was supposed to help him get promoted. Maybe the way you walk and sit can make you appear more like a leader... Or something. Even though the shoes looked a little strange, he realized that he was the only person in the class not wearing them. The exception

being the girls at the front of the class – who were wearing their usual high heels. Daniel decided that he better get on board. With a sigh, he slipped out of his old runners and into the shiny new shoes.

“These aren’t so bad,” he whispered to guys in front of him. Miles and Eugene nodded in agreement.

As it turned out, the instructor was right. The shape up shoes were great! By the end of the night, Daniel’s feet felt like they were walking on a cloud. He was so impressed by the difference they made, that he decided to wear them all weekend long, around the house, shopping for groceries – and even to the charity dinner with his wife on Saturday night.

Kat just rolled her eyes when she saw them. What an idiot. “People can talk you into anything,” she said to him.

J O E S I X P A C K

STUDENTS, EXCHANGED

**“French Dupe” by Joe Six-Pack
A Teens Transformed Story**



2010 Paperback Edition

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FRENCH DUPE

The terminal at Will Rogers World Airport was mostly empty on this night. The vendors had closed down, and only a few of the seats were occupied, mostly with dozing business travelers. A vacuum cleaner could be heard off in the distance somewhere, the only recognizable noise to be heard. The lights were dim, the sun had set for the night, and the gate area was dark.

A man dressed in a powder blue suit and cowboy boots was laying straight in his seat, trying to nod off. He adjusted the cowboy hat on his head to take a look around. What he saw, amongst the metal and the black seats was a young teenage girl, holding a sign that said "Welcome to America!" on it. She was dressed in a purple leopard-print mini dress held up with spaghetti straps, and wore a pair of knee-high high-heeled boots. Her blonde hair had been pinned up in an intentionally messy bun and her face shined with a fresh coat of makeup.

The man in the powder-blue suit placed the hat back over his eyes and tried to go back to sleep. He had lived in Oklahoma long enough to recognize hick white trash when he saw it. The poor girl would get married in a few years, probably to some jock football star, live with her parents until thirty, raise some bratty kids and never, ever leave the county she grew up in. She'd be a burnt-out cheerleader with a smoking habit. Same old story. Hell, he'd married that sort of girl. Three times.

Kelley Sue Crawford, holding her sign and bubbling with excitement, had a different view of her life. Yes, she was dating the school's starting quarterback, and yes, she wanted to get married soon, but there was no way she was staying in her home town. Winstonville only had ten thousand people living there, and she was determined to get out of that tiny town. She was just too good for them. She knew she had the looks and talent to go far. More than once, people on the street – people she didn't even know – would ask her if she was a model or a beauty queen or something the like.

"Not yet," she'd reply, with a flashy smile and a shake of her blond hair.

Her plan was centered around a television show, "Top Model USA," which was scheduled to come to nearby Stanton Valley. There, they'd tape a show where area girls would compete to go to Hollywood for a chance to be a part of the national finals in the Summer. She had made that her mission. She was going to win that show if it killed her.

Key to this plan for success was aboard the plane she had just seen land off in the distance.

On it rode Michelle Bouvier, the French exchange student she was hosting for the rest of the school year. She was going to give Kelley Sue the advantage in the Top Model USA competition. If there was one thing Kelley Sue knew, it was that she needed to have an edge over her competition. In the on spark of truly innovative thought that she might ever have, it occurred to her that she was just another country girl who was going to compete against others exactly like her. To win Top Model USA, she needed an edge. She needed the style and sophistication she couldn't get in Winstonville. That's why she brought the exchange student in. She was going to teach Kelley all about international sophistication. She was from France, after all. Paris. The ground zero of all things style.

How much more sophisticated could you get?

Michelle came from the country that invented fashion and style. Now, she was going to benefit from Michelle's expertise and wow those judges at Top Model USA. It was like she had just hired her own personal style consultant.



Kelley Sue bounced with excitement as she saw the Continental commuter flight pull up towards the gate. It wouldn't be long now. She was on her way to stardom.

She wasn't shy about her plan, either. Kelley Sue had bragged to her friends about how she now had the secret weapon to win. "Y'all ain't gonna recognize me after Michelle teaches me all about elegance and culture," she told Randi and Joelle her closest friends. "I'm goin' to be one high-class lady," she told her family. It wasn't uncommon for her to say to her schoolmates and teachers, "I wouldn't be surprised if Michelle didn't make me so sophisticated I'll be modelin' dresses n' stuff in Paris by the end of the year."

As the plane pulled into the gate, some folks gathered around, ready to welcome whomever it was they were waiting for. Nervously, Kelley Sue looked around for her parents, Ron and Chandra, but they were still absent. "Probably got lost parkin'," Kelley Sue said to herself. "Either that or they're still poutin'."

Her parents didn't really like the idea of hosting an exchange student this year. They were against it. That was probably because Kelley Sue hadn't told them about it until three days ago. She had made all the arrangements, and fed the forms into a stack of other things she had her Daddy sign for school. When the student exchange rep called to schedule an interview, Kelley Sue had made sure that it would just be too long a drive and her parents were just so gosh darn busy that in interview wasn't possible. That technicality didn't sand in the way of being approved. Just two weeks ago, Kelley Sue had been phoned to notify her that an exchange student was on the way from Paris by the name of Michelle.

Her parents might have strongly objected, but her parents would do what she wanted. She had her ways.

"Darlin', you know you need to tell us about these things," her Daddy had said. "This is goin' too far!"

"Oh, but Daddy, you won't have to do nuthin'!" Kelley Sue protested. "She'll be with me all day and she'll sleep in the guest room next to mine! You'll never even know she's here."

"What your father said, Kelley Sue!" Her Momma snapped. "You have no right! We'll have to just call and cancel! We can't just put some... Foreigner in our house! We don't know anything about her! What if she's a terrorist?"

"Well I can call the student exchange people and tell them our family can't host a student," Kelley Sue replied, "and I just hope they won't blame us for some sort of international incident!" She put on her best expression of innocence and concern. "If some other family in Winstonville should try and get an exchange student and be rejected, I certainly hope they won't be told they can't do it because they don't trust Winstonville. Imagine! They'd say, 'We all can't send an exchange student to you folks, because of what the Crawford family did.' Wouldn't that be just *horrible*?"

That was all Kelley Sue needed to say. She knew that her parents were touch sensitive when it came to their social status in Winstonville. Why, her mother was the president of the booster club, and jealously guarded her high position of status. Her Daddy was especially thin-skinned, as the family made good money from being the only tool & die shop within 100 miles of Winstonville. It had bought them the biggest home in town at two whole stories. Ron Crawford Tool & Die made the biggest float in the 4th of July parade, and every year Ron Crawford waved to the community like he was the mayor.

No, she new her parents would never jeopardize their social standing.

So that was why, as the gates opened up and the passengers came off the plane, Kelley Sue knew that she had already won. She always won. That was the fun of being Kelley Sue Crawford, the Queen of Winstonville.

As the about twenty or so passengers disembarked from the small commuter plane, Kelley Sue imagined showing her new possession off to the people of town, and most importantly to her schoolmates. She'd let everyone know how it was her family and her family's good reputation that awarded the exchange student to them. Michelle would be a walking trophy to display, shined and polished for people to admire.

Then, as they saw Michelle and Kelley Sue around, they'd remark how much more worldly and stylish Kelley Sue looked. They'd notice as she started to dress in modern fashions and carry herself with European grace and poise. In six months, she'd be unrecognizable as the country girl she was now and she'd walk and talk like an elegant supermodel, the type you see in beer posters and garage calendars.

As the crowd started to thin out, it suddenly occurred to Kelley Sue that she didn't see her exchange student. There were nothing but haggard business travelers in beaten suits. Except for...

Oh, no, thought Kelley Sue. It couldn't be. She turned to the only passenger that was still standing around, waiting. She approached, still holding her sign. "Scuse me, darlin..." she began.

The young man raised his head and nervously smiled. "Allo. I am looking for Kel Eeee Craw-ferd?"

"Oh, uh," Kelley Sue was reluctant to confirm her name. "Who are you?"

"I am Michel," he handed over his forms from the student exchange organization. "Michel from Paris."

"Yes!" Kelley Sue replied brightly. "Where is Michelle?"

The boy blushed. "Non. I am Michel."

Kelley Sue, confused, took a glance at the papers she held in her hands. The name read "Michel Jean Bouvier."

This couldn't be. She shook the papers angrily. "This is not right!" She looked around for any assistance. Seeing the clerks at the gate, she stomped on over to the ticket desk. "Excuse me!" she said loudly. "Excuse me!"

One of the clerks turned to face Kelley Sue and he gave her a courtesy smile. "Miss?" He asked.

"Yes, hello. How are you?" Kelley Sue replied, sweetening her smile just as much as the clerk. "We have a situation." She produced the papers from the student exchange. "There's been a little mix-up? You see? I have graciously consented to share my home with a French female exchange student by the name of Michelle."

The clerk gave Kelley Sue's papers a cursory glance. "Yes..." he said, unable to put together the pieces yet.

"Well, as you can see..." She pointed to Michel, still standing where he was, dressed in his skinny black jeans and baggy pullover. "That's not a girl named Michelle."

"Yes." The clerk pointed to the papers. "It's pronounced the same as..."

"I have not finished my story yet. Please do not interrupt me." Kelley Sue straightened her posture. "I have no need for a boy. There's obviously some sort of error."

The clerk replied by silently nodding.

"So, you need to send him back," Kelley Sue concluded. "Okay? Thank you!" She began to turn away.

Blinking rapidly in a sign of total non-comprehension, the clerk gathered his incredulity together. "I don't understand."

"I don't want this student," Kelley Sue re-stated, "You send him back to France."

The clerk decided against just walking away and laughing, and stood his ground. "Miss, we don't have any way of doing that."

"I'll sign whatever you want me to sign. Just put him on the plane and send him back. Do you need me to write a note?"

The clerk needed to end this. "Miss, this is not an issue for the airline. I can give you our customer service number if you'd like, but if you have a problem with the student exchange program, you'll have much better and faster service if you contact them directly."

Kelley Sue considered this. "You think so?"

"Oh yes, miss."

Kelley Sue then saw her parents approaching from the far side of the terminal. She didn't want to be seen having a problem, as if something wasn't completely under control. "Thank you for your help, then."

"Thank *you*," the clerk replied before escaping through a door.

Kelley Sue hurriedly returned to Michel to make sure she had time to think of something before her parents arrived. As she did, Michel smiled, and undid the tightly bound stubby pony tail at the base of his neck. "Veree long flight," he said, shaking his long hair free. It had been slicked tight to his scalp, but now unrestrained, his brown hair was past chin length and very healthy. "I would ask a shower, no?"

The new appearance of her exchange student caused Kelley Sue to pause momentarily, that long hair made him look like the girl she wished he was. In fact, he had a very effeminate face, except for the large beaky nose he had. She started to think that maybe, since he already looked kinda female... That... But before she could get her thoughts in gear, Ron and Chandra were there.

"Bon Jor No!" They said together in a loud Texan drawl.

"How Dee." Michel replied, returning the gesture of speaking in the native tongue.

Ron, Kelley Sue's father was the first to venture into conversation. "So, welcome..." he paused, as if to consider who, exactly, he was talking to. "...Michelle."

"Welcome to Oklahoma!" Chandra said, giving Michel a hug. "Um... Michelle."

Both parents seemed to be a bit skeptical, so rather than create a scene, Kelley Sue filled in the doubt with a lot of activity. "Michelle's luggage is coming in, Daddy, so why don't you go down to the basement to see if it's come in. Momma, I promised Joellen I'd pick something up from the gift shop, so here's twenty dollars, please find something nice for her. Meanwhile, I need to take Michelle to the ladies room to freshen up."

With orders, the group broke up and headed off in separate directions. Kelley Sue knew well that the luggage claim was not down in the basement, and that all the vendors were closed. That would have her parents wandering round for a while, buying her some time.



She was shocked that her parents still seemed to think that Michel might yet be a girl, but looking at him, she could understand their hesitation. Michel didn't seem to have much in the way of masculinity. Knowing that she was living on borrowed time, she whipped out her cell phone.

Kelley Sue argued for about ten minutes, loudly, with the student exchange people who refused to even acknowledge that sending Michel back was an option. Even her usual brand of intimidating charm wasn't making a dent in their denial of her simple, reasonable request. She was stuck with Michel. Frustrated, she clacked her phone shut and dragged Michel into the empty ladies' room.

"But eet is not for me!" Michel objected, as he was being steered to to bathroom with the skirted figure on the door. "I am not..."

"Stop complaining, Frenchie!" Kelley Sue commanded, as she shoved him inside.

Michel covered his eyes with his hands. "This eez embarrassing!" he cried. Kelley Sue ripped his hands from his eyes.

"Knock it off!" She barked. She rubbed the temples of her head for a few moments, and then made paced a few feet left and right before she put her hands on her hips and took a deep breath. "Okay," she said to the air. "Okay. Look. I don't have a choice."

She turned to Michel and then dropped to her knees. "Please pretend to be a girl!" She said, her hands clutched together to beg. "Pleeease!"

"What?" Michel replied, astonished at this girl's freakish behavior. "Non!"

"I told all my friends and teachers I was going to have a French girl!" She cried. "I can *not* go back and tell them Kelley Sue Crawford failed! I can *not* do that! It is totally unacceptable!"

His exit blocked, Michel backed away from Kelley Sue as far as he could, to the other end of the bathroom. His horrified expression spoke volumes. He was just on a plane from his home country and in the first five minutes of landing, he was in the middle of some bizarre scene beyond his imagination. "Please do not hurt Michel," he said.

"I will pay you anything! Good American money! I will do anything! I *have* to have a girl to show everyone!" Kelley Sue pleaded. "I will *not* be the laughing stock of Winstonville!"

"Je prie..." Michel started to say. He tried to speak another word, but knew he was lost. He grabbed a small book from his pocket titled "Expressions Anglaises" and flipped through it. "Please, where... is... the embassy?" he said, haltingly.

"The embassy?" Kelley Sue said. "Darlin, there ain't..." An idea struck her, as if a light bulb had gone off above her head. She then stopped talking for a second and then her expression changed from compliant to commanding. "Oh, no!" Kelley Sue said with mock concern, as she stood up. "Oh, Darlin!" she placed her hand over her lips, in a dramatic display of concern.

"Quel set..?"

"When I was told that a French student named Michel was coming, I assumed it was a girl," she said. "Now this is my fault and I do apologize. But I told the immigration people that our houseguest was going to be female."

"Im eh gray shun?" Michel tried to repeat.

"The government, honey. You know, the people with the guns and tanks?"

Michel's expression was suddenly stricken with horror. He rightfully feared the American government.

Kelley Sue approached Michel and placed her hand on his shoulder sympathetically. "I'm afraid that the government is expecting a female to be living with us. If they should find out that you're not who they think you are..." She held Michel's hand, and held it close. "I do not want to think what they might do to a foreigner. Have you heard of waterboarding?"

Michel jolted back into the corner, his eyes open wide with horror. "Quoi!"

"Now I am begging you, Michel, if you don't let me help you, you'll be thrown in jail before we even leave this airport!" She removed a tube of lipstick from her purse. "We can do this, Michel. I won't let them take you!"



Ron Crawford checked the road sign that indicated 65 miles as it flew by. The Chevy crew cab truck careened down the highway at 70, meaning it was going to be another hour until they got back home. He looked over to his wife, who was already halfway through a pack of Marlboro Lights. She dangled her lit cigarette out the window to keep the smoke out of the cab.

"So is it Spring in France?" Chandra asked, looking at Michel in the rear-view mirror. "I heard that when it's Fall here, it's the opposite over there."

"That's Australia, Momma," Kelley Sue said, exasperated.

"They're all in the same place, aren't they?"

"No, Momma!" Kelley Sue stared at Michel, as did both Ron and Chandra in the mirrors.

"You might be thinking of Austria?" Michel said, softly. He made his voice even quieter and softer, even though he really didn't need to. He ventured a smile to try and seem sociable.

Chandra was interested to note that Michelle wore the same shade of lipstick as her daughter. Perhaps Kelley Sue was more in style than she had given her credit for. She also noticed how Kelley Sue seemed to be constantly fiddling with Michelle's hair, brushing it and spritzing it.

"Do you like chicken? We can stop by KFC." She asked Michelle. "They have these wonderful things called Famous Bowls where they take mashed potatoes, gravy, chicken and corn and pile it all in a single bowl." Michelle looked unable to respond, and seemed to well up with tears as her mascara ran. "Poor dear," Chandra whispered to her husband, "homesick already."



"And is this Michelle?" The teacher at the head of the class asked. Everyone in room who already wasn't looking at Michel turned to see the arrival of the famous French exchange student. Every nerve in Michel's body was buzzing and he depended on Kelley Sue's hand at his back to keep him from collapsing.

It wasn't that many people. It was Kelley Sue's smallest class of the day, her first period English class, with about ten students, and not everyone had yet arrived.



Kelley Sue steered Michel over to his seat, which was difficult, as Michel was taking tiny, tiny steps in his modestly-heeled shoes. Kelley Sue had dressed Michel in something that was going to get him through his first day at school. In America. As a girl.

He wore a huge, oversized white dress shirt stolen from Ron Crawford's closet, with the collar left loose as were the cuffs unbuttoned and the tails untucked. With that she had him wear her own black dress slacks and as much jewelry as Kelley Sue could load him up with. His hair was teased out as high as she could get it, and all that left Kelley Sue with barely even enough time to do his makeup.

"Really?" Said Carla Langer, a girl who was well known for her acute love of hassling people. She was going to be a cop someday. "This is the student they sent you?" She turned to a friend sitting nearby. "Really."

"It was a long flight," Kelley Sue protested. "She's got a lot of jet lag." She took a long look at Michel, who was visibly sweating. The slap-dash makeup made him look so uneven, he looked sickly. Michel's eyes were popped open like turkey timers, and his face was locked into some sort of permanent state of dissociation. It looked incredibly creepy.

"That's Michelle?" Kelley Sue overheard another person say from a few rows away. "She's a mess."

"Welcome. To. Amer-i-ca." said the teacher, slowing things down so Michel could understand it. Michel just blankly stared back, unable to process anything at all.

Kelley Sue saw this situation quickly bucking out of control. "What's that?" She said to Michel, as if he had spoken words to her. "What did you say?" Kelley Sue leaned in closer to 'hear' what Michelle was not saying. "Miss Newman?" Kelley Sue got the attention of the teacher. "Michelle says she's very sick."

Miss Newman was alarmed. "Oh, dear! Does she need to see the nurse?"

"Oh no, ma'am," Kelley Sue said, gathering up both of their books. "She needs to go back to my place."

"The nurse is quite capable..."

"She needs her special... *European* medicines," Kelley Sue explained. She then tugged Michel to his feet and shuffled him out. She needed to train and sculpt Michel into a passable female. It was going to take a while.

"Your government would only put me in jail..." Michel said as he was being escorted hastily into the parking lot. "I hear the jails are nicer here than in France."

Kelley Sue groaned. She was looking at several days of training. What was she going to tell people? How could she invent an excuse to hide Michel for two weeks and train him to be female?

Maybe she could call it a quarantine or something. She decided that she'd just tell her parents that the school needed to quarantine all foreign visitors for two weeks as a precaution. Oh, she prayed she could come up with a better excuse.

"We are gonna need to do lots more work," Kelley Sue said, stuffing Michel into the passenger side of her cherry-red Mustang. "But as the good Lord is my witness, I will have my Michelle!"



"Slide it around," Kelley Sue instructed Michel. The boy reluctantly slid the bra he had fastened around his ribs around so the cups faced forward. "See? It's so much easier that way." She handed over some pantyhose stuffed with birdseed. "Put these in the cups."

"You have to explain eet to them, Kel-ey Sue!" Michel begged.

"I will!" Kelley Sue promised. "But I need time, Michel. Now I want you to put on these panties."

"Panties?" He asked, his face wrinkled with stress.

"These," Kelley Sue held up a silky, lacy pair of black panties.

Michel took them, sighed, and then stepped into them. He slid them up his now hairless legs and adjusted them as they rested on his hips.

"They fit you pretty good," Kelley Sue observed. She also observed that Michel rubbed them with his hands, feeling the silky material. He continued to adjust himself and move the panties around. "You like the way they feel?" She asked.

Michel looked up and blushed. "Non," he replied. "Non."

Kelley Sue gave him a pair of black stockings. "On your legs."

Taking them, Michel slid each stocking over his legs. The first one he had some trouble with, and fought with it a little. The second one he took his time with and slowly pulled it up, letting it slide against his bare legs. One all the way up, he ran his hands up and down his legs.

Kelley Sue smiled to herself. She had a sissy little panty boy on her hands. He just may grow to like this, she thought to herself.



Two weeks later, Michelle Bouvier strode down the hallway at Winstonville high school, laughing with her best friend Kelley Sue Crawford. She threw her head back, letting her long, shiny hair flutter in the wind behind her, attracting the attention of every boy.

There was little doubt Michelle was a carefree spirit from a foreign land. Everything about her spoke of growing up in a different environment, a different culture. The very way she carried herself suggested that she possessed a view of the world that the students of Winstonville high could only try – and fail – to understand.

She was exotic. A living exhibit of a world well beyond the borders of the city, even the borders of the county, say nothing of the state. The glances from her knowing eyes both attracted and terrified a man, promising rewards of lavish attention and the threat of being hopelessly inadequate.

At least, that's the way Kelley Sue imagined it. The truth was that two weeks of fairly intensive training wasn't going to achieve miracles, and Michelle's second debut at Winstonville High was only marginally memorable.

That was good enough, really. Considering the debacle of the first attempt, just being able to slip the new Michelle into the school without anyone suspecting Michelle's true identity was a major victory.

Michel was dressed in the best of what Kelley Sue's closet had to offer. A few days into the training revealed that he was almost exactly the same size as Kelley Sue, if not a bit



smaller. She didn't have much that could be passed off as Paris fashion, so she had kept it basic for Michel, with a black silk blouse, a black knee-length skirt, black tights and black flats. Black was always in fashion, Kelley Sue told Michel.

Fourteen whole days of drilling Michel hadn't made much of a dent in his personality, as he was still very quiet and reserved. All that Kelley Sue had been able to do was try and get rid of that "terrified beyond imagination" bad attitude of his. Kelley Sue found it helpful to make constant reminders of being exposed, picked up in an unmarked van and never seen again.

"I've never met anyone from France before," said Joelle, one of Kelley Sue's best friends. "Go on, say something French." They were sitting at the lunch tables, Michel poking around some bizarre mess of meat and lettuce called a "cobb salad" despondently.

Michel looked at Kelley Sue who just nodded back, prodding him on. "Faut péter dans l'eau pour faire des bulles," Michel said in his soft voice.

"Oh!" Joelle said excitedly, "It sounds so romantic!"

Michel looked around, seeing that that a small crowd of people had gathered just to stare at him. He would be excused if he felt like he was the latest freak at the circus. Turning away to stare at his salad, he didn't seem interested in entertaining the audience.

Still, as despondent as he felt, he didn't give anything away about his true gender. He didn't slouch in his seat. Michel kept himself sitting straight upright, like he had been instructed to. When he sat down at the table, he had swept his skirt underneath him and kept his knees together. If he had been eating his salad, he would have taken small, lady-like bites. That was what Kelley Sue had instructed him to do, and he was doing his best to comply.

"She really is quiet, isn't she?" Commented Randi, Kelley Sue's other close friend. "I don't think she's very happy."

"Michelle is a little down. It's her first day." Kelley Sue remarked. "I'm sure she'll cheer up when she gets adjusted to life in America." She spied someone a short distance away. "Colt! Oh, Colt!" She called.

A strong, well-muscled young man with a neck slightly thicker than his head turned around. His name was Colt Bradford, and he was Kelley Sue's boyfriend. His hair was cut in a buzz, and he wore the thick letterman's jacket he earned from being the starting quarterback and All-State wrestler for Winstonville High.

"Hey, Kelley Sue," Colt said, in passing. He turned to go sit with his friends, but didn't get very far.

"Come meet Michelle!" Kelley Sue requested, in a commanding way. Colt was powerless to do anything else but follow orders. He ambled on over to the table, where he only got a clear look when he was close enough.

"Hey," Colt said to Michel, with a flinch of his head. It was his customary greeting. He then noticed that Kelley Sue had turned her cheek and stuck it out, and Colt stretched over the table to kiss it.

"Say hello to Colt, Michelle. He's my boyfriend." Kelley Sue said.

Michel raised his head. "Bonjour, Colt."

"Oh! The French girl!" Colt said, suddenly realizing what the circumstance was. He sat down, across from Michel. "Say something in French!"

"She just did, Colt," Kelley Sue pointed out.

"Something else!" Colt quickly added.

Michel put his fork down and looked at his lap. He sighed. "Me faut retourner à la pute qui m'a accouchée."

Colt smiled. He looked at Kelley Sue. "I didn't understand anything."

"Le cerveau il etait en option chez toi," Michel replied.

A look of childlike glee spread across Colt's face. "This is awesome!"

That actually caused Michel to smile back. He looked back down at his lap, but the red lipstick he wore made the grin he was trying to conceal obvious. At least it was to Colt.

"Don't worry," Colt said to Michel. "Pretty soon you'll just be another student like any one of us."

Michel raised his head just enough to see Colt. It was probably the only bit of comfort he had received since he had gotten off the plane.

"Oh, is that the French girl?" Said one girl passing by. "Sharon! Darlene!" She yelled into the lunchroom. "Kelley Sue's French girl is here!"

"Let me see!" said a voice from another side of the lunchroom.

"I gotta see that!" another voice yelled.

Detecting that the situation was getting out of control, and that an ugly scene was about to take place, Kelley Sue stood up and held her hands in the air. "People! Whoa! Let's not be uncivilized! Now take it easy!" She then blocked off any contact with Michelle by throwing her arms out. "She is not a zoo animal!"

Kelley Sue tugged on Michel's arm, getting him up from the table. He was then led through the crowd by Kelley Sue who bravely held her hand out to fend away the crowd, even if they were just standing back and giving her plenty of space.

As they walked, Kelley Sue wrapped a protective arm around Michel, making sure he was extra safe. Kelley Sue loved seeing the glances and stares Michel was getting. No one suspected a thing. They all just assumed, that Michel was a real girl, and not even questioning it.

The truth was that Michel's appearance did nothing to combat that female impression. He was rakishly thin to begin with, and his hair was at least three times as long as the longest male student in rural Winstonville. His light skin and near-hairless young face was clear and smooth. His speaking voice was almost musical. His body was seemingly unthreatened by any male puberty. There was virtually nothing to indicate his true gender, save the bound and tucked package in his French-lace panties.

With just a touch of makeup, a spritz of perfume and a hairstyle, Michel was a convincing female. Add a birdseed in his bra and a skirt, and the disguise was perfect.

Kelley Sue felt like a god. She had virtually created this "girl" out of nothing. The rush of power running through her veins, if tapped, could fuel a small city. She felt untouchable.

She watched as Michel walked gracefully, bashfully glancing at the students, just as she had taught him to do. "Some of the kids have parents that work for the government." She had reminded Michel earlier this morning. "You wouldn't want them to suspect, would you?" He learned his lessons well, with the right motivation.

J O E S I X P A C K

THE FAIREST ONE OF ALL

“The Happiest Place on Earth” by Joe Six-Pack

Based on the “The Magic Kingdom” as previously published at TGstories.com

A Tales of Transformation Story



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THE HAPPIEST PLACE ON EARTH

Keith was sitting down on the bench in front of his locker when a pile of clothes on two spindly legs came walking towards him. It was breathing heavily, wheezing slightly, and wandering a little off course. He was impressed that it navigated through the maze of employees and various discarded garments in the locker room seemingly without the power of sight. It froze in front of Keith and appeared to be sizing him up.

Keith took one look at the pile of clothes and realized something needed to be pointed out. That costume that was resting on top of the pile was not supposed to be in this room. "Hey, dudette. This is the *guy's* locker room."

It was a costume he was well familiar with, the iconic billowy blue and yellow dress worn by Snow White. He was familiar with it, because his job was to be the Prince. He worked here in Anaheim, California at the Magic Kingdom as a performing live character, or "cast member," as they called it. He was the on third shift of the Princes, working the West gate. Usually he worked with a girl by the name of Melissa who was the Snow White for that shift. But Melissa was off for a few weeks, and he was told he would be working with some new person today. By the looks of it, she had accidentally entered the wrong locker room.

"No, this is the right one," The pile replied with a heavy sigh. The load of fabric dropped to the ground, leaving a scrawny kid behind. He was maybe seventeen or eighteen and was a walking skeleton with a messy mop of brown hair that hid most of his face. "Anybody using this locker?" The kid asked Keith.

"Uh-uh," Keith said in the negative. "Well, if you're in the right room, then you've got the wrong..."

"No. No I don't," the kid interrupted. His tone was one of resigned embarrassment. He plopped himself on the bench. "This is the right costume, I'm in the right room, and my life sucks." He lifted his hung head to be polite and address the man talking to him. "My name's Will."

"Keith," Keith replied in kind. "You mean, you're going to be Snow White? The Snow White who wears a dress? The *female* Snow White?"

"The same," Will said, as he kicked the pile closer to his new locker. "I had to get a summer job, and this was the only place hiring. The guy who interviewed me..."

"Vinnie?"

"That's the one. Vinnie said that he'd take me on, but I'd have to work a tough shift for a week or two until a slot opened up for me as Pinocchio or something. Tough shift is right."

"Vinnie hired you as a replacement for a female character?" Keith said, still trying to solidify the situation in his mind. "Dude. That can't be right. Vinnie wouldn't do that. He knows better."

"He told me it had something to do with the union."



Keith nodded his head. Now he understood. As actors, all of the “cast members” were required to be part of the actor’s guild, and they had some pretty tough rules for the park. One of them was a mandate that the park maintain a fifty percent male/female ratio, and this place had far more female characters than male. There were tons of princesses. Sometimes they would just hire guys to meet the requirements and they would sit at home collecting a paycheck. Obviously, the situation had come to a predictable but ridiculous result.

Keith shook his head in disbelief. “Yeah. Uh, hey. You wait here. I have to ask Vinnie a few questions.” Keith rose to his feet, his well-built body clad only in his boxers. He was in his mid twenties, had shaggy, neck-length sun-streaked brown hair and sported a California tan. At one time Keith had been an aspiring actor, but then had found a better life as a surfer. He lived to chase waves on the coast, and this job left him with the free time to do just that. The job was low-paying, slightly humiliating, and he lived with just the bare essentials – but he was content just the same.

“Vinnie!” Keith called after the squat, balding man who sat in his office. It was connected to the locker room, where Vinnie was essentially the dispatcher for the cast members.

Vinnie put down the cell phone he was texting on. "Cutler," he said, recognizing Keith and calling him by his last name. "What's yer problem?"

"The kid..." Keith started to say.

Vinnie needed no more information. He already knew what Keith's beef was. "Don't get on me about this, Cutler! I didn't have a choice! Union rules, and..."

"The union's had this rule for fifteen years, dude," Keith pointed out. "Why do this now?"

"I got pressures, Cutler! Pressure your spacious mind can't even comprehend!"

"Hey, I get where you're coming from, guy. I appreciate your hard work here." Keith had a talent for non-confrontational confrontation. "I understand that all you want to do is to provide a great experience for our guests. You do a great job, dude. Hiring a guy to play a princess is certainly a new step. How does that help our mission to create a magical experience for the guests?"

"Fuck you," Vinnie replied. "I gotta do what I gotta do or I get canned." He went back to his phone. "You have any problem and you can cram it."

Keith turned back into the locker room. He saw that Will had disrobed and was staring into the mirror with a dead expression on his face, like he was about to go to war. He was sorry for the kid. Will had been trapped in a pretty awful situation. Worse yet, Keith was the guy who was going to have to act with him for the next few hours. It was trouble enough to break in a new girl to do the act, and this was going to be an outright ordeal.

He thought that Will needed a friend to get through this day. If Keith were truly dedicated to his job and dedicated to making the new kid feel comfortable in this role, he would walk right over and pledge mentorship. Unfortunately, at this exact moment in time, Keith felt like he really needed to sit on the toilet for about fifteen minutes.

By the time he returned to his locker, the bench was empty and all of Will's clothes had been hung up in his locker. Keith got his costume on quickly, got his stage makeup done by the makeup people and ran it by Vinnie to make sure everything was approved. When he stepped outside into the hallway, Snow White was waiting for him. Keith's eyes were in danger of popping from their sockets, as he was amazed to see Will in costume.

"Yeah. It's a little freaky isn't it?" Will's voice said, coming from the pretty girl's mouth. "That's probably the only reason I got the job. They tested out the makeup when I interviewed. It worked pretty well."

Keith was in agreement with that. Once you got the shaggy hair out of the way and tucked it under the wig, once you got the face covered in pancake makeup, once you fit his slender body in the constricting costume – it was obvious. Now he understood why Vinnie had hired him. If a man could be born to play Snow White, Will was it. "They're payin' you extra for this, right?" Keith asked.

"Oh yeah," Will said slyly. "Time and a half."

Keith shrugged, accepting this ludicrous notion that now seemed to make perfect sense. A man could pretend to be girl and get away with it. Reality was taking a holiday. Whatever. “This way,” he said, walking through a door into a small, badly-lit passageway. “This tunnel will lead us out to the hedges behind the Sebastian’s Caribbean Seafood hut. We’ll wait for the previous shift to come off, and we’ll slip into the crowd to take their places. A plain-clothes security man will be around to make sure everything goes smooth. You’ve already gone through training and been over the basics with Vinnie, right?”

“Yeah. A few times,” Will said, showing his nervousness in his voice.

“Don’t worry about it. It’s a breeze. Just don’t scare the kids, never refuse a photo request, and ham it up with any dwarves you see. Simple stuff.”



Will cleared his throat with a deep rumble of his vocal chords. “Got it.”

“Voice!” Keith suddenly realized. “Your voice!” That was going to give everything away.

“I’ll just keep quiet,” Will said. “I was told that’s okay.”

“Just mime it,” Keith agreed. “I had to do that when I was the White Rabbit.”

The doorway cracked open and the previous Prince & Snow White entered, meaning it was time for Will & Keith to step out into the sunlight.



Will clinked his root beer bottle with Keith's hard lemonade. "To survival," he said, toasting.

The two had settled into a nearby restaurant, called "Harpoon Harry's," where Will was letting the anxiety of the day flow out of him. It was Keith's usual hangout, and he liked it because dingy and nobody from work ever showed up here. He could say the nastiest things about his coworkers and not get in trouble.

It was the first time he'd ever had anyone from the park here. That was because he admired the kid's guts. He had not only made it through his first day, but he was a natural. Will was great with kids, and had a knack for getting even the shyest to smile. Parents had a nasty habit of shoving their frightened kids at them, convinced that the kids' reserved attitude would change when they were face to face with scary giants in strange costumes. It's the one thing that made Keith miserable when he worked the crowd. Fortunately, Will was brilliant at drawing out laughs and giggles. Plus, he did it all in a dress, without speaking a word. The kid had balls. And that's why he had let the Will come to his secret little hideout.

"Another day, another urine stain on my costume," Keith said, returning the toast. "Dude, you can do this job in your sleep."

Will smirked. "Thanks. You been doing this long?"

"Three years now. I started as a teacup," Keith replied. "It's not bad work. It's never dull, that's for sure."

"I can see that. It felt like we were out there for twenty hours."

"It'll fly by before you know it," Keith said, gesturing with his hand gliding through the air.

"Good. I really need the money if I want to go to college."

"Dude, I've never been convinced college was worth it. Look at me. I didn't go to college."

"And you work at a theme park in a costume."

"Yeeeeeah.... Point taken."



As a part of the park's schedule, at four-thirty every day, "The Prince" and "Snow White" would work their way over to a platform and do a little karaoke routine with the dwarves, mouthing along to a prerecorded track of bad jokes and insipid songs. Every day they would get the same polite applause that felt like pity.

Still, it was the highlight of the day for the cast members, not because of the chance to perform – they rightfully hated it – but because it was the end of the shift. Once they had finished the lip-synch to the thirty-year-old backing track, they would work through the crowd before ducking into the bushes and back into the tunnel, where the next shift was waiting to go on.

On this day, as Keith and a few assorted dwarves danced around like drugged marionettes, all they could think about was getting out of there. They had two songs and a short performance in between them, and as listless as most of the performers were, one was putting all his heart and soul into it.

Maybe it was because Will hadn't been jaded by the day-in day-out drudgery of the profession, and maybe it was because he was still trying to figure things out even after a week on the job. But to the person viewing the spectacle, it was a heartwarming, earnest performance. The gathered crowd of small children and adults all smiled, and some sang along. They enjoyed the performance in a way Keith had never seen from the crowd before.

The kids jumped and squealed, laughing and giggling. Their big eyes were transfixed on Will, like he was made of candy. Keith was convinced that they were under a spell of some sort. They absolutely loved this Snow White.

Across the way, and high up in an office building concealed by a pirate ship, there was one person who was getting far more out of the performance than even the children. His name was Stan Bergstein, the Head of Park Operations, and the most powerful man in this unincorporated city. It was on his whims that decided the volume of tourism in the metroplex. At his word, he could shut the local businesses down, destroy tax revenue and put thousands on unemployment. Yet he could just as easily overflow the town's coffers with gold. Unfortunately, Stan was just the sort of person who made sure you never forgot how important he was.

Every day around this time, he made sure he was at the window to watch the little performance. Snow White was his favorite. His grandfather had created her, practically. It was his most cherished memory of his youth, watching Snow White in the theater for the first time. He knew the songs by heart. He knew all the lines by heart. He always loved seeing the girls who worked as Snow White dressed in that amazing costume. Stan sat there for the entire time on his windowsill, unable to hear the sound, but singing along in his own head.

In the last few days, he had been paying extra close attention. He noticed something different. To the untrained eye, all the girls looked the same in costume. But he could spot the changes. He could tell. Since Monday, he had taken notice of a new Snow White. A beautiful, lovely creature that wasn't just playing the part. She *was* Snow White. The Snow White of his dreams – and yes, he did dream of her.

Other girls he had seen play the part were Hollywood rejects and clumsy beauty queens. But this girl was the genuine article. She wasn't acting the part, she was *living* the part. Her movements were unconsciously graceful and natural. Her smile was infectious and inviting. She was the type of girl you wanted to embrace and hold tight, as you buried your face in that thick ebony hair and massaged that perfect ivory skin.

This was the girl Stan had been waiting for. This could finally be his Snow White.



Not too many days later, Will and Keith were slowly getting into costume for another shift. The two coworkers had been bullshitting each other for a few minutes as they readied themselves for the afternoon.

"She nearly ripped up everything I owned before she finally left. It was my name on the lease, after all," Will said, continuing the story he was telling.

Keith nodded. "Gingers are nuts. Seriously."

"I'm a sucker for redheads. I'm sure I'll get burnt again." Will unwrapped the plastic cover for his wig. "What about you?" he asked Keith.

Keith reflected for a moment. "I suppose the craziest girl I ever knew was Penny. She was from Baltimore. She moved out here to be a surfer chick, and boy she had the body for it."

"Thin? Tan? Blonde?" Will inquired.

"Thin where you wanted it, thick where you liked it. She was beautiful." Keith stepped into his big white boots. "But she was, y'know, tryin' too hard. She couldn't relax and take it easy. Couldn't surf worth a crap, either."

"That doesn't sound crazy."

"Well, not in public. But in the sack?"

"Whoa!" Will said with a grin. "What type of crazy are we talkin' about?"

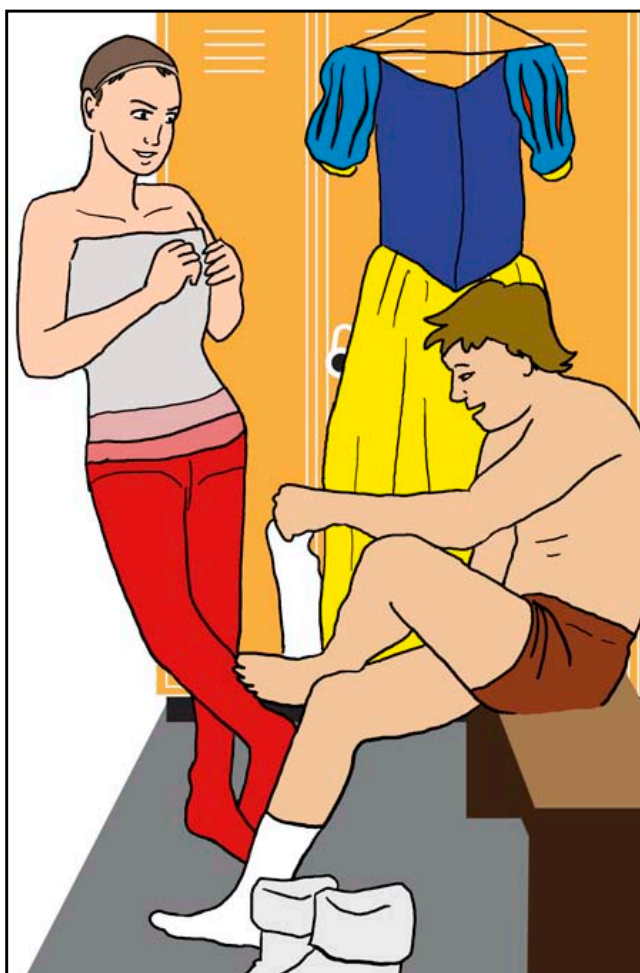
"She... Liked her... Toys," Will said, carefully. "S&M. She just was way too intense for me. For anyone, probably."

Will checked the time. "You need to tell me more about this girl when we're done."

"Yeah... I dunno, Will," Keith said, playing at rubbing his chin in thought. "It was kinda intimate. I'd need you to buy the drinks if I were, y'know, going to entertain the idea of reflecting on such personal issues."

"I *always* buy the drinks," Will replied.

"You *always* want me to talk."



The two spent a few minutes in makeup, then stepped over to Vinnie's office for inspection, and he waved them on through with little care. They made their way down the tunnel and waited by the doorway to make their subdued entrance. As the previous duo entered, Keith high-fived the Prince. "Angels took it 6-2, my man."

The departing Prince grimaced. "Not even gonna be in the wild card this year."

"Such is life," Keith said.

As they stepped into the light, they were held by the security people for a moment as they cleared some crowd space. Keith looked over to Will, who had his neck craned into the air. "What?" Keith asked.

"Do these buildings have people in them?" Will asked. He was referring to the large, seemingly innocuous buildings that appeared to have no function other than to be a backdrop and divide the park.

"Heck, yeah," Keith said. "These aren't fake. Every building has offices, storage and stuff. There's even a health club behind the bear ride over there."

"What about that one?" Will pointed to a building behind a pirate ship that was a story above any other.

"That's the executive office. Why?"

"There's always someone up there in the window. Watching. Kinda creepy."

"Don't worry about it. We're on." Keith took Will by the hand and gallantly led Snow White out into the crowd. Why he was holding Will's hand, he didn't know. That wasn't something he usually did.

All that day, Will was off his game. By the time the shift was over, Keith was a little worried. When kids cried or backed away from Snow White, he seemed to lack the magic touch. At the lip-sync performance, Will seemed to be unusually distracted. He was always glancing up at that tower. A few times Keith had whispered into his ear, asking if he was okay, but Will kept waving him off. It was in the middle of the second song that Will seemed to snap out of it. He straightened up, put a smile on and put in his usual show-stopping performance.

Keith had to step up his game working with Will. He had been slacking for a little while at his job, maybe a few months, but now that Will was practically bringing down the house with every show, Keith was trying to match his energy. Today, he thought Will was turning it down a notch, but all the sudden he was throwing his arms around dramatically, sweeping his body across the stage and hamming it up twice as much as he ever had before.

"You okay, Will?" He asked, when they stepped into the access tunnel.

"Was a little out of it, but I'm okay now," he answered. "I mean, if that guy is gonna watch, let him watch."

"What guy?"

"The guy in the tower."

Will looked over his shoulder, up at the executive tower. He didn't see anything.

On the way back to the locker room through the narrow tunnel, they turned a corner and nearly ran into someone. Someone who was waiting there for them. Keith suffered a minor conniption upon seeing who it was: Stan Bergstein, the über-boss of the park. He had never actually seen him in person, only on training videos and pictures in the employee newsletter. But there was no mistaking the shiny bald head and hawk-like nose that held up his wire-frame glasses.

"Just wanted to tell you that you're doing a fantastic job here." Stan said, gripping Keith's hand in a vigorous shake. "The company always appreciates hard workers like you two, and I'm sure our guests appreciate it as well. You're making a lot of little children very very happy."

"Thur... Th... Thanks." Keith choked out.

"Thank *you*, sir." Stan said. He stopped shaking Keith's hand and reached out to will. "You too, Miss."

"No sweat," Will replied.

Alarm bells went off in Keith's mind. This idiot was under the impression Will was female. The most dangerous man in the park, a man who could fire the both of them and blacklist them from getting another job, had a look on his face that could only be described as horrified. He needed to think of something, fast, before Stan caught on.

Keith whapped Will on the back with his hand. "Hey, you okay there? Frog in your throat? He continued to pat Will on the back. You sound like your *voice* is getting *deeper*, like you're catching a *cold*."

Will was confused. "My voice? What are you...?" he was without a clue.

Keith hit him on the back again, harder. "That's one bad frog in your throat! You almost don't sound like a *girl*, there."

"Oh." Will suddenly grasped the problem. He didn't want to get caught as a man playing a female character. That would be pretty embarrassing. "Oh!" He coughed as effeminately as he knew how. "I think I just need a lozenge," he said in an uneven falsetto.

Stan put his hand on Will's shoulder to comfort him. "I hope you feel better soon, uh..." He was searching for a name to complete the sentence.

"Will." Will said before thinking. "Er..." He had made a mistake. "Mee... Nah." He added.

"Willamena," Stan restated. "That's a name you don't hear very often. But it's very nice."

"Thank you. It's been in the family for generations." Will was wincing slightly from the mental pain of what he had just done. "But people just call me Willie. Or just Will."

“Do you mind if I call you Willie? You’re new here, aren’t you?” Stan asked. By this time he had placed himself between Keith and Will, separating the two.

Keith recognized the move. It was the “get lost, she’s mine,” move guys made in bars. His boss was making a pass at one of his employees. And *exactly* the wrong employee at that.

A devious thought crept into Keith’s mind. “Hey, I’ll see you, Willie. Catch you later!” Keith said, as he took a step away. He had no intention of actually leaving, but he wanted to see Will’s expression when he threatened to. Not to disappoint, all of Will’s teeth were exposed by his angry smile, and his eyes became saucers.

“Don’t go Keith,” Will said through his tensed face. “I’ve got to get that... Thing... From you... *Right now!*”

Keith played along. “Oh, yeah. The thing. Well, I guess we have to go do that now. Before it’s too late.”

Stan was disheartened at the turn in the conversation. He was trying to ask his dream girl a question. “Well, don’t let me keep you. But, uh... Would you mind if I gave you a call?” He asked Will.

Will didn’t see how he could say anything but yes to that, so he fought for an excuse. “I don’t have a pen or paper...” It didn’t even really occur to him why Stan would want to call him.

“I can look it up in the employee records.” Stan answered.

“Well, then, yeah. Okay. Sure.” Will wanted out, so he sidestepped past Stan to join Keith. “Nice to meet you.”

“A pleasure,” Stan said.

The two men scrambled out of view of their boss and kept on going until they got to the locker room.

“Ha!” Will said, looking triumphant. “He doesn’t know my last name. He won’t be able to find me in the employee records. He’ll never call me.”

Keith swiveled his head around. “Shit,” he said, angrily.

“What?”

“Well, he better be able to find you in the employee records! What do you think will happen if he can’t?”

“Um, he’ll...”

“Find us again, figure out who you are, and we all get our asses kicked.” He looked around and shouted. “Vinnie!”

“Oh for God’s sake, Keith. Don’t tell him, he’d just laugh.”

“He won’t laugh. He’s in as deep as you are. We’re going to have to get your records changed if we all want to keep our jobs and avoid a lawsuit.”

“But he still doesn’t know my last name.” Will said.

“How many Willamenas you think work here, bonehead?”



Later that night, Stan was as tense as he had been in years. He didn't even get this stressed when he was negotiating multi-billion dollar contracts or optioning his billions of dollars of stock. He was literally wringing his hands with apprehension. Stan hadn't ever asked a girl out. He hadn't even dated. Stan just met girls at functions and took them to hotel rooms. His one marriage was started when he wanted to keep his name out of the papers for sleeping with a New England socialite – not exactly a romance to crow about. It ended in disaster.

Stan had picked up the phone a half dozen times already, and tried to get himself to dial. But he was still having trouble going through with it. He practiced deep breathing, picturing a calm ocean and clearing his mind. When he opened his eyes, his knuckles were still white, clutching the phone. He really just needed to suck it up and dial the number.

He put the phone down and walked over to the closet. He pushed his clothes aside to reveal a panel built into the back wall. He pressed some numbers on a security pad, and the panel whisked open. There, carefully lighted and elegantly presented against a black velvet background, was a dress. A dress made of fine silk and satin. It shone in the light. It was dark blue, with light blue puffy sleeves, a bright yellow skirt and a high white collar.

“Finally,” he said to the dress. “All these years of waiting.”



“Dude,” Keith said, upon seeing Will for the first time that day.

“Dude,” Will replied. He sat down on the locker room bench with a heavy thud.

“Mr. Bergstein called you?”

“Emailed me. Oh, and he wants me to call him ‘Stan.’” Will said, looking sick to his stomach.

Keith laughed heartily. He nearly tumbled off the bench, fighting through his convulsive guffawing. He righted himself eventually, but only after his face had gone beet red. “Man, what'd he say when you told him off?”

Will turned his back to his friend.

“What'd he say?” Still, Keith got no response. “Dude, you told him off, right?”

“Hrmbl mrmgl,” Will said, mumbling. His head was buried in his locker.

Keith's joyous expression, expecting tales of executive humiliation, tightened up a bit. "What?"

"I just emailed him and said I was busy," Will replied. "He didn't write back."

"Yeah, that'll put an end to it," Keith said, sarcastically.

Will threw his hands in the air. "Well, what am I supposed to do? I've never had to tell a guy off before." He picked up his costume from the locker and peeled the plastic off of it. "Especially one that could fire me. This is messed up."

"Another coming of age moment for you, Will," Keith kidded.

"Thanks for the help," Will picked up the costume and held it out at arms' length. "Does this look weird to you?"

"A guy putting on a dress? Yes."

"No, no. I mean this dress. It looks different."

"Hold it up," Keith asked. Will put it in full view. "Yeeeeaaaaah," he said, considering it. "It looks a little bit better than the usual one. It's shinier."

"It's like satin or silk. Not that usual wipe-off plasticity stuff we get."

"It's wipe-off for a reason, dude. Be thankful for that when the next ten kids barf on you."

Will went through his usual routine. He disrobed from his jeans and checked shirt, t-shirt and socks and shoes. He put on the undergarment – he wasn't about to think of it as a corset, which was what it really was – and then the tights.

He picked up the dress again and fought with its thick layers of material, to position it where he could get it over his head. "It tingles," he said to Keith.

"Static electricity?" Keith ventured.

"Probably." He hoisted the dress over his head and let his arms work it down to rest. "Not as heavy as it looks." He wrapped the cape around his neck. "Fits nice."

"I bet it's some old version they had back in the laundry."

Will took a whiff. "It smells old."



“You wanna get a different one?”

“I’m good,” he said, sitting down. He slipped his feet into the black flats he wore with the outfit. “Meet you in makeup,” he said, leaving.

Meanwhile, Keith had finished with his costume, in the off-white pants tucked into his big white boots, a blue tunic with gold trim over his blousy white shirt, and a red cape.

“Hi ho,” Keith said to himself and walked to the makeup room.



“There you go. Congratulations, it’s a girl,” Vinnie said, handing over a plastic employee badge to Will.

Will took it and looked at it closely. It was simply a placard that had his face, his name, a picture and his job on it. The problem was, the name read “Willamena.”

Keith, who had been talking to someone else, broke it off and wandered over. “Congratulations. It’s a girl.”

“Original,” Vinnie said. He snapped his fingers in front of Will’s face to get his attention. “I know this is just a goofy little thing we gotta do, but it wouldn’t hurt if you didn’t act... Unnecessarily masculine around here.”

“You want me to act like a girl here?”

“Nah,” Vinnie said. “Don’t get me wrong, but you’re not exactly the manliest man in the universe, you understand?”

“I suppose,” Will replied.

“So just don’t go all lumberjack. That’s all I’m saying. Just to play it safe.”

“Yeah, you can do that,” Keith said, tapping Will on the shoulder. “Have you tried skipping instead of walking?”

“I could develop a lisp, I suppose,” Will said. “Maybe just throw a limp wrist around and flounce a bit.”

“Har dee har har,” Vinnie grumbled. “Just don’t get me fired.”



Keith had already been seated at the corner Starbucks for about twenty minutes when Will arrived. After a late night, Keith had invested in the Venti this morning for the extra kick. He was going over the sports scores in the paper.

“You don’t look like a baseball fan,” Will said, seating himself with an iced tea.

“It just passes the time. Mostly it’s so I can take some easy money off Steve and Quincy.” Steve and Quincy were two of “The Princes” who worked that same gate. “They bet with their heart. I just bet the odds.”

It was about thirty minutes before they were scheduled to report, so they were trying to take it easy in a desperate attempt to relax. Will grabbed a section of the newspaper and started flipping through it, as he fussed with his hair falling into his eyes.

Keith glanced over at his friend. “Hey uh, bud,” he said. “You still got some lip-stick on from yesterday.”

“What?” Will said. He grabbed for his backpack, popped out a tiny mirror and checked his reflection. He had to pull his hair out of his eyes to get a look. Seeing the lipstick, he grabbed a napkin and tried to rub it off.

“They’re just going to put it back on again in a few minutes, don’t sweat it.”

“How long have I been wearing that around?” Will asked. “That’s embarrassing.”

“In southern California? Believe me, people around here wouldn’t even care. Do you, uh, always carry around a pocket mirror?”

“I guess,” Will said, putting it back. “You never know when it’ll come in handy.” Will was frustrated with his hair, and reached back in the pack for something else. He put a little red clip in his hair to keep it in place.

Keith was a little taken aback. “Is that a barrette?”

“It’s a clip.”

“Guys don’t wear clips.”

“Some do.”

“Who?”

Will paused. “Some,” he tossed the paper on the table and then got up. “I think I better clock in early. I’ll see you there,” he sipped his tea and then was off.

“Well *excuuuse* me,” Keith said to himself.



“Cutler.”

Keith looked to see Vinnie talking to him. The small man



made a motion to come into his office. Keith did, and closed the door behind him. "You know this Will kid good enough, don't you?"

"Yeah, sure. He's a decent guy." Keith said, wondering what the secrecy was all about.

"Well, maybe you need to talk to him. When I made that fake entry into the personnel database to save your asses..."

"And yours," Keith added.

"Whatever. Point is, I think pretending to be a lady is getting to him."

The memory of the hair clip flashed through Keith's mind. "How do you mean?"

"He just changed into his costume. And I swear to God that he was hearing panties."

Keith turned his head around to look across the room where their lockers were.

"Don't bother," Vinnie said. "He's not there now." He leaned back in his chair. "Look, legally, It's none of my business if he has some oddball sexual orientation. I mean, who gives a crap, really? But if he's gonna be trouble here in the men's lockers, or he's got some problem between the ears, I need to know."

"Why not ask him?"

"I'm asking *you*. Plus, he gives me the creeps."

"I'm not asking a dude about his underwear," Keith said, crossing his arms.

Vinnie whirled in his seat to face his computer. "Did you email me the days you wanted off for vacation next week?"

"Yeah."

Using a dramatic swing of his hand, Vinnie pressed the delete key on his keyboard. "Never got it."

"You can be so imperious, man," Keith said, leaving the office. "Totally imperious." He walked over to the makeup desk where Will was just getting his wig fixed up.

"I got rid of the clip," Will explained.

"Yeah, I didn't mean to give you any grief, dude. But I just have a question..."

"Uh huh?"

"Uh, just, uh... I needed to... Uh... What kind of undies are you wearin' exactly?" Keith scratched the back of his hand nervously. "See, Vinnie was... They're not panties, are they?"

"These?" Will said. He hiked up his thick skirt to show. "No, they're not panties. They're briefs."

"They look like silk."

“I don’t know what they are. They feel great. Got ‘em at the dollar store.” Will dropped the skirt back down and smoothed it out. “You want a pair? I can get you some.”

“I’m good.”

“It’s like I’m wearing nothing at all!”

Keith childishly covered his ears. “Why are you telling me that?” He walked away before he got any more information.



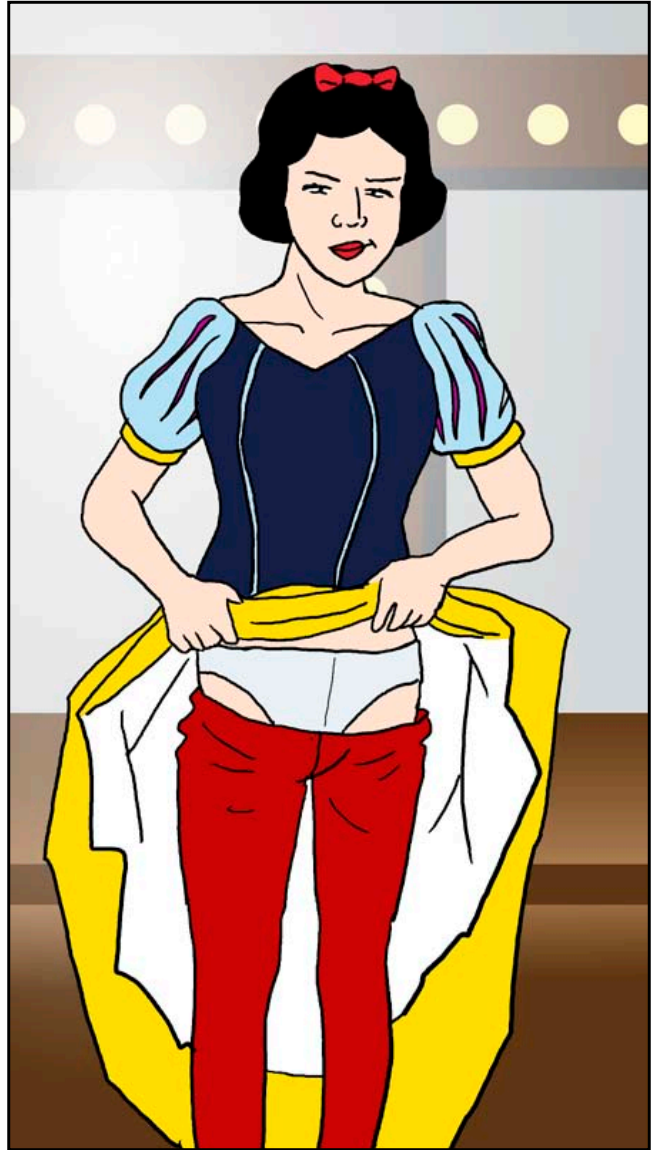
As usual, the four hours in the crowd went by like a dream. Keith was not looking forward to when Michelle returned. She was great and all, but working with Will made everything fun.

Watching Will interact with kids was heart-warming. His wide, alert eyes, perpetual smile and his expression of genuine wonderment was the work of a professional. The embraces and gentle love he showed those kids was what made Keith feel blessed to be out there.

He just carried himself so differently out in the crowd. Will would gracefully spin and float instead of walking, and sing every word he spoke. At any moment, Keith expected a bird to land on Will’s finger to tweet along. There was no mistaking that Will was the best he’d ever seen at this job.

It wasn’t hard to forget that the person inside the costume was a gangly teenaged boy who was prone to picking his nose. The character of Snow White was who Keith worked with, not Will.

“Look!” Will said to a little girl who had a sparkling tiara loosely planted in her slightly disheveled hair. Will pointed to Keith, who had wandered within earshot.



The little girl quickly dashed over to Keith, and looked up with astonished eyes. “You’re the Prince!” She said.

Keith quickly dipped to one knee and took the little girl’s hand. “What does my lady command of me?” He asked in his practiced, princely voice.

“We’re going to get married!” She said.

“Don’t you think we should get to know each other first?” Keith queried.

“Married!” The little girl insisted.

Keith had answered this question many times before. “Will there be horses at our wedd...”

“Married!” The girl shrieked at chalkboard-scratching levels.

There was one more attempt from Keith. “Yes, and when we...”

“Mar-ree-ree-ree-eed!” The girl yelled, tears coming from her eyes and starting to sob.

Keith hated this. He had no answers and no way of talking to her at this point. Where were her parents? Usually, they’d be here by now and take the kids away.

“Oh, no!” Will said, swooping in. In one graceful motion, he gathered the girl in her arms and perched her at his side. “Why do you cry, little princess?” he said, in the most tender, innocent and nerve-calming voice Keith could imagine.

“Marry!” The girl just said. “Prince!”

“Oh, but little princess, we’re not real,” Will said. He dabbed the girl’s tears with his cape. “We’re just your imagination!”

“You are?” The girl replied, looking at Will with trusting, watery eyes.

“Yes. We’re just pretend. We only exist in your dreams.”

“Dreams?”

“We come out and play in your dreams but we go away when you wake.” Will slowly lowered her back to the ground. “When you get married it will be for real. You’ll have a real wedding to a real person and have a real family.”

Will turned to Keith, who stood, slightly stunned, and weakly smiled back. “The Prince and I will disappear,” Will said to the girl. “You can’t marry a dream. Dreams never last.”



“That was a good ad-lib,” Keith said as they retreated to the tunnel. “With that little girl who wanted to marry me.”

“She wanted to marry the Prince, not you.” Will pointed out. “Why the hell anyone would ever want to marry a slacker surf addict like you...”

“What about the voice?” Keith asked. “That was... New.”

“Voice?”

“You know, that sweetie-pie goody-goody voice you spoke to her in. Sounded great, if not a little spooky.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The voice you used when you talked to the girl.”

“What did I sound like?” Will asked.

Keith wasn’t sure if Will was just playing him or genuinely confused. “If my mom had a voice as sweet that, I don’t think I’d have ever disobeyed her.”

“Huh,” Will said, looking a bit uncomfortable. “What’d you know?”

The two turned to the left, entering the locker room. “You didn’t even know you were doing it, did you?”

“Of course I knew.”

Keith jabbed Will in the ribs with his elbow. “No you didn’t.”

“I swear, sometimes I think it’s this dress.”

“Is that the same one from the other day?”

Will popped the wig off his head and placed aside, carefully. “It’s been clean and ready to go every day in my locker since it showed up.” He unfastened the cape from around his neck. “It’s like it commands me to act this way.”

“It’d be hard not to act like Snow White in that dress.”

Will put a leg up on the bench and leaned over, squinting an eye. “Pirates of the seas, we princesses be!” He said in a thick accent. “Swab the deck! Hoist the yard arm! Trim the mizzenmast!”

“Yeah, it definitely doesn’t work,” Keith chuckled. “You *have* to be all sweetness and light in that outfit.”

“The fairest of them all.” Will turned his back to Keith. “Unzip?”

“Yeah,” Keith undid the zipper on the back of the dress. “You need to find someone else to do this.”

“This is your last shift? Well, I’ll see you... When?”

“I’m going up the coast for Mavericks tonight. I have until next weekend off.”

“Mavericks?”

“It’s a surfing contest.”

“Of course it is. I’ll see you next Saturday then.”

“Yeah.” Keith slapped Will on the back. “Don’t let that dress push you around, all right?”

J O E S I X P A C K

FROM PALS TO GALS

“Mandate of the People”

As previously published at TGstories.com

A Stories of the Supernatural Story



2010 eBook Edition

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MANDATE OF THE PEOPLE

“Milton J. Mossley, Magic Man” Read the plain white business card. It was printed in that cheap raised ink that so many people mistook for ‘classy’ lately. It had a blobby clip-art picture of a magic wand and top hat in the corner.

“So what do you think?” Milton said, beaming with pride.

Jeremy flipped the card over in his fingers. He was hoping a punch line was printed on the back of it. It was blank. He glanced at his pal Stewart and they exchanged expressions of two boys who knew that they were in the company of true gullibility.

“Uh, guy, how much did all this cost you?” Stewart said, taking the card in his hand.

Milton looked around the small, cramped storefront. “You wouldn’t believe the deal I got, boys!”

Stewart and Jeremy looked around as well. They were just two teenage boys wandering around the ‘Woodland Creek Emporium Shoppes’ strip mall looking for cheap eats. They found an abandoned and forgotten little dump with only this one store open. It wasn’t actually open, either. The inside of the store was raw concrete, full of cement dust and bare wires, indicating that no one had ever actually moved into this unit in the strip mall. This, despite the fact that the building was obviously designed and built in the 1980’s.

The mall was convenient to an off-ramp and toxic fumes. This area of town was industrial, located under the freeway. It was miserable and isolated.

The store wasn’t empty, though. A pile of white cardboard boxes, all marked “MAGIXCOR MADE IN CHINA” were stacked along the back wall.

The two boys wandered in, curious, when Mr. Mossley had accosted them with kindness. He was tremendously happy just to see that only hours after he had moved in, he had customers. He knew then that this was a gold mine.

Milton patted one of his boxes. “It’s all here, the secret to instant wealth-building power!” He walked around his pile of boxes, admiring them. “With only a small investment, I received all this fabulous merchandise. And it’s all ready-to-sell!”

“So, you’re selling... what?” Jeremy asked.

“Dreams!” Milton proclaimed with enthusiasm.

“Dreams.” Jeremy repeated with well-deserved skepticism.

“Wishes! Desires! Power!” Milton said, projecting his voice to the roof.

Stewart sneered. “I think you’re crazy.”

“Crazy to be selling magic at these prices!” Milton proclaimed.

“Yeah, well good luck, guy.” Jeremy said, handing back the card.

Milton refused it. “No, no. You keep the card. If there’s one thing that helps getting a business off the ground, it’s word of mouth.” The two boys then shrugged and turned to leave.

“Fuckin chump ass loser.” Stewart mumbled to his friend.

Milton then had an idea. “Wait boys! Wait a second!” He turned to his nearest box, and opened it. He rooted around inside, and then picked out a musty bur-lap pouch. “You boys take this.”

The two boys both had their hands in their pockets and seemed too uninter-ested to take the item. They just stared at Milton.

“It’s magic!” Milton said. “Go on, think of it as a free sample.”



Finally Jeremy took the pouch, picking it with two fingers to avoid touching too much of the old thing. “Uh. Thanks.”

“Yeah, thanks.” Stewart said with enough sarcasm to kill a bull elephant. “Thanks a lot.”

Stewart and Jeremy exchanged another look and they left.

“You boys have fun with that! And let all your friends know!” Milton called out as the two boys got into Jeremy’s truck. Milton confidently returned to his store. He knew now that he had a bona-fide moneymaker on his hands. He would do this full-time. Tomorrow, he’d tell Mr. Blumsley to take his accounting job and shove it!



Thunk. Thunk.

“Quit it!”

Thunk.

“I said quit it!”

Jeremy tried to look surprised. “Me?”

Thunk.

The exasperated girl sitting in front of Jeremy picked up her books and moved to the farthest desk away.

The haggard low-wage teacher at the front of the class droned a warning. “Stop kicking people’s chairs, Mr. Tyler.”

Jeremy acted offended. “What?” He said. The teacher sighed deeply and went back to grading pop quizzes. Stewart, sitting next to Jeremy, gave him a low-five.

“Kggcch!” The ancient speaker above the classroom doorway choked to life. “Attention students. This is Vice-Principal Patterson.”

Stewart pretended to be the voice from the speaker. “And I like it up the ass.”

Jeremy and Stewart lost control of themselves in convulsive laughter.

“Mr. Tyler! Mr. Dantz! I don’t want to have to write you up!” The teacher said, trying to sound like he cared. The two boys calmed down. The rest of the class silently suffered through it.

The speaker continued to prattle: “...JV volleyball squad is to be dismissed at 1:15 for their game against Puttsville. I would like to congratulate Ryan Wells

for his third-place showing at the imagination fair. A big BHS cheer to Mr. Wells. And now the nominations for prom queen..."

Both Jeremy and Stewart started to chortle. "What?" Jeremy asked Stewart, suspicious of his friend's attitude.

"Nothin," Stewart said. "What's your problem?" He had a similar concern.

"Nothin," Jeremy said, grinning.

The Vice-Principal rolled off the names: "...Theresa Simmons, Virginia Derickson, Patricia Minniweather, and... last and certainly least, Jeremy Tyler."

Stewart laughed out loud at the top of his lungs. "Hah! Jeremy's gonna be the prom queen!" He slapped his leg while cackling.

Jeremy was not amused. He tensed his jaw in anger.

The Vice-Principal wasn't finished: "...and Stewart Dantz."

Now Jeremy had his turn at laughter. "Gotcha!"

"Dude, I nominated you." Stewart said.

"I nominated you." Jeremy snickered.

"Oh man." Stewart sounded disappointed. The two boys stared at the floor, in a masculine version of pouting. "Fuckin' ruined a good joke there."

"Yeah, no kidding."

The bell for the end of the period rang, and it was time for lunch. Stewart and Jeremy voyaged out into the sea of humanity pouring out of the classes into the hall. The students who knew them laughed as they walked by, making fun of the two unwilling candidates. But really, their popularity was limited in this school. Few knew who they were, and Jeremy and Stewart pretended not to care. They followed the prevailing current of the mob and went out into the commons.

The boys wandered out to the parking lot and jumped into Stewart's old Mazda and headed off for KFC. They punched Stewart's Metallica tape into the player and turned it up to eleven, letting everybody know who the big badasses on campus were.

Once they were out of earshot of their schoolmates, they turned it off.

Stewart put on his silver wire-rim sunglasses and opened the window a little more to let his brown unkempt hair fly in the wind. Stewart's pale, greasy face smiled. He thought he looked pretty cool. His thin, junkie-like physique inhabited a faded T-shirt that had an old 70's sports team logo on it, along with several small holes. His tattered cargo pants bunched up around his ankles around his retro jogging shoes. "Fuckin' ruined a good joke there." Stewart repeated.

“Yeah.” Jeremy agreed. “Hey, you got enough for half a bucket? I’m starved.”

“Lemme check.” Stewart emptied his pockets of change, and tossed it to Jeremy. He sloooowly counted. Jeremy was the slightly more stable of the two. His brown hair fell limply around his head, in a modified bowl cut. His face was trying to grow a beard, but had not been able to get more than a patch of stubble on his chin and at the sides of his mouth. He liked to wear an orange pullover hooded sweatshirt, and desperately needed to wash it on a more regular basis. His carpenter’s pants were slung low on his butt, which let an inch of his boxers elastic waistband visible. Such things were fashionable. Last year. He too, thought he looked pretty cool.

“Short a dime.” Jeremy reported.

“Check the glove compartment.” Jeremy suggested.

Jeremy punched open the glove compartment, and rifled through it. A map, a few burnt fuses, napkins, plastic forks, a sock, and an old burlap pouch. “Guy, you kept this?”

Stewart saw the pouch. “What is that?”

“The magic rock!”

“I guess.” Stewart was uninterested. “What about the dime?”

“No,” Jeremy said, “No money. Guy, I wish we had that dime. I’m so fucking hungry.” Jeremy checked the empty compartment again. “Oh wait, here’s a dime! Yes! Bucket!”

“Bucket!” Stewart chimed in.

Jeremy opened the old pouch and dumped out the contents, a smooth dark rock with a chinese glyph painted on the side. Some kinda magic, thought Jeremy. He remembered back to that night when they had stopped by that loser’s magic store. When they got back in the truck, all that was in the pouch was this stupid round rock. They considered going back and tossing it through the guy’s store window, but by the time they had come up with that brilliant plan, they were too far down the freeway to go back. They forgot about it, and somewhere along the line the rock found it’s way into Stewart’s glove compartment.

Stewart and Jeremy got their precious bucket of chicken after relentlessly hassling the poor girl on the drive-thru, and forcing her to count out five dollars in change. It was a nice day, so they stopped off at a local park to eat – and heckle the passers-by.

“I think you should run, dude.” Stewart said, spraying a mouthful of crispy breading.

“Where?” Jeremy said, gnawing on a bone.

“No, dude. Run for Prom Queen!” Stewart said. “I saw this movie once...”

“Shut up.” Jeremy said. “Runnin fer prom queen. Stupid idea. You run.”

Stewart was bristled. “You don’t want me to run.”

“Yeah?” Jeremy tossed the bone at a squirrel.

“I’d whup yer ass.”

Jeremy sounded amused. “Yeah. Whatever.” He got up and flung the empty bucket off the table. “Let’s go.”

The two boys got back in Stewart’s car and made their way back to school. Jeremy had picked up the rock again, and started to pretend he was throwing a curve ball.

Stewart’s brain sparked up a thought. “Hey, if we ran and won, we could get on the news or somethin’, I bet.”

Jeremy nixed the idea. “Who cares?”

Stewart couldn’t fight that logic. But at least, he did figure out a new angle to irritate his friend with. “So you’re scared.”

“Scared of what?”

“Losing.” Stewart said.

Jeremy laughed at that. “Fuck that, man. I bet I get more votes than you do.”

“Dreaming.”

“You think you can get more than me? Try.”

“Yeah? Well, we’ll see.”

“Uh-huh.”

Stewart grabbed the rock from his friend’s hands. “By the power of the magic rock, I will be Prom Queen!” Stewart said mockingly. He tossed it back at Jeremy.

“You’re scaring me, dude.” Jeremy said. “You ain’t right.”

Stewart ignored his friend. “I bet I can get at least Tony, Dean and Kevin to vote for me.”

Jeremy wasn’t impressed. “No. No way Dean’s gonna vote for you. And I’ve known Kevin longer than you.”

“Yeah? So who’d be stupid enough to vote for you?” Stewart asked.

Jeremy thought. “Kevin would. And Chad. Maybe.”

“Not a chance.”

“We’ll see.”

Stewart peered at his delusional pal. “Yeah. Well, you better use the magic rock, cause that’s the only hope you have of beating me.”

“Hey, magic rock,” Jeremy said, shaking the rock awake. “Gimme some votes. I wish you could make it so I can get people to vote for me.” Jeremy paused for effect. “And fer Stewart too. Just so he doesn’t feel too bad when he loses.”

Stewart snickered.

“Whoa!” Jeremy yelled.

“What?”

Jeremy brushed his hands. “The rock. It just like... Disintegrated.”

“Huh. Cheap piece a shit rock.”



Dean Carslyle had been looking forward to this egg-salad sandwich for four long periods. Which is what set Dean apart from the rest of humanity. Otherwise, in every possible way imaginable he was average. He held no opinions on any subject. He had nothing bad to say about anyone, but nothing good either. He was so ordinary that he faded into the background, unseen and unnoticed by the rest of the student body.

Of course, since Dean had no real opinions about anybody or anything, it wasn’t long before Stewart and Jeremy had descended upon him. He was someone you could tease, embarrass and humiliate repeatedly without any objection. No one cared what you did to him, and he didn’t care much about being tricked.

So, he was not only the perfect victim, he was the perfect voter.

Dean had his mouth wide open, about to taste the wonderfully ordinary blandness of his sandwich when he noticed he wasn’t alone. On one side, Stewart sat looking directly at Dean. He had a wide smile on his face. On the other side sat Jeremy with the same expression. Dean didn’t move his head, he just looked to his left, and to his right, and back again.

“H... H... Hey, whassup, guys?” Dean said, with due trepidation.

“Hey Dean.” Jeremy said, menacingly.

“How’s it goin’, Dean?” Stewart said with the same tone.

“Gonna eat a sandwich.” Dean said, displaying it.

“Good deal.” Jeremy said. Dean was pretty sure whatever the two were gonna do to him would be done in the next second or two, so he just clenched up his body and waited for it.

“Hey Dean.” Stewart said, making Dean even more anxious. “Who you gonna vote for fer Prom Queen?”

“Um. Yeah. I heard that you guys were nominated. Pretty funny.” Dean gave a polite laugh.

Jeremy got in closer to Dean’s face. “You gonna vote for me, right?”

Stewart got in even closer. “No. Dean wants to vote for me, right Dean?”

Dean now had serious doubts about ever getting to his sandwich. “Um.” He pointedly said.

“We’re friends, right Dean?” Jeremy asked.

Dean stated the obvious. “I was gonna vote for a girl, actually.”

“Don’t waste your vote on a girl, man!” Jeremy shook his fist in the air. “Make a *statement* with your vote.”

“Yeah, dude!” Stewart seconded the idea.

“Look guys, I don’t think I’m gonna vote after all.” Dean said, trying desperately to extricate himself from the situation. He decided that was his best chance to get to his sandwich. He took a giant bite and laboriously chewed.

But the boys didn’t give up easily. Dean realized this when he started to run out of food in his mouth. He kept on chewing air in the hope that they’d get bored and go away. But they didn’t go anywhere. Finally, Dean had to stop acting.

“So, which girl were you gonna vote for?” Stewart asked.

“I dunno.” Dean said. “Maybe Wendy Fischer.”

“Why?” Jeremy wanted to know.

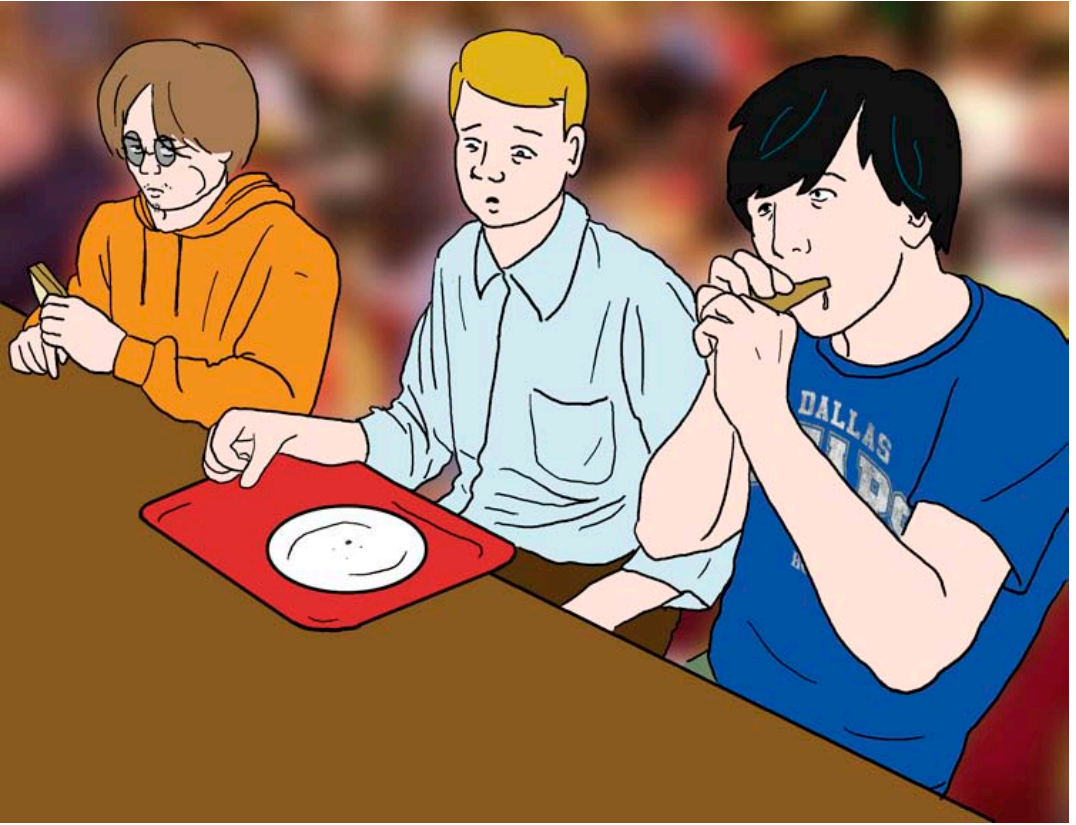
“I just, I guess, well... She’s got nice hair.” Dean was almost embarrassed to admit he found any girl attractive. That was just the way he was. A total wimp. “I like that short bobbed hair she has. I guess.”

Stewart was disappointed. “Oh.”

Jeremy, however, saw an opportunity to point something out. “Like my hair?” He said. He shook his bowl-cut hair back and forth.

“Yeah – like your hair.” Dean said. “Okay, Fine. Maybe I’ll vote for you Jeremy.” He took an even larger bite of his sandwich.

Stewart fumed in his seat.



“You won’t be disappointed, dude,” Jeremy said, slapping Dean on the back. Dean choked. “Polls say Jeremy has a one vote lead over his competition.” Jeremy gloated. He got up left. Stewart followed.

“Okay, well... Dean’s a homo,” Stewart said with not an ounce of resentment. “You can have his homo vote.” Jeremy and Stewart scanned the lunchroom for a familiar face.

“Chad!” Jeremy yelled, spotting one. He jogged across the lunchroom and went to go talk to his prospective voter.

Stewart stood around and looked around to see if he could spot someone he knew. He found the chubby frame of Kevin, the human lint trap.

Kevin always wore sweaters and corduroy pants, and seemed to generate his own field of static electricity somehow. Thus, all lint or fluff in his area would wound up on Kevin eventually.

“Kevin! My man!” Stewart said, cozying up to him.

Kevin was immediately suspicious. What he knew of Stewart told him that anytime he was nice meant that something fairly unpleasant was in the works. “Hey, Stew.” Kevin said. “Tryin’ for Miss America next?”

“That’s just what I wanted to talk to you about, Kev.” Stewart punched him in the shoulder. “Vote for me for Prom Queen.”

Kevin shook his head. “No way, Stew. I’m voting for Tamara Shays.” Kevin lowered his voice. “She’s got one fine pair of tits.”

Stewart cursed at himself. He was in total agreement about Tamara. It would be a crime not to vote for such fine examples of mammarian perfection. If he had tits like Tamara, then even he’d get some votes.

“But, you know... You’ve got a nice rack as well, Stew.” Kevin said.

Stewart arched his back a little to show off. “Yeah, I think mine are better, actually.” He pulled his t-shirt tight to further enhance the large, pert breasts that were now on his chest.

Kevin rubbed his chin. “You make a good point, Stew. Two good points, actually. Sure. I’ll vote for you instead.”

“Cool!” Stewart said. “You rule, dude!”

Kevin laughed. “Anytime, Stew. Good luck.”

Stewart looked around to see where Jeremy was. He was all tied up in votes with him now.

Jeremy returned from his campaign visit with Chad. “Well, Chad’s not gonna...” Then Jeremy’s meager powers of observation kicked in. “Guy, you have tits.”

Stewart looked down at his chest again and shrugged. “Yeah? So?”

Jeremy looked at them. They must be fakes. His friend was pulling a joke on him. “Take those out, you look stupid.”

“Ha. Ha.” Stewart said, not finding this funny. “You take your head off, then.”

Tony Pickens, a guy they both knew, walked by. “Hey.” He said, noticing his friends. He continued on his way.

Jeremy was confused. Why didn’t Tony say anything? It was pretty damn obvious, wasn’t it? Maybe Tony was in on the joke. He looked around. Nobody else seemed to notice anything wrong. Was everyone in on this? He quickly grabbed Stewart’s shirt and lifted it up, so that the fake breasts would fall out. Instead, two large globes of very real flesh shimmied there.

“Hey!” Stewart said, pulling his shirt back down. “What’s your problem?”

Jeremy stood there for a minute as his tiny brain trembled, shook and shut down. Luckily, it then fired up again, and he grabbed Stewart by the arm and dragged him off behind a wall for privacy.

“You... what the... Jesus fuck!” Jeremy uttered.

“What the fuck is wrong with you, Dude?” Stewart asked.

“You have tits!” Jeremy screamed at a low volume.

“And?” Stewart said, “Don’t tell me you just noticed.”

Jeremy grabbed his friend by the shoulders and shook him. “Listen to me! You! Have! *Tits!*”

Stewart seemed a little confused or possibly irritated.

Jeremy tried to state his case in simple terms. “You’re Stewart. You’re a guy. And guys don’t have tits!”



Stewart seemed to slightly comprehend the logic. You could practically hear the pistons try to fire in his brain. He rose a hand to protest, but was still too involved in thought to speak.

“Did you have tits yesterday? This morning? Five fuckin’ minutes ago?” Jeremy continued. “Think!”

Stewart’s mind was starting up like a car left in the snow for a week, inching its way towards reality. Then he made the connection. “Tits!” He yelled aloud. “What... I... Oh, Christ!” He grabbed at them in horror, felt them and then flung his arms back as if his chest was 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit. He tried to back up away from them, and then tried to shake them off. None of it worked.

Stewart let out a kind of whimper. So did Jeremy.

His fear was causing his hands to shake violently, but Stewart slowly convinced his arms to work and come around front. He gripped the collar of his t-shirt, and after many deep breaths, quickly lifted and looked under his shirt. Then again. And again.

He let go. With one hand flat, he tentatively patted the front of his expanded chest to see if it felt as real as it looked. It was definitely real.

He looked back at his friend in stark terror, unable to vocalize or even blink.

“I don’t know!” Jeremy said, answering the unspoken question. “I don’t know!”

Stewart looked back down at his impossible appendages. He looked all around him, as if there was someplace he could run to escape this. His head then snapped forward. "Rock!" he said. "The fucking magic fucking rock."

"No way." Jeremy said. "That thing was a stupid joke." Stewart made a vague, spastic motion at his chest, pointing out how real the situation was. "It was actually magic?" Jeremy asked rhetorically. "Fuck!"

Stewart finally found his voice. "W... we... you... I... wished that w... w... we could get votes f... f... for P-P-Prom K-K-K-Queen!"



"The rock gave you..."

"I asked K-K-K-Kevin to vote for me and he said he was g-g-g-gonna vote for Tamara." Stewart had to catch his breath. "Because of her tits. I thought that if I had those tits, I c-c-c-could get his vote."

"That was dumb." Jeremy crystalized the obvious.

"And neither of us..." Stewart tried to say.

Jeremy interrupted. "You guys didn't notice any change. Shit. It's like it changed reality on everyone."

Stewart suddenly realized something. "It was the vote! I got tits because I got his vote!" He started to roll his hands in circles, indicating that he was onto an idea. "Tell me you'll vote for me!" He said.

Jeremy didn't get it. "What?"

"Tell me that you're going to vote for me because you want a man as prom queen!" Stewart said with urgency. "Say it!"

"Uh."

"Say it! Now!" Stewart demanded.

"I... I'll vote for you..." Jeremy started to say. He then rose his voice so that any unknown presence in the area could hear him. "...Because you're a man, and I want a man as Prom Queen." He quickly added: "A man without breasts!"

As soon as he said it, they vanished from Stewart's chest. His shirt deflated and his body returned to a familiar shape.

They both stood there for a moment before they allowed themselves to feel relieved.

"Thank fuck." Stewart artfully said.

With that, the bell rang for the next period. The two boys stared at each other for a moment, until Stewart decided to move. They both then started to walk briskly, eager to leave the area like a bad dream.



The next day, Jeremy had been making a list of people he could get to vote for him. Oh sure, the two boys had just gone through the strangest incident in the whole of recorded human history, but Jeremy's pride was at stake. And besides, Stewart would never see this coming. It was an opportunity.

He looked at his short list of guys he could depend on for a vote, and he had a grand total of two. If he was going to make Stewart eat his words, he was going to have to get a whole chunk of votes at once.

He thought for a moment and came up with ideal bunch: The Mathletes Club. They were total losers, each and every one of them. But fortunately, they were all outsiders who would probably cast "joke" votes for cartoon characters anyway. It would be easy to get them to cast "joke" votes for him. He figured he could get five or eight votes that way.

The head of the Mathletes was Shaun Rimsdale, a pasty little kid who could sway the group in Jeremy's favor. He sought him out in between classes.

"Rimsdale, bud." Jeremy said, wrapping his arm around the smaller kid. "Have I got the funniest joke for you."

Shaun adjusted his coke bottle lenses to check to see who it was. He saw it was that jerk Jeremy Tyler. He started to squirm out of his grasp. "Just lemme alone, Jeremy." He whined.

"Here's a wicked idea Rimsdale. Instead of voting for Batman or Homer Simpson this year, vote for me for Prom Queen." He forced a laugh to indicate exactly how amusing it was. "Now that's funny!"

Shaun wriggled out of Jeremy's hold and started to run-walk away as fast as he could. "Don't hurt me!" Shaun whimpered as he tried to get away.

Jeremy went after him for a couple of steps, but then gave up. He wasn't worth the effort. "Man," he said to himself, "What does it take to get a vote around here?"

Then, a creepy little idea germinated in his noggin.



The next period, Jeremy tracked down Samantha "Sam" Wallace, the big dyke on campus. Sam was a stereotypical lesbian, short hair and buttoned-up collared shirts. The look was a kind curious androgynous turn on the outfit of the Hitler youth. Subtlety is not appreciated when you're seventeen years old, and Sam was not a subtle lesbian.

Jeremy applied the same lack of charm on Sam that he had applied to Shaun. "Hey, Sam I was wondering who you're gonna vote for Prom Queen." He smiled broadly.

"Get the hell away from me, jackass." Sam growled.

"I bet you're all pissed off about the tokenization of women this whole process encourages, am I right?" Jeremy had gotten those words off the internet.

A wave of surprise washed over Sam's face. "Uh... Well, yes..."

"And you probably were thinking of voting for a lesbian."

Sam was dumbfounded. This jerk actually had it figured out. "I... was..." How had this brain donor figured out her brilliant, subversive plan?

Jeremy was on a roll. "So a lesbian would get your vote, right?"

"Yeah, but..."

"Probably the most mannish, hardcore, tough-as-bullets lesbian around, correct?" Jeremy prodded.

"Uh... I guess."

“And every one of your lesbo friends would do the same, right?”

“I suppose...”

“Okay then.” Jeremy said. He walked off, and exited the hall.

Sam looked around for the candid camera.

A moment later Jeremy returned. “Hey, Sam!” He called out.

“Hey, Jer!” Sam acknowledged.

“Can I count on your vote for Prom Queen?” Jeremy said.

“Fuck yeah!” Sam rose her fist in solidarity. “Let’s show these people what dyke power can do!”

“Smash the status quo!” Jeremy replied, matching the fist gesture.

“Woo-hoo!” Sam shouted, as Jeremy proceeded on to his next class.



Stewart was waiting for Jeremy to show up for English, every few moments idly scratching his chest to make sure everything was still okay. Other than that, he had practically put yesterday out of his mind.

Jeremy came in and seated himself next to his friend with the sort of smile on his face that filled anybody who saw it with dread. He was up to something. “Hey.” He said, plopping himself down in his seat.

“Hey.” Stewart replied. He sensed something askew with the world all the sudden, but Stewart’s blunted ability to interpret the world around him was getting in the way to figure it out. He puzzled over the situation. There was something definitely weird going on here. What was it? There was something different about Jeremy, but Stewart couldn’t place it.

The teacher started to hand back papers from yesterday. She started down Stewart’s aisle and dropped a “62” scored paper on his desk. The usual.

“Stewart, please try reading the assigned chapters.” The teacher commented. She then continued on, and then returned to give back Jeremy’s paper. “Jerrie, you also need to read the assignments.”

Jeremy smiled nervously at the teacher and then avoided eye contact with Stewart by intently staring at his “65” on his paper.

Stewart was dumbfounded at his friend’s behavior. Something was definitely very odd. He watched Jeremy open his notebook – adorned with gay pride stickers – and pretend to write things. He saw Jeremy scratch his ear – with the

five piercings in it.

Well, if there was something different about Jeremy, he couldn't quite figure it out.

Class went on as usual, the two muttering insults and put-downs back and forth like they always did. It wasn't long before class was over and it was time for lunch.

"Jeremy, you up for Burger King?" Stewart asked.

"Hey, why don't we try Subway today?" Jeremy suggested.

"You've turned yourself into a lesbian!" Stewart suddenly blurted out. "That's what you did!"

"Shhh!" Jeremy begged Stewart to be quiet.

"You turned yourself... *Into a girl!*"

"Hey, I can always turn back." Jeremy said under his breath.

"What are you *thinking?*"

Jeremy looked almost exactly the same as he always did, with the exceptions of the earrings. And maybe a little puffiness at the chest and hips. Did he actually do this? Was he that dumb? Stewart looked at his friend as if Jeremy had betrayed everything he had ever believed in. Which might actually be the case.

A girl by the name of Pat Fredrickson walked by, and gave Jeremy a high five. "Way to go, Jer!" Stewart carefully replayed that last moment in his head. Pat was suspected of being a dyke by lots of people. That she'd be friendly to the 'new' Jeremy made sense, but Stewart wondered: what was the high-five about?



Pat made it easy for Stewart by continuing: "What will they say when they crown the first lesbian Prom Queen!? They'll have to take us seriously now!" And with that comment, Stewart finally got it.

Jeremy nudged Stewart with his elbow. "I'm gonna feel myself up after school." He said, looking very pleased with his ingenuity. "And I get to go in the girls' locker room."

"Votes?" Stewart shook his head. "You want the dykes to vote for you?"

Jeremy beamed a wide smile.

Stewart was aghast. "You lost yer..." He pointed at Jeremy's crotch. "Deal!"

"It's reversible! And besides, I don't really notice it – much." Jeremy observed.

"You are sick." Stewart sneered.

"I may be sick, but I'm a winner."



Stewart spent his Earth Sciences class in a daze. He always did, but today it was even more intense than usual. He had just witnessed his good friend of many years turn certifiably insane in front of his eyes.

Certifiably insane like a fox, he concluded. Stewart realized that Jeremy had taken advantage of his momentary weakness and leapt ahead of him. He had been so preoccupied he had let the whole competition slip into the hands of his friend. This was now a war.

Jeremy had scored the votes of every lesbian on campus for Prom Queen, which totaled about six – maybe eight if all the rumors were correct. Stewart knew that he didn't have the numbers to match the lesbo voting block. What he needed was a master stroke. Something that Jeremy would never even consider he was capable of.



Jeremy was out in the parking lot, idling his car as he waited for Stewart to show. He was gunning the motor whenever anybody came within fifteen feet of him, just to see if he could get people to jump. Finally Stewart made his way to the car, and Jeremy shoved in the Metallica tape and they were off for parts unknown.

"Whattayawanna do?" slurred Jeremy. It was his usual after-school question.

"MAKING FRIENDS"

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



**SICK PUPPY PRESS
PRESENTS**

"MAKING FRIENDS"

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http://sickpuppy.com www.sickpuppy.com

BUD, ARE YOU SURE? THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE TO BACK OUT, SUZUKI.

ARE YOU STUPID?! THIS IS GOING TO PAY FOR EVERYTHING UNTIL I GRADUATE, GARRETT.

YEAH, MORON! WHY WOULD WE BAIL NOW? THIS IS OUR TICKET TO RIDE FOR TWO YEARS!

THINK OF THE PARTIES WE CAN THROW WITH THIS CASH!

ALL RIGHT BOYS, I REMIND YOU THAT YOU CANNOT TAKE ANY PERSONAL ITEMS INTO THE HOUSE.

YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO LIVE OFF ONLY WHAT YOU FIND IN THE HOUSE, EXCEPT FOR THE MEALS WE WILL BE PROVIDING.

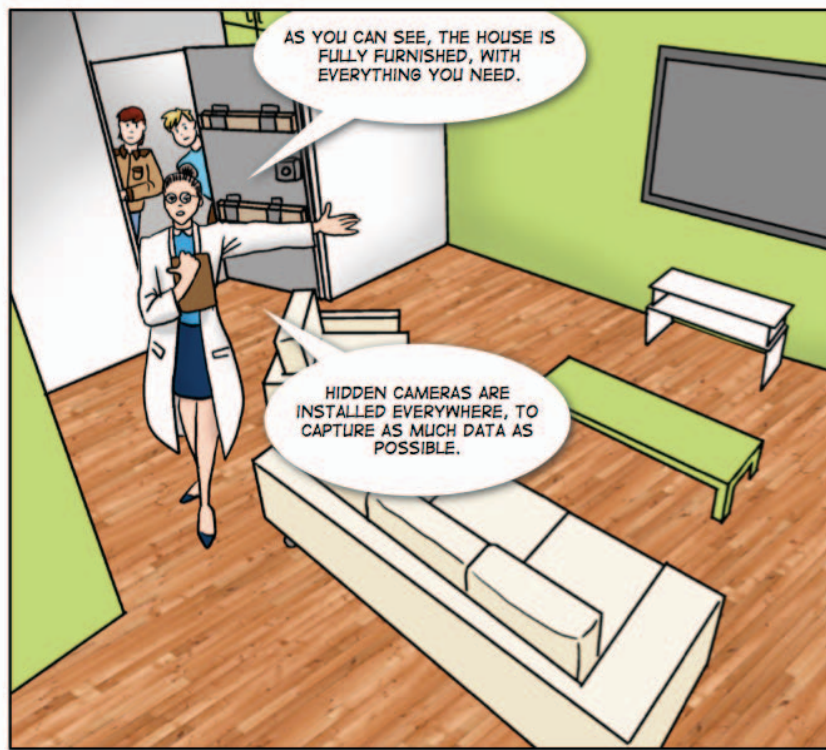
AND YOUR ONLY CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD WILL BE WITH ME, THOUGH THE COMPUTER.

FOR THE MILLIONTH TIME, WE UNDERSTAND, DR. BALLANTINE.

JEEZ!

BUT IT'S ONLY FOR THREE MONTHS. NO BIG. I CAN DO THAT STANDING ON MY HEAD.

I'M BETTING SUZUKI IS THE FIRST TO CRACK!



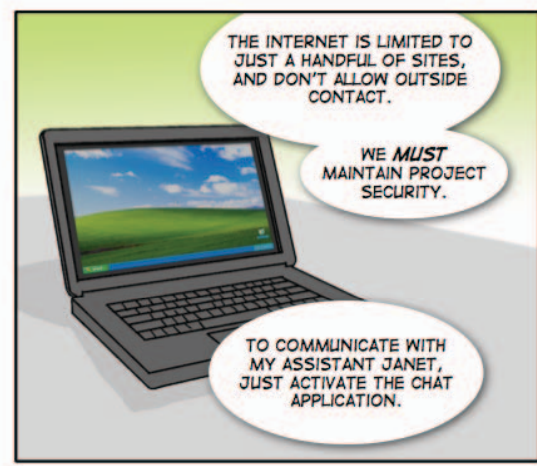
AS YOU CAN SEE, THE HOUSE IS FULLY FURNISHED, WITH EVERYTHING YOU NEED.

HIDDEN CAMERAS ARE INSTALLED EVERYWHERE, TO CAPTURE AS MUCH DATA AS POSSIBLE.



THE WINDOWS PROVIDE SIMULATED DAYLIGHT, BUT THEY'RE NOT REAL.

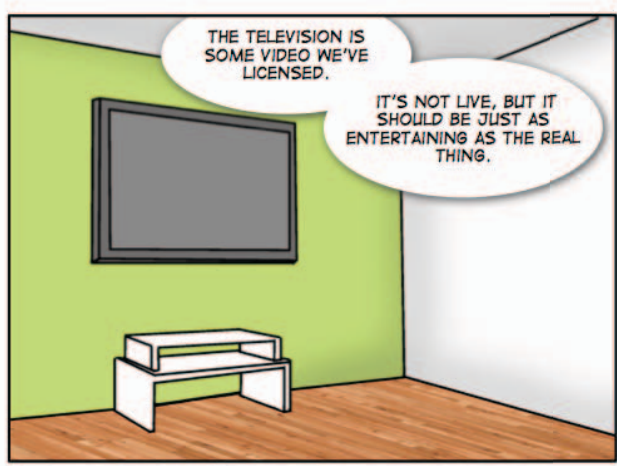
THEY SLOWLY GO DARK AT NIGHT, AND LIGHT UP GRADUALLY IN THE MORNING. IT WILL KEEP YOUR NOCTURNAL CLOCK IN BALANCE.



THE INTERNET IS LIMITED TO JUST A HANDFUL OF SITES, AND DON'T ALLOW OUTSIDE CONTACT.

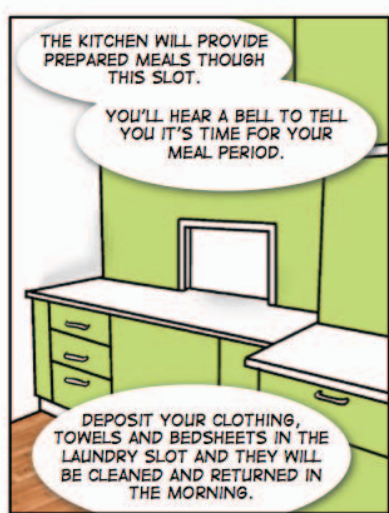
WE **MUST** MAINTAIN PROJECT SECURITY.

TO COMMUNICATE WITH MY ASSISTANT JANET, JUST ACTIVATE THE CHAT APPLICATION.



THE TELEVISION IS SOME VIDEO WE'VE LICENSED.

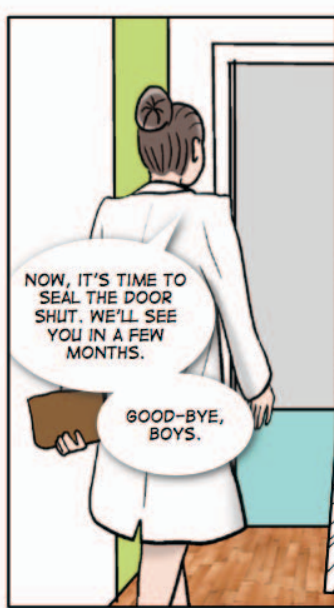
IT'S NOT LIVE, BUT IT SHOULD BE JUST AS ENTERTAINING AS THE REAL THING.



THE KITCHEN WILL PROVIDE PREPARED MEALS THROUGH THIS SLOT.

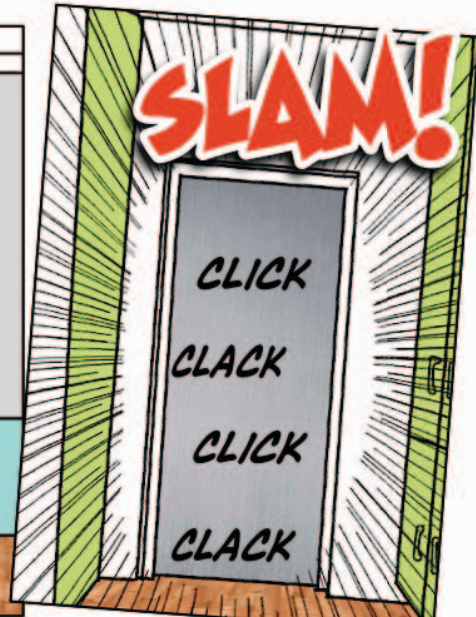
YOU'LL HEAR A BELL TO TELL YOU IT'S TIME FOR YOUR MEAL PERIOD.

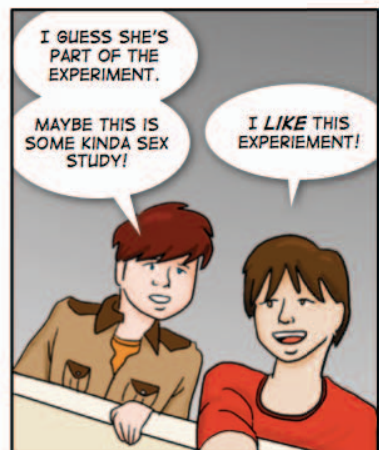
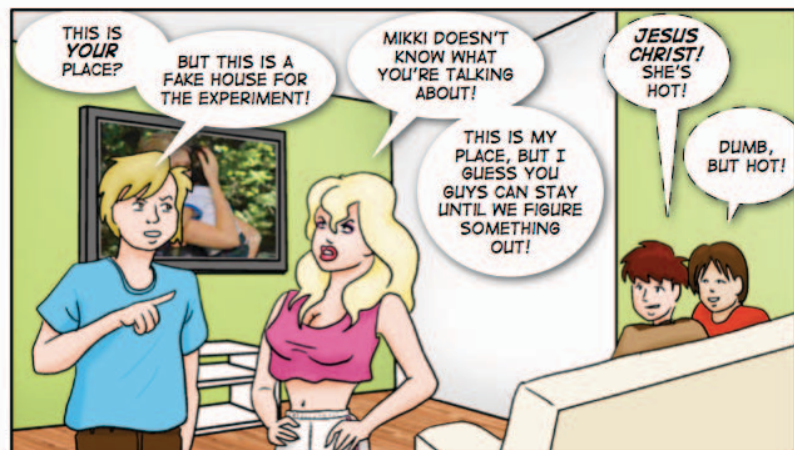
DEPOSIT YOUR CLOTHING, TOWELS AND BEDSHEETS IN THE LAUNDRY SLOT AND THEY WILL BE CLEANED AND RETURNED IN THE MORNING.



NOW, IT'S TIME TO SEAL THE DOOR SHUT. WE'LL SEE YOU IN A FEW MONTHS.

GOOD-BYE, BOYS.





LATER, THAT EVENING, THE BOYS GATHER...

HEY, THIS TV ONLY HAS SOAP OPERAS AND ROMANTIC MOVIES!

THAT'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU LET WOMEN CHOOSE THE TV SHOWS!

YO, DAWG. CALL JANET AND SEE IF WE CAN'T GET BETTER TV!

AND ASK HER ABOUT THIS "MIKKI" CHICK!

WE'RE WORKING ON LICENSING SPORTS AND NEWS.

WE MAY HAVE SOME CARTOONS SOON, THOUGH.

AS FOR MIKKI, I'M NOT ALLOWED TO DISCUSS HER INVOLVEMENT IN THE EXPERIMENT...

**DING!
DING!
DING!**

THAT'S THE FOOD BELL!

WELL, I GUESS IT SMELLS OKAY.

IT LOOKS EDIBLE ENOUGH.

IT BETTER BE GOOD. WE'VE GOT TO EAT IT FOR SIX MONTHS.

HEY, WHEN YOU GUYS FELL ASLEEP ON THE COUCH, DID YOU HEAR ANY VOICES?

YEAH, THAT WAS ME TELLING YOU YOUR FEET STINK!

YEAH, I HEARD SOMETHING. LIKE A WHISPER.

IT WAS LIKE IT WAS JUST OUT OF RANGE. I COULD NEVER QUITE UNDERSTAND WHAT IT WAS SAYING.

IT WAS A GIRL'S VOICE. AT FIRST, I THOUGHT IT WAS MY MOM OR SOMETHING. I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND IT, EITHER!

HEY
GLYS!

IS IT ME, OR IS
IT COLD IN
HERE?

WHAT WERE WE
TALKING ABOUT?

SO, UH, MIKKI, DO YOU
ALWAYS WALK AROUND THE
HOUSE HALF-DRESSED?

WHY NOT? WE'RE ALL
STUCK HERE. WE
CAN'T BE SHY!

YOUR HAIR IS
A MESS!

I'M STUDYING TO
BE A COSMETOL...
COSME...
COSMETOLOGER...

I WANNA
WORK IN A
BEAUTY
BARLOR!

THAT'S
BETTER!

UM, THANKS?

I DON'T KNOW,
DUDE. I THINK I
ATE TOO MUCH.

YEAH, I DON'T
FEEL SO GOOD.

I'M
GONNA
HURL!

THAT NIGHT, THE
BOYS SUFFER...

LIGHHH...

WAARRRGH!

OH, GOD, LET
ME DIE!

BLADDDGH!

I'M SORRY GUYS... I
CAN'T DO ANYTHING.

OH... I HURT
ALL OVER!

IS... IS... IS THIS
IS PART OF THE
EXPERIMENT!?

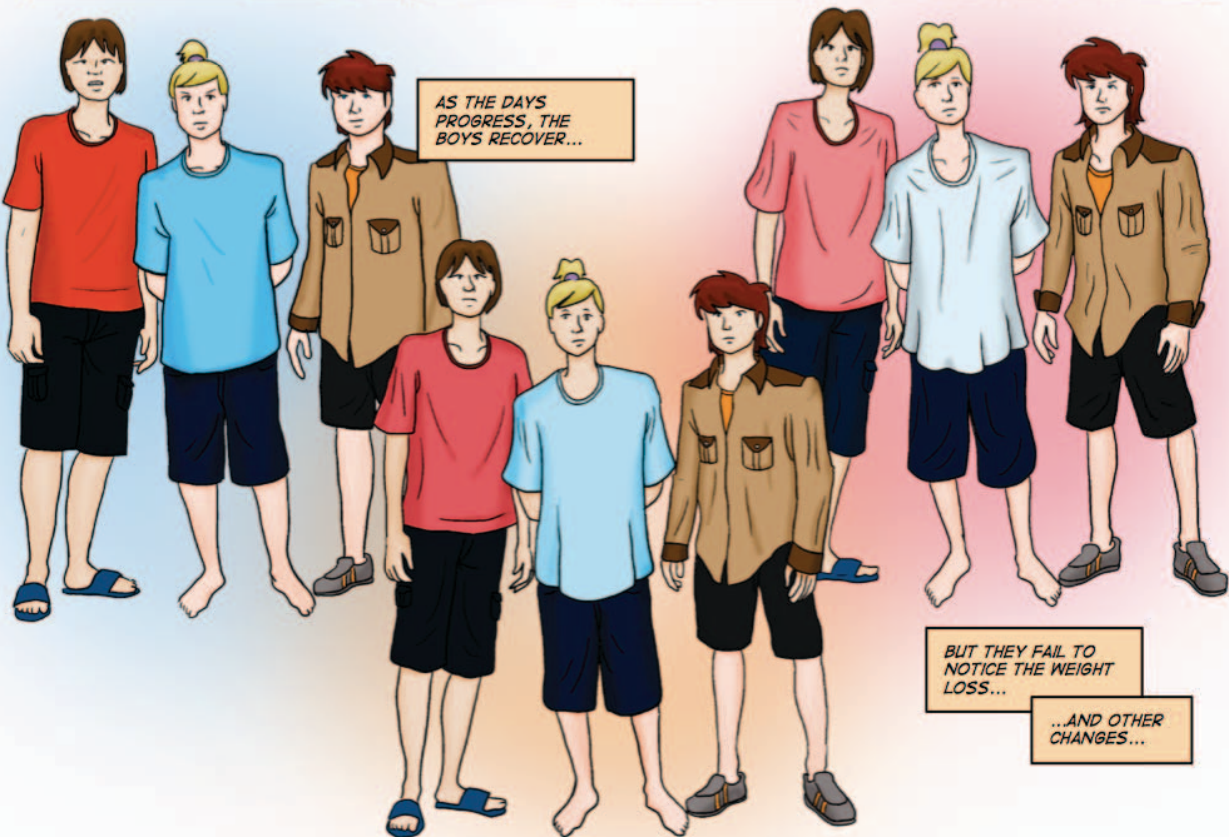
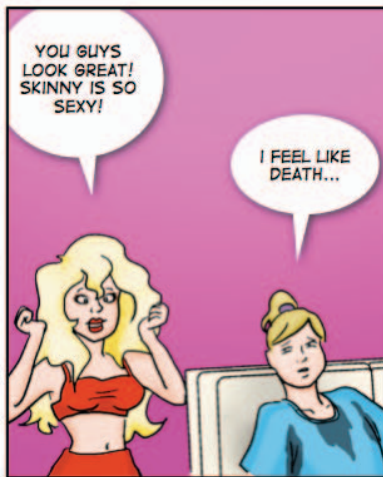
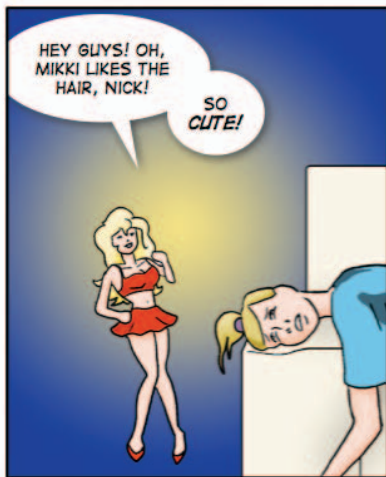
I'M NOT ALLOWED
TO SAY...

IF IT MAKES
YOU FEEL
ANY
BETTER...

IF YOU WERE IN
ANY DANGER,
WE'D GET YOU
OUT
IMMEDIATELY.

SO GET SOME
REST AND FEEL
BETTER IN THE
MORNING, 'KAY?



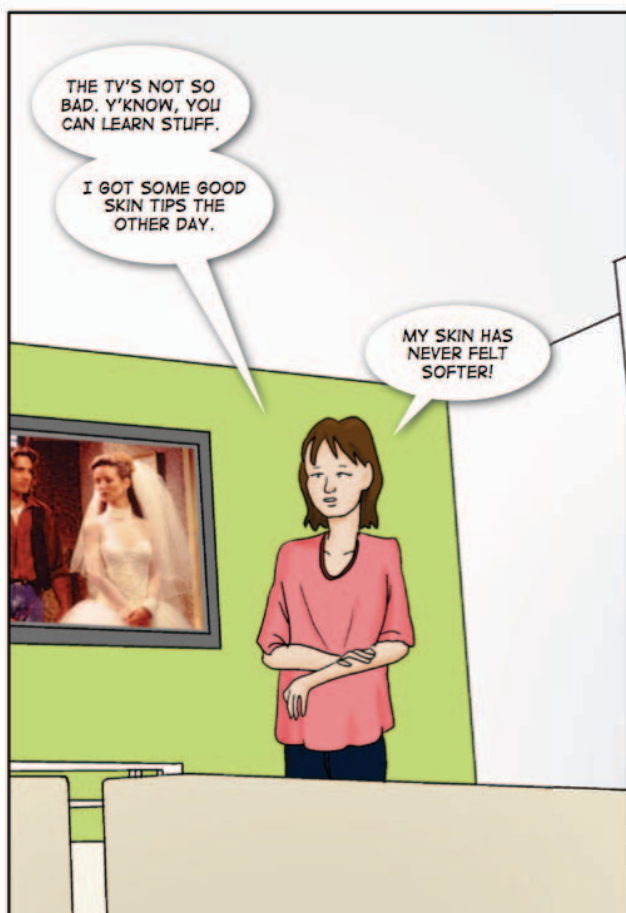




WHEN ARE WE GONNA GET SOME *REAL* CHANNELS?

YEAH, IF WE'RE GONNA BE SO SICK, WE SHOULD AT LEAST GET SOME DECENT TV.

AND BEER! WHAT I WOULDN'T GIVE FOR A BEER RIGHT NOW...



THE TV'S NOT SO BAD. Y'KNOW, YOU CAN LEARN STUFF.

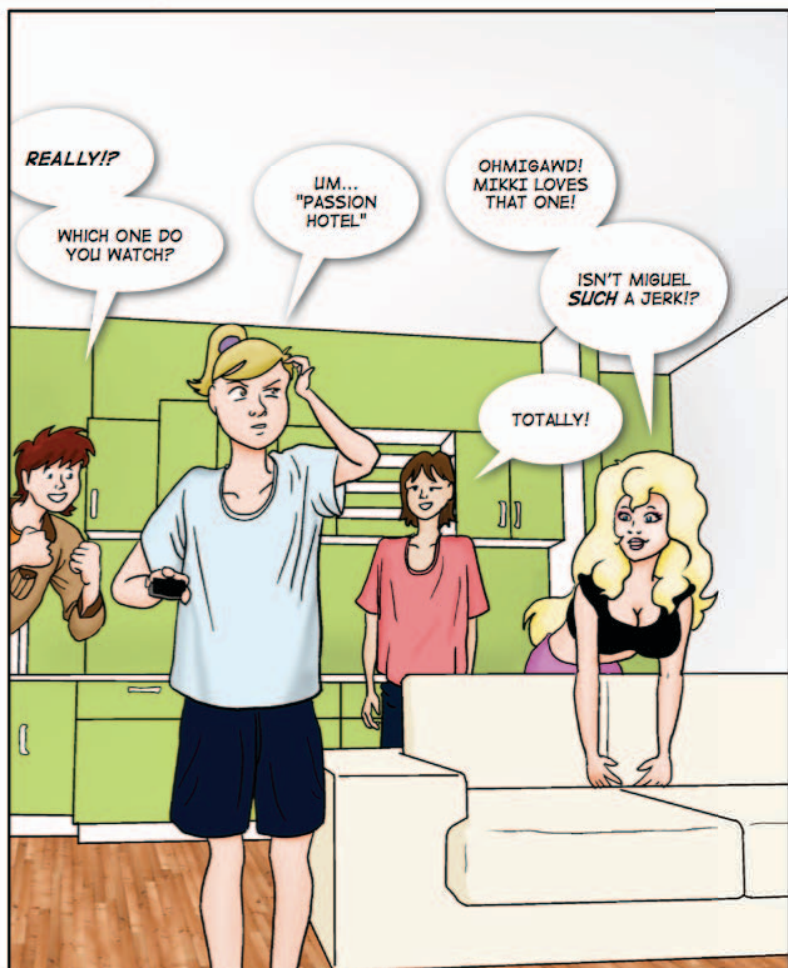
I GOT SOME GOOD SKIN TIPS THE OTHER DAY.

MY SKIN HAS NEVER FELT SOFTER!



WELL, I STILL WANT MORE STUFF TO WATCH. BUT THEY BETTER NOT TAKE THESE CHANNELS AWAY.

I CAN'T MISS MY SOAPS!



REALLY!?

WHICH ONE DO YOU WATCH?

UM... "PASSION HOTEL"

OHMIGAWD! MIKKI LOVES THAT ONE!

ISN'T MIGUEL *SUCH* A JERK!?

TOTALLY!

SOME WEEKS LATER,
A SEARCH IS ON...

DUDES! HAS
ANYONE SEEN
ANY SCISSORS
AROUND HERE?

WHAT'D YA
WANT 'EM
FOR?

I GOTTA CUT MY
HAIR. IT'S **WAY**
TOO LONG.

AND THAT PEABRAIN
MIKKI IS DRIVING ME
NUTS, MESSING WITH
MY HAIR!

I'M NOT
HER BARBIE
DOLL!

HEY! IF YOU
DON'T LIKE IT,
MIKKI CAN DO
GARRETT'S HAIR
INSTEAD!

HUH?

IF YOU DON'T WANT
TO HELP ME GET MY
COMETOLOGICALIST
DEGREE, I CAN
PRACTICE ON
SOMEONE ELSE!

GARRETT
DOESN'T
MIND, DO
YOU?

GARRETT ISN'T
A POOPY
PANTS LIKE
NICK, IS HE?

NICK IS A
DUM-DUM
HEAD
ANYWAY!

DURRR...

**SCREW YOU,
BITCH!**

I CAN'T FIND
SCISSORS
ANYWHERE!

WON'T LET
ME GET TO
FIRST BASE,
ANYWAY...

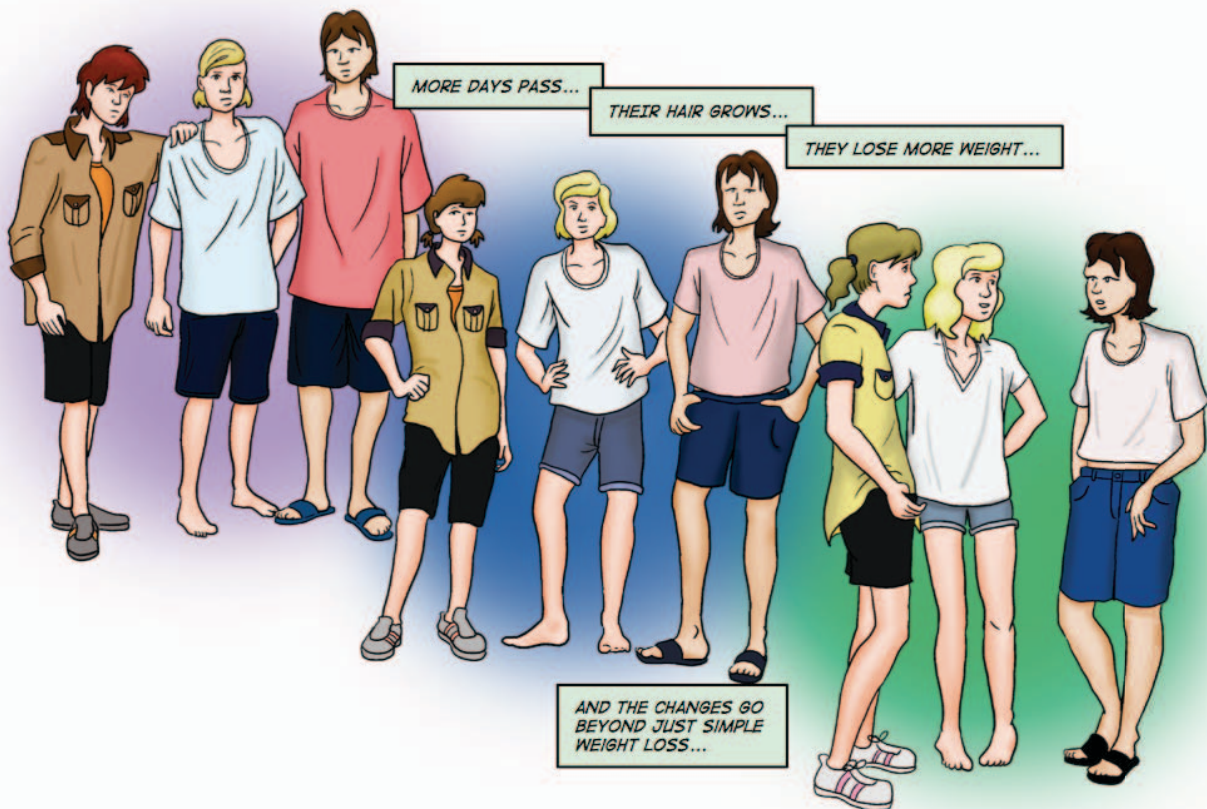
MAYBE WE CAN
CUT IT WITH A
KNIFE!

OR BURN IT
OFF!

WE COULD
YANK IT OUT!

LIHHH...

I'M THINKIN' MAYBE
WE SHOULD JUST
LET OUR HAIR GROW.



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SIX PACK SITE
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J O E S I X P A C K

HELLO, NURSE!

“Quality Health Care”

Revised from a the previously published story at TGstories.com

A Tales of Transformation Story



2010 eBook Edition

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QUALITY HEALTH CARE

“You can crash at my place. It’ll be like back in med school.”

Great. He only had been arrested twice in med school. Graduating out of there probably had saved his life.

“I just need a little help for a couple of months. That’s all.”

Oh, God.

It was a perfectly reasonable request – a perfectly sensible proposal his old friend had made.

Except for *one* detail.

“No one will ever suspect you. You’re never gonna get caught.”

The *catch*. Dane Thompkins was having trouble with the *catch*.

“What do you say? I’ll even buy you a plane ticket.”

Dane had to think. He *really* had to think. His friend, Jimmy Lynch, had called him up and made a job offer to him. Jimmy was opening his first office, a small general practice in the midwest. It was a tremendous achievement for such a young doctor to open an office just three years after getting his degree. But it had been Jimmy’s dream to “hang a shingle” and practice medicine like his grandfather had. In fact, Dane was deeply envious of the idea. It reminded him of his childhood, when he used to play doctor in his backyard.

But Dane had taken a different route after medical school. He spent his time trying to get grants for his studies. Hanging a shingle wasn’t the way he wanted to go. He wanted to work in research, finding new medicines and new treatments. He wanted to follow his ideas and break new ground, but he had found the actual process of getting money more troublesome than he ever thought.

Months and months of writing proposals and perusing grants had gotten him nowhere. He had been totally unsuccessful in his attempts so far, and he was in a deep financial rut. Dane had been living with his uncle for the past year, unable to find work and unable to break down and accept some “lesser” job at some chain hospital or nonprofit clinic. He had his pride at stake.

What he needed was a temporary thing. He just needed to earn a few bucks to pay off the bills and get a head start again. Once he had some money, he could go after the grants without worrying about the short-term.

So here was his med school roommate, Jimmy, offering him just that. Quick money for a few months’ work, free room & board and some good times on the side. It was very tempting, but there was one big problem.

According to the story told by his old roomie, Jimmy had to cut corners on expenses to open his office, and was running it by himself. The load was too much, and he needed a nurse. The nurses’ union was very strong in his state,

and just meeting the mandatory minimum salary was impossible on his meager budget. So he had offered Dane the opportunity to be his “medical assistant” for a few months until he could get enough patients to afford a full-time, accredited nurse.

It was also noted by Dane that this arrangement was very, very illegal.

It’s against the law to hire non-union nurses in most states, and it is certainly illegal to hire non-accredited nurses, even if they had medical doctorates. Plus,



this was nothing compared to the financial threat of the large HMOs who would never reimburse Jimmy a cent if they knew what was going on. But Jimmy was desperate. Yet Dane was even *more* desperate, in the end.

“Yeah, okay, Jimmy. I’ll do it.” Dane said, knowing it was already a bad idea. If there was one defining characteristic about Jimmy Lynch, he was a slick talker. He just hoped he wasn’t making a decision he was going to regret.



Dane’s first day of work was a whirlwind of activity. He was filling out forms, filing papers, answering the phone, tracking appointments and – when time allowed – doing some medical stuff on the side. He had flown out just the previous night, dumped his duffel bag at Jimmy’s place, and grabbed about four hours’ sleep before getting to his new job bright and early.

“Jimmy!” Dane called aloud down the office hall. “We’re outta envelopes!”

It was a large enough office, with a reception desk that served as Dane’s little office for paperwork. Then there was Jimmy’s wood-paneled office, three exam rooms, and four rooms full of equipment. It was obvious to Dane that whoever was selling medical equipment in this area had made a mint with Jimmy. That explained why he was short on cash.

“Jimmy! Envelopes!” He yelled again.

Dressed impressively in a three piece grey suit and a long white coat that made him look years older and far more professional than he deserved, Jimmy slinked down the hall to stick his head in the office window. “Doctor James R. Lynch, M.D.,” he whispered.

“Envelopes,” Dane responded.

Jimmy looked Dane over and squinted his eyes. Dane had shown up to work in jeans and a polo shirt, and Jimmy was obviously put off by his appearance. But Dane really didn’t care. If Jimmy gave him trouble, he’d just bring up that trip to Vegas in ’04. That always shut him up.

“There’s petty cash in the safe,” Jimmy said, pointing to it. “Get some.”

Dane held up a sandwich and a coke. He had already discovered the petty cash. “Four dollars and eighty-six cents is not petty cash,” Dane said. Jimmy growled and dug into his pockets for a five dollar bill. “Go get them now, before the next appointment.” Dane immediately sat up in a rush, spilling the coke all over the heaping disorganized pile of forms on his desk.

Jimmy’s head dipped in defeat.

For his part, Dane knew he was a disaster on two legs. In just the first three hours of the first day on the job, he had lost files, canceled perfectly good appointments and scheduled eight patients in the same half hour. He had already alienated one half of the clients and had insulted the other. That didn’t even

count what he had done to the microwave earlier this morning. Dane hoped it would come off with a stronger solvent.

"I'll take care of it," Dane said, dejectedly. He was desperately trying to make things right. "Don't worry about it." He stepped back from the desk and brushed off the splatters of soda on his shirt. He looked around for something to mop up the mess. "Paper towels?" He asked Jimmy. Jimmy dug into his pockets again.



It was at the end of a very long, very frustrating first day of work that Dane had finally gotten everything squared away. Or at least, close enough. It was eight o'clock at night, but now he had at least taken care of his basic responsibilities. Except for the ones that he had pushed off until tomorrow.

Jimmy strolled back into the reception area, stretching. He started to remove his white coat and fold it over his arm. He looked through the small office window to see Dane massaging his temples. "Tough first day, huh?"

"I thought there'd be more, you know, medical stuff," Dane said. "But it was phones, forms and filing. The three F's."

"Two F's and a P." Jimmy corrected. He stretched out his back as he talked. "I know it was difficult, and I guess I didn't prepare you enough for the administration side of this job... Sorry, man."

"I'll get the hang of it, Jimmy," Dane said. That wasn't his first instinct, though.

Earlier in the day, he had been seriously thinking about skipping out on his friend, high-tailing it for the airport. But he couldn't do it. He had to pull it together. "It just may take a while," he added, to cover his butt.

"You know..." Jimmy said, suddenly getting an idea in his eyes. "I did get this thing off the internet..." With that, he was off like a shot, heading down the hall. Dane heard some rustling in his office, and a minute later he reappeared with a small box. "Here we go." He tossed it to Dane.

Dane caught the box and flipped it around so he could read it. "Teach Yourself Medical Office Management And Procedure." He read further. "Includes CD-ROM."

"I bought that for help in running the office, but I never got around to using it," Jimmy said. "If you want to check it out, it might help." Dane opened the box and a small manual and CD slipped out.

"Yeah, yeah. This could help a lot." Dane said. He was ready – desperate – for any assistance whatsoever. "Lemme run it now."

"Take it home. You can use the computer back at the house."

"Good deal."



The two took the short drive back to Jimmy's house as the summer sun set for the night. This area of the country was actually very picturesque. Dane enjoyed seeing the last slivers of the sun disappear over the low hillside.

As Jimmy had promised, there was a nice, new computer in his house. In fact, it was in the "den," which was now Dane's temporary room. After downing most of a pizza and some idle channel surfing, Dane sat down to check out the CD for a little while before he went to bed. It had several different sections, and at least on the surface, it looked to be exactly what Dane needed to know for running the office. Although it was almost midnight, he clicked on the opening tutorial to see what it held.



The morning sun was still casting shadows that slowly crept along the wall at Jimmy's office. Dane, however, didn't really notice. He was in the zone.

"Jimmy? Hey Jimmy!?"

"Yeah?" Jimmy replied, as he strolled down the hall.

"Mrs. Shearer is on the phone and wants to talk to you about her dialysis," Dane said. "She's on line two."

"I'm expecting..."

Dane interrupted. "The Willard boy has been bumped back to 9:30, so you have fifteen minutes before Mr. Parker's chest x-ray session. Mrs. Parker is waiting in room 3 for her prescription and she has some questions. And I need your signature on the release forms in your 'in' pile before the post office picks up at two."

"Oh," Jimmy said, taking a moment to digest everything. He blinked a few times and then straightened his tie. "All right then." He walked off.

As Dane flipped through the appointment book, he was astonished at how easy it really was to run the office smoothly. Just yesterday he was lost in a mess of mistakes, but the CD-ROM had been an amazing help. The system for running the office was easy. A child could do it. It was painfully simple to him now. It was just a matter of priorities and time management.

That CD-ROM spelt everything out so clearly. It was the best piece of learning software he had ever used, Dane thought to himself. The retention of the material was incredible. He could remember every detail of the lessons as if they were still playing out in his mind.

Without even thinking about it, he dialed in a phone number. "Mr. Janson?" Dane said into the phone. "This is Dr. Lynch's office. I just wanted to confirm your appointment today at 4:00." Why did people even get paid for this sort of work? It seemed unfair, really. He could sleepwalk through this. "Very good, Mr. Janson. We'll be expecting you," he answered.



A patient then handed in a clipboard and completed form. Dane glanced at the form and noted the insurer, and placed it in the appropriate bin. "All right, Mr. Totale. If you'll follow me, I'll take you an examination room."



Dane got home to Jimmy's and expected to feel exhausted, like he had last night. But even as he tried to convince himself to at least fake being tired, he knew he was a lost cause. Jimmy had gone out to pick up some beer, leaving Dane just idle.

He cleaned up his den-bedroom a little. He organized the refrigerator. He alphabetized Jimmy's DVDs. Finally, he gave up and walked over to the computer.

He had been avoiding it, because he knew how successful that software had been. He knew he'd just get sucked in and run them for the rest of the night. With mixed feelings of caution and eagerness, he booted the computer up. Once he saw the opening screen, all doubts washed away.

If the opening tutorial had been this helpful, he was looking forward to what the next lessons could do for him. When the text started to flow across the screen, Dane leaned forward in his chair and let the experience overwhelm him.



Dane had returned from his lunch break looking a little different from when he left. "New look?" Jimmy asked him as he stepped back behind the office window.

"Just presenting a more professional appearance." Dane said. "I went downtown to the department store." Gone were his jeans and polo shirt, now he had outfitted himself in more traditional attire: white pants, white shoes & socks, and a white v-neck shirt. "It's important for patients to feel they're in a professional, competent medical facility."

"Right. Sure." Jimmy said. "Lemme guess the title of the last CD-ROM chapter: 'Professionalism.'"

"Could be," Dane answered.

"Well, it's probably is the right thing to do. Can't look too professional."

As Jimmy started to retreat to his office, Dane stopped him. "Oh, and I had an idea." He suggested. "We have to keep things here at the office professional. As in, what we call each other."

"Huh?" Jimmy quizzed.

“Just for the office, maybe we should keep it a little more...”

“Professional?” Jimmy finished his sentence.

“Yeah. It couldn’t hurt. For here at the office, you’re Doctor Lynch and I’ll be Nurse Thompsons.”

Jimmy smiled. “Uhhh... I....” He waved his hands in a gesture of amazement. “If you’re okay with that, sure. I guess.”

“All right then, Doctor Lynch,” Dane replied.

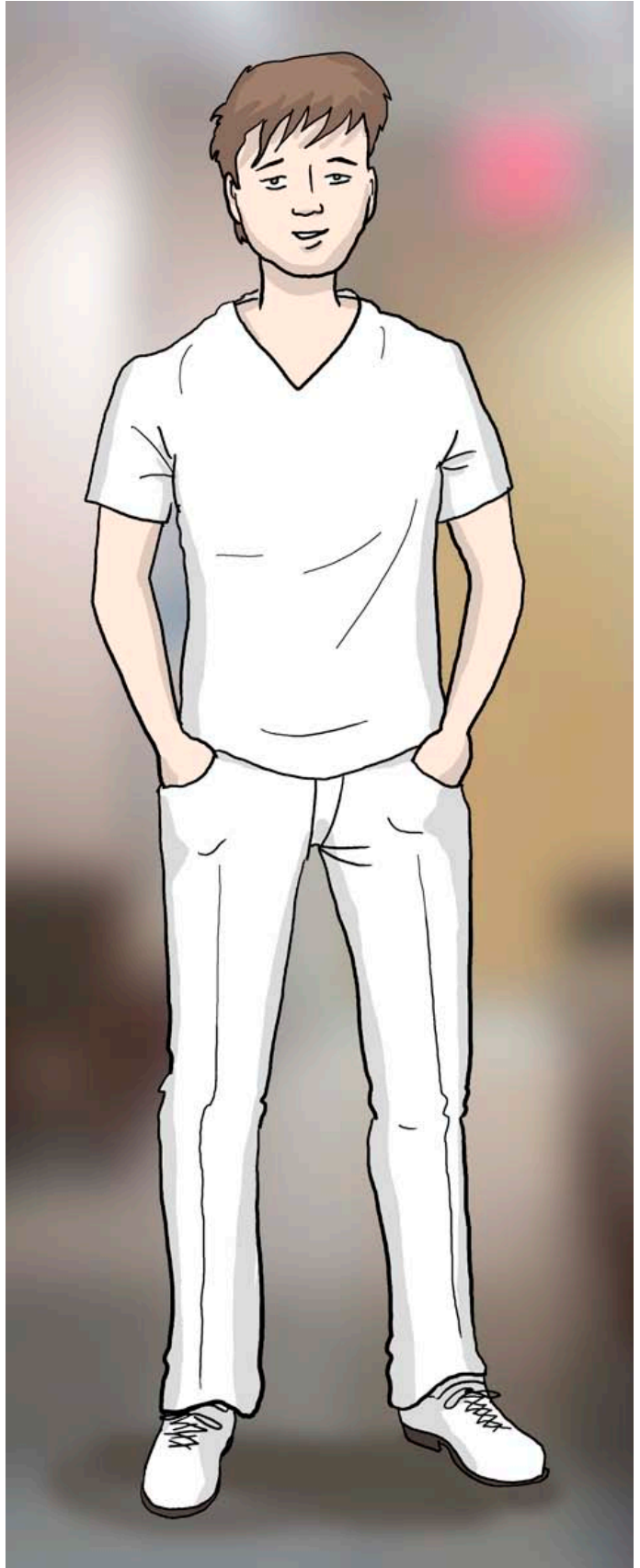
“Send in the next patient, Nurse Tompkins,” Jimmy said, smiling back. He went back to his office and smirked to himself.



After another long, busy day, it was five thirty that evening when the two closed the office. The second the door was locked, Dane let out a loud sigh of relief. He leaned back in his chair and popped open the top button on his pants. “Ohhhh yeeaaaah.” He said.

“Problem?” Jimmy asked, seeing his friend’s face show an expression of bliss.

“Pants.” Dane said,



looking down at the brand-new white slacks he was wearing. "I bought 'em too small. I don't know why. I haven't been a 32 waist since high school."

"Wishful thinking."

"Yeah." He patted his belly. "You know, I really should lose some weight. It's beginning to pile up on me."

"Well, if you're serious, I'm sure I've got something to help." Jimmy rubbed his chin in thought. "I got some Orlistat and some Adipex... And I got this new thing, Melanotan. A clinical trial thing."

"Gimme the trial stuff. I always like being ahead of the curve." Jimmy fetched the box from another room and tossed it to Dane who promptly downed two pills with a swig of water. "They seem safe enough."

"I trust you," Dane explained.

"There may be a slight chance of explosive diarrhea and advanced monsterism," Jimmy joked.

"I'll let you know if it happens," Dane replied.

Jimmy snickered and wandered over to the computer to the side of Dane's desk. He looked at the page up on the screen. "Web surfing on company time?" Jimmy asked Dane.

"Just looking for porn." Dane said, sarcastically. "Seriously. It's a nursing uniform site. I need to get some new stuff for around here. New pants, at least. Plus these shoes are killing me anyway." He clicked on a button. "You need any stethoscopes, otoscopes, sphygmomanometers or lab coats while I'm ordering?"

"No, that's okay. I've got plenty. I buy my sphygmomanometers in bulk."



That night, Dane skipped the pizza, trying to at least believe the diet pills were working. He hopped right on the computer, ready to get into the next tutorial. As usual, the text on the screen drew him in and shut out the world. The title for this session was called "The Professional Look." After a few minutes, he was in a trance.



It was later that week when the package from the nursing uniform suppliers' arrived. Work came to a halt as Dane attacked the big box and tore it open. Fortunately, there were no patients in the office at that moment.

Dane immediately grabbed some items and ran off, to get out of the increasingly uncomfortable clothes he had been wearing all week. He took over an

exam room for himself as he changed. Once he was satisfied, he paraded himself in front of Jimmy, making a display of his new outfit.

“Hey, Doc. Pretty snazzy, huh?” Dane said, posing for Jimmy.

“Are you wearing *mules*?” Jimmy asked his friend.

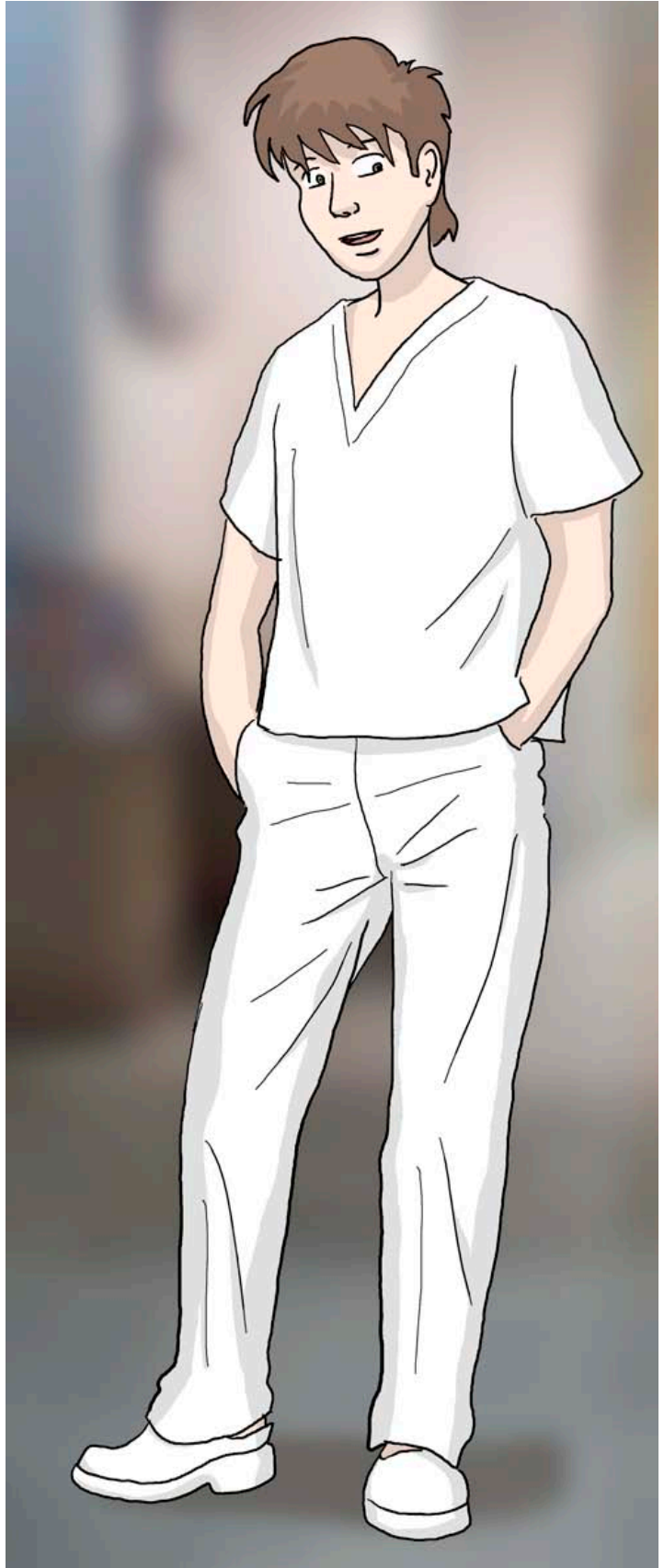
“Clogs,” Dane corrected. “Unisex Nursing Clogs. And they’re very comfortable, thank you for asking.”

“I suppose.” He took a closer look at the slightly strained expression on Dane’s face. “You know, you’re turning blue,” he observed.

“Just a little.” Dane popped the button on his new pants. “Wheeeew!” He let out the air he had been sucking in.

“Did you order 32 waist again?” Jimmy asked.

Dane looked at him incredulously. “No. I’m not an idiot.” He flipped open his fly to check the label. “28,” he said. Rolling his eyes and sighing, he glanced at Jimmy to see if he was amused at his mistake. He was. He then took a big suck of air and buttoned them back up and headed to



his desk, as if nothing happened. He organized some paper on his desk and tried to look busy, the suggestion being that Dane should leave him alone.

As soon as he did, Dane grunted. "Where did I put the pills?" he said. He then heard Jimmy snicker from down the hallway.



"What's tonight's lesson?" Jimmy asked as he entered his friend's bed room, leaving a glass of soda on the desk for him. He noticed that Dane was already dressed for bed, in his sweat shorts and frayed t-shirt. Dane was transfixed in front of the computer, his eyes wide open and his mouth slightly agape.

Dane shook his head abruptly as if he has dozed off. "Huh?" He looked over his shoulder at Jimmy. "Oh. The uh... Tutorial. Yeah. It's titled Work Delegation and Rules of Authority." He examined the drink Jimmy had just given him. "Is this diet?" He asked.

"Yeah. Oh, hey. I just got some lasagna delivered. Want any?"

"No thanks, I'll pass. The diet is starting to pay off finally. I don't want to ruin it now." He sipped the drink.

"Your choice," Dane said. "Just don't smell it. You'll be in trouble."

Curiosity got the better of Dane. "Maybe I should just take a look at it," he said, getting up out of his chair. Immediately, he started to lose his balance.

"You okay there, Dane?" Jimmy asked.

"Yeah... I'm just..." He then cringed in pain. "Oh, man..." He said faintly, just before he collapsed on the floor.

"Dane! You okay?" Jimmy yelled. "*Dane! Can you hear me?*"

Blackness took over Dane's world.



He awoke in a familiar place, the largest of the three examination rooms back at Jimmy's office. He felt quite out of sorts.

"Bud, you there?" Jimmy's voice asked. His blurry grinning visage then came into Dane's view.

Dane croaked out some words. "Yeeah... What..."

Answering the obvious questions, Jimmy interrupted him. "You collapsed at home, now you're in my office. How are you feeling?"

"A little out of it." Dane massaged his temples. "What happened?"

J A M E S J C R A F T

***MY BOSS,
THE BIMBO***

**“If I Were a Betting (Wo)Man” by James J. Craft
Illustrations by blackshirtboy
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2010 eBook Edition

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Illustrations by blackshirtboy

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IF I WERE A BETTING (WO)MAN

“You women have it so easy!” Lucas blurted out.

The young CEO had overheard a group of secretaries complaining about having to wax their legs every so often, and how the high heeled shoes that the company insisted that they wear were killing their feet. As was typical for Lucas, he felt the need to jump into the conversation without being invited.

“What was that, Mr. Johnson?” asked Irene, his new executive assistant, a taunting expression on her face.

Irene had only been with the firm a few years, but had quickly shown her potential and rose through the secretarial pool to become the youngest executive assistant to the youngest CEO in the company’s history.

Irene and Lucas were both highly competitive, and worked very well together. Their demeanor was far more casual than was normally allowed in such a top ranking position.

They were constantly challenging each other with bets and dares, each trying to up the ante on the other. The shareholders had already realized a sharp increase in the performance under Lucas’ guidance, but with Irene as his assistant, things had really taken off.

She had bet him a hundred bucks that he couldn’t get an instant productivity boost of ten percent. He did. Then she bet him double or nothing he couldn’t get another five-point boost...he did. Then she bet him double or nothing again he couldn’t get another five points....and he did.

It was this kind of back-and-forth banter and betting that make them such a great pair. Irene had, at one point, developed quite a crush on her boss, and made advances towards him to take their relationship ‘to the next level.’ Lucas, however, was far too focused on his career to have a relationship, and didn’t candy-coat this to Irene in any way. He hadn’t had a girlfriend since high school, and because of his driven nature... Had not yet ‘sealed the deal’ with a girl.

He felt that he was being very honest with Irene, but she was crushed. She took his rejection to heart, especially since he was a virgin. She knew that she was a pretty girl, with long lean legs and long brown hair (though it was usually up in a bun)and that the two of them would have made a good pair. Lucas was no slouch in the looks department either, though not in a particularly macho way. He had a slight build and soft features, and there was ‘something about him’ that she found particularly attractive – though she couldn’t put her finger on exactly what.

Not that it mattered now. Since he had flat out told her that he wasn't interested, she began to think of a way to either change his mind – or teach him a lesson. Either, by her account, would do.

Back at the office, the other women standing around Irene stood in shocked silence at the way she spoke to her boss. None of them would have ever *dared* speak to the CEO that way, but clearly, Irene wasn't afraid.

"You think that we've got it so easy?" she quizzed her superior.

Lucas stopped and chuckled. "Well, compared to what I have to go through in a day? Yes. All you have to worry about is what shoes to wear Ms. Davies" he taunted.

"Really?" she snorted, "is that what you think?"

Lucas' competitive energy was starting to seep out, "Yeah? Prove me wrong."

The other women gasped. Surely, Irene was going to be fired for insubordination.

"Well if it's so easy then why don't *you* wear shoes like mine Mr. Johnson?" Irene challenged, pointing down at her three inch pointy toed pumps.

Lucas chortled at the suggestion, "Well Ms. Davies," he began, "I don't wear shoes like yours because I'm a guy. Men wear shoes like these..." he lifted his pant leg and showed off his four-hundred dollar Italian leather shoes.

"So does that mean that you *can't* wear shoes like these or that you *won't* wear shoes like these?" Irene fired back.

The secretaries heads were turning from side to side listening intently to the two of them debating.

"No Ms Davies..." he returned, "I *can* wear shoes like those if I so choose... In fact, I can wear anything I want to... I simply *choose* to wear these."

Irene scoffed, "Pssssh! I'm not so sure Mr. Johnson... I don't think you'd last a day in these."

Lucas' eyes got wide, "A day?" he sneered, "I could do a week!"

Irene grinned. "Hundred bucks says you can't!"

"Huh!" Lucas grunted, "A hundred? That's it? Why not make it more interesting Irene... Let's bet... A hundred... Thousand?"

Irene just blinked. *Was he nuts?* She paused for a moment as she did the math in her head... Her ex-husband had paid her out a handsome settlement in her divorce... Plus there was the property her father left in Phoenix. She looked at Lucas and knew he was waiting for her to say that she couldn't afford it.

She wasn't going to give him the satisfaction. She thrust out her hand and shook Lucas' with a firm grip, "Deal!"

Looking surprised that she had agreed to the hefty price tag... Lucas regained his composure as he turned and walked back to his office. As he sat down at his desk, Lucas realized that he was going to need to get some practice in over the weekend so he didn't break his ankle. He couldn't believe that she had the balls to agree, and with his little gambling debt still outstanding from a few years ago... Coming up with a hundred grand would be painful if he lost – so he committed himself to winning.

He thought briefly that he might financially ruin his Executive Assistant, but putting her in her place would be well worth it. She really had it coming, he convinced himself.



Later that afternoon, Lucas set out to put his plan into action. He would have to start by finding a place to purchase the shoes he'd need to wear to beat Irene at her game. Luckily, his phone had a 'find-a-shoe-store' app, which initially hadn't seemed like a practical application for a phone to have, but after it led him to a local high-end fashion boutique downtown, his opinion was changed.

The store was massive, and stocked with the most expensive designer brands. Lucas went right to the counter and began to explain his situation to the attractive young lady standing there.

"I need to win this bet," he began, "in a *big* way."

"Bet, Sir?" the clerk looked confused.

"Yes," Lucas looked annoyed, as if not able to understand why she didn't already know what he needed, "I bet my secretary that I could wear women's shoes for a week... And I really need to win... So can you help me?" He leaned forward and handed the girl his platinum credit card.

The clerk smiled widely as she took the card from Lucas' hand, "I know *exactly* what you're looking for..."

Over the next hour, Lucas tried on what seemed like a hundred pairs of shoes in a variety of styles and colors before settling on what the young store employee called 'the perfect pair.' Four-hundred dollars later, he was on his way. A further forty-eight grueling hours of practice back at his condo was spent training himself to walk naturally in his new purchases over the weekend.

But Irene's facial expression – of sheer shock and surprise – made it all worthwhile the following Monday when he came into the office.

Dressed in his typical expensive designer suit, Lucas sashayed with a feminine gait that (after two solid days of practice) was very natural and fluid, in his black suede platform sandals with ankle straps and four-inched heels.



“My goodness, Mr. Johnson,” Irene bemused. Her original shock had subsided into a glowing pride at having made her boss not only wear high heeled shoes, but to go out of his way to wear very expensive... And very sexy ones.

Lucas spun around confidently to model his footwear for his executive assistant, “You like?” he chuckled.

“I love!” she exclaimed, “It’s just too bad that you wasted all that money for a bet you’re going to lose.”

“Ha!” he chortled, “There’s no *way* I’m losing anything Ms. Davies. I look forward to taking your money on Friday afternoon.”

And take it, he would. For once Lucas Johnson had set his mind to winning, nothing would stand in his way. Not the looks and stares, not the outright laughter from bystanders, not even the painful blisters he endured daily.

He would not, *could not*, lose.



Lucas easily endured the week of wearing those silly heeled shoes. But with a Board of Directors meeting on Friday he decided to bring his regular Italian loafers in a small bag. He reasoned that wearing his men’s shoes for an hour for the sake of the meeting was understandable... And he could get away with it, since he’d be seated at the table before Irene could see him.

Moments before the meeting, he slipped out of the heels and into his loafers, and headed to the conference room. The Chairman of the Board, Mister Harold Coons, greeted him in the doorway.

“Lucas” the old man beamed, “How’s my young protégé doing today? The stock numbers are good and the reports I’ve seen all indicate we’re going to have a good fourth quarter.”

“Yes,” Lucas began, “and just wait until we finish the write-offs associated with the merger in Singapore. That will really...” He paused as he saw Irene walking towards them from the corner of his eye. “That will really...um...why don’t I show you in here.” He gestured for the Board Chair to enter the conference room and he quickly hustled in behind him.

“My, my,” Mr. Coons remarked. “This report must really be something. That’s why I like you so much Lucas, you’re always moving. You’re a go-getter, just like I was when I was your age...”

Lucas made it through the shareholders meeting – undetected by Irene – and was changing back into the heels, for what he figured was the last time, when Irene came into his office with an ‘gotcha’ smile.

“Nice shoes, Luke,” she began, knowing how he hated it when she addressed him so informally. “You almost made it through the week,” she stopped before his desk and leaned forward tauntingly. “But *almost* isn’t really good enough now is it?”

Lucas was turning red. *How did she know?* he thought to himself. “What are you talking about?” Lucas said, playing dumb. He pulled up his pant-leg to show off his platform heels.

“Nice try buddy,” she scowled him, “You think I didn’t notice? You and Harold Coons are the exact same height – but in heels, you should have been towering over him when you two were standing in the doorway earlier. But you weren’t...now were you?”

Lucas looked dumbfounded.

“I saw you scurry into the board room when you saw me coming... And I saw how you kept your feet hidden every time I came around to serve you guys water and coffee during the meeting” She grinned at him wickedly, “So I guess...that means I win, now doesn’t it?”

“But...” Lucas whined, “I... You can’t expect me to wear these in front of the Board of Directors, Irene!” he cried.

“What I expect Luke,” she scowled, “is that you pay up before the end of the day.” She held up the pair of loafers that Lucas had foolishly left at the side of his desk.

Dammit! He cursed to himself. How had he allowed himself to lose? How was he going to come up with the hundred-grand that he owed her? How was this going to impact their boss-employee relationship?



Later that day, a very humble looking Lucas Johnson handed his secretary a check for one hundred thousand dollars. He had shuffled some bank accounts around, delayed some repayment terms on his outstanding debt, and had the bank draft the check.

Without saying a word, he handed it to her.

“I just can’t help but wonder if maybe you still don’t fully appreciate everything that us women do to look nice for you men,” Irene said.

Lucas laughed, “Oh come on... You just got me for a hundred large. But I almost did make it Irene, if it wasn’t for that meeting...” He paused. “Wearing heels really isn’t that hard.” He spun his legs out to the side of his desk to display his sexy heels to Irene, “in fact I kind of like them”

Now it was her turn to laugh, “You really haven’t got a clue, have you?”

Lucas’ face lit up, he knew he was about to be challenged again, though a little tiny voice in side of him was saying not to fall for it. It had been *very* hard to spend a week in high heels, and his pride might not be worth the challenge... But then again...

“I’ve got a list as long as your arm of difficult things that *us* girls do for *you* guys,” she retorted, “and I’d be happy to share it with you at *any* time.”

“Ha!” his foolish pride spoke before his sensibility had the time to stop it, “I can do anything on that list, sister!”

“*Anything?*”

“Any-thing” he proclaimed.

Irene smiled, she knew she had him in a place he couldn’t get out of, “Double or nothing, you can’t spend *another* week in those heels... *And* wear a women’s suit.”

Without even thinking his mouth opened and the following words came out, “That’s it?” he chuckled with plenty of bravado. “Done!”

“And that will have to include women’s underwear too Lucas” she smiled.

His brain, now fully aware that it had inadvertently committed him to another torturous week in heels, and that it might cost him two-hundred-thousand dollars this time, decided to let foolish pride take over again. “Done, and done.”



The following Monday, Lucas stopped to take a deep breath before he got out of his car.

He had spent the weekend dressing and undressing in the many different outfits he had purchased Friday night. He had the help of his new friends at the fashion boutique where he had gotten his shoes the week before. Three hours and well over two thousand dollars later, he had an outfit for every day of the week – plus new shoes to match. Afterwards, he had spent several hours walking and sitting and maneuvering in each of them.

Practice makes perfect, he said to himself. Lucas was going to leave nothing to chance. He wasn’t just going to *win*, he was going to win *big*.

He opened his car door, took another big breath and headed for his office. Of course, along the way, he drew many an interested look. Most people looked

confused. Others looked impressed, others still gave an expression of downright disgust.

Oh, well. Lucas didn't care. He was in it to win it. Besides, he was the CEO. Who was going to question him?

Grinning confidently to himself, Lucas continued on his way. Upon entering his office, he soaked up the reactions as he strutted across the floor in his new



ramped wedge-heeled sandals. He knew everyone was whispering to each other, but it didn't matter to him, all that mattered was winning the bet.

Irene's reaction was predictably mixed. Both shock and pride were mixed on her face as Lucas approached her desk.

"Well?" he said leaning against her desk in a mockingly feminine pose. "Wad-daya think?" he said with a sultry feminine voice.

"My God, Lucas," Irene said worriedly, "I honestly never thought that you'd do it... But here you are."

Lucas smiled, relishing in her veiled admittance that he had won the bet, "Yep," he said nonchalantly, "like I said before... Is *that* the hardest thing you guys have to do?"

Irene narrowed her eyes, "This is only your first day Lucas... I don't think you'll be singing the same tune this Friday after doing this for a week."

"Ha!" Lucas blurted out, "Piece of cake."

"We'll see," she muttered. Then she began to smile, "I wonder what *he* thinks of your new outfit?" She motioned behind Lucas.

Lucas turned around to see the Chairman of the Board of Directors, standing behind him, looking very unhappy.

"What is the meaning of... *This?*" The old man pointed at Lucas' outfit.

"Mr. Coons," Lucas tried not to look rattled by the Chairman, "it's lovely to see you. How are the grandkids?"

Mr. Coons looked increasingly unimpressed, "I want an explanation, young man. Surely this isn't the kind of behavior that one expects to see in a Chief Executive Officer."

"Oh *this*, Sir?" he pointed at his loose fitting, beige colored ladies dress slacks, cut to accentuate his hips and ass, worn with a loose sleeved body hugging blouse that accentuated his cinched waist and midsection. A form fitting, well-tailored suit jacket, also in sandy beige, finished off his new look.

The unhappy Chairman nodded.

"It's part of a new exercise we're engaging in to improve the morale around the office," he lied, "It's really working quite well Sir. You should consider giving it a try."

The old man scoffed, "Hmph, back in my day we didn't need to have executives dressed in ladies shoes to make everyone feel all touchy-feely. I hope you know what you're doing..." With that, the board chair turned and walked away.

Lucas sighed and looked down, and then saw Irene in the corner of his eye. “Four-more-days to go,” she mouthed the words silently to him then gave him a mocking ‘thumbs-up.’

I need to beat her. He said to himself.



By the weeks’ end Lucas had kept up his end of the bargain by wearing different variations of his Monday pant-suit each day. Each day he had seemed to be more and more at ease in his ramped shoes and snug-fitting attire. By Friday, he was even *more* smug about how easy it was to be a girl in the office.

Irene was getting quite worried that he might actually *win*, and decided to enlist the help of one of her fellow coworkers to make sure that Lucas would lose the bet.

The young secretary, terrified of getting fired, walked directly into Lucas’ path, coffee cup in hand, and spilled the warm brown liquid all over the front of his snug fitting jacket and loose flowing pants, then apologized profusely.

Not wanting to be seen as an ogre, Lucas told the girl not to worry, then headed to his office. He always kept an pair of pants in his closet for this exact reason.

Later that day, Irene tried to hide her smile as she approached his desk. “Well, Lucas I have to admit... You *almost* pulled it off again”

Lucas looked up from his desk, “*Almost?*”

“Well, I see you’ve had to change into your backup suit, – but it’s clearly not designed for a lady, Luke. So I guess that means you lose.”

Lucas looked down at his feminine pink blouse and manly black dress pants, than back at his executive assistant with an angry glare. “Wait a goddamned minute!” Lucas yelled, “You mean to tell me that because some stupid air-brained secretary spilled her drink on me, I’m going to lose?” he was getting visibly angrier. “What did you expect? Did you think I’d just wear those dirty, wet clothes all day?”

“No,” Irene answered calmly, “but you *said* you could do anything that we girls do.” She paused and smiled, “and we girls would have packed an extra outfit just in case... And *you* failed to do that.”

Lucas’ jaw dropped. He contemplated firing her on the spot, but frankly, finding an extra two hundred thou would be easier than the wrongful dismissal suit that she would file afterwards.

“Fine!” he scowled, then left the office – *his* office.



A very cheerful Irene happily accepted her check later that afternoon. “You know, Luke,” she began, “I really think I should give you a chance to redeem yourself. I know that losing isn’t easy for you... *But* I just don’t know if you could spend another week dressed like that.”

Lucas’ face remained stoic, as if waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Irene continued, “Of course in order to win this time...you’d have to style your hair, accessorize *and* get a wax job too.”

Lucas’ eyes grew larger. Irene figured that she had finally bested him – until he opened his mouth and said, “What do you mean by accessorize?”

Irene tried to cover up her dropping jaw, “Um... Well... That means that you’d have to wear a necklace and bracelets...” she paused to judge his reaction. He didn’t have one, so she continued, “And earrings.”

He opened his mouth as if he was about to protest, but quickly knew that Irene wouldn’t let him live it down. He could wear earrings, the clip one kind.

“Clip on earrings, right?”

Irene’s face became super-serious. “Oh no, Lucas, not clip-ons. Real girls don’t wear clip-ons,” she knew that she was painting him into a corner. “You’ll have

to get them pierced like the rest of us do, and in fact, a girl your age would likely have a little jeweled nose stud too. So you'll have to get that done as well."

"A nose stud?"

Lucas' eyes were wide and his brow furrowed. He had a feeling that he was being taken for a ride, but what could he do? A bet was a bet, and he wasn't about to back down. If he needed a couple of piercings for a week to win, then he would do it. Besides, they would eventually grow back in, and no-one would be the wiser.

He smiled. "And if I win?"

Irene coughed in disbelief. Had he just agreed to have his hair styled, legs waxed and ears and nose pierced? She had him.

"If you win, I'll give you your money back," she regained her composure, "And if you loose? I want another hundred-grand."

She could tell that he was pondering her offer.

"Well? Should I call my salon and make the arrangements for later today?"

"Yes," Lucas nodded, trying to hide his nerves under a blanket of faux confidence. "Yes you should."



Later that afternoon, Irene knocked on Lucas' door. "You'll need to slip out early if you want to make our appointment," she said, "It was the only time slot I could get that was long enough for everything that we need to get done." Her tone of voice changed to a taunt, "But if you need to stay to work, I understand. We can call the whole thing off. You're a busy CEO... I get that."

Lucas stood up and grabbed his jacket, "Oh no. I'm going. You're not getting off that easy. I'll come back tomorrow and finish up what I need to finish up."

"On a Saturday, Mr. Johnson?" Irene said in disbelief, he had often bragged about never-ever working on weekends, but had often asked his secretarial staff to.

"Well Irene, it's like I always say," he headed for his office door, "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do."

With that, the two of them took Irene's compact car to the salon across the downtown. It wasn't particularly busy that afternoon, which allowed Lucas to be somewhat pampered by the staff.

They frosted his short-ish hair with light, light blonde and trimmed and styled it into a spikey, sassy do, something that a young secretary would sport, then they waxed his legs, arms, chest, bikini line and eyebrows. Lucas wasn't sure why he had to endure the pain of the last treatment, but was told that it was part of the total package that *all* women got.

Lastly, his ears were double pierced and filled with silver studs, and a tiny silver stud placed in his newly pierced right nostril.

His weekend would be spent learning to care for his hair and piercings, so that when he came to work that next day in one of his five ladies' pant-suits, his hair and everything else was looking its feminine best.



Lucas entered the office to be immediately ogled by the secretaries who had gathered to see his new hairstyle and cute piercings. They whispered and gossiped for days, but by the time that Friday had rolled around again, the novelty of Lucas' look had worn off with most of them.

Some however, like Courtney, were still enthralled by the idea of the company's CEO being feminized willingly as he was being. She a young attractive secretary that Lucas had hired recently – more for her looks than anything else, though she was *mildly* competent.

“Bet you can't do another week in full makeup” she said as Lucas passed her and Irene by later Friday afternoon.

“Huh?” Lucas glared at her. “What did you say Ms. Frobisher?”

Courtney's face turned bright red, as she realized that she might have overstepped a boundary or two.

“Oh, just relax Lucas,” Irene scolded him, “she's just a little anxious to see you up the ante again. No harm done.”

“Listen,” he began, “I've been playing along with this little game for three weeks now, but I'm certain that the end is drawing near. You aren't going to con me into playing along with you any longer. A deal is a deal, Ms. Davies, and our deal is done. I believe you owe me....”

Irene chuckled, “*I owe you?*”

Lucas chortled, “Well...yes. I mean... Look at me. I got my body waxed, my ears pierced and my hair done... And I've been wearing these ridiculous brace-lets all week.”

“Well I guess you’re right Lucas. It was fun while it lasted – and you certainly rose to the occasion. I’ve never seen a man so anxious to prove us women wrong.” She removed her purse and began searching for money, “Just one question Luke...” she said without looking up from her purse, “Where’s the stud in your nose?”

Lucas’ hand rose up to touch the piercing in his nostril... The currently *vacant* piercing. He gasped as he realized that he’d forgotten to wear it that day – in fact, he had forgotten to wear it for the last *two* days.

“Just how much makeup are we talking about?”

Irene turned to Courtney as if to say, *see, I told you so.*



The following Monday, Lucas Johnson headed into the office as he had done a thousand times before. However, this time his hair was styled in a feminine do and he was wearing a brand new feminine outfit. He also had new silver hoop earrings dangled from each lobe, something that Lucas was still learning to get used to. Even though he was wearing them every day, they still felt a little alien to him. About as alien as the taste of his new red lipstick felt, or as much as the weight of mascara on his eyelashes or powder gray eye shadow felt. They all served as a constant reminder to him that he was ‘going for broke’ on this little competition that Irene and he were having.

Maybe he should bet her to grow a beard.

It had taken much longer to apply his own makeup that morning than the woman at the salon had taken. He had spent the enter weekend practicing, applying foundation, blush, lip color and then layers of eye-makeup to his face. His newly lengthened and red-polished nails made it all-the-more difficult – but he wasn’t going to complain.

He *had* to win, especially now, after going *this* far. He would never be able to effectively manage his secretarial staff if he didn’t prove the point that he could handle whatever they could, in whatever way.

And so he did just that.

“Wow!” Irene grinned, “Look at *you.*”

Lucas blushed under his makeup, feeling slightly demeaned.

“Don’t look down honey,” she continued, “you look terrific. You should be proud.”

J O E S I X P A C K

***HE'S THE
GIRL THEY
WANT***

**“Rallies” by Joe Six-Pack
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2010 Paperback Edition

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RALLIES'

Spencer Bateman stood next to his assigned locker, staring at the cheerleader skirt and top he had in his hands, and sighed. How in the world had he let himself get talked into this?

No, he knew how it happened. He was here willingly and even enthusiastically. He just wished he didn't have to do this dumb thing.

Six months out of college, Spencer was about to get his first job. Not just any job, either. He was going to be the director of logistics for Rallies' Family-Style Grill, a chain of restaurants with 92 locations nationwide and opening 20 more in the new year. It was just what he hoped for. An executive position with a growing organization that had nothing but upside.

Most of the students he had graduated with were still scrounging for jobs. If you could call what they were getting 'jobs.' From how they described them, they were just little more than flipping burgers and waiting on tables. So much for the \$250,000 they spent for their MBA's.

But Spencer was in luck. He, too, was finding nothing out there for his talents until he tripped across a craigslist posting for interviews. Little information was given, but there didn't need to be much to get him to show up in these tough times. An ad that merely read "jobs" would have done the trick.

In a small meeting room at a hotel, he and about fifty others gathered. Half were dismissed on sight, before the interviews even began. When Spencer's name was called, he was led to a small room where they spoke to him just for a few minutes – and offered him a position. They barely even looked at his resume.

After a quick physical and some details about his family and friends – for health insurance and emergency contact purposes, they said – he signed the stacks and stacks of forms necessary, and Spencer had his first job.

Well, almost. It was *virtually* a done deal. All he had to do was make it through the orientation period, and he was hired on with all the benefits and perks of an executive.

Since logistics was really his true interest in the job, he didn't like having an orientation period. Essentially, it was a "probation" like many job have, You work your butt off for 90 day and only then did they decide if they like you or not. Only then did they formally give you the job and the benefits.

Orientation seemed a waste of time. He didn't need any training. It really didn't matter to him if the company sold grilled food or made bicycle parts. Logistics was logistics.

Spencer soon learned what the company meant by 'orientation.' It meant two months at the company's training facilities in Missouri, at a place called "Ral-

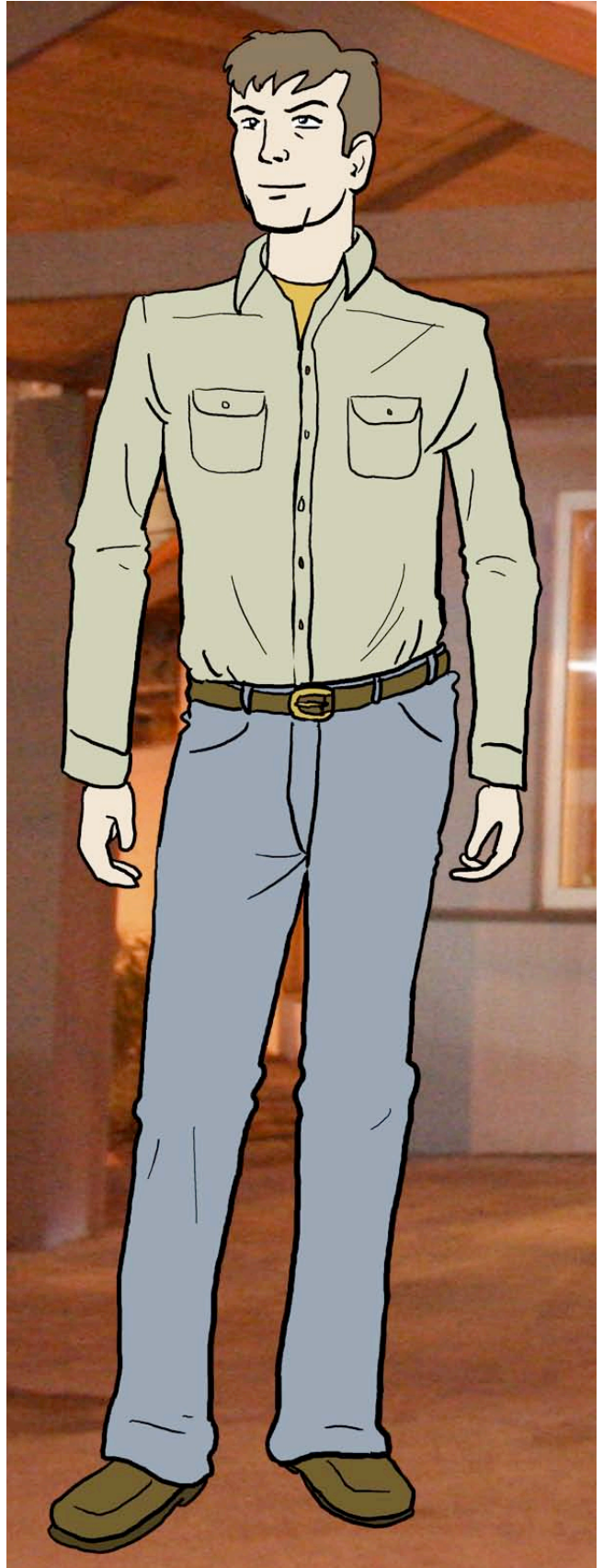
lies' University," where all the restaurant management trainees were sent.

That was one of the strange little requirements of this job. Every company has them, Spencer reasoned, so he wasn't about to complain. The odd part of this particular job was that at Rallies', the founder and Chairman of the company insisted that all new executive hires spend time working in a restaurant for the sake of experience.

Spencer had no desire to work in a restaurant. After all, he didn't care about the worker grunts. He had half a mind to walk away from the whole thing. Six weeks bus-ing tables? No thank you. So, he considered himself fortunate that he was given an option. They called it the "fast track" option, for "featuring" executives. On this fast track, he could spend his orientation time at the demonstration restaurant at Rallies' University rather than an actual, functioning restaurant.

So here he was, in the demo restaurant, ready to go through a simulated day as a server. That's why he had the cheerleading uniform.

For Rallies' wasn't just a *regular* restaurant – they had a hook. Like a lot of places, they called themselves



"Family Style," but really, Rallies' was a sports bar. They had walls made of fifty-inch TVs tuned to sports channels, and sold mostly wings, steaks, burgers and beer. Hidden in the menu were a few token salads for the wives and macaroni and cheese for the kids.

So what was Rallies' big hook? They had cheerleaders for waitresses.

Hooters had paved the way for them, and Rallies' followed the same template. They hired young women as wait staff, dressed them up in shamelessly immodest cheerleader's outfits and dubbed them 'Rally Girls.'

Unsurprisingly, the idea was a smash hit. It was as sexy as Hooters, and had sports on all the TVs. Plus, as previously noted, beer.

Much to his dismay, the demonstration restaurant didn't need table bussers. They didn't need dishwashers. They didn't need food prep. They needed servers.

That now accounted for Spencer holding the cheerleading outfit, which he was about to put on. It was a part of getting the job. He had to spend the next several weeks serving up food, waiting tables.

Of course, he wasn't required to strip down and dress up in the cheerleader outfit – no. Spencer wasn't going to be asked to do something that demeaning. He was just going to wear jeans and a T-shirt. The outfit he had been given was just a token representation of the real Rally Girl uniform. It resembled a large barbecue apron, with the cheerleading uniform printed on it, and it was designed for just this purpose: training men in a female's job. He was told that most of the male executives had gone through the same thing. To that end, it also had the word "trainee" printed on it in large letters.

He reported to the floor of the demonstration restaurant, his sneakers squeaking on the shiny clean floor, and met up with the other three "trainees" who were in much the same situation. These men, also being dressed in jeans, shirt and pastiche cheerleader outfit, were just as sheepish and reserved as Spencer was feeling.

A bubbly and energetic young woman sprang into the room, practically bouncing on her feet. She was dressed in the Rallies' cheerleader uniform, which was essentially a standard-issue high school cheerleading outfit, but cut a little differently to accentuate a woman's figure. "Hey, guys! My name is Amber and I'll be your squad captain! Thanks for coming and welcome to Rallies'!" Like any trainer, the woman was unnecessarily enthusiastic, but that was her job. "Okay! Great! Let's go over what's going to happen. First, I'm going to have everyone pair up with one of our visiting Rally Girls, and she'll be your personal trainer for the next several weeks! Sound good? Great!"

Dave, a dark-haired guy was partnered with Kayla, a sultry brunette. Niles, a blonde short guy was paired with Kendra, a redhead with a permanent smirk on her lips. Rodney, a shorter man, was matched with Eve, a sassy little

auburn-haired girl with arresting eyes. In fact, as Spencer examined Dave, Niles and Rodney, he noted that they were all kinda short, like he was. Probably none of them were over five-foot nine inches, or over 150.

While he contemplated this interesting bit of trivia, he was introduced to Jami Lynn, his “mentor” for the length of the orientation. She was a tall and confident blonde with hair tumbling down to the small of her back. She smiled sweetly and held Spencer’s hand as the trainer, or squad captain, continued on with her prepared material.

It was only natural that Spencer’s attention was distracted by the lovely young women he was now surrounded with. After all, they were dressed in cheerleading outfits that did a splendid job of showcasing their generously sized breasts and long, lean legs. He couldn’t remember being surrounded by so many beautiful girls.

“Okay! Let’s get started!” the trainer said.

“What?” Spencer replied, realizing he had zoned out. “What are we doing?”

Jami Lynn put a helpful hand behind Spencer’s back



and led him to the kitchen. "Weren't you paying attention?"

"Sure," Spencer replied. "But recap it for me, will you?"

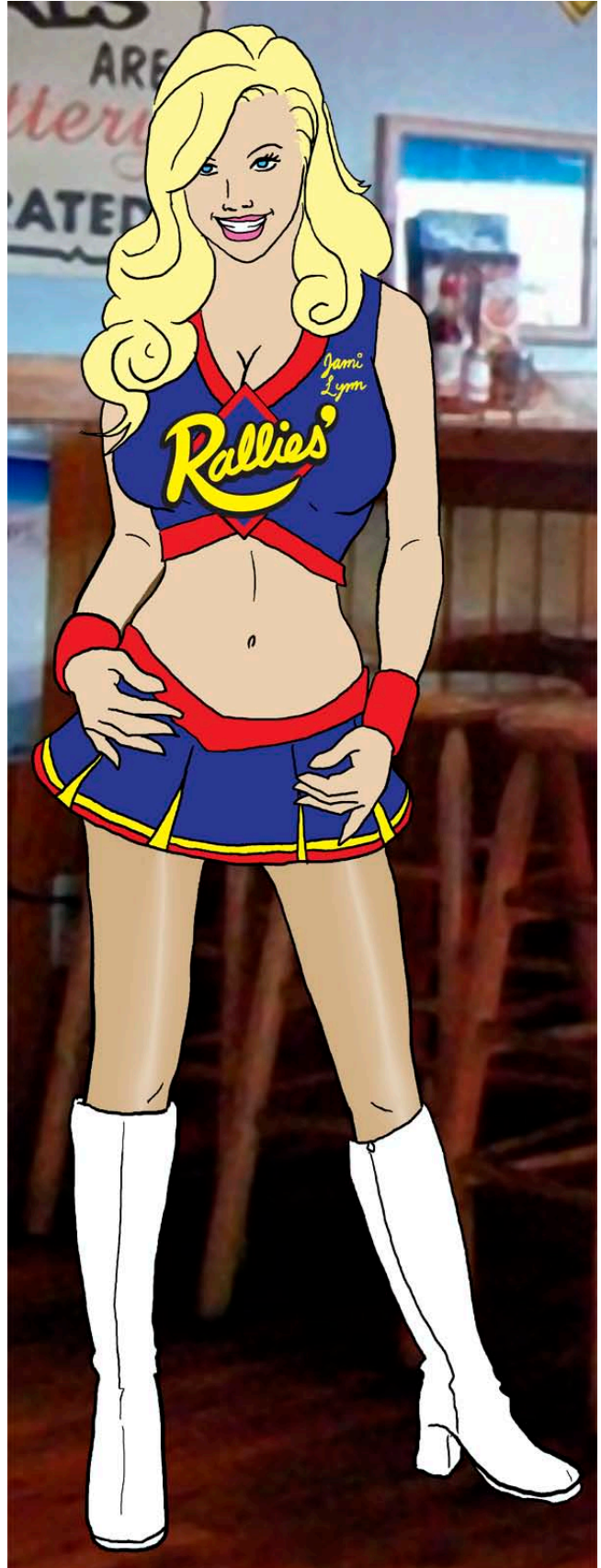
Jami Lynn giggled, a delightful sound that made Spencer's heart flutter for just a moment. "We're assigned to tables eight through sixteen for the next three hours."

"Wha?" Spencer said, twisting his head around quickly to see what table she was talking about. "Don't panic. I'll be leading you through the whole day." She poked Spencer's nose playfully. "This is going to be fun!"



For the next three hours, a rotation of fake customers came in through the place, some as many as four times each. They adopted different personalities and made orders that would always seem to require a little extra effort. They were probably coached to be that way. One would want things cooked "medium style" or wonder why the wings cost so much. Some would order things not on the menu or make a special request that was near impossible to execute.

Even though the restaurant



was set up exclusively for training, they also trained their cooks there, and served real food. Food that was often subject to the sort of mistakes that chefs in training would make. There were a lot of complaints and send-backs to the kitchen to cope with.

It wasn't too difficult, as waiting tables is fairly straightforward, and once Spencer got an idea of the rhythm and pace of the job, it only taxed him in the physical sense, not the mental. That didn't mean that the three hours felt like a long, long time. After a thirty minute lunch break, they did it again.

Jami Lynn was Spencer's feminine shadow for those shifts, standing just behind him, whispering the things to say and the things to do in his ear. Her warm breath in his ear was practically melting him whenever she spoke. He even started to make little intentional mistakes knowing Jami Lynn would step in and assist, brushing herself close and touching him.

After their two shifts were over, the squad captain congratulated them on doing an "amazing" job and that they were all doing "super great."

"Thanks, Jami Lynn. You certainly know what you're doing." Spencer said as he and Jami walked to the lockers.

"You got the hang of it already. I could tell." She replied. "Working with you is going to be a piece of cake."

Spencer looked down at the uniform hanging off of him. "You know, I almost forgot I had this on."

"Mmm. I remember when I got my first Rally Girl uniform," Jami said with a blush. She leaned over and said, quietly, "It made me *so* horny." Then she giggled.

Spencer had to clear his throat for a moment to collect himself. "Well, I suppose that they..."

"Oh my God!" Jami Lynn squealed, as she instantly regretted what she had said. "Please don't tell anyone I said that! That's *so* embarrassing!"

"It's just between you and me," Spencer said with a smile. The girl had been so helpful and so encouraging all day, he thought, demonstrating a mastery of her job, and in one sentence had just taken herself down from experienced professional to flustered and immature.

He could fall in love with a girl like that, Spencer realized. "You want to go out and get something to drink?" He asked.

"Now?" Jami Lynn replied. "But you still have to watch the orientation video."

"Video?" Spencer questioned.

Jami Lynn shrugged. "Yeah. It's about an hour, covers all the employee basics, so on and so on. There's one to watch just about every week in this orientation."

Spencer was directed to a small dark room with a few folding chairs scattered about. Inside, Dave, the dark-haired trainee, was already seated.

"Dave Olsen," the man said, extending his hand for a handshake.

"Spencer Bateman," he shook Dave's hand vigorously. "Orientation video?" He asked.

Dave nodded. "The other two are supposed to join us. Just waiting."

Spencer found a seat and laid back in the chair. He was glad to be off his feet. "You on the fast track program, too?" he asked Dave.

"Yep. I got a job in HR in the Northeast. You?"

"Director of Logistics, I'll be working out of Atlanta."

"They said I could get to Atlanta after two years," Dave replied. He leaned closer so he could lower his voice. "You lucked out. That Rally Girl of yours is one smoking hot..."

"Hey, yours is sex on wheels."

"She's cute, but I don't..." He then looked past Spencer and stopped talking. Spencer turned to see Niles and Rodney enter. They exchanged handshakes and got comfortable. The video started on it's own before they had a chance to talk.

On came a plump older man with flush red cheeks and bolo tie. "Hello. I'm Daryl Sewell, founder and Chairman of Rallies' Family Style Grill. But friends call me 'The General.'" He smiled, unconvincingly. "Now that you're here, you're more than friends, you're family. I want you to know that when I opened my first Rallies' in 1975..."

Already, Spencer was feeling his neck muscles give way and his head start to fall over. This was going to be a long hour. In just a matter of seconds, he found himself in a half-awake state, head slumped over, just picking up bits and pieces of what the old man on TV was saying.

"Thirty-five years of tradition..." "Wearing the Rally Girl uniform is an honor..." He couldn't even tell who was talking after a little while. "We are the service of the customer..." "Providing escapism from everyday worries..." "A clear system of authority..." "A smile is the best gift you can give..."

The next thing he remembered was a little gentle slap on his cheek. He opened his eyes slowly, trying to fight the sleepiness away.

"Time to go, sleepy-eyes!" Jami Lynn sang.

Spencer opened his eyes to see that the video was over, and his three companions had also fallen asleep from the excitement. He stood and stretched his back out. "I must have just close my eyes for a second..."

Jami Lynn shrugged. "It puts everyone out. I don't know why they turns out the lights in here when they show it. That's just begging you to nod off."

Spencer estimated it must have been an hour, and he was surprised to still see his mentor dressed. "Don't you ever get out of that uniform?"

"I like it," Jami Lynn replied. "But yeah, you can't wear it off company property. Corporate rule." She mimicked a pout and trailed a finger down her cheek where her imaginary tear would fall.

"Well, it is an honor to wear the Rally Girl Uniform, I suppose."

The girl smiled dreamily. "It sure is. It provides a little bit of escapism from everyday worries."

Spencer agreed. "And thirty-five years of tradition. So, what do we do now?"

"We get you set up in the hotel," Jami Lynn replied.



The Rally University complex included the demo restaurant, two stout office buildings, and one small four-story hotel, used for the trainees.

"They kinda played around with the idea of doing a Rally Hotel in Las Vegas a few years ago, and built it for testing." Jami Lynn explained as they walked across the campus. "But they gave up on it. They kept the hotel for the trainees, though."

The hotel was themed and branded even more heavily than the restaurant, with the Rallies' logo stickered, embroidered, screen-printed and embossed in every possible spot. The furniture, fabrics and even the carpet was all done in the blue/yellow/red Rallies' color scheme.

"Oh, *fourth* floor," said the concierge as Spencer checked in. He wasn't sure, but he thought he picked up a little wariness in that comment.

"What's wrong with the fourth floor?" He asked.

"That means you're part of the fast track program, I suppose," the concierge replied. He couldn't have been more than nineteen, and Spencer didn't like getting attitude from a kid.

"So what if I am?"

"We already have your luggage in your room," the concierge said, handing over the key card.

"No, what's wrong with..."

"Hey, we're next door to each other!" Jami Lynn said, hopping in a little display of joy. That and a demonstration of gravity and fluid dynamics inside Jami Lynn's bra.

Spencer forgot whatever it was that was bothering him, and let the girl lead him up to his room. On the elevator, he met Niles, and as it turned out, the entire group of four and their mentors were all staying on the fourth floor.

It was predictable that the room followed the same themes as the rest of Rallies' restaurants, but it was a little shocking to see the details. The room was outfitted like a teenage sports hero's room, with plaques, pennants and trophies on the wall. The bedspread had a giant Rallies' logo on it, as did the carpet. On closer inspection, the plaques and trophies were for cheerleading competitions. Spencer couldn't help but think that the decor, despite being very sporty, still looked a little less than masculine.

"We have a connecting door!" Jami Lynn declared testing out the small door that linked the rooms. "Kewl!"

Spencer gave a quick glance to verify that his four bags had been delivered, and then eyed the soft, inviting bed. After a full day on his feet, it looked more beautiful than anything he had ever seen. "I'm gonna just fall down dead for the night, is that okay?"

Jami Lynn rolled her eyes to the sky and bit her lip. "Oh, that sounds awesome!" She said. "I'll see you bright and early tomorrow, okay?"

"I'm guessing you're a morning person," Spencer said.

"Yeah. Sorry. See you soon, Spence."

"Spencer. My name is not *Spence*."

"Gotcha." She left through the adjoining door and Spencer was already unconscious by the time the latch closed.



Sometime late that night, Spencer woke. It was dark outside, and he hadn't yet unpacked his travel clock, so he wasn't sure exactly when it was. He was sweating, almost in a fever. He found himself in a fetal position, wrapped around one of the large bed pillows, clutching it to his body.

He had no memory of it, but he had stripped himself down to a shirt and briefs at some point. He got up, peeling the moist T-shirt away from his skin and walked in the low-lit darkness to hit the lights. It was blinding, but only for a moment. He made his way over to the mini-bar and found a bottle of water. Of course, it had a large Rallies' logo on the front, which kept him from knowing which brand it really was. He wished he could know. He liked it.

Checking the room service menu, he found they stopped serving at 1 am, and he knew it was well past that. The menu was a carbon copy of the Rallies' restaurant menu, item for item, he noted.

Customers, he thought to himself, *we are at the service of the customer*. Then we wondered where that random thought had come from. Maybe he was just tired.

Spencer yawned and decided he didn't have enough reason not to try and fall asleep again. He thought maybe some mindless TV might help him get back to sleep.

He looked around for a remote to turn the TV on, and found one bolted to the bedside table. He turned off the lights and flicked the set on. He was disappointed to find that he had only a handful of channels, a couple of news headline channels, a stock channel, Univision and all the sports channels he could imagine. There seemed to be other channels in the system, but when he tuned to them he received a stern message that said, "Blocked by Rallies' Administration." He watched a Spanish language soap opera for a few minutes before giving up.

Spencer rolled over to find a dry spot on the large bed and fell asleep again.



Too soon, he heard a knock coming from the inter-room door. He knew it was Jami



Lynn, and he reluctantly woke himself. It was light in the room, so he was aware that it was technically morning, and technically, he had to get up.

He stood, grateful he was dry again, and unlatched the door. He didn't seem to mind that he was just in the shirt and briefs when Jami Lynn arrived. She didn't seem to mind that she was dressed almost the same way, in panties and a T-shirt.

"You ready for breakfast?" She bubbled. "I ordered for both of us from room service." She then pushed in a trolley with food on it. "Can't get the day started without a good, wholesome family-style meal, fresh off the grill!"

The smell of food perked Spencer up a bit, and he almost ran to the trolley. There, he found an assortment of barbecue wings, curly fries and fried shrimp. "This is breakfast?" He asked.

"Sure is!" Jami Lynn replied, tucking into the wings. "Beats cold cereal, doesn't it?"

"I guess they don't have a breakfast menu?"

Jami Lynn popped some shrimp into her mouth. "Who needs that when you can enjoy these homestyle Rallies' classics?"

"You have a point," Spencer said, helping himself to some fries. For some reason, these odd choices appealed to him. He could feel his stomach growl and his mouth water at the smell and sight of this hot, steamy food. He opened a fresh bottle of Budweiser and sat down to eat.

Jami Lynn explained to him that they'd just be working three or four days a week, mostly on the weekends, just like the part-timers at the real restaurants. They'd work about six to eight hours, get a lunch break and then hang around for an extra hour for the orientation video at the end of the week.

"The rest of the time, they have an awesome employee gym and spa, a little store for essentials and even a nightclub," Jami Lynn said.

"It's like a little city," Spencer remarked.

"Even better, it's like city with nothing but Rallies' in it!"

Spencer smiled to himself. They sure did know how to find loyal people at Rallies'. This girl was a total lifer.



The week went smoothly enough, and despite the ridiculous nature of having to wear a dopey uniform over his shirt and pants, Spencer was getting very comfortable. He got better and better at waiting tables, and soon, Jami Lynn was only giving him advice, rather than instruction.

"You're doing a super job, Spencer," said Amber, the squad captain. It was just a few minutes between simulated shifts for Spencer, and Amber had cornered him in the dressing area. "You're really making great progress."

Spencer didn't know how to take that. On one hand, he hated having someone so below him on the totem pole compliment him like that. He didn't need encouragement from an underling, he was going to be her boss ten times over in a little while.

On the other hand, Amber was being pleasant, and she had a killer body that Spencer had spent much of the last week ogling. If he wanted a shot at her, he should probably just be decent enough to stay on the good side.

"Hey, thanks, Amber. It's tough work." He answered. "So Jami Lynn was telling me they have a gym and a nightclub around here..."

"Absolutely! Rallies' has everything you need to be the best!" Amber replied with glee.

"So, you want to show me around? Maybe get a couple of drinks?"

"Oh, not tonight, Spencer." She said, apologetically. "You have the video coming tonight!"

"Another orientation video? Do I really need to watch them?"

"Everyone needs to watch them! It's essential to the whole thing!" Amber declared.

Spencer kept trying. "I don't really need to know all that stuff, you understand."

"Orders are orders," Amber replied with a good-natured smile. "My job is to make you into part of the squad, and that's what I'm gonna do!"

"There's no way I can..."

"As your squad leader, I want to build the best Rally Girl squad I can. And that means watching the videos, just like everybody else."

Spencer back down. "All right," he said. After all, Amber was the squad captain, and he was part of the squad. It was a clear system of authority.



The evening shift was light, and was even a little slow. Spencer even found himself getting a little bored with work. Once it was finally over, he was happy to report to the video room, joined by Dave, Rodney and Niles. Dave reclined in his chair, his arm draped over another chair and his legs crossed, ankle-to-knee. It looked a little out of place with him still wearing the cheerleading uniform.

Spencer's hopes for entertainment were quickly dashed when the video started up, and the slow southern drawl of Daryl 'The General' Sewell, began to drone on.

"Our Rally Girls are the cornerstone of success," he said. "Their unique appeal can be traced to many different things..."

The skimpy costume and big tits might have something to do with it, Spencer thought to himself. He chuckled quietly.

"...More than just a warm smile and a girl-next-door quality," Mr. Sewell continued, "Rally Girls represent this company and its ideals. As a Rally Girl, you carry the flag for all the people who work here at Rallies', and you should carry it with pride..."

Spencer was absolutely determined not to fall asleep this time, and as such, was able to stay awake approximately thirty seconds longer than last time. He at least had the satisfaction of seeing everyone else in the room drop off before he did.

The next hour was largely spent in and out of sleep, with Spencer half-hearing the video through his closed eyes and then dropping back to slumber again.

"The successful Rally Girl takes pride in her beauty..." The video said. "The iconic look of the Rally Girl is your greatest responsibility..." "Constant care and attention to your appearance is key to Rally Girl excellence..." "Happiness is being a Rally Girl..."

The harsh noise of chairs scooting along the floor woke Spencer. With the video finally over, everyone was leaving. He checked his watch, and two hours had passed. The rest of the group got up and left so he followed them to the locker room, where they removed the uniforms and put them away.

"Dave," asked Niles, "do remember anything on that video?"

Dave turned around to address him. "Only the opening part. It seemed to have a lot to do with Rally Girls. I don't think we missed much."

Niles nodded agreement. "That's what I thought." He felt his lips. "Boy, are my lips dry. Does anyone have any Chapstick?"

Dave and Rodney both said "No." Spencer added a "No," as well, once he checked his pockets. Now that Niles mentioned it, his lips *were* feeling awfully dry. He hoped the hotel had something for them in that little shop in the lobby.

Maybe they had something for his hair, too. The hotel shampoo made it look so dull and lifeless. He might as well check when he got back.



It was hot outside, as summer was just starting. Spencer wasn't familiar with the weather in this part of the country, but he did expect something a little hotter than he was used to, with an abundance of humidity.

The crickets chirped away in the evening light as he walked along the pathway back to the hotel. It was a nice night out, and he was of half a mind to sit down somewhere in the grass and enjoy it, but he was beat, and his bed was calling to him.

He returned to his room and set down his purchases from the hotel store. They did, indeed, have some lip balm which he wasted no time in applying. He found a couple of different varieties of shampoo, and bought them all. None of them were his usual brands, so he decided he'd try them all out. Each shampoo also had a matching conditioner as well.

On impulse, he had also grabbed a pair of tweezers for his eyebrows, which just seemed to be out of control. A nail file was also amongst his new things, as his fingernails suddenly looked ragged and unkempt to him.

The door to Jami Lynn's room opened, and she walked in dressed in a T-shirt and panties. "Hey, I thought I heard you come in!"

"Hey, Jami," Spencer answered. "Just putting stuff away in the bathroom." He noted for just a moment the sight Jami's half-dressed beauty in his presence, but he wasn't of a mind to complain – after all, they were friends. Not to mention he was slipping out of his heavy jeans as he thought this, and kicked them away. Now, just in his briefs and T-shirt, they were on equal grounds.

"Oh, so how was the video?" Jami Lynn asked.

"So boring. I hope there's not a test," he replied, returning to the main room. He felt like teasing Jami. "Hey, where did you go after my shift? Some mentor you are."

"I must have seen those training videos a million times by now. *More than just a warm smile and a girl-next-door quality*," Jami said in a mock-masculine tone, "*Rally Girls represent this company and it's ideals.*"

"Yeah, that was the one," Spencer verified.

"I think those videos are great, but I'm not their target audience."

"And I am?" Spencer replied, flopping down on the bed. "I'm not even going to wait tables. I'm going to do logistics. This is a waste of my time!" he shouted at the ceiling.

"Everyone at Rallies' has watched those videos."

"Why? Why would any company deliberately be so wasteful of everyone's time?" Spencer yelled.

"Here," Jami Lynn said, hoisting Spencer up to a sitting position. She then leapt onto the bed and walked on her knees behind him and started to massage his shoulders. "Just let it go."

It was clear that Jami Lynn had vast experience in giving massages. Her hands kneaded Spencer's shoulders into jelly. His head fell back in relief, nestling itself in between Jami Lynn's breasts. He could feel the softness of her young breasts move up and down as she breathed. With every moment, his head sank deeper and deeper in between them.

"Don't fall asleep on me," Jami Lynn warned.

"You're wonderful..." Spencer said, dreamily. "Do you... Do you... Do you want to...?"

Jami Lynn's face came alive with excitement. "I could really go for a Rallies' Big Daddy Burger."

Spencer sprang up and leapt for the phone. "I was just thinking the same thing! The Big Daddy Burger has a unique blend of griller spices, topped with melted pepper jack cheese and served with mayo, lettuce, tomato, pickle and onion."

"Each Big Daddy is served with your choice of potato salad, coleslaw, or Rallies' famous seasoned curly fries," Jami Lynn added.

Spencer ordered one for each of them and a couple of beers. Plus, he had to get the Rallies' Olé Nacho appetizer. It just sounded so good.

"What do we do while we're waiting?" Spencer asked.

"Well, someone owes me a back rub," Jami Lynn said, turning her back to him. Spencer had little choice, so he went at it, doing his best. "Oooooohhh," Jami Lynn moaned. She stretched her back out in a distinctly feline manner, and might have purred if she was capable of it. She responded to his touch as though he was hitting g-spots with every movement.

"Would you mind plucking my eyebrows, Jami?" Spencer asked, oblivious to the stirrings of his mentor.

"Sure!" She replied with her usual megawatt smile. "I wasn't going to say anything, but they really do need some work."

Spencer was somewhat bashful. "I'm almost embarrassed to say I didn't even really notice until today."

"We'll eat first and then I can do some sculpting of those caterpillars of yours," Jami Lynn said. "You know what we should do, is make an appointment with you at the Rallies' hotel spa. They can do a much better job than I can."

"Do they trim eyebrows?"

"And so much more. You'll love it. I have a beauty day there every week."

"Sounds great," Spencer agreed. "As someone once said, constant care and attention to your appearance is key to excellence."

Jami Lynn nodded in deliberate accord. "That is *so* true." Then there was a knock at the door and it was time for a hearty Rallies' dinner.



On the way out, the next morning, Spencer stopped by the concierge desk. The same 19 year old twerp was working. "Scuse me..." Spencer asked.

The concierge stopped what he was doing to be attentive. "What can I do for you?"

"My TV. It has some channels blocked." Spencer said. "Can that be fixed?"

"I can take care of that for you," the concierge replied. He moved over to a computer terminal. "Now what room are you in?"

Spencer checked his key card to make sure. "412."

"Oh... Fourth floor."

"Yes. Is that a problem?"

"Our fourth floor guests are treated to a special package of news and sports unavailable to our other guests."

That almost sounded like a positive to Spencer, but he still hadn't really gotten a resolution to the issue. It was just a smokescreen. "Can't I get just, I don't know, ABC or something? I just want to watch some regular TV shows."

"Our news and sports channels provide a wide variety of entertainment options," was the reply.

"Okay, I get it. Can I move to another floor, where you have real TV?"

"The fast-track program requires you stay on the fourth floor, I'm afraid. But I can forward your request to the hotel management, and see if they can help you."

That at least sounded somewhat positive, even if it was a blatant attempt to pass the problem down the line.

"Fine," Spencer said with a sigh. "Do you know where the spa is? I have an appointment."

"It's just down that hallway," the concierge said, pointing to the rear of the lobby.

The hotel spa, called "Salón du Rallies'," was small, but just like the rest of the hotel, lavishly decorated in Rallies' colors and logos.

There were only three visible employees, two women in their late twenties and a younger girl who appeared to be some variety of Asian.

"You must be Spencer," said one of the older women. "I'm Barb. I have you down for..."

"Don't start without me!" called Jami Lynn as she ran into the salon.

"Wouldn't think of it, Jami!" Barb said, apparently well familiar with her. "My Wednesday isn't complete without you! Go on in, Shelley will get you started!"

"Thanks, Barb!" Jami Lynn bumped into Spencer, mischievously. "Don't worry, it won't hurt... Much."

"Uh, thanks?" Spencer replied. Up to that moment, he hadn't been expecting anything to hurt. Now he was wary of this whole enterprise.

Jami filled Barb in. "Spencer needs some work done on his eyes. Mostly a little brow grooming. He also has some concerns about his nails."

Barb took command. "We'll do the brows later. Shelley here will work on your nails." She then handed over a suddenly unsure Spencer to the other woman, who had a broad smile on her face. A somewhat suspicious one, if you had asked Spencer's opinion.

"So, a manicure?" Spencer asked.

Shelley grinned. "Oh, we'll cure you of being a man."

"Shelley!" admonished Barb. "Watch it!"

"What?" Spencer asked. "What do..."

"Let's take care of those nails," Shelley interrupted. "You have a seat at the station," she tapped the chair he was going to sit in, "and we'll have our nail girl with you in just a moment." She briskly walked away before she could answer any questions.

It wasn't but a minute before the Asian girl had his hands soaking in some sort of liquid. She didn't speak much English, so conversation was out of the question. While he waited for whatever step was going to come next, he saw at the other side of the room, Jami Lynn was seated in a hairdresser's chair, with her hair covered in goop and her face in some sort of mud mask.

With little warning, one of the women produced a syringe, filled with a green liquid, and injected it directly into Jami Lynn's neck. It also looked like she was trying to discreetly hide it from any onlookers.

Spencer wasn't familiar with women's beauty routines, but he was sure that what he had seen wasn't normal. But without anyone to ask, and his hands keeping him where he was, he couldn't ask any questions. In any case, Jami Lynn didn't seem to object and was her usual, nothing-but-smiles self.

After spending about a half hour with the nail girl, he was a little confused when he saw his now shiny, polished nails. They were immaculately clean, with a neatly trimmed cuticle, and a smooth edge. But they appeared to be at least a quarter of an inch longer than they were when he arrived.

Quickly, he was put into the hairdresser's chair, where he was reclined into an almost total horizontal position.

"My, you've really let the weeds grow," Shelley said, on examining his eyebrows.

Spencer agreed. "It's really embarrassing to look at them. I almost feel like I need to apologize to everyone I meet."

"Just sit back and we'll have them under control in no time." Shelley pushed his head back into the headrest. "You just take it easy and if you feel like sleeping, that's fine."

Spencer didn't fall asleep, but he was getting a little hazy. The chair was very comfortable and as Shelley worked on his brows, Barb was nearby, humming the Rallies' theme song.

At some point he felt a prick in the back of his neck, but he just assumed it was a nerve spasm or something. He got those occasionally. After a while, Shelley proclaimed the job "done," and adjusted the chair to sit upright and let Spencer see himself in the mirror.

"They're awfully thin, aren't they?" He said.

"Hmm." Shelley said, examining her work. "I may have gone a little overboard. Tell you what. I'll give you one of my eyebrow pencils and you can thicken them up if you need to."

Spencer liked that solution. After all, like when he got his hair cut, it always seemed a little too much to him before it grew out. That was probably the same for eyebrows. He'd just draw it in until it got back to normal.

"My eyelashes look a little different," he observed.

The lashes were visibly thicker and longer, and thin rim of black now outlined his eyes, and even gave him a little cats-eyed look. He also thought his eyelids looked a little darker. "Strange how trimming the brows can make everything else around it look different, huh?" he said.

"You'll get used to it, I'm sure," Shelley said with a pat on the shoulder.

"You ready to try the tanning booth?" Jami Lynn asked, as she emerged from a back room in a robe.

Spencer had not signed on for that. "Maybe later. I don't tan very well. I just burn."

"Suit yourself. Oh! I like your eyes. Very nice work, Shel."

Shelley beamed. "It's my specialty."

"Well, then. We're done here." Jami Lynn said, her hand on her hips in a sign of triumph. "I'll see you guys next week!"

Spencer followed Jami Lynn out, still examining his nails. They were long, but they were so well done, he couldn't think of going back and having them trim off their hard work. If they got in the way, he could do it himself. "Hey, Jami," he asked, "what was the deal with that shot you got?"

"Shot?" Jami Lynn replied. "What shot?"

"In the back of your neck, when you had all that gunk on your face."

"Oh, *that*... That was..." Jami Lynn leaned over to whisper. "Botox."

"Botox?" Spencer repeated with skepticism. "In the neck?"

"It works. The girls there know what they're doing."

Spencer had to agree. Jami Lynn had nothing even hinting at a wrinkle on her face. He didn't think she looked a day over 18, even though she had to be at least 21 to be working where they served beer. Plus, with her experience, she must be at least four years past that. Her flawless skin was probably thanks to those treatments.

"I like your hair. It's gorgeous," Spencer said, not even meaning to say it aloud.

"It always looks good after a trip to the salon."



A N G E L A J

DEMOTED & DEGRADED

**“Trixie the Secretary” by Angela J.
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2011 Paperback Edition

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TRIXIE, THE SECRETARY

FIRST MONTH

A creeping trail of yellow light crept across the carpet of the office, reminding me just how slow the morning was going. I checked my purse for a mint. At least sucking on it for a few minutes would be a slight relief to the monotony. My purse was empty except for a few cosmetics. The salespeople who occupied cubicles at the far end of the office all wandered about, aimlessly, looking bored and restless. Our office had ten small cubicles for the sales staff, but only three of them were being used. I had heard that in the past, there were more people working for the company but that was long before I started working here.

A tall partition separated us, me at the executive end, and the sales staff at the sales end. As they were just beginning their day, they were restless.

Right after the salesmen left the office to make their sales calls, the office phone rang. It was early Monday morning. I answered it as I always do: "Jones Enterprises, an authorized seller of Hill Office Equipment, Cindy speaking. How may I direct your call?" That was one part of my job as the secretary of Jones Enterprises. I got this job right after my father passed away. Without my father's income to support me, I had no choice but to drop out of college and look for work. I still remember as if it was yesterday, the day I came in for my interview. I was extremely nervous because I desperately needed the job and had no prior experience. My guidance counselor told me to "embellish" my resume a little but I just couldn't bring my self to lie. That's just not how my father had raised me. I was almost sure that I wouldn't get hired. But Mr. Thomas D. Jones, the President of Jones Enterprises, never looked at my resume. He just asked three questions. "Can you type?" "Does your coffee taste good?" "Are you single?" The last question gave me a little pause because I felt that it was a little too personal. But I answered affirmatively to all three questions, without complaint. To my surprise, I was hired on the spot.

Despite my short time at this job and lack of prior experience, I knew how to answer most phone calls. Potential new customers would call and I would provide them with the appropriate salesman's mobile phone number. New accounts were supposed to be assigned to a salesman based on a rotation system. But sometimes, Mr. Jones reassigned the new accounts to a different salesman at a later date. Most of the established customers already knew to call their salesman directly. Other times, someone would call asking for parts or repair service, I would just give them the number of the Hill Office Equipment certified service company in their area. Occasionally, we got calls from disgruntled customers; these calls were transferred to Mr. Jones or to his voice mail. Mr.

Jones would rarely take a call without some research into the problem. He would want to see the customer's file and talk to the salesperson assigned to the customer before returning the complaint call. A salesman would also often call to ask Mr. Jones to authorize a discount for a customer or one of the salesmen, – typically Jim, Mr. Jones' friend and one of the younger salesmen – called to complain about another salesman. Mr. Jones also instructed me to transfer these sorts of calls to his voice mail so that he could return them when it was more convenient for him. Despite this slacker attitude, once he got to it, he was able to resolve the problem in a decisive and authoritative manner. Surprisingly, even with Mr. Jones' young age, he was the boss and everyone knew it.

He was in his late twenties, and not much older than I was. Dark brown hair, fair skinned and even a little skinny. In my heels I was taller than he was. But he was still intimidating. He



could shut you up just by looking at you. I guess that's just how life is. Some people are born with leadership skills like Mr. Jones, and some people are not, like me.

Of course not all calls were business. On occasion, a family member or friend would also call. On this day, that's exactly what happened. "Cindy, it's me," said a terse voice when I picked up the call. I instantly recognized the voice as that of Mrs. Barbara Jones, Mr. Jones' wife. As I usually did many times before, I told her that Mr. Jones was on the other line and that I would let him know that she called. It was a white lie that Mr. Jones insisted I use with her so that he appeared busier than he really was – but this time before I could finish, she interrupted me.

Her words were: "I don't want to talk to him. I want to talk to *you*." She slowed herself down and said the next words to me very deliberately: "I know *everything*."

These words sent a chill down my spine. What she meant by that I wasn't sure. But I feared the worst. What if she somehow found out about me and Mr. Jones? I would be in a horrible mess. I didn't need this now. With my father passing away from a heart attack just last year, I had enough difficulty in my life.

"Meet me at the coffee shop at Main and Fifth in thirty minutes and don't tell my no good husband anything," she continued.

"But I can't..." was all I got to say.

"You can and you *will* meet me," she said, "just give him an excuse to leave the office," and then she hung up.

She was not requesting, she was demanding – that to me was obvious. But what should I do? Should I tell Mr. Jones? I just sat at my small secretarial desk, near the front of the door to the presidents' office, for several minutes not knowing what to do. I wished that my father was still alive. He was so strong and decisive. My mother and I had relied on him to guide us. Now, he was gone. I thought about calling my mother and asking her for advice. But as soon as that thought entered my mind, I quickly dismissed it. Getting her advice would require me to tell her what happened. She probably wouldn't understand and she definitely wouldn't be on my side.

As usual, during the day, only Mr. Jones and I were left here at the office. The salesmen would not be back from their sales calls until late afternoon. They came in briefly in the morning and then left for most of the day. Then they'd come back and fill out paper work in their respective cubicles. Each day ended with all of us in the large conference room, where the salesmen reported to Mr. Jones. The conference table had twelve seats but only four people sat on them. Mr. Jones always sat at the head of the conference table. The other seats were taken by the three member sales staff. Richard White sat to the immedi-

ate right of Mr. Jones and Jim Hunt and Sara Campbell sat to his left.

They would each take turns to report to Mr. Jones about their daily activity. Mr. Jones would either congratulate them for a good sale or would offer words expressing his disappointment. Then, right before closing time, Mr. Jones closed the meeting by offering the same old advice we had all heard a hundred times before. I usually stood in the corner near Mr. Jones and took notes when I wasn't busy bringing everyone coffee or other drinks.

But for today, the meeting was still several hours away.

Mr. Jones was in his large executive office either doing some paperwork – or more likely surfing the net for porn. That's how he passed most of his time. I guess there wasn't much for the President of Jones Enterprises to do. Other than the few phone calls, his only duty was to keep the company records, make regular reports to our mother company, Hills Office Equipment, do payroll, and keep other company documents in order.

I knew about the internet porn because I walked in on him a few times. I, of course, tried to pretend not to notice as he fumbled to close his internet browser and close his zipper. Each time, he yelled at me for not knocking and told me to leave his executive office immediately. I always apologized profusely for my error as I closed the door behind me. Actually, it really bothered me that he would engage in such disgusting and inappropriate activity in the office. But I didn't dare speak my mind. It just wasn't my place. My father would disapprove of Mr. Jones' behavior but would also frown upon me if I had objected. My father had always said that I should respect authority.

Of course, Mr. Jones would then lecture me on privacy the next time he saw me, and I had to listen and nod attentively. He was entitled to this because he was the President and CEO of Jones Enterprises, and I have to admit, I did respect him for that. Jones Enterprises acquired this company from another entity couple of years ago. I don't know the details, but according to Sara, that's when Mr. Jones took over. She told me because he was so young, people just assumed that his father was rich or something and was given this job to learn how to manage. Regardless of how Mr. Jones acquired this business, I could not afford to anger him. The economy was in a bad shape and I needed this job.

If it had ended with his internet browsing and masturbation, I guess I would not be in this predicament. But about three months ago, he started to target his attention on me. At first, he just stared at me for no apparent reason. Then he became bolder. I could feel his eyes on my chest when he stood before my desk to give me a task. He would also stare at my behind as I filed or copied. I wasn't used to getting this type of attention from men. I always dressed conservatively and stayed away from bad boys. So I didn't know what to do. I guess I should have stopped him there. But I just didn't know how to do it without angering him and risking his firing me or making this into a federal court case (literally).

So I just ignored his unwanted attentions. Then a few weeks after he started staring, he began “accidentally” touching me. He would brush up against me as he walked by and just say “sorry.” When I didn’t stop him, he started to make comments about my look and how much he wanted us to be “good friends.” I knew this was wrong, but I just didn’t know what to do. I called my mother once to ask her advice, but she pretty much just ignored what I said. She just told me to stop wearing outfits that would provoke men. I tried to explain to her that I wasn’t doing or wearing anything to provoke Mr. Jones, but she just didn’t seem to understand. I guess that she was in denial like I was.

It didn’t take long before he started to pressure me to have sex with him. No, he never threatened me directly. But he would comment about the bad economy and how hard it is to find a job and then put a hand on my side, or worse, my behind. He would tell me how much he liked me and then would tell me that some people he knew were having a hard time finding a job and it would be a shame if I had to go through that hardship. He even gave me a line about being “friendlier” so that I would not have to worry about the economy. The message was obvious.

Then about a week ago, it became even worse. He called me to his office and told me how he and his wife were not getting along and how lonely he was. He asked me to give him a hug to make him feel better. Like a dope, I obliged. I knew that this was a trick but I still could not say no to him. He continued to hold me tight, long after the hug should have ended. I tried to get free of his hold but just didn’t have the strength. “Cindy, I’ve always been attracted to you,” he said. He loosened his hold on me slightly. As I tried to get away, he kissed me on my lips. Before I knew what was going on, he kissed me again. I should have slapped his face and quit on the spot, but I didn’t. I guess I just didn’t have the nerve. Maybe, deep inside I was a little attracted to him. Physically he wasn’t the type of guy that I liked. He was handsome, but a little too skinny and short for my taste. But he was to me, because of his position, a powerful man, and that was attractive regardless of what he looked like.

His kisses intensified and I didn’t resist. I should have, but I didn’t. When he started to undress me, I finally spoke up. “This is not right,” I said, “you’re married.”

Then he looked into my eyes and asked, “do you like your job?” I didn’t respond. He continued to undress me and I offered no resistance. I should have – I really, really should have – but I didn’t. It was like I was in a trance. I just let him take the lead. Soon we were both naked and then were having sex. Then all of sudden it was over. One minute he was breathing on top of me as I lay on his big desk, and the next minute, he was done and was off me, and started to quickly get dressed. Without a word, I started to get dressed too. I felt deep shame. After all, he was a married man, and I had no intention of being the other woman. I guess he knew that too because when I started to cry after-

wards, he apologized and promised me that he would not pressure me again. I hoped that for both our sakes that he would keep his promise.

Since that time, it had been awkward in the office when we were alone. Each morning, after the sales staff left the office, I mostly sat at my desk doing clerical work and he stayed in his executive office doing what he does. We didn't talk about our encounter. I didn't tell him how worried I was that I might've gotten pregnant from the incident and how I relieved I was when I finally got my period. We only talked about work and only when we absolutely had to communicate. I had hoped that this was all in the past and that soon our relationship would normalize. But the phone call from Mrs. Jones brought it all back to the present.

If I sat at my desk any longer I would be late. I had to make up my mind about what I was going to do soon. If I only had family or friends to help guide me but I was all alone. I had to make a decision. I needed to find out what Mrs. Jones wanted before I would decide on whether to tell Mr. Jones. Having made up my mind, I walked to the door to the executive office and knocked on the door.

"Just a minute," I heard Mr. Jones' voice, and then a moment later, "come in."

"Mr. Jones," I said, "I... Have to leave the office for a few hours... I have to go take care of a personal matter."

"What is it?" he asked, "I need to know what it is before I can give you permission to leave in the middle of a workday."

"It's personal," I said, "I'm sorry but I can't tell you."

"How long?" he asked, looking rather annoyed.

"I'm not sure," I replied.

"I can't allow..." he began to answer.

"Please Mr. Jones," I pleaded with him and with the best serious look I could muster I said, "It's important."

Usually when Mr. Jones made a decision there was no way to change his mind. I habitually just followed his orders. But when he saw my persistency and heard the desperation in my voice, he must have realized how important this was to me.

"All right, but I'll take it out of your vacation time..." he finally said.

"Thank you, Mr. Jones," I said.

"Don't make it a habit," he said.

I quickly exited the executive office, grabbed my purse, and ran out to my car and drove to the designated coffeehouse. On the way there, I contemplated in my mind what I would say to Mrs. Jones if she confronted me with the extra

marital affair. But what I could say? “Sorry, but it wasn’t my fault.” How weak? Weak or not, that’s how I truly felt.

As I walked into the coffee shop, I suddenly realized a tiny problem. Because I was so busy worrying about what I was going to say to Mrs. Jones, it never occurred to me that I hadn’t ever met Mrs. Jones, and therefore had no idea what she looked like. Sure, I recognized her voice because she called the office often enough, but with knowledge of voice alone; I would have a difficult time picking out the correct woman from the four ladies, sitting by themselves at the coffee shop. I figured that the women sitting in various groups were not her. The topic of our conversation was mostly likely going to be too personal for company. How odd that Mr. Jones did not have a picture of Mrs. Jones in his office. Perhaps they really were having marital problems.

I looked around. I guessed that Mrs. Jones would be either the same age or younger than Mr. Jones. Presidents of companies often marry young beautiful women. One of the women sitting by themselves fit the description. Smartly but casually dressed, her hair long and glamorous, and sipping a small cup of tea as she grinned to herself. As I was about to approach, to ask her if she was Mrs. Jones, I heard, “Cindy, over here,” from a table near the back. I recognized the voice as the one on the phone, belonging to Mrs. Jones.

“How did she know what I looked like?” I thought to myself

“Sit,” she commanded pointing to a chair. Her apparent age and attire surprised me. The woman appeared to be in her mid to late forties, about twenty years older than Mr. Jones. A slight scowl on her face has already creased some wrinkles into the sides of her lips. She wore an expensive looking business suit and pants. I was expecting a young housewife in mid to early twenties. But here she was, appearing to be a mature, successful businesswoman commanding me to sit down. She sat across from the seat she pointed at, with a lonely large cup of coffee on the table and a briefcase next to her seat.

I sat.

She put the briefcase on her lap and opened it so the cover of the case blocked its contents from my view. She took out a plain blue colored file and handed it to me. In it were several pictures of Mr. Jones and me in compromising positions.

At first I did not know what to say... I sat there for what felt like an eternity. Not daring to look up from the file, in fear that my eyes would meet Mrs. Jones’ eyes. “I’m sorry...” is all I managed to say. It sounded even weaker than I first thought it would.

“Don’t be,” she said, “As I stated on the phone, I know everything.” She then handed to me a mini tape player with a headphone. “The tape is cued, just push play,” she ordered.

I put the headphones to my ear and pushed play as instructed. It only took a

few minutes of listening to the tape to figure out that it was recording of Mr. Jones' attempt to pressure me into sexual indiscretions.

I had heard enough and took the earphones off and turned the tape player off. "How?" I asked.

She smiled. "The technology today is amazing, a monitoring device can be hidden anywhere."

I just sat there staring at the pictures and the recording device, not knowing what to say.

"Cindy," she continued, "I know it wasn't your idea. So I am not mad at you. If it wasn't you, it would have been someone else. But since you played an essential role in his cheating... I want you to help me punish him."

"You want me to testify against Mr. Jones in the divorce," I asked.

"Divorce?" she said, smiling briefly, "Heavens no, child." She paused, her expression returning to a scowl then said, "I never got a prenuptial from him. That's the biggest mistake in my life." She took a sip of her drink. "I should have never allowed my emotions control me like that. He did a great job romancing me. Thomas never pressured me to have sex. He would be content to just hold me for hours while I complained about my work. He just listened and let me vent. Thomas just seemed to understand me. Did you know that he gave me little gifts everyday? Nothing expensive, but they were all romantic. He would give different flowers that he picked from a garden or would write me a poem or would record a song that reminded him of me."

I had to admit that sounded wonderful and couldn't help but feel a little jealous. Mr. Jones never did any of those things when he was seducing me.

"But it was all a lie," Mrs. Jones continued, "and like a simple silly girl, I fell for it. He was manipulating me the whole time. He was probably even laughing at me behind my back. No, I don't want a divorce. Who knows what he would allege against me to steal my assets. I worked too hard and sacrificed too much. Divorce is too unpredictable. That is a risk I don't want to take. No, not divorce, I want revenge – and I want you to help me get it."

"But how can I help?" I asked.

"You can start with this," she said as she put the briefcase on the table and turned it around to show me its contents. Inside was a clear plastic bag with a shiny disc inside it.

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's a computer CD," she replied, "It's for him. Make sure he plays it on his computer. The program will do the rest. Go ahead take it out of its bag."

I did as told and asked, "how do I get him to play it and what will it do?"

"You're a smart girl. I'm sure you will figure out some trick to make him play

it. And as for what it will do, you'll find out soon enough." She replied. With that, she put the folder with the pictures, the tape recorder, and the now empty plastic bag back into her briefcase and closed it shut. "Do as instructed. Today, before you leave the office, you will make sure he starts to play the CD. And then next month, on the same date as today, you will meet me again at this coffee shop at 8:30 a.m., before going to work. You will bring that CD with you. You may go back to work now." She took hold of her coffee and started to drink it.

I just sat there staring at the disc in my hand. What should I do? "Please. I don't want get involved..." I started to say.

"You are *already* involved," she interrupted. "I told you to go back to the office," she commanded.

I put the CD in my purse and I walked out to my car and drove back to the office. I still had to decide what to do. What would my father want me to do? I wasn't too sure. As I entered the office, I still had not made up my mind. I put my purse behind my desk and took out the disc and looked at it, the light catching the silvery surface. What should I do? Mr. Jones was the president of this company and as an employee I owed him loyalty. I needed to keep my job, at the very least. But at the same time, what he did to me was wrong. With the CD in my hand, I walked towards the door to the executive office and entered. I guess I was going to make a spontaneous decision after I was inside. I was either going to tell Mr. Jones about my meeting with Mrs. Jones and give him the CD as evidence or I was going to somehow get him to play it.

He was sitting facing away from the door to his office, looking at his computer on his credenza, with his pants and underwear down. He was browsing pornography again. His executive chair thankfully blocked most of his nudity and what he was doing with his hand but it was obvious what was going on. I tried to back out of the office slowly and close the door. But Mr. Jones stopped me by saying, "Cindy, is that you?"

"Yes sir," was my meek reply.

Mr. Jones then turned his sit around to face me with nudity clearly visible. His desk did not do a good job blocking his penis or his moving left hand from my view. "Damn it Cindy," he said, "I told you to knock first." As he looked at me he continued to masturbate. I just stood there as if frozen not knowing what to do. I couldn't even look away. In what probably was a few seconds later, but what felt like much longer, he came into a tissue paper while looking at me. After wiping his penis clean, he threw the tissue paper into his waste basket. Then he pulled up his underwear and pants up and then turned back around to close the internet browser. "You almost gave me a heart attack." He turned to face me again. "I don't know what I would have done if it was someone else," he smiled and then said, "Luckily we rarely get visitors in our business. You understand, don't you? A man has needs. If I'm not going to get anything from

you in the future, then I have to take care of that need myself.”

When I didn’t respond to his reasoning, He continued, “I tell you what. I won’t count your little break today against your vacation time. After all you were only gone for a few minutes and we are friends”

“Thank you, Mr. Jones,” I said with gritted teeth. He really had some nerve. I kept my mouth shut and was about to walk out of his executive office, when he stopped me again.

“What’s that in your hand?” he asked.

“It’s nothing,” I said suddenly panicking and not knowing what to do.

“Did that DVD come in the mail in a plain paper envelope?” he asked, “I’ve been waiting for it. It’s... It’s some files for the office. Leave it and go back to your desk, and don’t forget to knock next time.”

“Yes sir,” I said and left the CD on Mr. Jones’ desk and walked out of his executive office. The decision had been made for me.

I sat back at my desk and got back to work, typing up letters and emails that were dictated previously by Mr. Jones and answering a few phone calls. My mind kept drifting as I wondered what the CD was and if Mr. Jones was actually playing it. Did the CD contain a message to Mr. Jones? Was it blackmail? I didn’t really get a lot of work done as my curiosity started to eat me up. After about two hours, I just couldn’t take it anymore and quietly went to the door to Mr. Jones’ executive office and knocked. But he didn’t answer. I knocked again, this time a little louder. But there was no response. I slowly opened the door to the executive office a bit to get a look. A part of me was afraid that Mr. Jones was already playing the CD and was afraid of the potential the contents of that disc and another part of me was afraid that he was masturbating again. Twice in one day? Not even Mr. Jones would masturbate that often. Would he?

Luckily, Mr. Jones was facing away from the door and into his computer. From my vantage point, he seemed to have fallen asleep. The screen on his computer looked like it was on a strange screen saver and very soft music was playing. “Strange,” I thought, and closed the door behind me.

I got back to my desk and tried to concentrate on my work. I couldn’t help but continue to wonder what was happening to Mr. Jones, and I kept thinking about it until the sales staff came back that afternoon. That’s when I noticed that both Mr. Jones and I had missed lunch.

After the sales people finished their paperwork, we all gathered in the conference room and they took their usual seats and I stood in my normal spot with a pen and notepad ready. At this point, I was expecting Mr. Jones to order me to get every one drinks – but he just sat there, looking confused.

“Hey boss,” Jim said, “shouldn’t we start the meeting? We got some issues to cover today.”

“Yeah,” stated Richard, “and how about some drinks?”

That seemed to snap Mr. Jones out of his funk. “Cindy, make yourself useful and get everyone drinks... you know what everyone likes.” I quickly exited the conference room and went to our little office kitchen to get drinks for everyone.

Even before I got back in the conference room, I could hear the yelling. “This is fucked up,” Jim yelled. “He tried to steal one of my customers again... even after you told him not to do it”

“Hey, I can’t help it if Stevenson calls me because you don’t return his calls.” Richard replied.

“Bullshit...” Jim spat, “you called him and were trying to convince him to...”

“Why you little punk,” Richard stood up from his chair. He was a large man, more than six feet tall. “You’re damn lucky we are in the presence of ladies, otherwise I would kick your tiny ass for questioning my honesty.” Even though his grey hair showed his age, it was obvious that he was still in good enough shape to easily carry out his threat.

“Enough!” Mr. Jones commanded. “Dick, I told you to stop trying to steal Jimmy’s account.”

Everyone in that room knew that it was only Jim’s account because Mr. Jones gave it to him but no one dared to say anything. According to the normal rotation the account belonged to Richard but Mr. Jones gave it to his friend Jim instead, once it was clear that this account was lucrative.

“You need to fire him,” Jim said looking at Mr. Jones instead of the threatening Richard. Mr. Jones and Jim were fraternity brothers in college and that’s how Jim got the job. Everyone knew it and hated Jim for it. They were tight friends and even kind of looked alike. Jim was about the same age and height as Mr. Jones, meaning they were both young and short. The biggest difference was that Jim had a beard. I am sure that Jim grew his beard to make himself look older but even with the beard it was obvious that Jim was still in early to mid twenties.

“I said *enough*,” Mr. Jones repeated and gave a look to Jim to show him that he meant it. “Half of the commission from this sale will go to Dick and the other half to Jimmy.”

“But I got Stevenson to upgrade and get ten new copiers,” Richard bragged, “Why should I share my commission with Jimmy?”

“It’s not your account,” Jim replied, “and don’t call me Jimmy, only my friends call me that.”

Both men were about to complain some more, when Mr. Jones added, “if either of you don’t agree, then you can give me a letter of resignation. And Dick, if you ever pull this shit again, you are going to face serious conse-

quences.”

“I got a new account today,” stated Sara. “I sold several copier/scanner combos. I didn’t even need to give them a discount.”

“That’s a good girl,” Mr. Jones smiled for the first time since we started the meeting. “See, that’s what I’m talking about...” He started his usual speech that I tuned out. I heard its variations many times before. How the company was a family. He wanted everyone to get along. He stated how disappointed he was with some of the staff’s actions but had hopes that everyone would do better. He then congratulated Sara for a great sale. The meeting was over and so was the work day. I went home and tried to forget what had happened.



During the next few weeks, things at the office were just the same old routine. Mr. Jones sat in his executive office most of the day doing whatever he does and the day would end in the conference room with Jim and Richard arguing. Jim would repeatedly demand that Richard be fired but everyone knew that Richard was too good of a salesman to be let go. Richard would make a threatening remark towards Jim and Mr. Jones would get involved to stop Richard. Sara and I would ignore these arguments and just stay clear of them as much as possible. Things were so normal, I almost forgot all about Mrs. Jones’ request for me to help with the revenge and her CD. Sure, I knew that Mr. Jones played the CD for about three hours each day, but it didn’t seem to do anything other than stop him from watching porn. This was a positive.

At one point, a DVD, obviously porn, in a plain envelope arrived and when I gave it to him, he just tossed it into the trash can. It amazed me. Maybe the CD was helping him with his addiction to porn. I was all for it. It was better for me if he spent his day playing the CD then viewing porn and playing with himself. I had convinced myself that I was doing a good thing. Father would be proud.

SECOND MONTH

Exactly one month after meeting Mrs. Jones at the coffee shop, I met her at the designated date and time again as instructed. I had thought about it for several days, if not weeks. I had myself almost convinced that the first meeting never took place. But I wound up going to meet her just as she had instructed. Just like last month when we first met, Mrs. Jones sat at the table near the back with a large cup coffee on the table and a briefcase next to her. As soon as she saw me, she nodded for me to sit across from her.

“You forgot to bring back the CD,” Mrs. Jones stated.

“I...” I was shocked that she knew that I forgot to bring the CD until I connected the fact that she probably had surveillance equipment installed in our office. I felt like an idiot for forgetting it.

“You can’t even do a simple task,” she said putting the briefcase on the table. She opened her briefcase and turned it around, revealing to me its contents. It had another clear plastic bag with another CD. “Take out the disc,” she ordered.

“I thought the last one was it... And we were just meeting to finalize everything,” I said.

“Just do as instructed,” Mrs. Jones said, impatiently.

“I was worried at first, but it was effective... The CD made him stop watching porn...” I continued while taking the new CD out of the bag.

“How *wonderful*,” Mrs. Jones sneered.

I looked at the CD, marked simply as ‘#2.’ “But I don’t understand,” I said, “I think the other CD cured him from his addiction to porn and his advancements towards me has stopped... why do we need another one?” I asked.

“You ask too many questions,” she replied, “Go to the office and retrieve the first disc and make sure he plays this one. On the same date, next month, at 8:30 am, meet me here again. This time make sure to bring back this CD and the first CD.”

“What will this one do?” I asked.

“You will find out soon enough,” was her reply. “You may go to work now.” She said and started to drink her coffee.

I just sat there looking at the new disc.

“That was not a request,” Mrs. Jones said.

I put the disc in my purse and walked out of the coffee shop and headed to work.

Throughout my drive to work, I thought about how to make Mr. Jones play

the second CD. Yes, I had already decided to make him play it. The first CD seemed to do him good. I had high hopes that the second CD would be the same. But as I arrived at the office, I still had no idea how exactly I was going to get Mr. Jones to play it.

After checking for messages, I took out the CD from my purse and just looked at it, as if looking at it somehow would give me an idea as to how to make Mr. Jones play it. That's when Mr. Jones walked into the office. He looked at the disc.

"Is that the second CD?" he asked.

Not knowing what else to say, I simply replied, "yes."

"Good, I was expecting it." He grabbed it from my hand and immediately took it to his office. After the sales people came into the office and checked in and went out on their sales calls, I sneaked into Mr. Jones' office to check on him. He was facing away from the door to the executive suite and was staring at his computer screen. The screen simply flashed shapes and colors and I could hear soft music. Just like last time. Was it hypnotic? I suppose it was. Suspecting that Mr. Jones was in some type of trance, I relaxed and started to look for the first CD. I was careful not to make any noise that would break his trance. After a quick search, I found it on his desk. I took it and quietly walked out of Mr. Jones' suite.



For the next couple weeks, everything was as it should be. The office ran smoothly, almost to the point of tedium. Each morning Mr. Jones would go into his office for several hours and not make a sound. Around lunch time, I would break his trance by buzzing the intercom, asking him what he wanted for lunch. He almost always ordered a steak sandwich from Charlie's Restaurant. Then, after lunch, I had to remind him to get his work done.

Usually, I wouldn't have to tell him that, but he seemed to be avoiding the basics of his job lately. He was always the procrastinating type, but these days it seemed that his procrastination was getting worse. I was starting to get a few complaint calls from clients that did not receive a call back from Mr. Jones even after leaving multiple messages. I had to remind him about the calls, sometimes multiple times before he returned them. The sales staff was also beginning to complain a little. They were not happy that they had to wait to get answer on a discount request.

One day, Jim called, demanding to speak to Mr. Jones right away. I told him that Mr. Jones was on the phone and that he would call back soon. After I hung up the phone with Jim, I went to Mr. Jones' office to deliver the message and got a huge shock. He was sitting in his chair with one of his bare feet on his

desk and he was painting his toenails blue.

“Damn it Cindy, how many times do I have to ask you to knock first!” he was fumbling to hide his feet and the nail polish. His face was red from embarrassment.

“I’m sorry,” I said, trying to catch my breath, and was about to leave.

“It’s alright,” he said before I could leave. He sat up straight and proud, to look in-command and nonchalant. “Well, this is a little embarrassing. You see, I’m trying to... Get along with my wife and she commented the other night that she was having trouble reaching her toes to properly paint them, and... Well, I lost a bet. Now, I have to paint her toes for her. I... was just practicing. It’s nothing unusual. Besides, it’s blue,” he said putting back his feet on his desk to show me. “It’s dark blue, not baby blue, it’s very masculine,” he said.

I didn’t know what to say. But I’m sure my expression showed that I was still in shock and didn’t believe his excuse.

“Cindy, you won’t tell anyone?” he asked with a pleading look.

“No sir, I won’t tell anyone and yes sir, it’s *very* masculine,” I said.

With visible relief on his face, he again started to paint his toes. “You know this is much harder than I thought, I may need a lot of practice,” he said.

“And... um... I need to see how different colors look... That way I can give good recommendations to my wife. Cindy, can you go buy some nail polish on your lunch break? Just use our corporate card.”

“I’m not sure if that’s appropriate,” I said.

“Please Cindy, I’m trying to save my marriage,” he pleaded. I could hear the desperation in his voice. He had never used this tone of voice with me. He had never been anything but business-like and authoritative. I guess I had to give in.

“Sure Mr. Jones, what ever you ask,” I said. I was desperate to leave the room, and leave him to his peculiar little hobby, when he stopped me again.

“What do you want?” he asked, “why did you come into my office?”

“Oh,” I said, happy to be talking business again, “Jim called and he said he needed to talk to you right away.”

“Thanks for letting me know,” he said still giving all his attention to this toes.

During lunchtime that day, I bought him two nail polishes. Both were in what I thought were masculine colors of dark green and black. He seemed disappointed when he saw the dark shades I had selected. But he accepted them anyway, and began to remove the color on his toes in preparation of painting them with the new colors.

Apparently, Mr. Jones continued to paint his toenails over and over again and did not bother to call Jim back. Because when Jim came into office, he looked

furious. He yelled at me for forgetting to deliver his earlier message before he stormed into the conference room. I just sat at my desk and did not respond. Mr. Jones, Sara and I entered the conference room together and I was about to get drinks for everyone when Richard walked in and took his seat.

"You son of a bitch!" I heard Jim yell at Richard, "You stole another client."

"What are you going to do about it?" Richard said standing up from his chair.

Jim looked for Mr. Jones to help him. This is usually when Mr. Jones got involved and yelled at both of Richard and Jim. But he just sat there, looking scared of Richard.

Richard, noticing that Mr. Jones was not going to interfere, grabbed Jim by his shirt and pulled him towards him over the conference table.

"Stop acting like little boys," Sara finally interjected. "This is an office not the jungle. I swear that you are going to kill each other." She turned to Mr. Jones. "Boss, aren't you going to do something? I thought that your solution last time was fair. Split the commission."

"Yeah," Mr. Jones finally stated, "split the commission and stop fighting. You guys are really scaring the girls," he said.

I guess Mr. Jones didn't feel like giving his usual speech that day and just ended the meeting with, "if no one else has anything to add, well... I guess the meeting is over."

He got up and quickly went back to his office.



The next day, after the sales staff left in the morning, Mr. Jones gave me a list of nail colors and asked me to buy those during my lunch break. The list included baby blue, yellows and various shades of pink and red. I didn't question his request and just did as told.

From that day on, Mr. Jones would spend at least couple hours coloring his toe nails. He'd pick a color, admire it and then remove the polish and start all over again. I knew this because he would ask me to come into his executive office and ask my opinion on how well he did the job. This really bothered me because I knew that his fascination with his toes began after he started to play the CD. I figured the CD had to have something to do with it. I felt really guilty about it. That's when I started to question if I should continue to help Mrs. Jones.

I also worried about our company. Mr. Jones continued to spend all his mornings alone playing his CD and with his new hobby he didn't have much time to do any work. I really had to pressure him to even return calls. Unlike in the past, he didn't even bother to look at the files before calling the client back.

Without any knowledge of what he was talking about, he was unsure and hesitant, and that caused the calls to usually go bad. Then the sales staff would complain to me. Like I was responsible for this mess? Maybe I was. Regardless, why would they assume I could do anything about it? I guess they were afraid to complain directly to the boss but they were obviously unhappy.

It wasn't long before Mr. Jones started to wear slippers around the office when the sales staff wasn't there to show off his toes to me. I'd just nod and continue on with my work. Right before the sales staff got back, he would wear his socks and dress shoes and no one but me would know that his toes were painted.

I knew that Mrs. Jones wanted revenge on the man, but until then, I didn't know what this revenge entailed. But now it was obvious, that it entailed ruining Mr. Jones. It was meant to humiliate him and also possibly cause him to lose his job. It was a matter of time before someone walked in at the wrong time and saw what he was doing. I really wished that my father was still alive. I could lean on him when times got tough. But without my support system, it was very difficult for me.

The only thing that allowed me to not go in full panic mode when Mr. Jones walked around in his slippers was the knowl-



edge that we rarely got visitors without an appointment. Our mail man and delivery guys came in each day around 10:00 in the morning. Mr. Jones knew to stay in his office during that time. But one day, a man showed up around 11:00 a.m. without an appointment. He was a tall young man that could easily be described as the “tall handsome type.” He wore an expensive looking suit.

Luckily Mr. Jones was still in his office. Nonetheless, it reminded me that we needed to be more careful. The man’s name was Peter Smith and he told me that he was there to apply for a salesman’s position. When I told him that he needed to make an appointment, he told me that he knew Mr. Jones well and that Mr. Jones would see him even without an appointment. I used the intercom system to let Mr. Jones know that Mr. Peter Smith was here to apply for a job. When Mr. Jones did not respond, I decided to go to his office. Mr. Jones was in trance, still playing the CD, so I had to wake him from his trance. Once I was able to get Mr. Jones’ attention and let him about Mr. Smith, Mr. Jones smiled oddly. “Good old Peter,” Mr. Jones said while continuing to smile. “By all means let him in.” I had to remind Mr. Jones to put on his socks and shoes and to put away the nail polish. After making sure that Mr. Jones did so, I left the executive office and headed towards my desk.

As soon as I returned to my desk, I told Mr. Smith that Mr. Jones would see him now. Mr. Smith quickly entered the executive office and closed the door behind him. About ten minutes later, Mr. Jones asked me to join them in the executive office. When I entered I was surprised to see Mr. Smith on his knees in front of Mr. Jones who was standing.

“Go ahead,” Mr. Jones stated to Mr. Smith.

“Please, I am begging you, Thomas” Mr. Smith said, “please give me a job.” I was obviously called into the executive office to witness this act. This must have been very humiliating for Mr. Smith and I felt terribly sorry for him. I knew that my father would not approve of such behavior.

“Fuck off,” Mr. Jones said and laughed.

Mr. Smith quickly got off from his knees and without saying anything, turned around and headed out of the executive office, passing me on his way out. I followed him out of the executive office. After making sure that the door to Mr. Jones’ office was closed, I said, “I am really sorry that he treated you that way.”

Mr. Smith turned around and looked at me in my eyes and smiled. He then paused before saying, “Don’t worry about it. Thomas has always been a jerk and I knew that this could be his response. I was just stupid and desperate enough to ask for a job.”

“I am still sorry,” I said, “He shouldn’t have treated you that way.”

“What’s your name?” Mr. Smith asked.

“Cindy,” I replied, “Cindy Webster.”

"I'm Peter," he said, "Well, Cindy, I'm sorry that you have to deal with him every day. That must be very difficult."

"It pays the bills," I said.

"I wish you luck," he said then left our office.

I thought that it would be the last time I would see Mr. Smith but I was wrong.

That month ended before I knew it. The evening before my next meeting with Ms. Jones, I waited until everyone else left the office and gathered that second CD. With both discs in my purse, I went home.

I fussed around, already nervous about tomorrow. I barely ate my dinner. I did find a little bit of solace in a bottle of wine, though. As I prepared to go to bed, I looked at both CDs, as I had laid them out on the kitchen table, and I began to cry. These CDs were destructive things that were designed to tear down a man. I had played a part in this destruction. Sure, I was pressured into playing this role, just like I was pressured into the tryst with Mr. Jones. But that didn't relieve my guilty conscience. What could I say to Mr. Jones, after he was humiliated? "I am sorry, but it wasn't my idea." It sounded so lame. My father would definitely chastise me. But what could I do? Could I really stand up to Mrs. Jones and tell her that I can no longer help her. I felt so weak. I needed support. I called my mother again to ask for her help. But as usual she was no help. She just kept talking without really listening.

"Mother," I said, "it's me. I need your help."

"Are you eating right?" she asked, "did you gain weight?"

"No," I said, "my weight is fine."

"Are you on a diet again," she said, "I read in an article that crash diets don't work."

"I am not calling about that," I said.

"Did you eat dinner?" she asked, "it's already nine."

"Yes, mother," I lied, "I didn't want to get lecture from her about eating three meals per day."

"Is it about a man?" she asked, "Did you finally meet someone?"

"Well it's about a man," I said, "but not what you think."

"Oh my God," she said, "you are pregnant? I told you about men. You have to..."

"No, mother," I said, "I'm not pregnant. I'm not even dating anyone."

"Why not?" She asked. "How you are going to marry if you don't date? You are not getting any younger. Men don't like old women."

"Mother," I said, "I need your advice on something very important."

"You remember Lance, Jane's son," she said, "Jane tells me that Lance is go-

ing to graduate soon and he is single. He is a good boy. I can set you up.”

“Mother,” I said.

“You could do much worse than Lance,” she continued, “I can set you up.”

“Mother,” I said, “I don’t want that now.”

“You have to lower your standards,” she said, “you are not the *prettiest* girl, you know.”

“It’s not that,” I said, “I just don’t feel like dating any men right now.”

“Oh my God,” she said, “are you telling me that you are lesbian? I always suspected but... Oh my God!”

“No! I am not a lesbian!” I said. “Mother, I got another call.” I lied again. I lied twice in one evening. I hated to lie to my mother but what could I do? “I’ll have to call you back.” I quickly hung up the phone. I should have known better then to ask my mother for help. I wished my father was still alive to help me. He would know what to do.

THIRD MONTH

That night, I couldn't sleep. I kept repeating, in my mind, Mrs. Jones saying the word "revenge." Now that I knew what the CDs were doing, I shouldn't help her. I couldn't help her. My father wouldn't want me to help her. I had never imagined this kind of power existed, and I was terrified I was playing a part in it. Mrs. Jones was obviously trying to humiliate Mr. Jones. It wasn't right. I didn't want Mr. Jones to be a target of scorn. Sure, Mr. Jones may have deserved it. But that didn't mean that I should be involved in it. After a restless night, I decided to tell Mrs. Jones that I won't help her anymore. That's what my father would tell me to do.

The next morning, I woke up late, which wasn't a surprise since I had such a hard time falling asleep. I got ready as quickly as I could and got in my car. It was already 8:45 am, which meant if I drove straight to the office, I would be about ten minutes late. I knew from previous rare occasions when I was late that Mr. Jones would yell at me. If the prospect of being yelled at for being late wasn't bad enough, I had another problem. I had to tell Mrs. Jones that I couldn't help her. I had to tell her face to face that I could not participate in her revenge. I knew that she wasn't the type of woman that would take no for an answer. So I practiced what I was going to say and promised to my self that I would stand by my decision. As I pulled into a parking spot at the designated coffee shop, my watch told me I was really running very late. I hoped that she was still there.

When I ran in, I saw her sitting at the same table as our prior meetings.

"You're late," she said.

"I..." I began, suddenly losing all of words that I practiced in my head over and over again. "I am not going to get involved," I started to say "It's not..."

"It's a little late for that now Don't you think? You're already involved," she said, interrupting me. My defiance seemed to only amuse her. She brought an envelope out of her case and showed me the pictures of me with Mr. Jones again. "If you don't do as I instruct you, these pictures will be all over the news. That's the only other way to protect my family's assets. My family will suffer great embarrassment but you will be known for the rest of your life as the bimbo secretary that had an affair with her boss. Good luck getting a legitimate job after that. Maybe, you could be a stripper. You would need to get a breast job, but otherwise you will be perfect for that job."

"Please," I begged.

She placed her briefcase on the table and opened it and turned it towards me. "Take the CD out of the bag," she said.

I did as told. I still wasn't sure what I was going to do. I needed to placate

her, though. I would just decide back at the office if I'd go through with it.

"Now place the two prior discs in the bag and place the bag back in my briefcase." She ordered.

I complied with her order and she quickly closed the briefcase and put it next to her.

"Make sure he plays the third CD," she said. She paused to close the clasps on her case and then looked at me with a frown. "You may go now," she said, impatiently.

As I was already late, I quickly grabbed the CD, put it in my purse, got out of the coffee shop and drove to the office. Despite driving like a maniac, I was about twenty minutes late. When I entered the office, I heard Mr. Jones scream my name.

I quickly entered his office. "*You little bitch!*" he yelled, *How dare* you be late again, after I gave you that *warning?*" He looked right into my eyes, "you obviously don't like your job."

He was going to fire me. After all I had done for him, he was going to fire me just because I was a few minutes late. At that moment, I hated him. But was still afraid to stand up to him. I had to think quickly. Then it came to me. I knew what would distract him. "I had to stop by the store and get some new nail polish for you," I said, "I noticed that you were running out."

Mr. Jones looked confused, his eyes wandered for a moment and then they focused in on me again. He smiled and said, "I'm sorry for yelling at you Cindy. I'm under a lot of stress. Please forgive me."

"It's all right Mr. Jones," I said and was about to walk out.

"Where's the new polish?" he asked, pensively.

Luckily, I had an almost new nail polish in my purse and took it out and handed it to him.

"It's lovely," he said, taken with the shiny little bottle. He then glanced at my open purse. "What's that?" he asked, pointing to the new CD.

Not knowing what to say, I just handed the CD to him. "It's a sequel to the others."

"Thank you!" he said, very excited.

I left him alone with his new CD and the nail polish and went back to my desk and continued my work. Who am I kidding? I didn't get much work done that day. I was too busy feeling sorry for myself. I didn't want to hurt Mr. Jones. But at the same time I didn't want my affair to become public. Plus, he really was an arrogant jerk.

Hours of silence went by. He hadn't used the phone, he didn't buzz me. He didn't even come and ask what I thought of the new color on his toes. I started

to get really worried about Mr. Jones. Around lunch time I knocked on his office to check up on him.

"Come in," he said. He was blowing on his finger nails while admiring the fresh coat of paint. That's the first time I noticed how long his finger nails had gotten. They were definitely too long for a man.

"Um, Mr. Jones," I said, "what would you like for lunch?"

"I've been drinking slim fit diet shakes. I think I'll just have another," he said.

That surprised me. He was so thin already. Why was he on a diet? Maybe it was the CDs. Yes; it definitely had to be the discs. I didn't like this turn of events. I wanted to shake him out of it, but instead just played dumb. "Even on a liquid diet, you're supposed to eat a meal during lunch," I said.

"You are *so* smart," he said, "but I don't know what I want. What should I eat?" He blew on his nails again.

He used to be so decisive about what he wanted. "How about a steak sandwich from Charley's Restaurant," I said knowing that was his favorite.

"Salad," he said, "I think I want a salad, and hold the dressing..."

"Are you sure," I said, a little puzzled. He never ate a salad in my time with this company. I figured he was a strictly meat and potatoes kind of guy.

"I..." he said, "I'm not too sure." He had a distinct look of confusion on his face, like one part of him was fighting another. "But I think I want a salad," he said. He then thought about it again. "But if you think I should have a sandwich, maybe you're right."

"No," I said, "If you want a salad, I will get you a salad," I said, not wanting to get into a pointless back-and-forth. While I was going to do that errand, I figured I might as well remind him to get caught up on work. "You have several messages on your voice mail, and some of them are complaining that you're not returning their calls."

"Okay," was his response, but he didn't seem to care.

I left the executive office and called Charley's and ordered two salads, one with ranch dressing and one dry. A few minutes later I told Mr. Jones that I was going to go pick up the salad. I told him, "don't bother answering the phone and let the voice mail pick up."

I took my time walking to the restaurant. I briefly thought about just not stopping and walking the hell out of this nightmare. Instead, I picked the salads up, and went back to work.

"Here's your salad, Mr. Jones," I said. He turned to face me. His eyes were wide open but seemed a little strange. His pupils were almost fully dilated.

"Thank you, it looks delicious," he said, and then placed his salad on his credenza. Did the CDs change his eating habits too? This was becoming scary.

I sat at my desk and tried to organize some files but did not make much progress. I just couldn't get the image of Mr. Jones' strange behavior out of my mind. For the rest of the afternoon, I just took several messages, and apologized for Mr. Jones for not returning calls.

A few minutes before the sales staff was scheduled to be at the office, I decided to get Mr. Jones ready so that he didn't miss the meeting. I knocked on the door and Mr. Jones asked me to enter.

"You have to get ready for the meeting," I told him, "and you still have nail polish on your fingers and you're still wearing sandals, for God's sake! It shows the nail polish on your toes!"

He looked puzzled at first then replied, "You're right, Cindy. Please help me get ready."

I helped him remove the nail polish from his fingers and made sure he wore his socks and shoes to hide the polish on his toes. He thanked me again and we went to the meeting.

"Thomas!" Jim began as soon as we got into the conference room.

"Boss!" Richard, began.

"This joker stole another account," Jim bellowed, pointing at Richard. "If you don't fire him, he'll just continue to do this, and I won't have any more accounts left. As a friend, I am begging you to help me and put him straight... or I'm going to have to quit."

Richard got up from his chair again, "I'm getting tired of these accusations. Be a man! If you're going to accuse me of something," he said while reaching over the table. He grabbed Jim's shirt and pulled him towards him. "You talk to *me*," It looked like Richard was going to hit Jim.

Mr. Jones, surprisingly, looked frightened and just sat there while his friend was being physically threatened.

"Aren't you going to do something?" Sara asked, looking disgustedly at Mr. Jones.

She got up and came between the two men who were about to fight. "I'm getting a just little sick of this!" She then turned to speak to Jim. "It's obvious, Tom is not going to help you, so why don't you just quit."

That's the first time anyone called Mr. Jones "Tom." Before it was either "boss" or "Mr. Jones." Sure, Jim called him "Thomas" sometimes to get the point across that he and Mr. Jones are friends... But no one called him "Tom." I looked to see a reaction from Mr. Jones, but he sat there looking frightened.

"All right, then," Jim said with a look of regret on his face. "Get your hands off of me and I'm out of here."

Richard let him go and Jim turned to face Mr. Jones and said, in a disgusted

voice, “thanks for nothing, Tom.” Then he was gone. Mr. Jones went after him and I could hear him apologizing profusely to Jim as they walked away.

“I guess the meeting is over,” Richard said and walked out of the room.

When Mr. Jones did not come back, Sara and I also left the conference room. She left for the day and I waited a little longer in the office for Mr. Jones to come back. After a few minutes with no sign of anyone, I left the office and locked up for the night. I didn’t see Jim again for a while. The next time I saw him in the office it was under very different circumstances.

By the next day, Mr. Jones seemed to just ignore the fact that his good friend quit. So everyone else followed his lead. It was as if he had been edited right out of everyone’s lives.

I wasn’t sure if it was the loss of his friend or something in those evil little discs, but over the next few weeks, Mr. Jones just didn’t seem sure of himself. Richard or Sara would ask for a discount and he couldn’t make a decision. He would ask me what I would do if I were him. At first, I was reluctant to help him, figuring I didn’t want to get blamed for a bad decision. But when it became obvious that Mr. Jones could not make the decision, I started to advise him. I also found myself having to help him complete other aspects of his job. He told me what to do, between his nail-painting activities, but still asked my opinion.

One day, I heard a scream from Mr. Jones office. I quickly ran to his office and found him with what appeared to be a peace of paper with bits of hair attached to one side. His right leg was on his desk and a portion of his leg was devoid of hair.

“What are you doing?” I asked.



"My body hair itches," was his reply, "I want it off."

What he was doing, was a sort of homemade leg waxing. "Why don't you shave?" I asked.

"It'll just grow back," he responded, as if it were the obvious answer.

"Mr. Jones, this going to far," I said, "please stop this odd behavior."

"I can't," he said. "I want to stop but I can't. Cindy, I need your help."

The look of desperation convinced me that he was telling the truth. He really believed that he couldn't stop. I had to convince him to stop. So I decided to scare him with the possibility of exposure.

"I am not qualified to help you," I said. "Let me call someone."

"Everyone will know!" he objected.

It was working. He wouldn't dare risk someone finding out.

I decided to add more pressure, and I so grabbed from my desk a business card from a beauty salon. I made sure Mr. Jones could see what it was. "It's the only option." I said.

"It's too dangerous," he said. That's exactly what I wanted to hear.

"Then I am afraid you won't be able to wax your legs," I said feeling that I had a small victory. I turned to leave his executive office when Mr. Jones stopped me.

"Call the salon," he said, "tell them I need to wax my legs for a swimming race." He had called my bluff. "Tell them that I can't come to the salon because someone may get the wrong idea. Tell them to send someone that's going to be discreet. I will pay what ever they charge. Just put it on the corporate card."

"Are you sure," I said, "it sounds risky." I hoped that he would change his mind.

"The office is empty during the day, except for me and you," he said. "Besides, it's either this, or I have to live with this hair. I can't do that. We just have to be careful. Unless *you* want to help me, Cindy."

Since there was no way in the world I was going to spend my time pulling hair off my boss myself, and knew that he wasn't going to change his mind, I decided to call the salon.

Several minutes later, a lady came from the salon and I ushered her into Mr. Jones' office. I went back to my desk as she worked on him.

For the next hour, each time a strip of wax was ripped off of his body, he screamed into a towel which I could hear outside the office door. I knew that she would not believe the lie about the swimming race. She definitely would know that it was a lie when she saw his toes painted all red. I just hoped that she was indeed discreet. By the time they were done two hours later, and the

beautician paid with the office Credit Card, Mr. Jones begged me to tell him what I thought of his new, smooth skin. He was still wearing a feminine robe that the beautician had brought with her. When I asked about it, he just told me that he bought it from her because it was comfortable. He raised the bottom of the robe to show off his hairless legs. His legs, especially, with his toes painted, looked like woman's legs. In fact, the only hair left on him was his eyebrows and the increasingly long-ish hair on his head. I asked him about his rather long hair he had let grow over the past several weeks, and he just ignored me.

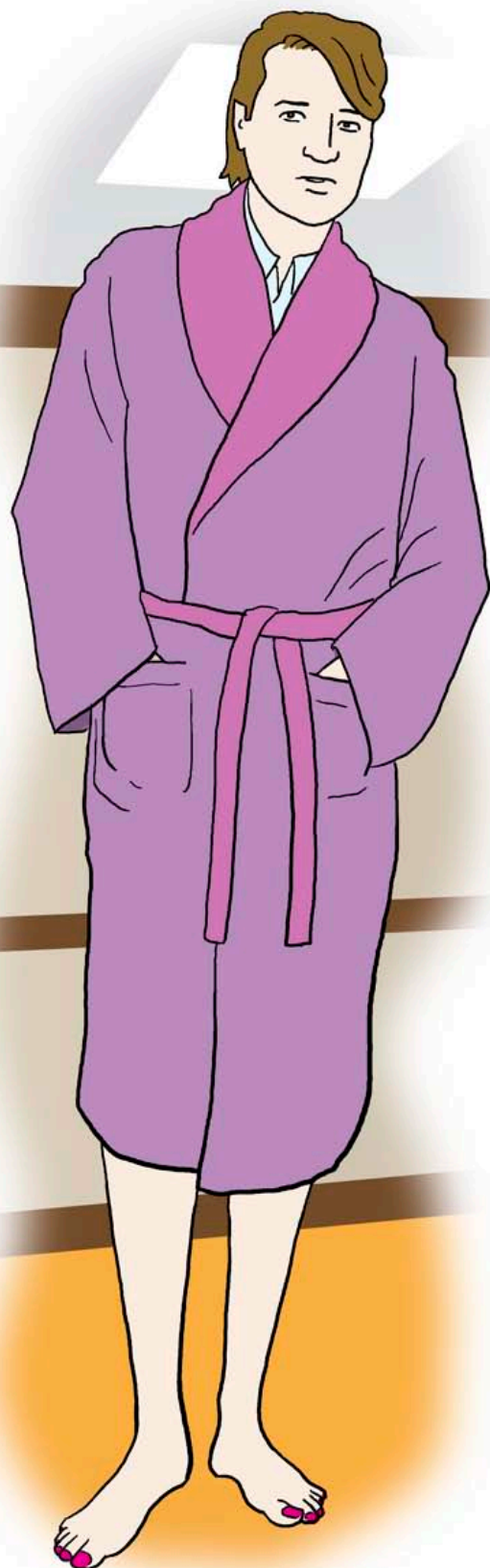


The very next day, I got a huge surprise. Mr. Smith called the office. Mr. Smith, the salesman who had been treated so badly. Correction – he called *me*. He wanted to have dinner with me.

“You were so nice apologizing for your boss,” Mr. Smith said, “you made the most embarrassing moment in my life a little more bearable. I was so filled with self pity that I didn’t even thank you. The least I can do is buy dinner.”

I needed some distraction from the things that were happening in the office. He seemed like a nice guy and knew that my father would approve. So I said “okay.”

He was waiting for me in the parking lot of our office building when I got off of work. He drove a black



Mercedes that looked very nice. As soon as he saw me come out of building, he quickly drove his car towards me, stopped the car, got out and opened the front passenger door for me. He was such a gentleman. I think I've only seen my father do something similar for my mother. He wore an expensive looking dark blue suit with a white dress shirt.

"You have a beautiful car," I said.

"It's all part of the image that a salesman must present," he said, "it's actually a little too showy for my taste."

"I hope you like Italian," he said, "I made reservations with Antonio's"

"That place is expensive," I said, "How can you afford it? I thought you didn't have a job."

"I just got a job," he said, "so we're celebrating."

On the way to the restaurant and inside the restaurant, he told me all about his new job. It was salesman position with a manufacturer and wholesaler of gloves used in various industries. It turns out he used to be a sales manager of another company that went bankrupt. He had no warning that his former company had financial problems and was taken off guard. When he checked with his friends for possible leads for a new job, he was surprised to find out that Mr. Jones was the president of a local office equipment company and that he had recently given a job to Jim. Mr. Smith, or Peter, told me that he, Mr. Jones and Jim and were all fraternity brothers back in college.

"Then I don't understand. Why was Mr. Jones so mean to you?" I asked, "he seems to be very fond of Jim."

"I was a senior and he and Jim were pledging with our fraternity," he said, "I was young and dumb and took the pledging thing a little too far. I made them do some crazy things. In hindsight, I realized that what I did was wrong. Later, I asked for their forgiveness but they never got over it. You see, it's actually my own doing. It's karma," he said smiling. "But it all worked out in the end. This new job is a much better fit for me. If I work hard, I have an opportunity to be a manager again soon. If I had been hired by Thomas, I would not have found this opportunity. Even if I had found it, I would have felt obligated to stay with your company."

"I am glad things worked out for you," I said.

"What about you?" he asked, "are things working out for you at your company?"

I seriously thought about telling him everything. He seemed so nice and helpful. He reminded me of my father. He was a lot better looking than my father but seemed to have the same type of personality. Unlike my father, I would describe Peter as dark and handsome. He seemed very confident and self assured. That reminded me of daddy. Maybe he, like my father, would be

able to help me. But I didn't know him that well and nice or not, a first date is not the proper place to tell secrets. "Everything is great," I lied. I didn't sound too convincing, even to myself. But Peter didn't press me on it.

Trying to change the subject, I asked, "Why were you surprised that Mr. Jones is a president of our company?"

He smiled. "I don't want to say anything bad about anyone. But since he's successful now, I guess there's no harm. Thomas used to be only into parties and girls. He almost flunked out several times. Don't get me wrong. He is very smart. It's just that he never applied himself. But I guess he has changed a lot since then. Becoming a president, even of a small company, is impressive at such a young age. He must've worked really hard to achieve such a success. I just hope that Jim also changed. I may've not shown it when we're in college, but I really liked them. That's part of the reason why I was so tough on them."

We had many more pleasant conversations that evening before he drove me back to my office building. As he stated good night to me, I hoped that he would end the date with a kiss. I closed my eyes as I turned my face towards him. But he didn't kiss me. He just opened his car door for me.

"I had a great time," I said.

"Me too," he said.

"Will you call me again?" I asked.

"Um," he said, "sure."

"Please call me," I said as I stepped out of his car. I again turned towards him and in anticipation of a kiss, closed my eyes. But he didn't kiss me. After a few awkward minutes, I entered my car. He waited until I started my car and was on my way before he reentered his car and left. I saw him drive away in my rear view mirror and really hoped that he would call me soon. I didn't know much about him but something told me that he would make a great boyfriend.

The next day, I thought that Peter would call me again and ask me for another date. But he didn't. I kept asking myself why he didn't kiss me that night. Did I dress too conservatively? Did I say something wrong? I hoped not. I desperately wanted Peter to call me. I would try harder to impress him if I ever got the chance. Every time office phone rang, I hoped that it was Peter. But it wasn't. As days became a week and I didn't get a call from Peter, I looked for and found his resume in Mr. Jones' office and thought about calling him. But I knew that my parents would disapprove. It wasn't ladylike to call a gentleman. So I decided to keep my mind off of Peter until he called. I kept his resume in my left top drawer, just in case I changed my mind.

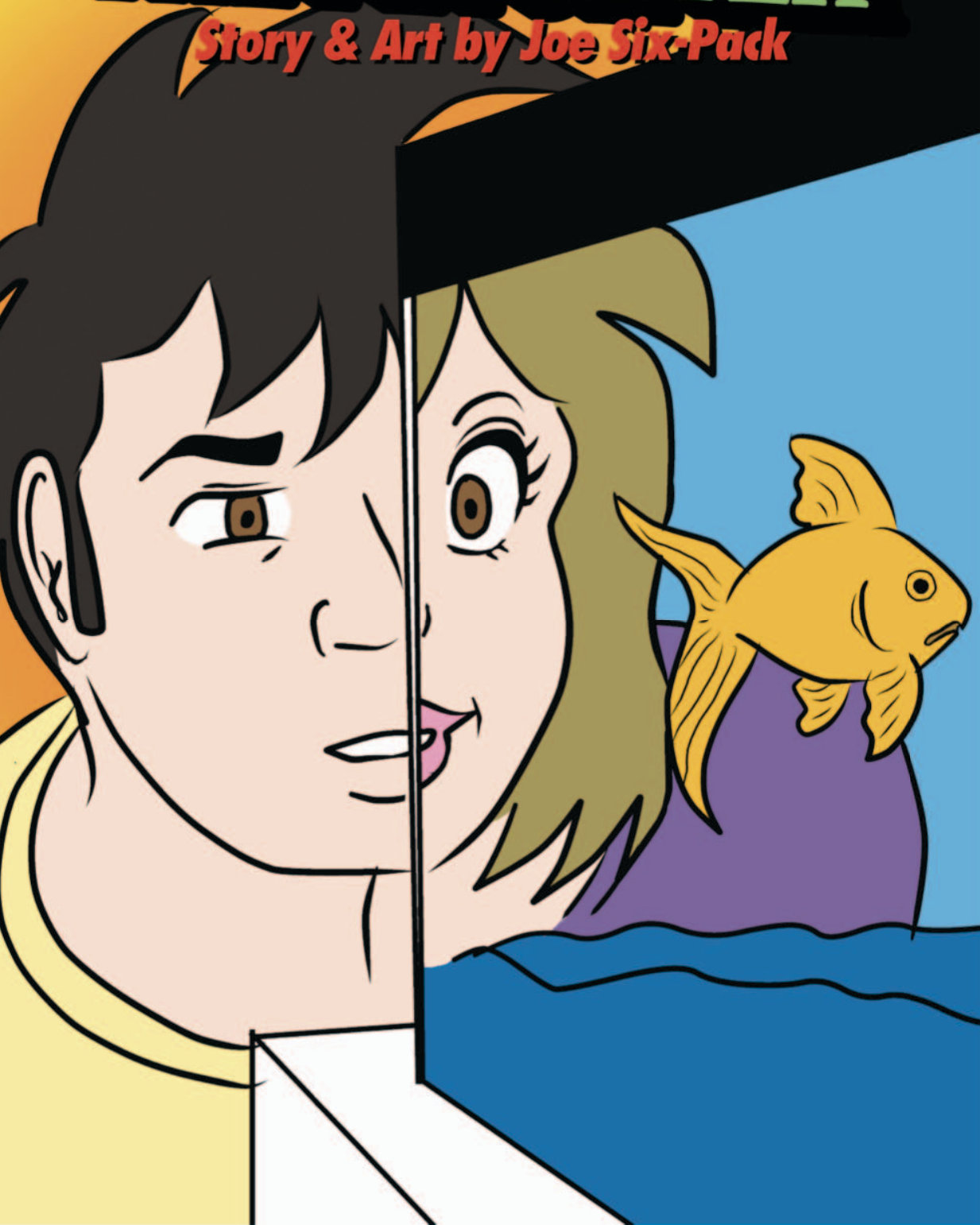
After another day's work, I checked the calendar, and it was the evening before my next meeting with Mrs. Jones, I retrieved the third CD from Mr. Jones' office and put it in my purse. This was too much for me. My father would want me to stop playing a role in this evil scheme. I decided to tell Mrs. Jones that I

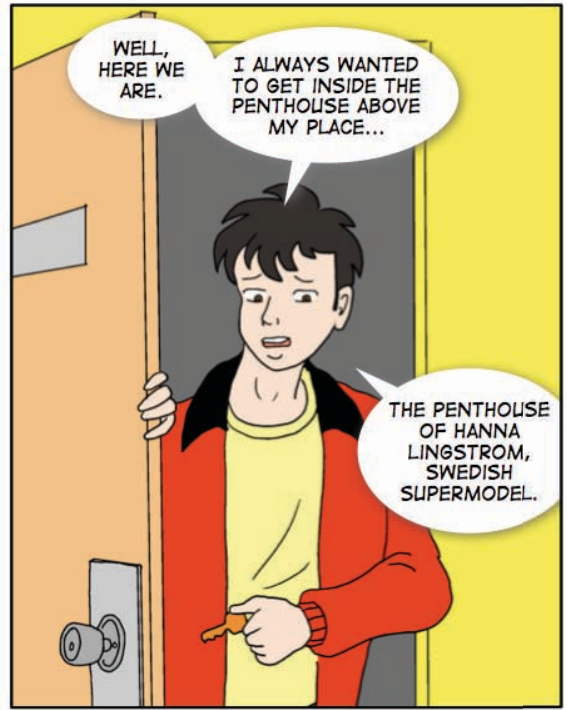
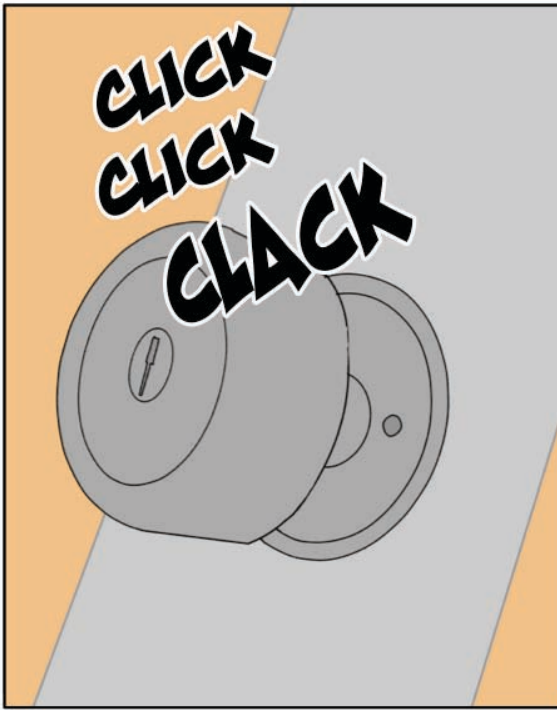
couldn't help her anymore. I chose to face the consequences. Even if everyone was going to know about my affair, I wasn't going to help Mrs. Jones anymore.



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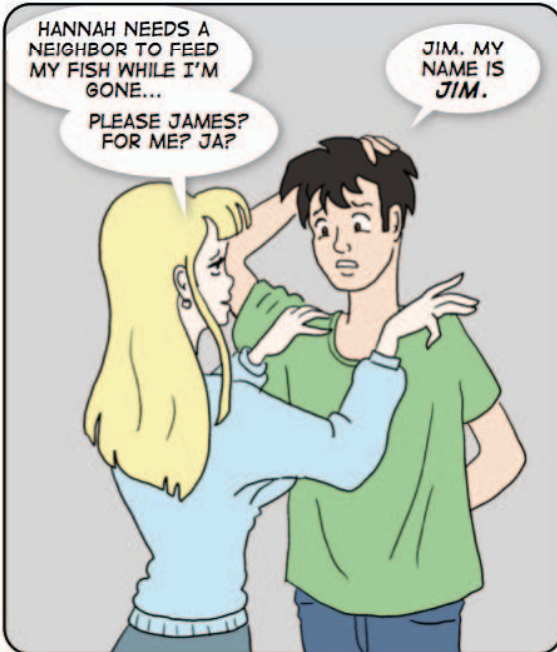


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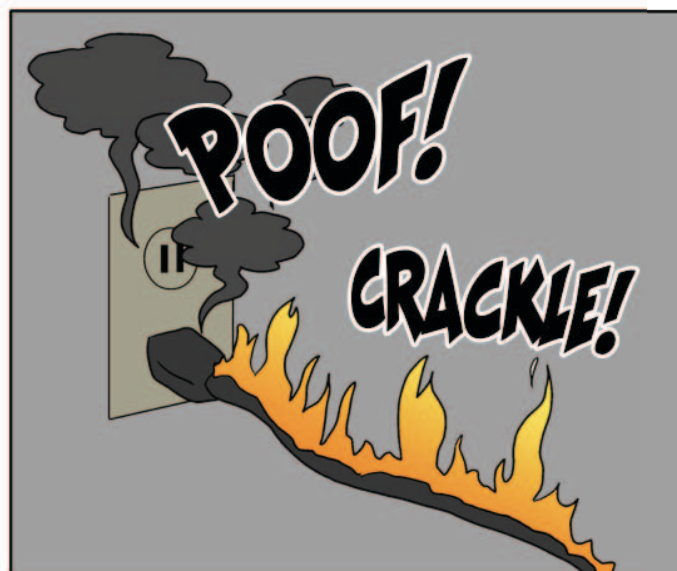
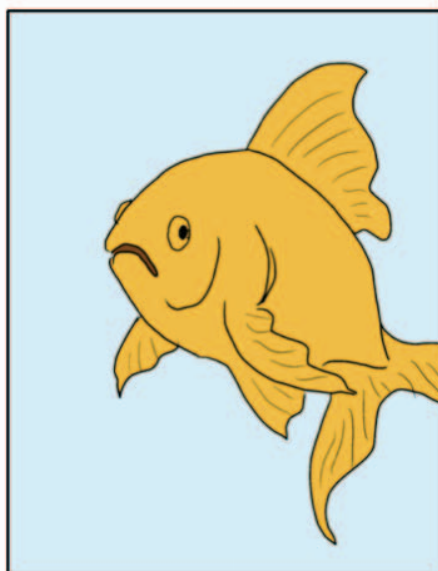
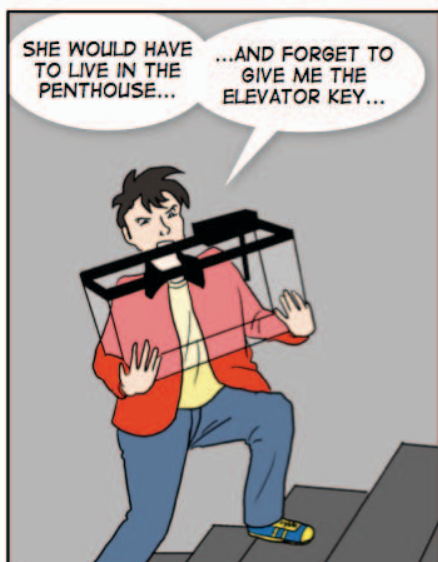
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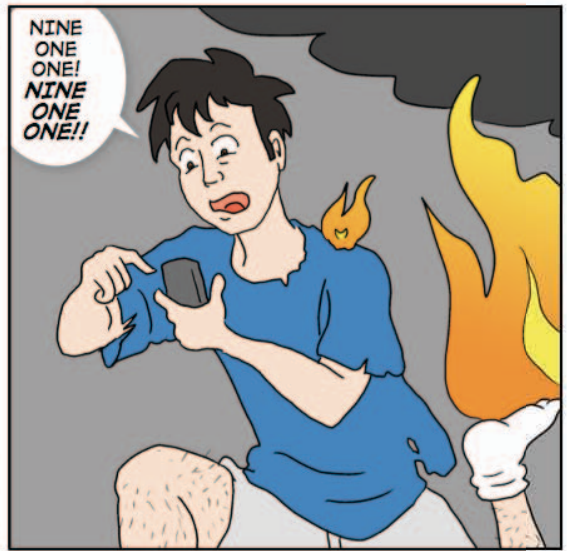
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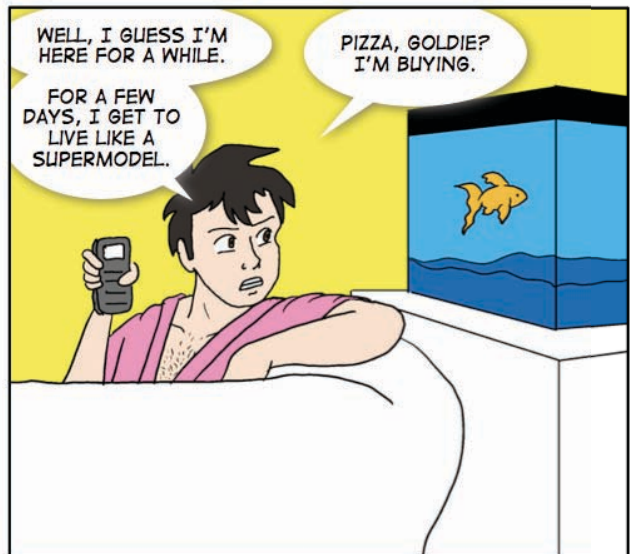
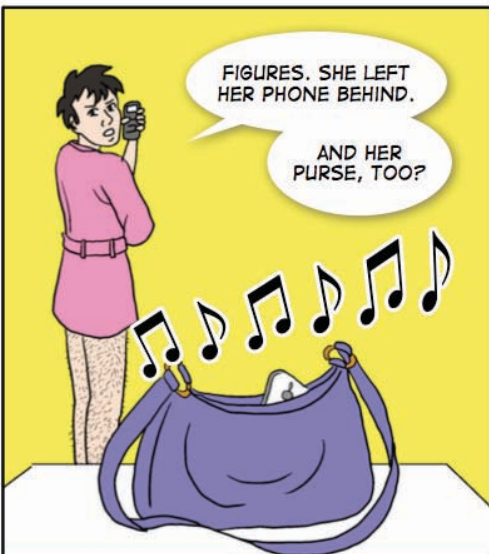
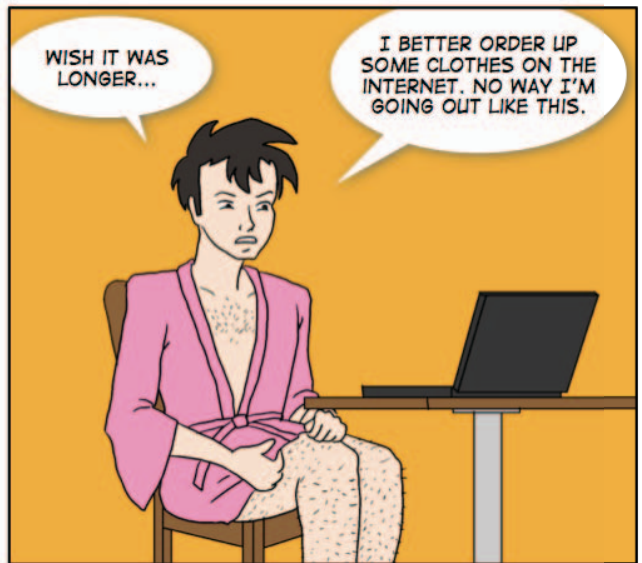


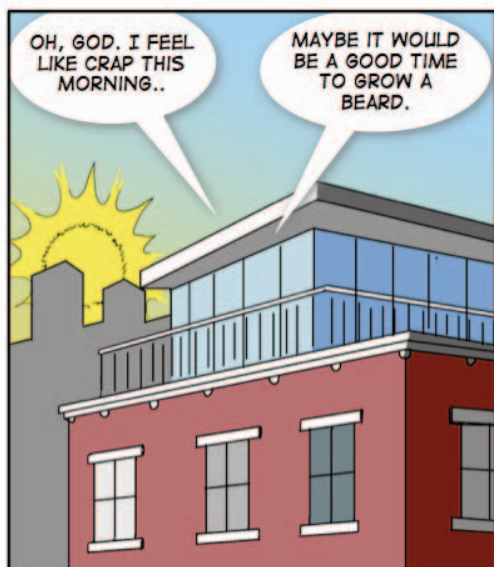








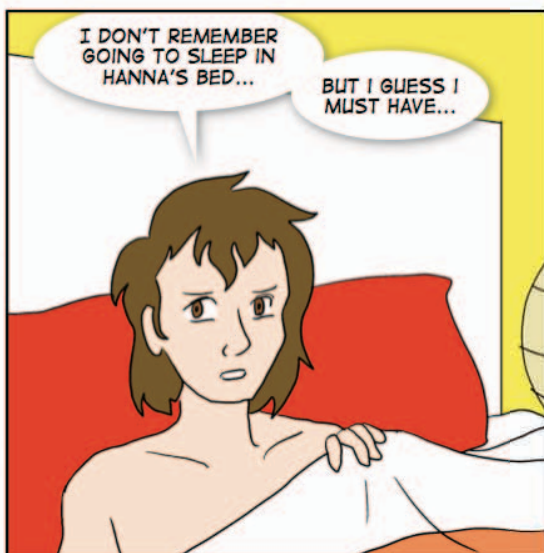






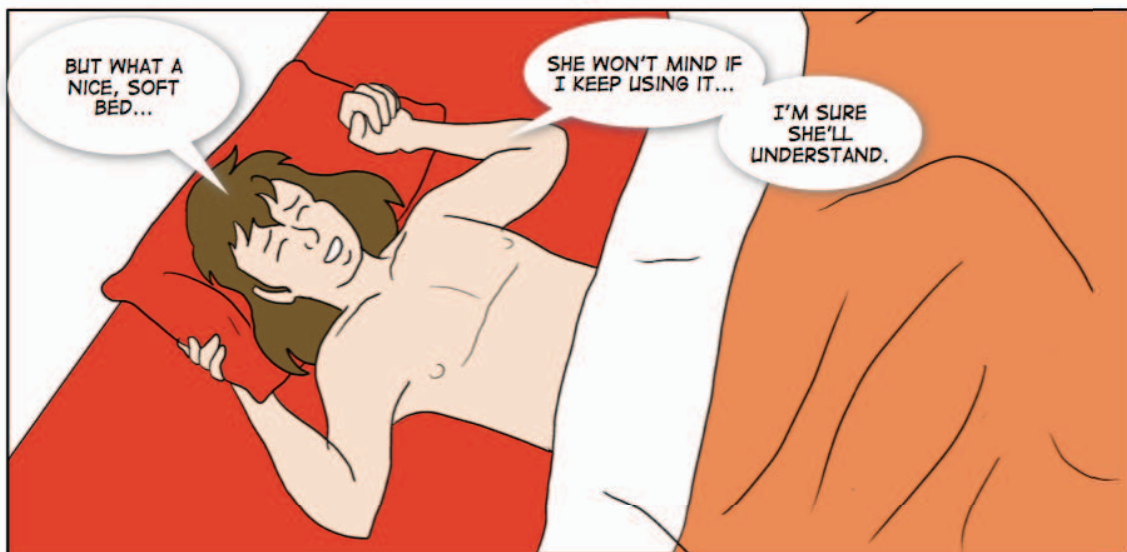


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BUT I GUESS I
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BUT WHAT A
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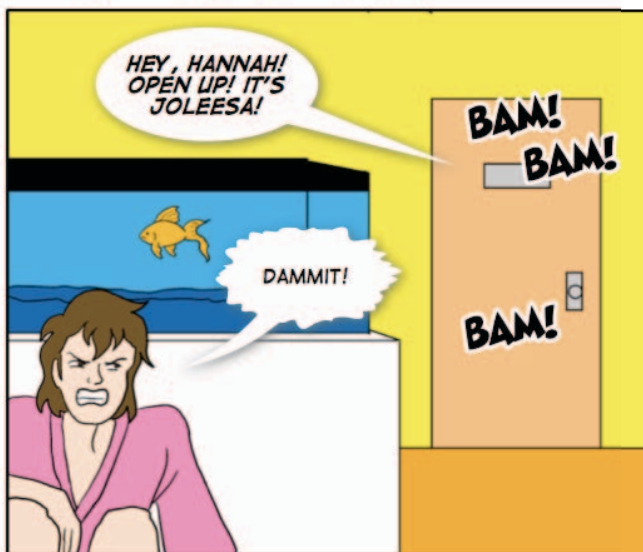
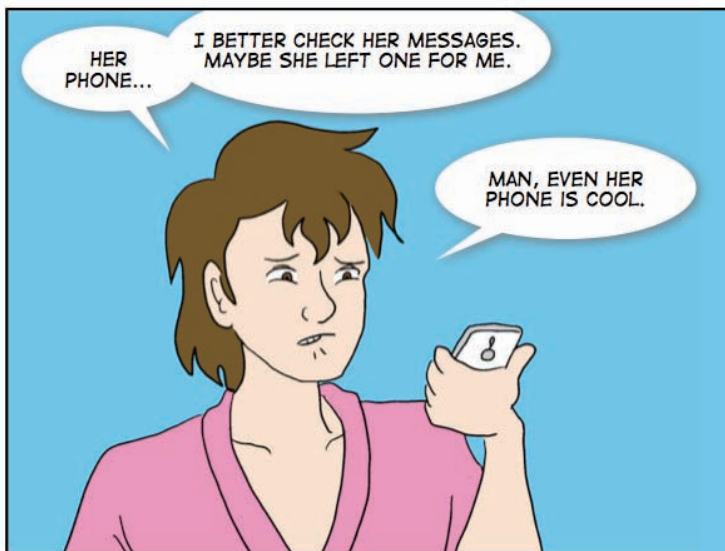
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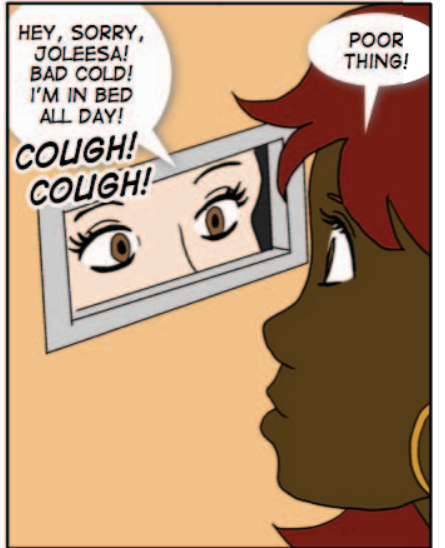
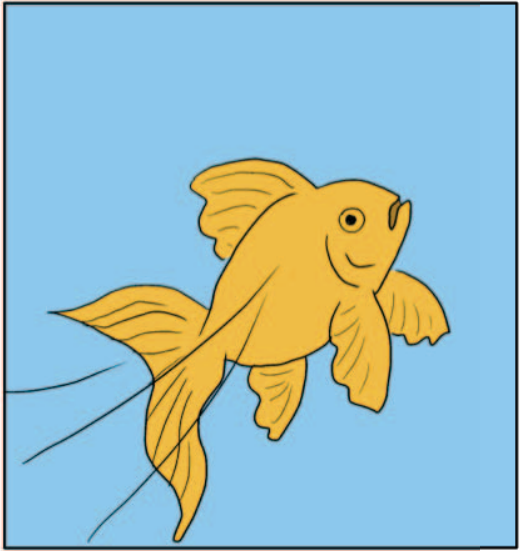
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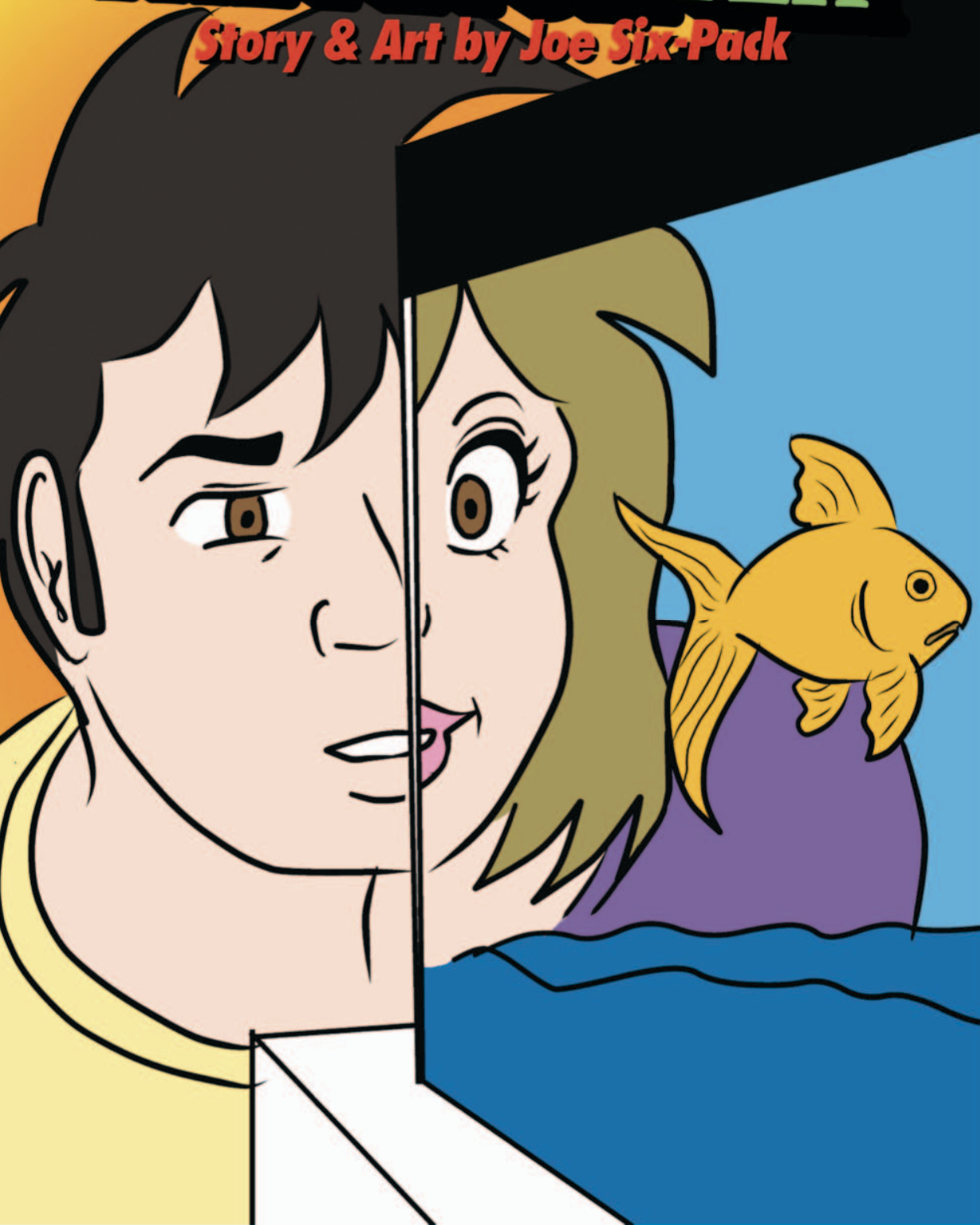


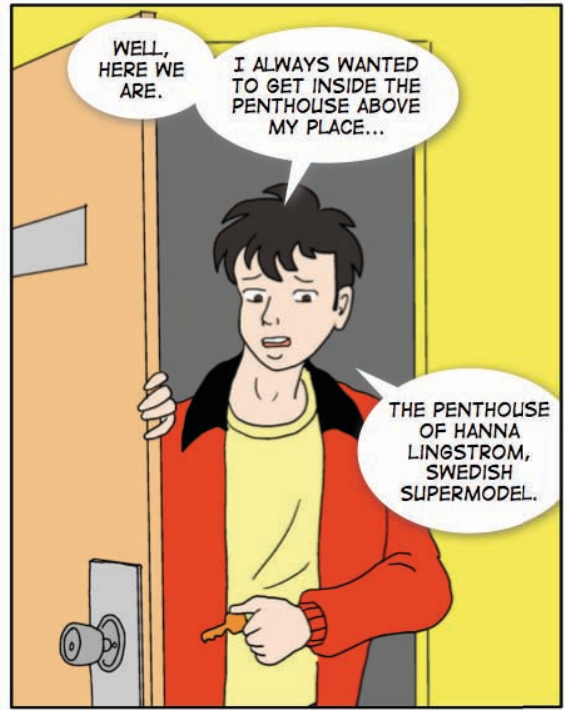
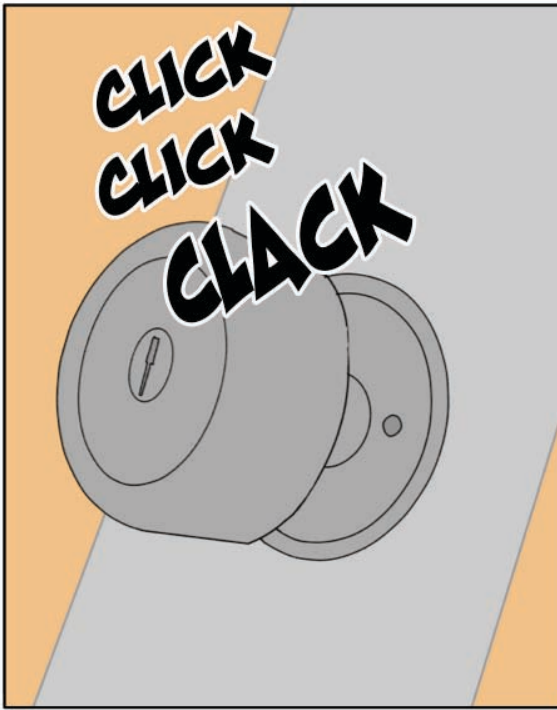




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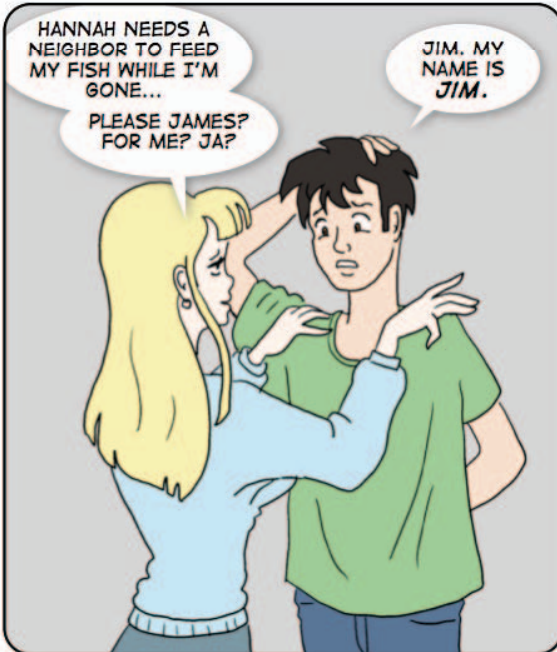


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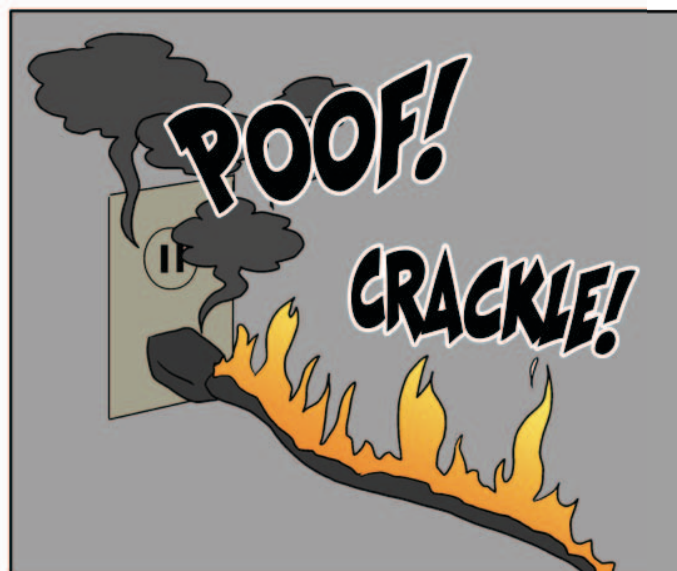
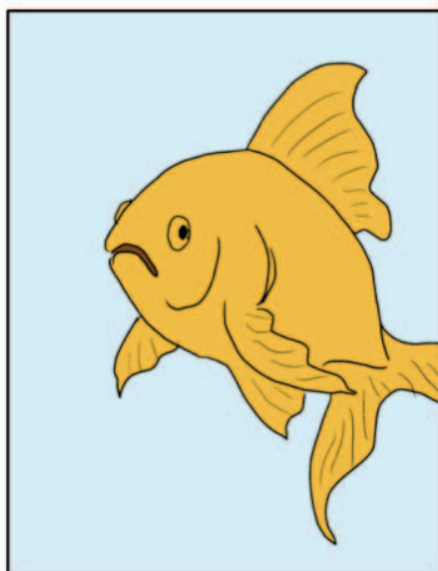
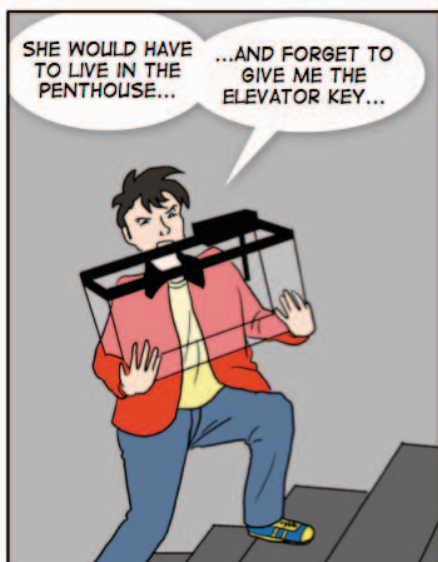
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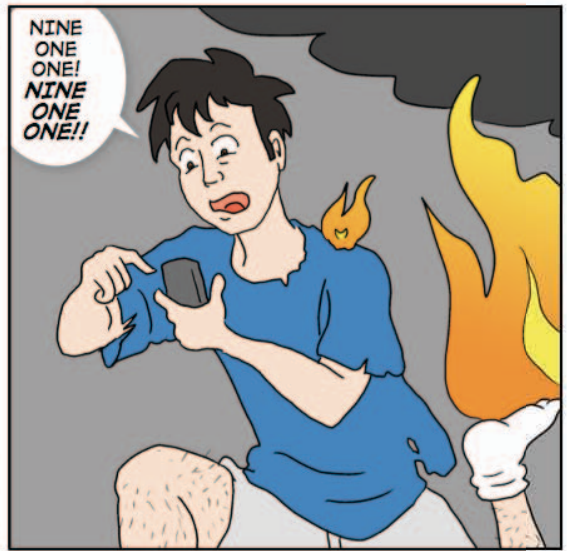
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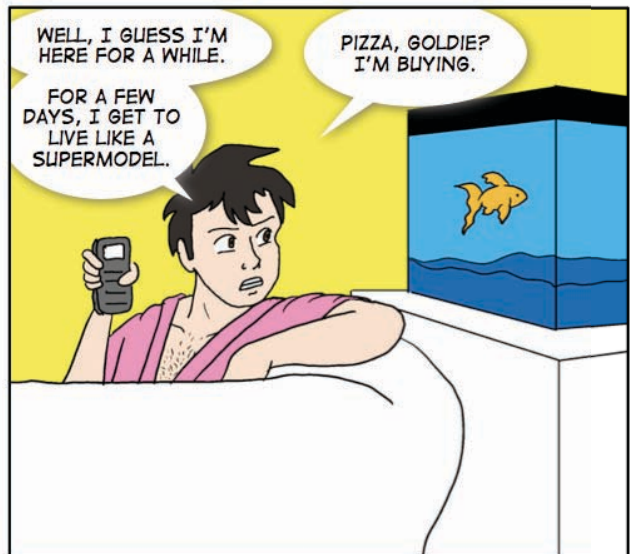
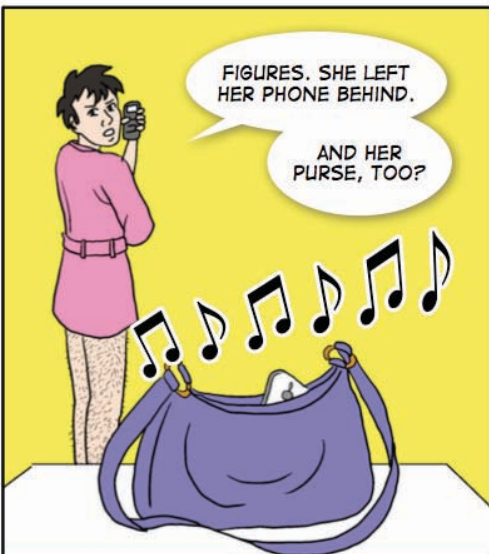
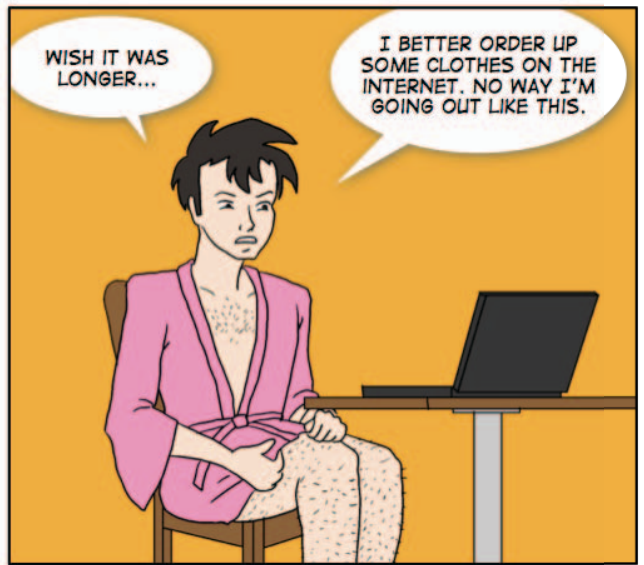


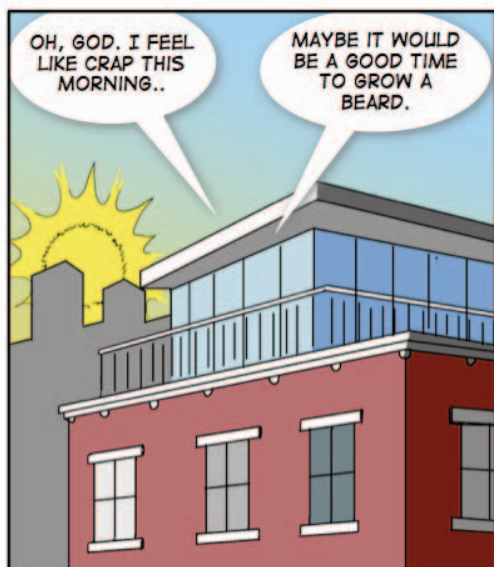








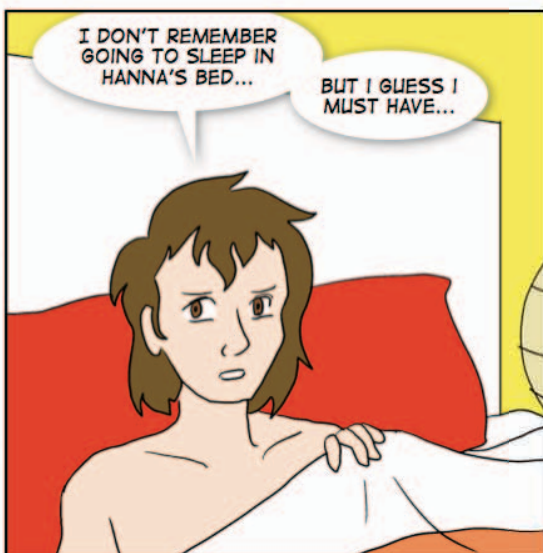






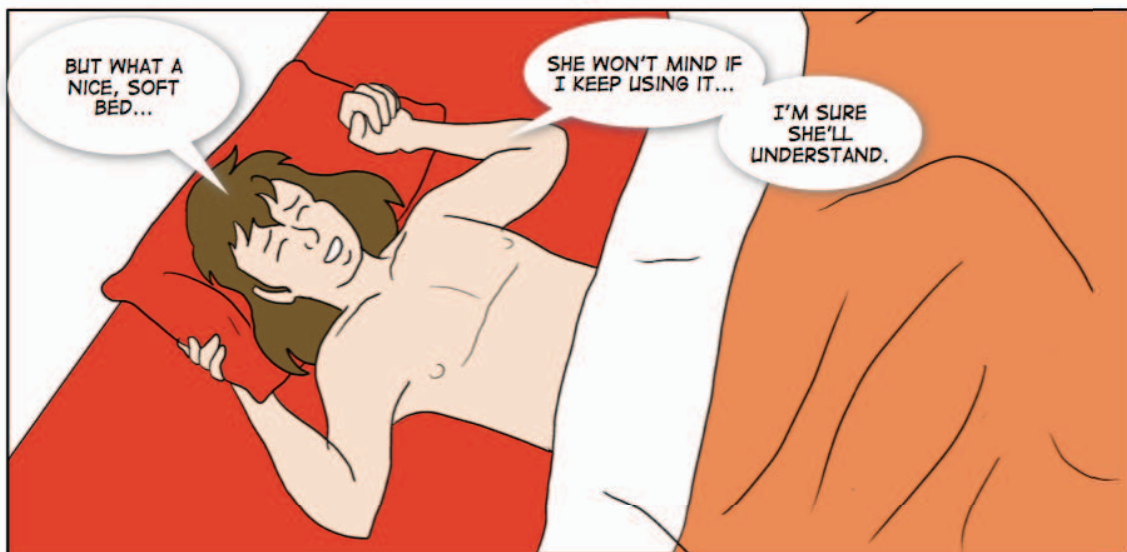


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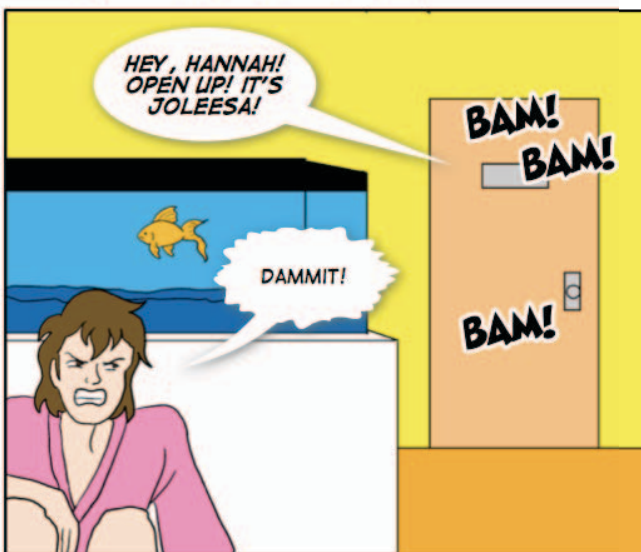
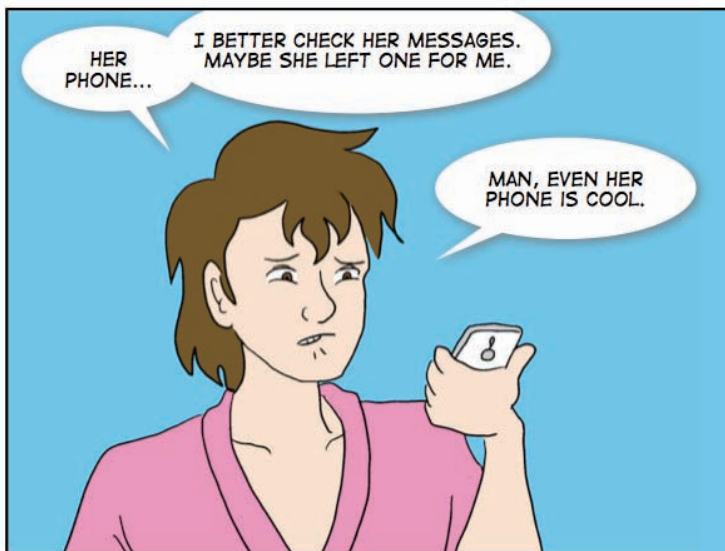
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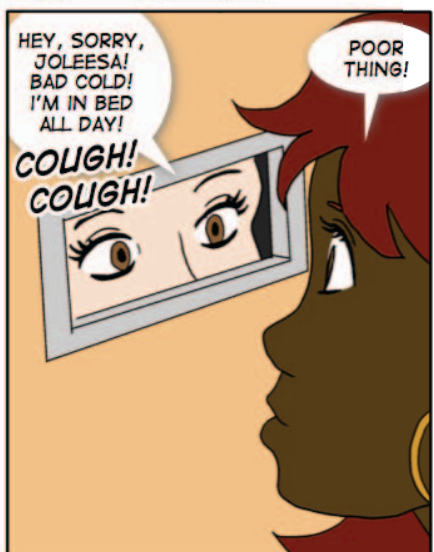
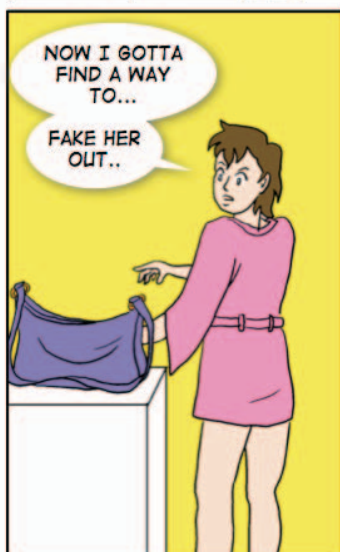
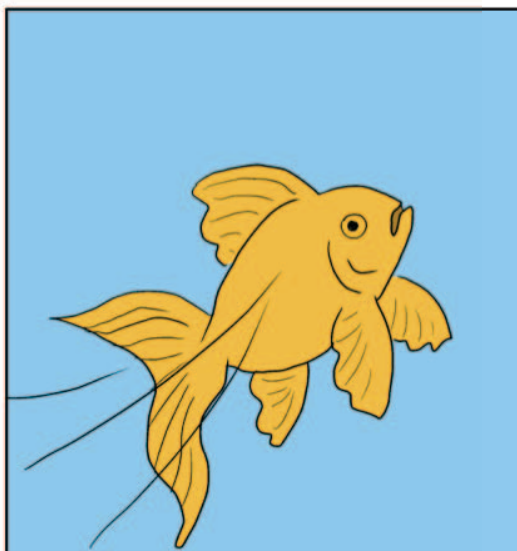
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J A M E S J C R A F T

I, CANDY

“Sissy Sweets” by James J. Craft
A Tales of Transformation Story



2010 eBook Edition

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rocketdave's site – rocketdave.deviantart.com

SISSY SWEETS

I was *not* a baker. I was a banker. I know that there is only an ‘n’ between the two, but it was a significant difference. My father was the baker in the family, as had been my grandfather and my great grandfather before him. In fact, as far back as my family tree would go, we were bakers... ‘pastry chefs’ to some... but bakers to most.

But not me.

I was different.

My name was Carl Christopher Sweet... and I was a banker.

It drove my Dad nuts that I wouldn’t carry on the family tradition of baking. But to his dismay, I learned very early in my life that I was more interested in rising interest rates than rising dough. It wasn’t that I *couldn’t* bake... I could... in fact I could do it quite well, as I proved many-a-time in my youth... I could bake as well as any member of the family. I just didn’t *want* to.

I spent my teenaged years working – begrudgingly – in my father’s kitchen. He was determined to make me love what had been the only thing he had ever known, and determined to make me want to take over.

For years I toiled in the bakery, miserable, taking out my unhappiness on my Dad and his employees. I would openly defy him and taunt and torture the people that he hired, as I was really challenging him to fire me.

But he never did.

I did, however, cause more than a few of his workers to quit, which – in hindsight – spoke volumes about where Dad placed his loyalties. He would evidently rather lose a good worker, than have to fire his own son.

Not that he and I got along well... far from it in fact.

He would routinely ask after one of my ‘outbursts’ “What the hell is the matter with you? Why don’t you see what you’ve got here?”

To which I would reply “There’s *nothing* wrong with me Dad, I just don’t *want* this.”

He would then shake his head and wander off, muttering to himself about how much blood sweat and tears he had put into building his bakery, and how I didn’t appreciate what I had.

But he was wrong... I *did* appreciate what I had, and *wanted* to be a success like him... just not by using blood sweat and tears.

At least not with *my own*. I wanted to make my fortune using *other* people’s blood sweat and tears.

And at the age of eighteen, I did just that.

I was hired by one of the nation's fastest growing banks. First as a teller, then as a banking rep, and eventually as a regional vice-president. I made a career out of leveraging everything to the brink in return for big payoffs.

Not that it always went according to plan – I had more than a few losses in my time – but my gains seemed to always bring me back, and that kept me in good standing with the people that mattered most.

To those who didn't matter, I was referred to as 'reckless' and sometimes even 'sleazy' in how I made my money. It was true, I'm not too proud to say, that I deliberately wiped some of my clients out – financially speaking – in order to make others even wealthier.

And those others always included myself.

I accumulated as much as I could. The houses, the cars, the 'playboy' lifestyle, I had it all. But I had *earned* it.

Still, such things weren't meant to last.

By the end of the decade, the banking system was beginning to fall apart. I saw the warning signs and ignored them... including a direct order from my supervisor, not to proceed with my last big deal.

It was a 5.6 billion dollar transaction on commercial paper, backed my sub-prime mortgages of under qualified people across the U.S. and in the U.K.

Sound familiar?

I even leveraged my own personal net-worth to secure what I thought to be the 'king-maker' of all deals. But the day after the transaction went through, it all went wrong. My bank, once thought of to be unsinkable... failed, my clients money evaporated and my own equity was instantaneously erased within the span of a weeks' time.

I went from riches to rags in seven days.

The bank's assets were swallowed up by a government backed consortium and newly appointed trustees looked for heads to deliver to the law-makers in Washington on silver-plates.

The first head to roll was mine.

Not only was I fired... I was charged and fined and subsequently financially wiped out.

In the midst of all this I got the news that father's health was ailing after a lengthy battle with some form of cancer, and that it would only be a matter of days before he died.

As distraught as I was, I was too busy being summoned before various senate committees and being publicly raked over the coals, in between having to sell off all of my various assets around the world, to attend to his deathbed.

So in the end, he died alone in a county hospital while I flew back from the capitol hill on a private jet.

I arrived at the hospital to an empty room, and broke down in tears. I had wanted to say goodbye and felt such immense guilt at having missed the chance. In my mind I promised myself that I would somehow make it up to him.

As the days passed, I found that I missed my father terribly – especially since we had remained so distant since I left the family business all those years ago. Since my mother had left us many-many years before, he had been the only family I had left in the world. Now, with both him and all of my material possessions gone, I felt for the first time – truly alone.

But every cloud has a silver lining.

As he was *my* only family left in the world, I too was *his* only family in the world. Which meant that the bakery... and the valuable downtown property that contained it... would be left to me.

The day that his lawyer called me to tell me to come review the will, my mind filled with vivid fantasies that my father had somehow amassed a small fortune selling his bread and buns, and it would be enough to help me rebuild my life and fortune accordingly.

At bare minimum, I figured there should at least be enough in his estate to keep me afloat until the market for greedy bankers like me improved.

But dear old Dad, however... had different plans for me.

I went to his attorneys' the day after my father's funeral. The lawyer was prestigious looking man with silver-grey hair, who barely smiled at all.

"Your father has left his entire estate to you," his lawyer began. I smiled widely, anticipating what was going to be said next.

"However..." He paused for a moment, seeing me start to smile, "There are some fairly rigorous conditions that the late Mister Sweet has placed on this happening."

My smile diminished some, as *that* was not at all what I had anticipated him saying.

"In order for you to completely inherit his estate, Carl," he continued, "You continue running his business for the next three-hundred and sixty-five days."

"What?" I cried. I knew that my father had always believed that I had a natural talent for baking. I also knew that he always believed that all I needed was to be shown... or rather *forced* into it... in order to change my mind about it... and quit my career in finance to become a baker.

But *this* was ridiculous!



“There has to be another way...” I pleaded, “I can’t run a bakery! I’m a banker!”

“Well Carl,” the attorney finally turned a small grin, “It seems that your father had other ideas. So you have a choice... either run the bakery for a year, or forfeit your inheritance.”

I gasped. I suddenly wasn’t missing the old coot as much.

“And if I do... if I walk away... where does the money go?” I asked.

“There are appropriate provisions in the will to account for such a scenario,” the lawyer’s smile dried up, “But I’m afraid that those are *very* privileged.”

“Privileged!” I repeated, “But I’m his son!”

“Yes Carl, we’ve determined that, but the will is the law here, and it clearly states that you must be on-site for a minimum of eight hours a day and a minimum of six out of seven days... for the next twelve consecutive months... before you can have any part of the estate.”

He paused for a moment before continuing, “So my advice to you would be to ride it out... honor his wishes, and in a year’s time, the business... and the build-

ing – which by the way is likely what you are *really* interested in – will be yours and yours alone.”

I felt my blood pressure rise, “Is there anything *else* I should know?” I spat.

“Well Carl, the business has to be successful while you are running it. Your father knew that you didn’t *want* to run it... and figured you’d just try to bankrupt it then take the money and run. Which, judging by the looks on your face... looks to be true,” he paused again, “which is why, Carl... your father insisted that we appoint a trustee to monitor you... make sure you don’t intentionally screw things up.”

I immediately felt even more enraged. Here I had what was potentially a million-dollar nest egg... just waiting to be picked... and my father... even after death, was screwing around with me and *still* insisting that I be a baker instead of a banker.

I took a deep breath and thought back to my promise at the hospital. I realized that I needed to do this in order to have some kind of closure in my life.

Also because I was broke.

I gritted my teeth and took a deep breath, “So who is this trustee?” I growled, “and when can I meet him?”

“His name, Carl... is Matt Munroe,” the attorney smiled widely, “and he’s as eager to meet you as I’m certain you are to meet him.”

“Oh...” I forced a smile of my own, “I can’t *wait!*”



The next day, I met my new ‘corporate babysitter’ at the bakery. He was a tallish man, not terribly unattractive... I guess... and with cocky bravado and self-affirming confidence that would have been second only to my own... if not for the fact that I needed him to make this work. So instead, I forced myself to act far more subdued than normal. He, on the other hand, waltzed right into the shop and introduced himself.

“These are very exciting times,” he gushed after we shook hands, “I’ve been looking over your dad’s financials... and I see a *lot* of opportunity here.”

I chuckled loudly at his announcement, “Frankly Matt, the only opportunity I’m interested in is the opportunity to liquidate the assets and sell the building.”

He took that comment poorly, looking as if I had personally insulted him. “But you haven’t even given it a try Carl... how can you say such a thing about your family heritage?”

“Listen Matt,” I continued, “This whole thing is a sham, all I want to do is get this year over with so that I can get on with my life.”

“Get on with your life?” he guffawed, “*This*, was your father’s life... and his gift to you... and you’re making a mockery of it?! You *disgust* me, Sir.”

I was shocked at his reaction. Clearly the man was unstable. “I’m sorry Matt,” I tried to begin what I was sure would be a long process of apologizing, “I just never figured that an appointed trustee would get so worked up over a silly sweet shop”

Matt’s eyes changed from anger to a curious look of wonder, “Silly Sweet Shop,” he chuckled, “You might be on to something to something there Carl” he paused for a moment to build the anticipation, “... but first thing’s first”

He slapped a heavy book on the counter and opened the cover. The multi-page document had a dazzling array of charts and graphs with statistics for this, and estimates for that.

“I’ve looked at everything that your father was doing... and the real problem, Carl... is that this place isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be. He’s been losing money for years, the estate is in deep debt actually... so if you’re looking to ‘get on with your life’ as you so eloquently put it, then the *first* thing that you will need...” he paused to make sure I was listening, “is to offer a product line that people actually want to spend money on. One that you can produce cost effectively... that has the highest possible margins with the quickest turn-overs. And from what I’ve seen... the products that you should focus on are pastries, cookies, squares, cakes and other deserts.”

He paused to gauge my reaction – which was muted to say the least - then continued, “Sweets Carl... Sweets.”

“Right. Sure Matt... Sweets, yeah I get it. Everything except the part about the massive debt.”

He slid the booklet around for me to see. I browsed through the financials and quickly discovered that although my father had been a heck of a baker... he was a *lousy* businessman. In short, if I sold the building today – it would just barely cover the debt he had incurred after years of selling baked goods that nobody wanted.

I turned back to him with a nauseated expression.

“I’ve done the research Carl,” Matt continued... his demeanor having returned to overly optimistic, “and this City has plenty of bakeries... too many in fact... but no-one specializes in pandering to sweet-tooths. And believe me, there are *lots* of them around.”

“Well yeah,” I agreed, “I *know* there are...”

Matt cut me off mid-sentence “I *know* you know Carl! But then *why*, pray-tell, would we not try to take advantage of them?”

“We?”

Matt frowned, “Carl... this is going to be a partnership from now one... or maybe that is a bit of an over statement. I’m running the show and you’re here for the ride... but you will be working *hard* along the way. And when we’re done... *I* will be in for *huge* promotion... and *you* will have your little nest egg to sell.”

“What?”

“That’s the condition of the creditors... they wanted to call the loan upon the death of your dear old dad... but I saw what they didn’t Carl,” he replied, “Can I call you Carl? Or Carl Christopher? Or is C.C. better?”

I simply glared with him with a horrific expression. Not only did I have to spend a year working in the business that I hated, not only was that business in debt so badly it was just barely getting by... but now I would have to spend the year taking orders from this idiot?

The idiot did not wait for me to reply.

“Anyhow C.C., what I am saying is that the non-desert side is the non-profitable side. Clearly it’s what almost brought your father down. You just can’t compete with the big bakeries on buns and rolls. There’s no money to be made in bread. If you want to turn this business around... and pay off all that debt... and maybe even make a little profit... than we are going to have to divest ourselves of those product lines and focus on what we can make the most money on.”

He paused again.

“Deserts C.C.! Sweets!” He paused for a moment deep in thought, “Hey... I like that... C.C.’s Sweets!”



“C.C.’s sweets?” I repeated aloud.

“Yeah!” Matt replied enthusiastically, “That’s the new name of this business I think C.C. And I guarantee its going to turn this place around. In and in twelve short months we’ll have made accomplished our goals.”

“*Really?*” I asked skeptically, “We’ll pay back all the debt and be ready to sell this place selling just sweets?”

“No C.C., not *just* sweets,” Matt smiled, “C.C. Sweets – the very sweetest sweets in town!”

I looked at him puzzled, “Matt, I think this is crazy. I’ve been a banker my whole life... and I can’t see that there is any way that you can make this work. I would *never* have approved such a crazy idea... how you even got this far eludes me.”

“You’re right... it does sound crazy...” he sighed, “but I’ve done this kind of thing before C.C., and I *know* it will work. And pretty soon you’ll see! We’re going to have customers lined up outside waiting to buy your sweets C.C.!”

I chuckled. He was nuts. Unfortunately, I didn’t have any other options.

“What other choices do I have?” I asked.

“Well,” he began, “You *could* walk away, in which case the bank takes control of the assets and I do what I was going to do *anyway* but when I’m done, the bank sells everything... and therefore... keeps everything for itself.” He shrugged with a sarcastic smile. “I guess it’s up to you, C.C.”

I looked at Matt with a hesitant smile while an equally wicked smile crept across his face. I could tell that he was serious... and that my life was about to change forever.

“Yeah... I guess it is” I groaned.



I signed the massive agreement that Matt had included as part of his corporate summary that afternoon, and the very next day we started to divest the bakery of anything that wasn’t a sweet. Anything that wasn’t a desert was gone, and that included all packaging and equipment. It unfortunately meant that I was divesting myself of a few of my father’s long-time clients as they had only purchased his breads and buns and were not interested in ‘sweets’.

“Don’t worry,” Matt smiled, “We’ll get them back. Them and lots more.”

I hoped... or rather *prayed* that he knew that he was doing. So did the remaining customers that continued to drop in in the days ahead. They all seemed a little confused by the new direction, but were all happy to see that the business was staying open, and agreed to stay with us regardless of the menu. By the

end of the month we had opened up twenty-five percent of the kitchen by getting rid of old product lines, and I had fulfilled my requirement of spending enough hours and enough days in the shop... by about double.

Matt started the next month with a new box of clothes for me. He had designed a new logo for the bakery and had had a new uniform made up for me to wear. White pants and shirt with a candy-striped apron.

“Why, exactly, do I need to wear a uniform?” I asked Matt as I glanced disapprovingly at the articles of clothing

“You’re the face of the business, C.C.,” he said, “People need to connect with a real person behind the company.”

I told him I thought it was a little much... he just chuckled, “If you think *this* is a little much... just wait until you see what’s next!” He handed me an appointment card for a hair salon in town. The name sounded familiar but I had never been there myself. I always figured it was for women, not guys.

“What’s this for?” I asked, holding the card up for him to see.

“It’s for an appointment Carl,” he snickered, “That’s why it says ‘appointment card’ on it”

I rolled my eyes, “Yes, I gathered that, Matt.” I paused to read the card over... it was for a place called ‘Nancy’s Boutique and Salon.’ “This doesn’t look like a place I’d normally go to...”

It was now Matt’s turn to roll his eyes, “Clearly” he agreed, “But this place just happens to be the very best in town... and I only deal with the very best. *You* Sir, need a haircut and manicure *desperately*”

“I can’t get a mani...” I began to protest, but he cut me off mid sentence.

“It’s about maintaining a polished look Carl. Your customers are going to expect it... so you better be prepared to deliver it.”

My face scrunched up as I formulated a reply, but Matt continued before I could speak, “And besides... you signed a contract agreeing to do as I recommended... so unless you’re prepared to breach a contract... one on which the ink is *barely* dry... then I think you’ll be headed to Nancy’s downtown as soon as you’re done here...” he looked up at the clock on the wall as the big hand moved the twelve, signifying that it was now 5:01, “which is right now... off you go... and don’t you dare be late!”

I grumbled the whole way to the car about how I could let myself get into such a predicament, and was soon on my way to the where Matt had made my appointment.

When I arrived, I shyly introduced myself... as a ‘friend of Matt’ and that I was here for my appointment. I was still certain that this wasn’t a place that men frequented... no matter how important their appearances were. The front half of the store looked like a high fashion boutique – for women – while the back

end was clearly a beauty salon, with pictures of women getting their hair and makeup done on every wall. Even the color scheme was decidedly feminine.

“So you must be C.C.,” I heard a voice behind me say.

I turned around to see an attractive woman smiling warmly at me.

“Um... yes,” I replied “Do I know you?”

She grinned but didn’t answer. “ You know that Matt is going to run that place one day... I swear. He’s a smart one. We’ve worked together a few times.”

I looked blankly at her.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she giggled as she extended her hand to me, “I’m Nancy... the owner. Matt requested that I work on you personally.”

“Work... on me?”

She giggled again, “Well sure... what did think you came here for? A social call? Right this way Cissy.”

“I’m sorry?” I retorted, “What did you just say?”

“I said... right this way C.C.,” she pointed towards the back of the salon, “That is your name isn’t it?”

I nodded, with an uncertain expression then slowly followed her to the rear of her establishment, where she seated me and clipped a cape over my shoulders before leaning me back into the sink to rinse out my hair.

“Yeah... Matt is pretty amazing. You would not believe the things I’ve seen him do. I just know that you’re going to be impressed,” she chuckled, “You’ll be completely reinvented when he’s done working his ‘magic’.”

I nodded, half in agreement and half in worry.

Nancy took the better part of an hour on my hair, adding golden blonde highlights and shaping it into what she called ‘a good foundation for a future hair-style’. It sounded rather foreboding to me, but I really didn’t have much of say. If I refused, Matt would have me in breach of contract... and I had too much at stake for that... so I allowed Nancy to do her work. The result was, at best – androgynous- at worst- slightly feminine- with sweeping bangs and a slight length maintained at the back, almost like a mullet, but less manly.

“Now let’s take a look at those nails,” Nancy proclaimed after showing me my new coif.

“Yeah,” I said, “Matt said I needed a manicure. That’s just like a cleaning and polish, right?”

“Yeah,” Nancy chuckled, “...that’s it.”

I was weary of the expression on her face, but allowed her to do her work none-the-less. She started by soaking, then cleaning and filing each nail on each finger on each hand, and then proceeded to do the same on each of my

toes. It seemed benign enough that I began to lose interest and started to day-dream by the time she returned to working on my hands. When she was finished however, I wished that I had paid closer attention, as she had given me a new set of acrylic white tipped, trimmed and clear polished



nails. They were the kind of nails that women routinely wore around the world... but on a guy?

“What the hell?” I cried out, “I thought it was just a cleaning and polish! How am I going to mix dough and bake stuff?” I whined.

“Simple dear,” she smiled, “You’ll just have to wear gloves like every other girl that works in a bakery.”

“But I’m *not* a girl working a bakery...” I whined, “I am the *owner*. This is all just a temporary thing.”

“Hush now dear,” Nancy interjected, “A nice girl like you shouldn’t be complaining so much. It’s un-ladylike.”

“I’m *not* a lady,” I growled, trying to get in the last word. She smiled and removed the cape from around my neck at allow me to leave. I frowned as I got up from the seat and headed for the door.

This was demeaning. Matt and I would have word about this.



“She insisted on calling me a girl Matt,” I complained later when he came to work the next day, “she said I was a lady. What the hell is *that* about?”

Matt just laughed, “Oh that’s just Nancy’s way. She calls everyone a lady C.C., even me. It’s just her thing.”

“Somehow I *doubt* that,” I scoffed, looking him over in his stiff white pants and shirt. It was a *stark* contrast to what *I* was wearing. The pants he had purchased for me were partially lycra, and stretched to fit around my waist and hips... and thighs... and knees. The shirt was about the same. Plus the stupid candy-striped apron was completely over the top.

“You just need to trust me to do what I do best,” he said, “You just go back to the kitchen and do what you do best C.C.... leave the heavy lifting to me.”

I’d been in the kitchen for pretty much a month straight, so if he wanted me to continue then I’d continue. At least there wasn’t anyone else in there to see me. Besides, as he had pointed out the other day, even though I sort of owned the place... I *was* under contract to listen to him. So what choice did I have?

“No choice at all,” I grumbled to myself as I started to bake.



The next week or so was very busy at the store. Matt had hired a contractor to ‘freshen up the façade of the building in preparation for the new signage and paint colors that were all part of Matt’s marketing plan. His plan for me, however, was to labor away in the kitchen to prepare an assortment of tasty confections for him to sample. He would routinely taste my wares when not schmoozing clients and checking on in the contractor’s work. He suggested that I take a variety of treats out to the contractor’s work crew, to get their opinion as well. I wasn’t crazy about the idea, since I felt a little self-conscious the ‘uniform’ that Matt was making me wear, but he said I looked just fine and that if anyone was staring at me that it meant he had done his job well.

But as I took the tray around to the offer my samples to the workers, I thought I looked positively silly, but since no one made me feel uneasy, and since I had little choice in the matter, I stopped thinking about it altogether. They were, after-all... only dumb, tight white pants and tops with a silly striped apron. It wasn’t *that* bad.

Was it?

A few weeks later, though, the situation started to change. One day, on what was supposed to be my day off, Matt personally drove me across town for what he called my ‘next appointment.’

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“You remember, my old friend Nancy from the salon?” he smiled, “To her place.”

“Oh no,” I replied. “Seriously? She’s crazy.”

“That’s Nancy, all right!” Matt chuckled as he opened the car door for me, encouraging me to get out. I sighed and slouched my shoulders as I exited the vehicle.

Upon our entering, Matt and Nancy immediately huddled to whisper back and forth to each other, only stopping from time to time to take measurements of nearly every part of my body.

“Are you two conspiring against me?” I asked Matt.

“You’ll see in a minute dear,” Nancy grinned as she disappeared into the stockroom.

True to her word, she returned minutes later from the back with a series of boxes in hand. The first contained some kind of strange white undergarment that had to be laced up from the back. She told me to exhale before she started tightening the straps. I yelped aloud as the device compressed my torso.

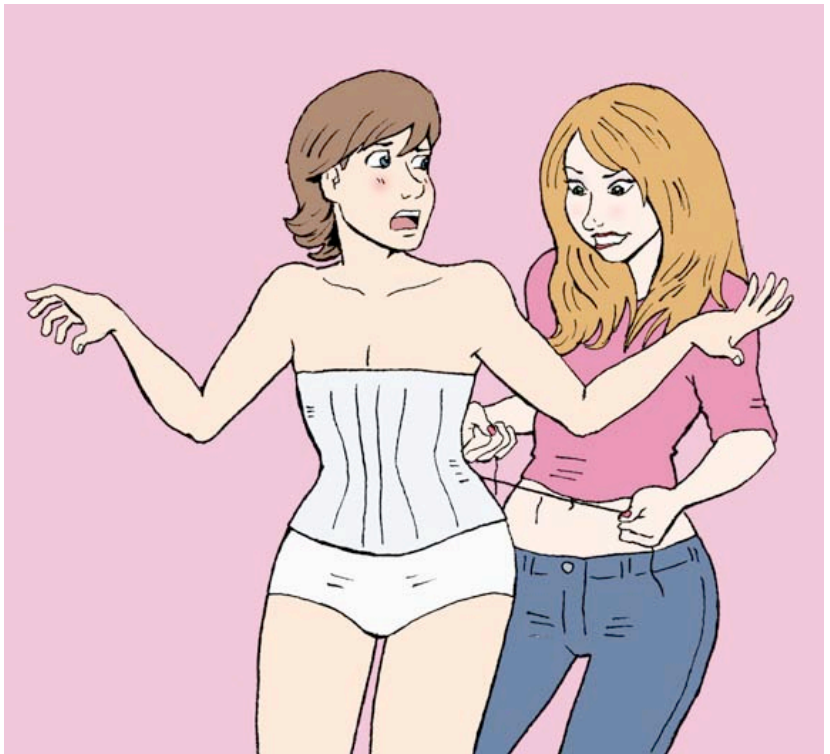
“What the hell are you...” but Nancy was relentless... ignoring me entirely... she ordered me to exhale again. This time I knew better than to waste precious oxygen on complaining, so I complied with her request... only to have her squeeze the tortuous appliance even tighter around me. This continued for two more minutes until I felt as if my insides would start to pop.

With a sly smile, Nancy moved on to give me a new pair of undergarments – ‘panties’ she called them – in white to match my cincher... which was apparently the name of the convoluted devil device that I had been forced to wear. After that I was given a snug fitting white tunic top that fell to mid thigh, with a pair of super tight fitting, white lycra pants.

“They aren’t pants love,” Nancy corrected me, “They’re leggings”

“Leggings?” I whined, “But aren’t...”

Matt wouldn’t have me whining, “That’s enough of that C.C.!” he scolded me;



"You'll not take that tone with Miss Nancy. She is merely trying to help you... to help *us*. You'll speak to her with respect. Is that understood?"

Feeling dejected I slumped my shoulders forward and nodded.

"Now apologize to Miss Nancy for your rude behavior" Matt continued.

I was quite concerned by his aggressive tone, but new better then make a scene.

"I'm sorry Miss Nancy" I whimpered.

"That's perfectly alright Cissy," she smiled, "I've dealt with more than a few of *your kind* before. I'm sure your manners will be *much* better the next time I see you."

My kind? Much better manners? Next time? Cissy... had she called me a Cissy?

Matt ordered me to twirl around in the tunic and leggings as Nancy adjusted the outfit and Matt made comments.

"We'll have to do something about that VPL," he said matter-of-factly.

"The tunic will cover it for now, just as long as she doesn't bend too far over or let the tunic ride up," Nancy replied.

"We'll have to switch over to a higher cut when we go to full-blown hose," he said.

"That's no problem," Nancy agreed, "We can even go right to a thong."

Matt just nodded, "That's probably what should happen."

I felt like I wasn't even there. I knew they were talking about me, but the conversation made little-to-no sense. High-cut? Hose? VPL?

The only word a recognized was 'thong' but I couldn't understand how it applied to me. The two of them continued to chatter with each other while my outfits were boxed up and an invoice made.

It was apparent in the way that they talked, that Nancy's earlier statement... that they had worked together before, was true. In fact it almost looked to me like they were and old married couple.

What was I getting myself into?

My confusion must have showed in my body language as Matt and I drove back to the shop in silence later that night. He kept looking over at me from the driver's chair, as if wanting me to strike up a conversation.

Finally he broke the silence and came right out and asked, "Is everything okay C.C.?"

I sighed and looked down, "Well... sort of... it's just that... I..."

"It's a lot to experience in a short time... I know," he interrupted.

“Well it’s not just that” I continued, “It’s that...”

“You’re unsure about the product line... I get it,” he interrupted again, “but you don’t need to worry about a thing. I’ve done the research... this *will* work.”

“Well... there’s *that*, but also I just...”

“Don’t worry, I know that you don’t feel like you have no-one to confide in... it’s perfectly natural. You can tell me anything you like whenever you need to. This whole image makeover thing is quite a lot at once C.C., but I’m here to guide you through it.”

I sighed. *Allowing me to get a word in edge-wise would be swell too Matt*, I thought to myself. I glanced at my reflection in the mirror, was this really just an image makeover... or was it complete and total redo? And how was it going to help me make more money in the end?

I just wasn’t so sure anymore.



Matt kept a low-profile for the next week while I was busy working in the kitchen. He pretty much stayed up front, serving customers and monitoring the contractors’ progress.

When he *did* come back to check on me... he mostly kept quiet and shot me a tentative smile.

A week or so later however, he was bursting at the seams when he came back to the kitchen.

“Well,” he began with a giddy expression, “I’ve got some *great* news. I’ve crunched our Q1 numbers and we’re on the right track. Margins are up, expenses are down... and we are actually making headway on that debt load. It’s *very* exciting CC.”

I just glared at him. “The first quarter was so good because I’m back here doing *all* the work Matt!”

“Oh... well... I guess I should have asked you how things are shaping up back here then,” he said in a smug tone.

I was carrying a tray of goodies to from the oven to the cooling rack, like I had done now routinely every day at ten and three o’clock.

“Shaping up?” I spat, “Did you really just ask me that? Do you have *any* idea how hard it is to work in a freaking corset?”

“No, I don’t. I’ve never worn one,” he said, “But I hear the more you wear it the easier it gets.”

“Whatever,” I scoffed, and set the tray down. I had taken a tray out front earlier for the contractor and his workers to sample. I wasn’t sure I liked their smiles and grins. It was hard to tell if they were pleased with the cookies and sweets, or if they were checking out my legs in my new ‘leggings’. Thank god for the tunic covering my butt, or who knows where their eyes would have wandered to.

Could construction workers be gay?

I continued to unload trays of fresh-baked goodies from the oven to the cooling racks while Matt watched.

“That’s terribly inefficient CC. Try to carry the trays two at time instead of one at a time.”

“I know a way that would be more efficient too Matt,” I snapped, “Why don’t you stop watching me and actually *help*?”

Matt chuckled, “Oh, I’m really far too busy to be back here. And you need the practice of wearing your new booties”

“What are you talking about? What new *booties*?” I glared at him.

“These ones” he smiled, holding up a pair of white ankle-high wedge-heeled boots with a slight platform sole.

“*What?*” I shouted, “There is no way I’m wearing those! This is getting out of hand Matt. I mean ... I understand the new product line, and the branding, and even the renovation out front, I do... but really... the new outfit... the hair... the fingernails... and now the boots? What in the frickin’ hell is this?”

“Listen!” Matt snapped at me, “You have to let *me* do the big picture thinking here, because *that* is what our contract *says* I’m supposed to be doing.”

He paused for a moment before continuing, “and besides... they were supposed to be a congratulatory gift for you for our Q1 results... but I can see that you truly are the spoiled *brat* that your father always claimed you to be.”

I sighed and looked down at the floor. Matt was right. I was acting completely unappreciative towards him for all the work he was doing to make me money – and proving everything my father thought about me to be true. Besides that, the contract said *he* was in charge, and I had to work there *every* day in order to inherit the building. So if I didn’t follow his direction, I’d lose *everything*. I really had no choice.

“It’s not that I doubt you’re going in the right direction...” I bemoaned, “It’s just that I really don’t understand what a lot of this has to do with making a more profitable bakery.” I motioned towards all of my new articles of clothing.

Matt smiled again, then chuckled, “My dear, in order to make this more profitable, I need you to ‘grow into the role’ as *the* focal point of CC Sweets.”

He paused to let it all sink in. Had he just called me *dear*?

“I’m changing your image to better represent the what we are going for at CC Sweets, as part of the overall brand. You’re the owner... the mascot if you will. And people will have a certain expectation of what you will look and act like, which is why I’m making you learn to do all of these new things”

“Huh?” I stared at him blankly.

“Never mind,” he continued,

“Just keep practicing with those trays. You’ll be done in half the time... and look fabulous doing it.”

I shook my head... still not entirely sure what he was up to or how I had allowed him to talk me into all of this. Regardless of how confused I was, I did understand being under ‘contract’... so within a few minutes my new ‘booties’ were on my feet, and Matt was tutoring me how to walk in what was equivalent to two-inch heels, while balancing trays of goodies in each hand. Needless to say, we wrote-off a lot of product that day as I tripped and flopped around doing my new balancing act in wedge-heeled footwear.

But after a few days... weeks perhaps, I started to get the hang of it. Matt took me back to the salon to ‘celebrate’ my achievements. Personally, I would have preferred going to a pub or restaurant, which I had suggested to him as an alternative, but he wouldn’t have any of it.

“All that beer will be hard on your waistline CC,” he said, scolding me for my suggestion. I sighed. He was right. It was true; it would be hard on my waistline. I had done such a good job sticking the diet that he had prepared for me ever since the day I was first laced into my corset. It didn’t make sense to blow it now. And besides, I didn’t want to appear to be unappreciative any more.

