

It
Happened
One
Morning...

A Novel

L.A. Hider Jones



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It Happened One Morning... (excerpt) by L.A. Hider Jones

The figure rose and slowly approached. Petite Liz backed away, the knife trembling in her grip. The tall figure came into the kitchen's faint bluish light. A woman. Liz recognized Boz's terrycloth robe, and her features were eerily like Boz's, only softened, more feminine. The stranger stared at her with a blank expression. But the eyes showed a mix of heat and chill, and they unsettled her.

"Who are you?" Liz demanded. "Why are you here?"

"Put down the knife, Liz. It's me."

"Who's 'me'?"

"Let's just say—" the woman barely breathed "—let's just say I'm not myself right now."

She moved to snap on the kitchen light. Her apparent loss of hope scared Liz even more. Hopeless people do drastic things. Fatal things. She stared at Liz. "That knife doesn't scare me. Men don't scare easily. At least, that's what I always believed. Until this morning."

"Tell me your name," Liz demanded once more. "I need to know your name."

The woman approached and stopped. Liz stood firm. The blade's tip poked into the stranger's stomach. "Boswell Edward Studebaker."

"You lie!" Liz screamed.

"I lie? Test me."

"What's my full name?"

"Elisabeth Maria Ortiz, born Flores."

"You looked that up on the internet."

The woman barely blinked. "Where did you and I go to lunch yesterday?"

"You and I went nowhere. But Boz and I went to—no. You tell me where."

"Mao's Chinese Takeout."

"You found that out somehow! You're some crazed fan who followed us." Or a transsexual who could be a dead ringer for Boz.

"When we were going up the steps, you said Jenny always gets my takeout."

Liz gasped.

"You didn't want to inconvenience Mike," the woman continued. "But he was happy to serve us. My favorite dish is beef lo mein."

Liz sobbed. "This can't be real." *Boz and I were the only ones in the restaurant. How does she know this?*

"You had a burning question: Why don't I ever take you out to dinner instead of lunch? Do you remember what I said?"

Numb, Liz nodded.

"I said that I believed that dinner was reserved for someone who's serious about pursuing a relationship. You and I did that already. We tried for two years. Unfortunately, now the entire country knows about our intimacies on air, thanks to me and my stupid stress ball."

"Oh my God—"

"You know what else is bad?" The woman went to the kitchen and stared at the floor. "I've cleaned out my Silver Label. I can't drink myself to death now. And Stella won't eat." Her body shook, and breaking into uncontrollable bawling, she collapsed on the floor by the cat's overflowing bowl. "I've traumatized my pet!"

Liz put the knife on the counter and went to her. “Where’s Stella?”

“She’s under the bed and won’t come out.”

Liz ran down the hall, snapped on the light, and flipped up the bedcover. Sure enough, two eyes lit back at her. “Come out, baby, it’s Aunt Liz. You remember me, honey, don’t you?” It was no use.

Liz returned to the sobbing woman and knelt by her. Hesitantly, she reached for her, then retreated. “What’s my ex-husband’s name?”

“Loco Hector,” the woman blubbered. “I still don’t understand why you married that loser.”

Liz bit her lip, pushing back a messy mix of laughter and sobbing at the truth of her failed marriage. “His name’s not Loco, but yeah. A loser.” She gingerly took her in her arms. “Oh, honey, even if you are batshit crazy, you shouldn’t suffer like this.”

The woman sobbed harder. “I’ve never cried like this in my life. Stupid estrogen.”

“It’s okay, let it out.” Liz laid her head next to hers.

They ended up sitting together against the cabinet doors while Liz struggled to gather her wits. *This chick’s insane. Nobody changes their sex overnight. Her tales are good, I’ll give her that. But something is familiar about her. She does look a little like Boz. There’s one sure way to tell. I can’t believe I’m entertaining this.*

Liz faced the stranger. “I need a favor from you.”

“Sure,” the woman squeaked.

Liz went to one of the kitchen drawers and pulled out a small LED flashlight. The woman frowned. “What are you gonna do with that? Gaze into my holes? ‘Cause I got a new one now where my balls used to be.”

“No.” She knelt and turned the woman’s face to her. “Look toward the light.”

“What are you doing?”

“There’s something I need to find in your right eye.”

“Ah. I know what it is.” For the first time, the stranger smiled.

It didn’t take long for Liz to find it. When she and Boz were living together, they would gaze into each other’s eyes so deeply that she’d spot a tiny, yellow speck in his blue iris.

There it was.

Amazed, Liz turned the flashlight off and cupped the imposter’s face in her hands, then searched deeply into the woman’s eyes—her energy, her soul. She found *him*. “Shit,” she whispered. “Boz, it is you.” She passed her hands along the she-Boz’s arms. They were soft with hardly any hair, but a bit muscular for an average woman.

Liz covered her mouth. The scary tales her *abuela* told when she was a child had chilled her to the bone and made her paranoid for years. *La Llorona, El Cucuy, chupacabras*. But this?

She searched her face for other clues. “How? Why?”

They both got to their feet, and this Boz-woman paced with renewed energy.

“When did this happen?” Liz asked.

“It started yesterday. I left the station early—”

“I remember. I was chasing Boz—you—down the hall.” She put her hand to her head in confusion. *This isn’t happening.*

“I mean, that last caller really pissed me off. Do you know how embarrassed she made me feel? So I went to the gym, then Archie’s. Dale wasn’t there, but I met this girl.”

Liz sighed in disgust. “You banged her, didn’t you?”

Boz looked at her wistfully.

“For God’s sake, Boz. And you yap about the dangers of online strangers.”

“You don’t understand. She was my dream girl, my Cancun. The girl I’ve been searching for all my life since college.”

“Oh.” Liz hung her head, her spirit sinking. “I didn’t know that.”

“She was hot. We had great sex, right? We wake up, she wants to do it again, I turn to her, and she screams at—” Boz motioned to her new body “—this!”

Liz looked at her askance. “I’ve never heard of a one-night stand turning into a gender bender.” Zeroing in on the red nails, she grabbed Boz’s hands and stared at them. “When did you get a full-on polish?”

“I didn’t! It came with the package.”

“Huh.” Liz tilted her head, examining the perfect manicure. “That’s a gorgeous color. It would look good on me.”

Boz yanked her hands away and turned.

“Okay, okay.” Liz held up her palms in defense. “What did you drink with this dream girl?”

“Hank’s Hooch. Wasn’t in the mood for Silver. I was too upset.”

“Well! There it is. The revenge of Jamie McKenry.”

“Shut up, no it isn’t.” Boz paced like a caged lion, combing her fingers through her hair. Then she stopped abruptly and pointed at Liz. “Wait—what did you say?”

“Jamie McKenry’s revenge?”

Boz shook her head. “No. It’s *her* revenge.”

Liz frowned. “Your dream girl?”

“Who was my last caller?”

“Um...Miss Penelope.”

“What does she do?”

“She’s a healer. Does astrology and tarot cards—”

“She’s a witch.”

They stared at each other. The room deadened with an eerie silence.

“Oh, come on, Boz—”

“Right at the beginning, I said to her, ‘Ooh, are you gonna put a spell on me?’ and what does she say? ‘Not yet.’”

Liz gasped and covered her mouth.

“She asks me if I’ve dated men, and I say, ‘Of course not,’ then she says something like, ‘You know what I wish for? I wish you live the life of a woman.’ “Well, ta-da!” Boz flashed a small pair of boobs at Liz, and she shielded her eyes. Boz covered up. “I used to like women’s tits and everything down south. Not anymore! Damn, you women. It’s all your fault.”

“My fault? Boz, do you hear yourself?”

“Worse, she made me plain. Would it have killed her to make me a ten with some serious hooters?” Boz grabbed Liz’s shoulders. “We have to find her to reverse this curse.”

“How?”

Boz paced again like a madwoman. “She called from Harlem, right? We’ll search every psychic room, office, tent, basement, and bodega until we find her.”

“What if she does her business from home?”

Boz stared hard at her. “Then we go on-air and ask for this Miss Penelope to call into the station. But I’ve got to find her.” Boz’s expression turned dark. “Then I’m going to kill her.”

Liz gripped her arms. “You don’t mean that—”

Boz broke away. “Don’t you get it? I can’t go to work like this. Can’t go to Archie’s anymore. I can’t even look at myself in the mirror. Son of a bitch!”

“Listen to me.” Liz grabbed her. “I came here to brainstorm with you for Kirk. What’s happened is even better than we could possibly conjure up.”

Boz’s jaw dropped. “Do you hear yourself?”

“It’s all here. We’ve got our answer.” Liz motioned to the new body before her. “Kirk wants something stellar on Monday? Let’s give it to him BIG—Dr. Bonnie Studebaker.”