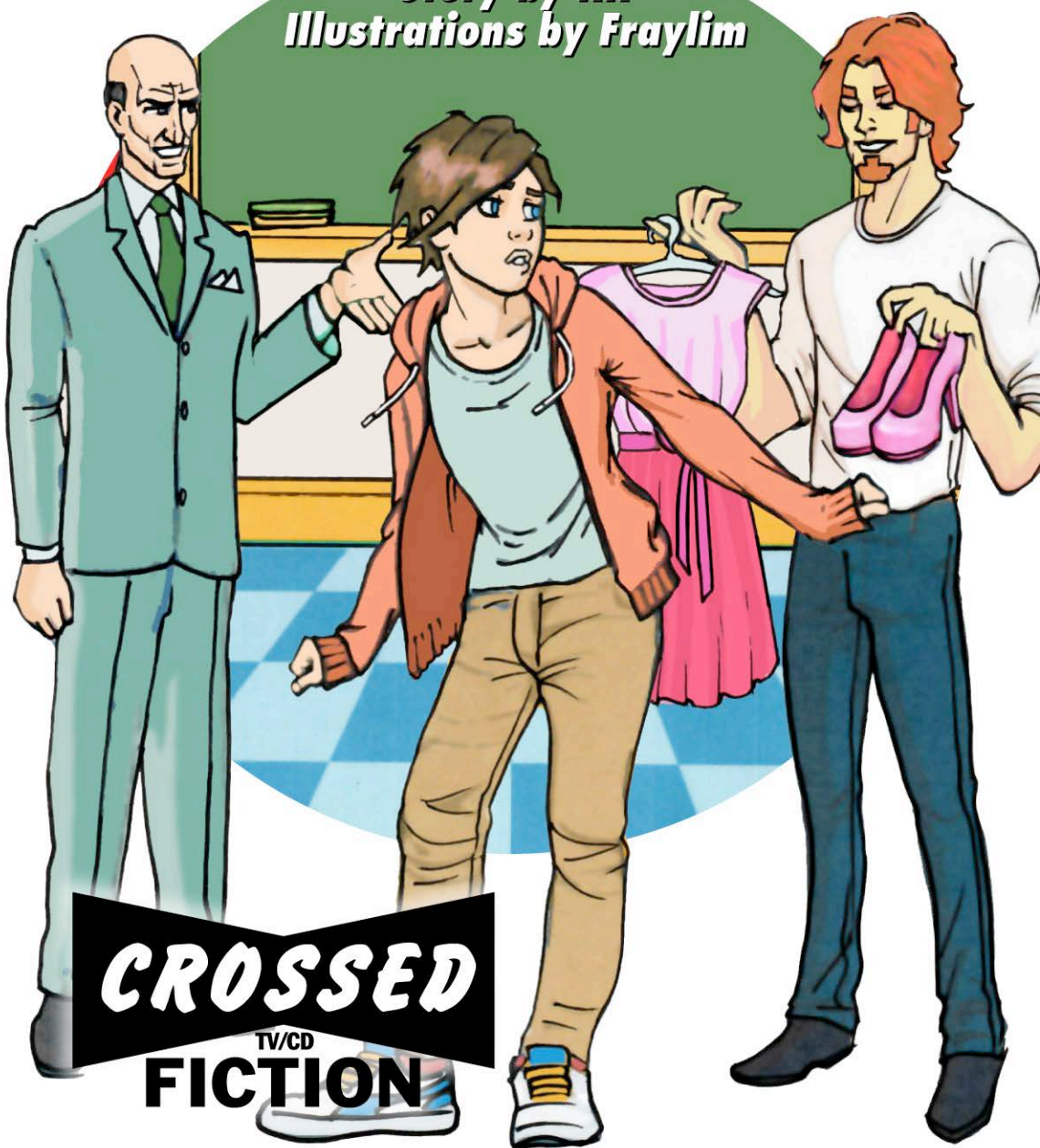


ADULTS ONLY

109 pages **32** illustrations

THE BOY'S GUIDE TO GIRLHOOD

Story by KK
Illustrations by Fraylim



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THE BOY'S GUIDE TO GIRLHOOD

**Story by KK — Illustrations by Fraylim
A Crossed Fiction Story**



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THE BOY'S GUIDE TO GIRLHOOD

Principal Hannibal T. Buckley, the 28-year veteran leader of Faribault High School, home of the Fighting Gamecocks, was a man with a problem. Throughout his long stewardship of Faribault, in the long annals of its illustrious history, his school had been lacking in the most essential mission of its charter. The shame of Faribault cast a long shadow over his legacy, and Hannibal T. Buckley, the last caretaker of the proud Buckley family name, felt the ignominy like a broadsword thrust through his still beating heart.



Oh, the school wasn't suffering through a budget crisis. It was a steady mid-pack performer academically. The teachers did their jobs adequately enough, the students were docile and the parents rarely caused any problems. No, this was worse than all that.

The source of Principal Buckley's mortification?

The football team had never, in his 28 years, won more than two games in a season.

The Fighting Gamecocks were the perpetual cellar dwellers of the Hi-Valley Conference, and the doormat of the state double-A teams. No matter how many coaches Principal Buckley fired, no matter how much equipment he bought, no matter how much shouting he directed towards the players and coaches, no matter how much of the budget he spent building his stadium, no matter how many academic rules he broke for the players, that team just could not win if their lives depended on it.

Sadly, he knew why. His students were the biggest bunch of wimps ever assembled. The school district was full of the sons of white-collar workers who never did a day of hard work in their lives, and were adverse to breaking a sweat. His student body was made up of computer programmers, mathematicians, scientists and artists. Loafers, the whole lot of them. Loafers. That was Principal Buckley's curse.

Without the warriors he needed to truly wage warfare on the gridiron, there was no hope. He planned to retire at the end of the year, and his last chance to save his reputation was slipping through his fingers. So far, the team was 0 and 2, with eight games to go. It was his final opportunity to scale the mountain that had always thwarted him.

Yes, Buckley had far bigger concerns than the two trouble-makers waiting outside his office to be disciplined. With a sigh, he turned away from the blank spot on his wall where he had always intended to show a championship banner and cleared his throat. "Enter!" he barked, and the two students immediately slunk inside.

The first to enter was no surprise: Rex Manning, resident "bad boy" and huge pain in Principal Buckley's you-know-what. Rex had transferred to their school from New York after his parents' divorce, and he thought he was a real tough guy. Despite having only been a student there for two weeks, Buckley was rapidly becoming acquainted with him due to his tendency to get into fights and break rules. So far he seemed to be a loner, and naturally, the girls were eating it up, as if he was a character from one of their silly little romance novels. He was such a loner, he rejected them, too.

What concerned Buckley the most was that Rex was the answer he had been praying for. If Rex was on the football team, they had a chance. All his troubles and anxieties would be gone if he could get this kid to play. He was bigger than any other student, and bigger than most of the opposing players they faced. He could plow through tacklers like a shark through the sea. His bad attitude, stoked by the flames of combat, would be an untamed force of divine vengeance. Yes, with Rex on the team, his legacy would be complete, and Buckley and his ancestors could rest in peace. However, so far, Rex had shunned every attempt the principal had made to get him to join the football team.

"Sup, Principal Buckley," Rex said thuggishly, putting his hands in his pockets and scowling.

Principal Buckley didn't deign to reply, rather instead, he narrowed his eyes and turned his attention to the next arrival. He had to admit he was slightly surprised to see who Rex's partner in crime had been. Kenny Hart, the small, skinny boy who was staring at the floor and all but shaking with fright, had never been in his office before, to the best of his memory. He was a dweeby, eager-to-please sort, who sat in the front of classes and could often be found sucking up to teachers and "cool kids" in an inane attempt to get them to like him, which naturally, always backfired. It was a strange couple, indeed.

As Principal Buckley looked down at the offense that had been committed, however, he could guess exactly what had happened. Rex, being his usual trouble-making self, had no doubt gotten his hands on a can of spray paint and decided to have a little fun. Kenny had likely walked in on it, and, seeing an opportunity to impress a "cool kid" who was too new to the school to realize that Kenny was most definitely not a "cool kid," had reluctantly agreed to go along with it. Of course, both of them had been caught in the act by the school's janitor, and now both of them were here in his office awaiting punishment.



“Well, let’s see, boys,” Principal Buckley said, shuffling his papers. “Vandalizing school property with inappropriate language and... Homophobic slurs?”

"We're sorry!" Kenny blurted. "Right, Rex?"

Rex gave him a look of disgust.

"How do you know we were the ones who spray painted it?" Rex asked the principal. "We just found it in there, and I saw the can, so I picked it up out of sheer curiosity."

"Right, and the spray paint on your hands was because you were so interested in the crime you had to actually touch the graffiti," Principal Buckley said dryly. Rex grimaced and reverted to his usual facial expression of scowling. Kenny, on the other hand, looked near to tears.

"You know, the players on the football team don't have these kinds of troubles," the principal said, trying to insinuate something. "If you were on the team, you'd find that these kind of issues seem to get lost and forgotten about."

"But I don't even like football!" Kenny blurted.

The principal flicked his disgusted gaze at Kenny. *Not you, you idiot*, he thought to himself. *Criminy*.

"Well, this is very serious," Principal Buckley said, as a devious idea occurred to him. "Very. Homophobic slurs are not permitted here. We are a tolerant, progressive school, and this might just constitute a hate crime." He was going to just pressure Rex into joining the team. He'd threaten to lock him up in jail unless he signed up. Strong-arm tactics were what Principal Buckley was good at.

The boys exchanged a look, and even Rex appeared slightly worried. "What do you mean, a hate crime?" he demanded.

"Well, how am I to know this slur wasn't directed at a specific homosexual student in order to intimidate and frighten them?" Principal Buckley said, leaning back in his chair and folding his arms. "Hate crimes, as you well know, are no laughing matter. I know a judge who might even want you two tried as adults."

"What?" Kenny gasped. "Are you kidding? *What* homosexual student?"

That was an issue. As far as Principal Buckley knew, none of his students identified as homosexual. Still, he was going to keep the pressure on. "I'm quite serious," Principal Buckley said, lying through his teeth. Of course, everything he was saying was ridiculous, but the boys weren't exactly legal geniuses. "Obviously we don't know how many of our students are homosexual! With you creating such an oppressive atmosphere with your graffiti, they're obviously too intimidated to come out of the closet. And Rex, with your prior record of fighting, I don't think it would be out of the question to see jail time for this."

"Bullshit," Rex blurted. "Jail time? For some graffiti? No way!"

The boy was so insolent as to actually swear in his presence, the principal thought to himself. *Imagine that kind of anger at work on the football field!* "At

the very least, I'm sure your mother would be glad to hear recommendations for military schools," Principal Buckley said. "Of course, there's a way to make all of this go away."

The principal pulled out the consent forms for joining the football team out of his desk. He filled in "Rex Manning," on them and handed them over.

Rex whisked them off the desk with a bat of his hand and they fluttered to the floor. "No way."

"I'm giving you one more chance, Rex." The principal said. "It's this or face the severe consequences of your actions."

"Wait!" Kenny suddenly piped up. "Are you trying to bribe him?"

Both Rex and the principal just ignored the skinny boy.

"I'm not joining some homo football team and dress up in your fruity little football costumes to play your gay little game."

"Rex, this is it. No more chances after this."

"Whatever."

"I'm serious!" the principal said. "This will have ramifications!"

"Yeah, sure. I'm not doing it, so bring it on."

Well, that caught Buckley off guard. He wasn't prepared to have his bluff called. "Uh... I can't guarantee there won't be a court case... But at the minimum... Three weeks of sensitivity training, served here at school." He realized that didn't sound terribly severe, but it was the standard response the district mandated for these infractions. He had to make it sound more dire than it actually did. He tried to ratchet up the tension. "In front of all your friends. Where everyone knows you're in trouble. They'll talk!"



"I don't have any friends. What kind of sensitivity training?" Rex asked, folding his arms.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," Buckley said with a mysterious smile, again failing to make it sound threatening. "Could be anything. So... Are you in or out? Play football, or three, uh... *grueling* weeks of learning to be more tolerant and accepting of *alternative lifestyles*."

"I'm so scared," Rex said. "I'll do the dumb sensitivity training. Better than dressing up for football."

"I'm giving you one more chance!" Principal Buckley said, desperately. "I'll have everything ready to go on Monday. Hours and hours of role-play. Talking and exploring your inner feelings. Day after day of it."

"Fine," Rex said.

"I like talking about my feelings!" Kenny said, excitedly.

Both teenagers hurried away, eager to be out of the principal's office, leaving Principal Buckley to clench his hands in the air in impotent frustration. *He had him*, he thought to himself. *He had that kid dead to rights! He had all the cards! He should have been the star player on the team by now!*

Perhaps, just perhaps, it was this kind of ineffective pressure and influence was the reason the Fighting Gamecocks were the worst team in the state.



As soon as they were out of sight of the principal's office, Rex gave Kenny an angry shove. "What happened to denying the whole thing, huh?" he demanded. "You cracked like an egg!"

"Aw, come on, Rex, he was never going to buy that we just 'found' the graffiti already there," Kenny whined, rubbing his arm where Rex had struck him. "Look, we're just lucky he didn't call the cops on us!"

"Whatever, dweeb," Rex scowled. "As far as I'm concerned, this whole thing is your fault. All you had to do was keep a look-out!"

"Sorry, Rex," Kenny said, cowed. "But, I mean, the sensitivity training can't be that bad, can it? And at least we get to do it together, right? Like pals?"

"Dude, we are not friends," Rex snapped immediately. "Don't think that for a second. Now get lost!"

Totally crestfallen at yet another rejection, Kenny walked home alone. When he walked in the front door, as per usual, his family ignored him. His dad was on the phone, bossing people around as always, and his mom and older sister were in the middle of one of their usual fights. He almost wished that Principal Buckley *had* called his parents and the police — at least that way he'd be

noticed, for once.

Sighing, Kenny went upstairs to his room and locked the door behind him.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, Rex let himself into his empty house, since his single mother wasn't back from work yet. He was still fuming about getting caught — that stupid little shrimp Kenny hadn't heard the janitor approaching until it was way too late — and now he was stuck doing some kind of “learn to be nice” program for the next several weeks. It was better than football, at least. He went to his stereo system and turned up some heavy metal tunes, loud

enough to shake the walls, then flopped down on the couch, glaring at the ceiling angrily. What was sensitivity training supposed to even mean, anyways? He guessed it was still better than spending a week with Kenny cleaning the whole school, which was what he'd assumed the punishment would be.



It was late that night, after Buckley finished off his Hungry Man dinner and a two cans of Old Milwaukee, that he was staring out the window into the darkness, trying to understand how he had not been able to coerce Rex into being his new star player. He could almost hear the wailing of his dear Great Grandfather as his spirit cried in anguish. If there was one thing he would do before he left this mortal coil, Hannibal T. Buckley resolved, it was to win three games this season.

Now he had been outsmarted by some dime-store thug. An attitude in shoes. He went toe-to-toe with the punk and lost.

In fact, as he thought about it, that dumb kid actually seemed to prefer taking sensitivity classes. If he had known the kind of touchy-feely balderdash that went on in those sessions, he would have surely opted for football, Buckley told himself. Actually, now that he thought about it, was it possible that Rex actually *did* prefer learning about alternative lifestyles to playing ball?

The lonely principal turned away from the window and sat down in front of his 486 desktop computer and fired it up. While it spent the next seven minutes booting, Buckley was running the conversation with Rex back and forth in his mind. He seemed awfully fixated on homosexuals. That's what he was busted for, spraying graffiti about homosexuals, and he mentioned it more than once in their talk. There was no question he was bent out of shape on the subject.

Then there was that bit about "dressing up" and "football costumes." *Great Methuselah's Ghost!* Buckley thought to himself. *It wasn't possible!* A fixation on dressing up. Preoccupied with gay issues. A loner. No girlfriend. That tough-guy exterior. It made sense to him now. He had just read an article about it in *Principal Monthly!*

Checking psychological work-ups the district provided, he brought up page after page of reference on his computer. Analysis and reports. Break-downs and summations. Psychological profiles. They all confirmed his hypothesis.

Now he knew. Now he understood *what* Rex was. *Who* he was. What was inside his *mind*. Now, he just had to use that to his advantage. If he was right — and by God, he knew he was — Buckley was going to get that lousy kid on his football team.



When Monday morning rolled around, Kenny showed up to school with a feeling of dread. He'd hoped that Rex would have cooled down a little over the weekend and been willing to commiserate together over their soon-to-be punishment, but Rex didn't so much as look at him in the hallway, leaving him to scurry to his locker alone, as per usual. As he put in his combination lock sequence and opened his locker, he was surprised to see a small pink envelope flutter out. Suspiciously, he picked it up and opened it quickly, shielding it from view with his hand. What he read made his eyes widen.

Welcome to Principal Buckley's 3-Week Pro-Awareness Program for Tolerance of Alternative Sexual Lifestyles.

Kenny winced. What on Earth was this supposed to be? He was making it sound like he was some kind of crazy bigot! Sure, Rex's graffiti had included a few gay slurs, but those were among plenty of other, more equal-opportunity curse words as well. It wasn't as if they'd done anything actually homophobic.

He kept reading, frown deepening with each sentence.

In order to move towards a position of tolerance and understanding for people of alternative sexuality, you must first gain empathy for their lifestyle. Many students express their sexuality through their dress, grooming habits, and general appearance, even though it may



draw the ire of their peers. In order to gain empathy for their struggle for self-expression, you will report to the cosmetology classroom at the end of school today for a full makeover. Attendance is mandatory, and attempting to no-show will result in serious (jail-related) consequences.

Kenny gulped. He definitely did not like the sound of some kind of “makeover” in the cosmetology classroom, but he was even less thrilled by the idea of ending up in jail over some graffiti. He had a feeling that with his small stature and delicate looks, he would be getting a “pro-awareness” program of another kind entirely. He read to the bottom of the letter and grimaced at what he saw next.

The cosmetology students who have kindly volunteered to help you are unaware that you are being punished, and you will not, under any circumstances, dispel assumptions they might make about your sexuality based on the makeover you have requested.

Kenny stuffed the letter back into his locker and took out his books for his first period class, trying to put the impending appointment out of his mind.

However, that soon proved to be impossible. Kenny spent all day in a state of total distraction, dreading what was to come, and when the final bell rang he made his way towards the cosmetology classroom as if he were a condemned

man going to the gallows. He met Rex on the way, who, to his surprise, didn't look particularly worried.

"How bad do you think this whole makeover thing is going to be?" Kenny asked worriedly.

"Makeover thing?" Rex demanded. "What are you talking about?"

"Didn't you read the letter?" Kenny asked, raising his eyebrow.

"Nope," Rex said, putting his hands in his pockets. "But Principal Buckley just intercepted me on my way out the back and told me I was getting a free haircut, or something dumb like that."

Before Kenny could reply, they arrived at the door of the cosmetology classroom, which was promptly opened by a pair of grinning cosmetology students. "Cool!" one of them chirped. "The volunteers are here! Thanks for letting us practice on you guys."

"Uh, no problem," Rex said, giving the pretty girl a suave grin. "You can practice on me any time, babe."

The girl giggled, then showed them inside. There were two salon chairs awaiting them in front of the mirrors. Rex hopped into the first one with little hesitation, spinning in a little circle, while Kenny reluctantly sat down in the second one. "You must be Kenny, right?" one of the girls asked, draping a cape around him. Kenny sighed.

"Yeah, and you're Brenda," he said. "We've been in the same class since, like, grade school."

"Of course," Brenda said sweetly. "Well, Kenny, you must have been planning this 'new look' for quite some time. You sent us just a ton of examples! Don't worry, I think you'll look really good."

"Uh, thanks?" Kenny said, now more worried than ever.

"Now just sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride," she said, smiling.



An hour later, Kenny was finally faced with his reflection in the mirror. His mouth fell open when he saw what they'd done to him. He'd been more than a little worried, especially by the ear piercing gun and eyebrow tweezers, but his hair... The back and sides of his head had been cut very short, practically buzzed clean, while they'd used the length on top to create a huge mass of curls in a men's bouffant style. Maybe a more manly and rugged specimen could have gotten away with such a haircut, provided they were European and very metrosexual, but on Kenny, with his manicured eyebrows, total lack of facial hair, and newly-pierced ears, there was no denying it looked extremely, totally...

"Fabulous!"
Brenda sang.
"Don't you think?
We nailed it,
right?"

On the chair beside him, he could hear Rex sniggering. By comparison, he had gotten off lightly. His new haircut was a bit on the "metro" side, but they'd only plucked a few hairs off his eyebrows and even with one of his ears pierced, he still managed to pull off the look without compromising his masculinity. In fact, Kenny doubted anyone would even notice it in school the next day. His own haircut was another story entirely, and how was he supposed to explain it away to his parents?

The two boys left the cosmetology classroom, Kenny stumbling out in a state of shock, Rex swaggering as per usual, with Brenda's phone number, which had been pressed into his hand.

"How am I supposed to go to school like this tomorrow?" Kenny wailed, as soon as they were out of earshot. "I look like a total..."

"I suggest you don't finish that sentence, young man," boomed the authoritative voice of Principal Buckley. Both boys turned around to see the principal standing there with several large shopping bags in tow. "Well,



cosmetology has done an excellent job on you both. A-plus material. Now, all you need is wardrobe.”

“Hold on,” Rex said suspiciously. “I’m not dressing up like a fruitcake just to learn a lesson about not using slurs in my graffiti.”

“The fact that you consider it okay to use the term ‘fruitcake’ in a derogatory manner tells me you definitely need to learn this lesson,” Principal Buckley frowned. “But maybe you’d like to actually see my selections before you make me rescind my offer of an alternative to *jail*?”

“Uh, point taken,” Rex muttered, taking the offered bag and peering inside. To his relief, all he found were a few V-neck T-shirts in a slightly tighter style than he usually wore, and some skinny jeans that were currently fashionable no matter one’s sexual orientation. “Alright, fine,” Rex said. “So us getting haircuts and wardrobe adjustments is supposed to make us realize what it’s like to be gay?”

“Gay? No, no. That’s not what this is about. And this is just step number one,” Principal Buckley said, with a mysterious smile. “Remember, this is only the first week of three.” He handed Kenny the other shopping bag and marched away.

“How come my hair had to get bleached?” he whined, as soon as the principal was out of earshot. “And how come you only had to get one ear pierced?”

“Don’t ask me,” Rex said, snorting. “Maybe they had to work harder to counteract your natural manliness.”

“Very funny,” Kenny said darkly. “You’re just going to look like you started reading GQ, I’m going to look like I read... I dunno, Cosmol!” He peered inside the bag, hoping to find something similar to what Rex had been given. Instead, his face blanched. “Aw, no way,” he muttered.

“What?” Rex demanded, with a spiteful grin. “Let me see! We’re in this together, remember?”

“Yeah, right,” Kenny yelped, trying to hold the bag out of sight, but Rex quickly and easily wrestled it from him and removed its contents. Like Rex, he had been given several V-neck shirts, but with some clear differences. His had a much deeper neckline, were mostly in bright, feminine colors like pink or baby blue, and some of them, at least to his eye, appeared as if they wouldn’t even cover his belly button. He was supposed to wear a crop-top to school! And the pants that accompanied the shirts were even worse, a pair of tight white capris in a distinctly effeminate style. Lastly, there were a pair of cork sandals, that, unless he was very much mistaken, had a bit of a lift to them.

“Somebody is going to look *faa*abulous tomorrow,” Rex snickered. “Definitely goes with your new ‘look,’ doesn’t it?”

"I can't wear this stuff!" Kenny gasped. "I'll be the laughing stock of the school! Everyone will think that I'm... That I'm..."

"That's the point, genius," Rex said. "Bet you wish you weren't such a big homophobe now, huh?"

"You know I'm not," Kenny protested hotly. "And neither are you! This punishment doesn't fit the crime at all. We should be, I dunno, scrubbing graffiti off a neighborhood wall."

"I'll take a little lecturing and some free shirts that show off my muscles over that any day," Rex grinned. "See you in school tomorrow, princess."

Rex swaggered off towards the exit, leaving Kenny holding his new outfit with an expression of horror and displeasure. He'd only been the look-out, so why was he getting the worst of the punishment?



When Rex sauntered into the house with his new haircut and a bag of clothes, his mom barely batted an eye. "I like it," she said. "And the earring is very modern. Now, do you want frozen pizza or frozen lasagna?"

"Neither," Rex snapped. "How about you actually cook for once?"

"Well, excuse me, but after a long day of work I don't always have the energy to cook for my ungrateful lazy-ass of a son!" she snapped back. "I won't even bother asking how much you spent on new clothes when I'm barely paying the rent as it is."

"I didn't pay a cent, for your information!" Rex barked.

"Rex Manning, have you been shoplifting again?" his mother demanded, her eyes widening.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," Rex said in a mysterious voice, copying Principal Buckley's statement from earlier. Satisfied that he had managed to get under her skin, he headed up to his room and slammed the door shut for some privacy. Throwing himself onto the bed, he couldn't help but think about what Kenny had been stuck with. Boy, that was going to be something to see in person.

On the other side of town, Kenny, who was much less enthusiastic about the contents of his shopping bag, was just stepping inside. He'd stuffed the new clothes into his backpack and had managed to more or less hide his new haircut and earrings under a hooded sweatshirt. As he closed the door behind him, his older sister Sara waltzed by without even acknowledging his existence — so far, so good.

"Why so late, honey?" his mom asked, bustling out of the kitchen. "Were you at a friend's house?" she asked hopefully, knowing full well that Kenny was not exactly overloaded with friends to hang out with after school.

"Uh, no, I stayed late to help with a... Project," Kenny said evasively.

"Oh?" his mom questioned. "For what class?"

"Cosmetology," Kenny mumbled, hoping his mom wouldn't hear him. "Well, gotta go do homework, bye!" He raced up the stairs before she could ask him anymore questions. Once he was in the sanctuary of his room, Kenny dropped his hood and inspected the damage again in his mirror. The hairstyle was bad enough, but together with the studs winking from his earlobes and his newly-thinned eyebrows, it was unmistakably a very effeminate, girly-boy look. What were his parents going to say? Worried by their reaction, he was unable to concentrate on his homework, and when his mom finally called him to the dinner table he could barely bring himself to walk down the stairs. He drew the strings of his hooded sweatshirt tighter, knowing it was his only hope to avoid detection.

"Home-made lasagna!" his mom chirped. "This used to be your favorite when you were little, you know, Kenny."

"Wasn't it Sara's favorite?" his dad said quizzically, putting his phone away.

"Oh, that's right, it was Sara's favorite," his mom corrected. "So what was Kenny's favorite?"

His dad gave a helpless shrug, then, just as Kenny was sliding into place at the table, reached over and grabbed his hood. "Hey, no hats at dinner," he said. "You know the rules, Kenny, and..." He trailed off at the sight of his son's transformed appearance. "Oh," he managed. "A... A haircut."

"So you *did* say cosmetology!" Kenny's mom said triumphantly. "Was this for, um, extra credit, or something? I didn't even know you were in cosmetology."

"I'm not," Kenny sighed. "They needed volunteers, and, well..."

"You got your ears pierced?" his dad demanded, noticing for the first time.

"Jeez, Kenny, isn't that a little... A little much? You look..."

"Stylish!" his mom interjected hastily, shooting her husband a warning look.

"It's an interesting style experiment. Experimenting is totally natural."

Before Kenny could open his mouth to make up a better excuse, his sister strode into the room, and, upon seeing her younger brother, nearly bust her gut laughing. "Oh my god, you volunteered for the cosmetology girls, didn't you?" she demanded. "They really did a number on you! Let me get a picture!" She stuck out her phone and clicked several photos. "You even let them pierce your ears and pluck your eyebrows? Wow, Kenny. This is a new low in the sucking up to girls department."

"Ahem, let's just sit down and have dinner, alright?" their dad said loudly. "It's not a big deal. I'm sure if you don't like it, they'll buzz it off for free."

"Yeah," Kenny muttered vaguely, knowing he wouldn't be allowed to buzz it off until his three weeks of sensitivity training was complete, no doubt. He ate

his food as quickly as possible, then retreated back to his room before his sister could start teasing him again. Not long after, he was surprised by a knock on the door and his dad's voice.

"Hey, son, can I come in?" he asked.

"Uh, sure," Kenny said.

"Thanks," his dad muttered, walking in as he opened the door. "Look, Kenny, I know sometimes you don't get a lot of attention around here, so if this new haircut of yours is a way of acting out...?"

"It's not that," Kenny said hastily.

"Then, uh, is there anything you want to tell me?" his dad asked awkwardly. "I mean, I know you haven't had any girlfriends, but I sort of just assumed you were a late bloomer. If it's something else..."

"No!" Kenny protested, going beet red. For several moments he desperately wanted to tell his dad the truth, but that would mean admitting he'd been Rex's accomplice in the graffiti, and that would lead to the kind of attention Kenny absolutely didn't want — he'd seen his older sister punished harshly for far less by being grounded and having her stuff taken away. "It's just a new style I'm trying out, that's all," Kenny said at last.

"Okay," his dad said, obviously relieved. "Great. I'm glad we had this open discussion about it. Goodnight, Kenny."

"Goodnight, dad," Kenny said. As soon as his dad was out of the room, he sighed. Well, that had gone about as well as he could have hoped. The real challenge was on its way in the morning.



As tolerant as his dad had been the night before, Kenny still received an expression of befuddlement that lasted a good ten seconds when he came down the stairs wearing his new outfit. Kenny had considered playing sick and staying home from school, but, knowing he would have to face the music eventually, he eventually picked out the least-awful shirt (powder blue with a deep V-neck, but not too tight and not one of the ones that exposed his belly-button) and put on the white capris to go with it. With the whole ensemble, with the haircut, earrings, and sandals and all, to say he looked a little effeminate would be an understatement — he looked absolutely ragingly, flamboyantly gay and not afraid to show it.

"Part of the new style?" his dad asked weakly, as his sister walked in and nearly dropped her toast. Rather than bursting into laughter again, she gave him a quizzical look, then complimented him on putting together a matching outfit.

"Seriously," she said. "It looks, um, nice on you."

"Thanks," Kenny said suspiciously, still unsure if she was making fun of him or not. His mom took the whole thing like a champ, merely complimenting him on looking "put together, for once", whatever that meant, before handing him his breakfast and admonishing him not to miss the bus. With a deep feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach, Kenny grabbed his backpack and set off for the bus stop, his mind racing a mile a minute as he wondered how people would react to his clothes and haircut. The first hurdle was relatively easy, because the grumpy bus-driver didn't even look up at him as he climbed aboard. He was quick to grab a seat right at the front, sitting down as low as possible in the seat and hoping the top of his bleached hair wasn't visible.

Once he actually arrived at his high-school, however, hiding was impossible. Nearly the second he stepped inside, he could feel people staring at him in curiosity. Every time he heard someone laugh, he jumped, thinking they were laughing at him, and he avoided all eye contact as he made his way to and from class. Most people were too surprised to really formulate a question, not knowing whether to tease him about his hair, his earring, or his new fashion choices. He managed to keep his head down and avoid speaking to anybody in his first couple classes, but he knew it couldn't last. At lunch, he was going to have to walk through the whole cafeteria, and everyone was going to see him. The prospect was so unpleasant that he nearly skipped lunch altogether, but his hunger eventually steered him into the cafeteria line. He did his best to keep his eyes down as he stood in line, still waiting for someone to come up and shove him into a locker, or something, but it never came. Maybe Principal Buckley's tolerance policy had had more of an effect than he realized...

Still, it wasn't going to make finding a table any easier. Kenny lifted up his cafeteria tray, took a deep breath, and arrived at the moment he'd been so horribly dreading. As he turned around, it felt like more or less the entire school was staring at him in concert. Normally Kenny tried to hang around the jocks' table at lunch — sometimes they let him sit with them if he bought them all sodas — or else with the cool skateboarder types, who only allowed him in to make fun of him. Usually he ended up at the very edge of the band geek's table, or else the nerds, neither of which group liked him all that much either, since he was always sucking up to the cooler kids.

But now, he knew without a shadow of a doubt that he wouldn't be welcomed at any of those tables without someone asking the obvious, and that was one thing Kenny didn't think he could bear. Instead, keeping his head down, he slowly walked to the far end of the cafeteria and sat down by himself at the only unoccupied table, face burning with embarrassment. He imagined he could feel the concentrated stares of his classmates, and even hear a few snickers, as he slowly began to eat, resigning himself to at least the next week spent as a self-exiled social outcast until he could ditch his new "look." Didn't Principal Buckley realize this was the sort of thing that could haunt him until graduation?

"Sup," came a half-hearted grunt. Kenny looked up, and was shocked to see Rex, who usually spent lunch hour in the parking lot smoking cigarettes, throwing down his tray onto the table across from Kenny's own.

"H-hey, Rex," Kenny stammered. "I was just waiting for a couple friends, but they got, uh, sick, so..."

"Whatever," Rex said bluntly. "Principal Buckley intercepted me on my way out, apparently eating together is a mandatory part of our rehabilitation thing."

"Oh," Kenny said, staring down at his plate. For several minutes they ate in silence, then finally Rex sighed.

"This cafeteria food is crap," he said. "Wish they had curly fries every day."

"Me too," Kenny said, hopeful that maybe Rex hadn't written him off completely after all. He gave a hesitant smile. Rex didn't return it, but his face did soften into a slightly less angry look, which Kenny figured was about as much as he could hope for. Maybe, just maybe, this whole debacle would end up making the two of them friends through adversity?



As the week went on, and Kenny continued wearing his new wardrobe to school, and both he and Rex continued sitting together during lunch, it didn't take long for the rumors to start flying fast and thick. Kenny had never been the center of so much attention before, and it was almost kind of nice to be talked about for once, even if the subject was whether or not he was gay.

By the end of the week on Friday, the school had seemed to reach a consensus, because a big pack of girls, including Stephanie, the cheerleader, and Brenda, the cosmetology student, came over to his locker to congratulate him on "coming out."

"I had no idea," Stephanie admitted. "I mean, I totally should have guessed. Looking back on it, the signs were all there! We're all supporting you one-hundred percent, and you should totally hang out with us this weekend, right girls?"

"Definitely!" they all chimed in. One of them started to giggle uncontrollably, then asked, "So, we see you hanging out with Rex Manning a lot. Is he... Are you two... You know..."

"No!" Kenny blurted, blushing beet red. "I mean, uh, no. We're not... Dating. We're just friends. Barely."

"I get it," Stephanie said with a knowing wink. "Nothing official, right, girls?" They all tittered. "But he's a real dream," she continued. "I'm so sad he's gay! Is him showing up the reason you wanted to come out?"

"It's... Definitely related," Kenny said evasively.

"My gaydar is not worth a penny," one of the girls sighed. "I had no idea you were gay, and I definitely had no idea Rex was."

"Are you sure he doesn't swing both ways?" Brenda asked hopefully. "Because I gave him my phone number, and..."

"Oh, no," Kenny said, with an evil grin, seeing an opportunity for a little payback. "Rex is as gay as they come, trust me." He gave her what he hoped was a knowing wink.

"Well, if you can drag yourself away from him for an evening, we're having a little get-together on Saturday," Brenda said with a sigh. "Do you want to come?"

"Oh, I don't know if I'll have time," Kenny said evasively, dreading the prospect of spending an evening talking about Rex's muscles with a bunch of girls who thought he was gay. "I'll let you know, though."

"Cool!" one of the other girls chirped. "See you around, girlfriend!" They bustled away, leaving Kenny with a grimace. Girlfriend? Really?

"Making new friends already, I see," came a gruff, authoritative voice from behind him. Kenny spun around and saw Principal Buckley standing there, holding another pink envelope. "I'd suggest you take them up on that offer. It can count towards your extracurricular training."

"Extracurricular training?" Kenny echoed, eyeing the envelope suspiciously.



"That's right," Principal Buckley said. "Homosexual individuals don't simply stop being gay on the weekends, now, do they? That's why, starting this weekend, you will have various extracurricular activities to complete. This Saturday, for instance, you and your partner ... in crime ... have an appointment at the salon for a manicure, pedicure, and waxing. Also a massage — thank me later."

"You made us a salon appointment?" Kenny gasped. "Like, as a couple?"

"Correct," Principal Buckley said. "And afterwards, I expect you to log at least three hours together at the mall. That time should be spent discussing your homophobic behavior and what you've learned so far in the pro-awareness program, patent pending."

"But people I know go to that mall!" Kenny said, wheels turning furiously inside of his mind. "They'll see us and assume..."

"People make assumptions all the time," Principal Buckley said. "It's an unfortunate fact gay students often have to deal with. Well, enjoy your weekend, Kenny." The principal walked away, already shouting at a pair of students who were rough-housing in the hallway.

Kenny shook his head. Sure, Rex had agreed to wear some tight T-shirts and eat lunch with a sissy-looking Kenny, but actually being seen together in public? At a salon?

"No way is Rex going to go for this," Kenny muttered. "No flipping way."



Despite Kenny's earlier doubts, Rex was waiting outside the mall at the theater entrance when Kenny showed up on Saturday, having gotten a ride from his sister, who now firmly believed that Kenny was gay and had been in denial all these years. The rebellious Rex was wearing a huge scowl, and before Kenny could so much as say hello, he started to rant.

"I told Buckley there was no way I was going to a salon, and then when I got home, I found a message waiting on the phone telling my mom about the graffiti, and a stack of brochures on my lawn for military schools, to boot!" Rex fumed. "He's blackmailing me, and trying to intimidate me, that bastard!"

"Wow, yeah, what an, um, a bastard," Kenny blurted, trying to sound equally angry about it. "Who just drives around to students' houses leaving brochures on the lawn, right?"

"Shut up, Kenny," Rex snapped, leading the way into the mall towards the salon. "Don't think I've forgotten this is all your fault to start with. I can't believe I have to spend my weekend hanging around with a dweeb like you."

"Sorry," Kenny muttered, slightly hurt, rubbing his arm nervously. "Did you have big plans, or something?" Rex opened his mouth, as if to speak, but then

closed it firmly with what seemed to be just a hint of an embarrassed flush on his cheeks. Maybe being the cool, rebellious kid in school hadn't made him as many friends as he pretended?

"Yeah," Rex finally said loudly. "Big plans." Kenny only nodded his head, but he had an inkling of a suspicion that Rex was not being entirely truthful, and it made him feel slightly better about himself. Misery loves company, after all, he thought to himself.

"Well, it's just for today," Kenny pointed out. "So, let's, you know, get it over with, right?"

"Right," Rex grumbled. "After you." He shoved the door of the salon open, peering inside as if it were a lion's den, and Kenny reluctantly stepped through it. Inside was a very sleek, clean, and modern-looking establishment with several pretty girls in professional-looking smocks bustling around. The one at the desk gave them a welcoming smile.

"You must be Rex and Kenny," she beamed. "You're right on time. Let's see, we have you down for a manicure, pedicure, waxing, exfoliation, and couple's massage. Does that sound right?"

"C-couple's massage?" Kenny stammered, as Rex was too aggrieved to speak. "We're not... It's not..."

"Let's call it a double massage, then," the receptionist smiled. "But please do know that our establishment is extremely welcoming of alternative sexualities."

"I'm *not* gay," Rex said, very quietly, so only Kenny could hear him.

"What was that?" the receptionist asked Rex, picking up on the sound.

"Nothing," Rex grumbled.

"All right then. Shall we get started?" Kenny shot a look at Rex, who was still gobsmacked, and nervously cleared his throat.

"Uh, yeah," he said. "That would be great."

The receptionist snapped her fingers, and an instant later another cosmetician appeared to lead them over to a pair of leather-backed salon-chairs. First were the manicures and pedicures, and although both boys were extremely embarrassed and nervous, both found themselves relaxing slightly as the procedure went on. There was nobody else in the salon save for them, and it was a nice feeling having one's feet and hands soaked, exfoliated, and moisturized. It turned out that Kenny's nails were in worse shape than Rex's, as he bit them constantly, and Rex glared daggers when one of the girls complimented him on his well-trimmed nails. Both of them were given a simple clear coating that was supposed to strengthen the keratin, and although it was slightly shiny in the light, both were assured it would dry clear.



Of course, with the comfortable experience of the manicure and pedicure lowering their guards, Kenny and Rex were not prepared for what was to come on the waxing table...

“Yowch!” Rex yowled, as the first strip was yanked away from his hairy chest.

"Owwwch!" Kenny yelped, as he got his first taste of the discomfort as the wax coating his left underarm was ripped off.

"I have to say, I'm a little surprised neither of you boys have ever tried waxing before," the cosmetician said, raising a skeptical eyebrow as she tossed a used strip of wax into the garbage. "Let's try not to make so much noise, okay?"

Rex and Kenny gritted their teeth as they laid flat on the twin waxing tables, facing away from each other and unable to see what the other was undergoing. By the time they were finished, both of them were bright red from embarrassment, and, more importantly, from the thorough waxing. Rex marveled at the bizarre feel of his denuded chest, legs, and armpits. He'd been a hairy guy since junior high school, more or less, and it was a shock to the system to lose it all in one go. He almost felt like he was a kid again, or something.

As they made their way to the massage room, towels wrapped around their waists, Rex couldn't help but notice that Kenny was walking funny, almost waddling. "Why are you walking like that?" he demanded.

"Why aren't you?" Kenny demanded, in a voice that was clearly holding back tears. "I am never doing that ever again! It took me forever to grow that stuff, and now..."

"Hold on," Rex grinned incredulously. "They waxed your junk?"

"They didn't wax yours?" Kenny demanded, mouth falling open in indignation and rage. "She said 'full body' means 'full body' and..."

"They did your buttohole, too?" Rex guffawed. "Like, your whole crack?"

"Shut up!" Kenny snapped, but the blush on his cheeks made the truth quite obvious. Rex was still sniggering as they entered the massage room and were each directed to a separate massage pad. Kenny, whose ears were bright red with embarrassment, refused to make any conversation, but once again, despite himself, he found the massage quite relaxing and enjoyable, even more so with his newly-hairless skin being so sensitive to the touch. Rex tried to reclaim some semblance of his manliness by hitting on his pretty masseuse, but she just giggled and didn't seem to take him very seriously.

When they were finally back in their own clothes and ready to leave the salon, Kenny had a momentary panic about payment, but it turned out Principal Buckley had put it all on his tab. Surprised by the generosity, and feeling good from the massage, both boys exited the salon in a state closer to tranquility than they had experienced in quite some time.

"Well, we have another hour to log," Rex said. "I got a timesheet in my envelope and it says when we're done with the salon we can go to Smoothie King. Maybe that's paid for, too."

"You're not worried about people seeing us, uh, together?" Kenny said awkwardly.

"Just try not to act like a fag," Rex sighed. "And it's not like I've got a reputation built up here I need to protect. Who cares what a bunch of small-town idiots think, anyway?"

"Right," Kenny said, unaware that he had been lumped in with the small-town idiots. He was too busy wondering why Rex had been given a timesheet and places to go together instead of him. It was almost like Rex was taking him on a date. Kenny flushed at the thought.

When they got to the smoothie place, both boys made a bee-line for a back booth well away from the windows that showed the busy mall. Kenny had managed not to see anybody he knew yet, and Rex, despite his bold words, clearly wasn't too keen on running into classmates, either. Both of them ordered large strawberry smoothies, and the waiter didn't so much as blink an eyelash.

For a while they sucked at their straws in silence, but eventually Rex started calling Principal Buckley names again, and Kenny was happy to join in without being rebutted. He even made Rex chuckle once when he described Principal Buckley's wart problem that was common knowledge to most of the school. Maybe it wasn't too late to end up friends with Rex, Kenny thought, as the other boy departed to the bathroom. Maybe, paradoxically, Principal Buckley was actually doing him a favor.

His train of thought was totally interrupted, however, when a muscular, tough-looking young hoodlum got up from a nearby table and strolled over, hands in his pockets and a scornful expression on his face. "You're suckin' that straw pretty good," he said. "I bet you get a lot of practice, right? Little cutie like you."

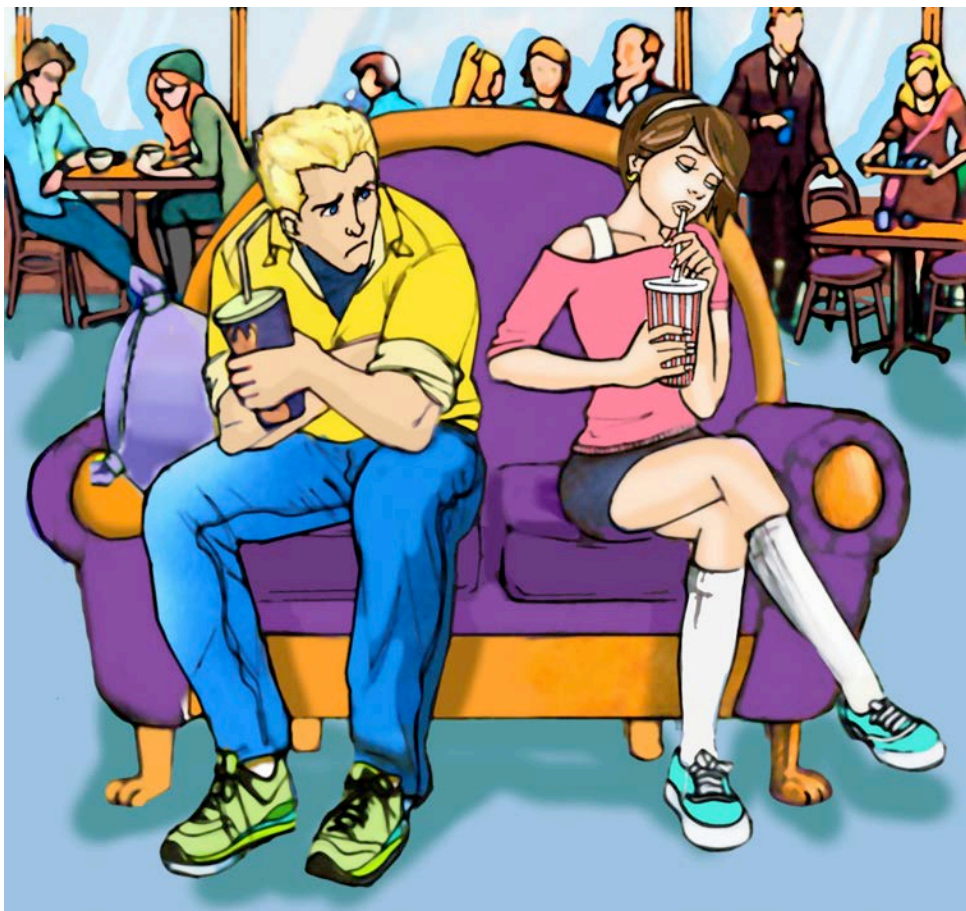
Kenny froze, completely unable to form a response. Was he about to get beaten up? He started to instinctively push the rest of the smoothie away, but the brawny teenager pushed it back towards him, simultaneously sitting down in the booth as he did so. "No, no, no, cutie, you got it all wrong," he said. "I like watching you work those hot little lips of yours. Keep sucking on it."

"Just, just leave me alone," Kenny said tremulously, trying to stand up, but he found his path blocked by the older boy's arm.

"I said, keep sucking on it, cutie," he said threateningly. Kenny's eyes widened. He looked around in fright, but the few other customers in sight were studiously looking away, avoiding all eye contact with him, obviously not wishing to entangle themselves in the situation.

"I'm not gay," Kenny said, flushing.

"I'm not, either," the teenaged hoodlum said menacingly. "You trying to say something, you little fairy boy? You trying to call *me* a faggot? With you



mincing around here in your cute little outfit and your pierced ears and your hair and nails?”

“N-no,” Kenny stammered.

“Then keep drinking your drink,” the boy grinned. “Nice and slow. I don’t think you need to use your hands, either. Or do you want me to beat you up instead?” Feeling noxious with fear and anxiety, and his face burning with shame, Kenny slowly did as requested, leaning forward to suck on the straw but leaving his hands in his lap. “Where’s the enthusiasm, cutie?” the hoodlum asked. “I want to see you bobbing up and down on that thing. See, I’m no fag, but I like getting a little on the side from a good little cocksucker, that’s all. And you would hit the spot, let me tell you.”

Kenny gulped, searching desperately for an escape route, when all of a sudden the boy doubled over in pain.

“I like kicking the shit out of wannabe tough guys like you on the side,” Rex said, pulling his fist back from the hoodlum’s stomach. “How about you go walk that one off and stop bothering my friend, huh?”

The boy scowled furiously, but there were tears smarting in his eyes from Rex's blow, and it only took a few seconds of sizing up Rex's superior height and muscles to make him decide to make a break for it, hurrying away, still clutching his stomach.

"Shit," Kenny gasped. "Thanks, Rex. I think he was... He was going to... Did you say friend?"

"Don't get excited," Rex grumbled. "It was just to make the one-liner sound better."

"But you said it," Kenny argued. "So..."

"Jesus, let it go already," Rex snapped. "We're not friends, okay? We're never going to be friends. Get that into your head. Guys like me are not friends with spineless little wimps like you. I never should have asked you to be a look-out. I could tell right away you didn't have the balls."

Kenny sat back quietly, staring down at the table. There was a long silence between them until Kenny's cell phone rang unexpectedly. Puzzled by a number he didn't recognize, he picked it up, glad for an excuse to ignore Rex. He was surprised to hear the voice of Stephanie the cheerleader.

"Hey, Kenny, I got your number from your sister," she chirped. "Are you coming tonight, or what?" Kenny looked across at Rex coldly.

"Sure," he said. "I'm just at the mall. Can you pick me up?"

"Of course, girlfriend," Stephanie sang. "Are you shopping? Meet us at the food court entrance, okay?"

"Okay," Kenny said, trying to sound equally cheerful. "See you."

"See you soon! Bye," Stephanie said, then hung up.

"You're seriously going?" Rex asked skeptically.

"To hang out with a bunch of hot, popular cheerleaders?" Kenny snapped. "Yeah, I am. Because I can tell when people want to be my friend, and I can appreciate it. Have fun being a pissed-off loner for the rest of your life."

With that parting shot, Kenny threw his smoothie into the trash, got up, and marched out of the establishment, blissfully unaware of how much it looked like he'd just had a lover's spat with his boyfriend. Rex sat back with a deep scowl on his face. He supposed he couldn't blame Kenny for getting a dig in, after all, he'd been a little harsher than usual on the dweeb. But seeing Kenny let another guy totally own him and humiliate him like that without putting up a fight made it clear Kenny was not friend, or even side-kick, material. Although he couldn't help but remember how good it had felt to hit that punk who'd been bothering him and see Kenny look up at him with that expression of awe and gratefulness on his face, his eyes wide as if he had just seen Superman in action. And even more so, maybe part of the reason Rex had come down so hard was because he was angry at himself for not stepping in

sooner. He'd watched the punk tease and humiliate Kenny, and for some reason, watching Kenny submissively leaning forward to wrap his pouty lips around that straw had been... Exciting?

Rex wasn't gay — no way, he told himself, he was straight as a board, and he'd done stuff with plenty of chicks — but Kenny hadn't looked like a guy, not in profile with his diamond earring twinkling in the light, his dainty little nose and soft lips and long lashes. No, he'd looked like a girl with a weird haircut, and a cute one, at that. Rex angrily tossed his smoothie into the garbage and got up, determined to go home and pump some iron to put it out of his mind.



As soon as Stephanie and Brenda picked Kenny up outside the food court, they immediately complimented him on his manicure.

"Somebody hit the salon!" Brenda giggled. "Nice nails."

"Thanks," Kenny said weakly. "I didn't realize it was so... noticeable."

"They'd be even more noticeable with some nice glittery nail polish," Stephanie pointed out. "We're doing our nails tonight, and you're joining in, okay?"

"Uh, I think the clear coat is enough for me..." Kenny said evasively.

"No way!" Brenda said. "Come on, it'll be fun! Are you worried someone will tease you?"

"Because now you have big strong Rex to protect you," Stephanie giggled. Kenny blushed furiously, immediately thinking back to the confrontation at the smoothie shop. There was no way they could know what had happened, but they had struck a sensitive spot all the same!

"I think Rex will like it," Brenda pointed out. "You're definitely the femmy one in the relationship, it's kind of obvious... His biceps are amazing, I bet he can just throw you down on the bed and..." She trailed off dreamily, obviously fantasizing about Rex.

"Knock it off!" Kenny pleaded, red in the face as a tomato would be. "I'll let you do my nails if you quit bugging me about Rex! I told you, we're not dating!"

"Touchy, touchy," Stephanie grinned. "Okay, fine, no more teasing. Just relax and have fun with us. Have you met the rest of the cheer squad? There's Brittany, Stacy, Marsha..."

The "girls' night" turned out to be taking place at Marsha's house, a very expensive house in the suburbs, and when they arrived there, she greeted each of them with an excited hug — Kenny included. It was quite a strange experience to have a cheerleader actually happy to see him, rather than looking at him like slime or ignoring him completely, but he thought maybe he could

get used to it... Especially since Marsha had the nicest rack of any girl on the cheerleading squad.

As she led them into the living room, Kenny was met with the sight of a bunch of pretty teenaged girls engaged in a flurry of feminine activity, doing their hair, painting each others' nails, and speaking a mile a minute. A few of them gave Kenny suspicious looks, but the majority of them were happy to finally have a "gay best friend" in their midst, and immediately began asking him for his opinion on various outfits and hairstyles. Kenny, of course, had very little knowledge of fashion, but he gave his honest opinions and the girls seemed to be paying good attention to it. Before long, he found himself having his nails painted a glittery pink shade, reasoning that he could take it off later, while he listened in on the latest gossip and high school who's who. The girls were growing increasingly giggly, and Kenny was hoping for some sort of underwear-clad pillow-fight, when Stephanie teasingly held up a dress to him.

"Ooh, have you ever thought about doing drag?" she demanded. "You have great bone structure and you're so skinny, I bet you'd make a really hot girl!"

"No, I've never had that particular urge," Kenny said delicately, blushing slightly at the backhanded compliment. Just because he was fake-gay didn't make him a fake-cross-dresser, too!

"You've never worn girls' clothes before?" Brenda asked, looking skeptical. "But I thought gay guys loved dressing up!"

Remembering Principal Buckley's warning that he was to maintain the appearance of his being gay at all times, Kenny gritted his teeth. He came up with the one memory that applied to this situation. "Well, there was this *one* Halloween," he admitted. "My costume got lost so my mom made me wear my sister's leftover from last year and go as a Disney princess."

"Ooh, what princess?" the girls chorused. Kenny's blush deepened.

"Um, the Little Mermaid," he admitted. The girls burst into howls of laughter.

"Oh my god, I bet you were adorable!" Stephanie squealed. "Are there pictures?"

"No way!" Kenny said. "I didn't let her anywhere near the camera."

"I bet you were scared your friends would tease you," Brenda said thoughtfully. "But now that you're out of the closet, you don't have to worry about that kind of thing anymore! After all, our school is really diverse and tolerant this year... At least, that's what all the posters say... And now you have us as your friends!"

"Hooray," Kenny said weakly.

"Sooo..." Stephanie said, grinning as she trailed off.

"Sooo?" Kenny echoed, questioningly.



“So, since nobody’s going to tease you, can we dress you up?” Stephanie beamed. All the other girls clapped their hands and squealed in delight. Kenny gulped. Somehow, he’d known this was coming. But he’d already been waxed, manicured, and had his ears pierced. How much worse could it be to throw on some girls’ clothes? And maybe he would get to see the actual girls without theirs if he played his cards right.

“That sounds fun,” Kenny lied through his teeth. “Let’s do it!”

As soon as the words left his lips, the girls were all business, adding to his suspicious feeling that they had been planning this as the main event of their

“girls’ night” all along. First they insisted he strip down to his boxers, so they could “see what they had to work with”, and when Kenny blushinglly countered that they should have to do the same, they only giggled at him. So, after a bit more persuasion, Kenny reluctantly took off his jeans and shirt, showing off his newly-denuded look, which did not go unnoticed.

“Oh, my god, I’m so jealous of your legs,” Stephanie gushed. “Do you shave or wax?”

“Wax,” Kenny admitted blushinglly. “Just today, actually.”

“I bet Rex loves that,” she said with a saucy wink, running her hand teasingly up Kenny’s smooth leg. Her touch made him tremble slightly, and he gulped nervously. Was she hitting on him? Or just having fun with her “gay best friend?” Kenny could only hope.

“You’ve got him all embarrassed,” Brenda said chidingly. “We agreed not to tease him about Rex, remember?”

“Sorry,” Stephanie said, though her expression didn’t seem particularly apologetic. “Okay, let’s find you a pair of panties. Marsha?”

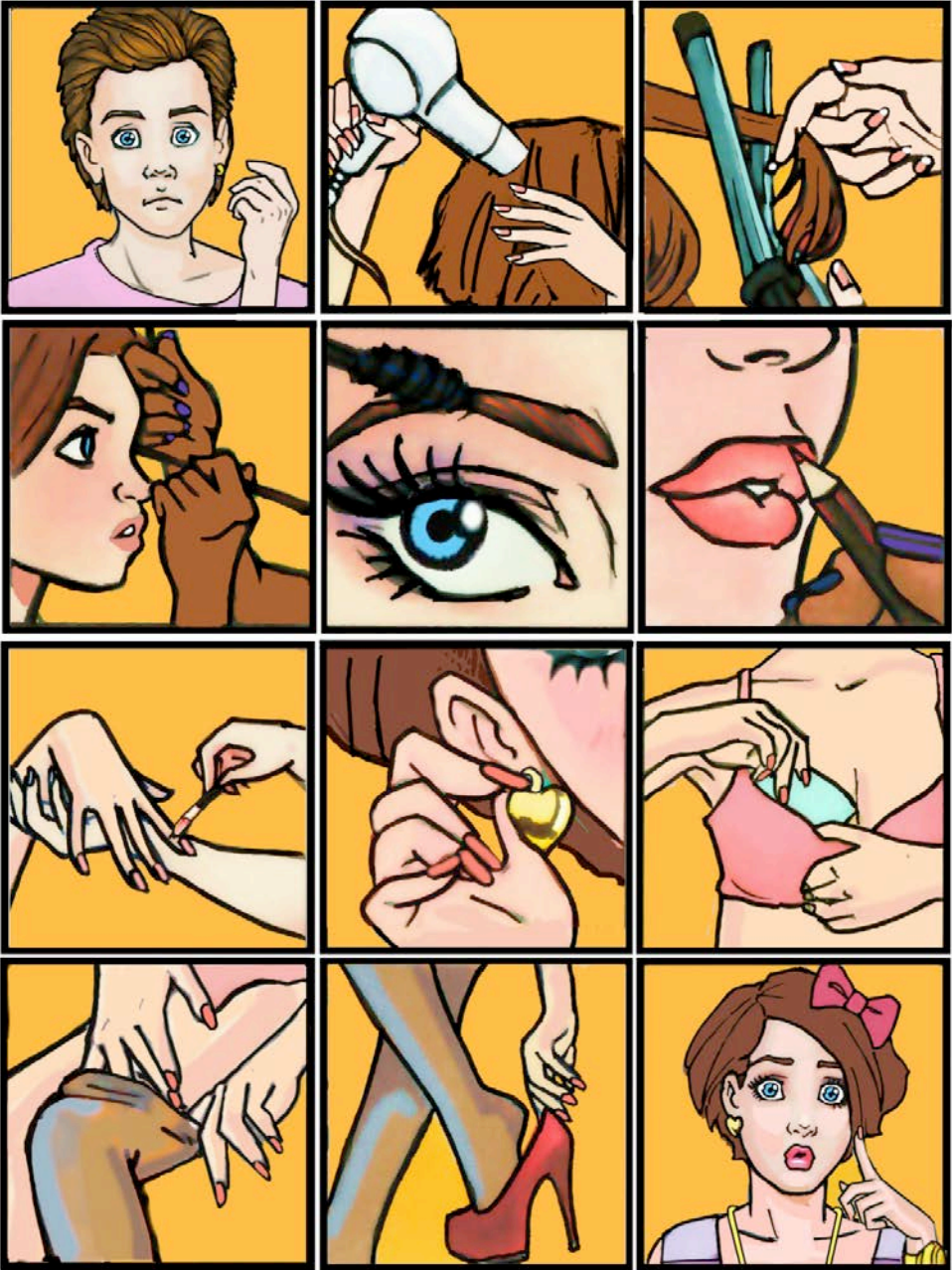
Kenny had never imagined himself getting into a cheerleader’s panties, and especially not in this particular sense of the phrase, but before long he was decked out in not just her frilly pink panties, but also a matching bra that she had outgrown years ago. Over the next half hour he was attacked with various makeup products: eyeliner, blush, mascara, lip gloss, the works. They used the reasoning that his eyebrows were already plucked as an excuse to make them even thinner, before using a pencil on them. The “piece de resistance” was a long brunette wig that Marsha’s mom apparently used for bad hair days. They spent at least ten minutes combing it out and fiddling with it, but when they finally finished all of the girls were in awe of the final result.

“Oh my God, Kenny, you look better than I do,” Brenda said, with a hint of genuine jealousy in her voice. Despite himself, Kenny was curious to see exactly what they’d done to him. He got up from his chair, immediately having to brush the long brunette wig out of his face — it was exceedingly tickly, and was driving him crazy already.

“Holy cow,” Kenny muttered, seeing himself in the mirror for the first time. If he’d thought seeing his reflection with bleached hair and plucked eyebrows was weird, this was even weirder. At first he hadn’t even recognized himself. He looked like a younger, and, dare he say it, hotter, version of his own sister. Definitely dateable, and maybe even prom queen material. Entranced by the bizarreness of it all, Kenny was only shaken from his reverie by the flash of a camera phone.

“Hey, what’s with the shutter bug?” Kenny exclaimed.

“What’s the point in looking cute if you aren’t going to take pictures?” Stephanie countered, waving her phone. “Come on, Kenny, pose for us!”



Kenny shot another look at his pretty reflection, embarrassed. He fiddled with the strap of his bra, debating internally whether the humiliation of posing in girl's underwear and makeup outweighed the benefits of getting a free pass to a sleepover full of hot cheerleaders.

"How's this?" he asked, putting his hands on his hips and giving the camera an exaggerated pout. He was rewarded with the sounds of more photo-taking and

admiring compliments. Starting to warm to the attention, Kenny struck a variety of “sexy” poses that he had mostly seen in magazines, kicking one foot up cutely behind him, cocking his head to one side, and even teasingly putting a finger in his mouth. The girls were having a great time, joining into the photo-shoot and eagerly taking several “selfies” with their newest girlfriend, and Kenny was enjoying it just a little too much when they kissed him on the cheek or hugged him tight. He was almost glad when they started rummaging through the wardrobe for something he could wear: he needed something to cover up his manhood, which was starting to get hard within the confines of Marsha’s silky panties.

“Hey, you’re not sending those to anyone, are you?” he asked worriedly, noticing Brenda texting furiously on her cell phone.

“Nobody important,” Brenda said with a wink. “Ooh, let’s find you a pair of heels!”

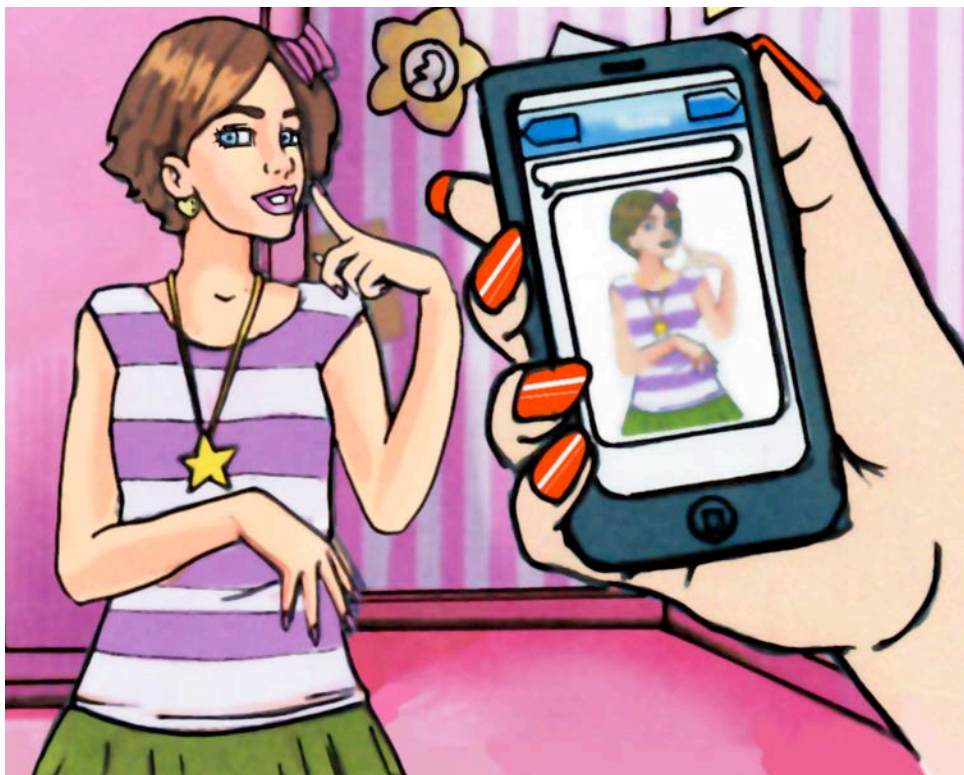
Kenny shrugged, resigned to his fate. After all, when in Rome...



On the other side of town, Rex’s phone buzzed in his pocket in the middle of his workout. He paused, grunting, and took it out, seeing a new text message notification. His face lit up when he saw who it was from: Brenda, that cute girl who’d given him his haircut in the cosmetology classroom. They had sent some flirtatious texts back and forth, but she’d quit recently — Rex suspected it had something to do with the disingenuous rumors floating around about his sexuality.

He figured her desire for him had obviously overpowered her doubt, because there was a photo attached to the text! No doubt she’d had a few drinks with her girlfriends and decided to send him a flirty picture. Eager to see what he was getting — besides, Principal Buckley hadn’t forbid him from pretending to be *bisexual* — Rex quickly opened the attachment. He wasn’t disappointed. What he saw was a gorgeous girl with long brunette hair, toying with the strap of her frilly pink bra and giving the camera a flirty smile. She had long, slender legs and a tight little body, even if she didn’t have much up top, and those pouty gloss-covered lips of hers were just begging for something to suck on.

Rex frowned. The only weird thing was, it definitely wasn’t Brenda. This girl was prettier, not as curvy, and had darker hair and different facial features. Maybe one of her girlfriends was using her phone to text him for a hook-up?



Puzzled, Rex went to the bottom of the message to see a small label attached: “your new girlfriend Kelli!!! ;) ;)” But who could...? Rex took another, harder look at the picture, and his jaw dropped. Those lips... The chick in the picture was totally made-up and wearing a weave and false eyelashes, but now that he knew what to look for, he could tell that it was none other than Kenny!

His first reaction was one of rage — where did Kenny get off, tricking him like that? — and then one of shame, because, like it or not, he’d just gotten turned on by a guy. Kenny was a dweeby shrimp of a male specimen... But as a girl, he was a total hottie. Feeling confused and angry, Rex went to delete the photo, then paused. Maybe he was overreacting, he thought to himself. And for some reason, also, he didn’t want to get rid of the photo just yet. Rex stuffed his phone into his pocket and returned to his work-out, already knowing that he would be looking at the photo again later on tonight. It was a hot little picture, after all, and for some reason, the thought of using it as “spank bank” material was more exciting than anything he could have gotten from Brenda.



Kenny had spent the rest of the weekend worrying about what might be in store during Week 2 of the program. They were supposedly undergoing the punishment together, but so far it seemed like everything had been stacked

against Kenny, while Rex had gotten off easy. After all, he hadn't spent his Saturday night stuffed in a dress and heels as a bunch of girls' new personal Barbie doll. They had made him try on at least a dozen different outfits, and "model" them all, before they took off his makeup and nail polish and gave him a ride home.

His worries intensified as Kenny opened up his locker and found a new pink envelope awaiting him. With a groan of dread, he opened it and began to read.

Welcome to Principal Buckley's 3-Week Pro-Awareness Program for Tolerance of Alternative Sexual Lifestyles, Week 2.

Congratulations on successfully completing week one of my program. I hope you learned a great deal about how young alternative lifestyle individuals are often treated, based on their appearance. However, the harshest discrimination against these students often does not occur based on their manner of dress, but on the company they keep. While many bigots are willing to ignore an effeminately-dressed young man, far fewer are willing to ignore a clear romantic relationship.

Kenny's mouth went dry as he realized, with a horrible sinking sensation, exactly where this was going. That "extracurricular" time at the mall had been no accident, and now...

As such, during week two of the program, you will be tasked with simulating such a relationship in order to experience how the world at large responds to a gay couple. Obviously you will not be expected to engage with each other romantically, but at least three hours must be spent in each others' exclusive company each day, and small gestures of affection, such as hugs when greeting or saying goodbye, and hand-holding while walking together, are MANDATORY. You will be under observation at all times. Failure to comply will result in very serious consequences, as previously discussed, and any assumptions of your sexuality based on your behavior must not be denied under any circumstances.

Kenny stared down at the letter as if it were a poisonous snake. Small gestures of affection? Hand-holding? Principal Buckley couldn't be serious. "This is going way too far," Kenny muttered, closing his locker with a loud bang.

"You're telling me," came a voice. Kenny jumped, realizing Rex was leaning against the next locker over with a similar envelope clutched in his fist. His voice was somewhat calm, but there was a wild look in his eye that Kenny knew meant he was on the edge of losing his cool.

"You, uh, you got the same letter?" Kenny asked hesitantly.

"Probably, except mine says I have to walk you to and from all your classes," Rex said through gritted teeth. "And it included a Xerox of the letter he's going to send the judge, so shut up and let's get this over with." Rex left out that it

also included a form to sign up for football and a post-it note that had, "You could make this all go away, son!" written on it.

"Is it really that bad?" Kenny asked.

"It makes me sound like a freaking criminal psychopath," Rex said darkly. "Every little thing I've done since I've got here, plus some stuff he dug up from my old school, put together in the worst way possible. He's devious, I'll give the old bastard that much."

"Sorry," Kenny said automatically. "Okay, my first class is science, so..." Both boys stood there awkwardly, staring at the walls, floors, and ceilings, before Rex finally extended his hand and Kenny awkwardly put his own inside of it, feeling like a total pansy. While they were still standing there, holding hands and each of them holding a pink envelope in the other, Stephanie waltzed past.

"Oh my god, you guys write each other little love notes?" she gushed. "That is so adorable!" Kenny blushed to the roots, while Rex went the other direction, going as pale as someone on their deathbed. The suggestion he wrote love notes to anybody, much less another boy, was like having his guts ripped out. He stiffly jerked his head towards the science wing, and they began to walk. Kenny's palm was sweating so badly he was surprised he didn't slip out of Rex's grip, which was none too tight to begin with. He didn't know what to do with his free arm, and their joined-together hands kept bumping awkwardly against either his or Rex's hip as they walked.

Of course, Kenny was focusing on a way to avoid the harsh reality that he was walking down the hallway, hand-in-hand with another boy. That reality was impossible to avoid, as everyone in the entire school seemed to



be staring. He kept his head down and his gaze to the floor, still blushing bright red. Rex, on the other hand, was glaring stonily and defiantly at every single person who dared look twice at them. Together, it gave the impression that Kenny had shyly and demurely agreed to take his boyfriend's hand, but was frightened of receiving the wrong kind of attention, while Rex was proud of his new relationship and ready to beat down anyone who dared object to it.

Plenty of girls gave Kenny encouraging smiles, but plenty of guys gave him strange looks of surprise or disgust, and it seemed like the longest walk in Kenny's life to finally get to science class. When they arrived, Rex made as if to break away immediately, only for both of them to hear the distinctive sound of Principal Buckley clearing his throat. And afraid of getting on his bad side on day one of what promised to be a very long week, Kenny gave the principal a quick glance, then, blushing furiously, hugged Rex awkwardly around the middle. Rex returned it with one arm, and a very pained expression on his face, then beat it down the hallway like a bat out of hell.

"Looks like someone's official," Brenda sang as they walked into the classroom. "Well, if I can't have him, at least no other girls can. Good for you, Kenny."

"Thanks," Kenny muttered miserably, as he sat down in his usual spot.

"You two are so cute together," she added. "In a dorky, awkward way, of course. I bet you're a lot more intimate in private, but don't be shy in public, either. It's the 21st century, and nobody at this school is going to complain!"

Meanwhile, as Rex slouched into his usual spot in his English class, the quarterback of the football team leaned forward and tapped him on the shoulder. Ready for a fight, Rex spun in his seat.

"Yeah?" he demanded. "What?"

"I was just going to say, you can stop glaring at everybody, dude," the quarterback said. "I'm cool with it, and the rest of us are, too. It takes all kinds, right? The way I see it, it's two less dudes I have to compete with for chicks. Not that Kenny was ever much of a threat, of course." Every masculine instinct within Rex wanted to scream that he was not some kind of queer, he was not dating Kenny, and he had banged more chicks than the whole football team, never mind just the quarterback. But remembering Principal Buckley's threat, he had no choice but to grunt and nod his head.

For both boys, it was one of the longest days of their young lives, but both of them dutifully carried out their instructions. Rex showed up to walk with him after each class, like any protective boyfriend, and Kenny, after a tip from Stephanie, found it was easier to loop his arms around Rex's neck for their quick hello-and-goodbye hugs, although she was still pestering him to kiss him. He managed to claim he was still too shy to do so in public, which satisfied her for now.

Rex tolerated the embraces with gritted teeth and stoic resolve, but it was driving him absolutely crazy — and not for the reason Kenny thought. Try as he might, he couldn't get the alluring picture of "Kelli" out of his head, and whenever Kenny went up on tip-toe to press his soft little body against him, it certainly didn't *feel* like hugging a guy. On the contrary, with Kenny's smooth, hairless arms around his neck and the feminine, flowery smell of his shampoo in Rex's nostrils, almost every indicator in Rex's masculine brain told him he was touching a girl. From the corner of his eye, whenever he caught sight of Kenny's smooth-shaven legs or dainty waist, he couldn't help but think of "Kelli" all over again, and to his shame, he was starting to get aroused by it. He did his best to think of sports whenever Kenny held his hand and brushed against his thigh by accident, but it was getting increasingly hard... In more ways than one!

As soon as the bell rang and Rex said goodbye to his little "boyfriend" at his locker, he bolted out of the school, eager to be away from Principal Buckley's prying eyes and needing to deal with a problem in his pants, besides. He was absolutely furious at being made to act like a queer and go around holding hands with another boy, but even more confused and angry about the fact he couldn't stop thinking of Kenny as a cute girl, rather than a guy. Before he could stop himself, he took out his phone and opened up the picture again, staring lustfully at the girl's sexy pink pout and soft, slender legs. She was so damn hot... And she was Kenny, the dweeb who'd gotten him into this mess in the first place by not acting as a proper look-out. The little shrimp deserved to have to flounce around like a pansy after giving them up so easily in the principal's office, but Rex certainly didn't deserve this kind of humiliation, or confusion. Closing his phone, he headed home, determined not to think about Kenny, or "Kelli" for the rest of the day.



Despite his proclamation, Rex was to find it all but impossible to put Kenny out of his mind. Not only did they have to maintain the charade of being in a relationship at school, but Principal Buckley had also decreed that they spend a certain amount of time together after school, as well. Obviously, away from Buckley's prying eyes there was no need for hugs, hand-holding, or acting affectionate, but the two hapless boys were still stuck in each other's company for several hours per day.

Rex made sure to be as angry and surly with Kenny as usual, but he felt like he was slowly losing his grip on sanity... Every time he so much as looked at Kenny, he started fantasizing about his alter-ego, "Kelli." Rex's reason for going along with Buckley's insane punishment in the first place was that he was secure in his sexuality. This punishment was just supposed to be something he could do without sweating a drop. He didn't care if a bunch of small-town

losers thought he was going through some weird gay phase — he was close to graduating, and once he did, he was getting the hell out of town, back to the big city, where he could go right back to cruising for chicks with no-one the wiser. But all of a sudden, his rock-solid straightness was in question, and it was starting to scare him.

As for Kenny, he was no more enjoying their predicament than Rex was — as he often reflected, he had the far worse end of the deal. Nobody wanted to tangle with a muscled-up angry teen like Rex, but plenty of people had smart remarks or threatening looks for the kid they saw as a swishy, effeminate gay teen. Being forced to dress in a stereotypically homosexual manner had opened his eyes to all kinds of discrimination, and even if his high school was a 'haven of tolerance,' the street certainly wasn't. Since the weather had turned warmer, he was now expected to wear shorts, and most of them were horribly short and tight, showing off his clearly waxed legs.

He had attracted more than a few wolf-whistles from guys driving by who hadn't realized, from behind, that they were looking at a guy and not a short-haired girl. Naturally, when they found out, they were either stunned — or angry! Kenny had had enough homophobic slurs hissed at him to fill a book, and the only way he could feel safe was, ironically, by sticking to Rex's side. Whenever he wasn't in school or at his own house, he found he felt most secure with Rex and his intimidating muscle-bound presence around.

Since they had to spend a certain



number of hours together each day, they had taken to doing their homework together at Rex's house, since his mom had been working late. Well, in reality, Kenny did both of their homework, while Rex played with his phone. Rex mostly ignored him, which Kenny supposed was better than bullying him. Although once, when Kenny went to the cupboard to get something, he caught Rex staring at his taut butt as he bent down to retrieve snacks from the lowest shelf. Kenny had blushed brightly, but Rex had just denied it. Neither of them had spoken about it, however, Kenny began to be on the lookout for it, and realized Rex was staring at him a lot more often than was normal. Was Rex actually *attracted* to him? Was his rough-and-tumble exterior just hiding the fact that he was actually gay all along? It seemed hard to believe, but there was no doubt this "program" of Principal Buckley's was messing with both their heads.

By the time Friday arrived, it was more or less accepted that Kenny and Rex were the high school's first gay couple. There was no staring in the hallways, and all of the staff acted as though there were nothing out of the ordinary. Stephanie, Brenda, and the other cheerleaders were constantly pumping Kenny for information about him and Rex's "intimate" activities, but all of Kenny's protests and blushing only made them suspect the worst, often dissolving into giggles making jokes about his butt and how much Rex had probably enjoyed it the night before. It was about the most emasculated Kenny had ever felt, having everyone assume he was the submissive, "bottom" partner to the big muscular Rex, but he had to admit it seemed like the most logical conclusion.

He was both relieved and anxious when the final bell rang on Friday. He had survived Week Two of Buckley's Pro-Awareness for Tolerance of Alternative Sexual Lifestyles, but he had no idea what Week Three might bring. His family, and everyone he knew, were now convinced he was gay — though he'd managed to hide Rex from his family so far, so they didn't know about that *particular* situation. How deep of a hole would Principal Buckley make him dig? Would he really be able to convince everyone that it had just been a phase? If he told the truth, that it was punishment for breaking the law, would they believe him? He was contemplating all of these questions at his locker when Rex arrived.

"Hey," Rex grunted, giving him the briefest hug possible. "You ready?"

"Yes," Kenny said, quickly gathering his books and closing his locker. "Your place?" He blushed, as someone's head turned at the accidental double-entendre. "Uh, for homework," he quickly clarified.

"Yeah, hurry up," Rex said, grabbing Kenny's free hand. Kenny grimaced, but quickly followed after him. As soon as they were outside the school, they dropped each other's hands like poisonous snakes and started to walk. As usual, Rex was silent and taciturn. Kenny, who was still holding out hope that Rex

might come around and want to be his friend once the whole thing blew over — misery loved company, after all — tried his best to make conversation.

“So, what do you think Week Three is going to be?” he said nervously.

“Hell if I know,” Rex said. “Tutus and ballet slippers, probably.”

Kenny grimaced. He had a feeling that, if Principal Buckley did have something like that in mind, he would be the one in the tutu, not Rex. They walked quickly towards Rex's house, which was on the seedier side of town, silent the whole way. Once he let them in with the key, they sat down at their usual places around the kitchen table.

“You didn't take any notes in English class again?” Kenny chided, as Rex's binder was opened to reveal nothing but blank paper.

“Why bother?” Rex asked, rolling his eyes. “You take notes, so why should I?”

“Well, what if I just stopped letting you copy all mine?” Kenny demanded snappishly, covering his notes with one hand.

“It's not my fault you're so much smarter than me, honey,” Rex said, slipping into the typical “boyfriend-girlfriend” banter without even realizing it. Fortunately, Kenny took it as more teasing.

“Don't call me that!” Kenny protested. “Jeez, it's bad enough at school!”

“Sorry, *dear*,” Rex said, quickly exaggerating his mocking tone to make sure Kenny thought he was ribbing him intentionally. “You're just so sweet, that's all!”

“Knock it off, I said,” Kenny growled, throwing a shove in Rex's direction. Rex caught the weak punch easily, holding Kenny's narrow wrist. Even as he did so, he couldn't help but marvel at how soft and supple Kenny's hairless arm felt — there was hardly a trace of boyish muscle. He'd always known Kenny was scrawny, but now that he had seen him as “Kelli,” he seemed more slender, shapely, feminine... Rex found himself gripping Kenny's hand, imagining him all dolled up in makeup and long hair, as his female alter-ego, until...

“Dude, what the hell?” Kenny gaped, staring horrifiedly at Rex's lap. He pulled his hand out of Rex's grip, and Rex looked down, equally horrified to realize he was sporting a very obvious hard-on. “Are you actually turning gay or something?” Kenny demanded.

“You're the one staring at my crotch!” Rex shot back. “I was just thinking about a chick I used to screw back home, that's all.”

“Yeah, right!” Kenny blustered. “I saw you staring at my ass the other day!”

“In your dreams!” Rex snapped angrily. “You're the one swishing around in short-shorts showing it off, and you have the nerve to call me gay after staring at my crotch? The only fairy here is you! Get out of my house, you little queer!”