

The Suit

by Brad Kozak

You won't understand.

Really...I get it. If I hadn't been there, I wouldn't understand either. But I'll try to explain as best I can. Just don't say I didn't warn you...

I'm an average guy, I suppose. Middle management in the exciting industry of all things hi-tech. It is a casual workplace...khakis and jeans are standard fare. We wear suits to the trade shows right now, but eventually, like even the perennially-stodgy IBM, we'll go to khakis and Polo shirts. No problem...I much preferred going casual to wearing a suit and tie, any day of the week.

Not long after I started dating Liz, I realized that her affinity for all things fashion might have an impact on me, outside her closet.

"Honey...why don't you ever wear a suit?"

"I do...every now and then," I replied. "Jeans are more comfortable."

"But you'd look so nice in a tailored suit," she offered.

"You don't think I look nice in jeans?," I teased.

"Of course you do, lover," Liz said. "But I think you'd look so handsome in a nice suit."

I'm not an idiot...I can take a hint. So we went suit-shopping. Of course, being a guy, I trend towards finding a store, finding a suit, buying it, and I'm done. But that's not good enough when you're shopping with a *Fashionista*. Nope. We had to go to no fewer than four men's stores, and look at practically every bloody suit in each place.

Now I'll have to admit that we did settle on a really nice-looking suit. All-weather wool. Double-breasted. Tailored, with just the perfect amount of break in the trousers. Got a nice selection of shirts and ties to go with. Sure, it put a dent in my wallet, but what the heck...if it made Liz happy, it was worth it. And, as she put it, I did "clean up nicely."

"My name is Bond. *James* Bond," I said, as I tried on the entire ensemble for her back at the apartment.

"Oh, stop," she giggled. "One suit, and you think you're a lady-killer."

Frankly, I expected a lovely evening canoodling on the couch at that point, but Liz had an early call the next morning for her regular modeling gig, so she had to scoot off back to her place. Sigh...

The next morning, my phone rang around oh-dark-thirty. It was Liz.

"Morning, handsome!"

"Oh, hi, Liz...what time is it?," I queried.

"Oh, it's...um...it's early," she mumbled. "Are you gonna wear your suit to work today?"

I thought for a minute, trying to clear my head. Why would I wear my suit? I mean...khakis or jeans are the company standard...and we didn't have any visiting dignitaries scheduled, so why bother? "Nope. I'll do the khaki thang, sweetheart. Why do you ask?"

"Honey, you need to wear that suit today. Seriously."

"Liz, there's no reason for me to dress up. And besides, I don't wanna get it messed up. Never know when I might need to take a pretty girl out for a nice dinner somewhere fancy."

"No...you need to wear the suit to work today. Promise me you will?"

Hmm. This was getting complicated. "Okay...but I'm gonna expect some major cuddling time tonight if I have to dress up for work today."

I could hear her grinning over the phone. "That can be arranged, lover. Now go make yourself presentable. And wear the maroon tie."

As I was showering (I do most of my best thinking in the shower), I thought, "maybe this won't be such a pain. I mean...perhaps I'll command a little more respect from the troops."

My first surprise came as I went through the employees entrance. "Morning, Jack...what are YOU all dressed up for?" "Lookin' sharp, Jackson!" "Wow, nice suit." Where I would normally make it through the building with only a couple of nods or mumbled "good mornings" coming my way, on this morning, it seemed that everybody noticed my suit and felt obligated to say something.

"I'll have to do this more often," I thought.

My second surprise was the rapt attention I received from my staff at the morning meeting. Whereas we'd normally have a good bit of boredom, punctuated by moments of sarcasm and a side order of a couple of stale jokes, this meeting was all business. And attention. Directed at me. Even the women in the department that would ordinarily have treated me with a certain disdainful ennui, somehow looked at me with, dare I say, a soupçon of lust in their eyes. Weird.

I took my customary lunch at a favorite little bistro, and got the same kind of attention from the waitstaff. In fact, one particularly cute waitress who had never given me the time of day before, insisted on waiting on me, even though my table wasn't part of her station.

All throughout the day, everyone, to a man, woman, and weirdo, treated me with a deference and respect they'd never shown me before. It was nice, in a very weird way. Just before quittin' time, our CEO – a man of few words and fewer emotions – called me into to his executive suite.

"Sit down, sit down...nice suit, by the way."

"Thanks, Paul. How have you been?," I offered.

"Oh, just fine. Just fine. I was about to ask you the same thing. Everything okay in the art department?," he replied.

“Um...yeah. Fine. Why do you ask?”

“Well, I just want to make sure you’re happy here. You *are* happy here, aren’t you?” he asked, rather nervously, if I didn’t know better.

“Yep. Everything’s fine. So...what can I do for you?”

“Well, it’s not what you can do for me...it’s what *we* need to do for *you*. I mean, you’re a valuable employee. We want to keep you happy. When was the last time we reviewed your salary, anyway?”

“I had a review three months ago, remember?”

“Oh, that’s right,” he said. “But you know, we’ve been talking in the C-level suite about you a lot lately. We think you’re VP material. And we want to make sure you stay on the team until we make the move to put you in the VP of Marketing position.”

“Well, Paul, I’m flattered, but I’ve got no plans to...”

“...and I think it’s high time we brought your salary in line with what our competitors are paying,” he interjected.

Wow, I thought. “But just three months ago, you were saying that, what with the difference in the cost of living between here and California, the salaries here ARE their equivalent.”

“Well, no need to talk about water under the bridge. How would you feel about an extra 10K a year...I mean...just to tide you over before we’re ready for the big promotion?”

“I’d say that’s mighty generous of you, Paul,” I said, grinning like a Cheshire Cat.

“But of course, we’d want your assurance that you’re going to stay, and not let some headhunter turn your head with other offers.”

“Paul, you have my word...I’m very happy here. Now I’m even happier.”

When I got back to my apartment, Liz was there waiting for me.

“You’re never gonna believe what happened to me today,” I started.

“You got a raise. A big one,” she guessed.

I went on to tell her the entire story. In my version, I toned down the part about the waitress hitting on me, and I offered that the CEO must have thought that I was interviewing at lunch, since I so rarely wore a suit to work.

“Nope,” Liz stated flatly. “It’s that suit. It has magical powers.”

“Oh, come on, honey. It’s just a suit. Besides...I’ve always believed that the clothes don’t make the man...they just make the man better looking.”

“It’s the same thing,” she pouted.

“Well, if you like this suit so well, why don’t we swing by your place, get you into something uncomfortable, and head over to *Chateau L’expensivez* for a celebratory slap-up?”

“Hmmm,” she purred. “I’ve got a better idea,” as she smiled a smile that could give a saint impure thoughts.

“Now, you’re talkin’,” I said, as I started to loosen my tie.

“Stop,” she said. “Leave the suit on.”

Now I hadn’t mentioned this before, but I sweat. A lot, actually. I mean, when I’m working out, or even just working hard, I tend to work up a pretty good sweat. Making whoopie in an all-weather wool straightjacket was not on my to-do list, but that look in Liz’s eyes was not to be trifled with. So we ‘danced.’ Of course after that, the suit needed a good dry clean.

A week went by. We had a big trade show out West. I took the suit. And I don’t think it was my imagination that my demos went exceptionally well. In fact, our trade show coordinator (less-than-affectionately known as ‘Attila the Honey’ by all) reported that we had an uptick in leads of 30% when I was demoing in the booth. Freaky. And at the end of the day, I had a respectable stack of b-cards from a number of surprisingly attractive women – women that would not, heretofore, given me the time of day. I’d begun wishing that I’d had that suit long before now – especially as I considered myself off the market, what with Liz and all.

When I returned from Vegas, Liz was waiting to pick me up at the airport. She looked happy to see me, but a little wistful.

“What’s wrong, cutie? Aren’t you glad to see me?,” I asked.

“Of course I am, lover...I was just hoping to see you in that suit.”

“Sweetheart...we don’t wear suits to tear down the booth. That would be insane. Trust me...it’s safely tucked away in my checked luggage.”

When we got back to the apartment, she unpacked my bags and laid the suit out on the bed.

“Honey, I’m bushed. If you wanna cuddle, now’s the time,” as I went to move the suit off the bed.

“Baby, would you mind trying the suit on for me again? I just love to see you in it.”

Now ordinarily, I might have humored her. But I’d been on the road, and I was worn out. “Gimme a rain check. But I’d love to snuggle with you.”

“Oh...well...okay.” She took the suit, a little bit too lovingly if you ask me, and laid it reverently on the chair. She posed it so it looked as if the suit had someone wearing it, as if they were relaxing on a overstuffed chair.

I was fading fast, and craving sleep. As I kissed her, I looked up at Liz, and realized she was distracted by something. Following her gaze, it slowly dawned on me that she was kissing me but staring at the suit.

“You’re tired. I need to let you get some rest,” Liz said, looking a little distracted. There was something in her demeanor that I couldn’t place. Guilt? Nerves? What was it? “Can I drop the suit off at the dry cleaners for you?”

“Um...sure...I guess.” Frankly, I was a little lost in thought. Some half-formed idea was nagging me...I just couldn’t quite get a fix on it. But something was making me just a bit uneasy, and I couldn’t figure out just what it was.

Now it was unusual for me to go more than a day without talking with Liz. But suddenly, she’d made herself scarce. I called for a couple of days – no answer. Finally, I swung by her place after work. Her car was there, so I rang the bell.

“Oh, hi, Jack...sorry I haven’t called you back. I’ve been...um...busy,” Liz said. But it was that guilty look...the way she wouldn’t look me in the eye, that spoke louder than her words.”Well, I stopped by the dry cleaners to pick up my suit, but they said you’d already gotten it.”

“Um...yeah. Oh, right,” she stammered.

“Well can I come in and get it?”

“Now’s not a good time,” she deflected. It was then I realized that she was wearing a fairly sexy little shorty robe I’d gotten her for her birthday. At 6PM. I’ll admit it. The first thing I thought of was, “she’s got another guy in the place.” I was pissed. I pushed past her, smiling one of those “I’m smiling with my mouth but not my eyes kinda smiles. “Won’t take a minute...I’m sure you have it hanging up in your closet.”

“No...wait, Jack. Uh...don’t go up there!...I’ll get the suit for you!”

But it was too late. I was up the stairs in a flash. I looked around the room, and was surprised to find...nothing. No guy. No clothing scattered across the floor. Nothing out of place. The only weird thing was that her bed was turned down, to reveal my suit, in the bed, just as if I was laying there.

As Liz came tearing up the stairs behind me, she stammered out an explanation. “They didn’t do a great job pressing your suit, so I was trying to use the bed to press it a little better.”

“Having a blonde moment, there, hon? That only works if you put the suit under the mattress, and on top of the box springs.”

“Oh,” she said, looking relieved.

I looked over at her with a puzzled frown. “Liz, I guess I owe you an apology. From the way you’ve been acting, I thought you had another guy up here.”

“Her eyes darted to the suit and back to me. “What ever gave you THAT idea?” she said, about a half-octave too high and a couple of decibels too loudly. I was still feeling that little voice at the back of my head – getting louder now, but still not quite loud enough for me to understand.

“Okay. I guess I’ll be going. We still on for Friday?,” I asked.

“Sure. Is the offer still open for the expensive restaurant?,” she replied.

“Um...yeah. I guess so.”

“You will wear the suit, won’t you?” she smiled.

So things went on like that for another couple of weeks. We’d go out someplace nice. As long as I had on the suit, I had her undivided attention. When we were together and I didn’t wear the blasted thing, she acted distracted and unfocused. On me, in particular. The nagging little voice grew louder, as did my suspicions, but her affections for me (at least when I was suited up) were obviously genuine. As an experiment, I went back to the same store and bought a second suit – this time, something in an understated two-button Navy job. But apparently, not just any suit would do. It was only when I wore *the* suit, that I had Liz’s attention.

At the next trade show, the suit once again seemed to make the difference in how well my demos went over. I took my new suit as well. The reactions were markedly different...there was definitely something about that one, particular suit. Again, upon my return, Liz looked disappointed when I showed up in casual clothing. And once again, she offered to take the suit to the dry cleaners.

Three days later, when I’d suffered through another bout of radio silence from my significant other, I stopped by her place on my way home from work. This time, there was no mistaking her demeanor. She looked as if she’d been engaged in far more than a little hanky-panky. Smearred lipstick. Glassy eyes. Sweat visible on her brow. All in all, she looked exactly the way she did in my fantasies – only in my dreams, *I* was the one that made her look that way.

“What do you want, Jack?”

“Nice to see you too, Liz. Why have you been ducking my calls?”

“I’ve been...busy.”

“I can see that. May I come in?”

“Now’s not a good time,” she replied.

“I can see that, too. Listen...you’ve obviously found somebody else. Let me just get my suit and I’ll leave you alone.”

“No. You can’t have it.” For the first time, she looked defensive...and vulnerable.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I thought you just said I can’t have my suit back.” I pushed past her rudely, and climbed the stairs, two at a time. The sight that met my eyes was surprising to say the least. She had the suit in bed again, but this time it was apparent that she’d been using it for her own enjoyment, and I don’t mean playing dress-up. All I could think of is that the suit looked a little...well...*used*. It looked cheap and dirty, lying there on her bed, all flaccid and wrinkled.

“Brad...I knew you wouldn’t understand. There’s...there’s no other guy. It...um...it’s the suit.”

“It’s...the...suit?” I asked.

“It’s complicated. You see...the suit and I have been talking...”

“The suit talks?!”

“Well...no, but...we’ve been seeing each other, behind your back, and it’s gotten serious...”

“And what have you and the suit decided, hmm?”

“Um...we want to be together. And we think you should get another suit. Please leave now. We want to be alone.”

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So you see, your Honor, I did warn you that you wouldn’t believe this. Hell, I don’t know that I believe it, and I’ve lived it. But you can understand now why I am suing Liz for custody of the suit, and why I respectfully ask the court to award it to me...after all, I did pay for it. I’m also asking you to deny Liz’s counter-claim for the suit, as well as her request for \$100,000 for mental anguish and alienation of the suit’s affections.

I rest my case.