

DUE FOR A CHANGE

A SHORT STORY

JENNIFER SWEET

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Sophomore year of college is a weird time – too early to chalk up the experience as a ‘loss’, but too late to make friends. Oh, I’m not talking about *me*. I’m talking about my study partner, Gio.

As a confident, outgoing, 19-year-old girl with a healthy dose of ‘pretty privilege’, I never had trouble making friends. I didn’t even need to join a sorority. Every step of the way, I’ve been blessed genetically, socially, and financially.

So why do I still feel so damn *empty*?

I talked about this a lot with my friend, Allison – another ‘pretty privilege’ beneficiary – at length. She blames the sociology course I took this fall for peeling back the layers of fortune I’d taken for granted. Grades? Good. Family? Can’t complain. Social Life? Wonderful. But still, there’s much to figure out with *how* I want to live my life. The purpose of college is to build a foundation for not just a career, but char-

acter too. It's December 14th – the Friday of finals week – and I've decided my exclusionary, inward-looking nature ends today.

So I'm making a change – to do one good deed and, *maybe*, change someone's life for the better. And to me, the obvious choice is Gio.

"*Him?*" Allison groaned. "The shrimpy dude you study with. *That* guy?"

I nodded confidently. "He's very sweet. I think he'd like to go out with us."

Allison paced around my dorm room, baffled by my sudden act of charity. "Are you *sure* you're okay? You didn't bonk your head?"

"Really, I'm fine! I just..." I paused, foreseeing the cheesiness of my sentence. "...I want this to be my New Year's resolution."

"*Sophie!*" Allison shrieked, collapsing onto my roommate's bed – my roommate who, fortunately, finished her finals early and was already home for the holiday season.

I'd had enough of Allison's lack of support. "I'm doing this, okay? I'm inviting Gio out with us. Benny's on Finals Friday is a right of passage. Plus he's got no one to go with."

She must've had enough of my white-knighting too. "Ugh, *fine*. But if he somehow fucks up my chance to get with any guys, I'm blaming you."

"Thaaaaaanks girlie!" I shouted to Allison as she shut the heavy wooden door behind her. I knew she'd come around. She always does.

It took a little more psyching up than expected for my walk to Gio's room and to actually follow through on my good deed. I

checked the time on my phone. One o'clock. Me, Allison, and a few other girls said we'd pregame for Benny's Pub at nine, meaning I had eight hours to convince Gio. How hard could it be?

Gio conveniently lived one floor down in Hanover Hall on the boys' floor, so there was no need to trek outside. As acquaintances, we've walked to and from Hanover to the library or class many times. Though not being actual *friends*, our conversations rarely extended beyond talk of schoolwork or campus-related small talk. I put on some pants, brushed my hair to look somewhat presentable, and made my way down to Gio's room.

I politely knocked, hoping he – and *not* his roommate – would answer. But instead of a friendly 'come in', I heard a bunch of voices. *Dude* voices.

It felt like intruding, but I let my curiosity get the best of me and creaked open the unlocked door... immediately facing the backs of three hulking, douchey frat boys.

"Dude, you don't fucking *own* this room, okay? It's mine too," One of the boys shouted.

A much gentler voice responded. "I know, Connor. I just... I'll probably go to bed early tonight."

The same boy threw his arms up in a fit. "It's Finals Friday, dude! And we can't pregame at Henry's. His roommate's girl is visiting."

"*Excuse* me," I said forcefully. The boys turned around, startled by the presence of a girl. Amazingly they calmed down and swiftly split the room to reveal Gio, seated on the floor and visibly overwhelmed by the verbal barrage.

“Sophie!” Gio yelled, his face quickly turning red. “W-what are you doing here?”

I could tell Gio needed a little more than just an invite at this moment. “That... *thing* you texted me about. I came to give it to you.”

Smartly, Gio recognized his out and played along. “Oh yeah... Come on in.”

Connor already looked annoyed – or at least enough to give up.

“Whatever, dude. I guess we’ll find somewhere else. *This* time.” He and his friends funneled out of the door, slamming it.

Gio stared at me for a moment, confused but grateful that I’d come by. “Sorry, he’s an asshole.”

He sat there on the side of his twin bed next to his neatly organized bedside table, still shaking a bit from the interaction. His small frame appeared even meeker than usual, and his curly, shoulder-length blonde hair was particularly frizzy.

“Was I being unreasonable?” Gio asked, scratching his head. “I just... I don’t like going out at night and I *hate* Connor’s friends when they’re drunk.”

“*Just* his friends?” I kidded. “He seems pretty rough too.”

Gio sighed and collapsed back on his bed. “Six more months of this and I’m done. Remind me never to sign up for random roommate pairing with other transfers again.”

That felt like an understatement.

“Hey, listen...” I began, remembering why I came. “This may not be the best time, but I wanted to invite you out to Benny’s tonight with my friends. It is Finals Friday...”

Gio's eyes widened, stunned by my request. He sat up in bed.

"You want *me* to join you?"

I nodded warmly, afraid he thought I was playing a prank on him. "Yeah! If you want to come. But now that I know Connor might—"

"He's not going to Benny's. None of them are. They're going downtown to some nightclub."

I raised an eyebrow, but Gio sighed. "*Still...*"

"You're right, you're right," I conceded. "You said it yourself. You don't even really *like* going out." I smiled at Gio again, accepting my failed effort. "Sorry to put you on the spot."

"Well... It's not really *that*. I mean, look at you. You're freaking gorgeous! And your friends gotta be the same, right? What business do I have hanging out with you? I mean, *shit*, the fact you even agreed to *study* with me is insane."

I blushed, flattered and embarrassed by his compliment.

Gio shook his head and laid back down on the bed. "I'd only hold you guys back."

He collapsed back onto the bed and let out a big, frustrated huff. The boy was stressed, clearly. But damn it if I didn't come here today to make a difference. Even if he doesn't come out with us, I can't leave him here feeling worse than when I arrived.

I took a seat beside him on the bed and rested my hand on his leg. "Look, you're not a burden on anyone. Trust me. You're a fun, sweet person that deserves a good time."

Again, Gio sat up, but this time made his way to the mirror.

“Thanks,” he muttered, then gasping at his reflection. “Jeez. My hair gets so freaking frizzy when I’m upset.”

He reached for a brush on his dresser and slowly ran it through his hair, smoothing out the frizz and returning his natural curls.

I sat there for a moment as he brushed his hair. I hadn’t really noticed until now, but his movements were so... *delicate*. Like no other boy I’ve seen. The way he walked with quick little steps, his elegant posture, and the gentle, soft way he spoke...

Suddenly, I had an idea. A way that this whole issue could be resolved in one fell swoop. One where everyone could – just *maybe* – end up happy.

“Gio,” I said, still entranced by his graceful brushing. “How about you come out with my friends and I tonight... and I dress you up as a girl.”

My words were like an emergency brake causing him to cease all movement. I didn’t make eye contact with him directly, but I could see his startled reaction in the mirror’s reflection. But curiously, no immediate ‘no’.

Rising from his twin bed, I shuffled over to the petite boy that stood frozen at the mirror.

“I’ll let you think it over,” I said softly into his ear, giving him a friendly pat on the back. “If you’d like to get ready with me, come to mine at seven. Room 412.”



MY OFFER to Gio was unlike anything I’d done in the past – and *far* more than I intended heading into the night. But something

about his... *energy*... made me think, maybe this is what he wanted.

Of course, I mentally spiraled over the next several hours, afraid that I'd offended him in some irreversible way. I rationalized my reckless behavior by convincing myself I could just avoid him for the rest of college. Everyone's leaving for winter break tomorrow anyway. Then I just make sure we never take a class together again. Done and done.

Allison texted me at 6:30 asking how things went. I planned to tell her Gio was almost certainly out. If he hadn't swung by in over five hours, why would he now?

I was just about to tell her exactly that when I heard a knock on the door. I'm not sure if it was more to my shock or to my delight, but there he was. Gio.

"Hi," he squeaked, standing nervously at my door. "Can I come in?"

I paused for a moment, then snapped back in. "Oh, yes, yes! I'm so glad you came by."

Gio took a seat across from me on my roommate's bed. He took a moment to look around the room and observe the differences between ours. Not that I was a *girly* girl, but the accessories, decorations, and overall energy of the space significantly contrasted that of Connor and Gio's.

"This is nice," he offered quietly, then paused. "I thought about what you said."

The look in his eye was all I needed. "You showed up. I think I know your answer."

Instinctively, I moved across the room, leaned forward, and sweetly kissed him on the forehead. For the first time all day, a

smile grew on Gio's kind face. He looked at peace. It wasn't what I'd planned, but this was my way to make a difference.

And so began the two and a half hour countdown till the girls arrived to pregame. I first had him strip and change into a proper girl's outfit. Handling most of this on the fly, I dug through my dresser for some underwear that would suit him, ultimately settling on some plain, baby-blue panties and a matching A-cup bra. Out of politeness, I turned away while he changed out of his boxers and into the women's garments.

The reveal was pleasantly surprising for two reasons. First being how *stunningly* feminine his features were. While his body isn't overly *womanly*, it isn't aggressively 'male' either. He was short, petite, and had just enough in his hips that the panties fit him snugly and with a mostly-flat front.

But what stood out most to me wasn't his figure – it was his complete lack of body hair. Nowhere on his legs, arms, armpits... *nothing*. Not even around his pantyline. Gio's body was as hairless and smooth as any girl.

He must've noticed me staring, because he started to blush.

"Just curious... did you shave before this?" I asked kindly.

Gio blushed even harder, but silently nodded.

"Well it suits you nicely," I complimented. "Let's get you dressed."

I proceeded to showcase several outfit options that might suit his figure. Projecting my assumptions onto him, I started him off with modest, conservative looks like jeans and a blouse, or a sweater with women's slacks. But to my surprise, Gio kept gravitating toward the girlier, flirtier outfits.

And so we tried on skirts, tank tops, and loads of dresses. Gio seemed happiest in those, always delighted by the feel of material swishing across his smooth legs. We settled on a dark green halter dress speckled with white flowers – a pretty little thing that was buried in the back of my closet. I hadn't thought about it in at least a year, but tonight it was delighting someone new.

With an outfit selected, it was time to do Gio's hair and makeup. Though before I could even explain the options, he jumped in with a straightening request.

"It's something I've never done," he said sheepishly. "I think it'll look pretty."

And right he was! His newly straightened hair completely transformed his head. No longer did he have curls resting just above his shoulders. Instead, he had soft, straight blonde locks that reached all the way down to his exposed back. The joy on Gio's face was unmatched as he tossed and toyed with his new hairstyle.

Recognizing his tilt toward femininity, I took the liberty of giving him a full glam makeover, complete with soft, shimmery pink lips, bold mascara and eye shadow, and just a touch of blush to bring out the sweetness of his cheeks.

God he looked adorable, and his shining smile further pronounced his beauty. Some final touches included cute black heels, a spritz of my favorite perfume, and last but not least a silver necklace with a tiny crescent moon charm that I offered as a gift.

Gio's final reveal in the mirror nearly brought him to tears – though I quickly put a stop to it lest he ruin his makeup.

“You look beautiful, Gio,” I said genuinely, giving him a hug from behind.

“*Genevieve*,” he said without missing a beat. “Call me Genevieve tonight.”

I chuckled at his quick, decisive correction. “Genevieve it is!”

We sat around and chatted for the next half hour while I got ready myself. Funny, a few hours ago I would’ve demanded Gio step out while I changed. But Genevieve? Well, she already felt like a sister.

Was I nervous about my friends’ reactions? Initially. But Genevieve’s beaming confidence was contagious. If she wasn’t nervous, why should I be?

Allison and my other two friends Gabi and Mika arrived soon after, and they took Genevieve’s presence surprisingly well. A few awkward questions broke the ice but it didn’t take long for them to accept Genevieve as one of their own.

We took the opportunity to play a friendly game of truth or drink, which both served as a chance for the girls to get to know Genevieve, as well as her to practice feminine mannerisms and her best girl voice. Within the hour, she was a natural at both.

By ten o’clock, everyone had consumed enough liquid confidence to venture out to Benny’s Pub for the night to begin.

“Everything’s gonna be fine, right?” Genevieve asked timidly before stepping out. “You really think so?”

I gently placed my hand on her shoulder and toyed with a strand of her hair. “I’ll be with you the whole time.”

Genevieve smiled back, warmly, clutching my hand as we ventured out the door.



BENNY'S, as expected, was bumping. It's the go-to off-campus bar on the last day of the semester, so no wonder the entire campus rolled through. And with their *incredibly* lax ID policy, even freshmen had no problem entering. Benny's was truly a place for all.

The space is *massive*, hosting multiple rooms and bar areas, each with slightly different themes. A sports bar by day, Benny's transforms into a near-club at night. The fluorescent ceiling fixtures get turned off in favor of funky, colored lights, and the inoffensive pop-rock tunes swap out for clubby, EDM-remixes. And tonight, students from all walks of life cram in shoulder-to-shoulder to drink, dance, and celebrate the end of the semester.

Allison, Gabi, and Mika each offered to buy Genevieve a drink on her first night out, which she gladly accepted. I'd have bought her one too, but thought it wise to not get her *too* inebriated dressed like this.

A shot here, a beer there, a seltzer to top it off – all five of us girls were off to a great start. After some convincing, Mika, the wildest of the bunch, grabbed Genevieve's hand and led her to the middle of the packed dance floor, where they spun each other around and scream-sang the muffled pop lyrics. Allison and Gabi followed soon after, hoping to not miss out on the fun.

I took another sip of my white claw and gazed out onto the dance floor. Three old friends and one new one. If you told me this morning that I'd be dolling up my study-buddy and sending him out to the club dressed as a girl, I'd have laughed

in your face. And yet, I did just that... and with astonishing results.

Leaning back against the bar, observing my four girlfriends live it up, I felt warm and comfy inside. And no, not *just* because of the alcohol, but personal satisfaction. I'd made someone's night. An impressive two-week head start on my New Year's resolution to do more good was all coming together.

"Blue moon please," I heard someone order next to me. At first, the order barely even registered. After all, I'd been hearing orders all night. But something about it made my stomach drop.

Slowly and inconspicuously, I turned my body to see who was beside me and... SHIT. It was none other than Gio's roommate, Connor.

My calm, collected confidence rapidly morphed into a mix of dread and fear. What the fuck was he doing here?! Gio said for *sure* Connor was going into the city... Did they change plans or something?

None of that mattered now, because Connor's presence was an immediate problem. I slyly ducked around the bar and out of his sightline before he could put two and two together.

Sometime during my mental self-celebration, I'd lost track of my four friends in the crowd. I scanned the dance floor but they were gone. I frantically weaved and pushed through students, hoping I'd find the girls and give Genevieve a warning that Connor was around. Fuck! Why did this bar have to be so enormous?

None of them answered my texts, and I started fearing something had happened. I bounced room to room, keeping a

watchful eye out for Connor and, likely, his douchebag friends. The upbeat music and carefree faces were no longer giving me joy, instead stressing me to my core. At this moment, all I wanted was to find Genevieve and get her the fuck out of here.

A breakthrough was made a few minutes later when I saw three-quarters of my original group gathered at a different bar, ordering a round of drinks.

...but not Genevieve.

“Sophie, over here!” Gabi shouted, waving at me. “We’re getting shots. Want in?”

“Where is she?!” I spat out, anguished. “Where’s Genevieve!?”

The girls paused for a second, thinking it over.

“Not sure,” Gabi shrugged. “Haven’t seen her in a minute.”

Mika chimed in. “Oh! I did see her talking to a boy like 10 minutes ago.”

My blood went cold. “She *what?*”

Mika laughed. “Crazy, right? Quick start to girlhood! I don’t know where they went though. Anyway, we’re all getting Casamigos. I’ll grab one for her t—”

I couldn’t care less about the shots right now. All I knew is that Genevieve, for all her confidence, was *not* ready to be out on her own.

I retraced my path through Benny’s many rooms, desperately searching for Genevieve, praying I’d find her tucked away somewhere, alone and safe. I alternated between fearing the worst and trying to stay hopeful. I couldn’t imagine how I’d feel if something happ—

And then I saw her. On the crowded dance floor, right in

front of me. Her pretty dark green dress. Her head of straight, beautiful blonde hair. There was Genevieve, somehow right where I'd left her...

...and *kissing a boy*. A boy I'd never seen before.

I leaned side-to-side, craning my neck around people passing in front of me, trying to ensure she looked okay, but her body language suggested she was more than fine. Genevieve was in the middle of her first ever make-out as a girl, and undeniably loving it.

A wave of emotions hit me – relief that she was safe, frustration with myself that I'd let her out of my sight, and utter joy that she was kissing a tall, handsome boy. Everything on paper was perfect. Until, just past the kissing couple, I spotted someone else.

Connor was back, and he had company.

This time we locked eyes, him shooting me a strange look of familiarity through the busy, dancing crowd. But his attention quickly pivoted away from me and into a grotesque contortion on his face. He had spotted Genevieve – or to him, Gio, his male roommate – in a dress and makeup. Right in front of his eyes.

Without regard to me, Genevieve, or anyone, Connor stomped through the crowd and grabbed the shoulder of the boy she was kissing, yanking him aside.

“That’s a dude, Brett! You’re kissing a fucking dude!”

Genevieve returned to reality, awakened by the brash, rude comment from Connor. If it had stopped there it would've been bad. But his loud outburst caught the attention of others around, who cleared space for Genevieve and Brett.

Brett recoiled, now inspecting Genevieve's face and features

with greater detail. For as feminine as she looked, her maleness was unfortunately noticeable enough.

The music still bumped, but the surrounding people drew silent and afraid.

Connor jabbed his finger forward. “See? That’s a fucking DUDE, Brett. That’s literally my roommate!”

It must’ve set in for Brett, because at the word ‘roommate’, he immediately vomited on the floor, right on Genevieve’s shoes. The vomit garnered screams from some of the girls and chaos erupted. Some cleared the dance floor. Others stopped and stared, a few with cruel, mocking gestures.

Already, Genevieve was starting to break into tears, frozen from the fear and trauma. She still didn’t know I was behind her, as I too was frozen from the guilt. The only person with any attention left was Connor, who took three menacing steps toward the timorous Genevieve.

“Fucking tranny *freak*,” he said with repugnance in his voice, then thrust out his hand and firmly shoved Genevieve to the floor.

He motioned to his buddies and without recourse from me or Genevieve, exited the dance floor and the bar.

I finally snapped back to reality and ran toward the grimacing, tearful Genevieve. The poor thing looked a mess. I tried to reach down and hug her, but she briskly pushed me away.

“A-are you okay?” I stammered, meaning only love in a moment like this. “Those boys are horrible.”

Genevieve whipped her head toward me, her straightened hair already coming undone from the stress, frizzing up.

“Why did you let me do this!? Why? WHY!?” she cried out, turning her head. “Now I’m fucking freak!!”

I had no answer for that. I tried. I really did. And look what that caused. A shamed, destroyed sophomore boy, crying from the pain and humiliation of expressing his girlhood.

The bouncers made their way into the crowd, finally, to break things up. One cleaned up the vomit and another helped Genevieve up, leading her through the crowd, gawked at by the hundreds of curious students.

I didn’t chase after her or anything, nor did she shout anything back. But notably, on my way out the bar, I found the crescent necklace I gave to her, smashed on the sidewalk.



I STRUGGLE to think of a worse start to Christmas break than the events of that Friday. I barely had time to process the whole event before embarking on my four-hour drive to join my family for the Christmas season. But dammit if I didn’t replay her screams every single goddamn second of that long drive home.

My mother, father, and two brothers served as a solid distraction from my trauma, insisting on endless Monopoly games interspersed with holiday movies. But neither the games nor the films felt fun this year.

I thought constantly about Genevieve. *Endlessly*. I sent her several apology texts that, of course, she didn’t answer. I thought of how she must’ve felt watching a boy retch from

kissing her, and the pain of being shoved to the ground. Not to mention the crippling gender dysphoria.

Christmas day came and went – again, without its normal magic. I gave and got some nice gifts, but all I really wanted to know was that Genevieve would be okay. In the following week, I saw friends from high school and traded stories from our new lives. But again, it all felt so meaningless.

My friend Kate planned an incredible party at her house including, as she noted, a few boys that had crushes on me. Normally I'd be ecstatic, but this New Year's Eve, all I could think about was my failed resolution. I acted like a secluded hermit the entire night amidst a sea of party-animals. The atmosphere reminded me too much of Benny's. I kept getting visions of Genevieve's euphoric kiss getting cruelly adjourned by Connor. For as bad as I was feeling, I couldn't imagine how distraught poor Gio must feel tonight.

Just a few minutes till midnight and everyone was positioning themselves for a kiss. A couple boys I'd talked to throughout the night sidled up beside me, hoping for action. But instead of lifting a champagne glass, I grabbed my coat and left the party entirely.

Why stick around? I'd failed in the New Year before it even started.



UPON RETURNING to school on the 7th, the whole campus felt revitalized. New classes, new activities, and new opportunities

galore. But nearly the moment I returned to campus, I ran to Gio's room, praying he'd be there.

But he wasn't – a fact I found out by rudely letting myself in and finding two *different* boys unpacking belongings.

“Is... is this not Gio and Connor's room?” I asked.

Both boys shrugged. One answered. “Who? We just moved in.”

The housing authority had made a change. Clearly the two boys couldn't continue living together. Frankly I wouldn't be shocked if restraining orders had been placed.

And so I sulked back to my room. Genevieve was out of my life for good, and so was Gio. It's just something I had to accept. Sometimes helping leads to hurt. There's no avoiding it.

I hung my head on the walk back down the boys' hallway and bumped into someone. Looking up, it was a boy I recognized – one of Connor's cronies I hadn't seen since that day. He clearly recognized me too, evidenced by his scowl.

“He moved, you know. Because of your friend,” the boy said curtly.

I wanted to just ignore him and retreat to the safety of my dorm. To greet my roommate and start the semester with a clean slate.

But I didn't.

Instead, I glared at him. “Connor did a bad thing to Gio. If he had to move, it's his own damn fault.”

The boy didn't fight back, but the scowl remained on his face. “It was never going to work, those two.”

He stormed past me, likely on the way to his own room. Again, I could've left things there but...

“Where is he now?” I shouted, my back still turned toward him.

“Greer Hall,” he answered, snickering. “Third floor, if you wanna go kick his ass.”

Fuck it. This was it. *This* was the last thing I’ll do for Genevieve. I know I’ve failed and abandoned my goal, but Connor deserved a piece of my mind.

Greer Hall was a trek across campus in the blistering winter air, but I didn’t care. I was on a mission.

I snuck in behind a student scanning into Greer and headed toward the elevator to the third floor. I glanced around the lobby, fuming at how much nicer Greer was than Hanover. He assaults my friend and gets an *upgrade*?

Up the elevator and down the long hall I went from room to room. Every room in Greer is a single, each with a name tag outside. Sure enough, halfway down I finally found a plastic name tag on the door labeled ‘Connor’.

In comically dramatic fashion, I wound up my fist to bang on the door, but right before making contact, I noticed something. Sticking out the crack in the door was a *notecard*.

I know it’s not my business, but my mix of rage and fuck-it attitude justified a little intrusion.

On the notecard was a simple, handwritten message. But when I read it, *honestly*, I nearly fell to the floor.

Dear Connor,

The scars you caused will remain on my skin, but I must recognize the true owner of that skin. Someone who for many years has been looking to come out. The real me. And neither you, nor anybody else, will take that journey away from me.

Sincerely,
Genevieve

“...Genevieve,” I whispered to myself, tears falling down my face.

Without a second thought, I slipped the letter back into the door and walked straight back down the hall.

I was never gonna change her life. All I could be was her catalyst. In many ways, she was mine too. In time, maybe we connect and reminisce about the first night we spent together as girlfriends.

Or not. And that’s okay too. This will undoubtedly take some time. I’ll be alright.

But for now, it’s *Genevieve’s* new year. And I’m damn thrilled she can finally have a happy one.