



and

Yes I Know

By Lita Wyche

What happened in the next moment was in his control; he had the power to do so when he only existed in his head. His body's presence would stop him from using his skill. He hesitated a moment, and then he proceeded with the need.

He moved into a gray, cloudiness. His face was there, but no body was attached; engulfed in the atmosphere. He looked for his friend Billy. Billy appeared in a living room with his son Max involved in a conversation. They both turned in his direction with a queer look as Jake's face hovered in front of them.

"Billy, can you see me?"

Billy and his son stared at him with concern. Billy returned a nod, unwilling to verbalize a response. He only nodded again with caution.

His head sucked back into the cloud.

I did it. I asked to see a friend, and I found him just like that. Hmm...let's see if I can do it again.

"Peggy, Peggy, where are you," he yelled out into the space.

His two eyes, nose, and mouth, were gazing out of the same collection of brown, this time with a thin swirl of red. His face enters into a home, past a doorway. Freckles cover the face of a young man who sits on a chair in the home next to the front door, as his own mother. He finds Peggy, dressed in a black sequins gown, sitting on a red velvet couch. He hovers peering out of the mass. "Peg, can you see me?"

“Yes, I can see you,” adjusting her gown to reveal more cleavage. Jake was surprised; Peggy would never try and seduce him in real life; she was a very married woman. It wasn’t a big deal for Jake to be there appearing in this smoke with just his face intruding in the space. Why did Billy and Max look so freaked out and Peggy was not even bothered? “Who was that man near the doorway and whose house is this?” he questioned Peggy, ignoring the attempted seduction. “Oh, this is so and so’s in law’s house,” Peggy, his D.A. associate in real life explained, “and the guy is”

Suddenly, his wife Madeline appeared from the right and sat down next to Peg on the couch, Peg disintegrated instantly in a swirl of dust. A large man caressed Madeline and kissed her on the cheek.

Madeline looked up noticing her husband in the cloudiness looking irritated.

“Honey,” she barely turned in his direction, searching for the man’s bellybutton over his shirt with her index finger. “What are you doing here in my dream? Not waiting for an answer, she focused into the space in front of her.

Jake’s face pumped with blood. Thirty dreadful seconds passed.

Madeline tapped her ring and pinkie finger on her thigh, her leg bounced. “A dream is a dream. It is private.” She scolded pointing her finger at Jake, her other finger now nestled in the small “innie” near a button. “You need to pop on out of here like nothing happened. I surely don’t want you to talk about this in the morning. Don’t even

mention it my darling.” She compressed her lips.

“Look at the contract, if you have a question; Section B,” not looking at Jake, “line four, it was your idea, remember,” dipping her hand into a bucket of chicken, swirling it in front of the fat guy’s mouth, “your idea Judgy Wudgy,” glancing back at him with cold calculation.

Jake’s mouth dropped from his face and shattered on the ground. He watched Madeline, dressed from head to toe in black leather, with red leather cat ears, straddle the man’s lap; a fiery red, furry, whip lay tucked in her armpit. Red lipstick surrounded her teeth that glowed and sparkled as she moved and shifted on the man’s lap. In her right hand, a chicken wing dripped with BBQ sauce as Madeline began to hand feed the “in excess of a four hundred pound” man. Jake’s face floated in

Madeline's dream with disbelief, his eyes protruded like two black olives stuck in watery sour cream, pumping in and out of his skull. His wife sat and giggled away as she placed piece after piece of chicken into his mouth; bone and all was chomped. His sausage fingers gripped firmly around his Maddy's waist slobbering her with BBQ kisses over her lips and neck, "Mmm...yummy chicken baby, delicious like you," he moaned and groaned into her red ears. "Do you want me to rub mayonnaise all over you baby, so I can lick it off starting at your pretty toes?" his mouth ajar waiting for a reply.

In a moment, Madeline and the fat guy floated above him on a flying carpet, jetting through the living room, in and out of the front and rear doors of the house in the dream. Madeline's laughter drilled in his ears, like a devil in ecstasy.

He clenched his face dreaming up a body with no avail; a trick he had failed at time after time.

“B for crap! A for as@#\$!!.” he grinded awake from his dream; his body riddled with hives and redness. He looked at his wife sleeping on the other side of the bed. A smile shaped her long face to a round contented circle, a snail trail of drool glistened on her chin. Scrambling out of bed, he slammed a shoe on the tile floor next to Madeline’s head. The smile disappeared into an opened mouth snore.

Stomping from the bed in front of the large master bedroom bathroom mirror, he smashed his knuckles onto the white marbled countertop. “I can’t stand this!” leaning forward nearly pressing his lips, huffing steam onto the mirror. “Contract

schmontract! Feeding chicken to a fatty?" And the last one with the neighbor's Great Dane! Dabg blummet!" Jake's ironman tattoo blended into his black curly chest, no flab peeked over his waistline.

His arms folded in defense as he stood. He had mastered the skill of dream invasions (he called them visitations) of humans and animals, and he was beginning to regret it. He had stopped having his own dreams, only invasions had taken place. Any kind of melon or red meat for dinner usually triggered the dream visitations, which is something he and his wife ate on a regular basis. His face reddened as he gazed at himself in the ten foot by four foot mirror.

Jake was a good looking man, not that he cared or noticed. Even better looking than George Clooney or even more attractive than his former

history professor Dr. Cochebueno at U.N.L.V., which was nearly impossible. In college, the art professors sought him out to be a live model; he finally surrendered to hard easy cash. Even to this day in his early forties, he was asked to model for Mature Male magazine. The editor of the magazine, Mara, a blond bomb shell from the Netherlands, would stop by his courtroom periodically to try a new bribe, with a wink on the way out. Her head would bow down to the ground as denial set in once again, as Jake refused her offer. Jake would blush, holding up his wedding ring as the District Attorney and Defense attorneys would tease him relentlessly behind closed courtroom doors with the nicknames Judge Zoolander and Freeland Jake. Where was that stupid contract? he asked the man in the mirror.

He descended the staircase in his home, and stormed to the garage where he had stashed a copy of the court document. Jake opened the garage safe and placed a small Nike shoe box onto a table. His bare feet cooled on the concrete floor; his two dogs Rooster and Betty remained on their dog beds hesitating to greet their owner.

"Come ere' my little angels," turning from the box. He noticed they had not moved from their sheepskin beds. "Come to papa, papa loves you my two little bears...I had a bad dream fellas," Jake confessed, scratching all four ears, getting doggie moans in return. "Ready for breakfast?" he said, scooping three quarters of a scoop into the dog bowls wagging his rear end imitating Betty.

You mean you got caught again, Betty
thought in her dog head.

He turned to the Nike box with
determination, lifting the cardboard lid and the ten
page document. "February 14, 2030... humph!" he
flipped past to the end and looked at his signature;
Judge Jacob Freeman. Whacking the document on
the hood of his new black Jaguar, special ordered
with a hissing cat button for those irate drivers on
the road, his teeth grinded. Betty and Rooster
turned, for two seconds, and then continued to
chomp on their dry kernels.

Betty whined when she was done, nudging a
dent in the dog food bag with her nose wanting
more. She had become a ranch dog and had been
burning a lot more dog calories; she was hungry

most of the time now, more than ever. Her master ignored her, holding a paper in his hand. "You're looking good now Betty, you have a waist line, and no, you just had breakfast my little white Chinese girl bear," turning his full attention to the piece of now rolled up papers.

Don't be mean in my dreams. Don't come in them at all please, doggie dreams are very important. Dreams balance our lives.

Betty stared at the garage floor and wondered where her mommy Maddy was; she hardly ever woke up to feed her and Rooster in the mornings. When she did, she always gave in a fed her a little more. I bet she's still dreaming, her yellow lab tail wagged.

Betty pawed her blue bone toy and rolled it under her coveted hairy sheepskin dog bed as she watched her master Jake yelling at a dumb piece of paper ignoring her more than righteous hunger pangs. She and Rooster knew not to tear up their sheepskins beds again. The last time Jake and Madeline had refused to put them back together like humans usually did. They were stuck sleeping on the freezing concrete dead in the winter for a month. They could never explain that they just wanted to find out if the creatures moving around in the foam filled beds were edible or not. Geeze! Everything was edible to Betty, she just had to taste everything: licking sour sun screen off legs and, of course, smelling crotches was every dog's favorite past time, not just for yellow labs.

"My stupid idea," her master grumbled at the court documents.

A bad dream, eh? Betty snorted. He had invaded her dream a couple of dog nights ago. Her master Jake had appeared out of nowhere spying on her when she was running through a meat department with a t-bone locked into her jaws, blood staining her yellow lab coat into her favorite color pink. He may have ruined the meat dream, but last night's dream was the best in a long time.

Ignoring her whining master and her grumbling tummy, Betty smiled as she remembered her dream of entering an open door of the local buffet restaurant, Sally's Never Ending Buffet Extravaganza. (She had smelled the restaurant in real life one day and had never stopped fantasizing

about it.) Betty squeezed in the turquoise door to find the stainless steel buffet bins still filled with macaroni and cheese, roast beef smothered with gravy, and pounds of stir fried rice. She couldn't believe her dog eyes! She sprouted rainbow colored wings, gliding through the restaurant as she landed directly in the beef with gravy; her white paws submersed in the delectableness of grease and floury substances nuzzling her nose and tongue with sheer happiness. Soon Betty was belly up in the dream on the carpeted floor moaning with delight, now looking more like a chocolate lab, covered with cheap canned gravy. The stainless steel bins gleamed. Her stomach had swelled pregnant with twelve full grown pups. She rolled from left to right, unable to get up, gravy staining the dirty carpet under her. Then, Betty recalled, standing

there on all fours; her dream sabotaged and interrupted by that dumb tabby cat in the neighborhood, jolting her to real life. She licked her chops imagining the gravy.

Back to reality, Betty rummaged around for kernels like a rat in a junk yard. She found two dusty kernels behind a bucket, well worth the effort. Her ears stiffened as she heard the safe door slam behind her followed by the slamming of the back door to the garage. She walked out past the garbage cans, searching for the perfect place to poop near her master Jake's favorite cherry tree far in the left corner of the yard. Rooster was a slow eater, sometimes he even skipped meals; for the life of Betty, she had no clue why.

Betty waited at the back door hoping to clean the morning dishes with her tongue; her head rested between her two front paws. She eyeballed her master in the kitchen. Aromas of eggs, scrambled with salt and pepper, and bacon wafted in the air around her. The hissing of the bacon made her eyes roll to the back of her head. Rooster continued to hunt for lizards, even when they had been long gone over the brick wall.

“Good morning dear,” Jake forced to Madeline as her bunny slippers landed on the last stair step.

“Good morning Judge Freeman,” she sassed out her unpainted lips. “What are you making for breakfast, chicken? nuzzling up to Jake, kissing him all over his neck.

“No. Darling,” moving his neck just an inch,
“I **was** making eggs and toast, but I think I will
leave for work early now. “I have to be at the
courthouse at 7:30 instead of 9:00,” he perjured
avoiding eye contact. Grabbing his black robe from
the downstairs closet, and his car keys, he left his
wife without kissing her good bye, something he
did not want to make a habit of. He just could not
look her in the eye this morning, not after the
fantasy he had just witnessed. He knew it was only
a dream, but...

Unbothered by his master’s grumpiness,
Rooster finished eating his dry food and headed for
the avocado tree, even though he had to nailpaw
around six dried up poops surrounding the root of
the tree, in order to poop there. Rooster squatted,
propping his red curly tail high in the air. He

pondered, (well he couldn't pull out a magazine)
why did Betty Mayberry hide her blue bone? A
number two fell onto the dirt near the young
avocado tree with no sound. His butt puckered for a
finale, before he walked around in the yard
pretending to be a red skunk, his favorite past time;
hunting for lizards at the same time.

Madeline hopped onto the black marble
counter, her red robe opened, as she heard the
garage door close. She smiled as Betty pooped near
Jake's cherry tree, and unrolled her copy of the
prenuptial agreement she always kept in her
bathrobe pocket. "Section B, line numero cuatro,"
she said out loud, waving the legal document in the
air. She loved that part. She wanted to frame it. A
lot of divorces had been documented over the years
blamed on Invasion into Fantasies of Wives

and Husbands, Jake had explained to her as he added in, The Right to Fantasize, into the marriage contract. Invasions had been blamed for over fifty percent of divorces in the past ten years. "I don't want to be a statistic," her husband Jake had commanded.

Next to the copper Espresso machine, Madeline fondled her lips as images of her dream flashed before her. She clenched down hard on her index finger, thinking of the large man, Mr. Juicy, she had named him who would, never in a million years, complain if her weight got out of control. The foam bubbled on the top of the coffee cup, as the last of hot milk completed dripping. "Maybe I'll take a nap later," she smiled sipping the foam. She slid off the countertop, and opened the back door,

“Betty! Rooster! Where are you? I have our special treat... whip cream in a can!” Madeline pulled off her wedding band and read the inscription. I am forever yours too Jake, just don’t be mad at me silly; I’m just dreaming. Betty arrived moments later, tail wagging.

Rooster lay on the bricks near the trash cans, his eyes moved all around underneath his lids, too deep in sleep to hear his mother master calling. In the neighbor’s yard...he was wearing a cowboy hat, fit to form around his rooster red ears. He was sitting in a wicker lounge chair catching pieces of BBQ prime rib, tossed to him by the naked neighbor. Rooster bared his teeth snapping an orange whip at the neighbor. “You will cook in the buff! No, not in the backyard! In the front! (In real life, the creepy neighbor had tricked him and Betty

with rotten meat, causing them to have a tummy ache for days) Who's laughing now? Rooster barked as neighbors from next door and down the block stopped to laugh at the large hairy ass riddled with red pimples, nude BBQ man.

"Here you go, master handsome master of mine," the neighbor shakily told Rooster, supplying him with a perfect cut every two minutes as was demanded. He waited on his knees on the concrete before Rooster waiting for his next request, small pebbles settling in the knee caps.

The purple sunny sky warmed Rooster's fur. Stars twinkled above and exploded like fireworks. White female Akitas licked Rooster's ears. He licked his chops and glanced at his pal Betty as she was tethered to a swaying pine tree. Betty barked

and leaped into the air as Rooster devoured every last morsel of continuous BBQ feast. He slowly awakened...

Later on, Jake returned home to find his beautiful wife slumbering in the patio; her long wavy red hair, melting onto the lounge chair. He shakes her arm gently, kissing her lips as she begins to awaken. "I love you Maddy," forgetting about the dream.

"I love you too honey, my Jakey, Jake" she returns with love.

One weeknight later, Madeline parachuted onto a remote island surrounded by men in loin cloths. They all wanted her and lined up along the island rocks ready to please her in any way she desired. Some nude men had a box of assorted

chocolates to entice her and others had fist of diamonds before she allowed them to take her in their arms. Pleasurable screams filled the island atmosphere until she heard the pounding a familiar gavel. Binoculars pressed to her face as she saw Judge Freeman pounding away with sparks flying. Tossing the binoculars, she continued her fantasy until she enticed every one of the men, instead of only the grey eyed Irish men.

Madeline propped herself on her elbows in bed. "Good morning Jake," she said to her husband, now wide awake. "Really...again Jake?" She got out of bed and took a shower; which led to the beginning of a shopping spree bill her husband would never forget. Ten thousand dollars were spent that day with her two friends indulging in Sancuti bags and Mazzarini footwear.

“What’s in the bags?” Jake asked his manicured wife at the end of the day. “You went to Hoffman’s I see,” he said as he cooked tri tip and chopped up some watermelon for dinner. “You want a salad?” he asked to an empty room. He bowed his head, closing his eyes, wanting to forget the dream he had at work when he took a nap during a twenty minute recess.

In the dream, Maddy was dead. She had fallen overboard off a sailboat. He watched as a team of deadly sharks swallowed her body. There was nothing he could do.

Nightmare after nightmare overtook his dream life. Madeline was dead or wound up dead in every one as days and weeks followed.

Jake lit two red candles on the dining room table, steaks cooked to perfection; a bottle of J.Lohr breathed from their cellar with two wine glasses, reflecting the candle's flame.

Jake and Maddy made love that night in their king sized bed. They dripped with perspiration before they collapsed on opposite sides of the bed. Smiles were exchanged as satisfaction seeped into their bones. "Good night baby." Madeline's face rested on her husband's chest.

Jake's eyes slowly closed as he drifted asleep...His footsteps echoed under a bridge, red rose bushes framing the path. A priest dressed in black stood by a wooden box just ahead. His pace quickened, goose bumps formed, as tears began to rush from Jake's eyes, his body depleting of all

liquids. He began to stammer and shake as the priest's arms slowly unrolled onto the ground engulfing Jake in a mass of rubber, lifting him above an awaiting casket. Madeline. Dead. The priest's hands suddenly released him face first into the open casket. Jake screamed in horror struggling to break away from her crumbling face. The priest slammed the casket door, locking Jake inside, before the casket tumbled to waters below. Jake let out a final scream as he awoke on the cold tile ground of his bedroom floor.

Vomit blasted from his stomach onto the master bedroom walls. Jake gripped his stomach and vomited again. His eyes reddened, on real tear fell.

The Dream Visitation Certificate caught fire
balancing and floating above the kitchen burners.
Jake held it down with a fork burning every last
speck of the license to invade.

“Is that something burning?”

Betty and Rooster stared at their master
from the backyard garden, noses snorkeling in the
air. Yes, it is honey, but it's nothing.”

Yes I Know

Austin walked along the beach boardwalk, toting along a light brown paper bag containing two sandwiches: roast beef with mayo and jalapeno peppers, and a ham and cheese with a large bag of BBQ chips, and "two bottles of Coke straight up," his dad would say. The bag crackled as it swung to and fro; sounds of the ocean wormed its way in his ears, his sandals shuffled along the sandy boardwalk.

He thought about his father Austin senior, when he was here. He had been gone for five years now, but that didn't stop Austin from having all of those great memories like they had just happened yesterday locked deep into his heart. Spending time at the beach, just the two of them; boogie boarding, a little surfing, playing catch, throwing a Frisbee back and forth. Burying his father in the sand was one of his favorites; his dad would pretend like he was the sand monster emerging from the packed sand to destroy all living beings around. His arms waving in the ocean air making monster sounds were the best. This made Austin giggle until he was hunched over crying, begging his father to tickle him till he peed his pants. Austin stared toward the ocean and smiled.

He stopped walking when he found his favorite part of the graffiti block wall and made himself comfortable; hopping up on the wall, no hands needed, Austin landed on his Rip Curl shorts. He flexed his legs, cut and painted flawlessly surely

by the strokes of an artist, he often assumed. His right triceps' beauty glowed in the sun, which eventually connected to his utmost desire at that point of the day: food for the belly. Placing the bag momentarily on the block wall, he kissed toward his sun; every morning he did, thanking it for lighting his beautiful day.

Looking left to right and then back again, Austin monitored the beach, flinging his perfectly bleached-by-the-sun blond locks onto his shoulders; bronze shoulders riddled with a variation of brown freckles inherited from his mother Angelina; his father's cool mirrored "chippie" glasses protected his eyes. Waves crashed one after the other leaving a foamy film on the wet sand below. Every few minutes the water left a new wet sand line along the shore, like new lifelines on the palm of a hand, a new future.

Austin and the other wave enthusiasts had been out there in the ocean surfing since about six that morning. He bang knuckled his buddies goodbye, unlike the hugs and forehead kisses he had still received from his father, even though Austin had been all grown up, pushing twenty five. He called it quits at 11:00 a.m. on that Monday; he was just too hungry to be out there for another minute, which could have wreaked havoc on this perfect morning. Rustling his bag open he grabbed his roast beef sandwich. His buddies were somewhere or another, most of them had taken off to go to work, but he didn't mind a bit being there by himself.

"No, no, get away from me," Austin heard out of the sky, but didn't see anyone. He searched around and hopped off of the wall by flexing his glutes and ham strings, still gripping his sandwich. His shoulders fell, his jaw dropped exposing his pink tongue, and a brief sadness enveloped his face as he gazed at the sand covered slice of pepper. A jalapeno had escaped onto the sand. Sorry dad. Glancing away from the food casualty he followed the sand waves to opened sections of the L.A. Times that lay stretched out over a man sleeping; having a nightmare maybe. Mini piles of sand had settled onto the "room for rent" want ads. Tight to the wall, the body lay. Geeze, how did I miss that, he mumbled to himself like an adolescent, shrugging his shoulders, his eyes filled with concern. There's a man there. More mumbling came from under the paper pile, "No, no, get out!" the body whimpered.

Ignoring his grumbling stomach, Austin curiously, and slowly, stepped closer to the talking pile of newspaper, sinking into the thick sand with his six foot two American body. Closer and closer he came to the covered stranger. Austin stood above the piles of newspaper. He took several bites of his awaiting sandwich, like popcorn with a movie. His head tilted to one side, what do you think dad?

Just don't take him home to your mother son. You know how she gets...

Jon's sole free K-Swiss tennis shoe stuck out from under yesterday's paper. All five of his

blackened toes snuggled together, like burned peanuts still in the shell; a flip flop was on his right foot; his dusty big toe and the next four ignored the upside-down v-shaped design jetting out to the side of the thin rubber.

Still entertained with the talking body on the ground, Austin cupped and shook the brown and white crumbs that settled onto the palm of his right hand. Like dice in Vegas, he carefully tossed them into his mouth, keeping one eye on the man in the sand. The salty BBQ chips delighted as a dessert. The body on the ground stirred; the toes wiggled like little black guppies in a child's hand scooping in a stream.

The fire crackled all around him in the deep dark dream. Fire was all around him; billowing out of mountain tops into watery green streams; the water a fiery blue. Jon, his name non-intruded by the Dutch, shook awake as he fell into the cold blue-green water. Suddenly a long slender feminine hand pulled him out of the water.

"Are you an angel?" Jon propped himself up on his elbows. He opened his eyes and noticed an intruder standing too close; Jon's right thumb dragged gunk, the color of a lima bean, out of the corner of his right eye. His leathery, dark brown skin stopped at his neckline, exposing a pale white origin. Jon commanded to the stranger who was hovering over him like Copter Nine, "Hey! This is my spot! Get away from me!" Jon forcefully shoved

both of his hands into his filthy pockets, "I have a sharp knife to use on you if I have to!" His hands jerked out with lint balls and dirt. Stunned, he stared at shadows of a silhouette, when he noticed the aroma in the air.

Jon salivated at the brown paper bag stained with sauce. "What else you got in that bag?"

"Oh, so your alive are ya? I am an angel, funny you should ask... Well, because you asked, I just finished a roast beefy and I still have BBQ chips in here and another sandwich, and then I'm going to wash it all down! What's it to you Mr...?"

Austin pulled the wrapping off of his ham and cheese sandwich and shoved all of it in his mouth at once, ignoring the slime of goo building up on Jon's bristly cleft chin. One droplet seeped from the corner of Jon's lips caught like a lizard's fly, savored like finely sliced portabella mushrooms simmered in buttery red wine sauce. Salivation is just as delicious, Jon mesmerized in a trance, eyes glossing over. The newspaper blew away in the wind as Jon stood balanced in the sand.

Austin tipped the bag into his open mouth; gravity coaxing every last BBQ flavored chip onto his tongue. "Don't trip dude," Austin reassured as he handed the bag of crumbs to Jon with a half grin. Rapidly turning the bag inside out, crumbs smashed onto Jon's tongue; hundreds of tiny bits, swelled up his salivary glands like a thick hanging tongue of a panting dog, which all humans imagine at one time being served for dinner.

The salt shriveled his tongue. "Anything to drink?" For Austin there was. He popped open the first Coke bottle, downed it, followed by the downing of the second and last bottle.

"Oh, do you want to recycle these Mr....?"

"My name is Jon, Jon stood presenting himself to Austin, dying of thirst. "Johnny, spelled Jaw-knee if you wanna play around with it."

"Oh." Austin turned his belly toward his Volkswagen van, holding the two empty bottles of Coke. Stooping along the way to carefully gather every bit of trash from his lunch, leaving the slice of pepper for varmints, Austin free-threw the bag of trash complete with a flick of his right wrist, into the trash can just on the other side of the wall.

Settling into the driver's seat, Austin smiles at his girlfriend's two inch face, surrounded by a tiny wooden frame dangling from the rear view mirror; a pink Chinese umbrella is in the background making her cheeks look pinker than they really are. "I love you Betty girl." The door closes with a ting, as he turns the key to start the van's engine. Austin's fingers connect to the keys again, killing the engine. He had no place that he had to be, no time card to clock in, no money to be made. "Thank you dad, he said holding his heart. Thanks for letting me enjoy my beautiful life, this beautiful day and not having to work, ever." His hands gripped the oversized steering wheel as he tapped his forehead onto his knuckles; fingers drumming in the curves. I probably shouldn't do

this... I can't leave him out here. He looks pretty hungry. I just like to mess with them sometimes.

"Car problems?"

He jumped. When I let my guard down, I never know what's going to happen. "Uh...yah... actually, can you give me a push?"

"Okay go!" Jon yells out from behind the van.

Austin put his van in neutral with the clutch forced all the way down to the floor board. Removing his foot from the clutch, the van's engine roared as it lurched forward onto the street. Austin turned the van around in a horseshoe stopping at Johnny's side. "Get in." Confused but willing, Johnny opened Austin's passenger's car door and got in as the van made its way to the nearest gas station. No questions were asked. Johnny sat in the moving van puzzled at the change of heart. He didn't have any place to be, so why not?

Son, don't take him home to your mother, his dead father warned once again. The van roared away from the beach.

"Let's go say hello to my mother, what could it hurt...right?" he said to Johnny, Johnny looking straight ahead eager to his prosperous future. Anything was better than living on the street he thought as the van made right and left turns through the city.

Winding down a driveway, Johnny followed the passing orange trees on his right listening to the tires grind the gravel underneath. The van came to a halt just in front of a beautiful doorway. "We have to get you cleaned up first before you meet my mother," walking toward the outside barn, "There's a shower in here, I'll get you some clothes," Austin said as walked to the main house.

Confused and grateful, Johnny disrobed and stepped into the wonderfulness of a hot steamy soapy shower. A half hour later, he stepped out of the shower into an unknown person's set of clothes, complete with undergarments. An entire basket full of deodorants, sprays, baby powder, and a mirror waited for him on a small chair just outside of the shower. I don't sink anymore, Johnny thought amused as he shuffled through the basket. I wonder what kind of a honey of a mother he has, Johnny secretly considered.

After dinner, Johnny graciously thanked Angelina for the wonderful meal. He couldn't resist kissing her hand. She was so beautiful. He couldn't take his eyes off of her as the food settled into his more than empty stomach. Austin was shocked at the kiss, but Johnny didn't really care. The crush for Austin's mother was already starting to grow and he loved every doggone second of it.

Johnny fantasized of holding Angelina in his arms as he and Austin drove away in silence. Austin looked at him with pursing lips stretched to the side.

Johnny nervously looked away. You are the one that introduced me to her.

"You can sleep in the barn Johnny. There's a bed and everything in there. See you in the morning. I have plenty of work for you to do around here at my ranch."

Johnny thought yes indeed I do son. When do I get to see Angelina again? he didn't say to Austin as his back was turned. She only lived a portion of a mile from Austin's place. He would try and see her tomorrow after his work was done. Johnny lay on his bed in the barn, interlaced his fingers behind his head and smiled in the darkness, visualizing the stars through the ceiling. Angelina was a widow, ripe and ready for a new relationship; a new husband would take care of her and all of her beautiful draft horses at her ranch.

A month later...

"Who's that...your new dad? Austin's surfer buddies joked in the driveway in front of Austin's house. Johnny was up bright and early before the sun even came out shucking the stalls. A wheelbarrow was full of horse manure ready to be dug in around the red rose bushes.

"Naw...that's just Johnny my new ranch hand. Buster hurt himself so he is going to take over for a while."

"Buster the moluster...l.o.l."

"Make sure you surround every rose bush with that manure!" Austin yelled out the window, his buddies chuckling in the back of the van.

Johnny reassured Austin with a wave. He shoveled and blended around the bushes and then cut three perfect roses. I'm going to visit you today my sweet when my work is done here...well maybe next week, he pondered, watching the butt of the van turn the corner off the gravel driveway. Cutting the thorns away from the three bloomed roses, Johnny's face soured. I wonder what he wants hearing the rumble of an engine coming closer. Did he forget something? Johnny popped up standing at attention flashing back to his military days. "What can I do you for sir?" wincing into the morning's sunlight.

"Well! The last time someone called me sir, they were stoned drunk. Then they suffered from a blast of a punch from my late husband!"

Her voice delighted Johnny's ear from his lobes through the eardrums then out the other ear if that was possible. "Oh gosh...good morning Austin's mother, pardon me," bowing with the perfect roses in hand offering them at once to her.

Delighted, Angelina whisked the roses from his hand pressing the petals up against her nostrils, inhaling deeply. "A woman deserves a batch of roses first thing in the morning! So, are you all done here?"

Johnny stood there in a daze just thinking about pressing his lips against hers. "No mam," he stood with shovel in hand, water collecting in his mouth, "this is it for today, I got up really early...early bird catches the...."

"Worm...I know. Do you think you could give me a hand today?"

She stood there so beautiful, in off white linen pants, her light brown hair tied back in a pink bow like a southern girl; lips tinted just a few shades darker then her normal lip color. "Yes sir, I mean mam, dag nummet, I would be honored to help you Miss..."

"Angelina Dale, but just call me Angelina. How long have you been here now, a few weeks?"

"Just a little over a week Miss Dale."

They made their way through the orange orchard, cutting across in the heavy dirt. Johnny's feet moved back n-forth in the broken in boots as they drudged through the thick dirt, his heart fluttering all the while in his chest. Squirrels scattered in every direction with every step. Johnny stared to his right into the nearby fields watching the workers in hooded sweatshirts walk together through the dirt like cops looking for evidence in a crime scene. His gaze returned to Angelina, so close to him now, he could smell the perfume on her neck. "I can take care of those critters for you too," Johnny smiled as he saw her agreeing with a nod.

As they arrived at Angelina's driveway, Johnny tugged at his beard. Angelina glanced back and surprisingly offered to shave his beard. She told him she still had her late husband's razor and the rest of the gear to complete a shave. Johnny couldn't believe his ears as he sat in the wicker chair on the back porch falling madly and deeply in love with every stroke of the razor. "Don't smile," she warned, "or I will wind up cutting you. This razor is still very sharp. My husband used it the day he..."

Her tears fell onto his forehead sliding onto his lips. Standing up, Johnny watched one more tear fall down her face. He took a breath, a big chance, and kissed her gently on the lips, Angelina's eyes rested downward unresponsive to his affection. "I will take care of you now my sweet Angelina my darling," coming up for just a moment of air. Angelina's arms dangled to her sides and then surrendered to her new lover pressing her lips against his.

She pulled away for a moment half stunned, and laughed. "You look just like Kenny Rogers...but he has a beard!" She laughed again pulling the Kenny Rogers look alike close to her body. It had been a long time since any man had held her. She was so ready to fall in love.

Many hours later, Austin got out of his van after a full day of surfing hoping for a hot meal at his mother's home. "Mom?" he called out holding her favorite bouquet of yellow daisies. "Moms,

where are you?" Pulling away the dead leaves from the stems he walked through her front door and into the dining room. He heard laughter and smelled cigarette smoke as he walked down the short hallway, his head cocked to one side. He stopped walking, turned around and headed back for the door.

"Is that you honey...? Angelina giggled as Johnny kissed her neck and bare shoulders. "Come on in honey," she smiled as Austin drove away.

The next morning, Austin confronted his mother in front of her home. "What are you doing wearing dad's ring that he gave you?" He looked up to the kitchen window and saw the homeless man he had brought home sipping a cup of coffee. "Who is that? Is that...No! You didn't mom! Oh...my...you don't even know him. Dad warned me, and I just didn't listen!"

"Huh?"

"Where is he off to?" Johnny asked his new bride, watching Austin drive away.

"Either horseback riding or surfing, that's what he usually does, John. What was he saying about my..."

"Well...I think it's time for your boy to get a job Angel. I know his girl Betty would appreciate it," fibbing just a little. John knew that Betty was most likely a gold digger since she didn't work either; showing up at Angelina's all the time in her

"beamer" convertible with her little friends. "It'll be good for him my love," trying so hard to remember the last time he himself had a paying job.

Six months later many of the circumstances in Austin's life had changed dramatically. Remember the pretty girl in the picture frame with the pink Chinese umbrella in the background? Gone. She married some rich rancher after she found out that her trust fund baby Austin was kicked out of his will complements of his new step dad. Some glitch he found in the will convinced Angelina to allow her son to make a living for himself. You will be doing him an act of kindness, make a big boy out of him, John had declared.

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The sun is out on Saturday; Austin's surfboard is securely attached to the top of his van. *A rich man is nothing, but a poor man with money*, his favorite W.C. Fields quote, he told his son Austin. A smile appeared on Austin junior's sleeping face... yes, I know dad, I miss you...



