

Zig Zag is Copyright © Max Black Rabbit. Sabrina, Darke Katt and R.C. are Copyright © Eric W. Schwartz. James Sheppard, Marvin Badger, Rhonda Badger, Yohni, Alexi, Michael, Esteban, Mia, Wanda Vixen and Tamara Rabbit are Copyright © James Bruner. Jean LeBrun, Francois LeBrun, Marie LeBrun, Gabrielle Ryder, Theodore Bigglesworth-Farthington von Salzburg the Third, Roxanne Bigglesworth-Farthington von Salzburg, Timothy Bigglesworth-Farthington von Salzburg, Malcolm Grazer, William Pongo, Captain Archibald, Peter Spermophilus, Miranda Spermophilus, ArseNick/Nicholas Babouin, Mr. Hammond, Leo Leon, Vincent Leon, Sergeant Otetiani, Lieutenant Black, Julie Black, Miriam Redtail, Lizzy Doe, Emma Grey, Rowena Spyke, Professor Nutkin, Professor Moose Nicholson, Lance Gulo, Henry Hippopotamidae, John Ferret, Charles 'Mouse' Mombay, Paul Donkey, Harley Davidson (Not the motorcycle manufacturer, obviously) and Pethouse Magazine is © Joan Jacobsen, 2005.

Legal Notice: This story is Copyright © 2005 by Joan Jacobsen. This story may not be sold or used for commercial profit in any form or fashion. This story may not be modified in any way. This story may not be posted on a mirror site or any other Internet site without the written permission of the author. This story may not be distributed on print, magnetic, electrical or optical mediums.

Permission to use characters that are Copyright other individuals was obtained prior to the appearance of said characters.

This is an independent work of fiction with no connection whatsoever to Max Black Rabbit, Eric W. Schwartz, E.S. Productions or James Bruner and is in no way meant to imply any connection with Max Black Rabbit, Eric W. Schwartz, E.S. Productions, or James Bruner. This story contains characters created by Max Black Rabbit, Eric W. Schwartz, James Bruner, Tigermark and Silver Coyote. Events and characters occurring in this story should not be considered part of the storylines for either 'Zig Zag', 'Sabrina Online' or 'Sabrina Online - The Story'.

In fact, as far as 'Zig Zag', 'Sabrina Online', 'Sabrina Online - The Story' and 'Zig Zag the Story' are concerned, this story does not exist. The artists disavow any knowledge of and do not officially sanction the events in this story.

LVII – How to drape a toga

"Zig Zag! I need a word with you..." Marvin's voice rang out across the studio.

Zig Zag turned around and looked at the badger with a smile and a nod. She put the papers she'd been going over down.

"Sure. Are you ready to go?"

"I am. I'll head off as soon as we're done here. But I need you to go talk to Esteban. He's walking around like he's forgotten his head at home. I think there's something really wrong with the fur."

"Is it that bad?" Zig Zag asked, frowning.

"Yohni's been prodding him for twenty minutes with all kinds of comments and he hasn't whined and said we should "geeve the lobo a break" yet. Also, he accidentally picked my mug out of the cupboard in the common room and he didn't notice..." Marvin said, concerned.

"Okay, that's *bad!*"

"That's what I'm saying. Could you go and have a word with him?"

Zig Zag nodded and scratches her neck. "Of course. I wonder what could make him act like that. Do you know if he and Jean are having problems?"

"I don't think so. I'm sure he'd be a sobbing wreck in a corner if *that* was the case. You know how badly in love with that vixen he is. No...I think this is something else. Anyway, you go talk to him and I'll get going."

Zig Zag took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "Never a dull moment..." she mumbled and headed towards the common room.

She nodded to Sabrina on the way. The other skunk was busy behind the computer, looking like she was deeply engrossed in something. Probably the convention-material, Zig Zag told herself. Then she pushed the door open and entered the common room. Esteban was sitting there, nursing a mug of coffee. Marvin's mug. It wasn't steaming anymore.

"Esteban..." Zig Zag said in a quiet, soft tone of voice.

The wolf looked up and managed to put a smile on his face. "Hola jefa. How ees life treateng the most amazeeng skunk een the world today?"

"I don't know. If you meet her, tell me," Zig Zag said with a chuckle and instantly regretted it when she saw the way it made Esteban's face fall.

"I deedn't...I'm sorree..." he began.

"Whoa...whoa, easy, Lobo. I'm only kidding. What's up with you? Marvin said you're walking around like you forgot your head at home," Zig Zag said and sat down next to the wolf, putting a friendly paw on his shoulder.

Esteban sighed and put the mug down. "I got a phonecall yesterday, Boss..."

"What was it about? Somehow, I think we've had a lot of nasty experiences come our way lately," Zig Zag said, squeezing Esteban's shoulder.

"It was my madre...they found Raimundo...he'd put a bullet through hees head and left a note about how he couldn't levee weeth the shame..."

Zig Zag just blinked rapidly and sat up straight. "Oh my *God*...Esteban...please, allow me to extend my condolences!"

The wolf put his face in his paws and rested his elbows on his knees. "Gracias, jefa...but you know what the worst part of eet ees? I don't feel *aneetheeng*. I can't grieve for hees

death. He was a cruel fur, and he treated me badlee all my life. He treated Jean badlee...my madre too. But I deed not mean for thees to happen..."

"No one ever means for something like that to happen. You mustn't blame yourself. He made his choice himself. It isn't your fault..." Zig Zag said, trying to make her head stop spinning.

"I know...but I can't *help* askeeng myself eef I could've done sometheeng to prevent eet. I asked when the funeral was goeeng to be. Madre said that she'd take care of eet and she deedn't expect me to come home for eet. I theenk she just wants eet over weeth herself..."

"You said he couldn't live with the shame, according to his note. What shame?" Zig Zag asked.

The wolf shrugged and looked back up. "Me. Jean. Getteeng thrown out by hees own wife because she couldn't accept hees machismo aneemore."

"Oh...I see. Can I be bluntly honest with you, Esteban?"

"Please...."

"Your father was not a good fur. In fact, I'm willing to say he was a damned idiot."

"I know, Boss...I know. But thank you. I'm sorree for acteeng beside myself. I'll be better een a moment. Eet helped to tell someone..." Esteban said and smiled weakly.

"Haven't you told Jean yet?" Zig Zag asked and tilted her head to the side.

"I haven't seen her yet, seence I got the call. I don't want to say sometheeng like that over the phone."

Zig Zag nodded. "That is understandable. She'll be here in a bit, though. She's going to help us out with the latest armors. Take a bit to talk to her about this, okay?"

"Boss...there ees sometheeng else I'd like to talk to you about..." Esteban said, quietly.

Zig Zag nodded and leaned back in her seat. "Of course. I'm right here. Go ahead," she said and smiled.

"I can't go on workeeng here. You know that. When Jean ees all done, I'm goeeng to be a one-veexen lobo..."

"I know. I've been expecting you to come to me with this for a while. And I know you've been worried about how I'd react. Esteban, I just want you and her to be happy, alright? I'm hardly going to put up a fuss because one of my employees goes out and finds love."

Esteban nodded and looked slightly more at ease at that. "Gracias. Eef...eef you have some other job here, though...behind the camera, I'd be verree happy to keep workeeng for you, even at a much lower wage. You're the best employer anee fur could ask for."

"Thank you for saying that. I'll certainly keep it in mind," Zig Zag said with a wide, grateful smile. "Now, you'd better wash Marvin's cup before he decides to take matters into his own paws," she winked.

The look on Esteban's face as he realized what mug he'd been drinking from was priceless. "Oh no...ees he goeeng to tackle me?" he asked with a whine in his voice.

"That'll be the biggest tackle of all time then. He's headed for Virginia to scout a location for our outdoor shooting. If he can tackle you from there, I'll dare say he deserves a prize," Zig Zag grinned.

Esteban nodded and couldn't help a grin. "Maybee I'll use hees mug a few more times while he's gone then," he said conspiratorially.

"Be nice, Esteban..."

"I'm always nice, Boss. Just ask Jean!"

"She's your girlfriend. She doesn't count," Zig Zag laughed and got to her feet. "I'll see you in the studio in a few minutes then, okay?"

"Absolutelee. Be right there, jefa."

Zig Zag headed back out of the common room and closed the door behind her. She looked at her paws and sighed. They were shaking slightly. There had been enough bad things going on lately. She was really looking forward to the convention now. Something fun and relaxing for once. Signing T-shirts and body parts sounded more or less like heaven compared to all that's happened in the space of just a few months. She looked over at Sabrina and shook her head.

"Have you ever felt like you're part of a soap-opera, Sabrina?"

"Not really, Zig. I frequently feel like I'm part of a comic-strip though, with all the laughs that go on at my expense around here," the other skunk answered with a crooked grin.

Zig Zag squinted at that and pondered. "I see your point..." she finally said and headed back to the studio.

###

Jean stretched and looked at Gabrielle next to her. They were headed towards the studio, but the traffic was awful and driving was starting to look like a bad idea.

"We'd have been there by now if we'd walked," the bronco grumbled.

"Relax. It's not a problem. Nothing's going to start until I get there anyway," Jean said with a grin.

"Oooh you're sounding full of yourself today," Gabrielle grinned.

Jean swatted her friend's shoulder and giggled. "You know what I mean. Until I put those armors together correctly, they're going to be unable to start."

"That's true at least. I hope mine is in there this time. I can't wait to see what I'll end up looking like," Gabrielle said and smiled widely.

"You're like a kid on Halloween sometimes, Gabby."

"So? I'm just a big foal inside."

"I'm SO not going to comment on that!" Jean said with a laugh.

Gabrielle just whistled innocently. There was an opening in the traffic and she put the hoof down on the gas pedal. A few minutes later, the studio came up ahead. She changed lanes and turned onto the parking lot with a look on the dashboard clock.

"Amazing. We're only five minutes late."

Jean smiled. "Not too bad. We did leave home in good time too."

"Damned traffic..." Gabrielle grumbled and got out.

They hurried inside and through the lobby with just a wave and "good morning" to Sabrina on the way to the studio.

Gabrielle pushed the doors open and looked around for Zig Zag. "Sorry about the delay. The traffic was bloody murder today," she apologized.

"No problem," Zig Zag said with a shrug. "I experienced it myself, coming in. It's been like that all morning. You'd think there's something important going on."

Jean had already turned to the large crate. Her tail was wagging. "Is that it?" she asked and looked at Zig Zag.

"Sure. Knock yourself out," Zig Zag grinned. "Oh, and we figured out how to drape a toga. That is to say *I* figured it out. Michael is still whining about it."

Jean sniggered and looked into the crate. "Heeey...neat. This all looks really good. Okay, let's get it onto a table."

###

Miriam's apartment looked like someone was moving out. Boxes everywhere, being filled with stuff. Emma and Lizzy were there, helping out. Music was streaming from a boombox. The mood in the apartment was high and occasionally silly.

"I have to say...you're not right in your red head, Miriam. Moving to *Columbus*?? Because of a male? You've got to be out of your mind," Lizzy chuckled and put a couple of books in a big cardboard box, already filled with clothes.

"I know, but...Fox is special and I think this is going to be the real deal. I didn't know he was Jean's therapist though. I'm a little worried if that's unethical or something. But on the other paw, I'm sure he didn't know about Jean either."

Emma looked up from wrapping china in old newspapers and blinked. "You mean to say you haven't mentioned her to him?" she asked.

"I haven't. I don't go around spreading her condition to the whole world, Emma. You should know better," Miriam said and shrugged.

"Ohh...I guess I can see what you mean. I just figured you'd have talked to him about your friends..." Emma answered and shrugged.

"I do. But I don't give out details like that. For all he knows, I have a great friend called Jean, whom he hasn't met yet," the vixen said with a shrug. "I really didn't know he was her therapist."

Lizzy nodded and scratched her neck. "Actually, I don't think it's a problem anymore, Miriam..."

"Why's that?"

"Remember that Jean is basically *done* with her therapy. They've agreed she's getting surgery. There's no conflict of interest at this time and since no one KNEW about this mixup from the start, there's never been a situation where he's had to consider if he was acting unethically," the doe said and smiled crookedly.

"You're right. That's a relief to know," Miriam said and exhaled.

The other two realized that it had been weighing pretty heavily on the vixen's mind. Emma looked at Lizzy and nodded, then headed into the kitchen to make a pot of coffee. Lizzy scratched her neck again and headed over to give Miriam's shoulder a squeeze.

"Hey, are you alright?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's a little odd moving, though. It always is."

"Don't worry about it. You'll still see us for classes and I guess we'll just have to use my pad to hang out in instead of yours. The SNF isn't going to end just because you move out of town, rest assured."

"Thank you," Miriam said, softly. "I really think I'm fortunate. I mean...I have friends like you and Emma, and like Jean. REAL friends."

Lizzy nodded and squeezed the vixen's shoulder again. "You know...a few years ago, I knew a refugee. Very nice fur, really. Palestinian...stateless, you know the drill..."

"Why am I not surprised that you of all furs know someone like that?" Miriam chuckled. "Go on."

"He was a wise fur in many ways. He told me...a parable, I suppose you could call it. About what a friend is. It's very harsh but so was life in Chabra and Shatila."

"What are tho...ohh....those were refugee camps, weren't they?"

"They still are," Lizzy said, darkly. "Nasty places. Anyway...let me tell you what he said."

Miriam nodded and sat down. Emma came back out of the kitchen and sat down as well. Lizzy cleared her throat and leaned against the table, folding her arms across her chest.

"First you have to pull the head off a chicken. This is important. You have to do that first of all, because you mustn't lie. Then you call *everyone you know*. Not just your

friends or family. Everyone. And you say "I have taken a life. I have killed..." but you don't say WHAT you have killed. That way, you don't lie..." she began.

The other two nodded, paying attention.

"After you do that, you wait," Lizzy explained. "After a while, you will realize that everyone you called reacts differently. Some furs will stay away entirely. You don't know them. You don't WANT to know them. They're not worth your time and effort. Others will come to your house, but stay on the opposite sidewalk, whispering and looking across the street with wide eyes. They'll say "Look, there lives a killer and we KNOW her!" and those you may one day consider acquaintances if you work on it...if you want to. But they're not your friends."

Emma blinked and nodded again, clearly understanding the principle. Miriam looked very thoughtful.

Lizzy continued a moment later, smiling crookedly. "The last ones...just a few furs...will come to your front door and ring the bell. They'll carry a gun and a bag. They'll give you the bag and say "Here, it is all my wealth. All I own. I don't know what you need it for, or how you will use. But it is yours," and then they will give you the gun, and say "This is my gun. I don't know how you're going to use it. But it is yours if you need it". Finally, they'll spread their arms to the side and say "Here I am. I will die for you. I am your friend". And those are the ones you can truly rely on..."

Emma cleared her throat and blinked. "That's...very harsh."

"I think if you'd lived a few months in Chabra, you'd think it was very apt..." Lizzy said. "My friend had lived there for most of his life."

Miriam nodded. "I think that if you modify that to life in the United States, the principle is still very good. It means that your friends are there for you, without hesitation or reservation. They'll back you up, help you and support you when you need, even if you're in trouble. Even if it means risking something themselves."

"Bingo," Lizzy said and nodded to Miriam. "I know for a fact that I have very few friends. Most of the furs we go to classes with think I'm a rabid political radical. I suppose I am in some ways. They think I'm forceful, brash, even rude. They never take the time to get to know me. You do. You know there's more to me than meets the eye..."

Emma nodded. "Oh, I can agree with that. I think that's something we can all recognize in fact."

Miriam smiled a little and looked at her paws. "Here I am. I will die for you. I am your friend," she said, and looked at the other two in turn.

Emma smiled and leaned over, giving her friend a long, tight hug.

###

Jean looked at her own work critically and nodded. Beside her, Zig Zag was standing with her arms folded across her bosom. She nodded as well. Yohni was leaning against the skunk, nodding. Gabrielle was nodding too, a finger tapping her chin. In fact, the only one not nodding was Michael.

The ferret looked horribly worried. "I can't wear this. It'll fall off!" he whined.

"As if your clothes falling off has *ever* worried you before...hellooooo, look at where you're working, buggo..." Gabrielle said, deadpan.

"Yeah but this is different!" Michael mumbled and looked sour.

"It won't fall off. And even if it does, you're wearing the tunic underneath. Don't look so glum. You're wearing a lot more than those playing the parts of the actual gladiators. Look at what Esteban will be wearing?" Jean said and smiled crookedly.

"Hey, don't start, vixen. You told him to make sure he could bring that home from time to time," Zig Zag said with a look askance.

"I never said I was complaining. I've got the single most gorgeous boyfriend in Columbus...do you seriously think I'm going to complain about having him running around the apartment in a loincloth and not much else, at my beck and call?"

"And if anyone ever wondered if Jean really *is* a femme at heart...I think we just saw the definite proof of it..." Yohni giggled. "Good one, dear."

"Just make sure he uses fur-conditioner," Zig Zag chuckled. "He'll be softer. But I think he always does anyway."

"He does. I know first paw..." Yohni grinned. Then blanched and hurried to look at Jean as if to see how that comment was received.

Jean just nodded and smiled. "No problem. You know what I think about him working here..."

"I'd like to protest!" Michael grumbled. "I'm just as good looking as he is."

There was a note of jest in his voice though. The ferret lifted his arms to level with his shoulders to test if the toga fell off. It didn't. He smiled in surprise.

"You know what the truly remarkable thing about togas is, Zig Zag?" Jean said, off paw.

"No...but I'm sure you're able to tell me," the skunk answered with a grin.

"There were many, many different ways to drape it. Some slaves were specially trained for it. That was their special skill. To help a gentlefur of stature...significant Romans...to get dressed properly for important situations."

"You don't say? Perhaps we should have Michael do some homework on the other methods, so he doesn't have to look the same in every single scene?"

"I QUIT!!!" the ferret shouted and lifted his arms, before laughing out loud. "Just kidding, but I'm having enough trouble with *this* method."

"It's the simplest one, Michael...for that era," Jean pointed out.

Gabrielle looked at the vixen. "I thought you said you didn't know how to drape a toga?"

"...Gabby...you've lived with me for years. You've known me most of your life. And you stand there, right as rain, saying that once someone points out something I don't know about history...Rome in particular...you are surprised that I go out and actually FIND OUT??" Jean asked.

Gabrielle grimaced and shook a paw rapidly in front of herself. "Ouch. Touché. Pinned to the wall."

"On to a more serious note..." Zig Zag started "...perhaps we should get those armors fitted on Gabrielle and Wanda in particular?"

Jean nodded. "Wanda isn't here yet though..." she said and looked around.

"Oh, she is...she's doing a photo-series with Mark. I think she'll be here in a matter of minutes," Zig Zag said and looked at Gabrielle.

The bronco nodded. "We can start with me until she gets here. I saw the items you picked out of the crate before. I'll look dangerous!"

"That *is* the general idea, I think, dear..." Yohni said, deadpan.

"Hey, what IS this anyway? Pick-on-the-bronco-day?" Gabrielle grinned. "I MEANT I'll look cool."

Jean grinned and nodded, getting the various pieces of armor. She looked up as Esteban entered the studio. She noted he looked tired, but waved him over anyway.

The maned wolf visibly livened up at seeing the vixen in the room. He came over and kissed her muzzle gently. "Hola chica. I need to talk to you when we're done here today."

"Good. I was hoping I could come with you when you go home," Jean answered.

Esteban nodded and looked at Gabrielle. "I theenk that's a good idea. Geeve her and Yohni some time alone, no?"

"It's only been a few days since we had a whole week, but the offer is definitely appreciated. I'm sure we'll find a way to pass the evening," Gabrielle said and grinned.

Esteban nodded again and watched quietly as Jean started getting her roomie dressed up in her armor.

"How long until the convention by the way?" Gabrielle asked a moment later and tried moving a bit with the armor on. It was not uncomfortable.

"Six weeks tomorrow," Zig Zag answered. "We're in good time. We'll have some raw scenes to bring, and a few edited ones, for teasers. Nothing major of course."

"It'll be fun!" Yohni exclaimed and smiled widely. "Are you coming too, Jean?"

"To a porn convention?? You're not serious. I'd be mistaken for a red vixen constantly, on account of my blush."

"Point taken. Besides, you've got your classes to deal with, I take it."

"No. It'll be in the middle of the holidays, but no matter. I'd rather not," Jean said.

"That's understandable. I'd like you to come along though, Jean..." Zig Zag said. "I mean, you're the script writer and I might actually *need* you there."

"Hmm...can I bring some friends?" Jean asked.

"How many?" the skunk asked.

"Three. Lizzy, Emma and Miriam. I'd feel safer and I know that while Emma would probably be blushing as much and as often as me, Lizzy will have an absolute blast there."

"Sure. I think that's possible, if they wouldn't mind helping out with setting up the stalls and suchlike."

"I'll ask them. Thank you, Zig," Jean said and looked relieved.

###

Esteban opened the door to his apartment and stepped inside. Jean followed right behind him. She brushed a paw over her boyfriend's arm and looked up at him with concern on her face.

"You've been very quiet all the way home. Is something wrong, Esteban?" she asked.

"Si...and...at the same time, no. Eet's just that I got a phonecall yesterday, from madre."

"Oh...is she okay?" Jean asked.

"She ees. But...I reallee have to talk to you about thees. Let's go and seet down and I'll get you a cup of tea," the wolf said.

Jean sat down and waited in the living room.

Esteban headed into the kitchen and rummaged around for a while. He didn't know how to break the news to Jean that his father had shot himself. He wasn't sure if she'd blame herself somehow. He rubbed his face. A bit of peace and quiet would be good for a change. Everything had been so hectic lately. He waited for the water to boil, then poured it on the tealeaves and brought the pot and two mugs into the living room.

"Chica...I know you never had much chance to get to talk to Raimundo..." he began.

"That's an understatement. He wasn't exactly the sort of fur I'd spend a lot of time on..." Jean said.

Esteban nodded and sat down next to her. "No. Me neither..." he said and sighed.

"What happened?" Jean asked, realization starting to dawn on her.

"I might as well say thees as eet ees. Raimundo was found een a hotel room a couple of days ago. He'd put a bullet through hees head and left a note sayeeng he couldn't leeve weeth the shame aneemore," Esteban said and sighed. He was ready to say something more in case the vixen began to crumble.

Her reaction surprised him. Instead of falling apart, she nodded, slowly, and put her arms around him, pulling his head down against her chest. "I am sorry for your loss. Even if he was full of himself and a bad father...he was still your father."

Esteban swallowed. For the first time he realized he'd been so worried about Jean's reaction that he hadn't allowed himself to react yet. His shoulders began to tremble, and moments later he was weeping against the vixens shoulder.

"I'm right here, Love. I'm not going anywhere..." Jean whispered, running her fingers through Estebans mane and stroking his back.

He couldn't answer. A lifetime of emotion was hitting Esteban fully in the face.

And all he could do was cry.