



Reluctant Press

Family Rivalry

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRIAN DUKEHART

A 'YOUNG ADULT TV' NOVEL

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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FAMILY RIVALRY

BY JENNIFER SUE

Allen Dryer screamed and tried to sit up, but was unable to do so. The panic stricken and terrorized youth struggled to free himself from the invisible bonds that held him as he painfully tried to suck in a deep breath to scream again. A searing throb from the center of his chest allowed him to merely gasp for air as he verged on blacking out.

Suddenly the lights came on and several nurses rushed into the room to calm and attend to the lad. Once they had Allen sufficiently calmed, he collapsed back upon the hospital bed. Panting and perspiring from the struggle, he desperately looked about the room.

The reason he'd been unable to move was that he was securely strapped into the bed with tubes emerging from both arms, and an array of wires leading to seemingly dozens of monitors. Aches and pains, including a pounding headache, added to his confusion and disorientation. Obviously he had been injured and was now in a hospital, but how and when alluded his murky thoughts. A shiver swept over him as he tried to recall what happened.

Once he stopped struggling, his lungs were able to begin replenishing the oxygen to his deprived brain. As his mind cleared, he recalled with bone chilling clarity a terrible cacophony of sounds: air horns desperately blowing, screeching tires on the pavement of the roadway, cursing from his father as he frantically spun the steering wheel, and a blood curdling scream from his mother. The lamentable pandemonium and sudden sideways skid of the car had disrupted his concentration as he sat in the back seat of the family minivan playing his GAMEBOY.

Looking up between his parents he saw the tractor trailer barreling towards them. Everything seemed to switch to slow motion as he watched the unfolding spectacle with horrified enthrallment. The van spun 360 degrees to once more face the looming truck head on. With startling lucidity Allen noted that the front tires of the truck had stopped turning as they futilely tried to grip the road. Smoke poured from the area where the tires contacted the pavement as the two vehicles inescapably barreled towards each other. Then came the never to be forgotten sound of crumbling and rending steel combined with shattering glass as the tractor trailer tore into the front of their van. The last thing he could recall was seeing the menacing glistening chrome

front bumper of the truck smashing through the windshield and dash of the van followed by a fountain of red as his parents disappeared.

There was nothing else until he woke just a few moments ago.

As the horrible scene replayed through his groggy mind, he realized with startling clarity that his parents had to be dead. His throat filled with bile as he searched the faces of the nurses, hoping to see something that would convince him that the terrible crash had not occurred. To his dismay, their countenance showed only great concern and sadness.

With the sobering understanding that he was now an orphan, Allen sank slowly into the warmth and concealing protection of the sheets. Turning his head away from the nurses he began to cry as silently as possible. In moments he fell into a dreamless, exhausted sleep.

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Nancy and David Glass felt the loss and terrible sadness of the situation. The tragic death of Nancy's brother, William Dryer, and his wife, Betty, left them with the awesome responsibility of raising their orphaned and injured nephew, Allen.

The will had left Nancy as executor of the estate. Both understood that the task would not be easy. Bitter feelings had been engendered during the past few years as their son Rodney and Allen grew more competitive and belligerent.

For Nancy, the rift had been aggravating. All her life she had grown up in the shadow of her big brother. Her old fashioned parents had given the burly young man every opportunity.

Not that she had been ignored, on the contrary, hers had been a sedate and pampered life. But she aspired to more, she wanted an education, but was politely told that girls didn't need anything more than good housekeeping and mothering skills. As she grew old enough to help her mother around the house, Nancy had been expected to be at her brother's beck and call. The fact that she had no other choice but to wait on him galled her. The result was that when she finally managed to weasel out from beneath Bill's thumb when he went off to college, she set her sights on a man that she could dominate.

David Glass fit the bill. The man was absolutely brilliant, but a total social nerd. No one had been able to understand what the perky cheerleader saw in the dweeb. Never had the school seen a more unlikely couple. But the relationship worked. David's widowed mother, Helga, understood what Nancy saw in her son, and after assuring herself that Nancy was a caring girl and would not abuse her son, she encouraged the relationship. Love bloomed and the two married immediately after graduating from high school, moving in with Helga.

David went on to college, secure in the knowledge that his loving wife would help him every evening and be there to make him look good during events that required social skills. David graduated with a 4.0 grade point average in computer science. With the backing and encouragement of his mother and wife, set up his own computer service company from the unused garage of their home. The company prospered and grew, making Nancy the wife of a wealthy entrepreneur.

Bill grew into a user and a party animal. All through high school and into college he was preoccupied with drinking, carousing, and womanizing. While Nancy loved her brother, to see the chances she wanted and had been denied thrown away made her bitter and frustrated. It took Bill six years to complete a four year degree, and then he barely graduated from college. Due to his low grades he had been unable to attain the power position his parents had expected. To add to their dissatisfaction, Bill married Betty Dryer; a mousy, weak, but quite lovely woman who did whatever her husband demanded. She had no surviving family. Nancy had always felt sorry for her slavish sister-in-law, but was helpless to aid her. Heartbroken, Bill and Nancy's parents passed away shortly after the birth of their grandchildren.

After the birth of the boys, and the death of their parents, Nancy had made an effort to keep in touch with Bill. Bill had little interest in his sister or her nerdy husband, but Betty dearly loved Nancy. The lonely subservient woman had no living relatives other than her in-laws. Thus the families kept in close touch. Unfortunately, this led to problems as the boys grew older.

The boys were born on the same day and there was a family joke that suggested that the boys had been switched at birth.

Allen took after his father emotionally. The boy was an aggressive, belligerent, bossy, and uncompromising redneck. His temper and bad attitude kept him back a year in high school. Unfortunately he physically resembled his nerdy uncle to the point where, although sixteen he had the physical attributes and secondary characteristics of the classic 98 pound weakling at a mere five feet tall with the almost feminine beauty of his mother and aunt.

Emotionally and intellectually Rodney took after his father, being meek, mild mannered, and a top student. However, he physically resembled his burly uncle. At sixteen he stood close to six feet tall and played line backer for his high school team despite his mild temperament. Because of his physical stature his grandmother and mother kept a tight reign on his manners and behavior to the point where he was known as the 'gentle giant' at school.

During their early childhood the physical appearance of the boys aggravated Bill, Allen's father, since he considered Rodney's size wasted due to his gentle attitude while he was frustrated by the diminutive size of his aggressive son.

Because of this he encouraged Allen to pick fights with Rodney. Thus it was almost inescapable that the boys would eventually go at it whenever they played together. Rodney should have been able to clobber Allen, but the youth had no desire to hurt another human being. The result was that Allen, through sheer determination, inevitably sent Rodney running in tears. Bill naturally flaunted the sissy behavior of his nephew as compared to the manly actions of his son.

This left Nancy fit to be tied, but unfortunately, she found herself helpless to stop the attacks without breaking off the relationship with her brother.

Arranging for the funerals of her brother and sister-in-law had been heart-rending. Going through their financial papers, settling the debts, placing the home on the market, sorting through and disposing the personal belongings had taken weeks. Each day

they had stopped in the hospital to see their comatose nephew. The ordeal lasted four weeks.

Only during the last few days that Allen had showed signs of recovery. The visit to the lawyer had been to sign the papers for the lawsuit against the trucking firm for the wrongful deaths and to secure full legal guardianship for Allen.

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As Nancy and David drove to the hospital, they sighed simultaneously. Both worried what would happen to their family with Allen living in their home. The sixteen year old was already set in his macho bellicose ways just as their own son was set in his accepting, peaceful, and tolerant ways. The last thing they wanted was to see their son fall under the thumb of the more aggressive Allen, yet both understood such an outcome was quite likely.

Allen was awake when Nancy and David entered the room. The adults had been notified by the staff that Allen had finally regained consciousness and realized what had happened.

As they stepped up to his bed, the boy glared daggers at his guardians. Ever since he awoke, he'd been thinking about how his aunt and uncle would expect him to behave like his sissy cousin. Allen vowed that he'd never succumb to their demands and standards. One thing his father had ingrained in him was contempt for the weak and cowardly of the world. In that redneck philosophy, only the strong and tough could forge a place for themselves and earn the respect of others.

No words were needed at the silent confrontation. Both parties understood that their relationship would be a continual war. Nancy did her best to kindly inform the boy about the funeral of his parents, the pending sale of his home, and the need to have him move in with them. Allen would need to stay in the hospital at least two more weeks.

In the hours since his awakening he had assessed his physical condition, hounding the evasive nurses for pat answers. Now he knew that he had suffered several cracked ribs and a fractured skull. All were healing well and there should be no lingering limitations. Allen mutely nodded his understanding, but not his acceptance, of the explanations Aunt Nancy supplied. The visit was brief and uncomfortable for all.

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During the ride home, Nancy brooded while David bemoaned their thankless responsibility. Their business was booming, and David had been forced to hire several employees. The garage office was now too tiny, but the location was wonderful. Before the accident, they had made plans to build a humongous new home in the country with a huge hot tub spa, steam room, and swimming pool, all in a greenhouse attached to the house for year round use. They even planned a tennis court for the backyard. Once they settled into their new home they planned to transfer the business to the old home and transform the present garage office into a warehouse. Thus they had bought land and hired a contractor. The construction was almost completed and they planned to make the move on July first.

Allen was about to disrupt their well laid and earned plans.

Helga greeted Nancy and David with a smile, and patiently listened to their tale of woe. She was well aware of the potential for disaster that Allen's moving in with them could create. Even more, though, was her concern for her grandson. During the past weeks it was equally evident that Rodney was afraid of the consequences of having Allen live with them as well as the relocation to a new school district the move to their new home would entail. As Helga served supper, she did her best to calm the fears and concerns of her family.

That night, Helga was unable to sleep as she thought about what might happen when Allen moved in and what could be done to prevent disaster. Finally she dozed off with no answer. The concerns for her family carried on into her dreams.

As so often happens, dreams can show answers.

In the morning, it was quite obvious to her family that Helga was deep in thought. Nothing, however, could elicit what had the woman so deeply entranced. All understood that when she was ready to share her thoughts, the old woman would do so.

It wasn't until after Rodney went to bed that evening that she asked Nancy and David to sit. Expectantly, they did so, waiting with bated breath for the wisdom that was obviously forthcoming.

After restating the obvious concerns and possible outcomes of Allen's arrival and their upcoming move, she asked the rhetorical question about what could be done to prevent ominous developments. Without waiting for a reply, she announced that she had a quite simple, but unorthodox, solution to all the possible problems.

"The problem is that Allen is all boy in the worst sense of that label due to his bigoted upbringing," she stated heavily. "What must be done to save our family is to completely separate Allen from all connections with his idea of how a man behaves. The only way this can be accomplished is to deprive him of what he needs to be that type of person! Do you agree?"

Naturally, David and Nancy had to agree, but obviously both were at a loss as to how such a thing could be accomplished.

"When I was a child," Helga began to explain. "It was not an uncommon problem to have unruly boys like Allen. Back then, such antagonistic behavior was not tolerated as it is today. Many young men who showed belligerent and uncaring attitudes were subjected to a most radical, but quite effective form of correction. It involved denying them the ability to project the manly image they wished, while forcing them to project the exact opposite impression. This was done quite simply by taking away all their toys and possessions, including their clothes. The very things that they needed and used to prove their mistaken notion of manliness were impounded. Every belonging the boy had was replaced with dainty girls' toys and clothes. In short, the boy was made to dress and behave as if he were a prissy young lady.

"The technique was called PETTICOAT PUNISHMENT. As you can imagine it was quite effective. After all, how can a boy be a tough guy when he looks like a simpering girl? I never saw it fail to change a boy like Allen into a most delightful lad."

Expressions of shock and stunned surprise were displayed by David and Nancy. Both had heard tales of PETTICOAT PUNISHMENT, but never had they seen it or con-

sidered it. David and Nancy had to concede that all she had stated was true. Such punishment would deter a boy from misbehaving while embarrassing him into keeping his shame a secret.

“The punishment continues until the boy's spirit is broken,” added Helga. “At that point he would be allowed to return to being a boy with the threat of a return to dresses if his behavior falters. In my experience it only took a few weeks at the most to make the recalcitrant youth understand that his past behavior had to change.

“Since Allen will be discharged in about two weeks, there will be about six weeks of school left. We'll make him be a girl until we move. Keep all his things packed away except for one outfit to bring him home from the hospital,” Helga stated.

Looking at Nancy she continued.

“It's a good thing we saved all your outgrown clothes, dolls, and toys when we cleaned out your parent's home. Everything is still in the attic. I'll unpack the things we'll need to create dainty little Allison.”

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Thus the plan for correcting Allen was set in motion.

Meanwhile, Allen was making a pest of himself in the hospital. The staff quickly learned to avoid the demanding, uncooperative, and rude lad whenever possible. Allen found that he looked forward to the daily visits from Aunt Nancy since she inevitably brought him a treat. He was surprised that not once did she scold him for his irascible behavior. Instead she told him about their new home where he'd have his own bedroom.

The pool and tennis court sounded great. Of course, he whined when she told him he'd have to join Rodney to complete the school year. Due to his Dad's inability to hold a decent job and the resulting frequent moves, he had discovered that going to a new school was difficult. Going to one for six weeks seemed useless since both he and Rodney would be going to a different schools for the new year. Again he was surprised when his aunt agreed, but she added that she had no choice since the law demanded he attend school.

Maybe he had misjudged her.

Now that he could see his aunt and uncle without the insulting comments of his father, Allen noted that the family was quite well off. This confused Allen, since many times his family had nothing. The situation was the exact opposite of what his father had always preached. In their cases, the physically strong family was poor, underprivileged, and looked down upon by others while the weak family was secure, prosperous, and admired. There was no doubt in his mind that he would enjoy luxuries living with his aunt and uncle that he had only dreamed of with his parents. These sobering thoughts conflicted with his ideas of right and wrong. The seeds of doubt and uncertainty of his personal value system were sown.

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It was a bright, sunny Monday morning when the day finally came for Allen to be discharged. Everything was in readiness. As expected, Allen complained when he saw that Aunt Nancy had brought his suit for him to wear home.

Much to his surprise, his aunt apologized.

"I'm sorry you don't like my choice of clothes," Nancy stated with faked chagrin. "I thought that your suit would be appropriate since I intend to take you to the cemetery to visit your parents graves before taking you home. Since you missed the funeral, I thought the formality... oh well, I'm sorry. I suppose it really makes little difference what you wear. I'll tell you what. To make up for my misjudgment, when we get home, you take a nice soothing bath in our hot tub. I'm sure the whirlpool will ease all the stiffness in your joints. While you're relaxing, I'll give you scissors to cut up this suit so that you'll never have to wear it again! When you're finished in the spa, I'll show you to your bedroom. We redecorated the guest bedroom especially for you, where you can choose whatever outfit you desire. Is that all right?"

Allen beamed and nodded his head. Never had he expected his aunt to be so willing to please him. Not having any choice but to don the uncomfortable suit, he dressed while she waited in the hall. She was right, he supposed, that it was appropriate to wear the suit to visit his parents graves. The promise of the use of the spa and a scissors to destroy the detested suit made the discomfort of wearing the suit almost palatable. With a smirk of superiority upon his face, Allen exited the hospital room.

Nancy led the way to the car, making sure he was all right and had no pain. Several times she asked if he wanted to stop to catch his breath. Every time he sneered that he was fine and needed no breather. As she opened the car door, he missed the sneer on her face as he entered. If he had seen the look of disgust mingled with glee about what was in store for him, he would have fled. Instead, he confidently went with her like a sheep to the slaughter.

At the cemetery, Allen tried to stand solemnly by the twin mounds that marked the final resting place of his parents. Grass was sprouting from the brown earth, indicating the rebirth that takes place after disaster. The boy didn't know what to do or say. The place seemed so lifeless and peaceful, so unlike his parents. Even now as that he stood by their graves, it was difficult for him to accept that they were gone. It was almost as if he expected them to step out from behind a tree and greet him. But they were gone and thus to be forgotten. It was time to get on with his life.

Nancy watched her nephew closely for some sign of grief. Not once during the two weeks since he'd regained consciousness had he voiced any sorrow or regret that his parents were dead. Now as she watched, she was reminded of the stony face she'd seen on her deceased brother when they had stood by the graves of their parents. In both cases the only emotion she was able to detect was one of impatience to have the ordeal completed. Allen fidgeted uncomfortably, she knew, not from grief but from impatience. Any lingering doubts that she harbored about the wisdom of using PETTI-COAT DISCIPLINE on the boy were wiped away by his callous reaction.

Allen removed the tie as soon as they returned to the car, then slumped into the seat.

“Please fasten your seatbelt, Allen,” Nancy informed the slovenly youth in a forced pleading voice. As she watched, the boy fastened the seatbelt as if it were the world's most odious task. The more she observed the boy, the more certain she became that petticoating him would do worlds of good for him!

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As soon as they entered their home, Nancy called to her mother.

“Mother, we're home.”

Helga was waiting in the living room. As soon as Nancy called out she arose. “I'm in here, Nancy. How's Allen feeling,” she asked as she headed to greet them.

The sight that greeted her filled her with disgust. Nancy stood behind the boy, smirking since she knew that her mother would be upset by Allen's appearance and attitude but would be unable to show it. The barefoot youth had his suit jacket crumpled under one arm with his shoes and socks jammed into the jumbled mass as the neck tie trailed on the floor. The buttons on the white dress shirt were opened and he was tugging the tails of the shirt from his slacks as he sauntered.

“I hope you're feeling well,” she forced herself to say with feigned concern. “Let me take your jacket and tie before you mess them up.”

“It's all right,” Allen sneered. “Aunt Nan said I could jump into the hot tub and cut this stupid suit to pieces since I'll never have to wear it again! Can you get me the scissors?”

Helga's eyebrows shot up in undisguised disapproval as she glanced to Nancy for confirmation.

Nancy just smiled.

“I apologized for bringing the suit to the hospital so he'd be appropriately dressed to visit the cemetery. Then I promised him that I'd never make him wear it again if he just wore it this time. In fact, I told him he could relax in the hot tub and cut up the suit. Then I told him he could go up to his room and pick out whatever outfit he wanted to wear.”

Helga was surprised and a bit startled by the first portion of Nancy's statement. But when she added that Allen would be allowed to go to his bedroom to select whatever outfit he chose, she saw the brilliance of her plot. The unsuspecting boy would unwittingly destroy the only masculine clothes in the house that would fit him! The clothes that filled the dresser drawers and closets in the former guest bedroom were ruffled, frilled, or trimmed in delicate lace!

“In that case,” Helga stated with a condescending smile. “I'll get you a pair of scissors immediately.”

With that, she headed off to get the scissors.

Nancy was entering the closed back porch from the kitchen with a glass of orange juice as Helga entered from the living room.