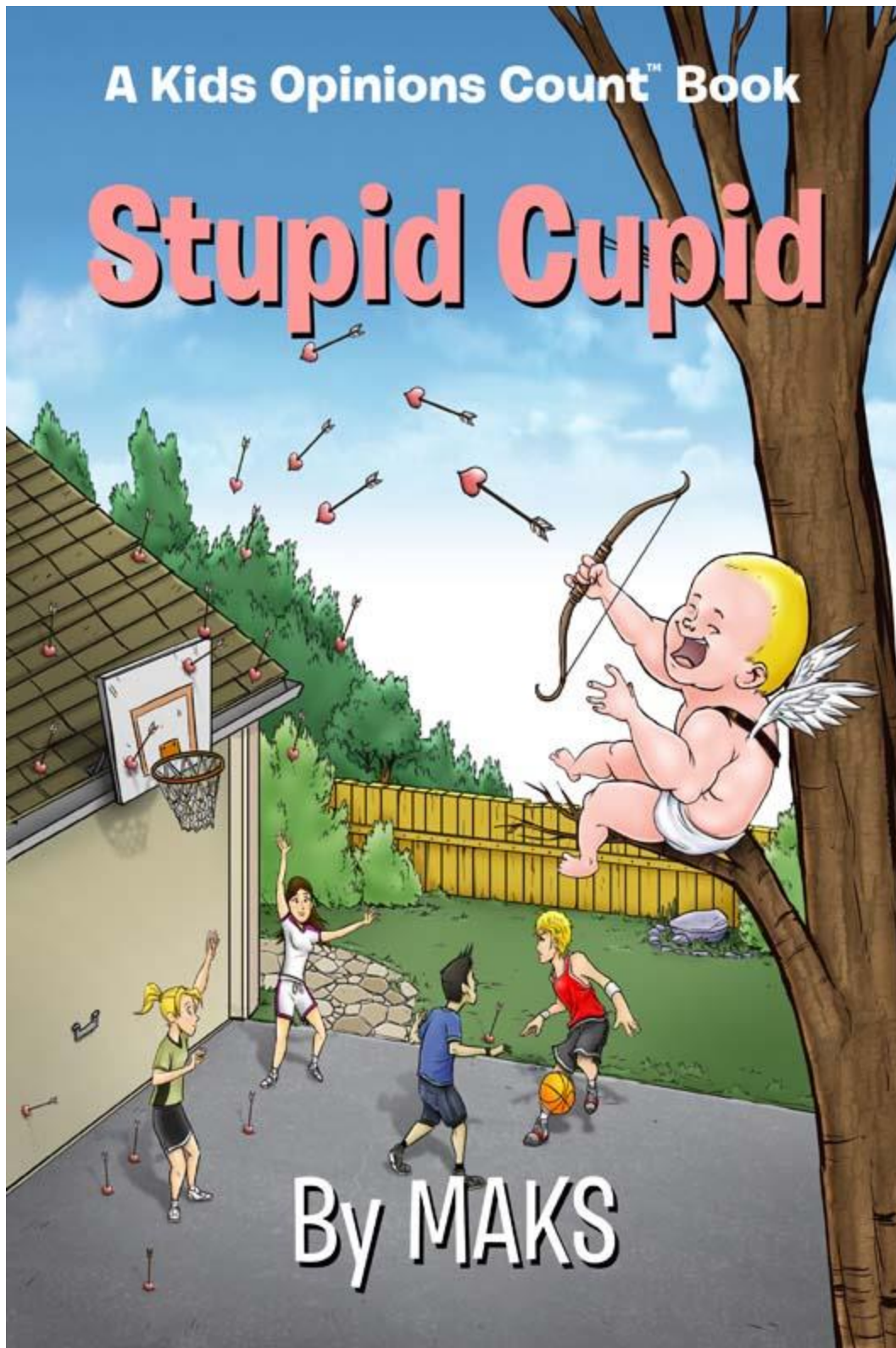


A Kids Opinions Count™ Book

Stupid Cupid



By MAKS

Stupid Cupid



Book Three in the
Kids Opinions Count Series
Agent's of Change
Publishing's
Teen Fiction Series with a
Difference

Written by **MAKS**

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Chapter One



It was 7:20 in the morning. Kim and Scott were up and doing their History homework. They had their TVs on in their rooms and were oblivious to anything else going on in the house.

Chris was downstairs putting cereal and juice boxes on the table. Chris had been so successful at heating up frozen lasagna for dinner last night, he decided to surprise the family and tackle breakfast.

Chris heard shouting over the clanking of jostled cereal bowls as he moved them from the shelf to the table. It was Tommie.

“NO! Buck! Don’t blow-up my parents! I’ll sign the documents!”

Chris quickly put the bowls down on the table and ran upstairs toward the bedroom.

RING... RING...

The phone beside Tommie’s bed rung loudly in her ear. Tommie was still half-asleep when she picked it up.

“Hello?”

“Tommie, this is Mrs. Hardy. I won’t need a ride with you today – but thanks anyway.”

“Okay,” Tommie replied. Mrs. Hardy hung up before Tommie could ask her – what ride she was talking about.

At that moment, Chris burst into their bedroom. “Tommie, are you all right?”

Tommie looked at Chris and then at the phone that was still in her hand. “Man, that was weird!” she said, as she sat up in bed. Tommie realized she was wet with sweat and grabbed the sheet to wipe her face.

“Are you all right?” Chris asked again. “What were you shouting about?”

“Shouting? I was shouting?”

Chris sat down on the bed beside her. He touched her back. “You’re soaked! Do you have a fever?”

“No.” Then she remembered, “I was having a bad dream.”

“About what? And who called?”

“That phone call saved my life!” Tommie replied as she hung up the phone. “Huckster had me cornered in an office. He was going to blow-up Mom and Dad if I didn’t sign those documents!”

Chris looked puzzled. “I understand him wanting you to sign those documents, but

why was he going to blow-up your parents?" Tommie chuckled. "Chris, the dream was in my head, not his.

Who knows? You know how nutzie-cookoo my dreams can be."

"So, what was that call about?" Chris asked.

"It was Mrs. Hardy, from school. She called to say she didn't need a ride."

"A ride? Where?"

"I don't know."

"That is weird!"

"She must have assumed I knew all about it. I'll have to ask the kids."

Tommie dragged herself out of bed. Chris went back down- stairs to finish setting the table. He found Max hanging around the kitchen, waiting to be fed.

"I better not have a repeat performance of yesterday," Chris said. He fed Max and let him out to the backyard. Chris then turned his attention back to feeding the family. "Cereal, juice, what else can I make?" He rummaged through the cupboards and spotted his next project. "English Breakfast tea. I can boil water!" Tommie showered, dressed and went downstairs. When she got to the kitchen, Chris was putting the morning paper on the table.

Tommie noticed the effort he made and commented, "My goodness, Chris. This is the first time you've ever made breakfast. I really appreciate it."

Chris felt good about himself.

Tommie sat down, grabbed the Center City Communicator, and poured herself a cup of English Breakfast tea. Chris sat down as well.

"Sports section please," he said. Tommie obliged.

As Tommie scanned the front page of the newspaper, an interesting story caught her attention. Tommie decided to read it:

"Investors in the Harbor Front Boarders and BMX Park have made a generous donation to another children's cause. The group of business men, represented by our own Joel Black, presented Mr. John Smith, chief fund raiser for the Center City Children's Hospital and President of The Center City Bank, with a check for \$175,000. Mr. Smith says he is grateful to the Men Of Business for their contribution and is pleased that they continue to acknowledge the importance of children and children's causes in our great city."

"That's nice, Dear," Chris said.

Chris and Tommie didn't pick up on the Men Of Business reference.

"Good grief, Chris. Listen to this!" Tommie read aloud, again. "What's Love Got to Do With It? Sex Acts Tarnish Fund Raiser's Event – Nude Female Dancers at VIP Gentlemen's Dinner on Cruise Ship.

"Reporters from the Center City Communicator, attending the event on the cruise ship yesterday afternoon, observed The Fund Raisers behaving improperly. President of the organization, Mr. John Smith, denied comment on whether there was any truth to the reports and refused to be interviewed. His administrative assistant said Mr. Smith was too busy getting ready for their major Fund Raiser Cruise tonight."

Tommie continued to read to herself. She didn't realize Chris was actually listening.

"What else does it say?" Chris asked.

"So, nude women are more interesting than the Children's Hospital?" she joked. "Wasn't this cruise ship out in the harbor when you were yesterday? Did you see any

nude women?”

“Busted.”

“Very funny.”

“So, what else does it say?”

“Apparently this has been going on for a number of years and the police say they’ve never heard about it,” Tommie commented. “How are these VIP gentlemen going to explain this?”

“Booze, testosterone and mid-life crisis come to mind,” Chris laughed.

“Will those be your excuses when you sneak out to ‘Gentlemen’s Clubs and get caught fooling around on me?” Tommie asked.

Scott and Kim had just arrived on the scene. They’d overheard some of Tommie and Chris’s conversation.

“Did you say Dad’s going to clubs and fooling around on you?” Scott asked.

“Fool around on your mom?” Chris said. “No man would ever dare to fool around on your mom. Not if they value their...”

“Chris, be quiet. The kids don’t have to know about this.”

“Know about what?” Kim asked. “Is there a problem?” Scott and Kim looked concerned.

“No, I was joking. I’m talking about a newspaper article,” Tommie answered.

“Which one?” Scott asked.

“Will someone change the subject,” Chris requested. “Isn’t anything else going on?”

“What article?” Kim asked.

“Oh, show it to them, Tommie,” Chris said.

Tommie put the paper on the table and pointed to the article. Kim and Scott read it and were disgusted.

“Dirty old men,” Kim mumbled.

“Yeah, dirty old men,” Scott laughed. “Who has page twenty of the newspaper? I want to read it.”

“I want to read it, too!” Kim declared.

Page twenty was part of the sports section. Chris handed it to Scott. “He asked first,” Chris said to Kim.

Scott grabbed the paper and whipped it open to page twenty. He looked the page over a couple of times. Kim was standing beside him, doing the same.

“Nothing,” Kim said. She sounded disappointed.

“What are you two looking for?” Tommie asked. She assumed since they were both looking at the same page, they were looking for the same thing.

“Oh, nothing,” they both replied.

Scott handed the paper back to Chris and then he and Kim raced back upstairs.

“Where are you two going?”

Chapter Two



“I gotta call Alex,” Scott declared. “I gotta call Amy,” Kim added.

The kids went to Scott’s bedroom and conferenced with Amy and Alex on speakerphone.

“Is everyone on?” Scott asked. Amy and Alex both replied, “Yes.”

“Scott, the takedown’s not happening tonight,” Alex declared. “Yeah, we know!”

“Did you see the article about the charity donation to the hospital?” Alex asked.

“No. You mean the money your dad was going to give to the Children’s Hospital?”

“Yeah. They reported that in the paper. The money went to some John Smith guy. He’s head of a bunch of charities in Center City AND he’s President of the Center City Bank. I hear my step-mom talking about him all the time.”

“And my mom, too,” Amy announced. “She’s always going to his fund raisers and stuff. She spends more time with him than my dad!”

“Fund Raisers? Was your mom on that cruise ship yesterday?” Alex asked. “John Smith was!”

“What cruise ship?” Amy replied.

“The cruise ship with the nude lady dancers! Man, and I thought you guys were the ones up on current events,” Alex scoffed. “I read it in the paper, AND I saw the nude ladies myself on that boat yesterday.”

“You did not,” Kim said. “I did.”

“That’s disgusting,” Amy proclaimed.

“Even worse,” Alex said, “John Smith lied to my dad’s reporters.

He said there weren’t any nude dancers on board. But I saw them!”

“He’s a sleeze bag!” Amy declared.

“He didn’t actually lie. He just didn’t comment. That’s not the same thing,” Kim explained.

“Maybe he signed a no-speak,” Scott joked. The kids all had the same thought.

“Maybe he’s one of Huckster’s business buddies!” Kim said. “Everyone thinks he’s such a good guy because he raises money for the kids. But then he goes and has nude dancers at the so-called gentlemen’s dinner. I’d like to nail this two-faced jerk... just like we’ll nail Huckster!” Alex announced.

“Yeah, and my dad doesn’t like him much, either. He’s always calling MY mom and getting her to do stuff for him. He thinks he’s such a big shot,” Amy said. “I heard my dad tell someone on the phone that he’s watching Smith.”

“Does your dad think he’s fooling around with your mom?” Alex asked. His parent’s divorce had him paranoid about such things.

“NO!” Amy snapped. “I think he just doesn’t want Smith taking advantage of my mom and the other ladies that help him out.”

“He is raising a ton of money for kids’ charities,” Kim interjected. “Maybe we shouldn’t get so bent out of shape about this.”

“I still think he’s a low life!” Alex declared.

“Okay. But you didn’t take a picture, did you Alex? So you have no proof,” Kim replied. “I think we have bigger projects to work on, like helping your dad capture The Ring Master and helping my mom take down Buck Huckster.”

“So, what are we going to do?” Scott asked. “When do you think your dad’s going to bust the Men Of Business?”

“I’m guessing, it will probably take him a couple of days to set it up,” Alex replied. “Let’s just keep monitoring the paper and I’ll do as much spying around here as I can. I figured out how to bypass their fix to the intercom system.”

“So they won’t know you’re spying?”

“No way. I’m so frigging brilliant,” he bragged.

“Kim! Scott! Breakfast!” Tommie shouted from downstairs. “We better go,” Kim said. “See you in school, Amy.”

“Bye, Alex,” Scott added.

The kids hung up. On the way out of Scott’s room, Kim had some things to get off her chest.

“So, tell me why you think Alex didn’t say anything yesterday about the nude ladies?”

“My guess is, he didn’t want to give up the binoculars.”

Kim was upset. “That little pervert. I can’t believe we agreed to work together yesterday.”

“Are you changing your mind?”

“I’m just dialing back my enthusiasm. Amy and I got caught up in all the excitement. I’m not sure we can actually do it – not if Alex is involved.”

“Can you do it for Mom?”

They started walking down the stairs. Kim was thinking about what Scott had asked her. They stopped just outside the kitchen. “For Mom? Of course I can. But the less I have to see of Alex, the better.”

“Agreed,” Scott replied. “So, what are we going to do today for excitement?”

“Mom’s meeting with her attorney and then with Matt Molina and that Benedict Arnold guy. Maybe there’ll be something we can do tonight to help her.”

“Right. I wish we could listen in on that meeting.” Kim laughed. “Thinking about calling Alex?”

“I think we better stay in school today,” Scott chuckled. “If the school goes haywire two days in a row – for sure someone will figure it out.”

“I have my Science Fair project to work on,” Kim said. “That’ll keep me and Amy busy.” She started to walk into the kitchen.

“Science Fair?” Scott replied, as he followed her.

Tommie heard them talking. When they got into the kitchen, she asked, “What project are you doing this year, Kim?”

“Pheromones,” Kim announced.

“What are you doing with pheromones?”

“It’s an experiment. Amy and I want to see if pheromones have any effect on the kids in our school,” Kim explained. “By the way, Mom, can I have thirty dollars for my project? I need to buy some supplies.”

“That sounds very interesting. I’ll give you the money when I drive you to school.”

“Thanks,” Kim replied. “I have some information that Amy and I put together. Do you want to see?”

Tommie looked at the clock. It was still early. “Sure, we have time.”

“I’ll print it off. It’ll just take me a minute.” Kim hurried back upstairs to her bedroom and her PC.

“Where’s breakfast?” Scott asked, as he sat down.

“Right in front of you,” Chris declared. He pointed toward the cereal boxes on the table.

Scott looked at Tommie. The kids always complained about her cooking, but at least she cooked.

“Your dad’s decided to make breakfast this morning. He did such a good job with the lasagna last night.”

“How about some toast, Scott?” Chris asked. Scott nodded.

“What are you doing this year for your Science Fair project, Scott?”

“I’m not doing one this year, Dad.”

“Why not?” Tommie inquired. “You do one every year. I thought they were mandatory.”

“Not this year!”

Kim came into the kitchen and handed Tommie her printout. “Here, Mom. Let me know what you think,” she said and sat down at the table.

Tommie was about to start Kim’s paper, when Chris got up to let Max back into the house. He went outside and called him. When the two of them came back inside, something followed.

“What smells?” Kim asked.

“Dad’s duker, what do you think!” Scott remarked. “Um, must have been Max,” Chris proposed.

Chris knew he was the guilty party, but he wasn’t going to admit it. His lack of smell – or actually lack of a sense of smell – got him into embarrassing situations.

“Quit trying to pass the buck, Chris,” Tommie laughed. “Don’t you mean quit passing the gas?” Kim quipped. “Can’t you guys cut me some slack?”

“Cut? Did Dad say cut?”

“I just keep digging the hole deeper and deeper, don’t I,” Chris answered.

“Is that a one or two holer?” Tommie responded.

Chris had enough of their verbal abuse. “Next time you guys experience some kind of body malfunction...”

Scott corrected him. “Don’t you mean body mal... odor?” Chris ignored Scott and said, “...I’ll be sure to bring it to your attention – AND whoever else is around at the time.”

Chris knew that they could dish it out but they couldn’t take it. He resisted verbal

retaliation – usually. On a mature scale of one to ten, Chris was an eight. Kim, Scott and Tommie, fluctuated between two and four.

As they ate their breakfast, they continued with their smelly conversation.

“Why is it that bodily functions are associated with such gross chemical reactions and smells?” Scott asked. “You’d think after millions of years of evolution, that poop would smell like roses, that B.O. would smell like Melvin Klein, and that breath would smell like peppermint.”

“Oh, I think the marketing people like the fact that we’re stinky,” Tommie suggested. “Then they can sell us all those products to cover it up.”

“Maybe we’re not supposed to cover up our natural smells,” Kim lectured. “Maybe they’re supposed to tell us something, like the pheromones do.”

“Excuse me?” Scott countered. “Humans are supposed to have GAPO?”

“Excuse me! But what’s gapo?” Tommie asked. “Giant armpit odor,” Kim explained.

Scott and Kim munched down their breakfast and then headed to the bathroom to brush their teeth. Tommie and Chris welcomed the opportunity to eat in peace.

RING... RING...

Chris saw the caller ID and picked up the phone. “Danny? What’s up?”

“You’re not going to believe this one!”

“What, you really did find a pirate’s treasure yesterday?”

“No, I haven’t even looked at the artifacts. It’s about the project. I dropped off the maps at the university last night. The businessmen had an arrangement to pick them up from the dean of our faculty.”

“And?” Chris said.

“And when I got there, a check and a note were waiting for me. The note said that the project was cancelled.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. What do you make of that?” Danny asked.

“I told you yesterday the whole thing sounded fishy.”

“It gets better!” Danny exclaimed. “The check was for \$225,000.”

“Holy carp!”

Now, Tommie was interested in the conversation. “What’s Danny want?” Tommie asked rather loudly.

Danny could hear her. “How’s the little large mouth bass?” Chris laughed.

“What’d he say?” Tommie knew it was probably a dig aimed at her. “Nothing important, Dear,” Chris replied.

“Danny, you better not be trying to get Chris to go off on another one of your fishing expeditions!” Tommie called out.

Chris and Danny continued to laugh. “What’s so funny?” Tommie asked.

“Nothing! And don’t be listening in on my conversation!” Chris directed.

Tommie shook her head as she turned away. She knew she wouldn’t get anything out of Chris. She decided to read Kim’s paper.

Chapter Three



Pheromones are chemicals secreted by an animal. Pheromones travel through the air and land on other animal's receptors. They tell the animal what to do. They're like a chemical email – chem-mail. In some animals the receptors are antenna, while in others, it can be the tongue or the nose.

Different species can produce the same pheromones. More than one hundred insect species and the female Asian Elephant produce the same pheromone chemical.

There are four kinds of pheromones. The first kind is the one that attracts one member of a species to another member. They call this the sexual attraction pheromone.

The second kind is the one that causes an animal to leave an area or to assume defensive positions. This is called the alarm pheromone.

The third kind is called the aggregation pheromone and it brings animals of the same species together to the same location.

The fourth is called the dispersion pheromone. It tells other animals of the same species that the territory is occupied and not to enter.

In humans, there is a small organ in the nose that is specifically designed to receive the human pheromone. It is called the vomeronasal organ. The pheromone chemical travels through air or water and is transmitted to the nose. Here, the vomeronasal organ picks up the signal and sends the message to the brain, which then tells the person how to respond.

The human pheromone is excreted through the sweat glands that are located in the hairy areas of the body, like the armpits, the genitalia and the chest.

'This is very interesting,' Tommie thought. Kim and Scott walked back into the kitchen, ready to head out.

"You're still here, Dad?" Scott said.

Chris was just hanging up the phone. "Danny's project was cancelled."

Kim looked at Scott. They gave each other a high-five. "What's that about?" Tommie asked.

"Nothing," Scott replied.

Kim wanted to avoid the third degree. "We gotta go, Mom. We'll be late."

"I just have to brush my teeth," Tommie replied. "I'll meet you in the van."

As the kids waited for Tommie, they asked Chris, "Did Danny figure out how old those things were he found yesterday?"

“Not yet. I’m sure he’ll tell us when he does,” Chris returned. Tommie emerged from the bathroom. “Come on, you two.” The three of them made their way to the van. Once inside,

Tommie started the engine, opened the garage door, and pulled out into the street.

“Kim, I read your notes. They’re very interesting. Tell me more about what you plan to do.”

“We’re doing an experiment to test if the vomeralnasal organ works in kids. We’re setting up a blind smell test. We’ll use perfume, cologne, vitality oils, sensual oils and a special perfume called ReaL that has pheromones in it. We’re going to see if kids like the perfume with the pheromones the most. We won’t tell them what each of the smells are because we don’t want them being influenced by the brand name – just the actual smell.”

“That sounds like a terrific project!”

“Yeah, Amy and I are heading over to the mall at lunch today to get supplies.”

“Let me know if I can help. Now, you said you needed thirty bucks, right?”

“Right,” Kim replied.

“That’s not going to buy you even one bottle of perfume or cologne,” Tommie announced.

“We’re hoping to get samples of the perfumes and colognes. But we might need to buy the essential oils,” Kim explained.

“Okay. That makes sense.” Tommie dug through her purse and pulled out some cash. “What do I have here? Will this do?”

Kim counted the money. “You’ve got \$27. That’ll do. Thanks, Mom.”

Scott was quiet during the drive. They were almost at school when he suddenly called out, “Oh, no!”

“What’s the problem?” Tommie asked.

“I forgot to tell you – we had to pick up Mrs. Hardy on the way here today.”

“Apparently not,” Tommie replied. “She called this morning to cancel. But at least I know what she was canceling.”

Tommie turned on the radio to listen to the Center City Radio morning news.

Reporter: No one could have predicted the events of two days ago. Many suspected that conflict diamonds were being obtained from regions of war and human rights abuse, but no one knew for sure. A major supplier, LeHops, was secretive about some of their sources.

Human rights groups have now forced LeHops to provide diamonds from mines that abide by human rights standards. This has already substantially reduced the number of diamonds on the market and raised diamond prices accordingly.

There will soon be a new global standard for identifying the source of a diamond and cataloging individual diamonds. It is being developed in Canada. It uses light to create a record of the diamond. The result is like a human fingerprint. No two diamonds reflect light the same. There will be a global record of every diamond sold. Each diamond, over a quarter carat, will be laser engraved with a serial number that cannot be seen with the naked eye.

Scott was shocked. ‘Was this the same diamond identification system that the Men Of Business were discussing yesterday?’ he wondered.

“See,” Tommie said. “I told you prices would rebound.”

“You’re right, Mom. And like you said before, it’s got nothing to do with the whales. By the way, what’s a conflict diamond?”

“Some countries raise money for their armies and their wars by selling diamonds – conflict diamonds. LeHops is actually financing what, in some countries, is almost genocide.”

“Like the holocaust in World War II?”

“Sort of. One group wants to obliterate another. The diamond trade has been supporting some wars for years. It’s a disgrace, but the world turns a blind eye. Now, maybe things will change. It looks like you two have really made a difference!”

“So, are we going to sell the diamond now?” Scott asked. “I’ll speak to your father about it.”

“I don’t know. I don’t feel right about selling it, Mom,” Kim said. “If it is a conflict diamond, we shouldn’t make money from it.”

“We don’t know that it is,” Tommie admitted. “Whatever we do, it will be what’s best for all of us.”

Tommie pulled into the school parking lot and dropped the kids off. “Have a great day,” Tommie said, as Kim and Scott jumped out of the van.

“Bye, Mom!” Kim called out. “I hope your meetings go well.”

“And make sure they don’t sign any of those documents!” Scott declared.

“Okay. Now get going you two,” Tommie directed. Kim and Scott rushed into school.

Chapter Four



Kim spotted Amy in the hallway. “Are we still going to the mall at lunch? We need to get the samples for our project.”

“That’s the plan. Today’s day three, so we have a spare after lunch. That should give us lots of time.”

The girls couldn’t wait for the morning classes to end.

Scott met up with Alex in front of their Math class. They walked to their seats at the back of the class. Alex asked Scott if he told Tommie about the documents.

“I couldn’t tell her what we heard, but we got lucky last night!” Scott exclaimed. “Mom told us all about her day and guess what?”

“What?”

“She said someone at work gave her all those dumb documents to sign.”

“Did she sign them?”

“No, she brought them home with her. She showed them to us. Kim and I told her that Huckster could use them to his advantage.”

“Cooool,” Alex said.

“Yeah. And today she’s meeting with some guys who Huckster’s also messing with. Maybe they can work together. We’re going to take down that slime bucket!” Scott bragged. “That guy thinks he’s untouchable, but he’s not.”

Alex was about to respond, when he spied Cynthia walking in his direction. He was immediately distracted. “Speaking of an untouchable, have you noticed that Cynthia seems to have grown?”

“She’s always been tall,” Scott replied.

“That’s not what I’m talking about,” Alex remarked. “Her bazongas! They’re bigger than they were yesterday!”

“Alex, be quiet. Everyone’s looking at you. You’ll get us hated by every girl in this school.” It was too late. The girls were already glaring at Alex and Scott. Guilt by association – again.

Alex loved the attention – even if it was negative. “You love me, don’t you girls. You all think I’m a Baldwin,” Alex announced out loud in the classroom.

He got a chilly response from the hot girls in the room. “No way! You’re a Fred,” Cynthia yelled out.

“Wilma!” Alex countered. “Geekoid!” Erica replied.

“Alex Black, no girl in their right mind would be attracted to you!” Allana declared.

“You girls all want me, just admit it. You all want to hook up with me,” Alex bragged. He didn’t notice Ms. Fogarty, the Math teacher, had come in the back way and was standing right behind him.

“Something you want to share with the class, Alex?” Ms. Fogarty asked. “Maybe we should put it to a vote. How many girls in this room want to hook up with Alex?” She didn’t realize what ‘hook up’ meant.

The girls were shocked. “As if!” Erica shouted out.

“They just don’t want anyone knowing they secretly think I’m dopey,” Alex explained.

Poor Ms. Fogarty. She didn’t get this one either – or did she. “But you are dopey, Alex. No one here would deny that!”

Alex got the joke and didn’t appreciate it. “Dopey, you know, hip, cool, da bomb, GQ! Man, tweet’s don’t know anything!” Alex replied. He had an audience and he thought he’d hold its attention for as long as he could.

“Well, this tweet knows more than you think,” Ms. Fogarty snapped. Alex was in deep now. He had tried to impress the class with his cool lingo, but instead got his teacher very angry.

‘Oh crud,’ Scott thought to himself. ‘She’s flamin’! Alex is in big trouble.’

Alex was out of line and there had to be consequences. ‘He needs an attitude adjustment,’ Ms. Fogarty thought – and she came up with a great one.

“Who would vote for Alex for School President?” Ms. Fogarty asked. A couple of guys put up their hands. None of the girls did.

“The election is coming up. We need a couple more candidates to make this a real race. Would you like to put your lack of popularity where your excess of mouth is, Alex?”

“Sure, I’ll run! Scott’ll be my campaign manager.”

Ms. Fogarty hoped that if Alex realized how much his arrogance and attitude were disliked by the student body, he might make a change for the better. She threw down the gauntlet and he picked it up. Now, to see what he does with it.

“Alex, you’ll have to see Principal Toole and register as a candidate.”

“No problemo,” Alex said. “Scott’ll do it. That’s what campaign managers are for.”

Scott groaned and rolled his eyes at his teacher. He was a defeated man and the voting hadn’t even started.

Ms. Fogarty walked over to her desk, sat down and pulled out some papers. While she looked them over, Scott and Alex chatted quietly in the back of the classroom.

“Alex, you haven’t got a hope in H E double hockey sticks of winning,” Scott moaned.

Alex ignored Scott’s comment. “Scott, instead of campaign manager, why not be my running mate? I need a Vice President, right?”

‘Vice President?’ Scott thought. ‘Maybe we can get elected. People like me. I’d make a great Vice President. Actually, I’d make a great President.’

“So, what do you think will give us an edge?” Scott asked his running mate.

“It’s all in the marketing. We’ll promise to give everyone what they want. That’ll get us elected. It won’t make any sense to vote for anyone else,” Alex proposed. “That’s what politicians always do. Who cares if we can’t deliver.”

“Okay, you two. Be quiet! Discuss your campaign platform outside of class,” Ms. Fogarty ordered.

Alex’s mind wasn’t on math. He was thinking about what it was going to be like to be School President. He was dreaming about the glamour, the girls, the prestige and the power.

Scott thought about the incredible uphill battle he’d be fighting. There was no way a majority would vote for Alex. Few understood Alex like Scott did.

The rest of the morning dragged on. Scott and Alex thought about the election and the Men Of Business takedown, while Kim and Amy concentrated on their Science Fair project. Between the four of them, no one was learning a thing in class.

Chapter Five



Five, four, three, two, one. The girls counted down in their heads.

BZZZZ...

As soon as the lunch bell went, they headed for Scentarama in the mall. It was a huge store and had every conceivable product that smelled.

Scentarama had a great selection of perfumes and colognes. A nice saleslady named Carol helped them. The girls introduced themselves and explained what they were doing for Science Fair.

“So, girls. Let me see if I understand this,” Carol said. “You plan to see if kids prefer one fragrance over another. They won’t know what they’re smelling. And you think that most of them will prefer the ReaL because it has pheromones in it?”

“Yes, that’s right!” Amy replied. “Where did they get the pheromones?”

“I’m not sure. It’s a secret formula,” Carol admitted. “But you know the company combined male and female pheromones so that both sexes could use the same perfume.”

“We didn’t know that,” Kim said. “So that makes it unisex.”

“Right,” Carol replied. “When a woman wears it, it mixes with her own natural pheromones and effects men. When a man wears it, it mixes with his natural pheromones and effects women.”

“What do you mean by ‘effects’?” Kim asked.

“I think it just makes everyone comfortable. Happy,” Carol explained. “Personally, I love ReaL, but not many people buy it.”

“They don’t advertise, that’s why,” Kim replied. “We’re all told what we should like. If we want to be one of the so called in-crowd, we buy it.”

“That’s a pretty mature conclusion,” Carol observed. “Now, let me see what I can do for you. You said you wanted twenty samples.

I’ll give you colognes and perfumes for different ages. You can get the essential oils from the aromatherapy counter. I’ll tell Natalie you’re coming over. She’ll get you samples so you don’t have to buy anything. Is that okay with you girls?”

“Thanks! That’ll leave me with enough money to buy a present for my mom,” Kim explained. “I’m going to buy her a bottle of ReaL. I think her and Dad could use a little help in the romance department.”

“That’s a nice idea,” Carol remarked. “I always find when I wear it – I have a great day! Everyone seems to be nice and happy, like I said. But I have to wear the more expensive stuff when I work. Let me get you the ReaL, first. And I’ll give you some free

samples of it, too.”

They took care of the cash transaction and then got back to the task at hand.

Carol reached under her counter and started to pull out samples. “Here you go, girls. This is a good cross-section for men and women, young and old.” She put the samples in a bag and handed it to Kim. “Now don’t forget to ask for Natalie over at the aromatherapy counter.”

“Yes, we will, and thank you very much for your help. We really appreciate it!” Kim said, as she and Amy headed to the aromatherapy counter.

Carol called Natalie and told her the girls were coming.

When the girls arrived, Natalie was ready and waiting. “Over here, girls,” she called to them. “I’m Natalie. You must be Kim and Amy.” Natalie was a lot younger and hipper looking than Carol.

“Hi, Natalie,” Kim replied.

“Carol told me about your experiment with fragrances. It’s a wonderful idea. I think I have just the selection of vitality and sensual essential oils you’re looking for. Do you know the difference?”

“Yes,” Kim replied. “Vitality gives you energy and makes you feel good – and sensual makes you feel like...” she paused for a second.

Amy broke in and declared, “Hooking up. Doing the dooo!”

“Amy!” Kim said, with a frown.

“That’s okay, girls. Sex is a part of life. You don’t need to be embarrassed to talk about it. And you’re right. Sensual oil has a scent that is supposed to reduce inhibitions and raise your libido.”

“Like Viagra?” Amy asked.

“Correct again! Sensual oils can be like Viagra for some people,” Natalie said. “I have a good selection here. I’ll give you five vitality and five sensual oils. For the vitality, I have Peppermint, which stimulates your mind and body and helps you think clearly. And I have some Lemon, which is uplifting. It makes you feel good.”

“Is that why they put it in household cleaning and polishing products?” Amy asked.

“Yes. It’s like a performance enhancing drug for housework,” Natalie laughed. “I also have some Pine for you. It helps increase energy levels and reduces anxiety and stress.”

“I should put one of those Pine tree things in the van. Maybe it’ll get rid of my mom’s road rage,” Kim said.

“That’s one way to use aromatherapy,” Natalie commented. “And I have two more for you. Eucalyptus stimulates the nervous system and Rosemary clears the mind and strengthens the memory.”

“Thanks, Natalie,” Kim said.

“Now, for the sensual oils,” Natalie said, as she reached under the counter and rustled around in the product drawers. “I’ll give you some Clary Sage and here is some Ylang Ylang, Jasmine, Sandalwood and Patchouli. Want to smell this?” Natalie asked, as she held out a sample of Patchouli. The girls leaned over and put their noses right up to it.

“Yuck!” Amy said. “This is supposed to turn you on? It’s gross! It smells like Alex.”

“Alex must be a very popular guy!” Natalie reasoned.

“No! He’s a gimp. Only my brother Scott likes him. They’re best friends for some strange reason,” Kim explained.

“Maybe your brother is attracted to the Patchouli smell.”

“What? Are you saying my brother’s gay?”

“No, no that’s not what I’m saying. Sensual oils can attract both sexes,” Natalie replied. “Just like pheromones.”

“Thank goodness. Hey, maybe if we can cover up Alex’s natural stink, Scott will stop hanging around with him,” Amy offered.

Kim had another problem on her mind – her parents. “Natalie, if my dad can’t smell anything, do you think his vomeralnasal organ is broken, too?”

“The vomeralnasal organ is different from the sense of smell. I’m not sure if other smells actually have anything to do with the pheromones. You see you really can’t smell the pheromones. They’re chemical signals that only your vomeralnasal organ can read,” explained Natalie.

Kim was relieved. “Great, my plan should work on my dad, as long as his organ isn’t broken.”

Natalie held back a giggle. The unintended joke went over Kim and Amy’s heads.

“We call them chem-mails, like chemical emails,” Amy bragged. “How come you know so much about this, Natalie?” Kim asked.

“I have a Masters degree in chemistry.”

“Awesome! How come you work here?”

“I’m still working on my Ph.D. and I need the money.”

“Wow!” Kim responded.

Now the girls had all they needed and Kim was taking away a little more – hope for her parent’s marriage.

“Thanks for all your help, Natalie.”

“Bye, girls.”

Kim and Amy headed for the drugstore to buy cotton balls and little plastic bags. They managed to get everything done quickly and had time to grab lunch before heading back to class.

“Oh, great!” Kim said. “There’s Scott and Alex. Hide behind this pillar. I hope they didn’t see...”

Chapter Six



“Too late. They’re coming over,” Amy replied. She was surprised by Kim’s reluctance to be seen. “How come you don’t want to see them? Aren’t we supposed to be working as a team?”

“Amy, I think we were under the influence last night,” Kim said. “Influence of what?”

“Wishful thinking. We thought Alex was okay last night. But I think he’s still the same old idiot.”

“Well, we’ll soon find out,” Amy replied. Then she added, “Maybe they know more about the takedown tonight.”

As the boys walked up to the girls, Amy blurted out, “Well, do you guys know anything?”

“We know everything,” Alex returned.

“I mean about the takedown tonight, dim wit.”

Scott answered. “No, we don’t know anything more than we knew this morning. We’ll just have to wait and see.” Scott took a pragmatic approach. There really wasn’t anything they could do.

“This is frustrating,” Kim admitted. “I really wish we could see Huckster get busted.”

“We all know what your mom’s dealing with,” Alex said. “We all want him to get his.”

Kim thought for a brief moment – that Alex could be a nice guy.

“So, what are you two doing here?” Alex asked. “What’s in the bag? Falsies like Cynthia’s?”

Kim changed her mind.

Amy turned to Kim and said, “You were right.” She turned to Alex and barked back, “We’re getting stuff for our Science Fair project – as if it’s any of your business.”

“Science Fair? You two are such brown-nosers. It’s not due for at least two weeks. You’re starting already?”

“Alex, you’re such a slacker!” Kim accused. “So, what are you doing?”

“Pheromones,” Amy replied. “Pharaoh’s tombs?”

“No, brain dead. Pheromones,” Kim said. “Ferroners, like out of towners?”

“Kim, don’t bother. He’s just trying to bug us.”

“No, really Amy. I don’t know what you’re saying. Did you say

Farrah moans?"

"No! You numbskull!" Kim yelled.

"Okay, okay. Tell me what a – whatever you said is. I'm listening." Scott wondered how he would ever get elected Vice President with such a headcase for a running mate.

"Alex, let's just get our lunch and go back to school. We have a lot to do. The election is in two days!"

"What's that got to do with you two?" Kim asked. "We're running!" Alex declared.

"Running? Running for what? Homecoming queens?" Kim laughed.

"We'd have a better chance at winning than you two," Alex said before he realized he was putting his foot in his mouth. The girls laughed hysterically.

Alex went on the offensive again. "I'm running for President of the student body and your brother's my running mate."

The girls laughed even harder.

"Stop with the jokes!" Kim cried. "I think I'm going to pee my pants! You can't be serious. No one will vote for you. You're an obnoxious, arrogant, spoiled, loud-mouthed cheese-head."

"So, I can count on your votes?" Alex asked, ignoring the putdowns.

"No way! You don't have any attraction pheromones," Amy declared.

"What are you talking about?"

"Pheromones, the chemicals that animals give off to attract the opposite sex. You don't have any!" Amy asserted.

"He has tons of dispersion pheromones, though," Kim chuckled. "How do I get these pheromones? Could I use them to get elected?" Alex asked. He grabbed the girls' bag and rifled through the samples.

"Hey! Give that back!" Amy shouted. "Something in here you don't want me to see?"

"No, just..."

Alex emptied the samples out onto the table. He looked them over and noticed the word 'Pheromone' printed on one of the labels. He picked up the sample and said, "It says here, this ReaL perfume has pheromones. What if I use it? Will it make me irresistible?"

"Nothing will help you," Kim declared, as she put the samples back into the bag.

"Give me that," Amy said. She grabbed the ReaL sample out of Alex's hand.

Scott whispered to Kim, "Can we use that stuff on Mom and Dad?"

"I already thought of that. I bought some. We can give it to her later."

Alex overheard. "What are you two whispering about? Are your mom and dad having problems?"

Scott and Kim were on the defensive. "No way!"

"Then, why did I just hear you say you needed to use the ReaL on them? Don't they like each other?"

"Alex, shut-up. It's none of your business."

"Oh, yes it is. If your parents are having problems and get a divorce – then what's going to happen to me?"

"Get serious, Alex. You have your own parents."

"I like yours better. So what's the problem?"

Amy was curious, too. "Yeah. What's the problem?"

"I just wanted to see if it might help Mom and Dad get along a bit better. Sometimes,

it seems like they don't like each other very much. I don't want them ever getting divorced. I just thought this stuff might help, that's all. No biggie."

"Good thinking, Scott. I've been through one divorce already. I don't need to go through another one."

"It's all about you, isn't it, Alex," Amy announced.

"Who else is there?" Alex's gears were grinding. "I think this stuff will help me!"

"You'll need all the help you can get," Kim remarked. "You don't stand a chance. No girl in our school will vote for you. You'll be lucky if you get any guy's votes either – unless, of course, you buy them."

"Great idea, Kim! I'll offer all the guys tickets to Jets games. Maybe even buy them all movie passes. What else could I do, Scott?"

"I plan to win votes the old fashioned way," Scott replied. "With a sound election platform. We need to figure out what we stand for – what we can do to make the school better for the students."

"I don't need to think about what I stand for. It's pretty simple... basketball, more time off, more dances and pep rallies, recruiting better looking girls to our school, making short skirts and tube tops the girls' school uniform... and easy exams. I'll get all the guy's votes," Alex replied.

"You're joking aren't you, Alex?" Kim asked. She turned to her brother. "Scott, how can you hang out with this guy?"

"He's not that bad when you get to know him," Scott said, in a vain attempt to stick up for Alex.

GRRRR...

Amy's stomach was growling.

"We haven't even eaten yet. You two have wasted our lunch hour," Amy said, as she started walking toward O'Dinkle's.

The girls bought take-out and took off. The boys did the same.

Chapter Seven



“Alex, what would you do if we were elected?” Scott asked.

“I’d hand all the work over to you. You’d really make a great President, Scott.”

“Why did you agree to run, then?”

“I couldn’t let Ms. Fogarty make an idiot out of me. I had to call her bluff ! I’ll show her!”

“Alex, we really do stand a chance if we get our act together. But we need a real election platform.”

“You build it.”

“Build what?”

“The platform. You build it. I’m going to tell everyone what they want to hear.”

“Alex, that’s what an election platform is!”

“I know that! Do you really think I’m that stupid?”

“Don’t make me answer that,” Scott replied, frustrated by Alex’s refusal to take anything seriously.

“We’ll work on the platform tonight at your house, after basketball practice.”

“We have our work cut out for us,” Scott said. “We need to assess our competition, determine their strengths and then counter them.”

“I think we should just figure out their weaknesses and go for their jugulars,” Alex replied. “You know. Dirty tricks. Like we learned in History. Tricky Dickie Nixon and all that. I could really get into that!”

“Be serious, Alex. We have enough problems at school. We don’t need to make more. Divide and conquer isn’t the solution.” Scott was referring to the way the student body was already divided into cliques.

“Scott, don’t sweat it.”

“I think you’re underestimating the competition. They’re not all geeks! Zach Jacobson is the football team captain.”

“So what? You’re the basketball team captain. We got the jocks covered.”

“His running mate is Erica Simpson, captain of the cheer- leading squad. I don’t think you qualify for that position,” Scott stated.

“Big deal,” Alex replied. “She’s so stuck up. She won’t get many votes. I think they’ll just get the football team, the cheerleaders and some of their hangers-on. Nothing to worry about. Besides, neither of them is that smart. What kind of election speech could

they put together? A few grunts and maybe a cheer. Who else is running?"

"Blair Rutherford," Scott replied.

"That wind bag. He's so full of himself. Head of the debating team. Biiiiig deal! What's he going to do for the rest of us?" Alex challenged.

"I have no idea. I guess we'll find that out tomorrow at the speeches. You can be sure his will be the best."

"Yeah, if the tweets are marking him. I bet he hasn't got a clue what we students want, or even how to talk to us. I think we can write him off right now!"

"You could be right, Alex."

"I think I heard J.R. O'Dinkle is running. Who's gonna vote for him?"

"All the people who eat at O'Dinkle's, that's who. He's giving away O'Dinkle's coupons. Didn't you see them lining up today when we were leaving the school at lunch?"

"Oh, I thought it was just a chuborian festival. There's not that many of them in school. Their vote can't make much of a dent. But they sure can," Alex laughed uproariously.

"Alex, you aren't very observant. You know that when we did that fitness test early in the year – they found out that almost fifty percent of the students are overweight. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that fast food places like O'Dinkle's are probably the main reason."

"So, we're up against the football team, the cheerleaders, the debating team, the lardos and who else, Scott? Who's our real problem?"

"If you keep dissing the student body, I think our biggest problem is you!" Scott reasoned. "But, if we get our act together and put forward a platform based on solidarity, then in reality, our biggest competition is Carl Morton. He could get all of the minority vote."

"What minorities are you talking about?"

"Everyone that feels disenfranchised."

"Dis-french-fried?"

"Dis-en-fran-chised, you moron!" Scott bellowed. "And that means?"

"It means – all the people who don't feel like they're part of the majority. If you take the entire student body and subtract the in-crowd, you get the rest of them. They'll vote for Carl," Scott explained.

"This is complicated. So who are we going to get to vote for us?"

"We need to target the entire student body. Government should be by the people, for the people – not by one person for a few," Scott proposed.

"Good answer!" Alex replied. "Okay, so you work on the campaign promises and I'll work on my plan – pheromone-induced votes. I'll be like Cupid but I'll get everyone to love me."

"A stupid cupid," Scott mumbled under his breath.

Scott's dream of becoming Vice President was turning into a nightmare.

Chapter Eight



That afternoon, all four kids had a spare first class and ended up in the common room at school. As Scott and Alex talked about the election, Kim and Amy worked on their Science Fair project.

“Let’s go over our methodology one more time and make sure it’s complete,” Kim suggested.

“Sure. Go for it.”

“Step one,” Kim said. “We collected different perfumes and colognes, and vitality and sensual essential oil samples from the mall.”

“All done.”

“Step two. We put all the names of the samples into a bag and pulled them out randomly. This is the order that they will be sampled in our experiment.”

“All done.”

“Step three. We soaked cotton balls with the scents and put the cotton balls into plastic bags. We numbered the bags to coincide with the list of the smells. This way no one knows what they’re smelling, except us.”

“That’s done, too.”

“Step four. We need to set up tables outside the gym in the hallway. We also have to arrange with Principal Toole to get kids out of class so that they can come and do our experiment. Does that about cover it?” Kim was sure they had it all organized. “Did we forget anything?”

Kim and Amy thought for a minute. “The coffee!” Kim said.

“Right. I’ll bring some beans and plastic cups tomorrow. It’s a good thing you remembered, otherwise we wouldn’t have anything to clean the nose.”

“Should we go see Principal Toole about getting tomorrow morning off to do the experiment?”

“Yes, good idea, Kim.”

The girls headed to Principal Toole’s office and explained their project. Principal Toole loved it. He even offered to have all the teachers do the survey as well, so that the girls could compare the adults’ results with the kids’. Amy and Kim were pumped. They were now going to set up their table outside the gymnasium and lay out their experiment so it would be ready to go the next day.

On their way out of the office, Kim thought of something else. “We still need to flesh out the report. I’ll take the sex aspect and you do the survey. That way all we need to do

is collect the data, analyze it, and write up the results.”

Scott and Alex walked into the office as the girls were leaving. “Are you guys in trouble or what?” Amy asked. It was a rhetorical question and they didn’t wait for a reply. They had work to do.

“No, we’re here to register for the election!” Alex announced. He walked over to the desk where the principal’s secretary sat. “Meredith, where do we sign up?”

“Is this a joke?” Meredith asked.

“No. I’m running for President and Scott here is the Vice President. We’re gonna win!”

“If you say so,” Meredith chortled. She pressed the intercom button to Principal Toole’s office. “Principal Toole. We have two more candidates for the election.”

“Who?”

“Alex Black and Scott Campbell.”

“Meredith, you’re a barrel of laughs.”

“No, really. They’re here in the office. Alex wants to register.” Principal Toole felt a little foolish. He shouldn’t have passed judgement on a student like that, but he really did think she was kidding. He got up from behind his desk and walked out into the office area. “Alex, Scott, nice to see you boys. So, you’re running mates are you?”

“Yup,” Alex replied.

“Scott. I think you’d make a great President. I’m pleased you’re running.”

“Well, actually, Alex is running for President. I’m the Vice Presidential candidate.”

“Oh, I see.” Principal Toole didn’t really see at all. Meredith handed him the registration papers and he passed them on to Alex.

“Fill these out and hand them in to me as soon as possible. You can do it right here, right now, if you like.”

Alex handed the papers to Scott and announced, “Scott’ll take care of it.”

Scott sat down at the table in the front of the office and filled them out, while Alex supervised.

BZZZZ...

Scott handed the papers to Meredith and the boys went to class.

BZZZZ...

When the final bell sounded, Kim and Amy headed for the girls’ gym for basketball practice. They bumped into Scott on the way. “So, how’s the election coming?” Kim asked.

“I’m working on our platform. Alex supposedly has a plan. He’s missing practice tonight to work on it. He won’t tell me what it is!”

“I think I know what it is. He’s going to buy the store out of ReaL. He thinks he’s going to smell his way to victory.”

“Amy’s right. That sounds like Alex. Too bad you have such a rotten running mate. You would make a good President.” Kim really believed her brother had what it took.

Alex showed up out of the blue. “Hey Kimmie, any of that ReaL for Men?”

“It’s unisex, Alex,” Kim said. “It’s gay?”

“No, it works on women and men,” Amy explained.

“You mean if I put it on, the guys will be attracted to me?”

“No! That’s not how it works!”

“Thank goodness. I don’t want to win that badly.”

“This is your plan? You’re going to douse yourself with ReaL?” Scott could hardly believe he was even thinking it. “Get real!”

“That’s the plan!”

“You are a moron!” Kim declared. “So, explain this unisex thing to me.”

Before they could answer him, their basketball coach shouted to the girls, “Kim, Amy, get your butts in here! Practice starts in two minutes. If you’re not on time, you’re on the line! We got a big game tomorrow night and you two had better be ready!”

The girls hurried inside. Scott headed to his own practice, while Alex slipped out of school and went to the mall.

Chapter Nine



An hour and a half and two pints of sweat later, the kids' practices were over. Kim called Tommie and asked her to pick her and Scott up. Tommie obliged, as usual.

The kids jumped into the van. Scott sat in the front and Kim sat in the second row of seats.

"Mom, I bought you something today. I think you'll like it." Kim had the ReaL in her hand.

"That's very thoughtful of you Kim. What is it?"

"It's ReaL. The perfume with the pheromones," Kim replied. She reached through the two bucket seats in the front – to hand the bottle to Tommie.

Scott intercepted the pass. He grabbed the bottle and opened it, but didn't realize he had taken the top right off. Scott reached over to give his mom a little dab of perfume and ended up soaking her in it. "Whoops, sorry, Mom."

"Scott, you twit!" Kim exclaimed.

"But she smells ReaL good, doesn't she, Kim?!"

"Calm down you two," Tommie said. Rather than overwhelm her, the spilled fragrance was surprisingly light. She took a deep breath and inhaled it.

"I love the smell of this stuff. Hmmm... I wonder what your dad will think of it?"

The kids were hoping he'd love it too – and by extension – love Tommie.

The ReaL spread through the entire van. It seemed to have a calming effect on the three of them.

"The lady at the perfume counter said that when she wears this stuff, it puts her and everyone else that's around her, in a good mood."

"That's very interesting. So it works for men and women."

"Yeah. It's unisex, Mom."

It's effect went way beyond what Kim had anticipated or even realized.

"Kim, tell Mom what you've done so far on your Science Fair project," Scott said. "Mom, Kim got a lot of great stuff from the store today. Tell her, Kim."

"Sure, Scott. Mom, the ladies at the perfume and aromatherapy counters at Scentarama gave us all the samples we need. We're all set for the experiment tomorrow."

"That's great, Dear. And Scott, how was your day?"

Kim replied for Scott. "Guess what, Mom? Scott's running for Vice President of our school! Alex – the dope – is his running mate. He'll be President if they win. It's too bad Scott didn't go for President. He'd be way better than Alex, and everyone likes Scott."

“Thanks for the vote of confidence, Kim,” Scott said without even a hint of sarcasm. None of them noticed the not-so-subtle change in their attitudes.

“Scott, is there anything I can do to help?” Tommie offered. “Not that I know of. I need to work on our speech tonight.”

“It looks like you two have everything under control. So, the only thing I have to worry about is supper.”

“Mom, can we have pizza tonight?” Scott asked.

It didn’t take Tommie long to make a decision. “Okay. Should I stop off at Mario’s Pizzeria for take-out?”

“Yeah! Great!” Scott declared.

“Ditto! But I’m waiting in the van. He’s so rude,” Kim said, describing Mario, the owner.

“Best ‘za in Center City, kids. That’s why we go there,” Tommie responded. “Now, what would you like? The usual for you, Scott – Hawaiian? And for you, Kim – triple pepperoni?”

“No, Mom. This time you choose what you want,” Kim replied. “Yeah, Mom. Just get what you want,” Scott echoed.

The ‘abnormal’ conversation seemed normal to them.

Tommie parked, left the kids in the van, and walked into the restaurant. Mario looked up and saw Tommie at the counter. He had a very successful business and usually didn’t bother with small talk. But today, as the scent of the woman breezed into the room, he felt the urge to be verbal.

“Mrs. Campbell, itsa wonderful to see you. How have you been?

Would you like the usual?”

“Hello, Mario. No, actually, today the kids said that I should pick out what I want. Aren’t they just the sweetest?”

“Let me guess, Mrs. Campbell. Youa gonna order what the kids want anyway, Hawaiian and triple Pepperoni. Youa such a good mamma.”

Mario moved closer to Tommie. “I’m gonna tell you what I’m gonna do for you today. Special for you, Mrs. Campbell. I’m gonna give you a free pizza. Just how you like it. Especially for you. You sucha nice lady. What can I get for you?”

Tommie was surprised. Mario was notorious for being cheap as well as rude. She’d been going there for as long as she could remember and he never offered her anything for free before.

“Oh, no, Mario. That’s fine. I’m fine. You don’t need to...” Before Tommie could finish her sentence, Mario had more freebees to offer. “And I’m gonna give to you some wonderful garlic and herb bread sticks and some of my famous cappuccino to go. You gonna love it. My pleasure. And may I say you look especially lovely tonight.”

“Why thank you, Mario. That’s very kind of you. My kids are in the van, I’ll just go out and sit with them while the pizzas are baking.”

“Please, Mrs. Campbell. Let me give you a cappuccino to enjoy while you wait. And here, take two gelatos for the children.”

“Thank you, Mario, but that isn’t necessary.”

Mario was still trying to score points with Tommie and insisted she take the cappuccino and gelato.

Tommie finally accepted his generosity and headed out to the van with the

refreshments.

She and the kids sat in the van and enjoyed their treats and each other's company.

After about twenty minutes, KNOCK... KNOCK... KNOCK...

Tommie looked toward the driver's window. Mario was standing outside with the pizzas in his arms. The effect of the ReaL had dissipated and Mario had returned to his real self. He looked annoyed. He didn't understand why he told them the pizzas were his treat. 'Since when should I just give away my pizza,' he thought.

Tommie lowered the window and out wafted the ReaL. Mario breathed it in and was again transformed from grouchy to happy.

Mario passed the pizzas through the open window. "Heara you go! On the house. Enjoy! I hope you come back very soon," Mario said and disappeared back into the restaurant.

"I don't know what you said to him, Mom – but good work!" Scott said.

"Yeah, Mom, you must have cast some niceness spell on him or something," Kim echoed.

"Not that I know of. Maybe it's this perfume," Tommie replied. "I hope it works this well on Dad," Scott whispered to Kim. Tommie started the engine and they headed home.

Chapter Ten



Suddenly, remembering about Tommie's plans for that day, Scott asked, "Mom, what happened with your meetings today?"

Tommie wanted to save this discussion for when they got home. "Let's talk about that over pizza, at home. I want your dad to hear."

"Okay, Mom."

Kim and Scott agreed, even though they were dying to know right then and there.

The drive home was peaceful. They listened to music, chatted about school, the election, the Science Fair project and basketball – no one threw a barb at anyone. Tommie thought the ReaL was what every family needed. 'I should get a patent and make this into an air freshener,' she thought. So far, its only effect was to put everyone in a good mood.

Tommie pulled into their garage.

Scott and Kim leapt out of the van, taking the pizzas, leftover gelato and coffee with them. Tommie didn't even have to ask.

"I absolutely love the effect this stuff is having on all of us!" Tommie declared.

Chris was already home. He was sitting in the family room with Max, watching ALLSPORTSTV. He heard the garage door open and close – the family was home. Scott and Kim blasted by with the pizza.

"Fantastic! I'm starved!" Chris got up from the couch and joined the kids in the kitchen. For some reason, the smell of the pizza didn't seem to faze Max. He and his nose were distracted.

Tommie was walking by the family room when Max bounded off the couch and jumped up on her. She tried to push him away, but in true doggie form, Max grabbed on to her leg as she tried to escape. He knocked Tommie over onto the couch and jumped on top of her. He was rubbing his neck up against the spot where the pheromones spilled on her. She tried to push him off, but couldn't. "What the heck!" Tommie called out. "Max, get off!" It didn't take her long to suspect that the ReaL was having an effect on the dog. Max was in the mood for love.

Chris and the kids watched the action from the kitchen. It was pretty funny. "That's exactly what he's trying to do!" Chris laughed, as he rushed to her rescue. "Lucky dog!" Chris said. He grabbed Max by the collar and dragged him through the kitchen's patio door and outside.

Scott and Kim giggled. "Remember when he was a puppy? He used to do that to

everything!” Scott exclaimed.

BARK... BARK... BARK...

Max was jumping at the door, trying to get back in.

A squirrel ran across the back yard. Max caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of his eye. He turned around and chased after him. The barking intensified.

“First – all I could hear was the darn golf game and now, the darn dog barking,” the old man complained.

“What did you expect, putting the transmitter in the dog’s flea collar?” the grandson replied.

“I guess, I’m just going crazy in my old age,” the old man said. “That’s the first lucid thing you’ve said in days!”

“Is that dog ever going to get back into the house?”

Max was jumping up at the tree that the squirrel had just climbed. The flea collar snagged on a branch and in his effort to get to the squirrel and free himself, the flea collar broke off and fell to the ground. The squirrel took off down the backside of the tree and led Max away from the collar to the far end of the yard.

An ant colony was close by. The entire hill picked up the pheromone scent and marched out of their hill toward the flea collar. Within minutes, the collar was on thousands of tiny legs, marching back to the anthill.

“I don’t hear anything except some faint squeaks or something,” the grandson said. “The transmitter must be busted.”

“You’re probably right,” the old man agreed. “This was a bad idea. I think a more direct approach is required.”

“Whatever,” the grandson said.

Tommie joined the kids in the kitchen. “Do you think the ReaL made Max act like that?” Kim asked.

“Possibly,” Tommie replied, as Chris walked back into the kitchen and sat down at the table beside Tommie. As he reached across her to grab a piece of pizza, Chris felt a little tingle down his spine and quickly forgot all about the kids and the food. “Tommie, you look ravishing tonight. Did you change your hair or something?”

Kim nudged Scott.

“No,” Tommie replied. “But thanks for the compliment.” Tommie thought she’d tease Chris a bit. “You know you’re the second man to tell me that in the last hour.”

“Who’s been hitting on my woman?” Chris replied, sounding a bit like a caveman.

The kids chuckled. Kim decided to fuel the fire. “Mario was really nice to Mom, today. He gave us our order for free!”

“That old cheapskate?” Chris replied.

“Yes, he was in a good mood and I guess we just got lucky. Right place at the right time,” Tommie explained. She grinned at Chris and added, “But honey, you know you’re the only man for me.”

Chris turned his chair to face Tommie, grabbed her head, turned it toward him, and kissed her.

The kids watched in semi-horror. “OOOOH, YUCK!” Kim exclaimed.

“Are you trying to gross us out?” Scott asked.

The kids were actually relieved that their parents kissed. They thought it must mean that they really did love each other.

Tommie realized that the ReaL was affecting Chris the same way it did Max. She pushed Chris away and decided to de-perfume and diffuse the situation.

"I've got something I have to do right now!" Tommie said, as she rushed upstairs.

"Do you need any help?" Chris asked. He jumped out of his chair and followed Tommie.

"NO!" Tommie shouted. She needed to change clothes, have a shower and get the ReaL off her.

Chris was deflated. He walked back to the kitchen and sat down. He turned his attention to the pizza.

Scott and Kim were disappointed.

"It didn't work. I think the problem is Mom. She's not attracted to Dad!" Scott whispered to Kim. "We need to put this stuff on Dad! We need another plan."

"What are you two whispering about?" Chris asked. "Nothing important," Scott replied.

Chris realized he had acted inappropriately in front of the kids. He didn't know how to explain it, so he decided not to.

Chris, Scott and Kim ate their pizza. Tommie finally returned to the kitchen. She walked right over to Chris and said, "Smell me."

"What for?"

"Just smell me."

"If you insist." He took a whiff of his wife. "Okay, what now?"

"Nothing?" Tommie asked.

"Is this a test?"

"Yes, and you passed," Tommie replied. She gave him a hug and a peck on the forehead. Then she walked over to the patio door and let Max back inside. Max ignored Tommie and went directly to his dinner bowl.

'Great,' Tommie thought. 'It's gone.'

"What just happened a few minutes ago?" Chris asked, hoping Tommie had an explanation.

"Didn't you kids tell him?" Tommie asked.

"Tell me what? Why I was acting like a teenager with raging hormones?"

Kim explained. "It was the attraction pheromones in the perfume Scott sprayed, or should I say spilled, on Mom in the van. They make you feel happy."

"So, does that explain Max's happiness, too?"

"I'd say so," Tommie replied.

"How come it didn't make you... happy?" Chris asked Tommie. "You sound disappointed."

"I was!" Chris exclaimed.

"I knew we were under the influence," Tommie laughed. "Knowledge is power."

Tommie finished up her pizza as the conversation and the clutter of a family meal filled the kitchen.

"So, Mom. What happened at your meetings?" Scott asked. "Which one?"

"First, what happened with RL?" Scott inquired. "What did he say about the documents? Did you tell him what we thought about them?"

"I sure did. RL had never really thought about their implications in terms of the First

Amendment. He thinks you kids might be on to something.”

Scott and Kim looked pleased.

“Did he say you should sign the documents?” Kim asked.

“As a matter of fact, RL changed his mind on that, too. He said I shouldn’t sign them. He said there could be a criminal prosecution as well as the arbitration cases against Huckster – especially if Huckster’s using these documents to steal from his employees and to make them lie or not speak under oath.”

“So, what are you going to do next?” Chris asked.

“Well, the first step is to build our arbitration cases against Huckster. Me and Molina and Arnold have to document all our stories as soon as possible.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Chris asked. “It sounds like a lot of work and who knows how an arbitrator might decide.”

“Of course she’ll do it!” Kim declared. “She has to do it! It’s the right thing to do!”

The kids were passionate about the situation. “Man, Dad, how could you even ask?” Scott asked. “Huckster’s a sleaze bag. He rips off everyone in his organization.”

Chris and Tommie were surprised by their comments. “What makes you say that?” Chris asked.

Was Scott about to blow their cover?

Chapter Eleven



Kim saved the day. She quickly elbowed her brother. Scott got the message and a sore rib cage.

“Oh, just things I’ve heard here and there,” he said cryptically. “Actually Chris, Scott might be right. Molina and Arnold told me a bunch of stories about the company. None of them sounded kosher to me.”

“So what else did Molina and Arnold say that can help your case?” Kim asked.

Tommie paused for a second and reflected on the meeting that day. “Arnold is key. I’m so grateful he and Molina decided to speak with me. You wouldn’t believe the stories Arnold was telling us. Molina’s heard them all before, but they were new to me. It’s amazing how a guy can put up with that kind of abuse from his employer.”

Chris was encouraged by what he heard. “It’s great how things can turn around so quickly. Just yesterday you thought it was hopeless, but this sounds like a win-win for all of you.”

“I think so. I’m meeting with...” RING... RING...

Tommie reached for the phone. “Hello?”

“Tommie?” the voice on the phone asked. “Yes, speaking.”

“This is Matt Molina.”

“Hi Matt.”

“Tommie, I just wanted to say how great it was to be able to talk to someone at the company about my own problems. Everyone else seems to be hiding their head in the sand. No one wants to go after Huckster.”

“Why not?” Tommie asked.

“There’s word on the street that he’s mobbed up.”

“Mobbed up?”

Kim and Scott’s eyes opened wide.

“Yeah, he might be dangerous,” Matt confirmed.

“Dangerous?” Tommie repeated. “How come you didn’t say anything at lunch?”

“Because I’m not sure we can trust Ben.”

“Why not?”

“Look at all the stuff he’s put up with over the years. He’s even signed documents saying they’d paid him everything they owed him – when clearly they hadn’t.”

“I’m glad you called,” Tommie said. “I have a better handle on things now.”

“We have to be careful around Ben, that’s all,” Matt explained. “We need to get as

much information from him as we can – but we can't give him anything he can take back to Huckster and the boys.”

“I hear you,” Tommie replied.

“I'll get all the documentation I have, and get it over to you. I'll push Ben to do the same.”

“That's great, Matt. I'm so glad you tracked me down. And thanks for being so honest.”

“Okay, talk to you soon.”

“Bye.”

The kids and Chris listened to Tommie's half of the conversation.

“Are you sure you can trust this Matt guy?” Chris asked.

“I have to be able to trust someone,” Tommie replied. “I have a good feeling about him.”

“I told you you couldn't trust Ben Arnold, didn't I!” Scott exclaimed.

“Yes, you did, and as it turned out, you might be right.”

“See, an apple doesn't fall far from its namesake,” Scott declared.

“Do they have an attorney yet?” Kim asked.

“No. I suggested they might want to call RL. It makes sense if we all go to the same attorney.”

When the family was finished with supper, Chris cleaned up, while Tommie sat at the table and thought about her conversation with Matt. The kids decided to take off before Chris tried to get them to help. On their way up the stairs, Kim said to Scott, “We need to call Alex and Amy and see if there's any news about the takedown!”

The kids placed the call from Scott's room. There was no new news from either of them. They planned to get together at the Campbells' later. Kim and Amy had to work on their Science Fair project and Scott and Alex had to work on the election speech.

Downstairs, Tommie asked Chris if he had given any thought to what they should do about the diamond.

“It sounds like the market has rebounded. I wouldn't mind finding out what we can get for it,” Chris replied. He was more curious than anything – but the money sure would be nice.

“Let's see if there are any appraisers open this evening,” Tommie said, as she pulled out the phonebook. After a few phone calls, Tommie declared, “I found four. They're all in the business district. We could check some of them out tonight and get a ballpark price. Then we can talk it over with the kids like we promised.”

“That sounds like a plan.”

“I'll tell the kids we're going out,” Tommie said, as she headed upstairs. She didn't tell them where they were going. Scott and Kim were having their friends over and they were just as happy that Chris and Tommie would be out for a while, and spending some time alone together.

Tommie came back downstairs. “Let's go!”

Chapter Twelve



It was seven o'clock as Chris and Tommie drove to the first appraiser. On the way down their street, they passed Alex and Amy – walking together.

“Will wonders ever cease!” Tommie exclaimed.

“Maybe love IS in the air,” Chris replied. “It sure had a hold of me earlier.”

Tommie chuckled.

DING-DONG...

Kim and Scott raced each other to the front door and opened it. “Amy! Alex! What are you two doing – together?”

“I was on my way over and I bumped into Amy,” Alex explained. “I decided to try out our election campaign promises on her.”

Amy was smiling. Kim was curious. “You walked here with him?”

“Why not?” Amy replied.

Kim shook her head in disbelief as they all headed upstairs. “What election campaign promises?” Scott asked Alex.

“The plan I’ve been working on. And it works!”

“Yeah, he surprised me. Alex’s got some fabbo ideas. He’s the deffest.”

“Fabbo? Deffest? I’m in the twilight zone! This is all a joke, right?” Kim exclaimed.

Scott was stupefied. “Alex, what campaign promises are you talking about?”

“Same ones as before,” Alex replied.

“And you like these, Amy? You hated them a few of hours ago!” Scott proclaimed.

“I was just being mean. They’re bang on!”

Alex whispered to Scott, “I’m wearing ReaL perfume.”

Kim overheard and took a deep whiff of him. She was smitten. “Alex, you smell fine.”

“He’s mine, Kim,” Amy announced.

“My plan is going to work!” Alex bragged.

“Do you really think we can win if we wear ReaL?” Scott asked. “I think it’s a brilliant plan!” Amy announced.

Not to be outdone, Kim agreed. “Me too, Alex. And if you need help with the election – just ask.”

“I’ll help, too, Alex,” Amy added.

The girls were acting like Max and Chris – except they were all over Alex.

“Hey, if you and Amy can stand to be in the same room as Alex, then it’ll work on anyone!” Scott exclaimed. “We’ll have an unfair advantage.”

“Fair, schmare. What’s that got to do with an election? It’s all in the schmoosing, the promises, the sound bites, the hair, the makeup – you know – it’s all about appearances. So what if I improve my image with a little harmless cologne?”

The girls were still hanging around Scott’s room. “Don’t you two have work to do on your Science Fair project?” Scott barked.

“He’s right,” Kim admitted. “We better get started.”

Amy reluctantly agreed. “Okay. But Alex, when you’re ready to go home, make sure you come and get me so we can walk home together.”

“Sure thing, Babe,” Alex replied.

Under normal circumstances, Amy would have gone ballistic. At that moment, Scott realized just how powerful the ReaL was.

Kim and Amy went to Kim’s room to work on their Science Fair project. On the way, Kim commented to Amy, “You know we were being too nice to Alex, don’t you?”

“I know. But it was like I couldn’t help it.”

As the girls escaped the reach of the ReaL, their attraction to Alex quickly wore off.

“I can’t believe we were sucking up to Alex,” Kim said. She was disgusted with herself. “That ReaL is powerful.”

“If it gets them elected – you know your brother will be the best Vice President the school’s ever had,” Amy announced.

“I know. We should help them – with or without the effect of ReaL.”

“You’re right,” Amy replied. The girls got to work as Scott tried to get Alex to work.

“Alex, I think we better write a speech anyway. We can’t rely on the ReaL to win everyone’s votes. Besides, it’ll look real suspicious if we win and didn’t even have a campaign platform.”

“Sure, we can write a speech, but I think I’d rather cement this thing with some super-strong pheromones,” Alex suggested. “Let’s check the Internet and see if we can order some.”

“All right. No harm in looking,” Scott replied. They sat down at Scott’s computer and typed the word ‘pheromones’ into the search engine. Up popped a number of sites. As they scanned the list, one in particular caught their attention.

Alex read aloud, “‘Hot chemical love liquid. If Cupid’s Stupid and missing your target of love, do it yourself. Guaranteed to attract every female or male under the sun. Next day delivery. VISA only’. – Let’s order some of this stuff !” Alex exclaimed. “It sounds perfect.” Alex had his own VISA card, which he was only supposed to use for emergencies. Alex classified this as one.

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea. It might be too strong. You should have seen what happened tonight with my mom and Mario, my mom and the dog, and my mom and my dad! It was really stupid!”

“You’re such a gimp!” Alex said. He ignored Scott and placed the order. “Okay, my work is done.”

“We have a speech to write,” Scott snapped. “All right. You write and I’ll play video games.” Scott worked while Alex played.

After about thirty minutes, Scott declared, “I think I’m finished.” Alex looked at his watch. “We only had to write a five minute speech. It took you more than half an hour!”

“Now, we have a solid election platform. This just might win us the election,” Scott announced. He printed a copy for Alex and handed it to him. “I’ve got some pretty powerful statements in here.”

Alex didn’t even look at it. He folded it up and slipped it into his pocket. “Don’t you believe in the power of love?”

“Alex, you’re so lazy.”

“Scott, you’re such a suck!” Alex replied. “If our work is done, let’s get the girls and shoot some hoops.”

Scott couldn’t smell the ReaL anymore. “Alex, I don’t think that stuff will have any effect on them. I can’t smell it.”

Alex laughed as he headed over to Kim’s room. “Hey, sweet cheeks, how about some two-on-two?”

Kim looked up from the computer.

Alex expected to get away with his comment.

Chapter Thirteen



Scott was right. The ReaL had totally dissipated.

“Bring it on, little man!” Kim challenged. “Come on Amy, we’re going to play a little two-on-two.”

Amy was up for it and the four kids headed downstairs and out the front door. Scott picked up a basketball and met them outside in the driveway.

Amy ripped the ball from Scott’s hands and took first possession. She passed it to Kim.

BANG... BANG... BANG... BANG... SWOOSH... “In your face!” Kim cried out.

Scott grabbed the ball, took it to the center of the driveway, checked the ball with Kim and started his play. Scott dribbled the ball to the left side. Amy was on him like a shadow. He passed the ball behind his back to Alex – who was running down the middle of the lane toward the basket. If he caught the pass it would be an easy two. Kim came out of nowhere and intercepted it. The girls had possession, again. Kim checked the ball with Alex and before the boys even knew what had happened, she lobbed the ball under the basket to Amy. Amy easily put it up for another two!

“All right!” Kim shouted.

“We let you have those points. Now we mean business,” Alex said. He checked the ball with Amy and decided to do it all himself. He dribbled straight toward the basket. Amy was with him all the way. Alex thought for sure he’d be able to run right over her. There were no refs to call any fouls.

Alex was within ten feet of the basket. He put his left shoulder down and gave Amy a wicked shove. Then he turned his body slightly away from the basket to protect the ball and thundered to the hoop. Amy was out of the picture. Alex was home free. He didn’t realize that Kim was on his right side. She stripped him of the ball.

“Hey! This is supposed to be two-on-two not two-on-one. You’re supposed to stick with your check!” Alex shouted.

“Who said?” Kim replied. “You were trying to cream Amy! Was that fair?”

“Alex, be a man. You didn’t score and they have possession again.” Scott didn’t like to lose, but he wasn’t a poor sport.

“I should put more of that ReaL on me,” Alex declared.

“Too late, now,” Kim exclaimed. She checked the ball with Scott, took two dribbles toward the basket, faked a pass to Amy, collected herself, and took a shot from their driveway’s three-point line.”

SWOOOOSH...

"That was just pure luck!" Alex whined.

"I'll take you on, one-on-one," Kim challenged. "Shots from anywhere in the driveway. First one to make ten points wins."

"You're on. I'll take you. No problemmo. You can go first. I'll be nice and give you a break," Alex taunted.

"Thanks," Kim replied.

BANG... BANG... BANG... BANG...

She dribbled over to the three-point line at the baseline and shot.

SWOOOOSH...

"Give me three," Kim said confidently.

Alex ran and got the ball. He dribbled over to the same spot. "Okay, Mr. President. Let's see what you can do?" Amy called out.

"Shut-up, Amy," Alex said, as he shot. He had so much arc on the ball, it was collecting snow. It came down and caught the inside rim. The ball swirled around and around like water in a toilet bowl before it finally fell through.

"I drained it! Give me three," Alex demanded.

"You drained it all right," Amy laughed. "Kim's was all net and yours was a poop shot."

Kim had the ball again. She decided to challenge Alex to a tricky lay-up. She took the ball to half-court. Kim dribbled crosscourt to the right side of the key, then reversed and came back into the middle to put up a one-handed, left-handed sky-hook.

SWOOOOSH...

Now it was Alex's turn. He was quite the ball handler himself, only he liked to use his right hand. He decided to go left and then right. He scored.

"Hey, that's cheating! That's not the shot I made!" Kim exclaimed.

"So what?"

"Time out!" Amy declared.

"Good idea," Scott said. He thought a break might cool things off.

The kids sat down on the grass and relaxed.

"Do you girls want to hear my NEW plan?" Alex asked.

"Not really, but I'm sure you're going to tell us anyway," Kim replied.

"You and Amy are going to release the pheromones into the air circulation system when Scott and I are giving our speech."

"Huh? This is the first I heard of this!" Kim replied.

"That's why it's my NEW plan. It just came to me," Alex admitted. "If the pheromones go into the air when Scott and I are speaking – then everyone will love our speech and love US!"

"It could work, I suppose," Amy said. She was intrigued by the idea.

"Hey, we'll never win any other way, so why not give it a try?" Scott was hurt that Alex hadn't even read the speech. He believed it could win them the election – but considering Alex's nonchalant attitude, Scott thought that the pheromones might be the clincher they needed.

Alex explained his plan. "I just ordered some really strong pheromones. They'll be delivered tomorrow. I'll get them to you, Kim. Scott and I are scheduled to speak at 2:40.

We can go up to Scott's room and I can show you how to get the stuff into the ventilation system."

The kids headed back up to Scott's room. Alex connected Scott's PC to the school's schematics and took Kim and Amy, step by step through the process. This was going to be easy. All they had to do was get into the environmental control room and release the pheromones.

Kim was starting to have second thoughts. She and Amy would be taking a big risk. 'What if we get caught?' she wondered. 'And what if the stuff makes people go crazy?'

"Alex, we don't know what that stuff will make people do. The ReaL had a pretty diverse effect on people and even on Max. Who knows what that strong stuff will do? And who knows what Toole will do if he finds out Amy and I put it into the ventilation system."

"You won't get caught," Alex exclaimed. "And the ad said it's a love potion. So if all the girls fall in love with me and Scott and vote for us, we can't lose!"

"What if all the girls attack you, like Max attacked Mom?"

"Bring it on!" Alex said. "Especially Cynthia and Allana and Erica!"

"Alex, you're such a schmuck." Kim turned to her brother and asked, "Scott, why do you hang out with this guy?"

"I feel sorry for him," Scott replied.

"No, really. Why do you?" Kim asked again.

Amy thought she knew. "He's Scott's alter-ego. You know, Scott's bad side," she declared.

Alex just had to have his say. "I'm baaaad. ReaL baaaad. So are you going to still help us win the election?"

"We said we would, didn't we?" Kim replied. Alex was relieved.

"I need to go home," Amy said. "I still have some work to do on our project and I want to see if anything's up with my dad."

"Me, too," Alex announced.

With the election and the pheromones, Scott and Kim had forgotten all about the takedown.

Alex continued, "I want to go home and check things out. I'll call you later, Scott." He and Amy headed home – together.

Kim worked on her Science Fair project. She knew Amy was doing the same.

Scott fine-tuned the election speech while Alex fine-tuned his TV.

By 10:00 the Campbell kids were exhausted and hit the sack. They hadn't heard from Alex or Amy.

Chapter Fourteen



Chris and Tommie had already visited three diamond appraisers and dealers. They got three different appraisals and three different offers to purchase the diamond. Each offer was about the same – two and a half million dollars. It was a huge amount of money and Chris and Tommie were beside themselves with excitement.

Chris parked the van outside the store of the fourth dealer. He and Tommie entered the store and walked up to the service counter. The glass display case was full of an amazing selection of diamond rings and jewelry. This was the most impressive store yet. As they ogled the inventory, a man walked over to greet them.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am Joshua Kleemyn, The Diamond Man. How may I be of assistance?”

“We’re pleased to meet you, Mr. Kleemyn. My name is Chris Campbell and this is my wife, Tommie. We have a rough diamond that we would like to sell.” Chris pulled the diamond out of his pocket and placed it on the counter.

Mr. Kleemyn picked up the stone and examined it with his jeweler’s eyeglass.

“Ooooh... Aaaah... Hmmm...” he said. “This is an exquisite blue diamond. I would like to show it to my colleague. I require his opinion regarding its appraisal.”

Mr. Kleemyn reached under the counter and in less than a minute, a giant safe door that looked like a bank vault, opened. An old man emerged. Mr. Kleemyn walked over to the vault and showed the man the diamond. They spoke quietly, so as not to be heard.

“This place is like Fort Knox!” Tommie whispered. “The other dealers didn’t have this elaborate a vault.”

“Maybe Kleemyn handles a bigger inventory,” Chris suggested. The old man continued to examine the diamond. He mumbled a few more words to Mr. Kleemyn and went back into the vault. The door closed behind him.

Mr. Kleemyn returned to the Campbells and handed them the diamond. “Mr. Campbell. We have discussed your diamond and are very interested in purchasing it. I am able to offer you three million. I will leave you and your wife to discuss it,” Kleemyn said, and then walked over to the far end of the display case.

“That’s half a million more than the other offers,” Chris said to Tommie.

“I wonder why?” Tommie asked. “Should we care?” Chris answered.

“Maybe this guy knows something the others don’t. It IS a rare diamond – being blue and all.”

Chris mulled it over and replied, “That’s probably it. So, what do you think? Should

we sell it to him or what?”

“I don’t know. We did promise to talk to the kids before we did anything.”

“I know, but if we can make half a million more, what’s there to talk about? We should just do it!” Chris explained.

“Maybe we should ask him how he arrived at this value.”

Chris shrugged his shoulders. He and Tommie looked over at Mr. Kleemyn and waved.

“So, will you accept my offer?” Mr. Kleemyn asked, as he walked toward them.

“Mr. Kleemyn, can you tell us why you think this diamond is worth three million?” Tommie asked.

Kleemyn looked surprised. He paused for a few seconds and then answered, “I am authorized to go as high as three and a half million, but that is all.”

This wasn’t the response they expected. Chris just had to ask, “Mr. Kleemyn, can we ask why you are so interested in acquiring this diamond?”

“I have a buyer,” he replied. “A collector.”

“How would you pay us?” Tommie asked. “In cash – immediately.”

Tommie and Chris were stunned.

“We’ll have to think about this, Mr. Kleemyn,” Chris replied. Tommie shot a quick glance at Chris. She was ready to sell it right then and there, despite her previous comment about consulting the kids. She had one question she needed answered first.

“Mr. Kleemyn. Is this a conflict diamond?”

“I have been asked that question many times today – about all of the diamonds that I sell. I must tell you, Mrs. Campbell, that at this time, it is impossible to know where the diamonds actually come from. They are all shipped to a central location where they are sorted for size and quality. We retailers have no idea where they came from originally. So, I will tell you what I have been telling everyone else today – I don’t know.”

Tommie thought about what he had just said.

Kleemyn was bound and determined to acquire the diamond. “Four million. Cash. Right here. Right now. This is a very important client to me. I must have this diamond.”

Tommie couldn’t control herself. “We’ll take it! It’s yours! If your client wants it, he can have it. That’s almost double what the others offered!”

Chris was surprised by her outburst.

Mr. Kleemyn reached under the counter, and within seconds, the vault opened and out walked the old man. The two men met and exchanged words. The old man disappeared and then reappeared with stacks of bills. He handed them to Kleemyn, who returned to the counter and placed the stacks on the display case.

Chris and Tommie had never seen this much money before – and it was theirs.

“We can’t take this money home with us! Can’t you give us a check? When you said cash, I really didn’t think you meant ‘cash’ cash!” Tommie said.

“What did you think I meant?” Mr. Kleemyn asked, sounding annoyed.

“We should do this tomorrow – when the banks are open,” Chris suggested.

“I would like to complete this transaction this evening,” Kleemyn insisted. “If I may ask, which bank do you deal with?”

“Center City Bank,” Tommie replied.

“That is excellent. I can make a call to Mr. Smith, the bank president, and he will deposit this money in your account, tonight.”

“John Smith?” Tommie asked. “Yes, why?”

“He’s on the Fund Raiser Cruise tonight,” Chris said.

“I have his personal cell number. He’ll arrange for one of his associates to make the deposit. It will be no problem at all,” Kleemyn assured them.

Chris and Tommie waited in disbelief as Kleemyn placed a call. Within minutes, a representative of the bank was at Kleemyn’s store, introducing himself to Chris and Tommie.

“I am Uri Slovack, Mr. Smith’s executive assistant. I am pleased to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Campbell. I understand that you have come into a considerable amount of money and would like to deposit it in our bank. Mr. Smith appreciates your business and we’re glad to be able to help you out at this time.”

The assistant grinned ear to ear and then continued, “If you like, you can accompany me to our branch office and I can take care of this immediately. Your money is safer in the bank than in your home.”

“Absolutely,” Tommie declared.

The Campbells and Mr. Slovack took care of the transaction. In less than half an hour, the Campbells had four million dollars in their bank account. It was almost too incredible to believe.

On the drive home, the reality of what they had done, hit them like a ton of diamond bricks. It was an unbelievable feeling, knowing they were now independently wealthy. It was an uncomfortable feeling, suspecting that their wealth could have come from a conflict diamond, although it couldn’t be proven one way or another. And even worse, it was an unsettling feeling, knowing that they didn’t keep their word to the kids – they didn’t ask for their opinion.

Tommie was feeling very guilty. “We should have consulted the kids. We’re going to catch major heck from them.”

Chris had an answer. “As far as whether we should have consulted the kids or not... well the offer was just too good to pass up. We had to go for it,” Chris reasoned, trying to make Tommie feel better.

“And?” Tommie added. “And what?” Chris asked.

“And what if it’s a conflict diamond?”

Chris replied, “We have no idea if it was a conflict diamond. Like Kleemyn said, there is no way of knowing... so we should put that one out of our minds, altogether.”

“What should we do then?”

“About what?” Chris asked. “The money!”

“We should just forget about it for a while. Otherwise, we might do something stupid. We should go on with our lives as if we don’t have it.”

“I guess we can try. But at least I want to leave HucksterCo.”

“Do you still want to pursue arbitration?”

“I’m not sure. If I leave, who’ll help Molina and Arnold? I did commit to them.”

“And we did commit to the kids that we’d take on the First Amendment issue. We better try to keep that promise to them,” Chris said, then added for Tommie’s benefit, “And Tommie. I’ll take the heat from the kids. I’ll tell them it was my decision to sell the diamond. It’ll be our little secret.”

Tommie was relieved. She always felt the kids held her more accountable than Chris. “Thanks, Chris. I think we did the right thing. Just think of the options the kids have now.

They can go to any college they want. In time, we can set them up in their own businesses, if that's what they want. I can get that new dishwasher and maybe a hot tub..." She stopped rambling for a minute. "Gosh, my head's spinning! There's so much we can do!"

Chris smiled and shook his head.

"You're right," Tommie announced. "Let's just forget about it for a while."

They decided to postpone telling the kids, as well.

Chapter Fifteen



It was ten-thirty by the time Tommie and Chris arrived home. The house was quiet. Scott, Max and Kim were sleeping. Kim had printed out her follow-up report on her Science Fair project and left it on Tommie's pillow.

MMMM... CLUNK...

The sound of the garage door woke Scott and Kim. They tried to fall back to sleep, but were soon distracted by voices.

As Tommie got ready for bed, she noticed the report. 'Great,' Tommie thought. 'Just what I need to wind down.' She turned on her lamp, fluffed up her pillow, stuffed it behind her back, and settled in for a short read.

Chris got into bed beside her. "What are you reading?"

"More of Kim and Amy's report on pheromones," Tommie answered. "Do you want me to read it out loud?"

"Sure. I think we need to do some research ourselves on that stuff."

Tommie laughed and began to read, "Pheromones are the hormones secreted by humans in their sweat to attract the opposite sex. Pheromones influence how humans develop, mate, bond, procreate and take care of their young.

"Human sweat takes on an odor at puberty. In addition to your individual scent, it is now believed that families possess related scents. Each member has its own particular odor but its family smells are related. It is unknown if the pheromone is part of an actual discernable smell or an odorless chemical associated with human body odor from other sources.

"It is thought that the females of a species prefer males with different pheromones. In this way the animal kingdom avoids inbreeding, ensuring that their gene pool is kept diverse and their immune system, healthy.

"Pregnant animals, including humans, prefer others with similar genes. These are likely to be close relatives. Close relatives provide a safe environment during the gestation period and after the infant is born.

"Humans may confuse the vomeralnasal organ with perfumes, colognes and deodorant so that they don't know what chemical signals it's picking up. This could be dangerous for humankind."

"The vom what?" Chris asked.

"The vomeralnasal organ. It's the little tiny organ in your nose that collects the pheromone signals and sends them to the brain."

“Oh, that vomeralnasal organ.”

Tommie admitted, “I only know what it is because I read Kim’s other section this morning.”

Tommie continued to read, unaware that Scott and Kim had left their beds and were now crouching beside their door, listening.

“When a female of a species becomes pregnant, they prefer to be with others who have like pheromones, such as their blood relatives. Interestingly, when human females are on the birth control pill, their body thinks it is pregnant and is attracted to males with like pheromones. This could be why there is a high divorce rate – because women are attracted to the wrong men.”

“Interesting hypothesis,” Chris said.

“That sounds like a great follow-on study. They could see how many women got married when they were on the pill and then got divorced when they went off it. Oh, oooh, Chris,” Tommie replied.

“I suppose you were on the pill when you first met me, right?” Chris replied.

“Yes, I was,” Tommie admitted. “I’m thinking of going off the pill. I wonder what will happen. Maybe I won’t be attracted to you any more.”

“And you’re attracted to me now?” Chris teased. “It could get worse,” Tommie chuckled.

“I’m ninety-nine percent celibate now! I think I really do need that ReaL.”

Tommie shook her head and she gave him a dig in the ribs.

The kids were shocked.

“Did I hear Dad, right?” Scott exclaimed. “I thought people got married so they could have sex all the time! It sounds like Dad still wants to and Mom doesn’t. I wonder why.”

“As if I know!” Kim replied.

Scott thought for a moment and then suggested, “It probably has something to do with her PMS.”

“PMS. You don’t even know what that is, you idiot.”

“Sure I do. It stands for Pno with a silent P, More Sex. Just like pneumonia.”

Kim rolled her eyes. “You’re a clueless mutant. Mom’s probably going through menopause.” She wasn’t sure what that was – she just thought it sounded right.

“Men On Pause. That’s pretty obvious.” Scott’s humor didn’t manage to hide his concern. “So, what can we do? We have to help them. If we don’t, Dad might go looking for a young chick. That’s what Derryl’s dad did.”

They both thought for a minute.

“Hey, I’ve got a great idea. Alex ordered those Super-Duper- Dopey Pheromones from the Internet. Let’s spray Dad with the stuff and see if Mom likes him more. We might just save their marriage.”

They decided to head back to their rooms – with a new mission for the next day.

Chris and Tommie were oblivious to the conversation going on outside their door. They were too focused on Kim’s report, to hear anything else.

“This report of Kim’s is interesting. I can’t wait to see the results of the experiment.”

Tommie and Chris had distracted themselves from the real topic they wanted to discuss – what to do with the money.

“I’ll go downstairs and make some Dreamtime tea.”

“That’s a great idea. Thanks, Chris.”

Chris made the tea and brought it up. They had a few sips and before they knew it, they were both fast asleep, dreaming about their future.

Chapter Sixteen



“She’s a hoooonkeytonk woman!” screamed out of the radio. “Is it time to get up already?” Tommie moaned, as she rubbed her eyes and sat up in bed. “It feels like we just went to sleep. Did we really sell the diamond last night?”

Chris reached for the alarm and shut off the music. “We sure did! We’re millionaires!”

“Just checking,” Tommie replied. “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking...”

“When? You’ve been snoring all night!” Chris replied.

“You didn’t let me finish. I was thinking about it in my dreams. I worked out the whole scenario.”

Chris laughed. “So did I.”

“I’m going to quit my job and start my own consulting agency. I’ve always wanted to do that and now I can!” Tommie declared. “And I have the money to continue the arbitration.”

“If that’s what you want to do, I’ll support you all the way, especially now that you have me, Kim and Scott, and Molina and Arnold, as your white-collar crime-fighting partners. There’s strength in numbers,” Chris joked.

“Actually, now that you mention the kids, I think I’d better meet with RL first. I might not be able to quit and still go to arbitration.”

“But they haven’t paid you your commission in almost a year! And didn’t you say they wouldn’t pay you your salary if you didn’t sign those documents? They can’t force you to do that, can they?”

Chris reminded her.

“I know that, but what’s stopping Huckster from saying I signed them before – and that they were lost – and that I just don’t want to sign them now?”

“Wow. You DO think he’s rotten to the core, don’t you.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Okay then. See what RL says,” Chris said, as he got out of bed and headed to the shower.

While Chris got ready for work, Tommie called RL and set up a meeting for 8:00 a.m.

“Chris, I’m meeting RL in half an hour. Can you drive the kids to school?”

“Sure can, Honey. See you tonight.”

Tommie got ready for work and left without breakfast. She was keen to meet with

RL. Now that money wasn't a factor – it was all about doing what was right. She felt confident that the kids would understand that selling the diamond has allowed them to be in a position to fight Huckster and help protect the First Amendment. She had rationalized the whole thing and she was happy. It's amazing how dreams can sometimes make sense of things.

As Tommie drove out of the driveway, Scott rushed downstairs. "What's for breakfast, Mom?"

Chris was looking inside the refrigerator. "She's not here. I'm driving this morning."

"Where is she?"

"Meeting with her attorney."

"Coooooool," Scott said, as he grabbed the morning paper.

"She's trying to find out if she can quit and still go after Huckster. Those documents may not let her."

"Not coooool," Scott said.

As Kim walked downstairs toward the kitchen, Scott called out to her. "It's not here!"

"Shoot!"

"What's not there?" Chris asked.

The kids pretended not to hear him. "So, what's for breakfast, Dad?"

Chris pretended not to hear them.

Kim and Scott thought that was fair. They got their own cereal and the three of them talked about Tommie's case. Time passed quickly.

"It's eight already. We need to hustle," Chris announced.

They grabbed their bags, headed to the garage, and piled into the van. The trip to school passed without a word spoken – each person was lost in their own thoughts.

As Chris pulled up to the school parking lot, Scott said, "Wish me luck!"

"Good luck? For what?" Chris asked.

"Alex and I are running for President and Vice President of the student body. Today's speech day. We have to impress the heck out of everyone so they'll vote for us tomorrow."

"Why is this the first I've heard of it?" Chris asked. "Why an election now?"

"Because our previous President and Vice President transferred out," Scott explained.

"Both of them?"

"They wanted to go to a school with a better hockey team. We just got into the race, yesterday. Don't worry, Dad. We've got it all figured out."

"Yeah, Dad. The fix is in," Kim laughed.

"Shuusssh... Kim," Scott cautioned his sister. "You'll blow it!" Chris looked at them suspiciously. 'They've certainly got something up their sleeves,' he thought.

"Just kidding, Dad. See you tonight!" Scott called out, as they opened the school door and walked through.

Kim, Alex and Scott met up in the hallway. Ten plastic vials of Super-Duper-Dopey Pheromones were delivered to Alex that morning and he couldn't wait to show them to his friends. The vials were two inches long and a half an inch across. The liquid inside was clear. The instructions were vague.

"Use with care. Reactions may vary. May encourage sexual drive. Use only on humans. Animals may react differently. Warning: These pheromones have been extracted

from female Asian Elephants. Do not use within a five-mile radius of zoos, farms, or anywhere else...”

“Are you sure this is going to work?”

“If everyone gets really happy when Scott and I make our speech, they’ll probably vote for us, right?”

“And what if they feel horny?”

“Then the girls will vote for us for sure!”

“What about the guys?”

Alex and Scott hadn’t thought of that.

“They might decide to vote for Erica!” Scott exclaimed.

“We’re just going to have to take that risk. If we don’t use it, we won’t get any votes,” Alex announced.

“What about my speech!” Scott rebuked.

“Okay, we’ll get a few votes without the pheromones.”

Scott and Kim were shocked. Alex was usually self-confident, even though he really didn’t have much reason to be. This was the first time he sounded, otherwise.

“We’ll use your plan,” Scott said, reassuring Alex.

“Give me the vials and Amy and I will do what we planned,” Kim promised.

Alex handed Kim the vials.

She put them in her backpack and went to look for Amy.

Alex and Scott decided to get the ball rolling and doused themselves in the ReaL, which obviously worked fine on its own. They already had a flock of shegulls, including Cynthia, Allana and Erica, following them down the hallway.

BZZZZ...

The bell went. “See you later, girls. And don’t forget to vote for me and Scott tomorrow,” Alex announced, as they walked into History class.

Kim and Amy had arranged with Principal Toole to get the morning off so that they could do their Science Fair experiment. They headed back to the table they had set up in front of the gym. The students would soon be filing by to do their smell test.

BZZZZ... Class started.

An announcement came over the school’s intercom system. “Good morning, students. This is Principal Toole speaking.

Something different for you all this morning. Each class, starting with junior grades and working through to the senior grade, will be asked to go to the hallway in front of the main gymnasium and to complete a smell test for Kim Campbell and Amy Montgomery’s Science Fair project. You will be asked to smell each of the different perfumes and essential oils and write down what you think of them. After each smell test, you have to smell the coffee beans that are in the cup beside the item you’re smelling. The coffee beans clear your nose and prepare you for the next item. Kim and Amy will be supervising their project. If you have any questions when you get there, you can ask them. I want you to do this in an orderly fashion and do not talk or waste time. There are a lot of students that have to do this and they only have the morning to finish it. Will the junior grades please proceed to the hallway in front of the main gymnasium.”

Kim and Amy were ready with their experiment and the survey sheets. They would hand each student a sheet when they approached the table.

BLAH... BLAH... BLAH...

"Quiet! No speaking," a teacher blasted from down the hallway. Kim giggled. "Here come the juniors."

The hoard stampeded toward them. "Look at the geekoids," Amy said.

"Hey," Kim joked. "That was us two years ago. The seniors were so mean to us."

The first in line was a blonde-haired girl. "What am I supposed to do?" she asked.

Kim knew they wouldn't have all paid attention to Principal Toole's announcement, so she had her speech ready to go. She shouted out so all the kids could hear. "Hi, my name is Kim and this is Amy. We're doing an experiment to see what smells you like best."

"Not Principal Toole's armpits, that's for sure!" a brave but not so smart guy declared.

"Not the boys' change room!" a clever girl shouted.

"I said, what smells you like best!" Kim explained again. "Students, please behave yourselves," a teacher ordered. "If any of you have a serious comment or question, you may ask it now."

"Why do you want to know what we like to smell?" a voice asked.

"We want to see if you like the smell with the pheromones," Amy explained.

"What's a feralmoon?" someone called out.

"A pher-o-mone is a chemical that animals produce to send out secret messages to other animals," Kim replied.

"What kind of messages?" another voice asked. "Pheromoniemails," a student way in the back of the line sang out. The kids all laughed and continued to chat amongst themselves.

"Question and answer period is over," the teacher declared.

"Keep your voices down and fill out the surveys quickly. Don't dawdle."

The students followed orders. The survey process began. Kim and Amy entered the results of each completed survey on a master spreadsheet. By the time the seniors and teachers were finished, it was clear that Kim and Amy's hypothesis was correct, and that the Real perfume was the favorite. It was also evident that Alex's plan just might work.

By 1:55, the entire school had completed the experiment. BZZZZ...

The two o'clock bell rang.

The students were now assembling in the gymnasium to hear the presidential candidates' speeches. The girls gathered up their baggies, surveys and spreadsheet and put them in their backpacks. Now, they had to head to the environmental control room and put Alex's pheromone plan in motion.

Chapter Seventeen



The presidential candidates were all assembled on stage in the auditorium. Each candidate had five minutes to make their speech and their case.

Fortunately for Kim and Amy, the speeches were broadcast over the school's intercom system. They could hear exactly what was happening in the gym – without having to be there.

Blair, Zach and J.R. made their speeches. Just as Scott suspected, each candidate concentrated on the special interests of their own friends, followers and hangers-on. The cliques were well represented.

When Carl hit the stage, every disenfranchised student was waiting for a hero, someone to represent them.

“You were right, Scott. Carl is our main competition,” Alex admitted. “Let’s see what he has to say and make sure we’re offering more.”

The boys listened intently. Carl delivered an ‘us against them’ speech. He made the in-crowd out to be the bad guys and he promised that the out-crowd would be in power if they elected him.

When Carl was finished, Scott turned to Alex and said, “Every one of the candidates missed the big picture – all for one and one for all. I think our platform is a winner!”

Alex added, “And the pheromones will make sure of it!”

The boys were up next. Alex looked at his watch. It was still early. “Go slow,” he directed Scott. “The girls need another minute.”

Scott and Alex took their time walking to the podium. Alex decided to open up with some jokes. It’s a good thing he did because Kim and Amy were having a hard time accessing the environmental control room. As Kim and Amy tried to break-in, Scott and Alex were breaking them up.

“I’d like to introduce myself to those of you who may not know me. I’m Alex Black and this is my running mate, Scott Campbell. We’d like to thank our opponents for giving us such an easy act to follow.”

Most of the crowd seemed to be in agreement and they gave Alex a hand.

“Before we get serious here,” Alex said, “did you hear that Ms. Fogarty asked any idiots in her math class to please stand up? Guess who stood up?” He didn’t wait for anyone to answer. “Don’t know? Well, I’ll tell you – Carl, Blair, J.R. and Zach. Then Ms. Fogarty asked, ‘Carl, Blair, J.R. and Zach, why do you consider yourselves idiots?’ ‘Well, actually we don’t, they said, but we hate to see you standing up there all by

yourself.””

The students roared with laughter. It wasn't much of a joke, but it broke the ice. The other candidates were embarrassed and Ms. Fogarty knew she had brought this on herself. Alex decided to continue.

With each joke, the crowd became more receptive to the boys. Alex thought for sure it was the pheromones because the jokes were pretty bad. He continued in his best mother/son imitation:

“Early one morning a mother went in to wake up her son. Wake up, Son. It's time to go to school!

But why, Mom? I don't want to go.

Give me two reasons why you don't want to go.

Well, the kids hate me for one, and the teachers hate me also! Oh, that's no reason not to go to school. Come on now and get ready.

Give me two reasons why I should go to school.

Well, for one, you're 52 years old. And for another, you're the Principal!”

The teachers howled with laughter. Meredith laughed the loudest. Principal Toole sucked it up and laughed with them.

Everyone was having a great time.

“Now, it's time to get down to business,” Alex announced. “We're here to kick-butt! When you elect us, we promise to put Spring Valley School on the map! Every guy in the area will be dying to get into this school because we'll have the hottest female student bodies in the county.”

YEAAAAA...

The crowd cheered.

“We thought you might like that!” Alex shouted. “And wait until you hear this one. We promise to get an optional school uniform policy instituted.”

BOOOO...

The crowd didn't seem to like that idea.

“Wait, you haven't heard our policy yet,” Alex remarked. “What is it?” Allana yelled out.

“The skirts must be at least eight inches above the knee, and if a girl has her belly button pierced – we have to be able to see it,” Alex proposed.

The boys and many of the girls cheered and clapped.

Scott couldn't believe his ears. ‘We're dead meat,’ he thought.

‘Alex has gone, too far.’

Principal Toole was outraged. He equated bare midriffs with pandemonium! This was not an acceptable speech. Alex had to be stopped.

Principal Toole made his way through the crowd toward the stage. Alex saw him coming but remained undaunted. He began to deliver their real campaign promises.

“But seriously folks, we'll make sure that the school budgets reflect what we all want and need and not just the special interests of the in-crowd and the staff. We'll have students on the budget committee and they will have a vote!”

The students applauded.

“We'll find sponsors and increase funding to all the special interest groups. We'll

kick-butt from band to dance to cheerleading to computer club, even ping pong – no one will knock our balls off the table.”

Principal Toole’s effort to reach the stage and throw Alex into detention, intensified. However, as he moved closer to the stage, the students re-directed him further away.

Scott saw the teamwork and declared, “Everyone in the school will become part of the in-crowd. There’ll be no more dis-french- fried students!”

The crowd roared with laughter. “Alex and I will represent everyone equally! No more geeks, dorks, jocks, hotties and nerds. We’re all cool and we’ll all treat each other with respect!”

The students and teachers were standing on their feet now to show their support. The gym was filled with teen spirit. Principal Toole was busy handing out detentions to those who tried to stop him from getting to Alex – and he was also trying to listen to what Alex was saying.

“We’ll have more school dances and pep rallies. And we’ll show off our fantastic cheerleading squad every chance we get!”

There was more to Alex than met the eye. That last promise was a stroke of genius.

Erica, Cynthia and Allana loved it. Zach’s speech didn’t even mention the cheerleaders. He just focused on the football team’s needs. Alex had won these popular girls over, even though Erica was running against Alex and Scott.

“Give me an A. Give me an L. Give me an E. Give me an X. What have you got? Alex!” the cheerleaders yelled out in unison.

Amy and Kim were still trying to get into the environmental control room.

“Can you believe this?” Amy asked. “These two are actually making a great speech!”

“And it sounds like Erica and her buddies are throwing their support behind them,” Kim added. “And we didn’t even release the love potion!”

“I think they’ve got a great shot of winning without the stupid Cupid plan,” Amy declared.

“Maybe, but we might be able to guarantee a win if we can figure out how to get in here.” The girls continued to give the break-in their best shot. It was the least they could do, since the boys were giving it their all.

With Erica and the hotties now supporting Scott and Alex, Alex could smell victory. “Man, we’ve got it in the bag!” he whispered to Scott.

Scott was really pumped now. He exploded into the microphone. “We’ll stage a war on drugs, smoking, booze, weapons and hate crimes. We’ll make this a safe school where none of us are afraid to come. We need to think about our future. We need to get the best education we can. We need to treat the teachers as our mentors – not our enemies. We need to respect each other. We want you to lissen’ to each other – not be dissen’ each other.”

This part of the speech received the most raucous cheers. Scott had really hit the nail on the head.

“They love us!” Alex declared to Scott.

“What’s love got to do with it? It’s probably the pheromones!” Scott whispered to Alex. “Don’t get too full of yourself.”

Alex took over again. “We’ll have the band play at our sports events and we’ll have

the athletes help with the drama productions. We'll work together as one big team. We'll listen to what every one of you has to say – because your opinions count.”

Principal Toole kept moving toward the stage but stopped handing out detentions. He was starting to like what he heard.

“We could tell you a lot more about what we'd do if elected, but I can see Principal Toole coming this way. He probably has a few words to say.”

Responding to Alex's words, the student body parted like the Red Sea, between Principal Toole and the stage. He made his way up the stairs and was now standing beside Alex and Scott.

Alex announced, “Principal Toole, they're all yours!”

Alex and Scott then stepped away from the podium and off the stage.

Kim and Amy were still struggling with the door to the environmental control room, when Principal Toole began to speak. “We've heard a number of very good speeches today. Now, I want you all to consider which candidates you think will be the best President and Vice President for our school. Decide who will represent your interests and those of your friends and fellow students, and vote for them tomorrow.”

He had to hold back his enthusiasm for Alex and Scott. He couldn't seem biased one way or the other. They seemed to have a real handle on the issues that faced the school and even had some ideas on how to address the challenges.

“Let's have the vote right now!” someone shouted out.

The rest of the students agreed and began to chant, “Vote, vote, vote...”

Principal Toole was open to the suggestion. “I'm listening,” he quipped. The crowd went wild. “I'll have the election forms distributed to all classrooms in the last period. We'll elect our new student body representatives then. Good luck to all candidates.”

“I'm mega stoked!” Scott exclaimed. “It looks like our secret weapon worked. There's no way the kids will vote for anyone else but us. What a coup we just pulled.”

The girls had given up their quest and searched out the boys in the gym. When they found them, Amy apologized. “Sorry guys.”

“Sorry? For what?” Scott asked. “The pheromones worked like a charm. They love us. Didn't you hear? Principal Toole moved up the election to last class! That's only five minutes away. There's no way the pheromones will wear off in that short a time. We've got it made. We have to head back and vote now!”

Kim looked at Amy and shook her head, signaling her not to say anything. ‘No use freaking them out now,’ Kim thought.

The students filed out of the auditorium and back to their last class of the day to vote. Each teacher tallied up their room results and submitted them to Principal Toole.

Now, all Alex and Scott had to do, was wait for the announce- ment.

Chapter Eighteen



After the girls cast their votes, they used the rest of the class to work on their Science Fair project. It took them no time to devise a table that reported their overall results. They studied the table and discussed the differences between the smells.

Order of Preference (highest "Like" percentage) ¹

<i>Smell</i>	<i>% Liked</i>	<i>% Disliked</i>	
Real.	75	12	Perfume
Peppermint	72	22	Vitality essential oil
Tommy for Girls	66	25	Perfume
Tommy for Guys	61	26	Cologne
Obsession for Men	53	31	Cologne
Chanel No. 5	49	33	Perfume
Eternity for Women	49	34	Perfume
Eternity for Men	47	38	Cologne
Obsession for Women	46	43	Perfume
White Diamonds	43	41	Perfume
Lemon	41	34	Vitality essential oil
Paco	37	50	Cologne
Pine	17	72	Vitality essential oil
Sandalwood	16	52	Sensual essential oil
Eucalyptus	16	75	Vitality essential oil
Rosemary	13	77	Vitality essential oil
Jasmine	10	84	Sensual essential oil
Clary Sage	9	83	Sensual essential oil
Ylang Ylang	7	82	Sensual essential oil
Patchouli	7	86	Sensual essential oil

¹ The results of the smell test were actually results from a REAL Science Fair Project.

"Look at this! Real was the most preferred smell. We were right!" Amy exclaimed.

"What about Patchouli, the stuff Alex smells like? How did it do?" Kim wondered out loud. Both girls looked over their results. "Wow!" Amy said. "No wonder no one likes Alex. Almost everyone hated that smell."

"So, what's with my brother?" Kim asked. "Why does he like Alex?"

Amy proposed, "Let's find Scott's survey and see what he checked off."

The girls found the seniors' surveys and then narrowed them down to Scott's homeroom.

"Here it is!" Kim said. They studied his responses.

"Kim, he put down that he really liked Patchouli. That explains things."

Kim thought about what she had learned doing the experiment, and suggested,

“Maybe if I find out what smell Scott really hates and I spray that on Alex, I can get rid of Alex for good!”

“Brilliant!” Amy commented.

Amy and Kim were ecstatic. Their Science Fair experiment was a total success and the results supported their hypothesis. Their excited chattering however, was a little over the top. Their teacher gave them a disapproving look. Kim and Amy got the message.

“Whoops,” Amy said. “Sorry, Mrs. Hardy. Kim and I are just excited about our Science Fair results.” The girls had to keep quiet now. They decided to explore Scott’s dislikes another time.

At ten to four, just before the teams had to head to the gymnasium for their basketball games, Principal Toole made the last announcements of the day.

“Good afternoon students. Today, and today only, detentions are cancelled. I want ALL students to report to the gymnasium to cheer on our girls’ and boys’ varsity basketball teams. Go Spartans!”

The students didn’t wait until they got to the gym to cheer. Principal Toole continued. “The Spring Valley Spartans are taking on our cross-town rivals, the Terra Nova Terriers, today, at 4:30. These should be two very exciting games.

“The Spring Valley outdoor band concert will be postponed until 7:00 p.m. – after the double header basketball games are over. This way everyone can attend both events. Now, I want all students to come out and cheer on the teams and your new President and Vice President of the student body, Alex Black and Scott Campbell!”

It felt like the school was hit by an earthquake. It shook from all the cheering, clapping and foot stomping. The students and teachers were all on the same team!

BZZZZ...

The 4:00 bell rang. The students rushed into the hallway to find Scott and Alex to congratulate them.

Even Ms. Fogarty made a point of seeking them out. She caught up with them outside the gym doors. “I’m proud of you boys. I knew you had what it took!”

Scott and Alex were surprised. “I thought you just dared me to run so you could teach me a lesson?” Alex admitted. “You thought I’d lose, didn’t you?”

“I confess, yes, to both, Alex. But after I heard your speech, you got my vote. I’m pleased you and Scott worked together and presented a solid platform. I hope you two plan on following through with your promises.”

“We meant what we said, Ms. Fogarty,” Scott said.

“I’m glad to hear that, boys. And if you need any help from me, just ask.”

As the boys walked down the hallway, they were congratulated by teachers and students, including Zach, J.R., Blair and Carl.

Erica approached Alex and Scott. “I think you guys will be great. All Zach wanted to do was promote the football team. I only joined him because he’s hot.”

Scott and Alex didn’t know what to make of this. “Thanks, Erica – I think,” Scott replied.

“You two are smart, and that’s probably what we need around here,” she admitted. “I liked your speech. Did you really mean the cheerleaders would get more exposure?”

‘Ah, ha,’ Scott thought. ‘The real reason she supported us.’ Alex was quick to respond. “We meant everything we said.”

“That’s great!” Erica replied. She batted her eyelashes at him. As she turned and walked away, she blew Alex a kiss. “That’s for good luck at the game tonight.”

Alex almost fainted. “This is going to be better than I thought!” he exclaimed to Scott.

Scott and Alex soaked up all the attention while Kim and Amy got changed for their game. The girls played first. As Kim emerged from the girls’ change room, she saw Scott for the first time since he won the election. She had a confession to make.

Chapter Nineteen



“Scott! Congratulations!”

“The best men won!” Alex declared.

Kim laughed. “The best MAN won,” she declared. Scott appreciated his sister’s sarcasm.

“Have you seen Mom and Dad?” Kim asked.

“Mom and Dad! I almost forgot!” Scott said, as he realized there was some unfinished business he had to take care of with his parents. “Kim, have you got any of that Super-Duper-Dopey Pheromone stuff left?”

“Yeah, I got all of it,” Kim admitted.

“All of it? How’s that possible?” Alex asked.

“Amy and I couldn’t get into the environmental control room.”

“You mean we won the election fair and square?” a surprised Scott exclaimed.

“It looks that way. You guys made a great speech!”

Scott turned to Alex. “Alex, can you believe it? WE won!” The boys were even more excited now.

“Why do you want the pheromones?” Alex asked. “None of your business, Alex,” Kim insisted. “Spill it, Scott,” Alex demanded.

“Kim and I want to put some on my dad. We think he needs some to get lucky with Mom.”

“Scott, why don’t you just use the Real?” Alex asked.

“Shut-up, Scott!” Kim tried to nip the conversation in the bud. The boys ignored her.

“We tried that on my mom already. It didn’t work. Dad was attracted to Mom, but she wasn’t attracted to him. I think Dad needs extra strength stuff,” Scott declared.

Kim shook her head, handed half the vials over to Scott, and left to find Amy.

The boys changed and sat in the stands to watch the girls’ game. Scott waited for Chris and Tommie to arrive.

As Tommie and Chris walked into the school, they were greeted by Mrs. Hardy.

“Tommie! Chris! It’s wonderful to see you. Have you heard the good news?”

“What news?”

“Alex and Scott have been elected President and Vice President of the school this afternoon.”

“That’s fantastic! But I thought the election was tomorrow,” Chris said.

“It was, but after the speeches this afternoon, the students decided they wanted to vote, today. Principal Toole agreed. You two should have heard their speech. You’d have been so proud of the boys.”

“I never did get the whole story from Scott. How did this all come about?” Tommie asked.

“I heard that Alex was acting up in Math class and Ms. Fogarty dared him to enter the race. He took her up on it. Of course he insisted Scott be his running mate.”

“Of course,” Tommie laughed. “Someone has to do the work.”

“Scott and Kim remind me of you when you were young, Tommie.”

“Is that a good thing?” Chris asked.

“It’s excellent! They’ll do great things. I’m sure of it,” Mrs. Hardy declared. “Will Lanny and Erin be coming to the game?”

“We’re hoping they will, but they have to supervise at the elementary track meet today. They may not make it.”

“I hope I see them at the game,” Mrs. Hardy said. “Principal Toole was so inspired by the boys – he asked all of the teachers to stay and watch. See you in there.”

“See you later, Mrs. Hardy,” Tommie replied, as she and Chris walked into the gym. The stands were already packed full of students and parents. They searched for Alex and Scott.

“Over here!” Scott shouted. He stood up and waved his arms to get their attention.

Chris saw him first and waved back. He and Tommie headed toward the boys.

“Scott, Alex, we heard the news. Congratulations boys. We’re proud of you two.”

Alex’s face lit up like a Christmas tree. “You’re proud of me, too?” Alex exclaimed.

“Of course we are, Alex. You’re like a son to us!” Chris declared.

Chris sat down beside Scott. “We want to hear all about the speech you made today. It must have been awesome!”

Alex and Scott told Tommie and Chris everything. Scott finished by saying, “Alex and I believe in what we said and we’re committed to making it happen.”

“Alex!” a girl’s voice shouted from across the basketball court. He and Scott looked over. It was Erica. She was motioning him to come and join her.

“Sorry, duty calls,” Alex said, as he took off.

When Kim saw that Alex was gone, she and Amy walked over to visit her parents.

“Mom, what happened in your meeting today with RL?” Kim asked.

Tommie looked at Amy.

“I know all about you and that awful Huckster,” Amy admitted. Tommie was only a little surprised. She knew that Amy and Alex usually knew everything going on in the Campbell house. “Well, what did he say?” Chris asked. “Can you quit?”

“RL did some case law research and found out that because they haven’t paid me commission and because they’re refusing to pay me my salary, unless I do something I don’t want to, that it’s like they fired me without firing me. It’s called constructive termination.”

“So, you don’t need to worry about what happens if you quit – because they’ve basically let you go already – because of their actions,” Chris said.

“That’s right!”

“So, according to RL, because they have constructively terminated me, without cause, I can pursue the arbitration and not have to be working there... because if they don’t pay me, why should I.”

“That’s great news!” Chris declared.

“But,” Tommie said. “He also told me this whole arbitration process could take years.”

“You’re kidding?” Scott said.

“No, I’m not. And it will cost a fortune in lawyer’s fees.”

“Is it worth doing then?” Kim asked.

“Well, he did say that my case was pretty strong and that he’d consider doing it on contingency.”

“What’s that mean?” Amy asked.

“It means he gets a percentage of whatever the arbitrator’s award is. It practically eliminates my risk.”

“I say, go for it, Mrs. Campbell,” Amy announced. “I agree,” Scott said.

“And what about the First Amendment?” Kim asked. “Are we still going to fight the no-speaks?”

“RL said that’s a whole other ball of wax.”

“Huh?”

TWEEEEET...

A whistle blew. Kim’s coach was signaling the girls to join the team on the floor.

“Gotta go,” Kim said, as she and Amy took off.

“Chris!” a man’s voice shouted from a few rows up. All three looked around and saw Ryan Nash’s parents, Chuck and Linda. Chuck motioned Chris to join them.

“Sorry. Like Alex said, duty calls. Back in a bit.” Chris made his way through the people sitting in the stands and squeezed in beside Chuck.

“It looks like it’s just the two of us,” Tommie said to Scott.

The Spartan and Terrier girls were doing their pre-game warm-up on the floor. The Spartans were executing their passing drills, shooting drills, two-on-two, lay-ups and rebounding. They looked impressive.

“So, how do you think the game will go today?” Tommie asked Scott.

“I hope we win, but it’ll be close,” Scott declared. “The good thing is – the Terriers play fair. It’s not like we’re playing the East End Cougars. I hate playing those guys. Their coach is a nutcase.”

“I can’t believe parents let a guy like that coach their kids,” Tommie said.

“He screams like a maniac. I know I would never play for him.”

“I’d like to get him banned.”

“Mom. Don’t even think about it. You can’t do anything about it.”

“What if...”

“Mom. Promise me you won’t say anything to anyone. The guy has influence with the Olympic team coaches. I don’t want you getting my name blackballed.”

“Okay. But what happened to us changing the world?”

“We can change a lot of things, but we can’t do anything about bad coaching,” Scott said.

The two girls’ teams walked to center court to shake hands, signaling the game was

about the begin.

Scott's mind wasn't completely on the game. He wanted to try out the Super-Duper-Dopey Pheromones on Chris. He decided to get ready so that he could splash Chris with a little love potion. He took a vial out of his pocket and tried to open it. Tommie noticed him struggling with the cap.

"What have you got there?" Tommie asked.

"Oh, nothing," Scott replied, as he shoved it back in his pocket. Scott looked like he was hiding something.

"Okay, hand it over," Tommie demanded. She took the vial and read the fine print. "Scott, what were you planning to do with this?"

"I was doing it for you, Mom. Kim and I want to save your marriage," Scott confessed.

"Save our marriage? What would make you think our marriage needs saving?"

"Kim and I overheard you talking to Dad last night. We thought if we could get you two to hook up again – then things would get better," Scott explained.

"Hold your horses, Kiddo. First of all, our love life is none of your business and secondly, what makes you think that's the only thing that keeps a marriage together?"

Tommie was about to get a shock.

Chapter Twenty



“Alex’s mom and dad divorced and I heard that Derryl’s dad is fooling around with some floozy!”

“That’s them, not us,” Tommie tried to explain. “Your dad and I have a great marriage. You don’t need to worry.”

“I’m sorry about the misunderstanding, Mom. Kim and I really did think you two were having problems.”

“Scott, it’s not your fault. We’re not very lovey-dovey but that doesn’t mean we don’t care. Sometimes parents have so much happening with kids and work and stuff, we forget about each other.”

“You two always put Kim and me first – and we appreciate it.”

“I sure didn’t expect to have a conversation like this with you. I guess you and Kim aren’t my babies anymore.”

Chris was making his way back to their row. Tommie saw Chris coming and asked Scott not to mention their conversation to him.

Chris sat down beside Scott. Then, Alex appeared out of nowhere and squeezed his butt in between Scott and Chris.

“So, what did the untouchable want?” Scott asked Alex.

“You’ll see,” Alex declared. He was grinning ear to ear. This was probably the greatest day in Alex’s life, so far.

TWEEEEET...

A whistle blew, signaling the start of the game. “Game on!” Tommie proclaimed.

The family and Alex watched and cheered. An hour and a half passed. Not only were the teams exhausted from playing such an aggressive and totally entertaining game, but so were the fans, from all the clapping and shouting and cheering.

With just twenty seconds left in the game, the Terriers were leading by three and had possession. They were stalling. The Spartans had no choice but to go for a steal or foul. They didn’t want to foul because the Terriers were excellent free-throw shooters. Kim flicked her hand under the ball. It went flying up into the air. She grabbed it, dribbled down the floor and stopped just outside the three-point line. The shot went up.

SWOOOOSH...

The game was now tied. BZZZZ...

The buzzer sounded to end the game. It was only right. Both sides had played their hearts out and everyone cheered loudly. The girls shook hands at center court and went to

the change rooms.

The boys came out to warm up. Alex and Scott took to the floor.

Alex looked around the stands to see if his dad or step-mom had shown up for the game. There was no sign of them. He was disappointed, even though he knew his dad was probably busy trying to take down the Men Of Business.

The boys warmed up as the girls showered. When Kim and Amy returned to the stands, they took seats by Tommie and Chris. They were just in time to see the cheerleaders take to the floor.

“Look at those chicks. They didn’t even bother showing up for our game,” Amy complained.

“Yeah, but they made sure they’re here for the boys. Typical.” Erica took center court and shouted out to the fans in the stands.

“We’ve been practicing a brand new pom-pom routine and cheer especially for this game and especially for the new President and Vice President of our school – Alex Black and Scott Campbell.”

“That’s where they were!” Kim exclaimed. She and Amy felt a bit foolish.

Hey
Hey
Who is the greatest man
Who is the greatest man
Who can do what no one can Who can do what no one can Who’s the guy we will
declare Who’s the guy we will declare
Our allegiance anywhere Our allegiance anywhere It’s A-L-E-X
It’s Alex
Hey
Hey
Who is our second in command Who is our second in command Who’s got the brains
we are his fans Who’s got the brains we are his fans Who’s the guy who’ll do the job
Who’s the guy who’ll do the job
To make our school the best by far To make our school the best by far It’s S-C-O-T-T
It’s Scott
Yea, Alex and Scott!

“Is that teen and parent spirit I smell?” Chris laughed. “I thought they were mutually exclusive.”

“Daaaad,” Kim groused at him. “Sorry, Kim,” Chris replied.

“Mr. Campbell, you’re cool. My dad wouldn’t even know about Nirvana,” Amy admitted. “Hey, I don’t even think he knows I play basketball!”

Tommie knew Amy needed some support from an adult. She and Chris were surrogate parents to both her and Alex at times.

“Amy, you had a fantastic game today. You’re getting better every time I see you,” Tommie said.

“Thanks, Mrs. Campbell.” That was all Amy needed.

The boys’ game was as nerve racking as the girls’. There was never any more than a five point spread at any one time. The game was physical and exciting. Scott was having

a great game – with the help of Alex’s excellent rebounding on both the offensive and defensive boards.

The Terra Nova Terriers were playing their best. They were once the dominant team in the division, but with Scott, Alex and Ryan, all playing for the Spartans, the games were always close now.

It was possible that the Terra Nova dynasty might end this year. Just like the girls’ game, it all came down to the final seconds. Terra Nova had just scored and the game was tied 78-78. There were twenty seconds left. Neither team wanted the game to end in a tie. The Spartans managed to beat the full-court-press and in-bound the ball to Ryan. Scott was in position at center court. He was surrounded by three of the Terriers.

Ryan had a great arm, and threw a long bomb down the court to Alex, who was waiting in the paint. The Terriers had double and triple teamed Scott all game and it was a great idea to pass the ball away from Scott. Alex caught the pass and easily scored.

It was now 80-78 for the Spartans – with fifteen seconds left. The Spartans pressed the Terriers. As they in-bounded the ball to one of the players, Ryan accidentally fouled him. The Terriers would have two foul shots. The boys lined up around the key. The shooter took his position. The ref handed him the ball. He bounced it.

BANG... BANG... BANG...

He picked it up and whirled it around in his hands. He bounced it again.

BANG... BANG... BANG...

He got ready for his shot, took a deep breath and pushed the ball up and out toward the basket. The crowd was silent.

SWOOOOSH...

He scored. He’d get another shot to tie the game. The ref handed him the ball. He bounced it. BANG... BANG... BANG...

He picked it up and whirled it around in his hands. He bounced it again.

BANG... BANG... BANG...

He got ready for his shot, took a deep breath and pushed the ball up and out toward the basket. The crowd wasn’t even breathing this time.

The ball traveled through the air in a perfect arc. It looked like it was in for sure, but it caught the back of the rim and bounced out, right back into the shooter’s hands. He quickly set up and shot, trying to win the game before the final buzzer. The ball was traveling up through the air when, BZZZZ...

The crowd watched as the ball hit the back board and somehow got lodged between the board and the hoop. Game over. The Spartans celebrated their victory.

As with the girls’ games, the crowd went wild.

“I wish all games were like this,” Tommie said. “Everyone’s a good sport!”

The boys rushed to center court and shook hands.

Principal Toole made his way over to the scorekeeper’s bench. He picked up the announcer’s microphone. “I’d like to congratulate the players and coaches on superb games. I’m sure the teams appreciated all the support from the students, the teachers and the parents from both schools. We’d like to invite everyone, including all the Terriers, to attend our outdoor concert tonight. There will be free refreshments for everyone!”

The whole place cheered. Everyone piled outside. The band was setting up on the outdoor basketball courts. The parents and students milled around the schoolyard, enjoying the refreshments, the sunny warm evening, and anticipating the fabulous

entertainment they were about to hear.

The Spring Valley School Band was well-known in the city. Unlike most bands who only played classical, jazz or big band music, the band teacher at Spring Valley wrote arrangements himself for punk, heavy metal, pop, country western... you name it. There'd be something for everyone.

As the Terriers and the Spartans became one big happy group, Alex and Scott headed for the change room to shower, while Chris and Tommie walked outside with the girls.

Once the boys were clean and ready to go, they joined the crowd in the schoolyard.

"Wow! Look at what we accomplished today. Everyone seems to be having a great time," Alex said.

"And we did it all without pheromones!" Scott exclaimed.

The boys were cutting through the soccer field toward the band when Alex asked, "So, what are we going to do with the pheromone stuff? Are you going to use it on your dad?"

"No," Scott admitted. "Mom says they don't need it."

"Are you sure? I don't want my family being broken up again," Alex replied.

"They're not breaking up!" Scott declared.

"Whoooops!" Alex stumbled and fell onto the grass. He stood up, brushed his pants off, and looked back to see what he had tripped over. He saw a big red fire ant anthill. Alex extended his hand toward Scott. "Here, give me a vial, Scott."

"What for?"

"Just give me a vial!"

"Alright already." Scott reached into his pocket and pulled one out. He handed it to Alex.

Scott watched as Alex poured the vial's contents on top of the anthill. "Let's see what happens," Alex mused.

The boys bent over the anthill and watched.

"Look, ants are coming in here from everywhere!" Alex declared. "There's carpenter ants coming, too!"

Alex was right. Not only were the red fire ants converging on the hill, but so were black carpenter ants.

"Maybe we better get out of here!" Scott said. "Or they'll be all over us in no time."

The boys headed toward the band and the crowd. They spotted Kim and Amy.

"Should we?" Alex asked Scott.

Chapter Twenty-One



“Should we what?” Scott imagined all sorts of awful scenarios that Alex might be cooking up.

“Should we go talk to the girls?” Alex asked.

“Just talk, right? You’re not planning to spill pheromones on them and hope the ants attack them, are you?”

“No way! But now that you mention it...”

“Alex! Promise me we’re done with these pheromones.”

“For now.”

“How long is ‘now’?”

“Don’t sweat it.”

The girls didn’t notice the boys approaching them.

“It’s like everyone’s attraction pheromones are working overtime,” Kim said.

“I’m calling my dad. He needs to get a news crew over here! We have to get this story on the air,” Amy declared. “A story with a positive spin for a change.”

The boys stood, undetected and behind the girls. They listened as Amy pulled out her cell phone and made a call.

“Dad, you need to get a camera crew over here to the school!

...No! There hasn’t been a shooting! ...No! There hasn’t been a drug bust. ...No, it’s not on fire!” Amy replied to her dad’s questions. She quickly came to the realization – that only a catastrophe would get him to send someone.

Taking a page from Alex’s dumb book of puns, Amy shouted, “Dad, listen to me. The school’s been taken over by pheromers!”

Kim giggled. “Pheromers? That’s pretty sneaky, Amy.”

“Yes, they’re terrierist pheromers,” Amy added for effect. Of course her dad misunderstood.

“...No, they don’t know I have a cell phone. ...Yes, I’m okay.

...Send a crew, right away! ...Great! Hurry. I just don’t know how long we can...” Amy hung up on him for effect.

“Terrierists?” Kim laughed.

Amy shook her head and rolled her eyes. “It’s the best I could come up with.”

“What’s he going to say when he shows up and there’s no story?”

“There’s a HUGE story here!” Alex exclaimed.

The girls spun around quickly.

“Alex! You were spying on us!” Amy announced.

“It’s a free country, last time I checked. If Scott and I want to stand here, we can. It’s not our fault you’re such a loudmouth.”

“Terrierists?” Scott said. “What are you talking about?”

Amy decided to speak to Scott and pretend Alex wasn’t there. “I wanted my dad to come to the school and do a report from here. I think it’s cool that we’re actually partying with our biggest competitors. It’s a good news story. We need more of them!”

Scott was impressed. “I agree, Amy. Good idea.”

Alex didn’t like being left out of the conversation. “There’s even a bigger good news story here!”

“What?” Kim asked.

“Our election victory!” Alex declared. “True,” Kim replied.

Not to be outdone by Amy, Alex announced, “I’m going to call MY dad and tell him to come to cover our victory!”

“He probably won’t come out for that,” Scott suggested.

Alex ignored Scott, pulled his cell phone out of his pocket, and made the call. He was lucky. His dad answered.

“Dad! We won the election and there’s phoner terrierists at the school. You gotta get here right away!” he shouted and hung up.

The kids groaned and shook their heads. “Copy cat,” Amy said.

“Phoner terrierists?” Joel Black echoed, as he put down his cell phone and turned to Richard Montgomery.

“You too?” Richard asked. “My kid’s been desperate for attention ever since we started this takedown.”

“I’ve got the same problem,” Joel admitted. “I think we better move this surveillance into your TV unit. We can keep an eye on the kids and the Men Of Business at the same time. Maybe we can even spend a few minutes with the kids. Didn’t they have a basketball game today?”

“I think you’re right! But first, I better call Chuck and make sure there’s no terrierists, right?”

Joel laughed. “I’m sure we’d know before him, but better safe than sorry.”

Richard placed the call. Chuck and Linda were standing around shooting the breeze with Tommie and Chris when Chuck’s phone rang. Chuck pulled out his cell and realized he’d better take the call.

“Hello. Chuck speaking.”

“Chuck, it’s Richard. Is there anything happening at the kids’ school?”

Chuck was surprised by this question. “Nothing except a band concert, why?”

“No terrierists?” Richard joked.

Chuck thought for a split second and replied, “As a matter of fact, the kids played the Terriers today. You missed some of the best basketball I’ve seen Amy play. Both teams and all the parents are out here in the schoolyard waiting for the band concert.”

Richard began to laugh. “Joel, you won’t believe this.”

“Chuck, would you mind keeping an eye on Amy and Alex? I think they’re up to something. Joel and I will be moving our surveillance to the mobile TV unit. We’ll be on the scene shortly. Don’t let anyone know we’re there.”

“Gotcha,” Chuck replied and hung up. Chuck looked around and spotted Amy, Alex, Kim and Scott. “Let’s move closer to the band,” he suggested.

Tommie, Chris and Linda followed.

“So? Is your dad coming?” Kim asked.

“Of course,” Alex declared. He sounded more confident than he really was. “Amy, what reporter do you think your dad will send?”

“He thinks there’s terrorists here. He’ll send Alan Lasowich, his investigative reporter.”

Scott looked a little concerned. Alex didn’t.

“Great!” Alex declared. “He’ll interview us for sure. Remember? He said we owed him. We can pay him back today!”

“How?” Scott nervously asked.

“We’ll tell him about our election victory and what we said in our speech. That’s a good idea, right?”

Scott, Kim and Amy were surprised and speechless. They all agreed with Alex – but no one said a word.

“Well, am I right?”

“For once in your miserable life, I think you’ve got it!” Amy joked.

The kids didn’t notice Alan Lasowich arrive in the Center City Television van. Lasowich and his crew were standing in the soccer field, getting shots of the crowd. It was a live feed and he was transmitting to all of Center City. Richard Montgomery and Joel Black were sitting in the van watching what Lasowich was televising – and some special feeds from other sources.

The school band was warming up.

“The band sounds like they’re ready to start,” Kim said. “I wonder what they’ll play tonight?”

“I hope it’s punk,” Scott declared. “I think it’s hilarious that the parents love the music!”

“Yeah, that is pretty funny. I’ll bet they even leave humming some of the tunes,” Alex added.

The kids were right. The band started with a political punk song. By the time the song was over, the adults were all humming the chorus.

Amy was the first to spot Lasowich. She elbowed Kim – and without uttering a word to each other – the girls took off toward the soccer field. The boys followed close on their heels. Lasowich was wondering what to do with his live feed. It was obvious there were no terrorists at the school.

He wouldn’t have to wait long for a story. By the time the kids arrived on the scene, Mr. John Smith was talking with Lasowich.

Mr. Smith had been at the boys’ basketball game – watching his son, John Junior, play for the Terriers. He hated going to the games, but it was the politically correct thing to do and it looked good for his business. He had a reputation and an image to maintain. Mr. Smith took advantage of Lasowich’s presence to make this event – his own. As his crew filmed the band, Lasowich had a short chat off-camera with Mr. Smith. He was now ready to report.

Lasowich: Good afternoon, Center City viewers. This is Alan Lasowich, reporting to you live from Spring Valley

School. I'm standing in the middle of a huge promotional event for The Fund Raisers' Circus. I'm here with Mr. John Smith, President of The Center City Bank – President of the Center City Fund Raisers and numerous charitable organizations – AND, for the past five years, honorary Ring Master of the Fund Raisers' Circus. Mr. Smith, how was it that you decided to visit this school to promote the circus?

Smith: I'm not sure if you're aware, Mr. Lasowich, but my son plays for the Terriers. He's not here right now – he had to go to a Young Republican's meeting – but if he were, you'd be very impressed with his commitment to the community. My son suggested that this event would provide an excellent venue to promote the circus and our fund raising efforts. We hope that attendance at the circus will reach an all-time high and that we'll have a tremendous bankroll to pass on to worthy charities and community groups in our city.

Lasowich: Mr. Smith, is there any truth to the rumor that you have been soliciting support from questionable elements of society, such as the Men Of Business? Didn't they just donate a large amount of money to the Children's Hospital?

Smith: Yes, they did.

Lasowich: Did they supply the nude dancers on your Gentlemen's Dinner Cruise, two days ago?

Mr. Smith kept his cool. He thought the media had already forgotten about the story. Apparently Lasowich hadn't. Smith covered up his anger and laughed at this statement.

Smith: Mr. Lasowich, what does it matter where the money comes from, as long as we know where it's going. And it's going to very worthy causes. And as far as dancers on our cruise ship, I have no comment."

"He's not speaking, again," Kim said.

"And not only that," Amy added. "When someone takes money from illegitimate operations and invests in legitimate businesses and charities and stuff – THAT'S money laundering! I saw that on Law and Order!"

Amy and Kim looked at each other. They were on to him. "Do you think he's the real Ring Master?" Kim asked. "Yes, I do. Let's tell the boys."

Amy turned to Scott. "Scott. We..." But before the girls could let the guys know what they were thinking, Alex was taking action.

Alex barged in between Mr. Smith and Lasowich, grabbed the microphone, and began to speak to the camera.

Alex: My name is Alex Black and I'm student body President of Spring Valley School.

Alex reached out, grabbed Scott by the shirt, and dragged Scott in front of the camera as well.

Alex: And this is my Vice President, Scott Campbell. We'd like to thank The Fund Raisers for joining OUR event.

Mr. Smith wasn't happy about being upstaged by a couple of kids. He looked annoyed.

Lasowich took his microphone back from Alex. Lasowich: So, Alex Black. This is

your event, is it?

Alex: Yes, it's OUR event. We're celebrating our election victory and taking this opportunity to get the message out, that kids' opinions count. You see, today it was our student body's opinion that we needed to improve our school spirit... and look what we accomplished with the help of our students, teachers and parents!

Lasowich: There you have it folks. This is Alan Lasowich reporting for Center City TV, that kids' opinions count! Now for a word from our sponsors.

"We're off the air," Lasowich said.

Alex wasn't finished. He was still mad at Mr. Smith. He knew Mr. Smith wasn't telling the truth about the nude dancers on the cruise ship.

"Ask him about the nude dancers again!" Alex ordered Lasowich.

"Pardon?" Lasowich replied.

Mr. Smith was trying to leave when Alex grabbed him by the arm and began to explain to Lasowich, "I saw them. I saw the nude dancers on the cruise ship. I saw them with my own eyes! I saw them close-up! I had binoculars!"

Alex stepped in front of Mr. Smith and grabbed both his arms. He looked Mr. Smith directly in the eyes and shouted, "Confess you dirty old man. Confess you're trying to cover-up your involvement with slimy people."

Kim, Scott and Amy couldn't believe how brave Alex was. Mr. Smith roughly pushed Alex to the side.

Lasowich was back on the air. He jumped on this opening.

Lasowich: Mr. Smith. What do you have to say about this? A few minutes ago you joked that you would accept money from anyone, even the Men Of Business. Now this young man swears he saw nude dancers on the Gentlemen's Dinner Cruise. Are you the upstanding citizen you pretend to be?

Mr. Smith's face turned red. His eyeballs looked like they were going to pop out of their sockets. He was ready to explode. There was nothing illegal about having nude dancers at a gentleman's dinner, but he had signed a no-speak and was bound to keep his mouth shut.

Chapter Twenty-Two



Tommie, Chris, Linda and Chuck watched and listened.

“I think I’d better get the kids out of here,” Chris exclaimed. Chuck knew that Alex was right. He knew that a couple of under-cover policemen witnessed the improprieties on the cruise ship. “Alex is asking legitimate questions. I don’t see a problem.”

A crowd was now gathering away from the band and around Lasowich, Mr. Smith and the kids. Joel and Richard were watching from the van. Lasowich was still trying to engage Mr. Smith in conversation.

Scott pulled Alex aside and said, “I think I know who The Ring Master is!”

“Who?”

Kim and Amy overheard as they moved closer to the boys. “Mr. Smith. It’s got to be Mr. Smith!” Kim whispered. “Oh, that’s just too obvious, isn’t it?” Alex replied.

“Think about it, Alex,” Scott insisted. “He was in the harbor when my dad and Danny were doing their research. He was in the harbor when the Pilot Cruiser blew up. He’s a banker. He’s got tons of money coming in from who knows where and going into his charity organizations and businesses. So, if The Ring Master is the guy who launders the money – this guy’s cover is perfect! I’ll bet The Fund Raisers and the Bank are fronts for The Ring Master!”

“We need to tell Amy and Alex’s dads!” Kim exclaimed. “No way! Let’s take him down ourselves!”

“Alex, you’re nuts!” Amy said. “How? The guy’s probably dangerous.”

“You got it backwards. He shouldn’t mess with us. I have a plan.”

“NOOOO,” Scott moaned long and loud. “Another plan. I think I’m more afraid of you than The Ring Master.” It was too late. Alex reached into Scott’s pocket and pulled out a vial.

“What the?!” Scott shouted.

“Watch and learn,” Alex replied, as he took off toward Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith was still trying to get away from Lasowich. Now, Alex was back in his face, too. “Mr. Smith! Mr. Smith! Confess!”

Scott and the girls wondered what the plan was. They would soon find out.

Alex suddenly threw the full bottle of pheromones on Mr. Smith and ordered Scott, Kim and Amy to help him, “Get Mr. Smith to the anthill!”

“The anthill?” Amy questioned. “What anthill?”

“That’s the plan?” Scott asked.

“Just do it,” Alex demanded. “You girls push him – Scott and I will pull. We know where we’re going.”

Lasowich was televising the scuffle, as all four kids hauled Mr. Smith to the anthill. Once on top of it, Alex ordered, “Hold him here until he confesses!”

Within seconds, the red and black ants were all over Mr. Smith’s shoes. The ants weren’t bothering the kids. They were just attracted to the pheromones on Mr. Smith.

“Confess!” Alex taunted.

“Confess what?” Mr. Smith cried out, struggling to get free, but trying not to lose his cool in front of the camera. The ants were now crawling up his pant leg. The more he struggled to free himself from the kids’ grip, the more active the ants became.

The crowd had now completely surrounded Alex, Scott, Kim, Amy, Lasowich and Mr. Smith. Joel and Richard rushed to the scene in time to hear Alex’s threat. “Confess or we won’t give you the antidote!”

“What antidote?” Kim asked.

“Alex, what are you up to?” Joel called to his son, feigning surprise and concern.

“Dad! You’re here!”

“Amy, you have some explaining to do!” Richard declared in a ‘parental’ tone. “Why are you holding Mr. Smith? He’s an upstanding citizen.”

“Dad! I’m so glad you came, too.”

Richard and Joel were playing it cool. They couldn’t tell anyone that they suspected Smith was involved with the Men Of Business and that they were working together to break his cover. They couldn’t reveal to the Men Of Business that Joel was still one of the good guys. At the same time, they couldn’t let on to the rest of world that he was one of the bad guys. They had to remain neutral. They had to let Alex, Amy and their friends get a confession out of Mr. Smith.

“Dad, make him confess!” Alex exclaimed.

“Confess to what, Son? If you know something I don’t know, you get him to confess.” Joel hoped Alex would just follow his own instincts.

It seemed everyone was running a covert operation. Everyone had a secret.

Tommie decided it was time to intervene. “Alex, Scott, Kim, Amy, let Mr. Smith go. This isn’t funny.”

Chuck took the cue from Joel and Richard and literally held Tommie back. “They know what they’re doing.”

Alex suspected that Chuck was in on it, too. He felt all the more determined to get the confession. Alex went for the kill. “Admit you’re The Ring Master and I’ll give you the ANT – idote!”

“Get these ants off me!” Mr. Smith yelled. The ants were now biting him and he couldn’t take it any more. “I’m The Ring Master. Now, get me the antidote!”

Joel, Richard and Chuck thought Alex’s reference to The Ring Master was just about the circus. They thought he was trying to expose the fact that Mr. Smith wasn’t the good citizen that he appeared to be... and that Alex was only following Lasowich’s lead. Alex and the kids, however, were on to bigger secrets.

“Admit you’re The Ring Master AND that you had nude dancers on the ship.”

“Big deal. I’m The Ring Master and there were nude dancers on the ship. Now get these ants off me!”

Alex wasn't finished. "NOW confess that you're the money launderer for the Men Of Business!"

Mr. Smith was silent.

Joel, Richard, Lasowich, Tommie, Chris, Linda, Chuck and the crowd were astonished – not all for the same reason.

Joel hadn't expected this. He turned to Richard and asked, "Do you think Alex has it right – that Mr. Smith is The Ring Master we're after?"

Richard was equally surprised. "Man, how did we miss that? It was staring us right in the face."

"So what do we do now?" Joel asked. "Alex almost has him confessing! If we intervene, we blow one of our covers. If we leave it alone, we blow the other."

"I'm stymied," Richard admitted, as Alex continued to interrogate Mr. Smith.

"So, you admit to me, Alex Black, super sleuth, that your organization has been fronting for the MOB. You've been laundering their money. You are The Ring Master. You are the criminal mastermind that all of American law enforcement has been looking for – and I uncovered your secret identity." Alex was relentless.

"What should we do?" Richard asked Joel.

"What's done is done. I'll just say I couldn't blow the Men Of Business's cover, that's why I didn't intervene. It worked before." Richard agreed.

"All right! I confess. I'm The Ring Master. I'm the money launderer! Now get these friggin' ants off me!"

Lasowich: This is Alan Lasowich and I'm here on the grounds of Spring Valley School, in Center City, bringing you live coverage of the takedown of a major criminal.

"Alex! Enough of these ANT-ics. Call off these ants," Chuck ordered, as he slapped handcuffs on Mr. Smith. "I can't take him to the station like this!"

"I can't call them off! I just pretended I could," Alex admitted. Chuck looked around and shouted out to the crowd, asking,

"Does anyone know how to get rid of these ants?"

"Wait, I have an idea," Kim declared.

Chapter Twenty-Three



Kim ran into the school. She went straight to her locker and pulled out the samples she and Amy used in their Science Fair project, and then hightailed it back to Mr. Smith.

He was squirming and whining. Chuck tried to brush the ants off and the kids continued to move him away from the anthill. But, like Alex, the insects were relentless. Mr. Smith was at his wit's end.

“Get these off me!”

“What have you got there?” Chuck asked Kim.

Amy knew exactly what Kim was doing. “Here, I’ll help.”

Kim put all the samples on the ground and one by one the girls sprayed them on Mr. Smith. Nothing seemed to repel the ants. They were down to their last sample – the Patchouli.

“This has got to work!” Kim said, as she sprayed it on Mr. Smith. The ants scattered like confetti in a windstorm.

“What did you spray on him?” Alex asked. “Dispersion pheromones,” Kim laughed.

“I like that smell,” Scott commented. “You would,” Amy chuckled.

With Mr. Smith now – ant free – Chuck escorted him to the police cruiser that was waiting. Mr. Smith began to profess his innocence.

With Mr. Smith out of sight, Joel and Richard no longer had to keep a low profile.

“Amy,” Richard said, as he emerged from the crowd. “I’m so proud of you. You’re going to be a great reporter some day. I don’t know how you knew there was such a big story here... but you did. You taught me a huge lesson. I need to pay more attention to my daughter AND to what I report. Pheroner terrierists!” he laughed, as he held out his arms. Amy ran to him. This was the best hug

Amy ever got from her dad.

You could cut the tension with a knife, as Joel approached Alex. He needed some answers. Alex had just done what an army of law enforcement people couldn’t... and Joel wanted to know how.

“Alex!” Joel barked.

Alex swung around and faced his dad. Alex hoped he had done the right thing.

“How the heck did you know about the money laundering?”

“What did you think I was trying to get him to confess to?”

Alex asked.

“I thought you saw the nude dancers on the cruise ship, that’s all,” Joel admitted. “How did you know about The Ring Master? If I didn’t know better...”

Before Joel could finish his sentence, Scott came to Alex’s rescue, shouting, “The money laundering was my idea!”

“Really?” Joel replied suspiciously. “What gave YOU that idea, Scott?”

“Kim and I spied on my mom and dad the other night. We overheard Detective Nash telling them about the MOB and The Ring Master and money laundering,” Scott admitted. “Kim and I just put two and two together.”

“Right!” Kim piped in. She also decided to help Alex out. “I figured it out, too. It was easy. Anyone could do it!”

Tommie and Chris had no idea the kids had overheard any of the conversation that evening.

“You’ve got some explaining to do, kids,” Chris ordered. Scott and Kim were happy to take the heat on this one.

Alex looked relieved and so did Joel and Richard. It seemed everyone’s secrets were safe... except for Kim and Scott’s. But it was a small price to pay to save their friend’s butt.

With Joel’s cover intact – with The Ring Master in police custody – with the Men Of Business takedown under control – Joel decided to do right by his son.

“How about we take that little fishing trip I’ve been promising you for so long?” Joel said to Alex.

“You’re not mad, Dad?”

“No way! You and your friends just took down a major criminal. I’m proud of you.”

Alex was elated.

Richard walked over to Lasowich and whispered something to him.

“Great idea, Boss. Kids, gather around. I’m going to get you all on the air! You’re heroes!”

By now, the local feed had been picked up by all the networks. It was being broadcast live into homes all over the world, as Scott, Kim, Alex, and Amy posed for the camera.

Lasowich: This is Alan Lasowich, still reporting live for CCTV, from Spring Valley School, where the criminal master- mind – The Ring Master – has been arrested by our own Detective Nash.

The Ring Master is thought to be the brains behind the Men Of Business’s money laundering operation. No one suspected The Ring Master to be our fine upstanding citizen, Mr. John Smith.

The four kids you see before you, managed to put all the pieces of the puzzle together themselves and were able to reveal the identity of The Ring Master. They made sure they got their opinion heard.

Scott and Kim Campbell, Amy Montgomery and Alex Black, is there anything you want to say to our audience?

Kim: We just want to tell all the adults to respect your kids, talk to your kids, and

listen to what we have to say, because,
Everyone: Kids' Opinions Count!

**We hope you enjoy our next book
What's the Skinny**