

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

***CHANGED  
AND  
REARRANGED***

**“Wrongs Make Wright” by Joe Six-Pack  
A Stories of the Supernatural Book**



2011 Second Edition

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joe@sixpacksite.com  
www.sixpacksite.com

## WRONGS MAKE WRIGHT

A hotbed of intrigue, boiling emotions and powerful men, this was a dangerous place to be. Ambition ruled here, where the slightest mistake or capitulation to human weakness would destroy you. In this den of base instinct and cruel reality, there were two men who stood above the rest, puppet masters that manipulated the masses to unwittingly do their bidding.

That was just the way fourth-period English class was at Middleton High.

What made it worse was no one in the room was aware of it. Everybody thought this was just another dull class, three periods away from the beginning of the day, and the last period before lunch. They suspected nothing.

Matthew Wilke was a Sophomore, a 15 year old who was the top student in this class, and the top student in the school. Hell, the whole district. He was a young genius. His life was all about school. As such, there was no such thing in his life as 'free time.' He was either in class, hanging around teachers or studying at home in the darkness. He worked from dawn until late into the night seeking perfection in his knowledge.

Every night at two in the morning he would curse the onset of sleep, an inexcusable intrusion on his studies and a painful reminder of how susceptible he was to being just as ordinary as everyone else. Slumbering, like the common people. Sleep was the most egregious flaw of human design. It made his skin crawl.

His rival sat across from him in class, a 16-year old Junior by the name of Christian "Chris" DeVray. He was the cool, calm and collected kid who sat in the rear corner of the room, seemingly disinterested with being taught – but consistently producing top marks. He seemed a natural learner, never having to even spend a moment on homework or studying.

He was the sort of person who never really sat in a chair, he just slouched his way into it. His eyes never opened beyond sleepy slits. And he didn't talk a lot, he kept to himself and traveled his own path. In other words, every girl in school had a crush on the handsome enigmatic loner. But few were brave enough to ask for a date. And if they had, they would have been turned down. Chris' sublime tastes ran a little older than teenage girls.

Both Chris and Matthew were passing this class – as every other class they attended – with A plus pluses. And although Chris barely could be bothered to keep awake for the entire day, Matthew was using every ounce of his willpower at his disposal. Because he had one goal. Not only to beat Chris in any given contest, but for once and all demonstrate that he should be taking classes at the local college.

That was his big ambition. To dump these simpletons and go to college just like those young brainiacs he was always reading about. The ones who graduated college at sixteen, and got Ph.D's at eighteen. That was his place in life, and he knew it. If he could only convince the imbeciles who ran this daycare center they called a school.

"How is everybody doing today?" said a man in a beaten old suit. He had entered the room slightly nervous and flustered, obviously out of his element. "Can everyone take their seats please?"

He was instantly recognizable to the students as the Assistant Vice Principal, an older balding man who usually spent his time behind a desk. That he was here was an intriguing turn in an otherwise standard-issue day. It meant that something was up.

"I'm sure you notice that your teacher, Mr. Lumbregadious isn't here today." The man said. The class suddenly looked around, just now noticing that the teacher was indeed missing. They hadn't really cared enough to check. "Mr. Lumbregadious has been put in the hospital for some emergency surgery on his heart." He paused to let the expected shock and gasp for his teacher's well-being to pass.

The room was silent.

"Anyway, I'm sure you all wish him the best. So today, we'll be watching a video." He walked over to a waiting A/V cart and wheeled it in front of the class. "You'll have a substitute for tomorrow."

With that, the class collectively checked out for the rest of the period. Cell phones were opened discreetly, notebooks were prepared for doodling and desk space was cleared for resting heads.



"Let's just face facts, Matt. You wouldn't want to," Chris said after class. He clearly wasn't delighted with the fact that he was having a conversation with this kid.

"Who says?" Matt objected. "Besides, I'm not arguing if I would like it or not. What I'm saying is I could. The school counselor even thinks so."

"I'm not taking Mr. Ragweed's opinion for anything," Chris said, leery of bringing the sandal-footed hippie-child counselor into the discussion. "That's yer problem, Matt. You're always dealing in the hypothetical. You're never in the real world with the rest of us."

"Whatever," was all Matthew could say. "All I know is I could teach that class just as easy as anyone else."

Chris wanted to drop the subject. “So you said a thousand times, Matt. I’m not arguin’ that point, dude.”

“You don’t think I can, do you?” Matt cried.

“Look, I gotta get to my next class, Matt.”

“I could! Why do they need to hire a substitute and waste taxpayer money! I could teach English better than anyone they’re ever going to find.”

“Great,” Chris said, accelerating his pace to try and break from his preoccupied classmate. He was getting a little angry, and that bothered him. He didn’t like getting wrapped up in bad vibes. They weren’t even really friends anyway, so why did Matt keep hanging around?



“I know that lesson plan back and forth!” Matt said, sitting himself down at Chris’ table. He was interrupting a perfectly good tuna sandwich. It even had little bits of celery to give it some crunch. Now, with his concentration broken, he could no longer appreciate it. Chris’ arms dropped in exasperation. He abandoned his food and excused himself.



“I’m going to go to the principal and ask! I really will!” Matt said, catching up with Chris between bells, two periods later. Chris ducked into his next class to avoid him.

He had a bad feeling that this wasn’t going to be the last he heard of this.

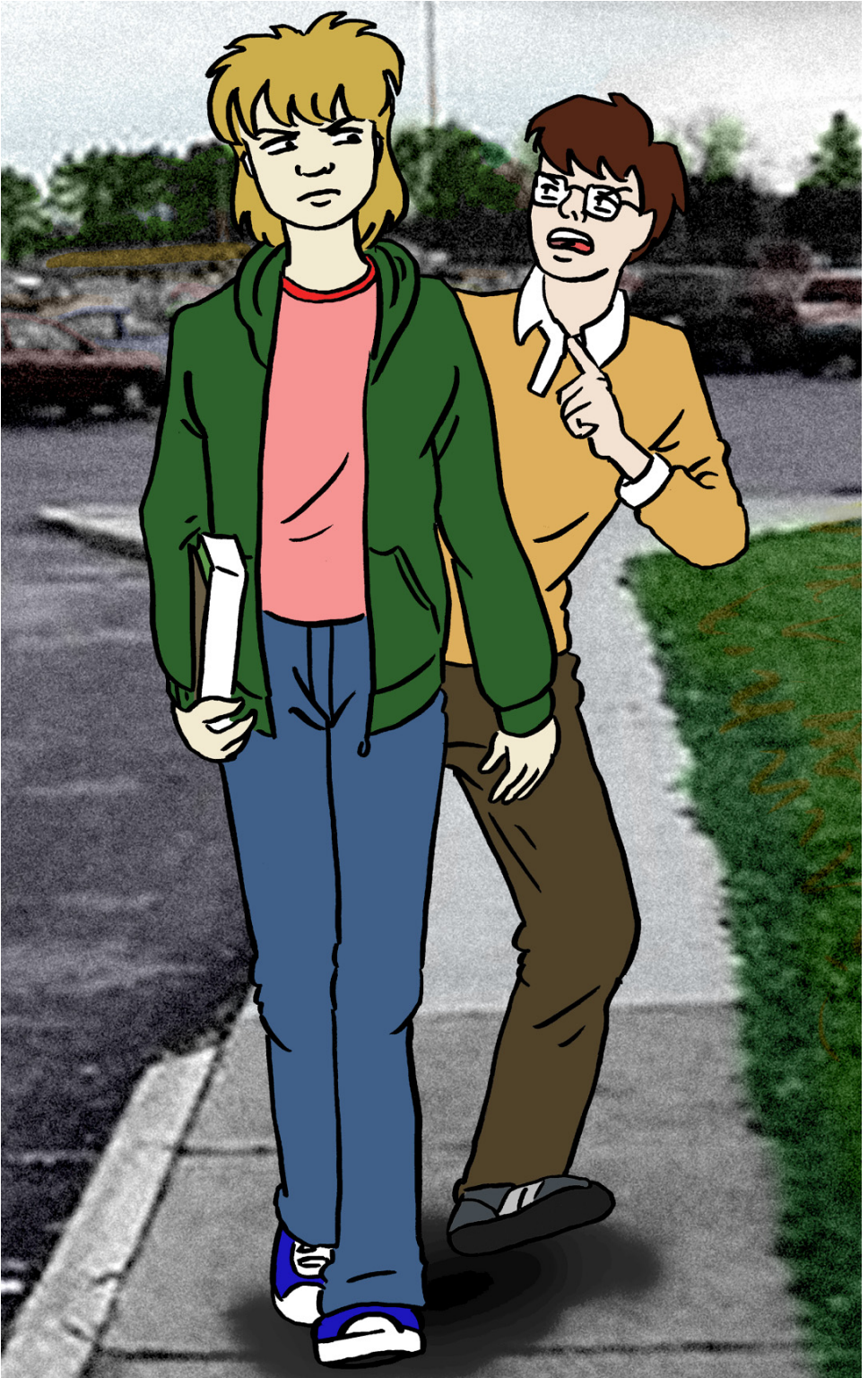
That was confirmed when he looked at the small window inside the classroom’s door to see Matt’s beady little eyes staring through it, while pointing at him.

“You think you’re better than me?” Chris would have heard him say if any sound could have gotten through the door.



Matt’s voice came from behind. “You still don’t think I can do it, do you?”

It was after school, and all Chris wanted to do was get away. He tried to jump on a bus that he wasn’t even supposed to be on, but decided against it. Who knows where he was going to end up. On second thought, anywhere was better.



“*Fine!*” Chris barked uncharacteristically. “I bet you can’t tech English class! Is that what you wanted to hear?”

“I knew it!” Matthew growled. “I knew it *all along!*”

“Oh, *man*, just leave me alone,” Chris begged. He broke into a rare gallop to get to his bus home and leapt for the door like it was a sanctuary.

Still, even as the bus pulled away, He could see Matt running pathetically alongside. His thin frame was not built for any physical activity beyond tying his shoes. He was a discombobulated mess of flailing limbs, dropping books behind him as he ran. “I’ll show you! I’ll show you!” He yelled in his nasal whine. “Just you wait! *You’ll see!*”



As Chris stepped off the bus the next morning, his 1/8–awake self proceeded on his usual trudge to his locker before classes begun, but was then interrupted. By screaming.

In the direction of the noise, he saw a crowd had gathered. It seemed to be watching something happening. Just another school fight? They usually didn’t merit such notice. Despite that, Chris grumbled and headed over to investigate.

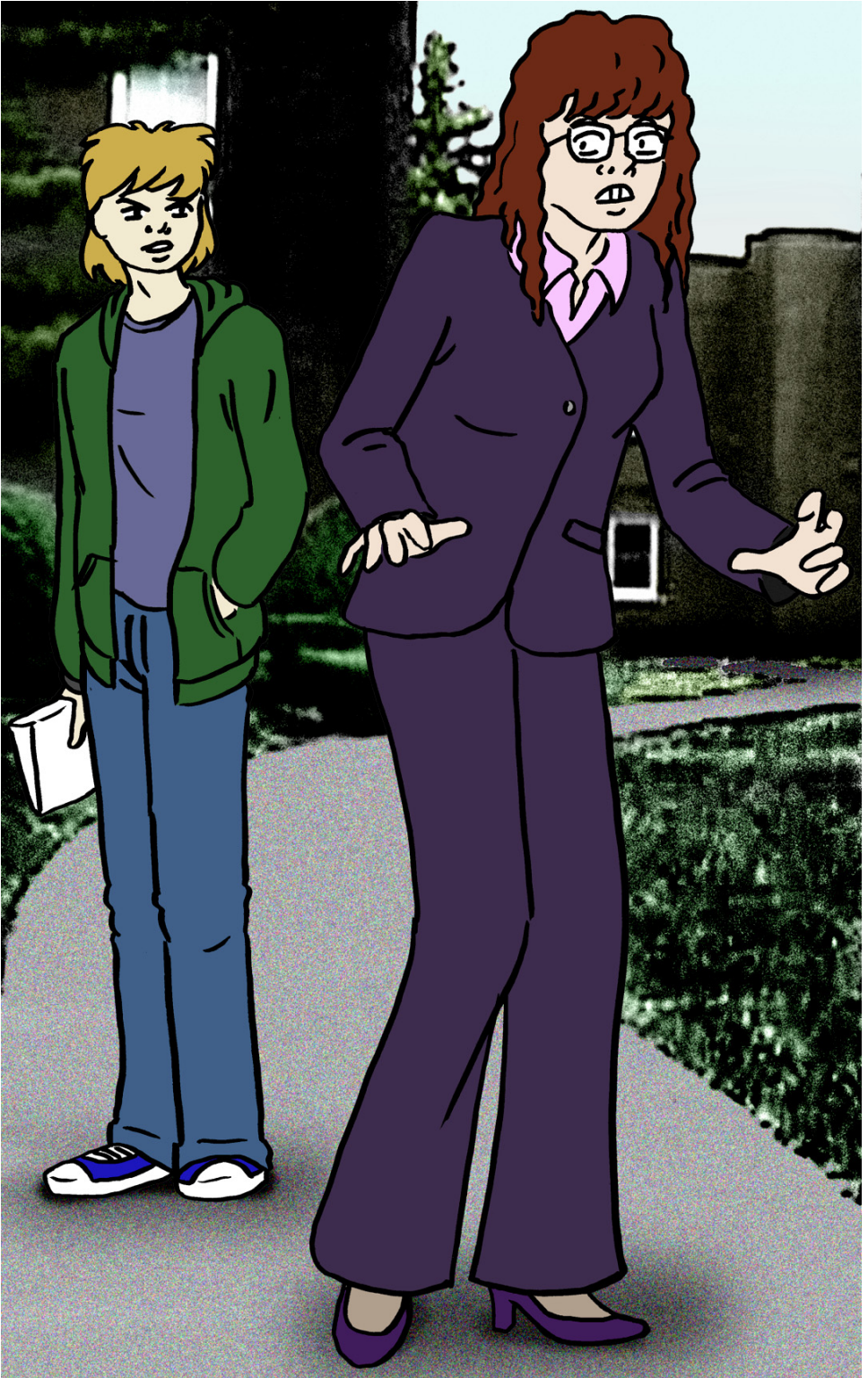
“Let me go! Take your hands off of me!” Came a screeching voice at the center. Chris weaved and wove through the crowd until he could get a decent look. “I’ll have you brought up on charges!”

Chris finally did get so see what was going on. The security officer who guarded this end of the East hall was holding a young woman by the wrists as she struggled to free herself. She was dressed in a somewhat dated and ragged pantsuit that was too big for her, and was in great danger of ripping it – or having it ripped for her.

“I’m the substitute teacher for Mr. Lumbregadious!” The woman cried. “This is no way to treat an adult!”

Chris immediately realized who it was – then tossed the idea right out of his head for being truly ridiculous. A scant moment later, he retrieved the idea from the round file and examined it more thoroughly.

“You don’t have the proper I.D., ma’am, and you cannot enter onto the school grounds,” the security guard said, with little effort or emotion. For the stoutly built man, restraining the woman was not so hard as to cause him to even blink. He headed her out to the parking lot by practically picking her up and turning her in that direction. “Now, if you need to make arrangements, you’ll have to call the district office. That’s all I can help you with.”



So with a hearty shove, the woman tumbled down the sidewalk on her heels, furiously trying to maintain balance. Almost immediately, the crowd of students swarmed around, threatening to instigate a truly uncomfortable situation.

“Back off!” Chris said to the mob, holding them off just with the conviction in his voice, apparently. “Let’s get on to class,” he said. Puzzlingly enough, the students immediately turned around and left as if nothing had happened.

“As for you,” Chris said to the woman who was trying to get away unnoticed, “I think we have to get you home...” he intensified his tone, “...*Matt*.”

The boy in the pantsuit – who certainly was Matthew – spun around in horror, nearly knocking himself out from under his wig.



Chris needed answers. “You honestly thought you could...” He paused. “Check that. What *exactly* were you thinking?”

“Nothing,” Matt mumbled to himself. He really wasn’t in a mood to talk. His plan never even considered that he would actually get caught. It was a perfect plan. Now that he was taking this cab ride home, he wasn’t eager to say anything loud enough for the driver to hear.

“You didn’t think you could really teach our class, did you?” Chris asked, knowing the answer.

Matt suddenly came to life. “See! You don’t think I could!”

“Fuck,” Chris muttered. “I don’t fuckin’ believe you.”

“Well, I *can* teach that class!”

“You dressed up as a substitute teacher, were going to sneak into school...”

“It would have worked if that stupid rent-a-cop hadn’t...”

Chris held his hand to Matthew’s face to indicate an end to the debate.

“Dude, you’re wearing women’s clothes.”

“Well, I couldn’t pretend to be a twenty-something *man*, so... the logical thing to do was...”

“Logical,” Chris said to emphasize the word.

“Hey, if I had pulled it off, you would have said I was a genius,” Matt replied.

“You’re smart, Matt. I’ll give you that,” Chris said, shaking his head. “But you sure don’t think things through, do you?”

“I wouldn’t have had to do this if you hadn’t forced me to prove my point!” Matt kicked Chris in the leg, like a petulant child. “Asshole!”

Chris used every bit of his energy to keep from doing something truly nasty to Matt. Because if he wanted to, he really could.

The taxi stopped in front of Matthew's house, and Chris was able to scrape together enough of his spare change and lunch money to take care of the cabbie.

"So, get out," Chris told Matt.

"Lemme check," Matt said, surveying the street for people. "Hokay," he said, consenting to idea. He tucked the heels under his arm and sprinted for the front door of his house, leaving Chris behind.

"You're welcome," Chris said to himself.

Matt fumbled with the keys and before he could stick them in the lock, the door opened for him. "And what exactly are you supposed to be?" Matthew's mother said sharply, waiting for him.

"Mom!" Matt yelled. "But your car is gone! You're not *supposed* to be home!"

"I took the car in to get fixed..." She replied, her voice dying off in a sea of unanswered questions. Like a lot of mothers, she decided to just skip over her confusion and go directly to anger. "*Matthew Thomas Wilke!* Have you lost your mind?" She planted her hands on her hips as her eyes lit up with fury.

"Your father is turning over in his grave!"

"But M..."

"I don't want to hear one word out of you! *Not one word!*" She barked. "You go right on up to your room and change! And then, you better have one *good* explanation for..." She stopped for a moment. "*Is that my old pantsuit?*"

Matt didn't answer as he schlepped on up to his room, humiliated.

Outside, Chris was waiting for Matt to come back out and help him with the fare, apologize, or at least wave him off or something. But it slowly became apparent that nothing like that was going to happen. Showing uncharacteristic impatience, Chris flipped open his cell phone and dialed Matt.

"*What?*" A sulky, angry Matt said when he answered.

"Dude," Chris said. "Did..."

"*Just fuck off Chris!*" Matt yelled so loud Chris could hear it both on the phone and out the windows of the house. "You've really screwed up my life this time!" The line clicked dead.

This time? "*This time?*" Chris yelled into the air. When had he ever done anything to Matt? He kept to himself, didn't talk much to anybody, and barely ever even exchanged so much as a glance with Matt. If Chris hadn't been checking his emotions, he would have crushed his little cellular phone with his one hand.

This wasn't the first time that little prick had made trouble for him. Matt had accused Chris of cheating on the first big test of the year, simply because Matt was too conceited to believe someone was as good as he was in English. Then,

in order to secure a position at the top of the grade curve, Matt had even asked to see Chris's school records in an attempt to have him transferred to a less advanced class.

And now, this was all he could stand of Matt. This was the limit. He had put up with his shit long enough.

"Yes?" Matt's Mom said, as she answered the door.

"Mrs. Wilke?" Chris said. "Do you have a minute?"

Mrs. Wilke wiped her fevered brow. "This really isn't a good time... Aren't you... Aren't you one of Matthew's classmates? Do you know anything about..."

"This will only take a minute, Mrs. Wilke. I need to talk to you about Matt. Please pay attention."



It wasn't long before Matthew heard the heavy, measured steps of his mother coming up the stairs. He could only wildly speculate about the size of the ass-whooping he was about to endure.

When the knob turned on his door, his heart just stopped beating, and a deep chill went from his chest right through the pit of his stomach and down to his toes.

"Matthew," his Mom said, coming in.

"Wh... Who was that at the door?" Matt said, trying to delay the inevitable for at least another second.

"There was no one at the door. Don't try and change the subject." She walked over to Matt's desk chair and sat down. In real life it took no more than a second, but to Matthew it lasted hours. Hours to build up even more fright and fear inside.

She raised an eyebrow and smirked when she finally spoke. "Why have you taken off your lovely clothes, Matthew? Don't you like wearing them?"

"I can explain, Mom..."

"I don't want explanations," she cut him off. "Frankly, I have no idea how to handle this sort of thing." She let out a heavy sigh. "What would you do in my place? A son that has suddenly shown an affinity for wearing my clothes?"

"Mom, I don't... I'm not..."

"I'm not going to be interrupted again, Matthew. Is that clear?"

Matt nodded yes.

"Good." She crossed her legs and leaned back in the chair. "I've decided that the only way to deal with this problem is to see it through to its conclusion."

“What...” Matt started to say, before the angry glare from his mother’s two fiery eyes stopped him.

“Put the clothes back on, Matthew. If you’re curious about this side of the fence, the only way for you to settle the matter is to experience your fantasy.”

“My fantasy?” Matt yelped in surprise. “I...”

“Zip it, mister!” Mrs. Wilke barked.

“B...”

“Zip!”

“U...”

“It!”

“D...” And Matt gave up.

His mother sported a triumphant grin. “Now get dressed. I want you to help me make dinner.”

Matt groaned. he knew his mother, and it was going to take all night to get her to back off this crazy idea of hers.



So it was early the next morning, that Matthew was deeply regretting that all of his valid arguments had been rejected by his Mother. She was strangely intent on seeing this idea through. Usually it wasn’t that difficult to distract her, but despite several attempts, she remained quite focused on this task – the task of dressing up her son as a woman.

She wasn’t going to let him out of this so easily, it seemed. That much was clear to him now. Especially since his mother had woken him and dressed him this morning.

Matt’s method of dressing for yesterday’s debacle had been last-minute and haphazard – in stark contrast with the careful, patient, delicate and exhausting routine he was engaged in now. Fortunately his smooth, young face required little in the way of shaving, but it did seem to warrant plucking. Lots of plucking. Painful plucking.

After his eyebrows had been ravaged into spindly little wisps, his mother started in with a home chemical peel that felt like a million tiny bugs crawling on his face. After it got washed off, his face then felt like it was burning like a pig roasting on a spit.

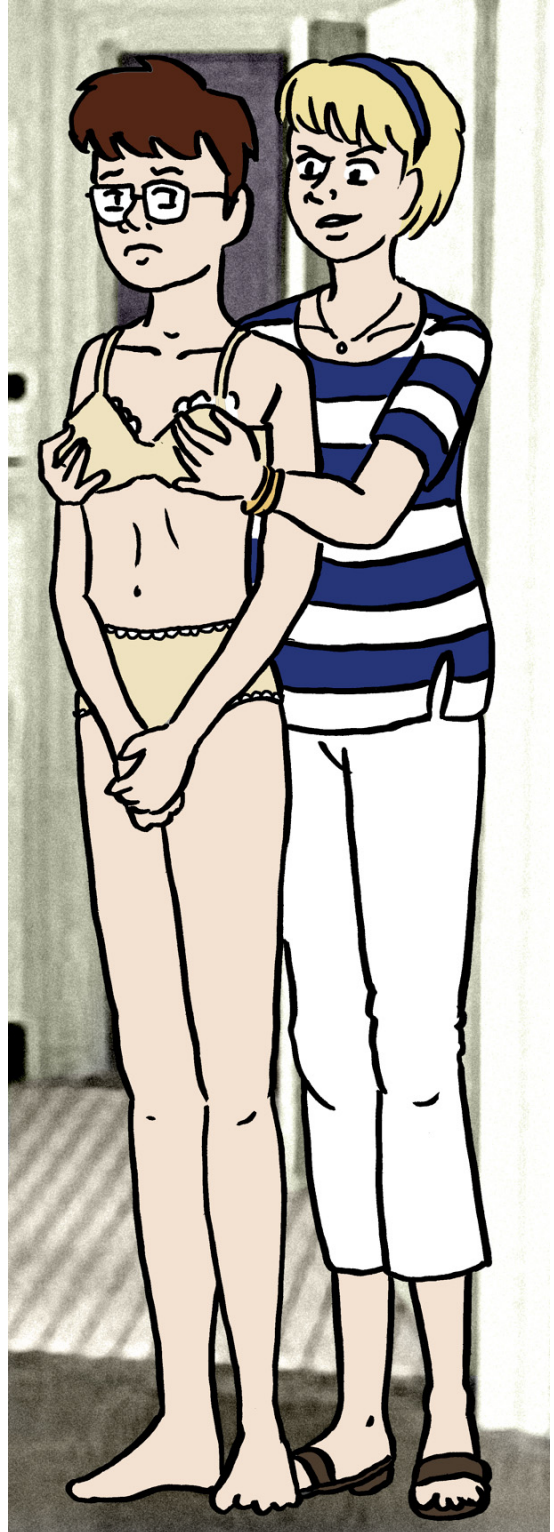
Seemingly content with the pain she had inflicted on Matt’s face, his Mom then moved on to his body. His legs were lightly hairy and would have required only a quick whisk with a razor, but Mrs. Wilke opted for a wax instead.

Pain like that was never meant for a man to feel. Only the half of the species designed to withstand childbirth could do that on any sort of a regular basis.

That was nothing, however, compared to the embarrassment of having his mother dress him in her underwear, and shaping his stuffed cups to look more breast-like. It was a crushing blow to whatever budding sense of masculinity he was developing. Then, just to make sure that he felt just as bad on the outside as he did on the inside, his mother produced some sort of corset from the bowels of her closet.

Waxed, burnt and plucked, he then was stuffed like a sausage into the peculiar-looking garment and left to find his own way to breathe. Gasping for survival, his mother patiently waited before giving Matt a pile of pink to wear. Pink-tinted pantyhose went over his burning legs, providing a temporary coolness that felt good for now. A long, flowery calf-length dress which was suitable for costuming in a revival of "Oklahoma!" was draped over him. Mrs. Wilke then had Matt put on his wig of super-long, curly long brown hair – actually an old wig Mrs. Wilke used to use back in the seventies – and fit it in place.

Now feeling as low as he had in his life, his mother then handed him a nice pink pair of of



pumps for him to break his ankles in. Matt clumsily stuck his pink feet into them. After his mother had seated him at her vanity and given him a light brush of makeup and lipstick, “a weekend look” she called it, an old set of silver clip-on earrings, necklace, watch and bracelet seemed to herald the end of the procedure.

Matthew knew he had just these two days to either force his mother’s hand or negotiate his way out of this mess. He was lucky to have the weekend to come up with the brilliant and indisputable argument that he would need to get out of this mess. Just exactly how had this insane idea gotten stuck in her head?



“What are these?” Matt asked after finishing the vacuuming and dusting.

“What do they look like?” His mother answered while watching television.

“They look like all those stupid women’s magazines you get at the supermarket.”

“Well, that’s probably what they are, then.”

“Well, why are they in my room?” Matt asked, afraid he knew the reply.

Mrs. Wilke chuckled. “For you to read.” She diverted her attention from the ice skating program to briefly look her son in the eye. “I want you to get familiar with all the things women have to go through. Those magazines are a good start.”

Matt sighed. “That’s all very nice and vengeful of you Mom, and I’m awfully happy that you’re getting a good laugh out of this, but exactly how long is this gonna last?”

His mother laughed at that. “Oh I don’t know... It depends.”

“Depends?” Matt said.

“*Depends,*” his Mom said again. She returned to her TV. Matt knew that tone of voice. Once and a while, she’d get in this frame of mind where she was bound and determined to teach him a lesson. But she’d always back off before it was too late.

“All right,” Matt said, taking the magazines under his arm. “I’ll do what you want.” As long as he knew that his Mom hadn’t truly gone off the deep end, he’d make it through.



“So what about a name?” Matt’s mother asked over dinner. She was trying to make conversation rather than talk about how horrible the dinner Matt had prepared was. It had started out as a stew, then became a soup, then a soufflé, and finally declared a casserole.

“What about what?” Matt replied. He wasn’t aware of how bad his food tasted. All he could taste was lipstick.

“I’m not calling you Matthew. In that outfit, it’s ridiculous.”

“We wouldn’t want to be ridiculous now, would we?” Matt snapped back

“You just bought yourself another hour in that outfit.”

Matt tried to look angry, but instead he was a little relieved. That meant that the end was coming, at the very least.

“Now what to call you...” Mrs. Wilke pondered. “When your father and I were coming up with names...”

Matt tried to think. What was a kind of female version of his name? “Matilda.”

“No...” His Mom went on, wincing at the thought. “Is was something...” She pointed her finger at him, as she remembered. “Erin.”

Ugh, he thought. “That’s stupid.”

“What we can do is get you a little name tag, and put it on your dress. ‘Hello, my name is Erin.’ You can wear that to school on Monday.”

“Monday?” Matt whined. “A *dress*?”

“Eat your food,” his Mom said with a hint of a smile on her face. “You take things too seriously.”



Matt found himself going to bed that night in an old nightgown, and dressing back up in another goofy dress the next morning. His tasks that day were the laundry and organizing the kitchen. It was innocuous enough, and wasn’t any big threat to ruin his weekend. Not any further than it was already ruined, at least.

He supposed that a lot of mothers with only male children probably have a little fantasy about having a daughter. Some might even have a complex about disciplining young boys by treating them like girls. Whatever the reason, Matt knew his Mom had too good a head on her shoulders to suspect any mental peculiarity. She was just having a little fun at his expense.

It still pissed him off, though.

He made quick work of his chores in the morning and veged in front of the computer surfing the internet for the remainder of the day. His Mom initially

pressed him on reading the women's magazines, but eventually gave up on the topic. By the time dinner rolled around, he was back in his old dirty robe, wig gone, frillies forgotten and his face scrubbed free of cosmetics.

His mother made the food tonight, not risking another mistake by her son, and they were right in the middle of eating it in front of the TV when the doorbell rang.

"Hey, Matt," Chris said, standing in the doorway in that casual manner that Matt envied and hated.

"What do you want?" Matt sneered. "We're *eating*."

"Yeah. Good to see you too, Matt." Chris knew coming here was a mistake.

"Nice robe. I just wanted to return this. You left it in the cab." He held out the English textbook with Matt's name scribbled on the front.

"Thanks a lot. I could have just gotten another one."

"Is this one of your friends, Matt?" Mrs. Wilke said, coming to the door.

"Hardly," Matt said, taking the opportunity to leave. He was quickly out of sight.

His mother wasn't expecting to be left alone with nothing to say, and tried to make conversation. "Do you go to school with Er..." She corrected herself.

"...Matthew?"

"Just dropping by to return something. Have a nice night, ma'am," Chris said, turning to the street.

"I'm going to bed, Mom!" Chris could hear Matt's yell through the still-open door. "Shut the door! Chris has to go home now!"

Chris turned right back around to face an embarrassed Mrs. Wilke.

"I don't..." Mrs. Wilke said, stumbling for words to explain her son's behavior.

"He didn't..."

"That's okay, ma'am. I've known Matt for a while now. I know how he is." His eyes suddenly latched on to the woman, causing her to stand, frozen in the doorway. "I need to talk to you about Matt. Please pay attention."



"Are you up yet?" Matt's mother said, whisking the blinds open in his room. "You need to get up and start your beauty routine before you go to school. It takes time when you're a woman."

Matt's reality quickly flooded his brain. Here he was, Monday morning and his mother was still on the same kick she had been all weekend. Now, she was going to make him sweat by playing chicken with him.

He knew his mother, and she'd push it to the absolute limit, and then back down at the last instant. It was just a question of waiting to see how far she wanted to push him.

"I hope you don't mind if I take the car today, I need to do some shopping downtown. I'll drive you in and pick you up after school. Is that all right?"

"Yeah," Matt replied. His mother was just full of herself these past few days, thinking she was pretty funny. Next year, when he turned sixteen, he'd finally get his license and a car – and he'd be able to rely on himself rather than his erratic mother to get around. She was just pretending he could drive. At least he'd get a ride today instead of the bus.

Matt stretched and rose from his bed, scratching himself and surveying the room. Sure enough, that pants suit was laid on a chair for him to wear. Matt snorted a laugh to himself. His Mom was going to try and scare him this morning.

"Better take your shower Erin, before it's too late," his mother said in passing by the door. *Yeah*, Matt thought, *she's really taking this to the limit*. Matt shrugged and took his shower and dressed himself in provided outfit. He also picked out the clothes he was actually going to wear today, so as to save time. He twisted the wig of long brown hair on and headed out.

"Ready?" Mrs. Wilke said as Matt came down the stairs. "I thought since you looked so mature as Erin, I'd just call you my sister."

"Whatever," Matt said, waiting.

"And you should just call me Susan."

Matt was impatient. "Yeah. Okay."

"You know, I have the perfect necklace to go with those earrings. Wait here and I'll get it." His mother dashed past him upstairs. Matt looked at the clock, and they were running pretty late. If he was going to get to school on time, they'd need to travel at light speed. As it was, he was already going to be late for first period.

"*Mom!*" He yelled. "We're gonna be late!"

His mother was already down at the bottom of the stairs, holding out a necklace. "I said call me Susan, sis. Here. Lift your hair."

Matt pulled the long hair from his neck to make way for the necklace, which Mrs. Wilke tied around him. "There. That looks good. Take a look in the mirror. Tell me what you think."

"We gotta get on with this, Mom!" Matt whined. "I can't miss all of physics class."

"But you don't teach physics, Erin."

“Uh, I don’t teach anything. Mom. I’m...” Matt then realized that she had picked up on what he was doing on Friday. He hadn’t told her anything about trying to be a teacher. “What are you saying?” Had someone told her about what really happened on Friday?

“Well, as a substitute, you only need to...”

Matt cut her off. “Stop messing with me, Mom. What’s the deal here?”

“I’m *Susan*, sis,” his mother cut him off. “Get in the car.”



Matt was begging and pleading. He was tearing at his mother’s clothes, clinging like a monkey to her side. “*Please, Mom!*”

“Hush,” she said.

“*I can’t go like this!*” Matt cried, tear welling up in his eyes. “*Please, Mom! Please!*”

“I told you – Erin – to call me Susan,” was all his mother said.

It was just getting more and more real to Matt. His Mom was dead serious about dropping him off at school like this. He had asked her to turn back in good humor. Then he politely asked again. Then he impolitely asked, and then he demanded. Then he tried begging.

Now he was truly desperate. Did she not realize how this was going to ruin his life? Not in a ‘teenage angst’ my-life-is-over sort of way, but in a real, tangible ‘ruin-my-reputation-for-all-time’ or a ‘tearing-the-fabric-of-the-mind’ way.

“I don’t know what you want to hear! Just please don’t make me go to school like this! *Please!*”

But it was too late. The car had already pulled up in front of Middleton High. Mrs. Wilke reached across the passenger seat and unlatched the door for her son. “Go on,” she said. “I’ll see you at four to pick you up.”

Matt didn’t budge. “Please,” he said, in a sober, beaten tone of voice.

Mrs. Wilke unbuckled the seatbelt for him. “I’ll wait here until you get inside. I don’t want you to meet with any trouble before you get in.” Still not moving, Matt’s Mom got a little more serious. “You can’t be late for your first day, Erin. Get a move on.”

With his body trembling, Matt stepped out of the car onto the sidewalk. His mother shut the door for him, and waved politely at her son. Then she waited for him to go into the school.

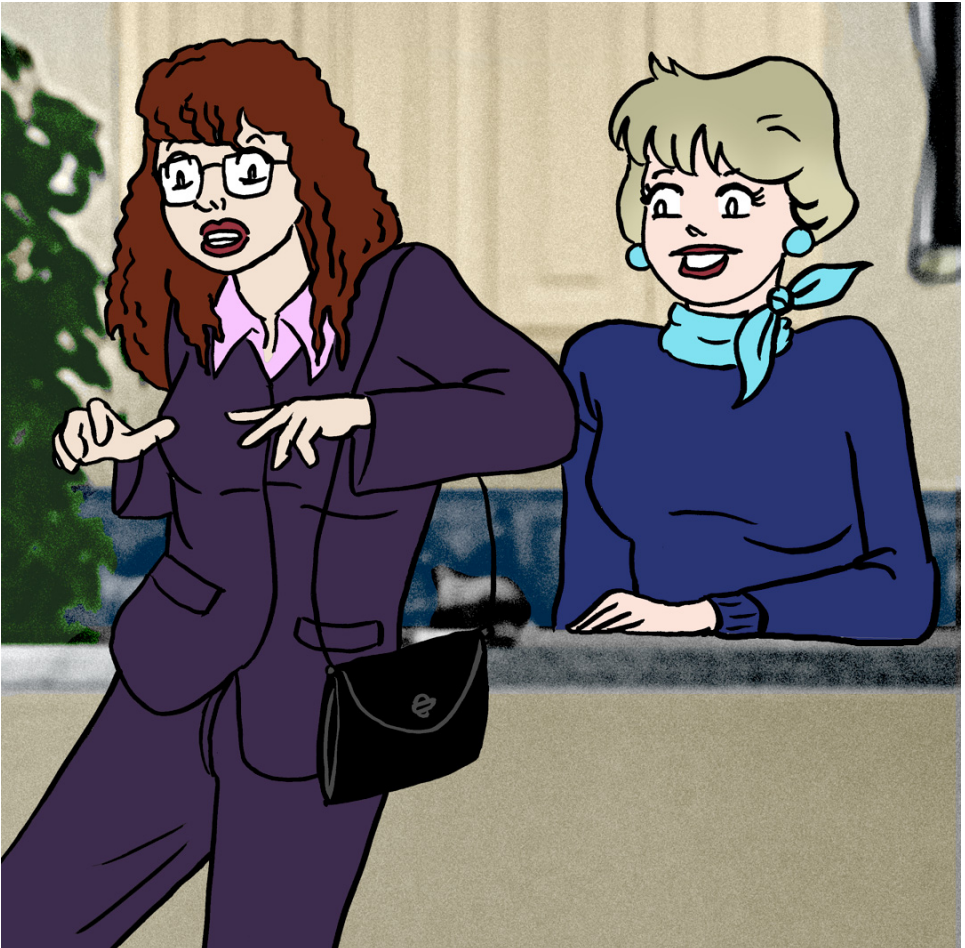
With the slowest, tiniest steps, Matt made his way down the walk way, hearing every scrape of his pumps against the cement as if they were being broadcast on loudspeakers. Where was that asshat rent-a-cop when he needed him?

He opened the door to the front office, where all late students reported, and went inside. Before he had to turn around the corner and formally enter the grounds, he took one desperate look outside again to see if that had persuaded his mother to pull away. It hadn't.

"You must be the substitute," came a voice at the front desk.

Matt's spine locked up. He turned around anyway, resigned to the fact that his life was going to end very, very soon.

"Erin? Hi, I'm Carol, I work the front desk here. Welcome to Middleton." She held out her hand to welcome Matt. He handled it like a live grenade. "I'm so glad we could get you on short notice. Poor George. Mr. Lumbregadious is one of our best, and I hope he gets well soon. You'll be handling his Advanced English classes, second, fourth, fifth and eighth periods, right?"



All Matt could do was return a smile. A smile usually only seen on the face of those committed to state institutional facilities.

“Follow me, and I’ll show you the classroom. Your first class starts in just a few minutes,” Carol said. She was a younger woman who had just started working at the school this past year. She was the person students dealt with about getting tardy slips and sick days. Matthew had never seen this woman smile, let alone use such polite and familiar language. Usually she was either assigning people extra detention for the slightest offenses or phoning parents to get the kids in trouble. She was a bitch. If it wasn’t a matter of life or death, Matt avoided all contact with her.

So to see her act so cordially towards him severely heightened the sense of the unreal for Matt. Why hadn’t she recognized him? Not to mention, how could Matt say anything without being thrown into jail? With no other recourse, he followed behind her, down the temporarily empty halls, as the students were all in class. His heels clacked on the linoleum and echoed off the metal lockers something horrible.

“Room 41. This is it,” Carol said, escorting Matt inside. “We’ve taken care of Mr. Lumbregadious’ personal effects, since we don’t expect him back until next year. Meanwhile, make yourself at home! There’s a bell schedule on your desk, and the teaching materials are over there on the shelf. If you have any questions, give me a call on the intercom or just come down.”

Then she left, so cruelly leaving Matt in a room so familiar, but terrifying him just the same. “I’m not the substitute!” Matt blurted out, loudly. “I’m *Matt Wilke!*”

“Pardon?” Carol said, sticking her head back in the door. “What?” She asked.

“I’m not...”

“You’re *not* Erin Wright, the substitute teacher?”

“N–n–no...,” Matt said, shaking his head, almost in tears.

“Erin!” Another voice said, coming into the room. It was Mrs. Plimsoul, the Social Studies teacher. “Good to see you! So glad you’re here!” She turned to Carol. “Erin and I went to a conference last year. She’s a wonderful teacher! We’re so lucky to have her!” She turned back to Matt. “I’ve got to get ready for the next class, please drop by when you can, Erin!”

Mrs. Plimsoul exited, leaving Matt stunned and silent. He had slipped into another reality. Like Star Trek. That was the only explanation.

“Where were we? Oh yes, make yourself at home, Erin!” Carol said before exiting. Then the bell rang.



As the class came in, Matt was even more nervous than he had been before, if that was possible. He knew each and every person in this class. They knew him. They all knew him.

They would shortly spot him at the desk, in the outfit, with the wig, wearing the makeup and he would be as good as dead. He sat at the desk to the side of the class, trying to shrink out of sight. He figured he must be doing a good job of that, because the tardy bell rang without even a hint of recognition. Another few minutes passed, and the chatter of the unmonitored kids just grew louder. Matt thought maybe, he could just duck out the door unnoticed, now that the halls were empty again.

“Just checking to make sure you’re all settled in!” The Assistant Vice Principal had suddenly appeared in the doorway, all smiles.

Matt just forced his anguished face into a smile.

“Kids!” The man said, going to the front of the class. “I’d like you to meet Ms. Wright...” He turned his head to Matt and asked as an aside, “Mrs.? Ms.? Mz.?”

“Mmrbs.” Matt mumbled in a very quiet voice.

“Ms. Wright. She’ll be taking over for Mr. Lumbregadious. I hope you’ll give her all the respect and attention you gave Mr. Lumbregadious, and more.” He graciously held out his arm, beckoning Matt to come to the front of the class and take over.

“Hello Ms. Wright!” The class said in unison. Matt jumped back five feet.

“H–h–hello,” he said, timid as a field mouse. A field mouse being hunted by a falcon.

“Great! I’ll see you later, Ms. Wright!” The Vice Principal said, whistling a happy tune as he left. The room was just now full of Matt, fifteen kids and one million metric tons of fear.

The silence in the room was terrifying, and Matt was left with no choice but to face the class. He picked up the Teacher’s edition text and gave it a look. “So we were on p–p–prepositional phrases, right?” He said, in a level of voice barely audible beyond six inches. He took a look at the class, expecting every eye to be on him like they could see right through everything, like they were agog with amazement that the boy who normally sat in the front of the class was now dressed like a woman and trying to pass himself off in the biggest lie ever told.

Instead, they were opening their textbooks as well, eyes down and thumbing to the correct page.

Except for one student. Chris.

He had forgotten all about Chris. He was the one who knew. He was the one student, the one person in all the school who knew the god-awful truth. As they locked eyes, Chris quickly turned his attention away, looking at his text like everyone else. But everyone else wasn't smiling like Chris. Everyone else wasn't chuckling to themselves.

How could they *not* catch on? Matt wondered. Were they all blind? Did they just not pay that much attention to teachers anyway? How could this ridiculous ruse get this far? It was like everyone else in the world had been brainwashed except him. Why did Mrs. Plimsoul make up that ridiculous story to cover for him? *What the hell was going on?*

Unable to even comprehend it all, he just read what it said in the teacher's edition textbook, almost relieved that he could shut his brain off and read from a script. Thank God for teacher's editions.



Several thousand years later, when the class finally ended, Matt was never more grateful to hear the bell. By instinct, he gathered up his books and headed out with everyone else.

"Ms. Wright?" Said a calm, steady voice from behind. "Where are you going, Ms. Wright? Don't you have another class?"

Matt turned around. It was Chris talking to him. He still had that knowing smile on his fucking goofy face.

"Do you... know anything, Chris?" Matt said, unsure of what a negative response might bring. Did Chris really understand the reality of this situation? Or was he just as blind as everyone else?

"I know a lot of things, Ms. Wright," Chris said, enjoying himself. "I'm a smart kid."

Matt took a chance and walked to the door and shut it. He leaned on it, to brace it closed. "You know it's me, don't you Chris?" He begged. "Please tell me what you know!"

Chris straightened up and got serious. "Is... is that *you*, Matt?" He said, mockingly. "I... I don't know what to say!"

"My Mom... she made me dress like this and.. and... then she dropped me off here and wouldn't let me change... and and everyone at the office... said they were expecting me... and... the teachersand the principalsaid they.. and.. I..." Matt just started to talk a mile a minute, his usually clear diction breaking down fast into a cry for help.

"Sit down, Matt," Chris said.

The use of his real name, and the first person in so long to even offer a hint of stability in his mixed-up world had Matt doing exactly as he was told.

“Listen, Matt. It certainly sounds crazy, but who can explain such things? There’s only one way out of this, as I see it. Just go along with this and take it one day at a time.” He placed his hand on Matt’s shoulder, reassuringly. “If you try and run or tell someone what’s going on, you’re going to get yourself and your Mom in trouble, right?”

Matt nodded.

“So just do your best, try to adjust and take it one day at a time,” Chris said. It was so true. So clear to him now. He had to try and just get through the day. Chris was absolutely right. The words kept running over and over in his head, because they made such perfect sense. He felt like he was almost in a trance. One day at a time.

By the time he returned to the real world, Chris was gone.



Matt was standing with Chris on the curb, after school. “Do you think she’ll let me get out of it?” he asked.

“From what you tell me, I wouldn’t even ask,” Chris answered. “She’s so angry right now, that I’d just do whatever she says and not make waves. You cross her, and you could be in heels for months.”

Matt hadn’t thought of it that way. His mother really was acting so strangely. She must be containing her anger inside. She must be so crazy with anger that she doesn’t even realize what she’s doing anymore. Thank God Chris was here to explain it to him.

Finally, he saw his mother’s car come over the horizon. In a way, he was as scared as ever. In another way, he was never so happy to see her, to take him away from this school.

He had barely made it through his four classes he was supposed to be teaching without disintegrating into a pool of melted jello. If his mother’s plan was to see how this had destroyed him, he was eager to show that he made it through unscathed. If that wasn’t part of her plan, who knows what was going to satisfy her. Chris’s advice was best. Just don’t rock the boat.

“Hey, don’t get all bent out of shape over this Matt,” Chris said, as the car approached. “I remember once my parents made me go to school once with a band-aid on my face.”

Yes, Matt realized, that was *just* like what he was going through. Chris *did* understand.

As Matt took steps towards his mother's stopped car, Chris was walking away. "Hey, try and fix up the hair next time. It was pretty nasty today," he said.

Matt felt up his hair. It really was ragged. He checked himself in the rear view mirror and saw his scraggly appearance. He'd have to take care of that if he was going to pull this off.

"Brush?" He asked his mother when he got into the car.

"Purse," she said. Matt dug into the purse by his mother's side and got her hairbrush from it. He immediately started to comb the wig out.

"Look what I got for you today!" Matt's mother sung as she pulled out a photocopy from an envelope on the dashboard.

Matt took it reluctantly and gave it a glance.

"A new birth certificate! See?"

Matt looked at it, puzzled. He read it, one letter at a time, afraid of what it said. typed on what looked to be a fully legal and certified document, it said ERIN MARIE WRIGHT in big, bold letters. He couldn't believe it.

"How did you get this?"

"There's this place in a downtown alleyway, I forget where I heard about it. They were just wonderful. They had everything I needed!"

Matt looked at the paper again. It recorded the birth in Santa Fe, New Mexico – where his mother grew up – as well as a new date of birth, August 29, 1986.

"You're twenty-five now. Congratulations!" His mother chirped.

Matt knew he was being tested. This was all an attempt to see how much more his mother could push it. Well, he wasn't going to give her an excuse.

"Isn't that nice," he said, simply, through clenched teeth.



The instant he was home, Matt fell dead on the couch, tossing those dammed shoes as far away as possible.

"How was your first day at work?" Mrs. Wilke asked.

"No big deal," Matt answered, telling quite possibly the biggest fib in his life. "I know the material."

"Why don't you go up to your room and relax? That's what it's for, you know. I want to keep the house neat."

Another heavy sigh left Matt's chest and he got back on his feet to go upstairs.

“Don’t leave your shoes on the floor!” He heard as he was halfway up. He turned back around to go pick “his” shoes up. At least his mother was still acting like a mother, even if he couldn’t call her that.

When finally got to his room, he twisted the knob on his door, only to find it locked. He threw his weight into it, but no luck.

“Not that room, Sis.” Mrs. Wilke said, coming up the steps. “That’s Matt’s room. Your room is over there.” She pointed.

Matt followed her finger to what had previously been the guest bedroom. He pushed open the door and flicked on the lights.

He wasn’t prepared for the assault of new furniture, heavily draped in linen. The room had been completely made over. The bed had an overstuffed mattress with a fluffy comforter and an explosion of pillows on top of it. A full-length mirror was in the corner, and another large mirror rested atop a vanity already stocked with cosmetics. The room was painted a honey color on the walls, and the furniture was stained oak, giving the room a golden hue, looking like it was perpetually daybreak inside.

The drapes spilled down onto the floor by an extra few feet, a design element that had to have be conceived by a woman. Only they could have thought of something so ridiculous. Looking around in disbelief, Matt saw an armoire was against the wall, with a door purposefully left open to display a wardrobe of new clothing. A wardrobe of tasteful women’s business wear, suitable for teaching.

“You shouldn’t have,” Matt said, dryly. “You really shouldn’t have.”

“Think nothing of it, Sis!”

Not much later, Matt sat through the third most uncomfortable dinner he had experienced in the last three days, picking through the take-out boxes of Chinese food while thinking of all the mean, vitriolic things he should be saying to his mother. But he was taking Chris’s advice and taking it easy.

“You use those chopsticks well,” his mother said, across the table.

“Thanks.” Matt mumbled.

“It’s going to be interesting to see how you do with long nails. I made an appointment tomorrow.”

Matt took a heavy breath and continued on, fishing for glazed pork.



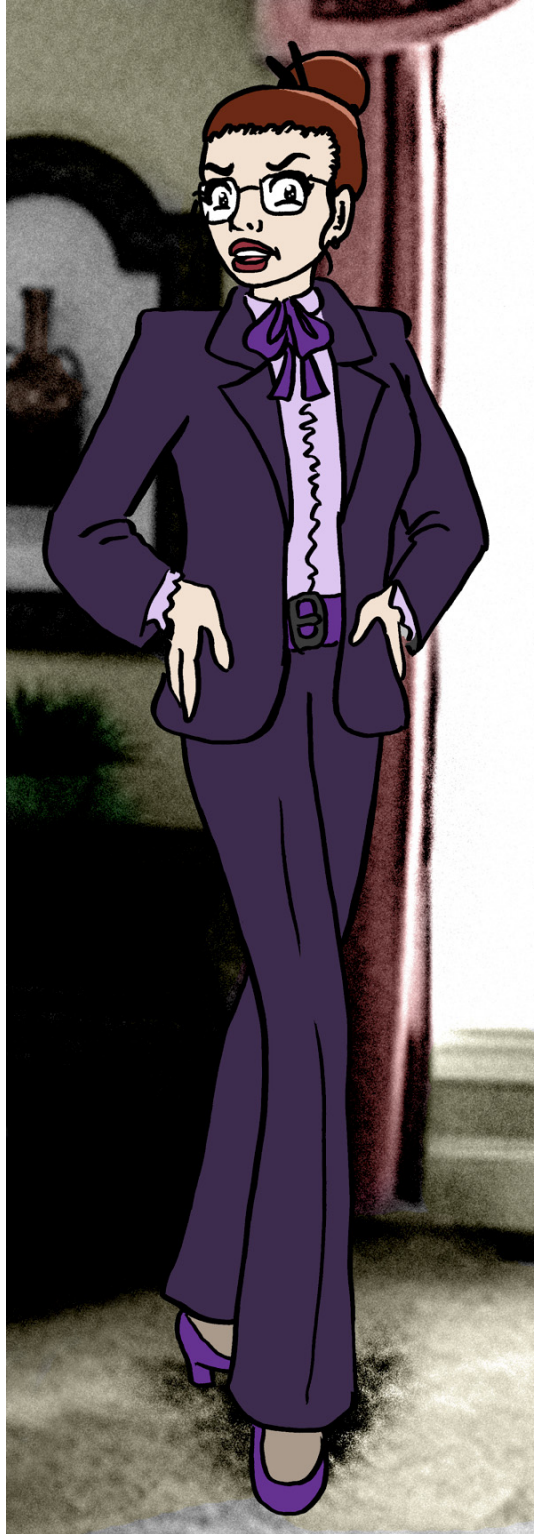
Matt sat at the desk, the one the teacher sits at, waiting for class to begin. He was understandably having some trouble with his present situation. He had gone to bed the previous night determined to find the way out of this mess. But

before he could formulate a way to escape, he had fallen asleep in the overstuffed mattress of his new room.

It was when he was already in the shower, scrubbing himself down with the puff pad, rubbing the body wash into his skin, that he even fully realized he was well into another day as 'Erin Wright' the schoolteacher. Was he getting used to this? No. He would never get used to it.

Wright was his mother's maiden name. That's where it had come from. It had taken him a while to place it. Being the 'sister' it only made sense that it would fall to him. What really puzzled him was the way the people at school expected an 'Erin Wright' to show up and teach. How was that even possible? He had checked the records and such this morning to make sure they had it right, but it was all documented properly. Erin Wright had been a substitute teacher around the district for a while now, hoping for a permanent position – or so the district administrator's office had said – when he called. The receptionist there even acted like she knew Erin Wright and they had talked many times before. It just didn't make any sense.

It was also when he was getting ready this morning when another horrible realization came to him. Paperwork and people's memory aside, he really did look the part. He had lingered in the



full length mirror when dressing, in a plum one-button blazer and matching slacks. The frilled lavender blouse was just what a teacher would wear. His knee-high suntan pantyhose and plum 1-inch pumps were so on the mark, it was like someone had just cast him in the role for a movie.

But the clothes weren't really what was bothering him. It was the way he looked in them. He fit the part just as much as the clothes did. His hairless, 15-year-old face was a perfect substitute for a twenty-something woman's. His almost flush cheeks, thick lips, long eyelashes and button of a nose were so right for this woman. The little bit of makeup he put on to satisfy his mother accentuated it further. He was... Cute. In a teacher sort of way. Trying to look serious even made him look cuter, more child-like.

At fifteen years old and five-five, he expected he had another few years to keep growing. But as a twenty-five year old woman, he was about average. His skin-and-bones physique would eventually fill out, he supposed. But it was a practically perfect weight for a female. He lacked the curves women had, but most would have killed to be his 98 pounds.

Standing there in the mirror, he almost believed he *was* Erin Wright. It was such a complete illusion. Even his high, childish voice was appropriate.

The more he thought about it, a notion kept creeping into in his head. Maybe there was just a clerical error that had him here. He could be mistaken about all the people who said they knew Erin Wright. It could have been a mix-up. Because if you stripped away all that nonsense, no one would have any trouble thinking he was the woman he appeared to be.

If there *was* a mix-up, maybe it was his fault. Or maybe he could at least be held accountable for the problem, somehow.

But he still didn't know all the facts. He had to just keep plowing through this and get to the answers later. As he steeled himself, the bell rang for his first class of the day.



Matt did what he had always assumed he could do with ease, and that was to teach this subject. The book wasn't very helpful. He barely used it except as a prop. They were working on sentence structure, and it was a cake walk. The only thing that gave him any trouble was the difficulty of the other students in comprehending it. They kept asking questions, and he had to keep repeating himself. How could they not grasp such an easy concept? At one point, he almost just decided to stop lecturing and ignore the class.

But after just a brief pause in his oration, he realized that gave the students time to look at him. Their eyes were all over him. Scanning, surveying and ex-

aming. All of them just looking at him, ready to spot the flaw that would give him away. So he just kept talking and made them take notes.

“Eyes on paper. Not on me,” he said more than once. He tried to make it sound professional. It worked.

Once class had been dismissed, he asked Chris to stay for a moment. Once again, Matt shut the door for privacy.

“Oh, hey, I like the hair,” Chris said.

“Huh?” Matt replied. He felt his head to find his wig gathered into a loose ponytail at the base of his neck. A velvet black ribbon held it in place. Had he done that? He could just barely sort of remember doing something with it this morning, but it wasn’t very clear.

“How’re ya holdin’ up, dude?” Chris asked. He almost looked concerned.

“Okay.” That was all Matt could say about that. “It just seems to get stranger every moment.”

“Your Mom still of the deep end?”

“She closed off my room and redecorated the guest bed to be my new room. She bought a whole bunch of clothes for me.” Something just occurred to him. “How did she even know my size?”

“Whoa. That’s intense.”

“I think it’s just getting worse. Maybe I should report her to the police or something.” Matt was obviously terrified of that prospect.

“Man, that would be an all-timer on the news!” Chris’s enthusiasm was measurable. “You’d be the freakiest story they’d ever have! You could sell your story for millions to the National Enquirer!”

That killed that idea for Matt instantly. He didn’t want his painted face all over TV. That’d be an even bigger nightmare. “So, what do I do?” He asked Chris. “What the... *Heck* do I do?”

“Hey, If I were you, I’d take it easy. You’re gonna blow a gasket if you don’t learn to roll with the punches, dude.”

It wasn’t the answer Matt was looking for. He really wanted to do something. But as usual, he had to agree that Chris’s reasons were infallible. Impeccable logic. When this all gets sorted out, he was going to have to try harder to get rid of Chris, he decided. He didn’t like people who thought they were smarter than him.

Chris stopped for a second, on his way out the door. “Hey, what you should do is get a perm or something. That’d look really killer on you, dude!”

“Mmm,” Matt said in reply. He barely even registered the comment.



It wasn't that much later that his mother picked him up and drove into town. Why into town? The memory came back like a ton of bricks. His mother had scheduled that nail appointment. How utterly humiliating, he thought. How utterly ridiculous.

Maybe his mother had just told everyone in the salon about this trick she was playing on her son, and that everyone should play along to tease him. Or maybe he was as convincing as he thought he was. Because when his Mom pushed him through the door, not an eyelash even blinked.

"Erin Wright for her 4:30 appointment?" Mrs Wilke said, keeping her hand on Matt's back to prevent escape.

"Gotcha! Right here!" Said the perky receptionist, pointing to her computer screen.

"Okay then, I'll leave you in their capable hands!" Matt's Mom said, waving goodbye.

"Wha...? *Mo...!*" No – he couldn't say 'Mom' here. "Hey!"

"I've got some shopping to do, but you're fine on your own, sis!" Mrs. Wilke grinned. "It's not like I need to hold your hand like a mother, do I?" She smiled and left.

"This way, Ms. Wright!" The receptionist said, to get Matt moving.

"So you and Susan are sisters?" The receptionist asked, leading him into the madness of a salon operating at full tilt.

"I guess," Matt said, glumly.

He sat through his cuticles being pushed back, the nails being buffed, coated, re-coated and shaped, and most irritating of all, the yipitty-yap of the nail 'artist' who had no grasp of the outside world beyond what was on American Idol last night.

"...but I thought she was the real deal! She had it all goin' on! I don't see how she got kicked off! Now it's down to that bitch from New Jersey and the black girl..."

Matt smiled from time to time in response, added a grunt of comprehension, and put his brain on auto-pilot, something he was abhorrent to do. His mind was a steel trap, ready to spring and latch on to information and insight. He trained it to be that way. The pursuit of knowledge was divine. Unless it was about TV.

"So let's get you to the chair and Maria will do your hair," was a phrase that the nail artist said that he should have paid more attention to. Because by the time he was seated in the hairstylist's chair, it was too late.

“Maybe a layered cut, I really think we need to take some length off and add some body,” said a Latino girl, presumably Maria.

Matt struggled to catch up with what the hairstylist was saying to him. “Huh?” he verbalized.

“What do you think?”

“I, uh...” Matt stumbled. He didn’t want anything. But he had to think quick. “Well, I...” Wait. There was one thing. “A perm?” He said.

As his hair was placed under the sink to rinse, he was suffering from an acute sense of idiocy. Why had he said that? Why had he actually asked for a permanent? It was Chris! He had put that into his head! Asshole!

“I’m going to leave this in your hair for a while and I’ll be back.” Maria said, after smothering his head in foul-smelling tapioca. At least it looked like tapioca to him. Something else was in his hair that felt like rods being placed in there. But that was ridiculous. Who ever heard of that?

It was only when Maria had finished up drying his hair and doing some final trimming, that a shock of white-hot fright went through him. He was wearing a wig! The hairdresser must have seen it! It would have been so obvious when she was that close to his artificial scalp! Good God almighty! She had probably already been all around the shop telling her friends about the sissy boy in her chair! They all knew!

Worst of all, how could he have forgotten something so simple, so basic and so obvious? He was in such deep trouble, that they’d never be able to dig his bones up.

“Voila!” Maria said, turning the chair around so Matt could see the finished product in the mirror.

The long, middle-of-the-back length of the dark down hair was a memory. This head sported a bouncy, wavy and full head of shoulder-length chestnut brown hair that shone and glimmered in the light. It waved gently from his temples to his shoulders. It was parted in the middle, and had long, wavy bangs framing the face. Whenever Matt gave his head the slightest movement, the hair bounced with him. It was a gorgeous hairdo. He was in awe.

But wait – what about the wig? Matt freed his arms from under the tunic wrapped around his neck and grabbed the edge of his hairline. Nothing was there. He felt for it, but couldn’t find the seam. He knew it was there, but he couldn’t feel any trace of it.

“Yeah, those perms kinda itch sometimes. It’ll go away.” Maria said, misinterpreting his behavior.

Matt realized how crazy he must look, and put his hands back under the tunic. He probably was just too panicky to find the seam of his wig, too frenzied to really search for it. He’d check later, when he was alone.



All the way home and all through the night, all Matt heard about was his hair. His mother was obsessed. “How did they get it so full?” and “I wish I had hair like that” and most troubling of all “I should have Maria do my hair like that, then everyone would know we’re sisters!”

Matthew was only up for a quick TV dinner and minimal contact with the mother who was ever so quickly losing it. After doing the dishes, he was out of there.

Through habit, he headed for his old room, and was startled when his door didn't budge. He kicked it anger. He had put up with too much of this nonsense and wanted it done with.

In his anger, though, he noted the oddest thing about the door. It looked like it always had, except the handle was painted the same white color as the door and the walls. In fact, not only did the handle not move, it was like it was a part of the door. It didn't wiggle in the slightest. The crack of the door and doorjamb was painted over as well. There was no seam. It was like the door was just an ornament in the wall.

More tricks, he assumed. More of his mother's stupid tricks. He trudged back to Erin's room and grumbled.

He had nothing to do. No books to read, no papers to write and no computer to type on. He tried to take as long as possible in getting out of his ridiculous outfit, before burying himself under the covers of the bed. But try as he might, it was still light outside, and he was never going to fall asleep. He then found those stupid women's magazines his mother had given him in the bedside table. At the limit of his desperation, he started to read them.

He was bewildered at how much of the magazine was just ads and pictures. Where was the information? The summaries, the extracts, the footnotes? These periodicals even lacked a bibliography! Even those pages graced with the presence of a few interloping words were useless. One article advised the reader of "50 different ways to make you summer-slim & swimsuit sexy." Fifty ways? Had not the women of American thought to just shut their big fat mouths and stop eating? Was this not obvious to them?

Matthew so wanted to throw away these insipid publications, but whenever he stopped leafing through them, he just started to stare at the honey-colored walls again. Boredom. So he was right back to "unbelievable lips he can't help but kiss" and the like.



When he woke the next morning, he had to wash off an avocado mask and brush out his hair to get it back to its bouncy, full condition that looked so amazing after the salon. Fortunately, he mused, he had naturally full hair. A quick shower and shave of his legs, and he was ready to pick something out for work.

It seemed all he had were pantsuits for work wear, so on with another one. Dark brown. He got his makeup just right, packed his purse and grabbed his books. He was impatiently waiting for his mother at the bottom of the stairs, ready to go.

“Up early?” His mother asked.

“Some people need to get moving in the morning, Susan,” Matt replied, with a snarl, “I still have tests to grade.”

“Grumpy in the morning,” his mother said under her breath.

Another class began, and yet again, the students which had known him so well refused to recognize him for who he truly was. Matt was still trying to figure a way out of this nightmare, but every time he tried to focus on the subject, his mind would wander. He had these lesson plans to make, and quizzes to write. But he did try to figure things out. He tried his very hardest.

Maybe, he thought, he could run away. Then his mother would be forced to look for him through the police as use his real name and identity.

Too public. Too much attention. Bad idea.

If he could simply take off all this stuff and ditch it, and refuse to go along with this any longer...

No. The plan was to roll with it. He couldn't risk pushing his mother into insanity. She was clearly stressed to the limit already with her delusions.

Maybe if he went to the school administration. No. That would ruin his chances for college. It would destroy him, it would...

“Ms. Wright?” A voice interrupted his train of thought.

“Huh?” Matt said, breaking his concentration.

It was Chris again. “Class is over,” he said.

So it was. The class was empty again, except for the two of them. He must have been so focused that he had missed it. “Chris,” Matt said, “I can't think of a way out if this.”

“Hey,” Chris said in that easy-going manner of his, “it's gonna take some time. Patience.”

Patience. Yes. Matt realized he needed to show some patience. Why had he treated Chris so badly in the past? He was really a very good friend.

“The hair's a nice touch.” Chris smiled. “A good idea.”

That was right! It was Chris who had made that idiotic suggestion about getting his hair done! That's why he was so mad at him! Why, he was going to...

“I think it really works on you.” Chris interrupted.

“Thanks!” Matt said. He was nice to notice. Wait a minute! *What* was he thinking? There he went again, losing his focus.

“What you should do is dress all femmy and stuff in a skirt and that way no one will ever read you as Matt.” Chris suggested.

“Yeah, well...” Matt shrugged. “I'm only going to take this so far, you know. I'm not exactly trying to get dates.”

“Yeah. That’s right.” Chris turned and went in his way. “This will all be over soon, and it’ll seem like a bad dream.” He left just as the warning bell went off for the next class. He stuck his head back in for one parting comment. “But think about it.”



“Just sit tight, and I’ll get us a table,” his mother said. She then walked away, leaving him there, alone. She was just ten feet away, but it felt like he was left alone on an island, shipwrecked, surrounded by sharks.

Or *men*, as some called them.

They were stealing glances at him, letting eyes drift over him like they were idly looking around and just happened to notice him. But Matt knew what was happening. They were checking him out, and he was sick to his stomach over it.

Fortunately, his mother returned quickly. “They have a table in the front,” she said with a smile.

His mother seemed amused at the frustration and silent grudge Matt had for her. She just had this stupid, silly grin on her face that was enjoying this horrible joke she was playing on him. When was she going to be satisfied that a lesson had been learned, for Christ’s sake?

The waiter walked them over to the table, and all Matt could do was think he was walking on hot coals. Of course the table had to be in the front, where all the people walking by could see him. Of course, it was in the center so all the diners could see him as well. Of course it had to be this way. Screw Voltaire. Matt was living in the worst possible of all possible worlds.

His mother made sure he would be as embarrassed as possible in front of the waiter, vetoing his attempt to get a burger, then a sandwich, then a bowl of soup. He wound up with a seafood salad and seething hatred for his mother.

They chitted, they chatted. Well, at least Mrs. Wilke did. His mother quizzed him on the clothing of passers-by. “Isn’t that hat cute?” she would ask. “I love those shoes.”

All Matt could do was grumble in her general direction.

“Don’t worry, Matt.” His mother finally said to him. “I think you’ve suffered enough.”

Damn right he had. He clenched his jaw and said so. “Yes,” he spoke.

That was when his world collapsed a little bit more on itself, for it was then he was spotted. Of all people, it was Chris who was walking by. He walked past once, and then a second time to make sure he was seeing what he thought he

was seeing. Chris started to laugh, covering his mouth and turning his back so no one would notice.

Fortunately, no one really had, and Mrs. Wilke took the moment to excuse herself for the ladies' room. Not after asking Matt to join her, of course. He refused.

Chris then led himself into the restaurant. "Dude," he said.

"Shut up," Matt grouched. "Don't talk to me."

"Whatever," Chris said, and sat down next to Matt. He helped himself to a fistful of breadsticks.

"It just doesn't make sense!" Matt said, at the end of his rope.

Chris calmly finished his breadsticks and looked directly into Matt's eyes. "Listen closely, Matt." He spoke slowly and deliberately. "It doesn't *have* to make sense."

Matt just looked at him cockeyed. What a weird thing to say, he thought. Then he just sunk his head in his hands. He was just so alone.

Still, he thought about what Chris has said. And he kept thinking. And thinking. Suddenly, it was as if a light had been switched on inside Matt's head. "I doesn't *have* to make *sense!*" He smiled for the first time in a long time. "It doesn't have to make sense!" He liked the idea so much he said it twice.

Talking to Chris always helped. He had a good head on his shoulders. In fact, it was kind of spooky how he always knew just what to say to calm him down.

"Hey, I'll see you in class tomorrow," Chris said, excusing himself.

"It doesn't have to make sense!" Matt said, gleefully.

"Right," Chris said, picking up another breadstick before he went. "Later."

Matt followed Chris out of the restaurant with his eyes. The guy just always knew what to say. He was some kind of Zen master or something.

He could see Chris stop and say something to his mother, returning from the bathroom, and then proceeded to watch him leave and walk on down the street. Only when he was totally out of sight did he return his attention to his mother.

"I think this should be a girls' night out. Dinner, dancing and the whole works!" His mother suggested.

Wasn't his mother just about to let him off? Wasn't this nightmare about to end? "Sure," Matt said, shrugging his shoulders. It was a crazy idea, and he didn't care. It didn't have to make sense anymore.



He breezed into class the next day, humming lightly to himself and got busy right away, scribbling out the day's lessons on the chalkboard. Matt almost didn't notice the class file in behind him as he finished up.

"Hey, you look to be in a good mood," Chris said, approaching Matt at the board. "You have a good time last night?"

Matt just smiled. It was quite an evening. But how did Chris know about it?

"You look great," Chris said, before Matt could ask.

"Thanks," Matt said, politely.

Chris looked down. "I like the new skirt."

Matt looked down there as well. It was just the most obvious thing in his closet this morning, a navy skirt that came down over his knees. Somehow, when he was picking out the clothes, he just couldn't get past the skirt. He had to give it a try. After all, that clever Chris had suggested it would make him look more like a woman. Which is exactly what he needed to do right now.

"It's different," was all Matt could say.

"Fortunately, you have the legs for it."

Matt had to agree.

"Hey, it's hot in here, isn't it?" Chris said, removing his hoodie. "It's gotta be like eighty."

It was the middle of November, but Matt did have to agree to feeling a little warm. He took off his jacket as well. But while Chris had only revealed a T-shirt, Matt revealed a thin, gauzy white blouse that was semi-transparent. "It is a little hot," Matt said, blowing wind in his face with his hand.

The bell then rang and Chris took his seat, restoring the teacher-student roles to normal. As class started, though, Matt's mood went from flighty to paranoid. Here he was, standing in front of this class, dressed in a skirt and a see-through blouse. This time, people were paying attention. All the boys were looking right at him. Or at least certain parts of him. Of course, his chest was just stuffed socks, but it was still the creepiest feeling in the world. They wanted him. They were fantasizing about him. Why was he doing this?

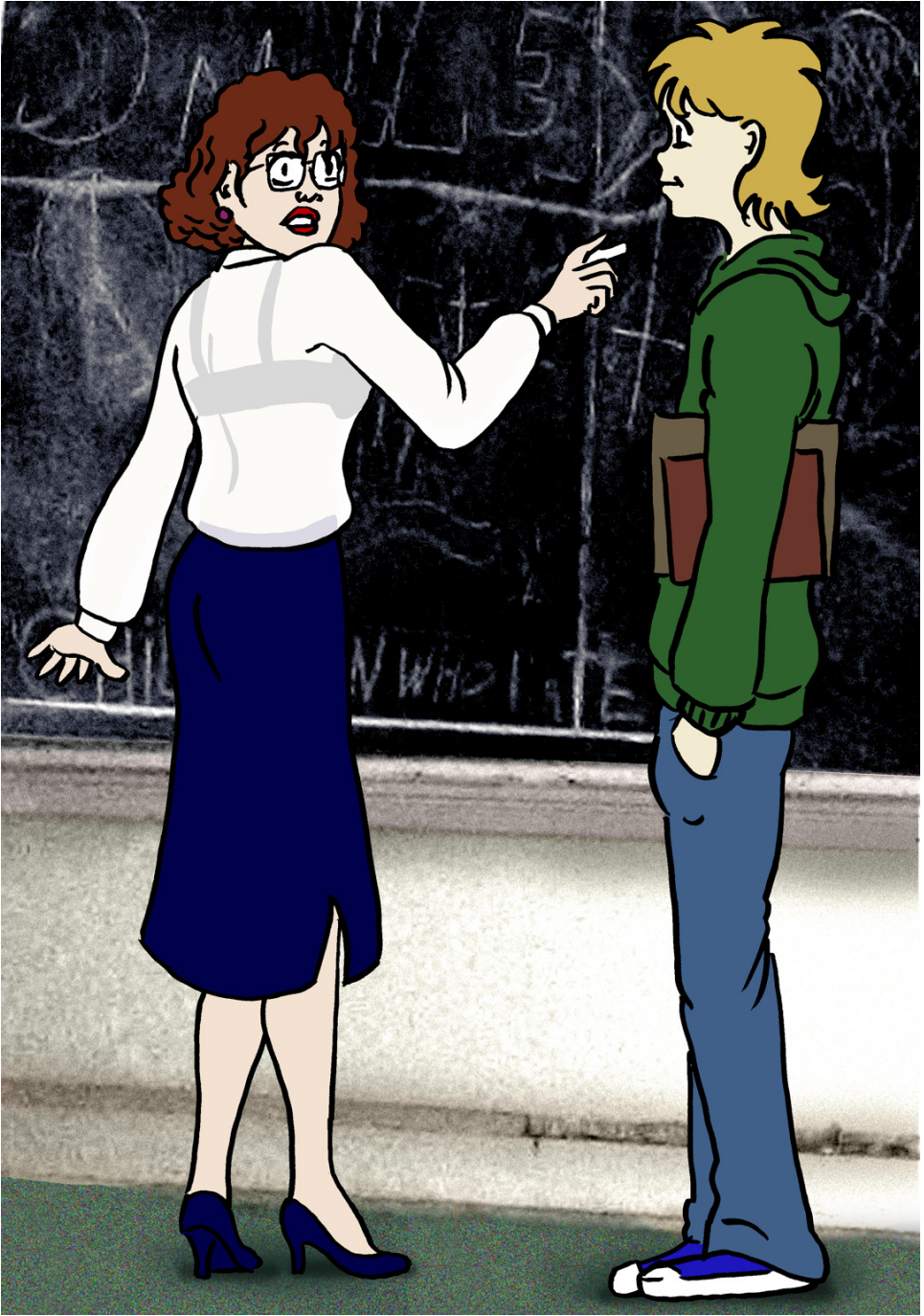
When the bell finally rang to end class, he asked Chris to stay behind. a couple of scolding "ooo's" were spoken by Matt's fellow former classmates as Chris sheepishly remained.

"This is driving me nuts, Chris!" Matt said.

"The opportunity will be there, Miss Wright," Chris said, Buddha-like.

"Not that, Chris!" Matt fired back. "I mean you have to stop telling me how to dress!"

"What?"



“You always make suggestions, every time we talk. And it just has to stop. It’s inappropriate.”

“You...” Chris was at a loss, but only for a moment. “You don’t *have* to do these things, you know. I was just kinda kidding around.”

“This is no joke,” Matt insisted.

“Well fine, then,” Chris said, almost seeming offended. “You don’t need anybody’s help.”

Matt had a sour look on his face. “I didn’t say that.”

“No, no!” Chris said, trying to leave. “I get your drift. I was just trying to help and you don’t want my help.”

“Look, Chris, I just need to do this without the suggestions, okay?” Matt said, uncharacteristically trying to calm someone’s nerves he had rattled.

Chris breathed out a heavy sigh. “Okay. Whatever.” He took step to the door, then turned around. “But that’s a good outfit for you, you should keep it up.” He added.

“Thanks. I will.” Matt replied.

What? *What* had he just said?



It was a more relaxed night at home than Matt had had in a long while. He was just able to calm down and stop worrying about the predicament he was in and take it easy. He knew now that just because he demanded a logical, ordered world, that meant he had no right to really expect such a thing. It had never worked before, and it certainly wasn’t working now.

He’d just have to find an opportunity and take advantage of it when it came.

Tonight, though, he was going through the papers he needed to finish grading before turning out the light. His hair was up for bed, and he was wearing a long nightshirt that seemed the only appropriate thing in his closet to wear going to sleep.

As he ticked away answers on a pop quiz, though, his mind drifted. He remembered last night when Susan had taken him out dancing after dinner. It was a.. *unique*... experience for him. His mother had picked an extremely sedate nightclub, as nightclubs go, and gotten a table. No sooner had the been seated than men were hanging round, asking questions and being nuisances. Sure, his mother was encouraging them, but he wasn’t going to have any of that crap. After a couple of drinks, though, he had loosened up a bit. Matt was sure a drink with “virgin” in it shouldn’t have any alcohol, but maybe he was wrong. The drink also had the word “screaming” in it, for that matter. Whatever the case, his attitude wasn’t the same after two hours.

He couldn’t remember what had happened much of that night, but did find it strange that his blouse smelled of men’s cologne and cigarettes, when he put it in the laundry hamper. Also, there was this dumb grin he kept breaking into

whenever he was thinking about last night. In fact, here he was, twenty-four hours later with that same stupid grin on his face. He cleared his throat and went back to grading papers.

If there was anything worth remembering, he'd surely have recalled it by now. Besides, Susan had already decided they were going back later this week. A return trip would surely jog his memory.



But after two trips to the nightclub in question, Matt's memory just seemed to get worse. Every time he had been there, he had made the same mistake of starting a drink, and then accepting one sent from some man, and before he knew it, he was blacking out again.

Next time, though, things would be different. He'd stick to his plan. He'd get to the bottom of that mystery. Nothing could stop him.

"I like your dress, Erin," the woman who worked the office said to him in passing.

"Thanks Carol," Matt said in reply. He looked down at the hem of the dress in dissatisfaction. He didn't want to wear them, but for some reason he kept doing it. Today he was wearing a slim, tan dress that closely hugged his body. It ended just above his knees and had long, flowing sleeves that made him feel ridiculous.

He didn't even wear pants anymore. They had hidden themselves deep in his closet and he never seemed to bother and go to find them. Of course, this was all Chris's fault, as he always had to make some comment on his looks, and sure enough, Matt would take it to heart. He even had a pair of lens less frames perched on his nose, because Chris has suggested that he'd be more convincing if he had glasses. But he didn't need glasses anymore, so he just bought a pair of designer frames and used those. At \$400! Fortunately, his meager salary as a teacher could just cover it.

It had been a tough day at school, and Matt was happily putting it to rest, turning in his attendance sheets to the office. "I'll see you tomorrow," Matt said to Carol before heading out.

Why would he see her tomorrow? Because he still hadn't figured out a way to end this joke. Here we was, a boy of fifteen and he was masquerading as a teacher in his own school. Just thinking about it hurt his brain.

Matt unlocked his car and freshened his lipstick in the rear view mirror before starting the motor. He had to pick up Susan at work and the two were out for some shopping. It seemed as if they were palling around as if they were really sisters. Hardly, Matt mused to himself. Because a real sister wouldn't keep

stealing his favorite tube of mascara.

After picking Susan up, they headed out for the mall, and spent themselves out of a paycheck. Weary and exhausted, Matt was overloaded with bags as he returned to his car. Susan followed with her bags in tow, and they dumped them in the trunk.

“You are going to knock ‘em dead in that halter top tomorrow night, Erin!” Susan said merrily.

Great. Just what he wanted. He only bought it because his Mom insisted. He dropped himself in the driver’s seat and headed out for the highway back home.

Driving, he cursed at the idiots out here on the road, the ones who couldn’t make up their minds as to what lane they were in. Now, *he* was a good driver. A careful driver. Why couldn’t everyone else be?

“You were awful nice to that shoe salesman.” His mother said, inferring something.

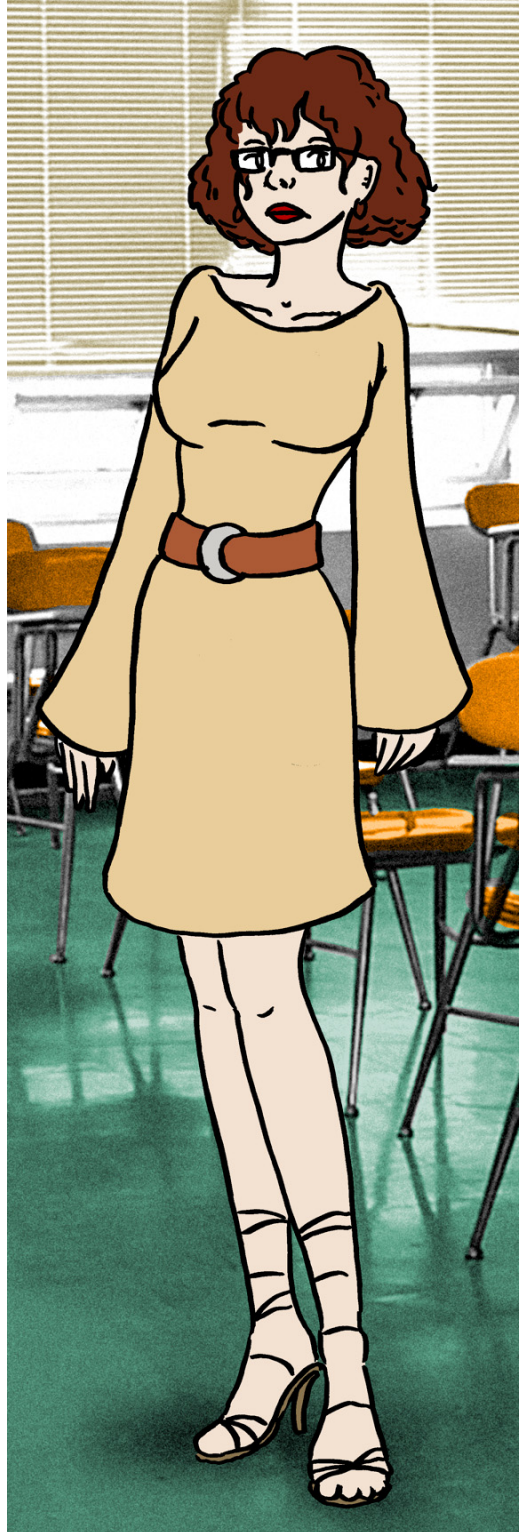
“Who?” Matt asked. Then recalled it. “Oh. Him.”

“Was I just imagining things or were you sweet on him? Because he was sweet on you.”

“I was just being polite,” Matt replied, curtly.

“Well, he had a very nice smile. And a very nice butt.”

“He may have a nice smile and/or butt, but I was just being polite.” Matt asserted. His mother was just full of nonsense. Goofy as a



loon. He wanted to change the subject. “I have this boy in one of my classes, Chris.”

“I think I’ve met him.”

“Probably. Anyway, he’s been hounding me about my clothes and my appearance every single day.”

“I don’t think that’s appropriate for a student.”

“Of course not,” Matt answered. “But I can’t seem to put anything he says out of my mind.”

“You’re a grown woman, Erin. You have to act like it.”

“I know,” Matt said. Something was very strange about what his mother just said, but he didn’t want to take the conversation off topic.

“I think I know the boy you’re talking about,” Susan said. “Chris from across the street. Yes. I’ve met him on a few occasions. In fact I met his father not too long ago.”

“Maybe I should talk to him.”

“He seemed like good people. A little odd, but nice.”

“I should schedule a parent–teacher conference,” Matt said. The car came to a stop at the light, and as he waited, he adjusted the rear–view mirror to check his lipstick. He fluffed out his hair, and then put the mirror back in place.

“Do you want to go out again tonight?” Susan asked.

Matt drummed his long red nails on the steering wheel. “I think maybe I’ll wait until the weekend,” he said, seriously thinking it over. “I’ve got a lot on my mind.”



As Chris came into class the next morning, he couldn’t wait to see what Matt was going to look like today. He had been having a lot of fun with him lately, but sooner or later, he knew he’d have to call a halt to all this.

*Ah well,* he said to himself, *maybe just a few more days.*

Matt was already seated at his teachers’ desk, working over some papers. He quickly shed his jacket and placed it over the back of his chair. “Good morning, class. I hope everyone got their homework done last night, because I really think we need to move on in the lesson plan.”

He stood up and took his position at the front, leaning back on the desk.

Chris noted Matt was wearing a white halter–top blouse that showed off smooth, slim arms and shoulders. It also gave him a low neck line. He had added a short navy skirt, shorter than anything he’d worn before. It ended a

few of inches above his knees.

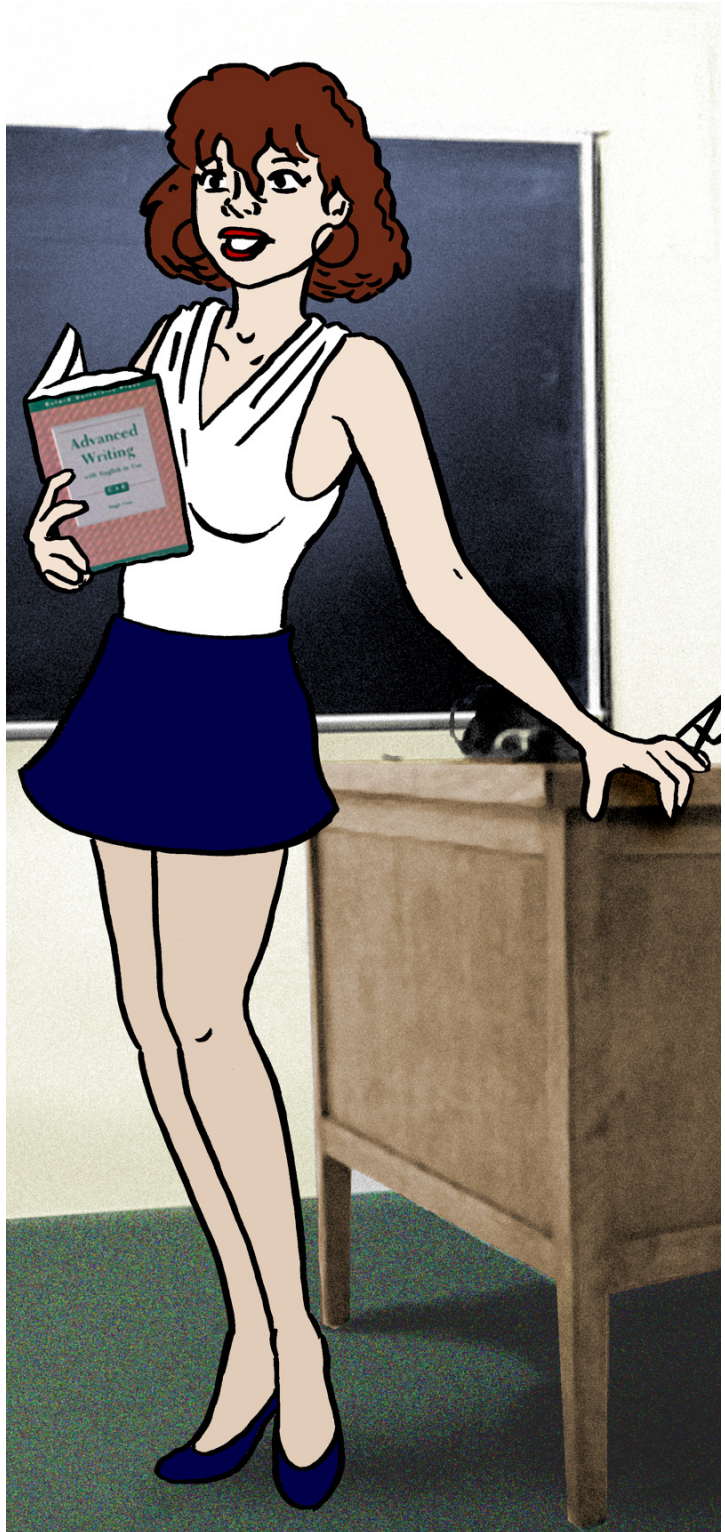
His long legs had sheer panty hose covering them, and Matt wore a pair of navy pumps with a three-inch heel.

As Matt recited the lessons from the text he was reading, he removed the thick glasses he was wearing and was using one of the ear pieces to absently run along his teeth.

Matt looked damn sexy. Chris was amazed at how little it took for a skinny boy to look like a hot woman.

“Miss Wright?” Chris said, interrupting the lesson. “I’m not sure I understand this illustration.” He pointed to a drawing in his book.

“What’s the difficulty?” Matt said, walking towards Chris’s desk. He noted the sway of his hips as he



walked perfectly in the heels. “This illustration,” he said, looking at the same drawing.

As he did, Matt bent over slightly to get a better look. Chris could smell perfume coming from Matt. He was that far into being a woman. He was amused. Maybe his Mom had talked him into wearing it.

“I’m not sure what the problem is,” Matt said, his lips covered with shiny dark red lipstick. His long lashes batted at Chris.

Then, Chris took a look down the blouse. After all, it was just sitting there, inches from his face. He could see the straps of a lacy bra going down to the cups, where...



Chris suddenly sat up as straight as a board. He turned his eyes away from Matt, looking anywhere but at the boy dressed up in women’s clothing. He couldn’t look at him. Fear was coursing through his system.

“I... I think...” He quickly glanced down Matt’s blouse again. And he was twice as afraid. “I think I understand it now. Sorry to bother you.” He needed Matt out of his face.

“All right, Chris. Now, back to the lesson,” Matt said, slowly swinging his hips as he walked back to the front of the room.

Chris looked at the clock. Five more minutes to go. He needed some answers. He needed to know what was going on. Something had gone wrong. But he had it so under control until now. But now, he had lost control of everything.

After a highly-strung five minutes of waiting, the bell rung. As usual the class filed out, and as usual Chris was asked to stay behind. But that’s exactly what he wanted. He had to talk to Matt.

“Matt,” Chris said, as soon as the room was empty. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, thank you for asking.” Matt then looked at Chris right in the eyes. “But this routine we’ve developed has to stop. No more suggestions about how I should dress or what I should do with my hair. This isn’t appropriate for the classroom.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Chris said, ignoring him. “Just tell me, have you been feeling okay lately? Anything really distressing happen in the last day or two?”

“Your concern for my well being is touching, but my private life is none of your business,” Matt replied. “I know you’re just trying to help me through this difficult period, but I’m sure I can handle it without your commentary.”

“So nothing urgent you need to tell me?”

“Chris, unless you want me to call your parents, I think you have to start knowing where your boundaries are.”

Chris just scratched the back of his neck. “Okay. Sorry,” he said. He quickly exited the room. But not before taking one last glance down Matt’s blouse. He saw the deep neckline. The bra. And then the breasts. Fully grown breasts.

How the fuck had that happened?



“Oh, I don’t know what I’m going to do with that Chris DeVray boy,” Matt said, putting his purse on the table as he returned home. “He’s driving me absolutely up the wall, Susan.”

Matt’s mother deposited her purse next to Matt’s as they both entered the living room. “Well, if you’re asking my opinion, Sis, I think you’re just leading the poor boy on.”

“Leading him on?” Matt said, placing his hand defensively on his chest. “What in heaven’s name are you talking about?”

“Oh come on, Erin! You’re dressing like you want every boy in that classroom to be staring at you!”

“I’ll remind you that you’re the one who wanted me to buy this top,” Matt fired back.

“For going out at night, yes. Not for the job.”

“For going out?” Matt looked at the top from his vantage point. “This is far too tame for going out. I might as well just wear a babushka.”

“Well, all I’m saying is that you need to tone it down a little for school. I’m sure someone is going to notice and say something at some point.”

“You need to grow up and come to the twenty-first century, Suze. This is how we dress here. Even teachers.”

“Suit yourself.” Susan said, dismissively.

Matt was ticked. “Thank you, I will.” He then marched upstairs to hide the seething anger he was feeling. Imagine, telling him how to do his job! The nerve!

Matt then stopped cold in front of his door. Well, not his door, but the old one. Or was it? He seemed to remember his room being here at the end of the hallway, but where there should have been a door, there was only a recessed panel. No doorknob, to crack in the wall, nothing. Just the area in the wall where it looked like a door should be.

Shaking his head, he quickly turned around and headed to where he should have been going all along, into his room. He sat on the bed and kicked off his shoes. He always felt so relaxed in his room. So warm and cozy. He loved those darling curtains.



As Susan went about the task of finding some veggies in the fridge for dinner, the front doorbell rang. She had no idea who it was. She wasn't expecting anyone.

“Chris?” She said, seeing her neighbor's kid in the doorway. “What are you doing here? Do you really think you should be bothering Er... I mean Miss Wright at home? Hasn't she talked to you about this?”

“I didn't come here to talk to...” He was suddenly aware he had to use the feminine pronoun. “...Her.” Chris realized that there wasn't any acknowledgment in this woman's eyes that she was saying anything but the truth.

“I came to talk to you,” Chris said. He fixed his gaze upon Matt's mother. “I need you to pay attention.”

Matt's mother released the doorknob and stood there with a glassy look in her eyes. “Of course, Chris.”

“This is very important, Mrs. Wilke. I need you to listen carefully.”

Mrs. Wilke nodded.

“This was supposed to be a punishment, Mrs. Wilke. This wasn't supposed to be real. You needed to show Matt how living like a woman was harder than he thought. To show him that he needed to be himself, to be a normal kid and not take things too seriously. You were supposed to make him feel ridiculous.”

Chris tried to crystallize his thoughts. “This was just a joke. A short-term way of getting Matt to unwind and take life a little slower. Not to become his new reality. Do you understand?”

Mrs. Wilke nodded again. “I understand, Chris, but what does this have to do with my sister?”

“Your son needs you to be there for him, Mrs. Wilke. No more fooling around. You need to help him. Help him become grounded again. Do you understand?”

Mrs. Wilke nodded once more. Then she snapped herself out of her daze. Why was she keeping the door open and letting a draft in? She had just been talking to... Who?

She shook the thought out of her head and went back to the kitchen. She was hoping to find some squash for the salad.



Matt rolled the shopping cart down the produce aisle, one wheel fluttering out of control. It reminded him of his life.

Here he was, trying desperately not to be discovered as a fraud, and he was out in public again. Well, he had chosen a grocery store halfway across town so he wouldn't bump into any students.

He came upon the produce aisle. What had Susan wanted? Squash. He plopped it into the cart.

How in the world was he going to deal with this situation. He knew that just going along with it was the best thing to do. But it seemed to him that his mother was acting more and more like his sister. He never even called her Mom anymore. In fact, Matt really didn't even *think* of her that way anymore.

Having a sister was way more fun than having a mother. Maybe that would make their relationship better when all of this blew over.

As he wheeled past the magazine aisle, Matt thumbed through a few of the women's magazines that caught his eye. They were just as silly as the ones Susan had him reading. There was no end to the self-conscious paranoia women felt. Maybe when he graduated college he'd have the money to start one of these magazines. There certainly were enough people buying them.

With a derisive snort, he placed the magazine back on the rack.

Then he had the misfortune of looking down at himself. He had come to the grocery dressed in grey sweatpants and an oversized hockey jersey. He had dressed entirely for comfort. As he looked around the store, though, he real-

ized that instead of anonymously blending in, as he assumed he would, he stood out looking like this.

The other women in the store were dressed somewhat provocatively. In fact, it looked like some of them were cruising the aisles looking for dates rather than another carton of milk.

What a crazy world this was. Women trying to pick up men. In supermarkets. What ever happened to good old bars?

Matt smiled briefly as he thought about having another night out. He didn't know why he looked forward to these nights, as he could barely remember what happened after the first drink or two. But something in the back of his mind told him that they were a lot of fun. He and Susan would go out tomorrow night, if he remembered correctly. It *was* Friday, after all.

He couldn't wait until Susan saw the outfit he was going to wear. If she had a problem with what he was wearing to work, wait until she saw her little sister tomorrow night.

Matt checked off the last item on his list and put his items on the conveyor belt at the check-out. He grabbed a copy of some magazine and added it as well. It was going to tell him how he could lose five pounds fast.



Chris was still trying to figure things out as his Advanced English class got underway. As usual, Matt was teaching.

But now, he seemed to be totally oblivious to the oddity of the situation. He looked to be totally relaxed. Chris could no longer sense the nervousness that Matt had embodied when he was first put into this position.

In fact, as Chris watched Matt read out the lesson for that day, he didn't look like a 'Matt' at all.

Matt was dressed in a shimmery beige silk camisole top with spaghetti straps to hold it up. The thin straps were resting on smooth, creamy skin that showcased a thin, graceful neck and round, delicate shoulders.

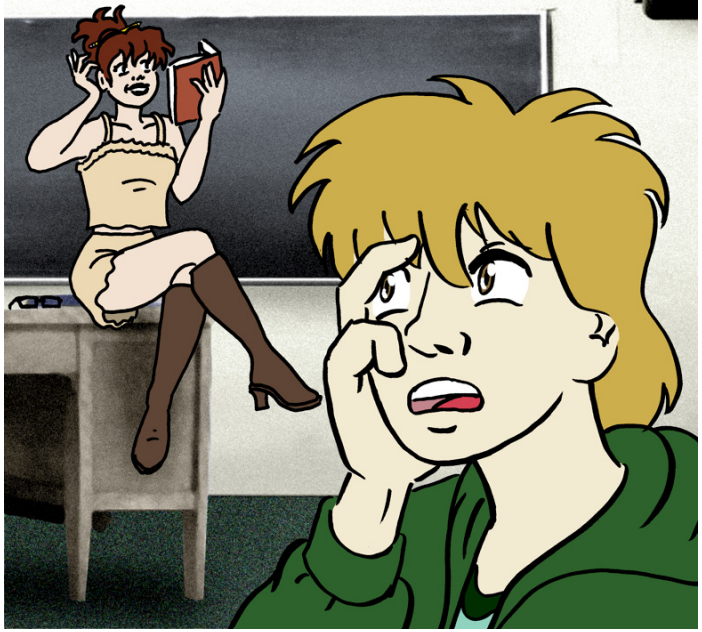
When Matt walked around, the top was just short enough to let Chris peek under the top and see the taught, slim stomach that was underneath.

He had matched the beige top with a fluttery skirt that could easily fall into the category of miniskirt. It was much shorter than he had seen on any teacher in this school. And shorter than what most of the teens wore as well.

Matt seemed to enjoy walking from side to side in his boots, showing off the sexy knee-high shoes with three-inch heels and strutting that sexy walk that Matt had been showing off lately.

His hair, piled up high on top of Matt's head was held there with a single number two pencil. His glasses rested in the tip of his button nose as his sexy, pouty lips carefully pronounced each word.

If Chris didn't know better, he would have called himself "hot for teacher." Because if Matt truly was his teacher, she was one incredibly foxy chick.



"Let's have everyone turn to page 298 in the text," Matt said, sounding like he was a little worked up. "This is a passage from *Wuthering Heights*. I'll read:

'This is nothing,' cried she: 'I was only going to say that heaven did not seem to be my home' and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth' and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of *Wuthering Heights*' where I woke sobbing for joy. That will do to explain my secret, as well as the other.'

Chris noted that Matt had removed the pencil from his hair, and it fell down over his shoulders. Matt shook it out to make it look even more attractive. He continued to read:

"I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven' and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now' so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made

of, his and mine are the same' and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire."

Matt took the book and used it like a fan. He took the pencil that had been in his hair and put it in his teeth. His wet lipstick shimmered.

Chris started to think that Matt was quite possibly the sexiest teacher he had ever had.

Even though it was obvious to anyone from a distance, Chris was totally oblivious to the scene around him. And for some reason, the other classmates didn't seem to notice anything amiss at all. The guys in the room went on about their business like they always had. Even with a teacher making obvious sexual overtures, they dutifully doodled, passed notes and goofed off as they always had.

Even more bizarrely, the girls also didn't notice anything wrong. This despite the fact that they had all undergone changes, some very severe in nature. In this class alone, three or four girls appeared to have gone through the "change of life" a couple of times over, sporting breasts that could be easily mistaken for large produce. Another had decided she was attending a Catholic girls' school – one with microscopically short skirts in the dress code. The chubby white trash girl that had previously done little memorable besides sneaking in a bag of pork rinds into class, had dropped thirty pounds, wore inappropriately short daisy dukes and spent the entire class putting her long hair into pigtail braids. The number of girls in the class who wore cheerleading uniforms had quadrupled, going from two to eight. In fact, the formerly 10-member squad now seemed to have near a hundred girls show up every day for practice. All thin, all blond, and all perky.

The Chess Club girls had stopped wearing bulky sweaters and ankle-length skirts, favoring tons of jewelry, trendy tops and skirts and talking on their cell phones all day long. The French club girls now all seemed to speak nothing but French and wore the latest European fashions. The girls on the student council had all started to dress in skimpy business suits and spent council meetings taking notes seated on the laps of the boys.

Every female in the school had lost weight, seen their skin clear up and were spending ten times as much on their wardrobe as they used to. Just in the current class, all the girls were lazily daydreaming, all with goofy smiles on their faces – and for some reason, they were all looking in Chris' direction. Which was too bad, because his attention was focused like a laser on the person right in front of him.

"Now who can tell me about how this passage relates to feminism?" Matt asked. "And the changing role of..." Matt licked his already wet lips. "*Female sexuality?*"

Chris fell completely out of his chair, taking most of his books, pens and paper with him.

“Christopher?” Matt said, his voice breathy and labored. “Would you mind...” Matt played with his hair for a moment, “staying behind after class?”

Ten other boys in the class simultaneously turned their heads around to look at Chris. They all had looks of envy on their faces.

“Sure... Miss Wright.”

When the class cleared out just a few minutes later, Chris stayed back. Matt strutted over to the door and made sure it was shut, and no one was looking through the porthole window in the door.

“I just wanted to talk to you for a moment, Christopher.” Matt came back to his desk and sat on the corner, letting his skirt ride up his leg to show scandalous amounts of thigh. “I’ve been thinking that maybe I’ve been too harsh with you.”

Chris took several steps back. He wasn’t sure at all what was happening. If it was what it looked like, he had never felt so odd in his life.

“If you truly do want to be a good student, then it’s my job to make sure that you be the best student you can be.” Matt tossed the hair off his shoulders and behind his back with his hands. “Even if that means you’re showing more of an interest in me than in the lessons.”

“What?” Chris yelped.

“Your grades have slipped quite a bit over the past few days. Why, I think on today’s quiz you only scored fifty-eight percent.”

Chris didn’t really know what the score was. He hadn’t paid a lick of attention to it. “Oh. Okay.” Chris replied.

Matt leaned on his arms, arching his back, sending his chest into the air. “So, I was hoping you could tell me what I can do to help you.” Matt’s smoldering eyes were placed in between two jaw-dropping beasts, from Chris’ point of view.

“I have to get to my next class, Miss Wright,” Chris said hastily. “I really have to be on time for my next class.”

“Aw,” Matt replied. “I understand. But if you need any special attention, I’ll be here at lunch. And after school, as well.” Matt stretched out one of his legs and let one of his boots slide up Chris’ pant leg. “Tell me what you’d like me to wear on Monday, Chris.”

“I gotta go. Gotta go,” Chris said, before bolting.

“Poor boy,” Matt said to himself as he straightened his clothes and sat back down at his desk. “I can only do so much.” He checked his watch. Maybe there was time...

“Goodness sakes, I’m sweating it’s so hot in here,” Matt said, noting his glimmering skin. “What could have possibly have caused that?”



Susan waited impatiently at the doorway. “Get a move on, Erin!” She yelled. “The club’s going to be to full to get in if we wait any longer!”

“Chill!” Matt yelled back from upstairs. “Why don’t you go warm up the car or something, Sis?”

“It’s seventy–eight degrees. The car is warm enough.”

“Okay! Here I come!” Matt then slowly descended the stairs. He walked carefully, because he had on black five–inch high heels with binding ankle straps. This complemented the PVC mini–dress he had chosen, with a hem that stopped about where his thighs started. The top, cut as a wide tank top, showed two perfect half–moons nestled aside one another, mere millimeters from showing aureole.

Matt had made his face up with a load of makeup that gave him an airbrushed, artificial appearance. The plastic shine of his red lips enhanced the look as much as his bristle–thick black eyelashes did.

Susan gasped, like an old maid. “Oh my God!” She said. She thought she was being flirtatious with her miniskirt and halter–top. But she was dressed like a Puritan compared to Matt. She crossed her arms and made a frown. “You’re not wearing that outfit outside, Erin!”

“Hopefully not. I intend to be indoors with it most of the time.” Matt responded. “Outside, I could probably get arrested.” By the grin on his plush lips, the thought seemed to have some appeal to Matt.

“Erin Marie Wright! You get out of that... That... Halloween costume right this minute!” Susan demanded.

Matt just ignored her. “Have you seen my purse?” He asked.

“I’m serious, Erin! You’re not going to the club looking like that!”

“Suze, you’re taking me to a club, and this is club wear!” Matt adjusted his hair in the mirror, arranging it to perfection.

“Erin, you’ll change right this instant!”

Matt finally had enough. “Who do you think you are, Susan? Mother?” He snatched the car keys from Susan’s hand and strode out the front door.

Susan sighed in exasperation, but turned out the lights and locked the door behind her.





No one was about to turn a hot looking chick away from getting in, so Matt and Susan were waved right through the line. They hadn't been to this club before, but Susan seemed to know a little about it. She had been acting a little suspiciously all week whenever Matt asked about the place.

But inside, it looked like your average club, with loud music, pulsing lights, tightly packed crowds and a well-stocked bar.

Matt had never been to a club like this one. The lights twirled and flickered. The beat of the music pressed in on his chest. It was an assault on his senses. It was the most amazing place he'd ever been in.

"I love this song!" Matt yelled over the noise. The beat and the lights were definitely hypnotizing him. It was so dazzling. So enticing. He heard it call to him. Then a foreign thought entered his mind, a thought he had never had before. "I'm going to dance!" He declared.

Susan put her hand on Matt's arm to stop him. "Just wait a minute." She shouted above the music. "I want you to meet someone!"

Susan waved to someone Matt couldn't quite see in the distance. Quickly, A man emerged and walked right up to Susan. He kissed her on the cheek. "Hey babe," he said.

"Hey babe," she replied in kind, and kissed back.

"This is Chuck." Susan said, announcing him.

"Hi Chuck," Matt said, politely. Wow, he thought. He was a big guy. Cute, too. Chuck nodded. "Nice to meet you. You're Erin, Susan's sister, right?"

"Yup."

"Then I'd like you to meet Jason. He's my kid brother." Chuck looked to his side and motioned for someone. "C'mere, Jase!"

Then it became clear to Matt. His mother was setting him up on a date. A double date. The little sneak.

A somewhat timid guy appeared, looking more than a little anxious. He wasn't as ruggedly handsome as his older brother, but he shared most of the same attractive features. Especially his muscular physique.

"What'd I tell you, Jase? She's smokin' hot!" Chuck yelled, thinking Matt couldn't hear over the music.

The young man extended his hand. "Hi. I'm Jason."

Matt offered his hand limply to shake. "Hi, I'm Erin." He looked back at the dance floor over his shoulder. The place had cast its' spell on him, and he had but one thing on his mind. "Would you like to dance, Jason?"

Jason immediately smiled. "Sure," he said.

Matt grabbed Jason by the hand and led him out to the middle of the dance floor. Matt had never danced a step in his life. But now, he felt like it was the one thing in his life he was born to do.

He watched the other girls step and twirl, and mimicked them perfectly. He let the beat tell him how to move. He swung his body left and right, back and forth. He then felt hands on his hips, and saw Jason joining in. He wasn't a half bad dancer in his own right.

Matt draped his arms around Jason shoulders and he drew closer.

"So, what do you do?" Jason yelled.

"What do you do?" Matt replied.

Jason laughed. "I asked you first."

Matt wondered what he should say. It just made Matt sound like a bitter old cat lady if he said he was a teacher. He didn't feel like a teacher right now, anyway. "I'm..." A few random things flew through Matt's mind before he answered. "I'm a dancer."

"Really?" Jason replied. He looked skeptical for a moment but then nodded his approval. "Yeah, I should have guessed."

Matt giggled to himself. He had just totally pulled one over on him. But then again, why couldn't he be a dancer? He certainly liked dancing. Plus he was hot. He could totally be a dancer.

Jason inquired further. "Ballet or interpretive or..."

How dull! Matt would never be involved in anything so boring. "No, like dancing. Exotic dancing."

"You're a stripper?" Jason yelled.

"We like to be called artists of exotic dance, thank you." Matt replied. He was lying so hard, he was doing all he could to stop from laughing.

But Jason started to back off. Maybe he felt a little intimidated. Maybe a little out of his league. But Matt didn't want him to feel bad, so he brought him back closer. He ground his hips into Jason. It was okay to be close, Matt wanted to tell him. It felt good.

Jason immediately took the opening and pulled Matt even closer to him. They were dancing in unison, holding each other tight. Matt could feel Jason rubbing his hands around his ass. He felt his breasts gyrate against Jason's chest.

Matt decided this was something he could get used to. Definitely.



Matt had no idea where Chuck and Suze had run off to, and he didn't care. He accepted Jason's ride home and before he knew what hit him, he was letting Jason strip off that patent leather dress like shrink wrap on a Christmas toy.

At first, Jason was reluctant. But no more reluctant than Matt. It was his first time, after all.

But as Jason slowly worked his hands around Matt's body, and kissed him ever so sensuously, Matt was no longer letting shyness get in his way.

They fell back onto Jason's bed, and quickly tore up the sheets as they tumbled around the mattress. By the time they had stopped fooling around, the light was starting to shine in the window. That was when Matt had finally had enough gymnastics. It was time for the deed to be done. "Do it," he whispered in Jason's ear.

The bed rocked. Back and forth. Back and forth. Hinges squeaked. Matt's moan was low and slow. It gained momentum. He started to squeal.

Then, finally, he felt it. He felt it inside of him.

The shriek woke the neighbors.



As the world came back into focus, Matt looked around. He was in another man's bedroom. He was naked. There was something drying in between his legs. The bed sheets were twirled around him. His hair was matted to his head. He felt wonderful.

It was a whole new world now. This was not just morning of a new day – well, maybe it was a bit past noon, actually – but it felt like a whole new life. Slowly and carefully extricating himself from the bed, he walked over to the mirror and saw the mess in front of him.

He looked back on the bed and saw the young man there, zonked out and unconscious. He liked how they looked, men. They were really so innocent when they slept.

The he turned back to the mirror. He whisked some of the hair from his forehead and fluffed it back to life.

It used to be so confusing, the world around him. He had clung to stupid, selfish dreams. Grades, degrees, awards and recognition. Things that would mean nothing to him except as something he could hold over people. He could gloat about it.

Now, none of it mattered.

Because that wasn't life as it meant anything anymore. This felt like it was far more real than dry academics. This was life. This was warm, inviting and deep. It was so much more than could have been imagined.

Yet she wanted to stay. This felt right to her. She wanted to keep feeling like this. She was an adult. An adult woman. A woman who was as capable of feelings as anyone. She had just discovered something amazing about the world and herself. She could feel love.

Oh, Erin had known about love in abstract terms, but looking on the bed, and the man sleeping there, she could feel the connection between them. It wasn't just a word. It was so much more.

It was everything.

Erin found her dress, torn up a bit. She found her undies, shoes and purse and packed them into a small grocery bag. She went through Jason's closet and borrowed a pair of sweats, a shirt and some flip-flops.

She saw a pack of cigarettes on the nightstand, and helped herself. After all, adults smoked after sex. She was an adult. As she drew in the hot smoke into her lungs, she loved the flavor. She loved the comfort.

Making sure that she didn't wake Jason, she kissed him on the forehead and called a cab. If he truly felt the same way about her as she felt about him, he'd call.

As she stepped into the back of the cab, Erin softly sighed to herself, letting her fingers slide down the side of her face. Jason was such a sweet guy. She really did hope he'd call. He was built, innocent and young. Maybe in his late teens or early twenties. But she liked young guys. Boys. She didn't know why.

As for today, it was still early. There was a lot to do. It was just Saturday, and it seemed a lifetime before Monday and going back to school.

What to do with the day. First, she needed some new clothes. All the stuff she had at home was just so... Dull. And then? A trip to the salon. She felt like doing something wild. Something different. Crazy, even. She was a new person and wanted to look like it.

Erin giggled when she thought about how she had told Jason she was an exotic dancer. She could just see herself, dancing in a club in a skimpy outfit or costume, sliding up and down a pole as lecherous old men stared on and lusted after her.

"Yeah," she spoke to herself, "I could certainly see myself doing that." Erin lit another smoke.





Chris had been feeling miserable all weekend, dreading what Monday would bring. He still didn't know what had happened to Matt. He still hadn't been able to figure things out. He was doing what he always had done. He was in total control. And then all of the sudden, things.. Things...

Maybe it was just that one day. Maybe, just maybe, things were a little out of whack for that one time. That's what he kept telling himself. Things would settle and then he'd have everything back to the way he wanted them.

There was no need to panic. After all, he was so much more advanced than these cavemen. He was the one who was in charge. Not some primitive like Matt.

In fact, that's probably what was wrong – he wasn't used to dealing with these Neanderthals. They probably had bad reactions to his control. The results a little unpredictable. But now, things would settle.

So going into class, Chris didn't bother to even look at the front. He just took his seat at the back, arranged his books, put his pens and pencils on the table, settled into his chair and only then, totally confident, did he look up front.

His heart stopped.

Up at the desk, the person Chris knew as Matt was gone. The woman he knew as Ms. Wright was gone, too. Who was there was causing the fragile excuses Chris had developed to shatter into shards of red-hot foolishness. The situation had not gotten better.

Her leg stretched out on the top of the desk, a pencil tapping her lips. The teacher was waiting to start class.

She wore black leather mary-jane shoes with a thick three-inch heel. Her legs were covered with snow-white stockings that went all the way over her calves, over her knees and ended mid-thigh, tied with red ribbons.

From there to the hem of her skirt, a tantalizing taste of bare thigh was far more exciting than being given the whole thing.

Tugged down low on her wide, rolling hips, a tartan plaid red pleated skirt barely covered the legal definition of female indecency.

There was wide expanse of real estate that followed, broken only by a pierced bellybutton. She exposed herself from the very bottom of her slight belly to the very bottom of her chest. The tiny, grippable waist was no more than eighteen inches.

A black, lacy bra was clearly visible under the gauzy white dress shirt that she wore. The thin shirt was only a wisp of fabric, it needed only to be there for the social conceit of wearing a top. The tails of the shirt were tied together in a knot, with the tails dangling down, the only hindrance between its' contents and the world at large.

The treasure the knot held was bountiful, indeed. For the perfect globes on the slender ribs were like ice cream scoops on a banana split. Soft, creamy and needing a good taste. They were magnificent, perfect, and intimidating. No pleasure could be so willingly available.

Any man would be wary that it could be nothing but a trap. A trap they would all kill each other to fall into.

The sleeves of the shirt were rolled up into thick, crisp cuffs that hung just beneath her smooth shoulders. Inside of the sleeves, emerged thin, delicate arms with slim, small hands and fingers which lazily swung through the air, dancing and hypnotizing watching eyes.

And by the time you saw her face, if you were not already committed to an eternity of sin for the thoughts coursing through your male mind, you surely smelt brimstone now.

Her lips were plush, wet and pink. They seemed capable of doing nothing but pouting or smiling, both captivating and enthralling the heart.

A tiny, nearly invisible nose was hard to see in the perfectly clear skin on her face. Her cheeks were high and round. Only the hands of a craftsman could have ever carved such face. Only a mind capable of knowing the subtleties of the male palate could have known to create it in just this way.

Two green eyes, alive and bright, looked over the book she held. Heavy eyelids and impossibly thick lashes of black made her look smoldering and sultry beyond any previous understanding of these concepts.

Her freshly cut, short, thick hair with sweeping bangs and flippy ends was dyed a bright, shocking pink. It was wild and daring. And totally inappropriate, daring anyone to call her on it.

This creature was beyond just a human being, she was a female confection. She was there to occupy the minds of men. She wanted it that way.

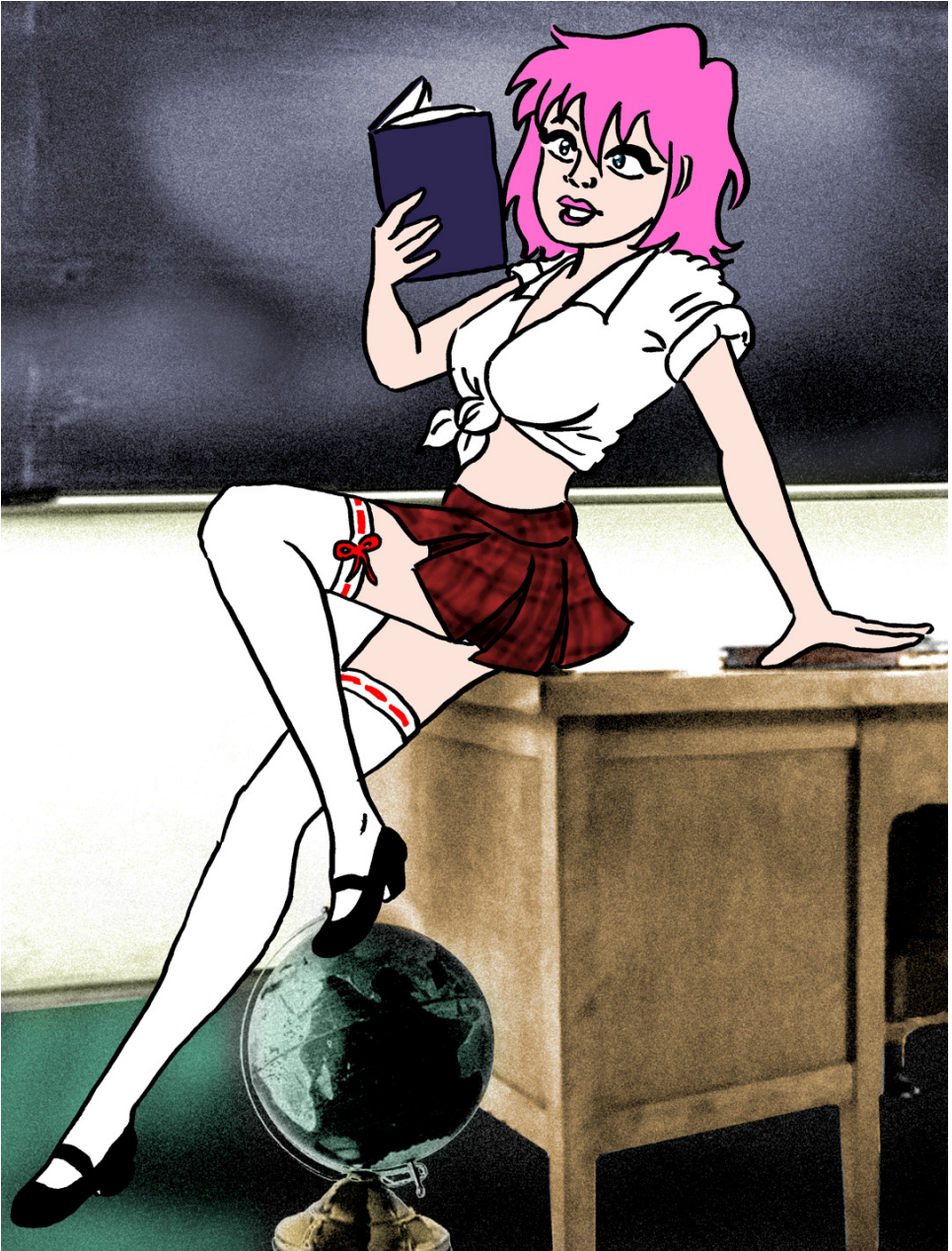
Chris seized up in terror. He had lost all sense of reality. This was so much more... So much more than he could handle.

He had seen this woman before. Oh yes, he knew who she was, she was Ms. Wright. She was Matt. But he had also seen her before today. He had seen her so many times.

Class started, and Chris dove his head behind his textbook, peeking out every few minutes to catch a glimpse. Ms. Wright seemed to be spending a lot of time dropping things and then bending over at the waits to pick them up.

Oh God, how was he going to get out of this class alive? He sat in his seat, quaking. He was living his worst nightmare. Well, maybe a nightmare wasn't exactly what it was...

The bell rang and Chris quickly packed and ran for the door.



“Christopher,” the teacher said from the desk.

Chris practically spasmed from hearing his name. He didn’t want to talk. He didn’t want to look. He just wanted to leave.

“I’d like to talk to you for a moment.” God, he had even heard that voice before. Calling to him. Begging him.

“I really have to go, Ms. Wright.” Chris protested, not even turning around to look. He headed for the door.

“Stop right there, young man.”

Chris reluctantly stopped. He didn’t know why. He could have just kept going. It wasn’t like he was going to get in trouble. Gaining his wits, he made for the door again. But as he took his first step, the teacher blocked his way. Closing the door, and locking it, she turned around, and backed against the door with an mischievous look on her face.

Chris took several well-cautioned steps backward. “I’m going to be late. I don’t want detention.”

Ms. Wright didn’t say anything. She just matched Chris step for step as he backed away. He didn’t even notice that he was about to be blocked by a filing cabinet.

He tried to move to the side, but Ms. Wright pounced, putting her arms on both side of the cabinet, trapping him.

“You’ve been failing tests, Christopher. Your grades are slipping. And you’re not participating in class,” she said, with a throaty purr to her voice.

Chris ducked out and backed away once more, but made the mistake of heading towards the desks, which he was tripping over. He clumsily tried to fight his way through, but he just kept running into more desks.

Ms. Wright picked a ruler off her desk and whapped it sharply against her palm. “I can see this is going to take some discipline, Christopher.” She whacked her palm again. “And it’s going to hurt you more than it hurts me.”

Panicking, Chris tried to actually climb over the small desks but didn’t get very far before he was on the ground, trying to scoot away on his backside.

Whang! He had knocked his head on that filing cabinet again.

Clearing his head, he shook it and then opened his eyes. He looked up to see Ms. Wright standing directly above him, straddling him as he lay there.

He had been in this dream. God, he could never talk about it. He had this fantasy night after night. The sexy, pink-haired teacher would chase him all around the class and then finally corner him and he’d finally made mad, passionate love to her. She’d moan, then scold him and spank him on the butt with her ruler. They’d ravish each other, pulling each other’s clothes off and exploring every inch of each other right there on the dirty turquoise linoleum floor.

Night after night he had this fantasy. It was his very favorite. *That’s* what had scared him today. This was they very *exact same* fantasy made real. Made flesh. Ms. Wright was his fantasy teacher, saying word for word what his dream woman said.

He knew it was beneath him, an advanced being of his level shouldn't be excited by these barbarians. But he was, and he didn't want anyone to know it. It was his secret. He even denied it to himself.

Here she was, standing over him and about to kneel down and grab him by the collar. Then she'd spit in his face and tell him how worthless he was. He'd wipe his face and slap her. Then she'd fall back, dazed. Then he'd rip her blouse off and tell her what she could do with her discipline as he pinched her nipples.

Chris swallowed hard and told himself he'd never do this. It wasn't real. It was a fantasy. It was so wrong. Unspeakably wrong. Illegal. Reprehensible. Below any standard of morals.

Ms. Wright kneeled down. "I'm going to teach you how to behave, Christopher. How to show respect to your elders." She spit in his face.

Taking many deep breaths, Chris rubbed it from his face with his sleeve.

Trying to rationalize the situation, he knew that if he just used that self-control he had mastered, he could find a way out of this. If he didn't give in, he'd be out of here. He could fix this situation, still. He could get this whole situation under control and no one would ever know anything had gone wrong.

Then, without even thinking, he slapped Ms. Wright. "Y... Y... You..." There was still time to back out, wasn't there? "You little uptight bitch," he said with a snarl. "I'm going to show you what real discipline is!" He ripped the top from Ms. Wright's shoulders. "You think you're in charge? Let me show you what a man can do for you, baby."

He yanked the lacy black bra from Ms. Wright's chest, letting free the bouncing, heaving breasts that jiggled and quivered like they were scared and frightened of what was about to happen to them.

Chris pinched her nipple. "How does that grab you, honey?"

Ms. Wright moaned in pleasure. "Oh, Christopher! Please! This is such inappropriate behavior!" She moaned again. "I'm giving you a time out..." Her speech was interrupted by another moan, "...or I'll be forced to call a parent-teacher conference!"

Chris didn't back down he had Ms. Wright on her back, her legs bent under her. He started to grab those amazing breasts with his whole hands.

"No, Christopher, this isn't going to look good on your permanent record!" She cried, her voice rising with the pleasure she was feeling.

"Oh *God!*" Chris snapped. Suddenly rising to his feet. "*No!*" He yelled at the top of his voice. He stood there for a minute looking down at the woman in the throes of passion, exposing such an incredibly tempting sight to him, and he gripped his frazzled hair. His expression on his face was one of terror and fright mixed with a look that can only be explained as a feeling of being irrevocably, perpetually, lost.

He ran away, opened the door and flew down the hallway and headed for the outside world. He had to get away.

Away from Matt, from the school, from his dreams, from everything.



“Is that you, Erin?” Susan called from another room. Erin dropped her purse and lone book on the couch and stretched herself out.

“Yeah,” she replied, the energy draining out of her voice as she spoke. Like most, at the end of a long work day, Erin was just letting it all go. She landed on the couch with the intent never to move again.

Susan came in to the room, throwing an empty box at her. “When you take the last pad, let me know, ‘kay?”

“Sorry, Suze.” Erin apologized, the empty box bouncing off her head. “I was in a rush this morning.”

“Another late night. You and Jason are really hitting it off, huh?”

Erin stretched again, the memories of another night of bliss coming back to her. “Oh yeah.”

Susan sat on one of the cushions beside her. “You’re just getting the daylights fucked out of you, aren’t you?”

Erin just smiled, knowingly, in reply.

“You thinking of moving in with him?” Susan asked.

“You just want me out of the house so you can shack up with Chuck,” Erin said.

“Chuck and I aren’t a thing anymore,” she said, with a slight air of disappointment. “But that’s probably for the better. As for you, I just think that at this point, the relationship needs to evolve. A little commitment.”

“You know, you’re right. But moving in is kinda too much to think about at this point. Maybe we should just kinda test it out.”

“Take a vacation. Get a cabin up at the lake. See how you get along. See if you can live with each other’s lifestyles. That’s important.”

“That’s not a bad idea.”



The next morning, Ms. Wright came into school, gently humming a tune she had heard on American Idol last night. She parked her car and saucily walked

the length of the parking lot to the front office. She gyrated her hips like she was shaking a drink with them.

Carol, the front desk supervisor was there to greet her with a pleasant smile. “Good morning, Erin!” She said, practically singing the words. “Oh, what a lovely outfit!” She said, seeing Erin.

“Thank you!” Erin answered, genuinely appreciating the comment. “I saw this in the store and just had to have it.”

She wore a baby blue halter top with sequins, a pair of pink leather shorts, gold fishnet stockings, pink knee-high boots with two-inch platforms.

“I think you’re really one of the snappiest dressers here in the school.” Carol said, in respect.

“Oh, you’re no slouch yourself, Carol!” Erin said, looking over her co-worker. “That dress is to die!”

Carol was wearing a silver lame mini dress, oversized chunky silver boots, glittery eye shadow, silver lipstick and a wig of long silver tinsel hair.

“You’re really too kind. The husband thought I looked a little dowdy.” Carol said.

“Don’t you believe it.” Erin said. “Anyway, I’ll see you at lunch?”

“I’ll see you then.” Carol said with a smile.

She left the office and strode down the hallway, her tall heels clacking loudly in the cramped hallway. All the boys spun their heads. All the girls sneered in jealousy.

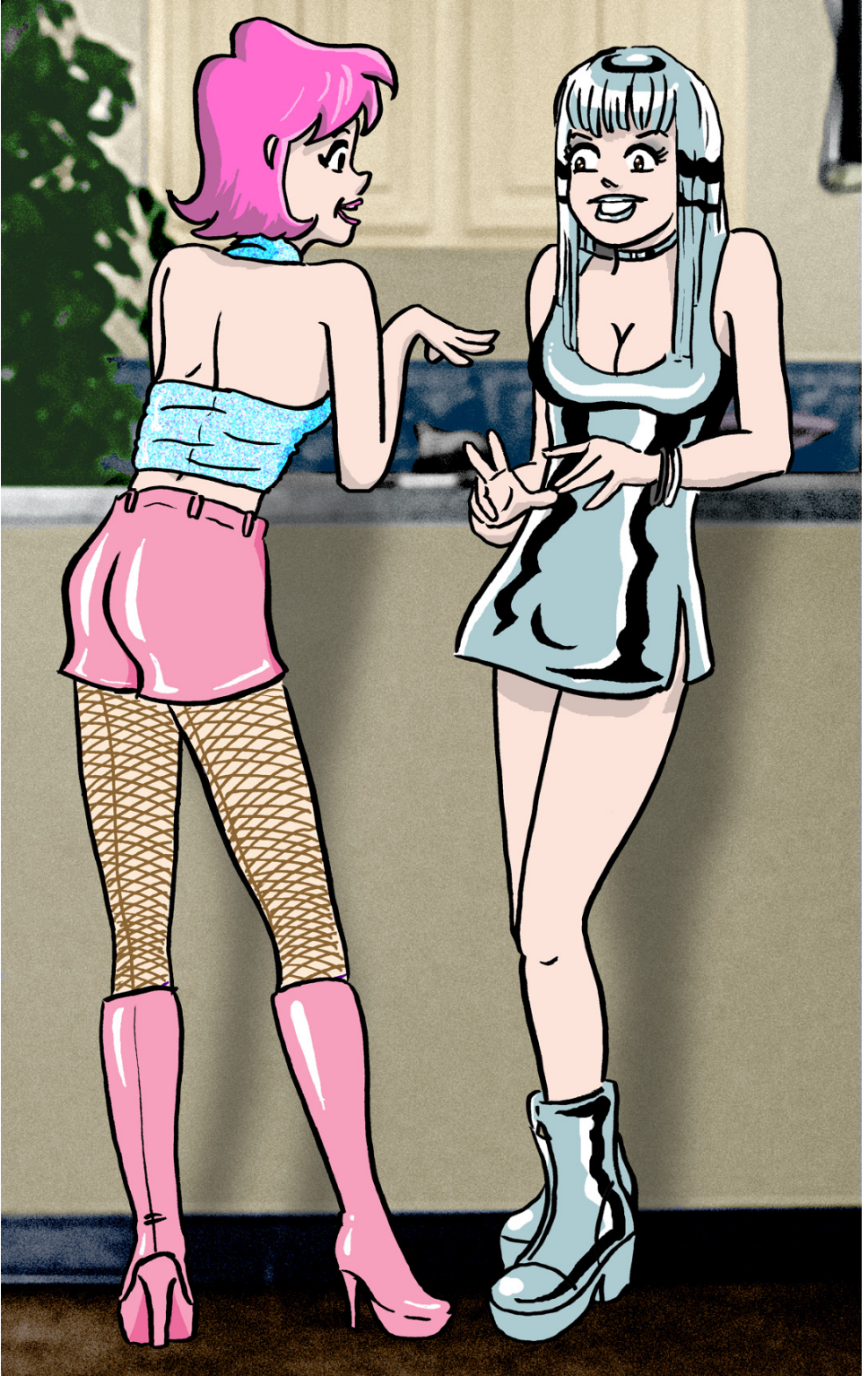
Arriving at her classroom, she dropped her purse in her desk and sat, waiting for the bell to ring. Flipping open her compact, Erin looked at her reflection. How things have changed so much. It seemed like just yesterday she had been a student. Then, working so hard to prove herself, she had become a teacher. Even her smug sister had to appreciate that kind of accomplishment. But still, it didn’t seem as satisfying as it should have felt.

Mrs. Wright spent most of her first class of the day covering the more ribald bits of *The Canterbury Tales*. But she did it with a real lack of enthusiasm. She hadn’t seen Chris in class. She had no idea where he was. He hadn’t been to school in a couple of days.

When she was moaning and touching herself while describing the rape of a woman by a knight, her heart just wasn’t in it.

All she could do was think of Chris. How had she failed him? His grades had slipped, his behavior had become increasingly erratic, and every attempt she had made to give him special attention had been rebuffed.

Here she was, finally proving that she could, indeed, teach this class, and the one person she had been trying to prove it to the most was beyond her ability.



Maybe she wasn't such a good teacher after all.

There was something about this arrangement which just didn't feel right. She just couldn't figure out what.



It was late. The sort of late that makes you feel unsafe. The streets are vacant, and the sidewalks sparsely populated by people with nothing better to do than wander around. If you found yourself in this place, at this hour, your only real concern would be to safely negotiate your way out of here. Your mammalian instincts for warmth and shelter would tell you to avoid the predators.

Out of the shadows, a man who looked like he fit in quite nicely with the surroundings strode down the alleyway until he came to a large doorway. His girth waddled back and forth as his tubby legs carried him along. Lit poorly by the streetlights, he read the rusting metal sign above the door.

"Royal Hotel and Boarding House" it read. The man pressed a buzzer by the locked doorknob. A slit in the door opened, revealing two eyes peering from the other side.

The door opened, but only so far, as a security chain kept it from going any farther. "What?" A man with an unshaven face and a thick middle eastern accent said.

"Wanted to talk to you about a room." The man replied. The door closed and a series of locks were undone. A brief pause was then followed by a buzzing sound as the door opened by itself.

Inside, a small grimy room with no furnishings waited. There were two doors, one marked "Guests" and another marked "Office. No Admittance." On the opposite side of the room, there was a large window with bars in front of chicken wire, over Plexiglas.

"Weekly Rent Due Friday by 10AM – No Exceptions." A sign read in large red letters. "You want room? How long?" The middle eastern man said, using a speaker system to be heard from behind the window.

Taking his time to reply, the big man scratched his chin. "Wasn't actually looking to rent one m'self," he said. "I just wanted to check on one of your tenants."

"Warrant! You must have warrant! You trespassing!" The man behind the window yelled. His face was red with anger. "I tell you people to have warrant! Get out!"

Looking things over carefully with a detective's stare, the large man didn't budge an inch. "I just wanted to make sure one of your guests is... given some special treatment."

“I tell you to get out! No room, you trespass!” The man at the window yelled again.

The large man stared him down. The anger vanished from his face. His eyes became vacant and stared off into the distance.

“Like I said, you’ve got a guest here. Want to make sure he’s taken care of. Don’t want anything to happen to him.” The big man adjusted a ring on his fat fingers. “I’m making him your responsibility. Anything happens to him, and I’ll come looking for you. His name’s Christopher.” With that, he put his hand in his pockets and turned around to leave. “He’s your responsibility.” He repeated.

“My responsibility.” The man behind the glass said.

“Good man.” The heavy door slammed shut.



Susan was idly reading through the latest People magazine down in the living room when a blur came rushing by. It had a mess of neon pink hair at its top, so she assumed it was her little sister. “Late?” She asked.

“I’m *so* late!” Erin yelled, running into the kitchen to grab a small container of yogurt. She stuffed it into her burgeoning purse. Running to the mirror by the front door, she quickly checked her face and hair.

“Another date with Jason?” Susan asked. She sighed. They had been seeing a lot of each other lately.

“Uh, no.” Erin replied. “Well, kinda.” She then added.

Susan tore herself from the magazine and looked her sister’s way. “Care to explain that?”

“Uh.” Erin looked at the clock. “I gotta go.” She made sure she had the keys with her. “Don’t wait up.”

She ran out the door, jumped in the car and sped down the street. She couldn’t be late. Not tonight. This was a big night.

Her little pink cell phone rang. “Hello?” She answered.

“Are you going to tell me about it, or what?” Susan asked.

“I’ll talk to you later!” Erin said, testily. She clacked the phone shut and threw it on the passenger seat. It rang again, but she ignored it. With a free hand, she fished around in her purse for a CD. With one hand, she deftly opened the case, grabbed the CD, flipped it right side up and slid it into the CD player.

From the speakers, blazing-fast techno music blared. It played a loud, bass-heavy pulsing beat. She imagined herself moving to the music. Athlete did that

before playing, she had read once. The visualized themselves making plays. And that was what she was doing.

Too soon, she had pulled off the freeway down into the industrial district, and then just past that. This time of day, it was pretty quiet down here. Not like at night. The place looked a little more threatening at night, and night would come soon enough.

Would Jason come? She had invited him. She just had to know if he was going to be okay with this. Sure, he said he was fine, but she needed some proof. That was what Suze had suggested. "Make sure our lifestyles were compatible." Knocking at the door, she was let inside, once they saw who she was.



Night had fallen. The city was now living on life support. Electric light and electric heat. If nature had her way, we'd be asleep at dark. But no, mankind had to fight it.

Chris peered out his window and looked around. There wasn't much to see but more of that trash-filled alleyway. There was no reason to go out. No practical reason. Yet, something was compelling him to do it. He just felt the need to go out there tonight. Maybe he had a death wish.

Well, no. There was no maybe about it. Ever since he had run away, he was very sure he had a death wish. He looked around for his coat before remembering he didn't have one. Only the one set of clothes he had left with, which were beginning to stink. Maybe he'd go to a church and get some new ones. Maybe he'd take a shower. Maybe he'd just crawl into a ditch until he died. They were all good options to his troubled mind.

He shivered in anticipation of how cold it was going to be outside. But he grabbed his room key and locked the door behind him anyway. The narrow hallway was a cheap chamber of horrors. It smelled faintly of things unmentionable in polite circles. Or even impolite ones. He stepped into the creaky elevator which plummeted for a heart-stopping four stories before yanking itself to a halt on the ground floor.

Chris went through the next door and waved at the man behind the barred window. "Going out?" He said.

"Be careful out there." The middle eastern man behind the window said. "No catch cold."

Chris spun his head around to take a second look. Was this the same man who had cursed at him for a solid minute when he asked for a towel yesterday?

He shrugged, figuring the reason for pleasantries was that dead customers didn't pay rent. He was buzzed through into the alleyway.

There was no disappointment or surprise in what waited for him. A barely-lit alleyway with vast dark patches. People could be there, waiting for some defenseless person to come along. Chris figured his best bet was to jog through quickly.

The street was a little better lit. But it was mostly lit by neon flashing from the windows and marquees around him. Live girls. XXX. Ladies drink free. Private suites. This was not a nice place to be.

Chris dug his hands in his pockets and set out in the direction he was already facing. He had no idea where he was going, so there seemed little point in choosing the way to get there. Every street was the same. Looked the same, felt the same. People were walking the sidewalks avoiding all eye contact. With the exception of the crazy people who talked to you if you were within earshot or not.

Occasionally, someone would ask Chris the favor of having good times with him. He'd learned not to reply. Don't even look like you heard them.

Looking around for a McDonalds or whatever, he saw something that attracted his attention. Something that looked familiar. A car parked along the street. It was forrest green, slightly rusted at the wheel wells and was missing a couple of hubcaps. He thought he might have been mistaken, but it looked like Matt's mothers' car.

As Chris walked along, his steps slowed. Then they started to drag. Then he tripped and needed a lamppost to brace himself. The off-the cuff thought had started to fester in his mind. In his recent experience, everything that could possibly go wrong was doing just that. It came to him that this should be no exception to the rule. He dove into traffic to get to the side of the street the car was parked on. Barely avoiding getting run over – twice – he stopped at the familiar-looking car. Pressing his face against the window, he saw a teacher's edition text resting on the back seat.

It wasn't possible. It just couldn't be possible. Please. Please. God, please. Why did this have to keep happening? Why couldn't he just keep it all inside his head?

He turned to see where the car was parked. He already knew the sign. He had dreamt about it. It read "The Blue Room" in bright neon letters. "XXXtremely Hot" it said below.

Chris walked right up to the front door. The bouncer flung his arm in front of the sixteen-year-old's face. Chris didn't even blink before the bouncer dropped his arm and apologized. "Sorry, Sir," he said, with respect and embarrassment.

Chris wandered into the dark lobby, through a curtain and into the main room. Thunderous music played from the speakers, a blazing-fast techno beat shook



the walls. “And Pinky’s gonna take it all the way!” an announcer said into a crackling PA system. This far from the stage, Chris wasn’t really able to see the dancer on stage. But he already knew who it was. The world had turned on him, and he knew what the cruelest trick left had to be.

The woman on stage flung her top into the crowd, her gift rewarded by whistles and whoops. As if Chris needed the help, he recognized the breasts now naked before the masses. By this time, he had filtered through the tables in the large room to be just a few feet from the stage. And he saw her up close. That body, that smile. That pink hair.

The dancer turned her head and saw Chris. She smiled with a sexy crook to her lips. She then pointed at him and used that finger to call him forward.

Chris took one step forward, compelled by his male desire. But then he froze. He turned around and ran back through the crowd, fighting the outstretched arms with dollar bills to slip in the woman’s thong panty.

Tears streaming from his face, Chris reached the street again. Gathering the attention one would expect, being a young boy, crying and alone in a bad part of town, Chris quickly ran off to avoid the stares and humiliation.

From a nearby doorway, a man emerged from the shadows and watched as the young man ran off. The large man scratched his chin and followed slowly.



By the time he arrived, things had gotten out of control. Searchlights were all concentrated on a nearby building’s top floor. A fleet of squad cars had collected on the streets, with megaphone all trained upwards. A couple of fire trucks were waiting nearby, as was an ambulance.

Overhead, the sound of one or two helicopters could be heard slowly circling. One shot out a searchlight, which lit the building with a nervously trembling light.

The large man headed toward the front door of the building, walking past the police barricades and into the front door without anyone stopping him. He got into the elevator and hit the button for the top floor. Arriving there, the police who were standing by, including the psychologist dismissed themselves upon the large man’s arrival. He wanted privacy.

Making his way to the window, he stuck his head out the window and looked at the young man standing on the ledge, his face red with crying and his eyes terrified of everything he could see. And everything he was imagining.

“Christopher,” the large man said to the boy, “come on, son. We’ve got to talk.”

“Dad? He said, fright causing his voice to screech. His shocked expression quickly turned into a look of determination. “I’m gonna *jump!*” He took a short step forward, teetering on the edge.

The large man reached out with his hand. “I know what’s happening, Chris. Please come on in, and we can talk about it.”

“You don’t *understand!*” Chris yelled. “You don’t understand what I’ve *done!*” He wiped a tear from his eye. “I’ve killed him! I’ve *killed* him!” He yelled with his raspy voice.

“We can work this out, Christopher!”

“I killed him just like I killed *Mom!*” Chris said.

“Your mother...” The man tried to block the blinding searchlight from below with his hand. “Your *mother...*” He had finally had enough. With one glance, the lights went out. The world became silent. “That’s better.”

“I don’t *deserve* to live!” Chris said. He looked down at the ground with certainty in his eyes. With purpose. He stood up straight and stepped one leg off the ledge. “I love you Dad. It’s not your fault.”

As Chris took the second step, his father waved his arm and an invisible barrier prevented his son from moving forward. Chris was hanging in midair, with nothing but the street below him. Yet he would not fall.

“Let me *die!*” Chris shrieked. “I don’t want the pain anymore!”

With both hands maneuvering something no one could see, the large man pulled at his floating son and took him inside the building. Chris pushed and punched at his prison but it had no effect. He knew it wouldn’t. He slumped down in despair. “I just want to go home,” he said, softly to himself. “I want to go *home.*”

Chris’ Dad set him down gently on the ground. “I’m truly sorry, Chris. I need you to understand. This is all my doing. I...” He paused to get the words out, “I’m just not a very good father, sometimes.”

Chris didn’t seem to hear him. His eyes were tightly shut, to protect him from a world he had no wish to live in any longer.

“I was down at the club. I saw what happened there. That *girl.*”

“That *girl* was my best friend!” Chris yelled. Well, truthfully, he was a jerk who was always fixated on showing him up. But he was still the only person he really knew here.

“I know,” his Dad said. He made a flick of his wrist and the undetectable cell that had been holding Chris ceased to be.

Chris didn’t try to run. He knew his Dad could just put it right back. “He was a guy. He was a boy. He was like me. All he wanted to do was just prove a point. And now he doesn’t even know who he used to be.”

“He’ll be fine.” His Dad said. “I promise you, I’ll do everything I can to put him back to the way he was.”

“You don’t know that! He’ll never be the same!” Chris said sharply. “He’s gone! And I killed him. Just like Mom.”

Chris’ Dad sighed with a heavy heart. “Your mother...” He started to say. The pause in his speech was because the very mention of his dear, sweet wife caused his heart to ache. It happened every time he just thought about her. He missed her so badly. “Your mother died in an accident. And it wasn’t your fault.”

“I was the one who broke the seal!” Chris objected. “*I did it!*”

His Dad corrected him. “Breaking the seal didn’t cause her to die.” The pocket of time they were in ruptured when Chris decided to take a little ‘trip’ outside and look around. They were visiting this time period as every family did on the long weekends. You took one of those new time holidays, a trip back to go look at the world how it used to be. He had seen dinosaurs, ancient Mesopotamia, Elvis and the American Revolutions. The first and the second.

But then they had taken a trip to see life as his great–great–great grandfather had lived it, when Chris had somehow slipped past the sealed boundaries, and into the real world. Instinctively, his mother had gone after him, to get him back. But with both of them outside, the time pocket broke down and they were all stuck there.

It wasn’t but a week later when one of the many extinct diseases of this ancient world had taken his wife’s life. The common cold, they called it.

“It was just an accident,” his Dad repeated. “It couldn’t have been helped.” He had to be careful. He couldn’t risk his son hearing his voice falter or see his eyes tear up. Chris’ Dad longed to have his wife back. He longed to have that beautiful woman just give him one last kiss. If anyone felt like killing themselves, it was him. He only slogged through this existence to raise their son. It was all of her he had left.

“And now I’ve *killed* Matt!” Chris cried.

“This wasn’t your fault!” his Dad shot back. “It was mine.”

“You don’t understand!” Chris pleaded. “This was all in my *mind!* I saw this all *before* it happened! *I made all this happen with my mind!*”

“With your mind?” His Dad asked, clarifying. “You thought it, and then it happened?”

“I told his Mom to dress him up like a woman... And I thought I was just going to teach him a lesson... and... and... Then it started happening for real! I couldn’t stop it!”

“You told his Mom...”

“I used my influence on her! I put it in her mind to treat him like a woman... Like a teacher! It was just to teach him to stop being such an ass!” He looked at his hands accusingly. “I just wanted to teach him a lesson!”

“It’s nothing you did, Son. It was nothing you could control.”

Chris looked at his Dad, his confused eyes red from all the crying.

His Dad dragged a chair from nearby and brushed the dust off of it. “Have a seat.” Chris did just that.

Mr. DeVray looked out into the night for a moment to collect his thoughts. “Every boy about your age goes through this.” He turned back to look at his son. “It’s called puberty.”

“Wh...?” Chris muttered.

“The kids in this time go through all the physical changes. The hair, the skin, the sex thing. It’s no different for you.” He started to play with the ring on his finger. “But our generation also has to deal with other things. Since we can manipulate matter and minds, that also starts to get a little... Strange when you go through puberty.”

“I’ve always been able to manipulate the minds of these people. What can’t I control myself anymore?”

“You just picked a bad time to do it, son. You lose a lot of self-control when you go through the... ‘Change of life.’” He scratched his temple. “When I was your age, I had a lot of problems, too. But most boys did. We would get these... Urges... And then try them on girls.” He coughed in embarrassment. “But the girls could just lock us out. Their minds were as strong as ours. They still knew what we did, and it was embarrassing as hell. I’d never live those years of my life over again, I’ll tell you that.”

“So, *puberty* causes this loss of control?”

“It just causes your mind to do stuff it wouldn’t normally do. It kinda reveals your innermost desires to the world and lets people see inside for a while. Then you grow up a little and learn to control it.”

“But... I didn’t want this to happen.”

Chris’ Dad looked a little flush. He was embarrassed. He was nervous. He didn’t want to say what he had to say. “I think you did, Chris.”

“No!” Chris objected. “I didn’t want him to become a *woman!*”

“Some part of you really got off on it, though.” Crap. He didn’t mean for it to come out that way.

“*What?*” Chris yelped. “I’m not *gay!*”

“*Shame on you!*” Mr. DeVray said, pointing at his son. “Don’t let these primitives influence you! We’re well beyond that sort of thinking and you know it!”

“I’m sorry.”

“Good. You *better* be.”

“But I never...” Chris started to say.

“I can look inside your mind, and you know it, young man. You’d better be honest with me.”

“But..,” Chris said, trying to find any defense.

“*But...*” His head sunk into his hands. “But I don’t...” And with his face buried in his palms, Chris started to gently weep.

Chris’ father got up and let his son bury his head into his shoulder and let it all

out. He couldn’t imagine how tough it was on him. Being hundreds of years away from anything he used to know. Any of his friends. He was a good kid. He just had a tough deal.

“Let’s get you home, now.” Mr. DeVray said. “And I’ll go see what I can do with Matt.”

And in the next instant, like the wind had just taken them away, they both had disappeared. The noise from the street and sky returned as things came back to life. But there was nothing for those searchlights to find anymore.



The techno sounds that shook the room were getting faster as “Pinky” rubbed herself up and down the fire pole at the center of the stage. The strobe lights flickered to turn the heat up. She loved it. She loved the attention and loved the feeling of being in control. In control of all these men.

It almost made her think about giving up teaching. How long would it be until someone discovered her secret? Until someone realized that the star dancer at “The Blue Room” was also teaching English at the local high school? Well, so far, no one had made the connection. It seemed bizarre, but no one appeared to recognize her.

Whatever. As long as she could keep dancing here, she was fine with it.

As the dancing became faster and more furious, she noticed the large man who had entered the room. He approached the stage and peered directly at her. As a response, She stripped herself of her bra and threw it at him.

It hit him in the chest and fell to the ground without a flinch. His worldly eyes didn't change. "The boy has a sculptor's touch," he said to himself, examining the beasts flying around before him.

He turned to the stage entrance and faced the huge muscle-bound man standing guard. He handed him a blank slip of paper. "I'd like to talk to the girl with the pink hair," he said.

The guard looked at the blank slip of paper. "Fuckin' A! I've never seen a thousand dollar bill before," he said, slipping it into his pocket. "Follow me."

The guard led him back stage, and into a dressing room. He was left alone, waiting. He looked around the small room, at the skimpy costumes and at a small picture of Chris that was wedged into the frame of the mirror. He grabbed it and tossed it in the trash.

"Hi!" Said a soft, melodious voice from behind. It took Mr. DeVray by surprise. He turned around to see her. She shook her pink hair away from her heavily made-up face. "You wanted to talk to me?"

"Yeah. Saw your show. You like to dance."

"Uh-huh!" She replied with a smile. "You mind if I change while we talk? I have another dance in a few minutes."

"Go for it," Chris' father replied. The girl went behind a folding screen. "I came to talk about my son. Chris."

"You're Chris' father?" she answered with delight. She emerged from behind the screen in a soft pink terrycloth robe. She sat down in front of her mirror. "I thought I had his picture up here. He's a doll, your son. Such a cutie."

"Do you know who Matt is?"

"Matt?" She said, grabbing something to scrub the thick makeup off. "The name..." She thought for a moment. "No, I don't think I know a Matt."

"Think harder." Mr. DeVray said, his eyes squinting in concentration.

"Well, now that you mention it, I think I..." She was definitely thinking. A look of recognition came over her face. "Matt!" She said, coming to a realization. "I think he's in my English class!"

"Concentrate." Mr. DeVray said.

Ms. Wright finished removing the makeup from her skin and washed it clean with a washcloth. Then she turned around to face her guest. "Or was he my sister's boy?"

Realizing he was getting closer, Mr. DeVray opened an eye to see if she had that look of recognition on her face we wanted to see. Instead, he lost his total train of thought. He was shocked. He had seen a ghost. “Oh, lord,” he said.

“Is something wrong?” Ms. Wright asked.

Mr. DeVray’s jaw dropped. The woman before him, was taking his breath away. With all that stage makeup off, it was clear that she was even more beautiful than he had imagined. Damn that kid if his. He hadn’t just turned this boy into a beautiful woman, he had turned him into... Karen.

She looked just liked his wife. His lovely Karen.

Mr. DeVray fiddled with his ring, feeling the pangs he had been fighting so hard to keep to himself. But how long could he keep telling himself that he wasn’t lonely. That he missed his wife, his one true love.



“I like that ring.” Erin said. “I used to have one just like it. Are you okay?” She asked, with the same expression his wife used to have when she was concerned. When he used to have someone care about him.

“I’m fine,” he replied. His pounding heart betrayed him. The sweat trickling from his brow showed his true feelings.

The girl smiled back. Just like Karen used to. She went back to the mirror to double-check her face. “Well, I bet Christopher learned how to be a little heartbreaker from his daddy.”

Mr. DeVray quickly stood on his feet and headed for the door. “I’ll be back later. We still...”

But Erin had snuck in behind him, and placed her lips right next to his ear. “I bet daddy knows how to make a woman feel special.” Her warm breath on his ear was like nothing he had felt. It was erotic.

She stood closer and pressed her breasts into his side. Her slender arm snaked around his neck and drew him closer. Her long nails lightly grazed his chest.

Damn that kid, Mr. DeVray said to himself. Damn him to hell.

He turned to look at her. To look at this woman. To see his wife. “K... Karen?” He said, weakly and unsure.

The answer was a kiss on the lips, which Mr. DeVray didn’t break.



Chris didn’t even bother to look up. Class had begun, and for the first time in a long time, he didn’t know who the teacher would be. Advanced English class now felt like a funeral for the guy he once knew as Matt. He really didn’t want to be here.

With his grades slipping, he had already been told he had a week to “get it together” before he found himself moved down to the regular “Intermediate English” class. It would be a class full of losers and troglodytes, but he really didn’t care. He just didn’t really care about much anymore.

How had he could have done this to a fellow human being? Yes, they were nothing but shaved apes, but they still deserved the same sort of compassion he gave those in his own time.

He was morose with dread and guilt. Matt never deserved what had happened to him, and it was all because Chris thought he could handle it.

Chris started to scribble heavy, thick pencil scratchings on the book cover in front of him. There was no design to it, no pattern. He just was making dark, jagged scratches on his book with no purpose. There wasn’t a reason for anything in this world anymore.

He really didn't feel like he had any right to live. And so far, his father hadn't even talked to him. He had nothing to say anymore.

The kids in the class were back to normal, at least. Well, as normal as they could get. The girls were all still impossibly beautiful, but at least they were living their own lives again. The chess club girls just decided to turn it into the fashion club. The huge cheerleading squad was now respected as one of the top squads in competition in the country, and all students took pride in it. And that white trash girl was back to eating pork rinds.

Maybe that's why his Dad hadn't talked to him in so long. He was embarrassed to have a son like him who was such a deviant. Such a pervert.

"...There's an open seat in the back." Chris heard someone say. Maybe it was the new teacher, whoever that was.

He then heard some murmurs. Some hushed talk. Unable to keep his curiosity from making him take a glance, Chris shifted his head to see what this was all about.

Standing in the doorway, Chris saw a young girl, maybe fourteen or fifteen, clutching her books to her chest. Her face was cute. She wore a ski cap, and looked a little unsure of where she was or what she was doing here.

Biting her lower lip, the girl walked over to Chris. She was dressed in tight black leggings with flat black skimmers on her feet. She simply wore an oversized white button-up shirt with the tails untucked. Her face had nothing more than a coat of gloss on her lips.

It struck Chris that she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

Here he was, advanced species and all, and he was experiencing "love at first sight." Wasn't that just ancient Earth folklore?

Honestly, all Chris ever had any interest in was teenage girls. He liked older women. Experienced, worldly women. Not girls. Not immature little teenyboppers.

She demurely sat in an empty seat.

Then, a crazy thought flew into Chris' crazed brain. "M... M...," he said.

The girl avoided looking at Chris.

Chris got on his knees so he could work his way into the girl's field of vision. "It's you, isn't it?"

"You're being rude," she said, whispering to keep things private. "You sound ridiculous."

"Uh, um... But... The... I... Where... It's... When...?"

The girl scowled at Chris' obvious confusion. The bell then rang to end class. As the rest of the students left the room, the girl stood up to follow. Chris scrambled off his knees onto his feet.

“You’re really making a scene. It’s embarrassing.” The girl said.

“It’s really you, Matt? You remember...”

She removed the ski cap and let her pink hair fall out. “I remember everything.”

For the first time in a long time, a bright light of hope shone on Chris. “My Dad!... He...”

“He’s adorable.” The girl said. “And call me Erin.”

“Erin...?”

“Erin Wilke. You know, Mrs. Wilke’s daughter.”

“My Dad... He modified history and... He made sure that everyone thinks...” Chris was still tying the shoelaces of this mess up in his mind. “And your life... Oh, God, I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean for you to have to be a girl for the rest of your life.”

“Well... About that...” Erin said, an impish look of mischief on her smiling lips. “Your Dad told me everything. The whole time thing, and being stuck here, and...”

“He did?”

“Well, he kinda had to.”

“So you know everything?”

“That’s what I just said, jerk.”

Chris’s brain was pulsating with chaos. Happy Matt was alive. Confused that he was Erin. Mystified that the secret was out. Glad his Dad could fix things. Baffled about everything else. “But why aren’t you Matt?”

“He gave me a few choices. Be Matt and forget everything, Be Ms. Wright and... Um... Some other ideas.” Erin cleared her throat, and talked in a whisper. “I kinda... Well, given the choices... I took this one.”

“Dude! You *chose* this? *Why?*” Chris’ strained voice breaking as he spoke. His eyes were like ping-pong balls, ready to pop out of the sockets. The transmission of his mind had just blown several gears.

Erin took Chris’s hand, and held it in hers.

Chris looked down at their hands in each others’, and then back up at Erin. Then back down at the hands. Then back up at Erin. Down, up, down, up.

“Oh, you gotta be kidding me! Do you *know* what I did to you?” he yelped. “You *do* know that, right?”

“Yeah...” Erin replied, her voice trailing off with a hint of uncertainty. “But I also remember a guy who made me feel like I was the most important person in their life. And then when he had every opportunity to do something horrible

and nasty, he treated me like I was special.” She gave Chris a peck on the cheek.

Chris looked at Erin with a knitted brow. “Are you insane?” He yelled.

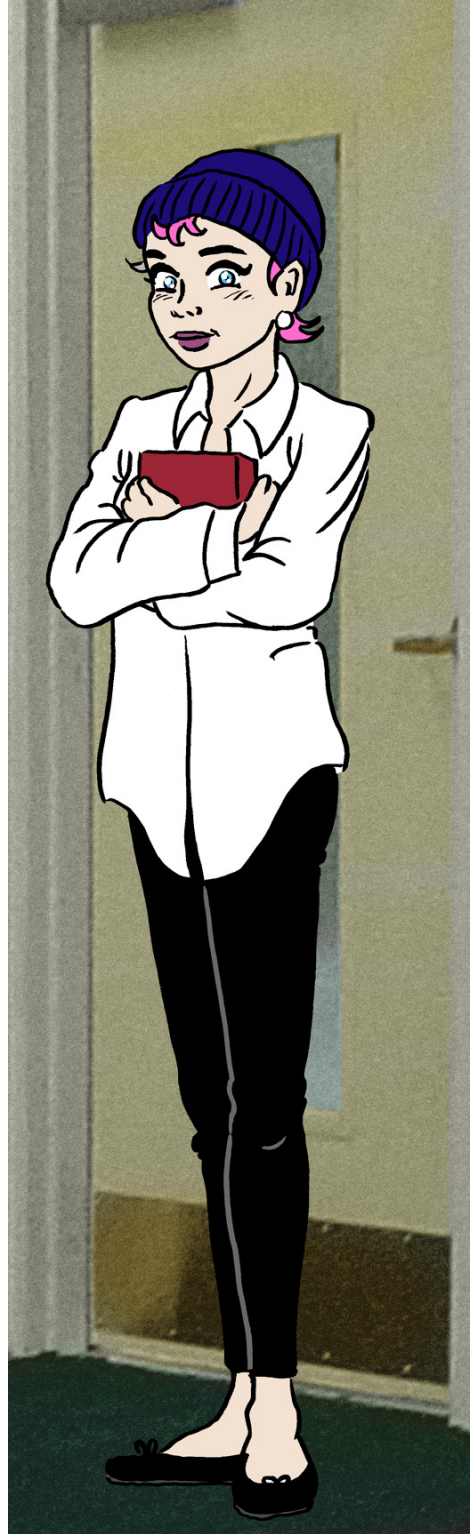
Erin shrugged. “I had to stop worrying about that a while back.” She took Chris’ hand again and held it in both of hers. “I just know that everything that used to be important to me now seems silly and stupid. I wanted to be like you so bad. I wanted to be as smooth and cool as you. I wanted to be the smartest person alive – just to be better than you. And now that seems like the most ridiculous thing in the world.

“For a long time, I was obsessed with you. As long as I’ve known you it’s been like that. The only thing I could really focus on is you...” And she looked up with huge, watery eyes that expressed nothing but pure honesty. “...and that hasn’t changed.”

The clarity of the moment made Chris shut up. He didn’t have anything to say. But then, without any ability to meter his thought, he came up with a reply. “That’s the dumbest thing you’ve ever said,” Chris said, “and you’ve said some pretty stupid shit.”

Erin giggled. “I’m just going to go with my heart. My head just seems to be screwed up all the time.”

“I know what you mean.” Chris looked down at his hands in Erin’s. He felt his heart thumping in his chest, heard his heavy breathing, and wafted in an impossible sense of total well-being. “Okay,” he said, “we’ll go with this, I guess.”



He placed his arm around Erin's back. She rested her head on his shoulder. It just felt right. Better than right.

Just simple human contact like this shouldn't have had such an effect on an advanced species like Chris. But that thought died like a burnt out light bulb. Later on in life, he'd look back at this moment and realize this was when it happened. The cord had been cut. He was holding everything he needed, and Chris was had no other place – or time – in the world he rather be. He had his home.

The End

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### **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 black-shirtboy. 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

## **I, Candy**

"Sissy Sweets" by James J. Craft, illustrations by rocketdave. 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

## **Stories of the Supernatural**

### **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 / 80 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**

### **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

## **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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