

Growing into the Job

Post 527: Retail Therapy, p1

by stevebasic



"Here, read this," Josie told me, abruptly slapping me in the chest with the pamphlet: *A Guide for Our Male Visitors*. It had been handed to her - pointedly not to *me* - by a pretty, smiling, immaculately dressed blonde as we'd walked in. She'd told us to have a nice visit, and that I was expected to follow these rules.

'Retail Therapy' was what this was supposed to be: the girls thought that a distraction from the fact that I'd just bagged out of my Endocrinology appointment, and possibly any hope of ever figuring out what was really wrong with me, would help. Help as much as the handjob Aubrey had treated me to in the backseat, to mollify my shame and fear? While Josie watched and Lakshmi sat ready to catch my load with some tissues? I didn't know how 'retail therapy' could make things any better but, I figured: *what the hell*.

What the hell indeed.

"What the...?" I began, frowning with furrowed brow at the glossy leaflet. This looked troubling, immediately. I also noticed - immediately - that the fawning attention all three girls had been lavishing on me all afternoon had been, at least temporarily, redirected.

"Holy crap look at this place," Josie breathed, eyes skyward, her hand anchoring itself warmly on my right shoulder.

"Yeah huh?" Lakshmi agreed, similarly awestruck, her hand settling just as naturally on my left.

"It's so *crowded*..." added Aubrey, from directly behind me. Her voice had a new confidence to it, and she'd been seeming to stand taller. Maybe due to the fact that she'd just jacked

off her boss with his face plastered to her tits in the back of an SUV. "...with so many *women*."

The new mall was, for sure, an impressive sight. Nothing at all like the old mall, which - admittedly - I hadn't stepped in for years. Gone were the typical sneaker shops, T-shirt places, and cheap jewelers that all smelled like pot. Gone were the floors of cheap, cracked tile, the gaudy signage and blaring canned music. Gone also were the families with too many snotty kids, old duffers with poor hygiene, and roving groups of feral teen boys. This place was filled with women. Upscale, well-appointed, *tall* women.

Well, they probably weren't all that tall. I was just super short.

But yes the mall had changed. No, let me rephrase that. It had been *transformed*. Over the past several months (construction happens so *fast* these days; the new Far Horizons is another testament unto itself) it had been made into *this*: the newest Vendare Center. Not a *mall*, mind you, or at least that's what the countless press releases I'd seen would have you know, but a *center*. A '*New Retail Experience for a New World*', according to every poster, tv spot, and social media ad I'd seen.

I glanced down again at the pamphlet, now partially crumpling in my little fists.

Maybe I ought to actually read it...

<do link to male rules pamphlet here><or maybe not>

The pamphlet felt absurd in my hands - glossy, colorful, friendly in a way that felt just a little *too* friendly. Like it had been written for a guest. A guest who shouldn't forget he was a guest.

At first, it wasn't bad. Vendare Centers, it said, are places '*where women thrive*'. Sure, fine. Places for '*empowerment*'. Places where '*men are still welcome*' - yikes but of course, of course - with a few simple rules, for everyone's '*comfort and safety*'. I could live with that. Women have put up with a lot of bad public behavior by the other gender over the centuries. Was it too much to think that they'd want a place where they'd be calling the shots, making the rules? Where they could feel safe and comfortable?

Then I got to the "General Rules for Male Visitors" section, and my stomach twisted a little tighter.

'Male visitors must be accompanied by a female adult companion at all times.'

Ok. I mean, that's basically happening already, right? What guy would want to come to a place like this alone or with, like, his fantasy football buddies?

'Male visitors must obey all posted signage and instructions from Center staff.'

I frowned. Hands on my shoulders guiding me, I barely noticed when we'd started walking deeper into the center. I was too busy reading.

'Male visitors may be gently corrected, reprimanded, or asked to leave by staff or companions if expectations are not met.'

"Gently corrected..?" I muttered under my breath.

Above me, I could vaguely hear the girls talking - something about how gorgeous the main atrium was, how different it was from the old mall, and how happy and energetically positive everyone seemed. I barely caught any of it, though I did take notice of how few men there were here. *Very* few, and all of them with a female '*companion*'. I kept reading:

'Males are expected to remain courteous, respectful, and quiet in communal spaces.'

Quiet. Like a kid tagging along, seem but not heard. My face heated.

'Dress neatly. Male attire should be clean, modest, and non-disruptive.'

Was I disruptive? Was I modest enough? I looked down at my scrubs, wondering if they passed the dress code now. Wondering if I'd somehow already messed up just by existing here. God, I wasn't even five minutes into this thing and already I felt like a little boy at a grown-up party, hoping nobody noticed how out of place he was.

I didn't even register that we'd passed into the main atrium, where the ceilings soared up in glassy curves and banners drifted down like soft sails, each emblazoned with inspirational slogans: "*Woman's Future is Now.*" "*Strength. Beauty. Power.*" "*The New Era Belongs to Her.*"

It wasn't until a high, lilting voice called out that I even looked up.

"Omigosh look at him!" a woman laughed.

Another chimed in; the voices had come from nearby us in the corridor: "Oh my god, he's so *vuln!*"

"Yeah where did you find this little cutie?"

Are they talking about me??

The girls - Josie, Lakshmi, Aubrey - all paused, stopping me with firm hands, and turned instinctively to form an invisible perimeter around me. They were mother birds gathering their chick when strangers had come too close. They faced another group of women, three of them, maybe late twenties. They seemed tall, of course, arms full of shopping bags. They all tittered. One of them, a busty girl with a cute brown bob and glasses, winked at me.

"He's ours for today!" Josie said brightly, beaming, giving my shoulder a little jiggle with her hand. "Isn't he precious?"

I realized, suddenly and too late, that Josie wasn't put off by the nerve of these girls. She sounded...proud.

I stared down at the half-crumpled pamphlet in my hands, willing it to suck me in and make me disappear, help me to escape the attentions of these new arrivals. I prayed they wouldn't recognize me from online, where I had a bit of pretty embarrassing celebrity. Their arms were thick with glossy shopping bags, which jostled playfully as they peered at me over the girls' shoulders, grinning at me like I was a puppy in a window display.

The conversation above me continued as the three women shoppers came closer.

"So adorable!" "So cute!" "So handsome!"

"Thank you!" Josie beamed.

"Are you having fun here, little guy?" "Are these your three *girlfriends*?" "Oh, isn't he just the cutest?"

The newcomers' voices were syrupy with amusement.

I was struck, and - though I tried - couldn't put two words together. Josie, to her credit, handled it with a kind of effortless good humor. "Of *course* he's having fun, aren't you sweetie?"

I flushed anew, and tried to stammer a response.

"Omigod he's *blushing*!" "So cute!" "How do you keep your *hands* off him??"

Josie beamed. "Right? It's *hard*! We're kinda low-key obsessed."

I looked up at Lakshmi. She was smiling, saying something appropriate, but didn't beam. She was giving a constant, polite little nod - protective, steady - but I could feel her hourglass body subtly angling in, her posture tightening. Somehow I could feel her mass increasing, the weight of her growing, like she was making herself a fortress between me and the world.

Aubrey, just behind me, hadn't said anything at first. But I felt the emotional ripples rolling off her. Her heart was thudding now - not from nervousness or anger, but for me, from whatever she was picking up through that secret, soft sixth sense of hers. She was feeling how flustered I was, how overwhelmed. "He's in a bit of a sensory overload here," she said, "So much to look at."

And there was. My face was burning. Especially when one of the new girls, the busty one with the short hair and glasses perched low on her nose, bent at her knees and leaned in close - so close I could smell the vanilla lotion on her skin and see the dizzying, creamy valley of cleavage her henley top left on very casual display.

"Aw," she cooed, grinning mischievously, "I just wanna buy him something. Maybe something cute from the Vulni store?" She bit her plump lower lip, eyes scanning me up and down, from head to toe. "What size even *are* you, sweetie?"

"Uh..." I tried to shrink into myself. My ears were so red they were probably visible from space.

It was Lakshmi who saved me, smoothly stepping forward with a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "Oh, actually, that is a great idea - where is that store?" she asked lightly.

Two of the new girls chirped directions - right in this wing, on this level, next to a place called Hertech - while glasses-and-bob stayed leaned down in front of me, quietly looking me over with that carnivore's grin while still obviously offering the view down her shirt. Lakshmi gave a gracious thank-you, followed by others from Aubrey and Josie, and steered me bodily away with a warm, firm hand between my shoulders.

Josie and Aubrey fell into step immediately, casual but deliberate, waving friendly goodbyes.

And me? *What had just happened??* I was flushed, humiliated. But underneath it - deeper - was an embarrassing, confusing warmth that had become familiar to me over the past several months. That dark, shameful little whisper in my chest: *they want me*.

I felt wanted. Wanted. They all wanted me, wanted to care for me. Wanted to claim me. Like I was a prize.

I swallowed hard, keeping my eyes down on the polished marble tiles as the girls bustled me away, chattering brightly about which shops we should see first. We moved deeper into the bright, airy thoroughfare.

Josie had whipped out her phone and was pulling up the mall map. "Ooo look, they have a Heritage!" she pointed out, practically bouncing on her toes, "And there's a huge new salon I hear about - Prism Beauty! Omigosh"

Lakshmi leaned over her shoulder, squinting at the screen. "Let us hit the Vulni store first, it is right up here," she suggested, her voice light but purposeful. "They might have some stuff that fits."

Fits *me*, she meant.

Behind me, Aubrey kept pace - quiet, calm - but I could feel her presence like a warm hand between my shoulder blades. The girls were around me, but not trying to crowd me. They were just there, with me. And, boy, did I need that right now, because even as the girls chattered about shops and boutiques and maybe finding matching outfits (*matching?!),* my mind was spinning in a different orbit.

I kept replaying the last half-hour - the car ride, Aubrey pulling me into her bosomy chest, cooing into my hair, rubbing my back like a mother comforting a little boy after a nightmare. Lakshmi, gentle but firm, coaxing me to admit what I hadn't wanted to say out loud, that I didn't want to go to that appointment, to start investigating my condition. Because deep down...a part of me wanted this. Wanted to keep getting smaller. Wanted to belong to Melissa, to them.

I had said it back there in the car. I'd heard my own voice say it. And now it echoed in my skull like some inescapable truth. I swallowed hard. The taste of that admission - of what it meant - was still thick in my throat.

"Hey," Aubrey said softly, her voice slicing gently through my mental noise. I turned my head slightly to glance back up at her. God she was so tall, once so petite but now the tallest of the three of them, and looked gorgeous in her fitted, buttercream dress.

She smiled - small, tender - like she already knew what was on my mind. "You okay?" she asked.

I opened my mouth to answer - to tell her I wasn't sure, to tell her about the low, swirling cocktail of shame and strange, guilty comfort still sloshing around inside me. But before I could get a single word out:

"Here it is!" Josie squealed, grabbing my hand (and half my arm) and dragging me toward the storefront glowing ahead of us.

VULNI.

Big, gleaming white letters. A soft, pearlescent storefront trimmed in rose gold. And through the windows, male mannequins modeling clothes designed "For Men 5'6" and Under" - promised by a sign.

'...and Under'... that's me. Clothes meant for men like me.

Josie was practically vibrating with excitement.

Aubrey's hand brushed the small of my back again - reassuring, protective - as Lakshmi held open the door, motioning us inside.

And just like that, the rush of warm, perfumed air from the boutique washed over me, and I was swallowed whole.

Josie barreled through the doors of 'Vulni' first, dragging me in behind her by the wrist like a toddler she was hurrying across a crosswalk. Lakshmi and Aubrey followed, laughing behind us.

The store was even more ridiculous - and a little more intimidating - than I'd pictured. Soft pastel walls, the color of sugared almonds. Creamy, cloudlike furniture clustered around the perimeter under warm, golden lighting that made everything - especially the clusters of well-dressed women shopping in pairs, or with their short boyfriends - glow like an Instagram post. Elegant, looping script marked every wall:

"Empowering Gentle Masculinity."

"Tiny - Just the Way We Like You"

"Weak is Strong."

More mannequins posed near the entrance - most of them short, exaggeratedly so - wearing immaculately tailored blazers, vests, tiny silk ties. I noticed, uncomfortably, that many of the mannequins were accompanied by larger, more statuesque female mannequins towering above them, posed protectively or affectionately.

The staff were no different: tall, poised young women in sleek uniforms, all smiles and encouraging gazes as we entered. Some glanced at me with open amusement - or maybe adoration. It was hard to tell.

Josie immediately zeroed in on a rack near the door, pulling free a soft T-shirt in dove-gray with sparkling silver script across the chest:

"Prince Vulni."

"OMG, you have to see this," she squealed, holding it up to me with a laugh. The shirt - though labeled 'XS' was clearly sized for someone bigger than me - it dangled to my mid-thigh.

"Too big!" Aubrey chimed in with a grin.

"That's okay," Josie said, mock-serious, flipping the hanger around to show the back, where a tiny velvet crown had been stitched below the neckline. "Soon they'll have even smaller shirts. Maybe even ones that say 'Doctor Vulni' instead, right?"

Josie winked at me.

I groaned, burying my face in one hand. She could very well be right, though. Thanks to the stupid viral videos, the internet already had a weird obsession with me, the "tiny doctor", the guy that shrinks. And Lucia Antonucci's team was practically salivating at the idea of marketing me, branding me even harder. Dr. Vulni™ merchandise was probably already being designed somewhere, for all I knew.

The girls giggled at my obvious mortification. Josie carefully hung the shirt back up - with exaggerated reverence - and then spun toward the deeper part of the store.

"Ooo, look at this!"

She pointed ahead where, set like a prize display in the center, was a perfect little schoolboy outfit - navy shorts, white oxford shirt, a tiny navy blazer and matching navy socks. Everything was meticulously pressed and arranged like a doll's wardrobe.

Lakshmi smirked, elbowing me lightly. "You would kill in that, Doctor. Just need a little backpack and maybe a juicebox."

My ears burned, and Lakshmi bumped me playfully in the shoulder with her massive hip. She was still in her scrubs, as was I. It was funny, how our relationship had developed. She worked for me long before Melissa was ever hired, and was a calm, smart, steady presence in the office - young but a great medical assistant. She'd always been so deferential to me, respectful - which, in a lot of ways, she still was. We'd both seen a lot of changes, in the office and, uh, in our own bodies, and had been through them together. It brought us, I guess, closer. We were comfortable around one another, I like to think.

Aubrey gasped, then tugged my sleeve toward a side display. "Look! Suits! They may even have your size!" Aubrey was another one - young, but she was an employee before Melissa, too. Despite her age she seemed an old soul and like Lakshmi had been a quiet girl that respected me - and maybe a bit more than that. She too, though, had blossomed in

staggering ways into not only her new height but greater confidence and an enormous pair of tits. I looked up at her smiling widely - she was beaming down at me with both. "Let's look!"

A long rack of pastel suits gleamed under soft lighting - pale pink, mint green, creamy vanilla, icy blue - all sharply tailored but clearly, unmistakably, designed for men of...well, small size. Some my size. Some - gulp - even smaller. But I was still trying to recover from the mental image of myself stuffed into a schoolboy outfit when the girls corralled me again.

"Okay, seriously now," Josie said, grabbing my shoulders and spinning me to face them. Josie, on the other hand, was a new face, a friend of Melissa's and now besties with Lakshmi. The youngest of them all she was normally an exuberant force of fun. "What do you actually *need*?"

"Yeah," Lakshmi chimed in warmly. "Something you can wear to work, maybe? To your meetings?"

"Or out having fun with your girls!" Josie laughed.

Aubrey stepped closer, a soft flush of excitement rising in her cheeks. "It'll be our treat, Dr. J, we know money's tight," she said sweetly, "That's alright girls, isn't it?"

"Oh, for sure," Josie said, voice dropping a bit lower as she took an almost imperceptible step towards me.

"We can pay for everything," Lakshmi agreed, hugging me to her womanly hip. Her warmth overtook me.

"You'll be our little project for the afternoon," Josie assured.

"We'll dress you up nice," Aubrey smiled.

I gulped. Their young, lovely faces - bright, smiling, completely earnest - and their bodies - curvy beyond belief - surrounded me from above. I swallowed hard, feeling about four feet tall.

Which, of course, I was.

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thank you to Joshua67 for his talents and patience in bringing the image to the story