**Brigid’s New Uniform**

by donnylaja

Note: For earlier adventures of Brigid the majorette (a/k/a “Frigid Brigid”), see the story “Tami Beethoven”

1.

Damn preschool band practice! Head down against the wind-swept rain, Rod made his final lunge across the street to the main entrance of his high school, and as usual guessed wrong. He had to try every one of the other thirteen doors before he found the one solitary door that Hank, the custodian, had decided to unlock this morning. Hank was perverse, only unlocking one door, and always a different one.

Rod was a little late. He hated being late. He had overslept this Thursday morning. Still, 6:15 was too early to leave his nice warm bed and plunge into this mid-March storm. But the dedication of Mr. Watson (“Sarge”, from his years leading an Army band) to the Tunemasters, the school’s locally famous marching band, had rubbed off on Rod as it did on everyone else. So he tried to be on time to the extent his sleepy body would allow.

The halls were pretty deserted at this hour. Aside from the band, the auto mechanic students sometimes showed up early, and that was it. Bookbag over his shoulder, Rod walked as fast as he could down to the band room. He went to the Big Instrument Room, pulled out his trombone case, and tried to slip into rehearsal unnoticed.

Fortunately they hadn’t started yet. He took his place with the other trombones in the back row, next to Jamal, and discreetly blew into his slide to warm it up. Then, as always, he searched the clarinet rows for his great unrequited love, the white girl who was this year’s majorette, Brigid.

Yes, she was there — between her friends Debra and Virginia as usual, arranging the music on their stand. Of course she was not in her skimpy majorette uniform. That uniform, along with the full-coverage uniforms of the rest of the band, was on the racks of hangers along the walls. The majorette uniform looked almost like an empty hanger, next to the floor-length bags containing the other uniforms.

Brigid was in her usual daily outfit of turtleneck shirt, denim jacket, and black jeans. Strands of her red hair straggled fetchingly over the back of her jacket. Rod tried to catch her eye. Fortunately he did, as she smiled quickly at him. Then got back to arranging the music. Debra and Virginia helped. Looked like they had misplaced something, then suddenly found it just in time.

Debra and Virginia were wearing those “Tunemasters earrings” that most of the girls in the band were wearing, those little silver “T’s” that were given out after the Christmas parade. The earrings swung back and forth as their heads bobbed back into position. Brigid wasn’t wearing earrings today. Usually she had a little something on her ears, like bits of coral or pearl-like thingies.

Sarge, on the podium with his baton up, started them on their usual warmup tune, “Captains and Kings”. Rod flubbed the first two notes but after that caught up with his warmed-up buddies, Jamal and Lorenzo and Howard and Jaycee.

This Thursday, Friday and Saturday would be a busy three days. Today was an important practice; the Tunemasters were getting into their “concert band” mode for Friday night’s all-district concert. On Saturday morning was the big St. Patrick’s Day parade, marching the whole three miles into Dorchester, with twenty other bands, all on TV, an old Boston tradition. Followed that afternoon by the benefit football game for the local food bank. Tomorrow, the day before the parade, was the school’s traditional “Uniform Day”, when everyone came to school in their uniforms, whether you were in the Tunemasters or on the football team, or on some other team.

Fortunately the weather was supposed to clear up later today, and actually be nice by Saturday. Rod was grateful for that. It had been a miserable year for marching. The whole football season had been rainy and cold. Sleet actually fell during the last game in December. Then those special-invitation parades. . . The Tunemasters had gotten quite a reputation around New England, and were invited practically every Saturday to be in one event or another. And they all were cold. For Rod and the rest of the band in their full-coverage uniforms, with thermals on, it was bad enough. But so much more so for their poor majorette!

Brigid was so dedicated, so focused on her craft. She kept her majorette smile on but still was so serious, so mature, doing those complicated baton throws, prancing around in her goose-bumps and her itty bitty majorette uniform. Rod and the other trombones always marched in the front line (to have room to move their slides) and so were right behind her. He often thought of trying to catch her eye, but didn’t want to upset her concentration. That she was white, one of only a few dozen white kids in the school, only increased his curiosity. He was fascinated with the way her skin flushed, either red or pink or purple depending on the part of her body and how cold it was.

What would his parents think if he asked her out? His first date with a white girl . . .

But he was getting ahead of himself. He hadn’t got anywhere near the nerve to ask her out. Yet they did have a bond — when Sarge had picked the two of them to represent the Tunemasters on that local TV show. Waiting backstage, seeing that gay-looking guy powdering the majorette’s almost totally naked body, watching her unbound breasts jiggle to and fro, then Rod and Brigid performing on the show while Sarge and the TV host Melba McIntyre watched, him playing a tune and Brigid doing some twirls, both flawlessly. That had been their one special time.

She didn’t have a boyfriend. He was quite sure about that. Across the hubbub of this big school he noticed that she had her own circle of close friends, some of whom were guys. But he had never seen her holding hands with anyone or acting real close. So maybe there was hope.

And now at lunch he got a real lucky break. He emerged with Jamal from the burger line and saw that Brigid was two tables away from them, sitting between Lucia (a heavy Latina girl) and Debra (a cute black girl he had known since third grade). And the bench across from them was empty!

Jamal seemed to want to drift over to the football players’ bench to hang out with Jaycee, but Rod subtly steered him to Brigid’s table. As he was about to sit down he was distressed to see her get up. But no, it was only to get some napkins. As he sat down and said hi to Debra, he sneaked a peak back at Brigid, skipping over to the napkins. He loved her fashion sense, the jacket, the turtleneck shirt, the jeans. Yet she did change things from time to time. For the past couple of weeks, instead of her black Uggs, she had been wearing old sneakers with no socks. Cute ankles. Of course, everything about her was cute, her ankles, her chin, her ears, and on parade, the slopes of her breasts, her tight butt, the dimples over her butt cheeks. . . Rod was self-aware enough to know that he was gushing about her in his head. He was in love and obsessed. Well, nothing wrong with that!

When Brigid sat down again Rod looked at her dancing green eyes. After some bumbling attempts to start a conversation he finally hit upon a theme. “This looks like the Tunemasters table.”

“Yes,” Jamal said, “Time to walk the halls like a dork in my uniform tomorrow.”

“You don’t HAVE to wear it,” Debra said. But of course it would be disrespectful to Sarge not to.

“It will be strange to wear my uniform without thermals underneath,” Virginia said. “I haven’t done that since October.”

“Yes. And that’s good. Mine scratch me in some weird places anyway,” Jamal said.

“T.M.I.!” Brigid laughed. Too much information! Which made Rod laugh too. Though Jamal was right. Those special thermals that Sarge ordered were pretty coarse. You had to wear your regular underwear under them. Of course, the band’s majorette didn’t have the option of wearing thermals or even underwear so she wouldn’t know.

“Hey, Fridge!” a guy said as he passed by with his tray. Brigid’s eyes narrowed. Rod turned to see who this jerk was — she knew Brigid hated that “Frigid Brigid” nickname — but then he saw it was Sammy, the baritone saxophone player, who was a good guy. As he turned back Rod realized that Brigid had actually taken the nickname as good-natured kidding, at least from Sammy.

They were all eating burgers and fries, except Lucia, who was trying to watch her weight with a salad. Seconds passed uneasily. Rod thought: should I try to make conversation again? Or just let things come up? Does this silence show that Brigid and her friends are ill at ease with me and Jamal? Or is it just something that comfortable friends allow to pass? Am I worrying about this too much?

Fortunately the girls made conversation themselves. It was prompted by Brigid’s trying to get something out of her bookbag, and dropping a key on the table, the key to the weight room.

“How’s body conditioning working out?” Lucia said. She had thought of signing up herself, but was self-conscious about people seeing her in workout clothes.

“Great. It’s just the ten of us, and Janowski is pretty cool. We do it three times a week, after school.” If Rod had known she’d signed up, he would have too. . . Another opportunity missed!

“Sounds like a lot of work,” Jamal said.

“It is. But it gives ya energy. And I’m gettin’ results, after only four weeks. Feel this muscle!” She flexed her left arm and pushed her elbow out at Jamal, daring him to feel her bicep. Realizing her jacket was in the way, she said, “Wait — ” and got up to take the jacket off. Rod and Jamal were treated to the sight of her twisting and turning in her turtleneck shirt, long red hair flinging about, her shoulders jerking to and fro along with her breasts, which were encased in what looked like a sturdy bra. Brigid’s breasts were a little big for her frame, and contrasted with her slim waist. Both guys imagined them bare, wobbling and jumping as she threw her baton, nothing covering them except the little circlets over the nipples.

“Feel here,” Brigid said again. (With her white-girl-Boston accent, it was more like, “Heah.”) She pointed her elbow at Jamal and then Rod, who felt her bicep. Rod’s heart (and his dick) jumped as he felt the firm lump under her long shirt sleeve. “Wow, Grade A!” Jamal said. Rod nodded.

“I bet you could throw a baton at the moon now,” he said. As Brigid put her jacket back on she smiled at this weak joke. He was going to say, “I bet you could hit McPherson from a hundred feet with your baton,” referring to Ms. McPherson, the principal, but decided it would sound mean. Though it would have been funnier. Rod bit his lip. He was always twisting himself in knots, thinking of what to say around this girl.

“I wrote something in music theory that I’d like to try out,” he said impulsively. “Why don’t we give it a go tomorrow after lunch?”

He was looking at Brigid, who for a second looked puzzled, an odd expression for her. “What?”

He hadn’t called her name but had been looking right at her. “Um. . . A piece I wrote that I need a woodwind for. I’ll play the trombone part, you can do the clarinet.”

Brigid smiled, her bright green eyes making his heart jump again. “Sure. . . Let’s try it out.”

Rod exhaled and thought: What did I just do? What just popped out of my mouth? I didn’t write no “piece”! I’m in music theory class but I’m terrible at it! Yet Brigid had said yes. I’d better write something tonight and it better be good!

“You were almost late to band this morning,” Debra observed.

Glad to be talking about something else, Rod said, “I couldn’t figure out Hank’s system for unlocking doors.”

“Thursdays, it’s always the last one on the right,” Brigid said.

“Except last Thursday,” Debra said. This was some kind of joke between the girls and all three laughed.

Rod saw Debra’s T-earrings jiggle as she laughed and then noticed that Brigid was wearing something on her ear after all. Just a little green thready-type earring on one ear, about an inch long. So small he hadn’t noticed it in band practice. What was that? It looked like just a supporting thread for something that had fallen off.

“So you’re wearing your uniform tomorrow?” Jamal said to Brigid. The majorette’s uniform, of course, did not comply with the school dress code, but that issue was settled long ago. In the big Tunemasters glass case in the lobby, amid all the trophies and photos of bands from years gone by, there was a yellowed newspaper article from 1977 or so about that year’s majorette being cited as in violation because she wore her uniform on Uniform Day. The article had a photo of the majorette, Vondera Richardson, in her majorette’s leotard and a skirt that was impermissibly short. Due to the publicity the school backed down and never made a fuss again — as the years went by and the majorette’s uniform got skimpier and skimpier.

Brigid sipped her soda, then glanced sideways at her friends and smiled. “I’m wearin’ my uniform now!”

Jamal and Rod looked at each other and then at Brigid. Their eyes darted a quick moment down to her chest, though the jacket and shirt would have easily hidden her circlets. Plus she had a bra on. Jamal said, “What, you’re wearing your uniform under your clothes?”

“That’s dedication,” Rod observed.

“No,” Brigid laughed. She turned her head and touched the thready green thing on her ear. “This is it. My new uniform.”

Rod narrowed his eyes to focus on the tiny thread. “What part?”

“This is the whole thing,” Brigid said, keeping her head turned, nibbling on french fries, talking between bites. “Ms. Kleinfelter cut it down some. . . Easier to twirl in. . . You’ll see me in it tomorrow. It’s very pretty.”

2.

Rod pedaled harder, feeling like he was in sixth grade again, but what the hell . . . he carefully crossed busy Washington Street, then down Standish Street where Brigid lived. . .

Fortunately the weather was better now. The rain had stopped that morning, right after preschool band, and it had gotten warmer. The streets had dried out, just an occasional puddle. Rod’s driver ed classes were going pretty good, but for now, getting around Roxbury was still a bicycle thing.

He’d go by Brigid’s house several times a week, hoping to “accidentally” see her. He kept telling himself it was a childish thing to do, but he couldn’t help it. So far it had worked only twice, once when he saw her walking to the store with her little brother, again when she was hanging out on her front stoop with her friend Millie. That second time, he should have stopped to talk!

After that encounter at lunch today, finding about Brigid wearing that tiny strand of thread, Rod’s mind had been spinning furiously. So had Jamal’s, probably. That was going to be her whole uniform?? Rod tried to figure it out. . . a fraction of what her uniform used to be, microscopic as that was. . .

He had never been very good at math but lately he had been calculating ceaselessly, since that science class when Ms. Shaw told them that the average human body had 3000 square inches of skin. And 120 of them were the face and neck. Rod thought: that’s all that’s exposed when the Tunemasters march. They had the “shako” hats, jackets with long sleeves, cummerbund, gloves, long wool trousers, those marching boots. Not counting the things underneath, the shirt, underwear, socks, and thermals when it was cold. One percent of 3000 is 30, times four is 120. . . So when the Tunemasters marched they had 96 percent of their bodies covered.

All the Tunemasters, of course, with one exception. Rod pedaled harder as he went through the calculations methodically for the hundredth time. Each of Brigid’s circlets (the new, smaller version) were, he guessed, about two square inches, so four total. The tiny “T” tiara didn’t count; it just rested on her hair and didn’t cover any skin. Her uniform bottom, the little strip that covered her pussy lips — again, the newer version, so narrow that it kind of pressed in between them — he guessed at maybe one and a half square inches. The strings that held it on, that went across her hips, met at her butt crack, then went down between her butt cheeks, past her butthole, then up to meet it again — they were about as thick as shoelaces. And how long? She had a real narrow waist, maybe 22 inches. Her hips would be a little wider, maybe — 30? Another six or so for between her butt cheeks. 36 inches of string? Maybe a total of 7 square inches. Call it 7 and a half, to make it an even 9 with the bottom strip included.

Then there were the stringy, sparkly flip-flops. The strings there were narrower than the laces everyone else had on their boots. A total of one square inch coverage for each foot?

Rod concluded the calculations in his head yet again. Circlets plus bottom plus shoes, four plus 9 plus two. Brigid had 15 square inches of her body covered, half of which was the strings for her bottom. If 30 is one percent of 3000, then 15 would be one-half of one percent. So:

Body coverage for Tunemasters: — everybody else: 96% — the majorette: 0.5%

Put another way, Percent of body exposed: — everybody else: 4% — the majorette: 99.5%

Sheesh. . . I’m turning into a math nerd, Rod told himself. But he could not have been the only one. ALL the guys thought about the Tunemasters majorette. How could they not, unless they were gay? Jamal had even counted the freckles on Brigid’s white, Irish skin: 83, including one on her left butt cheek. Of course he had the time to do it. As trombone players he and Rod had close-up views of the majorette during all the parades and halftime shows, and a lot of that time was just standing in formation waiting to march. That she was white made Brigid even more fascinating to him. The different shades of her skin in different weathers, and the fact that she got reddish after a long time spinning and throwing that baton.

Rod’s mind woke up to the here and now as the sun broke through the clouds, getting in his eyes, and now he turned the corner and approached Brigid’s house!

It was in a row of connected houses, with tiny front yards. Brigid’s was the tan one, number 207, the mailbox saying “O’Dierna”, with stars and stripes on it which looked like they had been painted by one of Brigid’s little brothers or sisters, or maybe all of them. Rod slowed down, thinking of his pretext, where he’d say he was going if he “accidentally” ran into Brigid. The road was cracked here . . . he had to be careful where he steered his bike.

Yes!

The long red hair, smoothed back by the white hand, freckled face, the jeans, sitting on the stoop, talking on her cell phone —

“Oh hi Brigid — ” — oops —

The bike tripped up on one of the cracks and Rod fell to his left. His body turned over and hit the cracked sidewalk, and in breaking his fall his hand got scraped . . .

He felt like an absolute idiot, lying face up at the blue sky, blinking to get his senses back, and now Brigid’s face hovered over him, once again smoothing her hair back, her green eyes looking with concern. “You okay, Rod?”

He took her hand and she pulled him up gently, though with her strength it was not a heavy task for her. He half-remembered a dream where he had slipped and hit his head just before a parade and she looked down at him, in her majorette uniform, and helped him up . . .

When he staggered to his feet she said, “That was a spill. Your hand’s bleeding. Come on in, we’ll clean it and patch it.”

Rod lurched over to get his bike off the road and steer it into the O’Dierna front lawn. Then he followed Brigid up the little concrete path and up the stoop. He noticed her clothes — more casual than what she wore to school. Sweatshirt, jeans with holes in them, cuffed up to mid-thigh. And she was barefoot, which was a little strange.

The O’Dierna living room was tiny, like the house, but well-kept. Rod got sat on the couch while Brigid padded into the kitchen just behind them. He heard her get out her cell phone. “Oh Dad, that was my friend Rod from school, he was passin’ on his bike and fell. No, he’s all right, just a scraped hand. See you soon. No, Mom’s not back yet.”

Some fumbling around the kitchen and Brigid was back. “Damn, I thought the bandaids were in the cupboard. Come to the bathroom, they’ve got to be there.”

In a moment Rod was standing helplessly in the O’Dierna bathroom while Brigid, forbidding him to move, rinsed his hand and applied the stinging antiseptic spray. Brigid was the responsible type, that’s for sure. He knew she was the oldest of five kids, and the others were pretty young. Oldest kids tend to be responsible. Rod was the middle of three, and his older sister, Sabrina, was like that. His younger sister Myeka was a different story.

Rod looked down at Brigid’s bare feet next to his sneakers, then her cuffed jeans. He glanced quickly for signs of breast mounds under her sweatshirt, then at her white hand holding his — she was holding his hand! — and then glanced around the bathroom, hopefully not in a snoopy way. Toothbrushes — which one was hers? — toothpaste, shampoo. An enema bottle, yuck. Someone in the house must be sick. Combs, brushes, and suntan oil, quite out of season. A drying bra hanging from the shower curtain. Hers or her mother’s? He tried to make out the size but couldn’t.

His hand meticulously bandaged, Brigid now said, “Why don’t you hang out a bit? I’ll get you a soda.”

They were sitting on the couch with their sodas when Rod finally found something to say. “Well –”

“Bridge! Math! I can’t do this!” a young voice called from upstairs.

Brigid closed her eyes in exasperation. “Sorry Rod, I’ll only be a moment. Here’s the remote, hang out.”

As she went upstairs, her feet slapping against the tile steps, Rod watched her tight jean-clad butt disappear and then contemplated the remote in his hand and the old tube TV in front of him. His attention was then drawn to the photos on the wall. Quite a lot of them, both parents and what looked like grandparents and of course Brigid’s little brothers and sisters. A photo of Brigid herself in maybe second grade.

And then there was a part of the wall with Brigid’s majorette stuff. A couple of award certificates, and three photos. The first was from band camp last August, when all the Tunemasters went to U-Mass out in Amherst for a week. The majorettes had their own subsection, and there on the sunny lawn, squinting in the hot summer sun, were Brigid and two majorettes from other schools, all in their uniforms, posing with their batons. The other majorettes were in sparkly, skimpy outfits, with bare arms and midriffs, lots of leg showing over their marching boots — but next to Brigid they looked positively fully clothed.

The second photo was from a newspaper article, showing Brigid, at a football game, and a baton way, way over her head, with people on the sidelines looking up as if at the moon. Brigid was waiting and in position to catch it, which she surely had. The stop-action of the camera had caught one breast on the rebound up, the circlet looking up a little, as if waiting for the baton too.

The third photo made him cringe. It was a black-and-white of Brigid leading that White Mountain Winter Parade up in New Hampshire last month. The coldest parade they’d ever marched in, well below freezing with a stiff wind, the one time Sarge told them not to even try to play because their lips might get frozen to their instruments! Only the drummers played, a steady cadence beat while the band marched holding their instruments in front of them. And there was Brigid, the nearly naked majorette, passing the bundled-up locals in their heavy boots and ski caps, with her arms stretched out and chest thrust out as she twirled. He remembered getting ready to march, hanging out with Brigid in her earmuffs and warm-up coat and Uggs, only her bare legs showing. She bit her lip and said, “Heah goes nothin’!”, and shook off the coat and earmuffs and boots, and slipped into her sparkly flip-flops. She shut her eyes, feeling the frigid wind on her body, and said, “Eeeeeee!!!”, to everyone’s general amusement. Then she shook her whole body, breasts jiggling, and put her “majorette face” on and took her place in front of the band. Of course she had performed perfectly, once again being “Frigid Brigid” — a nickname she always hated but it was just too obvious for the wise guys in the school to resist.

Why would Brigid have that picture up? Why would she want to be reminded of that bone-chilling day? Then he contemplated the photo next to it, of that high throw, and realized it was another difficult majorette trick that she was proud of: being able to stand the cold and perform in it. He thought of something from the Tunemasters guidebook, the section on majorettes: “Remember: Football season is during COLD months and the uniform does not have much to keep you warm. If you can’t handle being a little cold, there is always a place for you in a fully covered uniform marching with a horn.” Sounded like a dare!

Brigid was back down from helping her brother. “Fractions,” she explained.

“That was a fun band camp,” Rod said, pointing the remote at that photo.

“Oh yes. That’s Tilda and Marj. Their schools are near Leominster, I think.” Pronounced “Lemminster” by natives. “They taught me some good throws.”

Brigid’s foot was up over her other knee and Rod looked at it. “Cold for barefoot, isn’t it?”

“No, I’m gettin’ used to it. Training for the new uniform.”

Rod’s mouth went a little dry and he cleared his throat. “The whole uniform was hanging from your ear today?”

“The same!”

“What happened to the sandals?”

“Gone,” Brigid said. “The new uniform doesn’t have them. Those old flip-flops were a-gettin’ in the way anyway. Hahd to hold on, sometimes.”

Interesting, Rod mused. Whenever changes were made to the regular band uniforms, it was always in the direction of adding something — the plumes to the shako hats, the cummerbunds, the gloves. While changes to the majorette uniform were always in the direction of shrinking something, or taking it away entirely — like with shoes. They could have easily made the sandals more secure by putting back that ankle strap, like in Grenicia’s uniform from last year, but no. He thought of the old photos in the glass case, the boots of the 1940’s majorettes, shrunk over the years to wellies, slippers, sandals, flip-flops. Those stringy things Brigid had been wearing were the last vestige of footwear. Now that vestige was gone.

“But marching barefoot . . . isn’t it. . . won’t you step on something?”

Brigid was unperturbed and even enthusiastic. “Ms. Kleinfelter showed me photos of a parade in Thailand, the traditional dancers with the gold crowns, they perform in bare feet. But you have to get ’em tough.” She scampered back to the kitchen and then came back with those old sneakers she’d been wearing. “See?”

Rod looked. Inside these sneakers Brigid had glued rough sandpaper. “Ouch!”

“It kind of hurt at first, but it’s been three weeks and now I can walk on anything. Here, feel ’em.”

She moved her foot a little toward Rod. “Go ahead!” she said again, flexing her pretty toes. It seemed a little weird but Rod extended his hand gingerly.

“Wow . . . Brigid, your sole is like a rock!”

“That’s right,” she said proudly. “And I can do more now. Come in back, I’ll show you.”

Rod followed the barefoot girl through the kitchen and now they were out in the back yard. It was very small, fenced in, bordering equally small yards to each side and behind, straddled by a line of telephone poles. Wires criss-crossed overhead.

Brigid had a baton lying against one of the lawn chairs. She twirled it over her head, tied part of her sweatshirt against her waist, and said, “Watch.”

She did a high throw and then another. Being Brigid, there was no danger of the baton drifting out of the tiny yard, or hitting the wires. And now she did a third throw, spun around, and as the baton came down she twisted her leg around and hit the baton with the upturned sole of her foot. The baton bounced up and into her hand. Another throw, and she bounced it up with her other foot. And now she threw the baton behind her, and kicked it back up to her hand, first with one foot and then the other!

She caught her breath. “Can’t do that with those flip-flops on.”

Rod laughed. “Brigid, you are incredible!”

She blushed, a shy white-girl blush, her face turning red around the cheeks and forehead. And then she said what she said at lunch. “Wait till you see my new uniform. It’s very pretty.”

And so it was, the next morning, Uniform Day, nice weather, no preschool band, and Rod got to school almost shaking with anticipation, wearing his Tunemasters uniform, seeing the other kids pass by in football and basketball uniforms, and of course the occasional Tunemaster . . . and he got to the main lobby, past the auditorium doors, and saw a bunch of kids and teachers, crowding around someone, under a bright light . . .

3.

Rod tried to fight his way in to see what the crowd of kids was looking at, without seeming like he was trying to imitate the gametime moves of the football team guys who were in their uniforms this morning. There was one overhead light that was brighter than the others, in the center of the lobby, and that was what they were crowding around. Rod was not a short guy but he couldn’t get a glimpse, especially since some of the Tunemasters even came to school in their tall shako hats. Unsuccessful at getting a view from the front, he went around the other side and finally burst through between Jaycee of the football team and Lorenzo, his fellow trombonist.

His mouth dropped open at the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen.

The naked white girl, seen from behind, her skin gleaming in the bright light, arms extended, showing herself off to the people in front of her, her bookbag on the floor next to her bare feet, with her baton threaded through the shoulder straps.

She can’t really be naked, Rod told himself, as he caught his breath and licked his dry lips and gulped. They wouldn’t take away Brigid’s uniform entirely, and actually make the band’s majorette march absolutely stark raving naked, without a stitch, every private part of her fully on view, in front of crowds at football games, down the main street in town, in front of her friends and her parents and brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and teachers and the TV cameras, in rain, wind, sleet, snow storms, marching herself into frostbite and hypothermia — it would not only be downright cruel but against the law, indecent exposure —

As he thought these unbelievable thoughts Rod looked at Brigid’s tight, tiny, white-girl butt, the cute dimples over her butt crack, her slim waist, the thinly muscled shoulders. And now the lovely slope of her breast came into view, jiggling as she turned slightly, then more . . .

“Beautiful”, a girl said as Brigid turned, her arms still out, her toes flexing as she slowly rotated. Now she caught Rod’s eye and said, “Hi Rod.” Rod smiled weakly and in shock — the naked white goddess has singled me out —

He looked down to her breasts, then down to her totally shaved crotch. He had never seen a totally naked live girl before, and certainly not so close in such strong light. Now his eyes strained as he noticed something odd. Her nipples weren’t pink, really. Well no, the circular areas — it was called the areola, everyone could see now that Brigid’s were a little bigger than the size of quarters — were pink . . . but the actual nipples were — green??

“I like your new — circlets,” Jaycee said.

“They’re called ‘bits’,” Brigid corrected him, padding a couple of steps toward Jaycee, and then holding her breasts up to him to show off the “bits”. Rod gulped again. As they looked, they saw that the end of each nipple — not the whole nub, the size and color of a pencil eraser, but the top of it — was wrapped in green thread. The thread was tied on, in a little latticework, rather pretty in its own microscopic way, which slightly compressed the nub tip. The green circular cover made a pleasant contrast with the pinkness of the rest of the nub, and the pinkness of the areola.

“You must be good with crochet,” a girl said. Brigid smiled, and blushed with pride, still holding out her breasts, as if showing off a prize-winning cake.

“Nice job on the nails,” Debra said. Brigid extended her fingers in front of her breasts, then looked down and spread her toes. Green nail polish. It figured the new uniform would be green, for the St. Patrick’s Day parade.

Looking downward at her pretty toes brought everyone’s attention to her crotch. A lower-pitched older woman’s voice was heard. “The bottom is pretty too, Brigid.” It was Ms. Thomas, one of the guidance counselors. Rod suddenly noticed there were teachers around too. Maybe Uniform Day had developed an informal tradition of its own, the majorette showing off her new uniform.

“Thanks. You should thank Ms. Kleinfelter,” Brigid said, edging her feet apart and spreading her legs. What bottom part? Then Rod realized that the slit between the shaved pussy lips was green also — a thin thread, running from the top of the slit to somewhere below.

“How does that stay on?” Virginia asked.

Brigid smiled and rolled her eyes. “It’s tricky. I’m glad though. Those straps” — she motioned around her hips — “were uncomfortable, cutting in when I moved around.” Actually they hadn’t been “straps”, they were more like “strings”. Again, Rod mused, they changed the majorette uniform in the direction of taking something away, when they could have just as well made the “straps” more comfortable by widening them, like they were last year, or widening them more, like the year before.

They watched as Brigid turned around again slowly, proud and happy to have the privilege of wearing what everyone agreed was a beautiful uniform. “The committee really outdid itself this time,” said Mr. Haufenstedt, the Typing and Data Entry teacher.

The Homeroom bell rang.

“Okay, kids, break it up, get to class.” It was Mr. Poznik, one of the hall attendants, a little old guy, but not someone to be disobeyed. As the crowd dispersed Rod pulled up his bookbag and began the trudge to Social Studies, one of the classes Brigid was not in. He turned and saw her walking away with Debra and Lucia, her bookbag slapping her bare buns as she practically skipped to class on her (tough) bare soles, the baton in her hand. Debra was in her full-coverage Tunemasters uniform and Lucia, not on any team, was in her big black pants and jacket, both girls in boots, a strong contrast to the naked, barefoot girl in between. But of course, she wasn’t really naked.

4.

Social Studies class was just agony. The teacher was Ms. McCabe, a thin white lady around 35 or 40 with blonde, tied-back hair who was — well, “chilly” was the best word for her. She hardly ever smiled. And the topic they were studying now — the early Middle Ages — the best word for that was “boring”.

Rod’s mind was scrambled anyway from thinking about Brigid’s new uniform. He made some attempts to figure out the square-inch area of each of her “bits” but couldn’t concentrate. He looked at the eraser on his pencil — the size and color of Brigid’s nipple — and rubbed it, which made his dick hard. Bad idea, gotta stop doing that. He looked at the globe on the window sill. If the globe was Brigid’s breast, a “bit” would be the area of — what — Poland? No, less than that. Estonia? Monaco?

“Mr. Sykes,” Ms. McCabe said. She had a severe face and looked like she might have been a model, or an actress, once.

“What?”

“As we were saying,” she said in exasperation (Rod realized he hadn’t been listening), “the Merovingian Dynasty, who was the real ruler?”

Rod looked at the edge of the ruler that was sticking out of his notebook, like his dick sticking out inside his pants, and realized he was completely lost, even though like everyone he had his textbook out.

“Um — ”

“The master of the palace,” MsMcCabe said, trying to sound patient. “And the king?”

Rod’s eyes fell on a phrase in the book. “He was — he was just the titular head.”

“That’s TIE-tular, long ‘i’. Right. Now Ms. Sorensen — ”

Rod’s face burned with embarrassment as he realized he had mispronounced the word so that he was saying “tit”. He thought he heard someone snort. He couldn’t get his mind off the band majorette’s breasts. And everyone knew what was on his mind. He was quite certain about that.

He looked straight ahead, at the back of the kid in front of him, not daring to see anyone else’s glances, any smiles at his very revealing slip of the tongue.

Suddenly he wanted to get Brigid as far away from his mind as possible. He looked at the globe and tried to imagine it was the Earth and not a model of Brigid’s boob. He tried to imagine he was in one of those faraway countries, thousands of miles away, where there were no marching bands and no majorettes.

He actually managed to get through the rest of the class and the next one, Visual Arts, where he played with markers and construction paper and did some abstract designs, nothing having to do with live persons or bodies.

Third period was math, a class Brigid was in, and what was more, her assigned seat was near the front. Rod was in the back, one row over. He could pay better attention here, because his skin coverage calculations had gotten him to like math, at least a little. They were on algebra now, doing problems on the board for Mr. Gianelli.

Rod was lucky. Brigid’s desk-chair was not quite in line with the others so he got a good look at the side of her that stuck out. She was second from the front. Rod surveyed the kids in her row, starting with Millie who sat next to him, from back seat to front. Shirt, blouse, sweater, sweatshirt, bare shoulder, sweater. Jeans, sweatpants, skirt, dockers (ugh, Stanley! you’ve got to un-nerd yourself!), bare hip, jeans. Boot, sneaker, heel, sneaker, bare foot, sneaker.

Now Brigid turned a little and lifted her hand to scratch behind her neck. A little sliver of her breast came into view, like a crescent moon, and jiggled. Then she put her arm down again.

Now she did what she often did when she had her normal clothes on: crossed her leg and sat on it. Her bare toes stuck out into the aisle, wiggling from time to time as she listened and read and wrote.

And now she had a question, raising her hand. The breast bounced again, then swayed to rest. The question was about “completing the square”. Mr. Gianelli explained it carefully and concisely, the overhead lights glinting in his thick-lensed glasses.

“Why don’t you take the next problem to the board, Miss O’Dierna,” Mr. Gianelli said. Brigid got up and bent over to get her notebook, her waist seeming pencil-thin, then walked up to the board, proudly, as if to show off her uniform, though you couldn’t see any of it from the back. She braced her feet slightly apart as she picked up the chalk and started writing numbers.

“And problem number 7, uh, you, Mr. Sykes.”

Lord, give me strength. Rod tried not to trip over his feet as he went up to the board. I have to not do anything stupid, like saying “tit”.

Number 7 was not hard. Rod knew about completing the square and got started on it. He tried not to look at Brigid, who was to his left. He could swear he could feel heat radiating from her bare skin. He was getting hot himself, under all his clothes. He glanced down at her pretty bare feet, with the green toenail polish, next to his marching boots.

Brigid was left-handed and Rod was right-handed, and his peripheral vision told him he had an unobstructed view of her breasts, jiggling and wobbling tightly on her chest as she worked the chalk. He loved the way they moved when she was in her majorette uniform, either in circlets or these new “bits”, not strapped down by a bra, moving independently, one jiggling while the other swayed. . .

He looked over as casually as he could to her breasts, then went back to finishing problem 7. Then his face got hot as he realized that everyone in the room, certainly all the guys, was watching Brigid and would have seen him eyeing her boobs. This was one of those times he was so glad he was black, and not a white person whose blushes were visible to the whole world.

He finished and looked over to Mr. Gianelli, which fortunately meant looking away from Brigid. “Very good, Mr. Sykes.”

He got back to his seat, avoiding all eye contact once again, feeling a new wave of sweat under his clothes. As he sat down, Brigid finished, and turned to face the class and Mr. Gianelli. This time her face reflected not pride in her uniform but concern about her math.

“No, you don’t complete the square that way, Miss O’Dierna,” Mr. Gianelli said. “It should be one-sixteenth, not one-eighth. You added instead of multiplied.”

“Oh right — sorry — ” Brigid quickly lurched over to correct her mistake. The class attentively followed her motions, in particular her breasts hanging down and jiggling as she leaned over and wrote with the chalk. “Is that it then?”

“Yes, correct.” Brigid picked up the eraser and vigorously erased her work, breasts jiggling more quickly now. She was a embarrassed at having got one wrong. Such a perfectionist!

She turned to return to her seat and was almost there when Millie called out: “Bridge — look — ”

Brigid looked down uncertainly at her bare legs. “What?”

“Your bit.”

“Oh.” Somehow she had gotten chalk over her nipple so that the bit on that one was now white. She went up to Mr. Gianelli. “Mr. Gianelli, can I go to the bathroom. I’ve got to — ”

“What?”

“My uniform — ”

“What?” With his poor eyesight Mr. Gianelli couldn’t see what Brigid was pointing at. Finally she went up to him and cupped her breast, holding it up to him.

“Oh, yes. All right, Miss O’Dierna.” He fumbled with a desk drawer. “Let me get you a hall pass.”

“Wait, Bridge, I’ve got a wipe.” Millie got up with a medicated tissue from her bookbag.

“Could you do it, Mil?”

“Okay.” As Brigid stood in the aisle, looking down with concern, Millie bent down and squeezed her friend’s breast so that it stuck out, and carefully dabbed the chalk from the delicate latticework of Brigid’s bit. Soon the nipple tip was once again green, fitting for an Irish lass.

The class went on for the next few minutes, during which Mr. Gianelli reviewed the quadratic formula and the guys in the back of the room reviewed Brigid’s shoulders and either her left or right butt cheek, depending on which side of the room the guy was on.

“Attention. Brigid O’Dierna, please report to the Principal’s Office.” It was the scratchy voice of Ms. Kennedy, the Main Office secretary.

This announcement jolted everyone. What is going on? It could not be because Brigid was in trouble. She was the least likely kid in the school for that. Maybe having something to do with the parade tomorrow? But then wouldn’t it be Sarge who would have to see her?

Mr. Gianelli seemed unperturbed. Looking up at the loudspeaker after the announcement died away, he said, “Well Miss O’Dierna, I suppose you’ll need that hall pass after all.”

Brigid seemed as puzzled as Rod. She walked up and got the pass, and with a quick shrug, trotted out of the room. They heard the slapping of her bare soles trailing away in the hall.

Minutes went by and it occurred to Rod that maybe Brigid had a family emergency. He had heard somewhere that her mother had a heart condition or something like that. He watched the clock and tried to engage with the classwork. More minutes went by. . .

Almost half an hour later, just before the period ended, there was the slapping of feet again in the hall, which could only be Brigid. Strangely, she had her hands crossed over her breasts and she walked with her head down and her legs together. Putting the hall pass on Mr. Gianelli’s desk, she went back to her desk and sat down.

“We’re on problem 14, Miss O’Dierna.”

“Thanks.”

So there was no family emergency, Brigid was back in class. But Rod detected something wrong. The majorette slouched in her chair, foot sticking way out onto the floor of the aisle, elbow on the desk, propping up her head. When the bell rang, she grabbed her bookbag and was the first one out, walking again with her breasts covered and her legs together.

Rod snaked his way through everyone else, determined to catch up with Brigid in the hall. He finally did, on the concrete stairwell in the far end of the hall, the one that hardly anyone used.

Rod caught up with Brigid as she went through the fire door at the end of the hall and into the north stairway, a dreary place with no tile walls. Few kids used these stairs because it was the long way around to wherever you were going.

He found the scantily-clad majorette leaning against the cinder block wall, dropping her bookbag at her side. She again crossed her arms over her breasts, and looked down, her flat tummy going in and out with her stressed breathing.

At first he stood there. It was just him and her. The heavy metallic fire door closed behind him with an echoing thud. Then he said, “Brigid . . . is something wrong? You don’t look right.” In spite of his concern he was proud of himself, in being able to speak clearly in her presence, with his heart racing so.

Brigid looked down and flexed her toes. The smooth concrete floor must have felt like ice to her bare feet. “Rod . . . do you think I’m . . . N – naked?” She clutched her arms tighter around herself, and crossed one knee in front of the other.

5.

Then she slid down to the floor, the cinder blocks rough against her bare back, until her bare butt cheeks were on the floor, her knees up to her chin. It seemed like she wanted to disappear into the wall.

Rod was dumbstruck, fumbling for an answer. “Um . . . well . . . you wear a lot less than the rest of us . . . but . . . um . . . That’s being a majorette.”

She looked up at him, her green eyes meeting his brown eyes, as if daring him to tell her the truth.

The fire door burst open and two guys, Phil and Bill, bounded past them and down the stairs. Phil looked up and said, “Brigid! Must be Frigid!” Bill laughed. Then they were gone, the fire door downstairs clanging shut with an echo.

Rod shot a look of arrows down at where they had disappeared, then returned his gaze to the love of his life. There was no heat in this stairwell. He could feel the drafty chill even through his uniform. “It’s cold here . . . Let me help you up.”

“No. . . I’m a majorette,” she said dully as if by rote, “I’m used to the cold.” Then she looked up. “So am I . . . naked?”

“Uh . . . Majorettes have . . . uh . . . skimpier uniforms than everyone else. That’s true in any band.” Suddenly warming, he said, “You’re Brigid, the Tunemasters majorette! We’re practically famous, and you’re our leader! Brigid, you’ve shown us how being a majorette is . . . like . . . it’s the hardest job in the band. It’s being an athlete. And a dancer. You work hard at it, all those tricks you do, those high throws. . . you’re our inspiration, what you go through for us and for the school. You’re one of the great ones, Bridge!”

Brigid looked down at their feet. She stretched her foot out and wiggled her big toe against the toe of his marching boot. “Thanks.” They were silent for a moment, she sitting against the wall, he looking down at her.

The fire door opened, with a waft of warm air from the hallway. This time it was Jaycee and his new girlfriend Nilda, a Hispanic girl with dark skin and big boobs. She wore her soccer team uniform. They waved and passed by, absorbed in each other. Rod smirked, thinking how hard it must be for his friend to keep his eyes trained on his new girlfriend’s face and not further down.

Brigid watched them disappear downstairs. She was on the soccer team too, and Rod was afraid she was going to say, “I should have worn my soccer uniform instead of . . . this!” But she didn’t say it. She would have said it a moment ago. He gave himself credit for his little pep talk.

She let him help her up, and brushed dust off her butt, her hand slapping the bare skin. “Am I O.K. back there?” she asked. She turned to show him the back of her body, which was entirely bare, from her bare heels up to her red, tied-up hair.

He looked closely. The light here was pretty dim. “Um . . . you’ve got some dirt under your shoulder.”

Brigid tried to reach back there with her hands but couldn’t. “Get it for me.”

“O.K.” He brushed his hands as quickly as he dared from her shoulder blade down to the small of her back. It gave him a thrill. Her skin was not cold at all, considering the chill in here. “There, it’s gone.”

“Thanks.”

Of course, she would have done the same for him, brushing dirt off the back of his jacket. Tunemasters took care of each other. It was something Sarge always stressed, part of what he called “the teamwork ethos”.

Brigid turned up one foot, spreading her toes, then the other, checking for dirt. Suddenly she stood up straight and wiggled her shoulders, making her breasts dance, the bits pointing crazily here and there, left and right, up and down. She swung her hand behind her neck. “Akkk!”

“What’s wrong?”

“Somethin’ back there — it’s icky — ”

Rod got behind Brigid and looked. “Oh it’s a — ” He hesitated a moment before saying it. “Spiderweb.”

“Eee!” Brigid jumped up and down, dancing wildly, the thudding of her soles against the concrete echoing throughout the stairwell. “Eee!” Her little squeals echoed too.

“But no spider, don’t worry!” Actually he wasn’t sure about that. But there was a cobweb that came down from the ceiling and had fastened against the wall. Brigid must have caught part of it when she squatted and leaned back.

Rod wished he had his uniform gloves. As it was, all he had to work with was the bare skin of his hands. Then he realized how spoiled he was, thinking about all the bare skin Brigid had to deal with. The nerdy numbers went through his head again as he smoothed the dead filaments of web away from her pretty, delicate, white neck, then away from her back. 96 percent versus 0.5 percent coverage . . . 4 percent versus 99.5 percent exposed . . . He quickly cleared his throat and said, “Sorry, but — ” He then passed his hand quickly across Brigid’s right butt cheek, sweeping away the last bit of cobweb that had gotten stuck to her skin down there.

“Got it all,” he finally said. Brigid turned around to see Rod trying to rid his hands of the sticky grayish strings. He paused for a minute to say to himself: I’ll bet that cobweb momentarily doubled the amount of covering Brigid has on her body.

Finally Rod freed his hands from the web and they watched as it floated to the floor, between their feet.

“Ohhh — ” Brigid shook her whole body with relief, glad to be rid of it. Her breasts bounced back and forth, just like that time, in that burger place during the Foxboro parade, to check her circlets to make sure Debra — or was it Virginia? — had put them back on securely. “Thanks Rod.”

“Glad you’re feeling better,” Rod said. He was curious. “What made you so . . . worried? What brought that on?”

Brigid looked up at the ceiling and said, “The PTA or someone had a question about my new uniform. . . so I got called to Ms. McPherson’s office and I showed them . . . It was two parents, Ms. Hernandez, you know her? . . .I don’t know the other one . . .then I waited outside . . . they didn’t think I heard them, the door was closed . . . but they were complainin’ and sayin’ I was naked.”

She uncrossed her arms and looked down at her breasts. Then she cupped them and looked at her thread-clad tips of her nipples.

“Those . . . bits . . . are beautiful,” Rod said. “Your whole . . . um . . . uniform is beautiful.” He then decided to say it. “Just like YOU are beautiful, Bridge.”

She looked at him and he bit his lip. She then gave him a little peck on the cheek. “You’re a dear.” Which with her Boston-white-girl accent came out, “You’re a deah.”

Rod knew what to do next — he kissed her back, right on that left cheek.

He wanted to embrace her in some way but couldn’t think how. He decided to be satisfied with the memory of feeling her skin when he brushed the dirt and cobwebs off her. So he said, “Are we still on for after lunch?”

“What?”

“Remember yesterday, I said I wrote something for clarinet.”

“Sure, let’s eat together so we can get out together.”

This is going good. . . “There should be a couple of practice rooms open then.” Actually there were only three practice rooms in the band area, next to the Big Instrument room where his trombone was. There was no sign-up for those rooms; you had to grab was what available. This could be another time when they could be alone . . .

Brigid looked down at his uniform. She took a few breaths. She was almost composed now, almost back to her old self. Then she fingered a couple of the buttons on his jacket.

“Nice uniform,” she said.

“You too.”

He felt it was O.K. for him to step back and look down at her bare lower lips, and the green thread in between.

“How does that . . . bottom . . . stay on?”

“It’s called a ‘wisp’.”

“Bits and wisp.”

They laughed together. As they both looked down, she parted her legs slightly. Rod wished he had a magnifying glass, then smiled at the mental image of him looking at her like that.

“You didn’t answer my question, Bridge.”

“What?”

He smiled. “Don’t be coy. You know what I mean. How does your . . . wisp . . . stay on?”

Brigid looked to the side, then fingered his buttons again, this time up near his neck. Then she straightened out the frill of his sleeve, and cleared her throat. “Well I suppose I can tell you . . . just something girls know . . . and Ms. Kleinfelter of course — ”

RRRRRIINNNNGGG!

They looked at each in surprise — fourth period! Both hated being late for class. Then with relief they said the same thing. “Gym!”

“We’re on basketball,” Rod said as he pushed open the heavy fire door and they went out into the busy hallway. “It’s a lot of sweat. I have to wash my gym clothes at home every week now.”

“Ewww,” Brigid laughed through a wrinkled nose. “The unit we’re on now, we’re not wearin’ gym clothes, just whatever feels comfortable. Judo,” Brigid said. “Lots of fallin’ down on mats.”

“Yes I know, we can hear you girls through the partition.”

“We’re not THAT overweight!” she laughed as they got to the gym wing and parted. He saw Brigid strut down the hall, shoulders back, toes flexed up, proud once again to show off her Tunemasters majorette uniform. She linked up with fellow Tunemasters Debra and Millie in their “full coverage uniforms”, then they disappeared into the girls’ locker room.

He went in with the guys and got to his gym locker. As he took out the crusty socks and black-and-white (school colors) shorts, Rod thought of that temporary Brigid, the frightened, nearly naked creature in the stairwell, so cold and vulnerable. It was so unlike Brigid to be like that. He was glad he helped restore her confidence.

Basketball was O.K., but he really preferred baseball, or at least softball. But it wasn’t quite the time of year for that yet. Their gym teacher, Mr. Wheeler, was a good guy, though he looked like he needed some gym himself. He weighed about 300 pounds. Like Sarge, he used to be in the Army, and called the kids “men”.

The boys lined up in front of the folded-up stands and waited for Mr. Wheeler to come out with the ball bag. But he was in the little gym teachers’ office, door open, talking on the phone. Finally he came out and said, “Men, Ms. Blackmon is out sick, and they couldn’t get a substitute. So today I’ve got the girls as well as you guys.”

He lumbered over to the partition and said, “No basketball today, men. Dodgeball with the girls.” Lots of groaning, though of course they didn’t mean it.

Mr. Wheeler pressed the button and the accordion partition began retracting. As the girls’ side of the gym came into view, he went back to the office and hauled out two big red playground balls. “Take it easy, no rough stuff. . . Though I’m not sure you guys will be the winners.”

“Yeah, right!” Sammy said, expressing the general feeling. Now the retracting partition revealed the girls, one by one, first Kendra, then Millie, then Debra, Elisa, Rhonda. . . Rod held his breath . . . finally Brigid . . .

6.

The game of dodgeball started slowly, each side afraid to go after the other, but soon both sides got more aggressive and each found their style. The guys, at least the stronger guys, lost any inhibition about throwing as fast as they could. Rod wasn’t among the strongest but he tried not to cower in the back like the unathletic boys. He protected the right flank, dodging successfully and throwing his shots as hard as he could — at the girls’ legs, the best strategy.

The girls were more artful, faking and shifting. Except for Brigid, who became a hurricane to be avoided. She grabbed the ball whenever she could and charged! Red hair swinging, she thundered right up to the line and demolished the boys with her left-handed cannonballs. Part of it was she looked more heavily protected by clothing than did the other girls. True, she was just like the others, in a white T-shirt, black-and-white shorts, and sneakers with white socks. But it was so much more than she had been wearing to her other classes that she looked fully clothed, while the other girls, who had been fully covered up, looked half naked and defenseless.

Was Brigid wearing her majorette uniform under her gym clothes? As the game went disastrously on, the boys losing more and more teammates to Brigid’s shots, Rod decided that she was. She had to be wearing those “bits” on her nipples. Otherwise she would have to unbraid those threads beforehand, and re-braid them afterwards. The tiny, intricate latticework on the ends of her nipples looked like it took a long time to weave. As for the “wisp” between her pubic lips, well. . . he still didn’t know how that stayed on.

Rod got eliminated when he dropped a weak throw from Millie, pretty embarrassing. He watched from the sidelines as Brigid and her friends finished the boys off. That body conditioning class was really in evidence. Even though Brigid was not the tallest or the heftiest she looked the strongest, stronger than most of the guys even. Any lack of confidence she had, back in that stairwell, had been wiped out. Seeing her sweating through her T-shirt, the bands of her sturdy, large-cupped sports bra showing, the muscles of her arms rock-hard as they flexed — he suddenly imagined Brigid playing dodgeball in her majorette uniform. . . what a turn-on . . .

Afterwards the boys sulked into the locker room, defeated. Though once the shock was over they thought it was hilarious — beaten by the girls at dodgeball! “What a bunch of pussies we are!” was Lorenzo’s reaction, echoed by others. As Rod got dressed, pulling out his band uniform and carefully starting on the buttons, he smiled — until Sammy cracked, “You really got a load of Brigid’s tits in math, Sykes!” Rod’s face flushed, remembering getting caught looking over at Brigid’s bits when he was at the chalkboard. “Shut up,” he said, jokingly, but he really was embarrassed.

In the lunchroom he kept an eye out for her. She had suggested they eat together — this was really turning into a me-and-Brigid day! . . . He caught her on the lunch line. She was easy to see from a distance, her bare skin next to everyone else’s full-coverage uniforms or regular clothes.

They walked to her usual table, she being careful where she put her bare feet, watching for spills. They sat with the same crowd as yesterday, Debra and Virginia and Jamal, except this time Jaycee came by with his new girlfriend Nilda. Jaycee and the big-breasted soccer player had been inseparable lately.

“Dammit,” Brigid said right away. Her first forkful of mashed potatoes had dripped onto her right breast, on the upper slope, about an inch over the “bit”. She wiped it off with a napkin, her breast crushed under the weight of her fingers, jiggling with the napkin’s back-and-forth motions.

“One nice thing about being the majorette,” Nilda remarked, tossing her dreadlocks back as she ate her salad.

“Yeah . . . landing there would cause a stain on my jacket,” Debra said, pointing to the “T” insignia to the right of the buttons on her wool uniform, under which she had the benefit of two more layers of covering, namely her blouse and her bra.

“Still a bother,” Brigid said. “There, did I get it all?” She leaned forward to show them the top of her breast. The small reddish flush from the napkin rubbing was disappearing on her pale white skin.

Everyone nodded. They ate in silence. Rod looked sideways and tried to detect the contours of Nilda’s breasts, but he couldn’t. Her soccer shirt was too baggy. Not so with Brigid. He watched the motions of her breasts, the nipples capped with those tiny green thread bits, as much as he discreetly could. Everyone knew the precise size and shape of Brigid the Majorette’s breasts, the way they swayed and jiggled and bounced as she walked and talked. Now, they projected outward over her plate, wiggling with little tremors as she lifted her fork and chewed. Every motion of her body, no matter how slight, seemed to set off some kind of ripples through those round, firm mounds. When it came to public exposure Brigid had very experienced boobs.

He wondered how those boobs compared to Grenicia’s, last year’s majorette. One obvious difference was that Brigid was white. Her breasts changed color with the temperature, or with her exertions. They were a bit firmer too. Were they bigger? Grenicia’s were more covered up, with those big circlets . . . Compared to the sizes of their bodies, Brigid’s boobs ertainly were bigger. Grenicia was a big girl, taller, bigger hips, and a big black-girl butt. Thunderous thighs. She could probably kill someone with her baton, just from being naturally strong. Maybe Brigid could too, all that working with weights recently.

He concluded that Brigid’s boobs were bigger. As she leaned over to get her milk they stuck out even more over her tiny waist, mountains over a concave valley.

He briefly glanced around. Obviously most of the guys in this big cafeteria were catching an eyeful of the school’s majorette whenever they could. Well, she was used to it. . .

“Time to go?” Brigid said.

Rod looked at the clock and cursed himself for losing precious minutes. Time to get away to the band room, if they ever could. He practically inhaled his jello dessert and the two of them grabbed their bookbags and were down the hall in a minute.

7.

They were lucky. All the practice rooms were empty. He led her into the one in the back. Each room was tiny, with room for maybe three chairs and stands. They all had windows, but at least the one in back seemed more secluded.

“Here,” he said, nervously placing a sheet of music on her stand as she assembled her clarinet. He had stayed up late writing it, in his overly neat music notation. It was a passage from “You Make Me Feel Brand New”, off one of his father’s CDs. He had a vague idea of the clarinet’s range, and knew it was written in treble clef and one note above its actual sound (both foreign ideas to a trombone player). He hoped he hadn’t messed it up too bad. He also hoped his choice of a sexy tune wasn’t too obvious. But Brigid really \*did\* make him feel “brand new”.

Trombones need no assembling except for inserting the mouthpiece. Meanwhile he watched her suck on her reed, moistening it, trying not to think of her sucking on his dick. He though of her bare butt on the cold metal folding chair, her bare feet on the cold and dusty tile floor. As she screwed the sections of her instrument together and lined them up, he thought of that sentence in the Tunemasters handbook — “marching in a full coverage uniform with a horn”. It was odd to see the majorette with an instrument. Her uniform went with tossing a baton, not with playing a clarinet.

Now she sat straight up, feet flat on the floor, and played a couple of notes, the first a squeak. “Bleahh,” she said quickly, then she played a scale. “I’m not a real good clarinetist,” she said. “I’m flattered you picked me for this. You could have gotten Georgene.” Georgene was the band’s best clarinet player, a quiet and very pretty black girl. He’d had a crush on her back in fifth grade.

“Well I like you,” he said with a smile. Here she was, thinking this was a music theory assignment she was helping him out on, when it was actually just an impulsive idea to get them together alone.

A few preliminary toots on his trombone and he was ready. “Let’s go. . . One, two, three . . . ”

They struggled through the first few bars and it sounded awful. Trombone and clarinet is not a good combination, he realized. They stayed together and didn’t get lost, but it sounded clumsy. Brigid was laboring through the middle part. They ended up together, at least.

When they were finished Brigid leaned over to reach her little clarinet case on the floor, and got a pencil out. She then leaned forward to write some fingerings in. Her breasts, seeming the size of grapefruits in this tiny room, leaned forward too. They jiggled and swayed as she sat straight up again and played a few notes.

“I think I’m flat,” she said.

Rod snorted. The whole school can see that Brigid O’Dierna is decidedly NOT flat. Realizing how crude it sounded, he quickly turned his snort into a clearing of the throat to prepare for playing. He blew out a few idle notes.

“Play a B flat,” Brigid said. She was right — she \*was\* flat, at least in the musical sense. Rod adjusted his tuning slide. They tried again and were in tune.

“This is a bad register on clarinet,” Brigid said, and began playing that middle part, working about three keys with each note. Rod thought: Brigid is not one to make excuses. She must be right. “I’m switchin’ keys too much . . . How about up an octave?” She played the section again and it sounded more fluid. “In fact the whole thing can be played up an octave. Watch.” She inhaled and started from the top.

Again, she was right. He didn’t realize a clarinet could go that high. Then she came to the middle section. There was a quick five-note figure that she stumbled on. “Sorry.” She played it again, then again, just that figure. She licked her lips with a furrowed brow and played it again. And again.

She went on with that figure ten times, twenty times . . . She was lost in her own world, just her and that figure, trying to master it. Rod watched as her face got a little red, and then the area over her breasts started getting red too. Her toes slowly wiggled and flexed on the floor with her level of concentration. This is typical Brigid, he told himself. Practicing over and over, just like with her baton, determined to get it just right.

“Got it!” she said, exhaling. She played the figure perfectly, then smiled at him with satisfaction. “Sorry, I get caught up in these things.” She leaned her bare back against the chair, relaxed the instrument between her legs, then stretched out her leg and propped her bare heel up on the chair to the side. They both watched her stretch her toes as she caught her breath.

“It’s what makes you great,” he said jokingly.

They smiled at each other and he looked over from her toes to her strong, bare thigh. “You killed us in gym, we were at your mercy.”

“Haaa!” Brigid said with a lusty grunt, pumping her fist, causing a chain reaction in her breasts. “I am a Tunemasters majorette, invincible! No gettin’ over me!”

“Must be that body conditioning.”

“Oh yes — yes yes yes,” Brigid said, her green eyes brightening. She placed her clarinet upright on the floor and stood up. “You know bein’ a majorette, your body is like, part of your uniform. I’m gettin’ vain about it, I admit.” She stretched her arm up as high as she could and extended her foot to a point, just her big toe touching the floor. “Look at these muscles.”

She flexed from her hand all the way down to her spread-out little toe. As minimal as her old uniform was, it at least had that little string around her hips to hold that T-shaped bottom on, the one that had covered and partly cut into her pubic lips. Without the string crossing part of her, she was naked her entire length. And she was right about the muscles. From the little bulge along her foot, up to the hard calf, the rock-like thigh, the tight butt, the slim but powerful-looking shoulder and arm muscles . . . Brigid was more wiry and stronger-looking now. Also a bit thinner around the waist, if that was possible.

Rod nodded, showing he was impressed.

Brigid seemed to think for a moment, then said, “Feel my glutes.” She poked her finger into the thickest part of her butt cheek. “C’mon, feel ’em.”

Rod put his trombone aside and hesitantly shifted in his chair. He reached over with a pointed index finger and, biting his lip, poked into the muscle. It was as firm as a fully-inflated football. Bravely, he poked with all his fingers together, though just the tips, much as he wanted to cup the cheek with his hand. “This glute is in fact dangerous,” he said.

As she sat down, Brigid said, “the exercise allows me to move around better too. You really should sign up.”

“I will.”

They sat there and looked at each other.

“Brigid, I think you are wonderful.”

“Me too.” She blushed and laughed. “I mean I think \*you’re\* wonderful too. Such a dear.” (“Dee-ah.”)

They looked at each other, not breaking their gaze. Their gaze deepened, with affection, but with growing amazement, nervousness, fear, but finally with a conviction that holding hands and jumping off a cliff was the right thing to do and they were going to do it. They were going to kiss.

Their heads moved a little closer. Then a little more. Brigid started to move her hand up off her bare thigh —

8.

KNOCK KNOCK! The door pushed open. Rod and Brigid jolted in their chairs.

It was Ms. Kleinfelter, of the Band Committee, an oldish lady with cat’s eye glasses on a chain over her gray business-like jacket.

“Hello, Miss O’Dierna, hi young man,” she said in her stuffy old voice to Rod. “Sorry to interrupt your practicing, but a, uh, situation has come up as to the majorette’s uniform. If you don’t mind,” she said, looking at Rod, “we have to speak with the majorette here.”

“No that’s O.K.,” Brigid said, looking at Rod. “He’s a good friend of mine.”

“This conversation is personal to the Tunemasters majorette,” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

“No, he’s good,” Brigid said. She gave a puzzled but meaningful look at Rod. Whatever this was, it obviously had something to do with that business in the principal’s office.

“Over here, Jens,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, calling down the hall.

An even older man stood in the doorway, hunched in a tweedy jacket and rumpled clothes and thick-soled work shoes.

“This is Mr. Charlton, the Vice President of the Board of Education.”

Brigid and Rod both stood up out of respect, and shook his hand.

“The majorette, obviously,” Mr. Charlton said, looking Brigid up and down. He looked at Rod. “You can sit down, young man,” he said, with forced geniality.

The tiny room got even more crowded with the appearance of a thin, secretive-looking man meticulously dressed in a three-piece suit.

“And this is the school system’s attorney, Henry Cross,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. Mr. Cross gave a barely perceptible nod.

Ms. Kleinfelter was a bit nervous for some reason. “Miss O’Dierna, sorry for the, uh, intrusion, but I just wanted to show these men your uniform, the mechanics of it, to make sure that it, uh, complies with . . .ordinances . . .”

Jens Charlton, the Board V.P., shuffled forward to stand in front of Brigid. Though bent over, he was still a good deal taller than her. The remains of his gray hair, on his temples and in his mustache, contrasted with the bald black scalp shining in the overhead light. “Sorry to bother you miss,” he said, looking at Brigid’s face with his very thick glasses, “but . . . ” Hunched over, hands in the pockets of his jacket, he looked her up and down. “Now that we’ve got you going around in practically nothing, our lawyer Mr. Ross here — ”

“Cross,” the lawyer guy said.

“– Right, Mr. Cross is going to tell us if this ‘nothing’ is legal.”

“It’s a little cramped in here,” Henry Cross said. “And Dr. Brophy is yet to arrive. May I suggest the room next door?”

“It’s called the ‘big instrument room’,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, “for obvious reasons.”

“Miss O’Dierna,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, “if you don’t mind, this will only be a few minutes while we discuss your uniform. Let me say I think it looks very good on you.”

“Thanks,” Brigid said, blushing. A few moments ago she had been pumping her arms like some super woman, proud of her muscles. Now in the presence of three grownups she was shy and deferential. But as she looked down she straightened up, her breasts out, hips straight, toes pointed, proud of the bits and the wisp and her meticulously painted fingernails and toenails.

“Mr. Sykes, if you don’t mind,” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

“No, he’s my friend,” Brigid said. “I want him around.”

The three grownups looked at each other. Finally Henry Cross said, “She is within her rights. In fact it might not be a bad idea.”

Rod and Brigid looked at each other. She smiled at him, her green eyes twinkling, and he smiled back.

The “big instrument room” was actually not much bigger than the instruments kept there. A row of lockers on one side held the trombones, and the bass trombones that Lorenzo and Jaycee played in concerts. To the right were the big lockers for the bass drum and the other drums, then one of the two sousaphone chairs. The band had only one sousaphone player this year, and the other chair was out in the band room, ready for use. To the other side was the big cross-bar frame, extending almost to the ceiling, that held the bells and triangle, and also some empty hooks hanging from above. It too was hardly ever used. Finally, the cymbal locker. All this clutter left not much floor in the middle. At least it was more space than in that tiny practice room.

Brigid followed the others obediently, looking at the dusty, cold tile floor as her bare painted toes followed Ms. Kleinfelter’s heels, Mr. Charlton’s rubber-soled shoes and Henry Cross’s wingtips. In his marching boots Rod brought up the rear, looking closely at Brigid’s bare rear.

When they were all standing in the hallway of the big instrument room, Ms. Kleinfelter, pride showing through her nervousness, said, “This, gentlemen, is the style of the new majorette uniform, to be worn in all future parades.”

They had arranged themselves in a semi-circle and Brigid stood before them, blushing but obviously complimented, feeling — pretty? “And — and this is the uniform the rest of the band wears,” Brigid said, turning to Rod, not wanting to leave him out. “Very nice, don’t you think?”

“Yes, yes,” they said, looking at Rod briefly. “It’s full wool on the outside, the shirt underneath is cotton,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. “Note the ruffles,” she added, a little hurriedly as if for the sake of completeness. “It takes about five yards of fabric, but it’s worth it.” Rod, surprised to be pointed out, stood up straight. Brigid beamed at him.

They quickly turned their attention back to the majorette. “Turn to and fro, dear,” the old woman said. “As you can see, the new style uniform allows maximum freedom of movement for the majorette’s baton moves, which are part of the band’s reputation and which show advanced skill. The majorette leads her fellow Tunemasters, of course, and is an asset to the band. She is the first thing the crowd sees and a first impression is very important. Mr. Watson could talk a lot more about that, but he is currently teaching a class.

“Miss O’Dierna, you might know, is very accomplished at what she does. I’d ask her to demonstrate with her baton but she can’t do any throws in this little room.”

Brigid hesitated and then said, “Actually I can, not throws but . . . some other things.”

“Well maybe not now, dear,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, with a grandmotherly laugh. “The point of this little meeting is to — ”

“I think Dr. Brophy’s here,” Henry Cross said.

9.

“Hello – o – o,” came a booming voice from past the practice rooms. “Over here,” said the lawyer. Now entered a large, balding man with a big mustache, wearing a three-piece suit, like Henry Cross’s, though several sizes bigger and a little rumpled, as if he had just played soccer in it. He had toted a big, black, box-like suitcase, like an overgrown attache case.

“Dr. Bernie Brophy,” he said, giving a vigorous and bone-crushing handshake to each of them. He briefly glanced down as he shook Brigid’s hand. “Hello Miss.” Her breasts jiggled as he seemed to shake her whole body.

“‘Doctor’?” Mr. Charlton said as he looked up at him through his thick glasses. “What’s he here for?”

“You will see in a moment,” Henry Cross explained. “Dr. Brophy specializes in sports medicine. He is a physiatrist.”

“A what?”

“As I said, you’ll see.”

Dr. Brophy put his suitcase down and now there were five people, Rod included, looking at Brigid.

“The first modification was to the the top of the uniform,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. “As you can see, we did away with the circlets,” she said, her finger pointing at one of Brigid’s nipples, then the other. Brigid stuck her breasts out helpfully. “The old circlets were either uncomfortable to put on, being attached with clips” — Rod detected the slightest wince from Brigid, remembering those horrible old “bulldog” clips from last fall — “or not very secure, with the grommet method. The T’s didn’t work out very well either.”

Rod remembered those big plastic “T” things, attached to Brigid’s nipples. He remembered hitting his head just before that ski resort parade, and having that dream about the T’s getting twisted and yanked off poor Brigid. The actual parade wasn’t too bad, except for the arctic conditions.

“So we developed the braided thread ‘bits’.” Ms. Kleinfelter’s fingers came very close to Brigid’s nipples now as she pointed. Brigid looked down at them as did everyone else. “This is basically simple sewing thread, mercerized, though the uniform here is not so much about the material as to how it’s put on.”

“So she braids it on?” Mr. Charlton said, leaning closer, trying to bend down, adjusting his glasses. “I’m sorry, but it’s hard for me to see . . . ”

Brigid stepped toward him. She wasn’t a short girl but the old man’s eyes were still a good deal above her. She lifted her breasts up closer to his eyes. Not that they sagged — Brigid’s breasts stuck straight out. A paper clip placed under one of them would have fallen unhindered to the floor. But they were big enough and stood away enough from her body so that she could push them up a couple of inches.

Henry Cross turned on the overhead lights, never used except on a night when the band was getting ready for a concert. The lights were quite bright.

Mr. Charlton bent forward as much as he could to detect the nipples that Brigid presented to him. “Oh I see,” he said. The green weaving capping the ends of Brigid’s nipples twinkled in the bright light. For the first time Rod noticed that the thread was shiny. The effect was lovely — that was the only word for it. It kind of reminded him of the electromagnet wiring from science class yesterday, only green instead of copper-colored. “Quite a piece of work here,” the old man contined. “You say braided?”

“Yes, I instructed Miss O’Dierna on it. Quite simple, really.”

“Could you demonstrate?” Henry Cross said. This puzzled Rod. What did he mean by that?

“I have a sample,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, reaching through her pockets. At first she was unable to find anything but then she brought out a tiny envelope, the kind that would hold a padlock key. She grabbed inside with her fingernail and pulled out a thread about three inches long. “Oops.” She had dropped it. Rod bent down to help her look for it. The tiles were a little greenish so it wasn’t easy, but he finally found it next to his boot. Glad to be helpful, he held it up between his thumb and forefinger.

“Give it to Miss O’Dierna.”

Brigid held it up for everyone to see. Rod thought: this slender three-inch thread is half of Brigid’s entire top. . .

“Perhaps you can braid it for us,” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

Brigid looked around uncertainly. “How about on Rod’s finger?”

Ms. Kleinfelter was going to use her own finger but thought this was just as good an idea. “Sure. Use the pinky.”

Rod held out his pinky, surprised to be taking such an active part. He thrilled a little as Brigid’s fingers held his, as she looped the thread around his pinky and began braiding. She crossed the thread once, twice, but then uncrossed one, confused. “Um . . . it’s at the wrong angle. I’m used to doin’ this on . . . me. Sorry.”

Brigid thought for a moment, as everyone stood there uncertainly. Finally she said, “Rod, get behind me, stick your hand under my arm.” Rod soon found himself close up to Brigid’s bare back and shoulders. He looked down below at the rest of her. He had seen her from the rear all year in parades, with that string around her hips, and going down her butt. She seemed so naked with it gone. . . He dared not touch his body against hers, close as it was, for fear that she would feel the hard-on through his underpants and thick wool pants.

Rod couldn’t see what was going on up front, but could feel the thread again being woven around the tip of his pinky as Brigid’s strong left arm held his hand close to her. He exhaled. How he wished she would hug him with those lithe bare arms!

“No, this is too big,” Brigid said. Again she undid the weaving around Rod’s pinky.

“Here,” Ms. Kleinfelter said suddenly, bringing out a pencil. “Hold this, Mr. Sykes. The eraser can simulate the majorette’s nipple.” The pencil was placed in Rod’s hand and now Brigid could do her weaving magic in earnest. Rod looked down at Brigid’s bare toes flexing on the floor, echoing her mental exertions, and tried to detect the rebounding of her movements in the slight vibrations of her butt cheeks, so white and firm. The left one tremored, ever so slightly.

“There,” she said. Her arm released Rod’s hand. She held up the pencil eraser for all to see.

“Remarkable!” Mr. Charlton said, nodding his old bald head. “So fast!” Brigid smiled, pleased and also a little relieved.

“It’s a crochet pattern, basically,” said Ms. Kleinfelter.

“How does it come off?”

Out of the tiny envelope Ms. Kleinfelter fished out a little tweezer. Brigid carefully poked it into the side of the eraser, wiggled it a certain way, and the braiding came unraveled with a tug. It was once again a three-inch length of thread, dangling from the tweezer for all to see. Ms. Kleinfelter put it back into the envelope.

“Remarkable. . . So this . . . free-standing . . . ‘top’ . . . is the way to go?”

“Yes,” Dr. Brophy said in his loud voice. “With a strapped on top there is the danger of what’s called ‘runner’s nipple’, caused by friction with clothing, chafing the breasts. A problem when the moving around is as vigorous as with the Tunemasters majorette.” Rod looked back at the door. This man’s voice was so loud he was sure it could be heard out in the hall. “So this braided bit is probably the most comfortable alternative.”

“Is that true?” Mr. Charlton said, looking up at Brigid’s face.

“Well, they were a little funny at first, but after a while I didn’t even feel them,” she said, looking down at the bits.

Mr. Charlton looked down again. “So you say, Mr. Cross, that these are compliant?”

“Yes,” Henry Cross said. “The local law refers to ‘entirely exposed’, and in another place it says, ‘nipples’. Reading these together, we have a good faith argument that so long as the nipples are not entirely exposed, the uniform is compliant.”

Mr. Charlton, and indeed all of them, looked at Brigid’s “bits” appraisingly. Then he said, “Are they secure? They’re not going to fall off, are they?”

“No,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. She nodded at Brigid. Brigid then took a breath and violently shook her breasts from side to side. Then she took another breath and did it again. She looked down as her boobs came to rest. The bits were still on.

“There . . . is the matter of . . . weather,” Henry Cross said, looking at the doctor. “Isn’t it true that those . . . parts . . . change with conditions?”

“Oh yes.” Bernie Brophy bent down to his attache case, which for him was a long way down. “It is room temperature and dry here, of course. But the human body . . . uh, where is it? Oh here . . . The human body undergoes changes with moisture and temperature, particularly the latter. . . and this is especially true of female nipples . . .”

As he stood up he presented a little battery-operated blow dryer. He turned it on, the sound echoing through the small room. Brophy’s voice was even louder to be heard over it. “I’ll give it a minute to heat up . . . to simulate a very hot day . . .

“Here,” he said, handing it to Brigid. “Put it on your bits for thirty seconds. I’ll let you know when time’s up.”

Brigid handled the dryer uncertainly. Then she aimed it one bit, then the other. She looked up at Brophy who nodded that she was doing it right.

They all stood there as Brigid’s bits, and more importantly the nipples they only partly hid, were blasted with hot air. “Nipples expand with heat,” Brophy practially shouted over the noise. “Let’s see.”

Rod thought back at that cold, rainy football season, then the winter parades. When was Brigid ever treated to a hot day? Maybe at the end of the year, the big Memorial Day parade. . . God, that blower was hot as blazes!! He could feel the heat even from where he was. Brigid, directly under its blast, started sweating as the seconds ticked by slowly. She swallowed, clearly uncomfortable. Her nips must feel on fire!

Finally Bernie Brophy nodded and Brigid thankfully turned the little dryer off and handed it back to him. Her entire chest was flushed and red, as was her face. It was as if she had been standing in front of an oven. They all looked down at her nipples, engorged and reddish, the bits seemingly about to pop off. With a nod from Ms. Kleinfelter the majorette shook her reddened breasts again. The bits stayed on!

“And now,” Bernie Brophy said, his voice only a little softer now that the dryer was gone, “we will see how the uniform stands up to rain and cold.”

“Yes,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. “Unfortunately a majorette has to march through rain and wind. Even sleet and snow, this year.” “So I heard,” Mr. Charlton said. “I don’t know how you stand it, Beverly.”

“I keep moving,” Brigid said. It was her stock response. Delivered with strength and pride, Rod now realized, remembering the photo in her living room of her leading the band in the White Mountain Winter Parade.

“Her name’s Brigid,” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

“Oh yes . . . right,” Mr. Charlton said, taking his glasses off and wiping them. “So you’ve marched in some frigid parades. Frigid Brigid, you might say, hee hee . . . ”

Everyone rolled their eyes, including Brigid. Even Henry Cross betrayed a slight eye-flick upward.

When the old Board V.P. had put his glasses back on, Bernie Brophy stood up from his attache case with a thermos that turned out to be full of ice cubes.

10.

Dr. Bernie Brophy, equipped for everything, had brought a salad tong, now holding up an ice cube. “Applying this to the nipples will simulate the effects of rain on a cold day. I understand there were many such days this past year.”

Brigid was taken aback by this. As she was given the tong she exchanged glances with Rod. “Go ahead and rub it over the bits, Miss, and also around the areolas.”

“The — ?”

“The pink circles around your nipples.”

Well of course Brigid knew what areolas were, but she had only read the word, and never heard it pronounced. Neither had Rod.

As they watched, the majorette gingerly touched the ice cube to the “bit” capping her left nipple. She inhaled, then exhaled, her concave tummy betraying every nuance of the motions of her diaphragm deep within. Now the cube went past the bit, and circled the exposed part of the nipple. Now it touched the areola, the pink circle that was a little more than an inch across. Everyone watched intently. Frost started condensing on the outside of the cube and now it glided over the areola on a coat of water, starting to melt.

Rod guessed it must be a relief to Brigid to feel something cold on her nipples, after that hot blow dryer. But she had to keep on and on, per instructions. She transferred the cube to the other bit and began noodling it back around the nipple, and around the surrounding pink circle. As she continued to ice her nipples she shivered a little.

Brophy pointed to her left nipple. “Notice how it is puckered and hard, not only wet but also the volume is reduced. Yet the braiding seems secure. . . Notice also the raising of the pores on the areola.” He hardly needed to point that out. Brigid’s pink circles were now bristling with raised bumps that looked like pimples. “Not really relevant to the uniform, but this shows the arousal of the sebaceous glands underneath the skin.” The areola was also puffing out, like a cone. This caused the bit to stick out further. Her entire breast looked pointier than usual.

They looked intently as Brigid continued icing the right nipple and areola, until that breast stuck out as much as the other. She looked up at Brophy, who nodded for her to continue. Back to the left nipple. Her bare shoulders twitched as she shivered again, causing her boobs to jiggle. Drops of water now fell from the extending pink cones at the ends of her breasts, falling down to the floor, just missing her toes.

She closed her eyes and went back to the right nipple. “That would be good, Miss,” Brophy said. With relief she handed the tong back to him, closed much tighter now around what was left of the ice cube.

“Now see if the bits stay on, dear,” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

Brigid put her arms down to her sides and shook her breasts violently. Bits of water flung out, hitting Brophy in the face, sprinkling Mr. Charlton’s glasses. Even Ms. Kleinfelter and Henry Cross got their share. The four grown-ups laughed aloud.

Brigid stood there in alarm, her breasts coming to rest, her puffed-out areolas and hardened nipples glistening with water. She wondered what she had done and was confused by the laugher. Rod looked on, just as alarmed.

But it was O.K. “Good work, Miss O’Dierna,” Ms. Kleinfelter said as the grown-ups brushed the water off their faces and clothes. Mr. Charlton wiped his glasses with a tissue from his pocket. With nearly sightless eyes he looked toward the majorette’s boobs. “Well, I can’t tell direct, but I bet those things stayed on, or we would’ve felt ’em pop out at us.”

Indeed the bits had stayed on. Brigid looked down at them.

“So you see gentlemen,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, reassured, extending her hand to Brigid’s breasts as if introducing them, “the bits not only are comfortable and unobtrusive, but they also stay on under any possible parade condition!”

Henry Cross raised an eyebrow. In a slow, quiet voice he said, “We haven’t tested all possibilities.”

“What do you mean?”

The lawyer glanced briefly at Brophy and then said, “The ice cube was at the freezing point, maybe just below. But there have been occasions . . .”

“Yes,” Brophy said in his loud voice. “I am told that at an engagement in Vermont recently, the temperature at parade time was 18 degrees Fahrenheit, with a wind chill of just below zero. A short parade, of course; the majorette here was in a coat until march time. But there is that period of exposure to take account of. And there were other parades that were almost as cold.”

This time what he brought out of the attache case was a spray can. Rod and Brigid looked at it with widened eyes. What — ?

“Inside this can is a dry ice emulsion.”

“Dry ice?!” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

“No, don’t worry, I’m not asking the majorette here to risk freezer burn, or frostbite.” He aimed the can upward and gave it a quick toot. It looked like white smoke and it quickly disappeared. “By the time it leaves the can it is a lot, um, warmer than dry ice. But a few seconds of application will simulate, say, half an hour at zero wind chill. Far greater than she would ever actually endure.”

This big bear of a man, heavily clothed in his three piece suit, approached the nearly naked majorette with the spray can in his hand. Rod saw Brigid’s toes flex and knew she was reflexively thinking of backing away. “Now don’t worry Miss, this will sting a bit, but only for a second.”

Everyone held their breath as the spray can approached Brigid’s left nipple. Brigid shut her eyes as if about to get a needle stuck into her arm.

The jet of white frost, actually bits of frozen carbon dioxide mixed in air, shot at the nipple and areola. Brigid’s eyes popped open and her teeth clenched. The blast went on and on. It was actually only ten seconds but it stretched out like forever. The girl hyperventilated so as to endure this shock to her most sensitive area. Finally it stopped. But for Brigid the ordeal was only half over. Brophy moved the can over to the other nipple, which was in similar fashion subjected to a tiny blizzard, an icy blast of subfreezing air.

When it was over the ends of Brigid’s breasts were covered in white frost. The white areas extended past her areolas, covering almost half her breasts. It looked like white spray paint. The bits were invisible; for all one could tell, Brigid had been entirely bare-breasted before being sprayed.

She looked down at her whitened boobs in what only could be described as horror.

“The whiteness will disappear in a few seconds, Miss,” Brophy said. “Now see if the bits are secure.”

Brigid gulped and shook again. This time it was little flecks of icy whitenss that sprayed out at the grown-ups.

Ms. Kleinfelter smiled as the whiteness melted into wetness and tiny bits of green started showing through. They had stayed on.

“Thank you, Miss, sorry for the discomfort,” Brophy said, putting the spray can away. “But you’ve shown that the top part of the new uniform is as tough as you are.”

Brigid smiled, complimented. But then she shivered and said, “I’m cold.” It was so rare for her to actually say that, no matter how cold she felt in her tiny uniform. She cupped her breasts with her hands, gently rubbing and massaging her nipples and areolas, warming them back up, getting the feeling back.

They all watched her cupping her breasts, rubbing them. “Good job on the fingernails,” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

“Thanks,” Brigid said, briefly spreading her fingers. The nail polish, black and white in even divisions, was meticulously done. As she continued to cup her breasts she looked at Rod. She looked so sexy doing that. He remembered the first time he sat down with her, in that fast food place during the Foxboro parade, how she cupped her breasts to comfort them after taking off those horrid clipped-on circlets, how she looked up at him with an amused and embarrassed smile. He was so in love with her!

“So that’s that as to the uniform top,” Mr. Charlton said. He peered through his glasses at Brigid’s head. “What about the little crown she had?”

“Oh, the tiara,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. “We just had to do away with that. It kept falling off, or almost so. What the majorette does these days is just too vigorous to keep anything on her head.”

“I see . . .” Now Mr. Charlton looked down through his thick glasses to Brigid’s cleanly shaven pubic lips, and the little sliver of green between them. “And what about the bottom part?” The rest of them, Ms. Kleinfelter, Henry Cross, Dr. Bernie Brophy, and Rod, all looked down there too. Brigid herself looked down at her smoothy-shaven pubic lips, and the green sliver inserted in between.

11.

RRRRINGGGGG!

Rod and Brigid looked at each other. Sixth period — he had Woodworking, she had Spanish. They were both conscientious students and hated being late.

After the long bell ended, Mr. Charlton said, “Don’t worry kids, we’ll be done in a bit and then we’ll take you to the office to get hall passes. Got to get you by Mr. Poznik.” They all smiled, even a faint smile from Henry Cross.

“So what about the bottom part?” the old man said again, looking down at the lower part of the new majorette uniform.

“It’s called a ‘wisp’,” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

Mr. Charlton rubbed his chin, and bent forward to the extent his old spine would allow. “Can’t see it too good from here.”

Brigid looked down and slightly parted her legs, hoping to give the Board Vice President as good as view as possible.

“I think it’s very pretty,” Rod said. Then he realized he had spoken out of turn. Or perhaps not. Brigid smiled at him. Then she opened her legs a little more and stuck her crotch out, happy to show off the lovely green wisp.

“Well thank you, young man,” Ms. Kleinfelter said with a rare smile. From her standpoint, at least, Rod had said the right thing.

“Still hard to see,” Mr. Charlton said. “I have to report to the Board, you know.”

They stood around, trying to think of what to do. Then Bernie Brophy, his large bulk turning to the sousaphone chair, said loudly, “Why doesn’t she get up on that, brace herself with the instrument?”

It was a wide metal chair with clipped uprights to support the big, round, white sousaphone, so that you could just slip in from the side and play that thing, without having to hold it up. Last year, with Brad about to graduate, Sarge had tried to get Rod to switch from trombone. It was too exhausting. That thing took a lot of wind. And the low notes sounded like farting, which made him giggle. So now they only used the one sousaphone out in the band room, played by Myron, who was built like a tank and was strong enough to march with it.

Red was glad he hadn’t switched. As a sousaphone player, he would’ve spent the year marching in the back row, never enjoying the close-up views of Brigid.

The majorette in her new uniform looked over at the chair uncertainly. “Go ahead,” Bernie Brophy said, “if you could just climb up on it and face us, it will bring your uniform bottom up to . . . uh . . . eye level.”

Should she climb up and turn around? Or skittle up backward? Brigid decided on the second course. She faced her observers and, looking to her sides, braced her toes on one side of the seat, then the other. She reached back and grabbed the big round bell of the sousaphone with one hand, then the other, as her all-but-bare breasts swayed and bounced. Finally she placed each foot onto an arm, her toes curling over the sides. Her butt rested uncomfortably against the bottom of the bell. Her knees were bent and it was an awkward position. But it brought her crotch up to their faces and, with her thighs parted, they could see the green wisp to full advantage.

The grown-ups gathered around, Mr. Charlton in the middle, their heads leaning as close as possible without bumping into each other. Rod stood on one side. He looked up at Brigid’s face, high above, and gave a reassuring smile. Brigid’s smile was a little less confident, maybe because of her precarious perch. The extended posture made her tummy concave, and it breathed in and out, a sign of the stress on her muscles. Of course, Brigid was in great shape and could deal with it.

Ms. Kleinfelter pointed to the smoothness of the girl’s vaginal lips, Brigid’s clear white skin almost gleaming in the bright overhead light, without a trace of any razor rash. “Notice the fine job Miss O’Dierna did with depilation. Along with the nails, the majorette’s efforts at getting ready for the march must be meticulous.” Ms. Kleinfelter also pointed to the perfectly done polish on Brigid’s toes, which were spread out over the end of the arm of the chair.

“Yes, I see that,” Mr. Charlton said, adjusting his glasses. “It seems risky, a razor down there.”

“Since 1998 the use of a razor has been necessary. But done correctly there is no hazard. And the finishing is easy also, right?”

“I use . . . cream,” Brigid said, looking briefly behind her to adjust her grip on the sousaphone bell. The effect was to cause her chest to stick out. Rod glanced at the momentary jiggle and the bits on her nipples. It was interesting to see them from this angle, above his head. He also noticed how round and firm Brigid’s breasts were. The size of large oranges, more or less. The roundness of their bottoms sloped into her chest, above the visible contours of her ribs, with no hint of sag.

RRRIIINNGGGG!

Sixth period began. They could hear someone moving into one of the practice rooms. Rod remembered that his bookbag and instrument, and Brigid’s, were in one of them. No, these kids were using one of the others. From the sound of voices he could hear it was Lynn McCaig, and either Thalia or Danica, flute players. They would have no reason to come into the big instrument room.

“I can also see the effects of the body conditioning class,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. She was right about that. Brigid’s strained, spread out posture emphasized the definition of her inner thigh muscles, her firm calves. Up above, her triceps and biceps were well-defined in the harsh light.

No, it was Danica, not Thalia. As the four of them appreciated Brigid’s muscles they could also hear Danica and Lynn begin chatting.

“I oversee that class,” Dr. Brophy said loudly, his voice echoing off the walls. “Ms. Janowski says Miss O’Dierna is one of her most dedicated students. She’s always trying to lift more weight than the week before.” He pointed to Brigid’s opened thighs. “Notice the adductor muscles. She is very strong for someone her size. I’ll bet she could bench press 200 pounds.”

Brigid smiled, with a little twinkle of the eye, which told everyone that she was already able to do it.

Danica and Lynn began an out-of-tune scale, low notes that sounded pretty crappy.

“Go ahead, push me,” Bernie Brophy said playfully. “Push me with your foot, right here.” He opened his jacket and pointed to the vest underneath. Covering his shirt, undershirt, and of course he also wore pants, underpants, shoes and socks.

Brigid, clad only in a few strands of thread, smiled and braced one bare foot flat onto the chair seat. She stretched the other out and pressed it against Dr. Brophy’s vest. He leaned forward. Brigid marshaled her thigh muscles and pressed back against the vest. Her toes braced and spread out among the buttons.

He leaned forward more, only to be met with more resistance. “See?” he said to Mr. Charlton, Ms. Kleinfelter, and Rod. And also to Henry Cross. “I weigh 260. This is a strong girl!”

He stood back up and brushed off his vest, and closed his jacket. It was a little tight. “I should weigh \*less\*,” he said with a loud guffaw. “Maybe \*I\* should start taking that class.”

They all laughed. And now Mr. Charlton said, “Now about that bottom part.”

Through the closed door they could hear Danica and Lynn began ascending scales up to the top register, sounding pretty painful.

Brigid crept back up into her former posture, reaching back with her hands, her bottom sitting against the sousaphone bell, her knees bent and her thighs splayed, her toes curled around the arms of the chair.

“How is that . . . wisp . . . fastened?” the old man said.

Ms. Kleinfelter said, “Well it is hard to see, but it begins by braiding around the . . . uh . . . feminine anatomy, the little part that sticks out. The braiding pattern is different than on the bits because the purpose is to pull, rather than grab.”

Now, the sounds of flutes tooting some high arpeggios. As they warmed up the girls sounded a little better.

Brigid looked down at her crotch. “I loop the thread once, then pull a little, then two cross-braids, and after that the rest is easy.”

“I’m unclear on this,” Mr. Charlton said. “What do you loop around?”

“My . . . clitoris,” Brigid said, blushing. She mispronounced it, so that it rhymed with “Delores”.

Behind the door, Rod heard Sammy’s voice. He had busted in on the flute practice and was joking around with Danica.

“Oh . . . ”

“Yes, it has to be drawn out first,” Ms. Kleinfelter added.

Sammy was joking about the football uniform he almost decided to wear. This being Uniform Day, the three of them, Danica and Lynn and Sammy, were in their full-coverage wool uniforms now, just like Rod was.

“Sounds uncomfortable.”

Brigid squinted a little. “It feels funny at first, me bein’ tugged down . . . ”

“But it is very secure,” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

“Well that’s one thing, make sure it doesn’t fall off in a parade, in front of the mayor and the crowd and the TV and whatnot,” Mr. Charlton said. “Strange, but . . . creative.”

“Thank you,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, complimented.

“Yes, you deserve a lot of credit for your uniform designs,” Mr. Charlton said. “Everyone says that.”

Back in the practice room, Danica said to Sammy, “Your buttons are crooked.”

Sammy said, “There’s so damn many of them, it takes me f\*\*kin’ half an hour . . .” Oh boy, that must be embarrassing, Rod thought. He and Brigid exchanged quick glances. This old guy is on the Board of Education and he’s overhearing students using profanity.

Mr. Charlton, looking down at the wisp and then up at the bits, seemed not to hear, or maybe pretended not to.

Ms. Kleinfelter jumped in quickly: “The important thing is to present an attractive appearance, while affording a minimum of interference with the majorette’s moves. . . This new uniform has about one-tenth the coverage of the previous one. In total, about a third of a square inch.”

“Your pants are crooked too,” Lynn said, evidently to Sammy. Now they heard both girls giggling, then laughing out loud.

Rod’s mind wondered what was going on back there, but then his mind spun into those calculations again. One-third of a square inch! 3000 square inches of skin . . . 1/3 of a square inch . . . the rest of the band had 96% coverage . . . As the grown-ups contemplated the wisp in Brigid’s crotch, he did the math: One-hundredth of one percent of Brigid’s body is covered. Marching down the street, each of the rest of the band members was wearing 9,600 times as much as the majorette was.

He looked down at the fingernail on his pinky. Brigid has less coverage on her entire body than the area of that little fingernail. Yet she thought of herself as fully turned out, and was proud to wear that one-third of a square inch of a uniform.

Mr. Charlton said, “The other question is, is it compliant? It looks like just one strand down here.” He pointed to the sliver of green between Brigid’s pubic lips.

“Well your blouse is not even with your jacket,” Sammy shot back. More giggling.

Henry Cross said, “True, there is just one strand of thread. The ordinance says only that the genitals must be covered. But notice how, with a female this age, the labia majora are continuous with the surrounding skin. There is no legally defensible way to distinguish. Further, the clitoris is braided, and the single thread has utility in covering the unseen parts. Therefore in my opinion it is compliant.”

“Nothing to see, in other words.”

“Yes, that’s essentially it.”

Mr. Charlton stood back, wrinkling his chin. “I am impressed. I think the Board will be too.”

Ms. Kleinfelter and Henry Cross exchanged little smiles. Rod smiled proudly up at Brigid. She must have been relieved, because she broke out into a wide smile, her teeth shining in the light, her green eyes squinting.

They stood there, looking at Brigid’s lower lips and the single thread between them. Her toes readjusted on the chair.

“It’s supposed to be nice tomorrow,” Lynn said.

“Finally, a parade that’s not — ” It was hard to hear what Danica was saying but it sounded like the last word was “freezing”.

“No, we’ll be sweating our nuts off in these things instead,” Sammy said.

“Speak for yourself!” Danica said. More giggling. Not much practicing was going on in that practice room.

12.

Brigid’s cleanly shaved pubic lips, legally covered by the single thread that bisected them, shone in the light for the benefit of the grown-ups.

Then Mr. Charlton said, “Of course, there’s one more . . . area . . . to concern with.”

“Yes,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. “Um . . . ”

“Miss O’Dierna,” Bernie Brophy said, “can you turn yourself around on that chair?”

Brigid, perched on the sousaphone chair with the precariousness of the grip of her fingers and toes, looked to her sides and down below. First she stuck her crotch out, her pubic lips almost in everyone’s face . . .

“I could never wear one of those thong things,” Danica said, two closed doors behind them. Which made Sammy laugh. Rod shut his eyes. What the hell was going on back there in that practice room?? They had no idea the Board Vice President, and the district physician, and Ms. Kleinfelter, the Fashion Design teacher, were standing here, within earshot. Before they know it they’ll say something that can’t be ignored by these folks and then they’ll be in trouble.

The majorette looked behind her and ungripped one hand from the sousaphone bell. She turned her upper torso around, her breasts bouncing as she abruptly switched hands on the bell. Her knee twisted out toward them.

“No, bikini bottom is the limit for me,” Lynn said. “Nothing less.” “Me neither,” said Sammy. “Whoa, whoa!” said the girls. “No, I mean on hot babes!” he said, laughing. “Really!”

Brigid’s delicate shoulder blades were now facing them. Bracing her weight against the bell, she brought her feet flat onto the seat of the chair, then spread them apart. She stuck her butt out to the extent she could.

“Is this O.K.?” she said, turning her head to them and looking down over her bare shoulder. Rod looked lovingly down her spine, her visible backbone, the back muscles narrowing down to the inward slopes of her narrow waist, the cute dimples over the hard glutes, the Y-shaped indentation over her butt crack. If her body was, like she said, part of her uniform, it was by far the most beautiful part!

Mr. Charlton looked up at Brigid’s bare buns.

“No, spread your legs a little, Miss O’Dierna,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. “We can’t see the, uh, rest of the uniform bottom.”

“I hate seeing thongs on the beach,” said Sammy, who probably had never actually seen one there. “Keep your flabby butts to yourself!” “Ewww!” said Lynn.

Brigid’s taut, trim butt cheeks separated a little as she brought her toes up to clasp one of the arms of the sousaphone chair. Now, she did the same with the other foot. Something green could be seen up inside there . . .

“Could you get a little higher?” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

Brigid looked down at the sousaphone to see what she could climb further up on. Her breasts probably blocked her view a little. Now, she brought her right foot up to the sousaphone’s valves. Her hips tipped and her right butt cheek moved higher . . . With uncertain toes she clasped the tops of the valves, and hoisted up her right leg. Her hips were tilted away from them now and she could stick her butt up more. “How about now?”

Her tight little butt cheeks were now separated enough to reveal a green button-shaped thing in between. “Yes,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. “That’s good, thank you.”

Brigid looked down at her toes, then up at the wall in front of her. Her shoulders and arms moved slightly as she adjusted the clutching of her fingers on the top of the sousaphone bell. She was perched like a cat that had scampered up the front of the sousaphone, about to pounce up to the ceiling.

Ms. Kleinfelter pointed to the green button as Mr. Charlton peered in closer. “What’s that?” he said.

“It is a braided part of the wisp, we call it the ‘snowflake’. It covers the anus.”

Mr. Charlton said, “Hmmm. How does it stay . . . on?”

“The end of the wisp is a knot that goes inside. That secures it and anchors the wisp from the lower end.”

“Won’t it . . . pop out?”

“No, it expands once inside. It doesn’t come out until extra lubrication is applied.”

From the practice room, Lynn said, “You wouldn’t catch ME wearing one of those. I like my butt covered.”

“Yeah,” Danica said in a cutting voice. “Those girls who –” Their voices were blocked out by some trombone playing. Rod guessed it was Jaycee, in the third practice room, probably showing off for Nilda. In fact he was certain about that — Jaycee was playing Beyonce’s “Sweet Dream” with corny slides going up and down.

“Trust me,” Brigid said, turning around with a little smirk, “it doesn’t pop out.” She smiled down at Rod and shrugged her shoulders.

“The design of the snowflake is very individualized,” explained Ms. Kleinfelter. “The braiding pattern is, again, in the crochet style, and it is based on six radiating aspects, and many different designs are possible, hence the name, snowflake. See the work that Brigid did.” Ms. Kleinfelter’s finger pointed, practically stuck in between the majorette’s butt cheeks. “A very pretty design, wouldn’t you say?” Indeed it was, delicate and intricate, like a real snowflake. And even around her butthole Brigid was beautiful — the clear, white skin in the valley between her butt cheeks.

“Try this,” Bernie Brophy said, giving a large magnifying glass to Mr. Charlton. Dr. Brophy’s attache case was equipped for everything.

The old man took off his glasses and peered through the magnifier. Rod was so close that he could see the enlarged image. The green snowflake was pretty, even in such a place. He could see the darker color of Brigid’s sphincter skin through the tracings of thread. A contrast with the whiteness of the rest of her. He had always thought of that area of the body as dirty, of course, but Brigid’s was pretty. It was odd to think that, but it was true.

“Yes . . .” Mr. Charlton said, his wide-open eyes straining as he tried to focus. “Good work, Miss O’Dierna.”

Rod could tell that Brigid, facing the wall again, was blushing with pride. “Thanks,” she said. Her toes readjusted their grip on the valves. They were pressing nos. 2 and 3. Rod tried to remember his two lessons with Brad. What would that note be? C? F sharp? He suddenly imagined Brigid placing her anus onto the sousaphone and farting some low notes. He suppressed a giggle.

“Isn’t it uncomfortable?” the old man said. “And is it safe?”

Bernie Brophy said, “Provided the proper precautions are taken, and it is inserted and taken out gently, it’s perfectly safe.” Rod suddenly remembered the enema bottle in the bathroom of Brigid’s house . . . !

“And . . .” Mr. Charlton turned back to Henry Cross. “Compliant?”

For the first time, Henry Cross leaned forward to take a closer look at Brigid’s all-but-bare body. “The anus must be covered. Again, to the extent the area is contiguous with and not separate and distinct from the surrounding skin, we believe it cannot be called part of the prohibited, uh, body part. The creases of the sphincter, and the differently colored skin, are in Miss O’Dierna’s case probably about half an inch across, and the braided ‘snowflake’, as it’s called, adequately covers that, uh, area.”

Brigid had taken little breaths while trying to remain still. Now, she took a deep breath and straightened her back. She looked up at the ceiling. Rod thought he saw her butthole twitch, and the snowflake with it. He saw that freckle that Jamal had pointed out, on the inside of the left cheek, a little above and to the left of her butthole, the freckle that he and all the other trombone players had watched at that last football game, as icy rain washed over it . . . Brigid’s clasping toes changed position and now they were on valves 1 and 2. E flat? G?

Mr. Charlton shook his head with wonder. “Amazing, what you’ve done, Miss Kleinfelter. Again, you deserve congratulations.”

“Thank you.”

Brigid turned and looked down on everyone.

Ms. Kleinfelter looked up at her and said, “Miss O’Dierna, you can come down now. Thanks very much!”

Rod saw his chance to help. He stepped forward so that the tasseled shoulder of his jacket was pressed against Brigid’s bare hip. She put her arms down around his neck. As he helped her hop down he felt the bottoms of her breasts press against his face. They were warm and soft. Heaven!

The majorette’s bare feet slapped against the floor and now she stood before them, shaking her muscles out, bits pointing back and forth.

“It might be interesting,” Bernie Brophy said, “to show how that snowflake, and the knot, how they get braided.”

Ms. Kleinfelter got out the pencil from before, and the tiny envelope. This time the thread she pulled out was about twelve inches long. Brigid held the pencil between her thighs, the eraser end sticking out behind, below her butt. With quick fingers she braided the thread around the sharpened point in front. The point, Rod realized, represented her clitoris. This used up about three inches of the thread. Brigid tugged on the remainder. Amazingly, the braid stayed grabbed onto the point. Then, she pinched off three inches of thread and her fingers began to shoot in and out, around and around, forming a web and then shrinking it tight, then another web . . . In less than a minute she had made a “snowflake”.

This left four inches of the thread. “Now the end of the wisp,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, “is a special knot, related to what’s called a ‘monkey fist’ knot. Miss O’Dierna has to sit . . . ”

The Fashion Design teacher and the majorette looked at the sousaphone chair. It was obstructed by the sousaphone itself.

“I can sit on the floor,” Brigid said. Before anyone could say anything, she had placed her bare buns on the cold tiles. She stretched one leg out, then leaned forward with the almost-completed wisp in her fingers. She spread her toes and looped the end of the thread around her third toe, and went to work with flying fingers. The remaining thread was wrapped into a netting that covered the top of her toe, down to the base of the painted toenail. Now she slipped it off her toe, wrapped one final loop of thread around, and pulled on the snowflake to tighten the netting into a round knot.

Brigid got up energetically, feet slapping on the floor, breasts bouncing, and handed the finished wisp to Ms. Kleinfelter.

“Note that this knot is spherical, with air inside, like a hollow ball,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, crushing the knot between her fingers like a little grape. “Once inside, the natural action of the internal, uh . . . ” She looked to Dr. Brophy.

Bernie Brophy said, “The moistness of the internal membranes act so as to expand the size of this threaded sphere. This makes it more secure and also more comfortable.”

“IS it comfortable, Miss O’Dierna?” Mr. Charlton asked.

Brigid thought for a moment, as if picking her words carefully. “I feel it at first, but then I don’t notice it, except with some types of throws. It’s O.K., really.”

“Afterward,” Brophy said, “with vaseline, it comes out, and can easily be rinsed and cleaned and put away until the next parade.”

Ms. Kleinfelter held up the newly-braided wisp one more time for Mr. Charlton’s benefit, then put it away in the tiny envelope.

13.

“Again, my congratulations,” Mr. Charlton said. “So . . .” He looked at Brigid, who was standing next to him, at her bits and down at her crotch, where he knew the wisp was in there somewhere. “This is a . . . green uniform because she’ll wear it tomorrow at the St. Patrick’s Day Parade.”

“Yes, the new uniform is event specific,” said Ms. Kleinfelter. “Let me show you something. And Miss O’Dierna too. . .” From her bag she presented an elegant black-felt case, a foot long, an inch wide, that looked like a case for a necklace. She opened it up, carefully. “I’ve made these in one piece, to be cut up by the majorette for braiding.”

On a bed of plush, shiny white satin there lay a golden thread, eleven or so inches long. She dangled it gently from her fingers. “This, Miss O’Dierna, is for next month, the End of Winter Carnival Parade up in Vermont, I forget the name of the town. This is the uniform you will wear.”

Brigid pinched the thin thread between her thumb and forefinger and draped it lovingly over her other hand. It was hard to see the fine, shiny thread but it did look gold, once you detected it. “Oh wow. . . it’s beautiful!” She showed it excitedly to Rod. He nodded; yes, he supposed the gold thread was beautiful.

“And this,” said Ms. Kleinfelter, introducing another thread, “is what you will wear for the Memorial Day Parade.”

Brigid held it up to the light. “Oh, red white and blue stripes. I see!” She placed both uniforms, both slender threads, back into the case, careful to line them up next to each other. “Thank you very much, Ms. Kleinfelter!” She looked like she felt like hugging the older lady but resisted.

Before Ms. Kleinfelter closed the case, she let Brigid look at the threads a little more — all that would be covering her body at the Winter Carnival, and all that would be covering her body in the big Memorial Day Parade. “Can I wear them as an earring before I cut them, like I did with this?” She motioned down to her bits and wisp. Rod thought: one-hundredth of one percent of her body . . . the rest of the band wore 9,600 times as much as their majorette wore . . .

“Of course,” Ms. Kleinfelter murmured benevolently. Smiling, the old lady closed the little case.

Now, suddenly, back in the practice room, Danica and Lynn were practicing again, playing arpeggios together. And Jaycee was practicing too, that hard passage from “Manhattan Beach”. Rod had a sense of what that meant —

A moment later, Sarge opened the door, in his usual business suit. He looked a little surprised.

“Hello, Mr. Watson,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. She introduced Dr. Brophy and Henry Cross. Mr. Charlton nodded.

“I was just showing them the new majorette uniform,” Ms. Kleinfelter explained, motioning to Brigid’s breasts and crotch.

“Ah yes, the bits and wisp,” Sarge said tolerantly. “It doesn’t matter so much what the uniform is, but who’s in it.” He smiled at Brigid. “We’ve never had a better majorette than Brigid here.” He put his hand on her bare shoulder. “She’s the best . . . Hi Rod . . . ”

“One more question,” Mr. Charlton said, looking down. “What happened to the shoes?” They all looked at Brigid’s bare feet, next to their own feet equipped with shoes and socks.

“We took them away,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. “They were interfering. You remember that last game in December, when they got stuck in the freezing mud. She did fine after she kicked them off.”

Mr. Charlton said, “Yes, I heard. I don’t know how you survived that speech by old Roddington,” he said, smiling at Brigid. “That man could always talk the sun down. . .” He looked down again. “But on a parade . . . Won’t the road hurt her feet? What if she steps on something sharp?”

“She’s been told to toughen her soles,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. “And I thought you knew, but –” She looked at Sarge.

“I only march if I make sure the street’s just been swept and cleaned,” Sarge said. “It’s not just the majorette. The rest of the band wears boots, but oil or grease can trip up anyone.”

“I see.” They were all still looking down at Brigid’s pretty feet, the evenly painted toenails.

“It lets me do more moves,” Brigid said with a hint of enthusiasm. “Let me show you?” She scampered back to the practice room where her things were. Before Mr. Charlton could finish saying, “What? In here?”, she was back with her baton.

In the small space, before the five grownups and Rod, Brigid did what she showed Rod in her back yard, that little back-throw where she slapped the baton back with her upturned soles. Then she did it again, and the trick where the baton snaked over her shoulders. Finally she tossed the baton in front of her, kicked up, caught it between her big toe and her second toe, and spun it back into her hand.

They could only clap at that one, Rod clapping the hardest. Brigid bowed deeply, her breasts dipping down with the rest of her.

“Thank you very much for your time, young lady,” Mr. Charlton said. “Let us get you to the office so you can get a hall pass.”

“No, I can give them passes,” Sarge said.

The four of them, Ms. Kleinfelter, Dr. Brophy, Mr. Charlton and Henry Cross, left with goodbyes. As they went down the hall, out of earshot or so they thought, Rod heard Henry Cross say, “The conference room? They’re waiting.”

As Rod and Brigid stood there in the big instrument room, Sarge took out his pad and signed the hall passes. Then he went to one of the lockers to work on a sticky valve on a bass trombone.

Back in the practice room, Rod and Brigid waved through the window to Danica and Lynn, and further down to Jaycee and Nilda. Then sat down and started getting their things together.

They were no longer private. Rod sighed, knowing the opportunity to kiss Brigid was lost. But he sensed that sometime soon he would get another chance. He looked at the majorette and said, “You were great! And those tricks! I never saw that last one before!”

Brigid smiled and looked down. Then she said, “I have a couple more.”

Rod looked at her, puzzled. She stood up and looked through the windows, making sure no one was watching. “Look.”

She threw her shoulders back, standing straight up and perfectly still. Then one breast jumped up!

“Whoa!” he said. “Wack!”

She smiled down at him and did it again. And did the same with the other breast! It was like they were attached by strings that someone was yanking from behind. Like she was a marionette.

“How did you do that?”

She caught her breath. “Practice. It’s exhaustin’.” Now a conspiratorial smile and another glance through the window to make sure the coast was clear.

“Here (“heah”) . . . Look at my wisp.”

Rod looked at the little thread between her pussy lips. He was sitting down, so it was just a little below eye level.

The wisp jumped up! And then twice more! It was a quick, little jump, like it was winking at him, pulling up the tops of her bare pubic lips with it.

His mouth opened in astonishment. “That’s so . . . weird . . . and amazing,” he said, picking a better word. He didn’t want to call Brigid “weird”. “What . . . what was that I just saw?”

“Well, I just pull up with my . . . clitoris.” Like before, she seemed uncomfortable saying the word, mispronouncing it. “Funny, right?”

Rod looked up at her with admiration. “You are a prize, Brigid. A treasure.”

Brigid smiled and helped him up. Of course they could not kiss now, people would see, Danica especially, and it would be all over the school by eighth period. But Brigid brushed very close to him as they passed out of the practice room, down the hallway, and then started off to their sixth period classes.

14.

The two Tunemasters in their uniforms walked down the empty halls, his marching boots clip-clopping on the terrazzo floor all but drowning out the gentle slaps of her bare feet. They were waiting for the ever-present Mr. Poznik. That little old guy appeared around a corner; he must have some kind of radar. He wordlessly checked the kids’ passes and let them go.

“Is today your body conditioning class?” Rod said. He wanted to peak in on her . . . He almost laughed when he realized why. He had gotten so used to seeing her in her skimpy uniform that it would be interesting to see her in something more substantial, like workout clothes.

“No . . . I’m goin’ to extra help math,” she said, shifting the bookbag on her shoulder. The bottom of it bumped rhythmically against her butt. As her hard bare heels softly thudded on the floor, her breasts jiggled gently with each step.

“Oh . . .” Rod really couldn’t go to with her there. He was good at math and everyone there would know it.

Rod’s Woodworking class was usually pretty interesting to him. He always liked working with tools. But he knew his mind was still on the intimate show Brigid had been asked to give to those grown-ups. He could hardly think; he kept running those scenes through his mind. So he stayed away from the power tools and anything else that required too much concentration.

Fifteen minutes into class, the public address system came on. It was Sarge. “Attention, this is a brief announcement. At tonight’s all-district concert, Tunemasters are not to wear their marching uniforms. Repeat, do not wear your marching uniforms. Come to the concert in concert dress, something nice, as usual. It will not be ‘uniform day’ tonight. Save your uniform for tomorrow’s parade and game. Thank you.”

Rod, in his Tunemasters uniform under his apron, looked up at the loudspeaker, then over at Lorenzo, and Lorenzo looked at him. They both shrugged and went back to their projects.

Five minutes later, the public address system came on again. This time it was the principal, Ms. McPherson. “Attention Tunemasters. You WILL wear your uniforms tonight. Please disregard the previous announcement. The Tunemasters WILL play the concert tonight in their uniforms. Thank you.”

This time the look Rod and Lorenzo gave each other was puzzlement. What was going on?

Seventh period was his French class, which he hated. The teacher was Mr. Pierrepont, an old boring geezer in a beret. Not a bad guy, but he just talked . . . so . . . s – l – o – w! . . .

He caught up with Brigid after the bell, and walked with her toward the new wing for their last period, Chemistry. But they didn’t get there because Ms. Kleinfelter stopped them. She seemed nervous and rushed.

“Miss O’Dierna, sorry for imposing again, but . . . new uniform . . . changes . . . why don’t we go into my office here. It will only take a minute.”

Ms. Kleinfelter whisked Brigid into her office. Rod waited in the hall, looking at the fashion teacher’s door, photos of stick-thin high-fashion models in flowing dresses.

The door opened and it was Brigid, without her bookbag. “You come in too, Rod.”

This teacher’s office was cluttered. Clothes hanging from hooks and rods and hangers, a mannequin in the corner, stacks of magazines. A full-length mirror only made the clutter seem doubled. In the midst of all the fabric, Brigid looked even more naked as she stood there in her bits and wisp, waiting for Ms. Kleinfelter to say something.

“We’ve devised a cover-up for you, to wear over your uniform, for non-parade settings, such as tonight’s concert, and going to and from the parade location. . . Something to put on when you’re not actually marching.” Ms. Kleinfelter reached up behind a hanger. “It can also afford some protection from the cold.”

The hanger she brought down looked a lot like the hanger for Brigid’s old uniform, from the bits of material on it. “To start from down up, here are the sandals. They’re just like before.”

The flat, leather-bottomed sparkly flip-flops dropped onto the floor. Brigid obediently slipped her feet into them.

“Now, to go over the wisp, we’ve devised this elastic covering, we call it a mini-breech.”

Actually only the string part was elastic. It had tan flaps in front and rear, each about two inches across and six inches long. Brigid held it up. She looked at Rod with bewilderment. The flaps were shiny but leathery. Nice, but weird, like a tiny loincloth of animal skins.

“It just slips on. Go ahead.”

Brigid’s breasts and bits dipped as she bent down to pull the string around the flip-flops. She shimmied it up to her hips, then straightened it out so that the front flap was in line with her wisp, covering it. She looked in the mirror, turning her butt to it, to check that the rear flap was O.K. It just did cover her butt crack, ending right below where the “snowflake” would be.

“Now, the most interesting part, not that I’m not modest,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, with a little smile. From the top hook of the hanger she slipped off two white things that were like shallow cones with holes in the middle. They reminded Rod of the muzzle his neighbor put on his dog when he walked it, only much smaller.

“These are an adaptation of the old circlets,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, poking her index fingers through the holes as the cones slid on like rings. “The lattice work of the bits is too delicate to have something put over them, so these circlets — we call them gromlets, because they are similar to grommets — fit around them without covering them. And they have a ratchet mechanism that keeps them securely on.”

With one hand she made a screwing motion around one of the shallow cones. The hole got smaller. Then, turning in the other direction, the hole got bigger. It reminded Rod of an old-style camera shutter.

“Let me demonstrate,” Ms. Kleinfelter said. She slid her glasses down her nose so she could work at close quarters, and carefully placed one of the “gromlets” on Brigid’s breast, so that her nipple poked through the hole. She pressed a little bit, so that Brigid’s areola bulged through. Then with the other hand she carefully twisted the inner part of the gromlet. Brigid looked down with curiosity and a little bit of concern. Slowly the hole closed, one inch shrinking to half an inch.

The Fashion Design teacher took her spindly hands off the gromlet, which now was more or less firmly grabbed onto the end of the boob. “Hmmm . . .” She looked at it with a furrowed brow, the white gromlet, the inner pinkish ring around the nipple, then the green bit on the very end. It looked like a target, with the bit being the bull’s-eye. “Part of the areola is still showing.” She tightened the gromlet a little more, down to about a quarter of an inch.

Ms. Kleinfelter turned Brigid to the side to get a profile view. “The nipple is still showing.” Indeed Brigid’s nipple, except for the very tip covered with the delicate, tiny bit, was still exposed. “That can’t do.” Rod wondered why that should be such a big deal — after all, according to that strange lawyer guy, Henry Cross, all Brigid needed to be legal was just to have the bit on.

“Breathe in, dear,” the teacher said. Brigid inhaled, causing her round, firm breasts to rise and stick out even more. Carefully Ms. Kleinfelter adjusted the gromlet and turned it another quarter turn until a little clicky sound came out. As the hole got smaller the gromlet grabbed Brigid’s nipple and pulled it out. Brigid exhaled a bit more, suddenly. There was now a tiny part of nipple showing between the inside of the gromlet and the bit. Another eighth of a turn, with some effort, another click . . .

Brigid exhaled and then inhaled between gritted teeth. Her nipple had disappeared behind the gromlet; only the green bit appeared at the center, a green topping on a little white cone. In the process, the nipple had been stretched out and elongated. The gromlet made the bit push out maybe an inch further than without it.

Now Ms. Kleinfelter carefully applied and tightened the gromlet on the other breast, this time it being a quicker process.

When this was done, she turned Brigid to the mirror in profile. The majorette’s breasts stuck out a lot more than before. They certainly were a lot pointier, as if the gromlets and bits were guns shooting out at the world.

“How’s that?” Ms. Kleinfelter said.

Brigid tried to control her breathing, her concave tummy heaving in and out over the string that passed well below her cute belly button. She looked down at her now-pointy breasts with some concern. “They’re . . . stretchin’ me out.”

“Do they hurt?”

“Well . . . not really . . .”

Ms. Kleinfelter was satisfied with this answer. “I’m sure it’s better than the old circlets, with the clips.”

“Oh G -Gosh yes. \*Anything’s\* better than those horrid things!”

“Now let me take them off.” Ms. Kleinfelter unscrewed the grommets and they fell off into her spindly hands. Brigid exhaled with relief. Her nipples bounced back into her areolas, her areolas returned to their normal flatness at the ends of her breasts. She looked down and soothed them with her fingers, touching only around the bits so as not to disturb them.

“Let’s see you take them on and off.”

Brigid gulped and did what she was told, only on the left breast. She tried to get the gromlet on straight, but after a couple of tries, she said, “I’m comin’ at it from the wrong angle. I can’t see.”

Ms. Kleinfelter looked at the gromlet in Brigid’s hand. “Maybe a friend can do it.”

Rod felt the hairs on his scalp prick up as both females looked at him. “Yes, Rod,” Brigid said, handing it to him. “Can you put this on?”

His mouth was dry and his hand shook. Like an idiot he dropped the gromlet. It bounced off Brigid’s toes and hit his boot. He carefully bent down to retrieve it, hoping he wouldn’t somehow step on it.

Now he faced Brigid’s glorious, firm breasts. His dick hardened in his Tunemasters trousers as she raised her arms over her head to make her boobs stick out even more. In this tiny room they almost hit his nose. He could feel her body heat. Tucking his tongue into his cheek with concentration, he placed the gromlet over her areola. He touched her warmth.

“Oohhh!” Brigid laughed, her boobs shaking. “Your fingas is cold!!”

Rod smiled and pressed the gromlet against her boob, so that the bit, and most of the areola, stuck through. Now he turned the inner part, steadily . . . There were tiny clicks he could feel as it ratcheted closed. He watched closely as the white area enclosed around the nipple. He wanted to be as gentle as possible. Slowly, click, click . . . he felt like a safecracker in an old movie. He could not avoid pressing against her breast with his fingers, a little. It was both soft and firm at the same time. It was a turn-on, his black fingers against her pale white skin that seemed luminous in the brightly lit office.

There was no avoiding it. To get the gromlet fully closed around the bit, he had to tighten it so that it grabbed the nipple and stretched it out. Stretch, stretch . . . he could feel the resilience in Brigid’s firm, tight nipple, it became harder to turn the gromlet once it grabbed her. He looked down and could see Brigid’s flat tummy and navel, framed above the delicate hip bones, heaving in and out with the stresses of her shallow breathing. It was now so hard to turn the gromlet, his finger almost slipped off trying to crank that final eighth of a turn, achieving that final ratcheting click.

When the gromlet finally closed in tight against the bit, no nipple showing, he drew his head back. He looked up at the majorette and their eyes met — his in sympathy, hers in discomfort but determination to endure, and also thankfulness in the acknowledgement that he had performed this procedure in the least painful way possible.

He looked down at the pointy white cone with the threaded green dot in the center. Then drew his attention to the other breast. He finally got the other gromlet on too, with a final, forceful twist.

When he was finished, Brigid looked over at Ms. Kleinfelter, then at herself in the mirror. She drew her shoulders back, standing straight up, which made the pointy cones stick out even further.

“There — your cover-up,” Ms. Kleinfelter announced.

“Well thanks, Ma’m,” Brigid said, looking down as she began to slide the sandals off. “I’ll be sure to be wearing’ this — ”

“No no,” Ms. Kleinfelter said quickly. “You wear this in the hall, the rest of the day, for ‘uniform day’. And tonight at the concert.”

Rod thought he saw Brigid begin to blink back tears. But she controlled them and said, “Um . . . O.K.”

“You two should be going,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, putting her glasses back on her nose, the eyeglass chain around her neck sparkling in the light. “It’s almost eighth period.”

In a moment they were out in the hall, hiking quickly to Chemistry class. The bell rang just as they got in the door, Brigid dashing in first, her flip-flops slapping against the floor, the rear flap of the mini-breech swaying back and forth with the motions of her hips, her butt crack peeking out as the flap swayed.

Naturally Brigid’s new cover-up got everyone’s attention as she went to her lab table. But Mr. Santosky took no notice. He was a likeable teacher who looked like he might be Denzel Washington’s father. “Today is the big day,” he said. “The lab where you try to make a bar of soap. Let’s try to do this right this time, O.K.?”

The kids got the aprons from the hooks on the wall and returned to their tables. It was a contest, no doubt about that. They had tried it last week with disastrous results, but were ready to go for it again. Who could make the soap bubbles appear first? Not like most labs, this one was fun.

There were six lab tables in this big room, Rod and Lorenzo and George and Star at one, Brigid and Millie and Debra and Susie at the next one. They all got busy, mixing things into the big tube in the sink in the middle of their table, then lighting the Bunsen burner. Rod looked over at Brigid, whose totally bare backside was facing them. Well, no, not totally bare. Beside the string from the mini-breech around her hips, she now had that heavy black apron on, and from the rear you could see the loop around her neck, and the apron string tied around the small of her waist. And that flap that swung around her butt crack. She looked downright covered up, for Brigid.

Now, she moved to the side of the table, and Rod got a view of her in profile, the sides of her breasts pressing out against the apron. And now she moved opposite him, and she looked weird, covered with that apron, just her bare arms and legs sticking out.

The whole class was excited and there was an air of fun and competition. Of course, being the last period of the day, everyone was geared up anyway.

Lorenzo turned up the flame and it bubbled! The guys cheered, being the first. Brigid and her friends looked over. Mr. Santosky patted Rod and Lorenzo on the shoulder and said, “O.K., guys, not so loud. We don’t want Mr. Poznik coming in here and shushing us. . . Good work!”

“Oh sh\*t! Sorry!!” Millie exclaimed and then covered her mouth, laughing. She had knocked over their tube, spilling proto-soapy fluid all over the table. Brigid and Debra jumped over to the supply closet for some paper towels, Brigid’s leather flip-flops sliding and smacking against the floor.

When they cleaned up the mess the girls came over to Rod’s table to see bubbles. Brigid stood next to him and he got a quick look at her profile. Heavy as the apron was, it did not crush Brigid’s braless breasts in the least. And the conical gromlets poked the apron out so much, it looked like she was carrying around a sideways tent on her chest. He thought of making some kind of comment but couldn’t think of one that wasn’t crude.

Rod thought of her nipples, stretched outward by the gromlets. They must still be uncomfortable. Maybe she’s gotten used to it by now. . . The apron was rough fabric, meant to be worn over clothes. . . it must be rubbing and frictioning her nipples with every movement she made. Surely she must feel that keenly, through the single-layer thread of the bits? He thought of the night of that ski resort parade, with Mr. Tucker and Ms. Lee rasping poor Brigid’s nipples with sandpaper, thinking they were smoothing out adhesive used to keep those “T’s” on. Wait, that was a dream . . .

The boys cut the flame and everyone wandered around to the other tables. Sharon, Lawanda and Lucia, working one of the rear tables, got their soap bubbling after Rod and his friends but ended up with a bigger yield. Well, call it a tie then . . .

Some words from Mr. Santosky, and it was back to the equations. Everyone put their aprons back on the wall and got to their notebooks. Rod looked over at Brigid, sitting on a stool facing away from him, her sandals dropped onto the floor, her toes gripping the cold metal of one of the lower struts of her chair. A big contrast to Millie next to her, in her jeans and sneakers and white socks. Now Brigid stretched out her left arm, pencil in her hand, and as she turned Rod could make out the half-moon of one breast.

The bell rang. The school day was over.

He packed up and went out into the hall. Brigid was showing her cover-up uniform to a circle of friends and other curious people, including a few teachers. Smiling as if proud of the new outfit, yet secretly uncomfortable. She must be. Her nipples must be on fire!

She was going to extra help math. He obviously couldn’t go. The all-district concert was four hours away, and the Tunemasters, the last act, wouldn’t go on until an hour and a half after that. So he’d be going through a few hours of “Brigid withdrawal”.

He knew she had younger brothers and sisters. Were any of them in the elementary school band? Those bands were first on the program, followed by the middle school band. If so, then she’d be there early. Should he go early too? Maybe they could sit in the audience with her parents and listen. Would she be wearing her cover-up outfit?

She’d be in that extra help class till about four. He’d been with her most of the day, yet he couldn’t get enough of his dear Brigid, the brave Tunemasters majorette. Maybe, around five, it would be time for another bike ride . . . What would she be wearing? . . . !

15.

Young Rodney Sykes sat on the couch in the living room, ignoring the basketball game on the TV, staring out the window at the sump across the street, then past it in a vague eastward direction, over the distant house tops toward where the girl lived that he couldn’t get his mind off, young Brigid O’Dierna.

Daughter of a cop, oldest of five kids. . . and the perfect girl. Well, maybe not perfect. She wasn’t that smart in math, or in science either. She had the occasional zit — like most. She tended to ignore other people when she got into one of her concentrating moods, practicing something on her clarinet, her baton throws, studying. Though that last one wasn’t really a flaw. It was part of her charm.

And her “charms”, like an old book might put it. Her face and body really were perfect, in the contemplation of Rod and no doubt many others around the school. What good luck that it was she who was the Tunemasters majorette, walking through life in that microscopic uniform. He thought of that whole school day, “Uniform Day”. Everyone’s shoulders were hidden in full-length uniforms, except Brigid’s — and Brigid’s bare shoulders were beautiful, delicate, right back to the shoulder blades, yet strong, the hard biceps and triceps on proud display to the world. Every girl in the school had boobs, of course, more or less — but only Brigid’s were on view for everyone — flawless, round and firm, standing straight out from her chest, the pink nipples poking out at everyone, capped only at their very ends by those tiny, green-threaded “bits”. Only Brigid had an exposed tummy, but it was flat, concave even at times, like when she stretched her arms up. . . a smooth expanse of white skin, with the cute navel in the middle, framed above by the arched cathedral of her ribs, and at the bottom, by the gentle inward “V” of her hip bones. She was the only one with bare butt cheeks, but they were tight, firm, well-shaped. The only bare-legged student in the school, but her legs were straight and lithe. And the only one going through school with exposed feet . . . and even her toes were cute!

Rod took a deep breath. I’m getting obsessed here. Chill, man.

He looked down at his hands, thinking of how his fingers pressed against her boob as he fitted those “gromlets” on. The click, click of the ratchet, getting harder to turn as poor Brigid’s unseen nipples were compressed and stretched. He put his hands over his chest. Oww. . . Then looked at the black fingers again. Such a contrast with the white girl’s boob.

She was the first white girl he had ever been hooked on. It was strange new territory. Good thing it wasn’t like in the old days, like he heard his parents and uncles talk about, the busing riots, all that ugliness. So many white folks had left. Their place had been taken by Mexican immigrants, mostly. According to his dad, things had actually gotten better when they came in. Brigid’s family had stayed, and Millie’s and a few others. Maybe Brigid’s dad, being a cop, knew that things were working out all right. Maybe because they were Irish and they had been in the area for like 150 years. Rod’s own family had moved here after World War II.

Rod looked over at the pictures on the wall, Dr. King and President Obama. Not photos that Brigid’s family had on their wall. What if she became his girlfriend? Would they have anything in common? Would their parents clash? Interracial couples at the school were pretty rare. But Brigid was so good-hearted, and from what he had seen of her family, they seemed like good folks.

He thought again of cranking her nipples out with those gromlets. And the rest of that “cover-up” uniform, that weird little loincloth thing, and the return of footwear, minimal as it was. And her crying jag on the stairs, what she overheard the parents say in the Main Office. Then, the meticulous inspection in the big instrument room, with the doctor and the lawyer there, convincing the Board V.P. that Brigid, exposed as she was, was still “compliant” with indecent exposure laws. The conflicting announcements as to wearing uniforms at the all-district concert. Ms. Kleinfelter’s nervousness when she got Brigid into the cover-up uniform, her insistence that Brigid wear it . . .

Rod could piece together what had happened behind the scenes. Parents had complained about the majorette’s uniform being too skimpy, the Board of Education wanted assurances that it was legal, and the cover-up outfit was thrown together to pacify the parents, as a compromise. While still leaving Brigid freer with the smaller uniform to do her baton moves in the actual parade tomorrow, and during the football game. He was sure Brigid preferred just the bits and wisp, to those nipple cones!

And Sarge? Sarge was surprised to see those grown-ups in the big instrument room. He was probably above it all, or maybe trying to stay out of it. All he cared about was the well-being of the kids and putting on the best show possible.

Rod was proud he’d figured things out. He just hoped Brigid would be all right. That crying on the stairs really shook him. But she recovered pretty quick, by demolishing everyone at dodgeball. Strong girl. And in the practice room, she had actually invited him to poke his fingers into her rock-hard butt muscles. “Feel my glutes!” Any guy would be lucky to be with her.

He looked at the clock. Almost supper time. He wasn’t going to bike past Brigid’s house after all. Well . . . he could deny himself the sight of Brigid for a couple hours. He didn’t want to seem like he was stalking her. He knew she liked him but past that, he didn’t know how she felt about him.

At supper he tried to find an excuse for going to the concert early.

“I’d like to hang out with my friends.”

“You just want to hang with that white majorette girl,” his younger sister Myeka said. “In her itty bitty uniform.” Myeka enjoyed being a pest.

Rod’s face flushed. “Jamal and Lorenzo and I like to sit and watch the kids play.”

“Yeah right,” Myeka said. Myeka was a grade below Rod; to both of them, the elementary school kids were now little more than babies. “Hear them rag up ‘Twinkle Twinkle Little Star’. Something to go early for.”

“Stop,” their mother said. “Myeka stop. I keep telling you this.”

“Don’t be mean,” their father said. “You’ve got to straighten out, young lady.”

Rod thought of saying something but didn’t want to spoil his advantage now that he was “up” in contrast with Myeka’s “down”. “So . . . O.K.?” God, how he was counting the weeks until he got that driver’s license!

“Well Rod . . .” His mother thought for a moment. “I wasn’t going to take you until nine . . . I have to go shopping.”

“You can do that tomorrow.” Rod kicked himself. Why did he get sassy like that?

“Rod!” his father said sharply.

There was an uncomfortable silence. Then: “Okay, Rod. But I’ll have to take off and come back for the Tunemasters.”

“We should be on a little before ten.”

Rod’s father said, “Babe, I’ll go.” They had been to so many all-districts by now, they took turns. “Rod, I’ll pick you up after the concert ends, in the parking circle.”

“Some of us were going to go out for pizza later.”

“No.”

16.

Rod bounded out of the car with his trombone case. It was not very cold tonight; there was a crowd of parents and kids outside the main entrance. For once, Hank had all the doors open. Rod snaked his way through to the inside and started looking for Brigid. As always, she would be easy to spot.

The halls were packed with what seemed like hundreds of little kids, some middle school kids too. He had miscalculated. The concert wasn’t starting for another fifteen minutes. He ended up sidling along the walls, past the posters for student elections and club meetings. Whoa, posters for the junior prom. They’re putting them up early this year.

He quickly figured the most likely place to find Brigid would be the band room. Which was even more crowded than the halls. And lots noisier, with a constant shower of out-of-tune squeaks and toots and oom-pahs, as little kids started warming up their clarinets and flutes and trumpets and —

There was a flash of white skin across the room, glimpsed through the jungle of suits and black concert dresses. Looked like a bare thigh. It had to be her!

“Hey Rod,” Lorenzo said, working his slide. “What are YOU doing here so early?”

Momentarily distracted, Rod to be polite gave him a moment. “How about you?”

“My brother, he’s in third grade.” Lorenzo pointed his slide to a tiny kid in a black jacket and trousers and clip-on tie, ostentatiously but with clumsy fingers assembling his trumpet in front of proud parents.

“Cool,” Rod said. “Later.” He dodged through the crowd. Now another flash of white skin, this time a bare back. Definitely Brigid.

She was standing in her cover-up uniform, string around her hips, little leather flap covering her butt crack, toes wiggling in her dressy flip-flops, looking down at a little girl and an even littler boy, both with blond hair and all dressed up in long skirt and long pants, squeaking through a scale on their half-size clarinets. To the side stood Brigid’s father, a big beefy Irish kind of guy with a red face, out of uniform but wearing his police badge. He had a tiny girl in his arms, just out of diapers, her hair the color of Brigid’s, done up with a little bow. The girl had the sniffles. Next to them was a boy about 9 years old, with freckles and darker hair, in jeans and a little baseball jacket. The family resemblance was so striking, these white kids with the same noses and eyes and blond eyebrows, that Rod almost laughed.

“Wrong note,” Brigid said as Rod came over to her side. She had her own clarinet in front of her and showed the fingering. “Try again.”

This time the squeaks were less frequent and the notes were more recognizably a major scale.

“Good!” Brigid smiled and the little kids smiled too. “Oh hi Rod. This is my dad, and Chrissy and Johnny. They’re in the elementary band. And this is Sean, and this is Jessy, she’s the baby of the family.”

“Hi.” Rod smiled, trying not to make it look too forced. He thought: well, I’m not going to get much “alone time” with Brigid tonight.

Brigid’s dad shook his hand and looked at Rod’s big case. “You’re not a-playin’ clarinet, I gather.” Sounded like “gatha”. His accent was like Brigid’s, of course.

“No,” Rod smiled.

Now from across the room, Mr. Henderson, their old teacher from elementary school, clapped his hand. “Get ready, boys and girls! Line up!!”

Braving the wave of kids brushing past her, Brigid said, “Hey Rod, want to sit with us?”

“Sure.” He was hoping she’d say that. Though now he’d be in the middle of a crowd of O’Diernas.

Brigid and Rod stowed their instruments in the big instrument room, under the sousaphone chair. Brigid took Jessy from her father and Rod followed all the remaining O’Diernas down the hall, Brigid smacking the floor with the “shoes” of her cover-up uniform, her almost total nudity a contrast with the fully clothed wave of grown-ups and kids, her hips and the flap on her butt swaying as she carried her little sister Jessy on her hip as naturally as if she did it all the time.

They got in near the back of the auditorium, like row Z. Unfortunately Rod ended up with Brigid’s father between them, with Jessy and Sean on the far side. The place was full. It was a big school district, not well-off but with an active music program. First was the elementary school chorus, doing unison versions of “Wind Beneath My Wings” and a sanitized “Sweet Georgia Brown”, with the kids stepping right and left with the beat. Really cute, got a big ovation.

Now the elementary school band. Brigid and Sean and Jessy chatted with each other. Sean quickly pointed out where Chrissy and Johnny were in the clarinet section. Jessy said out loud, “Look! Look!” and pointed and waved, impossible to be seen from the stage of course. There were a lot of little kids in the audience so there was a general murmur which only slightly decreased as Mr. Henderson raised his baton. Brigid shushed Jessy as the band started. Of course they were terrible, out of tune, rushing and slowing down. But no one got lost and Rod thought it was probably no worse than when he was in that band. They finished their tunes more or less at the same time.

Rod pretended to listen; the whole time he was fighting his intense urge to look across at Brigid. But to do that he would have to look past her father. He dare not, fearing the father catching him looking. Finally he stood up for a second, making a pretense of straightening out his Tunemasters jacket — this uniform was designed for marching, it was uncomfortable to sit in — and got a quick glance over. But the father’s sweater blocked his view of Brigid’s bare skin entirely. All he could see were her nipple cones sticking out as she turned to put a tissue to Jessy’s nose.

Now in the little break before the middle school kids started, the O’Dierna family got up. Rod followed. Out in the hall, Brigid’s father said, “Let me say hi proper. John [‘Jawn’] O’Dierna. Good to meet you, Rod. I heard you had a spill yesterday.”

Rod remembered falling off his bike, and being tended by Brigid, and her talking on the phone to her father. “Same here.” John O’Dierna’s handshake nearly dislocated Rod’s fingers.

“Have to go. See you in a bit, Rod.” Brigid picked up Jessy and she and her father and Sean went to the band room to collect Chrissy and Johnny.

Rod found himself alone in the hall, standing in the middle of the swirling crowd, feeling out of place in his Tunemasters uniform. He thought of following Brigid but didn’t want to seem like a stalker. I have to be careful about that. . . Can’t look like I’m obsessed with her . . . even though I am. . .

“Hey man!” Lorenzo slapped his back with such force that Rod almost tipped forward into a clutch of passing second-graders. They got to talking and soon Rod found himself wandering the halls with his trombone buddies, while most everyone else was in the auditorium listening to the middle school acts.

“Whoa this is up early!” Sammy said. They had hooked up with Jaycee and were in the back hallway, looking at one of the junior prom posters.

“Who you taking?” Lorenzo said.

“Pfft!” Sammy said. “No girl will look at me.”

Rod and Lorenzo both thought: Well, you’re so obnoxious, no wonder.

“You going with Nilda?” Lorenzo asked Jaycee.

Jaycee bit his lip. “Well . . . I’m trying to get up the nerve to ask. We’re not that . . . serious yet.”

Rod thought: dare I ask Brigid? She’s out of my league, we’re not even going together yet, let alone “serious”.

“You don’t have to be serious, it’s just fun, man,” Lorenzo said.

Rod thought: at least I have time to work on it. The prom’s almost two months away.

“Yeah. Nilda seems like fun,” Sammy said. “She has such big . . . eyes.”

“Ohoho!” Lorenzo said. Jaycee smiled and looked down. “F\*\*k you!” he said playfully.

“Shhh!” Sammy said. “They’re between songs!” They were right near the stage door.

“Think they heard that?” Lorenzo whispered.

“I don’t know . . . let’s get out of here!” They dashed toward the band room as softly as their marching boots would allow.

When they got there, they found it empty. A bad sign!

“Oh sh\*t, we’re late!” Sammy said. They dragged out their trombone cases and put their horns together as fast as they could. They dashed out into the hall, working their slides, half laughing, half scared of Sarge’s wrath.

They got to the crowded backstage and it turned out they were not late. It was near the end of intermission. On the other side of the heavy, soundproofed curtain, the high school chorus was filing onstage.

The backstage light was so dim it was hard to see. The Tunemasters uniforms were white but it was still like wandering in a sea of ghosts. Then a couple of the ghosts parted and Rod spied the bareness of the majorette. Her body stood out clearly, her white skin luminescent in the weak light.

He approached her from behind, looking down at her tight butt cheeks bifurcated by the thin flap of the “mini-breech”, the bare toes against the floor, the thin straps of the sandals . . . up to the bare back, the delicate shoulder blades, the white shoulders, the bare white arms.

The Tunemasters majorette was working the keys of the clarinet in front of her and having a whisper conversation with Debra and Virginia.

“So how does the ‘cover-up’ uniform feel?” Debra said.

“Well . . . oh hi Rod . . . it’s weird (‘wee – ud’). . . feelin’ this thing flappin’ against my butt.” She turned around behind her.

“Those . . . cones are something,” Virginia said.

Brigid shrugged, the stretched-out nipple cones poking up and down in their faces. “She said this ‘cover-up’ is for warmth. Ha!”

“Well it’s supposed to be nice out tomorrow.”

“Finally!” Brigid said. Rod had never heard her talk about the weather like that. Even though as the majorette she always felt it more keenly than the rest of the band.

Now there was a little commotion. They turned and it was Sarge, in his best business suit, his baton in the pocket of his jacket.

And next to him was Dr. Jeffers, the Superintendent of Schools.

And they were headed right toward them.

The approach of Sarge, with Dr. Jeffers to boot, coming at them so quickly, made the four Tunemasters — Rod, Brigid, Debra and Virginia — a little nervous. Did someone do something wrong? Then they looked at each other and shrugged. No, no one was in trouble. How could we be? We’re all good kids. Well, mostly.

The two men in their business suits soon stood in front of them, then the men both looked around, as if suddenly remembering to survey the whole band in the dim backstage light.

“Looks like another fine night for a show,” Dr. Jeffers whispered, aware of the chorus getting into position on the other side of the curtain. He was a rather young guy for someone in his position, maybe 40? He was new this year. He liked to visit classes and introduce himself and crack a few jokes.

Everyone jolted as the chorus launched into a fortissimo version of “Somebody’s Coming”, an old folk tune about steamboats apparently. Then the Tunemasters, scattered among the folding chairs, looked at each other and suppressed a collective giggle. They could picture Mr. Grundschein, the chorus teacher, out there waving his arms wildly and ostentatiously as he conducted.

As they were listening, Ms. Kleinfelter appeared from the other direction.

“Hi,” Dr. Jeffers said, able to whisper more loudly now, with some voice, now that there was gospel-style wailing going on out in the auditorium.

“Hello,” Ms. Kleinfelter said, shaking hands across the fronts of Rod and Brigid, being careful to duck her hands under the majorette’s protruding nipple cones. The grown-ups looked at the three Tunemasters who had the full coverage uniforms, out of politeness, then looked as casually as they could at the one in the majorette uniform. “Well . . . what do you think?”

In this light Brigid’s uniform was a lot less visible than Brigid herself in her white skin. Surprisingly, Ms. Kleinfelter brought out a penlight and shone it onto Brigid. “Just a moment –” The brief flash of light, the glimpse of pink, told Rod what the problem was. Parts of Brigid’s nipples were peeking out around the braided green “bit”. “If you don’t mind, Miss O’Dierna, you need a little adjustment — ”

Before Brigid could say anything, the spidery old hands were twisting the inner ratchets of the nipple cones. With some effort Ms. Kleinfelter could get one click to register. Rod was standing right next to Brigid and could hear her tiny gasp and see the twitch of her navel, the little jump of the mini-breech flap down below, as her nipples were clinched and stretched out to new lengths. Debra and Virginia, who he supposed knew about the inner mechanism by now, winced, Debra starting a reflexive motion to cover her own nipples, buried under three layers of bra and blouse and jacket.

Some nipple still showed in the flash of the penlight. Ms. Kleinfelter used both hands on one cone now, one hand to steady it and the other to anchor her forearm, seeming to put her entire old lady’s weight on to apply enough torque. “Mmmph . . . mmmph . . .” she said. “MMPH!” Finally, a second click. She breathed deep and heaved her weight onto the cone on the other breast. When that clicked too she stood back and caught her breath. “There . . .” Another flash of the penlight. Brigid, catching her own breath, looked down at her breasts. Thankfully, the white cone was now flush against the green braiding, no pink showing, no more ratcheting needed. Between her breasts, her clarinet quivered as her fingers gripped the keys tightly with her suppressed feelings.

The cones now seemed to stretch so far out in front of Brigid, to her right and her left, that she would have to watch where she was going as she steered them around.

“Is that all right?” Ms. Kleinfelter said to Brigid. Brigid waited a second and then nodded silently. At least these cones weren’t as bad as those old clipped-on circlets. Or were they?

“Very good,” Dr. Jeffers said. “I think this . . . addresses the . . . situation.”

Sarge seemed to be trying to hide impatience. “It’s unusual for the Tunemasters to play a concert in their uniforms,” he said to Dr. Jeffers in a loud whisper, “but I think you’ll see that they are just as good as a concert band as they are marching.” He patted his reassuring hands on Debra’s braided shoulder and Brigid’s bare shoulder and smiled broadly, his teeth almost glowing in the dark.

“Somebody’s Coming” ended. Now they all stood still, Sarge’s hands still on the girls’ shoulders, waiting for the next song. The chorus flung into a show tune and they all felt free to move and whisper again.

“Are we done?” Sarge said. “We have to get into position.” Actually it seemed early to Rod. The chorus must have another song to go. He guessed that Sarge was trying to get rid of Dr. Jeffers and Ms. Kleinfelter.

“Break a leg, as they say,” said Dr. Jeffers.

And a few seconds later it was just the Tunemasters and their leader Sarge, signaling everyone to find their seats.

Rod smiled at Brigid and started poking his way to his section, his trombone held high up. Brigid said a few more things to her buddies and they sat down near the front, in the second row of clarinets.

Rod took his place between Lorenzo and Jaycee. They worked their slides out of nervousness. They sat through the chorus’s last song and now the great moment was at hand.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Dr. Jeffers intoned from somewhere, “boys and girls, students, let me introduce Mr. Lucius Watson and The Tunemasters.”

The curtain parted, and the show lights went on, almost blinding to eyes that had gotten used to near-darkness. The white and black uniforms, with gold piping, were resplendent. And so was Brigid’s white skin, gleaming in the lights. From where he was Rod could see only the bare shoulders, between the braided jackets of Debra and Virginia, and a bare hip next to Debra’s pants, and the toes of one foot next to Debra’s boot. It looked like Brigid was totally naked and Rod cherished the fantasy. He tried to catch her glance but she was looking offstage with everyone else, waiting.

A loud cheer went up as Sarge walked onstage and bowed. Now he stepped up onto the podium and raised the baton. Instruments were brought up in one movement, mouthpieces to lips.

The loud trumpet run was tongued perfectly, as they began “Captains and Kings”.

Rod’s thoughts of Brigid scattered as he focused on his playing. His “game face” was on. It was only after the tune was done, and the loud cheering began, that he thought of her again. Again he tried to catch her glance between songs and this time her eyes found his and they smiled at each other. His heart skipped a beat.

He imagined himself in the audience, the view they had. Not much of one, probably; they would see part of the scantily-clad majorette in profile but she would be mostly hidden by Virginia. Then he thought of what Brigid must be feeling, the pain of her elongated nipples, that she tried so hard to hide from Ms. Kleinfelter and everyone else. It must be a constant soreness . . . but she smiled and kept on playing. During that long rest in the middle of the next tune, “Toccata in D Minor”, he figured it out. To her, performing in discomfort was part of the challenge of being a majorette. Like smiling and doing her moves and throws while damned near naked during those windy, snowy winter parades while everyone else was in winter coats with thermals underneath.

The Tunemasters bopped through “Son of a Preacher Man”, then roared through the finale, “March Grandioso”. “Always end with something loud”, Sarge had often said. It worked. There was a standing ovation, lots of hooting and shouting.

Sarge motioned to the band and they all rose, Brigid’s cones bouncing. Did that hurt more? . . . Sarge left the stage, and the ovation continued. Rod tried to recognize people in the audience but it was always useless, it was so dark out there and the lights so bright. Now Sarge came back, and now Brigid put her clarinet down and vigorously clapped, cones pointing all over. Like during a march, the rest of the Tunemasters followed her lead, putting down their instruments and applauding Sarge. He bowed to the band. . .

“Good performance!” he said back in the band room, happy and covered with sweat, five minutes later, as the Tunemasters milled around and talked, not yet wanting to put away their instruments. Rod found himself in the back of the room with Jaycee and Myron, the sousaphone player, as he positioned his big instrument back onto the special chair. Rod thought of Brigid’s toes pressing down the valves . . . F sharp? G?

“You were great!” Nilda said, bouncing up and giving Jaycee a hug. “Let’s go for pizza!”

“Where? Giraldo’s?” someone said. That was a place down the block, a favorite for jocks and jockettes after a game.

Brigid was next to them, it turned out, talking with Lucia and Debra, their clarinets already in their little cases. Funny he hadn’t noticed her. “Can you go?” Rod said, knowing full well he couldn’t, not with his father about to pick him up out front of the school.

“No, I have to go home,” Brigid said. “My Ma’s not feeling well.”

“Oh — is she O.K.?”

“Well she has these spells now and then.”

“What’s the matter?” Rod didn’t want to pry but he wanted to sound caring.

“After she had Jessy she had a heart thing goin’ on, they had to do a bypass. Remember I was out last year?”

Come to think of it, Rod did remember hearing about Brigid’s mother and her heart condition. And Brigid was out for a couple of weeks last year. . . taking care of her younger brothers and sisters, no doubt.

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

“She’s all right. Just needs some watchin’.”

Rod had an idea. Tomorrow was the St. Patrick’s Day parade, then the benefit football game. “How about after the game tomorrow, we go for pizza?” He was hoping no one could make it except the two of them.

“Can’t . . . I’m on shift at Linda’s.”

“Oh, right.” Brigid waitressed at Linda’s Diner. He saw her there once, when he and his dad stopped for a burger. She didn’t have their table but she said hi and looked quite foxy as she zipped around in her white apron and little black skirt.

Rod decided to be persistent. Asking her to the Junior Prom still seemed impossibly far away, but . . . “Well why don’t I pick you up tomorrow for the parade? I’ll come to your house and we can walk here together.”

“That’s quite a hike!” She was right, it would be a mile over to her house, then another half mile back to the school. “How about I’ll meet you at the station?” She meant the bus terminal on Washington Street.

“O.K.”

The others were still talking about going out for pizza. “I’m in,” Myron said in his deep voice, moving his great bulk away from the sousaphone chair.

“Leave something for us,” Jaycee said.

“I’ll keep it down to half a pie,” Myron joked.

“Sure you’re not going?” Nilda said to Brigid.

“No. . . gotta be home. . . I’ll be glad to get out of this thing,” Brigid said, looking down at her “cover-up” uniform.

“I think the flap is cute,” Myron said. They all looked at the tiny flap of fake leather hanging between the perfect white thighs.

“Well, . .” Brigid shrugged her bare shoulders, the cones poking up and down.

“BRIGID!” It was John O’Dierna, across the room in the doorway, holding Jessy.

Brigid waved at him and took her little clarinet case and left, hopping through the gradually dispersing Tunemasters, her red hair bouncing behind her, the rear flap flying up and down over her butt crack, her flip-flops smacking againt the floor. She took Jessy in her arms and was gone.

17.

Rod got to the station way before the appointed time. Beautiful day, sun shining, blue sky, getting warm even though it was still morning. The Tunemasters majorette would deserve it. Finally a warm nice day to march in.

He stared intently in the direction of her street and smiled as the far-off white girl appeared and drew closer. He could see her smiling too, when she wasn’t looking out for traffic. Not that there was much yet. There would be, as people arrived to watch the parade.

She hopped across the street toward him, clutching her soccer team jacket around her, baton in one hand. The jacket came down to her upper thigh, bare legs underneath. And bare feet.

“Happy St. Paddy’s Day,” he said as she came up to him.

“Top o’ the morn’, as my granddad would say,” Brigid chirped.

Rod looked down at Brigid’s perfectly painted toenails. No flip-flops. “What happened to the cover-up uniform?”

Brigid looked both ways as if about to divulge a secret. Then she opened up the jacket, to reveal nothing but the green bits on her nipples, and the green wisp below. “The hell with that,” she said. “Too uncomfortable. This is better.”

“You look nice,” he said, knowing she wouldn’t mind if he took in the full length of her beauty, adorned by the tiny uniform.

“You too,” she said, fingering the buttons of his Tunemasters jacket. Her bare toes playfully kicked his marching boot.

“I’m feeling a mite like a dork standing here in this thing,” he said.

“Nonsense! Be a proud Tunemaster!” Well, she didn’t take off her jacket. But he felt proud to walk with her as they made their way to the school.

18.

Ms. Kleinfelter was almost unrecognizable, happy and relaxed in a flowery dress, glasses off, enjoying the sunny warmth. Rod found himself standing next to her as they waited at the beginning of the route for the act in front of them, girl scouts from Jamaica Plain, to march off. The Tunemasters were the last band in this big parade. They were at the top of the hill and could see down almost the whole route. It seemed like everyone from this part of Boston was out today, lining the streets, carts selling cotton candy, little kids on their parents’ shoulders to see better . . .

Brigid, in her new uniform, stood chatting with Debra, idly tapping her calves with the baton. Rod saw that Ms. Kleinfelter was in a good mood, and decided to make conversation.

“Very good design on the new majorette uniform,” he said.

“Thanks, Rod.” She never used students’ first names . . . “I can’t take credit for the bottom part though.”

“Oh?”

“No, it’s a design my daughter told me about. She was out on the beach in California and a Mexican girl in a bikini store was modeling it. It’s called a ‘C-string’.”

“Oh really?” He decided not to ask what the “C” stood for.

“Line up!” Sarge called out.

19.

The first Tunemasters parade since September to take place on a nice day was just joy, joy, joy. It was strange and welcome to feel the warm sun on their backs through their wool uniforms. Fingers and hands were supple, lips were loose, lungs were taking in warm air for a change. This was the right weather to play in. Every note was hit, from the occasional pedal tone up to the high registers. Even Nigel and Gordon, in the row of trumpets behind him, who usually flubbed the high notes, got every one perfectly. Rod and Lorenzo and Jamal and the other trombones, the front row of Tunemasters, played loudly and happily.

No more cold wintry winds. No more torrential icy rains. No more snow and sleet, battering the band from every direction, the cold slicing right through their uniforms even when they had their thermal underwear on. Ahhh — spring! They deserved it, man!

And no one deserved it more than their majorette, who had had to march through all that without thermals in her tiny uniform. As they passed the crowds thick along the route — it was so strange to be watched by folks in short-sleeved shirts, instead of all bundled up — the band seemed to be playing especially for Brigid, whose majorette’s smile was really a smile this time, no sense of it being forced.

He could sense as well as see the smiles on the faces of the people, maybe especially the Boston Irish folks — such an obviously Irish majorette, how fitting for St. Patrick’s Day. Her red hair and bright green eyes and white, slightly freckled skin sparkled in the sun. She smiled at them and they smiled back!

Whoa — Brigid’s family! There was big John O’Dierna, and the two little girls, Jessy up on her father’s shoulders, and Chrissy and Johnny and Sean, and a heavy-set lady with a cane who must be Brigid’s mother. A couple of old folks who might be grandparents. All waving proudly at Brigid, who smiled back during one of her turns.

Now, on to “Our Director”. The title made him think of Sarge, who as always, was walking to the side, back next to the saxophones. Rod looked down, remembering what Sarge had said in the big instrument room about making sure there was street-cleaning before every parade. For the first time Rod noticed how clean the pavement was, and how it must have been clean for every parade this year. No oil spots to slip on. No bits of broken glass.

This was an easy tune and Rod could devote more attention to the girl twirling in front of him. The sun brought out the best in her newly-conditioned body, the “definition” in her slender calves and thighs and shoulders, those tight buns, the narrow waist. He got to like those tiny “bits”. The green pinpoints in the sun blended well with the pink of the areolas, the pale skin, the red hair, and of course her green eyes. As she carried her breasts to and fro, up and down, tightly on her chest, it seemed like the band was being led by the majorette’s nipples.

The warm air must have made the majorette’s muscles more supple. Her moves were different today. The freedom from shoes, the freedom from the waist string, the tiny bits at the ends of her nipples, more comfortable than those clipped-on circlets — Brigid pranced around more loosely now. It was not only those throws kicked up by the soles of her feet, that she couldn’t do with flip-flops on. As the barefoot majorette bounced and danced she kicked up higher, did more upright splits. Her legs separated and spread out more. Pumping away on his trombone, watching her to the extent he could while marching in time, Rod finally understood. Brigid was proud of her new uniform and was showing it off, the little wisp in between her smoothly-shaven pubic lips, the pretty strand of shiny green thread, glinting in the sun, that she wanted all of Boston to see. Her skin welcomed and soaked up the warm sun, and now she spun around again, her toughened soles on the warm asphalt, and did another throw. A nearly-naked Irish sprite magically leading them to a land of enchantment.

There was a soft breeze gently at their backs as they began the long slow downhill toward Downtown. The route would take them back to the school eventually, or very close to it. A long, three-mile route, but no chore at all on a day like this.

He loved her, he wanted to be with her, he wanted to kiss her, hug her . . . feel her tight, well-conditioned body against his. Between songs, horn down, watching her tight bare buns jiggle as her bare feet marched in place, toes flexed, he wondered how he would ask her to the Junior Prom. Just do it, he finally decided. Can’t be too early though . . . But he didn’t want to wait until the last minute. Someone else might ask her first. Two weeks from now — that would be a good time. He’ll ask her out for pizza after school. What was her free day? Tuesday?

Roll-off by the drums, and into “Manhattan Beach”. Brigid spun, her breasts seeming to lead the way as they bounced up and out and swung, then a high, high throw . . . She smiled up at the sun and the sun smiled down on her, kissing her body, as she celebrated its warm caress.

20.

It was halfway down the route when the trombones felt a stronger gust from behind, then the shadow of clouds came over them. A call from Sarge behind, and Brigid turned to the band and marched in place, a sign for them to stop.

Rod had an idea what that meant, and as he marched in place with the others he felt another gust of wind, cold this time. Brigid looked up at the sky behind him and everyone was treated to the first rash of goose bumps along her bare white arms and thighs, the bits poking further out as her nipples hardened. But the majorette, baton entwined in her fingers and folded up against her arm, kept smiling her parade smile, her bare toes flexed against the still-warm pavement, breasts jiggling with every little, in-place step. From ahead, the crowd was treated to the sight of the totally naked back of one of the most beautiful bodies in the Boston area. Facing the band, Brigid smiled, though looking up at something the rest of her band was not in a position to see, and knowing what it meant.

From the corner of his eye Rod saw Sarge had produced the box as if by magic and was passing out the clear plastic ponchos. Rain had not been in the forecast. Sarge really was prepared for everything.

The band had gotten well-practiced with this and the operation proceeded quickly and smoothly. Ponchos for everyone — except the majorette. Brigid glanced at the band briefly as its full-coverage wool uniforms received yet another covering, another protection from the elements. In less than a minute Sarge’s emptying box was next to the trombones as they quickly donned the last of the ponchos.

Now the first drops of rain, and now a sprinkle, and now all at once a cold icy shower, driven by a wind that shot the rain like icy needles, which the rest of the band, protected by ponchos, felt only on the backs of their necks. Brigid felt it full-on frontally, wearing (as Rod had calculated) only one ten-thousandth what the other Tunemasters were wearing — less now, counting the ponchos.

The earth became dark and ominous, the crowd began to disperse.

Brigid turned around, did a throw, and now the muffled drums did a roll-off and they started into “Washington Post” and began marching again, trying to make up the gap with the girl scouts, who were now in ponchos of their own. The band still sounded good, though it was hard to hear under the ponchos and with the rain making a racket against the plastic, like golf balls on a tin roof.

They marched down the hill, Brigid in bits and wisp and goose bumps, her skin flushing red with the cold, prancing in front as if trying to catch up with the last of the blue sky that was disappearing in the distance. The crowd was now gone; only a few die-hards were left, who had been prepared for everything, like Sarge was, and stood bravely along the side in their raincoats. Some tried to open umbrellas but quickly realized they would be blown out in this wind.

Brigid turned and her eyes met Rod’s. She gave a good-natured shrug as she turned and spun. He smiled back at her. She was a trouper, she was used to the cold, she could deal with it! The band pushed her ahead as if rooting for her.

“Go! Go!” Some women in raincoats were pumping their fists, cheering Brigid on. She smiled at them and winked. The Tunemasters, being led through the wet and cold by their majorette. Go Frigid Brigid!

They were getting too close to the girl scouts so Brigid turned to the band and it halted. Rain was running off her bits, down her concave tummy, onto her wisp. She caught Rod’s eye. Now she turned in place. No, not yet. Those girl scouts were slow. She turned back to the band, then did a little playful hip thrust.

When she was sure she had Rod’s eye, she thrust her hips again, then he saw a spritz of rain jump up from her crotch. ?? She did it again and Rod smiled as he realized she was doing that little jumpy thing with her clitoris that she had shown him in the practice room. They gave each other a conspiratorial wink.

She turned again, and the band lurched into marching once more.

Now a vicious gust caught the ponchos like sails and almost blew the marching Tunemasters off the road! They quickly recovered and got back into formation.

Another burst of rain and this time it did not stop. As the street corners went more and more slowly by, the temperature dropped even more, the wind blew steadily, first one direction, then another. It turned into a deluge, driving away the few remaining spectators.

The band kept focused on the street as they felt the freezing rain on their faces and the backs of their necks. Little currents of water ran past their boots.

The majorette was now purple.

She pranced more stiffly, did lower and more conservative throws. The water ran off her nipples like a spout. The currents on the road surface swirled around her toes and spun out from them like a lawn sprinkler as she kicked and turned.

They passed a TV truck with cameras that were taking one last shot of the parade before quickly being packed away, the technicians and announcers closing themselves up in the cab to sip their hot coffees. No doubt they had caught a shot of the freezing majorette.

The parade had another half mile to go. The Tunemasters trudged on. The girl scouts in front of them abandoned the route, dashing into the troop leader’s van that had driven up along the all-but-deserted side of the street. The only other persons in sight were the Roxbury High School Band, far up ahead, who had given up playing and were now just marching in their ponchos to a muffled drum cadence. The Tunemasters marched faster now, with longer strides, not only to close the gap but to get this damned thing over with. “Let’s go, let’s finish!” Sarge shouted over the noisy torrent of rain.

Brigid braved on, like a swimmer in freezing water. Perhaps due to the cold, her bare pubic lips closed up around the microscopic wisp and it was now invisible. Rod was ashamed to admit it but the green of the tiny bits capping the rock-hard nipples made an intriguing contrast with the now-bluish areola and the purplish skin of the tight, goose-pimpled breasts. The bits stayed on, a tribute to the ingenuity of Ms. Kleinfelter and Dr. Bernie Brophy.

Despite the cold and wind and rain battering them, the ponchos had an insulating effect. The Tunemasters were actually sweating under them. They could feel the cold and wet only on their faces, and the encroaching wetness on the bottoms of their braided trousers. All the Tunemasters except one, of course.

The majorette was now seriously cold, purple from head to bare toes, shivering with teeth chattering as she strode bravely on. She stopped doing throwing her baton, probably realizing that she was shaking too much to catch it. Her bare feet slapped in the freezing water.

It seemed like forever, but they finally rounded the last bend and got to the end of the route. There was supposed to be a reviewing stand there, but it was deserted, of course, rain dripping from the rickety structure that was swaying in the wind.

The band played their last note for no one and began to make the dash for the school, three blocks away. Rod, his trombone over his head, poncho flopping, stayed close behind Brigid, who could run faster than the others, unencumbered by boots, her bare feet slapping up water behind her. “S – sorry,” she shouted, shivering, as some splashed up in Rod’s face.

The band dispersed as it dashed across each street, watching out for the few cars still driving through this deluge. Their boots slogged through torrents of water running along the gutters.

As they got to the school grounds word went around that the benefit football game was canceled, but the Dad’s Club, being stuck with a lot of food, was throwing a benefit party in the gym.

It was just Rod and Brigid now, having made their way across the street. They found themselves next to the equipment shed under the stands, under an awning, sheltered from the rain. They watched the desolate scene in front of them, the flooded street, wind hitting the stop sign, seeming almost like night under the almost-black sky. A fire siren skirled in the distance.

Now, a fork of lightning, and two seconds later, thunder.

“W – we’d b – better stay here,” Brigid said.

“Yes,” Rod said. He looked around and saw they were the last stragglers. Everyone else was gone. And it would not be a good idea to run across the football field to the gym, not with lightning around.

Rod fiddled with the slide of his trombone. Then he looked over at Brigid. “Are you O.K.?”

“Y – yesss.” She was shivering uncontrollably, purple and in goose bumps, hugging herself and her baton, one bare foot clasped over the other. She was clearly not O.K.

Rod looked at her and then looked out at the black clouds.

A frigid blast of wind blew in their faces.

“OHHH — OHHH –” Brigid gasped, doubling over, stamping her bare soles against the wet concrete.

He suddenly realized he had his poncho. Idiot!

“Here.” He scrambled as he rested his trombone upright in the corner and yanked off his poncho.

“Th – thanks.” The majorette put her baton next to the trombone and with shaking hands pulled the poncho over her head. She shook her head clear, water flinging off her red hair, and hugged herself again underneath it. It was see-through, of course. Her hardened nipples with the bits poked against it. It came down to her knees and did nothing for her freezing feet. Rod noticed that the meticulous polish on her fingernails and toenails had stayed on, even while her fingers and toes had gotten pruny as if she had been in the bath for an hour.

They looked out at the rainy scene. There was no more lightning, and the wind began to die down. It was just rain now. There was nobody around.

They stood there for five or ten minutes like this. Feeling like they were at the edge of the world, just the two of them, the rest of civilization having been washed away.

Brigid exhaled. Thankfully, she was no longer shivering. Her skin had gone from purple to red and now was kind of white again. “Wow,” she finally said. “This thing is pretty warm.” She stopped rubbing her arms underneath.

“We were sweating out there,” Rod said with a smile.

“Well \*I\* sure wasn’t.”

“Yes, I know,” he said stupidly.

They looked at each other. It quickly became the look they gave each other in the practice room, before the grown-ups barged in. The kiss that never was.

Rod swallowed.

The faces moved toward each other and then, after a final hesitation, their lips made contact.

Then they kissed again, harder.

Now, bravely, they kissed again with mouths open.

“Wait.” Brigid shucked off the poncho.

They wrapped their arms around each other, Brigid’s bare arms entwining with Rod’s jacket, and kissed and kissed. They couldn’t stop. Mouths opened more and more, unpracticed tongues clumsily played with each other, breathing got heavy.

Their lips disengaged as they finally had to catch their breath. Still in each other’s arms, Rod said, “We can go to the gym . . . eventually.”

“I’m not thinkin’ about it now,” Brigid said. She played with his buttons. “Rod . . . ”

“Yes?”

“Can you . . . go with me to the Junior Prom?”

Rod looked down at the ground, open-mouthed with shock. The world had raced out from under him. After blinking a couple of times, he caught up with it. “Y – yes.”

Brigid’s bright green eyes looked up at him. “I’m glad. . . We’ll have a good time.”

“Oh yes — ”

They kissed again, tongues playing down to the tonsils, more skillfully now.

“Rod — ” she said breathlessly.

“Yes — ”

“Feel my glutes. . .”

-end-