

“MITTEN HANDS”

“You have cooked a delicious meal, Kayla,” said Angela, as she, Doris, and Priscilla pretended to eat from the toy table set.

“It’s some kind of an Italian rice thingy, right?” said Doris. “I forget what it’s called.”

“Risotto,” said Kayla.

“Are the Bimbos not coming?” Priscilla asked.

Kayla’s face fell. “Er ... they asked what I was cooking, and when I told them, they said they were going to be having salad instead.”

“Hmmm,” Angela said with a concerned expression. “They’re eating out tonight, anyway.”

“And Annabelle,” said Priscilla. “What’s up?”

“Nothing. I’m not hungry.”

“Not hungry? You haven’t eaten all day; you snacked on some popcorn during the video and that was it, as far as I know.”

Annabelle shrugged. “I’m just not hungry.”

“Well, try and eat a little of the veggies.”

Annabelle sighed and put a couple of spoons of carrots on her plate. She took a bite, and then put her hands under the tablecloth. Mystified, Priscilla shook her head.

Following a knock and an invitation to enter, a handsome tanned vinyl face with a large jutting chin and black plastic hair peered around the door.

“Ken!” Kayla exclaimed.

“Barbie and Bev around?” he asked.

“They’re hanging out in their new Bimbo bungalow,” said Angela.

“Did they know I was taking them out?”

“Of course,” said Doris. “That’s why they’ve been changing outfits, brushing their hair, and putting on makeup for the past two hours.”

“Only two hours? That means I’m waiting for at least another. Oh well, I guess I can just chill.”

“Did you eat?” Kayla asked.

“Actually, no. I’m supposed to take the Bimbos out to eat, but all they’ll want will be a fat-free salad and water-lite, while they look down their noses if I tuck into anything more than a soup. Phew.”

“Well,” said Angela. “Kayla made a *delicious* Italian ... whatever...”

“Risotto,” said Kayla.

“Risotto? I’ll go for that anytime, and I’m as hungry as a bear.”

“Not this bear,” Bruno muttered.

“Okay, Bruno,” said Angela. “Just ’cos it’s not honey or treacle doesn’t mean you can’t enjoy it and be thankful.”



Ken was only five minutes into gobbling down his plate of risotto when Barbara and Beverly Bimbo strutted in.

"I thought we were going *out* to eat," said Barbara.

"Er, well..." Ken began.

"We invited him," said Angela. "He couldn't refuse."

"Hmmp," chorused the Bimbos.

"I hope he realises that a meal like that can put *inches* on his waistline," said Barbara.

"That's ridiculous," said Doris. "It's a healthy meal, and it's good for you. And besides, dollies can't put on weight."

"They're saying now that in actual fact we *can*," said Beverly.

"It's in the latest *Fit for Nothing* magazine," said Barbara.

"Oh, my goodness," said Kayla. "What can we do?"

"Say 'no' to it, like Belle here," said Beverly. "Right, Belle?"

"Er ... right," said Annabelle, staring nervously at her plate.

"Saying no to what?" Priscilla asked.

"To fat," Annabelle mumbled.

"Well, I guess we should fly," Barbara Bimbo said, hastily. "We reserved a table. It wouldn't do to be late."

Ken bolted down a few more bites and reluctantly excused himself with an apologetic smile.

"Duty calls," he whispered, with a wink to Annabelle.

"And Belle, be sure you check it before you go to sleep tonight," said Beverly, as she and Barbara made their way to the door with Ken sauntering behind them.

"Check what?" Priscilla asked.

"The weight scale in the Bimbos' bungalow," muttered Annabelle.

"Why, is it broken?" Doris asked.

"No," said Priscilla. "I think..."



"I'm concerned about Annabelle," Priscilla whispered, drawing Angela and Doris into the hallway. "It's not like her to pass on ice cream. That's the second time she's done it."

"It could be her age," said Angela. "But I have noticed she's very much into her reflection in the mirror. Not in an admiring way, like the Bimbos, but more like a concern."

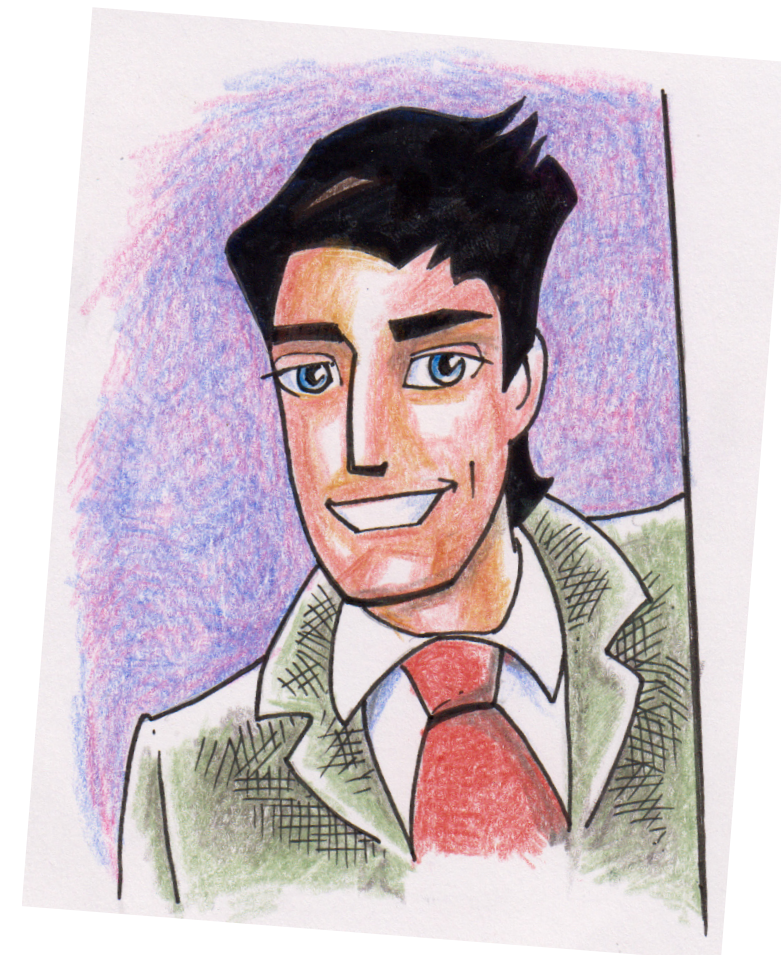
"Yes," said Doris. "She does look worried all the time."

"True," said Priscilla. "And it's funny. Just last night before I put her down to sleep, she had been sitting on her hands, like she did when Ken came into the room."

"That's right," said Angela. "I noticed that, but I thought nothing of it. Did you say something?"

"I asked her why she was doing that, and she wouldn't answer."

"Hmmp," Doris said, stroking her chin. "Annabelle *has* been spending a lot of time around the Bimbos, and I wonder if it's contributing to her self-consciousness."



"It's 'cos she has mitten hands," Kayla confided later that evening after Priscilla had received no explanation from Annabelle.

"What do you mean?"

"The Bimbos were commenting on everyone's hands. They didn't include Bruno, Nosey and Shumba's paws, of course, but they said mine were very nice, although not as long and delicate as theirs. That's okay with me, I don't want to be prissy like them; but then they looked at Annabelle's and giggled."

"That's cruel," said Angela.

"I know. Then Beverly said she has mitten hands."

"Mitten hands!" Priscilla said. "Why?"

Having overheard Priscilla's exclamation, Annabelle burst into tears. "I don't have long slender fingers like the Bimbos," she blubbered. "Actually I don't even have any fingers *at all*."

"But Annabelle, those are *your* hands, the ones you were made with, and they're unique."

"Well, I wish I could be sent back to the factory and be totally remade."

"Oh no," said Doris, who had been overhearing the conversation while straightening the bedroom.

"Then we wouldn't even recognise you. You wouldn't be the same Annabelle that we all love."

"You don't all love me," said Annabelle.

"Yes we do," chorused Kayla, Nosey, Bruno, and Shumba.

"The Bimbos don't."

"Yes they do," said Priscilla. "They just ... er ... show it differently."

"Ken likes you," Kayla said with a cheeky grin.

"Don't be absurd," said Annabelle.

"Yes, he does," Kayla continued. "He hardly says anything to me when he comes by. But he always talks to you."

"And makes sure he says goodbye to you," Doris added. "I have noticed."

The bedroom door opened, and Ken and the Bimbos strolled in.

"Coming back from our 'night on the town,'" said Ken. "But I'm *famished*."

"Famished?" said Barbara.

"*Ken!*" said Beverly.

"Yeah. *Ravenous!* Is there some of that risotto left over?"

"Tons," said Kayla, jumping up. "I'll heat some up."

"Hi, Belle," said Ken.

"Hello, Ken," Annabelle said, blushing.

"Oh, pardon me. I see you've been ... er ... crying."

"She had a little issue," Priscilla softly said.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Ken. "By the way, that's a beautiful name—'Annabelle.' Did Priscilla choose it?"

"Er ... yes. Umm, it's because I was presented to her on Christmas Day and I look like the dolly in the story of Annabelle, the Christmas dolly."

"Annabelle, the Christmas dolly!" Ken exclaimed. "Wow! Isn't that just the weirdest thing! I remember it was one my sisters' favourite stories when I was a kid. Not mine, of course, but I just loved the name."



"I think we'll be heading off to bed," Barbara Bimbo said icily. "Yeah," said Beverly. "Seeing as our evening together has taken another turn."

"Oops," said Ken, slapping his head. "I can be so insensitive sometimes. I didn't even notice you were *there* ... umm, like, *waiting*."

"It's fine," said Barbara. "We're done. You just go ahead and finish your little chat."

"Which you seemed to be thoroughly enjoying," Beverly added. "We wouldn't dream of spoiling your fun."

With a snort and a toss of their heads, the Bimbos trotted into their bungalow.

"So, Annabelle," Ken continued after offhandedly acknowledging their departure. "I hear you enjoy reading a lot."

Annabelle shyly nodded.

"It's obvious. You're so intelligent, but without being all high-minded and snobby. What do you like to read?"

"Oh, I don't know ... classics, some historical romance novels, Bible stories, and I love biographies."

Ken nodded ponderingly. "Tell me something..."



"It seems that they're still talking," said Angela as she, Doris and Priscilla cleaned the kitchen. "Ken hasn't left yet."

"Maybe you should remind him that it's Annabelle's lights out, Pris," said Doris.

At that moment, the kitchen door swung open.

"Ken!" Priscilla said with a hint of relief. "You're leaving now?"

"Yeah! Sorry, the time just flew by, but it was such a fascinating conversation. Belle can talk about anything! Makes me feel like a total dodo!"

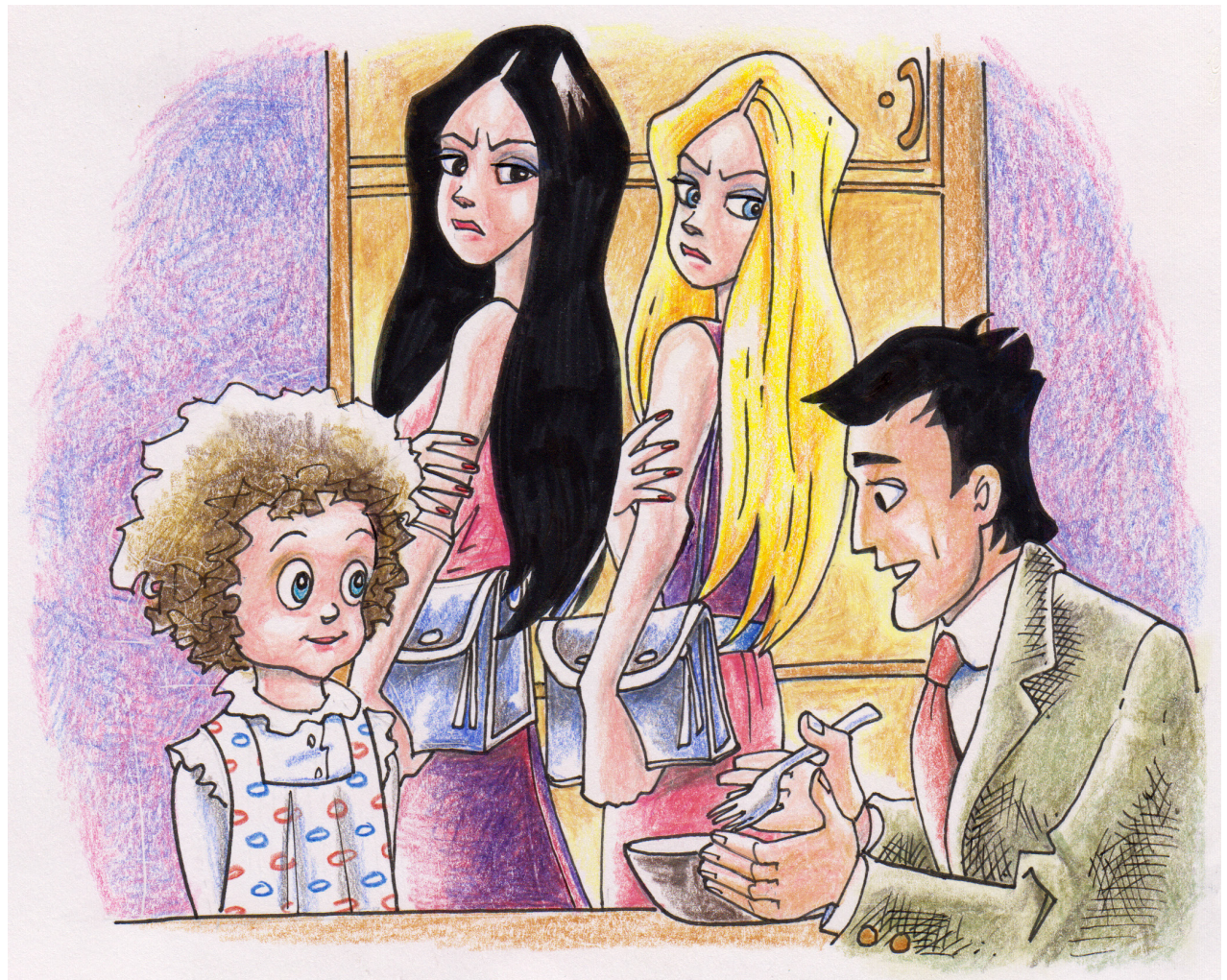
"Sorry," said Priscilla. "Annabelle does tend to go on a bit once you get her started—airing her views and all."

"No problem at all. It was the most interesting conversation I've had in ages. We must have covered everything from popular culture to politics, with history and humanity in between!" Ken rolled his eyes and smiled wearily. "But with the Bimbos it's an endless cycle of discussion about hair care, makeup, and clothes, to dieting, workouts, and then back again."

"Hmm," said Angela. "Their conversation can be a tad limited."

"But they do talk about boys' interests too," said Doris. "I've heard them."

"Oh yeah," said Ken. "Rock stars, sports, muscle toning, and cars. But I want to talk about other things. Where do we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? What's God like? Is there even a God? Things like Belle and I talked about tonight."



"Imagine, I have a night on the town with a couple of Bimbo beauties, end up bored stiff, and come back here famished, where I have the time of my life chatting with an incredibly intelligent girl!"

"That's wonderful," said Priscilla.

"Belle's fantastic."

"She most certainly is, Ken. I just wish she could hear you say all this. She's been having issues about her looks lately."

"Her *looks*?"

"Yes. Specifically her weight and her hands."

"Her *weight*? But she's just beautiful ... and her hands ... well, when we were first talking she was sitting on them, which I thought was kind of weird."

"She's self-conscious about them," said Priscilla.

"Yeah, but then as she got going with her opinions, she must have forgotten herself, and was waving her hands about like crazy! They are so unique and *expressive*."

"Yes, but the thing is, you see ... uh, just a moment..."

Priscilla paused, tiptoed to the kitchen door and opened it.

"Annabelle! I heard some sniffing. Were you eavesdropping?"

"I-I'm sorry. I-I came down to say good-night, and I h-heard Ken talking and m-my name mentioned."

"But why are you crying?" Priscilla asked, taking Annabelle up the stairs to avoid the blubbering dolly's embarrassment at facing the others. "Is everything all right?"

"Everything's f-fine. It's j-just ... the things Ken said have m-made me so happy that I c-can't stop c-crying."

"That's wonderful, sweetheart," said Priscilla. "And what did he say about your so-called mitten hands?"

"Er ... s-something about them being unique and ... what was the word?"

"Expressive," said Priscilla, as she tucked Annabelle into her shoebox bed. "He meant that your hands move in an interesting way to emphasize what you are saying."

So, Annabelle went to sleep that night with a contented smile and a grateful heart for not only her hands but for every way in which the factory had made her.

And the following day, she fearlessly tucked into a giant helping of Kayla's delicious risotto.

