

First publication: *Whetstone Vol. 15*

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Word count: 2,000 words

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By

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Like the old song goes, I've been looking for love in all the wrong places.

I breezed through college with a 3.5 and no hope of having children bearing a striking resemblance to that Swedish exchange student in my Microbiology lab, nor the hope of a new last name. I had six thousand guys on six thousand square feet of campus and never managed to snag one stinking proposal. Hell, I never even snagged one lousy date. The most romantic thing a guy ever did for me was hold my hair back while I puked on his fender.

I await the day when lightening bolts disappear from my pupils and are replaced with that heavenly annoying oblivion. I practice giddy snorts and giggles in the shower so I'll be prepared to answer when he says my name. And every Friday night I pluck my eyebrows, pumice my feet, and lose seven layers of leg skin letting Lady Bic go boldly where no man has ever gone before. All this, of course, in case I get into a car accident.

Now in the real world, the world where I work exactly forty hours at a job having nothing to do with my major and spend exactly forty percent of my income on shoes and handbags, bachelors are a lot harder to snag no matter how many credits you've got under your belt. It's a sobering thought like everything else in the real world. This year is my ten-year high school reunion. I've been out of college for six years. Six years! I should be on my second marriage by now.

While the monsoon of love spewed hearts and flowers on friends and classmates, it merely farted on me. There I stood, alone at last call, like Betty-Booger-Eater in the first grade, watching ones become twos and house keys exchange. Bitter? Nah, not me. I've become very good at slapping my palms against my cheeks and screeching, "Ooh, you guys are so cute together!" when friends bubble about Johnny Romantic. They are very considerate of my feelings on the subject and reserve heavy petting and pawing to those moments when I shut my eyes mid-sneeze or glance downward at my watch. And they know I'm just kidding when I shout across a crowded bar, "Hey Billy, the results of my syphilis test were positive! If you want, I can give your girlfriend the name of a good doctor!"

But, I was convinced my luck would change soon. Destiny was holding out because it didn't want me wasting my time with no-where guys and would instead present me with the real thing at the right time. Really now, seventy-five year olds have profiles posted on Match.com. It was bound to happen for me too.

And it did. Well, not exactly happened but the opportunity certainly presented itself in the most subtle yet obvious way. While carousing the local mall, soothing my unnerving case of boyfriend deprivation with one hundred and ninety-two dollars worth of shoes, (which I might add not enough people seem to appreciate,) I saw a sign. Literally. Plastered in the corner of a clothing store, between the mannequin's plastic foot and a clearance sign read the words: *Help Wanted*. The angelic creatures that lingered somewhere in the ozone layer, bare bummed and hairless, were finally putting down their machetes and aiming their love sick bows at me. For this was not just any clothing store. This was a *men's* clothing store and the only *men's* clothing store within a sixty-five mile radius to boot!

I put my four-year college degree to work and applied for the job. I pulled the sign out of the window and hugged it to my chest, realizing I should have accessorized myself with this sign a lot sooner.

The manager was younger than my CD player but that didn't bother me. Her interrogation did.

“What would make you a good employee?”

Uh, my BS in Molecular Biology.

“Are you reliable?”

Gee, I've had perfect attendance since second grade.

“What do the words *French cuff* and *tapered legs* mean to you?”

She had no right to get personal with me.

She looked me over, slowly raising and lowering her eyelids heavy with gummy eye shadow the color of bread mold. She circled me twice, sucking on the cap of a black felt tip pen.

“I can go home and change, you know,” I told her. “Maybe throw on some perfume. I only came here to buy some shoes.”

She must have sensed that I was Cupid's instrument, thought better than to mess with it and hired me on the spot. In less than an hour the world's most beautiful men surrounded me. Tall, bronzed, impeccably dressed, and astonishing as it may seem, they all had eyes for me. So what if they were one-dimensional and had the words, “Polo's: Now on Sale,” branded across their thighs. They had to be out there somewhere. Now all I had to do was wait for my airbrushed god to waltz through the door and beg me to measure his in-seam.

Putting my anxious heart behind me I spotted my first victim lingering in the fitting room area. I rehashed the two key phrases Miss Boys R'Us taught me. “Can I help you?” and “Would you like to try that on?” Putting on my most seductive pout I sauntered up to him and meowed, “Can I help you try that on?” I didn't realize my mistake until he stared at me, eyes wide and mouth agape displaying a yap full of braces. He howled, “Mommy,” dropped a pile of Jr. Khakis and Tees for Teens, and flung

himself into the arms of a woman I swear I used to baby-sit for. Too bad. That would have been a good sale.

My second customer was no poster boy, but at least old enough to drive. I convinced him to go with the chambray button down as opposed to the driftwood silk he was set on. He must have thought of me as a color-wise guru for I saw the way he gazed at me when I handed him back his change. “He’ll be back,” I thought. Moments later my hunch proved correct when I saw him stomping back to the register. Hey, when you got it, you got it.

“Excuse me, miss, but I can’t leave.”

I flashed him an understanding smile, poor boy. Who needs perfume?

“You left the sensor on my shirt.”

“Oh.”

Miss Fisher Price took me off the register. I could tell she was frustrated by the way she tapped her fingernails on the clipboard she toted around. Her nails were pastel, a color somewhere between Pepto Bismo and chive that went remarkably well with her moldy eyelids. When she pointed at me I could almost smell the combination. Tucking my own fingertips, fragrance and dye free, into my waistline, I awaited my next assignment.

“The mannequins on display in the windows needed an updated look,” she told me, piling linen blazers and knit vests into my arms. “This is usually my job because I have a very high spatial awareness.”

“Are you in the spatial Olympics?” I asked.

“No.” she answered with such sincerity I actually felt bad there wasn’t a spatial Olympics she could excel at.

But she got over it and told me to “get busy.” I found myself staring into the pupil-less eyes of what was to become my most intimate acquaintance. I looked around to see if anyone was watching, for I found this to be a rather private moment. An older couple was busy pawing through a pile of clearance golf shirts and the other sales girl was preoccupied trying on sunglasses from the *Police Beat* line.

Carefully, I untucked his red Polo shirt from his denim shorts and eased it past his midriff. When I caught sight of his belly button I blushed furiously. Please don’t tell me these things were anatomically correct. Not exactly. He was missing arms and legs and was spray-painted silver but he had a remarkably toned abdominal and the tiniest, cutest, Jane-Fonda-eat-your-heart-out rear end I had ever seen. I pulled his shirt up higher over his silver pecs and rounded shoulders and successfully managed to uncover my first male torso without a struggle or any snide comments from him. I could have been in love. Next came the hard part; removing his pants. I undid the button with little problem but found the zipper had gotten stuck in the seam. I pulled and twisted to no avail until my last heave-ho that sent my silver friend and myself stumbling to the ground. My head knocked into his buddy who cushioned my fall but my beloved landed square on top of me. Passerby’s stopped and gaped in the window. Grandmas fluttered their eyelashes and dropped their jowls; mothers covered the eyes of their young. There I lay, surrounded by half naked torsos, undoubtedly the ringleader in this plastic coated orgy.

Needless to say, I was unleashed from decorating duty and placed on the sales floor, sentenced to pleasantries like, “Oooh, nice color with your complexion,” and “Jeans, just \$34.99.” I couldn’t stand being bombarded with chirppy girlfriends anxious to surprise boyfriends with new leather bombers and silk boxers. “He, like, does so much for me, I just want to get him a little something to say like, I care too!”

Have you tried Yogurt Hut? I hear they’re giving 10% off pre-packed pints.

Attractive men did frequent the store. I tried to remember Mom’s advice not to appear hungry, because men could sense that. But damn, I had a severe case of bulimia on this love diet. Men approached me, but I purged any chance of romance.

“Excuse me? Can you help me? I’m lost in heat?”

“What?”

“I said could you help me? I lost my receipt.”

“Oh.”

“I love the color of your eyes.”

“What?”

“I said I love the color but not the size.”

“Oh.”

“Excuse me, Miss. Let me take you home. You are the woman of my dreams.”

“What?”

“I said, when I took this home, it fell apart at the seams.”

“Oh.”

My career in retail husbandry was folding faster than the denim shirts in stock. I contemplated pinning a large button on my shirt proclaiming: “DATES FOR DISCOUNTS! *Date me and receive thirty percent off your next purchase.* Patience has never been one of my strong suits.

But then I saw him. A flesh colored replica of my ex-lover on display. Rummaging through our selection of linen button downs, he was alone, alive, and close to my age. Cautiously I made my move.

“Can I help you?”

He looked up and smiled a clean, Close Up genuine smile. “Yes, I think you can.”

He informed me of what he was looking for and I led him to a display similar to what the chiseled, sandy haired men in print were wearing.

“Yeah, perfect,” he purred in my ear. “You’re a genius.”

Giggle, giggle. Snort, Snort.

He emerged from the dressing room looking spectacular and in three dimensions. My knees felt weak and the Orange Julius I had on break was blending and churning in my stomach.

I heard a voice exclaim, “My God Jake, you look fabulous!” Wait a minute. The toned and tanned arms of a skinny blonde straight out of a Noxema ad surrounded his neck and I realized that the voice did not belong to me.

“You simply must wear that to our engagement party.”

She smiled her thanks to me. White light flashed before me and my eyes began to burn. The lightning bolts were back.

I found Miss Hello Kitty, spackeling lipstick on her mouth, another fabulous shade from the Moldy Pepto Chivo line. I turned in my dressing room key. She looked surprised but not the least bit put out. Shrugging her shoulders, she returned to her reflection in the lens of a *Police Beat* shade.

I blew silent kisses to my cardboard boyfriends and waved good-bye to my silver-plated one-timer. Had he arms, I'm sure he would have waved back.

I decided to spend my hours worth of work and indulge in a pre-packed pint of yogurt. When I went for my wallet, the man behind the counter waved me off.

“Don't bother. It's on the house.”

“Thanks,” I muttered, unsure of what this could mean. Flesh colored skin, no wedding ring, all his appendages appeared to be intact.

“I think you should lose some weight,” he said.

“What?”

“I said, I think your shoes are great.”

“Oh.” I smiled back at him. “Actually, I was wondering. Are you by chance hiring?”

The End