

# *The Journey To Love version 5.10*

## *"Journey's Light"*

A Fictionality -- New and improved and with no bloat

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This Work is Dedicated to:

Kim Cattrall, Kristy Swanson, the original *Mannequins*,

Tiffany Marie Brissette, the person who enlightened my life beginning in 1985,

Chris Difford, Glenn Tilbrook, and Squeeze members past and present, for wonderful songs  
about love,

Jason Stratman, a friend unlike any friend,

Starship, for the wonderful song "Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now,"

My mother, Vera Havens, for putting up with my BS, with *Small Wonder* and this other BS

And the countless people who coached me on and thought that this wasn't a phase, and didn't  
think I was crazy.

**Thank you.**

## Foreword

This is version 5.1 of the "The Journey To Love" Fictionality series. I have wrote a version 5.0, but since that girlfriend dumped me (because of her mother), I deleted that story from my Web page and from my hard drive. Well, new place, so I would try my best to get to utilize this new location, even though I've been living here for two months.

Ever since I coined the term "Fictionality" in version 4.0, let's recap: A "Fictionality" has the reality part -- me and my friends, family, whatever, in a real setting (Hampton Roads area of Virginia) in a real time setting (the time I am writing the story, with a look into the future), with a few real settings. The fiction part adds a few fictional characters, and a few fictionalized settings (like the DifLove.com business). What you see here may startle you because it *really* uses the city of Virginia Beach for its setting, and all of its locations, also the HRT (Hampton Roads Transit) bus system. For more information on HRT, call 757/222-6100 or visit <http://www.hrtransit.org/> .

Well, I'm trying not to bloat this story like I did in version 4.0. What I'm trying to do is expand the story, but not go into irrelevant details or repeated dialogue. I'm also trying to give more details on my friends' girlfriends (which they were mannequins ... but you'll have to read the story more to find out) and more details on the surroundings around me. I'll give it a try, but you can email me at [kevin.havens@s88890090.onlinehome.us](mailto:kevin.havens@s88890090.onlinehome.us) to tell me where I went wrong.

Kevin "CasperGhostboy" Havens

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## One

### The Journey Begins

This is the story of three men, who were dismissed as "geeks," "nerds," "faggots," whatever the "popular" people would call them at school. Well, with these labels that were placed on them from the time they went to school to now, they thought they couldn't get a girlfriend. And if they did, they couldn't keep one because of the ridicule they'd get because of their labels that were placed on them. One day back in December, three people, Kevin Havens, Donald Willard and Jason Stratman, hooked up with a Web site called DifLove.com, who was offering an experimental service. But they weren't knowing what they would get. Well, let's forward all the way to February 14, 2001. It's a Wednesday (and Valentine's Day), and usually nothing happens on a Wednesday. But, since there was a unusual thing on that day, all three people were there. And this is where the journey is starting to begin.

One of the men, Kevin, writes:

Today was a bad day. I was trying to get a girlfriend, but I got the usual rejections from the women around me. One said that I wasn't her type. Another said that she wanted to stay single for a while, so she'd let me know when she's ready to go on the dating scene again. Fed up with these little rejections, I was looking for Jason Stratman. I found him outside smoking his pipe. "Hey, yo," he said, offering his pipe, still lit, to me, "what's wrong?" I told him that nothing was wrong. I took his pipe from his hand, which was extended to me, wiped the mouthpiece off, placed the pipe in my mouth and took a couple puffs off of it to get it started back up, then inhaled a couple times. "Stratman," I said, "I'm getting tired of this goddamn shithole. Let's see if Don's home and let's see if we can get a lift to my place. Maybe we can get a couple beers, since I have five bucks left on one of these Gift Cards, maybe we can get a three bottles of some imports and get on the Net for a while, then Don can take you home." "Well," Jason said, "I already called him about an hour ago and told me to call him about 2:30." I quickly looked at my watch. "Well, it's about that time. Now what?" "Let me finish my peep. I have to take one monster-sized piss." "I gotta take a piss myself. Then we'll call Don." We took five minutes passing back and forth a pipe which was packed with cheap rolling tobacco and then finished it. Jason emptied it by tapping the bowl of the pipe against the sidewalk and went inside. Both Jason and I went to the men's' bathroom and took a leak. We then stopped off at the retail unit first, but all of the phones were in use, so we went to the clerical unit and stopped off at a phone near a computer that was running Solitaire, a mouse-teaching program/game that comes standard with Windows 95. Since the computer was not in use, and the seat was abandoned, so Jason grabbed a seat and I sat down and I called Don.

I dialed Don's number and the phone rang three times. Don picked up. "Hello," Don, who was on the other end, said. "Hey," I said, "Jason and I would like to go to my house and maybe fool around a bit." We talked about five minutes until Don said "Kevin, tell Jason that I'll pick both of you up at 7-Eleven about three to three-thirty. Be there." "Okay," I said and then told him my good-byes. I then hung up the phone. I then told Jason that we need to leave now to go to 7-Eleven. We gathered up our stuff and got out the door. Since it was a nice day, all we were wearing was shirts and jeans.

We were passing pipes and cigarettes back and forth for about fifteen minutes until a green

Chevy Cavalier pulled up in the parking lot. We left to go on the interstate until we got off at Witchduck Road. I asked Don if he could stop off at the Food Lion right at the corner of the boulevard and Aragona. "What for?" Don asked. Jason asked "Hey Don, do you want some *beer?* Kevin's buying." Don hesitated for a few seconds and said "Sure. But no cheap domestic shit!" We got out of the car and walked inside the Food Lion.

Since that Food Lion wasn't selling St. Pauli Girl, Don's favorite imported beer, at the time (they were out of stock), we settled for some Sapporo, a Japanese beer. We got three large cans, and I pulled out my Gift Card while hiding the sticker that said my name, how much it was (it was a ten-dollar card, and I had about a good \$4.85 left on it), and the disclaimer "NO ALCOHOL/NO TOBACCO," which discourages Beach House members *not* to buy those two products, but people do it anyway, and anybody can. That is, if you're slick about doing it. It's not hard-coded into the cards. Anyway, the display for the cards say "Use like cash at any Food Lion store." That's when you buy the cards from the Food Lions themselves.

Anyway, we checked out our beers, after Stratman paid for it with some of his cash (about \$2.50), and we found out that we had a good six-cent overage. Since I had a nickel and a penny in my pocket, hidden between a labyrinth of keychains and keys, I successfully dug them out and gave the two coins to the cashier. Our brewskis were bagged and we left the store, after putting my identification card back in my wallet, which was checked at the point of sale. We hopped in the car and went to my place.

Don was saying "Kevin, when we get to your place, *before* we go drinking, we need to check your e-mail." I knew I had about four ways of doing it, either checking it using Eudora, Yahoo Mail, Hotmail, or a new service that surpasses them all (Yahoo and Hotmail), Pinnacle Online WebMail at webmail.pinn.net.

We got to my place, set the beers in the fridge, sat down and I turned on my computer and the Award BIOS startup screen verified that I had 98304 kilobytes, or ninety-six megabytes of memory, my device on the secondary master channel was a "FX320M," or something like that, and gave me an option to enter setup by pressing the "Delete" key. I didn't need to enter BIOS setup, so I proceeded to booting up.

Then I saw an "Award Software, Inc. System Configuration" table which told me my configuration that was in CMOS. Then I saw the following messages:

```
Primary Master HDD S.M.A.R.T. Capability - None
Primary Slave  HDD S.M.A.R.T. Capability - None
```

(My C drive is on the primary master, my D drive is on the primary slave channels.)

```
Verifying DMI Pool Data....
Starting Windows 95...
```

(Don't tell *me* that I need Windows 98 or Windows Me. I'm happy with Win 95.)

Then I saw a little startup screen that looked like a *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* title screen (I captured it using a Sega Genesis emulator called KGen 98 v.04) with information on the

emulator. I made my startup screen be a little different than the Happy MicrosoftLand Windows 95 startup screen. I downloaded a program by Emmanuel Huna called "The Changer 3.0." I downloaded it from CNet's Shareware.com. It plays a midi file after the system starts up. Then, all of a sudden, my CD-ROM driver, my mouse driver and MSCDEX, a CD-ROM driver extension for DOS, showed up. My fingers were crossed while that showed up on the screen...then the following words showed up on the screen:

windows protection error. You need to restart your computer.

Jason went "*Goddammit!*" I went "*Shit!*" Then without hesitation, I quickly reached for the reset button and the usual self-tests were showing, then the other stuff and then a scary-looking startup menu that looks similar to the start-up menu when you hit F8, but with the following "important" message:

Warning: Windows didn't finish loading on the previous attempt. Choose Safe Mode, to start Windows with a minimal set of drivers.

Usually it's not a driver problem. The computer wants to be "funny" and try to halt bootup by issuing a "protection error" and forcing me to reset. So, I hit the key for the first option, normal bootup, and hit Enter. The system booted up without a hitch.

I saw the "Welcome to Windows Networking" dialog box, wondering why I have this up, noting that have a network card, but no physical, but a dial-up network connection. But if you don't enter in a networking password (which is my dial-up password, and I ain't tellin'), the computer *won't* let you on the Internet. So, I entered my password and hit Enter. I had a startup sound that I downloaded from [FM99.com](http://FM99.com) called "getreadyto.wav" which is the Tommy & Rumble morning show introduction. Then the Changer information dialog box showed, telling me that my startup screen has been changed to Xfiles2.bmp, which is an "X-Files" animated startup screen, and that it's playing faxaover.mid, which is the "Faxanadu" overworld music from the NES game that David Laws introduced to me (and beaten many, many times) and it happens to be my favorite NES music of all time. Then a Notepad window that contained a file of a checklist to see if anything got ruined in transit of my computer equipment. All were checked that everything was okay, except where it says "PLENTY" for how many times my computer issued protection errors on the first day I moved in. I thought *I have to get rid of that. It's taking time just to close the fucking window.* Then :CRQ, a program that I got with a Cue:Cat from [RadioShack](http://RadioShack) letting me know what's on CRQ, popped up. Since I can't close the window manually (there's no X button), I would have to wait and let it close itself. It did after thirty seconds. I then closed the Changer dialog, double-clicked on the icon that said "Eudora e-mail for havens3@mail.pinn.net" and let the program start. Since it said "Version 5.0 - Light Mode," and my registration number and who it was registered to (me), I clicked on the button which looks like a purple arrow going to an Inbox. It asked me for my password. All Pinnacle services that require a password, including FTP for Web page uploading, the password is your dial-up password. I got a message from Shopper's Voice (I read it, it's a bunch of women's crap), CDNOW, and one from a *weird* source. The sender was DifLove.com Replier. The message size was a paltry two kilobytes, and instead of clicking *once* to read the message, I clicked *twice* to read the message so it can open into a full screen and so I can read the headers. I clicked on the button which looks like "Blah, Blah, Blah" to read the headers. The message said:

Return-Path: <jdifford@diflove.com  
Received: from c853.diflove.com (c757-h555.c002.smtp.diflove.com [198.222.101.4])  
by makalu.pinn.net (8.9.1a/8.9.1) with SMTP id TAA26406  
for <havens3@pinn.net; Wed, 14 Feb 2001 10:01:39 -0500 (EST)  
Received: (cpmta 28530 invoked from network); 14 Feb 2001 11:01:07 -0800  
Received: from simple.reply.dorito.diflove.com (HELO jdifford) (63.31.7.88)  
by smtp.diflove.com (198.222.101.164) with SMTP; 14 Feb 2001 10:01:07 -0800  
X-Sent: 14 Feb 2001 15:01:07 GMT  
From: "Diflove.com Replier" <diflove-reply@diflove.com  
To: "Kevin Havens" <havens3@pinn.net>  
Subject: Important information  
Date: Wed, 14 Feb 2001 09:03:01 -0500  
Message-ID: <MABBLFCCFJLPKBPOLKEECEAHCAAA.diflove-reply@diflove.com  
MIME-Version: 1.0  
Content-Type: text/plain;  
charset="iso-8859-1"  
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit  
X-Priority: 3 (Normal)  
X-MSMail-Priority: Normal  
X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook IMO, Build 9.0.2416 (9.0.2910.0)  
Importance: Normal  
X-MimeOLE: Produced By Microsoft MimeOLE V5.00.2615.200  
Status:

Dear Mr. Havens:

You and your two friends, Donald Willard and Jason Stratman, have been accepted for an experimental service. The service include experimental materials and support.

The experimental service involves a female mannequin with all of the necessary materials.

To verify your acceptance of this offer, please send a reply with this message within twenty-four hours, or the offer would be considered null and void.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Jeff M. Difford, Project Director

DifLove.com Matchmaking Services, Inc.

Please note: A message similar to this one has been sent to both donald869@home.com and wingnut\_dwarf@lycos.com . If you see them, let them know, or call them. All three of you participating in this is essential. Thank you again.

Don said "Wait a goddamn minute here. We each sent off a request to find each of us a *girlfriend*, not us getting some cockamamie piece of plastic for nothing!" Jason said "I know, this sucks." I said "Wait. Maybe we're in some place where something else might happen." Don said "What do you mean?" "Ever see that movie, what is it, oh yeah, *Mannequin*, where the store window dresser falls in love with a mannequin, and suddenly it comes to life?" "Yeah," Don said, "But this is *not* Hollywood. What happens in the movies is far from true, hard reality. It just can't happen. It can't. Period." "Don," Jason interjected, "what happens if all three of us get an experience like that movie Kevin was talking about?" Don asked "What do you mean?" Jason said "It's a long story. It'll take too long and basically all night to explain. Anybody wants to

stop off at Barnes & Noble to get some espresso? I believe we can stay up all night talking about this." Don said "Hell no!" Jason then said "My point exactly."

Jason exited Eudora for me, then went on the Web to check his e-mail. That was after I sent a reply back to this "Jeff Difford." Jason did the same, and Don affirmed that he'd done it before he came and got us.

We then opened our beers. I took a sip off of it. I winced. "Wince!" I yelled. Then I shook. "Shudder!" then I yelled "*Goddammit!* Curse!" Then I looked at Don. He laughed. "Damn," I said, "This shit's strong!" Don said "I should've warned ya. This shit *is* strong." Then I retorted "Shall I 'repeat?'" This little joke we call "Wince, Shudder, Curse and Repeat" Jason and I got off a T-shirt that we both found at Lynnhaven Mall at some kiosk called "Harygul's Entertainment." It featured a bottle of liquor that had gold flakes that had in the background "Wince, Shudder, Curse, Repeat." It became mine and Jason's signature saying for a strong alcoholic beverage. It even became the saying for the espresso Jason and I got from Gloria Jean's Coffee Bean a few weeks ago.

After a few Napster downloads, which we got some love songs (it's Valentine's Day, whaddya expect?) and we decided to check our e-mail, both me and Jason. I decided not to check the headers, but we both got a similar message to this:

To: havens3@pinn.net, donald869@home.com , wingnut\_dwarf@lycos.com  
Subject: Messages received okay. Details follow.

Dear Mr. Havens, Willard and Stratman:

Your messages have been received okay. However, these are the details: All three of you have to meet me and your mannequins at Greenbrier Mall, by the Regal Cinemas, Saturday, February 17, 2001 at 1:30 PM. You have to be there no earlier than five minutes early and no more than five minutes late. You will receive your materials, and a debriefing. This whole procedure will take no longer than fifteen to twenty minutes. After the proceeding, you take your mannequins, and don't look back.

May the best of luck to you all.

Sincerely,

Jeff M. Difford, Project Director  
DifLove.com Matchmaking Services, Inc.

We then finished our beers, and we talked for a few minutes. Don was reaching in his pocket. "What's this?" Don said while pulling a five-dollar bill out of his pocket. I looked in my wallet. There was a couple dollars in there, about three dollars. Jason pulled out a few food stamps, about thirty dollars, and he assured that he can cash them in for money by doing bubble-gum runs at the local 7-Eleven. "Now what do we want," I asked, "Pizza, coffee at Barnes & Noble, or more *beer*?" "Beer," Don said. "Yeah, beer," Jason said. I then said "And some potato chips or some Geedunks to supplement the beer."



Don asked "What kind of beer are we getting?" "Well," Jason said, "since imports are out of the question..." "And Steel Reserve," I interjected. "Yecchh," Don retorted. "How 'bout some Miller Genuine Draft?" "Well," Don said, "I wanted Coors, but sure, MGD will do."

I said "Since you both are going to probably stay here until we get our 'love objects,' mainly Sunday at best, we need beer, soda, and *plenty* of Geedunks, so, Stratman, Don..." "Yes?" was the reply from both of them. "Don, go and get some beer. Stratman, buy about a good twelve dollars of Geedunks, soda included, and cash the rest of your FS. You need the change for beer. Me, let me get my shoes on. Give me five minutes. I'm coming with you."

I went back upstairs to my room and put on my shoes and got on a light jacket, since it was getting colder outside, I grabbed my keys and left for outside with Jason and Don. We headed to the Kroger at Pembroke by the OfficeMax and the old HQ hardware store and made numerous Kool-Aid runs. Since I had enough sugar to make at least a couple pitchers, we cashed about \$15 in food stamps and got about a good \$13 in change back. We then gave the change to Don, whom picked out a case of Miller Genuine Draft twelve-ounce cans. He paid for it, and we walked out of the store with Kool-Aid in one pocket and a case of beer in my arms and chips and two-liter bottles of sodas in Don and Jason's hands.

We went back to my place, placed the beer in the refrigerator and my roommate, Mike, came down and said hello to both Don and Jason. I told him that they're staying until Sunday for something that's happening Saturday. After all, we were told to keep quiet about this offer. The only people we can tell about this are ourselves. That's me, Don and Stratman. Mike said "That's cool, player, but no longer."

Well, the days that passed on until Saturday morning passed on slowly because there was *absolutely* nothing to do besides get on the Internet and browse endless Web pages, which got boring after the first couple hours, go on Napster, and my D drive was shrinking fast, so that *also* got boring by Friday. We tried playing ZSNES, a Super Nintendo/Super Famicom emulator by playing *Arcana* and *Super Mario All-Stars* with a little *Super Mario RPG* thrown into it, and also Gens, by playing *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, even after beating Robotnik silly numerous times by entering in three cheat codes, but that got boring by 10:30 PM Friday night. So what else was there for us to do? Simple. We went to bed right after we beat *Sonic 2* for the twentieth time.

*Beep-beep-beep-beep.*

This endless racket came into my dream. By the way, it was loud enough to wake me. I looked at my clock. It said 8:30. I was dreaming of getting some pussy by some tall, not too skinny, nor not too fat, big-breasted brunette woman. I forgot what her name was. Was it Yolonda, my ex? Maybe not, if she lost 100 pounds! Anyhow, Don was sleeping downstairs and Jason was sleeping in the spare bedroom. I gave them some blankets and a couple of my pillows and told them to go find a place to sleep. I grabbed my watch off of my dresser and said "*Oh shit!* It's Saturday! And I *know* what today is! Our day to go to Greenbrier Mall!" I, like a bat out of hell, went into Jason's room and said "Time to get up!" Jason said "What the fuck do you want?", looked at me funnily, and went back to sleep. I yelled "Stratman! This is *no* time to bullshit around! We have to get up!" He got up, then we went downstairs to wake Don. Don got up, went

to the bathroom and came back asking "Do you have anything for breakfast?" "Yeah," I said, "some pancakes and sausages on a stick. It's like a corn dog, but with sausage in the middle and pancake batter." Don said "Nah." "Well," I said, "I have some cereal, but it's Cheerios." "Sure," he said, "I'll take that." Jason said "Well, I'll take two pancakes and sausages on a stick." "Better have four," I said, "because two won't fill you up."

After Don ate his Cheerios, and after Jason and I ate our own breakfast, we washed it down with some iced tea. I went upstairs to get a change of clothes on, and we had about a good three hours to kill. So, we headed off to Greenbrier Mall just to look around. We stopped off at the Wall and looked at some CD's. Jason was looking at the Sade CD's. "Damn," he said, "she looks good!" I said "Okay, we can stop getting horny over here!" I was then looking at the Squeeze CD's. All they had was *Piccadilly Collection* and *Singles -- 45's and Under*. Unfortunately, we didn't have the money to buy a single CD or cassette, so we went upstairs to get a bite to eat. However, Jason had a good five bucks to get us each a mini McRib and a small soda. We sat down, and took a good thirty minutes for lunch. It was one o'clock. We went into the RadioShack and Don got himself one of those Cue:Cat things just to have one himself because he's been using mine scanning *everything* from the :Cues in my RadioShack catalog to even the UPC's on his beer can and my pack of cigarettes. Then we found out that it is 1:20. Since Greenbrier Mall is a big mall, we had to walk across the mall to get back to the entrance at Dillard's, then walk to the theater looking for this so-called "Jeff Difford." Well, we saw this man, about in his mid-thirties, wearing a grey suit and blue tie, in a tree-lined area near Volvo Parkway. Jason commented "Nice tie that guy has on." This person spotted us and asked "Are you the three guys that sent off a request?" "Yes," I said.

He then extended a hand, saying "I'm Jeff Difford, the project director for this experiment that you three are going to undertake. I need to know all three of your names so I can get each of you straight."

I extended my hand, saying "I'm Kevin Havens." I then shook Jeff's hand.

Jason extended his hand, saying "I'm Jason Stratman, or J for short. Kevin here calls me Stratman." He then shook Jeff's hand.

Don extended his hand, saying "I'm Donald Willard." Don then shook Jeff's hand.

Jeff then said "Well, since we made our introductions, let's get going here. Kevin, Donald and Jason, I'm going to let you preview your mannequins for five minutes." Knowing that we'll look stupid doing so, we gave it a go, but Don said "Aren't we gonna look funny doing this?" Jeff said "Don't worry, we cannot be seen by other people during this session. There's a bunch of trees around us shielding us so we can't be seen, even by mall security."

I got my assigned mannequin, which looked like it was in its young twenties, which had chestnut brown hair, blue eyes and looked above-average than all of the mannequins I've ever seen. This mannequin must've cost DifLove about a good \$800 or more. The hair felt *real*, not like it was made out of nylon. Don's mannequin was a blonde, about in her young thirties. This one had brown eyes. Jason's mannequin was an Asian-looking one, about in her mid- to late twenties. It also had brown eyes. My and Jason's mannequins had hair down to its mid-

shoulders. Don's mannequin had hair to its neck.

While we were passing time previewing our mannequins, Jeff said "Time's up." We were asked to set our mannequins to the right of us and we were being briefed on our little "experiment."

"Kevin," Jeff said, "Your mannequin is named 'Alexandra Tiffany Tilbrook.' She is twenty-three years of age, like you, and her birthday is April 15, 1977. So, she'll be twenty-four fourteen days before you." Then he turned to Don. "Donald," he said, "Your mannequin is named 'Sarah Michelle Roberts.' She is thirty-one years of age, like you, but her birthday is December 1, 1969. So, you and her will celebrate a birthday one right after another." Then he turned to Jason. "Jason," he said, "Your mannequin is named 'Esuna Busy.' She is twenty-five years of age, like you, and her birthday is June 9, 1975. She will turn twenty-six fourteen days before you."

Then Jeff turned away from Jason and said "I know that one of you has an Internet connection. But it would be preferred to do it at Kevin's house. You take these mannequins to the place specified, Kevin's place, and assemble them in the kitchen, by the screen door, and don't touch them, don't *even* kiss them, until 11:30 tonight. That's when you start up your Web browser, forget about using Napster or even checking e-mail. Since this applet that will be brought up when you click on the 'continue' button, will open every port over a secure connection, so even port 6699 that Napster uses will not be available to it. Fortunately, they will be closed and all available ports will be ready after the applet finishes its job. So, before starting your Web browser, reboot your PC and hit Start, then Run, then type the following URL into the following dialog box: <https://jdifford.diflove.com/start.cgi?02172001>. This will bring up a login page, where each of you type in your username and password. There will be three separate login boxes, but it is done on one page. Then hit 'Continue.' An applet window will appear, counting down and give important facts on the service. Then at midnight, the applet closes, a 'Congratulations' video will start up and give instructions. You need RealPlayer 7 or better to use this service." He then gave me, Jason and Don cards with our usernames and passwords. He even gave us thirty dollars apiece to cover any and all expenses, including beer and pizza, even cigarettes. It wasn't a check, but cold, hard cash. Jeff then gave us briefcases to put our mannequins, one each with our mannequin's names on it -- Alexandra Tilbrook for me, Sarah Roberts for Don and Esuna Busy for Jason. They were fitted for our mannequins' form, so they won't rattle around. We put our mannequins in the briefcases and shut them. We walked out of the trees, and Jeff said "Good luck," and then shook our hands. We did as he said, don't look back. We didn't, but we didn't know what would happen if we did. So we didn't.

We headed back to my house, but first we stopped off at the Harris Teeter to get beer, beer, more beer, Doritos (Cooler Ranch, in case you wanted to know), a twelve-pack of Pepsi (I wanted Dr Pepper, but Don settled on Pepsi), and a Red Baron pepperoni pizza. Hell, we even had a few bucks left, so we bought a bag of Maxwell House French Roast coffee, a half-gallon of milk and a two-pound bag of sugar. By the time we checked out, the cashier was asking "Okay, what kind of a party are you guys having?" We didn't bother to answer. Jason went to me "Kevin, why does she want to know?" Mine was checked out first; the pizza, a twelve-pack of Natural Ice cans, the Red Baron pizza, the coffee and milk, I was asked for my ID. I pulled it out of my wallet, which was behind my HRT half-fare ID, presented it to the cashier, and got my stuff bagged, after I paid \$20.76. Don bought a six-pack of St. Pauli Girl, the Doritos and the sugar, but also bought himself a snack. He assured that he'll share it with us. Jason, on the other hand went "I'll think about checking out my stuff." I punched him on the upper arm. He said it again. Then he went "You know what to do." Then I punched him *hard* on his right shoulder blade "Ow! Ow! Fuck! Okay! Okay! I'll check out my stuff!" Jason bought a twelve-pack of Miller Genuine Draft cans,

and bought three four-packs of Boost High-Protein shakes, assuring (maybe not) that each of us will get a pack, and a twelve-pack of Pepsi. We then left the Harris Teeter and went back on Interstate 64 back to 264, then the Witchduck Road exit. We got back to Grand Lake Crescent.

When we got in, I said "*Fuck!* I need some cigarettes! Stratman, would you walk to 7-Eleven with me, or RaceTrac to get me some cigarette tobacco or some cheap cigarettes?" Jason went "I'll think about it. *You* know what to do..." I told him "Esuna's going out in that trash can and I'll have to tell Jeff the reason why." "*So?*" quipped Jason. "I'm just kidding," I said and laid one hell of a back punch on Jason's right shoulder blade. "Okay! Okay! I'll go with you! Just let me put up my stuff! *Ow! Ow! Goddamn!*" We put up our beer, Geedunks and dinners in the fridge and I told Don to stay here.

Jason led me through the back way to the 7-Eleven and I got three three-packs of Lucky Strike filters. I even got a two-liter of Classic Selection (7-Eleven's brand) Black Cherry soda. It cost me all of my money. Jason got himself three packs of Black & Mild cigars and also himself a two-liter bottle of Classic Selection Black Cherry soda. We both then checked out and left. Jason started to lead me down Virginia Beach Boulevard. I cried "Stratman! Where in the fuck do you think you're going?" He then quipped "You know what to do." I laid one mother of a back punch, in the same location, and his reaction was, as usual "*Ow! Ow! Ow! Fuck! Goddammit!* Okay! We'll go back through the woods!"

We went back through the woods and Jason asked me if he can get a pack of Luckies off of me. I went "I'll think about it." Jason punched my arm. I went, again, "I'll think about it." He punched me *hard* on my back, right in the center. "Okay! *Fuck! Shit!* I will! I will!" I pulled out a holding carton, opened it, and handed Jason a pack of cigarettes. He opened his bag, pulled out a pack of Black & Milds, and quipped "I'm *seriously* thinking about giving you this." He nudged his head toward his back. "*You know* what to do." I gave him, of all the times that I gave him back punches, a serious back punch. He lost his balance and almost fell into the mud. "Here you go," he said, "but next time, go a *little* easier on me!" He then got back up.

We went back to my house and told Don and Jason that we need to set up our mannequins. Since the briefcases that held Alexandra, Sarah and Esuna were locked, and can only be opened by the corresponding key. I took my key, which was my house key that was marked "116," unlocked the briefcase, Don and Jason did the same, which Don's was his car key, and Jason's was my room key, marked "116A," and set up our mannequins. "Alexandra" was wearing, because I specified in the search form that my "girlfriend" is somewhat a football fan, was wearing Levi's 501 stonewashed blue jeans, new black Nike Air sneakers, and -- get this -- a Baltimore Ravens: Super Bowl XXXV Champions T-shirt. That shirt must have cost Jeff a good \$45. Well, that's when I found out at Foot Locker at Lynnhaven Mall.

"Sarah" was wearing jeans, plain cheapo sneakers and a red blouse. "Esuna" looked like the "Esuna" from the Super NES game *The 7<sup>th</sup> Saga*. Right down to the dress that she wears. I wonder. Does DiLove try to match the fantasies of its customers? Well, if they did, They sure did a damn good job matching Esuna's character from that Super NES game to Jason's mannequin, also named Esuna, minus the elf ears.

We got a little hungry while assembling our mannequins. So, we left them alone, like we were told to and then popped our pizza into the oven. "Hey, guys," I said. "Do you want to get our

beers?" "Yeah," Don said. "I'm thinking about it," Jason said. "You know what to do, Kevin." I punched him in the back. "I'm thinking about it," he said again. I punched him again, only this time, a little harder. "Ow! Ow! Okay! I'll get a beer!" I reached in the fridge and grabbed one can of my Natural Ice, one bottle of Don's St. Pauli Girl, and one can of Jason's Miller Genuine Draft. After we downed our beers, the pizza was ready. Don asked me if he could have one of my beers saying "Well, I don't want to down my six-pack in thirty minutes." "Sure," I said. Jason bellowed one mother of a belch.

Well, after bullshitting around on the Internet for a while, I realized it was 11:30. "Time for a reboot," I said. Don asked "What for? Your computer's not screwing up on you, is it?" "No," I said, "I have to do it, remember? Jeff said that I had to start up Internet Explorer from the URL typed into the Run dialog box and a fresh dial-up. It can't be hindered from other Web pages." I clicked on Start, then Shut Down and clicked on Yes.

After I rebooted, after hearing the Tommy & Rumble intro, and hearing Passport.mid, and that my startup screen has been changed to Macos.bmp, I exited MSN Messenger, just to be on the safe side. And also :CRQ. I didn't want any Internet applications "accidentally" sending or receiving data while this "applet" was showing. I closed any open windows to be sure. All that was showing was my Desktop icons and my joke wallpaper that starts as "January is National Uncle Fucker Month." I held down the Windows key and pressed the R key. In the resulting dialog, I typed "https://jdifford.diflove.com/start.cgi?02172001" and pressed Enter. Internet Explorer started up, my computer dialed into Pinnacle, and the resulting screen had one hell of a Hotmail-like login screen. But it had three user name and three password entry fields, but only one "Login" button. I typed my login information, pressed Tab, Don typed his, and then Jason typed his and put the mouse pointer on the "Login" button and clicked the button. We were off.

A window that said "DifLove.com Status Change Countdown - Microsoft Internet Explorer" that took half of the screen was showing, and the status that showed a gradual "Loading" in pink Arial Black on a gradual blue background. Then RealPlayer showed up as a small window, knowing my connection speed. It boomed "Welcome to DifLove.com. We will be running a countdown on your PC to count down the welcoming of your mannequin into a real woman. This will take place in less than thirty minutes. If you need something from the kitchen, please get it now." It paused for a minute while Don, Jason and I grabbed our beers, the Doritos and some other things in a frantic hurry. The voice came back on. "In the meantime, to keep you entertained, since you all need to be in the den while this process takes place, we will be running videos on DifLove.com's policy, and short clips of movies that feature mannequins as the main focal point. Please do not look in the kitchen. Thank you for using DifLove.com and many happy beginnings with your new girlfriend." "Girlfriend?" Jason said. "I didn't know that these things will become our girlfriends!" Then a 25:35 in green Impact that was counting down showed up on the screen. It ran short, two-minute clips from *Mannequin* and *Mannequin Two -- On The Move*, along with DifLove.com policies like how to treat your new girlfriend, even though it might be "programmed" with current things, but it might not know everything. Then at T minus one minute, the time color changed from green to red, and then a voice said "One minute remaining. Get ready!" Then at the T minus ten second part, it showed a zooming numeral that corresponded to the number of seconds left against a city skyline (Norfolk's Waterside) and saying each number in a crowd-like chant voice. Then when it reached zero, the time color changed to green again and started to spiral, slow at first, then going faster as it panned out. Then it played a video while saying "Congratulations! Your mannequins are now human women. You may now enter the kitchen and see your girlfriends. This application will close in thirty seconds."

We waited to let the countdown window close by itself. A voice that said "Thank you for using DifLove.com. Application written in Microsoft Java by Jeff Difford. Text and/or audiovisual reproduction of any portion of this application prohibited. Application now exiting." The window closed and I went to go to the kitchen. I had to dump beer cans into the trash. I heard one female said "Kevin?" I said "Who said that?" This female said "I did, honey. I'm Alexa Tilbrook. I can see you're cute." She then kissed me on the lips. *Damn*, I thought, *this woman is hot!* Alexa said "Honey, call your two friends back here. Sarah's getting mad that Don's not coming to see her yet, and Esuna's getting nervous that your friend Jason hasn't got to see her yet. So, please do something!" "Alexa," I said, "why not we try to bring them out to the den and let them see for themselves!" Alexa said "Sarah, Esuna, come here." Esuna quipped her dress was getting too hot. Jason went to the kitchen to see something. Esuna kissed Jason on the lips. "Who the fuck are you?" Jason retorted. "I'm Esuna Busy. Nice to meet you." "Damn," Jason said, "You're hot!" Don came into the kitchen asking "What's going on here?" Sarah said to Don "Don, I'm Sarah. I see you're kinda busy now, so I'll let you finish what you're doing."

We then went back on the Internet, after a reboot because Internet Explorer was giving DNS errors after the countdown window closed. We stayed on the Net until about 4:30 in the morning. We even watched *Saturday Night Live*, it was a rerun, but Alexa, Esuna, nor Sarah never saw it. They *laughed their asses off*. We even played Jeff Foxworthy. Alexa and Sarah liked the song "Totally Committed." Sarah said "Don, I heard that's how you act sometimes." Don said "Sarah, please. Not now."

At five in the morning, we started to get tired and wanted to go to bed. Don and Sarah moved the coffee table out of the way and slept on the floor in the den. Jason and Esuna found room on the floor with Don. I then turned to Alexa and said "Alexa, honey, now *you* don't have a place to sleep. I can let you sleep on my bedroom floor, but that's uncomfortable. I can switch places with you, but that won't be fair to me. What can I do?" Alexa said "Kevin, honey, I live here." "You do?" "Yes, I do. And I have my own room to sleep in. So, don't worry about it."

I crawled into bed, Alexa turned my radio to FM99, she turned off the lights and told me "Good night, honey." She then kissed me on the lips for one more time before she went to bed. "I love you," Alexa said. Then I heard her mutter *Damn, I think this is one man that I can live with. He's better than those damned people on N\*Fag or Fagstreet Boys. He is like a Glenn Tilbrook!* Alexa then left my room and shut the door.

## Two

### Boyfriends and Girlfriends

Morning. Or shall I say early afternoon?

The sun was out already. I was sitting in my dream with my ex, Yolonda, and Alexa quarreling over who gets to date me. To let you know, Alexa won. *Honey?* This voice sounded like she was telling me to come along. *Kevin? Time to get up! Rise and shine!* Then I felt one mother of a kiss right on the cheek. I got up. "Oh," I said. "I thought you were my ex, Yolonda, trying to win me over from you." "Ha, ha," Alexa said, "very funny. And who in the living fuck is this 'Yolonda?' You're not thinking of her, are you not? I'm your one and only."

I got out of bed and said "Alexa, Yolonda Lee was my ex-girlfriend. She lives in Chesapeake. But one time when Don took me over there, to her house, I was turned down at the door. I was thinking that maybe her mother might get to know me a little better sooner or later. I then heard from her friend that her mother does *not* want me to see her, *ever*. I then said 'Well, I'm going to take my mouse over there, swing it around and I don't care if I hit her mother and break my mouse. A mouse only costs eight bucks at OfficeMax.' Somehow I was overheard. Then *that's* when it was *really over* with her. Then this morning, before I woke up, I dreamt you and this Yolonda girl were at Lynnhaven Mall with me, Jason and Esuna, and somehow you two were quarreling over me. Somehow, before her parents came to pick her up, we met Yolonda at the carousel after we left EB after looking at games for the PC, and we wanted to get a cigarette, we saw Yolonda, she said "Hey, Kevin. Who's the girl with you?" and you two were having one hell of a catfight, but no fists were flying. Then her parents came by and her mother said 'Kevin? What the hell are you doing around my daughter? I told you to stay away from her!' Then you told her 'Look here, *I'm* Kevin's girlfriend now. Your daughter better stay away from my boyfriend or I *will* put a restraining order against your daughter!' Then Esuna got a little nervous thinking Sonya, which is Yolonda's mother, was talking about her. Then Yolonda and her parents left, with Sonya going 'Harumph.' We then started to leave to get a cigarette until you woke me up." Alexa then went "Don't worry, honey, If Yolonda does come near you, I'll give her a piece of my goddamn mind. And that's the bottom line. Because Alexandra Tilbrook said so!" I then quipped "Okay, Stone Cold Steve Austin wannabe." She then said "I like Stone Cold. Stone Cold can whup The Rock's ass anyday!" We then got up off of the bed, went downstairs and cleaned up our beer cans, our potato chip bags and our messes around the computer. Sarah, Don, Esuna and Jason helped.

After a couple hours of cleaning, the living room was *clean*. No paper on the floor, and the floor was straightened. We also filled the trash can outside halfway. Esuna went to the freezer to get some ice for soda and said "Hey! There's no ice!" I told her "Esuna, let me make some." She then looked at the fridge next and said "What's this? Beer?" Jason said "Yeah. Want one?" Esuna then went "Yeah, I always wanted to try Miller Genuine Draft." Jason went "Help yourself, but give me one." I then went "Yeah, give me one of my Natural Ices." Twenty-five seconds later, Esuna came out of the kitchen with two cans of MGD and one can of my stuff. We then opened it. I took a big hit off of mine. Alexa slapped me across the back. I almost choked. Alexa went "Goddamn, Kevin, how much of that shit can you tolerate at once?" I asked her "You want one? Go get yourself one." She said "What kind is yours?" I said "The Natural Ice cans are mine, It's in a blue and silver box. You can't miss." She came out with a can. She opened hers. She winced, shuddered and cursed under her breath. "So, Alexa," Jason said "you know our little 'Wince,

Shudder, Curse, Repeat' routine?" "No," she said, "I don't. By the way, where did you get this from?" Jason went "You know where Harygul's Entertainment is at Lynnhaven Mall?" "Yeah." "Well, one day, me and Kevin were there a month before Halloween before going to EB and we saw it. We laughed our asses off. That became our signature routine for any drink, including alcoholic drinks, that's strong." Alexa nodded her head and said "Ah."

A few minutes later, both Jason and I were three-quarters the way from finishing our beers. "Kevin," Jason said, "Hey Kevin, want me to Ogre this last bit?" Esuna went "Honey, what do you mean by 'Ogre this last bit'?" He went "Watch me. Kevin, you know what to do." Jason put his lips to the can and I chanted "*Ogre! Ogre! Ogre!*" Alexa said "*Kevin Arthur Havens!* Where in the fuck did you get this from?" I said "Honey, did you ever watch *Revenge Of The Nerds?* I mean, the first one?" "Yeah." I then said "Well, a little after the beginning, when the Alpha Beta fraternity was having a party, this guy, which they call 'Ogre,' was guzzling beer out of a *huge* trophy. They were chanting '*Ogre! Ogre! Ogre!*' That's where Stratman and I got it from. It's our slang term for 'guzzle.'" Alexa went "*Okay!*" Then a few minutes later, Alexa was near the end, about one-quarter left, and said "Want me to *Ogress* this last bit?" Both Jason and I said "*Fuck yeah!* Let's see a woman do it this time!" Alexa then went "Okay. Tell me when you're ready." I said "Ready when you are, honey." "Okay, go."

Alexa placed her lips to the mouth of the can and started chugging. Both Jason and I went "*Ogress! Ogress! Ogress!*" Then about fifteen seconds later, Alexa placed the can on the table and wiped her mouth. I said "Alexa, you're one hell of a beer drinker, you know that?" Alexa said "What do you mean? I've been drinking ever since I turned twenty-one." Then I picked up my beer can, started chugging, and this time *both* Alexa and Jason went "*Ogre! Ogre! Ogre!*" They kept it up for ten seconds until I *literally* slammed the can on the table and belched one mother of a belch. Jason went "Nice one!" Alexa slapped me playfully. Esuna went "Well, I'll try *Ogress-ing* this last bit." She lifted her can, placed it to her mouth, and this time, me, Alexa and Jason went "*Ogress! Ogress! Ogress!*" After a good twenty seconds, Esuna finished her beer. She then placed it on the coffee table and belched like a man. Jason went "*Damn!* Nice one, Esuna honey!" Sarah went "Damn, what people do that's funny." Don went "C'mon guys, let's knock it off." So we decided to quit.

After our Ogre and Ogress drinking game, we decided to clean up. More beer cans went in the trashcan. We were briefed, again, on why Alexa, Esuna and Sarah were here for us.

Alexa went "Kevin, Jason, Don, we are here on a mission. In fact, we are here to fulfill *your* missions to find a girlfriend, because you failed in the past, we are made as your true loves. We want to be your girlfriends." I said "I accept to that." Jason said "Same here." Don said the same thing. Esuna then said "Well, unlike Alexa, who lives here, both Sarah and I live in our own apartment off of Baker Road..." Jason quickly answered "The Hamptons?" Sarah said "Yeah." Jason then said "One of my friends lives there." Esuna then said "We have a three-bedroom apartment so when we marry you..." Jason said "*Marry* you?" Alexa said "Yes, Jason. Do you want to be happy for the rest of your life?" Jason went "I guess..." "Enough said, but when we marry you three, you can move in with us," said Esuna. Sarah said "Both me and Esuna share a Plymouth Neon so we can get to places we need to go." Alexa said "Honey, I have a Ford Focus so you and I can go places. So, you have no need to take the Beach House van or ride the bus or your bike to where you need to go. And you *don't* have to pay me gas money whatsoever." "Cool," I said. "Same thing goes for you, Jason," Esuna said. Jason said "Cool!" Sarah said "You have a car, Don, but if you need a ride in any case, just call me or page me. Then I'll come and get you."



We then got Alexa, Esuna and Sarah free e-mail addresses with Lycos, we then got off of Pinnacle and then Jason played *The 7<sup>th</sup> Saga* on ZSNES. Esuna asked if she could play. "Sure, honey," Jason said. He loaded *The 7<sup>th</sup> Saga* ROM and when Esuna wasn't looking, he started a new file for her. "Go for the elf character," Jason said. "What shall I name her," Esuna asked. "Just go to 'End', and press the A button." Boy, you should've seen the look on Esuna's face when she did that. When it asked "Is your correct name Esuna?" she was surprised. "Hey! That's my name!" Jason said "Just select Yes and hit the A button." "Okay," Esuna said and then the game started.

Well, Esuna and Jason played the game for a while while Alexa fixed dinner. Alexa fixed a good dinner. She fixed one mother of a taco salad. It had flavored ground beef, kidney beans, pepper jack cheese, good lettuce, salsa, and leftover Doritos. Alexa is frugal. I like that. She decided to skip out on the tomatoes because she thought that since there's salsa in the salad, there's no need for tomatoes. Even Alexa had sour cream on the side. I grabbed a plate, one of Alexa's, and piled on a little bit of the Doritos, beans and the lettuce, piled on a lot of the beef, cheese, salsa and sour cream. Alexa said "Goddamn, Kevin, ease up! There's other people that have to eat!" Alexa called the rest to dinner. Even Mike came downstairs and asked me "Hey, player, what's to eat?" "Well," I said, "Alexa fixed a big batch of taco salads. Go help yourself." Alexa said "Hey, Mike." Mike said "What's this?" Alexa said "Taco salad. Help yourself, but go easy. I have to get myself something to eat, too." Mike got himself some dinner. He came back into the living room and said "Thanks, Kevin. Tell Alexa 'Thanks,' also." "I heard that," Alexa said, "but anyway, you're welcome, Mike."

We ate dinner for a good hour until Mike said to Don, Jason, Sarah and Esuna "Hey, you've been here since Wednesday. Shouldn't you go home?" It was reaching 7 o'clock in the evening. "Yeah, I think so," said Jason. Jason, Don, Esuna and Sarah gathered up their stuff and then Esuna said "Jason, you're riding with us. We'll take you home." Jason said "Thanks." Don said "Yeah, thanks, Esuna. I'm getting a little tired myself, but is it a little out of your way? I mean, you and Sarah live off of Baker Road and Jason lives not too far from me. I'll take him home if you don't mind.." "No," Esuna said, "I insist. He is my boyfriend, after all. Anyway, I don't mind." "Okay," Don said, "if you insist." Don, Sarah, Jason and Esuna left out the door and Jason said "See you at Beach House Monday, Kevin and Alexa. Bye." "Bye," both me and Alexa said. After five minutes, an older model green Chevy Cavalier and a purple Plymouth Neon left the driveway and all that was left was a blue Ford Focus. I started to pick up the phone and dial 430-0368. Alexa is good at knowing keypad tones, so she recognized them and said "Kevin, hang that up. Remember, I have a car that I can take you to Beach House!" "Oh," I said and hung up the phone in an instant. I told her after that "I'm used to doing this. After two years of dialing Beach House's number around this time every Sunday to get a ride in, it's become etched into memory." "Well," Alexa said, "I'm going to sandblast that out of your memory. You can sleep in until 8 o'clock. Then that's when I'm going to wake you up. You'll take a shower, but not with me, if you're going to act like a horny little bastard, I don't think so. The time will come when you can take a shower with me. Then we'll get some breakfast at McDonald's. I believe that Mickey D's is having a sale on Sausage McMuffins with egg for 99 cents. You can get any drink you want, any size. It doesn't matter to me. Then we will head off to Beach House and we'll get your money and food. We'll look for Jason and Esuna and pile into our cars and head off to the mall. We'll spend all day there."

Alexa and I rinsed off the dishes and loaded up the dishwasher. We then cleaned up the living room and watched *King of the Hill*, *The Simpsons*, listened to one of my CD's on my Sega Saturn

that's hooked up to my stereo for the time *Malcolm in the Middle* was on because both Alexa and I agreed that it sucks, and then a show that Alexa forced me to watch, *X-Files*. I said "Shit, Alexa, I missed three seasons because Jason Johnson, my former roommate, said I couldn't watch it because it gives him nightmares after he watches it. He said if it does it to him, it might happen to me. I know that's a bunch of bullshit, so, thanks." Alexa said "You don't know me when it comes to *X-Files*. I love that show and haven't missed a single episode." We then turned the station to channel 43 and we watched the show. At ten o'clock, the news came on. We watched it, and the weather guy said that it was going to be 65 tomorrow. So, that gave us an idea. Leave the coats at home, wear T-shirts, jeans and a light sweatjacket in the morning.

Alexa said "I'm getting tired of this heavy T-shirt. I'm going to change." Alexa changed out of her jeans and her shirt and put on a nightgown that had something about her being an Aries. "Good night, Kevin," Alexa said, "I'll see you in the morning. Don't stay up too late. Remember, I'm waking you up at eight." She kissed me on the lips four times. That reminded me when my late father, when he was alive, kissed my mother four or five times, on the lips, before he went to bed at ten at night so he can get up in the morning because he had to wake up at four-thirty in the morning in order to leave out the door for work by six. "I love you, Alexa," I said, "Good night." After the news went off, I turned off the Saturn, the stereo, the TV and the light and went to bed. But first, I went into Alexa's room and said "Night, Tight, Bite." Alexa said "What does that mean?" I said "It means 'good night, sleep tight, don't let the bedbugs bite.'" "Oh," she said, "Good night honey." I then said "Well, she's better than Bitchney Spears. And Christina Ack-Goddamn-Ulerra."

I went into my room, put dirty clothes into a box that I had for that purpose and jumped into bed, pulled the covers over my stomach, opened a copy of *PC World*, read that for about a good thirty minutes, turned off my light and went to sleep.

### Three

#### Hangin' 'Round

I fell asleep about 11:30. I was dreaming not about Yolonda, but about *Alexa* and only *Alexa*. No catfights, but a marriage scene. I then had one hell of a nightmare. No, it wasn't about *Alexa*, *Esuna* and *Sarah* being aliens out to kill us, but about something I can't remember. They say you can remember half of your dreams, but you can't remember a single nightmare. But I assured myself, it wasn't about our girlfriends, and it wasn't caused by *The X-Files*. I woke up at 6:30. *Tommy & Rumble* was playing one of their little skits called "Clint Taurus." Yes, I know, it sounds like "clitoris." I went "*Goddamn!* I don't think I want *Alexa* to hear that!" Anyway, I have the MP3 that I downloaded off of Napster, so whenever I feel nasty, I'll go to my D drive, open the "My Files" folder and play the "Tommy & Rumble--Clint Taurus.mp3" file.

*Alexa* saw my light on in my room and said "Oh, up already?" "Yeah," I said, "Had one hell of a nightmare, so I woke up in a cold sweat." "I heard you laughing excessively," *Alexa* said, "what were you laughing about?" "You don't want to know, *Alexa*," I said. "*Tell me, Kevin.*" "No," I said. "Now, Ghostboy," she said. "Don't call me Ghostboy, *Alexandra*. Only some approved friends call me that." "I'm one of them. And don't call me 'Alexandra' like that." "Okay, if you insist, *Tommy & Rumble* was playing something called 'Clint Taurus.'" *Alexa* slapped me, for the first time, across the face, then said "*That sounded like 'clitoris,' something that they shouldn't be saying on the radio!*" "Well, Dr. *Laura* says it on *her* talk show on *WNIS*." "Talk radio's different, *Kevin*. Two immature adults shouldn't be saying it on the radio." Then I retorted "*Tommy Griffiths, Rick Rumble, Chuck Cooney, Nikki Reed, Rod Fitzwell and Scott Ellis* say things like that all the time and the *FCC* doesn't get on their asses about it. Oh, by the way, *Alexa*, I thought you hated *Z104*. You know those DJ's on *Z104* are *lame*." "I do and I know..." Then *Alexa* paused for about a moment and said "I've seen that you have the 'Clint Taurus' MP3 on one of your hard drives. Play it, will you?" "Sure," I said, "but let me get out of my room first."

I turned on the computer and luckily, there was not a single Windows protection error. I closed down :CRQ and double-clicked on a shortcut called "Muzak from Napster." I then double-clicked on "Tommy & Rumble--Clint Taurus" and RealPlayer started up and played it. *Alexa* *literally* raised her nightgown, pulling it off. Her breasts were exposed. "Put your nightgown back on, *Alexa*. What happens if *Mike* comes downstairs and sees you? By the way, nice tits." "I don't give a fuck. Oh, and thanks," she said. Then when *Chuck* the Intern was saying "I gave her Clint Taurus over 200 hard laps," *Alexa* said "Hey *Kevin*..." I went "Yeah, *Alexa*?" "Do you want to give *my* Clint Taurus over 200 hard laps? I'm willing to give it a try." "*Alexa*," I said, "I'm a virgin. I don't know *Jack* and *Shit* about sex, and *Jack* left town." "What do you mean," said *Alexa*, "I'm a virgin, too." We headed upstairs and stopped off between mine and *Alexa*'s rooms. "Which one?" I asked. "What I heard from my friends in high school," *Alexa* said, "*always* have sex in your boyfriend's room. That's so the girlfriend's mother don't say shit. So, we'll do it in your room, *Kevin*."

*Alexa* led me to my room and shut the door. I asked *Alexa* "*Alexa*, what about going into *Beach House* today and getting my money? And by the way, how do you get *your* money?" *Alexa* said "*Kevin*, don't worry about not going into *Beach House*. We *are* going. And for my money, I have a checking account. And an ATM card. So, when I need moolah, I just walk up to the 7-Eleven by *Beach House* or up the boulevard and pull out some money. Of course, so I don't get charged the extra dollar and fifty cents, I'm *supposed* to use the ATM's at *First Union*. And by the way,

it's only 6:45 in the morning. Let's get it on!" Alexa took off her panties and I *never, ever* seen any of my girlfriends naked, until now. Not even have one of them suggest sexual intercourse. Not until Alexa came along. She then helped me pull off my T-shirt that I've been wearing for about almost three days and then asked me to lie on the bed. We then engaged in intercourse. "Scheiße! That feels good!" "Yeah," said Alexa, "I know that feels good, and what *did* you say?" "Scheiße. It's German for 'shit.' It rhymes with 'slice.'" "Or you can say 'Ode to Mother Deutschland'," said Alexa. "HHOS," I said. Alexa said "What?" "Ha, ha, very funny. It's what it means," I said. "That don't match up with the initial letters," Alexa said. "Okay, okay," I said, "it means Ha, ha, only serious. It then evolved into what I said before." We then finished fifteen minutes later. "Oh scheiße," I said, "I forgot to put on a rubber!" "Don't worry, Kevin," she said, "I believe I'm not ovulating now. It's not my time of month, and *no*, I'm not telling you. If you knew when my fertile days are, you'd be fucking me every day when I am. I'd rather wait a while. Anyway, both you and I wanted to lose our virginity *without* one of us having a 'wall' around that." She then went to her room, said "I'll BRB, honey," and kissed me. We have our little slang that we use around each other. For instance, "BRB" means, if you ever used ICQ, MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, participated in an IRC or Web-based chat, you'd know. But if not, it means "Be right back." We even coined one term, "Get bent," which means "go to hell" or "fuck off." Jason and I have been using it whenever some staff at Beach House, especially when Richard Goenner or Debbie Amme pisses any of us, me or Jason, off. Well, anyway, Alexa came back to my room and then said "Well, time to take a shower." "Okay," I said. "Well, aren't you coming along with me?" "I thought that you said 'No shower with me yet!'" "Pfffft! Fuck that! I had a headache last night because I Ogressed three beers yesterday afternoon because we played that 'Ogre and Ogress' drinking game. I almost got sick and almost did a Ms. Puke-a-thon. We'll drink sometime later, but we'll drink like *normal* adults, not like we're at a college frat party!" "Okay, *Jason Johnson*," I said. She retorted "Who did you call me?" "Alexa, Jason Johnson was one of my roommates that told me what I could do, how I could do it, when I could do it, who I could do it with and where to do it. He basically ruled and ruined my life. Then some lease cancellation came up and we separated for reasons unknown. It was a godsend, I tell you. I was free from him. Then one twist came along that failed. He *almost* moved in with me, instead of you." "Right now," Alexa said, "nobody knows we were mannequins. Never have and never will. See here, when Esuna, Sarah and I were mannequins, our human forms were in another area of the universe, you might say we were in cyberspace. When that program called up the countdown, it enabled our human forms to enter into the mannequins, soften the hard shell and basically, 'bring us to life.' It looked pretty disgusting when it happened, that's why you three were asked not to look in the kitchen, or you, Don and Jason would start your Mr. Puke-a-thons. Anyway, by hearing about Jason Johnson, I don't want to hear more about it. At all." We then started to take our first lovers' shower.

When we got out of our shower and got to put our clothes on, the phone rang. Right when I got my left shoe on, the phone rang again. I saw on my Caller ID phone:

07:45 AM 02/19 Call: NEW 3

490-2194

BUSY ESUNA

I said "Hello?" It was Jason. I said "Stratman! Why are you at Esuna's house?" Jason asked "How could you tell?" "Caller ID, remember?" Jason said "*Duh!* I'm half-asleep. Hold on." There was a pause. "Hey," he said, "I've been staying the night with Esuna. We even had sex for the first time. Boy, is she great! But anyway, we'll be going on a convoy to Beach House at 9:15. We'll be there about 8:45. We'll get some coffee, and a couple cigarettes in and then leave." I heard Esuna

yelling at Jason. "Hey, yo, I gotta go. We'll see you in about an hour. Bye, yo." "Bye," I said and hung up.

Well, Alexa and I got to getting our clothes on. I played the "Striking Matches" MP3 for myself and Alexa said "Nice song. Who sings it?" "Alexa," I said, "who else but Squeeze?" Then she said "I didn't know that was Squeeze at first!" "On this song," I said, "Chris Difford sings lead on this one. It's on the *Babylon and On* album. Can't find it anywhere, not even CDNOW." "Oh," Alexa said, "is Chris Difford related in any way to Jeff Difford?" "No," I said, "Chris lives in Deptford, England and Jeff, well, I really don't know. Anyway, there were no distinguishing features to really tell the two were related, if they were." "Oh," Alexa said. "By the way," I said, "I'd like to know what that Monique Dyan is *really* saying in the background vocals on that track." Alexa said "Well, honey, I really wouldn't know even if I tried."

Time passed, and then the doorbell rang. I got up and looked out the window. Alexa ran and tried to extinguish her cigarette. I quickly looked out the window and said "Alexa, stop your paranoia. It's only Jason and Esuna. Go ahead and relight your cigarette." Alexa said "After the housing counselor came by, she told me to put out my cigarette, and I had to *lie* to cover yours, Mike's and my asses saying that Don, Sarah, Jason and Esuna *weren't* staying the night Thursday afternoon..." "You weren't yet animate until early Sunday morning," I said. "Oh, I forgot to tell you, Kevin," she said, "when we came to life, your world as you know it changed a little. We were 'brought to life,' yes, but when that happened, an interrupt in the space-time continuum happened. We have birthdays, and we now act like we've been living life since Day One. *That's why nobody* knows our mannequin past, and never will. Life changed a little for you, Jason and Don, but a *lot* for everybody else." The doorbell rang frantically and Jason pounded on the door. I hollered "Okay! I'm coming!" I opened the door and said "Hey, Stratman. Hey, Esuna." Jason said "Hey, yo." Esuna slapped him on the arm. "Would you stop talking like that?" Then Esuna said "Hey, Kevin. Hey, Alexa. May we come in?" Since Mike was already on the van to Beach House, both Alexa and I said "Sure."

We all crammed on the sofa, with me on the far right, Alexa next to me, Jason on the far left and Esuna next to him. Esuna gave Jason a cigarette, a Marlboro 100. Alexa gave me a cigarette, a Basic Menthol 100. The women gave themselves a cigarette, and we all lit it. Alexa said "Honey, go make some coffee." Since there was some coffee left from the party Saturday night with me, Don and Jason (and probably with Alexa, Sarah and Esuna in another universe until they 'came to life' early Sunday morning and joined us in *this* one), I made some coffee, a medium-sized pot and got out the milk and sugar. All four of us got a cup. I then initiated conversation by saying "Esuna..." Esuna said "What?" I said "Okay if Alexa and I spend the night at your house tonight? Alexa and I will leave in the morning." "Okay," Esuna said. Then she turned to Jason and said "You want to spend the night with me?" Jason said "Yeah, sure, I don't care. Gets me out of that hellhole that they call a 'group home' for another night."

We were halfway finished with our coffees and both Alexa and Esuna gave me and Jason a cigarette. It was five minutes after nine. I put up the milk and sugar and shut off the coffee pot. I got on my shoes and Alexa put on her shoes also. Alexa got out her keys and said "Kevin, turn off the lights, the PC and the TV. We're going. You ready, Esuna?" Esuna said "Yeah. You ready, Jason honey?" Jason said he was ready thirty minutes ago. Alexa

then said "I see you're all ready. Let's go. Kevin, lock the door." I then shut off the lights, the TV and the computer. I then grabbed my keys and Esuna grabbed hers. "Oh, Kevin," Alexa said, "Hold on. We gotta pack some clothes and you need to pack your medications. Mine's in my

purse." We went upstairs with a Food Lion grocery bag in our hands and packed a pair of shorts, two shirts, a pair of underwear and a pair of blue jeans. I packed my bottle of Lithium and my bottle of Risperdal. Alexa and I were ready at the same time. Alexa asked "Ready, Kev?" "Yeah," I said. "Let's go." We then went downstairs and Esuna quipped "Took you two too long. I've been wanting to go five centuries ago." What Esuna meant that she wanted to go five minutes ago, but Alexa and I was deciding on what to get to wear.

We hopped in the cars and took off down Independence Boulevard to Holland Road to Lynnhaven Parkway and got to Beach House. Since the bank so Jason and I can get our money out was closed, Alexa and Esuna pulled out ATM cards and asked me and Jason if we wanted to get something. "Sure," I said. "Why not?" asked Jason. We then headed down to the 7-Eleven and Alexa and Esuna were in line with ATM cards in hand. Esuna asked what Jason wanted. "Oh, a bag of chips and a two-liter bottle of Coke," he said. Alexa asked me the same thing. "Same thing as Jason," I said. Both Alexa and Esuna pulled out \$60 apiece. Alexa got her money out and got me my bag of chips and came to my aisle with a two-liter bottle of Dr Pepper. "I thought you might want this instead of Coke. Anyway, it's on sale." She then went back to the soda and Geedunk aisle and said "Pick a snack, any one you want." I was looking at the beef jerky and said "I'm thinking about getting some beef jerky." Alexa hit me in the arm and said "Either you're getting beef jerky or not." I told her "I'm just kidding, honey," and picked up a bag of Hickory Smoked-flavored beef jerky and Alexa and I went to the counter. Tita, the Filipino cashier in the morning at that 7-Eleven said "Hey, Kevin." Then she rang up mine and Alexa's chips, mine and Alexa's Dr Peppers, and our beef jerky, she said "\$9.84, Kevin." Alexa then said "What you like to smoke?" "Alexa," I said, knowing not to hurt her bank account, "Basic Full Flavor 100's in a box." Alexa said "Get him one carton of Basic Full Flavor 100's Box and me one carton Basic Menthol 100's soft pack." Tita then rang them up and said "Your total is \$53.71, Kevin." Alexa said "I got it, and you don't have to pay me back, not now, not anytime you want something like this." Alexa then pulled three twenties out of her purse and Tita then said "So, you're having this lady pay for your stuff, huh?" Alexa said "I'm his girlfriend. I don't mind." Then Tita gave Alexa the change, which was \$6.29. "Have a nice day." Alexa and I went outside to get a smoke. Jason and Esuna got two bags of chips, two two-liters of Coke *and* themselves a bag of beef jerky. They also got themselves a carton of cigarettes apiece, Marlboro 100's for Esuna and Parliament Lights for Jason. We looked inside for a quick second and saw the time was 9:50. Esuna was complaining that she needed a cigarette. Esuna lit one, and we walked back to Beach House. One member looked saw Alexa place her money in her wallet and put inside her purse. This member quipped "Can I have a dollar?" Alexa said "Look here, do I look like a free ATM? No." "Please? I need lunch!" Alexa roared "NO! You should've saved your money for lunch instead of buying useless things." Jason said "Next time she does that, I'll turn her ass in for panhandling." My watch beeped signaling that it was ten o'clock. "Time for us to go in, Stratman," I said. "I'll think about it," he said. "You know what to do." I laid one hell of a back punch, like I did when Jason and I were cutting through the woods coming back from 7-Eleven after a cigarette run. He went "Ow! Ow! Goddammit! Fuck! Fucking shit! Okay! I'll go in!"

We went inside, and then Alexa and Esuna followed five minutes later. Debbie Amme came up to Esuna and asked her to take out the trash. She said no. "Esuna," Debbie said, "We are going to be busy around here today, so can't you spend five minutes just doing that?" "No," Esuna said, "I have to leave in five minutes for a doctor's appointment." Then she turned to Jason and said "That bitch made fun of my name. And I'm not doing shit around here unless I get paid for it."

Five minutes later, Jason and I got our money and left. We didn't clock out, because we never done it when leaving for Lynnhaven Mall. This same member that was asking Alexa for a dollar came up to her and said "I'll give you five cigarettes for a dollar." Alexa *literally* turned red and

said "No! How many times do I have to tell you that? No means no!" We then left in our cars, me and Alexa in one, Esuna and Jason in another. We stopped of at the 7-Eleven at North Lynnhaven Road and Lynnhaven Parkway and Alexa and Esuna withdrew another twenty dollars. We then slipped back into our cars and went up the street to Lynnhaven Mall. We parked by the old Hecht's Men's and Home store and walked in by our usual entrance, after getting a cigarette. We stopped off first at EB and looked at the games for the PC. Nothing was interesting, so we walked to Babbage's and looked at something for PC, more games. Nothing was interesting, so we went back in our cars and headed off to FuncoLand. Jason was looking at the Sega Genesis and Super NES game cartridges. Alexa was weird enough to pick herself out a PlayStation. She bought one used, and bought *Crash Bash* and *Final Fantasy VII*. Alexa had her stuff bagged and was outside smoking a cigarette. While Jason and I were looking at PlayStation games cheap to play on Connectix Virtual Game Station, a PSX emulator, Esuna bought another PlayStation with *Vandal Hearts*. Jason said "There's Jack and Shit for games, and Jack left town. Wanna leave, Kevin?" "Sure," I said. Jason said "Bye, Joe." Joe is the manager of the FuncoLand at Lynnhaven North Shopping Center. He waved a "bye" sign. We got back outside and rejoined with our girlfriends. I asked Alexa if there was anything we can do. She asked me for the time. "Oh," I said, "about twelve o' clock. Why?" She said "The day is still young. We might go back to the mall and spend a while. I got cash to buy you and me lunch, but I'm not buying you much things right now because I have bills to pay before the end of the month." We headed upstairs to the food court and Alexa was being a little frugal, but not too frugal. But anyway, we settled on McDonald's. All four of us. She bought me two Big Macs, Super Size fries, and a sundae. She bought me a strawberry sundae with nuts. Oh, I love nuts. *Not* my nuts, dumbass, but chopped peanuts on McDonald's sundaes. Esuna and Jason bought them only two Big Macs for themselves. Alexa bought a Grilled McChicken Extra Value Meal and a chocolate sundae. We found a place to sit and we ate for thirty minutes.

After we ate, we left the mall. Alexa told Esuna that we'll met her at Esuna's house. Alexa had to take me grocery shopping. "Give us about a couple hours," Alexa said. "Okay," Esuna said and we both left the mall.

Alexa took me to the Food Lion at Wesleyan Drive. I bought three twelve-packs of soda, with one going over Esuna's apartment when me, Alexa, Jason and Don are staying with Esuna and Sarah. I also bought some chips and other Geedunks, and the rest on food. I bought a can of Bugler tobacco with my money to have cigarettes for the next few weeks. We then got back to mine and Alexa's house and got my stuff put up, except for a twelve-pack of soda, a bag of chips and snack crackers. We then left for Esuna and Sarah's apartment.

Alexa stopped off at the apartment door and knocked on the door. Sarah answered. "What are you two doing here?" Alexa asked "Is Jason and Esuna here?" "Yeah," Sarah said "but..." Esuna yelled from the background "It's alright, Sarah, they're staying the night." "Okay," Sarah said, "but just *one* night. In the morning, they're getting back in that car and going home." "Fine with me," Esuna said. Esuna then ran to the door. "Come on in," she said.

Alexa sent me to the 7-Eleven to get some beer. I got a twelve-pack of MGD. That meant roughly three beers to me, Alexa, Esuna and Jason. When I came back to the apartment, Don was there with a six-pack of St. Pauli Girl for him and Sarah.

At eight o'clock, Sarah came back from the KFC with three buckets of chicken, lots of biscuits, beans, potatoes and cole slaw. We had a good dinner. We then played Esuna's PlayStation for a

while.

I fell asleep on a bed, with Alexa next to me. I was drunk.



## Four

### Captain Of Her Heart

*Kevin? Alexa?* This voice sound closely to Sarah's. *Kevin? Alexa? Time to get up!* Alexa came over to me, and kissed me. Alexa said "Kevin! Time to get up, honey!" I got up and I found out that I had *drooled* all over the pillow that Sarah let me borrow. Sarah said "Like this room, Kevin and Alexa?" "Yeah," I said. "Yeah," Alexa said, "I like it." "Well," Sarah said, "This will be your room when you two get married. But you're welcome to stay the night in here anytime you want." Sarah had the room decorated with pictures of scenery and had a queen-sized bed in all of the rooms. All of the rooms were nearly equally-sized, with the exception of Sarah's room being a little larger.

We got out of what will be mine and Alexa's room when we get married and move out of Grand Lake. Somehow, Esuna made a large breakfast of pancakes, sausages, bacon, eggs and hash browns. We had our choice to drink coffee, orange juice or both. I piled up two pancakes, a sausage patty, two slices of bacon, a piece of scrambled eggs and a hash brown patty. I also grabbed a coffee cup off a hook and poured a cup, loaded on the sugar and milk and poured myself a tall glass of orange juice. "Goddamn, Kevin," Sarah said, "can't you be considerate of other people? Other people have to eat, too, you know." After I sat down, and started to eat, Esuna said "Wait until everybody else gets their stuff. Then you can eat."

After everybody else got their breakfasts, we all sat down and ate. "Well," Esuna said, "How's breakfast?" "Great," I said. "Not bad, Esuna," Alexa said, "I didn't know you can cook good." Esuna said "The pancakes are not from frozen, or from a mix. I made them from scratch." "It's good, honey," Jason said. "Good, not too bad," Don said while having a mouthful of pancakes. "Not too shabby," said Sarah.

We then ate for a good forty-five minutes and then Alexa helped Esuna with the dishes. After a couple hours of bullshitting around and helping Esuna and Sarah clean up, Sarah said "Well, Kevin and Alexa, I guess it's time for you two to go home. You can come back later on this weekend." Jason said "Hey, Kevin! Hey Alexa!" I said "Yeah?" Alexa answered in the same way. Jason then said "Mind if I spend a couple hours over your house?" "Yeah, sure," I said. "You can bring Esuna with you. But you two can't spend the night." Esuna went "Why not?" Alexa said "If I'm not mistaken, the housing counselor's going to come by and see if the house is clean. She said she'll be coming, oh, about five-thirty to six at the latest. It's about 12:30, so Esuna will take you home about four." We then left, with me and Alexa in Alexa's car and Jason and Esuna in Esuna's car.

We got to my house and right when we got in, Alexa took her PlayStation right out of the box and hooked it up to my TV. Damn good thing she bought a RFU adaptor so she can hook it up to my TV because it does not have AV inputs. Esuna brought her *Vandal Hearts* game and her memory card and played it for a while with Jason. Then Alexa said "Shi't, Esuna, can I play my PSX for a while? You can play your game when you get home." Alexa then played her *Final Fantasy VII* game with me and let me start my own game.

Well, it was four o'clock and Alexa said "Jason, Esuna, isn't it time for you to go home? It's four

o'clock already." Esuna said "Already? C'mon, Jason, I gotta take you back to your house. Let me get my game and my memory card." Esuna and Jason left.

Alexa and I were in a frantic hurry to get the living room, the kitchen (we loaded the dishwasher in a hurry and cleaned the counters) and our rooms (we helped each other) clean. Alexa and I sat back around five o'clock and lit up a cigarette. "Man, honey," Alexa said, "What we have to do around here to keep this place clean." I spotted Alexa's PlayStation on the floor and got up. Alexa asked "What's wrong?" I placed her PlayStation on top of the TV. "Your PSX was on the floor," I said. "Any thing that's left on the floor, the blame from the housing counselor goes on *me*. And if *any* part of the house, common areas or my room, are not clean, she'll come over here *every day* and help me clean *until* the house is clean and *stays clean* until she returns the next day and sees if the house is staying clean. Then if it is, then she won't come back for a while, but checking up on me once in a while checking to see if the house is staying clean. The first instance it is not, it starts up again." "That's not right, honey," Alexa said. "I *know* you can clean. With my help, you can." She then unplugged and wound up her Dual Shock controller and put it in the cabinet. She then put her game jewel cases in there also. "There," Alexa said, "looks good to me." I mean, the place looked good as a motherfucker. Alexa and I took a walkaround inspection and ten minutes later, Alexa said "Looks good to me."

We went back downstairs and lit another cigarette. It was 5:20. Alexa and I thought since she'll be coming in about ten minutes, we'd better get a cigarette in before she comes. We were talking about engagement and somehow marriage. I said "Alexa, honey, is it a little *too* early to be talking about it? I mean, we just met. Shouldn't we be talking about this a couple months down the road?" "You're right, Kevin," Alexa said, "maybe I'm jumping the gun a *little* too early. Okay, I'll hold my tongue."

Right when Alexa and I put out our cigarettes, the doorbell was ringing frantically. I quickly got up, and ran to the door. The housing counselor came in, quickly looked at the living room, then the kitchen. She said "Good job, Kevin. Keep up the good work." Then she asked "May I look at your room? Hope it's clean, too." I told Alexa to stay down here, and followed the housing counselor upstairs to my room. "Looks good, looks good." We then walked downstairs and she said "Kevin, I'll be back in a month to see if you can keep the place clean." I told her Alexa's been helping me. She then said "No, no, no. You don't rely on Alexa to help you clean. *You* can keep it clean, because I want you to turn over a new leaf. I *know* you can clean, but you just want to act lazy and don't want to do it! But in other words, keep it up with the cleaning! I'll see you in a month, Kevin. Keep it up, and don't always rely on Alexa to keep it clean for you." She then left.

Alexa had a surprised look on her face and said "Well, I never. I'll help you clean, but I'm going to have to result in letting you clean your *own* messes. But if we make a mess together, we'll clean it together. The kitchen, well, you and I will alternate on days on loading the dishwasher. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays you load the dishwasher and clean the counters. Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays I'll do it, while on Saturday you and I *both* load the dishwasher and clean the counters. Same for the living room. But on the matter of our own bedrooms, well, to each his or her own. But if you make a mess, even a *slight* mess, clean it up. If I'm going to be married to you, I *don't* want to marry a slob. I *know* you can clean, Kevin. I love you too much to know that you can do it." I had a look of disappointment on my face. She then said "Give me a kiss. I love you, and you know I do." I kissed her right on the lips. Alexa asked "Feel better, honey?" "A little," I said. She kissed me again. "Now I feel better," I said. "That's my Kevin," Alexa said, "I kiss you when you're down, it may take a couple tries, and you perk right up. We were

made for each other." "I know that, Alexa," I said, "it's the chemistry we have between each other."

Alexa wanted to make dinner, but I insisted on making it this time around. "What are you going to make?" Alexa asked. "Dunno," I said, "but I think you'll like it." I went into the kitchen and got out rice, and made that, and threw together one mother of a dish of Beef and Broccoli. I had some leftover broccoli in the freezer and some stir-fry beef in the freezer. I got a leftover onion, and a clove of garlic from a bulb that Alexa had sitting around. I added soy sauce, some bean sprouts and let that cook for a good five minutes. Then to thicken the sauce, I made a thickening liquid from a spoonful of cornstarch and cold water. I added that while the stuff was boiling and stirred that around for a couple minutes. It was done. I got out two of my plates, the ones with ducks on it, piled on a couple big spoonfuls of rice and spooned on the entree. I then cleaned off the table in the little dining area and got out two cans of Dr Pepper and two forks out of the drawer. I didn't care if they were mismatched, but at least Alexa and I were having a good dinner, albeit homemade, together.

I called Alexa to the table. "Kiss the chef," I said, "I think you'll like it." Alexa then kissed me and asked me "What did you make me, honey?" "Beef and Broccoli," I said. "Well," she said, "Beats getting it from Bamboo Hut for \$6.95 a pint, about \$13.90 for two pints, not including tax and that crazy fifty-cent gas surcharge." "Well," I said, "a bag of broccoli costs about ninety-nine cents, beef, about two bucks, bean sprouts, about seventy-nine cents, soy sauce, about the same price of the sprouts, and rice, a bag costs about ninety-nine cents. It's about \$5.56 for a dinner for two." Alexa did some quick math in her head and said "You saved roughly \$8.35 for us. I love you because you can save me and you money when it comes to dinner. I like frugality when it comes to a man." Alexa, I said, "remember when you made those taco salads for me, you, Mike, Jason, Esuna, Don and Sarah?" "Yeah," she said. I said "You used leftover Doritos for the chips in the salad instead of having to run to the 7-Eleven to get a bag of Tostitos for about four bucks. Anyway, taco salads cost about \$4.50 at Taco Bell. Multiply that by seven, and boy, you'd be blowing a wad of money out the window. You're frugal, too, Alexa. I like that in a woman."

We sat down to eat and Alexa said "Kevin, you know how to cook. You made this in a way where you don't have to drown out the true flavor of the dish by adding a ton of soy sauce." I said "I learned it from my father. He taught me how to cook with flavor instead of drowning it in a bunch of salt or other salty sauces or other stuff. It was when a doctor told me to lay off the excessive sodium. I can tell you one sauce that doesn't add a lot of salt, but adds a kick." Alexa asked me "What is it?" I said "What else but Tabasco?" We continued eating for a while until we were finished.

"Let me do the dishes, honey," Alexa said. "After all, you made dinner for the both of us. Thanks." Alexa was patting her stomach. "I'm full," she also said. "Yeah," I said, "I'm full too."

A week passed on. Thursday afternoon, after I cleaned the living room and Alexa cleaned the kitchen, I sat down in front of Alexa's PlayStation playing *Final Fantasy VII*. When I met Aeris, I named her "Vera" because I already named Tifa "Alexa." Cloud was named "Ghostboy," and Barret was named "Stratman." When I was in the process of naming Aeris "Vera," Alexa said "Why not name her after one of your friends?" I proceeded on to name her "Vera." Alexa got surprised and asked "Who in the hell is this 'Vera' girl? I *told* you not to think of other women!" I rebutted "*Except* my mother. Besides you, honey, my mother is on the same level of loving as

you. And by the way, 'Vera' is my mother's name." "I don't believe you, Kevin," she said and went to call my mother.

"Mrs. Havens?" Alexa asked. "Is your first name Vera?" The phone was loud enough so I can hear "Yes, Alexa, my name is Vera. I was a twin born on Christmas." Alexa said "Sorry, Mrs. Havens. My boyfriend and I got into a squabble and I didn't know that your name was Vera. We were playing a video game and your son was naming a character after you. I didn't know." There was a pause. "Thanks. Bye." Alexa then hung up the phone.

Then Saturday morning, Alexa and I got a call from Esuna. Something about us coming over for a surprise visit from Jeff. Alexa and I got showers in and we got in a frantic rush to get clothes on and out the door. We were at Esuna and Sarah's house by 1:30.

We even brought our FF7 game and our memory card just to pass time until Jeff came. Esuna was happy enough, but nervous enough that she didn't want to play video games.

At five o'clock, there was a knock on the apartment door. Esuna said "Who is it?" The person on the other side of the door said "It's Jeff Difford from DifLove.com." Sarah opened the door. Jeff was standing there with a small case cradled in one arm. He found a seat and said "Even though you've only known your girlfriends for a week in real time, but the interrupt in the space-time continuum says you've been dating your girlfriends, or trying to, for about two years. So, I'm here to help you six get engaged."

Jeff then opened his case. There were three felt-covered boxes; red, navy blue and black. Jeff handed me the black one, Don the red one and Jason the navy blue one. "Kevin," Jeff said, "You and Alexa go first."

I asked Alexa to come toward me. I kneeled and said "Alexa, darling, I've only knew you for two years. You are the love of my life and will always be. Alexa, will you marry me?" Alexa cried "Yes! I will! You have given me the best two years of my life!" I then slipped the ring on Alexa's ring finger.

Jeff then asked Don to go next. Don asked Sarah to come near him, he kneeled and asked Sarah to marry him. Sarah said yes, and Don slipped the ring on Sarah's ring finger.

Jeff then asked Jason to go ahead. Jason asked Esuna to come toward him, kneeled and asked Esuna to marry him. Esuna said "Sure, honey. You *know* I love you. I always will." He then slipped the ring on Esuna's ring finger.

Jeff said "Well, Mr. Havens, Ms. Tilbrook, Mr. Willard, Ms. Roberts, Mr. Stratman and Ms. Busy, I now officially pronounce you engaged! I'll help you get your marriage licenses in June. Your marriage date's July 4<sup>th</sup> at Grand Affairs." I thought *July 4<sup>th</sup>. That was my mother and father's marriage date! Boy, what my mom would think when Alexa and I get married on Independence Day!*

Jeff then said "I even brought you guys some supplies to have a transition party. Have fun." Jeff then left. We then partied until three in the morning and we fell asleep. We didn't wake up until two in the afternoon.

## Five

### Heading On The Journey To Love

After Alexa and I left Sarah and Esuna's house, Alexa had thoughts of marriage in her mind. She even got bridal magazines from the Food Lion to get herself an idea of a wedding dress. She even told me that she had dreams of envisioning herself in those dresses in the magazines.

A couple months passed. It's now the beginning of April. Mike has had his girlfriends over, but when they compared themselves to Alexa, they thought that Alexa was much more prettier than they were. Even one of them said "Alexa, honey, I'm glad you are getting married to him. He needs to be seeing what love is about." Alexa said "Thanks. I'm glad to soon be married to Kevin. While his other girlfriends were treating him like shit, I don't. Kevin has sensitive feelings and I know whenever they're hurt. That's why I don't try to hurt his feelings unless it's *absolutely* necessary. And as a matter of fact, I've never hurt his feelings yet. I plan to keep it that way."

It was a warm day in the middle of April and we decided to go to a place called Cool Stuff. Alexa had a couple PlayStation games that she finished, or said that they sucked, and wanted to trade them in. I had my old Nintendo and a shitload of games and also wanted to trade them in. Jason and Esuna were there and Jason had a couple NES games to trade in. Instead of doing separate trades, we all got a couple bags and put the stuff in there, and took off in Alexa's Focus to the store next to the check-cashing place and the Exxon gas station and traded in the merchandise. Esuna wanted to take Jason in her Neon to Cool Stuff. So, a compromise was agreed on and Alexa and I went in Alexa's car, and Esuna and Jason went in Esuna's car.

We arrived at Cool Stuff about ten minutes later. It was after 11:30 AM. The guy who owns the store saw four people, two people who he knew, me and Jason, and two women, Alexa and Esuna, whom he didn't know. The guy said "So, got girlfriends?" Alexa said "You mean fiancées." The store owner said "About time these two guys get a woman in their life." Alexa had two bags in her hand. The Nintendo and the games were in one bag, and Alexa's PlayStation games were in another. At first, my NES was hesitant to load a game, after numerous attempts of cleaning and restarting the system, Jason took a shot at it and it started up. Then my games were given at one dollar apiece. Alexa's games were valued at fifteen dollars for three games. I had to check twice to see if *Final Fantasy VII* was in there. If it was, I would've got on Alexa's ass for trading in that game. I haven't got to Corel yet. We had about thirty dollars store credit. Alexa said "What? No cash?" The store owner said "Hey, if I give out cash, I'd be going broke to run the store within a week. Don't worry, if you guys don't spend all of your store credit today, I'll just see how much you guys have left and note it so when you come back another time, you can use what you have left." "He's right, Alexa," Jason said. "Do you see anything you want in this store? You get roughly seven dollars and fifty cents to spend on what you want." Alexa asked "Where's the CD's?" I said "In that first room on the left." Alexa got herself a copy of Garth Brooks' *Double Live*, about six bucks, and a mystery novel (Alexa has a thing for whodunit novels), for \$1.50. I picked out *Mannequin* and *Porky's*, for three bucks apiece. Alexa saw that I had *Mannequin* in my pile and told me to follow her to the back of the store. *Oh shit*, I thought, *what could it be this time?*

I followed Alexa to the back of the store and we met in the CD room. "Kevin," Alexa said,

"what's this about buying *Mannequin*? I thought you knew the secret thing about 'broadcasting' mine, Esuna and Sarah's former existence was prohibited." "Don't lay a John's Creek in your pants, Alexa," I said, "I like the movie and *no*, I'm not going to tell the guy that you, or even Esuna for that matter, were mannequins. C'mon Alexandra, I think that you'll like the movie. Anyway, this movie was made in 1987, before DifLove was established." "Oh, okay," Alexa said. "But get a book to go with that. You're making me nervous just having that movie around me." I got a sci-fi book. I already spent my \$7.50, so did Alexa. Jason bought the *Ultima Online* player's handbook and told all of us that he can make a pencil-and-paper RPG as a D&D expansion with that player's handbook. Jason spent four bucks and bought *Introspective* by the Pet Shop Boys. Jason spent eight bucks, because Esuna only wanted a CD, which was four bucks and a bunch of romance novels for three.

We then walked up to the register, and the guy who runs the store had a calculator on the counter adding up *Mannequin*, *Porky's*, my sci-fi book, *Double Live*, Alexa's mystery novel, *Ultima Online* player's handbook, *Introspective*, Esuna's CD and her romance novel bundle. He then said "You guys are straight." He then gave us four bags that he had so we can take our stuff back home with us. We then left.

After a while, Jason and Esuna left for home. Alexa asked me to pop in *Mannequin*. "Not a bad movie, honey," Alexa said. "I'm sorry about telling you to put that back. After all, it was bought with your old Nintendo and some of your games. My stuff was bought with my PSX games, so why was I bitching? And we were nice enough to split the store credit with Stratman...There I go. I start calling Jason 'Stratman' because you do it. Well, anyway, we split our store credit with Stratman and Esuna. I split my store credit with Esuna for my PSX games and you split your store credit with Stratman with your NES and games. Fair enough. Anyway, like you and Stratman are best friends, Esuna and I are best friends. I don't know about Sarah and Don. Oh well, they're in their own little world. Four is more powerful than two."

In the morning, the phone rang. My Caller ID confirmed that it was from Esuna's place. I picked up. "Hello?" There was an elongated pause. "Esuna? Sarah? Hello?" Then Esuna came on the phone. I heard Esuna screaming. "Sarah's back to a mannequin! What can I do?" I then turned to Alexa. "531 Emergency over with Esuna, Alexa," I said. "531" is the DifLove experimental project code for "Unexpected one-eighty with a smooth beginning." "Sarah Roberts is now a mannequin." "Oh, *SHIT!*" was the reply from Alexa. "Hand the phone over here, Kevin." I gave the phone to Alexa. Alexa got told Esuna "Hold on, Esuna. Let me get out my response card." Alexa got out a small manual from the closet and asked "Esuna, this means business. I have to read off to you a series of questions. Please answer honestly." I had an extension picked up, because Alexa asked me to, and listened in.

Esuna said "I'm ready."

Alexa asked "Esuna, has Sarah's SO been dabbling in AO Chat rooms, like love chatrooms?"

"I think."

"Did the SO ever talk about this other person, other than Sarah?"

"Discreetly."

"When you were invited over to this person's house, did you see a disinterest from the SO in Sarah?"

"Yes."

"Once that question is answered with a 'Yes,' I have to stop here and ask you to call Jeff and report this. This is serious. I have to go. Good-bye."

I said "Alexa, Don's been telling me about finding a girl online because Sarah's been overbearing to him." "I *don't* think that Sarah was overbearing to Don! That asshole!" I said "Honey, let me check my e-mail. I think Don's sent me something about this."

I double-clicked on Eudora's icon and checked my e-mail. Only one message came across mail.pinn.net to me, and this is what it said:

From: PgPhbr@aol.com  
Subject: what's up  
To: havens3@pinn.net

kevin and alexa-  
in case you are wondering, i moved in with my finance peggy... we live in kentucky now...  
if you could send me your address so i can send you stuff... by the way send me jason j.'s new number...  
ok, i will talk to you later,  
donald

"Alexa!" I yelled. "Come here!" Alexa took one good look at the message and literally yelled "That son-of-a-bitch! He violated the DifLove terms and conditions of ending your relationship with your mannequin girlfriend by not writing to DifLove first! God fucking dammit! I guess he's not our friend now. Oh well. If he dumps that 'Peggy' bitch, he won't have Sarah to fall back on. Sarah's now being tested for another experiment." "*Another* experiment?" "Yeah," Alexa said, "there's ten guys, now nine, all around the country who have been dumped by their trashy girlfriends and need to find another way of finding a girlfriend. Right now, or as so I heard, it's a 90% success. With the exception of Don, it *is* a 90% success. The experimental program needs a 60% or better success rate to be turned into a public service. I hope it stays at 90%." "I hope so too," I said.

The day after, after seeing *Mannequin* for the twentieth time, she was crying in her room. I knocked on the door. I saw her crying. "Alexa, honey," I said, "what's wrong?" Alexa said "Even that Emmy girl in *Mannequin* had a mother. Well, I *don't*. Neither does Esuna." Right after I heard that, the phone rang. It said it was an out-of-area call. I told Alexa to pick it up. Alexa told me to leave the room. I heard later that Alexa and Esuna were going to get mothers. My house, midnight. Me, Alexa, Esuna and Jason had to be there. Our mothers (mine and Jason's) didn't need to be there. Right at 6:00, Esuna showed up with Jason. Esuna and Alexa chipped in for Chinese food, even for Mike. Alexa got me Shrimp Egg Foo Young, and Alexa got herself Beef and Broccoli, Mike chicken fried rice. Esuna got Jason pork fried rice, and Esuna got herself Sweet and Sour Pork. We ate for a while, until we were thirsty and needed a lot of soda. Alexa gave Esuna five dollars and asked her to get two twelve-packs of Dr Pepper. "Five bucks won't cover two twelve-packs at Eleven-Seven," Esuna said. "Go to Food Lion," Alexa said. "Here's another buck to cover tax. Make sure you have your MVP card." Esuna grabbed her keychain and said "Yep." Esuna then left.

After seeing a bunch of TV (Jason and Esuna don't like *Mannequin* at all), and watching *Porky's*, Mike went to bed at 10:30. We were halfway finished with the Dr Peppers. At midnight, we saw a pair of headlights go up in the driveway. Jason ran for cover thinking it was somebody checking up on me to see if I had Jason here. "At this time, Stratman?" I asked. "Oh." The



doorbell rang. Jeff and two women were at the door. "Let me guess," I said, pointing to the Caucasian brunette, "D'signers Boutique," then pointing to the Asian-looking one, "Hecht's Lynnhaven." Both of the women said "Right." The Caucasian said "How'd you guess?" "Easy," I said, "I've seen you both there." Jeff said that these two are Alexa and Esuna's mothers. Alexa's mother is named "Jennifer Tilbrook," and Esuna's mother is named "Jasmine Busy." Both Alexa and Esuna hugged their mothers and told them that they were engaged. "So who's the lucky Prince Charming my Alexandra's going to marry?" Jennifer asked. I walked to the door and said "I am." Jasmine said "So Esuna's going to be lucky. Just don't blow it."

Jennifer, Jasmine and Jeff left. We then fell asleep after watching *Big Ballers* with Mike at five in the morning. Esuna never seen it before and never knew what southern gangsters were like. All she knew about were gangsters in California, New York City and Chicago. Never in Florida. After we saw it, all five of us went to bed.

## Six

### Going Forward

After Jason and Esuna left, we decided to clean up some more. We went on to going on the Net for a while and, I, going on a whim, went to Google and typed "Tiffany Brissette + 'Small Wonder'" in the search box. Luckily, Alexa didn't see me do that, because she'll go ape shit and go on her "I'm the only woman for you" shit. I know that I love Alexa and nothing is going between us on that fact. After a few uninteresting sites, I found one on something called "The Small Wonder Webring" called the *Small Wonder* Home Page. Alexa asked me "Kevin, what site is that?" I said "Honey, it's the *Small Wonder* Home Page. Has everything on the show, including show descriptions. Just found it." After a while, we logged off the Net after printing the *Small Wonder* FAQ.

A couple days later, after Alexa went to Beach House and got our usual mallratting done, Jennifer came by with a *big* box. "Oh, hi, Mrs. Tilbrook," I said. "Here to see Alexa?" "Please, Kevin," Jennifer said, "Call me Jennifer or Jen. It's not like I'm your supervisor at work or something. Oh, please do get Alexa for me, would you, hon?" "Sure, Jen," I said. "*Alexa!* Your mother's here for you!" Alexa came down, after blaring loud FM99, came down and said "Hi, Mom. What's in the box?" "Oh, some stuff you had when you were younger, like some movies and some of your novels. I was going to sell it at a yard sale, but I thought you might want it instead." Alexa took the box from her mother and handed it to me. I set it down next to the computer. "Oh, Alexandra," Jennifer said, "don't forget to call your doctor for your annual checkup. It's nearing that time." "I won't," Alexa said and Jennifer left.

I opened the box, which had about fifty VHS videocassettes in it, and *Mannequin Two* was one of them. "You're dead, Alexa," I said. I pulled out an unmarked cassette and proceeded to put it in the VCR. The VCR was disconnected, so I rehooked it back up. The VCR was already in VCR mode. I put in the tape, pressed play and heard Tiffany Brissette's familiar, recognizable robotic monotone. "*Alexandra Tiffany Tilbrook!*" I yelled "You are motherfucking dead!" I fast-forwarded it to the end of the show. Another *Small Wonder* show came on. "Ooohhh, shit, Alexa," I said, "you are *really* going to get it." Alexa asked "What, honey?" I told her "Alexa, how many *Small Wonder* episodes do you have?" "Every one," Alexa said, "from the pilot to the finale. I thought that I might like to archive the show for watching later on when I got older." "Alexa," I said, "That was my favorite show! I *can't* believe that you taped them all! I liked Tiffany Brissette because I had a liking for her. She was affable, and likable. Too bad she's three years older than us and now some kind of missionary." "I know," Alexa said, "but you have me, and we're engaged." "Yeah," I said, "but that was over ten years ago. Things have changed since then."

We then sat down with a cold Dr Pepper and I told Alexa that I was the one who named her. "Yeah," I said, "You were named after a Russian czar's wife after a book I read in high school, you know, *Nicholas and Alexandra*." "You were in special education," she said, "how could you read that book?" "Checked it out at the library. But that's far from the point. Your middle name comes from Tiffany Brissette. I liked the woman so much, I thought to use that name in my 'dream' woman. People say I got 'Tiffany' from a staff woman that was interning at Beach House named Tiffany Jefferies. Not true. Your middle name *did* come from Tiffany Brissette. Your last name..." "I know," she said, "From Glenn Tilbrook of Squeeze. You like the band so much that

you'd thought to have the last name in your 'dream' woman." "Partly true," I said. "You were going to have some cockamamie name like Vanessa Marie Faxanadu because I liked the game *Faxanadu* so much, and 'Vanessa' was Vicki's 'twin sister' on *Small Wonder*. I got slammed for that name by Natalie Murphy, my therapist at Great Neck Middle Hell..." "Great Neck Middle *what?*" "Okay," I said, "Great Neck Middle School. I hated the school so much, it was like hell. But when I started to like Squeeze, 'Vanessa' needed a new name. You were going to have your mother's name, but before that, I had a copy of *Babylon and On* by, you guessed it, Squeeze. I unfolded the insert, it was a cassette, and closed my eyes and swirled my finger around, above the photos of the band. It first landed on the studio credits. I tried again. Once my finger landed on Glenn Tilbrook's photo, I thought *The dream woman's last name is going to be Tilbrook*. Then I named the 'dream woman' Jennifer Tilbrook, which is your mother's name. I then picked up a copy of that book that I mentioned before, and named you *Alexandra Tiffany Tilbrook*. It stuck for about five years. I like the name, so when I was surfing around on the Net one day, and ended up at DifLove.com, I entered your name into the form that asked for 'Dream Woman's name' and that is the name that you have. Now since this interrupt that happened, it is your birth name. Honey, you look like an 'Alexandra Tiffany,' and I love you too much to not let you go. Even with names like 'Yolonda' and 'Melanie,' only *Alexandra* and *Alexa* just roll off my tongue. 'Yolonda' and 'Melanie,' which were my ex-girlfriends from Chesapeake, don't." "Oh, Kevin," Alexa said while cuddling closer to me, "I love you, too. I know you'd like my name."

After a few days of watching *Small Wonder* episodes, for which each tape had twelve episodes recorded in EP Mode on a T-120 tape, we watched all the episodes in about five days.

The Monday after we watched all of the *Small Wonder* episodes, Alexa and I came into Beach House singing the theme from the show. One staff member asked "So, a *Small Wonder* fan?" Alexa said "Yep." I said "To the core." I got my money, Alexa got me and her our cigarettes and we took off with Jason and Esuna to Lynnhaven Mall. We started to just leave our cars in the parking lot at Lynnhaven Mall, and if we wanted to go past the shopping center that had FuncoLand, like Wal-Mart, we'd walk back to the mall and get there. We needed the exercise. We were heading toward the side entrance near Hecht's when I saw at the Zap kiosk somebody that looked like Melanie Lowell. Next to her was a heavy-set dirty-blonde woman. I quickly passed her on as Yolonda. "Oh, shit," I said. "Alexa said "What, honey?" I said "Melanie Lowell's here with somebody that looks like Yolonda. Be cool. Be cool, Jason and Esuna. I'm going to test if it's them.." I said "Disconnect my Internet!" This woman who had the glasses on, said "I know who says that phrase. It has to be Kevin." The heavy-set woman said "Who?" The other woman said "Kevin Havens. You dated him once." I said "That's CasperGhostboy to you. What's up, Melanie?" Melanie said "Hey, Kevin. Who's the girl with you?" I said "A friend. Nothing more, nothing less." Alexa whispered in my ear "*Kevin!*" I whispered back "Alexa, be cool, I don't want to give it away yet." The heavy-set woman said "So what's the ring on your *friend's* finger for?" I said "Shut up..." She said "Kevin, if you're not dating anybody yet, I'd like to go back out with you again. Who cares what my mother says." I said "Yolonda, I'm trying to take it easy for a while."

Alexa snapped into one of her protective moods and said "Yolonda, whatever your name is, I'm engaged to Kevin!" Alexa showed Yolonda her ring. Melanie said "So that explains the ring." Alexa said "I've heard horror stories about the way *your* mother treats your boyfriends! I've had a crush on him since he was in high school, but now I love him! You can't change it now! I've been wanting to date him for two years, but now I got to date him right after I heard he got dumped by *your mother!* I was treated like shit by my other boyfriends, but Kevin don't treat me like that. You and Melanie *both* treated my Ghostboy like crap! I don't!" Yolonda asked for my telephone number so she can get to call me just to see how I was doing. "*No!* Anyway, I

heard your mother won't let guys call there without getting a game of Twenty Questions played against them! Anyway, I heard that you called my Kevin when you were calling him very scarcely! I live with Kevin, yeah, I go to Beach House so if your mother calls me 'Beach House trash,' I've got something to tell you *and* your mother! I don't want your mother calling me, or you calling Kevin! Period!" Jason said "Uh, Alexa, I think you had enough chewing them out. Anyway, I want to go to FuncoLand." We walked out of the general area they were at and Alexa muttered "Bye, you whores."

After Alexa and I got home after doing our grocery shopping (we started to combine our grocery bills to save money, but I do my Gift Cards first, then Alexa either writes a check or uses her ATM card), we put up our groceries and sat down to watch *Mannequin Two*. The phone rang. At first, Alexa dismissed it as a call for Mike, but I quickly looked at the Caller ID display. It said:

4:35 PM 4/23 Call: NEW 25  
485-2005  
LEE RICHARD C

I said "What in the living fuck does Yolonda want?" I picked it up. I said "What do you want, Yolonda? I'm engaged to somebody!" Instead, Yolonda's mother said "Can I speak to this 'Alexa Tilbrook,' your so-called fiancé?" I called Alexa to the phone. Alexa said "What does she want?" I whispered to Alexa "It's Yolonda's mother. If she says anything about you cursing her daughter out, deny it. I don't want the burden put on me for letting you curse her daughter out."

Alexa said "Yes, may I help you? ... No, Mrs. Lee. I didn't curse out your daughter. ... Yes, I'm engaged to Kevin. ... No, Kevin didn't tell me to do so. ... No, Mrs. Lee, Kevin didn't tell me to do it. ... Where did you get that from?" Alexa started to get mad and yell in the phone "If you start treating your daughter like a 22-year-old instead of a ten-year-old, maybe you can let your daughter succeed in life! ... I know, but you making Yolonda dump Kevin, I found success in him! ... Well, up yours!" Alexa slammed the phone down. I said "What's wrong, honey?" "Kevin," she said in anger, "You're getting Call Block and blocking her number. She said she used 411 to find your number. She says she won't stop unless you dump me and go back out with Yolonda. If you do, DifLove would have a lot of paperwork to do because we're considered the 'leaders' of the Hampton Roads area. If I turn back into a mannequin, you'll be stuck with Yolonda and her not keeping in touch with you for times on end." I instantly called Verizon and told the operator that I wanted Call Block put on my phone line. She assured me that it would be put on by 5 PM the next day. If not, call a certain number.

After Yolonda's mother kept on harassing Alexa until 10 PM, pissing off Mike when he was on the phone with his friends or girlfriends, We decided to get on the Net. We even searched with Google on tips on how to keep it cool when your ex's mother keeps on harrassing your girlfriend, even if she claimed she made a mistake and wants you to go back out with her daughter, but you're happy with your current girlfriend. They were all informative. We went to bed at 12:30 in the morning.

At 2:30 in the afternoon, we were about to enjoy another *Small Wonder* marathon until Yolonda's mother called. Alexa said "Fuck off, whore," and hung up. The phone rang again. The Caller ID said it was from Verizon. It was telling me that my Call Block service was put on. I

hung up, waited twenty seconds and hit \*60. I instantly added 485-2005 to my block list. We waited about a couple minutes after hanging up from the service to see if Yolonda's mother would call. Nope. So we enjoyed our six-hour *Small Wonder* marathon.

Alexa got to thinking of her wedding dress, so another bridal magazine came into her hands. I said "Goddamn, Alexa, that's all you've ever read. Ever since you and I got engaged, you've been buying those every month! Why don't you read those mystery novels of yours that your mother gave back to you!" Alexa said "Like you read your computer magazines, I'll read my bridal magazines until we're married. Enough said."

I told her of a certain place called "D'signers Boutique," and we'll go with Esuna and Jason next week. Alexa found the number in the telephone book and set up an appointment. She didn't mention to Luz, the person who runs the dressmaker's shop that I was coming, not even Jason, but her and a friend, who's getting married on the same day.

We then went to bed, thinking of what to do in the upcoming month of getting planned.

## Seven

### Pay Dirt

After a couple weeks of getting enough information on *Small Wonder* by searching off of Google, I got tired of seeing "out-of-the-closet" remarks of ex-college students, I went off of Google and went to my home page at kevinshaven.cjb.net. After seeing a few Reduxes that I made especially for Alexa, I felt like I was getting detached from a show that *both* Alexa and I liked when we were children. So, *without* going back to Google, I clicked on the Address bar in Internet Explorer and typed <http://smallwonder.hispeed.com/COC.html> and hit Enter. I searched around for important details, schematics, and other things. A couple things that interested me is a topic on robots (like the VICI series) and religion. When I saw why Mormons (like Yolonda's family) and Catholics would *not* appreciate a VICI/ADA in their homes, I quickly remarked "A-ha!" Alexa said "What, honey?" "Now I know why Sonya and Richard *wouldn't* let Yolonda watch *Small Wonder*! Every time I remark about the show to her when I dated her, she didn't know what it was about!" Alexa said "Now I know why you and Yolonda *weren't* compatible. You liked *Small Wonder*, and she didn't even watch it. I have every episode on about eight different VHS cassettes, and you and I watch it every weekend."

I kept on searching on the *Small Wonder* home page and found *complete* episodes in RealVideo format. But they weren't streaming. Good. Gives me an excuse to turn my \$400 computer into a \$60 VCR. But the caveat is, they're in two parts to save download time. I have RealPlayer 8 Basic, because I got it and Jeff wanted RealPlayer 7 or better to "activate" Alexa and Esuna. "Pay dirt," I said. I said this because I *know* that Alexa has *every* episode, including "The Bad Seedling" when Vanessa is introduced, but I want a quick fix instead of constantly rewinding and fast-forwarding and searching through a lot of tapes vaguely marked "S1" through "S8," and bearing a ten-minute blooper of a recorded show of *Oprah* at the beginning of the first tape before "Vicki's Homecoming," which is the first episode, came on. I downloaded both parts, and unzipped them. I was afraid that WinRAR (I don't use WinZip, but WinRAR also handles Zip files) might come up with a "corrupted file" error. I was lucky. Both files weren't corrupted. I put them in the D:\Small Wonder Episodes\Vicki's Homecoming (101)\ directory. Both files, sw101-1.rm and sw101-2.rm were good. But I needed a way to "stitch" them together so I don't have to get up and double-click on Part 2. Since I found out that MP3 playlists, or M3U's for short, can be used for more than MP3's, before Napster got shut down by the San Francisco Court of Appeals a couple months ago, I learned how to make M3U playlists. All it is a pure-text file that either has a Web URL or a local path and file name on one line with no line breaks, with each file to be played in the playlist on each line. I found out that WordPerfect is terrible for making M3U playlists, even if you save it in pure-text format, it *will* have line breaks. So I found out that Notepad is the best.

I made my M3U playlist of both RealVideo files, added instructions on how to turn your monitor into a TV screen (i.e., full-screen mode), and ratings from the TV industry, movie industry, the Entertainment Software Ratings Board, or ESRB for short (as a joke), and my own arbitrary rating. They were text files, and RealPlayer can handle text files, although they have to be short...*very* short. I named it SW101.m3u. The Welcome file was first, Ratings second, Part one third and Part two last. I sat down to watch *Small Wonder* in full-screen mode on my computer. Alexa instantly recognized the show's beginning when Jamie is in the kitchen wishing for a sibling, then Ted comes in and jets to the other side of the room. Alexa said "Kevin! How'd you hook up the VCR to your computer? You don't have video-in ports on your computer!" "Alexa," I said, "I didn't. While you were upstairs fooling around, I downloaded

'Vicki's Homecoming, parts one and two' as Zip files and unzipped them. Then I made one of those M3U playlists and made it like a complete show." "Cool," Alexa said.

A week later, Alexa called Esuna saying it's time for their appointments at D'signer's Boutique. Esuna and Jason came about twenty minutes later and we all piled into Alexa's Focus and headed down Witchduck, then Independence to D'signers Boutique. We all got out, got in a cigarette and I made it so where I go in first because Alexa's mother is the mannequin that was in that window. Esuna asked "Why?" I said "Esuna, Luz in there knows me. And she knows that I loved that mannequin, well, used to. She'll think that I took her mannequin one day without her knowledge. I will get the yelling of a lifetime. I will have to explain..." Alexa said "*Kevin! You know* not to divulge the complete details of this experiment!" I said "I know, but I'll tell her that *somebody else* walked in..." Jason said "Who, Jeff?" I said "No. A random guy. I'll say somebody might have taken her mannequin when she was not looking." "Sounds good to me," Alexa said. "Anyway, you're almost done with your cigarette, and so is Stratman, but neither me or Esuna's finished with ours."

I asked Alexa before I went in asking her if she had her bridal magazines on her person so Luz can get a global idea of what Alexa wants to wear at her wedding. Esuna had some ideas from those magazines, also. "Yep," Alexa said, after looking into a Nordstrom bag. Alexa went to Nordstrom at MacArthur Center to get some shoes for the wedding, and some blue and black Reeboks because the summer is here, and she needed shoes so her feet could breathe. I walked into the shop.

*Ding!*

I went to the back room, where Luz Cardenas, a plump Filipino woman in her upper sixties, looked at me. "Hey, Kevin," she said. "How's things?" Then before I could answer, she said "Wait a minute," turned to me, and said "*Kevin! Where in the hell is my goddamn mannequin?!*" I tried to tell her that I did not take it. "Quit lying to me, Kevin. I know you took it." I told her that I didn't, honest. The door chime rang. I thought *Please, let that be Alexa, Esuna and Stratman, please!* Luz and I kept arguing until she said "I hope you love Alexa!" Alexa came in to the room and said "He sure does!" Luz asked Alexa "Who are you?" Alexa said "I'm Alexa Tilbrook, Kevin's fiancé. I'm here with my friend, Esuna Busy, for our appointment. We got some magazines in this bag so we can show you our ideas for our dresses. We're on a tight budget." Luz asked how much both Esuna and Alexa were able to spend apiece on their dresses. "Five hundred dollars apiece," Alexa said. "*Tight budget my ass,*" I whispered to Jason. "*Oh, I know,*" Jason replied back. Luz somehow heard us and said "Guys, sometimes wedding dresses cost eight hundred dollars or more. That is kind of a tight leash on what they can have and cannot have on their dresses. You guys can have me tailor your suits if you need me to." "No," I said, "I'll just rent one." "Me too," said Jason. Luz then asked Alexa and Esuna to go into a room and wait for her, and asked me and Jason to either go outside to the waiting room, or go somewhere. She'll be fifteen minutes with Alexa and Esuna.

Jason pulled out his pipe, and said "I don't know about you, but I need a *massive* nicotine hit." I pulled out my pipe that Jason gave me and said "I do, too. Let's go." We went outside and packed our pipes full of a mixture of four tobaccos: Prince Albert, cheap Black Cavendish, Carter Hall and Top cigarette tobacco. Usually I'd smoke the cigarettes that Alexa buys for me, but this time I'll make an exception because I haven't had Jason's "hybrid" tobacco in a *long* time. I sparked my lighter into a flame, lit the tobacco in the bowl, puffed on it, inhaled it and

enjoyed the major rush of nicotine that was the quintessence of all tobaccos I've ever smoked. Not Newports, not Marlboros, not even Black & Milds, even though this pipe-pack tasted like a Black. "Aaaaahhhh," I said, after I exhaled the smoke. Jason said "Some good shit, huh?" "Fuck yeah!" I replied back. We were smoking our pipes for about twelve, maybe thirteen minutes, until we went inside. Luz was discussing with Alexa and Esuna on ideas for their dresses while sketching them on paper. Luz was finished with Alexa and Esuna. She said "Kevin, I'm sorry that I accused you of taking my mannequin. Alexa here is a very beautiful woman. I'm glad that you'll be marrying her. Good luck. Good luck, too, Jason." Jason said "How'd you know my name?" Luz said "Esuna told me that you're her fiancé. She even told me your name." I said "Luz, before we part, I might need some newspaper, even some catalogs." Luz said "Kevin, why catalogs? You already have a fiancé." I said "Luz, why I need it is because when Alexa and I move, we need packing material. I know you have a lot of that stuff, so when Esuna and Alexa come back, we'll have them pick up some. Because when Alexa and I get married, we're moving out. So is Jason out of his group home." We then said our good-byes and then left.

A day later, at house meeting, Debbie Amme said that she was retiring after almost twenty-two years of faithful service to Beach House and the surrounding community. Party will be held Friday, her last day. A roast will be held, cake, soda and light Geedunks will be served. Then we will have a ceremonial (and free) luncheon before the party. We all thought to attend. Alexa and I were wondering who was going to take her place. Maybe somebody from outside might do a good job. Just give them a crash course in the Fountain House/Clubhouse model and philosophy and they'll do fine. Hey, that's what happened to other staff members. No formal trainings were needed for them. No sir! They did fine the minute they were hired. Of course, "older" (what I mean by this is that they've been there longer) staff members told them the difference between the clinical model (the clinic upstairs) and the Clubhouse model (Beach House). They learned *quick*.

Esuna, Jason, Alexa and I attended Debbie Amme's farewell party that Friday. We didn't feel like saying anything for the roast. After all, I didn't know her that well, even though I've been there for about five years. Adam Ebel, my other best friend, *did* say something nice, but funny to be it. But all four of us, including Adam, shook Debbie's hand. Alexa said "Good luck, Debbie, on your retirement." Debbie said "Thanks," and that somebody named Tiffany is taking her place. For now, we just dismissed it as a no-name, no-face person. Alexa and I, with Jason and Esuna, went outside to get a cigarette.

Alexa said "I know we're going to get a new TEP person named Tiffany." Jason said "Won't I shit if it's Tiffany Brissette." I said "I know. I would yell 'Disconnect my Internet,' be it in the bathroom or outside by CAI's office if need be. I've been dying to meet Ms. Brissette for about sixteen years." Esuna asked "Who's Tiffany Brissette?" Alexa said "Got a free weekend?" "Yeah," Esuna said. Alexa said "Got all five seasons of *Small Wonder* on videocassette. Come on over. Bring Jason with you. We'll spend about six hours watching classic TV. I'm buying dinner from Pizza Hut." "Sure," Esuna said, "I'll come. What time?" "Saturday at 11:30 AM. Be there." "I will," Esuna said. "I'm counting on you." We then left for home without clocking out because members were asking us up the ass for cigarettes.

Saturday, Esuna and Jason came over and we saw Season one of *Small Wonder*. "So," Esuna said, "Tiffany Brissette's the little girl robot!" I said "But she's not a 'little girl robot' anymore. She's six months older than you. It would be nice to have her as our staff member at Beach House." "But with that voice?" Esuna asked. "She speaks more like a *robot* more than a human being!" I said "That's *acting*. She does talk normally. I think she gave the robotic monotonic voice up



after *Small Wonder* got the axe." "Oh," Esuna said and Alexa ordered two Stuffed Crust pepperoni pizzas. She sent me and Jason to 7-Eleven for soda. After we ate, Esuna and Jason left.

Sunday, Alexa and I got our laundry done. Since Alexa gave me a Handspring Visor for my birthday, I downloaded off the Web, as offline pages, parts of the *Small Wonder* home page at smallwonder.hispeed.com, onto the Visor, including Tiffany Brissette's bio for instant reference so I don't have to push somebody off the computer to get it. I even got a MP3 attachment for the Visor so I can put on that *Small Wonder* theme to play it through to Visor. I put my Visor on the recharging cradle so I don't have to be embarrassed on a dead-battery incident, if it is Ms. Tiffany Marie Brissette. After my last load of laundry came out of the dryer, I took it upstairs and folded it. I saved a pair of shorts, my Quiksilver shirt somebody gave me, and a pair of underwear. I looked at the time. *Oh, shit*, I thought. It was a quarter after three in the morning. I thought *Time to load up on the stay-up juice*. What I meant is that it's time to make a pot of coffee. I needed it. I went on the Net just to bullshit around. I already signed Mike up for Monday. Alexa was in bed.

Around 5:45 in the morning, I took a shower. Not with Alexa, because she was still in bed. I was singing "Satisfied," by Squeeze off the *Play* album. Jason gave me the CD from Volume CD Exchange for Christmas. I got him a CD from there, also. We both picked out our Christmas gifts to each other. I always let my best friend pick out their Christmas gift. As long it's five dollars or under. I got out of the shower singing the chant at the end of the song. When I got out of the shower, Alexa was getting ready to take a shower.

I walked into my room. Something felt different. My Socket 3 486 motherboard was "taken" down from its "display" on my wall. I thought *It must've fell. Oh well, let me get it behind the dresser and hang it back up on the wall*. I moved the dresser out of the way and *it wasn't there!* Well, Alexa might have taken it and might want to play around with it, maybe build herself an inexpensive 486 for shits and giggles. I'd shit if it works. I got dressed and went downstairs.

Alexa was taking a long time. *Goddammit*, I thought, *how long does it take a typical young adult woman to get a shower, put on a pair of panties, a bra, a pair of shorts, a T-shirt, socks and shoes?* It was 6:30 by the time Alexa came downstairs.

Alexa really did it this time. She looked like an adult version of Vicki off of *Small Wonder*. She even spoke, for a few seconds, in a robotic monotone. She looked like Vicki, down to the red dress and lace pinafore. "Okay, *Vicki Tilbrook*. What's with the get-up? Halloween's five months away." Alexa said, this time, in her normal voice, "I'm getting ready to welcome this Tiffany girl to Beach House. Gotta do it in style!" "Alexandra," I said, being serious, "I don't think it is going to be Tiffany Brissette. True, Ms. Brissette might have a bachelor's in psychology, but it doesn't mean that our new TEP person is going to be her!" Alexa said "You just wait and see, Ghostboy," in *another* robotic monotone. "Go upstairs and change into normal clothes, Alexa," I said. "No," she said, "I'm going to do it. I am woman, hear me flame you on the Net!" "Okay," I said, "just don't get yourself a lot of stares..." "I won't," Alexa said and we got breakfast in ourselves. At 8:25, we left for Beach House, stopping off at the Exxon at the corner of the boulevard and Independence to get coffee.

We arrived at Beach House at 8:47, according to the clock on Alexa's car radio. We were playing

one of Alexa's CD's to make the drive/ride shorter. I went upstairs to get my money, twenty dollars, and waited for Jason. Jason saw me standing with another girl, indiscernible at a distance, but once Jason came up to me, and said to Alexa "Hey, Vicki." Alexa said "Stratman, I'm Alexa!" Jason said "Oh, hey, Alexa. Esuna thought Kevin dumped you and gone out with somebody else. Anyway, you can tell I'm half-asleep. I saw too many *Small Wonder* episodes with you and Kevin." Jason went upstairs and got his money. Esuna, Alexa and I were talking about the surprise Alexa and I are going to do on this Tiffany person when we first see her. Anyway, I had to have my Dominion Virginia Power bill paid before it gets in too late. Jason came down and wanted to go to the mall. I told him to wait until I pay my power bill.

We then waited until both the Eye Opener and the AM Huddle were done. All four of us went inside after a 7-Eleven run. Sitting in Debbie Amme's place was a young brunette. She was dressed normally, in a red blouse and navy-blue skirt with low-cut heels. The heels weren't too high, neither were they too low. Richard Goenner was talking to her. "Kevin, Alexa, Jason, Esuna, meet Tiffany, your new TEP person." I said "You look familiar, Tiffany. I might have seen you somewhere before." Tiffany said "I haven't seen you before." I reached into my backpack and pulled out my Visor, the MP3 attachment and two styli. Tiffany said "Kevin, you gotta be careful with those palm PC's. You can scratch the display *very* easily. I went to the Palm OS offline Web browser and pulled up the Tiffany Brissette bio. "Tiffany," I said, "I think you might like this. It's about my favorite person, also named Tiffany. You might have seen her on TV when you were younger." I handed Tiffany the Visor and my spare stylus. I *never* let anybody use my "lucky" blue-and-silver stylus that Alexa gave me. She told me to "never let anybody use your lucky stylus." Tiffany took the palm PC out of my hand and used the black stylus to scroll down. "Hey!" Tiffany said. "This is about me!" "Get out of here," I said. "You're not Tiffany Brissette, aka Vicki on *Small Wonder*!" "Yes, I am," Tiffany said, "I am Tiffany Brissette, or 'Vicki' on *Small Wonder*." I said "You're *the* Tiffany Brissette I've been dying to meet for sixteen years? Hold on. I'll be back. Alexa, get my Visor from Tiffany." I made it to where I was like going to the bathroom to take a dump, went into the small stall, closed it, locked it, and yelled "*DISCONNECT MY INTERNET!!!!*" It seemed like I was hearing echoes of "Net...net...net" throughout the bathroom. I sighed. I got out of the bathroom. Heads were turned toward me. "What? What did I do?" I went back into the Retail unit and I repeated "I'm not worthy" to Tiffany three times. Richard said "Kevin, you've been watching *way* too much *Wayne's World*. Anyway, how did you know she was 'Vicki' on *Small Wonder*? And, how did you know what she done?" I said "Ask Tiffany yourself, Rich. She'll tell you." Richard asked Tiffany about *Small Wonder* and Tiffany told Richard about the show.

Esuna, Jason, Alexa and I were outside smoking a cigarette. Alexa said that she was going to show Tiffany her "Vicki" get-up when I go inside to pay my bill. I saw something bounce back and forth in Alexa's "Vicki" costume. "Alexandra Tiffany," I said. "Come here." Alexa came toward me. I said "Let me see what you're smuggling in the back of your dress." I took her to the back of the building, away from windows so people don't think I'm a pervert, and unzipped the back. "So there's my 486 motherboard, Alexa. Why did you take it without asking me?" Alexa said "I wanted it to be part of the costume. I thought it would look good.." "Okay," I said, "you can keep the 486 motherboard, under one condition. You have to build yourself a complete computer from that motherboard. It has to have at least eight megs RAM, any size hard drive above 400 megs, a version of Windows, I'll provide that, video card, sound card and speakers, modem, Floppy drive, CD-ROM drive. Network card is optional. Memory is installed in sets of one, and cannot go over 64 megs." Alexa said "I accept your challenge," and shook my hand. "The other stipulation," I said, "is that you cannot have any outside help." "Deal." We then went inside after Alexa zipped up her dress and re-fastened her pinafore.

We went inside and I grabbed a request form from the cabinet (no pun intended, because of Tiffany) to fill out my power bill. I asked Tiffany to sign it. She happily signed it for me, but she signed it "Tiffany M. Brissette, B.S." I didn't care. I made two copies of the request (one for my file, and the other for Tiffany's "Autograph") and three copies of the power bill. One for my file, one going to Mike, and one going to Alexa so they can get them paid on time. We then left for the mall, after Alexa came out of the bathroom with the 486 motherboard in a paper bag.

After we done our mallratting, and Alexa and I got our grocery shopping done, we went home. Alexa now looks like a normal young adult, not like some freak. I asked Alexa what Tiffany thought of her "Vicki" costume. "Oh, she liked it," Alexa said, "Nice and original with the 486 motherboard, she thought."

We then went to bed after emailing a *shitload* of *Small Wonder*-oriented sites that Tiffany Marie Brissette is now working for Beach House and gave them the number: 757-430-0368 ext. 16 to speak to her to prove it.

## Eight

### Butterfly Kisses

We were spending an entire week lavishing, and seeing updates, if any, to *Small Wonder* pages to verify the fact that Tiffany Brissette *does* work in the Community Empowerment Services unit at Beach House. This is the email message I sent them:

To: VickisCabinet@fan.net  
From: Kevin Havens <havens3@pinn.net>  
Subject: Tiffany Brissette's new job  
CC: TMBRISSE@vbgov.com, wingnut\_dwarf@lycos.com, esuna\_busy1234@lycos.com, alexandra\_tilbrook@lycos.com

Salutations. V.I.C.I.'s Uncle!

This really happened to me, so please bear with me.

This email message is intended for you, V.I.C.I.'s Uncle, to inform you that Tiffany Brissette is an employee of the Virginia Beach Community Services Board as a Transitional Employment Director at Beach House, the clubhouse I told you about in Vicki's Cabinet. I posted a message in Vicki's Cabinet to let the fans know what Tiffany's doing now. However, I intend to let you, the Webmaster, take the necessary liberties to update your Web site.

Tiffany can be reached, if in case you do need additional information, at the following telephone number: 757-430-0368, extension 16. Leave a message between the hours of 4:30 PM to 8:30 AM Eastern time, and on weekends. She can be reached in person at the same number between 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM Monday-Friday Eastern time. I can be reached via e-mail at havens3@pinn.net (Which is my Vicki's Cabinet email address) if in case you need additional information from myself. If you feel that you need to email Tiffany, her work email address is TMBRISSE@vbgov.com. For the sake of her privacy, please do not post Tiffany's work email address on your web site.

My friends Adam Ebel, Robert Berry, Jason Stratman and Alexa Tilbrook, along with myself, did see Tiffany begin her job at Beach House on this Monday past, June 4<sup>th</sup>. All of us wish Tiffany a warm welcome to the Virginia Beach Community Services Board, and the best of luck.

Thank you for your time and consideration into this matter, and please spread the news.

Kevin A. Havens (havens3@pinn.net) (AKA CasperGhostboy in the Cabinet)

I instantly reached for my mouse and clicked the "Send" button in Eudora and the application asked me for my mail server password. I quickly typed it in, and hit Enter. The message was on its way. I logged off the Net and watched TV.

A week later, Alexa got a call from Luz Cardenas saying that her and Esuna's wedding dresses were ready. Alexa got off the phone with Luz two minutes later and called Esuna. She told

Esuna to meet her at Value City in twenty minutes. Alexa got off the phone, put on some shoes and took off.

Alexa didn't come back until an hour later. She jetted up the stairs and came down looking innocent. I asked her what was wrong. "Nothing," she said, and told me not to worry about it any more.

The day after, which was a Monday, we went into Beach House. We needed something to do besides bullshit on the Internet and find stuff that our new staff member done back then. Anyway, I thought maybe Tiffany can tell us more on what she done more than a plethora of Web sites brought up by Google and the other metasearch engines.

We walked in to the first part of the Retail unit, all four of us, walking away from the education room to the door in the Retail unit. "Hi, Tiffany," I said. "How was your weekend?" "Fine," Tiffany said. "Yours?" "Great," I said, "I was on the Internet." Tiffany then said "Hold it right there, Kevin Havens and Alexa Tilbrook." She opened up her GroupWise program. She clicked on a message that said "Kevin Havens [havens3@pinn.net]" on the sender line and "Tiffany Brissette's new job" in the subject line. "What's this?" she charged, pointing to the message on the screen. "I don't want anybody knowing, not even some Webmaster, except you guys, that I have a job here!" I retorted "Damn, *Vicki*, what virus bit you this morning? AntiEXE?" "That's not funny, Kevin," Tiffany said. I said, sarcastically, "Do I look like I'm laughing, Tiffany?" "No," she said, "but I don't want you sending me a copy of *any* messages to people, like your friends, or other people you send messages to about me. You can send all the crap you want about me, because you do look like one of *Small Wonder's* fans, but I'm now one of your staff members here, not a distant person you, how can I put this, knelt down to when you were younger. Now, go on, do something." I asked "You mad at me and Alexa, Tiffany?" Tiffany chuckled, then said "No, guys, but it might seem nice that you helped a fan site get their site straight. Thanks."

We all walked out of the Retail unit and I said "Tiffany might not be mad at us, but sometimes she acted like she was being bit by the AntiEXE virus." Alexa said "*Kevin!* She is *not* a computer! She's a human being! Why do you treat an nice young woman like the character on some TV show she was on sixteen years ago?" Jason whispered in my ear "*AntiEXE is the virus to be!*" I hit Jason in the arm. "Stratman," I said, "Alexa's right. We might have known Tiffany to be no more than a robot, a VICI, a computer. But inside, Tiffany is now twenty-six years old. She's all human. Just like our soon-to-be wives. And also, she's one hell of a good staff member." We walked outside.

We then lit a cigarette and Jason said "I think Tiffany and Richard would make a good couple." Esuna said "What for, honey?" "Well," I said, "They're always talking to each other, clubhouse-related or not, every time they get, and they sit around lunchtime at the same table." "Yeah," Alexa said, "but didn't Richard take religion as his minor study in college?" "Yep," Jason and I said simultaneously. Esuna said "Richard's a little religious, and so is Tiffany. Damn! Wouldn't they make a good couple!" "Well," Jason said, "At least Tiffany won't play 'Fuck House Favoritism' like Richard doesn't with us, unlike all these other staff members do." After we finished our cigarettes, we took off.

It was nearing the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. Alexa and I were packing up and only a few clothes, dosed out over a week at a time were out. I was lucky one day because my mother knew I was getting

married, so she gave me a suit that was my father's.. Alexa and I took it to Luz and she tailored it right in front of us. Alexa asked "How much?" Luz said "No charge. Kevin, how long have I known you?" "Eight years," I said. "You had a ripped seam in your T-shirt one day and I fixed it, free of charge. Your mother thought you did it." "Thanks," both Alexa and I said and left.

By the time June 30<sup>th</sup> came by, there were boxes all over the house, each marked with the room, whose it was and what its contents were. Alexa was ready to go to CAMG to cancel our leases with me and her anytime soon. We then went to bed after the last item, the computer equipment, was packed at 11:39 PM July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2001.

\* \* \* \*

*Beep-beep-beep-beep.*

I was thrashing in my bed. I heard my alarm clock go off. It was 7:30 in the morning. July 4<sup>th</sup>. Independence Day, My mother and late father's anniversary, Mine and Alexa's wedding day... Wait a fucking minute! Let me recall what today is! Independence Day, my mother and late father's anniversary, *Mine and Alexa's wedding day*... Holy shit!! I'm getting married! Today! I jumped out of bed and went to Alexa's room. Her bedroom was strewn with boxes all over the floor. I tried to wake Alexa up, but at first to no avail. "Wake up, lucky girl," I sweetly eluded to Alexa. "Go away," Alexa said, "Let me sleep." "Oh," I said, "you don't want to be happily married and so you can turn back into a mannequin." Alexa got up, said "Fuck you very much! Fuck you and the horse you rode in on! Of course I want to be married." I said "I heard that your wedding day is supposed to be the happiest day of your life. Why are you this way?" "I was going to wake up at 8:15. Oh well, now since you woke me up, time for me to take a shower. It's considered bad luck if the bride takes a shower with the groom on the day of the wedding. You just wait here." Alexa then went to the bathroom and said out loud "Well, this is my last shower in this house. Good-bye, sectional bathroom." Alexa was saying this like she was only temporary. I hope not. But you know, when somebody grows attached to the certain aspects of a house, it seems like you just made a home, but then you have to move. Life's a bitch...sometimes.

Alexa got out of the shower and told me that the shower's all mine. I took a good thirty minutes in the shower, regardless if the hot water ran out. I had to wash my hair, and wash all over, including my back. I then had to spend at least fifteen minutes shaving, getting all of my facial hair off of my face, and brushing my teeth. I then had to use my electric razor to get my sideburns an equal level and to trim my neckline. I then got my suit in a nice hanger/bag combination so it don't get wrinkled. We arrived at Grand Affairs about 10:30, the time we were supposed to have ourselves there so we can have ourselves prepared by 1:30, the time the ceremonies were going to take place. Jeff met us there. "Have your marriage licenses ready?" Jeff asked. I went to my backpack, pulled out a envelope that was marked "City of Virginia Beach - Circuit Court" and affirmed Jeff with a simple "Yep." Jason reached into a Food Lion bag, pulled out an identical envelope, and affirmed Jeff with another simple "Yep."

Jason and I were taking separate smoke breaks from Esuna and Alexa because this wedding was going to be slightly traditional. We knew the rules. No seeing your bride before the ceremony, we know. Jason and I went in and Richard Goenner and Tiffany Brissette were there. I exclaimed "Rich! Tiff! I thought you couldn't come because you are Beach House staff!" Richard leaned over to me and Jason, and said "You know what? Fuck what they say. Tiffany's going to get Alexa and Esuna ready, while I'm going to get you, Kevin and Jason, ready." Tiffany departed off

to go to help Esuna and Alexa get ready, I guess. Richard said "C'mon, Kevin, Jason. We have to go to room 3 to get ready before 1:30.

Richard got us ready in time. Hell, both Jason and I were ready by 12:45. Richard said " You know what? I need a smoke." I pulled out my pack of cigarettes from my backpack, you know, the Basic Full Flavor Box 100's, the type Alexa buys for me by the carton. Esuna only bought Jason Parliament Lights that one time only. Now she buys him the same thing that Alexa buys me. Jason got his pack out from the grocery bag and I said "Me too." Jason said "Same here." We went outside to have a cigarette.

Richard pulled out a pack of Camel Filters Box out of his pocket, but was struggling looking for a lighter. "Hey, guys," he said, "got some fire?" Jason pulled out a red lighter out of his suit pants pocket and gave it to Richard. He lit his cigarette and gave the lighter back to Jason. I plucked a cigarette out of my pack and lit it, also. When we were halfway done with our cigarettes, Richard spotted Alexa and Esuna, in their bridal gowns, coming outside. Richard said "Hey, Kevin, Jason! Brides at nine o'clock!" "Oh, shit," I said. We hid behind the building, asking Richard to keep a lookout for them. We were finished with our cigarettes and quietly snuck in to the building.

Richard, Jason and I saw Tiffany come out, with Tiffany having a Polaroid camera and a few Polaroids in her hand. She asked "Hey, lucky guys." "Hey, Tiffany," I said. Jason said "Yeah. Hey, Tiffany." "Got some pictures of your brides," Tiffany said. I tried to take a look. "Uh-uh-uh," she said, pulling back the pictures. "That would have to wait!" "Damn," I said. Jason said the same thing. Tiffany then asked us if she wanted to take our pictures for mementos to remember our special day. "Sure," both Jason and I said at the same time.

Tiffany said "Jason, stand right here." Jason moved away from me and Richard and Tiffany snapped his picture. Jason sat down. Then she said "Now you, Kevin." I stood in the same place that Jason stood at, and then Tiffany snapped my picture. Tiffany then told me to stay there and told Jason to stand next to me. I placed my arm on Jason's shoulder. "Comical, Kevin," Tiffany said. "I like it." Jason and I started to do the "bunny ears" trick. "C'mon, Kevin and Jason," Tiffany said, "I know that you guys are funny, but the bunny ears *has* to go." "Damn," went Jason. "Now just look natural." I started to take my arm off of Jason's shoulder, but Tiffany said "C'mon! I don't want you to look like a bunch of VICI's!" "VICI's?" I asked. "It's like VICI," Tiffany said, "but it has an A for adult instead. Kevin, put your arm back on his shoulder." I placed my arm on Jason's shoulder. "Now angle it." *Flash!* Our picture was taken. "That's it?" Jason asked. "Yep," Tiffany said, "that's it." Tiffany kept the photos for now.

We looked at the time. It was five minutes to one o'clock. Richard said to me and Jason "You guys look hungry, and the reception ain't until 2:30. Hold on. I'll be back." I asked "Where you're going, Rich?" "To Zero's. I'm buying. What do you want?" I said "Footlong Turkey and Cheese. Go easy on the hot peppers." Jason said "Pizza sub." Richard asked "six inch or footlong?" "Footlong," Jason replied.

Ten minutes later, Richard came back with three subs, small bags of chips, and three twenty-ounce bottles of Pepsi. Richard got himself a ham and cheese sub. We ate for about fifteen minutes, but we only had half of our footlong subs before we had to get ready. "Break a leg, Kevin and Jason," Richard said. Tiffany said "Rich, if I was a VICI, and I heard that, I would've done that. Literally."

Jason and I got in one *final* cigarette before I got my dearly beloved into my life permanently. This time smoking was allowed in the building, but it had to be done at the reception tables. We had ten minutes to get a cigarette, use the bathroom and do whatever we had to do before we had to stand at the altar that was made especially for this occasion. I saw my mother there. She congratulated me on finding a good girlfriend and getting this far. She even commented on how crazy Melanie and Yolonda were in not seeing my full potential. "*Mom!*" I exclaimed. "This is my wedding to *Alexa*, not Melanie or Yolonda! Please!" Mom said "Kevin, I'm sorry. Good luck."

Twenty minutes later, the usher prompted me and Jason to take our places at the altar. I, wanting to get married to Alexa *quick*, took my place. Jason, on the other hand, hesitated until Esuna's mother grabbed a metal folding chair, folded it, hustled toward Jason and said "Jason, either you're getting married to my daughter or you're going to get it." Jason asked "What do you mean, Mrs. Busy?" Jasmine said "If you don't marry Esuna *now*, you and this chair are going to meet face-to-face." Jason got a little terrified by Jasmine threatening Jason to marry Esuna, so he *literally* placed one hand on his ass, like he was picking himself up, said "I'm going! I'm going!" and hauled ass toward the altar. After all, he should be happy that he is marrying Esuna, and unlike his other girlfriends, Esuna doesn't ask him for his money. As a matter of fact, *Esuna* buys Jason stuff and doesn't ask for Jason paying her back. The same happens for me and Alexa.

"Dearly Beloved," he started out, "we are here to gather two men, and two women into holy matrimony. Now we all know that these two people have made their arrangements with each other to love them dearly. If anybody, anywhere feels that these marriages should not take place, please speak now or forever hold your peace." A couple people coughed, somebody hawked a loogie, and one person sneezed. There was a pause of about a minute.

I looked at Alexa, in all of her beauty, pureness and serenity of her in that wedding dress. All thoughts of her sexually were erased from my mind at the moment. I was standing there, thinking of how lucky I am to be married to a woman like Alexa. It seemed like Alexa had a white glow radiating from her. I was thinking in my mind *I love you, Alexa*. Somehow I heard Alexa, but her lips weren't moving, nor was she saying it under her breath, she was saying in the back of my mind *I love you too, Kevin*. I was getting a little chill from my shoulders to my shoes. It wasn't the air-conditioning system, even though it was set to "high," and it was a *little* cool in there. Maybe this is what "real love" is about. Not thinking about your woman as a sex object, or a sex toy, but as an existence of a being. I dunno. It's hard to explain.

The minister was reading off from a book of wedding readings for about five minutes. Then he turned to me and Alexa and said to me "Kevin Havens, do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to love and to cherish, to honor and to hold, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, until death do you part?" I didn't hesitate at all and said "I do." Then he turned to Alexa and said "Alexandra Tilbrook, do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, to love and to cherish, to honor and to hold, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, until death do you part?" Alexa didn't hesitate and said "I do."

Then he turned to Jason and Esuna. He said to Jason "Jason Stratman, do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to love and to cherish, to honor and to hold, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, until death do you part?" Jason tried to hesitate, but looked



quickly at Esuna's mother pointing to a metal chair, and blurted out "I do." Then he turned to Esuna. "Esuna Busy, do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, to love and to cherish, to honor and to hold, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, until death do you part?" Esuna didn't hesitate and said "I do."

Then the minister turned toward the congregation and said "By the powers vested in me by the City of Virginia Beach, I now pronounce you two couples husband and wife. Gentlemen, you may now kiss your brides." Both Jason and I lifted Esuna and Alexa's veils (our own brides, that is) and kissed them. The wedding bands were presented by one of Jeff's assistants at DifLove. Alexa slipped my wedding band on, and I slipped Alexa's on. Jason and Esuna did the same. Damn, it feels good to be married.

There was a good thirty minute break before the reception started, so anybody can feel free to socialize. Both Alexa and I went with Jason and Esuna outside to get a smoke. Alexa and I went outside first, then Esuna and Jason followed. "Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Stratman!" I said to Jason and Esuna. Esuna said "Yeah, Thanks. Congratulations, also, Mr. and Mrs. Havens! Many happy years ahead!" Alexa said "Many happy years ahead, also, Jason and Esuna." My mother came out, with Willie and Justina. Mom said "So, Alexa, welcome to the family." Alexa said "Thanks, Mrs. Havens." "Alexa," Mom said, "call me Vera." I saw Jennifer come out. "Here comes my mother-in-law," I said. Mom saw Jennifer and said "Who? Her?" Alexa said "Vera, meet my mother, Jennifer Tilbrook. Mom, Vera Havens. Vera, Jennifer." Mom shook Jennifer's hand. "So, Vera," Jennifer said, "you're my daughter's mother-in-law." I pointed to Willie, and said "Alexa, this is Willie, your brother-in-law," and I pointed to Justina, "and this is Justina, your sister-in-law." They both said "Hi" to Alexa.

Somebody came out and informed all in attendance that the reception was going to start in ten minutes. So, we all got another cigarette in and went in and used the bathroom and took our seats. The reception was a blast. The one song that Alexa and I danced to was "From This Moment On" by Shania Twain and Bryan White. Jason and Esuna wanted that song, too. So, they danced to it, also.

The food. Ahh, the food! We had our choice of fried chicken, mashed potatoes or french fries, and a lot of other stuff. There was plenty of beer, wine, juice and soda. There was a toast to many happy years of life ahead for the four of us.

After the reception was over, we each went to a hotel, and done something that I'd rather not say in two separate hotel rooms. Our first nights together as husband-wife, not boyfriend-girlfriend were fantastic. Once we closed the doors, we disconnected from each other like we did when we leave Beach House, only different.

*SLAM!*

## Nine

### The Morning (And Week) After

The morning after Alexa and I got out our hotel room, we parked our cars right in front of what is now mine, Alexa and Jason's new apartment. We only packed a suitcase to hold a couple days of clothes. We got in, Alexa told me and Jason to hold off and she and Esuna will be back in about forty-five minutes.

Well, forty-five minutes later, Esuna and Alexa came back a medium-sized U-Haul truck. Alexa came in, pointed toward the door, and said "C'mon Kevin, we're getting our stuff out." Jason said "I don't have much stuff, so can I come along? Saves you a couple trips." Alexa thought on it for a couple minutes and said "Sure, Stratman. Got everything packed up?" "All I got is some clothes and a PC with a *lot* of games," he said. "Come on," Alexa said.

We got into the U-Haul and Alexa asked Jason where he lived. "Off of Military Highway, in College Park," he said. We got there, pulled into the driveway, and Jason rang the doorbell. Jason's house person said "Jason! Why are you home so early? Beach House doesn't let out for another couple hours!" It was 1:30 in the afternoon. "I got married," Jason said, " and I'm moving out. Got a couple people, Kevin and Alexa Havens, my friends, to help me move out." "Okay," she said, "but make it quick. I'm not really supposed to let you in this early." We got in, got to Jason's bedroom that he shares with three other people, took some trash bags, packed up the clothes, loaded them into the cargo area of the truck, and then proceeded on to unhooking the computer and taking it, piece by piece, downstairs, out the door and into the truck. I asked Jason if that was it. He went inside and spent five minutes checking. He came back outside with a few things, like a couple games, some cassettes, and a few packs of cigarettes. "That's it," Jason said. He put the games in the back of the truck and we stopped off before going to mine and Alexa's old place to get a cigarette. Since we didn't want smoke in a U-Haul truck, Alexa and I were fishing around for our pack of cigarettes. Jason pulled out his pack, and handed us a cigarette. "Thanks, Stratman," I said and lit the cigarette up. "Yeah, thanks, Stratman," Alexa also said and lit her cigarette up. Jason said "Since you all hook me up with things, why not I hook you both up with a cigarette?" "Yeah," Alexa said, "You're right."

We then finished our cigarettes and went up Kempsville Road, which lead into Witchduck Road at Princess Anne Road and turned left onto Virginia Beach Boulevard. We got to the address known as 5381 Grand Lake Crescent. I unlocked the door, and we spent about an hour-and-a-half making numerous trips to get forty-five boxes, which thirty were in the bedrooms. Twelve were kitchen things, with the perishables in the cooler, and two were the computer equipment. Right when Jason, Alexa and I got the last three boxes in the truck, Glenna, the house counselor, came by. She saw Jason with a box. She said "No, Kevin and Alexa, Jason has to leave now. He cannot move in. Get that moving truck loaded back up and take his stuff back to where it belongs." Alexa said "Glenna, we're moving out. We got married yesterday. We're going somewhere where we can split the rent four ways. We're moving into Esuna Stratman's, Jason's wife, apartment." Glenna said "So you all got married. I didn't get the lease cancellation notification. Tell Mike I came by. Hope you got the house cleaned by the time you moved out." I said "Take a look yourself, Glenna." Glenna went inside and looked, came back out twenty minutes later, and said "Okay, guys. Good job. I'll tell Shanna that you'll get both of your deposits back, Kevin and Alexa. If she asks why, and sees any discrepancy, I'll tell her that I saw it myself and it looked good to me." She then turned to me and Alexa and said "Good luck on

living independently, and good luck on your future endeavors." Glenna then got into her car and left. We had one final cigarette and then shut the cargo door. I also shut and locked the front door.

We then got in the truck and Alexa offered lunch. We stopped off at the Burger King on Newtown and Baker Roads and got three Whopper with cheese combos, King Sized. We sat inside the restaurant and ate for about a good hour, slamming CAMG housing and their stupid keep-the-house-clean-or-get-kicked-out, guest-no-more-than-five-days, and other rules that made CAMG housing seem like a semi-independent group home. Alexa said that Glenna wanted me and her to go to Beach House three times a week, even though Richard Goenner, my staff and Tiffany Brissette, now Alexa's staff, she switched over from Ellen Jones because she was too overbearing; only asked that Alexa and I come into Beach House one time a week. Both Richard and Tiffany asked Glenna to go with what's on our service plans, not what somebody thinks is best for us. She also told it when Glenna rebutted with the response saying that if Alexa and I only get to Beach House on Mondays, we get Jason Stratman over when we're not supposed to. Jason noted the fact that on Mondays when we go mallrattin', Esuna takes Jason to her house and they do whatever they wanted to do, and usually visit over mine and Alexa's now-old house occasionally and leave in the afternoon, before the night settles in. We then finished eating, refilled our sodas, and took off. Esuna went to the leasing office and got three extra key copies. We then stopped off at our new paradise.

After five hours of putting stuff into our rooms, we felt that we need to make a good utilization of that third room that *was* supposed to be mine and Alexa's room. Since Esuna told me and Alexa to move into Sarah's old room, and since my dresser was already in there, I broke out the ashtrays and we had a cigarette. In the middle of having that cigarette, both Alexa and I suggested that should be a computer room. We put the computers and Esuna got a desk for Jason's computer, so we put the computers, and my line was already set up for use (I called Verizon on the Monday before to give them necessary notification), and Esuna told me that Verizon came by and got the house wired. I had my splitter, so that saved me eighty-five dollars to wire a jack. My computer was set up, connected to the phone line and connected to Pinnacle without a hitch.

Esuna ordered out to Pizza Hut and ordered a bunch of Super Supreme Stuffed Crust pizzas, and sent me and Jason to the 7-Eleven at the corner of Weblin Drive and Baker Road to get a shitload of Dr Pepper and, yes, beer. Alexa handed me two twenty-dollar bills and asked me to get two twelve-packs of Natural Ice and two twelve-packs of Dr Pepper. When we came back to the apartment, with each of us carrying one twelve-pack of each Dr Pepper and Natural Ice, which Jason and I bought separately, the pizza arrived ten minutes later.

We ate our dinner, partied with a lot of music and beer, about a six-pack to each of us, and went into Beach House the next day. We stayed up all night, hoping that no staff caught us drunk, because the penalty of intoxication at Beach House is a night in Detox, and facing a possible thirty-day suspension. Richard, and now Tiffany, doesn't give a fuck if we were up all night drinking. Just as long as we don't constantly do it. It's the other staff members that will pop into their "Fuck House Favoritism" mode and call Detox to get all *four* of us taken away.

Tiffany was sitting at her computer, and said "Hey, Kevin and Alexa Havens, Jason and Esuna Stratman, how was your wedding?" She winked to signal to us to not to give it away that she was there. "Oh," I said, "it was great. You should've been there!" I winked back at Tiffany to

signal to her that I knew not to give it away that she was there, but "wasn't" so she don't get chastised by Amy Darden, the director of Beach House, for going to a non-clubhouse sponsored event. But, as I found out, it was both Rich and Tiff's day off, and the fourth of July was only a social day and only Chiquita from Food Services and Melissa from Clerical headed the social day while Jason, Esuna, Alexa and I got married. While they were having leftovers, we were having fried chicken and other stuff and Richard bought subs for me, Jason and himself for a quickie lunch. After the reception, Richard and Tiffany left for home. So what's there for Tiffany and Richard, our favorite staff, to do when they have a day off and want to help out? They came to our double wedding!

We stayed all day, and at 3:30, we took off for home. Alexa *almost* started to turn down Nelms Lane, until I had to remind her we don't live there anymore. "Oh," Alexa said and turned into the La-z-boy gallery and turned around and went back on Virginia Beach Boulevard. I even taught her the shortcut through Davis Street, to Davis Way, then to Aubrey Drive to Baker Road. I told her it saved her the hassle of the left-turn light on Newtown Road and Baker Road, and all she had to do was go straight down Baker Road at the Newtown light to go straight to our apartment. We got in and celebrated our first weekend as husbands and wives.

The day after, Jason's stepfather came by with a network card and some CAT5 crossover cable. "Heard you two want to be on the Internet together," he said, popped open Jason's computer and got both mine and Jason's computers connected over a network. He even installed Windows 98 on my computer to take advantage of the Internet Connection Sharing applet. He even assigned user names and passwords to the computers. Mine was havens3, what I wanted, and Jason's was wingnut\_dwarf. After I got the kinks of Windows 98 on my computer solved, I reinstalled my software and was back on the Internet within a couple hours. I sent Jason an instant network message to download Eudora instead of using Outlook Express. I wasn't connected to the Internet, so when he started up Internet Explorer, my modem came up dialing my connection to Pinnacle. It was on my screen, but we both were connected to the Net. I called my mother, on Esuna's line, telling her that I moved. She asked why so soon, I told her "Mom, remember that I got married?" She said "Yeah, but you couldn't stay at your current place." I said "Mom, when there's a married couple living in Beach House housing, and there's another guy living there that's single, it doesn't look right." "Oh, I see," Mom said. "So now where you're living?" "In with the other couple that got married with me and Alexa, Jason and Esuna Stratman." "Okay," Mom said, "but don't get yourself into a lot of trouble. Anyway, it reminds me of that stupid show, what is it called?" "*Friends*," I said. "I'm always on the Net when it comes on. Esuna watches it." Mom said "Kevin, it usually doesn't look right when two married couples are living together. A lot of fights can occur even with the *slightest* indifferences happen." "I know, Mom," I said, "We've been friends for quite some time and I'm quite uncertain if *that's* gonna happen. But if it is, Alexa and I would move out to our own apartment. Anyway, the rent, by splitting it four ways, it's cheaper. The utilities we only pay here are phone, electricity and Internet, and by splitting that by four, it's dog-ass cheap. The utilities covered by our rent are gas, water and sewage. Our rent's about \$490 a month for a three-bedroom apartment, about \$122.50 a month for all four of us. And that never changes. Unlike CAMG's rent, which goes up, and up, and up...it goes on and on." Mom asked "Why a three-bedroom? Why not a two-bedroom? It's cheaper." I was trying to quickly cover up the situation when Sarah turned back into a mannequin, and that Esuna and Alexa were once mannequins, I said "What if we have guests? They need a place to sleep. Anyway, we need a place to hang out, so that's also our computer room. Right now mine and Jason's computers are networked, so we share an Internet connection. Right now, we're on the Net right now." Mom asked "How did you call me?" "Two lines," I said. "I use my own line as a 'hotline' for my friends and a line to the Internet. Don't worry, Mom, the number hasn't changed. The other line is used for normal telephone calls. And yes, I pay for both. We all do. We believe on the fact of 'you use it, you pay for it.' No ifs, ands or buts about it." Mom said "You still haven't told me where you lived." "Oh," I said, "We live off of Baker Road..." Mom interjected with "The same place you used to live with that

asshole Jason Johnson?" "No," I said. "Anyway, Jason Stratman can't go back to Beach House housing. We live in an apartment community called 'The Hamptons.' Before you go to my old place, the one that was by the 7-Eleven, you turn left. Then you make a right, then turn right. You will see a blue Ford Focus and a purple Plymouth Neon there. Alexa's car, the Focus, has the license plate that says 'ALEXA 77' on it. That's the car Alexa and I use. It's in front of the apartment." Mom said that she had to go.

Sunday, Jason, Esuna, Alexa and I had a little drinking party. Alexa went to the Spencer's at Lynnhaven Mall the Monday before and picked up a drinking board game called *Passout*. To tell you the truth, I won. And it was my first time playing the game. We stayed up all night after downing twenty-four cans of beer and trying to abate the effects of alcohol by drinking coffee. Strong coffee. We didn't get up until 10:30 the next morning, knowing that we had to get to Beach House. We jetted like mad dogs to Beach House and got our money. We didn't go to the mall, just went grocery shopping and went home.

## Ten

### Changing Faces

After Jason, Esuna, Alexa and I spent weeks on end surfing the Internet, going into Beach House, going to the mall, drinking our asses off and just plain having fun, Alexa and I thought, along with Esuna and Jason, to have a child.

Yes, a child is a *huge* responsibility, and there's a *huge* financial responsibility associated with it, so all four of us went around looking for jobs. *Both* Esuna and I had to slap Jason silly even though he said "Yeah, bye-bye Social Security benefits!" I had to tell Jason "You *can't* support a child on SSI alone, Stratman." Jason returned with "How come *other* Beach House members whom are married can do it and do just fine?" Alexa replied with "Because they are stupid schizophrenic assholes who think they *can* do it, but then give their child to their parents or up to the system to handle their child because they *thought* they *could* do it, but they didn't have enough money to support the child. Anyway, Stratman, SSI is welfare. Do you want to live off of welfare while supporting a child?" I looked into mine and Alexa's room and pulled out a Social Security document titled *SSI Rules To Help You Work*. I told Alexa, Jason and Esuna that they can make about \$1048 in pre-tax wages a month and still earn \$1 in SSI. I told them, "Me, it's a little different. I can make only \$150 in pre-tax wages before my \$28 SSI check goes bye-bye. But, I can make up to \$5,500 to \$7,500 a year before my Survivors gets cut completely. See here, I can get a job that pays up to \$10 an hour to earn my quota. You guys might as well get a job somewhere." Alexa and I took off. Esuna and Jason took off, too.

We went our separate ways. We told each other to meet each other at the house by six o'clock. Alexa and I stopped off at Ticketmaster to get jobs as Customer Care Representatives because there was an advertisement on TV asking for all the help they could get. Alexa and I got hired the same day, but we were asked to sit at separate desks distant from each other because they didn't want people who were already working there get any ideas. We went home three hours ahead from Esuna and Jason because Alexa got herself a Sprint PCS phone the month before (it's now October) and they called us from a pay phone telling us they were at K-Mart looking for a job. The manager told them to wait at the snack bar because they were hiring in time for the Christmas rush. Esuna applied for a number of positions, but Esuna wanted either cashier, jewelry counter associate or a toy department associate (so she could feel like working with children before she even had one.) Jason, on the other hand, wanted to take any job that was open. They called us on mine and Alexa's way home that they might be late.

Esuna and Jason arrived at the house at 7:30. Jason told me that he is working at K-Mart as a "all-around person," and Esuna is working in the jewelry department. They both start at \$6.00 an hour. I told Jason and Esuna that Alexa and I are working at the Ticketmaster as customer care reps. During our training, we get \$5.50 an hour, then after training, our pay shoots up to \$7.00 an hour. Esuna said "Alexa, girlfriend, say good-bye to your SSI!" Alexa responded with "Esuna, at least *I* would be able to support a child." Esuna started to get pissed off and say "Well, Alexa, at least *I'll* be able to support a child, too!" Alexa rebutted with "I remember when you and I were children, you'd play with boyish things *instead* of playing with girl things!" "Shut the fuck up, Alexa," Esuna said, "you know I was a tomboy." "Yeah," Alexa said, "Until you were sixteen, and you had to go to your first sophomore dance! Your mother had to get the knots out of your hair and *force* you to wear a dress to even dance with that Jamie Lawson!" "That jabroni was such a dipshit," Esuna said. "I felt so not with it when I danced with him. But you had to be

sitting at the wall of the gym at Bayside because *both* you and I had to go to feel safe. David Andrews was your first love, and you never danced with him! You had to call *mommy* just to take you home! You're such a pussy, Alexa, you know that?" "Oh, is that so?" Alexa responded. "Wanna piece of me? C'mon! I want you to!" Esuna got up, yelled in Alexa's face "Yeah! That is so!" Alexa got up, said "Wanna piece of me, bitch?" I had to get up, restrain Alexa, and Jason had to do the same to Esuna. "Alexa," I said, while preventing Alexa from even flying a fist toward Esuna. "Alexandra Tiffany Havens!!!" I had to restrain her even more. I even tried the Vulcan Death Pinch to succumb her, but to no avail. Now I know that the move is only good on *Star Trek*. She hit me when I did that. "Goddammit, Kevin, you uncle fucker," she said, "that hurt!" Jason was trying to restrain Esuna while telling Esuna "*Esuna Busy Stratman!* Knock it the fuck off!" Esuna uses her maiden name, "Busy," as her married middle name because Esuna, technically when she was "born," didn't have a middle name. Jason was busy restraining Esuna, while I was restraining Alexa. I yelled "*Alright!!! Knock it off!*" Alexa literally collapsed in my arms and said "I'm sorry, Kevin." I told her "Don't apologize to me, Alexandra. Apologize to your best friend and my best friend, also." "*No*," she said. "*Now*, Alexandra," I told her. She refused more. I had to tell her that if she and I wants to keep living here with Esuna and Jason, my best friend for four years, she'd better apologize, and she better do it *quick*. "*Okay, okay*," Alexa said. "I'll do it." In the meanwhile, Jason was telling Esuna to apologize. And, as usual, because of Esuna's attitude problem, she was refusing. Jason was coercing his wife to also apologize. "Okay," Esuna said, "if it means us staying here and having us have drinking parties every weekend, I'll do it, under one condition." Jason asked "Uh oh, what is it?" Esuna said "At least Alexa doesn't try to pull no stupid shit on me for a while." Esuna walked up to Alexa and said "I'm sorry, Alexa." Alexa said "Apology accepted, Esuna. I'm sorry, too." Esuna said "Apology accepted. By the way, you're buying the beer for tonight. I bought it last week. This week I'm buying the food for delivery." "Oh *scheiße*," Alexa said. Esuna said "You know the rules, Alexa. You and I alternate on the beer and the delivery food every week. One of us buys the beer, while the other buys the delivery food. It's been established when all four of us moved in. When our husbands get the source of income, then they get into the rotation. For now, it's just you and I."

Alexa took off in her car, left me with Esuna and Jason and I went on my computer looking for delivery places to try. Pizza Hut was getting old, Bamboo Hut was getting too "tried-and-true" and we had enough of Chanello's and KFC doesn't deliver. Not in this area, as I think. I told Esuna to lay off going to call the "usual" delivery places and just get chicken. "Anyway," I told Esuna, "beer goes great with chicken." "Yeah, Kevin," Esuna said. "But KFC doesn't deliver." I said "Esuna, I can go with Jason to KFC to get some food." Jason interjected with "Who says that I'm going with you, Kevin?" Esuna said "Well, your best friend's not going to carry all that food by *himself*, do you think?" Jason replied with "Okay, honey, if we want to eat, I'll go with him." Esuna reached into her purse and pulled out two twenty-dollar bills. Esuna told both Jason and I to get the following: one bucket of Original Recipe, one bucket of Extra Tasty Crispy and one bucket of Hot and spicy. Eight-piece buckets of that. One order of biscuits, a large mashed potatoes and gravy, large cole slaw and a large baked beans. "Forty dollars should cover it," she said.

We started to leave out the door when Alexa pulled up with something new. A twelve-pack of Steel Reserve twelve-ounce cans. That's 144 ounces of 8.1% alcohol by volume lager. Esuna said "Goddamn, Alexa! Where'd you find *that*? All I saw them in was the 40's and the 24-ounce cans! This is something new!" "I found this at the Food Lion at Newtown and Baker. New product, or as so they say. Only cost me \$5.01 after tax." Alexa then spotted us in our coats and shoes and asked "So, guys, where are you going?" Jason replied with "KFC. Getting food. We are walking there." Alexa said "Oh no you're not. The traffic on Newtown and Baker is hell. It took me about five minutes just to get back out on Baker Road. I had to go up Lake Edward Drive just to avoid

traffic because it's a *crawl*." Then she told me and Jason to meet her at her car. She'll be back in a couple minutes. She had to use the bathroom.

Alexa wanted to use the drive-thru, but I told her that the employees usually fuck up the orders if you do that. I told her "We'll be inside. Give us about ten, maybe fifteen minutes at the most." Jason and I went inside and ordered three eight-piece buckets of one Original Recipe, one Extra Tasty Crispy and another one Hot and Spicy. We then ordered a dozen biscuits, a large mashed potatoes and gravy, a large cole slaw and a large baked beans. I started going off with that WAV file that's on fartfarm.com, you know, the one that goes "July is National baked Bean Month..." Alexa responded with "Guys, it's October. You've shoulda done that three months ago." We then left for the house.

We partied with the food and the beer, and we each had sex afterwards.

A week later, Alexa and Esuna went to the Walgreens to get a two-pack of early pregnancy testers. I don't know Jack and Shit about reading those things, and Jack left town. Esuna and Alexa spent five minutes to themselves in the rooms while Jason and I were sitting on our computers bullshitting on the Internet. The wait was painful. *Is my wife going to have a child?* We asked ourselves.

Esuna came out of her and Jason's room first. Esuna likes to make things seem different at first, but then breaks down laughing and tells the person who she is trying to muster up the real thing. Alexa, on the other hand, tells them straight up. Esuna said "Jason..." Jason said "What?" "I don't know how to make this to you, but I'm pregnant!" Jason exclaimed "*What?*" "Yes, honey, I am. You should be proud." Jason said "Proud? I'm flabbergasted!" Then Jason said "Oh, Esuna honey, I don't know how to put this, but I'm happy!"

Alexa came out her room next. She just came out, came toward me, kissed me, and said "Honey, I'm pregnant." I got up from my chair, and hugged her. "This is the best day of our lives!"

Now this meant that we *all* have to make subtle changes in our lives. Beer drinking was *out* for the women. They stated that they'll buy it for me and Jason, but they won't be drinking it. Because if you look at the Surgeon General's warning on each and *every* beer can, bottle, what have you, that says "Pregnant women should not drink alcoholic beverages because of the risk of birth defects." I don't want a fucked-up child, and neither does Jason. I also heard that even *cigarette smoking* can cause birth defects, but I remember that my mother smoked when she was bearing Willie and Justina. But, on the other hand, she cut back *dramatically*. I told Alexa if she wants to bear a healthy child, she'd better cut back on the smoking.

We went into Beach House the Monday after and I got my food, and my money (a paltry twenty dollars, because I'll be starting work the next week at Ticketmaster). I chose not to tell Laura *yet* because one instant you tell Laura, she asks you when you get your first paycheck, and on that week your first paycheck is given to you, your spending gets *cut*. I'd rather just keep it a *little* secret for now.

We decided to go to the mall and just hang out all day. At 3:30, we got back in our cars and went to the grocery store. Now since Jason gets gift cards, all four of us combine our groceries,



\$80 for both me and Jason, and usually another \$80 combined for Alexa and Esuna, which is about \$160 a week for all four of us, and we allow each other to use anything we would like to use of the other couples'. As long as you return the favor by buying something identical to what you ate.

A week passed on. No drinking party was done this weekend because of two pregnant women. We just ordered a pizza and had a twelve-pack of soda to go along with it.

Sunday, I knew that I have to start work Monday at Ticketmaster at 2:30 and work until 7:30 for training. A simple five-hour training at \$5.50 an hour. So, I took a shower and went to bed at 11:30. I laid off the stay-up juice and drank orange juice and went to bed right after I had the juice and a cigarette. I went to my room, set my alarm clock to 7:30 and crawled into bed. Alexa followed. "Honey," she said, "remember that I have to go to work at the same time you do. So, good night, honey," kissed me and we both fell asleep.

My alarm clock went off right at 7:30. Alexa and I jumped out of bed. We went into the kitchen and made a pot of coffee. Esuna and Jason, having to start at K-Mart the same day, at 3:30 to 8:30, had a pot of coffee and put their basics of their uniforms on, white shirt and black pants, and putting their red vests and name tags in a bag and making sure they keep in their car while we're at Beach House getting our money and other stuff.

We headed off to Beach House and it was a quick in-and-out operation. Both me and Jason got our money and our food cards and left to get lunch. Since we're now working, small pleasures like hanging out at the mall and Jason and I blowing twenty dollars on cheap games and petty things like cheap lunches at McDonalds and trying to blow the money at places like FuncoLand, Dollar Tree and the like are out of the question. Now we're working for our money to spend on other things, but bills and other related things are priority one before we can go down to EB, Babbage's, FuncoLand and buy games and PC accessories.

After we all had lunch at CiCi's for the buffet, we left the pizza buffet about one o'clock. We headed back on the Interstate to the Pembroke area and Alexa was dying for a cigarette. I let her have one, because she hadn't had one since 10:30. I said "Okay, honey, you may have one." She pulled out a cigarette out of her purse and lit one. I also had one. We looked at the time. It was 2:15 after Alexa and I had about one-quarter of a pack of cigarettes to ourselves. We went to our car and we pulled out our name badges. Alexa started to put on mine. I quickly spotted it. "Hello there, Kevina Havens." I started to put on Alexa's. "Hello there, Alex Havens," she said. Then Alexa said "Oh shit! We got each other's badges on! Let's get it right this time." I said "Don't worry, Alexa honey. It's just first-day nervousness." We switched our badges around and put on our *correct* name badges. "There," I said. "Looks better, since now we have our correct badges on."

We walked into the office and went inside the "employees only" area. A security guard who didn't know us at first, because we were new, asked us to show our employee identification. He was not in a good mood, because he's seen fake ones before. He radioed into the Human Resources department to see if a Kevin Havens and an Alexandra Havens works there. A good thirty seconds later, I heard over the Rice Krispies of static, "Yes, Mr. and Ms. Havens does work here. They're our new hires. Send them upstairs for training." "Mr. and Ms. Havens, you're needed upstairs for your training. Anyway, you're in the wrong area." "We're sorry," I said to the

security guard. "No need for an apology, Mr. Havens," he said, "It's your first day of work here, and people do get lost around here. It's only natural." He then looked at Alexa's left hand and saw the engagement ring and the wedding band, and the wedding band on my left hand. "So, husband and wife, eh?" "Yeah," I said. "We're newlyweds. Got married on this past July on the 4<sup>th</sup>." "Independence Day newlyweds, eh? You people are going to be having a long marriage," he said, "because people married on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July have long happy marriages."

We went upstairs and done our training. A week later, we were upgraded to part-time representatives. We were taking orders like a pro, and we were working staggered shifts so Alexa and I don't get involved with our personal life when we should be worrying about our job when we're working. That usually meant that I had to take the bus. So, on select Tuesdays, I had to stop off at Pembroke to get a ten-ride farecard for the bus. Alexa gave me the money. Or usually I'd wait at Pembroke Mall for Alexa to get off of work, or hitch a ride with Esuna and Jason when they got off of work at K-Mart.

Two weeks later, Alexa and I got our paychecks. Alexa and I'd rather wait until we got off the clock. We got off the clock. Alexa said "You first, honey." I said "No, Alexa. *You* first." Alexa said "Okay, if you want, we'll *both* open our paychecks together. On my count: three, two, one." Alexa and I *carefully* opened our paychecks and *both* Alexa and I said "Oh my God... Disconnect my Internet!" Alexa asked me how much did I get. "I got \$378.45. How much did you get?" Alexa said "About the same as you, \$377.33." Alexa then said "You know that if you put this into Beach House's account, all you'll get is a little twenty dollars a week to spend that off of. I'm going to help you open your *very own* checking account with me at First Union." I said "Alexa, when I had a checking account with NationsBank, now Bank of America, I overdrafted. I owe about \$100 or so." Alexa then said "We'll stop off at the Bank of America and pay that off. Then we'll stop off at First Union and help you open a new account. And this time *I'm* holding your ATM card and your checkbook so you don't do that again."

We then stopped off at the Bank of America at Pembroke One and told the teller that I had a past-due overdraft balance from four years ago. She asked me for my ID, entered some numbers into a computer and told me that it was only \$45. All I told her is that I all I have is a payroll check. I was lucky. The drawing bank was Bank of America. She cashed it, took out the balance and told me that the update will be posted to the verification network within twenty-four hours. So, that meant that Alexa and I cannot go to First Union and open myself an new account today. I told Alexa after I went outside that I couldn't open a new account right away. That I had to do it tomorrow. Alexa asked me to give her the money, put it into an envelope and gave me a twenty-dollar bill and we stopped off at the First Union so Alexa can deposit her check. She put twenty dollars of my money into the mix. "You're buying your own cigarettes this time, Kevin," she said. "But since you can't open an account today, I'm depositing \$20 of your money into my account so I can buy them for you." We then left the drive-thru window and headed to Food Lion and got a couple cartons of cigarettes.

We then went to bed, since tomorrow was our day off, we went to bed late. We knew that we can't do this *every* day, but since we hadn't a day off in two and a half weeks, we went to bed partying freedom from Laura's paltry \$15-\$20 a week spending.

## Eleven

### The Visitor From Hell

After Alexa and I been working at Ticketmaster for about a month, and Esuna and Jason have been working at K-Mart for the same period of time, both Alexa and Esuna got themselves a computer. Alexa is frugal when it comes to groceries, food preparation, rent, utilities and gasoline, but she is outrageously *not* frugal when it comes to consumer electronics (like the time when she got the PlayStation when we were dating). Alexa stopped off at the Gateway Country store and got herself a Pentium III 1 gigahertz with 128 megabytes of RAM (she beat me by thirty-two megs), Windows Me (I still have Windows 98 that Stratman's stepfather gave me, and I'm not upgrading any further), a DVD-ROM drive and a CD-RW drive (I'm stuck with a 16x CD-ROM drive that Richard Goenner gave to me and I'm not complaining), and a 50 gigabyte hard drive, enough to store a lot of roms, emulators, MP3's that Jason and I were getting off the Gnutella network, and Corel WordPerfect Suite 2000 Voice-enhanced edition, along with a full install of Microsoft Office 2000, with room to spare for data files and enough space to install Doom, all three versions of Quake and all the first-person perspective shooters and *still* have space to spare. "Damn, Alexa," I said, "your computer's going to be the file server!" "Not if I can help it," she said.

Esuna, on the other hand, went to CTI in Newport News because, for one, my computer was *once* built there for Don, but once Don upgraded to a Duron, he gave me the half-unassembled computer to me and told me to have fun with it. I got it up and working in one night. Of course, there's the occasional Windows protection error, and I've learned to put up with it. Esuna came back with a Duron-700 with 64 megs, and a 56x CD-ROM drive. She only got a 15-gig hard drive, but it was enough.

After a couple weeks of trying to get bills paid, food on the table, and enough gas in the car to get me and Alexa to work every day, we sometimes work seven-day work weeks, especially when a big event's coming to the Verizon Wireless Virginia Beach Amphitheater, and they need enough employees to cover all the ticket sales. As a matter of fact, taking one order, then trying to crack your knuckles to get a quick stretch in, seems impossible, but before you could do it, another call comes in. It is stressful, yes, but it is rewarding work. We barely had enough money to even get Jason and I a couple Camos, a beer a bit stronger than Steel Reserve and a simple pizza, usually we had to settle for Pepperoni because it is cheaper, and no Stuffed Crust pizzas. We now mostly order from Chanello's because it's cheaper. Then we had to get the soda for Alexa and Esuna because they can't drink because they're pregnant, and all in the while me studying for my driver's license exam because Alexa said there's a big surprise for me on my birthday. Alexa likes to think ahead... *way* ahead. I always told her not to think too far ahead because there might be something coming up before then and she couldn't do it.

But in the meanwhile, Alexa wanted me to open my own bank account. I told her to put me down as a co-holder because we are married and that's what married couples do. Alexa obliged, and the new checks that said both mine and Alexa's name were mailed, and my ATM card was in the mail with it. As always, so I don't withdraw money willy-nilly, Alexa is holding on to it. This happened a week ago.

Alexa pulled out a Class of 1995, Bayside High School yearbook and I asked her to turn it to the

Senior class, to the L's. I pointed to David Laws' picture and told her "Alexa, that guy right there, David, me and him have been best friends since second grade." "Oh, I know David," Alexa said. "You know David?" "Yes," Alexa said. "Somebody was trying to set me up with him, but I didn't want to. I heard he was dating somebody else. That's when I met you, but you seemed like you weren't ready yet." Alexa then turned to the T's. She pointed to her picture. "That's me," she said. "I had shorter hair then. People thought I was not with it. When David told me that you went to SECEP for school, people thought I was crazy trying to date a person who went cuckoo. I told them to fuck off. But a teacher overheard me and I got ISS for two days. I wasn't giving up. But when I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, they put me in Beach Psych and set me up for Beach House. That was after I graduated. Then when those bitches Nicole and Rebecca turned you down at the Valentine's Day party, I came up to you, but you didn't want to speak to me. I told you that I can be better than those two jabronies. You said yes, I moved in with you and we are now husband and wife." I responded with "I thought that DifLove.com set me up with you." Alexa put her left index finger on my lips and said "Ix-nay on the DifLove thing. Let me tell you something. Once I married you, and Esuna married your best friend, Jason, another interrupt happened. Okay. I know that 'Sarah Roberts' turned back into a mannequin, but once the marriage process happens, we are humans for life. Say if you dumped me in the dating procedure, I would just simply turn back into a mannequin. But say if you divorce me, and I'm not saying you would, I would just go through the court proceedings and find another boyfriend." She then went to her room. "See this?" she asked. It was her high school diploma, signed by the principal, Michael J. Debranski, and the superintendent back then. "This is real. It is not a computer-generated piece of paper generated by DifLove. That yearbook was not altered in any way. See here, Kevin, I'm the real thing." I quipped "Who are you and what did you do to my wife Alexa?" Alexa said "Kevin, stop kidding. I *am* your wife Alexa. Things are a little different since DifLove set us up and now this is reality. You'll just have to face it."

After a couple weeks of working, bullshitting on the Internet and Jason and I having our Friday-night drinking parties, my line rang. This happened when Jason and I got off the Internet. I picked it up before the Caller ID can say who it was. "Sup," I said. "Who's this?" the person on the other end said. It was a female voice. "I'm Kevin Havens, who are you?" "This is Katie Smith, Alexa's friend from Bayside. Can I speak to Alexa?" I handed the phone to Alexa. "Who is it?" she asked me. "Some woman named Katie Smith. Says she knows you from school." "I don't know no... Wait a minute! Hand it here!"

Alexa talked to this Katie person for a good twenty minutes, all in the while Jason and I were tapping our feet and humming video game music to each other to signal that both *Jason and I* wanted to get back on the Internet. There were more MP3's out there on the Gnutella network, and we're going to find them. Also we wanted to get a hard-to-find ROM for the Super Nintendo and only Plasticman's Emulation Zone had it. The guy just uploaded it to his server. "Okay, Alexandra Tiffany Havens, you had enough talking to your girlfriend. Now can we get back on the Internet?" I heard Alexa say "Yes, he did say 'Havens.' I'm married to my first crush of two years, Kevin, for four months now and it's been great." Alexa turned to me. "Kevin, Stratman..." Jason said "Alexa, you can now stop calling me 'Stratman.' There's two Stratmans around here, me and Esuna." I looked at Jason strangely. "Aw, alright. You may keep on doing it. You've been doing it ever since you both met me." Alexa said "Kevin, Stratman, as I was saying, when you get your paychecks in a week or so, save up a little so you both can get some beer." I asked "What about the ABC store?" "Yeah, get whatever you guys want from there. Just get enough for you two plus one more. She's coming over next Friday." I told her "Alexa, you know if we have another person for our drinking parties, usually they'll have to sleep in the computer room. And you just got a new \$1500 Gateway computer. I don't want it stolen or you come running to me to run the restore disc on it. You just be careful. New Equipment Rule No. 1: If the computer room has a new PC in it, to prevent people to damage it, the guest must sleep on

the sofa in the den. Subpart A: Those restore discs provided by major companies delete everything and get it back to the way it came to the house: Windows and included software. No MP3's, no data, no network user info. Subpart B: If it's stolen, the police can't do shit unless you have the serial number. Which I think you *don't*." "You're right," Alexa said. "I don't. Hold on. Katie, I'll have to call you back later. Bye." She then hung up the phone. Alexa took a piece of paper off of my printer and copied down the serial number of the computer and then the serial number of Windows Millennium Edition. I have my Windows 95 and 98 serial numbers written down, but alas, not my PC's serial number because it is home-built, so in essence, it has a serial number of 1.

That Friday, Alexa and I have to work another staggered shifts, so Alexa took me to Pembroke Mall and let me hang out. She gave me my ATM card. "Remember, Kevin," she said, "*only* withdraw no more than sixty dollars. If the statement comes in and I saw that you withdrew more, you and I are going to have a long talk. You have to go to work in two hours." I asked her if I could see a movie. "No," she said, "you *may not* go to a movie. By the time the movie's over, you'll be late for work." "Alexa," I said, "I would like to maybe hang out at Bit Of England and maybe pick up a couple 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition AD&D rule books." "Which ones?" Alexa asked. "Oh," I said, "Player's Handbook and Dungeon Master's Guide and some dice. Maybe I'll head to Dollar Tree and get some pencils and notebook paper and then get myself some dinner at Subway." Alexa said "You downloaded that free QuickDice roller from ZDNet. Save yourself a few dollars and use that dice roller on both yours and Stratman's computers. Oh, get yourself a new belt at Sears. Your belt is about ready to fall apart. You got that belt four years ago at Marshalls when you worked there, and now it's time to get a new one. Use the money you saved on not buying dice for a new belt. Oh, Katie likes D&D. She said that she'll like to play with you guys. She's already got a character pre-rolled for herself to play with you and Stratman. Right now she might have already made it there and is talking with Stratman and Esuna. Oh, one last thing. Save yourself seventy-five cents so you can ride the bus home." "I have a ten ride farecard with three rides left on it," I said. "Okay," Alexa said, "just make sure you get yourself in that door and clocked in by 7:30." I looked at my watch. It was 5:25. "I won't forget," I said. Alexa then dropped me off by the theater and the old Upton's and she said "Remember, 7:30." "I won't," I said, kissed Alexa, got out, shut the door and she took off back toward the K-Mart and disappeared past the Pembroke transfer station. I walked inside the mall.

Since Pembroke Mall seemed "new" to me, it's because I've been bullshitting around at Lynnhaven Mall for two years. It looked way different than I remembered. A lot of stores were closed down. I stopped off at the SunTrust ATM by the ice cream shop and inserted my card. I entered my PIN, selected to withdraw from checking, hit 60.00, hit the key to confirm. Then a "Processing Transaction, Please Wait" screen showed, then not more than ten seconds later, a screen came up telling me "You are using an ATM not by your bank. A \$1.50 processing fee will be deducted from your account if you wish to continue." Then it asked me if I wanted to continue. I muttered "Yeah, yeah, yeah," and hit the button for "yes." Then another "Processing Transaction, Please Wait" screen showed up. Then I heard a whir, then it told me to remove my money, then told me to take my card, then take my receipt. I put my card, my money and the receipt into my wallet. I put the receipt behind my half-fare ID so just in case Alexa wants verification that I withdrew \$60, and no more. I then stopped off at Bit of England, but first catching a glimpse of the old PlayMore store, smirking and said "Burn in hell, FuckMore and you too, Jeremiah, for being the biggest asshole there ever was," in a low undertone. I then walked into Bit Of England. I picked out the AD&D 3<sup>rd</sup> edition rules and the DM's guide and they were priced lower than anywhere else I found it. I walked up to the counter and the clerk asked me if I needed dice. I said no. The things I needed were 3<sup>rd</sup> edition character sheets. I instantly changed my mind, put the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition rules back and got the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition revised rules. The books were \$10 apiece. Saved myself a bunch of money. I then walked to Sears and got a nice

leather belt for \$15. I had about an hour and a half to blow, maybe less than that, so I went to Subway and got a BMT with everything. I also got a large soda and a bag of Doritos. I sat down and ate the sub. I had thirty minutes to kill. I also had twenty dollars left. The Coney Island arcade was tempting, but when it comes to me and arcades, I totally lose track of time. I then walked into Waldenbooks and got myself a *PC World* magazine. That left me with enough money to buy a twelve-pack of beer. Forget the ABC store, because it'll be closed by the time I get off of work, and there's no way in hell I'm walking from Janaf all the way back to our apartment community, no matter *if* Jason Johnson taught me shortcuts through the Hollywood subdivision of Norfolk. Lake Edward itself is dangerous enough, and me walking with a fifth of liquor through the "heart" of Lake Edward is bait. Pure bait for me to get the shit kicked out of me and my liquor taken away from me. My reminder alarm beeped at 7:15. That meant to stop anything that I was doing, go try to get a bottle of soda at Dollar Tree, get in a couple cigarettes and walk all the way to the Ticketmaster office. I was at the EB looking at the Game Boy Advance games. Damn. The Game Boy sure has advanced since its black-and-white boxy introduction with *Tetris* back in 1989. But the *one* good thing about *all* the Game Boy flavors Nintendo introduced, Nintendo made each flavor of the Game Boy backwards-compatible. So, the Game Boy Advance *can* play the first Game Boy game, Tetris, all the way up to the new games. I quickly hustled out of EB, Went to Dollar Tree, but cursing in German under my breath about some old lady practically buying out the store. All I had was two 24-ounce bottles of Shasta Root Beer. When that old lady finally wrote her check, I looked at the time. It was 7:21. Right when she got her check approved and stuff in her hands, I muttered "About friggin' time." The person behind me asked me "What's your problem, mister? Can't you be respectful of the old lady?" I said "Ma'am, I have to get to work in less than ten minutes." She said "Well, you should've thought of that before you came in here." I muttered, near silence, "STFU." STFU means "Shut The Fuck Up." I got my bottles bagged, my change given to me and I quickly jetted out of the store, headed toward the center court, past the lottery machines, turned at the area where the movie theater was, jetted out the door, stopped and lit a cigarette, making quick service of lighting it, and made like lightning across Constitution Drive, past the Pembroke East transfer center, past the public health department, and right to the Ticketmaster office, while puffing on the cigarette like a chimney. I had five minutes to spare. "Phew," I said. "I can't believe how I did that, jet across a lot of obstacles and get here with five minutes to spare. And I thought I was *really* out of shape. Maybe not." I then lit another cigarette and quickly smoked it. It was 7:30. I walked in, clocked in, got a swig of my root beer, plugged in my headset, logged in and got to work.

Three hours later, Alexa went off of work while I went on break. I handed Alexa ten bucks. I asked her to stop off at the Food Lion and get a twelve-pack of Natural Ice and spend the rest on a few bags of potato chips. Alexa took off. But before that, she said "Honey, you'll be off in two hours. I'm going to pick you up. Be outside when I do. Okay?" "Yeah," I said. I finished my cigarette and went inside and went back to work.

After I got off of work, Alexa wasn't outside at the time. I lit a cigarette, and when I was halfway done, I saw an outline of a Ford Focus coming toward me. *Naw*, I thought, *that couldn't be Alexa. After all, that car looks black.* I kept on smoking my cigarette. The car turned into the parking lot. The car horn beeped. I ignored it. It beeped again. Then the passenger side window went down. "*Kevin!*" This voice sounded like Alexa's. I pointed to myself going "*Me?*" I then looked at the license plate. Only Alexa's car has the license plate that says "ALEXA 77." I quickly gathered up my bags and said "Okay, Alexa, it's you. I'm coming. Hold on."

We then got to my place and there was Esuna, Jason and this blonde. She was wearing a black shirt with blue jeans. She had herself a backpack. I told her that she might not be staying the

night. "Who gives a shit," this person said. "Kevin," Alexa said, "this is Katie, one of my friends in school. Katie, Kevin. Kevin, Katie." I said "Hey, yo."

Jason and I went to the fridge and got the beer out. Katie asked if she could have one. I said "Sure." I gave her one.

I then showed Jason my new purchase. "Goddamn, Kevin! How much did that cost?" "Ten bucks apiece. And of course, you can use this." I handed him the Dungeon Master's guide. "Remember," I said, "It's mine, but you're a better DM than I. You can use it anytime you want." "Scheiße! Thanks!" We then went on to make new character sheets and then went on to play D&D.

After a while, Jason and I got tired of role-playing and just quit. I told him that I would get the *Monstrous Manual* later on when I get my bills straight. We finished the twelve-pack of beer and the potato chips and went to bed. Katie slept on the sofa.

In the morning, Katie was gone. Esuna, Alexa, Jason and I went on our computers and found out that our backup 33.6 KBPS modem was gone! I quickly looked in the den to see if my portable CD player was there. I looked everywhere. "Alexa," I said, "do you know where my portable CD player is?" "No I don't, honey," she said. I had to take one monstrous leak in the bathroom. But before I could hit the john, I saw a message in red lipstick on the bathroom mirror. It said:

Alexa, Kevin, and friends:

If you want your shit back, pay me back the money that Alexa owes me.

Cheers,

Katie

I yelled "*Alexandra!*" Alexa asked "What, honey?" When I yell Alexa's real name at a high pitch and volume, something's wrong. I said "Come here!" Alexa asked where I was. I said "In the bathroom, staring at some message in red lipstick. Alexa came to the bathroom and turned red. "Oooooooooohhhhhhhh, that goddamn, no-good, lying, trifling, nasty bitch!" I asked Alexa "What?" "That bitch double-crossed us! I *don't* owe anybody shit!"

We then settled down, recollected our thoughts and knew that since we had jobs, we could replace our stuff. It would take quite some time, but since we are working as a team, whatever we can do is possible, as long as we put our minds to it.

We set up a replacement fund in mine and Alexa's bank account to help replace the items that got lost, because Jason and Esuna had things "missing," too. I reserved twenty dollars of my check every pay period, Alexa, Jason and Esuna reserved the same. After a few months, our replacement fund reached \$300 and we were able to replace our "missing" items. Katie was barred permanently from the premises. Alexa issued a restraining order to help enforce it.

Our lives are now back to normal, and it would take a while to heal from the damage inside.

## Twelve

### Christmastime Memories

Around when December 1<sup>st</sup> came by, one-fourth of our paychecks were spent on Christmas decorations. We found out that Alexa has an allergy to fresh Christmas trees, so we spent \$25 on a 6-foot artificial Christmas tree at the K-Mart. Since Jason and Esuna works there, they got a discount on the tree. We even got Christmas gifts on layaway to defer the costs of getting it all at once.

A week later, we decided to stop off at Cool Stuff and get CD's and videos for people like our friends and such. Alexa, Jason and I were looking at the videos while Esuna saw the door open. It was a recognizable female with an overstuffed backpack. Maybe she wanted to trade some of her stuff to get Christmas gifts. She came closer. "*Oh shit,*" Alexa whispered to me. I whispered back "*What's wrong, honey?*" Alexa whispered to me and Jason "Katie's here to trade in your D&D stuff and your CD player. I'll just play it cool." Alexa walked up to Katie and asked her what was up. Jason quietly and slyly looked at the first page of the D&D books. Those books *always* have my name, address, e-mail address and telephone number. Jason quietly put the books back and joined me, Alexa and Esuna in looking at the CD's and the videos. Jason whispered to me that the books were mine. When she started to trade the stuff in, the guy asked Katie for her ID. He now asks people for their identification before trading in merchandise. The first thing that came out of her bag were the D&D books. The guy then looked at the condition of the books to determine her credit on the books. When he looked at the name, address, e-mail address and the phone number in both books, he asked where she got them from. Katie answered "They were my boyfriend's. I didn't need them anymore, because I got 3<sup>rd</sup> edition." He then said "I know this Kevin Havens. He is dating some girl named Alexa Tilbrook."

Right when I heard that, Alexa and I went to the counter and Alexa said "We're now married happily for five months now." The guy said "Hey, Alexa. Please tell me these were your husband's." Alexa replied with "They were. One day last month, me and him had to work staggered shifts, so I had to work before he did. He went to Pembroke Mall and got the books with the money we got saved up in our account. I told him that he could buy them." Jason went through her bag and pulled out a portable CD player, a 33.6 KBPS modem, a Super Nintendo with a lot of games and some of Jason and Esuna's books. The guy said that he couldn't buy the CD player and the modem, but by looking at all of the items minus the CD player and the modem, Katie could've walked out the store with at least forty to sixty bucks store credit. Katie almost started to hastily pack up the items and run to the front door. He asked Jason to lock the front door. Katie was cursing out loud and started to run for the back door. Jason, Esuna, Alexa and I know he always keeps that door locked. No matter if it is nice outside and he wants to ventilate the store. The guy started to call the police on Katie for trading in stolen items.

The guy put up a "Closed" sign and waited for the police to come. Within fifteen minutes, police from both Norfolk and Virginia Beach came. They questioned Katie and all of us. I showed the Virginia Beach police officer my ID and the D&D books. I even told him that is my real e-mail address and that is my real phone number. He didn't care about my e-mail address or my phone number, but checked the addresses inside the covers with my ID. Esuna's books had her name in them. One of the officers asked who was "Esuna Busy." Esuna said "It's now Esuna Stratman, but those are my books." Esuna showed the officer her ID. He even gave us the CD player, the



SNES with the games and the other unmarked items, knowing we were truthful and looking the officers from Norfolk and Virginia Beach in the eye, even though Jason and I heard horror stories about Norfolk police officers. Katie was hauled away in handcuffs, and we *were* given subpoenas to appear in court in January, and we got our stuff back. The guy who runs the store said "Thanks for helping me keep stolen goods out of my store." All of us said "You're welcome." We started to leave. He then said "I'll tell you what. I'll give each of you ten dollars store credit apiece for helping me help the police and letting them help you get your stuff back." We each thought on it for a few moments, but it seemed like it was enough to get some of our friends (or ourselves) something nice. We all said "Sure." I saw a Windows 98 secrets book for ten bucks exactly. Jason and Esuna got some fantasy novels and a CD. Alexa bought two five-dollar videos. We walked up to the counter and then he told us "If you ever see that Katie Smith, tell her that she's barred *permanently* from my store. If I ever see her in here again, I'll call the police. But anyway, Thanks for helping me.." He saw the prices of our items, said "You guys are good," asked us if we needed a bag, we said no and walked out. We walked out with him calling his buddies if he could get a replacement for that day we *all* have to go to court because of Katie.

A week before Christmas, we all got our stuff out of layaway and we were in four separate areas wrapping our gifts. Alexa was in mine and her room, Esuna was in her and Jason's room, Jason was in the computer room, and I was in the den. We spent about forty-five minutes to an hour to the each of us, and if you were done early, you had to go into the kitchen and have a cup of coffee and smoke a cigarette, pipe, cigar, whatever and wait until the rest were done. Somehow Alexa was done with her wrapping of gifts before I was. I was in the middle of wrapping her gift, a gag gift of *Cosmopolitan Virtual Makeover 4* with free USB digital camera, because Alexa sometimes states she don't like her drab chestnut brown hair (even though I love it), and wants to see what it's like to be a blonde, a redhead, whatever with some nice (read: expensive) clothes without committing herself to six weeks of a bad blonde dye job or clothes that might not look all that well on her. I know Alexa to wear replica football jerseys (mostly the ones of Troy Aikman, who just retired, or Randall Cunningham), and basic shirts and jeans/shorts. The only time she wore something expensive was her wedding dress on our wedding day. Well, I was in the middle of trying to wrap it when Alexa started to go in the kitchen. Since the kitchen is connected to the den, because the den also has the dining room, you have to pass through the den/dining room just to get to the kitchen. She tried to take a look at what I was trying to wrap up. I told her to buzz off. She tried to lift a corner of the paper to see what it was. I told her that it wasn't for her. She then left me alone and went into the kitchen and had a cup of coffee and a cigarette. I then wrapped an "I love you" gift of a dove holding a branch on a chain. Then came my mother's gift of a necklace with her birthstone on it. Then came Willie and Justina's gifts of a PlayStation 2 game for Willie and a regular PlayStation game for Justina. I got Jason a copy of Quake 2 and Esuna an Enya CD. I knew someday after Jason plays his New Age CD's around Esuna, she'd get hooked on it. I then put my gifts in a pile and went into the kitchen. I joined Alexa with a cup of coffee and a cigarette. Esuna and Jason followed a few minutes later.

When Esuna and Jason joined us in the kitchen, we were all discussing and secretly whispering to each other what we got whom. We then placed the gifts underneath the tree and sat down. Alexa and I are dead lucky that we both have Christmas Day off. Alexa has to work 10 AM to 3 PM Christmas Eve and I have to work 12 PM to 5 PM the same day. And as we found out, we would get paid time-and-a-half if we do get called in. We hope not. I'm *not* walking all the way to the bus stop at the corner of the Boulevard and Newtown by the Crown gas station and wait for who-knows-how-long and then get to work, working and then wait from thirty minutes to an hour for the next bus coming, then walk in the cold and wind back to home. I love the job, yes, but working on Christmas Day? No way!

Christmas Eve came by and Alexa and I did the same thing. Drop me off at Pembroke Mall, this time Jason joined me because Esuna had to work longer than Jason did, but Jason and I had to start work at the same time. So, I treated Jason to lunch at Subway, but the line was godawfully long. So, I said "Fuck it, Jason. We'll have lunch somewhere else." The friggin' mall was so crowded with last minute shoppers. So we stopped off at Dollar Tree and got two twenty-four ounce bottles of soda and a bag of chips apiece. We then stopped off at the Subway again and seen that the line was short, and getting shorter. Jason was hesitating, and with each thirty seconds of Jason hesitating, the line was getting, little by little, longer and longer. Jason was saying, as usual, "I'll think about it!" I told him "Stratman, if you want lunch and to get to your job by the time we finish lunch, and maybe have some time to kill to look in the stores to blow some cash to get things for tonight, better think quick!" The line was getting longer by the minute. Jason went "No, you know what to do." Since Jason and I grew tired of punching each other in the back or on the arm, we make like a shape of a gun pointed toward the temples. I did so, Jason said "Okay! Okay! We'll get some lunch!" I told him that I'm treating the both of us. "Cool," he said. Even though that Esuna and Alexa gave us our ATM cards, and we're now handling our own Social Security money, and mine is deposited into mine and Alexa's account, and Jason's is deposited into his and Esuna's account. We basically gave up Beach House, except for clinic appointments, but they're holding onto our ATM cards and our checkbooks when necessary to make sure that we're not buying things stupidly. I got Jason and I two steak and cheese subs, six-inch, and then went to the benches by the movie theater and sat down and ate. After we ate, we had about forty-five minutes to blow. So, we went into Dollar Tree and got tortilla chips, dip and Geedunks. We even got a couple three-liters of soda. Alexa gave me her car keys to put the stuff in, but I had to leave it at the receptionist's desk so she could pick them up after she leaves. We went outside to get a cigarette, and we found out we had fifteen minutes before we had to get to work at our jobs. We got in one more cigarette, then Jason and I took off. I told Jason that I'll see him when he gets home. Jason went inside the K-Mart. I kept on walking toward the place and had one more cigarette. I then put the stuff in Alexa's car trunk and went inside.

I gave the car keys to the receptionist, telling her that those were Alexa's car keys, I'm her husband and she asked me to leave them there so she could pick them up when she leaves for the day. I showed her my badge, she let me in and I went to work.

An hour and fifteen minutes later, I had thirty seconds to get a drink from my bottle and a quick bite to eat. My screen told me that I had an incoming call. I said "Thank you for holding, this is Kevin, how may I help you?" The person on the other end was arrogant and seemed like she wanted to get it over and done with *now*. She said "About damn time I got somebody. I've been on hold for twenty minutes already!" I replied with the response I was trained with about when somebody complains about the long hold time and is upset. I then took her order, for which for it was an event at the Norfolk Scope, and took her credit card number, all in the meantime polite and respectful, because my call *may* be recorded for training purposes, or a supervisor might be listening in and I might get yelled at, or terminated. I then read the confirming screen to her, and verified that her order is being processed. I told her "Thank you for calling Ticketmaster, and you have a happy holiday." She retorted "Whatever," and I then ended the call. I made sure that she was gone, for which I can tell by dead silence, muted my microphone, and muttered "Dumbshit." A person next to me said "Hey, Kevin. I know that it's Christmas Eve, and we all want to go home early, but live it out." He then asked me what time I get off. I said "Five o'clock." He then said "I get off at seven. You are one lucky dog." My supervisor came up next to me and said "Kevin, you're Alexa's husband, right?" I answered in the affirmative. "Well," she said, "it's Christmas Eve, and it's getting too cold outside. I don't want you waiting outside in the cold waiting for the bus. I'm going to let the both of you off at three o'clock." It was nearing two o'clock. That meant I have an hour to get what I needed done.

She then said "When Alexa gets off of work, I'll come and get you." She then left my area and I went back to work.

The next few customers who called in were a little bit more respectful, maybe because they know we want to get off as soon as possible, and having a rude and arrogant person on the other end of the line doesn't help us much. Time seemed like it was flying, and then the supervisor came next to me, but I was in the middle of taking an order, stood next to me, I was nervous as hell. I then finished the call, and the supervisor said "Mr. Havens, you may now leave. You need to spend Christmas with your family." I wanted to get the money, but she said "No," then chuckled, "I'm going to let you leave early. You deserve it. Anyway, I saw you handle that call real good." I said "Okay," logged out and then clocked out. Alexa and I went to the receptionist's desk and got her car keys.

We headed off on Virginia Beach Boulevard and stopped off at the Food Lion at Newtown and Baker to get food for the dinner on Christmas Day and to have our little Christmas Eve party. We already got the ham and most of the side dishes, but we needed dressing, sweet potatoes and marshmallows. We got beer, frozen pizza and some other things for the party, like cheese, wine and crackers. We then partied with the beer and snacks and went to bed right at midnight.

Right at five-thirty in the morning, I was awakened by Alexa telling me that it's Christmas morning. I was sitting there, dazed, going "*Already?*" Alexa said "Yes, honey. It's Christmas morning. C'mon, let's go get some coffee and doughnuts to get ourselves up. But let's go wake up Stratman and Esuna." I said "Wait a minute. I heard that Stratman usually doesn't wake up until about seven or eight in the morning on Christmas morning. We can wait for them by sitting in the living room and watching TV until they get up drinking coffee, eating doughnuts and smoking a few cigarettes."

I went into the kitchen, made a pot of coffee and got the doughnuts out of the freezer and thawed them in the microwave for only a few seconds, because I don't want to drop a hot box of doughnuts on the floor and ruining half of them by having them fall out on the floor. I was singing *Microsoft, Microsoft, bloatware all the way! I've sat here installing Word since breakfast yesterday! Microsoft, Microsoft, moderation please! Guess you hadn't noticed that forty-gig hard drives don't grow on trees!* I heard Esuna and Jason get up and head toward the kitchen. Esuna said "Kevin, if you're going to sing 'Jingle Bells,' sing it right or don't sing it at all." Jason stopped Esuna and said "Esuna, honey, both Kevin and I sing it that way." Jason and I joined in by doing another Christmas song parody by going *Another "ping," are you listening? The 'puter screen is a glistenin'. With icons so bright, they light up the night. Welcome to the e-mail wonderland.* Esuna said "*Enough!*" Alexa asked Esuna "What's wrong? I think those songs are funny. Anyway, Kevin likes computers. Just let it go." "Aw, alright," Esuna said. We then got a cup of coffee, some doughnuts and had a couple cigarettes before we all decided to open gifts.

I done my gifts first. I handed out Jason's first. "Cool," he said, "just what I wanted. A copy of Quake 2. I'll get this up and working by this afternoon." I then handed Esuna her gift. She *carefully* opened it, and said "Cool! An Enya CD!" Jason said "You're dead, Kevin." I then handed Alexa her two gifts, the necklace and the computer software. I told her to open the larger box first. "Oooh, Kevin," she said, "you are motherfucking dead!" I asked her what for. She said "I can use this to give me a different look and not worry about bad dye jobs or clothes that really don't look good on me! Thanks!" I hugged her and kissed her for a couple minutes. She then opened her smaller box first, and you should've seen the awe on her face when she done that.

She said "Kevin! You've shouldn't have!" I helped her put it on and we lip-locked for a minute or so.

Jason did his gifts next. Jason handed out mine. I hastily opened mine, ripping up paper. It was Squeeze's *Ridiculous* CD. "Shit, Stratman," I said, "you are dead. But anyway, thanks." Then he handed out Alexa's next. It was an "Itchy and Scratchy" T-shirt that he got her from Spencer's Gifts. "Oh, my God," she said. "How did you know I like *The Simpsons*?" "Dunno," he said, "I just thought you might like it." Then Jason handed Esuna her two gifts. The first was a dress identical to the one that the "Esuna" character wore on *The 7<sup>th</sup> Saga*. But it was a little more lighter and made for everyday wear. Then Esuna unwrapped her second gift. It was a CD portable so Esuna can listen to her CD's anytime she wants to, but not at work. Esuna hugged and kissed Jason for a few moments.

Esuna was next. She handed Alexa her gift first. It was the new Tommy & Rumble CD. I told Alexa that she is one dead motherfucker. She slapped me playfully. Then my gift was next. It was Squeeze's *Argybargy*. It even still had the Volume CD Exchange price sticker left on it. I told Esuna my thanks. Then Esuna got Jason's gifts out. The first gift to Jason from Esuna was *Pure Moods* on CD. Jason had one hell of a surprised look on his face. The next gift from Esuna was a nice green turtleneck. Jason literally lip-locked with Esuna for quite some time.

Then last, but not least, Alexa. Alexa gave Esuna her gift first. It was a new stack of romance novels. Esuna said "Thanks." She gave Jason a burned CD-R of New Age MP3's that she spent weeks getting off of Gnutella and then spending one late night burning a copy of them onto Audio CD format. Hell, a blank computer CD-R costs about fifty cents, but as they always say, "It's the thought that counts." Jason didn't care about the cost, but that he got Clannad, and others. Then my gifts from her were, as they say, the best saved for last. I opened my first gift. It was a new thirty-gig hard drive bundled with Windows 98 Second Edition. The next gift was a CD burner. A little bit different than Alexa's on her PC, but at least it would let me make my own CD's as gifts, or as my own personal things to listen to. She even went into the computer room and pulled out a fresh, factory-sealed spindle pack of blank CD-R's. She told me that they're mine. She told me to have fun with them.

After we all opened our gifts, we cleaned up the paper and threw it outside to the dumpster. We then played with our gifts for a while, and having Jason help me install my new things.

We then helped everybody else fix dinner, and we all had fun doing it. We got done with dinner about 2:30, and Jason and I set the table. We had to put most of the dinner in the kitchen to save room on the table.

We all sat down to eat, and we took a good two hours to eat, until we were full.

We then continued to play with our gifts and then we went to bed.

## Thirteen

### AntiEXE, Jobs And Pregnant Women

On December 31<sup>st</sup>, all four of us had one hell of a New Year's Eve party. There were hot wings of all flavors from Cal'z, including "Suicide," which they *say* it's the hottest, but Jason and I had about half of the bucket (a fifty-piece bucket) to ourselves and there *might* be a little kick, but both Jason and I agree that it ain't hot at all. Jason can take sips off a Texas Pete hot sauce bottle and not wince at all. We also had our chance at making our own pizzas, which my mother made the dough and gave it to us. All we made were Pepperoni, sausage and Pepperoni and Sausage. We even had a lot of Geedunks and there was Internet time spent. Jason and I had case after case of beer, and since Esuna and Alexa were pregnant, I bought the wives O'Doul's non-alcoholic brew so they could join us without feeling left out. Of course, there was soda. Jason and I went to bed *drunk as fuck* before Alexa and Esuna did. There was one massive hangover for both me and Jason, and we were lucky we all had that day off.

A couple weeks later, all four of us went into Beach House, because one, it was our day off, two, Alexa and I had clinic appointments that day, three, one of Jason's friends were going to be there and Jason wanted to introduce him to Esuna, and four, we haven't gone in over a month. So, to say hello to all of our friends and to say in the house meeting (it was a Wednesday) about how our independent employments were going because Tiffany Brissette asked us to mention how average members can work after TEP's.

We went inside to get lunch, which was Fractured Tacos (their name for taco salad) and we all sat and ate for about twenty minutes. We went back in the retail unit and Tiffany saw us come in. She called for us by saying "Kevin, Alexa, Jason, Esuna, come here." She was holding a piece of paper in her left hand which looked like it was from Internet Explorer. She then said "Kevin, you probably remember when I first chastised you for using the term 'AntiEXE' when you got mad at me, but I see all four of you saying 'so-and-so has one major case of AntiEXE.' You usually say this when somebody is ticking you off or acting crazy toward you four. I have a question for you guys. Do you think that person's a computer? Do you think *I'm* a computer?" I said "No, Tiffany." "Sure, *I* played a computerized robot on a TV show some sixteen or seventeen years ago, but I'm a human. Everybody else here is human." She then reached for her piece of paper. "I have something to read to you. I went on the Internet last night and got some virus, ahem, *computer* virus definitions and this is what AntiEXE means, and I quote: 'AntiEXE: Infects the boot sectors on hard disks and floppies. Saves original Master Boot Record to hard disk or a hidden buffer in memory. AntiEXE also corrupts certain EXE files when read. AntiEXE is a stealth virus which occupies one kilobyte of memory. The payload is executed as a three in two-hundred fifty-six chance. It has been suggested that the target of this virus is a Russian anti-virus program,' unquote. One more thing. Do you think that half of these members are or I am a Russian anti-virus program?" "No," Alexa said. Tiffany said "I thought so. Don't make me suspend you guys for using some silly term which means something that can damage somebody's PC. You are my most favorite members that understands the show I was on." "I know," I said, "*Small Wonder*." "Right," she said, "From now on, I won't listen to you guys when you say that somebody has a case of AntiEXE. I would only hear it if your *computer* has it." Jason said "Uh, Tiffany, don't you mean *computers*? All four of us has a computer to the each of us that is networked across a LAN." "Computer, computers, as long as you don't say that somebody that's a person who has it." We then started to leave to get a cigarette until Tiffany said "Oh, one more thing. I need to know how your jobs are doing. Have you been turning your paystubs in to Social Security?" "Yes," was the reply from all four of us. I said "Do you want us

from now on turn in our paystubs to you?" Tiffany asked "Are you guys now working a TEP?" "No," I said, "we aren't." "Fine then," she said, "If you aren't working a TEP, then you can turn them in to Social Security if you got the resources and the time to do so yourself." I said "Debbie Amme required if you are a member, and you're working, TEP or not, you had to turn your paystubs and a copy of it in to her." Tiffany said "Am I Debbie Amme?" We all replied "No." "Fine then," she said, "I believe in the *entire* Fountain House philosophy of 'If you're capable of doing it yourself, then do it yourself.' That's why I encourage members to learn the HRT, I think that's what you call it..." I said "You're right, Tiffany." She said "Anyway, I encourage people to learn the bus system so they can get to their jobs. I even encourage Laura Fowler upstairs to cut checks for fare cards so they can get to work. That's why I have a bunch of bus schedules at the front desk so people can pick them up when needed." We then continued talking, this time about our jobs. We then left outside for a cigarette then went to house meeting. We talked about employment past the TEP. After that, we went home, made dinner and went to bed.

I woke up the next morning groggy and thinking of what Tiffany said to us. I hopped in the shower and not more than five minutes later, I heard some radio playing Aretha Franklin's "Respect." I waited for the right time, and belted out "A-N-T-I-E-X-E, I'll tell you what it means to me, A-N-T-I-E-X-E, Get that, get that person away from me!" Somebody knocked on the bathroom door. I yelled "*Occupied!*" There was a knock on the door again. Alexa said "Remember what Tiffany said, Kevin. Don't even be making fun of that song. I like it, you know." I finished rinsing my hair, turned off the water, got a towel around my body, opened the door and said "Alexa, we're *not* at Beach House. Anyway, we can say it *if* we're *not* at Beach House, and we're *not*." "You're right, Kevin," Alexa said, "We're not at Beach House and we can use the 'AntiEXE' term whenever we feel like it. Hell, *I've* been using it to dismiss some nasty, rude and arrogant co-workers, supervisors and customers at work, but I have been saying it under my breath, and not like you and Stratman have been using it. I heard you one day when you got off the line with a customer saying out loud 'What have you got? AntiEXE?' and your supervisor told you not to use derogatory terms around the co-workers, or you would be given another warning. You're now at your second warning. Third warning and you get terminated. You need to be working." I got some clothes on and went into the kitchen.

I got some breakfast and got a cup of coffee and a cigarette. I got my shoes on and played Alexa's PlayStation playing, as always, *Final Fantasy VII*, because I was dead-near Sephiroth and I've been getting strategy tips for getting a bunch of Materia, weaponry and armor and even learning the sequence necessary beforehand on the first part of Sephiroth off the Internet. Anyway, it was nearing noon, and Alexa and I had to leave for work, this time it wasn't a staggered shift, and we had to be at work by 1 o'clock, so we headed off at 11:30 to get lunch at a Chinese buffet. Esuna and Jason joined in. They had to be at work by 1:30. We went and had fried rice, sesame chicken, General Tso's chicken, a lot of soda, soup and others. We finished by 12:45, and Esuna and Jason went to the restroom and so did Alexa and I. All we had to do was take a leak. We headed out of the buffet place, and headed out of Pembroke Mall, since it was at Pembroke Mall, and had a cigarette to the each of us. Alexa and I took off to work, and we didn't get off until six o'clock.

A couple days later, Alexa and Esuna had the day off so they can go to their appointments with their "woman doctors," what Jason and I call it. They are now three and a half months pregnant and they came back saying that everything's okay with the both of them, and something surprising: Alexa is going to have twins! This came back to me as a 10,000,000-volt shock at high amperage that made me pass out!

*Kevin?*

I was lying there in my favorite chair when Alexa was trying to fan me with one of my copies of *PC World*. *Honey? Don't be surprised*. I opened my eyes and there was Alexa above me saying "Kevin, honey, now this doesn't mean that twins are going to stop us from loving each other." She also stated that the twins are due June 12<sup>th</sup>, so there were a lot of preparations needed to get ready.

A few months passed. It's now the beginning of March. Alexa and Esuna have been going to their "Woman Doctors" as scheduled and one time some couple months ago, and Alexa got the test for the babies' sex, and any birth defects that there might be. Both babies had no birth defects, and the babies are girls! We didn't know what names to give the two girls. Esuna undertook the same test, and her child is not going to have any birth defects, and that it's a boy. I hugged the life out of Alexa and kissed her for quite some time.

Over the next couple months, Alexa and I were going to numerous stores to get *two* cribs, *two* sets of clothes and *two* sets of everything else. Our LAN was moved in to the dining room and our kitchen table was used for putting things on. We mostly ate on the couches and the chairs in the den and we sometimes rented movies from the Hollywood Video and we rented *anything* we wanted. We first started out in the new releases section, then moved from that to the comedy section, working our way around to the horror section. Esuna once had a Ms. Puke-A-Thon when we saw *Children of the Corn 666*. I almost did, also. A couple times we rented from the DVD section and saw a movie on Alexa's computer.

It is now nearing the expected due date of Alexa and Esuna's children, and we basically got the apartment prepared in time for that date.

## Fourteen

### Four Hands And Feet

On that Memorial Day that just passed, all we had to ourselves were a small box of hamburger patties with not that much condiments on white bread, and hot dogs on white bread, but no chili or onions, and not that much potato chips. We were *way too busy* getting prepared for the event that is coming up for both Alexa and Esuna. Our computers that's connected over a LAN has been moved into the dining room, and our dining room table is now being used as a printer stand and Alexa's computer table.

We were not doing much things, but doing things like working, and getting simple meals like TV dinners from the store and eating on the couches and the chairs in the den whenever we eat, even when we order out. We were doing this so just in case whenever the women did go into labor. Those dates they set, you know, June 12<sup>th</sup> for Alexa and June 17<sup>th</sup> for Esuna, are just that: *expected* delivery dates. Those babies can pop out anytime, earlier than expected or later than expected. Take me for instance. I was supposed to be born on April 15<sup>th</sup>, but instead I was born on April 29<sup>th</sup>.

A week passed. It is now Sunday, June the 9<sup>th</sup>. We did nothing particular that day. Then the 10<sup>th</sup>. Then the 11<sup>th</sup>. Then it was midnight, June 12<sup>th</sup>. I went to bed after fooling around on the Internet. I first went offline, then shut down all the computers over the network, then the hub, then the printers and the monitors. I went into mine and Alexa's bedroom. I crawled into bed. "*Good night, honey,*" I whispered to Alexa. "*Good night,*" she whispered back. I fell asleep.

Not long after I fell asleep, I was dreaming about being the biggest IT professional at some company. I don't remember what company it was. I kept this dream up for quite some time before I heard some female voice. *Kevin?* This voice sounded like Alexa's. It seemed like she was telling me in the dream about some node that went down. *Kevin? Please wake up. I have something to tell you.* I woke up, all groggy and said while I was half-asleep "Alexa, if it's one of your cravings *again* for Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, I don't want to hear it. Let me get some sleep so you and I can get to work in the morning. Anyway, there's no Ben & Jerry's in the freezer, and *no*, I'm not going to 7-Eleven to get you some." I looked at the clock. "It's three in the morning, Alexa," I continued, "go back to sleep." Alexa said "No, Kevin. My water broke and I'm having contractions. They're forty-five minutes apart. I need to get to the hospital *quick!*" I got my shoes on and went to the bathroom so I can bid adieu to last night's Dr Pepper that I drank while downloading some mod to Quake 2 that I got Jason for Christmas, and he said he wanted it. If you wanted to know that "surprise" that Alexa was going to give me on my birthday, it was a used Geo Metro with a Pioneer CD system. She even got the license plate to say "GHOSTBOY," what I wanted. It was white. She even took me to the DMV to get my license. I gathered up my CD's and we got into my small compact car and we headed off to Sentara Leigh Hospital and I carefully walked Alexa through the patient entrance and I slowly, calmly explained to the nurse on duty that Alexa, who is my wife, is going into labor and her contractions are now thirty minutes apart. Alexa was hyperventilating and then an orderly came by and asked her to easily sit down in a wheelchair. They took her to a delivery room and I was taking smoke breaks every thirty to forty-five minutes, all in the while having to scrub up and get into scrubs every two hours just to see my wife Alexa giving birth to twins. A few hours later, after the last smoke break, the doctor's assistant, said "Glad you're back, Mr. Havens. Your wife's ready to give birth." I saw her give birth to the first one, all in the while with Alexa squeezing my hand hard



and screaming loudly that it could shatter lead crystal. I knew that Alexa had a high-pitched scream, but I've *never* heard it this loud or this high-pitched. Within a few minutes, the first one came out. Then the doctor said "Mrs. Havens, the second one's ready to come out." I wiped Alexa's head with a cool washcloth and then the same old shit came up again. The hard hand squeezing, the loud lead crystal-shattering scream, after all was said and done, there were two baby girls.

Alexa was thinking hard, then asked me to lean my head toward her. "Kevin, honey," she said, "You know that Tiffany Brissette played two robots on TV years ago named Vicki and Vanessa?" "Yeah," I said. "Well, since she's our favorite staff, and she said we're her favorite members," Alexa stated, "I think we should name our two children Victoria, or Vicki, Anne and Vanessa Marie." "Vanessa didn't have a middle name on *Small Wonder*," I said. "I know that," she said, then whispered quieter, "But I remember that you had a *you-know-what* named Vanessa Marie. So, I'm giving respect to Tiffany. I think she'll like it. Anyway, Marie's Tiffany Brissette's middle name." "Sounds good to me," I said. "Vicki Anne Havens and Vanessa Marie Havens. I'm beginning to like it." Then a records officer from Sentara came in and he asked "Mrs. Havens, what are your two children's names?" Alexa said "The one born at 3:45 PM is named Vicki Anne Havens and the one born at 4:05 PM is named Vanessa Marie Havens." The two children were then put in to bassinets and then taken to the nursery. Alexa was taken to her room.

I was going home to get some things for Alexa some times, but I always stayed at home. I visited Alexa every day after work, and got to know my two new children. After five days, I was called at work to come and pick Alexa up after 5 PM.

I got into my Geo Metro, but first stopping off the K-Mart to get two new child safety seats for *my* car because I *will not* get one from the DAV thrift store, because I heard on Channel 10's Ten On Your Side about the dangers of old child safety seats, and the Virginia State Police recommending throwing out your child seats after the seats are five years old. The cashier asked "So, why two safety seats?" I simply replied "Wife had twins. I needed to get them for my car because my wife has them for hers." She then asked me "So, what's their names?" "Vicki Anne and Vanessa Marie." I then got them in my cart and then went to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Precinct to ask for assistance to help me install them.

I then went to the hospital, and then Alexa got checked out right at 5:15. Alexa was carrying Vicki and an orderly was carrying Vanessa. I then put them in their car seats and then Alexa got in the car, then I did. We closed the car doors and we took off.

By the time we got at the stop light at Kempsville Road and East Virginia Beach Boulevard, I recalled something from a Jeff Foxworthy CD called *Games Rednecks Play*. I remembered the part from the track called "I Love Being A Parent," and went "I love being a parent. It's a hard job being a parent. You sacrifice years of your life, to no sleep, no social life, so your kids can grow up, go on *Oprah* and blame every dang problem they've got on you! Aren't you getting a little tired of this? Just one time I'd like to see this: 'You know what? My daddy was great, my momma was great, I'm just a shithead!' Just one time!" Alexa laughed her ass off. Then Alexa said "Kevin, you know, some parents are crazy. I hope that you and I aren't one of them." The light turned green and we headed off to the apartment.

We got in, and Esuna and Jason were looking depressed. Alexa asked "What's wrong, Esuna?"

"Our child died after birth," Esuna said. "Nine months of preparing for the big day, and this motherfucking bullshit happened!" Jason said "calm down, honey." Esuna then cried on Jason's shoulder. Alexa and I put Vicki and Vanessa in the cribs and we all sat down and comforted Esuna. I said "Don't worry, Esuna. There's always another time. Maybe, just maybe you'll be lucky."

We then asked Esuna to help us to take care of Vicki and Vanessa, but at first she hesitated, but she said "Sure. It might help me ease the pain of the loss of my child." Esuna helped us and now she feels like she's one of them. So, now Esuna's Vicki and Vanessa's godmother.

## Fifteen

### Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now

It was nearing the first anniversary of mine and Alexa's, and Jason and Esuna's first year of marriage. We had one hell of a 4<sup>th</sup> of July cookout/anniversary celebration and we had one hell of a time. We even save the tops of our wedding cakes (there were two) and we well preserved it, so we thawed it on the counter, not in the microwave, and we cut our respective pieces in half and had one major sugar high, but we all had one great time.

We then went inside to see the fireworks at Waterside on TV. This was the greatest time of our life. From an e-mail message a year-and-a-half ago, to the pick up of three mannequins, then the surprising coming of the mannequins to women, and all of the things that happened while we were dating, to Jason and I getting married to Alexa and I having twins, and all of the while having one of my favorite TV show actresses seventeen years ago become one of my favorite Beach House staff members, that person was nobody else than Ms. Tiffany Marie Brissette. I recalled all of the times, good and bad, Alexa and I had together, all in the while Jason recalling all of the times, good and bad also, that he and Esuna had together.

I called Alexa to the computer area, and said "Alexa? You are my princess. I love you." Alexa replied with "Kevin? You are my prince. I am never going to let you go." I then secretly double-clicked on the MP3 of Starship's "Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now" and we sang to the corresponding male or female voice.

This is what we sung to:

Looking in your eyes,  
I see a paradise  
This world that I found  
Is too good to be true.  
Standing here beside you,  
Want so much to give you  
This love in my heart  
That I'm feeling for you

Let them say we're crazy,  
I don't care about that  
Put your hand in my hand, baby  
Don't ever look back  
Let the world around us  
Just fall apart  
Baby, we can make it  
If we're heart-to-heart

And we can build this dream together,  
Standing strong forever  
Nothing's gonna stop us now  
And if this world runs out of lovers

We'll still have each other  
Nothing's gonna stop us  
Nothing's gonna stop us now, oh no

I'm so glad I found you,  
I'm not gonna leave you  
Whatever it takes, I would stay here with you  
Take it to the good times,  
See it through the bad times  
Whatever it takes is what I'm gonna do

Let them say we're crazy,  
What do they know?  
Put your arms around me, baby, don't ever let go  
Let the world around us  
Just fall apart  
Baby, we can make it  
If we're heart-to-heart

And we can build this dream together,  
Standing strong forever  
Nothing's gonna stop us now  
And if this world runs out of lovers  
We'll still have each other  
Nothing's gonna stop us  
Nothing's gonna stop us...

Ooh, all that I need is you  
All that I ever need is to hold and  
All I want to do  
Is hold you forever, ever and ever  
Hey!

And we can build this dream together  
Standing strong forever  
Nothing's gonna stop us now  
And if this world runs out of lovers  
We'll still have each other  
Nothing's gonna stop us,  
Nothing's gonna stop us (nothing's gonna stop us!)

And we can build this dream together  
Standing strong forever  
Nothing's gonna stop us now (nothing's gonna stop us!)  
And if this world runs out of lovers  
We'll still have each other  
Nothing's gonna stop us  
Oh, no!

And we can build this dream together (hey, baby)  
Standing strong forever (I know)  
Nothing's gonna stop us now (nothing's gonna stop us)  
And if this world runs out of lovers (hey, baby)  
We'll still have each other (woo-hoo)  
Nothing's gonna stop us (nothing's gonna stop us)

I looked Alexa in the eyes, and so did Jason, and we would never forget this one-of-a-kind experience that we both took back then in February, 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

This is Kevin Havens, Alexandra Tilbrook-Havens on the behalf of Vicki Anne and Vanessa Marie, and Jason Stratman and Esuna Busy Stratman saying good-bye.

## Sixteen

### Finishing The Journey

This was the story of three, now two men who found love from a Web site that offered an experimental service. As you can see, it turned out well. Kevin and Alexa had a nice time getting to know each other, and they found out that love can be possible, even if the man had problems in the past and the woman's was made by an interrupt in the space-time continuum.

Alexa and Kevin are now taking care of Vicki and Vanessa and they arranged for childcare through their employer. Kevin and Alexa are now supervisors and that means more money.

Esuna is now Vicki and Vanessa's godmother. Jason is still doing his "all-around person" work at K-Mart, but Esuna has been promoted to Jewelry Department Supervisor.

All four are doing fine, and they would like to say is "Even though you didn't get an experience like ours, but good luck on your relationship, no matter which one you're in."

To take what they said, Good-bye, and good luck on the relationship you're in

## The End

## Copyrights, Credits and Acknowledgements

This story is a work of fiction. All characters, locations and incidents that were made up are a product of the author's imagination and are used fictitiously and are a part of the author's imagination.

Special Apologies to Square Enix, Co., Ltd. for the usage of the name "Esuna Busy" in this story. My co-author and friend wanted that name as his woman because no other name worked out.

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"Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now" performed by Starship. Written by Dianne Warren. © 1987 RCA Records.

"I Love Being A Parent" performed by Jeff Foxworthy. Written by Jeff Foxworthy. © 1995 Warner Bros. Records, an AOL Time-Warner Company. (God, I *hate* AOL)

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It took me almost six months and a lot of time just to write sixty-eight pages. Some were written in one night, while some, including the first chapter, was written in about a month. One part was written while I was watching the Super Bowl with the Ravens and the Giants. Just to get the winner on "Alexa's" Super Bowl shirt, I had to sit there carefully watching the game just to see who was going to win the game. Of course, I could have just guessed it, but to make it seem good, I waited to see who was going to win Super Bowl 35.

I'm still looking for a girlfriend. Nobody seems too interested in me. Well, I'll just wait and see. I sure did slam Ms. Yolonda Lee (my real ex-girlfriend) real good! But in real life, I wouldn't slam the poor girl, and yes, in real life, I would let my real-life girlfriend curse her out. And that is what I did with "Alexa."

I wish all who reads this story, either on the Web or by looking at my binder, good luck and best wishes. May God Bless You. Good luck on your current relationships, and if you're not with a boyfriend or a girlfriend, keep looking and do not give up. The right person might turn up someday. Date completed: May 24, 2001

Thank you for supporting my Fictionalities!

Kevin Havens