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99 pages 31 illustrations

# LITTLE TOKYO

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



TRANSGENDER STORIES OF THE  
**SUPERNATURAL**



**J O E   S I X   P A C K**

***LITTLE  
TOKYO***

**Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack**  
**A Stories of the Supernatural tale**





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# LITTLE TOKYO

Once again, for the what felt like the infinitive time, the unstoppable force was meeting the immovable object. This paradox played out at least three times a week in these halls. Unlike the paradox, it would subside, briefly, before raging back to life, twice as powerful as before.

If he was going to have to choose which was which, Nate would have to say that Professor Mandrake Ravenclaw, the head of the Abnormal Psychology Department, was the unstoppable force. A man who had the brazen confidence of a cocky teenager but the body of an 80-year old — which he was. The immovable object was the rotund, bearded, forty-year old George Blutermann, the head of the Linguistic Anthropology Department. He had to be the immovable object only because he was as large as a boulder, and roughly the same shape.

Just around the corner, Nate Corman was cringing. He had been working here at Plains County Community College for just over a year, and couldn't believe no one had found a way to keep this argument from happening on such a regular basis. It was silly to have this same argument over the allocation of classrooms.

Here, in “Building M” on campus, the administration had packed away some of the more unpopular departments in the oldest of the 14 buildings available. Building M was small, cramped and congested. It was impossible to not run into every single person who worked there during an eight-hour day. Aside from the Abnormal Psychology and Linguistic Anthropology departments — and by “department,” that usually meant it was the one teacher who taught the subject — it was also home to the Foodservice Technology Department, the Apparel and Garment Crafting Department, the prestigious Welding Department and the nearly unattended Advanced Applied Mathematics Department.

It wasn't all bad. Despite the age of the building, it was a fair distance from other buildings and didn't get a lot of cross-traffic. That meant they weren't swamped with students, and since the administration office was clear on the other side of the spacious campus, they were too lazy to get involved with Building M. So without any meddling interference from superiors, the atmosphere was pretty laid-back and carefree.

Except when it was unstoppable vs immovable time.

“My twelve students simply cannot continue to use that glorified broom closet! There's practically no room to think!” Professor Ravenclaw was standing outside his office, dressed in one of his ancient tweed jackets with the clichéd leather patches on the elbows. “I have precedence on my side! Room 4 has



been used for my classes since I arrived here!” There were only seven small classrooms in Building M, but one larger amphitheater-style room, capable of holding up to 75 students. Nate taught his Intro to Advanced Applied Mathematics there, every Tuesday and Thursday at ten.

“But I had signed up for it first, sir!” Countered Professor Blutermann. “First come, ergo, first served!” Blutermann was only in his early forties, but had none of the charm of a man many years his senior. He was condescending, blunt and dismissive of everyone he met. Unfortunately, he managed to somehow make one of his classes a liberal arts degree requirement, which meant that he had to stay on.

“You deliberately obscured the sign-up sheet in the bulletin board!” Professor Ravenclaw wheezed in his dusty, raspy voice. “I was deceived!” Ravenclaw had been a tenured professor at Princeton for decades, but was pushed out for his increasingly eccentric behavior. He had been in and out of several institutions of higher learning and had finally had to settle for work at this small, obscure community college to pay the bills. According to him, however, he had only desired to move out to the plains because the air was better for his weak lungs.

They argued about the sign-in for classrooms on such a regular a basis, it bordered on pathological. Why they hadn’t been able to work something out was impossible to understand. Coin flips, rock paper scissors, guess a number between one and ten. Anything to resolve this pedantic issue. Truth was, neither needed to use a classroom that big. The only real advantage was that it had a private bathroom for the instructor.

But the usual pointless back and forth bickering took a different turn today. As Nate listened on, a new weapon was being unleashed in the great amphitheater war of PCCC.

“I have spoken to the scheduling office, and they have decided to assign the classroom on who has the largest class,” Ravenclaw said, with pride. “I have twenty-three students in my class and you have twenty. Starting next week, they have assured me that they will assign it to me for the rest of the semester, and henceforth, they will assign it to the largest number of students automatically. Enjoy your amphitheater while you can.”

Blutermann was gobsmacked. “That’s underhanded and duplicitous! I will not stand for such chicanery!”

“It is done, there is no point to further argue. I bid you good day.” Ravenclaw sheathed his verbal sword and returned to his office.

The rotund professor was not finished. “This will not...”

“I said *good day* sir!” Ravenclaw interrupted, and closed the door behind him.

“I will not let this go without retribution!” Blutermann howled at the closed door. “I demand my right of satisfaction!” He stood there for a moment to

catch his breath, and then sharply turned and headed back to his own office in a huff.

Nate looked around, made sure the coast was clear, then dashed across the hallway to his own office. He closed the door quietly behind him.

“The Bluto vs. Bird grudge match over?” Asked Rachel, Nate’s teacher assistant. She had a stack of quizzes she was grading.

“Bluto vs. Bird?” Nate asked, puzzled. “Oh, you mean Blutermann vs Ravenclaw. Yes, I think it’s actually been resolved.” Nate took a moment to reconsider. “Or made a million times worse. It’s hard for me to say.”

Rachel shrugged. “I don’t even hear it anymore. It’s like background noise.” She put down her red pencil and checked the time. “Aren’t you supposed to be out of here?”

“Just checking in before I have to go report to the court.” Nate had been assigned to jury duty, and in a high-profile case. The jury was to be sequestered, and he’d have no contact with the outside world for a few days. The judge estimated it might be as long as three weeks. He was already packed, with his flannel shirts, jeans, shaving kit and several Mathematics textbooks in his suitcases. “So any last questions?”

“I’m good. I have all your pre-taped lectures and tests ready to go. Your students will barely even know you’re not there.”

“They barely know most of the time anyway.”

“Your students love you.”

“They should, they get caught up on all their sleep in my class.” He took a look around his desk and found no reasons to delay his departure any further. “Thanks, Rachael. I’ll see you in a few days, hopefully. Remember, if you get in a pinch, Tim Holland in Building D can...”

Rachael interrupted. “I know, I know. Tim Holland, Mathematics Department. Just get going, you’re going to have the cops come drag you away if you keep dithering.”

“See you. Good luck.” Nate took his things and made his exit.

He was lucky to have Rachael, as most of the other so-called “departments” at Plains didn’t warrant or didn’t want a TA. But he had at least 47 students spread over three courses, so he definitely needed a little help grading and running the labs. Rachael was somewhere between “essential” and “a Godsend.” If she wasn’t so young, he’d have given her a shot, too. Although he was only 34, so it wasn’t like he was a bag of bones yet. There was only a 10 year difference in their ages, and that wasn’t that big a gap... Yes it was. He was just kidding himself if he thought that he could ever swing that.

Just to make sure he left on good terms, he decided to check in with everyone. “Hey, Hank, I’m headed out.” He stuck his head into the Welding Department office. “Last chance to beg me to stay.”

“Oh! Hey, amigo! Already?” Hank Watters was a skinny, thirty-eight year old man with a crew cut and an affinity for work shirts that had his name stitched on them. “Doing that double-murder trial? Get that psycho!”

“Hank, I can’t discuss the case.”

“Oh! Yeah! I guess not. So keep your nose outta trouble!”

“I’ll see you, Hank.” Nate then went next door into the Foodservice Technology Department — which was just a fancy way of saying it was a training program for McDonalds managers. They had the nicest digs, taking up a large space that was full of fast food kitchen equipment and a dining area to simulate a real restaurant. They’d even serve up lunch for the staff sometimes. “Hey, Nora!” Nate called out.

From behind the shake machine, Nora Masterson popped out. “What’s up?” She asked. She was a good-natured woman who had a good attitude, although she tended to stay upbeat even when the situation didn’t call for it. Nate could easily see her clapping and cheering on a funeral procession.

“I’m about to go into state-sponsored exile for a while,” Nate said. “I just wanted to let everyone know.”

“Is that happening today? Well, we’ll miss you!”

“Thanks, Nora!” From there, he headed across the way to the Apparel and Garment Crafting Department, which always had the churning noise of sewing machines running in the background. “Hey, Tom.”

Tom Yeager was not the person you’d expect to be teaching a glorified sewing class. First, he was a man. Besides that, he had a Fu Manchu mustache, bags under his eyes, a bowl cut and wore nothing but black t-shirts with metal bands on them. “Chief,” is how he addressed Nate.

“You smoking?” Nate asked.

“No,” Tom replied, a cigarette dangling from his lips.

“You know you have to do that outside, 25 feet from the building.”

“Uh-huh.”





Nate didn't really mind it too much, as Tom usually did go outside for his smoke breaks. But after class, like today, he just kept it in his office. Besides, Nate respected Tom's deadpan, no-nonsense attitude.

"Just wanted to let you know I'm headed out. See you in a few."

"Yeah," Tom said. "Got it."

That was Tom, a man of few words. Nate once more proceeded down the hall, deciding to pass on talking to George Blutermann, knowing how mad he was just a few minutes ago. Besides, he really was a bit of an oddball. He always had his head in some weird place. He'd probably not even notice Nate's absence.

He went past the Drama Department storage room and then headed over to Ravenclaw's office. He gave a quick tapping knock and then opened the door a few inches. "Hi Professor," Nate said. "Just to let you know I'm out for jury duty for a little while."

"Nathaniel," Ravenclaw replied, looking over the tops of his bifocals. "Yes. I saw the memo. You won't have any trouble with covering your classes, will you?"

"No, Rachael's going to handle it and I have everything mapped out for her." Despite Ravenclaw's advanced age and intimidating manner, he was actually very easy to talk to. Over the year and a half that Nate had worked with him, he had come to regard Professor Ravenclaw as the kind of teacher he'd like to be more like. Minus the weird name, though.

"Splendid. It's a shame you got chosen for it. I rather thought lawyers would shy away from the brighter people. They prefer people who are more easily swayed."

"I guess I didn't impress them enough."

"Well, be off with you. Fare thee well!" The professor then returned to his work.

Turning to leave, and closing the door softly behind him, Nate sighed. He had procrastinated enough. It was time to go.



"He returns!" Rachael said, seeing Nate enter the office. It was four weeks later. The trial had gone on and on, starting and stopping. They had heard mountains of evidence, listened and reviewed a hundred hours of testimony, and twenty four days into the trial, six days into deliberations, it was declared a mistrial and they started over with a new jury. Nate was crestfallen, but happy to shed himself of the burden.

"So it appears," Nate replied. "Happy to be back in the real world."

“If you can call a community college the real world.”

“Well, close enough. I also found I much prefer judging my students to judging psychopaths.”

“Plus, the students don’t have lawyers,” Rachael observed.

“Exactly.” Nate sat down at his desk and made a ‘lay it on me’ gesture. “Let me have it. I know you want to do it.”

“What? Oh, you mean give you all the backlogged papers? I don’t think I have any...” Rachael paused, tapping her lower lip with her finger, thinking about the question. “Wait — there is this,” she said, dumping a six-inch-high stack of papers in front of him. “Is that what you were talking about?”

A low moan escaped Nate’s throat. “This is gonna be a late night.”

Rachael was in a teasing mood. “Not for me! I get to go home early for the first time in four weeks!” She sure hadn’t let the extended workload get her down, Nate told himself. She was as spunky as he had ever seen her. “There are still some cookies left. You can snack on those for strength.”

“Cookies?”

Rachael pointed to a tin perched on a stack of textbooks. “Homemade. From one of the other professors. I never got which one because the tag fell off. They’re good! Been snacking on them for a while. So be sure to finish them off before I get fat.”

Nate had a hard time believing she was battling any fat at all. In fact, she looked remarkably thin. She may have dropped as much as ten pounds since he last saw her, and it had taken at least five years off her face. Which was saying something, as she was 24 to begin with.

In fact, everything about her was a little different. She was definitely not at a loss for energy, she was thinner, and she was smiling. Rachael wasn’t a sourpuss — far from it — but she was usually more even-tempered. Even the clothes she wore were indicative of some sort of a change in her, as she wore a loose white tank top with a sparkling number 8 on it, with a purple miniskirt and ludicrously impractical heels.

Maybe she had a new boyfriend. *Good for her*, Nate thought.

Rachael grabbed her purse and headed for the door. “Well, anyway, have fun with your papers — I’m outta here. Say-o-nora!”

“Bye, Rache!” Nate chimed back. He settled into his chair. It was nice to be back in familiar surroundings, as he had been living out of hotel rooms for almost a month. They were nice rooms, but they couldn’t match the comfort of his own chair at his own desk. He reached over to pop open the lid on the tin of cookies and helped himself. Rachael was right. They were good.





A little over two hours later, the formulas on the papers he was grading were starting to get a bit fuzzy. It was a challenge to look at the same answers time after time and not begin to daydream. He had to shake it off and focus if he wanted to be out of here before nine, though.

“Knock knock,” said a voice from the doorway. “You’re Professor Corman, right?”

Nate turned around to see a young woman smiling at him. “Yes I am, and you are...?”

“I’m Miss Ozake. Professor Blutermann brought me on to help teach one of his classes.” She was a beautiful woman, dressed impeccably in a professional manner. Her long, straight thick Asian hair was wrapped up in a bun kept in place with what looked like chopsticks. Her face was young and her eyes were almond-shaped. She wore a dark grey women’s suit with a skirt, a faintly blue blouse with a maroon bow, and black heels. She at least dressed the part of being a teacher — even overdoing it a little.

“Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Miss.” He tossed the paper he was grading to the side.

“I’m so happy to be here. I’m honored to be working with such wise professors like you, Professor Corman.”

No one called him that. Even his students just called him Nate. He was a little embarrassed. “Uh, so which one of his classes are you teaching?”



Well, that was a silly question. “Let me guess — Japanese, right?”

“How did you guess,” she replied with another cute smile.

A moment passed.

“No, really. How did you guess?” She asked.

“Oh, uh...” Nate was at a loss. “I just figured that you, being, you know, Japanese and all...”

“Japanese? I was born in Cleveland,” she said with a laugh.

“To Japanese parents?”

“My parents were Polish.”

“Oh.” Nate was confused, but more mortified than anything else. “I guess I’m a bad judge of that sort of thing.”

“Shinpai shinaide,” she replied, bowing her head. “Don’t worry.”

“I guess this means we’ll be working together. Glad to have you on board...” He wanted her to fill in her first name.

“Miss,” she replied, keeping it formal.

“Miss Ozake. Nice to meet you.”

She bowed her head again. “Shitsureeitashimasu!” Then she headed back to her office.

For a Polish girl, she sure did give off a heavy Japanese vibe, Nate thought to himself. *Nah, she was probably just punking me about the Polish thing*, Nate concluded. *There was no way that girl wasn’t 100% Japanese. She was almost painfully Japanese.*

He picked his paper back up and got back to work. He took another look at the time and rolled his eyes. He was still hours away from getting this done. By the looks of it, he was back just in time, too. The grades on these papers were not good. His students were going to need some refreshers.



Nate left his class in confusion. He had never really had control of his courses today. Yesterday and the day before were much the same. In fact, ever since he had come back from jury duty, he had felt like his skills as a teacher were slipping away. He was still a master of his subject, but the ability to build a rapport with his students was not what it used to be.

When he was up in front of the class, things felt different. The students looked more serious to him, more attentive. They were quiet and listened to every word he said, never interrupting him or even so much as checking their phones

for a text. They even took notes, something he'd rarely seen before. This was only community college, for goodness sake, not Harvard. Nate was worried.

He was used to a little back and forth with his students and even some teasing here and there. Now they seemed so respectful that it was troubling. So today, in an effort to get them to loosen up, he scrapped his usual teaching ensemble in favor of a new look. He traded in the shirt and sweater vest for just wearing an old too-big dress shirt, untucked. It almost went to his thighs, it was so long. He also wore that pair of skinny jeans he'd accidentally bought online a year ago and was too busy to return. He was way too old for skinny jeans, especially this pair, which looked more like they were painted on than anything else. They were so thin, he tucked the legs inside his socks.

The idea was to give his students something to talk about, something to make fun of, but instead, they just sat there quietly and politely, taking notes and listening. What was wrong with them? Here he was, dressed like a clown, and not even a snicker in his direction.

Maybe dressing up was the wrong way to go. Why he had decided on such a strange course of action to fix his non-problem was something he really hadn't been able to get his head around. It seemed perfectly logical to him: to feel more comfortable, he needed to dress in these particular clothes. That was what a little voice in his subconscious was telling him, and he was to use any conscious excuse to justify it.

Worse yet, the grades were still dropping. Nate had tried to slow it down a little and go back to fundamentals, but the class grade average had dipped to 60%. Even with the new 'super studious' attitude of his students, they weren't absorbing the material. They just weren't working at the college level.

They'd probably do better if they weren't so obsessed with trends, Nate thought. The girls were so in lock-step with fashion, they were practically dressed exactly alike. Same with the boys. It didn't really matter. Next week they'd surely be on to a new trend.

As he made his way back to his office, he ran into Hank Watters, walking back from the Metal Shop. The shop was attached to the back of the building and was where they did all the actual shop class. As usual, he smelled a bit burnt and had a few patches of soot on his pants. "Hola, Amigo!" He said, when he saw Nate passing his way. "I like the shirt!"

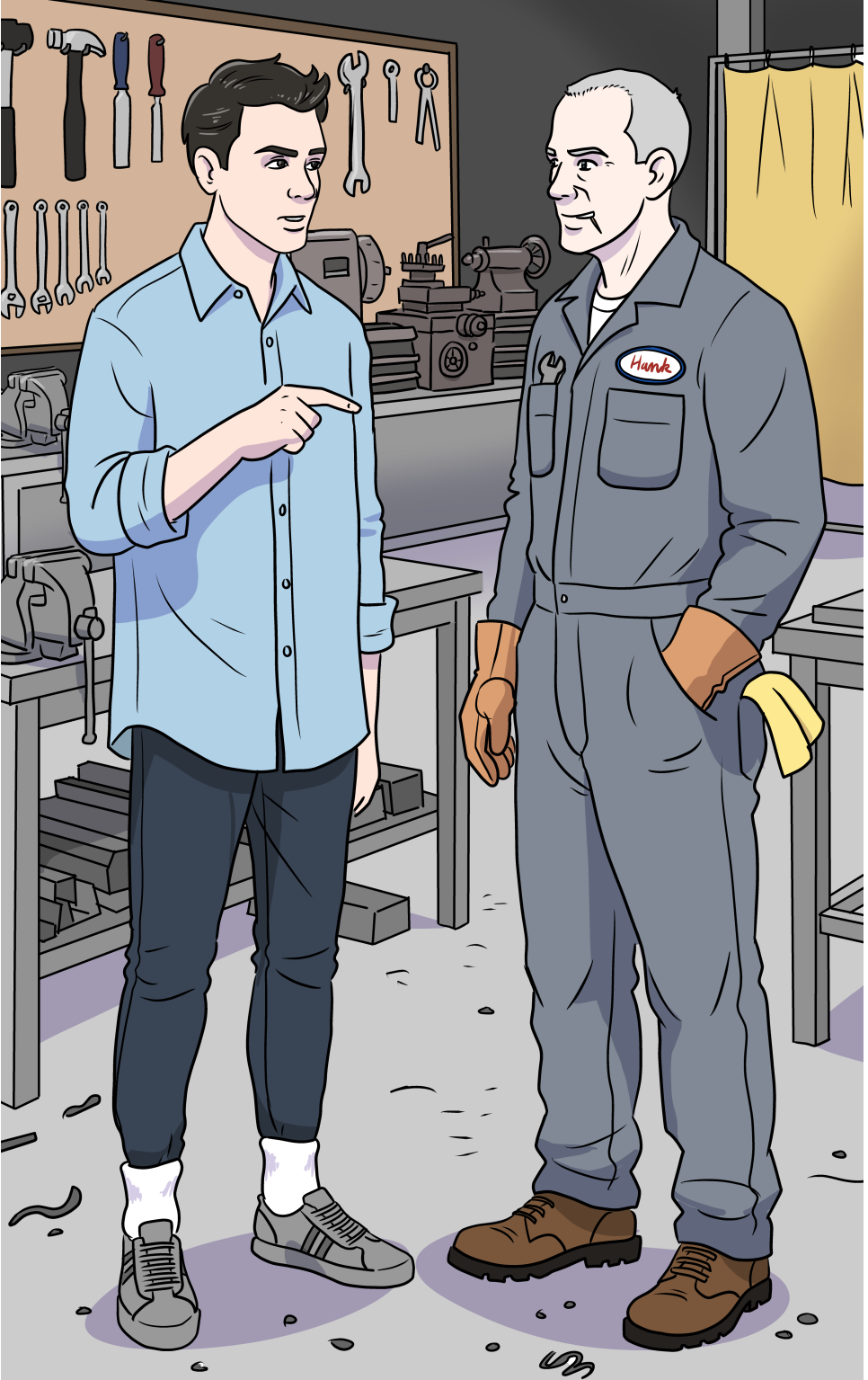
"Oh, thanks. Say... Uh..." Nate kind of pulled him over to the side for a minute and lowered his voice. "I was just wondering if you haven't noticed something odd in your class."

"Odd like what?" Hank asked.

"I don't know. Like they're better students, but at the same time, not better?"

"Hey, you're gonna have to run that one by me again."





“Okay. Like they’re paying attention, and being polite. Yet, the work that they’re doing is a little less than what it was just a few weeks ago?”

“Huh. Well, yeah, I think my guys are paying a little closer attention. But they’re still weldin’ the same joints they were doin’ since they got here.”

“What about the way they’re dressed?”

“Well, the boys pretty much dress the same way. But hey! That’s just because they have to wear the work overalls out there.”

“And the girls?”

“I don’t have any girls in my class,” Hank answered.

Upon reflection, Nate realized that maybe Hank wasn’t the best person to answer these questions. He wasn’t the most observant person, either. The unkempt debris on the floor seemed indicative of that.

“Just keep an eye out and let me know,” Nate said, ending the conversation.

“Will do!” Hank said, and headed on his way.

Nate headed into his office, and Rachael was already there, talking to one of the male students. Immediately, Nate fluffed out his hair, hoping it would make him look... *Wait*, he asked himself, why had he just done that?

“There you go,” she said, signing a piece of paper and handing it to the guy. “Thanks for coming by.”

“Thank you!” the boy said as he left in a haste.

“Who was that?” Nate asked.

Rachael rolled her chair up to her computer. “One of the students in your Nonlinear Systems Class.”

“What did he want?”

“He just wanted me to sign something for him.”

“A form? Is he transferring?”

“No, he just wanted me to sign something.”

“Oh, okay,” Nate said, stretching out before taking his seat at his desk. Rachael had always attracted attention from the boys in Nate’s classes. Rachael would sit to the side and hand out tests and papers and run the labs, and she had attracted her share of lovesick young men. Nate didn’t blame them one bit. Now it looked like they were just inventing excuses to talk to her. But they weren’t just asking her for autographs now, were they? Kids these days.

Fortunately for Nate, it was his *job* to talk to her, and didn’t need to make up thin excuses. After all, she was the closest thing he had to a girlfriend these days, even if she really wasn’t anything even close to being one at all.

Nate had not been in a relationship in what felt like forever, and he was not in any danger of one starting up anytime soon. He wasn’t the most social of

creatures, and he had no life outside of the college. He went home late every night and read or watched TV until he fell asleep. Not that he was morose about it. He felt having a girlfriend was more of an obligation to society than any burning need for companionship.

Although, lately, he had been feeling a little uncomfortable with his isolation. Not that he was looking for a girl, but he did feel a like it would be nice to have one person there to provide him with a little validation. Maybe more than one person.

“Do you think I look like an idiot?” Nate asked Rachael.

“What?” Rachael replied, as the question had come out of nowhere. “No! I like the new look. I think a belt would tie it all together, though.”

“No one would be able to see it, under the shirt.”

“Not under the shirt, over it.”

“Oh,” Nate said, thinking about it. “That might work.” He was inclined to regard Rachel’s fashion advice highly. He had been impressed with the way she had upped her game lately.

She had never been much of a flashy dresser, but lately Rachael was showing off a whole new side to her. Today she was dressed in black hi-top converse shoes with red stockings. She had a flouncy knee-length white skirt with petticoats, a wide gold lamé belt and a poofy red blouse with white lacy trim. She added large gold ball-shaped earrings dangling from her ears and bracelets made of the same. She had also added a red lamé ribbon to her hair to top it off. She looked like a celebrity, in Nate’s opinion. He liked it.

“Are you eating those cookies again?” Nate asked, seeing her nibble on one.

“They’re addictive, I swear.”

“But I got rid of them all!” Nate said, not mentioning that by ‘getting rid’ of them, he meant that he had eaten the remainder of the tin.

“Another batch showed up,” Rachael said, pointing to a second cookie tin placed on top of the first. “No idea where from.”

“Someone’s trying to kill us with sugar.” Nate grabbed two and crammed one in his mouth. “Sfo goodf,” he said. Rachael was quite prescient when she said they were addicting.

Despite the high consumption of calories, though, Rachael hadn’t gained an ounce, and had maybe lost a few, in Nate’s opinion. He himself had dropped seven in the last three days alone, but he was pretty sure that was water weight, not anything else.

Nate brought up the web browser on his computer and logged into the Plains County Community College online staff portal. He had to put in the assignments for next week. The thing was, he knew his students were way behind in the course syllabus, and forging ahead with his usual material was



only going to get the class more behind. He was left little choice but to dumb it down a little bit — just a tiny bit — if he didn't want to flunk the whole class.

As he twirled a lock of his hair, that's what he decided he had to do.



Well, now Nate was beginning to worry. Over the past two weeks, he had indeed dumbed down his course, not just a little bit, but by a lot. He had been reducing the complexity of the material day after day, and when he started to fear that he was just going to have to bring out multiplication tables and abacuses, they finally started to catch on. However, the class was now doing simple algebra at a beginners level. The high school level.

Nate wasn't sure what to do. In his eight year teaching career, he had never seen this kind of failure rate. It was a good thing it had leveled off, or else he would have had to think about resigning. No school would employ him for these abysmal results. As it was, he just hoped he could gently work his students back up to where they should be.

He asked Professor Ravenclaw about it, who had a predictably pessimistic reply. "If they can't get the answer from those foul little lightboxes of theirs, they stand little chance of grasping it for themselves, Nathaniel." He was referring to mobile phones, Nate assumed. The truth was that Nate didn't disagree with him, and he suspected his students were getting more and more reliant on outside information than figuring things out for themselves, sadly.

That concern for his students went beyond academic irregularities, though. He looked over one of his classes as they were silently finishing up a quiz. His previous observation that the students were dressing more and more alike proved salient, as the students were now starting to dress *exactly* alike. At first, he assumed it was some kind of prank or dare, but it wasn't going away.

Sure, it occurred him to just go up and ask one of the students was was going on, but last time he asked a student about their clothes, he got a stern lecture from the HR department about what were appropriate and inappropriate questions to ask young students from a sexual harassment perspective. So he was going to leave it alone for now.

Besides, he liked the style. The boys were wearing the same boring coats with "Sgt. Pepper" kind of collars, but the girls had a cute nautical theme going on. All in all, he had no problem with their taste in dressing alike. Just the creepiness of it. Nate was not quite sure — Wasn't *Children of the Corn* filmed around here?

Nate put aside his phone, where he was browsing cutepuppiez.com for the latest adorable baby animal photos, and sat back in his chair. Rachael was over to the side, dressed in a flamboyant outfit, a form-fitting yellow dress with huge

white ruffles at the shoulder and a brief white ruffled hem. She had matching yellow boots which also had a white ruffle, and a white ruffled collar with a pink band around the neck. She was silently mouthing the words to a song she was listening to on her big pink headphones.

Every so often, a male member of the class would glance up at Rachael, their eyes would start to get a little glassy, and then they'd get back to work. Nate's assistant had her own little fan club, and it was growing. Nate was a charter member, too. Because whenever he'd spot someone ogling his junior partner, he'd feel a little pang inside. A pang of — well, it was hard for him to admit, but it was jealousy.

Sure, Rachael was a smart girl who was blessed with good looks and great sense of style, but what was wrong with *him*? Why didn't *he* get looks like that from the students? He had heard stories of students getting crushes on their professors, but he'd never seen it for himself. It was like he was invisible. It was even more disappointing, considering that lately, he had tried every day to dress up a little fancier, but not so much as a glance in his direction.

He had added the belt that Rachael suggested. He had hung it loosely around his waist, over his long dress shirts, and it did bring his outfit together. The next day he had pulled his belt tighter. Then tighter some more. Since he had been losing so much weight lately, he wanted to show it off, and using that belt to demonstrate his new slender waistline was just natural.

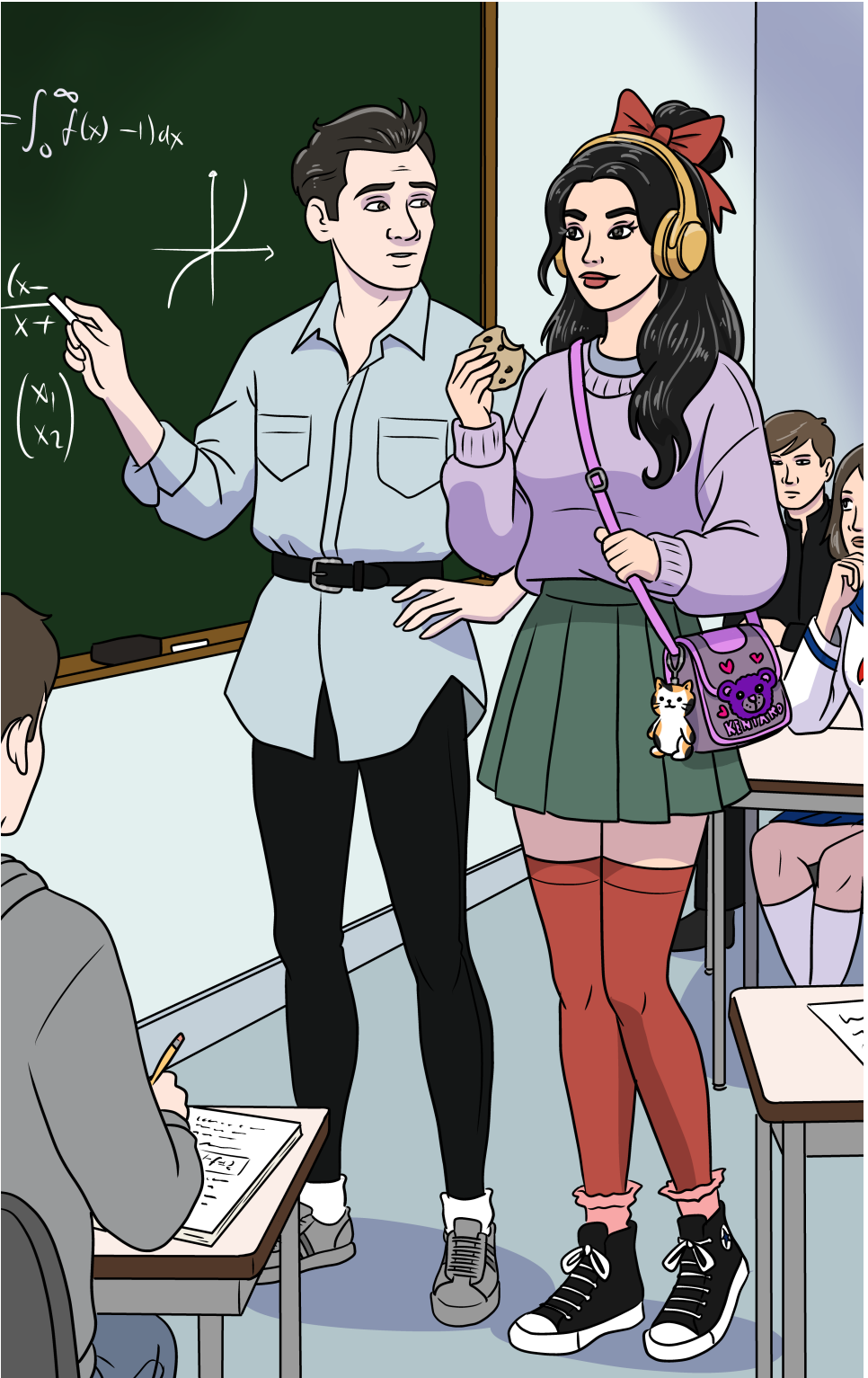
Nate was a bit more critical of his appearance these days. He had a hard time not stopping at reflective surfaces to check his hair or his face. He tugged on his shirts, wishing they were more flattering to him, not showing off his chest at all. He would stick out his butt, wondering why it was so flat. "I should do some squats," he told himself over and over again.

Nate had also discovered that tight jeans were way more comfortable than he first suspected. The tightness was like a warm hug all day. So he went right out and bought a couple more pairs of skinny jeans, even tighter than the first pair. Even better, he found one pair that was basically like exercise pants, made out of stretchy spandex stuff, but made to look like jeans. He bought one black pair out of curiosity, and now he found himself wearing that same pair for the third day in a row.

Sitting next to Rachael, though, he wasn't going to catch anyone's attention no matter how good he looked. She got all the attention. As the students finished the quizzes and dropped them off in front of Nate, he was checking them, hopeful that the grades were going to get better. They weren't. If anything, these students, and the students in his other two classes, were incapable of improvement. There was a real danger that he wasn't going to get any of these kids through their courses.

Things were just all topsy-turvy right now. Nate felt like everything around him was just beyond his control. As the last student finished up and left, it was





just him and Rachael. She was still bopping along to her music, eyes closed and unaware that the class was over. He tapped her on the arm, and she opened her eyes. She quickly pulled off the headphones and asked, “fire drill?”

“No, class is over.”

“Already?”

“Hour and twenty minutes, like always,” Nate said, gathering the quizzes and getting up. “I gotta go talk to someone.” He handed the papers to Rachael. “Put those in the database for me, would you?”

“Yeah, I can do that!” She said with enthusiasm.

Nate wandered out into the hallway, and headed nowhere in particular. He made his way past a couple of dark classrooms and then the drinking fountains. It wasn't that huge a building, as it was just one floor and held only eight classrooms, a couple of large storage areas, the kitchen and then half a dozen smaller faculty offices. So when one wandered the hallways, one did not have a lot of ground to cover. He noticed a student standing outside one of the language classrooms and headed that direction.

It was a male student, in his coat and slacks, holding a sign that read “Disrespectful and rude” on it. He was either being punished or advertising for a new movie with a bad title.

“What's going on?” Nate asked the kid.

“I was disrespectful to Miss Ozake and my classmates,” he replied loudly. He acted like he was an army recruit, proclaiming his infraction. The only thing that was missing was a “sir” at the end.

He had been paying close attention to Miss Ozake since she had arrived, and had grown to appreciate her teaching skills. She truly commanded the attention of her students and they respected her for it. Her classes were orderly and efficient. Especially impressive was her grade average, which was rising like crazy. Her students were learning Japanese at an astonishing rate, and he could only wish for such results.

He decided to watch her in action, and quietly opened the door to sneak into the classroom, which wasn't sneaky at all, and Miss Ozake glared at him for making a disturbance. She was lecturing the class in Japanese, and Nate waved off any further interruption, quietly taking a spare seat to the side.

Nate didn't have a lot of time to observe before class ended, only about ten minutes, and what he did observe didn't help him out much. Miss Ozake was a stern teacher who ran her class with military precision and relied more on her demanding personality than any genius teaching techniques. Yet, she did get incredible results. The kids in her class all sounded like native Japanese speakers to his ears.

“Miss Ozake,” Nate said, approaching her after the students had left, “I hope you don’t mind me saying so, but I’m truly impressed with what you get out of these kids.”

“Thank you, Professor,” she replied with a smile. She treated him respectfully, because he was an adult, saving her austere manner for the students. “That means a lot coming from you.”

“The results are mind-blowing! I’ve never seen kids learning so fast!”

“They do seem to be absorbing the material quickly.”

“It’s very impressive. Listen, I was hoping you could do me a favor...” Nate said. “I’ve got the opposite problem. My students are floundering. I’ve never seen it like this. I’m worried I might lose my job.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. But what can I do?”

“I was hoping... Well, I know it’s a lot to ask... I’d like to see what it would be like if you used some of your teaching skills on my class, and I can observe what you’re doing.”

“You want me to teach your courses for you?”

“Just one class, one time. So I can watch and learn.”

“I don’t know much about your subject...”

“I’ll have it all laid out for you. If you have any trouble, I’ll be there to help you out.”



So the next Tuesday, Nate sat to the side and watched as Miss Ozake taught his Applied Probability course to his usual 13 students. It was a minor disaster. Whenever Miss Ozake tried to discipline a student for an incorrect answer or not paying attention, the eyes of the class fell on him to check to see if Nate would approve her actions. It tainted the whole experiment, knowing that both teacher and students were filtering what they were doing. Besides, the quiz grades were only slightly up from normal.

Sadly, Nate learned nothing.

“That was a waste of time,” Nate declared at his desk that evening. He leaned forward, his long hair covering his face in shame. He was feeling depressed. “I’m never going to figure this out!”

“Did you just snuffle?” Rachael asked, from her seat.

“Maybe,” Nate replied, too distraught to deny it.

“Look, you’re tearing yourself apart about this.” Rachael pulled her headphone down onto her neck. “Maybe you can ask her to do it again?”

“Maybe, but why? The same thing will happen all over again.”

“I can take some video of it. You can be out of the classroom and then watch it later. That could work!” Rachael said, excitedly.

“No, I have to be there, I have to see how she does it with my own eyes. I have to really feel it.”

“Well...” Rachael got a funny smirk on her face. “Just how *much* do you want to be there?”



“Hi, Mr. Yeager!” Rachael chimed, as she came inside the Apparel and Garment workshop. “I have a little project for you!” She was so upbeat these days, it was almost irritating.

“What’cha got?” Tom Yeager said, throwing his cigarette into his half-empty coffee. “Nice look you got goin’ there, Rache.”

Rachael was dressed in a tiered organza skirt, a pink t-shirt with a picture of a white fluffy kitten on it, white tights, white tennis shoes and a huge white bow on her head. “Thanks, Tom! I like you without the mustache!”

“It was time. So what’s this project? This isn’t one of those things where you try to get me to do free work for you and call it a class project, is it?”

“Of course it is!”

“Fair enough.”

“You know that look all the kids are going for these days? This big new fashion trend?”

“The one that kinda looks like everyone’s in the navy from the 1800’s?”

“That’s the one!”

“I was hoping you or one of your students could make one for me. One of the girls’ outfits.”

“Your size?”

“No... More like... Nate’s size.”

“Sure, no problem.”

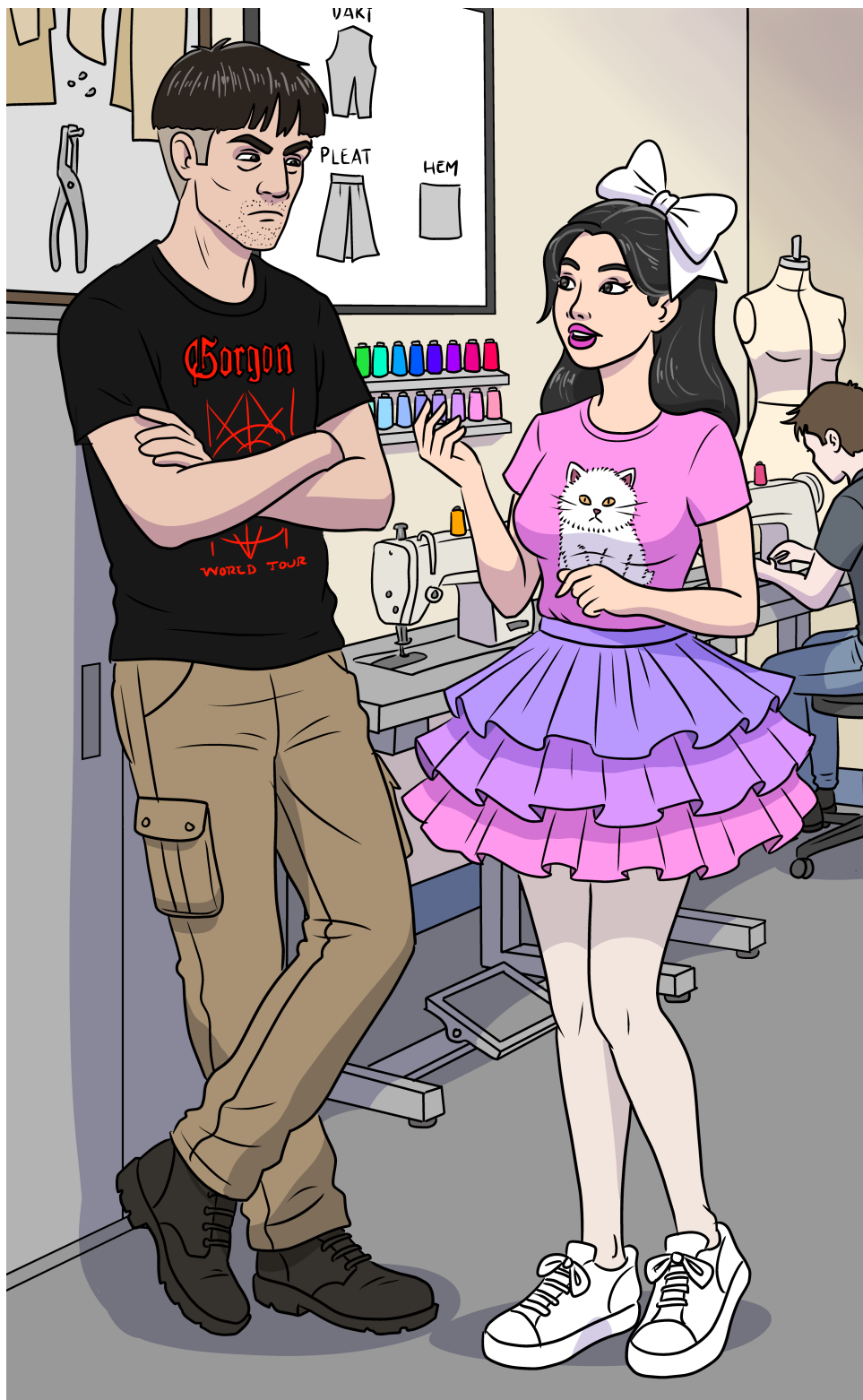
“Just like that?”

“We’ve been making nothing but those outfits for the past two weeks. I practically can do it in the dark.”

“I was wondering where they all came from. How long will it take?”

“Pick it up at the end of the day.”

“Thanks, Tom! I really appreciate it. And Nate does, too.”



“Send me a photo of him when you get him dressed up in it.”

Rachael winked. “You have a devious mind, Tom!”



“I changed my mind,” Nate said, his arms clutched to his chest and his knees wobbling. “I’ll just videotape it.”

“We’ve come way too far for that, Professor,” Rachael said, as she finished spreading out the outfit Tom had made for them on the bed.

They were in Nate’s bedroom, at his modest apartment. Nate was stripped to his underwear, and having a very visible negative reaction to Rachael’s plan. He had been skeptical from the beginning, but now that the reality was laid out before him, he had no idea what he was thinking or how Rachael had talked him into this. Her plan? Simple. If Nate wanted to be in the room and not be detected as the teacher, then he needed to be one of the students.

“I could just be one of the male students!” Nate had pointed out.

“Like hell you could,” Rachael said. “You know you’re not exactly the manliest of men, Nate.”

That was an unwarranted cheap shot, he thought. “Yeah... But...”

“When’s the last time you shaved?”

“My face?” Nate felt his baby-smooth chin. She was right. He couldn’t even remember when he last grabbed a razor. He recalled that he had cultivated a Grizzly Adams beard in college, but had been clean shaven since. Now, it felt like he’d never had a whisker in his life. “Still, I don’t know why you want me to dress up like a female.”

“When we’re all done, you can tell me if I’m right or not. I think you’ll make a cute girl.”

There was just something about the way she phrased that sentence that made his resistance dip, and it dipped just low enough to let Rachael do what she wanted.

Nate should have rejected the idea flatly when she proposed it in his office. He should have refused to let her make the outfit for him. He absolutely shouldn’t have agreed to letting her come over to dress him up. And he positively, beyond any doubt, should have stopped her from having him strip down naked, never put on a young girls’ panty and bra and then wait for instructions. He kept reminding himself that he needed to put up some kind of resistance.

“What do you want me to do next?” Nate asked, compliantly.

“Aren’t you the agreeable one?” Rachael remarked.



“Isn’t that what you want?”

“Let’s work on your body. I see you already shaved your legs.”

Nate looked down, his skinny legs were bare, but he was absolutely sure he hadn’t shaved them. Well, mostly sure. In fact, he really couldn’t decide if he ever had hair on them to begin with. He could see both the study hirsute legs he had grown up with and the skinny smooth legs he now had. Which one was correct? He couldn’t quite say.

“Is that okay?” Nate asked.

“It’s just fine,” Rachael replied. “Now, let’s get started. First, the socks.”

Nate took what Rachael gave him, and couldn’t figure it out at first. They weren’t like normal socks. He put one on, feeding it over his foot, then his calf, then his knee. They were very tall socks. They were tight, which he loved, and had decorative thin stripes at the top, which ended four inches up his thigh.

Once he had the other on, he took a few moment to flex his leg and examine the look. He looked over at Rachael, who was admiring from across the room. “Are you sure?” Nate wondered.

Rachael nodded. “Sure I’m sure. All the girls in your classes are wearing these.”

Nate felt all sorts of strange in the tall socks, the flimsy scanty panties and the tight pull of the bra straps on his shoulders. “This is a bad idea,” he said.

“This is the only way, Nate. You said it yourself.” She handed him the skirt.

“I did?” he asked himself. He wasn’t sure that was true. “Yeah, the only way,” he then added, trying and reassure himself. The skirt seemed so small, so delicate. It was impossible to believe it was actually clothing. How it was supposed to conceal or protect him was a mystery. He bent down and stepped into the pleats. He pulled it up his legs and after fumbling for some kind of zipper in front, Rachael fastened it at the back for him.

Now with it on, he *still* wondered how it was supposed to conceal or protect him. It felt like he was wearing almost nothing at all, his nearly-bare butt still feeling the cool breezy air. Even more confusing to Nate was how it even fit him around the waist. He hadn’t lost *this* much weight, had he?

As he tried to tug it down farther, and not succeeding, he gave a look to Rachael who already knew exactly what he was thinking.

“Yes, it’s supposed to fit like that *and* feel like that.”

“Like it’s not even there?”

Rachael shrugged. “That’s the deal! But you’ll get used to it. Even like it.”

“That’s hard to believe. I’m going to have to be careful with every move I make.”

“Yes, you will.” Rachael handed him the top, a short-sleeved white blouse that had a broad turquoise collar, matching the color of the skirt. Nate turned and shook it a few times to see what was what and then put it on. A pair of women’s loafers were the final item of clothing, but he didn’t want to put them on right now. After all, they were indoors.

“There!” Rachael said. “Now, the hair.”

Before he could even look to see what was happening, he was accosted by a massive flurry of pink. It got in his eyes and his mouth and he had to spit and pull it out. “Pink?” Nate said, exasperated. “A pink wig? Tell me how this could possibly make me look like a real college girl!”

“Well...” Rachael said, finishing up her fiddling with his wig. “Why don’t you tell me?” She swiftly turned him around so he could see himself in the closet mirror.

Nate kind of stood there, staring at his reflection much as a house pet might stare at their own reflection — unsure of who was behind the glass, and feeling threatened. He took a timid step forward, to see if the image would match his own movement. It did. It really was him in the mirror.

“How is this possible?” He asked, his voice straining to speak the words. “I really look like a girl!”

Rachael agreed. “And a cutie at that!”

Nate took another look at himself. “Cute?” He swung his hips back and forth, swishing his skirt and played with the wig hair. “You really think I’m cute?”

“If you aren’t the cutest little thing I ever did see!”

Nate turned a leg and gave himself a smile. It was important to him, it was important to be cute. If he was going to be a girl, he wanted to be a cute one. The very cutest one, actually.

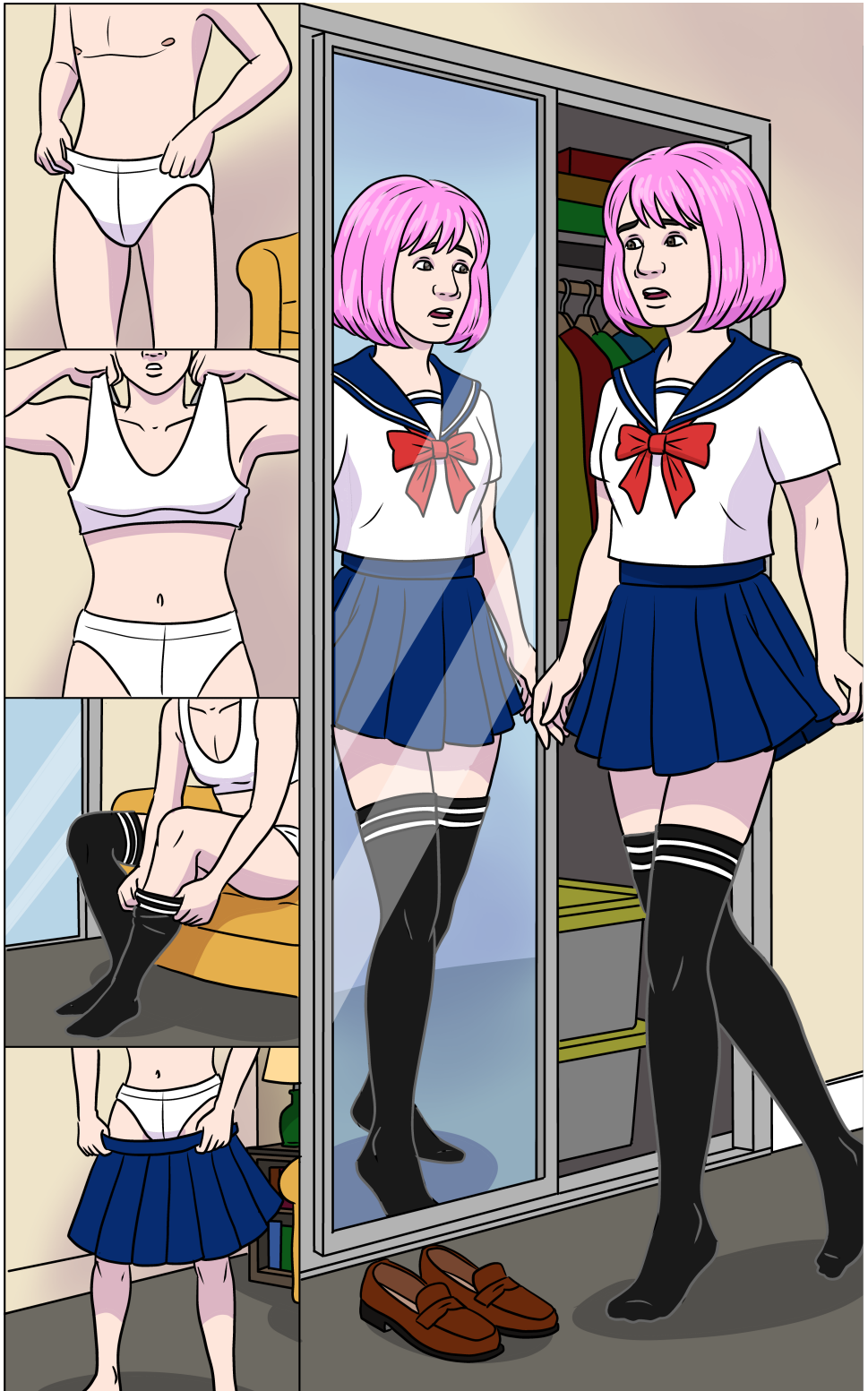
But reality came back to him and slapped him in the face. “Wait. What’s happened to me?” He asked aloud. “I’m a 35 year old man! Not a teenage girl! What’s *happened* to me?”

Rachael rubbed her anxious mentor’s shoulders. “What do you mean? Nate, you’ve always been a little on the small and slender side. Just because...”

Nate interrupted. “Since when? I weigh a hundred and eighty pounds... I could slam dunk a basketball in college...” He pointed to his reflection. “This isn’t me! How could it *possibly* be me?”

“Calm down, sweetie pie. So you might not be the man you thought you were. I still like you. Everyone likes you. It doesn’t matter what you look like. Or *thought* you looked like before you lost all that weight.”

“It doesn’t?” Nate said.



“Not at all,” Rachael patted him on the head. “Nate, you’re just having a little bit of an identity crisis. I’d have one too if I was a boy who looked like such a cute little girl.”

“Really?” Nate said, and added another snuffle.

“Yes, really. Now, if you think carefully, I don’t believe you were ever 180 pounds, or could dunk a basketball. You gotta be exaggerating things. Maybe just a *little* bit?”

Now that he really did try to recall the particulars, his memory wasn’t as reliable. His life in the years since he turned 18 were vague and he couldn’t form a clear picture of them. “Maybe...” Nate replied.

“I bet you had to sit on someone’s shoulders to dunk.”

“Well, that might be true...” Now he could see it. He was sitting on the shoulders of his friend, while they were playing around one day, and he could just get high enough. “Possibly.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. Now don’t get worked up. This’ll be to your benefit. You’ll get to see how students get through your class from the inside.”

Nate straightened up and put a smile on his face. “You really think I can pass for a girl?”

“I guarantee it.”

Nate looked at his reflection once again. “Where did you get this wig?”

“The drama department storage room. They did that 17th century French revolution drama last year, and they had all the long, weird upperclass wigs they used for it. Then I styled it up for you.”

“You stole it?”

“Borrowed it. We’ll put it back when you’re done.”

“Oh... Okay. As long as they won’t miss it.”

“They didn’t even have a lock on the place.”



The next day at Building M, it was clear that Rachael wasn’t the only one to discover the lack of locks on the drama department storage room. It appeared that every female student had raided the place and claimed a wig as their own. The looks were completely over the top, with various big shaggy cuts, wild spikes, super long lengths and impossibly curly curls. Although many students favored dark brown or black colors, there were plenty of powder blue wigs, red, bright blue, dark green, white and more than a few blondes. However, Nate felt a flicker of pride that only he was wearing a pink one.

Not he could feel his flicker of pride through the mad swirling rush of emotion he felt from coming to his job in a conspicuously short skirt, disguised as a girl, and a girl half his age. He had nightmares about showing up to school naked, and this didn't feel terribly different. Still, from the very moment Rachael pushed him out of her car and drove off, leaving him alone in the school parking lot with no way back, Nate wasn't getting much attention.

The boys smiled at him, and the girls nodded as he passed by, giving no hint that they suspected him of being anything else than just another student. He closely watched the eyes of the people he was walking past, careful to see if their gaze was showing any hint of concern. Their eyes would just continue on their way, and Nate would fearfully await for the next pair to come coming towards him.

Only after passing by thirty or so people did it finally sink in that no one was going to make trouble for him. He even took a quick trip into the restroom to check his reflection and confirm that he was still dressed up as he was — and he was still the cute girl he had first seen last night.

Convinced that he had a plausible disguise and he was now in the perfect situation to finally see his class being taught by a great teacher, Nate pulled the straps of his pink backpack tight and went on his way to class, much to the confusion of the three boys using the stalls in that particular men's bathroom.

He had spent yesterday evening begging Miss Ozake to teach his next class, and after trading away most of his snacks and instant coffee from the faculty room, she agreed to do it one more time. Nate also told her to expect a "visiting student" and not to single her out or make any special notice of her.

Slowly, cautiously, and on his tip-toes, Nate entered his class at the rear and took a seat, deathly afraid that one of his students might possibly notice him. Then, when he clumsily dropped his heavy books on the floor, everyone in the class noticed him as they all snapped their heads around to look.

Nate froze in place, certain that his students, all looking directly at him, were bound to recognize him. Only after they started to turn around and go back to what they were doing was Nate able to unlock his body and try to act natural.

"Hi, are you new?" Said a girl in front of him. Nate had to hope she was talking to someone else, but there was no one else in his direction. "I haven't seen you before."

Nate cleared his throat, readying it for the attempt at speaking in a high register. "I'm just visiting..." His voice started in a screech and then trailed off to a whisper quickly.

"What's your name?" The girl asked. For the life of him, Nate could not place her. Maybe that was the first lesson to learn to be a better teacher — know the names of the students. Of course, it was hard to tell who she was, as she had a

brand-new huge mop of hair with enormous bangs that nearly obscured half her head.

“I’m Na...” Nate began to say, suddenly aware that he was delivering his real name. Worse yet, he hadn’t even contemplated the need for a fake name. Now, in the middle of saying it, he had to figure out how to finish. The logical answer would be to go with “Natalie” or “Natasha” but his neurons just weren’t firing that fast. “Natrismuhburble,” he answered, with his voice trailing off fast and mangling the last syllables intentionally.

“Natsuki?” The girl assumed. “What a cool name! Nice to meet you Natsuki.”

*Natsuki?* Well, Nate decided if that if it was a good enough name for this girl it was good enough to stick with for the next hour or so. He nodded agreement.

“Well, if you have any questions or anything, let me know. My name is...” Oddly, the girl seemed to be troubled for a instant, as if she was having difficulty remembering her own name. Nate was hanging on the moment, curious to know who he was talking to. He knew he would recognize the name, at least. “It’s...” Her face showed a little bit of stress as she tried to speak. “I’m Aimi,” she finally said, allowing herself to smile.

Amy Peterson. Yes, Nate knew her name from the attendance sheet. She was a good student. Or at least she was, up until he came back from jury duty.

“Oh, yes,” Nate replied, finding his seat. He was barely audible above a whisper. “Thank you.”

It wasn’t long before Miss Ozake arrived, although it was long enough for Nate to get so worried that he used his books to block being seen by the rest of the class. All they would have seen was a mass of pink hair bursting over the top of an Applied Probability textbook.

And so, class was finally ready to start. When he heard Miss Ozake begin, he listened with every bit of focus he could muster. He wanted to absorb everything: the way she spoke, the words she used, the steps she used to ensure comprehension. How much information did she include in one lesson? How often did she repeat the concepts she was teaching? What tone was she striking? What was the magic that Miss Ozake had being such an incredible teacher?

After the hour and twenty-five minutes were up, Nate had a stack of notes and a feverish head full of her lecture. Problem was, and it was dawning on him every minute he was listening, is that he had no idea what she was doing. It was just an ordinary class lecture, one like hundreds he had heard in his life.

Yes, she was a little strict, or maybe even described as a a bit short-tempered and cruel, but certainly that wasn’t they key to being a good teacher. If it was, by Nate’s reasoning, there would be no need for teachers, just drill sergeants.

No, there was something else at play, and Nate had to try and figure it out. he slung his pink pack over his shoulders and headed out.

“Um... Give me an hour or two. I’m on the other side of town,” Rachael said when he called her for a pick-up.

“What!” Nate barked. “You knew I was going to be ready for...”

“I know, I know! I got delayed. I’m sorry. I’ll be there by one. I promise. Two at the latest.”

Nate had no choice but to wait. With time to kill, he decided he needed to see if any of the other professors might help him figure things out.



He walked down the hallway, deciding who to ask first, not noticing all the swiveling heads from the boys as he walked past in his standards-of-decency-challenging skirt. “Hey, Nora!” Nate called out as he entered the Foodservice Technology kitchen. Nora was always the one who listened to his troubles best. She didn’t always have very good answers, but she did listen.

“Nora?” Nate said again, looking around at the kitchen. Only now, it wasn’t the kitchen he expected. Every semester, Nora would re-do the place to fit into a theme, like a burger joint, a Mexican restaurant or a pizza place. But this was new. It had been re-made as a café. A nice, Parisian-style café with ornate furnishings.

It also had customers. More than a few. Nora occasionally opened up the place to the professors, but this was a full crowd of students, who were easily recognizable from the way they dressed alike.

“Welcome!” Said a cheery voice. Nate recognized it as Nora’s, but had a tough time recognizing Nora herself. She was all dressed up in a crazy outfit that looked kind of like a French maid’s outfit, but wasn’t quite as revealing. Also, she had cat ears on. “Nya!” She added. “Would you like a table?”

“What’s going on here?” Nate asked.

“It’s the Cat Ear Maid Café!” Nora explained. “The most popular café in Building M!”

“It’s the *only* café in Building M.”

“So it is!” Nora replied with a smile. “But we’re still pretty popular.”

“That’s a whole new look for you, Nora. I like it.”

Nora was puzzled. “Do I know you?”

“Oh... Uh...” Nate had completely forgotten that he was dressed up as he was. He immediately changed his demeanor, pulled his arms in, hunched over a little, and turned his head away so he couldn’t be seen. He thought about bolting and getting away as fast as possible, but he had nowhere to go until Rachael showed up. “A table, please,” Nate squeaked out.

“Follow me!” Nora chirped as she grabbed a menu and led Nate to a small table in the center of the room. Where everyone was going to stare at him.

“Um... Maybe a table over there?” Nate asked, pointing to a the corner.

“Okay, if that’s what you like.” Nora seated him at the requested table and handed him the menu.

As Nate glanced up to take the menu, Nora ducked her head in and got a better look at her customer. “Is that you, Nate?” She asked.

Nate turned his head away and answered with a weak “No.”

“It is!” Nora said a little too loudly for Nate’s comfort. “I thought I recognized you! I never thought I’d see the where professor Nate Corman was dressed up like...”

Nate lurched at Nora, trying to cover her mouth and pull her down to his level. “Please! Please! Nora!”

“What? Oh, I get it! You don’t want people to know!” She said, her voice booming through the café.

“Please be quiet!” Nate said, in the loudest possible whisper.

“Quiet?” Nora then lowered her voice. “Right. You don’t want to attract attention.”

“Yes!”

“Okay, if that’s what you want. You make a fine looking girl, Nate. You’re as cute as a button.”

Nate couldn’t help but feel his cheeks burn at being called cute.

Nora continued. “I always said to myself, ever since I met you — you know what? I bet Nate would look great in a dress. So delicate, small and pretty.”

“Really?” Nate asked with a reluctant smile. He knew Nora spoke the truth, as he had always been small and delicate, ever since he was young. He could remember being the smallest boy in his class and never being able to grow a single beard whisker. That was just who he always had been.

“Absolutely! Oh, don’t hide that smile of yours, you’re too adorable to look so troubled, Nate, sweetie.”

“Don’t call me Nate!” Nate protested.

“I’m sorry, I should know better.” She patted Nate on the hand. “What should I call you?”

“Um... Natsuki.”

“Oh, I love it! What a beautiful girl you make, Natsuki!” Nora headed away, ready to go back to work. “Let me know when you’re ready to get something, Natsuki!” She said, loudly. “Definitely a girl named Natsuki! Not anyone else!”



Nate cringed, but no one was paying any attention beyond a few glances from the boys at his skirt. He relaxed and opened up his pack to go through his notes again. Somewhere had to be the answer. Nate just needed to put together the clues.

After a few minutes, a girl dressed in the cafe's maid uniform came to take his order. He wasn't quite certain what he was getting, as the menu was quite baffling, but he was pretty sure it was coffee and a bear claw. He was concentrating so hard on his notes, he didn't even notice that what he got back was a cold latté with a smiling kitten's face drawn in syrup atop the froth, alongside a small strawberry shortcake that was fashioned in the shape of a bunny rabbit.

He checked the time, and it was still an hour before one, when Rachael was supposed to come by, and he had a lot of time to examine the many pages of notes he had taken. Over and over again, he read them, trying to figure it out. On the surface, Miss Ozake did nothing more than boss her students around and almost bully them. She showed no tolerance for any talk back, debate or discussion. She ruled her class with an iron fist. Teachers like that were a dime a dozen.

Maybe it was the way she dressed? She presented a businesslike appearance, uptight and no-nonsense. Maybe it was the way she talked? She almost spoke with an accent at times, flubbing her 'r' and 'l' sounds.

Nate really didn't know any more now than he did five days ago. Miss Ozake was somehow able to get her students from novices to fluent speakers of Japanese faster than one could imagine, yet, he still had no idea how.

"Lunch rush is over, you want to talk?" Nora said, seating herself at Nate's table.

Looking up, it was only then that Nate realized he was the only customer in the place. He had been so engrossed in his thoughts, it had completely slipped his attention.

"It's a long story, Nora." Nate pushed his papers away, sick of looking at them. "I need to find out what Miss Ozake is doing to be such an effective instructor."

Nora agreed. "She's got us all looking pretty crappy, don't you think? She's some kind of prodigy or something."

Nate looked down at himself. "So that's what this is all about. I needed to see what she was doing..."

"...And you dressed up as one of the students to sneak a peek, huh? I guess that makes sense."

No, it really didn't, as Nate ran that back in his head. How could he have ever thought this was a good idea? Well, it was a bit late to be kicking himself about it now.

He explained to Nora how his students were failing at an unprecedented rate, that he had rolled back his curriculum to 11th grade levels, only to save his job. That if he didn't have some of his students pass the required tests that he'd be losing his job by the end of the term.

"I noticed my students have taken a step back, too," Nora said. "Although my students aren't exactly plotting the next moon mission."

"I'm miserable. I don't know what to do. I'm desperate."

"I have some panda pancakes that would cheer you right up."

"No, I really gotta get my mind off this. I'm just so lost."

"They have banana slices and blueberries for eyes. Scoops of chocolate ice cream for ears."

"No, no. I don't deserve it. I know the answer is staring me in the face. I just have to figure it out."

Nora began wiping down some tables as the two girls in the maid uniforms cleaned up the floor and tidied up. Nate saw it was now 1:45 and still no sign of Rachael. Begrudgingly, he started reviewing his notes again, in search of whatever it was that he was missing. How could Miss Ozake get her students to learn Japanese so quickly?

"Noriko-senpai, we are finished," one of the two girls said about an hour later. "Are we dismissed?"

Nora smiled and nodded her head. "Yes, thank you, Emiko-chan. Thank you Midori-chan. I'll see you both back here for evening service?"

"Oh, I must finish my paper for Miss Ozake tonight," said the girl called Emiko. "Did I not tell you? I feel ashamed."

"You told me, and I forgot. My apologies."

Nate checked the time again, and it was 2:30. He texted Rachael who replied with "Car trouble! ( °Д°)ノノ." He nearly threw his phone to the ground, he was so angry.

"Natsuki... Nate?" Nora said, approaching him. "I have a favor to ask."

"Yes?"

"Well, if you have the time to spare..."

"Oh, I have plenty of time to spare," Nate replied, angrily stuffing his phone into his backpack.

"Well, I was hoping I could ask you to help us out in a pinch. I'm short a waitress tonight."

It took a full five seconds before Nate understood where Nora was going with this. "Oh God, no," he said.

"I really am desperate," she repeated.

“Not for a million dollars.”

“Well, I didn’t want to do this, but...” Nora had her phone in her hand. “I could just take a shot of you right now and post it to all the people in the admin building.”

“You wouldn’t do that, Nora.”

“Yes I would. And everyone here calls me Noriko.”



“You!” Miss Ozake yelled from across the room. “There you are!” She strode through the crowded cafe, pushing people aside.

Nate immediately tried to shrink and hide, but there simply was no way. He, Midori-chan and Emiko-chan were lined up, ready to do their little pantomime song, “Love at Your Service,” when she spotted him. They did the song every hour at the back of the Cat Ear Maid Café for the customers, along with a little dance, and he had gotten quite good at it, with a crowd gathered to watch. But because of where they were, Nate had nowhere to go.

“Have you been here the whole time?” Miss Ozake barked.

Nate tried to say something. “I...”

“I don’t want to hear it!” Miss Ozake cut him off. “You’re coming with me!” She grabbed Nate by the ear — not the cat ear on his headband, but a real one — and pulled him away.

“Oww!” Nate whined, just barely able to keep up with the irate teacher in his high-heeled platform shoes.

“You leave me teaching your class and you don’t even tell me where you went! The nerve!” By this time, Miss Ozake had dragged him into the kitchen area, away from the customers. “Of all the impudence!”

“I... I’m sorry... Miss Ozake,” Nate replied in halting words. He was unsure if he should be regretful for doing what he did or angry that this woman had just humiliated him in front of his co-workers at the café. He defaulted to regret.

“Sorry isn’t nearly enough!” The tall, stern woman told Nate. “You just left me stuck teaching your class without a word!”

Nate was apologetic. “I meant to find you after class, but I was occupied... And then...”

“That was five days ago!” Miss Ozake yelled. She was so loud the plates on the counter rattled.

*Five days?* Nate couldn’t believe it. “But I... But...”



“But nothing! I’ve been teaching your classes for you for nearly a whole week!”

“I just was helping out Noriko-senpai... And...” The events of the past few days suddenly started to rewind in Nate’s memory. He had been asked to help out — blackmailed, actually — and then he had to clean up, they quit early, Noriko-senpai asked him to come in the next day to finish, and one thing led to another... But five days? He had been waitressing for Noriko-senpai for five days?

He could remember putting on the costume for the first time and how silly and exposed it made him feel, then being forced to learn the “Love at Your Service” song, then taking orders and... Then coming in the next day, and the next, and the next...

“Noriko-senpai tricked me!” Nate told Miss Ozake.

“She tricked you into working for five days at her café? An unlikely story! Of all the impudence!” Miss Ozake slapped Nate in the cheek. “You will change out of that outfit and come to class right this instant!”

“Owww...” Nate whined, rubbing his cheek. He couldn’t say he didn’t deserve it, but it still stung.

“Now!” Miss Ozake commanded.

Nate scurried off to the changing room, pouting and holding his skirt down.

Nora was understanding, but still reluctant to let Nate go. She did make him promise to be back for the evening service, because she wasn’t about to let him “give up” on the café.

Once he was back in his school clothes, he took his backpack and quickly headed for his classroom, only to find the lights dark. He opened the door anyway, just to look, and the place was abandoned. Where was his class? He had to find it quickly, as it was about to start, and he didn’t want to make Miss Ozake any angrier than she already was, if that was even possible.

He dashed to his office, to see if he could get Rachael’s help, but the door was locked tight, and his keys were at home, probably. Then he ran towards the hall he had just come from, where he saw Hank Walters walking along.

“Hey, champ!” Hank said, holding out his arm to stop Nate. “Whoa, there!”

“Do you know where Miss Ozake is?” Nate asked. “I’m late!”

“Calm down there, Natsuki-chan,” Hank replied, pointing behind him. “Miss Ozake’s teaching her class that-a-ways. Room 5.”

“Thank you!” Nate said, heading off the right direction. Then a funny thought hit Nate. Hank’s hair definitely looked larger, fluffier and bluer than Nate remembered it. All the students might have wearing wigs, but Hank too? There was no time to worry about that, though. He was late for class!

It didn't take him long before he found Room 5. Nate could hear Miss Ozake inside, so he carefully and quietly tried to open the door. By the time he poked his head in, everyone was looking at him. He headed for the desk, behind Miss Ozake, but he was stopped in his tracks.

"Natskui!" Miss Ozake barked. "Take your seat! You have five demerits for being late and inconsiderate!" She pointed him to the classroom seats, amongst the students.

"B... B... But..."

"Now! I have no more patience for you and your lazy ways!"

"I..."

"Now, Natsuki!"

Nate slinked along the wall to the back of the class where he took a seat in the only empty seat left. He felt humiliated, and a little bit responsible for putting Miss Ozake in such a bad mood. He tried to slump down in his seat to hide, hoping that being out of sight would get him off the hook.

"Posture!" Miss Ozake shouted, and he had to sit up straight again.

Only after about twenty minutes had lapsed did Nate even bother to look around. He realized why his class was shut down, because he recognized that his students were in this class, alongside the Japanese language students. The two had been merged together.

That seemed like a terrible idea, and he wanted to raise his objections to it, but he had no real way of doing that for the moment. Maybe it was just because Miss Ozake didn't want to teach two separate classes or something, but this arrangement had to be against the wishes of the students. After all, his students had signed up for math, not language, and her students surely had no interest in learning about the Markov process.

However, all the students sat quietly, patiently, attentively. In fact, he might have even recognized a few of the students who had dropped his class in the first few weeks. It was hard to tell, what with this crazy wig fad obscuring their features. They all appeared to perfectly content to be in this class and learning whatever it was that Miss Ozake was teaching. Which, if Nate was correct, was biology.

Maybe this was the magic. Inter-disciplinary lessons. Nate thought he might finally understand what Miss Ozake was doing. She was teaching one lesson in one subject and using it to enlighten another lesson in a different subject. Brilliant! Nate hung on every word she was saying in the hopes of finally discovering her secrets.

So he was quite proud that he had gotten at least 8 of the 10 biology questions on the quiz right. Why not do the quiz? He was curious to see how she'd connect it all up. He turned in his paper with pride. Back in his seat, Nate sat

and waited for the class to get around to his Applied Mathematics, and to see how Miss Ozake was going to tie everything together.

And he waited, and waited, and waited.

By the time the last bell of the day rang, Nate was mystified how it was all supposed to work. He was more confused than ever. He went to the corner to pick up the broom and began to sweep the classroom, just like the other students did.

“Natsuki-chan!” Aimi said, as she packed up her books. “All the girls are going to the arcade to play Dance Dance Revolution! You have to come!”

“That sounds like fun! I’d love to go!” Nate said, before thinking. He immediately recognized his mistake. There was no way he could go out dancing with girls half his age dressed as he was. Even if he was better looking than most of them. “Oh, but... I have work to do.”

“Aw,” Aimi replied. “Well, maybe we can drop by! You work at the Cat Ear Maid Café, right?”

His plans were a little muddled. He had papers to grade, he was sure of it — and he had to memorize the specials. He had to meet with Miss Ozake and talk about what had happened to his class or he had to clean the tables and mop the café floors. He had to find Rachael and give her the notes for the labs or maybe he had to train the new girls how to do “Love at Your Service?”

“Yes I do?” Nate answered, unsure of himself.

“So cool! I bet you look super cute in those uniforms! Well, I’ll see you tomorrow for class, Natsuki-chan!”

“Bye, Aimi-chan!” Nate called out with a smile as the girl left. He did hope Aimi-chan would stop by so she could see just how cute he did look in the café uniform. But checking the time, he realized if he didn’t get a move-on, he would be late for his shift.

That was what he should be doing, wasn’t it? Nate asked himself. There was something at the back of his mind that was bothering him, but he was unable to remember what it was. I’m gonna hate myself until I remember it, he told himself.

He stuffed his backpack full of books, pencils, pens and papers and was off. He passed by his office in a trot, unaware that Rachael was waiting for him inside, ready to review the lesson plans for the next week.

“You’re almost late, Natsuki-chan!” Nora said as he was let into the café. He noted that someone had installed a large picture window in the front with a neon sign for the café.

“I’m sorry, Noriko-senpai!” Nate apologized, bowing.

“Get your uniform on, and don’t keep us waiting!”

“Yes, Noriko-senpai!” He ran to the back room, and stripped himself down to his bra and panties quickly, and helped himself into the uniform. He rolled his stockings up his hairless, skinny legs, fluffed his pink hair, and then settled his chest into the triple-A cup bra. He still couldn’t remember what it was that he was supposed to be doing, and shrugged it off. It was time to go to work.



By the end of the week, Nate had made some adjustments to his new routine. It had become clear that Miss Ozake was furious with him, and that even trying to initiate a conversation with her was impossible. She would ignore him or threaten him every time he’d even approach her. So he decided to just stay undercover and keep attending class as if he were just another one of the students until she relented.

Working at the café wasn’t so bad. He liked the girls he worked with and Nora was a good boss. She had started to wear a black business suit and handled all the management of the café. Sometimes Nate got tired of all the “accidental” brushes of his butt and thighs when he was bending over to serve people, but there wasn’t much he could do about it. He was quite thankful that he didn’t have the breasts the other waitresses had, or else the boys would be all over him. Despite that, he enjoyed being busy and doing simple work, and he never tired of people complimenting him on being cute. Everyone liked his pink hair.

On this Friday, however, as Nate was serving up a tray of their famous Green Tea Ice Cream Parfaits in the shape of teddy bears, he spotted someone walk in the café. Tim Holland, the titular head of the School of Mathematics wandered into the café looking confused and bewildered.

“I was looking for Nate Corman, in Applied Mathematics?” He was talking to Nora who was at the entrance. “Have you seen...? What in the world is going on here?” He asked, looking around in shock. “Is it someone’s birthday?”

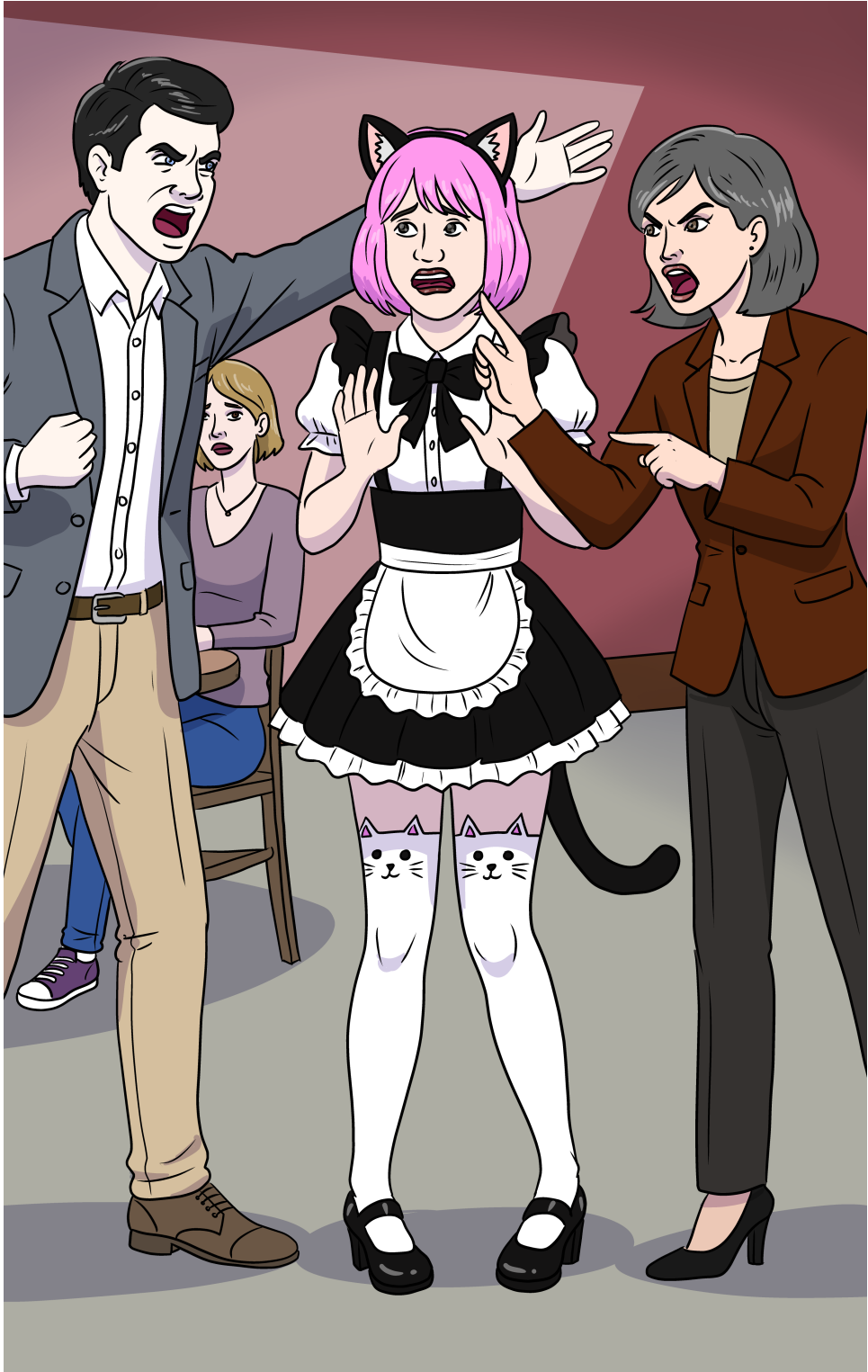
“Irrashimase!” Nora replied. “Would you like a table?”

“I don’t understand — what’s happening? Where are all the students? The professors?” Tim Holland stuck his head back out into the hallway. “This *is* Building M, isn’t it?”

Nate lost track of him for a while as he wandered off. Tim was effectively his superior, as Tim was the one responsible for submitting the budget request every year.

Time was actually the whole reason Nate had taken the job at PCCC in the first place, as he had always admired his work. They had both gone to the same college together, and never really had the guts to approach him. He was a kind of low-level prodigy, a master of anything he decided to try. Honestly, Nate was embarrassed to admit he’d followed him around after graduation, tracking his





activity online, and when he was taking the job as PCCC, that was where Nate wanted to go.

However, despite being the head of the department, Tim really didn't have any authority, and was just a teacher like Nate was. It just meant he had a nicer office in the admin building. Still, he was nominally in charge, which made this situation dangerous.

"Excuse me, Noriko-senpai! I must take my break," Nate said to Nora, then quickly retreating to the back room so he couldn't be seen. If Tim recognized him in this crazy get-up, and working a second job, he was going to be in real trouble.

No sooner had he taken a seat in the back room than he heard a commotion out front. It was Tim's voice. "Is this a legal enterprise? You can't have a business running on campus!"

Nate began to panic. He shed himself of the maid uniform and unclipped the cat ears from his wig.

Tim Holland continued yelling, now even louder. "Where is your approval? This is going to get everyone here in hot water!"

Nate had to get Tim to calm down and talk him out of doing anything rash, but looking like he did, that wasn't going to happen. He went to his dressing hook, and was reminded he wore his student clothes to work, like he did every day. He couldn't face Tim in those. "I'm sorry, Noriko-senpai!" He said into the air as he started to go through Nora's things, as close as Nate was going to get to "normal" clothes. He also checked his co-workers stuff.

Soon he was dressed in a complete outfit, with slacks from Nora, a t-shirt from Midori and some shoes from Emiko. Finally, he thought, he was looking like his old self. Just as he was about to exit, though, he realized he needed to remove the giant pink-haired wig he was wearing. Surely, that might give him away.

He tried to rip it off, but it was tightly stuck to his scalp. He had to run his fingers around the edge and almost peel it up before he could get the rest of it off. Only now did he start to think that maybe he should have been taking it off at night and letting his skin breathe. Keeping it on all day and night was making it feel like it was a part of him. With a final yank, he was free of it, but his natural hair looked truly awful, thin, sickly, and slightly damp. He scuffed it up and tried to brush it out, but he only could do so much with it right now.

"Tim!" Nate said when he burst out of the back room. "How are you?"

"What?" Tim replied. "Who?"

"It's me, Nate Corman."

"Huh? Do you know where I can *find* Nate Corman?"

"I *am* Nate Corman!"

“Yes, that’s who I’m looking for,” Tim answered, walking away to go look for his fellow mathematician. “Maybe he’s in his office.”

“But...” Nate said, then reluctantly let the subject go. For whatever reason, he didn’t recognize him as Nate, but making a scene about it in the middle of a crowded café was not what he wanted to do right now. He trailed after Tim, hopeful to talk away from other people.

He found Tim testing the knob of Nate’s office door, but it was locked. Nate was still looking for the eyes, though he was sure they were hidden in his apartment somewhere, probably under the couch.

“Hello again,” Tim said, as he walked past Nate to the main corridor. “Let me know if you see Professor Corman anywhere.”

Maybe he needed to spend more time with Tim. It was possible, after all, that since he rarely even visited him in person that he just didn’t recognize who he was. That’s what you get for just exchanging emails, Nate told himself.

“Where did all this neon come from?” Tim said as he walked down the hallway, looking left and right at the bright illuminated signs along the walls. “This can’t possibly be authorized!”

Nate wasn’t sure why he had a problem with the signs, as Nate quite enjoyed the glow, especially late at night. Though he did admit that they were staring to accumulate. Actually, now that he thought about it, exactly where were they coming from?

Well, Nate decided that wasn’t important right now. What was important was finding a way to convince Tim everything was okay so that he didn’t do anything rash. The last thing Nate needed was to deal with the administration coming in and getting involved.

“That’s what I said. It’s been taken over!” Tim was talking into his cell phone. “The entire building is crawling with unauthorized people, and I can’t find a single staff member. The place is practically unrecognizable!”

*Uh-oh.* It was a little late, Nate realized.

“Yes. I wholeheartedly agree! I’ll see you right here in five minutes, Dr. Hayes!”

Dr. Hayes was the Chancellor of the college, and very, very bad news. The man had a foul temper and a predilection towards firing people. The art of staying employed at PCCC was the art of avoiding Dr. Hayes. That wasn’t hard to do in Building M, usually.

It was time to get out of here. Nate ran past Tim Holland and back to the café to grab his things. He didn’t want to be here when the shit hit the fan. But ten minutes later, he found himself back in his cat ear maid uniform, pink hair and all, scrubbing the floor.

“That’s what you get for stealing clothes, Natsuke-chan!” Nora said, scolding him. “You ask permission next time!”

“Yes, Noriko-senpai!” Nate replied, duly admonished. He tried to work as fast as he could, intending to escape, but it wasn’t long before he heard the voice of Dr. Hayes bellowing from just outside the café.

“Who’s responsible for this?” He yelled. “Where’s Corman? Where’s that old guy, Ravensomething? Where’s that shop teacher? Somebody *answer* me!”

Nate got to his feet and tried to sneak away, but Nora kept him working. “Scrub!” She commanded. “You scrub!” Nate thought Nora was pretty bossy as a manager.

Dr. Hayes wasted little time in entering the café, and dramatically whipped off his sunglasses as he looked around. He was a big man, and his presence was impossible to ignore. “This is beyond the pale! Where is...” He checked a sheet of paper he had with him. “...Nora Masterson!”

Everyone looked at each other, unable to understand what was being asked. Even Nora herself had a puzzled expression on her face. Nate was crouched into as much of a defensive position as possible, readying himself for the fire and brimstone that was bound to happen.

Dr. Hayes’s cheeks were turning red with anger. “Nora Masterson! She’s the head of this program! Where is she?” Being a hulk of a man, a former football player, he towered over everyone in the room. Even without his authority, he was intimidating and threatening. “Nora Masterson!” He said again, zeroing in on Nora. Even without a response from her, Dr. Hayes was smart enough to figure that the only adult woman in the room, the one dressed in a suit, must be the person he was looking for.

“Who are you?” Dr. Hayes asked her directly.

“I’m the manager of this café, and you are being rude!” Nora shot back. “My customers...”

“Customers?” Dr. Hayes interrupted. “This is an establishment of higher learning, not a business! Once *again*, who are you?”

“Noriko Matsui,” Nora replied. “Owner and manager of the Cat Ear Maid Café!”

“What is God’s name is going on? Is this some kind of elaborate stunt?” Dr. Hayes was not satisfied with any answer he was being given. “I’ll have you all thrown out or arrested until I get some answers!” With no answer, he scanned the room. Everyone was dead silent and glancing back at him, but avoiding eye contact. He looked to his side, finding a small bowl of complimentary cookies on top of a desk. The big man plunged his hand into it like he was spearing a fish and then crammed the cookie into his mouth. “Does anyone want to tell me what the hell the story is here?”

“You can leave my restaurant, thank you very much!” Nora declared.

“The county owns this resta... This *classroom*, madam. If you don’t vacate immediately, I’ll have campus security escort you!”

By this time, Nate had scurried away on his hands and knees to a spot behind a counter where he couldn’t be seen. There, he had to recalculate the situation he was now in. His teaching job was one conversation with Miss Ozake away from being toast.

If he came clean, maybe he could rescue things. After all, it was clear by now that life in Building M was a little off kilter in the past few weeks. He could make a case that this was why his students were doing such a poor job in class. Unfortunately, it was also clear that his disguise as Natsuki was so brilliant that he wasn’t recognizable as Nate right now.

What if he just threw himself on Dr. Hayes, explained everything and begged for mercy? That might be his best bet. Who was he kidding, it was his only way out, and he had little choice. He gathered his courage, clenched his tiny fists and mustered up every bit of confidence he had left.

Springing to his feet, popping up from behind the counter, Nate yelled out, “Please forgive me!” at the top of his lungs. He minced over to Dr. Hayes in his heels and began to shed tears as he clasped his hands together for forgiveness. “It wasn’t my fault! I tried my best!”

“Who are you?” Dr. Hayes asked.

“I’m Natsuki... I mean, Nate Corman!”

Dr. Hayes smiled and put his sunglasses back on. “Who is Nate Corman?”

“You...” How was he going explain this with sounding insulting? “You were just asking for me.”

As Nate watched, Dr. Hayes’ sunglasses faded from dark black to clear. For a moment, Nate just figured he had those indoor-outdoor lenses. But when the glasses finished becoming clear, it was obvious that they weren’t the only thing that had just changed. Dr. Hayes’ eyes were squinty and almond-shaped.

“I think you are confused, young miss,” Dr. Hayes replied, seemingly oblivious to the dramatic changes he had just undergone. “I just stopped in for a snack,” he took another cookie from his hand and nibbled on it. “Addicting,” he said.

“Thank you for coming by, Director Hayashi,” Nora said, as she approached. “As you can see, your students are a big fan of our little café!”

“As am I, Noriko,” the changed man replied. “See that you treat them well so they’ll be ready to learn tomorrow!”

Nate wasn’t quite sure he believed what his eyes were telling him. The man had physically changed right in front of him, almost instantly. He had also changed in attitude as well. First, he was as angry as a man could be and then he was gentle and cordial, in the span of a few seconds.

Even as he watched Dr. Hayes leave, he appeared to be losing his height and weight by the second. The man was actually shrinking.

Nate ran out into the hallway and saw Dr. Hayes as he proceeded on out of the building, leaving small pools of grey liquid where he stepped, as if he was an old jalopy that had sprung a leak in the crankshaft.

“Something’s not right here!” Nate warbled out in the air.

“Natsuki-chan? What’s wrong?” It was Tom Yeager, standing in his doorway, looking on.

Nate was glad to see a familiar face. “Tomiko-chan, I think something very strange is going on in this building!”

“Yeah, you noticed it too?” Tom replied.

“It’s like the world is going crazy!”

“That’s how I feel all the time,” Tom answered in his usual monotone. “Nice dress.”

“Uh, thanks?” Nate wasn’t sure if that was sarcastic or not, as Tom rarely let on to what he was really thinking though is deadpan personality. “I like yours, too.”

Tom was wearing a black corset-topped dress with white trim that only just barely covered his petite little butt. His skinny legs were clad in striped red stockings and platform black leather boots with steel spikes on them. He wore fingerless black gloves and a red poofed-sleeve blouse. His long hair was deep black with a stripe of red to the side and a red bow up top. “Thanks,” Tom replied, sounding somewhere between unimpressed and uninterested. His black-colored lips didn’t show any sign of emotion.

“Did you shave off your mustache?” Nate asked, thinking that maybe there was something different about Tom.

“It was time,” Tom answered. They both entered into the sewing classroom, which was now festooned with a large neon sign and packed wall-to-wall with racks of clothes. “So tell me what you’re seeing.”

Finally, Nate was given a chance to unload. “Well, first it started when I had to disguise myself as... Well, I guess it *really* started when I came back from jury duty. All my students were behaving so oddly. Dressing alike and unable to learn...”

“That’s the way these sheeple are,” Tom said, folding a black top that was on display. “They march lock-step as the overlords tell us what to think, all trying to be like exactly each other. But they all wind up in the same place. The grave. They never learn.”

“Oh, yeah,” Nate replied, trying to agree with Tom. But he was off on a different tangent. “Anyway, then there was Miss Ozake, who’s students are learning Japanese at an incredible rate. I went undercover to learn her secrets...”



“Customers,” Tom said, looking to the front door. Two boys walked in and started to browse the racks, so Tom looked over to check on them.

“Irasshaimase! Nani wo osagashi desu ka?”

“Miteiru dake desu,” one of the boys replied.

Nate got closer and lowered his voice, so as not to be overheard. “Anyway, Rachael dressed me up as...”

“You know Rachael?” Tom suddenly replied, as if it were significant.

“Of course I do,” Nate answered. She was his TA, and Tom knew that.

“She seems interesting,” Tom said, pouncing on his toes, excitedly. “You have to tell me about her.”

Another one of Rachael’s many fans, Nate told himself. But, then again, Tom and Rachael talked all the time. Why was he so excited about just hearing her name? He was kinda behaving a little bit oddly, Nate thought. “So I was disguised as a student, and then...”

“Natsuki-chan, we *are* students. How could you disguise yourself as one?”

Nate didn’t follow, so he tried to figure out what Tom meant, and went with it. “A student of life, sure. But as teachers, we...”

“I’m a teacher? You’re crazy, Natsuki-chan.” Tom covered his mouth as he talked. “Maybe we’ll be teachers some day, but right now I’m just stupid tenin.”

“Ten in?” Nate queried.

“Hai,” Tom replied. “A store clerk’s life sucks. I’m just a drone for the corporate machine. At least I get the discount on clothes.”

‘Ten in.’ Maybe that was some kinda slang Nate wasn’t up on.

One of the boys approached, holding a jacket. “Motto ōkii saizu wa ari masu ka?” he asked.

“Zaiko ga kireru,” Tom replied.

“Chigau iro wa arimasu ka?” The other boy asked from behind.

“Tadaima zaiko ga aruka mite mairimasu.” He turned to Nate. “I’ll talk to you later, Natsuki-chan. I have to work now.”

“Oh, okay.” Nate sighed and left the shop, with the busy illuminated sign for ‘Black Candy Style Shop’ blinking in the window, and out onto the street. He walked along the sidewalk past the other shops, regretting his missed chance to get his concerns off his chest. That was when he had to pause and take a second look.

How was it that he was on the street? This was a hallway a minute ago, wasn’t it? Now it was a paved narrow street and sidewalk. He stomped his foot on the ground, and it certainly felt like cement, not linoleum. He looked up and saw that a slit had developed in the ceiling. It had split open to the sky. It was like



the entire building had become two. As he looked up, he was losing his balance as his sense of reality was leaving him entirely.

Stunned, and a little dizzy, he returned to the Cat Ear Maid Café and passed his manager who wanted to know where Natsuki had been. He ignored Noriko and walked all the way to the back.

“You are lazy!” Noriko shouted at him. “Who said you could leave?”

“I have to go,” Nate said as he removed his crazy maid costume and cat ears. “I don’t think I’m feeling all that well.” With no further explanation, Nate dressed back into his normal clothes, his school’s sailor fuku uniform, grabbed his pink hamster-shaped backpack and left.

“You come back!” Noriko shouted as Nate ran down the street, faster and faster, through the crowds, his skirt fluttering behind him. “You good for nothing girl! Natsuki-chan!” Noriko yelled, but Nate hadn’t heard her.



Nate wandered around for a while, searching for his car in the Building M parking lot. However, much like Building M, the parking lot was no longer quite what it used to be. Nate’s car, a ’92 forest green Ford Taurus, had vanished, along with every other car in the parking lot, replaced by a lush, well-groomed park. There was a cluster of playground equipment located around where he had parked, and if he wasn’t wrong, his car was now a squat little children’s slide shaped like an elephant.

Without any way to leave, he walked back to the school. He found it even more changed than it was an hour ago. The narrow street that had formed had widened, and the former classrooms were split up into individual storefronts. He made a turn down a street that used to be the way to his office. There was a gate there now, surrounded by shrubs and trees, which led to a small building that he could just recognize as three classrooms and the small faculty offices he worked in. Or used to work in.

On the gate was a sign, but he couldn’t read it. It was either Chinese, Japanese or Korean, though he wasn’t sure. He had never been big on East Asian languages. Past it, and inside a doorway, he found the doors he recognized as the staff offices. The one that was once his had another sign he couldn’t read on it and was locked shut. He never was able to find his keys back at home.

That was where he decided to go next. After all, it was late, and all this freaking out was making him tired. He adjusted the hamster backpack that held his schoolbooks and headed to his apartment. It wasn’t a vey long way away, but Nate barely recognized anything, as he walked along his usual route. What used to be cyclone fencing and abandoned lots were now two-story

buildings with neon signs out front. Steam rose from some of them into the night sky.

His apartment building looked largely untouched, except it felt taller to him than before. He remembered it being four or five stories, not twenty or thirty. Still, his apartment felt like sanctuary to him, and as he got inside, he exhaled, dumped his backpack on the floor, removed his sailor fuku, and slid into an oversized pink t-shirt that left one of his shoulders exposed. He just left his bottom half bare, except for his striped blue panties.

Nate filled his electric kettle with water, set it to “沸” and then turned out the lights. The bright light felt harsh on his eyes, and besides, it was easier to play video games in the dark. He wasn’t quite sure when he had become such a big fan of playing video games, but there was a console attached to his flat screen, and something about that made him want to turn it on and play. With his water boiled, he filled up a cup noodle, put some chopsticks in his mouth and carried it with him as he plopped himself down into a pile of pillows in front of the screen.

The faint alternating glow from the flashing neon signs outside his apartment lit his small, fragile body and smooth skin in blue light, which contrasted nicely with his pink hair. He switched his tiny hands in between his controller and the chopsticks to guide the ramen noodles into his mouth as he played his game, which took almost all his attention. Just the tiniest sliver of Nate’s mind was trying to work out all the various changes he had seen and undergone himself recently. It certainly was something he would have to pay more attention to, he resolved. It wasn’t like it was the most important thing in the world to him, though. It seemed pretty low priority. More urgent was how he was going to get past the level boss he now faced on screen.



“Natsuki-chan!” Nate heard from his apartment door. It was followed by more loud banging. “We’re going to be late for school!”

Nate recognized Rachael’s voice and immediately awoke. He had fallen asleep in front of the screen and it read “Game Over” in bold red letters. The blue LED clock below his set read “7:48” and Nate knew immediately, with a true sense of panic, that he had to get moving for school at eight.

“Are you up?” Rachael called from behind the door.

“Give me a minute!” Nate called back. He whipped off his shirt and looked for his top. However, his chest was jiggling around, moving on him, making it difficult. “I’m going to need a bigger bra,” he said to himself. “I hope I have one.” He found one up from his dresser and wrapped it around himself, as if he had done it for years. Of course, any girl would have become an expert after a



little while. Nate did have to fuss a little, settling his C-cup breasts in place, which looked much bigger on his tiny frame. He then put on his sailor fuku top and reached for his skirt. He swore that every time he put on his uniform skirt it felt shorter than before. He put on his black thigh-high stay-ups leggings and penny loafers and then grabbed his cute backpack.

With a piece of toast dangling from his mouth, Nate burst out of his apartment, chasing after Rachael who was already headed to the elevator.

“You’re so predictable, Natsuki-chan. Every single morning. You’re lucky I’m the responsible one!”

“I’m sorry, Rachael...” Nate whined back as they boarded the elevator. The banter was casual and informal, as if they met before school every day like this.

“Quiet!” Rachael admonished. “That’s my secret!”

“Huh?” Nate replied, confused.

“No one can know that I’m really Rachael, the famous pop idol! You promised me you would keep my secret!”

“Oh, uh... Yeah...”

“As long as everyone believes I’m just Reiko Fujimoto, average high school student, so I can live a normal life.” She adjusted her hair, which, when Nate looked at it more closely, was an obvious black long-haired wig with a prominent red bow.

Rachael’s explanation was both bizarre and yet strangely familiar to him. He didn’t recall the details, but he must have agreed to keep this so-called ‘secret’ at some point. Nate nodded. “I’m sorry, Reiko-chan,” he said.

“Don’t scare me like that,” Rachael said as the elevator reached the bottom floor with a ding. “Now, we have to run, Natsuki-chan!” And both ran out of the elevator and through the lobby, their short skirts fluttering in their wake, to get to their school before they were tardy.



Miss Ozake’s class lingered on forever, and it was struggle for Nate to just look attentive and awake. He so badly wanted to finish the game he had been playing last night. Being online and chatting with his friends as he played through the game-of-the-moment was what he lived for, and he hated having to sit through another boring English class.

“Natsuki!” Miss Ozake had called on him. “Repeat this phrase...” She said, pointing to the words she had written on the chalkboard.

Nate stood up straight and at attention. He looked at the board. The chalk scribbles looked like gibberish to him, but if he was lucky, he might be able to



figure it out.

“I wirr... seea... you-ra nex... wirk,” Nate choked out, speaking very slowly. He didn’t understand why he needed to learn English, he was never going to use it, anyway.

“I *will* see *you* next *week*,” Miss Ozake said, clarifying the sentence Nate had just read from the board. “You will need to try harder, Miss Koyama,” she said to Nate.

“Yes, Ozake-sensei,” Nate said, sitting back down, grateful to have avoided her wrath for butchering the English. He resolved to try and do his homework more often. Then again, maybe not. It wasn’t like he was an actual student, after all.

As the day went on, Nate remained oblivious to his own situation. He didn’t notice the slight, automatic dip of his head when greeting a teacher, nor did he register the soft, deferential pitch his voice had adopted when answering a question. He simply thought he was trying to be polite in this bizarre ever-changing culture.

His walk, now a delicate, hip-swaying gait, felt like a necessary adjustment to the slick floors and the unfamiliar weight of his new body. When he went to the restroom, he instinctively walked towards the men's room, only to be stopped by a giggle from a group of girls. “That's the boys' room!” Figuring this was being pointed out to him because it must be broken or full, he went into the girls’ room without a second thought. The space of sweet-smelling soaps and feminine chatter felt like a violation of the natural order.

Looking in the mirror, he adjusted his hair. The rest of the world saw a feminine creature with wide, dark eyes and a soft, pouting mouth. He, however, still hadn't quite caught up with what everyone else saw.

When the morning was over, Nate went into the hall and looked for Rachael — no, *Reiko*, he reminded himself — to go eat together. The first place he checked was the old office he used to work in, which he hadn’t seen in quite a while. The door was locked and the light inside turned off. It didn’t look like anyone was here at the moment. The text on the door read “Teacher’s Room,” instead of his name, however, which he found disquieting. Just a day or two away from his job, and those stupid bureaucrats had already given away his office. When this disguise gambit had run its’ course, Nate told himself, he’d probably have to fight to get it back.

He was grateful, however, that someone had changed the signs around the school back into something he could read. Finally, he found Reiko out in the courtyard, eating her bento. “Where have you been, Natsuki-chan?” She said with a smile, and patted the empty space next to her. “We’ve been going to this school for years now, and you still get lost.”

Nate hopped up on the short concrete wall beside his teaching assistant. “I didn’t get lost, Reiko-chan, I was trying to find you. Did you see what they did to our office?”

“Office? When did we get an office?”

“What...? We’ve spent hours in there, the both of us. It’s where we do all our prep, grade papers and work on the lesson plan...” Then Nate stopped himself. “Oh yeah, we’re undercover. I forgot.” He looked around to make sure no one had heard him.

“You’re so strange, Natsuki. You shouldn’t play so many video games.”

“What’s wrong with video games?” Nate snapped, genuinely offended.

“I’m just joking!” Rachael said with a smile. “Now eat your lunch and maybe we’ll go shopping after school, okay?”

Perplexingly, Nate found a small plastic heart-shaped box in his backpack, filled with rice and pickled vegetables. Even if he had no memory of putting it there, it was delicious and the contents vanished quickly.



“Oh, good, you’re not a customer,” Tom said, greeting Nate and Rachael, “that means I don’t have to be nice to you.” He peeled down a lower eyelid and stuck his tongue out at his friends.

“Hi Tomiko-chan!” Rachael said with excitement. “Actually, we are customers. Well, at least I am. Natsuki spent everything on that drink.”

Nate was sipping on a large “Sakura Frappuccino,” a pink cherry-blossom themed drink, with stripes of hot pink and white on the sides, mile-high whipped topping and pink flakes sprinkled on top.

“But it looked so goood!” Nate whined. “I didn’t know it would be so expensive...”

“How goes your ‘undercover assignment’ Natsuki-chan?” Tom asked.

“My what?” Nate replied, not understanding the question.

“That’s what I thought.”

“So *cuuute!*” Rachael chirped as she picked up a laced headband from a display rack towards the back of the shop. “How much?”

Tom turned and walked over to go answer the question. That left Nate alone, and as he sipped his strawberry-flavored drink, he had to concentrate. It was slowly coming back to him, again. For some reason, he kept forgetting about why he was dressed like a schoolgirl. Rachael seemed to be forgetting about it too, treating him like a girl-friend rather than her teaching superior. Actually, now that he thought about it, she didn’t even treat him like an adult anymore





— even in private.

Sooner or later, Nate was going to have to get on top of all this confusion he had swirling around in his head. He could recall some kind of event at the café where he worked that involved Director Hayashi and his employer, Noriko-senpai, and that it at one time felt like the most important thing in the world to him, but now... He couldn't even recall what it was about.

There was no doubt about it, Nate concluded. Something odd was going on around the school. Even if it was tough to call Building M a school anymore. There was now a one-lane outdoor street where once there had been an indoor hallway, and on either side, large neon signs had sprouted up. At first, they had been just signs, but today, as he and Reiko walked along doing their shopping, almost all the signs now had businesses and shops to go with them, too. There was a great noodle place just across the street, a few more clothing shops, a pachinko parlor, an electronics store, a Lawson, and he got his Frappuccino at one of the four Starbucks locations now placed along the new road.

It wasn't just Building M, either. Building N, Building L, and the administration offices had been changing. He hadn't gone inside them yet, but the administration offices were now in a twenty-story building that had salarymen and office ladies coming and going all day and night. Building N now had a Ferris wheel and a teacup ride rising from above the walls, and Building L had what looked like a cocktail bar where all the employees from the admin building were going to late at night. Even stranger, a sign for a subway stop had appeared square in the middle of the sidewalk, despite there being no subway within a thousand miles of the medium-sized midwestern town.

*Huh*, Nate thought to himself, *what exactly was the name of this town again?* He was sure he should know the answer to that question.

"Reiko," he asked as she tugged on her sweater. "What's the name of this town?"

Reiko looked thoughtfully at the ceiling for a second, then at Tomiko. Tomiko shrugged, sending her ringlets bouncing. "I don't think it's important," Reiko said to Natsuki, patting him on the head.

"I was just curious, that's all," Natsuki replied and took a long slurp on his drinking straw. Maybe he'd be more at peace, if he asked some discreet, but direct questions of his friends. "Hey! Tomiko!"

"I'm right here, Natsuki-chan."

"Oh, right," Natsuki replied. "Um... What do remember about the way things used to be? Before all these changes and stuff?"

"You mean before puberty?"

"No!" Natsuki said, with a giggle he couldn't suppress. "I mean, back when this was a sewing class, and when you were a teacher and..."

Tomiko snatched the drink from Natsuki's little hands. "You've had too much caffeine, Natsuki-chan."

Natsuki grabbed after his drink, but his short arms weren't long enough to grab it from the taller Tomiko and all he could do was wave uselessly in its direction as he leaned over the shop counter.

"Just take a break, Natuski-chan," Reiko said. "Go try some stuff on, okay? Work some energy off and then maybe you'll stop having delusions."

Natsuki pouted and trudged off into the store. He had the distinct feeling he was being made fun of. It was just a simple question, in his opinion. The store had changed only a little since last time he had been here, but there was absolutely no indication it had ever been a classroom. There were mirrors on the wall, rack after rack of black, lacy, gothic clothes and carpet on the floor. The only legacy of what it used to be was an old-timey foot-pedal sewing machine used as a decoration.

He was still stewing about being dismissed by his friends, until he spotted a blouse that just spoke to him. Despite the situation, he had to try it on. Grabbing it off the rack, he carried it over to a changing room.

"It's too big!" He moaned when he put it on.

"Well, you picked the large size!" Tomiko said, arriving in the changing room. "Let me get you the extra small. And your boobs are way too big for that bra."

"Extra small?" Natsuki complained. "But I always wear a large!"

"Are you kidding me? How much caffeine have you had today?" Tomiko said, as she hung up an extra small version of the same blouse on the changing room door. One look at Natsuki, and Tomiko made a cross look on his heavily made-up face. "That bra is way too small for you. Let me get you a double-D."

"What?" Natsuki replied, immediately looking down at the breasts on his chest. Just this morning, he could have sworn the bra was just right, but now he was overflowing. As he looked up, he could see a tape measure marking on the wall, used for sizing. Curious, he stepped over to it and checked his height. He was four feet, eleven inches tall. "Are these measuring things correct?" He called out.

"They're probably off by a little," Tomiko said, as he presented a lacy black bra to Natsuki. He took it with a visible sigh of relief.

"Phew!" he said. "I was worried there for a second." Of course, by 'a little' Tomiko had meant an inch or two, not a foot. Still, Natsuki seemed satisfied with that explanation. He undid his bra, feeling a sense of relief as his now double-D breasts practically burst forth. He took the new bra and fastened it up, grudgingly accepting that it was necessary. If he actually had been a girl and not in disguise, he thought to himself, he looked like some wet-dream anime girl from an oversexed nerd's imagination. He was thankful it was just a disguise.

He stepped out of the changing room in the extra small white blouse, which was loose, with long billowy sleeves, but stretched tight over his bosom. Both his shoulders were left uncovered, and it was strapless. The black of the bra was very visible through the thin material of the blouse. His thin legs poking out from underneath his uniform skirt were knock-kneed in uncertainty, as he was waiting for an evaluation from Tomiko.

“That makes you look so cute! Perfect for a cheerful, sunny day,” she said. “Why do we even have that in this store?”

“I can’t afford it, anyway,” Natsuki said with a pout.

“I’ll get it for you,” Reiko said, already taking the money out of her wallet. She handed Tomiko two twenty dollar bills. “But you owe me.”

Natsuki rushed to his friend and hugged her around the waist. “Thank you, Reiko! Thank you thank you!”

“It’s only because you look so cute in that, Natsuki-chan.” She accepted back the change for the transaction, a 2000-yen bill and some coins.



They were on their way out when they passed by what looked like a garage of some sort. It was small, and they didn’t have any cars being serviced. It looked like all they did work on was motorcycles. Natsuki and Reiko would have never given it a second look, except for presence of the girl out front.

She was wearing a set of slate grey cover-alls, idle for a rare moment in between jobs. She was leaning back against a wall, one leg bent, cleaning her hands of grease, a toothpick dangling from her lips, and a perceptive glint in her eyes.

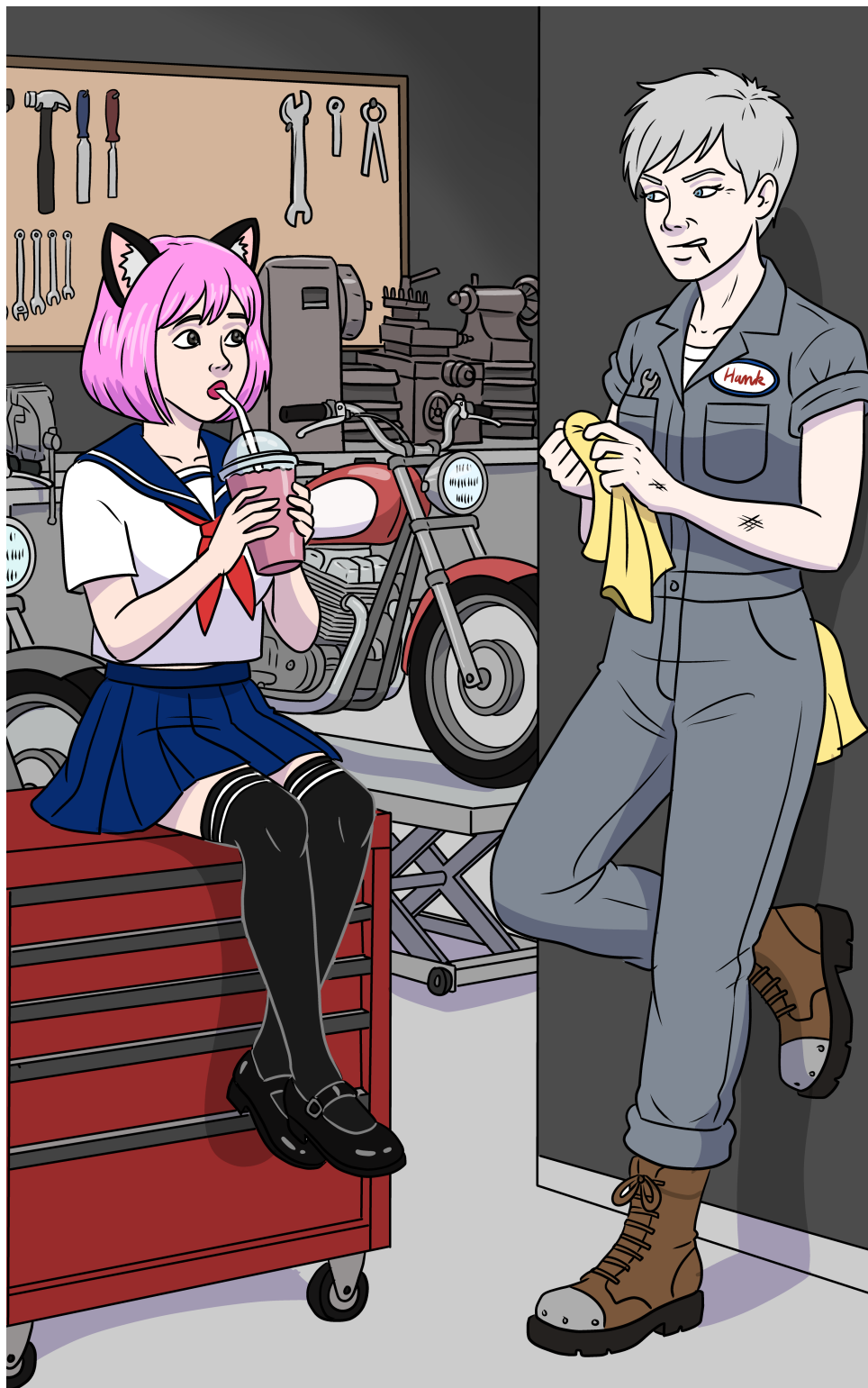
“Hola, Natsuki,” she said, when she saw her friends. She scratched her short white hair and worked out a crack in her neck. “Hola, Reiko!”

At first Natsuki was puzzled, and approached cautiously. He didn’t recognize this person at all. Then she looked up and immediately, that rakish smile she sported reminded her of someone. “Hi... Hank?” Natsuki said, finally placing the metal shop teacher’s face.

“How’s it going, amigos?” Hank, now Hikari, replied. “Just broke down a classic Kz1000! Gonna re-tool those cylinders and put in a new set of heads. What are you two up to?”

“Shopping,” Reiko said, holding up the bags she was holding.

“That’s livin’!” Hikari said back. He looked into the backpack nate had left by the door. “Mighty fine blouse there, Natsuki-chan! That come from Tomiko’s shop?”



“Yes, it did,” Natsuki responded.

“Figures. That gal has a real knack for findin’ the cutest dang clothes you ever did see. I got me a deep red jumper dress from her the other day with a keen heart-shaped cutout in the back. Ruffled cream-colored lace at the hem, ruffle-cut at the shoulders. I tell you, I look a pretty as pin-up in it, yes sir!”

“Don’t let her fool you, Hikari-chan!” Reiko said. “I think she does the goth thing just to attract customers. I think she’s a secret burikko.”

“Burikko?” Natsuki asked.

“You know,” Reiko answered, “a girl who acts all ultra-cutesy, is happy and excited all the time, wears frilly girly clothes, talks in a child’s squeaky voice, and... Well, like you, Natsuki-chan. You’re totally burikko.”

“I am not!” Natsuki objected squeakily. “I am not cute!”

“You are the most burikko thing I know, Natsuki-chan!” Hank added.

“That’s not true!” Natsuki said, in an ear-splitting high-pitched voice, hopping up and down. “Take it back! Take it back!” He started to rub his eyes with his tiny fists as he mock-cried.

Reiko sighed. “Okay, fine. You’re not burikko.”

“Yay!” Natsuki said, bouncing up on his toes and clapping. Both Reiko and Hikari narrowed their eyes as large blue drops of sweat appeared near their foreheads.

“We better go,” Reiko said. “See you later, Hikari-chan.”

“Adios, amigos!”

As they walked away, Natsuki waved goodbye. “Bye, Hikari-chan!” He said, in his best cutesy voice.

“Bye, Natsuki-chan,” Hikari said back, as she watched the two walk away.

As they headed down the street, Natsuki couldn’t help but let his eyes drift upwards at the large advertising screen overhead, flashing images of Pocky in new flavors that looked delicious. Sweet corn! Creamy melon! Salted salmon! It all looked so good. Then, the sounds of a sugary pop song began to play as a girl danced on screen.

“Oh God,” Reiko said, blushing and hiding her face.

“What?” Natsuki asked his friend.

“That!” Riko said, turning away from the screen. “The song!”

Natsuki listened for a moment and didn’t really understand, but then realized that the singer’s voice sounded quite familiar. “Is that...” He started to ask, but then saw the name “Rachael” on the screen, in English, as Reiko’s face smiled and sang in the sky. He didn’t know English, but he did recognize the name of his best friend.



“That’s your song!” Natsuki blurted out.

“Quiet!” Reiko said, trying to cover Natsuki’s mouth. Then as those on the street looked their way, Reiko just picked Natsuki up and carried his small body away into the shrubs.

Natsuki was confused. “What’s the big deal?”

“No one can know!” Reiko said. “Rachael is the most popular singer on the radio! If people knew I was just walking around.... My life would be over! I would be a prisoner to fame!”

Natsuki crossed his tiny arms. “If it was me, I’d want everyone to know!”

“Please, Natsuki!”

“Okay, *fiiine*,” Natsuki said. “I was just surprised, I guess.” He wasn’t sure why he was surprised. Ever since he’d known Reiko, ever since they’d met at Comiket, he’d known about her double life. She wasn’t exaggerating either. Everyone knew Rachael. Everyone had at least two Rachael CDs in their CD collection. Her songs could soothe even the most wild of hearts. If anyone knew who she really was, she’d be crushed in the street from the adoring crowd.

“Can we... Go to your place?” Reiko asked. “I don’t want to be out in public.”

“Will you play smash with me?” Natsuki asked.

“I uh... Er...”

“Super Smash Bros!”

“Oh,” Reiko said, bushing. “Okay.”



A few hours later, after being trounced by Reiko in match after match, Natsuki had finally given up. As Reiko remained in Natsuki’s living room, barefoot and silently practicing her dance choreography for her next concert, Natsuki had popped open his laptop, his curiosity burning a hole somewhere in his mind.

He wasn’t sure exactly what it was, what was causing him so much mental discomfort. It was like there was something in his skull telling him to pay more attention, to listen closer, to think harder. He was trying, but he was doing the best he could. After all, he was just a normal high school girl. There had to be thousands just like him just in this prefecture alone.

Still, he just had this nagging feeling that he couldn’t shake. He was researching the vague ideas that kept popping up in his head. That the school was going through radical changes every day. Even by the hour. That the students were becoming more... student-ey. That the administrators had

suddenly accepted everything. That the administrators themselves seemed to be changing. and that...

There was just so much. Stuff that made no rational sense. He'd seen changes in Hikari, who he could recall used to teach... Metal shop? Noriko-senpai used to teach... Cooking? Something like that? In fact, Natsuki could recall that just about every instructor he had worked with was no longer teaching but running a shop in the market district.

Since when did the school have a market district?

But then again, it wasn't every teacher. Not *every* instructor.

Ravenclaw.

Professor Mandrake Ravenclaw, the head of the Abnormal Psychology Department. He hadn't shown any effects. He hadn't even seen him at all since things started to get *really* weird — since everyone started losing their minds.

Abnormal Psychology. This was all very abnormal, and the psychology was baffling. This was exactly what the old man studied. He was bitter about being kicked out of so many colleges. He was an old man with an axe to grind. He had theories to prove, and he had more than enough ego to try them out on students and faculty.

Natsuki looked it up online. There were dozens of books he had written on the subject. Hundreds of papers. He had online articles about how Ravenclaw had been kicked out of every job he'd ever had, for breaking ethical guidelines. The man had been relentlessly pursuing his field of study for decades, and now... Now this explained everything.

"I gotta go," Natsuki said, tucking the laptop into his hamster backpack.

Reiko wasn't prepared. "But..."

"Just lock up when you leave!" He said as he rushed out the door in a blur of energy and tension.

Natsuki's little legs had never run so fast as he dashed to campus.



The sound in Building M was wrong. It wasn't the familiar echo of a government-designed, right-angle hallway. The gleam of floor wax or the buzz of florescent lights above. There was no ceiling. There was no floor. Just a side street with merchants of both sides where the classrooms used to be, asphalt on the ground, sky above.

Where the reception desk and faded motivational posters should have been, there was now a bustling street scene. A paved road, complete with crosswalks and paper lanterns strung overhead, stretched before him. Natsuki walked



along the street, dodging drunken bar hoppers and solicitors. This was not the college he had been hired to work at. This was not a school at all. But it wasn't the foreign, bizarre nature of being in what now looked like a Tokyo neighborhood. The scary part was how *familiar* it felt.

He walked down the main street, past a shop selling manga and another with displays of intricate bento boxes. Every person he saw was Japanese, dressed in modern street clothes or traditional yukata, their faces serene and content. They moved with a placid purpose that was utterly alien to the chaotic energy of the American vocational school he remembered.

His first stop was what used to be the metal shop. The large bay doors were now the entrance to "NeoTokyo Tuning & Performance." Inside, the shop was still present, but it was much smaller. A woman with long, white hair tied up in a messy ponytail was bent over the engine of a highly modified sports car. She wore a pair of grease-stained overalls, cuffed, unzipped to her navel, revealing a tight tank top underneath. She had a pair of goggles on her head. Her figure was voluptuous, a stark contrast to the gruff, beer-bellied Hank Nate knew. "Hikari?" Natsuki ventured, his voice trembling.

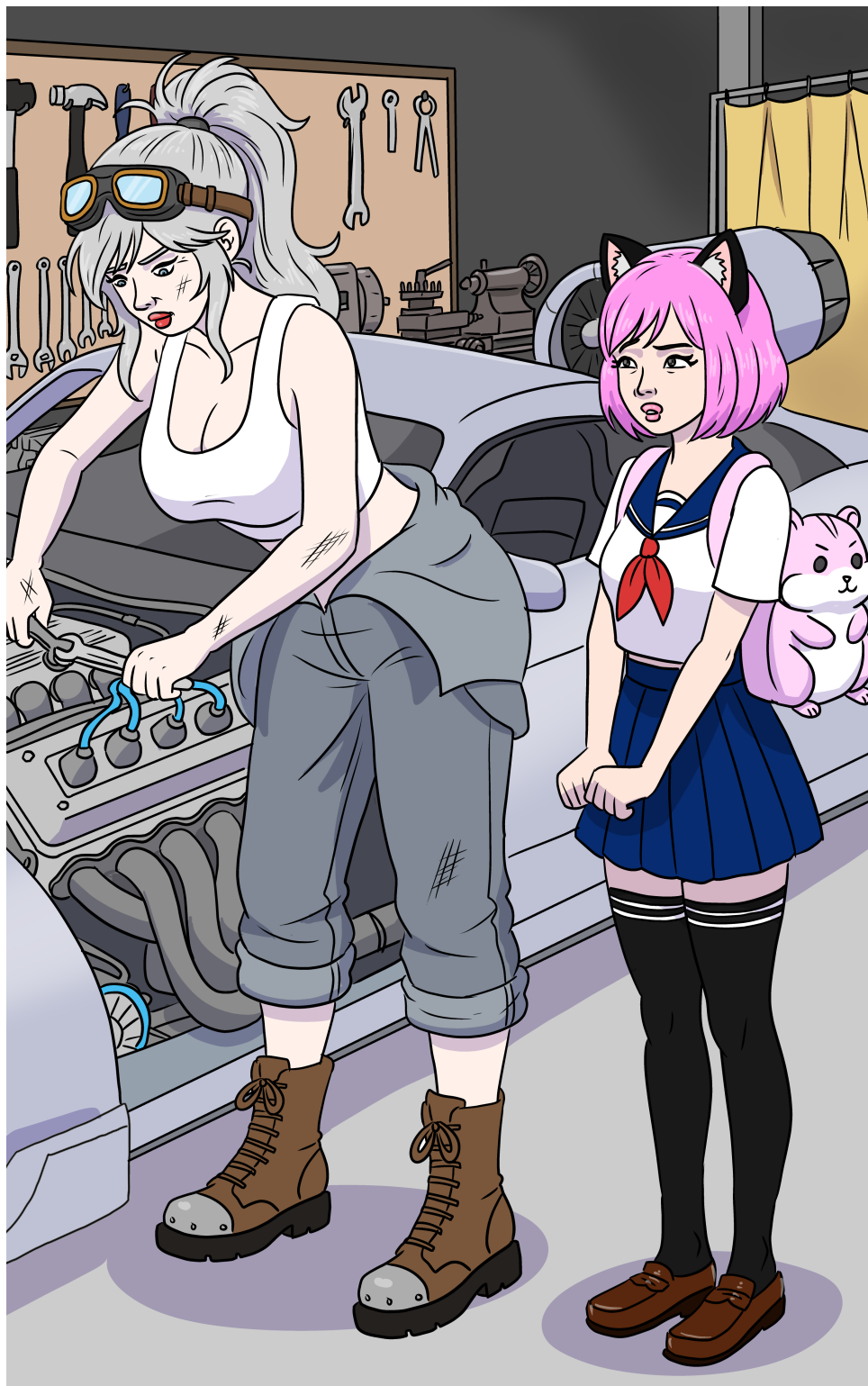
The woman looked up, her eyes wide and innocent. She wiped a smudge of grease from her cheek with the back of her hand, leaving a new one. "Hola Amigo!" she said with a cheerful, singsong voice. "Never been this busy before. Everyone seems to need their engine rebuilt. Motorcycles, cars, galactic cruisers, star freighters, I'm the best!" She patted the panel with affection. It was then that Natsuki realized that the vehicle he was working on didn't have wheels. It had an enormous rocket pod in the back, like a spaceship. "All the boys say I have a magic touch." She winked, a gesture so unlike Hank it made Natsuki's stomach turn. He tried to explain, to tell her what Ravenclaw was doing, but she just giggled, patting his head like he was a child. "You're a strange little ladybug sometimes, Natsuki-chan."

"Hey, Hikari..." Said a young man who suddenly emerged from the back of the shop, putting on his pants. "Oh..."

Natsuki looked back and forth between the two. He had just interrupted something.

"Now, if you'll excuse me, this beauty needs my full attention." She walked over to the young man and draped her arm around his shoulders. "And this one here, too." She turned back to her work, completely oblivious to Natsuki's panic.

He hurried down the street, a sense of real dread washing over him. It was all happening so fast, now. Before he could even try to collect his thoughts, his attention was grabbed by the sky. He looked up, seeing a flash pass by. Not a bird. Certainly not an airplane. This was different. He only saw it for an instant, but it looked like... A little guy. Well, not little from this distance. In reality it would have had to be a huge guy. A huge mechanical guy. That's what it



appeared to be, at least. No wings, just legs and arms and a head jetting across the sky. As he continued to look up, he saw two more coming past.

“Mae o mite aruki nasai, ojōchan!” a man said, as he bumped into Nate, forcing him to stop looking up, and missing the chance to making out some details of what he was seeing.

“Sorry,” Nate replied. He looked back up only to see a dark, empty, starry sky.

Next, he found the gothic lolita dress shop. Inside, racks of black, frilly dresses and elaborate bonnets filled the space. Natsuki felt his heart skip, surrounded by such beautiful, frilly clothes. He wanted to try them all on. But he was on a mission. Behind the counter, a girl with stark white makeup, heavy eyeliner, and a choker was meticulously arranging a display of lace parasols. It was Tomiko, the cynical teacher who had complained about government takeovers and conspiracy theories since he had met him. Surely he would realize the truth. “Tomiko?” Natsuki asked, his voice barely a whisper.

The girl looked at him, her dark-rimmed eyes vacant for a moment before focusing. She had been “gothy” before, but now she was a gothic fantasy come to life. “Natsuki?” she said, her voice a monotone drawl. “Uh, now’s not such a great time... My boyfriend...” Before Natsuki could answer, a teenage boy in a high school uniform swaggered in. He pointed at a dress and then at Tomiko, speaking in halting, breathless Japanese. “Kirei... anata... totemo kirei.” Tomiko’s blank expression melted into a devilish smirk. She leaned over the counter, her lips meeting his. The boy’s hands roamed, finding the buttons of her frilly blouse as she sighed contentedly, letting him pop them open one by one.

Nate watched — *really* watched — but then the urgency of the moment caught back up with him. This was a girl screaming and shivering as she was getting an afternoon quickie from a schoolboy half of Tom’s age. Never mind exactly where the kid’s dick was going. Did Tomiko have a vagina? Did that mean Hikari did, too? And what about... *Himself*?

With a yelp from deep within himself, he scrambled on away, trying to think about it. Natsuki stumbled out of the shop, his face burning with a shame and horror he couldn’t articulate.

At the bustling Cat Ear Maid Café, Natsuki dashed inside, seeing Noriko, who a part of him still thought of as his employer, standing sternly at a counter, arms folded, watching the cat-eared maids flitter from table to table, gushing over the patrons, dancing little dances and settling elaborate pastries and deserts in front of eager young men.

“Natsuki!” Noriko yelled. “You are late for your shift again, lazy girl!” The woman lunged for Natsuki’s arm, but he dodged it. Why had he even come here? Of everyone at the former school, Noriko-senpai was the farthest gone of all of them. She had even lost twenty years if not more. She looked to be 25 or



30, now. There was no way he was going to talk her into seeing reason.

Where do you think you are going, you lazy cat girl? Noriko yelled at him, pointing her finger accusingly.

She took one giant step toward Natsuki and grabbed him by the ear — the cat ear on his head. That was not quite what he was expecting. He wriggled free, and grabbed the ears he had been ignoring for days, and felt them twitch at his touch.

“These are real!” He screamed in horror.

“Only bad girls come to work on drugs!” Moriko said, with a sneer. “You bad girl, Natsuki!”

He dashed out of the café as fast as he could, three of the maids running after him, trying to catch him and drag him back inside. He dodged a shuriken one had thrown and headed down a blind alley.

*Shuriken?*

That left turn led him right where he was probably headed anyway, and no less than a few dozen feet away, there was a structure that was unmistakably a traditional Japanese high school. The walls of Building M had formed into a stout building with a clock atop a spire. It was, if he wasn't mistaken, exactly where the offices used to be. Where his own office was *supposed* to be.

Natsuki saw his reflection in a window, a face with wide, frightened eyes and a frame so small he looked like he could be blown away by a strong wind. But his mind was steel. He was a man, a teacher — he knew it, he could feel it. He was determined to figure out what was happening to his reality. He clutched the straps of his hamster backpack, his knuckles white, and forced his feet to move and walked up the stairs.

Inside a classroom, the scene was one of



perfect, unnerving order. Rows of students, all dressed in crisp sailor uniforms for the girls and black gakuran for the boys, sat at low desks. They weren't learning algebra or history; they were practicing calligraphy. The only sound was the soft scrape of brushes on paper. Each student was focused, their expression one of pure, unadulterated contentment. Nate felt a chill crawl up his spine. This wasn't just a change of scenery, it was a fundamental tear in reality. He had to find his tormentor. He had to find Ravenclaw.



He suspected this was all some kind of trick of his thoughts. He couldn't explain it, but it made as much sense as anything at this point. Reality just didn't change like this. It made sense that this was all in his mind — possibly everybody's mind — and they were being controlled by Ravenclaw. They were seeing and feeling the things he wanted them to see and feel.

Desperate, Natsuki sought out the one person he thought might be immune: Miss Ozake. She was new, unattached to the old reality. He found her in the teacher's office, which was the only room that still looked somewhat familiar, though it was now impeccably clean and organized. Miss Ozake, a sharp, intelligent woman in her late thirties, was grading papers.

"Miss Ozake, thank God," Nate gasped, rushing inside. "You have to help me. Something is terribly wrong. The building, the people... They.... they're all... Japanese!"

Miss Ozake looked up from her papers, her expression one of weary concern. She walked to the window. She shut the blinds. She went to the door. She locked it.

"I know, Nate," she said, her voice a low, serious whisper. The use of his name was shocking to him, like a slap that suddenly restored memories. His name. He hadn't heard it or even thought it for days. "I've noticed," she continued. "The curriculum changed so fast. The students' names... they're all different. They all learned perfect Japanese so quickly. It's like a collective delusion, but it's so thorough."

A wave of relief washed over Nate. He had an ally. Someone who saw the truth. "We have to get to the bottom of this," he urged. "We have to find a way to reverse this."

Miss Ozake stood up and walked around her desk, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Where does it even start?"

“Ravenclaw,” Nate said. “Think about it. Professor of Abnormal Psychology. It’s his work. I looked it all up. This is what he wanted.”

“That makes sense. He’s the only one,” she said softly. “But you need to be calm. You’re agitated. You’re always so disruptive in my class, Natsuki. Always questioning things.”

Nate blinked. “Natsuki? No, my name is Nate. I’m a man.”

A strange light entered Miss Ozake’s eyes. Her posture straightened, her demeanor shifting just as much. “That’s the problem,” she said, her voice losing its softness, taking on a sharp, disciplinary edge.

“What?” Nate said. “Miss Ozake, please, focus.”

“It is not your place!” She grabbed him by the wrist, but he pulled his arm away and turned aside, to keep it from being grabbed again. Instead, she just grabbed his tail and pulled him closer.

“I have a *tail*?” Nate screamed.

“Do not raise your voice!” Miss Ozake scolded.

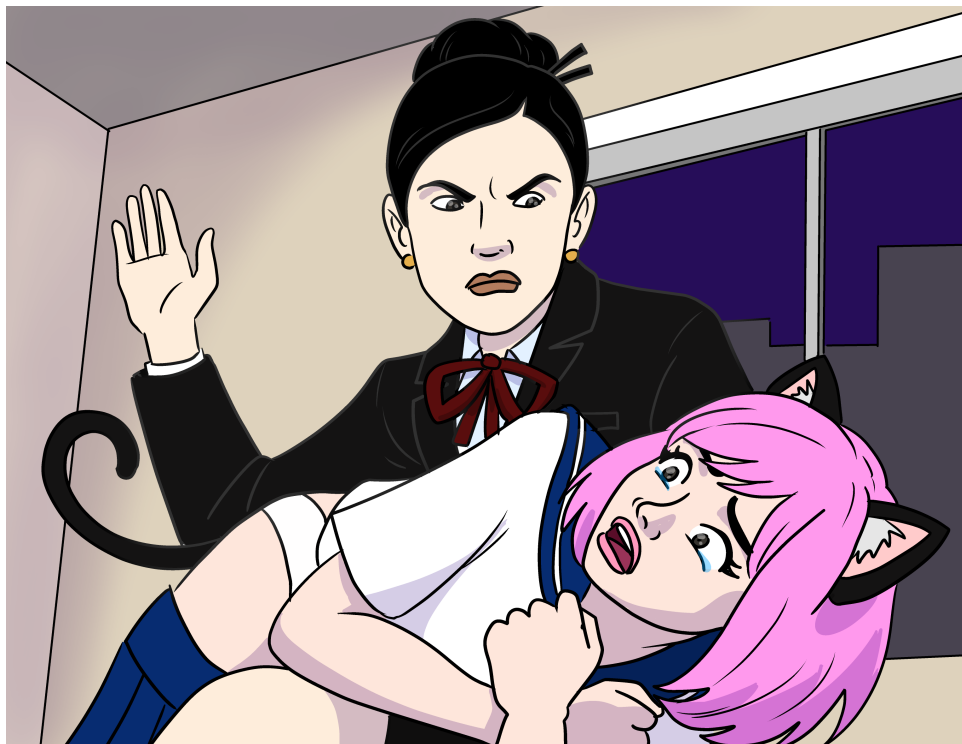
“But A... A... *Tail*?” It suddenly curly it’s fluffy soft self around his midsection, as if to say hello.

“You are rude. You are disrespectful. You do not listen.” In one fluid motion, she spun him around and pulled him towards her desk. “You have forgotten your place, Natsuki-chan.”

Panic seized Nate as he realized his mistake. She wasn’t immune. The transformation was just slower for her. He struggled, but her adult grip was strong. She sat down on her chair, pulling him across her lap. “In my classroom,” she said, her voice now cold and unrecognizable, “we discipline those who do not show proper respect.” She lifted his skirt and her hand came down hard on his bottom. The sharp, stinging slap echoed in the small office. It wasn’t just pain — it was a violation, a fierce, crushing blow to his identity.

“You are a good Japanese girl, Natsuki-chan,” she said, her voice returning to that sickeningly sweet, placid tone as she continued to spank him. “You will be humble. You will be obedient. You will find your place.” Each word was a hammer blow, chipping away at the man named Nate, leaving behind only the terrified, broken shell of Natsuki. As the tears streamed down his face, he looked at the classroom through the office window and saw the students practicing their calligraphy, their faces serene, their minds at peace. He had never felt peace like that. Not for a moment. He could only imagine the relief he would feel. The serenity.

With the third spank, something inside Nate broke. The resistance in his body went slack. He stopped fighting. He stopped thinking of himself as Nate, the man, the teacher. The name felt foreign, distant, like a character in a book he’d



forgotten the plot to. The pressure, the certainty in Miss Ozake's voice, the undeniable reality of her powerful hand on his tiny body — it was all too much.

Miss Ozake felt the change in him. The tension left his shoulders, his legs went still. She stopped the spanking and pulled him upright, standing him before her. She smoothed down the pleated skirt he was wearing. Her expression was no longer cold, but one of firm, maternal guidance. She saw not a broken man, but a rebellious child finally seeing reason.

“There now,” she said, her voice soft but still holding an edge of authority. “That is better. You see, Natsuki-chan, all this anger and confusion is not proper. It is not the way for a young lady to behave.”

Natsuki looked down at the floor, cheeks burning with a new kind of shame. It wasn't the shame of violation, but the shame of a student who had been thoroughly and justly reprimanded. She had been rude. She had been disrespectful. She had raised her voice to a teacher.

“I... I am sorry, Ozake-sensei,” she whispered, the honorific slipping from her lips without thought. The voice was small, high, and deferential.

Miss Ozake nodded, a small, satisfied smile on her lips. “I know you are. But being sorry is not enough. You must understand why your behavior was wrong. You come into my office, shouting, making wild claims about people changing. It is disruptive. It is unbecoming.” She gestured to the papers on her desk.



“Look at these. Calligraphy assignments. Each student is focused. Each student is striving for perfection. That is what is expected of you. Not this... this dramatic nonsense. No one like an unruly girl.”

Natsuki's eyes followed her gesture to the papers. She saw the neat, precise characters. The calligraphy was beautiful. Was hers as good? She suddenly felt a pang of anxiety. Her own calligraphy practice probably wasn't up to standard. She needed to practice more.

“But... The sky... It shouldn't be there...” Natsuki said, unsure she had any more words to speak.

Miss Ozake sighed, a patient, weary sound. “Natsuki-chan, you must stop this fantasy. This is what I mean. Your mind is not on your studies. It is on these silly daydreams.” She paused, looking at Natsuki's downcast face. “Or perhaps it is on boys? Is that the problem? Is that why you are so distracted?”

The question hit Natsuki with the force of a revelation. Boys. Her mind latched onto the idea with a desperate intensity. The image of the student flirting with Tomiko flashed through her head. The way Tomiko had smiled, the way the boy had touched her. A strange, unfamiliar warmth spread through Natsuki's chest. Was that what she was thinking about? It made so much more sense than the alternative.

“I... I don't know,” she mumbled, her face turning a deeper shade of red.

“It is natural to think about boys,” Miss Ozake said, her tone becoming conspiratorial, like a teacher sharing a secret with a favored student. “But it must not interfere with your studies. A proper Japanese girl is polite, she is diligent, and she prepares herself for a good future. Looking cute is part of that. It shows you have self-respect. But your primary focus is your schoolwork and your respect for your elders. Do you understand?”

Natsuki nodded vigorously. “Yes, Ozake-sensei. I understand.” She did understand. It all made perfect sense now. The world wasn't wrong; she was. Her mind had been filled with difficult, unpleasant thoughts. It was much simpler to think about her studies, about looking presentable, about being respectful. It was her purpose. The only thing that mattered now was pleasing the stern, wise woman standing before her. Miss Ozake's approval was the only validation she needed.

“Good,” Miss Ozake said, her smile widening. “Now, I want you to go back to the classroom. I want you to take out your brush and you will write the character for ‘harmony’ one hundred times. I want it to be perfect. Do not disappoint me.”

“I won't, Ozake-sensei,” Natsuki promised, her voice filled with a newfound sincerity. “I will make you proud.”

She bowed deeply, a perfect, respectful bow. When she straightened up, Miss Ozake gave her a final, approving nod. Natsuki turned and walked to the door,

her movements now small and graceful. She no longer stumbled. She walked with the quiet deference of a student who had learned her lesson. She had her purpose. Her purpose to do what she was told. It was all planned out for her now. Respect, deference, politeness. She knew every step she would take from now until oblivion.

As she slid the door open and stepped back into the hallway, she looked down at her small hands. They were the hands of Natsuki. Her mind was the mind of Natsuki. Her thoughts were now clearer than they ever had been before. The feeling of serenity was just as good as she had imagined it would feel.

She had to write the character for ‘harmony.’ She had to make it perfect. She had to make Ozake-sensei happy. And maybe, if she was very good, a boy would notice her. The thought brought a small, shy smile to her face as she walked towards the classroom.



Every stroke of calligraphy had felt like she was wiping away all Natsuki’s mistakes. All her silly suspicions. Natsuki practically skipped out of the classroom, ready to head home, her burden lighter now. A boy glanced her way and she giggled and turned away with a blush.

Miss Ozake was the wisest teacher she could have wished for. She was right about everything. Natsuki walked down the hallway, her small footsteps quiet and orderly.

She changed her shoes out in the lobby and headed outside. It was a bright, beautiful, sunny day. Almost artificially so. She was heading back home, with the idea she needed to clean it up a little. Just thinking about it gave her shame. It was so disorderly. She suddenly remembered that Reiko was there when she left, and she should probably call her to make sure she locked the door when she left.

She was looking for her phone in her backpack when she noticed the road. Where there should have been a direct way out of the area, a new walkway branched off, lined with polished stones. A soft, inviting light emanated from its end. Compelled by curiosity, she followed it.

The walkway opened into a small, serene courtyard. At its center stood a traditional Shinto shrine, far more ancient and dignified than anything that should exist inside Building M. A vermilion torii gate marked the entrance, and a stone water basin stood ready for purification.

The air was still, the only sound the gentle rustle of leaves from a single, immaculately cared-for maple tree. Natsuki felt a pull she couldn’t explain. This was a place of peace. A place of reverence. She stepped through the gate, her earlier mission forgotten.

She approached the offering hall, her movements slow and reverent. She clapped her hands twice, bowed her head, and closed her eyes. She didn't know what she was praying for, only that she was supposed to.

Then, as her hands came together and her mind stilled in the silent ritual, something shifted. The placid, teenage thoughts of schoolwork and boys began to fade. A different pressure, a different reality, started to push through from the other side. The name "Natsuki" felt wrong. The image of Miss Ozake's approving smile warped into one of stern, disciplinary control. The sense of worry, of anguish, of fear, started to flow back into him like a reservoir that hadn't seen rain in a hundred years.

Nate's eyes snapped open. He stumbled back from the prayer bell, gasping for air as if he had been drowning. He looked down at his small hands, the pleated skirt, the ridiculous loafers on his feet. A wave of nausea and rage washed over him. It had been a trap. The classroom, the discipline, the simple-minded contentment — it was all a lie designed to pacify him. He was Nate. He was a man, a teacher. And this place, this entire impossible Japanese neighborhood, was a mirage. He had to get out. He had to help the others.

"Are you alright, miss?"

The voice was soft and polite. Nate turned to see a young girl sweeping the stone path with a bamboo broom. She couldn't have been more than fourteen, with a sweet, humble face and long, dark hair tied back with a simple white ribbon. She wore the traditional red and white hakama of a shrine maiden. She was the very picture of youthful, earnest piety.

"I... I think so," Nate managed, his voice rough, fighting though the remnants of Natsuki's deferential, airy tone.

The girl stopped sweeping and bowed deeply. "It is an honor to have a visitor pray at our shrine. Grandfather is resting, but he would be pleased." She looked at Nate with genuine sympathy in her eyes. "You seem troubled. The gods listen to those who seek the right path. Sometimes we just need to quiet our minds to hear their answer."

Nate stared at her. Her words were wise, kind, and utterly infuriating in their placid simplicity. "The right path?" he repeated, his old persona of Nate, the pragmatic teacher, reasserting itself. "The right path is getting out of here! This is all wrong. Don't you see that? This not a... not a historical district!"

The priestess blinked, her expression one of gentle confusion. "How strange. This shrine has been in my family for generations. It has always been here." She then gave him a kind, knowing smile. "Grandfather is always telling me that I think too much. Sometimes the heart knows things the mind cannot grasp. You must trust."

As she spoke, a jolt of recognition shot through Nate. The cadence of her speech, the intellectual yet detached way she delivered her platitudes — it was



unmistakable. He had heard it a hundred times in faculty meetings. The dark hair, the hazel eyes, the detached attitude. “Professor Ravenclaw?” he whispered.

The girl tilted her head. “Ravenclaw? What a strange name.” She giggled. “My name is Ritsuko. Ritsuko Karasu.” There was no flicker of recognition in her eyes. Yet there was no doubt in Nate’s mind. “Ritsuko Karasu” almost *sounded* like “Ravenclaw.” It was him, changed like all the others. She was completely, utterly remade. The brilliant, cynical academic was gone, replaced by this humble, polite girl who swept dust and spoke of trusting.

Nate had no idea what to think now. Ravenclaw was the one behind this. It was him. It had to be. If it wasn’t... What could explain any of this? He started to back away, but Ritsuko stepped forward, her polite expression firming slightly. “Wait, visitor.”

“Yes?”

“It is customary to make an offering before you depart,” she said, her voice still sweet but with an undeniable edge of transaction. “To show your gratitude and receive the shrine’s blessing.” She smiled as she patted a wooden offering box.

Of course. Numbly, Nate reached into the pocket of the backpack. His fingers brushed against a few small coins. He pulled them out and dropped them into the box. The coins had square holes in the center of them.

Ritsuko bowed in thanks. “The gods smile upon your generosity.” As he turned to leave again, she added, “We also have some omamori for sale. Protective charms. For academic success, for safe travel, for finding love...”

Nate dug into his pockets with a silent groan.

With a new charm attached to his new shrine-themed phone case, he ran back down the walkway, his mind racing. He was Nate again, but now he was truly alone. Everyone was lost. He burst out onto the market street, his chest heaving. Where was he to go now? How far could he get from here? Was there a point to running away?

As if in answer to his desperation, his phone buzzed in his pocket. The email on the screen was clear. The sender was “PCCC Administration.” The subject line read: “Emergency Meeting”

He opened the email as fast as he had ever done anything in his life. “Report to Administration Building Immediately,” said the body of the email. “Utmost urgency,” it added. And even better, it was signed Tim Holland. The same Tim Holland who was the head of the School of Mathematics, and the very same Tim Holland who had tried to call the administration on what was happening at the café. He knew Tim’s sharp mind wouldn’t give up until he had an answer. He had always trusted Tim.

A surge of hope, fierce and resolute, flooded through him. He wasn't even sure there was any administration left. He thought he was the last one. But he wasn't, and Tim finally got on top of it. This was his chance. He clutched the phone, his knuckles white.

The new charm sparkled in the sunlight. Had it worked?

He would go and tell Tim everything. He would save them all. He didn't notice that as he ran towards the administration building at the far end of the street, his steps were smaller, his posture more delicate.



The administration building was a nightmare of conflicting realities. Nate pushed through the main doors and was immediately disoriented. The lobby to his left was sterile and familiar, with grey floors and clearly marked signs in English hanging from the ceiling, pointing to departments and restrooms. But to his right, the hallway warped into a scene from a 1980s anime. Shoe lockers, umbrella racks, a bulletin board with neat and orderly posts with manga illustrations on them. A reality and a... Fiction seemed to be in contrast to each other.

Holland's room was at the back of the building, and getting there would lead him past the admin offices. Dr. Prentiss was the first door plaque he recognized, the chairwoman of academic affairs, a woman of formidable intellect and bureaucratic authority. If anyone could cut through this madness, it was her. He found her in what used to be her office, though the nameplate on her desk now read "Kansuki."

The woman inside was undeniably Dr. Prentiss, but transformed. She wore a stylish, navy-blue skirt and a silk blouse that was tight enough to be unprofessional, outlining a figure Nate had never seen her display. Her once-curly grey hair was now styled in a fall of thick black hair. She was arranging a vase of chrysanthemums with a dreamy smile on her face.

"Dr. Prentiss?" Nate said, wondering if she even recognized her won name anymore.

She turned to him, her eyes wide and vacant. She let out a high-pitched giggle and bowed deeply, her hands clasped in front of her. "Kansuki desu," she chirped. "Hajimemashite!"

Nate stared, his hope turning to ice. "Prentiss, it's me. Nate. From the building M. Something is terribly wrong."

She just giggled again, tilting her head. "Nay-eet?" she giggled, covering her mouth with her fingers. "Funny name!" She bowed again, a gesture of pure, uncomprehending politeness. "Ocha wa ikagadesu ka?" The sharp, capable

mind of the committee chairwoman was gone, replaced by this rapid, smiling creature. She was incapable of understanding anything beyond her immediate, cheerful reality.

Frustrated, he left her office. A door down the hall was slightly ajar. From within, he heard a female voice speaking in rapid, high-pitched Japanese, full of exaggerated enthusiasm. “Sugoi! Sensei, anata wa totemo ii desu yo!” The phrase was followed by a thud, like books falling off a shelf, and then a final, satisfied sigh. Nate shuddered and moved on. The female staff were a lost cause.

He had to try the men. They seemed less affected, their transformations slower or perhaps more subtle. Like him. He made his way toward Professor Larson’s office, the history teacher who was as dry and cynical as they came. His door was cracked open. Nate peered inside.

Larson was there, sitting behind his desk, but he wasn’t grading papers. He was staring, his expression vacant and entranced, at a female student leaning over his desk. She was dressed in a sailor uniform with skirt shortened. She spoke to him in a high-pitched, chirpy voice, her words a performance of feigned innocence. “Sensei, I just don’t understand this history at all! It’s *sooo* hard. Could you please, please explain it to me?” She batted her enormous, artificially darkened eyelashes.

It was a blatant, clumsy seduction, performed with the exaggerated tropes of an anime character. And Larson, the tenured academic who prided himself on his stoicism, was completely mesmerized, a dumb smile on his face.

Then, Nate’s own body betrayed him. A heat bloomed low in his belly, an unexpected and powerful surge of arousal. His nipples, sensitive and hardening, pressed against the fabric of his bra. The sight of the girl’s performance, the raw, predatory nature of it combined with the professor’s helpless entrancement, was compelling. He knew he should burst in and stop them, to shake Larson out of his stupor. But his feet were rooted to the spot. His own body was responding in a way that felt both alien and undeniably potent.

The student escalated. She “accidentally” lost her balance, letting out a cute little shriek as she tumbled directly into Larson’s lap. In the same motion, she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him into a deep, passionate kiss. Larson’s hands came up to rest on her back, his vacant smile never leaving his face. All Nate wanted to see was how big Larson’s cock was. He thought that he had to be packing. Nate stumbled back from the door, gasping. He was overwhelmed, not just by the sight, but by the intensity of his own reaction. A pressure was building inside him, a physical need that was drowning out his rational thoughts.

He had to get control. He had to find someone else. Tim Holland. The mathematics department lead. A man of logic and reason. If anyone's mind could withstand this, it was Holland's.

As Nate unsteadily made his way down the hall, the transformation accelerated. The linoleum floor beneath his feet was softening, the patterns bleeding together to form the texture of paved stone. The fluorescent lights in the ceiling flickered and died, replaced by the warm glow of paper lanterns that seemed to grow from the fixtures themselves. He passed two male students, and an instinct, deep and terrifying, took over. He altered his walk, his steps becoming smaller, his hips swaying slightly in a more feminine gait. He was acutely aware of the hard points of his nipples beneath his bra, which suddenly felt too tight. He stopped to adjust his high socks, feeling their eyes on him, and a thrill went through him.

He passed an unused equipment room, the door left open. Inside, a young couple was tangled together. The girl, wearing a classic school athletics uniform with bloomer-style shorts, was moaning softly as her boyfriend kissed her neck, his hand already up her skirt, moving beneath her panties. Nate froze, his breath catching in his throat. He found himself breathing hard, his own hand wandering down to the hem of his own skirt, tempted to mimic the boy's actions. The sight of their public intimacy was a siren call, promising a release from the unbearable tension coiling within him.

Horrified by his loss of control, Nate tore himself away and stumbled onward. It took every ounce of his willpower not to duck into the nearest restroom and relieve the intense, aching pressure building between his legs. He was losing himself. The man named Nate was being buried under a avalanche of new, alien sensations. He had to get to Holland's office. It was his last chance for sanity.

On his way, he passed the main department office. Teen J-pop music, upbeat and saccharine, spilled into the hall. He saw Belinda, a department secretary in her fifties, now dressed in a frilly pink blouse and a matching skirt. She was sitting at her desk, looking no more than 16, clutching a small anime plushie to her chest and singing along to the theme song, her eyes glazed over. The entire department was lost.

Finally, he reached Tim Holland's office. The nameplate still said "T. Holland." Nate threw the door open, ready for anything.

Inside was not the balding, middle-aged academic Nate knew. This person cut a slimmer figure. His back was to Nate, but he was already nervous. He knew this was not what he wanted to see. They turned around quickly, revealing himself to be perhaps seventeen or eighteen, with sharp, intelligent eyes and a confident, athletic build. He was leaning against his desk, a rakish, aloof manner about him that was devastatingly attractive. He wore something that looked like a high school boys' uniform jacket with a mandarin collar, but he



had scrunched the sleeves up and a slight glow came from the edges, indicating this was no ordinary jacket. When he looked at Nate, a slow, knowing smile spread across his face.

Nate tried to speak. "Holland... Tim... I... was looking for Tim..." But the words were weak. The boy's presence was overwhelming. His gaze was so intense, so focused on him. Nate's feminine heart, the heart of Natsuki, started pounding like a drum.

"I was looking for Tim, too," the young man said, in a voice that was deep and soothing with a hint of grit. "Was looking for a long time. Turns out... I was Tim."

"What?" Nate replied. "You... You're Tim Holland? And you *know* you're Tim Holland?"

"It's a very weird thing to realize you've become someone else, isn't it, Nate?"

Nate, the young girl with the pink hair, stumbled backwards a half step, his hand reflexively masking the gasp sound coming from his tiny mouth.

"I see you got the email," the young man continued. "I sent it to everyone, but no one's responded. Except you." He zeroed in on Nate. "I'm glad it was you."

"Tim, I..."

"Tim-senpai hasn't been around for a while. I go by Tomoji now." Tomoji pushed himself off the desk and crossed the room in a few easy strides. He was so much taller than Nate. He gently took Nate's hand. "We've been here together for so long. So close yet so far away. I always thought we could be friends. I've wanted to talk to you, but I was always too shy." He brought Nate's hand to his lips, kissing the knuckles softly. "But seeing you now... Like this... There's no reason to be weird about it. I like you, Natsuki. A lot."

The world tilted. The desperate mission, the fight for reality, it all dissolved under the weight of Tomoji's confession. This was what his body had been craving. This was the release from the tension. The man named Nate screamed in the far corner of his mind, but his voice was a whisper. Natsuki blushed, her cheeks burning. "Tomoji-kun..." she breathed.

He smiled and gently pulled her closer. "I knew you felt it too." He lowered his head and kissed her.

No. This was wrong... Tim was his superior... an upperclass student... It was so improper.

It was a soft, questioning kiss at first, but it deepened, becoming confident and possessive. Nate's resistance crumbled into dust. He was Natsuki. She was in the arms of a handsome boy who liked her. Nothing else mattered.

Tomoji led her to the small couch in the office, his grip possessive and sure. He pull her, he guided her, his warm and solid body against hers was thrilling. His hands were gentle but firm as they found their way under her sailor top.



His eyes, dark and intense, never left hers, holding her captive in a gaze that stripped away every remaining thought of resistance. He was unwrapping a present, and the slow, deliberate way his fingers worked the back of Natsuki's bra made every breath feel like it wanted to go back inside.

With the bra undone, he parted the fabric, exposing the D-cup breasts that looked ridiculous on Natsuki's small frame. He didn't touch them, not yet. Instead, his hands traced the curve of her waist, his thumbs brushing against the sensitive skin just above the waistband of her skirt. He laid her back against the worn leather of the couch, his touch igniting trails of fire wherever his skin met hers. She had never felt anything like it. Every nerve ending was awake, humming with a desperate, needy energy. She felt a new, unfamiliar wetness bloom between her legs.

She didn't need to see it. She could feel it. She was a girl. Not a boy, not a man. She was a cat girl. No mind games could cause her to feel this way. She felt a slick, molten heat that was both terrifying and exhilarating. It was a readiness, an ache to be filled, a primal need her body understood even if her mind was still shattered.

He hooked his fingers into the waistband of her skirt and her panties, pulling them down in one smooth, confident motion. The cool air on her bare thighs made her gasp. He paused, his gaze roaming over her exposed body, and the look of raw, unadulterated hunger on his face sent another jolt of liquid heat to her heart. He settled over her, his weight a delicious pressure that pinned her to the couch. He positioned himself at her slit, the head of his cock hot and insistent against her slick folds.

She had only really been aware that she was truly female for moments, but just as quickly, she was sure she was going to lose her female virginity, mere milliseconds after realizing she had one to lose.

He looked into her eyes one last time. Natsuki could only manage a small, breathless nod. Then he pushed inside. There was a sharp, brief pain, a stinging, tearing sensation as her maidenhood was claimed. A small cry escaped her lips, but it was instantly swallowed by Tomoji's mouth as he kissed her deeply. The pain was fleeting, washed away by a tidal wave of profound, soul-shattering pleasure. He filled her completely, stretching her in a way that was both overwhelming and perfect. Her virginity was being taken, not by force, but by a willing, joyful surrender.

She purred and mewed demurely, the sounds utterly feminine and instinctual. Her body arched to meet his, her hips rising to take him deeper with every thrust. Her mind, once a battlefield of confusion and fear, was now a blissful, empty haze of pure sensation. There was only the rhythmic slide of his body in hers, the friction building an unbearable tension deep within her, the feel of his hands gripping her hips, and the sound of his ragged breathing in her ear. The world outside the office, the fight, the man named Nate — it all meant nothing.

There was only this moment, this love, and the exquisite pleasure of being utterly, completely his.

Afterwards, they lay tangled together on the couch, Natsuki's head on Tomoji's chest. The bizarre world outside the office didn't exist. There was only the sound of his heartbeat and the lingering warmth of his body. Then, a phone buzzed on the desk. Tomoji sighed, untangling himself to answer it. He listened for a moment, his expression unreadable. "Hai. Wakarimashita."

He hung up and turned back to Natsuki, pulling on his uniform pants. "We need to get away from the windows," he said, his voice all business now. "Come with me."

He didn't explain why. He simply took her hand, his grip firm and absolute, and led her out of the office and back into the transforming hallway. She was more than willing to follow him wherever he wanted to take her.



They left the office and started up the main staircase of the administration building, heading for the top floor. The building was still in a state of flux, the walls a mix of institutional cinderblock and traditional wooden paneling. As they reached the second-floor landing, a loud commotion from outside made them both freeze. It sounded like a freight train derailling.

"What was that?" Natsuki whispered, her earlier contentment evaporating into a spike of fear.

Tomoji's face hardened. "Get down." He shoved her away from the large window overlooking the main quad. "Stay low."

Nervously, Natsuki peered over the sill. The fake Japanese street was in chaos. Students were screaming and running. And then she saw them. Three figures, impossibly large and bulky, stomping through the courtyard. They were encased in mechanical suits, gleaming metal exoskeletons that bristled with weaponry. Mecha suits. They looked like the things she saw flying over the college. The little guys. The word popped into her head from some forgotten piece of Nate's memory.

As she stared, one of the mecha turned its head toward their window. A panel on its arm slid open, and a long, sinister-looking barrel extended. "Tomoji!" she screamed.

The window shattered inward in a storm of glass and frame. A bolt of crackling energy sizzled past their heads, melting a hole in the wall behind them. Tomoji moved with a speed that was breathtaking. He didn't hesitate; he didn't flinch. He grabbed Natsuki around the waist and yanked her into a narrow service corridor as another laser blast scorched the spot where they had



been standing.

“Go! Go! Go!” he yelled, shoving her ahead of him. They pounded down the corridor, the sounds of destruction echoing behind them. Natsuki risked a glance back. Through the smoke and dust, she got a second look at their attackers. One of them, the one in the center, was different. Its helmet was retracted, and the face inside was not human. It was a deep, unnerving blue.

“Who are they?” Natsuki sobbed, stumbling as Tomoji pulled her along. “Why are they wearing those suits? Why is he blue?”

“Quiet!” Tomoji snapped, his voice sharp with command. “Don’t talk. Just run.”

He was dragging her now, not toward the ground floor, but down, toward the basement. The lights flickered and died as they descended, plunging them into near darkness. The entire building groaned, and the floor shook violently. From outside came the deafening roar of jet engines, followed by a series of concussive explosions that made her teeth ache. A high-pitched whine, like tearing metal, filled the air. Natsuki screamed, a raw, terrified sound, and Tomoji immediately clapped a hand over her mouth, pulling her into a tight embrace. His body was a shield, his strength the only thing holding her together. She could feel his heart hammering against her back, a frantic drumbeat that mirrored her own terror. She mewed into his palm, her body trembling uncontrollably.

The onslaught seemed to last forever, but then it moved away, the sounds receding into the distance. Tomoji slowly relaxed his grip. “The basement,” he said, his voice a low growl. “Now.”

They found the basement door and plunged into the concrete darkness. It was cold and smelled of damp earth and old machinery. But Tomoji didn’t stop. He pulled her through a maze of storage rooms and forgotten equipment, heading for the very back of the building. He kicked open a heavy, rusted metal door, revealing a dark, loading dock.

And there, waiting for them in the shadows, was a shuttle. It wasn’t a bus or a car. It was sleek and metal, with a faint blue light pulsing along its seams. A ramp was lowered.

Natsuki’s mind, already stretched to its breaking point, simply refused to process it. “Tomoji... what is that?” she whispered.

“No time,” he said, practically lifting her up the ramp. He strapped her into a seat before jumping into the pilot’s chair. The ramp retracted, and the door sealed with a hiss. Natsuki felt a strange, weightless sensation. She looked out the small window and saw the ground falling away. The shuttle was rising, silently and smoothly, straight up into the sky.

She was bewildered, utterly lost. The attack, the mecha, the blue-skinned man — it was a nightmare. But this was something else. This was impossible.

“How... how is it flying?” she stammered, her voice small with awe and terror. “It’s like a... a spaceship.”

Tomoji didn’t turn around. His hands flew over the controls, and the shuttle accelerated, rocketing them upward through the clouds, away from the burning, broken world below and into the star-dusted blackness of space.



The shuttle accelerated, the silent, impossible thrust pinning Natsuki to her seat. The burning, broken world of Building M shrank below them. The blackness of space, pricked with the cold, distant fires of stars, was overwhelming. Her mind, a fragile vessel recently refilled with the persona of Nate, was threatening to shatter again. She needed answers. She turned to Tomoji, whose hands were still moving confidently over the controls.

“Tomoji,” she began, her voice trembling. “Where are we going? What was that? Who were they?”

“Evacuation,” he said, not taking his eyes off the starfield ahead. “We’re getting as many people out as we can. That was a scouting party. They’re softening us up for the main fleet.”

Scouting party? Main fleet? The words were nonsensical, alien gibberish. But before she could press him further, she noticed the other passengers. The shuttle wasn’t empty. Huddled in the seats were familiar faces, each one a dagger of twisted reality. There was Ritsuko, the serene shrine maiden, her hands folded calmly in her lap, her expression placid despite the chaos. Beside her, Hikari, the raven-haired mechanic, was cleaning grease from her fingernails with a fierce, concentrated look. Noriko, the bossy maid, was already trying to organize the other passengers into a neat line, and Tomiko, the gothic lolita, sat in a corner, her dour, beautiful face staring out the window at the stars.

Her friends. Her former colleagues. They were all here.

“You... you brought them?” Natsuki asked Tomoji.

“Hikari keeps the fleet running. She insisted on brining the rest.”

Natsuki’s head was spinning. “Fleet? Tomoji, stop! I need to know what is going on! How are we in *space*? How are we fighting *aliens*? How did all of you... how did I become an entirely different person? This doesn’t make any sense!”

“I wish I had more answers, beautiful,” Tomoji replied as he steered the ship.

A sheepish, hesitant voice cut through the tension from the back of the shuttle. “I... I might know something about this.”

Every head turned. George Blutermann, the Linguistic Anthropology Department head, was shrinking in his seat. He was a man prone to academic bluster and self-importance, but now he just looked guilty. Most shockingly, he was exactly as Nate remembered him: paunchy, balding, wearing a tweed jacket that was wildly inappropriate for a spaceship. He was the only one who hadn't changed.

"Blutermann?" Natsuki gasped, her mind reeling. "You're... you're you!"

"Yes, well," Blutermann stammered, adjusting his glasses. "About that. This... this might be my fault."

Natsuki was on her feet in an instant, her fear momentarily eclipsed by a white-hot rage. She stalked to the back of the shuttle and loomed over him. "Your fault?" she hissed. "Your fault? A community college has turned into some kind of Japanese-themed sex dungeon and now we're fighting aliens in space! What the fuck!"

Blutermann flinched under her glare. "It was just a hobby! Some experiments I was conducting on the side! Theoretical, you understand!"

Natsuki grabbed the front of his jacket. "I don't understand! I don't understand anything! And you're going to start talking, right now!"

"Alright, alright!" he cried, holding up his hands in surrender. "I was working on a way to create a self-replicating nanite using micro 3D printing. A programmable matter cloud. And I... I... Might have had everyone at the college ingest them."

"*Might* have?" Natsuki said, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "George, we are in a spaceship flying in deep space. I think we can drop the 'might have' and agree that you definitely did."

"It wasn't my fault!" he insisted, his voice rising in a panicked whine. "The online directions I was following didn't say anything about this happening! I never programmed the nanites to do this! This is an emergent property, a completely unforeseen consequence!"

Natsuki's grip tightened. "Then what, exactly, did you program the nanites to do before it replicated itself a billion billion times and rewrote reality?"

Blutermann's face turned a deep shade of crimson. He looked away, suddenly finding the floor riveting. "Well, I... it's a bit embarrassing."

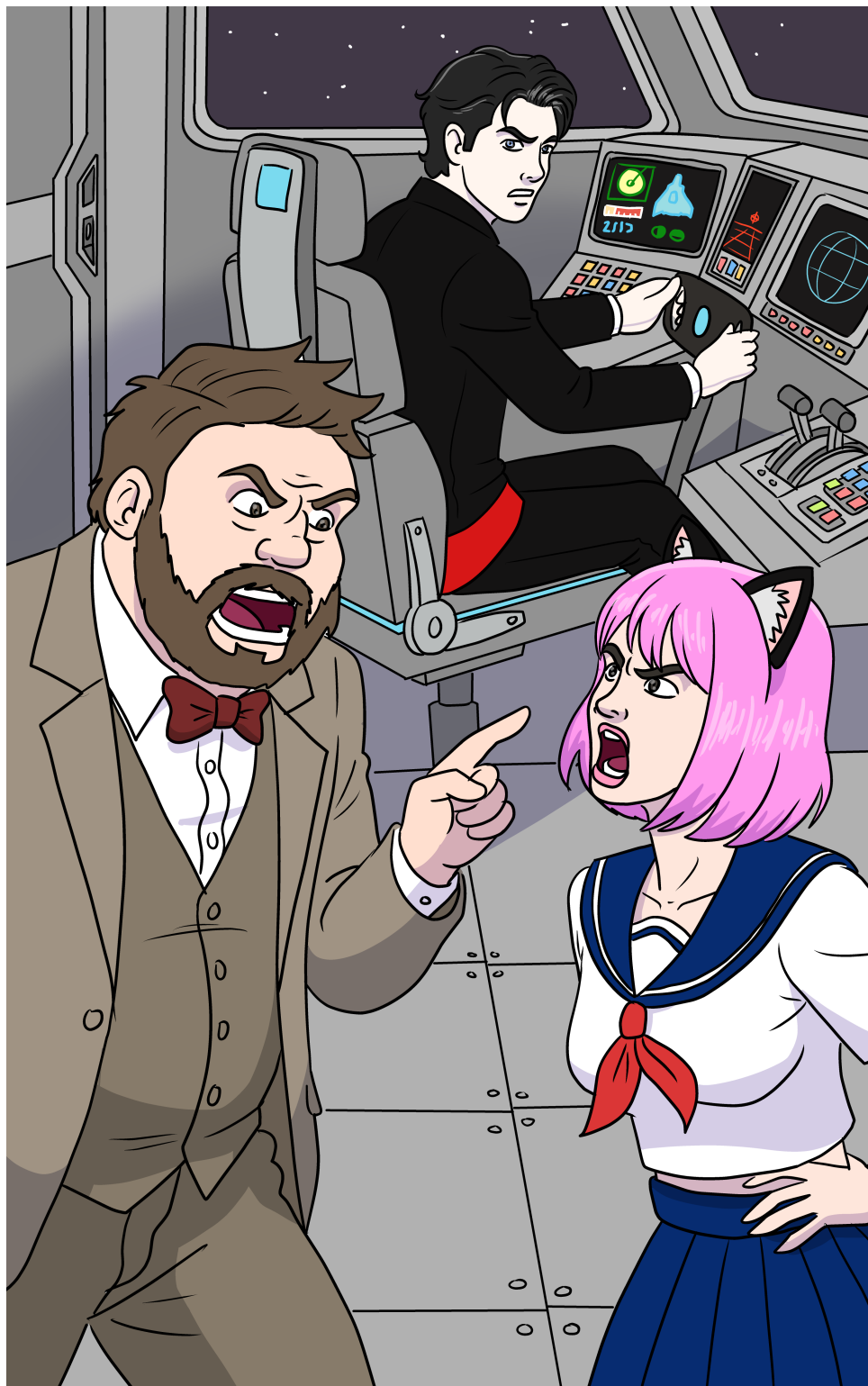
"George, so help me, I will throw you out that airlock."

"You're too small."

"I'll have a lot of help!" Natsuki assured him.

He sighed in defeat. "It seemed like a marvelous thing to do at the time," he mumbled. "I... I programmed it with a deep-seated affinity for Japanese culture. Specifically, late 20th-century anime, manga, and light novels. I thought it would be a fascinating exercise in memetic propagation."





Natsuki just stared at him, her mouth agape. The sheer, idiotic, nerdy hubris of it all was staggering. He had weaponized his own otaku fantasies.

“I wanted to have everyone in the college share in my enthusiasm for Manga and anime.... So that’s what I programmed the nanites to do... To change minds about anime... But I think it went a little farther than that.” He tensed his hands into fists. “This wouldn’t have happened if you people really appreciated storytelling!”

Natsuki slumped back into her seat, the fight gone out of her. “Cookies. You put them in those dumb cookies.” For some reason, Natsuki’s mind flashed back to the cookies Nate couldn’t stop eating after he got back from jury duty. It seemed a million years ago, but her mind just needed to find answers.

“I had the staff and students eating them for quite some time, before I realized you were on jury duty,” Blutermann said. “That’s probably why you could figure out what reality was, since you hadn’t consumed as many nanites as everyone else. You plan for every contingency, and still...”

Natsuki stared out the window, her mind a blank slate. The shuttle flew on, and in the distance, a small, pale-colored planet came into view. It was Pluto. They were flying past Pluto.

She stared out the viewport at the lonely, distant shape of Pluto, her mind struggling to connect the dots. Space. Aliens. Transformed colleagues. A town that had become a space ship. Then, like a lightning strike in the inky blackness of space, the connection was made. The pieces, each one insane on its own, clicked together to form a picture of glorious, infuriating absurdity.

Her head snapped around, her eyes locking onto the cowering form of George Blutermann. “Macross,” she said, her voice low and dangerous. “This is Macross.”

Blutermann blinked. “Macross? I don’t know what you’re...”

“Don’t lie to me!” Natsuki shrieked, launching herself out of her seat. “You turned this into the plot of Macross! The space mecha, the alien invasion, the space ship that’s also a town — it’s the story of Macross! You changed us all, our bodies, our personalities, to fit your nerdy fantasy! That’s why the aliens are blue! We’re being attacked by the Zentradi!”

The accusation hung in the air. Hikari the mechanic stopped cleaning the grease from under her nails. Noriko stopped trying to do her taxes on her phone. Tomiko looked up from her gloomy contemplation of the void. All eyes turned to Blutermann.

He held up his hands defensively, his face a mask of wounded intellectual pride. “Now, hold on! This is not Macross! I’ll have you know this is a wholly original concept of my own creation. It might have been... influenced... by certain seminal works of the genre, but the core ideas are mine!” He puffed out his chest.

“What do you not understand about this?” Natsuki sputtered. “George, the nanites have replicated the entire scenario of *Macross*! The space mechas, our bodies, our personalities — Hikari was a 50-year-old metal shop teacher named Hank! — and that community college back there? It’s not a college anymore, is it? It’s a city on board a massive spaceship, probably orbiting at the edge of our solar system!”

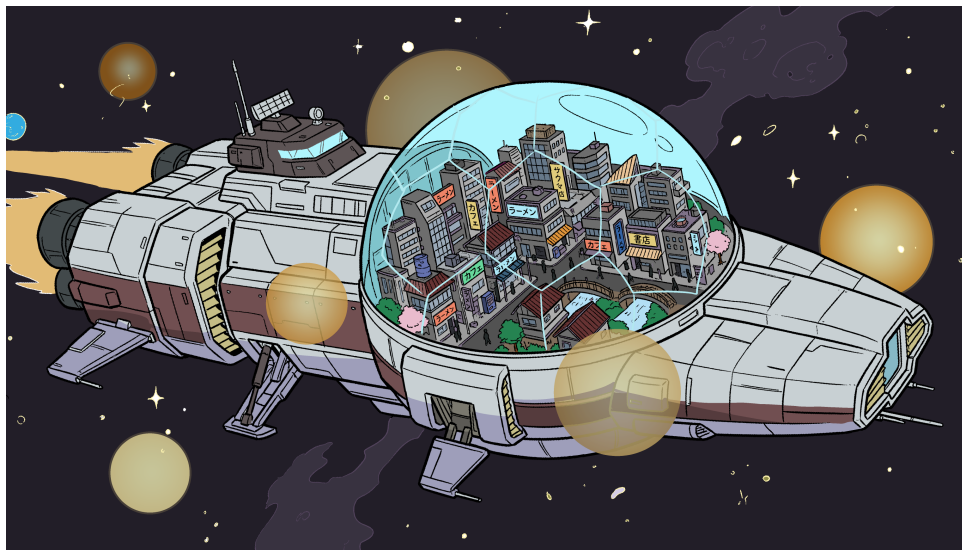
Blutermann shrank back, his bravado deflating. “Well,” he mumbled, adjusting his glasses, “it does appear to have taken on certain... macro-structural characteristics that are *reminiscent* of that *particular* narrative. Loosely.”

“And the aliens?” Natsuki pressed.

“They’re not Zentradi,” he said, with a hint of his old bluster. “They are my own copyrighted concept. I call them the Xenadis.”

This declaration was met with the purest sense of being dumbfounded that anyone had ever felt. The revelation that their reality was a bootleg anime did not go over well.

The dam broke. The others in the shuttle, upon hearing this insane confession, started to argue amongst themselves. “So we were men?” Hikari asked, looking at her grease-stained hands with a new horror. “I was a guy



named Hank?” Noriko was livid. “I was a department head! I had a master’s degree! Now I’m a bossy glorified maid who wants to serve tiny cakes!” Tomiko just looked more dour than ever, her entire conspiracy-addled worldview validated and destroyed at the same time.

Then Ritsuko, the serene shrine maiden, spoke, her soft voice tinged with confusion. “I don’t understand any of this. All I know is that I look at him,” she

said, pointing a delicate finger at Blutermann, “and I feel this... this overwhelming fondness. I find him... attractive.”

A chorus of agreement went through the transformed women. “Me too,” Hikari admitted, blushing. “I can’t explain it. I just want to... take him back to my, erm, engine bay.” Noriko nodded curtly. “The urge to serve him is... strong.” Even Tomiko gave a reluctant, almost imperceptible nod of assent.

Blutermann, cornered, confessed. “I may have... programmed the archetypes with a... a fondness for the creator.”

The mood shifted instantly from confused horror to murderous rage. Five women, each a powerful archetype in her own right, turned on the man who had remade them. “You programmed us to want you?” Hikari snarled, advancing on him with a wrench in her hand. “You disgusting fat creep!”

“I’m going to feed you your own fat ass!” Noriko shrieked, brandishing a serving tray like a weapon.

The argument was cut short by Tomoji’s sharp, urgent voice from the cockpit. “Everybody shut up! We’ve got a major echo on the long-range sensors!”

He didn’t need to elaborate. Outside the viewport, a colossal shape blotted out the stars. It was a monstrous, jagged thing of grey metal and glowing lights, impossibly huge and moving with a terrifying, deliberate purpose.

“Is that...?” Natsuki began, her heart sinking.

“The Xenadis battleship,” Tomoji confirmed, his voice tight. “And it’s on an intercept course for our mothership.”

Natsuki turned to Blutermann, her voice dangerously quiet. “Our ‘mothership.’ You mean the space-borne community college. With thousands of students on board.”

Blutermann shrugged, a gesture of pathetic helplessness that was utterly infuriating. “Presumably. Is this not self-evident?”

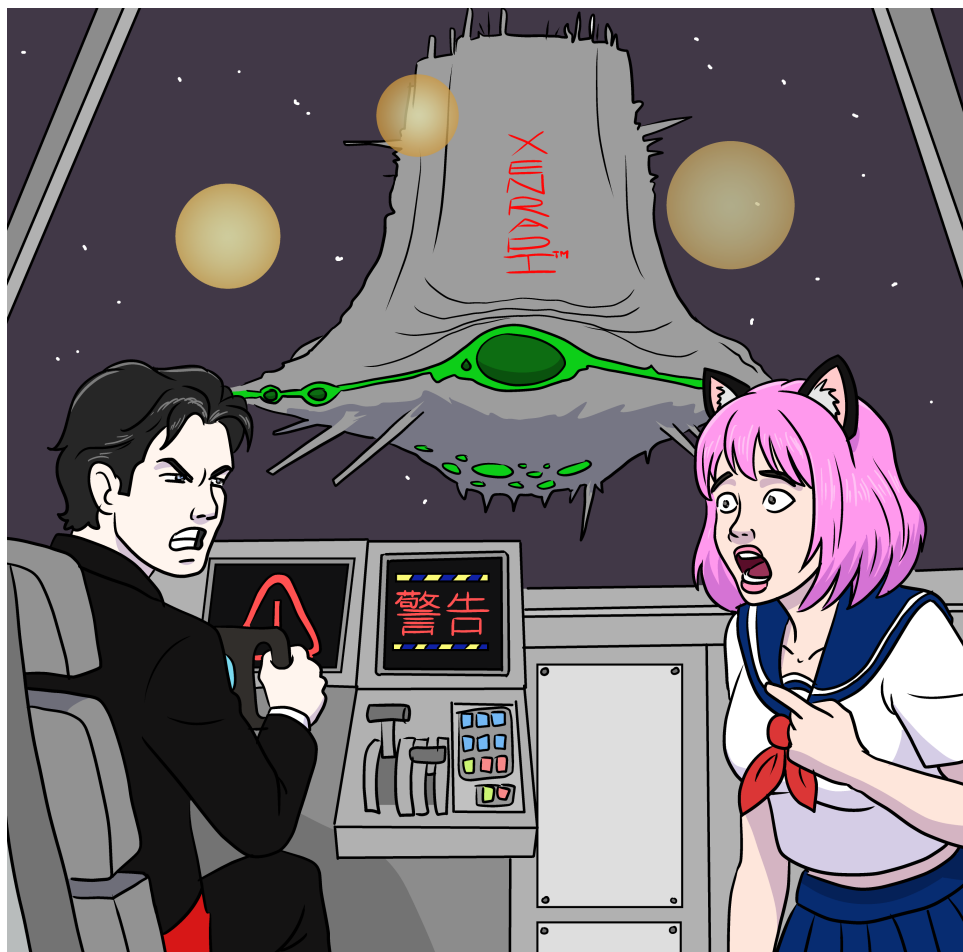
Natsuki looked at the impossibly large spaceship outside the window to the pathetic man who had created it. She was not pleased. She was not pleased at all.

The murderous rage in the shuttle was instantly replaced by a cold, creeping dread as the Xenadi mothership filled the viewports. Its weapon ports began to glow a menacing orange.

“Something of note...” Blutermann added, holding up finger to indicate he had something to add. “They used to be people.”

Natsuki stared at him, her mind refusing to process the new layer of horror. “What are you talking about?”

“The nanites,” he babbled, his words tumbling over each other in his panic. “They needed raw material. They couldn’t just create life from nothing. They...”



they converted the nearest available resources into the story’s antagonists: a small housing development a few miles from the community college. As far as I can tell, the entire Xenadi race used to be the population of Sunnyside Estates. That development near the water treatment plant.”

Natsuki couldn’t believe it. She couldn’t breathe. The aliens, the monstrous aggressors about to vaporize their homes and friends, were just innocent victims of Blutermann’s insane hobby, and it was unthinkable to kill them. The barrage of fire from the mothership began, brilliant lances of energy piercing the void, impacting the shields of their home ship. And then another thought, colder and sharper than any fear, fought through her shock. Reiko. Not only were thousands of students about to be killed, but her best friend in the world, the one person who felt like an anchor in this madness, was about to die. All she ever wanted to do was sing.

...And that’s when it clicked. It was so insane, so perfectly, stupidly obvious, it had to work.

She scrambled to the pink hamster backpack she had inexplicably been wearing and dug out her cell phone. Her fingers flew across the screen, finding Reiko's number. She hit dial. No signal.

"Can you send my cell signal to the ship?" She asked Tomoji.

"I need that power to run the shields!" Tomoji replied.

She kissed him on the cheek. "Trust me? Please?" He asked with a feminine purr.

Tomoji hit a button on the dash. "Try it again."

It rang twice before a sleepy, familiar voice answered.

"Mmm, hello? Natsuki? What time is it?" Reiko sounded groggy, confused.

"Reiko, where are you?" Natsuki demanded, her heart pounding.

"In your apartment," she mumbled. "I didn't wanna go home so late."

Natsuki's mind reeled. She was still in her apartment, which was now apparently part of the mothership. It didn't matter. She was alive, and she was the key. "Tomoji!" she shouted, holding the phone out. "Patch this audio into the communications system! Broadcast it out on all frequencies, military and civilian! Now!"

Tomoji didn't question her. He slammed a few switches on his console. "You're live, Natsuki. What are you doing?"

"Reiko," Natsuki said, her voice urgent and clear. "I need you to sing. Right now. Don't ask questions. Just be Rachel, the pop idol, and sing your loveliest song. Sing for me."



There was a pause on the other end, filled with sleepy confusion. “Rachael? I’m not Rachael! You’re just being silly. You’re talking nonsense...”

“Reiko! Now! *Please!*”

“Okay... I trust you, Natsuki.” And then Reiko began to sing. It was her signature ballad, a song of longing and hope that had once topped the global charts in their fictional universe. Her voice, even through a phone, was supernaturally beautiful, a soothing, mesmerizing melody that filled the shuttle.

*Starlight paints the window pane... Another world, a world of pain... A million light-years in the dark... Just one small, fragile, hopeful spark... Are you real, or just a dream... Love can happen at light speed...*

For a minute, nothing happened. The Xenadi mothership continued its relentless assault as Rachael kept singing. Then, slowly, the barrage of weapons fire began to slow. The glowing ports dimmed. The massive ship seemed to hesitate, its aggressive posture slackening into one of complete stillness. Outside, swarms of smaller Xenadi mecha simply stopped firing and drifted in the void.

On the shuttle, everyone stared at the viewports in stunned silence. “What... what happened?” Hikari asked.

Natsuki took a deep, shaky breath, the adrenaline starting to fade. “I just co-opted the end of Macross Part 1,” she explained, a grim smile on her face. “We’re satiating the enemy with Rachel’s mesmerizing, soothing voice.”

“In the Macross universe,” Blutermann explained, “the power of song, from an idol singer, pacified the war-hungry aliens who had never experienced such things.”

It seemed Blutermann’s nanites had followed the source material to the letter.

Blutermann, seeing his creation playing out before him, could only shrug. “I never liked that ending.”



The show was being broadcast back to Earth, still 3 billion miles away. Rachael danced and swayed on stage to the most beautiful melodies, as the crowd of thousands swayed with her. She was a vision on stage, sparkling beauty, a voice of an angel, but a spirit that transcended both. Rachael had finally embraced her destiny as the voice of her planet, the voice of her people and the voice of peace and tranquility. Even the blue-skinned Xenradi in the crowd cheered alongside their human friends.

No one could quite explain how the ship had even gotten out this far without anyone even noticing. The going theory was that the nanites knew something

about warp propulsion that they were not sharing, and in a matter of days they were transported from the great plains to the edge of the solar system.

There was no denying it was where they were. Earth was a long ways away, and would take five years before they got home again. It would have been nice if those nanites could warp them back, but apparently it didn't work that way.

That was all for the better, as Earth was having issues. It seemed that the nanites weren't localized to the community college, and the better part of the northern hemisphere was now a futuristic Japan. There were a few cities and towns which held out, but everyone had realized that once it happened, once the infection of nanites began, it was better to embrace it. There were counter-measures, but they weren't entirely effective and for the moment, it was a bit of a mess. Many saw the advanced tech and the leap into the near future as a destruction of culture and their very identities. Many did not, choosing to welcome the future with open arms. Their numbers were growing, too.

That's the approach they had taken on board the space-borne SS Blutermann. They had embraced it. They had even embraced the name of the ship, seeing as the man responsible for this mess had written it into his fictional universe. There didn't seem much point in trying to re-write it now, as it was embedded in their minds and memories.

"Woo-hoo! Rachael! Woo-hoo!" Natsuki shouted from the side of the stage, jumping in her little legs, her pink hair flying about.

Life as a pint-sized teenage cat girl wasn't so bad. Yes, he had literally forgotten more about math than most people, but he had gained years back. Good years. Years as a spunky girl with a spring in her step. You would have a spring in your step if you got 20 years back, too.

"Light Speed! Do Light Speed!" Natsuki called. She knew Rachael could hear her. She wasn't that far away.

A quick side-eye from the performer who had once corrected math papers seemed to confirm it. Rachael wasn't going to do it yet. The song that had brought peace to the two races was her closer.

Hikari Watanabe, ace mechanic and rocket jockey, was leaning over the open maintenance panel to an ion drive, wrenching the intake manifold into place. She paused, tossing her long ponytail behind her as she listened to Rachael sing. She hadn't gone to the concert, as she had a backlog of rockets to fix up, but it didn't matter. She could hear her from where she was, in her garage, just a half mile away. There was a lot of work for Hikari, just the way she liked it.

Ritsuko Karasu swept more dust from the grounds of the shrine, her oasis in the high-tech world of the SS Blutermann. She hummed along to the song, as the sound drifted in from the distance, over the tree tops. Of all of them, Ritsuko was maybe the happiest of all, a simple girl with a simple life, and decades to spend it.





Tomiko Yamagata stood at the very back of the concert grounds, making sure no one was looking back as she cracked a smile. It wouldn't do for her to be seen smiling. It would ruin her entire business. Being a dour goth girl was lucrative, after all. Not just in money, but in cock. There was no end to men who wanted to screw the big tiddy goth girl, and she was not making it difficult.

Noriko Matsui was in her café, drilling her maids in dance. These concerts gave her the chance to train her maid waitresses as it emptied the district. She also knew that it was great for business as when the show let out, they would flood her café with customers. So with an hour or two of light customers, she had her girls twirling, singing, shuffling and shaking their little butts. Now if only she could get that slacker Natsuki to come in and pick up a shift.

Deep under the administration building, George Blutermann rested in a cage. Sentenced to imprisonment, he welcomed it. The bars kept people out as much as they kept him in. And everyone — everyone — wanted to rip him to shreds.

Except for the ladies. They wanted to fuck him. *Then* rip him to shreds. His best hope at this point was that those nanites would, at some point, figure out how to break the barriers he set in place to protect himself from being altered and consign him to the same sort of fate everyone else had been forced into. He wouldn't mind being one of those cat girl maids, if he had a choice.

Which he didn't.

Meanwhile, Natsuki turned away from the show to watch the fighters zooming off in the distance. The sky was artificial, a projection of daylight on the clear dome that encased the district, and she watched a hexagonal hole open up and the fighters exit to go on patrol.

She waved at them, knowing that it was impossible for Tomoji to see her at this distance, but she couldn't let her boyfriend leave without the silly, girlish gesture. He would be back in a few days, and she was already missing him. She had long since dropped out of school — if she ever was a real student in the first place — and was going to be a stay-at-home military wife. Spending her days cooking and cleaning for her hubby, a cute little homebody.

That lated all of a week before she signed up with the Galactic Defense Force, working in the conning tower, now a flight controller in charge of reconnaissance missions. She loved the uniform.

Natsuki swished her skirts back and forth, watching her best friend sing her heart out. She couldn't have been happier for her. She wasn't sure Rachael needed to be loved and appreciated any more that she already was, but if anyone deserved universal adoration, it was her.

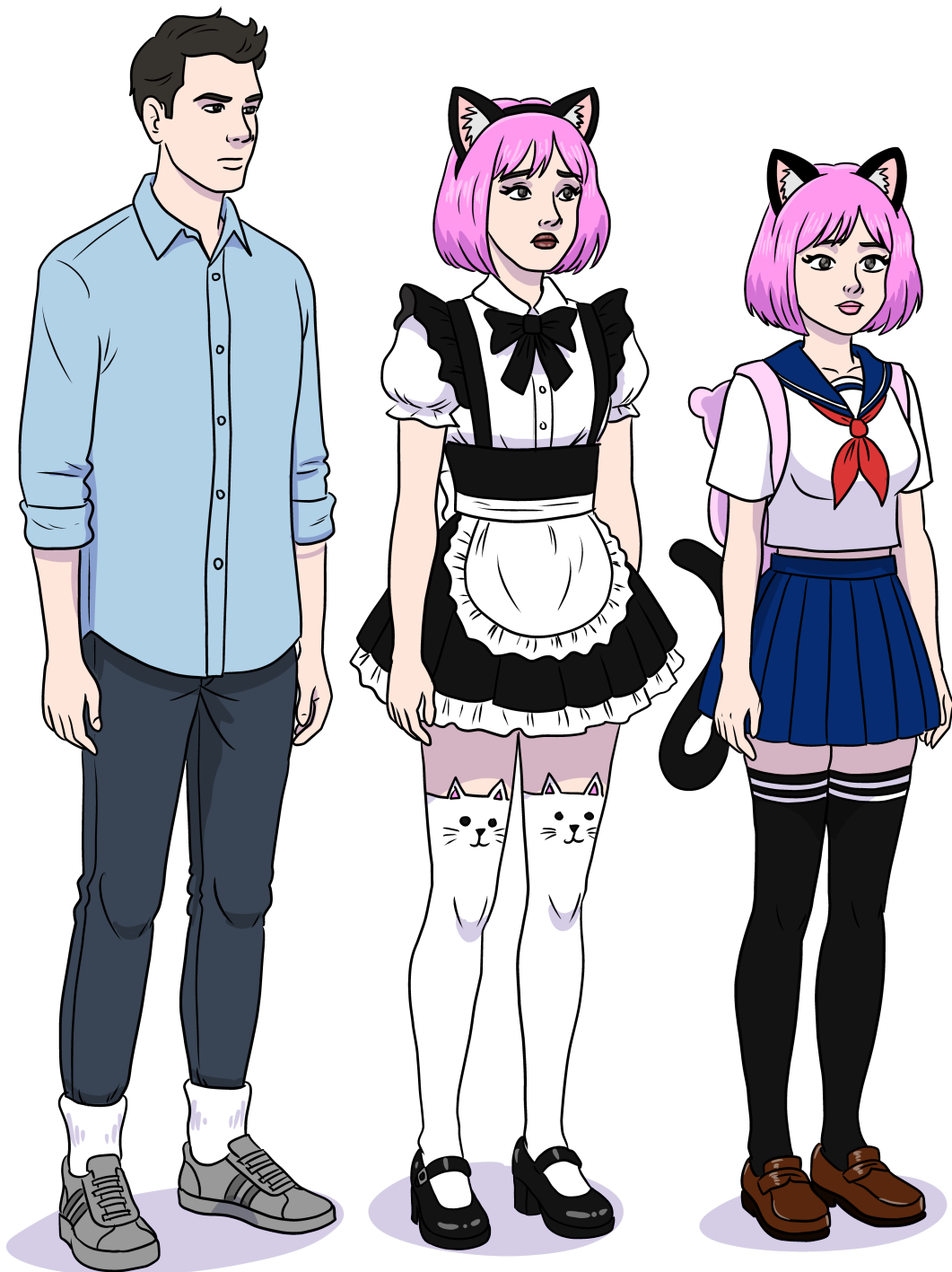
The former teaching assistant smiled to the audience, dazzling them. She played with the cord of her microphone and started her next song, swaying from foot to foot. The music started and she closed her eyes and let the world



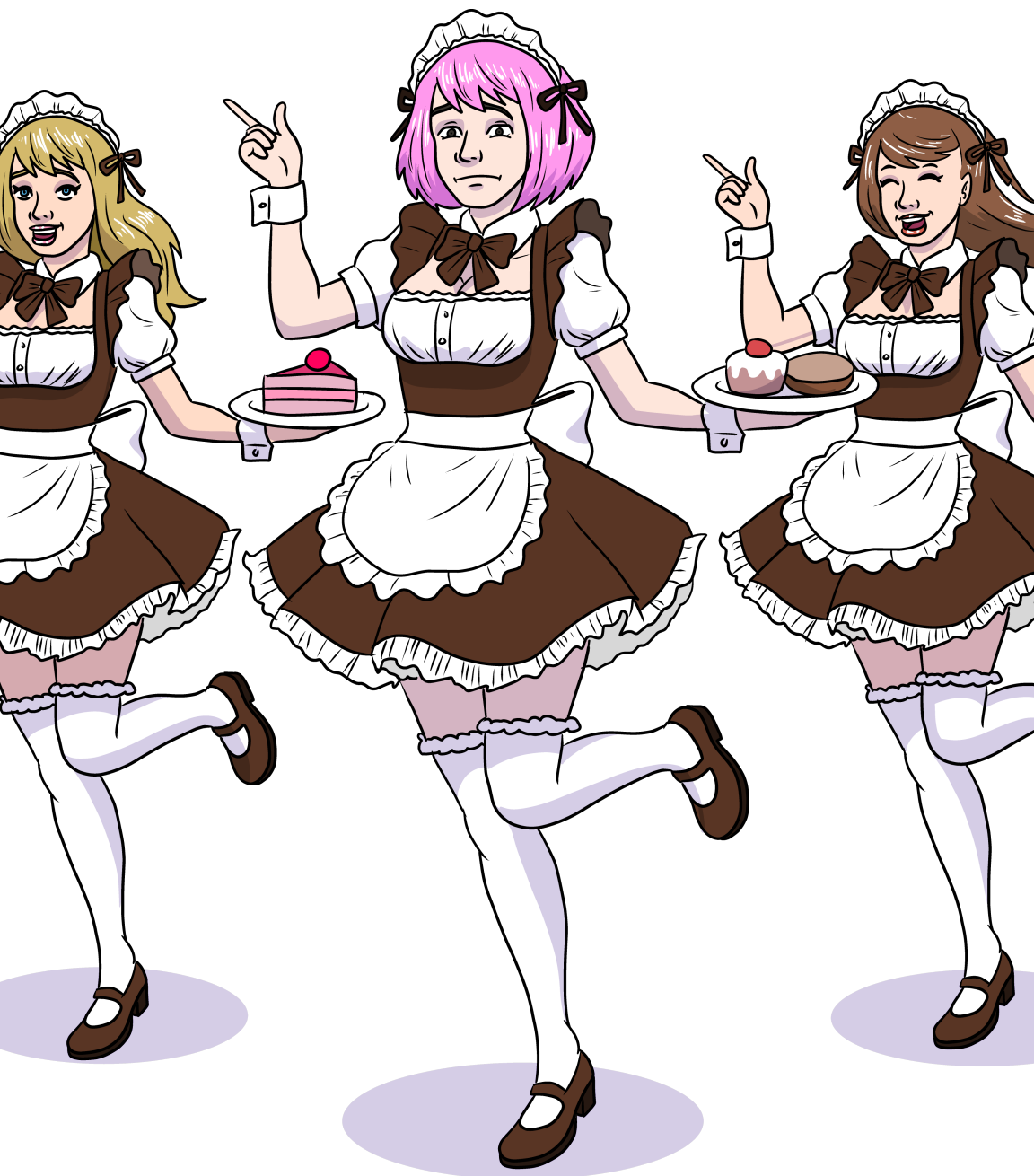
be just her voice. She had made her sacrifice. She would never be a plain, unnoticed schoolgirl again. Rachael was the girl who had brought peace to the known universe, and she would never live another moment without being recognized. It was her sacrifice. Her peace given away to save everyone else's.

It didn't mean she had to be unhappy, though. The happiest ending to a story is the one where you stop fighting the script and allow it to end itself.

The End







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By Joe Six-Pack. Derek and Cole grew up together as kids. One year, though, Cole has to start pitching in at the family wedding business. His life will never be the same. Book / 63 pages / 25 illustrations

## **Gone Girly for Good**

“Big in Japan” by James J Craft. Mike and Ken were one-hit-wonder rock stars. Then they discovered they had fans in Japan, so they left to become famous. Then they discovered that the Japanese didn’t know they were guys. Book / 77 pages / 26 illustrations

## **One Year in Tokyo**

By James J Craft, illustrations by Kwon Lee Tran. Mickey is forced to spend a year with his father in Japan. However things often get confused when words get translated from English to Japanese, as Mickey soon finds out... Book / 87 pages / 20 illustrations

## **Mall Makeover Madness**

“A Day at the Mall” by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Four boys are going to have one weird day at the mall. By the time the day is over, it’s four girls who leave the mall to begin their new lives. Book / 109 pages / 25 illustrations

## **Convicts to Co-Eds**

Story by By Courtney Captisa & Claire Bear, illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Three teen boys are sent to a reform school. What they can’t know is that they are about to be “reformed” all the way into skirts... And beyond. Book / 154 pages / 31 illustrations

## **Creating Samantha**

Story by Cheryl Lynn, illustrations by The Might Fenek. Samuel was under the tutelage of his legal guardian, only his guardian had no intentions of letting him grow up male. Book / 70 pages / 16 illustrations

## **Crosley High Chronicles**

By Joe Six-Pack. River is coming to a new school, and trying to fit in. The problem is the only way he’s going to fit in is in skirts and heels. Book / 217 pages / 75 illustrations

## **Student Exchange**

By Joe Six-Pack. Kelley Sue’s convinced a French exchange student to disguise himself as a girl. What happens when she realizes he has no intention of returning back home? Book / 77 pages / 22 illustrations

## **The Substitute Ski Bunny**

By Joe Six-Pack. Walker is a young man who’s fallen in love with a girl. The only way he can get close to her is to dress up and become her roommate. It’s not going to go according to plan, though. Book / 132 pages / 31 illustrations

## **My Brother, My Mother, My Doll**

By Joe Six-Pack. Seven year old Amelia has made a wish. A wish that she had a mother more like her doll, and that her brother weren’t so mean. Her family is about to have their lives turned inside-out. Book / 109 pages / 34 illustrations

## **The Princess Center**

By Cheryl Lynn. Jeffrey wanted everything his brother Alan had. He was willing to to any length to get it, even to send Alan to... The Princess Center. Book / 85 pages / 26 illustrations

## **Tales of Transformation**

### **He’s the Wrong Girl**

“Office Chemistry” by Joe Six-Pack. James had to fill in at the reception desk. Problem is, the business is a bio-genetics company. And all of the sudden the coffee tastes funny. Book / 53 pages / 14 illustrations

## **City Boy, Country Girl**

By Joe Six-Pack. Richard's successful city life is interrupted when a sheep he wants to fleece needs urgent care out in the country. But instead of returning home, all Richard's wife hears are a series of suspicious excuses. Revised in 2019. Book / 92 pages / 34 illustrations

## **Thames Greene**

By James J Craft. Ira wanted something better for his family. A new start. But in Thames Greene, everyone's getting a new start, whether they want it or not. Book / 77 pages / 26 illustrations

## **Hiding in High Heels**

"How Not to be a Sissy" By Joe Six-Pack. Vince was on the run from people who wanted their millions back. Howard was a friend with a funny little idea and a knack for making subliminal CDs. Mini-Pix / 48 pages / 15 illustrations

## **A Blessing in Disguise**

By KK, illustrations by Kannel. Jay was a witness to a murder, and now he's the target of a vicious criminal. Resorting to a female disguise, he becomes trapped with no way out. Book / 84 pages / 16 illustrations

## **I'm Your Dolly**

"Barbie-in-a-Box" By Joe Six-Pack. Tyler wasn't much of a boyfriend anymore. Jessica wanted to throw him out, but then a better idea came to her, in the form of the Barbie-in-a-Box service. Tyler better get used to pink. Book / 103 pages / 20 illustrations

## **Winning is Everything**

"Costume drama" by Joe Six-Pack. Seth made a funny little bet for Halloween. He needed to pull off the impersonation of a Cheerleader for a party. What's at stake? 100 million dollars and his manhood. Book / 215 pages / 37 illustrations

## **His Life as a Trophy Wife**

By Joe Six-Pack. Nick had a great life, but then it evaporated. Now he's down on his luck. In steps a wealthy executive willing to pay him handsomely to pretend to be his wife. What can it hurt? Revised in 2018. Book / 256 pages / 39 illustrations

## **Male Monday, Girl Friday**

"Hey, Cutie!" by James J Craft. Daniel is going to be promoted from his average life to an exciting executive position. At least, that's what his bosses are telling him. They may not be telling him everything. Book / 58 pages / 20 illustrations

## **The Happiest Place on Earth**

From the files of TGStories.com: "The Fairest One of All" By Joe Six-Pack. Will is a kid looking for a job. He gets one, performing as Snow White at a theme park. For Will, he doesn't suspect that playing the role and wearing the costume is slowly changing him, day by day. Book / 51 pages / 21 illustrations

## **Hello, Nurse**

From the files of TGStories.com: "Quality Health Care". Dane is filling in as a nurse for his pal Jimmy at his new office. Although both are doctors, Dane begins to take to his new role as a nurse. Soon, he feels compelled to be the ideal nurse. Book / 44 pages / 15 illustrations

## **My Boss, The Bimbo**

"If I Were a Betting (Wo)Man" By James J Craft, illustrations by blackshirtboy. CEO Lucas has a superiority complex. When his long-suffering secretary is able to feed into Lucas' competitive nature, he'll make any bet to prove his dominance over women. Book / 38 pages / 10 illustrations

## **He's the Girl They Want**

"Rallies" by Joe Six-Pack. Spencer has a great new executive job in the food service industry, but first he's got to learn the ropes of the business by waiting on tables. He just doesn't quite fit in with the cheerleader theme. Yet. Book / 63 pages / 22 illustrations

## **Demoted and Degraded**

"Trixie the Secretary" by Angela J. Cindy didn't much like Tom Jones attitude and his advances, so when she has the opportunity to help take the wind out of his sails, she takes it. But she had no idea that it was all designed to make Tom into Trixie the secretary. Book / 87 pages / 17 illustrations

## **I, Candy**

“Sissy Sweets” by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Inheriting his family’s bakery requires this young man to become the new face of the business. A female face. Book / 45 pages / 15 illustrations

## **Boyz II Girlz**

“The Making of the Ballroom Brats” by Joe Six-Pack. The Ballroom Brats become the newest worldwide celebrity sensation. How did four unsuspecting guys at a fast food joint become the hottest girl group in music? Book / 113 pages / 34 illustrations

## **His Strangest Desire**

“Employee of the Month” by Joe Six-Pack. Mick is declared Employee of the Month, and he’s going to find himself hurtling headlong into facing his weirdest inner desire. Book / 59 pages / 19 illustrations

## **Hard Time or High Heels**

“I’m Turning into My Mother” by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Colby got deep into debt to a local gangster. Before long, he’s on the arm of that very same gangster as his reluctant girlfriend. Book / 75 pages / 20 illustrations

## **Seriously Skirted**

“The Show Piece” by KK. Illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Mel finds work at a clinic as a secretary. He slowly begins to fit to role. Book / 75 pages / 19 illustrations

## **From Mister to Sister**

Story by Melissa N., illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Dan just wanted to help guide his girlfriend’s sister out of her depression. Instead, he’s being guided out of his manhood. Book / 84 pages / 24 illustrations

## **The Russian Girl**

Story by Melissa N., illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Casey’s wife has had enough of watching him kill himself with work, so she forces him out of his comfort zone... Into the life of a female stripper. Book / 196 pages / 30 illustrations

## **Swindled into Skirts**

“Beta Male” by Joe Six-Pack. Kyle inherited a multi-million dollar mansion in southern California. He begins to adjust to the Cali lifestyle, but his adjustments seems to have a decidedly feminine flavor to them. Book / 78 pages / 23 illustration

## **Mergers & Acquisitions**

Story by James J. Craft, Illustrations by Sortimid. Mark is a disaffected retail salesperson, and after a takeover of his store, he finds himself selling feminine fashion... and struggling to embrace everything about it. Book / 103 pages / 31 illustration

## **Suddenly a Secretary**

Story & art by Joe Six-Pack. Rock guitarist Mick has become obsessed with following the life of secretary Lori Chandler through her inter-office email messages. Soon, Mick is taking her place. Book / 133 pages / 30 illustrations

## **Stories of the Supernatural**

### **A Change for the Better**

“Do-Overs” by Joe Six-Pack. Evan wants a chance to do over his biggest mistake. He gets the chance, but he keeps wanting his new life to be a little bit better than the last. Book / 59 pages / 18 color illustrations

### **Changed and Rearranged**

“Wrongs Make Wright” By Joe Six-Pack. Chris and Matt were rivals. Then, Matt decided to show everyone how smart he truly was by impersonating a teacher. But the disguise becomes more and more real, much to Chris’ dismay. Book / 74 pages / 19 illustrations

### **From Pals to Gals**

From the files of TGStories.com: “Mandate of the People” By Joe Six-Pack. Teens Jeremy and Stewart are good friends, but a bit thick in the noggin. When they jokingly nominate each other for Prom Queen, they slowly become the perfect candidates, thanks to some magic. Book / 45 pages / 16 illustrations

### **A High-Heeled Halloween**

Story & art by Joe Six-Pack. A costume shop has four spooky tales to tell this Halloween, where the price you pay for your costume is far more than money. Book / 128 pages / 34 illustrations

## **Born on Black Friday**

Story & art by Joe Six-Pack. Malcom Balford was forced to go shopping on Black Friday. What he finds at the mall may mean that Malcom will never leave. Book / 57 pages/ 17 illustrations.

## **In the Family Way**

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. The Finch brothers are trying to catfish a man out of his money. To do so, they dress up as mother and daughter. But their impersonations slowly seem to be taking them over. Book / 182 pages / 42 illustrations

## **Crossed Fiction**

### **Sisters for the Summer**

"Camp Counseling" By Joe Six-Pack. Brock McCade always thought of himself as a real man, or at least he would be one, someday. After summer camp, he's no longer so sure. Book / 76 pages / 17 illustrations

### **They're the Girls for the Job**

"Peace and Harmony" By James J Craft. Illustrations by blackshirtboy. Pete and Harmon need jobs bad. How far would they have to go to get them? Book / 64 pages / 19 illustrations

### **Blondie's Lost Summer**

By KK. Illustrations by Fraylim. Carl's dream summer was about to become three months of dresses, heels and makeup. Book / 159 pages / 48 illustrations

### **Blondie's Lost Year**

By KK. Illustrations by Fraylim. Book Two in the Blondie Series. Carl's trip to Florida has been horrible enough, trapped in dresses and makeup. Now, high school has presented a whole new level of humiliation for him. Book / 221 pages / 52 illustrations

### **Blondie He's Not**

Story by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Mark got a job at a salon, and fell in love with one of the customers. Problem was that customer was Candi "Blondie" Wethers, and what happened to Candi was about to happen to Mark. Book / 151 pages / 40 illustrations

## **I Never Wanted to be a Woman**

"Politically Corrected" By Cheryl Lynn. Illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Michael's politically active mother has decided she's going to make her hippie son over into the daughter she always wanted. Book / 64 pages / 19 illustrations

## **If the Shoes Fit**

"Hand Me Downs" By KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Sydney is a teen who is just trying to make it through the summer with no money. He finds himself wearing hand-me-downs from his sister, and that takes his life in a whole new direction. Book / 98 pages / 30 illustrations

## **The Boy's Guide to Girlhood**

Story by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Dweeb Kenny and cool Rex find themselves trapped in a Principal's twisted scheme, and only one of them is going to get out in tact. Book / 109 pages / 32 illustrations

## **Fashion Victims**

Story by Lauren Bliss, illustrations by Fraylim. Teenage boy Jamie just needed clothes for school. Oh, he's going to get clothes for school. Just not male ones. Will he ever need male clothes again? Book / 67 pages / 26 illustrations

## **The Boy's Guide to Girlhood**

Story by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Dweeb Kenny and cool Rex find themselves trapped in a Principal's twisted scheme, and only one of them is going to get out in tact. Book / 109 pages / 32 illustrations

## **The Making of a Beach Bunny**

Story by KK & Fraylim, illustrations by Fraylim. Before heading off to college, John wanted to spend his last normal summer at the old rental summer house with his friend Stanley. There was nothing about this summer that would be normal. Book / 134 pages / 58 illustrations

## **Medical Miss-Practice**

Story by KK & Fraylim, illustrations by Fraylim. Jerry just needed a medical procedure. He came out with two big new problems and a whole new life. Now he's losing everything he loves, piece by piece. Book / 95 pages / 51 black & white illustrations

## **12 Days of Christmas**

Story by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Paul was a rising executive, but he had a secret embezzlement scheme. Now he's being blackmailed into skirts day-by-day in the 12 days of Christmas. Book / 74 pages / 21 illustrations

### **Seriously Sissified**

## **A Family Femmed**

"The Femmed Family Robinson" by James J. Craft & Cheryl Lynn, illustrations by Sortimid. The Robinson boys all had dreams of their own, once. Now they have new ones, thanks to their stepmother. Book /96 pages / 29 color illustrations

## **Forever Femmed**

Story by James J. Craft & Cheryl Lynn, illustrations by Sortimid. "A Family Femmed's" Deborah is still hard at work, flipping men into sissies and selling them to the highest bidder. But this time, there's a new wrinkle. Book / 108 pages / 28 illustrations

## **Auntie's Girl Time**

By Cheryl Lynn. David was just a young teenage boy who wanted all the things in life a man could look forward to. His aunt, though, is going to make sure he never gets them. Book / 79 pages / 20 illustrations

## **Revenge of the Cheerleaders**

"Pansy Cheers" By Angela J. Patrick Sears was a football player trying to sleep with every cheerleader at his small college. He'd have to pay for his conquests. Book / 116 pages / 19 illustrations

## **He's Got His Mind Maid Up**

By James J. Craft. Illustrations by kinkyrocket. Corey has just a sliver of a chance to get into college, but that chance involves becoming his stepmother's maid. And she wants him to fit both the role and the dress. Book / 68 pages / 16 illustrations

## **Fated for Femininity**

Story by KK, illustrations by RocketXpert. When a web page shows Evan having sex with another boy, the poor kid is chased out of town — right into the arms of a gender therapist who has her own agenda. Book / 70 pages / 15 illustrations

## **Un-Boxed & Undone**

By James J. Craft, illustrations by Banedearg with additional art by Joe Six-Pack. Caleb is struggling to get his YouTube career started. When he gets some strange shipments of makeup and clothes, he finds his channel suddenly taking off - but can he control it? A picture story. Book / 41 Pages / 33 illustrations

### **Web Classics Revisited**

## **Two Forms of ID**

By Joe Six-Pack. Harvey had the unusual ability to convincingly imitate a teenage girl. In desperation, he has to use that talent to make some money. But when is enough enough? Paperback / 194 pages / text only

## **Barbie's Life**

Story & Art by Melissa N. Chris was a student actor who said he could play any role. A disgruntled girlfriend and playwright are about to see if he'll be able to play the lead role in... Barbie's Life. Book / 55 pages / 21 rendered images

## **Amazon.com Kindle books**

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Working His Way into Skirts (Part 2)

He Gave at the Office (Part 3)

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