

Dilemma

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Chapter 1

When Reggie Met Brenda...Again

Reggie McCaffrey couldn't understand what he was doing back at the *Forester*. For less than a year, he tried to make a concerted effort to make it as a full-time journalist. But after a failed stint in some out-of-the-way town in Northwest Ohio, he knew that he had to come back and finish his degree.

The only problem, of course, was that he was about 30 credit hours and a couple of grade points short of a journalism degree. However, he found a loophole that would get him out of Forest State by the end of the year. After talking with his academic advisor, he found that he had enough credits in Political Science to get his Bachelor's. All he'd have to do is take a three electives and a seminar class in the spring, and he was home free.

As for finding something constructive to do in the meantime, well, he always had his clerk gig at the Brass Handle convenient store in University Circle. He's known the owner, Roscoe Truman, for years. Getting some hours wouldn't be a problem, and since he moved back to East 115th Street, getting there wouldn't be a problem.

But he needed something fun to do as well and he couldn't think of anything else but to write for the *Forester*. Reggie would have been happy enough getting a couple of sports stories in. But the Editor-in-Chief, Jim Case, who had been News Editor when Reggie had left the first time, had a better idea for him.

It turned out that the next in line for the Sports Editor job, Steve Grissom, was kind of flighty, as Jim put it, and was still a year or so away from taking over. Steve didn't seem to mind, since he spent most of his time chasing his dream of being a skateboarder, to no avail. Jim also had his most loyal sports writer, sophomore John Kramer, decide not to take the job.

That left Reggie, who Jim knew was coming back. So, at the start of June, Jim walked into the Brass Handle and approached Reggie.

“I heard you’re coming back to Forest State to finish up,” Jim said.

“That’s right,” Reggie replied, as he greeted people walking through the door. “Would you mind if I did a couple of columns next year? Nothing too big. Maybe a revival of ‘Regulation Time’ or something like that.”

“I’ve got a better idea. How about you run the sports section this year? And, I want you to be my right-hand man and get people oriented to the system. You can be Steve Grissom’s mentor, and I’ve got a fresh News Editor for you to break in.”

“Anyone I know?”

“Perhaps. You remember Brenda Alvarez?”

Reggie nodded his head, but he remembers more of Brenda than he let on. During the summer of his first departure, a young lady straight out of high school started poking around the *Forester* office after one of the orientations. At the time, he was quickly enamored with her. But the timing was bad, for the next day, he got the sports job at the *Daily Call* in Bryan, near the Ohio-Indiana border.

“I hope you’re not rusty, Reggie,” Jim continued. “I’m going to need you to get with the program in a hurry. And Brenda’s going to need the most help. She’s only a sophomore, and I had nobody else to turn to.”

Reggie interrupted Jim as he rang up a six-pack of Corona for a waiting patron. He thanked the customer and directed his attention back to Jim.

“I’m ready for whatever you can throw at me,” Reggie beamed.

“Good,” Jim said, smiling from ear to ear. “Because I’ve decided that we’re going to put out a summer issue in July.”

Though taken a little off-guard by the announcement, Reggie grinned and shook his old friend’s hand. If Reggie learned anything from his journey to Smalltown, U.S.A., it was how to work under pressure.

The next day, Jim gathered his editorial staff for the first meeting of the summer. Brenda and Reggie were there, as was the entertainment editor, senior Yolanda Heller, copy editor Roger Bolles, ad manager Devin Young and longtime photo editor Wilt Wilkerson, looking as out of it as ever.

Reggie didn’t remember a lot about the meeting, though he heard the Jim Case speech, containing all the “rally around the troops” clichés he could think of. Most of Reggie’s concentration had been on Brenda’s long, dark hair and deep, dark eyes, her bronze complexion, her perfect smile, her...

“So, Reggie, how do you think we should proceed?” Jim said in an effort to snap Reggie out of his trance.

“Well, uh, I think we should move full-steam ahead, boss,” Reggie replied with a canned answer.

“That’s the kind of attitude I’m looking for,” Jim said with a nod. “Everyone can take their tips from Reggie. He’s been around the rodeo a time or two. Think of him as the second-in-command. That’s all I had. Anybody have anything else?”

The room fell silent, and Jim adjourned the meeting. Soon after, Reggie walked up to Brenda’s desk.

“Hi, Reggie,” Brenda greeted him. “I didn’t think you’d remember me from last year. I seemed kind of anxious to get on staff, didn’t I? I have to apologize. My mother was a writer here back in the 70s, and she told me about all the fun while she was here.”

“So, um, have you been having fun so far?” Reggie said, nervously.

“To tell you the truth, it’s been kind of dull. I had hoped that the staffers besides Jim would be a little more festive. But to tell you the truth, it’s been boring as all get-out. All of the other writers were stiffs, except for Steve, who I see rarely.”

“You’ll be seeing a lot more of Steve this year. I’ve been tabbed to whip him into shape so he can take over as sports editor after I leave.”

“I hope that won’t be too soon,” Brenda said, looking like she was blushing.

“Oh no,” Reggie replied, becoming more uneasy as the conversation went on. “I’ve got to graduate next spring, or else I’m going to have to live out of my car.”

“I hope I can pick your brain a little bit. Jim’s a good editor, but not much of a teacher. All of these computer programs are a lot to take in.”

“Tell you what. You pick a time where we can sit down and talk a little bit. I know a great coffee shop on St. Clair that’s kind of out of the way, and we can come up with a plan for us, I mean you.”

“What are you doing right now?”

Reggie wasn’t sure if Brenda had caught him slip, but unless he was reading her wrong, she was kind of into him. But the clock was no friend of his this day.

“I can’t,” he said apologetically. “I’ve got to get to work in a half an hour. Tomorrow, perhaps? My schedule’s open. How about you?”

Brenda smiled. “I’m all yours.”

Reggie agreed to meet with her and headed towards his car. As he took a step out the door, Jim called him into the office.

“Listen, Reg, there was something I wanted to talk to you about in private,” Jim began. “I kinda talked you up to Brenda over the last year. Ever since you two talked before you left, she was really interested in what you were all about.”

“So, what are you saying?” Reggie asked.

“All I’m saying is she might have a little crush on you,” Jim stated in a light tone. “If that makes you uneasy in any way, let me know, and I’ll talk to her about.”

“No, Jim, that’s fine,” Reggie quickly responded. “Hey, I think I can take a little bit of love thrown my way, especially after the year I’ve had.”

“Alright, but just to let you know, the last guy she crushed on in high school who rejected her got verbally assaulted within an inch of his life.”

While this didn’t sit well with Reggie, he nodded and walked towards the door, as he looked around the office, he caught Brenda, who waved at him and smiled.

I can do this, Reggie thought. What’s the worst that can happen?

Chapter 2

The Curve Ball

For the first time in a long time, Reggie was looking forward to heading into work at the Brass Handle, not because he enjoyed sitting behind a counter for eight hours in the evening. He now got to spend his eight hours fantasizing about Brenda.

His infatuation almost got the better of him as his shift waned, when he screwed up a customer's change right as Roscoe had walked in to check up on things. From the look on his face, the boss didn't look too pleased.

"What's gotten into you tonight?" Roscoe blared.

Reggie had no choice but to apologize for his mistake, and Roscoe, despite his reputation for being a grumpy old man, gave him the benefit of the doubt. When he arrived home at about ten o'clock, he found his roommate, Marcus Gladden, watching the local news.

"You realize that we're going to have to get cable at some point, right?" Reggie joked with his long-time friend, who worked as a music teacher in the Cleveland Heights school district.

"Now you know as well as I do that neither of us are ever home enough to bother with it," Marcus shot back. Reggie knew he was right, but he still couldn't resist poking fun at his roomie.

"Seriously, I've got a question for you," Reggie changed the subject as he took a swig from a 40-ounce bottle of Mickey's that he grabbed before he left work. "You remember us talking about some girl named Brenda?"

"Maybe," Marcus replied, trying to remember. "You talked about a lot of girls before you left. And, if I'm not mistaken, you didn't hook up with any of them."

“First of all, I was too focused on getting out of Cleveland to take any of them seriously,” Reggie retorted. “Secondly, I’m not working with any of the rest of them. And get this, Jim Case told me she’s crushin’ on me!”

“Sounds interesting,” said Marcus. “Are you planning on following up on this one?”

“What do you think?” Reggie asked emphatically. “I haven’t gotten laid since before I left the first time. I feel like a monk!”

“That’s a good attitude,” Marcus said, sounding skeptical. “Taking advantage of someone’s puppy love for your own carnal gain.”

“Alright, that sounded kind of harsh,” Reggie corrected himself. “But I’m telling you, this girl, she could be the one.”

“Are you serious?” Marcus scoffed.

“Well, either that, or it’ll be one helluva summer fling!”

The friends laughed, and after taking another drink, Reggie put his Mickey’s in the refrigerator and headed to bed. Instead of sleeping, though, he just stared up at the ceiling in the darkness, thinking about what might be.

Is this for real?

Stranger things have happened.

What if she says no?

What if she says yes?

I wonder what she’s like in bed...

Get your mind out of the gutter!

After what seemed like an endless amount of time wrestling with the issues inside his head, Reggie finally fell asleep. Of course, his dreams turned to Brenda, and they weren't exactly pure.

Despite getting very little sleep, Reggie sprang out of bed the next morning. All he could think about was his trip to the Bean Sprout, a small coffeehouse on St. Clair, later on in the afternoon. He stopped by the *Forester* office, looking forward to seeing Brenda's face.

Instead, he was greeted by Jim, who had taken to amusing himself by blasting plastic pop bottles off of Reggie's desk with his 9-iron. Jim had also put on his CD player, with Limp Bizkit blaring in the background as the bottles sailed in the air.

A sane person would have started screaming at Jim and demanding that he step off of their desk. However, Reggie, his brain addled by failing as a full-time journalist and, well, Brenda, politely requested Jim step off his desk...then stepped up himself.

"Let me show you how we did it in Bryan," bragged Reggie. "You see, we had a lot of wide open spaces out there, and plenty of room to whack the ball."

"Oh, I'm sure there was whacking and plenty of balls, but I doubt any of them had to do with golf," Jim said crassly.

"Leave what you do with Rosie Palmer and her five sisters out of this!" rebutted Reggie, who sent one of the empty bottles crashing against the wall.

"Oh, my virgin ears!" A female voice rang out. It was Brenda, who had just walked into the office.

Trying not to act embarrassed, Reggie hopped off his desk, saying, "Normally, I would have a snide remark to that. But being a gentleman, I'll refrain..."

"Gentleman? Where?" Brenda zinged back, leaving Jim on the floor laughing his ass off.

“Ha ha, very funny,” Reggie replied, dropping the golf club on the floor. “Keep talking that that, Alvarez, and you’ll be buying your own scones.”

“Lucky for me I eat muffins, McCaffrey,” said Brenda, eager to get in the final word. “And I had no idea you had enough money to pay for both of us.”

Reggie stopped dead in his tracks, not because Brenda done him one better, but because their playful banter was making him want to do something inappropriate to her in front of Jim. Reggie was starting to feel like a high-school kid with the way he was feeling, but he couldn’t help himself.

Nevertheless, he diverted his attention from the impure thoughts he had for his co-worker and more towards their pending meeting.

“So, are you ready to head to the coffeehouse?” he asked.

“I am so sorry,” Brenda said. “I totally spaced on the time. Can I take a raincheck?”

Reggie was crestfallen, but he tried to play it off by saying, “Raincheck? Oh, I guess so. Out of curiosity, what could possibly be so important that you’re blowing me off?”

“I promised my boyfriend Oscar that we’d go out to a movie at Tower City,” she replied.

“What?” Reggie asked, confused.

“What?” Brenda echoed.

“It sounded like you said you had a boyfriend.”

“I do,” Brenda said, and looked at the figure walking through the door. “And there he is.”

She ran over to Oscar and threw her arms around him and kissed him for what seemed like forever. Reggie just stood there mystified, while Jim’s face bore an “I did *not* see that coming!” look to it. After removing her lips from Oscar’s face, Brenda smiled and waved goodbye to her co-workers.

As the door to the office closed, Reggie slowly turned to Jim.

“So, Jim,” Reggie said, his voice rising. “Could you explain to me what just happened?”

“Reg, you know what?” said Jim, as if he had an epiphany. “It just hit me. She’s got a boyfriend!”

Angry, Reggie took the half-dozen pop bottles that were left on his desk and started winging them at Jim, who was doing his best *Matrix* impression to avoid them. Successfully keeping from getting him, Jim made a silly face at Reggie and ran into his office, shutting the door soundly behind him.

Chapter 3

Strictly Professional?

“And then her boyfriend comes out of nowhere!” Reggie said to Marcus, who stopped by the Brass Handle to pick up some junk food for the house.

“That sounds like an awful story,” Marcus, the more rational of the two, replied. “So what happened to Jim?”

“I shoved a chair under his door knob,” said Reggie with a nasty grin. “For all I know, he’s still stuck in his office, unless Wilt came out from the dark room and gave him a hand. And that was yesterday.”

“A pretty cruel thing to do to your boss,” said Marcus, opening up the bag of sour cream and onion chips he had just purchased.

Reggie didn’t really care. Jim had committed a crime by failing to divulge the fact that despite his intuition, Brenda was already spoken for. The scowl Reggie wore on his face was all that his best friend needed to see to realize that Jim had to pay.

“So, did you at least figure out who this guy is?” Marcus asked.

Reggie then went into the information Jim had given to him behind the door of his office, fearing that more projectiles would be hurled his way. Brenda met her boyfriend Oscar Minaya while they were in high school. Oscar was a starting forward on the soccer team, while Brenda, of course, was editor of the school paper.

When they graduated, the two seemingly went their separate ways. Brenda attended Forest State, and Oscar was accepted to Ohio State on an academic scholarship. She had only mentioned her boyfriend once while at the *Forester* her freshman year and that was in October. Jim figured that the long distance had taken its toll and that the two were no longer together.

Coupled with her ongoing fascination with Reggie, Jim came to the conclusion that Brenda had a new object of affection. This was further facilitated, as Jim thought, by Reggie's return to campus. Only was it earlier in the day that Jim came to realize, just as Reggie had, that Brenda and Oscar were still very much together.

"I guess this means that you're going to have to find someone else to have a summer fling with?" Marcus said at the conclusion of Reggie's story.

"Hell no, I'm still going after Brenda," Reggie declared. "That guy she's with is temporary. Besides, how long do you really think that this long-distance thing is going to last after she spends some quality time with me?"

"You say that like that's a good thing," Marcus joked, prompting Reggie to throw him out of the store.

While he spent his previous work shift fantasizing about Brenda, Reggie spent this shift thinking up ways to snatch her out of Oscar's hands. His plans, of course, centered around two questions: How serious were they still and how much did Brenda know about Reggie's feelings?

If he needed any doubt as to the latter question, it was all erased near the end of his shift, when Brenda came walking through the door.

"You're a ways out from the west side, aren't you?" Reggie asked, trying hard not to show too much emotion.

"Jim told me you were working here," said Brenda. "It was the least he could do for me after I rescued him from being barricaded in his office."

"Now who would do something like that to our beloved editor?"

Brenda leaned over the counter with a slight smile. “Well, word around the water cooler is that he was blocked into his office for failing to mention to our sports editor that the news editor...had a boyfriend!”

“I think your sources are a little off,” Reggie said, acting as if none of that were true.

“Well, I’m not so sure, because it was Jim who told me,” said Brenda, her smile getting wider.

“Jim was under some mental duress,” Reggie argued. “He could have said that aliens had inhabited his brain at that point. But enough about Jim. What exactly do you find so amusing about the whole situation?”

“That’s why I came down here,” Brenda continued. “I wanted to let you know that I’m flattered.”

“Flattered about what?” asked Reggie, playing dumb.

“I understand that you might like me a little,” she replied, then laughed softly. “Well, maybe a lot. I mean, you did barricade Jim in his office.”

“Look, it doesn’t make a difference how I feel,” Reggie said, the scowl on his face becoming ever more prominent. “The bottom line is that you already have a boyfriend. So, I guess that means anything I say at this point would be beyond the scope of professionalism and be borderline sexual harassment, if indeed that was truly how I felt.”

“I just wanted to explain...”

“You don’t have to explain anything,” Reggie interrupted. “I made some assumptions based on some bad information, and I’m sorry. For the record, yes, I do like you a lot. I think you are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen in my entire life! From the moment I laid eyes on you

last year, I wanted to be with you. Of course, I get a job a day later and figured never to see you again.”

Brenda stared at Reggie, speechless to what was pouring out of him.

“However, having said all of that,” Reggie continued. “I respect the relationship that you have with your boyfriend. I know it must be tough to keep it together since you two are about 100 miles apart. So, I’m not going to do anything to mess that up. Therefore, I think in the interest of the paper, we keep our relationship strictly professional.”

Brenda’s reaction was anything but professional. As soon as Reggie was done with his diatribe, she grabbed him by his convenient-store vest, pulled him dangerously close to her and kissed him. When they finished, Reggie returned to the other side of the counter, seeming quite dazed by what had happened.

“Didn’t I just say that I wasn’t going to do anything?” Reggie said.

“I’m sorry,” Brenda replied. “It’s just, well, that was so wonderful that you would say all of those things to me. Oscar never did.”

“Wait a sec,” Reggie said, quickly reacting to hearing her boyfriend’s name. “He’s not, like, in the car or anything, is he?”

Brenda shook her head. “Are you kidding? Do you know what he’d say if I told him that we were coming to a convenient store on the east side to talk to another guy?”

“So, now what?” Reggie asked.

“Like you said. In the interest of the paper, we should remain strictly professional,” she calmly replied.

“But what about what just happened?”

“Oh, that. I shouldn’t have done that. That definitely gave you the wrong idea. I’m really sorry.”

“Then why?”

Brenda smiled. “Well, I had to know what I was missing out on.”

Reggie smirked. “Not exactly a litmus test you should let Oscar know about. But since you mentioned that, did you figure out what you were missing?”

“Let’s put it this way,” Brenda said as she turned a bright shade of pink. “If I didn’t already have a boyfriend, you and I would probably be in the stock room in the back of this place, and your boss wouldn’t be too pleased. See you tomorrow, Reggie.”

As Brenda walked out the door, Reggie felt the frustration, sexual and otherwise, well up inside him.

“You know what you just did is illegal in six countries!” he yelled towards the door, hoping that she would hear him.

Chapter 4

Disoriented

In the weeks that followed Reggie's encounter with Brenda at the Brass Handle, it pretty much remained business as usual at the *Forester*. Despite what he told Marcus, he opted to keep in line with his promise to Brenda not to interfere with her and Oscar and tried his best to train her in all the nuances of the newspaper.

Meanwhile, Reggie was faced with another problem, that being the seeming unwillingness for Steve Grissom to get with the program. By the time the end of June rolled around, Steve still wasn't able to lay out a single story, which frustrated Reggie to no end.

"How is this even possible?" Reggie asked Steve one day. "Aren't you a Computer Science major?"

"Man, that's all programming and stuff," said Steve matter-of-factly. "I'm going to work on Web sites when I'm done with school."

"You are aware that the dot-com bubble burst, right?" Reggie snarled. "And it didn't even reach Cleveland."

"That's all media hype!" Steve replied with a straight face. "There'll be a place for me. If not, I've always got my board as a back-up."

And then there was the skateboard, which, in time, became the bane of Reggie's existence. At least twice a day when he was training Steve, he'd damn near break his neck tripping over Steve's alleged claim to fame. And despite the board's presence, Reggie had never once seen Steve actually do any kind of trick.

Reggie's only saving grace during the waning months of June had, coincidentally enough, become the object of his desire, Brenda. Eager to learn anything new, Brenda had taken

only a week to completely figure out the layout program, and by the end of the month was creating mock-up pages on her own.

The last Friday of June presented a new challenge to the *Forester* staff. Starting that day, Forest State's New Student Center was conducting its annual bi-weekly orientation program. In years past, as Reggie recalled, the *Forester* was a stop on the tour.

But for this year, things were to be a little different. By Student Life decree, it seemed, editors from the *Forester* were asked to present themselves before incoming freshman classes. Jim had taken the democratic approach and had asked for volunteers. Reggie chose to go first, and so did Brenda.

The New Student Center had opted to hold their mass meetings for the summer in the conference rooms of FSU Arena, the home of the men's and women's basketball teams. Reggie knew these halls well, having covered the Lumberjacks extensively during his previous sports editor stint.

On the morning of the orientation, Reggie looked over at Brenda, who was hard at work on her latest mock-up. "Are you ready for these freshmen?" he asked.

"It's weird," she replied. "At this time last year, I was running around just like these guys. Now, I'm going to be telling them what's going on around here? That only tells me one thing. Forest State needs some real student leaders."

Reggie laughed as he pointed Brenda towards the door. It was about ten minutes before they were supposed to be at the conference pavilion for their spiel, and they had a couple of blocks to walk.

As they walked towards the arena, they passed one landmark that caught Brenda's eye: The Crash, the bar that Jim often mentioned over the previous year.

“Is that place any good?” Brenda asked as she pointed in that direction.

“It’s a decent joint for the college crowd,” Reggie said. “I’d have figured that you would have been there at least once during your freshman year when they had their College ID nights.”

“They’re a 19 and over place,” said Brenda, frowning. “I didn’t turn 19 until May 16th. By that time, school was out and there wouldn’t have been any reason to go.”

“You should probably go to the Beach Club in the Flats. I know the guy who DJs there on the weekends. We should go one of these nights.”

Brenda smirked. “Is this another veiled attempt to get me to go out with you?”

“Of course not,” Reggie retorted. “In fact, you can even bring Oscar with you.”

“That would be nice, if not for two problems,” Brenda said, looking down at the sidewalk. “First, he’s never been into dancing, and second, he’s not here anymore.”

“What do you mean he’s not here?”

Apparently, Oscar had only been back in town for a couple of weeks after the end of Ohio State’s spring quarter. Brenda went on to say that Oscar had returned to Columbus the previous week to start training for soccer season, since he had also been invited to come back to play for the Buckeyes after earning a spot on the roster the year before as a walk-on.

Reggie wasn’t interested in the back story. “Well, I guess this means that I’ll have to take you out all on my lonesome. Will Oscar be down with that?”

“What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him,” said Brenda slyly. “But no funny business, McCaffrey.”

“Fine, but don’t be surprised if you have to take a cab home because I’ve hooked up,” Reggie said in an attempt to make her jealous.

However, she didn't miss a step. "From what I've heard, it's been a long time since that's happened, and the odds are long that it'll happen when we go out, either."

Jesus, Jim's got a big mouth, Reggie thought, and the two were silent the rest of the way to the arena.

As they entered the room, Brenda and Reggie were greeted by a throng of new students and a clearly agitated representative from the New Student Center. As they found out later, The *Forester* contingency was the only student group that bothered to make good on their promise. The notable absence of anyone from Student Government left at least one freshman a little perturbed.

During the question-and-answer period that followed a rather shaky presentation on Reggie's part, a girl with wild long brown hair and crazy green eyes stood up. The loony-looking female wore a pair of low-rise jeans and a rather tight t-shirt, which caught the attention of every guy in the room, with the exception of Reggie, who seemed rather annoyed that she'd have the gall to prolong his misery.

"I just wanted to ask if you knew anything about the student government," the girl asked. "I was on Student Council in high school, and being on the student newspaper doesn't sound like it would fit me very well."

Before Reggie could come up with a snide comeback, Brenda jumped in. "As the News Editor, I can tell you a lot about it. What would you like to know, um..."

"Lanie. My name's Lanie Chapel," the strange girl replied. "And I just wanted to know when the Freshman Senator elections were."

"Well, Lanie, those occur in October," Brenda said, hoping that would be the end of it.

However, Lanie had other ideas. She proceeded to ask question after question until a person from the New Student Center decided that they had ran out of time. Reggie had never seen a room clear out so fast. Within two minutes, the only people left were Brenda, Reggie...and Lanie.

The crazy-looking girl approached Brenda and shook her hand.

“Thank you for answering all of those questions for me,” Lanie said with smile that looked rather fake. “Since you’re on the school paper, you’ll probably be seeing a lot of me, since I’m going to be trying to get into SG.”

“Well, good luck to you, then,” Brenda said, fake-smiling back.

As Brenda and Reggie walked back to the *Forester* office, they reflected on what had become a rather amusing disaster.

“What was up with that Lanie girl?” Reggie thought out loud. “Nobody finds Student Government that interesting, not even people in Student Government. Why else would they not have bothered to show up? In fact, I don’t even know who’s in Student Government!”

“Well, it would seem you’ll now know Lanie Chapel,” Brenda said, mocking the girl’s screechy tone. “And she’ll make the world, or at least Forest State University, a better place.”

“You shouldn’t talk about your new best friend like that,” Reggie chuckled. “It might hurt her feelings and she’ll be chasing you around the office with an ax or something.”

“Best friend? More like worst enemy. The only way she could win an election is if she slept with half the freshman class, which she looked ready to do. I’m surprised you weren’t drooling all over her, too.”

“Realistically? I was only paying attention to the fact that she kept us there forever. As far as I’m concerned, annoyance trumps hotness, or, in this case, ill-perceived hotness.”

“So, I guess I can assume that you think I’m way hotter than her?”

Reggie’s face screwed up at the question. “I think answering that question would violate my promise not to interfere in your relationship.”

“But you are still taking me out to the Beach Club,” Brenda said sternly. “You’re not getting out of that one.”

“Since you put it that way,” Reggie responded. “I’m off of work tomorrow at about seven. Pick you up then?”

“Actually, I think in the interest of not giving my family the wrong idea, I’ll pick *you* up,” Brenda said as she poked her finger into Reggie’s chest.

With that, it was set. Brenda and Reggie were going out to the Beach Club on Saturday night. This confused Reggie further. He was now taking a girl out dancing, but it wasn’t a date. The thought of it made him scratch his head for the rest of the day.

Chapter 5

All Downhill From Here

When Reggie returned home from his shift at the Brass Handle and told Marcus about his Saturday night out with Brenda, Marcus seemed as confused about the arrangement as Reggie clearly was.

“So, let me get this right,” Marcus said. “Her boyfriend is back in Columbus, she kissed you, you two are going out to the Beach Club tomorrow night, but it’s not a date. Furthermore, she has no interest in breaking up with her boyfriend.”

Reggie nodded. “That appears to be the situation.”

“This leads me then to question number two,” Marcus added. “How did you buy into all of this? And, more to the point, why are you taking her out, knowing full well that nothing is going to come of it?”

“That would be questions two and three,” Reggie corrected. “I’ll admit it does seem kind of odd. First off, you know the old idea that chicks want you more when they think you’re unavailable? Well, that’s my reasoning behind taking her with me.”

“OK, that’s a complete bullshit answer,” Marcus retorted. “But that’s your story and you’re sticking to it, eh?”

“Whatever,” said Reggie, rolling his eyes. “In any case, I figure that this relationship with Oscar isn’t going to last forever, and I want to be at the front of the line when that happens.”

Marcus chuckled. “And this is what you think you’ve learned in four years of college. No wonder you had to come back! You didn’t learn a damn thing! I have no idea why you think you’re in the front of the line. With this strategy of yours, you have pretty much put yourself in the back of the line.”