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YOU WILL BEHAVE. You will sit right there and listen until I am finished with you, and then you will march up those steps and apologize to your sister for sodomizing her Sparkle Beach Barbie with Darth Vader's light-saber. Then you will give that poor doll a proper burial—preferably out back, in the lot behind the garden where you buried all those toy soldiers who laid down their lives on your Iwo Jima play-set.

And please see that she receives the same honors—the casket will have to be a shoebox instead of a matchbox, but you can keep the twenty-one incher salute,

the kind words from the Furbie. She deserves at least that much.

Then you will take Darth Vader—without his light-saber, of course—over to Barbie’s beach house, where he will just have to face Barbie’s friends and see the damage he has done, see with his own eyes that when you rape and murder a lively young girl with a future as bright as her glitter-streaked hair, you leave a hole in the lives of those who’ve loved her. And yes, Darth will have to face Ken.

Ken, of course, will be strong and stoic in his chiseled, all-American way. He will even shake Darth’s hand before he leaves, and for a second, as plastic touches plastic and their eyes meet, a pocket of inexplicable homoerotic lust will swell inside each of them. But you will behave. You will walk the dark Sith lord out the front door of that beach house, take him back to your room, and he and Ken will forget their little moment.

Then you will sleep.



When you wake, march into that bathroom, do the ugly things you have to do, and then get your butt down here and eat your breakfast without saying a word to your sister. If Stacey’s got anything to say to you, she will say it and you will listen.

She may tell you things you don’t want to hear. She may tell you that your nails are dirty, that your pudgy face is quickly outgrowing its cuteness, and that violent and aggressive forms of sexual play have no place in our enlightened society.

After all, every girl knows in her heart of hearts that Ken is really gay. Just as they already sense something shameful about certain holes in their own undeveloped bodies, they know that Ken can do nothing to Barbie but love her. He can hold her, he can listen, he can drive her around in a lovely little pink convertible, humming opera arias while the wind does nothing to his sculpted hair, but he cannot “do” her because he has no light-saber.

Take down his pants; he is smooth. And this is why Barbie and Ken *are* an appropriate form of sexual play—because they are smooth, because they are clean. You will understand this some day, but for now you will keep quiet and listen to your sister.

When she is through with you, you will get your books and go to school for nine more years, and you will behave.

You will sit quietly, maybe even fold your hands, tilt your head in a practiced look of wonderment. You will listen attentively to men smelling of talcum powder and cigarettes, men sporting tweed sports coats and off-kilter toupees. You will listen attentively to women in pastel skirt suits with matching pumps, white-haired women who squeak mysteriously from the hips when they walk past your desk. And you will pretend that nothing they say has anything to do with sex—that not a single lesson concerns anything bodily. In fact, you will forget from time to time that these voices you hear even have bodies.

You will behave. You will not picture these men and women (without their toupees, pumps, and underwear) piled into an oil-soaked orgy. You will not draw pictures of them engaging in oral sex with each other or with barnyard

animals, and you certainly will not snicker over these pictures with your pimple-faced friends.

Yes, by this time, you will all have pimples. Feel free to lock yourself in the bathroom for hours, caking your face with Noxzema, Clearasil, and some lemon-water and baking soda paste you pick up from the Internet, but it will do nothing. And in this way—as you listen, as you wash, and as you behave—you will spend your high school years in a dull and proper normalcy with the exception of one major indiscretion.

2



IN THE SECOND half of your senior year, despite my best efforts, you will fall in love with a cheerleading uniform.

It will be blue and gold—the school colors—with white trim on the sweater sleeves and the edge of that pleated crotch-length skirt. There will also be the tights or panties underneath.

They will be gold, and they will draw you more than anything else. For at every basketball game, at every football contest, at every wrestling match, as sweaty young men thrust, batter, and rub their bodies against one another's, you will sit in the first row of the bleachers waiting for the kick in every cheer—the moment when a shaved leg lifts to the pulse of the pom-pom and you stare

into the fraction of a second, tracing that smooth contour from calf, to knee, to thigh, to gold.

Let's call her Demarzio, Deluvio, or Degenerito. She will be half Italian, half Puerto Rican, and she will move here in the summer of her sixteenth year. Eventually, she will be little more than a scandal in this town. A loose girl—a foul mouth, rumors of group sex behind the pizza-joint, an abortion or two. But at this point she will merely be a sixteen-year-old cheerleader, a sophomore, a bright and bouncy friend of your sister, obsessed with mix-tapes, horses, and collages made from catch-phrases and magazine photos.

But really, what does it matter? She will mean nothing to you. You will behave, and her legs, her sleek little body, her crudely burgeoning sexuality will be little more than a medium through which you love that uniform.

Her name, in fact, will carry only the vaguest of meanings. In the same way you will someday need women's names for masturbatory purposes, you will need this girl's name only as a concrete connection to your fantasy. Two weeks before the close of wrestling season you will search the girls' locker room for that name above a locker, in which, through the crosshairs of the metal grid that forms the door, you will spy the lovely, lifeless material of that cheerleading uniform.

Go ahead. Pick the lock. Bundle the sweater, the skirt, and the pom-poms into a duffel bag and take them home. I suppose you will have to do this; and, after all, we both know from countless examples of transvestites, serial killers, and evil Jedis, that, in the pursuit of lifeless beauty, there are much worse things a young man could do.

When you get it home, you will lay the uniform out on your bed. With painstaking care, you will use my pocket sewing-kit to connect the body stitch by stitch. Sewing pom-poms to sweater, sweater to skirt, and tights to waistline, you will bring the uniform to life, but you will behave.

You will sit that uniform in the chair by your desk and talk to it. That's right, talk. You will talk and you will listen, and not just act like you're listening—blankly nodding while you think about football and unorthodox sexual positions—but really listen. And please, let's keep our eyes off the area where the breasts would be. Show some respect. Focus on the empty space above the collar.

Then, once you've given your guest a chance to tell you about herself, you will take her by the pom-pom and request a dance. So you'll dance—but dance nicely. None of that sweaty grinding you'll see the rest of the little monkeys doing at all those gymnasium orgies your student council will insist on calling dances. You will use the steps I taught you—the foxtrot, the waltz, the tango—and you will discover by the end of the evening that both you and the uniform are indeed lucky to respect each other enough *not* to tear off each other's clothes. To put it simply, you will behave because, as you hold one pom-pom in your hand and curl your other hand into the small of the sweater's back, you will understand that if you did not behave, if you lost control, if you tore the clothes from her nonexistent body, there would be nothing. Nothing.

And so it will go like this for months. Nicely. Politely. Respectfully. Until *she* enters the picture. Yes, I'm referring, of course, to the Demarzio, Deluvio, or

Degenerito girl. By this time she'll be your sister's best friend, spending hours in her bedroom after school giggling over inside jokes about pop-singers, charm bracelets, and "blow-jobs." There will be a sleepover. They'll braid each other's hair, dance in front of the television, and stuff their faces full of Pop-Tarts, until around 12:30 when they will turn off the bedroom lights, lie side by side on the floor, and whisper exactly how far they'd "go" with certain boys in the senior class.

When your sister falls asleep, Demarzio, Deluvio, or Degenerito will peel Stacey's drool-encrusted face off her shoulder and rise to go seek your bedroom. Why, you wonder? Well, you won't understand this for years, but, yes, she will come to you simply because she has one of those crushes bad girls tend to develop on the awkward older brothers of good girls. She will walk down a dark hallway steering herself toward the line of light at the bottom of your bedroom door and the sound of Mel Torme crooning from your stereo. She will bump the wall, brush a photo with her shoulder, regain her balance, and then, pressing her palms against the wood, she will inch open your door.

The music will surge louder, the light will envelope her, and she will wonder breathlessly for a moment as she watches you and the uniform she instantly recognizes as her own glide from desk, to bed, to dresser. Then, as you bend your beauty back for a dip to the closing horn riff of "I've Got You Under My Skin," you'll turn to the doorway, and your eyes will look directly into hers.

There are few moments that matter in a young man's life; this will be one of yours that does. You will

look at Demarzio, Deluvio, or Degenerito's unmade face—innocent and hungry, eyes widening as her lower lip swells against her upper. Shock will ripple through your stomach. She will look back perplexed, let her head fall to the side, the frayed end of one braid dangling against her shoulder, and you will both feel like you are about to understand something as cruel and as dark as the hole Darth mined in Barbie's *derrière*.

The feeling will be so strong that you both momentarily forget where you are or what you are doing. She will lean sleepily against the door jamb, you will loosen your fingers from the frills of the pom-pom and the worn material at the back of the sweater, and that cheerleading uniform will tumble to the carpet with a splash that startles you both back to the awkward moment.

Watch her gasp, straighten, then spin in the doorway and dash back down the hallway, but do not follow.

You cannot. You will not. For you will know that following her would mean leaving behind the golden girl that now lies lifeless on your bedroom floor. This will be the first collision between fantasy and flesh in your young life, and you will make the only decision you can. You will behave. You will choose neither.

The next morning, when you wake, you can try to scoop that uniform up and make it dance again, but it will not. The grain of the fabric, the tickle of the pom-pom, the sway of the skirt . . . It will all only bring back that image of her—little Demarzio, Deluvio, or Degenerito slumping in your doorway under the weight of wonder and disgust. So do what you do with all the inanimate dead. Bury the

cheerleading uniform in the lot behind the garden, break out the inchers, the Furbie, and your silly little tears.

It will all add up to your first heartbreak, and you'll mope around the house with the adorable melancholy of a cartoon psychopath. Demarzio, Deluvio, or Degenerito will never mention the incident in school. Ashamed and confused over her own role in the discovery, she will only avoid your gaze, hug her textbooks a little more tightly over her chest when you pass in the halls, and kick a little more cautiously at the basketball games.

So this too will pass. You will drift back into the normalcy of teen-aged despair and pass your final months of high school with thoughts of suicide and military service that eventually resolve into the acceptance that the only death you desire is the diluted form afforded by higher education.