

Jim-Bob Fleasy, Professional Escort

Sarah Totton

Picture this: You're standing outside a nice restaurant next to the beautiful girl you've just bought dinner for. Unfortunately, you're not so much dwelling on what a lucky man you are as wondering when your best friend and your date are going to stop groping each other and get up off the grass so you can split the cab fare home.

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Tricycle Inc., The Discreet Escort Agency

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Newton was reading the newspaper at the Good Burps diner.

"What's that?" said Jim-Bob, looking over Newton's shoulder.

"Drop dead," said Newton.

Jim-Bob sat down instead and plucked the paper out of Newton's hand. He glanced over it.

"Escort agency?"

"Yeah? So?" said Newton defensively.

"Oh I get it," said Jim-Bob.

"Not very often," said Newton quietly.

"Isn't that, like, a place where losers who can't get a date go and pay someone to be seen with them?"

"Quit stealing my chips," said Newton. "Buy your own."

"Can't," said Jim-Bob. "I'm broke."

"Then get a job."

"Hey..." Jim-Bob had just experienced something that only happened to him about once a decade: he'd had an idea. "Do you think this place hires guys?"

"What? Good Burps?"

"No. The escort place." A large grin spread across Jim-Bob's face. "I hear those escorts get paid to have sex."

"Who's going to pay *you*?" said Newton. "Look at you, and that's with your clothes *on*."

"You haven't seen me in my new G-string," said Jim-Bob smugly, draining Newton's Coke.

Newton went right off his chips.

"I'd model it for you," said Jim-Bob, "but I've got a job to get. I am off like a prom dress."
And with that, Jim-Bob did the nicest thing he'd done for Newton in weeks; he left.

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As it turned out, Newton was wrong. Tricycle Inc. was very impressed with Jim-Bob and hired him on the spot.

"You're perfect," said the first interviewer.

"And he's got a good personality," said the second.

"And, hey--that hair," said the third. "*Nice.*"

Jim-Bob came out of the interview room with a mile-wide grin. He was glad that he'd remembered to shave last weekend and that he'd worn the overalls without the rips in them.

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Newton was nervous. He'd cleaned his room six times and even had his mother come in to check for ants. Newton's date, Debbie, wasn't going to see his room, but he was convinced

that she would be able to tell how neat his room was just by looking at him.

At 2:30 pm, the phone rang. It was Jim-Bob.

"Looks like I'm getting laid tonight, loser," he said.

"What?" said Newton.

"I got the job."

"As an escort? I don't believe it."

"They were very impressed with my personality. I've got to go and get ready now. See ya, you loser." Jim-Bob hung up.

Good, thought Newton and went back to brushing the lint off his undershirt.

By 3:30 pm, Newton was nervous. By 4:00, he was skittish and by 4:30, he was about to spontaneously combust. At 4:35, he charged down the stairs and screamed at his mother, "My shoelaces. They're filthy. Look at them!"

"I'll wash them."

"No. Get them dry cleaned!"

Newton realized he hadn't finished drawing up his flow chart of conversational topics yet. His mother was a gifted conversationalist. She had full-blown arguments with the house plants on a regular basis. Newton momentarily considered asking his mother to come with him. But he realized that Debbie might construe that as uncool, even for a first date. He considered cancelling. Then he remembered the newspaper he'd read that morning. He picked up the phone.

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Jim-Bob was being debriefed by one of the Tricycle Inc. employees, a man called Nirdin.

Nirdin was not an impressive specimen. He was built like an eight-year-old and wore glasses that made coke bottles look like contacts. Jim-Bob deduced that he must be one of the desk workers who was kept behind closed doors and never allowed to see the light of day.

"Anything you have to buy on the job, we'll reimburse you for," explained Nirdin, "and that includes drinks (which, trust me, you'll need), bribes, disguises, weapons--"

"What about sex?" said Jim-Bob.

"Right," said Nirdin briskly. "Here are some condoms. Our Type 1 clients usually forget to bring them, so they'll probably ask you. Now the most common mistake that first-timers make is leaving too early. Don't leave unless the clients ask you to go. Incidentally, you get an extra \$100.00 for every hour you have to work after 2:00 am. And I suggest bringing a book. We've got a library downstairs. Or you can have this deck of cards. I usually play

solitaire when I'm out."

Jim-Bob looked at him sceptically. "You go out?"

"Every night, usually. February is a busy time for us."

Jim-Bob was worried. "What kind of women do you get as clients here? I mean, no offence, but I don't want to get set up with any dogs."

"Uh, Jim-Bob. Agency policy: We don't use the 'd' word. And we generally get two types of clients. Type 1's are the most common at this time of year. Take a look at this."

Nirdin shoved a DVD into his laptop. On the screen, a blue and white caption read:

Tricycle Escort Agency

Promotional Tape

Type 1 Couples

This was followed by a series of still shots of various couples, fully clothed and embracing while exuberantly trading saliva.

"Do they all look like that?" said Jim-Bob.

"Of course not," said Nirdin. "This is a promo disc We hired actors. The poses are bad enough; we don't want to make our clients puke by using real people."

Nirdin cued through the stills quickly. "Probably the most challenging thing is not falling asleep. I find I get a lot of reading done when I'm out with them. You are permitted to bring a book, but be discreet. I mean, they may seem completely oblivious, but, believe me, they're oblivious as hell when they find out they're being ignored.

"I remember one night in particular, I was out with this couple and the woman asked me if I had any condoms. I mean of course I did. I was using one as a bookmark. But I was right at the part in the book where Bigwig just escaped from Efrafa and General Woundwort and all of his crew are in hot pursuit and I didn't want to stop reading, so I just tossed the condom on the table without looking up.

"I came *this* close to getting fired for doing that.

Jim-Bob squinted at Nirdin. "Who's Bigwig?"

"You know... *Watership Down*? Richard Adams?"

"Huh?"

"You need to get out more, Jim-Bob. Visit the library. Anyway, where was I--Oh yeah, that couple...the take-home message is to pay attention, or at least, give the appearance of paying attention. Type 1's need an audience on a date. She probably left her husband and three kids for him, or he left his wife for her and for a while, it's great. There's this big scandal about them being a couple. After a while, though, their friends get sick of being the

audience, so they hire us to do the job for them. Their friends might even hire three or four of us for one night."

"Kinky," said Jim-Bob.

"Don't use the 'k' word in front of the clients," said Nirdin. "Now, Type 2's--"

"--Wait a sec'," said Jim-Bob. "I'm only going to be sleeping with the women, not the men. Right?"

"The clients might ask you to join in, especially if they think you're not paying enough attention. But if they do, tell them it's not our policy. If they want that, they'll have to go to another agency."

"Then what are they paying me for?" said Jim-Bob.

"You're getting paid to be a third wheel," said Nirdin.

Jim-Bob absorbed this. "Wait a minute... So I don't get to have sex at all?"

Nirdin took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "You actually thought we were *that* kind of escort service? You thought that's what we hired you for?"

"Well yeah," said Jim-Bob indignantly.

"Aw, Jim-Bob, come *on*. I hate to draw your attention to reality, but have you looked in a mirror recently? What did the interviewers say to you?"

"They said I had a good personality...And one of them liked my hair."

Nirdin looked at Jim-Bob. "Have you ever heard a woman say: 'Geeze, I wish I could get laid by a guy with a good personality'? And whoever said they liked your hair before this interview?"

Jim-Bob thought about it. "My Mom."

Nirdin looked dubious.

"Ok!" said Jim-Bob sharply. He stood up, pulled his wedgy gun out of his pocket and aimed it at Nirdin.

"So I don't get to have sex and the only reason I got the job is because I'm butt ugly. Why would I want to work for you?!"

"About \$200.00 a night, and I'm not wearing any, so put it away."

Jim-Bob thought about the money and what he could do with it, and promptly sat down again.

"Thank-you," said Nirdin. "Type 2s..."

The caption on the monitor now read: *Type 2 Clients*

More still shots followed, this time of some photogenic nerds, or more probably, some photogenic people in nerd clothes and accessories.

"Now Type 2s are the kind of people who go for years without dating," said Nirdin. "They usually pine after one person for a long time, work up the courage to ask them out and then get told to stick it up their nose, or something equally typical, and so it goes. Then finally, after years of this pointlessness, the man (if it's a guy) finds his dream woman, someone who appears to return his feelings. He asks her out on a date and she accepts. Life is perfect and the world is a great and glorious place.

"Then they go out on their date and along comes the guy's best friend and the girl realizes that the friend is much funnier and better-looking and more fun to be with than her date. She figures the best way to get to know this friend better is to talk to him all evening while only occasionally acknowledging the presence of the poor, pathetic guy who's paying for her meal. He can afford it and anyway, he won't notice what she's doing since he's such a total *loser*." Nirdin's face was beginning to turn red.

"But of course," he continued, "if there's no best friend for her to throw herself at, then she'll find someone else: the janitor or a shoe salesman for god's sake, and the next thing you know, you're making small talk with the cab driver *while they make out in the back seat!* Bastards! I hate them! Kill them all!!!"

Jim-Bob held his wedgie gun protectively in front of him in case Nirdin leapt across the desk and latched onto his throat. Instead, Nirdin stared off into space for a minute and then pulled himself together.

"Generally, a Type 2 job pays twice as much as a Type 1 and the evening's usually over much earlier. The trick is to make the client look good by comparison. In this case, Jim-Bob, you've got a definite advantage. I mean, the most dangerous thing you can do in this type of situation is to appear interesting. I don't mean to brag, but I am exceptional when it comes to these jobs.

"If you bring along a book, take a textbook--nothing with any form of Anatomy in it. Amy down at the library will show you. A set of Trivial Pursuit cards is better. Keep them in your pocket 'til you need to palm a couple. Then if the client's date tries to start a conversation with you, just ask her did she know that yaks' milk was pink.

"You're there to let other people know that this table is occupied by a couple getting to know each other and it's protected by someone (That would be you.) who is absolutely no threat to the relationship. You've got to be just good-looking enough so as not to put them off their food, and just interesting enough that they can tune you out without falling asleep. Ok? So, Jim-Bob, tell me about yourself."

"Huh?" said Jim-Bob.

"Perfect," said Nirdin. "And if, in the course of their date, the usher at the movies starts flirting with her, smack him upside the head, grab his nuts, crush that testosterone-charged

dick-brain and show him you're not going to take that crap! That's what you're being paid for. But do it in a stupid way, and then fart afterwards. Otherwise she'll fall in love with you. Got it?"

Jim-Bob smiled.

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"What time is it?" Newton asked.

"You're wearing a watch," said Debbie.

"Oh, yeah," said Newton. "Funny how you forget...Oh crap!"

The escort from Tricycle Inc. had arrived.

"Hey, buddy," said Jim-Bob.

"Excuse me for a second," said Newton and pulled Jim-Bob aside. "Get lost, Jim-Bob."

"Ok. It's your money," said Jim-Bob.

"Pardon?"

"I'm the escort."

Newton thought about this for a microsecond. "You're fired."

"Fine with me. We have a no-refund policy. You pay for me whether I'm here or not."

"No way," said Newton coldly. "I'm paying this money to make sure people like you don't screw this up for me. Don't go anywhere. I'm calling the agency."

Five minutes later, Newton came back into the restaurant, fuming. The agency had booked out all of their escorts for the evening. It was Jim-Bob or no one.

Newton sat down at the table. "Sorry about that," he said to Debbie. Then he looked around. Debbie was no longer at the table, Jim-Bob was gone and the waiter was curled up on the floor in a ball, making a noise reminiscent of a kitten with digestive difficulties. Debbie was kneeling beside him. A crowd was starting to gather.

"Did I miss something?" Newton asked her.

"Are you ok?" said Debbie to the waiter.

Just then, Jim-Bob came running back into the restaurant, brandishing a pair of scissors. He bounded up the waiter. "It's okay everyone. Don't panic. He must have been wearing jockey shorts. Stand back. I'll get them off."

"Don't go near him, you animal," said Debbie, shoving him aside, and because she was a

frail, fluffy woman, Jim-Bob let her.

"What did you *do*, Jim-Bob?" said Newton.

"My job," said Jim-Bob. "He started flirting with her when she asked him about the soup of the day. So I shot him with my wedgie gun. Okay, I had it set on Atomic, but it shouldn't have wiped him out like that...unless he was wearing jockey shorts."

"You..." Newton suddenly forgot what expletive he had been about to use as he was jostled farther from the scene of the crime by the growing number of people surrounding the waiter. Various startled shouts sounded.

"Somebody call an ambulance!"

"Oh my god. He's not breathing. Does anyone know C.P.R.?"

Newton pushed to the front of crowd. "I'm a med. student."

"Excuse me," said the restaurant manager. "Anyone who didn't see what happened can leave. The situation is under control."

Newton tried to push past him.

"Didn't you hear what he said?" said someone else to Newton.

"Debbie!" said Newton, slipping between two women and kneeling down beside her. Debbie was giving the waiter C.P.R., even though she didn't know C.P.R. This didn't matter much, as the waiter obviously didn't need it.

"Hey!" said Newton.

"Oh, leave them alone!" said the manager and he pulled Newton to his feet and frog-marched him to the exit.

Jim-Bob was waiting for him outside.

The manager glared at them. "Get out, both of you!" He started to walk away.

"Here," said Jim-Bob, handing Newton the wedgie gun. "You'll feel better."

An inhuman screech perforated the eardrums of everyone in a six-kilometre radius.

"Hmm," said Newton. "I thought so."

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"Go figure," said Jim-Bob. "I give the guy a Grade A wedgie and the chick flips for him."

"Just shut the hell up," snarled Newton. "You've ruined my life."

"Look on the bright side, buddy. At least they won't be having any kids. And anyway, if you haven't got anything, at least you've got your friends," said Jim-Bob.

"I'm taking a cab home. Good night, Jim-Bob."

Jim-Bob put his arm around Newton. "And friends don't let friends walk home when they can lend them cab fare, right Newton?"

"Jim-Bob, are you still wearing that G-string?"

"What – Aieeeee!!!!!"

Sarah Totton's short fiction has appeared in *Realms of Fantasy*, *Writers of the Future XXII* and the late *Planet Relish*. She knows that if you don't have anything, at least you've got your friends. And if you've got your friends, you've always got someone to give wedgies to. She is currently accepting applications for new friends.