

Boy Tackles Girl

Josh Alletto

When I tackled Jenny Moriarty outside of her father's bakery on Fifth Street, she was wearing a four foot-by-three foot foam-rubber suit shaped like a wedge of hot pink birthday cake. There was a hole for her face and the wedge part hung off of her like a clumsy fish tail. Her arms stuck straight out the front and made her walk like a mummy. Jenny worked at the bakery with her father after school and on the weekends and I had it so bad for Jenny I would have done anything to get her to notice me. And I knew Jenny hated Alex Bowlin who also worked at the bakery because his father and Mr. Moriarty were college roommates. Alex Bowlin, who had worn his 20th Anniversary Star Trek T-shirt to school every Friday for an entire year. Alex Bowlin, who sat next to me in Mrs. Robert's freshman English class popping his pimples, raindrops of his tapioca slime soaring from his face to my desk. And Alex Bowlin, whom Mr. Moriarty dressed up in the foam rubber suit every Saturday and had to wave to cars and passing pedestrians. Had I known it was Jenny adorning the costume instead of Alex, who usually wore it, I would have never jumped out of the bushes across the street from the bakery, ran across traffic and dove from the curb to the sidewalk where I hung in the air like Superman, my arms stretched out to grab the cake suit. When I hit, it was like every noise, the cars in the street, the customers in the bakery, everything was one giant pulse wave of sound and it made my ears pop and my head ache. I hit her from behind and we flew forward so fast I feared we would slide forever, round and round the world. Unfortunately, friction got the best of us and Jenny's two front teeth fell forward onto the concrete and made a scrapping noise like a hacksaw as they slid across the sidewalk, pushing back up into her gums, filling her mouth with the loose-change taste of blood and she spit a bubbly mouthful of it onto the ground.

I rolled off and stood over the cake. I still thought it was Alex.

I had got him so good and it felt good and it was all good. The cake remained face down, unable to roll over in the massive suit that now looked like a giant pink shark's fin sticking out from a giant pink shark swimming under the sidewalk. Then I heard her start crying, wailing and struggling to catch her breath. I bent over, hands on my knees, and noticed it was Jenny. The blood was filling her mouth and it came out in waves every time she tried to say something, but she only coughed and the blood looked thick and sticky like a melted piece of candy. Her upper lip curled up a bit and I could see where the two front teeth had chipped when they hit the concrete, the little points that hadn't been pushed all the way up into her gums stuck out like little spider fangs. Small specs of white floated in blood beneath her.

And now watch closely because this next part happened so fast you might miss it.

I stood to run away, but kept my eyes fixed on Jenny whose cheek was resting on the concrete, and as I leaned forward to run, just as I turned my head, Mr. Moriarty stuck out his arm and I ran right into it, his thick hairy wrist colliding with my throat and I flew up into the air and came down with my back parallel to the sidewalk. And a crowd had gathered and Jenny was screaming and her father reached down and with one hand lifted me up into the air. I thought he was going to kill me. I saw Jenny crying on the ground, her pretty face forever mangled, and the accusing faces of the crowd around me and I kinda wished for a second he would kill me. But he didn't. He dropped me instead. I don't know, maybe he noticed how badly hurt Jenny really was. I didn't stop to see. I landed on my feet and took off, and I don't know, but I think I might have blown it with Jenny Moriarty.