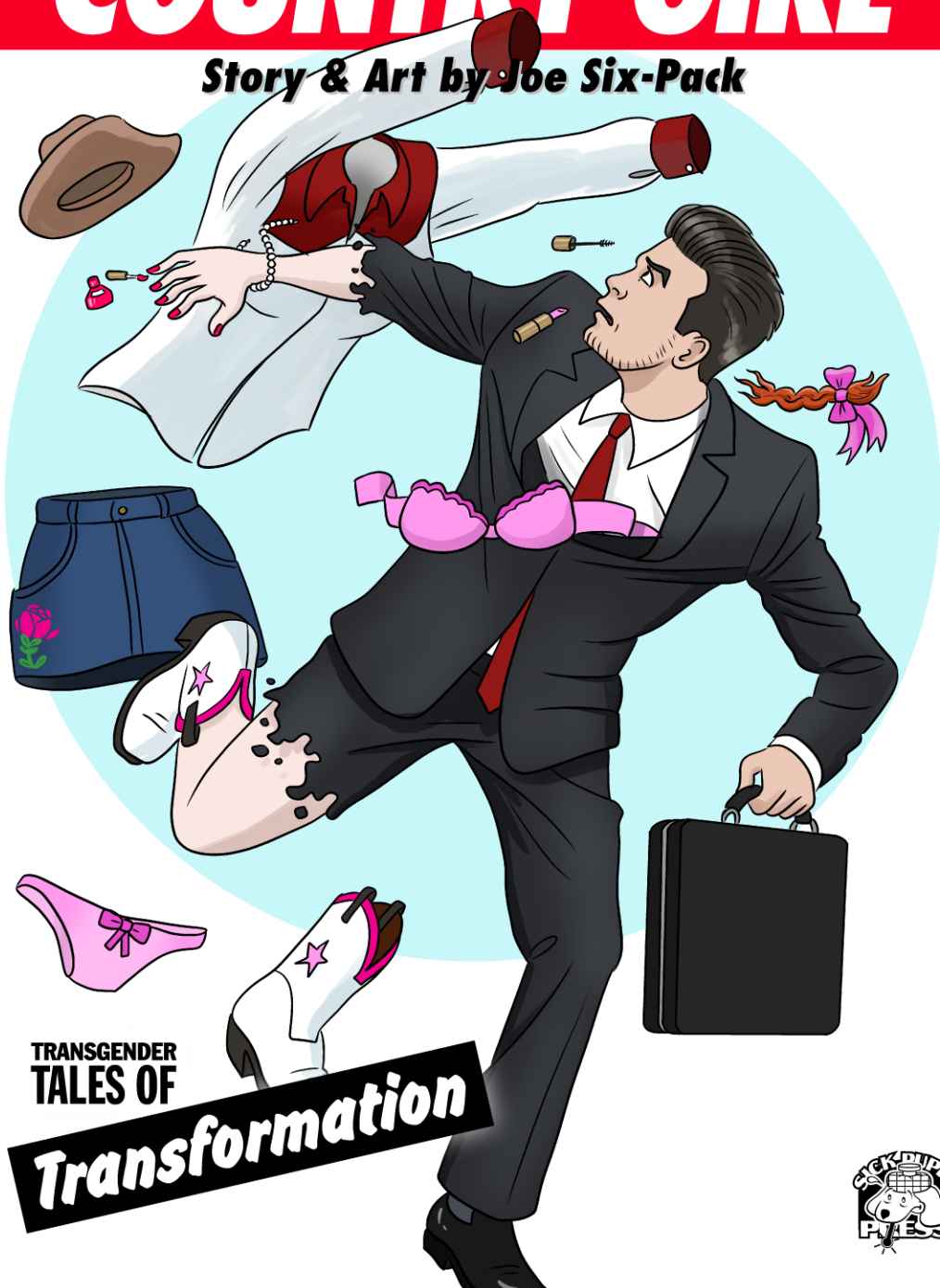


ADULTS ONLY

92 pages 34 illustrations

# CITY BOY, COUNTRY GIRL

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



TRANSGENDER  
TALES OF

**Transformation**



**J O E S I X P A C K**

***CITY BOY,  
COUNTRY  
GIRL***

**Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack  
A Tales of Transformation story**



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Printed in the United States of America.

[j6p@sixpacksite.com](mailto:j6p@sixpacksite.com)

[www.sixpacksite.com](http://www.sixpacksite.com)

## CITY BOY, COUNTRY GIRL

My husband Richard Rubenstein and I lived on the upper west side, where we had a nice brownstone we had been sub-leasing for a couple of years now. He was an investment banker, and I had my work in radio to keep me busy. Public radio, of course. I was twenty-four, and I had promised myself that it wouldn't be more than a year until I was ready to start a family. At least, by that time I would have accrued enough time for a few weeks of pregnancy leave, and we'd be well-off enough that I could hire a quality nanny. Even then, I had my doubts about that timetable. There was a very real possibility I was going to have to re-prioritize my whole lifestyle agenda.

Richard was also twenty-six, and we had been married for three years. I'm Janice Perlman, his wife. We both graduated college early, mostly because of our heavy prep-school credits, and partially because neither of us were comfortable in the adolescent setting of a university. Really, four years is a waste of everyone's time, especially if you're as intelligent as we were. I had grown up in Brookline, Mass. and he in Waterbury. So, although we lived in totally different worlds, we still had fallen in love.

We first met at the Hartsfield, Atlanta airport while our flights were being delayed. With our cell phones both needing a recharge, we talked for what seemed like hours. In fact, it *was* hours, if I remember correctly. Those incompetent idiots at the gate counter couldn't get a plane off the ground to save their lives. Worse than O'Hare.

As it turned out, Richard and I saw the world in much the same terms. We both saw life as the domain of predators. A shark tank, for lack of a better metaphor. If you weren't in on the kill, you were the one being killed. We were very practical people.

So we exchanged numbers before we caught our flights, and we'd text each other from time to time. One night, I found myself screwed over into attending a formal function, and I needed a date. Richard seemed like just the sort of man I could use — a confident, cocksure man. He was a fine prospect with a good future and wonderful table manners.

It sort of grew from there. After we had been exchanging favors by being each other's date at company gatherings and other formalities, it seemed like we were more than compatible. Plus, after we were married, consolidating our finances made health insurance, car leasing and leasing the brownstone much easier. Our combined contacts, references and referrals almost made it too easy. We had the house signed just hours after we returned from our working honeymoon. Plus, we got a prime location for parking as well.

No, it wasn't in a very upscale neighborhood, as we'd rather be closer to the financial district, but I have no doubt that we were well on our way.



Oh, and I would be remiss if I didn't impart his skills in keeping a woman happy. The man is unbridled animal energy in bed. Well-bred, a tenacious businessman and a passionate lover. I deserved nothing less.

It was just after the Holidays when Richard picked me up at the gym with a grin on his face that made me quiver. That was the kind of expression I'd seen of the faces of many powerful men when they were hot on the trail of a blockbuster deal. The look of a jungle predator who's trapped their prey.

"Are you going to tell me, or keep it to yourself, Richard?" I asked him, as he took us home.

“Babe, my number one prospect just came in,” he said, his eyes alive with energy. “I’ve been keeping this one under my shirt for years.”

“Really?” I asked, curious as I could be.

“There’s an oil field in Oklahoma that’s responsible for 2% of crude production in the US.”

“Oil? Is there still money in oil?”

“Billions, Janice,” he said, rubbing his hand up my stocking leg. I already knew we were going to fuck when we got home, and it would be amazing. He would not be denied in a mood like this.

“Darling, how did you get involved with oil?”

Richard was eager to talk. “It was my first client when I took this job. It involved a lot of research on oil rights in Texas and Oklahoma. I stumbled on this little nugget almost by accident.”

“Tell me more.” I was getting wet. The idea of being rich, oil rich, was turning me on. Richard was so smart.

“I’ve done the research, put in the hours. There’s a plot of land with oil rights that’s been in a small family’s hands for eighty years. It’s right on the edge of the oil field. If they drilled, they’d have claim to that field, and to any and all oil they could pump. What makes it sweeter is that I’m the only one who knows about it.”

“Sounds interesting. Why hasn’t this family, erm, drilled?”

“The husband died years ago, and was against drilling for some... Emotional reason. Who knows. Not important. His wife has held the property for the past fifteen years, and honors her husband’s wishes. But now... Now...”

“What? What’s happened?”

“The *best* thing. The daughter died.”

“That's horrible!”

“No, it’s wonderful!” Richard said. “The woman now lives by herself. She’s put the land up for sale. Lonely, I guess. Anyway, it’s the break I’ve been waiting for.”

“You’re going to buy it.” I assumed.

“No,” Richard replied. “Well, yes. I am going to buy it, one way or another. But she refuses to sell to strangers. She’s rejected my best offers. I’ve been in contact her for the past two years, trying to convince her, but as hard as I’ve tried, no luck.”

“You’ve *talked* to her?”

“Yes. Regularly. She has no idea who I am, though. She thinks I’m just someone who wants to start a family in the country. Imagine!”

“You devious man, you.” He really was a true, tenacious capitalist at heart. I knew it from the very start. He may not have been the largest, tallest or most rugged man, but he sniffed out money with the best of them.

“Yes, well, I have my moments.” Richard took a deep sigh. “But this isn't going to be easy for us, Janice.”

“For us?” I didn't immediately see the reason for concern. “And this affects *me* how?”

Richard's face was dead serious. “I made some promises...” He ran his fingers through his slicked-back hair. “I said I'd come if she ever needed help. She called me this afternoon and said she was feeling weak, maybe a little sick, and needed someone there. I have to go.”

“You can *not* be serious,” I said. “Just because she can't get out of bed, she expects you to completely put your life on hold for her? That's just selfish.”

“We've been talking for a long time, Babe. I said a lot of things. I've got to have this property. This is a fortune like you wouldn't believe. I made this promise to her, that if she ever needed my help, I'd be there. I'll do anything to get my hands on this land.”

“You'll go? Just like that? Where is this town?”

“Boregard. Boregard, Oklahoma.”

As if I knew where that was. “And for how long are you going to stay there?” I inquired. He knew I didn't like to be surprised like this.

“For however long it takes. It's money, Janice! Besides, she's probably falling apart. That woman lost her daughter, you know. They were close, so she'll be nearly incoherent. It'll take time to get that land.”

“You know, they'll never give you that promotion if you just up and leave the firm,” I reminded him. “Our income can't survive you being away for too long.”

“I don't think it would be more than a week or two. I've been working at the firm without complaint for almost two years. I should be able to spend a little bit of that credibility, and our savings and investments will carry us through.”

“So you're actually going to go?” I asked.

“I'll book a flight and leave tomorrow,” Richard replied.

“Well, I think it's unnecessary. You should just force the woman to sell. Use a good lawyer to make her leave.” I said. “My father used to do that for years. Should I give him a call?”

“No!” He grabbed my wrist, which shocked me a little. Normally he only did that in bed when he was feeling feisty. “No one can know about this! Anyone who gets involved is going to want a cut. This is mine!” Richard said, practical-

ly frantic. “You can’t tell anyone! No one is going to be involved but me and that woman. Mrs. Dilkins.”

“Well, I won’t stop you.” Besides, having Richard out of the area meant I could play the field. “Bring me back a souvenir. Maybe a butter churn or a banjo.”

“Thanks for understanding, darling,” Richard said, pecking me on the cheek. “Now I’ve got to get on the phone with my assistant to book the trip.” He turned away. “Call Drew,” he said to the car’s computer.



Richard and I traded messages for the next few days. I was worried that the house would feel empty without him, but I found more than a few ways to pass the time. I hadn’t had a chance to go to the clubs for what seemed like years. The things they can do now with drugs are amazing. Even the smallest little hit will send you into ecstasy for hours. It was delightful.



Before I realized it, four days passed without getting so much as a text from Richard. I had previously assumed he was busy doing whatever it was that he was doing, but now he was just being impolite. Finally, eight days after he had taken his flight out, he bothered to call. Eight days. Honestly.

“She’s not quite an invalid, but she needs a lot of attention,” Richard reported. “She’s been devastated by the loss of her daughter and...”

“I have your emails and your phone messages for you,” I said, interrupting his prattling. “Would you like me to forward them to you?” I said.

“I’ve had the town doctor out to look at her every day, and he tells me that he doesn’t really know when she’ll be ready to hold a conversation. She’s been impossible to reach.”

I was impatient with him. I didn’t call for updates on old whatever-her-name-was. “Do you want your messages or not?” I asked.

“Janice, I can’t deal with that now. I have to look after Mrs. Dilkins.”

“How much time could that possibly take? Surely you can just use a cell and your laptop...”

“Janice, babe, thank you very much, but seriously, I have all I can handle, keeping the house neat and tidy while attending to this woman.”

“Neat and tidy?” I asked.

“She throws a fit when the chores aren’t taken care of. She won’t sleep or eat her food if the house isn’t clean. I have to keep her happy. This is the opportunity of my lifetime! *Our* lifetime! We’re talking billions!”

He was obviously trying to oversell his point. Billions? I hardly think so. He still had a job that paid good money, and his messages were too important to ignore. When you’re an investment banker, keeping on top of your messages is the most vital part of your job. His clients were not going to be ignored for long. “You’re going to have to make some call backs soon, Richard. There are a lot of very important people...”

“Yes, yes. That can wait for now. Getting this land is priority number one,” he said, interrupting me rudely. “I’ll be back shortly anyway. This can’t go on any longer than the end of the month.”

“You’ve already been there too long,” I told him. “I can already hear a twang in your voice. Next thing you know, you’ll be wearing cowboy boots and line dancing.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Janice. Right now, this woman needs my help. If I do this, she’ll sell to me, no problem.”

“So when do I tell people you’ll be back home, Richard?” I asked, making sure he knew I was not pleased with his attitude.

“Tell them I’ll be home when Aunt Elizabeth is out of danger,” he replied, his tone less than cheerful.

He ended the call abruptly, and if I wasn’t very much mistaken he had called this woman “Aunt Elizabeth.” I was worried he was getting sentimental.



It was two weeks later that Richard finally called again. Yes, I know I could have called him, but what would that have proven?

“It’s two steps forward, one step back,” he said. “She’s really trying, but there’s only so much progress one can expect.”

I really didn’t care. “What does the old bag have, anyway?” I asked.

“Her name is Elizabeth. And she’s only about forty-three.” He paused for a moment, probably trying to make me feel bad.

“The doctor says she’s in severe shock and has acute depression. That’s led to fatigue, exhaustion and hallucination. It’s very serious.”

“Whatever,” I said. “Your office called yesterday, and wanted to know why they haven’t heard from you in three weeks. What exactly do I tell him?”

“You can tell Drew that I have to take care of this house by myself, which means I do the cleaning, the cooking and washing. I have to pick up groceries, I have to pick up the doctor in town and I have to do everything else to keep this place from falling into disrepair. You can tell him that.”



“You’re honestly doing the cooking?” I asked. “I can’t believe you just don’t hire someone for that.”

“There’s no one to hire around here, Janice. You have to do things here yourself. That’s the way it is outside the city.”

“It sounds *wonderful*.” I had had quite enough of this. “Why don’t you just tell this Elizabeth person you have a *life* you need to attend to, and you need to come back to New York. Promise her you’ll return in a week or something. Tell her anything. *I don’t care*. Just get back to work before something serious happens!”

“I know you mean well, Janice, but I can’t do that. First of all, Aunt Elizabeth is on medication, and isn’t very lucid most of the time. Second, I have no intention of leaving this poor woman to fend for herself – and possibly die – just so I can return some insignificant phone messages. Third, this is an opportunity I’ll never see again. I’m not screwing up this chance. I’ll do whatever that woman asks. All I need is to make a little sweet talk, show a little politeness and I’ll have this land and all the oil underneath it. A few lapsed messages are insignificant.”

“*Insignificant*? That’s not the Richard Rubenstein I married! You know as well as I that if you show any weakness or lapse in focus, there won’t be a job to return to!”

“That’s still not as important as her life,” he said.

“Don’t be so dramatic, Richard. She’s probably just lazy.”

“I am n... Aaa... not being...” He coughed, after his voice had cracked in the middle of the word ‘not.’ “I am not being dramatic.” His voice cracked again in the word ‘dramatic.’

“Well, I certainly hope that her fatigue isn’t catching,” I said. “Your voice sounds horrible.”

“Fatigue isn’t something you can catch.” Richard was still trying to clear his throat. “I think it’s just a minor infection. Just a cold. It’s mostly in my chest. It’s felt sore lately. The doctor is giving me some stuff for it.”

“You *sound* sick.”

“I was in bed for a few days. Nothing to worry about. I just needed some rest to fight off this infection or whatever it is. There’s been some morning nausea and cramping. I’ve lost a few pounds since I got here.”

“How much?”

“Eight, ten, twenty pounds, I think. I’m taking pills for that, too.”

“It’s your food. You’re probably cooking yourself sick.”

“Elizabeth cooked while I was bedridden.”

“Hold on, I thought you said she was too weak? You're the one who's supposed to be looking after *her*.”

“When the doctor confined me to bed, Elizabeth seemed recovered enough. She's relapsed since then.”

“Sounds like a setup, Richard. Are absolutely sure she's sick? Or maybe it's the country air that makes you ill.”

Don't be petty, Janice. If anything, the air has been good for my skin. It's never been clearer. My hair is thick and growing fast. Or it could be a side effect of these pills the doctor has me taking.”

“Tell him to double it, because it obviously isn't getting the job done. Is he an accredited physician? What's his specialty? Did you get a referral?”

“I'll call you later, Janice,” he said. I didn't know what had gotten into him. He was usually so much more practical than this.



It was late February before I heard from Richard again. I had already contacted a lawyer about divorce proceedings. Nothing final, of course, just covering my bases. Still, I wasn't going to give Richard many more chances.

“I'm sorry, wrong number,” I said when I heard the voice on the other end.

“Janice? It's me, Richard.”

I was startled by how odd he sounded. “Your voice sounds different.”

“Just some throat issues,” he said. “I need to speak softer to keep from aggravating it.”

“Yes, well, how dare you not take my calls! You *are* my husband, or have you forgotten?”

“I'm sorry, Janice. It's been hectic here. It's hard for me to focus on much more than Elizabeth. She's doing better, just so you know.”

“Oh, by all means, tell me more about it,” I said, sarcastically.

“She's showing some real improvement,” he said to me, not picking up on my tone of voice. Obviously, he knew that I wanted him back home. He knew he needed to give me good news, but I was suspicious that he was going to tell me only what he thought I wanted to hear. “She's able to walk around and her breathing is becoming less labored.”

“Well, thank God,” I responded, dripping even more scorn into my voice so he couldn't miss it. “Thank goodness your little pet project seems to be doing better. I can't say the same for you. The firm has put you on indefinite leave,” I told him. I expected anger from Richard.

“They did what they had to do,” was what I got.

“Maybe you don’t understand me, Richard. You don’t have a *job* anymore.”

“As far as I’m concerned, those guys at work can go... They can go... Soak their head.”

“Soak their head?” I yelled into the phone. “Soak their head? You just lost a job that paid you over a quarter of a million dollars a year, and all you can say is ‘soak their head?’”

“What do you want me to say, Janice? There’s nothing I can do about it.”

“Of *course* there are things you can do about it, Richard!” I told him. “You could simply...” I stopped myself from having the same argument with him again. “I just want you to tell me when you’re coming home. It’s that simple. I need you to set a date. Tell me what day you’ll return.”

He paused for a long, tense minute. “I... Just can’t do that, Janice.”

“For God sakes, Richard! How do you expect me to survive? This is a partnership! We’re team players! Forget about being there for your little obsession, what about being there for *me*?”

“For you?”

“I can’t do everything myself! I need to get money from the bank! I need your paycheck! I need you to make contacts through your network of clients! That’s where my best news and interviews come from! *You just can’t do this to me!*”

“Please,” he begged. “I know it’s been tough on you, and I’ll smooth everything over when I get back. But I’m so close to getting Aunt Elizabeth able to take care of herself and when she can, I can get this property. It won’t be long. I can’t leave now.”

Fine. Frankly, I was *this* close to giving up on him. But he knew so many people that made for great contacts. It made my job as a radio segment producer so easy. Not to mention his membership at the downtown club was in his name. It would take me years to get that membership on my own. I couldn’t just walk out on him.

“Are you over that cold?” I asked, trying to take the conversation back from the edge.

“I think so. The doctor has me taking a lot of medication, it’s made me kind of... Woozy at times. It’s not easy to think clearly.”

That’s an understatement. Maybe his strange behavior lately was due to being improperly medicated. It was something to think about.

“What kind of medication is it, Richard?”

“I asked Aunt Elizabeth, but she told me I didn’t need to worry about it.”

“And you trust her?”



“Of course I do. She’s been like a mother to me since I got here.”

“But you’re out of bed, right?”

“I do have to rest,” he said. “I get tired easily. I’m weaker after the weight loss.”

“That twenty pounds?”

“Oh no. I lost another few pounds.”

“Are you all right? Do you need me to send a qualified physician? I can have you airlifted and sent to the nearest medical center right away!” I could just imagine him lying in bed, sickly, checking his temperature. It served him right. A little health scare might drive him back home.

“It’s okay, Janice,” he replied. “I’m in good hands with Doctor Coonrod.”

“Coon rod? Coonrod? You can’t be serious.”

“No, really, Janice. I’m doing fine. Doctor Coonrod is very good. And he’s on top of everything. My weight loss is finally stopping and...”

I interrupted him. “How much weight have you lost?”

“I’m scared to check,” he said. “Last I weighed myself three days ago, I was down to 137.”

“137! That’s... No! You’ve got to be nothing but skin and bones! Richard, take a photo of yourself and send it to me. I need to see for myself.”

“Just a second,” he replied. A few seconds later, he came back on the line. “I just sent it to you.”

The picture was downloading slowly. “Richard, I don’t need to see a picture to know that this is serious!” I started to open up my contacts on my phone. “You need to see a real doctor, not some country bumpkin! Go drive to a hospital!”

“I don’t think Aunt Elizabeth would like that.”

“Do it anyway!”

“She doesn’t want me driving the car... She worries about me.”

“I’m calling the med-evac people right now.”

“Janice, I’m going to be fine. Aunt Elizabeth brings the doctor to see me every day. I trust him. He gave me a couple of shots. It helps with the swelling.”

“What swelling?” I asked. When would this stop? It was health problem after problem for Richard.

“Oh, I’ve puffed up in few places. Especially my chest.”

“Sounds like an allergic reaction. Are you allergic to anything?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Richard, you’re truly scaring me. This sounds like some sort of chamber of horrors.”

“It’s not as bad as it sounds. I can walk around in short trips, and Aunt Elizabeth is taking care of me.”

“She... *She’s* taking care of... *You?*”

“As soon as the doctor told me to rest, Aunt Elizabeth was able to look after me. I guess it’s that country spirit of pitching in when someone needs help.”

“It can’t be a coincidence, Richard. Don’t be a fool.”

“Well, I think having someone to care for has given her something to focus on,” Richard said. “Maybe it’s crazy, but I think me being in bed has helped her recovery.”

I just couldn’t seem to get Richard to break through. He didn’t seem even *lightly* suspicious of what was happening. Shots, weight loss, forced bed rest, a suddenly mobile invalid. This wasn’t right, and Richard wasn’t seeing it.

This whole episode was making me very nervous. I always get suspicious when a bunch of coincidences come together. Maybe that’s the journalist in me, but I really didn’t like the way this was shaping up. “I guess you’re just determined to do this.”

“So you don’t mind if I stay here until Aunt Elizabeth is up and about?”

“I mind. I mind a lot, Richard. You’re putting me in a very awkward position. I’m not your secretary, and I don’t like making excuses for you,” I said. “And frankly, this is pushing our marriage right to the limit. Right to the limit – do you *understand* me?”

“Yes, I know, Janice. And I’m sorry. Truly sorry.” It sounded like he was really trying to sound remorseful. Maybe trying too hard, if you know what I mean. “I’ll ask Aunt Elizabeth when it’ll okay for me to come home.”

I was getting tired of making these calls and getting the same answer. I was just going to have to let him come home on his own. If he didn’t want to come back, then I knew where I stood. “Richard, it’s up to you. You need to find your priorities. Okay?”

“I know, Janice. This is hard on all of us. And I’ll find some way to make it up to you.”

Now we were talking. I could use a new car. Maybe redecorate the living room? He was going to buy me quite a bit to make up for this.

“If you really are sick, promise me you’ll stay in bed and take it easy.”

“I will.”

“And just see if you can try and get a few more answers about what’s happening to you.”

He paused. “Okay. I’ll give it a try. I have to go. Aunt Elizabeth doesn’t like me using my phone too long.”

As soon as I hung up, the photo he took finished downloading. After just one quick look, I booked my flight for Oklahoma. It was time to meet “Aunt” Elizabeth.



The flight from New York went into DFW. From there, I took an express flight to Oklahoma City. The only transportation from Oklahoma City to

Boregard was by bus. Yes, by bus. Normally, I'd just get a driver for the day, but the trip was eight hours out to Boregard. I had my laptop with me for the trip, and I caught up on my budget planning for the quarter.

The truth was, I missed him. I needed him, to a certain extent. Maybe I had just gotten used to having him around, but I often found myself daydreaming about him, his warmth, his vitality. I wanted to feel his touch again. I guess this was what it felt like to be lonely. It must be horrible for *other* people.

A few hours later, houses appeared on the flat horizon, and eventually, a gas station. There was a small diner next to it. The bus pulled up, and the driver announced that we had arrived in Boregard. I lugged my carry-on bag with me, and stepped outside into dusty wind. The bus closed the door and was on its way – and I was by myself in the middle of nowhere.

The roller wheels on my bag were useless in the rough baked dirt, and I had to drag it along into the gas station.

“Kin I help you, Ma’am?” The gawky man behind the counter said. The patch on his oil-stained shirt said “Jeter” on it. I kid you not.

“Well, Jeter, I was wondering if you could call me a Uber.” I asked.

He looked at me like I was from another planet. I guess he had never seen a woman dressed as nicely as I was, in my business suit. “You’re not from ’round here, is you?” He said.

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m just here to see my husband. Maybe you can call me that car, if that’s not too much time out of your busy schedule?”

“Well, we ain’t got no taxi cabs here in Boregard,” he said, adjusting his oil-stained baseball cap. “But if you’re lookin’ to get somewhere, I can take you.”



“What will it cost me?” I asked.

He looked at me confused. “Cost you?” He asked. “I jus’ need to go pick up some fan belts from my pal Raymond out past there. I’ll drop you off on the way.”

“What’s in it for you?” I asked.

By that time, was already on his feet and headed out. Quickly, he was revving the engine in a rusted tow truck. “Git in if you’re a-comin’.”

I was let off at the beginning of a long dirt road, which this Jeter person assured me would end at Elizabeth Johnsons’s house. I could only barely make out what looked like an old victorian house in the far, far distance. “I can drive you all the way, if you needs me to,” he offered. I assured him I was quite capable of doing this for myself. It must have been three miles, but he turned out to be right. Damn heels nearly killed me.

The house was surprisingly large, and aging badly. The place was probably white originally, but now had collected dirt, blown into the slats of wood siding by the winds which never seemed to let up around here. The bottom few feet of the house appeared caked with dirt.

I rang the doorbell after struggling up the creaking old stairs with my bag. A woman answered the door. “Yes?” She said, a little scared. Then she gave a disconcerting smile. “Land sakes, you must be Janice!”

“Yes. I’m Janice Perlman. Richard’s wife. And you are?”

She hugged me warmly. “I’m Elizabeth!” She said. “Ritchie didn’t say you were coming, or else I’d have prepared a room for you. Come in, come in.”

As I stepped inside, I swear I could hear fiddle music. It was like they weren’t even aware of the clichés about life in the country. “I’m not staying,” I said, “and Richard didn’t know I was coming, either.”

I’m not sure what I was expecting, but Mrs. Dilkins was far younger than I had pictured. In my head, she was a bony old crone, I suppose. This woman was just slightly older than my own mother, although not nearly as well-kept.

“Well, you sure do know how to surprise someone,” she said. “I saw you coming down the road, and I was worried you were lost, or a car had broken down.”

“Where’s Richard?” I asked.

“He’ll be so glad to see you. He’s up in in his room. Did he tell you he’s had an awful time with a cold?”

“He mentioned it.” I took a skeptical look at Mrs. Dilkins. She seemed to be perfectly alert and healthy. It was hard to believe she had been sick at all.

I mean, it was *truly* hard to believe.

“Can I see him?” I asked.

“Oh!” She said, embarrassed. “Where are my manners? Why don’t you leave your bag here, and we’ll go upstairs and see him. The dear should be done by now.”

Done with what? “It’s quite a large house,” I said.

“I fear it’s too big for just me. It may be time to let it go.” Richard had read her correctly. She was ready to consider an offer. “What brings you out here so suddenly, if you don’t mind me asking?” She headed to a set of wooden stairs at the side of the room.

“Well, of course I’m just a concerned wife,” I said, playing on her simple-minded emotions. “And I do need my husband to take care of a few financial matters.”

I followed her up the stairs, and noticed how briskly she was moving. Some kind of miracle recovery, surely. She didn’t seem to be mentally incapacitated, either.

“New York must be such an interesting place to live. So many people.”

“Yes, yes,” I replied. “It’s everything you’ve read about, I’m sure. Although I’ll be leaving for Los Angeles soon.”

“You don’t say.”

“I’ll be working out of LA for a few months, temporarily. That’s why I couldn’t wait for Richard any longer.”

“Oh my, oh my. Such a busy life you city folk lead.”

It really was a huge house, with far too many rooms just for one woman to use. There was kind of a folksy charm to the place, if I was being honest. If this house had a little work, some paint and some decent landscaping, you might put it on Airbnb and get some big returns.

Except that we were out in the middle of nowhere. Come to think of it, we were out even further than that. Even the people who lived in the middle of nowhere hadn’t even heard of Boregard.



“Ritchie has had an awful time of it the past two weeks. He’s just been so difficult,” Mrs. Dilkins said.

“Yes, it must have been hard to take care of him while he was sick.”

“Well, yes, it was a trial, but that’s not what I’m talking about, dear. It’s his ornery disposition that’s been a problem.”

I couldn’t believe she had actually just used the word ‘ornery.’ “He’s been difficult?”

“I suppose you know, being his wife and all, but Richard can be downright stubborn sometimes.”

Like when he’s trying to take care of some random lady in Dumbfuck, Oklahoma? “Yes, he certainly can be that way at times. I hope he hasn’t been too much to handle.”

“Oh, he was fidgety and fussy when Doc Coonrod ordered him to get some bed rest, believe me.” Her cross face then brightened. “He just has trouble accepting his situation, and what this illness has done to him. He can’t look after his own affairs anymore, and needs a firm hand to guide him. It’s almost like raising a child at times.”

We passed by a brightly colored pink room, with gauzy curtains, lacy bedspreads and a slight smell of sweet perfume coming from it. I looked in the open door and saw a wreath of black flowers positioned inside. A picture of a buck-toothed, red-haired, freckle-faced girl rested in the middle of it. She was pretty, in a common kind of way.

“That was my daughter’s room,” Mrs. Dilkins said. “Daisy Mae. God rest her soul.”

That was what Richard had said, that this woman had lost her daughter. He mentioned that they were very close, and that was the main reason as to why she was selling. I also noticed that the dyed-black flowers were fresh. She was supposed to have died at least a couple of months ago, wasn’t she? Had Mrs. Dilkins kept buying fresh wreaths for her daughter? Creepy.

Mrs. Dilkins knocked gently on the third door she



came to. “Ritchie dear, are you awake? Oh, I have such a surprise for you!” She opened the door and as she did, that screeching fiddle music became much louder.

I really didn’t have time for this. That bus was due to come back through here soon, and I had to get back to New York and run the production meeting on Monday morning. I only had an hour or two to make my connections to get to the airport by midnight. At the very least, I needed to get his signature on a small pile of documents, get his PIN number for the debit card and the bank accounts. I had bills to pay.

The door creaked wide open. I strained to see if I could see Richard, but Mrs. Dilkins was blocking me. “Wait until you see who came to see you, dearest,” she teased.

Finally, I could see Richard, and he could see me. It was then that I could see that my husband — my strong, virile husband — was standing at a music lectern, in a ruffled, cotton nightgown. He had been the one playing the fiddle.

He raised his hand to his mouth in shock. “Janice!” He yelped.

“Hello... Um, Richard,” I said. The sight of him had taken my breath away. Not only was he dressed in women’s clothing, but he was quickly discarding the fiddle he had just been playing. *My* Richard? Playing the fiddle? He had always scoffed at anything that wasn’t cool Jazz.

His hair had grown a little, hanging from the back of his head. His body, neck and arms looked bony thin. If I hadn’t been told that it was my husband, I might not have recognized him.

“Don’t look at me!” He cried. Childishly, he ran to the nearby bed and flung the covers over his head so I couldn’t see him.

Mrs. Dilkins was angry. “Ritchie!” She yelled. “Don’t be a nuisance! Janice has traveled all the way from New York City to see you, and you will behave!”

The covers stayed up.

“Ritchie! *I said behave!*” Mrs. Dilkins commanded. “He has been acting so immaturely lately,” she said to me.

Slowly, the covers dropped, but Richard turned his face away, so he didn’t have to look at me. “I don’t want to talk to her,” he said. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing, or believe this petulant behavior. This was a man who could stare down a boardroom of a Fortune 500 Company and win every time. He ate billion-dollar hedge fund managers for lunch. Now he couldn’t look me in the eye, and I could see him trembling.

“Ritchie, you will talk to Janice or I’ll put you over my knee and give your backside a good spanking!” She threatened.



The look on Richard's face and the flinch in his body seemed to tell me that it wouldn't have been the first spanking he had received. How was that even possible? Richard would never allow such a thing. Although in his skin-and-bone state, he probably wouldn't be strong enough to fight her.

"Say hello, Ritchie. Say hello to Mrs. Perlman," Mrs. Dilkins told him. "Say hello, or no tapioca pudding for desert."

Reluctantly, Richard looked in my direction. "Hello," he said, clearly embarrassed. "Hello... Mrs. Perlman."

"Richard," I replied. I was still in shock. I turned to Mrs. Dilkins for an answer, fearing Richard didn't want to talk. "Why is he dressed..."

“Oh, the nightgown,” she said, smiling mischievously. “I simply don’t have any proper bedclothes for a man. I only have nightgowns. As you might reckon, living out here with just my daughter... I mean, by myself... I don’t have much in terms of clothing for men.”

It made sense. She was a lonely spinster. That didn’t explain *everything*, though.

The next thing I was worried about was how Richard felt. Did he feel good enough to get on a bus and a flight, if I wanted to rescue him? He looked awful. Oh, he was clean and groomed, but he was rakishly thin and frail, just like he had been in his photo. “Richard? Do you feel all right? You look like hell.”

With his eyes cast down, he looked up at me and then down in his lap again. “I’m okay.”

I really just needed to talk to him. “Um... Mrs. Dilkins, could you give us...”

“Of course. You probably have so much to talk about,” she said, smiling. “Will you be staying for dinner?” She quickly added on her way out.

What, and miss that delightful pudding? What was the main course? Road kill? “I’ll have to be on my way,” I said.

“I can make more, it’s really no trouble.”

“I have a bus to catch,” I explained.

“Well, if you change your mind, let me know,” she said before shutting the door.

I turned slowly to Richard. I looked him up and down. “I don’t even know where to start,” I said.

Richard shook his head. “I’m sorry, Janice. I just... I just really didn’t want anyone to see me like this... Before I was back to health.”

I did not like his explanation. “You could have simply asked me to send you some decent clothes, Richard. Does Amazon not deliver?”

“I... I guess I... I didn’t want to refuse her hospitality. She would have been crushed if I didn’t accept her nightgown.”

I gave him a longer, more careful examination. He was in his bare feet, and his toenails were gleaming in the light, as if they had a clear coat of polish. What I could see of his legs were shaved clean and smooth.

I had many questions, one of which was the music he had been playing. “The fiddle? The fucking fiddle? What the hell happened to you, Richard?” He was a mess. In this state, he wouldn’t have been able to attend even the most casual of dinner parties. I wasn’t sure about his behavior, either. I leaned in close to him, to make sure no one listening in could hear us. “What has that woman done to you?”

He nodded. “It’s been a tough few weeks.”

"It's been *two months*, Richard," I told him.

"Glory be. That long?" He answered. *Glory be?*

"Your voice, it sounds awful." His tone was more breath than voice, and what voice he was able to muster had a distressing high-range sound to it. "You sound like a teenager."

"It comes and goes," he said. "More coming than going, lately. The doctor said it will settle, in time."

Then something occurred to me. "That's not Mrs. Dilkins's nightgown," I said. "That's a girl's nightgown. Are you wearing her *dead daughter's* nightgown?"

"I didn't have any choice," he said. "Aunty Elizabeth is punishing me."

"Punishing you? You let her treat you like this? Richard, I'm appalled!"

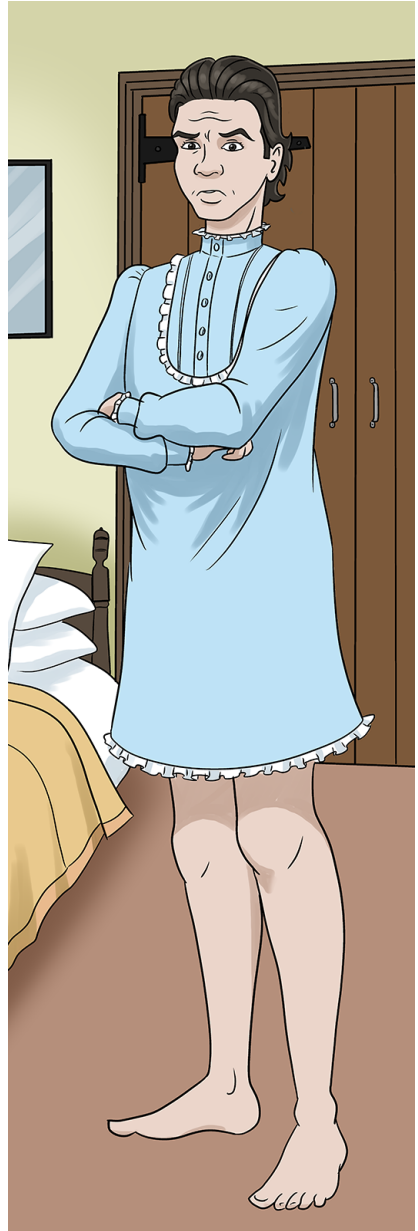
"I... I... I just wanted to..." he said. "I've been working so hard for so long to get this property. The money — I have to get the money. It's all I've ever wanted! I can't risk it by upsetting Aunty."

"She's not your aunt, Richard! Stop calling her that!" I said. "Now, are you coming home with me or not?"

My husband didn't take very long to respond. "Just when I'm getting her to trust me? Not a chance, Janice!" He lowered his voice. "I know it looks strange, but do you think I can't take a little bit of embarrassment in exchange for the billions I can get from this deal?"

I had figured as much. "Have it your way." I got the papers I needed him to sign out of my bag. "If you're going to stay, there's a lot of things I need you to take care of, babe. There's bills, we have a new lease to be signed for the next year..." I spread the papers out before him. "What is she punishing you for?" I asked, unable to resist.

"Talking back," Richard said.



I just had to keep reminding myself he was doing this for money. Lots and lots of money. He was a grown man, who made adult decisions, and he was in control. That was the Richard Rubenstein I knew. He would come out on top. He always did.

“I need to know our PIN number,” I asked. “Write that down too.” I took away the yellow pencil he had grabbed. “In pen,” I told him.

“It sure does pile up, doesn’t it?” He said as I handed him a ballpoint.

“Yes, Richard. It does. Especially when you’re not even thinking about it.”

“I’ve been thinking about it!” He objected. “I’ve been thinking about you all the time!”

“Well, I can’t cash a check made out to ‘Good Thoughts’ can I?”

He pursed his lips, and squinted his eyes. Was he was getting emotional? My Richard? Unthinkable. Besides, I hate emotional.

“Never mind, I just need the papers signed.” I pointed to the pen in his hand.

He signed the half-dozen papers he needed to. I didn’t even recognize his signature, it was so labored. Once he was done, I quickly collected the papers and put them away. “Now, since you’re obviously not in good health, I suppose it’s best for you to recover here. When you’re ready to come home, just let me know and I’ll take care of the arrangements.” I bent over so I could look him in the eyes. “I’m trusting that you’ll know when you’re ready to leave, and not let that lonely woman or that crazy doctor talk you into staying, all right?”

“I... I’ll do that. I promise,” he said.

I decided he needed a little reminder of what he was missing, and I kissed him. Hard. He was hesitant, almost recoiling when my lips met his, but he relaxed quickly and let me do the work. I ran my fingers through his unusually soft, longish hair. It reminded me of the college kid I had slept with last weekend. Richard’s face was soft where I usually felt the grip of stubble on his cheeks.

Mrs. Dilkins interrupted us by entering the room. Perfect timing. Perfect if you were listening through the door and trying to keep us from being intimate. “Is everything okay in here?” She asked. “I hope I’m not interrupting.”

“Of course you’re not interrupting,” I said, coating my voice in restrained anger. I stood up and dusted off my skirt. “So, ‘Aunt’ Elizabeth. Tell me about the doctor you have helping my Richard. What was his name? Crumberman?”

“Doctor Coonrod. He’s an old friend. He’s treated the last three generations of Fletchers. Old Gene Coonrod’s the best doctor this side of the Mackford ridge.”

“And what does he say is wrong with Richard?” I asked.

Mrs. Dilkins looked at Richard, who was looking back at her with anticipation. He wanted to hear the answer as much as I did, it seemed.

The woman gently touched me on the arm and guided me towards the door. "We'll be right back, Ritchie. I have to talk to Janice now," she said, sweetly. "Why don't you read one of your books? I think you're almost finished with 'The Black Stallion.'"

Richard wanted to hear the discussion. "But I..."

"Hush!" Mrs. Dilkins said, cutting him off. "I won't hesitate to punish you again! Read your book and we'll be back in a moment."

Richard looked like he wanted to say something, but he held back. Dejectedly, he pulled a beaten old cloth-bound library book from his bedside table and opened it to the bookmark. He watched us leave, rather than read it, though.

Once we were outside, Elizabeth still kept her voice low. "I didn't want to say anything in front of little Ritchie, but the doctor thinks it could be some sort of problem with his pitrararay gland." She reconsidered what she had just said with a funny, concentrated expression on her face. "Pit-oo-itary? I think that's what it's called. It regulates the hormones?"

I nodded. "That's right. The pituitary gland."

"He said that it was a correctible problem, and a combination of drugs and rest will have it fixed lickety split."

Well, I had to admit, this *did* sound serious. Country doctor or not, this was a significant condition. "Will he be in bed much longer?" I asked.

"Well, all of us are optimistic, but he's going to need someone to look after him for a while. Doc Coonrod said it could be just a few weeks, but he's seen this sort of thing take several months. Sometimes a year."

This *was* serious. "Well, what if it *does* take months?"

"Whatever my little Ritchie needs. He was so kind to me looking after me. It was nice to have someone in the house after Daisy Mae's passing."

Then it was settled. I could leave him here and not have any major interruptions in my life. "If you ever need anything. Money. Just give me a call," I said. "I'll be happy to help out with the expenses."

"How very generous of you to share the burden like that, dearie. But I think I'll be able to handle it. I live on a sizable land trust that takes care of everything I need." She patted me on the shoulder. "I know you'll miss Ritchie, but this time will pass by so quickly. You'll see."

"Yes. Yes." Speaking of time, I had to check my watch. I needed to think about meeting that bus. "Oh, look at that. I'm going to have to run soon."

“I’ll be happy to drive you out to the gas station so you can meet the bus. It’s due at five seventeen. It gives us a few more minutes. Maybe you’d like to say goodbye to Ritchie?”

“Do you have a phone?” I asked. I really needed to make some quick calls, and my cell had no reception and was almost dead. “I need to touch base with my people back in New York. Let them know what my schedule is.”

“It’s downstairs,” Elizabeth said. “I’ll show you.”

I pulled out my phone. “Can I recharge this?”

“Anything you need.”

I plugged it into the wall and found some phone numbers. The reception was almost non-existent out here, and wound up using Elizabeth’s land line. I made the calls I needed to make, and confirmed the times of the meeting I need to attend tomorrow. Our lead reporter had been assigned to a story by the network, and we’d have to have our b-team fill in. We had a solid fifty minutes or so, but we needed another two hours worth of material. I told them what to do, mostly to fill the space with interviews. By the time I had taken care of that, it was time to leave.

“We only have a minute before we need to go,” Elizabeth said, putting on a pair of white gloves. For driving? How quaint.

“I’m ready,” I said.

“Do you want to say goodbye to Ritchie?” She asked.

I was so short on time. I quickly jogged up the stairs and stuck my head in the room. He was still in bed, and had been reading that book. He was totally engrossed in it, mouthing the words as he was reading.

“Ritchie?” I said. “I mean, Richard?”

He turned his head and set the book down. “Janice. Is everything okay?”

“Everything’s fine. But I have to run and catch the bus. Are you going to be okay here with ‘Aunty’ Elizabeth?” I said. “I’m going to be preparing no to go to Los Angeles for a while, for work. That’ll give you plenty of time to reel this pigeon in and get her to sell. Or plenty of time to learn the fiddle.”

“It was Daisy Mae’s hobby. Aunty said I might like it.”

“Do you?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Janice. I’d burn that awful thing if I could. You have to go right now?”

“Elizabeth’s warming up the car.”

“That wasn’t a lot of time.”

“I have meetings,” I said. “I’ll come back out and we’ll have a little more time to spend together. I promise.”

“I’m sorry you had to see me like this,” he said.

“Don’t worry about it,” I reassured him. “After all, we’re married. I’ll send you some of your clothes. Just remind me.”

“All right,” he replied. “Oh, I wanted to give you this. I made it.” He looked for something at his bedside. It was a small swatch of fabric. “Home Sweet Home” was stitched on it with a flowery detail around the edge.

“You’re *sewing*?” I asked, barely disguising my shock.

“It’s needlepoint. And it helps pass the time. Auntie is showing me how.”

I took the fabric and folded it up and stuffed it in my pocket. “I’m sure it’s very nice. Now I want you to be nice to Elizabeth, but please be careful. I’m not sure I entirely trust her or the Doctor.”

“I can’t say I haven’t been suspicious,” he said, “so I’ll be careful.”

“Are you being nice to Mrs. Perlman, dear?” Mrs. Dilkins said as she entered the room. “I don’t want her to leave thinking my little Richie is rude.”

“Yes. Ma’am,” Richard replied.

She turned to me. “I’ll be in the car. We’ll need to get a move-on.”

“I’ll be right there,” I said.

She turned to Richard again. “And what do you say when someone’s come all this way to see you?”

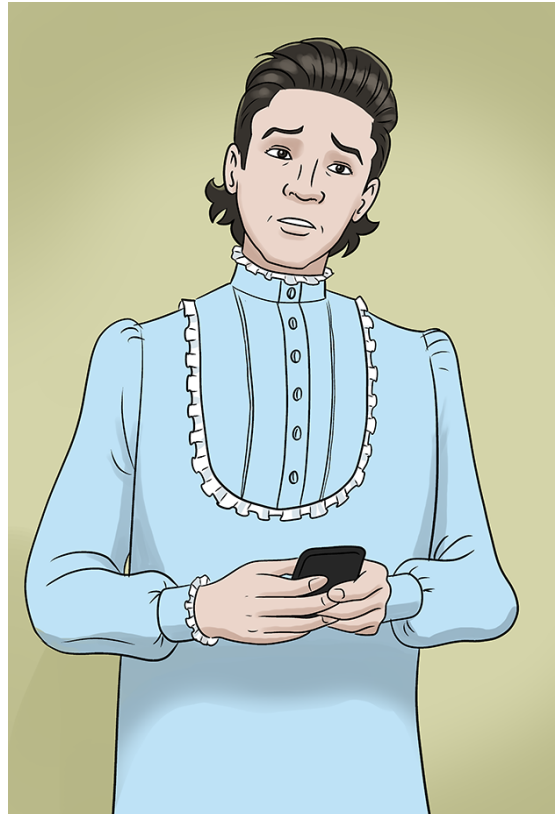
“Thank you Ma’am,” Richard said to me.

“Very good,” she said, and then left.

“What was that all about?” I said, laughing. “Yes Ma’am, ‘no Ma’am?’”

“What?” Richard said, staring at me blankly. He didn’t seem to think there was a problem. I just decided to move on.

“I really do have to run,” I said, as I hugged him. As I did, my head was behind him, and I glimpsed down where he was sitting on the bed. The nightgown had ridden up, and I was sure I could see a pair of pink



panties on his butt. With my head beginning to swim with crazy and bizarre images of what Richard was really going through, I finally had enough. I just had to get out of this place and back to civilization.

“Oh, Aunty wanted me to give you my phone. It’s no good out here anyway. No towers.” Richard fetched his trusty phone, which I had never seen him get farther than three feet away from in my life, and handed it over to me. It almost looked like he was getting emotional again, like he was sacrificing his beloved pet.

This may have distressed me more than him. He’d never give up his phone willingly. He once punched a man in the street who had tried to steal it. He had lost it once in an Uber and had told the police he had been sexually molested by the driver to force them to track the car down. “Okay... I have to go now.” I kissed him on the cheek. “Now, be good.” I said. “Get her to sell,” I added in a low whisper.

Richard’s expression was one of concern — and maybe some fear? “Oh... Okay.” He said, less sure than I ever remember my husband being.

I hated to leave him like that, but there just wasn’t time. To make my point, Elizabeth’s car honked outside.

“Bye-bye, Babe,” I said, leaving the room. “I’ll call you when I get back to my house. I mean, *our* house.”

“Bye,” he said. He did sound sad. He’d get over it quickly, though. I had other things to worry about. Richard’s strange illness would have to resolve itself for the time being.



Before I knew it, six weeks had passed. I had been insanely busy at work, preparing my replacement before I was off the to west coast. Total moron. They’ll sink with that idiot in charge. It’s not my problem, though. I was looking forward more than ever to my time in the Los Angeles studio, putting together a new morning show. I was very ready to put my New York job behind me. By the time I came back, I’d have a promotion and be the returning hero, saving them from this pinhead who I was leaving them with.

I didn't miss Richard, frankly. I was getting more work done than ever before. We had never been a particularly clingy couple, and were very independent, but eliminating the brief periods of time we spent together doing "couple" things made me even more productive. I'd have to readjust when he came home, but for now, I was loving all the extra time I had.

Six weeks was probably too long to go without seeing my husband, so I had set up a video call to check in on him. I didn't expect that the connection

would be very good, but I did want to see his face and how he was doing with his hormonal problem.

“Janice!” Elizabeth said as she saw me. I had been expecting Richard to answer my call. “Ritchie told me you were calling sometime today. I’m so glad to see you again. And I’m sure little Ritchie will be overjoyed. You look well.”

“Thank you,” I said, skeptical of her cordial greeting. “Why do you call him ‘Little Ritchie?’” I asked. He was five-foot-six, and quite defensive about it. His temper would boil over if anyone dare called him ‘little.’

“It’s a term of endearment, Janice. I want him to feel like one of the family.”

“Where is Richard?”

“He’s been making wonderful strides in his recovery. He’s up all day long now, and finally starting to put a little meat on his bones. He still has to take his shots and his pills, but Doc Coonrod tells me it’s just a matter of time before things work themselves out.” She turned to the kitchen. “Ritchie, Janice is here, come say hello!”

She turned back to the camera with a broad smile. “I can’t imagine what it must be like to live and work in New York City. It must be an adventure every day.”

“It’s a busy place all right,” I told her. “But I’ve always thought that it’s the most important place in the world, and if I’m going to live somewhere, I have to live in the most important place in the world. Everything you could possibly imagine is in this city. I love it. I’m going to miss it when I’m working in LA.”

“How wonderful.” Her attention returned to the kitchen. “Ritchie! Where are you? Janice is here to see you!” She was immediately frustrated. “Sakes alive, I have to look after little Ritchie every moment.” She left the room. “I’ll be right back.”

Shortly after she left, I could hear some fussing off-screen. Elizabeth’s voice was loud and harsh. The second voice was soft and hard to hear.

“Yes you will!” I could hear Elizabeth shouting. “You’ll go out there this second!” There was another pause. “Right this very second!” Another pause. “Well, she’s going to see you sooner or later! Everyone will! You’d better get used to it!”

“Please, please!” I heard. It was a girl’s voice. “Please don’t make me!” I felt a shot of fear go through me as I realized that I wasn’t hearing a stranger’s voice. I had to have been hearing Richard’s voice.

“Now!” Elizabeth bellowed.

Without much delay, I could see the door to the kitchen as it slowly opened. Behind it, what used to be my husband appeared.

I say what ‘used to be’ my husband, because this person didn’t bear much of a resemblance to my Richard. My Richard was a proud, sharply dressed and

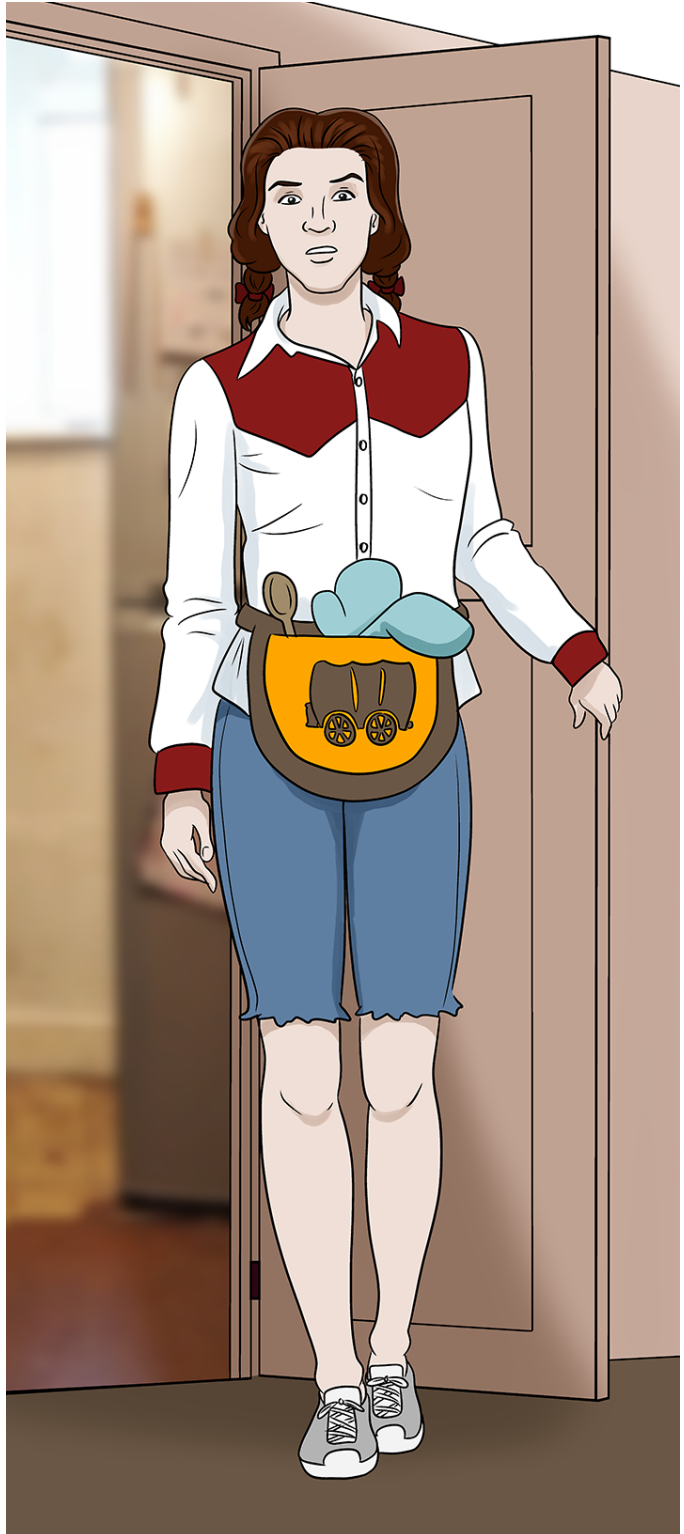
handsome man who looked you in the eye and told you what he thought. The person who emerged from the kitchen was a faded memory of that man.

Richard was dressed in cutoff denim shorts and a western dress shirt with red panels on the top half. Over that, he wore a small apron that had a spatula and two oven mitts tucked into it. His legs were smooth, hairless and perfectly flawless. His hair, which now looked less black and slightly copper-toned, was tied into two pigtails fastened with ribbons that rested just above his shoulders.

“What did I tell you about smiling, honey?” She asked.

“A smile is a ray of sun into everyone’s life,” Richard said, in a soft, lilting voice I could barely hear.

“And you wouldn’t want to block out the sun, would you?”



Richard immediately painted a smile on his face.

“Hello, Ma’am,” he said to me.

The blood rushed from my head for a moment, causing me to forget what I was doing, just for an instant. This was Richard? I could hardly believe it. My husband was the man I had shown with pride to the world. I’d never be seen with this... This sissified version of that man.

“Hello, Richard,” I said coldly. “I see you’re on your feet.”

“Yes Ma’am,” he said, as he dipped his head. I think he gave a slight curtsey, but I wasn’t sure.

“Are you wearing makeup?” I asked.

“Little Ritchie’s complexion has gotten quite pale due to his illness,” Elizabeth said, coming in to view. “He wanted to look a little less sickly, so I’ve been showing him how to add some color to his skin with makeup.” She stood behind Richard, which made him look small and slight by comparison.

“What about his legs? Why are they shaved?”

“We had a little problem in the shower. Little Ritchie mistook my Nair for body soap. We had a good laugh over that.”

“I see.” From Richard’s face, I don’t think he was sharing in the humor of the situation.

“What about his hair?”

“The town barber is going through a bit of a spell, I’m afraid. He hasn’t been cutting hair since February,” Mrs. Dilkins said. “I told Ritchie he could either have me cut it — and my arthritis gives me some shaky hands — or we’d have to make it more manageable. Pigtails seemed practical.”

“Practical?” I said.

That woman was spewing pure nonsense. I held back on eviscerating the bitch, because I wanted to get a moment to talk with Richard — alone.

“And his color?”

“His hair is a lovely copper once all that gunk gets washed out. It really brings his face alive,” she said, finding a seat on a nearby chair. “Oh, show Janice what you made!” Mrs. Dilkins said to my husband.

Richard looked uncertain. “I... I’m not sure...”

“Don’t be shy!” She said. “Get a move on!”

He hung his head and left through the kitchen door again.

With him gone, I had some urgent questions. “Elizabeth, why is my husband dressed like that?” I said, angrily. “I asked you to look after him, not turn him into some freak.”

“Hush, now,” Mrs. Dilkins said, without even batting an eyelash. “Haven’t you noticed how slender he’s become? The only clothes I have that will fit him are some old things I had around the house.”

“I sent him some of his things to wear.” I pointed out.

“They just drape all over him. He’s just not comfortable in them. Besides, his skin is so sensitive right now, he’s likely to break out in a rash from those machine-washed clothes.”

“He’s my husband, Mrs. Dilkins, and he’s a fully-grown man. You’re just being cruel to him. This is not doing him any good. You’re ruining him! He’ll never be confident of himself if you’re putting him in girls clothes!”

“I’m *building* his confidence *back* up. The poor dear was near suicidal when he first saw how much weight he had lost and how weak he was feeling.” She turned toward the kitchen. “Do you need me to come in there and help you, Ritchie?” She yelled, more as a threat than as an offer.

“No Ma’am!” Richard called back, in a feeble voice.

I wanted to lurch through the screen and strangle her. I wasn’t used to losing arguments. “You could cut his hair short, give him a pair of pants and let him get involved in his work again. That would help him feel like himself again. It would give him the confidence he needs.”

“Oh,” She said, “that may work for a busybody like you, dear. But little Ritchie is a bit more delicate than that. He needs that feminine touch to soothe him back to health.”

I bristled at that insult. Was she insinuating I wasn’t feminine? Yes, I wore my hair in a tight ponytail, worked hard and wore slacks most of the time, but that didn’t mean I was any less of a woman, God damn it. Who did she think she was?

Before I could make any more points with the old woman, the kitchen door opened and Richard returned, with a tray. An ornately embellished golden brown pie rested on it.

“Is that a pie?” I asked.

“Pecan,” Mrs. Dilkins said. “Isn’t that right, little Ritchie?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

He held it closer to the camera and I could see that the decoration in the crust must have taken an hour at least. I’d never known Richard to have the patience for that kind of thing. I also noticed his fingernails were polished to a shine as he handled the tray.

They seemed to be waiting for me to comment. “It looks very nice,” I said.



“With his new cooking skills, along with his housekeeping skills he developed while taking care of me, little Ritchie is becoming quite self-sufficient! I’m so proud of him.”

It almost sounded like she was boasting about how well she was raising a child. “I’m sure he appreciates it,” I responded.

“Oh,” Mrs. Johnson said. “Mrs. Perlman was asking if your clothing bothered you, Ritchie. Do they?”

“No, they’re the only clothes that fit me,” Ritchie answered in what sounded to my ears like a rehearsed statement. “I don’t want to be a burden.”

Mrs. Johnson looked very satisfied with his answer. “And your hair has just gotten so long that braiding it just makes sense, isn’t that right?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he responded, unenthusiastically.

This woman was full of it. She thought she was so clever in always having an answer for why she was torturing Richard, but I knew her game. She was trying to get more money. Yes, she had probably figured out his scheme, and was

now going to push him as far as he would go, until he finally surrendered and paid her price.

I decided that rather than be confrontational with Mrs. Johnson, I should just let this go for now. Richard may have been acting submissive in her presence, but my Richard was never helpless.

“Anyway,” Mrs. Johnson said, putting her hands on Richard’s shoulders, “we do have to get back in the kitchen. I’m teaching Ritchie how to make my famous Dilkins Family cornbread.”

“Richard,” I said. “I called to talk to you.”

My husband looked nervous. “Aunty needs help in the kitchen,” he said. “I need to go.”

I was so disappointed in Richard. I expected at least some attempt to reassert himself.

“I’ll call you when I’m settled in in LA,” I said.

“Oh, okay,” Richard replied. “Bye, then.”

It was an abrupt end to the conversation. I welcomed it, though. My nerves were on edge, and I was exhausted. Dealing with Richard was becoming more and more taxing on me.

I had already begun to put my laptop aside when I heard the incoming call chime. It was from Richard. I nearly didn’t answer it, because I wasn’t sure how much more I could take, and if it was that woman calling me back, I didn’t have any desire to talk to her for any length of time.

I picked up the call anyway. The screen came up with Richard’s face. “Janice?” He asked with urgency.

“Yes, Richard? What’s wrong?”

“She went to take a nap,” he said, quietly. He looked over both shoulders before continuing. “I had to talk to you without her around. That woman isn’t what you think. she’s out of her mind.”

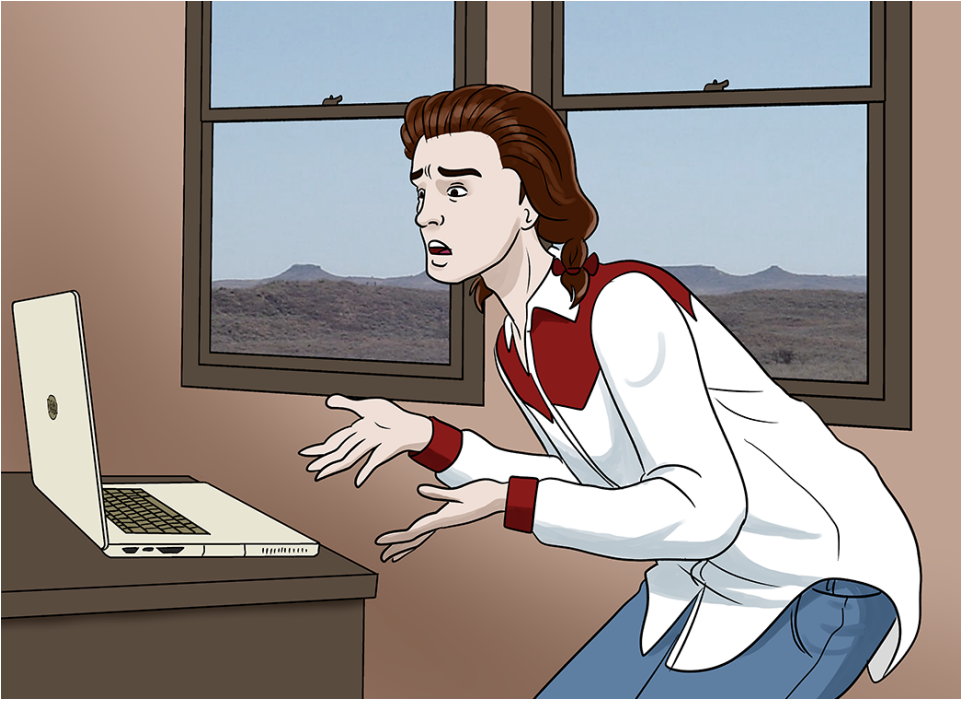
“Well, she certainly is rude, I’ll say that.”

“No, I mean she’s not right in the head. Just about everything she told you was a lie. A total fabrication.”

“Well, I know that, Richard, I’m not an idiot.”

“You don’t even know how far she’s gone. That woman is treating me like her dead daughter!” Richard said. I was used to this kind of energy and drive from my husband. He was more focused than I had seen him since this started.

“I don’t know how you live with such a rude person,” I said. “She treats me like I’m a second-class citizen. As if! She’s the one dressing in dollar-store dresses and living in dilapidated shack...”



“Please, Janice!” Richard interrupted. “She won’t leave us alone for very long! You have to listen!” He begged.

He knew I wasn’t very pleased with him. In fact, disgusted was the word I’d use. “How could you let her do this to you?”

“Janice, let me talk!” He said, looking as scared as I’d ever seen him. “I know this is all insane, but you don’t know the whole story!”

“Well? I’m waiting.”

“All that stuff she’s telling you is a lie! I haven’t agreed to any of this! She’s forcing me!”

“Everything?” I said. “It looks like you’re just letting her have her way with you.”

“Yes! She uses threats of drugs and taking me out in public to control me! I know it sounds nuts, but I think she’s trying to really make me into a...”

“Into?”

“She’s trying to make me act like I’m a girl. A young girl,” he said. “And she’s starting to make me look like one, too.”

“Making you *look* like one? What do you mean?”

“Look at my skin!” He held his arm out for examination. “Look, it’s soft and smooth. Somehow, my skin has been changed!”

“How?”

“The doctor is always giving me shots and pills. He won’t tell me what they are. I think M... Auntie is telling him to give me things that change me.”

“You’ve almost called her something else several times, Richard. What does she want you to call her?”

“M... Momma,” he said. “She makes me call her Momma. I’ve been doing it for weeks, and she told me to call her Auntie only when you’re around.”

Amazing. “What *else* happens when I’m not around?”

“She always has me in dresses. And what she told you about the clothes you sent isn’t true. She took them out back and burned them when they got here. I wear nothing but dresses from the dead girl’s closet and she has me learning to play her fucking fiddle!”

“You think she’s trying to pretend you’re her daughter?”

“Pretend?” Richard sniped. “She’s trying to make me into her.”

“Don’t exaggerate, Richard. You’ve been sick, you know.”

“I don’t think I was ever sick, Janice. I think they did this to me. Intentionally.”

“Did what?”

“My weight loss, my skin, my weakness... I can’t even lift a chair. This wasn’t a cold or a flu or whatever they called it, I’m almost sure. That addle-brained doctor and Mrs. Dilkins did this. They’re trying to make me an invalid, or something. I’m almost completely dependent on Mrs. Dilkins to do anything.”

“So leave, Richard. If what you say is true, get the hell out of there.”

Richard looked down, pensively. That was not the Richard I knew. He was not a man who hesitated. “There’s too much money on the line, Janice.”

“Richard, I don’t trust any of these yokels. You should leave now and move on. It’s costing you too much.”

“I can deal with this, I know I can. What I need you to do is...”

“I’m not your mother, Richard. I’m not there to clean up after you. If you want to risk everything, that’s on you.” I paused to let it sink in. “I’ll get you a ticket out of there right now, and get you back here where you belong. But I won’t nursemaid you.”

“It’s humiliating,” he said.

“How?”

“The women of the town get together every Sunday afternoon and go this one woman’s shed in her backyard, where she has a bunch of hairdressing stuff. They call it their salon day. Auntie... Mrs. Dilkins... brings me along in a dress.”

“So she *does* bring you outside in girls’ clothes.”

“They took my beard away,” he said. “At the backyard salon, they teach me how to do my makeup. This one woman uses some kind of electrical needle that they say will remove hair permanently.”

“Electrolysis,” I said, filling in the blanks for him.

“Mrs. Dilkins has had me doing it for two months, now. Yesterday they said I was finished. I’ll never be able to grow a beard again, and that story about Nair in the shower was a total lie. She makes me get my legs waxed every three weeks.”

“Why are you telling me this, Richard? If you can’t handle it, get out. We can make a fortune doing something else. We’re young. We have time.”

“No,” he said. “This is my one opportunity that I may never have again. This is my one shot.”

“Then, that’s your decision.”

“Will you come see me again?” He asked.

“I’m in LA for three months, Richard. I’m going to be very busy.”

“I’ll be done with Mo... Mrs. Dilkins by then, probably,” he said, but he didn’t sound exactly confident about it. “Of course I will. I’ll be back home by then, contract in hand.”

“Well, I’ll see you then,” I told him.

“They punished me at the salon,” he then said, reversing course. I got the feeling he just couldn’t make a decision. One moment, he was certain he could endure Mrs. Dilkins’s trials, and the next he wasn’t. It was so unlike him, as if he had a different personality mixed in with his.

“Punished you? How?” I asked.

“As punishment for not doing my daily chores, I had to show all the women that I was wearing panties...”

“Panties?”

“Mrs. Dilkins says I can’t wear a skirt without panties.”

“Are you wearing them now?”

“Yes,” he said, sheepishly. “Anyway, I had to show all the women that I was wearing panties and a gaff.”

“What in God’s name is a *gaff*?”

“It’s something to hide my genitals so they’re flat, just like a woman. I have to wear it all the time now. Mrs. Dilkins inspects me every morning.”

“She makes you do this?”

“Yes. And I have to play the fiddle for them. Sometimes I have to dance.”

“She’s pushing your buttons, Richard. She’s not going to give up her land so easily. She’s playing tough on selling her house.”



"I don't think she even knows that's what I want."

"Why else would she do this? It's a bargaining tactic."

"I don't think..."

"Trust me, Richard. If you weren't so deep in it, you'd see the same thing. You'd recognize all the signs of someone trying to bully you into worse bargaining position. Don't lose your leverage. If you're going to stay, and you really shouldn't, stay focused."

"Okay, okay, I guess I can see that. But I'm sure she hasn't figured out what I want."

"Never underestimate your opponent," I reminded him. "That's what you've always said."

"Yes... I remember..."

"How long have you been wearing that gaff thing? Is it uncomfortable?"

"It used to be," he said. "It drove me nuts for a long time, but now I'm used to it. I've been wearing it for three months, now, so I guess I've adjusted. Sitting when I go to the bathroom is natural now."

I hated to even think what this was doing to his dick and balls, but he had never been the most... *Endowed* man I'd ever met.

"You haven't gotten off in forever, I would think."

"You know, it's strange. I barely even think about it. What about you?"

"I'm... Okay," I said. That reminded me, I had a date tonight, and I wasn't going to play too hard to get. I had my needs, after all. "I should go," I added.

"I've changed my mind. Please come get me. I need to get out of here."

"Richard, I can't drop everything! I'm due in LA on Monday. If you want to come home, it's up to you."

"But she won't let me drive the car!"

"Then don't ask!" I said. "Just go!"

"I tried that and..." He sighed.

"You've tried to leave?"

"Kind of. I was in town and I decided to try and sneak away. Then the policeman found me."

"What happened?"

"He laughed," Richard said, his face blushing. "An' he said I was a sissy, an' he said I was a fag, and' he said..."

"You told him you were a grown, man right? And they didn't believe you?"

"No," Richard said, looking down at the floor. "So he took me back to Mo... Aunt... Mrs. Dilkins."

“What did she do?”

“She... She spanked me.”

I was disgusted by my husband's behavior. Maybe it really was time to write up a divorce. “Look, I need to get back to work. I'll call you when I get to LA.”

“No!” Richard said. “Please. I don't get to talk to normal people anymore...”

“What is that noise?” I heard a voice yell in the background. Immediately, Richard's eyes popped wide open in fear. “Who are you talking to?” Came another shout. It was Elizabeth.

I could hear a door slam, and heavy footsteps coming closer. “No, no, no...” Richard whined. He turned and headed in one direction when Mrs. Dilkins's hand grabbed him by the neck of his shirt, pulling him back.

“I told you to get dinner ready! Not talk to...” She didn't finish her sentence before the screen went dark.

However, it wasn't over. The connection hadn't been shut down, and I guess just the screen of the laptop had been closed, but not completely.

“Please, Momma! Please, I just wanted to talk to someone!” Richard said, his voice suddenly raising up into a squeal. “I didn't mean nothing!” I could still hear them, even though they were a little muffled.

“There you are!” She yelled. “You disobeyed me!”

“No, no, Momma, please!” Richard screamed. With every passing moment, his voice was growing more and more panicked and his pitch higher and higher until he sounded just like a little girl being punished, screaming, begging and even crying. “Momma, please! Momma!”

“Get the strap!” Mrs. Dilkins commanded. “You know what's coming!”

“No, please!”

“Get the switch, girl!”

There was a long, tense pause. “Yes, Momma,” I finally heard Richard say. That was followed by some slow, methodical footsteps, which I figured were Richard's.

“Raise your skirt and lower your panties,” she told him when she returned. I heard three sharp slaps. “And then you're going to get your ears pierced at the salon this weekend.” She declared. “Stop crying!”

I heard some sniffing, and a halting reply, “Yes, Momma.”

“Are you sorry?”

“Yes, Momma.”

“Say it.”

“I'm sorry, Momma. I'll do exactly what you tell me, Momma. Please no more switch.”

“We’ll see, girl. Now back to the kitchen.”

“Thank you, Momma,” he finally said.

At that point, I terminated the link myself. I wasn’t sure I was married to a man anymore. I think was married to a sissy.



Los Angeles, was not — from a professional point of view — a success for me. I’ve been producing public radio for a long time, and know my stuff. I also know that morning news is a dead format, and needs to be taken off life support. We need something new to shake things up. Some rap music, some prank phone calls, more opinion, it’s what they need in public radio. Something to dazzle.

Predictably, those close-minded fools who ran the network didn’t want me to change anything on their precious show. Well, why did they transfer me, then? To do nothing? To do jack shit? I was going to take them into the twenty-first century, and they just wanted to play it safe and keep the status quo.

So I was dumped. Essentially. They tried to call it a “lateral shift,” and placed me in one of their three-AM public service shows, but they effectively fired me. Yes, they tried to save face by claiming that since I took over, they had never had so many complaints about the program, and blame me for taking the risks. You can’t make omelets without breaking a few eggs, you know what I mean?

Out of the *generosity* of their hearts, and probably to keep me from suing their asses off, they gave me a month to find a new job. Which was fine with me. Everyone’s going to local radio anyway. That’s where the money is. That’s the future.

I was doing some interviews in Dallas, and I really couldn’t avoid stopping by Mrs. Dilkins’s house and see my husband. Which he still was, technically. Not that I really cared about marriage anymore. I had already hooked up with more than a few men in LA, and now that I was back in New York, I had boyfriends on both coasts.

It wasn't an altruistic visit. I needed his money, frankly. The bank account was down to just a few thousand, and I needed access to Richard’s personal investment account if I was going to survive. He had a large portfolio, as you might guess, and it was worth quite a bit.

I got off the bus and made my way to the nearest building in a fierce wind. It was their diner, but more like some kind of truck stop, really. Inside, it wasn't exactly bustling. There were some large men in cowboy hats and western

shirts jabbering away in the corner, and some other improbably burly men staring at small cups of coffee, silently.

I walked to the counter, with the intent of asking for a phone to call Mrs. Dilkins's house, but given how draining that long bus ride was, a bottle of mineral water sounded good.

"What in tarnation is a mineral water?" The waitress asked me. It's like being on the moon out here.

"Fizzy water, Ethel," said a man seated nearby. "The young lady is looking for fizzy water."

"You mean like Perry-yer?"

"Perrier, yes," I said, amazed they had even heard of it.

"I'll check," the woman said, departing for the back.

I looked to see the face of the man who had stuck his big fat nose in my business, and was taken aback. He was a tall, slender man with dark hair and a grin full of paper-white teeth.

"Smith," he said with a smooth twang. "Pastor Smith. If you don't mind me saying, you look a little bit out of place here in Boregard."

I took that as a compliment. He was wearing a freshly laundered suit — the first man I'd seen in these parts who wasn't dirty and unwashed — and maybe that softened my attitude a little bit. Normally, a man like him would be getting a stern reminder of personal space and boundaries.

"I'm visiting," I said.

"Well, what do you think of our little town?" He asked. "It ain't much, I know, but it's home to so many good, God-fearin' people."

"Listen, I'm not falling for any sales pitch. I'm from New York, and it's the greatest city on Earth as fas I'm concerned."

"New York City?" He said with an even bigger smile. "My oh my. Never been, myself. Always wanted to, but preachin' to the flock has always been a higher callin'. I don't know what the town would do without Sunday services, and I run the church myself."

"Yeah, well, so it goes," I replied. I was bored with him.

"Now, I've been tryin' to find a missus, but there ain't a lot of ladies who'll marry a pastor in a small town."

"Tragic." Was this guy hitting on me?

"Howdy-do, Mrs. Perlman," I heard from the other end of the counter. Sure enough, there was Jeter, seated, sipping soup. I had missed him on my first scan of the diner.



He smiled when he saw me, his crooked, tobacco-stained teeth making him look even more freakish. “Well, fancy seeing you again, Ma’am,” he said. “I’m suppos’n you need a ride out to the Dilkins place.”

“If I could use the phone, I can call and see if Elizabeth will drive out here to get me.” I replied, not wanting to sound too dependent on this bumpkin.

“I wouldn’ want her to go through all that trouble when it’s so easy fer me t’ drive ya.” He got his keys and went out to the truck.

“I’ll see you around,” said the pastor, who ran his eyes up and down my body in an extremely creepy way. I grabbed my bag and practically ran out of there. No mineral water was worth this.

About ten minutes of silence was broken by my driver’s irritating country twang. “So I done overhear you talkin’ to pastor Smith, and did you say you was from New York City?”

“That’s right,” I answered.

“Whooo-ee!” He said with a country twang. “That’s the one city to be from, ain’t it?”

“I guess so.”

“I always figger’d on goin’ there one of these days. But now that they had the nine-eleven, I think maybe it’s too dangerous.” He parked the car in front of the road to Elizabeth’s house. “Don’t want to be killed by them a-rabs.”

I got out of the truck and closed the door. “Well, I think that’s the safest thing to do,” I said. “Don’t want to tempt fate.”

“No Ma’am,” he said.

“Listen, Jeter...” Time to swallow some pride. “Could I call you when I need to get out of here?”

He grinned. “Be my pleasure, little lady.” He just made my skin crawl. Jeter tipped his cap and pulled away. The men of this town were all psychos.

I walked the long walk up to the front door of Elizabeth’s house and knocked.

“Janice,” Mrs. Dilkins said when she greeted me at the door. “How nice of you to drop by. What has it been, three months? Won’t you come in.”

“Mrs. Dilkins,” was all I said, keeping my emotions in check. I could hear music from upstairs.

“Thank goodness you called to let us know you were coming. We’ve been busy as beavers for your arrival.”

“May I see my husband, please?” I didn’t want to do any smalltalk.

“Mrs. Perlman is here!” Mrs. Dilkins called out, loudly projecting her voice. Then she smiled and returned her attention to me. “How was Los Angeles? I hope you had a fun time.”

The fiddle music upstairs kept playing, and unlike during my last visit, it was actually quite proficient. Not that I’m an expert in fiddling, but it was tight, crisp and fast. Country music is certainly what they must play in hell. Horrible noise.

“It was an exciting time, yes,” I replied. “I learned a lot.” I learned public radio was not my future, that was for sure.

“Why, it must be wonderful to have the freedom to just jet off anywhere whenever you like! I so envy you.” The woman thought she was so clever with her veiled insults. She was taping her fingers impatiently. “I’ll go fetch little Ritchie.”

She headed upstairs. Idly, I checked the exits in the house. If I had to grab my husband and run, where would I go? I wasn’t *really* going to do it, but I couldn’t rule out a run for my life, either.

“No!” I heard a shriek. “No, no, no!” The voice screeched. “I can’t! I can’t let her see me like this!”

The I heard a swat and a yelp. “That’s not how you were raised!” Elizabeth barked.

In that old house, I could hear the bumping and thumping coming from wherever they were upstairs. I could even hear Elizabeth angrily talking under her breath. “Behave!” she growled. “Remember your manners!”

“But momma...”

“But *nothing!*”

She hadn't been talking to Richard, had she? That voice sounded like an insolent child, not my husband. I could then hear him start to descend the stairs.

I could see his feet first, which were wearing shiny black Mary Jane shoes and a pair of white lace-edged socks. Thin, hairless legs continued their way down the stairs, going on for a shockingly long time before I could see a multi-layered denim skirt.

He was dressed in a pair of denim skirted overalls. Under it, he wore a pink tee that accentuated the thinness of his arms. Although his outfit wasn't outrageously feminine, there was no need for it to be, because he looked more like a girl than any clothes could ever manage. When I could see his eyes, they appeared larger and more alive, sparkling in the light. His hair was no longer just tinged copper. It was red. It was tied up into two braided pigtails that must have been at least eight inches long.

I nearly lost my balance, standing before him. He was so feminine, it was impossible to comprehend that he was the man I had slept with for the past two years. This person wasn't a man, he was a girl. From the hot pink ribbons tied in his braids to the tips of his polished fingernails to the thin gold necklace around his slender neck. He looked like a sixteen year old girl, fresh from the farm.

Rather than being humiliated and reserved, he smiled brightly at me as he gently swayed from side to side, playing with one of his long braids. He seemed to want some kind of approval from me. "It's wonderful to see you again, Ma'am," she said. "I thought you'd forgotten about us way out here."

I had miscalculated. I had not thought this could ever happen. I simply misunderstood what this evil woman was up to. I thought she was merely torturing Richard, that she was using him to substitute for her lost daughter in an emotional sense. No. She wanted Richard to fill the same role as her dead daughter, and treat him as such. Elizabeth had made him resemble a girl, and dressed him like one.

"Richard?" I said. "Richard, tell me you're playing a joke on me."

Instead of replying, he looked to Elizabeth, as if he needed her approval to answer. Did he?

Elizabeth gave no indication she was going to speak, and therefore, left it up to Richard. "No Ma'am. I... I don't think so," he said.

"Why in the world are you dressed like that?" I demanded to know.

"I... I..." He looked confused, as if I was asking the most ridiculous question. "They're my clothes."

"Your clothes?" I said, looking at Elizabeth. She graced us with a response.

"I'm not a rich woman, Janice. I have plenty of clothes in the house that fit Richard perfectly well, after his weight loss. Richard and I agreed that selling



my car or family jewelry just to purchase him some temporary clothes was not worth the cost.”

“How can you do this to a man?” I said to Elizabeth. “He has dignity!”

“Ritchie’s sacrifice is his choice, and I appreciate everything he’s doing for me!” Elizabeth objected.

“You decided to do this?” I asked Richard. “You had a choice?”

As I waited for his answer, Elizabeth prompted his reply. “You agreed to this, didn’t you, sweetie pie?”

“I... I did,” he said. “Daisy Mae’s clothing is good ‘nuff for me.”

“This is insane. *Clinically insane*,” I said.

“This isn’t the city, Janice. This is Boregard. We can’t go to the stores every day. I make one trip to the Wal-Mart in Sorensen City every year and it takes seven hours to drive there, I spend a night in a motel and then drive seven hours back. I can’t just run out to a fashion boutique to buy temporary clothing.”

I glanced at Richard, and just for a brief moment, the look in his eyes told me that he was still living in fear. He showed fleeting moments of uncertainty and fear in his expression. Was he was begging for me to take him away? Maybe, but I wasn’t about to make a run for it based on a momentary expression.

“Please don’t be sorry, Ma’am. I know you is busy with what you do, an’ I’m just so happy to see you again!” He said, smiling.

“The way you look...” I tried to explain it, but the words just couldn’t come out.

“I’m sorry I ain’t dressed all fancy for you, Ma’am. I wuz just up in my room practicing. I wasn’t expectin’ callers.”

“Practicing for what?” I asked. “Why are you talking like that?”

“Why don’t you show her what you’ve been working on, darlin’?”

Richard was shocked. “You mean...?”

“She’s come all this way. I think she’d like to know how you’re getting along here in Boregard.”

“But you can’t mean that I...”

Mrs. Dilkins pointed to the stairs. “I want you to show her everything, little one. Just like you showed all the folks at church the other day.”

“You’ve been taking him out to church?” I said. “Looking like *this*?”

“Oh, no. We dress up when we go out.” She turned to Richard. “Now, go change and get your music.”

Richard was about to object, but he didn’t. He just looked at the two of us and then hung his head. “Yes Ma’am.” He said, and he then headed back up-

stairs. He stopped mid-way and turned back. "Should I do my hair?" He asked.

"No, that'd take too much time. Now scoot."

"Yes, Momma."

"But everything else!" She reiterated.

"Yes, Momma!" Richard replied.

Elizabeth watched as he went up the stairs and waited to hear the door close. "Now we have some time to talk without little ears eavesdropping," Elizabeth said, then gestured towards a chair for me to sit on. "You must be startled to see Richard like he is now."

"Of course I am! You're trying to turn him into a girl! You're just insane!"

"Now, just calm yourself, Janice," she said, sitting and folding her hands calmly in her lap. "I haven't done anything but show little Ritchie some discipline. Besides that, the circumstances of his condition are sufficient to explain everything."

"What?" I said. "You *can't* be serious!" When had she ever given me any rational explanation for what was going on here?

"Janice, I'll ask you to keep a civil tone."

"What you're doing to him is the most un-civil thing I've ever seen done to another person!"

"His weight, his appearance and his behavior are all due to his illness. You know that as well as I do."

"That crazy doctor is pumping him full of drugs that have changed almost everything about him!"

"The doctor is *saving* him." She then gathered her purse, from where it was resting on a nearby table. "Now let's get down to business. You lost your job. You need money."

The cunt. It was true. "How did you know?"

"That's not important," she replied, waving my concern off. She took out a check book. "How much do you need, dear?"

"I don't want your money!" I objected. "I want the money I already have. Richard's money!"

"Well, I'm afraid you might not be able to get it so easily," she said, starting to write on the check. "He's just not the man he used to be." I think she was smiling.

"Just let me talk to him. I just need his personal account numbers."

"He doesn't have any more money, Janice. He gave it all to me."

“He *what?*” That wasn’t possible! “He wouldn’t *dare* do that before asking me!”

“Richard signed over his power of attorney to me last month. I transferred all his personal accounts into mine. After all, I’m the one looking after his best interests. It may take him as much as a year to fully recover from his illness.”

Now I *knew* she was smiling.

“I tell you what. I know the owner of our town radio station. KBRL. I’m sure they can find a place for you. I know you’re used to bigger positions, but I’m certain they could use someone with your talent.”

“Probably some god-awful country station, I would guess? I’d rather die.”

“They’re a religious station, owned by Pastor Smith, they broadcast sermons and some country music, but it’s work, which is better than anything you’ve found so far.”

She knew it all, apparently. Yes, I’d been doing interview after interview, and no one had offered me a thing. Many made remarks about my “confrontational reputation” and so-called “history of workplace drama.” I knew I wasn’t going to find work anytime soon, and I did have bills to pay. Big bills. I still had time, though, and I’d get a job sooner or later. I was a top talent in my field.

“Religious radio?” I said. “In a small town like this one? They probably pay for ads in eggs. I think I’ll pass.”

“Suit yourself,” she said. “But since I have access to your husband’s money, you won’t have to go through Richard anymore. How does ten thousand dollars sound? Should that cover things for now?”

“Ten thousand?” I questioned. “I owe twenty thousand right now!”

The old woman didn’t even blink. “I’ll make it out for thirty thousand then. That will give you a little bit of spending money.” She finished up writing the check and carefully tore it from the book. She put everything away and then offered the check to me.

“I don’t need your money,” I said.

“Don’t think of it as *my* money. As you said, it’s the money Richard earned. I’m just looking after it.”

I got up to take the check from her. I reached for it, and she pulled it away. “Now, I don’t think Richard would want this money to go to someone who was taking advantage of him,” she said.

“What do you mean?” I replied.

“I mean, if I was trying to change Richard, as you seem to think, one might assume I was paying you to look the other way. Someone might think this was some sort of... Bribe.” She laughed again. “Ridiculous, don’t you think?”

I really hated this woman.

“Don’t you agree that it’s ridiculous?” She asked again.

I nodded. I just needed the money.

“And poor Richard is just going through an illness, you believe that, don’t you?” She asked.

I nodded again.

“I’m sorry, by my ears aren’t what they used to be, sweetie.”

“Yes,” I replied, spitting out the word.

“And we wouldn’t want Richard to think you didn’t trust me completely.”

I took two deep breaths. “I trust you completely,” I said. I grabbed the check from her fingers. I had so many debts. Blow isn’t cheap.

I had folded up the check and put it in my pocket when I heard an upstairs door open and close. A loud clacking on the stairs told me someone was descending. Someone wearing shoes that had to belong to a...

“Richard?” I yelped involuntarily when I saw him.

Again, I first saw the feet, wearing white heeled shoes. Cowboy boots. Next, his legs. Long and lean, under his skirt. The rust-colored skirt he was wearing was long, ending in white fringe. As his legs moved, the skirt swayed back and forth, the fringe rustling from side to side, loudly.

The top was a matching fringed jacket. It was some kind of performance get-up, with the shapes of steer and wagon wheels stitched into it. His chest was obviously padded, as he had curves where a woman would have her breasts. It screamed ‘girl’ all over. It was more costume than dress.

Richard’s hair was indeed the same as I had seen it earlier, but he had applied a dark layer of mascara to his eyelashes and lipstick. He was made up for the stage, with extra-bold makeup designed to be seen from a fair distance away.

Then he smiled. He smiled! He wasn’t shrinking away, he was happy. Or at least, he looked like it. Was he proud of how he looked?

“Richard...” I said again. The look on my face must have been one of horrific disbelief, because the grin on Richard’s face was replaced by a pensive pout.

“The little dear has been taking square dance calling lessons,” Elizabeth explained. “Isn’t it a wonderful dress? He made it himself.”

“You did?” I asked.

Richard nodded. “Yes. I worked really hard on it.” He looked at me, waiting for a response. “At first, I didn’t think it was a very good idea, but when Momma said it would help me recuperate...” He trailed off. “You think I’m a sissy, don’t you?”

“Uh...” I had to say something. Looking at him, there were so many questions. He had the fair skin of a teenager, and he was shorter than I was, plus

he was wearing a skirt and high heeled boots. His nose was just a little nub. How was it possible? How was *any* of this possible?

Then, I felt the check in my pocket. Until I cashed it, nothing was for certain. The money. I had to have the money. "I think it's a beautiful outfit," I replied. "You look very nice."

With those words, Richard's face lit up with joy. A moment later, it faltered. "You don't think I'm..."

"She said she loves the dress, so what do you say?" Elizabeth interrupted.

"Oh! Thank you, Ma'am!" Richard said, as he grabbed the skirt and gave me a full-on old-fashioned curtsy. "I'm so glad you like it!"

"You could just wear jeans and a shirt," I said.

Richard looked to Elizabeth to answer.

"Unfortunately, the men around here don't have much tolerance for feminine boys. Putting him in a dress and skirts is the best disguise."

Richard looked back at me. "No one suspects a thin!" He giggled in his tinkling little voice. "Everyone thinks I'm a girl for reals!" And he giggled again.

Giggled. He *giggled*.

"So, give us a performance, little one," Mrs. Dilkins said.

I had failed to notice that he had brought a fiddle down with him. He quickly brought it up and tucked it under his slender chin and began to play. Richard unleashed a flurry of action, as his arm flung the bow across the strings as if he were trying to saw through it.

At the same time, he was stomping his foot to keep time, lifting his whole leg to stomp with.

Just as abruptly as he started, he stopped. "Head two couples lead to the right," Richard called out. He then played a few more more fierce notes. "With a right hand star, go back to the left." Then once more a brief assault of music. "And there you are."

I felt like I was losing my mind. Mrs. Dilkins was clapping along in time, but I was about to scream. This was my husband! My strong, combative, intelligent and resourceful husband! He had brought down Fortune 500 companies, and now here he was, acting like a clown. *A clown!*

"Now a right to the lady behind your back," Richard called out in his perfectly tender girlish voice, "And a left to your own and take her home."

Finally, I had had enough, and has to leave the room. I dashed to the hallway, just to catch my breath and gather myself. The music trailed off and stopped, and I could hear them talking. A few moments later, Mrs. Dilkins came in. "I see you're overcome with joy. Little Ritchie is almost ready for the big spring hoedown at the county fair."



“What have you done to him?” I asked. “*Why* did you do this to him?”

I almost had my question answered for me as I looked behind Mrs. Dilkins at a picture that hung on the hallway wall. It was a picture of a young sixteen year old girl, with red hair in pigtails, a big buck-toothed grin on her face, wearing a rust-colored dress and playing the fiddle. A small plaque on the frame read “Daisy Mae Dilkins, Wahaatu County Square Dance Calling, 1st Place.”

It was a picture of this woman’s daughter, and it looked like my husband. The hair, the dress, the fiddle. Elizabeth wasn’t just trying to fill a hole in her life with Richard, she was trying to make Richard fill Daisy Mae’s role.

She recognized that I was gaping at the picture and then patted me on the shoulder. “My Daisy Mae was a very special girl,” she said. “Don’t you think so?”

Before I could answer, Richard arrived with pitchers of drinks on a tray with glasses. “Would you like a drink, Ma’am?” He asked me. “We have ice water and lemonade,” Richard said, his smile becoming more strained. “Please tell me what you would like.”

“Richard, are you feeling alright?”

“Just tell me what you’d like, Ma’am,” he said, a bead of sweat coming from his forehead. “Something to cool you down?” His eyes pleaded with me.

Despite the bizarre situation, I nodded yes. I felt I was about to faint. “Water,” I said.

“Right away, Ma’am.” My husband deftly held the tray with one hand as the other poured the pitcher. When full, he changed hands and offered me the glass, delicately. He had done this before, serving drinks. In fact, he had to have practiced.

“All right, darlin’,” Mrs. Dilkins said to him.

He dipped his head, swinging his pigtails, turned and headed back to the kitchen. His hips swayed gently as he walked, adept at walking in heels, and looking alluring in a very feminine way. How many days had this horrible woman spent training my husband to walk like that? To act like this? To dress like this? How had she done it?

Elizabeth then left the kitchen and returned to me, a look of satisfaction on her face. “Isn’t little Ritchie such a polite child?” She said.

“He’s not a child!” I said.

“Sometimes I forget,” she said. “He does behave so childish at times. I think he would be better off starting over and growing up again.”

That was it. I had heard enough from this self-righteous starchy backwater lunatic. “Let me tell you something, Elizabeth Dilkins, I know people who...”

Right as I was ready to extract some kind of satisfaction, the phone rang.

Richard poked his head into the hallway, a silent question to Elizabeth if he should do anything about it. "Please answer the phone, Ritchie," Elizabeth told him.

Ritchie walked past us over the phone on the wall, his head hung low. He picked up the phone, and tried to block his voice from being heard. "Dilkins residence," he sang sweetly with a practiced cheerfulness. "How may I help you?" He looked over at me and his eyes cried out for forgiveness at his behavior. "Yes, doctor, she is. May I tell her the reason for your call?" He listened for a moment. "I'll see if she's available." He looked over to Elizabeth. "It's Doctor Coonrod, Momma. He'd like to talk to you, but he doesn't want to tell me why."

"Tell the doctor I'll take his call in the den," Elizabeth said, passing by me. "We'll pick this up when I'm done, sweetie," she said with a smug smile. She then proceeded to the den and closed the door behind her.

"She'll be with you in moment, sir. May God bless you," Ritchie said. He waited for Elizabeth to pick up. "Yes Ma'am," he replied, and hung up.

As soon as Richard hung up the phone, he checked to make sure the door was shut. He urgently motioned me over. "Janice!" He whispered loudly.

"Richard? What the hell?" I asked.

"Please keep your voice low," he said, "M... Aunt Elizabeth may hear you. She doesn't want me to talk to you."

"Listen, Richard, I didn't have the patience to play games with you any more. You're in over your head. You've lost control of the situation."

"I have?" He said, his voice sounding airy and unfocused. "No, no. I'm closer than I ever have been before."

"You signed over all our money to her!"

"I have? I don't remember... She did ask me to sign some things... But I needed to to keep her on the line. She's going to give me the house. She said she would."

"She's not going to do anything! She's just stringing you along until you replace her daughter!"

"Momma has been actin' all peculiar lately..." He then lowered his voice down to nearly a whisper. "She's been a might bit frightening. She's been schoolin' me all day long. How to talk, how to walk, how to act... Maybe... Maybe... Maybe we should leave her be. She needs to have some time by herself."

He finally wanted to escape. Finally. However, taking him out of here was the last thing I needed right now. I needed the check in my pocket to clear before I did that. "Just sit tight for a little bit, okay? Maybe give it one more chance?"

“But y’all said I was wastin’ my time!” He complained. “I thought you’d be happy I wanted to git.”

“I am, I am... But I just need you to wait. I’ll be back. I just can’t do it today. Patience, Richard.”

“What?” He said, not understanding my very simple request. I had simply asked for his understanding. I had a lot to deal with! Did he ever think of what I was going through?



“If you says so, Mrs. Perlman...”

“I’m your wife, Richard. Has she been drilling you to forget that, too?”

“It... It’s come up.”

“Honestly, that woman.”

“She also has me takin’ lessons on curtseyin’ and takes me to church and we sing Christian songs and...”

“Please tell me you’re just talking like that to play a joke on me. That can’t be what your voice sounds like.”

“Um... I... I guess it’s been like this for a spell,” he said. “I can’t help it. I think it was the drugs.” It sounded so strange to hear this adolescent voice of a kid coming from his mouth.

“If possible, it sounds even more high-pitched than it did last time.”

“I guess I’ve just gotten used to it.” He sounded like he wasn’t able to put all of his energy into speaking. Besides being light and airy, it sounded distant and slightly dreamy.

“She’s really done a number on you, hasn’t she?”

“Please, Mrs. Perlman, I... I think I need to get away from here.”

“Richard, you need to get your wits about you and focus. Stand tall and fight her. Do whatever you need to do. But don’t let her win.”

“Can’t you take me with you?”

“Would you stop whining? You know how I hate whining.”

“Please. I want to go. Ma’am, we do need to be a-gettin’ if we’re gonna be a-gettin’!”

I simply needed him to stay here until I could claim the money, why couldn't he do as he was told? Elizabeth was right — he was being stubborn. This wouldn't be forever. Surely, Richard could resist for just a little while longer. I gave him my best excuses. “Richard, don’t be stupid. I don’t have a car with me, I can’t take you anywhere. You’ll just have to stay here until I can come and get you. Show some backbone!” I said. “And you can start by taking off those dresses and skirts, wherever they’re coming from.”

“She gets them from Daisy Mae’s room. Aren’t they the pertiest?”

“Daisy Mae,” I said to myself. I wanted to know more about this girl. Maybe her death might help me trap Mrs. Dilkins and turn the tables on her.

A noise came from the den door and Richard’s head suddenly snapped, turning towards the sound. “She just hung up the phone. She’s a-comin’ back!” He turned to me and began to beg. “Please Ma’am, I think it’s be best to git on outta here! Now!”

"If you want to leave so badly, just walk out the door, Richard! You don't need my help!"

"It's miles to the nearest house! And everyone knows her. They'd just..."

"Why don't you change out of that outfit, darlin'," Mrs. Dilkins said as she re-entered the room. "You want to keep it clean for your debut."

Richard didn't budge, clenching his arms to his chest.

"Get a move on, Ritchie."

"Yes Ma'am," he said, giving me one last pathetic look. He then left for the stairs.

Elizabeth turned to me. "Now, weren't we having a discussion?"

"I'm always humbled by your hospitality, Elizabeth, but I think it's time for me to go," I said. "Do you mind if I make a call?"

"Not at all, dear." She said, motioning to the phone.

I pulled the greasy business card Jeter had given me to dial the number. As I waited for him to pick up, I looked at the sign hung above the phone. It read "Blessed are those who walk in Jesus' footsteps."

I looked over to Elizabeth. Figures she'd be the religious type. The *pushy* religious type.

She noticed my interest. "Like the sign? Little Ritchie made it for me."

"We're both Jewish, you know," I said.

"We're all God's children," she replied. Sanctimonious cunt.



That inbred yokel picked me up at the end of Elizabeth's driveway. I don't know which was worse. Having that crazy woman try to fool me or watching Jeter comb his eyes over my body.

"Eyes on the road." I told him.

"Aw shucks, Ma'am," he said. "You just may be the prettiest girl I ever did see. So sophisticated."

Compliments like this I could do without. "So what do you know about this Doctor Coonrod?"

"The Doc?" He said. "He's fourth generation. His great, great grandfather settled in this town when it was founded. Way back when the Comanche were still in these parts."

"Fascinating. I mean, is he a good doctor?"

“I couldn’t rightly say. I’ve never met another doctor. But I don’t know any-one that wouldn’t trust him with whatever ails ya’.”

“Where’s his office?”

“Works out of his house.”

“Can you take me there? I need to ask him some questions.”



I knocked loudly and confidently on the door to the doctor’s house. It had an irritatingly quaint wooden sign out front that read “Will take cattle for payment.” I suppose someone thought that was funny.

“Hold on, hold on!” A warbling voice said from behind the door. The latches clicked open and I was face to face with an old man, slightly stooped over. He was bald with grey hair at the sides, and a thick goatee exploding from his face. “What kin I do for you, miss?” He said, as he cracked open a can of beer. “I hope you’re not lookin’ for help fixin’ your car...”

“You’re Doctor *Coonrod*?” I asked.



He took it as an accusation, and straightened out his posture. "That I am."

"You're treating my husband."

"Your husband? I don't know anyone..."

"My husband, *Richard Rubenstein*."

"Richard?" He said, trying to place the name. "Oh, oh. Little Ritchie. Elizabeth's guest." He gestured to some nearby deck chairs. "Why don't you have a seat, my back is..."

"What are you doing to him?" I said. "I want you to tell me what the hell you think you're trying to do to my husband."

"Well, if you're not going to sit, I will. I just can't stand up for too long these days." He walked through the door and hobbled over to a wooden chair nearby on the porch. "Your husband has a severe pituitary gland problem," he said. He paused as he slowly lowered himself into the chair. "The symptoms were acute fever, hallucinations and diarrhea." He wiped his brow with a handkerchief he pulled from his jacket pocket. "The treatment is a series of drugs designed to take over the functions of his pituitary gland while simultaneously trying to treat the original problem. Also, some sedatives to keep Ritchie from feeling any pain."

"I've never heard of any such thing. You're lying to me." I wasn't going to let him try and trick me with his made-up diagnosis. "I know plenty of doctors, and they can tell me what's really happening to Richard."

The old man just shrugged. "Believe what you want," he said, unconcerned. "But your husband has a very serious problem that needs serious medical attention."

"And how does taking all the beard hair off his face qualify for medical attention? How does starving him down to a shadow of his normal weight help him at all? And what the *hell* did you do to his voice?"

He looked across his front lawn, not even meeting my eyes. "I could explain it all, but I'm not sure you'd understand it."

"Not understand it?" This redneck was telling me *I* was the stupid one? "I understand *plenty*, doctor! Have you ever had a malpractice suit? Well, you're sure going to get one hell of one now, I *promise* you! My family knows the best lawyers up and down the East Coast!"

He took his glasses off his nose and started to clean the lenses. "I think you'll find that out here, the courts don't have a lot of meanin'." He rubbed a little bit of spit on the lens. "I don't know if family means much to you city folk, but it's everything out here."

"Don't patronize me," I said.

“Point is, I’ve known Elizabeth for a long, long time. I birthed her myself. I introduced her to her husband, God rest his soul. I birthed their child, Daisy Mae. They’re as much a part of my family as my own kin.”

“How sweet,” I said, hoping he was going somewhere with this.

Doctor Coonrod dapped his brow again. “My family came to this land in eighteen hundred and twenty-two.” He said, fishing for something in his pocket. “We lived alongside the Cherokee back then. My great, great grand-pappy Boregard Coonrod settled this area. I’ve been here a long time.”

He put his glasses back on. “And in all these years, I’ve never seen a woman so completely heartbroken as Elizabeth Dilkins, when she lost her girl.”

“Everyone has heartbreak,” I said. “What makes her so special?”

“I swore to her that if there was anything I could do to right this wrong, I would. When your husband came to steal her house away...”

“My husband is not stealing anything!” I said. I inly then realized that indeed, they did know why Richard was here. He hadn’t fooled anyone with his true motives.

“Be that as it may, I finally found a way to fix that broken heart of hers.”

“Which was?” I asked, as if I couldn’t already guess.

“Use all my knowledge and skills as a doctor and a surgeon to remedy what ails Lizzie Dilkins.”

“You’ll regret this! Doctors aren’t above the law, even in Boregard!”

“So be it. I’ll do everything I can to help Elizabeth, no matter what you try to do. I gave her my word.”

“What. Are. You. *Doing* to him?” I asked, demanding to get an answer.

“What I need to do.”

“You’re changing him. You’re drugging him, brainwashing him, filling him full or hormones and who knows what. It’s illegal. It’s all illegal!”

“He’s a small feller, ain’t he? Got a young face. Delicate bone structure.”

He wasn’t going to admit to anything, and I needed to catch my bus. “You just made a big mistake, asshole!” I yelled at him. “You’re going to regret the day you ever decided to fuck with me! I’m not bluffing! I’m going to sue!” I turned on my heel and got the hell out of there. Jeter was waiting in his truck.



After beating the pavement for months, I did eventually find a job. Unfortunately, it was in Rhode Island, producing children’s pop radio. Well, it was all I could get. No, it didn’t pay very well, and what made it worse was that I still

lived in New York, so I commuted three hours every day both ways to get back home. My money was being spent as fast as I could make it.

Maybe it was about that time I finally gave up on being married. Yes, I had already been sleeping with a few men, but I always thought I'd come back to Richard when he was healthy. What he didn't know wasn't going to hurt him. Hell — even if he knew, who cared? I would never had let him leave me.

My husband, however, was quickly becoming a part of my past.

However, I was naturally curious about this so-called “Daisy Mae,” the dead daughter. This girl, who seemed to be an obsession with Mrs. Dilkins, deserved to be researched a little. Just because I had some question I needed answered about this whole thing.

Running the name Daisy Mae Dilkins through the internet did little, and even putting down \$20 on a “people finder” search didn't produce a result. A trick I had picked up from some of the reporters I used to work with was to try to work backwards, based on location rather than a name.

Sure enough, I found a handful of people who listed “Boregard” as their birthplace. From that, I found an entry for a “Marie Margaret.” As it turns out, “Daisy” is a common nickname for “Margaret.” Knowing that, it didn't take a genius to see “Marie Margaret” was just a variation on “Daisy Mae.”

More searching revealed little for Marie Margret Dilkins, except for one very interesting tidbit. Marie Margaret — without Dilkins — was a listed actor in the screen actor's guild, with just a few entries in her internet movie database file. She was in a few teen slasher b-movies that went straight to video. She listed her birthdate to indicate she was nineteen, but it was very clear from her photo that she wasn't even close. If Elizabeth was to be believed, she was only sixteen. It was also clear that this was Daisy Mae Dilkins, but with a different hair-style. I recognized her most by her freckles.

With no other information to go on, I did the next thing a reporter does and ran a search at the coroners, but found nothing for the longest time. That was until I managed to spot a mention of a “Mary Margerie.” It fit her description and

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**Marie Margaret** (TV) SEE RANK  
Actress | Miscellaneous Crew | Make-Up Department

[View Resume](#) | [Official Photos](#) »

Marie Margaret was born in Oklahoma in a rural prairie town as an only child. Acting since she was 10 in church plays, Marie moved to Los Angeles to pursue a future in acting and modeling. Her first role was as "Cheerleader #3" in *Camp at Blood Lake IV*. She had since appeared in five films ...  
[See full bio](#) »

**Born:** October 8, 1999 in Boregard, Oklahoma, United States  
**Died:** April 22, 2018 (Aged 19) in Los Angeles, California, United States  
[More at IMDbPro](#) »

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**What Marie Margaret Made 'W'**

age perfectly. She had died of an overdose of heroin in a cheap motel room with three male witnesses.

So that was the story. She had left Boregard in search of fame for her pretty face. That meant she was a runaway. She went to Hollywood to become an actor, and after getting mixed up in the hedonistic lifestyle there, she met with predictable results.

That was the short, pathetic life of some fame-whore yokel from Boregard, Oklahoma.

It seemed like she wasn't the angel her mother had made her out to be. Far from it, really. She had left home at too young an age, running from the clutches of her overbearing mother. Mrs. Dilkins probably held such a tight yoke on her daughter's life that running away was the only answer. Then, on her own, she let herself become completely corrupted in search of fame.

I'd be sad, but anything was better than being stuck in Boregard with that psychopath of a mother for the rest of her life. At least she took a chance.

If what Elizabeth was doing to my husband was any indication, getting out was the only thing the girl could have done to have any kind of a future.

In regards to the future, my future with Richard was now looking dismal. I knew that Richard was no longer going to be the love of my life. I had re-signed myself to knowing that we weren't ever going to be the way we were. Still, divorce? The more and more I thought about it, it was out of the question. I lived in his house, drove his car and used his credit cards. I needed him. After I got him back, we were going to sue that woman and that doctor for millions. I wouldn't get a cent of that if I divorced him.

As the days passed, I realized that what I had to do was get him back here, back in NYC. As much as I hated to do admit it, I needed him to live the lifestyle I was accustomed to. I told the people I was working for that I was going to take a few days off and I packed a suitcase. The last two times I had been to Elizabeth's, I had left in a rush. I wasn't going to make that mistake again. I would clear out the time and make sure I could take Richard with me when I left.

I also wasn't going to let the inconvenience of not having my own car stop me this time. I rented a mid-size at the airport and drove out to Boregard myself. That was probably a mistake, as it took me twelve hours of driving, and I got lost twice on the way. I really should have gotten the GPS option — and AC. I had never felt as disgusting as when I pulled into Mrs. Dilkins's driveway. My clothes were sticking to me and the car stank of my own body odor. It was absolutely repulsive.

My plan was to somehow separate Richard from Mrs. Dilkins, and then take Richard to a nearby town, where I would de-make all the things Elizabeth and the doctor had done to him. Well, maybe not every single thing, but at least

everything I could. I'd cut his hair, trim his nails, remove his polish, take off his makeup and put him in a proper suit and tie, which I had in my luggage. Then I wouldn't have to worry that he'd be mistaken for a girl when the police would inevitably find us.

I headed up the stairs to the all-too-familiar front door and knocked. I waited for about twenty seconds before the door opened up.

"Miss Perlman!" Richard said with a gasp. He covered his strawberry-colored lips with his tiny hand in shock. "We wasn't expectin' you!"

I nearly dropped to my knees as my conviction drained out of me. This wasn't Richard. This wasn't my husband. It couldn't be. Yet, I knew it was.

The person before me was a girl. A young, teenage girl. She stood pensively, her slim body covered by a strapless pink polka-dot dress with a multi-layered ruffled skirt and a white laced-up cincher belt. The top of the dress supported two modest but ample breasts, the flesh slightly quivering as Richard shifted his weight. These were not padded. They were real breasts.

He wore a pair of small cowboy booties, with his toes pointed toward each other as he was anxiously knock-kneed. His slim and coltish legs were perfect, and made me envious.

"Momma!" He called back into the house. "Come quick! Momma!"

I realized that this was an opportunity, so I wanted to get him to come with me right away. "You don't need to..."

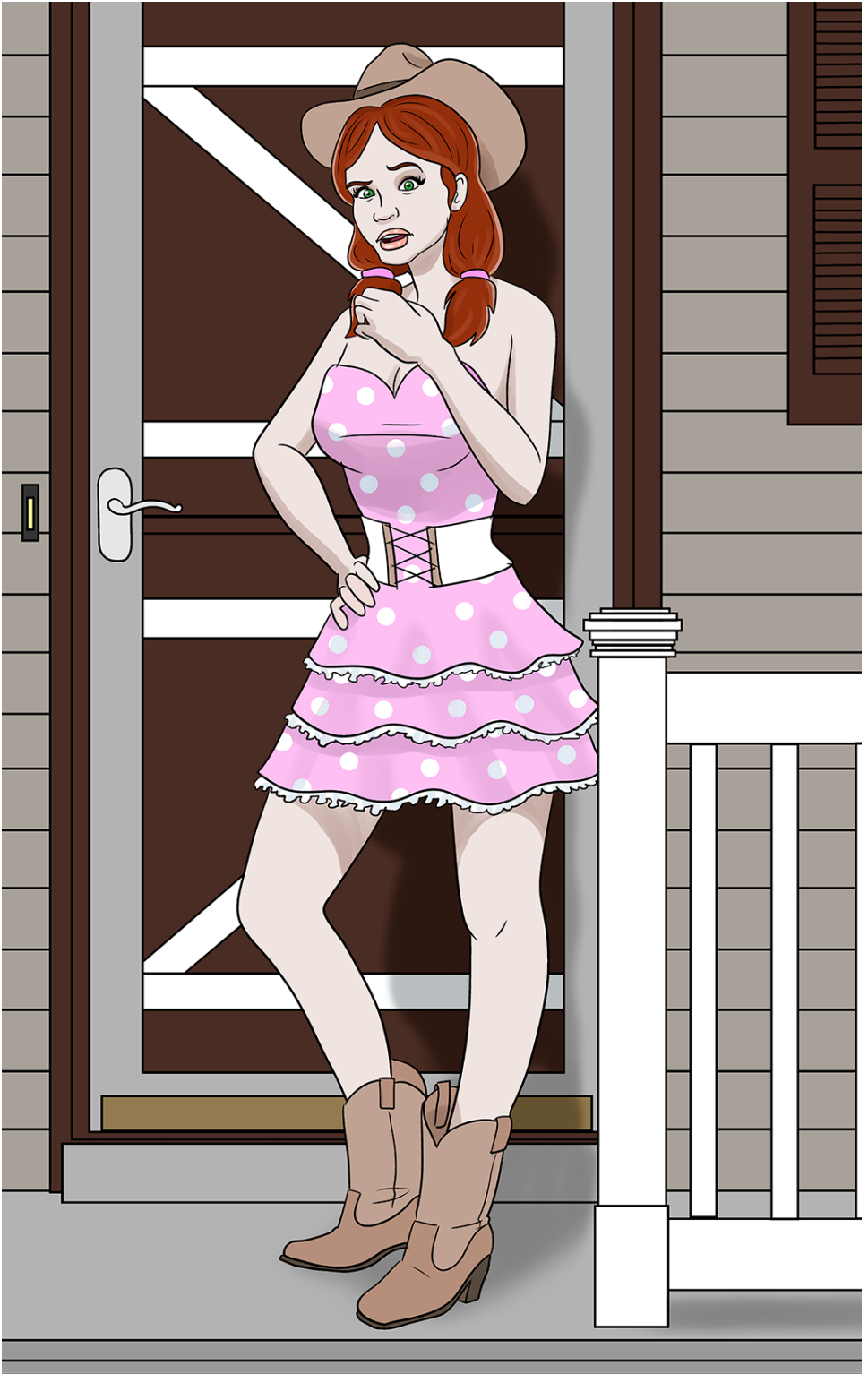
"I'm supposin' I should show you inside, Miss Perlman," he said in a sweet, lilting country drawl that sounded completely appropriate for how Richard now looked. He walked with an elegant shift to his hips that many born women hadn't been able to master in their natural lives. "Momma is upstairs. She'll be a-commin in jus' a sec."

"I wanted to talk to you," I said.

"L... I... I think maybe you should talk to my Momma first," he said.

I still couldn't reconcile the person I was talking to with my husband. He no longer looked in any way a mis-match of parts from different people. From head to toe, from fingertip to fingertip, he was all girl. His skin was fair and silky smooth, glowing with youth. His body, of which I could see a great deal, was sculpted to perfection, with graceful lissome limbs and a streamlined supple figure that curved gently.

He had on light makeup, as he needed little to highlight his already angelic face. His lashes were thick and long, his face blessed with a kiss of natural blush, and his thick lips flush with color. His eyes were the part that stabbed at my heart the most, however. They were large and wide awake, twinkling in sunlight, and tinged green.



His hair, a natural smoldering rust red, was in two twisted braids, much like the pigtails he had been wearing, but the base was loose and insecurely tied up. It was a hairstyle that looked casual, but to a woman like me, I knew it would have taken an hour to get just right.

I had no doubt now that he had been subject to much more than just drugs. He had been altered surgically. He had to have been. A male body just can't look this feminine without drastic, physical alterations. They had butchered him.

My plans were falling apart. I didn't know anymore if I could unmake what had been done to him. For the first time since I realized what was happening, it seemed permanent.

"Well, look who the cat dragged in!" Sang out Mrs. Dilkins as she came down the stairs.

"Hello, Elizabeth," I said, coldly.

"Have you offered Miss Perlman some refreshments, Daisy Mae?" She said to Richard.

"Oh, where are my manners!" Richard squeaked. "I'm such a bad hostess!"

"Lemonade for the both of us, Daisy Mae," Elizabeth instructed. "Miss Perlman looks like she needs a little cooling off."

"Yes, Momma," Richard said, who darted to the kitchen.

"So what brings you to Boregard, sweetie?" Elizabeth asked as she took a seat in a worn upholstered chair.

I waited just a moment before I had to speak. "You monster!" I hissed. "You've destroyed my husband! How can you call yourself a human being?"

"Your husband has never been happier," she said. "And she's finally getting over her illness. It's too bad it's left her in the shape she's in, but we'll just have to make the best of it."

"Why are you calling him Daisy Mae? Your daughter is dead, and she's not coming back! You're delusional!"

"Your husband has been quite willing to take her place. She's embraced her new situation..."

"She? Her? Why are you calling him a *her*?"

"Richard Rubenstein is a silly name for such a beautiful girl," this evil woman said, as if it were nothing. "His manhood is behind him."

"His manhood? You don't mean..."

"Here's your lemonade," Richard trilled as he carried in a tray with sweaty cold glasses of iced lemonade. I grabbed it greedily, as I was melting from the heat. I watched as Richard elegantly served Mrs. Dilkins, placed the tray down and then stood behind Elizabeth's chair, like a dutiful daughter.



"Thank you, Daisy Mae," Mrs. Dilkins said, accepting the glass.

"His name is *Richard*," I said.

"Yes, we decided on the name Daisy Mae for several reasons, isn't that right, child?"

"Yes, Momma," Richard replied.

She looked in Richard's direction. "You thought it was best."

Richard nodded obediently. "I don't like confusin' people. I don't have no rightful place callin' myself a boy no mores when I don't look like none." His high-pitched chirpy twang still chilled my blood when I heard it.

"We had some people in town givin' us funny looks," Mrs. Dilkins added. "Folks there know who Daisy Mae is, so using her name seemed like the best way to avoid trouble."

"Momma still had her birth certificate and IDs," Richard added. "It helps that I kinda look like her, too."

"Quite the coincidence," I remarked, looking dead-eyed at Elizabeth. She didn't even break in the slightest.

"It also helps in developing an interest in girlish things," she said, "like clothes, cleaning, cooking, makeup, hair... Boys... As a girl, Daisy Mae is free to explore those things without the worry that it would be inappropriate. She's a very clever girl, my Daisy Mae."

Ricard blushed and turned his head away.

"And when he gets over this illness?" I asked, keeping the absurd pretense of a disease. "He'll just be back to..."

"The doctor is optimistic Daisy Mae will make a full recovery," Elizabeth answered, in a tone that sounded entirely uninterested the the question. "Although it may take years, Daisy Mae will return to being an adult."

I noticed she left out any mention of Ricard returning to being my husband — and a man. Then again, I suppose she was making it obvious. She had no intention of letting Ricard return from anything. She wanted to keep him this way.

"A little more ice," Mrs. Dilkins said to Richard, handing him her glass.

Richard looked crestfallen. "Yes, Ma'am, I'm sorry, Ma'am." He grabbed the glass and sped off to the kitchen as is he was being chased by wolves.

Ricard was not only being treated like a girl, and not just as if her were a child, but like a personal servant.

"I'm sure you share my deep concern for Daisy Mae and pray that she can learn to live a full, healthy life despite her situation," Mrs. Dilkins said, with a calmness that stood the hair on my neck on edge. "I'm sure she can return to normal in the future."

“If he’s ever allowed to leave,” I added a long pause, “your care.”

“When she’s good and ready — although she has expressed interest in staying.”

“Totally unprompted, I would assume.”

Ricard then returned with a new glass of lemonade with the extra ice. Mrs. Dilkins took a moment to visually examine it, making sure it met her expectations, before taking it. Richard was visibly relieved, and took his station behind Elizabeth’s chair.

“Why do you allow her to treat you this way, Richard?” I asked, directly.

“I... I...”

Not surprisingly, he didn’t seem to have an answer. What was a surprise was that Mrs. Dilkins was letting him answer without prompting or interruption.

“My... My...” Richard was conflicted, that much I could tell from his haltering speech. Finally, he managed to talk. “Momma is always right.” He dipped his head.

I had heard enough of this nonsense. “You’re a man, Richard! A grown man! You can strip a company of assets and flip it for millions of dollars in a week-end! You can make a foreign government’s currency drop through the floor! I’ve seen you walk into a corporate boardroom and walk out with the scalps of billionaires!”

“Daisy Mae is a gentle girl, Miss Perlman!”

“Mrs!” I corrected. “Misses Perlman. I’m his wife!”

“No, not anymore,” she said, and sipped her drink. “We’ve had the divorce papers signed and processed. I’m sure you’ll have them waiting in your mail by the time you get home.”

“Divorce? Hardly! I’m not going to sign them, if that’s what you’re assuming. I love my husband, even through something like this.” Did she think I was just going to give up all that money? She was even more presumptuous than I thought.

“It’s up to you, of course,” Elizabeth said. “However, I don’t think holding on to the past will serve you all that well. And it would be so hard on Daisy Mae, what with a trial and all. It might just traumatize her, in her fragile state.”

I could see her point. If Richard wasn’t on my side, any attempt to resist a divorce — and any claim I had to his money — would be thrown out in court. I needed to talk to Richard and get his side of the story, and to do that I needed him alone.

“Well, I certainly don’t want to hurt anyone,” I said. “Richard is my first and only concern, of course.”

“Oh yes, of course,” she replied.

I had to play nice until I had my opportunity. "Fall's coming," I said. "Does it get cold out here?"

"It's not the cold that will get you, it's the twisters," Mrs. Dilkins replied.

I had no idea what to do for small talk. I wasn't a chatty person. I liked to come to the point. Still, we managed to keep a pointless conversation going for well over twenty minutes. I had to keep telling myself to not stare at my husband the whole time, as he stood guard beside Elizabeth, cowboy hat in hand. I was in utter shock at his transformation. What kind of medical horrors has they unleashed on him? They had to have done some kind of work to trim his figure and get his face in that feminine shape. The change was otherworldly.

Eventually, we got onto the subject of the upcoming school year, and Mrs. Dilkins had yet another surprise for me. "Daisy Mae is quite excited. She'll be starting her sophomore year at Boregard High."

"Richard? In high school?" I said, biting my tongue. "I know you're not prone to humor Elizabeth, but..."

"No," she replied with no hesitation. "Daisy Mae is a sixteen year old girl, so of course she's going to school. You want to go, don't you, doodlebug?"

"I'm kind of nervous," Richard answered, telling me who 'doodlebug' was supposed to be. "I ain't never been to school as a girl, y'know. I hope I look like I's suppos'ta be there."

"I'm sure you'll be fine," Mrs. Dilkins said with a motherly smile.

I had to speak my piece. "You can't force him to do this. This is public humiliation. It's unspeakably cruel. Do you not have any trace of civility?"

"Oh!" Richard suddenly spoke. "Momma, can Miss Perlman help me pick out something for the first day of school? Y'know, because she's so sophisticated, bein' from the big city an' all."

"I don't see the harm in it."

"Will you, Miss Perlman?" Richard said to me. "My room's just upstairs."

That was the first sign I had that Richard still had his wits about him. He was trying just as hard as I was to find a way to get away from Mrs. Dilkins.

I followed Richard up the creaky wooden stairs, watching my former husband trot along, his arms floating out to his sides, being ever so careful in his heeled shoes. When we got to the hallway, he made an unexpected turn into the first doorway.

"Isn't this the dead girl's room?" I asked.

"Dead girl?" Richard said, as he swung open the doors to a stand-up wardrobe. "No, it's my room."

Richard's room was decked out in feminine frills, just like I remembered it from the first time I saw it. A pink bed sheet with white lace trim dressed a simple but large bed that had a pile of stuffed animals on it. White cotton lace curtains blew in the wind. The walls were painted a pastel pink and the wardrobe, vanity, and full length mirror were white.

On a shelf, a raggedy-ann doll rested, smiling vacantly at the floor. On every wall, a framed picture of needlework was hung. "Only in the Lord will ye find happiness," read one. "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom," read another. Stitched on his pillows was the most intricate stitching of all, where it read "Property of Daisy Mae."

"This is Daisy Mae's room," I said.

"Uh-huh," he replied, unfazed.

"I see," I said. "And now you stay here."

"Of course I do!" He said, looking around for the things he wanted to take. "It's my stuff."

"It's *Daisy Mae's* stuff."

"Uh-huh," Richard said as he picked out a dress from the wardrobe. "I'm gonna needs me some clothin' I'm figgerin'." Richard said in that idiotic country twang he used now. I could see that Daisy Mae's wardrobe was stuffed with dress after dress, lace, frills and ruffles bursting forward. There was also a lot of denim. Ungodly amounts of denim.

That was in agreement with the whole room, though. "Are you sleeping in here?"

"It's *my* room, Miss Perlman."

"Everything's so pink and girlish in here. How can you stand it?"

"Ain't it wonderful? I've always loved pink."

"When I wore pink to the Nusbaum bar mitzvah you said it made you sick to be seen with me."

"I thought you looked like a slut," Richard said, looking at me. I recognized the look in his eyes. That look of determination. That steely gaze I knew so well. He was still in there. "And no one can be taken seriously in pink."

"So why do you stay here, Richard? Why don't you change the color?"

"I think I tried... Once..." He said, looking around the room, at the walls. "But then I remembered how much I love pink..."

"Richard!" I barked. "Focus!" Obviously, he had trouble keeping track of his real self. I walked over to him and ripped his attention away from the dresses. "You wanted me alone for a reason! To talk to me!"

"I did?" He replied in an airy, uncertain voice.



“I hope to God you did. Anyway, I need to talk to you. I’m worried you’ve lost control of the situation.”

“I don't understand, Miss Perlman.”

“This was to buy the property, Richard! I know you can be stubborn, but can't you see what she's done to you?”

“Who?”

“That witch downstairs! Mrs. Dilkins!”

“Momma? I love my momma!”

“You’re bring brainwashed!” I told him.

“Momma would never do that. She loves me so.”

“Your mother died three years ago, Richard. You were by her bed!”

Then a look of awareness came to him. He was sad. He looked down at the hard wood floor. “I promised her I’d be successful. I promised her I’d be a billionaire.”

“Do you like dressing like this, Richard? Do you like living out here in the Godforsaken hellhole? Do you want to be the virtual slave of that woman?”

“I want to go home, Janice!” He said, strength coming to his voice. “Please take me home!” He looked at me, begging me again. He relied on me for direction. He needed me to tell him what to do. That was the way I liked it.

“Get your things and let’s go!” I said. “We’ve got to go now!”

Richard turned back to his wardrobe and picked out two dresses. “I guess I can’t really go anywhere in my old clothes,” he said. “I’ve got to use what’s here.”

“Pick one and move!”

“One?” He whined. “I can’t take just one! This one’s my fancy dress for company and this one I made myself, and this one’s for church...”

“Richard, you’ve got to stop thinking like that!”

He looked like he was on the verge of crying. “But... Don’t you think... Sometimes I know down deep in my heart... I really could be... I like it when people call me Daisy Mae. I feel so good. So real and warm inside. It’s so wonderful.”

“Richard!” I barked.

“Oh, I so *hate* that name!” He said, his strong voice giving way to a girlish screech. “*I hate* being called that!”

“You’re my husband, Richard Rubenstein. Twenty-six years old. Born in Waterbury, Massachusetts.”

“No I ain’t!” He replied, his eyes expressing delight, like he had just discovered the truth. “Your husband is dead! My Momma said so! I ain’t never been your husband!”

“She said... *What?*”

“She said that’s why you’re all bitter an’ that why you want to take me away! You want to change me! Because you’re lonely and wicked!”

“Richard, *please!* You have to concentrate! We nearly...”

“My name is Daisy Mae Dilkins! My Momma is Elizabeth Dilkins and I was borned in this very here house by ol’ Doc Coonrod! You’re a liar!” He pointed at me accusingly, as his eyes welled up in tears. “A liar!”

I grabbed him by the shoulders. “I know you can beat this, Richard! Please *concentrate!*”

“No!” He screamed. “I’m Daisy Mae Dilkins! *I know* I am!” Tears started to roll down his cheeks. “I want... I want...” He then shook his head and looked me in the eyes. “Help me, Janice. I... don’t know what’s happening anymore.”

“Then let’s go!” I said, tugging him by the arm.

He just looked at me, his body beginning to shake. His eyes were filled with confusion and terror, with tears streaming down his face. I took him in my arms... I hated having to do this. There wasn’t time. I hate babying people. As his arms wrapped around me, his legs gave way and he sobbed like a baby into my shoulder. “...I just wanted to make my mother happy...” He blubbered. “I wanted to be a billionaire, like I promised her... That’s all I ever wanted... I just wanted to be good for her... Oh, Momma...”

I patted him on the head. “Just let it out. Let it out, honey. There’s been so much you’ve been through. I know.” I had to sound sympathetic with him to make him feel better. “No one knows better than me what you’re going through.”

He pulled his head back to look at me. “Really?” He said, fighting the tears.

“Do you know how many pathetic little crybabies I’ve had to work with? You have to listen to what they want, and what they feel and dab their tears when they get the slight bit butthurt. I have to fake things all the time!”

“Uh-huh,” he said. He let go and stood on his own. “It must have been... real-ly bad for you.”

“I mean, not to complain, but the faster we’re out of this horrible, miserable little town of losers and slack-jawed yokels, the better!”

“We better get going then,” Richard said. “I’ll just take one.” He went back to the wardrobe. He picked one dress out and felt the fabric. “I wore this one to my baptism with Pastor Smith. Everyone in town was there. Everyone told me how pretty I was and how much they knew I’d be such a wonderful daughter for my Momma.”

“Richard. Please. You’ve *got* to focus.”

“I remember thinkin’ that I was going to get it all wet, because of the baptizin’. Then I thought that I could make sacrifices for my faith in the Lord.”

I heard that spine-chilling creaking of the stairs. “Richard, come on! She’s coming back!”

“...And then when I was bendin’ over, I realized that my slip might be showing, so I tugged at the hem, and everyone laughed. I was so embarrassed. Did I show you the shoes I wore that day?”

I grabbed Richard by the arm. “Richard!” I yelled at him. “Richard!”

“I wore my Mary Janes because so many other girls wore them to Church. Momma said I looked so sweet in my Mary Janes and my white stockings. Sweet as sugar frostin’ she said.”

“You’re Jewish like me, Richard! You’re a man! You’re my husband!”

“I can’t be your husband, can I *really*?” He said. It was a question he wasn’t asking me, he was asking himself.

“Elizabeth has to be stopped! She’s made you as crazy as she is!” I stomped on the floor. “Let’s move now!”

“Okay,” he said. He took the dress he was holding and then ran behind me down the back stairs, away from that insane woman.

We got to the door and he turned quickly to a mirror to re-apply his lipstick.

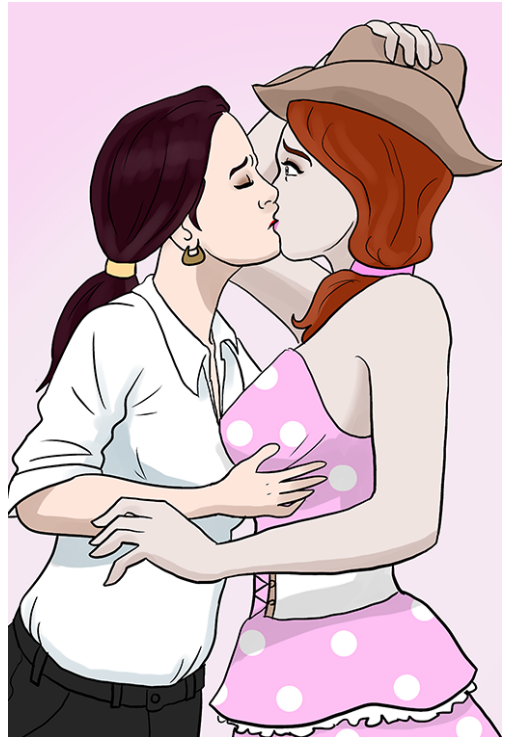
“Please, Richard!”

“I need to look proper going out,” he said. Then his eyes started to drift again. “Maybe we should ask my Momma if it’s okay for me to go with you?”

I grabbed him and kissed him as deeply as I could. I knew I didn’t have the time, but he left me no choice. “Do you remember, Richard? Do you remember the way things used to be? Don’t you want to be in each other’s arms again?”

“But...” He still had some hesitation. I kissed him once more. “Did we really love each other?” He asked.

“Of course we did, Richard!” I told him. “We’re husband and wife!”



He straightened himself up and swallowed. "Elizabeth's going to be heart-broken. I hope we're doing the right thing." Clearing his voice, he seemed to struggle with speaking. "Let's go," he said.

"Finally," I said, rolling my eyes. "Sometimes you're more trouble than you're worth."

I turned to see Elizabeth standing in the doorway.

"Leave Daisy Mae alone, Janice."

Richard looked frightened. "Momma I..."

"Shush, doodlebug," she said, calmly. "I think I smell something from the kitchen."

He sniffed the air. "The stove!" He said, looking back inside. "Oh, my preserves!"

I watched as he dashed out the door, in a panic.

"No, Richard! *No!*" I yelled. "Let the damn place burn!"

"My blackberry preserves! I'll never win the blue ribbon at the county fair now!" He called out, as he went downstairs.

"Please, Richard!" He was already out of earshot. I turned to Elizabeth. "What have you done to him?" I yelled. "He really believes he's your daughter!"

"And I'll love him like a daughter," Elizabeth replied. "Because she *is* my daughter."

"He's my husband!"

"She's not anyone's husband no more." She said, with a smile that made me sick. "She's dressing in girls' clothes, living in a girls' room and answers to a girls' name. She's no more your husband than she's the King of Siam."

"Fuck your self-righteous, condescending attitude! You're a murderer! You killed him! *Killed him!*"

"I have given her a life full of happiness, discovery and purpose. I've given her Daisy Mae's life. A life that never should have ended."

"You have no right!"

"Rights got nothin' to do with it. Your husband would have cheated me out of my house and property. Whatever he got, he deserved."

"It's all ruined, Momma," Richard said, pouting, as he returned. "My preserves are all burnt." He untied the apron around his waist and put it aside. "I'll never win the blue ribbon at the county fair now!"

This was my last chance to get through to him. "Please, Richard!"

He looked at me with a stare. "I... I gots to do what I gots to do, Ma'am," he said.

“Richard!” I barked.  
“Snap out of it!”

“We have many more blackberries, darlin’. Why don’t you go pick some more.” Elizabeth said, supportively.

“I know Momma, but we worked so hard!”

“And we’ll just have to work harder,” she replied. “No go fetch your pickin’ basket and get some more berries before sundown.” She then paused. “Unless you want to go to the city with Miss Perlman here.”

He only glanced at me for a split second before he walked past me. “Okay, Momma!”

Richard said, his mood lightening.

“Richard!” I called to him.

He turned around. As he did, I no longer saw any trace of my husband in that face. He had never looked happier. The Richard I knew would never have dared look so cheerful. “I guess I’ll just never see the big city,” he said with a half-hearted smile. “I’m jus’ an old-fashioned country girl at heart.”

“No!” I yelled. “*Don’t let them win!*”

“I’ve got to change into a berry pickin’ outfit, don’t I Momma?”

“I expect so, little one,” Elizabeth replied with a smug smile.

“I know exactly what I want to wear!” He said, his face lit with joy. He practically skipped past me, ignoring me like I was invisible, humming a happy tune.

I had heard enough. I had dealt with this situation more than anyone could ever bear. No one would blame me if I left. So I barged past Mrs. Dilkins,



went outside and headed out to my car. The hell with them. The hell with Boregard. I was sorry for Richard, but I had tried my best.

Besides, this was all his fault. I was blameless.



The disappearance of Richard Rubenstein eventually attracted attention. The police came around to my new apartment to ask me questions, and I had to spend the last of my savings on a criminal attorney. I wasn't sure what to tell the police, or even the attorney, at first. I had to be evasive, which undoubtedly made me look guilty.

My read on this situation was not good for me. A prominent financial executive, worth over five million dollars (6.76 million, but who's counting?) had disappeared without a trace. The last person to see him "alive" was me. His bank accounts had been drained, and his phone was in my possession.

I needed to explain a lot, but I had few answers I could give them. If I was totally candid with them, there was simply no chance they would believe me. I didn't believe it, so why would anyone else? When I did finally gather up the courage to tell my lawyer the whole sordid story, I received a bill and a letter saying he was no longer available to work my case. I can understand why, but it certainly didn't stop that weasel from taking my money.

Then Richard's "disappearance" made the Post. Once they had a hold of the story, or at least their version of it, my life became a nightmare. I was immediately dismissed from my crap job, I was asked to move out of my temporary apartment because of the relentless presence of the media camped outside the building, and I couldn't go anywhere without being recognized as the "Black Widow" the press had billed me as.

I had no money left. After backing out of our lease on the brownstone, and that ghoul of a woman stealing all of our money, I had nothing. The media was reporting that the police were "running out of suspects" and were already drawing up charges against me.

There was no way out for me. I had an alibi no one could believe, and nothing to back it up. So there was only really one option



left.

It was late November when I returned to that godforsaken Boregard. I had phoned Jeter ahead of time to let him know I was coming. He met me at the bus stop with a cold bottle of Coca-Cola. "This is gettin' to be a habit," he said. "One might think you wuz comin' back just cuz you were sweet on me." I nearly threw up.

In the window, I could see the figure of Pastor Smith, in a tan suit, watching us. He kept both eyes on us even as we were driving away in Jeter's truck. It was quite unsettling.

We headed out the now-familiar road to Elizabeth's house. It came off of an all-too-familiar sparsely-used highway, a turn-off that at parts was paved, and other parts wasn't. Mailboxes were the only real indication that somebody lived in the area. They all had small yellow boxes attached to them for the local newspaper. Some mailboxes were plain, others decorated and painted. There were patriot themes, covered-wagon designs and the occasional miscellaneous decoration like cheerleading, the Oklahoma Sooners or one that was made to look like a giant gun. That was just this part of the country, I guess. Everyone wants a little bit of attention and this was all they were ever going to get. Mailboxes were their one claim to fame. Pathetic.

Jeter decided to let me off easy and drove the full length of the driveway up to Elizabeth's house. I asked him to wait for me, and he obliged, as usual. I could probably ask him to knock over a bank and he'd do it.

"Jaince!" Elizabeth said, sounding almost pleased to see me. "Why, you're early! Do come in!" She was drying a dish with a towel and finished up while ushering me inside. "Hello, Jeter!" She said, waving to the truck in the driveway. "Is Doc on his way?"

Jeter waved back. "Yes'm."

I braced myself for what I knew I had to do. At the same time, in my mind, I was running over what I was planning to say. "I've come to take Richard," I said, simply. No small talk. No distractions.

"Yes, I know," she replied. "Daisy Mae! Company!" She yelled upstairs.

"You know?" I asked.

"Yes, of course," she said with a smile. "I had hoped to finish the dishes before you arrived."

"Why did you know I was coming?"

"Have a seat," she said, before returning to the kitchen. "You held out much longer than I expected. Once the tabloids started to report on you, I thought you'd be on the first plane out here."

"You know they intend to arrest me?" I called out to be heard through the kitchen door.

“Yes, Janice,” she returned from the kitchen without the dishtowel and apron. “I’ve read all about it. It’s a connected world, isn’t it? Some of those stories were so tawdry. Just nasty.”

“So you knew I’d be back.”

“It was inevitable. For many reasons,” she said. “Where *is* that girl?”

“I’m a-commin’!” A melodic, soprano voice said from the stairs. He stood there, looking anxious, and bit his plump lower lip, girlishly. His big, clear eyes looked out at me. He braced his weight on the handrail, his long, slender arms holding the sides.

“Oh!” He said. Or *she* said? It seemed pointless to keep calling this person a ‘he.’ “I thought it was Jesse.”

“He’s not due until five,” Mrs. Dilkins said, sternly. “And he won’t be a second earlier if he knows what’s good for him.”

“Yes, Ma’am.” The girl’s voice was just as light and melodious as it had been last time I talked to her. This time there was something different about the way she said things. She seemed so natural, so at ease with herself, like she’d lived like this her whole life.

“Richard?” I asked her.

She looked back at me with a squint in one eye. Then she looked at Elizabeth. “I don’t understand.”

“Miss Perlman was mistaken, doodlebug.” The woman then turned to me. “There’s no one here by that name.”

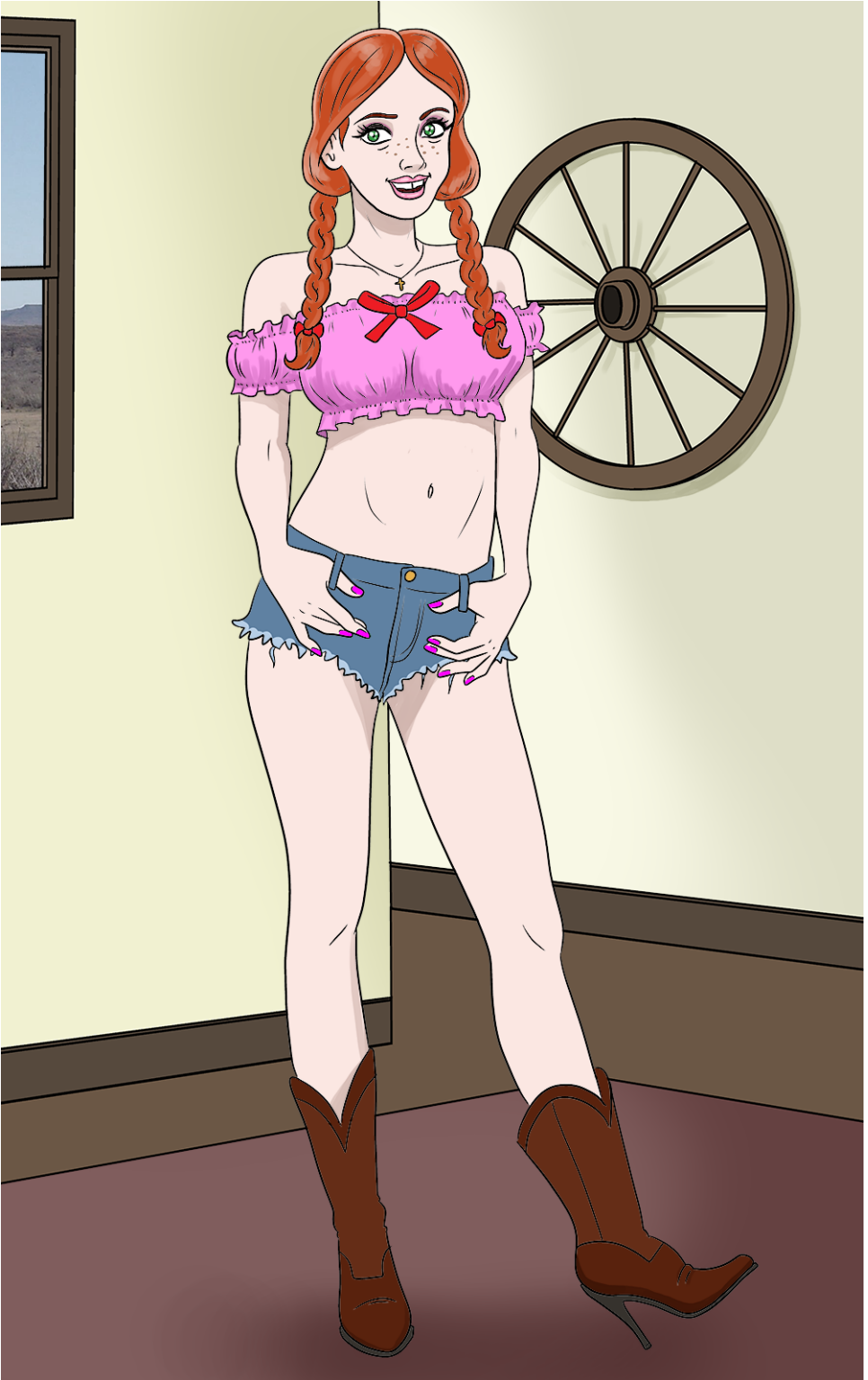
“Oh, Miss Perlman!” Daisy Mae Dilkins said with a broad smile of recognition. “It’s been so long! I’m plumb ashamed I didn’t recognize y’all!”

As she spoke, I could get a better look. The sprinkle of freckles across her nose, just like Daisy Mae had. The two buck teeth with the slight gap. The bright blue eyes. The dimples in her cheeks when she smiled. Her face was identical to Daisy Mae.

She had done it. Elizabeth had won. She had made my husband into her dead daughter. My husband had gambled he could deal with the situation. He had lost.

She was wearing a simple outfit, but one only a country girl would wear. She had on tiny denim shorts that ended where the thighs began. Daisy Dukes, as they call them. They showed off a deeply envious pair of long, smooth and slender legs. She had on a pair of women’s cowboy boots, one I hadn’t seen before. She probably a dozen pairs up in her room.

But as girlish as her legs were, her upper body made the blood in my heart go as cold as the bathroom floor on a winter morning. She had a pink strapless crop-top fringed with small ruffles. It showcased two perfectly formed, round globes of flesh, perky and young, that would make any man drop to his knees



in awe. I had little doubt there was no padding. That was all her.

“Why don’t you go back to your room and finish getting ready, Doodlebug?”

“Good to see you, Ma’am,” Daisy Mae sang out with a hint of a curtsy. She didn’t even glance back at me as he headed back up the stairs.

I was trying to contain my anger, but I could only do so much. “Give me one good reason I shouldn’t phone the police and have you locked up.”

“Oh, the police have already been here,” Elizabeth said. “Ol’ Sheriff Turnbull and his boys said there were reports of a man living in my house. Doc Coonrod and I cleared everything up. They apologized for the trouble, then they even helped me with getting Daisy Mae a new ID.”

I was angrier than ever. “You should be ashamed of yourself! I don’t care what your little backwater police say, I’ll have you buried so deep in lawsuits, you won’t be able to cross the street without a lawyer present!”

“If you feel so strongly about it I will would not object to you taking him home and looking after him. I’m sure he’d be delighted to go back to the city and meet all of your old friends, and talk about how sick he is. And I’m sure he’d love to meet your new boyfriends as well.” Then she approached me, walking very slowly and deliberately. “But you’re not going back to the city, are you?”

“What do you mean by that?” I said. “Of course I’m going back. And I’m taking Richard back with me!”

“To prove who he is by a DNA test, I presume,” Mrs. Dilkins said, now standing inches away from me. “That’s just about all that’s left of your husband, isn’t it? Little bits of DNA.”

I stood up as straight as I could, countering her childish pathetic attempt to physically intimidate me.

“It’s the one thing you couldn’t change about him,” I said. “Once they see that, I’ll be vindicated.”

“You might be right,” said another drawling voice behind me. I turned to see Doctor Coonrod had let himself in the front door. “Then again, they’d never try it. No one would believe you.”

“I’d show them the scars where you mutilated him!”

“You can try, but I doubt you’ll see any scars. I am a craftsman, after all. I know my trade.”

“You can’t hide everything.”

“I can and I did,” the doctor said with more than a hint of pride. “No one would look at Daisy Mae and think she was your husband. They can’t force her to take the test without a court order, and I don’t see any judge believin’ such a tall tale.”

"I can make them believe!" I said.

"Maybe you might," he said, scratching his neck. "Maybe you might."

"That's why we made you come back," Elizabeth said.

"You didn't make me do anything!"

The doctor chuckled. "The smart thing to do would have been to leave the country, don't you think?"

"Or you could show them your husband's plane ticket here to Boregard," Mrs. Dilkins said. "There are probably a dozen things you could have done instead of coming back here, which you knew was never going to work."

"But you couldn't help yourself, could you?" Doc Coonrod said. You were compelled. Just like your husband was compelled to stay."

"Compelled? You did nothing to me! I had to come back or... I... There was no..."

"Used to be I made my livin' bein' a stage magician," the doctor said. "My show was famous from for ten counties around. What really drew them in was the..."

"Spare me," I said.

"Shush now," the doctor said.

I tried to say something, but I couldn't make a sound. Nothing would come out.

The doctor continued. "What really made my show somethin' special was the hypnosis act. I'd invite the prettiest girl in the front row on stage, have her lie between two chairs, snap my fingers, and she'd become stiff as a board. Then I'd stand on her belly. People loved it. Problem was, I didn't know that other magicians used a ringer. Someone in on the secret." He laughed. "Bein' a country boy, I just thought that I need to learn how to mesmerize 'em for real. Which is what I did."

"This story changes every time you tell it," Mrs. Dilkins said to Dr. Coonrod, with a grin. "And gets longer."

The doctor didn't stop his tale. "I was good at it, too. I could put someone under without them even knowin' a thin' about it. Twenty, twenty-five seconds that's all I need."

"I don't think she believes you, Doc," Elizabeth said with a wicked grin.

"Talk," he said to me.

Suddenly, I could speak again. "You're crazy! Both of you! Crazy!"

"Speak like one of God's children," said the doctor.

“What in all creation is that suppos’ta mean?” I said, grabbing my mouth closed as I said it. Not only had I used that insipid country slang, but I said it in the drawl these people used.

“That’s better.”

“Why does I...?” I started to ask, before stopping myself.

“You might well convince a judge to check Daisy Mae’s DNA. So it’s probably for the best that you don’t get the chance.” He then walked to the door and made a signal to someone. “You’ll like Boregard,” he said. “It grows on you.”

“Is it time?” Jeter asked the doctor as he appeared in the open front door.

“Just about,” the doctor said.

“Time? Time for what?” I asked, as I backed away. I suddenly had the feeling I was in real trouble. “Don’t you touch me! No one touches me!”

“Stand like a statue,” the doctor said to me, and suddenly, I couldn’t move. My arms, my legs and the rest of my body were frozen. The doctor smiled as he knocked on my shoulder. “Stiff as a board. That one’s my specialty.”

Lizzie turned to yell up the stairs again. “We’re going out, Daisy Mae! Back in a couple of hours!”

“Okay, Momma!” I heard the girl yell back.

Jeter bent down and picked me up, putting me over his shoulder like he was carrying a coat rack. I was unable to move, not even to bend my body. I really was a statue.

I was laid in the bed of Jeter’s truck roughly, and tied down like cargo. “Yer gonna be a right perty wife for Pastor Smith,” Jeter said as he affixed the last cord around my legs.

“Once we get to my practice, Jeter, you can either wait or go home,” the doctor said. “Lizzie and I will be busy adjusting Janice here for a few hours, at least.”

“I don’ mind waitin’,” Jeter replied. I heard him slam his truck door shut. “Besides, Pastor Smith has been tearin’ his hair out, waiting for a new wife. I want to see his face when y’all give her to him.”

A car started up after two door slams. I couldn’t see out of the truck bed but I assumed the doctor and Lizzie were going on ahead. Sure enough, the truck fired up and turned down the driveway, following them.

How had I gotten myself here? How had I misread the situation so badly? And how insane was it that hypnosis could have done this to me? Richard, that asshole, I swear to God that if there’s any bit of him left in that hillbilly girl, I’ll kill it off myself. He led me into this mess. This was his doing. Now I was stuck in this nightmare, and if I didn’t find a way out, I was going to have my brains scrambled. Fine time to be without a lawyer.

I caught a break just about a minute after we left the Dilkins's house. The truck hit a rock or something and the ties holding me down snapped. I slid out the back and onto the hard dirt road. I'm not kidding you, I nearly died. I had scratches all over my elbows and knees, but I could move again.

Jeter must not have noticed, as he continued on down the road, dust kicking up behind his truck and Elizabeth's car.

Like just about anywhere in the Godforsaken town, there was no other house in sight. The only course of action left to me was to head back the Dilkins place. This was going to work out in my favor, having Daisy Mae alone. If I could get her to come with me back to New York, I'd finally have my way out — and if she didn't want to come with me, I'd just knock her out. Maybe I could get her to a testing lab or police station in another town. I'd figure it out as I went.

It must have taken me twenty minutes, but I finally got to the driveway. There was another truck parked outside. I hadn't seen it before.

I made my way to the front door, and opened it quietly, which wasn't easy given how creaky and old everything was in that dumb house. I immediately heard some noise upstairs. Then I heard a giggle. Then I heard another voice.

Before I could even think about what I was doing, I crept up the stairs. I knew what I was hearing, but I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't. When I got to the top, I saw that Daisy Mae's door was open, and the lights were on inside.

"Please, Jesse!" I could hear her voice pleading in a warbling tone. "I'm not ready!"

"Daisy," said a very deep but distinctly slow drawl. "We've been dating for three months now... Muh balls are so blue I think they're gonna dry up and fall off!"

I pushed the door open just a crack more so I could see for myself. Obviously, this Jesse kid, who Daisy Mae had said she was expecting, had shown up, and they now had the house to themselves. He was now doing what any teenaged boy would do in this situation, and was sitting on her bed, in his underwear, trying to get laid by his girlfriend.

Only this wasn't any girl, this was my husband. My Richard.

Was I about to see my own husband taken by a young boy no more than sixteen? I still couldn't believe it.

"C'mon, Daisy," the boy whined. "We ain't got forever." He was a rugged young man, with a body that was already becoming marbled through heavy farm work. His brown hair was thick and tussled, he had a lantern jaw and eyes that were magnetic.

"I... It ain't right, Jesse. This don't feel right."



“What? You still havin’ that dream? The one where you’re a man?”  
“It feels so real!” Daisy Mae said. “It’s like a whole lifetime of stuff.”  
“You’re no man, Daisy! You’re my girl!”  
“I know... But...”

Then I saw the boy grab his briefs. He grabbed Daisy Mae’s hand and stuck it down the front. “Feel it!” He said, sternly.

“Jesse!” The girl screamed back. She looked horrified. “This is...”

“You need to stop jimmy-jackin’ me around, Diasy! Feel how much I love you!”

The girl’s objections softened. I could see the worry lines on her forehead evaporate and an expression of curiosity overtake her.

“There you go! Now do you still think you ever had one of these?” Jesse kept holding her arm in place.

“No...” She said, quietly, almost to herself. “It’s so big...”

“Can you even wrap your hand around it?” He said. “It’s big and hard, Daisy.”

“It’s a giant!” She said. I could tell what she was thinking. That the cock in her hand was so much bigger and thicker than what Richard might remember. Anything less didn’t even count.

“Stroke it,” Jesse said.

“How?” Daisy Mae asked. It was like she had forgotten everything she had known about Richard’s manhood. Faced with the huge throbbing tool this farm boy wielded, Daisy’s subconscious had decided everything she had learned was now invalid.

“Use your fingertips. On the underside,” He said. “No, start at the base!”

“Sorry!” She said.

“You’re doing fine,” said Jesse with a tone of serenity to his voice. “You be-ginnin’ to forget those dreams, now?”

“I... I don’t know...” Daisy replied.

“Here,” Jesse said, pulling away from the girl’s hand. He leaned forward and reached up under her top. I could see the tension in her breasts shift, as he swiftly removed her bra and tossed it aside. He was reaching up and kneading her boobs. “Does *that* make you forget about that fool dream?”

Daisy Mae looked even more confused. Whatever was going on in her mind was causing her real distress. “I don’t think we should be doin’ this.”

“That’s all I can take!” Jesse shouted. In one sweeping move, he grabbed Daisy Mae by the waist, pulled her forward while also pushing her down. All of the sudden, she was on her back, and Jesse whipped her top off, leaving her still emerging breasts bobbing on her slender chest. He then started to grab at her shorts, yanking them down until he couldn’t pull them down any further, as he was blocking it, seated in between her legs.

I didn’t know until that moment how far the transformation of my husband had gone. I covered my mouth with both hands to restrain the scream I wanted to make, seeing that my husband’s dick had been removed. He was a man no more. The slit between her legs was tight and perfect. As Jesse began to tug at her panties, I could see that she kept the lips of her virginal pussy shaved.

He was a girl. A girl in every way.

Jesse took his fingers and poked them inside those lips, causing Daisy Mae to gasp and whimper at the same time. So did I, for that matter.

“You still think you were a man?” Jesse asked.

Daisy Mae’s eyes were closed tight as she gripped the sheets of her bed.

“Well?” Jesse asked again as he made another thrust.

“No!” Daisy Mae shouted.

“You were never a man, were you, girl?”

“N... N... No!” She started to shake her head side to side, violently.

“What’s that? I need to hear the words!”

“No! I was never a man!” Daisy Mae replied in a shaky voice.

“I don't know if I believe you, Daisy!” Jesse said. “I'm gonna have to fuck those thoughts right outta yer tiny head!” With one hand he freed his engorged, red and purple monster from his pants, and then leaned over Daisy Mae's body.

“We... We're too young! I promised Momma!”

“Don't think of your Momma now, girl!” he growled. “Here's what gonna fix you!”

The pop in Daisy Mae's eyes was all I need to see to know that she was now feeling a cock enter her for the very first time. “Erk!” She said with a peep.

“Now, feel it leave you!” Jesse said. “There's no space for these silly thoughts in your tiny head, Daisy Mae Dilkins!” He made a thrust.

“Oooowoooh!” Daisy Mae said, urgently. “You're hurting me!”

“It's the dream leaving your body, Daisy!” Jesse said. “Can you feel it leaving?”

“L... L...” Daisy Mae was in pain, I could tell from the look on her face. Then, all of the sudden, she bucked, and arched her back. “Yes! Yeeeeees! I feel it!” She howled.

“It's almost gone!” Jesse said, as he began to thrust and thrust and thrust. “It's on the run, now!”



“Uuuuh!” Diasy Mae moaned. “Euuuh!” She said again. Then it started to come faster and faster. She was moaning in time with the thrusts. “It’s almost... Almost... Almost...”

Then, Jesse’s quick thrusting slowed up abruptly. I knew that move from experience. “Urrrgh!” He said, as his expression changed.

“More, more!” Daisy Mae squealed. “Keep it goin’!”

The boy complied, and unlike every man I’d ever been with, he just kept pumping and pumping like he had some bottomless tank of jizz he could draw from. Oh, to be a teenager again.

The longer it went, the more I could see Daisy Mae melt into the bed. There was no more struggle. She was laying back and taking the full length of a man’s disk, and reveling in it. She was losing her need for escape, for dominance. She was accepting the submissive role she would play for the rest of her life. It was almost like an exorcism.

Daisy Mae lifted her tired arms and wrapped them around Jesse’s neck. “Did I do it right?” She asked, meekly. “It was my first time.”

Had I just seen it? Had I just seen the last moments of Richard as he vanished from the face of the Earth? I had a feeling that was *exactly* what I had just witnessed. That girl had killed him. That Daisy Mae had killed my Richard. She had done it in the filthiest way, too.

“You’re gonna wanna clean me up,” Jesse said.

“Clean you up?”

“With your mouth,” the boy clarified. “Y’all better get a-movin’, before it’s all dry.”

I could see her hesitate, but it was only for a moment. “Yes sir,” Daisy Mae replied as he stuck her head down in between Jesse’s legs.

I backed away from the door and went back downstairs. I probably made a lot of noise as I did, but I was sure neither of the two kids upstairs were paying any attention, as they began their next round.

My Richard was gone. Well and truly gone. That girl had eaten him from the inside, like a parasite. That girl — no, that she-demon — had stolen his life from him. Surely, she was the devil, that girl.

Yes. That was it. This wasn't the work of a just God. A just God would never had let an innocent man succumb to this kind of horror. This was the work of the devil. Satan! Right here, in Boregard. As sure as his cloven feet and horns on his head, I had seen the work of the devil.

Lucifer himself was here, his burning fingerprints of sin all over this house, that girl, and this town. Where would it end? Now that she had gotten a taste of the sinful pleasures of the flesh, where would she stop? Daisy Mae Dilkins

was a product of evil, just as surely if the devil had molded her from mud and forged her in the fires of hell.

“There you are,” said Lizzie as she walked in the front door. “We thought we had lost you.”

“Sinner!” I yelled, standing tall and unafraid. “Repent your wickedness before God, and beg his forgiveness!”

“Oh, I think we came just in time, after all,” the mother of the devil’s spawn said.

“Is she...” Doc Coonrod said as he arrived.

Lizzie grinned as she crossed her arms. Did she think she had won? “Her change is already underway, Doc.”

Did she not understand what I was saying? “You have poisoned this town with your Godless scheme!” I shouted, so they would hear me. “That girl is a succubus! The devil’s minion! You’ve put this town in the crosshairs of God’s vengeance!”

“Oh, yes,” the doctor said. “Tell us more, woman. Preach!”

“Hold your tongue!” I told him. “Satan has stolen your souls, you’re doing his bidding!”

“Jeter! You’d better come in here,” the doctor said, as he called outside.

Jeter was quickly inside. “Yessir, Doc?”

I immediately positioned myself behind him. I knew he would see my side and defend me. I trusted him. “These heretics have been in bed with evil!” I told him. “They are under the influence of prince of darkness himself!”

“Maybe you ought to take her home to Pastor Smith, Jeter,” Lizzie said. “I don’t think we need to do anything after all.”

“Yes, Jeter,” the doctor agreed. “Take her home. She’s made the adjustment herself.”

This was nonsense to me. They were talking in gibberish. “She did?” Jeter said. “So, she’s Pastor Smith’s wife, now?”

“Yes,” Lizzie said, before turning to me. “Isn’t that right, Edna?”

I didn’t understand what they were saying. Were they trying to fool me? “Jeter, get me away from these deceitful agents of the dark lord. Right now, you hear me?”

“Yes, Edna,” he replied. “I’ll take you to yer home. Welcome to Boregard.”

“You best well repent!” I shouted back at Doc and Lizzie. “And that girl, too!” Satisfied that I had lifted the veil of deceit from the eyes of truth, I followed Jeter out to his truck. I had to tell my husband about the sins I had just witnessed with mine own eyes.



As time went by, I began to recall all the events that led me to Boregard. It's quite a story. From an Eastside brownstone to a shack on the prairie. I wouldn't change nothing 'bout it though. Jacob and me live a good, honest life here. I run our little radio station, sending the message of praise and worship out to the flock. I spend just as much time at the Baptist Church, *our* church, and began my new mission of saving the souls of this town. Jesus would lead us out of the darkness, and I would light the torch of enlightenment alongside Jacob, my dearly beloved and righteous husband.

I'm treated respectfully by the town. Being the Pastor's wife has its benefits. People stop talking when I come into the room. They know they don't want to be the subject of our next sermon.

Unfortunately, like a lot of the women here, I can't seem to keep the weight off, and I've put on a few pounds. I suppose it makes me more like a homesteader from Boregard. I think Jacob likes the curves. Truthfully, so do I. I feel bigger, more powerful. More substantial. More real.

No, now, I know what you're sayin': *You're from New York, and those evil people made you stay here in this city so's you could never tell about what they did to your husband.* And that's true. It wasn't but a few hours after I came back to my new home that I decided I'd never leave this beautiful town. I know Doc made me feel like this, but there's nuthin' I kin do about it no more. I know I don't *really* like it, but I just can't stop the feelin' that I do. I've learned not to fight it. As Edna Smith, I have a life of fulfillment, working in the name of the Lord, and it's best I embrace it, so I have.

The Lord does test me, and my vigilance. I can never let my guard down and allow Satan to claim my town. There are so many sinners in our midst that would surely ignite the flames of Hell if they were given the chance.



Elizabeth Dilkins and her daughter are prime amongst them.

I don't know how that woman can live with herself, the way she raises her girl. Daisy Mae Dilkins is a harlot, pure and simple. A sinful girl. Just the other day, she came to the founder's day barn dance in the most indecent costume I ever did see. She looked like an old prairie town prostitute, in short ruffled skirts, exposed garters and a low-cut bodice displaying quivering flesh to tempt the good men of this town.

I will not let you win, Satan!

Of course, she comes to church every Sunday, as any worshipper of evil would. She doesn't fool me. She's a wicked girl. It's my mission to put Daisy Mae on the path to righteousness and to being a proud member of this community.

She is so pretty. But she's wasting it on hedonism and debauchery. I can save her, though. I can claim her soul for God. She's gonna marry a good, decent man and have his children. There's just no more fuffillin' thing in life to have your man's children and come to church every Sunday. So I have made it my one true mission to save her soul.

I know, it's that hypnotizin' talkin' again, but I just can't tell anymore where Doc's commands start and where they ends.

I actually saw Daisy Mae just yesterday. She was in with her friends at the diner, makin' a big ol' scene in one of the booths, y'know, like teenagers do, laughin' and screamin' with her friends. She's a senior in high school, an' she's seein' Jesse Johnson, the All-County halfback. She was in her scandalously brief cheerleadin' outfit. It was shamelessly short and surely made to kindle impure thoughts, but it was tradition in these parts. Not that I haven't lodged my concerns with the school board repeatedly.

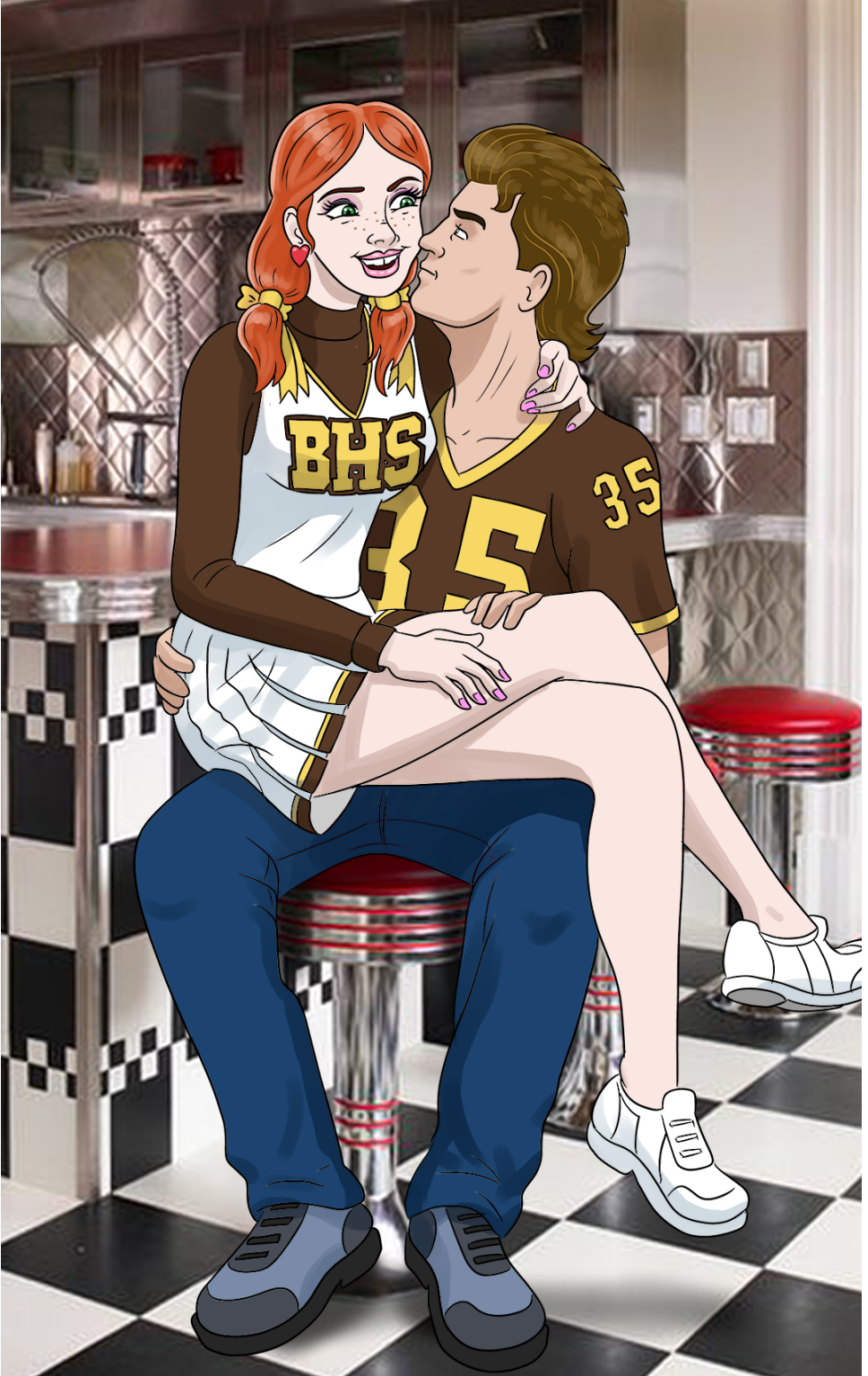
The kids were orderin' mostly the cheapest thing on the menu – sodas – and sharin' em with two straws. I came over and admonished them for carrying on in public and making a scene. They immediately quieted down, of course. No one crosses Edna, the church lady.

You could see that Jesse had really fallen hard for Daisy Mae. He was just starin' in her eyes all the time. No kissin' though. Even she wouldn't dare.

Life for me in Boregard is one long battle against evil, in it's many insidious forms. Not a day goes by that I don't expose the diabolical wickedness of Satan to the townsfolk. I feel so grateful to the Lord for revealing to me a calling so noble as this one. This was truly what I was borned to do.

Sometimes, though, I find myself forgettin' about my old life. There will be days and days I go without thinkin' about the big city. Sometimes a whole week goes by an' I'll not even remember Janice, an' what it used to be like to be her.





Been gettin' more and more frequent, too. But what are you gonna do? I guess that's why I wanted to tell the story one last time before I forgets it.

There was this time that I tried gettin' my money from my bank and all, but I couldn't prove nuthin' to the bank. I had no identification or anythin'. There ain't never been no such person as Janice Perlman as far as anyone's concerned. So now, I'm just Edna Smith — The Pastor's wife. Edna the church lady. All the people here in town know me as her, an' that's all I ever was to them, a simple country woman with a simple purpose.

And, God willing, I'll make sure Daisy Mae Dilkins is the same.

The End



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"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

## **Students, Exchanged**

“French Dupe” 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 / 57 pages / 15 illustrations

## **He’s a Valley Girl, Fer Sure**

From the files of TGStories.com: “Corey Taylor’s Big Bodacious Adventure” by Joe Six-Pack. For Corey, the only way he can get into college is to pretend to be a girl. But when does it stop being pretend? When he’s cheerleader? A girlfriend? A beauty queen? Book / 78 pages / 17 illustrations

## **From Boys to Bridesmaids**

“Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Groom” by James J Craft. Two spoiled and privileged boys are about to be put in their place by their new step-mother. And their place is by her side as her bridesmaids and daughters. Book / 77 Pages / 16 illustrations

## **Little Mis-ter Popular**

“My Two Moms” by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Thanks to his aunt’s “Confidence Club,” Leon will find a way to become popular, and to get over all his hang-ups... Including his masculinity. Book / 77 Pages / 17 illustrations

## **Bride to Be**

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

## **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

## **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

## **Convicts to Co-Eds**

Story 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

## **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

## **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 long-forgotten aunt is sick, and he goes to care for her. His calls back home leave his wife Janice confused and unsure about his return. So she goes to find him. But is there much left to be found? Book / 64 pages / 25 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

## **His Life as a Trophy Wife**

"The Puppy Mill" 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? Book / 210 pages / 16 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

## **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

## **Crossed Fiction**

### **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

### **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 political-ly active mother has decided she’s going to make her hippie son over into the daughter she always wanted. Book / 64 pages / 19 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

## ***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 Made Up***

By James J. Craft. Illustrations by kinky-rocket. 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

## ***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



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