

Pump Up The Crowd
A Mercynaries Story from SinComics.com

"It's Jackson Hoyle with the reception! He's only just joined the Shipmen and already Bayview is off to its best season start as far back as this announcer can remember! He's blasting down the field, at the 40 and- Oh! Right past number forty-three! It's all but assured Hoyle will see his second touchdown of the game.

Hoyle gives his signature wave to the cheerleaders and the crowd eats. It. Up! It doesn't look like he's getting any complaints from the sidelines either. It's not often you see the cheering squad getting pumped up themselves.

Hoyle's at the 20, but if he doesn't pay att- Oh! Brandice with the tackle! Hoyle is down! I think we heard that snap all the way up here! Hoyle is... he's still down, folks, but he's moving. The coach is coming out now. Stay tuned, listeners, this could be a season-ender for Hoyle. If not a career-ender..."

The coach blew his whistle and motioned for the team to start the practice drill over again. Off to the sidelines, a metallic springing was barely audible over the grunts and shouting of the team.

"What are you doing out here, Hoyle?"

Jackson forced a grin and nodded to the coach. "You know I don't miss practice, Coach. Got me to where I am today."

The coach looked over his former-star leaning on crutches.

"Idiocy got you where you are today." The coach paused for a beat and adjusted his hat. "How you holding up, boy? How's physical therapy going?"

Hoyle shifted on his crutches. "Doc says they can start putting me through my paces any day now. Just a bit more to heal up and then the hard work starts."

"Good to hear, son."

"Being put up gave me enough time to work on the notes you sent over. I've been watching the tapes and I think we can overcome their weaknesses if we make a few changes to formation."

The coach waved to the assistant and motioned for the next drills before putting his hand on Hoyle's shoulder.

"Glad to have you still helping out the team. Let's talk in my office."

Over the coming weeks, the team rallied around their injured friend, but it was clear they needed him out on the field. What started with a few losses soon spiraled into a losing streak that blew their early season gains. The new fans that Hoyle brought in proved fickle and with the new star relegated to the sidelines, the crowds grew thin.

"Who let this scrawny guy in here? Get lost on the way to the library, man?"

Hoyle waved his crutch. "Ah can it, Wallace. Even on medical leave I can bench more than you."

His teammate laughed and supported Hoyle. "Once you're back on your feet, you're not going to see anything outside of the weight room."

"The bed rest is killing me, man. I haven't been this lean since my high school days. Therapist won't even let me lift weights."

"Once those cheerleader groupies of yours wise up and get fed up with your scrawny self, you send them here. Wallace Brown can treat women right."

Hoyle chuckled. "Not a chance, my friend. If there's anything the ladies love more than a star, it's an injured bad boy to nurse back to health."

Wallace shook his head. "Man, you got it coming and going. Injured and you still get to hang out on the bench coddled by the ladies. I have half a mind to show up in a cast myself."

"That half a mind would explain the fumble in last night's game."

"Low blow, Hoyle! Low blow."

Savannah cooed as she twirled Hoyle's hair.

"How are you doing tonight, sweetie?"

Hoyle settled in on the bench and gave a friendly wink to the watching squad.

"Can't keep me down. Make sure the rest of the crew shows some love to the guys on the field too."

Savannah smirked and gave him a peck on the cheek.

"Ah, they spend so much time in the opposing end zone these days that we don't have much to cheer about. That keeps up free to wook after our injured widdle star."

Hoyle raised his hands against the mocking concern.

"Cheer your hearts out to get a win for these guys and you can treat me any way you want."

Savannah winked as she strutted out to the sidelines. "We'll hold you to that. You spend so much more time down here with us that you should join the squad."

The team, and lingering crowd, were joyous at the 3-point win the Bayview Shipmen eked out. Earlier in the season, that paltry victory would have felt like a loss, but they were now taking anything they could get. The players raised their fists triumphantly to the crowd, slapped each other on the back, and carried the coach on their shoulders as they made their way to the locker rooms. Wallace stopped by the bench and gave Hoyle a hearty handshake, followed by a hug.

"You did it, Brown! Way to go, man."

Wallace hugged his friend again.

"The definition of a team effort, my man. That pass you cooked up burned right through their

defense. It wasn't pretty, but even the ugliest win looks like the belle of the ball these days. They let you drink on those meds you're on?"

"Ha! Even if they didn't, I am down for some-"

"A-hem! Mr. Hoyle has a previous engagement." Savannah grinned.

Wallace whistled then started back to catch up with the other players. "Even on the sidelines, the man gets action..."

Savannah tossed her arms around Jackson and kissed him on the nose. "Now about what you said..."

"Aww, c'mon. We were just joking around."

"Jackson Hoyle! I would never have taken you to be one to skimp on a bet. The ladies and I do our fair share for this team. We deserve a celebration too!"

Jackson started to speak but a pom-pom clogging his mouth stopped him.

"Show up an hour early for the next game."

As the coach reviewed the final plays, there was a knock at the locker room door. Friendly whoops and whistles sounded as Savannah sashayed into the room.

"You boys decent in here?"

The coach quieted down the boisterous crowd and shook his head back to Savannah.

"For today's game, I want to introduce the newest member of the Bayview cheering squad, Ms. Jessie Holly."

She dramatically gestured as Hoyle hopped into the room on his remaining crutch. A long blonde wig bounced as he maneuvered in and he brushed the loose strands away from his face. His comically red lips were pursed with a begrudging smirk. Dressed in an ill-fitting Shipmen cheering squad uniform, Hoyle pushed the skirt down, smoothed out the blouse, and adjusted the white tights as he leaned against the crutch.

Jackson sighed, put on a fake smile for the crowd, and raised a pom-pom to the air.

"Gooo, team!"



The locker room broke out into cheers and whistles as the coach shook his head again.

"You got it going on, Hoyle!"

"Best you've ever looked!"

"You found your calling!"

"Quiet down, you mugs," the coach bellowed. "You're an embarrassment to the sport. Get out of my sight and win me a damn game."

The team gave a final hoorah and made their way to the exit. Every one of them had encouraging words or blown kisses for Jackson.

With the room otherwise empty, Hoyle turned back to Savannah. "You had your fun. Let me grab my stuff and change back before the game, then we can-"

"Oh, no, missy! The full game! You're on the bench with the team for this one, we need our good luck charm."

Jackson moved to gripe some more, but Savannah placed her finger to his lips and shushed him.

"If you weren't still on that crutch, you'd be in heels too."

Jackson was thankful that the game went well and the crowd kept its attention on the players and not on the sidelines and him. He even found it within himself to wave his pom-poms as the team caught an interception and scored the first touchdown of the game. By the time they scored their third field goal, he had the words to the cheers down.

Hoyle made his way to the records room to review the tapes for the next game. As he pulled out his notepad and reached for the remote, the coach's frame filled the door.

"Need a minute of your time, son."

Hoyle turned off the TV.

"Anything, Coach."

"You know I'm a practical man, Hoyle. Skills win games, but... Even the most hardened man on that field won't buck superstition. When you have a streak going, you keep at it."

"Sir?"

"The team looked good out there last night. And maybe, maybe we can keep that up and win some more games. Turn things around mid-season."

"I don't think I follow-" Hoyle turned and saw Savannah leaning against the door frame. "C'mon, Coach, you can't possibly-"

Savannah entered and took her place beside the coach. "The team was loose out there. They were in good spirits, less focused on the recent defeats. We think they just needed a good luck charm."

Hoyle chuckled. "Okay, okay. Funny. Now let me get back to these-."

The coach shook his head. "We need the wins, son. You do some fine work for the plays and helping the team strategize, but maybe you could be of more help just... just making the team feel good. Raise their spirits..."

The next game, Hoyle returned to see his office had a new sign taped up over the window. "Jessie Holly, Mascot". He sighed and saw the bag on his desk and the spread waiting for him. Once more, he changed into the cheering uniform and put on the wig. After a knock on the door, Bridget came in carrying a small satchel.

"We thought we could go a bit more understated than last time." She pulled out several tubes of lipstick and held them up against Hoyle's skin to compare the colors. She nodded sagely and pat Hoyle on the head.

"Pucker up, hun!"

After their third win, Hoyle was barely a presence on the team but Holly was like family. The players were winning and Savannah was able to negotiate some bonuses for her squad. With their payday resting on it, Holly was a hit with the whole team and Jackson was watched over by the cheerleaders.

Returning from the showers, Jackson ran into Wallace.

"Wallace, man, do I ever need to talk."

"What's going on, Jessie. I-er- Damn..."

Jackson glared at his friend.

"Sorry, man, sorry. It's just... you know, we've kind of gotten used to your new look. And you kind of smell like flowers. It slipped out."

Hoyle grunted. "It's a depilatory. Stuff burns like a mother."

"Yeah but at least your legs look good in that-" He stopped and surveyed Hoyle's face. "Not in the mood. I get that."

"You owe me a drink, dammit."

With the renewed interest of their fans and a cheering squad working their hardest, Bayview continued its push through the season. After the team's success, they started to grow complacent and their performance dropped. Narrow wins led to losses and the downward spiral started anew.

"Thanks for coming in, Savannah."

"Of course, Coach. We're all here for the team."

"Hrm. The team has started to slide again. We made a deal earlier and if this keeps up, the bonuses will have to stop. I can't afford to keep your squad in top shape if the crowds aren't coming out and-"

"Leave that to me. I have a plan to get our lucky charm in tip top shape."

Hoyle returned to the office and tossed his wig onto the desk. Playing along during a game was one thing, but as soon as it was over, he was glad to be out of the uniform and to get to real work. The knock on the door startled him and the intruder came right in. He wasn't surprised to see Savannah, but she came with a guest.

"Hey, hun! The team has taken on a new doctor. Allow me to introduce, Dr. Lavender!"

The doctor was a tall woman, her brunette hair pulled back in a tight ponytail, and smartly dressed in a blouse and knee-length skirt. She looked Hoyle over but didn't raise an eyebrow to his current outfit.

"Mr. Hoyle. I have been hired and brought to you because your medical leave is taking longer than anticipated. My services are required to speed up your therapy regime and get you back to being an asset to the team."

Jackson beamed. "That's great, Doctor! I've been putting in some, uh, odd hours so I don't get to the gym or therapy as much as I want."

The woman nodded. "That ends today. I will take over your therapy, medication, and nutritional plan until you are deemed well enough to rejoin the team and perform."

Over the coming days, Hoyle was removed from all training and assistance duties as he worked exclusively with the new doctor. She prepared all his meals and kept him to a strict diet. His normal anti-inflammatory medication was replaced by a new prescription and he was required to take several of the purple pills throughout the day. Dr. Lavender was strict and didn't tolerate excuses.

Hoyle strained at the machine as he pushed the weights up with his legs.

"I don't know, Doc. My legs are improving but the rest of me doesn't feel any stronger. My clothes are hanging off of me now and I don't think-"

The doctor never looked up from her tablet as she continued her work.

"Perfectly natural for the healing process. As your body heals your legs, it needs to take energy from elsewhere. After you are well, we will change tactics and you will start to put mass back on."

He grunted as he struggled with the weights.

"But what if it's a reaction to all this medicine? I don't even know what this-"

"If that were the case, then you would not be healing so. Your legs are improving nicely. Even your skin and hair are in fine condition. Clearly, you are well. Now, that's enough repetitions. Stop."

Hoyle lowered the weights and sat back on the machine. He brushed the bangs away from his eyes and wiped away the sweat.

"You are relying too much on your crutch. You will not heal properly until you abandon it and start pushing yourself properly. I have a device to help you. Come."

She led Hoyle to her office and opened a box propped up against the wall.

"These boots will help you gain control much quicker than the crutch. They are designed to promote blood flow and keep the muscles aligned properly."

She presented him two tall, thick white boots. They looked barely more mobile than his old casts. The doctor motioned for him to sit and raise his leg. She jerked the first boot on and pulled it up to his thigh. Even relaxed, his leg stayed outstretched.

"Doc! Auck! I can barely bend my leg, it's-"

"Perfectly natural and the point."

She tugged it one final time, forcing his foot down into the bottom, where rubber blocking trapped it in and pointed practically straight down.

"This will improve your posture and facilitate the healing process. You will wear these until I give the order that your muscles have properly healed. Next foot."

Hoyle complied and the second boot was forced on. He had to use the chair to help push himself up to his feet and he tottered and wobbled once he was there. The boots' rigidity required him to use short steps and keep his hips and back angled properly.



The doctor kept Hoyle in the contraptions for days, but he eventually grew accustomed to them and walking felt natural. The loss of movement made his exercising more difficult but the doctor simplified his routine and upped the dosage on his medication. Daily vitamin injections were started as well to make up for lost time.

Hoyle rubbed his arm as the doctor pulled the needle away.

"I do feel better, doctor. But I'm worried we've gone too far away from the plan. I've started to put on some weight again, but not muscle. The boots are tight around the thigh and my hips are-"

"This constant questioning of the process has grown tiresome. Have I not vastly sped up the healing of your legs? Is your blood work not showing perfectly health results? Your coach was quite pleased to hear about your improvements."

"I know, I know. And I'm happy too, but it all seems too-".

The doctor snapped her case closed and slammed it down on the table with a bang.

"If you want the fast way instead of the proper way, so be it!"

She went to the metal cabinet in the corner of her office and unlocked it. From the refrigerated compartment, she pulled a vial and shook it vigorously. Another needle was prepared and she filled it with the thick, red syrup.

Hoyle's arm was swabbed again and the needle slid in. As she depressed the plunger, Hoyle could feel the thick liquid push its way inside him. His arm burned momentarily but that faded quickly as he felt a tingle spread through his body. His eyes grew heavy and he stammered as he tried to speak. It wasn't long until Hoyle passed out against the bed and fell into a deep sleep.

Hoyle was unsure of where he was or how long he had been out as he started to come around. The blurry shapes and colors eventually morphed into the doctor's office as his senses came back to him. He wiped spots of drool from the corner of his mouth and then brushed away the hair from his eyes.

He swung his legs over the side of the bed and hit the floor wobbling and uneasy, only barely propping himself up by leaning against the wall. His throat ached and his body still tingled, uneasy and awkward as he tried to compose himself.

Doctor Lavender strode into view and examined him. She quietly pulled out a stethoscope and pressed it to his chest. As she nodded in approval and murmured something about success and normality, Hoyle tried to push it away. His hand brushed against soft, heavy flesh next to her device. The slow signals reached Hoyle's groggy mind and he reeled back against the wall.

"Wh-what is... What have you done to me..."

The doctor brushed her blouse off and composed herself.

"My job, Ms. Holly."

Hoyle continued to shake his head in disbelief as he gawked into the mirror. Reflected back was a person he barely recognized. A beautiful woman with what looked like his face. She had long, shiny blonde hair, an athletic frame accentuated by wide hips and a moderate bust that tugged at her hospital gown.

"You can't do this!"

Doctor Lavender made her notes and checked off her forms as she surveyed her client.

"Your continued trite complaints have no bearing on my work, Ms. Holly. I was paid to get you to work on the team and now you are ready to begin."

"The team!? You couldn't possibly expect me to play in this condition!"

"Wrong part of the team. Your fellow squad members rightfully see you as far more of an asset on the sidelines than on the field."

"I'll go to... to the police! To doctors! I'll let everybody know-"

"Check your contract. Any halfway decent lawyer would be able to spin your rights clauses to include my work. You are required to follow the orders of the team doctor after medical leave and take all measures necessary to ensure you are an asset to the team. Missing practice and defying orders will result in fines at best and being counter-sued if we see fit.

If you ever have any notion of leaving the team after your contract is through here, you are required to follow my orders. At the very least, we could make you quite undesirable for another team even if you were returned to your previous state. And that's if we choose to not divulge your current

state and actions. Play by the rules and Jessie Holly and Jackson Hoyle will remain separate people in the public eye."

Hoyle slumped against the wall. He knew he had no leverage, even if she was full of crap about who he was required to follow.

The door burst open and Savannah bound into the room.

"Is she ready? Is she ready?!"

She let out an excited gasp and rushed to Hoyle's side.

"Holly! You look a-may-zing!"

He tried to shove her away, but Savannah grabbed his arm and spun him.

"Looking great. The doctor does wonderful work. You've never looked better, girl!"

She bound back to the door and collected a duffel bag in the team colors.

"Let's get to work!"

Savannah laid out a new uniform on the bed and motioned to Hoyle.

"As the newest member of the squad, you will report to me from now on. You follow the guidebook same as the other girls. You wear the uniform, you check in with me, and you work. Hard. Suit up."

Hoyle picked up the feminine undergarments before him and felt defeated. He changed quickly, too ashamed and angry to look at his body that he quickly threw on the top and skirt. Savannah motioned to the doctor.

"Are the boots ready to come off?"

With a nod, the two sat Hoyle down and yanked them free. Hoyle looked over at his legs, now beautifully curved and shapely, with his feet delicately pointing out. He stood and winced as he flattened them on the ground.

Doctor Lavender smiled. "You healed perfectly. The way your muscles have been rearranged, standing flat like that will quickly cause you undue strain. A heel of at least three inches or so is recommended to keep your feet in the proper position."

As the days passed, Hoyle was indoctrinated into his new role. He was kept to the cheering squad's quarters and spent his days flanked and judged by his new squadmates. They kept their new sister on track, adhering to the squad guidelines, and coddled her like a doll. Their former affection and doting was now sinister to Hoyle and their coos and giggles were like fingernails on a chalkboard.

During the process, Hoyle was regularly visited by the doctor and subjected to daily injections and continued medication. His hair grew at an unnatural speed and he was filling out his uniform more with each passing day.

After he was able to primp and preen to the squad guidelines, Savannah and her crew ran Hoyle through his paces. From sun up to sun down, he was either on the field practicing routines, in the squad gym stretching and working on gymnastics, or had his thoughts drowned out by looping tapes of the team cheers and rallies.



Hoyle landed and pivoted on the heeled boots before stumbling back and plopping to the ground. He rubbed his bare bottom and groaned as he wobbled back to his feet.

"Jessie! Get it together! It's a simple maneuver." Savannah angrily pointed to the other members that successfully landed with the proper pose.

"This is your fault! Don't take this out on me. If you'd stop sending me off for those injections, I wouldn't be ballooned out like this!" Hoyle cupped his chest, which now strained against the uniform. "I can't be bounding around out here like... like... ugh, this."

Savannah brushed off her new charge and smiled coldly.

"If you could land your routines, we wouldn't need to send you to the doctor for booster shots. You're not the best gymnast, love, so we need you to at least look good doing what little you can."

She clapped her hands and motioned in a circle.

"From the top, ladies!"

There was a silent acceptance of the new cheerleader among the team. It was as if Jackson Hoyle was erased from history. Even Wallace turned his back on Hoyle and Holly became all there ever

was. As soon as the team started winning again, the questions stopped and the cheerleaders were the stars of the show. Thanks to Holly, the team was invigorated, the wins started up again, and the crowds came out in force, but not always to watch the game. With Savannah ensuring the squad was properly compensated, they were happy to play along with their new member and put her out in the limelight. With each Holly shirt, calendar, and doll sold, the squad rallied harder and the team did better.

Jessie Holly was the face, and bust, of the Bayview Shipmen. Minor jealousies sprang up, so Savannah allowed the team to make appearances in Holly's commercials and advertising. Of course, she kept quiet on the fact that the squad's bonuses led them to being better compensated than the players, just to keep the peace.

Doctor Lavender knock on the office door and let herself in.
"Coach."

He nodded and tipped his cap as he looked up from the playbook.

"Ms. Holly's contract has been renewed. I will inform her that she signed on for another cycle when she returns from tonight's modeling shoot."

"Did we at least get enough for the team? I need to recruit new players. If we can't get out there to play-"

"The owners know what brings the crowds out, sir. But yes, funds have been released to bring on some new players. However, the investors have given their approval for some more interesting projects. The debates are still going on, but where do you fall on the topic? Should my services be used to expand to other teams in different markets or should we stay local and start working with the other Bayview franchises? I hear your baseball team isn't living up to its promise."

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