

2016

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Recommended Citation

Jensen, Jennifer (2016) "Bathroom Stalls and Pseudo Sex," *The Tuxedo Archives*: Vol. 2005 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholar.dominican.edu/tuxedolit/vol2005/iss2/10>

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Bathroom Stalls and Pseudo Sex

By Jennifer Jensen

Though I was fully aware that many of the younger students frequently "missed" the toilet and peed on the floor, I sat down. The ugly salmon pink and medical green linoleum seemed the lesser of two filthy evils when I considered the fact that anyone who "missed" while defecating usually left their presents on the toilet seat rather than the floor. I sat in front of the toilet in the second stall from the left (the one next to the bigger stall for handicapped people) and stared down at my plaid skirt, trying desperately to stop crying and to keep myself from vomiting-trying not to think about what everyone in class was discussing. Instead, I thought about how much I hated my skirt and how much I loved my boots.

A company named Dennis made our school's uniforms, and many of my fondest daydreams involved burning and shredding the bland, shapeless, maroon and navy blue catastrophes Dennis called clothing. The administration forced us to buy Dennis skirts one or two sizes too big so that they would extend all the way down to our knees. Anything shorter was considered too provocative. Most girls just rolled their skirts up to their thighs, but I didn't care enough about being provocative to bother. I did care about being interesting, though. Every morning, I spent an extra fifteen minutes lacing up ridiculously high-heeled black leather boots, painting black stars on my face, and choosing gaudy five dollar rings to wear on every one of my fingers, just to look interesting. But wouldn't you know, the moment I became the most fascinating topic of conversation at North Hills Christian School, all I wanted to do was hide in a dirty bathroom stall.

The shiny brown door to the bathroom creaked open just minutes after I had locked myself away in my nauseating pink and green sanctuary. Sunlight streaked across the floor and hit my skirt, as if to shout, "There she is! There she is! She's ditching class, that coward!" I huddled more closely to the toilet and pulled the fabric of my skirt away from the warmth.

Someone tapped on the stall door and asked, "Are you okay in there?"

"Yeah, I'm fine" I answered, sniffing back some snot and wiping the black eyeliner streaks off of my cheeks.



"Are you sure?"

"Uh-huh." I would like to say that I hated being asked, "Are you okay?" because it really is a ridiculous question to ask when you hear someone crying or see someone sitting on the floor of a bathroom stall, but I liked being asked that question. It meant someone noticed and cared, and it was easier to answer than, "What's wrong?" Asserting your okay-ness only requires a simple "uh-huh," whereas explaining your problems requires a lot more thinking and verbalizing. I wanted acknowledgment, not a therapist.

I breathed a sigh of relief when the person finished their business and left me alone, again. It was only a matter of time before more people would start coming into the restroom. I couldn't stay in that stall forever, so I decided I needed to quickly sort some things out before venturing back into the bog of gossip that awaited me in second period Spanish.

Just a day earlier, Christina, Mae, and I were on a silver bus that was driving us back home from a Bible camp called Mount Gilead. Every year, North Hills scheduled a "retreat day" on which the entire high school (all one hundred and twenty of us) would pile into two buses, travel sixty-six and a half miles from Vallejo to Sebastopol, and compete in a series of embarrassing games. The administration considered this competition a good "bonding experience" for the student body, but really, it was just about eating a bag of green onions and cocktail weenies as fast as you could or spinning around in circles and being able to run in straighter lines than your opponents. People choked on the onions, fell on their butts, and generally made asses of themselves when they got upset at the other teams for "cheating" (winning).

I was the master of avoiding such games. Just when they needed volunteers for teams, I was nowhere to be found. I did, however, enjoy the bus rides to and from Mount Gilead. We gossiped, sang songs, and made life miserable for our bus drivers. Those bus rides were good times, except for that one time we decided to play truth or dare on the way home.

I don't remember what question I had been asked. All I remember is picking "truth" and admitting to having a crush on a girl named Jenny, who was in the junior class. "Yeah, she's gorgeous," I said, feeling unusually daring and shocking. Christina and Mae just looked at me with surprised faces.

"I never knew you were like that, Jenn," Christina exclaimed a little too loudly. I didn't mind shocking my close friends, but I wasn't really prepared to announce to the entire bus that I was wrestling with my sexuality.

"Well, I ... I think I've always been 'like that,' Tina," I answered in a more hushed tone. I chewed on that statement for a moment. I had never actually told anyone before, and now that I was realizing how serious my confession was, I couldn't remember why I

wanted to be so shocking in the first place. Chalk it up to my narcissistic desire to be interesting, I suppose.

"But you've liked some boys before," Mae whispered, phrasing it as more of a question than a statement of fact.

"I know ... I guess I just ... like ... both." I really didn't want to talk about it, anymore. Being shocking was fun, but the novelty had worn off, and I was afraid someone might hear us. At a private school as small as North Hills, gossip got around at the speed of light, and the students were never understanding about scandalous pieces of information concerning their classmates.

When the Bible is taught right alongside arithmetic and grammar from kindergarten through high school, it creates not only a heightened sense of morality, but an unhealthy air of self-righteousness, as well. People had admitted to having sex before, and they were labeled sinful sluts before the next school day. How would people react when they learned that perfect Miss Jennifer Jensen, top student of her class and charter member of the Christian Leadership Council, was bisexual?

Of course, the first things I heard at school the next morning went something like, "Dude, are you gay?" and "Vanessa told me you wanted to go down on Jenny! That's not true, is it?" and "Don't worry, Jenn. I got your back. That ain't right, what people are sayin' about you ... It's your business." Oh. Boy. Right after my first class ended, I ran straight to the bathroom: the second stall from the left.

When I was about four or five years old-before I started attending kindergarten at North Hills-I had a friend named Jessica with whom I used to have play dates just about every week. I can't remember being more innocent than I was when I was five. I was the model child: smart, cute, obedient, potty-trained, and excellent at drawing pictures for the refrigerator. The only thing that used to disturb me about my childhood was the memory of a game Jessica and I used to play together. Essentially, we had pseudo-sex. One girl would be "the boyfriend" and the other girl would be "the girlfriend," and one girl would sit on top of the other girl and wiggle around for a bit until we were both "done." I have no idea where we learned this. I imagine it came from a combination of listening to my older siblings talk and watching late-night MTV, but it seemed perfectly natural to us, at the time. When I was old enough to understand what I had been doing, I felt guilty about it, like there was something intrinsically dirty about me. I had managed to bury the pseudo-sex memories deep beneath years of Bible study and "being good," but it all resurfaced when the rumors about my bisexuality broke out.

I heard the brown door creak open again and knew that it was time for me to get out of there.

"Jenn?" I heard Mae ask from just outside of the stall.

"Yeah?"

..."Mrs. Fajardo wants to see you."

I inhaled a lungful of sickly sweet bathroom air, pushed myself off of the floor, and unlocked the stall door to find Mae's sympathetic smile on the other side of it. "Okay. Thanks."

"I didn't tell anybody, I swear," she said solemnly.

"I know. Someone must have overheard." I swung my black backpack over my left shoulder and trudged toward the mirror to see the mess I'd made of my face. The eyeliner and stars around my eyes had smudged and flaked off, and my nose was an ugly shade of pink, like the pink parts of the linoleum. I laughed at myself. "Wow, I look lovely."

"It'll be okay, Jenn." Mae hugged me then, and I felt a surge of calm rush from my head down into my chest.

Mrs. Fajardo was really just a P.E. teacher masquerading as a student counselor, and her office was really just a tiny classroom with small, square P.E. lockers along the walls. I sat in a plastic orange chair next to her desk, studying her tan, freckled cheeks and curly, dirty blonde hair. I had always liked her friendly face, but that day, Mrs. Fajardo's features were all seriousness and pity.

When she pulled out her Bible, I bit my lip at the sight of the familiar thick book and averted my eyes. All the reassurance I had gotten from Mae's hug drained out of my chest and into a puddle on the floor. My heartbeats sped up, and I fought with the urge to run out of the room and back into the stall. I didn't need a sermon on the sinfulness of homosexuality. I had already been having a very long, private quarrel with God about the issue for years, and a recitation of verses I had already read a thousand times was not going to solve anything. I held my breath as she opened her mouth to speak.

"Are you okay?"

Phew. Excellent. A question I could answer. I nodded my head and forced a smile. "Yeah, I'm okay."

"I know what you're going through must be tough, and I want you to feel like you can talk to me if you need anything" You know, your body's just going through a lot of changes right now..."

My body was going through a lot of changes right then. It relaxed from its frigid tension for the fourth time that morning and slumped more comfortably into its plastic seat. I

cannot express how grateful I was for the touchy-feely talk she was giving me about body changes and feelings-not because it was at all enlightening, but because it wasn't a warning about the damnation of sinners. I gave her my best "I'm listening" face and let my eyes glaze over a bit.

"In a few years, you probably won't feel the same things you're feeling right now," Mrs. Fajardo continued. I nodded my head in understanding, knowing that her statement wasn't entirely true. In a few years, I might be a bit more at peace with myself, but I would still be just as attracted to women as I was to men. In a few years, I wouldn't be stuck in that abominable Dennis skirt, and I wouldn't feel the need to seem so interesting, but I would still believe in the ability to fall in love with anyone-whatever the person's gender. In a few years, I would get away from that strange place I called high school, and I would never again feel the need to hide in a filthy pink and green bathroom stall. The bathroom stall really wasn't so bad, though" I mostly just hated the skirt.