



Eyelid Movies
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Eyelid Movies

Laughter, conversation, and a mildewy smell drifted from the back of the bus. Casey stared out the window, his eyes semi-focused. The power lines rose and fell, rose and fell as they passed.

“Casey, my friend, I got some bad news for you.” Rob Blanke said, clutching at the seat backs on either side of the aisle. Rob was smirking. He sat down next to Casey. “Got a text message from Champ Rottenbucher last night.” Rob stuck his finger into a hole in the seat fabric, worked it around a little. “One of the dream-channels—” Rob busted out laughing. “One of those—” he tried to continue but couldn’t.

He flicked his finger out of the hole, making the fabric pucker. “Sorry, sorry,” he said, shaking his head and forcing the ends of his mouth to straighten. “It’s really not funny.” He cleared his throat. “Your dreams were on the net last night. One of the pirated dream-channels must have got hold of your private code.”

“What?” Casey said. “No way.” He felt his bowels loosen. His dreams? It was a joke. Rob was a little gremlin who did this sort of stuff all the time. “You’re full of shit.”

Rob wiped his eyes. The grin returned. “Champ said you dreamed you were making out with Lauren Meyer.”

The dream came back with a jolt. Lauren Meyer, with her tattooed eyes and her shaved head, sitting in Casey’s lap, kissing him, licking his neck...

“It wasn’t me,” he said, his voice a whine.

Rob stood, patted Casey on the back. “Good luck. Have a nice day today.” Halfway to his seat near the back of the bus, Rob turned. “You better pray Rando doesn’t hear about it!”

Casey pulled his portable from his jacket, punched in Jay’s public code, but it was locked. Jay was probably late, still in the shower. He tried Thom. Thom’s was open—Casey watched through Thom’s eyes on the little screen. Thom was climbing down the steps and out of his bus, heading toward the big double-doors of the school.

Casey deepened the link. *Thom? It’s Casey*, he thought.

Hey Case. Wanna grab some doughnuts first period? The reply was a buzz between Casey’s ears.

You haven’t heard anything? About my dreams?

What? Thom replied.

Talk to you later. Casey disconnected.

His heart thumping hard and slow, he looked up Lauren Meyer's code, punched it in, set a shallow link to keep himself anonymous. He was so nervous he got it wrong, had to re-enter it. Lauren's was open. Lauren's was almost always open—she didn't care who watched what she did.

"...see this," Oxy Bonano was saying to her.

"What?" Lauren said, reaching out to pluck a recorder chip from Oxy's hand. Her fingernails were bitten to the nubs. She popped the chip into her portable and hit play.

Casey's dream lit up the little screen: Lauren, leaning forward with slightly-parted lips, her cat's-eyes closed. "C'mere Casey," his dream-Lauren whispered.

"Who the fuck's Casey?" Lauren asked. "Where'd you get this?"

"I copied it off 'Unauthorized Dream Streams.' I got the route written down if you wanna watch him tonight," Oxy said, snickering. "Casey Cypes. He's a freshman. Red hair, scrawny?"

"Don't know him," Lauren said. "Fucking little choker. I'm keeping this—"

Casey unplugged, and locked his own public access so no one could spy him.

How could this happen? How did "Unauthorized Dream Streams" get his private code?

Oh god. It must have been one of the porn sites! They must have hacked him while he was connected. He'd known it was a bad idea, but he'd done it anyway. Now he was paying.

The bus roared into the big semi-circular drive in front of the school, pulled behind another bus. The folding door groaned open. Casey stood on shaky legs, stepped into the bright sunlight, feeling like someone had painted him Day-Glo orange while he slept.

Lauren Myers. Shit. Of all people. He thought about the night Jay had texted him, all caps, telling him to hook into Lauren Myer's public access right away. She'd been with Rando, behind the Timesaver. She was on her knees, sucking his dick while he called her all sorts of filthy names and smacked her face till her lip was bleeding.

The awful thing about it was that she wasn't upset—she'd liked it. Casey wished he'd never seen it. Every time he thought of it he felt awful. But he couldn't stop thinking about it.

"Casey, you're a star!"

Casey turned from his locker. It was Mick Lee, holding up his portable. Casey's dream was playing on it.

“You studmuffin! Lappin’ Lauren Myers!”

“Who said that?” a voice snarled.

Lauren Myers cut through the crowd. “Who said that?” She looked from face to face, raking with those green eyes. Black tears were tattooed in the whites. The tears continued, trailing down hollow cheeks to a wide, flaring jaw. She had a big mouth that jutted forward like a shark’s.

Mick Lee looked at the scuffed linoleum floor.

Lauren glared at Casey. “Are you Casey?”

Casey’s eyes started watering. He nodded.

“You like dreaming about me?” She stepped right in front of him. “Huh?”

“I didn’t mean to,” Casey said. His tongue felt huge and dry; he swallowed, making a loud clicking sound.

It wasn’t Lauren that Casey was most afraid of — it was the crowd. It was getting humiliated in front of an audience. He was going to cry, he wouldn’t be able to help it. And at fifteen, that was one small step short of pissing in your pants.

The hall was clogged in both directions with gawkers. People were texting their friends.

Lauren grabbed Casey by the hair and shoved his head against the wall. Casey’s head bounced hard off the cinderblock; his vision blackened around the edges, leaving an oval framing Lauren’s face.

Suddenly there was a straight razor in Lauren’s hand. She pressed it against Casey’s crotch. His bowels loosened. A rumble went through the crowd.

“Please!” Casey said. “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to.” He could smell smoke and liquorice on Lauren’s breath.

She gripped a clump of Casey’s hair. There was an awful tearing sound, then Lauren was holding Casey’s red hair in front of his face. He stared at it obediently through a blur of tears.

“Ooh. Looks like you’re losing your hair.” She opened her fingers and let it drop. “You like thinking about sticking your tongue in my mouth?”

“No,” Casey warbled. “I’m sorry.”

Lauren yanked the knife away. “You better be sorry, fucking dink.”

Casey watched her black boots thud down the hall. He touched the burning spot on the crown of his head. It was smooth, but there was no blood on his finger when he pulled it away.

Thom was doing his biology homework while eating a hot dog. He looked up as Casey sat.

"How'd they get your private code?" Thom asked.

"Where'd you hear about it?" Casey said.

Thom wiped his mouth. He had a habit of wiping his mouth after every bite no matter what he was eating. "All over. You ever recognize a dream of someone you know on the net?"

Casey shook his head.

"Neither has anyone else. It's like you're a weird kind of celebrity. But not in a good way."

"It's not good at all. It's awful."

"So, how'd they get your code?"

"I don't know," Casey lied.

"Hey Casey!" Keryl Schneider had twisted around in her seat at the next table. "Would you mind going to sleep early? I'm having a hook-in party, and I don't want it to get started too late."

The other girls at Keryl's table laughed raucously.

"Good one!" Helen Munchgesang said. "How many eyes do you have hooked in?"

Keryl checked the spy-tally in the corner of her screen.

"Sixteen," she said. "How many do you have?"

"Eleven," Helen said.

"Not bad," Keryl said, "that's probably more than the whole dink table has combined." That got another big laugh. Every girl at the table had the same freaking laugh, the same fake C-cup boobs, the same button nose.

Casey tried to stay awake all night. He spent hours trying to hack "Unauthorized Dream Streams" and disconnect his link, but it was useless. They were probably high-level cybermob types.

He read until two a.m., till his eyes started to burn and he felt himself getting drowsy. He got up and paced around his room. He turned on his wall-screen, surfed other people's dreams for a while. One guy was dreaming that he was drowning in his bathtub and couldn't get up, because there was a hard surface, like room-temperature ice, between him and the air. It was interesting when it wasn't you.

He'd considered telling his mom and dad, so they could put in for a code change for him. But his dad would want to know how his code had been compromised, and he wouldn't buy 'I don't know.' His parents would kill him for linking into porn sites.

Casey changed channels. A woman was dreaming that her teeth were coming loose while she was giving a report at a business meeting. There

was a link at the bottom of the screen, for advertisers. It was a weird concept, advertisers for an illegal site, but the pirates had to be making money somehow. Banners and signs for running shoes, video games, anything teens like, were pasted into the corners of every dream.

Casey hit the link. No return address. Big surprise.

He texted them a message:

Hey! You stole my personal code and put me on your web site!! If you don't disconnect me, I will alert the police's cyber-unit immediately. How dare you do this!

The reply came within minutes:

That's right—we steal! And there's nothing you can do about it. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!

Bastards. He chided himself, for the thousandth time, for hooking into those porn sites. Never again. He had to get out of this, somehow.

He tried another message:

Don't you understand what this is like? You're ruining my life! I can't sleep, I can't eat, I can't face anyone. Please, please disconnect me. You have dozens of other people. Please do me this favor.

The reply flashed almost immediately.

No.

He stared at the single word, feeling numb. Hopeless. No. It was that simple. They had him, and there was no way to stop them.

He flopped onto his bed, stared at the white speckled ceiling. It was so quiet.

His body started to hum; he felt the familiar sensation of falling gently down into his mattress. Gravity eyelids, Casey thought as he drifted. He had gravity eyelids.

Casey was in the dustbowl—the spare field down behind the school—only it was bigger than he remembered, and the slope up to the school was higher and steeper. Three grown men in black hoods slid down the slope on their heels, trailing clouds of dust.

“Come on!” a voice behind him said. It was Jinny Collechia, who sat behind him in algebra. She grabbed his wrist. A gunshot lit the air. They ran across the field to the picnic table, tipped it on its side and took cover behind it. Casey pointed the pistol he was suddenly holding and pulled the trigger. The bullet crept sluggishly from the gun, plopping to the ground before it reached the men. He aimed the gun higher; the bullet traced a high arc, again thumped to the grass short of the men.

Chips of wood flew from the picnic table as more gunshots cracked. It was dark now, but Casey could see graffiti carved into the table, although he couldn't read it.

He and Jinny fled into the woods. There was a path. Jinny led the way, holding his hand. It was hard to run, like they were running through thick mud, but Casey could see that the path was dry, and covered in pine straw. There were shouts right behind him; Casey cringed, expecting to feel a hand on his collar any moment.

Jinny veered off the path. They tore through a thicket, ducked behind a tree, curled together to make themselves as small as possible. Nearby, twigs popped under heavy boots. One of the men growled something to the others.

Casey's head was pressed close to Jinny's; he could feel her warm breath on his nose. Jinny leaned forward and kissed him softly. He kissed her back, quietly, thrilling at the feel of her soft lips sliding across his, thinking, *Finally, I have a girlfriend, if only we get out of this.*

But as he opened his eyes, it wasn't Jinny he was kissing, it was Thom. Casey pulled away. Thom looked at him, asking *What's wrong?* with a silent shrug. Casey wanted to explain that there'd been a misunderstanding, that he thought Thom was a girl, but he didn't want to alert their pursuers.

It occurred to him then that he was dreaming. Of course—this was a dream. He was relieved that he hadn't really kissed Thom.

"This is a dream," he said to Thom.

"What do you think's on the other side of the woods?" Thom said, ignoring what Casey had said.

Then Casey remembered that he'd been hacked, that people at school were watching and recording this. He leaped to his feet, opened his eyes as wide as he could, tried to wake up. He wasn't wearing any pants, he realized.

The scenery swirled like salad in a blender.

He jolted awake.

The dim grey glow of early-morning light leaked through the cracks around his drawn shade. He craned to look at the clock on his dresser: 5:12. Jesus, he'd dreamt that he was kissing Thom. Everyone would see it. They'd think he was gay. Thom would think Casey was gay on him. Casey curled up, racked by bubbling cramps. He pulled the pillow over his head and cried.

The guys at the back of the bus made kissing sounds. "Hey, Casey Queer!" Eddie Reich shouted. The other guys laughed. They were back there watching the dream; every so often they'd all burst out laughing. Casey stared out the window. His neck felt tight, like a rusty hinge. His portable slid in the grip of his slippery palm. It was off. There was no one he wanted to talk to.

Casey kept right on walking past his locker, right past his homeroom, out the back door, down a cracked, weed-infested sidewalk behind the school. A row of badly overgrown shrubs pressed against the windows, providing cover as he hurried, hands stuffed in his jeans pockets, down the hill and into the dustbowl.

No one was down there—it was too early for the burnouts to start smoking. He sat on the picnic bench at the far end of the field—the bench in his dream—and stared at the field.

There was frost on the patches of struggling grass mottling the field. It would have been nice to sit out there, early in the morning, the sun just visible through the trees, if his life wasn't a nightmare.

The bench was covered with carved initials and incoherent messages that he could now read. "VJ Blows." "Carpet my dick." "Vangie Loves Cort." Casey ran his finger along the ravaged wood, veering to avoid a clump of white bird shit. He'd never cut a class before. He didn't know what to do.

He pulled out his portable and called up the book he was reading, the third book in the Yellow Raven series.

A few pages in, a flash of movement across the dustbowl caught his attention. He glanced up, and forgot all about Yellow Raven. Lauren was heading toward him, head down, black boots wet with dew.

Casey stood. There was nowhere to run, unless he ran into the woods like he had in the dream, only there was no path, and tangles of thorny blackberry vines stretched along the perimeter.

As Lauren approached she looked up at him. Recognition registered, and she grunted a laugh.

"You," she said. She strolled to the bench, sat on the edge, facing away from Casey. She pulled a black nasal spray bottle out of her front pocket, threw her head back and squirted both nostrils. Jesus, she was snorting Quicksand. At eight in the morning.

"What's your name again?" she asked, a little too loud. She was probably listening to music. She sniffed, wiped her nose on her sleeve.

"Casey."

Lauren nodded. From Casey's angle she looked even more than usual like a shark—scary, sexy, inhuman. Lauren didn't seem real to him; she was an idea, a wild, unpredictable, savage shadow who, until yesterday, had never spoken to him, never looked at him. They traveled in different dimensions. It was strange to be sitting here with her.

She twisted, propped one of her feet on the bench, pulled her baggy pant leg up to her knee. Her skin was white as bone. He looked away from it, afraid Lauren would think he was ogling her.

Lauren reached into her back pocket and pulled the straight razor. She flicked it open. Casey stood, took a few steps toward the woods, getting ready to run if she came at him.

"Relax," she muttered, smirking and shaking her head. "I ain't gonna hurt you."

"I know," Casey said, trying to sound casual. He sat back down.

She slid the blade across her calf. A two-inch slash welled with blood. Casey stared, stunned. She was crazy. Holding her left hand in her right to steady it, she made a half-inch slice perpendicular to the first line.

"Ow," she hissed as she cut again, going deeper than she evidently wanted. A drop of blood oozed out and rolled down her ankle. She had carved an "F" into her calf.

"I hate myself," Lauren said matter-of-factly. "I'm looking forward to another world, 'cause I hate the way I live now."

Casey had no idea what to say to that. "Really?" he managed.

She nodded. Then she made an angled slash beside the F, gasping. "I want to, but I just don't have love for anybody. I lost my soul as a human being." The second letter was an "A." After the F, Casey had figured she was carving "Fuck," but she wasn't. She wiped her eyes, which were tearing from the pain.

"Is your line off?" she asked sharply, turning to glare at him.

"Yeah," he said quickly.

She nodded, went back to cutting. There were thin white scars all along her forearms. Casey had never noticed that before.

"Rando dumped me," she said.

"Oh. Sorry," Casey said. Shit, he hoped it didn't have anything to do with the dream.

She shook her shiny head. "I don't give a fuck." The next letter was an "I." Lauren put down the razor, took another squirt of Quicksand.

"He left his line wide open to me, so I can hook in and watch him fuck other girls, feel what he's feeling while he does it. I keep looking, even though I don't wanna see."

Casey nodded. She was moving more quickly now, getting into a rhythm. Beads of blood trailed down her calf in a dozen places. She was on the fifth letter, a "U." She was carving "failure."

"So what're you doing out here?" she said. "Little chokers like you don't cut classes."

"The dreams," Casey said. He didn't want to say too much at once, like he shouldn't waste too much of Lauren's time talking about himself.

"That sucks," she said, sounding far away.

None of Casey's friends were gonna believe he talked to Lauren. If they were still his friends. Maybe Lauren and him would be friends. That would be cool, walking down the hall laughing with Lauren Meyer, everyone seeing him with her. Cool.

"Why don't you get your code changed?" Lauren asked.

"It's complicated." A small flock of starlings were hopping around, pecking in the middle of the field. Their tweets sounded like cries. "I can't take another night of this."

"Yeah, well, life's hard, fucking whiner," Lauren said. She finished the "E" and stared at the leg, her eyes glazed. "Do me a favor. Run in and get some paper towels from the bathroom."

Casey slid off the bench and trotted across the field. In the boy's room he yanked a wad of paper towels from the dispenser, stuffed them into his back pocket, and ran back. A teacher shouted something at him as he went out the back door, but he ignored her.

Lauren accepted the paper towels without a word. She wiped the razor first, then pressed a handful against the wound. Blood blossomed through them. She threw the bloodied clump on the ground, grabbed another pile from the stack.

"I bet all the beautiful people are having fun with you," she said.

"I hate their guts," Casey said. "Fucking stuck up, conceited assholes." The curses felt strange on his tongue.

Lauren poked at her portable. Probably changing the music.

"You know what I'd like to do?" Casey said. Lauren shook her head distractedly. "I'd like to somehow get their private routes, and put all *their* dreams up!"

Lauren laughed. Even her laugh was vicious. She dabbed with the paper towels, which were now just speckled with red spots. The bleeding had almost stopped, leaving red, welted tracks. They looked infected already. The "A" was too small compared to the other letters. She hadn't even done it carefully, and now she was going to have to look at it the

rest of her life. It occurred to Casey that that might not be a very long time.

"You know what I'd like?" Lauren grinned, an animal baring its teeth. The grin didn't reach anywhere near her tattooed eyes. "I'd like to be able to control my dreams, so I could make them go the way I wanted them to go."

"That'd be cool," Casey said. "I read once that sometimes people can do that. It's called lucid dreaming." He glanced at Lauren, thinking he might be annoying her by sounding too smart, but she looked interested.

"Can you learn how to do it, or are you just born that way?" she asked.

"I think you can learn it."

Lauren opened her razor again, slid the blade along the table. "If you learned how, you could dream all of the beautiful people naked, and make them have sex with donkeys. Or stab them to death. You could do anything you wanted."

It wasn't what Casey would want to dream if he really could control his dreams, but the idea made sense. "Maybe there's stuff on the net about how to do it."

Lauren did another squirt of Quicksand and hopped off the bench. "Come on." Casey didn't hesitate. He wanted some of his friends to see him walking with Lauren.

They got nailed as soon as they entered the school. Mr. Mannino came out of the teacher's lounge, a Styrofoam cup of coffee in his hand, just as the back door slammed shut.

"Hey!" He barked. "Where are you two supposed to be?"

Lauren turned around. Casey turned halfway around, stared at the wall of see-through security lockers peppered with photos and magazine pics taped from the inside.

"Casey here is escorting me to the nurse's office," Lauren said. "I had an accident." She lifted her pant leg farther than was necessary, twisted her long leg to show Mannino her handiwork.

His eyes got round. "Oh... all right." He hurried off. Jeeze, the teachers were scared of her too! The thought boggled Casey's mind.

Lauren laughed harshly, before Mannino even had time to reach his classroom. Mannino didn't turn around.

"Somebody should carve 'worthless' into that toad's hairy back," Lauren said. She strutted down the empty hall like she owned it. Casey struggled to stay beside her. She was tall. He glanced into the classrooms as they passed, looking for people he knew.

He spotted Thom, in Bio class, sucking on his pen cap. Casey paused. Thom looked up, met his eye for an instant, then looked away. His expression confirming what Casey had feared.

"Let's go," Lauren hissed. She veered into the computer lab, grabbed a chair, spun it around backward and straddled it.

The trick, evidently, was to think 'Am I dreaming?' as often as possible, day after day, until you started thinking it while you were asleep. Once you thought it in a dream — bam — you'd realize you were dreaming, and then you could pretty much run the show.

Casey was grinning as they ducked down a stairwell. He had a better idea.

"What do you mean, a wake-up call?" Lauren asked.

Lauren stopped and sat on a windowsill, pulled out a cigarette and squeezed the igniter. The tip glowed red.

"I leave my line open for you all night, a deep link. You watch my dream channel. When I start dreaming, you let me know."

Lauren nodded. "I like it." She paused, bit the end of a ragged fingernail. "But if I'm gonna sit up half the night, you have to do something for me. I'm not a charity."

"Sure."

"I want to be in the show," she said, blowing smoke toward the ceiling. "Dream me singing with the Young Mozarts... then make me fifty feet tall and have me wreck the school." She thought for a minute, staring out the window, eyes glassy. "And I want to fly. Way up high. Fast."

"If I can figure out how to do it, I will." Casey said. "If this works..." He reached out and patted Lauren's shoulder. "I—"

Lauren knocked his hand away. "Don't touch me!" She wheeled, flicked the lighted cigarette at Casey's face. The unlit end bounced off his cheek. "What do you think, we're buds now?"

"No—" Casey said.

"You think I'm your girlfriend? Is that what you want? Here." She grabbed his hand and put it on her tit. "Go ahead," she hissed. "Is this what you were dreaming about? Huh?" Casey stood frozen, his hand pressed against Lauren's small, soft tit, afraid to move it.

"Squeeze it, you loser! Go ahead!" She grabbed his hand and pressed. "Don't you know anything?"

He pulled his hand free.

"What's the matter, Romeo?" Her eyes were like high-beams.

"You don't only dream about things you want to happen!" he said.

Lauren put her hands on her hips and glared at him for a long moment. "That's for sure," she said. The bell rang. A wave of voices and footfalls washed up the stairwell.

"Look, thanks for doing this," Casey said. "Sorry I touched you."

"Yeah," Lauren said. She turned and headed down the stairs.

Three princesses of the social elite breezed up the stairs past Lauren, led by Keryl. "Hey lover-boy," Keryl said as they passed him. The other two giggled.

"Fuck you," Casey said.

From the bottom of the stairwell Lauren's green eyes flashed. She grinned her shark's grin at Casey.

The first two times Lauren signaled him, the voice jolted him awake.

The third time, it worked.

He was in health class. Mrs. Plimpton was gouging words into the white plastic wall with an ice pick. Casey was trying to figure out what she was writing, but it made no sense. Then he heard Lauren's voice say "Hey loser... this is a dream." He turned around. Lauren was sitting behind him, and he realized he was dreaming.

"You're doing it!," she said. "I see myself... I'm in your dream!"

"We did it," Casey said, trying to stay calm, afraid if he got too excited he'd wake himself up.

Mrs. Plimpton turned around. "You did what?" She was glaring at him. "Why don't you come up to the front of the class. You need to be taught a lesson, not to mess with things you know nothing about."

"I don't think so," Casey said.

The gashes in the wall, which were pink along the edges, split open wide. "I don't think so," they echoed in rasping pantomime.

Students in the room gasped. Casey ignored them. "This is my dream. I call the shots."

"Make her strip!" Lauren said.

Casey made a face. "You think so?"

"Okay, maybe not," Lauren said. "What about the Young Mozarts?"

Casey wasn't sure how you controlled things in a dream. He tried picturing the Young Mozarts. Nothing. He tried to imagine their music, and heard a distant guitar riff, but that was all. He tried closing his eyes and imagining them, but the classroom was still visible, as if he was looking at it through a thick grey film.

"The Young Mozarts are right outside," he said, pointing toward the door, trying hard to believe it. "Come on in, guys."

The door opened, and they filed in wearing their signature blue monochrome suits and outrageously large powdered wigs. They leaned up against the back wall like loitering delinquents.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to my dream," Casey said.

"Yes!" Lauren said. "Move me back there."

For a second Casey didn't understand what she meant. Then he understood: he controlled the dream-Lauren—the real Lauren only controlled the voice. He was incorporating Lauren's voice into his dream the way a phone showed up in his dream if the phone rang while he was sleeping. He took Lauren by the arm and walked her to the back of the room.

Casey had her and lead singer Jared Spool perform a duet. The health classroom morphed into the gym, and the entire school was there, cheering wildly. Casey put principal Mooney's head on the drummer's body, then added three other teachers that nobody liked to serve as background dancers. He put them in the hokey pseudo-cool orange jumpsuits that one of the sponsors of the unauthorized dream-streams site advertised, and for good measure added the long, dopey running shoes that were the hot item from another proud sponsor. Casey wished the sponsors could see this—they'd yank their business in a heartbeat...

"Whoa! Lauren?"

"Yeah?" She was doing martial-arts moves in the air above the band.

"Do me a favor—shoot this stream toward the PR sites of the sponsors I'm roasting. I'm gonna screw this site over good."

Lauren laughed maniacally. "You're gonna walk all over their polished floor! Naughty boy!"

Casey changed the back-up dancers from teachers to shriveled, stooped over senior citizens who danced in shuffling old-people steps, and decked them out in all the gear he could remember from the site's advertisements.

Then he grew himself twenty feet tall, Lauren too, and ransacked the school. The band and dancers followed behind as Casey and Lauren tore through the library, scattering racks of CD's, tipping tables, smashing computers under their enormous fists. He brought in little bulldozers to help, then added a giant fire-breathing poodle. Lauren was laughing so hard she broke into a cough.

As they rose into the sky, looking down on the smoking rubble until they were too high to see it, Lauren sighed.

"Show's over, stud. You've been disconnected. Looks like the sponsors complained, and you've been cancelled. All I'm seeing is a blank screen."

“We’re way up high, flying,” Casey sent. “The Earth is a big, blue, slightly sucked-on gumball. It’s getting smaller... now it’s gone. There’s nothing but stars and blackness, and the stars are whipping by. We’re way, way out in space...”

“Very cool,” Lauren sent. They were silent for a moment. “Later. Dream about me all you want. You got my permission.”

They swarmed around Casey the next day, slapping his back, asking how he did it. Everybody. Well, everybody but the beautiful people—they kept their distance. He would have told them to fuck off anyway. But everybody else. Even a couple of the cooler teachers asked him about it. Recordings of the dream were circulating all over school.

He ate lunch with Thom, Jay, and Jinny Collechia, who’d asked if she could sit with them out of the blue.

Lauren burst through the swinging doors, cigarette in her mouth, looking like a rock star, like she owned the place.

She strutted over and looked at the food, flicked her cigarette over the sneezeguard and into the tureen of clam chowder, turned from the screams of the lunch lady and headed for Casey’s table.

“You want to go hang out at the dust bowl sixth period?” She asked, fishing another cigarette.

“Okay,” Casey said.

“Cool.” She headed for the door. Before she reached it she burst out singing her Young Mozarts song at the top of her lungs.

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