

PERIE WOLFORD ENCOUNTER

“ENCOUNTER” by Perie Welford, BOOK 1

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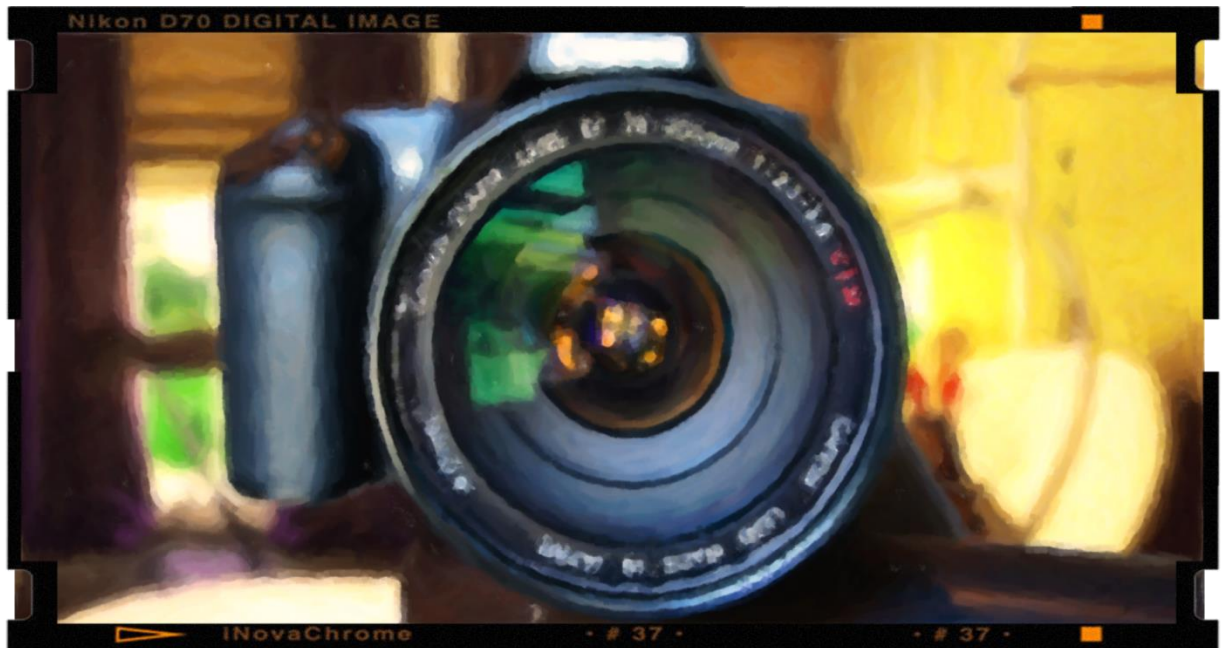
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Book has been edited by [CoolBeans](#) Editing Services.



CHAPTER 1

THE VLOG

The moment Ricky pushed the record button the camera captured his DC Comics Blue Lantern T-shirt, and then his hands fiddling with the tripod. Caught in the frame were all parts of his slender youthful body, one after another, except for his face, the one part that he was actually trying to make the camera capture. If only the darn tripod was more cooperative.

Ricky was never good with cameras or anything related to photography for that matter. That was all Josh's world and his camera too. A bulky professional thing with a whole bunch of confusing buttons and levers which Ricky knew well enough must never be touched under any circumstances. Josh was very anal about anyone fooling around with his equipment. Shooting wedding videos and other celebratory events was his bread and butter after all, his primary source of income. Not that he particularly needed a source of income since his family was rich. But Josh enjoyed his independence better than his parents' money.

Ricky barely knew what he was doing with the camera, but Josh was late, as always and Ricky only had about half an hour left before he had to make his way to the airport to pick Emily up. And he wanted to get that vlog thing started before she arrived.

And since Josh had been staying over at Ricky's house for almost a week now with all of his equipment, Ricky was tired of Josh's constant excuses and listening to him say "We'll do it later, okay?" Ricky decided to grab the darn camera and try doing the interview thing on his own. As always if he wanted to get something done, he needed to take matters into his own hands.

Although, on second thought, it might not have been such a good idea, because now as the camera was recording and his face was, hopefully, in the frame, Ricky suddenly felt intimidated by that dark little aperture on the front side of the thing, the one that was peering at him. He never really liked to be photographed, let alone the idea of videotaping himself. Although he was told repeatedly that he was attractive and quite photogenic too. Ricky himself didn't think he was particularly attractive at all. But even he couldn't deny the fact that his deep blue eyes were kinda pretty; and his brown hair, that would curl just a little bit after he showered, was kind of cool; and his body, although not quite athletic, wasn't exactly unpleasant to look at.

He wasn't on the swimming team anymore. He quit after the first semester in college. Between studying and all the extracurricular activities and then this, he didn't have much time left for swimming. Although, the main reason was that he didn't really like to be looked at, especially when he was only wearing his swimming shorts and nothing else.

Fortunately for him, his looks had nothing to do with the kind of video he was making at the moment, far from it. The thought relaxed him and he began.

"Hi, guys! Ricky McAllister here," he said into the camera and the sound of his voice instantly seemed awkward. If you think about it, he wasn't talking to anyone but himself, and he wasn't used to talking to himself, not out loud. And having the camera record him at that awkward moment wasn't making it less uncomfortable either. But Ricky overcame the discomfort and continued.

"This is the first video of our vlog series, one that we just started. There is already lots of info on our website, and you should check that out if you haven't already, but we wanted to expand on the subject a little. We wanted to show you guys what it is we actually do here. So I thought that creating a vlog series could be a good way to go," he said, trying to replicate the kind of friendliness and approachability the famous YouTubers had. It didn't look half as hard though when he was watching *them* do it.

But there was no backing out of it now. The idea to get more video footage up on the channel, now that it was finally gaining attention and the number of subscribers had turned from triple digits into a four-digit number, actually wasn't horrible. Having a videography of what the team was doing was probably going to triple the number of subscribers. Plus it would make the whole thing look, for the lack of a better word, believable.

Photos were never really enough to prove anything. And photos never really captured the atmosphere, and the feel of it, being out on the field at night, making the circles while trying not to be caught by the farmers who owned the land. The intensity of it all could only be captured on video. So starting a vlog was a good idea, even though it was Josh's idea and his ideas were rarely good, which actually was making this one even more valuable. And Ricky just needed to go through with it, no matter the amount of time it was going to take.

Josh suddenly interrupted Ricky, as he approached the camera from behind and took it off the tripod and into his own hands.

"Just give me that," he said grumpily, a little annoyed that Ricky took his camera without permission.

"Now *this* is how you actually do it," Josh commented on his own work as he changed camera's angle and depth of field settings, making Ricky pop up against the blurry background. Now the picture looked much more professional.

"Yeah, so the guy holding the camera right now is our photographer, Josh Cullen," Ricky said into the camera as relaxed and chilled out as he could manage. God, he hoped he wasn't blushing.

Josh turned the camera 360 degrees and flashed his face in the frame briefly, giving the audience one of his trademark charming smiles. "There isn't a bigger narcissist in the entire world" Ricky thought. And Josh being a narcissist was one thing that Ricky honestly hated about him the most. But to his defense Josh did look like a runway model with his slender but well-built body, his chiseled facial features and his slick black hair.

"Hi there!" Josh said into the camera and then focused it back on Ricky so he could continue.

"All the pictures we have on our website are actually the courtesy of Josh and he's a real pro here, or as close to a pro as one can get without any actual education and the only experience being shooting wedding videos," Ricky said with a smirk. He sure knew the antidote to Josh's narcissism.

"Get to the point, you jerk face," Josh replied jokingly.

"The point is, we wanted to expand our website and producing a video diary seemed like a great way to go because this way you guys will have a chance to experience everything almost live and practically firsthand. And it would eliminate the need for me to write the lengthy articles explaining what happened... You'll just see it all for yourself, guys."

"What's the name of the website?" Josh asked in a superior tone, trying to direct Rick. Josh was making it look like he would have been doing a better job in front of that camera than Ricky was. But he wasn't in front of that camera and he didn't show any desire to be there. He seemed much more comfortable just hiding behind it, making cutting remarks. But the thing that calmed Ricky down was that he was the one to do the final editing on all interviews, so he could cut all that he would find unnecessary, including most of Josh's comments.

"Yes Josh, it's *therealcropcircles.com*. For those of you who are watching this video elsewhere, I will put the link to our website in the description so you can come take a look. If you enjoy the subject of UFOs and crop circles, I think you should definitely check it out."

"Yeah, but before we do so, can you just tell us what the hell is it all about, Ricky?" Josh made the comment, as if from a point of view of a viewer. "That comment is not going to make the final cut," thought Ricky. But Josh did have a point there actually.

“Well, our group...our team...what we're trying to do is... we want to prove that...” Ricky tried to explain what the team was doing. But he suddenly found himself lost for words as the subject was complicated and controversial. And to fully understand it people needed to get it explained in simple terms. “Those crop circles that you see in the news, those that appear on the farmer's fields overnight and make people speculate relentlessly about aliens and UFOs, they have nothing to do with them,” Ricky said firmly.

“How so?” Josh asked skeptically.

“Because those crop circles are human-made, very much so. It's a hoax!”

“But why would anyone wanna do something like this?” Josh asked in a voice of a random simple-minded person.

“Because some guys are trying to get money out of it, others are trying to get exposure, and in our case, we're just trying to prove a point that it can be done by hand,” Ricky explained passionately.

“But why should we believe you?” Josh asked using the same voice. “Isn't it impossible to make a crop circle by hand? It's just so complex, all those intricate shapes and sizes and lack of time, no witnesses, all that crap,” Josh asked, finishing the sentence with his own voice.

This made Ricky smirk; he couldn't believe that the audience could even believe those stories.

“Well, keep watching then, you'll be amazed” he said simply. There was this devilish spark in his eyes now, one he would get whenever he was in an argument and whenever he knew for fact he was right about something.

“Okay, I take it this will be a cut,” Josh said and turned off the camera.

The next time the recording started was when Josh was following Ricky down the stairs, with a tight grip on the camera, trying to minimize the shaking and keep Ricky in good focus.

Ricky stopped in the middle of the downstairs hallway and turned around to face the camera. Him being the one in front of the camera, and not Josh, actually made sense because as gorgeous as Josh was, he was foul-mouthed. And that wasn't a great representation for the project. Besides, Ricky was the one who started it all in the first place. He was the mastermind behind the team and he was the one directing everyone and making things happen.

“This is my folks' house,” Ricky said into the camera, giving the audience a small house tour. “They are not here at the moment. They're on one of those Atlantic cruises, enjoying the Caribbean I suppose. So for the next month or so, depending on how much they like it there, this is our headquarters.”

Josh panned to the left to show first the kitchen, then a spacious living room decorated in white, and then some other rooms in the back. The back door was all glass and showed a beautiful view of a nice swimming pool area. Josh made a full circle and panned back to Ricky.

"So, yeah... That's my house," Ricky commented. It seemed he didn't have anything else to say, so he gestured to Josh to stop recording.

"Okay, you can turn it off now," he said.

Josh didn't turn the camera off though. He was being his usual obnoxious self, using every chance he got to annoy people around him just for fun. Plus he really enjoyed filming Ricky *in his eyes* Ricky was really hot. But that was something he was never going to share, neither would he ever admit that he might have just a little crush on him.

They were buds; that was it. Plus it was only for the past couple of years that they have been inseparable, bonded by the project and the mutual fascination with the "unexplained" phenomenon of crop circles. But the closer they were getting to each other, the more protective Josh was feeling over his little secret. He knew that revealing that secret would probably compromise their friendship. And that was the last thing he wanted to do. So he kept silent about his feelings and tried not to show that he liked Ricky a bit more than as just a good friend.

"What, five minutes under the aim of a camera and you're already getting a celebrity syndrome?" Josh asked with a grin. Ricky sighed exasperated, turned around and headed for the front door.

"I'll cut it out later," he said under his breath then walked outside. Josh followed him to the car that was parked in the driveway.

"Whatever you do, just restrain yourself from punching the camera, okay?" Josh joked. Ricky didn't say anything, just sighed loudly once more. He thought he was beginning to get used to the way Josh was, but here he was again, getting aggravated by Josh's innocent yet never-ending stream of jokes. It was a good thing that Josh had a lot of other *good* qualities.

"Where are we going?" Josh asked, still focusing the camera on Ricky as he was now opening the driver's door. Before getting into the car, Ricky turned to Josh and gave him an irritated look.

"Do we really need to film this?" he asked.

"I don't know. It was your idea to do this vlog thing. Now you want to pull out of it all of a sudden?"

"Okay," Ricky sighed, giving up. He made an effort to turn on the vlogger mode as it was still new to him and said, "We're picking up Emily Bridget at the airport. We have like half an hour to get there."

“Who the hell is Emily Bridget?” Josh asked, trying hard to hide the note of jealousy in his voice.

“Can we do this in the car please? We don’t have much time. I don’t want to make her wait. It wouldn’t be very friendly,” Ricky said and Josh finally took the camera’s aim off of him.

He focused it on himself instead and made an unsatisfied grimace before stopping the recording at last. It always had to be on schedule with Ricky. He was a control freak. And he was no fun. But Josh still liked him nonetheless.

Josh turned the camera on and started the recording. He angled it to show the road through the windshield, the highway to the airport according to the road signs. The camera then automatically refocused and showed the rain drops spattered over the glass in chaotic patterns. It was the beginning of the overcast days. Josh then aimed the camera lenses at Ricky who was driving the car.

“So... Emily Bridget?” Josh began.

“Yeah, what would you like to know?” Ricky asked, innocently. He was purposefully avoiding telling Josh anything specific about Emily until the day she arrived. He didn’t want to subject the poor girl to Josh’s blatant and relentless flirting. And if Josh had in his possession her email address, he would have made her suffer through it before she even met him. She probably wouldn’t come here at all if that happened. Now, as she was hopefully already here, she wouldn’t have much choice but to get used to Josh. Maybe she would even see and recognize the good qualities he has and give him a chance. After all, now that his girlfriend dumped him, he was again available. Not that having a girlfriend ever stopped him from being available to other girls. But now he was officially single.

“Who the hell is she, for starters?” Josh asked.

“We met online,” Ricky answered shortly. “She messaged me on Facebook.”

“A girl finally messaged you on Facebook? Score!” Josh commented, grinning. Ricky ignored that.

“She said she wanted to know more about what our team was doing. She’s an intern in some kind of scientific institute in D.C. She is voluntarily doing research on the crop circles phenomenon, studying it in an attempt to explain it, something like that,” Ricky clarified.

“So she’s a brainiac! The crop circles phenomenon? Did *she* put it like that?” Josh asked.

“A *social* phenomenon actually. She is trying to prevent people from getting delusional about the subject and make them consider the actual facts. Kinda like what we are doing. There’s no physical evidence that the circles aren’t human-made after all. And there has never been. So the interesting part here is the psychological reasoning behind why people are making the assumption.”

“Are you quoting her right now?” asked Josh.

“Kind of,” Ricky answered with a smile.

“So what does she plan on doing here anyway?” Josh asked.

“We'll take her to the fields, show her how the circles are made and stuff,” Ricky answered shortly, again not willing to give Josh any unnecessary details.

“And stuff? Yeah, that part is interesting. What kind of stuff are you planning to show her exactly, Ricky?” Josh asked and pushed the camera into his face for an extreme close-up. Ricky just gave him a look.

“Unlike you, Josh, I'm not planning to show her anything she'd be unwilling to see,” he said plainly. That made the desired effect. Josh pulled the camera away.

“Yeah, being a gentleman never works. You should know that by now,” Josh added.

“Oh, just fuck off, Josh,” Ricky said. Josh laughed. He liked it when Ricky allowed himself to use some foul language. He rarely did though.

Josh turned the camera around and focused it on his face.

“And this is a face of someone who is actually going to get laid tonight, ladies and gentleman,” he said with a staged pride but only half-joking. Getting laid was never a problem for Josh, or at least getting laid with a girl. Doing it with a boy was something he always wanted though, but he was scared of it too, practically terrified. He wanted to do it with the right person and he was surprisingly old-fashioned in that regard. Ricky was actually the kind of person best fit to Josh's ideals. But he wasn't sure if Ricky was even up to something like that or not. And quite frankly, he didn't really know how to find out.

“Turn it off! Now!” Ricky commanded. So Josh did.

Josh turned the camera on again. He was standing amidst a mass of moving people crowding the large space of the airport building. Ricky was standing in the distance, facing a bunch of people de-boarding at Gate 9 and Josh focused the camera on him. He looked visibly nervous as he was trying to find Emily's face among a crowd of people with mostly irritated and/or exhausted expressions.

“There's our boy, all grown up, meeting a girl...” Josh said fake-proudly to the camera. He zoomed in as a girl with a wide shining smile emerged from the crowd and approached Ricky.

“Here she is, apparently,” Josh commented, trying desperately not to show it in his voice that he was actually consumed with jealousy at this point. The girl was beautiful!

The camera captured Ricky greeting Emily, a little awkwardly, of course. It wasn't often that Josh saw Ricky interact with a beautiful girl. Josh couldn't even imagine Ricky making a move on a girl. He wondered if he ever did. Ricky then helped Emily with her bags and the two of them headed Josh's way.

"Oh, they see me! My cover is blown!" Josh said jokingly. He zoomed in on Emily as she was approaching and now it became even clearer that she was very attractive to say the least; lush dark curls, huge green eyes with long black eye-lashes much like ones on the mascara ads, full lips touched with rose-colored lipstick, a sick figure too. She was basically perfect, a dark-haired angel fallen from the sky. Josh felt the muscles in his chest tighten. If Ricky was into girls, this one was definitely going to steal his heart away. He wasn't sure he could allow that to happen.

He panned to Ricky who was staring at Emily at the moment, apparently thinking all the same thoughts; she was just too damn attractive.

"Oh, look at the way he's staring at her. It's love at first sight," Josh commented somewhat sarcastically. When Ricky and Emily got close to him, he turned the camera around and aimed it at himself.

"Okay, gotta hide the camera now before she snaps it out of my fingers and says 'no fucking photographs!'"

Josh took a wide shot of the living room as Ricky, Emily, Ann and Mike were all sitting around the coffee table, finishing pizza and having a heated crop circle related discussion. Mike and Ann joined the team shortly after a few of the former members left about a year ago. Since then they've become good friends with Ricky and Josh and were now irreplaceable.

"Well, for one thing, Doug Bower and Dave Chorley made headlines claiming it was them who started the thing in 1978," Ricky said, bringing in historic facts which he knew well. He's been completely obsessed with the subject throughout his teenage years and the passion didn't go away as he got older. "They used planks and ropes and they showed exactly how they did it and it was pretty convincing. I mean, we're doing it almost the same way now."

"Yeah, but after Bower and Chorley came clean the circles continued to appear, hundreds of them every year around the globe. That's when people started talking about aliens," Emily said. She knew her facts well too.

"Copycatting! Simple copycatting. It has nothing to do with aliens," Mike commented.

Josh focused the camera on Mike as he pulled Ann closer into his arms, not at all ashamed of showing affection in public. Josh then zoomed in on the various piercings and tattoos both of them had all over their bodies. He lingered on an ominous-looking snake coiling around Mike's bicep. Even though he really didn't like tattoos, this one was incredibly hot on Mike.

“Yeah, I agree with that, but still the circles were reported way before Bower and Chorley came onto the scene,” Emily replied. “It was just never in the public eye until the late seventies. Besides there is a theory that the British government actually paid Bower and Chorley to take responsibility so they could pull people's attention off of that subject and continue investigating it under wraps.”

“I'm confused, do you think aliens made the circles?” Ann asked bluntly.

“No, I don't. Personally, I don't think that it has anything to do with aliens. I'm just trying to understand why people are so drawn to make that assumption. I'm curious to the psychology behind that. What was it that made people connect these two things? Why aliens? Why not demons, or leprechauns, or chupacabra?”

“Because people like to believe in things. Some people assumed it was aliens and others believed them and told that story to others and so forth,” Ann said. “In actuality though it's just us, no aliens involved. Some people invented crop circles and others replicated them.”

“But why? Why are people still making the circles?” Emily asked. She was obviously passionate about the subject and had her own opinion about it too. “For example, your team, you're doing it to prove the point that you can create a complex crop circle design in one night and unless you tell them otherwise people will think it was aliens. But how did the circles appear in the first place and why are so many people still copying them until this day?”

“A lot of freaks out there, baby,” Josh said with a grin and zoomed in on Emily giving him a look.

“Yeah, cheers to that!” Mike exclaimed and raised his beer. Others raised theirs too.

“Cheers to making one hell of a circle tomorrow night,” Ricky added.

Everyone else cheered to that too, except for Emily who didn't drink. She was obviously taking this subject much more seriously than anyone else in this room, including Ricky who was an embodiment of seriousness. It was a little frustrating for her, but she still was glad she had a chance to become a part of the team, even if only for a couple of days.

Ricky noticed her frustration and hurried to say something, “Listen, maybe we'll know all the answers one day but until then we are just trying to have fun with it. It's like a sport, in a way. Once you made one circle you just want to make another one and another one. That's how it goes.”

Emily nodded and leaned back. “I get that.”

“You'll see for yourself tomorrow. It might not *seem* all that exciting but it's actually an amazing experience.”

“Yeah, you have to be there to understand the magic of it,” Mike said.

“Yeah, the magic is until you get shot in the ass,” Josh commented, still hiding behind the camera and preferring to focus it on everyone else instead.

Ricky gave him a look.

“That never happened,” Mike responded.

“Yeah Josh, you're gonna scare her.” Ann said.

“I'm not scared,” Emily replied.

“Good, Josh is just messing with you,” Ann said.

“I just want to be open about what she's getting herself into,” Josh countered.

“Don't listen to him. We've been doing it for a while now and it's pretty safe, especially when you know what you're doing.”

“Whatever,” Josh added, giving up.

“Yeah, it's gonna be a lot of fun. You'll see,” Ricky hurried to reassure Emily and touched her shoulder in a friendly way. He then stood up to collect all the empty pizza boxes and empty beer bottles and went to the kitchen for more. Josh also stood up and followed Ricky, keeping the camera trained on him.

“So, is this like your primary research field or something?” Ann asked Emily, trying to keep the conversation going.

“No, it's more of a side project really. I just use the institute facilities to pull some strings and get information. We have big archives so there's a lot to learn,” Emily explained.

“That's cool.”

Meanwhile Josh followed Ricky into the kitchen and zoomed in on him putting empty pizza boxes into the trash bin.

“Yeah, come on, show her what a tidy wuss you are. She'll probably like that,” Josh commented.

“Shut up, Josh,” Ricky hissed.

“So what do you think of her?” Josh asked. Ricky seemed reluctant to talk about her with him, especially in front of a camera.

“I don't,” he said plainly.

“Come on! You like her so much you won't even talk to me about her?”

Ricky didn't say anything to that, just rolled his eyes wearily. Today was one of those days when Josh's ability to irritate people was at its maximum. Or maybe Ricky's ability to tolerate him wasn't as strong today. Whatever it was, Ricky couldn't wait for Josh to stop talking.

"I like her too, you know," Josh said finally. He didn't, of course. He never really liked girls, although it never stopped him from sleeping with them, even if only for the sake of keeping appearances. Josh was always considered to be a womanizer, ever since high school. And it was hard to shake that image off now. Being with girls was his way of not letting anyone suspect he was gay. He was terrified that people might suspect. He couldn't even explain why. But the thought of publicly coming out of the closet was terrifying. Maybe it had to do with his father being a homophobe and being verbal about it too. Josh could remember his father saying things like he would rather have no son than have a homosexual one, imagine such a disgrace to have a *gay* son. Which is the reason why Josh was trying so hard to be independent in the first place. But there was also another reason. He simply didn't feel strong enough to face people's condemnation. He didn't think he could deal with it on his own. He needed someone to be there with him and hold his hand through it. Until then he'd rather stay in the closet, for now at least. "I wouldn't mind taking her for a ride as I am absolutely positively single tonight," he declared.

"Yeah, tell her you just got dumped. She'll probably like that," Ricky said copying Josh's trademark friendly asshole-ness; although it came off a little too bitter for it to pass as a joke. Then he took more beer from the fridge and went back into the living room, leaving Josh alone.

Josh zoomed in on Ricky as he sat down on the couch next to Emily. Emily was talking to Ann though and didn't seem to be really into Ricky.

"There's no way," Josh muttered to the camera.

Josh held the camera so that it was sticking just a little bit out of the door frame, getting a glimpse of the second floor bathroom which was right down the hallway.

The door to the bathroom was open and the camera captured Emily brushing her teeth. She was getting ready to go to sleep and was wearing pajama pants and a DC comics T-shirt, one she probably borrowed from Ricky.

"That is totally hot," Josh whispered to the camera, hiding his true feelings from the audience. He knew damn well that Ricky was going to watch this recording later and he was hoping to provoke him into showing his feelings, whatever they were. Josh was afraid that Ricky was into girls, into Emily to be exact. But there was only one way to be certain. He needed to make him jealous and he knew just the way to do it.

He stuck the camera all the way into the hallway, making it impossible for Emily not to notice it. He zoomed in on her breasts.

“Yeah, come to daddy, baby,” he said in a jokingly perverted tone. He then panned up to her face and she was looking at him.

“Busted!” Josh whispered, not at all ashamed. He kept on recording.

Emily spit out the foam from her mouth and looked at Josh again. There was something about that look. She wasn’t angry, no. She was up to something, Josh could tell.

“So, are we’re just gonna keep staring at each other?” he whispered to the camera but Emily could very well hear that too.

Suddenly, she rolled up the bottom of her T-shirt, flashing Josh, giving him a perfectly good view at her bare breasts. A second later she rolled her T-shirt back down and shut the bathroom door.

“Oh, my God!” Josh gasped. “Did that really just happen? Jesus...”

He turned the camera off to play it back and make sure he didn't make it all up in his head. This was way better than what he had expected. He was so showing this recording to Ricky tomorrow morning. This was awesome.

It was dark in the room when somebody turned the camera on and it wasn’t Josh because he was in the frame, sleeping on the couch peacefully.

The person holding the camera approached him to get a close-up of his face. Then a hand appeared in the frame; it was a female hand obviously, most likely Emily's. There was a black marker in her hand and she used it skillfully to draw a cute little mustache on Josh's face. Aw, he looked adorable with that fake mustache.

She zoomed out and then turned the camera off.

Josh got Ricky in focus as Ricky was sitting in front of his computer; a USB cord was stretched between the camera and Ricky's PC.

“Come on, it was right there in the root folder,” Josh yelled, impatiently.

He zoomed in on the computer screen as Ricky was browsing through the various video files in camera's memory, trying to find one Josh was referring to.

“There's nothing here. Nothing like what you said,” Ricky replied. He didn’t believe for a second that Emily actually showed Josh her breasts last night and let him record that too. It was probably just one of his jokes.

“It was right there,” said Josh angrily. He was eager to show Ricky what a slut Emily was. Of course he was covering his true intentions with the usual manly cockiness and the supposed desire to share with Ricky the image of Emily’s hooters.

“Josh, come on, there’s nothing here. It didn’t happen.” Ricky said.

“It happened! I’m telling you,” Josh yelled in frustration and then it dawned on him, “Wait a minute... Could she...? Did she sneak upon me last night and delete it?”

“Seriously?” Ricky asked and gave Josh a look. “Do you really think that she would actually get up in the middle of the night to sneak up on you and delete files from your camera? It’s a big stretch if you ask me.”

“She did. I’m telling you, she did!”

“Just admit it that she didn’t show you her breasts and we’ll drop the whole story,” said Ricky.

“She did! She did!” Josh protested.

“Did she really?”

“She did. Man, you gotta believe me,” Josh pleaded.

“I’m sorry but I just don’t believe you,” Ricky replied and stood up. He headed for the door.

“We gotta go,” Ricky said. “Go get dressed and wash that stupid thing off your face, will you? I’ll be waiting in the car.”

“What thing?” Josh asked, confused.

“That stupid mustache you’ve drawn on your face,” Ricky said and walked out of the room.

“You have five minutes,” he yelled from the hallway.

Josh walked out of the room too and headed for the bathroom. He approached a mirror and took a look at his reflection. There it was, a cute little mustache drawn with a black marker.

“What the fuck?” he hissed.

He put the camera down on the counter without turning it off and took a closer look at his face.

“That bitch!”

Josh aimed the camera at his face; he was using it as a mirror this time, checking if there was anything left of that stupid mustache. Black marker wasn't so easy to wipe off the skin. There was only a dark shade left now, just a little of it. But the skin on his upper lip was all red from rubbing.

"Is there anything left?" Josh asked Ricky who was driving the car. Ricky looked at his upper lip with a grin.

"No... Just some red skin," he said. "Why did you draw it anyway?"

"I didn't! I told you she did it. I'm gonna get her back, I'm telling you," Josh replied.

"For the record I don't believe for a second she did it. But even if she did, can't you just drop it?" Ricky asked. Josh could act so childish sometimes; it was hard to believe he was nearly twenty.

"Have we met? No!" Josh said. "I'm not gonna drop this. The bitch will get it."

"You're such a drama queen," Ricky said.

Josh didn't say anything to that, trying to ignore that comment altogether. He wasn't sure if Ricky was insinuating anything here or not. He probably wasn't.

Josh focused the camera outside the car on the huge Home Depot building.

"Who goes to Home Depot at eight thirty in the morning? The parking lot is almost empty. There's no one here," Josh said.

"That is exactly the point," Ricky replied and parked the car in one of hundreds of empty parking spaces.

Josh got Ricky in focus as he was walking towards the entrance and Josh followed him in.

"We're going to the Home Depot and there's nothing interesting about it," Josh sang to the camera in a silly manner.

Ricky turned to him and gave him a look.

"Turn it off!" he said.

"Yeah, yeah..."

Josh resumed recording and aimed the camera at Ricky, again. This time Ricky was deep into the process of picking out a ruler. As much as Josh enjoyed any opportunity to stare at Ricky's cute butt while he was bending down over the shelves and there was no one around to bust Josh staring at him, Ricky was comparing different models of rulers so meticulously that Josh was beginning to lose his patience.

“Come on, tell us what you're doing, keep us interested, entertain us, damn it,” Josh said as he was getting annoyed.

“Didn't I tell you to turn the camera off?” Ricky asked glaring at him.

“Come on, isn't this the kinda stuff we gotta document,” asked Josh.

“Picking out a ruler at Home Depot isn't quite the most interesting part,” Ricky replied. If he knew beforehand that Josh was gonna be such a pain in the ass following him around with that camera, he wouldn't have agreed to this documentary/vlog idea in the first place. Although knowing how Josh was he should have probably guessed that he was gonna be like this.

Josh approached Ricky and aimed the camera ridiculously close to his face.

“Tell us why do you need a ruler, Ricky?”

“I need a ruler to measure the geometrical pieces of our circle design,” Ricky said through gritted teeth and pushed the camera away. “Or otherwise it wouldn't be possible for us to keep the right proportions once we're out on the field.”

Ricky finally picked the right ruler and moved on to the next aisle. Josh followed him.

“Okay, now what?” Josh asked.

“Now you will turn the camera off!” Yelled Ricky.

“You're boring,” Josh replied.

“And you're annoying,” Ricky countered.

Josh turned the camera around so his face was now in focus.

“Do you think I'm annoying? I don't think you think I'm annoying,” he said in a silly voice.

This time when the recording was resumed the camera captured the plastic surface of a table and Josh and Ricky having breakfast at one of the outside tables of some small restaurant in town.

Ricky looked at the camera.

“It's recording,” he said positively sure that Josh hadn't turned it off.

“No, it's not,” Josh replied defensively.

“It is!”

“I just shut it down, man!” Josh exclaimed as if appalled.

"I can see the reflection of the LCD on the table's surface behind it," Ricky said, busting Josh's attempt to resume recording without him noticing it. If anything Ricky wasn't stupid. Josh knew that very well and was probably just trying to be annoying.

"No, you don't," Josh said continuing the charade anyway.

"Yes, I do!" Ricky yelled. The two of them were staring into each other's eyes for a second and then Ricky cracked a smile.

Josh smiled too. "Okay, you got me."

As much as Josh was annoying, Ricky had to admit that he could still make him smile sometimes, well most of the times actually. Between the two of them Josh was the one with a bubbly personality. Without him Ricky's life would be kinda dull, much more relaxed but still dull. Sometimes when Ricky would get fed up with Josh and start craving some alone time, he would make up a ridiculous excuse for him to leave, even if only for a couple of hours. He would enjoy the first thirty minutes or so of quietness and then would start missing Josh so badly that he would call him with a ridiculous excuse for him to come back.

When did the two of them get so close? They used to have completely separate lives before, doing stuff on their own, meeting only on Sundays to plan out a circle. Now the idea of doing anything on his own seemed ridiculous to Ricky. The two of them were always together.

Ricky finished his burger and looked at Josh.

"You're sure in a cheerful mood this morning, Mister *'I got dumped yesterday'*," Ricky said.

Josh grinned.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he replied.

"Really?"

"Really."

"So your girlfriend, Veronica, didn't just dump your lousy ass yesterday, and in the most miserable way...over a text?"

Josh shook his head no.

"What girlfriend? Never happened!" he said with an exaggerated sureness.

"Right..." Ricky replied sarcastically.

"Besides who cares about Veronica anyway when I have Emily in the house," Josh added. He wanted Ricky to think that he had his eye on her. Why wouldn't he? For all Ricky knew Josh was straight. Emily was definitely the kind of girl he would be interested in if he were into girls.

Ricky looked at him.

“Maybe I like her too you know,” he said.

“Yeah... I know,” Josh replied with a smirk. He already guessed as much. “That makes it even more interesting...the competition!”

“I don't like competitions,” Ricky said.

“That's because you suck at them, you never win,” said Josh. “I on the other hand win every time.”

“Oh, get over yourself,” Ricky replied and looked at him daringly. “This time I will win.”

“We'll see about that,” said Josh and looked at his friend even more daringly.

“I hate you, you know that?” Ricky asked.

“Yeah, that's the reason we've been best friends for the past two years, the mutual hatred.”

They both smiled.

“Come on, let's head home. We've got stuff to do,” Ricky said. He stood up and started towards his car.

“The game is on, man!” Josh yelled at him.

“Whatever.”

Josh crammed the remains of his burger into his mouth and stood up grabbed the camera and turned it off.

Josh stuck the camera a little bit outside of the bedroom door so he could get a glimpse of Ricky standing before Emily's door, visibly nervous and hesitant to knock.

He took a deep breath and knocked.

Emily opened the door.

“Hey...” Ricky said a little too loudly.

“Hey,” Emily replied.

“Listen, we'll be having a sort of briefing downstairs in about twenty minutes,” he said. “You're welcome to be a part of it. I mean, if you want to. Do you want to?”

“Oh, sure,” Emily said with a smile. She could tell that Ricky was nervous. She was very well aware of how beautiful she looked, the effect her body had on men, and this was definitely not her first encounter with an admirer.

“Awesome,” Ricky said. The awkward silent pause hung in the air.

“Okay, I’ll see you in a bit then,” he said.

“Sure.”

“Okay,” Ricky added, turned around awkwardly and headed downstairs.

Josh zoomed in on Emily following Ricky with her eyes, probably evaluating the amount of admiration he had for her and the chances he got. Or at least that was the interpretation of her thoughts made by Josh at that moment. Her real thoughts might have been quite different. Josh was afraid that she could genuinely like the guy.

And then she noticed him filming. He didn’t make a big effort hiding the camera after all. Her smile faded away at once and was replaced with pouted lips and raised eyebrows.

“You do realize I’m not gonna show you my breasts again, don’t you?” she asked.

Josh ducked his head back into the room but kept his arm stretched outside with a camera still recording her. She shook her head and went back into her room and shut the door.

The next time Josh resumed recording he zoomed in on the paper sheets that were scattered all over the coffee table in the living room. Those were the crop circle designs accompanied by copious notes and measurements in Ricky’s handwriting. The complicated designs were broken down into basic geometric shapes, like squares and triangles.

“So, how does it work? Why do we need ropes?” Emily asked. She was looking over the design scrupulously keen on understanding it down to its last detail, which Ricky thought was kinda flattering. This was where his intellectual skill was predominant over Josh’s looks.

Josh got both Ricky and Emily in focus. Ricky’s hands were busy sorting through the ropes of different size and colors while his eyes were trained on Emily. Ann and Mike were there too, helping Ricky sort through the abundance of ropes. Some of the ropes had markers on them, and numbered tags attached to them.

“Well, we could use the rulers instead, but to make things easier for all of us and to save us time on the field, which is essential, we usually prepare the ropes in advance,” Ricky explained. “They’re the exact lengths of each circle according to the design.”

“What he’s trying to say is...” Ann said with a smile, seeing that Emily didn’t quite grasp the concept.

“See these four dots here?” she asked Emily and pointed to the dots in the design.

Emily looked down at them. “Yeah.”

“That's how we start off. We measure the distance between them and put flags or a person in those places where the dots are. These four dots make a basic square. Everything else is put around that square so that it doesn't matter how complicated the design is, we can just break it down into the basic geometry elements that fit inside the square and put it all together in the end.”

“Okay...” Emily said, beginning to understand.

“So the yellow ropes are the sides of these triangles, the red ropes are the circle's semi-diameters. See these numbers here?”

Ann pointed out the numbers inside each circle on the design.

“Yeah,” Emily confirmed.

“Each rope has a tag on it with the same number so that we wouldn't have to go through the sheets in the dark trying to understand what goes where. It's easier this way not to mess up,” Ann explained.

“Did you ever mess up?” Emily asked, curious.

“Never happened,” Ann said, confident and proud of being in a team that can get things coordinated and done right, without screw-ups.

“It happened once actually,” Mike admitted. “We messed up the shapes pretty bad this one time...”

“Yeah? And what happened?” Emily asked.

“In the end we got the design that looked even better than the original,” Ricky said with a smile. Emily smiled too.

“So even if you mess up you're still gonna have a crop circle,” Ann said. “So it's a win-win situation.”

“Yeah,” Ricky affirmed.

“So, this is it, a couple of ropes and planks? This is all we need?” Emily asked looking around at a pretty simple selection of tools.

“Yeah,” Ricky said.

“There is more to it than it seems,” Ann added. “But you only learn about the pitfalls when you're out in the field. It's more about knowing exactly what to do than having sophisticated tools to do it with.”

“Yeah, but don't worry. We've been doing it for a while now. I mean we know what we're doing and we'll teach you.”

“You're in good hands,” Mike added and they all smiled.

Ricky finished packing ropes into his backpack and took a final look at the design.

“Everybody ready?” he asked the group.

“Yes!” Ann and Mike shouted out at the same time, enthusiastically.

“Yeah!” Emily said after them.

“Okay, let's go make a crop circle then,” Ricky said and everybody cheered.

“Let's do this!”

Everybody took the rest of the stuff and started heading out of the house.

“The wicked aliens are on the mission again,” Mike added playfully. They all smiled at that.

“Yeah, I was thinking about getting us all alien masks. You know if anyone sees us...” Ricky said.

“That would be rich,” Mike replied.

Josh turned on the camera and focused it on Ricky who was driving the car. It was past ten now and it was getting really dark.

Josh panned to Emily. She was sitting on the passenger seat next to Ricky. Mike and Ann were sitting in the back seat with Josh.

Josh panned back to Ricky.

“Hey, Ricky?” Josh enquired. Ricky turned to him, already annoyed.

“What?” Ricky asked.

“Are we there yet?” Josh asked and laughed out loud at his own joke. The guys smiled too.

“Josh, you're impossible,” Ann said.

“Yeah, yeah,” Josh replied.

“Turn the damn thing off, please,” Ricky pleaded. “Save the battery.”

“I'm just checking the night vision. You can't blame me for taking my job seriously,” Josh countered.

He turned the night-vision mode on and off a couple of times and it was working just fine. Ricky didn't say anything back, just kept his eyes on the road. He was stuck in a position of an intermediate between Emily and the group, especially one particular part of a group named Josh. Ricky brought Emily in, invited her to take part in this, after all. But that wasn't quite the problem. The problem was that he was acting differently with Emily around. Same actually went for Mike and Ann, but they weren't around constantly for it to become apparent. But Emily was a houseguest now and Ricky wanted to appear friendly and be a good host of course, but more than anything he wanted to appear intelligent and mature.

It was when he was with Josh alone that he would allow himself to be silly and participate in Josh's sometimes ridiculous escapades. To put it simply, when he was with Josh he allowed himself to appear foolish and stupid and not to care about people's opinions, well as long as he had Josh by his side. And having Emily around the house, he couldn't allow himself to do that. Emily was older for one thing and she was clearly an intelligent type. Ricky wasn't sure that she would appreciate the kind of humor Josh had. He didn't want her to think that this whole crop circles thing was just a joke for them. He wanted her to take them seriously.

So ever since she arrived Ricky was trying to mold Josh into behaving respectfully, limit the number of pranks and subdue the general level of foolishness. But the more he was trying to do so, the more rebellious and annoying Josh was getting and it was harder for Ricky not to get angry with him.

Josh zoomed in on Mike's face in night-vision mode.

"Your face looks scary in the night-vision, man," Josh said.

Mike gave him a look.

"You are impossible, seriously," Ann said.

"Yeah, but you all love me though," Josh countered, damn sure of that fact. The guys snickered. Josh turned the camera around getting his own face in focus.

"They love me, they really love me!" Josh said into the camera.

"This documentary is not about you, Josh," Ricky said in preaching superior tone and regretted it at once. He'd better not say anything. Now Josh was gonna take this and turn it around as usual.

Josh looked into the camera and shook his head.

"Oh yes, it is!"

The camera captured the darkness. There was nothing visible on the screen until Josh turned the night-vision on.

They were making their way through a field of ripe wheat, following Ricky's lead. Emily was walking next to Ricky, followed by Ann and Mike; Josh was lagging behind making sure he got them all in focus. The air was crisp and cool and Josh was glad he didn't forget to pick up his coat, the way he did last time and got chilled to the bone because of his own stupidity. This time he was feeling a lot warmer. If only there was something he could do about the bugs. There were so many of them here that the insect repellents proved ineffective.

They were all walking along the thin lines the tractor's wheels left in the wheat, so that way they would not make any additional damage to the crops. It was important that people, who would be inspecting or just looking at the circle later, did not have a direct clue to the fact that the circle was man-made.

Ricky suddenly stopped and ducked down. It seemed like he noticed something in the distance.

"Get down, you guys! Get down!" he commanded in a loud whisper.

There was a truck driving down the nearby road and its bright headlights were piercing through the darkness, threatening to expose the group.

"Okay, it's just a truck," Ricky said.

The truck's headlights illuminated the part of the field where they were for a second and then it drove away, leaving them in a complete darkness again.

"Okay, all clear. Moving on," Ricky said and stood up. Emily moved closer to him.

"So if we get caught we get arrested, right?" she asked.

Ricky looked at her. "If we get caught, yeah," he admitted. They were trespassing on private property after all.

"Did you ever get caught?" she asked.

"Almost... once," Mike responded in a loud whisper. He looked at Ricky, silently suggesting him to tell the story.

"Yeah, we had this amazing circle design..." Ricky began.

Josh zoomed in on Ricky and Emily, putting them both in a frame. The two of them did look good together on screen.

"And we wanted to try a bigger field for it. But the farmer who owned the land saw us," Ricky continued. "He started chasing us around the field with a rifle and everything."

"Seriously?" Emily asked a little agitated. Ricky was grinning though, proud of himself for having that kind of adventure.

“Yeah, we ran away before he was able to get to us. We never finished the circle though. So, now we're trying to get information about who owns a field before we step on it. And we sometimes use the fields we've already been to. Old Randy who owns this field is turning seventy eight this year...”

“Seventy nine,” Mike corrected.

“Yeah, he sleeps tight at night. There's no worry,” Ricky finished.

Emily smiled. “Okay, that's good to know.”

“Although, he's not gonna be too happy when he sees the circle in the morning. The farmers get pissed,” Mike commented.

“Of course they get pissed, we're destroying the crops,” Ann explained.

“The damage we do is insignificant. They'll survive,” Ricky said in an attempt to justify the activity. In actuality of course the farmers would have done better without the damage, but some of them enjoyed the publicity. So it wasn't all that bad. “Okay, I think here is a good spot. What do you think?”

The crew all stopped and looked around.

“Looks good enough to me,” said Ann and everybody nodded in approval.

“Okay then,” Ricky said. “Let's get started.”

He took ropes out of his backpack and handed some of them to both Mike and Ann.

“Mike, you go make the ones on the rear and I'll be doing the parting in the center,” Ricky said.

“Kay,” Mike said and got to it.

Ricky, Mike and Ann all seemed very coordinated in their actions and they all knew exactly what they were doing. Emily on the other hand seemed a little lost.

“So, what are we doing?” she asked.

Mike unraveled one of the green ropes. Ricky held one end of it in his hand and Mike, holding the other end in his, went away, stretching the rope between them. Ann followed Mike, taking two of the planks and leaving one to Ricky.

“Here where I'm standing that's the center of the big circle you saw on the design sheet and this is also a point where two sides of a square connect,” Ricky explained to Emily. “This green rope here is exactly the length between that center and the center of the neighboring circle which is also the opposite diagonal point in the square.”

Emily smiled, having difficulty imagining such a structure.

“Okay, if you say so.”

“Everything else is done around these two points because it's just easier to break things down into geometry shapes inside the square,” Ricky added.

The green rope Ricky was holding stretched out and tightened.

“Done! Let it go,” Mike shouted out in a loud whisper and Ricky let go of the rope. Josh zoomed in on Mike and Ann standing in the distance, doing their thing.

“Okay, can you stand here?” Ricky asked Emily.

Josh zoomed out as Ricky was putting Emily in the exact place where he was standing just a second ago and handed her one end of a red rope.

“Hold this,” he asked and Emily grabbed the end of the rope.

“This rope is the radius of our circle,” Ricky explained. Emily read the marker tagged to it.

“Rope three,” she read.

“Yeah, that's the one,” Ricky said.

“Don't you need to check against the design or something?” she asked.

“No, I remember it perfectly,” Ricky said.

She nodded. “You must have a pretty good memory.”

“When it comes to circles, yes,” Ricky said. “Well, I design them. I'm bound to remember what they look like.”

He took his modernized plank-thing that looked more like a small version of a snowboard with *therealcropcircles.com* printed on its surface along with some colorful geometric design. There was a thin rope attached to both ends of that plank so Ricky could lift it up each time after pressing the wheat to the ground with his foot and repeat the operation.

“Okay, now I'm just gonna start pushing the wheat down,” he explained. “And you have to turn around to follow me so that the rope won't wind around you.”

Emily smiled. “Okay. I think I got it.”

Ricky started pressing the wheat down to the ground simply by stepping on the plank with one foot, lifting it up and moving it forward to repeat the same again and again. The flocks of wheat were bending down without breaking and were laid on the ground carefully and in order. One flock of wheat would help pushing down the next one and so on. After Ricky was done with one spot, he

would move on and leave behind him a nicely-flattened coating of golden brown stems on the ground.

Josh zoomed in on how perfectly the wheat stems were bent and how amazing the created path looked among others untouched stems that were still standing upright.

Ricky made a full circle around Emily once and now it was a path in a shape of a large circle but still not hollow inside. The wheat inside the circle needed to be pushed down as well. The way to do it was for Ricky to start going inwards, into the circle in a spiral, shortening the distance between him and Emily as he went on, and bending more and more wheat on his way in.

“That's it. That's the whole process,” he commented. “It's not rocket science.”

“Yeah, I guess I had to see it to realize it wasn't that hard after all,” Emily admitted.

Ricky smiled and kept going, holding one end of the rope and Emily was holding another.

“It's the complexity that dazzles people,” he began. “If you have five or six circles in the design people start thinking that it was impossible to make it by hand and in a short time period. And the reality is that it doesn't really matter how many circles you have in a design, it's all manageable.”

“I see.”

“There are only five of us doing it now,” Ricky added. “Well, four of us making the circle and one lazy ass filming it.”

“Ha, ha... Very funny,” Josh commented sarcastically. He was a good boy so far, not disrupting the process. It seemed like it was about time for him to start doing something.

“We'll be done in about an hour and a half,” said Ricky. “That's all it takes.”

The moment Ricky went away to mark a center of another mini-circle and left Emily to hold the end of another, this time orange rope, Josh approached her.

He got a close-up on her face as it was serious and thoughtful while her eyes were looking into the distance. She then noticed him recording and her expression changed.

“Are you gonna be following me with that camera all the time?” she asked.

“Yes, I am,” he admitted, plainly. Josh wouldn't be Josh if he was ever ashamed about the things that were coming out of his mouth.

“Cause it's very annoying,” Emily clarified.

“That's not my problem.”

“You're very disrespectful, you know that?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he said and continued filming her. “I’ve been told that several times.”

“So maybe you should do something about it then?” she suggested.

“Nope, I don’t think so,” he answered. “I am what I am. And I like myself this way. And I think you like me this way too.”

She raised her eyebrows but didn’t say anything back to that. This conversation sounded more like a flirt in spite of what they were saying. There was chemistry between them, undeniably. Girls like Emily liked jerks and Josh knew that. And he knew exactly what he needed to do to keep Emily away from Ricky.

“So tell me something…” he began.

“I have a boyfriend,” Emily said before he even managed to ask her that question.

“No, you don’t. Do you think I didn’t check your Facebook status?” Josh replied with a smirk.

“Oh my God! You’re like a stalker,” she said almost indignantly but not quite. The corners of her lips were still lifted in amusement. She was finding him entertaining at the very least.

“That turns you on, doesn’t it?” he asked in a jokingly seductive low voice.

“Get over yourself,” she replied and allowed herself to smile only a little bit, barely noticeable but noticeable nonetheless. She looked away in an ostentatious attempt to end this “unpleasant” conversation. Josh turned the camera to where she was looking and stumbled upon Ricky looking back at them. He sure noticed that the two of them were talking.

Josh panned back to Emily’s face.

“He doesn’t have a chance, doesn’t he?” Josh asked.

“That’s not a nice thing to say. Aren’t you supposed to be best friends or something?” she asked without answering his question.

“Yeah, we are best friends,” Josh said. “That’s why I’m looking out for him. And you’re not the girl for him. You’re not one to mess with.”

“You got that part right,” she simply answered.

“I always do. Girls are like open books for me, believe me. It’s a gift,” he said. His gift was actually in being indifferent to their charms and having the upper hand with his own charm over them.

“And guys are like open books for me as well,” Emily countered with a grin. “That’s a gift.”

“That's what makes it interesting, isn't it?” Josh asked looking straight into her eyes. Emily was looking back into his eyes daringly.

“Josh, I think it's time you give Mike and Ann some screen time, okay?” Ricky shouted in a loud whisper, interrupting an intense moment between them.

“Yeah, yeah, I'm on it,” Josh said and zoomed in on Emily's face for a second before starting away from her, but still keeping her in focus though as she followed him with her eyes.

Josh turned on the camera and focused it on Mike and Ann creating their part of the circle. The process was pretty much the same and the two of them were a darn good team, so it wasn't gonna take them long to finish it.

Josh panned from Mike to Ann.

“How's it going, you guys?” he asked.

Ann looked at him, a little annoyed that he was not helping, not really, since Ann didn't really count his loitering about with a camera as help.

“We're about done, Josh. Piss off,” she said.

“I'm documenting the thing, that's my job,” Josh countered.

“Piss off anyway. I don't remember signing up for this documentary thing.”

Josh zoomed in on her.

“Well, you're gonna have to talk to Ricky about that,” said Josh.

“Turn the thing off, I mean it!” Ann persisted.

Mike gave Josh a look. Mike wasn't a small guy. He could make Josh do it if he had to.

“Okay, okay, chillax!” Josh said. “This is about as interesting as it's gonna get anyway.”

He turned the camera off.

The next time the recording resumed, the camera captured everyone putting equipment back into the car and getting ready to leave.

Josh panned to Emily who was standing aside, looking back at the field. The crop circle they've created was hardly even visible from this spot downhill but it was there nonetheless. The clouds in the sky had finally parted and the moonlight was coming through now. The wind was spreading waves over the field and the wheat looked much like the surface of water. The wheat ears

were glimmering in the faint light, everywhere but in the middle of the field, there where the dark gap was. That gap was the circle design. The only way to see it properly was from the air and in the day time.

Ricky put the last of the things in the car and shut the trunk.

“Okay, great job, you guys! Let's get going,” he said.

They all started to get into the car.

“Do we get to see how it looks? Like one of those aerial shots or something?” Emily asked.

Ricky looked at her, realizing that she probably was very anxious to see the result of their work. He remembered his own first crop circle and how anxious he was to see how it turned out.

“Well, we don't really have the equipment,” he explained. “So, we'll have to wait until somebody else does the shot, like a newspaper or some crop circle enthusiast.”

Josh zoomed in on Emily's face as she looked a little bit disappointed.

“We'll get the shot, don't worry,” Mike tried to cheer her up. “There's lots of UFO freaks out there. They are putting out photos all the time. New circles attract them like a moth to a flame. They are obsessed with it.”

“Oh, okay,” Emily said. She was beginning to understand all of it. “We'll wait then. I guess it's even more exciting that way, knowing that somebody else is gonna be taking a picture.”

“Trust me, it's gonna look great,” Mike added.

“Yeah, we did a great job,” Ricky commented. “Come on, guys, get in.”

From the looks of it, Josh had set the camera up onto one of the top shelves in the bathroom, next to shampoo bottles and such. He apparently put it so that it wouldn't strike the eye directly and at the same time would get the shower cabin in full focus.

After about fifteen minutes of unchanged picture, Emily walked in and locked the door behind her. Crooning some song, she looked at herself in the mirror; she looked good with her untamed dark hair flowing around her shoulders.

She started getting undressed, taking her top off first. But as she was doing so she almost providently turned away from the camera as if she knew somehow that she was being recorded at the moment.

She turned the water in the shower stall on and then stepped out and turned around to face the camera, covering her breasts with her arm.

She approached it and looked straight at it.

“There's no fooling me, Josh,” she said with a grin. “You gotta do better than that. Sorry!”

She took a towel and threw it over the camera.

Josh aimed the camera on himself.

“So, what do you think?” he whispered, addressing whatever audience.

He panned the camera down to show off how nicely he was dressed and smoothly shaven too. His hair was combed, so he really looked neat and gorgeous.

“Good, ah? She has no chance, does she? She's not gonna be able to resist all that. The girl is so screwed,” he said with a smile.

He put the camera down and adjusted his outfit while standing in front of the mirror. He took the camera then and got his face back in to focus.

“I'm making her the Double Tomato Bruschetta,” he said and grinned. “If you guys have no idea what the hell that is, believe me, that's just fucking amazing.”

He couldn't stop smiling, imagining how the evening was going to go. There was no way in hell Emily would not fall for his charms. This was a side of him she hadn't seen before and he was sure she was going to love it.

“Here we go,” he exclaimed and turned off the camera.

The camera was set on the kitchen counter and focused on the fancy-looking nicely-decorated dinner table, with candles burning and everything. Emily was sitting at the table, enjoying the meal.

Josh put some more of that delicious-looking Bruschetta on his plate and took it to the table. He sat down opposite of Emily.

She noticed the camera, of course.

“What's up with you and the camera?” she asked with a smile. She wasn't a bit surprised that he turned it on.

“I'm a cameraman,” Josh answered plainly and with a smile too. “My camera and me, we're a team.”

“Do you have to document everything?” she asked.

He leaned closer to her and said, “*You*, I have to document.”

“Oh yeah? All of me?” she asked, teasingly.

“The more of you, the better,” he replied with a grin. The evening was going splendidly. The bird was in the cage now.

“I don't think I would allow that,” Emily said.

“I think you would,” Josh replied. “It's very enjoyable.”

She smiled.

“So, your parents are divorced,” she dropped the subject of the camera and sex tapes and moved on to what they were discussing before he turned it on.

“Yeah, they split up a couple years ago. I don't really give a damn. They have their own lives, I have mine. I like to be independent. And they have no problem with that too.”

“I wish I had the same attitude about my parents splitting,” she admitted.

Josh seemed reluctant to talk about serious things. So he said, “Okay, I know a better topic for conversation.”

“Shoot,” Emily agreed.

“How many boyfriends did you have?” Josh asked.

Emily grinned. “How many did you have?”

“How many boyfriends did I have? Well, let me count...” he joked about the subject, even though it wasn't easy for him to joke about this, because he actually never had a boyfriend, but that information he couldn't confide in anyone.

She just smiled.

“That's a lame one,” she commented. Luckily for Josh she had no idea he was actually gay. He was good at his game; he was, no matter the motives.

“You're smiling though,” he said. She *was* smiling all evening long. If anything, girls always enjoyed a guy with sense of humor.

“How many girlfriends did you have?” she corrected herself.

“I asked first,” he said.

“Fair enough,” she replied and made a dramatic pause, pretending to calculate thousands. Josh was waiting for an answer patiently.

“Okay, five,” she said. “But I've only slept with three of them.”

Josh smiled. "Okay. You're honest. I like that."

"So? How many did you have?" she persisted.

"Five...But I've only slept with seven of them," he said.

She smiled.

"Okay..."

They took a silent pause just looking at each other while finishing their meals. Emily looked like she was enjoying the meal, even though she didn't think she would initially. Josh wasn't as simple as he appeared, she could see that now. And he could tell the same about her as well.

"This is actually really good," Emily said, referring to the Bruschetta. "Where did you learn to cook?"

"My parents were never home," Josh began, seriously. It was a good strategy to give the opponent a chance to see the real him occasionally and tell the truth. This way she wouldn't detect that he was lying about the rest of it. "I was hanging out a lot with our chef."

"Your family had a chef?" she asked, amused.

"Yeah, we did. But he was more like a father to me. He taught me to cook, among other things," Josh said. "He died a couple years ago, a heart attack."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Emily, warmly.

"It's okay. Without him around I've learned to do it on my own. It's better that way. I think he would have been proud of me, not being dependent on my parents' money, you know," he said.

"I think he would," she replied. A small silent pause hung in the air for a moment.

"Well, anyway, I have many talents," he said with a grin, moving away from the serious topics.

"You do, don't you?" she replied with a smile.

"Yeah! I'm good with cameras, computers. I'm good at cooking, cleaning around the house, gardening..." Josh began counting down a number of his talents.

"Gardening, really?"

He nodded and continued.

"I could be a mechanic, I'm good with cars. I could be a musician, I play guitar well. Also, I'm a great kisser... and I'm good in bed," he finished.

"Okay, I'll take your word on that one," she commented.

“You don't have to.”

A sound of the front door being opened distracted both of them. They looked in the direction of the hallway.

Ricky appeared in the doorway, looked at the two of them having a seemingly lovely time together, something that he didn't anticipate, or he did, but he didn't want to admit it until he saw it with his own eyes.

“Oh, it's a nice dinner thing you guys have here,” he said.

“Yeah, Josh was trying to impress me with his cooking,” Emily said, trying to make the situation less awkward. Somehow the two of them thought that he was gonna be out longer or maybe the time just flew by because they both were enjoying it. Anyway, Ricky was back home and now it was a little awkward.

“Yeah, he does that. Cook I mean,” Ricky said. Josh had cooked for Ricky on numerous occasions.

Ricky kept looking over the two of them, obviously jealous, very jealous.

“Yeah...” he added having nothing else to say. And it began to get a lot more awkward.

“Come join us,” Emily suggested finally.

“No, thanks,” Ricky replied. “I grabbed some pizza on my way home. I'm not really hungry.”

He took a couple more seconds to look at the two of them before turning around to leave.

“I'll be in the study,” he said and walked away.

“Okay,” Emily said.

Emily and Josh waited for Ricky to go upstairs. They didn't begin to talk until they heard the sound of the door being shut close.

“That wasn't very nice of us,” Emily said to Josh, in a whisper.

“He'll get over it,” Josh said. “He always does.”

“Aren't you guys supposed to be best friends? How exactly does it work?” Emily asked.

“It's a competition, fair and square. I told him that you're not a girl for him,” Josh explained.

“And how do you know that?”

“I just know. I have a gift, remember?” he clarified, sort of.

She got back to her meal, not wanting to get into the details of men's friendships. Apparently there was something she was not understanding about the two of them.

“Okay then. I'll just leave it between the two of you,” she said.

Josh stood up and approached the camera.

“He'll be fine,” Josh replied.

He reached for the camera.

“I better save some memory of this for later,” he said and the camera caught Emily's grin before shutting down.

Josh turned the camera on and skillfully focused it on both him and Emily as the two were lying in bed together, kissing passionately and ready for more.

Emily pulled away from his lips and looked at him, seriously.

“No camera!” she said.

“Come on, it'll be fun,” Josh replied. “I promise you'll like it.”

“I said no,” she persisted.

“Okay, okay, next time then,” said Josh with a grin.

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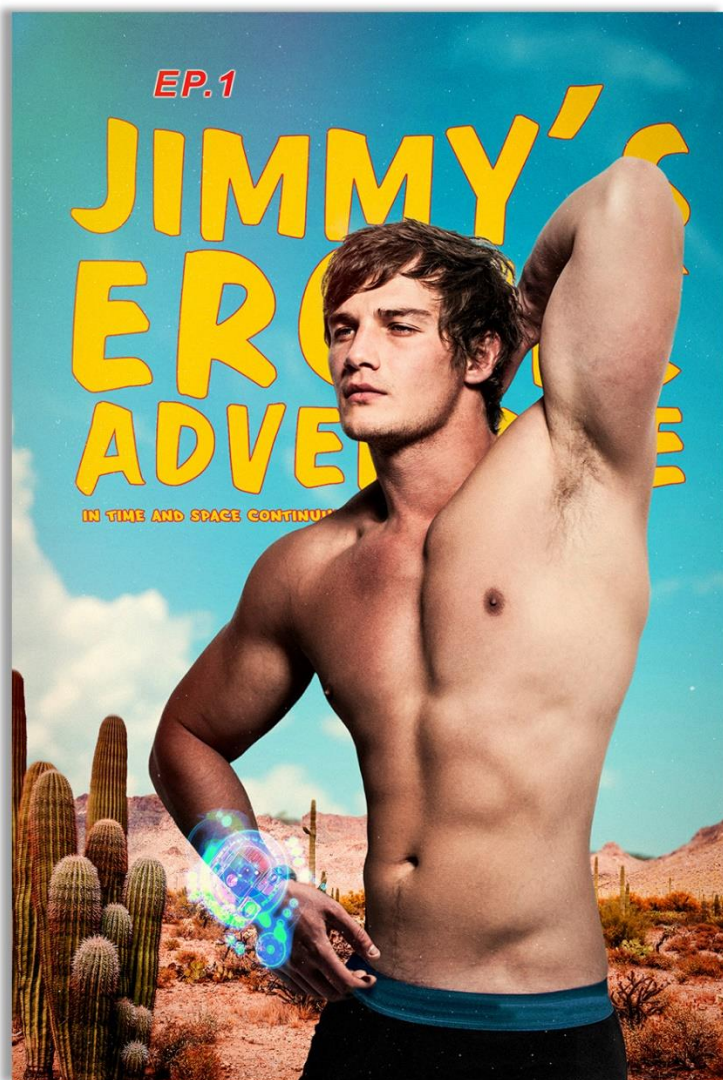


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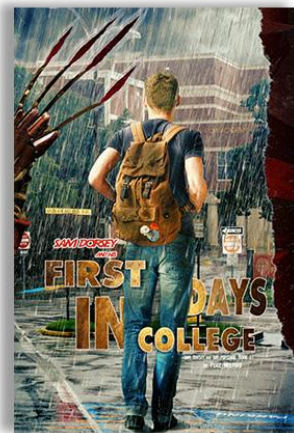
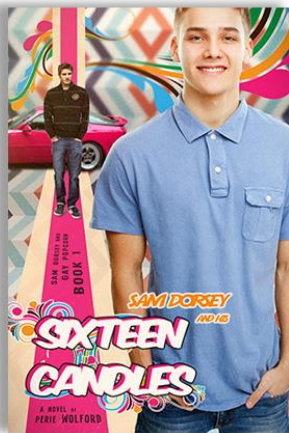
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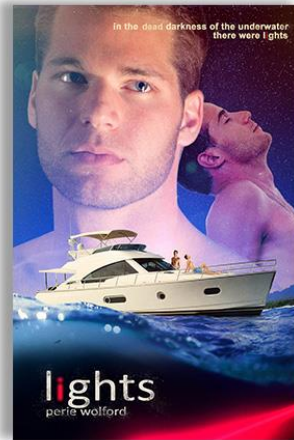
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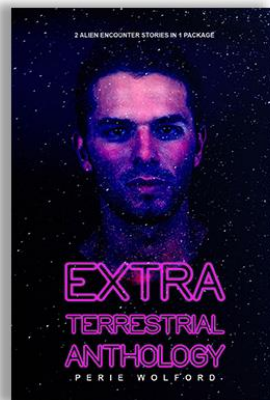
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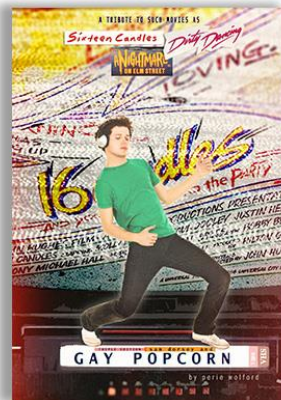


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