

The Score

They were between me and the exit.

Rats! I thought I'd ditched them.

I knew my dad was parked in his usual spot right in front of the door, looking at his watch and muttering that I'd be late for my allergist appointment. Dad preferred I come out right when the bell rang, so we could get to the doctor's office by 3:15 and possibly get in early for my weekly 3:30 shot.

They spotted me. I thought about backtracking to the side door, but then I'd have to run to get to Dad's car, and what if they intercepted me outside? Dad would honk.

I walked right up to Kath. “I don't have time. I have to go to the allergist.”

“Tomorrow, then. Please, Manda? We still have 400 paper roses to go, and the dance is this Friday.”

“Not my problem.”

Cindy grabbed my arm. “Yes it is. It was your idea in the first place.”

“I have to go! I’m gonna get in trouble.”

“Tomorrow or else.” Cindy’s eyes glowed sort of red, as though she were smoldering inside.

I shook myself free and slipped through the door. My dad tapped the car horn twice, as if I needed the reminder he was there. I slid into my seat without a word.

When we got to the allergist’s office, I was ushered right in to the exam room. Dr. Anesh appeared and asked me about my symptoms.

“The same,” I mumbled.

He administered the shot and opened the door for me. Elapsed time: sixty seconds.

My dad had already paid for my shot and turned to the door when he saw me coming. At this rate we’d be home by 3:35. I almost considered asking him to drop me off back at school. Kath and Cindy would be working on those roses ‘til 5 for sure.

Almost. But I stopped myself.

Cindy was right. It had been my idea to volunteer the three of us to be on the decorating committee. And the theme was my idea, too: *I promised you a rose garden*. It was a take-off on Billy Joe Royal’s song, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. It also was my idea to fill the entire gym with thousands of paper roses. Kath and Cindy and I were the paper rose queens ever since we were in Girl Scouts together in elementary school. We perfected the technique of forming gracefully curved crepe paper petals by shaping the edges around a pencil. I promised

the entire committee that the three of us would supply plenty of roses to cover the walls with cascading blossoms and all the tables with centerpieces.

But that was three months ago. When I had every expectation of going to the senior dinner dance with Bob. Before he dumped me. For that cheerleader. Cherie. Who’d slept with the whole football team.

Bob and I had been inseparable since fall, when we were in Regional Chorus and sang a duet together. We had so much in common—both planning to go to State College next year and major in music. I thought we were bonded forever, destined to make beautiful music together for eternity. I wanted our senior dinner dance to be perfect, because that would be the perfect time for Bob to propose to me. So, you see, I had a lot at stake. That’s why I had all those extravagant, time-consuming ideas for decorating the gym.

Now I’d be going to the dance alone. Making those roses was a painful reminder of dreams that would never come true.

Poor Kath and Cindy. This was not their fault. Their boyfriends didn’t dump them. Kath and André had been best friends since sixth grade, Cindy and Ron since ninth. It’s not *their* fault my boyfriend is fickle.

My conscience kicked my heart. I am a stinky friend.

I’ll help them tomorrow.

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The next day I headed straight for the art room after my last class. Kath and Cindy caught up with me and walked with me, one on either side of me, like a police escort. I deserved it, unreliable as I was.

Miss Johnson was at her desk with her gradebook and a stack of folders, probably working on report cards. She let us work in her room and store our thousands of roses in her supply cabinet, which was mostly empty of supplies, this being toward the end of the year. She nodded at our greeting, barely looking up from her work.

We took out our colored crepe paper, scissors, pencils, cardboard patterns, and florist wire and got started on our roses.

Kath cleared her throat. “There’s something I have to tell you.” She glanced at Cindy and back at me. Then she looked over at Miss Johnson, who was absorbed in her work. Kath leaned forward and lowered her voice. “André told me the senior boys have this bet going. About having sex before they graduate.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“It’s supposed to be a secret, but André told me a couple of months ago. It started out with the boys writing their initials on the wall of the boys’ restroom in the senior wing when they lost their virginity. Some guys put their initials up the first day. By the end of the week, almost every senior boy’s initials were up there.”

I snorted. “Yeah, right.”

Cindy said, “But that was no good. Everybody saying they’d done it meant everybody just got their own money back. So they upped the stakes. Next to their own initials, they had to write the initials of the girls they’d done it with. The guy with the most girls’ initials would win the pot, provided that the girls verified it.”

“Cherie’s initials are next to every guy on the football team,” said Kath.

“I knew it.”

“And your initials are next to Bob’s,” said Cindy.

“What? No! I’ve never done it! That’s so unfair! I told Bob I was waiting for marriage. I did the right thing! Wait—are your initials up there, too, for André and Ron?”

Kath’s cheeks reddened. “Yes, but we didn’t do it. André just put mine up, and then he told me about it, but swore me to secrecy.”

“And you’re *okay* with that?”

“No, but I get it.”

“What about Ron?” I looked at Cindy.

She shook her head. “Ron’s not part of the bet.”

“So you told her, but not me?” I asked Kath.

“You never came to make flowers with us. When was I going to tell you—in class?”

I finished the rose I was working on, threw it on the pile, and started another. Inside, I was burning. My anger turned me into a super-powered rose-making machine. How dare Bob claim I slept with him? “So that’s why Bob is dating Cherie now? To improve his chances of getting laid?”

Cindy shrugged. “Boys are pigs.”

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The next day after school, I noticed Bob in the hall, leaning close to Samantha Stewart, hanging on whatever vapid words she was saying.

My heart panged. I turned on my heels and went into the girls’ room. Cherie stood at the sink, looking at the mirror. I ducked into a stall.

When I came out, she was still standing there, tears streaming down her cheeks. I accidentally caught her eyes in the mirror. She looked away and sobbed.

I don't know why, but I suddenly felt sorry for her, another victim of Bob's fickleness.

“It hurts, doesn't it?”

Her eyes zeroed in on my reflection. “Word gets around fast. He dumped me for Samantha. Cause I wouldn't put out.”

Yeah, right. “Surprising, since you've been with the whole football team.”

Her eyes and mouth opened wide. “That's not true. I'm a virgin.”

“Pfft. Then why are your initials on the scoreboard at least a dozen times?” I heard the door open behind me.

“What scoreboard?” Cherie asked.

“The one in the senior boys' restroom.”

“Manda, I told you that was a secret,” said Kath, who had just come in.

“Yeah, but it's not right. The boys are pressuring us for sex and then lying about it when they don't get their way. André lied about you, Bob lied about me, and Cherie said she's still a virgin, so Bob plus the whole football team lied. They're ruining girls' reputations here. They can't just get away with it.”

“So what can we do about it? Tell the principal?” asked Kath.

“No, Mr. Brown would just cancel the dance to punish everybody,” said Cherie.

“I bet a lot of girls will get pressured to leave the dance early to drive up to Lookout Point, and then get seduced in the back of some horny guy's car. Maybe it would better for everybody if the dance were canceled.”

“No! Not after we spent three months making paper roses! And I already spent all my babysitting money on a dress,” Kath protested.

I suddenly had a brilliant idea. “What band is playing at the dance?”

“Impending Doom,” said Kath.

“Great! I know the lead singer.” I couldn’t keep the smile off my face. “I have a plan to get back at the boys for what they did to us. But we’ll have to cue in all the senior girls. Kath, I know you’re thinking about your vow of secrecy, but that was a pretty crappy thing André did, writing your initials on the scoreboard. Here’s what we’re going to do...”

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Friday the decorating committee stayed at school late, transforming the gymnasium into a rose garden paradise. Mr. James, the custodian, set up tables around the perimeter of the gym, and then nodded at me, so I knew he was going to do the thing we’d talked about. Cindy and Kath and I gazed around the room. “It’s even better than I imagined,” Cindy said, and Kath and I agreed. We had just enough time to go home, get ready for the dance, and carpool back to school before the guys had any idea what we were up to.

That night, the atmosphere at the dance was totally different from any dance in the preceding four years. All the girls got there early, carpooling together instead of waiting for their dates—those who still had dates, since a lot of the couples broke up because of the pressure of the bet. Nevertheless, the girls were made up, well-coifed, and dressed to kill. Unlike the prom, this dance was semi-formal, which meant dressy, but not floor-length. The dresses ranged from elegant cocktail chiffons in sherbet colors (though none of us could drink cocktails) to demure Sunday-morning-church numbers trimmed with lace.

Even Miss Johnson and Mr. Mendez, who were chaperoning the dance, seemed surprised that the girls arrived without dates. I drew the art teacher and coach aside. “There’s a rumor that the boys will try to spike the punch.”

The chaperones nodded. This was a familiar concern. “Don’t worry, we know all their tricks.”

When the boys arrived, they found the girls unmoved by their presence, immune to their charms. Usually girls would link arms with the boys they liked; but this night, most girls clustered in friendly boy-less groups.

As the record player offered Top 40 hits from its stacked spindle, the caterers carried in and arranged steaming trays of food and stacks of plates on the serving tables. Finally, the chaperones announced that dinner was ready. After negotiating the buffet lines, the girls filled tables and conversed pleasantly, leaving no spaces for the boys. Glumly, they occupied chairs at all-male tables, casting us perplexed looks from their freshly shaven faces.

At one point, there was a commotion near the punch bowl as Mr. Mendez took the arm of one of the football players and led him into the locker room, presumably to his office, where he would phone the boy’s parents and notify them of his attempt to pour a flask of alcohol into the punch.

After about an hour, the band began setting up their equipment on the portable stage and a crew of volunteers bussed tables. Then the record player abruptly fell silent and the lead guitarist strummed his first chords.

We promised the girls ten songs to dance to before we settled the score. We encouraged them to ask different guys to dance, not necessarily anyone they ever dated or thought they had a chance with. Tonight was about the girls having fun without worrying what the boys thought.

After experiencing the girls’ lack of interest in them prior to dinner, not having to make the first move set them off-balance. Popular boys found themselves suddenly dancing with quiet

girls. Brainy boys struggled to keep up with athletic girls. Girls flirted with guys they’d never even dared to talk to before. And everyone seemed to be having a great time.

Then Cindy, Kath, Cherie, Samantha, and I got up on the stage. Kevin, the lead singer, nodded at me. He knew what song we wanted them to play.

But I hadn’t told him we changed the words.

My heart pounded as I prepared myself. My stomach churned the butterflies inside it. I took several deep, measured breaths to calm myself. *This is not about me. This is about getting back at the boys for ruining our reputations.*

As the band played the intro, the girls turned their attention to the stage.

I grabbed a microphone and sang the first verse directly toward Bob, catching his curious eyes:

“I wouldn’t get hot and bothered
In the back seat of your car,
So you dropped me for another
But you didn’t get very far.
You tried to tempt a temptress
But instead she raised the bar,
So you’re looking for another one
To help you be the star.”

Cindy and Kath sang the refrain and the second verse with me, while Cherie and Samantha sang doo-wops and we each pointed out different guys. They were all guilty.

“But we’re not gonna be
Another notch on your bedpost—
The answer is NO.

“Now, if you want to get to know us
We’ll take it nice and slow.
You’ll treat us with respect
And your credentials will grow.
But we’re not gonna sleep with you
Until we’re your Mrs.

So keep your hands to yourselves
And be respectful with your kisses.”

Samantha and Cherie joined in with us as we sang the refrain two more times.

“We’re not gonna be
Another notch on your bedpost—
The answer is NO.
We’re not gonna be
Another notch on your bedpost—
The answer is NO.”

By now the band realized that something was up and the guitars and drums stopped playing. But all the girls in the gym joined in as we sang the refrain two more times *acapella*.

When we finished, all the girls laughed and cheered, but the boys just stood there with their mouths hanging open. Some looked embarrassed, others angry. This night was not turning out the way they’d expected. They were busted.

All the girls trooped out of the gym together. As we walked past the senior boys’ room, Mr. James came out carrying a paint bucket and roller. He put a sign on the door that said “Restroom Closed—Wet Paint.” He nodded at us and said, “If I’d known what all the scribbling on the wall was, I’d have painted over it sooner.”

“Thanks, Mr. James. No problem,” I said as I flowed out the door with the crowd heading out the parking lot.

We would carpool to the all-girl afterparty at Mary Rogers’ house. We’d planned a lavish sleep-over with snacks, party bags, games, and make-overs, all chaperoned by Mary’s parents, who agreed to hang out in the background. We even made “awards” for each of the girls—old Barbie dolls I’d stayed up all night spray-painting gold to look like “Oscars”—recognizing everyone for the unique, special, talented person she was: artist, baker, photographer, comedienne, dressmaker, scholar.

It was not the night of my dreams; no marriage proposal for me or anybody else. But in another way, it was the best possible senior dinner dance. We girls were more than just classmates now; we were sisters who would not let each other be taken advantage of. We had new respect for ourselves and each other.

The End