

# Cheer Up

A collaboration by Princess Kay and Penny

I nearly fell off the couch when the knocking started at my door. The doorknob rattled as I blinked away the remnants of my nap. Then came another knock, even louder, fueled by irritation at finding the door locked. It's common to have a few seconds right after waking up when you don't remember who you are or what's happening around you. But I knew exactly who was at the door.

“Jacob~!” A high pitched voice called out my name.

I once made the mistake of telling her the door was too thick to hear her knocks as a dumb, half-assed excuse for taking my time to answer. Apparently, and unfortunately, Kristina had bought it. Some people would develop a sense of patience; she decided to double down on volume.

“Jacob! You better not be napping in there! You're supposed to be getting ready for the party!”

With a soft groan, I pushed myself up into a sitting position, and lowered my feet to the ground. My body felt heavy and dense, a contrast to my head, which seemed to be stuffed with cotton.

Kristina is a force of nature, though, so before she could break down the door I stumbled over to open it. My mouth opened as well, ready to release a piping hot piece of my mind, but then I saw her and no words came out.

Kristina looked exactly like she always did; wavy red hair that cascaded down her back and over her shoulders. Bright green eyes that crinkled around the corner when her high-boned cheeks were pushed up by a smile like the rising sun. My best friend since second grade, and the subject of my eighteen-year-long secret crush.

“Morning, sleeping beauty,” she laughed, pushing past me and into my apartment, heaving two black tote bags “You totally haven’t gotten ready yet, have you.” She strode to the bathroom, not waiting for a response. “Passed out as soon as you got home from work, right?” Kristina knew me like the back of her perfectly manicured hand.

She tossed one bag into the bathroom and turned back to me, still smiling. “I can, like, trust you to take care of everything yourself, this time right? I have my own outfit to change into.”

“Trust me to... Wait...” Walking into the bathroom, I opened the pitch black bag and peered inside. Staring back at me was a bright and cheerful pink and gold cheerleader outfit, complete with a pleated skirt.

“No. No crossdressing. You’re not tricking me again.”

“I’m not *tricking* you into anything,” Kristina said trickily in her tricking voice. “Besides, you’re so *cute!* Even Audrey admitted that you were super pretty.”

If I could, I would have raised an eyebrow at that. The cajoling and flattery was fairly standard when Kristina was trying to manipulate me, but she had to be desperate if she was bringing up her ex.

That was reason number one why my crush stayed secret; Kristina's tastes lay exclusively with women. Tall, short, skinny, thick; She loved being around them, talking with them, and most definitely being on top of them. Not just romantically, either; she'd gotten much closer to her sister, after Mandy had come out as a girl. In fact, with her father absent, I was pretty much the only male in Kristina's life, though I tried not to bring that up.

The last time I'd asked if she was okay hanging out with a boy like me, we were ten years old. That was when Kristina had calmly explained that I didn't count as a boy. Then she'd excitedly asked me if I wanted to try on skirts with her.

Basically since then, Kristina made it a point to dress me as a girl at least once a year. She insisted on watching makeup tutorial videos together. She taught me what colors would go well with my skin tone. She'd even tried to make me try out for the cheerleading team with her and "jokingly" begged me to pledge her sorority back in college. After the last time, I had thought I'd gotten her to back off, but some small part of me had wondered if she was just picking her battles in anticipation of something bigger.

“Like, come *on*, Jen!” Kristina interrupted my thoughts with my ‘pet name’ as her soft lips pulled into a picture-perfect pout. “You have fun when we do stuff as girls. You get to wear cute clothes and we watch lesbian chick flicks and it’s so nice!”

I fought the urge to look away as my face turned red. “It’s something we do in private.”

“Yeah...” Kristina agreed with me. A little too easily. I dared to dart my eyes back to her, but that was a mistake - her green gaze, full of hurt and disappointment and a tiny flicker of hope, locked on to my brown eyes. She gave me a bright enough smile to leave my knees trembling. “But you missed our party last year! Even though you *promised* you would come, remember?”

I remembered. Kristina had refused to answer my texts for a week after last year I skipped out on our Halloween hangout for a bad date. The eighth morning brought with it a seventeen-text speech about the importance of keeping your word, and me making a new promise- one I was about to regret.

“When I said you could pick my next costume, I didn’t think you meant for a *public* party.”

“Well, you should have said so at the time. But you promised. And there’s no way you’d break *another* promise, right?” She was bouncing in place. There was no stopping her now. “Besides, you’re not going as just a girl.”

“...I’m not?”

If there was any timeline in the multiverse where I persuaded Kristina to abandon her plan, it was not one that contained those two words and their implication of consent. A gleaming smile spread across her cheeks, the way a mushroom cloud forms on the horizon.

“Nooooooooooooo. Well. You see, you said that you’d go as *anything* I wanted, right?” she bit her lower lip, and shifted from leg to leg- she was feeling guilty. “And I was like, totally getting teased by one of my old sorority sisters for not being able to get a date, sooooo... I thought you could go. As my girlfriend?” She smiled brightly with the last word, but for my part - I nearly crumpled over.

The love of my life was asking me out.

As a girl.

It wasn’t even real... but it might be the closest I could ever get.

“...Fine,” I conceded, with a loud sigh. “Fine. I’ll be your fake cheerleader girlfriend, and go to the party.”

“Oh, no, you’re not a cheerleader, Jen!” Kristina corrected, holding up a finger. “You work at a call center, just like in real life. You’re just going as a cheerleader for the costume party!”

“...If I have to pretend anyway, couldn’t I have gotten a better job out of it then working at a call center?”

“Well, I really wanted it to be a simple change for you!” Kristina explained, leaning forward and taking my hands in hers. Her fingers were warm, and soft, and I found my cheeks turning red the longer she held them.

Perhaps it was inevitable that I ended up blinking in confusion when she said “Alright?”

“Uh....”

“Did you zone out again?” she asked, pulling her hand free from mine. Her lips were pulled into an adorable pout as her professionally plucked brows furrowed. “I *said* that we’re sticking as close to the truth as possible. You’re my best friend, Jen, who always had a crush on me but never had the nerves to come out and say it - until last Halloween, I finally got a bouquet of roses and confessed to you myself.”

“Doesn’t that make me seem a bit pathetic?” I asked, scratching at the back of my head. My fingers got tangled quickly in the messy curls of my brown hair,

reminding me that I was overdue for a cut. I hadn't been able to find the energy for it, of late, and my hair had grown halfway down my neck as a result.

“Not to me,” Kristina replied, unaware of the drift in my thoughts. Her fingers were clasped together over her heart. “Once I found out that my best friend was totally into me, it was like the planets had aligned to give me the perfect girlfriend! I realized I had feelings for you too, and, when you totally actually did show up for our Halloween Hangout, I told you everything in my heart. We had a magical kiss, watched horror movies all night, and have been together since. Understand?”

“I don't see how any of that's close to the truth,” I said, seeing it vividly in my mind, “but okay. I'll go along with your plan.”

“Great!” Kristina pumped her fist in joy. Pure delight on her perfect face, like a gorgeous portrait concealing the hidden dungeon of Machiavellian scheming.

“You know you could probably find a real girlfriend, if you actually wanted one,” I pointed out, reaching for the doorknob.

“Maybe I'd rather have you.”

She stuck her tongue out at me when I didn't respond, but I honestly couldn't think of anything to say. Instead, I let the door close behind me, and turned my attention to the costume.



I was expecting a cheap, slutty halloween costume to be in the bag. Something Kristina might have bought for twenty bucks during her lunch break. I wasn't exactly wrong - it was slutty - but the costume in the bag definitely wasn't cheap.

It was an actual cheerleader uniform. In fact, it was Kristina's old uniform from college. A bright yellow crop top, with "Princes" written diagonally across it to indicate our team name, and a rich purple pleated skirt that I knew wouldn't even reach my knees.

I remembered staring at Kristina in this uniform so many times. She'd always looked beautiful in it. Surprisingly, though, she'd never let me try it on - not that I'd really wanted to, of course. It was just that when she was having me dress as a girl, anyways, I'd sometimes wondered what it would be like to wear that outfit in particular. She'd always shot me down, though. It was too precious, even for her best friend.

If she was letting me wear it today, then she really must have wanted to sell the fact that we were a couple. That she loved me.

I sighed, wishing for a moment that I really could be Kristina's girlfriend.

Then I dismissed the ridiculous fantasy, and checked what else was in the bag. I found a pair of bright pink panties, a padded bra, and the foam breast forms

she'd gotten for me as a prank gift, a few years back. There was also a pair of kitten heels, and a bottle of depilatory cream.

I stripped off my black jeans and grey tee. I hesitated on the boxers, but then imagined them being noticed under the miniscule skirt, and off they came.

The next step was using the depilatory cream. It wasn't my first time using it, to be honest; I'd waxed, too. Sometimes it didn't feel like there were any limits to what Kristina could get me to do.

Sighing at the thought, I squeezed some depilatory cream out of the plastic tube Kristina had given me, and rubbed it across my hairy legs. A few minutes later, I turned on the tub faucet. The cream flowed down the drain and took the hair with it, leaving me with nothing but smooth legs.

Next, I turned to the sink, and ran the water hot until the mirror started to steam. After removing some of the fog with the palm of my hand, I grabbed the shaving cream, and spread it all across my face. Scraping off the scraggly hair, removing the sparse stubble that decorated my face. Every few seconds, I'd run the razor under the hot water, and watch the tiny hairs fall down to circle about the drain. Watching them wash away was like seeing my masculinity disappear down the tubes.

An interesting thought, but I wasn't really going to turn into a girl just because I'd smoothed out my legs and shaved my face.

Shaking off a sudden burst of melancholy, I decided to move onto the makeup. First, I rubbed some primer across my face. Then, I applied foundation that matched my skin tone: a gift from Kristina "to Jen." Next, I added a touch of blush to my cheeks, just to bring out the color.

That was followed by a primer for my eyelids, and then a little eyeshadow, some mascara, and of course the piece de resistance: lipstick. I went with a bright pink bubblegum, in sharp contrast to the subtle approach I'd gone with so far. I thought it might draw attention to my lips. Kristina always said they were one of my best features.

After the makeup was finished, I picked up a brush and began to run it through my hair. My curls were a mess, and every few seconds I had to pause and detangle a knot with my fingers, before moving back to the brush. Eventually, however, I reached a point where I could pull the bristles straight through my curly locks, without it catching once.

My brown hair was long for a guy, but short for a girl. I worried about how it would look, at first, but the way the curls framed my face in the mirror disposed

of those worries. I really did look feminine; pretty, too. As long as you focused only above the neck.

Well. It was time to take care of the rest of me.

I hooked the padded bra together, then slipped it over my head and shoulders, situating it against my chest. The band was a snug fit, but me and Kristina had worn each other's clothes enough for me to know we were about the same band size. The problem was only that I had nothing to cup, but the breast forms quickly took care of that.

A moment later, I was pulling the crop top over my head, the fabric settling against my sternum. My stomach was almost completely exposed, to my embarrassment, but with the bra and breast forms covered, I really didn't think anyone would be able to tell my chest wasn't real. Not without feeling it for themselves.

The panties went on next. I was thankful that Kristina had insisted on teaching me about tucking; a bulge was not what I needed, tonight of all nights.

Soon, I was slipping on the heels. They only lifted me two inches, and they were easy enough to walk in, but the fact that I was wearing them out was a little embarrassing. I could only hope that no one ever found out.

“Kristina?” I called, hand cupping my mouth as I projected my voice. “Are you ready? I want to come out.”

“Ready!” came the reply, sounding as cheerful and bright as she always did.

My heart pounding in my chest, I took a deep breath and opened the door, uncertain what I’d find on the other side.

“...I was not expecting this...”

Kristina was apparently going as a football player; a very feminine football player. She had her hair pulled back into a ponytail. She had a football helmet under her arms. And she had a jersey, complete with shoulder pads, that stopped a solid three inches above her belly button.

She was also wearing black trousers, and white cleats, the latter being the most realistic part of the costume.

“How do I look?” she asked me, doing a little spin while I stared slack jawed. “I bet I look super manly like this! Like. Rawr!”

She giggled.

I sighed.

“Let’s... Let’s just get to the party,” I muttered, head down.

Perhaps I should have been grateful. Between me in an ill-fitted cheerleader uniform, and Kristina in her perfectly fitted costume, it was easy to guess who would draw the attention.

“So I get to drive, right?” Kristina asked, already reaching for the hook by the door where I kept my keys.

“What? No. There’s no way I’m getting into any car you’re driving,” I protested, holding out the palms of my hands in a firm gesture of refusal.

Kristina’s lips pulled into a perfect pout, but I simply closed my eyes and shook my head, crossing my arms.

“There’s no way I’m getting into a car you’re driving,” I insisted. “You go way too fast, you barely bother with stop signs, and I *still* remember how close we came to hitting that old woman last time.”

“I’ve gotten better, since, though!” she promised, her voice filled with pride.

“It was last week!”

“Well, yeahhhhhh, but I’ve been doing a lot of practicing since then!” she declared, pantomiming turning a steering wheel. “Look at my form! My teacher said we should take the whole class, and just focus on my form, without any driving for a bit.”

“Uh-huh... There’s no way you’re driving,” I declared, walking forward and reaching for the keys myself.

“But, like, won’t it be weird if a cop pulls you over when you look like this, Jen?” She put a finger to her lip as she spoke, and tilted her head innocently to one side. You wouldn’t tell, looking at her, that she’d just driven a spike of fear through my heart. “I mean, if you’re sure there’s no chance you’ll get pulled over, I guess it’s fine...”

“...You can drive...” I sighed, dropping my hands from the keys.

Kristina hopped happily in place, squeeing loudly before grabbing my keys and running out the door.

I stared after her for a moment, and then shook my head, hoping I wouldn’t regret the decision.

\*\*\*

Kristina slid out of the car, dancing from foot to foot eagerly as she moved toward the building.

I waited a moment longer, taking keys out of the ignition and trying to catch my breath. Riding in a car with Kristina was always an experience and a half. I’d

do it twice more, though, if it meant not having to go inside and face the world as Jen.

Kristina was calling for me, gesturing with her hand for me to hurry up, so I slowly moved out of the car and joined her in walking up the stairs to the porch. I was expecting us to knock on the door, but Kristina merely tugged it open and ushered me inside.

There were people inside. That's probably obvious - it was a party - but it didn't really hit me until I was inside just how many people there would be. Talking, flirting, laughing, drinking. Dancing to the music that was being pumped through the house, sound as ubiquitous as oxygen to the point where I could barely hear a word Kristina was saying beside me.

Then she was tugging me in.

I felt eyes travel across us both as we crossed the hall. Men we passed did a double take, looking us both over one after the other, and I couldn't help but worry that they were seeing me for who I truly was. That they could tell I was simply a man in a costume.

Kristina was still tugging me, though, so I kept walking forward. One foot in front of the other, moving deeper and deeper into the belly of this social beast.



“Kristina...” I whispered, but the low pitch of my voice was wiped out by the thrum of music. “Kristina?” I repeated, louder, only to realize that she’d stopped in front of a girl. Was pointing to me, and puffing out her chest.

The other girl glanced my way, but only for a moment, before smiling at Kristina. Talking to Kristina. Reaching out to put her hand on Kristina’s arm, and leaning forward to whisper in Kristina’s ear.

Kristina giggled, in response.

I felt a sudden sickness in my stomach. Were they laughing about how I looked? Were they talking about how ugly and out of place I was, in this cheerleader outfit? Were they laughing about how Kristina had finally convinced her childhood friend to come out in drag?

I took a step backward. Kristina frowned, in response, but I only took another step away from her. Then I turned, and began to run, back down the hall, back past the people. Back toward the car, and safety.

I had the keys. I could drive home. She had only brought me here to mock me - why else would she bring me out into the real world in such an obviously ill-fitted to me costume?

Barely able to breathe, I realized that there were tears streaming down my arms. I wiped at them with my arm.

Something caught at my hand.

No. Not something. The fingers that wrapped about my fist were ones I knew quite well - Kristina's.

She was standing behind me, smiling brightly, and trying to tug me back.

I shook my head, unable to express that I couldn't return, that I couldn't do what she wanted me to. I couldn't pretend to be her girlfriend, in front of all these people. Not when they could all so clearly see right through my costume.

I didn't know how to express all that, though, in the loud house with the people watching. So I only stared at her, and sadly shook my head.

Kristina frowned, for a moment, then grinned suddenly. Still holding my hand, she pulled me back a few steps, to a door in the hallway. Opening it, she gestured for me to go in.

I hesitated, uncertain what she wanted, or what to do. She gestured again, pouting her perfect little pout, and I sighed before walking past the door.

I was in a bedroom. A single-person mattress, in a simple mahogany frame, took up most of the room. There was a nightstand, with a glass of water, which trembled faintly every few seconds from the noise thrumming through the house. There was a black lamp, with a bendable frame. That was the entirety of the room.

I didn't understand why Kristina had brought me here.

Until she closed the door, and the overly loud music immediately was immediately muffled to a more manageable level.

“There,” Kristina declared. “You can only really have conversations in a private room, at a party like this!”

“Conversations,” I muttered, still unsure what the point of all this was. “So we can talk. How’s that supposed to help?”

“I wanted to know why you freaked out so much! You totally looked like you weren’t having a good time, and then you tried to leave? Without even talking to me?” She put the football helmet down on the nightstand as she talked, moving the glass of water over to the side. “I just don’t get you. I thought you’d be super excited to take Jen into the outside world!”

“Why would I be excited about giving a bunch of people the chance to laugh at me?” I muttered, barely able to keep my rising frustrations contained. “Why would I be excited about showing a bunch of people a man in a dress?”

Kristina stared at me for a moment, her mouth open into a little “o” of surprise. “Wait... You think people look at you and see a man?”

“Well, what else would they see?” I demanded, placing a hand on my chest, between the foam breasts. “I’m a man, aren’t I!? I know you aren’t interested in guys, but the least you could do is see me for who I am!”

“I do see you for who you are,” Kristina protested, stepping toward me. Reaching forward, she ran her fingers through my hair, before letting her hand fall down to my shoulder. Then, with her hand around my neck, she pulled me closer to her. “I’ve seen who you are since we were kids. You’re the one who’s always had trouble...”

“What are you *talking* about?” I demanded, exasperated. “Why do you always talk like you know me better than anyone!? You don’t even know I’m in love with you!”

Kristina stared at me, eyes wide, mouth opening and closing. I stared back, heart beating rapidly, barely able to believe that I’d spoken the words held in my heart all this time.

For whatever good it would do.

I might have confessed my feelings, but Kristina was still a lesbian. And I... I was still...

Kristina giggled.

It caught me so off guard, all I could do was stare at her in surprise, as she leaned backward, tilted her head back, and started to loudly laugh.

“Wh-What’s so funny?” I demanded. “Is it so funny, knowing that I love you? Just because you only like girls-”

“It’s funny...” she lifted a finger, letting another fit of giggles while I stared in silent anger. “It’s funny because... because.... Because I love you too, you dork!”

“...But you only like girls,” I pointed out, a small frown on my face.

“Well, yeah. What’s the problem with a girl who likes girls loving another girl?” Kristina demanded, before letting out another giggle. “Oooh, it feels good to finally say that. I’m a girl who loves girls, and I love Jen! I love Jen! She’s my favorite girl, and she always has been.”

“I’m... I’m not a girl...” I whispered, staring at the ground. “You can stop making fun of me by calling me one. And pretending to love me. It’s not... it’s not nice...”

“Jen...” Kristina took a step toward me. I was surprised to see an actual serious look in her eyes, as she took my hands. “Jen. I’ve been in love with you since last Halloween. When you stood me up, to go on a date with a girl, I finally realized everything we had - everything I wanted to keep - and everything I stood to lose by not telling you the truth.

“The only thing that stopped me is that you’re a total dumb dumb when it comes to yourself! You figured out that you’re in love with a lesbian - but you couldn’t figure out you’re a lesbian, too?”

“I’m not... I’m not a girl...” I repeated, unsure how else to put it. “I mean, I was born with a dick. I can’t be a girl, just because I... because I...”

“Because you want to be?” Jen asked, leaning forward until her lips were just a hairbreadth away from mine. “I think my sister would disagree with that. She might even punch you for saying it.”

“That’s... That’s different. She - she always knew she was a girl, she was just... she was just too scared to say it. I don’t know anything of the sort,” I muttered, looking at the floor. “I don’t know who I am, or what I am, or...”

“You know you love me, though, don’t you?” Kristina asked, eyes bright and wide. “And you know I love you.”

“Jen. Do you remember the first time you ever wore a dress?”

“Yeah. You forced me into one of your skirts...”

“I only suggested you wear it because you’d spent an hour staring at them in jealousy. Jen. I knew from the start that you were a girl. I just hoped you’d figure it out for yourself.”

“But then I fell in love with you, and I realized how stupid we were both being. You wasted so much time waiting for me to realize how you felt - and I wasted so much time waiting for you to figure yourself out.”

“That’s why I’m here to tell you, Jen... You’re a girl. And a girl loves you.”

I stared at her for a moment, then shook my head. “But...”

“Jen.” Letting go of my hand, she reached back into her helmet, and of all things pulled her purse from its depths. Then, from within it, she pulled out a handheld mirror, which she handed to me.

“Look at yourself. Do you really think you’re a guy?”

I stared into the mirror for a moment. Stared at the reflection. “It’s... It’s just the makeup, making me look pretty...” I protested.

“It wouldn’t matter if you looked ugly,” Kristina told me, gently closing the mirror, and again taking my hand. “It wouldn’t matter if you looked like a guy, in that dress.

“None of it matters one bit. Because you’d be a girl no matter what. And I’d... I’d always love you.”

I stared at her for a moment, unsure what to say. I felt the tears slipping down my cheeks, before I even realized I was crying, and wiped at my face with my arm once more.

Then I smiled. “How do you always know the right words to cheer me up?”

“Because I’m a cheerleader!” Kristina declared, puffing out her chest like when she’d talked to her friend. “Because I’m a cheerleader... and because I love you, Jen.”

Reaching out to run my hand through her hair, I leaned forward to kiss my football player date on her lips, a small smile spreading across my face the moment we parted.

“I think I’m the cheerleader tonight,” I pointed out.

Kristina’s only response was a giggle, before holding out her hand “Are you ready to go back out, then?”

“Part of me still wants to go home... But... I guess we still need to prove to all your friends that you could get a date.”

“Oh, I totally made that up to get you out here,” Kristina replied, giggling. Then, while I stood staring at her in shock, she tugged me toward the door. “But I’m still really eager to show everyone my date.”

I nodded, a small smile on my own face, as Kristina opened the door and let the music wash over us.

This would be the last costume party I attended with Kristina for quite some time. Not the last party, though.

It was just that I didn’t need a costume to cheer up.