

Kuwait Book

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Novella

F U R V A N W I N K L E

Written by
Yousef A. Mustafa

Edited by
Mohammed A. Mustafa

Kuwait, Hiteen 2011

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Yousef A. Mustafa

– NOTE –

Although this novella crosses gender norms, it remains clean in context.

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chapter one
change

As the annoying bell rang, Furnivall Bloi headed towards his assigned classroom as he was supposed to. Like the loner he had become, he sat in the farthest seat of the last row and opened his textbook to where the class had last stopped. Occasionally his eyes would wander about the classroom. Sometimes they settle on a certain object and take Furnivall's mind to a wonderland. Other times, he is bound by reality. His eyes would see how everyone sat next to someone. Everyone. Every single student had someone they wanted to sit next to, and vice versa.

Through his silent observations, he realized that the girls had much more awareness in what they dressed. Fur understood and respected that. In fact, he admired their different styles; their choice for excellent fabric; the radiant colors he could never wear – would never be allowed to. However, turning his eyes towards his own gender, he failed to understand how their minds worked. Their plain, boring cloth showed great lack of interest in how they chose to represent themselves. Looking at their wardrobe, only one word came to mind: lifeless. Furthermore, he failed to grasp the logic behind the guys' interest – or obsession – in their handheld gadgets. Unlike him and the female students, they didn't have a text book in front of them, or even a note book or a pen for that matter, however, they did have their sunglasses and

car keys displayed on their desks, as well as their indispensable cellular phones – which appear to occupy them mentally and physically. But Fur never made anything out of it. All his observations contributed to no deductions – all these notes about society were taken down subconsciously. Naïvely, he looked the other way. He never did venture off on emitting his thoughts on paper, not because they were dangerous thoughts to the social norms, but because he had yet to awake: Fur did not realize how different he was from the other boys.

It was a Wednesday when the day arrived, the day that would bring out what had been inside Fur for so long. It had been inside of him ever since he could remember, yet he couldn't name what it was, but only feel it. This was his eighteenth year of going through life, and only now had he felt something was wrong. He never dared to describe it to anyone, not even to confine it to a piece of paper, for if it ever got out, it would change everything. Change. A fearful process for a boy of his caliber.

Before that day arrived, Fur had been feeling blue. The more he grew and saw the world around him, the more he came to despise it. He felt resentment towards his own town, his neighbors, his classmates, even his family, while the cause was the one to resent. He knew the cause, but no good would come from going against it, as it dominates all. It shapes our lives and how we live. We live in it, by it, and for it. Those who follow its word to the letter are the fortunate fools, while the others, the minority, the freaks, are the ones cursed with open eyes. Fur was one of them.

Fur felt things, unnatural things, things which he must keep buried. He couldn't tell anyone as everyone would judge him and never understand how it is to feel the way he felt. He came to loathe chats with any male as their chats were strictly macho-talk or practiced in a manly manner. The way they spoke; the topics they discussed; the jokes they made .. all of them belonged to a circle he wished to have nothing to do with. But he didn't want to be shut out, he did wish to chat with his other peers, female peers. Constructive chats. Non-violent chats. Pleasant chats. But of course, there was no way such a dream would come true in a society of this reality.

Life sucks, he constantly thought. It has been a while since he felt otherwise. Fortunately for him, it would all come to an end soon. It was his senior year of high-school, after that life would change. Little did he know, change would come sooner than he thought ... a change of a different scale.

The following day was, in every possible sense, a life-altering one. Fur woke up looking through a fresh set of eyes. Feeling the difference but unable to name it, Fur scanned his surroundings from bed; he ran his eyes across his white walls, from his emo poster to his hung Emily Dickinson poem, MUCH MADNESS IS DIVINEST SENSE. Everything seemed the same as it was yesterday, but, at the same time, in an odd, unexplainable way, everything was completely different. That paradoxical feeling drove Fur to get up from bed and march straight into his bathroom. Once he was on both feet, he felt even more bizarre. It was as if, somehow, he was shorter, thinner, and lighter. He wasn't heavy – or even meaty – the night he slept, but somehow he had shrunk in a way.

He checked himself in the mirror and saw a face he failed to recognize – it was possibly his mother's when she was a high-school freshmen, but not his. His chin was the first change he noted, being completely hairless. He never had a beard since he shaved daily, but this was different. It was as if his chin hair follicles – the glands that produced his chin hair, a term he

picked up in Biology 101 – were dead. Now, other than the hair on his scalp, his eyebrows, and his eyelashes, he had no hair at all. His nose was much smaller and more rounded than he had remembered it to be as well, though it might have been an illusion caused by the softness of his chin. The thought that he was operated on while he slept crossed his mind. He thought that, perhaps, someone performed a plastic surgery on him in the past eight hours. It was ridiculous, but logical. But that theory, he thought, could never account to the other aspects of this change. His shoulders seemed at a lowered height; his arms and legs, thinner. Even his fingers, the ones he ran across his body in examination of the incredible physical changes, seemed to be more thinner and hairless as apposed to how they were yesternight. Within seconds of viewing these changes, his heart was presented with earthquakes. It frightened him.

Is this a hallucination, he wondered, a dream? It seems real – it feels real. But how is this possible? There hasn't been anything like this in history .. or has there, but been kept a secret out of shame .. ? No, he told himself mentally, such ideas are ridiculous. There was no way he was really female. This must be a trick of the mind, somehow. But .. everything feels so real. One question after another came, each answered with doubt and worry, but none with evidence. Although he tackled a number of questions, one crucial question remained submerged in his subconsciousness: Would this last? Is it for a short period, or will he go on living like this?

As Fur questioned his new reality secretly, his heart suddenly jumped with the sudden knocking at his door.

'Fur. School.'

Should he go? Can he go? How could he emerge into the public looking the way he did? What would people's reactions be? His peers? His family? He attempted to stall these questions by throwing his hair in front of his face. If it was covered up, he thought, no one would question him for the time being. Then, he got out of his PJs and get dressed as there wasn't any time for a shower. It would have to wait until he returned home. How much, Fur realized, he craved for a shower at this point of his life.



Fur, dressed in his most gloomiest, boyish cloth he could find, got out of his room. The weird feeling accompanied him. Sneakingly, he tried to make his way out of the house without encountering his mother or sister. His father was never around at home during this time of year. However, just before he made it undetected to the front door, he heard a sharp voice come from behind him.

'Going somewhere, young man.' It was the voice of his mother. A sweet, spoiling mother who's age was just above forty. There was a time when she cared about her own life, such as perusing education or staying fashionable, but since Fur was born she held him as the most precious and dearest to her heart. 'If you don't want breakfast, you don't have to eat, but the least you could do is give me a kiss.'

Fur always gave his mother two kisses, the first when he leaves the house, the second when he returns. However, this time he was reluctant to kiss her. He couldn't even turn around to face her. He feared that she would notice the changes.

'Sorry, mom, but I'm late.'

With that he departed, leaving his mother in confusion. It wasn't the words he chose, but the voice he used. She noted the pitch to be different than usual. Softer. His sixteen year old sister exited the kitchen with a toasted bread between her fingers, leaned on the wall, then took a crunchy bite out of her breakfast.

'What's up with him?' She asked her mother while munching away.

'None of your business. Get ready for school.'

Fur rushed towards school without knowing why. He had not escaped a lethal confrontation, but only delayed it. And the weekend was coming, so his secret would be out eventually. Fur partly rushed to school as he thought it would provide him with a shelter. Seeing that he has no friends, he would be invisible there. Fur partly rushed because he was terrified of his recent discovery. When he apologized to his mother just before he stormed out of the house, it was the first time he had noted the change of his voice quality. He never had a deep tone, but it wasn't this soft either. Fur wished it was the last of this morning's creepy surprises.

As predicted, Fur walked the busy halls uninterrupted. Wearing baggy cloth and having his hair over his face granted him invisibility. On this day Fur had only two classes, but he would only attend one as the other class was canceled for the day. In other words, for Fur, he had fifty minutes of boredom to sit through, but after that, his nightmare would begin. Having this issue of gender-loss to deal with, he marched straight into class with little intention of taking notes. It was a general course, Biology 101.

Fur sat in his usual chair before anyone had arrived. Four minutes remained before the class would start, and there was still no one present. The female students were usually the first to show up, at around two minutes before the class begins, then the guys would come later, at around five to ten minutes after the professor had arrived. The class room seemed, to Fur, quieter than usual. He looked at his scribbles on the desk, then shifted towards the leaf outside the window. Everything seemed the same, yet it felt different .. as if he came to school wearing PJs, or like that there shouldn't be a class on this day or at this time. The quietness of the moment drove Fur to an unsettling feeling, a feeling one would have before giving a presentation.

Once the first student set foot in the classroom, time quickly passed by. Before Fur knew it the classroom was full of noisy students, non of which gave Fur a second look.

'Settle down, class, must we go over this every class?' The biology schoolmaster spoke up. He was a fair instructor of a round figure. His cloth preference, at least when he came to lecture, was anything formal and brown in color, both of which Fur noted and disliked, but respected. 'Now, where were we last .. who're you?'

Time stopped. That question fired at Fur stopped the lecture, the student's noise and movement – the entire room was quiet and motionless again. Fur's heartbeat stopped, then started beating rapidly. He struggled in finding an answer for the question, an answer not only the schoolmaster waited for, but apparently the entire class as everyone had tilted their heads towards Fur. All awaited the answer.

Should I tell him the truth? Will he believe it? It was obvious that his change had gone far enough. Telling the schoolmaster that he was in fact Furnivall Bloi would only get him into more trouble. Had he not experienced the changes himself, he wouldn't have believed it. Fur was a dreamer – a fact he is well-aware of – but he also knew that this was a time in which he

had to be realistic. It was ten in the morning and he already had a plateful of physical trouble: the last thing he needed was academic trouble.

'Um,' Fur's voice was nothing like his own – it was too feminine to be his, 'I'm here instead of Furnivall Bloi.'

Fur didn't intend to lie, but it was the best he could come up with in a short notice.

'And why is Mr. Bloi too busy to join us this morning?'

'Huh?' He uttered in unexpectedness of the second fired question.

'Where is he?' The schoolmaster demanded with a strict, unpleasant tone.

'He's not feeling very well.'

'And who're you?'

'Uh .. his sister.'

'Well, Mr. Bloi's sister, you may take his seat for now, but I expect to see your brother first thing Sunday morning.'

Once the schoolmaster said those words, Fur's behind came crashing down on the seat, and finally, much to his comforts, eyes were no longer on him. Gradually, Fur recovered, realizing the grave danger in which he still remained. Impersonating his sister could not result in anything good; lying couldn't result in anything good. Fur believed in the truth, and knew that it was his only option. However, he decided to conceal it until he understood it first. He gave himself the upcoming weekend to figure out what to do.

Fur daydreamt the entire session, except for one topic that managed to penetrate through his subconsciousness. It was when the schoolmaster mentioned the dangerous word gender.

'Some bacterias, such as the Genoteria, had puzzled biologists whether to consider it alive or something that lives in a different sense of living, seeing its inability to reproduce. However, studies have shown that it is possible for them to reproduce under the right settings. Genoteria's by nature have female organs, but are capable of transforming those organs into male organs in dependence on the temperature and environment they are in. Yet, if all the Genoterias in that setting transform their organs, the problem won't be solved. They would all be males thus cannot reproduce. See what I mean? Now. Returning to the ...'

At that point Fur's concentration with the lecture broke off. He had a weird thought.

'Am I ... a germ ...?' Fur asked himself the silliest question he could imagine, not noticing the words came aloud, but no one had heard him as they were listening to the schoolmaster.

The lecture was over quickly, and Fur failed to take down one note. He had wasted the entire session in thought. Yet, this wasn't the first time Fur sought feelings and pondered his reality during a lecture. He had done so also in Politics 101, when the politics professor stated that 'There are many reasons to why people hold political power over others.' Fur recalled the lecture, 'First and foremost is the biological factor. Man is by nature a political animal. He cannot live in a society unless it holds some of his ideals of order and organization. Regardless of how uninvolved in politics one may be, he will always have ideals for his perfect society.' A 'perfect' society, Fur fantasized, would be a genderless one. Sex is a certainty, no one could doubt or change it, but there are some things that can be changed. If only the minority could be a majority ...

'... That will be all for today, everyone.' The schoolmaster concluded his session. 'Have a busy weekend. Remember, the exams are just around the corner, you don't have time to goof

around.' By the time he closed his mouth – even before he finished giving his piece of advice, everyone had packed away and gone.

While Fur began to gather his books and papers, everyone else had left. He, and the schoolmaster were the last two to leave. Just before Fur left the classroom, the schoolmaster stopped him.

'Miss Bloi,' he said to him, 'send my best to your brother.'

Miss Bloi. He had called him by a title he had never seen coming. As a result, Fur had wondered off in the halls of the school subconsciously, lost in the thought. Miss Bloi. It had a strange effect on him, much more effective than the usual Mr. Bloi.

Suddenly, a shout down the hallway grabbed Fur's attention. It was a roaring sound, like that of a lion in a leafy jungle, or a thunder in a stormy sky. Fur froze in his place as he had recognized the voice: it belonged to the headmaster. As Fur heard loud footsteps marching towards him, a thought came rushing into his mind – the thought of having been discovered. As Fur turned around slowly, he saw the screaming headmaster bypass him and stand in front of a boy facing his locker.

'There are school regulations, young man!' The headmaster shouted at the boy, 'Wearing red spandex to school is not one of them!'

He was wearing red pants, brilliant red that guys wouldn't usually wear, though one would find them on female students.

'Um, sir, they're just plain pants ..'

'Doesn't matter!' He insisted viciously, 'You're not supposed to wear that.'

Supposed to.

Two seemingly ordinary words, but words that show the true colors of the flawed system, a society of meaningless preferences. That's why boys wear what they wear and girls have their own type of clothing, Fur realized. They were supposed to wear certain cloth. All this time he thought everyone had chosen what they wore by free will, but it was never really their choice, but society's – what it expects from them to wear; what it accepts.

Fur watched, along with the other students, the boy as he apologized with disappointment to the headmaster, promising not to repeat this heinous action again, then left. The headmaster left, then the boy left, and soon the audience left as well. But Fur didn't. His last update on the world around him was when the headmaster had said those two frightful words. Since then he had been lost in thought.

Should I start wearing other type of clothing? Fur wondered to himself. He had always worn baggy pants and long-sleeved shirts because he felt like it. The last time he wore colorful clothing was when he was a child without a care in the world – a time of eternal joy; a time in which he did not understand the term gender and the misery it brings; a time in which he knew who he was, but not what he was and should act like. Since he departed that world and entered the adult one – the one which taught him about gender – he had always worn gray and black baggy clothes as it was all what he had felt. But now, now it's different, he realized. His depression and seclusion from the outside world had existed because of the simple fact that he was limited to male rights; he built fences around himself only because society had built walls around him, imprisoning him from being himself. But now, now it's different, he was no longer imprisoned in that reality. He was still a subject of society, but of the female side. If he had to chose a gender to be categorized as, it would be the pink one. But .. should he?

Fur was about to leave campus when his heartbeat stopped. It was a fearful scene that had brought a horrible feeling to his heart. His half-open eyelids jerked wide open; his back slammed against an opposing wall. As he breathed with difficulty, dreadful thoughts came to his mind about what it would mean if the one he had been hiding from saw him. Biff Frohike was coming his way.

Biff was a year older than Fur, but at the same senior level as he had failed a number of courses during his sophomore years. In intelligence, Biff comes a bit short than Fur, but in his physique, Biff is twice as big as Fur in both height and weight, which allowed him to raise to the glorious prestige of being the captain of the football team. By nature he was one of those who loved to hog the spotlight, however, he did have other activities in the back-streets. During his five-years stay at Putmud High, Biff has gained a notorious reputation. That was a part why Fur was mortified to death from the mere image of Biff – To Fur, Biff was more than a top delinquent of Putmud High, but his personal tormentor; Biff was Fur's bully.

Knowing that Biff would spot him if he had remained in that position, Fur panicked and hid in the nearest room, which was the restroom. He hoped that Biff would just pass by, then Fur would make his exit. However, Biff ruined Fur's sound plan by going to the restroom, and shared the same shock with Fur as they stood staring at each other.

'Uh .. hello there!' Fur stuttered gently.

What now? Fur wondered, does he know it's me? Of course he knows! He has been tormenting me since freshman!

A moment had passed in silence. Both stood there staring at each other. Fur hadn't the foggiest idea what Biff would do to him in a setting such as this: both of them are alone, surrounded by the filthiest objects. Biff could have a blast in demeaning Fur in such an environment.

'What are you doing here?'

What does he mean by that? Then, thinking about the question, Fur realized that he was in the mens room. He was the one out of place. Simultaneously Fur figured out what his question implied. He knew that Biff hadn't figured it out. He failed to recognize Fur, which meant there would be no pounding.

'My name's Biff, Biff Frohike. And you?'

Why's he acting weird, Fur wondered, so .. tender? He's usually violent even in tone and choice of words. Even with his friends ..

'You know, when a guy walks into a bathroom, the last thing he'd expect to see in his face is a dazzling beauty.'

Biff's remark left Fur speechless. He didn't know how to respond to such a dangerous compliment coming from his worst nightmare. Right then he had an epiphany. Not only did he realize that Biff was hitting on him, but it was because of his appearance. Only then did Fur realize how superficial people are.

'Haven't seen her around. She must be new here ..' Biff thought to himself, then said aloud: 'You know, I'm the coolest guy in school, and you're the hottest chick I've seen. I bet the two of us would make something, huh?'

The more words came out of Biff's mouth, the more shocked Fur became. He could not believe how radical Biff had changed by the mere appearance Fur projected. It was so shocking that it frightened Fur. He was at the verge of crying, not because he had become desirable

instead of a punching bag, but because he understood that this whole new world he had been pushed into was going to change every thing. This marvelous, unexplained change in gender brought more than he could ever anticipate or aspire for. Right then and there Fur understood that unless he changes back, everything he had been taught about life would no longer apply. Now he was playing in a whole different league.

'Do I at least get a name? Or maybe get to hear your voice?' Biff urged Fur softly with a shy yet forward smile and a fixed look into Fur's eyes.

'Yes, sorry.' Fur replied in his usual manner but with his newly-discovered feminine voice. 'My name's Fur.'

It came out unintentionally. Only after it slipped out did Fur realize the grave mistake he had made. If Biff connected this Fur with the Fur he used to beat up, the results could be catastrophic.

'Fur .. what a beautiful name!'

Oh right, Fur exclaimed in his mind, Biff never really knew my name. We never had a class together.

'So, how about it?' Biff asked gently, but shyfully forward as always.

'Yeah sure.' Fur mumbled without thinking.

Fur and Biff's relationship has always been a direct one; Biff usually did the pounding and Fur did the receiving. Their relationship consisted of short-lived encounters, ones which Fur always said and did everything in his power to get over with and done. As soon as Biff left with a date, Fur realized what had happened.

Biff had jotted down Fur's address – which Fur had given subconsciously when asked – on his wrist and agreed to pick him up at around eightish. Fur thought of not going, but knew well that standing Biff up would most likely result in something far worse than an evening out with him. He decided to go. What's the worst that could happen?



Fur returned home with one intention: to lock himself in his room. If no one saw him, no one would question him about his recent change. He didn't have any answers. He didn't even know whether he'd remain in this state or not. The sun had set, the school was out, but the mystery had remained.

Fur arrived home shortly after sunset. The neighbors were dining at that time like usual, hence no one noticed a strange girl going into the Blois house. Fur opened the door gently, much more careful than usual. He wasn't in the mood for neither his mother nor his sister to interrogate him about his new look. He figured there was a time and place for everything, and tonight was neither. The least he could do was sleep over it and see what happens in the morning. Part of Fur wanted everything to return to the way they were, yet another part of him, the part which thought of the consequence of things returning to the way they were, wanted this change to last. Fur had loathed his old life, and perhaps this was what he needed.

Fur made it up the stairway undetected, but when he opened his room, he saw his sister standing in his face.

'Amy!'

'Fur!'

There was a moment of tension between them at that time. They both stood as if time had stopped due to the error in their reality. Either time or space was out of place. Amy knew how much Fur upheld privacy and disliked anyone trespassing into his room without his consent. Fur, at that moment, wasn't thinking about her illegal entry or what she was doing in there as much as he was thinking about what her reaction to his appearance. Feeling apologetic, Amy failed to realize the alteration her big brother had undergone, but only for a second. The minute she really saw Fur's face her apologetic look and worried voice shifted into a smile of a dangerous caliber: mockery had presence in her tone now.

'OMG Fur, what have you done to your face? .. Are you wearing makeup?'

'Amy, I'm busy now, so if you don't mind ..' Fur muttered behind his hair as he bypassed Amy.

Fur was inside his domain now – his sanctuary – and all that remained was to shut the door. But he didn't wish to do so with his sister inside his turf. He tried hinting her to leave – even tried shoving her outside – but she was mesmerized by Fur's cute look. Intrigued. Curious. Captivated. While Fur avoided eye contact, Amy couldn't take her eyes off of his face; her smile appeared permanent as well. She struggled to steal a look beneath his hair – his hair was the same as it has always been: it was long enough to cover his forehead and eyes, but not enough to tie up into a ponytail. Feeling uncomfortable, Fur shouted in her face.

'Amy get out!'

It was a quiet, girly shout. Harmless. A little polite and too cute. It was issued loud enough for Amy to know that he was serious, but not loud enough for their mother to be alerted.

'You're voice ...' she replied with her watery smile and her fixed eyes, 'And your hight ... you're almost at my hight ... What on earth have you done?!

Seeing that Amy was reluctant to leave, Fur yanked her arm towards him, pulling her completely into his room. Then, he shut the door. Fur calculated that if she were to leave with no answers and complete astonishment, the chance of her telling their mother and causing more commotion would double. Once inside the concealed room, Fur dropped his backpack next to his bed's leg and sat on the mattress. He didn't know where to start.

'Come on, Fur, you can tell me.' She said tenderly as she swooped next to him: it was too fast, as if she craved to know his little secret.

This was a first, Fur realized. Never before had Amy sat down next to him, asking him to open his heart to her. Her eyes were on him; her hand on his kneecap. At that moment, in that position, Fur felt as if they were sisters, not brother and sister, hence they could share anything and everything with each other. At that moment, he failed to recognize the sarcastic, insensitive sister he used to know, and met a caring one instead.

'I ..' Fur uttered a syllable with a hesitant voice, but then decided to tell her all that he knew. Lying wouldn't solve anything. 'I don't know what happened. Last night I went to bed like usual, and this morning I woke up like this. I know it sounds ludicrous, but that's the truth. And now, I don't know what to do. I can't tell mom, I think she'll freak out more than I did. I can't show up at school again 'cause I'm not enrolled there, male Furnival Bloi is, and to top it all off, I have a date with a guy in a couple of hours!'

After his short, relatively-calm outburst, Fur looked his sisters in the eyes, then pleaded for help.

'You gotta help me, Amy, I don't know what to do.'

Amy got up, took a few steps towards the window, then turned back with a smile and a wink, and said: 'You've been a girl for half a day and you already have a date? You work fast!'

'It's not like that!'

'Easy, I was only kidding.'

Fur was about to go into details about his date – about how he was cornered into it – but didn't want to tell Amy that he had a bully for the last four years of his life. Amy went to his same school, but she hadn't been there long enough to know about Biff.

After issuing her short joke, Amy got serious and took a thinking pose as she tried to help Fur with his new situation or condition. Finally, she presented Fur with a couple of options.

'Okay, you could either announce the entire thing, which would be much better 'cause then you wouldn't have to worry about sneaking around and missing classes and guys hitting on you, though I think you like that,'

'Amy!'

'Or,' she continued, 'you could fake your death and I'll tell mom you're my cousin or something.'

'I'm serious, Amy.'

'Well I don't know what you want me to tell you. This is odd, beyond odd. But if you wanna know what I'd do, if anything like this were to happen to me, I wouldn't trap myself in my room worrying about it. I would explore my options.'

With that piece of advice, Amy headed towards the door, but before she left, she added: 'Like not missing out on my date.'

Fur remained in his room thoughtfully about her proposal. Amy was sweet about this, he thought, maybe others would be too. Maybe he should come out and get it over with. He thought a bit more about the first piece of advice, ignored the second, and spent most of his time pondering the third.

At six minutes before eight o'clock Fur heard segmented horning coming from outside his window. He had an idea who it was, but regardless, he ran to the window and took a look. As expected, it was Biff.

Fur made his way –undetected, naturally – to the front door and stepped outside before his mother would answer it. Fortunately for him, his sister had planned to keep his mother busy at this time of the evening, and away from the door. Fur stepped out into the evening and meet eye to eye with Biff. Biff was leaning on a rented limo and dressed in a cheesy brown suit – which seemed to belong to his grandparents' generation – while Fur wore jeans and a sweatshirt. Biff said nothing as he let his eyes do the talking: he looked at Fur's cloth with an obvious hint.

'Um, I'm sorry. I didn't know what to wear.'

'That's okay. Our reservation is at nine so I can wait.'

'Wait? For what?'

'For you to change, of course.' He said smiling, as if it was a given, 'Where I'm taking you is classy. It has a dress code. I don't think they'll let us go inside with you dressed like that, so go on, get change. I'll wait here.'

'But I .. I haven't got anything of that sort.'

Hearing Fur's reply shattered Biff's smile. He had not expected such a predicament to stand in the way of his plans. Secretly, Fur smiled in relief. Fur thought that since he didn't have

anything formal to wear, the night would be canceled. However, Biff refused to give up on the things his heart desired.

'Get in the limo.' He said kindly.

'But ..' Fur argued, just as gently, as his legs walked towards the limo, 'what about the dress code?'

Biff didn't reply other than with a smile.

Fur's question was soon answered as the limo driver pulled over in front of a mall. Biff took out his wallet, opened it, took out his credit card, and handed it over to Fur. Fur received it with the utmost subtle shock in his eyes.

'Try not to go over two hundred as I have just around five in my account. Just a little black dress and a couple of shoes should do. The secret number is' Then, he leaned over and whispered in Fur's ear: '4158. I'll wait here in the car.'

Fur opened the door and stepped out. The look of puzzlement in his eyes would not go away. He was shocked to see how far Biff would go to have dinner with him. But why, Fur wondered as he wandered into the mall, what does he see in him? He has seen Biff with a number of girls – some much more prettier than himself – so why go out with Fur? The thought of Biff knowing the truth came back to mind. The thought went as following: 'If Biff knows that I'm me, then the only reason he's going along with this is because he has something in mind .. it must be another prank or something? But .. could it be a prank? A practical joke to humiliate me? Biff has never spent any money on his bullying acts before. The night's still young and he's already booked a table at an expensive restaurant, rented a limo, hired a driver, put on a tux, and now handed over his credit card to me to buy something for myself .. what's going on inside that head of his ..?'

Fur didn't like to be kept waiting, so he was considerate in assuming others hated the same thing. Since he couldn't return empty-handed, he chose a store and went inside.

'Yes. Please, how may I help you' The clerk said with forwardness and a wide smile.

He was a tall man with very thin whiskers. His hair was straight and silky in appearance. The sharp scent and atmosphere of the store penetrated through Fur's shyness and made him speak his mind.

'I'm looking for a dress .. a short, black dress.'

'Ah, yes, an evening cocktail wear.' He replied quickly, showing Fur that he knew what he was talking about, then hurried to a stand, snatched out a dress, and presented it to Fur as a man holds his bride, 'how about this one? For a lady of your size it should do wonders with your body! It's in style this year and all the ladies adore it.'

'Thank you. May I try it on?'

Fur was starting to feel uncomfortable with his forwardness and openness about the subject so much that he just wanted to buy the dress then leave.

'But of course, miss. It's right in here.' He replied while holding the changing room's door open for Fur.

'Thank you.'

Fur stepped inside with the dress in hand, and the clerk closed the door gently after him. Nervously, Fur took off his cloth, then slipped on the dress. As he did so he wondered why he was so nervous. It's just cloth, he thought to himself. Why should cloth matter? Does the shape, fabric, and color of the outfit one wears determine everything? These questions puzzled

Fur as his perception of cloth – ever since the change – had been reduced to its most basic form: he believed that he was entitled to wear whatever he liked. On top of that, being female meant that he had the keys to the kingdom. He was allowed to wear whatever he desired from female and male clothing, while males are strictly to wearing only male clothing. It wasn't fair, Fur understood, but it was the dominant norm of all societies, norms people abide by.

By the time the dress was neatly on him, Fur looked into the mirror and saw himself in a completely different perspective. Only then did he see himself as female; there was nothing boyish about him anymore.

Fur charged the credit card then exited the store. As he walked in his sneakers and new dress, he carried a bag containing his old cloth in one hand, and the receipt in the other. It read 80 K.D. Now, it was time to hunt for shoes.

Once again, Fur entered the first shoe-displaying store his eyes met. There was a wide selection of shoes. Unlike men, women had a wonderful variety of shoes. The more Fur tried on, the more he wished to buy. Had he been given the same freedom to pick and try on his own dresses without the clerk pushing him, Fur realized, he would've fallen in love with a number of dresses as well. Cloth and shoes for women were different then for men – for men they were a necessity; for women, pleasure.

Fur walked out of the store wearing his black mini-dress with small open-toe high heels. Knowing that the money he had wasn't his, he wised up and resisted the urge to buy more. The smile on Biff's face when he saw Fur showed his approval. Together as a lovely couple, Biff took Fur to their reservation at an expensive restaurant as promised. At first, Fur was very nervous and reluctant to talk to Biff, but soon he was eased into it by Biff's light conversations and funny jokes. Fur was surprised to see a sensitive side to Biff and wondered why he never saw it before.

'So, if you don't mind me asking, what were you doing in the mens' room earlier?'

'I ... uh ... heard from a friend that it was filthy, and I was curious to find out if it was.'

Fur hadn't intended to lie, but the fear he had for being discovered as the Furnivall Bloi by Biff was something he couldn't handle – didn't want to even imagine it. Wherever this night – this path – might lead, Fur thought, he had to stick by it for the time being.

'And was it?'

'Huh?'

'Filthy, I mean.'

'Oh yes, indeed. Much filthier than the ladies' room.'

'Fur,' Biff said in a serious but pleasant tone, as if he was about to say something important or declare his feelings. Then, after a slight pause while looking into Fur's eyes and holding his hands gently, Biff said: 'I want you to marry me.'

A bomb.

That's what Fur felt.

Biff had dropped a bomb, just as inescapable in size, and just as shattering in power.

'I know this seems a bit rash, but the moment I laid eyes on you I knew you were the one. I've been with other women, Fur, I won't lie to you. But with you .. it's different, you know? Being with you tonight was more than a date, but a test .. to see if I really do love you, and I do. Why wait when you know it's true love, right?'

'I can't! I –'

'Hey, relax. I know this is kind of a bomb on you, so I understand that you need time to think about this, so no hurries.'

Biff gave Fur space and talked about other things. However, Fur was silent for the remainder of the evening.

Biff got Fur back home rather late. It was already past twelve o'clock. Fur said goodnight then walked up the steps before the front door, refusing to look back at Biff as the limo drove away. Fur had made up his mind. He mustn't see Biff again. He's crazy, Fur figured, wanting marriage .. he couldn't possibly. He couldn't possibly! That was the only excuse Fur managed to find. He couldn't possibly! Fur kept exclaiming in anger in his mind.

Upon discovering the door to be locked, Fur went round the house to the back door. He knew that his mother usually locks the front door after nine but leaves the back door open in case one of the kids was out. Fur got in, turned on the lights, and saw his mother standing in front of him, staring at him with both arms crossed.

'Mom!

She said no word as she scanned Fur from head to toe in that mini-dress and small shoes.

'Mom .. I -'

'Fur .. why didn't you tell me?'

'I - .. huh?'

'Your sister told me everything.'

'She .. did?'

Just then, upon hearing her name mentioned, Amy came out of the kitchen wearing her pink and green PJs with a caramel ice cream bucket in one hand and a spoon in the other. She was licking it with a weary smile directed at Fur.

'She did.' Fur affirmed with an I'll-get-you-for-this look directed back at her.

'Why didn't you come to me?'

'I don't know, mom, I was confused!'

'You thought I wouldn't understand?'

'No .. well, do you? Do you understand why this has happened to me?'

'Of course I don't, but I know that whatever is meant to be will be. Oh, Fur!' She exclaimed heartedly as she walked towards Fur and embraced him tightly to her chest, 'Don't you know that I would love you no matter what?'

'But I thought you liked me .. 'cause I'm a boy.'

'What? That's not true!'

'Isn't it? I mean, that's the only reason I see for why you kept pressuring me to ace my courses and finish high school.' He said with his head still embraced by his mother, 'You make me breakfast and give me special treatment, more than you do to Amy, as if you're hanging all your dreams on me .. the man in the family.'

'Oh Fur, that's not true. I only spoil you and want you to finish 'cause you're my first child. It has nothing to do with being male or female.'

Amy let out a short, cynical puff of air then left the room. Their mother didn't seem to mind.

Fur felt that she was telling the truth, but only in part. It was only natural that a parent would feel disappointed if their only son turns into a daughter. However, having enough action for one day, Fur decided not to indulge in what he really thought she was thinking.

The next morning Fur woke up calmly, but then sprang off his pillow. He checked to see if he was still female. He was. Everything was the same. He really was a girl. And at that moment it seemed that he would remain that way.



Fur took a shower, got dressed, and got down to have breakfast. His mother and sister had cooked eggs and sausages for breakfast, along with orange juice. But for Fur, he had tea. There would be no rushing through breakfast today for it was the weekends. A time Fur once thought to be the most difficult part of the week, but now saw as a time of comfort. He didn't hide behind gloomy clothing, but wore bright cloth. For the first time in a long while, Fur felt at home.

'Just tea?' Amy questioned Fur as she ravished her eggs and sausages with her fork, knife, and teeth.

Fur took another sip, then nodded peacefully.

'Amy! Let your brother enjoy his tea.' Her mother bit her head off, then looked at Fur and, seeing his calmness, added: 'It's been a long time since he drank tea.'

It has been a long time since he drank tea, he thought. Far too long. He used to drink tea every morning. Those were cheerful days. Perhaps, he thought, perhaps these days would return now that he has changed. Fur knew that change came from within, but living in such a superficial society, change must come from outside first, then the person could change accordingly.

'Finished!' Amy shouted out then stormed off her chair, heading towards the front door.

'Amy! Where are you going?'

'I promised my friends to meet at the mall.' She shouted from the living room, 'Gotta run.'

'But it's only ten in the morning!'

'Yeah. I'll be back by dinner time, promise.' She shouted at the front door, 'Love ya. Bye!'

'Amy! What about the dishes?'

But it was too late. By then, Amy had shut the door on her way out.

'It's okay, mom, I'll do the dishes.'

'You sure? You don't have studying to do? Or prepared other plans?'

'Not really, no.'

'Oh.'

Fur wanted to spend his weekend at home, alone. He needed time to think about what he should do when he comes back to school on Sunday. But at the same time, he didn't want to lock himself in his room worrying all the time. He decided to let life flow for the time being. Doing the dishes would be a good distraction, he thought. The truth was, he didn't mind cleaning as social norms were at work; he believed that it came with the territory.

Fur and his mother scrubbed, washed, and hung the dishes together like mother and daughter. They did so quietly and cooperatively, almost as quiet as the sunny morning. She asked him how was his date last night, but he told her that it was okay. His tone was especially clear when he said it, indicating that he didn't want to talk about it. She dropped the subject afterwards.

'Mom,' Fur said hesitantly, breaking seven minutes of silence, 'he asked me to marry him.'

With that news, his mother stopped scrubbing. She turned around slowly and stood facing Fur – her little boy who had grown into a beautiful young lady.

'Well,' she finally said: 'what did you say?'

'Mom!'

'What?'

'You know I can't do that!'

'Why not?'

'Because I ..' but then his voice faded, partly lost for an excuse, partly confused about his real reason to oppose.

'Because you were a boy?' his mother helped him, 'that's in the past, Fur. Don't tell me because of that you will never marry?'

'No, of course I'll marry ...'

'What? You don't believe you're going to marry a girl, do you?'

At that moment Fur realized how confused he was. What was he suppose to be attracted to – to be pared with – males or females? Should he be a wife or have a wife? What about the role of the husband? Who will be the father of Fur's children? What was the right choice for a freak like him? Juxtaposition. That was the state Fur felt he was in. It was a word he learned in an art class at school – how one element is presented within a group but does not belong. In fact, it more than stands out, it jumps out. It's as if the other pieces reject this odd one. It doesn't fit in.

'I ... I –' Fur stuttered in confusion.

'Look.' She said sensitively, placing the dish in her hands on the counter and walking towards her child. She pressed both her hands against Fur's soft cheeks and told him: 'You're a girl now, and a beautiful one too. I was your age when I married, and so was your grandmother.'

'So .. you think I should say yes?'

'I think you shouldn't say no.'

Their short but meaningful conversation left Fur thinking about the topic for a while. He thought about what she said, and what Biff said. Then, he thought about what would happen if he was to say yes. But instead of making rash decisions that would determine his future, he went to his room, hopped on his bed, and took out his note book. He started to make a list.

Fur made a list of all of Biff's good aspects as well as the bad. Under the good qualities came sensitive, funny, good-looking, fit, and un-stingy when it came to money. However, Fur failed to come up with one good argument for the other side. He did, at one point, write down that he was mean in the past, but then scratched it off as he was comparing Biff's current characteristics and not his previous ones.

Then, he noticed Amy's head peaking in.

'Hey.'

'Hey.'

'Mom says dinner's ready.'

'Yeah ...'

Fur looked out the window and saw that the sun had set. The day had flown by quickly. He had spent hours on his bed making that list. The list had sided completely in Biff's favor, yet, Fur still felt unsure.

'Amy .. can I talk to you?'

'Sure, what's up?'

Before going down to dinner, Fur told her about Biff's proposal.

'Is he rich?'

She smiled. He didn't.

'Okay okay. Um .. I don't know, do you like him?'

'Like him?'

'Yeah. I mean, does he treat you good, say nice things to you, take you to nice places .. that sort of stuff.'

'Yeah, I guess ..'

'Then I say go for it. It's not everyday you meet a guy like that!' Then she started joking as she went downstairs: 'Heck if you don't want him, I'll marry him!'

You too, huh ..' Fur mumbled quietly and thoughtfully.

His mom said yes. The list said yes. His sister said yes. All of them seemed to point in that direction as if it was the best option in the matter. His heart was still unsure. A part of him was scared, but then again, anyone would be by the idea of marriage. He thought it was only natural. The next time Fur saw Biff, he received the same question, and he gave him his answer.

On twenty-eighth of August, Fur and Biff wedded. They had just finished the finals and their last high school year and had set out on their lives, united. Fur wore a big, white wedding dress and Biff was in a traditional black suit. Their parents and siblings danced and sang at their wedding. Even Fur's dad managed to make it. However, while Fur's father was told the truth, the groom was not. Fur married Biff without telling him that he was once a boy. He didn't know how to tell him – how Biff would handle the truth – and feared that it would destroy everything if he knew. For both himself and his husband's sake, Fur decided to forget about it. Fur had kept a secret from the first night.

The next morning, when Fur woke up and saw the ring on his finger, it came as a sudden shock. Despite the fact that he, along with his mother and Amy, had planned this for months, it still felt weird. But he knew that he had to adjust. After all, he was now Biff's wife.

The couple lived in a small villa in a nearby town. It wasn't Putmud, but it felt like a new home; a new start. Biff became a police officer, and by that profession he did a good job in supporting his wife. Fur became a housewife, and an obedient one at that. He loved Biff and did all that he could to please him. Biff loved Fur as well. They lived happily together, until one fateful afternoon when Fur heard knocking at his door.

'Good afternoon, Mrs. Frohike.' an acquaintance of the Frohikes said in a formal, sad tone.

'Good afternoon, Jack.'

Fur had known Jack Orr for sometime. He was one of Biff's colleagues at the precinct.

'I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but ...'

The smile on Fur's face slipped off as he began to worry.

'What is it, Jack?'

'Your husband was in a car accident. I'm afraid he didn't make it.'

Hearing the news, Fur collapsed on the ground. Just then Fur realized how much he actually loved Biff Frohike. Jack crouched to help Fur, but Fur shouted out in pain. It wasn't until he was taken to the hospital that they knew that Fur was pregnant.

chapter two
love

It's been seven months since Biff's death, and life hadn't changed much. Fur's belly got bigger and rounder, but other than that, life was the same.

Day in, day out. Fur lived a gray life with sadness for the future that awaited him and his child. His baby would never meet his father, or know what it feels like to have two parents as a child should, or know the joys of having siblings to bicker with. Fur had decided to never marry again as he had come to a new belief – a very sad and pessimistic belief. He saw Biff's death as a sign that he shouldn't marry men; in fact, he shouldn't marry at all. He saw Biff's death and the way he died as a curse. Had he not married him, Fur figured, he would still be alive today. Fur blamed himself for Biff's death.

Despite feeling blue, Fur hadn't neglected to take care of himself for his child's sake. He remained fit and healthy. His hair had ran long by now. It reached about shoulder length and he intended on letting it grow longer. He wore it in many feminine hairstyles, but the one he preferred most was the simple and fashionable up hairstyle. It aroused a motherly feeling in him.

It was another gray morning when Fur received mail. Although they had a mailbox, they never got any mail before, so Fur took interest in it. As he opened the envelop, the feeling that it had something to do with Biff came to him, but soon disappeared once Fur read the words in the fine print. Immediately after reading the short letter of a few words, he dropped it on the ground in horror. It was a death threat.

The police weren't much help. There was no fingerprints and zero leads. They asked Fur if he had any ideas of who would want him dead, but Fur failed to come up with one person. They sent a police car to keep an eye on Fur's place for a couple of nights, but when they saw no advance of any kind, they called it quits. They ignored the matter. But Fur feared that whoever wrote the letter was still there, watching him.

'Jack, please. Isn't there anything else you could do?'

'Like what, Fur?'

'I don't know.'

'Look. We have no leads to go on. You can't expect us to waste our time trying to nail a ghost. Chances are it was a prank. And if this guy's for real, then you have my number. I'm only a few blocks away. Just give me a call and I'll be there in a flash.'

'Jack, I .. I don't feel safe at my house anymore. Can't you stay over?'

'Fur, I'd love to. But Myrtle would kill me. She's already at my neck for not spending enough time at home.'

'Well .. isn't there anyone else you know could stay over? .. anyone not married or has the time ...'

'Well ...'

'Yes?' Fur replied with replenished hope in his eyes.

'There is my cousin.'

'I'll take him!' Fur replied excitedly.

'I'll have to ask first. And she's a she.'

'Fine by me!'

'The thing is, she's not local force: she's with the FBI, but she's sort of suspended. She has a real problem with authority. Doesn't like to be told what to do, especially if her superiors are men.'

'Oh.'

'Yeah. But she's a good agent. And I know that this little mandatory vacation she's taking is driving her nuts. Would you believe that she just keeps calling her buddies at the bureau asking for the latest news and developments? She even phones me from time to time asking if I had any cases we can't handle.' He said while shaking his head with a smile, 'Of course she can't guard you legally, but no one has to know, right?'

'Oh thank you thank you thank you! When can I expect her?'

Jack was glad to be of help. Seeing Fur emotional again, he believed that his cousin would do Fur good. It has been months, several months – seven months – since he's last seen her this excited about anything.

It was around six in the morning when Fur heard annoying, peace-disrupting knocks at his door. The sun was barely up, and so was he. Fur wasn't exactly a morning person, hence he hated anyone who knocked on his door before the hour struck ten. He tied his robe on and went to answer it with the intension of giving whoever it was a piece of his mind.

It was a woman in black; a brunet dressed in a black suit, about five to seven years older than Fur.

'Yes?' Fur greeted, although he felt a strong itch to shout out: 'Who on earth are you?' and 'why the heck are you at my door at six o'clock in the morning?'

'Furnivall Frohike?'

'In person.'

'Hi. I'm Special Agent Jo Rhys. My cousin told me about you.'

'Oh, Agent Rhys!' Fur's mean look broke into a smile, 'Yes yes, please come in.'

Just like that, his attitude took a radical uplift.

As Rhys stepped inside, Fur noticed that she was much thinner and taller than she had expected. Rhys's eyes wandered around the ceilings and far walls as if checking for something rather than admiring the cornice.

'Sorry about the timing. I'd been driving all night to get here.'

'Oh, you must be tired then.' Fur said considerately.

'Well .. actually ..'

'Say no more.' Fur interrupted, then pointed the way upstairs, 'go into the first room on your right and you'll find a comfortable bed to sleep in.'

'Oh, I can't take your place. What about you?'

'Oh it's alright. I had my eight hours sleep. I usually get up around seven so its no problem.' Fur lied grinningly.

Fur did usually get up at around seven, but in the last few months he woke up on a daily basis at around ten. He stayed in bed until twelve. Once Rhys had disappeared into the second floor, Fur crashed on the sofa in the living room.

'Hey! Wake up sleepy head!' Fur heard a shout.

It was Rhys's voice – a friendly yet strict voice that Fur couldn't ignore and go back to sleep. He got up and followed the voice, which came from the kitchen. Rhys was making tea. Fur clumsily stumbled into the kitchen, opened the fridge door, and leaned on it with an empty look at its content. He wasn't hungry, but didn't know what to do. Waking up by a shout usually had that effect on him.

Rhys knew this case was self-assigned, hence could be taken lightly, but she decided to be extra careful. After all, she was protecting two people, not one.

'Are you sure you had enough sleep last night? Irregular sleep is not good for the baby, you know.'

'No no, I'm fine.' Fur replied as he made his way towards the sink.

Fur washed his face and mouth, then excused himself to go upstairs. He took a shower and brushed his teeth. He was awake by then.

'Take a seat, there's tea in the teapot.' Rhys said to Fur as she spotted him descending down the staircase, 'I hope you don't mind me making tea.'

'No, it's okay.' Fur replied as he sat on the same sofa he slept in. 'So, how did you sleep?'

'Oh wonderfully. Thanks for the bed. It was just what I needed. Though if I'm gonna stay here, I'm gonna need my own bed .. unless you don't mind sharing.'

Fur let out a little laugh, but Rhys only smiled. By the way she spoke and acted, Fur received a vibe from Rhys. She was very possessive. She had been in the house for less than twenty-four hours and already she ran it like its owner – dominating his bed and making tea.

Rhys noticed the vibe she had given, and didn't mind the thoughts that passed through Fur's head.

'So, let's get down to business, shall we?' She said as she poured then handed Fur a cup of tea and sat on the opposing couch with hers in her hands. She had her hands wrapped around her cup. 'Do you have any idea of why anyone would want to hurt you?'

'No, and I've been through this with the police.'

'I know, I saw the report. I just thought that ... well. Some people are afraid,' Rhys trimmed her right cheek with the side of her forefinger, then explained, 'afraid of naming suspects because of either fear or love. Sometimes they have an idea of who was threatening them, but they do not want to go there as it would mean facing them in court, or giving up a part of their family.'

'You think someone of my family did this?'

'No, but if I were you, I wouldn't rule out anyone, not family or friends.'

'Not even your cousin?'

'No. Not even him. I love Jack and think of him as a brother, but when you've been on the force for a long time, you see how deceptive and twisted criminal minds are. In most cases such as what we have here, a close friend or family member is usually the culprit.'

Fur was moved by the coldness of the agent before him. Fur felt great admiration and respect towards Rhys, yet pitied her as well. He felt sorry for Fur for having lost her faith in sacred bonds and trust. Just then Fur could picture Rhys living alone in a cold apartment with her job as the highest priority in and of her life. Yet, at the same time, Fur couldn't help but feel admired by her strength to be objective to reach the truth no matter what. This was the stuff, Fur believed, detectives and leaders were made of.

'Okay, so no suspects. Don't worry your pretty little head about it, I'll get to the bottom of this eventually. I always do.'

Rhys spent her following days and nights with Fur at his place. They had set up a room for her next to Fur's bedroom, which used to be Biff's guys' room – a room he thought of as a haven away from his wife. Whenever Biff had his male buddies over, they hung out in that room. Now, it was Rhys's.

Fur felt safe with Rhys around the house. Rhys wasn't like most women he knew. She was a leader, a take-charge kind of a person, as if she was a player in the male world; as if she wants to be the best among men, not women.

It took about a week for the case to progress. It came, once again, in the form of a delivery. This time, instead of an envelop, it was a package. Fur got up early in the morning and, without even thinking of consulting Rhys, opened the package. The thought of it being a bomb or something harmful didn't pass through his mind. Fortunately, it was only something horrid but not lethal. It was a dead rabbit with maggots feeding on it. Fur immediately dropped the box on the ground and covered his mouth with both his hands. It was by that time that Rhys came rushing. Fur pressed himself in fear against Rhys who comforted Fur while scanning the box with a keen eye. Rhys picked up the tag card. It read YOU'LL END UP LIKE THE LITTLE FUR BALL FOR YOUR DEPICTION. Rhys rushed out into the streets to see if someone was watching and laughing, but no one was there.

'Sick bastard!' She said, then returned to Fur, 'Don't worry, Mrs. Frohike, I promise you he won't touch you. I'll protect you and your baby no matter what.'

Rhys then told Fur to stay inside the house and lock the doors. She told him not to open it for anyone except for her when she returns. Rhys headed with haste of fury to the post office in an attempt to know who sent the message. They argued that such information, unless written on the package, is classified. Rhys used her suspended badge power. Not knowing she was suspended, they told her that it was delivered to them under a false name and a fake telephone number. Whoever it was, he hadn't broken any laws by using a pseudonym name.

Rhys returned home, and with her returned two feelings, one of anger, and the other of failure, each resulted from the other. While the terrorist was succeeding in planting terror and fear in Fur's heart, she was getting nowhere.

Then,

Rhys saw something.

A glimpse of a silhouette moved in the window of a neighboring house. She could've sworn that whoever was looking at her just then was watching her, and that he or she only moved away because Rhys had looked.

Rhys knocked at the house and Fur let her inside.

'Where did you go?'

'Never mind that now. Frohike, tell me something. Who lives in that house over there?'

'Mrs. Rollington. Why?'

'No one else lives there?'

'No. She has two sons, but both of them have married and moved outside .. Rhys, what's this about?'

'A possible suspect.'

'Mrs. Rollington? No, impossible.'

'Improbable, maybe, but not impossible. Every thing is possible. What's your relationship with her?'

'Well .. she's a bit grouchy, I suppose.' Fur said as he got in and sat on the couch. Rhys did the same. 'Usually when I say hello,' Fur elaborated on his point, 'she would reply in the strangest manner, such as when I say hi, she says hello back with a despicable tone. Or when I say good afternoon, she replies by saying: what's good about it. There was this one-time when a little boy accidentally threw his baseball on her lawn and she bit his head off.' Noticing the cautious look in Rhys's eyes, Fur stated his opinion: 'But she's alright. She wouldn't hurt a fly.'

'How would you know?'

Fur thought instead of speaking.

'How could you be so certain to scratch her name off the suspect list? Just before I knocked on your door I caught her staring at me through that dusty window of hers. And when I looked, she moved away out of sight.'

'Being nosy doesn't make someone a psychopath!' Fur unintentionally defended Rhys's only suspect, 'And Mrs. Rollington is known as the neighborhood watchman .. or watchwoman for that matter. But I really doubt she has intentions to kill me.'

'We'll see.'

'Rhys, come on.'

'I'm not scratching her name off as a suspect.'

The thought that Mrs. Rollington was the villain of the story remained in Rhys's mind, although it sounded ridiculous in Fur's. Rhys believed that Mrs. nosy might have the heart to

send such a message; have the heart to terrorize a life then take it. However, Rhys refrained from acting on that thought until she was positive she had evidence to back her approach. For the mean time, she had to keep silent about this. All she could do was keep an eye on Mr. Rollington, but nothing else.



One night, when dark clouds reigned supreme over the neighborhood sky, Rhys, headed towards her own room, passed by Fur's room and saw him sitting on the bed instead of lying. She took a moment to study him, and saw that he was shaking.

'Frohike?' She said with high concern as she stepped into his room.

Fur looked at her, but the shaking didn't stop. He sat on his bed and hugged his knees with both arms. Sweat ran down across his forehead to his neck. His body seemed to shake as if in bitter cold or in fear of the worst possible fate, but it was his eyes that seemed to shake the most. He was more than troubled, Rhys noticed, he was so shaken up that he was unable to sleep.

'Frohike, what's wrong?' Rhys asked as she rushed towards him, sat by him, and placed both hands on his shoulders, looking into his eyes.

'Jo ...'

'I'm here.'

'Jo .. I'm scared.'

'I'm here. Nothing's going to happen to you.'

'It's .. it's not that.'

Just when Fur was about to tell her what had him so worried, his lips maintained silence. But his eyes remained locked onto Rhys's. They wanted to speak, but his mind was hesitant. He thought for a while about whether he should entrust in Rhys his true fears or not.

'What is it?'

He had only known her for a number of days, yet through them all, she has been there for him. This was a person Fur felt comfortable with, someone with whom, he believed, he could share his darkest secrets.

'I ...' Fur felt hesitant to tell her, as if a barrier had risen in front of his articulators, but then let it all out as he believed it was for the best: 'I was once male.'

'What?'

Silence soon filled the room.

Rhys's mouth became filled with questions she wished to fire, but Fur let the silence do the talking. Their mouth rested for a while, and their eyes talked. Looking into Fur's sincere eyes, Rhys knew that he wasn't joking about being born biologically male, though there was nothing manly about him.

Fur thought he only told her the truth because he didn't want to make the same mistake of losing another person he loves because he developed a relationship based on a lie. Whatever happens between them, both Fur and Rhys are better off knowing the truth. However, there was another reason to why Fur shared his past. Fur couldn't identify it or name it at the time, but he felt that there was something between them. With her, he felt secure, safe, protected. He wondered if it was only the badge talking, or if there was a deeper reason behind it.

'The reason I'm telling you this' Fur went on after taking a moment of silence, 'is because I turned female last year. The transformation was unexplainable so please don't ask me to tell you how. I'm afraid that, if I go to sleep .. I will be male again tomorrow.'

Before Fur was able to emit the last two words, he burst into tears. Rhys immediately shifted her arms from their previous position to an embracing one: she hugged him closer for comfort. Screw social norms, Rhys thought, this was a person who needs to be comforted! She held that position although she didn't know what had brought all this crying onto him. Even if there really was a chance he would miraculously wake up a man the following morning, there isn't anything to be upset about. This is because Rhys saw that being male was something spectacular.

Fur had never cried like that before. This time he was really afraid. His tears might've come out of his eyes, but they poured out of his heart.

'I .. can't ...' Fur tried to speak while crying.

'Shshsh.' Rhys produced a comforting friction while holding his head to her chest.

'I can't ..' Fur insisted on making his point, 'I can't be male again. Because then .. what would happen to my baby?'

'I won't let anything happen to you or your baby. I promise.'

'How could you be so sure? I changed into a girl over a night. It could all be over just like that. No explanation. No transition. No nothing. And this time, I have more to lose.'

'You won't lose your baby.'

Rhys had no way of preventing that. She knew that well, and so did Fur. However, she knew that Fur needed to be lied to in order to understand that she will do all that is in her power to prevent it from happening. Fur appreciated the lie.

'It's not just that.' Fur went on. 'You have to understand, Rhys. The day I became a female was the day I started living.' Fur said, then took a slight pause, then continued with a retrospective tone: 'Looking back now, I understand that I didn't exactly celebrate that day or jump for joy. I wasted it entirely in hiding from everyone and worrying that I would be discovered. But I was alive. I never had felt more worried about anything as I was on that day, as I am now.'

Having the will to worry about something is a blessing. Losing that, one might as well be dead. To Fur, losing his womanhood was like losing his will to live. In his case, life came with womanhood; depression came with manhood. Rhys failed to understand that view, but could clearly see the empty look in his eyes – the look of despair.

Around this time last year, Fur had been confused about what his change meant and what it had put him through, but only now when he realized what was at stake did he understand what returning to the previous sex would mean. Given the chance to live his life as both male and female opened his eyes. He realized the gender, no, the sex, of his self rather than his body's, which was female, his child's mother and a possible wife of a loving person in the future. He did not understand whether he was supposed to marry males or females, or which was right or wrong, but he did understand that being female to him was to be alive, and to hold onto and cherish life. He had to remain that way, not because he wanted it, but because he needed it. Rhys hadn't seen him go through life as male, but understood that when he was male, he was more like a zombie. His body lived, but his soul didn't. Fur cried as he feared the return of that awful, inhumane state.

Rhys held Fur closely in her arms with a new look towards Fur. Hearing Fur's worst fear and seeing him in that vulnerable state unleashed a new emotion within her. Now she wished to protect him not because of her self-assigned duty, but because Fur needed someone to love him, to hold him, to lie to him, and tell him everything will be alright, even if they both knew it was a lie. Rhys refrained from joining Fur in his genuine tear-shedding experience, but her soul wept for him and with him.

They remained in that position until they had fallen asleep. Rhys had intended on leaving the bed quietly once Fur had slept, but she had fallen asleep as well. As a result of spending the night in Fur's bed after such a dramatic evening, Rhys's next morning started with a shout.

'My baby!'

Fur shouted out once he came to, but Rhys didn't get upset or angry. There were things more important than the temporary safety of her eardrums. She was understanding.

'Hey, relax,' a tender voice calmed Fur down, 'you had a bad dream, that's all.'

Fur looked up and saw Rhys's comforting smile, then immediately checked his belly. It was round as yesterday. He was relieved when he saw that everything the same. Rhys was extremely happy seeing Fur glad that his worries were for nothing. She was happy because he was happy. Just then she began to notice how much she dangerously loved Fur – dangerously because loving Fur the way she felt was something their society would regard as taboo.

Rhys made eggs and sausages that morning, and served it along with orange juice. Fur smiled at the coincidence, recalling the same date last year when he had this meal for breakfast, only it wasn't with a friend, but family. This time, Fur had a proper breakfast instead of just tea. But afterwards Fur had a cup of tea. A lot has changed since then, but he still preferred tea to coffee. Rhys was a coffee person, and had tea only when there wasn't any coffee beans to be found, such as the first day she came to the house.

There was a bit of awkwardness in the atmosphere between Rhys and Fur once the truth was out, such as Rhys's confusion on whether she should treat Fur as a male or a female; address him as a he or a she. The worst part was she didn't know how to handle it, but remained in the same room as she desired to protect Fur, regardless of sex or gender.

'Frohike, I was wondering,' Rhys said hesitantly, smudging her index finger's side to and fro across her cheek, 'were you always .. feminine? I mean, even when you were male?'

The question alerted Fur, obstructing his hands' movement from lifting the cup to his mouth.

'You don't .. have to answer –'

'No, it's alright.' Fur placed the cup back on the table with both hands still wrapped around it, absorbing the warmth, then looked at Rhys and answered truthfully: 'I've always been feminine, but in a different way. Before the change, anyone could tell I wasn't like the other boys. Amy .. that's my sister, she used to call me a cry baby. She loved playing physical rough games, something I'm not very good at. Of course she would beat me ninety-nine percent of the time, which usually leads to me crying. Not because she beat me or because she gloated afterwards, but because I was me. Anyways, Amy, whenever she saw my eyes tearing, she would call me names. Mom would always come to my rescue and yell at her then send her off to her room. She would tell her that I'm a sensitive boy and that's all, which would usually make me cry more. Everyone who knew me knew that I was the most sensitive boy on the block. I couldn't play with the other boys as their way of talking was louder and more violent.'

My way of speaking was always soft. So you could imagine that I didn't mix with boys my age. I couldn't befriend girls either because .. well, you know our society's norms when it comes to boys and girls mingling ..'

'Of course.'

'Of course I put an end to such humiliation by distancing my self away from everyone. Even my own family whom I loved, and still do. By then I was in high school. I used to spend hours alone in my room. Sometimes writing poetry and flash fiction on my computer. Other times reading a novel I like or my book of Emily Dickinson poems. I had a huge book of her collected work, it's around here somewhere in the house. She helped me a lot when I was feeling down, which was most of the time. But I have to admit, seclusion did wonders to my grades. I excelled in most of my subjects as I had more time to study.'

Rhys nodded lightly with a smile, then remarked on her own lonely childhood: 'So that's why I always got As .. and here I thought I was a genius.'

'So I guess I always knew that I was feminine .. not female, or male for that matter. The truth is, and I know some will hate me for this, but I always had this belief that girls are smarter than boys. And, as paradoxical this may sound, I also believe that girls should obey their fathers at all times. Especially when a girl becomes a wife to a husband. She should always listen to and obey her husband.'

So that was so special about him, Rhys figured out. From the first day she met him, she had a feeling that Fur was nothing like anyone she had met before. And now, now she knew why. He wasn't just different because he was born with a body of one sex and a brain of the other, but because he had a wonderful perspective about life. That's why he defended Ms. Rollington even though she gave him the creeps. Because he lived in solitude most of his childhood, leaving beyond the looking glass, always wanting to touch the world but never could, he developed something greater than most people would understand. He had faith in humanity; he had the capacity to love unconditionally.

He was male and female at the same time, Rhys understood, mentally one and physically the other. When those two synchronized last year, he became whole but remained different as he didn't fit in the society. Being one of a kind made Fur appear vulnerable, making Rhys want to protect him. Just before Rhys gave in to the moment and said what was on her mind, she changed the subject. Society would not approve of her intentions.

'So,' Rhys said in a not-so-soft tone, 'do you know the sex of the baby yet?'

'No. I told my doctor I didn't want to know the sex yet. Not before giving birth. But to tell you the truth, I don't care. Regardless of a boy or a girl, I will love and treat my child just the same.'

It wasn't just something Fur said that projected him as a loving mother, but there was something genuine about the way he said it. Rhys felt that authenticity and knew that it came from the heart; that he would truly love and treat his child just the same. Many parents would say that, but a few of them would mean it. Fur and Rhys felt that the tension and awkwardness had faded away.

Males. Females. Those are two terms society coined, Rhys believed, in order to classify people into being what they are supposed to be. She hated such ideals. Their purpose is to make people fit in and assume a role. But in Fur's case, he was an alien to both. He was neither this nor that; not black nor white, but formed an area of his own, a gray area which society

refused to accept. In Fur's case, he didn't seem to mind. He didn't claim to be either female or male, but left it for others to judge him, not by appearance, but by behavior, for the way one acts is truly the reflection of what is inside.



That afternoon, they received another mail. This time, Rhys went to the mailbox first. To her shock, it had a name! It was sent by a Helen Rollington, their neighbor. The audacity! Rhys thought, it's not enough that she threatens her neighbor, but she puts her name on it? It was as if she was taunting Rhys, daring her to arrest her. Rhys torn the envelop open, praying for proof to nail her, but it was nothing more than a kind invitation. There was a party in three days at her place. She invited Fur to come and bring someone if desired. No doubt it was for Rhys, Rhys suspected. Rhys believed that it was more than a challenge, but a chance to meet face to face with her opponent and to meet formally, or rather, study up close.

When heard the news, Fur became excited to go. He had been creeped out by his own house of late and wanted any excuse to leave it. Rhys was also motivated to go. She believed there was a big chance that who was behind these death threats would be at the party. Rollington might've been her primary suspect, but Rhys knew that a good detective should never hold onto one suspect so tightly that she would be blinded from the rest of the crowd.

On the night of the party, Fur wore a black long sleeveless dress with pearl earrings that Biff bought him. Rhys wore her usual black suit.

'Hey, look at you!' Rhys complimented Fur, overwhelmed by his appearance in his dress.

'Thanks. You look .. nice, too.' Fur commented back with a tad of disappointment.

'What?' Rhys caught Fur's disappointment through his declining voice.

'Nothing, it's just that .. well, why don't you put on a dress?'

'Nah, I prefer suits over dresses.' Rhys told Fur the truth, a truth he failed to comprehend, then added jokingly: 'Besides, I don't want to steal your thunder.'

Fur saw Rhys's smile, and for a second, he managed to penetrate through her mask and see beyond that smile. Beyond it was another face. A truthful face. An aching face. Fur saw a man in Rhys, a man trapped inside a woman's body. Fur himself was a trapped man once, Fur recalled, why couldn't there be others like him? Yet, at the same time, he considered the possibility that he was seeing something not there: that he liked knowing that there was someone like him in this world, hence he projected his desires onto Rhys. Since Rhys said nothing, Fur kept the matter dead as well. Ironically, his thoughts were right on queue. Rhys was trapped inside, trapped by norms of society that determined her to be female accordingly to her biology. Society and its norms thrived on biology and appearances, a problem people like Rhys hated.

Fur walked up to Rhys and placed his soft hands around her tied neck.

'Uh, Frohike ..?'

'Hold still.'

Although Rhys was uncomfortably nervous about Fur's unapproved approach, she remained frozen. Fur was loosening up her blue tie a bit. Something he did a lot to Biff.

'There. Now you don't look so stiff.' Fur said smilingly.

Rhys smiled back, then offered Fur her elbow: 'Shall we?'

Fur took Rhys's elbow and they went to the next door party. The house was full as couples from all over the neighborhood had come to the dinner party. From the way everyone was elegantly dressed, it was apparent that it was a formal party. Men wore suits, women dresses. Men bragged by showing off their beautiful wives, and their wives bragged by showing off how sparkling their ears and necks were. Men and women mingled at first, but then each flocked and chatted with their own gender. Fur and Rhys were the only two who seemed to stand out: Fur was the only pregnant widow who had brought a woman dressed as a man as her date. Furthermore, they were the only two addressing each other by their last names. While Fur had difficulties adjusting to the plentiful backbiting he was receiving, Rhys didn't seem to mind. That evening, Rhys had acted more like a detective than a date.

'Ah, welcome to my party. Mrs Rhys, I take it?'

'Oh yes. You must be Mrs. Rollington. Nice to meet you.'

Helen Rollington's age was a mystery to Rhys and everyone around her. Her hair was white as snow, yet her face was as young as a Barbie's. Her eyes were gemstones; emeralds. Her cheeks were pinkish and her complexion was clear. However, it didn't matter, Rhys thought, criminals come in all shapes and ages. Rhys projected a false grin at her, and she smiled back. Rhys knew what she herself was thinking about at that particular moment, but could only venture off guesses of what Mrs. Rollington was thinking.

'You know,' Rollington chitchatted with her opponent, 'I heard some say you were behind the arrest of Carlo Banks last year, the mastermind who sabotaged the subway train project.'

'I believe his name was Milo Banks.'

'Oh no, dear, it was Carlo Banks. I'm sure.'

'Well you would know.' Rhys muttered behind her raised glass, then took a sip from her drink.

'I beg your pardon. I didn't catch the last part?'

'Never mind.'

'Oh look, here's Andrew!'

Change the subject while you can, Rhys thought, you can only escape for a while. But when you're caught –

'Andrew, come over and say hello to a friend of mine. This is Josephine Rhys.'

'Actually it's just Jo,' Rhys said to both of them, with more emphasis directed at her opponent, 'Jo Rhys.'

'She's a Special Agent!'

'Wow.'

'And Mrs. Rhys, this is Andrew Carmichael. He's my accountant.'

'Good to meet you, miss Rhys.'

'Good to meet you, Mr. Carmichael.'

'You two get acquainted. I just spotted someone I've been dying to talk to.'

With that excuse, Mrs. Rollington left Rhys and Andrew.

'So, Mr. Carmichael, you're an accountant?'

'Yes, I am. And please, call me Andrew.'

'How friendly of you.'

'Actually, I've known Mrs. Rollington from even before. I was her two sons' college friend.'

'Oh really?'

Just then, Rhys became eager to talk to Andrew. She saw this opportunity could offer some sort of insight that, if played correctly, could help progress her case.

'Yup. Stuck by them the entire five years. Well, four at least of them. I didn't know them in freshman.'

'Interesting.' Rhys lied.

Rhys hadn't payed attention to what he said. She was busy cooking up questions she could ask Andrew about Mrs. Rollington. She didn't want to be so obvious that she would give away her reason of asking, so she thought about possible back-door questions. Then she remembered what they might have in common. Fur. She thought if she could understand his attitude towards Fur, then shift the conversation towards Mrs. Rollington and get her attitude towards Fur, she might find a motive of why she would want to kill Fur.

'Tell me, Andrew, did you come alone or with a date?'

'Nope. Just by myself. My wife and I are separated, actually.'

'Yeah. I couldn't find a date either.' Rhys said without sympathy, 'I came with a girlfriend. You know Fur. Say, what do you think of Fur?'

'Oh, she's a nice lady. Pretty sad what happened to her husband last year, though.'

'Really?'

'Yeah. Real shame. Now her kid's gonna grow up without a father.'

'What about you? Do you have a kid on the way?'

'Nope. My wife's sterile.'

'Oh. Sorry to hear that.'

'Yeah. I tell you, had I married Fur and Biff got Stacy, we would all be happier. For one thing, Stacy wouldn't be pregnant with Biff's child.'

Just then Rhys found herself another suspect: Andrew. She established a motive for him even before seeing him as a possible suspect. It was obvious that he wanted to marry Fur, but Biff married her .. I mean him, Rhys thought. Jealous of him having his baby, he wishes to kill Fur. Thinking critically, Andrew might be more of a criminal than Rhys had intentionally thought. He could very well be a murderer! Envious of Biff and feeling resentful for his perfect life, he killed Biff. He probably tried proposing to Fur, but seeing how depressed he was, he turned him down, and now he wants Fur dead as well. Like the motto of most crazed killers goes: if I can't have her, nobody can. Rhys thought she was onto something until ..

'So, Jo,' Andrew interrupted her thoughts, 'I was wondering if you were seeing someone at the moment.'

Just like that Rhys discarded her hypothesis. Obsessed killers don't hit on FBI agents.

That night was over and brought nothing but a headache to Rhys. She had theorized about half the guests of how and why they would want to kill Fur, but eventually ended with no concert evidence that anyone would be her guy. Even Mrs. Rollington's name was barley hanging on the list as a suspect. It was a long, confusing night.



The next morning Rhys had gotten up late. She got up to girly laughter coming from downstairs. She didn't recognize the voice, but knew that Fur had a guest, presumingly one young lady. She got up, sneaked out of her room, and stuck her head from behind a wall,

studying the stranger. It was indeed a young lady, about a couple of years younger than Fur or so. She was a bit thinner and taller; her hair was shorter and darker, but had a lighter complexion than Fur. She wore jeans and a cream-colored summer tank top. As she spied on them, the young lady's eyes rolled towards her and Rhys immediately ducked, bumping her head on the wall.

'Ouch!'

They both heard Rhys curse whisperingly as she rubbed her head, and both laughed.

'Rhys, come down here. There's someone I want you to meet.' Fur called out.

Rhys, acting like she hadn't been spying, got up and came down the stairs in a carefree manner. Fur and his guest rose up in respect.

'Oh, hi.' Rhys greeted in a casual tone.

'Hi.' Fur's guest replied smilingly.

While Fur's guest's smile was genuine, Rhys's was not. She wouldn't admit it if it killed her, but she was jealous of this person standing before her getting all chit-chatty with her Fur. That was, until –

'Rhys, this is my sister, Amy.'

'Oh, hi!' Rhys replied with more a passionate and apologetic tone, 'Sorry about –'

'Oh it's alright, don't worry about it.' Amy said smilingly, 'Fur told me how protective you've been of him. I wanted to thank you for that.'

Yes! Finally! Him! Rhys thought to herself as she finally knew what pronoun to use on Fur.

'Oh, no, it's nothing really. Just doing my job.'

'Still, I want to thank you.'

They sat back down on the couch. Rhys joined them on the armchair.

'So, what brings you all the way down here?' Rhys asked Amy.

'Just checking on my sis.'

Huh? Sis? I thought she called him a him, Rhys thought to herself, shouldn't she have said bro or brother? Rhys was back to her confused state.

'So, Fur tells me that you've been living with him here?'

'Uh, yeah. Just temporarily of course. Until the case is resolved.'

'Any leads so far?'

'None, really. But I usually close my cases before they get cold.'

Rhys noticed that while Amy talked to her, she kept her eyes on her brother. Once Amy noticed that Rhys had noticed, she got up.

'Well, I guess I'll be leaving now.'

'What? Why? It's too early.' Fur complained, 'have some tea first.'

'I already had two cups of tea, Fur.' Amy said smiling, then kissed Fur goodbye, 'bye sis, talk to you soon.'

'Bye.'

Amy left with a smile, and left a smile on Fur's face. However, Fur noticed that Rhys wasn't smiling – she held a face of a serious caliber.

'What? What is it?'

'Could she be .. a suspect?'

'Oh stop it!' Fur said smiling, shoving Rhys tenderly, 'you're impossible!'

Fur took what Rhys said as a joke, but Rhys wasn't sure. She didn't understand why Amy had drove all the way here just to leave after firing a couple of questions at her. Because of that, Rhys decided not to dismiss Fur's sister as a suspect.

Amy saw the way Fur looked at Rhys as she talked. It was an old look. The last time Fur had looked at that to anyone was on his wedding night when he looked at Biff. It was a look Amy thought had died with the death of Biff. She was glad to see it was still alive. That was the true reason why she had came.

Rhys hadn't seen that look. She didn't know how Fur felt about her. Naïvely enough, Fur hadn't noticed the look he had towards Rhys himself. For some couples seeing what they had came naturally. For others, they needed to go through a trail which would expose their true feelings towards each other. Unfortunately for this couple, their upcoming trail was a drastic one, one which would arrive sooner than expected. In fact, it was away from them by hours.

That night, the house's electricity went down.



One minute there was light throughout the house, the other, pitch black. It was darker than the streets outside – and that's with the streetlights being off. In the sudden darkness that fell upon them, Fur freaked out and panicked, but fortunately for him, logical Rhys was there. Rhys took affirmative action.

'Where are you going?' Said Fur in the dark.

'Don't worry, I'm just going to check the fuse box. You probably burnt a fuse or something, nothing to worry about.'

'No, don't go. I don't want to be alone.'

'Frohike, be reasonable. If I don't, who will get the power back on?'

'I don't care. I don't want power, I want you.'

'I'll be right back.'

'Jo!'

Rhys ignored Fur and went downstairs. Fur's last words floated in her head, but she decided not to pay them any attention. Fur was frightened, she convinced herself, he didn't mean what he said. Besides, there was nothing to be worried about.

Rhys made her way to the back door and went outside. It was easier to see outside with the moon radiating its moonlight on the streets. Rhys made her way towards the fuse box and, shockingly, found out that the wires had been cut. Sabotage. Fur! Rhys shouted in her mind as she ran as fast as her legs could go back into the house and towards Fur's room. She did so while taking out her sidearm, lifting the safety off, and holding it with both arms and extreme caution. Seeing the fuse box tampered with meant that someone had intentionally done it. More likely than not, it was her perpetrator. Rhys ran all the way back into Fur's room and found it empty.

'Fur!' Rhys called out in a panicked cry, 'Fur!' She tried again.

Then, she saw a shadowed face lurking in the darkness of a corner. Rhys pointed her gun at the face.

'Whose there?' Rhys demanded while pointing her piece at the motionless, hidden face, 'Fur, if that's you, come out slowly ..'

The face emerged, exposing it and its body enough for Rhys to recognize it. It was Fur.

'Oh, Fur, you scared me.' Rhys said with relief, lowering her sidearm, 'What were you doing in there?'

As Fur further emerged, Rhys saw that he was more terrified than ever. Then, Rhys noticed another figure emerging along with Fur, hiding behind him. Rhys immediately lifted her gun at his silhouetted head.

'Let her go!' Rhys commanded with a sharp tone.

A short outlet of a mocking laugh was her response.

'Show yourself!' Rhys issued another order.

This time, he complied.

As he came out of the shadows slowly, Rhys saw his grin. His malicious grin. His face wasn't visible or recognizable as he wore a mask over his mouth. Still, Rhys was able to see his horrible grin lines across his cheeks. They belonged to a madman who obviously had written those letters and sent those mails. Through his actions Rhys categorized him as a lunatic who tormented pregnant widows for amusement. Rhys loved to shoot him right there, but she noticed that his right arm had disappeared behind Fur's back. Although Fur was shaking from head to toe, he was stiff as a wall. Fur did not move an inch while having the intruder standing close next to him with his hand behind him. Such a position indicated that he had a gun or a weapon of some sort stuck to Fur's back.

'Drop it!' Rhys ordered.

'No! You drop it!' He shouted back.

He might've covered up his face, but he didn't cover up his voice. Little did he know, saying those four words exposed his identity to the person who loved him the most.

'.. Biff?'

That syllable was the only sound Fur managed to articulate. Describing Fur's emotions at that point of his life as puzzled or confused would be an understatement. No one could claim to understand what Fur was going through unless they have been in that exact situation. Fur failed to understand how a man he long ago believed to be buried underground was standing next to him. Other questions that dominated his line of thought was why, when, and where – as in: why was he holding his wife at gunpoint, when did he come back to life, and where has he been the entire past seven months.

'You're .. alive?' Fur uttered out those two words aloud without realizing it.

'Shut up!' Biff shouted at his wife for the first time.

Rhys, still holding her sidearm at Biff's head, put one and one together: 'It was you,' she deduced, 'who sent Fur the death notes, the dead animal .. but why?'

But before Biff could react to Rhys's question, Fur had turned to his right – facing Biff – and by that move she gave Rhys a clear view of the magnum Biff held in his hand. Both Biff and Rhys knew that such a rash move usually got hostages killed, but they both saw the innocent look in Fur's watery eyes that prevented him from caring about such technicalities at such a time. After all, he was in the shock of his life: his husband, whom he believed to be dead, was standing in front of him. Fur raised his trembling hands slowly up to Biff's face, and lowered the mask off his mouth. Seeing his face again, memories of all the good times came rushing back.

'... Why?' Fur cried out softly, heartbroken by Biff's seven-month long deceit.

'You lied to me!' He shouted in Fur's face.

A million question raced to Fur's mouth, but only silence of confusion came out. It was Biff who had lied, Fur and Rhys thought alike, how can he claim it to be the other way around?

'Because I lied ..' Fur said without recalling the lie, '.. you faked a car accident? You ran away from our home .. away from me? Tossed away our marriage as it didn't count .. ?'

'You lied to me!' He echoed in pain and anger.

'You keep saying that, but its not true! I loved you, Biff.'

'Shut up!' he shouted at Fur, then, upon seeing signs of great confusion on his face, he decided to elaborate: 'You never told me that you were Furnivall Bloi .. the punk I used to bully.'

Just then Fur recalled the lie. It wasn't exactly a lie, but a truth untold. This kept truth was the greatest lie Fur had welcomed into his marriage and life with Biff, a lie so strong he constantly feared it as a reason to end everything he had. Now, he knew he was right. By keeping it a secret, he did not kill it, but only fed it and made it stronger.

'I thought ...' Fur began, but broke off. He had no excuse for his lie.

'You thought wrong!'

'I thought you knew.' Rhys intervened.

'If I had known I wouldn't have married him!' Biff shouted out.

The truth was finally out in the open. It was sharper and more hurtful than the threat letters, the horrible present, and the scare night put together. Fur wished he could take back his lie, but it was too late. Rhys had her mind occupied by trying to avoid thinking about subjects she should refrain from at times like these. She couldn't help but wonder what bothered Biff the most, the fact that his wife was someone he hated at high school, or the fact that he was once male. Another thought that came to mind was that she was probably the only person Fur had ever told his secret to; entrusted her deepest, darkest secret to, and hoped that she would guard it and guard his fragile heart.

'But why this?' Rhys questioned Biff's reasoning, 'Why not a divorce?'

'Are you kidding me? Have everyone know I married a T.G?!'

So it all came down to reputation. What people thought. Biff terrorized his pregnant wife and put him through hell just because he was afraid the guys down at the precinct would have a few laughs. Rhys was disguised by Biff. She was sickened by him; she saw him as a disgrace to mankind, that people like him gave man a bad name. Of course, in her thoughts, when she thought of the word man or mankind, she thought of males.

'So you faked your death.' Rhys concluded.

'I had no other choice ..' Biff shouted in reply, looking at Rhys while holding his piece at Fur's head, 'After I knew the truth, I couldn't look at Fur ever again. So I wrecked the car and had everyone believe that I died in an accident .. then started fresh at another part of the town. It was the only possible way out of all of this without being publicly humiliated.'

Through it all, Fur remained looking at Biff's sweating face through his watery eyes and broken heart. Biff did love him, Fur gathered. Biff hated him for what he had done, but also didn't want to divorce him. In a way, Biff wasn't the enemy here, Fur saw, but society is to blame. Because of the norms – of what is accepted and expected of Biff – Biff was cornered about what others would think of him. Because of that, he and Biff cannot be together.

'So why did you come back then?' Rhys questioned Biff while maintaining the same angle she held her gun at, 'If you love her like you say you do, why didn't you butt out and live a separate life like planned? Or do you get kicks out of scaring your exs to death?'

'Because I just knew about the kid .. I just found out that I had a baby on the way!'

'So why are you here then, pointing a gun at her?'

'I don't know!' He shouted in panic and confusion, 'I thought I'd put my unborn child out of its misery .. but I .. Damn it! Why'd you have to get pregnant?!'

After shouting that last line in Fur's face, Biff realized that he hasn't decided what to do yet. He had planned on killing Fur hence killing his unborn child. But he could never live with himself knowing that he took the life of his unborn child whom he loves and want to love so much. He had wanted a baby for so long. Fur had known this as Biff had spoken of nothing else other than having a baby since the first day they started living together.

Unsure, Biff lowered his gun and headed out.

'Hey! Where do you think you're going?' Rhys shouted at him in an attempt to interrupt his departure.

Biff didn't stop, turn, or even talk back. But he did say one last line directed at Fur: 'This isn't over.'

'Hey! I said: Where do you think you're going?!' Rhys, raising her sidearm at him, repeated herself with more force.

Knowing that she wasn't going to back off, Biff tilted his head around to hear her out.

'You're under arrest!' Rhys stated.

'For what charges?'

'Oh, I don't know .. threat notes, breaking and entering .. putting your wife through hell!'

'... Fur hasn't seen anything yet.'

'.. What on earth are you talking about?' Rhys shouted.

Biff ignored Rhys and looked at Fur, then explained his last remark: 'That's my baby you're carrying, and I'll be damned if you're going to spend so much as one minute with it after giving birth.'

'Over my dead body.' Rhys shouted.

'You stay out of this.'

'She's right.' Fur replied, 'I'm sorry that you do not want to live with me anymore, but ... But you're not going to take my baby away from me!'

Biff took a step closer towards Fur, but Rhys stepped forth to protect him.

'I'm gonna have what's mine!' He shouted in Rhys's face.

'You gave that long ago when you faked your death.'

'That child's mine, and I'm gonna fight for it in court if I have to.'

'Good luck finding an evil court that'll separate a newborn from its mother.'

'Justice is on my side!'

'Justice? You're a maniac! Don't talk about right and wrong!'

'I will get legal custody of my child!'

'You can't separate a child from its mother!'

'Watch me.'

A room filled with tension and shouting soon ended with none. Silence reigned supreme. This occurred as Biff had marched outside the moment his last two words were uttered in the

face-off with his feisty opponent. What he said pissed Rhys off, but before she let him leave, she remembered that she had a right to arrest Biff. Rhys ran outside the room to take him in.

'Hey, you're still under arrest.'

He ignored her. She took out her sidearm and pointed at him as he walked away.

'I swear I'll shoot.'

'Go ahead,' he taunted her as he continued to leave, 'Shooting a man in the back in his own house is a fast ticket to a wonderland behind bars. I'm a cop, I should know.' Just before he was out of the house, he turned his head around towards Rhys and said: 'Mark my words, Agent Rhys, I will take my baby.'

Then,

He was gone.

Rhys lowered her arms, feeling as if the real battle was yet to come. She returned back to the room and saw that Fur had collapsed. He was crying. Rhys crouched down next to him and placed her right palm against his left shoulder, then brushed it vertically along his delicate arm tenderly.

'Don't worry, Fur, I won't let him win.'

That was a promise Rhys made. Not because she had to, but because she wanted to. Protecting Fur and ensuring his right to keep custody of his unborn child ranked the highest of importance to her. Her badge, her suspension, her money, her life .. they all came second. The strong desire to protect Fur and Fur junior was burning bright, though Rhys did not know why. Couldn't care less either. This was war, Rhys realized, and the righteous party had to win.



The next morning Rhys got up earlier than usual. She had been busy all morning researching some of the hottest lawyers in town. She viewed their cases, checked their backgrounds to know their reason behind becoming lawyers, compared their successes and failures, and finally, selected the best who would represent and defend Fur in court. The lawyer she chose came expensive, but money was no issue. Rhys would gladly give up all of her savings to win the case. Was it egotistical male competition, Rhys wondered, that was driving her to do this? Or was there another motive? She liked Fur a lot, she knew that, but how much? To what extent would she go to protect him .. ?

As Rhys expected, Fur received a letter that noon.

'Mrs. Frohike?' The man said.

'Yes?' Fur replied with a clueless look.

'Here you go.' He said as he handed him an envelop, then added as he started to leave: 'Have a good day.'

'What is it?' Fur shouted out.

He tilted his head back with a smile and said: 'You've been served.'

Biff had sued him.

It was ten to one when Rhys and Fur were sitting outside their courtroom, minutes away from their case and hearing. Rhys had met with the lawyer, but Fur had yet to see her. Fur trusted Rhys. He trusted her with his life, yet couldn't help but feel worried as he held his

round stomach and thought about the future of the creature growing inside of him. Will he be happier living with his mother without a father, Fur wondered, or will he be better off living with his father without a mother? Will he be happy? Will he be loved?

Rhys saw the worried look on Fur's face. She placed her hand on his.

'Hey, relax, will yeah? Mrs. McAllister is one of the best. You're in good hands.'

Fur noted that Rhys had simplified the matter. She did not understand. It wasn't that simple, Fur wanted to tell her, it wasn't black and white. Biff's not all bad. He proved to be a good husband before this happened, and he knew he would make an excellent father. He wasn't the villain of the story, but a victim. What's more, Fur believed that Biff has a right to this child as much as Fur. However, Biff wants to separate their child from one of his parents, and that's where the problem lies. Fur's biggest fear does not lie with winning or losing the case, but which would present a better life for their child. Fur wanted to tell this to Rhys, but felt that Rhys had enough on her plate as it is. Fur knew that she had gone beyond the call of duty just for his sake, so he didn't want her to worry about such an impossible predicaments.

'Alright.' Fur replied with a slight smile rising, 'Rhys .. thanks for everything.'

'Hey, don't sweat it.' she replied with a mirrored smile while patting Fur's knee cap gently.

'Um .. last night,' Fur added after the passing of a moment of silence, '.. you called me Fur.'

'Did I?'

'Yes. After Biff left.' Fur pointed out, then went to the point: '.. Would you .. keep on calling me that?'

Rhys half-faked a serious look of surprise; Fur looked at her with hopeful eyes, as if they said: don't say no, I need you; his glossy eyes begged her to not only become his protector, but his friend who would always be there for him, during the good times and the bad. Rhys finally wiped that shock of her face and slipped into a smile.

'Sure.'

Fur was relieved. Rhys had known that she called Fur by his first name last night. She did it intentionally. Calling him by his marriage title Mrs. Frohike became an insult after seeing what kind of a heartless brute Mr. Frohike was. To Rhys, Biff was more than an enemy, he was a monster.

'There she is.' Rhys said as she gestured with her head at the woman walking down the hall towards them, then grabbed Fur's hand and got up to meet her.

The lawyer Rhys hired was a mid-thirties Caucasian blond who went by the name Samantha McAllister. She looked like a Barbie in a professional lady suit, but she was good. Rhys had chosen her after reading her work and biography. She only saw her picture after selecting her. Samantha McAllister was in fact one of the best. She managed to astonish her rivaling opponent, the judge and jury in every court when she walks out victorious. She is one of those people who were told that blonds are stupid and would amount to nothing. She rejected that truth, and worked hard to become a lawyer to walk into prestigious halls and tell people that they are wrong, then prove it. She was more than a lawyer: she was a missionary to illuminate the darkness in people's hearts and open their minds.

'Miss Rhys. Mrs. Frohike. If you'll follow me.'

With McAllister in lead, Rhys and Fur followed her inside the courtroom where Fur's breath was taken away. It wasn't the courtroom's enormous landscape that had terrified him, nor the interior dome-structure, nor the rows of wooden chairs filled with a crowd of people

she didn't recognize, but the purpose and power of this session. Here, his child's fate was to be decided.

Scanning through the strangers as he was directed to his chair, Fur saw his mother and sister sitting in the back row. He only noticed them after seeing them wave at him. He waved back with no smile. With such nervousness even a fake smile was difficult to produce. Then, his eyes were attracted to a more threatening section of the courtroom; he saw Biff sitting next to his own lawyer. Biff looked back at Fur. They kept eye contact. Biff's lawyer had whispered something to him, but he seemed to be focused more on looking at Fur through his fixated eyes. Angry eyes. Wanting eyes. He wants, Fur realized, he wants.

The crowd made background noises until a guard shouted: 'All rise.'

It was the judge who had just entered through his own entrance on the right side of the courtroom. He was Judge Edward Chomsky, a fair judge in his late sixties who would rather go to prison than rule a false verdict. He was the type of man who honored his position; preformed it with honesty; did his job to the fullest not only to show the state that they have done good by appointing him this chair, but to ensure that justice still exists in the world. If there were truly a few good men in the world, then Chomsky is no doubt one of them. In spite of knowing all this, McAllister knew Chomsky only by reputation. This was her first case in his court; her first chance to shock him.

The hour was slow, Fur felt, very slow and refusing to progress. There were arguments from each side, and for each there was a counter argument. They were both convincing, but lead nowhere. It appeared to be an infinite loop.

Fur noted that Jerry Basinger, Biff's attorney, hadn't brought up the subject of gender deceit. He talked about deceit as in keeping the truth of the child away from Biff, but not deceiving him into marrying a biological male. Fur knew that Basinger, as a hotshot lawyer, would do all in his power to win the case .. yet he refused to play the gender card. It was either because, Fur deducted, he was keeping it preserved as a trump card – a hidden hand in which he would turn the tables around if he was forfeiting the case, or, he wasn't told the truth. Seeing Biff sit silently looking back at Fur, Fur saw something else in his eyes this time; silence. At that moment, studying Biff's eyes – you can tell a lot from the eyes, especially if you have a strong bond with that person – Fur knew that Biff had kept the root of this problem a secret. Fur interpreted this as a kind gesture, a desire not to expose his wife and make a mockery of Fur while taking his baby away from him. Rhys also noticed that Basinger hadn't mentioned the gender deceit, a fact which she herself kept from McAllister. Rhys wanted badly to win the case, and in order to do that she understood that her lawyer is on her side, that is, she has to be told the whole truth in order to command the court. But Rhys didn't wish to ruin Fur's life – have people calling him a freak with their eyes if not their tongues. It wasn't only Biff, but Rhys too wanted to protect Fur.

The nightmare came in a trilogy. The session was over with no resolution, only a continuity. They were to meet here again within two days, then come back within five for the last meeting in which both sides would present their closing arguments, and for all to hear the final decision.

The final round came after the passing of a number of boring, slow days in which Fur's worries refused to minimize. Rhys took care of all the talking and planning with McAllister. Now that the day was finally here, Fur wondered if the pain would finally stop.

The final session was in order as both lawyers were to take the stand and offer their last arguments, which could determine the ruling. Both McAllister and Basinger wore their finest suits. They met eye to eye, smiled, then looked back straight to their front. So formal. So lifeless. This was just another case to them, just more cash, more reputational-growth. Yet, they both seemed glorious in Fur's eyes. Both were representing more than just their clients, but, their gender: McAllister having a scared girl as a client and Basinger having a furious man as his. At the end, Fur understood, everything came down to gender.

'Basinger. You want to go first?' Judge Chomsky nominated the male side to speak first.

'Certainly, your honor,' he replied, adjusted his tie with a wide smile, then got up to take the stage.

'You got two minutes.' Judge Chomsky instructed him.

Basinger wore a dark navy Armani suit with silver vertical stripes. His body was tall and fit; he had a large, squarish chin with straight, gel-greased hair. Before Basinger faced the jury and began, he took a quick glance at Fur, but only for a split second. That glance, a flashed smile, held something else underneath its appearance. Like a message, Fur thought, or something. It was menacing.

'Ladies and gentlemen of the jury,' he began, 'two minutes.' Then he stopped.

His technique threw everyone off guard, not just the jury. He stopped talking and looked at several members of the jury eye to eye. Rhys thought he was wasting his time, but McAllister knew that it was a dramatic pause; one which would allow him to give power to his next words.

'Two minutes,' he picked up again, 'is all the time I have to save my client's child's life. Two minutes to convince you that it would be wrong,' his voice rose and his smile faded into an angry expression, 'to take that man's reason of living and give it to his wife, who, I may add, has not deceived him. No. She went beyond that. She murdered his heart. Now, legally, it's not against the law to kill a man's heart, nor is it against the law to keep a father untold of his child, but, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, it is against humanity. Now. As you've witnessed in the last session, all of Mr. and Mrs. Frohikes' neighbors that have been called on stand have sworn that there wasn't a happier couple in the entire block. My client loved his wife. And what does she do, she keeps his child a secret from him – the only thing he loves more than life itself. What kind of a monster should be allowed to keep a child away from his loving father? What kind of a society would we be living in if we allow such a beast to raise a kid to become another beast? What kind of sane people do we claim to be if we take away from this victim, who had come to this court searching for human compassion, his reason of hope .. his reason of living ...'

'Time, Mr. Basinger.' Judge Chomsky announced.

'I leave you .. with that.' Basinger concluded as he went back to his seat with confidence.

Basinger straightened out his jacket and adjusted his former projectile smile again as if nothing had happened. He was the one inhumane, Fur thought, judging people and deciding their fates without knowing them, all for money.

'Ms. McAllister?'

'Yes, your honor.' She replied as she got up.

As she passed by her opponent, their eyes met shortly, sending messages through their smiles. 'Beat that.' His eyes told her. 'It's not over yet.' Hers responded.

'Ladies and gentlemen of the jury,' she began, though unlike her opponent, she appeared less cocky, 'my client has also come in seek of your help. Only you could give her what she's fought hard to keep: a child. I know you've heard this statement a million times, and I know how much if a cliché it is, but the truth is: a child really does need its mother. My client's husband has been absent from his wife for over seven months. He is unreliable. Fortunately for my client, she's a grown woman and can take care of herself. But can a baby? What hope has it got to go on living when Mr. Frohike decides to get up and leave?'

'Objection!' Basinger shouted as he sprang up from his seat, 'you're honor, this is clearly slander!'

'Overruled. Sit down, Mr. Basinger.'

Without his smile, Basinger sat down. McAllister resumed her concluding argument.

'Seriously, money aside. What do you think is right? As a parent, would any of you agree on sending your child away? During my last week, while I was making preparations with my client's friend regarding this case, I noticed how worried my client was. She had no appetite to eat, no desire to sleep, no will to go on.'

She noticed? Fur was shocked that someone had noticed his behavior.

Yet, she forced herself to eat, to sleep, to go on, not for her own sake, but for her child. She hasn't given up hope .. not because of her own heart, but of the smaller heart that beats within her body.'

The jury were moved, McAllister noted.

'And to take –'

'Time, Ms McAllister.'

McAllister stopped, looking at the judge as if requesting thirty seconds more.

'Sorry, Ms McAllister. Please get back to your seat.'

McAllister returned back and forced a smile at her client and Rhys, but received none in return. All three of them were worried.

'Half an hour break.' The judge announced as he pounded his gavel.

Half an hour.

Half an hour.

Half an hour, and after that, his baby's future would be written. Even before he is born. What gender he would be, what interests would he have, what beliefs would he fight for .. all of those major, life-determining aspects of a human being seemed to be secondary in importance when compared to the ruling of the court. Fur understood that his child will have to grow up with only one biological parent by his side, but which one? Which one will the jury decide on? – Which one would the baby want doesn't matter. It might be its life to live, but the court had the power to overrule. It was as if it wasn't a court, but the voice of ...

Society.

In half an hour the verdict was out. Fur was so worried that he unintentionally kept his mind wondering while it was announced. He kept thinking about the larger-than-life issues that he missed out on the best part.

'Case adjourned.' Was all what Fur heard.

Seeing Rhys get up with a huge smile and tears in her eyes gave him the answer. Rhys immediately strapped her arms around Fur and hugged him tightly while shouting 'We won! We won!'

Fur was pleased to hear the news, though not overjoyed. He was still unsure if he would make a better parent than Biff. However, right there as he was hugged by Rhys, his eyes met with Biff. He appeared angry as ever, but hid it well. Only Fur knew how angry he was. Regardless, right then and there, Fur made a secret promise to Biff, and to himself. He promised to do the best in bringing up their child upright.

'Well,' McAllister said to Fur, 'congratulations.'

'Thank you.' Fur replied, 'But what does this mean for Biff?'

'Nothing. He lived his last seven months wifeless and childless, and now he has the chance to continue doing so. Now. I understand that you are still legally married to him, if you want a divorce, which I assume you do, we can ...'

The more Fur and Biff stared at each other from across the court, the more McAllister's voice faded away. The noise disappeared as well. Soon, it was quiet for Fur. Nothing but him and Biff – once bully and bullied, then man and wife, then deceivers, then fighters of a war over a human being they both loved without knowing. Regardless, Fur felt the strong urge to talk to Biff. To apologize, if nothing else. He wasn't sorry that he had won, but he was sorry that it turned out like this. The more Fur gazed at Biff, the more empathic he became. Soon, that thought grew powerful enough to possess Fur's body and itself in motion.

'... But of course, it's up to you ... Mrs. Frohike?' McAllister exclaimed as she saw Fur walk bypass her during their chat.

'Fur! Where are you going?' Rhys shouted out.

Rhys shouted out, but was ignored. Fur was determined to talk to him. The closer he got, the clearer he saw Biff's face. He was furious.

Fur and Biff stood quiet for a minute, he in sympathy, him in anger; both in pain.

'Biff .. I ...'

Biff got up close to Fur's face, looked down at him with hatred, then roared: 'This isn't over, Bloi!'

Then, he took off.

Fur was intimidated by his tone. He had changed. Or rather, returned. That tone, Fur realized, was the exact same tone he used with him when he was his bully. Seeing Biff like this made Fur's eyes weep. The tragic thing about it was that Biff believed with all his heart that it was a scam from the beginning. That Fur didn't love him. Never loved him.

Frohike issued his last threat secretly. It was a sort of a quiet, channeled shout. With the courtroom being noisy, only Fur heard and feared it. If Biff said it wasn't over, then it wasn't over. The goosebumps Fur received from this event; from Biff's cold outburst, remained. They remained as strong as permanent marker on a white board, even though the board wasn't that white. Regardless, it was hard to rub off. Biff's last words sent several messages, one was that they no longer shared anything together anymore. He was no longer a Frohike, but a Bloi once again. Another message, which was more devastating, was conveyed by his tone. It told Fur that peace and happiness are two qualities of life that he will never have the privilege of obtaining in this lifetime.

Fur has yet to obtain legal divorce, but he was a Bloi once more. This marked a new chapter in his life, Fur realized, but not a sad one. He was a Bloi, but this time he wasn't alone. Looking into the sky, he hoped that this new chapter of his life would be a peaceful one, one with a happy ending for himself, his baby, and their guardian angel.

chapter three
peace

The last day finally arrived. It was the day on which all inner-conflicts, confusions, and worrying would be over for Fur.

Fur's delivery wasn't due on this day, at least not for another week, but apparently Fur's child had other plans. Fur's water had just broke. For that reason, Rhys took Fur directly to the hospital.

'Excuse me can any one help me here?' Rhys shouted on the top of her lungs as she carried Fur into the hospital, 'I've got a pregnant woman in labor here!'

Within a matter of seconds Fur was helped onto a wheelchair and taken by a number of nurses to a room. Rhys accompanied them until they were about to pass a gray door.

'You'll have to stay here.' One of the nurses told Rhys.

'What? Why?'

'Because beyond this point friends and family aren't allowed.'

'What? Are you kidding me?' Rhys made a scene as she saw Fur being taken away, 'What about this? Does this help?'

Rhys flushed out her badge. The nurse wasn't interested.

'I'm sorry, but hospital regulations. Only husbands are allowed to stay with her.'

'Well I'm her ...' But Rhys broke off.

Rhys was left standing alone.

After a long forty five minutes a nurse came out. Rhys immediately sprung off the floor and in her face.

'How is she?'

'She's fine.'

'And the baby?'

'The baby's fine too. But still inside Mrs. Frohike.'

'What .. I don't understand ..'

'It was a false warning.'

'But the water thing broke and blood was everywhere .. !'

'I know. Sometimes these things happen.'

'... No, feeling pain happens, but not this. This happens only once.'

The nurse said nothing.

Just then Rhys had a feeling that things were not as they appear. She felt that there was some sort of scam going on. That this nurse wasn't really a nurse; that Fur wasn't really fine; that Biff was here.

'Where is she?' Rhys's tone took an uplift from worried to furious.

'Excuse me?'

'Furnivall Bloi? Which's her room?'

'I'm sorry, but visiting her right now would be -'

'I don't care. I want to see her.' Rhys insisted.

'I'm sorry. Close family only.'

'I'm her family, okay, I'm her ...' Rhys broke off again, this time with more frustration and anger.

The nurse shook her head, but Rhys ignored her and marched right pass her.

'Hey!' The nurse shouted, then saw a security guard and shouted: 'Stop her.'

Rhys saw the security headed her way, so she took another path. However, knowing that she would get caught, she dashed through the hallway. The second she dashed, the security guy made after her in the same manner. As she passed by each door, she slowed down to take a peak at who occupied the beds, then rushed again. This was starting to remind her of The Twilight Zone. That Fur was being held captive against his will, and that everyone was in on it. Rhys was trained to run fast, but because she was busy making stops at every door on her left and right side, she lost momentum and the security caught up with her. Luckily for her, they did so right in front of a sight for sore eyes.

'Fur!'

'Jo?'

Fur was lying on his bed with a puzzled look on his face.

'What's going on?' He asked.

Rhys didn't reply. She was just happy that he was safe. As the guards took her away, she shouted: 'I'll be back, Fur!'

And she did. Within visiting hours. The hospital didn't ban Rhys from re-entering, though they had the right to, Rhys gathered, but she was appreciative that they didn't. When she got in

Fur's room, she saw a doctor standing next to Fur's side. He was in a fit body and had a blond beard that seemed to be fake.

'Jo, hi.' Fur welcomed Rhys warmly, 'This is my doctor, Zyz.'

'It's Aziz actually,' he introduced himself properly with a smile, 'but for some reason Fern finds it fun to call me Zyz.'

'Just like you like to call me Fern.'

'Nobody goes by the name Furnivall anymore, Fern.' He said smilingly, then turned to Rhys and joked: 'Please try to convince her of that since I appear to be headed nowhere in that discussion.'

Rhys nodded lightly with a fake smile. It wasn't clear to either Fur nor Zyz that she did not like him. In fact, she despised him a bit.

Rhys pulled a chair and sat next to Fur. She placed her hands on his.

'How are you feeling?'

'I'm good.'

'You gave me quiet a scare, you know.'

'Oh, there's nothing to worry about really,' Zyz interfered, 'The delivery isn't due until next week, so Fern shouldn't be here right now, but we're keeping an eye on her just in case.'

Rhys couldn't stand hearing him talk anymore, so she, smilingly, said in a sharp, suggestive voice: 'do you mind?'

'Jo!' Fur exclaimed, 'be nice. He's a friend.'

'Wow. I see I have missed quite a lot in my absence.'

'Actually,' Fur commented, 'I've known Zyz since I knew about my pregnancy, long before I met you.'

'Oh.'

'Yup. Zyz has been by my side through the entire ordeal.'

Rhys wanted to shout out: What about me? Haven't I been there for you? But didn't. She decided to keep her rage a secret for now as she doesn't wish to upset Fur. However, seeing Fur look and smile at Zyz filled up that bottled emotion. Rhys noticed the way how Zyz smiled at Fur, and how Fur smiled back, and felt the warmth in that communication. Rhys did not share their smile out of jealousy.

Rhys had been thinking a lot lately about what Fur meant to her. She wanted to tell – or more accurately, she wanted to show – Fur how much he meant to her. She didn't want Fur to spend his life with anyone else besides her, but there was this social factor standing in the way, then the ex-husband trying to steal her baby factor, and now, this. Competition. How could she compete with Zyz? He could give Fur what Rhys could not: a normal relationship. Marrying him and starting a life with him and his child would make them accepted into society. They would be labeled normal, a label Fur had long desired. Was she, Rhys thought, being selfish by loving Fur the way that she did and wanting him all to herself .. ?

Zyz was soon proven wrong. Within an hour Fur entered labor .. again. The baby was coming. Zyz pushed the button for a nurse to come and help him deliver the child. As he put on his gloves, he noticed that Rhys was still in the room.

'Mrs. Rhys, you wanna .. ?' He hinted her to leave.

'No. I think I'll stay and watch.' She said in an indecisive tone, but in truth she was determined on staying.

'I'm sorry, but you're going to have to leave.'

'Make me.' Rhys replied with a smile; a horrible smile; his smile.

Enraged by her childlike dare, Zyz attempted to shove Rhys out. However, Fur butted in: through one of Fur's many shouts, he shouted out Rhys's name in a way that showed he wanted her to stay.

'What?' Zyz asked with puzzlement.

'I don't care aghhh!' Fur shouted out, 'about regulations. If the only way she stays is by marriage, then I'll marry her!'

'What?' Zyz repeated in more confusion.

'I'm gonna marry her aghhh!' Fur made it clear.

'Doctor.' The nurse shouted out for Zyz to help.

Zyz didn't waste any time. He immediately got back to doing his job. He obviously didn't enjoy hearing such a joke, but the seriousness of her tone made him make an exception. Rhys could stay. While Fur was breathing in and out exhaustively, Rhys was breathless. She couldn't believe her ears, what Fur had said. Was he blowing off steam, or was he really proposing? Rhys was lost in thought.

'Aghhh!'

Fur's shouts penetrated through Rhys's thick skull. She immediately discarded her thought and rushed by his side. She held his hand, but he squeezed hers in return. At first Rhys felt pain by the suddenness of the firm grasp, but soon smiled. It was a girly grasp. So girly that Rhys felt like the husband, if they were to get married, that is. While Rhys got lost in fantasy again, Fur gave birth.

'Here it comes.' Zyz said with a smile.

Fur shouted more; Zyz smiled more; Rhys wished more. Time seemed to have slowed down at that moment; the second seemed prolonged, extending in the greatness of the matter – the second miracle of life to bestow Fur. The first miracle happened a little more than a year ago.

'It's a boy!' Zyz announced, 'a healthy baby boy.'

Rhys smiled gaily, then looked at Fur who finally shut his eyes and breathed normally; finally began to relax. Gradually, his smile returned, he opened his eyes, and his breathing rate was back to normal. Rhys took a tissue and wiped the sweat off his forehead. Fur and Rhys made eye contact. It was there. They felt it.

After cleaning the baby, the nurse handed him over to Fur. Fur handled him with care and held him with love. Looking into his small eyes and seeing his miniature fingers wrap around his finger was truly breath-taking. Rhys was there too, but Zyz wasn't. He had a problem with the two as a couple.

Seeing Fur holding his son close to him and seeing the genuine smile and look in his eyes made Rhys think about what should be done now? What would Fur want? What should she herself do now, Rhys thought, should she act as her heart desires and make Fur her wife? Would that be wrong or right? Fur is technically a male and hadn't undergone any gender-transforming procedures, so he should marry a girl, which Rhys happens to be. However, his body is now female, so the accepted and expected thing to do is marry a man, some one like Zyz, a good man who's Fur fond of. But which one would be right? And how could one know for certain? That logic only confused her more, but she knew she had to find a solution for this

problem. Fur is a mother now, so taking care of his new born should be his first and only priority. He shouldn't have to worry about such issues now, so Rhys had to worry for him. She wanted to.

Fur looked up at Rhys with his genuine smile and tears of joy watering his eyes, and said: 'I have a child.'

Those four words expressed Fur's feelings perfectly at that moment. He might've been a bit slower than Rhys in understanding things, but that at that moment, Fur realized, he was at peace with himself and the world. For the first time in his life, there was no confusion, no puzzlement of whether he is a father or a mother. He had no worries like the days before. He wasn't worrying about being a single parent, about what people would think of him, about his ex-husband's last words. For him, all was right with the world. Zero words came to Fur's mind, but a river of feelings flowed strongly. Unity. Peace. Happiness. For once in his life, he became synchronized with himself and the world around him.

Then, he came.

It all happened so fast. Biff had barged in with tears in his eyes and a shotgun in his hand.

'Biff!' Fur shouted.

Biff raised the shotgun.

He aimed at Fur.

Then,

He shot Fur.

The newborn fell down on the floor.

Fur fell down on the floor.

It all happened so fast.

Rhys reacted by pulling out her piece and aiming it at Biff. She shouted a warning for him to drop his weapon, but through adrenaline her voice seemed so distant. Biff, noticing Rhys, shifted his aim quickly towards Rhys to shoot her as well. But she beat him. She pulled the trigger first. Biff fell down on the floor. Rhys collapsed on the ground.

It all happened so fast.



The room was covered with blood – blood of birth mixed with that of death – everywhere, on the walls, on the equipment, on the ground ... yet, there was peace. Silence was a noise that hurt the ears of whoever was still alive in there. Four people were inside, the staff had ran out upon the sound of guns being shot. One of the four was dying, and two were dead.

Rhys rushed to Fur, holding his head in her lap.

'I need a doctor in here!' She shouted out the hall through the open door.

'I ...' Fur stuttered.

Fur wasn't dead yet as the bullet had penetrated his body but missed his vital parts. Still, he was losing substantial amounts of blood.

'Don't talk!' Rhys silenced him, while her tears dripped on his face. 'Just hang tight, help's on the way.'

'Please .. take care of ... my baby.'

Rhys looked at his newborn, he was dead.

Fur's baby had no chance of surviving, not in an environment like this. He died the moment he hit the ground; the moment he left his mother's arms.

'You're not gonna die, damn it! Not like this, not now!' Rhys shouted so hard that it hurt her vocal cords, but then lowered her voice as she knew how much Fur liked to hear soft words instead of loud shouts. 'You're in a hospital, for crying out loud,' she tried to joke to see Fur smile, which he did, 'you're not gonna die! A Doctor! Anyone!' She fired another shout.

Rhys refused to put down his head. She pulled his head to hers and laid her forehead against his. Their faces mirrored .. in a way, their faces matched; both were in pain but projected a fake smile in an attempt to give hope to the other – both were covered in a fluid long-contained; Rhys in tears and Fur in blood.

'I'm glad ..' Fur, feeling that he was about to utter his last words, spoke: 'that your face .. is the last face I see ...'

Fur bled to death in Rhys arms.

Rhys finally wept. She had never wept before in her entire life: she was always strong. But now, she wept, she wept for Fur. It wasn't only because she had, during their short period of knowing each other, fallen in love with him, but because society refused to shed a single tear for Fur. In fact, at his funeral, some of the people who knew Fur seemed glad that Fur had died, as if Biff had done humanity a favor by casting off such an abomination – a freak neither man nor woman. What right did Fur have to live in our society, their silent tongues would say, and actually aspire for happiness? Freaks breed freaks, so Biff is a savior in this scenario. He single-handedly disposed a monster and her son. Now, hoping that a glitch of life wouldn't happen again, society could go on living as it use to.

Now all that remained of Furnivall Bloi was memories, ones which Rhys must suppress and keep buried because society will not accept such ideas.

T H E E N D

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WHEN FANTASY AND REALITY COLLIDE ...

Like Rip, Fur went to sleep and woke up to a whole different reality. However, the alternation Fur experienced was not of the environment and people around him, but of his body. His face failed to sustain its facial hair; his waist narrowed while his hips grew wider; he became a she.

The question of why and how failed to rank the highest in priority as the dominant question was will, as in: will Fur accept his new body, and, more importantly, will society?

“Fur Van Winkle is a novella of a simple tale. You either love it or hate it. Of course since it goes against norms of society, you'll probably do as society taught you to do and throw this in the recycle bin. But if you could overlook such social restrictions, you might find yourself enjoying this social war.”

— Yousef A. Mustafa

“After reading this, I realized that this is a story, a real powerful story and not a bed-time story. It tackles a very sensitive subject, a subject that not many would find it comfortable. It's definitely not for underage individuals as they might perceive the wrong idea. Although I am an adult, I was strongly urged by the author not to read it for what it contains. However, I jeopardized my mind, but found it quite enjoyable. If you're like me, you'll probably take the chances and read it. All I can say is that in order to enjoy it just like I did, read it as a fictional story.”

— Mohammed A. Mustafa

FUR VAN WINKLE is a novella written by Yousef A. Mustafa. Edited by Mohammed A. Mustafa. All of the portrayed characters and events featured in the text are fictional and products of the author's imagination. For more information regarding this text or any other works of art published by KUWAIT BOOK, please send an email to q8bkman@gmail.com. Comments sent might be added on the front or back cover as a quotation after acquiring permission from the sender. KUWAIT BOOK is licensed under a creative commons attribution-noncommercial-no derivative works 3.0 unported license. Some rights reserved. For more information regarding the terms of the Creative Commons license, please visit: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0>. Written in Kuwait, Hiteen, 2011.