

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

***HE'S THE  
WRONG  
GIRL***

**“Office Chemistry” by Joe Six-Pack  
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2011 Second Edition

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## OFFICE CHEMISTRY

“Did someone leave their coffee here?” James called out into the office.

He looked around the drab grid of cubicles and got no response. One person gave him a whole half-seconds’ worth of attention before going back to playing solitaire on her PC.

“Coffee? Anyone?” James said again. He held up the steaming mug to see if anyone recognized their ownage of this particular steam. “Left on the desk up here,” he continued. Still no response. “Anyone?”

James Wright shrugged and sat down at the huge reception desk. Maybe it was just a nice thing someone was doing for him, getting him coffee. First sniffing the coffee, and then sipping it, he decided it was okay to drink. According to a well-known but unavoidable rule of fate, no sooner had he taken a drink of the coffee than someone came around the corner to claim it.

“Wait! That’s...” The look on the man’s face was strangely earnest for such a minor problem. “Don’t drink...!”

James swallowed and then looked at the man. “I did ask if this was anybody’s coffee, Barry.”

Barry, a thin man of forgettable features, was blanched. He looked like he wanted to object in the strongest way possible, but he was holding his tongue. James figured it was because he knew he hadn’t a leg to stand on for claiming the coffee.

“Where’s Sheila? This was for her,” Barry said, looking around. “The coffee was for Sheila.”

“Sick leave,” James explained. “She called in today. Her mother’s not feeling well, so she’s flying out to spend a day or two with her.”

“*Not here?*” Barry said sharply, as if James were responsible for it. “What do you mean?”

“She’ll phone in today for messages,” James said, trying to belay Barry’s obvious fears. “Meanwhile, I’ll be picking up anything that needs attention to.”

“That’s why you’re sitting at her desk?” Barry objected.

James looked a little nonplussed. “That’s why I’m getting some stuff from her email.”

“This isn’t good,” Barry said to himself before leaving abruptly. “Not good.”

“Do you want me to give her a message when she calls?” James asked as he walked away. He got no response. “Okay then.”

He sat back down in Sheila’s chair and began to sift through her email. Not her personal email, but all the business stuff. She was responsible for creating those



spreadsheets everyone in the southwest region depended on, and he was going to have to do his best and make them on his own. He didn't like his chances, but he was given little choice.

Sheila was the lynchpin of the office, the most dependable person James knew. She was always at work, always pleasant, and even when swimming upstream against a torrent of requests, paperwork and deadlines, she still came through. All in all, she seemed to know more about running the business than the people who were running the business.

Too bad she was all work and no play. Sheila was only able to talk about office

stuff, and didn't seem to even have a thought about life outside it. She was a very private person. She was someone James could easily see being a decent wife or mother, but Sheila never seemed to have any other interests besides the office.



He still liked her and admired her, and wanted to come through for her, so he started to get to work on gathering the data for those daily spreadsheets. They'd be due in two hours, and he didn't want to screw it up, if only for Sheila's sake. He didn't want to leave a smudge on her record of dependability. For now, though, since he had to man the big reception desk for a few minutes, he had to pretend like he cared about the people arriving in the lobby. But it was worth it, because when Sheila got back, and he could tell her everything was okay and he'd taken care of it, he'd enjoy seeing that fleeting smile on her plain, spectacled face. He'd be satisfied to make her happy for a moment.



Maureen Newell had just popped her head out of her office for a split-second, and just that quickly, her whole day was ruined. "Hello, Barry," she said to the man waiting outside.

"Oh. Hello, Maureen," Barry replied, looking worried. "Did you know James is at Sheila's desk?"

"He's filling in for her today, Barry," Maureen said, loathing the conversation already. Barry was a toad, who seemed to enjoy getting people in trouble. A tattle-tale. Knowing Barry's penchant for formalities, she felt the need to make James's work official. "He has my permission to be at her desk."

"Someone should have sent out a memo," Barry said. "At least seven days in advance."

That's what Maureen loved about Barry - there was no problem a pointless rule couldn't make worse. "Is there something you wanted to talk to me about, Barry?"

"Oh." Barry said, coming back to his point. "I just got your tea for you, Maureen." He handed over the mug in his hands. "And I wanted to tell you that I respect you."

Maureen looked at him cockeyed. This was so far out of character for him, she could only be suspicious. Ever since he had gotten attached to the Huberson steamroller, he did little else but brown-nose his new boss. Max Huberson was skyrocketing through the company, getting promoted almost every other month or two. He was just a supervisor last year. Now he was vice president in charge of research and development, which made him the head of the division they all worked in. Barry was going right along with him, as his assistant. Maureen hated them both. Not because they were successful, but because they were jerks to everyone. Why did the assholes always get the top jobs in this company?

But that was business for you.

“Thank you, Barry,” Maureen said, accepting the mug. She checked to see if the tag hanging over the rim was her usual brand. Surprisingly, it was. “Was there anything else?”

Barry still stood there, waiting for something. “I think relationships are built on respect. Whether personal or business.”

“I see,” Maureen said, trying her best to end this. He still stood there, like a gargoyle perched on a ledge. “I’ll see you later on,” she added. Usually her broader, middle-aged physique and scowling wrinkles were enough to tell someone when the conversation was over. As office manager, she carried that kind of weight.

Barry remained in place. Maureen sighed and turned her back to him, and walked away, sipping the tea. It was still a little hot. By the time she sat at her desk, though, Barry was no longer haunting her doorway.

“Shame he couldn’t stay for lunch,” she mumbled to herself.



At the sink in his bathroom the next morning, James tugged at the long strands of hair that were growing at the back of his neck. “Need to get that cut,” he said to himself in the mirror. “Again,” he added, remembering his last haircut was just eight days ago. He spied the time and rushed through the rest of his morning routine. Combing through his hair, he found it unusually thick, in addition to being too long. “Must have not washed it very well,” he thought.

He wildly grabbed what he needed, stuffed it all in a briefcase, grabbed a coat and sprinted out the door.



As James hurried into the office to avoid being late, he stopped by the coffee machine for his usual cup a’ joe. But the machine was out of order. “Hey the machine’s not working,” he said to his friend Alex as he passed by his desk.

“Nice tie,” Alex replied.

James looked down. In his rush he had grabbed the exact wrong thing. A silk pink tie. A gift from his mother. “Whoops,” he said.

“They’re takin’ the machine out of here today,” Alex said, addressing the original issue. “They’re gonna replace it. There’s a thing about it in your email.”

Sure enough, when James got back to his desk, there was an email from Barry, saying they were going to have an outside company provide coffee services

every morning. James needed to fill out a form to put in his vote for what types of coffee to be made every day. The top three would be the only types brewed. Yet another victory for executive foolishness.

James wasn't too put off. Anything had to taste better than the greasy weak broth they previously made here. Especially yesterday's stuff. As bitter as anything he'd ever tasted.

"Hello, James. Good Morning," Maureen said, seeing him seated at Sheila's desk. "Don't let Barry catch you sitting here. He'll have a fit."

"God forbid," James replied.





“Nice tie,” Maureen said.

“Is everyone going to give me grief about the tie?”

“No, I mean it. I like the tie.” Maureen clarified. “Pink’s your color. Not a lot of guys can wear it, but you can.”

“Thanks. I guess.”

“Good morning,” Max Huberson said, entering the office. James straightened up a little in the presence of the executive. Maureen, unimpressed, took a sip of her tea.

“Morning.” James and Maureen said almost at the same time.

“Morning. How’s everybody feeling today?” Huberson seemed a little overly transfixed over Maureen sipping her tea. Then his attention shifted to James. “Where’s Sheila?” He said sharply, seeing James seated there.

“She’s with her sick mother,” James replied.

“Said she may be back tomorrow,” Maureen added, “but she wasn’t one hundred percent sure.”

“So, James is taking her place?” Huberson said, angrier than he should have been. “And no one sent out a memo?”

Great minds think alike, Maureen thought to herself. Barry and Huberson were really two of a kind and deserved each other. “I told your assistant.”

“Barry!” Huberson yelled across the office. “Barry!”

In no time, Barry scuttled his way to his bosses’ side. “Yes, Mr. Huberson?”

James and Maureen looked at each other, ready to see a rare, unexpected delight. The boss was going to chew out his assistant. In public.

“Did you know about this?” Huberson said, pointing at James.

Barry fidgeted for a brief moment. “The information had been recently passed on to me...”

Huberson’s face went beet red. “You know how this affects everything, don’t you?” He barked. “Of course you don’t. You’re too stupid.”

No one said anything, but Huberson gathered his things and marched off to his office. “I need to have a discussion with you.” He was halfway there before adding, “right now, Barry!”

James watched the two men close the doors behind them, fighting the urge to go and put his ear to the wall so he could hear it. “Wouldn’t want to be him,” he said to Maureen. “Mr. Huberson can be a real animal at times.”

“I suppose.” Maureen said, sipping her tea. “I just feel sorry for Barry. I respect him.” She turned to head back to her office. “Did I just say I *respect* Barry?”



James' attention quickly returned to other important matters. Like his hair. He could just see a wisp of hair coming into his field of vision from above his eyes. His hair was just growing out of control, and he needed to get it cut today. At lunch, if he could manage it. But his usual clips place was at the mall, across town, near his apartment. Quickly, he flipped through Sheila's contacts and found the name of her stylist.

"What to do think?" The stylist asked him when she was done. "It makes you look younger, if you ask me."

James agreed. It was cut much like he usually had it, a part on the side and combed over his forehead, but the mass and thickness of this cut did make him look younger. "I like it," he said. He took another two looks in the mirror. This stylist was very good. "Hey, can I set up a regular monthly appointment?"

"How about weekly?" She replied.

"Sounds great," James answered, although he had no real idea why a man would need to get his hair cut once a week.



It was the first day of the weekend, and James and Alex had gotten together to finish work on the motorcycle James had been working on for the better part of a year. A few more weekends, and it would finally be done.

"This is gonna be one nasty hog, dude," Alex said, wiping the grease off his hands with a rag. "I can't wait to see this screamin' down the interstate."

It had been a lot of hard work. James stood back to take a look at it for himself. It was a huge bike, an '88 Harley Touring with leather saddlebags. It was decked out all in chrome, with a black gas tank that was detailed with flames painted on the side. "It's sure going to be impressive," he said.

"Got that right," Alex agreed. "You gotta let me ride it once and a while."

James sighed and turned to his friend. He wasn't absolutely sure why he was going to say what he was about to say, but it just felt right. "You want it? Take it."

"What?" Alex said, shocked. "Don't fool with your pal, now."

"No, I mean it," James said, scratching his head. "I'm just not into it anymore. I mean, it was a great idea for a project... but now..."

"Now that it's over, you want to start another project, right?"

*No, not really,* James thought to himself. He had just gotten tired of the idea of

driving a bike. It sounded good at one time, but he just didn't see the appeal in it anymore. It just looked so large and dangerous. He would never be able to handle that monster. Best to leave it up to a real man like Alex. "You got me," James lied. "Time to move on to the next one."

"You're serious, now?" Alex said again.

"Yeah, I've just kinda had my fun with it." He scratched his chest. "Can you take it today?"

"Sure!" Alex said, already seeing himself riding it down the road. "I got my truck. I can take it."

"Good."

"And as soon as it's done, I'll let you have the first go at it."

For some reason, James was also picturing how good Alex was going to look on it, driving down the road. "Don't worry about it. Maybe you can just give me a ride on it sometime."



James sat at his new desk. The reception desk. Well, it wasn't *formally* his, but he had pretty much claimed it now. Sheila would be back at some point to take back control like only she could, but word had come down that Sheila's mom had not improved, and the day or two off had now turned into a longer leave of absence. Until then, though, it was his to use. James was sipping some of that delicious new coffee that they were now serving while flipping to the comics page of the newspaper when Maureen arrived. "Hey! G'morning!" James said, cheerily.

"Morning!" Maureen replied, almost as enthusiastically.

"Wow! Did you get a tan?" James asked.

Maureen's skin was a few noticeable shades darker than it usually was. "You know, it's the strangest thing," she said. "My skin is just darker all over. All I did was a little gardening yesterday, and I got the best tan of my life!"

"Well, good for you, Maureen." James said with a smile. Behind that grin, he was wondering exactly what was causing him to be so energetic all of the sudden. Maybe that coffee had a few extra shots of caffeine in it.

"I like your hair like that," Maureen said, returning the good feelings. She, too, was wondering exactly where all this kum-ba-yah attitude had come from. She hated Mondays. Normally she felt like biting the head off a small dog on Mondays.

James rolled his eyes. "I just cut it!" He said, exasperated. It was already coming down over his eyes.

“What, like last month?” Maureen asked.

More like this morning. “It just keeps growing.”

Maureen was just in too good a mood to do much but complement. “Well, long hair suits you.” She looked James over briefly. “In fact, I love your whole look.”

James wasn’t aware he had a ‘look.’ The only thing he had done today was get rid of the tie and roll up the sleeves of his dress shirt. The sleeves were too long on this shirt and they kept covering his hands.

“Morning,” Barry said, speeding by the two.

“Good morning, Barry!” Maureen said as bright as day. “It’s going to be a great day!” *Good God, what has come over me*, Maureen thought.

James was massaging his chest through his shirt. “Maureen, do you think swelling in my chest is a bad sign? Do you think I should see a doctor?”

“You know, I was talking to Barry just the other day, and he was talking about his breathing exercises. Did you know he does Yoga? I found that fascinating.”

“I mean, they’re getting puffier every day. I even think they’re starting to look like breasts.”

“He does these types of exercises where he breathes in and out deeply to clear his mind. He said it helped him mellow out after a tense day.”

“And they’re really sensitive. I’ve put tape over the nipples so they can’t keep rubbing against the insides of my shirt. That was driving me nuts.”

“‘Mellow out.’ What a wonderful phrase. I think that’s good advice. I think we could all try and ‘mellow out’ a bit.”

“So what do you think?” James asked Maureen.

“Oh, it’s something to think about, that’s for



sure,” she replied. “Anyway, I’ll be in my office if anyone needs me.”

“Yeah,” James said, still poking at his chest. “I should probably see a doctor.”



Barry was cringing. He was recoiling. He had just dropped the report on Maureen’s desk. The report, which had left Maureen’s office crisp and white was now soaked with red ink and had post-it notes exploding from its’ pages. What



had been all clean and pristine was being retuned as the Frankenstein's monster of in-house reports. And now, Barry was feeling like a weather man, lashed to a sign post, reporting live from the heart of Hurricane Maureen.

"You do *not* honestly expect me *and* my department to be able to get this done by *Thursday*, do you!?" Maureen bellowed. "That is total *bullshit!*"

"We've already committed to Thursday, we can't push it back," Barry said. He tried his hardest to look determined, but his chinless face, balding head and english rim glasses didn't intimidate anyone. "There's no way to extend the deadline any further. Mr. Huberson is already putting himself out on a limb by giving you this much time."

"Mr. Huberson can take his report and *stick it up his ass.*" Maureen said. "That brown-nosing sycophant will give us a *reasonable* amount of time to get this down, or I'll go in there *right now* and *ram* these revisions down his *cock-sucking throat!*"

"Maureen! *Please!* We have to get this done!" Barry begged – more for mercy than anything else.

"If I had every person on my staff working *twenty-four seven* until Thursday, we'd only get *half way* there! There's more chance of Mr. Huberson getting *laid* by the Virgin Mary than getting this report done by Thursday!"

Barry was going to give it one more try. "We *have* to do this, Maureen. There's no way out! This *has* to get completed! I'd like to give you alternatives, but there *aren't* any!"

"Bullshit! Huberson called the meeting, he can cancel!"

"That's just going to make him look bad!" Barry objected.

"*Look bad!*" Maureen bellowed. "Look bad?" Then she took a breath. And another. And another. She was trying to do those relaxing breathing exercises. "I just need to mellow out," she said to herself, "and treat people with respect."

Barry watched on as Maureen slowly, breath by breath, got her emotions down under control. She opened her eyes again and took another look at the pile. She started to flip though the pages. "The least we can do is try," she said.

"Huh what?" Barry said. Had he heard that correctly? "Uh... Yes. That's all we're asking."

Maureen scratched her chin. "I think if we use all our resources, we can... We'll have it done."

Barry wasn't certain he had just won the argument. He never won arguments. "Great." He pushed his glasses back up on the bridge of his nose. "Good."

"We just have to mellow out and deal with what fate gives us," Maureen said, a slight smile coming to her lips.

"Work smarter, not harder," Barry suggested.

Maureen's lower left eyelid twitched. But she smiled. "I believe you're right, Barry. That's very good advice."



"This time, just buzz it." James said, resigned to get control of this hair problem once and for all. "Fire up your electric shears and mow that mess away."

The old man who was to cut his hair shook his head like a disapproving grandfather. "You really need to see your barber more often. You can't let it grow out of control like this."

"Yeah." James grumbled, knowing his last haircut was just a day ago. How was he going to budget this? He was paying more for people to cut his hair than he was for utilities. Every time had had to find a new barber, too. It was to embarrassing to go to the same place back to back. He was having it cut twice a day now.

"It's a nice head of hair, though." The barber commented. "Might as well enjoy it while you can, before it all falls out." He pointed to his own receded hairline as proof.

He would welcome that right now, James thought to himself. He might just like that option.

"So you going to college?" The barber asked.

"I'm thirty two." James replied.

"Oh. You've got a young face, there. Makes you look like a kid."

James looked up into the mirror to take a look. He did look younger. He had assumed it was the hair that was making him look this way. But maybe it was something else. His cheeks were higher than he remembered them, his lips redder and fuller. And his eyes were missing that world-weary appearance he had grown used to seeing in the mirror.

"You sure you're thirty-two." The barber said, skeptically.

"Yes." James said, a bit put off by the question. "I was thirty-one last year, and next year I'll be thirty three."

"Just never grew a beard, I guess." The barber said.

James looked at himself in the mirror again. That was true, he hadn't shaved in days. Yet it really hadn't even struck him until now. Why hadn't he noticed? In fact, there didn't seem to be any trace of hair on his face at all. This was insane, and it was the last straw.



“Maureen, I need to take a few hours off tomorrow for a doctor’s appointment,” James said, coming into Maureen’s office.

Maureen was thumbing through a copy of *Vibe* magazine on her desk. She looked up briefly to register with James. “Nothing serious I hope.”

“Uh, just... Just going to have something checked out. I’m probably overreacting.”

“Mmm-hmm,” Maureen was too busy reading her magazine to pay full attention. “Well, good.”

“Thanks. I’ll make it up with overtime this week, I’m sure. Any word on Sheila?”

Maureen decided to break the hold the magazine had on her. “She’s saying it may be a while. Her mom is doing better, but she’s going to need to...” Maureen was taking a look at James for the first time that morning. “You’re trying something new today?”

James was tired of people commenting on his appearance. His hair was growing out of control, so he had tied it back in a pony tail, with a few loose hairs sweeping across his face he had to brush away every few minutes. And with the problem he was having with his chest, he had decided that wearing his shirt untucked and loose would be the best way to hide the severity of the swelling there. “Can’t someone try something new without everyone making a smart remark?” He said.

“I was just going to compliment you on it. I think we should be allowed to dress how we feel. There’s no need for a dress code around here. I’m probably going to ask Barry to see if he won’t get rid of it.”

“That’s all I need — to get Barry on my case,” James said. “Is it me or is that tan of yours getting darker?”

Maureen checked her arm. “I guess,” she said. It didn’t seem to be much of a concern for her. “I was going to ask, do you know where I can rent some old movies around here? Some old seventies stuff?”

James had to think for a minute. “You could probably get them on the internet. There’s lots of places that do that.”

“I wanted to watch them tonight. Waiting a few days for them to mail it to me doesn’t really work for me.”

“I’m not that familiar with the area. But I’ll ask Ruth. She lives around the corner.”





“Hey, Ruth.” James said, walking up to her desk. Ruth was a district manager for the Midwest, and spent much of the day on her phone while furiously typing emails on her computer. Today, though, she seemed a little distracted. She was doodling on her post-it notes, drawing little pictures. She was chewing gum and popping the bubbles as she twirled her hair with her free hand.

“Oh, hey,” Ruth replied. “What’s the sitch?”

“I was going to ask if you knew anywhere you could...” James took a second look at Ruth. “Are you doing something with your skin? It looks amazing.”

Ruth shrugged. “Nope. Looks like it always has.”

James was sure that wasn’t true. Ruth’s skin was clear and perfect. It was creamy white and smooth. She had the skin of a teenager. Which was odd, since they had just had a fortieth birthday party for her. James didn’t remember her looking so young.

But it wasn’t important. “Hey, Maureen was curious if there’s a good video store or rental place in the area with old seventies films.”

Ruth just rolled her eyes and looked exasperated. “*Gol!* How would I know? I don’t go out and rent video, I get everything off my iPhone. Only you old farts get things like ‘DVDs.’ That’s so *ancient*.”

“So you don’t know of any places, then.” James clarified.

“*No*,” Ruth said, again rolling her eyes and acting like answering was the most tiring thing she could do. “Why doesn’t she just use the internet like a *normal* person?”

“Yeah, I suggested that. She wasn’t ready to do that.” He thought for a moment. “Okay, thanks, Ruth.”

“Asta,” she replied, going back to doodling and blowing bubbles.



“This is just asking *too much*, Barry. This is truly *over the top*.” Maureen said, restraining herself from physically accosting the small, unimposing man. “There’s no way we can take on *another* project while we’re *still* finishing up the revisions on the report.”

Barry was trying to head out the door, dumping and running, but now he had to explain himself. “This isn’t a request, Maureen. These figures need to be checked and tabulated before the end of the day. *Period*. I need the excel files in my email before you leave tonight.”

“This.” Maureen said, building. “This, is a steaming fragrant pile of donkey shit!” She yelled. “I can’t put up with your massive incompetence any more, you *sawed off little runt!* You’re going to have to do this *yourself* if you want it

done! I'm not going to *touch* this until we're done with the revisions, and that's the *final word!*"

"But Mr. Huberson said..."

"Tell Huberson to *suck it!*" Maureen hollered.

"That's insubordination!"

"That's the *way it is*, Barry!" Maureen said. "And that's the way..." She faltered. "That's..." She then took a deep breath. She needed to mellow out. She needed to take it easy. "I'm sorry Barry. I didn't mean to yell at you like that. Tell me, when are you leaving tonight?"

"Uh... About four." Barry said.

Maureen just put a pleasant smile on her face. "Well, we'll have to have it done by four then."

"Good," Barry said. Lacking any common sense, he decided to push his luck. "And maybe if you just did your job instead of barking at me, we could avoid these sort of confrontations."

Maureen looked at him with fire in her eyes. But when her mouth opened, that fire had suddenly been extinguished. "You know me, Barry. I just want to keep things mellow. Fighting isn't something I'm into. If you need those figures by four, hey, that's cool with me. I can respect that."

Barry smiled to himself when he realized he had won another argument with Maureen. She used to be such a pain in the neck. She always was finding some excuse not to do the things he told her to do. But lately, she had been stopping in the middle of her tirades and giving in. Why, Barry had started to believe he actually had some authority around here.

Ever since he and Mr. Huberson had put their plan into action, the office had been changing. Changing for the better, as far as Barry was concerned. Although he wasn't happy with getting so small a say in what was going on, he did have Maureen.

"Hey, Barry," Maureen said, resting her smiling face in her hands. "Let's not fight. We should be working together. I'm going to grab a drink down on the corner after work. Maybe you could join me?"

Well, this was certainly a new development, Barry thought to himself. "I'll see if I can fit it in," he said.



James was spending more and more time in the company bathroom, trying to deal with what was happening to his body. As he leaned forward into the mirror, he really wasn't sure what he was seeing. His hair had been growing out of

control, and he was just about to give up on trying to even tie it back. He would put a rubber band at the base of his neck, and then by lunch, the rubber band would be down between his shoulders.

He still hadn't shaved in days, and in fact, he couldn't find much trace of his beard stubble anymore. The skin on his face was totally smooth. His lips seemed bigger and redder. His cheeks were more pronounced. His eyes looked larger. But maybe he was just exaggerating things. It could be just a little bug he had caught. That could happen, right?

*But what about the rest of him?* He had been losing weight like crazy. He could see his ribs when he took his shirt off. His legs were scrawny thin. And if such a thing was possible, he had been losing some height.

He was shrinking, he knew it. His pant legs needed to be cuffed when he wore them, rolling them up and folding them twice. Today, he almost needed to do it three times. And even then, he had taken to wearing a pair of cowboy boots that put an inch or two back.

Then there were the things on his chest. He didn't want to call them what they were. He didn't want to even think about it. But there they were, round and firm, bobbing around under his skin. He wrapped a bandage around them most of the time, yet this was becoming more ineffective every day. Especially since whenever he touched them, he shivered. They were so sensitive. So satisfyingly sensitive. He could spend hours just brushing his fingertips lightly on his skin, drinking in the sensations.

In fact, since he was on a fifteen, why couldn't he...?

*No.* He had to get back to work. *Now.*

Maybe at lunch.

But before he went back to work, he needed to relieve himself at a urinal. It was happening more and more frequently, and he had to make quick trips to the toilet. His mom used to be like that, in fact most women he had known were like that. Such strange things were happening to him lately.

Maybe if the hair growth was stopped, everything else would be back to normal. It made sense to him. If his body were spending so much energy making this mass of hair, maybe it was stealing from the rest of his body. It was using all its' hair-growing power on his scalp and that's why his beard was gone. Not to mention the hair on his arms and legs, too. Gone.

So, it seemed to him that his bones and flesh were probably shrinking because all the mass of his body was being made into hair. That meant that he had to go to the bathroom all the time because of all the waste products his supercharged body was making. See, it all made sense. All he needed was an anti-hair pill or something, then he'd be fine.

While he was standing at the stall figuring this out, James was still digging



through his underwear looking for his snake to drain. Finally, he found it, hidden away in there somewhere. Boy, it was nestled in there good.



Maureen was trying to pour herself another cup of hot water for her tea when Mr. Huberson stuck his head in the employee break room.

“Getting some tea, huh?” He said.

The oppressing dread of trying to make small talk with her boss caused her to audibly grunt. “Yes. Getting some tea.”

“You like the tea?” He asked.

“It’s fine,” Maureen replied.

“It’s, uh, pretty good, isn’t it?” Huberson added. “I’m a coffee man, myself.”

“Everybody has different tastes.”

“Yes, yes they do. Especially in this office.” Huberson watched closely as Maureen picked out a tea bag from the large crate of bags the company provided.

“The green ones, huh?” Huberson inquired.

“Mint.”

“Ah!” Mr. Huberson said, nodding his head. He then checked his watch. “Well, I have to be in on a conference call. I’ll talk to you later.”

Relieved, Maureen took a long breath to blow her hot mug cool.

“Oh, and fight the power,” Mr. Huberson quickly added before leaving.

“Fight the power!” Maureen said, lifting her fist into the air.



The doctor was examining his notes while James sat atop the butcher-paper-covered bench awaiting comment. “Looks to me like you’re in tip-top shape, James,” he finally said.

“Uh...” James was floored by that remark. “Well, Doctor Lumbago, the fact is that I’ve lost nearly a third of my weight, my hair is growing like bamboo, and there’s the problem with my chest.”

“Just some swelling. Antibiotics should get that under control,” the doctor said.

James’ jaw dropped. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Look, I don’t pretend to know much about medicine, but I know I’ve got a problem. *A major problem.*”

The doctor continued to go over his notes, peering over the half-height glasses that made him look more intelligent than he sounded. “I think you should leave the medical diagnoses to the professionals, James. As a trained doctor, I can tell you, you are as healthy as you’ve ever been.”

James wasn’t getting through to him. “I may be healthy, doc, but I’ve lost fifty pounds in two weeks, my hair is growing a foot every forty-eight hours and...”

Right as James was about to get to the breasts jutting from his chest, the doctor’s attractive nurse entered the room, trying to not interrupt and failing miserably. “Here’s a message for you, doctor,” she said, handing over a small pink slip of paper.