

CONTEMPORARY TV FICTION

MAGAZINE

"A DIFFERENT KIND OF MODEL!"

A YOUNG MAN HELPS HIS SISTER BY
BECOMING A MODEL AT A BRIDAL FAIR.



VOLUME #49

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A DIFFERENT KIND OF MODEL

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“A Different Kind of Model”

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A Different Kind Of Model

By Catherine J. Sambark

For the longest time I blamed Lori for what happened. It seemed easy to lay the guilt on her doorstep. It was her problem after all. I just was trying to help. But after it was over, I realized that I was the one to blame, if you can call it that. I could have called it all off at any time I wanted. I just didn't want to.

It started my senior year of high school, around Easter. Ken Woolsey, class of '99; that is I. I was gearing up for graduation, applying to colleges, and doing the usual senior pranks.

I remember the day the whole thing started. I was still living with my mother (my father was never part of my life nor is he part of this story). I came home from school to find my sister, Lori, waiting for me.

"Hey, sis," I said as I pecked her on the cheek, "What brings you by?"

"What? Can't a girl visit her family?" she smiled. At 22 she was a few years older than I was. We were close despite the age difference. She had moved out a few years ago and it was always nice to see her.

"You don't come by too often, so I was wondering what the occasion was," I said as I began to fix myself a snack.

"Well, I've got exciting news..."

"I'm all ears," I replied with my mouth full.

"The tri-state bridal show is coming to town in a few weeks!"

"Gosh, that's wonderful," I said, not bothering to mask my lack of enthusiasm.

"No, you don't understand. It's a huge trade show and I get to display three of my gowns there!"

That was actually big news. For years my sister had been trying to break into the fashion industry. I supposed working in the fashion industry was a lot like being a musician or a writer with thousands of rejections before you got the big break. My sister had never had a success like this before. If it worked out for her there, it might be the jump-start her career needed.

“Congratulations,” I said, more excited this time. “Don’t forget us when you’re a millionaire industry leader.”

Lori laughed, nervously, “God, if only... Breaks like this come along maybe once every five years. If the customers are interested in my gowns, then maybe one of the big companies will take me on as a designer. God, I hope I picked the right gowns.”

“Why do you have to use just three? You’ve designed about a dozen, and I’m sure there’d be room for a couple more.”

“It doesn’t work like that. The gowns will be modeled by women and I’m only allotted three trips down the runway, there isn’t time for more.”

“So who’s modeling your gowns? Elle MacPherson? Cindy Crawford?”

“Ha, ha. No, actually I can’t afford to pay anyone to model.”

“So you got a friend to do it?” I asked, hoping that maybe she’d introduce us.

“Actually, I’ll be modeling my own work. It’s unusual, but I couldn’t find anyone willing to sit through all the fittings and measurements for no pay.”

“Well, I can’t imagine a prettier bride,” I told her. This wasn’t a mindless, brotherly comment, either. Lori is a lovely, statuesque woman. She is just under six feet tall, muscular (though not grossly so), with short black hair, long legs, and a pretty face. We bore a striking resemblance to each other. I think we could have passed for twins if we had been closer in age.

“You’ll come, of course?” asked Lori. The thrill of going to a bridal show was lost on me, but I knew it would mean a lot to my sister, so I assented.

Mom came home and soon the girls were deep in conversation about the upcoming convention. Their fashion talk soon lost me and I retreated to my room.

Two weeks later, I had one of the worst experiences of my life. I was sitting in my science class when the principal hurried in. He searched the rows until he located me and motioned for me to join him in the hall. This is a scary enough experience for a high school student, but he didn’t look angry. He looked upset and worried, which was even more disturbing.

“Your sister has been in a car accident,” he told me flatly.

“How is she?” I blurted, dreading the answer.

“I don’t know. Your mother just called from the hospital. I’ll drive you.”

“She’ll be OK. She’ll be OK. It’s probably just a couple of stitches. Hell, they make everyone in a car accident go to the hospital. She’s probably just being held for observation. Her car probably is beat up and they wanted mom to drive her home,” I kept telling myself on the hellish ride to the hospital.

Of course, it was hard to convince myself. If there were no problem, then Mom would have said so on the phone. If Lori weren’t hurt then they probably wouldn’t have called me at school.

I nearly football tackled the duty nurse in an effort to find out where my sister was. “Room 701,” she replied, calmly, “And don’t worry, she’ll be fine.”

I began to breathe easier. That was a hell of a scare. You’re lucky if it’s never happened to you. I burst into the room to find Mom kneeling next to Lori’s bed. I rushed over.

Lori was fine in the sense that she would suffer no permanent damage from the accident, but she was hurt. Both of her legs were plastered to the thighs and elevated on slings. Her face was

badly bruised, and one of her eyes was swollen shut. Later I found out she had been speeding a bit, hit a wet spot, and lost control of her car.

I tried to put on a brave face. "Well, young lady, you gave us quite..." I then broke down sobbing for the first time since I was about seven. I couldn't help it. My crying set off Mom and Lori and we hugged each other.

Finally, we regained control. "Why did this have to happen? Why the hell did this have to happen?" moaned Lori, inconsolable.

"Shhh, honey," said Mom, "It's OK. There'll be no scarring and you'll be out of here in about a week. The casts come off in a month..."

"No, you don't get it. The Bridal Show! It's in less than a month!"

"Well, you can still go," I stupidly pointed out.

Lori sobbed again, "I can go, but I can't model."

"Why not?" I insisted, demonstrating my utter ignorance about such things. "You'll still be able to walk on crutches or use a wheelchair."

I could tell Lori was getting angry, but it passed. "I guess you wouldn't understand. Look, the women at the convention will be planning the happiest day of their lives. They'll have nothing on their minds but how perfect they want their wedding day to be, and how they would look in the gowns. I won't be able to do anything but limp along and my face will still be a giant bruise. If a bride-to-be looked at me, she'd think of how hideous I looked, and that is not a mental image I want them to have."

"There has got to be a way!" I exclaimed. I hated to see my sister so upset on the heels of a leg-crushing, Buick-totalling accident. "Hey, how expensive could a model be? Really? We can pool our funds and afford it. We'll just call an agency and tell them what we need. I'm sure we can find a college girl who'd work for a couple hundred..."

Lori shook her head. "Thank you, Ken. I know you want to help, but in the fashion industry, you design the gown with the model in mind. Skin color, hair color, body shape, height, weight, you get the picture. Remember all the measurements you had to get for your tux at the dance last year? Well this is about a thousand times worse and there's no time for me to do alterations. I'm sunk unless you can find a six-foot tall girl with pale skin, a muscular build, black hair, and long legs."

I'd never seen her that sad. A nurse came in and told us we should let Lori get some rest. Mom and I retreated to the cafeteria. "Ken, I want you to think," said Mom when we sat down, "This is for your sister. Can you think of anyone who looks like your sister? Think of a friend, a classmate, a teacher, anyone? It would kill your sister if she had to cancel now. She's been building up to this moment for a long time."

I wracked my brains, but no one came to mind. Few women are close to being tall enough. The few tall girls I knew were heavysset, very skinny, or otherwise had the wrong body type. Even with what little I knew about modeling, I was aware that altering the dresses was much more involved than lengthening a pair of pants. There wouldn't be time to do the necessary work required to make the dresses suit them.

"I'm drawing a blank. Do you know anyone?"

Mom shook her head. "Well, I guess we can call some modeling agencies tomorrow, though I don't have much hope. God, don't we know anyone about six-foot tall, pale skin, dark hair..." Mom stopped short. It seemed she was staring at me, but I guessed she was just thinking.

"What? Did you think of someone?" I asked hopefully.

"Maybe... I want to ask your sister something." She left quickly and wouldn't say anything else about the subject that afternoon.



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That night, after we bid Lori goodbye, we sat at home picking at the frozen pizza we were having for dinner. We were relieved that Lori had survived the accident OK, but depressed because Lori was about to miss her big opportunity.

Finally, Mom asked me if she could ask a serious question. "Ken, I've been thinking about this all day. I want to ask you something and I hope it won't make you angry."

"You can ask me anything, Mom," I replied, a tad nervous. Why would I be angry?

"You know what a big day the convention was supposed to be for Lori, right?"

"Of course."

"Well, I think, with your help, she can still display her gowns."

"You know I'd do anything to help, Mom."

"You may not want to do this, Ken. Forgive me for what I'm about to ask you to do, but at the same time, think about it."

"Mom, why are you getting so weird? Out with it!"

"Ken, I think you should model your sister's gowns for her."

I was about to get angry for joking about something so serious, but then I realized that she was not trying to be funny. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Just listen. Five minutes." That was kind of an unwritten rule in our family. Whenever any of us got into an argument, we'd ask for five minutes to state our side without interruption. Not always easy, but it saved a lot of yelling and hollering back and forth. I fell silent, preparing my myriad of reasons why I wouldn't participate in this insane plan.

"Ken, it struck me at the hospital today that you fit the body type! You're tall and you're kind of muscular, especially if you were a female. You have dark hair and look a lot like your sister.

If you let me fix you up with makeup, a new hairstyle, and padding, you could pass for a girl. You go to the convention, walk down a runway three times and then leave. It could save your sister's career and no one would have to know."

"Yeah, except for the thousands of people at the convention."

"Do a lot of your friends go to Bridal Shows?"

"Well, no...of course not."

"No one you know will be there, Ken, so one will know you are a guy. Only us and we'd be there to help you out. We'd never mention it again afterwards."

"I refuse. I'm not a girl, Mom."

"Ken, sleep on it, OK? I know what it sounds like now, but at least think about it. Could you do that for me?"

"I suppose..."

That night I lay awake, thinking about my mother's ridiculous plan. Model my sister's gowns indeed! What the hell was she thinking? I loved my sister, but did she honestly think that her teenage son would put on a gown and model it in front of hundreds of people? I mean, I wouldn't just have to dress like a woman, I'd have to dress like a friggin' bride! There was no article of clothing more feminine than bridal gowns, except maybe a string bikini. Well forget it! I had my pride and that was just a little too humiliating. Lori would have to make do somehow.

I thought of Lori. It was odd, really. Almost no one ever winds up choosing the same career they wanted when they were five (I wanted to be Mr. T), but not Lori. For as long as I can remember, fashion was in her blood. She'd design little outfits for her Barbie dolls, draw dresses in art class, and spend every spare cent on fashion magazines. After she got out of high school, she worked nights as a waitress to afford to go to the top of the line design school. She'd stay up half the night working on some new outfit that she had created. Her fingers were constantly bandaged, from the repeated pokes with the needle.

While she could create just about any item of women's clothing she put her mind to, it was in the field of wedding dresses that she shone. Even with my lack of understanding of such things, I could tell that her gowns were something else. But to actually wear one?

The industry was cruel. Month after month she would try to get an interview with some major clothing company, and month after month she was given the run around. On occasion she would be granted an interview with some low level executive, but nothing ever came of it.

I thought of this bridal convention. Every engaged woman in the area would be there. What if a bunch of them approached her wanting her to design gowns for their weddings? What if Lori's dresses caught the eyes of some of the industry representatives there? Could this be the big break she was looking for? Couldn't this make her dreams come true?

My sister had always been there for me. She drove me around before I got my license, helped me with my homework, and gave me advice about women, but this was different. It's not like she ever had to pretend to be a man for me! Then again, it wasn't like I ever had a career opportunity hanging in the balance, either.

Was I being just a little shortsighted? Mom was right, it's not like anyone would see me up close; especially not anyone I knew. I loved my sister and I knew this would be a gift she'd never forget, even better than the humorous fake severed arm I gave her for her last birthday.

But then, even supposing I did do the honorable thing, would it really work? I mean, if anyone realized that I was a guy, it wouldn't be merely embarrassing for me, but it could get her blackballed from the bridal circuit. If word got out that a man was modeling her gowns, she'd wish that she had modeled them herself, casts or no. I'd need more convincing if I was to do this thing.

The next morning I approached Mom about her idea. "I guess maybe I could possibly think about doing this. I know what it

would mean to Lori, but, well, do you really think we could do it? I mean look at this,” I held up a bridal magazine that Lori had left in the bathroom and pointed to the cover model. “I mean this woman is gorgeous! Maybe I’m no Mr. Universe, but I’d like to think that I’d look a bit silly in a wedding dress!”

Mom nodded, “Ken, of course you are right. If you threw on a dress right now, you’d look ridiculous, but I think with padding, makeup, and some lessons on feminine deportment, you could pass for a woman. No one would expect you to look like that cover girl, but all we’d need is for you to look like a woman. You’re skinny enough with no beard, and your jaw isn’t too prominent. Your trips down the runway would be less than a minute each and after that we’d forget this ever happened.”

“Hmmm... Maybe it’s just the male programming in me, but I still have my doubts...”

“Listen, honey, Lori left some clothes here the other day. Maybe if you tried them on...”

“What! You think I’d feel more comfortable?” I barked, fearing she was mocking my manhood.

“No one expects that. I was thinking that if you saw yourself in women’s clothes, with padding, makeup, and all, you’d realize that under the lights you could pass yourself off as a woman.”

I was dubious. “C’mon,” said Mom, “It’ll only take a couple of hours. If you aren’t convinced, then just change back and we’ll pretend it never happened.”

I sighed, “I’m agreeing to nothing, you understand? I just want to see whether this is at all possible. If it is, I’ll decide then, not now.”

A few minutes later, I stood naked and alone under the harsh bathroom lights. Was I really doing this? Was I letting my mom, my own mother, doll me up like a girl? What’s the worst that could happen, I thought, as memories of Anthony Hopkins dressing as his mother and knifing tourists flashed through my mind.

I looked down at my naked body. Points against me passing as a woman were my height (actually a blessing in this case), my slightly muscular frame, and my maleness. Points for were that I wasn't too hairy or too big, and my voice wasn't too terribly deep.

Mom knocked on the door and tossed in a pair of dark panty hose. "Put them on like socks, not pants," she told me through the door. "They're dark, they'll cover your leg hair."

I yanked them on, wondering how women managed to wear these things every day. Finally I got them on more or less correctly. I bulged out in the front. The hose designer obviously didn't have individuals with male things in mind. Still, my leg hair was covered and I observed that there wasn't anything too obviously masculine about my legs from the thighs down.

"Are you doing OK?" called my mother.

"Yeah, it's kind of odd to be wearing these things on my legs instead of over my face."

"Mr. Funny guy. Do they feel OK?"

"Kind of weird, you know? Tighter than pants, tighter than socks, so close to the skin, but soft too."

"Wait till you get used to them. You'll get sick of they way they are constantly getting torn soon enough."

"Whoa, I'm not 'getting used' to anything. So far as you know, this will be a one-time thing."

"Yeah, I know, I didn't mean anything by it. Here, try this on."

She passed in a gray, full-length, pleated skirt. It zipped up in the back. I slipped it on. In all my eighteen years, I had never put on a skirt, even for fun. It was an odd sensation. I think that if my legs hadn't already been wrapped in pantyhose, I would have felt like I was standing with nothing on.

I looked at myself in the mirror. The skirt covered my legs, so I was all right there. I knew that a wedding dress would be full

near the bottom with only the bride's shoes visible, so I was OK downstairs, I supposed.

Above the waist was another matter. I had seen a few of Lori's gowns before, and I knew that most of them hugged a woman's figure. I certainly didn't have the curves required to slip into something like that. I began to feel a little relieved. If I looked silly enough, maybe Mom would forget about this crazy plan.

As usual, Mom had thought ahead. She passed me something through the door. "Slip this on."

It looked like a corset, only smaller. It wrapped about my stomach and closed in the back with hooks and eyes. "Mom, what the hell is this?"

"Don't worry about it, just put it on."

"Don't worry about it? Is this a corset? Where did you get it?"

"I ordered it off TV, OK?" said Mom, embarrassed. "It, uh, can help hide a woman's stomach." I smiled, Mom was fighting the middle-aged woman's battle against cellulite. "Just put it on. It'll make you look like you have curves."

"Lucky me."

"Be sure it's on its tightest setting."

I yanked and pulled, took a deep breath, and groaned. After about ten minutes, I had it cinched at its second-smallest size. I figured that was the best I could do.

"How are you doing?" called my mom.

"I can taste my kidneys."

"I'm sorry, honey, but it's the only way you'll fit into that bridal gown. Remember, if you do this, it'll only be for a few hours."

"Yeah, who needs to breathe?"

In my reflection, I looked like a boy in a skirt and corset. Maybe I'd look less stupid when I put on some kind of top. Mom passed me a blouse, a white one. It was poofy and trimmed with lace.

I looked at it dubiously. "Well, here goes nothing."

"No, wait," said Mom, "We have to give you boobs first. Can I come in?"

"Sure..." Mom suppressed a grin when she saw how I looked. "Was this my idea?" I asked, defensively.

"I know. Sorry."

"So what now?"

"We have to give you breasts."

"Great. How?"

"Turn around." I knew what was coming, even though I hoped it was wrong. I slipped my arms through the straps of a bra and closed it in the back. It felt very tight and looked quite stupid.

"Mom, I don't exactly fill this thing out."

Mom rolled up a couple of washcloths and stuffed them in the cups. They stuck out stupidly like a couple of falsies on one of the 'Kids in the Hall' actors. "Do you honestly think that Lori would look worse than this?"

"Wait till we're finished. How are you holding up?"

"Cold and uncomfortable. I'd be humiliated as well if I thought anyone else knew what I'm doing."

"You'll be fine."

"No one will know what I'm doing, right?"

"Honey, I swear I won't tell anyone. I know this isn't your idea of a fun afternoon. If you agree to go to the show, we'll tell your sister, no one else."

“You know that I’m doing this for Lori only because this is her big chance.” Even though Mom hadn’t implied anything, I felt I had to justify what I was doing.

“Honey, I’m sure Lori will never forget this.”

“Yeah, well, I’d just as soon she did forget this ever happened.”

Mom helped me into the blouse and buttoned it up in the front. I looked in the mirror. The change was disconcerting. While I was shirtless, the corset and bra looked just plain dumb. Now, they simulated the curves and chest of a young woman. It appeared that I had an hourglass figure and an ample chest. I knew I couldn’t survive in an outfit that showed off too much flesh, but with the long shirt and long sleeved blouse, it seemed I had the body of a woman. Wedding dresses didn’t show much flesh, and I knew that if my Mom could fix up my face well enough, then I’d have no excuse other than my own fears to duck out from doing the bridal show.

“There you go. Looking better already. You’d never be able to do this on a daily basis, but I really think no one would notice if you tried it for a few hours.” Mom really wanted me to do this, but y saying that I could never pass on a daily basis, she was telling me I wouldn’t be less of a man. I shrugged.

Mom took out a brush and spritzed up my short dark hair into something a little more, if not feminine, then neater. It was kind of an androgynous do.

Mom didn’t seem happy with it. “There’s only so much I can do with hair this short. If you agree to do this, your sister will have to help you out.”

She then took me to the well-lit kitchen and began on my makeup. Draping a towel over my shoulders, she instructed me to ‘just relax’. I wondered how well she’d relax if someone were trying to make her look like a man.

First came the foundation. It was freezing and I felt like my face was caked with mud. It felt so goopy and gross. I had to stop

myself from touching it. Then, gently and carefully, Mom reddened my cheeks with a hint of rouge. "The blushing bride," she giggled.

"I'm warning you, Mom..."

"Lighten up, Ken. I'm not trying to humiliate you or make you feel like a sissy. We both know you're doing this so that you can help out your sister. Don't be so defensive."

She began to apply the eyeliner. That took forever. I kept getting the impression that she was about to jam the makeup pencil in my eye. Finally, she finished.

Then she took out a mascara brush and lengthened my eyelashes. It felt disgusting, like I had crusty eye boogers in my lashes. Lastly, she took out a red lipstick and colored my lips. "Finished!" she said happily.

I groped for the mirror, but she stopped me. She refused to let me look until she had taken care of everything. 'Everything' unfortunately, included a manicure. I initially balked, but after she explained that the only after-effects would be well-trimmed nails, I assented. Soon my nails were filed, trimmed, polished, and painted pink. Mom assured me the paint would come off quickly with a little alcohol.

Finally, she clipped a silver chain around my neck, a smaller one around my wrist and two clip-on earrings on my lobes. She then told me I could look in the mirror.

I won't get into clichés like I didn't recognize myself, or a stranger stared back at me. I knew it was me; no amount of makeup can change ones eyes or the shape of their nose, but it was a very disturbing change, nonetheless.

I remember once while fooling around on the Internet that I found a commercial photo morph site. Most of the photos advertised were to create fantasy pictures such as standing next to a celebrity, but there were a few gender change photos.



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**“Hold very still, Ken. I don’t want to smear your lipstick,”
Mom cautioned as she touched the lipstick to my lips.**

The owner of the site boasted that they could make you look like you would have, had you been born the opposite gender. That was how I felt now.

It was my reflection, yet different. The padding and corset thing gave me the impression of natural curves. If I didn't know that it was my body, I'd have assumed that its owner had a flat tummy, a curvy frame, and an ample pair of breasts. As for what was under the skirt, I didn't even want to think about what people would assume was under there!

My face, however, was what really blew my mind. It was my face and yet it wasn't. It looked more like Lori's. Softer, well maintained, and not rough, it was the face of a teenage girl.

I stared and stared into the mirror, observing myself from all sides. I didn't like it, not one bit. I knew that with a more careful makeup job, a new hairstyle, and a little practice, I could easily pass as a girl for a couple of hours. Why the hell was my beard taking so long to come in? Why didn't I keep my New Years resolution to bulk up? Even my height, the one thing that should have made me appear masculine, was working against me. I had been chosen to replace Lori for that very reason.

"So what do you think?" asked Mom.

"I dunno..."

"Be honest, it's a heck of a disguise. Do you honestly think anyone would recognize you?"

"Maybe not recognize me, but could anyone guess my true gender?"

"I doubt it. You'll need a lot of work before you go on..."

"Hang on now, I never agreed to anything..."

"Ken, look at yourself and tell me why you couldn't dress like this for one afternoon."

I looked. I tried to relax and make myself look a little more normal, like I was just a teenage girl about to do a favor for her sister.



“Now smile, so your sister can see the new you,” Mom giggled as she snapped my photograph.

"Calm down," I told myself, "You are helping out your sister who is lying in a hospital bed right now. You are about to do an honorable thing. This will not make you less of a man."

I thought back to the previous fall when I had a bit roll in the school's production of 'Music Man'. Maybe if I just thought of this as an acting roll... I stared at the feminized reflection, and I ventured a smile. The girl in the mirror smiled back, and I wondered what I'd look like to a stranger.

"Have you talked to Lori about this?"

"Yes, she said she'd only consent to it if you agreed totally. She said she refused to do anything that would make you uncomfortable." That was my sister. Always thinking of others first.

"Do you really think we could pull this off? I'm going to be scared to death."

"Your sister is the industry expert. Why don't we ask her what she thinks?"

"How about not."

"Well, why don't I take her a picture of you? Let her be the judge."

"OK, but we'll have to burn it afterwards."

"Great," said Mom, "Just a couple of more touches."

She touched up my makeup, and then got out a pair of her heels. They barely fit," I cried as I crammed my toes into them. She then handed me a purse, which I clutched awkwardly in front of me.

She snapped the Polaroid. I watched as it developed. The blurry snapshot further obscured my true gender. To the layman, I'd look like a shy girl with a bad hair-do. The only way I could get out of this was to flat out refuse.

We found Lori morosely staring at an infomercial on her television. She looked bad, her bruises were starting to swell up in earnest. She had a dismal air about her, which immediately brought me down.

“How’s it hanging, sis?” I asked.

“Ug, just trying to put off calling the bridal show and canceling.” She glanced at me out of the corner of her eye, as if hoping I would somehow prevent that. I took a deep breath.

“Listen, Lori, I guess you’ve heard what Mom was thinking.”

“Yes and I want you to know that you don’t have to do it. I mean, It’d be great if you could do it, but it has to be your choice.” She couldn’t keep the hope out of her voice.

“Well, look at this picture. Do you think I, you know, could pass?”

Lori took it. I had expected her to enthusiastically agree that I would make a beautiful bride. I guess I was a little shocked when she looked rather skeptical. “Maybe, but you’d have to spend every night for the next few weeks practicing makeup and deportment. It wouldn’t be easy, but I bet you could pass...for a couple of hours at least.”

I began to get annoyed. Not only did it look like I’d have to appear in public as a girl, but I’d have to bust my butt to do it. “Lori, what exactly would I have to do?”

“Mom and I would have to give you a lot of lessons on how to act like a young lady. Femininity is more in the head than in the body. You may look like a woman, but if you don’t act like one, then you’re more likely to be found out. Also, we’ll have to have about a dozen fittings until I can get all the gowns adjusted to your body.”

“Great...” I was starting to get annoyed and Lori knew it.

“Ken, you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to. I’m not going to force you or try to guilt you. I’d be asking you to put in a lot of work, in addition to doing something I’m sure you don’t want to do, and I can’t offer you anything in return. It’s your choice, brother, but I want you to know that I’d spend the rest of my life trying to repay you the favor.”

It would have been so easy to back out; no one could really have faulted me on it. What do you mean ‘dozens of fittings’? Lessons in femininity? Sorry, I had better things to do.

Of course, I didn’t refuse; I owed it to my sister. That’s what family is all about. You make sacrifices for those you love. You do what it takes to make them happy.

“OK. I’ll do it, but the first time I hear a smart-ass comment from either of you, I quit.”

Lori smiled. And it wasn’t simple smile either. Her whole face lit up. It was like I had just given her the best news of her life. It probably seemed that was to her then. During the weeks that followed, I’d think back to that smile to remind myself why I was doing what I was doing.

Against hospital orders, Lori checked out that night. She said there wasn’t a moment to lose in preparing me for the convention. Soon I was spending every afternoon and evening developing my feminine nature.

It was hell. Mom and Lori were relentless. It was only going to be for a few hours, and yet they insisted that I had to be totally comfortable, totally natural as a woman.

“Representatives from some of the top design firms are going to be there,” Lori told me excitedly the first night. “This is how careers are made! If you help me with this, I could be the next Elaine Kessie! Or the next Bertha McRoy! Or Estaphania Gomez!” I had no idea who any of those people were, designers, presumably.

“Look, let’s just get this over with. When you become famous, you can set me up with some of your top models.”

“Oh, I was hoping that you’d be my top model.”

“Maybe you’d like to find someone else to do this.”

Lori fell quiet, but that wasn’t the first moment of friction. I felt she was being just a little too demanding of me; it’s not like I was getting paid. Several times I walked out, telling her I refused to do it anymore. I always returned, feeling too guilty at leaving

at the last minute. Lori would always cut my apology short with one of her own.

This went on for three weeks. The second I arrived home from school, I would be forced to put on some new manner of feminine garment. At first, I had naively assumed that all I would be wearing would be the wedding gowns. Not the case!

The wedding gowns weren't adjusted to my size yet. I wouldn't be trying those on until the end. For the time being I had to practice being a girl in Lori's clothes.

Lori, being a designer, made most of her clothes and found them easy enough to alter to fit me. She never let me wear her slacks, she insisted on dresses and skirts. I had to practice wearing the garments without legs, at least that was her explanation. How to sit (never spread my legs), how to cross my legs like a girl, how to smooth the skirt when sitting and standing, and how to make sure I never tucked it into my pantyhose.

The pantyhose were another thing. I began to see why women were annoyed with them. They were constantly tearing, catching on things, making me sweat, not to mention they were especially inconvenient when using the restroom.

I asked my sister why I had to wear these things constantly. She frequently went bare legged. Her answer was simple, she shaved her legs and I didn't. As a desperate attempt to rid myself of the restrictive, pantyhose, I agreed to shave my legs. I'd have to do it for the wedding show anyway.

It was weird shaving. I was never overly hairy, but I always had a bit of fuzz on my legs. Now they were smooth, girlishly smooth. I knew it would be a while after the show before I could wear shorts. Still, at least now I could go bare legged under my dresses. Of course, I still had to wear underwear, and of course, my sister had only lacy panties. I guess I could have insisted on my own Fruit of the Looms, but what did it matter ultimately?

I felt almost naked now that hose didn't cover my legs, like I was wearing a bathrobe and nothing else. I kept looking down nervously. My sister would constantly point out my unease. That

was how she justified doing all the practice, so that when it came time for me to do it in public, I wouldn't seem so out of sorts.

My tops were another thing. Lori was never a shy girl and didn't mind showing off a bit of flesh. At first I insisted on wearing long sleeved shirts, bulky sweaters, and conservative dresses. It was a warm spring and they soon became uncomfortable, even in the house. Mom and Lori were insistent: if I wanted to wear something cooler, I'd have to shave my armpits. At least no one at school would notice that.

After I had denuded my underarms, Lori made me take off my shirt and she spent twenty minutes plucking my torso with tweezers until the few strands around my nipples and under my navel were gone. They had taken a long time to grow and I wondered how long it would take for them to come back. I thought like most teenage boys that macho guys have chest hair.

Once I was sufficiently hairless, Lori allowed me to wear her looser, cooler outfits, like sleeveless sweaters. They looked cute on Lori, but I felt they looked dumb on me, even as a girl. My arms were a little muscular and I felt that an outfit like this would look stupid on anyone with arms like mine.

Lori disagreed, "Lots of women have powerful upper bodies. Trust me, you look athletic, not freakish. Besides, my arms are about as strong as yours, so watch what you say."

I looked at myself in the bare-armed sweater in a new light. Maybe Lori was right. I was probably just being sexist, not thinking that a powerfully built woman would be attractive. What did it matter anyway? No one would see me like this.

The sweaters weren't the only tops that I wore, of course. Some of Lori's outfits had plunging necklines. Obviously I couldn't wear anything too revealing, but many shirts revealed a fair amount of upper chest. Not only that, but some of her sweaters had extra large neck holes, so quite a bit of my bare shoulders were visible. Unmanly? And how!



My family was relentless at teaching me all the nuances of being a model. I never realized how much I didn't know.

But that was only the beginning. Shoes in my size were procured and I was forced to wear them. They had high heels of course. It took me well over a week before I could walk in them naturally.

Of course, just wearing the clothes wasn't sufficient for my loving family. No, I had to learn how a girl is expected to act, and that meant a hell of a lot of hard work.

Who would have thought I'd have to learn how to walk again? When Lori told me that was the first thing I'd have to practice, I laughed. Women walk forward one foot at a time, same as guys. It didn't seem so funny after about a week of practicing my posture and carriage.

Women, as it turned out, do walk differently than men. Lori took me watching people at the mall to demonstrate. Men slouch, they slump over. They lead with their head and chest and roughly plant one foot ahead and to the side of the other. Women, on the other hand, lead with their hips, one hip forward, then the other. That's what gives them the 'wobble' in their walks. They step differently as well. Instead of extending their feet directly forward like a man, they place their left foot directly in front of the right one and vice versa. Next time you have a chance to observe a group of people, watch for this phenomenon. You'll be surprised how obvious it is once you know it exists.

You wouldn't think that such little details would make such a big difference, but they do. That night as I practiced walking in front of a mirror, I was shocked at how girlish my stride was once I aped Lori's manner of walking. Wiggling hips, dainty steps, straight posture, I supposed that Lori hadn't just been compulsive when she insisted that I relearn how to walk. Since walking would be about the only thing I would do at the show, it had to look right. Still, I felt like I was in physical therapy or something, 'place your right foot in front of the left and stand up straight'. It got old fast.

Another thing I constantly had to practice was my voice. While I wouldn't be expected to say anything during the show, it

would be unwise to assume that I wouldn't have to speak to someone backstage.

Lori coached me, "Your voice isn't too bad, but it's still the voice of a man. Try not to speak too loudly, just above a whisper should be enough. Don't deliberately try to make your voice higher, you'd sound like a cartoon. Just push more air into your voice when you talk, don't say much, and relax."

I asked her how she got to know so much about impersonating a female voice. "Off the Internet. Some help page for cross-dressers." Was I embarrassed? I'll give you two guesses. Lori finally stopped badgering me about my voice when I managed to order a pizza over the phone and have the person on the other end address me as ma'am.

While I refused to listen to detailed lessons about makeup, Lori did insist I know the basics. She'd do my face up for the show, but it wouldn't hurt for me to know how to touch everything up. I'm sure I knew more about makeup than any boy in my class.

After a couple of weeks of training, Mom and Lori decided I was as ready as I'd ever be. I couldn't help but agree. Looking into the mirror, I looked back at the twin sister I never had. Her clothes, makeup, deportment, and walk were all feminine. Standing wearing a woman's sweater and jacket, with a skirt and heels, I certainly didn't feel like a man. The corset caused my stomach to turn in and the fake breast forms Lori had bought me gave me a convincing bust. My hair was still the same because I wouldn't let Lori do anything to it until just before the show.

"You look great," said Lori. "You'll do fine. Now we'll have to begin on the wedding dress fittings."

"Yeah, great," I replied, sadly.

"What's wrong, honey?" asked my mom.

"What's wrong? Your son is standing here in a skirt and bra and you ask what's wrong? I haven't had a free night in weeks! I feel like I'm living a double life! Like I'm being brainwashed!

I've been practicing acting like a woman for so long that I have to keep myself from doing it at school. All I know is that I'll be glad when this is all over."

Lori came up to me and hugged me, "I'm sorry, Ken. I guess I kept forgetting how much work this is for you. You need a night to relax. Can I take you out to dinner tonight? I want to thank you for all your help, both of you."

I smiled, "I guess in all the rush, I forgot how important this show is to you. Sure, dinner sounds great. Let me change."

"Why bother? You make such a good woman that no one would notice."

"Har de har har."

"I'm serious," said Lori, "You're always talking about how uncomfortable you are at the thought of dressing like this in public. Well maybe you just need a little practice."

I was about to tell her to stop joking, when I thought about it. It was going to be nerve-racking enough doing this at the bridal show. Maybe if I had a little practice beforehand, then I'd be a little more comfortable. Better to make a fool of myself in a restaurant than on stage in front of hundreds of people.

"OK, but I get to pick the restaurant."

Mom and Lori seemed both shocked and excited that I had agreed. "So where would you like to eat?" asked Mom.

"Fred's Steak Emporium."

"That's all the way out in the city," groaned my sister.

"I know. I can't risk running into anyone I know."

"But Fred's? Didn't they get shut down by the Board of Health?"

"I'm sure they're reopened. C'mon, it's there or nowhere." Fred's place was a dive, but since so few people frequented the place I figured that fewer people would see me.

As we headed out to the city, I began to wonder about the intelligence of my rash decision. True, I was interested to know if I had a change of 'passing' in front of all the people at the bridal show, but was this the best way to do it? What if someone found me out tonight? What if I got caught?

When we arrived, my confidence nearly failed, but Mom and Lori insisted I go in. I braced myself at the front door (which now proudly bore a 'B' rating from the grudging health board) and steadied myself. I straightened my skirt, ran a finger through my wayward hair, and followed the rest of my family inside.

As luck would have it, there were only about a half dozen customers in the greasy spoon. We selected a booth in the corner and sat down. The waiter approached us and handed us our menus. "What would you ladies like to drink?"

Well, it happened. It was thrilling in a way, as if I was a spy whose shaky cover had worked. At least I'd be a little more confident when I walked down the catwalk the following week.

I glanced at the unappetizing menu. "Well," I asked, making an effort to keep my voice soft. "What does everyone want? I think I'll have the T-bone with a baked potato..."

Lori motioned me to lean forward so she could whisper to me. "Remember that you are a girl tonight. Try to eat like one. I suggest a salad."

Well, maybe it was the fact that Lori had agreed to pay for my meal, but she did have a point. How many women eat big juicy steaks? Besides, I'd probably have less risk of getting e-coli poisoning this way.

After three wilted salads with watery Cokes and stale crackers, we were ready to call it a night. It hadn't been a relaxing night for me, just the opposite. It's not that I was overly worried about being caught; I hadn't had so much as a casual glance in my direction since we walked in. What was stressful was that I could never let down my guard for a second. I was constantly worried about doing something ungirlish. I had to perpetually make sure that my mannerisms, my walk, and

especially my voice were on par with my supposed gender. I'd be glad to get it over with, but first there was something to try...

"If you'll excuse me, I have to run to the lady's room."

Mom and Lori feverishly tried to object, but couldn't stop me without making a scene. I girlishly swished my way into the final frontier.

The women's bathroom was dirty, but clean compared to the rest of the restaurant. I snooped around at the unfamiliar sights, the lack of smutty graffiti, the toilet seat cover dispenser, and the tampon machine. I was startled when the door opened and a pair of women walked in. Quickly I ducked into a stall.

I figured that just standing behind the door might arouse suspicion, and besides, I needed to use the facilities. After placing a paper cover over the seat, I tried to sit down. Confounded skirt! Confounded hose! Confounded cramped stall! When you are a man, the world is your toilet. As a woman, you have to plan.

I sat there for a bit, listening to the two women gossip. After getting tired of sitting down forever, I decided to venture out into the restroom. Neither of the women gave me a second glance. As I was washing my hands, I noticed that my lipstick had smeared while eating. It looked rather stupid, so I took out an extra tube Lori had given me and touched my lips up.

It was crazy, but funny in a way as well. Here I was, casually putting on makeup in the ladies room. Knowing that Mom and Lori were probably panicking I decided to extend their fear and re-do my whole face. Who knew when I'd be back in the women's restroom again?

My confidence was shattered when one of the women, a good-looking blonde of about thirty, asked to borrow my mascara brush. Trying to act casual, like people asked to borrow my makeup everyday, I handed it to her.

"Jesus, I look awful. It's the damn humidity, my makeup's always smearing."



When you are a man, the world is your toilet, but a woman has to plan how to Could I ever get used to this?

I wasn't sure how to react to that. Well, when in doubt, just nod and agree. "Tell me about it," I said, "Just look what it's done to my hair." My hair is my worst feature.

"Oh, I don't know," she replied. "Actually, I think you can do a lot with it. I'm a stylist, you see. If you're interested, come by some time for an appointment." She handed me her card. I thanked her and left.

I was surprisingly giddy when I walked out. I felt like an actor who had pulled off the greatest roll in his career. They didn't even suspect. While I could have been inclined to take this as an affront to my masculinity, I decided it resulted from a combination of Lori's instructions and my acting ability. Maybe I could try my hand in Hollywood after graduation. Yeah right.

Mom and Lori waited until we were in the car before they said anything. Then they were all questions, "What happened? Did you talk to those women in there? Did you say anything? Why were you in there so long?" They were excited; I guess they got a kick out of how well their 'creation' was getting along.

I answered their questions with a laugh. It had been kind of a fun evening, though I was glad it was over. Lori had been right; now that I had a little of the nervousness out of my system, I should be able to face the bridal show with more ease.

All in all, it seemed that I would spend about eight hours out of my life pretending to be the opposite gender. What a thought! Thank God that after the show I'd never have to do it again. Of course, things don't always work out the way they are planned.

A week later, Mom drove Lori and I to the bridal convention. I sat in the car silently gnawing at my lower lip. What had I agreed to do? Going to a restaurant was one thing, but this convention is something totally different. I would be standing on a stage, inviting hundreds of people to scrutinize my every detail. Had I gone insane? How could I have been so stupid?

I thought back to the previous week. After I had proven to myself that I could pass casual inspection as a woman, Lori had begun the final fittings of the gowns. There was little I had to do

those nights, just stand there and let Lori alter the gowns to fit my slightly larger frame.

Lori, after realizing I had begun to get over my embarrassment, began to tease me just a little bit, nothing viscous, just big sister ribbing. "We'll, after I'm done with your dress, it won't fit me anymore. I suppose I can save it for you when you get married. I could make an identical one for your wife and you could both walk down the aisle..."

"That's enough, Lori," warned my mom. I appreciated Mom for standing up for me, but the joking really didn't bother me. Within a few days, all of this would be over and at this point what did a couple of jabs matter?

Lori put down her needle and thread and told me to take five. She swiveled in her wheelchair and tried to massage her broken legs. I felt sorry for her. Besides having to have her brother model her bridal gowns, she had been stuck at home with a couple of plastered limbs for almost a month. She was normally someone who hated being stuck at home watching TV, but thanks to her injury and the loss of her car, she'd been almost a shut-in. I had kept my complaints to a minimum to avoid adding to her stress.

I looked down at the half-completed dress I was wearing. Since Lori had to build it around my girlish figure, I was wearing my padding and falsies as well. I was a little disturbed to realize that I was almost getting used to the feeling.

I didn't feel like taking off the dress only to have to put it on again later, so I hitched it up and swished my way to the kitchen for a snack. Lori wheeled in after me. "So, Ken," she asked, "what name should I call you now?"

"Lori, you are beginning to try my patience..."

"No, I'm not trying to be funny. When you model at the bridal show, they'll announce your name. You probably wouldn't want to be called Ken."

“That’s a good point. I guess I’ll choose the obvious and go with Kim.”

“OK, Kim it is. Let’s say Kimberly. It’s more model-like.”

“Whatever. It’s not like I’ll be using it after next week.”

“Speaking of next week, what are we going to do about your hair?”

“My hair?” I replied, taking a swig from the milk carton, “I dunno. I thought you’d do it for me.”

“I’m not too good at that. Would you allow us to take you to a beauty parlor?”

“No.”

“C’mon, why not?”

“So I can go around with girl hair for a month? I think not.”

“Hear me out. Your gender will be less noticeable if you have a woman’s haircut. Your hair is long enough now to make it look really cute. After the show, I’ll give you a crew cut. You’ve worn it that short before. What do you say?”

She had a point. I guess if I was to be a model, then I should have convincing hair. After a quick buzz cut, no evidence would remain, so I assented.

“Where should we go?” I asked. I usually got my haircut at the unisex salon where both Mom and Lori went, so that was out.

Lori began to think, and then I had an idea. I hunted down the old purse I had used the night we went out to eat and fished out the business card that read, ‘Kelly McGwire, hairstyles for girls and women.’ “I suppose this place would be as good as any other.”

The evening before the bridal show, Mom drove me to the salon. It was a small but tidy shop in a suburban mini-mall. It seemed deserted, which pleased me. We stepped inside and I recognized Kelly, the woman whom I had met in the lady’s room the previous week.

"Hello there!" she smiled at me, "I'm glad you decided to stop by. What can I do for you?"

I suddenly panicked, realizing I knew jack about women's hairstyles. Knowing that it would look ridiculous for a 'girl' my age to ask her mother to decide how her hair should be cut, I simply said, "I'm in the mood for something new. Can you suggest something?"

Kelly had me sit in one of the chairs and together we flipped through a book of photos of women's haircuts. I feigned interest. Frankly, I could have cared less about a haircut that I'd have for only one day, but I had to make it look real.

Finally, we settled on a style that Kelly could create out of my medium-length black hair. It was poofier with a bit of curl. I guess you'd call it a wave. It would give my hair more bounce and make it look much more feminine.

With false enthusiasm, I let her begin. With a flick of her scissors, spray from a bottle, and about forty-five minutes of time, Kelly worked her magic. Even I couldn't help but be impressed.

Instead of the frizzled, chaotic hair that usually surrounded my head, there was a neatly styled, feminine 'do'. With my made-up face, my women's clothes, and my jewelry, I certainly looked like a teenage girl. Surprisingly, I was happy about the change. It wasn't permanent and it would help me blend in at the bridal show.

Of course, things were different now as I sat in the car parked in the convention center parking lot, and hyperventilated. Mom had already gone inside, helping Lori roll into the building to get settled.

In a few minutes, she'd be back to help me carry my dresses inside. There was no going back now. Lori had made a commitment to the show. If her model canceled at the last moment, it would be a black mark against her career. I was in for it now, there was no quitting.

When Mom returned, I had my head between my knees, breathing rapidly. "What's wrong?" she asked, horrified.

"Just look at me and tell me what's wrong!" While it would have been silly for me to wear the bulky gown on the way to the show, I still had to dress as a woman on the way over. That way no one would see me in male clothes before I had a chance to change. Right now I was dressed in a pair of women's jeans, a sleeveless shirt, and heels. "I'm about to freak out, Mom. Everyone is going to see me!"

Mom looked me in the eye. "Ken, Lori's worked hard for this day. More to the point; so have you. You've sacrificed weeks working on getting ready. I really don't think you want to blow everything because of a case of nerves, so just calm down. A few hours and it will all be over. Do it for your sister."

With a foreboding sense of finality, we walked to the building. Mom handed me my prodigious garment bags and wished me good luck. She'd be watching me from the audience with Lori. From here on out, I was on my own.

Staggering under the weight of the three dresses and accessories, I found the staff entrance. I showed the guard at the door my pass and he motioned me down a service corridor. So far so good, he didn't look like he suspected a thing. I followed the grimy passageway, looking for the dressing room the guard had indicated.

About half way to my destination, I saw a youthful-looking maintenance man going in the opposite direction. He was handsome, about twenty years old, and was carrying what appeared to be a bag of garbage. When he saw me, his face broke into a big smile. He continued to smile and look me in the eye as I drew nearer. I let out a gasp and hurried on. As I passed him, I noticed that his smile had quickly turned to a hurt frown.

It wasn't until I reached the dressing room that I fully realized what had happened. That punk was flirting with me! Not that I had any right to get mad. I'd been much more overt in some of my quests to get women to notice me. Still, that meant the guy

found me attractive, which was rather insulting. Passing as a girl was one thing, but an attractive one...? That was a headache I didn't need. Of course, none of this was his fault and he seemed a little hurt when I ran past him. Well, I had bigger fish to fry at the moment.

I reached the dressing room and knocked. "May I help you?" asked the bespectacled, middle-age woman who answered the door.

"I...I'm Kimberly Woolsey," I stammered, trying to keep my voice high, "I'm here to model..."

"Let's see," she said, consulting her clipboard, "Woolsey, Woolsey...ah, yes. Step right in, Miss. You can get ready wherever you can find room."

I stepped out of the hall and into a Penthouse letter. There, in the spacious, brightly lit dressing room stood about a dozen models, all in various stages of undress. Immediately to my right stood a shapely black woman pulling on her hose without a stitch on above her waist. Next to her stood a tall, freckled redhead in nothing but her bra and panties. At the rear of the room, a blonde was cramming her ample bosom into her tight, strapless gown.

I'd never so much as seen a real naked breast before, now I was seeing several. I wanted to stand there and stare. I wanted to drink in the sight with relish, imprint it on my mind. I wanted to take out a video camera and record everything.

With more self-determination that I thought I had, I controlled my glances and made my way directly to a changing booth. After closing the door, I began to breathe again. So many naked women and yet I'd never be able to tell a soul. Well, at least I'd always have the memory.

Time for work; I unzipped the first bag and began to organize. First, of course, came the girdle and the falsies. I heaved a sigh of relief that this would be the absolutely last day I'd have to wear the dumb things.

Then came what Lori had laughingly referred to as my trousseau. The dress was an enormous, complicated thing. Lori had shocked me by telling me that it would sell for well over a thousand dollars. All I knew was that it was impossible to get into it by myself, and yet I couldn't very well ask anyone to help me.

Once I was finished, I looked at myself in the wall mirror. Despite my dislike of what I was wearing, I had to admit that Lori really knew what she was doing. The gown was what I called 'dark-white,' if such a thing were possible. It had a long flowing train. Its short sleeves reached all the way down my arms. There were very few ruffles or ribbons, only some lace around the edges and the around the bodice. There was a large bow at my lower back. The neckline was high, of course, but it plunged slightly in back, showing off my shoulder blades.

I glowered at the woman in the mirror as I pinned my lacy veil to my hair. I hated to admit it, but I did look like a bride. Maybe not the kind you see in the magazines, I didn't have the curves and grace of a super model, but I knew that if I were walking down the aisle to meet a groom, no one would think it odd. They might even comment on how pretty I was.

I winced, and clipped a dangling, pearl earring to each of my ears, and then I slid the fake engagement ring Lori had given me on my left hand, so much for clothes.

After triple checking every detail, I stepped into the dressing room. I was sorry to see that most of the women had finished dressing. There was nary a leg or breast in sight. Wordlessly, I found a seat at an empty makeup table and began applying my face.

"May I make a suggestion?" came a pleasant, feminine voice from beside me.



The wedding dress was huge! How will I ever be able to walk in front of hundreds of people wearing it?

I turned to see a pretty woman I had noticed earlier in a much more naked state. She was about twenty-five with long black hair and a firm, statuesque figure. She hadn't dressed in her wedding gown yet, but she was gorgeous. I comforted myself by thinking that she'd be too old to ask out, even if I wasn't dressed like this.

"That color isn't exactly right for your complexion," she continued nervously. I guess she thought she might be intruding. I nodded encouragingly, hoping that she would continue. "Here," she said, "may I?" With that, she began reapplying my makeup.

I enjoyed the touch of her soft, manicured hands on my face. I wondered if there was a possibility I could introduce myself as 'Kim's' twin brother after the show, probably not.

Finally she finished and the results were impressive. While my makeup would have done for day to day wear, I could tell, even with my limited knowledge, that she had given me a makeover that would show up much better on stage.

I thanked her and introduced myself as Kim. "I'm Shawna. Kim, you look nervous. Is this your first time working a bridal show?"

"It's my first time working any show. I'm not a model. My sister's a designer and needed someone to model at the last minute. I volunteered."

"Well, that was sweet of you."

Sweet? If only she knew. "I'm not sure what I'm doing. Any pointers?"

She smiled sweetly, "You'll do fine. Look, you go on after me. Just follow my lead and relax. It's loads of fun, maybe you'll want to do it more after today." Fat chance of that!

"Places, everyone!" called the woman with the clipboard. I took my place behind Shawna. She winked at me sweetly.



I was so nervous as I stepped onto the stage for my first walk., but I was aghast the next time when they teamed me up with a 'groom'. I almost lost it!

It took a lot of control not to hyperventilate backstage. All the other women looked calm. Of course, they were all doing this because it was their job...and (one couldn't help but assume) they were all women.

Shawna glided on stage. She made it look so effortless. Just a pause at the curtain while the announcer read her name and designer. Then a few steps down the runway, smile, turn, and walk back, as the announcer read a description of her dress, simple as that. The audience clapped as Shawna exited the stage. She smiled at me and I was on.

I stepped past the curtain, and the lights temporarily blinded me. When my vision cleared, I was staring at a sea of people, mostly young women with their eyes riveted on me. I expected at any second for someone to scream, "He's a guy! Look at the pervert in the wedding dress!" Thankfully, nothing of the sort happened.

"Kimberly is wearing a Lori Woolsey Original," began the announcer. That was my cue. I stepped forward...

"Kimberly's dress," continued the announcer, "is antique white (so that's what it was called). Her gown has a flowing train with embroidered lace and optional ribbon."

I had reached the end of the walkway. I flashed my best fake smile to the audience and twirled to let them see my back. "The dress has a open back for the bride who chooses to feature her shoulders. Thank you, Kimberly."

With that, I was finished. The audience broke into applause. I had done it! It went off without a hitch! True, I still had to do it two more times, but for the first time since I had agreed to be a bride, I wasn't scared. This was going to work. Lori's dresses would impress everyone, and she'd get a contract, make a million dollars, and be happy. Maybe someday we'd all get together and laugh at how the now famous Lori Woolsey had to have her brother model for her at her first show.

But now onto more pressing matters. I had to quickly duck back into the dressing room and change into my next outfit. I

found Shawna already there struggling into her new dress. "Nice work, Kim," she said over her shoulder. "Told you it wouldn't be hard. Jeez, do you think this thing could show of any more cleavage?"

I agreed that her dress was a bit revealing for a wedding, then grudgingly tore my eyes away. "Zip me up?" she asked. I helped her, despite the fact that my hand wanted to interpret the command 'zip up' as 'unzip.' Then it was my turn to change.

Lori's second gown was an exercise in minimalism. It was plain white with wide shoulder straps and a high neckline. There were no sleeves; my arms were completely bare. Lori said that she wanted the gown to plunge lower to show off a bit of cleavage, but that obviously wasn't possible. The gown came with the tiniest of veils; it was little more than a slip of fabric I attached to my hair with a barrette. A locket completed the outfit.

I was nominally braver when my turn came up again, but not by much. I was stunned when they teamed me up with a male model as my 'groom'. I nearly tripped on my heels when the announcer made an innocent comment about my imaginary groom carrying me across the threshold on our wedding night. Jeez, I was getting sick of all this!

Lastly, I put on Lori's *magnum opus*. It was an opulent, extremely ornate gown with ribbons, ruffles, and fake pearls. It was sleeveless, but it came with gloves that went up to my elbows. The veil was enormous; it came down past my butt. Lori had me wear this one last. She wanted me to feel as comfortable as possible in her masterpiece. After I'll I had been through, I'd certainly do my best. As difficult as this experience was, I wouldn't make it all for nothing by not trying my hardest.

As I left the dressing room, I saw a bouquet of flowers someone had left. Impulsively, I grabbed them and walked down the catwalk with them. I thought it added an aura of authenticity to my wedding garb.

Finally, it was all over. I rushed back to the dressing room to get back into the women's clothes I had arrived in. Then I could

find Lori and congratulate her on the show, speed home, and get into some male clothes. Lori would buzz me nearly bald and we could put all of this behind us.

Shawna walked into the dressing room. I groaned inwardly. It sucked that I wouldn't ever see her again, but there was no way around it. It wasn't worth impersonating Kim again to maintain the friendship and I doubted she'd understand if I told her the truth. She'd probably be quite angry after seeing her naked.

"Kimberly, there you are. C'mon, we have to get out to the convention floor."

"Why? The presentation's over..."

"That's only part of the show. Now we have to mill around with the customers and show our gowns off, so they can see them up close."

"My sister never said anything about that!" I said, annoyed.

"Well, this will be where her gowns get sold. You need to do it, Kim, otherwise she probably won't sell a thing."

Blast and damnation! After putting up with this farce, I find out there's more to come! Well, I guess it would be futile to protest if this was how the business worked. Faking interest, I asked Shawna which of my three gowns I should wear. She suggested the one I was already wearing. It was her favorite.

Still clutching the bouquet, I followed Shawna out to the convention floor. This actually turned out to be the most uncomfortable part of the day. The bright lights and barriers of the catwalk didn't shield me nor was I just another face in the crowd like I was at the restaurant. Here dozens of people milled around me, staring at me. I was sure I was about to be found out.

I stood for over an hour with Shawna, several other brides, and to my surprise, several male models in tuxedos as well. Many brides-to-be seemed enamored with Lori's design. I stood there for less than five minutes when a young woman with her boyfriend in tow approached me.

"Tom, wouldn't this look absolutely darling? I just love the lace work! And that veil! It's to die for!"

"It looks wonderful, honey!" said Tom, with great enthusiasm and no conviction. That scene was replayed several times, the gushing bride and the indifferent groom. I chuckled inwardly at how one-sided wedding preparations were.

After what seemed like an eternity, the booths began to close and I finally began to think I could go home, stop being a bride, and go back to being a teenage guy. When Lori rolled herself over to me, I was sure she was going to tell me to change my clothes so we can go. It was not my lucky day.

"Ken...er...Kim! Come with me! Quick!"

"What's up? What's wrong?" I was getting just a little sick of the fake falsetto I had affected.

"Lawrence Kunyak wants to see my dress up close!"

"Who's...?"

"He only owns one of the biggest bridal companies in the country! This is it!"

I steeled myself. If he was as big a muck-a-muck as Lori made him out to be, then the least I could do was meet him. He probably wanted to see the dress in more detail.

Trying to look my prettiest, I followed Lori over to the VIP table where Mr. Kunyak was sitting. He looked to be about seventy, and reminded me of every other CEO I had seen a picture of.

When he saw me, he smiled. "Ah, Ms Woolsey, thank you for coming," he bowed his head to me. "Your sister told me you were a little nervous."

"Ah, well, I'm not a professional model."

"I understand. In fact, that's the reason I wanted to see you."

Lori's face fell a bit. She had assumed that her dress was the only reason he wanted to see me. "I beg your pardon?" I asked, confused.

"Now don't get me wrong," continued the businessman after seeing Lori's worried look, "I was sold on the dress the moment I saw it." He winked at Lori. "I think I'll be able to offer you a satisfactory offer for the rights to the design."

Lori's bruised face broke into an enormous grin. "But," he said, turning back to me, "I'd also like to speak to you as well."

"What for?" I asked, nervously wringing my flowers.

"Ms Woolsey, do you have any idea how I turned a failing transmission repair shop into one of the largest and most successful bridal companies in the country?"

I honestly couldn't think of an answer. "I did it," he went on, "because I know women. A woman's wedding day is the most important day of her life, and when she prepares for that day, do you know what she'll be thinking about?"

"How beautiful she'll be?" I ventured.

"Wrong. She'll be thinking how imperfect she is." I guess the puzzlement showed on my face.

"Ms Woolsey, I can see that you are new to the fashion industry. It's an industry built on women's insecurity. When a woman prepares for the day when she'll be the center of attention, all she'll be able to focus on are her imperfections, perhaps she's a little overweight or very tall or whatever."

I was beginning to see where he was going with this. "And what do the bridal magazines do?" asked the bridal expert, "They bombard the young ladies with pictures of wafer-thin, anorexic, five-foot-eight sex pots. This just makes the future wives all the more insecure. It holds them to a standard they can't hope to meet."

He paused to take a sip of his gin and tonic. "That's why I was so impressed when I saw you. You're tall, you're athletic, and you'd make a perfect model. You are beautiful and yet you

have the kind of beauty the average woman feels that she can achieve. I hope I'm not offending you."

I had no idea how I should feel. Should I be happy that my beauty wasn't 'conventional' or should I be angry that he called me beautiful in the first place? How would a real woman react? Too confused to reason, I simply thanked him.

Mr. Kuniyak stretched back in his chair and faced Lori and myself. "So, I'd like to offer you a deal. Offer you both a deal."

"What sort of a deal?" asked Lori, chomping at the bit.

"In addition to purchasing the dress designs, I'd like you to help me with a show I'll be having in New York this summer. I'd like you, Lori, to design two or three more gowns, and I'd like you, Kim, to model them."

Nope, nothing doing! "I'm sorry, Mr. Kuniyak. I appreciate the offer, but I'm not a model and I only filled in this once."

"I'm sorry you feel that way. It does pay handsomely."

"I'm sure it does, but you can find someone else to model Lori's designs."

"I'm afraid not, it's an all or nothing offer."

I felt bad for Lori, but I had done more than enough for her already. "That's too bad. Thanks for the offer, but I'm not interested."

Mr. Kuniyak handed Lori a card. "I'll be in touch about your payment for these dresses soon. Thank you very much."

Finally, FINALLY, we went home. Mom drove, she couldn't stop talking about what a success the show had been, how Lori had finally made it into the fashion industry. I listened halfheartedly to mom's descriptions of how this was only the beginning of Lori's successes. All I could think about was getting out of this dress and trimming my hair. I was unaware of how quiet Lori was being.

It was a relief to get home and change. I wouldn't let Mom rest a bit when she got home. As soon as I was back in my male clothes, I insisted she give me a buzz cut. As my girlishly styled hair fell to the bathroom floor, I smiled to think how all this was behind me and I'd never have to dress like a girl again.

The next day, Lori packed up to go home. As she was leaving, she took me aside. "Ken thanks a lot for everything you did. I know I promised not to mention it again, but you really saved me back there. I have my first design contract and it's all thanks to you."

"No," I corrected, "it's all thanks to you. You designed the dress, all I was, was a coat hanger."

"Well, Mr. Kuniyak seemed to think of you as more. You know, about the show in New York..."

"Lori..." I said, warningly.

"Look, it'll only be for a week and I was just thinking..."

"Well you can stop thinking. Find another model and that's final."

"I understand, it'd be a lot to ask. Well," she smiled, sadly, "See ya!" Mom helped load her into the car and they sped off.

About a week later, I got the call. I was sitting at the kitchen table doing my homework when the phone rang. Mom answered it. "Yes?" she said into the receiver. "Um, I'll check. Just a minute." She seemed nervous.

"It's that Kuniyak guy," she whispered to me, "he wants to speak to Kim Woolsey!"

"Tell him I'm out!"

"Please, Ken, this may be about Lori's contract. Just talk to him."

Grumbling, I picked up the phone. "This is Kim," I said in my feminine voice.

"Miss Woolsey!" Kunyak boomed back, "Nice to hear from you!"

"Likewise," I twittered.

"Listen, the reason I'm calling is my idiot assistant lost your sister's number. You were the only one I could contact."

I quickly dictated Lori's number for him. "So," he continued, "have you given any more thought to my job offer?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid it's just not what I'm looking for. I'm no model, you see."

"Pity. You know the job pays \$10,000 for a week's work."

I nearly choked. "U.S. dollars?" I stammered.

"That's right. Are you sure I can't change your mind?"

"Er...could I call you tomorrow?"

"Certainly."

I hung up, then sat down. Ten thousand dollars! I'd never had more than five hundred in all my life! That would pay for more than a year of college! Dear God, what a windfall!

I related what Mr. Kunyak had told me to my mother. She seemed stunned. "Goodness, Ken, that is a lot of money. And for only a week's worth of work." It was obvious that she hoped I'd take the job.

"But I'd have to dress like a woman for a week! I mean a solid week, even when we weren't shooting."

"Yes, but wouldn't it be worth it? It'd be just like the last time, no one would know."

I was already counting the money. "I'll call Mr. Kunyak tomorrow. I guess I should tell Lori the good news."

When I told Lori I would agree to model, she insisted I drive out and talk to her in person. I found her in the living room of her apartment. She was rolling back and forth in her wheelchair, as if she were pacing.

"This is big, Ken," she said as I walked in the door, "You don't know how big."

"Oh, I have some idea." Like maybe ten grand!

"No, I mean this sort of thing is the pinnacle of the fashion world. Look..." she handed me a magazine.

It was some sort of fashion trade journal. I found the article she had indicated. 'Fashion Leaders Preparing for June Bridal Show.' The article went on to proclaim how this show would be the bridal exposition of the year.

"This is amazing. The opportunity of a lifetime," ranted Lori, almost to herself.

"Yeah, the opportunity of a lifetime," I repeated, thinking of the cash.

"But, Ken, I don't think you know what you're getting yourself into."

"Oh, I know it will be tougher than last time."

"That's an understatement. Ken, I think I need to explain something to you. Have a seat." I seated myself opposite her chair.

"If you agree to do this, you'll be surrounded by the chief fashion executives of this country for a week, a solid week. For that entire week, you can't let Ken out. Not even to sleep. For seven days you'd have to be Kim."

"I kind of figured on that. Don't worry, I can keep up the ruse."

"I know you'd be willing to do it, but could you pull it off?"

"How do you mean?"

"The local bridal show was one thing. It was just a couple of hours and you barely had to talk to anyone. This will be different. You'll be 'performing' without stop for days on end. You won't be able to make even a single mistake."

I almost backed out then, but the thought of a cool ten Gs held my tongue. "So what do you recommend?"

"When are you out of school?"

"Late May."

"Let's see, the show is in late June. If you agree to do this, I'd want you to live as Kim for about three weeks before the show, to avoid any screw ups."

"Three weeks? No way!"

"Then I won't agree. I'm sorry, Ken, but this is the big time. If you get caught, you'd be humiliated and I'd never work again. I know you'll be getting paid a lot for this. Wouldn't it be worth a month of living as Kimberly?"

I thought about it. College would be expensive and \$10,000 would go a long way towards defraying the costs. A lot of people didn't earn that much money in a year. Couldn't I sacrifice a month for financial security?

"OK, I'll do it, but I'm only doing this for the money, mind you. I have no aspirations to be a super model."

Lori smiled, "You have to be sure about this. Once we tell Mr. Kuniyak you agree, you won't be able to back out."

I gulped, "I'm sure."

"Great. Since I'm sure you won't want anyone you know to see you, I think it would be best if we moved to New York right after you graduate. You can be Kim in private there, and when it's all over, we'll move back."

The year wore on, and I graduated. Soon it was time for me to move to New York with Lori. Mom seemed nervous about the whole thing. She didn't think the plan was weird, per se. Like me, she looked on it from a financial point of view. Still, I could tell that the thought of her son going to New York to participate in a bridal show made her uneasy. But I had signed a contract, and there was no backing out now.

Lori, who had since had her casts removed and was already back to running two miles a day, had moved ahead of me. I booked an economy flight to New York and she met me at the airport.

Lori had rented a small, two-bedroom pad in the not-too-terribly-bad part of town. I tossed my suitcase on my bed to start unpacking, when my sister told me not to bother.

“What do you mean, don’t bother?”

“Look, Ken, I meant it when I said you’d have to spend this time as a woman all of this time. For the next three weeks, you are my sister. Femininity has to become second nature or they’ll see through you in a second.”

“Lori, I think you are taking this a little too far.”

“Ken, I’m not trying to do this to humiliate you. Believe it or not, I’m trying to save you from humiliation. I don’t want you to get caught.”

“Yeah, I guess that wouldn’t be good for your career if people found out your bridal model was your brother.”

“Well, yeah, but I’m more worried about you. You’re really sticking your neck out for me here. I’d hate myself if you ended up getting found out. That’s why I’m going to insist on full time girlhood from here on out.”

“Lori...” I continued to whine.

“Ken, I guess I can’t force you to do this. But believe me, it’s a choice between spending three weeks dressed like a girl with only your sister knowing or getting found out at the show.”

I grimaced, “So what do I have to do?”

“For starters, no boy clothes. Stick your suitcase in the closet. All you’ll need is your toothbrush.”

“So what am I supposed to wear?”

Lori showed me. She had been shopping, there was everything still in the bags from the many women’s boutiques she

had purchased them from, including two dozen packs of colorful cotton panties, one pair of women's sneakers, and three pairs of women's heels. She had six pairs of nylon hose, three pairs of clip-on earrings, various chains, bracelets, and necklaces, and six women's sweaters (two completely sleeveless). There was one basic skirt, one mastectomy bra (a more realistic simulated female chest) size 36C, and enough makeup, nail polish, and perfume to last me through the year.

I fingered the material nervously. "You really expect me to use all this?"

"Yes, and constantly. By the time of the exposition, being a woman has to be completely natural for you."

"I'm not sure I like the sound of that."

"Don't worry, I'm sure 30 seconds after it's over, you'll have forgotten all my training and hard work. Now get dressed, we're going to the mall."

"The mall?" I squeaked. I had hoped to avoid publicity as much as possible.

"Yes, I only got you what I knew would fit. We have a lot more shopping to do. Also, from now on, I want you to talk like a girl."

"Yes, Lori," I said in my best feminine voice and followed her into the bathroom.

"Take off your shirt, Kimberly. I want to see something."

"What did you call me?"

"C'mon, Kim."

Sighing, I complied. Lori frowned and with a pair of tweezers picked out my half dozen chest hairs. "Hey, do you know how long it took me to grow those back?"

Lori shot me a warning glance, and then she instructed me to shower and shave my legs and pits. I didn't object only because I knew that the hair wouldn't take too long to grow back. If anyone

noticed afterwards, I'd just say I had a case of heat rash and had to shave.

Soon I had finished. Lori instructed me to open a package that she had left on top of the toilet tank. "What is it?"

"Just open it."

I examined the garment I found. It was made of sturdy rubber and was shaped like a pair of panties. "This can't be what I think it is."

"If you think it's a device for hiding your maleness, then you are right."

"Where the hell did you find this?"

"From a catalog, it was designed for female impersonators..."

"I don't want to hear this!" Grunting and groaning, I forced myself into the thing. It was uncomfortable, but not as painful as I had expected. Looking at my reflection, all I could see was a small mound where my manhood had once been. Embarrassed, I slipped on a pair of yellow panties. Thank God, Lori had spared me the lacy kind. Next, I pulled on the hose. I was becoming a bit of an expert in that department. I then pulled on my skirt. Half the battle was over.

I then picked up the padded bra. The inserts were quite realistic, they felt a lot like real breasts. At least I assumed they did, I had never actually touched a pair.

Try as I could, I couldn't get them on straight. I finally had to call Lori in for help. Standing behind me, she held the bra to my bare chest and helped me pull my arms through the straps. Then she fastened me in back. "I look ridiculous."

"Here, pull this sweater on."

She handed me a yellow, sleeveless sweater and I pulled in on over my head.

"You know," she said, "Kunyak was right, you are rather pretty. Don't take that the wrong way. I mean, you look like a normal guy, but in a dress you have this female athlete look about

you. That's popular these days. I can see why Kunyak wanted you."

"Lucky me..."

"C'mon, aren't you the least bit flattered."

"Nope!"

"Not even a tiny bit? It's nothing to be ashamed about."

"Well...Jeez, I can't believe I'm going to tell you this, but I was a little proud of myself when he offered me so much money to model. I know I should have been insulted, but after all the work I went through, well, I guess it was nice to be recognized."

I glanced sideways at Lori, afraid that she would laugh at me, or even worse, act thrilled. "I know how you must feel," she said. You really did bust your ass to help me and you sure were rewarded. You know what I think?"

"What?"

"I think you are going to end up enjoying all this time as Kim."

"Please..."

"No, I'm serious. Haven't you ever wanted to understand women more?"

"Of course."

"Well, next month you'll have insights into the feminine psyche that will serve you well for years to come. All your future dates will wonder how you got to be so empathetic, but only you'll know why."

In spite of myself, I was interested. "Do you really think so?"

"Of course. For starters, you'll probably never rush a woman out of the bathroom again. And you'll be able to make semi-intelligent comments about their clothes and hair, subtle things that will drive the women wild. Women want to be understood and you're getting a crash-course in understanding."

"I wish I could share your optimism."

"Look, Kim, I know how hard it is for you not to complain right now, but just put it out of your head. There's no backing out now, but if you try to enjoy this, you might just find it's not so bad."

"I think you're exaggerating, but if you promise not to make fun of me, I'll at least try to have a good time. Hell, New York should be a blast, skirts or no."

"That's the attitude! Now let me make you up."

"Er, no... I probably should get the hang of this and I might as well start now."

Lori smiled a lovely smile and then did something she hadn't done for years. She leaned over and kissed me. "Good for you, little sister."

Finally, after about fifty false starts, my hair and makeup looked at least OK. I clipped on some earrings and grabbed one of Lori's purses. Balancing on my heels, I looked myself over. "What's the verdict?" I asked Lori.

"You tell me."

"I guess I can stop kidding myself. I don't really look like a drag queen. I might even say..."

"Yes?"

"That I looked, well, kind of cute." I looked to Lori for conformation.

"To say the least! Well, let's hit the town."

It was hard to remember everything as we took off down the street. How I was supposed to hold my head. How I was supposed to walk, not to scratch my groin. Lori elbowed me in my ribs. "Relax, you're doing great."

Finally, we entered a mall and went into the department store. I knew right away that I was in for an ordeal. As a man, I could simply grab a couple of shirts and a pair of jeans and I'd be done

clothes shopping for the season. Now that I was a 'woman', things would be different.

Lori dressed me from the bottom up, which meant we started with the shoes. It was hard to find shoes in my size (that was the area where Lori and I differed the most, size-wise), but I ended up leaving with a pair of attractive flats. Lori tried to convince me to buy another pair of heels, but I held fast. I couldn't imagine a more uncomfortable type of footwear. I did, however, buy some more socks and hose.

Next came the skirts. That's where Lori and I had the biggest debate. I was more comfortable with the conservative, floor-length kind, while Lori kept trying to get me to go shorter and shorter.

"You have such lovely legs, Kim. I don't know why you won't show them off."

Since we were in public, I refused to mention the true state of things, not even in a whisper. "I just don't like short skirts. What's wrong with that?"

Much to my horror, Lori called the saleslady over. She was a pretty, twenty something blonde. I could have died. "Don't you think my sister would look good in this?" she asked holding up a skirt that barely reached my knees.

"Oh, yes," the commissioned salesclerk gushed, "You have such athletic legs, do you work out?"

"A bit," I admitted. Not wishing to say more, I tried it on.

Lori and the salesclerk made me prance up and down in front of the mirror. I had to admit, I did look good, but I felt almost naked in the tiny garment. Finally, to avoid a protracted argument, I agreed to a couple of the shorter numbers. I'd be dressed as a bride in a few weeks, I couldn't exactly complain about looking like a sissy now. I did, however, draw the line at the leather mini.

Next came the dresses and tops. Since it was summer time, Lori took that as an excuse for me to show off as much flesh as

possible. Soon we had bags full of backless dresses, sleeveless blouses, and low-cut shirts.

As we were standing in a jewelry shop picking out a necklace and bracelet for me, I asked Lori why she was spending so much money on me.

“Well, you’ll be surprised how much clothes you’ll end up needing in the next couple of weeks, and it wouldn’t be fair for you to have to pay for it.”

“But it seems like such a waste. No one will be wearing any of this next month.”

“Oh, you’re almost my size. I’ll probably keep most of it.”

“That’s a relief. It would have been rather awkward for me to try to dispose of it.”

The clerk was wrapping up my jewelry. “Kim, I was just thinking about the gown you’re going to be wearing.”

“What about it?”

“We’ll, you’re going to be lovely in it, but I think you’d look even better if you wore earrings.”

“So I’ll wear earrings. We still have those clip-on ones.”

“No, dear, I mean earrings for pierced ears.”

“Nothing doing.”

“C’mon, Kim, the holes will heal up by the end of the summer. Lots of guys are wearing them these days.”

“Not me.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s too girlish.”

“Kim, you are standing there wearing a skirt, a woman’s sweater, and a bra, and you’re telling me you’re afraid of looking too girlish?” I left the store with pierced ears.

Later that afternoon we sat in the food court, sipping out our diet cokes. I wanted to take off my shoes and rub my feet. They ached something terrible

“Feet bothering you?” asked Lori.

“Yes! How do women stand to wear these things?”

“Because they look good. Women are expected to always look their best. You’ll realize that soon.”

“Well, I could use all the help I can get to look like a woman, but if I were a real woman, I sure as hell wouldn’t wear these!”

We were interrupted when a masculine voice said, “Hi ladies, mind if we join you?”

“Chuck!” squeaked Lori, happily. I regarded the pair of men that had just walked up. Chuck was tall, dark, and handsome, and about Lori’s age. I wondered if they were just friends or were dating.

“This is my friend, Patrick,” said Chuck, as they sat down. Patrick was tall, even taller than I was. He looked to be about twenty-one. He was handsome, even I could tell that. He had gray eyes, sandy blonde hair, and a good build.

“Pleased to meet you,” said Lori, “This is my sister, Kim. Kim, this is my friend Chuck.” We shook hands all around. I remembered at the last second to shake hands limply like a woman.

Soon we were all chatting. I found that Chuck and Lori had met at an art show the previous week. They had never dated, but I got the impression Chuck was building up to it.

At first I was too petrified to talk much, but after a while, I began to relax. Concentrating on my voice, I was soon enjoying everyone’s company. Patrick, who was my own age, was an interesting guy.

After a bit, Chuck said that they had a couple of things to do and had to go. “But hey,” he continued, “We’re both free tonight. Why don’t we all go see a movie?”

"We'd love to!" replied Lori.

I began to sweat. That sounded a lot like a double date. "Er, Lori? Don't we have that thing tonight?"

"What thing?" she asked with effected innocence.

"You know, the thing we have to go to!" If she didn't go along with this, I swore I would kill her.

"Oh, that thing!" she finally said, much to my relief. "Don't worry, that's not till tomorrow." Thanks, Lori!

I waited until we were back home before I blew up at her. "Do you think this is funny? Do you think this is some kind of joke?"

"Calm down. We're just some friends catching a flick."

"Friends my ass! You kind of like Chuck, right?"

"Hmmm, maybe..." she said, smiling.

"Well, then that's a date. And if you two are on a date, that means Patrick and I are as well."

"No it doesn't..."

"Lori, I'm a guy. If I were in his shoes, I'd sure think it was. I'm going to cancel."

"Why? Just come to the theater. It's not like we're going to an orgy or something."

"I can't believe we're talking like this. What am I supposed to do, make out with him?"

"Kim, have you ever been on a date with a woman and she wouldn't let you kiss her or even hold her hand?"

"Well, yes..." Many times, actually.

"There you go. He can't do anything if you don't let him. You seemed to get along as friends. Just keep it like that. Friends."

I glowered, but she had a point. I'd just keep it strictly buddies. If he tried to make a pass, I'd politely but firmly reject him. If he pressed the issue, I'd tell him I just wanted to be friends.

"Now do you want to shower first or should I?"

"I took a shower this morning."

Lori put her hands on her hips. "Kim, c'mon. I know that for you this is just a day out with some friends, but you could try to make an effort."

Lacking the energy to argue, I stumbled into the bathroom. At least this way, I'd know there'd be some hot water left. I scrubbed myself clean with Lori's girlie-smelling soap and stepped out of the shower. I wrapped a towel around my waist and looked at myself in the mirror. Amid the steam in the bathroom, my new earrings, and longish hair; it wasn't hard to imagine that it really was a woman's reflection staring back at me (at least from the shoulders up!). Wiping the mirror clean, I pondered whether or not to wear makeup.

I was shocked when Lori suddenly burst in. "Don't mind me, Kim. Just needed an aspirin." With that she was gone.

I was stunned. I hadn't locked the bathroom door because it never occurred to me that she'd come in like that. I could have been naked for all she knew! While we lived together we had always respected each other's privacy. What the hell had gotten into her?

Could it be that she was treating me like she would a sister? My God, we were just pretending, but here she was, walking in on my shower as if I really was a woman. I made a mental note to lock the door from then on.

Thinking back to the problem at hand, I wondered if I could get away with no makeup. If I wore makeup, it would look like I was making an extra effort to impress Patrick, but if I didn't, I'd look more masculine. I decided to wear a little, just to be on the safe side.

After coloring my cheeks and putting a touch of red on my lips, I pulled on a robe and went to decide what to wear. I searched through the bags of clothes we had purchased today until I found the least erotic outfit I could find. It was more like a business suit, an ankle-length gray skirt, with black pumps, dark hose, a white blouse, and a gray jacket. It looked more like something to wear to the office instead of a movie, and in the summer heat it was a little stifling. Still, it made me look frigid, which was the look I was after.

As Lori showered, I tried unsuccessfully to put my hair in a bun. I couldn't manage that so I settled on a simple ponytail.

Lori came out of the bathroom dressed to the nines and looking like a million bucks. "Kim," she said in a disappointed way, "are you trying to look like a spinster or what?"

"Yes, I am. I agreed to do this, don't press me."

At the appointed time, Lori drove us over to the theater. "Don't worry, Kim. It's just a few friends going to a movie."

Chuck and Patrick were waiting for us in front of the box office. They had both changed clothes and showered as well. "You look nice," Patrick told me when I greeted him. I could tell he meant it too; so much for my plan of turning him off with my clothes.

We took our seats in the dark, Lori and Chuck to my right, Patrick to my left. During the movie, Chuck casually draped his arm around Lori's shoulders. Luckily for me, Patrick wasn't that bold. Aside from an awkward and unsuccessful attempt to hold my hand, he kept to himself.

Finally, it was all over. I still felt a little disgusted with myself, Patrick had paid for my ticket and that was a date in my book. Matters weren't helped when Chuck gave Lori a more than friendly good night kiss. I looked over at Patrick afraid he would attempt the same thing. I could tell he was vacillating, wondering whether to go for it or not. I defused the situation by firmly shaking his hand and thanking him for a nice evening.

As we drove home, I grilled Lori about Chuck. "So what's up with you and this guy?"

"Oh, I dunno, he seems kind of sweet. Maybe something will come of it. So how about you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You and Patrick? Think you'll go out again?"

"Lori, what in the hell are you talking about?"

"I was just wondering. He seems to like you."

"Lori, will you get a grip? I know you want to treat me like a sister, but some things aren't going to change! Tonight was a one-time thing and it will not happen again! Understand?"

"Well, I just thought you might get bored and want someone to hang out with besides me."

"Lori, let's forget for a moment about my objections. How do you think he'd feel? He thinks he dated a girl. It wouldn't be fair for him to think that 'Kim' had a thing for him. This is the end."

Lori shrugged. I was beginning to worry. She certainly didn't take long to start thinking of me as her sister. Did she honestly think I would ever consider dating Patrick?

The time wore on. Patrick called me twice, but I blew him off. The bridal show was approaching and I began to get more and more nervous. What if I was found out? I could picture the tabloid headlines now: "Teenage boy tries to pass himself off as a Bride!" Jesus that would be all I needed.

Lori helped assuage my fears by plunging me even deeper into my femininity. She put me on a diet that caused me to lose about ten pounds by the time of the show. She forced me to use a depilatory spray that helped me remove all traces of my former body hair. She made me practice speaking, walking, and dressing like a girl for like two hours every day.

Not that she kept me in the apartment. After our 'date', she insisted that I accompany her around New York, many times in the company of her friends. While I made it clear that I would never do anything approaching a date again, I often found myself out on the town with a group of young people, many of them handsome guys.

It wasn't too bad, I guess. New York is a fun town and Lori's friends were good people. After I learned to relax, it really wasn't that traumatic chatting in a coffee shop or strolling down Broadway, even if I was decked out in a sundress and heels.

Of course, something would always jolt me back to earth. Sometimes it would be a construction worker whistling at me, or a waiter unconsciously talking to my chest instead of my eyes. Most disturbing, however, were the come-ons.

I guess I should have known I made an attractive woman. Lori, Mr. Kunyak, even my mom said so. I knew I was tall and leggy, and with my padding, well endowed, but I could never really believe that I was beautiful. Yet, almost on a daily basis, someone would ask me out.

At first it would be all I could do to keep from slapping the guy, but I kept my cool. In their eyes, I was a pretty young lady who they wanted to get to know better. I'd asked out many girls in my time, many of whom I hardly knew. I just learned to take a deep breath and tell them, 'No, thank you.'

Most of my 'suitsors' were nice guys who just wanted to take me out. Of course any woman will tell you that it's not always nice guys who ask you out. Once, a guy old enough to be my father asked me if I wanted to take a ride in his convertible. Another time, a greasy cook made a sleazy comment about the chicken breast sandwich that I had ordered. And once...

Jesus, this is an embarrassing story, but I guess I should tell it. I was in a bookstore and this kid, no older than twelve, came over and swatted my rear. Just like that! I swear, lady or not, I almost broke him over my knee.

“What’s up, sugar?” he leered. Dear God, did he honestly think even a real woman would be interested in a twerp like him?

“What do you say you and me get together?” he continued, in a pathetic attempt to sound macho. I was about to shove his ball cap down his throat when a better idea occurred to me.

I had pretty well mastered the art of the feminine voice. I still sounded rather husky and yet feminine, but now I dropped all pretense of girlishness.

“Why sure, you hot young thing!” I said, as deeply as I could. Instantly, he realized the truth. God, I still regret not having a camera to capture his expression.

I decided to talk to Lori about male attitudes. “Jesus, are we all really like that?” I was afraid that women viewed me the way I viewed the obnoxious kid.

“No, not all men are like that. Most guys are very goal driven and want to get us in the sack, but still manage to be nice. Of course, I don’t have to tell you that there can be some real cretins out there.”

“So what do I do?”

“The same thing you’ve been doing. If you like him, go out with him, if you don’t, then politely decline. If he’s an ass, tell him where he can go.”

Later, I felt a little weird about that conversation. Had I just had a talk about boys with my older sister? It was like Lori was giving me advice about dating men! I looked forward to the day when the only reminder about this experience was the money.

End of Book 1 OF 2

SEE “A DIFFERENT KIND OF BRIDE” CTV #50



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BEEN A SPIFFY
DRESSER...BUT
HIS WIFE HAD HER
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