

Wreck League Volleyball

by Michael Grimberg

How could something be such a blessing and at the same time be such a curse? You'd think stopping for a coffee wouldn't turn into an instant condemnation of one's being. Blonde hair. Real blonde hair. Loved for it. Despised for it. "Who stinkin' cares anyways? It's just the way it is and look.. I got it darkened underneath." Jennifer tries to get it out of her mind that some hosebag gave her the look of death while she was standing in line to get a double mocha. She should be thinking ahead to rest of the afternoon anyways... it's not like she's the only cute girl in the world anyways. Why can't they look inside? Isn't that what matters?

Now for the real blessing and curse. Six months ago Jenn decided to take on a job a psychiatric nurse. It's one of those residency programs where you learn as you go with an incrementation in pay until you earn your professional certification. It meant moving away from the city to a small town about 40 minutes drive distant. It's not like she'd moved to Guatemala or something because all the vestiges of her previous life are still there... just that the job and the town aren't what she expected.

It's a short drive across town from her suite to work so all those thoughts have to take a backseat as she pulls into the park like institutional grounds. Oh crap... some dork dick just took that good parking spot by the door and she is going to have to park in another time zone. And look, it's that scaly intern that's got more lizard in him than Godzilla. Her eyes roll up just like a bug landed on her forehead and she shakes her head from side to side when she sees him checking her out.

Good thing she's a psycho fit chick. It does tend to discourage the real gomers. It also might help because after a quick tour of the parking lot she finds there isn't one available spot. This completely stupid. Whoever designed this place? She has to drive way over to the overflow parking lot which is way closer to her house than it is the hospital. Oh well, serves her right she thinks, because she had one of those super fattening blueberry muffins at the coffee place last night.

She finds an open stall way over in bear country and starts her trek across the grounds. She puts on her cutie girl toque and matching mittens, as winter hasn't quite given up yet, and starts out along the treed over walkway. About two minutes along she comes upon a higher functioning patient chipping ice. She gives him a polite half smile then recoils when he looks up at her letting go a gruesome droll down his chin onto his jacket. Jenn isn't yet accustomed to this sort of stuff as she's had mostly classroom instruction until about a month ago, so she is pretty unnerved by first sight of the day. Even worse it kindled a memory of her last boyfriend at a chug-a-lug at some dumb country bar. Boy, she's gone out with some real losers she thinks.

The chill of the afternoon quickens her pace as she passes a little bridge going over a

creek. It would be so much better if it was summer though. Jenn, like most sane people, is a creature of the summer. There's nothing like going for a run or a walk by the lake on a warm summer day.

Ah... but then reality knocks her out of her beautiful reverie when her cell phone rings. How did civilisation ever manage to exist before these things came along? Off goes a mitt and down into her pocket goes her velvety hand. It's her tied-for-first-place best friend, Margaret. Margaret is a girl whom she knew well before and is taking the same program she is.

"Hi, where are you? You're going to be late."

"No, I had to park in the overflow parking lot, I still got 20 minutes."

"Yeah, I know... you're always here before I am though."

"That's because you have two jobs. I don't know how you do it."

"Jenn, there's no one here to talk to."

"Tough it out... I'll be there in five minutes."

"Okay, yeah, bye."

"Bye."

There is no way Jenn would have stuck it out for six months with all these booger licking maniacs and drab institutional décor if it wasn't for Margaret. She seems to have a giant reserve of fortitude for this world that Jenn just can't put a finger on. Margaret is so much less grossed out and remains calm in situations where spaz Jenn would want to smoke someone over the head with a pizza box.

Finally she gets to the first parking lot and bounds across it to the door. In she goes darting through the halls to where her little class of eight is supposed to meet. Everyone except for the nurse/instructor lady has shown up. Beautiful brunette Margaret perks right up when she sees Jennifer walk in. Their eyes lock as she zooms over.

Jenn has a very lovable habit of rapidly firing questions at people she likes the instant she sees them.

"Did you see Survivor last night? Did you get that cheque yet? Hey, you're wearing your black sweater... you know they're going to have a sale at the Bay this weekend..."

Even though Margaret has known her quite a while she still gets bowled over by Jenn's supernova of energy sometimes. But today she knows how to handle it a better than Elvira knows how to goop on green eyeliner. Comically, she shoots questions right back at her.

"How about that guy? They should never have left him alone with that duck. What are doin' after...hey, they got a new magazine in the waiting room."

They both suddenly pause, sharing some secret meaning before bursting into quiet

laughter. Some of the other student nurses marvel at this very teenage display, perhaps smiling, as they all once knew such feelings. Jenn and Margaret inject life into their small group like energy drinks perk up young ravers.

Just about as they are about to resume their girl world one of their other instructors comes in announcing that the lady who is to be teaching them today is going to late or not make it at all so they should go do whatever for 40 or so minutes. Under her breath Jenn says something about the instructor lady having as bad a luck as herself finding a parking spot.

Margaret is pretty excited about the prospect of having chat time with Jenn. She really doesn't have too much opportunity with that with her two jobs and adhering to a psycho fitness regime much like Jenn's. Their eyes meet again.

"What should we do?"

Jenn thinks for a second. "I know... let's go to the upstairs lounge."

"Great idea... let's go."

They leave their coats before darting out of the room off to another part of the building where there's a deserted ward. They pass by a few nurses and one of the grumpy old administrator guys before bounding up the stairs. Then as they race up to the top Jenn gets a most peculiar urge.

Ever since she was a little girl she has had this inclination to squeeze through stair railings and other tight spots. And here, at the top of the stairs, there's a railing that cuts off a landing so giddy little Jennifer just can't resist. She stops dead in her tracks almost having Margaret crash into the back of her.

"What are you doing?"

"I wonder if I could fit through there."

"What?"

"I'll bet I could."

Margaret suddenly remembers Jenn having tried doing something like this before.

"You're Crazy."

"What? Don't you think I'll fit?" She looks at Margaret accusingly.

"Well no, of course you will."

Jenn isn't dissuaded at all because it really is a tight spot as she bends down, sticking one muscular girl leg through the railing onto the landing. Then, leading with her arm, she starts her petite, but shapely, body through a space that couldn't be more than 20 centimetres wide. With some serious squishage she gets half of her nice bum through the railing but is having some serious difficulty getting her top half to go. It's really tight so she exhales hard and really starts pushing with her outside leg. Just about through, things get kind of awkward when her bra gets pulled over one boob and, at the same time, starts pinching her in the back. This gives her a real sense of immediacy to get through and leaves her feeling a bit naked as always has her perky treasures snug inside a bra when she's out in public.

Margaret's eyes widen when she sees Jenn's little calamity.

"I hope that doesn't hurt."

"No... I'mmmm just about through."

The railing is around Jenn's neck as she gets her other leg out onto the landing, then all that remains is to get her pretty little head through, but... Jenn's head is of slightly larger proportions than the rest of her, so anytime she's tried a stunt like this it's been the most challenging part.

Right about the one of the worst things that could possible happen does. Jenn goes into a giggling fit which totally halts her progress and is completely contagious to Margaret. Then there's some rustling along the upstairs hallway that's probably the heating kicking in but sounds like it could be people.

Margaret can't help but make more of it.

"Oh no. A couple of guys are coming."

Jenn is almost at a panic but is still laughing. Margaret knows what'll really get Jenn going.

"I think they're going to ask us for dates."

"What!!?"

Jenn starts freaking out being in such a ridiculous position. She starts pulling and twisting to the point of almost ripping an ear of while still in full giggle. Completely contrary to her unmischievous nature, Margaret is overcome with a brilliantly spontaneous idea while Jenn is horror stricken with the thought of a bunch of pimple date seeking nerds about to see her like this.

In a flash Margaret jumps over the railing to Jenn's blind side and with her bum sticking out so awkwardly, gives her the hardest two handed cheek squeeze she's

ever had in her life.

Jenn screams so loud half of the building hears it and Margaret's laughing isn't that quiet either. Suddenly Jenn's head is through the railing and she's laughing so hard she's got tears in her eyes. now she's completely sure Margaret did it.

Margaret gets her arm up just in time to for Jenn to pound her with the bottoms of her fists, but this is so stupid an attempt at retaliation it just makes then laugh more. They wind up hugging one another all teary eyed. But clam right uo when they really do hear someone coming down the hallway.

Quickly they both jump over the railing and start off up the hallway seeing this middle aged guy coming out of his office towards them.

"Is everything alright?', he asks them as they are trying to straighten up a bit.

"Yeah, everything is fine." Jenn says starting to giggle again.

Margaret erupts behind her when she sees the guy's astonished look when he notices Jenn's dislodged bra cup up by her shoulder and her unfettered treasure so prominently reflecting the excitement of the previous moments. Jenn burns by him completely embarrassed when she realises the origin of the guy's amazement. Margaret shoves her from behind as she bounds ahead trying to fix her misalignments. They zip into the staff lounge throwing the door shut behind them to laugh some more. Half an hour quickly passes with a fast paced discussion covering topics like clothes, work and, of course, guys.

Before they know it they are back downstairs getting the lowdown on the afternoon's activities. The instructor didn't show up so they are dispersed to do some hands on training. Margaret gets sent one way and Jenn another, probably because the regular staff think they're a menace when they're together. That's okay though, because they'll meet up again later on for their supper break and they have stuff planned for after work.

Jenn grabs her jacket and mittens before heading off to some other building with another mid 20s trainee girl. As is the case with nearly everyone, Jenn gets along quite well with her. Her name is Suzie and she's a bit of a quiet type. Jenn is very conscientious of this so she hits the dimmer switch on her limitless radiances and spasmodic tendencies. They talk a while as they cut between buildings and trees. Jenn can't help but feel that Suzie's being a little puppy like though. This is truly unacceptable to her very egalitarian worldview so she, very diplomatically, slips in things into their conversation to make Suzie feel like an equal and not an inferior. It seems to have worked as by the time they reach their destination with Suzie appearing more confident and talkative.

It's really good they've had some bonding because they are going to need each other

when they walk into the ward and see scaly man intern guy. He's sitting with his feet up on the counter.

"Hello girls." he says lifting his electrolysis nightmare eyebrows.

"Oh gross." Jenn thinks but she says, "Hi, we're going to be on this ward today."

"Well that suits me just fine."

Suzie is noticeably uncomfortable with intern and retreats into quiet mode so it's up to Jenn to do the talking.

"So... what's going on?"

"Same old."

"Got any meds to hand out?"

"Nope."

Seems like the guy wants to play a little game of non-interest so Jenn decides to put the kybosh on him.

"Well, we'll just go do a round then."

With that Jenn and Suzy walk off down the hallway coldly leaving the guy. Suzie admires Jenn's sternness in dealing with the jerk.

"You really know how to deal with people."

"Thanks, we came here to learn stuff and we aren't going to get any help out of that sister kisser."

They look in a few windows in the ward that very much resembles a newer hospital but is getting on in the years. It is however a lot less optimistic a place than a real hospital because that is usually where normal people go to get well and this is a place where sick people stay sick. They peek in one open door seeing an older lady sitting on the edge of her bed. The lady gives them an inviting look so that's reason enough to go in.

"Hi, how are you doing?" Jenn asks, slightly leaning down to her.

"Alright if it wasn't for all these damn pills they keep givin' me."

"You're not feeling too good today?"

"No... I'm feeling way too good."

"What do you mean?"

"They're givin' me so many pills it feels like a cloud is pulling me up into the sky... listen dear... I'm not ready for St. Peter yet."

Jenn laughs a bit. "Have you asked them to decrease your meds?"

"Yeah, but they say I'll be down in the pits if I they do that."

"Oh?"

Jenn knows it's really up to the doctors and clinicians to dictate dosages, so she can only be comforting. The girls find out a bit about the lady's life and discover it was pretty normal until about 10 years ago when she was diagnosed with depression. It only got worse with treatments and later institutionalisation. All the previous raiment's of her life floated off leaving her listing like drift wood in an empty sea. But despite that she seems remarkably composed compared to all the true slobbering maniacs.

They finish off their off their little conversation with the lady giving them a wrinkly old smile. As they go Jenn sees Suzie gently put her hand on the lady's shoulder then slowly lift it off. Jenn can't help but see something greater though. Lots of people touch each other and it hardly means a thing. But sometimes even the briefest touch can impart the sincerest warmth or love. How much quiet little Suzie gave of herself to that lady with the merest of touches Jenn thinks.

They walk out into the hallway quickly losing the tenderness of the preceding moment to some guy screaming way down at the end of the hallway. A few seconds later the intern guy flies by them with an older nurse right behind him sporting a huge needle and an immense bottle of koo-koo juice.

"Come on girls!" She beckons them.

Towards that end of the ward is where they keep the really bad patients (probably to save their nerves). The guy in second last room is screaming and smashing stuff which does a bit of a number on the girls' composure. The intern unlocks the crazy's door and goes in with the nurse a step behind. Jenn's adrenalin shoots right up when she follows them in to see the intern in a real battle with this skinny red haired patient. The intern looks quiet adept at handling out of control patients when he gets the guy into a pretty good hold. With a machine like coldness the old nurse draws a huge dose out of her vial with the meanest looking metal syringe while the intern really clamps down on the patient.

Just as the nurse is about to give the guy his shot he flips out with amazing energy sending the intern flying over the bed. The nurse takes a quick step back to protect

everyone from the needle while the crazy guy glares at it like it'll be the death of him. Neither Jenn nor Suzie are scrapper chicks, but they know they have to do something. Suzie winds up and kicks the guy in the shin but that doesn't do much to deter him. With the flame of insanity in eyes he goes to push Suzy but Jenn intercepts his arm, twisting it and pulling him forward so he wipes out all three of them out on the way to the floor. To make the crash even louder the intern guy jump's on the patient's back. For a couple of seconds there is a four person clamour on the floor but the old nurse is lightning quick with her deadly needle and, in a few more seconds, the life goes completely out of him.

It's quite a relief to see the intern loading the guy onto his bed and the nurse checking his vital signs. Suzie picks herself up off of the floor while Jenn has to rectify her second major bra misalignment of the day. She makes a mental note to wear her super squeezer sport cups next time.

In a few short minutes Jenn and Suzie find themselves doing the most detestable thing... changing some super low function guy's diaper. Jenn would rather go back and tussle with the raving lunatic than suffer this indignity. Super rancid stinking wet poop.

Compared to that the fight was almost fun. She's always liked things that get her adrenalin going. Nothing lets you know you're alive like testing yourself doing a standing backflip or smashing a volleyball into some hussy team's big feet.

A few hours go by with the girls doing a variety of housekeeping like activities before they get their half hour lunch/supper break. The two of them meet the rest of the trainees at the staff cafeteria place. This isn't the happiest occasion as the conveyor belt food isn't the great. About all Margaret and Jenn can bear are some salad and some buns. But it isn't all bad as they zoom off into into their million mile an hour girl world. To some onlookers it might even seem like they were watching a film that was slightly sped up and suddenly rips when they head off back to work.

Not long after, Jenn is stuck in some backroom with a computer writing some reports and doing some filing. One of things about this job that surprised her was how much of this stuff there was. You seem to have to write something about thing you do. Furthermore... everything has to written in gross bureaucratic language. Just how is she supposed to put it that they beat up a psycho who wanted to kill them and sent him off into la-la land with half a litre of horse tranquiliser?

Despite her complaints, Jenn's actually quite proficient at this sort of stuff, having had a few office jobs in her time. So, seeing this, the old nurse piled like... 200 reports on her. It suits her just fine as she's a real trooper when it comes to work. It should eat up the rest of her day/evening and then it'll be fun time again.

About an hour into it Jenn really starts getting dragged down by it all. Some of the stuff is so horrible and wearing on her super acute girl senses. Maybe it's time to take a

little break and think about things. Was this such a really good choice? She was doing alright before she came here. The doubts are really starting to fly. After a few minutes she is almost incapacitated by a terrible sinking feeling. Maybe it'll go away if she gets up and goes to the bathroom like she's been needing to do for the last half hour or so.

It's a ways off down another corridor in a secluded part of the building. Jenn goes in and does what girls do, then runs some cold water to splash on her face. It doesn't help much, so she goes to sit on a shower stall bench. She plants her elbows on her knees and cradles her face with her hands. So often she is distracted by her activity rich life that she rarely has time to sit and think things through. What is it that is bugging her?

Staring at the lavender tiles she mulls over her career choice. This job sucks and if it wasn't for Margaret being here she'd have packed up a few months ago. But then she's stuck it out with a lot of jobs that weren't so great. Maybe it's her bouncy history of relationships. She's never really been too sure of a guy and the rare one that's been close to "it" winds up drift off or having some fatal flaw that ruins everything. But that's not it either. She's never had any difficulty knocking boys off of their feet. Hmmm... it has bugging her that she hasn't seen too much of her family of late.

Jenn sits up a bit looking at a lovely pink towel fresh on the shower bar. Pink is her favourite colour and always brings her some measure of happiness. It is so weird she just starts to feels worse looking at it. What is wrong? She drops her face into her hands and stares at her feet.

She thinks of the old lady alone in her room. How completely awful her lonely in this mental institution must be. No family. No future. Yet she is coping with it so well. Even though Jenn was playing the role of comforter it was her who was getting something from the old lady. Maybe an assurance that God really does take care of people. Or maybe it was an echo of the warmth she received from her grandparents as a kid.

That's not it though. She stares at the tiles to the point of them becoming a blur. In that blur she sees Suzie's hand touching that old lady's shoulder. How much kindness in that simple act. How much warmth, how much love. This so not like Jenn. She never fixates on moments like that. She's a doer. Actions and interests drive her existence and here she is stuck on that one thing. What is it?

Then her stomach sinks and her throat becomes one gross lump. She hasn't felt this sad in years. So much of being a girl is about tenderness. Suzie's hand was so much an extension of her loving heart. Sudden Jenn is enveloped by a gray sea of doubt. Maybe she doesn't have as much love in her as she thinks. Maybe she missed the boat living, doing, going... whatever, that she forgot how to feel all the deep things a girl should feel. Her heart sinks even more and she begins to cry. The only times she cried in the last three years have been for happiness and now she cries out of despair.

Jenn's almost forgotten how good it feels to let her emotions out. She wipes her eyes and blows her nose to compose herself. A measure of joy comes with her new resolve. She does know how to feel. She does know that love is in her heart. With that she returns to her computer and her big pile of reports.

Around eight o'clock they are done their shift. Jenn has invited Suzie to come join in on her and Margaret's volleyball game at the local community center. There are quite a few good players around and there's pretty competitive league happening amid the surrounding towns. This is to Jenn's absolute delight as she was on her college's team and has all sorts of trophies and scars vouching for her proficiency. She even broke her leg once when she smacked into the pole going for the ball. You know a girl like this takes her volleyball really seriously.

The girls are quick to don their skimpy jock duds. They look more like they are off to hotties only aerobics class than a volleyball game. Tonight they're up against a team visiting from the major city an hour up the road. Jenn recognises one girl she played against on a university team. The girl also recognises Jenn and flashes her a snotty look. She looks a tad too confident with her group of beanpoles, just like when Jenn's team waxed her in the regional playoffs five years ago. Then she spots another girl who went to the national championships. Well, hopefully her team of fun seekers can put up a good fight.

Margaret is probably the best player on the team besides herself. It's kind of puzzling though as she's kind of a girly girl and never did a lot of sports. But she can really go because she gets so determined. Jenn hopes she doesn't get too fired up and get hurt bad like she once did.

After a few minutes delay where the teams stand restlessly looking other over one another the line judge shows up after her donut and deodorant break. She's a big lady and a lot of the girls secretly hope the platform can withstand her freight train sized butt. She forgoes the coin toss and awards the first serve to the more professional looking visiting team. It's nice to see she's impartial.

Both lines of three on Jenn's team hold hands a moment before they scatter with the whistle and the first spike of the ball. Suddenly the gym is super alive with the squeaks of runners and bouncing girls. There's not so cordial yelling going on between each team as the ball gets lobbed from one side to the other. Right off the bat each team knows the other is charging up for them. It's Margaret who smashes the ball down in between Snotty Lips and National Champion for the first point of the game. Jenn is so proud of her as they slap hands and she can see a plodding carnivore like enthusiasm in Margaret's beautiful grey-blue eyes.

As quickly as their team gets a point the other team gets one back. Then the visitors methodically rack up a few more points. Jenn sees and ever destructive arrogance slip into the opposing squad not even two minutes into the game when they start to

play soft. Jenn gets her team a point and then, even better, it's her turn to serve. This definitely the strongest point of her game. The weakest is when she's up at the net because she's only about 5'8".

Swinging her right leg back, she hesitates for a split second, freezing every girl on the opposing team just like she did a million times back in college. When she gets around to smacking the ball with her powerful little forearm the whole opposing team seems mesmerised by the sporty little blonde girl. The ball bounces off the floor just inside the line and it's home team's point. "How'd she do that?" Half of the other team is wondering. "I thought you were going after that." Quickly some high school girl hanging around after her practice retrieves the ball and admiringly fires it over to Stern Faced Strike Smash Jenn. Then she doesn't hesitate to do the exact same thing over again. "What!?" Now it's Margaret slapping hands with Jenn seeing a priceless gleam in her ocean blue eyes.

Jenn is on a roll like her best days in college when a stunned National Champ girl takes it upon herself to break her spell. She's seen this before. Some adorable little girl like Jenn that should have stayed in home economics class will (whether she knows it or not) suck the whole good team into awing her gracious little figure and subtleness like a magazine cover rips the hope out of a girl down on herself. Secret is... don't look at her while she's serving. Ball goes up... National Champ sends it back. They still lose a point but they won't be the first team in history to be ploughed under by one girl serving.

Next go they do get a point and the rest of the game is pretty close until match point. What would such fine early serving performance be without Jenn winning the game for them without a bellybutton stretching shot block at the net?

The home team is ecstatic with all the girls exchanging adulations on their way to their water bottles. They don't waste too much time though and in a short minute they're on their way back to action. Looks like the visiting team is having a strategy session with National Champ really giving it to one older girl who doesn't deserve it. They trot back a bit late while Margaret whispers encouragement in Suzie's ear as he's up to serve.

It doesn't help as Suzie completely flubs it giving the visitors a chance to start their revenge. Snotty Lips winds up doing a carbon copy of Suzie's try so they're tied again. Now it's Margaret's turn to serve but she's off in wonderland needing to be prompted by another player. Snapping out of it, she concentrates on the ball on Oprah would concentrate on a mound of pork chops. Then, after a brief hesitation, she smacks it over the net uncontested by the stunned members of the opposing team.

"What!? I thought you had it." With an uncanny resemble to Jenn's first game serving performance beautiful brunette Margaret pauses another frozen moment before hitting the ball and in so doing paralyses every opposing player with it bouncing twice inside the line. Jenn is so proud of Margaret she turns and gives her a half hug with nearly a tear welling in her eye.

But there's no repeat performance as the next ball sails on her. It almost knocks the line judge off of her perch when it careens back off of the far wall. That's a relief to the opposing team as they regroup and get a healthy lead. Jenn's team fights back with a few points but the visitors handily win the game 25 to 12. Well, at least they won the first game.

Both teams are really gasping for air and in need of water as they go for their next break. As they go to their respective benches Snotty Lips in on a parallel course with Jenn and she can't resist demonstrating an immense dislike for her. Her eyelashes squeeze into malicious slits as she half says, "Nice serve slut." Jenn can't believe someone she's maybe seen five whole times in her whole life could hit her with something like that. "Yeah, nice dye job.", is all she can muster as a response.

Grabbing her water bottle out of her gym bag Jenn just can't get over the sting of the girl's insult. "She doesn't even know the first thing about me.", she thinks, "She must have a pretty crappy life to go around being that lippy." Margaret pulls her right out of it by giving her well formed bicep a good squeeze.

"You think we can win the next game?"

"Yeah, with the way you're playin'."

"No.. you're the one that always carries the team."

"I don't think so."

Before they know it the whistle goes reconvening the epic contest. All the girls are starting to look a little damp as they hustle back. Being put on the defensive by the snide comment Jenn looks over the other team a bit closer. She gets a shock when she sees National Champ's big armpit sweat rings. Time for some Lady Speedstick.

It's visitor's serve when the next whistle blows and it's Snotty lips who puts a weak one into their court. After a minute long volley one of Jenn's teammates gets them a point. Seems like the game is getting kind of serious already. On the next play Margaret lunges for the ball ploughing herself into the shiny floor just getting the ball over the net but then Trucker Woman Line Judge calls it visiting team's point. All her teammates dispute the call but she blows the whistle pointing to the net like it were her hamburger and someone took a giant bite out of it. After her initial flare up, Jenn is pretty forgiving because she's she a million bad calls and they usually even out.

The next ball comes to Margaret again so once more she dives for it without any regard for herself. It stays in, starting an intense series with Jenn's team earning a point by the ball going off of someone beanpole's noggin and out of play. Although taking it off of the coconut is fairly common in volleyball, the opposing teams sees it as deliberate and declares war. Jenn's bunch loses the next point and when it's

Snotty lips' turn to serve again her emotions get the best of her and she drives the ball straight into the net.

Two - two. It goes like that all the way up to 10 - 10 when two of Jenn's teammates have a bit of collision and one of them goes down. Ever the sensitive one, Margaret helps the girl to her feet while a couple of the girls on the other side sneer at what isn't an all too uncommon mishap. A little callously the line judge blows the whistle to resume play, but anyone can see that the girl needs a few seconds to collect herself. All just part of the sport she loves Jenn thinks. The girl looks okay as the ball goes back in motion with another well contested half minute long volley resulting in a visiting team point.

The next point takes nearly two minutes to win. It must be the longest series Jenn's ever seen in her life. She feels some real fatigue setting in as the all the girls are desperate to catch their breath. Even the squeaks of the runners on the floor are starting to sound different. Could be she's getting to the point of exhaustion where the body starts to release all sorts of chemicals that make you feel funny. This is so much like a playoff game in college she thinks.

Somehow they get those points back quickly. Then National Champ does an illegal move the Line Judge doesn't call. They lose a point on that one. Jenn feels some real excitement as her team goes up 14 - 12. They just might be able to win this game and take the whole thing two to one. At first she thought they were just going to get hosed but now victory seems a real possibility.

Margaret makes an excellent serve to start another long series. Back and forth the ball goes, each girl so desiring for it to hit the floor on the other side. It doesn't. About the sixth or seventh trip over the net a real individual competition develops between Snotty lips and Jenn who each send the ball over the net twice in a row. For a third straight time Jenn rockets off the floor smashing the ball as her heels hit her tight buttocks. It cannonballs over to where Snotty Lips returned it last go but she is out of position toward the back line. She races to save it, bounding the ball upwards but she can't stop her herself and flat out smokes into the Line Judge's pole. She goes down like a ton of bricks while the Line Judge drops her whistle as though it were a poison donut to grab onto the madly oscillating pole to keep from falling off backwards. It was a major recoil though and it yanks her forward so much she loses her balance and falls. All 200 pounds of her go crashing down onto Snotty Lips making the most horrible scrunching sound.

All of the girls are completely petrified by this dreadful catastrophe. Instinctively Jenn's hands go up to cover her wide open mouth. The gym is absolutely quiet with the exception of the still bouncing volleyball. In half a second one of the other team's girls and Margaret, who was right there, are helping them. The Line Judge rolls off of Snotty lips, her fat butt squishing across her grimaced face. She says she is okay and Margaret gives her arm a good tug so she can stand. A girl from the other team says she's a paramedic so she goes right to work with everyone forming a concerned half

circle around the writhing Snotty Lips.

She rolls around gasping for air as the paramedic tries to calm her. She is super methodical in her assessments and actions, allowing her to sit up only when she is sure there is no serious injury. She and Margaret lean her up against the hard steel pole so she can fully get her wind back. Jenn feels just awful. She never meant in a million years to send her for the pole. It was an accident.

Right about then the Line Judge calls the game off and declares it a draw. Jenn wishes the game never happened out of concern for the girl. She looks so hurt as her eyes are squeezed shut only relaxing when Margaret's calming hand comes softly to rest on her shoulder. So much kindness imparted through a single touch.

A while after the game Jenn and Margaret go to the local coffee place. Neither of them will be able to sleep for hours so hopefully this will help them get their minds off of that horrible picture. The first thing they notice is that the place is unusually busy for it being 10:30 at night. The second thing they notice is the gruesomely long line-up. They have to wait and wait to get their decaf mochas and much deserved yummy buns. They also have difficulty finding a seat so wind up sitting on a wide window ledge.

Once they are settled in the conversation drifts onto clothes as they notice a particularly well dressed person in the shop. Both of them are in desperate need of a shopping trip into the city.

"it's been like... three weeks since I bought anything. " Margaret complains.

"Let's go on Saturday."

"Gag, I have to work in the morning."

"We can go later, everything's open 'till nine."

"We'll be so late."

"So?"

"My credit card is going to overheat."

"Quit making excuses... you know you want to go."

"Jenn..."

A tight lipped smile comes to Margaret's face as she looks deeper into Jenn's eyes. Sometimes she gets the most peculiar feeling as though she were falling forward into her. Maybe it's just from having a long day.

"Hey! What are you doing?" Jenn complains as Margaret starts dumping coffee on her leg from leaning too far ahead.

"Whoops... I'm sorry." Margaret grabs a serviette from under her yummy bun to dab Jenn's pant leg.

"Margaret, you're trancing out again."

"Sorry."

"It's okay... it's not like I've done that I've never done that myself."

"I've never seen you."

"What was the worst one?"

Half smiling Jenn squints her eyes as she starts searching the files in her brain really hard when Beep A Leepie Beep goes her cell phone. She seems a little annoyed that her concentration has been so rudely interrupted. She grabs it out of her coat and answers.

"Hello... no...I'm busy... that's nice... but okay... I gotta go... bye."

Jenn pushes the end button while rolling her eyes up like a bug landed on her forehead and shakes her head from side to side. It was the ever present girl problem of boy plague.

"Who was that?"

"Ah... never mind.. what were we talking about?"

"Hey look! There's an open spot." Margaret points to a table for two being vacated with any vulturing seat scabs nearby.

"Oh great, let's go."

They grab their coffee, buns, cell phones, coats, girl bags and whatever else happily abandoning the bum flattening ledge for some nice cushy chairs by the shop's fake fireplace. They dart through the busy place like Christmas shoppers intent on nabbing the one remaining waffle iron that would make Aunt Sheila's life complete.

Quickly Margaret gets settled in, but Jenn is stuck having to manoeuvre her chair out of a low spot in the carpet, fearing she'll start rocking like a red neck on his trailer's porch when she has one of her famous energy outbursts. As she goes to sit down she notices two poorer looking middle-aged ladies sitting with a young boy of about

10 at the next table. What is he doing here at nearly 11 o'clock? He sits a bit removed from the ladies and isn't involved in their conversation. He has a very sad, almost pathetic look on his face as they briefly exchange glances. Taking her hair out of her pony tail she tosses it from side to side. Then she gets on Margaret.

"You haven't touched your bun yet."

"I don't know if I want it."

"You're probably starving and you still won't eat that?"

"Well..."

"You probably burned a million calories playing volleyball... come on... those are sooo... good..."

"Okay."

Margaret takes a small girl sized bite, looking quite guilty for doing so, while Jenn encourages her with a nod.

"Isn't it good?"

"Yeah, it is."

"Hey! You haven't eaten yours yet... you're going to sit there and watch me get huge while you sit there all skinny."

Jenn laughs at this ludicrous indictment of how girls torture themselves with the weight issue.

"Okay, watch... I'm eating it."

She takes a gopher sized nibble and then they both laugh. Jenn can't help but notice the boy at the next table smiling at their fun, so she hams it up by baring her perfect white teeth, except the cap that's a little grey, and chomps half of her bun at once. Margaret's look of surprise turns to giggles as Jenn's mouth really isn't big enough for the size of the bite she took. She's trying to chew but her cheeks bulge out, and worse, she starts laughing. The more she tries, the funnier it gets.

Then she tries to talk, "I'll dick smack you!"

Margaret loses it and Jenn isn't far behind trying not to choke. The boy is laughing too with admiring eyes at the silly blonde girl. In about a minute Jenn manages to swallow her food, but not before her face goes completely red. Then it's Margaret's turn for cell phone boy plague. Very politely she gets rid of the guy and that gives Jenn

some time to straighten up.

They sit around about another twenty minutes talking about whatever else. They just barely manage not to have any more Jenn incidents. Getting late, they decide it's time to go. Jenn sees a not a so well hidden sadness return to the boy, likely due her leaving. Maybe he feels just a bit attached to her.

She stands up, throwing on her coat, Margaret already starting to go. How bashful his little face is she thinks, as she purposely walks towards him and stops leaving him in frightened wonder of her. She looks down deep into his eyes smiling as she softly puts her hand on his shoulder. How much kindness imparted by a simple touch. Then she walks away in the sureness of herself.