

-SYLVIA-

Ike lowers his stance just like I want him to. He dribbles the ball double time, to work to the camera lens. His right foot is forward, and I'm laying on my belly, pointing my camera up. With this angle he'll look like he's going to step right out of the page.

“Ok, Ike, now shift your weight like you're going to run right past me.”

“What do you mean?”

“Kay. Just look like you're doing a fake-out.”

He does this side to side head and shoulder wiggle thing that seems pretty dopey, but I get a pretty good shot for the one moment that it looks cool. That's photography.

“OK.” I say “That's good. That's really good.”

Rolling over I get up off the ground and dust the dirt from my ass and chest. With my pink skirt on the dust clings with gray color. Pretty soon it's mostly gone. I look over to the other side of the court. This is a smirked little smile of mine. I want to shoot the two lovers.

“Mitch, Cliff, can you guys come over here?”

I landed this gig by actually talking to Tre. Just talk, you know, putting myself out there. It was easy. Tre knows who I am, and he likes to get his photo in the paper. So he asked if I could come in one practice, and do some personal shots for the yearbook. The Coach Oked it and Tre gets what he wants. Actually it's what I want, I just convinced Tre that he wants it too. Just having a few drinks last night and I promised a two page basketball montage spread. I have no way to back that up, but the yearbook won't be out for another six months. I've got nothing to worry about, and I get to play with the boys.

There are four hoops used for practice on the court, they run parallel on the two courts that are perpendicular to the main court. I've got one of the hoops all to myself to do my photo shoot.

Cliff and Mitch come over I set them up.

“OK, fellas what do you think?”

“Think about what?” Cliff asks me.

You know what? I can even picture him naked right here and now.

“About the shoot. What kind of stuff would you like in the yearbook?”

Mitch shrugs. "I dunno."

They look at each other, clueless.

"What?" Cliff asks

"Nothing." Mitch replies.

That smirk of mine tries to re-surface.

There is so much here right below the surface, and all I have to do is get them to bring it out.

"Tell you what, guys, why don't you just face off in a little one-on-one. I'll take a few shots, and we'll see what we get, OK?"

So they face off in a one-on-one game. I'm yawning. I was expecting to see the passion here. There's no passion, no aggression. They just looked like two guys playing basketball.

Mitch would spin-dribble. He misses a lay-up. Cliff rebounds fades back and scores. There's a little shuffling about and then Mitch scores.

So the photos were pretty good. Very workable. The problem is that they were ordinary, and they didn't show how these two guys really feel about each other.

"I got it guys. Come here."

They line up in front of me. I'm thinking about how Arthur kissed Loopy during the big fight last night. Wait. Today must be November first.

"Right, gentlemen. I need you to do some trash talk."

"What do you mean?" Mitch asks

"There's no edge to these shots, and you guys, I've seen in the past have a lot of emotion. I want that emotion to come out. Don't play a friendly game. Play dirty. A little trash-talk is all."

"Trash talk?" Asks cliff

"See what happens. Try to piss each other off. Get pissed off."

And I raise my camera and see exactly what I want to see.

Cliff shuffles his feet and spin dribbles, there's tension in his face, competitive spirit. He gives Mitch the slip. He cuts across the floor and nails a jump-shot.

“Oh, damn. Guess what you didn't catch, slacker?”

“Shove it, bitch. Pass me the ball.”

Cliff bounce-passes the ball.

“Oh, yeah, hey, what does bitch rhyme with?”

Mitch checks the ball, Cliff swipes at it, loses it and ends up trying to chase it as it goes out of bounds.

“Oh, damn, shit-head. Head-fake a bit much for you.”

Cliff smirks “Fag.”

“What was that?”

“I said my hand slipped.”

“You want something you can actually keep a hand on, I'll buy you a yo-yo. You just suck ass.”

Cliff checks to Mitch again. I think the last one hit a nerve.

“Don't push, ass-wipe.”

“Oh, don't push? Fine. Here it comes.”

The fade away, from behind the three point line. I get the shot. Swish.

Cliff doesn't move.

“Get the ball, bitch.”

“Fuck you, Mitch.”

“Oh, fuck me?”

Mitch gets right up in Cliffs face.

“You like that shit? Why don't you tell me what you really like?”

Cliff pushes him back. “I'd like your ass out of my face.” Mitch comes right back at him.

“Just because you can't play for shit. Don't go starting shit.”

Cliff froze. Their eyes dart back and forth anticipating, angry, passionate, fearful, it's a storm of emotions. I'm a sick little monkey. I've started a war of glances that fires back and forth, and now their pride is in the game. I didn't have to encourage them at all.

“Your play, punk. Get the ball.”

I kept them playing. Kept them cursing. I caught it all; the jump shots and fade aways and behind-the-back dribbles and the scorn from their eyes, and cursing from their mouths. It intensified every moment.

Then they blew.

“Shut up you piece of shit.” Says Mitch

“You heard me, faggot!”

“Fuck you.”

Cliff smiles. “Know it now. One day everyone is going to know it. You are my bitch, Mitch.”

So Mitch throws the ball at Cliffs legs, and charges him. Cliff hops to one side and gets a defense up, but Mitch grabs him. Then they're both on the ground.

I snap a photo of it.

The next shot I get is Cliff shoving him off, and getting up.

The next shot I get is Cliff chucking the ball at Mitch just like Mitch did to him.

The next shot is them squared off, fists up.

The next shot is a real winner. Mitch throwing a punch while the coach comes up in the background. He's screaming;

“What the hell is this chicken shit!?”

The next shot is them back on the floorboards of the court.

The last shot I got was the both of them looking up at me from the floor. They have a shocked look in their eyes. I don't have a picture of my face, but I know it was worse shock than theirs. This is because just before my last shot, my cell-phone went off. They definitely recognized the ring-tone.

-DAVE-

I wanted it to be sunny when I got out of jail. It was gray and it was cold, and an abysmal Thursday.

"I thought I told you not to call me at school!" She's got an angry whisper from behind her crackly cell-phone reception.

"School?" I ask her "It's 4:30 PM. School got out like an hour and a half ago."

"Shut up, Loopy. What are you calling me for?"

"Just wanted to let you know that I'm out of jail."

"I do not give a shit!"

I snort unintentionally "Yeah, well fine. I'm sorry I called. Arthur and I have to talk. Maybe I'll call you later."

"Wait. Wait. Is Arthur there?"

"Yeah. He's dropped the charges, and bailed me."

"Put him on! Put him on! Put him on!"

"I won't call you at school again."

I hang up and turn to Arthur.

"OK, man. Let's go."

We cross a cop as I leave the precinct that shoots me a dirty look. Ignoring him I move to the street and get into Arthur's Audi TT. Arthur wordlessly gets in and starts the car. We pull away.

"I've got to get you out of that robe." He says. "Lets do a little clothes shopping."

I bite the inside of my cheek, and stare outside.

"My treat." he speaks up.

A misty-cold precipitation falls outside and the whirring of the windsheild wiper

servos is barely audible against the hum of the engine. I'm so angry, and I've wanted to yell at this arrogant little fucker all night long. But here I am, and all I can do is just go mute like an idiot.

We continue driving down the street and stop up in a traffic jam. Horns honk sparsely from the surrounding cars and taxis.

"It's pretty busy right now, but we're coming up to rush hour."

Ten seconds of silence go by, before I say my piece.

"OK. Look! Shut the fuck up for a second. What the fuck? I mean seriously! You shi- You little douche bag. I mean my God. You fucking faggot. Christ almighty. I mean shit. What the fuck is wrong with you? Do you have any clue what a prick you are? I mean, can you even...begin to see this shit?"

"Yeah, about the Halloween party. Do you remember what happened?"

"Fuck yourself."

"I have no idea what happened. Last thing I remember I was looking out of my window, in my Dracula outfit. I woke up at three this afternoon sore as hell with my dad very angry at me. I had a card from the police with a case number on it, and I called up. They said you were in jail."

"Oh, I'm sorry, little rich bitch. There is no way in Hell I'm letting you slide with a stupid innocence routine."

"I'm being serious, Ken."

"Dave! Dickhead! My name is Dave!"

"Fine then, Dave. I'm sorry I blacked out."

"You forgot, huh? Let me surmise it for you. You took some freaky drugs, threatened me, fucked with me, tossed me down the stairs and then I knocked your ass out! Don't you ever dare to start another thing against me. You pompom pansy cheerleader rich freak. I will alley-dog your French-poodle ass. I laid you right down."

The blood pumping in my veins feels like pure, hot rage I've risen from my seat propping myself up in the TT's cabin. It's like I suddenly realize my head is bent sideways from the roof of the car.

“OK. So that's what's happened?”

“In a nutshell.”

I settle back in my seat.

“OK.” he says. Several moments pass as he makes a turn to the next street. “What happened before that?”

How can he keep his cool demeanor when I'm so worked up? It defuses me. He is not putting up a fight. My pent up anger feels like disappointment. I slump into my seat.

“Before that you called me into your room and we were discussing about your insider trading scheme.”

I look out the window. I just don't want to look at him anymore.

“That you know my name, and that I'm a professional thief.”

“Oh. I mentioned that?” He asks nonchalantly.

“Definitely.”

“OK. Well, that's one of the things I was hoping to say. What else was there?”

The kiss.

Oh, shit.

He's blacked it out and I don't need to remember. It never happened.

“Nothing, man. Keep driving.”

I know this is what it means to bear a cross. Figuratively, anyway. He pulls us into a parking garage and I allow myself to relax and be mesmerized by the overhead lights and passing cement pillars. My cell phone rings, It's Sylvia. I click to ignore the call. We wind up the floors, and he pulls us into a spot, and kills the engine. He looks me right in the face.

“I feel that I owe you for the jail time. Let's get you dressed. Are you sure there isn't anything else I should know?”

“Well, there is Sylvia.” I say. “Sylvia Jenks is an under age child pornographer and

she's also in love with you.”

He rolls his eyes; “Anything else.”

“Did you know?” I ask

“I just don't care.”

“Oh.” Again for a second I'm amazed at the level of calm that has come over me.
“Well, um...You're rich, right? The ten mill you've got? The doomsday fund?”

“What about it?”

“What's it for?”

“For none of your business.”

Whatever. Look, if he's rich than there's a buck to be made here.

“Well. How would you feel about buying a Lexus SUV?” I ask “Used.”

He smirks and cocks back his pretty boy head.

“Well, I'll take a look at it.”

-ARTHUR-

When he comes out of the dressing room he looks so slick and gangster. Navy blue suit and a new white shirt. I got him new leather black shoes. They're glistening. His silvery tie with the black inlays on it gives him a nice edge.

Maybe I'll get him a fedora.

He's got his robe slung over his arm.

"You know what it needs?" He asks "A watch."

"Damn right." I reply.

So we go and he tries on a gold-plated timepiece with a built in 31-count calender and an etched wristband

"I don't know. I'm looking for something useful. Not anything that's like an antique."

I look down into the jewelers case, and there's a silver wristwatch with a built in motion generator. I wave Ken to come over, and when he does I point down at it, and he gets real close to the glass.

"Now that's what I'm talking about."

I can't believe I'm playing dress-up here. Halloween was yesterday. He gets the watch handed off to him, and puts it on. Less flashy, more practical. I like his style.

He holds the watch next to his grinning face.

"Nice score. Goes well with the suit. I believe I have a wardrobe, Arthur."

I snap my credit card down on the counter.

"Oh, I forgot one thing." He says to me.

"Hm?"

He looks at me for a second. "No. Nevermind. I'll tell you later."

I encrust his wrist with a silver watch for \$800. I've never spent so much on a thief before. There is honor among us.

I can't believe I told him about the doomsday fund. The biggest secret, and most ambitious thing I've ever done and I blurted it out to him? How hammered did I get? He even knew it was ten-million dollars worth. It took half my strength to keep my poker face when he told me. It took the other half to not wet myself.

Ken has all the proof he needs, and I go to jail for a long, long time. We walk out of the mall and into the biting crisp autumn air. Into the parking lot we go and head off in my car. We get about half a mile from the mall, when he pops the question.

"So tell me. Are you gay?"

No. No. No. That's not fair, Ken. You can't ask me that, without showing me a little interest first. I can't get asked my orientation so suddenly by a guy I'd sleep with in a heartbeat. This timing sucks. What do I say? I'm not gay by my standards, I'm just flexible.

"What?" I ask "Are you?"

"Hell no." he says, offended.

Shit. Fuck. Goddammit.

"Neither am I."

What the hell is the point of being a spoiled, rich, bipolar brat when you don't get what you want? Curse you, Ken. You steal my money then break my heart. I could kill you. No. No. No, I can't.

"Sylvia Jenks is one fucked up chick. You know that? We need to do something about her."

"We?" I ask.

"Yeah. I just figured it out. We can work this out. We become partners."

Hell yes, we do.

"I don't know what this doomsday fund is for, but I want in. Refusal is not an option."

No, it's not. I won't let you walk away from all this. Not away from me, and not away with my money. I won't let him freeload.

"If you want in you have to contribute. I'll need more than 10 million to do what I need to."

"What? Donations?"

He scratches his chin and then looks directly into my eyes.

"OK, man. I know you don't remember what happened. You were wasted. You didn't know what you were doing. So I forgive you."

Christ. What did I do last night?

"Let's go back to my place. You want contribution? I've got a car that we will sell there's some other gear too."

"That's a good start."

I sometimes get naked when I'm drunk or when I get really high. I can't have been that stupid.

He sticks out his hand.

"Put 'er there, partner."

We shake and then I start the car and we head out to the hustle.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to
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