**Sitting Tables with Brigid**
by donnylaja

**Sitting Tables with Brigid -- Part 1**

It was the weekend before the big Thanksgiving day parade.

"Why are the Tunemasters doing this?" Rod's father said as their car pulled up to the local supermarket. "Don't you dudes make enough money for the school with all those parades?" He was always peeved at how much time Tunemasters activities took out of Rod's schedule, what with all those special engagements out of town. Like some of the other parents he felt that, despite the prestige of being Tunemasters, the school was taking advantage of them.

Rod was aware of his father's attitude and, as always, tried to shrug it off. "Sarge says we have to 'keep a local presence'. Anyway it's for the preschool." "Sarge" was their band director, Mr. Watson, earning the nickname from his years with an Army band.

"What, your preschool practice? The one you have to get up at 5 a.m. for?"

"It's not that bad, Dad," Rod said, craning his neck to see who was at the table set up outside. "No, the preschool kids, nursery school."

His father snorted. The Tunemasters not only had to fund-raise for themselves, particularly for those expensive uniforms, but also for half the rest of the school district. "Your uniform all perfect?"

Rod ignored the sarcasm and looked down to check the line of buttons. "Yes, O.K." It always felt hot, constricting and scratchy, but today no worse than usual.

"Sure you don't need a coat? Or worn your thermals?"

"No, it's not that cold." Not as nice as yesterday, but O.K. As Rod got out he looked up at the gray sky. It was a little chilly maybe, some wind, but in his Tunemasters uniform, the full jacket, shirt, long pants, marching boots over tube socks, and the long underwear underneath, he should be all right. He got his trombone case from the back seat. Sarge had told everyone to bring their instruments and play tunes occasionally to attract attention to the table. "See you at 3." His father's car sped away.

Rod hadn't told the real reason he wanted to sit table today -- he had finagled it so that he would be sharing the 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. shift with Brigid. Brigid! The Tunemasters majorette, the white Irish girl he'd been in love with from afar. Two hours with Brigid! On top of that it would be just them two! He had gotten here ten minutes early, hoping she would be early too, wanting to maximize every minute.

She wasn't here yet. His friend Jaycee was sitting at the table, finishing up his shift. And Georgene, the pretty girl who was the lead clarinetist. She was quiet, nice, polite. Aside from sharing the same black skin color, the two were an odd couple, not talking much as they sat behind the big donation box with their clipboards. Their instruments were packed away, the cases under the table.

"Where's the drum?" Rod said. The big old bass drum, with the 1950's style Tunemasters logo, which they never used (it was punctured on one side) but brought out sometimes for display.

"Jeff's supposed to bring it," Jaycee said. "I don't know where he is."

"What, that big red SUV?"

"That's it. . . He's such a bad driver, I'm surprised his momma lets him drive it. . . Well hello!"

It was Nilda, Jaycee's new girlfriend, or at least he was well on the way to getting her there. Nilda was a tall Hispanic girl with a nice body and big breasts that stretched the front of her zip-up suede jacket. Jaycee tried very hard not to look at them as he engaged in chitchat with her. Rod casually looked her up and down, and at her friend Luisa. They both had on skinny jeans and Uggs, and also knit caps and gloves, dressing like it was winter. Girls seemed to feel the cold more, he supposed.

Jaycee's goo goo eyes, and his casual slouch, were arrested by the sight of Sarge approaching. It was strange to see him not in his usual suit, but in an open jacket and flannel shirt and corduroy pants. And sneakers!

Jaycee sat up straight. "Hi, Sarge," the three Tunemasters said.

"Feeling better?" Rod said. Sarge had had a cold all week and had been out sick yesterday.

"Yes, thanks. My first sick day in five years," he said. He still sounded a little nasal. "Time to get some things for the wife. Thanks for doing this, kids." He looked at the table. "Where's the drum?"

Jaycee and Georgina shrugged.

Sarge looked around the parking lot as if expecting to see Jeff and the red SUV drive up. "It should be here. Hank was supposed to leave the door open for Jeff." Hank was the school custodian.

Sarge turned to look at the Tunemasters, in "inspection" mode. "Jaycee, your top two buttons."

"Oh, right," Jaycee said, as if he had been unaware. Now all 16 buttons were fastened. He pulled down his jacket to straighten it, in the process giving his newly cinched neck some breathing room.

Sarge looked up at the sky. "Looks like the weather will hold. Who's signed up next?"

"Me and Brigid," Rod said, as blandly as he could.

"Is Brigid going to wear her uniform?" Jaycee said. When Sarge announced the table sitting last week he made it clear that everyone had to be in uniform.

Sarge shook his head. "No, it's too chilly for that. Marching is one thing, just sitting around is another. I was sick, but Ms. Kleinfelter was going to tell her to just wear something nice, appropriate for the weather.." He looked up at the sky and put his hands in his jacket pockets. "Most bands, they give their majorettes a cover-up uniform for when they're not marching, but . . . well . . ." He shrugged. "Not my department. Hope Jeff gets here soon, that drum is a real attention getter. A piece of our history too. Take care, kids, thanks again." And with that he went into the supermarket.

When he was gone Jaycee took up with Nilda again. Rod sat down and opened his case and started putting his trombone together. "How's the take been so far?"

"Pretty good, I think," Georgina said in her quiet voice. When they were in sixth grade Rod had had a crush on her.

"Some loot, but no Gold Sponsors yet," Jaycee said.

Rod sat down next to them, trombone in hand, and looked at the clipboard. There was a box for donations. People who gave $25 or more got to be a "Gold Sponsor" with a complimentary T-shirt. The T-shirts were in a box under the table. Rod thumbed through them. They looked pretty nice, but . . .

"There's only ten of them," he said.

Jaycee shrugged. "I suppose the preschool folks don't have their hopes set too high."

Georgina said, "Maybe they sold the rest already, at the preschool."

Rod placed the cold mouthpiece against his lips and started blowing air to warm the trombone up. "What have you been playing?"

"Here." Jaycee put a little loose-leaf in front of him. Rod turned the pages. The single-line melodies of some of their standard marches, written in bass and treble clefs. This way, any Tunemaster could play the melody as a solo. Sarge thought of everything.

Now he looked around for Brigid. It was almost one o'clock. It was too far for her to walk from her house. Probably her father would drop her off. In his police car? Would that be allowed?

"Take over for me, Rod, will you?" Jaycee said, grabbing his horn case and heading for his house two blocks away, having made a date with Nilda for pizza afterwards. He had finally gotten a side view of Nilda's boobs as she turned into the supermarket with Luisa.

That left Rod with Georgina. She was so quiet, and he couldn't think of anything to say. It seemed odd that such a pretty girl wouldn't have a boyfriend. Didn't anyone ever ask her out?

An elderly couple, carrying small bags of groceries, dropped some dollars into the box. "Thanks, very much," Rod said with a smile.

A minute later Sarge came out with a gallon of milk, waved, and went to his car.

Rod looked at the big clock on the bank across the street. It was now one o'clock.

An old Volvo pulled up next to them. Rod's head snapped at attention as he looked inside. No, no one in it but a tall black girl in the driver's seat, looking maybe 20 years old.

"Sorry, I have to go," Georgina said.

"It's O.K., I can do it alone," Rod said.

"Thanks . . . I'm sure Brigid will be here soon. Oh look, I think that's her poppa's car."

The Volvo drove off and now Rod's rapt gaze was fixed on an old station wagon, lumbering and lurching toward him.

Yes, that was Brigid's father driving, the big friendly red face, unruly red hair. Looked like he was wearing a sweatshirt, off duty. And --

Brigid! Or at least her head, in the passenger seat, the neatly combed red hair, the pretty face . . . All he could see through the window glass was her head. She was slouched down as if adjusting something below. But now as the car pulled up alongside, she looked up and smiled at him. He grinned and his heart was in his mouth, beating rapidly, as the big door opened and she stepped out.

**Sitting Tables with Brigid -- Part 2**

The bare feet emerging from behind the door told all. And it was a total surprise. Now two thin flip-flops, with their slender sparkly strings, slapped flatly onto the asphalt. The dexterous toes, with nails meticulously painted black and white, wiggled into them and Brigid emerged.

She stood up, this beautiful white girl, her perfect body almost completely on display, her green eyes radiant, a sprinkling of freckles on her face and her bare shoulders, her red hair carefully done up in pinned-up braids. A last-minute check of the evenness and the secureness of the little circlets, barely covering her nipples, with a gentle shimmying of her shoulders that made her breasts jiggle back and forth. Then she peered down past her concave, well-toned tummy to check the tiny T-string, an inch wide, barely covering and pressing into and separating her shaved labia. She reached behind and stretched out the clear V-strings on her butt cheeks, letting them slap back into place, to make sure they were positioned directly over her unseen anus. She leaned back into the car and got her baton.

Rod heard her father call out, "Now don't keep yourself from a-goin' inside if you get chilled." She nodded and the door shut and the old car lumbered off. Brigid took a deep breath, looked around, and walked to the table, her bare slender legs, lightly muscled, almost strutting, proud to be a Tunemaster and proud of her uniform. People turned around, thinking for a moment they had seen a naked girl walk by, then realizing, oh, that's the Tunemasters majorette, whom they'd seen at football games and parades.

Smitten as he was, reflexively smiling as he saw female perfection walking toward him, Rod was puzzled. Sarge had said Brigid didn't have to wear her uniform.

"Hi, Rod," she said, though in his imagination her greeting was a lot more flowery. As if sitting for an exam, she took her place at the folding metal chair next to him, put her baton on the table in front of her, and clasped her hands.

Rod tried very hard not to look sideways at her. He sat up and clasped his gloved hands, imitating her. Looking at her bare hands he noticed the nails meticulously painted in the school colors. He kept a stupid smile on his face, trying to think of something to say. He had mentally prepared a list of conversation topics, but it now escaped him. She always had this effect on him.

All he could think about now was her bare butt on the cold metal of the chair. It must be like sitting naked on a block of ice. It had to be too cold for her to just sit around in her majorette uniform.

Finally he cleared his throat. "I admire you, Brigid. Showing up in your uniform."

"What do you mean? We all have to. Sarge said."

"Didn't Ms. Kleinfelter talk to you?"

"What?"

Rod thought of whether to say anything. Looks like the message somehow never got to Brigid. He would hate for her to think she was freezing her buns off for no reason. He wondered if Brigid would pursue it. She didn't.

"Been busy?" she said, pointing at the collection bin.

"So so," Rod said. "Here are the T-shirts for the Gold Sponsors." He reached back and tapped the shirt box with his booted foot. She looked down, in the process spreading her toes to check the polish. With the disappearance over the years of boots and gloves, fingernail paint and toenail paint had become part of the majorette's uniform. Rod looked down too, as if also dispassionately inspecting the polish. He wasn't a foot fetishist or anything like that but he had to admit she had pretty feet.

"Isn't the big drum supposed to be here?" Brigid said, looking around.

Rod shrugged. "I know." Man, he thought, why can't I think of more to say?

Now a young couple with two little kids passed by and gave them a ten. "Thanks for supportin' the preschool," Brigid said. One of the kids, a girl, looked at Brigid and her baton with wide-eyed awe. Brigid smiled engagingly.

It was a peak shopping period at the supermarket and people were always going in and coming out. Now another guy put in a five. "Thanks."

"Hi, Ms. Pikarski!" Brigid said, waving to a tall, youngish woman bundled up in a coat and scarf. She came by. Ms. Pikarski was the head of the preschool. An older woman was with her.

"You're dressed for winter," Rod said, then wondering whether he said the right thing.

"I'm thin blooded," Ms. Pikarski laughed. "Brave for you to be out today," she said to Brigid.

Brigid shrugged her bare shoulders, and Rod caught a view of her breasts gently swaying and jiggling. They were the size of large oranges, more or less, and stood out firmly from her chest. Below, he caught a view of her tiny waist, and the gentle valley that encompassed her navel. "I'll twirl a lot to keep warm," she said pleasantly. "Rod can play tunes."

"Mom, this is Brigid, the Tunemasters majorette, and Rod," Ms. Pikarski said. "This is my mother."

"Good to meet you, I've seen you at games," the old woman said, shaking their hands with her gloved hand. "Here, let me be a Gold Sponsor." She pulled out her purse.

"Thanks very much," Rod said, as he got a T-shirt from the box. Only nine left now. Brigid did the paperwork.

Ms. Pikarski's mother laughed. "I can't see me wearing this!" she said, putting the T-shirt up over her coat. It was gold and had a cute kid's drawing of a house crowded with kids, a sun scrawled overhead. Rod thought: Ms. Pikarski's mother is heavily clothed, like all the rest of us, except one.

"Thank you, thank you once again, Tunemasters!" Ms. Pikarski said. "Looks like things are going well today. This will get us out of a hole."

"Jessy's looking forward to next year," Brigid said. With her accent she pronounced it "next yeah".

"There'll be a spot for her, just like for Chrissy," Ms. Pikarski said. Then she put in a ten and said bye.

As if on cue, a quite overweight woman limped into view, assisted by a cane, holding a little girl by the hand, whose face was a three-year-old version of Brigid's.

"Hey Ma," Brigid said.

"Hello Mrs. O'Dierna," Rod said. He knew she had some kind of heart condition and was in the hospital sometimes. Something having to do with when she gave birth to Jessy, her last baby. He wasn't sure of the details.

"Hello young man," she said in a jovial voice.

"Will you be okay?" Brigid said.

"Oh fine," her mother said. "The stockboys will take everything out to the car."

"I thought Dad was off today."

"He was until a minute ago. Patrick called in sick."

Jessy, jumping up and down in her snowsuit, couldn't contain herself. "Nutella! Nutella!"

"NO nutella!" Brigid said sternly. "Ma, promise me, no sugary junk!"

"Okay, okay," Ms. O'Dierna said with a tolerant smile. Then with a wave she ambled into the store, her youngest child in tow.

Brigid slowly shook her head. Rod knew that she was the oldest of five kids, and six years older than the second-oldest, so with her mother being frail she was kind of an assistant parent. She had that "concerned mother" look on her again. "Jessy eats so much in the way of sweets. Ma just can't say no."

Rod, figuring he could say nothing, sighed along with her. Now they both re-clasped their hands, a little ridiculously. An old woman smiled and put in a five as she passed. Now Rod's friend Jermaine passed by with his mother and Rod waved.

Now it was their friend Latosha, stopping by with a bag of what looked like bread and eggs. "How was Ivan this morning?" she said.

"Not so bad this time," Brigid replied. They were referring to Brigid's job waitressing at the Olympia Diner, where she had the 6 a.m. to noon shift. Latosha worked there too, on Wednesdays after school. Ivan, the boss, could be a terror, especially when it came to keeping the ketchup bottles filled. "I have to fix my uniform though," Brigid said. "I passed by the grill and the apron caught on that hook. A little tear, I can fix it."

"Mine's still too tight. I have to let it out a little. . . You'd think they had more sizes than just small and extra small!" Brigid laughed. They talked a little about school stuff, then Latosha left, walking to her house, which was two blocks away.

Rod noticed Brigid picking up the pencil for the Golden Sponsors list and playing with it. She was left-handed. With her fingers she did a little twirl as if her fingers were her hands and the pencil was her baton. Rod chuckled, trying not to glance back at the exquisite little jiggles this mini-twirling was causing with her breasts.

"I suppose I'm a little compulsive," Brigid said, twirling the pencil again. Now she laid her palms up.

"Is something wrong?"

**Sitting Tables with Brigid -- Part 3**

"No, just checking how rough I am. There's a grip on the baton but it's not real good." She pointed to the metal shaft. In the middle it had a little network of engraved lines, not noticeable except up close. Now back to her palms. "I don't want to get too callused, so I use hand cream at night, but only sometimes. I can't be grippin' with soft skin, it would hurt."

"Why don't you use gloves?"

"What, like yours? I need to be flexible."

"No, I mean . . . um, like those fingerless gloves, they use for exercise."

"Ms. Kleinfelter was thinkin' about that a few months ago, but she decided against it. It would quadruple the coverage of what I'm wearin', and kind of dominate the presentation of the uniform."

Presentation. A word Sarge used often. So important for a marching band.

Rod figured he could mention her uniform now, giving him an excuse to look at her breasts. "The circlets look nice today."

"These are the sparkly ones," Brigid said, gently cupping a breast in each hand. The sparkly circles must just barely cover the areolas; they were about an inch and a half across. Rod wondered how they stayed on. Glue?

"They look a little golden," Rod observed.

Brigid looked up. "No, that's just that car." A gold-colored SUV was parked nearby. "They take on the color around them."

They both looked at her breasts, held in her hands. Or rather, they were appraising the circlets. She pulled up so that they pointed more upward.

"Now they look red," Rod said.

"That's from my hair," Brigid said.

Rod gulped, and shifted in his chair uneasily, trying to accommodate his stiffening dick. Fortunately he was sitting down, and behind a table!

"I've wondered about lettin' my hair down for marching, how it would affect the presentation. I should ask Sarge."

Rod pictured Brigid prancing in front of the band totally naked, her long hair whipping around her shoulders and her arms, competing with the twirling of the baton.

"What made you want to be the majorette?" The question just popped out.

Brigid nodded and smiled at someone who put in a few dollars. "Last year when I was puttin' together the clarinet for a game I saw Sarge and Grenicia goin' to his desk, you know, next to the big instrument room?" Grenicia, a big black girl who graduated, was last year's majorette. "She was standin' there in her uniform, holdin' her baton on her hip, while Sarge was pointin' to a diagram of the formation, showin' where the drums would roll off, the yard lines, and a bunch of other details. It was like she was the on-field leader of the Tunemasters." That was true. Sarge himself liked to stay on the sidelines during games. Even in parades, he never led the band; he always walked alongside in his business suit.

"And then, Sarge started askin' Grenicia's \*advice\* on things to do. Like she knew things he didn't, just from bein' the majorette."

"Grenicia was very smart," Rod observed. He remembered that her uniform had more coverage, with bigger circlets, a simple bikini bottom instead of the tiny strings Brigid had to wear, and sturdier sandals with heel straps. For some reason, the majorette uniform kept shrinking, year by year.

"Yeah, she went to Tufts, or Boston U., one of those places, on that ROTC scholarship, remember?" Brigid said, referring to last year's graduation ceremony. She turned a little toward Rod, her rebounding breasts following, as if helping to emphasize her words. "People have an idea that the majorette is just bein' pretty and twirlin'. But she has to be smart too, at least in the Tunemasters. ('Tunemastuhs.') So I figured that's for me. \*I\* can do that!"

"You always like a challenge," Rod said. Then he realized it sounded a little sarcastic, somehow. He was going to say, That's what I like about you. But that would be too much. Instead, he added, "That's good."

"Oh good grief!" Brigid said, half laughing, half in outrage, turning toward the parking lot.

It was Jeff, big wide smile on his pimply white face, looking back from the driver's seat of a pickup truck that was backing up toward them. On the truck bed was the big drum, on its side, rolling back and forth precariously.

Jeff nearly backed up into a passing car. He stopped as he was honked at, and then honked at again by someone else. "My Dad's SUV is in the shop!" he shouted merrily. "This is my uncle's pickup!"

He lurched back a few more inches, only to stop short as another car sped by him.

Brigid was up like a shot, bouncing into the fire lane, holding her hand up to both sides, directing cars to go around the pickup. Now she motioned to Jeff to back up, back up. From Rod's rear view, she was totally naked except for the thin, clear plastic strings angling like a V into her butt crack. Now she put her hands all the way up to signal Jeff to stop. Rod could see just the crescents of her breasts poking out from each side of her thin back, first one then the other, bouncing with her motions.

Brigid taking charge. It's like what she was just saying about Grenicia. The majorette directing the band, with Sarge away. Brigid kept supplying Rod with more reasons to love her.

The pickup was backed up to the sidewalk now, right near the table. Jeff hopped up into the cab and began struggling with moving the huge drum. It was about four feet high and hard to get a hold of. Brigid, shaking her head, fretted back and forth along the bumper, then reached up to open the tailgate. She decided to hop up and help the hapless 11th-grader. "This is a two-person job," she called back to Rod (breasts wiggling), "Could you stay on the ground and we'll hand it down to you?"

Rod, of course, jumped up at this command, in the process making sure his stiffened dick angled down one leg of his pants. He was pretty sure no one could see it, though he wasn't about to look down to check. He positioned himself behind Brigid and tried to look up at the drum and not at her body. Judging the wispy flip-flops to be a hindrance, Brigid stepped out of them and, anchoring a hand on the lowered gate, vaulted barefoot up onto the truck bed, which was covered with an old carpet to protect the drum.

Brigid and Jeff, standing up on either side of the drum, got into rushed but ineffectual discussions as to who would hold what. Jeff was a little slow and his failure to comprehend was getting the majorette frustrated. Rod almost laughed at this sight -- two white folks arguing on the bed of a pickup truck. He thought of rednecks, or what he imagined southern whites to be, leaving aside the fact that Jeff was Jewish and Brigid was Irish and it was Roxbury, Massachusetts.

Jeff finally got the sense of what Brigid was trying to tell him, and the two of them picked the drum up and inched it backward, Brigid backing up from in front, Jeff pushing from behind. Rod stepped next to the gate. The drum was deep as well as tall, and to get her arms around it Brigid had to crush it against her body. Rod could see the squashed breasts flatten out on either side, under her armpits. The tension rods rubbed against them, pushing them up and down and sideways as the drum jerked about with their awkward steps. Probably bitingly cold metal in this weather, very uncomfortable against Brigid's bare skin.

Brigid's goose-pimpled butt was now right above his face, her legs twisting crazily as she prepared to hand the drum over to him. He was aware that the spectacle was drawing a crowd of onlookers. Now Brigid, with her majorette's flexibility, turned one leg so that her toes curled over the lip of the gate. "Here, Rod." He reached up to grab a couple of the tension rods as she hopped down out of view. He heard her soles slapping on the asphalt.

Rod tried to get a secure grip on the rim of the drum, so that it would not slip out of his gloves. In his full-coverage band uniform keeping his arms up over his head was awkward, constricted as he was by the long-sleeve undershirt, the long-sleeve band blouse, and the long-sleeved jacket with its 16 buttons, scratching him the whole time. Now Jeff lurched forward a little too fast and, trying to bring the drum down a bit, Rod's steps faltered. He crazily stepped right and left, his boots clomping all over the asphalt.

Finally he got the drum in his arms and swerved it over to the table. He was proud of the fact that he successfully planted it on its side, good side facing out, right where it should go, next to the Golden Sponsors sheet.

From behind he heard Jeff yell in the distance, "O.K., bye!" as he drove off. The fool didn't remember to close the tailgate . . .

Now Rod's heart stopped as he heard Brigid's quiet but desperate whisper behind him --

"Oh shit -- my uniform!!"

**Sitting Tables with Brigid -- Part 4**

Rod had never heard Brigid use such language before. He quickly turned around, then turned back, then turned around. He had to think fast. A uniform malfunction!! Would he get to see Brigid's bare nipples? Or maybe her shaved "pussy"?? Or maybe he shouldn't look at all?

Through the corner of his eye he saw the problem and figured it was ok to turn around and look. Brigid, trying to get out of his way when he turned around with the drum, had twisted in one of her sparkly flip-flops and one of the little strings had snapped free of the thin sole. She hopped back to the table, trying to hold onto the broken sandal by squeezing with her toes. It fell off and she awkwardly bent down to pick it up.

When Rod returned to his seat next to her she was in a distracted state. Her bare buns once more sat on the freezing bare metal of the folding chair, but now one leg was curled, toes hidden in the hollow of her other knee. She held the damaged flip-flop in her hand with eyebrows knitted with concern. She knew the smallest detail of her micro-uniform; Rod could see that the little button that kept the string in the sole had broken off, lost now somewhere on the parking lot asphalt. As Rod watched closely, the Tunemasters majorette carefully re-threaded the string through the hole and tied the ground-facing end into a knot. The parts of her uniform were so tiny Rod imagined she should be using a watchmaker's magnifying glass.

"It will be a little tight on the ankle side, but it will do," Brigid said. She carefully brought her foot out and slipped the flip-flop back on. Standing up, she attempted two steps but the knot slipped out, and soon she was back on the chair, the bare foot hidden again. "What will I do now?" she asked herself, clearly distressed. "I can't be seen like this!"

Everyone knew that Brigid was a modest girl. She would never be seen in the provocative clothes some other girls wore. Her usual outfit was long pants, sneakers with socks, and a long-sleeved blouse over which she often wore a denim jacket, probably to hide her boobs, which stuck out on her thin body. She was proud of her majorette uniform and to be seen with an item missing would deeply embarrass her.

Rod thought fast. "Maybe . . . if you tied it around a toothpick or something?"

"Good idea!" Brigid said, which made Rod feel proud. She looked to the supermarket door. "My mom's still in there -- can you ask her to get a box?"

"Okay!!" Rod jumped at any request Brigid might give. He dashed inside and walked briskly from aisle to aisle, looking for Mrs. O'Dierna. He couldn't find her! . . . Well, I can buy a box myself. He had a ten-dollar bill with him, in case he wanted a snack or something. Quickly searching, he found toothpicks in the soda aisle, next to the party plates, and zoomed to the checkouts.

It turned out that Brigid's mother was on line. He got behind her. "Hello, Mrs. O'Dierna," he said, stiffly and respectfully. She had been pushing the cart with one hand, her cane in the other. Little Jessy was in the little seat on top. Rod noticed Nutella in the cart. Brigid was not going to be happy about that.

With some difficulty Rod pushed his fingers into the tight pocket in the front of his jacket and extracted the ten-dollar bill. Then on an impulse he pulled a bottle of water out of the little cabinet next to the line. Realizing that Brigid hadn't brought any money with her (where would she put it?), he got a bottle for her too.

The line wasn't moving. An old guy in front was having an argument with the cashier as to the value of one of the coupons. It went on and on; now the assistant manager was called. Listening, Rod learned that the dispute was over twenty-four cents. He closed his eyes and exhaled. Brigid was in crisis, waiting for him. And this old man was holding things up over twenty-four cents.

Not that wearing that flip-flop actually meant that Brigid would be more "covered". The strings were so tiny, thinner than shoelaces, that she was in effect exposing all of her bare feet to the world. Everyone else's uniform covered their whole bodies, except for their faces and necks. While the majorette only had those little circlets, the little V-strings over her butt, the one-inch-wide strip over her vagina, and the little flip flop strings. Rod had once calculated that the majorette enjoyed only 0.5 percent coverage over her body, while the rest of her band had the benefit of 96 percent. But it was the principle of the thing. A majorette can't go around in public with part of her uniform missing! It would be indecent!

Rod exhaled again. He shared an exasperated look with Mrs. O'Dierna, though her eyes had a twinkle to them. She was not in any hurry. As for little Jessy, she was happily perched in her seat, engrossed in a rattle built into the front bar.

Finally the old man was placated; the store decided to honor the coupon after all. Rod wanted to cut ahead of Mrs. O'Dierna but he knew that would be impolite. Brigid would have to wait a couple more minutes. Looking outside the front windows, he couldn't see her, though he could see part of the drum. He saw people passing by on their way in, in their overcoats, boots . . . Here he was inside the warmth of the store, all covered up . . . poor Brigid practically naked outside, sitting on that freezing metal chair . . .

The O'Dierna family liked chicken, it seemed. There was a lot of it, lifted from the cart by the stockboy and put on the moving belt. Evidently the folks at the store knew about Mrs. O'Dierna's limited ability to bend over and lift things. The overweight, disabled mother of five watched with a smile. Then as she pushed the empty cart forward Jessy hopped onto her shoulder and jumped to the floor, sucking her thumb as her mother led her out behind the stockboy pushing the cart full of bags.

Rod thought: The O'Dierna's are a happy family. Despite not having a lot of money, and Mrs. O'Dierna's health problems. Having Brigid as "assistant mother" must help a lot.

He finally got out to the table with the little box of toothpicks. Brigid, still with her foot folded into her knee, sat with her fists on the table and a furrowed brow. Rod smiled. "I know, Nutella," he said.

"Yes . . . exactly." Brigid watched as the old station wagon turned onto Martin Luther King Boulevard. Now she looked at the box of toothpicks. "Thank you much, Rod." She opened the box and fumbled to get a toothpick out. Rod noticed that her fingers were stiff and red. He glanced down and noticed that her toes were red too. In fact her body was flushed all over. White people, you could tell so much about them from their skin. Brigid tried to hide it but she was feeling the cold.

"Here," Rod said, putting the bottle of water in front of her. "Thanks." Then he could have kicked himself. Just what she needs -- a drink of COLD water. He could have gotten her a hot tea. Then again . . . they didn't have any hot drinks in the store.

Resourcefulness was an important asset for a Tunemasters majorette. Brigid had it in abundance. She expertly formed two toothpicks into a cross, then tied them onto the bottom of the flip-flop. Once again she slipped it on and took a few steps. This time it worked. "Thank goodness!" she breathed with a sigh of relief as she sat down again. Rod tried not to watch as her breasts rose and fell with her sigh. It seemed like the circlets were sticking out more. Underneath, her nipples were probably hardening with the cold.

Brigid's next comment was instructive. "Let's play." Rod knew what that meant. He picked up his trombone, moved the slide in and out, stopping when realized it reminded him of jerking off, then read from the loose leaf the first line of "American Patrol". Brigid limbered up her stiff muscles and, stepping out past the sidewalk, did some expert throws. The first couple were low and safe, but then she got into her "zone" and threw way, way up, past the roof of the supermarket. Rod, inspired, went on to "Washington Post" and "Manhattan Beach". He knew these well enough so that he could glance at the majorette's circlets whirling round and round, as Brigid twirled her breasts along with the baton. Somehow she kept those backless flip-flops on her feet as she high-stepped and pivoted. The crossed toothpicks did not fail.

As it was meant to do, the display attracted a little crowd. People stopped on their way and soon Brigid was being appreciated from every angle. She and Rod finished together, with Rod giving one final fanfare, extra loud. With the applause Brigid said, "Thank you -- step up and support our preschool!" This shamed enough people to come forward that for the next ten minutes she and Rod were busy taking donations and giving out shirts. They brought in two hundred dollars.

They both caught their breaths as the rush subsided. "That was good, Brigid," he said.

"Yeah," Brigid said, gulping down cold water, checking her hands like before.

After this burst of activity there was a lull. Rod looked down at the box. There was only one T-shirt left. Then looked up at the sky. It was getting darker, though he couldn't tell if it was oncoming rain, or just this time of year. Daylight savings time had ended last week and it was now getting dark way early.

It was getting near the end of the shift. Brigid exhaled. Her arms were blotchy and goose-pimply. Now she exhaled again, trying to suppress a shiver. She rubbed her upper arms with her hands. Rod decided he had to say something. "Brigid . . . you must be freezing. Why don't you put on that last shirt?" They were the long kind. If she put it on it would probably reach down to cover her tight bare butt cheeks, or almost. He imagined it would be hard to slip over those protruding circlets. They then would cause the shirt to stick way out, practically poking through it.

"N - no . . . it's for the p - preschool . . ."

"C'mon, Brigid!"

"Don't worry about me, Rod . . . It's p - part of bein' a majorette. Anyway . . . I'm thinkin' of snuggling under the covers w - with a hot chocolate when I get home . . . That is after I show B - Bern how to make that f - fried chicken for dinner." Rod remembered that Bernadette was the second oldest in Brigid's family, about ten years old.

"No need to shiver until then! Put the shirt on!" Strong-minded as Brigid was, Rod did not mind being insistent at a time like this.

At that moment who should show up but Mrs. Melinda McPherson, their high school principal, dressed up nattily in her fake-fur coat, flowered dress, boots, velvet gloves, and large church-style hat. "Good afternoon, Mr. Sykes, Miss O'Dierna . . . how are we doing?"

"Total take so far, five hundred twenty dollars," Brigid reported promptly, checking the sheet. "Eight gold sponsors."

"Very good," Mrs. McPherson said, without surprise. "That's five hundred twenty dollars the preschool didn't have before. Oh hello, Mr. Lemrick." Rod's friend Lorenzo, another trombone player, had showed up for the last shift. He waved and bent down to open his case.

Mrs. McPherson took out her purse. "I will have to be a gold sponsor too, you know!" She had two moods: A) wicked old witch, and B) kindly grandma. At the moment she was B. She handed Brigid forty dollars.

"Wow, thanks, Mrs. McPherson!" the nearly naked majorette said. Rod could not detect her thoughts as she picked the last T-shirt out of the box and gave it to her heavily clothed school principal. They watched her fold the shirt and put it into one of her coat pockets, then walk into the store.

"Well time for us to go," Rod said, watching his father drive up. The wind kicked up. "Not a moment too soon either!" He vicariously imagined her relief as he thought of Brigid slipping her half-frozen body under blankets and sipping that hot chocolate. As Lorenzo took his place at the table Rod looked around.

"Who's taking your shift, Brigid? They look like they're late."

"It was g - goin' to be Debbie but she called me to say she's s - sick," Brigid shivered. "So I'm a-takin' her shift."

"Oh . . . okay, then bye."

"B - bye!"

Rod imagined she could warm herself up with more twirling as Lorenzo played fanfares. But he still felt miserable as he left her, nearly all bare and shivering. He got into the car, said hi to his father, put the seat belt on, and caught one last glimpse of Brigid has he straightened his jacket and undid the top two buttons, giving his neck some room to breathe. He felt hot and would be glad to get home and take off these heavy scratchy things.

[end]