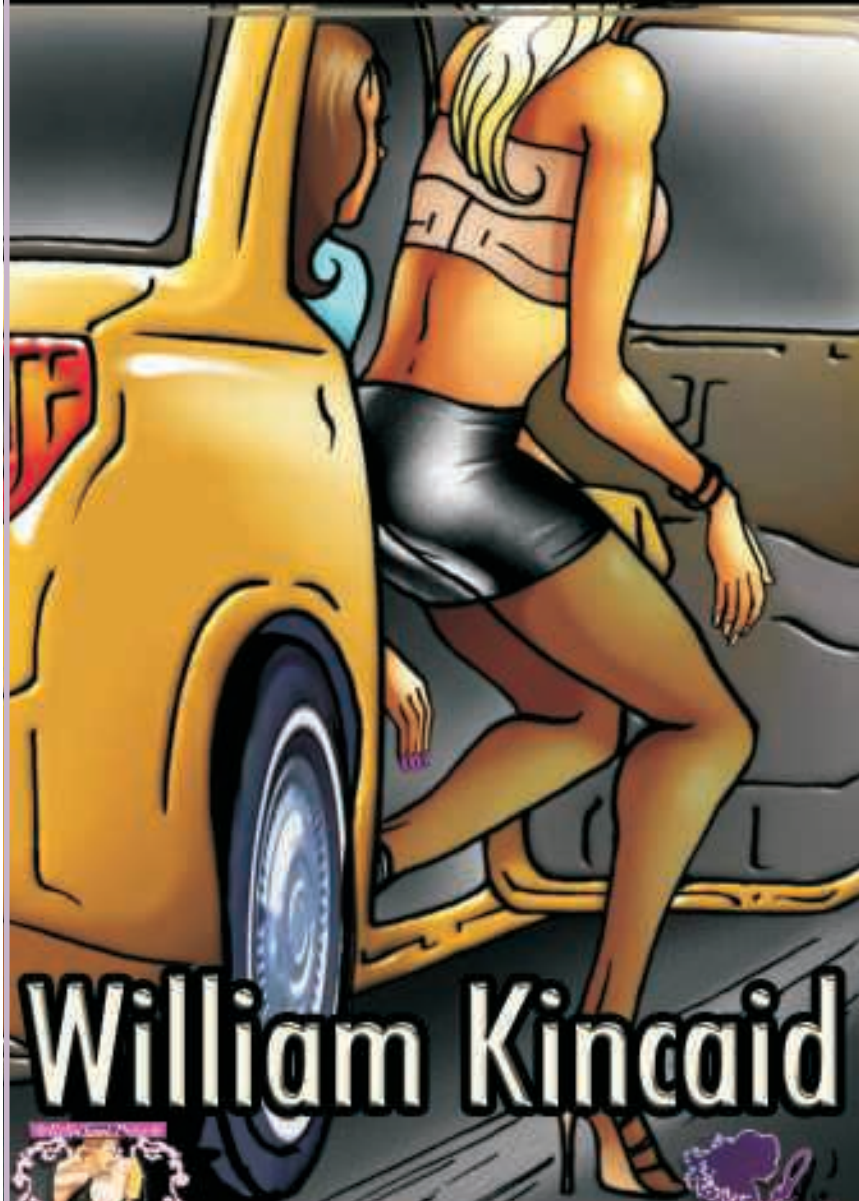


BFFs



William Kincaid



A "New Woman" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder. This material is intended for persons over the age of 18 only.



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BFFs

By William Kincaid

Mark had been inside Crystal for hours and had her prone beneath him in the hotel bed, brutally thrusting into the well-broken-in ass of his date. Crystal now started to release without even touching her own cock, a first that made her feel entirely like a woman.

“Fuck me, I’m your bitch. Fuck me harder,” she screamed, once more feeling herself cum into the now wet sheets of the hotel bed. “God yes!” This was the most incredible coupling of her life.

Finally, Mark shuddered and bucked, exploding into his condom. Crystal released one last time, feeling more like a woman than she had ever felt before. She let out a mindless shriek, then collapsed onto the pillow and into unconsciousness.

Awaking after an hour, Crystal made her way through the darkened hotel room into the bathroom, walking with a natural feminine sway and wiggle.

She truly was a woman on the inside, and Mark had brought it out like no other. Crystal's bedraggled image reflected brightly in the mirror. Her porn star lip gloss had failed sometime around the third hour of being impaled and her lipstick had been completely erased against her lover's domineering mouth. The black lace lining of Crystal's bustier had started to detach from the nylon body, revealing a corner of her left foam breast form. Her right earring was missing, lying underneath the coffee table where the session had begun, with Crystal sprawled over the table top, her ass beckoning her lover onward and inward. Although still intact, each of Crystal's stockings now bore deep runs.

"Mark is terrific. I think I have found the one," Crystal joyfully said to herself while sitting on the toilet. "This was awesome."

Crystal eagerly pranced to Mark who was now pulling on his pants to give him a warm embrace.

"This was pretty good, babe. I wish you would have gotten more into that blow job, though. You should watch some good porn." Mark put on his shoes and was at the door, with Crystal beside him, seeking reassurance.

"See you around, girl." Mark gave her a quick kiss and was gone.

Now alone, Crystal stared at the hotel door. Being a transgendered woman, she was often alone, stood up at the bar waiting for a date that had disappeared back in his closet, or all dolled up in her lingerie and makeup at her apartment, waiting for a knock that would never come. Being with Mark had nearly broken her back literally, and had figuratively. Crystal was tired of being alone. She needed a friend, a real

friend, and resolved that she would come out to Lindsay at lunch on Monday.

In the heart of Washington, D.C., Lindsay stood naked and alone in the living room of her fiancé's apartment. An inebriated William slept soundly in the bedroom, but Lindsay could not sleep and stared out the window at the late night traffic moving on the avenue below. William was a congressional legal aide and he had paraded Lindsay at a reception for the evening as his trophy. Lindsay was truly beautiful, but she had never recognized her full beauty through high school, college, and a fundamentalist Christian law school. Her fiancé had pursued her relentlessly and asked her to marry him after the completion of her second year of school. She was the ultimate accessory for moving up inside the Beltway, and Lindsay's shy sincerity had won over the crowd at a fundraiser several times. Congressman Jordan had remarked that Lindsay was better than any whore in loosening a donor's wallet, to William's obsequious laughter.

On Monday, Crystal had reverted back to her male self as Tim Hays, and now sat in front of a computer screen next to Lindsay Leigh Faulkner in a recently occupied office building in Fairfax County, Virginia. The two lawyers were at the very bottom of their profession, shit law, doing legal claims review. Floor managers monitored the lines of reviewers to make sure they stayed at their desk, looking at endless streams of documents for large-scale lawsuits with thousands of plaintiffs. The work was dull, uninspired, but it was lawyering. In the evenings, the two would continue to stare at computer screens looking for job postings to escape the quicksand in which their careers had become entrapped.

"Thai or Vietnamese?" Tim asked Lindsay. The two had bonded as survivors, watching their fellow appli-

cants fall from favor and disappear without so much as a whimper from HR. They were an entirely expendable asset and the firm had no loyalty to them. Their only benefits were flexible hours with good overtime.

“You and your pho with tripe.”

“Hey, the tendon is good too. Nothing like the bad parts of the cow.”

“Let’s do Mexican, I’m hungry for some fajitas,” Lindsay countered.

“I like the way you think.”

“So?” Lindsay asked, while scraping her grilled chicken into a tortilla. “How was your weekend? Did you meet some nice girl?”

“Can I tell you something, Lindsay? It’s not easy.”

Lindsay looked concerned. “Sure, of course.”

“I *am* the girl.”

“Huh?”

“I’m transgendered. I spent Friday night as a woman.” Tim was terrified he had jumped off a cliff as he observed Lindsay registering the news.

Lindsay laughed, “I don’t hear that one every day.”

“Every other day?”

“Nope, usually just on weekends at parties full of lobbyists. They usually come out to me over shrimp cocktails or bacon wrapped scallops.”

“So you’re okay with it.”

“You’re my friend. As long as you don’t steal my fiancé. On second thought, go for it. So do you have any pictures?”

Tim gave Lindsay his iPhone and she scrolled through numerous pictures of him at gay bars from New York to Washington, D.C.

“Very pretty,” Lindsay assessed as she continued to look at the photos. “You would give any woman a run for her money.”

“Sometimes I do. Plenty of guys say I am more of a woman than their wives or girlfriends.”

Lindsay looked alarmed for a second.

“Don’t worry, I have never slept with a congressional aide.”

“He would be incognito, and using a fake name,” Lindsay joked, “like Jay Hoover.”

Lindsay then paused at a series of point-of-view photos of Crystal sucking a massive cock. In the first she was poised at the head, then with her ruby lips wrapped around the shaft until finally, in the third picture, she had entirely engulfed the man’s member as he held her tightly by the back of the head. “Nope, that’s definitely not him. So do you have a girl’s name?”

“Crystal.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Crystal.” Lindsay extended her hand.

“Charmed,” Tim responded in a feminine voice, honed by four semesters of speech therapy at the university he attended.

Lindsay fished her iPhone from her purse and called their boss at work.

“Ron, this is Lindsay. I have to take Tim to the doctor, he is vomiting something awful, don’t eat at Casa del Monterrey. Could you clock us out?”

Tim heard a muffled response on the phone, and Lindsay ended the call.

“Come on Crystal, you and I are going shopping at the Tyson’s Corner mall. The claims will wait.”

“Shopping?”

“To get some dresses for New York. We are taking the train in two weeks. Let’s get something nice to wear. We will take Monday off as well and make the time up during the rest of the week.”

“And William?”

“I will tell him I am going with a girl from work. That’s not lying. He would never go to New York unless Congressman Jordan dragged him there. We will catch a couple of museums and have a picnic in Central Park. I could use some makeup tips too.”

“Oh my God,” Lindsay exclaimed as she looked in the makeup mirror on the counter of their hotel room in New York. Tim had booked a gay-friendly hotel in which he could comfortably transition; immediately upon arrival, he had stepped out of his male persona as he would step out of his blue jeans and became Crystal. Crystal then helped Lindsay with her makeup, giving her a sultry and seductive look with smoky eyes and inviting lips.

Lindsay had never felt so alluring in her life. She winked and suggestively licked and puckered her

lips. Intently studying her reflection, the girl felt frightening urges that she had been repressing her entire life. The product of a strict religious upbringing, Lindsay had remained a virgin into law school, and was deflowered by William only two years ago, in her last semester. Even now, sex made her feel guilty as she was not yet married to the fledgling Washington power broker. With her parents' strongest approval, Lindsay had become increasingly plugged into the kabuki theater of Washington politics where every gesture, every word, was analyzed for hidden meaning, and any association with the wrong type could lead to a permanent banishment.

Crystal was definitely the wrong type as she emerged from a taxi cab in the late spring night of Manhattan wearing a tight-fitting tangerine colored dress with nude high heeled sandals. Lindsay sported a short black dress with sheer sleeves and a sheer panel that revealed the tops of her luscious breasts. The girls beamed at the bouncers at the drag club, who leered back, and strutted on their stilettos to the hostess, who cheerfully sat them near the cabaret style stage, for all to see and lust after.

"You know, Crystal, I don't see you as Tim right now. I just see you as a woman."

"You mean it?" Crystal beseeched Lindsay, hoping to have won her approval.

"Yes. So are you going to become a woman? This is the happiest I have ever seen you. You are positively glowing."

Crystal bit her lipstick-covered lip. "I want to, but it's not as easy as it looks. I don't have millions of dollars for facial feminization surgery or an adoring entourage in Malibu."

“You have something better, you have a friend.”

“And my parents? They would freak.”

“We can’t live our lives for our parents.”

“What about your fiancé? I am sure he will approve of you hanging around with a transsexual.”

“I don’t want to think about him right now. I want to have fun in New York. See those guys over there.”

“But there are three of them.”

“Yes, I can count,” Lindsay said, as she gave them a come hither wave.

Despite her earlier bravado, Lindsay now felt frightened as she gazed at the delectable morsel she had become in the mirror. Back in the hotel room, she and Crystal had donned matching purple bustiers with black lace trim, accompanied by lace chokers, G-strings and stockings. Crystal had struggled to hide her maleness behind the tiny patch of nylon, but so far it remained out of sight. The girls had touched up their makeup and attached false eyelashes for a more dramatic look. Crystal replaced her wig with one that had an up-do, and helped Lindsay adopt a similar style. She sensed her friend’s nervousness, however, and fished two small plastic wrapped glass bottles from her suitcase.

“For butterflies before the main event,” Crystal grinned.

“What is that?”

“Nitrate, it is used for heart patients, it lowers your blood pressure temporarily, and loosens your inhibitions. I get it from the adult shops. You become an in-

stant slut. It's non-addictive. I use it only for sex, and it eases the shock of penetration in my ass."

"An instant slut?"

"You already look the part. You're white hot. Those guys should eat you up."

"OK."

Crystal tore the wrappers off, then twisted the bottle top with a noticeable release of pressure.

"Nothing like the fresh stuff."

She placed a bottle under Lindsay's right nostril.

"Seal off your other nostril and inhale the fumes. Take about three good hits."

Lindsay did as instructed and felt as if she had been hit by a baseball bat. The Jungle Juice coursing through her body brought the earlier feelings she had sensed to the fore and completely erased everything else. Lindsay was reduced to her basest essence, a slut who craved sex. God, she wanted to be fucked. God, she wanted cock. She snatched the bottle from Crystal and took another series of hits, fanning the fires of her crazed wantonness.

The three men, Australian tourists in their thirties on vacation in the Big Apple, had quietly waited on the deck of an open air courtyard sharing a bottle of Jamesons while they sat on the lounge chairs, giving the girls time to change into something more comfortable. Their hearts leapt when they saw the lingerie-clad young ladies emerge from their hotel room with fires burning in their eyes.

The girls set down their small bottles on a patio table, along with a small bottle of lubricant, an absolute necessity for Crystal. They then posed provocatively before the men, still sitting on the lounge chairs.

“Turn around, dolly,” one man ordered Crystal, who willingly obeyed. Lindsay mimicked her friend, presenting her bare ass to the other two men. The girls then pivoted and advanced to the men, who started to fondle their nylon-clad legs. They both sighed in pleasure, and one of the men started delicately rubbing Lindsay’s g-string covered crotch, feeling the lips of her recently shaved pussy respond and the small beads of moisture that had begun to form on the fabric.

“Hmmm.”

“You are a nasty little tart, aren’t you?”

“HmMMMM.”

“Say it.”

“I’m a nasty little tart.”

The men then pulled the aroused young women next to them on the lounge chairs. Crystal and her paramour started to suck face while he fondled her ass and probed her crack with his finger. Sandwiched between her two Aussies, Lindsay started rubbing their crotches, feeling the steel bars of their manhood entrapped in their khakis. One man pulled her breasts from the bustier, so that they stood proudly in the moonlight. The other man bent over and started suckling on the jutting nipples to Lindsay’s intense moans.

“One day you will have titties like your friend,” Crystal’s man confidently declared.

“You think so?”

“I know so. I will bet you one hundred dollars American that in two years’ time you will have a set of breasts as good as your friend. Just send me a selfie when you do.”

Crystal smiled. “Will do, mate.”

She then went to retrieve her lubricant from the table, but the man followed her and pushed her down at the waist so that she leaned against the table top, bracing herself for the coming assault. The man took the bottle of lubricant and covered his fingers.

“Ooohh,” Crystal gasped as he penetrated her rosebud with his large index finger.

“Just relax girlie, we have all night. We are going to put on a show for the guests.”

The courtyard was rectangular with one side taken up by a waterfall flanked by an ivy-covered wall and the opposite end an enclosed hot tub which a gay couple had entered and began their own lovemaking. The third side was bordered by a wooden fence, but the fourth side opened up to a covered walkway in which the patrons of the hotel constantly went back and forth from the elevator to their rooms. Seeing the amorous group in the darkened courtyard, the patrons would smile and laugh to themselves. This is exactly why they visited New York City. You didn’t see this in Indianapolis.

After fondling and suckling Lindsay's breasts for some time, the men wanted their own satisfaction. They pushed Lindsay to her knees, unzipped their khakis, and shoved their massively engorged cocks in the girl's face. An intimidated Lindsay became frightened once more, her eyes wide with consternation.

"I have never sucked a cock before. I don't know if I can do this."

Unperturbed, one of the men stood up, went to the table, took the bottle of nitrate, and placed it under the hesitant girl's nose.

"Luckily, you have a solution, there, you little bitch. It's a good thing you had planned for this contingency."

Lindsay inhaled the chemicals and felt her mind once again drown in a tidal wave of lust. She reveled at the feelings and took a second series of hits which propelled her onto the waiting shaft. The man still stood above her and pushed her head up and down against his mate's manhood, then set a rhythm in which Lindsay became a cock swallowing bobblehead.

"For an oral virgin, she sucks like a whore," the lucky man joked to his companion. The man pulled his iPhone from his pocket and started filming an enraptured Lindsay. "This is the highlight of my trip. We have a regular porn star here."

A half hour later, with her man gleefully thrusting deep inside her, Crystal's attention went to Lindsay, now riding the other man cowgirl style on the lounge chair after swallowing his mate's cum. Crystal smiled, she had finally found a true friend to share her existence.

Blissfully riding her Aussie, Lindsay looked up for a second into the covered walkway and saw a well-dressed older man with a trimmed white beard accompanied by a young hustler making their way back to his hotel room. Lindsay and the man's eyes met for an instant. He smiled and winked at her before he turned in for the night and his own illicit tryst.

"Wake up girl," Lindsay cheerfully called to a sleeping Crystal, the next morning. "I brought us Dunkin' Donuts. I know you don't drink coffee but I got you a milk and orange juice."

"What time is it?" Crystal moaned.

"It's 7:30. It's been daylight for over an hour. Come on, girl."

Crystal dragged herself from the warm cocoon of the bed. The mattress was so comfortable, but four hours of sleep wasn't enough.

"We only have a few days here. Get up."

Crystal yawned and dragged her bedraggled self to the table, still in her bustier from last night. The two had been deposited by the three Aussies in near-comas in their hotel room with a well-satisfied "good day, ladies."

Crystal started to recover her strength from the milk and donuts and went to shower. She emerged from the bathroom and started to put on her male attire. It would much be easier to venture out in New York as a man in the daylight.

"Oh no," Lindsay shouted. "I didn't come up to New York to hang with some guy, especially one that doesn't really exist. Get in your dress, Crystal Hays. I'll be waiting out in the courtyard for you."

Savoring the morning while munching her donuts and sipping at her coffee, Lindsay sat on a lounge chair and read from her Bible, a habit borne of long years that she would not break. Last night was amazing, she thought. She was so glad that Crystal had revealed herself to her from the shell of the persona named Tim. Lindsay would help extinguish Tim and release Crystal to live full-time. With those thoughts in mind she looked up and saw the older gentleman now with an even broader grin pass by her in the company of the handsome young hustler. He gave Lindsay another wink and a smile.

“Welcome to New York, have a great day.”

Wearing long summer dresses with stylish sandals, the two girls had an incredible day. The May sun was warm and beautiful, but not overpowering. The young ladies went to the Museum of Natural History and thrilled at the exhibits and after her initial nervousness, Crystal relaxed and accepted herself as just another woman enjoying a day at the museum. Crystal’s nervousness returned when confronted with a long line of women, waiting to use the ladies room and looked wistfully at the almost empty men’s room.

“You would think us women would think of some way of actually becoming efficient,” she joked to herself while waiting.

Noticing her friend’s bemusement, Lindsay smiled, “Welcome to the sorority, girlfriend.”

At three, the two sat out on the steps of the museum, next to the equestrian statue of Theodore Roosevelt, eating a veritable feast of lamb gyros and chicken kebabs, with fruit smoothies from the street vendors.

“So I take it after last night, your engagement is over. You are giving up a lot.”

“And gaining something far more valuable, my freedom. I never had that.”

“Yes, but you know the line in the song about freedom, nothing left to lose.”

“I never felt so alive and free as I did last night. My whole life was buttoned-down morality for the sake of appearance. I got it from my parents, from my school, and now from my fiancé and his family. I would have to be the sweet little China doll for the rest of my life.”

“Well, it was pretty damn amazing. I’m glad I could share it with you.”

“Not only that. I was lonely. Lonely in my own relationship for Gosh sake. My fiancé didn’t see me as a friend or companion, or even lover. I was just a piece of property to claim, or an accessory, like his laptop.”

“I know all about loneliness. I have been that way for over ten years. My family doesn’t know about Crystal, and the guys I meet are never interested in more than a good fuck. Now I don’t mind a good fuck, but I want more.”

“What do you want, Crystal Hays?”

Crystal thought about Lindsay’s question for almost thirty seconds, until she focused on an attractive mother, pushing a baby carriage through the throng of the museum crowd, one of the many young mothers that Crystal had observed that day at the museum.

“I want that,” Crystal gestured to the mother. “I want to be like that. I want to be somebody’s wife and a mommy.”

Lindsay smiled, “All in good time. I’m sure that will happen and you have a friend, now, who will help make it happen. But right now it’s time for another good fuck.”

Crystal rose from the steps, threw her food wrappers in the trash, and adjusted her sling bag around her shoulder.

“I like the way you think. Come on. Let’s go shopping. We need a different wardrobe for the place I have in mind.”

“You go, girl.”

The girls emerged from a taxi cab wearing short skirts, tube tops, and high-heeled sandals, with provocative makeup and large hoop earrings. That was the beauty of New York, a girl could find anything in an afternoon of shopping. Although catering to a transgendered clientele, this club was far different than the one they had visited the night before. Instead of a cabaret-style drag show, transsexual strippers gyrated from poles and filled their G-strings with cash. In the darkened perimeter of the main room, and in side rooms off the main floor, transgendered girls gave men lap dances. The men were different as well, mostly street types from the city rather than visiting tourists. Taking one look at the carnality, both Crystal and Lindsay licked their lips as they strutted to the bar. They had come to the right spot and knew a score was imminent.



Feeling a man fondle her panty-clad bottom while she stood at the bar ordering a drink, Crystal laughed to herself that the men here had a wonderful, non-verbal approach to introductions. Lindsay felt similarly, but in her case her gentleman felt her bare ass; she had gone commando in the spirit of the evening.

The girls turned to face their fondlers and their arousal became tangible. The tattooed muscles bulged on Luis and Ramon's arms. They both wore leather vests and sunglasses, and had neatly trimmed beards. They did not smile, but stared holes into the two girls.

"So do your daddies know where you are?"

"Cute," Crystal responded. "I hope you aren't out past curfew or your mom will be pissed, either that or your parole officer."

Luis, the man confronting Crystal smiled, while a scowling Ramon leaned over and gave Lindsay a deep probing kiss on the lips, bringing forth an intense response from the aroused girl.

While Lindsay and Ramon swapped spit, Luis preferred to engage Crystal in conversation.

"So are you two girls students or something?"

"We're undercover DEA agents."

"Yeah right."

"Actually, we're lawyers, and we have heard all the jokes, so don't try and be funny."

"I have a friend who can use a good lawyer."

Crystal laughed, "I hope he was arrested in Virginia. That is where we are both licensed."

"So what brings you to New York?"

"We are taking in the culture. We plan to hit the Met tomorrow. I always wanted to see it."

"Never been."

"You should go sometime. They have an incredible Greco-Roman section. You'll love it."

"Maybe I will go sometime, but not tonight." Luis grasped Crystal's hand and led her to an easy chair that alternated between brightness and shadow from the strobe lights on the stage. Luis sat while Crystal stood before him.

"You are one tasty TV dinner. You should be one of those strippers up on stage."

"You really think so?" Crystal asked hopefully, seeking reassurance.

Luis then pulled Crystal into his lap and kissed the back of her neck.

"I could marry a bitch like you, have you strip for me every night with your brand new tits and then have you suck my cock. Even have you take me to museums." Luis laughed at the last suggestion, then pulled Crystal's legs wide apart with his strong, rough hands and fondled the inside of her thighs, underneath her short skirt. Crystal whimpered and surrendered entirely to the moment, submitting to her man. She was Luis's woman.

Lindsay was Ramon's woman as he fingered her in the taxi cab back to the hotel while both she and

Crystal lustfully kissed their men. They strutted through the lobby of the hotel on their heels with their men fondling their asses and up the ramp to the elevator to the knowing smiles of the concierges on late duty. The reputation of the girls had spread to the staff.

Tonight, Crystal and Lindsay were too aroused to waste time changing into something sexier. They already looked like street walkers. Once in the courtyard, Lindsay stripped out of her miniskirt and tube top. Wearing nothing but her heels and earrings, she leapt into her lover's waiting arms. She held him by the shoulders as he released his massive member from his trousers and gasped as he entered her.

“You are just a dumb fuckin’ hoe, aren’t you?”

“Oh yeah. Give this fuckin’ hoe your big cock.”

After lubricating Luis's cock, Crystal straddled him and impaled herself on his spear. She then began riding him, lifting herself by the legs and falling back in bliss. Luis started to time his thrusts with her bouncing until he penetrated deep into her ass. Crystal had never had back-to-back nights like this with two different men and the hunger in her ass was overwhelming her, turning her into a savage. She screamed and shrieked to the condescending laughter of Luis, who was thoroughly enjoying watching the girl lose herself on his large, thick cock.

Lindsay was equally lost, thrusting against Ramon. She was lucid enough, however, to notice the same man from last night and this morning appear in the covered walkway with another handsome, well-dressed hustler. Their eyes caught, and this time Lindsay initiated the wink and lewdly licked her lips before focusing again on Ramon's cock thrusting inside her.

“They showered us with cash,” Crystal announced the next morning, seeing the bed covered with hundreds of dollar bills. “They must have thrown a thousand dollars at us.”

“But we didn’t say we were charging them. We never said we were actual whores,” Lindsay answered, sounding distressed and embarrassed.

“We didn’t, but they wanted to show us that we were whores as far as they were concerned. Guys like that, it makes them think they can buy us. I had another guy do that. I told him I didn’t want his money after sex, but he kept insisting I take it. He wanted me to be his whore. Finally I took it to shut him up. I felt like shit afterwards, thinking my ass could be bought. As far as he was concerned, I was a whore as he didn’t contact me for three months until he was horny again.”

“But I don’t *want* to be seen as a whore. Not even by guys we will never see again. I just wanted to cut loose and have some fun.”

“Is that how you really feel?”

“Yes.”

“Good. We are in agreement. We are not whores if we don’t spend the money. Get dressed, I have an idea.” Crystal started to gather the small bills together while Lindsay went into the shower.

Two hours later, two demure-looking young ladies wearing long summer dresses and sandals sat in a pew at the Unitarian Church in Midtown Manhattan, prior to going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In

the middle of the service, the collection plates were passed among the congregants, and Crystal dropped in a two-inch thick wad of bills. The usher looked perplexed when Crystal reassured him, "I was once a drug dealer, but I found Buddha."

The service concluded and the girls made their way to the exit, which was starting to crowd, including a man with a very familiar face, Lindsay noticed. The man caught a glimpse of Lindsay, and she froze, terrified.

The man warmly smiled and marched directly over to Lindsay, offering his hand, which she meekly took in her own.

"The courtyard exhibitionist, I like your style. So what's your name, young lady?"

"Lindsay, Lindsay Faulkner," Lindsay muttered, looking at the floor in shame.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Lindsay. I had to ask your name. I have this feeling our paths will cross again."

"Courtyard, that's your new nickname," Crystal laughed.

Crystal loved the Metropolitan museum, and traced the history of western civilization from the Minoans to the fall of the Western Roman Empire. She stared intently at the red and black female figures on the Grecian urns and started to feel a kinship with the women from eons past. Crystal also noticed the male anatomy on both types of urns, fully developed in marble, and felt the familiar hunger.

Later that afternoon, Crystal and Lindsay feasted over a shared platter at an Ethiopian restaurant in

Hell's Kitchen, which piled beef and lamb stew on top of a flat, spongy bread that also served as the plate.

"This food is incredible. This weekend was incredible. I don't remember when I had so much fun," Lindsay exclaimed, while wiping her mouth.

"I'll say the same thing."

"So, do you want to go back to being a guy?"

"I'm not ready to be a subject of ridicule at the firm. I don't need that."

"So did you like being a woman all weekend?"

"I was thrilled."

"Exactly, thrilled. And if I could snap my fingers and you would become a woman, right here and now, with no negative consequences from your family or work, would you do it, Crystal?"

Crystal hesitated and thought for a minute, reaching for a large helping of collards and stewed beef and drowning it down with a Meta, an Ethiopian brewed beer.

"Yes. Yes, I would."

Lindsay snapped her fingers.

"Fine, you have made your decision, the rest is just details. We will work them out together."

"Yeah, but the details are where everything gets messy."

“Are you crazy?” William thundered at Lindsay when she told him that she wanted to call off the engagement.

“No, it’s how I feel.”

“Well, that is just fucking stupid. Here I give you a twenty thousand-dollar rock, and a chance for the big time, and you are turning it all down. Sometimes I don’t understand you. Why don’t you come back tomorrow, when your head is on straight? You always get this way, all full of shit about romance. You are throwing away everything.”

“I’m sorry, William, but I have made up my mind. Here is your engagement ring back. I am flattered that you gave it to me, but I have decided to look elsewhere for my happiness.”

Lindsay anticipated that she would have to move out promptly, and had packed her bags in advance. She was certain that William would have thrown her clothing and pictures out the window in a fit of rage. She drove to Tim’s apartment; he gladly took her in. Tim was on a monthly lease and they would start apartment hunting together after work the next evening. He had already identified several two-bedroom apartments near work that would be suitable for their needs.

Lindsay’s parents called her that evening and berated her for dumping William and walking away from all that he had to offer. They expressed their deep disappointment with their daughter, and their embarrassment at her decision. William’s parents were livid, they reported. They did not want to see their daughter until she changed her mind and went back to William. Someone or something at that law firm she was working at was probably corrupting her mind.

For Crystal, the momentum she had gained and her resolve quickly vanished in the inertia of doing daily claims reviews back at the firm as Tim. Moreover, she was frightened about coming out to her parents, and would not consider transitioning yet. Lindsay, however, convinced Tim to start hormone therapy and laser hair removal, so that when he actually gave himself the courage to become who he was meant to be, it would go smoother.

The two friends continued to scan the legal job announcements and submit their application packages, helping each other review their writing samples and fine tune their resumes for greater impact, but the actions still reeked of futility. Tim did have an interview at a very respectable Washington D.C. firm, but did not think that he bonded with the attorneys who conducted the meeting, and continued to slog away at sending out his applications into what seemed like a black hole.

The two did find a very suitable apartment, which was not too overpriced, and put a security deposit to hold it for the first of the month. That week they shopped at IKEA to obtain inexpensive furniture for the new place.

“You actually have as good a taste in furniture as you do in woman’s clothing, the place should look really nice. Crystal and I should be able to have some really fun parties there.”

Crystal seemed very remote at the time, but one night Tim returned from a doctor’s appointment with a tube with a gel that was infused with hormones administered by a roller ball. To Lindsay’s rapt attention, he removed his blazer, dress shirt, and T-shirt, and applied the gel underneath his armpit.

“I am so proud of you,” she said, and went to give Tim a hug.

“Don’t come any closer, if you come in contact with this it might make your breasts bigger. You would be confused for a porn star.”

William kept badgering Lindsay to reconsider, as he was certain she had not thought this through. He sent her texts all day and called her in the evenings. Sometimes, when it seemed like he wanted to be reasonable, she would make the mistake of answering his phone calls, which quickly degenerated into a shouting match that Lindsay did not have the confidence to terminate by simply ending the call.

One night, Lindsay had a reprieve and was searching through legal job postings when she came upon a winner for Crystal. The Transgender Legal Institute, an NGO operating out of Washington D.C. was searching for an associate attorney with one year’s legal experience and a GPA which Tim had far surpassed in law school. Naturally, transgendered applicants were given a hiring preference, acknowledging how difficult it was for them to obtain positions at traditional law firms, which were still very hidebound in their hiring practices.

“How about this one?” Lindsay asked. “It would be perfect for you and we could still keep the apartment.”

“They are looking for someone who has already transitioned, I’m sure. Look at me, I don’t even have anything close to breasts yet.”

“Don’t blow this one off. It is your perfect opportunity to work as Crystal. I am sure the applicant pool for transgendered lawyers is pretty thin, and you easily meet their criteria.”

“I’m not yet ready to do that. It’s not the right time. I have seen plenty of postings like this but I am sure they don’t want to see some guy, saying that in his heart of hearts that he is actually a woman.”

“I think you are way wrong on this one. I think you are just afraid to take the next step. Like I said, I am here as your friend. We are in this together.”

“Let me think about it, the deadline isn’t until next month.”

“OK, but to be honest, I think you have been thinking about this for years. Maybe it’s time to come down off your damn fence. I don’t think that sitting on it is doing you any good anymore.”

Stung by her family’s abandonment, irritated by William’s constant stalking, disheartened by Tim’s timidity about transitioning to Crystal, and demoralized by daily looking at a computer screen of legal documents, Lindsay needed to get away from Fairfax County and its environs. She wanted to breathe life back into Crystal as well and see the vibrant woman whose company she so enjoyed. Tim had let his leg and armpit hair start to grow back in so one night, when he was watching television, she tossed him a bottle of Neet, which he favored as it did not give him any rash or bumps on his skin.

“We need to get a change of scenery for the weekend. I booked a bed and breakfast for us at Winchester for Friday and Saturday nights. I found it on an LGBT travel site and the place is listed as transgender friendly. I do not want to see you as Tim for the entire weekend. We will do regular girl stuff together, visiting the historic sites, hiking in the mountains, and just enjoying ourselves. We had such a terrific time together in New York City and I am sure

we can do it again at this place. You have got to move forward as Crystal.”

Inspired by Lindsay’s actions, Tim immediately went into the shower to begin the tedious procedure of removing his body hair. Luckily it had not grown out too much since the escapade in New York, but it would take some time. With his legs covered in a thick white goo, Tim thought about how lucky he was to have found a friend like Lindsay who encouraged his being transgendered. He was so right to have come out to her that one day at lunch, and had a strange feeling that somehow his ultimate destiny lay a mere hour and a half away in the Shenandoah Valley.

“McMahon sighs and damns the eyes of anyone that looks upon Fanette the Fair, with golden hair, the fairest maid in Warrenton,” Crystal recited the doggerel to Lindsay as they drove on I-66 through the small Virginia city on their way to Winchester.

“What was that from?” Lindsay asked.

“From a man’s painful and unrequited love during the Civil War, I wish I could have been Fanette. I would have paid attention. She would have never found a better man as long as she lived.”

Crystal loved driving on I-66, escaping the artificial environment of Fairfax County and the attitude of Washington, D.C. The girls were dressed in shorts, running shoes, and T-shirts. Crystal had gone to REI the day after she had removed the hair from her legs to purchase these items. That was a first, as her wardrobe before consisted almost entirely of dresses. Lindsay was continuing to have a positive effect on her. The girls planned on walking through downtown Winchester near the head of the Shenandoah Valley in the morning, then hiking up Massanutten Moun-

tain in the afternoon. A girl had to exercise to keep her figure.

“He is checking you out, here you always tell me that a girl has to pay attention and you are completely oblivious.” The girls were touring the upstairs of the Civil War museum in the old courthouse in Winchester, and Crystal evidently had been paying too much attention to the exhibits.

“Are you sure?”

“He has been staring at you since the gift shop.”

“Are you sure he’s not staring at you there, Courtyard?”

“Oh no, babe, he wants you.”

Crystal took a long and probing look at the cute young man in shorts and a T-shirt. He glanced in her direction, but when he saw her looking back, he shyly turned away. Crystal was very familiar with the type, in fact she *was* that type as a guy, nerd. A nerd had made his interest known, and predictably would let Crystal slip through his fingers.

“He’s a nerd.”

“You’re a nerd. It’s perfect. You’ll never let a better man slip away there, Fanette.”

“So you want me to go all Jedi, grab hold of Nerdlinger over there and rock his world. Because you know that puts me in the elite of the elite, a nerd queen.”

“Yep. It’s about time you woman up.”

“So you want me to become his woman, to give him confidence as the bad girl with the heart of gold that he always wanted in his wildest dreams, then get married, adopt two kids, have a dog and a cat, maybe even a bunny rabbit and a groundhog in the back bushes, then happily grow old together.”

“It’s your destiny, hon. I’m so proud of you.”

“You know, nerd’s hearts are incredibly tender. Once I make the first step, I’ll have committed to this for life, as his woman. No turning back.”

“You’ll have earned those breasts that you keep talking about.”

“And you? Can you take the social stigma of your best friend being a nerd queen? It’s far worse than being friends with a transwoman.”

“I’ll be beside you every step of the way.”

“Then forward ho.” Crystal led a charge as inexorable as the cavalry charge that broke the Confederate line outside the city in 1864, the first time the Union Army in Virginia ever did anything really right. Crystal waited until her future betrothed stood by a massive fifteen-inch iron cannonball from a Union monitor in the James River Squadron. She sidled up to him with Lindsay guarding her flank.

“I love big balls.”

The young man looked as if the cannonball had exploded, scattering his brains and other miscellaneous body parts all over the second floor of the exhibit.

Crystal smiled broadly, “I’m Crystal, Crystal Hays, and this is my friend, Lindsay Faulkner.” Lindsay smiled and waved in an over-effected manner.

The young man still couldn’t talk, so Crystal continued. “You are going to meet me at 8:00 tonight at the British pub. Wear some nice slacks and a polo shirt. I think you would look great in a navy blue.” Crystal turned to Lindsay.

“Yep, navy blue. Dark and strong, distinguished.”

“Exactly.”

“Now tomorrow Lindsay and I are going canoeing down the Shenandoah. We could use a good man to help paddle while she soaks up the rays. She is so frail and helpless in a canoe.”

“I’m amazed that I can even hold a paddle. I might break a nail,” Lindsay said in her best southern belle accent.

“Now your name is?”

“Peter. Peter Emory.”

“Well, Peter Emory, this is your miracle, and we are your angels. But like the saying goes, don’t look your gift angel in the crotch. I’m transgender, but for somebody like you, I will gladly transition. In fact, I’m planning on it.” Crystal’s voice cracked. Her bravado had completely vanished, and she looked both hopeful and fearful. “I hope to see you at 8:00 but if you are not there, I understand completely.”

As Crystal turned away, Peter Emory noticed her mascara glistening.

As readily discerned, Peter Emory was a nerd, hence his being alone in the Civil War museum in Winchester on a Saturday morning. Date night had come and gone as usual with him reading in his Alexandria apartment. During the week, Peter worked as a computer hacker for a clandestine government agency, a job he excelled at. He had served three years in the military as a crypto technician, but even the military could not erase his essential kindness or shyness around women.

Peter's parents lived in Warrenton. His father, Douglas Emory, a West Pointer, had retired as an army colonel on a horse farm with a house originally built in 1835, but with numerous additions and upgrades since then. He was proud of Peter's military service which included a tour in Afghanistan, but he was worried whether he would ever find the right woman and settle down. Peter was such a nice, earnest, and intelligent young man and it pained him and his wife, Patricia Emory, to still see their son alone. Evidently, girls dismissed nice guys at first glance and moved on.

Peter walked in silence through the remainder of the exhibit, then sat on a park bench for over an hour, trying to make his decision. The one thing he couldn't shake out of his mind was the fact that the transgender girl, Crystal, looked ready to cry when she turned away.

Usually fashionably late, Crystal was on pins and needles as she watched a half-hour tick away before 8:00. Used to being stood up, she figured Peter Emory would be a no-show as well and it pained her. She never wanted a man to show up on a date as she wanted him. She let out a painful laugh, she was acting just like a sentimental young girl. Lindsay was right, dating Peter would make her a fully-fledged woman. This is exactly what she hoped for.

Wearing her killer tangerine short dress and nude high-heeled sandal ensemble, Crystal sat at a table on the terrace outside the British restaurant. She wanted to be with Peter where all the world could see. If he was uncomfortable being seen in public with a transgendered woman, she would know soon enough. Crystal was exceptionally passable but her armor was not perfect and occasionally she would be read. Looking, dressing, acting, and especially speaking feminine, however, gave her breathing room so that people let her slide. They usually accepted her as she presented herself.

Scanning the crowd that strolled by in the soft light of the summer evening, Crystal finally saw Peter approach and breathed a sigh of relief. He was here, as promised. Her relief turned to anguish when she saw that the young man approaching through the crowd was not Peter, but someone with similar looks. Crystal looked at her watch. 8:05. Peter wasn't coming.

“You look amazing.”

Crystal's heart leapt. She wasn't familiar with Peter's voice as he did not say much in their initial conversation but she turned around to find Peter Emory standing behind her with a summer bouquet he had purchased at the local farmer's market. He had approached from her rear and observed her for a minute before steeling up the courage to make his move.

“They are beautiful, how thoughtful.”

Peter pulled the chair out for Crystal, who sat back, relieved and happy. She noticed that he wore a dark green polo shirt.

“Not navy blue, I see.”

“The girl at Banana Republic said green is better, more noticeable.”

“The girl is right, I need to calibrate my hues better. Still, dark and strong. Very nice.”

“I love your dress.”

“Thank you,” Crystal beamed.

“So why the British restaurant?”

“Well, I must confess that I am the one person in the universe who actually likes British cuisine and is not just here for the beer. My family lived in England for a year and I went to school there and developed a taste for steak and kidney pies, bangers and mash, and haggis.”

“Haggis?”

“The tastiest parts of the sheep are the worst.”

Peter laughed. “It must have been really nice living in England.”

“It was an adjustment, especially the schools, but my family went to a castle, battlefield, cathedral, or Roman or Iron Age ruin every weekend. We lived in Sussex, and there was so much to see; Pevensey, Arundel, Lewes. We also went fishing a lot in this Ouse River estuary near our house.”

“Sounds amazing.”

“Yep. England was also where I was first confronted with actually being transgendered. They had drag clubs in London and I wished that I could be one of the performers. Some were incredibly sexy and feminine. It just resonated so much within me.”

“So you must be very close with your family.”

“I am but I’m sure that will change. I don’t know how they will deal with the real me and I don’t think you were what they had in mind as the person I would take home to meet them.”

Peter laughed, “Mom and Dad always wanted me to take home a nice girl.”

“I’m not a nice girl.”

“No?”

Crystal slid her foot along Peter’s leg, causing him to lurch as if he had been bit by a snake. He breathed heavily for a second, then recovered his composure in time to order for the two of them.

Crystal had read on the internet about nerd dating and the message was clear: be sexual and you will have your man for life. She knew that she was just the woman to reel in Peter. For dessert she ordered a blackberry pie with vanilla ice cream a la mode, and made a point of provocatively licking the residual ice cream off her spoon. She carelessly got some on her lips but licked the dollop off all the while staring into Peter’s eyes. He was captivated by the young woman.

After an after-dinner liqueur, Peter drove Crystal back to the bed and breakfast where she and Lindsay were staying for the weekend. The sun had set behind the Appalachians but it still emanated a lavender and peach glow that outlined the mountain range, and gave a serene feel to the Shenandoah Valley.

“So with your other dates, what do you like to do?”

“I like to be fucked,” Crystal joyfully announced. Upon hearing that news, Peter depressed the accelerator until they nearly ran into the back of the car they were following.

“Oh. My. God. It is like I am dating the prom queen who I have wanted all semester.”

“It was her loss.”

“And us?”

“Usually we would be going to my room right now but you, Peter Emory are special. We are not going to fuck until the third date. Tonight counts as the first date and tomorrow on the Shenandoah will count as the second date. if you are game. I hope you can make it. I will buy some special lingerie for the third date.”

“For real?” Peter looked hopefully at Crystal.

“For real, I’m a lawyer, I know how to draw up a binding contract. Give me your phone number. I will text my promise to give you an incredible session of carnality that will weld our hearts and souls together for eternity.”

“I think you are an amazing woman, Crystal Hays.”

“You inspire me like no other man before you, Peter Emory.”

The next morning Peter greeted Crystal and Lindsay at the bed and breakfast with a shy but hopeful smile on his face and a second bouquet of flowers for Crystal, who gave him a deep hug and whispered in his ear, “Date number two and counting.” Peter had also purchased a bag of peaches at the farmer’s market, some chocolate bars, and bot-

bles of over-priced sparkling cider to share on the canoe trip down the Shenandoah.

Once underway, Lindsay stripped off her shirt to reveal a string bikini underneath. “Be a doll, Peter, and rub some suntan lotion on my back and shoulders. You need practice for when Crystal can do the same thing with a string bikini. Hmm, he has such a nice touch. I envy you your Date Number Three,” Lindsay declared.

“Thanks, Courtyard.”

“Courtyard?” Peter asked.

“All in due time, I promise you will find out.”

“He better not,” Lindsay shouted and threw a peach at her friend’s back.

“Thanks again, Courtyard. I was getting hungry.”

To Peter, canoeing down the Shenandoah was like riding a gondola through the Grand Canal at Venice, he felt so lucky. Here he was, having been without a girlfriend on Friday night, and now two hot chicks, one of whom was incredibly interested in him, were sharing a canoe ride on a gorgeous summer day. Crystal and Lindsay engaged him in conversation and sincerely listened to what he had to say. He especially liked to steer the conversation to Crystal, to get her to talk about her year spent in the British Isles. He loved Medieval History like any good nerd and could talk at length with her about castle architecture or the Baron’s Revolt.

Observing the interaction of the two from her comfortable perch in the middle of the canoe, Lindsay could not have been happier for Crystal, and was now certain that surgery was in her future to aug-

ment her hormone regimen. She had found the man that was bringing forth her womanhood in a far more beautiful bloom than either had thought possible.

The day grew hot as the trio continued their downriver trip up the Shenandoah Valley, passing by meadows and tree-covered mountains, and shooting through the small rapids over rock shelves. Relaxed by the friendly conversation, Peter decided to take it up a notch. In the next, large, slow moving pool between rapids, he leaned over in the back seat until he capsized the canoe into the cool, clear, refreshing water to the delighted screams of the girls.

“You asshole,” Crystal playfully yelled.

The trio dragged the swamped canoe onto the shoreline and dumped the water out. A soaked Crystal with water dripping in a trail behind her strutted to Peter and gave him a warm embrace. “Nice move, darling. I can’t wait until Date Number Three.”

Crystal then gave him a kiss on the cheek.

Peter’s morale was sky high as he drove eastward on I-66 back towards his apartment in Alexandria. He cranked his stereo to the maximum volume, and surged through the traffic. Crystal was right, he had his miracle.

“A girl? You spent the weekend with a girl? Are you shitting me?” Harold asked Peter back at his apartment. A group of Peter’s friends gathered at Peter and his roommate Andrew’s place every Sunday to eat takeout and watch old movies such as Star Wars. None of them would mention specific women as part of their weekends, but they vigorously debated the merits of Natalie Portman vs. Kate Hudson.

Peter pulled out his Samsung and scrolled to a picture of Crystal smiling and enjoying an after-dinner liqueur at the British restaurant and tossed it to Harold.

“Oh my God. I can’t believe she is interested in you. What is her problem, does she have a penis or something?”

Peter felt a tightness in his chest, but he had made his decision when Crystal announced her secret. He saw the fear and hope on her face and heard it in the trembling of her voice. His heart reached out to her at the museum. In a way, they were very much alike. It was time to confront it head on.

“Yes, she does in fact. She is transgendered and is starting to transition to living as a woman. As far as I am concerned, she is all woman. She sure acts like one. So do you have a problem with that?”

“Uh, no,” Harold meekly responded.

Jeff, another friend, looked at the picture of Crystal in her tangerine dress at the restaurant and was impressed with her confident femininity.

“So the secret to being a woman is believing you are a woman,” Jeff said channeling a kung-fu master tortoise.

“I would do her,” Michael announced, after the phone was passed to him.

“Well, she’s mine and what we do is none of your business, dude.”

“Must be really nice saying a girl like that is yours,” Jeff confirmed.

Lying in bed after the guests left, Andrew could not sleep. He did not add anything to the conversation about Crystal, as he didn't want to voice his true opinion. Andrew thought transsexuals were mentally ill, like schizophrenics, and was not about to voice his favor of dating this "Crystal." He would talk about it with Peter when he was alone. He didn't want to see him make a mistake with his life. As he fell asleep, the last thing Andrew remembered, however, was the broad smile of his best friend when he talked about his weekend.

"So why are you doing this?" Andrew asked while the two ate Chinese food watching TV on Monday night.

"Because I like her," Peter growled.

"But she is a freak. She's not even real."

"She seemed real enough."

"How?"

"Those were real tears she had when she told me she was transgendered. It's no wonder she has them, the way you are carrying on about a woman I am interested in. I would recommend you knock it off or you will be looking for a new roommate. We have a date Saturday night and I have never been more excited. That is fucking real."

"I'm sorry."

"No you're not. But someday you will say you're sorry and mean it."

Crystal bought a new dress for Saturday night, a playful black flower print with a flared, short skirt and taffeta petticoat. Her trusty black suede high



heeled sandals completed the look. Crystal wanted the night to be perfect and never felt more nervous before a date. Peter had booked a Bed and Breakfast on Virginia's Northern Neck. They would go out for a seafood dinner and then spend the night together.

"I'm scared, Courtyard," Crystal cried to Lindsay as she emerged from her bedroom all ready to go but with her mascara glistening. "This is the first time I ever wanted a guy for real and I don't want to blow this for me or him."

Lindsay gave Crystal a warm, sisterly embrace, "I'm glad you're scared. I am so proud of you, as it shows you really care, and are not just doing this as a joke. Let Peter see that you are scared, it will bring out the very best in him."

"So how did you pick the name Crystal?" Peter asked on the way to the seafood restaurant.

"I didn't pick it, my first boyfriend gave me it. He worked for years at a drag club and taught me the works, makeup, fashion, taking it like a woman."

"So you enjoy that."

"I will tonight."

Peter choked up for a second. "So what happened between the two of you?"

"We broke up, he wanted me to be his gay boyfriend that did drag on occasion, but I wanted to be his girlfriend. That's a situation that is bound to diverge."

"So do you want to be *my* girlfriend?"

Crystal hesitated and when she spoke her voice broke, “Yes, yes I do. You don’t know how much.”

Sensing Crystal’s reaction, Peter took his right hand from the steering wheel and tenderly grasped Crystal’s well-manicured left hand. “If it’s anything like how I feel, it’s a hell of a lot.”

Fortunately for the burgeoning lovers, steamed blue crabs could not be eaten with drama or decorum so that their hopes and fears were replaced with green slime and melted butter running up their hands as they worked through an immense pile on their dinner table. Both laughed and started to relax as they savored the succulent lumps of backfin and beer.

After the last claw was picked through and the last shell fragment piled high, Crystal gave out a deep, relaxed sigh and saw Peter smiling back.

“My lipstick must look terrible,” she offered.

“It looks fine.”

“Yeah right.” She pulled out her compact mirror, and true to prediction the lipstick was almost smeared away by the mountain of crabs. She reapplied her dark raspberry lipstick and rubbed her lips together.

“Now, is that more kissable?”

Peter smiled, “Oh yeah.”

“Well?”

Peter didn’t get the hint, being too nice a guy.

“Well?” Crystal demanded and leaned over her plate.

Finally clued in, Peter leaned over himself and their lips met. In the slightest and most delicate touch, two hearts were joined as one.

“Wow,” Peter exclaimed as he entered the bed and breakfast room to find Crystal in a pink bustier with white stockings and white lace gloves. He had sat outside for half an hour waiting for her to change, and she fulfilled every fantasy that he could conjure up during the wait. An incredibly hot, sexually knowledgeable young woman was interested in him and he never felt happier or more complete.

Crystal had prepared a sound track on a continuous loop that she played on her Pill: John Mellencamp’s “Ain’t Even Done with the Night” and “Jack and Diane”, “Happy Talk” from South Pacific, “Miracles” from Jefferson Starship, and “Sweet, Sweet Fantasy”.

Duly inspired, Crystal threw herself entirely at Peter in a way that she had never done before. This time she was making love and giving from the heart to please another person that she cared deeply about. In doing so, the persona known as Tim died entirely, and Crystal rushed to fill the vacuum. Love had been the impetus that triumphed over the fears she had about living the way she was supposed to. Spooning with Peter in a lover’s embrace, mascara-stained tears of joy quietly dripped down her face, staining the bed sheets while Peter quietly breathed in the moonlight streaming onto the bed. Crystal then felt drops of moisture on her bare shoulder.

“I love you, Peter.”

“I love you, Crystal.”

“You have to do a victory lap, Darling. It’s a must,” Crystal insisted. She now wore a denim skirt, nude high-heeled sandals, a lace blouse and sunglasses. The two had driven along the Chesapeake Bay, holding hands and shyly smiling at each other. Now the two were stocking up at a seafood market for an extra special Sunday movie night before they returned to Alexandria. “You need to parade me as your trophy, like a gold medal or World Series ring. You’ll be legend.”

Peter noticed that every male over the age of twelve was gawking at his girlfriend’s soft, smooth legs and he never felt prouder. Yes, Crystal was right, he did want to show her off to his friends.

“Welcome, how are you tonight? I’m Crystal, Peter’s girlfriend,” Crystal beamed to Jeff, the first guest. She had changed into distressed blue jeans, but still looked great as she led Jeff to the dining room table, which unquestionably had a woman’s influence. Instead of either a bag of Cheetos or tortilla chips with salsa and Budweiser for the bord des affaires, the candlelit table featured steamed clams and crab cakes, fried croaker chips, corn on the cob, and key lime pie.

“Please, don’t be shy and help yourself to as much as you want. We have Margaritas, banana daiquiris in the kitchen and Stella Artois. We wanted to be festive tonight. Can I get you something from there?”

“A daiquiri please.”

“Certainly,” Crystal beamed, “it’s nice to meet you, Jeff.”

Crystal cheerfully repeated the spiel with all the guests, playing the part of the gracious hostess to the hilt. She owed that to Peter, and sensed that she

would be further and further in his debt with each passing day and was fully prepared to pay it.

The crowd was quiet when the movie started, their inner sanctum now infiltrated by an unfamiliar feminine presence. In order to counter her feminizing influence, Crystal had suggested to Peter that they select a hyper-masculine movie to start off the night; *El Dorado*, featuring John Wayne with Robert Mitchum, playing himself as the drunken sheriff, and a young James Caan as the eager but poor shooting rookie.

Crystal made a point of snuggling next to Peter on the couch, while his friends looked at him with envy mixed with pride that a friend had finally scored.

Inspired by the Duke, the young men felt emboldened enough to start their usual banter, which Crystal joined in. Then, with John Wayne and Robert Mitchum limping up the street after vanquishing the bad guys, Crystal put in a new movie, *Pretty Woman*.

“A chick flick, here it goes. First we eat something nice, now a chick flick. What is going to happen next? A dress code. Shirt and ties?” Harold complained.

“You would look great in a tie and I suspect you can use some tips on how to talk to a woman. Don’t worry, we will regress to even lower than before soon enough with *Die Hard* or *Out for Justice* and we will all be gnawing meat from the bones on the floor and communicating by grunts, like in the Paleolithic.”

“You will be gnawing meat from the bones?”

“Looks like we will be having ribs sometime, huh, darling?” Crystal looked at Peter.

The margaritas, daiquiris and Belgian beer had tranquilized the guests enough so that they enjoyed Pretty Woman and soon began the male innuendo, with which Crystal had no problem.

The night concluded with the guests all stating to Crystal how nice it was that she could be there, and wishing Peter and her a good week. Andrew, who had helped with the dinner preparation and again sat as a silent observer, had already grown to like Crystal. He saw a surge of confidence in his roommate and when he looked at the two of them together on the couch, he just saw a guy and his girl.

“I was wrong about Crystal,” he said to Peter after all the guests had left. “I am glad you found her. She is pretty cool. I’m sorry.”

“And she is a screamer,” Peter joked. “That’s for sure.”

“Awesome,” Andrew responded, giving his roommate the high five.

Tim cried for the five hours from his parent’s home back to his apartment in Fairfax County. He had come out to his family as transgendered and his father had gone ballistic with shock and shame. What would everybody think? How could he be so ungrateful as to bring this into the family? How could he really think he was a woman on the inside? A dress and makeup didn’t make a woman, DNA did.

“They don’t want to see me again, Lindsay. I am welcome at their home at any time, but only if I stop being transgendered. As if that were even possible.”

“So what do you want to do? For real, and don’t lie to yourself.”

“Become Peter’s wife someday and be a mother to our adopted children, like I said at the Natural History museum.”

“Your parents will come around with time and effort. You are too valuable to them, and they love you too much to let you go. In the meantime, I think you have now cut one of your last ties with living as a guy. From what I see, there is only one more to go.”

“I guess it’s time to move forward.”

“Yep. I’m glad the time has finally come.”

That week Crystal submitted her resume to the Transgender Legal Institute. At least she could tell them she had started to transition. They had to understand that.

The estrangement from her parents, blossoming relationship with Peter, and the applying for the job at the institute combined to give Crystal immense confidence, and a permanent presence. Even when dressed as a man after a day’s work at the firm, Crystal requested that Lindsay address her as Crystal, or just as “girl”. She moved with a feminine sway and planned for the time that she would have breast augmentation and facial feminization surgery. Crystal now saw “Tim” as just an expedient disguise that was hopefully very temporary. She was incredibly grateful for her friendship with Lindsay who was bringing her off the fence on the right side of the field.

“I wish you would stop talking to William,” Crystal confronted Lindsay one night. “You said you wanted your freedom but you surrender it all the time by talking to him. You made your decision, now go forward with it.”

Stunned by Crystal's candor, Lindsay pondered her words. "You're right, girl. Looks like it's time for both of us to move forward, together, like we keep saying."

Crystal wore a leopard print bodysuit with matching pumps for the Sunday movie night, which featured 10,000 B.C. and a stunning Raquel Welch. She had prepared three racks of barbecued ribs from Aldi, beans, cole slaw, and cornbread. The second movie was Out for Justice, and the guys whooped and hollered at the stripper scenes as they gnawed the residual meat off the rib bones. Equilibrium had once again returned to the apartment.

Later that night, an exhausted Crystal lay in Peter's arms after an episode of torrid sex. Their love had created a deep foundation of feeling which brought forth intense emotion during their coupling. Both lovers wanted to give of themselves fully.

"I think Andrew is a nice guy, once you get to know him. I think he and Lindsay could make a good couple. She would rock his world in a good way, in the same way somebody rocked yours."

Peter rolled Crystal onto her stomach, and she felt his hardening manhood probe at her rosebud. "You mean the same way I am going to rock yours?"

"Oh yes," she whimpered.

"Andrew? But he's a nerd."

"Duuhh. Exactly my point. You started this and you see how happy I am with Peter. You said you would be beside me every step up the way, well maybe you could do it by double dating. You are the exact kind of bad girl he needs in his life, Courtyard. Trust me on this one."

“OK. One date won’t kill me.”

Dinner with Andrew had gone well enough. Andrew was polite and appeared sincerely interested in Lindsay. He seemed reserved, however, and didn’t really open up to her that much. Now on the ride home, Andrew was completely silent. Lindsay sensed that he had a deep-seated anger and bitterness about dating, as he had been overlooked or dismissed too many times by women in the past. She then remembered Crystal’s statement about her being the bad girl that Andrew needed.

Lindsay pondered the pronouncement that she was now a bad girl. She had never anticipated ever bearing that moniker, growing up in a strict and aggressive fundamentalist family and church. She knew some hypocritical friends who wore their purity on their sleeves and regarded anal and oral sex as exempt from their abstinence pledges, but Lindsay had stuck to her guns and her morals.

Meeting Crystal had changed all that. In one intense and memorable weekend, Lindsay had gone from being the proper young fiancé of a Congressional aide to becoming a wanton party girl who enjoyed sex for its own right. She also learned that being a slut didn’t really change who she was. She had been a true and loyal friend to Crystal, who was on the verge of bursting through the cocoon of Tim as a beautiful butterfly. She also envied Crystal her new boyfriend, Peter, and their white hot relationship. Crystal’s confident sensuousness shone like a beacon that guided the two lovers forward.

“I could be that with Andrew. Crystal doesn’t call me Courtyard for nothing,” Lindsay thought to herself.

“Drive onto I-95 and head south,” Lindsay ordered.

“Why?”

“You’ll see.”

In twenty minutes, Andrew was driving on the interstate and was starting to clear the traffic congestion.

“I don’t think I can wait until the third date with Andrew, he and I both need it now,” Lindsay thought as she leaned over, put her head in Andrew’s lap and unzipped his khakis.

Lindsay snuggled with Andrew in the back of Peter’s car two weeks later as the two couples fought their way through the Friday night, Eastern Shore traffic to Rehobeth Beach, a gay resort town in Delaware. The couples had booked a hotel suite for the weekend. Here, Crystal could comfortably venture out in swimwear onto the beach without fear of condemnation.

“She really is a screamer,” Andrew joked to himself while body surfing with Peter in the light surf of the Atlantic while looking back on the beach toward the two sunbathing girls. The tired couples had a seafood dinner at a local restaurant, then turned in for the night. Crystal’s shrieking loudly carried from her and Peter’s bedroom. Lindsay was quieter, more focused, preferring to talk dirty to drive Andrew to new levels of arousal. Early the next morning, the couples shared breakfast on the verandah overlooking the ocean, and now Peter and Andrew were frolicking in the ocean.

“Our future husbands seem to be having a good time,” Lindsay remarked, happily observing the two young men through her sunglasses.

“Oh yeah,” Crystal confirmed. She sat in a chair, wearing a beach skirt to cover her bikini, happily getting a woman’s tan line on her torso. She was uncomfortable getting into the water, however, as she still wore a wig and had on makeup to complete her feminine appearance.

Lindsay scanned the beach; there were relatively few beachgoers at this time of the morning, and all were same sex couples. The time was ripe.

She arose from her beach chair and sexily strutted to the two men in the ocean, engaging them in a brief conversation while gesturing towards Crystal and the other beachgoers. The trio advanced towards Crystal, sitting in her chair, when Lindsay sidled up to her best friend and snatched her wig off, placing it on the beach blanket.

“I have seen you without your wig and you rock the short look, but now it’s time for your baptism as a woman.”

Crystal was terrified, her makeup was not waterproof and would wash off, plus she was not yet ready to rock the short look, having relied on her wig as a soldier would rely on his helmet for protection in the trenches.

Undismayed, Lindsay grasped Crystal’s hand and wrenched her from the chair and started to drag her to the water’s edge, ignoring Crystal’s pleas. Crystal planted her feet in the sand and halted Lindsay from dragging her to the ocean. Peter came at her from behind, lifted his girlfriend in his arms and carried her to the ocean, kicking and screaming. He entered the

ocean, and marched into the waves until he was almost to his waist. He then unceremoniously dumped his beloved into the warm waters of the Atlantic.

“You bastard!” Crystal shouted, emerging from the water, and attempted to march towards shore. Lindsay and Andrew confronted her and again lifted her up and dropped her into an advancing wave. Crystal’s makeup was all but washed off the second time she emerged, dripping from her baptism, but this time she laughed joyously. She walked out of the surf, removed her sodden beach skirt, placed it on the sand, and returned to the waves, feeling liberated from her fears.

Crystal then dove headfirst into an advancing breaker and swam for ten feet underwater, feeling her body relax and unwind. For over an hour the group played in the ocean, body surfing with the waves until they petered out in the sand. Crystal discovered that her falsies, tightly bound in her bikini top, seemed to provide her with extra buoyancy which allowed her to bodysurf the farthest.

Crystal continued the short look that evening when the couples went to a beach club for dinner. The girls wore short, tight dresses and heels, while the men had on khakis, docksiders, and polo shirts, having had the sense to listen to their girlfriends when it came to fashion. Dinner was overpriced, as expected, but very good, and the girls started to relax after downing two very generous cocktails served in umbrella festooned glasses.

After a slice of key lime pie for dessert, Crystal suggested that the group move to the deck overlooking the ocean, where a band was playing; numerous couples, mostly gay, but some straight, were dancing. Being nerds, she suspected that Peter and Andrew couldn’t dance but hopefully could learn.

Crystal leaned against the rail, feeling the nightly ocean breeze in her face, and gazing at the moon shining a silver streak on the darkened waters of the Atlantic. Finally, she got the song she was waiting for, Otis Day and the Knights' "Ooh Shama Lama", a slow tune.

"Come on, darling," she urged Peter, "anybody can dance to a slow song." Andrew and Lindsay followed suit and followed their friends into the crowd.

Peter followed her lead and held Crystal in the small of her back while walking with her on the dance floor. He could not have felt any happier at the moment when he looked into her eyes and saw a deeply-held love reflected at him.

The song concluded and the couples returned to their perch on the railing, with the women leaning against their men, enjoying their presence.

"I'm going to the bar to get another cocktail," Crystal announced and strutted towards the bar on the deck in her heels, making sure everybody noticed her. After getting her ostentatiously accessorized cocktail, she passed by the band and mentioned something to the leader at the conclusion of the current song.

Two songs later, Crystal's request was started up by the band. It was "Dancin' in the Moonlight" and again Crystal led Peter onto the dance floor. This time Peter started to playfully fondle Crystal's butt with a shy smile. She grinned broadly and at the end of the dance gave him a glancing kiss on the lips.

"I think I'm ready to go back to the hotel room and slip into something more comfortable," Crystal cooed.

The suit Crystal now tried on was anything but comfortable. She had received a phone call the Monday after the weekend at Rehobeth Beach from the Transgender Legal Institute to arrange an interview and she was preparing for her debut into the professional world. Crystal wore a navy blue blazer over a white blouse, with a matching skirt that came almost to her knee, and navy blue pumps. She carried a black Timbuktu bag over her shoulder with her resume and legal writing samples.

“Impressive,” Lindsay announced. “Just be yourself, your interviewer is pulling for you as well. You rock that short look, babe.”

“Mrs. Bonham will see you now,” a young, perky transsexual legal assistant announced to Crystal as she nervously sat in the lobby, with butterflies clanging away at her insides.

“Thank you,” Crystal smiled.

Mrs. Bonham was a petite blonde transsexual in her early thirties with a fierce look in her eyes. Crystal wished in time she could be like her. She had obviously been on hormones for many years, had an ample bosom, and spoke immaculately from excellent speech therapy. If Crystal had not known otherwise, she would have mistaken her entirely for a genetic woman.

“Crystal Hays? Were you a performer?”

“No. An ex-boyfriend gave me that name. But my last name really is Hays.”

“My girl’s name was originally St. Cyr.”

“Like the stripper?”

“Yep. But my Mom put a stop to that immediately the day I came out to her.”

“My mom doesn’t want to talk to me anymore.”

“I am sorry to hear that. It must be tough.”

“You try to manage, and for the record, I am trying to become Crystal Emory.”

“So what does young Mr. Emory do, if I may be so bold?”

“He was a crypto-tech in the army, now he is a computer guy at Langley.”

“Crypto tech? Computers? Langley? He is probably reading Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump’s Ashley Madison account history as we speak. So what you are telling me is you are dating a nerd,” Mrs. Bonham derisively stated the last word.

“I am working on him.”

“Working on him? So that makes you a nerd queen.”

Crystal had to confront this unexpected attack. She paused. “Yes. Yes it does,” Crystal confidently replied.

“That is awesome,” Mrs. Bonham announced. “A nerd queen. I’ll give you all the credit in the world for being one. I didn’t even have the guts to do that. But my husband is not what you expect a lawyer to be married to.” Mrs. Bonham gestured to a picture of her with a large and scruffy waterman holding a Red Drum.

“Is that a drum?”

“Oh yeah. You know your fish.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Crystal, I like you already and I am going to be honest with you, as I don’t like to play games. You had the guts to stand up for yourself and I am very impressed. If you can’t advocate for yourself, you will have a tough time advocating for our clients. How is the interviewing going?”

“I am getting interviews, but no offers. I suspect I am not interviewing well.”

“Are you interviewing as Crystal or as somebody else?”

“Somebody else.”

“Well, I think that is your problem. You are not even interviewing as the person you really are. I am sure the rejections are discouraging but you are interviewing at a disadvantage. The interviewers can see through you and you probably come across as artificial, trying to appear to be a straight, heterosexual man. It won’t work. Besides, do you really want to hang out with a bunch of straight, heterosexual men, other than to date them?”

Crystal was speechless at Mrs. Bonham’s bluntness.

“I do have several more interviews this week, but I am very glad to have met you, Miss Hays. Even if I don’t select you this time, I do want you to keep us open as an option. You have a very solid resume and I was impressed with your writing sample.”

Crystal’s iPhone rang on Friday.

“Hello.”

“Is this Tim, Tim Hays?”

“Tim Hays,” Crystal thought. “The answer would be no, as I never really was a man named Tim.” Crystal cleared her throat, “Yes, yes it is. May I help you?”

“This is Laura Palladino, from Archer, Arter, Beckerman and Goldstein. You interviewed with us about a month ago. We would like to make you an offer to come work for us as an associate attorney.”

The offer was over twice what the advertised salary was for the Transgender Legal Institute. Here was Tim’s brass ring, a good job at a reputable law firm. All he had to do was say yes and live as Tim. The answer was very clear.

“Laura, I would like to thank you for your firm’s generous offer, but I think I am in a strong position to accept a position at the Transgender Legal Institute.”

“I understand completely your issue, I have a very good friend who is transgender. I wish you all the best.”

“Thank you.”

“Welcome, Miss Hays,” the transsexual legal assistant, Beth, smiled to Crystal. Mrs. Bonham had called Crystal two hours after she had turned down the offer from Archer, Arter, Beckerman and Goldstein, and offered her the job.

“Your desk is down the hall, second on the right, it actually has a good view of the Potomac. I will help you get logged in to our computer and onto our Westlaw account.”



“Thank you,” Crystal beamed. She followed Beth into her new office and felt a pang in her heart as she looked at her new desk. Prominently displayed on Crystal’s desk was a wooden nameplate, made from a tree that witnessed Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address with ‘Crystal R. Hays, Esq.’ emblazoned on it. A gift from Lindsay. Crystal had finally arrived.

“Thank you,” she said to Lindsay over the phone once she had finally settled in.

“Thank you,” Lindsay responded, “thank you for everything.”

Crystal finished her makeup, then dressed in a long black, short-sleeved, flower print dress with matching high-heeled sandals. She grabbed a purse that matched the dress and then waited for Peter to pick her up. Tonight would be truly special.

Peter drove west on I-66, holding Crystal’s hand for reassurance, then pulled into a long, fence and tree-lined driveway on the outskirts of Warrenton, the home of Peter’s parents. Crystal was going to meet Mr. and Mrs. Emory and Peter’s brother and sister, and her heart was in her throat. Peter parked the car in the driveway next to a new Audi, a Ford pick-up, a well-used Camry, and a RAV-4. He went to Crystal’s side and opened the door for her, and took her by the arm for support.

An attractive, middle-aged blonde women in a white blouse and khaki slacks met them at the door.

“So you’re Crystal?” Peter’s mother asked. “He has told me so many good things about you. I am sure you will have a good weekend here. You are very welcome at our home. Douglas, Miss Hays is here.”

A tall man with military bearing and short hair approached from the living room. He looked Crystal over from top to bottom, then offered his hand. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Miss Hays, I have never seen my son happier than he has been this past month."

Patricia Emory led Crystal to a guest bedroom, and Crystal deposited her suitcase on the queen sized bed.

"I don't want you to feel at all nervous among us, young lady. Our family has discussed who you are at length and are fully prepared to welcome you as part of us if that is what Peter wants. And please don't be intimidated by my husband, Douglas. He still thinks he is an army colonel. You can never wash West Point and the camouflage out of his blood."

The dinner setting was superlative, the result of Mrs. Emory having to entertain numerous superior officers and dignitaries during her thirty year's spent as the wife of an army officer. Maintaining an impeccable sense of propriety, Crystal did not sit next to Peter, but instead sat diagonally from Mrs. Emory and next to Peter's younger brother, Malcolm, who was going to be a sophomore at William and Mary. Peter's sister, Julia, was in her second year of law school at the University of Virginia and had received First Year Honors.

"Peter tells me that you have recently accepted a position as an attorney in Washington D.C.," Mrs. Emory probed Crystal.

"Well," Crystal thought, "here goes, if they mean what they say, this should be a non-issue."

“Yes Ma’m, I am now working for the Transgender Legal Institute. Right now, I am assisting with an appeals brief for the D.C. Circuit Court on a case involving a VA worker who claims he was denied promotion for being transgendered.”

“And I expect that you will do an excellent job, Miss Hays,” Mr. Emory stated, as he would to a junior officer preparing an operations order. Crystal felt relieved, her being transgender had obviously been addressed by the family at length before her arrival, but the family expected that she would make them proud professionally and personally as their potential daughter-in-law.

“Peter tells me that you lived in England for a year,” Mr. Emory interrogated Crystal.

“Yes sir, in West Sussex, and I loved it, although I must admit, the schools took some getting used to. The discipline was not what I was familiar with as a twelve-year-old kid, but I did do well academically. I loved England, especially living on top of so much history. Like I told Peter, our family travelled all over England and the continent. We even visited Normandy and the Ardennes,” Crystal said, hoping to further win Mr. Emory’s approval.

“I always love going to those places. They are quite moving.”

“So do you have any brothers or sisters? It sounds like your family is very close,” Mrs. Emory took the baton.

“I had an older brother, David, but he was in the army and was killed in a CH-47 crash at Fort Bragg five years ago.”

The Emorys' expressions changed to horror at that revelation, and looked sympathetic at the young woman sitting before them.

"I remember that crash," Mr. Emory asserted, "we were at Fort Bragg. I am sorry for you and your family."

"Thank you, sir."

Alone in the guest bedroom, Crystal wore an ivory nightgown with a matching robe with sheer puffed shoulders that made her feel like a princess. Peter could not be caught within thirty paces of her bedroom or it would be over for the two of them. Crystal hoped she made a good impression at dinner. Peter's Mom, Patricia Emory, was super friendly, but his Dad was still a tough read. They would be exquisitely polite to her, but she desperately hoped that she had won their favor.

Hearing the scuffle of socks on the hard wood floor, Crystal looked up to see Peter's sister, Julia, in an Ithaca College sleep shirt, holding a box of Belgian chocolates.

"Hi, I was hoping you were still up. I brought us some chocolates, to do some sister bonding and stuff."

Unwrapping a truffle, Crystal smiled, "Thanks. I was hoping to get a chance to talk with you."

"Well, it certainly wouldn't have been at dinner time. Mom and Dad have an exclusive monopoly on dinner conversation if they choose to assert that right."

"You ought to take them to court."

“Trust me, we did. You know Mom and Dad are very conservative, being in the military all that time. We had an inter-generational war over you for a weekend. Peter and me versus Mom and Dad. Malcolm took their side initially but we turned him around and the three of us finally won out.”

“What was the winning argument?”

“That it was obvious Peter loved you and regarded you as his woman. That you were not some flake looking for a fling and that you already had lost your parents over this. It showed your commitment.”

“I guess I should be happy my parents cut their ties with me.”

“Well, from what I see. You should have two new parents if you keep going the way you are. I can’t wait to become your sister-in-law.”

“Sisters-in-law, at law.”

“Yep, and I love that robe.”

“I will get you one for Christmas, if things work out, sis,” Crystal said before unwrapping another truffle.

The family took two cars to Harpers Ferry at the top of the Shenandoah Valley for a day trip. They would hike the seven-mile trail up the ridge of Maryland Heights overlooking the historic town below, then have dinner at an antebellum country inn.

The hike was strenuous and Crystal was winded at the top of the plateau, where a series of Civil War fortifications remained in excellent repair.

“The Union troops folded here like a cheap blanket,” Mr. Emory declared in disgust.

“Yes but they had been in the army all of three weeks and were fighting against the Confederacy’s best, Stonewall Jackson’s troops. A year later, those same rookie troops lost half their brigade beating back Barksdale,” Crystal responded. She always loved stories of redemption.

“I didn’t know that. I’m impressed, young lady.”

“Thank you, sir.”

On Sunday the Emorys attended the Episcopalian Church in Warrenton with Crystal who wore a demure, flower print blazer and shift dress with beige pumps. She attended communion with the family, and after the service greeted the family friends.

“She is a baby doll,” Mary Johnston enthusiastically declared to Patricia Emory after being introduced to Crystal. “I am so happy for Peter. We were starting to worry that he might be gay, if you want to know the truth.”

“Now why would you ever think that?” Patricia Emory smiled to her friend.

The family gathered at the dining room table for a large lunch before Peter and Crystal headed back to their apartments. At the conclusion of lunch, but before the plates were taken to the kitchen, Peter knew the time was right. He stood up in his Sunday best and rang a crystal glass with his fork.

“I would like to have everybody’s attention. I’m sure everybody can see how I feel for Crystal, and I think you all like her.” Peter then reached into his

blazer to pull out a robin's egg blue box with a silver ribbon, Tiffany and Company's trademark.

"Crystal Hays, I love you with everything I have. Will you marry me?"

Crystal could not say a word but the tears dripping down her face and the nodding of her head confirmed to the Emorys that she was now Peter's fiancé, and they were delighted for their son and the young lady.

"I want you back," William stated brusquely to Lindsay. On William's persistent demands, the two had met for coffee after work in Washington D.C. "I still can't believe you left me. With all I gave you. You lost the best thing that will ever happen to you. What amazes me is you don't even seem to realize it. Here is your ring back."

Lindsay looked at the expensive diamond ring and felt her resolve weakening. Andrew was a very good guy but here she was, still struggling doing legal claims review. All she had to do was slip the ring back on her finger and things would be easy. No, she thought. Things would never be easy. William would always hold it against her that she left him and her family would similarly regard her as irresponsible and foolish. She was damaged goods in their eyes and always would be. No, she thought, she would win her family back based on her own terms.

Besides, Lindsay's life had become so much richer since she had left William. She had learned so much about herself and grown immensely. Lindsay realized that the inner workings of the Beltway provided a very poor soil on which a person could actually grow. If she was to go back to the life William offered, she would end up stunted and deformed.

“I’m sorry you can’t let go, William. To be honest with you, my life has been so much better without you in it.”

“I don’t believe that.”

“Deny it all you want. It doesn’t make it any less true. Let me go, William. There are plenty of women that would jump at the chance to lead the life you offer, much to their discredit.” Lindsay got up to leave, “I am sure you will go far but I am also certain you will never change. I want a man who I can grow with.”

That evening, Lindsay sorted through the mail and found an envelope addressed to her from a law firm at which she interviewed a month prior. The envelope was small, light, one page, another rejection. Lindsay felt the anger rise and turn towards Crystal. Here she was engaged, with a decent job away from shit law, while Lindsay still struggled with interviews and had no ring on her finger. It wasn’t fair. It wasn’t right.

At times like this, she would find solace in her Bible. Yes, she was now officially a bad girl, but she sat down on a chair in the living room and read from Matthew, Chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount, and all became clear and calm once more within her. She was growing spiritually as well as emotionally. Lindsay and Crystal had become best friends and, as promised, she would be walking beside her through life, in the same manner that she held hands with the girl in Kindergarten when they went to the bus. What was her name?

Patricia snuggled up to her husband alongside her in their king-sized bed.

“That’s a tough situation in that family, but we need to help. Crystal is going to be our daughter-in-law and we will be responsible for her happiness in the same way as we are for Peter, Julia, and Malcolm. If anybody can resolve a tough situation, it’s you, Colonel Emory.”

A Lexus SUV pulled up to the Emory’s house and a middle-aged couple rang their doorbell. It was John Hays and his wife of thirty years, Karen.

“Mr. and Mrs. Hays, it’s a pleasure to meet the both of you. Please come in. I am looking forward to our weekend together,” Patricia Emory greeted the couple with her broadest smile.

After another impressive dinner, Mrs. Emory brought Mrs. Hays a cup of coffee, while her husband and Mr. Emory shared a bottle of bourbon. Douglas Emory was not a man to beat around the bush or run from conflict, and he was not going to let the issue between the two families fester for one minute longer than it had to.

“Patricia and I know that things are difficult between you and your child, but if our family can welcome Crystal with open arms, you can certainly give her the respect and love that is her due.”

John Hays said nothing, uncomfortable with the topic, not wanting to refer to the son that he once knew and loved as Crystal, or identify her as his daughter.

Douglas Emory continued, “You both look like very nice people and we are terribly sorry for the loss of your son, David. You have our deepest condolences, but Crystal will continue moving forward with her life with you in it or not. I will not, however, accept those circumstances. Trust me, my wife and I had to do our

own serious soul searching, but what we saw of Crystal made us thoroughly impressed. My son loves her, and that is the tantamount issue for us. We are also willing to love her as our daughter-in-law. My wife and I cannot believe that you would turn your back on your child, especially over something that she has been struggling with for over ten years without any guidance or assistance from either of you. If you are concerned about what other people will think, look no further than myself and Patricia. We already adore Crystal and respect the two of you as her parents.”

John Hays sipped his bourbon, while Karen Hays looked at her husband. He would have to say the first word, as was the custom in their household.

“I’ll talk to Crystal. Could you call them and see if they would be willing to meet us here?”

“They will be here in two hours, if I request it.”

A smiling Patricia Emory met Crystal and Peter at the door at ten o’clock that night.

“Your parents are in the living room. Be respectful, we will not tolerate arguing in this house. I am sure you will do just fine.”

“Mom, Dad.”

“Crystal.”

“I hope you are well.”

“The Emorys have been very welcoming.”

“I know this is very hard for you and I am sorry we have to go through this, but we are a family.”

“It’s evident that you have made your decision.”

“Yes, yes I did. I fought against it for years, trying to live the life you expected me to live. But it didn’t work, it *wouldn’t* work. Now I have made my decision and to be honest, other than losing you two, I have been the happiest I have ever been, ever.”

“Are you happy? Truly happy?” Karen Hays spoke for the first time.

“Yes, very much so.”

Mrs. Hays then looked at her husband who sat, drinking his bourbon.

“We don’t like this, but at the same time we won’t try to stop it. Give us time.”

“You have all the time in the world, Dad.”

Upon being called Dad a second time, the tension in Mr. Hays started to release. “We do love you, Crystal.”

“And I love you both.”

Douglas Emory then took charge, “Why don’t you two stay the weekend? I think we can work this out just fine if we all stick together as one big family.”

“Sure Dad,” Peter responded.

“Who wants ice cream?” Patricia Emory interjected, adeptly removing all the remaining tension.

Crystal and Peter and Lindsay and Andrew easily maneuvered through the throng at the Washington D.C. LGBT Lawyers formal dinner and dance that October. Crystal looked ravishing in a sheer black

cocktail dress, whereas Lindsay looked amazing in one of midnight blue. Lindsay, however, was chagrined when she told the other lawyers that she did claims and document review. The lawyers quickly changed the subject and moved on. Sensing Lindsay's discomfort, Crystal stayed close to her friend to shield her from lawyers establishing a pecking order of professional accomplishment.

Scanning the crowd for potentially annoying attorneys, Lindsay saw the worst possible person staring and smiling at her, the well-dressed man from the hotel in New York City. He stood with a similarly aged and distinguished-looking gentlemen who was obviously his partner. They both looked directly at her and laughed, Lindsay knowing that she was the butt of their joke.

"Let's get out of here," she urged Crystal, and gestured towards the two men.

"I don't think we have time," Crystal replied, seeing the man approach them from the other side of the room.

Lindsay wanted to crawl under a table and assume the fetal position but that was impractical in her evening gown. Soon the man was standing in front of her and Andrew.

"Miss Faulkner, if I remember correctly. It is a pleasure seeing you at this event. I knew our paths would cross again at some time. I am not at all surprised to discover that you are an attorney. That is correct, isn't it?"

"Yes," Lindsay meekly responded.

“I never introduced myself to you at the Unitarian Church in Manhattan. I am Stanley Ward, the managing partner of a boutique law firm in the city. I could use a young attorney like yourself at my firm. Here is my card, call and ask to speak to Debbie on Monday afternoon if you are interested. I do hope you will.”

“OMFG!” Crystal exclaimed. “You did it Courtyard, you did it.”

“Yes, yes I did. Thanks to you,” Lindsay turned around and gave her best friend a hug.

Crystal felt like a true princess as she emerged from her London hotel suite. Her parents and the Emorys had pooled their resources for a two-week trip to England and had paid for Lindsay and Andrew to accompany their friends. Now the group was on their way to a performance at the Royal Opera House, and the girls were making the most of it. Crystal donned a deep purple evening gown with matching gloves and had a marabou plume in her hair. The gown accentuated her new cleavage, a Christmas gift from the Emorys who paid for a trip to Thailand for breast enhancement and facial feminization surgery. Even with the airfare, it was still cheaper than using a cosmetic surgeon in the United States. As promised, she did text the Aussie from long ago a selfie of herself fondling her bare breasts and received a one hundred dollar check in the mail, which she promptly donated to the institute’s charitable fund.

Crystal positively glowed as she locked arms with her fiancé, much to the approval of her parents who, given the time and support from their new friends, now fully embraced the lovely young woman as their daughter. The other women; Crystal’s mom, Patricia and Julia Emory, and above all Lindsay, looked equally regal as they paraded through the grand

lobby of the opera house. The men were immensely proud of their women, and the event was one that would be talked about in family lore for decades to come.

The remainder of the trip was spent touring London and making day trips from the hotel into the countryside. Crystal's parents were especially grateful to see the sights that they had once visited with their son, Tim, but were now sharing with their daughter, Crystal, who surprisingly was just as intelligent and perceptive, and actually much more enthusiastic, now that she could actually be herself.

On a Saturday night, Crystal and Lindsay got dressed in party dresses that accentuated their cleavage and smooth, seductive legs, and took their men to a London club that catered to the transgendered crowd. The club was as risqué as the second club that the girls had hit in New York City almost a year ago, but now they were just looking for some fun, not to make a score. Nevertheless, as the alcohol flowed, the couples became more and more amorous until they reconvened in one of the rooms with a bed set aside for sex. It was great to let go every once in a while.

The room had a window opening to the hallway in which clubgoers started to congregate, to see the two couples get nasty. Lindsay "Courtyard" Faulkner was having none of it this time and drew the blinds in the face of the disappointed voyeurs. What happened in the room stayed in the room.

Crystal and Lindsay cornered their men against the wall, standing next to each other, and vigorously started kissing them. After ten minutes of passionate kissing, the men looked at each other and forced the girls to their knees. They unzipped their flies and shoved their manhood in their beloved's faces. Like

good nerds, they graded the girls on the merits of style and speed until they exploded into their mouths, with Lindsay objectively graded as the better cocksucker. After a twenty-minute recovery, the men mounted the girls, with Crystal's screams echoing through the halls. This evening would be talked about in private circles for much longer than the family talked about the night at the opera.

Finally, with only three days left on the trip, the group drove early in the morning to Leeds Castle in County Kent, a Norman motte and bailey castle that had been heavily modernized, until now it was regularly referred to as the most beautiful castle in the world, complete with a private lake.

"You must be the Emory-Hays wedding party," an attractive English hostess greeted them in the main hall, much to the confusion of Crystal. She and Peter had not firmed their plans for their wedding and she suspected that it would eventually be held at the Episcopal Church in Warrenton.

"Come with me, Miss Hays, we have several wedding dresses for you to choose from. We will have the one you choose fitted for you by the time of the actual ceremony at four o' clock. Your wedding reception will be held in a room adjacent to our main dining room. I am certain that you will be most impressed."

Crystal looked to her parents and to Peter for confirmation of the hostess's words. They all smiled at the young woman who had so blossomed in the past year. She was who she was meant to be now, and everybody confirmed that truth.

"I know how much you love castles and thought this would be a nice surprise," Peter shyly declared. "I hope you like my idea."

“You couldn’t be a better knight in shining armor than you are right now.”

Hours later, Crystal stood, in her wedding gown outside the main dining room in the castle, glowing in absolute bliss, with Lindsay as her maid of honor, and Julia as a bridesmaid, both tastefully attired. Crystal’s gown had long, lace sleeves, a train, and a fortuitous veil so that nobody could see a tear of joy slide down her cheek. She couldn’t have asked for a better wedding.

The Bridal March played and she met her father, smiling at the door.

“You look so lovely, Crystal, I am so proud of you.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

Crystal then marched on the carpet and up the aisle, until she stood before Peter Emory, the charming and courageous young man who made her into the woman she had become.

At the reception in which an orchestra played Medieval and Renaissance tunes, each individual toasted the newlyweds until Andrew was called to give his own toast.

“Life throws at you many surprises and planning for them is usually a waste of time. I am so happy that Crystal came into Peter’s life and that I can share this special occasion with them. It was so beautiful and inspiring that I would like to come back here next year to marry you, Lindsay Leigh Faulkner, if you will say yes.”

Crystal quickly placed the bridal bouquet in Lindsay's hands to bolster Andrew's marriage proposal.

"Of course I will marry you, Andrew. Of course I will," Lindsay responded, with her voice cracking. Andrew then walked to his betrothed and placed an engagement ring on her finger. The orchestra, surprised by the spontaneity of the occasion, stopped their serenade and started clapping in applause.

Upon arrival back to the United States, Lindsay called her estranged parents, gave them the news that she was now engaged to a very nice young man with a good job, and that she wanted them to meet him. Her parents were awestruck with the pictures from Crystal's wedding and vowed that they would be there to proudly give their daughter away in marriage. They advised her that William had already married and been promoted but Lindsay smiled and said it no longer mattered, she had found the man that she would face life with and grow continuously until decades from now they would finally be forced to lovingly say goodbye.

Three years later, Crystal and her husband, Peter, and Lindsay, and her husband Andrew, strolled through the Washington Zoo. But now they were joined by additional persons; Douglas, and Erin, both aged two. Douglas was adopted by Crystal, and Erin was the natural daughter of Lindsay. Both women pushed their children in baby carriages through the crowds of other mommies doing the same thing, and never felt more complete.

THE END