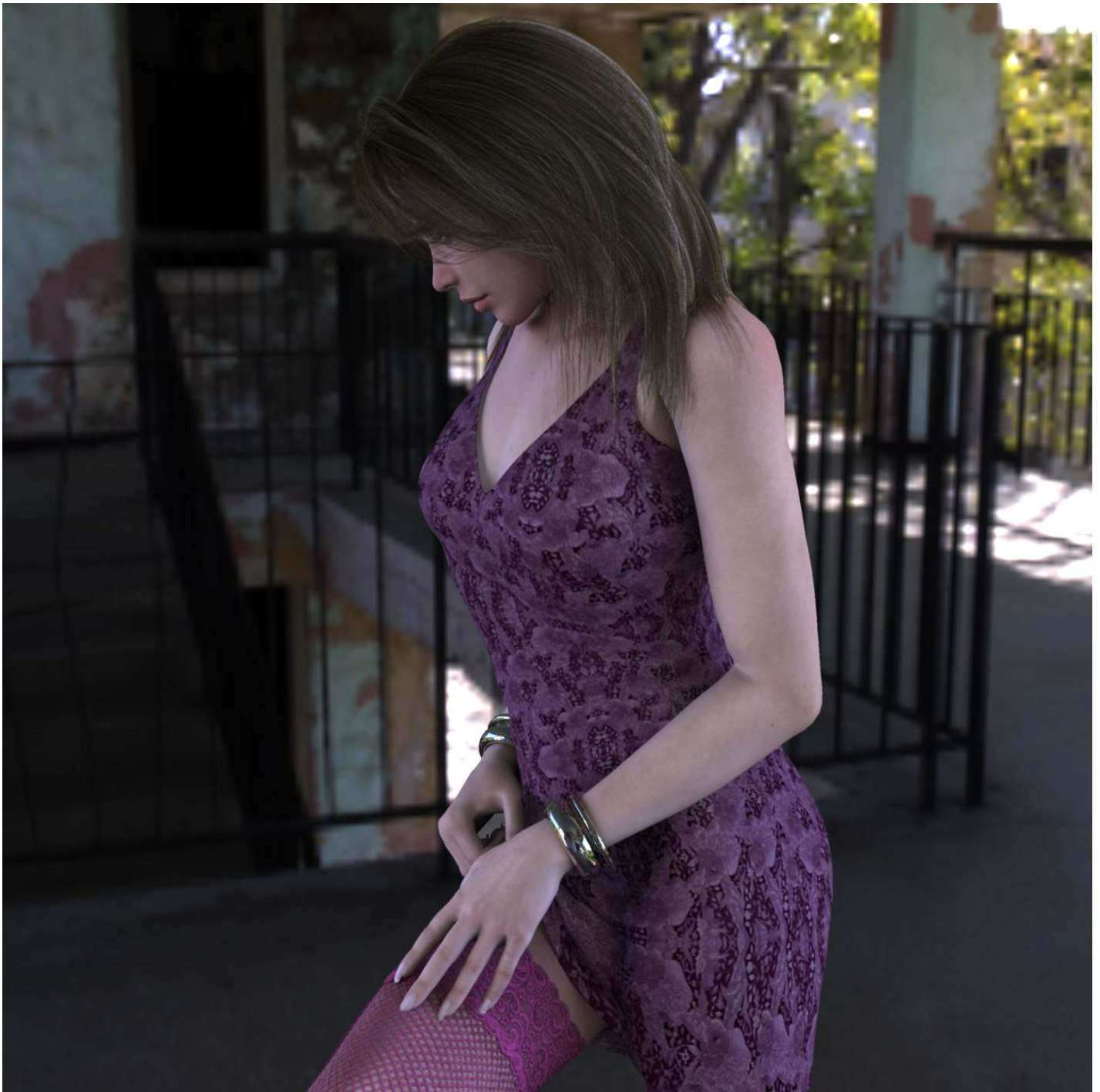


# "CURVES AHEAD"

BY P.J. WRIGHT



**EVER SINCE HE STARTED WHAT HE CALLS HIS 'TRANSITION,'** my best buddy Mark has had a whole bunch of new things to remember and keep track of. 'Chick things.' For instance, stopping occasionally to check and make sure his nylons haven't gotten wrinkled. Shit like that.

Of course, I've had new things to start keeping in mind as well. Shit like struggling to remember I have to keep my hands to myself. Struggling to remember that no matter how much it might not look like it, the sizzling hot little bitch checking out a fucking dynamite pair of legs is still my best buddy Mark.



**OKAY, IT'S REALLY GETTING TO BE MORE THAN A LITTLE, “What the fuck, dude?!”**

Look, it's like this; Mark has been my best bud since kindergarten. We share everything. So I've known for a couple of years that he's what he calls 'transgendered'. If I understand his explanation right, that means someone who wants a sex-change. Now, I won't lie. At first, it was... well... you know. But I've always known he was wrestling with 'stuff'. Stuff that sometimes got him down and

made him really sad. And then, once he came out to me and I'd had a chance to think about it for a while, it all made sense. You know? So I was pretty quickly cool with it.

How could I not be? He's my best bud.

Anyway, he's been doing that 'transition' thing for about a year now. Long enough that his docs said he could have his first operation. The one where he got his boobs.

He was laid up for a while. I checked in on him every day. Made some Pizza Hut runs. Picked up his meds at the drugstore. Shit like that. Hell, he did the same for me when I busted my leg up really bad a couple of years ago. It's what best buds do.

Anyway, two weeks or so after the operation, he was up and running around again. Happier and more charged-up than I can remember seeing him in a long time. So I'm thinking everything's cool and it's all good.

But then, yesterday, there's this knock on my door. I open it and there's Mark standing there in a trench coat he bought last fall. Now that struck me as strange, cuz it was eleven in the morning and already getting kinda warm. So I'm about to ask him why he's wearing a coat, when he suddenly flings the damn thing open and...

He's not wearing anything under it! Well, he's wearing this kinda slutty ... oh, hell – whadaya call it?... uh ... That chick thing that holds up her nylons but doesn't cover her tits.

Now I'm standing there with my jaw hanging down to my belt buckle when Mark strikes this stripper pose and purrs, "Didn't they turn out great?!" (His fucking tits. Obviously.)

I finally manage to blurt out something like, "Uh... yeah! Really great!"

Then Mark giggles – *giggles*, for fuck's sake! — closes his coat and then saunters back to his place like nothing is going on!

Leaving me standing there absolutely fucking freaked, wondering if he could possibly just be jerking my chain, the way we always do.

Or if maybe, just maybe, my best bud since kindergarten is trying to put the moves *on me!*



I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON! Something's wrong with Mark. Or me. Or me and Mark.

Probably me and Mark. But like I say, I don't know what the fuck it can be.

So, alright... After that weird bit with him flashing his tits – a couple of weeks ago now – things got back to normal pretty quick. I figured out he was just jerking my chain. 'Cuz like I say; we do

that to each other all the time. And like I say, we went back to the normal routine. Pal-ing around. Getting together at night to watch TV. You know; the usual best buds shit.

We even hit the bars a couple of times. And that was pretty much like it's always been too. Two best buds knocking back beers and checking out the chicks. Okay, it might have been a little different because Mark's got this new... 'perspective'... on things. But I mean; how could he not? Right? Anyway, it's shit like; I point to this babe across the room and I go, "Check out the ass on that one." And Mark's like, "Good ass, yeah. But you're not supposed to put makeup on by the pound." Or I'm like, "Dude! Look at that hot blonde by the window!" And Mark's like, "Who? The slut in the 'ten bucks a fuck' nothing of a mini-skirt? Get a clue, dude! She'll only be around as long as you're buying. Then it's off to the next sucker." So it's the same, but different. See what I'm saying?

Anyway...

Yesterday I'm coming out my door and I spot Mark kind of half-running, half-stumbling up the stairs. (Half-stumbling because he's wearing these high-heeled sandals he likes for some reason and I've heard that running in high-heels is a trick even for real girls.) He'd said he was going grocery shopping and I figured he was coming back from the store. But then I noticed, first – that he didn't have a grocery bag. And, second – that he... that... uh...

Okay, his... what do you call it? Not eye shadow. Mascara! That's it; mascara. His mascara was running.

I'm pretty sure that when her mascara's streaked down her cheeks like that, it means a chick's been crying.

Needless to say, even if I didn't know exactly what it was, I knew something was sure as fuck wrong. So I stop Mark by getting in front of him and I go, "You good, dude?"

But he doesn't say shit! He just tries to brush past me. So now I'm really starting to get spooked. I grab his arm to stop him so we can talk. But he tries to pull away. "Leave me alone!"

And I'm like, "Damn, dude! Tell me!"

He gets his arm back – the one I'd grabbed – and then he clenches up again. "I don't want to talk about it, Nick!"

Then he starts to try to push past me and I cut him off again. And then I figure it out. "Did someone try to fuck with you?" See, what I was thinking was; he'd gone to the store and somebody we knew had given him shit cuz he's... you know... dressing like a girl. (I was thinking it had to be someone we know cuz if you didn't know Mark before, you'd never guess he wasn't always a chick. He's had the look almost from the start. And then once he started the transition for real, part of what he decided to do was take these 'lessons' from this... I don't know if she's a doctor or a counselor or what all. But she teaches guys like Mark who are in transition to... you know... walk and talk and just generally come across like a real girl. And Mark was really dedicated to learning it all and practicing and shit. He really worked his ass off. So in no time at all, like I say; if you didn't know him before you wouldn't have a clue.)

But instead of answering whether or not someone had been fucking with him, Mark just kind of backs up a step and, if anything, clenches up even tighter. Now I'm figuring that has to be it – somebody was fucking with him – and I'm really starting to see red. Nobody fucks with my best bud! And I'm like, "Who was it?! I'm gonna shove my fist so far down that fuck's throat I'll pull his balls out his mouth! Come on!" And I start to head down the stairs, figuring he's gonna be right behind me.

This time, he grabs my arm. "No! Leave it alone!" Once I stop and turn and stare at him, he lets go of my arm and huddles up again. Now this is weird, cuz in the past when the two of us were around to have each other's backs, everybody in our circle knew not to fuck with us. Mark might be a little dude, but when he got into it he could be a fucking animal! I mean; a badger might be a small critter, relatively speaking. But there's a reason why grizzly bears don't fuck with 'em. Know what I mean? Same with my buddy Mark.

But now I'm standing there, blinking and trying to figure out 'what the shit?' And I go, "Dude? What? I'll be there."

Then Mark's staring at me with this really strange expression. " 'There'. What's that mean? 'There' how?"

"Huh? 'There' like... you know. Like always. There to have your back."

And he shakes his head and stares even harder at me with that expression that's really starting to creep me out. "You think that's what I want? For you to have my back? Why would you think that's what I want?"

" 'Why'?! Because you're my best bud! And buds cover buds!"

I admit, even with that streaked mascara, I hadn't really believed that Mark had been crying. I mean, I hadn't seen him cry for... god; since he was six or something! But I couldn't doubt it anymore when his eyes welled up and then the tears were running down his cheeks and he... sobbed... " 'Best bud'?! Best BUD?! Jesus! How can you be so fucking clueless?!"

Then he charged up the stairs before I could stop him and slammed the door to his place in my face.

I tried knocking. Then I gave it an hour and tried again.

Nothing.

I'm pretty sure I got it right; somebody was fucking with him. But I don't know who. And I don't know what they did. It's been a whole day, but Mark hasn't come out of his place. He won't answer the door. Or the phone.

I don't know what to do.

I don't know what the fuck is going on.



I'D JUST Poured my morning's first cup of coffee when there was a knock on the door.

It'd been two days since the "how can you be so clueless" blow-up. So you don't know how good it was to find Mark standing there. We stared at each other for a second. Then he kind of half-smiled. "Hey, bro."

I could feel my own smile starting. "Hey."

Mark's got this new thing where he tucks his hair behind his right ear. "I... uh... wanted to apologize for last Tuesday."

"Nothing to apologize for."

“Yeah, there is. It wasn’t fair for me to... to...” Then instead of staring at his toes, he was staring into my eyes. “You’ve always been there for me. You’ve always done everything you could.”

“Hey, you’re my best bud. I’ll always be there.”

Mark went back to staring at his toes as he nodded, that same little smile quirking his lips. “I know. I know you will. Anyway... I just wanted to say... you know... I’m sorry.”

“So what the fuck was it? Who was messing with you? I’m not ready to just...”

But Mark was shaking his head. “It’s nothing. Mountains out of molehills. You know me. Besides, nowadays...” He shrugged. “Hormones and shit. And Doc Crowley would blow a fuse if she found out I’d tracked someone down and beat the crap out of ’em. Not ‘lady like’. She’d probably make me give my boobs back.”

It felt good to laugh with Mark again. (Well, laugh while he grinned that shit-eating grin that I knew so well.) “Still, if you ever want to sneak out at night when nobody’s looking and get payback, you know where to find me.”

Mark chuckled. “Yeah.”

Everything was good again. Everything was back to the way it ought to be. I stuck out my fist for our traditional fist bump. “Buds forever.”

Mark’s smile was... I don’t know... kind of ‘wistful’ (is that even the word I’m looking for?) when he stuck out his own fist, touched it to mine and repeated, “Buds forever.”