

Visions

By Cedric Collins

Emily appears to be teleporting in stages from her dad's wet bar to the couch where I'm sitting, and I can't help wondering what kind of hallucination this is. There are several explanations for what I'm seeing, the most likely being that I'm dreaming. There is no way Emily Campbell has invited me over to her house, to her basement, so obviously I've gone completely nuts and fallen into a fantasy world. I'm sure I'll wake up in a few moments with a needle stuck in my arm and several people in white coats hovering around me looking concerned.

I pinch myself just to check, and it hurts like hell. She's real, I'm real, the basement is real, and I think I just blacked out again, because despite the fact that I can't take my eyes off of her, she appears to be moving without walking. Anyway, she isn't walking like any other girl I've seen, and I've watched a lot of girls. There are the sort of chubby ones with cute faces who hurry to class like it's aerobic exercise, there are the tomboys who strut out of the locker room, and there are the best ones who weave gracefully around the high school like willow branches. Emily has them all beat.

She's reached the couch, and my heart is beating out the time to a techno song I heard on the drive over. Her long, black hair brushes my face, making me forget that I don't drink, as she leans over the back of the couch to offer me a glass of Coke spiked with something or other. I sip the drink without ever seeing it, and the warmth spreading through me makes me realize that I was shaking. She just looks at me and smiles, and she has me.

She crosses over to the front of the couch and moves to the other end. Her long, slim blue jeans fold up onto the cushion next to her, causing her to lean in my direction. The big-screen T.V. stares blankly at me, dumbfounded that I'm in the room. I couldn't agree more.

"So, what do you think of Ms. Engel?" she asks. My scores in middle school allowed me to skip all the dumb freshman English courses, which is why I'm in this junior-level class with Emily even though I'm only a sophomore. Ms. Engel is this dumb bitch who chews through husbands and grades boys harder than girls. She still goes by her maiden name even though, for the moment, she's got a husband.

"She seems to be a fair teacher," I hear myself saying. "I think we'll learn a lot about Shakespeare from her." I am so full of crap, but I'm feeling a little overwhelmed at the moment. Just give me a few moments to recover.

Emily changes the topic, releasing me from my lie. Looking down at her own drinks, she says, "So anyway, um, my mom found out I wanted to go see *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* at the community theater, so she bought me two tickets so I could take a friend..."

So much for recovery. My head starts spinning. A date, with Emily Campbell? It can't be...but wait, she just said "friend."

"...but, um, I was thinking, if it was okay with you, that it could be kind of a date."

I plunge headfirst into another hallucination. I'm in a dark theater sitting next to

Emily, and she's wearing those jeans. After the show, we hold hands.

Fighting back to the surface, I re-enter reality and ask, "What happened to Curt? I thought you two were, uh, an item or something." Man, I shouldn't have said that. There's no way she could honestly compare me to Curt Hanover and still want to go to the play with me.

"That dumb hick?" she glares. "I don't think so. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern doesn't have any football humor. Besides, he'd only go to a play with me if he knew I might put out afterwards. I'm through with him."

My eyes widen, and I can't keep my head above water anymore. Suddenly, I can see Emily in a prom dress, her beautiful, black hair pulled up and away from her graceful neck.

"Why did you decide to ask me, if you don't mind my asking?" I sound funny, like I'm speaking in another room.

"Well, I figure you are the only other person I know of who would like the play. That, and you were the only other person in class yesterday who was absolutely sure that Hamlet is only faking madness." It's funny she should say that, because right now, I'm absolutely sure I'm faking sanity. "So anyway," she continues, "you sure are asking a lot of questions." She gives me a worried look. "You do want to go, don't you?"

The world spins out of control. I see a ring, cake, a bouquet flying through the air. I see us having kids.

"Of course I want to go," I say. I'm back in reality again, as far as I can tell.

"Okay, good," she smiles, sounding relieved. She casually reaches for the remote control, sits back, and turns on the television, like this sort of thing happens just every day.

Believe me, it doesn't.