

## ***HAIR APPARENT***

*Or Hair Today Bald Tomorrow*

**1978**

*Sharing a hotel room is never easy, even if you like the person that you happen to be sharing it with but here lately Neal is fit to be tied. Steve is in the bathroom.....again. Neal bangs on the bathroom door and Steve, always the diplomat, yells.*

*“What in the fuck do you want?”*

*Neal is taken aback. “I want your fucking autograph! What do you think I want...get out of the damn bathroom?”*

*“In a minute.” Steve says.*

*Neal looks at his watch. “You said that ten minutes ago! What in the hell are you doing in there?”*

*“I am on the road to a very bad hair day and I am trying to head it off at the pass!” Steve laughs hysterically. “Get it! Bad hair day? Head it off....?” Steve laughs his high pitched laugh. “Oh....I so love me!” Steve says between bouts of laughter.*

*Neal rubs his forehead. “Right now you are the only one that does....get out!” Neal says as he bangs on the door again then suddenly the door is opened and Steve stands there.*

*“Do you think I’m going bald?” Steve asks then Neal laughs.*

*“What? I hardly think so. Why do you ask such a question?”*

*“Well because there is more on the floor than there is on me. Look.” Steve bends over to show Neal the top of his head and Neal looks closely.*

*“No I don’t see anything.” Neal says as Steve rises his head back up and he pushes past Neal. “Trust me you could lose hair and nobody would notice.”*

*“Yeah probably.” Steve pulls a t-shirt over his head. “I guess I have reverse baldness.”*

*Neal looks at him and he makes a face. "You have what?"*

*"Reverse baldness, you know, I can grow it on my head." Steve pulls on a lock of his hair. "And no place else." Steve pats himself on the chest.*

*"Man that is so uncool and besides chest hair is no big deal."*

*"Oh yeah right man easy for you to say." Steve says and Neal shrugs.*

*"I'm Italian."*

*"Well...just call me the hairless Portuguese. Nice to meet you." Steve tries to shake his hand but Neal bats it away as he turns and walks into the bathroom.*

*"So how many hair dryers have you burnt up with that mop of yours?" Neal asks from the bathroom.*

*"I don't use a hair....." Steve says but doesn't finish because Neal lets out a high pitch scream.*

*"Aaaarrggghhhhhhhh!!!!!"*

*"Dryer." Steve finishes as Neal comes to the bathroom door.*

*"You! You used all the fucking towels!" Neal yells as he points at him.*

*"Calm down man I'll just call housekeeping and have them send us some more towels." Steve says as he goes over to the phone, he talks for a few minutes then he hangs up. "Okay man they are on the way up. I better go and tell the security guy so he lets her up on the floor."*

*Steve goes out to where the security guy is stationed and he tells him about the maid coming up and they shoot the breeze until the elevator opens and the maid pushes the cart out onto the floor.*

*"Did you call for more towels?"*

*She asks and Steve smiles and he raises his hand. Wow! She is cute he thinks. He flashes one of his women killing smiles as he approaches the cart. It is odd to him but ever since he had joined this band he has become a chick magnet, Neal told him that it has to do with the rock star mystique; all chicks want to be with the guys in the band. He got into this business because he wanted to sing; no he needed to sing and yeah okay he wanted to be a rock star too and if women came with that well then that was just the gravy.*

*“Room 512.” He says charmingly.*

*She looks him up and down and she smiles back, one hand on her hip the other on the cart.*

*“Nice hair.” She says.*

*“Oh well thanks.” Steve leans over to get a look at her name plate. “Dolores.”*

*“And you must be Steve right?” She says as she smiles.*

*“Right. Are you a fan Dolores?” Steve asks.*

*“Oh and how.” She says as she hands him four towels and Steve takes them. Their eyes meeting.*

*“Ah Dolores do you think I could have just a few more?”*

*“Maybe. How much is it worth to you?”*

*“Worth? Well I left my wallet in the.....” Steve says as he points over his shoulder at the room.*

*“I wasn’t talking about money sweetheart....” She winks at him then she reaches out and tugs on a lock of his hair.*

*“Oh!” Steve eyes widen. “Oh!”*

*45 minutes to an hour later Steve finally returns with a stack of towels, he didn’t count them but there has to be at least twenty of them, not to mention wash cloths and hand towels.*

*“Holy shit Steve! Where in the hell.....wow! That is a lot of towels.” Neal replies as he takes some from him then he gets a good look at Steve, his hair all messed up, his face flushed. “Wait? Is that what I think it is?”*

*“What?”*

*Neal takes a closer look. “It is! It’s a damn hickey!”*

*“Maybe.” Steve says.*

*“No maybe about it! Un-fucking-believable! You are the only guy I know that goes out for towels and gets laid in the process.”*

*“Like she said Neal it’s all about the hair!” Steve smiles.*

1979

*“Okay let’s have the three short guys first. You and you and you.” The photographer says as he points at the two Steve’s and Neal.*

*Steve then leans over to Smitty and he says. “He called us short. I think I am offended.”*

*“Neal in the middle and then you Steve on the end.”*

*Neal moves to the middle and Steve and Smitty look at one another.*

*“Which Steve do you want where?” Steve asks.*

*The photographer is busy with his camera and he isn’t looking at them.*

*“The one with brown hair.” The photographer replies and they both look at one another.*

*“We both have brown hair.” Smitty answers.*

*“No we don’t. I have black hair and you have brown hair.” Steve points out and Smitty makes a face and he shrugs.*

*“Who cares?” Smitty replies.*

*“I care.....!” Steve says then Neal interrupts them.*

*“Guys! Could we do this please! These leather pants are hot!”*

*Then the photographer turns back around. “You over there and you over there. Okay Gregg you stand between Steve and Neal and Ross between Neal and Steve.” The photographer then looks thru the view finder. “No that isn’t right, you two tall guys switch places.”*

*Gregg and Ross switch places then the photographer looks thru the view finder again.*

*“Much better. Oh wait.....you with the frizzy hair.”*

*Then Steve starts to laugh and he gently shoves Neal as the other guys can't help but laugh and Neal looks put out, he sticks his tongue out at Steve.*

*"Ha-ha frizzy hair!"*

*"No not him....you." The photographer says to Steve and Steve looks shocked as he points to himself then Neal starts to laugh.*

*"Me?"*

*"Deidre! Hair spray and a comb!" He glances at Steve. "Make that the industrial hold hair spray!" Then he glances at Steve again. "And make that comb a brush."*

*"Hey wait just a minute....!"*

*Steve tries to protest but Deidre is a pro with the hairspray and brush and Steve is just mere putty in her hands.*

*"Owwwww! Hey watch it! Leave me some hair!"*

*"Just trying to beat this cowlick into submission." Deidre says as the guys laugh.*

*"Cowlick? I don't have a.....owwwwww!"*

*They brush, they tease and they spray and before Steve knows it he is coifed to perfection, just so long as nobody lights a match Steve thinks. Steve gets back into his place beside Ross.*

*"Hey cutie what's your name?" Ross asks and the others laugh.*

*"Shut.....up!" Steve says.*

*The photographer looks thru the viewfinder again. "Deidre!" He yells.*

*"Oh what now!" Neal says. "These pants are hot!"*

*"Who told you to wear them anyway?" Steve asks as the others listen.*

*"Chicks man! Chicks love leather pants, it's a whole....Zen thing." Neal says as the others nod their heads.*

*"Deidre! His nose is shiny!" The photographer yells.*

*"Whose nose?" Steve asks.*

*“Your nose.” Smitty says. “Shiny.” He says as he taps himself on the nose.*

*“Yeah Steve you could signal planes with that shiny beak of yours.” Neal says as he smiles.*

*Steve’s eyes cross as he looks down at his nose then Deidre appears with a powder puff and she powdered Steve’s nose.*

*“Arrrrccchhooooo!” Steve says as a reaction to the powder.*

*The photographer claps his hands. “Okay, let’s do this before leather boy there starts to chafe.” The photographer says as everyone laughs and Neal simply glares at him. “Okay....ah Gregg! Rest your hands on the shoulder of him and him.” He points to Neal and Smitty.*

*“You smile.” He says as he points to Neal. “Just a little, you grab the lapels of your jacket and cross your foot...yeah yeah perfect.” He says to Ross. “And you....you just look cute, tilt your head just a....that’s it! Perfect.” He says to Steve. Okay everybody say Gold Record!”*

## 1980

*“Steve those sideburns have got to go.” Neal says.*

*“I like my sideburns.” Steve says back.*

*“This is 1980.” Neal says again.*

*“You’re point being?” Steve says.*

*“Sideburns are so....passé.” Neal says.*

*“Passé...?”*

*“Yeah I’m going to start calling you Elvis.” Neal says.*

*“That would not be an insult; I happen to like the King, thank you, thank you very much.” Steve tries to say in his best Elvis voice possible.*

*“You need to keep up with the times, this is a new era, and it’s the 80’s!” Neal says.*

*“Look’s whose talking! You still have an afro bro!” Steve says.*

*“Not anymore! I had most of it weeded out so it isn’t as afro-ish as it once was.” Neal says.*

*“Hmmm well maybe so but I like my sideburns and when I get ready to make a change then I will.”*

### 1983

*Sooner or later change comes to all and Steve is no exception but sometimes it is either by choice or sometimes fate steps in and in Steve’s case fate stepped in a big hole, make that a ditch.*

*It was a three month hiatus because the guys needed a break but now it was over, their vacations just a sweet memory and a lot of pictures, and they had gotten together at Neal’s house to discuss the new album and tour that would eventually follow, they were laying down strategy and waiting on Steve.*

*“He is fashionably late.” Ross says as he takes this opportunity to show his vacation pictures around.*

*“Yeah he is always something. He likes to make an entrance.” Neal says.*

*Just then they hear a commotion outside, Neal’s dog barking like crazy and by now Neal has come to recognize his barks and this one is he has something treed at the same time they hear the trash cans fall over with a loud, metallic clang and somebody yelling.*

*“Hey that sounds like Steve!” Smitty replies.*

*“NEAL! NE.....AL! NE...AL!”*

*They hear Steve yelling from outside. They all get up from the table and they run to the back door and Neal throws it open and he turns on the outside lights. As they huddle around the door they see Neal’s dog sitting at the base of the large oak tree in Neal’s backyard, barking, and Steve hanging from the limb above.*

*“Neal! Call your damn dog off!” Steve yells.*

*Immediately they all begin to laugh.*

*“Yeah, yeah real funny.” Steve says as he looks down at the dog.*

*When Neal finally stops laughing he goes out to the porch and down the stairs, the guys following him out to the porch, Neal walks out to the tree his hands on his hips, a smile on his face.*

*“What in the hell are you doing up there?” Neal asks.*

*“Practicing to be a squirrel! What do you think; your damn dog chased me up here!” The dog barks at him again. “Could you....you know....do something with him?”*

*“Why did he chase you?” Neal asks as he pets him. “He knows you.”*

*Steve is frustrated by now. “Well Neal if you hold him I will get down from here and tell you!”*

*Neal grabs a hold of his collar and he holds him then Steve warily gets down from the tree limb and as he hits the ground he runs into the house. Neal lets him go then he follows the others into the house he shuts the door behind him.*

*“Now tell me Steve what....” Neal says as he turns back around then he stops when he sees Steve. “Whoa....!”*

*The other three guys are all standing and staring at Steve their mouths open and Steve looks right back at them, his hands on his hips, his hiking boot clad foot tapping with profound impatience. “What?” Steve finally says.*

*Neal covers his mouth with his hand as he walks in circles around Steve his eyes as big as saucers then Neal points. “What happened....”*

*“To your hair?” The other three say in chorus with something close to horror in their voices.*

*“I got a haircut okay!” Steve says.*

*Ross approaches him and he sticks his finger out and Steve watches him as he comes closer to him and Ross points. “Is that real?” Ross asks.*

*“Yeah can I touch it?” Smitty asks.*

*“No, you can’t touch it and yes it is real!” Steve says as he bats Ross’s hand away from him. “You guys act like you’ll never seen a mustache before.”*

*“Of course we have, just not on you.” Jon says.*

*“Yeah Steve that is impressive, so what did you do, cut it off your head and super glued it to your upper lip?” Neal says as he laughs and the others join in.*

*“What in the hell does that mean? What....you guys didn’t think I could grow a mustache?” Steve asks as the guys look at one another.*

*“Well Steve you know....it’s the Portuguese thing.....now Neal here,” Ross points to Neal. “Is the sheepdog of the band?”*

*“Hey!” Neal says loudly.*

*“I meant Neal is who he is and you.” Ross points to Steve. “Are who you are....”*

*Steve looks at Ross. “What in the Sam Hill does that mean?”*

*“Neal is Italian and you are Portuguese.” Ross says.*

*“Wait...are you inferring that Neal has more testosterone because he is....Italian?”*

*Neal smiles and he crosses his arms over his chest as he rocks back and forth on the balls of his feet. “Oh yeah...I am the Italian Stallion!”*

*“Hey! Is that gray hair?” Jon asks.*

*“No!” Steve says loudly. “I don’t understand why you guys are freaking, I mean, eventually, you know...I mean...Smitty! You...you have had a mustache and Ross...Ross so have you and Neal had that....whatchamacallit back in the 70’s...that ah...ah...” Steve snaps his fingers. “That stupid Fu Man Chu thing!” Steve says.*

*“Hmmm.” Neal says slightly offended.*

*Ross stands there, one arm crossed over his chest and his hand up to his mouth, then he starts to wag his finger at Steve as he walks around him, Ross’s eyes closed slightly, his eyebrows knitted together as he thinks then his eyes open wide as he snaps his fingers.*

*“Now I know who you remind me of!”*

*“Yeah who?” Smitty then asks.*

*“Yeah who?” Jon and Neal say at the same time.*

*Steve looks around at them. “Stop! You sound like a bunch of owls! Who? Who do I remind you of?” Steve asks curiously.*

*“Wayne Newton!” Ross says proudly then they laugh hysterically, Neal and Smitty holding each other up as they laugh and Jon laughs so hard he cries.*

*“Wayne Newton?” Steve says with a shocked expression. “Uh huh! No I don’t!”*

*“Uh huh! You do! Look!” Ross then pulls his wallet out of his back pocket and he opens it and he pulls a picture out of it and then he hands it to Steve.*

*“You carry a picture of Wayne Newton in your wallet?” Steve asks as he looks at Ross.*

*“Yeah, see it’s autographed, I saw him in Las Vegas, I am...a fan!”*

*“Yeah Steve he’s a singer.” Smitty says. “And he plays the guitar and the drums and you do bear an uncanny resemblance.”*

*“Yeah Steve do you play the banjo by chance?” Ross asks.*

*“The....the banjo?” Steve asks as he looks at the picture and he runs two fingers over his mustache. “He isn’t a bad looking guy...I mean...I don’t look anything like him...here!” Steve hands the picture back to him.*

*“So....Steve why did you get a haircut?” Jon asks him.*

*“Yeah Steve why?” Smitty asks.*

*“Yeah why?” Ross and Neal ask.*

*“Because...because I wanted to...you know....it was time for a change...it was time to rearrange!” Steve laughs as he quotes the old song lyrics and no one else is laughing.*

*“Are you sure Steve?” Jon asks.*

*“Yeah, sure I’m sure....” Steve clears his throat. “Why?”*

*“Because I heard something...different.” Jon says as he looks around at the others.*

*“What?” Smitty asks.*

*“Yeah Jon give, what did you hear?” Neal asks.*

*Ross rubs his hands together. “Oh boy gossip! What! What!”*

*Jon lets them stew a little as he milks the moment for all it is worth, he looks at Steve and Steve nervously looks back at Jon.*

*“Ah! He’s bluffing he don’t know anything!” Steve says as Jon walks closer to Steve and since he is taller Steve has to look up at him.*

*“Tell them who Frank is Steve.” Jon says as he looks down at him.*

*Steve swallows. “Frank?”*

*“Frank?” Neal, Ross and Smitty say as they look at one another.*

*“Yeah Frank. Frank is in Sausalito...Frank is a genius...Frank is a...”*

*Steve shakes his head back and forth a look of sheer terror on his mustached face. “Don’t say it....don’t say it!” Steve practically begs him.*

*“Stylish!”*

*Jon takes great pleasure in saying as Neal, Ross and Smitty gasp audibly, their eyes wide, their mouths even wider taking on the appearances of three large mouth Bass in a small lake then from somewhere they hear a sound of an organ, like the ones that used to play on old soap operas after somebody had dropped a bombshell. They all look around.*

*“Ohhhh nice sound effect.” Ross says impressed.*

*“Steve, you have a stylish?” Neal says.*

*“No!” Steve turns to Neal. “Frank is a barber!”*

*“Does he have a....pole?” Smitty asks.*

*“A pole?” They all ask in unison.*

*“Yeah a barber pole, you know, a red and white barber pole.” Smitty explains. “That is how you tell that it is a barber shop....otherwise...it would be called a....” Smitty looks at all of them but then he focuses on Steve. “Salon!”*

*Again they hear the sound of the organ and then Steve loses it.*

*“Alright then! Okay! I...I didn’t want you to know!” Steve says as he pushes Jon away and he paces around the room holding his hands to his head. “It’s true! There is no barber pole! Frank’s is a....salon and yes....yes I did get my hair cut there! Ohhhh the humiliation, the shame and I have to tell you something else....!”*

*“Uh oh...you mean....there’s more!” Neal asks.*

*Steve then crosses the small space between them and he grabs Neal by the forearms as he says. "Ohhhh yes...there is a lot more....I....I...got the full treatment!"*

*"Steve....oh my god what are you saying?" Smitty asks horrified.*

*"I mean...I got the wash...deep conditioning...the cut....!"*

*"Steve! Steve! Stop it! I don't think I can take anymore!" Ross pleads.*

*Steve lets Neal go and he approaches Ross as Ross shies away.*

*"Oh no! You wanted to hear it! You wanted the truth! I even got it blown dry and....and they threw in the scalp massage...for free!"*

*Again they all gasp audibly and once again there is the organ.*

*"You know after awhile that could become annoying." Ross replies.*

*"But! But how did you find out! You weren't there!" Steve yells at Jon.*

*"No I wasn't there but...my wife...was!" Jon replies.*

*"You're....your....!" Smitty says.*

*"Wife?" Neal and Ross both say then they look at Steve and Steve looks back at them.*

*"Arrgggghhhh! Is nothing sacred! Is nothing private! Yes...yes...okay...it is...a unisex salon!"*

*"Oh my god!" Neal says. "Steve how could you?"*

*"Wait...isn't that against your religion?" Ross asks.*

*"She also told me why you had to get it cut." Jon says.*

*Steve's eyes widen. "Oh my god!" He exclaims.*

*"He had to get it cut?" Neal says.*

*"What do you mean he had to?" Ross asks as he looks at Steve. "Steve you weren't doing some weird, medieval, sexual type of thing...were you?"*

*Steve looks shocked. "No! Of course not!"*

*“Shit!” They all say.*

*“Oh oh oh I know!” Smitty says as he raises his hand sounding a lot like Arnold Horshack on Welcome Back Kotter. “You lost a bet!”*

*“No!” Steve says.*

*“You got too close to your barbeque grill?” Ross asks.*

*“No!” Steve says.*

*Neal snaps his fingers. “Sherrie was jealous because your hair was better than hers so she.....”*

*“No!” Steve says again. “It was a....accident.”*

*Ross looks incredulous. “A what? How can you have a haircut accident?”*

*Steve balls his fists up as he says. “No! I didn’t say it was a haircut accident I said it was a...accident! I had an accident! I got gum stuck in my hair!”*

*They all look at one another. “Gum?”*

*“Yes gum dammit! I got gum stuck in my hair so I had to.....!”*

*“Was it spearmint?” Ross asks. “Or was it wintergreen?”*

*“What! Well hell I don’t know I wasn’t chewing it!” Steve says.*

*This time they all close their mouths and they just look and they all get a disgusted look on their faces.*

*“I was....was....driving Sherrie’s car...you know...the convertible?” Steve looks at them and they all nod their heads in unison. “I was on the 101 and I was trying to pass a semi.....I came up alongside of him....the trucker rolled down his window and.....”*

*“Ewwwwww!” Smitty says.*

*“Done in by A.C.G.” Ross says.*

*“A.C.G.?” Neal asks.*

*“Already chewed gum.” Ross says.*

*“Bleeecccchhhh!” Neal replies.*

*“I must admit that is...gross!” Jon says.*

*“How in the hell do you think I felt?” Steve says as he shudders.*

*Neal comes over and he puts his arm around Steve’s shoulder to comfort him. “Steve it is alright, it’s over now. You let it grow out and you promise never, ever to go back there, again.”*

*“Yeah Steve you know we all make...bad choices.” Smitty says.*

*“But the most important thing is, you told us, you said it out loud and that is the first step. We will be here for you Steve.” Jon says as he gives Steve a hug.*

*“Yeah we can find a chapter of H.S.A.” Neal says.*

*“H.S.A.?” Steve asks.*

*“Hair Salons Anonymous. You know they say that this can lead to worst things.” Neal says.*

*“What?” Steve asks worried.*

*Neal looks around then he says. “Teasing, crimping, braids....”*

*“Oh yeah and in some cases...hair extensions.” Smitty says.*

*“And some people get so desperate that they have to....” Jon lowers his voice as he says. “Dye their hair!”*

*They all gasp as Jon nods his head. “Oh yeah yeah by then it is too late.”*

*“Oh yeah but you know Steve some people aren’t even affected by their first Salon experience.” Smitty says.*

*“As long as you didn’t enjoy it....” Jon says then Steve blushes and he looks down at the floor.*

*“Oh no Steve say it isn’t so!” Neal replies.*

*“I couldn’t help it guys! Those women there are pros! Their techniques....”*

*“Stop!” Neal says as he covers his ears.*

*“Magda....oh my god! She took me by my hand and she led me to the sinks....the warm sudsy water....the smell of the shampoo and the conditioner...elevator music over the speakers...”*

*Steve’s eyes become glassy and Jon slaps him hard across the face then he grabs him. “Steve! Steve! Snap out of it!”*

*“What?! Oh! Oh! I’m sorry....I don’t know what came over me...” Steve says as he looks around at everyone.*

*“That is alright Steve it happens to the strongest of us....” Smitty says.*

*“Yeah, yeah we can do a hair intervention.” Neal says.*

*Suddenly tears come to Steve’s eyes and he wipes them away. “Gee thanks you guys are the best...I feel a group hug coming on.”*

*They all hug for a few minutes. “Okay that is enough!” Steve says.*

*There are silent for a few minutes all of them searching themselves and knowing but for the grace of god go I then Ross says, “Why didn’t you just use some ice?”*

*“Ice?” Steve says as the others look at Ross.*

*“Yeah ice, you get an ice cube and put it on the gum and when it gets hard you....can....get....it....out....of....your....hair.” Neal, Smitty and Jon look at Ross then they look at Steve and a bad look covers their faces.*

*Steve then gets a look on his face like he is about to have a stroke then he grabs Ross and he shakes him as he yells. “OH MY GOD! YOU MEAN I DIDN’T HAVE TO CUT MY HAIR OFF!!”*

*Steve’s eyes roll up in the back of his head, he swoons and before Neal can catch him Steve faints and he lands on the floor in a heap.*

*“Steve! Steve!” Neal says as he grabs a magazine and he starts to fan him.*

*“Elevate his feet!” Smitty yells.*

*“Get a wet washcloth!” Jon yells.*

*“Forget all of that check his mouth for some gum!!” Ross yells.*

*Okay, okay I know it is a slight exaggeration but hey it is the best explanation I've heard why Steve cut his long hair off. Right. RIGHT! Yeah I knew you would agree.*

**1986**

*Steve and the other guys have been working out for months getting ready for the Raised on Radio tour and Steve was buff. He could easily bench press a moose that is if he wanted to and he felt great but things were happening in his life and things had happened, Sherrie was history and his mom was ill and he had been taking care of her so he felt he needed something....a change. They were in the locker room of their private Journey gym and Steve was primping and flexing in front of the mirror, Jon had just gotten out of the shower and Neal had been waiting his turn, sitting on the bench reading the paper.*

*“What in the wide world of sports is Steve doing?” Jon asks Neal as he glances over at Steve.*

*“Admiring himself.” Neal says.*

*“Does he have to do that where we can see him?” Jon asks and Neal shrugs.*

*By now Steve has finished at the mirror and as he heads for his locker he has to pass by Neal and as he does he looks at him but he doesn't stop, he goes over to his locker and he fiddles with the combination and then he opens it then he turns and looks at Neal again. Then his curiosity gets the better of him so goes over behind Neal and he looks at the top of Neal's head and he studies it hard then he reaches out and pulls on a strand of Neal's kinky hair.*

*“What are you doing?” Neal asks as he continues to read the paper. Neal has long since stopped being bothered by Steve and his weird ways.*

*“I am just looking.” Steve says.*

*“Looking at what?” Neal asks.*

*“Your hair.” Steve says.*

*“What about my hair?” Neal asks.*

*“It's curly.” Steve says and Jon laughs.*

*“And you just now noticed this?” Neal asks as he tilts his head back and he looks at Steve.*

*“Well yeah I guess I have.” Steve says as he comes around the bench. “I mean I am in the best shape of my life, I changed my body so I think I want to make another change.”*

*“Such as?” Jon asks.*

*“I want to change my hairstyle.” Steve announces.*

*“Oh is that all?” Jon says as he continues to dress and Neal goes back to reading his paper.*

*“I mean a radical change. I feel...adventurous!”*

*“How radical?” Jon asks. “I mean you aren’t going to go...blonde...or anything like that...are you?”*

*Neal laughs as he turns a page of the paper. “Blonde! Can you image him as a blonde?”*

*Steve looks at them. “That is an idea but no...I was thinking...I want curly hair!”*

*Jon looks at Neal and he points his finger at him and he says, “You mean...like him?”*

*Neal puts down his paper and he looks at Jon. “You know I don’t think I like how you said that....”*

*“Well tough beans! I think you’re too sensitive anyway....you throw a hissy fit about people spelling your name wrong and now I just say one thing about your hair and you.....” Jon says.*

*Neal stands up and he throws his paper on the bench. “I’m too sensitive?”*

*“Guys! Guys!” Steve says but nobody is paying attention to him as Neal and Jon get louder and louder so Steve jumps up on the bench and he puts two fingers in his mouth and he whistles.....loud.....Jon and Neal both stop and they look at him.*

*“Wow Steve where did you learn to do that?” Jon asks impressed.*

*“New York. You know in New York if you want to call a cab...” Steve says.*

*“I think they call it hailing a cab...” Jon corrects him.*

*“Oh yeah you know you may be right....” Steve says.*

*“Enough about the fucking cabs! Steve, get back on the subject, you know, your hair.” Neal says.*

*“Oh yeah right, well I want curly hair but not that....curly. I am tired of straight hair I want to experience life on the curly side of the fence.”*

*“Uh huh yeah right!! You know Steve curly hair isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. Sometimes I....I.” Neal doesn’t finish and Jon looks at him.*

*“Sometimes you what...?” Steve asks sincerely.*

*“Yeah Neal what?” Jon asks.*

*“Ahhhhh it’s silly, you guys will laugh.” Neal says.*

*“Oh no no we won’t.” Jon says.*

*“Yeah Neal share.” Steve encourages him.*

*“Well, sometimes I wished that I had long straight hair, like yours.” Neal says.*

*“Really?” Steve says surprised.*

*“Yeah having curly hair is hard sometimes, especially when it rains, oh brother!”*

*“Neal hair envy is a natural thing. Never be ashamed to share how you really feel.” Jon says. “You know I always wondered what it would be like....to go curly too.”*

*“Really?” Steve says excitedly as he jumps down off of the bench. “New album, new tour and new Steve and Jon. We can do this! How do we do this?” Steve asks and in response Jon just shakes his head and he shrugs.*

*“I think you have to get something called a perm.” Neal says.*

*“A perm? What’s that exactly?” Steve asks.*

*“I don’t know but my wife is always talking about them and after she gets one she looks great...so...I guess that is what you ask for.” Neal says.*

*“Got it!” Steve says happily.*

*“And I know where we can go! My wife goes to this place and there is this sign in the window advertising perms. I’ll call them and set up an appointment.” Jon says.*

*Jon called and set it up for after hours and they would have to pay extra for that but hey they didn’t care, all was fair in love and hair care. They get to the hair place and they are shown in and the door is locked behind them and the blinds pulled, there are three women there and one is the manager.*

*“Hello Mr. Cain.” She says.*

*“Hello Margie. Margie I want you to meet Steve....”*

*“Oh! I already know who he is. Hello Mr. Perry it is very, very nice to meet you.”*

*“Thank you Margie it is very nice to meet you too and please call me Steve.”*

*“This is Cindy and Stephanie.” Margie says.*

*Steve laughs. “Stephanie? That is pretty close to Steve....maybe she can do me...I mean she can do my hair....I mean.....”*

*They all laugh and it breaks the ice.*

*“Alright gentleman have a seat and they will get started. I’ll be in the back if you need anything.”*

*Steve and Jon sit in the chairs and the girls cover them with their smocks.*

*“So...let us get this straight....you two want a perm, right?” Stephanie says.*

*They both nod their heads. “Yes that is right.” Steve says.*

*Stephanie and Cindy look knowingly at one another then she runs her fingers thru Steve’s hair. “Okay then. You need a trim then we do the perm and this could take a while. It’s a long boring process so if you want to go sleep.....”*

*“My wife speaks highly of this place and we trust you...” Jon says.*

*“What about you....Steve?” Stephanie asks him.*

*“I don’t have a wife and I put myself in your very capable and lovely hands.” Steve says as he smiles up at her.*

*“Oh brother.” Jon says as he shakes his head.*

*“Alright Cindy battle stations!” Stephanie says as she grabs her scissors.*

*Almost immediately when Stephanie started trimming his hair he closed his eyes and he dozed off and he had no conscience sense of anything going on until he smelt a very noxious and pungent order, in all of his 37 years he had never smelled anything so.....bad! Well okay.....that was a lie...he has smelled worst things but that is another tale for another time.*

*It was a very sharp, chemical type smell and when he finally pried his eyes open they burned from the stench. He can only keep them open to little slits as he manages to turn his chair around in the direction of the mirror and then he raises his head and he takes a look. Even though the fumes are almost unbearable his eyes fly wide open and he comes up and out of the chair and he looks in the mirror and his hands go up to his head where he is wearing a silly little plastic cap and peeking out on either side.....are curlers. Yeah that is what they are alright. Curlers. C...u...r...l...e...r...s. Steve can't believe that he is wearing curlers and that is when he screams.*

*His scream awakens Jon who was also asleep and he sits up and he tries to get out of his chair and he trips and falls to the floor. Steve helps him up and when Jon stands up they both look at one another, both are wearing blue plastic smocks and Steve, being the shorter between the two, his falls passed his knees and they both are wearing the silly plastic shower type cap and Jon also has curlers peeking out from underneath his.*

*They both point at one another, speechless and their faces turned into grimaces and their eyes merely slits.*

*“YOU'RE.....YOU'RE.....WEARING....CURLERS!!”*

*They both say to each other at the same time then they both scream and by now the three women have ran out from the back room and they stop.*

*“What in the hell is going on out here?” Margie asks.*

*“LOOK!“ They both say at the same time and then they both begin to gesture wildly and Steve suddenly begins to spout gibberish he is talking so fast.*

*“He....he....he....looks like my mother-in-law!!” Jon says.*

*“Ohhhh that was rude!” Steve says. “We're wearing.....curlers!” Then Steve starts to scurry around the shop, he checks the front door to make sure that it is locked and he pulls the blind down on it even further then he continues onto the other windows making sure that they are locked as well and that the blinds are down far enough.*

*“What are you doing?” Jon asks.*

*“You don’t want anybody to see us like this...do you?!” Steve says.*

*“Oh hell no!” Jon says.*

*Stephanie, Margie and Cindy watch Steve running around. “Guys what did you think a perm was?” Stephanie asks.*

*“Well....we didn’t know exactly. Why didn’t you ask your wife?” Steve says to Jon.*

*“Me? This...this was your idea! You...you....talked me into it! Why didn’t you ask somebody?” Jon says back to him.*

*“My idea? I talked you into it?” Steve says.*

*“I am glad that you agree!” Jon says as he crosses his arms over his chest.*

*Steve makes a face. “I don’t and I didn’t! And I don’t have anybody to ask.”*

*“Guys...you have about 20 more minutes to go and then it will be all over.” Stephanie says as they look up at the clock and Steve starts to laugh.*

*“You know you do look pretty ridiculous.” Steve says to Jon.*

*“Yeah so do you.” Jon says as he smiles back.*

*Just then they hear a noise from the back room it is the sound of a door slamming shut and they all turn to look in its direction.*

*“Oh shit! “ Jon exclaims.*

*“Did you girls forget to lock the back door?” Steve says.*

*Before any of them could respond Neal runs into the room and he slides across the slick floor yelling. “Guys! Guys! Stop! Don’t do it! I know what a perm is and you have to wear.....” Neal slides to a stop against one of the chairs and only then does he look up. “Curlers....!” Then he breaks into uncontrollable, hysterical laughter, he doubles over, he laughs so hard he cries.*

*“Oh my god! Oh my god! Look at you two!”*

*Neal walks over to them and looks at them with a smirk on his face. “Pewwwww! What is that smell?” Neal asks as he holds his nose.*

*Jon and Steve look at Stephanie. “Oh that is the solution it makes the hair curly. Wow! Who did your hair?” Stephanie asks in awe as she approaches Neal.*

*“God.” He simply answers. “I am Neal.”*

*“Stephanie. Happy to meet you may I....?” Stephanie gestures.*

*“Oh be my guest and I am very happy to meet you.” Neal smiles as Stephanie reaches out and she feels a strand of his hair.*

*“It’s a little dry I have some conditioner for that...”*

*Steve and Jon roll their eyes. “Hey what about us?” Steve says.*

*“You have ten more minutes.” Stephanie says.*

*“Oh man I wish I had a camera! I see the opportunity for some great blackmail potential.” Neal says as he smiles.*

*“I have some coffee in the back room would you like a cup or two?” Stephanie asks Neal as she flashes her best come hither white smile.*

*“Hey she didn’t offer us any beverages.” Jon says to Steve.*

*“Yeah and I bet that she has some of those Petridge Farms cookies back there too.” Steve says.*

*“Oh shit you know I really love those!” Jon says.*

*Neal offers her his arm and she takes it as they walk towards the back room. “You know I always wanted to try and straighten my hair, do you think, you could help me out there Stephanie?”*

*“Oh yeah I could really straighten your hair.” She says.*

*“Ahhhh excuse me! What about us? The guys in curlers?” Steve yells.*

*“Hello!” Jon says as he waves his hands. “By the way he is married!”*

*“Hey I’m single!” Steve yells.*

*“How long is this stuff supposed to stay in?” Jon yells as they hear the door close and he shrugs as he looks at Steve. “I guess it doesn’t matter. Oh look man they have Cosmo!”*

*Twenty minutes later the girls return to remove the curlers.*

*“ARGGGGHHHHHHHHH!” They both scream. “YOU.....YOU....LOOK LIKE....LIKE....LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE!!!”*

*The moral of the story is ‘be careful what you wish for.’*

**1996**

*Trial by Fire.....Journey’s Back.....Trial by Fire. Oh yeah in the last ten years a lot has gone on, the last album Raised on Radio, his life spiraling out of control, the people that he had loved and continued to do so, gone. He feels like an orphan. All of his primary family members passed away and he was the only one strong enough to take care of them and then he sat back and watched the inevitable and he was the only one left to pick up the pieces, so after all that was said and done he had FTLOSM. He did the tour thing of small venues across the country and now two years later he heard the call of Journey and he...answered. Heaven help him. It had been awhile since he seen the guys, they talked a lot but so far as seeing each other, well no.*

*This was a breakfast meeting and it was early because if you wanted to get anywhere in California you left early, preferably the day before, traffic was that bad. He arrived at the new offices and with this venture everything was new and sparkling, new office building, new manager, new music and his new black SUV, which he loved, it was big and roomy and there was plenty of space for all of his stuff. So he parked it next to the other cars that he didn’t recognize and he got out and he went to the door and it was a heavy door with a little window at the top and of course it was locked.*

*“Good morning. May I help you?”*

*Steve jumped at the sound of a voice not attached to a body and he looks around.*

*“Look up at the camera.” The voice says again and Steve looks up and he waves.*

*“Well hello there. I’m Steve Perry and you are...?”*

*“Security. I’ll buzz you in and we’re go from there.” The voice says and then in the next minute Steve hears a buzzing noise and the door unlocks and he pulls on the handle and he goes in and the door automatically shuts hard and loud behind him with a loud ‘click’ and the sound echoes down the hall which is long, devoid of any pictures, and at the end of the hall was a light so Steve goes towards the light. At the end of the hall was a circular lobby, white sterile, a stainless steel round reception type desk and a uniformed security officer standing behind it and at the opposite end of the room was another door just like the first.*

*“Holy....guacamole.” Steve says as he looks around and he whistles. “This is some..setup.” He says as he approaches the desk.*

*The desk top was empty and the Security Officer was cute, red hair and green eyes, peaches and cream complexion.*

*“Okay so what happens now? Do I sign in?”*

*“No not exactly.” She answers as she reaches for something out of Steve’s view and Steve is surprised when she produces a microphone, at least, it sorta looked like a microphone.*

*Steve laughs. “What am I supposed to do with that?”*

*“What do you think?” She asks without changing her expression.*

*“Well I mean I know what I am supposed to do with it but its way too early for me to sing....”*

*“All you have to do is hit one high note.” She says.*

*Steve laughs again. “Oh is that all? That isn’t as easy as it sounds. What happens if I don’t.....?”*

*“Then you don’t go in.” She says as she motions with her head. “Come on I know you can do it. I have the patience of a saint and the faith of the angels invested in you?”*

*Steve is shocked and he isn’t sure that he heard her right. “Wait...what did you just say...my mother used to say that to me. Can...I warm up...first?”*

*“Of course.” She says.*

*Steve would go and stand in the corner and focus but since this is a round room there are no corners available so he turns back up the hallway and with his back to the room he closes his eyes. It is awfully early in the morning so he goes slowly at first. He starts with the scales, the low end, taking his time, elongating each note, letting his vocal cords wrap around the note and doing with it what they will then when he feels the time is right he continues on reaching the higher end of the scale. The sound leaves his throat and runs around the room, the echo coming back to him like a freight train and when he opens his eyes he is standing in front of the reception desk, holding the microphone.*

*He looks around his eyes wide. "Wow that was weird! How did I get over here?"*

*She takes the microphone from him and she smiles. "How do you think? That was perfect, you may go in now."*

*She motions with her head in the direction of the door which is now opened and Steve looks then he crosses the room and he crosses over the threshold and when he does the door swings shut with a loud 'thud.' Steve finds himself in another round room, this time carpeted and filled with a huge conference table and comfy chairs and the others are already here, standing around, drinking coffee and they are all dressed in black and they turn to look. It is a tableau in oldness. They are all older. Steve Smith smiles at him as he sets his coffee cup down on the table then he comes over and he hugs Steve then they look at each other.*

*"Wow Steve! Holy shit...you have a lot of...hair!"*

*"And you Steve...have none. What happened?"*

*Smitty runs his hand over his bald head. "Well I could use the excuse that I pulled it all out over my ex-wife and kids but the truth is...I shaved it off before it fell out."*

*"I heard that you had...hair extensions." Neal says.*

*"Not true. This is all mine."*

*Ross comes over and he shakes Steve's hand then he tugs hard on Steve's hair.*

*"Owww!"*

*"Hey guys it is real." Ross yells back at them.*

*"Well yeah!" Steve says as he rubs his head. "This is some place."*

*“Here Steve have some coffee and look they have your favorite muffins.” Neal says as he motions to the table that Steve swears wasn’t there before. He walks over to the table.*

*“Hey they do! Blueberry muffins with the crumbly stuff on top!” Steve grabs a plate and a muffin and a cup of coffee and he takes a sip.*

*“Hmmm this is delicious! This has got to be the best cup of coffee that I have ever had.”*

*“Okay guys let’s have a seat.” Jon says as they all sit down and there is only one chair left and Steve sits in it and it immediately forms to fit his body.*

*“Woweeee! Oh man! I love this chair! This is a amazing place and security is really tight here, I mean, this place is locked up tighter than Fort Knox and that security lady out front, she is really cute! Red hair and green eyes. I just don’t understand why all the subterfuge, I mean, this is just an office building and you know what is really strange I don’t remember this being here before.”*

*Neal drinks some coffee. “That security lady out front isn’t real.”*

*Steve laughs and he is waiting on the punch line. “What...? What do you mean she isn’t real?”*

*“She is a hologram.” Ross says as he drinks some coffee.*

*“She’s a holo...what?” Steve asks.*

*“A hologram. She is a projected image created internally and she is whatever you want her to be. You said that you saw her as a red head, green eyes and cute, right?” Ross asks.*

*Steve nods his head. “Right.”*

*“Because that is the type of woman that you like. We all saw a different type of woman and you really don’t want to know what Neal saw....”*

*They all look at Neal. “What? I happened to like blonde women, big breasted, a lot younger and with limited intelligent so they don’t see all of my faults. I ask you is there anything wrong with that?”*

*“Her name was Inga.” Smitty says as he drinks some coffee.*

*Steve notices that they continue to drink coffee but their cups always seem to be full and steaming and the cups look familiar. Steve scratches his head.*

*“Anything wrong Steve?” Jon asks.*

*“Well now that you mentioned it.” Steve looks around. “Doesn’t this sorta look...familiar? I mean when I first came in here the furniture looked different...but now.”*

*“Now Steve?” Jon asks.*

*“Well yeah this is the set from After the Fall video, I mean the table and the chairs and those huge, white Texas size coffee mugs. This is weird!” Steve leans over the table. “Did you guys have to do anything...special...to get in here?”*

*They all nod their heads in unison then Jon says, “I had to play a keyboard that was bolted to a warehouse wall.”*

*“I had to play trashcans.” Smitty says.*

*“And I stood there....looking cool.” Ross says.*

*“Neal...what did you have to do?” Steve asks and the others look as they drink more coffee.*

*“I had to show Inga that it wasn’t really a sock.” Neal says. “All that hair is really yours right?”*

*Steve looks frustrated. “Yes dammit! How many times are you going to ask me that?”*

*“How long did it take you to grow it that long?” Ross asks.*

*“I stopped cutting it in 1988 and well you see the results. I thought we came here to talk about the new album....”*

*“Is it healthy....your hair I mean?” Neal asks.*

*Then Steve is surprised when Ross grabs a handful and he looks at the ends of Steve’s hair with a magnifying glass.*

*“No split ends.” He announces happily. “Nice shine and a healthy texture.”*

*“What shampoo and conditioner do you use?” Jon asks.*

*“You don’t blow dry it do you because you know that isn’t good.” Smitty says.*

*Steve then stands up and he leans on the table. "Hey! What does my hair have to do with the new album?"*

*"It has everything to do with the new album." Neal says.*

*"Which by the way is going to be called TBF." Ross says as he looks at his nails.*

*"TBF? What does that mean?" Steve asks.*

*"Well for the general buying public it will stand for 'Trial by Fire'" Neal replies as they all change into positions they that were in the After the Fall video.*

*"What do you mean for the general buying public? What does it really mean...?"*

*"Transcelestial Babe Funding." Ross says.*

*Steve makes a face. "Transcelestial....? Is that some of new bank I am not aware of....oh! It is Swedish right?" Steve looks at them. "Right guys?"*

*"No not exactly." Jon says.*

*"Wait! What did you mean when you said that my hair has everything to do with the new album?"*

*"Because it does and in some ways TBF is a...financial institution...right guys?" Neal asks them and they all nod their heads.*

*"Okay guys I am in Wheel of Fortune land here so Pat I would like to buy a vowel because I can't solve the puzzle!!" Steve says loudly.*

*"We needed financial backing for the new album...." Neal says.*

*"Well that isn't unheard of..." Steve says.*

*"Yeah after you jumped the Journey Mothership in 1986 and disappeared we really didn't have a choice...." Ross says.*

*"Well guys I explained all of that....." Steve says.*

*"So when we decided to do this new album we went to a lot of different places...." Smitty says.*

*"And they all turned us down...." Jon says.*

*“Because we were a bad risk....” Ross says.*

*“A....bad risk?” Steve says.*

*“Oh yeah....ten years went by Steve...we were basically in a holding pattern...while you had...” Neal says.*

*“FTLOSM.” They all say together.*

*“Hey! I funded FTLOSM myself! I used my own money.....!” Steve says as he points to himself.*

*“We know that but we weren’t that lucky...” Neal says.*

*“But...but...what about all the solo projects you guys did? What happened to all of that money...?” Steve asks.*

*“Ex-wives.” They all say.*

*“Bad investments.” They all say again.*

*“Bankruptcy.” Ross says.*

*“The government.” They all say.*

*“So you see we wanted and we needed to do another album...” Neal says.*

*“And like we said no one would touch us...” Jon says.*

*“So we had to go a little farther...out.” Ross says.*

*“Actually a lot farther out...” Smitty says.*

*Steve is now getting a little worried actually he is getting a lot worried here. “Meaning what actually...? I still don’t understand....”*

*“You can thank Ross for this one.” Neal gestures at Ross as Steve looks down at him and he smiles and he wiggles his fingers at Steve. “He is actually the one that found TBF.”*

*“Yeah okay thanks Ross.” Steve says.*

*“Don’t mention it.” Ross says.*

*“The thing about TBF is they are a unique organization. An enigma wrapped inside of a mystery...” Neal says.*

*“Treasures in a jar of clay....” Jon says.*

*“Yeah Steve you can’t tame the lion...” Smitty says as he raises his eyebrows at him.*

*“Arrggghhh! Cut to the chase!” Steve yells.*

*Neal takes a deep breath. “The thing is they were very specific...”*

*“Yeah specific...” Ross says.*

*“Yeah Steve all financial....institutions....require some sort of...” Jon says.*

*“Collateral...” Smitty says.*

*“And in this case you’re...the collateral.” Neal says as he points at him without a hint of a smile.*

*Steve now knows that he is in the loony bin and the inmates are running the asylum. He looks around at all of them, his mouth open, and his hands on his hips then he starts to laugh. His high pitched squeal of a laugh.*

*“Oh man! Good one guys! You...you really had me going there but just for a second. Boy this is a lot of trouble to go thru just for a joke!” Steve laughs again but the others aren’t laughing as a matter of fact they all look like statues, very serious, statues.*

*“This is a joke...right? I mean guys...come on now! You can’t be...serious!”*

*“Do you see us laughing Steve?” Neal asks.*

*Steve looks around. “Well no...but...you can’t give a person as collateral! That is insane and illegal and...and...immoral and....and....it smacks highly of...slavery! That’s it! You....you...guys are crazy!”*

*“We can and we did and you won’t be a slave. Trust us.” Neal says.*

*Steve laughs again. “Trust you! Trust you! After you sold me to the...the highest bidder! Wait! Didn’t you guys say that you had to go a long way out to find this...this organization?”*

*They all nod their heads.*

*“Farther out than California?” Steve asks.*

*“Keep going.” Smitty says.*

*“Outside of the United States?” Steve asks.*

*“Oh yeah.” Ross says.*

*“Europe?” Steve asks.*

*“Go pass Europe and hang a left...up.” Ross points up and they all look up.*

*Steve stands there following Ross’s finger up, his hands on his hips, his face screwed up into a quizzical expression.*

*“Russia? You guys got money from Russia?” Steve asks.*

*They all groan and they shake their heads. “No!” Neal yells. “They are from a galaxy far, far away.” Neal says as he points to the sky. “They are from out there! They are from another....planet!”*

*Steve stands there looking at him. “You mean to tell me that they are...illegal aliens?” Steve whispers the last two words.*

*“No you dolt!! They aren’t from Mexico but yeah they are...ALIENS!” Neal yells the last word.*

*“Ah bunk and bashum! They are no such things as aliens! They are no little green men with those...those almond shaped eyes! “Steve demonstrates by putting his fingers up over his eyes in the shape of an almond. “No way Jose I don’t believe in aliens’ guys! Uh huh! Ain’t happening!”*

*“Don’t stop believing Steve.” Ross says.*

*“How do you think all of this got here?” Neal asks as he gestures around then they watch as Steve goes over to Ross and he pulls him out of his chair.*

*“Hey!” Ross says.*

*Steve then proceeds to turn the chair over and he looks at the bottom and not being satisfied he doesn’t stop there he goes over to every chair in the place and he does the same thing then he crawls underneath the table and he lays there looking up at the bottom of it.*

*“Neal I think he has flipped his wig!” Ross says.*

*“Yeah Neal! He can’t be crazy!” Smitty says.*

*“Yeah Neal remember they want zero defects!” Jon says.*

*“Yeah Neal they want all the original package! No dents, no dings, all the original parts and paint!” Ross says.*

*Neal waves his hands back and forth. “Alright, alright ready! Yes I know all of that! Just give me a...sec!” Neal then gets down on one knee and he looks at Steve lying underneath the table.*

*“Stevie whatcha doing?” Neal asks in his sweetest voice possible.*

*Steve takes a deep breath. “Looking for the tag that says ‘Made in China.’”*

*Neal rubs his eyes. “Steve there are no tags that say ‘Made in China’ the aliens did all of this. Remember how you said that you don’t remember this ever being here before?”*

*Steve nods his head as he looks at him.*

*“This is the house that the aliens built.” Neal says as he offers his hand and Steve just looks at it for a minute, then with a high degree of reluctance, he finally takes it and Neal helps him out from underneath the table. Ross turns a chair back up onto its feet and Neal helps Steve to sit.*

*“Man....I could really use some...sparkling water...with lemon.” Steve says and before he knows it Neal is holding a glass of said beverage before him. “With lime.” As Neal holds it the lemon changes into a lime and Steve laughs. “That is so cool! How about with one of those...you know...umbrellas?” As they watch an umbrella is added.*

*“Will you stop already? Here!” Neal says as Steve finally takes the water and he takes a drink.*

*“Hmmm it is perfect!”*

*“So...now do you believe us?” Neal asks.*

*Steve looks around. “Well....I don’t know. I just get this bad feeling that you aren’t telling...me....everything. I mean it’s a creepy type of feeling...are they friendly?” Steve asks.*

*“Oh yeah.” Ross says.*

*“What do they look like?” Steve asks.*

*“Well...we don’t really know...we haven’t seen them.” Ross says.*

*“You haven’t seen them? What is the name of this planet anyway?” Steve asks.*

*“Fa...lo...pi...an? Yeah, yeah Falopian.” Ross says.*

*“Falopian? Well that doesn’t sound too bad I guess. I must be crazy because I can’t believe that I am going along with this!”*

*The other four guys look at each other over Steve’s head as Steve drinks his water and he just happens to glance up and he sees a certain look on Neal’s face.*

*“What! What was that look for?!” Steve asks.*

*“Look? What look?!” Neal says.*

*“Yeah Steve you’re imaging things.” Ross says.*

*“Oh no I’m not!” Steve stands up and he puts his glass of water on the table but before it reaches the table a coaster appears underneath of it. “Wow! How did it know I have a thing about...rings? Anyway! If you don’t tell me I...I...will do something....drastic! Yeah that’s it! Drastic!” Steve says boldly.*

*“Oh yeah what will you do?” Neal asks as he crosses his arms over his chest.*

*Steve looks back and forth then he reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a pair of really big scissors actually they are more like shears and they aren’t too far from being hedge clippers. They all watch in horror as Steve grabs his hair in one hand and he pulls it over his shoulder and he holds the scissors to it.*

*“He travels with scissors in his coat pocket?” Ross asks Neal.*

*“Hey you never know when you might need them.” Steve says. “Anyhow! Those gums better start flapping or I start cutting and your collateral is null and void....bucko!!”*

*“Neal stop him!!” They all yell at the same time.*

*“Alright! Alright! Yeah okay you were right....” Neal says as he puts his hands up to stop him.*

*Steve laughs. “Yeah I already knew that now tell me something I don’t know! You have until the count of 3! 1....” Steve starts to count.*

*Neal and the others look at one another.*

*“...2....!”*

*Neal starts sweating. “Steve come on put down the scissors.”*

*Steve shakes his head and he closes his eyes and he takes a deep breath. “Sorry hair...I love you! 3....!”*

*“WOMEN!!”*

*Neal yells and Steve opens his eyes and he looks at Neal. “What did you say?”*

*“I said women. They are only women on this planet and you would be the only....man. Now put the scissors on the table.”*

*Steve looks at him with a cock-eyed expression then he glances over at the scissors still in his hand and then he places them on the table.*

*“Now step away from the scissors.” Neal says and as Steve does Ross runs over to grab them.*

*“Did you say....that they are...only women on this...planet?” Steve asks.*

*Neal nods his head. “Yeah that I did.”*

*“And....and...I’ll be the only....man!” Steve asks as his voice slowly gains altitude.*

*“Yeah...the only...man.” Neal says.*

*Steve tries to clear his throat. “Just how many woman....” Clears his throat again. “How...many...women...are...there...?”*

*Neal looks at Ross and he wrings his hands. “Oh...in round numbers? How does 30 grab ya..?”*

*“30!” Steve says then he suddenly starts to hyperventilate his hands up on his chest and Neal and Ross grab him.*

*“Steve!” Ross yells.*

*“...30!....”*

*“He’s hyperventilating! Quick somebody we need a paper sack!” Ross yells.*

*They help Steve to a chair and Smitty hands them a paper sack and they look at him then they put it over Steve’s face.*

*“Okay Steve breathe. Breathe.” Ross says.*

*Steve does and after a few minutes his breathing returns to normal and he pushes the bag away.*

*“Are you alright Steve?” Neal asks.*

*Steve nods his head. “As well as any guy can be after he finds out that his friends sold him to a planet full of women. Oh yeah I am just peachy keen!”*

*“What are you bitching about? Do you know how jealous the rest of us....are!” Neal says and the other guys nod.*

*“How....how.....how.....?” Steve tries to ask.*

*“How did we contact them?” Neal asks and Steve nods his head.*

*“Well actually, they contacted us, I have a satellite dish in my back yard and...” Ross says.*

*“Wait! Wait! Are you telling me that they talked to you thru your...television set? What is this frigging poltergeist?” Steve asks.*

*“Come to find out that they have been monitoring the airwaves for a long time and they heard us way back in 1978 and they have been keeping track of us ever since.” Neal says.*

*“Neal!” The three of them say and Neal jumps and so does Steve.*

*Steve looks around at them. “What!”*

*“Oh....hell...alright. Actually they have been keeping track of...you.” Neal says as he points at Steve.*

*“Me?” Steve repeats as he points to himself.*

*“Yeah! Well you know it is the most peculiar thing...” Neal says.*

*“Yeah peculiar...” Ross says as the rest of them nods their heads.*

*“It seems that they have a thing about long, dark, haired Portuguese singers named Steve.....” Neal says.*

*“That have big noses.” Ross says.*

*Steve looks around then the realization hits him. “Hey! That is me! My name is Steve and...and...I am...everything....that you....just said! And more!”*

*Steve slowly stands up and he walks around the chair smiling holding the lapels of his coat.*

*“I have....alien...fans!” Steve says.*

*“Yeah you do and imagine that. Even damn alien women want you.” Neal says.*

*Ross looks at his watch. “They will be here soon.”*

*“Who....who will be here soon?” Steve asks.*

*“The alien retrieval party.” Neal says.*

*“The alien retrieval party? Their coming here? Now?” Steve says.*

*“Oh yeah Steve they will be here soon.” Jon says.*

*“To whisk you away to their planet.” Smitty says as he makes a swooping motion with his hand.*

*“But....but...I can’t go!” Steve says and the others looks horrified.*

*“What?” Neal says.*

*“Don’t you want to go Steve I mean....” Ross laughs. “You would be stupid not to! I mean 30 women...the only...man...hubba...hubba!!” Ross says as he nudges Jon.*

*Steve comes from around the chair and he paces the room. “Oh no no I want to go...most definitely....but...but...I have to pack...and oh my god! I almost forgot Pumpkin my cat! Who is going to take care of her! I have stuff to do and.....” Steve stops and he looks at them. “Well I be able to come back....I mean...I won’t be a prisoner or anything....you know....now that I think of it...I wouldn’t mind being a prisoner of love! Oh yeah that sounds good....a....prisoner....of...love. Nice to meet you....I....am....Stephen....prisoner...of....love!”*

*“Oh god.” Neal says.*

*“I think I’m going to puke!” Jon says as he holds his stomach.*

*“And to think we were worried that he would pitch a fit.” Ross says.*

*“No you were worried. I knew he would do this.” Smitty says as he smiles and he rocks back and forth on the balls of his feet.*

*Steve is talking to himself, pacing back and forth, he found a notepad in his pocket and he was writing things down.*

*“Steve!” Neal says but Steve keeps pacing and talking to himself.*

*“STEVE!” Neal yells really loud and finally Steve stops.*

*“What?”*

*“Just how much other stuff does he carry around in that coat?” Ross asks to Jon and Smitty.*

*“I don’t think you have to worry about packing anything they will have everything there for you.” Neal says.*

*“Oh....what about all my clothes?” Steve asks. “I mean I do have some nice Armani suits and there is one that I look especially dashing in...I mean...with my banded collar shirts and I...”*

*“Matching shoes too?” Smitty asks.*

*“Oh yeah of course and the belt matches too....” Steve says.*

*“What colors are the suits?” Smitty asks.*

*Steve walks closer to Smitty. “One is dark blue with pin stripes and another is....”*

*“Guys!” Neal yells as he waves his hands back and forth. “Talk fashion later. Steve, you will be the only man on a planet of love sick, lonely, beautiful and probably horny women. Clothes might be a hindrance if you know what I mean.”*

*“Yeah Steve forget clothes and pack condoms.” Ross says.*

*“Yeah Steve think safe sex.” Smitty says as he looks at Jon and they both nod their heads.*

*“Gee thanks mom! So....they are going to furnish everything? Lodging, food, clothes....” Steve says.*

*“Yeah and they did say something about you being Tarzan and them being Jane...”Smitty says.*

*“And....I think I heard them say something about a...loin cloth...but you know that is...neither here nor there.” Neal says.*

*Steve laughs. “What? Did you say a loin cloth?”*

*“You know I think that I have seen this same plot in one of those adult type movies.” Ross says.*

*“Those movies don’t have plots.” Smitty says.*

*“Actually I think that was Dream After Dream that you were thinking about.” Neal says.*

*“No that was two women and one man.” Ross says.*

*“And something about birds...?” Jon asks.*

*“I have some books at home that I...” Steve says.*

*Neal shakes his head. “No.”*

*“No?” Steve repeats.*

*“Yeah Steve I think you will be too busy to read.” Neal says.*

*“Think of it this way Steve you will be living in an erotic novel.” Ross says.*

*“Yeah Steve I think that they have your schedule booked up all the way into the year 2000.” Jon says.*

*Steve eyes widen. “Wow. I’ll have to buy a new day planner.” Steve says as he pulls it out of his coat pocket.*

*“Shit! There he goes with the coat again!” Ross says.*

*Steve looks at it then he puts it back in his coat pocket. “Do you have any idea what this place looks like? I mean what is the climate...is it hot...is it cold...?”*

*Before Steve can finish Ross hands Steve a brochure.*

*“What’s this?” Steve asks.*

*“It’s a brochure.” Ross says.*

*“They have...brochures?” Steve asks as he opens it up and he looks at it. “Hey wait a minute! This...this...looks like....Hanford! It is! It is Hanford.” Steve says surprised.*

*“Well no not really.” Neal says.*

*“What do you mean no not really? Look! That is where I went to high school! Look! That is where I used to park when I was a teenager and where I....”*

*Steve stops and he raises his eyes to find them all waiting with anticipation. He clears his throat as he folds the brochure back up.*

*“Anyway that is Hanford!”*

*“Yes and no. It can be anything or anyplace that you want. They made it to look like Hanford because they wanted you to be in comfortable surroundings.” Neal says.*

*“Yeah with places that you would recognize.” Ross says.*

*“So...I can make it look like anyplace that I want....well you know if I am going to be having wild orgies every night I really don’t want it to look like the place that I grew up in...that would just be wrong...you know....wait! Jon, did you say that they have me booked until the year...2000?”*

*“Boy you are slow aren’t you?” Ross asks.*

*“Yeah but I am caring....so...what about the year 2000?” Steve says.*

*“Well that is how long we have to pay off the loan.” Neal says. “Technically.”*

*“What sort of interest rates are we talking about?” Steve asks.*

*“2% percent.” Jon says.*

*“Wow that is a good rate over five years. What happens if you don’t....you know...pay it off?” Steve asks.*

*“Well then...it’s the same as with any other loan...we forfeit the collateral.” Neal says.*

*“Forfeit?” Steve asks.*

*“Yeah you lucky bastard they get to keep you.” Ross says.*

*Steve looks at the floor and he scratches his head. "There is just one more thing that is bothering me...."*

*"What?" They all say.*

*"If they are aliens and they are from this planet...Falopian? Where did they get all of this money....I mean....I don't even know how much it is....so what is...my net worth?" Steve asks.*

*Neal, Jon, Ross and Smitty all look at one another. They knew that this question might come up and damn if they weren't right, he had every right to know of course but they hated to tell him because they didn't want to inflate his ego anymore than it was already.*

*"Now Steve before we tell you, you have to promise us something." Neal says seriously.*

*"Oh yeah sure guys anything what?" Steve asks."*

*"You have to promise not to get, you know, a big head about this." Neal says.*

*"Yeah Steve you know this room isn't big enough for all of us..." Ross says.*

*"Not to mention your ego." Jon says as he rolls his eyes.*

*"Oh yeah sure, sure no problem! My feet are firmly grounded...right here...in this very spot! So hit me."*

*Neal looks at the rest of them then he says. "On the low side of..."*

*"Yeah...?" Steve says.*

*"Half a million dollars." Neal says as he closes one eye and Ross covers his eyes, Smitty his ears and Jon covers his mouth. See no ego...hear no ego...and speak...no ego.*

*Steve stands there for a full five seconds and he doesn't move then suddenly a slight smile creeps over his lips.*

*"Half....a....million....dollars? Guys.....I....am....really truly...touched!"*

*"Is he going to cry? I think he's going to cry..." Smitty says.*

*Just then Steve reaches into his coat pocket and he pulls out a monogrammed handkerchief and he daps at his eyes as he snuffles.*

*“Ahhhh Steve we didn’t mean to make you cry.” Ross says.*

*“Oh no no it is alright I am just...emotional. I am an Aquarius you know.” Steve dabs at his eyes one more time then he puts the handkerchief back where he got it. “So....where would these women get that kind of...money?”*

*“Well....they said something about new technology.” Ross says.*

*“New technology? Do you mean musical technology?” Steve asks.*

*“Well no....not exactly.” Ross says as he looks at the others.*

*“Uh oh! I don’t think I’m going to like this I’m I?” Steve asks.*

*“It isn’t that bad...” Neal says.*

*“What? What isn’t that bad..?” Steve says.*

*“They have some new....medical...technology.” Ross says.*

*“Medical?”*

*“Now Steve it is all theory really....” Ross says as Steve advances and Ross backs up.*

*“Ross! What is theory?” Steve asks.*

*“They told us something about...” Ross says.*

*Steve grabs him by his shirt as the others gathered around them. “What!”*

*“They told us that they were working on perfecting....cloning!!”*

*“CLONING!” Steve yells.*

*“Yeah cloning but it is just a theory....” Ross says as Steve lets him go.*

*“Sure Steve they take a little bit from you and they make another....you.” Neal says.*

*“What little bits?” Steve asks.*

*“Oh you know, hair, saliva...” Ross says.*

*“Ewww...what else?” Steve asks.*

*“Oh well you know....sperm.” Ross says.*

*“Sperm?!” Steve says.*

*“Yeah Steve you do have some of those, don’t ya?” Neal asks.*

*“Well of course I do! What kind of question is that? I recently had a physical and the doctor told me that I am in tip-top shape!” Steve starts to laugh then.*

*“What is so funny?” Neal asks.*

*“I bet....” Steve laughs again. “If you looked at my sperm under a microscope....” Steve laughs. “I bet they would be wearing tux tails!” Steve laughs really hard. “You guys...don’t think....that is funny...do ya?”*

*“No we don’t.” Neal says as they all shake their heads no.*

*“Killjoys!” Steve says. “Oh no wait...!”*

*Everybody waits. “I just had another thought...aren’t we supposed to be recording a new album and then....go on tour...to promote said album?” Steve says as he moves his hands back and forth.*

*“Ya Steve that is the general idea.” Neal says.*

*“Well...how can I do that if I’m not here, I got it! I could be like one of those reporters!” Steve puts his hand up over his ear as he pretends to talk into a microphone. “This is your roving lead singer, Steve Perry, singing to you from a very remote location....”*

*“No...” Neal says.*

*“Or...” Steve says as he holds up one finger. “I could go after the album is finished....”*

*The guys shake their heads as Neal says. “They want you...now.”*

*“Yeah Steve when 30 women want the same thing it is kinda hard to ignore them....” Ross says.*

*Steve leans closer to them and he points at them as he says. “I’ll be missed you know and how are you going to.....?”*

*Neal puts his arm around Steve's shoulders. "Steve....Steve old buddy, old pal of mine, it has all been taken care of...the women have thought of everything!"*

*Then, oddly enough, well nothing is too odd for this scenario, Neal has a remote in his hand and Steve watches as Neal aims it at the far wall and he pushes one of the numerous buttons on it. In an instant a door appears in the smooth metal of the surface where just seconds before there wasn't one and with a sound that sounds like something out of Star Trek the door slides open and after the smoke clears there is another Steve standing there dressed just like the original.*

*Steve is flabbergasted, dumbstruck and his mouth opens and his chin drops south to the floor his eyes as big as saucers. Neal reaches over and he closes Steve's mouth then he gives a little encouragement in the form of a push. Steve isn't so sure as he looks back at Neal then he walks ever so slowly over to the other Steve. The other Steve walks over to him and like in one of those old westerns they circle each other, the other Steve looking the other Steve up and down.*

*"God almighty! This has got to be the scariest thing that I...have ever seen." Ross says as the others nod their heads in agreement.*

*"And how!" Jon says.*

*"Two Steves..." Smitty says as he holds up two fingers.*

*"Identical cousins..." Neal says.*

*The two Steves continue their circling ritual like two males getting ready to mark their territory then finally, before dizziness can set in, they come to a stop face to face. Steve to Steve. The real Steve reaches out and he pulls on the cheek of the fake Steve and at the same time the fake Steve does the exact same thing.*

*"Feels real." They say at the same time.*

*Then they both reach out at the same time and grab a handful of the other's hair and they give it a good hard yank.*

*"Owwwww! Hey! That hurt!" They say at the same time as they both rub their respective heads.*

*"I'm Steve Perry." They both say as they point to themselves.*

*"No I'm Steve Perry!" They both say again.*

*"Oh my god stereo Steve!" Ross exclaims as he slaps his cheek.*

*“Neal! Can’t you do something?” Jon says.*

*“Yeah Neal find the damn mute button!” Smitty says.*

*All the while Neal has been looking at the remote but there are so many buttons on it he is having a hard time. “I’m trying okay I’m trying!”*

*“Jerk!” They both say.*

*“Jackass!” They both say.*

*“PRIMA DONNA!!” They both yell.*

*For just a split second there is no sound in the room except the collective intake of breath.*

*“Uh oh!” Ross says.*

*“Oh shit” Jon says.*

*“Oh...this isn’t good.” Smitty says.*

*“Oh fuck!” Neal says.*

*“What....did....you....call....me?!” They both say.*

*“You heard what I said....” They both say as they point at each other.*

*“Guys!” Jon yells.*

*“I don’t stutter and your ears don’t flap!” They both say.*

*“Guys!” Jon yells again.*

*“Nobody calls me a fucking Prima Donna....not even....me!!”*

*Then the fight was on. They both grabbed one another and they begin to tussle back and forth.*

*“Which one is which?” Ross asks.*

*“Neal! Hit the damn stop button!” Jon says.*

*Neal finally finds it and he pushes it and it was just in the nick of time too because they were both reared back, fists balled up and raised and both were ready to hit the other in their noses. The fake Steve suddenly stops, his arms dropped down to his sides, his chin resting on his chest.*

*“What just happened?” Steve asks as he reaches out and he raises the fake Steve’s arm and he watches as it drops and it falls harmlessly and limply back to its side.*

*“I thought you said that cloning was just a theory?” Steve asks Ross.*

*“I did and it is but he...” Ross points to the fake Steve. “Isn’t a clone.”*

*“Then what is he...?” Steve asks.*

*“He’s an android.” Ross says with a tone that makes it sound like that everyone should know this.*

*“You mean he’s a robot?” Steve asks.*

*“No!” Ross throws his hands up into the hand. “He’s an android!”*

*“What’s the difference?” Steve asks as he throws his hands up into the air.*

*“Haven’t you ever seen Star Trek?” Ross asks.*

*“Yeah Steve? Steve Jr. here is like Data on Star Trek.” Smitty explains as he walks over to the fake Steve and he admires it. “He thinks....therefore he is.”*

*“He is just like you in everyway.” Ross says.*

*“Well yeah but if they can build me...” Steve points to the fake Steve. “Why do they want...me?” Steve asks as he points to himself.*

*“Because they wanted the genuine article, the real you! You lucky dog you!” Neal says as he slaps him on the back.*

*Steve makes a face. “Okay, he does look like me, he talks like me, he walks like me and he certainly has my keen fashion sense but can he...sing? Can he deliver the goods? Can he sell it? Does he have my stage presence, my savior faire, and my ambiance....my...?”*

*Neal waves his arms. “Alright, alright we get the picture....Ross the book.”*

*Ross tosses a book about the size of a phone book onto the table then he proceeds to thumb thru it.*

*"Holy....Shit!" Steve says as he points. "What is that?"*

*"The instruction manual." Ross says without batting an eye.*

*"The instruction.....?"*

*"Yeah it is written in German, Spanish, French, Russian and finally, English....let's see." Ross runs his finger down the index. "Singing....singing....ah! Here we go!" Ross says as Steve peers over his shoulder.*

*Ross and Smitty are both in their elements now their shared love of science fiction, which the others had laughed at all of these years, was now coming in handy. Ross took the remote from Neal and he handed it to Smitty as Ross read the instructions Smitty begin to push buttons. The first thing that happened was the room seemed to get bigger, then the lights dimmed and then a spotlight focused it's beam down on the Steve android and then a square opened up in the floor in front of it and then a microphone and stand rose into view in front of it.*

*"Alrighty then...." Smitty says obviously pleased with himself. "What era shall we select from....let's try something from the 80's." Smitty says as he hits a button then the Steve android begins to move, he grabs the microphone....*

*"You should've been gone....knowing how I made you fe...."*

*Smitty hits the mute button. "Oops sorry Steve." Smitty looks at him and Steve just shrugs his shoulders.*

*"Now let's try this one...." Smitty says.*

*They hear the opening strains of "Separate Ways" and the Steve android begins to sing.*

*"Here we stand....worlds apart, hearts broken in two, two, two..."*

*The android sings it with the same gusto, same tone and inflections, emotions and the same facial expressions and with even the same hand gestures and Steve was shocked and he was creeped out all at the same time. It was like watching a live action video of himself, except this was no video.*

*“Can you know...sorta turn him down?” Steve says loudly over his shoulder at Smitty.*

*“He isn’t turned up.” Ross says.*

*“Yeah Steve, your just that loud, naturally.” Smitty says.*

*“Wow, I am...” Steve exclaims.*

*“Yeah Steve, why do you think we had such a hard time with you singing back-up...you drowned the rest of us out man!” Neal says.*

*“So Steve, what do you think?” Jon asks.*

*“Well...” Steve says as he scratches his head. “You know...I...it is really....he’s really....for a....you know....a....a....a....yeah okay....well you know....yeah sure...”*

*“Come on Steve don’t mince words.” Neal says.*

*“Yeah, you’re rambling!” Ross says.*

*“Ah....no....okay....he certainly has the Perry pipes but does he have the Perry....?”*

*Just then the android Steve takes off his overcoat to reveal black tux tails then he goes into the patented, always imitated but never duplicated, Perry twirl.*

*“....Twirl....” Steve says.*

*“That answers that question.” Jon says.*

*“Thank you and goodnight Houston!” The android says then it stops as Smitty hits the stop button.*

*“I think I’m out of a fucking job!” Steve says as he gestures to the android.*

*“Oh no no buddy!” Neal says as he puts his arm around Steve’s shoulders and he gives him a little squeeze. “Just think of this as a....sabbatical!”*

*“Yeah Steve some r&r.” Ross says.*

*Just then the lights blinked on and off and the whole building begins to shake.*

*“EARTHQUAKE!” Steve yells.*

*“Hmmm not hardly.” Ross says.*

*They hear a loud whoosh, the sound of engines and then a loud thud like something heavy had just set down outside.*

*“They’re here!” Smitty announces happily.*

*Steve then starts to run back and forth like a maniac. “They’re here! They’re here! Guys, how do I look?” Steve stops and he holds his arms out to the sides as he turns in place.*

*“Stunning.” Ross says.*

*“Captivating.” Smitty says.*

*“Depilating.” Jon says.*

*“Now Steve don’t be nervous.” Neal says as he adjusts the lapels of his coat.*

*“Oh no no I won’t....” Steve says.*

*“Yeah Steve flash that Perry smile at them.” Ross says.*

*“Yeah Steve remember they are....women.” Smitty says.*

*“What do I say? What do I say....oh hell do they even speak English?” Steve asks.*

*They all stop and they look at the wall where a seam appears and the seam turned into a door which opened with another Star Trek sound effect and thru some more smoke, two women with dark hair emerged and cut into the style that Steve had sported in the 70’s, long and feathered and dressed, strangely enough, in tux tails, the yellow shirt with the multitude of hearts on it then jeans and finally the white and red Nikes.*

*“Whoa!” Steve exclaims as he smiles.*

*“Good afternoon gentlemen.” They both say their voices taking on a lyrical quality.*

*“Oh shit I was hoping we’ve seen the last of that shirt.” Jon says as he rubs his forehead and he grimaces.*

*“Ladies!” Neal says as he approaches them. “You are right on schedule and here he is....” Neal gestures at Steve.*

*The ladies smile. “Oh yes so we see. I am Suzanne and this is Donna Please.”*

*“Donna Please?” Steve laughs.*

*“Yes we are envoys to Melody.” Suzanne says.*

*“She is our leader and we have come to take you back with us.” Donna Please says.*

*“You do know all about that don’t you?” Suzanne asks as she smiles sweetly.*

*“Oh yes yes sure but what’s with the....ah....crazy outfits?” Steve asks as he gestures at them.*

*“Do you not like them?” Suzanne asks as she tugs on her lapels.*

*“We can be anyone you wish.” Donna Please says as they snap their fingers and they change into two different women, different hair color and styles. “And wear anything you wish....” They snap their fingers again and their clothes change and they run the gambit between jeans, slinky evening dresses, and bathing suits.*

*“Or nothing at all....” Suzanne says as they snap their fingers again and their clothes disappear and they stand there naked as the day they were born.*

*“Oh shit!” Neal says.*

*“Damn!” Smitty says.*

*“Man oh man! So that is what a naked woman looks like.” Jon says and they all turn and look at him.*

*“Jon you’re married!” Steve exclaims.*

*“Yeah.” Jon gestures. “And you know what they say happens after you get married...”*

*Neal, Ross and Smitty having at one time or another, being married men all nod their heads in agreement.*

*“Ah girls....” Steve says as he blushes.*

*“Is this not what you were thinking...?” Suzanne asks.*

*“Yes....you were thinking what we would look like...naked.” Donna Please points out.*

*“STEVE!!” Neal, Jon, Ross and Smitty all exclaim.*

*Steve jumps. "What! You....ah....girls....read minds?" Steve asks as he clears his throat.*

*They nod their heads as they smile.*

*"Well maybe you better....you know....put some clothes on." Steve says.*

*They snap their fingers and in the next instance they are wearing the red flannel shirt that Steve wore during FTLOSM.*

*"Steve, man did you do that?" Neal asks.*

*"Well yeah, you know, I think a woman wearing a man's shirt is sexy...."*

*Suzanne hands Neal a manila envelope and he opens it and he pulls out a contract.*

*"We trust that you will find it all in order." Suzanne says.*

*"Yes it is everything that we had discussed." Donna Please says.*

*"Wait....a contract?" Steve says.*

*"Yeah Steve." Neal says as he looks it over and he signs it. Neal then hands it to Jon and Steve scurries over to Jon trying to get a look at it. Jon looks it over as well then he signs it Jon then passes it over to Ross.*

*"Guys wait! I want to read that....just a minute!"*

*Steve says as Ross looks it over then he signs it then he hands it to Smitty as Steve scurries over to him.*

*"Steve man relax." Ross says.*

*"Yeah Steve." Jon says.*

*"Yeah buddy we already told you what's what" Neal says.*

*"Yeah but you know I...."*

*Steve is stopped in mid-sentence by Suzanne who takes him by his arm and she smiles at him. "Don't worry Steve...."*

*Donna Please takes the other arm. "Yes Steve don't worry....everything is ready for you."*

*“Oh yes Steve you will be well taken care of....” Suzanne says.*

*“All your needs and wants will be taken care of....” Donna Please says.*

*“So Stevie don’t worry it causes wrinkles....” Suzanne says.*

*“Oh well okay girls if you say so and look I have FTLOSM cd’s for you.”*

*Steve says as he takes them out of pockets of his coat and he hands them to the girls who jump up and down and squeal.*

*“Damn!” Neal exclaims.*

*“He walks around with FTLOSM cd’s in his coat pockets?” Ross asks.*

*Steve takes the girls by the arms. “Okay girls let’s go! Take me to your leader!” Steve says.*

*Arm in arm they walk across the room and when they reach the door Steve stops and he looks back over his shoulder.*

*“Hey guys look! It’s the mother ship!” Steve yells excitedly.*

*The other guys run towards the door and they look out to see that it is exactly the mother ship from the Escape album, the Egyptian scarab beetle. They all ‘ooohhhh and ahhhhhh’ over it.*

*“She is called Calgon.” Suzanne says.*

*“Well Calgon take me away!” Steve says as they walk out to the ship together and Steve looks back over his shoulder and he waves. “Bye guys! Don’t wait up for me!” Steve says happily as he laughs.*

*The four of them stand in the doorway and they wave and they watch as Steve and the two girls walk up the ramp and they board the mother ship.*

*“Maybe....we should have....you know....told him the rest.” Ross says as he waves. Neal reaches into his back pocket and he pulls out an index card.*

*“You mean about the mating ceremony?” Neal asks as he consults the card.*

*“And the impending nuptials?” Smitty asks.*

*“Yeah you know...just maybe...we should have mentioned the fertility dance....thingy.” Jon says.*

*Neal takes a deep breath as he rips the card in two. “Oh well....too late now! Words....unspoken.”*

*The vignettes end here but if you like the story about Steve going to Falopian I do plan on continuing it. Stay tuned on this same Steve channel for the continuing adventures of Steve on the planet Falopian. Perry on!*

**-30-**

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