

HOSTILE TAKEOVER

By Sally Wild



ILLUSTRATED BY CHAS

A 'HER TV' NOVEL

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HOSTILE TAKEOVER

By Sally Wild

Chapter 1

It was late and past time to go home to his small apartment but Karl Gibson was still at his desk, as usual. There was no one to rush home to and he had a few things to sort out before turning out the office lights

He breathed a small sigh of happiness as he finished reviewing his company's financial records for the previous year. His small consulting firm had been steadily increasing its revenues and, more importantly, its profits for the last twelve months. After three years of struggling to make a few dollars it looked as if all his efforts were starting to pay off. Never one to tempt the fates, he attempted to shrug off the feeling of smug satisfaction that threatened to wash through him by turning his attention to other matters.

After all his impressive spreadsheets and projections were one thing but unfortunately there was a small problem that conspired to take at least some of the shine off the rapidly improving financial situation of his firm. And the problem's name was Janet — Janet Turner, to be precise.

He had hired her about eighteen months ago when his previous secretary had left for a better paying job at another firm. Janet was young, in her early twenties with a pretty face framed by long blonde hair and a nice figure that curved in all the right places. Assets that would have convinced most men to take her on as a secretary but the real reason that he had done so was that she was outgoing and intelligent. Two attributes that would allow her to represent the company well and that was all that really counted in Karl's books. Not that he didn't enjoy a beautiful girl as much as the next guy but business was business and pleasure was found somewhere else — particularly when you were fighting off bankruptcy every second week!

At first Janet had worked out well. Her quick mind and personable manner allowed her to be a productive team player from the outset. She settled in quickly and it was soon obvious that she was grasping some of the more complex issues he dealt with, far beyond the normal expectations he had of his previous secretary. In addition, she made it clear that she was attracted to him.

Karl nervously recoiled from her subtle, but unmistakable advances. After all he had a business to run and if the truth be known, he couldn't fathom why a pretty young girl such as Janet would be attracted to somebody like himself in the first place. He was at least ten years older than her, only an inch or so taller than her petite, five foot six height and hardly a manly stud with his slight physique which was starting to get soft around the edges with his lack of exercise. His only talent was in running his business with quiet efficiency. He wasn't a particularly aggressive man, indeed many

people thought him rather bland and mild. As a result, he had never had much success in romancing the fairer sex so he couldn't help questioning her real motives for showing an interest in him. *Couldn't she see that he was only interested in getting his company up and running?*

This situation of Janet's almost coy advances and Karl's equally shy rejections continued for the better part of twelve months. During this time, Janet continued in her remorseless quest to absorb the skills needed to run the company as well as snaring Karl's interest. If he hadn't been so desperately focused on ensuring his financial survival there was a good chance that he would have succumbed to her double campaign of intellectual and sexual temptation.

She was good; there was no doubt about that. Her ability to run an orderly office and to anticipate many of the problems he had to deal with on a daily basis was truly remarkable. Almost as remarkable as the sweet smell of her perfume and the glimpse of the top of a softly rounded breast peaking through the lace of her bra as she bent over his shoulder to point something out to him. Or the tantalizing flash of a stocking top and garter tab as she crossed her long, shapely legs magnificently displayed below one of her short skirts as she prepared to take dictation in the chair she strategically placed in front of his desk.

With a twinge of remorse, Karl remembered how everything had changed six months ago when he hired another consultant. By then business had picked up and the workload was becoming too much for him to handle. The new consultant was a woman in her middle thirties with good qualifications and a quiet, almost painfully shy personality. Rita Jenkins was her name and she quickly grasped the complexities of the company's business. She was about Karl's height and rather plain in appearance but always well dressed, albeit conservatively, with immaculate makeup and had, in Karl's opinion at least, rather nice legs. Not that his opinion really mattered as she showed absolutely no sexual interest in him or in any other man for that matter. She made it clear from the start that there had been previous problems with men in her life and that even a cursory interest from others would not be welcome.

But the problem had not been with Rita, at least initially. It was Janet. From the first day of Rita arrival, it was obvious that she was incensed that Karl had the gall to hire another consultant, particularly a woman, when she should have been chosen for the position. Karl tried to explain that she was a marvelous worker but she just didn't have the appropriate qualifications. However, his efforts were rebuffed and Janet turned off her valiant, if futile, attempts to win his affection. She continued to run a very effective office but her warm, outgoing personality was reserved for others.

At first, she treated him in a cool but respectful manner but as the months went by her attitude became increasingly disdainful. She made it clear that she was now dating a "real man" and had no time for wimps. Even worse, she made a vigorous and obviously successful attempt to gain Rita's appreciative approval. In the last few weeks, the strain in the office had become almost intolerable, at least for him, and as he was the boss he had felt compelled to speak to Janet about her less than endearing attitude. His only reward had been a sneering dismissal and an even more cavalier disregard from Janet.

All of this had begun to undermine any feeling of strong self-worth he had in his masculinity. Never the most macho of men, he had begun to question his inability to bring her under control. After all he was the employer and she was the secretary. Who was in charge anyway?

Wearily rubbing his forehead, Karl decided that he would speak to Janet first thing tomorrow morning and give her two week's notice. That should be enough time to find a suitable replacement. It was really too bad but she had left him no alternative. Grimacing with weariness and a vague sense of failure, he struggled into his rather rumpled dark suit jacket, adjusted his bland tie and set about locking the office before driving home in his old but reliable Ford sedan.

Chapter 2

“What do you mean, you bastard?” snarled Janet, her blue eyes flashing with scorn. “You think that you can dismiss me so easily? I’ve worked my heart out for you for the last eighteen miserable months and you thank me by firing me. You miserable, worthless piece of dog crap, who do you think you are?”

Karl grimaced in extreme embarrassment at Janet’s vicious tirade. He had delayed breaking the news of her impending dismissal for most of the day. Finally realizing that it was Friday and if he didn’t take action soon he would have to wait until Monday to carry out the foul deed, he called her into his office just before quitting time.

Stammering and stuttering, he had barely managed to mention that he was serving her two weeks notice before she had unleashed a virtual torrent of abuse upon his bowed head. Her normally delicately featured face twisted into a mask of violent fury, spittle flying from her crimson lips, she let him know in excruciating detail what she thought of all spineless, undeserving, chauvinistic geeks in general and of him in particular.

“I’ll make sure that you pay for this you slime bucket! You’ll be sorry that you ever dreamed of screwing Janet Turner around. My god, it makes me gag to think that I once thought of screwing you. Well, you pathetic wimp, you’ll rue the day that you turned against me. You will suffer, I’ll make sure of that!”

Uttering these final threats, Janet left his office, slamming the door ferociously behind her. Karl remained frozen, sitting behind his desk for several minutes after her abrupt departure. Endless reruns of what he should have said in reply to her obnoxious and blatantly untrue slurs against his character ran through his head. By the time that he had summoned up the nerve to emerge from his office, it was obvious that Janet had left. And worse, that Rita had gone with her in a show of feminine solidarity.

Shaking his head over the thought of having to deal with a surly staff on Monday morning, if they even bothered to turn up, Karl decided to go home. It was almost five o’clock anyway and for once the idea of staying late at the office did not appeal. There would be time to sort out a replacement secretary on Monday. Surely at least Rita would come to her senses by then. She was an intelligent woman and would know that

he had little choice in asking Janet to leave after her increasingly disruptive behavior. After all business was business.

Pulling on his raincoat, he glanced out the window and saw that it was still raining. A bleak, dreary day that matched his mood, he mused bitterly. Muttering under his breath, he locked up the office before trudging down the stairs to retrieve his car from the nearby parking lot.

As if to push him closer to his limits of rapidly dwindling tolerance, the drive home on the wet streets took almost twice as long as normal. Still muttering under his breath at the injustice of the day, he finally drove down the ramp into the basement parking of his apartment building and eased his car into his designated space. As always he made sure that his vehicle was securely locked before taking the elevator up to the eighth floor and letting himself into his small but efficient apartment.

It wasn't much to look at, only consisting of one small bedroom, a kitchenette, bathroom and a reasonably sized living room that also contained a tiny alcove for a dining area. Still, it was a warm, dry refuge with a meticulously neat appearance that reflected his need for orderliness. For once, he felt relieved to be able to leave the cares of the office behind and to immerse himself in the more mundane domestic duties of the confirmed bachelor.

Karl was just finishing his dinner when he heard a knock at the door. As he knew very few of his neighbors and access to the apartment building was normally confined to its occupants, he idly wondered who it could be as he went to open the door.

He had barely unlatched the door before it was thrust open with an explosive force driving him backward so violently that he almost fell. Stunned, he watched in horrified amazement as two men stepped inside his apartment and closed the door while glowering menacingly at him. They were both big, over six feet tall, and weighing more than 200 pounds. Although they were dressed in beige trench coats and wore dark fedora hats with the brims pulled down over their faces, it was obvious that not only did they each outweigh Karl by fifty or sixty pounds but that they were also considerably more fit than he was.

"You Karl Gibson?" growled the older of the two thugs confronting him. His cold, gray eyes bored into Karl as he spoke while his thin lips barely moved as he arrogantly uttered the question.

His eyes frantically darting from his interrogator's swarthy face to the equally hard features of the other looming figure standing in front of him, Karl tried to stop his voice from shaking in fear as he framed an appropriate response.

"W...who want's to know," he finally quavered, as it became apparent that his lack of an answer was starting to make his two unwelcome visitors extremely agitated.

Almost before the words had left his mouth, a large fist slammed into his nose breaking it with a sickening crunch of shattered cartilage. He reeled back blood gushing down the front of his shirt as his hands reflexively flew up to cradle his damaged face while he gave a short shriek of surprise and agony.

Strong hands roughly grabbed his bloody shirtfront and pulled him close to the gray-eyed hoodlum. Karl smelt the man's foul breath, as he snarled, "No more smart guy crap! Just answer my question, shit for brains. Are you Karl Gibson?"

Snuffling and shaking in pain and fear, Karl managed to nod his head and pled for what he feared was his life, "Y-y-yes. I am. P-please don't hit me again. What do you want? I'll give you anything. Please, I beg of you, just leave me alone."

"Shut up, you stinking wimp. If you had answered my question properly in the first place, I wouldn't have cracked you one. Now stop your sniveling and get into your bathroom to stop that bleeding and clean up your face. We're taking you to see someone and there had better not be any more stupidity on your part or it'll get a lot worse. Get my drift, dummy?"

Holding a hand to his bloody face, Karl nodded his head vigorously in an attempt to ensure that he was not hit again. The sharp pain of his broken nose made him desperate to keep his two unwelcome visitors happy. Turning quickly, he scuttled off to the bathroom while continuing to contain the flow of blood that was threatening to overflow his cupped hand. As ludicrous as it was to be thinking about such things in his present dilemma he couldn't help worrying about staining his living room carpet. *It was such a bitch to clean!*

Rushing up to the bathroom sink, he allowed the accumulated blood to splash from his hand and face as he turned on the cold water tap. Looking in the medicine cabinet mirror, he was horrified to see his nose reduced from its once fairly prominent, almost aristocratic proportions to a misshapen, rapidly swelling piece of hamburger. And to make matters worse, it was obvious that he was soon going to have two very black eyes to enhance his looks even further. The only good news was that the flow of blood was slowly reducing to a trickle even though the pain was not.

Fighting back tears of humiliation, Karl reached for a face cloth and soaked it in water before gingerly wiping the worst of the blood and gore from his face. Rinsing it out, he folded it into a pad and held it to his nose to further slow the bleeding.

"Enough already," growled gray eyes from his position by the bathroom door. "Lose the cloth. Push some toilet paper up your nostrils – if you can find them! We're going."

Too frightened to do anything else, Karl endured the agony of cramming some rolled up balls of tissue into his mangled nostrils and then meekly scurried into the living room where the other hood threw him his raincoat and an old hat that he normally kept in his front hall closet.

Scrambling to put them on, Karl managed to work up the nerve to ask if he could also take his suit jacket as it contained his wallet and keys.

"Don't worry none about that," grunted gray eyes. "That will all be taken care of. Now, if you know what's good for you, shut up and do exactly as you are told. Got it? Good. Let's go."

Karl found himself being hustled out of the door of his apartment, down the hall and into the elevator to the basement parking area. Much to his chagrin, they saw no one as they made their way down and into the waiting car, which smoothly accelerated away as soon as he was sandwiched between his two abductors in the rear seat.

A kaleidoscope of impressions flashed across Karl's eyes as they pulled out onto the street. It was still raining, the car had heavily tinted windows, the driver also wore a fedora, there was music playing on the car radio, his nose was pounding with pain, he was afraid, really afraid and what was this all about?

His jumbled thoughts were interrupted when old gray eyes muttered savagely, "Don't get excited wimp but we're going to blindfold you. Don't piss me off again. Got it?"

Karl nodded resignedly and a few seconds later was plunged into darkness as something was wrapped around his face and tied off behind his head. Thankfully, it didn't press too heavily against his raw, throbbing nose.

Hemmed in by the broad shoulders of the two brutes sitting on each side of him, Karl was left to his worst fears and anxieties as they drove for what seemed hours. Other than registering the feel of the car slowing, stopping, starting again and turning corners, his mind was left free to dwell on the pain in his face and the question of where he was being taken and what was behind this whole miserable experience. *Surely it must be some kind of mistake.*

Eventually, it could have been minutes or hours so jumbled was Karl's thinking, the noise of the tires changed from the hum of being driven on asphalt to the crunch of gravel. Startled out of his frantic reverie, Karl noted that this new sound only lasted for two or three minutes before the car slowed almost to a halt and then accelerated forward for a few feet before stopping again. This time the car engine was turned off and he distinctly heard the thud of a garage door being closed behind him.

"All right, sleeping beauty, time to get out. The blindfold stays on until I take it off. Got it? Good. Now stay seated until I tell you to move," rasped the now familiar voice of gray eyes as Karl sensed both of his captors opening their doors and moving away from his tightly compressed shoulders.

"Now, come this way. That's it, wimp. Just do as you are told and you won't get hurt. It's good that we have an understanding. Watch your head as you get out of the car. Put your feet on the floor and stand up. Keep your hands away from your head, dummy. I wouldn't want to have to have to smack you again! Come this way."

Karl felt the strong hand of gray eyes gripping his upper left arm and allowed himself to be pulled forward. Completely blind, he could only depend on his other senses to give him even a vague inkling of what was happening. He could hear the thunk of the car doors being closed and could feel the hardness of a cement floor under foot but there was little else that he could ascertain. Hell, he thought, I can't even smell with these great wads of gory tissue stuck up his nose.

The creak of a door being opened alerted him to the fact that they were leaving the garage. The ensuing hollow sound of their combined footsteps appeared to indicate that they were walking on a wood floor probably located in a long hallway. A growing sense of disquiet assailed his racing mind as the seriousness of his situation was reinforced by his sense of complete helplessness.

The seemingly interminable walk down the hallway came to an abrupt end as another door creaked open and he was ushered into a room. Although he was still blind-

folded, he sensed that the room was bigger, much bigger, than the space that they had just been walking down. And the caress of luxurious carpet replaced the feel of a wood surface underfoot as they moved approximately ten more feet before coming to a full stop.

For several minutes, Karl was left standing staring into the darkness of his blindfold, the strong grip of gray eyes forcing him to remain motionless even though his mind accelerated to ever higher levels of anxiety of what could happen next. Finally, he heard a deep voice command, "Let me see his face."

The blindfold was removed immediately and he was left blinking in the glare of a brightly light room. A room that was immaculately finished and furnished, almost shouting out the vast sum of money spent on its construction. But Karl had no time to think of such considerations as his attention quickly focused on the man sitting behind an imposing desk a few feet to his front. Even though he was still extremely conscious of the large hand firmly holding his left arm; Karl could sense the power emanating from the seated man. There was no doubt that he was in charge.

Before his eyes fell away from the penetrating gaze being coolly leveled at him, Karl observed that the man's darkly handsome visage topped by black, curly hair was dominated by a large, hooked nose and thin cruel lips. Lips that were pulled back in a sardonic grin revealing even, white teeth.

So intimidating was the man's presence that Karl couldn't bring himself to immediately protest his violent abduction and being forcibly dragged into this room for some unknown reason. Instead, he stared at the floor in frightened subjugation, his neck hairs bristling as he continued to feel the heat of the man's intense glare lashing his puny body. To his feverishly racing brain it felt like hours before the deepening silence was broken.

"So Karl, I finally get to meet you. Unfortunately not under the most auspicious of circumstances for you. And you are probably wondering why you are here," boomed the deep voice. "It might not mean anything to you when I say that I am D'Vardi but that is not really important."

Karl gulped in deeper fear as he immediately recognized the name D'Vardi as one deeply involved in organized crime throughout the local area. Not that anything had ever been proven, at least in a court of law. *What in god's name could a man like D'Vardi want with somebody like himself?*

"Yes, my name is not important but the name of Janet Turner might be of more interest to you."

Karl recoiled at the sound of Janet's name and looked in horrified surprise at D'Vardi's piercing eyes.

"Ah, yes, I see that you recognize the name. Undoubtedly you will be even more distressed to hear that she is my niece and I am not happy about the way that you have chosen to treat her. She has told me all about your stupidity, how you tried to take advantage of her. And even better she has made a proposal that will allow her to gain revenge for that stupidity while making a tidy profit for both herself and me. You might

say that we are to be mutual partners in your fitting punishment. One that I find most amusing.”

“Bu...but that’s preposterous. I never took advantage...uuhh...”

Karl’s stream of protestations ended as quickly as they started when a meaty fist landed squarely in his belly once D’Vardi impatiently raised a finger. For almost a minute he gasped and wheezed in an attempt to fully regain his breath, only saved from the further ignominy of collapsing to the floor by the fact that he was being held firmly by the arm.

“Karl, Karl, you must be quiet until I have finished speaking. It is not polite to interrupt others. You must understand, I don’t really care what you think. Janet has made a good proposal so it will be carried out. As you like to say, business is business. My only advice to you is not to fight what is in store for you or your life will be very unpleasant and probably very short. You do want to live, don’t you Karl?”

Too frightened to speak, Karl could only nod his head as he continued to gasp for air. Sweat was running down his face and his legs were visibly trembling as he stood before the impassive stare of D’Vardi.

“Good, I see that you are a frightened little thing. Janet was right; your punishment will be most benefiting. You are not a real man and now you will pay the consequences of your despicable behavior. Good-bye Karl, pray that you do not see me again because if you do it will mean you are a dead man. Get him out of my sight!”

Sobbing in incomprehension at the events of this terrible night, Karl didn’t even see the sucker punch coming. All he felt was the explosion of the impact on his jaw before he slid away into unconscious oblivion.

Chapter 3

“Wake up, Katie. It’s time to stop lying around when there is so much to do. Come on girl, wake up.”

Karl stirred as the words began to penetrate the deep, murky fog that swirled around in his brain and held him safe in a quiet world free from pain and fear. As he began to float up toward consciousness, he encountered aches and unpleasant memories that threatened to drive him back down into the tranquillity of drug induced slumber. But the incessant and insistent voice he was hearing would not allow this to happen. Finally, he hovered just below full wakefulness and the details of the nightmare interview with D’Vardi came crashing back. Recoiling from the images of that humiliating event, Karl whimpered at the thought of what might be waiting for him when he regained full consciousness. *And why was the voice calling him Katie and girl?*

A sharp stab of pain as if he was being fiercely pinched shot through his arm and jolted him back into the present and his eyes fluttered feebly open.

“So, you have finally come back to life, have you Katie? About time! I can hardly wait to start your training. It will be much more pleasurable for me than you but that will be part of the fun.”

Karl squinted against the bright light in the room and fought to focus his eyes. His body seemed to be incapable of responding to the simplest message that his brain was attempting to convey to his unresponsive nerve endings. *What was this person babbling about?*

Eventually a sharp image of what he was seeing swam into shape and he was terrified, but not entirely surprised, to see Janet's leering face staring possessively down upon his recumbent form.

He struggled to ask her what was happening but he could only manage to move his mouth sufficiently to produce a gurgled croak. Slowly licking his dry lips, he tried again and managed to whisper. "W...what go...going on"

Peering into his panic-stricken eyes, Janet felt a surge of power and vindication for having gone to her ruthless uncle for assistance. Karl had spurned her, not once but twice and his punishment would be a delightful revenge, not to mention a rewarding one.

"Why my dear Katie, you are right to wonder what is going on," she replied in a condescending tone. "You have been incapacitated for quite some time and will need to be told many things but don't worry your pretty little head about it at the moment. You still need to rest before I tell you everything. For now, just be content to know that you are in my charge and I will be most happy to take care of you, yes my dear, very good care of you. Now, rest quietly and I will be back to talk to you again soon. Bye."

Karl lay helplessly as she left with an amused giggle. The noise of the door closing and being locked did little to alleviate his growing concern for what the demented Janet had in mind for him. *Why did she keep calling him Katie and treating him like a little airhead? Had she finally lost it completely?*

Conflicting, discordant thoughts raced around in his harshly throbbing mind. Unable to fall back into the blissful tranquility of quiet slumber, he turned his attention to trying to move his rebellious body. Having already succeeded in opening his eyes and speaking a few words, he thought it best to concentrate on moving his head. Slowly, deliberately and not without a certain amount of pain, he managed to lift his head slightly for a few seconds.

Collapsing back on the pillow he kept his mind occupied by attempting to recall what he had seen. He was lying in a brightly-lit room, a small, sterile room much as one would expect to find in a hospital but there were no windows, only two closed doors. The furniture appeared to consist of the twin-size, metal framed bed that he was lying on, a plain bedside table holding a glass and small pitcher of water and a wardrobe cabinet in one corner.

Satisfied with his efforts to recount what he had already ascertained, he next turned his attention to trying to move his hands. Eventually, after a long effort, he felt some movement but try as he might, he could only move them slightly. Perplexed, he decided to attempt to move his head even higher than previously so that he could look down the bed. Struggling with the effort, he finally managed to raise his head sufficiently to peer briefly over the top of the sheet and blanket draped over his body so that he could see his arms and hands.

The incredulous sight that met his eyes caused him to drop back onto the pillow with a weak moan of shock. Restraints were placed around both of his wrists and attached to the side of the bed frame. And worse, at least from the appearance of the material covering his arms, he was wearing a pink, satiny nightgown. A woman's nightgown! *What, in God's name was going on?*

The pitiful thoughts of his helplessness and what might happen next caused tears to course unchecked down his cheeks as he sobbed on the edge of complete hysteria. Finally, his mind rebelled and sought refuge in the solace of a deep sleep.

A sleep that was broken by the noise of a door slamming shut. Jerked from his satisfying slumber, he snapped open his eyes and peered wildly around, terrified that it might have been someone entering his room. Only when he was sure that no one else was present, did he close his eyes and sigh in relief that he was still alone. The very thought of having that harridan, Janet, coming to torment him was almost too much to bear.

Unfortunately, his whirling thoughts on what kind of vicious punishment she could possibly be planning for him made it impossible to go back to sleep. The overwhelming trepidation caused by his vivid imagining of the tortures she could inflict while he was helplessly in her power proved almost more unbearable than having to actually suffer her vicious attention.

His gloomy, increasingly fear-inducing musing was interrupted by the noise of another door being pushed open and this time it was the one for his room. Taking a deep breath to steady his frayed nerves he opened his eyes and saw the smirking face of his personal nightmare.

"So Katie, have a nice nap? Here, let me help you hold up your head and then I will give you a nice drink of water. After your two weeks of bed rest, you must be dying of thirst even though you were on an intravenous drip and catheter for most of that time. Mind you, you have lost so much weight! You'll have to be careful or you are going to make other girls jealous. That's enough to drink. Are you happy to see me?"

"Yes, Janet," Karl managed to stutter quietly even though his fear-filled features did little to reinforce the sincerity of his stumbled answer.

"Oh no, Katie, it's not Janet to you, it's Ms Turner. A much more appropriate term of address for a subordinate to use to their superior, don't you think?"

Gritting his teeth in a mixture of helplessness and humiliation, Karl whined huskily, "Yes, Ms Turner but why are you calling me Katie?"

"Silly girl, I'm calling you Katie because that is your new name - Katie Gibson. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let me tell you what has been going on while you have been lying idle in bed and even better, let me tell you about what is going to happen to you next."

Having a pillow plumped up behind his head and being given a drink of cool, refreshing water had been like heaven to Karl. Now it seemed that Janet was prepared to plunge him further down into the hell that she had so carefully devised. Nothing she was saying made any sense and it appeared that her demented ramblings were only going to get worse.