

(STORY)

THE CONVERSATION OF NICKI AND JAN

Our story involves a teenage girl, Nicki, and her friend, Jan. The time is a few years in the future in a world characterized by the present social course having been continued.

Nicki has been raised in a suburb of a large city in America. The ambiance of this place is one of rejection of nature. Her suburb, of the sort touted in the popular culture as being the pinnacle of human aspiration, derides substance. The city as a whole is a cold, impersonal jumble of concrete and glass through which race masses of cars. Like her peers, she has been in school almost all her life, and she has spent most of her time with others her age. She is presently attending a large high school with hundreds of students. About a third of these students are non-white, and most of these are bussed from the inner city. Her parents place all emphasis on maintaining and, hopefully, advancing their sense of self-worth through suburbanism. This is also true of the other adults in her world. There is no sense of history. If she hears anything about the history of white people, it is typically derogatory, whether it comes from the media, from teachers, or from anyone else. As with all her peers, the media has been a large part of her life. She has watched a great deal of television, seen many movies, and spent quite a lot of time chatting, playing games, etc. on her 'Twitterteen' device. She and her friend, Jan, had once spent a lot of time together watching CTV (Cool Television). Nicki had enjoyed doing this, but she had never been as enthralled with the content of what they watched as was Jan.

One day, as she was leaving school, Nicki ran into Jan, and they decided to go have something to drink at a fast-food establishment not far from where they lived. The two had not really done much together, including watching CTV, since Jan had adopted her new identity about 3 years before. This identity reflected things featured on CTV and other such conveyances. Nicki had gone in this direction to some extent, but did not feel entirely comfortable with it and, so, the two had drifted apart. There had been friction between them because of this. This school-year, they shared one class, where they sat together and had gotten beyond their friction, though they still ran around with different groups. They were glad that they had encountered one another this afternoon and looked forward to having their first real talk in quite some time. At the restaurant, they ordered their drinks, then went across the main area and sat at a booth in the corner. They made small talk for a while regarding homework, clothes, and various goings-on at school.

After a bit, Nicki decided to broach a subject that had been of concern to her. She felt safe in doing so because she was confident that, under her multicolored hair, Jan was still the good, reliable friend that she had always been. She knew that Jan had dated a number of non-white boys, so she began on that score.

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"So, uh, how have your dates been?" she asked.

"Fine." Jan answered.

Nicki sat expectantly for a moment, waiting. "Good." she said.

Jan raised her eyebrows. "Some have been fun. Others not so fun. But generally, fine." she said.

"I see."

Jan looked away momentarily, "Yes. . . I would say generally fine." she noted airily.

Nicki looked at Jan with a purse-lipped smile. "From the first!"

Jan chuckled. "Reciprocates?"

Nicki shrugged a little. "Reciprocates." she agreed. She hesitated. "Though, uh. . . there's probably not whole lot to reciprocate." She looked around and then back at Jan. "I mean, it hasn't exactly been 'With It.'" she confessed, referring to the television series, very popular with young people, which featured a group of teenagers in unlikely scenarios of independence and daring.

Jan looked down, pausing. She looked back at Nicki, shyly. "Uh. . . Confession?" she inquired.

Nicki looked at her. "Confession."

Jan glanced around. "Uh. . . well. . . Ditto."

"Really?" asked Nicki, somewhat surprised.

"Really. Or, well. . . pretty really, I guess." Jan conceded.

"Gosh." said Nicki. She was quiet a moment, then said, "So, from the first? And reciprocation promised."

Jan smiled. "Okay. Well, I. . . "

They continued, Jan telling Nicki about the various boys she had gone out with and run around with, their pros and cons, what they had done, and whatnot. Nicki told Jan about the dates she had been on, where they had gone, and such.

After a bit, they paused and sat for a moment, watching the other customers. There were not too many there. Just a usual afternoon group and no one the girls knew.

Nicki had a sip of her drink and was about to resume the topic of boyfriends in order to again approach the point that was concerning her, but before she could do so, Jan spoke.

"Too bad we didn't have any sessions together on Social Unity Day." Jan said, referring to the school event, held each semester; this one, the week before.

"Actually." Nicki agreed.

"Get assigned to any interesting ones?" asked Jan.

"Oh, I don't know. I was in one of the ones led by Congressman Edwards." Nicki said, referring to the congressman who represented one of the city's congressional districts and who was black.

"Really? I heard he was there, but didn't see him." Jan said. "What session?"

"That was, uh. . . Respecting Ethnic Assertion." Nicki answered. "He talked about the legislation he introduced a while back that would give the votes of non-whites in Congress and the Senate more weight than the white votes. To make up for discrimination."

"Oh." said Jan. "Does he look like he does on TV?"

"Yeah, zactly, pretty much. . . but he's not as tall as I thought." Nicki told her.

"Well, too bad I didn't have him for a session." Jan said. "He's 'boyant.'"

"Yeah, he bops." Nicki said. She had some of her drink. "What sessions did you have?"

"A couple. . . one led by Ms. Goldstein." she noted, referring to the school principal. "With two professors from the university."

"What did they talk about?" asked Nicki.

"The Holocaust." Jan replied.

Nicki nodded.

"Also, Ms. Goldstein talked about what Robby O'Hara did." Jan added.

"Oh? He got in trouble about a month ago for saying the Holocaust didn't happen like they say." Nicki observed.

"Right." said Jan. "You know. . . he has to stay in Attitude Remediation till Winter Break!"

"You're kidding!" responded Nicki. "Wow." She paused. "He said that not nearly six million died in the Holocaust, right?"

"Yeah." Jan answered. "Just a small fraction of that. . . and that they weren't murdered but died in epidemics."

"Huh." said Nicki. "I wonder how he got that idea."

"I don't know." Jan said. "Sleeping in history class, I guess. Or maybe he hasn't seen any of the movies about it."

"Something." Nicki responded. She paused. "My parents said that when they were in school, they thought all the people were put in gas chambers at the concentration camps."

"My mom learned the same." noted Jan. "Now we know that they were shot in the woods, somewhere in Eastern Europe."

Nicki nodded, then looked disgusted. "Of course, there were the trucks with gas chambers on the back that went around gassing people." she observed.

"Uuh." said Jan, "Awful." She was quiet a moment. "Anyway, maybe some were gassed at the concentration camps. Still, it's a lot different story."

"Yeah." Nicki said. "I guess they've found out some things since then."

"Must have." Jan concurred.

Nicki paused. "Between being gassed or shot, I'd definitely take the firing squad!"

"Ditto!" Jan agreed.

Nicki was quiet a moment. "Too bad Robby's not right as far as his idea that things didn't happen like that."

"Really." Jan agreed. She shook her head. "But, I guess people aren't good-hearted enough for it not to have."

"Yeah. . . unfortunately." Nicki responded.

They sat quietly for a time, gazing idly at the activity in the restaurant. Nicki was glad that none of their other friends were there; and in fact, she was hoping that none of them would show up. She really wanted to talk to Jan alone, most particularly about what had been concerning her. She looked at Jan somewhat self-consciously, then edged again toward this point.

"Mind if I ask you something?"

Jan smiled a little. "Depends on what."

Momentarily distracted, Nicki looked at Jan quizzically, "You mean there's more than what you confessed before?"

"That's just the point. There isn't." she said. "I wouldn't want THAT to get out!"

Nicki laughed. "Your secret is safe with me."

"I'm at your mercy." Jan noted. "Anyway, you wanted to know?"

"Well, its just that. . . I was just wondering. . . " she said, tracing a small pattern on the table with her fingernail. "Do you like going out with non-white boys or with whites the best?"

Jan was somewhat startled and looked around quickly, then implored, "Careful. . . you'll get us both accused of hate-speech!"

Nicki ducked a little. "Sorry." she said, realizing that her nervousness had caused her to ask the question a little louder than she intended. They sat for a moment. Then Nicki continued. "Well. . . is there one you like best?"

Jan shrugged some. "Oh. . . I don't know." she said noncommittally. She was quiet a moment. "Non-whites are cool. They bop."

Nicki glanced around. "How about whites?"

"Oh, they're okay." Jan answered. "Not as 'boyant, maybe."

Nicki nodded.

Jan looked at the other customers, then back at Nicki. "Of course, Asians are different. They're fun enough, but. . . they're not even as bopping as whites!"

They chuckled.

"They try though." Jan added.

"Probably nicer." observed Nicki.

"Probably."

Nicki paused a moment. "But. . . well. . . don't you ever feel like you want to stick with. . . with your own race?"

"What?" Jan inquired incredulously. She glanced about. "Are you feeling okay?"

Nicki tilted her head slightly and looked away. "But. . . well. . . do you?"

"You mean only with whites?"

"Uh. . . yeah, I suppose." Nicki replied.

Jan raised her eyebrows, looking incredulous. "Gaa. I think I'd feel. . . well. . . sort of racist."

Nicki nodded.

"Also, I'd be afraid I'd be seen as racist." Jan said.

"Right."

Jan was quiet momentarily. "And also. . . I think I'd feel a little trapped."

"If you just dated white boys you'd feel trapped?" Nicki asked.

"Yeah. . . I guess." Jan answered. She paused. "I mean, non-whites are way more with-it than whites."

Nicki was thoughtful a moment. "Well. . . a lot of whites are awfully concerned about what people think."

Jan nodded, then was silent, musing briefly. "But you know. . . it's. . . it's not really the boys."

Nicki sat quietly.

"Only with whites." Jan uttered. She looked out the window. "Whites." she said in a tone touched with disapproval. She paused, looking out. "Who wants to be like that?" she asked, indicating the scene dismissively with her hand - the nearby tract homes, the city skyline in the distance, the part of the freeway visible from there and upon which rush-hour traffic was beginning to build.

Nicki looked at the scene. "Yeah." she said.

"Man living by bread alone." said Jan. "Or trying to."

Nicki nodded.

"I mean. . . there's nothing wrong with wanting to be comfortable." Jan observed. "But do we have to stomp everything else out of existence?"

"Yeah." responded Nicki. She paused a few moments, viewing the scene. "Little things. . . like feeling and beauty."

"Really!"

They sat quietly.

"Only that." Jan noted.

The thought made Nicki shutter involuntarily. She sat looking out the window, feeling confused.

"Anyway," said Jan, "I don't think I want to be around just whites. She hesitated. "Oh. . . sometimes maybe. I don't know."

Nicki was silent, then asked, "Well. . . are you, uh," she glanced around, "Are you attracted to white boys?"

Jan laughed and looked at Nicki questioningly. "Hey, how long have you known me?"

"Only since we were toddlers in pre-school together."

"Right. Of course I am. . . some."

"Who?" asked Nicki.

Jan smiled self-consciously. "Well. . . how about Casey Thomas?" she offered.

"Hmmm." nodded Nicki approvingly.

"Or Reg Johnson." said Jan.

"Jack Henry." returned Nicki.

Jan paused. "Bobby Smith."

"Ooooh!" uttered Nicki in a mock swoon of desire.

"Really." said Jan. She was quiet a moment, then looked at Nicki shyly and said, "Uh. . . Vance Minetti."

Nicki looked at Jan. "Wait. . . . You mean quarterback-of-the-football-team Vance Minetti?"

"Uh. . . yeah."

Nicki laughed. "I didn't think you were the type who went for jocks."

"Some aren't so bad."

Nicki laughed again. "True." she said.

They went on in this vein for a while, laughing and giggling like any teenage girls.

After a bit, they paused.

In a few seconds, Nicki inquired, rather nervously, "May I tell you something?"

"Depends on what!"

Nicki smiled, then became serious. She looked down, silent a moment. "Well, I . . ." she hesitated as someone walked by their booth. She sat gazing at her fingernails briefly. She then glanced around, and said, "It . . . it's that I . . . I would rather have . . . a white boyfriend."

Jan gazed at Nicki, rather dumfounded at what Nicki had said. She looked away, then back at Nicki. "Uh . . . I see." She was quiet momentarily. "You mean just because he's . . . you know?"

"Yes. . . I guess so." Nicki replied. "I mean. . ." She opened her hands to make the point. "There are lots of non-white guys who are nice, and who have good builds and are bopping and everything, but I want a white boyfriend." she explained.

Jan's expression went blank, and she sat looking at Nicki for a second. She raised her eyebrows. "Gosh!" she said. She looked down, considering a moment, then back at Nicki. "Well. . . I . . . that's not that unusual, I guess."

"So, you don't mind then?"

"Uh. . . no. . . I suppose not." Jan reassured her.

"Thanks." said Nicki.

"Anyway. . . are you sure?" asked Jan.

"Well, yeah. . . pretty."

Jan looked thoughtful. "But what difference does it make? Aren't people just people?"

"Yeah." Nicki responded. "But. . . It's a . . . a sort of preference."

"An important one?"

"Oh. . . I guess, fairly." Nicki replied.

Jan looked at her. "Well. . ." She hesitated.

"Well what?"

"Just. . ." said Jan, "It's just that. . . we shouldn't take race seriously." she noted, involuntarily sounding like Mr. Abdullah, who taught 'Sameness Through Diversity', one of several federally mandated courses of its type which were required for graduation and which was the class the girls shared.

They each caught the similarity in tone and laughed.

"Anyway. . . they shouldn't." urged Jan.

"I know." said Nicki. She reflected momentarily. "Well, I'm not prejudiced. I mean, not like whites were in the past."

"Oh. . . you're nothing like them." Jan assured her.

Nicki sipped her drink. She looked at Jan, then looked down. "Uh. . . you know, a part of it is that. . ." She glanced around to make sure no one else could hear. "Part of it is that. . . I think white boys are. . . more sexy."

Jan covered her mouth, wide-eyed, laughing a little. She looked at the other customers, then back at Nicki. "Uh. . . well. . . well, I guess that's okay and everything, but they. . ." She paused. "I mean. . . it's, like . . . they don't bop with flow. Not as well, anyway. And they're never leaders of the Cools." She paused again. "Well, except for maybe organizing things."

Nicki tilted her head in acknowledgement. "Yeah." She was thoughtful. "But. . ." She looked around. "Well, I . . . in general, I mean. . . I like their faces. . . and their color."

Jan's jaw dropped. "Oh wow!" she said as she put her hand to her forehead. "Man I hope this booth isn't bugged!"

"Me too!" Nicki concurred.

In a moment, Jan said, "Well. . . maybe I understand what you're saying, but still. . . !"

Nicki nodded a little, pausing. "Another thing is that. . . even though a lot of white boys don't. . . oh. . . know who they are or something. . . it's like, I know who they are." She hesitated. "I know that sounds weird. But. . . well, maybe you could say that us whites don't know who we are, but we know who we are. And there's a certain comfort in that familiarity. If that makes any sense."

Jan reflected some. "It sort of does." she responded.

"Anyway," said Nicki, gesturing with her hand, "I guess those are pretty much the reasons I want a white boyfriend."

"Uh. . . Okaay."

Nicki was quiet a moment. "And. . . there's one more thing I might as well say as long as I'm talking." She glanced about. "This is that . . . well. . . I simply like the white look. And. . . I just want whites to always exist for that reason. It's really as simple as that." She paused. "The white look is a pleasing look, although I know we're not supposed to say so. And there's not anything wrong with it existing!"

"Gaa!" Jan said. She sat looking at Nicki for a second. She looked away and raised her eyebrows, tilting her head to the side, smiling a little wanly, then looked back at Nicki. She chuckled a bit, shaking her head some. "Wow." she said. "Uh, well. . . I. . . I guess I understand, but. . . well, just be careful who you tell!"

"Indeed!" Nicki concurred. "You know, I got really fired up and inspired and almost did say this in one of the discussion groups I was in during Unity Week. The theme was, uh. . . 'Racial Pride and Awareness'. But then I thought better of it and didn't."

"That was wise!"

"Really!" responded Nicki.

The two were quiet.

"And so," said Nicki, ". . . that's what I wanted to tell you. . . that I want a white boyfriend. . . and tell you the other things too." She paused. "Jan, I. . . I hope I haven't upset you. It's just that I had to get this off my chest."

Jan looked at her. "Hey. . . I'm glad you told me." she said. She sat quietly. "Anyway, you've, like. . . said it straight."

"Thanks."

They were silent a moment.

Jan glanced out the window, then back at Nicki, and smiled a little, shyly. She hesitated. "Uh. . ." She hesitated again. "Say, uhh. . . thanks for sharing this with me."

Nicki smiled and nodded.

Jan was quiet briefly. "Anyway," she said, "as far as dating. . . well, lots of whites date!"

"Yeah."

Jan sat gazing at her cup a moment. "You know, if. . . if they find out you prefer it that way, you could get a racist rep, and that would be dire."

"I know!" said Nicki. She glanced around. "I mean, look at me. . . I've got non-white friends and I like them a lot. Most of them are girls, but some guys too. But if it were known that I only wanted. . . a white boyfriend, well. . . what you said."

"What about dating?" Jan asked.

"That's what worries me." Nicki told her.

"But, you've gone out with Juan."

"Yeah." Nicki responded.

"And three white boys." Jan noted. "That's not too much of an imbalance."

"Well, I know, but. . ." she looked at the other customers, then back at Jan. "But most of the times that I've been asked out have been by non-white guys. So, I've turned them down more."

"Oh."

"So far, I don't think anyone's noticed." Nicki said, "But there is a definite trend."

"I see." Jan responded. "Well, you're okay right now. No rumors yet." Then she added, kiddingly, "At least any I've heard."

Nicki smiled and was quiet. "Yeah, but. . . there's something else." she said.

"What?"

"Well, Juan's asked me out a couple of times."

Jan nodded.

Nicki paused. "Also. . . Jarmane Jones has been sort of hitting on me."

"Really?" Jan responded, frowning. "Hmm. . . That could be trouble."

"Really." agreed Nicki. "And then there's another guy I don't know who's been. . . testing the waters, you might say." She gazed out the window. "And all this just since school started."

Jan sighed. "And if one of the guys gets mad at you, and for Jarmane, that wouldn't take much, they could start talking, and you could have a reputation in no time."

"Uh-huh."

Jan looked thoughtful. "Jarmane's still going with his girl-friend isn't he?"

"Yes." answered Nicki. She glanced around, then added. "And don't you know she'd love to smear some white girl who she thought was trying to get her boyfriend. . . or who he was just attracted to?"

"Right!" Jan was quiet a moment. "And, of course, once you got your racist rep, the counselors would get into the act, and off you'd go to. . . to Attitude Remediation. . . for racial therapy."

Nicki chuckled mirthlessly. "Yeah. That's just the cherry I'd need to top off the joys of a racist rep!"

They laughed a little, and were quiet briefly.

"Wow." said Nicki. "Can you imagine what my parents would say if I got bounced into A.R. for. . . racial therapy?"

"Man!" Jan responded.

"I mean, I'd never hear the end of it!" Nicki noted. She paused. "In fact, they'd probably put me in private therapy too!"

"Man!" Jan stated.

Nicki shook her head some. "Also, they'd undoubtedly hope that this could be 'kept quiet' in regard to friends and our neighbors."

"Unlikely."

"Yeah." said Nicki. "You might as well try to muffle the siren on an emergency vehicle!"

The girls became tickled at this. And then, more so, responding to one another's amusement at the comparison and the likely behavior of the people in question. It took a little while for them to regain control. They tried hard to become more sober when their laughter began to draw the attention of the other patrons, even though they had attempted not to draw this attention in the first place.

They sat quietly for a time, sipping their drinks.

Nicki chuckled.

"Now don't start again." said Jan.

"Well, I won't if you won't." teased Nicki.

Jan stifled a chuckle, then noted. "I mean, really it's not funny."

Nicki nodded. "I know!"

The two were silent.

"Boy." said Jan. She looked around. "I guess racial therapy's no picnic."

"Really!" Nicki responded. "Probably the first session or two would be the worst, when they bring in all the non-white kids who know what it is you did wrong. Then they and the counselors all sit around criticizing you and demanding an explanation."

"Yeah." agreed Jan. "But even later when it's just the counselors, or just a counselor, it's probably not much fun."

"Indubitably."

Jan considered momentarily. "Anyway, right now, I would say you're okay as far as your reputation. Besides, you've got several non-white friends and people like you."

"But if people. . . well, non-whites anyway. . . knew what I've told you. . . well."

"To be sure!" Jan concurred.

Nicki paused. "I mean, if a person were just around all whites, and they heard what I've said, sure some would be indignant or get in a sanctimonious huff for a while or whatever. . . but so what!"

Jan was amused by Nicki's audacity and laughed, glancing furtively to the side to see if anyone was looking.

"No, but really." said Nicki earnestly. "Seriously. See, non-whites are different. They're really sensitive about the racial factor. I mean, they can be hurt. . . hurt badly by what we say and how we act toward them. So, we need to be aware of this and be careful."

Jan sat listening.

"So, then, if you have whites and non-whites all mixed up together", Nicki continued, "so that, on the one hand, you have non-whites, so very sensitive on the racial factor, and, on the other hand, whites, and each white really afraid of being thrown into the spotlight of doom, things get serious quick."

Jan nodded.

"And anyway, my wanting a white boyfriend is something that could. . . uh. . . impact on non-white racial sensitivity in a negative way. Or it could be interpreted in a volatile situation as being something pretty bad."

"With you being viewed in a way you'd rather not be viewed." Jan observed.

"Right!" Nicki stated. "So, if what I've said here were revealed by my 'boyfriend activities', it could be seen as exclusiveness on my part, which is one of those things that could hurt non-whites, including my non-white friends. And then make them angry, I might add."

Jan nodded and sat quietly.

"Jan, I know the guys wouldn't understand. Even gay guys like T. J. and Jose."

"Flaming!"

Nicki chuckled. "They're really fun!" she smiled. Then she shook her head a bit, looking worried. "But they're also really passionate about equality and everything, and I know they wouldn't understand." She paused. "And I don't think the girls would either. If I were repped a racist, people wouldn't like me anymore." She paused again. "Ms. Goldstein would hate me." she noted. She sighed and gazed out the window. "But. . . it wouldn't just effect me. It would hurt people. . . maybe badly. Friends. My parents. . .", Nicki's lip quivered and tears welled up in her eyes.

Jan took her hands.

"I. . . I wasn't even sure how you'd react, since you're 'boyant and you bop." Nicki told her. The tears came.

Jan reached out and squeezed Nicki's arms, holding them a moment. "Nicki, look at me. . . Blazes with bopping! This is Jan here. I'm by you!"

They looked at each other, tears coursing down their cheeks.

Then Jan put her right hand up. Nicki grasped it with her own.

"Thanks, Pard." Nicki told her.

Jan was quiet as Nicki regained her composure. After a bit she said, "Listen Nicki, you're okay right now. It's just that. . .", she looked around, making sure no one was interested in their conversation, "it's just that, you need to date some non-white boys." She paused. "I mean, to keep up appearances." This last remark made her cringe, and she put her head in her hands. "Gaa. . . 'Keeping up appearances'! I'm starting to sound like my mother!"

Nicki got tickled at this, and, then, Jan, and it was a moment or two before they could get back to their conversation.

Nicki rubbed her forehead with her finger tips. "Anyway. . . I know, I do. And it's not that I really mind going out with non-white boys, it's just that. . . well, they tend to want to get more serious, it seems to me. . . to want involvement." She hesitated. "They seem kind of possessive, desperate." She looked at Jan. "Do you notice that?"

Jan shrugged a little. "Well. . . maybe. I don't know." she said, pausing. "Hey. . . all guys are desperate!"

"Well, I know." Nicki said. "But. . . it's more than the sexual aspect." She was quiet briefly. "I think that the ego aspect of being liked or accepted by a girl is even stronger. I would say that that's true of all guys, but for. . .", she glanced about, "for non-whites there seems to be a little extra desperation there, an extra. . . need. So anyway, then, here we are, us white girls." She paused. "They do find us attractive don't they?"

Jan looked at Nicki and nodded. "Yes."

Nicki sighed and sat looking across the room for a time. "Of course, some white boys can be the same." she noted. "I mean, like when I went out with Morie Levine. It was. . . it was like. . . I felt like I was being kind of pressured."

"Uh. . ." responded Jan. "You mean. . . ?"

"No, not really that." Nicki answered. She smiled a little ironically. "At least not yet." She considered a moment. "No, it was more like I was being pressured to. . . oh, be his girlfriend, I guess."

Jan nodded. "But, from what you told me, before, going to a fancy party like that, did you have any fun?"

"Oh, it was okay." Nicki replied. "I mean, I don't really dislike him or anything. . . but, it's just that. . . oh, I don't know." She looked thoughtful. "I mean, all the expense he went to was nice, but. . . it was like he was trying too hard."

"Right."

Nicki reflected a moment, then frowned. "He was competitive on every little thing. And when he thought he'd gotten the best of someone, he attituded it. I mean, I think he thought I was impressed, but I was just embarrassed."

"Mmm."

"Also, he wanted to make sure everyone knew we were together." Nicki told her.

Jan laughed.

"Anyway," Nicki said, "he tried to act in-the-know and confident, and is very locked into that. I think he actually feels just the opposite and he's really insecure. I think he saw me. . . and maybe still does. . . as something of a solution to that problem."

"I track." Jan said.

Nicki shook her head a little. "Me. . . The Solution." she noted doubtfully.

Jan laughed. She paused, then shrugged some. "Well. . . he's rich." she offered. She cringed again, knowing that she was once more sounding like her mother.

Nicki nodded. "Yeah." she responded. She looked out the window, sitting there silently a moment. Then she raised her hand a bit and pointed, indicating the tract homes across the way, and the city generally. "So are they."

Jan was silent, then gazed out at the scene. She sighed, nodding slightly. "Yeah." she said.

After a time, Nicki looked down. "Gaa. Trying to avoid involvement with non-white boys." She looked around, then back at Jan. "Trying to avoid a Jewish boy." She hesitated. "I just hate being such a. . . a jerk!" She put her forehead onto her hand. "Also, I could really get into trouble."

Jan wanted to say something, but knew there was nothing to say.

Nicki was quiet, then looked at Jan, pleadingly. As she held the gaze her lip quivered and her eyes again filled with tears. "Jan. . . Jan, I'm scared."

Jan didn't say anything. She just took Nicki's hands.

Nicki sat for a moment, looking out the window, collecting herself. After a time, she said, "Well, at any rate, knowing that I want a. . ." She glanced around. "a white boyfriend, I don't want to get too tangled up with a non-white guy. . . one who might start to expect a serious relationship. . . and then the hard feelings when his expectations didn't pan out. I guess that's what I'm afraid of. And it wouldn't be fair to the boy."

"Well, you just have to be firm." Jan told her. "Just try to keep it casual if that's what you want."

"Truly." Nicki said. She sighed. "And I know I have to have a racial balance, or at least not too much imbalance, anyway, in any dating I do." She was quiet, then smiled and sat up straight, arching her eyebrows, "Have to keep up image, you know!"

"Discretion is the better part of valor." Jan returned.

"Yeah."

They were silent for a time.

In a moment, Jan smiled. "Besides," she said, "if they drag you off to A.R., you'll have Robby there to keep you company." She paused. "Kind of cute!"

Nicki looked at Jan somewhat incredulously, chuckling a little; then shrugged a bit. "Oh, not bad. . . for a sophomore." She had some of her drink. "I mean, they shouldn't tack more than two or three months onto my sentence for cradle-robbing."

"There you go!" Jan said encouragingly. "See, everything's working out just fine!"

"Really!" Nicki responded. "In fact, I can just see the story on the school news site." She raised her hand to indicate the story. "A picture of Robby and me, arm in arm. And banner headlines. . . School's Most Notorious Couple!" She looked off into space. "Yes," she said longingly, "I can just see it now."

Jan laughed. Then she thought of something else and laughed a little harder. "Or. . . how about. . . Dastardly Nazi and Ice Queen. . ."

"Oh please!" Nicki implored.

Jan continued, "Dastardly. . ." She caught herself becoming a little carried away and looked around, then stated more quietly, but still dramatically, "Dastardly Nazi and Ice Queen Plot School Domination in A.R.!" She paused. "Say They: Today, Hill View High - Tomorrow, the World!"

Nicki picked it up. "Says Ms. Blake. . ." she began, referring to one of the school counselors, who sometimes team-taught 'Sameness Through Diversity' with Mr. Abdullah, "We need bars around this room!"

Jan laughed. Then, as she was having a sip of her drink, she suddenly started laughing again, almost out loud.

"What?" Nicki inquired.

Jan held up her hand to indicate Nicki needed to wait.

Nicki looked self-consciously at the others in the restaurant, then back at Jan. "What?" she begged.

Jan struck a pose to emphasize the quote. "Elec. . ." she began. She could not finish.

Nicki was laughing a little. "What?" she pleaded.

Jan took a moment to compose herself. She then tried again, raising her hand for emphasis. "Electro. . ." She had to pause. She took a breath, then blurted out, "Electro-Shock Fails to Thaw Ice Queen!"

The girls laughed out loud this time.

Nicki quickly leaned toward the window and buried her face in her coat, biting it some to muffle her laughter.

Jan had her hands over her face.

In a moment, Nicki glanced about at the other patrons, keeping her coat over her mouth.

Jan was barely trying to cover her amusement.

"Jan. . . Jan, they're looking!" Nicki managed.

"I know! I can't help it!"

Nicki turned back toward the window.

When the pair had for the most part regained control, Nicki turned to face Jan. Then she thought of something else. She cleared her throat and sat up straight, trying to appear serious.

Jan watched while leaning back against the backrest with her hands over her mouth.

Nicki raised her hand to give the quote. "Ice Queen. . ." She could not finish.

The two continued laughing.

Nicki attempted to compose herself. She looked around. "Okay." she said. "Ice Queen. . ." She had to pause.

Jan sat looking at Nicki expectantly, hiding her face with her hand from the others and chuckling. "Yes?"

Nicki sputtered and laughed.

"Please!" implored Jan.

Nicki took a breath, then put up her hand. "Ice Queen. . . Who Is Now Undergoing Therapy for Cradle-Robbing As Well As Racism, Issues Ultimatum to Ms. Blake. . . Stay Away from My Man!"

The girls' mirth was obvious. Nicki again plunged her face into her coat. She stole glimpses at Jan who was covering her face with her forearms.

Nicki looked about furtively at the other customers. Several of them were glancing in their direction, and, tickled further by this, she pressed more firmly against the backrest.

After a few moments, Nicki sat up. She straightened her hair.

Jan had her face in her hands and sat laughing, shaking her head a little.

Then, Jan's laughter picked up once more. She made a sign that she had yet another quote.

Nicki sat, hiding her mouth with her hands, looking at Jan.

Jan straightened. She struck her pose of journalistic seriousness, at least as much as she could, and declared, "Ms. Blake Says. . ." She tried to continue, but then sputtered out laughing and had to pause. Composing herself a moment, she tried again, quickly proclaiming, "Ms. Blake Says. . . Ice Queen Rehabilitated! Recommends Immediate Release from A.R!"

Nicki once more went for her coat, pressing hard against the backrest. She glanced occasionally at Jan who had turned toward the back corner of her side of the booth. They began laughing anew each time they looked at one another.

After a while, the girls began to settle down.

"Gaa!" Nicki said, rubbing her forehead.

Jan shook her head a little.

"Anyway," said Nicki, "about that electro-shock. . . don't give them any ideas!"

"Really!" Jan concurred.

They sat quietly for a few moments, still chuckling from time to time, sipping their drinks.

In a bit, Nicki looked out the window, sitting there pensively. "Well, anyway, I. . ." she paused.

"What?" asked Jan.

"Oh, I'm back on 'expectations'." answered Nicki. "They're the key, aren't they?"

"Elaborate."

"Well, just by talking to someone or accepting a date with him his expectations may zoom beyond all reason." Nicki explained.

Jan smiled. "I suppose I can't say anything. Mine would do the same if, say. . . Casey Thomas asked me out!"

Nicki laughed. "And mine would do the same if Bobby Smith asked me out." She paused, then looked at Jan shyly. "Let me rephrase that. Mine would do the same if Bobby Smith said 'Hi' as we passed in the hall!"

They laughed.

"I believe I know the feeling!" offered Jan.

The girls continued bantering for a moment.

After a time, Nicki grew silent once more, gazing at the table-top. "Anyway, 'expectations'." she said. She looked worried. "These can be a problem."

"Well, you really don't have any control over that." Jan noted.

"Yeah." Nicki responded. She shook her head. "If I disappoint the non-white guys I need to go out with to save myself and get them mad at me for not meeting their expectations, it may bring about the very rep I'm trying to avoid by going out with them!"

"Hmm." uttered Jan, shaking her head a bit. "Anyway, just. . . just always keep things casual, and it'll work out."

Nicki paused. "What I'm planning is to use people."

Jan nodded some. "Well, it is a little. But you probably need to do it."

Nicki frowned. She was thoughtful, then brightened. "Well. . . it doesn't mean that I don't like them as friends. Right?"

"Exactly!" Jan responded. "And if you both have a good time on a date, no harm's done."

"Right!" said Nicki. She was quiet a moment. "And if. . . if I found a. . ." She glanced around. ". . . a white boyfriend, and we were steady, or kind of steady, and people thought we got together by accident, that would pretty much solve my problem."

Jan had some of her drink. "Here's some advice."

"I need all I can get."

"Well, when we took riding a few years ago." Jan reminded.

"Yeah."

"You know. . . you kept the reins firm sometimes and let them out other times." said Jan.

"True." Nicki responded.

"Well, the same with guys." Jan explained. "With some, you keep the reins firm. Keep things casual. And do it from the first." she advised. She paused a moment. "But of course, have fun still." she added.

Nicki nodded.

"And with others," Jan continued, "say in your case, when you go out with. . ." she looked around. . . "a white boy. . ."

"That is - IF I go out with one." said Nicki.

"Hey, think positive!" Jan encouraged. "So. . . if one asks you out . . . and I'm confident one will. . . and if you like him, and if he's cute. . ."

Nicki smiled. "That's a lot of ifs!"

"Well. . . scheming requires a lot of ifs." explained Jan. "Anyway, if all those things, and you go out, don't be as firm on the reins."

"I've got you." said Nicki.

"It's pretty simple really." Jan observed nonchalantly.

Nicki paused, then smiled a little. She looked at the others then back at Jan. "And if Bobby Smith asks me out, and we go out, I'll just take the bridle clear off and throw it away!" she declared facetiously.

"That's the idea!" Jan confirmed.

"I mean, no need having unnecessary encumbrances in crucial situations!" Nicki commented.

"Truly!" Jan agreed.

They chuckled and were quiet a moment.

Then Jan pointed a bit at Nicki and said, "You know, one thing you might do is transfer into European History next semester. In fact, you might even be able to transfer in for the next nine-weeks, but you'd have to hurry. Anyway. . ." she began. She looked around. ". . . there's hardly anyone in there but whites. At least that's the way it was last year when I took it."

"Hmm."

"Now, I'm not sure what guys are in there this year." Jan said.

"Me neither." Nicki said thoughtfully. "I think Reg Johnson might be."

"Maybe." Jan said. She thought a second. "Jay Vasek? Rick McCauley, perhaps?"

Nicki nodded.

"Well. . . it might be worth looking into." said Jan.

"Yeah, might be." Nicki responded. "I think it's sometime in the morning. Anyway, as long as it wasn't the same period as a required class, like Diversity."

Jan considered briefly. "I might be wrong. . . but I think it's the period right after Diversity."

"Huh. . . That'd be just right, since that's my study period." Nicki said. "So, if I did transfer into it, I wouldn't have to drop another class. . . for which some explaining might be expected."

"Well, tomorrow let's find out when it is, and if it is that period, then you could wander by there and check it out." suggested Jan.

"Okay."

Jan had a sip of her drink. She smiled. "Get this. . . if there were some cute boys in there, and. . ." Another customer passed by their booth. "they were you-know-what, and you added the class. . . maybe you could. . . bring one of your mini-skirts and maybe a tight-top, or other sexies, in a duffel bag. And do this a few times. You could change right before class. . . and change back after class."

Nicki looked at Jan skeptically, then laughed. "Are you serious?"

"Sure."

"Uh. . ." Nicki uttered. She sighed and dropped her head backward, chuckling a bit, then looked at Jan. "And. . . don't you think that would look just a little crazy, not to mention obvious?" she asked. "And suspicious?"

"Well yeah, if you did it too often." Jan replied. "But I think you could do it three or four times and get away with it."

Nicki laughed, dropping her face onto her hands and shaking her head.

Jan continued. "I mean, it's too bad we can't have our normals or our frumpies on around some individuals and our sexies on around others. But anyway, the point would be to draw a little extra attention from certain parties, while not drawing it generally."

Nicki shook her head, smiling. Then she sat quietly, considering for a moment. "Uh. . ." She glanced around. "Actually. . . it. . . it might be kind of fun." she admitted.

"Well, it's a suggestion." Jan noted.

Nicki was thoughtful. "If I did get into European History, it'd be more work."

"Yeah. But think of the benefits." Jan pointed out. "Besides it's a great class. Mr. Spracht is a really good teacher and makes it interesting. I enjoyed it."

"Hmm."

"So," said Jan, "if the scheduling was okay and you found out that the. . . uhh, . . . other aspects were there, I could put in a good word for you with Mr. Spracht. That might help. I know him pretty well."

"Okay." said Nicki.

"Matter of fact, I talked to him a little while the other day."

"Oh?"

"Yeah." Jan said. She was quiet briefly. "He's retiring this year."

"Really?" responded Nicki. "Boy, he's been around forever."

"He has indeed." Jan agreed. "He's taught high school for over forty years."

"Gaa!" Nicki exclaimed. "You mean he's taught high school kids for over forty years?"

"Uh-huh."

"Wow! He deserves a medal!" observed Nicki.

"A lot of medals." said Jan.

Nicki nodded. "I know your mom had him for history over at Clark." she said, referring to another high school across town.

"Yeah. They enjoyed visiting last year during parent conferences." Jan told her.

"Neat."

"Also," said Jan, "as far as the plan we discussed, you are pretty lucky to have European History available."

"Oh?" Nicki inquired.

"Yeah. Mr. Spracht said they probably won't offer the course anymore after he's gone." Jan explained.

"Gosh." Nicki said. "That's too bad." She paused. "Well, I'm lucky then. I'll definitely look into things tomorrow."

"Good."

They were quiet momentarily.

"Is Mr. Spracht looking forward to retiring?" asked Nicki.

"Yes. He said he really is." Jan replied.

"That's good." said Nicki. She had some of her drink and looked out the window. She sat reflectively. In a moment, she said, "And we'll be leaving too."

Jan looked out, gazing into the distance. "Yeah." she responded. She was silent briefly. "I try not to think about it."

"That makes two of us." said Nicki.

In a bit, Jan said, "Well. . . there's college anyway."

Nicki nodded. "Yeah, thankfully." she said, somewhat flatly.

They sat quietly, peering out the window.

After a moment, Jan chuckled mirthlessly. "Looks like a slow moving parking lot." she observed, tilting her head toward the scene.

Nicki turned to look. Rush-hour traffic was in full flower in the distance on the interstate. She chuckled dryly, and turned back, sitting there, twirling a strand of hair between her fingers. She sighed. "Well. . . we've got over seven months." she noted. "That's quite a while."

"Yeah." Jan responded absently.

"So we don't have to worry about it yet." Nicki said.

"Right."

They were quiet for a time.

Jan sat transfixed, drumming her fingernails lightly on the window sill, then looked back at Nicki. "Well, as far as your boyfriend problem, I think you'll be okay if you play your cards right."

"Hopefully."

Jan sipped her drink, looking thoughtful. She looked at the other customers, then back at Nicki. "About what you were saying concerning whites before. Basically what you're saying is that you just like whites, or what characterizes whites, and want whites to always exist because you like them?"

"Hmm. . . yeah, basically."

"But is just liking whites. . . just liking the white traits and everything. . . a good reason to be for whites?" Jan ventured. "They'd say this isn't a good enough reason."

Nicki nodded. "I know." she responded. She was quiet momentarily. "But look at it this way. By the way people act and all the expectations and everything, you could say that. . . uh. . .", she glanced around, ". . . that they respond negatively to whites and, so, they're against whites."

"Uh. . . okay." Jan said.

Nicki considered briefly. "So. . . it's like, they're saying that their negative response is a good reason, and enough of a reason, to be against whites. But, my positive response is not a good reason, and isn't enough of a reason, to be for whites."

"Hmm."

"Well," Nicki continued, "I think my being for whites because of my positive response is just as legitimate as their being against whites because of their negative response!"

"Huh. . . well, that makes sense." admitted Jan.

"Also," said Nicki, "they'd say that since I like whites, I hate everyone else. But Jan, I don't hate everyone else." she insisted. "And they don't say that non-whites who like their groups hate everyone else. Just whites."

Jan nodded. "Mmm, right."

"I'll tell you," Nicki continued, "they act like they don't even want whites to exist. It's like they're working for the end of whites. And this 'they' sure includes a lot of whites. . . so tell me how that makes sense!" She had some of her drink. "And anyway, as with my other point, I think my wanting whites to exist is just as legitimate a want as their not wanting whites to exist. And in fact, since we're the ones whose existence is in question, I think my wants in the matter are way more legitimate their wants in the matter!"

Jan chuckled a little and glanced around. "Wow." she said, looking at Nicki a bit open-mouthed. "Well, uh. . ." she said in few seconds, "I . . . I see what you're saying, but. . ." She considered briefly. "But. . . if whites got together, wouldn't whites be a danger to others? I mean, look at the Holocaust."

Nicki tilted her head a bit, concedingly, and paused. "Well. . . that was a long time ago. Also, it was whites who stopped the Holocaust." She was quiet for a moment. "And now, all this time later, it's like. . . because some whites committed the Holocaust, then all of us in the present have to be treated like we're about to commit another one. We have to be dealt with like we're guilty of the crime before the crime is even committed!"

Jan glanced about nervously, then looked back at Nicki, still a bit open-mouthed.

"I mean, someone in the future might do something wrong." Nicki declared, fluttering her hand sarcastically. "So, everyone on earth go jump off a cliff in order to prevent this!"

Jan laughed.

"Besides," Nicki continued, "if whites really wanted to holocaust everyone, they could have done this anytime since the Holocaust!"

"Uh. . . okay." Jan said. She was thoughtful. "So, uh. . . what you're saying is that since we will supposedly do away with others, then we need to be done away with. And also, that we, ourselves, need to help others do away with us, so that we won't do away with them!"

"Well put!" responded Nicki. "And as far as us eliminating others, they fail to explain why this hasn't happened."

Jan nodded. She sat gazing at her cup a moment. "Interesting that the first thing that occurred to me was whites being a danger to others if we got together."

Nicki nodded. "Well, it's what people think. Just about everyone, I guess." she observed.

"Yeah."

Nicki glanced about. "It seems there are so many loony aspects of this. Something sort of like what I mentioned before for example. . . I like our race, but since they don't want me to, then I'm not supposed to. . . so I'd be proclaimed a criminal for something those of other races are praised for. I mean. . . the more you look at all this, the weirder it is!"

Jan sat silently, looking the table top, a questioning expression on her face. "You know. . . I see a lot of what you're talking about. But. . . being for whites seems so. . . so racist."

Nicki tilted her head a little. "Well. . . yeah." she said. "But even when it's just liking whites and not hating others? Why would this be so wrong? Others can like their races." She hesitated. "Sure whites have done some bad things. But we've done a lot of good things too. Yet, there's this whole idea that being for whites is bad. I mean, really. . . why would we be taught this?"

Jan shook her head a bit, trying to shake off the confusion of the circumstances they were addressing. "Huh."

"It's pretty crazy." Nicki said.

"Yeah."

Nicki looked around. She sighed, looking down at the table, then back at Jan. "But, you're right. It. . . it does seem racist to talk about these things. I mean. . . I've been thinking about all this for a while now. Yet, talking about it still seems kind of racist. . .and like I shouldn't be saying these things."

"Really. . ." Jan began. "Definitely seems wrong for us to be talking about this."

"Yeah." said Nicki.

"But. . . you're not a hater, and I'm not." Jan noted.

"No." Nicki concurred.

"And. . .well. . .you have to say that what you're saying makes sense."

"Thanks." returned Nicki. "It seems to to me." She paused a moment, then said, "Here's another thing. . .right at school. Has anyone ever even heard of a non-white being sent to AR for. . .racial therapy?" she asked. "I don't think so. It's understood that it's only for whites. I mean. . .others can say or do about anything they want, at least with regard to whites. . .and they can have their own clubs and activities and push their own agendas, all based on race. This is all considered to be just fine and great. But if any white said even the slightest thing in defense of whites, or maybe suggested a club for whites, or simply something positive about whites, then people would be really indignant! And it'd be off to AR and racial therapy for that person."

Jan nodded, looking down quizzically. "I know." she said. "That's true." She was quiet a moment. "I mean, a person knows all this, but doesn't really think about it and just assumes it's justified and okay or something."

"Yeah." Nicki said. "And then just stepping back and focusing on it puts things in a different light."

"Wow." said Jan. She paused, looking thoughtful and frowning a bit. "I mean. . . in this whole area concerning. . .", she glanced around, ". . . concerning whites and racial matters. . . I wonder. . . is everyone brainwashed?"

"Hmm. Maybe so. Maybe you could say it's brainwashing since people seem to be mentally blocked from seeing things that should be pretty obvious." responded Nicki.

"And we're supposed to be so free!" Jan noted.

"Man."

Jan smiled. "You've sure stepped out of the box on this!"

Nicki chuckled a bit. She looked around, then back at Jan. "Well, it's just that because of my liking for . . .for whites, I'd say that I started seeing through a bunch of smoke-screening and crazy beliefs. . . beliefs that are really important. And it was like no one else did."

"Well . . . you've made some interesting points."

"Thank you." Nicki told her. "It certainly helps to clarify things, having someone to talk to. This is the first time I've really talked about it to anyone."

"Oh." said Jan. She paused momentarily, looking at Nicki, then said, "Uhh. . .I. . . Thanks, Nicki. . . Thank you for sharing with me again. . . Really."

Nicki smiled.

"And kudos for being independent-minded!" Jan added.

"Thanks Jan."

Jan sighed, then stated in mock accusation, "Now you've got me thinking! Don't you know it's better not to think?"

"Yeah, I know. But sometimes you can't help it." responded Nicki.

Jan laughed a little and looked out the window. In a few seconds, she pointed, indicating the scene. "We've known that that was gigaditzy from before." she noted. "Now there's more that could be even crazier?"

"Man!"

"What's one to do?" Jan wondered.

Nicki paused a moment. She fixed her gaze pensively on the city outside. "I don't know." she responded.

Jan was quiet, then said. "I guess we should refrain from airing these views in diversity class."

Nicki laughed. "I mean. . . can you imagine?"

Jan raised her eyebrows and smiled a little wanly.

Just then, two customers approached and sat in the booth behind Jan.

Jan had some of her drink. "Anyway. . . some very. . . uh. . . thought-provoking points. We'll need to talk about this some more."

"Indeed." concurred Nicki. She lowered her voice. "Hopefully without being recorded!"

"Totally!"

The girls sat silently for a while, watching the other customers and gazing out the window. Sitting there, their expressions were blank as they looked about or stared absently into the distance.

Outside, the freeway continued jammed and the rest of the city, stretching farther than one could see, swirled in its endless rushing.

Nicki put her cheek in her hand and sat for a few moments running a finger nail through the condensation on the side of her cup. In a bit, she sat up. She looked at Jan and said, "Jan."

"Uh-huh?"

"Thanks." Nicki told her.

Jan turned to her, then smiled. "What are friends for?" she responded. She paused. "Anyway. . . very interesting!" She paused again. "And on dating and everything, try not to worry. Things'll work out."

Nicki nodded a little.

"And hey." said Jan.

Nicki looked at her.

"Should you ever need this," Jan tapped herself on the shoulder, ". . . it's there for you."

Nicki gazed at Jan soft-eyed, then looked down quickly. After a few seconds, she looked back at Jan. "Hey." she said. She reached up and tapped her own shoulder. "Likewise."

Jan's eyes misted quickly. She took a deep breath. "Thanks, Pard."

The girls sat quietly.

After a time, Nicki said, "So anyway, on the boyfriend front, I'll just try to follow the plan. . . at least until I find. . . if I find a. . .", she glanced around and lowered her voice, "a (she mouthed "white") boyfriend."

"Really." Jan said. She smiled. "After all, you need to. . . to. . ."

"Keep up appearances!" the girls said together.

Nicki looked toward the ceiling, shaking her head.

"To be sure!" stated Jan.

"Bopless!" Nicki declared.

"The most!" Jan concurred.

Nicki sighed. "But, right now," she said, shrugging a bit, "no preferable alternatives."

"This is true." agreed Jan.

Nicki lifted her cup, having a final piece of ice. "Well. . . I suppose."

"Suppose." Jan responded.

They started gathering their things to go.

"Say," Nicki asked, "do you want to go shopping Saturday?"

"Sure."

Postscript -

Nicki avoided a racist reputation. (As did Jan.)