**Collateral Damage**

by Fred Key

It is a truth universally acknowledged that in any small group of friends, there will be one person who is “the nice one.”

It is a truth equally well-acknowledged that “the nice one” is code for “the one who will end up with the short end of the stick, probably getting fucked by it, and almost certainly without lubricant.”

The senior class of Laurel Canyon High School was ready to celebrate! It was finally the end of the year; graduation was over, diplomas were in hand, and now all that remained for the class of 2023 was to spend the summer before they headed off to new worlds of responsibility partying as much as humanly possible. Event after event was scheduled, each aiming to top the previous one in chaos, energy, and fun.

For Addie Anderson (seriously, what were her parents thinking? Adelaide Anderson? Why not just name your kid ADD Addie and be done with it?), this was about closing out her high school career by moving into the ranks of social success. For years, Addie and her friends had hovered around the periphery of the school’s top social circles, too good-looking and fun to be “outsiders” but not hot enough, cool enough, or rich enough to be in with the elites. Addie was determined to break through that barrier this summer, and she knew just how to do it.

Addie explained her plan to her best friends, Sydney and Zoe. Everyone was throwing house parties, and those were decent, but they had lots of risks. You had to get your parents out, you had to get people in, you had to get booze there somehow, and then you had to somehow keep the whole thing from blowing up. Half the time the party got so loud that the police were called, and then the host was busted for sure by angry parents. The other half of the time, someone destroyed something expensive, and the host ended up shelling out huge amounts of money to try to fix the damage before it was discovered. Neither of these outcomes appealed to Addie, who wasn’t particularly wealthy, and whose parents weren’t going to leave her home alone this summer because they KNEW her.

Addie wasn’t rich, but she DID have one thing going for her - her uncle, Marty.

Marty was one of those guys who never quite made it fully into adulthood. He had been one of Laurel Canyon’s biggest party boys throughout his high school and college years, and had made lots of friends. One of them had set him up as the manager of his charter boat service operating out of the marina. Marty was in charge of renting out boats for fishing tours, afternoon cruises, and pretty much anything else. It was the anything else that had gotten Addie’s attention.

“Seriously, Addie?” Sydney asked when Addie had suggested a party boat.

“It’s a GREAT idea,” Addie replied enthusiastically. “You can’t bust a party out in the bay! The police aren’t going to show up and shut it down for noise, and nobody’s parents are going to show up out of the blue and chase everyone out. You don’t get randos showing up trying to crash, either!”

Sydney nodded. “Ok, but didn’t you say that your Uncle Marty was a creeper? Like, he was checking out your boobs?”

Addie rolled her eyes. “Yeah, but one, I DO have great boobs, and two, it isn’t like he grabbed them or something. We just have to get him to set us up with one of the boats, and we’ll have the most memorable party of the summer!”

Zoe was far less enthusiastic. “But how are you going to get him to let you rent a boat? Do you have the money for something like that? You’re gonna need a pilot or something, too, right? And some crew or something? I mean, if you get a big boat, I bet you need a few people to run it.”

“I’ve thought about that,” Addie said. “If Uncle Marty likes MY boobs, I bet he’ll like THREE hot girls in bikinis even more…”

“No. Absolutely not!” said Zoe.

“...and a whole BOAT full of hot teen girls? He’ll probably volunteer to pilot himself just to stare all day. We get a few of the guys who work at the marina to agree to help–ones who wouldn’t get invited otherwise–and we’ve got a boat!”

Sydney looked skeptical, but Addie’s enthusiasm was overwhelming. Soon she and Sydney were discussing plans for music and figuring out how much per person to charge to cover the booze Uncle Marty would be cajoled into buying for them. Zoe could see disaster coming, but she couldn’t bring herself to say no to her two friends.

After all, she was the nice one.

Everything went pretty much the way Addie had planned. She, Sydney, and Zoe had gone to visit Uncle Marty down at the marina wearing their bikini tops and wrap skirts, and predictably, Marty’s eyes had spent the entire meeting well below the chin level of the three eighteen year olds. While he was checking out Sydney’s tan line, Addie was able to get him to agree to letting them use one of the larger party boats at no cost - in exchange for him piloting, of course.

His stare moved to Zoe next. Zoe had always been self-conscious about her breasts, which she thought were way too large for her skinny frame, but Marty’s stare made her flush crimson. She felt like her boobs were actually getting BIGGER as he stared, and she wanted more than anything to cross her arms over her chest. Trooper that she was, though, she kept her hands by her sides as Marty blathered on about crew and about costs.

“Look,” he said, finally tearing his eyes away from Zoe’s orbs and turning back to Addie. “Like I said, I won’t charge ya for the time. You’re my favorite niece, after all. We’ll call it a graduation present from your Uncle Marty.”

“Oh, that’s so SWEET!” Addie gushed. Sydney and Zoe looked at each other like they both wanted to vomit. “You’re my favorite Uncle, Uncle Marty! You’re the COOLEST!”

“I know, I know. But listen, even if I don’t charge you, I gotta have something from you to hold as collateral against any damage during the trip. I mean, I know YOU wouldn’t do anything, but I used to go to parties like this back in the day, and we got a little out of control and all. One time…”

“Yeah,” Addie interrupted, “I get that, but, like, how much are we talking here? I mean, I have a couple hundred…”

Marty frowned. “Hon, I can’t put a boat like this out there against a couple hundred bucks! That would hardly pay for one rail to get fixed if someone broke it. These things are seriously expensive, ya know. You’d have to put up something worth, like, five thou. Maybe one of you has a car or something?”

Addie looked crestfallen. “I don’t have a car, Marty.”

Sydney shook her head, too. “My car belongs to my parents. If something happens to it, you might as well start planning my funeral. Zoe?”

“Nothing,” Zoe said. “I have a thousand or so in my bank account from working, but that’s it.”

Marty shook his head sadly. “I’d really like to help you ladies out, but with no money or property to hold, my hands are tied.”

Addie looked at Marty with her best, most wide-eyed sad puppy dog face. “But Uncle Marty, this was going to be my one big chance to host something really special! You remember what the social game was like, right? If you don’t have the cash, you better have the flash, or you don’t have a chance! And I just wanted to be as popular as YOU were when you were my age…”

Marty rubbed his chin. “I get it, kid, I do. And I want to help. MAYBE there’s something I can do. I could guarantee the money on your behalf, I guess, like a middleman…”

“OH MY GOD, YOU’D DO THAT?” Addie squealed, causing everyone to wince. “Uncle Marty, you are the absolute best, most amazing, most wonderful…”

“Whoa, slow down there,” Marty said, holding up his hands. “I said I COULD do it. But I would still need some collateral from you. You know, so I know you have a reason to make sure the boat stays safe and all, and I don’t get hit with the bill.”

“But we already told you we don’t have enough for that,” Zoe objected.

“Well, you don’t have the money,” Marty replied. “But I’ll tell you what I’ll do…”

As I said before, it is a truth universally acknowledged that the nice one is the one who ends up getting screwed. On the day of the boat party, Addie was wearing her best bright pink bikini, knocking back drinks and having the time of her life. Sydney was right there with her, in her funky paisley two-piece. The rest of the social elite of Laurel Canyon were there as well, drinking, dancing, and having an amazing time.

Only one person who was there was NOT having an amazing time, and that was poor Zoe. She stood there, one arm covering her large breasts, the other clamped firmly over her naked, tightly trimmed pussy, and a pathetic look on her face that begged the viewer to answer the question “how could this happen to me?” And as Addie shouted into her ear for the fiftieth time that Zoe was the BEST FRIEND EVER, the dark-haired girl sighed, and resigned herself to wait for the end of the trip, and to pray that no one did any damage to the boat, because if they did, the swimsuit that she had somehow been talked into giving up as collateral to Uncle Marty (who had already come by and patted her on the bare ass twice, telling her she was a trooper)....

…would just end up as collateral damage.