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Number One Nerd

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Drooling once again behind me in chemistry class, Liz anchored her green eyes into Scott Demburg's red shirt two seats ahead. I could practically hear the saliva plopping down onto her assignment sheet. "Why don't you just inform him of this undying, passionate love?" I finally inquired, staring at her over my shoulder.

She glanced absently at me, twirling strawberry blond strands around a curled finger, and smiled dreamily.

Love had already destroyed the poor girl's mind.

Something very sharp jabbed my arm. Arnold Chadwickski, whom I cheerfully preferred death to, flashed me his buck-toothed grin. He pointed with a pen to his mouth, full of what appeared to be a hamster. "I have in my mouth," he announced, "four pieces of Big Bandit Bubble Gum, and am about to break the world's record for biggest bubble."

"I don't care," I replied, although I spent five minutes observing the yellow bubble slowly wobbling from his pursed mouth. He sat Indian-style, pale hands clutching the sides of his desk, concentrating, determined to become the World's Biggest Bubble Blower (and probably honored spokesperson of Big Bandit Bubble Gum).

Which is why I suppose he took it so hard when Scott Demburg turned around and calmly popped the bubble with his pencil. Gum exploded across Arnold's Coke-bottle glasses.

"You'll die for this--do you HEAR me? Die!" he screamed, waving his thin arms wildly. Scott shrugged.

Mr. Oswald, our bald, blue-suited, boring chemistry teacher, glanced up from his desk. "Problem, Mr. Chadwickski?" he asked calmly.

"This dude"--Arnold pointed an imaginary gun to the back of Scott's blond head--"is dead. Gone! History!"

Scott shrugged.

"There is a problem, class," Mr. Oswald stated, ignoring the World's Biggest Bubble Gum Blower.

"Someone stole the chemistry test in advance last Friday and sold copies of it, thinking I wouldn't find out if it was replaced the next Monday. It may come as a shock, but I am not stupid, class. And unless I find out which of you stole that test, I fail all of you." He crossed his arms. He meant business.

I wondered what Liz would have to say about Mr. Everything Demburg if she knew he'd been the one, the sneaky, low-life weasel, who stole that test and was costing us our A's (I was positive he had, having bought a copy myself).

Chuckling, I scribbled a note to her and flung it triumphantly over my shoulder.

Arnold waddled up to me after class, curling his fingers around a large silver belt buckle and rocking back and forth in untied green sneakers. "What's cookin', good lookin'?" he drawled, nerd-style.

Liz's eyes were glued to Scott's retreating back as he sauntered down the hall. She brushed past Arnold, rolling her eyes at me before adoringly trailing the popular blond senior. I began to follow, but Arnold stepped forward,

"Oh nothing, nothing," he replied innocently, in a voice singing, "I've got a secret, I've got a secret!"

"Get out of the way."

"Not so fast, hot mama." He cracked his knuckles and smoothed back greasy black hair. " Seems to me we could do each other a favor. You scratch my back, I scratch yours."

I didn't know what he was talking about, but I definitely knew I didn't want him scratching anything. "I'm not going to do you any favors, so get out of the way!"

"Ah ah, you seem to forget, I have your note," he smiled, scratching his nose.

"My what!" I glared at him. "You stole my note to Liz?" The note proving Scott Demburg stole the chemistry test?

"Didn't steal it, babe. You left it lying on the floor. Only dummies leave things lying on the floor."

"Only nerds use the word 'dummies'," I returned crossly.

"Louise, Louise, Louise, must we threaten our relationship with this ridiculous bickering?" he sighed.

"We have no relationship," I reminded him.

"Come on, Louise!" Liz called from down the hall.

I poked Arnold in the chest, practically knocking him over. "We'll discuss this later, moron," I snapped.

The phone rang after dinner. "Hello?"

"Hey, babe. Arnold Chadwickski here."

Ugh. I needed no further convincing, being able to smell his bad breath through the phone. "I want that note back," I said. "Where is it?"

"Safe place, mama, safe place," he replied. "You can have it if you do me one small favor. All you have to do is, go out with my cousin Clarence this Friday."

I gagged.

"He's visiting from out of town and I promised him hot action and a tasty woman."

"Forget it!" I shouted.

He continued to remind me how uncomfortable the situation might be if Scott Demburg discovered in spite of Liz's "undying, passionate love", she was the one who turned him in to Mr. Oswald for stealing the test. Liz would never forgive me. Wrong. Liz would probably KILL me.

"He's really a dude—he collects fish hooks, disco dances, and collects stamps—are you there, Louise?"

"I want the note in advance," I growled.

"Forget it, ma'am, I reckon you's have to play cowboy mah way," he slurred. I hung up, humiliated. I'd actually associated with Northrup High's Number One Nerd.

I dreaded Friday. Through school, Liz bubbled on about her plans to visit friends at the university, how Scott would be there, how Mom and Dad were giving her the Fiat, etc., etc. I ignored her entirely. This was all her fault, anyway. I wasn't dating this Clarence Chadwickski for ME—I was for HER. And she would be at a party tonight while I discussed fish hooks with Arnold's undoubtedly nerdy cousin.

My mother flashed her Our-Little-Girl-Is-Growing-Up look when I informed her of my date. "Oh sweetheart, how nice!" she beamed. "Can he drive well?"
"Listen to me, Mother," I replied darkly. "Don't get your hopes up. And expect the worst when you answer the door—his name's Clarence, and he's a (gag!) Chadwickski. I'm being blackmailed by his cousin Arnold."

"Isn't that the one who Sally beat up last year?" she asked after a moment. Sally was my younger sister, and pretty much a monster.

"That's the one," I agreed. "I have to change now." Suddenly I panicked, climbing those stairs to my room. What if someone I knew recognized me with a Chadwickski? What if I ran into my friends? What would I say? Aha, I knew. I would simply disguise MYSELF as a nerd (I can be so clever sometimes)! Disguise myself beyond recognition!

Humming, I collected fuzzy yellow hair ribbons and twisted them into my long black pigtails, slipping into Sally's rainbow-striped suspenders, worn gaucho, and knee socks with orange frogs all over them. I added her raccoon cap and my old sneakers, grass-stained and generously decorated with large holes. Why bother with make-up? I didn't want to seduce the poor guy. He'd most likely never even had a date!

I grinned at the disgusting image in the mirror, and gracefully picked up a roll-on deodorant. "You are a gem, dahling," I toasted, clicking the roll-on against the glass. My reflection modestly tipped the raccoon cap.

The doorbell rang.

"Louise!" my mother called. "It's- it's- it's-"

I chuckled. Poor Mom. She'd probably never been so close to an actual nerd before. I slipped on a pair of red sunglasses and bounded down the stairs in a two-footed hop, singing the national anthem quite loudly. I bounded right into the front hall, before my mother and....

"Excuse me, who IS that?"

He stood tall and perfect under the light, raven black hair shining, sapphire eyes gleaming, mouth hanging open in horror as he stared back at ME. My mother was also terrified. Her brows disappeared under her wispy bangs.

"I'm Clarence," he managed, flashing a gorgeous smile. "You must be Louise, Arnold's friend." Was he ever confident about that much!

Beginning to sweat, I glanced desperately at my mother, still trying to figure out who I was (dressed like Arnold). "Uh, no, I'm not," I replied (shakily). "No, no, not Louise here! I'm...ah...Sally! Louise's sister, Sally." Poor Sally.

Clarence slipped his gorgeous hands into gorgeous creme colored coat pockets and waited.

"Uh, why don't you go get Louise then, SALLY?" my mother managed.

"Aw shucks, Ma, do I have to?" I muttered, sprinting up the stairs as fast as I could, praying Clarence wouldn't disappear (as the gods have been known to do).

Louise Chadwickski, I daydreamed. It had a nice ring to it.

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