

The Rivals  
Written by  
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FADE IN:

INT.-LIVING ROOM -- EARLY EVENING

SUSIE, a thin, lanky girl with sharp features and limp hair tied loosely on the top of her head, sits hunched over in the corner of this tiny, crowded room. She is seated at an old art table, one of two that are squeezed along the back wall of this converted living room/ studio space that also (barely) contains various mismatched pieces of threadbare furniture and an ancient floor model television.

Susie selects a pen from her art bin, which is perched dubiously upon the arm of the adjacent sofa, and makes a number of careful marks on the page of the comic strip she is drawing. She straightens, looking over what she has just done, and laughs openly at the humor of the strip.

JEFF, a classically attractive, well-built young man who has a look of the star athlete from a Midwestern high school, sneaks awkwardly into the living room, carrying a bottle of champagne. He hits his knee on the coffee table and produces a muted yelp. Susie fails to notice, too involved in her work. Jeff manages to get right up behind Susie's chair before she becomes aware of his presence.

JEFF

Surprise!

SUSIE

(startled)

Aaaaah!!!

JEFF

Oh, baby. I'm sorry. You alright?

Jeff leans in to kiss Susie on the cheek but she rises abruptly from her seat and brushes past him into the center of the room.

SUSIE

Damn it, Jeff. What's wrong with you?

JEFF

(feigning innocence)

Whatever do you mean?

SUSIE

Come on, you know the code: You never bother an artist while they're inking.

JEFF

Oooh, big shot. I'm sorry if I interrupted the great "ah-tiste".  
But...

(sarcastically)

Hmm, don't you have to be paid for your art before you can call yourself that ?

SUSIE  
Hey! Low blow!

JEFF  
(with a smile)  
Aren't you more like a professional  
hobbyist?

SUSIE  
Keep those gloves up, mister!

She playfully smacks him across the shoulders as Jeff cowers in fake terror.

SUSIE (CONT'D)  
You'll see, I'm going to get my  
shot.

She turns to walk back toward her drawing table but Jeff stops her by grabbing her by the arm.

JEFF  
Speaking of shots...We've got cause  
to celebrate.

Susie finally notices the bottle of champagne in Jeff's hands. She looks into Jeff's face, on the verge of an explosion of excitement.

SUSIE  
Fantagraphics?

JEFF  
Yep.

SUSIE  
Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

Susie falls into a brief screaming fit of happiness. Jeff picks her up and swings her around, setting her down on their ratty couch. He produces a folded envelope from the back pocket of his jeans. Susie's eyes fix on Jeff's as she settles herself on the couch, quivering from excitement. He unfurls the letter and begins to read it as if it was a proclamation to the town.

JEFF  
"Dear Mr. Bower. ."

SUSIE  
Oh.

Susie's face darkens. She looks down and begins to play with her ragged cuticles as Jeff talks.

JEFF  
"On behalf of Fantagraphics  
Publishing Inc. I would like to  
invite you in for a meeting so  
that we can discuss your future  
with our company."

Jeff looks up from the letter at Susie with a big grin on his face. Susie offers up a weak smile in return.

JEFF (CONT'D)

And the letter is signed by Mr. Simons himself. He's like Mr. Fantagraphics. Doesn't that fucking rock?

SUSIE

Sure honey, that's great.

JEFF

Oh, jeez. This meeting is scheduled for tomorrow? They sure took they're sweet ass time getting this too me.

Jeff starts to pace back and forth across the length of the room. He is too absorbed in himself to notice the pained look on Susie's face.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Well, whatever. At least I'm finally getting some recognition over there. I deserve it, right? Right?

SUSIE

Oh, oh, yeah. Right.

JEFF

I mean, I'm basically drawing that whole Space Robot Avengers thing by myself, but do I get credit? No. I do all the work and that lush signs his name, all because he's some "legend" of the comic world. Legend my ass. Maybe if he ate a breath mint every once in a while.

Jeff sits down on the couch next to Susie without once looking at her. He taps his foot repeatedly and stares straight ahead.

JEFF (CONT'D)

(essentially to himself)

They've got to be giving me my own book. What else would they want to talk to me about? I mean, they've got to know what a great talent I am. They wouldn't want to lose me.

INT.-BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Susie leans over the chipped porcelain sink as she stares intensely at her face reflected in the bathroom mirror. Her eyes glisten as she rubs her eyes, almost willing tears not to appear in them.

JEFF (O.S.)

What's going on in there? Your champagne is getting flat! You better drink this. I paid fifteen bucks for this stuff, y'know.

SUSIE

Chill out. I'm finishing up in here.

INT. -LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT (LATER)

Jeff is splayed out on the sofa, obviously drunk. He clutches the empty champagne bottle close to his face while Susie looks on. It becomes obvious that Susie has had considerably less to drink than Jeff.

Susie reaches over and pokes Jeff gently in the knee.

SUSIE

Jeff? Jeff, you still awake?

JEFF

(slurred)

Hmm. What? What'd you say?

SUSIE

I asked if you were still awake.

JEFF

Oh. Umm.

(thinks for a second)

Yes. Yes, I am.

SUSIE

Good. I want to talk to you about something.

JEFF

Hmmph, what is it, sweetbottom?

Jeff curls up next to Susie on the couch and nuzzles his head into her shoulder.

SUSIE

(takes a deep breath)

Well, this is hard to admit, but I'm a little jealous of your success. And. . Oh, I feel so stupid asking this. .Do you think you could talk me up over at Fantagraphics or something?

JEFF

Hmm? Oh, yeah sure.

SUSIE

You would? Really? It wouldn't be too much of an imposition?

JEFF

Nah. Besides, they'll probably give me a secretary if I get my own book. It might as well be my cute, cute, cute girl. You're soo cute, sweetheart. Just as cute as your little drawings.

SUSIE

Little drawings?

JEFF

You know, those stupid little cats and shit you draw.

SUSIE

Oh.

JEFF

But, so, yeah, you shouldn't be jealous, y'know, because you're my woman. You're the woman behind the man. My woman behind my man.

Jeff snuggles in closer and drops off to sleep, still holding the empty champagne bottle. Susie sits with her eyes wide open, staring into the distance.

INT. -KITCHEN -- MORNING

Susie, wrapped in an oversized kimono-like robe, stands at the stove, idly pushing eggs around in a heated skillet. Jeff appears in the doorway dressed in a blue blazer and khaki pants. He looks like a frat boy heading off to meet some poor girl's parents.

JEFF

How do I look?

SUSIE

(coldly)

Nice. I guess.

JEFF

Just nice?

Jeff looks into the mirror on the wall and arranges errant pieces of his over-gelled hair.

JEFF (CONT'D)

I thought I looked pretty fucking dapper.

Susie shrugs her shoulders and says nothing.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Well, gotta go lock this deal up. Oh, shoot. Where's my portfolio? They're gonna wanna look at that before the meeting.

Jeff finishes with his hair and moves to adjusting his tie.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Get to know my real talents. Not just that Space Robot shit. Do you know where I stashed it, hon?

SUSIE

Uhh, it might be in the laundry room?

Jeff exits. As soon as he is gone Susie pulls his portfolio out from a cabinet and lays it on the kitchen counter. She then runs into the living room and grabs the comic that she had been working on the previous day. After giving the strip a quick once over, Susie stuffs it in with Jeff's work. Jeff walks in just as Susie finishes zipping up the portfolio.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

Uhh, I found it!

JEFF

Aww, thanks babe.

Jeff kisses Susie on the cheek and smacks her on the butt.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Catch ya later.

Jeff stops for a second and looks over his shoulder at back at Susie.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Hey, Sooze. Maybe while I'm there I'll put in a good word for you. Maybe get you in as my colorist. How's that sound?

SUSIE

Great.

Jeff leaves. Susie stands for a moment at the counter, thinking. She moves back over to the stove, removes the frying pan from the burner, and dumps the uneaten eggs into the trash. She takes the soiled pan and places it in the sink. Suddenly, Susie unties the knot at her waist and throws off her robe, to reveal a very sharp business-like skirt suit. She hurriedly rakes her fingers through her unruly hair as she secures her own portfolio and rushes out the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. -FANTAGRAPHICS OFFICE BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

Susie's car speeds into the parking lot and screeches to a halt in the nearest space. Susie exits the car and makes a swift beeline toward the entrance to the building.

INT. -EXECUTIVE OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

MR. SIMONS, a high-powered executive in a very pricy suit, stands behind his lush mahogany desk looking at Jeff sitting across from him.

MR. SIMONS

Well, Jeff m'boy. Let's see, how long have you been helping us out here?

JEFF

Almost a year, sir.

MR. SIMONS

Almost a year. Yes, that's quite a while. Long enough that I thought I had you figured out.

JEFF

I'm not sure what you mean, sir.

MR. SIMONS

Well, I was looking at your portfolio here and, frankly, I'm a little surprised.

JEFF

Uhh, about what?

MR. SIMONS

Just when did you become in the habit of acting as an agent to unsolicited artists?

JEFF

What?!

CUT TO:

INT. -FANTAGRAPHICS GROUND FLOOR LOBBY -- CONTINUOUS

Susie scurries through the lobby and punches the button for the elevator.

INT. -EXECUTIVE OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

MR. SIMONS

This strip here, by a Miss. . Susie Woodward. You don't know anything about it?

JEFF

Oh, that's just one of my girlfriend's dumb drawings. I don't know how that got in there. Sorry about the misunderstanding. I certainly didn't intend for you to see any of that stuff.

MR. SIMONS

Oh, don't worry. I love it!

JEFF

You what?

MR. SIMONS

Love it! It's hilarious. "Fuzzy Wuzzy Cute Comic Creatures"? What a funny idea. Do you have any idea what her price would be to do a whole book based on these characters?

JEFF

I'm sorry, what?

MR. SIMONS

Don't beat around the bush with me young man. I want to speak to this Susie girl as soon possible. This stuff is hot. Just what people are buying these days!

Mr. Simons walks around his desk to where Jeff is sitting and grabs him by the shoulder and leads him to the door to the waiting room.

INT. -WAITING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Just as Jeff and Mr. Simons emerge from the office, Jeff collects himself enough to speak.

JEFF

Mr. Simons! Mr. Simons, wait!  
What about me?

MR. SIMONS

Huh?

JEFF

What about me? Wasn't there something you wanted to talk to me about?

MR. SIMONS

What? Oh, yes. We're canceling Space Robot Avengers. Just not selling anymore. But, don't worry, we've a nice little severance package for you.

Mr. Simons utters this last word as the elevator doors open and Susie comes bursting out.

JEFF

Susie!

SUSIE

Jeff.

JEFF

Susie, what are you. .

MR. SIMONS  
Susie? Susie Woodward?

SUSIE  
Yes. .

MR. SIMONS  
You're just the girl I want to  
see. Loved your comic. Has great  
potential. Just come into my office  
and we can talk about where this  
project is going.

SUSIE  
Really! Okay!

Susie enters the office and Mr. Simons closes the door,  
leaving Jeff alone in the waiting room, save for the  
secretary.

SUSIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
What about Jeff? Should we just  
leave him out there?

MR. SIMONS (O.S.)  
Oh, I'm sure we can get him in on  
this, maybe as a colorist!

Jeff sinks down into the waiting room couch, dejected.