

Command Performance

A commission for Aardvark

By Pappy Wolf

Note: Godric Von Essen and Oliver created by Aardvark

A small, hairless fist pounded on the door of the men's room stall. "What the hell are you doing in there, faggot? Get out of there, c'mon!" The voice aimed for intimidation but was sabotaged by its high, reedy tone.

Ron Calder finished fastening his studded belt and warily pulled the door open. As he had feared, there was Tennyson Broome in all his preppy glory. "Tough talk for a virgin," he shot back. He let his leather-jacketed shoulder brush against Broome's slim frame as he stomped past him, his work boots thudding heavily on the tile floor.

Broome headed him off at the sinks. "Who needs a toilet when I can just piss in your mouth? That's what you homos like, right?"

Calder set about washing his hands, only glancing at Broome to say, "I keep forgetting you have no bladder control. The changing table's over there for all your diaper needs. Too bad Mommy and Daddy didn't come on this trip, too. You'll have no one to wipe your little wiener for you."

Broome's tan face acquired a pink tint. "Tough talk from a queer who buys all his hipster supplies with his daddy's credit card. You're really sticking it to the man, alright!"

Knox, a far larger Senior, shoved Broome out of the way as he took the open stall for himself. "Would one of you twerps just throw a goddamn punch already? All this talk, you sound like an old married couple. Hurts my fucking ears." The door slammed shut and the deafening sounds of his defecating began.

Scandalized, Broome gaped at this, and then looked back at Calder. The phony Bohemian was already slipping out the door, flipping him the double bird.

Calder and Broome had run into each other only a handful of times through their four years of high school. But each boy hated the other at first sight. It didn't help that the rest of the student body kept mixing them up. They were both short, wiry lads with boyish faces and only the barest wisps of facial hair. Vice-Principal Fong liked to refer to them as "the twins." Neither youngster found this amusing.

With one month left until graduation, they were on a Senior trip to New York. Now they bumped into each other daily. It was a nightmare. But not as bad as the lame magic show they were obliged to attend tonight. "Magic & Might: Syzygy," the thing was called. The star was "Godric," a middle-aged himbo with Dr. Strange hair and the body of an exotic dancer. Posters showed this clown posing like a superhero in a star-spangled cape, his 'roided-out bod bathed in sunshine on his right side and moonlight on his left. A group of girls had swarmed a cardboard standee of the dude in the lobby, giggling and taking photos of themselves with it.

"GAY," Broome had said in a conspicuous tone as he passed the mob of adoring teens. It would have been funnier, he thought, if Calder hadn't said the exact same thing at the exact same time. The boys' heads had swiveled in unison so they could share a contemptuous glare.

Ms. Lopresti, the chaperone, had snapped her fingers and motioned for them to join her by a bench. "Knock it off. I don't want to hear that kind of talk from you for the rest of the trip. And by the way, you kids are lucky to see this show. Normally, Godric performs in Las Vegas. But he's on a nationwide tour right now, and his New York booking just happens to coincide with our little vacation! Isn't that lucky?"

"It's fate," Broome had agreed through clenched teeth.

Nobody exited the other stalls, so Broome had to wait for that caveman Knox to finish up. The meathead athlete had done a real number on the bowl that no amount of flushing could remedy. Broome had to breathe through his nose to keep from gagging.

Afterward, he spruced up at the sink, eyeing his look approvingly. He looked like money. Thick blond hair with the curls flat ironed and freshly trimmed in an undercut. Navy blazer, slim fit khakis, blue suede loafers *sans* socks, a fun nautical print dress shirt (yachts alternating with sharks), his trusty gold Audemars Piguet wristwatch, and even a polka-dot pocket square, just for fun. The show was bound to be goofy as hell, but it did give him an excuse to show off.

But his thoughts scattered, and he loitered in front of the mirror longer than he had intended. His shoulders sagged. The satisfaction of dressing up was getting more difficult to hang onto. He didn't know what was wrong with him. It was like there was an ulcer in his soul, and everything that used to bring him joy was leaking out of it. Part of growing up, maybe. The problem was, he didn't know what could replace those old feelings.

He found some comfort in knowing he looked classier than Calder. Today, the wannabe punk was attired in scuffed work boots, skinny jeans sporting multiple holes in the knees, some kind of S&M belt, a flannel shirt and a leather jacket Broome knew damn well was *Roberto Cavalli*. It had to have set him back \$7500. At least. The pretentious little shit accessorized with numerous biker rings and bracelets, a wallet chain heavy enough to stun a charging rhino and a wool beanie artfully arranged to allow one lock of green hair to dangle over his left eye. Then there were his teeny tiny tunnel gauges. Clearly, his parents wouldn't allow him to move up to a size that would permanently wreck his earlobes. Pathetic. Post-college, his dad would just empty Calder out of his alternative drag and pour him into a suit, let the piercings heal up, and then it would be like his rebel phase never happened.

As he left the men's room, he almost collided with the object of his ire, who was pacing the floor and tersely saying the word "Dad" over and over.

Calder's dad refused to listen to him. Sure, it looked bad, but Calder knew he was innocent. But the old man was in no mood for explanations. Yes, some of Mom's pills were missing, but it hadn't been his fault... this time. It had to have been that bitch, Riley. Not the Riley in his calculus class or the one in Glee Club. This was the Riley in his punk band with the soot sprite tattoo on her ankle. He never should have brought her over to his parents' condo. Her dad was in *retail*, for fuck's sake. There was no way she knew how to act around the upper crust. But that's what he liked about her. The air of danger.

But Dad wouldn't let him get two words in to defend himself. Bang, the gavel came down. The old man decreed he would keep a close eye on Calder's spending while he was in New York. The second he got back to Laguna Beach, the credit card was going into the shredder.

Dad ended the call without a goodbye. Three beeps and the trip was ruined. Calder looked up to see Broome standing there, bemused.

"*What,*" Calder demanded.

Broome just threw up his hands. "I'm not saying anything!"

Mrs. Lopresti came tearing around the corner in a huff. "There you boys are—! Calder, the phone goes away *now*. Both of you, come with me. We're going to be late!" As she took off again at a sprint, she muttered, "*This* is why I told them we needed an extra chaperone...!"

When they reached the auditorium doors, they were closed. An usher stood guard with crossed arms and a pinched expression. "It's showtime," he explained. "No admittance once the lights go down. Godric doesn't like distractions."

Ms. Lopresti started to complain, but just then a huge, musclebound, bare chested blond man in leather pants strode up to them and smiled. "I think we can make an exception just this once. I can assure you, Godric won't mind."

Another himbo, Broome thought. But he had to admit, the guy's English accent was classy as shit.

The chastened usher hurriedly opened the door. The blond man walked in with them. "You three are lucky I just happened to be out here, doing my nightly perimeter check," he said, breezily. He moved swiftly down a side aisle, then slipped through a door next to the orchestra pit.

Calder rubbed his vaguely scruffy chin, eyes goggling as the mountainous character went on his way. The dude was massive. He couldn't imagine getting that big. It would take forever.

Broome had hoped he'd be able to sit out the whole tacky spectacle. Magicians were for grade schoolers and cruise ship passengers. There was no way he wouldn't be bored to death by this show.

Ms. Lopresti found her seat, leaving Broome and Calder to search for theirs. They squeezed past the knees of their annoyed classmates until they got all the way to the end of the row and discovered they were sitting next to each other. With a shared groan, they flopped down into their seats.

A PA announcement went through the typical precautions about cell phone use, cameras, flashing lights, smoke effects and such. Calder tried to ignore it as he stared listlessly at the curtain. A projection of the show's logo rippled over the drapery. *SYZYGY*, big and bold, in sizzling orange and ghostly blue Egyptian-flavored lettering. It sounded like the moniker of a metal band or an energy drink. He had heard the term before but he couldn't recall where. One of his science texts, maybe.

The projection faded away as the curtains opened on a stage dominated by colossal abstract props suggesting pyramids, twisted palm trees, broken columns and sarcophagi. The backdrop was a digital projection showing a sky divided between day and night, like on the posters. Subsonic hums built to a rumbling drum solo punctuated thunderclaps as a stylized disc the size of a pickup descended from the

rafters amid showers of artificial fog. One half of the disc was gold with curving flames around the perimeter, the other half silver with short, straight lines emanating from the outside edge.

"Pokemon Sun and Moon: The Musical," Calder grumbled. Despite himself, Broome had to laugh at that. They were both shushed by a lady sitting in front of them.

The disc cracked down the middle, revealing a mummy the size of John Cena, or maybe even bigger. The monster slowly raised his arms and then struck a bodybuilder pose. The audience lost their goddamn minds.

"Jesus—!" Broome stuck his fingers in his ears until the cheers died down.

The mummy thrust his tree trunk arms out and lumbered forward like Frankenstein in time to a thumping bass line. At the front of the stage, he leapt into the air and came down in a split, accompanied by jets of flame on the right side and silvery explosions of glitter on the left. The ominous music faded out as another song started up. Some 70's sounding crap about "golden years." *Too old even to be Dad Rock,* Calder thought, sinking down in his seat. *It's more like Grampa Rock.*

A long midnight blue satin cape with a tall, stiff collar suddenly erupted from the mummy's back. The fabric fluttered upward and stayed there, undulating like a manta ray as the performer vogued and gyrated to the music. He kicked his right leg out and the wrappings spiraled out into the crowd, revealing a metallic blue boot. A few more dance steps and a spin, the wrapping on the left lower leg flew off, showing another boot. He pumped his fists and raised his beefy arms heavenward. The wrappings shot into the rafters and were never seen again. The mummy was wearing sky blue elbow-length leather gloves and the sleeves of a diaphanous white silk shirt.

In walked luck and you looked in time, some English guy crooned on the soundtrack. *Never look back, walk tall, act fine...*

The mummy moonwalked, then did a backflip so high that it had to have been enhanced with wire work. When he landed, he tore the wrappings from around his waist and thighs. The mummy sported gray-blue leather pants accessorized with a wide black belt inlaid with silver filigree. He crouched down and did some cheesy Cossack maneuver where he crossed his arms and kicked his legs. Hopping to his feet again, he strutted around the stage in time to the song, flexing his biceps. After an interminable amount of posing, he flexed his powerful chest, snapping the wrappings like rubber bands. The mummy's faggy ballroom dancer shirt was unbuttoned almost to the waist, putting his mammoth pecs on display. Even from a distance, Broome could see that the guy's hairy torso was groomed to within an inch of its life. Typical queer.

Projectors beamed a giant hologram of the mummy's bandaged head above the actual guy. The head's movements were synced with the performer's. The mummy put a gloved hand under his chin and lifted the wrappings off all at once, like a rubber mask. Simultaneously the wrappings on the hologram vanished. There was Godric's jolly himbo face, writ large: his shellacked coif of black hair with its two swooping streaks of white at the temples, the thick but obviously manicured brows, the merry, mischievous blue eyes, even the designer stubble, so dense it may as well be called a beard. The magician showed his perfect white teeth in a friendly smile and winked.

The audience stood up and applauded. Calder wished they would just keep standing so he didn't have to look at this asshole. He found Godric's energy profoundly grating. It reminded him of the Rock, or Ryan Reynolds. The guy was charming, sure, but in a way that made it clear he was desperate for *every single person in the world* to like him. It was so uncool, it almost circled back around to cool again. *Almost.*

"Welcome, New York," the magician boomed. "I am Godric Von Essen, and *THIS... IS... SYZYGY!*" He punctuated the announcement with a matador swirl of his coppery satin cape.

Broome gasped. The cape was supposed to be blue. He remembered that. Almost the whole outfit the dork was wearing had been blue, just moments before. He'd had no chance to duck behind a prop and change it. But now, everything but his see-through shirt was resplendent with warm tones. Metallic gold boots, yellow leather gloves, gold accents on a white leather belt, red-orange ombre leather pants.

Godric basked in the applause, his ingratiating smile burning into Calder's eyes. The guy's act was annoying in the extreme, but Calder couldn't look away from it. The magician shimmered and grew blurry. Calder wiped the tears from his eyes. It almost felt like he had forgotten to blink; he was so completely focused on Godric. He finally managed to tear his eyes away and glanced about at the audience. They were all staring at Godric, too. Everyone. Nobody was looking at their friends or at a phone or at the food in their lap. Godric had them all zeroed in on *him*.

Digital stars sparkled in the night half of the sky while digital clouds floated lazily in the sun half. The postmodern props began to slowly glide about on the stage. Godric gestured expansively at the crowd. "Who among you here know what syzygy is?"

Applause and foot stamping, while several people's hands shot into the air.

Godric raised a heavy brow, his countenance dashingy skeptical. "That's *impossible*. Do you know how I know that? Because *I* can barely define it, myself!"

This remark was met with delighted laughter.

"Syzygy," Godric continued, "is the alignment between three bodies." He raised a finger. "*Heavenly bodies*, I should say. This isn't *that* kind of show!"

Even more laughter.

"We see syzygy in a solar eclipse. Between the sun and the earth comes the moon, and the sun... changes."

Murmurs swept through the audience.

"But does it really change? It may seem that way, but the moon merely allows us to see what the sun has been hiding from us. Its corona. Its secret glory. Tonight, I will take you on a journey to discover the beautiful secrets hiding all around us!" He extended a gloved palm to the crowd. "Take my hand, and I will lead you to the cosmic radiance, the fire behind the ice, the crystalline heart of the flame... to SYZYGY!" The moving props finally locked together behind the magician, forming an image of the Sphinx.

Broome couldn't muster the enthusiasm to applaud, but he did find himself slapping his armrest in time to the audience's clapping. The flashy fucker had swagger, he had to admit. He glanced over at Calder, who was staring with wonder at Godric. Even he wasn't immune to the magician's charisma.

Godric introduced his assistant, who turned out to be the ripped English dude. The guy's name was Oliver. This prompted Calder to say in a squeaky Cockney voice, "Please, sir, may I have some more... creatine...?"

The lady in front of them whipped her head around to shoot them a dirty look. But Broome had to admit, it was a solid burn. He grinned at Calder and offered a fist to bump. Calder bumped it and smiled.

Godric's act wasn't as lame as the young men had feared. There were a lot of transfiguration tricks. Bluebirds became bats, owls became parrots. A shackled Godric escaped from a water tank as the liquid exploded into a ball of flame, which then froze into a shower of snow.

The illusions slowly built in scale and complexity while Godric teased his final trick, called *Syzygy*, just like the show. At last, the time came. "And now," the magician announced, "my talented assistant is in the audience, selecting two very lucky volunteers!"

Calder wasn't sure that *volunteers* could be *selected*. He only knew that—

A spotlight blinded him. He shaded his eyes and glanced at the aisle next to him. Standing there was the towering muscleman, Oliver.

"You two lads here on the end," he said, firmly. "You're coming with me. A reward for your patience with that twat of an usher."

Broome blanched. So did Calder. But everyone was staring at them and applauding wildly. Feeling like prisoners *en route* to the gas chamber, the youngsters trudged off to their fates.

Oliver had them wait offstage while Godric launched into another flowery spiel. But soon enough the magician motioned to his assistant and Oliver shoved Broome out onto the stage. "Here is our sun," Godric declared. "So shiny and bright! So flashy!" He tweaked the polka dot pocket square in Broome's pocket, fluffing it up a bit. "Tell everyone your name, young man."

Weakly, Broome complied.

"Mister Tennyson Broome, your sense of style puts mine own to shame. Why, the glare from that gold watch is enough to make me want to don sunglasses." He snapped his fingers and a pair of shades appeared in his palm. Putting them on, he held out his hands, framing Broome in a square made of thumbs and index fingers. "Much, much better!" The crowd roared.

Oliver pushed Calder into view. Godric gestured for the lad to stand next to Broome. "And here," the magician announced, "is a far earthier individual. Isn't that right, my dear boy? You're a man of the people, with no pretensions whatsoever!" He lifted Calder's wallet chain with a pinky finger and let it fall heavily back onto his thigh. "Now, tell everyone your name."

Calder's throat was dry, but he managed to croak his reply.

"You strike me as a very grounded person, Mr. Ronald Calder. Just plain folks, practically a hick."

Calder's stomach scrunched in on itself. He nodded, unsure of how else he should respond.

Godric smoothly stepped between them and put his hands on their shoulders. Sighing, he rolled his eyes wistfully upward. "Ah, but *underneath*...! Well, I suppose we will see, won't we?"

Two tight spotlights beamed down on either side of the stage. One blue, one amber. Godric guided Calder to the blue one and Broome to the amber one.

“Earth, the blue planet,” Godric bellowed. All the lights dimmed except for the blue spotlight over Calder.

“Sun, the golden orb,” Godric shouted. Now, only the amber light over Broome was lit.

The blue spotlight reappeared. “Two bodies,” the magician announced. “Very different from one another but bound together by gravity. They think they know who they are. We think they know who they are. But now we add a third body. *The moon.*”

A white spotlight blazed down onto the magician. His outfit had changed again. Now it was all white with geometric silver accents, looking like a skintight astronaut’s uniform, down to the helmet with smoked glass visor. Godric put his hands to the helmet. With a hiss and a burst of glittery smoke, the helmet detached from the costume, and he lifted it off. He cradled it in one arm as he drew an elegant circle in the air around his face with his other hand. “As though I would deprive you all of *this*,” he said, with a winning smile.

Gentle laughter from the audience.

He tossed the helmet to Oliver. “Already, things have changed! Mr. Broome, where is that fancy handkerchief of yours...?”

Broome looked down. The pocket square had vanished.

Godric turned to Calder. “Here it is. It seems Mr. Calder has swiped it!” Calder glanced at his leather jacket. The absurd bit of fabric had been stuffed into one of his leather jacket’s breast pockets. A pocket that had been zipped shut just moments before.

The magician turned back to Broome. “No need for any hard feelings, Mr. Broome. It looks like Mr. Calder has given you his wallet chain!” Broome’s mouth fell open as he stared at the heavy silver chain hanging from a belt loop and draping around his thigh to his back pocket.

“What else might change? We shall see!” Godric unzipped the front of the outfit down to his waist. With a snap of his fingers, a silver-and-white satin cape with a high collar sprang to life from the costume, the cape fluttering upward just as the others had. Glancing at Calder and Broome, he said, “Boys, would you do me the favor of joining me on my moonwalk?”

Calder, his body tense, watched as the magician slowly rose into the air. It was the smoothest wire work he had ever seen. He had to give the guy credit for that. A wave of dizziness took hold. He felt lightheaded. He could sense his heels lifting off the stage, and then his toes. He seemed to have no power over his own body. His arms drifted upward and outward as his wiry form was borne into the air. On the edge of his vision, he could see the same thing was happening to Broome.

Delighted whispers and scattered applause teased Broome’s ears. This wasn’t wire work. They were actually floating. He hated heights, and his phobia was kicking inside his gut with both feet. This was unnatural, and that Godric was... what? A real magician, like a wizard or something? Or was it worse than that? Was he a demon or an alien creature? How could no one else see that this whole situation was seriously wrong? But a tingling numbness in his face explained that away. Godric was forcing him to

appear calm, all while he was mentally screaming his head off. And the clapping morons in the crowd had no idea.

“So tense,” Godric cheerily scolded them in a stage whisper. “Relax, let go. You’re both trying so hard to impress people when you should just be yourselves. Ah, but that’s the folly of youth. You boys aren’t happy with how things are at your age. That’s easily remedied. Allow me to fast forward things for you.” The silver patterns on his costume glowed half blue, half orange.

Calder could see coruscating patterns in the air, surrounding him like a soap bubble. He wanted to believe it was a hologram. He knew in his heart that it wasn’t. But as he hovered helplessly twenty feet above the stage, he felt his anxiety drain away. Energy surged into his limbs. It almost felt like his muscles were swelling, growing stronger. His eyes lit on his arms, which were slowly stretching outward, muscle piling up beneath his skin, making the sleeves of his jacket and shirt far too short and slim to contain them. With a creaking noise, the seams grew taut and split apart, causing the fabric and leather to hang in strips from his shoulders.

He had always wanted to be taller. But not like this. His body was just a hunk of clay for the magician to reshape however he wanted. It was monstrous. Helplessly, he observed the world turning about him as his body spun in the air, turning about to face his rival, Broome. The preppy kid looked to be in the same state as himself, all gangly, leanly muscular arms and legs sprouting from an outfit that was too small for him. Broome’s slim fit khakis looked like form-fitting board shorts and had developed tears at the thighs. Neither of them had been athletes, but now they looked like they could have been stars of the school swim team, at the very least.

Hazy recollections popped into his head of grueling practices and hard-won trophies. Phantom waves lapped at his body, like he had felt after wading into the Pacific. Muscle memory. And Broome had been there, too. In the next lane, stealing looks at him as they raced. He tried to block it out, this false memory. But it stubbornly insisted it was real. And one by one, his real memories warped in order to accommodate it.

“Tell me,” Godric smiled, “what was your name again?”

It was fuzzy. Calder looked at the downy hairs wriggling up from his bare skin and realized, he was fuzzy too. “Ron... no, Don... Carter...?”

The audience roared. “If you say so, Donald,” Godric winked.

A fresh burst of energy radiated from Carter’s chest outward to his fingertips and toes. His torso expanded along with his arms and legs. His studded belt helpfully unbuckled itself. With a dull plinking sound, the studs detached themselves and rained down onto the stage. His gauges followed suit. But when he looked again at the stage, the metal was gone. As he lazily observed this, he noticed something odd about his boots. They seemed shorter, more like shoes. The scuffs were vanishing as the leather darkened and developed a glossy finish.

He cast his gaze at Broome. The kid’s suede loafers were warping into something like boots, the obnoxious blue material deepening into a worn brown leather. His shredded khakis had turned gray and were weaving themselves back together into baggy trousers. But more than that, his body was tall and strong. Not overly so, but certainly powerful enough for the football team.

Godric turned to face Broome. "Remind me again, young man... what's your name?"

Broome had to ponder on that. "Um...? Tenny... uh, no, Benny Brom...ney. Benny Bromney, yeah."

Godric slapped his forehead... theatrically, just like everything else he did.

Bromney's head ached. Something was wrong. He couldn't shake that feeling. But he was in Godric's grip, and he could sense his mouth smiling idiotically at Carter. He wasn't an athlete, he knew that for a fact. But his mind kept conjuring scenarios of the two of them going up against each other at swim meets, at track meets and now on the football field. God, football was the best out of all of them. Not just racing against Carter but slamming their bodies together. Versus, always versus. Because they didn't go to the same school. Because... Carter lived in posh Orange County and he was from... somewhere up north. That was it. They only ever saw each other at state tournaments.

But... what was he doing in NoCal? He tried to recall his family sailing on their yacht. But the choppy ocean surface flattened out and sprouted clumps of fescue and ryegrass, and then he was riding through his family's orchard in the back of an old pickup.

No, that wasn't right. He tried to ignore it, to blot it out, but the harder he tried, the more vivid it became. The colors flared to neon brightness, while his memories of a preppy seaside life faded to gray.

His cock stirred in his denim trousers as his gaze lingered on Carter. It was a distraction, and he couldn't afford that right now. He had to remember who he really was. But Carter... goddamn handsome, classy Carter...! He watched in fascination as the rich boy's green hair faded to a more sensible brown. Yes, that's the color it had been when Carter was a teen. Although there were some silver flecks at the temples now. As Carter's beanie unwove itself, the yarn floating into the ether, the shaggy mop slicked itself back. The look suited him, along with the light coating of stubble that lined his strong jaw. The flannel of his shirt smoothed itself out and paled into a pristine white oxford.

"You're doing splendidly, Carson," Godric said to the sturdy millionaire.

"Carson?" He scratched at the solid layer of stubble spreading up his cheeks. A glimmer alerted him to a diamond-studded cufflink popping into existence in the French cuffs of his shirt. The cufflink was shaped like a little life preserver. Just like the ones on his yacht. He flexed his fingers and toes, feeling more powerful by the second. It seemed like his extremities were forever too large for his frame, and he wasn't exactly small. That was fine by him, though. It let his business rivals know he was physically superior to them, not just financially.

No, too much. It was happening too fast, and he was onto the scheme. Godric was in his head, rearranging his life like puzzle pieces. But it was all nonsense. He wasn't an adult. Or... if he was, he wasn't a fucking suit. That was his father, not him. But even as he tried to hang onto this idea, a shadowy figure lurked in the back of his mind. A short, slender lad in a perfectly ridiculous outfit, looking right at him. Calling him "Dad."

It felt good. It felt even better when a guy called him Dad in a *non-familial* way. And it was fun to call other hot guys "Dad" too. That was a good way to relax after a day of making hard decisions.

He could feel his toes press against his silk socks and then press into his patent leather Louboutins. But then the shoes gave way and got roomier. That brand topped out at 14 in this style, but he always sprung to have his shoes made custom. He enjoyed bragging about that.

But as big as his feet were, at least they weren't clownishly huge like poor Bromney's. That hick was stuck wearing the same style of clodhopper boots. His dad had gotten a deal on them, Bromney had told him. Sixty pair! He had to wear them, one pair after another, until they wore out. All these years later, and he was still wearing them. They were so bulky they made his paws look even larger than they already were. "Bigfoot" Bromney, that's what everyone called him.

Bromney wriggled his hairy toes inside his smelly old boots. Were his feet always that large? He didn't think so, but there they were. Yup, that's why they called him "Bigfoot." Not that he minded. Everybody knew what they said about guys with big feet. And his were the largest. He liked being big. He liked being around big guys. Like those goons his Daddy would hire for season help in the orchard. It was fun to sneak off behind the barn with them and...

His baggy gray denim trousers were turning blue, with deep pockets and loops for tools appearing on the legs. A tingling on his upper lip and next to his ears heralded the growth of his mustache and sideburns. One sinewy hand floated up and scratched at them. He grinned. He loved having some face fur. It separated the men from the boys. He'd had some kind of facial hair since he was twelve. The principal at his little backwater school tried to make him shave, but his Daddy marched right down there and put an end to that shit right away. His daddy, big and broad with his stewpot gut and his curly Viking-grade whiskers. Bromney wrinkled his forehead as he tried to reconcile his image of his big outdoorsy father with a slim, pinch-faced city slicker who had formerly held the title in his memories. But that whisper-thin asshole grew indistinct, his body eroding into a stick figure, and then he was gone. Just crumbs from a rubber eraser and a smear of graphite.

He touched the nape of his neck, which felt very warm, suddenly. His thick fingers encountered a heavy growth of curly hair on the back of his head, not the crisp undercut he had expected. All his hair was the same length now. With no product. Just an oily sheen and some fine grit on his skin, like he'd been caught in a dust storm.

He looked again at Carson. The holes in his pants had healed themselves, and the distressed denim looked more like pinstriped wool. The jacket's leather was thinning into an identical material, the extraneous zippers and flaps getting absorbed by the garment, leaving just two modest lower pockets and a single upper one to hold the fanciful pocket square. Carson looked like he was well over six feet tall, with a barrel chest dusted with short hairs. His jaw was prominent, his nose hawklike, his brows straight and thick. His traps were bulking up, suggesting a wrestler's or a weightlifter's. His biceps were cannonballs, his mighty limbs laced with thick veins beneath all the hair. A new memory popped into his addled brain. Carson in a unitard, his beefy body crushing him down onto a wrestling mat. He could recall the sensation of Carson's muscles pressing into his own. He could smell his musk, overpowering the expensive cologne the upscale brute always wore. His hairy nostrils flared as he reminisced about huffing it while they grappled. He could feel his sideburns lengthen and fluff up as they spread downward to the edge of his jaw.

Godric snapped his fingers. "Please, Mr. Benson...! You're fifteen feet above the stage... this is no time for daydreaming!"

Benson felt very warm now, all over. And terribly confused. He dabbed at the sweat on his forehead with the old rag in his pocket. "I'm sorry, sir... were you referring to me...?"

Godric smiled his dazzling smile. "I don't see any other Tommy Bensons floating above the stage, do you?"

The crowd roared.

Certain he was being made a fool of, Benson sputtered, "No, I suppose... I suppose not...!"

"Now, your friend here, Mr. Carson Elder, is paying full attention to me. Aren't you...?" He turned to the millionaire, who was rubbing his muscles, while he smiled blissfully, his eyes closed. Godric slapped his face with both hands, *Home Alone* style, and exclaimed, "WHAT...?! OH NO!"

Hooting and hollering from the audience. Someone in the front row fell out of their chair, laughing.

Floating in space, Elder flexed his powerful body, feeling more like himself than he had in ages. He thought ruefully of his long-ago rebellious phase, when he tried to distance himself from a father who was more like him than he had wanted to admit. And now, he was going through the same ordeal with his own son, Ben.

But Ben was a small, delicate type, like his mother. In the case of his own father, there was no use in pretending. He and the old man were practically the same person. Both of them 6'8" and built like brick shithouses. Not to mention, hairy as fuck. He stroked the dense, sandpapery stubble on his face as he mused on this. He knew he had a great jaw – superhero grade, he liked to say – so he never went without shaving for more than a few days. There was no sense in hiding perfection. His hand wandered higher and rubbed at his temples. His hairline had receded an inch or two, but it wasn't too terribly noticeable. It just made him look mature.

Certainly, he had fared better there than poor old Bigfoot. He could see the dumb rustic fucker right now in his battered corduroy barn coat, slapping impotently at overalls with straps that were slithering over the shoulders of his tacky embroidered Western shirt. His hairline had fled to the top of his skull and left a bald spot the size of one of Bigfoot's Skoal tins at the back. Maybe that's why Bigfoot grew those goofy Elvis sideburns and that bushy mustache. To make up for his baldness. But he had to admit, the lowbrow look worked for him. He could already feel his bull balls churning as he eyed the giant farmer.

Benson caught Elder's lustful gaze and blushed, his cheeks turning almost as red as his perpetually sunburned neck. He normally liked to lord his size over another guy, but that fancy boy was just as tall as he was, and in better shape. After high school, he had watched himself get both stronger and fatter. Lucky Elder just got stronger, he saw. But something in Elder's expression told him that the old business bear appreciated his double chin. And he knew Elder would like the muscle gut that was rapidly inflating beneath his puffy man-tits, stretching the material of the overalls to their limit. He wanted to grab his crotch and give it a good squeeze, just like he would do back at his orchard whenever he spied one of his hands without their shirts on. But he was in polite company now, and it just wouldn't do.

His wrist felt oddly light. He held it up and examined the cheap vinyl watch there. Not totally cheap; it had a calculator. But he couldn't imagine why it would have weighed anything at all. Now, Elder... that

guy was all about the pricey jewelry. His watch probably weighed ten pounds and looked like it was solid gold. A few tasteful gold rings inset with precious stones decorated his furry sausage fingers.

A final burst of energy crackled through Elder's limbs. He felt fantastic. He knew that this night was a great opportunity to cut loose. That was why he had forgone his ties and left his shirt unbuttoned just a tad, to let his carpet of chest hair breathe. And, of course, why he had worn his most outrageous pocket square. Polka dots, can you imagine...? He wanted people to see he was in a partying mood. And now, not only was he a volunteer in a magic act, but he got to see his old pal Bigfoot again. He hadn't laid eyes on that country boy since they'd hooked up after their respective Senior proms. And that had been twenty-four years back. But he'd thought about him, a lot. He winked at the hick, enjoying the secret they shared. Nobody knew anything about their connection. The secret made his monster cock start to stiffen up. He hoped the audience wouldn't notice his boner.

Benson plucked the trucker cap he kept folded up in one his back pockets and clamped it down over his balding pate. As that rich boy Elder winked at him, he felt his graying sideburns thicken up even more and sweep across his cheeks, joining with the corners of his walrus mustache. Beneath his cookie duster, he smirked back.

His greasy chode perked up as he recalled their prom night. After chivalrously dumping their female dates at their homes, they had met up at a motel between their two towns. Benson brought the pizzas. Elder brought the bourbon. They had gotten to talking about some pretty deep stuff. Their futures, the universe, God, all kinds of heavy bullshit. They had argued about which one was stronger. It had turned into a wrestling match. A couple of dumb teenagers wrestling in their tuxedos, although the fancy suits hadn't stayed on for long.

The stage rose up and cradled their feet once more. Godric shook their hands. "The heavenly bodies are realigned and set into new orbits," he declared. "Gentlemen, thank you for your cooperation. You were my best volunteers so far!" The audience was on its feet, stamping and hollering. Elder bowed and Benson doffed his trucker cap, although neither man was certain what all the fuss was about. All they had done was float for a little while. Godric's dreamy assistant Oliver escorted them off the stage.

Elder returned to his seat at the end of the row, right next to Ben. His son was slumped down in his seat with his arms crossed, his beanie pulled down so far over his head that it was wonder he could see anything at all. Elder patted Ben's arm. "Well? Your old man didn't do too bad up there, did he? I bet all your friends will say your dad is pretty *crunk*, huh?"

Ben emitted a shuddering groan and stared straight ahead. "Da-a-ad...! Nobody even *says* that! And anyway, you're using it wrong."

Elder plucked the beanie from the kid's head and thumped him in the chest. "Watch your tone, boy. And sit up straight. You know, I thought helping to chaperone this trip would... well, never mind." He looked around the theatre, hoping to find Bigfoot. But the venue was too large, and the crowd was already dispersing. It was impossible. He got up and explained to Ms. Lopresti that he had to make an important phone call and that the rest of them would have to wait on the curb until he was done. The uptight cunt was clearly annoyed, but he knew she couldn't complain. After all, he had paid for this entire trip himself.

After the magic trick, Benson didn't go back to his seat. He couldn't exactly remember where it was, so he hung out in the lobby for a bit. He watched as the chattering crowd filtered out of the auditorium and swept through the lobby doors. Benson, restless, wandered the theatre. He wasn't sure why he had gone to the show to begin with. Yeah, he had won a ticket in a giveaway at the convention he was attending but still... magic wasn't his thing. He lumbered upstairs to the mezzanine. And then higher still, to the balcony level. Around a corner was a restroom. It reminded him of the old system he and Calder had. They'd find the stadium restroom that was furthest from where their busses were parked, and they'd meet up there to fool around.

He pushed the door open and stared at his reflection in the mirror over the sinks. Seeing Elder again had stirred up a lot of memories. He fished his wallet out of his overalls, the chain dangling from it, and flipped through the laminated photo sleeves. He still had the newspaper clipping of himself holding the state wrestling championship trophy. He had been so young then. It seemed like only yesterday.

He sniffed at the air. A refined aroma tickled his nose, penetrating the miasma of his unbathed pits and the cheap, leathery cologne he employed to cover it up. He remembered the scent. He cast an eye at the handicap stall. A tinny clicking noise indicated the latch unlocking. But then the seconds slipped by without anything more happening.

He pounded his massive, hairy fist on the door, slamming it open. There was Elder, presenting his muscular ass to him, both of his hands on the tiled walls. The rich dick regarded him with a gleam in his crinkly old eyes.

"What the hell are you doing out there, faggot," he teased. "Get inside me, c'mon!"

"Don't have to tell me twice," Benson growled. And as he groped his onetime rival, it was like the intervening decades had never even happened.