

A narrow alleyway at night, flanked by brick buildings. A street lamp on the right casts a bright glow, and a traffic light with a red light is visible in the background. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the street lamp.

# THE REPLACEMENTS

A PRELUDE TO A TOUCH OF HONEY

# GAMAL HENNESSY

# ***The Replacements***

*A Touch of Honey Prelude*

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The headline on the old newspaper read "Hunt for Teen Beauty Continues," but layers of grime and mud from the alley covered most of the big bold letters. It didn't matter. The three boys standing in the alley didn't have any interest in the news anyway. They had more immediate issues on their minds.

Mark, Bryan and Chad waited between the oppressive, blackened walls of the tenement, fighting to suppress their gnawing fear. They leaned up against their car, trying and failing to look dangerous. They hoped their juvenile posturing would scare off anyone who might decide to split their heads open with a steel pipe, rip out their teeth with a hacksaw, or any of the other terrible things the other kids said happened to people who were stupid enough to come to the city at night.

At Spring Valley High School, they were the jocks, leaders of the varsity football team. They were the strongest animals in their jungle. But this wasn't high school. The boys left their safe, suburban enclave and drove to the dark side of town. The boys came into the dark to meet their dealer. They thought the scheduled transaction could erase the shame of recent days and satisfy their hormonal hunger.

Chad held the most nervous energy in the smallest physical frame. He paced around his stepfather's Mercedes like a frightened rabbit. "She's not gonna show. We should go back home and hook up with the girls. Maybe if we just took them out for some drinks..."

Mark spat. "I'm not going back to her on my knees! They're never gonna give it up, so fuck them! Let them die with their legs closed." Anger defined Mark and drove the actions of the three boys. He already spent a lot of time and money on Claire. They'd been together ever since he joined the team and she became captain of the cheerleading squad. He decided he deserved some ass in return for his investment. If she wouldn't give it to him, someone else would.

Chad saw the obvious logic in the arrangement. Last week, all three boys took their girlfriends out to the beach. Their plan included a little privacy and a lot of vodka. They thought some collective sexual release would be good for morale ahead of the big game against their cross state rivals. Why wouldn't the girls want to motivate their star players? Isn't that what cheerleaders did?

Claire didn't agree. She didn't want to be known as the team slut. Once Claire said no, the other girls followed. The small party turned into a big fight. Mark stormed off, promising to get some, one way or the other. Bryan and Chad followed Mark because they didn't know what else to do.

Mark and Claire stopped speaking. The team lost the big game. Chad knew things couldn't get any worse. But when they sat with Bryan's brother to wallow in their defeat over shots of Jager, things changed. They came up with a brilliant plan. At first, Chad went along with it as a joke. But when the liquor wore off the conversation continued. Then one night they stood in an alley waiting for their dealer to arrive.

Now Chad couldn't stop moving or whining. "Yeah, but, why don't we just get a hooker? I know a guy online who says---"

"This is better, son." Bryan spoke with the false confidence of being two years older than the other boys. The fact he'd been left back twice did nothing to temper his arrogance. "A hooker is only for a night. With our plan, we can get some anytime we want. It's all set. We pick her up here, bring her to my brother's place and we never have to pay for it again. It's simple."

"But slavery is illegal!"

Mark's temper made his words sharp. "So what?! Listen son, you didn't have any problem skimming the cash from your mom's IRA account. That's illegal. My uncle wrote the scrip to get us the drugs. That's also illegal. The way I see it, it's way too late to think about breaking the law now!"

"So, what if she tells someone or tries to blackmail us?"

Bryan waved Chad off. "Why hurt a paying customer?"

"Yeah, besides, if she tries any shit we can always take her instead!" The boys forced themselves to laugh. Then bright headlights bathed them in a cold white glow.

"Looks like you might get your chance, son." They all leaned off the car to meet the dealer.

The thick hourglass shape of her body cut a dark shadow in the harsh light. As she moved closer, her dark curly hair and deep brown eyes seemed to reach out and grab Chad by the throat. None of the boys could move or look away from her. Her smile only pretended to be warm. It reminded Chad of a python, just before it crushed the life out of its prey.

"Gentlemen," her voice carried a strong Hispanic accent, but Chad couldn't tell what country she might be from. "I'm so glad you decided to come." She paused for a second, as if she could taste the double entendre. "Are you sure you still want to do this?"

"Yeah." Mark's anger vanished, but his bravado remained. "We got the stuff you wanted." Chad felt his chest swell with male pride. Mark was so good at this. He didn't even make the mistake of saying 'drugs' out loud as he reached into his jacket. Everybody knew you weren't supposed to say 'drugs' out loud when someone might have a microphone on them, but Chad didn't remember until after Mark had done the right thing.

"Very good," The dealer held out her hand for the paper bag. Mark began to look around, not knowing what to do next. Chad knew, but he didn't want to interrupt.

Bryan didn't care. "We want to see our stuff first."

"That's fine." She smiled again, motioning them to follow her to the back of the vehicle.

This was good, right? Things were going according to plan, just the way they talked about it, just like they saw on TV. Chad wanted to feel like they had control over the situation, but every step told him she directed this meeting. The urge to run grew heavy in his stomach, but how could he turn back now?

The boys followed the dealer to the back of the Escalade. She opened the side door, revealing a woman's body covered by a black cloth. Her torso squirmed under the sheet in a manner suggesting both nudity and grace. The dealer spoke as if she sold pizza or DVDs.

"Here she is, boys, ready to ship to your final destination. If you want, I can have her delivered for you."

"No, we'll take it from here." Bryan sounded as nervous as Chad felt. He understood the problem. Bryan probably didn't want anyone to know the address to his brother's place. "Give her the stuff, Mark."

"No. I want to see her first. This stuff is worth a lot, I don't want some dried up, flat chested junkie. Let's see what we're getting." Mark's confidence seemed to grow with each passing moment, just like it did on the field. Chad wished he could be that cool.

If Mark pissed off the dealer, she didn't show it. In fact, her smile just got wider. "Oh my, I had no idea I was dealing with such sophisticated clientele! You boys must have quite a collection of playthings already."

Chad finally spoke up, anxious to seem as cool as his friends. "We just need a replacement." It didn't come out as cool as he wanted, but at least he said something.

"I see." The dealer's smile made Chad sorry he said anything. "Well then, you will be able to appreciate this one. We're not talking about any flat chested junkie here." She lifted up part of the cloth so the boys could see the soft pale legs and carefully trimmed pubic hair of their purchase. Those were the cheerleader's legs of Chad's wet dreams. He heard everything the dealer said, but he wasn't listening.

"This girl is a prime specimen of Caucasian virgin, just as you requested." The sheet rose more, revealing strong hips and a smooth, flat stomach. Chad imagined her as an athlete. His excitement made him feel light headed.

The dealer continued, ignoring their wide mouthed silence. "She is so pretty. I might have kept her for myself if you weren't so adamant about your requirements." The dealer used the dark sheet to tease and seduce her young audience. High young breasts peeked out from under the cloth to hypnotize them. Chad couldn't take it anymore.

Bryan had seen enough too. "Mark, give Adriana the damn drugs."

Mark passed the case to the dealer mutely. He wasn't even looking at her anymore.

"Thank you gentlemen. It's been a pleasure doing business with you." Adriana's grin was sharp and slimy now. But Chad didn't even notice. The sight of a naked female body blinded them to the danger. Then, the last part of the sheet was thrown back, paralyzing him in horror.

And then it was too late.

At first, it was hard to recognize Claire's face. Huge purple sores replaced lips that used to be so thin. Enormous welts grew out of her cheeks. Her disheveled and matted hair fell in wild strands on her face and her tiny little nose had been crushed into a bloody mess. But her eyes burned with tears of anger and hate. Chad realized Claire heard everything they said. Her body shook with a mixture of unbridled anger and futile desperation. Her neck strained against the leather dog collar pinning her wrists behind her head. She tried to scream, but the plastic ball stuffed in her mouth made her sound like a dying rat.

"Claire?"

"Oh God, Claire!"

"What did you do?!"

"What the fuck did you do to Claire?!"

Adriana looked just as shocked as the boys did. "Is something wrong, gentlemen? I think I met your specifications quite exactly. Blonde hair, blue eyes, between fifteen and twenty, and a virgin...Well I must admit she's not exactly a virgin anymore. I'm afraid I never could resist the feel of cool young skin." The two women shared a look of perverse intimacy Chad didn't want to understand.

The boys stood there, frozen by the turn of events. The dealer's smile hissed at them, cutting through the shock of Claire's appearance. "What's wrong, gentlemen? Didn't you realize that buying a sex slave would deprive someone of their daughter, their sister, or their girlfriend? It seems to me that if someone was going to lose, it might as well be you. I mean, at least this way you break even."

"Let her out."

"What?"

"Get her the hell out of there!" Mark was red and flustered. Tears flowed down his face. "Open it!"

Adriana shook her head. The motion reminded Chad of all the teachers he ever disappointed in school. "All right Mark, but you might want to think about your request. You see, after I picked up Miss Claire I brought her back to my place and told her what you boys wanted to do. Imagine my surprise when she didn't believe me! She said you loved her Mark. I think she was saving herself for you. It was all very sweet."

Chad saw Mark trapped between wanting to run to Claire and wanting to run away from her. Adriana ignored his suffering.

"I asked Claire if you would hire a prostitute if you didn't want to wait for her. She said no. I told her you wanted more than a whore. You wanted a slave. She didn't believe me."

Claire started to cry weak sobs, stifled by the ball gag. The sound made Chad want to vomit.

"Now I don't enjoy being called a liar, so I decided to relieve my frustration. You can see the results. Poor Claire was nice enough to hold still while I got my anger out, but I guess she didn't have much choice after I tied her down."

Claire quivered in the back seat of the Escalade. Chad looked away. He couldn't look at her broken face. He didn't have the stomach to confront her broken spirit.

"When I was done, I promised Claire I would prove what I said. I would prove you were a drug dealer and a slave trader. I would prove you planned to hold some poor, innocent girl trapped in a basement, with her ass in the air, destroying her mind and her life just so you could get off.

Chad saw his own tears falling at his feet. He couldn't look up at anyone now. Guilt held his head low, but Adriana kept pushing her point.

"And here you are. You show up with a fistful of drugs and you demand to 'inspect the merchandise.' That was very professional. You helped me prove my point nicely."

The boys didn't respond. What could they possibly say?

"I could let her out now and send her right back to her parents. But what would she tell them? Do you think she would lie to protect you? I don't think so. No, I think you'd be thrown in prison faster than a serial rapist infected with HIV. So tell me Mark, should I let her out now?" Mark backed away, his skin drained to a translucent pale white.

Adriana turned to Claire's broken face. "You see sweet pea, every word I said was true. He doesn't even want you now, even after he's paid so much to have you." The dealer stroked a soft hand on Claire's cheek, wiping away a trail of tears running down the girl's battered face. Claire didn't try to pull away. All of her resistance was gone.

The sight of Adriana touching Claire must have flooded Mark with rage. He threw himself at the dealer, grabbing the lapels of her jacket and throwing her against the side of the van.

Chad saw Bryan moving too. He reached into his belt and pulled out a gun. Where did he get that? What was he going to do with it? Kill Adriana? That made sense. She deserved to die for what she did to Claire. But would he shoot Claire too? Maybe he had no choice. No one could ever know about this. Chad couldn't survive in prison. He knew that. Chad understood what had to be done. The dealer had to die. Claire had to die with her. It was fucked up, but there wasn't anything else left to do. They could figure out a story later. Now they had to--

"FREEZE! Put your weapon down and put your hands up!"

A new light flooded the tunnel and blinded them. Chad heard thunder booming through the narrow alley and knew it was gunfire. His knees collapsed underneath him. His face hit the cold pavement before he could think about running. He curled up into a ball with his hands around his ears. He heard his own whimpering cries echoed through the alley after the gun shots faded. "No! Not me! It wasn't me!"

Chad felt rough hands holding him down. He couldn't see the face of the police officer, but whoever forced his knee into the back of Chad's neck ignored his pleas for mercy. He heard shuffling and muffled groans to his right and left. He imagined Adriana, Mark and Bryan struggling with different cops on their backs.

A male voice broke through the confused pain. It also sounded Hispanic. Was it the same as Adriana's? Chad hoped the two of them came from the same country or something. Maybe that would help them get out of this shit. He tried to listen to see what they said.

"We could pick you boys up on a long list of charges: Possession of Narcotics with Intent to Distribute, Drug Trafficking, Illegal Receipt of Kidnapped Persons, Assault and Attempted Murder. We have it all on video! You made it easy for us."

Chad tried to whimper his way out of trouble the way he did in school. "What about her Officer? She tried to sell Claire to us!"

The man with the sandpaper face simply smiled. "Officer? Who said I was a police officer? I just wanted to get your attention. It's amazing how many people give up just because you yell 'freeze' and fire a few rounds over their heads. But that doesn't mean I'm a cop."

Bryan's voice tried to be strong, but the knee on his back made him gasp for air. "If you're not cops, then get the fuck off me! You don't know who I am! My brother..."

"Your brother is the one who sold you out, *estupido*." Chad turned his head to see Adriana pick up Bryan's gun and pull the clip out in a smooth, practiced motion, checking the rounds in the magazine. "He owes me a big debt, and I decided connecting me with you was the best way for him to pay it."

"Why are you doing this?" Mark couldn't be tough or angry anymore.

"I'm actually glad you asked. The story is too good to keep to myself. You see, an old friend called me a couple weeks ago, just before Claire rejected your pitiful advances. Where do you men get your warped sense of entitlement?"

"In any event, my friend told me one of his favorite boy toys had died after a playdate got out of hand. He tends to be a bit heavy handed, but I suppose most men are like that. Anyway, my friend needed a replacement." Adriana stole a mischievous glance down at Chad. Chad strained to look away, but his neck was pinned to the concrete.

"It just so happens my friend prefers blond boys with strong arms and tight little asses, like your American football players. At first, I wasn't sure I could take the order. I didn't know many football players, and natural blond males are hard to come by in this country. People have a tendency to miss them. But then you boys show up with your ignorant pride and sheltered stupidity. You fit the bill perfectly. You landed right in my lap, Mark."

Mark cried and cringed. All the girls at school used to love his blond hair. Chad used to be so jealous. Now he thanked God for his short brown hair cut.

Adriana saw Marks' panic and played with it. "Don't worry, little boy. You're going to like Bolivia. You won't like what happens to you at first, but who knows? You might find the life of a fuck toy suits you after a while.

"Then let the rest of us go!" Chad talked without thinking. "Take him! Just let us go! We won't say anything, I swear!"

Adriana took the pose of a sad teacher again. She strolled over as if she had all the time in the world. "Now Chad, what kind of friend are you? And you're so rude. I didn't even finish my story." She stroked the boy's hair while he cried. "People miss blond boys, remember? There has to be a story to explain Mark's disappearance. It needs to be something shocking. Something Mark's parents couldn't live down if it was ever exposed. Would you like to know what I have in mind?"

The man spoke again. His voice came out in a whisper, as if he was right behind Chad.

{“We can't stay too much longer. The gunshots might attract attention.”}

{“We can leave soon.”} She said without worry. {“But no one cares who shoots or get shot around here. Just bring the other car around.”} Chad studied Spanish in high school for four years. He got to be pretty good, even if he didn’t go to class. But nothing he heard now gave him any hope of escape.

Adriana continued. “Here’s the official story. You boys came here to trade drugs for slaves. The deal goes bad and guns are drawn. We have all that on video, even the gunshots.” She replaced the clip in Bryan’s gun and stood. “After the video ends, the evidence will suggest two of the young slave traders are killed in this alley. Mark will disappear, along with the drugs and the girl. An anonymous source will send the video after your bodies are found. People will start looking for Mark but everyone will assume Mark escaped.”

Chad heard movement behind him. The desperation in Mark’s cries spiked for a moment, then there was a dull thud. Chad spent enough time on the football field to recognize the sound of a violent blow.

Adriana continued as if nothing happened. “The story will be big for a week or two. Mark’s parents will deny everything and the police will investigate everything his family might have been up to in their search for clues. A few Twitter posts claiming to spot Mark in various parts of the country will make the story even bigger for a while, but no one will ever find Mark, and after two weeks the public will get tired of hearing about it.” Adriana stood and walked away from Chad as if she had nothing left to say. “You won’t have to worry about all that though. Your story ends in this alley.”

Fear clutched Chad’s heart so tight the boy couldn’t even cry.

“So what happens to Claire, you bitch?” Bryan’s fear had been replaced with cold conviction. Chad had forgotten about Claire. Even now, the question seemed stupid. But maybe Claire could get away. Maybe she could help save them. Maybe at least she could tell people the truth about what happened to them.

Chad let go of his hope when Adriana laughed out loud.

“Claire is an extra added bonus, little boy. I’m going to keep her for myself. You have no idea how many rich people want little white babies of their own and won’t bother asking a lot of questions about where they come from. I’m going to breed Claire like a dog and sell the litter for good money. When she’s burned out, I’ll throw her in a landfill with the rest of the trash. The dealer smiled as she fed a round into the chamber of Bryan’s gun and pointed it at his back. “But you won’t have to worry about all that...”

Chad and Bryan were found the next morning, face down next to the Mercedes. The story hit the newspapers the next day. The video of their drug deal went viral on YouTube by the end of the week.

Mark's parents and the police fought in the media and in the courts, with accusations and threats flying in both directions. A nationwide search was conducted, but Mark and Claire were never seen again.

Every year following Chad's death, rumors circulated at Spring Valley High School. Seniors told stories to freshmen, about somebody's mother supposedly adopting a baby on the black market that looked just like a former cheerleader named Claire. Of course, no one believed those stories, but they did think twice before they drove out to the dark side of town.

End

## ***Thanks***

I hope you enjoyed this short trip into the world of Crime and Passion. Mark and Claire might be gone forever, but if you want to find out who can stop Adriana and her sex slave operation, check out *A Touch of Honey* available on March 17<sup>th</sup> 2015 at the [Nightlife Publishing Store](#)

And if you want to find out more about the Crime and Passion world, [please join the RSVP List \(no spam I promise\) here](#)

I hope your adventures in New York are as exciting, but not as dangerous, as the ones I dream up...

Have fun.

Gamal