**Ashley's Handstand**

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The 4:30 crowd had already descended on Rick's Coffee Shop by the time Ashley, Kelsi Waylan, and Jenni Tremane, sat down to exchange the day's gossip. The three seniors at Marcus High School were only three weeks away from graduating, so spirits were high. Seated in their favorite booth near the window, the girls sipped ice coffees and traded sweet girlish lies for close on an hour. Their laughter could be heard tinkling above busy murmur of the cafe, their eyes danced with pure teenaged mischief. The conversation died down briefly when Nick Tyler and his friend Billy Rupp joined the group.   
  
Kelsi didn't like Nick very much. He was a dominant alpha-male type, and though Ashley was hardly a lightweight herself, she seemed a bit meek and submissive around him, as if she were doing it deliberately to keep the peace, for Nick would tolerate no disagreements from her in any situation.   
  
With the boys present, their talk quickly turned to sports and cars. Occasionally, Billy would steal a glance at Kelsi, who was arguably the most attractive girl in their booth, but she would have nothing to do with him either. Finally, she managed to steer the discussion to gymnastics and the recent Texas State Finals where Ashley took gold in the Floor, Vault, and Bars routines. Her friend had been studying gymnastics since she was six years old, and her physical skills were the stuff of legend around Marcus High.   
  
"Ashley can do one hell of hand stand," Nick broke in. "You wouldn't know it to look at her, Billy, but she's pretty damn strong for a girl. Just last night I watched her do one for 90 seconds."  
  
This was no news to Kelsi and Jen, for they had seen Ashley demonstrate the routine before, usually during gym class, but Billy didn't believe it.  
  
"A minute and a half?" he scoffed, "You're bullshittin' me."  
  
"Ten bucks says she can do it." Nick challenged, "in fact, let's make it an even TWO MINUTES."  
  
"You're on."  
  
Ashley was very quiet during the discussion, which was strange to Kelsi. Typically, her friend would have answered any challenge like this, especially if came from a guy, but now, she just sat there and let her boyfriend do the talking for her. In fact, she had barely uttered a word since he arrived.  
  
"So where are we going to do this?" Billy asked.  
  
"Right here, of course."  
  
Jenni almost spilled her coffee.   
  
"Are you kidding?" Kelsi glared at him, then looked over to Ashley, who still said nothing.  
  
"Why not? We'll have plenty of witnesses," Nick then winked at his friend. "This way, no one can welsh on the bet."  
  
"Sounds fair to me," Billy added with a sly grin.  
  
Kelsi and Jen glanced around them. The coffee shop was full of people, and hardly the place for a girl to perform a handstand. Even worse, Ashley was wearing a summer dress with spaghetti straps and the hem cut just above her knees.  
  
"So what do you say, pet? Ten bucks?"  
  
(Nick always called Ashley 'pet', supposedly as a term of affection.)  
  
The trim, pretty 18-year-old considered the suggestion for maybe five seconds before her assent. Slipping lithely out of the booth, Ashley stood up and began adjusting her dress, automatically smoothing her wispy floral skirt over her bare legs underneath. She kicked off one sandal, then the other. Strangely enough, the fact that she would be displaying her virginal white underwear to every patron in the restaurant seemed to have been lost on her.  
  
The thought certainly occurred to her friends, however.  
  
Jenni raised her voice to just above a whisper in sudden alarm,   
  
"Ash, what are you DOING?!" she exclaimed, her eyes as round as saucers. "You're wearing a DRESS, we're sitting in a crowded diner!! EVERYBODY will see your PANTIES."  
  
Kelsi was in complete agreement, "You can't do that in HERE!! Do you want everyone in town to know what you're WEARING??" Both girls were utterly mortified.  
  
Ashley answered their pleas with a gaze that was almost void of all emotion. Then she glanced over to Nick, and for a subtle moment, that vacant expression in her blue eyes melted into a plea for mercy, as if her boyfriend had complete control of her actions, and that only HE could release her from the embarrassing display she was about to commit herself to.  
  
"Go ahead, pet," Nick urged her on.  
  
Straight-laced as she was, when it came to gymnastics, Ashley was intense and aggressive, and had no problem performing some of the riskiest numbers in front of hundreds of people. And technically, she wouldn't be showing of any more of herself compared to the skin tight leotards she wore at each tournament, but that still didn't make this any easier for Kelsi and Jenni to watch!  
  
Stepping back from the edge of the table, she found a clear space about six feet from the booth and judged she would have just enough room to maneuver. By this time, the conversation had attracted the attention of the entire cafe. Heads turned, other conversations died and an expectant hush fell over the room. Even the waiters were craning their necks to see what was going on.  
  
Most gymnasts have fierce, compact, flexible bodies, while dancers are light, limber and strong, though not overly muscled. Ashley's figure fell somewhere in between. Her legs and arms were well-toned like that of an athlete's, yet still very feminine-looking in a dress. Her smooth skin was a light bronze color and flawless. Although she wasn't all that tall to most people (being only 5'5"), in the gymnastics world she was much taller than most of her teammates and competitors who generally measured anywhere from 4'8" to 5'2". This height difference hadn't stopped Ashley from competing and winning most of her routines. In fact, she could even use her height to an advantage on the bars. Her favorite event though was the floor exercise, for that was when she could really display her dance and tumbling skills. The blue leotard she wore was always cut very high around the thighs and derriere to show off every smooth muscle in her powerful legs, and her abilities were always admired by both boys and girls -- obviously for different reasons.  
  
"I'll watch your time," Nick checked his wristwatch. "Wait until I give you the word, and remember, that's TWO minutes."  
  
Ashley nodded her head, and drew a long breath.   
  
Kelsi shook her head in complete exasperation. Ashley was actually going through with this! Her best friend was about to model her dainty white underwear for everyone in the restaurant. And why? Because this jerk she was dating made a ten dollar bet! And who was HE to tell her what to do? Kelsi had never felt so embarrassed in her entire life. She buried her face in her hands, peeking through the bars of her fingers. If this got out, they'd NEVER live it down!  
  
Ashley stood there for a moment to contemplate the move, her eyes never leaving the dirty tiled floor. Everyone in the cafe was staring at her now, many still completely unaware as to what this pretty girl in the spaghetti strap floral dress was really up to.   
  
"On the count of three," Nick's eyes darted between Ashley and his watch. "ONE."  
  
Ashley slowly raised her hands high above her head, exposing her smooth, hollowed armpits to the crowd.   
  
"TWO."  
  
Her body became a supple, elegant curve as she drew in a calming breath. All eyes followed her motion while she went over, bracing her palms flat to the floor.   
  
"THREE."  
  
Gracefully arching her spine, she flew up into a perfectly controlled handstand -- her naked legs as straight as arrows, her toes extended towards the ceiling. An admiring gasp went up from the booths.   
  
The thin, almost diaphanous skirt immediately fell away and hung upside down from her waist like a rush of floral fabric. Dozens of jaws dropped simultaneously. Ashley adjusted the position of her arms by shifting the palms, then brought her heels slowly together, toes still pointed.  
  
Just as anticipated by her friends, the move exposed everything under her skirt to the crowd, but what the girls didn't expect was that she would be wearing the skimpiest g-string they had ever seen! It was bright white, as innocent as virgin snow, yet the tiny front offered scarcely enough coverage for female modesty, while the strings in back merely trailed deep between the cheeks of her bare tush. Both Kelsi and Jen stared open-mouthed at each other, then at their friend, unable to believe that "straight-laced Ashley" was actually doing this!  
  
"Let's work those legs, pet," Nick said.  
  
Slowly and seductively, Ashley bent one knee sharply forward while keeping her toes pointed. Her form was flawless, arms locked in position, effortlessly (if not miraculously) holding up the rest of her 5'5" body. Her legs looked even longer than usual, calves, thighs and buttocks smooth and beautifully sculpted like that of a professional dancer. The skirt covered her face and upper arms completely, but her long, straight chestnut hair could still be seen underneath sweeping the floor. Her softly chiseled abs and belly button was also clearly visible.  
  
"THIRTY SECONDS," Nick announced while looking at his watch.  
  
Ashley's heels came back into line. Her body became a taunt, rigid javelin aimed at the sky. She seemed breathless with concentration. An eternity seemed to pass while she realigned her center of gravity. Then slowly, imperceptibly, her feet began to separate again.  
  
Inch by inch, with infinite patience, Ashley extended her legs in a classic 'scissors' -- right leg thrusting forward, straight as a foil, left leg slicing back. Her long, sleek thighs trembled slightly as she locked her knees into the forward splits, toes still 'in point'.   
  
Her stringy undies had been on full exhibition for nearly a minute now. Kelsi and Jen stared open-mouthed at their friend; everyone in the restaurant stared. People were actually pausing in the street, looking in through the window. By the end of the afternoon, the news would have spread all over town. Ashley's little stunt would be the hot topic at school Monday morning with detailed descriptions of what she had been wearing underneath that dress -- down to every lacy pattern!  
  
"ONE MINUTE . . ."  
  
Ashley slowly raised her legs again and touched her heels lightly together. She paused three seconds, then began moving her pointed feet outward until her legs formed a V.   
  
Amazingly, her arms remained rock-steady and ramrod-straight as she kept the pose. Then, slowly and carefully, she bent her head back from under the skirt and arched her back a little to keep her balance, while stretching her legs out even further until they were parallel to the floor in the shape of a T!   
  
There were whistles of appreciation from a few of the man. A flash bulb went off somewhere near the back of the restaurant. Ashley's g-string was clearly in view now with the dainty front straining between the smooth, wide-open curvature of her inner thighs. The white material in front shimmered under the fluorescent lights above. From behind, the tight cheeks of her firm derriere pressed together in perfect half-moon shapes with the string burrowed deep within.  
  
"ONE MINUTE, THIRTY SECONDS . . ."  
  
Kelsi watched, spellbound, her face burning with a high, crimson blush. Ashley had been hanging upside down with her skirt over her head for close to two minutes. Her lacy 'G' was extremely pretty. No point denying that one. Yet her unmentionables were not meant to be exhibited like this. Never before in her entire life, had she felt so embarrassed; almost as if it were HER pink silk panties being displayed to all and sundry. What was even worse, was that Kelsi's trained eye could clearly make out the faint rosy hue of baby-smooth pink though the gossamer lace, affirming that her friend had done much more than just trim the hair a little between her legs. She had shaved it off completely!  
  
Under the dress, Ashley's arms were finally starting to tremble. Her body swayed a little and her taut stomach quivered, signaling that her lungs were now struggling for the air her muscles desperately needed to maintain the rest of her body in its upside-down areal splits. She still held the position though, with no complaints, while everyone else gawked at the display.   
  
"TEN . . . NINE . . . EIGHT . . . SEVEN . . ."  
  
Filling her depleted lungs with a deep, final inhalation, she carefully raised her feet towards the roof and clipped her heels together, signaling the end of the routine.   
  
"That's it! TWO MINUTES!"  
  
Folding at the waist, she dropped lightly down onto her feet. The skirt slid neatly back into place, affording the crowd a final, fleeting glimpse of her lush, round bottom. She completed the movement by lifting her hands in a smoothly executed dismount, as if she'd just pin wheeled off the beam at gym.  
  
Ashley slipped back into the booth, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glittering with shy pleasure.   
  
"Wow!" Billy drew an excited breath as he handed Nick the money. "Now that was worth the ten bucks!"  
  
She took another sip of her iced coffee, glancing around the table to gauge her friends' reactions. Kelsi looked bemused, and still goggle-eyed with disbelief. Jenni was incapable of meeting her gaze. The seconds tapped by in lip-biting silence. Ashley finished her IC and set the glass down on the table.  
  
"Well?" Kelsi finally asked, eyebrows raised in cool inquiry. "Was it worth it?"  
  
Ashley shrugged with disarming innocence. Her former indifference had returned; her blush was fading to a subtle rose tint as she glanced abstractly out the booth window. Lowering her pulse rate presented no real problems for her. Breathing control was one of the first things you learned in this particular discipline.   
  
Nick seemed completely unaware of the thoughts being exchanged between the girls -- or he just didn't care."  
  
"Two minutes", Billy shook his head in admiration. "I still can't believe she pulled it off."   
  
"We'll have to aim for THREE, next time," Nick gave Ash a pat on the knee. "How about double or nothing, Billy?"  
  
"No way," his friend glanced around the room, then he laughed, "though I'll bet you could take up a collection here and make twenty times as much."  
  
Nick laughed too and nodded in agreement. The girls said nothing.  
  
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