



AFTER THE GIRL GROWS UP

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CONNIE GOES ONLINE

“Hey Cutie! Let’s have some fun!”

Connie read the online message with a frown. “Now why would somebody his age be interested in somebody my age? I don’t get it.” She stared at the picture. A buff, tan, smiling 38 year old guy stared fetchingly out at her. “Hum,” she thought, “he *is* cute.” She pulled the mouse down and clicked on “Profiles”. “Let’s see” she murmured to herself, “age, height, weight, job, interests, salary, ah...marital status.” She paused to look harder at the screen; did it say ‘married’? Wasn’t this a singles dating site? What was a married guy doing on here?

Connie read 'Gary's' message again and could see that he was asking her if she wanted to chat. "No," she said out loud to the computer screen. "I do not want to chat with you Gary," she said with an angry click to her mouse.

Connie's life had taken a turn when, as life tends to do, kids grow up and go away to school. This had happened to her when her only daughter, her baby Scooter, left four years ago to attend a big name university. With her heart breaking, she had said her goodbyes as they packed up a bunch of her daughter's things. Also, as life has a tendency to do, the baby was going to be living much closer to the Dad now. Connie had gotten a chilly feeling that Scooter was going to be spending a lot more time with him now, making up for lost time away from him after the divorce. As Connie had predicted, that is exactly what did happen. Countless nights and weekends spent together watching TV movies, eating home-delivered pizza and baking seemed to be a thing of the past.

So these days, if it wasn't Scooter's Dad, it was the boyfriend and if it wasn't him it was her school or her work and Connie-mom really didn't get to see much of the girl anymore. She got weepy over this from time to time as countless friends tried to cheer her up and talked about the 'growing up process.' She didn't know if they meant hers or the kid's.

"Growing up and growing old," Connie said to the room with a gloomy tone. Turning fifty had hurt her ego more than anything else. As far as dating; the pool of men seemed to get smaller every year and statistics about these things indicated that wasn't just in her mind.

Connie clicked on a message from "Greatguy." "Oh God, nineteen years old! Gak!" That one actually made her feel a little sick. "Why in the world..." She shook her head, at fifty-five, she knew she did look 'good for her age', but still, nineteen? Good God.

"Hey, let's hook up!" She read the message from Steve from California who was also married and apparently looking for a 'Friend with Benefits' and 'NSA'. Connie studied his profile, cute she thought, too bad about the married part. NSA? She looked at it again; NRA? No, NSA. What the heck? "Oh!" she got a sudden flash, "NSA – no strings attached. Of course."

"Oh well," she dicked off the computer, time to get to the gym.

She positioned herself with the hand weights and started to do the back lifts the gym instructor told her about. She lifted up to the back and and repeated 15-20 times. She did front side and back for several minutes and put the weights down and glancing around to see if anyone was watching she lifted her arms up and giggled the arm flab in front of the full length mirror. "Actually," she thought to herself, "it wasn't looking so bad," It really did look like that ugly upper arm flab was receding. She thought about lipo-suction. "Nah," she thought, "If I am going to spend \$4,500, I'll spend it on my face."

She saw the guy coming over who at age 55 dressed like he was a 30 year-old mountain hiker and always trying to get her attention. "I might be interested," she thought to herself, "if he just wouldn't spend so much time looking at himself in the mirror." True to form, the guy came over to pick up some

of the heavier weights and made sure to adjust his baseball cap to a jaunty level above his eyes, and gave his cotton neckerchief a little yank. "I wonder if that is just a sporting look" thought Connie, "or to hide the wrinkles?" She moved away, no point in letting him think she was looking at him. She was looking at him, she reminded herself, but she wasn't *looking* at him.

She moved over to the exercycles and got on one. There was a housewife type next to her who gave her a cheery hello! "She seems to be having a great time!" Connie thought grudgingly as she pulled out her book to read. She checked the clock, should make this twenty minutes for the correct amount of cardio and all that jazz. She adjusted the dial down to the lowest point and started cycling. Exercise could be a pain.

Later on in the locker, she was amazed as always, in the number of women who sported what one of her friends called 'the apron.' The apron happened when the belly fat was so large and stuck out so much that it eventually sagged down in a large fold over the bottom of the abdomen, sometimes hanging as low as the pubic area. Connie always tried to not stare at women with this. "I am sure they feel just as bad about it," she thought to herself. "Wow!" as one woman walked by. "Plastic surgery? Something, yikes!"

Connie was contentious about the gym, but certainly did not feel like she was compulsive about it like some women. She was fairly sure one of her 'gym-mates' was there every day and possibly twice a day. "Too much!" she thought as she saw the women yet again, "nobody needs that much exercise. Geese!"

Back at home that evening; she compulsively went to her online dating site. "I do not have to check my mail, I don't, I don't, I don't..."

'Looking for Love', she read, 'Really Nice Guy.' "Hum, nice picture," she told Bubbles the cat who seemed only mildly interested. She read on, "widowed, two boys....they are my life....and my dogs, good doggies..." Connie jerked at this one but continued to read paragraph after paragraph about their lives. He seemed like a good father at least; the paragraph went on and she then came to "but I might get violent if I found you watching a chick flick..." What! She read it again and then once again to be sure if she read it right. Was he trying to be funny? "God, no wonder his wife died!" Connie told an uninterested Bubbles who was licking his fur. She decided to give 'Looking' a pass and did send a message to Kiwi from Australia; too young of course, but cute on that bicycle.

Connie had to stop all this frivolity to get ready for bed; tomorrow was definitely another day and this was finals week and she needed her energy.

Mr. James was waiting in line for the bus as usual and she moved behind him and attempted to pull out her book to start reading quickly. No luck, he had to talk to her. Mr. James was an employee at her school who had started there about six months earlier. He immediately fastened on to her and kept giving her invitations to lunch, dinner, coffee, hiking, etc, etc, etc. Connie countered with being busy, having no business cards, forgetting her phone number, not calling him, having a friend call him after he

just insisted on going with her hiking group. Connie had told her friend Lilly “If this guy is not married, my name is Mickey Mouse!”

Today the subject was movies and they managed to squeeze out 5-10 minutes of conversation on the latest movies before the bus mercifully showed up and she could get on. She dashed to a seat next to a girl student quickly before he could figure out where she was and sat down. “Boy, do I need to shake this guy,” Connie mused to herself, shaking her head.

Connie got through the day of sweaty, semi-hysterical students with their final exams, and fortunately, almost to her surprise, most of the students did really well. “Guess that open-book idea worked,” she told Bob her co-worker.

“Ah, you’re going too easy on them,” was his response.

“Maybe so,” she told him. “But, it is either that or a bunch of them flunk the test and then I am called on the carpet to explain why students ‘can’t’ pass the class.” Bob shrugged his shoulders with a ‘what-do-you-do’ kind of attitude.

Connie told him about the ‘chick-flick’ guy. Bob laughed “Oh no, caught red-handed watching ‘Sleepless in Seattle’ the second time and it is my favorite movie!” They both laughed.

Back home that evening, Connie decided to skip the gym, she was too tired. She told Bubbles she wasn’t going and Bubbles stared at her blankly. “I know, I know,” she said. “First it’s one day, then the next, and the next, and the next.” Bubbles lost interest at this point and started to lick his fur. “Yeah, yeah,” she said to him.

Back on-line, “Hello, how are you?” came the polite question. Rudolf was 45 years old, blue eyes, 6’ tall and educated. He was here in this country to do some engineering work. He wanted to know if she would like to send him an email. “Hum,” Connie thought, “so polite.” She scanned his profile. “Married” was blank. That didn’t look so good. She did send him an email “Nice to meet you Rudolf, you look very interesting, Are you married?”

The answer came the next day and Rudolf indicated that he was ‘separated.’ Experience told Connie that could mean a really lot of things. She began fantasizing about why he was separated. His wife has had an affair with a new boyfriend, a new girlfriend, she drinks too much, she takes pills, she works too much, she won’t work at all, she sits on the sofa all day, she goes to the gym all day long. Between these fantasies they were emailing each other back and forth and finally decided to meet.

Rudolf lived in the Big City which was two hours away by train. She was ok with that; allowed her to collect herself before meeting him. Connie had to grind over and over again about going back to Dr. Lee to have Botox on her forehead. \$400 she groaned to herself. “Jesus that’s a lot of money!”

But, she had to admit, every time she went past a mirror, especially in bright light, the deep furrows between her eyes were doing nothing for her looks. She finally decided to bite the bullet and go in and

do it. Two hours later and lighter in the pocketbook, she emerged with only a little ice pack on her forehead.

“You’re an artist Dr. Lee,” she told him. She wasn’t kidding. He had just gone after her face hammer and thongs with two laser guns for heavy sun spots and done a beautiful job. The spots above her mouth were fading away nicely.

Dr. Lee looked very pleased with himself. “He should,” she thought, “making that kind of money. “

Connie got her hair colored and bought a new pair of wooly stockings to go with her latest English dress that was very ‘trendy.’ The dress covered the remaining stomach and butt bulges without clinging. The hairdresser curled her hair with the curling iron, something she could never do herself, and she brushed it out the next day and was ready to get on the train.

By the time she got there and got checked in; she was starting to feel tired. Connie decided to lie down a little before she got dressed and met her date. No point in looking droopy. After 45 minutes she got up; reapplied her makeup careful to hide the bruises from the Botox, brushed and sprayed her hair. The dress was on, the stockings up; the shoes matched everything and the jewelry too. She was ready to go.

She met Rudolf by the subway and her first impression was that he was shorter than she thought he would be. “He has got to be the shortest 6’ man I have met in awhile.” Regardless, they were soon chatting together like old buddies.

They tried to find a restaurant but most weren’t open yet so they ended up at Starbucks and he ordered them coffee; Connie got a sandwich. They both talked about themselves and he seemed to like talking about himself. She had to admit, he had the deepest blue eyes she had seen in quite some time. She could fall right into those...

“And I have been to 27 different of the United States” he told her. “And I bet you have never been to Lynchburg, Tennessee where they make Jack Daniels whiskey.” She had to admit she never had and he told her all about it and how the place was just like the commercials. Rudolf proceeded to tell her about all the cities in California he had visited too and then started in on the Asian countries he had been too and all the weird food they had. Connie felt like they were in some kind of race.

After about two hours of this marathon ‘where have you been, what have you done,’ Connie had to tell her date that she was meeting some other people there in town but made plans for lunch with him the next day.

Rudolf seemed a little surprised by the request but agreed and they shook hands parting. Connie knew she could be in trouble with this one; she met her other friends for dinner and she felt herself calming down. Later that night she knew she would have to confront Rudolf about his situation with his wife . She realized reluctantly that there could be all kinds of reasons for it; and maybe none of them to have anything to do with the wife at all; the company offered him a bunch of money to come here, he was

bored and restless, having a mid-life crisis, he wanted an opportunity to get away from the family and fool around, so on.

Connie got up bright and early the next day; looking forward to lunch. An hour later she got a text from Rudolf that he could not make it because of illness and that he was going to have to cancel all his plans for the day. She wrote him back and thanked him for the info indicating they could talk later.

Later that week; she got off the bus with Mr. James and he demanded to know what she was doing for the next holiday weekend. She was ready; she informed him she was off to the City with her boyfriend and was it going to be fun! Mr. James got really quiet and then advised her he would be spending time with his three daughters and then finally squeezed the words out, "and his wife". "Wasn't that hard," Connie thought.

Connie wasn't sure she was going to hear from Rudolf again. "It's okay," she said to Bubbles as they sat watching television, "I gave up all that trying to impress people kind of stuff in high school. I guess that guy is still back there. Weird. I just might not be nearly exciting enough for him. Hum. Maybe I should send him the phone number of that Pink Escort Service I saw advertised. Now I bet those girls are really exciting!"

Bubbles yawned, clearly unimpressed by all this drama. He laid his head on her lap and she gave him a pet. "Sherlock, Bubbles?" He didn't disagree so she changed the channel.

PERFECT

Sally admired her handiwork, she turned the pink skirt right and left, "Looking good," she thought.

She smiled to herself and put it down, "Won't mother be pleased when she got back from her trip! To think, I did the whole thing myself without any help." She felt very proud of herself.

Sally was sixteen years old and her mother had gone home to visit her parents over the Christmas holiday like she did every year. Sally had decided to make the pink skirt and matching vest while her mother was gone. She had gotten her Dad to take her to the fabric store, she had picked out the pattern, found the fabric to include the liner and had the clerk cut the right amount. Then she picked out thread and a zipper and charted the whole pile home to the sewing room.

Sally's mother, Lilith, was in probably the 'master' seamstress category. She was very proud of her abilities as she could sew anything and everything and frequently did. Lilith showed off her outfits to neighbors, friends and relatives alike even entering little Sally into a mother-daughter look alike dress contest when she was two. Many a time Sally sat, literally at her mother's knee, learning this and that about sewing and actually knew quite a lot for a girl her age.

Sally had read the instructions over and over again for the zipper and had put one in before with her mother's help. This was the first time she did it by herself. She had laid the fabric out on the kitchen table and carefully placed the pattern pieces on top and cut them out with the pinking shears. She matched the sides together and then sewed the lining together and put it into the outer shell. But, it was the zipper, the hardest part she was the most pleased with. She couldn't wait for her Mom to get home and show her.

Lilith got home a few days later in a flurry of coats and jackets, and packages and luggage. The grandparents always sent home gifts from the fam. Usually, it was large bags of shelled pecans that would end up in delicious pecan pies later on. Sally's dad and brother had gone to the airport to pick her up and she landed with great flourish. She would be hitting the bridge circuit with all her buddies soon to chit-chat, have cocktails and swap gossip.

Sally waited until Lilith was settled before taking her into the sewing room to show her what she had done. At first Lilith's face was quizzical, she certainly wasn't expecting this. Sally sat her down in the sewing chair next to the machine and produced her masterpiece, vest and completed skirt.

Lilith turned the skirt over and over in her hands. Then without looking up or looking at Sally, she grabbed the thread ripper and started ripping out the zipper. "This is wrong, all wrong! You don't do it this way, this is a mess. I'll fix it," Lilith finished triumphantly.

Sally's mouth hung open. Her beautiful skirt, now in her mother's hands, was disintegrating. Not one work of praise for anything. She turned and left the room in a daze.

Later, Lilith, true to her word did 'fix' the skirt and Sally was able to wear the entire outfit to school and she was still felt good about that; but the rounds of eternal picking and picking started all over when her Mom had gotten home.

“Sally, you shouldn’t eat that. It’s bad for your skin, you know that chocolate makes your skin break out. How many times do I have to tell you. And stop picking at those zits! My Lord! Use some of the make up I got you to cover those up.” Lilith was always on Sally about her weight. At medium to tall height, Sally’s weight fluxgate from 125 to 130 lbs. That never seemed good enough for Lilith. She would nag constantly about her ‘getting fat.’

“Sally,” she would say. “If you don’t stop getting those ice-cream bars, you are going to start to look like your cousin Grace and God knows, she can’t get a man!”

Then her grades. She brought home some B’s and two C’s on one card, the rest A’s.

“You know Sally, you come from a pretty smart family. I thought you could have done better than this,” her mother said with a frown.

One night, after the latest report-card, chocolate-ice cream rant, Sally went to her room and locked the door and threw herself on the bed, sobbing. She felt completely defeated. She lay there a long time until the light faded and it was almost twilight. Her mom had gone out to bridge and the rest of the family had high-tailed it to safety too, so they weren’t around.

Sally was puzzled then, when the twinkling of lights started in her room. She thought she had left the light off. Maybe there was a short in the wire. She started to become alarmed when the soft twinkling started to turn into the equivalent of strobe lights. “What the hell?”

She almost shrieked when a form started to appear close to her bed. She pulled herself up and grabbed her teddy and hugging it. The form began to take shape and with a ‘popping’ sound a woman appeared in her room. She reminded Sally a little bit of the good fairy in Cinderella; but, like she had gone on a diet and cut her hair.

This woman was full figured but stuffed into a tight leather jumpsuit complete with silver studs and belt and gelled up purple hair. Wow! And then, biker boots? Sally’s mouth hung completely open.

The woman reached over and with a surprisingly kind voice said “Now, now dear. Got to close that or the flies will get in.” And with a quick motion, she closed Sally’s mouth for her.

“But, but, you, you...” Sally stammered.

“I know, I know,” the woman nodded. She looked down and gave the leather suit a little stroke. “What do you think? This year’s model.” She turned and looked at herself in the mirror and tilted a bit back and forth.

“The first 50 pounds weren’t so hard. But the last ten. What a bitch!”

Sally’s mouth fell open again. “You’re, you’re...”

“Right as rain dear, “ the woman said with what sounded like just a bit of an English accent. “I’m your Fairy Godmother.”

Sally thought she was going to fall over. She felt faint. Was she still hearing those popping sounds? She shook her head.

“No dear, it’s really true. I am. Sent here just for you.”

“But why....” Sally’s voice trailed off.

“I thought you called for some help. Didn’t you?” The Fairy Godmother looked quizzical at Sally.

“Well, yes, I did. But.....”

“Well, right then, this is what you got! We have to get to work, there is a lot to do and I have a hair appointment that I don’t want to miss. And, let me tell you, that guy’s a real wizard!”

Sally felt her mouth sagging open again and she closed it with a snap.

“You’re,” she was trying to master control of herself now, “you’re here to help me?”

“Yes, dear, that’s what I said. So let’s get up out of that bed and get to work.” Sally put the bear down, staggered up off the twin and stood up. She was taller than the fairy but definitely not nearly as cool.

The Godmother pulled her into the middle of the room and began to walk around her. “Hum,” she kept saying. ‘Hum...’ She was tapping her chin reflectively.

“Let’s see.” She snapped her fingers decisively and a glittery wand appeared in her hand.

“How”... Sally started.

“Tut, tut...” replied the fairy shaking the wand at Sally. “Now for the hair.” With a little whip of the hand she breezed the wand over Sally’s hair. Sally could feel something like wind stirring up her hair and pulling on it. The fairy pulled her to the mirror.

“Now, straight or curly?” she asked.

“I always sort of liked curly,” Sally replied timidly.

“Ok, with regular brown or streaks?” Sally couldn’t believe she was getting these choices. Usually with the prices at the salon, she could never afford this.

“Blond streaks, please.” It was like ordering a latte.

The wind intensified on her hair and it magically began to fall into beautiful ringlet curls to her shoulders and then like a layer of frosting on a cake, the blond streaks started to appear, subtly, here and there with a little twinkling sound.

Sally stared at herself in the mirror. "Wow!" was all she could say.

"Ok," the Fairy Godmother was pushing up her sleeves. "Now for this pesky acne," a wave of the wand and Sally could feel her face start to tingle and glow. "A bit off the ass." There were a weird contractions going on in Sally's rear and thighs, always her very worst spots.

She looked in the mirror, her face looked curiously rosy and she looked closer, dear! For once, dear skin! She turned and, was her butt smaller?

"Now for these clothes...good God!" the Godmother stood staring at Sally's unbelievable messy closet. She waved the wand and to Sally's amazement, the clothes, hangers, shoes, boxes, everything started to dance around and rearrange themselves.

"Okay then, while we are waiting on that to happen, let's look at you again." The Godmother turned Sally right and left. "Yes, better, better." She didn't seem completely satisfied. "There is something else.....What was it?" She seemed to think to herself.

"Ah! She almost shouted. "Didn't you say something in some prayer about school, some class or other. What was it?" Her very, very blue eyes looked deep into Sally's.

"Ah, ah...." Sally stammered again. The Godmother tapped her toe impatiently. "It was algebra and French, yes that's right. I just can't seem to get the hang....."

Sally felt the pointed edge of the wand hitting her on top of the head. "Ow!" She put her hand up to stop it, but it appeared the old lady was done before she started.

"What...."

"Alright Sally dear," the Godmother sat her down on the bed again. "What I have done is to put a temporary spell on you." Sally's mouth was doing the open thing again and Godmother closed it with her hand. "As of today, you will be able to remember everything in French perfectly."

"Perfectly?" Sally stared in disbelief.

"Perfectly," replied the Godmother. "Also, in Algebra, you will be able to remember everything perfectly and will be able to do all the problems just right."

"Well, great, great," she said with disbelief. "It's just so hard to believe..." Sally jerked back when a little puff of smoke came out of the wand. There was something like a brief flash in the fairy's eyes.

"You don't believe me?"

"I do, it's just, I am so bad at math! " Sally was trying to get out.

"Not to worry, "the fairy patted her hand. "It's going to be okay now."

“However; as I told you, this is a temporary spell. It will last exactly six months. Then on the stroke of midnight, everything will go back as it was. Do you understand Sally?”

Sally stared and then slowly nodded her head up and down. The fairy godmother pointed her wand at the calendar which mysteriously changed pages by six months. A bright silver star appeared on the 6th page with a pop!

Fairy Godmother patted Sally’s hand again. “You are going to be alright dear, just heed what I said. You’ll be fine. In fact,” her voice was trailing off at this point, “you’ll be just perfect!”

With that and a popping sound, she disappeared.

Sally sat stunned for a minute. Then she could hear her mother’s voice “Sally, is there someone in there with you?”

“No, Mom, just the radio,” Sally lied. She got up from the bed slowly and went over to her closet. In amazement she saw that every single thing in her closet was reorganized and color coded for matching outfits. She went back to the mirror. Wow, that hair looked great. Slowly, she started to feel a new bit of confidence steal over her.

“Guess it’s time for bed,” she said to herself. “Tomorrow is definitely another day!” With that she went to bed.

The next morning, Sally tramped down to breakfast with the new hair and an outfit she hadn’t been able to find in three months lost in the back of her closet. She sat down.

Her brother Dan looked up from his bowl of cereal and gaped at her. “What did you do to your hair?” his eyes went wide. Sally fluffed her new curls with one hand as she sat.

“New home perm,” was all Sally said briskly reaching for the cereal box.

Her mother turned from the stove with the bacon pan in her hand and almost dropped it.

“Oh, my God!” Lilith managed to put the pan down before spilling the grease on the floor. “Sally, your hair?” It was as though she couldn’t figure out whether to ask a question or make a statement. She came over to examine the new do.

“Is this what you were doing squirreled away all last evening?” She was peering at the hair trying to find something, mercifully, to criticize.

Sally was feeling a little hot now but remained composed. “Yep, just me and my box of home perm.” She was casually shaking cereal, or what was left of it, into her bowl. Dan was such a pig.

“Well, dear me,” her mother exclaimed, “it’s really, ah, ah, nice,” she finally said. “I didn’t know you knew how to do home perms?” Now that was a definitely a question.

“Ah, internet, you know. You can learn anything on the net.” She shoveled a few spoonfuls of the cereal into her mouth and gulped it down. “Well, gotta go, bus!” With that she grabbed her backpack and sped out of the room. Dan was calling out after her, “It looks good, even on you!”

Sally got lots of compliments that day from her friends at school about the new do and she was getting about worn-out with saying ‘thank you’ by 6th period. Amazingly enough, she had sailed through 4th period Algebra II. Just like Godmother had said, although this was usually one of her worst classes because the teacher was old and boring and it was right before lunch; today she seemed fresh and able to concentrate. Better still, she seems to not only remember what Mr. McGruder showed them on the board, it was like she had taken a smart pill, everything made sense for once. Zoowie!

McGruder always gave the class twenty minutes at the end of class to get their homework started and to ask questions. Sally got out her paper, numbered the problems down both sides of the sheet and went to work. Two minutes till the hour she walked up to the teacher’s desk and handed him the paper.

He looked up surprised, like he didn’t expect to see her there. “What’s this Sally?” he asked taking the paper.

“It’s our homework, Sir,” she replied politely.

McGruder looked at her sharply and then looked at the paper. He looked at the answers and made little red checks against each one.

“Looks like you didn’t quite get this last one, Sally.” He was looking at her strangely. “Did one of the guys help you out on this?” he wanted to know.

“No sir,” Sally shook her curls a little, “I just seemed to understand it better today for some reason.”

McGruder looked away from her a moment and then shouted “Ryan, did you help Sally with her paper?”

Ryan, one of the kids in the class, looked up mystified and shook his head no. Reluctantly, McGruder handed the paper back to Sally and told her to redo the last problem and turn it in again the next day.

Sally did exactly that and got a 100% on that paper and then every single paper she did for the rest of the term.

In French class, Madam always managed to call on Sally and make her squirm when she couldn’t come up with the correct answer. Today, when she was called Sally replied “Je voudrais la poisson pour diner, s’il vous plait.” Madam stopped her slow march around the room long enough to shoot Sally a slightly confused glance. But she looked away and Sally breathed a sigh of relief.

Sally had always done well in her other classes; English, Language Arts, Art, PE, etc. but now she began to do even better in those classes too. While Mr. McGruder kept trying desperately to figure out which of the boys in class was slipping Sally the answers on everything, her other teachers were much more pleased.

“Oh Sally,” Mrs. Kirkwood, her English teacher just gushed one day, “I just knew you had more in you, just a little locked away.”

“Thanks Mrs. Kirkwood,” Sally replied, actually a little embarrassed. But things were picking up for Sally all over the place, with the new hair, the minus five pounds, clear skin and a something different attitude, Sally was starting to attract a lot more attention from both the boys and the ‘more popular’ girls at school. She had to laugh up her sleeve when Amanda, one of the snottiest girls on campus asked Sally to come to her birthday party.

“Gosh, I am so sorry,” Sally had to say. “I would love to come but I already made other plans.” She wrinkled her face into the ‘so disappointed’ look a lot of the girls at her high school used. Amanda was the one who looked disappointed.

She turned away and sort of mumbled a “Next time then,” something and Sally shook her head vigorously up and down. Sally did have a movie date with Karl, one of the school soccer players which she could have broken. But, Amanda, why bother?

At home, her brother Dan was still calling her names like Bozo-head and Dweeb but, it seemed with less enthusiasm all the time. When Sally started to date Karl and knew that Dan idolized Karl as the best kicker the team had ever had, there was an ever so slight shift in their relationship.

“Hey, Sal,” she heard him call out when she got home one day. “So when you seeing Karl again?” he shuffled his feet around a little and was looking down.

“I donno, why?” she said casually.

“Well, I just wanted to talk to him about, about some...soccer stuff, you know,” he finished up and looked out the window. Sally knew for a fact that Karl was probably going to be next team captain and Dan was trying to get on his good side.

“Well, I’ll just tell him you want to talk about some.....stuff,” she told her brother. He looked up suddenly and beamed at her; maybe the first time since they were both in bunny foot pajamas.

“Great, great! Thanks, Sally, you’re a pal.” He was going to hit her on the back in thanks and she managed to dodge him just in time.

Sally’s Dad kept insisting to her mother that, other than the hair, Sally really wasn’t that much different than before. “She’s just growing up and coming into her own,” he would say. From time to time, Sally would catch him giving her quizzical little looks and if she caught him, he would look away quickly like he

was inspecting the wall paper. She smiled to herself, her dad had always been on her side, she knew that.

Lilith was an entirely different matter altogether. While at first, she told herself she liked the hair and the newly organized closet and the improved grades; the entire thing was disconcerting. She would try to give her daughter advice and constructive-criticism like she had always done to help her and show her love.

“Sally about your hair,” she’d start.

“What about it Mom,” was the tart reply.

“Well, it’s cute and all, but, gee, all that perming and color is so hard on your hair. Wouldn’t you like to go back to the way it was before to give it a rest?” Lilith looked to her husband for support and he hid behind his newspaper.

“Mom, everyone at school loves my hair, Karl loves my hair, hell; even Dan loves my hair! It’s perfect just the way it is and I’m not changing it,” she said with finality.

Lilith looked and looked for something to land on; Sally had mysteriously, almost overnight, lost all excess fat and was now, well, what was the word, perfectly proportioned. Plus, there didn’t appear to be even one zit in sight. She just couldn’t understand it. She took to checking Sally’s closet and medicine cabinet to see if there was some weird chemical lurking there that was responsible for all this; and, nothing. She was stumped.

Then, the grades. Sally’s grades started to improve bit by bit but when she came home with a straight A report card, Lilith’s mouth fell open. No one in their family had ever made grades like this. “Sally, this is so unusual, how, how...” she stammered. She just couldn’t think of what to say without accusing her daughter of outright cheating, but with who, how?

Sensing the dilemma, Sally responded to the unasked question. “I have just gotten more focused Mom and decided to quit screwing around at school. Easier on everyone this way.”

Lilith signed the report card with an almost shaking hand and gave it back to her daughter. “Oh, by the way, Mom, I think you said something a long time ago about me getting dothes if I could ‘only ever bring home the grades.’ So, now, I have done. Can I have some cash please?”

Lilith was astonished by her daughter’s new found directness. “I don’t, that is, I don’t think I have any money,” she said in a very low voice.

“That’s okay,” Sally was quick, “I’ll take Dad’s credit card. He won’t mind.” She held out her hand to her mother who stared at her. “Hey, Karl is coming over in a few minutes, could you get it for me please?”

Glazed and stunned, Lilith moved to her bedroom slowly and then came out in a couple of minutes with a plastic card. Sally whipped it out of her hand. "How about \$200, say? Since, it was all A's." Lilith nodded and then slowly settled down to the sofa.

Sally grabbed her purse and stuffed the signed report card and the credit card inside. She pulled out a lipstick and looked at herself in the hall mirror as the sound of a car horn beeped outside. She put on lipstick and with a final flourish turned to smile at her mother. "Just what you always wanted, Mom, picture perfect everything." With that she turned and waltzed out the front door.

The light was fading from the day and Lilith didn't bother to turn on any of the lamps. She just sat and stared, mouthing something.

Later, her husband found her there in the same spot, crying. "Lilith, Lilith dear. What is it? Is something wrong?" He grabbed her and pulled her up.

Lilith was still crying and then sobbing. Finally, the words that had been trying to come out all day, got out. "My little girl," she sobbed, "my little girl. Whatever happened to my little girl?" Her husband rocked her back and forth.

It was June and warm and Sally was out in the garden. The six months had passed and she knew it was time for her to receive her visitor again. The biggest problem that she had had was trying to find a hair shop to do her hair the same way at a reasonable price. She had found one place and was still dickering with the owner to get the price down. "You have to realize girlfriend," the owner had said condescendingly, "it's streaking over a perm. It has to be done very carefully or the hair will burn." She had quoted Sally \$100 a pop to do the hair once every 6-8 weeks. Sally could afford it out of her babysitting money; but it was still a lot.

She was still dating Karl and had a number of really good conversations with him. Instead of being a completely hopeless jock, like some of the guys on the team, Karl had proven to be one amongst many with a real brain. "I always liked you Sally," he told her one evening over ice-cream. "I used to watch you when you came to your brother's games."

"So, why didn't you ever ask me out?" she wanted to know.

"I don't know exactly how to describe it;" he looked a little embarrassed. "It's just, well...."

"What?" she wacked him playfully on the head.

"You just didn't seem to have any confidence in yourself. I mean, just not any," he finally spit out. "I just thought maybe you were still too young and maybe had to grow up some, or something." He stopped talking with a sort of pleading look on his face.

"It's okay," she told him, "you were right, I didn't have any confidence and I did need to grow up." She leaned over and gave him a little kiss on the nose. He smiled at her.

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