

EX-HUSBAND

Magazine

*Manic Pixie
Dream Girl*



Llewellyn handed the joint to Baxter Lepage, who took a toke, held the smoke in, nodded then exhaled, a stream of bluish smoke unrolling from his mouth, rising and dispersing toward the ceiling, which was completely covered by the sagging bubble of a rainbow parachute. “Weed is so much stronger than it used to be,” he said.

He handed the joint back to Llewellyn. She took another toke. The two of them were propped up against the backboard to her bed, the smell of sex heavy in the air along with the weed, the smell of her sandalwood incense. Baxter looked around the smoke hazy room— dozens of dream catchers hung along the walls, dangled in front of the windows. There was a statue of the Buddha missing a nose. A cat slunk along the back wall as if stalking prey, but it mainly seemed to have become fascinated with a beam of late afternoon sunlight cutting through the window.

Llewellyn got up and stretched. She was naked, young, completely unashamed of her body. She walked across the room, opened the fridge and grabbed a beer, twisted off the top and raised the bottle, gulping down half the bottle, some of the suds dripped from her mouth and dribbled down her breasts.

She saw Baxter watching her and smiled. “What?”

“I just admire you so much,” Baxter said. “You’re so free. No responsibilities. No stress. No worrying about keeping up with the Joneses. How do you do it?”

Llewellyn wandered back over to the bed, handed Baxter the bottle of beer. He sipped, looking at her face, her eyes. There was some kind of energy there, a spark, maybe a hint of madness. It drove him wild. “The thing is,” she said, slitting her eyes, “you just do it. That’s all.”

“It’s not that easy,” Baxter said.

“It really is.”

“For you, maybe. But, you know, I have bills to pay. Alimony to my bitch of an ex. It’s complicated.”

“It’s not. No. It isn’t. You just need to stop being scared.”

Baxter sat up. “Scared? I’m not scared.”

“Then come with me,” Llewellyn said. “Right now. I’ll show the shadowy alleyways, the dark places of broken things.”

She held out her hand. Baxter was about to say no, I can't, I have to work tomorrow, big day in court and all that, but it seemed like the room tilted for a moment, and when it tilted back, he found himself reaching out, taking Llewellyn's hand and whispering, "Zazz me."

Annie, his ex-wife, laughed. She had watched the whole thing using the scrying stone she'd gotten from Tatiana the Fixer, who assured her she would be able to change and control her ex-husband, turn him into anything she wanted. It had seemed insane, impossible, but it now seemed totally real. She'd planted the idea for him to say "zazz me" in his mind, and she'd planted ideas in the mind of both him and Llewellyn that he needed to "be free."

She seethed with rage as she looked over Llewellyn's lean young body, hating her ex not only because he'd dumped her for a younger woman, but because he'd replaced her with that type. Annie had turned herself into a Stepford Wife for him, giving up all her own hope and dreams to become a suburban, stay at home mother. Now he was smoking weed and acting like some kind of bohemian after telling her he found her boring. Hmmpf.

"You want a manic pixie dream girl?" She thought as she watched the two of them getting dressed. "Maybe you should be one?"

Clubs, drinking, lights flashing. Baxter and Llewellyn dancing and laughing. They'd been sitting at a small table in some dingy basement club, a DJ standing on the stage, spinning some sort of throbbing, hypnotic trance music. Smirking, Llewellyn had whispered in the ear of the guy sitting next to her, and the man had fished some pills out of his pockets and dropped them into a martini glass. Llewellyn had brought it around the table and lifted it to Baxter's lips. "What are the pills?" He'd asked, eyeing the red and white capsules floating in the sparkling gin.

"Freedom," Llewellyn had said, tilting the glass back. Baxter had drank, swallowed the pills. It felt like the world had bent, expanded, the sound of the music became stretched, distorted like it was being broadcast through a broken bell. He and Llewellyn were dancing, and he'd suddenly shouted "The colors! I've never seen the colors!"

Later, brighter lights, but soft lights. Baxter looked at himself in the mirror while a woman with a sharp, pointy face like a shark jabbed a needle in his nose. "I didn't feel a thing," Baxter laughed while the woman slipped a nose ring into the hole she'd made. Baxter turned his head slightly, watching as the light glittered off his nose ring, the ring in his lower lip, the one in his right eyebrow.

Llewelyn's face appeared in the mirror behind him. She was smiling, that mad gleam in her eyes even more intense than before. "Your client is going to be so pissed," she said.

"Who gives a fuck?" Baxter had said. Llewelyn gave him a kiss on the cheek, then patted him on the shoulder. "That's the spirit."

Annie laughed, seeing her husband with his edgy piercings. It's going to be one hell of a hangover she thought, when my manic pixie dream dork wakes up tomorrow.

Later, Baxter sitting in a chair, looking at himself in the mirror. A girl was twisting pieces of tinfoil into his hair.

"Ya sure?" She said.

"Yeah," Baxter had said, feeling wild, out of control, free. More free than he'd ever felt.

"Make it pink."

Back out onto the streets. A spotlight cutting the sky. Clouds high above the buildings, Baxter stood in the middle of the street looking up at the skyscrapers, the rows of windows, most of them still lit. "What are you doing with your lives?" He screamed. "Wake up and live!"

Baxter woke, the events of the night before like a blurry dream. His head hurt. His tongue tasted like rancid butter. His face and ears throbbed. Llewelyn, who was snoring next to him, curled into a ball, had pulled the shades, but there was a sliver of bright, morning sunlight sneaking under the blinds. What time is it even? Baxter wondered. Looking at his wrist, he squinted and then shouted, "Fuck!" He was due in court in less than an hour.

"Rude," Llewelyn moaned, pulling her pillow over her head.

Baxter jumped out of bed. "Shitty shoot poopy poop!" He said, confused where that stupid sounding phrase had come from, but too panicked to give it much thought. He found his phone and called for a Zooper, then pulled on his pants, his shirt and suit jacket. The whole time he was dressing, he kept hearing a delicate jangling sound, and wondered what the hell it was, only to find out when he went to the mirror to check his hair and once more screamed. He meant to shout Fuck again, but instead heard himself shout "Cluckity Cluck a Duck!"

His weird new lingo might have disturbed him more if he had not found himself staring at what to his morning eyes looked like a train wreck of his face. He had gotten piercings. Multiple piercings. His lip. Eyebrow. Nose. He felt something cold and heavy inside his mouth, and opening his mouth he saw he had a tongue piercing as well. He even had earrings at the top and bottom of his ears, little chains linking them, which were the source

of the quiet jangling. And, just in case that wasn't enough, his hair was now bubble-gum pink.



Baxter felt himself gripped with shame and terror. He was not the kind of man who would get these piercings. He was the kind of man who made fun of people who had piercings. More importantly, his client was not the kind of man who would appreciate his lawyer showing up looking like some punk rock reject from the 1980s. He'd have to remove them and just hope the holes weren't too noticeable. He reached for the hoop in his nose, turned it, thinking to take it out, but when he went to unclasp it, his fingers froze, his hands shook. He couldn't. He wanted to, needed to, but he couldn't.

His phone dinged. His Zooper was about to arrive. Shit. Shit. He didn't have time. He could smell himself—sweat, booze, three different flavors of weed, so he grabbed a bottle of Lew's perfume—it would have to do—sprayed it in the air, stepped into the cloud, than ran out, hurrying downstairs, his earrings jangling with every step.

Once he was in the Zooper, he texted the clerk of the court requesting to reschedule. Then struggled once more to remove his piercings. No go. He simply couldn't do it. Texts were coming in from his client now—Henderson Upshot, a big time Wall Street money man—asking him where the hell he was—Baxter texted back—traffic. On my way.

The request to reschedule was denied. As the Zooper pulled up to the courthouse, Baxter looked at himself in his phone with his pink hair and piercings. Shit. He was out of time. If he walked into court looking like this, word would get around legal circles in the city. His reputation would be destroyed. If he ditched, he thought, his reputation would also be destroyed.

Still, he lingered in the Zooper for a minute, considering it. He had some money in the bank, a little hidden in the Caymans. He could just go, get away from all of this. But then, he thought of something Lew always said. "Whenever I have to make a decision," she said. "I always make the choice that seems crazy."

Yes. Yes, he decided. That's what he would do. He got out of the Zooper and marched into



the court room. "I've talked my way out of worse situations," he thought. "I'll talk my way out of this one." Indeed, he instantly had an idea, and it was soooo obvious.

Baxter pushed both of the double doors to the court room open and strode in, chin out, shoulders back. He liked to make a big, bold, aggressive entrance, and he felt good about that, but suddenly he felt all bubbly and silly and without any thought, he smiled, rose up on his tippy toes and twirled.

April Essex, and his client, the previously mentioned Henderson Upshot, craned their necks around, and both of their faces registered total shock. The look on Henderson's face turning rapidly evolving into rage. The attorney for the other side, Penny Offutt, smirked, thinking maybe Baxter had come to court high on something. She was, however, impressed with his pirouette. His form had been perfect, right down to his ballet fingers. She silently applauded while at the same time hoping his weird behavior was going to hand her a win in what was, she felt, not a great case.

Baxter, confused and embarrassed by his ballet move and beginning to think he'd gone insane, regained his composure, checked his cufflinks and marched to the litigator's table.

"What the hell?" Upshot said staring in horror at the weird thing he now had as a lawyer. "I hired a lawyer, not a prancing pincushion."

"Bax, what?" April said.

Baxter sat and leaned over so he could whisper to Upshot. "I did this to help you win your Kooky case," he said. *Kooky?*

"Bullcrap."

"Wait till you see the judge." It had been his inspiration to try and convince Henderson he'd gotten the work done as a part of his strategy.

The bailiff announced the judge: Esther Stein. She walked into the courtroom with her nose stud and purple hair. Henderson looked over at Baxter and smiled, then whispered, "You sneaky son of a bitch."

Baxter tugged on his earring and smiled. Court happened. Judge Stein didn't seem to even notice Baxter's new look, though she'd seen him in her courtroom many times. Henderson seemed content as he headed off to make more money, shaking Baxter's hand and whispering, "when you said you'd go to any lengths to win this thing, you weren't kidding."

Maybe, Baxter thought, gently rubbing his finger against his lip ring, there's something to Llewellyn's whole live free approach to life.

Penny, the rival lawyer, approached. "I love your hair, counselor," she said.

"What about my jewelry?" Baxter answered, having to decided to brazen it all out.

"Oh, you look adorable. I hope you don't think this new look is going to sway judge Stein. She isn't that gullible."

"I didn't do this for her," Baxter said. "It's a statement of who I am." As those words left his mouth, he shivered. It was, he realized, on some deep level, the truth now.

After, he and April paused out in the hall. “Well, you managed to placate Henderson, but you didn’t fool me. What the hell is this?”

“It’s a long story involving a lot of booze,” Baxter said, gingerly touching his lip ring. “I guess I’m stuck with this for now, though.” He could tell the energy between he and April had changed, and he didn’t like it. She’d had a crush on him since she started working at the firm and had always been a little in awe of him, a little flirty. That was gone now. He decided to reset the paradigm. “Let’s get a drink.”

“It’s a little early, and I need to get back to the office,” she said, clearly turned off. Baxter was about to insist when a pair of portly lawyers from a third-rate firm walked by and looked Baxter over. They shook their heads in disgust and one of them mumbled, “freak.”

“What a couple of jerky werkies,” Baxter said, his hand going right to his mouth as he was once again embarrassed by his weird new lingo, especially when he was just trying to re-establish himself as a bad ass man to this little woman. “Sorry. That’s so weird,” he said, knowing he was making it worse, but unable to stop himself.

“You got that right,” April thought. “See you at the office?” Any started walking away.

Baxter’s exotic look and behavior made her feel weird, awkward. She just wanted to get



away from him. And, besides, she couldn’t wait to dish about his new piercing fetish.

“No. I’ve got some errands to run,” he said. April left. Baxter stood, tugging on his earring as he thought about what to do. If he could have seen himself, he would have realized his facial expression—crooked little smile, raised eyebrows, eyes to the side, was the same one Llewellyn made when she was thinking. He’d always found it so cute.

Now that he’d lied about the reason for his new look, he

was kind of stuck, but maybe he could at least cover his head and maybe get the piercings removed so he only had to wear them to court?

He yawned. He was so tired. Maybe he could swing by his apartment first and take a quick nap, he thought, as he extended his arms out to the sides, slightly bent his wrists and did another twirl.

To be continued...

Sneak Peek

