

ICE STORM

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Chapter 14 - Fourth Of July

That overly opinionated guy, John Davis, who thought too much of himself came to the Jaycees meeting again. Some of the guys went to him as if drawn to a magnet while most of the women drifted away from him.

I checked my Wyndham Crane Operator name tag was in place and wondered if the Jaycees should have name tags. I walked straight at him, and used my regular voice. "Hi, I'm Sandy. I operate one of those big high rise construction cranes." I held out my hand.

He hesitated a moment signifying that he still hadn't wrapped his mind around what I represented with my mixed image. The room became almost silent waiting to see what he did. As before he was slow raising his hand. "I'm John Davis of the Metropolitan Jaycees Council." He didn't say 'hi'.

I shook his reluctant hand. "Ah, yes, you said that before, didn't you? Well, I'm still wearing girl's clothes for concealing a medical disability. I really do operate one of those big cranes way up in the sky. But, tell me, what can this Chapter do for the Metropolitan Jaycees?"

"I've been told you grew a cross dressers support group on a lead from this Chapter. Can the Chapter take credit for that as a civic achievement?"

I stalled wondering how he knew that, and what could be the correct answer. "Only if I'm a member. I did all the work. No one has quite gotten around to making me a real member." I wasn't so sure what would be different about being a real member, or would that protect the leadership of the chapter from this blowhard.

His face went through several subtle shifts of expression. The impression he made on me became his annoyance, or worse, with the confrontation.

Ha, I thought. This is nothing compared to what Sam had to do most days among his crew chiefs with who received the next lift.

I hit myself inside my head with the realization of how much self-esteem I had made for myself. I had grounded in who I am more than most of these young adults. I wanted a date with Denny, or better having her in bed, but I hadn't made myself dependent on her for my sense of my own well being. I tried not to be too obvious in taking in a big breath with my thought. That moved my bust, and his eyes went to that. *Sexist pig* I thought. I realized I had made myself richly deserving. At least Sam and his chiefs were nice to me even though they had to be gruff and bossy most of the time including to me.

Don't stop now I told myself *keep pushing on this obnoxious man*. "So, what can this Chapter do for the Metropolitan Jaycees?"

Most of the other men's faces were unhappy with what I had done. Most of the women were alert and interested.

I asked myself. *Dare I?* And decided. *I dare*. "There are two dozen good Jaycee members in this room. They would like to do something useful. You want me to go find a church to paint? I think you can find a more interesting civic program than that. Yes?"

I had begun getting the hang of women adding a hook question at the end of their sentences. Now, if I could master all their facial expressions, but I doubted I would live so long.

I wished I had a secret camera for having Andrea and Denny watch what his face and body language went through. He squirmed, but that may have been my wishful thinking, or fond desire.

I waved a hand, and called out. "Lydia, Stephanie, Claudia, Caroline; come help me, please."

They came most of the way, but not real close.

"What could we do to help Metropolitan Jaycees? There must be some big event coming up. Could we host a charity concert?"

If sweat could talk a voice for every one of his sweat pores would be going a mile a minute.

One of the guys way on the far side of the room said loud enough for everyone to hear. "We could do the soda pop concessions for the big Fourth of July Parade."

This caught John in a corner, and I didn't need my shoulder bag with my gun.

He did take a step back. "I'll have to check. The Board may have done something already."

"Fine." I took him by the arm. "Let's get you a drink." I turned him over to the guys and retreated from them while trying to hide a smirk that was struggling to break out on my face.

Back with the women I had to ask. "Did I do what you would have wanted done?"

They smiled.

Metropolitan did assign the project to the Chapter, but too many members had family or other commitments that made them unavailable.

I let the anxieties build. Not my responsibility if they didn't even have the courtesy of making me a member. I kept wearing the best outfits to their meetings I could throw together quickly after work.

I did bring of my buddies from Pies On The Run as guests, but I didn't push. They developed more customers.

When the Jaycees were almost fit to be tied with anxieties, I quietly told the women members I might have an answer. Their heads drew back as one side of their mouths went up for a sly grin. That made all the affirmation I needed.

I clapped loudly interrupting the meeting and the guys having too much at the bar. "OK if I go recruit half a dozen people for the parade concession?"

They should have known better, but they didn't even ask.

The half dozen all came from the Wyndham Supply Office with a few more from the Cross Dressers Group. Without any authorization we made a place next to the main soda bar for Pies On The Run.

Of course, somebody had to screw something up. It was the supplier of all people who didn't arrive on time with the soda syrup and pressurized gas.

My anxieties soared into the sky, but I caught it. "Hey girls, who do we know in a hurry?"

Pies on the Run knew the restaurant supply houses. They had to get to us fast before the police closed the main drag for the parades being assembled.

I used that tried and true Wyndham phrase the Supply T-girls all knew. "Do it."

"How many?"

"Beats the hell out of me. Just a sec." I scrolled through my handheld to a copy of the contract. "Damn. It doesn't say. Tell 'em everything they have and we'll deliver the excess back tomorrow."

They said all that. "They want a deposit."

One of the T-men standing there said it for us all. "Shit." And that was out of her sweet girl mouth.

That's when I knew I had better join the world and get my own major credit card.

Pies on the Run came to my rescue. "We'll use our credit." She (a he in spiffy girl clothes) found her purse under the counter and came up with her hand held. "Tell 'em the Pies purchaser order number is" ... she paused ... and then she rattled off some string of alpha-numeric digits.

The regular supplier arrived only ten minutes before the access to the parking lot we were at had been supposed to close. I walked up to the cab of their truck. "You're late. You're too damned late. We had to call someone else."

"Who pays?"

"No one you clunk head. I don't need to read a contract to know there had to be a drop dead time because the police will close the roads. You get the hell on out of here. Sue me later if you must. Look at how many witnesses are standing right here."

If anger could light a bomb, that truck cab could have exploded taking me out with it.

I wondered where I had left my shoulder bag with my revolver. "Tell you what. If you want to hang around and that other supplier doesn't get here before the roads close, then OK, you win."

To my great fortune the other supplier arrived all of one minute before the roads were to close.

We all got hot and sweaty out there under the sun on the Fourth of July. My diaper suffered. We all passed sun tan lotion around.

One of the T-girls watched the cash box. The he inside those cute clothes could only be described as a fairly big guy. Somebody tried, but our self-appointed guard had a big muscular hand clamped down on the thief's wrist, and she wouldn't let go. It became a real cat fight.

OK, tough punk, enough already. When he hauled back a fist for a power blow I grabbed his other wrist and bent that arm way up his back. He swore something fierce. I moved that arm higher up as he bent over and screamed in pain. I moved it even higher. I hooked a foot around his ankle and pulled that leg out from under him. He fell banging his nose on the pavement spewing blood. Someone had wire cord for the banner lines. The thief's wrists were tied behind his back. Our big T-girl tied his ankles and held his feet high. He struggled, kicked, and did everything he could think of, but T-girl hung on until a police officer arrived.

The officer handcuffed the thief's wrists and untied that cord. He hauled the thief to his feet with blood all over his face. "Oh, you." He turned his attention on big T-girl. "How much did he steal?"

"Stopped him first."

"How much would he have stolen?"

One of the other T-girls made a quick count. "Five hundred at least."

"Could you write that on a slip of paper? Pipsqueak here just violated the terms of his pre-sentencing release."

She wrote on and handed him a slip of paper.

"OK; off you go." The officer untied the thief's ankles and marched him across the parking lot and out of our sight.

An older gent came up to us in outrageous shorts, a sweaty t-shirt, and a straw hat. "You-all are wearing the wrong clothes aren't you?"

"Uh. Yes, sir. We volunteered to run the soda concession for the Jaycees when too many of their members had other commitments today."

"Well done, kids. I've been struggling with all these new lifestyles. You just showed me that you live up to my values. Do you have an organization that you support; that supports you?"

"Values?"

“No lyin’, cheatin’, or stealin’.”

“Uh. Sir. We all meet as a support group on Sunday afternoons at a church that could use a lick of paint.”

He nodded and walked off. More of a shuffle maybe. He was back in a dozen minutes or so.

I stood in the back letting everyone else meet, greet, and feel socially acceptable. That put me where I could be attentive to him.

He wiped his sweaty brow. “What’s the name of that church?”

“North Cedar Falls.”

He took out an old fashioned fountain pen clipped inside the neck of his stained t-shirt, and a damp blank check from a pocket. He borrowed a corner of a stack of boxes, and wrote a check made to the church for One Thousand Dollars. He handed it to me.

“Uh, sir, isn’t this too much?”

“I think I know you. You were in the news and run a big crane. Naw, I needed something to love, and a church that actually does some good instead of hoarding money for paint needs some help. You can take that check to them, can’t you?”

“Yes, sir. I can do that.”

“Good. Have you ever heard the ethnic joke about the one part of society that no one ever knows any more? Therefore we can joke about it and no one be insulted.”

“No, sir.”

He hardly paused for breath. “A gunsmith in a small town that didn’t attend regularly, but life kept getting on, so he thought he should something. He passed the word that if the church needed any repairs he would do them. He was good with his hands, so he was thinking of something that required skill like plumping or electrical repairs.

“But no. What they needed was far more mundane. They needed the Sanctuary painted inside. They had a big coffee can in the back for dimes and quarters and dollars for the paint fund. When it grew to what they thought could be enough they sent for the gunsmith.

“He took the can of money to the hardware store and bought what the money would pay for. Cans of paint, new brush, and thinner cleaner.

“He had been painting along in his boredom when he noticed he was a quarter of the way done, but had used more than a quarter of the paint. So he poured in a little thinner, stirred very carefully, and kept on going. Now you and I couldn’t tell the difference with the slightly thinned paint, but he, the craftsman could, and did.

“Half way on the wall had still used a little more than half of the paint. He poured in a little more thinner, stirred very thoroughly, and went back to work. And again at

three-quarters of the way through. He made it. The last brush load of paint got him to the far bottom corner.

“Now, you and I couldn’t tell where he had thinned that paint, but he did. All tired and feeling low he trudged outside with the empty cans to clean the brush. Then and there out of the blue he was knocked flat on his back.

“When he cleared his head as he lay there on the ground he remained beside the same church lawn under the same trees. He had remained on earth in this vale of tears.

“Never occurred to him, mind you, to go buy another gallon of paint.

“When he picked himself up a voice boomed out from on high. ‘Repaint, and thin no more’.”

I laughed. I got the mis-pronounced pun on repent, and sin no more. “Very good sir. Are you from around here?”

“Oh no, son. My daughter and her family lives here. My wife passed, and I have moved in with her from a big city in the east.”

I didn’t know what to say to that. But he called me ‘son’, and somehow that felt like a compliment.

He continued. “You said North Cedar Falls, huh. Meet you there some Sunday morning. If you don’t attend, think about that. Wearing the wrong clothes must make everything harder. Church is community. You may need the community.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“My pleasure. You let me tell that joke. I haven’t had a chance to do that for some time. What’s your name?”

“Sandy, sir.”

“Good cross gender name. You take care, now. I have to get back in the shade.”

He didn’t look too stable on his feet as he turned.

“May I take your elbow, sir?”

“Girl in clothes as pretty as you? Of course. Let’s go.”

That old sweaty arm of his was covered with coarse hair. He smelled old. Some woman almost without enough clothing to be decent came trotting across the lot to him. “Gramps.”

“Diane, guess who I met? This here is that Sandy person in the news about crime gangs being up in those tall cranes.”

I had no idea what to do. “Hi, Diane. I’m Sandy working the soda concession for the Jaycees.”

“Well thanks for helping Gramps on a hot day.” She clearly wanted to take him somewhere else.

Some band somewhere started a loud marching song.

“You’re welcome.”

A hand came up to her mouth in some form of embarrassment for her. “Oh! You’re a cross dresser.”

“Yes, ma’am, I am.” I wet my diaper right then. “My cross dressers support group came to the rescue today. Too many of the Jaycees had family commitments and couldn’t staff the soda stands along the parade route.”

He face changed from concealed scorn to relaxed and a little fun loving. “You take care. Thanks for helping Gramps.”