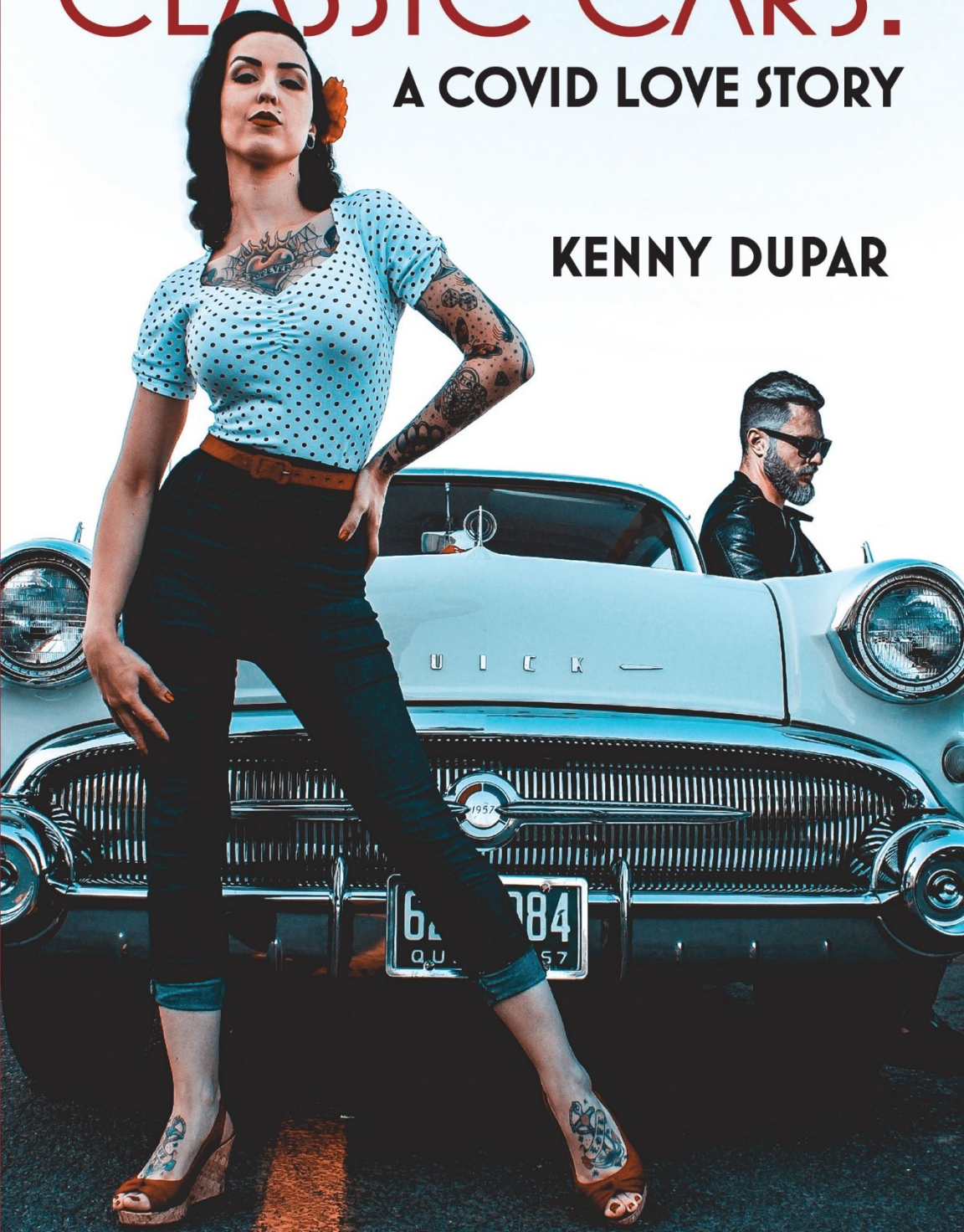


PIN-UP DOLLS & CLASSIC CARS:

A COVID LOVE STORY

KENNY DUPAR



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This is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual persons or organizations are entirely coincidental. In order to maintain anonymity, in some instances I have changed the names of events and places and may have changed some identifying characteristics.

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In dedication to Bea Dupar.

She was my first editor. And suggested with D&C that I include a list of characters since the beginning has lots of names. Mom didn't make it past chapter eight.

We saw things very similarly. I look forward to reuniting on the other side.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

	<u>Pin Up name</u>	<u>Nemesis</u>
Corrine	Corrine De Menthe	Evan
Cory (son) & Cassie		Sharon
Peter		
Audrey	Holly Hot Rod	Kaelani
DeMarco (son)		
Tamah (son)		
Mitchell (Uncle)		
Owen		
Ryan		Tiffany
DelMonica (daughter)	Cherry Nova	
Johnny (son)		
Jack		
Kimmy	Serenity Jade	
Brian		
Donna	Donna Diva	
Aleia	Miss Demeanor	
Aaron		
Lawrence		
Gary		

LIST OF CARS

*Chevy Nova 1950 Chevrolet
3100 pickup truck*

Bel Air Go Karts

*Buick Rivera '40 Willys
Coupe*

Impala '48 Anglia Trio

Cadillac Eldorado El Camino

*Pontiac GTO Dodge
Challenger*

Skylark '32 Ford coupe

F-150 1967 Rally Sport Z28

Toyota RAV4 Dodge Ram

*'69 Mustang Ragtop
Thunderbird Sports
Roadster*

Corvette Kaiser Dragon

*Plymouth Road Runner
Regal*

Maserati LeSabre

*Porsche Ford Fairlane
Crown Vic*

Model A Ford Expedition

Toyota Tundra Explorer

*Kia Sportage Lincoln-Zephyr
Convertible*

Nissan Sentra Continental

*Chevy Silverado Oldsmobile
Starfire*

Mercury Cougar

Pontiac Bonneville

Costco Petal Car

Honda Civic

Barracuda

Camaro

Mother's Day

“What’s your favorite color, and what does it smell like?”

“My favorite color is black. It smells like the exhaust from racing fuel,” Holly Hot Rod replied to the Master of Ceremony’s prearranged question.

She posed with one gloved hand high in air, her toothy grin imposing. Her dress had the intensity of a midnight storm. Camera phones pretended to click. She was more powerful than the other Pin Up Dolls. The high slit in her evening gown was like a fleshy, flashing lightning bolt upon a disappearing shadow. Audrey (though no one there used her real name) was the fastest machine at the classic car show that day.

Oh, the gearheads liked her! The genuine applause was filled with loud, male handclaps with a few thundering

“yeahs!”. She turned wrenches for Boeing and had the gritty confidence mature men want, until they get it. Taught by their dad’s example to use Gojo’s orange oil and pumice filled soap, everyone was cleaned up real good today. The grease under their fingernails had even been brushed out. Although for some mechanics, oils seeped into the layers of their skin from constant contact. It just leached back after the surface was scrubbed bright.

Holly was crowned Queen of the first pageant of the season after the judges tallied and the popular vote was counted. It was Mother’s Day, 2018. The “Brazen Beauties” Pin Up club helped promote the event. She would stay late to clean up, after most from her chapter bailed. Her fiancé waited at home with her underemployed, car-less son. The unlucky man having to work on a Sunday. They both gave her thoughtful cards. And Holly texted her man the happy news after she had hugged practically everyone.

Beautiful women and muscle cars blended in a symbiotic perfection on a partly cloudy day. In the Pacific Northwest the adults were ready to play after a rainy Spring.

Lockdowns hadn’t been imposed and COVID had not yet killed.

Corrine De Menthe was asked by the MC if her man was planning anything special for her on Mother's Day. Donna Diva passed out slips of paper with random questions to the Dolls five minutes before the Q&A started. She didn't have time to worry about the emotional impact it could have on a single, boyfriend-less girl. The microphone passed to Corrine. Within the car show's beer garden, a small space was carved out for the interview portion of the pageant.

"Well, you know, I got my special present this morning. . . 'cause, you know. . ." Her lace off-the-shoulder party dress strained to cover her eight-inch oval headlamps. "If Momma ain't happy. . ." Her chest heaved with a dramatic pause. "Then's nobody happy!"

The crowd's assent was unanimous and rowdy. Her real present was a crayon drawing on construction paper.

"But if Daddy ain't happy. . .?" she asked absentmindedly. Three men lowly replied in unison, "then no one cares," which got some chuckles.

Miss De Menthe added with a wink, "But believe me, my Daddy's happy today."

And that was enough. Slutty responses always proved effective. It was a popularity contest, after all. Corrine cried a little when her son gave her the picture of them together playing with their puppy, and read the unsteadily written,

sincere, "I LOVE MY MOM." She almost won Miss Congeniality that mid-May day, but this was only her second year, just "patched in" over the winter and the Chapter president, Miss Diva wasn't yet in a giving mood towards her. Corrine curved perfectly like the fenders of 1939 Deluxe Ford Coupe; she was bulbous and wide, painted in a harmonizing tropical green. She got lots of votes, most of which were counted.

Grills gave wafts of smoking meat to imbue the Americana set. The small brewery hosted this day hoping to make money with Kielbasa and pale ales. Such super spreader events as these were soon to be a relic of the past.

Ginger Honey Bear, Marie Bella Rose, Serenity Jade, and Katastrophic spoke about the pediatric cancer charity the chapter supported, their lives' victories, like personal illness, eldercare, or children with special needs. Defeating wounds like divorce and death were avoided.

Masking her usual, self-serving self, Miss Demeanor pined on and on about how much the "Sisterhood of Pin Up Dolls has meant so much in my life." It was a "soft ball" question pitched by Miss Donna Diva to her long-time friend. Some sisters hated the fact that her dresses were always special ordered, never second hand or personally sewn.

An immigrant girl from the Philippines attended her at a salon the night before, so she could always win best makeup. Another bedazzled ribbon sat across her dainty chest. She was named a Princess many times over but didn't use the title, "Miss", being integral to her name. She never tried very hard at anything and couldn't give a fuck about becoming a queen.

Her son was on the other side of the country. It occurred to her to call her ex, since he'd wait for her to phone before making their five-year-old son talk to his mom. Somehow Aleia found the money to outspend most girls in the Brazen Beauties Pin Up chapter, although she was damn near homeless, a sociable but slippery girl.

Authentic Pin Up chic was pursued with hairdos and many accessories like parasols, handbags, and faux, vintage, clear crystal jewelry. Tattoos were too numerous to be found inauthentic in the 21st century. Body art clashed with sleeveless dresses. Contestants showing up in a ponytail, however, were judged to be unpardonably lazy.

It wasn't about winning awards for many enthusiasts, but the car scene itself. Hundreds/thousands of people came to Issaquah, those who could pronounce Native place names, in order to appreciate what others had built, and lasting friendships were made. Magnificent lowriders and

traditional custom rebuilds parked side by side. Imaginations flourished from fresh off the assembly line, glorious, back in the day original styling. Artistic design and attention to detail inspired future builds.

But none could ever surpass the perfect creation of the human form itself. Amazing, awesome friendships welded together, ground down, and Bondo'd to seamless, helped men stand strong when family passed away. They enjoyed meeting people because of the cars.

Both Dolls and Gearheads strove toward beauty abstractly, in Washington State. It was something you could almost touch, but fleeting, like a chance for a few hours of recognition.

The Dolls wanted their pictures before, atop, and within a Nova, Bel Air, Rivera, Impala, Eldorado, or a Pontiac GTO. Their owners wiped chrome into glass with micro-cloths. Pin Ups asked, "Can I touch it?"

The smart boys responded, "Yes, you can. As long as you're wearing your gloves." Don't smudge. Pride outshined sexual tension barely, by a smidge. Owners needlessly related their car's modifications to ladies who had spent months choosing outfits and altering their looks. Ornery

curmudgeons scowled and rarely won awards for their cars, or friends.

With baskets full of their business cards tied to candy, Dolls stepped carefully through grass with too high heels. Calves would be sore by the end of the day. Attentive men offered their hands over uneven ground. Many wanted to win a prize but would settle for photographs with racy composition.

Flat red looked orange in the spotty light. Bonnets were fully raised over engines. Backgrounds often sucked as people milled about, other cars or objects getting in the way. Photographers with cell phones spoke clumsy suggestions on maybe how to pose. Get up close. Check the serpentine belt, is it taut? Should you even be under the hood? Are you allowed? Did you jiggle the hoses? Are they all connected good? Did you just get caught being naughty? Could you top off the fluids? Why don't you get behind the wheel? Do you like to go fast? Let's see your pouty face. Check your mirrors. Is someone following you? Is Daddy going to let you drive? How 'bout we hop in the backseat? Can you blow me a kiss?

"Just one?" she might ask.

Even though it was awfully tempting, Ryan didn't buy a delicious porter at the small brewery that hosted the car show with the Carburetor Crackups car club, and Brazen Beauties sponsoring. Forty or so vehicles of all makes had entered. He sat in a folding lawn chair and sipped from cans of Mountain Dew, then used the empties to spit back into while enjoying a dip of Copenhagen mint long cut. He was a car enthusiast, and this was his first show he had entered. There was no chance he'd have any alcohol before putting his baby to bed. Having poured about 20k into his '70 Nova, he didn't need another drunk driving offense. Eight years ago, they didn't have the "blow and go" but it still cost him over ten grand in court fees and increased insurance. As a reward for such self-control, Ryan planned on getting shitfaced when he got home. His daughter Delmonica and her fiancé wanted pizza for dinner, so they planned to get some pies to go. Eating out would upset his liquid appetizers. It was a good day with zero pressure.

Recently, his buddy Jerry had an ignition interlock device court ordered for a year resulting from his OUI, and it was a real pain in the ass. One morning after drinking heavily, a positive result required a tow to a licensed service shop to reset the computer, and two days away from work and a reported violation to the Motor Vehicle Department. Jerry got another six months tacked onto having a breathalyzer.

He stopped by to give well wishes and admire his friend's efforts. That was at least one vote Ryan could count on.

The kids sat with him most of the afternoon. Another gearhead, Jack, sporadically talked details about the rebuild to his future father-in-law. They installed the black door panels in a weekend with only one case of Rainier beer between them. Named for the mountain that dominated the southern sky view of Seattle, it was an inexpensive Pilsner that had its intended effect.

Jack was glad it wasn't his credit card that financed the pursuit of an automotive dream. It would have been less costly to order the whole interior kit and then Craig's List whatever they didn't need. The correct lens for the interior light was on order. Ryan was building it "one piece at a time." Goofing around a previous weekend in the garage, the kid played Johnny Cash's song by that name on his iPhone and got called a "son-of-a-bitch" for the effort. It became their anthem.

"You haven't even met my mom yet, Ryan. She's good looking. You know I came from a broken home, so maybe you could be my new d-aaa-dddy?" he bleated like a sheep. "Not just an in-law, but for reals."

"Like that wouldn't be weird." Ryan swigged a third of a can of Rainier, "That's wrong in too many ways." After a big

pause, he added, "That means Delmonica would be your sister and your wife."

"It's happened before." The zone between three and five beers, when men could still somewhat safely work with tools, also corresponded with smack in the middle funniest banter. He's a sick bastard, he thought. And he liked the notion. He continued to consider in his mind: maybe I'll meet his mom at the weddin'? That was a sore subject as there wasn't a definitive date for the nuptials. Soon Ryan's daughter would be on her own, maybe. As far as his family was concerned, he was in charge of jack shit.

A few Pin Ups came by to talk, passing out cards and asking for votes. They traded promises to mark ballots for each other, Ryan entering the Best Chevy category for only \$20. Another twenty and he could have shown in the Best Hot Rod or Best Paint. Best interior was a project too far away. Best in Show seemed unattainable.

He thought about joining the Carburetor Crackups. Pretending to be interested in their efforts, he told most of the girls that they had pretty dresses. Most were in their 40's or 50's but beauty knew no age. He was getting a glimmer of how to politic for votes in this world. And for a moment Ryan became embarrassed for wearing just a Motley Crue T-shirt and a ratty pair of sneakers.

“How long have you had your car?” Ginger Honey Bear asked. She accented her cherry-colored hair with pink carnations and cat eyed red frame shades. Everything she wore was pink except the roses and stems on a below the knee rockabilly swing dress.

“I bought it from a guy in Puyallup last year.”

“Love the paint job. What kind of orange is it?”

“Actually, it’s called Monza red. It took a while for me to find replacement paint that matched the stock color. It’s not brilliant but flat, so it can change the look depending on the light.”

“Can I touch it?” Her smile and squinty eyes were so playful that it made Ryan want to play, too.

“Do you have pink gloves?” This being his first show, Ryan forgot this time to ask for pictures to be texted right away, before folks blended back into the crowd. There could have been a few he’d print out full size and hang in the garage. A mark of small victories. Something to look at and smile, wondering who was going to give who a ride.

Corrine De Menthe walked Serenity Jade, aka Kimmy, around the car show, showing her the ropes, asking for votes. Kimmy was Ryan's sister-in-law and just recently joined the Chapter as a prospect.

"Where's my brother at?" Ryan asked.

"He's working in Nevada. Still setting up displays at conventions. It's a two week gig this time."

"Is he going to hang out before breaking down?"

"No, they fly the crew to Reno next weekend, in between." She missed her husband and told Miss De Menthe to never fall in love with a traveling man. Not that her advice would soon matter.

Corrine had worked with Ryan distributing Pepsi Products a few years back and they remained very close friends to the annoyance of his then wife Tiffany. Ryan and Corrine endured her job shadowing week while making sure she could drive the rig containing hundreds of cases of soda, always working at a fevered pace.

Jerry called her twice to come and keep Ryan out of jail when he was obnoxiously drunk at local taverns and

wanting to fight. With her, Ryan was like an older brother and if he had amorous inclinations, he kept them to himself. Being fifteen years, her senior probably had an effect.

He “licensed” her on the hand truck and reported her required physical attributes. “She’s plenty strong.” He appreciated a woman willing to work with her back. The wage humping beverages wasn’t great, but the overtime added up fast to fat paychecks. Few applicants had the hustle, and laziness meant job security for Ryan. At least these days he could finally spend some money on stuff that brought him pleasure rather than everybody else’s essentials, like Amazon delivering car parts. It was Corrine who bugged him until he agreed to bring his baby to the show.

He strapped the over-the-shoulders restraints over his belly and rumbled out of the grassy yard soon after Holly and a 1966 Buick Skylark were said to be the best that day. Del and Jackass (a new pet name) picked up the pies after he gave his daughter fifty bucks for the effort and he rolled slowly enough to enjoy the ride back to his house all alone. Baby had the whole two car garage. His like-new, used F-150, canary yellow truck took up one side of the driveway. His ex-wife’s 2013 Toyota RAV4 sports utility parked it in. No fucking pride in anything, he thought.

The idle propelled his Nova past the car he bought her. Looking inside one would see fast food wrappers and wrinkled clothes. The exterior was a record of inattentive driving with scratches and dents on every panel, a few giving footholds to rust. At least she put her own gas in it and insured it herself. Her snarky request that the least he could do was change her oils and keep it road-worthy blazed worthy arguments.

Ryan opened the workshop fridge before going inside the house and grabbed a cold one. Tiffany was smoking at the dinner table, watching the Hallmark Channel.

The pleasant glow of the afternoon dimmed quickly. “Mel is bringing me pizza. I suppose you’d want to eat?” Ryan said, but it wasn’t an invitation.

“I’m not hungry.” She was even fatter than Ryan. At least he groomed his beard and mustache and kept his clothes clean. The old hag had translucent whiskers and permanent stains on her gray sweatpants.

Tidying up the kitchen while throwing away mailers, he asked, “there are credit card offers here. Are you sure you don’t want some more?”

This time, first blood was his. It was wickedly fun to bait her. At least he didn't open up her mail, like she did to him, he suspected. His bills wouldn't be missed if thrown away. Her need to know supplanted his need to stay afloat. Several times routine correspondence was lost via the stellar U.S. Mail, supposedly. Late fees atop interest made his hands shake. Ryan put nothing past her. The paranoia was but one thing to cloud his judgment?

"Don't be an asshole," she snapped back and put out a butt. Then Tiffany braced to lift her 230-pound frame. "Oh, my knees are creaking today."

There were two boxes of macaroni and cheese in the waste bin since he left for the show. He grinned and mused to himself, I bet she ate a whole stick of butter today. Buy your own glucosamine and chondroitin, bitch, let them joints snap, crackle, and pop. She can answer phones for \$20 an hour. Customer service? Her fat ass.

"Hey, why don't you throw away your beer cans before you open another?" Tiffany shot in his direction.

Ryan absorbed the jab without a counter punch, returned to the garage, and turned on the radio to an oldies station playing AC/DC. She made him seethe in waves. Even though they were divorced, the separation wasn't that long. He had

paid for both of their lawyers. Peace was shattered when he found out that his only child and his ex were living in the unheated garage of a family-friend.

She had been granted majority custody but couldn't even put a roof over their heads, even with \$1000 a month in child and spousal support. Then, a few months later, a homeless education liaison from the local school district contacted him to establish his daughter's address. Delmonica couldn't provide one, as she and her mother were living in Tiffany's SUV.

He took a swig from a bottle of Jim Beam. "Kissing Jimmy." That's what he called it. It was a package deal, their moving back in, and it removed much of his financial strain. He didn't have to pay Tiffany a grand a month anymore, but now bought her groceries and changed the oil in her car. Jerry asked if taking her back to court was an option. All Ryan could respond with was, "with whose money am I going to do that?"

He woke up the morning after learning how his daughter was living, not remembering how he'd cut his hands and head. Jerry helped piece together the previous night's fight at a local bar. Ryan did that often. Bourbon whiskey affected his memory several ways, first pushing back the idea of his child shivering under blankets, on a cot above an

oil-soaked concrete floor, then bringing anger out in waves considering how Delmonica could sleep in a car.

Tiff got his money with the custody and enjoyed vacations and plastic spending sprees for Chinese made Walmart crap. There wasn't much choice but to take both back into the four bedroom, two story house, whose mortgage he met through his own effort, his own sore back, delivering Pepsi products sixty hours a week.

At least his kid could graduate with him in the picture. The deal with the devil was that the bitch was back. All of her shit (worthless possessions) were back from the big storage space she had rented, spreading out her filth like a diseased rat, sniping and back biting at every turn.

Now Delmonica was about to graduate high school four months pregnant. At least Jack wasn't a mean guy. Ryan told him, "If the baby is a girl and you name it Tiffany, I'll kill the entire Goddamn family." It was said with sick humor but may not have been too far from the truth. Especially if Ryan got blackout drunk.

...

Although she looked a bit like a melted candle, Audrey got a big kiss when she finally got back to their double wide. The Queen's crown was readjusted in the carport and the sash was checked for folds, its safety pin keeping everything from being undone.

The porch light flicked on before Audrey was exactly ready and a goateed man with a cowboy hat opened the front door. Exposing his bald spot with a bow, he removed the hat with a sweeping motion, face to the floor, and uttered, "Your Highness!"

Holly Hot Rod had won princess tiaras in the two years she had competed, but this was a huge breakthrough in the land of positive self-esteem.

Oh, she liked that! Owen had asked about her speech and whispered in her ear as she swept inside with a small suitcase and a big swag bag. "You smell like racing fuel," he commented.

A big, toothy grin pulled wider across her face. "I just need a glass of wine and a shower."

"Let me help get you out of your dress."

“Stop, peasant. The wine first.”

He tapped his forehead, bowed, and intelligently stopped talking.

The door to her son’s room was closed as Audrey walked the six steps of the hall. The “Master” bedroom was choked with dressers and two chairs filled with outfits. Accessories were scattered over and beside the bed as if a rushed tantrum had taken place earlier in the day.

Owen entered and tried to find a place to set the glass down but couldn’t immediately find a space large enough. “Here you go,” he said and handed her the wine glass. “If you need any help, I’ll be playing my guitar.” He turned to leave, then remembered his dinner plans. “Do you want a burger, or a foot long? I’m grillin’.”

“I haven’t eaten all day. But first, you could sit and listen about my day.”

“Where? I mean, okay. Where you going to put your crown?” He stood smiling with his hands interlaced, hanging by his silver engraved oval belt buckle. There were never enough places to put all her stuff and he got rattled when it spilled into the rest of the double wide.

Her kid moving in, although he didn't really have that much, wasn't at all a help. Her princess tiaras and sashes were displayed prominently, around battery operated candles and over the bed frame. Owen wondered if there was an anniversary for shacking up. He remembered the commemoration with a special dinner out.

The kid wasn't bad, just lazy. When I was your age. . . popped into his head often. Thirty years earlier he had a BA in music theory and was working in radio, selling advertising and gofer'ing for any other, more established, employees. Owen was used to being poor. His divorce made him poorer still, but another chance at happiness was a good tradeoff. The pictures were supposed to be the payoff. "Aaron was taking pictures of the girls but look how shitty the angles were." The Queen manipulated her phone to show him. "He's always on a knee looking up." The grills of the cars were more prominent than the Pin Ups.

"Who's Aaron?"

"Miss Diva's husband."

"She's the President of your club? She was the MC?" His questions were ignored as Holly Hotrod was too tired to explain the organizational details again. If she had at all.

Instead, she simply handed her phone to Owen. "Yeah, I see that. Did you get some good ones of you being crowned?"
"She sent me some from her phone."

Owen asked her to forward the good ones to him and she agreed.

"How was the station?" she asked him. "Is the garden show still putting you to sleep?"

"I'd rather produce the mortgage show on Saturdays. Sorry, I couldn't be there, babe, for your victory." They exchanged a hug. A kiss. A little ass grabbing. Owen could kick himself for being so dense. There was a sequined, strapless black evening gown to help peel off a girl's body. What a show. He almost missed out. Those great long struts and springs. He did manage to stammer out, "you got great legs, baby." Then he struggled to refocus. "Are you going to act like a Queen now?"

Always searching for the sexual opening herself, Audrey responded with another hug and said, "Oh, it's going to get worse."

Having the kid added much stress for their young relationship. It was temporary until Demarco could find a

place. Fat chance for a part time grocery clerk who had recently spent six months in jail for burglary. Before he got locked up, though, Demarco did manage to impregnate a wretched girl named Kaelani. She gave birth before Demarco was released.

Audrey and Owen brought flowers to the hospital but were prevented from seeing the baby as Mom refused access, stating “they ain’t family”, enjoying her new-found power to separate, control, and destroy.

Her Samoan brother acted like a bouncer from the Jerry Springer show trying to control a fight that wasn’t going to happen, blocking the door with hands ready to push flatly against Owens’s chest. In a hospital corridor Audrey was crushed, a bouquet pointed toward the floor. The intended target was brought low. But she did meet her grandson in her own home once Demarco was situated there. She’d be on eggshells with Kaelani, forever fearful of her inexplicable hostility.

The rents were high near the offices of Microsoft, Amazon, Google and Facebook that were in and scattered around the Emerald City, named for Chief Si’ahl. In the sticks with the poor white trash, though, not so much. First, Audrey’s ex moved out, then her son, then Owen moved in, then the kid

back again. Audrey had lived a lot in the last few years in her rented double wide.

Owen knew enough to never get between a woman and her son. When she got mad that he was smoking pot in his room he agreed with her, but Owen was metaphorically lynched because he'd gotten high with the lad once. If he disagreed with her with anything concerning her twenty-five-year-old, he was wrong. If he was right, he was wrong and if he was wrong, he was wrong. The only thing to do was watch what he said, put his headphones on, strum his guitar, and make dinner for three. There was still a thin chance of getting some "Nana love" this weekend.

...

Corrine went home to an empty, two-bedroom apartment and fed the fish. Her son's father, Evan, had Cory that day, just as he would have Corey for Father's Day; it was just how their trading weekends schedule fell. It felt selfish that she had special plans without her son on Mother's Day. She could have easily argued to have him. Her mother made mention of it when Corrine had called to wish her well.

It was always a battle to change dates, but she hadn't tried, preferring to have fun with new friends. Corrine criticized herself a lot, feeling guilty, not knowing how to protect her

child from a hostile and sustained attempt to alienate her from her kid. The constant disrespect sometimes seeped through.

She and Corey had names for the fish but it changed often. "Gekko" was a favorite name from the PJ Masks cartoon series. Changing from white to green to blue depending on the fish's mood, the Chromis scooted around little plastic plants, fake coral, and a diminutive SpongeBob SquarePants pineapple house. Miss Donna Diva asked if the "her man" question was okay only moments prior to the Q&A portion of the pageant. What was she supposed to say? "No, my last date was with a four-year-old"?

Her dress pulled reluctantly off her hips. Little man could zip up and down which would have been a help. Her Pin Up friends helped her pull it together and into her meadow green dress that morning. Corrine was emotionally charged just getting into the shower, feeling so fat and unattractive. She sobbed a few times while she toweled off but managed to place her new pictures on Facebook. Then she called several girlfriends until finding one who would gab for an hour. Having a pleasant personality worked for her how? The super sweet, fat girl overwhelming aspect of her hadn't much changed since getting her Associates Degree. Just being pathetic had added bitterness.

Corrine caught herself in a “poor me baby” attitude sometimes. But one day she would win a princess tiara and then the tall, glittering crown! Queen De Menthe would be like the Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland and command, “off with their heads!” Corrine was also the funny, super-smart, sweet, fat girl.

...

When she got into the camper, Miss Demeanor tossed her bags onto the queen bed then instantly grabbed her stubby bong from the dinette table. She turned up the thermostat and slid into the elevated pop-out booth. Parked on her friend’s property she had to figure her next move soon. Three months’ rent free was going to get old. She needed a grand gesture for the Donna.

Though she’d been married four times, there weren’t any keepers at the show that day. Maybe she could get another telemarketing job? Aleia hated that. Drinking meant carbs and not fitting into clothes. If only she could score some speed.

The weed relaxed her instantly. Aleia preferred a body buzz cannabis to a head buzz. Today had been so much fun hanging with the dolls. Bringing her one hitter, Lady Ida Delight and she were floating and giggling through the rows

of cars. Flirting and getting their pictures taken, it was delightful, getting high in public.

Public Storage boxes filled with little boy art, lots of dresses, shoes, and accessories filled her 8x10 rented space for \$99 per month. Late fees added onto her tab for over \$250 and Miss Demeanor needed to pay that off in order to move it or keep it there. A few pictures of her four-year-old playing in snow, smiling when kissed by his mom, could be thrown into a dumpster if she didn't pay.

But taking another drag from the bong and a little swig from a cheap pilsner made her plans foggy. Construction paper turkeys made from handprints stared back at her, wishing her well. Cotton balls and sequins stuck by thick streams of Elmer's glue told her how much she was loved. They were beloved since a child had gathered rocks by a stream while camping, and now they became precious treasures in jeopardy of a landfill. Precious cash must be dedicated to preserve a connection to her slipping memories.

A favorite pastime for Aleia was trolling for another sugar daddy via dating sites. Her relationships always ended badly; eventually the bloom fell, leaving a limping stalk. Someone else was always going to pay the mortgage. For her lovers, unencumbered sex was always supplanted by resentment. Dropping out of high school before her foster

dad tried to rape her didn't portend well for her academic pursuits, or healthy relationships. Not that she had any of either. She got her GED when she was twenty-five.

Players need not apply to her Plenty of Phish site. Big ballers were fun but would never, ever shack up, or pick up a check, for that matter (outside the first one or two dates). She wasn't made of gold but acting like it helped. Girls usually posted pics with themselves with their lap dogs or cats. Guys liked to post pictures of themselves with animals they'd killed, like big smelly fish or a deer.

Camouflage clothes and boats meant men with less than fatal faults. Aleia placed pictures of herself hiking, camping, and wearing sports jerseys. Always, she was within a crowd of new friends from that year. She lied about her job and only showed photos from many years ago. Glamor shots of her Pin Up pursuits while emphasizing charitable concerns could tempt a church boy. They were easy to hook, sincere, but were ultimately boring, so trusting and in desperate need of a slow, sloppy blowjob. That type of pfishin' could be a lot of fun.

She'd been patched into the Brazen Beauties club for five seasons and saw first-hand how hard her friend worked to keep the organization afloat. When the former treasurer,

Morgan Sweet, had moved to Vegas to work a hospitality job, Aleia volunteered to replace her.

All the dues, pageant fees, and purchases for prizes and gifts had to be accounted for, plus outlays for future events, plus the money raised for charity. Getting drunk with Donna on her patio was like an ongoing chapter meeting. Just because Miss Demeanor hardly had any money didn't mean she didn't know how to manage it. And she desperately hoped she wouldn't have to embezzle the funds.