

# Scared Straight

By RisanF

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*Is this about a technique for reforming delinquents? It is a dubious joke about homosexuality? Nope, it's just a nice moment between Numbuh Two and his crazy new friend, Laura Limpin!*

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## Scared Straight

A KND quickie by Reid M. Haynes

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On a hot early afternoon sometime in late summer, daily activity had come to a lull during this period between lunch break and evening rush hour. The call of bluebirds somehow gave the otherwise silent streets a lonely feel; ironic, being that the loneliness was brought on by a presence rather than a lack thereof. As for kids, only a few were venturing onto the lawns right now, the rest attending a party held at an underground root beer watering hole. This left the boy mostly by himself as he traversed the sidewalk in a funk, ready to depress anyone simply by radiation.

The normally jovial Numbuh Two was downer than a pigeon picked off by a poacher. His boots scraped the sidewalk with an irritating grating sound, and his hands dug into his pockets, completing his miserable posture. He was stuck with an annoyingly heavy burden that he couldn't relinquish onto anyone. None of his friends could understand, and one of his friends might be considerably offended by his personal grievances.

Around the corner, a braided, bespectacled geek of a girl sat on the curbside. Laura Limpin, mild mannered tween with a hulking alter-ego, was engrossed with the LCD screen of a Game Boy, her eyes intently focused on the action displayed upon it. There was evidence that she had gotten frustrated with the game's challenge level; four other Game Boys lay completely demolished in the grass behind her, their circuitry exposed like the entrails of a gutted whale. When she turned to regard the Gilligan boy, however, she was all smiles and shining eyes, greeting him with an enthusiastic wave. "Hi, Hoagie!"

Numbuh Two looked with mild interest towards the girl, and acknowledged her with a slight wave of his hand before continuing on. It was true that she had become a friend, (a scary friend to be sure, but she promised she wouldn't hurt him) and she probably was the only friend he felt he had the option of talking to. Yet all he really wanted was to curl up with a mopey disposition in the ripped-up couch of his heart. I mean, c'mon, he was an upbeat dude most of the time; he deserved to have his sulking moments.

But though Numbuh Two was willing to let himself wash away in the sewer sludge of self pity, Laura was not. "Golly, what's wrong?" she asked, standing up and making as if to follow him. "You're sadder than when I found out how lobsters were cooked, and then destroyed Red Lobster!"

The young pilot didn't turn around, and actually lowered his head an inch more. "It's...kinda complicated," he said, taking a brief glance at the screen of her Game Boy. (Level 9, High 5 in Tetris,) he

pondered privately to himself. (Now that's annoying!)

Laura blinked a few times. "Gee, you shouldn't be so down, Hoagie," she chirped, picking up her pace to keep up with him. "There's a neat party at the soda shop, so you should go! I wanna go too, but I wasn't invited. I wonder why?"

He sweated. "Uh, that's because you wrecked the soda fountain when M.D. Peppy was out of order," he mentioned, a nervous chuckle off-putting this blunt statement.

"Oh yeah!" the girl giggled, putting a hand to the back of her head as she recalled that little incident. "Whoops!"

Numbuh Two smiled, a real chuckle coming from his lips this time. Already he was starting to feel better; Laura could always make him laugh. "Ah, I don't really wanna go anyway," he told her, wagging his head slightly.

"Why?" she said, leaning closer to him as they walked. "Don't you like parties?"

"Yeah, but all my friends are there," he said, an admission building up within him. "I don't really...want to hang out with them right now."

The gawky look on the girl's face told him clearly that she wasn't following, and that he would have to explain in full. It was just as well; their conversation had just about broken any inhibitions he had about spilling his guts. "Look, a lot of us just turned twelve," he explained, finally turning to look his friend in the face. "That means a lot more girl and boy stuff, like Numbuh One and Lizzie stuff. And...I'm not doing so good there."

"But Hoagie is a muffin stud!" Laura insisted, clenching her fists in indignation. "A blueberry muffin stud!"

"Yeah, I wish," he snorted in bad humor, the-self depreciating sarcasm suiting him poorly. "All the girls like Numbuh Four, since he has that bad-boy thing. He doesn't have to do anything to get them all around him! It's like...being stuck in Draco Malfoy fandom all the time."

"Want me to beat him up for you?" Laura asked innocently, clasping her hands behind her back. "I've done that before, you know." (Numbuh Four, not Draco Malfoy)

"Nah," Numbuh Two answered this bizarre offer with a simple negative. "It's not his fault."

"I guess that's why I'm so bummed out," the lad admitted, his eyes focusing on the cloudy sky behind the trees. "Numbuh Four is my best friend, and I feel bad being jealous when he's always been there for me. I mean, who can help that he's cool, and I'm a slob who can't get a date?" The feeling in the pit of his stomach was rising back up to his throat and sticking in there like a drain stopper.

"But Hoagie...?" Laura tried her best to bring him back to reality, though she was losing him by the second.

"I couldn't ever get Cree interested, and the rest think of me as 'the good friend.'"

"Hoagie?"

"I might as well make my own girlfriend, like the nerd from Weird Science. All I need is a few cereal boxes and a sofa spring..."

"STOP BEING WIMPY!!!" A huge, booming voice shook Hoagie's foundations, the aftershock finding the boy on the ground like an infant learning to crawl. He looked up to find a gargantuan presence hovering above him; a six foot spandex-clad giant resembling a Mexican luchador. "Ack, the Badolescent is ba-ack!!" he cowered, the raging golden eyes and hornlike braids always a dead giveaway.

The Big Badolescent appraised him with the look of a drill sergeant eyeing a hapless private. "STAND!" she demanded of the prone Numbuh Two, who remained on the ground like a meek hamster.

"STAAANNND!!!" she roared a second time, and the boy sprang to his feet, again like that hapless private. "REPEAT!" The Badolescent ordered him, with Numbuh Two nodding wimpily in response, eager to appease the beast.

"HOAGIE IS NICE BOY!" she stated, putting her hands on her non-existent hips.

"H-Hoagie is n-nice boy," he recited shakily, trying desperately to keep up with her.

"HOAGIE IS HANDSOME BOY!" she continued, in that same terrible tone of voice.

"H-Hoagie is handsome boy," he said, slowly adapting to his subordinate position.

"HOAGIE IS SEXY BEEFCAKE!"

"Hoagie is...hey Laura, where did you learn how to talk like that?" he asked suddenly, peering at her curiously.

"SEXY BEEFCAKE!!!"

"Okay, okay! Sexy Beefcake!" he hastily amended, trying to blunt her flaring frustration.

"LOUDER!" she barked, prodding him again with her boisterous glare.

"Hoagie is Sexy Beefcake!" he repeated, more defiance audible within his voice.

"LOUDER!!!" Here, the Big Badolescent got right up into his face, spittle flying from her mouth to splatter against his face.

"HOAGIE IS A SEXY BEEFCAKE!!!" he suddenly screamed, grabbing the Big Badolescent and shaking her like a rag doll. He suddenly stormed away from her, and threw a fist into the air. "I, Hoagie P. Gilligan Jr., swear on my dad's honor that I will get a girl, the best girl around, who likes me for the hot stud that I am!!" A flashing Japanese sun appeared behind him to highlight his figure, and the sound of a tamtam poned in the background to exalt his imminent victory.

"Yay!" the Big Badolescent squealed, now Laura Limpin again. "My Hoagie's back!" With a furious tackle, she embraced Numbuh Two large frame, pressing her cheek against his chest. He laughed and hugged her back, running his hand through her black curls. "Thanks, Laura," he told her breathlessly, once they had separated enough to look each other in the face. "I kinda needed that."

"Uh huh!" she nodded, grinning from ear to ear.

Together, the two of them settled down on Laura's spot on the curb, still quite close to each other. Numbuh Two's hand remained on the girl's head, and she happily leaned into him. They both stared up at the tree tops, and at the birds flitting around from branch to branch. "Hey Laura, you really don't care that I'm not the coolest guy around?" the boy suddenly spoke up, peering over beside him.

"Nope!" she responded lightly, giving him a buck-tooth smile. "I ship Neville/Ginny!"

While Numbuh Two pondered over the meaning of this statement, Laura was already preparing her next sentence. "Anyway, I know it's real tough getting a kissy friend sometimes," she explained. "But I know I can wait forever, until someone likes me! 'Specially if he's a sexy beefcake!" (here, she bat her eyes at him in a cutesy manner.)

Numbuh Two ignored her unsubtle flirtations and lurched away, too surprised by the actual merit of what she was saying. No wonder she had understood what he was going through; if he had a tough time getting a girl's attention, it must be a gauntlet for the Big Badolescent to find a mate. But she didn't let it get her down; she kept her faith in the billions of people on Earth, knowing that at least one of them had the strength to wrest out the heart of a monster. A heavy thumping was starting to form in his chest, and now he was feeling weird.

"I don't think you have to wait forever," he said quietly, the words coming out of his mouth before he ever realized he had formed them.

Laura turned to the boy with a start, her mouth prepared to form nonsensical phrases such as 'huh' or 'wha' or even 'hoyo.' Whatever it would be, it was irrelevant as the protrubant look on Numbuh Two's face cut short any possible response. The two children stared wide-eyed at each other before their faint, ingrained knowledge of romantic situations started to kick in, causing them to slowly lean in. The pilot kept his hand tussled within her hair as he brought her cherubic face to his, and he softly kissed her on her welcoming lips.

When they separated, two large, goofy grins were present in place of their puckering mouthes. "Hey, that's a bit better than my kiss with Cree!" Numbuh Two commented, with more typical point-blank bluntness.

"Hee hee!" Laura giggled, a crazed spaciness in her manner. Then, her eyes rolled back into her skull, and she fell backwards onto the ground, her head fortunately landing softly on the lawn behind her. A mindless grin characteristic of a drugged out loony was etched onto her face, as if it was permanent. "Too hot for TV Y7..." she burbled in the Badolescent's gravelly voice, a streamer of drool squiggling down her right cheek.

Numbuh Two stared blankly at the fallen girl, raising an eyebrow in curiosity. "Er, a bit too much for her,"

he decided, putting a hand on the pilot's cap he wore. "Guess I might as well fix up these Game Boys until she's awake." Setting about assessing the damage to the devices a block back, a silly grin came to his lips. "'I don't think you have to wait forever,' that's such a great line! Man, I am a sexy beefcake!"

Considering how things were going for him today, even Numbuh Five would have to agree.

END