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**The Short While**  
Art by Jeremy Sorese

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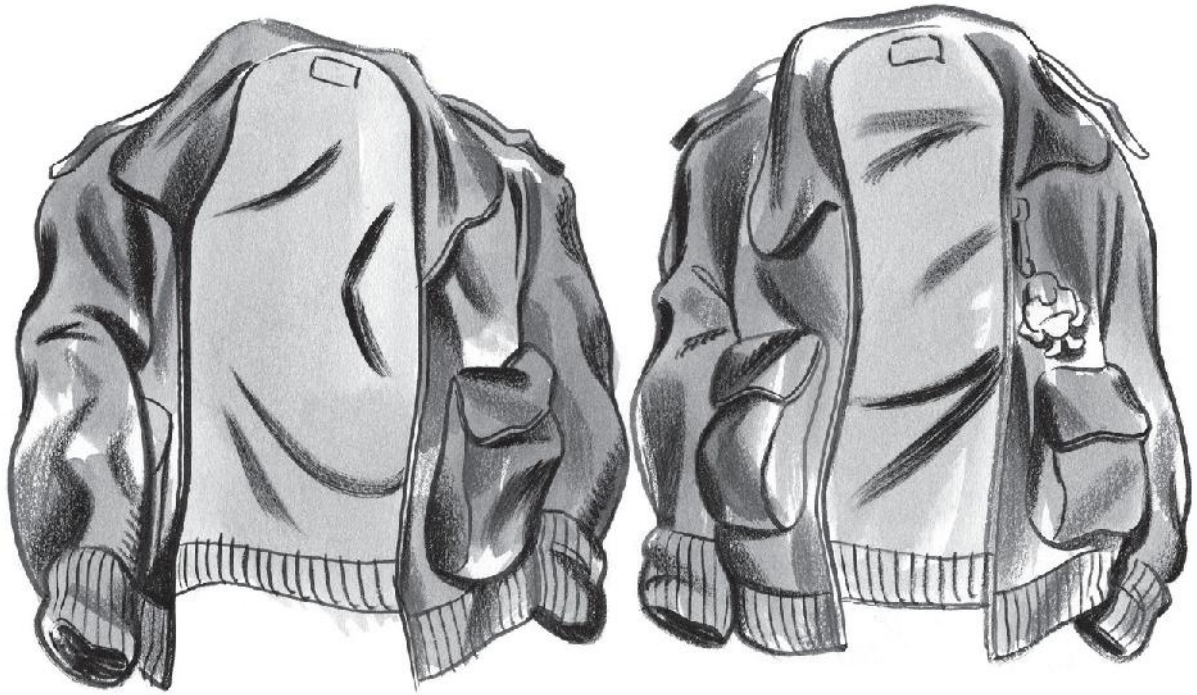




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**C**olin and Paolo met after leaving a party while accidentally wearing each other's nearly identical leather jackets. Their jackets were heaped together on a bed in a darkened room, along with every other partygoer's discarded outer layers. The only noticeable difference between the two jackets was a small plastic toy hooked to the zipper of Paolo's.

The party had been thrown by a friend of Colin's named Avery, who remembered that both men arrived separately but dressed alike. Avery exchanged information on their behalf, suddenly obsessed with making sure the jackets were returned. Only after Colin and Paolo started talking did it occur to Colin that their lost jackets, and subsequent meeting, may have been orchestrated entirely by Avery, who wouldn't be above feigning innocence in an effort to spark some romance in Colin's life. Colin did appreciate their effort though—his jacket had originally belonged to his mom Minnie, purchased when she was his age.

Their first date lasted just long enough to swap jackets and promise a longer one to come.

Colin suggested they see a movie together, and they settled on a documentary titled *A View From All Sides*. Unexpectedly, Paolo started sobbing half way through, and they left before it was over.







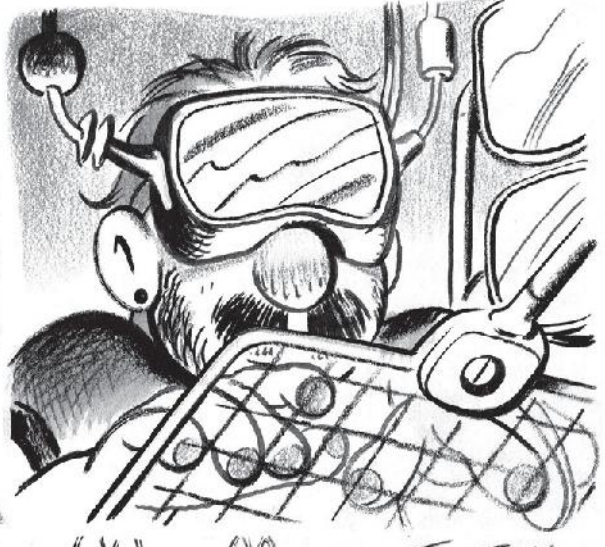
Truth was, Colin did find it attractive. He felt a soft spot for emotional people, especially men. Their uncontrolled feelings gave him a purpose—to be comforting, a little overbearing. Parental, but tender.

Paolo struggled with feeling like a burden. Admittedly, he was rarely difficult, often choosing to accept the decisions of others as if they were his own. Passive, but content.





Paolo wasn't working at the moment. He worked a series of odd jobs—landscaper, plot-line writer for erotic virtual reality experiences, barista at an organic beetle bar—but was taking time off to find a new direction, surviving on the guaranteed income provided by the city. He slept in. He took long walks. He pet cats at the local shelter. He had time to spare, which Colin never seemed to have enough of.

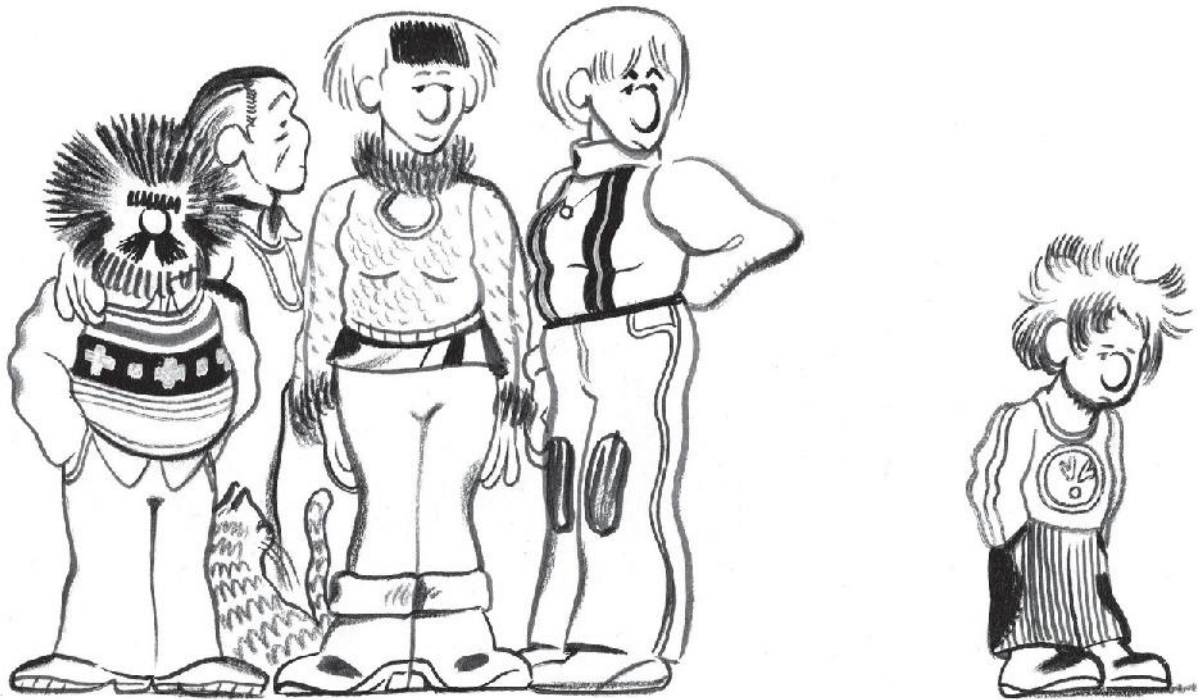


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Paolo was the accidental third child of two immigrants from the crumbling European Union. After working for years to support their first two children—Paolo's twin sisters Karoline and Karolina—Donnino and Pina were reluctantly gifted a baby boy much later in life.



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