**Frigid Brigid the Majorette**

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**I: Brigid and the Patriot's Day Parade**  
"Thbbb! ... Th-thbb!"  
  
He licked his lips and tried again on next group of sixteenth notes, pressing against the mouthpiece that felt like a block of ice no matter how much he blew into it.  
  
Even through his full-length wool uniform, and the long underwear, he could feel the frigid wind knifing right through him. It wasn't just him, of course, as he tried to pt-pt the notes of "Little Giant" along with the seven other trombonists in the front row. The rest of the band wasn't sounding much better. It was nerve-racking being a trombonist, having to be in the front row of the 60-member band to make room for the trombones' slides.  
  
But this was a great day for the band, for their families, for their high school. They had won the national competition down in Atlanta and were privileged to lead the parade into Foxboro Stadium for the Patriots' last regular season game.  
  
They had expected cold this time of year, but not THIS cold. It had snowed two days before and the banks were piled up high on each side of Washington Street. Behind the snow, crowds five deep watched, bundled up, and cheered, or made ridiculous muted clapping with their heavily gloved hands. There was some talk about the parade being canceled, but that was only a dream. They couldn't pass up being seen on national TV.  
  
It was a poor, mostly black school, T----- High, but the marching band program was its pride and joy. They had quite a reputation in the Boston area and were often invited to march in other towns' parades, like St. Patrick's Day and Memorial Day. Their uniforms were resplendent, the tall plumed hats and the braided jackets with the shoulder tassles and striped pants, though with the district finances the way they were, upkeep required frequent fund-raising. He hated doing that.  
  
But like for any kid it was worth it, being a proud member of this famous band, marching strictly in step as they were trained to do in their daily morning practices, out on the football field and in the gym in bad weather. The big glass case in the school lobby, right after the metal detector, had a slew of trophies, and annual band photos going back to 1937 when it was a segregated school.  
  
Now "Little Giant" ended and they would switch to "Our Director". After the last cymbal crash from the half-frozen arms of his friend Jared ten rows back, he and the other trombonists counted three beats and then dropped their instruments down to waist level in "ready" position. The next tune after that was "Washington Post" and then "Manhattan Beach". This was part of their regular rotation, the traditional marches then "Hold That Tiger", during which the band could finally do a little swinging around to get their blood moving again.  
  
Anything was better than straight marching on a frigid day like this. His feet were getting numb, and the tips of his gloved fingers. The wind was now blowing into their faces as they began marching downhill with the road. He could feel his nose sniffle and hoped snot didn't run down where he couldn't wipe it. Unnecessary motions were much discouraged, they ruined the formation. He thought of their band director, Mr. Weaver -- they called him "Sarge" because he used to direct an Army band -- who was marching to the side twenty feet back. He glanced furtively down at his white fake-leather gloves. Would snot show on them?  
  
The drum guard, way behind him, did their vamping and he looked straight forward as he was supposed to. He could see the city ahead, and the stadium in front of it, looking like it was ten miles away. It wasn't that far, but this was a long parade -- first going down to the park, then a short break, then the final leg down Broadway, in front of the reviewing stand, then finally into the stadium.  
  
The sound off, and now into "Our Director". D-flat was not his favorite key but this was an easy tune, not too many notes. The band didn't make as many flubs on this one. Now he looked a little to the right, to their regular majorette, a white girl named Brigid, prancing and twirling her baton all alone at the head of the parade, and contemplated her very interesting skin.  
  
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He had noticed it in the photos in the glass case. As the uniforms for the rest of the band got more abundant and ornate over the years, with the addition of high boots, cummerbunds, epaulettes, the majorette's uniform got more and more skimpy. The 1940's majorettes wore mid-length skirts which showed some leg, but otherwise their uniforms were much like the rest of their band's. And then over the years the big "shako" hat got smaller, the jacket shrank to a vest, then disappeared, the blouse and skirt shrank to leotards, then in the 1980's the midriff appeared, the boots shrank to sneakers...  
  
He liked looking at Brigid's beautiful skin, very white with freckles over the shoulders, a product of her Irish heritage. It was certainly well on display. Her uniform began with a little pillbox-style cap, a shrunken version of the shakos the rest of her band wore, black and white, the school colors, with a "T" on the front. It was pinned to her red, braided-up hair. Her nipples were covered by circles of white fake-leather (called "circlets") maybe three inches across, little rounded cones, with again each with a black "T" on them. He wondered how the circlets were attached so they didn't fall off as she went through her vigorous paces. That was something the girls in the locker room would know, though for obvious reasons, Brigid had emerged from there this morning well before the others.  
  
Further down, her closely-shaved pubic area was covered with a little white V-shaped triangle, certainly the smallest bikini bottom he had ever seen, held on securely by sparkly silver strings that went low around her waist, meeting in the rear at the crack of her butt where they formed a delicate "T" with the band that went down and disappeared between the cheeks. Add a pair of low-heeled, dressy flip-flop style sandals, held on with just the thinnest silvery straps, and that was Brigid the majorette's uniform.  
  
He was fascinated by white girls' skin, how it changed color, getting a tan in the summer, blushing, turning whiter when they were afraid, red when they were mad, red and blotchy in the cold. White folks' skin was pretty funny in general. During the competition in Atlanta, watching the other bands, he and his buddies almost lost it during another band's audition, an all-white band from Kansas or someplace. Five trumpeters did consecutive solos and the face of each started out white and turned red, one after the other.  
  
Brigid was beautiful, though. Nothing ridiculous about her or her skin. He didn't really know her. Her regular instrument was clarinet, and the clarinets were across the band from the trombones. She always sat between her friends Debra and Virginia, black girls who were pretty O.K. And her skin, especially today, was interesting, fascinating really, like a canvas of a painting created by God called, "On a Freezing Cold Day". Her shoulders were reddish, her arms blotchy, her bare back a little lighter, her legs and feet a little purplish, her toes a little more so. Her sacral dimples, a few inches above the T-string, were lighter than the blushing butt cheeks below.  
  
It was kind of callous of him to think of her this way, of course. She must be suffering on a day like this but she didn't show it. She was a real trouper. They had never marched on a day this cold. Feeling his cold hands and chilly arms in their gloves and two layers of sleeves, he thought of how her bare hands and arms must feel tossing and twirling that baton. Feeling his whole body trying to get some blood moving under his full-length wool uniform and long underwear, he felt sorry for her bare torso, the breasts tightly bouncing in the freezing air behind the -- were they glued on? -- little circlets. His butt was freezing -- but how much more freezing Brigid's must be, entirely naked to the winter wind except for the ridiculous tiny string. And his feet were almost numb in their heavy socks and boots. Meanwhile the frigid wind whistled between poor Brigid's bare toes!  
  
But like always, she kept a smile frozen on her face, alternately twirling and the jabbing the baton in the air to keep the beat, then when the band was marching in place, tucking the baton under her arm, stepping in place. He wondered how she kept those backless sandals on her feet while whirling around. It must be hard to grip with toes going numb. Only once did she falter, one heel slipping a bit on black ice, but she recovered right away and hardly lost a step.  
  
His mind went back to September. It seemed so long ago now. The measuring for uniforms, one by one in the practice room, though how Brigid was measured, it would have been interesting to see. Then the meeting in the auditorium. One by one the members were called up by the band secretary, Ms. Jillian, to get their uniforms. A big travel bag held up by a coat hanger, with a smaller bag attached which held the boots. The bags were huge, massive, five feet high and heavy. Some of the girls had trouble hefting theirs back to their seats. Then Brigid was called. She was in the back and walked down the aisle in her usual outfit of black jeans, white-collared shirt, jean jacket and sneakers. Ms. Jillian handed her a tiny black thing like it was a little birthday present. It was the flip-flops tied together with a tiny black pouch the size of a CD case. Her uniform bag.  
  
During the rest of the year the uniforms had been hung up on those racks along the walls in the rehearsal room. Big heavy travel bags, except for a hanger that looked like it had nothing on it until you looked and saw the tiny black pouch with flip-flops.  
  
Now "Our Director" ended. Instruments down. The band halted, Brigid having been instructed to stay at least fifty feet behind the flashing fire truck. The whole band, the majorette and the instrumentalists and the drum guard, marched in place, little steps, two inches up, as they had practiced. During those early morning sessions at the school Brigid had taken off her shoes and socks, so she could practice in those backless sandals. Her bare feet were striking with everyone else so fully clothed. He wasn't a foot fetishist or anything but it was pretty sexy.  
  
Of course, now she was almost all bare. He watched her butt cheeks intently, as they jiggled ever so slightly with each in-place step. Nice and tight, a white girl's butt. He knew she was on the soccer team and she was in such good shape. Of course, a majorette at this school had to be. Real narrow waist, flat tummy, nice legs, nice boobs too, not especially big but sticking out firm without a bra. He threw furtive glances at the crowds behind the banks of snow, looking for the TV cameras. None yet; they had to be further down the route.  
  
And the newspapers. The crowd was all bundled up. Standing in place it was easier to get cold. Most of the faces were all but covered with scarves or ski masks. He tried to detect their expressions and supposed they were cringing at the sight of the nearly naked majorette in the cold. He could picture tomorrow morning's front page of the Globe, tabloidy as always. The headline: "CRUEL! School makes majorette march near-naked in freezing parade!" Pictures of horrified onlookers. And of course, a big picture of Brigid front and center, so all the outraged readers could jerk off to her under the breakfast table.  
  
He told himself: I'm obsessing. He had obsessed on Brigid all year, being in the front row of the instrumentalists, having such a constant view of her. And he told himself that exposure to the elements was just part of the life of a majorette. He and the other trombonists had gotten used to following her around during the whole football season, watching her body soak up the sun those hot September days (and being a little envious back then, stuck in their sweaty wool uniforms), mesmerized by the sleek wetness of her bare curves in October drizzles, then counting the goose bumps on her butt during those windy November weekends.  
  
So it was more than just watching her bod. He wanted to get to know her. He admired tough girls. What was she like?  
  
Now on to "Washington Post". This was a livelier tune. He got with the program and concentrated on his playing as they again advanced. Then Brigid spun 180 degrees, twirling, and his thoughts wandered again. That tiny triangle bottom, it's really narrow - maybe no more than like two inches across at the top. Does she have to shave all her pubic hair? Or just pare it down so it's like a pubic Mohawk? Is her pubic hair red like her head hair? Someone told him that all white girls, no matter what their head hair is like, their pubic hair is like a dull brown...  
  
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It felt so good to wolf down this big burger. Being out in the cold makes you hungry. He sat up, munching on fries, his shako on the table, his trombone bell-down next to him on the bench.  
  
And then Brigid sat down across from him!  
  
Her breasts with their circlets wiggled a bit as she and Debra and Virginia, on each side of her, sat down with their trays. They sucked on the sodas and chatted about this and that as he tried not to look too directly. He could see down to about the middle of her tummy, and her almost total nudity, all that white skin, now turning white in blotches now that it was finally exposed to warmth again, contrasted with her fully-dressed black friends with their gold braids and buttons and epaulettes. Debra and Virginia had taken off their gloves to eat, carefully setting them to the side, but still had their tall shakos on.  
  
It was a big room, with the whole band around them sitting at tables, and over the hubbub the girls were talking about their driver education class, namely that old big Chevy the school had. "It's hahd to control that cahh," Brigid said, and Virginia agreed. "Girl you know it." Brigid's accent seemed a little different than the standard white-person Boston accent. Maybe more like a Providence accent. Then she shifted on her hips and he knew that she had dropped her sandals to the floor and was sitting cross-legged.  
  
Now she pivoted her body toward Debra, still engaged in conversation. Girls talked a lot faster than guys and by now they had gotten into going to the mall next weekend with Maria and Shonday. He realized Brigid was pretty popular. It was such a big school, though, that there was no point of contact between his circle of friends and hers. Now as he finished his burger, trying not to look, Debra scooted away from her and put ungloved hands down, and he realized she was massaging Brigid's half-frozen feet. His eyes leapt as he caught a glimpse, the warm black hands rubbing the circulation back into the white toes, stretching them, spreading them. He supposed it wasn't so skanky if the person was essentially barefoot all day like Brigid was.  
  
"Hey Brigid!" It was a guy he knew as Willy, something of a wise guy. He held up an ice cream on the way to his seat. "Want some COLD ice cream?"  
  
Brigid squinted sarcastically as he passed by.  
  
He straightened up a bit, automatically, as Old Lady McPherson came around, the Principal. She could be (A), an old witch, or (B), a nice old grandma. Right now it was (B). "How are you doing dear?" she said. "Pretty good," Brigid said. "You look fine out there. You all do," she said glancing over at the rest. "We're proud of you."  
  
Looking down at Brigid's feet, then at her hands, Ms. McPherson said, "You did a good job on the nails, girls. I didn't think you could get another year out of those old bottles."  
  
"Well they WERE about empty," Virginia said. "I did the feet," Debra said proudly, as she held them up for the Principal to see, Brigid trying to spread her still-reviving toes with some effort. This was no small matter. With the disappearance of boots and gloves, fingernail paint and toenail paint had become part of the majorette's uniform. And like everything else about the band members' appearance it was expected to be meticulously perfect. The paint was the school colors, black and white, alternating on each finger and toe.  
  
After the old lady had gone on, another guy came by with a giant-sized soda. "Brigid -- want some -- COLD -- soda?" The majorette stuck her tongue out with a sour face.  
  
Sarge came by. "Don't eat too fast," he said. "We've got a mile and a half to go. How's everyone doing?"  
  
Having finished his burger and used his napkin, he spoke up with a smile. "It's hot in here," he said. Indeed he was getting sweaty indoors, encased in his thermals and full uniform.  
  
"Pfft," Sarge said with a good-natured dismissive wave. "Talk to Brigid about that."  
  
It was the first time he referred to Brigid's plight. With the forecast being for cold, there was some talk about canceling the parade. But that was just impossible. It was to be their big day. At the last band meeting Sarge had talked about it. "Now it will be chilly out, so it will be all right for all band members to wear thermal underwear, except the majorette of course, providing it's not bulky and doesn't show." Half the guys must have looked over at Brigid sitting in the clarinet section. Brigid showed no reaction to this passing mention, but Debra and Virginia glanced sideways at their friend. Everyone could wear thermals except the band member who needed them the most. Of course everyone knew for the majorette it would be impossible. Even a body stocking or something like that would look ridiculous. It probably would make the sandals slip off. And mabye there would be no way to keep the circlets on.  
  
"Hey Brigid," another guy said as he passed, "are ya -- FRIGID?"  
  
He could detect Brigid giving him the finger from under the table. He was fascinated by her even more now. She could give as well as she got.  
  
"Woo! Look! The girl scouts!" Debra's announcement got the three of them up. Careful to put her sandals on first, Brigid joined the rest of them as they went up to the big window facing the street. They stepped up onto the low sill and pressed their hands against the glass, waving at their old troop leader, Miss Pikarski, who waved back as she passed by leading the pack of smiling little girls in overcoats. Debra and Virginia, standing against the window covered all up in their jackets and long-legged trousers and boots, and in between, Brigid in her backless sandals, her total nakedness from the rear interrupted only by the little T-string in her butt, and the little cap clipped to her hair.  
  
They got down and for a while they ate silently. Now another clown came by and said, "Were ya frigid, Brigid?" He could see it might become a nickname now whether she wanted it or not. Frigid Brigid.  
  
Her eyes were darting around the room, as if making sure no one was looking. Then she said, "This uniform is killing me."  
  
Debra and Virginia seemed to know what she meant and looked around too.  
  
"Make sure the coast is cleah, O.K.?" And then his mouth dropped as Brigid took the circlets off with a little sideways squeeze from each hand. He saw now they were kept on by springy metal clips like you use to keep papers together, or on a clipboard -- "bulldog clips", he thought they were called. God, they must hurt!  
  
Her nipples stood out, stiff and red, like they were angry at being tortured all morning. Brigid sighed and closed her eyes as she massaged them between her fingers. It was almost as if taking them off was as painful as having them on.  
  
And then she opened her eyes and looked up at him for the first time -- smiling and giggling a little bit, with a shyness and sense of slight embarrassment that was unusual for this tough girl, as she cupped her breasts in her hands. He smiled back and felt at that moment like he was in love.  
  
She returned to massaging her abused nipples then put her hands at her sides. Her breasts wiggled a bit more freely now with the motions of her arms as she ate. She looked up warily now and then. Any T---- High majorette was aware of public indecency laws and knew she shouldn't be out like this.

Her breasts looked even more protruding, more pointy, with her red nipples exposed and sticking out. Again, a fascinating aspect of white girls -- he had never seen a real live white girl's nipples before, so expressive, angry and red. Especially against the breasts which were returning to the normal white color, as they spent more time in this warm fast food place.  
  
Brigid's breasts needed more soothing, apparently. She finished her soda with a loud slurp and then she stuck her fingers in it. She fished out two chips of ice which she now held up against her nipples. "Mmmm..." It was a sensual sound that made his dick hard. Fortunately it wouldn't show under all his coverings. She checked around for grown-ups, rubbing the quickly melting chips againt her.  
  
Now a clap from across the room. Sarge's signal. "Quick, do me up heah," Brigid said, turning to Virginia and sticking out her breasts. Virginia hurriedly clipped the circlets on. "Ow ow ow," Brigid said, taking off the left one. Virginia had clipped it too near the end of the nipple. He imagined it must have hurt like hell. Virginia re-did it.  
  
"How do I look?" Brigid said, turning to Debra. "This one's crooked," her friend said, resetting one so that the "T" stood straight up.  
  
Then Frigid Brigid shook her breasts violently side to side, making them bounce like miniature soccer balls. This took his breath away. But it was the only way to make sure the circlets were secure.  
  
The band got up and made for outside. He put on his shako and picked up his trombone and followed. Having gotten hot in his uniform, he was almost grateful to feel the freezing air hitting his face as they emerged onto the sidewalk. They were bottlenecked as members filed through the narrow cutout in the three-foot-high snow bank to get back onto the street. Brigid was needed at the front and couldn't wait. So she took off her sandals and, using her baton as a walking stick, scaled the snow bank in her bare feet, her toes grabbing the refrozen slippery chunks of white with care. It caused people to look but it was simply the sensible thing to do.  
  
Now out on the street, they got into formation. Sarge and Brigid stood in front. When everyone was all set Sarge said, "How are your toes, Brigid?"  
  
Standing in front with the other trombones, he saw her look down, flexing her toes in the dressy flip-flops. "OK"  
  
"Folks," Sarge barked out, "I... know... we don't... sound too good... today." He was speaking slowly so as to be heard clearly, his breath forming little clouds. "This is probably the coldest parade we've ever been in. There's just no way to play well in this temperature. Don't... worry about it. Concern yourself with formation. We'll be in front of TV cameras soon... so how we look... will be what counts.  
  
"I've noticed the formation isn't too good." He pointed over to the majorette. "Watch... Brigid. She's freezing her... BUNS off... for us. The least we can do is follow her beat. Brigid," his voice lowering, "lead as much as possible. Twirl only when the band seems in step, and only one throw at a time." Brigid nodded.  
  
And with a sound off from the drum guard, they were off, marching forward, beginning "Son of a Preacher Man". They were still going downhill and now the wind was so stiff that it was an effort to push ahead. The cold sun disappeared and now it was overcast. He glanced up and it looked like snow clouds. Brigid led, her baton jabbing into the air, stepping high, the icy wind no doubt piercing like needles into her near-nakedness...  
  
In a few moments her skin was multicolored again, and he was grateful for his thermal underwear.  
  
They got to the reviewing stand and stopped. Aside from entering the stadium itself, this was their big moment. As planned, the majorette turned and faced the Governor and the other important, formally-dressed personages up there in their top hats, overcoats and white gloves, as the drum guard marched single file around the instrumentalists and formed behind her. Cameras were everywhere, on the reviewing stand, perched up on scaffolds here and there, all aimed at Brigid.  
  
The drum guard did the sound-off, then launched into a furious barrage of gunshot-like drum shots and cymbal crashes as Brigid twirled and spun and pranced. Her skin was a little purplish now, maybe from her exertions. He could tell she was breathing heavily, and realized what an athletic workout it was.  
  
Now she flung the baton high, high up into the air, spun around once, and deftly caught it over her head in time with the last cymbal crash. She stayed in that position, baton up, her breasts wobbling for a split-second before coming to rest, her pelvic bones framing her concave tummy, one foot in front of the other, the other arm straight out from her side, the majorette's permanent smile frozen on her face.  
  
The men and women up on the stand cheered, as did the rest of the crowd. He would have cheered too if he had been allowed. If she had dropped the baton it would be all they would hear about in the media, it would be how T---- High School would be known. But she had come through. Good old Frigid Brigid!  
  
Now they marched down the hill again, behind the fire truck, as they went the last leg down to the stadium. Another easy tune, "Under the Double Eagle". Brigid's body stayed purple as she led the beat. He wondered how long she could go like this. Her exertions would heat her up to some extent, but there had to be a limit.  
  
As he worked the slide his mind went into fantasy. He pictured the fire truck stopping and the firemen jumping off it with their hoses. And training them on Brigid, the great arcs crashing onto her and splashing her all over. Now there were more firemen, from all directions, coming out of the crowds, till there were ten or more big jets of water bombarding her. It was cold water of course, but to her it would feel warm and she would be grateful. Swinging her baton wildly over her head, she would dance in the massive downpour like it was a shower, kicking her sandals off, laughing as she flung up her bare feet. Her breasts were hit to and fro by competing jets and now the circlets came off, one after the other, and she gratefully accepted the water on one nipple then the other, soothing them. Another shot to her crotch and the little triangle flew off, shooting away from her with the tiny strings, and now Brigid the majorette danced joyfully nakedly in the fire hose shower, and now the whole band put down their instruments and cheered...  
  
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**II: Brigid on TV**  
He waited anxiously, nervously fidgeting with the slide of his trombone. Mr. Watson, whom everyone called "Sarge" from his years as a bandleader in the Army, waited impatiently as Jamal fiddled with the A-V equipment. It was first period practice in the crowded rehearsal room. They had just gone through their usual warm-up tune, "Captains and Kings". Now they were snorting with anticipation. Except for him. And Brigid in the clarinet section, sitting between Debra and Virginia, in her usual jean jacket, white turtleneck, black jeans and Doc Martens. She was easy to pick out because she was one of only five white kids in the whole band. She bit her lip and was as nervous as he was.  
  
Finally -- the big screen lit up blue. The screen was ripped here and there. T--- High School might be known locally for its marching band but this was not a school district with a lot of money.  
  
Some out-of-synch blurry images and now the genial, grandmotherly face of Melba McCann, the anchor of the local news show. "And now, we have with us guests from the famous T--- High School marching band, who will be performing at this Saturday's regional title football game between their school and Brookline High School." Her first words sounded like she was talking underwater but then Jamal's hand slammed down on something in the control room and the sound cleared up. "Here we have -- "  
  
The camera panned over to the three guests, Sarge in his business suit with the black tie, Brigid in her majorette uniform, her baton laid primly across her bare thighs, and he himself in his braided wool uniform, holding his trombone in "rest" position in front of him.  
  
Watching the screen, he cringed as he saw the beads of sweat on his forehead. It wasn't just nervousness -- it had been hot in that studio. Sarge had insisted on getting there half an hour early. Already burdened with his trombone case, he had needed Brigid's help in hefting his big uniform bag out of the car and through the many hallways before finally getting to the dressing rooms. Brigid went in front of him, holding up the boots end of the bag, her baton slung over her shoulder. At the end of the baton dangled her own uniform bag, a tiny pouch like a beanbag.  
  
Then it had taken him forever to struggle into his uniform in that tiny cubicle, what with the cummerbund, the epaulettes, the big boots. Finally he emerged into what they called the green room, where guests were made up before walking onto the set.  
  
Brigid was there sitting up on a high stool, already dressed, while the gay-looking guy powdered her with makeup. He supposed that a white person would look like a ghost on TV without some cosmetic help. Especially Brigid, whose Irish skin was very white, with a smattering of freckles across her bare shoulders.  
  
She smiled at him as she said, "I'm getting the royal treatment." The makeup man had a lot of skin to cover, what with her entire uniform consisting of two little circlets covering her nipples, and that tiny triangle over her pubic area held on with silvery strings that went low around her hips and the other string that disappeared between her butt cheeks. Below, her bare feet rested on the bottom rung, the flip-flop style majorette sandals on the floor.  
  
He got the trombone out of his case and sat and watched, having nothing else to do. Brigid's circlets seemed to have gotten smaller. The uniforms had just come back from their twice-yearly cleaning. Maybe the majorette uniform was subtly altered before it came back. He thought about the photos in the glass case, and wondered about the shrinkage in the majorette uniform over the years, how it was done, how past majorettes dealt with it. Around about 1970, for example, how did the majorette for that year find out that her short skirt and blouse had morphed into a leotard? How did the 1990 majorette deal with a short short that had become a bikini-style bottom? Or the 1999 majorette who found that the strings on her top had disappeared and she now had to wear circlets?  
  
Those first circlets were huge compared to the ones Brigid had to wear. Her breasts were round and firm, maybe a bit bigger than average; and around her circlets all her breast slopes, top, bottom, and sides, were in full view. He wasn't about to do math calculations but the circlets covered maybe 15% of Brigid's total breast area. He thought of the big plastic eyeball model in the science room, the area formed by the iris and pupil. About that much.  
  
He saw the makeup man do his work, puffing the powder between Brigid's breasts. He had seen boobs bounce before, of course, but always in tank tops or bikini tops. Brigid's breasts, not strapped to her body or to each other, moved independently, one wobbling a bit while the other was still, sometimes bobbing the same way, sometimes toward each other, one moving in a tight little circle while the other lurched left to right...  
  
The makeup guy bent down and Brigid parted her knees as he got that area around her uniform where she had shaved her pubic hair. The triangle bottom seemed to have gotten smaller too, more like a narrow "V" now. She looked down with a neutral expression as the guy powdered industriously. "Spread a little more, please..."  
  
Sarge came in. "We're on in five minutes. How's it going?"  
  
The two band members smiled and nodded. Now Brigid spread her toes as the guy powdered them. Pretty toes. She had carefully painted the nails in the black-and-white school colors. Cummerbund and epaulettes and braided jacket and high boots were part of his uniform; toenail paint was part of hers.  
  
He put on his white gloves and looked at them. Even one of his gloves provided more coverage than Brigid's entire uniform.  
  
Then he remembered getting suddenly nervous as Melba McCann came in to get them, and Brigid picked up her baton and followed Sarge into the big room with all the cameras surrounding the set, and he followed Brigid...  
  
Sarge sat down in one of Melba's guest chairs and chatted with her quietly while a commercial was being shown. Rod and Brigid, waiting by the big camera setup, looked at each other. Rod was so enchanted with this shy Irish white girl that he choked up whenever he wanted to speak. Finally he croaked out, "How do I look?"  
  
He stood up straight as Brigid, holding her baton in her armpit, adjusted his jacket and tugged at his epaulettes. "Great. How about me?" She held up her arms and her breasts stuck out. "Are my 'T''s straight?"  
  
Rod was open-mouthed, unsure of what she meant, looking down finally at her ribs and the hollow tummy below. "Your -- "  
  
"My 'T's!"  
  
He swallowed and felt flushed as he realized she meant the "T" school logo on each of her circlets. He bent down a bit so that Brigid's breasts were at his eye level. "Fine. Both straight."  
  
"Good. Oh no!" Brigid opened her mouth and out came a retainer. "This'll show! I forgot entirely!"  
  
She frantically looked around for a place to put it. He heroically took it and held it in his gloved hand. "It's safe with me."  
  
"Oh thanks, you're a dear," she said. He felt his heart skip a beat.  
  
Then Sarge motioned for them to sit down next to him, and the camera guy counted down...  
  
Now, in the band room, watching with everyone else, he sat through Melba McCann's introduction and then smiled as Sarge fell over his words in describing the marching band, at first saying it was founded in 1527 instead of 1927. Sarge, sitting on his conductor's stool, covered his face in good-natured embarrassment.  
  
Melba then said, "We have here also Brigid O'Dierna, the band's majorette, and Rod Sykes, first trombonist. You're part of a proud tradition. How do you like marching with the band?"  
  
Looking at the big screen, the band saw Brigid and Rod smile at each other shyly. Brigid giggled nervously, her breasts bouncing with her laugh, then jiggling for a second after her body had stilled. He said something to the effect of, "It's a great band and it's great marching with your friends." Brigid said, "We all work together." Not memorable words, exactly, but what the heck, they were petrified.  
  
"The forecast for Saturday is cold and drizzly," Melba said. "In your majorette outfit," she said, looking up and down at Brigid, "how do you stay warm on days like Saturday?"  
  
"You keep moving," Brigid said. Her stock response.  
  
And now in the band room there was a general shifting of chairs with anticipation as Melba McIntyre announced Rod and Brigid were going to do a tune. His friends in the trombone section smiled at him but he was not nervous because he knew what was coming.  
  
The two band members on TV stood up, him with the trombone up to his lips, her with the baton tucked under her arm. Then she nodded and he launched into a verse of "American Patrol" which was flawless. Watching in the band room, he smiled. He had been so afraid he was going to botch it but he hadn't. Good tone throughout, not one note flubbed -- while successfully hiding Brigid's retainer carefully in his slide hand. Meanwhile Brigid twirled. She couldn't do any throws in Melba's little studio but she did everything else, spinning, fanning, switching arms, down through the legs, even that special trick she did where the baton seemed to crawl back over her shoulders on its way from one hand to the other. She spun around, leading with one breast and timing it so that the other breast followed. A performance as flawless as his.  
  
At the last note he and Brigid froze, as planned. He was sweating in his wool uniform. She was not immune to the studio heat, either. As she posed, her breasts coming to rest, a trickle of sweat was visible that had started below her neck, rivered between her breasts and down her flat tummy, and delta-ed at her navel.  
  
Melba and Sarge clapped, then it went to a commercial and the clip ended. Jamal turned off the screen light. Everyone in the band room applauded.  
  
"Stand up and take a bow, well done," Sarge said. He stood up in his sweatshirt and long jams. Brigid stood up in her jean jacket and turtleneck and black jeans. Local stars!  
  
"One fine performance deserves another," Sarge said. "Time for a big tune. Let's do 'March Grandioso'!"  
  
  
**III: Brigid and the Big Game**  
"The long walk", they called it, from the locker rooms to the football field, everyone trudging through the wet grass before game time, the team and the band and the cheerleaders in front. It was a chilly day, no doubt about it, and it was almost noon and hadn't warmed up a bit. It had rained yesterday and there were sloppy mud patches to be avoided. Of course, the football players were resigned to getting all muddy, but for a variety of reasons that did not bother them so much. The odd conversation between them mixed with the more subdued chatting of the band members and the much quicker talking of the cheerleaders.  
  
He finagled it so that he was walking near the front, next to Brigid, who was mindful of the cold. Parades were one thing, but games, where the band had to sit for long periods in the stands, were another. She wore her green wool poncho over her uniform, her sandals in her hand as she trod the wet grass with red Converse All-Stars on her sockless feet. The poncho barely came down past her butt and she looked like she was naked underneath. Some of the football players said hi to her as they passed.  
  
He looked up. The clouds were gray but it looked like the sun might break through. With luck...  
  
They got to the field and waited for Sarge, as the players, led by their captain, charged onto the field to go through their warmup plays while the visiting team from Brookline went through theirs. Brookline was a wealthy town and their football uniforms were a dazzling gold and green. The almost all-white team looked like a bunch of future executives. T--- should make short work of them today.  
  
He noted, with irritation, the ten or twelve cops hanging out around the stands. Just because we're a mostly black school they send riot control. Well, at least the cops they usually sent were nice.  
  
Brigid chatted with a couple of the cheerleaders, who wore coverall sweats over their short skirts. They had long sleeves too. Brigid's bare legs and arms really stood out. He listened to their conversation. They were going bowling later. Cheerleaders traditionally were pretty snobby, and didn't like the band majorette -- maybe they thought she upstaged them during the halftime shows -- but they had made an exception for Brigid.  
  
The cheerleaders went off to get their stuff at the storage shed as Sarge showed up, with his little briefcase, wearing thermal gloves, and an open overcoat over his business suit. "Band, this is a big day," he said, in his "announcement" voice. "Also a cold day. It's thirty-eight degrees and it might rain. But you know what I say, if our team has the courage to play out there, WE can play too.  
  
"We have one tune before the game, then we sit and then at halftime we'll do the roll-off with Brigid and the drummers and then 'Washington Post'. Local TV will be here. But before that happens they're presenting a dedication to Roddington McNeil. You know who he is? No? Well he was principal here for 25 years. He retired ten years ago. They're dedicating the new scoreboard to him.  
  
"Now this is the big game for our team. They go to the regionals if they win. While we're sitting up there waiting, I want you to cheer them on. Remember, we're their biggest fans."

He looked up at the sky. "Looks like we might get lucky. Maybe the sun will even come out. Well, let's go."  
  
He led them as they walked, not in formation, to the admissions area where the ticket takers were setting up their tables. Past it, the Dad's Club was setting up their refreshment stand. They had a big metal tub on a dolly with Jamal's uncle using tongs to put big ice chunks into the tub and then filling it with water to keep the cans of soda cold. Sarge had a brief call to make on his cell phone. The band stood around and watched the tub fill up until he was done.  
  
Now they walked behind the stands, under the announcer's booth where Mr. Simonelli was opening up, trying to pry open the top compartment which was submerged in three inches' worth of yesterday's rainfall. The band, with its majorette right behind Sarge, turned under it.  
  
It was then that the first of Brigid's many misfortunes that day occurred.  
  
Walking behind Brigid, watching her bare legs flushed with the cold under her poncho, he followed her as they turned into the narrow passage between the two grandstands.  
  
At first they thought it was a sudden downpour. But then they saw that the only person getting poured on was Brigid. She shrieked as a narrow but persistent torrent of water came from way above and doused her on her poncho-covered shoulder. Everyone stopped in alarm, trying to help but afraid of being doused themselves. Sarge looked back. Brigid tried to dodge the gush of water but it seemed to follow her as she zigzagged left and right in the narrow passage. Finally a few dribbles and it ended.  
  
Brigid stood there miserably, arms out, her poncho totally soaked and lying heavy and flat against her body, probably weighing about twenty pounds, dripping onto her equally soaked sneakers.  
  
Sarge looked up and yelled. Mr. Simonelli looked down and, mortified, apologized frantically. There was no time for recriminations, though. Brigid breathed heavily, on the verge of tears, and starting to shiver.  
  
"You've got to take that thing off, you'll get hypothermia," Sarge said. Wearing a sopping wet cold poncho on a day like this was not healthy.  
  
Rod was glad to help. He put his trombone down on the pavement and helped Sarge as they carefully lifted the poncho off her. Sarge folded it up and put it on one of the grandstand benches.  
  
As the band members came up from the rear and encircled Brigid, everyone looked at her, her arms still out to the sides, her white goose-pimpled skin interrupted only by her majorette uniform, the little circlets covering her nipples and the little "V" down below with the strings. Everyone looked around for a towel or something to dry her off or cover her with, but under a grandstand such things are not to be found.  
  
"Maybe we should get you inside," Sarge said.  
  
"No," Brigid said, realizing that she would be needed momentarily to lead the band's pre-game performance. "My uniform's not wet," she said, holding up her breasts to get a close look at the circlets. She seemed to be speaking to them as she said, "The rest of me will dry off in the air in a little bit."  
  
Which was true. The band members had noticed it during that first wet game, the first game of the year back in September. There was a downpour early in the game. At the halftime show everyone else was still soaked except for Brigid, whose bare skin and minimal uniform dried swiftly.  
  
"I'd best get rid of these, though," Brigid said, noting her sneakers. She got the poncho from Sarge and put it on the ground, then untied the sneakers, wiped her bare feet on the poncho, then slipped on the low heeled silvery flip-flops that were part of her uniform. The rest of the band, fully covered and in their big boots, looked on silently as she wiggled her toes in the sandals as she stood up.  
  
"OK then," Sarge said, as they resumed their journey through the grandstands.  
  
The stands were filling up quickly and they didn't have long to wait. The sky looked like it might be clearing up. The wind subsided. This might not be a bad day after all.  
  
Sarge ambled over to Coach Gunderson, who was corralling his players to the sidelines. They chatted a bit and when Sarge came back he said, "Five minutes".  
  
They stood around and waited. Rod worked the slide of his trombone. On a cold day he was sure to prep with a lot of valve oil, but it looked like it wouldn't be that cold. So now he was worried he might have used too much, and it might drop onto his gloves. Or worse, his jacket. He kept the trombone away from it, the expanse of white with black borders, with the big "T" on the right side next to the row of black buttons. Behind him, the rest of the band was playing with their instruments too.  
  
He looked over across the field where a van was parked, near the visitor's grandstand, which of course was a lot smaller, and half-filled with dedicated Brookline fans. They looked almost like a country club crowd, except maybe for some beefy guys with "B" sweatshirts standing up on the top bench.  
  
The van looked like a TV van, and sure enough a crew was getting out. They didn't look like they would be ready to catch the pre-game set. At least they'd catch the halftime show.  
  
He worked his slide again. Sarge examined the sky. Brigid checked her fingernails with the alternate black and white polish, looked down at her circlets, and then clutched the baton between her bare thighs as she examined her spreading toes on one foot and then the other. He looked down. It must be hard to get the polish on those pinky toes. He pictured her in the locker room, sitting on a bench, carefully painting them while the other girls were pulling on their long trousers, their braided jackets, attaching the epaulettes and cummerbunds, and pulling on the tall boots.  
  
He thought of the time he had seen her in the girls' gym class, as he was walking through it with the other boys on the way to the b-ball court outside. The girls were doing jumping jacks. In their white T-shirts, black shorts and sneakers with socks, even though Brigid was wearing the same exact outfit as the other girls, the rest of them looked as bare as he'd ever seen them -- except for Brigid, who looked unusually covered up.  
  
He looked at the smattering of freckles across Brigid's shoulders. She had a great body, possibly the best in the school -- it was impossible to say, of course, only hers was ever on display like this -- but just her skin was so interesting to look at.  
  
Did she really have 83 freckles? Jamal and he had joked about it in the locker room before coming out.  
  
"You mean you really counted the freckles on her shoulders?" he had asked incredulously.  
  
"Of course. During that long roll-off at practice yesterday. She has one on her butt too. On the right cheek, halfway down to her butthole, under that little 'Y' over her crack."  
  
He laughed as they put their shakos on and headed toward the door. "I can't believe you count the freckles on a white girl's butt!"  
  
"Hell, no sisters will go out with me, I'll take what I can get!"  
  
He thought: Jamal won't admit it but he's probably as in love with Brigid as I am.  
  
As they emerged, he had said, "Man, another cold day. Brigid will be freezing her circlets off."  
  
"So what? She's used to it!" Jamal said.  
  
As they trotted out he had laughed. "Lord, you're awful!"  
  
Now Mr. Simonelli, evidently having gotten over his guilt at spilling all that rainwater, cranked on the P.A. system and said, "Welcome to our last game of the season! To our guests from Brookline, welcome to T--- High School! Today -- "  
  
It was his usual long-winded introduction. He talked about the season record, the presence of the TV crew, rules as to trash and conduct, the snacks and soda and coffee available, the thanks to the Dads' Club, etc., etc. Sarge waited impatiently. He joked quietly to his band, at least the ones in front who could hear, "The whole game won't last this long!" Meanwhile Brigid shook out her body, arms and legs, trying to get circulation going. As she did her breasts jiggled tightly.  
  
Finally Mr. Simonelli introduced the band and the crowd woke up and cheered. The band was this school's pride and joy. Sarge marched out smartly and they followed in double file. They followed him as he detoured around a nasty-looking patch of mud at the sideline, then got into formation astride the 50-yard line.  
  
Sarge, as was his tradition, yelled out, "My name is Herbert Quincy Watson and this is our band -- the T--- High School Tunemasters!!"  
  
Loud cheering from the stands as Sarge walked off the field. It was his style not to hog the spotlight. The band was a product of his hard work, on both the music and the marching, but he didn't wear a uniform himself, and didn't lead. He just got out of the way and let the band shine.  
  
Which it certainly did. They stood there in "attention" position -- Brigid in front, feet together, arms down, her baton upright with one end in her left hand (she was left-handed) with the other end pressed against the front of her bare shoulder -- and behind her, he and the rest of the line of trombones, then the flutes, clarinets, trumpets, the tubas in back, and on the side, the drum guard. The uniforms were splendid, even Brigid's, scanty though it was. The black and white colors were the same, the T's on her circlets and on her little cap matched the T's on the chests and on the big shako hats of the rest of her band. Her uniform might be different than everyone else's but it fit in as one of the band.  
  
The cheerleaders, having reluctantly gotten out of their sweat pants, assembled to the side, shivering in their shortish skirts, and posed with their pom poms at their hips. Their uniforms were fine-looking too. All in black and white, the school colors, yarn bows in their hair, long-sleeved sweaters (which they wore in the cold weather -- in hot weather they wore tank tops) with an embroidered black "T" over a megaphone. Then pleated skirts that came to just above the knee, long white socks and black sneakers. They would stand there still during the band's performance and then, at the final flourish, jump and cheer and wave their pom-poms and begin their cheerleader thing that they would do throughout the game.  
  
With a swing of the baton, Brigid started marching in place. That was the drummers' cue and they started vamping. Now she did her first throw which was the cue for the roll-off.  
  
Rod blasted away as they launched into "Stars and Stripes Forever", the cut-down version. They didn't have to march in place or anything but he could feel his boots give a little. He glanced down and saw that the field was still pretty muddy.  
  
As they played, Brigid pranced and twirled and threw. That was how majorettes stayed warm, he mused. Only they were allowed to move around so much. He could see the wisdom of a majorette's scanty uniform, having free movement in the arms and legs. To go through those moves in a full uniform like his would be uncomfortable, and hot, even on a day like this. Now -- a really high throw.  
  
Brigid was serious about her twirling. She did it a lot during recess and after school in that little out of the way courtyard past the gym, pretty much out of view so that people wouldn't think she was showing off. But he watched her once and noted her diligence. (She was in her regular clothes of course; the majorette uniform would have violated the dress code.) She was totally concentrated on it, trying more and more difficult throws, doing the same throw maybe fifty times or more until she was satisfied she got it right. She would vary what she was wearing, sometimes even throwing while she was wearing a coat. She would use different size batons, and even tied little weights to them. The idea was to be able to throw accurately under any type of condition.  
  
Still, today one could tell that the mud was gumming up her style a bit, the heels of her sandals sinking in and taking an extra split-second to pull up. Being flip-flops, they separated from her feet at the heel and slapped back up against her sole on the upstep more smartly than usual, though with the band playing he couldn't hear it.  
  
And now a big spin and one real high throw, maybe thirty feet in the air. Brigid spun around and looked up.  
  
It came down a hundredth of a second sooner than she expected and hit her pinky.  
  
Brigid dropped the baton.  
  
It fell on the wet ground and she missed only an eighth of a beat, picking it up and starting the next twirl, but the sense of shock was palpable. The whole season and this was her first drop. Her face was deadpan as she continued her paces and the band finished up, and it was not the end of the world of course, but everyone who knew Brigid knew she had to be mortified. One of the baton knobs was smeared with mud, a reminder of her shame at letting down the band which would not go away.  
  
One final throw, perhaps not as high and risky as she would have done otherwise, and the band finished with a cymbal crash. The crowd cheered, but it was a muted cheer. Not because the crowd appreciated the performance less but because they were stunned.  
  
The cheerleaders did their woo-hoo pom-poming and the players got ready to take the field. The drums started the walk-off vamping and Brigid began to lead them off, baton tucked under her armpit, the mud-smeared knob hidden. She must have still been distracted by thinking about her drop, and eager to get out of view as quick as possible. At least that was the theory everyone had afterward. It explained why she marched straight for the grandstand gate and did not see the patch of mud.  
  
Brigid's foot slipped back out from under her and she fell forward, face first. As she tried to pry herself up from the cold mud her hands slipped and her face and upper body hit the mud again. Mud slopped to the sides. On her third try, quaking by now, just one hand slipped and she flipped over onto her back.  
  
Across the field, some of the big beefy guys in the visitor's grandstand hooted.  
  
The band was in disarray. The cheerleaders looked over from their places with concern. Sarge rushed out and shooed the rest of the band to leave the field. Everyone carefully stepped around the patch. Sarge helped his majorette up.  
  
She was crying. One flip-flop fell off and her bare foot squished into the mud. She slipped her muddy foot back into it and almost twisted her ankle before she finally righted herself. Her white face was all muddy. Mud was all over her front, covering her circlets, and actually appearing to be shoved in under them. Mud was over half her tummy. Down below it gummed up and covered the lower half of her uniform such that it looked like she didn't have a bottom at all and had simply stuffed mud into her crotch. As for her back, brown goo dripped from her butt down her thighs, making it look like she had had a bad "accident".  
  
In the stands, people stood up to see what was going on. As the band walked up to their reserved area halfway up, trying not to look back, Debra and Virginia stayed behind to help Sarge take the crying majorette under the stands.  
  
Rod felt miserable, about to cry himself. He hated the jeers coming from the visitors' stands. This was horrible. Aside from the humiliation he just could not imagine how Brigid must feel with gritty cold mud over her body.  
  
The game started and he couldn't get focused on it. He sat on the near side of the band section, looking down at his trombone and weakly moving the slide. A few moments later he looked over and saw Debra and Virginia with their muddied friend at the Dads' Club stand, evidently waiting for Sarge who was on his cell phone. They had tried to wipe off the mud with the little paper napkins available but it was pitifully inadequate. Poor Brigid was still smeared from her face down to her bare toes. The wind had kicked up and lifted the used napkins out of the trash. They scattered around the feet of the brown-smeared majorette, looking like used toilet paper.  
  
Someone offered Brigid a coat to put on but she declined, not wanting to get it dirty. She had stopped crying, the dried tracks of her tears visible where they had washed away the mud on her face. She sipped a hot tea as Debra and Virginia, in their full uniforms, their clarinets on the refreshment table, huddled around her.  
  
Rod watched with pity. He had always been too shy and tongue-tied to express his affection for her but he was more in love with her than ever now. He did not know that Brigid's misfortunes today were only beginning.  
  
  
  
....................  
  
"Come on, Brigid, eat something. Have a hot dog. It'll warm you up." That's what he thought as he played with his trombone slide, looking over at the majorette with her two friends next to the Dads' Club area. Jamal's uncle was pushing food on her, free of charge. Of course the cold soda cans bobbing in the ice-filled metal tub wouldn't be a good idea. But there were hot dogs, chips, bags of popcorn. Brigid refused all this, preferring to stand between Debra and Virginia and sipping her tea, watching the game with them. They were behind the little table that held the napkins and the serving board with the partly covered tins of ketchup, mustard, relish and sauerkraut.  
  
She had composed herself by now. Ms. Farkas, the gym teacher who ran the cheerleading squad, walked over to her and talked. So did one of the policemen. Sarge got off his cell phone and said something to Brigid and Ms. Farkas. Standing still like that, Brigid looked like she was finally beginning to feel the cold, hugging herself with her bare, mud-streaked arms, her legs together, wiggling her gritty toes, tapping the heels of her muddy flip-flops against the gravel, as she sipped the tea and held the cup close, feeling the steam on her smeared face. How was she going to get cleaned up in time for halftime?  
  
Rod got distracted by action on the field. His friend Scotus had intercepted a pass and was running for a touchdown. He got into cheering like everyone else. Scotus went all the way to the 10-yard line before getting tackled, having run 40 yards. Yay team!  
  
The air on this raw, gray day filled with excitement now. This would be the first score of the year. The cheerleaders, spinning around in their shortish skirts, pumped up the crowd, which really didn't need much pumping up. This town had plenty of school spirit.  
  
Rod looked over. Debra, Virginia and Brigid were cheering too, each jabbing the air with one fist. Brigid's breasts jiggled in time, the mud-streaked circlets tracing independent epicycles in the air. To be honest, the bouncing of the fringes of Debra's and Virginia's epaulettes on their jackets was quite fetching too. There was something about a girl in a uniform, the regular band uniform as well as the majorette uniform, which was sexy.  
  
Now --  
  
Jamal's cousin Jared, helping out at the stand, engrossed in the game, rested a foot on the dolly holding the ice tub. The dolly gave way, one wheel collapsing, and the tub lurched and nearly slid off it. The tub had been full almost to the brim and now a little tidal wave of ice-cold water washed over the legs and feet of the three girls.  
  
It was a surprise but not an ordeal for Debra and Virginia in their tall rain-proof boots. Quite a different experience, though, for the majorette. Brigid shrieked and hopped back, then yelped with pain as hot tea leapt from her jolted cup and splashed over the slope of one breast, down her bare tummy and onto a thigh. She felt unsteady on the gravel and leaned back on the table to catch herself, unfortunately causing the serving board to slide and flipping the tins, the lids of the tins flying off.  
  
She fell backward and sauerkraut flew onto her face. Before her bare buns hit the gravel, relish had sprayed over her tummy. As her feet went up, one flip-flop flying off, the mustard tin overturned onto her supine body, coating her left circlet.

No one in the stands saw this except Rod, but everyone in the refreshment area was in shock. Debra and Virginia quickly took off their white gloves and helped their friend up. Once again Brigid broke down crying. 'What a day she's having,' Rod thought. As she tried to stand, her bare foot, hunting around for its sandal, lurched forward and stepped into the ketchup tin, the red tomatoey goo oozing up between her toes.  
  
Her face, with sauerkraut around her nose and over her forehead, was pretty disgusting. It looked like she had sneezed with a nose full of boogers. She turned and he could see the bits of gravel stuck to her mud-smeared back, the nakedness interrupted only by the encrusted string across the tops of her butt cheeks. Gravel also coated the backs of her thighs and calves. As she cried, holding the mustard-smeared flip-flop, she staggered forward, collecting gravel between her ketchupy toes. She was led by Ms. Farkas under the stands and out of Rod's sight. Meanwhile Jamal's uncle and Jared were scurrying around to prop up the dolly to prevent further spillage. The uncle got a toolbox from his van and set it up on the dolly as he frantically began screwing the wheel back on.  
  
Now Sarge was bounding up onto the stands and stood on the lower aisle, looking up at his band. He spoke loudly. "Brigid is getting cleaned up. She'll be ready for halftime. If not, I'll get out there and conduct. Let's go!" He held up his arms. "Fanfare!"  
  
This was the short tune they played as a cheer. Instruments rose to lips. Nobody in the band liked sitting in the stands on cold days like this, everyone's butts getting numb on the metal benches. But at least playing warmed you up a bit.  
  
The tune evidently had talismanic powers. Right on the last note, Scotus pushed over the goal line. Six nothing, T----!  
  
As his team launched into the next kickoff Rod wondered how Brigid was going to get cleaned up. Probably they had some towels in Ms. Farkas' car or something like that. Taking her to the locker room showers was probably not possible. Between the time it took to walk all the way there, and showering, and the time back, they would already be into halftime. And after that, it didn't matter. The halftime show was the last thing the band did; for the rest of the game, properly he supposed, all eyes belonged to the team.  
  
He saw the camera guys coming around the field from the visitors' stand. Too bad they missed Scotus' interception. Well at least they missed Brigid's misfortunes too. Though he really didn't think they would put that on the local news. Local news wasn't as mean-spirited and tasteless as the networks.  
  
It was a long kick. Brookline was forced to make a fair catch. On the next three plays they gained only three yards. The early signs were that T---- was going to win this game.  
  
He flexed his butt muscles to get some circulation back. Man, even through his wool uniform trousers and his thermal underwear his butt was cold. On a day like today the metal benches were like sitting on blocks of ice. He looked around and could tell that everyone else in the band felt the same way.  
  
He thought back to his first-ever conversation with Brigid, last week before their appearance on Melba McCann's show. His eye was attracted to her whenever he saw her in the hall. It was between periods and she had been walking with Shonday and Luisa. Then she stopped at her locker.  
  
Brigid had a distinct if understated fashion sense. One could call it "the Brigid look": jean jacket over a white or black turtleneck, black jeans, Doc Martens with the thick soles, pink socks. It was cute, the way her red hair, shoulder length, draped over her jacket. He supposed white girls had plenty of hair options, but Brigid always wore her hair the same, straight and unstyled. She was on the quiet side, though if teased she could give as well as she got. And modest. Even in hot weather she didn't show much of that white, freckled skin. He had seen her come to school in shorts only once.  
  
That day at the locker, he had come up and, careful to clear his throat and speak slowly, said, "We're going to be TV stars."  
  
She smiled; a shy but gorgeous smile. Then she waved her hair back from her face in a way that was adorable. She could be a model if she wanted to. "Yeah. I just know I'll make a fool of myself." A little wave to one of her friends passing by.  
  
Another throat clearing. "Probably say the wrong thing. I will, I mean." Not you, Brigid. I meant ME!  
  
"Yeah, well. I'm sure Sarge will do all the talking. Just so we look nice and our uniforms are straight."  
  
"Mine will be."  
  
"Mine too." She glanced briefly down at herself. He knew they were both picturing themselves wearing their band uniforms, the majorette and the first trombonist, here in the hall.  
  
"Well, gotta go. Later." He wished he could stay with her but he couldn't think of what else to say.  
  
"Later."  
  
As a first-ever conversation, it wasn't too bad.  
  
Now Rod sat on his cold butt and rubbed his white gloves over the crook of the trombone and idly watched the game.  
  
Then he glanced down and noticed something strange. Between the floor board and his bench, he had a constricted but clear view of what was under the stands and saw what looked like a blanket tied to one of the understruts. Leaning to one side revealed a makeshift triangle of privacy enclosed by tarps and a blanket. In the center was the long metal tub on the dolley, having been quickly repaired and rolled there, Jamal's uncle's tool box still lying on the end. To one side was a little tin like the ones that held the condiments. Inside the enclosure were Debra, Virginia, and Ms. Farkas. And Brigid.  
  
A totally naked Brigid.  
  
Rod's mouth opened and his eyes widened. Brigid was spread out in an "X", her legs wide apart, her toes gripping along the wide brim of one side of the tub, while her hands grasped struts overhead three feet apart. Scanty as her uniform was, she looked totally different in the altogether. What a magnificent, beautiful, perfect body. The first live naked girl he had ever seen. Thank you, thank you, thank you God, thank you --  
  
Rod's head bobbed up and he looked at the band members around him. No, nobody was looking down, nobody suspected anything was going on down there, nobody was blessed with the view that he had. Again: Thank you, thank you, thank you God --  
  
He glanced down again, as casually as possible, and made it look like he was adjusting his spit valve. The next thing he noticed was that Brigid had not shaved all her pubic hair like he had theorized: she had cut it down to a "pubic Mohawk". And it was reddish, kind of like the hair on her head, though partly caked with mud. Miraculously, her head hair and her little "T" cap had not been affected by her misfortunes, the cap still immaculate white and black. It was pinned to her hair which was braided up, no doubt to stay out of her way during her twirling but perhaps not coincidentally giving a clear view of her neck and shoulders.  
  
The next thing he noticed was that the soda cans had been taken out of the tub, leaving only the cold water and that huge long chunk of ice, and that Debra and Ms. Farkas were busily wetting washcloths and applying them, fore and aft, to the many streaks and smears on Brigid's body. Brigid seemed to be wanting to help, at one point bringing a hand down to grab a cloth, but this made her posture too precarious. She needed to grip with both hands on those understruts.  
  
Now, he noticed Virginia bent over the little tin, her bare hands freezing as they scrubbed in the cold soapy water. It took a moment to figure out what she was doing -- cleaning Brigid's uniform. The little tin was all that was needed.  
  
Brigid was trying not to flinch from the application of the freezing cold cloths, and Ms. Farkas and Debra were trying not to press too hard, but they were not making much progress in de-mudding, de-mustarding, de-sauerkrauting, de-relishing and de-ketchuping their majorette. Brigid closed her eyes, taking measured breaths, shivering but trying to control it. Good thing the blanket and the tarps shielded her from the wind. Ms. Farkas and Debra, their gloves off, frequently shook the fingers of their bare hands, probably going numb from the freezing water.  
  
Now the toes of Brigid's left foot slipped and the leg gave way and -- she flipped sideways into the tub! It was a deep tub, maybe two feet deep, and poor Brigid's nude body totally went under, her backside making almost a body-long contact with the ice, bubbles exhaling from her nose. She splashed helplessly for a moment, then spun around on her knees and stood up, one foot and then the other pushing down against the bottom of the tub. As she emerged the icy water dripped off her chin, her fingers, and coursed off the stiff red pebbles of her nipples.  
  
"OHH -- OHH!!" He could hear her shudder. Then after a few breaths she shook her head free of water and seemed to realize something. Maybe it was the shock of the cold immersion, but she was no longer shivering. Also, due to her little dip her skin was now mostly clean.  
  
She grabbed the cloth from Debra and went to work completing the process, sitting on the edge of the tub, vigorously and of course quickly passing the cloth over her tummy, astringently rubbing it over her nipples, scrubbing her toes.  
  
"Fanfare!" Sarge's call brought Rod's gaze back up to what seemed like the outside, daytime world, as opposed to the secret ablutions going on out of sight below. He quickly checked around and saw again that he was the only one privy to Brigid's trials.  
  
The first quarter ended with T---- ahead, 13 - 6. The teams changed sides.  
  
When the band rested again, Rod looked down. And he was in for another surprise, one that made him almost ashamed to look, as if he as a male should be not invading such a private, female scene. But of course he looked.  
  
....................  
  
He turned back up to the game, watching Scotus do another short run. He knew that what was going on below was not meant for his eyes. But he couldn't help it. He looked down again.  
  
Brigid, face up, was doing a kind of suspended animation crab-walk on the tub, arms and legs spread, her hands grasping each side, her toes grasping each side at the other end, careful to keep her bare butt well clear of the ice floe below. Straining in her awkward posture, she looked down at her upthrust crotch with concern, as Ms. Farkas carefully swabbed it with the dripping wet cloth that she had dunked into the icy water.  
  
Rod's gaze was as furtive as possible given his degree of amazement. He made it look like he was glancing down at his spit value. He played with it a little to keep the pretense convincing. A quick look around -- no, nobody else was privy to what he was seeing.  
  
He was fascinated by the white girl's pussy. He had never seen an actual pussy before. The closely-cropped tuft of reddish hair, now almost free of mud, framing two lips, with a little pink thing -- was it called a clitoris? -- at the top. The lips were spread wide by Ms. Farkas as she burrowed the freezing cloth in between two inner, redder lips as part of a sweeping motion. Those inner lips opened and closed with Brigid's gasps, revealing a narrow open slit where it was too dark to see. Man, I feel like a gynecologist looking at that...  
  
It was hard to believe Ms. Farkas was making Brigid go through this, but as he thought about it it made perfect sense. If it rained or even drizzled during the halftime show, the smallest bit of mud would cause a streak of brown to go down her thigh, painfully visible on this white girl and sure to be detected by the TV cameras. A streak of brown coming from her uniform bottom sure wouldn't look too good. Possibly the band could do the show without Brigid, with Sarge conducting as he said he would, but they had never done that before and it wasn't reassuring. They needed Brigid and, though modest and unassuming as she was, she probably knew it.  
  
Brigid winced and jerked as she felt the icy rag deep within her private area. To her side, Debra and Virginia were furiously scrubbing the tiny bits of the majorette's uniform in the little tin. Without their band gloves, which they had laid carefully on top of Jamal's uncle's tool box, their hands were red and probably numb. So were Ms. Farkas'. He felt sorry for them, their hands all exposed and dunked over and over again into freezing water. Yet it was all school spirit. This school was as dedicated to its marching band as it was to its football team.  
  
He looked up, distracted by cheering. Brookline had intercepted a pass but his friend Jaysee had forced a fumble and recovered it. Go, go go!  
  
"Fanfare!"  
  
He brought the trombone up to his lips and as he moved he realized once again how cold his butt was. Man, he hated playing in the cold, especially sitting on these freezing metal benches. Everyone in the band felt the same way. They were counting down the minutes until halftime. Then the halftime show, where at least they got to move around a bit, and that was it for them. The rest of the game belonged to the cheerleaders, who were rushing in and out of their coverall cloaks as they did quick cheers and then covered up again. And of course, to the team.  
  
And halftime would be it. This was the last game of the season. After that, there would be just concerts up until the St. Patrick's Day parade. Though there were rumors of an invitation to go up to Vermont, the big ski resort at Killington, to play in some kind of winter festival they had up there in January. Please let it be an indoor event...  
  
They finished the fanfare, with a few less flubs than before. As he put his trombone down he looked down and -- oh Jesus --  
  
He shut his eyes but of course opened them again. Brigid had turned over, her butt high in the air, fingers and toes grasping the edges of the tub. And now Ms. Farkas was swabbing her butthole! Ewww! He had never looked at a butthole before and averted his gaze. Brigid must be intensely ashamed and he didn't want to see her in her shame. But he couldn't resist looking again. How disgusting.  
  
Well, maybe not disgusting. Brigid's butthole was neat and clean, the cold water coursing over it, spasming now and then as Ms. Farkas poked and probed. The ring of brown skin there winked at him like a little brown eye as the majorette was shocked by the cold water on her most sensitive spot. It was strange to think such a thought but Brigid's butthole seemed beautiful, just like the rest of her. He thought: Brigid has three eyes, two green ones and one brown one, and they are all pretty!  
  
Not that Brigid was enjoying this. Her face turned upward, eyes squeezed shut, and she clenched her teeth and grimaced, maybe from shame or just discomfort, as Ms. Farkas poked, making sure to get every speck of mud out. Poke, wince, poke, wince, now a deep poke, and Brigid's eyes squeezed even more, as her toes squirmed against the cold metal rim of the tub. He couldn't see the muscles of her hollow tummy from up where he was but he was sure they were quaking...  
  
Suddenly he realized that if she opened her eyes she would be looking right at him. He turned up to look at the game. Not much exciting happening, a slow march down the field by T---- as they gradually gained first down after first down.  
  
Whoa -- now Scotus had the ball again and was rushing for a touchdown. Twelve-zip T----. Now a two-point coversion. Sonny, their quarterback, threw a perfect shot to Scotus deep in the end zone.  
  
He thought of Brigid's anus. Wow, I've seen every part of her, even her most secret part. He felt like he possessed some secret knowledge of the majorette, that maybe just Ms. Farkas and Debra and Virginia shared. He looked down and was relieved to see the grueling ablutions were ended. Brigid was once again standing on the rim of the tub, hands stretched up to hold the understruts. And she was smiling, because Debra and Virginia were presenting her with the prize of their frantic labors -- Brigid's uniform, sparkly clean! Debra balanced the circlets on the tips of her index fingers. Virginia had stretched out the tiny V-shaped bottom over her thumb, the strings dangling down. On her other hand dangled the stringy silvery uppers of the majorette sandals.  
  
He smiled, happy for Brigid. She was a modest girl and no doubt wanted to be back in her uniform. Not that it gave her much protection from the cold. Then again, the pinned-up blankets shielded her from the wind. And that involuntary ice bath a few minutes ago had stopped her shivering, probably by shocking her metabolism into higher gear. Like in swim class when you dive into cold water but it doesn't feel cold after you get used to it.  
  
Also, her body was now dry. "Brigid's rule": bare skin dries quickly. Unfortunately there was another problem. As Ms. Farkas handled the circlets he saw that the way of keeping them on had changed. No more bulldog clips. That was good -- those must have hurt. Maybe they were too big for the smaller circlet design. He had been right, when he had seen her sitting for that makeup guy in Melba McCann's studio. The circlets were indeed smaller, maybe two and a half inches across now. And now they had a detachable short threaded cylinders, perhaps half an inch long, which --  
  
He almost laughed but suppressed it because it would have attracted attention. But the little grommets (he thought that's what they're called) were designed to slip over the nipples, then the "T"'s were screwed onto them with a racheting motion. More comfortable than the clips, for sure. The grommets were a little narrower than Brigid's nipples -- he wondered if they had had to be specially fitted? Of course, if they weren't narrower, they wouldn't stay on her nipples and the circlets would fall off.  
  
But the cold presented a problem not present in a nice warm locker room. The cold made Brigid's nipples pucker, made them tight and hard, and Ms. Farkas's fumbling frozen fingers could not draw them out far enough to slip the grommets on. She pinched the pink nubs and pulled them out, causing Brigid to wince, but just as she was about to slip the grommet on, the little pink pebble slipped from her grasp, making the breast jiggle tightly. He sighed. For poor Brigid this day has been once trial after another, staring with getting her green wool poncho soaked...  
  
A howl from the crowd brought his head back up. Jaysee had gotten tackled and didn't get up. Mr. Bailey, the trainer, ran over with his first aid bag. Before he got there Jaysee showed signs of life. He struggled to his feet and put his arms up for the crowd. What a relief -- football was a dangerous game. One of many reasons he had never tried out for it (another reason being that he was terrible at it).  
  
Jaysee, helped by Mr. Bailey, hobbled from the field. He was replaced by Rodrigo. Four minutes left in the half . . .  
  
He looked down and -- good grief -- will this ever end!  
  
It was the most shocking sight yet. Brigid was still standing up in an "X". As Ms. Farkas held the grommets in each hand, waiting for the right moment, Debra and Virginia had taken two pairs of pliers from the tool box and had applied them to Brigid's nipples!  
  
At first it seemed like torture, like those things that middle-aged people do to each other when they can't get turned on any other way, like those kinky sites he had seen on the internet. But it wasn't torture. It was simply the sensible thing to do, with Brigid's nipples being so tight because of the cold. And her friends were going about it as gently as possible. They were squeezing the pliers, and pulling with them, very carefully.  
  
Still it looked grotesque. Brigid shared her friends' determination but her face betrayed what she was feeling, once again a grimace, eyes shut, teeth clenched. Her pink nipples, pinched in the jagged jaws of cold metal, stretched out obscenely from the rest of her breasts.

Again he realized that if she opened her eyes she would be looking right at him. So again he turned back up.  
  
"Fanfare!"  
  
After that was done he looked down again. The grommets were on. Brigid looked down at them, and at the ends of her nipples emerging from them just the slightest bit. Ms. Farkas carefully screwed the circlets on. One of them ended up a little crooked, at 11 o'clock instead of 12, and she had to twist the whole circlet together with the now-hidden grommet. Bridget bit her lip and endured...  
  
He decided he would not look down there again. Then during a long time-out he felt the urge. No, no, must... not... look... Brigid... naked...  
  
He exhaled and cheered with everyone else as Brigid, all suited up, bounded up onto the lower aisle. She held her hands up, one with the baton, as if in triumph, the circlets bouncing with the rest of her. Quite a change from the crying, mud-streaked wretch as the band had last seen her.  
  
She hopped up the steps, her low heels clanging echoes against the metal, Debra and Virginia close behind her. In a moment they were seated right in front of him.  
  
He felt like he should avoid eye contact, ashamed at having been a Peeping Tom, though of course they didn't know it. But they were busy in their own world, chatting about ordinary things as the quarter wound down. Not much was happening on the field. T---- was on the Brookline 30 yard line and was running plays into the line to run out the clock.  
  
"Zhhhh!" Brigid shivered, then got up a bit and massaged her bare butt cheeks. That cold metal bench must be super-cold to her! On top of that the sky was getting gray and the wind was picking up. He felt a tiny raindrop on his nose, then another.  
  
Debra and Virginia offered half a lap each, and Brigid was now spared the cold bench by sitting up on their uniformed thighs. She dropped her sandals off and wrapped her feet around the jacket of Luisa sitting down in front of them. Brigid put her arms around Debra and Virginia as Luisa, putting down her flute, rubbed the majorette's toes with her gloved hands.  
  
From what he could tell they were talking about bowling again. Mostly about the goofiness of the shoes they gave you. Jeremy, one of the trumpet players, sitting a few rows up, said, "Hey Frigid!" Brigid gave him a killer look and aimed her baton like she was about to throw a spear at him. Then got back to talking.  
  
Sarge passed up a black blanket, donated by a parent probably. Brigid put it underneath her, then curled up cross-legged in what had to be welcome warmth. She looked like an ancient Druid, wrapped up in a black robe, except for the jaunty little Tunemasters cap. And the lovely white neck, with a few strands of her braided-up red hair hanging down, tossed with the cold damp breeze.  
  
One minute left. And now a fine mist filled the air.  
  
Sarge walked over on the lower aisle with a big box and set it down. "Attention folks. It's almost halftime, then we wait on the track for ten minutes while the crowd gets their snacks, then our big show. The cameras are set up. I don't have to tell you what a big deal this is. I know you'll come through like you always do. Brigid, come down and help me OK?"  
  
Brigid unwrapped herself and, toting her baton, bounded down to Sarge. She gave him the folded-up black blanket. He opened the box and showed her the contents, saying something.  
  
Now back to his announcement voice. "Now, it looks like rain. We haven't had to do this so far, but it's time to put on the plastic ponchos. You heard me talk about this in September. Walking around in a wet uniform on a cold day is a sure route to hypothermia. Not in my band! These..." Helped by Brigid, he slipped one on. "Fit over the head and will cover your shoulders and down to about your knees. I know they look strange but the point is the crowd can still see your uniforms and believe it or not, you can still play your instruments, even the trombones and drums. They're that loose. Remember -- the formation is just as strict with these things on as otherwise." He put his gloved hand on the majorette's bare shoulder. "Brigid, help me hand these out O.K.?"  
  
....................  
  
The band milled around in the track area, between the Dad's Club stand and the end zone, waiting for the signal from Sarge to get into formation for the halftime show. They had gotten used to the clear plastic ponchos that covered them. It was a struggle at first, but once they were fully on down to your knees, and you got your instrument organized under it, they were not so bad.  
  
The band was trying to relax. But the mobile camera truck loomed over them like it was a tank. They knew they'd be on the local TV news tonight, watched at home by their families, their parents, and most embarrassingly, by their younger siblings. Embarrassing, that is, if something went wrong.  
  
So the air of casualness and joking around was forced. He played with his trombone slide and shot the breeze with Jamal and Jaysee, who was on a crutch, his calf bandaged up, out of the game and a lot more relaxed than his friends. Others paced, chatted, blew through their instruments. The color guard, which would lead the formation, hovered near the edge of the field, straightening their jackets, making sure the flag holders were secure. To have the flag drop would be a disaster. As for the cheerleaders, not involved in the halftime show, they were sipping diet sodas at the Dad's Club.  
  
One of the more relaxed band members was Brigid, near the fence, talking idly with one of the police, Office McElroy, who he remembered was her uncle. He was a big beefy Irish cop kind of guy, with a jolly face, in his heavy coat, gloves, with ear muffs and a ski mask under his cap. On a cold day a guy like him, whose job was just to stand around, had to bundle up. He had pulled the ski mask down to his chin so he could talk. Usually he was three times Brigid's size, but with him all bundled up next to her in her tiny uniform, it was more like ten times.  
  
The two were laughing at something, Brigid's circlets jiggling, flexing her purple toes, idly scratching her butt with her baton. In the chilly, damp wind, her body was a raw red from head to toes, though a little whitish blotch could be seen where the hot tea had splashed her, on the inner slope of her left breast. If Officer McElroy was thinking about what his niece must be feeling like, he gave no sign.  
  
They were joking around about the Star Wars present her brother had gotten at his recent birthday party, from what he could hear. As she scratched her left butt cheek he smiled. I know what Brigid's butthole looks like...  
  
Could anyone else see it? When she was sitting in front of him a few minutes ago, raising her butt to put that black blanket under her, her butt briefly was almost in his face. The string of her bottom, no wider than a shoelace, bisected her butthole; he could see the sides of her secret brown eye on each side. Well, it would never show in performance. Sticking her butt out at the crowd was not part of the majorette's routine.  
  
Now Brigid, talking to her uncle, lazily tapped the baton against her shoulder, then dropped it and tapped it against her bare heel. Now she casually twirled it, joking with her uncle all the while.  
  
The rest of the band, of course, had the benefit of the clear plastic ponchos, which it turned out also afforded some warmth and shielded them from the wind. After the last of the ponchos had been handed out in the stands, Brigid had looked down at the empty box. Whether this was a surprise to her or not, he couldn't tell. But it kind of went without saying that the majorette couldn't perform in a poncho. It turned out, like Sarge said, that he could slide his trombone under it, and the drummers could wield their drumsticks under theirs. But there was no way to twirl in one.  
  
Actually quite warm now in his full-coverage uniform and plastic poncho, he looked at his band's majorette chatting nearly naked in the cold and felt in love again.  
  
He sat across from her in one class, English. He was hoping she hadn't noticed how much he looked over at her. In her turtleneck shirt, jeans jacket, black jeans, Doc Marten boots -- he could picture her naked body under it, knowing how she really looked underneath, the breasts that were hidden in the turtleneck, the butt cheeks in her jeans, the feet and toes in her Doc Martens. With no other girl could one do that. He felt like he had x-ray vision and was looking through her clothes. Then turned away before she caught him staring.  
  
He imagined taking her to the prom, him in his tuxedo, and her going in her majorette uniform. It was certainly dressy enough for a nice party like that, though not allowed by the dress code. Where would she put the corsage he gave her? Maybe it could hang from a circlet. Or pin it one of the strings of her bottom, below the graceful ridge of her pelvic bone. Well, no, the string looked too thin and fragile for that. Better yet, clip it to her red hair, hair that would be braided up like it now was under her cap, so that he could see her lovely neck and bare freckled shoulders.  
  
Sigh... He would never have the courage to ask her to the prom, of course. It was all he could do not to choke up in her presence even without planning on saying anything. As to what she would actually wear to a prom, he could guess. An elegant but modest dress, floor length, maybe sleeveless at the most. No bare shoulders, definitely no bare midriff or bare legs. Sandals, maybe. But covered up.  
  
He shook his head, trying to stop fantasizing, but he couldn't. What if she went through the school day every day in her uniform? With everyone else normally dressed? He pictured her sauntering down the hall, talking with her friends, the clip-clop of her heeled flip-flops along with the thumps of their boots, her breasts jiggling and agitated as she laughed, the circlets dancing their crazy little ellipses in the air, her concave tummy moving with her breathing and laughing. Or playing in a concern in her uniform, with everyone else in their nice clothes, the boys in their ties, the girls in their black floor-length dresses. And in the clarinet section, among the black formal fabric, the bare beautiful white body gleaming in the stage lights as she played along with the other clarinetists...  
  
He cleared his throat and blew through his trombone, watching Brigid and her uncle through the corner of his eye. I'm getting all sappy. I hardly even know her. Yet it was hard not to be in love. Probably a lot of other guys were too. Now Brigid turned with her back to him, flexing her arms, changing the baton from hand to hand over her head, as she spoke. From her cap to her backless sandals she presented a rear view of total nudity interrupted only by the tiny T-string of her bottom that disappeared between her butt cheeks. Then she turned slightly. He loved her from that angle. The side of her breast came into view, but not so much that he could see the circlet perched at its tip. From this angle, she looked like she was topless.  
  
Uh-oh -- her uncle was looking at him, seeing that he had been looking at Brigid. "How're ya doin', young fella?" he said.  
  
He smiled and nodded weakly, thinking he was going to get some sharp warning from this big cop about ogling his niece. But the cop's smile didn't seem to hide anything stern.  
  
Then Brigid turned and said, "Oh hi, that's the guy who was on TV with me. Come heah," she said in her Providence accent, waving him over.  
  
Still not at ease with the cop, and nervous as he always was about approaching Brigid, he walked over, making a show of conscientiously blowing through his trombone under the poncho and checking the slide.  
  
"Yes, I remembah," the cop said, with the same accent. "You and Brigid put on a good show."  
  
"Th - thanks."  
  
"Even though Sahge had us mahching for almost five hundred yeahs," Brigid said. A reference to Sarge's slipup saying that the band was founded in 1527 instead of 1927. She laughed and he did too. He tried not to look at her circlets wobbling. The fine mist had given a sheen to her reddened skin. The scald mark was barely visible, a slightly less reddened area shaped like a flame, along the side of her breast, almost touching the circlet.  
  
He smiled and looked down at his trombone, watching his high boots next to the red bare toes in the sandals. The mist had formed little beads of condensation on the toenail paint.  
  
Now a gust of wind. "Geez, it's cold," her uncle said, shaking his arms under his coat.  
  
"Yeah," Brigid said, shaking her bare shoulders. A rare acknowledgement from her. As she shook the circlets danced. And she smiled, enchantingly.  
  
Now Sarge called her away and spoke to her, his gloved hand on her bare shoulder. He heard him say the word "muddy" but couldn't make out the rest. Probably giving her a pep talk to avoid the disaster of the pregame show.  
  
Sarge shouted, "Get ready!" As they assembled he said, "Change of plan. There's a dedication to Roddington McNeil, I told you about that. He has a request. We're going to do 'Catch That Tiger' instead. Then Mr. Simonetti goes on the field with him and he gives a" -- he spoke in a stage whisper now -- "hopefully short" -- back to loud -- "dedication speech. Then it's "Stars and Stripes", the full version."  
  
Groans from the flute players. He said, "Now this is the last halftime show of the year, so let's end in a big way. Remember --" he looked up and saw that it was beginning a light rain now -- "it's more important to look good and stay in formation than to get every note right. The ponchos are going to muffle the sound a bit anyway. But they're clear plastic and the formation is going to be very visible."  
  
Sarge looked at the general drift of people from the snack area to the stands. Then, again holding his gloved hand on the majorette's bare shoulder, he seemed to count off five seconds and said --  
  
"Now!"  
  
The six snare drummers lined up behind Brigid and on her signal they began the rat-tat-tat of the opening salvo. This got the crowd's attention and there was an accelerated movement from the Dad's Club area up to the stands. Brigid's signal was to thrust her baton over her head, her breasts wobbling tightly before coming to rest. He loved the way those circlets moved in little, well, circles. Were they being propelled by those hard pink nipples they were screwed onto? Or did the circlets cause her breasts to sway more?  
  
Once again he felt the possessor of secret knowledge, having seen her total nakedness and how the circlets were fastened onto her. He looked at them and wondered how far her nipples, stretched by the hidden grommets, extruded. The circlets themselves didn't seem to protrude very far. They made her breasts look slightly more puffed-out but that was all. Certainly nothing like that pointy bra Madonna wore in the 80's. He wondered how Brigid's nipples felt in this cold. Did the cold make supporting the circlets more bearable? At least it couldn't be as uncomfortable as those "bulldog" clips.  
  
He took in the rest of her posture -- her "call to attention" pose. Her baton up in the air, her other arm extended behind her, fingers outstretched, one leg in front of the other, the rear leg bent slightly at the knee. Kind of theatrical, but that was the name of the game with a marching band. He saw something he'd noticed before. In this posture, the toes of her rearward foot were spread. Her pinky toe, the school colors meticulously painted on the tiny nail, was almost off the sole of her heeled silvery flip-flop and nearly touching the cold muddy ground. It looked so precarious.  
  
But Brigid was strong and, as she began marching and everyone fell into formation behind her as she strutted, she exuded strength and confidence. It had not been a good day for her, one misfortune after another. Being doused by cold water from above. Falling face down into the cold mud which squirmed into her circlets and into her bottom, and squished up between her toes. Having hot tea spilling on the bare slope of her breast and down her tummy, icy water splashing over her bare feet and legs, having a freezing cold cloth poking into her pussy and into her asshole, her whole naked body plunged into ice water with her back against a big block of ice, finally having her nipples bit and stretched by pliers.  
  
But that was then. She had put it all behind her. And now, as he and the other trombones marched out behind the drum majors, the cheering as the band came out in formation, the Tunemasters were supreme. Yes, being in a marching band was considered geeky. The uniforms certainly were, at least in any other setting. But out here on the football field during halftime, no other outfit would do. As they began marching in a circle around the field, each being careful to stay six feet behind the one in front, two feet from the one to the side, the crowd cheered more loudly, a cheering heard even after they started into "Catch That Tiger", and his heart swelled with pride.  
  
This is where all that practice paid off -- all those before-school practices on this same field, at the ungodly hour of 6:30 a.m., in all kinds of weather, enduring Sarge's benevolent but strict discipline, in the rising sun and often in drizzle and biting cold. Everyone in their regular clothes, with coats on when it was cold, though Brigid had taken her shoes and socks off to get used to marching in the majorette sandals. And now, here at the big game, in uniform, all the drudgery was forgotten.  
  
The TV trucks seemed to be everywhere. He couldn't tell from his angle but he guessed there were cameras at every corner of the field. They knew this would be on local TV and probably the Boston local news too. This was their moment! All those guys who teased the band members for being geeky, they couldn't help but envy them at a time like this. The formation was excellent, the band sounded great, not a single flubbed note in spite of the chill. Looked great too. Even though all the band members except one were covered from neck to knees in plastic ponchos, the magnificent uniforms could still be seen clearly, moving in perfect synchronicity around the field as Brigid and the drum majors turned into the center and he hooked up with Jamal in front of him now, and the other percussionists in the rear rank, as the band formed a huge donut circling on the field. In the middle, it was out of his view, but he knew the drum majors were turning around in sync as they did their rolls, and Brigid was prancing and doing some throws.  
  
The cheering continued, audible to him even through the music. The ponchos muffled the sound but only a little. It was beginning to drizzle, as he could tell from looking down on his poncho and feeling it against his face, but he couldn't hear the pitter-pat against the plastic, everything was so loud and alive! The cheerleaders, in the Dad's Club area, put down their sodas and just had to clap. Even the tiny bunch of Brookline fans in their little grandstand stood up, getting some circulation going, and seemed impressed.  
  
Now was his big moment. It was his cue, as the first trombonist, the one on the left. Glancing down carefully while still playing, he stopped exactly at the 47-yard line and marched in place. The other trombonists, watching him, stopped with him. He looked forward as Jamal and his line pulled away. Now, he watched Sarge, in his unobtrusive position on the sidelines. Sarge was waiting for the band to bunch up into "tight" formation, just three feet between each rank. Now Sarge signaled. Still marching in place, Rod turned toward the crowd, as the band went into the "B" part of the tune on the last go-round. The trombonists followed him and now they were in a line, working their slides in the direction of the stands.  
  
In a moment, Brigid and the drum majors came down in front. The band played especially loud the last few bars. A few rim-shots from the drums, then some terrifically high throws from Brigid. He could see the wisdom of not having a poncho on the majorette. The baton would get all tangled up in it. One final throw, and then silence. And now cheers!

He couldn't help but smile. Smiling in formation was O.K. The cheers continued as Mr. Simonetti, with his wireless microphone and a folded-up umbrella, walked tentatively onto the field, at the sideline, about twenty feet in front of Brigid and the drum majors. The cheering had barely died down when he said, "Let's hear it again for the Tunemasters!"  
  
More cheering, and some whistling. The drum majors stepped off to the right, and stopped in line. He looked to the left, at Brigid, whom he could see in profile, about ten feet in front of him, a little to the side, so as to complement, and not obscure, the presentation of the band in formation. She was in "presentation" position, hands on her hips, baton in her left hand (she was left-handed), again with one foot in front of the other, rear leg bent so that her rear foot was on its toes, the sole of the backless sandal separating from her heel. She was smiling too.  
  
Mr. Simonetti introduced Roddington McNeil, and an incredibly old man hobbled onto the field with a cane. He had on a business suit, a fedora on his head, and rubbers over his shoes. He gave a labored wave to the crowd as Mr. Simonetti introduced him. The cheers seemed to be from the older parents. Nobody in the band had seen this guy before, though they'd seen his name on a plaque in the lobby, near the glass case that had the old band pictures and trophies. Mr. Simonetti motioned to the new scoreboard and asked Mr. McNeil to say a few words.  
  
The old guy grabbed onto the microphone, his hand over Mr. Simonetti's, and began to speak in a quavering, old-man voice. He began speaking about when he first came to this school, in 1962...  
  
Rod realized this might be awhile so he glanced over to Brigid. What a fine view he had. In profile she displayed to him the slopes of her breasts, her flat tummy, one knee in front of the other... He was in love again.  
  
He looked at her tummy. It was more like a hollow. She was on the soccer team, she was in good shape. He remembered again that time he had walked through her gym class, her doing exercises with the other girls in her T-shirt and gym shorts, sneakers and socks. So covered up compared to now. What a fine-looking tummy, flat and just slightly muscular. Flushed red with the cold like the rest of her, though her toes and fingers were a little purplish by now too. White girls' skin was so interesting.  
  
He noted the smoothness of the tummy, down to her navel, then the long expanse down, down, down past her delicate hip bones, down, down, down some more, finally to the top of the tiny V-shaped uniform bottom. He knew what her pussy looked like now, and where her clitoris was, and estimated that they began just millimeters below the top of the little triangle of fabric. The skin above was flawless. How did she shave her pubic hair there? What did she use? A razor? Or some kind of cream like girls use to get the hair on their legs?  
  
He thought of last year's majorette, Grenicia. During one of the halftimes last year, during a moment like this, he noticed she had bumps down there, some kind of irritation. Fortunately for Grenicia her skin was real dark and you couldn't notice unless you were up close. Maybe she shaved too close, or had some kind of allergic reaction to the cream she used. Brigid, with her white skin, could afford no such mishap. To have a red rash visible above her uniform bottom would look pretty bad.  
  
Of course, Grenicia had been lucky. That whole last year, the band was blessed with beautiful weather. Every Saturday was warm and sunny, even into December. St. Patrick's Day was a nice day too. Brigid, at the time marching with the clarinets in a full-cover band uniform, must have looked at the majorette and decided to try out for the job when Grenicia graduated. There were about ten candidates, the way he understood it. And she got picked, the first white majorette in years.  
  
And look at how it turned out! To begin with, the uniform got more skimpy. Grenicia's circlets were four inches across and, her breasts being a little small, covered almost the entire slopes. The uniform bottom had been bigger, the straps going around the waist, and around Grenicia's quite bigger butt, had been thicker too. The sandals had had a strap around the heel which was now gone. But the worst of it was the weather. Grenicia had strutted in the warm sunshine. But except for those first two Saturdays in September, poor Brigid had had to endure the coldest and wettest autumn on record. It was always raining, or windy, or just plain COLD, and sometimes all at the same time. Yet she strutted and marched and twirled as if it was sunny and 70 degrees out and as if being the majorette was a great honor that she was thankful for. Which it was, of course. Yet no one who saw this girl, this unassuming, really quite ordinary though pretty girl, walking through the halls in her jean jacket, talking with her friends -- no one could suspect the steely strength within.  
  
The old guy kept rambling. And now drizzle turned into real rain. Umbrellas went up in the stands, and Mr. Simonetti opened up his big golf-style umbrella so that it covered him and the elderly honoree. Still the old guy kept talking, Mr. Simonetti nodding with just the slightest indication of impatience.  
  
Rod was glad for his poncho. In his full uniform with the thermal underwear underneath, he was not at all cold. In fact the poncho acted like a greenhouse and made him a bit warm. Not a feeling being experienced by the poncho-less majorette. Brigid stood there, in "presentation" pose, smiling, as the rain began to coat her flushed body. Her toes flexed every now and then but otherwise she stayed motionless to the extent she could. He watched as a thin sheet of water developed which ran down her bare back, turned at her sacral dimples, then dripped off the string surrounding her waist. Courses of water ran down further, around the Y-shaped dimple over the beginning of her crack, then washed over the two cheeks of her butt. Jamal was right. Brigid DID have a freckle on her butt, on the right cheek right near her butthole, about halfway down. Then the water ran down the backs of her legs. On the rear leg, it went down to her flexed reddened heel, then dripped off her heel down to the sole of her sandal, from which it ran down and collected under her toes. Through the corner of his eye he could see the TV camera guy, fifty feet away, the camera maybe trained on the speech but could he be actually trained on Brigid?  
  
Rod looked at her frozen smile, as the rain dripped off her nose, off her chin. What was she thinking? Warm thoughts? He saw her start to shiver. That was not unusual. A scantily-clad majorette on a cold day was expected to shiver. It was part of the majorette's life. But still he felt pity as the freezing rain washed over her in its icy caress. He wished he could throw his poncho over her, no more than that, wrap her near-nakedness in his jacket, give her his long pants, his nice warm boots over her frozen feet... He had a fantasy of the end of the halftime show, Brigid jumping into a hot tub set up on the 50-yard line, splashing around in it gratefully, a special chemical in it making her circlets and bottom dissolve, her warm wet body finally jumping up in triumph in her warm wet nakedness to the cheers of the crowd...  
  
He shook himself away from this bizarre fantasy and thought of Brigid in happier times. Those first two Saturdays in September were hot and sunny. The rest of the band was actually sweating in their wool uniforms and Brigid was having a great time. Maybe too great! There was the Bubble Gum Game, the second Saturday. Debra and Virginia had made the ill-advised decision to chew gum on the way to the field. What to do with it? Up in the stands, having to play "Fanfare", they had to put it somewhere fast. There not being any place to put it on their own uniforms, Brigid, who had no playing to do, offered her circlets. And so for the rest of the time up there one could see little pink nubs on her circlets. It looked for all the world like her actual nipples were sticking out through holes. It sure gave him a rise. Neither Brigid nor her girlfriends seemed to be aware of this, as they chatted during fanfare breaks and cheered the team on during runs and touchdowns. But to see Brigid jump up when Jaysee caught that long one in the end zone, the pink nubs bouncing up and down -- he considered himself lucky to have taken in that sight once in his lifetime.  
  
The old guy rambled on... Mr. Simonette was trying, gently, to wrest the microphone away but McNeil had it in a death grip in his gnarled hand. Maybe he was trying to show how hardy he was despite his age, standing up and talking for a long time in this cold rain.  
  
The rain got more torrential now, and now a gust of wind that almost knocked him over. Maybe others in the band too. Their ponchos flapped ferociously around them. Mr. McNeil, perhaps aware of this, spoke louder and closer to the mic.  
  
Brigid adjusted her toes very slightly to the wind but kept in place, smiling, hands obediently on hips, baton wrapped in the fingers of her left hand. Currents of cold rain ran down the slopes of her breasts into the circlets, no doubt chilling her nipples before re-emerging below. Now there were drips coming from the undersides of her breasts, water accumulating, then dripping, accumulating, then dripping... Cold rain likewise ran down her tummy into her uniform bottom, no doubt running in between her pussy lips, maybe going inside... Cold rain washed down her butt, down her crack, no doubt running against her hidden butthole...  
  
Now with the increased flow the rain began going on top of her circlets and spouting off them. Like skiing, or one of those fountains in Italy you saw pictures of, where water squirts out of a statue's nipples. Two little streams, coming off Brigid's breasts. Now her shivering increased and the streams scattered.  
  
How long was this old guy going to go on? Mr. Simonetti leaned forward to the mic, trying to say something, but the guy just kept talking.  
  
He pictured Brigid shivering so much, that her breasts scattered the water like a lawn sprinkler. A comical sight. On sale now -- the Majorette Lawn Sprinkler. Then he scolded himself for being so cruel. Still, he was beginning to get concerned about her. Sarge, under his umbrella in front of the stands, seemed to look concerned too. Hopefully the old guy was almost done. Unfortunately he had only gotten up to 1985 or so...  
  
He had been getting concerned and the fact that Sarge was concerned made him more so. Sarge had led a band in the Army for years. And this was his tenth year leading the Tunemasters. Marching bands were his life. He could handle any type of situation -- like that time last year when Chelsea, one of the flute players, vomited during the Fourth of July parade. Sarge quickly snatched her to the side and got her some medical help, and moved the marchers around so that the march continued with hardly a blip. Fortunately Chelsea was O.K. But it was the kind of eventuality that he knew how to deal with from his years and years of experience.  
  
But now Sarge looked uncomfortable and uncertain. This was a situation he had never had to deal with before. Majorettes had to get used to marching in the cold in skimpy uniforms, it came with the territory. But the marching kept them warm. Standing still in freezing rain was different.  
  
Rod stood there miserably in his sweaty warmth, feeling the rain pelt his poncho, and underneath the poncho was his jacket, then his shirt, then his thermal underwear. The rain was a remote feeling, like being inside a house and hearing it hit the roof. But Brigid had none of these protections. The rain entombed her bare skin, the cold no doubt piercing her to the bone.  
  
She shivered and the rain cascaded over her, into her circlets and her uniform bottom and deep into her most private crevices, then down finally over her bare purple toes. It was not just her toes. Her entire nearly naked body now had a purplish tinge to it. She had no place to hide from the cold.  
  
And now it got worse.  
  
The rain started feeling hard, like little stones. He looked down at the muddy field and saw to his horror that the rain had changed to sleet!  
  
Yet Roddington McNeil, the old fool, kept babbling on. Mr. Simonetti was getting more insistent in trying to interrupt but Mr. McNeil kept on hogging the microphone. The people in the crowd, huddled under their umbrellas or under raincoats, were losing interest, rolling their eyes, no doubt joking to each other as to when this geezer was going to finish.  
  
This was ridiculous. Everyone in the crowd is all bundled up, wearing gloves, under umbrellas, and Brigid was standing out in front of them wearing practically nothing. She stood as still as she could. Her smile was as frozen as the rest of her. And then, finally, a sign of weakness -- one knee buckled and she had to switch feet. Now it was the right set of toes that was planted firmly downward, spread a little bit, purple from the cold, millimeters from the muddy ground, and the left heel that was arched up, the last few drops of rain dripping from it onto the sole of her miserably inadequate flip-flop. His feet were warm in their socks and boots. How he wished he could give her his socks!  
  
At least with the ending of the rain she was no longer covered with the coursing of freezing water. The temperature might be even lower now but, with the cruel caress of the wintry wind like the world's roughest towel, her skin was drying quickly. Brigid's Rule.  
  
He and the other trombonists decided to check out her goose bumps. A favorite pastime of theirs, on cold days, that is, almost every day of this football season -- taking note of the many varieties of Brigid's goose bumps, where they appeared, how high and how many. Today was a record breaker. She had goose bumps all over -- those on her her shoulders, her arms, and her legs were always visible , but the inner recesses of her butt cheeks were always where they were highest. Today they were monumental, sharp little mountains, going right into her crack, someone inside where the tiny hidden black string bifurcated her cheeks and pressed snugly and intimately against her butthole.  
  
As the old man went on, Rod saw Sarge waving from under the little awning in front of the stands. He had gotten an extra coat from somewhere and was motioning as if to open it up. In other words, he was waving for Brigid to come off the field and put some damn covering on.  
  
A drastic measure, perhaps unprecedented in Sarge's experience, but this was a drastic situation. Rod looked over at Brigid. The freezing majorette evidently saw Sarge -- in fact, from where she was, it was impossible to miss him -- and did not react. C'mon, Brigid! He sighed. She was stubborn.  
  
His thoughts were distracted by the novel sight of the tiny grains of sleet bouncing off her bare shoulders. And the top slopes of her breasts. And her knees. With so many aspects to this new spectacle, each trombonist decided to pay attention to one. Rod looked at the shoulders. The sleet came down in one direction but bounced off at angles depending upon which angle of her beautiful curves they hit. The ones that hit the tops of her shoulders bounced straight up, then came down again, bouncing either in front or behind on the second bounce. The ones hitting the sides of the shoulders bounced off to each side. Some bounced up and fastened onto the lovely wisps of red hair under her cap.  
  
Sidney, the trombonist next to him, watched the grains bounce off her cute little cap and the braided up hair below. George, the next one, was mesmerized by the scattering of the little grains by her breasts and circlets. The ones that hit the circlets shot out especially far out in front of her. Well, he figured, that made sense. The vinyl of the circlets was harder than the skin on the bare slopes of her breasts. Herman watched the sleet bouncing off her hips and butt. Deion liked the sight of her bare knee and how the white stones shot out in front as if she were kicking them. At the other end of the trombone line, Lorenzo watched Brigid's right foot and the specks of ice bouncing off her spread toes.  
  
The sleet got a little bigger and fell harder, and made a real racket against the ponchos. It made it hard to hear McNeil and increased the sense of unreality, that this was some kind of dream. Though of course for Brigid it was all too real.  
  
Sarge's waving became more insistent and he could detect Brigid shaking her head, as slightly as possible so as not to be noticed by the crowd, an incongruous gesture to her frozen smile. Then he realized that following Sarge's instruction was not a simple matter. The TV cameras were trained on the band as well as McNeil, in fact now that the speech turned out to be so boring they were probably more into the band. And it was certain now that the guy at this corner of the field was focused on the majorette. For Brigid to leave the field would be distracting and disruptive to the show, and possibly would be the one item to make the news. "Frozen majorette can't take it any more!" The screaming headline on the Boston Globe. The show, the show -- with a marching band, it was always about the show.  
  
Still, hardy as she had become from all those days marching in the cold, Brigid must think of her health. And so the words came out of his barely moving lips, words that he couldn't really believe he had said until they entered his mind through his ears.  
  
"Brigid, go!"  
  
His first thought was that he was in big trouble, talking out loud in formation like that, but no one could hear him through the white noise of the sleet hitting the ponchos, except Brigid and maybe Sidney and George. He waited for a response. Then he cleared his throat and said again, moving his lips as little as possible so no one in the stands could see, "Brigid, go and put that coat on! We'll be fine!"  
  
Shivering, she replied, "I c - can't!" He screwed up his courage and said, "Don't be foolish! You're freezing!"  
  
"Ya think I don't knnnnow that!" In her Providence accent.  
  
He had confronted her and, in his nervousness, thought he had lost her friendship. So he had nothing to lose. "I care about you, Brigid! PLEASE go get that coat on!"  
  
"N - no." She closed her eyes -- maybe trying to transport herself into a place of warmth, a hot beach maybe. Or under a hot shower. Or maybe thinking of herself as being one of the rest of her band, all covered up under a poncho, as if she was once again marching with the clarinets.  
  
The sleet began to accumulate on her cap. Little crescents of white crust began to form on top of the circlets. Down below, the white grains were filling up the spaces between her toes.  
  
"Thank you, thank you, Roddington McNeil!" Mr. Simonetti said. The old man had had to catch his breath, finally allowing a space to jump in. McNeil looked around, as if awakened, then looked back at the band and at the majorette who was turning into a kind of frost-encrusted sculpture. "Oh sorry -- what a fine band -- thanks for your time!" And with that he hobbled with his cane off the field, followed by Mr. Simonetti.  
  
The sleet, as if on cue, ended. Now it was just a gray sky and a chill breeze.  
  
The second the two men were off the field Brigid lurched into action. A bit more stiffly than usual, but it was oh so good to see her come to life. She spun on the sleet-covered muddy field, shaking the white crust from her cap, her circlets, her toes, and thrust her baton into the air. A loud roll-off woke the band up, as instruments went up to lips. And now the intro to "Stars and Stripes Forever". A bit flubby, but by the time they were two bars into the first section they were back on their game. Their final tune of the year, a big finish, the grandest and most famous of all marching band tunes.

And one of the hardest, especially for the flutes. Fortunately the trombone part was not that hard. As he pumped away on his slide he smiled, watching Brigid twirl, at first slowly, but then her body went from purple to red, and her smile once again became the smile of a living person.  
  
But --  
  
Now she stumbled! The heels of one of her flip-flops sank into the mud.  
  
..................  
  
Brigid stumbled, but only for a second. She didn't seem upset about it. In fact she seemed to expect it. Then, to his astonishment, hardly missing a beat she kicked the heeled flip-flop off to the side, where it landed on the 40-yard line, and on the next beat kicked off the other. And she continued her routine like nothing had happened.  
  
Rod's eyes widened as he pumped his trombone. So did the other trombone guys. Brigid was strutting and twirling barefoot! Yuck! The sleety mud was up almost to her ankles, oozing up between her toes, as she spun and kicked. On her kicks to the side and front, little bits of mud flew out from her toes. Within seconds the school colors on her toenails were totally obscured by brown muck.  
  
Yuck! What a violation of the rule about what Sarge always called "neat and proper presentation"! Yet Sarge, on the sidelines, was actually smiling. And talking to people to his side, as if answering their comments. Rod realized this was what Sarge had been mentioning to Brigid before halftime, when he had pulled her away from chatting with her uncle the cop. "If it gets too muddy, dispense with the footwear."  
  
Now the showy part, and the trombones swung to the left and then to the right, in perfect sync. This was the beginning of the "trio" section, the main tune, and as they broke into it the crowd cheered. Nothing like your folks and your family cheering you on. It was a great feeling. The TV cameras were eating it up, scanning the field, each line of the band kicking and high-stepping, all the way back to the percussion line at the rear. But most of all the cameras trained on the barefoot majorette slopping around in the cold mud.  
  
Brigid was having a great time. As she spun and twirled and threw the baton up, it looked like a different type of dancing. Looser-limbed, more relaxed. More African. She was so stiff and formal sometimes, it seemed like she had a second baton up her butt. But not now! It stood to reason that without having to totter on those heels, having to grip her toes to keep those backless sandals on, she could move around more freely. It also just was the sensible thing to kick off the sandals when twirling on a muddy surface. He wondered when she had practiced majoretting barefoot. Certainly each time he had seen her, doing twirls on that grassy patch during recess, she had worn shoes.  
  
Her face was flushed, not with cold now but with exertion. Imagine! Not two minutes ago she was shivering and miserable and battling hypothermia. Now she was alive and hot. He realized for the first time what twirling meant to her, what a thrill it was for her. Nobody would suspect it, seeing her around school in her regular clothes, mostly a quiet normal girl, talking with her friends in the hall... Now, dancing around barefoot and nearly naked in the mud in front of the crowd and the cameras.  
  
And now as she swung around, her jiggling breasts leading the way as she threw them just so, she looked back at him and smiled. Just for him. His heart leapt. Yes!! She wasn't mad at him for confronting her about running off the field to put on that nice warm coat. He could see now that she had made the right decision to tough it out. How much would have been lost if at this moment the band's majorette was huddled on the sidelines.  
  
But she was smiling at him -- remembering that he had said "I care about you Brigid"! He didn't know what the future would bring, but right now it looked promising.  
  
With the sleet no longer hitting their ponchos, the band really rang out. Now on the final few bars they hit fortissimo. The drum guard's beats sounded like cannons. The big climax to the tune, the show, the season! Now Brigid threw an incredibly high throw, the baton going up what looked like a hundred feet, and she spun around and spun around like five times as it took seemingly half an hour to come down.  
  
Holy ----! She was really going to do it! A split! Brigid turned to the side and her left leg went forward and her right leg back -- and as her bare butt hit the mud, her muddy toes spread and extended in front, kicking out mud, she caught the baton on the final cymbal crash. The trombone players thrust their instruments up to the sky in unison.  
  
A pregnant second, and then the crowd let loose with a big roar. He thought he could detect a chanting undercurrent in there, some guys in the back rows maybe, "Frigid Brigid Frigid Brigid Frigid Brigid Frigid Brigid -- "  
  
Sarge ran out and helped Brigid up. The insides of her legs were coated with mud but she didn't care. On his prompting everyone took a bow. Then Sarge playfully waved to the camera guy who was now within ten feet of them. Brigid waved too, with a big smile and a wink, her other hand tucking the baton next to her bare hip.  
  
Rod smiled, looking at her flushed butt, her total nakedness from behind, interrupted only by the splatters of mud on her back, her buns, her legs, and the tiny horizontal string just above her crack, and he thought of her lovely hidden brown eye. Maybe it was winking at him now. It was corny but he decided to wink back.  
  
Halftime show over, the band broke formation and trotted off the field as the football players, now assembled at the sidelines, waited to charge onto it. Brigid ran to retrieve her sandals; then zigzagged back to the fence, her toes kicking up bits of mud behind her. He watched her go.  
  
She ran to the gate where her three little sisters and two little brothers were waiting along with her parents too, all cheering and laughing, and ready with warm washable boots, a big fluffy blanket to wrap herself in while they watched the second half, and a huge thermos full of hot chocolate!  
  
  
**IV: T--- High School Board Meeting**  
Minutes taken 10/1/09.  
  
"Next order of business, Ms. Kleinfelter's proposal for a modification to the Tunemasters Uniform."  
  
"My proposal," she said, untying the accordion folder and fishing out a stack of papers, "is to modify the lower half of the majorette uniform. This is called the 'Petra Red String', though of course it will be in the school colors, white on the right side and black on the left."  
  
The papers, drawings of the proposal, were passed around. After they had studied them for a moment, Board President Jones said, "What are the advantages of this modification?"  
  
"Threefold. First, there has always been a question of pubic hair showing, which as you know is in violation of specs." By "specs" she meant the local public decency law, a copy of which was provided to each year's majorette so that she could guard against accidental exposure. "Currently the majorette shaves so much of her pubic hair as to not show, but there is always the chance of exposure during a vigorous twirl or jump. With this modification, she will have to shave entirely. If she has no pubic hair, none can show.  
  
"Secondly, it is more secure. It lodges between the girl's vaginal lips, instead of drifting precariously over them."  
  
Board V.P. Charlton, an old guy in a business suit who was nearsighted, had taken off his glasses and was holding up the drawing to his eyes dispassionately. "Are you sure this is compliant?"  
  
"Yes. I spoke to the mayor's assistant. The genitals must be covered, but the area AROUND the lips, as opposed to the inner lips, is not part of the genitals.  
  
"The third reason is, not to put too fine a point on it, but having the string inside her vagina and -- other parts of her -- provides stimulation that will help her keep warm during parades and other events when the weather is inclement. Also, because it sits closer to her body, it impacts more closely to her anus, with similar results."  
  
They sat around the table, littered with empty coffee cups and stacks of memos, and contemplated the proposal.  
  
"How fast can this modification be made."  
  
"It already HAS been made," Ms. Kleinfelter said. She unthreaded the string from the staple that held it to the accordion folder and held it up. "This, gentlemen, is it."  
  
She extended the tiny black and white string between her hands. They were impressed.  
  
Jones looked around and sensed agreement. He didn't have to ask. "It has been decided," he said, leaning over to the secretary taking minutes. "The majorette will get the new lower half at the next cleaning.  
  
"Next order of business . . . Advertising the new bond issue . . ."  
  
  
**V: Brigid at the Winter Carnival**  
They were in between songs in the big practice room and Sarge, up on his stool, looking down at his stand, itched behind his ear with his baton as he read from the papers in front of him. Rod sat in the trombone section, looking across the sea of black faces and the occasional white one, especially Brigid in the clarinet section, trying to catch her eye. She was very fetching today, no jean jacket, but a purple sweater over a white collared shirt. Some girls looked good no matter what they wore. The strands of Brigid's red hair, long and loose, played over the shoulders of the fluffy sweater.  
  
Alas, Brigid wasn't looking at him. Her attention was fixed on Sarge as he went over the new invitation. "Now, this is a big step for us, the Winter Carnival at Killington. We've never been at an event like that before. We'll be doing straight marching, but the affair is kind of, how shall I say it, glitzy. You notice the uniforms are gone," he said, motioning to the empty coat racks around the perimeter of the room. "Some shiny piping is being put in. But we won't be doing any different moves, just what we did basically at the Patriots pregame in Foxboro.  
  
"Now, this is at night, the middle of winter, up in Vermont. It will be cold. The thermal underwear that some of you were wearing in Foxboro, well some of it was too bulky. A couple of you looked like you were about to explode." There was some laughter; everyone knew exactly the kids he was talking about. "So the school has decided to spring for streamlined thermals, made especially for marching bands. We have to get the orders in right away. Let me know now. Who is going to be wearing thermals?"  
  
He looked up and saw almost everyone raising their hands. He counted. Now Brigid's hand slowly rose to join the others. Sarge laughed. "Not you!!", and good-naturedly waved her hand down with his baton. Brigid put her hand on her lap and stuck out her lower lip in an exaggerated pout.  
  
After he had taken the count, Sarge said, "OK, enough talk. Let's get to 'National Emblem'." He raised his baton and waited for the shuffling of sheet music until everyone was ready.  
  
His baton still up, Sarge covered his eyes and said, "Sorry, I just had a vision of our band being led by a majorette in long johns." He shook the thought out of his head as some of the kids laughed. Then he looked at Brigid. "Don't worry, it won't be a long march. And not like that last game. No standing still in the freezing rain while some old guy gives an endless speech."  
  
Brigid, remembering, momentarily dropped the clarinet from her mouth to say, "Zhhhh!" and shudder. Debra and Virginia and some of her other girlfriends giggled in sympathy.  
  
Baton still up, Sarge said, "By the way, we'll be marching on packed snow, so the majorette's footwear is being revised to be more secure. Also, some other uniform changes."  
  
Tentatively, Brigid said, "Like what?"  
  
"Well I understand they're doing away with the circlets. Okay, let's go!"  
  
His baton went down for the first beat.  
  
"Thhhhbbbvvvvssshhhzzz!!!"  
  
It was a spectacular flub, from the suddenly dry lips of the trombone section.  
  
The room burst out with laughter as if it had been the world's loudest fart.  
  
"Goodness that was horrible," Sarge said, cutting off the tune. "Let's try again." He raised his baton. "Let's go!"  
  
..................  
  
Rod straightened his sleeve and looked down with mixed feelings at his new uniform. He glanced around and saw that he was in a big room. Tunemasters uniforms were milling all around. Playing with the slide of his trombone, he decided to sit down at one of the long tables near the sodas.  
  
He looked around for Brigid. She was not hard to pick out.  
  
...................  
  
He wondered why he was fiddling with his trombone. Everyone else almost, had their instruments over on those cabinets on the side of the room. It was a pretty big place, maybe a cafeteria or something for this big ski resort, whose Winter Carnival the Tunemasters were marching in. Converted to a kind of waiting room for the marchers.  
  
He was still not sure about these new uniforms. Sarge had explained that the effect was to be a bit more glitzy, so they had been jazzed up a little. There were now ruffles along the buttons and on the cuffs, and extra piping up and down. He supposed it made them look taller. The piping, though, was gold. Weren't the school colors supposed to be black and white?  
  
"I'm not quite down with it either," his friend Jared said. Jared had wisely put his cymbals on the cabinets and was carefully sipping a soda he had gotten from the little serving table, which had sodas and pretty much nothing else. Just something to wet everyone's lips, he supposed, to get ready for playing. Jared and Rod looked down their uniforms, at their jackets with the big "T" over the right breast, the cummerbund, the long braided trousers with the now-gold piping, down to the long black boots.  
  
He shifted a bit. This new thermal underwear, necessary because of the intense cold outside, was a bit itchy.  
  
"Good thing it's not too hot," Jared said, reading Rod's thoughts. Their own thermals had gotten them hot while they were inside. These special-order ones didn't.  
  
"Yeah... " He looked up at the TV screen mounted from the ceiling. A Vermont station, from Burlington, a brief news break. "And we will have live coverage of this year's Killington Winter Carnival, starting next." And now a long view of the route they would be marching, pure white, plowed snow, with ropes marking off the "street". Maybe there really was a street there in warm weather, but you couldn't tell now. Just to the side, a stand of skis and other equipment, then a kiosk that led to a path to the ski lifts, with a few people carrying skis to it. A big contraption that looked like a tractor, with a pile of snow behind it -- a snow making machine and a salt water tank, someone said. A little silo which contained a gift shop. And Christmas-style string lights hung over the route at intervals, held up by poles on each side. It was almost sundown -- for some reason this parade was at night -- but it was still hard for the camera to adjust to the sunlit whiteness. The camera got a little better adjusted and now one could see the orange electrical wires strewn along the sides of the packed snow "street". Lots of lights up.  
  
He looked around. The room was mostly full of Tunemasters kids but also there were some grown-ups. Some important-looking guys in top hats and white gloves, maybe the Grand Marshals or something, talking to Sarge, who was in his usual bland business suit. Also some soldiers, a couple of old American Legion guys in their boy scout-style caps. Ladies' Auxiliary folks. But mostly Tunemasters. About forty of them were able to make this trip and they outnumbered the rest.  
  
He licked his lips and looked at the soda table. Jamal's lips didn't need wetting, he was percussion, but Rod wondered what it would be like to blow into a trombone in such cold. Yes, there was that last game when it sleeted for a while, and that big parade before the Patriots game, but this parade was actually below freezing. As in, his lips might freeze to his mouthpiece! They had never marched outside in January before. It was already maybe 25 degrees and the temperature was sure to drop once it got dark. Fortunately there didn't seem to be any wind.  
  
On the TV, two guys in ski outfits were talking in the foreground. In the background you could see people filling up behind the ropes.  
  
He decided on soda, but it had to be clear so as not to make a stain on his uniform if it spilled. Luckily they had 7-Up. He returned his trombone to the cabinets and got a can and sipped.  
  
He took another view of the room. The new uniforms sure made the Tunemasters look different. Before, the effect was kind of military. Now, with the luxuriant ruffles and piping, and the big new shako hats with frills that a lot of them already had put on, the effect was more like entertainment, like a big show in Las Vegas. Jaycee, Virginia, Debra, Morganna, Sid, Ty, Jacob... they all seemed to be wearing more clothes, somehow, taking up more space. And the gold piping made their raiment seem all the more abundant. It was not actually bad, he decided, just different. Hard to get used to.  
  
He wondered about the changes to the uniform of the majorette, Brigid. He looked around for her but she was hard to find in all this finery. A - ha! Behind that clot of flute and clarinet players, all girls, he saw two bare white butt cheeks slightly sticking out in profile.  
  
He and Brigid had a special bond, he knew, or he thought he knew, based on that on-field conversation at that last game, but it hard been hard to build on. He just couldn't screw up the courage to ask her out. Mostly he could just chat in the hall whenever he saw her between classes. It was a big high school and hard to "bump into" someone accidentally-on-purpose. And he couldn't think of anything interesting to talk about. "What's up?" He kept kicking himself for being so inane.  
  
He took a deep breath, sipped from the can, and approached her.  
  
As he walked up behind her he saw she was talking with Velda and Lourdes, friends of hers from the clarinet section, who were straightening out their jackets. Brigid was enthusing about the new piping, feeling the fabric in her fingers, testing the ruffles  
  
"That's so neat, pwiddy!" she said in her "Pwovidince" accent. "They'll get a big chahge out of that!"  
  
Rod looked down past Brigid's bare shoulders and slim, bare back, and for a second he thought she was totally naked! But no, the strings that held the thong bottom on were still there, they were just transparent now. Kind of like clear plastic, hard to see, and only what looked like an eighth of an inch wide. Also they didn't meet at a "T" like before. They curved down, well below her sacral dimples, and into her butt crack where they met. Kind of like a "V" in script. Down below, she had on her backless majorette sandals.  
  
"Oh hi Rod!" Brigid said, turning around. He bit his lip as he saw her pretty white Irish face, the freckles and the red hair set up in braids. "You look real nice!" As she smoothed his ruffles he looked up. Her little cap had disappeared.  
  
"Nice tiara," he said, thankful he could remember the name for that little half-crown that was now on her head. With a "T" in the middle, otherwise just a little half-circle of metal or maybe plastic, the ends going into her hair.  
  
Brigid turned her head side to side as if modeling it.  
  
"What's that? A headset?"  
  
There was a little piece of it going into her ear.  
  
"No, just a speakah so I can heah Sahge," she said, tapping it. "This way he doesn't have to mahch right next to us, he can give me directions to go fast, go slow... And how about my new 'T's?!"  
  
His eyes widened as he looked down to her chest. The ever-shrinking circlets were now gone. In their place were black-and-white T's mounted on her nipples. They were maybe three inches high. His mouth opened in puzzlement. Behind them he could clearly see the circles of her nipples, a little below the junction of the "T". They were about the size of quarters. He had heard that white girls, their nipples were pink until the first time they went out topless in the sun. Then they turned brown and never went back. Brigid's nipples, as anyone could see, were pink, against her white skin.

Wasn't this against the public decency code? Weren't female nipples supposed to be covered? He imagined the Tunemasters majorette would know about such things. But the "powers that be" must have decided it was OK. Maybe it was just the tip of the nipple, the part that stuck out and supported these letters, that had to be covered.  
  
"Aren't they great?" Brigid said, sticking them out slightly, proud of this change in her uniform. "The circlets were too small. This way my 'T's are more cleah." As she moved the T's danced a little.  
  
"Do they stay on OK?" he couldn't help asking.  
  
"Sure, they fit right on." In the middle of each letter was a little black circle, as big around as a pencil eraser, that covered the nub of her nipple. He couldn't imagine how these things felt. "Better than those horrid old clips."  
  
"I'll say."  
  
He noticed people forming a circle around them as Brigid explained the benefits of her new uniform.  
  
Rod looked further down and saw that her uniform bottom, which used to be a narrow "V", was now also a "T". It was clear by now that Brigid had had to shave off every bit of her pubic hair because her lower T covered only her pussy lips and her clit, those private parts he had spied on during that last game when Brigid was being "cleaned up" under the stands by Ms. Farkas and Debra and Virginia. The T was way, way below her navel, maybe eight inches of flat lower tummy framed by the larger "V" of her hip bones. The junction of the T had to be right over where Brigid's clit lay hidden between her lower lips...  
  
The clear plastic straps came around from the sides, crossing the lower parts of Brigid's hip bones, and met at each end of the T. The bottom of the T was almost hidden as it disappeared between her legs.  
  
"Looks a little insecure," Marisa, who was standing behind Brigid, said of the strings in the back.  
  
"Oh this is called a V-back," Brigid said, turning around and looking back on it to the extend she could. "It's actually more secuah than a T-back. I can move around and it stays put." Everyone looked down at the tiny transparent straps that curved into her butt crack. He couldn't help but continue to admire how tight and firm and curvy her butt was. Her white skin was beautiful and clear...  
  
"Your sandals changed too," Brian observed.  
  
"Yeah," Brigid said, taking one off and putting her bare foot on the tile floor, surrounded by everyone else's big ruffled boots. She held it up at the level of her cute puckered navel. "See, no heel. And it's got a tread." Indeed the sandals were now totally flat flip-flops, with straps that were as transparent as those around her hips. And the bottoms did have black treads on them, like sneakers do.  
  
"Snow flip-flops," someone said. Everyone laughed, including Brigid. "Yeah, like tires," she said. "It was eithah that, or chains," she said. More giggling.  
  
As Brigid put the flip-flop back on, Rod looked down and told himself: Brigid's entire foot is now exposed. He regarded again the T covering her pussy lips, and the tiny bit of coverage afforded by the T's on her breasts.  
  
He held up the pinky on his gloved hand and told himself: now she's down to less than this. My pinky has more coverage than Brigid's entire body does!  
  
This little chitchat was interrupted by Sarge, who was followed by one of the men in top hats, a white guy with a beard about 55 years old, with a ribbon across his ruffled tuxedo-like jacket. "Tunemasters, this is the mayor, Mr. Richfield, who's grand marshaling this parade. Mr. Richfield, we're all proud of them, the Tunemasters!"  
  
Rod and the others said a variation of "good to meet you", the standard greeting they had been trained to say. Comportment off the march was very important, especially since the Killington resort was donating a big wad of cash to the school for this appearance. Mr. Richfield said a few words about how he was glad to have them here, how he'd heard about them even up here in the Green Mountains, etc., etc. Then he said,"It's traditional for a photo of some of the visiting band members to be taken before the parade. I'd like a couple of you to stand outside with me for a moment. We've got to hurry -- it's almost getting dark."  
  
Sarge said, "Well one of them has to be our majorette, the other -- Jared? Get your things."  
  
By that he meant: Brigid, get your baton, and Jared, get your cymbals. In a moment both were hustling to the foyer and then outside, along with Sarge. The rest stayed inside and watched through the big foyer window, through which they could see the marching route.  
  
The photographer, bundled up in his scarf and coat and gloves and ski cap, was waiting out there for them. The snow was a little golden now, with the last rays of sunshine. As Rod and the rest of the Tunemasters watched, Jamal and Brigid stood on either side of Mayor Richfield and smiled, trying not to squint as they faced the setting sun. Jamal, with his cymbals posed in front of him as if about to crash, Brigid, with her baton primly placed up against her left shoulder, next to the Mayor. Down below, a few grains of snow had dusted up on Brigid's bare toes. Her body was flushed from top to bottom in the invigorating cold.  
  
The Mayor's white glove rested on Brigid's bare right shoulder. Rod thought: how does a middle-aged guy feel resting a hand on the majorette, getting to feel her bare skin, if only through his glove? Didn't he really wish he was cupping her ass? He smirked at the thought.  
  
"Come on, Mr. Watson," the Mayor said, beckoning for Sarge to get into the photo. Sarge modestly refused, but the Tunemasters, shouting through the glass, egged him on. Finally he shrugged and took his place next to Jamal as the band inside cheered.  
  
Smiles stayed frozen on their faces as the photographer fiddled with his camera. A minute went by. Finally the Mayor took his hand off Brigid's shoulder and shook off the cold that was penetrating him even through his suit and gloves and heavy boots. One might think that someone who lived up here would be more temperature resistant. "Something wrong, Fred?" he finally said.  
  
"The contrast with the girl, she's too white, she blends with the snow," he mumbled. At his suggestion there was some shifting around. Breaths condensed in the cold air as Brigid got a little more flushed. Maybe her increasing redness made the contrast better. Another minute later, the flash went off. A second flash, and now Brigid and Jamal and Sarge ran in to the foyer.  
  
They all got back to the big "ready room" and Rod sat down and sipped his soda. Jared sat next to him and they talked about basketball, how the Celtics were doing this year. On the TV, it was amazing how dark it got right away. The two guys in ski outfits were still talking. The sound was too low to hear what they were saying.  
  
He turned around, sensing Brigid near him. And found himself staring eye-level with Brigid's crotch only a foot away.  
  
She was standing and sipping soda, with Virginia and Debra, her fully uniformed friends, on each side of her, looking out to the gathering crowd on the snow-packed parade route. She wasn't aware of his gaze.  
  
His close-in view allowed him to fully enjoy her smooth white skin, from her flat tummy with its cute navel down to her thighs. The only interruption from total nakedness was the thin clear string that journeyed from both sides across her hips, crossing the lower parts of the big "V" of her delicate hip bones, crossing the smaller "V" of her pubic mound, meeting in that little black-and-white "T" that hugged and partly bit into her pubic lips. She must have taken a lot of care shaving down there. Not a hint of stubble, no trace of the pubic hairs that he now knew were as red as the hairs on her head.  
  
The little "T" was as skinny as his pinky and the top was only half an inch wide. It looked ridiculously tiny on her. Thin as she was, it made her hips look wide as the clear strings journeyed their way across them, like trekking across an endless desert toward the tiny oasis of covering that was the "T". She looked like a 50-foot woman who had stretched on a normal size thong.  
  
And the stem of the "T" was so thin that it bit into her lips, actually separating them, as it disappeared between her legs. From his close view he could see the little streak of gold running down the middle of the "T", within the black that was in turn framed within the tiny white border. So here was the gold that matched the gold piping on everyone else's uniforms, though shrunk down to almost microscopic dimensions on the micro-uniform that the majorette had to wear.  
  
"Micro-uniform." That was a good name for it. Brigid could hardly be said to be wearing anything, yet she stood straight up and poised and clearly proud of what was on her. He wondered what the scene was like in her house on game days. For his part, he would shower, get into his thermals, then his momma would have his uniform laid out on his bed, shirt next to jacket, then pants, then his socks, with his boots on the floor. And Brigid? He imagined her walking to her room totally naked, to find the tiny circlets and V-botton carefully arranged, tiny bits against the expanse of bedsheets, which would take only a few seconds to tie on. Then slipping on the flip-flops, and prancing out to get her baton.  
  
Examining her crotch again, he saw the fleshiness of the white-skinned lower lips, sloping down from each side of the "T". Including the crease at the beginnings of her legs, it looked like the letter "W", though with soft bottoms. A little "w" in script, maybe.  
  
He quickly turned around, thinking Brigid might be seeing him look at her crotch. She was used to being looked at, of course, but it wouldn't be cool to stare so directly. He sipped his soda and, looking back, was relieved to see she was still looking outside.  
  
There was a big, flashy scene that was developing out there. The place seemed to be in the middle of nowhere, judging from that long bus ride, so where did all these people come from? it was a little city carnival. Music was piped in, food was being sold from booths, people milling around waiting for the start of festivities.  
  
His mind wandered and he thought of those dreams he had been having. It had been three or four times now. He was older and had a girlfriend, or maybe it was a wife. Her name was Tami and she was red-haired and white and she was always naked. Like a natural forest woman, kissing him and then scampering away through the forest, her tough bare feet hopping from rock to log to branch, light as a feather, then in no time disappearing from sight. These dreams were clearly inspired by Brigid, especially that last one where this Tami lady was wearing this little string thing in her crotch and seemed to be as proud and glad of this covering as Brigid was with her micro-thong.  
  
Now Brigid sat on the bench a few feet down from him, saying hi but then chatting with Debra, who sat down on the far side. He watched as they talked about their favorite TV shows, Brigid with her legs crossed dangling the flip-flop from the ends of her toes. You never saw bare toes in January, except with the Tunemasters majorette of course.  
  
Her breasts must have gotten bigger. It sure seemed so, as he saw them in profile, sticking out from her rib cage more than before, jiggling slightly with the motions of her leg. Well, most girls her age were still developing. He saw the pink circles of her nipples in profile -- they were called areoles, something like that?  
  
First the circlets, then the smaller circlets, now these suspended T's -- it seemed like the uniform was gradually leaping off the fronts of Brigid's breasts. Now only the very tip of her nipple, was covered, in that tiny half-inch tube that supported the "T"'s which had no other point of contact with her. They didn't pull down her breasts at all. They looked to be hollow plastic and almost weightless. They jiggled a little too, with every little motion.  
  
"Ready to get -- Frigid -- Brigid?" a wise guy cracked as he passed by. Brigid began to turn but changed her mind and kept talking about soap operas.  
  
"Icy titties," another boy said as he passed by. Brigid made a quick sign of "f\*\*k you" with her lips but kept talking.  
  
Now a stray comment from some distance away. "Popsicle toes!"  
  
Brigid ignored him, though it seemed like the skin around her collarbones flushed a bit as if in anger. She was used to the occasional jerky comment. It never rattled her. The way some boys acted, it didn't make him proud. Sometimes he wished she would jump up and say, "Hey in a few minutes I'll be freezing my tits off for you idiots! Just shut the f\*\*k up!" Or thrusting her breasts in some boy's face and saying, "Go ahead keep talking. Just know you will never... EVER... get to touch these!!" It would serve him right. But that just wouldn't be Brigid. To be the Tunemasters majorette was a big responsibility and she handled it like a real pro.  
  
He briefly wondered what it would be like if it was him. That is, a drum major, who had to wear just a tiny jockstrap-;ike thing. He'd die of embarrassment. Kind of like if Brigid, standing at attention in front of the formation of full-uniformed Tunemasters, was nervously clutching the baton in front of her and saying, "P - please, Sarge... C - could I be allowed to wear more -- clothes? Please??"  
  
His increasingly weird musings were interrupted by Sarge's loud bark. "Attention, troops!" Like what he must have said hundreds of times in the Army. Rod and Brigid and Debra and the others got up, as Sarge addressed them, Brigid as usual by his side.  
  
"First question, how is that thermal underwear working out? Anyone feeling hot?"  
  
A murmur of approval. Brigid, crossing her arms, one foot turned to the side, looked on.  
  
"Good. Believe me, it's a new fabric and it's wonderful. Developed for the Army, or by the Army, I understand. No surprise here," he said with a smile. "You wouldn't get the Navy latching on to something that good... Now, it's a packed snow route, as you can see, and real cold. Out of consideration for the band, I've asked that the route be short. We'll be marching only about 300 yards. We'll be outside no more than ten or fifteen minutes. After that, you can come back here and change, or you can mingle. Be back by nine o'clock though."  
  
Rod knew that the reference to "consideration for the band" was really "consideration for our majorette who has to march practically naked". But Brigid would not want any mention of special treatment. A pro.  
  
"We'll be doing 'National Emblem', 'Little Giant' and 'Winter Wonderland', which is the obvious choice. Remember the double tonguing on the intro to 'Wonderland'. I know it's a new tune for you but I know you'll do fine.  
  
"I won't be marching with you, I'll be on the reviewing stand. Watch Brigid. Like always, but especially tonight. She has a headset and will be hearing my directions. Remember," he said, lowering his voice to the majorette next to him, "if my voice is too low, turn left. Too high, turn right. I don't want you going deaf for our sake."  
  
A short old lady appeared next to Sarge. He said, "Now you voted to donate our marching fee to the disabled learning center, as you recall. Good choice, though all the choices they gave us are worthy programs at our school. Here's the director, you've seen her around the school, Dr. Bellamy."  
  
To his surprise Tommy Blackwell appeared next to her and everyone felt about to choke up. Tommy, who had been one of the most popular guys in the school, his ornate dreadlocks a daily sight swinging down the halls, the quarterback for the freshman football team, who was in a car crash, who since then hadn't been able to put a complete sentence together. His parents were optimistic but it was obvious he just wasn't getting better.  
  
Dr. Bellamy said a few words, thanking the band "from the bottom of our hearts." Then she gave the floor to Tommy.  
  
"Th - thank... you... g - guys," he said, struggling with each sound. Then a labored wave of his hand, and through his surgically repaired lips, a little flash of his old smile.  
  
Some of the girls sniffled and probably some of the boys too. Then suddenly, loud applause.  
  
It made Rod proud, once again, to be a Tunemaster. Sarge gave them ten minutes until lineup time. Ron went back to his soda at the table.  
  
And felt his left boot go out from under him. Then a quick view of the ceiling and an awful pain in the back of his head, like being hit with a baseball bat.  
  
It seemed like a week later when he woke. For a moment he thought he was as messed up as Tommy, but he blinked and realized he was OK except for a headache. He looked up from the floor and saw Brigid's T's, dancing gently above him, as she bent down and placed her hand behind his head.  
  
Her breasts were so round and firm and white... he looked up past her bare shoulders at her concerned and helpful face.  
  
"Are you OK, Rod?"  
  
"Oh Brigid..." He was about to tell her he loved her. But then saw the sea of concerning faces standing behind her and thought better of it. He tried to help himself up. Brigid, her toes flexing in her flip-flops, put her strong arms around his wool jacket. He placed his gloved hand on the upper slope of her hip, which helped revive him a lot. The next moment he was standing up, taking deep breaths...  
  
"What happened?"  
  
"You slipped and were out cold for a few seconds," Jared said.  
  
He shook his head quickly and felt a quick chill all over. "I'm OK, gang!" he announced. A sigh of relief all around.  
  
"All line up!" Sarge shouted from somewhere in the distance.  
  
"That was some spill," Brigid said as they lined up, he and Brigid and Debra and Virginia near the front, waiting to get into the vestibule and then out into the loud, light-filled nighttime air.  
  
"You mean someone spilled soda?" he said.  
  
She laughed enchantingly, tapping her baton against the bell of his trombone. "No, I mean you fell backwids, gave us quite a scay - uh."  
  
They talked about the crowds outside, how the whiff of hot dogs was making them hungry, whether their parents would see this event on TV. Meawhile Debra and Virginia spoke among themselves. He and Brigid were having the most relaxed conversation they'd ever had. It was a good feeling, he told himself, as he looked down at his long braided trousers and boots next to her bare thighs, her bare feet in the clear-strap flip flops.  
  
During a lull they looked at the night scene outside. For the first time they noticed the lights of the village down the hill, sharp and clear over the bluish tinge of snow. A bank thermometer said it was minus seven degrees. It must mean Centigrade. He wasn't sure he should be mentioning her plight but he said, "Are you going to be all right out there?"  
  
She took a deep breath, causing the T's to rise and fall, then looked down as she wiggled her toes. "It's only a shawt time. Afterwids I'll run back heah and get into my clothes."  
  
"You can wear my jacket," he said.  
  
She laughed. "Thanks but I don't think that'll do it."  
  
They waited and waited. Everyone was getting fidgety. From the front Sarge said, "There's been a delay. They can't get one of the floats to start up. Hang on, crew."  
  
Then they had to move out of the way as some men rolled dollies by carrying what must be float stuff. The four of them moved aside into a little hallway with a water fountain and a door that said, "Custodian". They had run out of conversation and were getting seriously impatient. He twiddled with his spit valve and slide. Virginia played with her clarinet keys. She was using a size four reed and let Brigid try to play a few notes. "Wow, that's a thick reed," she said. "It's hahd to get a note out!" She gave it back to Virginia. They watched as another dolly went by.  
  
Debra began to contemplate Brigid's T's in a way that only a close girlfriend was probably allowed to do. "It's hard to believe that those things stay on."

"They feel a little strange, but they're on good," Brigid said, sticking them out a little and looking down at them. "It's spirit glue and a little twist." With a push of her finger she gave the corner of one T a little turn, maybe five minutes on a clockface, and it wiggled and came to rest back in place.  
  
"Don't they hurt?" Debra said.  
  
"No. Well just a little. These little circles, they're called microcirclets. I fit the T's on and the microcirclets snap on last." Ron felt it was O.K. to look along with the girls. The T's, like that microbottom, were black with white borders, though there was a little lining of gold inside the white. Halfway up each T, in the middle of the black, was a little black circle, about the size of a pencil eraser. You couldn't tell unless you looked real close. Which he was thankful he had the privilege to do.  
  
"Still seems dicey," Virginia said.  
  
"Not at all. Look." Brigid made sure no one was looking in from the main hall, then shimmied her bare shoulders side to side to make her breasts shake and wobble vigorously. Ron's mouth opened.  
  
Now with two quick pings, the microcirclets flew off, one after the other. They bounced into the hall unnoticed and were immediately crushed into a thousand pieces under the wheel of a passing dolley.  
  
The nubs of Brigid's bare nipples, bright and pink amid the blackness of the T's, poked out at the world like little penlights.  
  
"Oh Christ!!"  
  
The three Tunemasters in full band uniforms, Rod, Virginia and Debra, and the nearly naked majorette herself, stared speechless and in shock down at the bright pink nipples, poking slightly out from the little plastic T's. It was as jarring and indecent as if Rod's own dick had been hanging out the fly of his braided trousers. It was horrifying, it was disgusting... Brigid was as modest as the next girl, and was deeply shamed by having her nipples showing...  
  
Brigid's fingers quickly flew up to cover them. She looked at her friends in panic and misery. Only two fingers were needed for each nipple. The four high school kids turned quickly to the hallway. Fortunately nobody was looking. "Oh... God..." Brigid saw Rod looking at her most private nipples and, in an uncharacteristically pleading voice, said, "Please don't look, Rod!"  
  
Reflexively he directed his glance up and met her anguished face with his own look of empathy and concern.  
  
Debra thought quickly. She tried the "Custodian" door and it was unlocked. "Let's get you out of sight. Rod, tell them we went to the bathroom." And the three high school girls closed the door behind them.  
  
Oh man, what a fix we're in, Rod told himself, compulsively working his slide. Only minutes away from our big moment, the Tunemasters' biggest and most lucrative engagement yet, that would bring thousands of dollars to the Special Learning Center to help kids like Tommy Blackwell. And Brigid, who would be leading the band, getting instructions from Sarge through her headset, out of commission! Disaster!  
  
Fortunately no one from the hallway was looking in at this little alcove. Sid, one of the other trombonists, sauntered by and nodded. Now here came the three faculty chaperones, the old shop teacher Mr. Tucker, with Mrs. Toriello the social studies teacher and Ms. Chen, the science teacher. They were talking among themselves. Rod was worried. If the girls came out of the custodian closet they would be noticed immediately.  
  
Brigid, Brigid... How could he show his love for her in this crisis? He felt helpless, standing out in the hall with the suffering majorette trapped in that closet. He decided to be heroic. To hell with the band, it's Brigid's welfare first. She could not emerge as she was. He would give her his jacket, which would serve to cover her nipples. Then he would go out with her, and she could act sick with the jacket draped over her, and he'd tell Sarge that Brigid was ill and he was too, they just couldn't march tonight. The Tunemasters would have to go without their majorette this time. And Sarge would have to march alongside them as usual, shouting instructions whenever needed.  
  
He bit his lip but congratulated himself. Yes, a gutsy thing to do, but I'll do it, dammit!  
  
But of course it was not up to him. He wondered what Debra and Virginia were planning with Brigid in the closet. As the moments went by he got uneasy. Making sure no one was looking, he put his ear to the door. No sound. Now there was a shot of something like compressed air, and Brigid's gasp. His ears were burning now. He knocked. "Brigid?" he whispered loudly.  
  
The door opened and Debra pulled him in.  
  
It wasn't a closet, it was a whole office, with shelves of cleaning stuff and tools and paint. Debra and Virginia checked his face. He answered, "No one knows we're here." "Good."  
  
Brigid was facing away from him, giving him a full body rear view of her utter, total nakedness, from her pinned-up hair down to her heels of the backless flip-flops, interrupted only by the curvy V of the tiny clear strings sloping into her butt crack. Her elbows up, she seemed to be still covering her nipples with her fingers.  
  
"Show him, Brigid," Debra said.  
  
"Oh... God..." Brigid showly turned around, fingers on her nipples, afraid to meet his gaze. Then she cleared her throat and looked up at the ceiling and brought her fingers down, just a few inches.  
  
The T's were back to being all black! No more pink!  
  
"How did you do that?"  
  
Debra held up a can of black spray paint.  
  
He looked closer, and saw the nubs of Brigid's nipples, now jet black. "Wow!"  
  
"It's obvious, isn't it?" Brigid said in misery.  
  
"No... it doesn't look bad at all... They just look like... part of the T."  
  
"Exactly!" Debra said. As the three friends looked at the black-painted nubs, Virginia said, "It looks like rubber cement. Black rubber cement. To keep the T's on."  
  
Indeed it did look just like some kind of glue to keep the T's on, colored black to match. If one didn't know...  
  
Brigid forced her arms down straight at her sides, her fingers rubbing her hips. Looking up as if praying, she said, "You guys GOTTA look at me like that??"  
  
"OK, OK," Rod said quickly, his eyes shooting down to the floor, where he contemplated their boots and Brigid's squirming toes.  
  
Through the door they could hear Sarge's muffled voice out in the hall. "The floats are fixed, people! Line up in five minutes! For sure!"  
  
"Let's get out there!" Debra said.  
  
"I just -- can't!" He had never seen Brigid like this, so shy and queasy, though he could well understand.  
  
"You know you have to," Virginia said.  
  
Brigid gulped and shook her head in misery. "Yeah... What choice do I have?"  
  
"Of course you have a choice," Rod said. "Tell them you're sick. Here, take my jacket." He began the laborious task of undoing the fifteen buttons down his front.  
  
"No, no..." Brigid walked forward and gingerly opened the door. With a deep breath, a heave of her breasts and a rise of the T's they supported, she walked out into the alcove.  
  
They got out there and Brigid once again reflexively covered her black-painted nipples with her fingers.  
  
"You have to put your hands down," Debra said. "Don't give the slightest sign..."  
  
Brigid nodded and straightened her arms down her sides. She got her baton from where she had laid it down before. And the four of them walked out the alcove into the hall.  
  
The band was roughly in line but more or less hanging around. After all, they had five more minutes in this endless wait. The four friends stood around and tried to act relaxed. Rod allowed himself just fleeting glances at Brigid's T's. He felt Debra and Virginia under a similar stricture. The four of them tried to look everywhere but... Everyone else was going to see the T's, of course, the rest of the band and the hundreds of people lining the route, but only the three of them knew what they would be looking at...  
  
"Hi Debra, Rod, Virginia, Brigid," Ms. Chen said. She and Mr. Tucker and Mrs. Toriello came up to them. The three teacher chaperones, expecting to be outside in a moment, were in their coats and winter hats, carrying gloves. "I could make you nervous and say 'ready for your big moment', but you're all old pros at this."  
  
The four Tunemasters smiled politely, unable to think of anything to say.  
  
"Your new uniforms are positively resplendent," Mrs. Toriello said.  
  
"Thank you," Virginia said. They all felt the need to look down, if only quickly, at their new duds. Even Brigid. With the heavy coats on the teachers and the new uniforms, the rest of them looked twice her size.  
  
"Looks good," Mr. Tucker said in his gravelly voice. "The majorette uniform keeps getting... more interesting." He looked down at the tiny T that covered and also separated Brigid's lower lips.  
  
Brigid blushed, as if being gushed over, which was not surprising to the three chaperones.  
  
Ms. Chen, a very short Chinese woman, looked at Brigid's T's which were almost at her eye level. Her eyebrow furrowed. "I thought these were all plastic. This looks like -- " The four friends almost died with fright as the three teachers gathered closer.  
  
"It's -- rubber cement," Brigid said.  
  
"Seems like it's coming out," Mr. Tucker said. "Excuse me dear." He gently held one of the T's and -- poked his rough old shop teacher's finger into Brigid's nipple!  
  
Rod could hear the sudden intake of breath, could see the quaking tummy below --  
  
"I'm afraid it might fall out," he said. "We don't want that happening, don't we?"  
  
"Rubber cement?" Mrs. Toriello said.  
  
"Looks like xanthum gum, a good choice I' say, but it doesn't look too good," Mr. Tucker said.  
  
Ms. Chen said. "Excuse me, dear..." She held the other T and gently poked the other blackened nub...  
  
Some of the other band members approached in curiosity. Soon there were about ten of them gathered around, watching the teachers fix Brigid's T's, maybe to prevent a "wardrobe malfunction" during the parade?  
  
"What's wrong?" Jared said.  
  
"Xanthum gum fastener, I think she put too much on," Mr. Tucker said, continuing to try to poke the black nub in, but it kept springing back out. Ms. Chen was having a similar lack of success with the other one.  
  
"Oh... I didn't notice that before," Jared said. As indeed none of them had, when they were viewing all the new uniforms in the big cafeteria room. They had not been examining the T's too closely, their attention naturally being directed to what the T's were covering (or not covering).  
  
This can't be happening, the three friends told themselves as they looked at each other. They watched in horror as Mr. Tucker and Ms. Chen kept gently poking as Brigid looked down with widened eyes and gulped. Seeing the faces around her, she suppressed her natural body reactions and said, "It's -- really - - O.K. We'll be mahching in a minute -- " Her fingers fidgeted against the baton, her toes wiggled and squirmed...  
  
Ms. Chen and Mr. Tucker gave up on poking and stood there, contemplating Brigid's T's. "Maybe we can fix it."  
  
Mr. Tucker saw the word "Custodian" on the closet and said, "We've just got to get this xanthum flush with the rest of the T's. Otherwise it looks like -- well..." He didn't want to say it but they knew what he meant. "She'll be on TV, you know. We've got to act fast."  
  
"Where are you going?" Ms. Chen said.  
  
"There should be some sandpaper in here," the shop teacher said, walking into the custodian's office. "Some steady buffing with 150 or so grit will probably do it."  
  
"Get some for me too," Ms. Chen said.  
  
Before Brigid and her friends could decide what to do, Mr. Tucker had come out of the custodian office with two little sheets of sandpaper.  
  
Actually there was nothing they COULD do. Everyone was watching them, standing around waiting for the old shop teacher to emerge. Brigid couldn't run. She couldn't tell them the truth, that it was actually her bare nipples sticking out in everyone's faces. That would be indecent exposure, detention for sure, telling her parents... as well as shame that would last for years. The incident would stick to her name for years. And they were about to go out to march. She and her friends were frozen to the spot, terrified.  
  
Now Mr. Tucker gave one sheet to Ms. Chen. "Only 220 grit, but let's see what we can do," he said. He wadded his sheet up into a little section, then grasped Brigid's left T around the edges. The T was only three inches high and was dwarfed by his rough, burly hand. "This should only take a moment, Miss O'Dierna..."  
  
The first rub of 220 grit onto the majorette's most sensitive spot caused a little strangled gasp and a quick intake of her bare tummy. He slowly drew the wad all the way across, then back, then forth, back and forth --  
  
In a full band uniform one can always hide the manifestations of one'e emotions. Tummies shake with nervousness, butt cheeks clench with cold, arms and legs and chests sweat with exertion or heat, toes squirm in their boots, and of course also hidden are male erections, which for a teenage boy are frequent events. But a Tunemasters majorette cannot hide her body. As they watched in sympathy and horror Rod, Debra and Virginia looked their suffering friend up and down and noted the twitching shoulders, the flushed collarbones, the quaking of the flat tummy, the flexing of thigh muscles, and the spreading of her meticulously painted toes as poor Brigid tried to withstand the unbearably intense stimulation.  
  
Ms. Chen started working on the right T, holding it in her little hand as she began sanding what she took to be the black gum adhesive. It was almost at her eye level and she peered in very closely. Seeing no progress, the two teachers became more vigorous, brushing back and forth faster, faster, harder, rasping away at the nipples. Behind the T's, Brigid's breast flesh jiggled in response to their motions.  
  
Rod shut his eyes. He couldn't look. But of course he opened them again. Brigid's eyes popped open and she seemed about to cry. She looked at her friends with pleading. But they could do nothing. They were horrified at what it must feel like. Debra and Virginia folded their arms tightly across their chests, as if to protect their own nipples, which lay hidden from the world and protected by bras, thermals, blouses and jackets. Four layers of covering that Brigid was denied. For Rod's part, he pictured the sandpaper going over the end of his dick, his most sensitive part, so sensitive that he himself never touched it, not even when jerking off.  
  
Around them, the other band members drew closer, curious about whether the teachers could get that extra gum off. The buffing grew more furious. Mr. Tucker, a bit winded, stopped to tighten his grip on the T. So did Ms. Chen. Then they bore in and rubbed harder, faster, with lightning speed back and forth, back and forth --  
  
Brigid's breathing grew ragged. Her eyes blinked and opened wide again. It must be agony! Rod felt about to cry. Poor Brigid must be about to jump out of her skin! Her fingers clutched the baton with a white-knuckled grip. Her toes wiggled in her flip flops and spread and squirmed, individually and together, as if speaking urgently and eloquently of her distress in some kind of sign language.  
  
Brigid looked up as if praying for deliverance from this torture. She must be Catholic and Rod pictured this as a stained glass scene. The Agony of St. Brigid.  
  
The teachers rested again, then buffed again. Brigid sniffled. Her eyes squeezed shut. Then she remembered she must not betray the truth and she kept as still as she could. As her nipples were rasped and scraped, she kept her eyes forward, not looking anyone in the eye, in a resolute gaze, as if waiting for the signal to march. She stood up straight, baton at her side. Only an occasional twitch of the tummy or toes evidenced her suffering.  
  
Rod was afraid that the black color might rub off. But it was a penetrating, oil-based paint and could only come off with turpentine.  
  
Finally Mr. Tucker and Ms. Chen stood back and conceded defeat. Brigid closed her eyes and caught her breath.  
  
"We're not getting anywhere," Mr. Tucker said.  
  
"If anything, it's sticking out more than before," Ms. Chen observed.  
  
Looking around at the gathered Tunemasters, Mr. Tucker said, "Any ideas, folks?" This comment only emphasized how everyone's gaze was fixed on the black nubs at the center of Brigid's T's. She looked about to die from shame, though to everyone else it just seemed like the distress and concern she shared with the teachers, who had seen at the last minute a problem with her uniform that she hadn't noticed from her vantage point. Rod and Debra and Virginia glanced at each other helplessly.  
  
Mrs. Toriello, a grandmotherly type, came up and stood right in front of the majorette. She gripped the T's in each hand and examined them appraisingly. In the process she turned them a bit inward to more directly meet her gaze, making the breasts look a little cross-eyed.  
  
"I think we're under a misimpression here. This not what we think it is."  
  
Oh no! Brigid, looking down at her T's, bit her lip.  
  
"I think the gum has separated."  
  
The four friends exhaled in relief. But then they held their breath again as she said, "It's in pieces. See all these little bumps? Maybe we can pluck some of the pieces out."  
  
Mr. Tucker grabbed part of Brigid's left nub and pulled. She suppressed a gasp. He squeezed again, harder. But his fingers were too big and rough to get a good grip. "This is a job for women," he conceded. "Someone with long nails."  
  
"I can do it," Brigid volunteered quickly.  
  
"No, you can't see from your angle," Mrs. Toriello said. "Also I don't want you to ruin your manicure." A valid concern. With the disappearance of boots and gloves, fingernail paint and toenail paint had become part of the majorette's uniform. Brigid's nails were meticulously done in the school colors, black and white, now with a little line of gold near the cuticle.  
  
Everyone looked on as Mrs. Toriello and Ms. Chen bit into Brigid's nubs with their fingernails, like pincers, squeezing them and pulling them, delicately and carefully, so as not to dislodge the T's, but none the less painfully from Brigid's standpoint.  
  
Brigid's nipples were squeezed and pinched and yanked on for a minute or more, the sharp fingernails cutting and slicing into the little bumps.  
  
"This material is very tough," Ms. Chen admitted. She brought out tweezers from her handbag. The nubs were now subjected to the merciless and crushing of the little metal jaws. The Agony of St. Brigid continued. Now Ms. Chen twisted the tweezers, almost half way around, trying to dislodge one little bmp after another Rod brought his hands over his crotch and almost doubled over as he pictured this being done to the end of his dick. The pain must be horrible. Debra and Virginia cringed and squeezed their arms across their chests even tighter.  
  
The majorette reverted to waiting-to-march mode, eyes forward. Though her eyes were now rimmed with red. And now the pink circles behind the T's, her areolas, which one could see clearly because the stems of the T's were only a half-inch across... The pinkish hue was becoming more red, and the areolas were getting a little puffy. It made the T's stand out more from her breasts. Not only were the areolas getting puffy, little goose bumps were forming around the perimeters.  
  
As for the black-painted nubs, they were getting bumpier and more prominent, as each individual little bump was yanked and crushed and squeezed and twisted. Rod had to admit that they did look like bits of some kind of dried glue.  
  
The women were not succeeding in tearing the bits off. "The only thing to do," Mr. Tucker announced, "is cut. There's a wire cutter in there," he said, walking toward the custodian's office. "I'll be right back!"

"No!" Rod said. "No!"  
  
Mr. Tucker, not one to brook any disrespect from students, said, "What, young man?"  
  
Rod's heart was in his mouth and his whole body was shaking as he took his stand. Fortunately the words that came to him were convincing. "This is a... Tunemasters -- matter. We help each other in this band. Let us fix it ourselves."  
  
"Yes, yes," Debra and Virginia said quickly.  
  
"Th - that's right," Brigid said, still recovering from the assault on her sensitive nipples.  
  
"Let me do it," Rod said. He stood in front of Brigid. Their eyes met. He wanted to kiss her, hug her, take her away from the probing eyes and the tormenting teachers. If only they knew how cruel they had been. But his task now was to pretend to deal with the outcropping black gum.  
  
He looked down at her nipples. She didn't want him to look but she knew he had to. Under the black paint they looked swollen, abused, maybe angry. Like that time she took those old circlets off at the burger place, during the Patriots game parade, after her nipples had been squeezed by those bulldog clips all morning.  
  
"It's best to push it in," he said. Gingerly he brought his gloved hands up. He brought an index finger to each nipple and once again contemplated how just one of his fingers enjoyed more covering than the majorette had for her entire, gorgeous body. He swallowed and looked at her. Her eyes were full of gratefulness. She pictured them going back into the custodian's office, alone, as he comforted her, crying on his shoulder. "Oh Rod... I thought I was going crazy..."  
  
She gasped as the tips of his gloved fingers rubbed her nubs tenderly, soothingly. He wanted to lick them. They would be soothed by a soft, wet tongue. Actually what she probably needed was ice. Well, in a few minutes her nipples would be hit by to the frigid air outside. That should help, though it would be rough on the rest of her near-nakedness.  
  
The three teachers watched closely, along with Debra and Virginia. "You're not getting anywhere," Mr. Tucker complained.  
  
He rubbed gently and then began pushing the nubs in, as tenderly as possible. Brigid sniffled and then smiled at him. He smiled back. They were in love, for sure.  
  
He wanted to kiss her, so, so bad!  
  
"March time!" Sarge yelled from somewhere.  
  
That broke the tension. The scene broke up as the kids turned quickly. "We'll be okay," Brigid said to Mr. Tucker as the Tunemasters went back into line. In a moment Rod was walking behind her as she led the band into the vestibule.  
  
As they approached the glass doors the bright lights of the outdoor winter carnival began to play on their uniforms, on Brigid's skin. And now the frigid mountain air hit them as they walked outside, one by one.  
  
He blew through his trombone yet again and crunched his boots in the hard, rocky snow. Man, it was cold. Thank goodness for these new thermals under his full uniform, he was nice and snug, covered up from head to toe. Except for his face! The bank thermometer down in the distance read minus ten degrees. What was that in Fahrenheit? Fourteen? What made it worse was the wind. They weren't expecting wind. The wind-chill must be zero. His face was beyond cold, it stung with pain, especially his nose.  
  
.....................  
  
He was in the front row as always, as the band stood in formation, well behind the beginning of the route, waiting for the local police guy to signal to march. The band was only at half strength on this trip. Despite the big carnival some distance ahead of them, they felt alone. They didn't feel the usual big rush just before marching. Ahead of them was a space of maybe two hundred feet, then the beginning of the route, where the float before them had paused. Up further, near the slope of the next mountain, past the strings of overhead lights and the crowds cheering the passing floats, he could see the end of the route, and the reviewing stand where Sarge was, with all the other guys in top hats and a slightly out-of-season Santa. It did look like about three hundred yards, like Sarge said. About ten minutes' march at regular speed.  
  
But from here, it seemed a million miles away. They seemed alone in the bluish moonlit snow of this remote tundra. Like they were about to march on the planet Pluto.  
  
To his right, the other trombones, Sid and Lorenzo and Deion, all suffered from a bad case of Frozen Face just like he was, grateful at least for the flaps from the big shako caps that kept their ears warm. The parts of their bodies not covered by the thermals were feeling the cold too. His hands were stiff and cold in their gloves. And it seemed he could never find socks thick enough. Even with two pairs and these big boots, his toes were cold and he kept on stamping his feet to keep the blood going, albeit with little steps so that he looked like he was still in formation.  
  
He blew through his trombone yet again. It really did seem like his spit had frozen, he could feel the ice crystals. What was the purpose of a marching band in this cold? They seemed totally out of place. The wind bit his nose again and he twitched it, trying to get some feeling back.  
  
Now he contemplated the rear of the blue-skinned naked girl in front of him. No, not really blue; that was just the dull hue of this unearthly scene, a reflection of the snow. But the bare toes in the flip-flops, flat on the crusty snow, the bare legs and butt, the bare back, the thin but strong arms and the delicate bare shoulders -- how totally out of place. It was so unfair. They were freezing in their thermals and cover-all uniforms, but the poor majorette had to stand there in the frigid wind with almost no covering at all. Such exquisite nakedness should be soaking up the rays on a tropical beach. Maybe that's what she was fantasizing about. Or maybe thinking of Tommy Blackwell and how this march would help the Disabled Learning Center.  
  
Of course she was not really naked. But in the dull blue light the V of the clear strings curving into her butt was totally invisible. And from the back one couldn't see the main parts of her uniform, the little T in her pussy lips, and the T's perched on her areolas. He missed the riot of White Girl Skin Colors that was Brigid on a brisk day. the blotches of red on her shoulders, the purplish fingers and toes, that cute patch of pink over her sacral dimples, the blushes of red at the ends of her butt cheeks. Tonight she was just blue and naked and motionless, facing the zero-degree wind chill without outward expression. Like she was not really Brigid but some alien woman, from a race of blue people living on an even colder planet than Pluto, who had decided the only way to deal with this "hot" Plutonian weather was to go naked.  
  
He supposed it was not so bad for Brigid, just a temporary chill, then a quick ten-minute march. Colder by some degrees, but not really that much worse than what she had gotten used to as a majorette during that cold, rainy football season. There was a little station at the end of the route, past the reviewing stand, where she could duck in and warm up. After they finished he would gallantly run back to the cafeteria room and get her coat and boots, what she wore on the bus ride up from the motel. After that she could hang out and enjoy the party like the rest, covered up except for her bare legs showing below the knee.  
  
That float just didn't want to start. It was a styrofoam- looking display of little ski slopes with three women in ski suits who were supposed to be elves or something, perched on them. At first he thought they were just pausing, letting everyone take in the sight before continuing, but bundled-up men were now lumbering around, speaking to each other through their ski masks, and he could see something was wrong. The band stood and waited. And froze. His butt cheeks were so cold they were starting to tingle.  
  
His butt, that is, covered with thermals and jockey shorts and the long braided trousers. Brigid's butt had no such protection. He looked at it, motionless in front of him, like a double blue moon, and try as he might he just could not make out the plastic V-strings that he knew were there.  
  
Another minute went by. "Come on," Sid said quietly, impatiently, "I'm half frozen."  
  
"Jesus, it's cold," Deion chimed in.  
  
"No weather for black people!" said Lorenzo, who had the darkest skin of all of them.  
  
"I can't feel my toes," Sid said.  
  
Rod saw Brigid turn her head slightly and could see the exhale of her breath in the glint of the faraway lights. Great plumes of condensation, as if she were in a deep freezer.  
  
"Christ, you know nothing about cold, guys!" Debra said from behind them in the clarinet section.  
  
"Yeah," said Millie, one of the saxophones, and the only other white kid to make this trip. "Our majorette's freezin' her bare buns off up there!"  
  
Brigid turned to them halfway and he thought he saw her smile. Then she shivered all over. No longer a trans-Plutonian woman, once again a normal human adolescent, shivering in the bitter cold in a tiny majorette outfit. Poor Brigid!  
  
A moment later, Brigid allowed herself to say, "Oh Jesus!" and shook herself all over. Her baton discreetly changed hands. And now, in a bold move, she raised one foot out of its flip-flop and wiggled her toes in an attempt to get some circulation back. It was forbidden, it was a little obscene, it was erotic, sexy, seeing her bare foot, her bare toes, in this frigid air, inches above the bed of crusty snow. After carefully parking the still- stiff foot back into the flip-flop, she did the same with the other foot.  
  
It was very unusual for Brigid to complain about the cold. He could remember only one other time -- that second game in September. They were waiting in the stands to come down for the halftime show. It had clouded over and suddenly gotten chilly. And now a wind kicked up that he could feel right through his uniform. He was standing next to Brigid and saw goose bumps raise up and down her arms, on her butt, and on her thighs. "Oh brother!" she said, then shook all over as if trying to shake the chill off. Cold as it was that day, I bet she wishes it could be that temperature now!  
  
That stupid float up ahead still wouldn't start. And now a bad sign. A little truck came out from behind that big snow- making machine, and ropes. The bundled-up men were forced to take off their gloves as they began to tie the ropes to the float to pull it. This would hold up things even more.  
  
Now Brigid started seriously shivering. "Ohh... God... P - p - please..."  
  
A couple of men walked up near them, on the way to the parade, not aware that the band was there. They were talking loudly and sipping coffees. "Crikey," one said. "I'm glad we have this coffee."  
  
"Good thing these gloves are insulated!" the other said.  
  
"These boots are great," the first one said, lifting one of his gigantic, bulky moon boots. "I'm nice and snug. I'm almost downright hot!"  
  
Brigid brought her foot up again and wiggled her toes. The men walked away toward the carnival, never having noticed the band. She shivered again, miserably. It was most noticeable in her blue shoulders. Her bare butt cheeks trembled.  
  
Rod felt flushed with anger, making his frozen face a little less frozen. This is an outrage! A wintry night is no place for a nearly naked majorette. At least give her several layers of body stockings! Give her the covering the rest of her band enjoys! Let her march in a regular full uniform and boots! He applied the logic procedure from a recent math class. She probably couldn't twirl in the full band uniform, and body stockings would look ridiculous. So therefore: you cannot have baton twirling in this cold. You simply can't. He wished he could do something, at least say something.  
  
Finally! The little truck started pulling the broken-down float and now there was the signal from that police guy, using one of those airport flashlight extensions, to start marching. And now Brigid stiffly strutted into motion, giving the band four beats. Her breasts bounced with her motions. Even her breasts seemed stiff in this cold. Everyone blew silently into their instruments to warm them up as the drum guard did the roll-off. Then they launched into "National Emblem", doing the familiar "monkey wrapped his tail around the flagpole" leadoff without any flubs, and on the on-beat, took their first step forward.  
  
As they came into the lit route he could feel his circulation going again. He could also sense the crowd coming alive, doubly attentive after that stalled float. Some were even clapping, not very audible because everyone was wearing gloves -- everyone except Brigid, of course.  
  
The Tunemasters passed under the first string of lights, held up by poles on each side. Then another string. The lights played off Brigid's back and butt, off her legs. It was sexy but also beautiful. Everyone was enjoying the light show taking place on the majorette's body.  
  
The snow crunched under his boots. An odd sensation. Brigid must feel it even more through the thin soles of her treaded flip-flops. She moved a little less stiffly and he could see her body flush with the cold. Good. It showed she was warming up. Now she started her first twirl, and as she turned around to catch it he saw the T's on her breasts jiggle and shift, in time with the tune, in time with the step, in time with catching the baton as it came down. The T's were dancing on her nipples. It looked like the majorette's breasts were leading the band. These T's were a good idea, they gave a whole new dimension to her twirling and to the whole presentation of the band.  
  
They passed a setup of cameras. Back in the cafeteria room, on the overhead TV, Gus Guy and Pierre Poquette enthused about the visiting band to an audience of several custodians. "And here comes the Tunemasters, from T--- High School in Roxbury Mass. One of the best high school marching bands in New England. Winner of last summer's Regional Competition in Atlanta, Georgia."  
  
"That is one brave majorette, in this temperature."  
  
"Yes, her name is... it says here on the band list, 'Brigid O'Dierna, sophomore'. I'm told her uniform is designed to allow for maximum flexibility in twiring that baton."  
  
"And she certainly is expert at it! Look at that throw! That must be thirty feet, at least!"  
  
Brigid turned around again and Rod once again fell in love with the brave, flashing smile. She winked at him and he crinkled his eyes, his best substitute for a smile as he tooted away. The band sounded good too.  
  
They approached another string of lights and Brigid tossed the baton over it and caught it as she passed on the other side. This brought some cheers. She raised her arms and pirouetted, showing off her lithe biceps and meticulously shaved armpits. Some snow dusted up on her toes. She spread her toes and expertly flicked the snow off with her next step.  
  
Maybe it was on a signal from Sarge through her headpiece, or maybe it was her own decision, seeing that they were coming too near that float. But as they got near the snow making machine and the biggest bunch of booths and food stands she gave the baton signal to stop. The band kept playing, marching in place. Brigid stepped and turned slowly. It was always amazing how she could keep those backless sandals from falling off her feet while marching in place. She was crunching down with her toes, but just a little.  
  
A whiff of hot dogs came from the booths and Rod got hungry. He pictured the two of them at the stand later, wolfing down hot dogs and soda, he in his uniform, she in her long coat and Uggs, her bare calves showing, as if she had nothing on underneath. And talking with their friends, Debra and Sid and the others. "The most fweezing mahch I've evah been in!" she would exclaim in her Providence accent, between bites.  
  
But for now Brigid was still in her micro-uniform, still marching in place, still turning around slowly, round and around. From totally bare backside (the strings on her butt were still invisible) to almost bare front, the dancing T's on her nipples and the tiny T in her crotch, the lights from overhead played on her body, playing across her curves, caressing them. They hit her head on, then slurred and stretched sideways as she turned, then head on again. All the while, she smiled, exhaling clouds of breath that spiraled off into the wintry night air as she turned.  
  
And the band sounded great! As Rod pumped his slide he never felt prouder of being a Tunemaster. He could see Sarge, on the reviewing stand up ahead, beaming, the men around him clapping him on the shoulder with the thanks he deserved. The cameras moved in closer. Rod thought of the regional competition they'd won, and the Disabled Learning Center, Tommy Blackwell...  
  
They were launching into the final repeat of the "B" section when he saw the string of lights in front of them drop halfway, then fall all the way to the ground. Brigid, turned to face them, did not see. Then she turned and gave the signal, and began marching foward again. One of the bundled-up security men quickly ran to one of the supporting poles on the side and turned a crank that brought the string off the ground again in short, jerky increments.  
  
Brigid, smiling and twirling, still did not see what had happened. With another jerk the string of lights came up about to the level of her breasts as she marched right into it.  
  
Getting to the end of "National Emblem", waiting for the roll-off to lead into "Little Giant", Brigid spun and twirled. Her T's looked perkier than when he first saw them in the cafeteria room, facing more upward as they danced on her breasts. Well, of course. Out here in the cold air, her nipples would be erect, pushing the T's up and out.  
  
The tune ended and the drummers took over. He put his trombone down in front of his jacketed, shirted, thermaled chest. He watched the T's on her bare chest and smiled. Only the four of us know that the crowd is seeing Brigid's bare nipples right in the middle of those T's. Brigid herself must not be thinking of it, engrossed in her twirling. Good. She was tough as nails but basically a modest, unassuming girl. She didn't deserve to feel embarrassed.  
  
And now he watched with alarm as she spun right into the rising string of lights!  
  
Her T's got caught on them immediately and they rose up as the guy at the side pole kept cranking the string higher and higher. Rod stopped in shock and so did the other trombones. The rest of the band almost ran into them before they too stood there stunned.  
  
"Aieeee!!" Brigid's poor breasts got stretched upward as the string of lights went up, up... The T's were on very securely. They gave way a little bit but were held on by the very ends of her nipples that were so swollen and hard in the cold. You could see the stems of her nipples stretched out from her areolas. As the T's stretched out and up, the areolas puffed out even more... In a split second her breasts were grotesquely distorted.  
  
She dropped her baton and grabbed the string with both hands to keep it level with her breasts. The guy at the crank didn't see any of this because he wasn't looking. Up, up, up... Brigid did half of a wiggly kind of chin-up on the string as her feet left the snow-packed ground. Her legs kicked helplessly. One flip-flop dropped off and then the other. By the time the guy understood the shouts of people telling him to stop, the string was back to where it was, fifteen feet off the ground.  
  
The crowd and the band watched in silent horror as the majorette struggled, trying to disentangle her breasts from the string without doing any damage. Her bare feet twitched and jerked around uselessly above their faces. The string was a tangled interweave of rope and electrical wires and extricating the T's would have been difficult even without the dire distress of her nipples being stretched.

"Aieee! -- Ahhhh!" Cries of pain and exertion cut through the cold night air as Brigid tried to use one hand to hold on and the other to untangle a T. But that was beyond anyone's arm strength. Next she tried to climb up onto the string. Her toes spread and her legs splayed wildly as she made it up. Straddling the string as if clutching onto a horse, she winced as it cut between her pussy lips, pushing the little T down there deep inside her. He thought of the moisture inside. If there's a short circuit she would be electrocuted!  
  
There was no danger of that as the guy at the crank unplugged the wire and the lights went out. He tried to lower the string again but the crank was jammed! A friend came over to help him. They tried hitting it with a hammer. With every strike the thin pole lurched and the string jerked, causing Brigid to yelp as the rough rope dug in between her lower lips. Now one guy started running to the building to get some liquid wrench.  
  
Brigid could not stop gravity from pulling her down and she spun around the string. Now she was hanging below it, grasping it in the crooks of her knees and elbows. Now her breasts were squeezed, one pulled up near her neck, the other yanked down toward her navel. Once again she tried to free a hand to work on a T but she kept losing her balance. Finally her legs slipped away and she was back to doing a half chin-up. She looked down and faced the band, her bare toes dangling above them.  
  
She was crying, her face etched with pain, looking down at her friends helplessly. Rod and the others felt just as helpless. Her searching feet were too high up to find a supporting shoulder.  
  
They saw the T's facing them from up on high. One of them was twisted onto its side. The other was turned completely upside down. Behind them, her areolas were creased with the twisting. Her nipples must be burning in agony!  
  
Rod felt miserably helpless as his eyes met hers in the pleading, suffering face, the short, ragged breaths reflected in her quaking, concave tummy. Below, her little T had disappared into her labia. And one of the clear strings had snapped. It hung down from her bare hip.  
  
"AIEEEE!" A mighty hammer blow to the pole and Brigid's hands slipped! There was a horrible moment when she hung by the T's, her head wrenched back, her face heavenward, her breasts stretched out torturously. Then, with a final awful pain, the T's tore away from her nipples and she fell to the snow, landing on her butt.  
  
In the fall, the last bit of her uniform, her lower T, had flung off to the side. The traumatized majorette, now totally naked, rolled over onto her side, breathing heavily. Everyone was still too shocked to come forward to help. "Oh Jesus..." Her prayer was heard clearly in the still air. Though they all felt sorry for the majorette's embarrassment, lying there stark naked, they also heaved a sigh of relief. She seemed O.K. There was no other sound.  
  
Her unsteady bare feet came up flat on the snow. Being barefoot on snow must be a freezing shock even for someone of Brigid's wide experience in being exposed to the cold. In trying to get up one foot slipped. She slowly got up again, onto all fours, still panting. Her breasts hung down, the nipples reddened and tender from the obscene stretching.  
  
Now she tried to get up, splaying one leg out, and the crowd was treated to the sight of her cute brown eye, her little anus, in the valley between her exquisite, taut white butt cheeks, winking at them in the bright lights. The crunching of the snow under her gripping toes resounded in the silence.  
  
And now a strange creaking sound, like a rusty door opening. For it turned out that in swinging the hammer that guy had hit the tank next to the snow-making machine. And now a valve gave way, and...  
  
A ski resort must not only make snow when needed, but sometimes remove snow and ice from paths and equipment. So a supply of salt water, which melts ice, is always kept handy. A special salt is used which is not harmful to skin or membranes, and which further depresses the freezing point.  
  
So the water which now surged from the tipping tank in Brigid's direction was chilled to minus fifteen degrees Celsius.  
  
Everyone lurched back as the little tidal wave crashed onto the snow-packed path. It slammed into Brigid and knocked her over. And now more, and more of the subfreezing water coursed onto the path. Brigid tried to escape but her hands and feet kept slipping. She flopped down onto her back, then onto her belly, then onto her back again. And now the snow underneath began to melt and Brigid sank into a bathtub-sized hole.  
  
The tank held several hundred gallons. Soon Brigid was totally submerged. When the tank had fully emptied there was nothing but a little pond. Everyone crowded around, careful not to get too close lest they too slip in.  
  
Bubbles issued from below, and then the pretty head emerged. Somehow she made it to the edge of the pond and, after one more slip, she climbed back up on the snow on her crusty bare feet. She stood straight up, shoulders back. Her eyes were wide open, her arms were extended, fingers stretched out. The salted water dripped from her chin, from her nipples, from her fingers, from the center of her shaved crotch.  
  
"OHHHHHH!" she howled in wide-eyed shock, lurching toward them. "OHHHHH!!!"  
  
And now the load of snow on top of the snow-making machine gave way. Once more Brigid was knocked over as the powdery stuff piled on top of her. Soon there was a pile six feet high. Brigid was in there somewhere.  
  
After a few terrible moments of waiting, they saw a set of bluish toes thrust out near the bottom of the snow stack. Now the pile broke up as Brigid fought her way out.  
  
Once again she faced the crowd. Her whole body was encrusted. Snow was jammed into her lower lips, all over her hair. Her eyebrows were white. And her skin color -- she really was a blue trans-Plutonian woman now.  
  
Slowly, as if regaining her senses, she blinked and looked around on the ground. Her uniform was all around -- one flip- flop here, another there, the T's flung to each side, and the little bottom T near the pole.  
  
Now she lurched over to the baton. Slowly as if in pain, she bent to pick it up in her left hand. Her anus stared at them blankly, flecked with the white flakes.  
  
The blue, snow-blasted girl looked at Rod blankly, then at the rest of the band. And now she said something.  
  
"L - little... G - g - giant..."  
  
She thrust the baton into the air with a jerk that them jump. Then three violent beats, making her blue breasts bounce, and she turned to march stiffly and nakedly into the winter night.  
  
They could only follow and play. In their shock their sound was uninspired but after a few measures they got playing together. The trombone mouthpiece was almost frozen to his lips. And then he passed over a wet spot from the salted water and his boot flew out in front of him. Then a big blow to the back of his head --  
  
It seemed like a week later when he woke. For a moment he thought he was as messed up as Tommy, but he blinked and realized he was OK except for a headache. He looked up from the floor and saw Brigid's T's, dancing gently above him, as she bent down and placed her hand behind his head.  
  
Her breasts were so round and firm and white... he was so happy to see her, warm and happy, in her new uniform which she wore proudly. Thank God that was just a horrible dream... He looked up past her bare shoulders at her concerned and helpful face.  
  
"Are you OK, Rod?"  
  
"Oh Brigid..." He was about to tell her he loved her. But then saw the sea of concerning faces standing behind her and thought better of it. He tried to help himself up. Brigid, her toes flexing in her flip-flops, put her strong arms around his wool jacket. He placed his gloved hand on the upper slope of her hip, which helped revive him a lot. The next moment he was standing up, taking deep breaths...  
  
"What happened?"  
  
"You slipped and were out cold for a few seconds," Jared said.  
  
He shook his head quickly and felt a quick chill all over. "I'm OK, gang!" he announced. A sigh of relief all around.  
  
"All line up!" Sarge shouted from somewhere in the distance.  
  
  
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**LOCAL GIRL SHARES STAGE WITH OBAMA**  
**Tunemasters Majorette O'Dierna Picked for Ceremony**by d. laja  
  
National television viewers who did not see the entire Inaugural Parade were sure to notice the high school majorette standing at attention on the right side of the screen as President Barack Obama addressed the huge D.C. crowd at his second inauguration -- despite a brief camera-tuning mishap that made everyone else look like space aliens.  
  
Brigid O'Dierna, 16, the majorette for the regionally-famous Tunemasters, the marching band of Frederick Douglass High School in Roxbury, was selected from among the many high school bands in the Inaugural Parade to represent them on the stand. Ms. O'Dierna was easy to pick out among the heavy clothes, hats and gloves of dignitaries and family members in the bone-chilling sunshine, in her uniform consisting only of pasties, a "microthong" and sparkly flip-flops. She stayed admirably motionless during the speech, smiling at the crowd while holding her baton in "ready" posture under her arm.  
  
Ms. O'Dierna's bare shoulders, purple in the 19-degree-Fahrenheit weather, were responsible for a color tint mishap at CNN Headquarters. "So help us," said an unnamed staffer, "we had never seen skin that color before. We thought the tint was messed up." The "correction" changed Ms. O'Dierna's skin to normal but resulted in the President and everyone else on the stand taking on a greenish hue. The correction was corrected after thirty seconds.  
  
The Inaugural Stand was only the last ordeal that Ms. O'Dierna had to endure in her scanty costume. Leading the Tunemasters, one of 17 high school bands, along the mile-long route, she had endured strong winds and a brief snow squall which made the band almost invisible. "The instruments stuck to our lips," said Rodney Sykes, a trombonist who nevertheless had the benefit of a full-coverage outfit. "We were all wearing thermals underneath but we were still freezing."  
  
"It was a cold and windy march for us," said the Tunemaster's long-time bandleader, Sgt. R.T. Watson (retired), "but we met the challenge and it was an honor to be invited." The brevity of Ms. O'Dierna's uniform makes it easier for her to pivot and do high throws, he added.  
  
After the ceremony, Ms. O'Dierna spoke briefly with First Children Malia and Sasha, obviously admiring their warm but fashionable coats. Sasha asked how to hold a baton. "She's got a great grip," O'Dierna said. "They are both friendly, regular girls."  
  
And did she exchange any words with the newly-sworn in President?  
  
"He shook my hand and laughed and said I deserved a hot bath," O'Dierna said. "Right after that my band came by and I slipped into a long coat and Uggs. They're all great guys."  
  
[end]