



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

**BORN ON  
BLACK  
FRIDAY**

**Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack**  
**A Stories of the Supernatural Story**



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# BORN ON BLACK FRIDAY



“Why am I even doing this?”

“Because you love me,” said the woman driving. She looked over at her husband who was drained of all of his energy, leaning against the window. “You *do* love me, right?” she inquired.

There was no reply. Not because Malcolm Balford was considering the question, but because he had fallen asleep. It was, after all, 5:21 in the morning.

Lizzie elbowed her husband back awake.

“Get that duck!” Malcom said, abruptly.

“What kind of dream was that?”

“Nothing...” Malcom said, embarrassed. He looked around to verify he was back in his horrible reality. He was. Working on three hours sleep and in the passenger seat of his car, he being driven by his wife into the gaping mouth of hell.

It was Black Friday.

The leftover turkey in his fridge wasn’t even cold yet, and here he was, on the day after Thanksgiving lugging his bloated stomach to the Sun Creek Mall, throwing himself into a nightmare.

“It’s not going to be that bad,” Lizzie said. “Shopping can be fun!”

News stories showing of the madness of Black Friday shopping were playing in his mind. Malcom had always viewed that tradition of shopping as a bizarre ritual that was a window into the madness of modern life. Who would risk life and limb, trying to fight through a crowd of frenzied shoppers to get some dumb toy or a flat-screen TV? Hadn’t any of these people heard of Amazon? Or just had an ounce of common sense, for that matter?

He had asked himself every time the subject came up, why on God’s green Earth would anyone waste a single millisecond of their lives in a swirling scrum of consumerism? It was a window into all the things humans should be ashamed of. If he had his way, no one would ever do this humiliating, rat-in-a-maze behavior in the service of corporations that manipulated them into the acts of financial debauchery while also casting to the wind their kindness and compassion.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Lizzie said. “We have a lot of presents we need to buy this year! The deals aren’t going to be any better than right now!”

“Deals?” Malcom replied. “Hun, it’s not worth it. It’s just not worth it.”

“If you want a promotion at work, we need to send the best gifts to your bosses and their wives,” Lizzie said. “This is for your benefit.”

“No promotion is worth this,” Malcom said with a yawn quickly following. “And since when do you give a crap about my job?”

“Maybe it’s about time I did, honey. You don’t seem to be that motivated to stick up for yourself.”

He hated his job. Fortunately, it was low-impact and didn’t steal too much of his time. That’s the way he liked it. Promotions just meant more stress.

“I just want to go back to bed,” Malcom said.

“When we get done, you can sleep all day,” his wife said. “Well, after we drop by the Home Depot for that potting soil. And I told Steph I’d help her pick up a Christmas tree. Her car is in the shop.”

Malcom let his head fall back limp. He hated this. He also knew perfectly well that his wife did not share his sentiment regarding capitalism run amok. In fact, he was very sure she was enjoying this, and was just making up excuses. “It’s my birthday for Christ’s sake.”

“Born on Black Friday. Well, some people have all the luck.”

“I should be home being waited on hand and foot. Or at least being allowed to sleep in.”

“Forget it. If you expect some sympathy from me, you’re looking in the wrong place.”

“Where are the birthday gods to protect me?”

“Your gods won’t save you now!” Lizzie added a comedic laugh of wickedness.

“We can do this any time. This is pointless.”

“So you keep saying,” Lizzie said. “Why can’t you just let go for once and have fun? You’re going to enjoy yourself, if you just keep an open mind! You might even be back with me next year!”

“Maybe we should just take it easy next year, okay? Maybe do our shopping online?”

“That reminds me. You need to download Instagram.”

“Do I?”

“Yes, for the mall. They send out promotions and discounts live. Kind of like a flash sale, but for the different stores mall. If there’s something on my list, and they have a flash sale, I want you to go get it as fast as you can.”

“I’m not downloading Instagram. You know how I hate social media.”

“Well, you can delete it after we’re done. But you need it now — and subscribe to the Sun Creek Mall feed.”

“No.”



“I’ll do it for you,” she said, grabbing his phone from the dashboard holder. She immediately swerved slightly as she diverted her attention from driving.

“Fine,” Malcom said, taking his phone back. “Just keep your eyes on the road.”

He went to the app store and began a search. “What did you say about a list?”

“I shared it with you. It’s in your notes app. I have a short list of...”

“There fifty items on this list!” Malcom said, looking at it.

“Forty-five. Don’t exaggerate.”

“How long are going to be there?”

“As long as it takes. So it’s in your best interest to work as fast as possible.”

Malcom was doubting very much that his wife cared one whit about his best interests at this particular moment. She just wanted to shop, something he’d never understand.

“Have you done the download yet?” Lizzie asked with a smile.

Sure, she was cute, Malcom reminded himself. She still had the looks he had fallen in love with back in college. Even if age was starting to dim that youthful smile and mischievous glint in her eyes, he was still in love with her. His life was still focused around ways to make her smile or laugh. Lizzie meant the



“Tupperware?” Malcom said. “When the hell did you get Tupperware? Do you know how much waste that produces?”

“It’s just a little bit of plastic, Mal.”

“Plastic. I hate plastic.” Malcom stared out the window. “It’s not just that, it’s what it represents.”

“And what, pray tell, does it represent?”

“Everything wrong with the world.”

There was a fifteen minute wait just to get into the parking lot, and Malcom could feel the forebodings rising up and gripping him like they are seeping through the car seat. They spent another ten minutes weaving up and down the aisles trying to find what Lizzie said would be the “ideal” spot, and it took a while for Malcom to convince her that any spot was the ideal spot right now. She reluctantly agreed.

“Now keep checking the list,” she said, coaching her husband as they got out of the car. “When I get something, I’ll cross it off.”

“Right,” Malcom replied.

“So my job is going to the big stores and getting the sales I already know about. Your job is to monitor the mall instagram and go get anything they advertise that’s also on my list.”

“We’re splitting up?”

“More efficient that way.”

They got to the throng of people outside one of the gates of the mall, easily three hundred people and dozens deep.

Malcom wanted to turn around, but before he could retreat, there were hundreds more shoppers flooding in behind them.

Two minutes late, the doors flexed open, and as one the crowd lunged forward. It was terrifying, as people poured through like liquid, not caring where they were going or who got swept away in the process.

Malcom was almost immediately separated from his wife, and she headed off in one direction, while he was being pushed another.

After what seemed like a half hour of negotiating the crowd, but was more like five minutes, Malcom found a spot not crowded with crazy shoppers and texted Lizzie to make sure she was okay. A minute later she replied. “Don’t you have things to buy? Get moving!”

So with a sigh, he checked his list. First item was... Well, he’d know as soon as he could get the notes app to work. It was frozen up.

“Hey, Mr. Balford!” said a voice over the rumbling murmur of the crowd.



Malcom looked up to see Amy Robach, the daughter of his next door neighbors. She was probably around 16, although he didn't know for sure. She went to the local high school and was, in his opinion, exactly the kind of girl he'd have fallen for if he were 15 years younger. Cute, bright and unassuming, Amy was a lot like Lizzie.

"Mrs. Balford talked you into coming, huh?"

"She told you about this?"

"We had a bet, actually." She made a good-natured frown. "I guess I lost, so now I have to water your plants on your next vacay."

Malcom liked that Amy felt comfortable enough just to start up a chat with him. He'd never really had a lot of courage when it came to talking to her, and she was a teenager who didn't have a lot of time for people who weren't also teenagers. In fact, he couldn't remember that last time they'd talked.

"It's crazy here, isn't it?" He said, still working his phone, trying to get the notes up. As usual, he had to navigate around the three large cracks in his screen.

"It's way intense. You need any help with that?" She asked.

"I'm not an old man..." Malcom began to say, but with two flicks of her finger on his broken screen, the notes app came up without a hitch.

"Yeah, my mom is hopeless with hers, too."

The spear launched from the depths of hell that pierced Malcom's brittle heart couldn't be seen by mortal eyes, but the man sure felt it. He had just been lumped in with his neighbors, who he considered "old." They were adults and parents, for goodness sake. Not him. He was young. 31 wasn't old. Was it?

Worse, why did Amy Robach, the literal girl-next-door, have to say it? He took a moment to piece his shattered psyche back together and carry on.

"Anyway," Amy said. "Do you know which way the bookstore is?"

"Sorry," Malcom replied.

"I think it's this way," Amy said, as she headed back to the torrent of people coursing through the mall. "See ya!" She added with a bright smile and a wave of her hand.

"31 is not old," Malcom repeated to himself as he went back to his phone.

As nice as it was to bump into a familiar face, it was time to get working. His wife was going to kill him if he didn't at least make an effort.

He was looking at the list his wife had given him, but he wasn't really reading it. He was still thinking about how Amy had treated him. On the one hand, she was as casual with him as she would have been with others her age. On the other hand, she had made him feel like Rip Van Winkle, old before his time. It was odd.

His first item was a sweater for his niece, Olivia. He had no idea where he should even begin, but trapped where he was against some fake plants and an advertising sign was not getting him anywhere. He needed to get to a larger area where he could look around.

He was startled when his phone started buzzing, knocking him out of his introspection. He worked his finger around the cracks to activate the mall app, which was alerting him to a “Doorbuster” sale, whatever that was. 70% sweaters at H&M. That sounded like a teen fashion store, if he remembered his brands correctly.

He crashed into the torrent of souls that were headed that way and hoped for the best. Malcom was able to escape the crowd as he got to the center atrium area, where an odd water feature was entertaining no one as they dashed by in their desperate deal-shopping tunnel-vision.

There was a map there, which Malcom was very grateful for. He was man. Men liked maps. Maps made him feel comfortable.

He looked for the H&M store, finding it closer to where he started than where he was now, so he got back into the salmon run and headed back the way he came.

Sure enough, there was a table with a sign that was advertising a sale on sweaters. 70% off, and in all different shades of pink. Powder pink, petal pink, hot pink, magenta, watermelon, flamingo, bubblegum... It was odd how he knew all the proper names for these shades, but what worried him more was the itching. It just wouldn't stop. It made him want to get the sweater and go, but as he decided on which one to buy, he caught sight of another person staring at him as he bent over.

It was a woman, this time, and she didn't look too pleased as she glared at him. Tracing her stare, though, it led him back to his chest, and he saw what she seemed displeased with.

Manboobs. He had a definite set of fleshy mounds that were pushing at his tight flannel. It must have been the bending over, because he had never really noticed until now. After eating so much Thanksgiving food, he knew he'd put some pounds on, but he must have really been letting himself go. The mounds were obvious in the tight shirt and him leaning forward. Worse yet, they were itching. Badly.

He turned away from the woman, grabbing the sweater as he did. Malcom was blushing in embarrassment and he needed a place to rearrange his shirt a bit to try and conceal the problem — and to scratch that itching. A changing room nearby was the obvious place to go.

Inside, he unbuttoned his shirt and began scratching for relief. How had he let it get this bad? And why hadn't Lizzie said anything? He kept scratching, but he seemed to be making the problem worse. They were swelling even bigger,



as he scratched. He tried to button his flannel back up, but it was just too tight now.

Malcom could see in the reflection of the changing mirror that he was positively shameful. His chest looked like a pair of boobs were on his torso. He didn't even dare go back out into the store looking like this.

He could only think of one option. The sweater he had just grabbed. It was pink, although closer to red, he told himself, and not altogether inappropriate for him to wear. In fact, it was a nice XL size, something he hadn't even noted.

With no choice, he slipped into it, finding it did a mostly adequate job. It was just baggy enough to hide twin ridges and not draw attention to himself.

He headed out, picking up another sweater in a smaller size for his niece and paid for both at the register. No one really seemed to care, fortunately. Now he was going to have to join a gym or something, he told himself. That's what he deserved for that third helping of pumpkin pie last night.

He checked the item off Lizzie's list and headed back out into the mall proper. It was lessening just a little bit, thankfully. It was still a madhouse, but not quite



as intense as when the place opened up. Malcom figured everyone was going on about their business now, and the thrill was wearing off, thank God.

The next item on the list could wait, as he was still feeling very self-conscious. The pink sweater was quite obvious on him. He needed to regroup, so he ducked into the gadget store nearby to assess the situation.

Stepping inside, he was not immediately noticed, which was good. The big pink sweater hadn't attracted any attention, which was what he had hoped for. He went about staring at the various items on the shelves, keeping an eye on the other shoppers to see if they were gawking.

The store was chock full of useless gadgets, stuff that he loved. From robotic wine openers to nose hair trimmers to bluetooth shower speakers to night vision binoculars, it was all here. They even had the gold standard of gadget shops, the vibrating chair. Two of them.

Maybe he was a little too preoccupied, but for whatever reason, he was bored with all of it. Even the 3-in-1 hot dog slicer failed to interest him. It all seemed so... *Uncouth*.

The more he looked at the products for sale, the more common and childish they seemed to him. It was like a toy shop for grown-ups. It was pathetic.

“Would you like to try out the new Mach 9 Massage Chair?” A salesman asked as Malcom was leaving. Malcom noted a little extra attention the salesman’s eyes gave him.

Malcom stopped in his tracks. Normally he’d just decline and head on his way. But this felt different. “Really?” He replied. “Do you seriously ever sell those things?”

“They’re very popular. Everyone talks about them,” the salesman said with a smile.

“Everyone without taste, maybe,” Malcom replied. He nearly used his free hand to cover his mouth. He had no idea where that had even come from.

He shook his head. “Sorry,” he said as he left. No sooner had he done so than his phone buzzed again. Looking for another sale, he checked to see what it had to say.

“You’ve just left Stonemith’s Gifts,” said a message. “Rate your experience?”

“Great. More tracking,” he grumbled. He was a simple swipe away from dismissing the message, but instead he tapped on it. He did have a rating. One Star.

“Describe your visit,” it asked.

“Loser sales freak at the door wouldn’t stop bugging me about the massage chair,” he typed in quickly. He had never typed anything so fast, and he was just using one hand. He had only seen teens with that kind of skill, and it was shocking him almost as much as what he was writing. “Probably a perv. Worst experience ever.”

He had almost tapped the send button, but froze when he realized what he was doing, and what he had just typed. A comment like that might get someone fired, and that sales guy had just been doing his job.

Still, he probably was perverting on him.

*No, no, no*, he told himself. What was even thinking? He was letting the stress get to him, he had to think. Malcom gave his head a vigorous shake, trying to clear his mind. He was thinking like a snobby brat, and he needed it to stop.

Just as he was considering that, though, he tapped the “send button” and the message was sent.

“I didn’t mean to do that!” He said out loud. He told himself he had been trying to close the app, but he could see his finger headed for the send button and

didn't stop it. What wicked part of his mind wanted to do that? What had literally possessed him?

It was probably this dumb sweater, he decided. That's what he got for wearing a girl's sweater in public. It was rubbing off on him.

He looked down, and found that the bagginess of the sweater wasn't quite as pronounced as it had been when he first put it on. In fact, his fleshy chest was almost visible once again. A quick grasp confirmed they were definitely there, and if he wasn't very much mistaken, still feeling sensitive. He was going to need something better to cover himself up.

There was a men's store nearby, and he had been meaning to pick up a new coat, so he headed in and grabbed something that looked big and thick enough to cover him up. He found a nice, big beige insulated parka, just to his tastes, and as a matter of fact, bought it and wore it out of the store. He'd have to explain the \$200 to Lizzie somehow, but he'd worry about it later.

Before he could consider that, he felt his phone vibrate and checked it. It was the mall app, advertising another "doorbuster" sale on lawnmowers. He was reasonably sure that they were not on his list, as long as it was, so he decided to go get coffee instead.

Predictably, it only took about a five minutes before he was feeling extremely hot in his new jacket. He thought that maybe he should get rid of the sweater, but he didn't want to change his clothes out in public. The bathrooms looked crazy packed.

Sitting in the coffee shop by himself, at a very tiny table, he was very tempted to take the jacket off, but then everyone would see the pink, pink, pink sweater — and maybe even his little manboob problem.

He just decided to tough it out.

Ten minutes later, Malcom headed to the next target, a department store, his new jacket stuffed into one of the shopping bags. It was just too hot to wear it, and he had to brave the pinkness of his sweater.

"No one cares," he said to himself. "I'll never see any of these *commoners* ever again, anyway."

The department store was offering 20% off on gift cards, for the next four hours only, and Malcom figured that gift cards were still a good get for Christmas. They were not on his list, but he knew a good deal when he saw it.

The department store was huge, and not quite as busy as the rest of the mall, but still insane. It was unclear exactly where to buy gift cards at first, but Malcom eventually figured that a window labeled "guest services" with a line heading several hundred people long was where one was supposed to get them.

He was not going to stand in a line for the next two hours, so he figured his gift card adventure was over. As he headed out he noticed that the in-store

beauty counter was selling something to a customer that looked a lot like a gift card, so he decided to wait for that transaction to finish before asking.

“Yes, we do,” said the woman at the counter. “Everyone goes to the window, but any register can sell gift cards. Don’t tell anyone though, I’m busy enough.”

“Your secret is safe with me,” Malcom said with a smile. It was his first win of the shopping trip.

“I love that sweater,” the woman said as he began to activate her checkout register, tapping at the keys with her extended-length nails. “How much do you want on the card?”

“Let’s go fifty bucks each for four cards,” he said. As she did whatever she needed to do, Malcom reconsidered his cursed sweater. Maybe pink wasn’t so bad on him. Some guys could wear pink. Frankly, he had never tried it. Maybe he was a pink guy and never knew it. Maybe he shouldn’t take an idle complement so seriously.

As he waited, just idly staring at products, he became aware that he was staring at a display of hairbrushes. That was on his list.

He got his phone out and flipped through the items and found what he remembered.

“Conair InfinitiPro Hot Air Brush, 1.5-Inch, Silver.” Malcom had no idea what that even was supposed to look like.

“Do you have these?” He said, pointing to the item on his list so the sales lady could see it.

“We sure do!” She said, turning to the display and picking a package with a silver handle and bursting with small black bristles. “Do you want to get it?”

“Yeah,” Malcom said.

“Here we go, four cards for fifty each.” The sales lady handed them over, each in an envelope. “And one hairbrush. Oh, let me get a small bag for you,” she added, as she dipped down behind her counter. She sprang right up again and handed over the small pink handled bag. “I threw in a little sample to help take care of that gorgeous hair of yours.”

“Oh, thanks,” Malcom said as he left.

When he was sure the sales lady had moved on to something else, he ran his hand through his supposedly ‘gorgeous’ hair. Something was... Not right.

It felt, thicker, longer, and dare he say, silkier.

He did it again, and found the same results. Hair, as far as he was concerned, was a bundle of unruly strands that occasionally needed to be trimmed on schedule like one would trim a hedge. That was all he ever did with his hair. Sometimes Lizzie would want him to care for it, but why would one do that? It was just this junk that grew out of you.

Finding the furniture section, a bedroom set had a mirror he could use, so he tried to casually stand in front of it to see what he could see.

His reflection was not what he was used to. His hair was supposed to be black, short and scraggly. Instead, it had a brown, shimmering color to it, and was ear-length. It also was as smooth and straight as he'd ever seen it. He had the hair of a model for a romance novel.

He immediately dashed away from the mirror, as if not seeing his reflection anymore would help him escape it.

Malcom dropped his bags and felt his hair with both hands. His mind spun as he tried to find a way to explain it. Maybe the stress had affected it. Maybe his eyes were tired. Maybe he was hallucinating.

Without even thinking about it, his hands fell down to his chest and he felt



the mounds there. He once again looked at the pink sweater he couldn't bear to remove. This was no mistake. It was too much to keep inventing excuses for. He was having a real problem of some kind.

He went for his phone and texted his wife. "Not feeling well. Think I should go home."

A moment later, he got a response. "Don't pull this crap on me, Mal."

"No really. Something isn't right with me," he replied.

"I know you don't want to be here, but I'm not even going to think about going home until you cross off some more stuff from the list."

"Please, Lizzie."

"You're wasting daylight."

His wife was letting him down big-time. She was so hypnotized by this craven consumerist holiday she wouldn't even listen to him. Then he thought that maybe if she saw a picture, she'd realize that he wasn't trying to skip out on the shopping trip.

He held his phone up and took, for the very first time in his life, a selfie.

He looked to make sure it had everything he needed to show his wife. The hair was very obvious, and she couldn't ignore it. However, he probably shouldn't be making the peace sign for the photo, as he just had, for some inexplicable reason. He decided to delete it and take a different one.

That one had him making kissy lips at the camera. Malcom didn't even realize he was doing it. They were some kind of subconscious expressions. He tried doing another shot but stopped when he noticed he was fluffing his newly long hair to make it look better.

His changes weren't just physical. Something else was happening to him. Something he couldn't even describe.

Malcom couldn't stay where he was. It was too busy to just be standing around, so he figured on making his way back to the coffee shop. At least there, he could sit down and try to figure things out.

The very confused man sat at a small table after ordering the cheapest scone on the menu, and stared at it with no intent to eat it.

He dared not touch himself in any way, in pure fear that he'd find something else that had changed about him. Instead, he just sat there, unmoving, unable to process his thoughts and paralyzed in fear, doubting his senses or reality or both. He was alone in his own universe. With a chocolate chip scone.

"Hey, Malcom!" Said a voice that snapped him out of his daze.

He looked up to see Dave. Office Dave. The guy who worked on the desk two desks down from his. He didn't even know his last name.

“Hey... Dave...” Malcom replied, not sure what he could even do with a conversation now.

“Nice hair,” Dave said, helping himself to a chair and sitting down. “The surfer look suits you.”

Malcolm’s inability to fully compute what was going on lead him to speak the obvious because it was all he was capable of saying. “Dave?”

“Wife pulled me into being her mule for the day,” Dave From the Office said. “You married?”

Malcom nodded. He didn’t know Dave that well. They rarely talked beyond time-killing water-cooler discussions.

“The things we do to keep the little lady happy,” Dave said with a grin. “Say, I’ve been meaning to ask someone. Did you upgrade to the tier 2 health plan? I know the HR people upstairs were pushing it, but I’ve had the tier 1 for years, never had any problem with it.”

All Malcom could do was let the talking just go on and on.

“I tried asking my supervisor. He wasn’t any help at all. Typical supervisors, huh? But I just keep my head down. I know reviews are coming up soon, and I can sure use that bonus. So don’t make waves, that’s what I...”

“Tch,” Malcom said. At first he didn’t even know where that dismissive noise came from, but all evidence was pointing to it coming from his own mouth.

“What’s that?” Dave asked.

He didn’t want to say the words that were pushing their way into his head. He didn’t want to break away from his urgent issues he needed to deal with and talk to Dave, but he just had to.

“I mean, seriously?” Malcom said. “Who cares?”

Malcom tried to shut his mouth, he really did try. Yet the words were just spilling forth from him.

“I mean... Do you think anyone honestly cares about your stupid problems with your dumb job?”

Dave took the statement in stride, unsuspecting that his office mate was serious. “Heh, well, I suppose... It is a holiday, after all.” He pointed to the scone. “You gonna eat that?”

Malcom watched as Dave from the Office grabbed the scone and took a big bite out of it. He hated him. He hated the way he talked like he was the star of the show, he hated the way he just invited himself to the table when Malcom was having a genuine life-altering crisis and he hated all this lame office talk. When he wasn’t working, Malcom refused to even think about his job. Period. If Dave didn’t respect that, then he needed to be *told* that, and Malcom was not about to hold back.

Malcom held back. He didn't want to start anything. He didn't want to make enemies. He just wanted this day to end so he could go home and figure things out. He just wanted this all to go away.

"God," Malcom said, watching Dave eat his scone. "Could you get any fatter?"

"Well, I..."

"Just shove that food into your fat fucking face, I guess? I suppose it's the only thing that keeps you from realizing your life is so pathetic."

"I'm sorry?" Dave asked, unsure what this was about.

The things Malcom had just said were words he would have never ever even contemplated. Yet, it felt good. It felt good to tell this guy off. It felt good to be vicious. It felt so damn good.

"You should be sorry! Sorry you're such a spaz!" Malcom said. He stood and grabbed all of his things.

"Buddy, what's your problem?" Dave asked.

"You're the person with a problem! Don't even talk to me, okay? You make me feel gross for even being around you!"

"Yeah, well fuck you!" Dave said, finally fighting back.

"You wish!" Malcom replied, baffling himself as he said it. Malcom then stormed out of the coffee shop with his bags and didn't look back.

The thing was, instead of feeling awful about being in an argument or guilty about being difficult, Malcom felt a rush. Telling Dave from the Office off was like pure adrenalin to him. Every neuron was firing, the colors were brighter, the world was slower, the words came easy.

He knew, even as he strode through the mall, that he was losing whatever battle he was fighting. If this was what was happening to him, feeling more confident, feeling smarter, feeling superior, then he wanted it. He liked this. This was well worth ticking off some worker drone for.

"But what... And how?" He asked himself. He waited for a moment, but there was no answer.

Then his phone vibrated.

The message was from the mall app. Another sale. This one was for 75% off all kits at Rêvéle Cosmetics. Second floor.

He then looked it up on his list. Sure enough, there was an item for a makeup kit. It was for his niece, who was just turning 14.

It was just nearby, and he would have felt weirder ignoring it than getting it. Besides, he was curious. He'd never been in a makeup store before.

The store was just row after row of mirrors and items in glass cases. It was hard not to be dazzled by everything, with the glare, the shine and fractured

images everywhere. He was able to find the makeup kits in the back, and got one of the nicer ones for his niece.

As he did, he passed by the lipstick section and casually picked up a tube and popped it open. It was his shade, after all. He gave his lips a thick coat of autumn pink before checking himself in the provided mirror.

It was as he put the lid on that he registered what he was doing. Yet, no one was looking. No one paid the man with the pink lips any mind.

However, he was paying plenty of attention to himself. Just as he was ready to use his new \$200 jacket to wipe the color off his lips, he took a second look, and it stopped him cold.

Malcom had always had thin lips. Not especially thin for a man, but just slightly thinner than most. Until now. His lips were thicker and plumper than he'd ever seen them. He ran his tongue along his lips, tasting that nasty lipstick, but also verifying that his lips were indeed bigger than before. Much bigger. It felt strange, like he had just taken a punch in the face, but without the pain.

His first instinct was to try and pinch his lips back down to normal size, but that would look odd in public, nor be very effective.

Now he was faced with how he was going to get out of here. If it was anything like how things had gone previously, maybe it would be okay. Then again, maybe he would be chased from the mall in terror.

He timidly made his way to the counter and put his items up to be scanned. A makeup kit and one tube of autumn pink matte lipstick.

Malcom paid for it without so much as a blink from the cashier. He was standing out in the thoroughfare again, dozens of shoppers passing this way and that, and no one cared he was wearing lipstick.

What was happening to him? To his life? He was bereft. What even was all this?

He chose a random direction and started walking. He went nearly the length of the mall when turned a corner and found an empty spot near an employee exit. A blessed, empty spot. He leaned against the wall, his mind consumed by a thunderstorm fueled from anguish.



“It can’t be,” he whispered. He now knew what was happening, but dared not even think the words in his own head. “I’m becoming...” He didn’t finish the sentence.

He got his phone out and started a new list. “Symptoms” he titled it.

1. Hair changing color
2. Hair growing longer, smoother

He felt it as he finished typing. His hair might even be longer now, he wasn’t sure.

3. Itchy chest
4. Acting like a brat
5. Kissy-face selfies

It took another one, and sure enough, he did it again without even trying to.

6. Lips getting fat
7. Using makeup accidentally
8. Cant stand people

Well, he hadn’t really changed his opinion of people. He could take or leave most of them. But now people — when they interacted with him — were driving him crazy. How could they all be so dumb?

Then he remembered the one thing he’d been trying to pass off as normal. The one thing he’d been, even now, trying to excuse and look past.

He hadn’t magically put on weight overnight. He had never had a fleshy chest. The “man” boobs he’d been feeling on his chest. Truthfully, there was noting “man” about his boobs.

9. Growing boobs

At that point he had no choice. He had to admit it. He had to think the thought.

He was turning into a girl.

Not a woman, no. By his estimation, and judging by his new temperament, he had to say that his emotions were more like a teenage girl. A very bratty, nasty and petulant teenage girl.

Why? It was a question he couldn’t even begin to figure out. How? It was impossible. People didn’t spontaneously change at the genetic level. That was fantasy or science fiction. Still, it was happening, probably.

Even now, with the clear evidence hanging from his chest, he couldn’t accept it completely. Who would? The impossible was happening to him, so he needed to rationalize it, and no rational explanation was satisfactory.

“So if I really am turning into a spoiled teenage girl...” he said quietly to himself. “What else might happen?”

He created a line of dashes after his list and started a second one.

“Girl Things” he titled it.

1. Boobs (check)
2. Pussy

He blanched at that. He even clenched his legs together slightly, just to make sure he could feel his package down there. No change.

3. Long hair (in progress?)
4. Makeup (also in progress???)
5. Pink (lips, sweater)
6. Skirts

With that, he ran out of steam. “Skirts” was kind of pushing it, and pink wasn’t exclusive to girls at all.

Accordingly, he changed the title of the list.

“Bitchy Girl Things” was the new one.

7. Nasty to people
8. Obsessed with looks

He didn’t have a really good idea of what to put in the list, as he had always made it a priority to avoid these kinds of people. He just didn’t like confrontation.

9. Super hot
10. Always fashionable

That seemed fair. A girl who acted bitchy would have to look good enough to get away with such behavior.

11. Better than others

Again, fair. It wasn’t like that was a high bar. Most people were dumb, stupid pervs anyway, in his opinion.

12. Confident
13. Always right
14. Really smart

“Yeah,” he said quietly. “You know it.” Girls with attitude may be called bitches by others, he reasoned, but that’s only because they were right. People hate on the truth, and some just can’t handle it.

15. Boys want her
16. Makes other girls jealous
17. Gets what she wants
18. Can’t be stopped

Satisfied he had defined his list adequately, he put the phone away. So if these were the sort of things that he might find changing, maybe he might get lucky and pick up a few positive traits. No having any idea how stop this — or even if it wasn't just a product of his imagination — Malcom just had to make the best of the situation. It wasn't all bad, as he could stand to get a little more confident, in his opinion.

A few minor changes here and there were okay with him if it meant he could feel more confident. That rush he felt telling off Dave from the Office was amazing. If that was what it felt like to be confident, then a different hair color or whatever was a reasonable price to pay.

He felt his hair again, and wasn't quite that surprised to find that it was now covering his ears. He was scared, yet somehow thrilled, as he kept his fingers running down its' length, past his chin, past his neck, and past his shoulders.

Malcom didn't heed a camera or a mirror to see it now, as he could hold it, plain to see in front of his face. The change was alarming, even sickening, so why didn't he feel that way? To him, it meant that these changes were still happening. It meant he even more of this new confidence could be coming.

Indeed, holding his new long hair, pooled up in the palms of his hands, was exciting. He was trembling in anticipation, thinking that he hadn't yet reached the end of this process. Far from being terrified, Malcom was looking forward with nervous, bone rattling anxiety to seeing what was ahead for him.

Besides, the hair looked good. It was a lustrous rich brown with natural highlights in blonde. It shone like old stained wood in the morning sunlight and was even smoother and silkier than it had been earlier. He was going to hate cutting it when he got the chance, but he would cut it for sure.

