

1 JONATHAN GRANT STOOD at the bulletin board at Heritage Hills Secondary and read the notice: **ATTENTION STUDENTS:** Assistant Editor needed for *Heritage Hills Courier*.

If interested, see Ms Ruby, adviser, Room 202.

Only a few weeks ago Jonathan wouldn't have dreamed of going for that job, even though he was in the journalism class. Jonathan was the failure in a family of successes—at least that was the way he used to feel. He'd often thought that he would never accomplish anything of importance.

Then, over the July holidays, he'd gone to see his biological father in Stony River. Meeting Ed Maitland had changed everything. Meeting the father he'd never known had given Jonathan a brand new outlook on life.

Now, as he studied the notice, Jonathan thought that maybe, just maybe, he'd try for that job. It would be great to write features for the *Courier*—like Ed Maitland who now wrote stories for the *South-West Courier*.

A voice cut into Jonathan's dream. 'That job's taken.'

Jonathan turned and saw Eric Schmitt studying the board with an affable smile.

Jonathan had never been very good at socialising with his peers. In the reports of his school counsellors he'd been described as 'poorly adjusted, a loner, lacking social skills'. And he certainly wasn't at ease with Eric. Eric was one of the popular kids who

‘Did Gigi send you in here to talk me out of it?’ Jonathan asked suspiciously.

‘I think she’d like that, but not me,’ Jeff said. ‘I say, go for it, Jon.’

Jonathan was surprised by Jeff’s support. Jeff had never looked up to Jonathan like some younger brothers admired their older siblings. Why should he? Jeff was always doing everything better than Jonathan, even though he was younger. Jeff skate-boarded better at five than Jonathan did at seven. He swam better at eight than Jonathan did at ten. What was there to admire in a useless big brother?

‘I’m writing my feature about something different, Jeff. All the stories in our school paper are about sports and great guys like you. I’m writing about the homeless guy who stands on the corner and sells flowers. People in Heritage Hills don’t like to think of the real world. We all live in this fake, plastic paradise. But I’m going to shake ’em up,’ Jonathan said.

‘Hey, I like that,’ Jeff said. ‘Maybe you’ll beat old Eric after all.’

‘Nah. The Eric Schmitts of this world have golden wings. The Jonathans of this world have paper wings. When we fly too close to the sun, we get burnt. Eric’s golden wings just get burnished, see?’ Jonathan said.

‘With comparisons like that, you should be a writer, mate,’ Jeff laughed. ‘But it’s still a bad attitude to take.’

‘That’s me,’ Jonathan agreed, turning back to his story.

Jonathan thought about the homeless guy he often talked to. He remembered how he’d dash into traffic with his paper flowers. Sometimes Jonathan bought a bunch of them just to help the guy out.

The man had told Jonathan that, as a little boy, his nickname had been ‘Lucky’. The man always laughed grimly about that. Jonathan thought most of the people in Heritage Hills didn’t appreciate the flower man working on a corner near them. He was a shabby reminder of the world beyond the stately homes and landscaped gardens of Heritage Hills’s gated community.

Jonathan felt a bond with the man, though—they both belonged to the brotherhood of losers. And he typed in the title that had come so easily: ‘A Loser Called Lucky’.

4 JONATHAN WAS GLAD Eric Schmitt was only in one of his classes. If Eric had any nastiness to throw, it'd probably happen in English.

Jonathan arrived a few minutes early and settled into his usual spot in the back row. Eric immediately announced in a loud voice, 'Hey, did you hear who's the assistant editor for the *Courier*? It's Jonathan, Mr Low-Marks himself!'

Jonathan wasn't really failing any of his classes, but he had pretty low marks in a couple of courses. He felt his face burn as several students turned to look at him.

'That true, Jonathan?' Carla Lohman asked. 'Heck, I've never seen you write anything more than your name.' Carla was the only girl Jonathan had ever gone out with in this school. She'd gone out with him only to make her boyfriend jealous. Then, after movies and a pizza with Jonathan, she regaled all her friends with stories of how boring Jonathan was.

Jonathan ignored her jab and was glad when Ms Douglas arrived to begin the class. She quickly launched into a painfully dull explanation of a grammar rule.

'Which is correct?' Ms Douglas asked. "'The present was for you and I" or "The present was for you and me"?''

'Jonathan has his hand up,' Eric lied. 'He wants to answer for a change.'

Ms Douglas adjusted her glasses and glanced at Jonathan. 'Yes?'

5 JONATHAN RELUCTANTLY PUT his father's article away and began studying for tomorrow's English test. If he was going to be assistant editor of the school newspaper, he supposed he'd better learn the basics of English grammar.

At ten-fifteen he glanced at the clock. Another half hour of studying and he'd finish up. Jonathan stretched and decided to get a small snack before he finished. He found his parents in the study watching the news. No sign of Gigi, though. And he hadn't heard her come upstairs.

'Gigi back yet, Mum?' he asked. Eric's words from earlier that day still haunted him.

Mrs Grant looked away from the flickering TV screen. 'No, and she said she'd be in by ten. I'm going to have a talk with her.'

Barry Grant laughed and said, 'Oh, give her a little slack. She's a good kid.'

Jonathan stood there looking at his handsome parents. They were both in their early forties, but they looked even younger. 'I'm surprised you guys even let Gigi go out with that guy,' Jonathan said.

Mr Grant turned. 'Eric Schmitt? Why?'

'He's a creep,' Jonathan said.

Barry Grant frowned. 'Jonathan, I don't know where you get that judgmental attitude of yours, but it surely won't gain you any friends. And while we're on the subject, Jonathan, I'm really getting concerned about you not having any friends. It's not...normal.'

You're a writer. All writers are a little crazy.'

Jonathan smiled. He didn't know what to say. He hardly ever knew what to say to a pretty girl.

'You busy this afternoon, Jonathan?' Adriana asked.

'Uh, no...I don't think so,' he said. He wondered if Adriana wanted him to work some more on the paper.

'Let's go out then,' Adriana said.

Jonathan stared at Adriana. He knew that girls asked boys out, but it had never happened to him before. But then a lot of things never happened to him.

'I hope you're not one of those prehistoric guys who thinks it always has to be the guy who asks the girl,' Adriana said.

'Not at all,' Jonathan said quickly. 'I'd like to take you out.'

'No, no,' Adriana laughed. 'We'll go Dutch. If you don't mind driving, that is. We can go to the burger bar. I intend to pig out and I'd be much too embarrassed to land you with the bill.'

'Oh, okay,' Jonathan said.

'You write better than you talk,' Adriana noted with a smile.

During lunch Jonathan spotted Eric with his arms around Gigi's shoulders. His skin crawled at the sight. Gigi was stupidly falling in love with the big, handsome fake. Soon Eric would have her doing anything he asked.

After school at the burger bar, Jonathan stared into his milkshake without saying anything. Adriana finally broke the silence. 'Are you always this talkative or do I bring out the chatterbox in you?'

'I'm sorry. I was just thinking about something else. Did you ever go out with Eric Schmitt?' Jonathan asked.

Adriana almost choked on her drink. 'You mean, God's gift to women? Puleeze, Jonathan. The typical Heritage Hills guy just isn't my type. Who needs these chest-thumping macho guys who openly drool at the sight of a girl in a tight skirt? They're just not very interesting.'

'So what—or who—does interest you?' Jonathan asked.