

Chapter 5 - Boy meets Girl

Though large, white puffy clouds blew a warm, brisk breeze through the tall palm and coconut trees within Florida International University's campus – most of the first year students, who had just started attending this week, were either too involved in trying to get adjusted to being a college freshman or still trying to find out what life in Miami was all about, to even notice.

"Wow," Tom exclaimed, brushing the hair out of his eyes to take a better look as a thin, olive-skinned female approached the table he and his dorm mate occupied near the Student Lounge entrance. "Can you believe it, Chad? The girl heading toward us is a 'babe'."

Chad turned and briefly stared at his friend for a second, then shook his head. "Tom. Isn't this the fiftieth female you've said that about? And we only became roommates last Monday."

"I suppose so," Tom acknowledged. Somehow he managed to maintain his child-like grin. "Does it matter?"

"Sort of," Chad replied. He picked up his Coke and taking a long, refreshing sip. "It's unrealistic. There is no possible way that every single girl you happened to run across could be a babe. ... Didn't they have any females back at Calabunga, Illinois, or wherever it was you came from?"

"Yeah. They did," Tom replied, trying to ignore his friend as he savored the girl's waist-length, dark brown hair. "And the town was called Potomac."

"Oh. My bad. So you were raised where GM makes Pontiacs."

Tom presented Chad a dirty look, then sighed. "For at least the fifth time this week, Chad, they don't make Pontiacs in Potomac. ... In fact, there's not even a GM factory anywhere within a hundred miles of the place."

Chad chuckled. He seemed to enjoy getting under Tom's skin.

"So you really think this one's a babe, even though she's no where near being a 36-24-36?"

"A what?" Tom appeared to be puzzled.

"A 36-24-36. ... That's what most men like, isn't it?"

"Yes. If you're referring to her figure."

"I am," Chad said, trying not to laugh in his face. "What do you think I was talking about - her dress or shoe size?"

"At first, I wasn't really sure." Tom said, shifting his position so he stare into Maria's dark, romantic eyes as she passed by.

"Well hello, sweetheart. You're new here. Aren't you?"

"Well, hello yourself," Maria replied, coming to a halt. "And whom might you be?"

"I'm Tom," Tom said, partially tripping on his feet as he attempted to stand up. "Tom Becker. And that's Chad. ... Chad Buckingham," he added, pointing to his friend, who was still sitting.

'Oh?" Maria reached to shake Tom's hand. "I'm Maria. Maria Sauterel. And you're right, I am new here. ... Like everyone else, I just started my freshman year this week."

"Don't feel bad. You're not alone, Maria. ... We're both freshmen, too."

"Really?" Turning toward Chad, she unexpectedly him a wink. "You know, your friend's cute. I like that in a boy."

Tom rolled his eyes in disbelief. "Yeah. Maybe. I never really noticed."

"I'm sure, you wouldn't."

"It really doesn't matter anyway," Tom said, now trying to recapture Maria's attention. "If you ever went out with him, you'd quickly find out that he's not nearly as good with girls as I am."

"Is that a fact?" Maria replied, trying not to chuckle.

"Yes. It really is. You see, Maria. I started dating even before I turned twelve So, over the years I've learned how to treat a woman."

Putting her hand across her mouth, Maria couldn't stop herself from laughing this time. The comment Tom just made had been the most ridicules thing she had heard in ages.

"Would you like to sit and spend a few moments with us?" Tom asked, apparently obvious to Maria's response.

“Well. I don’t know,” Maria said, starting to toy with him. “You just may be too much of a man for such an inexperienced girl like me. ... Maybe I’d better settle for someone ordinary, like your friend, Chad.”

Tom stared at his friend and frowned. “No. Believe me. Chad’s a nice guy, but he’s really not your type. ... In fact, I don’t think he even likes women.”

Chad’s cheeks instantly turned a bright shade of red.

“Hey! I like women,” he replied, bouncing his eyes between both the two of them. “I’m just not interested in getting into a relationship at the moment. I’ve got my studies I need to concentrate on.”

“And who said anything about getting into a relationship?” Tom countered.

Maria wondered how Chad was going to reply.

“You did ... you want to be a Romeo, dork.”

As Tom stared at Chad, his face soon exhibited the expression of a bulldog about to growl. Then all of a sudden, he quietly turned to face his potentially new girlfriend.

“Just you never mind him, Maria. We’ve got better things we could be doing,” Tom declared, as he tried to calm himself down. “Would like to go with me to see what movie the student center is going to be playing this weekend?”

Maria looked at him and smiled, though it was only a small one. “I don’t believe so, Tom. I really need to be getting a few of my notes together for my upcoming literature class. ... So, if you don’t mind. I think I just hang around here and visit with Chad for a while .”

Tom stepped back and glared at her, as his insides quietly exploded. *This can’t be right. I mean. What did I do wrong?* “Well, OK. If that’s what you’d prefer.” He then took a step toward the outer courtyard, before turning around. “How about a game of putt-putt this Saturday with me ?”

“I’d really like to, Tom,” Maria lied, in an attempt to avoid hurting his feelings - again. “But, I’ve already made plans. ... Sorry.”

Tom nodded, then walked away. ... Despite her efforts, Maria could tell that he’d been hurt.

“Don’t worry. He’ll get over it,” Chad interjected before she had a chance to face him.

“What?”

“I said, Don’t worry about it. He’ll get over it,” Chad repeated, as Maria told a seat next to him. “After all, you’re talking about a guy who must have called at least 50 girls ‘Babe’ this week alone.”

Maria laughed, revealing a bright sparkle deep within her eyes. “Is the kid that desperate?”

Chad slightly nodded as he picked up his notebook and turned to the page where he had recently hand drawn a cartoon, in pencil.

“No. I’ll take that back. I wouldn’t exactly call him desperate,” Chad said, as he began to sketch an inflated rubber ball into the beach scene he had drawn of Tom lying on the beach, checking out the bikinis surrounding him. “Let’s just say he’s a bit hormone driven.”

Maria smiled at his reply.

“You know. You’re pretty good at that.”

“At what?” Chad said, noticing how Maria was looking his shoulder.

“At drawing. ... Do you do it often?”

Chad blushed. “No. Not really. Normally, I only scribble whenever I get bored.”

Maria instantly displayed a frown. “Is that so? ... Then I must be boring you .”

“Huh?” Chad’s eyes expressed that he had been thrown off guard. “What are you talking about. I’m not bored.”

“Then why did you start drawing?”

“Well,” Chad began, stumbling over his words as he tried to figured out what he should say. “To be honest. I’m feeling a little nervous.”

“Oh? And why is that?” Maria took hold of his hand and gave it a small squeeze. “Do you think I’m going to bite?”

“No.” Chad shook his head. “It’s just that ...”

“Just what? ... Is Tom correct? Is it possible that you don’t really like women?”

Chad gazed up at the sky as if maybe a passing sparrow might provide him

with a non-revealing answer.

“Not ex-actly,” he then stuttered. “I do like women. But I’m ...”

Flying 10,000 feet above, a passing F-14 on its way to Key West made one of the loudest sonic booms Maria had ever experienced. And whatever Chad’s answer was, she never got a chance to hear it.