

## **Two-Lane**

**900 words**

**ted.gross@comcast.net**

The first thing you noticed about Dr. Stripe--you couldn't help it--was the enormous breast line.

She was questioning Mel about his childhood, and he was tempted to turn it around, ask her how old she was when she knew she was different than her friends, how did high school pan out socially, did you dress to disguise your situation, and if so did it work at all?

You might even ask--since she was a bit overweight--what happened when you were thin, if you were, I mean did you ever keto it and was there much reduction then? Mel figured *not* much, it didn't work that way, at least he hoped there wouldn't have been.

She was running down a standard checklist taking a few notes, though interestingly nothing about was he breast fed as an infant, which a previous therapist (a male one) had asked about.

Then she throws him a curve ball: What was the most outrageous thing you did before the age of 25?

There was only one answer to that one, which you

weren't going to give. He thought of the runner-up thing, but that wasn't real interesting. He'd jumped off a falls, not Yosemite Falls but down that way, on a dare and cracked a rib. It was high and scary and looked worse when he went back there later, but not necessarily outrageous.

So he made one up on the fly. "This was in my college dorm," he said. "I wasn't a regular inmate though, I had some responsibility, I was a whadaymacall . . ."

"Resident manager?" Dr. Stripe said.

"Right," Mel said.

"One would assume you would know that," she said.

"We called it something different," he said. "What it was, I was in charge of the lower floor. A section of it. This a big dorm. This other dude's in charge of my same area a flight up. They roomed us together, but it wasn't the bunk bed bullshit, we had a sort of apartment, the end of the hall."

"Uh-huh."

"The second semester this gal from Sweden shows up. She's older, she's a grad student, but she's in the dorm for whatever reason."

Dr. Stripe was writing something down.

Mel said, "And she wasn't particularly attractive--nor

unattractive, kind of a ordinary, which was part of the appeal.”

“Uh-huh.”

“The other part of course, her endowment level was off the charts.”

Dr. Stripe said, “I’m curious why you said of course.”

Mel was thinking, do I have to make an announcement here, I mean look what I’m dealing with right in this office. *Of course* of course.

He said, “So there was an incident one night. She took ill. It could have been the seafood in the dining hall but there was something going around. Either way we get a call from her, is there a medical person here before she goes to an ER. The guy with me, his name’s something like Joink, he goes, let’s knock on the door and say we’re medical people.”

“Your friend’s name was Joink,” Dr. Stripe said.

“Well you were nodding just then,” Mel said. “So what’s the big deal.”

“Please continue.”

“So we do. She’s courteous and all, lets us in. She’s not wearing much.”

“There’s no roommate?”

“Could be, might have been out. I’m thinking now it

was a single room, her being a grad student. What difference it make?”

“And the outrageous part was?”

“This other guy, he has her lay down and cough, he checks her tongue, has her hold her breath, total bullshit. All to get close to her.”

“And?”

“That’s about it. We gave her some 7-Up, she felt a little better, she told us in the morning she slept fine.”

“I see. So the most outrageous thing you did before the age of 25 was act as a trained medical individual that night.”

“That and there’s a little more.”

“Uh-huh.”

“My partner, the Joink dude, he hooked up with the Swede. They moved off campus, I never saw either one again.”

“And that disturbed you?”

“It *absolutely* did. It still bothers me . . . In fact why’d you make me dredge it up?”

“Did you convey the incident to others?” Dr. Stripe said.

“That we decided to fake it? Or you mean that he started banging her, and may still *be*.”

“The former.”

“Maybe . . . you wouldn’t want to like go out for Thai food or something, would you? I mean I’m not seeing anything on your left hand.”

Dr. Stripe neatened up her notes. “It’s about time, and I’m afraid we’ll need to conclude,” she said.

The real McCoy, in answer to her question, was more intense. He was hitchhiking around Salinas and some guy picks him up and it feels like the guy took a backroad and they’re heading to the middle of nowhere--and when the guy stops at a T Mel pulls a folding knife out of his backpack and sticks it in the guy’s leg, leaves it, and hightails it out of there. He checked the papers for a while to see if a guy bled to death or some shit, but he didn’t see anything.

