



Reluctant Press

A Walk In Her Shoes

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY MISTY MALVEAUX

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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A WALK IN HER SHOES

by Patricia Smith

CHAPTER 1

“Are you looking for work this morning Kim?” Mom asked me as she got herself ready to go to work. Mom was a nurse in a small and private clinic.

“Yeah,” I replied lazily as I watched her pop the last bit of her toast into her mouth. Then she put on her lipstick. “I look for work everyday, including today.” Mom was one of those rare and beautiful women. In her early forties she could pass for being in her twenties and it drove a lot of guys I used to know crazy. That was their tough luck. Ever since Dad left us, Mom has been a very determined and confirmed Lesbian. She’d had enough of guys using and abusing her so she had tried women and found that she liked them more than men so she stuck with them now.

I was nineteen and still lived at home with Mom. I had no choice. Ever since I had finished high school more than a year ago, I had been looking for work and couldn’t find any. There was high unemployment in the state and the few jobs that did open up were grabbed by those with more experience than what I had. But I stuck with it and kept looking for work.

Mom always amazed me when I saw her ready for work in the mornings. Her shoulder length black hair was clean and shiny and neatly arranged. She had large breasts encased in her full cup bra and sticking out in front of her like twin pointers. She had a tiny waist and flared hips and the best legs I have ever seen in my life on any girl. Mom wore three or four inch high heeled shoes all the time so I guess that had something to do with her fantastic legs. Her short uniform dress showed off a lot of her legs too and being a tight fitting dress it showed off her figure as well. All on a five foot frame so I guess she weighed about a hundred pounds or so.

I took after Mom in that respect I guess. Five feet tall and I weighed eighty nine pounds stripped. But I was a male while she was definitely a female. My hair was a bit longer than what Mom wore hers at, but it never looked as shiny and clean, even when it was. I just wore it in a ponytail at the base of my head and let it hang inside my jacket. I didn’t have any muscles the way other guys did and I didn’t have any fat on me either. Except for my excessive body and facial hair, I could have passed for a kid.

That was my curse. Hair! I had way too much of the damned stuff and it bothered me constantly. At nineteen, I had to shave my face twice a day at least to keep the stubble down to a comfortable level. Below my neck, I doubted if I had a single square inch of clear skin. Front or back! When Mom was trying to be cute with me she would call me her little monkey. I hated that nickname and I hated the damned hair but there wasn't a thing I could do about it.

Mom left for work when her ride arrived and I checked the time. The Employment Office opened in just over an hour so I had to get going. It would take me about an hour or so to walk down there. Buses were for rich people, cabs were for millionaires. I wasn't either of those.

I got to the Employment Office a few minutes later than usual so the line was a lot longer than usual. I got to the end of it and waited the minute or so before the doors opened, then waited more than an hour to get inside and check the postings that were left. Nothing again! I needed something soon.

There were a few places I could check on my way home, and a few people I could see on the way too. I thought I was in luck when I saw a Help Wanted sign in the window of the Morris Bar and Grill across the street. But by the time I was able to dodge the traffic and get there, they were taking the sign down. Too late again.

It had been a nice day to begin with but it had clouded up fast and I was right in the heart of the downtown area when the skies opened up with thunder and lightening and a heavy downpour that could drown a rat. I found shelter in a doorway with an overhanging canopy and stood there to watch the water fall from the sky. It should be over in an hour or so.

Standing there with nothing to do I watched as a cab pulled up and a woman got ready to run into the building I was taking shelter at. She leapt from the car and raced for the doorway and I opened the door for her so she could get straight inside. She flashed me a smile in thanks and I saw a lovely face framed by red hair and a perfect row of white teeth, then she was gone into the elevator. I turned to look at the rain again and the cab drove off.

That's when I saw the black purse laying on the sidewalk just about where the lady had jumped from her cab. I ran out into the rain to retrieve it and rushed back to the safety of the doorway and overhang. The handle strap was broken! That explained how she could lose it and not notice it, even in the rush she had been in and with the huge case she'd been carrying.

Guys aren't usually seen with purses so I tucked it inside my jacket and held it under my arm. I considered checking the purse for a name, but I didn't have to. I knew the face and I knew the building and I knew that no one else had come in or had used the elevator so I was positive I could find her without invading her privacy by looking in her purse. I would try it this way first. If worse came to worse, I could always look in it later.

I went inside the building and took a look at the old fashioned dial pointer above the elevator doors and saw that the car was stopped at the fourth floor. I would take the stairs. That way I could check each floor for any sign of the woman in case my idea was stupid. The second and third floors were dark and dank, dusty hallways with cu-

bicles off to each side. I doubted she would be there. The fourth floor was brightly lit with a carpeted floor that opened up to a private art gallery. I walked right in.

Walking into that art gallery was like walking into Mom's bedroom, minus the furnishings. Mom was a collector of old prints of the pinup girls of the thirties to the fifties. All the walls of her room were covered with prints of the original paintings, while this gallery seemed to be covered with the originals themselves. I walked with awe to stand in front of a picture of a pretty brown haired girl who was in the process of putting on a grass skirt. Mom had a copy of this one though she never knew the real title for it. The sign said the title was "I Hope the Boys Don't Draw Straws."

"Come to look at the pretty pictures?" a man's voice said behind me.

I turned and saw a tall man standing a few feet behind me with his arms folded across his chest and a relaxed grin on his face. "I didn't know they were here," I told him. "Are they all for real?"

"Of course! Its not proper to have copies in an art gallery."

"Gil Elvgren," I said and pointed to the painting I had been staring at. I moved my finger around the room to another area and added, "Alberto Vargas and Rolf Armstrong!"

"You know your pinup artists, do you? So come over here and look at this one and tell me who painted it," he said. I followed him to an easel standing in the middle of the floor and he allowed me to stand right in front of it.

"This is an untitled and undated work by Pearl Frush, circa mid-fifties," I said. Mom had a whole wall dedicated to this artist. "And I see you have some Zoe Mozert too!"

"Alright kid, where'd you come from?" the guy demanded.

"Outside," I said simply. "Its raining out there."

"Yeah I know, I don't need a forecast. What do you want?"

"Did a lady with red hair come in here?" I asked him.

"What do you want to know for?"

"Because she dropped something and I want to return it to her."

"You can give it to me and I'll give it to her." He held out his hand.

"No way! I'll give it to her if she's here or I'll give it to the police and she can get it from them. I won't turn it over to anyone else."

"Okay. Wait here. And don't touch!"

"You think I'm nuts? I can't afford a copy never mind an original!" I called after him.

I stuck my hands in my pants pockets and my eyes roamed back to the section filled with the work of Gil Elvgren. This guy really had talent! This gallery had about twenty of his paintings even though he had done hundreds of them. Still, since they were all real, they had to be worth a fortune now.

The woman came out and saw me and tried to give me a smile. "Ahh, the doorman." It was obvious she wasn't in a good mood. "I understand you know more about the art than my brother does. That pisses him off something fierce. What can I do for you?"

"After you came inside and were on the elevator," I told her and reached inside my jacket, "I found this on the sidewalk by the curb." I pulled out her purse.

"My purse!" she shrieked with obvious delight.

"Jill? What's the matter?" the guy came running out.

"My doorman friend found my purse for me!" she waved it to her brother.

"You'd better check it. It could be empty. How'd he get it? Cut the strap?"

She held up the end of the strap and showed him that it was frayed at both ends, not cut.

"Looks like it broke when I got out of the cab," she said. She looked at the catch and added, "It hasn't been opened."

"How can you tell Jill? You'd better check anyway." The guy was giving me a dirty look now, as though he wanted a reason to jump me and beat the hell out of me.

"The catch on my purse has been loose for a long time so I use a tiny piece of tissue to make it tight. The tissue is still in the catch so I know it hasn't been opened." She opened the purse and the tissue started to fall so she caught it, "See? Now leave us alone Jeff. I want to thank this young man properly."

"Your brother doesn't trust people, does he?" I asked when he left us.

"Not people who know more about his art than he does. Well its our gallery, his and mine and the only reason he trusts me at all is because I'm his sister. He has no choice but to trust me. What's your name?" she asked.

"Kim," I told her. "Kim Young."

"Well, I am very happy to meet you Mr. Young. My name is Jill Johnson." She stuck out her hand and I shook it lightly. She was taller than I was, but she was wearing heels too.

"Just call me Kim," I said. "I guess I had better go now."

"What's your rush Kim? Wouldn't you like to have a look around?"

"Is it okay? I mean I wouldn't want your brother to get mad at me or nothing."

"Forget about Jeff. He won't bother you at all. How is it that you know so much about pinup art from forty to sixty years ago? Not too many people these days seem to be all that interested in it."

"My mother is in love with the work of that era. She has prints all over our house but she keeps most of the nudes or semi-nudes in her bedroom. I've lived all of my life with prints of most of these pictures and quite a few that aren't here too. But prints don't cost what these ones do so we can afford to have lots of them."

"I'll bet. I have a private room back here with more paintings in them. Care to have a look and see if you can tell me who the artist is?"

I was game. If it was from that period at all, I would have a good chance at an educated guess. Jill led me to the room and I saw about ten different pictures on the walls so I clasped my hands behind my back to circle the room and look at them all. Jill waited for me by the door as I concluded my tour. "Well?" she asked me.

"If these were all done by the same artist, then they were done in the last fifteen years," I told her.

"What makes you say that Kim?"

"The female forms are perfect for the era and the styles are almost correct all the way. But the colors are too new and its obvious that you were the model for most of them."

She smiled at me then. "Yes, my husband Andrew painted them. I model for him once in a while and sometimes he just puts my face and features over the outline of another model."

"He's a talented man, and a lucky one too."

"Yes, he is that. But he's also a starving artist. If it wasn't for my job here, we wouldn't be able to eat. He has yet to sell a painting."

"Yeah, well I wish I had half his talent," I said.

"So what do you do for a living Kim?" she asked as we walked back to the main gallery.

"Nothing," I said. "Unemployed and looking for work." I looked out the window and saw that it was still raining pretty hard. "No talent and no experience so no job."

"Can you work for minimum wage?" she asked me then.

"Sure!,Doing what?",I wanted what I could get.

"Nothing," she said with a smile.

"No, please. I can do something. Anything."

"Can you sit without moving for an hour or two at a time?"

"You mean like a model?" I asked her.

"That's exactly what I mean. All we can pay is minimum wage so we can't get the girls to sit for only an hour or two. They want eight hours at a time or forget it. Andrew just needs a form to sketch so he can fill it over with my face and figure later. He's done so many bowls of fruit lately that he is getting sick of them."

"But I'm a guy!,And a pretty hairy one at that!,Doesn't he need a girl?"

"No, he just needs a model so he can sketch the pose and get a start. He can fill me in over top later. Six dollars an hour. One or two hours a day for now, maybe more later. We're about the same height when I take my shoes off so you would work out perfectly. The only catch is you would have to be at least semi-naked to pose so he can get the lines right."

"I'm a really hairy guy Mrs. Johnson. I have to shave my face at least twice a day just to stay comfortable. And I can't shave the rest of me either. I tried it once and it doesn't work."

“Why not?” she asked. “And call me Jill.”

“Because when it grows back, and it will, I have to be tied down to keep from scratching. It almost drives me crazy. I have to let it grow on its own and leave it alone. I have very sensitive skin so I have to be very careful with it.”

“Have you tried a depilatory cream?”

“Yes, and waxing too. Electrolysis can work but its so darned expensive and neither me nor Mom can afford it now. If I can get a job and keep living with Mom, I may be able to afford to get it done in a year or so.”

“I see. Well, why don’t we go and see my husband and see what he says?”

I had nothing to lose. Jill went to tell her brother she was leaving and I saw them having an argument over something. I moved in closer and could hear some of it. “Its not worth that much!” her brother was saying.

“We paid a thousand for it Jeff. We can’t sell it for less!” I went to look at the painting in question and broke out laughing.

The man who was interested in the painting was there and he looked at me with a stunned silence. Jill and her brother came over to find out what was so funny.

“I’m sorry,” I apologized to my new friend. “But when I heard you say that you stole this painting for a measly thousand bucks and your brother wants to just give it away, that is really funny to me. If I had three thousand dollars, I would be tempted to steal it from you,” I said.

Jill was smiling then and her brother was as stunned as the other man. “What about it Kim?” she asked me.

“Its an untitled, unsigned and undated Billy DeVorss, circa early forties. If you want a fair market price for it, ask for six to seven thousand. A museum might pay as much as ten.” I looked away and gave out another chuckle.

“Okay,” the man said. “I thought I could steal it away for a few hundred bucks. I’ll give you eight thousand right now for it. But I won’t go any higher.”

Jill and Jeff looked at each other, then at me. “Sold!” Jeff said and took the man to the office to collect his money. Jill just stood there and looked at me with a bit of awe on her face.

CHAPTER 2

“I don’t think that six dollars an hour is a fair wage to pay you Kim.” she told me as we waited at the door for the cab she had called. “If my husband can use you, I think that eighteen dollars an hour is a much fairer wage as a model. When he doesn’t need you, we can use a salesman like you at the gallery. I know I can talk Jeff into it. I really want my husband to become a successful artist and he doesn’t have nearly

enough work done for a show. He needs at least two or three times what I showed you already.”

Eighteen dollars an hour!,With that much money, one or two hours a day wasn't so bad!,And I could like working at the gallery, if I could get along with Jeff. It would beat applying for a job as a dishwasher.

Andrew Johnson was bigger than Jeff was, burlier too, and he had a mustache which he kept nicely trimmed. The house was huge compared to any house I had been in before though it looked quite a bit smaller on the outside than some of the mansions I had seen. Jill told her husband all about how she and I met and the circumstances since then and he smiled broadly when he heard about my seeing his collection. He laughed when he heard about the sale of the Billy DeVorss painting.

“Jill tells me you're a really hairy guy Kim,” Andy said with a laugh.

“Physically, all the time. Figuratively, sometimes,” I smiled back and shook his hand.

“You're small enough and thin enough so the hair really doesn't matter. I can use any person about your size. We just can't afford to pay you much right now.”

“Kim and I have already settled on a fair wage Andy,” Jill said. “With the sale he helped us with today, I've offered him eighteen dollars an hour. One or two hours a day. When you are done with him he can come to the gallery and work as a salesman.”

“Ooh!,How'd that go over with your brother?”

“Jeff doesn't know yet, but he will. And he'll accept it too. Kim made us seven and a half thousand dollars today since Jeff wanted to get rid of the painting for a mere five hundred dollars. That's seven thousand profit. If nothing else, we can use Kim to help me appraise the works that we get in. He may be a lot younger than I am, but he knows a lot more than I do about the era and the art.”

“I'm going to clean this place up and get set up for some serious art work again. How about eight tomorrow morning Kim?”

“Sure. I'll try to be here for then.”

“If you can make it at eight, great!,If not, just get here when you can.”

“I'm taking the car dear,” Jill said then. “I'll drop Kim at home and take it to the gallery with me. Cabs cost a lot of money if I have to take them more than twice a day.”

Andy kissed his wife and Jill led the way out of the house and to their car parked in the garage. She gave me a ride home and I gave her a tour of the house Mom and I shared. “I can't show you Mom's room cause that's her room. Only she can show it to someone,” I told Jill.

“I understand,” she said with a smile. “I hope to meet your mother very soon then.”

“No you don't,” I said.

“Sure I do! Why wouldn't I?”