**Back to School - Whitebriar Academy**

by LeahR

**Part Four**

By the time Jessie got back to the academy most of the other students had gone home for the weekend, including Ashlee's roommate, Marty. Most of the tables in the dining hall had been closed, the chairs placed upside down on top of them, and she didn't see anyone she knew to eat with, so she had to ask a couple girls if she could sit with them.

Her dorm room was lonely without her roommates so she did spend the evening in the common area, where there was at least some activity. This time she made it through a movie before finally feeling tired enough to go to bed.

There was no bell Sunday morning, but Jessie was up early anyway. She supposed her inner clock had been reset by the daily six o'clock wake up bell. She made her bed and went to get breakfast, which was only pastry, juice and coffee today. Instead of coffee though, she had milk, and wondered why she had never liked it before.

After breakfast she took a shower, then spent some time looking at her hair. She found that it was easy, using a blow dryer and the pomade, to get it looking pretty much like Étienne had left it. She decided it really was a nice cut after all. She even spent some time with the little makeup kit Aunt Becca had brought her, trying to duplicate the rest of the look, with a fair degree of success.

On Sunday afternoon students began returning from their weekends at home. When Ashlee saw Jessie's haircut, she said, "Wow! Cute! I can't wait until Spencer sees it!"

"I can," said Jessie.

"Why, don't you like it?"

"I like it, Ashlee. I just wish you weren't so obsessed with Spencer and I."

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Monday morning came and before homeroom started, Jessie remembered to visit Mr Baumhart's page and choose an extracurricular. She still hadn't come up with anything better than Glee Club, so she signed up for that. She thought maybe Miss Pierce would be the club advisor, but when she clicked on the link she found out that it was Mr Marshall, a science teacher. The link to math tutoring was working, so Jessie signed up for some help.

Ashlee reminded Jessie that Cheerleader tryouts were scheduled for Tuesday after school, which happened to be the night that Glee Club practiced, so she sent an email to Mr Marshall to let him know she wouldn't be able to make the first practice.

The rest of the day was pretty quiet, except when Mrs Sommers, their study hall monitor, caught Jessie and Ashlee running in a hallway. Ashlee had forgotten her algebra book in her locker and they had gone back to get it, then had to hurry to keep from being late. She might have just given them a warning, but when Ashlee insisted they weren't running, only 'walking fast,' she told them to report to room 102 after school.

When classes ended they went to room 102, where two other girls and two boys were waiting. Another girl came in right after them, but that was all. None of them were in any of their classes. Jessie was pretty sure the two boys were freshmen, the last girl to arrive was a senior, and she guessed the other two were juniors.

They waited silently, the only noise the ticking of the clock until one of the boys asked, "What is this? What are we waiting for?"

The senior girl laughed and one of the juniors said, "Paddlings. We're waiting for someone to come spank us."

Punishment was administered by two teachers, a male and female. Jessie didn't know the man, but the female was Miss Spearman, one of their gym teachers. They were both carrying, not the rulers Jessie was already familiar with, but actual paddles. Each was about three quarters of an inch thick, two feet long and about four inches wide, and they each had six holes drilled through the paddle part.

The male teacher took the two boys out, and left Miss Spearman to administer the girls' punishment. Each girl in turn had to lie across the teacher's desk and pull their panties down. Miss Spearman then lifted up their skirts and applied the designated number of swats. She insisted that they count out loud each swat or it wouldn't count

This paddle was bigger and heavier than the rulers, and it hurt much more. One girl got two swats for not picking an extracurricular activity by the deadline, two others got three swats each for passing notes in class. Jessie got two for running in the hall and lastly, Ashlee got two for running, and two more for backtalk.

It wasn't as bad for Jessie as some of her earlier paddlings because, even though each swat was worse, there were only two. For Ashlee though it was her first paddling, and four blows were twice as many as Jessie got. She was crying when she and Jessie stopped in a bathroom on the way back to the dorm. "I'm sorry I got you spanked again," she said to Jessie.

"It's okay, Ash. It wasn't your fault."

"Yes it was. I forgot my book, and then I think she was gonna just let us go, till I told her we weren't running."

"It's okay Ash. They shouldn't be hitting us no matter what we do."

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Tuesday Jessie again had the weird, surreal, Jamais vu feeling that high school was completely new to her. The really weird part was that this time it didn't happen in math, but in English, while Mr Baumhart was having them read passages from The Red Badge of Courage, which Jessie considered totally familiar, yet the passage she had to read seemed oddly unfamiliar. She even stumbled over the reading, causing Mr Baumhart to comment that since she was supposed to have read the chapter last night, she shouldn't have such trouble reading it now.

The feeling persisted through math class, which really wasn't terribly surprising, and in study hall she again found herself doubting her own sanity. Was she deluded? Was she 24 years old, or really 15? She thought back to the first morning she had come here. She had lost her travel alarm clock, and Aunt Becca had had to wake her up. "Honey," she remembered Aunt Becca saying, "It's time for your first day of school." Not "Your first day of work," but, "Your first day of school."

She wasn't sure she even caught that at the time, or even recognized the difference if she did, but now it was the way she remembered it. Did it make a difference? Did teachers on the way to work say they were going to work, or to school? Aunt Becca was right about one thing she had told Mrs Spencer. Jessie did used to line up her dolls and stuffed animals and hold 'class.' But, was that years ago, or just last summer?

Could she have read about Weber State in a college catalog or maybe US News or something, and then imagined going there? Did her mother's death send her into some sort of delirium, where she projected her thoughts into the future and deceived herself? No, she decided. She knew too much about teaching methods, grading systems, test construction to have imagined it.

But did she? How did she know that what she thought she knew was correct? If she looked up how to construct a multiple choice question and confirmed that what she thought was correct, couldn't she have looked the same thing up before, and now remembered it as something she learned rather than researched?

In the end she decided that she was not crazy, that she really had been to grad school, that she should be sitting at the teacher's desk and not in a row of theater seats in study hall. Still, she would go to the library and find a book about Weber State and see what she remembered. But, what if she had taken out the same book before, from some other library, and used it to fabricate a memory? Jessie decided not to think about it anymore. She had wasted all study hall daydreaming and cheerleader tryouts tonight would make it difficult to finish all her assignments as it was.

Before she could really get any work done study hall was over, and they were on their way to music. Ashlee was excited about the tryouts after school. Jessie had butterflies. Even though she had no intention of trying to make the team, she still was nervous about what tryouts would entail.

Tumbling? Handstands? Making up a cheer? She had no idea what they might ask her to do. She used to be able to do some simple tumbling, but that was years ago. She had been practicing yoga, which probably why Ashlee had noticed her flexibility in gym class, but she didn't know if that related to cheerleading.

They had about twenty minutes between the end of class and tryouts. Time enough to go to the dorms and change, but Ashlee was afraid of being late, and insisted that they change into their gym clothes in one of the school bathrooms. Tryouts were to be held in the auditorium and, due to Ashlee's urging, they were the first ones there, which caused Ashlee to worry further, thinking that maybe they were in the wrong place. It wasn't very long however, until a girl in a cheerleader uniform showed up.

The uniform shocked Jessie. It consisted of a very tiny wrap-around skirt and a long sleeved crop top that exposed a lot of midriff. She wished she hadn't let Ashlee talk her into coming to the tryouts, even though she wasn't planning on being on the team.

They were seated at the end of the front row of auditorium seats, and a table with a few chairs had been set up on the floor in front of the stage. Shortly another girl showed up, who Jessie recognized from a couple of classes. It was already time for the tryouts to begin when two more cheerleaders arrived. One was dressed as the first, while the other wore a slightly less revealing uniform, with a v-neck shell top and a more traditional pleated skirt that wasn't much shorter than the school uniform Jessie wore every day. "She's on the JV squad," Ashlee whispered, "They wear last year's varsity uniforms."

The three cheerleaders sat at the table and started whispering among themselves. A few minutes later, Miss Pierce arrived. "She's the cheer advisor," Ashlee said, "Did you know?"

Miss Pierce whispered briefly to the three cheerleaders, and then said to Jessie and the other two, "You girls just relax for a few more minutes."

The cheerleaders and Miss Pierce then went to the back row of the auditorium and had more whispered conversation. When they came back Miss Pierce took a seat in the second row, behind Jessie and Ashlee, and the cheerleaders sat at the table, with the one that had been there first in the middle.

"First of all," she said, "Thank you for coming. Before I go any further, could the three of you move to the middle of the row please?" Ashlee, Jessie and the other girl all got up and moved to the center. While they moved, the girl paused and looked at each of the two girls beside her, as if expecting them to say something.

She continued, "Thanks. I'm Marcia, captain of the varsity squad. This is Wendy, one of our varsity flyers, and this is Kendra, also a flyer, and captain of the JV squad. What we were gonna do, was have tryouts, and pick two girls, put them on the JV squad, and train them as flyers, since three of our four varsity flyers graduate this year. What we have decided though, is that it doesn't make sense to hold tryouts just to eliminate one of the three of you. So, Welcome to the Whitebriar Cheer Squad!"

Jessie was stunned, never even having had the chance to prove her ineptness, she was suddenly a cheerleader. Ashlee, sitting in the middle wanted to high five Jessie, who reciprocated, but not with quite the same degree of enthusiasm. Ashlee also high fived the girl on the opposite side of her.

Miss Pierce then got up and gave them some information about what was expected of them as cheerleaders. She asked them all their student numbers, and gave them a schedule for the next couple of days. She gave them each a slip excusing them from study hall the next day so that they could go to the school nurse and get a physical.

Jessie wanted to say no, that she didn't want to be a cheerleader, but she couldn't think of a logical way to do that. After showing up for tryouts, it would be too embarrassing. Then she thought that maybe, instead of trying to be inconspicuous like she had been, maybe being high profile would be better. It would make it more difficult for Aunt Becca to keep her under control. Cheerleaders went to away games, right? There were crowds. She decided cheerleading might not be a bad thing.

She looked at the schedule. Practice after school tomorrow. A JV game on Thursday, which was listed as 'home.' She asked Ashlee where the games were played and was told that JV games were on the practice field next to the school. There was another practice on Friday, before the dance, then a varsity game on Saturday afternoon, which they were expected to attend.

And that was it. She was a cheerleader.

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She and Ashlee gave the permission slips to Mrs Sommers in study hall the next day, then went to the nurse's office for their physicals. Ashlee, with her last name Preston, went ahead of Jessie in alphabetical order, so Jessie sat in the waiting room and chilled.

It was about twenty minutes before Ashlee came out of the exam room, the nurse behind her. "You can return to class now, Honey," the nurse said, and then asked Jessie to follow her.

In the exam room, Jessie asked, "Do I have to undress?"

"No, Honey," the nurse said, opening a folder. "They sent your physical from your last school. It's still current."

"They did?"

"Uh-huh. It's right here."

"Can I see it?"

The nurse looked a little conflicted, but eventually said, "I guess so," and pulled a two page form out of the folder and handed it to Jessie.

Jessie studied it. Most of it was accurate. 'Great Western High School' it said. That was where she went to high school all right. Allergy to penicillin. Appendectomy at age seven. Broken collar bone the next year. There were inaccuracies though. Her name, instead of 'Schmit' had been changed to the Whitebriar misspelling, 'Schmidt.' It was dated just last year, when she'd actually graduated from GWHS seven years ago. The social security number on it was wrong too. But it looked authentic enough to again cause her to doubt her own memory.

"Is something wrong?"

"No," Jessie said and handed it back.

"All we have to do is update it. Take off your shoes and stand on the scale."

It wasn't one of those old fashioned balance scales, but digital, and Jessie could read the 101.1. Jeez, she'd gained three pounds. She must be eating too much. Next she had to stand against the wall and the nurse measured her height. As was her habit when being measured, Jessie stood as straight and tall as she could. The height rod had a digital readout too, but with her back to the wall, Jessie couldn't see it. She could see the 4' 10 1/2" the nurse wrote down though.

"That's wrong," Jessie said.

"Hmm?"

"I'm four-eleven. I've always been four foot eleven."

"That doesn't make sense Honey. You're still growing."

"What does it say I was....last year?"

"Four-eleven."

"See?"

"Honey, that is obviously an error. Either they measured you inaccurately, with your shoes on maybe, or their equipment was inaccurate, or they just wrote four-eleven by mistake."

"I've always been four foot eleven!" Jessie insisted.

"Honey, you are not making any sense. How could you have 'always' been any particular height? And shouting won't help. Mrs Spencer has instructed me I must report any misbehavior, so settle down. I'll measure you again."

Jessie stood against the wall again, this time willing her spine to stretch as tall as possible.

"See Honey, you are ALMOST four foot, ten and three quarters, but we round to the nearest half-inch, so, four-ten-and-a-half."

Could she be shrinking? She knew people lost height as they aged, but she thought that didn't start till much later.

"Your thing must be broke."

"Honey, it's all brand new equipment, and just calibrated at the start of the school year. Don't worry about it so much. You're probably due for a growth spurt soon. You could end up five-four or so."

Sure. Right. A growth spurt.

The nurse finished the exam, which involved taking Jessie's temperature, blood pressure and pulse, and listening to her heart and lungs. She didn't even have to take off her polo, the nurse just slid her stethoscope underneath it. Lastly, she went to a little refrigerator on a counter, and got out a syringe.

"What's that?"

"Your shot record says you are overdue for some booster shots."

"Shots?"

"Well, just one shot. They're combined."

"But I don't want a shot."

"Look, I can give you your shot today, or you can wait till next week, when I have two student nurses from the community college coming to practice giving injections."

The nurse pushed up the sleeve of Jessie's polo and wiped her arm with an alcohol pad. Jessie didn't even feel the needle, though there was a little bit of burning when it was over. "There. All done. That included a tetanus shot, so you'll wanna remember that. If you ever get hurt and have to go to an emergency room they'll wanna know. Now back to class with you."

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Practice was scheduled to start twenty minutes after the final bell. In addition to the school building and the dorms, the Whitebriar Academy campus also consisted of an athletic area. It was across a busy street, but there was an elevated walkway which went from the second floor of the school building to a building called the field house. There was also a baseball/softball field, some tennis courts and a football field with a running track around it. The perimeter of the city block the complex was on had a track used for cross country running.

Jessie had never been across the bridge because, while the field house was used by the boy's gym classes, the girls classes were held in what was called the old gym, which was attached to the school building. The football field had only a small set of bleachers with just a few rows of seats, and was used for junior varsity games and practice, while the varsity played home games at a nearby public school with a large stadium.

The field house did have a girls' locker room, where they changed into their gym clothes for practice. They went out to the field where the combined freshman, junior varsity and varsity football teams were at one end, doing calisthenics, while the cheerleaders were down at the far end. Jessie and Ashlee had to walk down the track past the football players.

"There's Spencer," Ashlee said.

Jessie looked, but couldn't see him. "Where?"

Ashlee pointed, and now Jessie could pick him out. He usually looked big to Jessie, but among the linemen and other players, he actually looked small. They sat on the front row of the bleachers while they waited for practice to start. Jessie's arm hurt a little where she got the shot, and she rubbed it.

"I didn't know we were gonna get shots," she said.

Ashlee looked at her. "You got a shot?"

"She said I needed a booster. You didn't get one?"

"Nope. I got a bunch of shots last year, so I guess I didn't need one."

Practice started and they broke into two groups, varsity and junior varsity. They started out with stretching, which Jessie was good at because she had taken up yoga a couple of years ago, and was pretty flexible. Kendra made sure they got acquainted with the bases. "You have to be nice to your bases," she told them. There were two guys on the squad, Marco and James. There were two girls who were bases also, Samantha and Chloe.

"May as well start building trust," Kendra said, and made them play the 'fall backwards and I'll catch you' game for a while.

At some point Ashlee said, "Look. There's Mrs Spencer," and pointed up at the bleachers. "Wouldn't it be funny, if Spencer was her son? Then he'd be Spencer Spencer!"

"Hopefully Ashlee, if his last name was Spencer, his parents would have named him something else."

Jessie looked at the bleachers and yes, there was Mrs Spencer, and next to her was Aunt Becca. They sure were getting chummy. She wondered if Mrs Spencer had found out she was a cheerleader and invited Aunt Becca to watch practice, or did Aunt Becca just happen to come by and find out.

Jessie, Ashlee, and Kristine, the other girl from tryouts, were taught a couple of simple cheers so they could participate at tomorrow's JV game. Ashlee, it turned out, had been a cheerleader in middle school, and Kristine was a gymnast. Jessie had only her yoga training to rely on. At one point when Jessie turned around, Ashlee was missing. She looked around and finally spotted her, by the bleachers, talking to Aunt Becca and Mrs Spencer, who were now in the front row. What the hell was going on?

When practice was over Miss Pierce told them she was going to take them to her office and give them uniforms, but they had to wait while she talked to the varsity squad.

While they were waiting Jessie asked Ashlee, "What were you talking to my aunt about?"

"Huh?"

"I saw you talking to my Aunt. What was that about?"

"Um, oh, she just wanted to know if you needed anything?"

"So why didn't she ask me?"

"I dunno Jessie. Look! There's Spencer! Hi Spencer!" she yelled, waving.

It didn't look like Ashlee was willing to share anything about Aunt Becca. Jessie turned and saw Spencer, standing on the track with a couple of other players. Then he was walking toward them, carrying his helmet. He did look cute, even in just a practice uniform.

"My two favorite cheerleaders. Ashlee and Jessie," he said.

"Hi Spencer," Ashlee said again. "Oh! Just a minute! I have to ask Miss Pierce something!" and she went off toward where Miss Pierce was just leaving the group of girls she was with, leaving Jessie standing with Spencer.

"Hi Spencer," she said.

"So, when did you become a cheerleader?"

"Yesterday I guess. Ashlee wanted to do it so I went along, and here I am."

"Well, you'll make a great cheerleader. Ashlee too."

"Thank you. I hear you're a pretty good football player."

"Good enough. You'll get to see tomorrow. You'll be there, right?"

"Uh-huh."

"Great!"

She couldn't think of anything else to say, so she just stood there, awkwardly silent, looking toward Ashlee and Miss Spencer.

"And," he said, "I'll see you at the dance Friday, right?"

"Yes."

"Great! I love to dance. Do you?"

"Uh-huh."

He laughed. "You sure do talk a lot."

"Sorry Spencer. I guess I got a lot on my mind."

"It's okay. You don't mind me talking to you do you?"

"You talk. I'll listen."

"You're a transfer student right? Did you have a boyfriend or something at your last school? Are you missing somebody?"

She shook her head, "Not really."

"I had a girlfriend last year, but she moved away. She said it would be stupid to try and keep in touch since we wouldn't see each other again ever, probably. She said we should just find new friends. I wrote to her once, but she didn't even write back."

"I'm sorry. But, you must have lots of girls after you."

He shrugged. "Not so much."

"Spencer. You're a cute boy but I can't... I'll dance with you, but don't expect too much else, okay?"

Just then another player jogged up. "Yo! Spence! Coach says we gotta meeting right now in the locker room!"

"Okay. See you tomorrow, Jessie."

Ashlee's conversation with Miss Pierce suddenly seemed over. Jessie didn't see Aunt Becca anywhere around either. They got their uniforms from Miss Pierce's office, where she insisted they try them on immediately. Jessie still felt silly dressed as a cheerleader. The skirt was shorter than her everyday uniform, but not by a great deal. Miss Pierce reminded them that since there was a JV game tomorrow, they, as JV cheerleaders, were to wear their uniforms all day in class.

They wore the uniforms back to the dorm, where Jessie's roommates made a few comments about 'Miss Cheerleader,' but that was it. It was late and Jessie quickly changed before going to the dining room for supper. A hundred and one pounds? She tried to leave a little on her plate instead of cleaning it like usual.

After dinner she worked on homework till lights out. Unlike most previous nights she didn't fall right to sleep, but lay there, thoughts spinning through her head. Aunt Becca and Mrs Spencer. Ashlee and Aunt Becca. Cheerleading chants. Spencer. Math class. The Red Badge of Courage. Why did she get a shot and not Ashlee? Was she shrinking? Was she getting fat? Where did that physical paperwork come from? Had aunt Becca brought in forged papers like she implied she would, or was it somehow reality and her memories just a delusion?

Being a teenager wasn't any easier the second time around.