

Skirt
(formerly titled In the Know)
by
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SHOWCASE SAMPLE FROM SKIRT BY JULIE TOSH

BETHANY wanders out in her yard. It's dark. Her house looms behind her.

MICHAEL crosses the lawn.

MICHAEL

I haven't been by.

BETHANY

Mom's sleeping.

MICHAEL

This early?

BETHANY

She had a hard day.

MICHAEL

Is Del still up?

BETHANY

I looked for you today. After school.

MICHAEL

I was in a meeting. Think he'd mind if I--

BETHANY

He'd mind. He gets upset. With changes. Your folks have been gone for a while now.

MICHAEL

They're in South America. Being missionaries.

BETHANY

Since when?

MICHAEL

Since about three weeks before I got home.

BETHANY

They left you alone?

MICHAEL

You look cold.

BETHANY

It smells like fall.

MICHAEL

Dry leaves and dirt.

Dead stuff.

BETHANY

Is that why you're out here?

MICHAEL

I come out sometimes, to look for my satellite.

BETHANY

Isn't it too cloudy?

MICHAEL

They could break.

BETHANY

Pretty late for you to be out on a school night.

MICHAEL

It's eight-thirty.

BETHANY

Still. You must have homework.

MICHAEL

Did it.

BETHANY

Even mine?

MICHAEL

It was easy.

BETHANY

It's going to get harder.

MICHAEL

I learned what a troglodyte is.

BETHANY

Yes, well--

MICHAEL

And what they can do.

BETHANY

All creatures do that.

MICHAEL

They never show it on television.

BETHANY

They might on reality TV. It'll be an anthropological archive some day. Showing human behavior of our time.

MICHAEL

BETHANY

Do you think people are really like that?

MICHAEL

It's one way to get attention.

BETHANY

Oh. Let's sit.

MICHAEL

In the grass?

BETHANY

Wait for my satellite.

MICHAEL

It might be wet but okay.

They sit in the grass.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

What happens when you see it?

BETHANY

It's a sign.

MICHAEL

Of what?

BETHANY

Just a sign.

MICHAEL

What kind of satellite is it?

BETHANY

Not geosynchronous. I know that.

MICHAEL

Whoa. Somebody likes science.

BETHANY

We learned that in fifth grade. It stuck with me. I was going to ask Mr. Russell about it, you know, what kind of satellite moves? But I can't talk to him about stuff like that.

MICHAEL

Why not?

BETHANY

He'd want to know why I was so interested.

MICHAEL

I thought you liked Mr. Russell.

BETHANY

He's old.

MICHAEL

You're on the fence about him.

BETHANY

Some girls, they love/hate him. First he's all hot, then he's a jerk 'cause they didn't do their lab write-ups.

MICHAEL

He's their teacher.

BETHANY

Someone who is just your teacher is just your teacher. Nothing more.

MICHAEL

Yep.

BETHANY

I told Del you were back. I'm not sure if he understood.

MICHAEL

It should have been me that day. In the car. Not your dad. If I'd taken the scholarship here, if I'd stayed home--

BETHANY

It still would have been Dad.

MICHAEL

Del and I were due for a talk. Or a fight.

BETHANY

He was getting a dad-lesson. When you really screwed up, Dad would take you out to a place he had all stamped out in the cornfield.

MICHAEL

He ever do that to you?

BETHANY

I was the good kid. But Del. No crying interventions or threats or groundings from the car made any difference. So Dad bought a case of beer and took him out to the corn. Get him puking drunk so he'd see what it was really like. The police found most of the empty cans in the field. And Dad, his autopsy showed no alcohol in his system. Cops said Dad was driving. Del was too much of a retard to tell us what really went down that day. Did he pull on the steering wheel? Try to throw himself from the car?

(MORE)

BETHANY (cont'd)

He almost died from alcohol poisoning. Almost. Now I'm supposed to help him get better. But there isn't anything left to help.

MICHAEL

It's only been a few months.

BETHANY

Did you ever play with paper dolls? As a kid?

MICHAEL

No. Afraid not.

BETHANY

You can dress them in a million outfits. Make them anything you want them to be. But when you're done playing, they're paper.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry I wasn't here.

BETHANY

Why didn't you come home?

MICHAEL

Rough semester.

BETHANY

Oh yeah. You get a B on something?

MICHAEL

It was more than that.

BETHANY

You got a C.

MICHAEL

No, Beth. I failed.

BETHANY

How can you fail student teaching?

MICHAEL

It was...my supervisor thought I should take a break. Try something a little closer to home. I worked in Westminster for awhile. Until I could wash the stink of it off.

BETHANY

You still smell a little.

MICHAEL

That's my cologne.

BETHANY
Might be time to go to the mall.

MICHAEL
You don't like it?

BETHANY
It's weird to have you as my teacher.

MICHAEL
Student teacher. It's not exactly the same.

BETHANY
Yeah, it's not. Michael, that brother/sister thing. Were you serious about that?

MICHAEL
Would it help?

BETHANY
It'd be nice to hang out. Sometimes.

MICHAEL
Get an ice cream?

BETHANY
It's not like I want to be a little kid or anything. If Del were here, he'd punch me if I acted too stupid.

MICHAEL
Even big kids like ice cream.

BETHANY
You get ten years to be young, and then you're an adult forever.

MICHAEL
It's not humanly possible to be an adult that long.

BETHANY
Wait, look!

BETHANY points up at a break in the clouds.

MICHAEL
Where?

BETHANY
Lie back.

They do.

BETHANY (cont'd)
Give it a minute.

MICHAEL
Shh.

BETHANY
The satellite can't hear us.

MICHAEL
What if it's a spy satellite recording our every move?

BETHANY
Better not be.

She gives the sky the finger.

MICHAEL
Never going to come out now.

BETHANY
Why not?

MICHAEL
You hurt its feelings.

BETHANY
Oh, yeah? There it is.

They watch the satellite go by.

BETHANY (cont'd)
Then it goes away.

MICHAEL
Because it's not geosynchronous.

BETHANY
That's what they do.

MICHAEL
But they come back. Like clockwork.

BETHANY
I want it to be up there all the time.

MICHAEL
Then you need to pick a different satellite.

Pause.

BETHANY
Michael, do you think it's okay for a brother and sister to hold hands?

MICHAEL

You afraid of the dark?

BETHANY

You're acting like Del.

MICHAEL

Did you hold his hand?

BETHANY

Sometimes. When I needed my big brother.

MICHAEL holds his hand out toward
BETHANY.

BETHANY (cont'd)

Not the usual way, maybe. Something different.

MICHAEL

Like how?

BETHANY

Lay your hand out in the grass.

MICHAEL does.

BETHANY (cont'd)

Now, I'm going to make my hand into a fist, 'cause I'm your little sister and I never know when I might need it. But for right now, I'm going to put it here.

BETHANY lays her hand on MICHAEL's open palm. They lie like paper dolls in the grass. MICHAEL closes his hand around BETHANY's fist.

BETHANY (cont'd)

If I fall asleep, will you wake me up before it gets too late?

MICHAEL

Sure.

BETHANY closes her eyes. Locusts chorus from the trees. MICHAEL watches her a moment then closes his eyes.

Lights flash on in BETHANY's house, illuminating the yard. She sits up.

BETHANY

Oh god, she's probably looking for me. She never bothers me out here.

MICHAEL

I thought she was asleep.

BETHANY

She's probably sleepwalking. I better go.

MICHAEL

I'll come with you.

BETHANY

No, Michael, it's...she'll be confused. I'll see you tomorrow.

BETHANY races toward the house.

MICHAEL stands and watches her go.

BETHANY enters the house.

DEL sits alone in his wheelchair. He stares into space, unaware of his surroundings.

BETHANY

Did Mom forget you again?

She moves to the handlebars then turns her back to him.

BETHANY (cont'd)

It's not cheating. It's just for awhile. Until we get back on our feet.

DEL

Makes no difference to me.

BETHANY

You liked him in the old days. Before.

DEL

Before he got good and educated? How you gonna compete with that?

BETHANY

What do you mean?

DEL

He thinks you're eleven.

BETHANY

No. He listens to me. Thinks I'm smart.

DEL

For an eleven-year-old. Probably a lot different than any girls he knew at school.

BETHANY

What girls?

DEL

Girlfriends. Coeds. Pieces of ass.

BETHANY

You know what? I'm smarter than any of those bitches he met at school.

DEL

Smart's a good beginning, but you're going to have to drum up a whole lot more if you want him to hang around.

BETHANY

Like what?

DEL

I'm just saying. Something more.

BETHANY

You said enough.

She looks at DEL's face. He stares vacantly into space again.

BETHANY (cont'd)

Find your own damn way to bed.

She exits.

DEL turns his head after her.