

The Jacket

Thrift shop "Smile", located at the corner of Bellevue and Main, is open seven days a week.

This Tuesday, Betty runs the till and sorts out some of the new incoming stuff. Eighty percent is trash, the rest is priced and finds its place in the store. Marshall Davids opens the door, and a digital version of *Jingle Bells* sounds through the shop. It's mid-June. Betty welcomes him and apologizes for the tune that just played.

'We tried to change it several times, but somehow this thing has a mind of its own! It just changes back to *Jingle Bells*!' Marshall hears her story, but couldn't care less. He is just looking for new shoes. Once well known as a model and part-time actor, Marshall has a hard time coping with his new status. Seven months ago, he had to leave the apartment he lived in for almost 12 years. Actually, they evicted the place while he was on the other side of the country for a small and underpaid acting job; 18 boxes, 5 big blue garbage bags stuffed with clothes, a few pieces of furniture, and a flatscreen TV were put in secured storage.

After paying outstanding rent and all extra costs for the eviction, and storage, he was nearly flat broke. Marshall followed in his father's footsteps in banking, but suddenly made a career change at the age of 52. Rosa Woods, a respected client at the bank and owner of RW AGENTS and PA SERVICES, mentioned his good looks at almost every appointment.

The first few times, they would just laugh about it a bit, but over time, she persuaded him to take a few drama lessons and to do a small photo shoot for a portfolio.

Things skyrocketed from that moment. Less than a week after the shoot first jobs were offered. Even Rosa was overwhelmed by his instant success, big names in modeling and those with Hollywood connections knew about Marshall Davids within the year.

He traveled all over the world attending one shoot after the other for a couple of years. Small-time film acting followed and led to a few bigger productions that made it to the big screen. He loved it all and the attention coming with it, maybe even more. His looks worked for years, but the lack of real acting skills kept him from the really big parts.

Things turned for the worse after a few bad meetings with "Mister Walker". Johnnie stayed too long that one weekend, resulting in missing a flight (again) to an important shoot overseas. The client was pissed and banned him from further shoots with them. As quickly as his star rises, it falls from the sky. Rosa still tried to provide castings and auditions for him, but work became less and less. Johnnie moved in, and both lived mainly from the money Marshall saved over the years.

This morning, Marshall received a call from Rosa after weeks of silence. An audition for a small art project at the opening of a new art gallery. 'It's not much, but at least it's something!' she had said, and after offering him to cover expenses for the trip, he promised to be there on time next Monday.

'Please, leave Johnnie home this time, Marshall,' Rosa said just before they hung up. Marshall promised and thanked her for another chance.

The client had asked to bring a casual black suit and classic shoes to match. The suit was no problem, but he didn't have the shoes, so he decided to visit a few thrift

shops, and this was the first one. *Jingle Bells* rings through the shop a few times more as he wanders around looking for the men's shoe section. "Only Today: Shoes 2\$ a Pair!" reads the sign.

Most shoes look worn out or do not fit the picture, but one pair sticks out, and he tries them on. They are two sizes too big.

'That should not be a problem! Just put some cotton in the tips and they will fit like a glove!' Betty says, scaring the hell out of him. She seemed to appear out of nowhere. 'By the way, today is two-for-one day! Just take any two items for the same price and pay for just one! Ain't that a bargain? Let me show you some of our men's jackets, which are also two dollars!' She leaves him with no choice and almost pushes him in the right direction.

'Well, that's very kind of you but I don't need a jacket, I just need a pair of shoes,' Marshall tries.

'Nonsense! A man can never have enough jackets! Come, I think I have just the right one for you!' She takes off taking the shoes with her. 'Here we are! Let me see... Hmmm, aha, this one! This one is perfect for you! Just try it on! The mirror is over there, I'm back in a flash! There are people at the till.' She pushes the jacket and shoes to his chest and takes off. Although she has a terrible voice and pushy behavior, her taste surprises Marshall a bit. The handmade jacket looks actually very good and is a steal if it were to fit. He puts the shoes on the chair next to the mirror, takes the jacket from the hanger, and puts it on. A strange tingle runs through his spine as the fabric hits his shoulders. It fits like it was tailor-made for him. The strange feeling spreads throughout his whole body, and as he looks up at the mirror in front of him, he sees a softly vibrating and bright glowing reflection of himself