

Chapter 1: And Then, There Was Yardley

“Can anyone tell me why I am the only person who has trouble getting into my pants?” Seriously. It makes no damn sense at all. I tugged at the one pair of clean jeans I had. Elvis looked at me as if he had the answer, but was too scared to tell me. “Yes. I know, Elvis. It’s because my ass is so big.”

Ashamed, Elvis walked away and joined his doggy brother, Get Low, on the couch.

“The bed. I have to roll on the bed. Isn’t that what they do in the movies?” I lay down on the bed and began to desperately roll and tug. “How on Earth can someone who only weighs a hundred and twenty pounds not fit into size ten pants?”

Elvis reappeared in the doorway to the bedroom.

“Yes, I know. Again, it is because my ass is so big. I have to get into these things. Yardley will be here any minute.”

On cue, Yardley knocked on the front door. “Hey, Mel! It’s me! Can I come in?”

“Hang on! The front door is locked.” Like a penguin, I slowly waddled to the door as if I was on a slow and steady mission across the frozen tundra. The jeans, which would not pass my thighs, limited the movement of my legs.

“Are you okay?”

I made it to the front door. “Yes. Well no. It seems I’m the only person that has a hard time getting into my pants.”

“Tell me something I haven’t heard.”

Jerk. "Seriously, I cannot pull my pants up over my wide ass hips or maybe it is just my big ass in general. Either way, this is my only clean pair of pants. If I can't Crisco myself into these babies, I won't be going out tonight."

Yardley cleared his throat to stifle the giggles. "I can be of assistance. I want you to unlock the front door and go into the bathroom. Shut the bathroom door behind you. I'm going to count to ten before I come into the house."

"Better make it fifteen. I've never had such a hard time performing tasks with my pants pulled down before."

I shuffled to my bathroom and closed the door behind me. Moments later, I could hear Yardley's footsteps at the door.

"Mel, do you trust me?"

"Yes. I think. How can you ask someone that when they have their pants stuck around their thighs?"

"I'm going to close my eyes and come into the bathroom. We are going to fix those jeans."

I sighed. I could only imagine where this was going. "Come on in."

Yardley wandered hand first into the bathroom. "Mel?"

"Right here."

"I want you to turn around with your back to me."

"This has all the makings of a bad porn."

"You've got to trust me."

I did as instructed and stood patiently.

“Can you guide my hands to your belt loops on the sides?” I completed the task.
“Remember, you have to trust me. Now, hold on tight.”

Suddenly, Yardley picked me up by my belt loops. My feet dangled inches off the floor. He began to violently shake me by my pants. “Dear God, Yardley! What in the hell?”

And then I fell into my pants. Yardley put me down. “Alright! Zip up and button up! Let’s get to the bar!”

“Coming, coming, coming! Let me throw on my flip -flops.” I slid on my shoes, kissed both of the dogs on top of their heads and ran out the door behind Yardley. “My car or yours?”

“We can take mine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.” He walked to the passenger side and opened the door for me.

“Really sure?”

“Yes. Really sure.”

I slid into the car and buckled my seatbelt. I then verified that it was secure. “I don’t mind driving us, Yardley.”

“I got this. What are you so scared for? The bar is only five miles away.”

It was May of 2003. My cousin had just moved away and left me to learn how to live without her. I didn’t know what I was going to do. Who was going to eat Mexican food with me at El Maguey? Who was going to go to the bar with me? Who was going to sing obnoxious songs at the top of their lungs in cars with me? It was looking like no one.

And then, there was Yardley.

Yardley can tell you all about the first night he met me. We had a mutual friend named Amy. She had worked with me at the animal hospital, but then transferred to another one

about thirty miles north. Amy was celebrating that night because she had kicked out her boyfriend and had convinced the Rent-To-Own people that he had taken the TV with him. How could they repo a television that wasn't on her property? As the repo fellows walked to their car mumbling how they would never see the TV or the guy who owed them the money for it, Amy smiled knowing that she was not only a free bird but she also had a free television out of the deal.

I made it to her house first. I mean, if you wanted to celebrate and get your drink on, I was definitely the girl to call. I dragged my giant cooler up the stairs to the loft apartment. Amy met me at the front door. "Girl, what did you bring in that coola?" That's right, I typed 'coola'. I am not an expert at conveying a heavy Boston accent, but I hope you follow my drift.

"What I brought in the *coola* is some Bloody Mary mix, some tequila, my pepper grinder, some pepperoncini, and some hot sauce."

"I've heard about you and tequila. I'm not going to have to kick your ass before the night is over with, am I?"

"I sure hope not."

Amy grabbed a side of the cooler and helped me in the door. "I hope you don't mind, but I invited a friend from my new job. I think you'll like him."

"You are not hooking me up with a co-worker."

"No, I don't mean it like that. He's married. I meant you guys would be buds. He's funny as shit, Mel. Just you wait and see."

Outside, Yardley pulled his green Ford Ranger up and parked beside my car. He walked around to admire the two cars side by side. My personalized tags said 'MELDAWG' and his said 'YARDDOG'. Yardley will report that this was the moment when he realized that he was about to meet his new best friend.

Yardley came in the door and walked right past Amy. "Is that your red car out there?"

“Yes. Did I leave the damn lights on again? I always leave my lights on!”

“Your lights are off. Your tags say Meldawg?”

“That’s right.” I held out my hand for a good shaking. “I am Meldawg. Lovely to meet you.”

Yardley ignored my open hand and grabbed me in his arms. “I’m so happy to meet you!”

I’m sure Yardley and I would agree that there were good times had that night, but when telling the story somehow the cream filling always gets skipped over to the moment that Yardley realized that his new best friend was insane.

“I think I’m going to head home.”

Amy and Yardley looked at me with party disappointment in their eyes, “You are going back to Parksley already?”

“No, my hometown. I feel like going to Cape Charles. I think Porkchop is having a party at his house.”

“Mel, you are in no shape to drive an hour to Cape Charles. You’ve been hammering Bloody Maria’s for hours now.” Amy foolishly tried to talk some sense into me.

“Nope, when the gypsy vibe hits me to roll with the breeze I’ve got to do it.” They both stared in amazement as I put my cooler back together. “Alright, see you guys later!”

“Wait! Wait, I’ll help.” Yardley grabbed the other half of my cooler and we headed for the door.

“Congratulations on the TV, Amy.”

“Mel, be careful. Parksley is just down the street, but Cape Charles?”

Yardley and I made our way down the stairs and to my car. “Do you want to put the cooler in your trunk?”

“In the backseat is fine. It's easier to mix drinks along the way.”

I left Yardley there that night and made it to Porkchop’s house in Cape Charles. Yardley called the next day to make sure that I had made it home okay. “Yeah, I made it home about an hour ago. I was drunk enough that Porkchop was able to confiscate my keys. From what I understand there was a face to face argument over whether or not I could leave. Sometime during my defense speech, I actually fell over backwards. I have vague memories of Porkchop sticking me in his bed and partygoers coming in to kiss me on the forehead and say goodbye. I woke up with a sore hip. When I woke up, I found my friend Peanut sleeping on a couch. He said I was trying to walk up the stairs and then fell down them when I was about to the top. Damn hip hurts like a son of a bitch.”

I’m not sure how the magic happened, but Yardley still wanted to be my friend. Automatically, we were partners in crime. He came up to solutions to my everyday problems (being unable to get my ass in to my pants). I was the person he could count on to party at the drop of a hat. We were a great team, so it was no surprise we’d be heading to a local bar together. I just wished that he would let me drive.

I tugged on my seatbelt some more. Why on Earth wouldn’t Yardley let me drive?

“Mel, I was thinking about taking a road trip on the last weekend of the month. Have you been to Seacrets before?”

“The club in Ocean City with the dance floor with the springboards underneath? Damn right, I’ve been to Seacrets.”

“It’s Amy’s birthday that weekend. I thought we could get her out of the house and go to the club? We could get a room at the hotel next door. What do you think?”

“Booze. Dancing. Ocean City. Hmmm.... Let me think. Yes.”

“I’ll talk to Amy about it on Monday.” Yardley reached up for his face, a move I knew he was going to make.

“Don’t you do it, Yardley.”

“Do what?”

“Don’t take off those glasses.”

“We are almost there.”

“You are blind as a bat.”

“I look so dorky with my glasses. I always take them off before I get to L.J.’s.”

“Don’t do it. Leave them on. You are blind, Yardley. You can take them off in the parking lot.”

“You’re right. I could.” Moments later the glasses were off his face and in the center console. He leaned forward and squinted over the steering wheel.

“I’m going to die. Why don’t you let me drive? I knew you were going to take off your glasses.”

“We’re not going to die. I do this all the time.”

We pulled into L.J.’s parking lot without incident. The parking lot was littered with cars of fellow drinkers. We approached a line at the door and could already hear the bass from the deejay inside. “Is it Jim tonight?”

Yardley shook his head. “Not Jim. I’m not sure who the deejay is.”

The line slowly moved along as the woman at the door collected ten dollars from patrons. When we made it to the front of the line, there was a pause that was just long enough to let the last of them slip into the loud bar. Once the door shut, the woman smiled at us and said, “Five dollars apiece for you guys.”

“I love the fifty percent discount.”

“You two will make it up in gin.”

Flashing strobe lights, blaring music, cigarette smoke. This was L.J.’s. Yardley and I, who had both been fairly popular with the regulars for quite some time on the individual level, were now being recognized as a dynamic drinking duo. Yardley shook hands, I gave hugs. It was like bar royalty. We smiled and made our way as speedily as possible to the bar. Bruno was the bartender who regularly handled our orders. “What can I get you two ladies?”

I spoke up in defense, “Hey, hey, Bruno. I’ve got balls. I’m no lady.”

Yardley couldn’t figure out who to glare at first. “Gee thanks, Mel. Nice back up.”

“Gin and Juices?”

We nodded.

“Yardley with orange juice, Meldawg with grapefruit?”

We nod again.

“Three cherries in each?”

“Correct.”

“Yardley, have I mentioned how happy I was that you got me back on gin? I hadn’t had it in years.”

“You are certainly welcome. There’s Laurie.”

“Laurie!”

Laurie shoved past us. “Clear the way! I need a Coors Light!”

“Grossest beer ever.” I stuck my tongue out in an attempt to represent gagging.

“All beer is gross. That’s why I drink gin and juice. I don’t know how you girls drink beer.”

“Coors Light is not gross. That Mexican piss you drink Mel, now that is gross.”

“I’ve done a lot of crazy shit, Laurie. I have not, however, drank Mexican piss.”

Yardley threw his hands up in an effort to surrender. “That’s it! I’m heading to the dance floor.”

“We’ll be right behind you. I’m just going to booze it up for a minute.”

Laurie and I clinked drinks together and went bottoms up. I joined Yardley on the dance floor and Laurie went to people-watch with a local band called Krookit’s keyboardist, Screech. Screech pointed at me and yelled, “It’s the devil!” We spent a pleasant evening of getting drunk and getting down. The night wound down and the ugly lights came on. We were cruising the crowd to say our good-byes.

“Mel, you are getting checked out.” Laurie nudged me and then nodded in the direction of a lone man standing on the other side of the bar.

I smiled bashfully at the glowing face of a man who raised his drink in my direction. I returned the gesture and said, “Good Lord, that man is a honey.”

“Go talk to him.” Yardley gave me a gentle push. “Go.”

“No. He’s good looking, but there is only room for one Mexican in my life. That is Julio Torres. He will be here in July and I am going to wait patiently.”

“You don’t know if Julio is really coming back. This guy is right here, right now, checking you out. Go, talk to him.”

“Nope. Hanging tight. Being a good girl.”

“Shit, I’ll go talk to him for you.”