

NEW PLEASURES

Chapter two



By

JOHN D.

Credits and License

Codes: nose sex flirt voy

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Preface

This story is the sixth instalment of the “Growing Pains” universe: Sixteen year old Andy is still transfixed by Abi’s actions but has his mind distracted by the delectable Sarah.

This story is set in June 1998, although the Prologue is set ten years later.

The “Growing Pains” universe is a set of stories that centres around the life of Andy Williams and all those who got to know him as he grows up. While everything may not be totally clear, it will be the time the Universe is all released. For a fuller explanation please see my website under “Site and Story Credits.”

I shall try and keep to a regular posting schedule and will upload to StoriesOnline.net, asstr.org and my website. Completed stories will also be uploaded to Amazon Kindle, Smashwords and FirstyFish, where their internal policies permit.

Please provide feedback to me, either by e-mail, Twitter or website review, whether you enjoyed it or not; I like to be told and it is the only payment I ask for.

Kind regards,

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Chapter II

“Ray rang for you. He said could you ring him back before four,” Mum told me as I entered the room. I was still dazed from Abi's admission only a few seconds earlier and barely registered Mum spread out on the couch scribbling over some paperwork, let alone compute what she said.

I jerked my head towards her when I noticed her presence and she clapped her hands together to get my attention.

“Ray rang for you. He said could you ring him back before four,” she repeated, her eyes bearing into me. “Honestly, you've been in a daydream all week.” I ignored the pointed criticism and thanked her for passing on the message. “And don't natter for ages, it's peak rate,” Mum warned me as I picked up the handset and dialled Ray's number. His mother answered and passed the phone to Ray.

“Hiya Andy,” he said breathlessly – he had obviously ran to the 'phone. “A few of us from German are going bowling tonight. D'ya fancy it?” I hesitated for a moment and he continued. “Four girls, three guys, we want to even up the numbers. And it will take your mind off of Paula.” I thought for a moment about Abi, who had achieved that quite successfully, but then wondered if I needed something to occupy my mind from the thing that had distracted me all day, but chose not to complicate the matter in voicing this convoluted array of deliberations and simply agreed to meet Ray and the rest of his German class at seven; he promised me that I knew most of them anyway.

“I'm going to seeing Ray later with some schoolmates, bowling,” I said to Mum as I put the receiver down.

“Don't be too late,” she warned me and I nodded in agreement. While technically I did have a curfew of 11pm, as I had finished my exams I knew I would not get into trouble if I was a little later as long as I was back in the flat by the time Mum got back from the club and didn't get into any trouble.

“I won't. We are just going bowling, I doubt if I will be later than ten or eleven to be honest,” I admitted and wanted to speak with Abi, not least so she could explain what she meant at the bottom of the stairs, but Mum sensed my desire to go upstairs and thwarted it with a simple request.

“Make yourself useful and double check my ledger,” she asked me and passed me a large book and calculator. I groaned, but she shot me a reproachful glance so I sat down and began working through them. I had done it before and it wasn't an arduous task, just checking that the incomings and outgoings matched her calculations for the month, but it was time-consuming and dull.

It took me forty five minutes to double-check over 500 transactions but eventually I agreed with her total at the end. Abi came and joined us on the sofa half way through and I lost my place when I looked up and smiled at her but only had to redo that page. I could see her playing with the hem of her skirt in my peripheral vision but I did my best to ignore her deliberate distractions and got on with the task of balancing Mum's accounts.

“You know, if you need someone to work in the office ...” I started but Mum cut me off.

“You know I don't want you in there,” she told me firmly. “It's no place for a child.”

I didn't notice the implications of her tone of voice and continued. "I'm not a child," I said indignantly.

"I don't care, Andy, no."

"Well you said yourself I need a Summer job," I suggested to her and she glared at me with an unwavering determination.

"Andy, the answer is no. It's not happening," she replied staunchly, her body language displaying a firm and resolute immovability. I huffed and placed the ledger on the coffee table between us. "Anyway, I don't need an office administrator; I have one but I have to check this for myself. It's called running a business. And taking on and paying staff I don't need is not a good way to run one. The only vacancies I have at the moment are for a few more dancers and for a cleaner. Why don't you go see the new owners of the florist if they have a vacancy as you used to work there."

"A cleaner, you said? Before the club opens?" I asked, a bit too much excitement in my voice and she sighed deeply. Her eyes narrowed at me, fizzing dangerously.

"Andy. You are not working there."

"Why?" I argued my voice raised and my hands gesturing. "Give me one good reason."

"Because you are sixteen and I say so. It's my business, so that the end of it."

It did seem so unfair that she wouldn't even consider me. Instead I had to compete with hundreds of other school and college kids in the area for temporarily employment when there was a ready made job on my doorstep, within the gift of my mother. I searched around the room for inspiration.

"What could possibly be so wrong about it. It's before anyone else gets there, right? It's not as though..."

"I've told you, it's not up for discussion," she shouted over me and I gave another deep sigh. She stared at me and collected her ledger from the coffee table.

"Abi," I continued and Abi looked up from her book.

"Please don't drag me into this," she told me firmly and her head shaking.

"Please can we talk about it because you are just dismissing me without hearing me out. Abi, please help me here, as an independent opinion."

Abi looked across and shrugged her shoulders. "I don't want to get involved, but ..."

Mum raised her hand and stopped Abi, then looked straight at me. "Don't involve Abi in this," she warned me but Abi continued.

"Perhaps it's better when you're a bit older."

I stared at her for a moment, ignoring the grin on my mother's face. "You're supposed to be on my side," I whined and Abi closed her book.

"Oh, I thought you wanted her 'independent opinion'?" Mum enquired and looked at me.

"I do, but ..."

“... but only when it supports you?” Mum finished for me. I opened my mouth to speak but Mum interrupted “So far, instead of showing that you could work for me in an employer-employee relationship you have just thrown your toys out of the pram. Is this what would happen tomorrow if I spoke to you as your manager?”

“No, that's not what ...”

But Mum interrupted. “So why start now?”

“I wasn't!”

“You were, now that's the end of it,” Mum told me and I let out a deep breath. It did seem so terribly unfair but there was little I could do about it.

Abi looked over at me and sighed. Andy, you need to think things through before you speak,” she said tentatively. “If the club needs an extra cleaner, well in my experience vacancies like that are often snapped up pretty quickly as turnover is quite high so it must have come about very quickly, and this has probably caused a bit of a problem; other members of staff having to fill in or work extra hours, right?”

“Probably.” I grunted, shrugging my shoulders as I did.

“So you need to ask, 'I know you don't like me going into the club, but why not let me do it for awhile and see how we go. It'll help you out and I could do with the work; even if it is only for a few days or a week or two. Please think about it'? There is no pressure there and you are much more likely to get the result you want.”

Mum smirked as she spoke. “Instead he got on his high horse and behaved like a ten year old.”

Abi smiled at me and raised her eyebrows expecting a response, but I slouched into the chair, knowing I had been well and truly outmanoeuvred. Arguing with one woman was bad enough, but two? Well that's not fair, is it?

“On that note, I'm going to make some tea,” Mum told us and got up smiling and patted me on the shoulder.

“I thought you might help me,” I murmured to Abi in a low voice after Mum had left.

She took a deep breath and gave me a grin. “I just have,” she whispered, her eyes twinkling, and with that Abi went into the kitchen to help my Mum prepare tea.

Why was Abi so cryptic?

* * * * *

I was ten minutes early for the bowling, but this didn't bother me. I wanted to run through the days events in my head and sat in the foyer staring into space.

I liked Abi; I liked her a lot but I just didn't understand her. One moment, she is confident, and the next flirtatious and always fun and exciting. I didn't speak too much to her over dinner and felt guilty for it afterwards. I was not upset or angry with her, but I still did not understand what was so magical about her, and that summed up Abi in my mind perfectly. She was perfect, but she was also enigmatic. I could not have predicted the last couple of days in my wildest dreams, but I wondered if I would still like her so much if everything she

said and did made perfect sense to me and I could predict her every move?

I was snapped out of my thoughts by Ray bounding in through the red double doors of the bowling alley followed by a few girls.

“How was German, mate?” I asked him as he came up to me.

“Ahh, fine. Sarah and Donna reckon the town hall is das rathaus but I reckon it is a feminine nominative noun. I hope it's feminine not neuter or else I've made a ton of grammatical errors.”

I smiled. “In French we only have the two genders”

“Bah, I know! So how was Economics?”

“All right; who's coming?”

“Well Donna, Lisa and Sarah obviously; we came on the train. Just waiting for Jodie, Terry and Jez.”

“Jez, that lanky streak of excrement?” I exclaimed and he laughed.

“He always did get on your nerves, didn't he?”

“I saw him earlier. He was, well, Jez. Interrupted a perfectly nice afternoon,” I grumbled.

A mixed-race girl stood directly behind Ray and peered round as I spoke. “Jez is all right, isn't he Ray?”

Ray looked at me tensely. “Andy and Jez had a bit of a falling out some time ago. It's best not to, umm, well best not to discuss it,” he said tactfully.

The girl stared at me awaiting an explanation and I shrugged my shoulders. She shook her head, “And they say its' women who are the bitchier sex,” she replied dismissively.

I chose not to respond and resumed my chat with Ray, “I was thinking of going up to Wendover Woods this week while the weather is good with the Nikon. You fancy it?” I asked and Ray nodded.

“Sure.”

“Two boys running around a wood together. Kinky,” the mixed race girl continued and I laughed.

“You are welcome to come if you want, it's just a breath of fresh air and some photography.”

“Oh. I don't have a camera,” Donna admitted and I fidgeted for a moment.

My silence was interrupted by a loud, distinctive voice. “How ya doin' fellas ...”

Jez was warmly greeted by some of the assembled throng but I remained seated to stay out of his eye line and looked up at the ceiling. I am not sure I would have agreed to come if it involved spending two hours with Jez which is probably why Ray omitted it during our earlier conversation. I could cope with him in small doses, but any significant length of time, and he would irritate and annoy me. He was a male version of Rhea, only a tad more

frustrating and lot less dignified, if that was possible!

“Exam. Fook me. Impossible, right? I got a 'D' at most I reckon.”

“Shall we go in?” I asked. “It is seven.”

“Andy, where’s that bird ya wiv earlier?” Jez shouted, his voice echoing in the foyer.

Ray shot me an inquisitive look. “Well, she isn't here,” I replied stating the obvious and gesturing around me with my open arms. “Shall we ...”

“I wanna know right, how this fella gets himself this piece of skirt. She's 18, fit as fuck, awesome chick. Short skirt too; and no fookin' knickers. What bird goes out without her trollies on if she's not goin' to get stuffed right. She was fookin' oozing sex. Massive jugs. Welsh ...”

“Scottish”, I replied instantly and everyone turned in my direction.

Jez grinned as I spoke, somewhat satisfied that he got a reaction from me. “What?”

“She is Scottish, not Welsh. And she told you that, but you probably weren't listening, right?”

“Too fookin' right. No bloke would listen to her; every guy in the park was watching her as she walked. No bra either and you copped a feel as you left. I saw. Everyone did. Anyhow I wanna know how you gets her. 'cos she ain't from school. And if I had a bird like that she'd not leave the fucking bedroom, you know what I'm saying? My cock'll be red raw”

Jez didn't seem to be embarrassed by his candid chauvinism and instead seven pairs of eyes looked at me. “It's probably because of that attitude that you don't have a 'bird like that.' Now shall we, err, go and bowl?”

“Sure,” replied Ray biting his lip and then smirking.

It was a Friday night and the bowling alley was fairly busy. Ray had booked but it was a bit last minute and we had lanes two and fifteen which meant I was, thankfully, at the other end of the bowling alley to Jez, who was revelling in his role as the storyteller.

Quite why my non-existent relationship with Abi was so interesting to everyone I did not know and I only really knew Ray and Lisa from the seven other people in the group – although a couple of the others were familiar – but everyone lapped up Jez's stories despite their clear exaggeration.

His one-sided two minute conversation with Abi earlier in the day was morphing into something more considerably significant in the retelling. It was obvious that Jez was stretching the truth to breaking point, akin to a journalist on a cheap tabloid, but he had always liked and revelled in being the very centre of attention and his tale of this model with loose morals was interesting enough to captivate attention – especially when the male subject was someone who had not expressed much interest in the female members of our year group.

“If you tell people you are going out with a super-fit woman, they probably won't believe you and think you are a sad fantasist. If someone else tells everyone you are going out with a model then suddenly it is awesome and you are a stud,” Ray told me reading my mind as I tied my bowling shoes opposite the mouthy Jez.

"I'm not going out with her," I told him and a smile flickered across his face.

"Well at least you're not thinking of Paula." I felt a momentarily pang of guilt in how easy it had been to put her out of my mind but shook this from my thoughts as I laughed and looked up at the monitor above us. Why should I feel guilty in moving on with my life? It was Paula who had made it perfectly clear that a long-distance relationship wouldn't work and she was the one that had decided that we must part on good terms now rather than bad terms in a few months time.

"Well I wasn't until someone mentioned her."

"Oh yeah, sorry. You heard from her?"

"No, not for a couple of weeks. We spoke on the phone a few days ago and she wished me well for the rest of the exams but I've not had a response to my letters."

"Letters? How many?"

I looked sheepish for a moment, "three."

Ray shook his head, "What the hell have you had to tell her in just three weeks to put into three letters?"

I shrugged my shoulder and looked out over the bowling alley. "I don't know. All sorts really."

"You so need to find yourself a girlfriend. That's not healthy to keep brooding over her," he said as he got up and patted me on the shoulder.

We had just been set up on the lane computer by Donna who had tapped away at the console next to the chairs and I was the last to go – Donna, Ray, Sarah and then Andy. "So who is she then?" Ray asked as we waited for Donna to catch up and tie her laces.

I sighed. "I'm not going out with her, she is not my girlfriend."

"OK, I get that. Who is she? Is she eighteen? Has she got a boyfriend?"

I thought for a moment. In truth, I didn't know how old she was. "I don't think so. I think she is a little older. She certainly has the confidence and elegance of someone older than eighteen."

"Oooo! Someone's smitten," Donna teased and I glanced over at her still tying her laces.

"Can I just say, Master Ashton that I amazed that you managed to get four girls to come tonight. I mean, bowling shoes hardly ever go with whatever outfit they've chosen and obviously this exposes the narcissistic streak within them," I baited Donna and her eyes widened, staring back at me.

"What's narcissistic mean?" Donna asked Ray

"Vain," he responded and I didn't elaborate.

Donna puffed out her chest and she grinned. "So is she fit as fuck?"

I went red again, and sighed. "Well ... she's"

“Awesome?” Donna enquired, smiling as she spoke.

“Well, yeah, OK. She's awesome,” I told her, my cheeks still burning red.

Ray raised an eyebrow at me. “Short skirt?”

I thought back. Given it was a summer dress, it technically wasn't a skirt so I shook my head but Ray could see the look on my face and he raised his eyebrows.

“No knickers? No bra?” Donna enquired, her face lit up expectantly.

I sat back in my seat and shook my head. “That is very, very private. I can't answer that.”

She smirked knowingly. “That's a yes then. What did you do to find out?”

I could feel myself blushing even more than before but stuttered a reply. “Well if I say she was fully attired you won't believe me and if I say she wasn't you'll want to know much, much more so can we abandon this now? I really don't want to talk about Abi.”

Ray was persistent. “Abi? Don't recognise that name. Oh Mum said you came into her shop for stale bread to feed the ducks and you were with a girl she didn't recognise.”

“You went to feed the ducks with her? That's quite romantic, really,” a small voice from the end of the seat uttered. “No one has ever taken me to feed the ducks.”

“Me neither,” Donna agreed and Ray shrugged at me. “Did you cop a feel though?”

I buried my head in my hands; I hadn't felt Abi at all, at least not in public but didn't want to get into a conversation about Abi at all. “Can we please bowl. There is nothing to talk about with Abi and me.”

“Ahhh ... rejected you?” Ray teased.

I puffed my chest and asked Ray “What makes you think I've asked?”

Donna answered for him barely suppressing a giggle, “because she is fit as fuck, wears short skirts, no knickers, no bras and has massive jugs”

There was a gaggle of laughter and even I couldn't contain my smile. “OK. Fucking bowl” and Donna got up to bowl a six followed by a single.

Ray fared little better with a five and two but Sarah got her ball in the gutter twice. I felt a little guilty when I hit a strike first time out.

“Knocks 'em down, just like with all the ladies,” Donna ribbed.

“Are you going to take the piss all night?” I asked playfully, my arms outstretched as I walked back to the seats, and Ray laughed.

“I was thinking of taking a break for a couple of minutes around 9:30 but pretty much, yeah,” she replied, grinning.

“Can't you control her?” I asked Ray and he sniggered.

“Come on love,” Ray said seriously. “If we continue he'll only storm off home to her.” I shot him a pained look but he continued. “Actually mate, why didn't you bring her along?”

"What, and subject her to you lot?" I grinned. "She is way too refined to meet you riff-raff."

Donna and Ray looked at each other. "Come on mate, we aren't that bad. Sarah's very sweet, Donna can be polite when she wants to, and I was nice to Paula."

"You were not. You and Rosie cheated with a marked deck when we played Strip Poker," I replied a bit too quickly and Ray went bright red.

"Rosie always cheated at everything when I played her with Zoe," Sarah added and I remembered that there was a fourth person with us. She was being quiet at the end of the seats and hardly saying anything as Donna and Ray teased me. If I was her, I would have felt a tad isolated.

"Well that was Rosie's idea," Ray responded quickly and Donna looked at him, her arms folded. "Anyway, you weren't complaining at the time."

I had an instant memory of a naked Paula in my bedroom surrounded by a nearly-naked me albeit with an almost fully-clothed Ray and Rosie. It was the first time I had ever seen her naked and it was a powerful, erotic memory that at the time had induced plenty of frantic teenage masturbation.

"Dreaming about Abi?" Donna taunted, trying to guess my thoughts. "So why didn't you bring her?"

"Can't, she's working" I replied abruptly without thinking.

"On a Friday night, where does she work? In a bar? Supermarket? Where?" Donna asked.

I saw Ray's eyes flash and Paula disappeared from my mind in an instant. Not many of my friends knew about my mothers' business and certainly didn't publicise it, but as my best friend he obviously knew, especially given the fact that he had been party to the naked girls in our lounge a few years previous. "You don't mean ..." he started and I interrupted him with a steely glare.

"Ray." I said firmly, my eyes unwavering and firmly warning him to be careful what he said.

"What?" asked Donna innocently, looking at both Ray and me in turn.

"You are joking, aren't you?" He asked. "You are joking? Please tell me you are joking."

"I didn't say anything!" I stammered in a response. "And neither will you."

Ray thought for a split-second and tilted his head, eyebrows raised. "Well that explains, quite a lot!"

"Explains what?" asked Donna impatiently. "Will one of you tell me?"

"Nothing," I told her and she looked at Ray imploringly. "It's your turn"

"Ray, tell me!" Donna demanded.

I stared at Ray and he shook his head. "Nothing. It's your turn," he said sullenly.

Donna stared back at me and got up. I shot Ray a look asking him to keep quiet but it didn't register.

“Does your Mum know?”

“Will you shut up?” I whispered firmly at him.

“OK, but that’s totally mental and a bit cool. I hope you know what you are doing.”

“Right, I am not going out with Abi. Understand that. I am not doing anything.”

“At least she should take your mind of Paula,” he told me and I sighed in resignation.

Donna was trying to listen in on our hushed conversation, and therefore scored a measly three. Ray did barely any better before Sarah managed just one. I tried not to gloat after my turn but a “spare” wasn’t bad at all.

“You are very good at bowling.” Sarah told me as I sat down at the opposite end of the bench to Ray and Donna. They had cuddled into each other whispering intently and it was not difficult to notice a closeness between them. Paula and I had always been careful to ensure our public displays of affection and closeness did not isolate or embarrass anyone we were with, but Donna and Ray did not seem to appreciate that they were ignoring Sarah and myself.

“I used to come most weeks. Sister was on the bowling team until she got thrown off and she used to come to practice so Paula and I tagged along, but luck helps,” I told her and she sighed.

“I very rarely come bowling. It’s quite expensive for Donna and Zoe isn’t allowed out very often. And me and Lisa prefer football, it’s cheaper.”

“I would have come if you asked me,” I told her and she gave a wry smile.

“But I hardly knew you, did I?”

“You were in my Maths class?” I corrected her. “In Year 8 and 9? Used to sit behind Zoe and me.”

She smiled. “Well yes. Apart from that. I could hardly ask you to go bowling with me?”

I hummed, choosing not to answer her question. “And I know Zoe fairly well, she was at Grove House with me. We were good friends. I know she isn’t fond of bowling but you know, I’d have happily have gone with you.”

Sarah gave me a slightly pained look and we returned our attention to the bowling.

Donna and Ray improved their throws to register a nine and eight respectively so when Sarah got up I followed her.

“Here, I’ll show you” I said and picked up a different colour ball. “You appear to be struggling with the 12lb, try the 10lb.”

She smiled and nodded, her long straggly light brown hair moving gently as she did so.

“Put the ball down for a minute. When you bowl, your left foot should be next to the centre dot here,” I told her pointing towards a little mark on the wooden floor, “and your right foot just behind your left foot, like this.”

I demonstrated without a ball and she watched. She tried it and I told her to “bend her

knees but keep her body straight and then release the ball.”

She practised it again but her arm was a jerky movement not a smooth sweeping bowl.

“Here, shut your eyes for a moment,” I told her and she froze. “Trust me.” I went behind her and told her to bowl and when she did guided her hands in a smooth motion with my right hand and used my left hand to steady her, placing it on her stomach.

“And again,” I told her and gently moved her arms with her motion.

“Try it,” I told her and stood back and watched as her ball rolled perfectly and hit a strike. She turned round, beaming.

“He doesn't miss an opportunity, does he?” Donna asked Ray. “Feeling up poor Sarah too.”

Ray smirked. “Well, he has a reputation to uphold. We best not tell Abi.”

I picked up my ball and held it up. “Best not to try and wind me up when I have a 16lb ball in my hand.”

I didn't hit a strike but a spare wasn't too bad and I sat down, comfortably leading.

“Thanks,” Sarah said and put her hand on my knee.

“You're welcome.”

Donna seemed to enjoy teasing me all evening although I didn't really mind. I seemed to have acquired a reputation, albeit temporary and unfounded, for being good with the fairer sex. I wished it were true, but knew it wasn't and I suppose Donna did too or else her baiting wouldn't have been funny.

Sarah and I got on very well. I doubt if even a week ago I would have had the confidence to engage in such conversation with someone I barely knew but it was as if my alter ego who had been dormant for the previous sixteen years had decided to take centre stage for the evening. I suppose, when Donna and Ray kept telling me I was a charmer, I started to feel supremely confident, not to mention what the divine Abi had done to my confidence earlier in the day. I behaved as Donna and Ray expected with Sarah and instead of Sarah feeling uncomfortable with my approachable and chatty demeanour, she seemed to warm towards me and was funny and talkative all evening.

Meanwhile, Ray and Donna were clearly an item – or at least going to be – and in between the joking and sniping they practically ignored Sarah and I for large parts of the evening. If I had not have been there Sarah would probably have been a gooseberry, but this probably explained why Ray was so keen for me to come. In all the years I had known Ray, he had never been inconsiderate, even when he was with just Rosie and myself, and I did uncharitably wonder what delights Donna was promising him for later in the evening!

We were all done by 9pm. I had bowled a fair few strikes and posted three respectable scores – 155, 163 and 141. This was easily enough to beat Ray, Donna and Sarah although Sarah posted 135 in the final game which was a very good score, especially for someone with her experience and was leading up until the final frame.

As a group, we ambled over to the bar in the corner of alley to get lemonades. They would not serve us alcohol as we were too young and were not stupid enough to ask, although I

really fancied an ice-cold IPA on the warm night.

My love of beer came from the weeks away at my father's house. He was an active member of CAMRA and he began to introduce me to proper beer and I found I enjoyed it, especially on a warm day but Mum would only buy it for me occasionally and I was too young to get served away from the flat (and not stupid enough to try).

The cool lemonade quenched my thirst nicely and I sat down at the table.

"We saw you touching Sarah up," Jez started from the other side of the large table and Sarah blushed.

I laughed, "I was not touching her up"

"It didn't look like that to us," a short boy next to Jez replied.

"Well, I didn't, I was showing Sarah how to bowl"

"It didn't look like that to us either and Sarah definitely had a smile on her face," Donna added and Sarah gave her friend a push on the shoulder.

"Come on mate, we all saw the hands a-wandering," Ray told me, and Sarah and I both blushed.

"He did that earlier with that Scottish girl."

"Her name is Abi," Donna told him and he nodded. "And we don't know if she has a boyfriend but they are not going out. Or so he claims."

"Can I have her phone number then?"

I laughed and looked at him. "She'd eat you alive."

"Well that's a chance I am happy to take," Jez joked.

Donna giggled and Jez quickly moved the conversation onto his winning score. This suited me fine and I said nothing to interrupt his ego in full flow. We chatted as a group for 20 minutes or so, and I noticed Donna and Ray leaning into each other again. They were holding hands and not making any attempt at disguising or hiding their attraction to each other.

Sarah slipped out from her seat as she finished her drink. "You OK?" I asked her and she nodded.

"I'm just going to ring Mum," she told me. "She likes to come and pick me up."

"Oh, where do you live?" I asked, a little disappointed she was leaving so early. I did not fancy being alone with Ray and Donna, or going back to the flat to be on my own. "You came on the train, right?"

"Wendover."

"Why not just take the train back?" I asked. "Ray lives in Mandeville and he travels back there."

Sarah fidgeted slightly and spoke in a quiet voice, "She doesn't like me travelling back

alone at night. I mean, I did get a return but it's getting' a bit dark now and she won't like it."

"Look, I'll still walk you back. It's no trouble, I don't fancy going back to an empty flat, to be honest."

Sarah hesitated behind her seat. "You don't need to. I'll be fine."

Donna, who was listening in, leant over her chair, "She says yes she'd love you to. She hates disturbing her parents in the evening, don't you?"

"Donna, do you mind," Sarah said to her friend in a stern voice. "Andy lives in Aylesbury."

"Do you normally speak for her?" I asked Donna and she nodded with a wide grin.

"It's much, much easier this way, you'll see," Donna told me and winked. She looked at Sarah who relented and held out her hand.

"Come on then, if you want to."

"Be careful though, Sarah," Ray warned, his eyes sparkling mischievously. "He's sex mad!"

"I am not sex mad!" I replied, a little too loudly so the rest of the bar looked round at us.

"You are. Even Paula said you were constantly thinking about it."

"You going back to ya bird?" Jez interrupted but before I could answer Donna replied.

"She's working but he won't tell us where."

"Bet you it's a pub or a club somewhere..." Jez replied.

I looked up at the ceiling. "Two hours. For fucks sake; why are you interested in Abi?"

Jez grinned sheepishly, "'cos she's the sexiest thing outside my Dad's secret magazine and video collection."

The table roared with laughter and I couldn't help but join in.

"Anyway," Sarah added from behind me, her hands on my shoulders as she leant over, "you are very cute when you are embarrassed. It's entertaining."

"Good to see that I have some use then!" I grumbled and drained the last of my lemonade. I stood up and walked around my chair.

"Before we go, can you just tell them if you're wearing knickers or not, 'cos these rumours, you know" I asked Sarah jokingly, not expecting a response but she giggled.

"I am wearing knickers," she said. "And a bra."

"That is true," Donna added. "She got ready at my house and I saw them. Little lacy red G-String."

"Donna!" Sarah squealed. "Will you behave!"

Donna nodded and turned back towards the table. "Little hearts on them. Just the sort of knickers you wear for someone to see. Or remove."

Sarah squeaked, and pushed me towards the door. "Come on, lets go!"

"I think you might get lucky Andy," Donna called out and I smiled at Sarah who hurriedly making a beeline for the exit with me.

"You know you are very cute when you are embarrassed," I joked and smiled at her. "You OK?" I asked as we got outside the bowling alley into the cool fresh air of the Buckinghamshire twilight.

"I'm fine. I will have a word with Donna about explaining my underwear to my German class 'though but she is like that. She doesn't mean any harm by it. What about you?"

"Me, oh I'm fine," I told dismissively. "Just a bit of fun."

"Donna 's a bit relentless though."

"Maybe. I don't mind too much. I get worse from my sister. Who is going to object to being characterised as smooth and confident with the opposite sex? It's not true, but it does my ego no harm so I don't mind."

Sarah shrugged. "Well if you weren't there I'd have been on my own as Donna and Ray were enjoying each others' company a bit too much."

We crossed the road and turned off towards the station.

"I'm sure you wouldn't have been the odd one out," I said with a little more conviction that I believed.

"Hmmm, I'm not sure. Well I'm glad you are confident. Not many of our class would have offered to take the train to the next town so I get home safely," Sarah told me.

"No maybe not. But there is a selfish reason there also. I really don't want to go back to an empty flat. I'll just torment myself with my thoughts," I admitted and she nodded as we walked into the station entrance.

"So who exactly is Abi? If you don't mind me asking."

I took a deep breath and sighed. "I'd say she is a friend but she is more than that, maybe. Or not even that. I don't really know."

"That doesn't make any sense," she replied eventually and we sat down on the empty platform.

"I know. Tell me about it."

"So what was that all about when Ray said it was mental." I tensed up and then stalled. "You don't have to tell me," the softly spoken girl said and I nodded. I needed to speak to someone, and someone I barely knew – a real outsider was just perfect. It felt right that I could tell her and there was nothing wrong about what I was going to tell her, just that some people didn't like the idea of lap-dancing venues.

"Have you been down Castle Street at all?" I asked and she looked surprised.

"A few times."

"Describe it. What's down there?"

"A few galleries, bakers, florist, pub, newsagents." Sarah shrugged.

"Anything else?"

Sarah thought for a moment. "I can't remember."

"There is a lap-dancing club there, on the right-hand side as you come from the station". I paused to let Sarah digest this and then continued. "My family owns it. Well Mum does. Dad is in the Lake District"

"Right," she said tentatively.

"Well Mum has always been super careful about my sisters or I knowing or seeing anything that goes on in the club. It's a bit difficult as we live in a flat above it, but she would never let us see anything that went on. It was a bit frustrating, to be honest, especially when you hit puberty and have all the hormones buzzing 'round"

Sarah giggled knowingly and I continued.

"Well, yesterday I had my last exam, came home at lunchtime and there is a girl in the flat with Mum talking and she is drop-dead gorgeous. Late teens, or early twenties. Scottish accent which I love and I am tongue-tied. I couldn't speak to her. Anyhow, she is staying in the guest bedroom for a few days until her flat is sorted and I'm still not able to talk to her. There is an aura about her. Mum goes to work yesterday evening and nothing much happens until Abi gets a bottle of wine open and we share it over a game of chess."

Sarah grinned. "Alcohol. Loosens inhibitions"

"Quite. Anyway, we are playing. Well she is winning and I mention something I probably shouldn't have done. I tell her that she is perfect which was the alcohol short-circuiting my thoughts to my voice box"

Sarah laughed at this point. "See you are a charmer" and I bit my lip.

"Well I'm not really but she was touched by it but I did kind of mean it."

"How long had you known her at this point?"

"A few hours. Yes, I know. It sounds mad. It's sound mad to me trying to explain it but there was a great spark between us. She flirted a little with me, even when the subject of Strip Poker came up"

"You played Strip Poker?" Sarah asked incredulously and I shook my head.

"No we didn't. We then played on the PlayStation and got pissed. Mum came home and didn't shout or anything. She didn't seem to mind that this girl and I had drunk three bottles of wine."

"My Mum would have gone crazy."

"Yes, mine would have done, well should have done – on past performance anyway – but didn't. So that was a bit strange. Get up this morning and spend the day in town. She is dressed to die for, looks absolutely stunning but I don't really notice."

Sarah raised an eyebrow at me and I shook my head.

"I just didn't. It's like being in a bit of a trance. She captures my attention perfectly from her personality. I barely noticed the short dress once we stepped outside the flat. It's sounds implausible but it's true. We do a bit of shopping, get some bread, feed the ducks. She cuddles up to me afterwards on the park bench and I just felt so..."

"Satisfied? Content?"

"Yeah. Just it's perfect. We have an ice-cream in the café, Jez comes in. Tells Abi that I am a bastard and am only trying to get into her knickers. She replies, 'what knickers?' Hence, the, questions earlier."

"Ahhh, was she wearing any?"

"I'll get to that, because we left after that and ambled home. Got through the front door and she pushes me against the wall and then guides my hands to her arse and pushes her dress up. I can see nothing as she is between me and my hands, pressing up against my body, but I can feel no fabric just bare skin."

"Wow," Sarah said and the train came into the station. As Aylesbury was the terminus it stayed for a few minutes before travelling back down the line towards London so we got on but did not expect it to move immediately. I sat opposite Sarah by the window facing her and let her continue. "You're not gay then?"

I rolled my eyes and opened my hands. "No I am not," I replied indignantly, "although every red-blooded guy was staring at her."

"So what happened next?" asked Sarah impatiently as I sat down.

"Nothing really. I asked her why, and she said if I had been paying attention to her body all day I would have noticed."

"Fair point," Sarah conceded on my behalf.

"Totally. But that's what I don't get. I didn't notice. I wasn't looking. She did give me every opportunity but I was paying attention to her, not her knickers – or lack of them. She asked me what I thought it meant by me not looking and I said I didn't know."

"Did she explain?"

"No. She just said 'good'. So I am more than a little confused."

"Maybe she was just trying to see what your ulterior motive for wanting to take her out was," Sarah suggested.

"I don't have an ulterior motive," I told her and Sarah nodded.

"I know but maybe she was just checking."

"Maybe. Anyway, later, I'm arguing with my Mum. Basically, I want to work in the club ..."

Sarah shot me a look, "... I bet you do."

"As a cleaner. So I'll be done long before any of the girls turn up. Unfortunately, no lap-dancing girls or sexy waitresses or whatever. Just cleaning but Mum says no, so we are having an argument. Abi sides with Mum which I don't get and then says she has helped

me.”

“Hmmmmm...” Sarah murmured.

“Quite. So I am here. Abi has confused me. I have known her for less than 36 hours, spent more time thinking about her than I have been with her. She is everything I think I want in a partner, have a really good spark with but I don't know if that's the start of a good friendship, a partnership or if it is just a flash in the pan. I have not felt this way about anyone before. Not even Paula and we dated for two years.” Sarah's eyebrows leapt when I mentioned Paula. “She lived next door. She was my best friend. We went on dates. We kissed. We played strip poker. Alone, and with Ray. She slept in my bed a few times. Mutual mas... a few things. She left earlier this month to go to Dorset.”

“But you never felt anything special towards her?”

“I thought I did, but it was different, In a weird way I loved Paula as she knew me better than anyone but I'm not sure I ever truly fancied her, if that makes sense. With Abi, there is a real spark there. I felt it on the park bench. Butterflies in my stomach as she cuddled up against my chest. But I don't know what to do? It sounds irrational. It is irrational, I know this.”

Sarah smirked. “Do you think it is infatuation or love?”

“I don't think it's, well I don't know. It can't be love, I barely know her.”

“You have no romance,” she teased. “Ever heard of love at first sight?”

I shook my head. “I just don't know. You can see why I don't want to go back to the flat and brood?”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don't want to do anything until Abi is ready to move into her flat. If I do, and she doesn't feel anything then she would be uncomfortable around me and the flat and it'll be unfair.”

“That's quite cool”

“It gets me out of making the decision for a few days anyhow. Coward, I know.”

“No. I know the feeling. Feel guilty about it?”

“A bit,” I admitted and the train jerked into life.

“So she is a stripper then?”

I nodded. “And very flirtatious too”

“I bet she is. So this explains why she is drop dead gorgeous and why she is very sexy and everything. You have the hots for a lap-dancer. Doesn't every guy dream of going to bed with a lap-dancer?” she added.

“Maybe. I know being flirty and saucy goes with the territory but we didn't even walk down the street without holding each others hands. That's a sign surely?” I added and Sarah raised her eyebrows and looked down at her lap. Unbeknown to me I had placed my hand on hers as I had been talking.

I withdrew it immediately. "Shit, sorry!"

"See, you are sex mad!" she said with a smile on her face.

"Obviously, but we used to have dancers in the flat to babysit. They were never flirty or sexy, just normal people. Actually I think a lot of them were Uni students as they used to help with my school work."

"You used to be babysat by strippers?" Sarah asked incredulously.

"Well, yes" I replied sheepishly. "Is that really strange?"

Sarah thought for a moment and nodded. "Yeah. Did they wear the lingerie sets?"

I laughed. "No. Not a single one of them. Mores the pity. I would have liked some real help with some of my Biology homework but it never materialised. Not in reality anyway"

Sarah smiled knowingly. "Ah, the filthy dreams"

I went red immediately and grinned. "So young ladies don't have them then"

"Not for female strippers, not normally, no," Sarah replied quickly.

"Normally?"

Sarah smiled and then changed the subject. "I think Donna is smitten though"

"Oh you noticed?" I said a little condescendingly and Sarah grinned. "So how well do you know Donna?"

"She's one of my best friends. We go back since I started school. How long have you known Ray?"

"Years. We were in the Scouts together. From what I saw," I reasoned, "I think she will wear the trousers in that relationship. Rosie was a lot more placid and calm."

"Yeah, Rosie is. She is Zoe's friend really but I know her, and is just so shy and quiet. Donna is the exact opposite and she doesn't normally get on with shrinking violets."

"I wouldn't call Ray a shrinking violent but he thinks before he acts or speaks. He's a very methodical person."

"And you?"

"I get told I'm impulsive. I do act on gut instinct too much, I know that but I try not to"

"But you aren't doing so with Abi?" Sarah replied.

"Can't afford to." Sarah grinned at me and the train approached Stoke Mandeville to a standstill. "I don't want to ruin anything. So enough about me, what about you ..."

"Weren't we talking about you and your love life?"

"I don't have a love life any more. That's what is so depressing. Anyway, it might take my mind off of it."

Sarah smiled at me, "there is nothing to tell"

"Well you live in Wendover so your father is either in the army or owns an airline"

Sarah laughed, "It's RAF Halton not the Army"

"Sorry, in the RAF or owns an airline"

"No, we sold the airline last year. We only own the merchant bank and the football club" she replied flippantly. "I was saying to daddy on the yacht last week..."

"OK I get it, still about you?"

"Are you drop t'is?"

"No"

"OK I have an elder brother, Paul who is off to Uni this year. My mum runs the Landmark Hotel towards Buckingham and dad works as a senior manager in London. Grandfather in the army although now lives in Missenden"

"Any boyfriends?"

"Sort of"

"Doing better than me then"

"You want a boyfriend?" Sarah enquired flippantly. "You said you weren't gay!" I groaned. "He is called Kevin and I met him in London. He lives in London so I have to travel to see him so it's difficult and is causing a bit of tension."

"Now Bournemouth would be difficult. I could cope with London."

"Hmmm..." Sarah grinned at me.

The train glided into Wendover station and we departed, alighting from the carriage and walking over the bridge.

"Did you get a ticket?" Sarah asked and I shook my head. "The ticket office was closed so I can pay at the other end, which is also closed this time of night. I'll probably get a free ride back as well."

"Fare dodger!"

"Maybe."

We set off down the road towards Sarah's house and she surprisingly took my hand. I glanced across at her and she shrugged. "It's dark and scary," she reasoned and we walked in relative silence.

St James Way was a short road, no more than half a mile from the village centre but was lined with a dozen or so large five-bedroom detached houses. Sarah walked up the road and I was about to wish her good night but she tried to beckon me in. "Come in. Have a coffee at least. Ten minutes, pur-lease"

I looked at my watch and then at her. Her house was behind a couple of large trees and a

hedge with a six foot high wooden fence. I could barely see it, but I knew it would be impressive.

“Look, I haven't this much fun for a long time and you don't want to go back to your flat and brood, do you?” I smirked at her and hummed. What was she offering exactly? “Half an hour. Promise! It's just so early for the night to end,” Sarah pleaded.

OK. I don't want to miss the last train out of Wendover. It's the best part of seven miles. I like walking but, well ya know.”

“Last train is at half eleven”, she implored. “It's barely nine thirty”

“OK. What did you have in mind”

“I have loads of games. Or we could watch telly, I have one in my room. Or just chill, listen to some music. You've walked me back home, at least make it worth your while.”

Sarah's house was impressive. The little manicured lawn at the front had a bench on it and the house covered in ivy. I knew there was hundreds of these houses in Wendover and the local area, but this was still far grander than our flat.

Sarah opened the front door and we walked into the hallway. She called out to her mother to say she was home and then dragged me half way up the stairs when her mother appeared. She was not much shorter than Sarah possessing a similar build, body and hair to her daughter.

“Sarah!” a warm but firm voice called out and we heard the lounge door close.

“Yes,” she guiltily answered from the stairs.

“Where are you going?”

“I'm just going upstairs.”

“You know the rules,” her mother said sternly.

“I'm sixteen,” her daughter whined.

“Yes I know that, I paid for the party, remember?” her mother reminded her, coldly.

“It's not fair! Paul brings his girlfriend home and you don't mind. I can even hear them having sex in the morning. I just want to chill out and relax with my friends.”

“He is eighteen, you are not.”

“But...”

Her mother extended a finger, and wagged it at her. “I don't care. I know what sixteen year olds are like. I know what Paul was like at sixteen. I know what I was like.”

“I'm surprised you can remember that far back,” Sarah murmured and her mother took a deep breath.

“Look, Sarah, why don't you bring down what you wanted to do and we can go sit in the dining room, or conservatory or wherever,” I suggested.

Sarah wailed at her mother. "I want some privacy. Why do you have to embarrass me?"

"There is nobody here," her mother told her and waved me down. "Paul is in Newquay and your dad is working."

Sarah grumbled and then asked me to wait in the lounge. The lounge was immaculate, bright blue carpet and bright white walls. A brick built fireplace was not set in the wall but a couple of feet into the room and with the chimney made a great focal point. I stepped around the fireplace and sat down on the sofa on the far wall. Pictures of Sarah, always smiling, and an older boy were dotted around the room.

"Thank you," her mother said as she closed the lounge door. "I don't think we've met. Angela."

She held out her hand and I shook it. "Andy."

"Sarah can be so stubborn when she wants to be but then you probably already seen that."

I grimaced slightly. "I've only really met her tonight" Her mother's demeanour changed slightly so I nervously continued. "It was the German class social but I know a few people from other classes so tagged along."

Angela's smile returned in part. I could see her mind was whirring as to who I was and what my intentions were, and I felt as though I was being assessed or measured. I wondered briefly how I would compare against Kevin or against Paul's partner and whether I should care. Deep down I knew I would do, as I didn't want anyone to have a bad opinion of me, but in truth I didn't really know what my intentions in being here. I suppose I was here as Sarah had pleaded for me to spend a bit more of the evening with her, and that I didn't want to be alone with my thoughts in the flat, although her petulance on the stairs made me wonder if she would really be much fun.

"You live in Wendover then?" she asked, snapping me out of my musings.

"Aylesbury." I pre-empted her questioning and so pressed on. "Sarah said you didn't like her travelling home alone so I've walked with her. I'll take the last train back to Aylesbury."

"Won't your parents mind you getting back so late?" she asked, her eyes narrowing at me and I shook my head.

"No. Last train will get me in before midnight and I only live 'round the corner from the station," I replied and then stopped aghast, hoping that she was not about to ask whereabouts I lived. Admitting that your family lived on top of, and ran, a strip club would give some people a bad impression and I had always been aware of the need for discretion.

Angela's and my thoughts were interrupted by Sarah. She held a couple of board games in her arms but my attention was drawn to her clothes. Or lack of. Instead of her shorts and T-Shirt there was a purple nightdress. Her arms were covered, and her neckline covered everything but it was short. Very short, just a few inches below her waist.

"Sarah!" warned her mother when she turned.

"What?" she asked

“That is not appropriate....”

“...Mum! Can you stop embarrassing me please. My T-Shirt and shorts were sweaty and uncomfortable. It's not unreasonable to change into something more comfortable,” Sarah interrupted. Her mother didn't seem too happy and went to speak but Sarah glared at her.

“You can go in the conservatory,” her mother told her and Sarah walked passed me, through the door to my right and I followed.

Neither Sarah nor I closed the conservatory door, we didn't dare, and Sarah put two boxes on a wicker chair. There were over eight chairs in her conservatory that looked over the expansive garden and Sarah offered me Chess or Scrabble.

“Scrabble,” I said, the memories of Abi's complete victory still fresh in my mind.

“I'm a little annoyed with you,” she said as she laid out the game.

“Looks like it,” I quipped and she grinned.

“If you hadn't of interfered we'd have had some peace and quiet in my room”

I stared at her and shook my head. “The only thing that would have happened is that I would have gone home and you would have got a bollocking,” I replied. “I had such an argument earlier with my Mum. Parents can't lose. They don't. They might not win, but they just defer victory.”

“Rubbish,” Sarah snorted and shook back her wavy hair.

“It's like turning up to a battle with swords when the other sides have guns, missiles and aeroplanes. No point starting a fight when negotiation and compromise will get you a partial victory.”

Sarah stared at the board and then at me. “So you never get into arguments then?”

“No I do. And I know it's pointless. But it is easier for me as an outsider looking in than it is for you. Save your arguments until you really need a victory.”

She eyed me suspiciously but didn't continue with her thoughts on her parents.

“Pick your tiles,” she told me passing me a velvet bag and I selected seven letters – the blank, a K, an I, two O, a Q and an M. I surveyed the board for a moment. It is difficult to use all seven letters in one go, but with nothing on the board it was possible, surely.

I spent a minute thinking and looking at my letters before opting for KIMONO.

“Nice,” Sarah said and put WRONG over the O in KIMONO.

“A nice few points here”, I uttered and put down OZONE to which Sarah responded with ALLOW and I added FOA to, to make FOAL.

Sarah started giggling. “I can't. Oh I can't resist” she muttered and put down FANNY.

“You can't have that!” I told her and she reached down and brought up a dictionary. “Give it here”

Sarah passed me the dictionary and I leafed through it to the correct page.

"I can't see it," I joked with her but Sarah's eyes sparkled.

"Maybe you should be looking at rather than ignoring the ladies with no knickers on then?"

"Like yourself. I had noticed but wasn't going to say anything."

Sarah bit her lip coyly and I laughed and then took four letters from the bag. I left the dictionary on my lap deliberately and put DA to the Y in FANNY to make DAY over a triple-word score.

Sarah put down JAGRA and I pulled her up. "It's a word" she countered and I picked up the dictionary.

"If you can tell me what it means you can have it," I told her with a smirk as I located it.

"What it is, not what it means, surely?" she replied, a smile flashing over her face. Somehow, I got the feeling she knew what it was. "It's Hindi. It a state of consciousness."

"HMMMM ..." I grumbled and put the dictionary down, picked up my letters to make KITES. Sarah put down PARVE

"It's Jewish food that contains no meat or dairy" she told me as she slotted the E into place and her mother appeared.

"Do you want a drink?" she asked and Sarah readjusted herself subconsciously to make sure she was totally decent.

"I'm fine, thanks", I said and she glanced at the board.

"Who put that word down?" she asked pointed into the corner of the board.

"That was me," Sarah answered sheepishly.

"I did protest but it is in the dictionary so..."

"...so it's allowed" Sarah finished for me. "But he did protest as he did not like my fanny! Can you believe that?" I pursed my lips together, trying hard not to giggle.

"If you are going be lewd then Andy can go home and we have that chat about how sixteen year old girls should behave," Angela threatened and Sarah groaned.

I waited until her mother had left the room and stared at her. "What?" she asked, not noticing the disapproval in my eyes.

"I'm saying nothing."

"Pah!" she said and added S and Y to ALLOW to make SALLOWY.

"Impressive" I told her and then exchanged all my letters. Suffice to say Sarah won. I managed TWAT and she added GOO alongside it, but she won by over 100 points.

"Strip Scrabble, we agreed, right?" she teased her eyes glowing.

"I'm not sure your mother would approve."

Sarah looked sullen for a moment as she packed the game away leaning over to turn on

the radio beside her. She grinned at me and stretched her arms and legs.

"Tell me about Paula," she asked and I shrugged.

"What is there to tell. She was my best friend and my girlfriend. We spent almost every evening together doing homework, we went walking together most weekends and used to run the florist together every Saturday."

"Wow. That's basically living in each others' pockets," Sarah murmured and I grinned.

"Yeah we did. We did everything together. As I said she was my best friend."

"Everything?" Sarah asked her eyebrows raised.

I laughed at her and nodded. "Yeah everything. Well obviously we didn't go to the bathroom together or anything but we were always with each other. She even went up to the Lake District a couple of times when I went to stay with Dad for the week. Mum thought we were besotted with each other but she was a really nice person who had similar interests, at a similar age and lived next door. Of course we were going to be friends although Rhea, my little sister, didn't like Paula's sister. I didn't like her too much either but they really disliked each other."

Sarah smiled and shrugged. "There is no-one 'round here my age. I used to know someone down the end of the road but I don't see him any more. You are lucky living so close to town."

"I think you're lucky having all this on your doorstep," I told her and pointed to her garden. "Our garden is limited to a window box."

Sarah smiled at me and looked out, "I suppose. I wouldn't mind living a bit closer to school. Donna and Lisa live in Mandeville and that's a few miles away and Zoe is in Aylesbury."

"I know, she lives a few minutes walk from me."

"And Jodie and Ingrid live on the other side of Aylesbury so that's miles away."

"I have that now as well. Ray is in Mandeville. I don't have Paula next door any more. I mean, yeah I have loads of people I know in Aylesbury but my close friends are five or hundred and five miles away."

Sarah smiled as I laid back in my chair. "You have Abi, she is next door to your bedroom."

"She is next door, true, but we are not going out and I don't know if I will see her much after she moves into her new flat."

"You need to ask her out on a date then," Sarah told me and I grinned.

"Yeah, well. If I have the courage."

Sarah scoffed. "What's the worst that can happen?"

I thought for a moment. "I don't know. It'll be awkward if she says no and I will be upset. And pride, and ..."

Sarah shook her head. "... men!"

“No, just. It's not something to enter into lightly. I don't want her to be uncomfortable and I don't even know if she likes me.”

“She wanders around Aylesbury with you without any underwear, flirts with you and you wonder if she likes you or not. I'm telling you now, every guy I know would have noticed, stared, got embarrassed and then ogled. So why not you?”

I spluttered. “I don't know. I've asked myself the same question.”

Sarah smiled. “Is it because you are immune to it, all those beautiful, lovely babysitters you had over the years.”

“It was only a couple of times a week and I am not immune to the curves and charms of beautiful women. I just wasn't expecting it so I wasn't looking. Paula was very beautiful but I rarely noticed, so to speak. I was happy with her, even when we were cuddling up to each other. Dating and kissing just wasn't that important to her so it wasn't to me.”

Sarah grinned a bit and then smirked. “A bit personal, but I am guessing from what you said earlier you never had sex with her.”

My eyes widened at her. “That's very personal.”

“A bit of an inappropriate question, maybe,” she said quickly but continued. “But I can see from the look on your face that it's true. Maybe if you had then you would have seen her differently.”

I shifted in my seat uncomfortably and she smiled. “Yeah, that's maybe true. We did a few things but they were mostly alcohol induced and more out of intrigue than passion,” I admitted. “We even managed to share a single bed for a whole week and nothing really happened.”

“Whoa. How long had you been going out?”

“Err ... a year, a year and a quarter maybe. It was at the start of the year, just before my sixteenth birthday.”

“Were you not tempted?”

She grinned at the smile on my face and I nodded.

“A little, but it was up to her. Their kitchen got flooded so her parents moved into the spare bedroom, Paula moved into my room and her sister moved into his Rhea's room for the week, which was fun. I was supposed to sleep on the floor but I don't reckon anyone thought I would. It was really nice waking up next to my girlfriend and cuddling her but if we did anything it would have been up to her and she made no moves. She was happy and so was I.”

Sarah shook her head. “I've never had that, I've never woken up along side someone but ...”

“You should, it's lovely. I just felt so content and happy. It was January as well as so sharing body warmth made it very snug.”

Sarah grinned and I changed the subject to the song on the radio. We talked about our exams for twenty minutes and then I got up to go.

"I better get going", I told her. "It's nearly ten thirty and I have to get back to the station. Sarah nodded and escorted me out of the conservatory. Her mother was still in the lounge but the volume was noticeably lower on the television.

"Goodbye, Mrs Bailey" I said as I left.

"Bye Andy," she replied and Sarah walked me to the little porch where I put my shoes back on.

Sarah hugged me on tiptoes and I put my arms around her. She felt so soft as we touched. "Thank you for walking me home."

"Can I take your phone number?" I asked as we broke apart.

Sarah passed me a piece of paper from her pocket. "I was hoping you would ask for it," she admitted.

I gave a wry smile. "I want to take Abi to Wendover Woods over the weekend. Sunday probably. Ray said he'd come and if Donna changes her mind, get her to come as well. Picnic. Bottle of wine. You up for it?"

Sarah nodded eagerly.

"I'll ring you," I promised and scribbled my number on a sheet of paper by the door.

* * * * *

I heard the door shut and two sets of feet on the carpet. I knew what I needed to say and waited until Abi and Mum were in the lounge. I had been thinking on the train and as much as it pained me, I had been wrong earlier and needed to make amends.

"It's gone two. You should be in bed," Mum said when she saw me.

"I wanted to say something, but I want to be allowed to finish," I told her. "Abi was right."

Abi grinned but my Mum stayed motionless. "Something happened tonight. I basically did to Sarah what Abi did to me. I intervened in an argument and sided with the parent..."

"It's not about sides ..." my Mum started but I stopped her.

"Let me finish, please. I ... agreed ... with Sarah's Mum because she was right, or she was less wrong than Sarah. And Sarah was a little annoyed with me. Unfairly, I hasten to add, but she was irritated at least. But what I did was agree a compromise.

"But we haven't said," Mum interrupted.

"Will you let me finish!" I exclaimed at her and she sighed. "I know that. But it was far easier to see it as an outsider looking in. So I replayed the conversation we had earlier on the train coming back. And I was wrong. I can see that now. For a start I shouldn't have tried to drag Abi into it, so I am sorry for that. And ultimately, it is up to you and I know that"

"Did he say he was wrong?" Mum asked Abi, her face smiling.

"I think he might have done," Abi told her and she smirked. "I'm not sure."

"Well I knew I was right."

“OK I admit I approached the subject badly, I reacted badly and I know why you don't want me to work there. I have to respect that and behaving as I did, well it didn't help.”

“No, it didn't” Mum responded firmly.

“But at the same time, you just dismissed the idea because I'm your son.”

“You are sixteen,” she said in an exasperated tone. “You don't even know ...”

“I understand why you don't want me there. I don't agree with it. I could run off to Gretna Green and marry someone. I could be a father. I can join the army and be trained to kill. I can do all these things. But as I said, I know it's up to you and I shouldn't have reacted as I did. So I would like you to think about it, let me have a week or two to see how I get on.”

Mum nodded and then gave me a hug. “I'll think about it,” she said. “I'm still not happy with it though. Now I'm off to bed. Night.”

Abi waited until Mum was up the stairs and looked at me. “Much, much better. Well done.”

I nodded. “Well that's one little problem sorted.” I resisted the urge to mention that the big one in my life was staring at me, and got up. “Oh...and you know I saw Jez today at bowling and he described your little stunt to ... well everyone really. He described you as ... '18 years old, fit as fuck, awesome girl. Short skirt too. No knickers. Fuckin' oozing sex. Big tits.”

Abi laughed as I described Jez's description of her.

“And you know I got asked about each individual point, whether it was true or not.”

“So which ones did you say were true?” she asked as I walked up to her.

“Don't you know?” I asked, looking into her brown eyes. Abi shook her head.

“Good,” I replied and was chased up the stairs.

Note from the author

The “Growing Pains” universe is a set of stories that centres around the life of Andy Williams and all those who got to know him as he grows up. While everything may not be totally clear, it will be the time the Universe is all released. For a fuller explanation please see my website under “Site and Story Credits.”

I shall try and keep to a regular posting schedule and will upload to StoriesOnline.net, asstr.org and my website. Completed stories will also be uploaded to Amazon Kindle, Smashwords and FirstyFish, where their internal policies permit.

The next two stories to be released are:

New Pleasures Chapter III

Abi fights with Andy before going on a picnic with him and his friends in a beautifully romantic and picturesque location. Meanwhile Sarah has some new boots, Rhea teases Jez mercilessly and Andy receives a most unexpected guest.

Excerpt: Abi was happy to explain what happened in a lap-dancing club and Ray, Donna and Sarah were eager to listen. Sarah kept fidgeting in her seat, so much so that her short denim skirt had risen up. I could see her underwear perfectly – a lacy pale pink G-String that was only just covering her labia.

Over her mons, the G-String ruffled and it was clear that she trimmed or shaved her pubic hair. I tore my eyes away, feeling guilty at looking but Sarah leant back revealing even more. I felt my dick stiffen and pulled my hand over my lap. Did she want me to look, and if so, why? I felt a little self-conscious and in an effort to do something other than look at Sarah's barely covered pussy, I rummaged around for the second bottle of wine that I had opened for myself earlier, and poured the remainder into the empty cups.

To be released on, or before: 15th June 2012

New Pleasures Chapter IV

Andy spends the night with the rain-soaked guest and is sorely tempted to do something he shouldn't. Rhea gets to tease her brother and Abi is asked out.

Excerpt: “What's up?” I asked her the moment Mum had left the room. Rhea looked on, but didn't say anything and just gleefully watched from the lounge, listening in on what Sarah had to say.

“I've left home,” she admitted, and I guided her to a chair at the dining table where she burst into tears again.

“You're not knocked up are you?” Rhea asked excitedly bounding into the room. “Annabella missed a period and thought she was pregnant. Her mum went ape but it turned out she wasn't.”

“Rhea!” I spoke firmly, glaring at her, but my little sister didn't understand we needed some peace.

To be released on, or before: 22nd June 2012