

You Can Buy the Girl

It's a fact.

You see, I'm not much of a stroller, but when I do stroll, I like to do it with my friend Brooks, who, like me, doesn't like to stroll much but does it now and then. Usually when he's with me.

"See, Brooks," I said, as we were strolling one night down Panama Street watching the floozes selling their wares and trying to avoid being rubbed by the bums and the junkies.

"What I'm saying is," I said, "You can buy the girl." I pointed with my eyes in the direction of a medium-spicy flooze being patted down by an ugly guy in a Big Suit and not liking it much but doing it cause the guy was chits all over.

"See, I bought last time so now it's your turn." Then I hitched up the pants of my zoot and leaned casually on a light pole to wait for Brooks to go get her.

"But Mike," he said, "I don't have anything on my flake, see?" He reached into his pockets and pulled them out for me to see.

"Oh, for Chrissakes," I said, "Don't you never have any money?"

He shrugged. "We spend too much on girls anyway," he said, "That's why I don't like to go strolling cause we always got to have a girl and it costs too damn much money to get one."

I snorted. "Well, if you're gonna go strolling with me, we gotta have a girl," I said, "I'm not gonna go strolling with just another guy—people will think we're a couple of bananas or something."

He hunkered down in his jacket and glared at me. "All I'm saying is, we spend too much money on the floozes."

Oh, brother, I thought. Brooks could be stubborn like the worst kind of frizz sometimes. “Well, what do you want?” I said, “That one of us should dress up like a girl so we can go on a stroll at night and look respectable and not like a couple of bananas?”

He frowned. “All I’m saying is, we spend too much money on the floozes.”

I let out a deep sigh. “All right then, you win. Let’s go find some girly frizz stuff. But I’m telling you, this is absolutely the last time I’m buying, and I mean it.”

So we went into the local frizz shop and asked the counter flooze for the hair puffs and the size ten’s. Brooks was on the lean side for a guy—he had no trouble at all looking coolly lost in his zoot—but tall, which was good for being a guy, but bad for a girl, since current frizz style dictated all girls be five-six and under.

Brooks shook his head, looking disgusted at the racks full of midget clothes. “Those body jobbers must be making bucket loads of chits lopping inches out of girls’ thighs,” he said, holding up a dress a full five inches too short.

“Don’t you got anything taller?” I asked the counter girl. She rolled her eyes at us; she was really full-out frizz, that one.

“What is your girl, some kind of freak?” she said, and pointed to a rack stashed way in the back, next to the bathroom and bargain-bargain-bargain racks with glitz so out of fashion even bargain-bargain-bargain floozes wouldn’t wear them.

“I think purple’s your color, Brooks,” I said, picking out a nice long silky latex thing that came with instructions for assembly.

“Purple’s all they got,” he said, holding the thing up to himself to get a look.

“Good thing,” I said, “Cause it’s your color.”

We took the purple thing and went to look for the hair puffs. “What color should I get?” Brooks asked, picking up a blonde one with his thumb and forefinger.

I shook my head. “Nah. What do you want that one for? What’s wrong with the color of your hair? I always liked it. How about this one?”

Brooks shrugged and put on the brown one I handed him. “How does it look?” he asked, turning around so I could see the back. It was nice and long, hanging all the way down to the middle of his back in soft, filmy waves.

“That’s real nice, Brooks,” I said, “Like I said, you should just go natural.”

“If I was gonna go natural, I wouldn’t be dressing up like a girl,” he said, slipping the dress on over his zoot to get a picture of the whole effect.

“Now all you need is a good paint job—”

“I’m drawing the line at paint!” he said, poking a finger at me, “I’m not putting on no lipstick.”

“You’re right,” I said, “Who wants to taste all those chemicals anyway?”

“And I’m not kissing you neither!” he shouted, and I waved at him to quiet down cause the frizz counter girl was giving us the eye.

He shushed his voice a little. “I’m just doing this so we can go for a stroll and look respectable not like a couple of bananas so we can pick up real girls and not spend a lot of money on doing it.”

“Exactly,” I said, “Now take off that stuff so I can go pay for it.”

At the counter, I handed the girl—who was really super hyper-frizz close up, and not at all a pretty sight—my flake and she ran it through, or I should say whacked it down two or three sizes. When she was done, I held it up in disgust.

“I’m telling you, Brooksie, this is absolutely the last time I’m buying for a long time.”

Outside we found a nice dark corner and Brooksie wrangled himself into the latex shimmy.

“This is gonna look stupid,” he said.

“Nah. Take your hat off and it’ll look fine.”

He did what I said, then stepped out into the light so as to get the whole effect. I put my hand on my chin and gave him a good gandering.

“It’s a little short on you,” I said, “But it looks real nice.”

We stepped back out onto Panama Street, all neon and shine, and Brooks was nothing but pure glitz in his latex silky and hair. It was definitely worth a little grin, strolling down the street with a fine girl at my side, a nice-looking respectable girl and not a flooze at all. I took Brooks’ hand and put it on my arm.

“There,” I said, “That’s more like it. No sense walking down the street with a fine girl at your side if she’s not on your arm. Spoils the effect—what would people think? They’d think you were my sister or something. Here, Brooksie, give me a kiss.”

“What? I already said no kissing!”

“See those girls over there? They’re giving us the eye right now. They’re thinking: If a nice girl like you won’t kiss me, why should they? So give me a nice big wet one.”

Brooksie rolled his eyes and leaned down to give me a nice fat one right on the mouth. He even closed his eyes and everything. Very smooth. The girls across the street were real impressed, I could tell.

“That did it, Brooksie,” I said, “That did it real nice.”

In fact, the whole thing worked just like a charm.

After that first night, strolling turned into another level of heaven. We went out practically every night and turned the town upside down and didn’t have to worry about looking like a couple of bananas or spending an arm and a leg for cheap flooze decoration. Which gave us more left on our chits for the real things you went strolling for.

We went casino and ate real ritz and saw the shows, and sometimes we just strolled, shooting the breeze and we always had a good time just the two of us and we never had to worry about no hire girl stepping in on the conversation or getting in the way of the fun—although Brooks never did get the hang of heels and had to stick to the flats, which was right okay by me, since he was taller than me anyway.

Then one night I went to pick up Brooks and I said to him, “Let’s give Panama Street a miss tonight, Brooksie. Let’s take a walk down by the waterfront.”

He shrugged. “Okay, Mike. Whatever you want.”

It was a clear night, and the colored lights of the boats were sparkling like strings of jewels on the water.

“The lights sure are pretty tonight,” Brooks said, “They look just like diamonds and rubies and stuff strung out on the water, sparkling like that.”

I shook my head and blinked, thinking how cool and un-frizz it was that he could always read my mind like that.

I cleared my throat. “That reminds me of something, Brooksie,” I said. He turned to look at me and I had to clear my throat two or three more times before I could say what I wanted to say. I had my speech all nice and pretty and worked out, but the minute I looked into those big brown eyes I forgot every word of it.

“Brooksie,” I said, “These past few weeks...well, you know I’m not much of one for saying...you know...things. But I think we had a good time together these past few weeks and...Well, I just wanted to give you something—”

I pulled the velvety box out of my pocket and held it out to him. Brooks took it from me and opened it.

“Christ Almighty!” he said, his eyes wide, “It’s beautiful!” He pulled the ring out and slipped it on his finger. Then he held his hand out and squinted to get a picture of the whole effect. The lights from the boats made rainbows in it just like magic. When he looked at me again I could see the tears sparkle in his eyes like jewels on the water, and when he tried to talk, his voice was all frogged up.

“It’s beautiful, Mike,” he said.

“It’s the real thing, Brooksie,” I said, taking his hand. “I just wanted to give you something nice cause I want you to know I appreciate the good times we had and...Well...” I looked down at my feet shuffling in their oversize shoes, “I want you to stay with me, Brooksie.”

Brooks frowned and squeezed my sweaty hands in his warm bony ones.

“You know, you were right,” he said softly, “You can buy the girl.” He squeezed my hands. “But you can’t buy her heart. That you gotta earn a different way.”

I looked up at him. “Did I earn your heart, Brooksie?”

His answer was a soft, fuzzy one that warmed me up to the very cockles and probably would have made the Devil himself think that Hell wasn’t such a bad place after all.

That, I thought, with an idiot kissing grin still wide on my face, was my Brooksie.