

Bad Attitude

by Mark Reep

Lose all the good parts of Telan's walk to work— the hike and bike path, the gorge, the creek crossing— start with a long look down the alley, a small hoodied figure turning in. Next panel, bring her closer, show details: Her hood's pulled tight, she's checking her cell. Last panel, she's at the gallery's back door, a light's on inside. Small thought bubble: *Crap.*

The part of Telan nearly always occupied with these things decides yeah, that works. She closes the door behind her quietly, pulls her hoodie off, hangs it in the entryway. Tells herself: Remember. Make a sketch.

In the ladies' she looks in the mirror, fluffs what the hoodie flattened. Her bangs are getting in her eyes again, a look she likes but can't stand, too blink-making. Next drawing she sells she'll get a trim. Or just do it herself again.

The restroom's light yellowing her hair the way it does, rendering it no honest auburn but an unconvincing reddish-blond she might have bought on sale, left on too long. More panels coming to her, looking in the mirror: "Hey," she says, not loudly. "What?" her reflection says. Leans forward, cups a hand to one ear. Maybe they hear something, turn away in unison. Nah. Too cute.

Checking her boots, wiping mud from one. The basement door's ajar, lights on in Peter's office. In the Salon, the computer's on, a stack of framed pieces on the counter. Black frames, like her drawings— They *are* hers. A consignment sheet with her name, a list of titles, RETURN in green letters. Kim appears at the top of the steps with a cardboard box, sees Telan, pauses. Kim works weekends, evenings, openings. Not mornings. "What's up," Telan says. Trying for casual, unconcerned.

"Hi," Kim says. She doesn't look at Telan, puts the box on the counter. It's empty. "Um," Kim says, tucks her hair behind her ear. "Peter wants to see you. He's downstairs."

For a moment Telan sees how she'll draw this one too: Hoodie Girl looking stunned and stricken, well-dressed people coming in the front door. Perky Gallery Girl: "Good *morning!* Can I *help* you?" Telan takes a deep breath, starts down the stairs.

And so she gets fired. Peter's got a list, a speech: How all the art majors in town want to work for him, every year dozens of applicants, blah blah. Unfortunately, Telan hasn't chosen to take advantage of this opportunity. Hasn't done her homework, gotten to know the gallery's artists, collectors well enough. Hasn't gone the extra mile, made the extra effort, tried harder to close sales. And of course— looking at his faux-Rolux— she's regularly late for work.

"If nine-thirty is too early for you, Telan, I don't know how you'll..." Peter shakes his head. "Bottom line, Telan— You're unreliable, and you've got a bad attitude. I'll have to let you go."

He waits like he expects her to say something. Telan can't think what. Her face feels hot. But she finds she can look at him at least, look him in the eye, and she does. He's calm and self-satisfied behind his big desk, blue eyed and still mostly blonde and probably sure the gray only makes him more distinguished. Leaning back now, not uncomfortable, only disappointed with her choices. Behind him, another of his scribble drawings, this one a big black square of scribble, tangle of barbed wire or pubic hair hung where everyone who comes in has to see it. Telan wants to point, say Peter you know what I've always wondered? What the *fuck*.

His eyes are depthless, empty as a bull terrier's. What did she ever see in this guy. He turns to his monitor. "You'll need to find another home for your work," he says. Mouseclick. "Make sure you sign for it." Click.

He's forgotten to ask for her keys. She works them off her ring, tosses them onto his keyboard. Peter flinches, looks up quickly, reddens. Telan smiles. Peter's face gets redder. He jabs a finger at her: "Telan—" She turns, walks out. Up the steps: Slow down, don't hurry.

