



SUMMARY: When a race car team is approached to help train an all female team, the guy agree, but little do they know that they are going to be transformed and become the team.

## **CALENDAR GIRLS**

**By Valerie Hope**

Corey Hoffman looked across the sea of empty bottles at his two best friends from school - Gabe Knowles and Jenner Colfax - and tried to make his eyes focus. It had been a typical Saturday evening for the trio, washing their brains out with a sea of cheap beer while comparing notes on the morning's events at the speedway. They were a decent team, for all their faults. Corey drove the hand-built number 28 car, while Gabe and Jenner worked the pit and radio. They'd taken quite a few awards at the local dirt tracks and dreamed, someday, of getting into the NASCAR circuit, but their lackadaisical attitudes about life in general and their weakness for the drink pretty much kept them out of any serious contention. They couldn't remain serious about anything they did - which is why they'd all three washed out of community college and held dead-end jobs and never went much of anywhere.

"It's not us, it's the damned car," Gabe was saying, trying to blame the afternoon's third-place finishing on anything but themselves. "If we had the money to put the car together the way that Jenner wants to, then we'd win all the damned races."

Jenner belched wetly in assent. "Damn right," he said.

Corey was shaking his head adamantly. "No, no, it wasn't the car," he slurred. "It was me, man. It was me. I just got my ass outdrove today, that's all there is to it."

"Bullshit," Gabe protested, upsetting the empties along the edge of the outdoor table in Jenner's backyard as he lurched forward unsteadily. "Nobody can outdrive you, Core. Maybe you just didn't have your head in the race today. It was talking to that representative that fucked you up."

"Yeah, what was that about, anyway?" Jenner asked.

Corey shrugged. "Didn't seem like much," he said. "Some company called Ingénue Cosmetics. They want to buy a car and start on the Winston Cup circuit."

"No shit? What did she want to talk to you about?" Gabe pressed.

"She was talking to me about training drivers and a crew," he continued. "They want to have the first all-girl racing team in the circuit, and they want the best. They have all these girly sponsors."

"Like who?" Jenner asked.

"Lemme see," Corey said, rolling his eyes heavenward in thought. "She had Paul Mitchell hair care, Victoria's Secret, Cosmopolitan Magazine, Virginia Slims cigarettes. whole buncha shit like that."

"And they only want girls on their team?" Gabe asked.

"'s right," Corey slurred. "They wanted to see if we'd be interested in helping train their drivers and crew. I told her I'd talk to y'all about it."

"How much?" Jenner asked, the question of the hour.

"Twenty-five thousand," Corey said.

Jenner whooped, a rebel yell that set all the dogs in the neighborhood barking and eliciting several angry shouts from nearby homeowners. Gabe just laughed, long and hard, clapping his hands.

"I dunno, though," Corey said. "It seemed a little weird to me."

"I don't give two shits about how weird it was," Jenner said. "I'm in, with or without you two yay-hoos. Twenty-five large is going to go a long way towards that car."

"Damn right," Gabe seconded.

"Okay, okay," Corey said, raising his hands in defeat. "I'll call her tomorrow."

\* \* \*

Gayle Lourdes was a very prim, proper-looking woman in her late thirties. She wore a very expensive-looking, tailored suit and little rimless eyeglasses and shook all the mens' hands in a straightforward, businesslike manner.

"I'm not going to lie to you gentlemen," she said. "We're only after winners, here. Your records on the track aren't quite enough for us to buy into you sight unseen. We want to see how you work together and whether we've found the right people to help us win races. I hope you understand how much we have at stake here."

"You bet," Corey said. "Look, you've seen me drive. And I'm willing to vouch for these two. They're the best. Give them anybody, and they'll be whipped into a world-class pit crew in no time."

"What about a backup driver?" Gayle asked.

"Never used one," Corey said. "Too expensive for folks like us. But I have some suggestions I could make."

"Very good," Gayle said. "What about a pit crew?"

Gabe looked sheepish, unused to speaking around educated people, as Gayle obviously was. "I know a couple or three good guys who'd be interested," he said. "But the money ain't gonna be right if we have to split it between the three of us, three others and a backup driver. Real sorry, ma'am, but that's just the truth of it."

Gayle looked confused. "Twenty-five thousand apiece isn't enough?" she asked.

Jenner nearly swallowed his gum. "Apiece?"

"That was the arrangement. Didn't Corey tell you?" she asked, a little shocked.

"I only heard twenty-five," Corey said. "I didn't hear no 'apiece.' Shit, ma'am - pardon my French - for that kinda money we can get you a championship crew in no time."

Gayle smiled. "Then see to it, gentlemen. I expect to see the crew and the drivers on the speedway at eight a.m. Thursday morning. If you can run a time-trial worthy of Daytona, then you have the job."

\* \* \*

Gabe, Corey and Jenner looked over the rest of the people they'd found to flesh out the racing team. Cayman Lockhart, a young man who'd grown up in the same neighborhood as Gabe and Jenner, was the backup driver and held the promise of being every bit as shit-hot as Corey if he could just keep his head on straight. Like all the others, his lack of focus and his love for the suds held him back from success.

Sidney Keller, Ketcham Smith and Otto 'Doc' Jones were the rest of the pit crew. Ketcham and Doc were some of the best bush mechanics in the region, and they'd been instrumental in putting together the number 28 Ford that Corey was driving now. Sid Keller had been a recommendation of theirs, and anybody that Doc and Ketcham recommended was okay by the others. They got together on Monday morning and started tinkering with the car, stopping late into the night. Then some test-drives, Corey and Cayman both, then more tinkering. Lots and lots of beer, cheap take-out food, and the smell of grease and hot oil, the pungent fumes of gasoline and grease-smearred Marlboro cigarettes dominated the days.

Finally, after a week of intense focus and thought - what all the men had needed in the first place for success, although they didn't know it - they pronounced themselves ready as they were going to get and towed the car to the local speedway. Gayle Lourdes was there, with several men in lab-coats and thick glasses, all carrying laptop computers and cameras and all sorts of electronic stuff. Apparently, the folks up at Ingénue were pretty damned serious about all of this.

They started the day by signing a whole lot of waivers and releases agreeing to not hold the company liable if anything happened. Then the drivers took the track and began their time trials. Corey and Cayman both drove balls-out, right up against the edge of recklessness, which they had been doing on dirt tracks all over the South in order to win the trophies and checks that kept their habit alive. They drove with passion and determination, pulling into the pits at intervals to show off the precision and speed of their pit crew, which had been rehearsing under a stopwatch for a week in preparation.

When Cayman finished his last lap and pulled into the pit, Gayle and her entourage were among the first to congratulate them. One of the lab-coated individuals had a bottle of champagne, which he opened with a loud pop.

"Congratulations, gentlemen," Gayle said. "We were looking for the best and we found them. You have the job, if you want it. We'll be expecting you in Atlanta within two weeks. There you'll have your own track, your own garage, and apartments for each of you. Your meals will be paid. You'll have three weeks to go over the Ingénue car and tweak her to your hearts' content. After that you'll begin training camp."

Doc Jones stuck out a hand after cleaning it against the leg of his jumpsuit. "Ma'am, we thank you for this opportunity. We're really lookin' forward to it."

She took his hand warmly, with a winsome smile. "Our pleasure, Mr. Jones. We hope you get as much out of it as we do."

\* \* \*

It had been one hell of a week. The training camp was state-of-the-art and the Ingénue car was a top-of-the-line Dodge with incredible timing off the blocks and a real stayer in the long stretches. The seven men had been living in hog heaven for every second, taking the new car through its paces and tinkering with every last screw, nut and bolt of it in the interim. The only hang-up was the candidates for the Ingénue Racing Team. There were some really good drivers, and a few decent mechanics, but by and large they lacked the cohesion as a unit that it would take to make a truly winning team.

Gabe flipped the last of the résumés onto the table in the little meeting room in the garage. "It's no damn good," he grunted, the Marlboro on his lip bobbing up and down in time with his words. "Either they're not good enough drivers or they're prima donnas who aren't going to work well with anyone else. We're up against the wall here."

"Well, they ain't payin' us to bitch about problems, son," Doc told him. "They're payin' us to fix 'em. We have to pick the most likely candidates and hammer 'em into a team."

"I don't see how we can," Cayman grumped. "I hate to sound like some chauvinist pig, here, but they're not too hot on the idea of takin' orders from no men."

"I noticed that too," Corey said at last. "That last driver - Kathy - I asked her if she wanted to try a different line on the turns, keep from losing so much speed, and she looked at me like I just told her to go in the kitchen and fix me some supper."

"I hate to say it, fellas, but I don't think it's any use," Jenner concluded.

Cayman shook his head violently. "There's gotta be a way."

Ketcham concurred. "There's gotta be. We just have to figure out a way to talk to these ladies without makin' 'em feel like we're orderin' 'em around. Hell, y'ask me, I think we should talk to Ms. Gayle about the whole thing. Just be honest about the problem and see what she says."

"I think Ketcham's right," Corey said. "Maybe she'll have some ideas."

"Problem is," Sid began, "we are, in a way. Orderin' 'em around, I mean. These ladies had to fight like wildcats to get much of anywhere in this damn sport and they're jealous of their positions. I can't say as how I'd feel much different if I was in their shoes."

"Yeah," Cayman said. "Think about how many 'women driver' jokes they must hear every damn time they get ready to race. I kinda feel for 'em. I mean, we get a lot of 'redneck' and 'trailer trash' jokes because we're racers, but they have to get it a helluva lot worse than we ever do."

"Shit," Jenner put in. "I didn't ever think about that."

"It don't change the fact that we have to keep our heads here," Corey concluded. "We have a job of work ahead of us, that's for damn sure, and if we want to convince these people we're professionals we have to solve it without rufflin' any feathers."

Corey stood, grinding his cigarette out in the overflowing ashtray. "I'll talk to Ms. Gayle tomorrow morning and see what she has to say about it."

\* \* \*

"I have to admit, Mr. Hoffman, I'm surprised at the level of your sensitivity to the matter," Gayle said, folding her hands neatly over the leather cover of her notebook. "I'll confess, I wasn't expecting a group like yours to be so understanding of the problems these women must be experiencing."

Corey shifted uneasily in the elegant designer chair in Gayle's office. "Well, ma'am, think about it this way. We all have mothers and sisters. Some listen to 'em, some don't. I guess we all listened. Goes to prove that sayin' all men are the same is as wrong as sayin' all women can't drive."

"You're a rare group, then," Gayle said. "That's basically what this racing team is all about - it's proving to a whole lot of women out there who don't think they're capable of doing such a thing that it can be done - and done well - by a woman."

"I think we understand that," Corey said. "At least we hope we do. That's part of the reason we all want to do a good job for y'all folks. Maybe a bunch of guys like us will never firsthand know what you're talking about, but just 'cause we don't see it don't mean it ain't there. We all figure what you're doing is important."

"I appreciate that more than I can tell you," Gayle said. "But it doesn't change the fact that we aren't finding any crew or drivers that have what it takes to be winners, and I'm afraid that second place is going to spoil everything we're working for."

Corey nodded sadly in agreement. "I know," he said. "Add to that the fact that these ladies - whoever they wind up being - are going to have to go up against folks like Petty and Waltrip and Rudd and Wallace don't make it any easier. See, ma'am, what the ladies that come through last week are all lacking is experience. Y'have to've run a helluva lot of races to know what it's like out there. And those ladies don't have any idea, and they're too proud of how far they've come to let us tell 'em. It's a real sticky situation."

"It certainly is," Gayle agreed.

"Hell, makes me wish sometimes that we was all women. We'd win those races for y'all and get y'all on the map," Corey said regretfully.

"Don't you think that would kind of defeat the purpose?" Gayle asked him.

He shrugged. "Does it matter? It's not like we can win a race by wishin'!"

"If you weren't born women, though, you wouldn't have the real experience of having all that doubt and sexism to overcome," Gayle went on, ignoring him. "You wouldn't really know what it was like to try to be a racer in such a male-dominated sport."

"I guess not," Corey said, a little perplexed as to why she was still pursuing this line of reasoning. "But then, we wouldn't have all that 'I'm just a girl' bullshit - pardon my French, ma'am - to get past, neither. We'd have a blank slate to draw on, to make our way in the world without ever havin' been told we couldn't do somethin' just 'cause we were women. We wouldn't be forever talkin' ourselves out of stuff that we want to do because we were raised thinkin' we weren't as good as no man."

Gayle tapped her nails against her desk thoughtfully. "You're right," she said. "Imagine the kind of role models you would be. You'd never even acknowledge the sexist hype surrounding

women in sports, or business, or anything like that. You'd believe only in yourselves. The foundation would already be built, and women could look at you and see that all of that chauvinist rhetoric was just hot air."

"Scuse me, ma'am, but you're talkin' like this is possible or something."

Gayle sat back from her desk a little and took off her glasses, cleaning them with a handkerchief from her pocket. "What would you say if I told you it was?"

Corey knitted his brows. "You mean, like, dress us up in makeup or something?"

"No, Mr. Hoffman, I mean alter your DNA and transform you into biological women," Gayle said. "It is theoretically possible. Some of Ingénue's research into anti-aging has come across methods for using viruses to rewrite people's DNA to a certain extent. I won't go into the deep science of it, but it's nothing short of miraculous. I believe that they can make a virus that can change your Y chromosome, which determines your sex, into an X chromosome. You'd effectively be reborn as women."

Corey jumped a little bit. "You ain't serious, are you?"

Gayle leaned forward again, replacing her glasses on her nose. "It can be done, that's all. What I'm asking you is: would you be willing to do it? To live as a woman in exchange for a place on the NASCAR circuit, a guaranteed job as our driver, sponsorship - all the things you'd been fighting your whole life to get?"

"I meant to earn those things, ma'am," Corey said.

"And leaving everything you've ever known and beginning a new life as a woman isn't earning a place? You'd be a hero, Mr. Hoffman, to women young and old all over this country. A role model. I can practically guarantee that you will become a household name and, in the process, become very wealthy."

"Ma'am, I still can't believe that you're talkin' seriously about this."

"I am very serious, Mr. Hoffman," Gayle said. "We can do it. I want you and your people to think about it and discuss it. It means a lot to the women of this country, and to the success of our business and the businesses of our sponsors. And we would be willing to make you all very wealthy in exchange for your cooperation."

Corey staggered out of the office in a numb haze, still unable to wrap his mind around the gravity of what Gayle was offering. It hardly seemed possible, on the one hand, but Gayle was so serious, that there had to be something to it. There had to be.

She cleared her throat just as he reached her door. He turned, still half in shock.

"Very wealthy, Mr. Hoffman," she repeated. "Think about that, too."

\* \* \*

"She's out of her dadgum mind, and that's all," Sid said, shaking his head. "Who in the hell is going to believe we're women? Damn."

"Tell me about it," Cayman said. "And here I thought I had a chance to drive Winston Cup, finally. Fuck. That woman's crazy."

"Waitaminnit, fellas," Corey said. "What if she ain't? What if she's serious and can pull this off? This could be our chance, y'all know that. We ain't ever going to get an offer like this again. To drive NASCAR. To race nationally, to get famous. To have a car like the one we have."

"Are you on somethin'?" Gabe asked in disbelief. "You're talking about dressing up in a dress and a wig and lookin' like a damned idiot on national TV just for a chance to drive against Rusty Wallace? Sometimes the cost ain't worth the reward, Core."

"She wasn't talking about dressing us up," Corey said. "She said something 'bout DNA and shit. It sounded serious to me. Dammit, Gabe, I'm looking at a chance to have it all, here, and you're talking about going back to the dirt track and working weeks at the auto parts store. I ain't gonna deliver no more beer for the brewery, Gabe. I have a fantastic car and a chance to race at Daytona, and dammit, I'm gonna take it before she changes her mind."

"Corey's right," Jenner said. "What the hell do we have to go back to? Cayman? You like working at the damn salvage yard and rolling pennies to try to get decent tires? Doc? You like changing the oil on rich folks' Mercedes and dreamin' all the while 'bout running the pit at Talladega? Sid? Ketcham?"

"We still don't have a Gas Man or a Can Catcher," Doc said back, defeated. "And no support crew."

"And we ain't limited to just trying to find women no more, neither," Jenner said. "Hell, Doc, you can call up Bucky Cox and Amos Rollins and they'd be here in four hours. They're as hungry to be a part of something big as we ever were."

"We're all men with no families, no prospects, not a damn thing to lose. Think about it," Corey said to them all. "If this works - we're women. So what? Hell, boys, I like women. It can't be that bad to be one. But we're also in the circuit. We have a car, and sponsors. And most of all, we have a shot. At the big time."

"The big time," Jenner echoed.

Cayman nodded his head solemnly. "I'm in," he said firmly.

"Me, too," Jenner said. "What about the rest of y'all?"

Gabe shrugged. "I been with y'all since we was boys," he said. "Can't very well run out of y'all now. Count me in, I guess."

Ketcham, who had been silent up until this point, lit a cigarette and looked at the ceiling contemplatively. "I can't say I'm too thrilled 'bout this whole thing - it seems kinda shifty to me. Under the table, like. But I like you boys, and I think y'all can go all the way if you set your minds to it. I may not want to be no girl, but I do want to be a winner. And if havin' tits is what it takes, then, hell. I'm in."

"Sid?" Corey asked.

"What the fuck?" he said, scratching his neck. "Ain't like this damn DNA shit is gonna work anyway."

"That just leaves you, Doc," Jenner prompted.

"I think y'all are all fuckin' nuts," he pronounced. "You're gonna let these people dress you up in some skirt and put a damn wig on your greasy hair and try to act like a gal. You're gonna look the fool in front of everybody."

"You really think that Ms. Gayle is going to let her team come off lookin' the fool?" Cayman said. "Have a little faith, Doc."

Doc considered that. "I guess she wouldn't, at that," he said finally. "Okay, then, I'll stay. But you can just forget about me suckin' any of y'all's dicks."

\* \* \*

"This is a very brave step you are all taking," Gayle told the assembled men. "I'm very proud of you all. I can't say that I would have the courage to do what you're doing."

"What's she talkin' about?" Bucknell "Bucky" Cox whispered to his buddy, Doc Jones. Bucky was a tall, lanky man who raced dirt tracks all over Georgia and Tennessee and his friend and cousin, Amos Rollins, was one of the better pit men in the amateur circuits. They'd come in the four hours that Jenner had prophesied, and were suddenly immersed in all the explanations of what the men were about to go through in their quest to become champions.

"Shh," Doc said. "Just listen."

"You've already signed all the releases and waivers, so all that's left is the procedure itself. Our scientists, in conjunction with several other firms and the government, have custom-engineered a virus which will replace the Y chromosome in every cell of your bodies with an X chromosome. Your entire body will be rewritten as the cells regenerate - over the course of the next week or so you will probably feel very ill and slowly transform yourselves into what, in essence, would be your own identical twin sister. There will be several doctors on hand to make sure that nothing happens over those weeks, but we can pretty much tell you now that you'll feel very sick, achy and weak during that time. We will adjust your diets and provide vitamins to keep you from developing any deficiencies."

"Ma'am?" Cayman asked. "Even if we look just like women, ain't nobody gonna believe we was born that way. We're still gonna act like guys, walk like 'em and talk like 'em. Not to mention stuff like clothes. Hell, I couldn't even tell you what half the stuff in my old girlfriend's closet even was, much less how the hell to put it on."

The assembled men laughed. They were shivering uncomfortably in a large laboratory theater, wearing only the filmy open-back hospital gowns which left them unconsciously keeping their hands clasped behind them to defend their exposed backsides. They'd been treated to a long series of tests all morning, eating a tasteless but filling breakfast and had been given a series of injections to lower the immune system's reaction to the virus, plus a whole slew of others which the men had completely lost track of. They'd all had their body hair removed as well, which made the cold room seem even colder.

"We've already thought of that," Gayle said. "We've decided on a double course of action - we're going to send two women to live with you who will help you adjust and learn the skills you need to know. In addition, we'll also be using subliminal tapes which will aid you by teaching you while you're asleep."

"We're also going to put you on strict diets, with supplements, and give you a very rigorous physical training regimen once you've all recovered. I think in two or three weeks, once you've

acclimated a little, we'll be able to split your days into 'lady lessons' in the evenings and racing in the mornings. Slowly it will all phase out and you'll be left to do your jobs as you've always done them."

"Any other questions?" Jenner asked. "I'm freezing my balls off." That brought a whole new round of laughter, genuine but nervous.

"I'm going to give you brave gentlemen one more chance to back out," Gayle said. "After this, there's no turning back. So if anyone wants to leave, now's the time."

"We've been over this a million times since you made the offer, ma'am," Corey said. "And we're all convinced that this is the way to go. It helps you by giving you the drivers and team you were looking for, and it helps us by finally giving us all the shot of a lifetime. We're in, ma'am."

Gayle's smile was a little bit envious as she turned to the white-coated doctor behind her. The doctor fitted a little vial filled with a liquid that looked suspiciously like beer into a pneumodermal injector and pressed the gun against Corey's carotid artery. There was a little hissing sound and a feeling like a pinch or a mosquito bite, and then it was done.

"That's it," the doctor said. "Next one?"

Corey walked away touching the little tender spot on his neck. There was a little bit of dampness there, but he felt nothing. Nothing but cold, that is.

"Are we done here, ma'am? Can we take our rooms and get a little sack time? Y'all got us up awful early this mornin'," he asked Gayle.

"Sure," she said with a warm and wistful smile. "I'll have a nurse show you."

\* \* \*

Corey woke up in a pool of sweat. The afternoon sun slanted through the blinds in his private hospital room - had he really slept that long? He couldn't have arrived at the room later than about ten a.m., and the clock by the bedside was telling him it was nearly six in the evening.

He stood weakly, hoping that he wouldn't throw up. When Gayle had told him he'd feel weak and sick, Corey hadn't realized that it would be anything like this. The sweat on his body had a sticky, oily feel that he wasn't sure he liked. It had a kind of rancid smell to it, as well.

Suddenly, his guts heaved and began burning and it was all he could do to make it to the little private bathroom on time. Managing to plop himself down on the seat, he groaned and clutched his middle as his lower intestines erupted in what seemed like fire. The fetid, decaying smell of diarrhea assaulted his nostrils, making his gorge rise. Without much warning, Corey was able to turn his head towards the sink and vomit noisily, which brought on a fresh bout of the oily, sticky sweat.

When the nightmare of bodily fluids was over, Corey decided to forego any attempt and cleaning himself by conventional means and just collapsed into the little shower opposite the toilet. The hot water sluiced through the nasty sludge that was accumulating on his skin nicely, and gave a nice and leisurely massage to his aching shoulders and neck.

"What the hell did you get yourself into, Corey old boy?" he asked the air.

He had to interrupt the shower several more times to evacuate himself (he hadn't thought his poor body could hold so much, to be honest) and after the third such occurrence he just

stopped turning the water off. Finally, his guts seemed to be settling down a little and he'd gotten the greasy crud off of as much of his skin as he could. Lightheaded from dehydration, Corey struggled his way back to the bed only to find the white-coated doctor, Gayle, and a couple of staff changing out his sheets.

"How are you feeling, champ?" the doctor asked him.

"Rode hard and put up wet, doc," Corey said. "Been throwing up and pissing out my ass for the last hour, seems like. Sweating like a whore in church, too, and it's sticky and smells like my socks."

"That's to be expected," the doctor said. "Nothing to worry about."

"Nothing to worry about?" Corey repeated testily. "You don't have to go through it."

"Your body is starting to reshape itself," the doctor explained. "Part of the genetic rewrite is that your body is going to be sloughing off a whole lot of excess body mass. Your body is processing this leftover tissue through your digestive system - which explains the diarrhea and vomiting - and your renal system, which will account for the sweating and any excessive urination."

"So this," Corey said, running a finger through the sludgy sweat on his shoulder, "is me?"

"In essence," the doctor explained. "It's excess bone tissue, muscle mass - anything your body is telling itself to get rid of. It's necessary for the transformation."

"You mean this hocus-pocus is actually working?" Corey said in awe.

"Didn't you think it would?" Gayle asked.

"Shit," Corey muttered, sitting down heavily. "Shit. I didn't think it was really gonna work. Shit."

"Everything is going to be okay, Corey," the doctor told him.

"Holy shit," Corey muttered, not looking up. "I'm going to be a girl. I'm really going to be a girl."

\* \* \*

Dr. Sylvia Creeger looked at the proposal in her hands in disbelief. "This is highly unethical," she said in her gravelly alto.

Gayle Lourdes brandished a huge sheaf of signed affidavits. "It's what they want, Doctor. They've all signed documents to that effect."

"Are you positive they know what they were getting into?" Creeger asked.

"We made every effort," Gayle explained. "They have no misconceptions anymore about the procedure."

"You realize, of course, what this course of therapy is going to do," Creeger said.

"I'm not a psychologist, Doctor," Gayle explained. "That's why my company has hired you. These men - brave as they are - are very troubled. They took the steps they've taken because it satisfies a need in them. They're going to need your help."

"But this - this seems a little extreme, don't you think?" Creeger asked.

"Dr. Creeger, there are several eminently qualified hypnotherapists who would jump at this chance. We approached you because you are among the best. These men need help, and we want to give them the best there is in the field," Gayle explained. "You have to understand. They are racers. Rednecks. Good ol' boys. They don't know anything about the lives they've chosen for themselves, and they have to project the image which my company and our other sponsors wish to project."

"You're asking me to shift their personalities radically, Ms. Lourdes," Creeger countered. "Don't you understand? Their personalities aren't going to accept this radical a change without serious peril to their senses of identity. It's dangerous."

"It's what they want, Doctor," Gayle said again. "Ingénue Cosmetics, Paul Mitchell, Victoria's Secret, Virginia Slims tobacco, Cosmopolitan magazine. All of them wish to project the image of a fun-loving, youthful, vibrant and beautiful woman. Modern, liberated, but at the same time classic and elegant. Very sexual and seductive."

"But this emphasis on looks and image, ma'am, they're detrimental to a developing personality. You run the serious risk of having these courageous men turn out as self-absorbed, vain airheads. Bimbos. Is that the image that you want to project?"

"Keeping in mind our target audience, Dr. Creeger, I don't see how that can be overly detrimental," Gayle said. "Better that than shy, awkward wallflowers. If there's any way we could have that pit crew ready to do a catwalk fashion show, then more the better for what we need from them. And a certain level of vanity is necessary for any woman, isn't that so?"

"But to this extent? Are you sure?" Creeger protested feebly.

Gayle flourished the bundle of affidavits again. "It's what they want, Doctor."

"If that's true, then you're right," she said. "They do need all the help they can get."

\* \* \*

Gayle waited until Sylvia Creeger had left the office before dialing her phone. After a short series of rings, she left a message on the voicemail of her boss.

"Vivian, it's Gayle. I just got Creeger. We should have just the kinds of women we need for the racing team - all your merchandising tie-ins and publicity should work in nicely. It should only be a few more weeks before we can let the press in on the new team, and before long everybody's going to be falling all over themselves to get at them. And let me tell you, Vivian, it couldn't have happened to a nicer bunch of redneck hillbillies. I almost fell for that 'understanding women' schtick, but I don't think we're going to have to worry much from now on. I'll keep you posted."

\* \* \*

It was three days after they 'got their shots' before the team got together once again, this time in the little cafeteria of the clinic where they'd been taken. Corey was surprised to see his friends in the conditions they were in, but it wasn't nearly enough shock to penetrate the thick layer of numbness that had fastened itself across his senses. All of them had lost weight and height terribly, looking like gaunt and awkward skeletons with faraway, haunted looks. It seemed that none of the men had realized the gravity of their decisions, and none of them really suspected that the treatment might actually work as planned. All of them were stick-

thin and their skins showed a glossy sheen of the 'sludge' sweat which leaked the mass of their bodies out of their own pores. The worst of the processing was over, the doctors said, meaning that soon their digestions would return to normal and they'd soon lose the horrible greasy, nasty feeling that haunted them everywhere they went. Another plus would be the disappearance of the faintly rancid odor that permeated the air around them.

All of them had been receiving vitamin infusions to keep them from deteriorating further. Huge doses of Vitamin E had caused their hair and nails to grow out as well. All the men, even the ones like Doc and Amos Rollins who had already accumulated huge bald spots, now had lank, stringy hair which hung greasily and limply over their narrowed shoulders and down their backs.

Corey was just amusing himself by counting the 'spine bumps' down his emaciated back by pressing them against the chair when the doors to the cafeteria were closed suddenly and the lights were dimmed. Some of the distance and shock which had grown over the troupe of friends disintegrated as they stood en masse, looking for any danger.

"Good evening, ladies," a strong yet feminine voice said from seemingly nowhere and everywhere at once. "How is everyone feeling?"

"Who are you?" Doc asked.

"I asked you, how is everyone feeling?" the voice demanded, stronger this time.

There was something in the air as well, a faint citrus odor and a low, soothing hum just below the level of hearing that made Corey relax slowly, seemingly one muscle at the time. "I'm fine. A little thirsty, but that's always the case these days," he said.

"About the same," Doc said.

"Fine," chorused the others.

"I didn't inquire about your health, ladies," the voice said. "I asked you how you were doing. I can look at your medical records and find out everything I need to know about the state of your lovely bodies. I want to know how you are feeling."

Corey nodded, slowly beginning to unwind. "Oh," he said. "I understand. Well, ma'am, I guess all I can really tell you right now is that I'm scared."

"Me, too," Cayman piped up just before the others agreed as one.

"Understandable," the voice said. "But why on earth would you be scared? Look at how beautiful you are all becoming. I should think you'd be full of joy."

Jenner blinked. "You think we're beautiful?"

"Of course. Can't you see it?"

Ketcham shook his head. "I certainly don't feel beautiful," he said. "Not by a long shot. I feel greasy and stinky and dirty. I ache all over and I can't make my body work right. I feel like a clumsy idiot all the time."

"That can be remedied," the voice said. "A long hot shower, some decent shampoo and conditioner, some nice perfume to cover the scent - there are all sorts of things to help you feel more beautiful. Would you like that?"

"Hell, yeah," Bucky Cox piped in, his former six-four, two-eighty frame reduced to a tiny little frail 110-pound stick that barely topped five foot six.

"I can arrange a day for you all," the voice said. "At a spa. It would do wonders for you. You can swim and bathe, get a massage for the aches and pains. Then a facial and a manicure, a pedicure - it's luxury, ladies. You feel like the most pampered being on the planet when you're done. Doesn't that sound nice?"

Corey thought for a second. It did sound nice. It sounded really nice, come to think about it. A day of relaxing, being waited on and taken care of after all the abuse of the last few days.

"Where do I sign up?" he chimed in.

The voice sounded amused. "I take it that's a 'yes?' All of you?"

There was a ragged chorus of ayes from the assembled people.

"We can start right now, if you like. You could spend the rest of the day being treated like a princess and then fall into bed relaxed tonight. How does that sound?"

"Sounds great," Gabe said. "All except for the 'princess' part, I mean."

Cayman shook his head. "Look, Gabe, we should start getting used to the idea, right? It worked. That DNA thing they shot us with worked. We're going to be girls in a few days. Look at Bucky, for God's sake."

"Shit," Gabe grumped.

"We're all just going to make ourselves sick if we don't face the damned facts," Cayman went on. "We're girls now. So get used to the words: 'Princess.' 'Lady.' 'She' and 'Her.' It's what we're going to be answering to from here on out."

"Cayman's right," Doc said. "It ain't that big a deal, I guess. Shit, it might be kinda fun if we keep our heads screwed on right."

"Fun? How the hell can you call sweating bacon grease and having the drizzling shits 'fun?'" Jenner complained.

"It ain't gonna last forever, Jenner," Doc countered. "Figure it's kinda like having a monthly. You endure it and it feels better afterwards."

"Periods," Ketcham muttered. "I clean forgot about them."

"All right, all right, enough," Corey said. "Look, we're in this now. I'll be the first to 'fess up - I didn't think this would work any more than y'all did. But it did work, and we can't take it back. So we either get busy bein' the kinds of girls that win titles, or we curl up in a little ball and die. I ain't one for goin' out without makin' a little noise, now."

"Damn right," Bucky said. "I may be short and skinny but I can still put up a fight."

"So what now?" Sid asked.

"We go to this spa thing the lady done told us about," Amos Rollins said firmly. "We sit down and get our hair done and mud on our faces and shit, and we take it like men."

"Like women, you mean," Cayman said.

"Right," Jenner said. "Like women."

\* \* \*

If they'd known being girls was as nice as this, they'd never have complained about it. Jenner stretched languidly, working out muscles that had been mashed and stretched and pulled and loosened by a professional masseuse over the course of the last hour. He cracked his neck noisily and sat back into the hot tub with a contented sigh. Candles burning around the perimeter of the open, airy room gave off a pleasant, warm scent that exuded relaxation.

"Look at this here," Amos said. He bent effortlessly at the waist and put his nose against his knees without the slightest bit of strain. "I ain't never been able to do that before."

"Gals're more flexible," Sid told him, sitting in a comfy overstuffed chair in front of a little table where a surgical-masked little man was working diligently on his nails with a file and a little motorized rotary tool.

"One of the perks," Amos said. "I can get used to this."

Jenner flipped the page of the magazine he was reading as he waited for the perm in his hair to set. His skinny head was wrapped with cotton batting and set in large rollers, and he was paging through a copy of Mademoiselle as he waited.

"Y'know, some of this stuff is pretty interesting, actually," he said as he read. "Did y'all know that less than one in ten of all sexual assaults in the country are never reported to the police? That's 'bout the saddest thing I ever heard."

"Girl or no, any man tries that shit on me and I'll kill him," Gabe said. "I don't give a shit if my arms look like sticks or not."

Sid raised one hand, displaying the long acrylic extensions that the manicurist had recently applied to his nails. They overhung his slender fingers by a good three-quarters of an inch. "Get you some of these here," he said. "Claw the sumbitch in the eyes."

"Now how the hell are you gonna be able to change tires in the pit with them things on?" Jenner, the crew chief, asked indignantly.

"Shit," Sid said. "These are Ingénue's new line. Practically indestructible. My mama wore her nails this long and she could do most anything. Watched her fix the toaster once and didn't have a damned problem with it. I figure it won't take me long to get used to 'em. Besides, I like it when gals wear their nails long. Looks sexy."

"Yeah, I like that too," Corey said.

"Then get your ass over here and get you some of 'em," Sid said. "Start gettin' used to 'em right now."

"How does it feel?" Cayman asked.

"Siddown and try it," Sid urged. "Shit, it's kinda fun. You can always take 'em off later if you don't like 'em."

"I'll try," Doc said. "Might be kinda interesting. An experiment, like."

Ketcham looked at Jenner, Bucky and Amos. "I'll do it if y'all do."

Corey plopped down in the chair next to Sid. "Why the hell not?" he asked, grinning. "Figure it this way. We're all pretty new at this 'being girls' shit. Why not try and take in as much of it as possible?"

"That's the spirit," Sid said, elbowing Corey.

"Shit, I'm gonna get 'em just to have some weapons, like Sid said," Gabe said. "I don't like the idea of some drunk-assed guy jumping me in a bar or something."

"Then get you one of them self-defense classes," Cayman told him. "Shit, my sister took one a few years back and she like to tore me up. Those damned things work."

Gabe looked over at Corey. "You think maybe Ms. Gayle might set something like that up for us if we asked her? It'd make me feel a little better."

"I bet she would," Corey said. "I'll ask her this afternoon."

\* \* \*

Gayle was more than a little taken aback at the appearance of her racing team when she dropped by that afternoon after lunch. The men were shriveled and emaciated, their skins still a little shiny with the last of the greasy secretions, but they'd all cleaned themselves up and had taken the day to relax and enjoy themselves. All of them - Corey, Cayman, Jenner, Gabe, Sid, Doc, Ketcham, Bucky and Amos - had left behind their hospital gowns and chosen comfortable clothes for the meeting - women's blue jeans and t-shirts, for the most part, but in brighter colors than before and even sporting some embroidery and ruffles along collars and cuffs. All of the men had gotten manicures and pedicures, and sported brightly painted toenails which peeked merrily out of the toes of their sandals, and all of them wore long nail extensions which were either painted the same bright colors as their toes or sported white French tips. Some of the men - Jenner, Gabe and Cayman, for sure, and possibly Sid and Corey as well - had taken a turn through the tanning booth as well and were a few shades darker than before.

The facials and spa treatments had left their skin healthier-looking and softer, but they still held a little of the look of sickness on them. Their hair, formerly lank and stringy, had been worked on exhaustively by the team of stylists that Gayle had shanghaied into service. All of them had been trimmed and curled, clipped and conditioned into styles that were soft and feminine-looking, and very versatile and maintainable. Gayle had stressed that the stylists should choose flattering styles which would be easy to maintain but still 'glam up' really easily in case of a press event.

Corey, now with long and wavy chestnut locks which held a hint of red highlight, stepped up and cleared his throat. When he spoke, his voice cracked like a teenager's, slipping from his customary baritone into a husky alto and back.

"Me and the boys - 'scuse me, the girls - were wonderin' if we could make some requests over the next couple or three days," he said nervously.

"What can I do for you?" Gayle asked brightly.

"Well, ma'am, first of all we're havin' a little trouble getting a few things right. We were wonderin' if there were some people that could stay with us for a couple days and help us with stuff like how to talk and walk without lookin' like men. And some of us would like some help figurin' out ladies' clothes and stuff like that."

"I can certainly arrange that," Gayle said. "I'd originally thought to bring them in after you left the hospital, but I can move that up by a few days."

"We'd appreciate that," Cayman said, his voice also cracking. He kept his arms folded across his chest, like he was cold, but Gayle could see the telltale swelling on his chest which marked early breast development.

"Anything else?" Gayle asked.

"Yes'm," Gabe said. "I was wonderin' if there was any way we could get one of them ladies' self-defense instructors to come and give us some lessons. That's one of the things that's got some of us worried and we'd feel better if we knew what a gal did to defend herself."

"I think that's an excellent idea," Gayle said. "I'll get right on that. Anything else?"

"One last thing," Corey said. "It's kinda embarrassin', though."

"We're all girls here," Gayle said brightly.

"Some of us - like Cayman over there - are startin' to. uh. get curvy, if you know what I mean."

"Developing breasts," Gayle said.

"Yeah," Corey said, running a hand over the back of his neck. "We were wonderin' for one, when we can expect that to happen to all of us, and also if we could get."

"I'll have training bras delivered tomorrow," Gayle said, sparing him having to say the dreaded word. "It's something you should all expect."

"We know," Doc Jones said. "Just kinda shocking, 's all."

"You're doing wonderfully," Gayle told them. "Beyond everything I expected."

\* \* \*

It was only that evening, after a very filling dinner (Gayle said it was to 'fatten them up' a little, and it would probably work - everything in a cream sauce and thick, heavy desserts) that Corey first noticed that his 'equipment' was changing. His testicles were shriveled and smaller, and seemed to be retreating into his body. His scrotal sac was softening and drawing backwards, down between his legs and towards his anus, and his penis - formerly a very respectable size - was shrinking steadily. It was acquiring a downwards point and the piss-hole was getting smaller. A little examination with a long-nailed finger showed that a very tender, soft spot was developing in the space between where his balls had formerly resided. It felt almost as if he pushed hard enough, his finger would break through the skin and inside his body.

He didn't know what scared him more - the fact that it was happening in the first place or that the thought of having something inside his body came with a little thrill of excitement and desire.

He lay down hard on the bed, trying to ignore the little swelling mounds which were on his chest, poking upwards and crowned by his swollen and erect nipples. He sat up and pulled on an old t-shirt, anything to hide them from his eyes. He could be accepting of this tomorrow, but for tonight he decided he could be a wreck about it. Silent stinging tears leaked from his eyes and across his smooth, unblemished cheeks. The rough stubble of his beard was infinitely softer and starting to thin out and become pale, turning into the downy white little hairs that all women had when you looked closely.

"I never thought this was going to work," he whispered to the unrepentant heavens.

"But it is working," a soft voice said from the air around him. The voice was always present before he slept - only the fact that the other men confessed to having heard it as well kept Corey from thinking he was completely crazy.

"I know," he said. "But it doesn't make things any easier."

"I can see that," the voice said to him. "But the best things are never easy."

"Best things?" Corey asked.

"Yes," the voice said. "And being a woman is the best thing in the world."

"How do you mean?"

"You're going to love it," the voice told him. "You get to be beautiful and sexy all the time, you can do anything you want to do. You can write a Pulitzer-prize winning novel one week and pose for Playboy the next. Any life you want to live."

"I just want to race cars," Corey said.

"That's a man talking," the voice told him. "Women aren't constrained to just one thing. Surely there are other things. You can do anything you want."

"I haven't really thought about it," Corey said.

"I can see you haven't," the voice told him. "Lie back and go to sleep, baby. Just close your eyes and relax, feel that gorgeous body of yours get heavy and drowsy. Go to sleep, sexy little girl, and I'm going to tell you all about what a joy it is to be a woman."

\* \* \*

Breakfast was a far merrier affair for them all that day. All the men-turned-women talked about the wonderful nights' sleep they'd had and all the very pleasant dreams they'd seen. They chatted while they ate, wondering what the day was going to hold for them. Apparently they were all at their target sizes, since all of them had awoken without the sour-smelling grease on their skins and their digestive systems seemed to be back to normal. They carried plates piled high with eggs and bacon, steaming cups of coffee and entire loaves of toast, slickly glazed donuts and fresh fruit, heaping bowls of cereal and glasses of fresh-squeezed juice and cold milk.

They hadn't even started well before Gayle came in, this time leading two very attractive women wearing lab coats. Gayle introduced the tall, leggy brunette with the sophisticated-looking rimless glasses first.

"This is Laura Dales," Gayle said. "She's going to be staying with you for a few days. She's the lady who's going to help you learn some of the things you're going to need to know. Her specialties are hair, makeup and clothing. She's really good - I think you're going to learn a lot from her."

The second woman, a lushly-curved Hispanic woman with an immense fall of lush black hair which nearly reached the backs of her shapely thighs, waved elegantly at the collected group, giving a brilliant smile that seemed to make the lights in the room dim. "I'm Yolanda Campos," she said in a slightly-accented soprano. "I'm going to be teaching you a little bit about feminine manners and speech. Gayle has also asked me to teach you all how to dance, as well. I'm really looking forward to this."

"When do we start?" Gabe asked.

"Today is a full day," Gayle said. "You have physical therapy all morning and you need your sleep after lunch. After that we want you to see the doctors again, and then we're going to do a psychological evaluation of you all, to make sure no one is getting depressed after the procedure. You probably won't be able to get to work with Laura and Yolanda until early evening."

"Then we better get to it," Cayman told the group. "The sooner we get busy being ladies the sooner we can get back to the speedway."

Gayle only smiled.

\* \* \*

"I'm still not convinced that this is the best course for them," Dr. Creeger said again, leaning back in her chair. She pushed across a thick file folder. "This is the data compiled from the psychologists you brought in."

Gayle clicked her tongue. "They seem very happy and carefree to me, Sylvia."

Creeger tapped the folder again. "That's my point, Gayle. There should be some ill effects after the procedure. There should be identity issues, at the very least some concern. But these men are exhibiting none of this. It's like they don't even care that it happened."

"I told you, Sylvia, this is what they wanted. Doesn't it stand to reason that they'd be happy about getting it?"

Creeger sighed. "You're oversimplifying things," she said heavily. "Don't you see what's happening? They're ignoring what's happened to them. Look at them."

The monitor on the living quarters showed Doc, Jenner, Gabe, Ketcham and Cayman sitting in a big circle around Laura, doing one another's makeup under her supervision. On the other side of the room, Yolanda was showing Corey, Amos, Sid and Bucky how to walk in outrageously high heels.

"This isn't normal," Sylvia concluded.

"I have to disagree, Sylvia," Gayle said. "They look perfectly happy and normal to me, and all the psychologists agreed with me. What remains for us to do is to ease their transition into womanhood and make it as quick and painless as possible. Don't you want these men to have normal, healthy lives?"

"Of course I do! It's just that."

"It's a yes or no proposition, Sylvia," Gayle said sternly. "You either want to help them become the women they want to be, or you don't. I value you as a member of this team, but if you're not as dedicated as I am to their well-being, I'm afraid I'll have to replace you."

"That won't be necessary," Sylvia muttered, defeated.

"I'm relieved to hear that," Gayle said. "Because the next few nights are crucial. The diet and exercise program is proceeding well and they're going to be at a critical juncture for their development soon. They're going to stop thinking of themselves as men soon and we have to be sure that they begin thinking of themselves as the right kind of women."

"I understand," Sylvia said.

"I want you to begin easing them into their sexual identities," Gayle said. "Give them a foundation to build on. They're going to need all the help they can get."

"And I'm to use the archetypes that you gave me," Sylvia said.

"Correct," answered Gayle.

"You realize that you run the risk of having these women become total self-absorbed bimbos," Sylvia told her. "Keep in mind, the only real source for sexual identification that these men have, the only real exposure to feminine sexuality is through things like girlie magazines, strippers, television and movies. They're not going to imprint on the sexuality of the women they know. They're going to imprint on their interpretations of those women."

Gayle shook her head. "I understand that there's a risk. So do those men in there, Sylvia. It's a chance they're willing to take."

"Can I make a suggestion?" Sylvia asked.

"Absolutely," Gayle said. "It's why we hired you."

"You need to allow them access to their old lives, soon. Anything, a favorite shirt or working on their car. Let them go to the movies or out to the speedway. Anything will help ease that transition, so long as they have an anchor."

"Do you really think that's wise?"

"You've put them into a world that they really don't understand," Creeger explained. "From carburetors and canned beer to satin sheets and leave-in conditioners. If you don't give them some kind of access back to their lives, some point of reference, then they could get lost in all of this mess."

"I'm not going to lie to you, Sylvia," Gayle said. "We want a winning racing team. Of that there is no doubt. But we also want a role model. We don't just want good racers. We want good

racers who use Ingénue Cosmetics, and read Cosmopolitan magazine and smoke Virginia Slims cigarettes and use Paul Mitchell shampoo. We want these women to be able to discuss fuel intake systems in one breath and the Mizrahi summer line in the next. A certain amount of immersion in their femininity is encouraged."

Sylvia sighed. "You're sure about this. They're sure about this," she said.

"Yes," Gayle told her firmly.

"All right," Sylvia said heavily. "I'll get them started. One NASCAR racing team with a fixation on clothes, makeup and hairstyles, coming right up."

Gayle snickered. "And boys. Don't forget the boys."

\* \* \*

"Everything is on schedule," Gayle said into the phone. "We're making the adjustments, but getting it past Sylvia Creeger is getting to be a problem. If she wasn't so damned good at this, I'd cut her loose."

A pause, then: "No, she bought it. She's going to start on the program we detailed, Vivian. If all goes according to plan, we're going to have everything we want out of these men. Advertising models for Ingénue, Paul Mitchell, Virginia Slims, plus the merchandising tie-ins of their own lines. And they'll be media darlings. Perfect little bubbleheads, mugging for the camera. A few pictures in the sports page and all our little boys who are into racing will be lining up around the block to get a copy of the Team Ingénue Bikini Calendar. We'll outsell Sports Illustrated. Who knows? Maybe we can wrangle a spread in Playboy or Penthouse before it's all over. Then we can have little bastards all over the country jerking their dicks over our little girls."

Another pause. "Should we care, Vivian? Creeger is converting them into brainless little nymphets like we wanted. Once it's done, and we can get some real women in their places, I don't care if they're whores or strippers or baby factories. I hope I never have to see the worthless pieces of shit again."

The longest pause of all, then: "I'll see to it personally, Vivian. Don't worry about a thing."

Gayle replaced the phone in its cradle, grabbed her purse and hustled out the door towards her next appointment, for which she was exceedingly late. She shut the door behind her and never saw the curtains stir, or Sylvia Creeger creep from the place she'd been hiding in the window.

"This changes things," Creeger said, watching the door where Gayle Lourdes had just left. "This changes things a lot."

\* \* \*

Corey was completely exhausted by the time he dropped into bed that night - the sessions with the physical therapists and then the marathons with Laura and Yolanda (whom the half-men-half-women had taken to calling "Yo-Yo") were taxing their already seriously depleted reserves of energy.

He sighed contentedly as he snuggled into the soft flannel coverlet and felt his face sink into the downy pillow. He was already half asleep when he heard the familiar voice, soft and husky, whispering to him softly as sleep overtook him at long last.

"Corey, I need to talk to you."

"Mmmph," Corey managed, snuggling deeper into the thick carpet of his pillowed hair.

"Corey, wake up, honey. It's important."

"What?" he said, hearing the note of urgency in the voice.

"You're in danger, Corey," the voice said. "Gayle Lourdes is not who she says she is."

"What do you mean?"

"You and your friends were transformed to become female racers," the voice explained. "But Gayle isn't concerned with you the way you think she is. She wants you all to be commercials for her products. The results will have serious impact on your individual personalities - you run the risk of ending up as nothing more than living Barbie dolls. Gayle has told me time and time again that it's what you and your friends want. But I have to know, Corey - is this true? Is that really what you want?"

"Barbie dolls? Us? Hell, no, it's not what we want. We just want to be racers. Championship racers. And, hell, I don't know about the others, but I want to be the best possible woman that I can be. I didn't think this cock-and-bull treatment was actually gonna work, but now that it is, I don't want to come off looking like a freak. I figure if I gotta be a girl, then I want to be the best possible girl I can be."

"Understandable," the voice said. "And very courageous. You and your friends are quite remarkable people, Corey. We haven't been formally introduced. My name is Dr. Sylvia Creeger. I've been trying to ease your transition through hypnotherapy and subliminal therapy."

"I figured there was somebody behind the scenes," Corey said. "Pleased to meet you, Dr. Creeger. Do the other guys know about you?"

"Not yet," Sylvia said. "You're usually the first I speak to."

"What makes you think Gayle is out to do this to us?" Corey asked.

"I overheard a phone conversation she had with some executive at Ingénue. I'm trying to track down exactly who, but I don't know yet."

"So what do we do? We put a lot of faith in Gayle. And we don't have many alternatives. We're pretty much stuck with her, for better or worse."

"I know," Sylvia replied. "But I think I know a way."

"Tell me," Corey demanded.

"If you and your friends are willing, I can create a layered personality for all of you. On the surface, you'll be the willing little bimbos that Gayle expects. Concerned with nothing more than clothes, makeup and sex. And driving, of course - nothing changes that. But underneath, I think I can help you all develop normally so that you'll have healthy and distinct personalities."

"Sounds complicated."

"It is," Sylvia said. "But I helped pioneer the field. The way it will work is this: during the days, you'll feel and act like the woman Gayle expects. But as soon as you begin your time with Yolanda and Laura, that personality will be subsumed and your 'real' attributes will surface. I've spoken with Yolanda and Laura both, and explained the situation. They're willing - eager, actually - to help."

"What's the catch?" Corey asked.

"The catch is, you can't just turn a personality on and off like a light switch," Sylvia told him. "There are going to be elements of the 'bimbo' personality that are going to remain active always, because you're going to encounter things as that woman that help you define your own identity. Some things aren't going to change, no matter what."

"What kinds of things?"

"A preoccupation with appearance, possibly. Maybe a tendency towards promiscuity. It all depends on what you find to define your identity. If there's something that makes you feel particularly feminine, and thereby reinforces your feminine personality - like a sexy strut in your walk or acting like an airhead in front of men - then it's going to become a part of your personality."

"So we can't dodge the bimbo bullet, no matter how hard we try," Corey concluded.

"Possibly. Possibly not. This isn't an exact science, Corey. Every person is different, and different things are important to who they are. I can't tell more until we start the process."

Corey sighed. "Damn that woman."

"If I'd only known earlier, Corey, I could have averted this. I'm so sorry."

"It ain't your fault, ma'am," Corey said. "There was nothing you coulda done about it. What's important is that we have a chance to salvage who we are and maybe turn the tables on that woman somehow."

"Revenge on Gayle Lourdes will have to wait, Corey. First things first."

"Right," Corey said. "But I ain't likely to forget what she done."

"Nor will I. Justice will be served, I promise you. But only after I'm sure you and your friends are completely safe. Remember, Corey, I can be replaced and Gayle can find someone who won't have any ethical problems with converting the lot of you into mindless little mannequins. We have to be careful. She can't suspect."

"Don't worry," Corey said. "Me and the boys can keep a secret."

"Good," Sylvia said. "Then we're agreed."

"I'm trusting you, here, ma'am. You can do whatever to me, but be careful with my friends. I don't want nothing to happen to them."

"They're every bit as important to me as you are, Corey. I'll watch out for them."

"Okay, then, we're agreed," Corey said. "What do we do now?"

"The first thing is for you to go to sleep, Corey. You're feeling drowsy already. Your eyelids are becoming heavier and heavier, your body more and more relaxed. All the muscles of your body are relaxing. Your toes, your feet, your ankles."

\* \* \*

The next day was difficult - even with the hypnotherapy, none of them were quite prepared to wake up and be unable to locate their penises. The organs, severely dwindled, had disappeared between the thick folds of what had been their scrotal sacs but now resembled labia majora. Careful probing with long-nailed fingers had found the tiny little buds that had once been their proud male appendages, tucked securely under a protective hood of flesh. And none of them could deny the incredibly intense waves of physical sensation that had accompanied that gentle prodding.

There was still no vaginal opening, but it seemed that the cavity between their legs was sealed only by the thinnest of membranes, that sitting down too roughly would rupture it. It wouldn't be long now.

Corey looked over at his companions, still awed by the incredible transformations. The diet and exercise programs had shaped and smoothed all their muscles into sleek femininity, while trimming their waists and filling out their butts and hips. A sleek layer of fatty tissue had developed under their skin, giving them all a smooth, soft and rounded appearance and causing their skin to almost glow with health and vitality. The loss of muscle mass had caused arms and legs to become tapered, slender and shapely and necks to become long, graceful arches. The doctors had pronounced that the pelvic bones were widening to accommodate the new 'plumbing' and giving them a more hourglass, curvy contour.

Because of the ravages of the virus which had started the transformation, and the long period where they'd evacuated their bodies of excess mass through the kidneys, liver and digestive tract, they were all very slender (the doctors told them they'd live the rest of their lives with only eight to ten percent body fat, the lowest possible to still be healthy and curvaceous) and, unfortunately, flat-chested. Their ribs showed prominently through the smooth, unblemished skin of their torsos, showing that the ribcages were already reconfiguring themselves to their new, feminine contour and size.

"Y'know," Sid was saying, looking down at his body through the collar of his loose t-shirt, "it's funny. I didn't believe any of this was actually happening right at first, but now - I'm almost looking forward to when the tits start to grow. I kinda want to see what they're going to look like."

"I hope I have some great big ones," Ketcham said, cupping his little AA-cups in his long-nailed hands.

"How're you going to be able to carry tires with a big set of knockers?" Jenner asked. "More than a handful is a waste, if y'ask me."

"I ain't askin' you," Ketcham shot back. "And I want some great big ol' titties. I'll roll the tires with my knees or something."

They all laughed. But underneath their superficial hypno-conditioning, the true personalities of the men were a little aghast. It was happening awfully quickly. Already they were willing to

risk effectiveness as a pit crew just in order to look more desirable. Corey didn't let it show, but he was becoming more and more afraid.

"I like Yo-Yo's," Gabe said. "D'you mind me askin' how big yours are, girl?"

Yolanda smiled demurely. "I wear a 36C bra," she said. "But I don't come close to filling it up. I could probably fit in a B cup if I wanted."

"Do they make, like, a J cup? That's the kind I wanna have," Ketcham said, and the table laughed once again. Already it was becoming a lilting, feminine sound instead of the formerly masculine boom of laughter that had usually attended Ketcham's jokes.

"Well, see how they turn out and if they're still too small we'll use the tire compressor to fill 'em up a little bit," Doc told him.

"What's on tap for today?" Cayman asked Corey.

"We're going back out to the track today, if the docs give us a passing grade," Corey told the table. "We have PT all morning, then lunch and then the physical. If we all pass the physical, then we're out to the track for a little practice."

"That'll be good," Doc said. "I been missing it."

"How you gonna work on an engine with those claws of yours?" Amos asked, waving his own long, square-cut fingernails at Doc.

"Figure I gotta get used to it sometime," Doc said, "'cause I ain't plannin' on cutting 'em short ever again. I love these long nails. They look good on me and they're sexy as hell."

"What about tonight?" Cayman pressed.

"Dunno," Corey confessed. "More work with Yo-Yo and Laura, I guess. Why?"

"Nothin'," Cayman said sheepishly.

"Speak up," Doc told him. "We're all friends here."

"It's stupid," Cayman replied.

"What is?" Gabe demanded. "C'mon, Cayman, tell us."

"Well, I was wonderin'. I mean, I really like y'all. And this has all been fun and all, but I still don't feel like I really know y'all. Y'know?"

"Me and Gabe and Jenner've known each other all our lives," Corey said. "But yeah, I don't know much about anybody else. What did you have in mind?"

"Well, my sister always used to have these sleepovers when she was a girl," Cayman explained. "My mom and dad told me I wasn't s'posed to bother them, but I snuck down anyhow and just listened. And they sat around and just talked. I mean, they made cookies and shit, too, but mostly they just talked. I guess I was wonderin', y'know, if maybe we could do something like that."

"That sounds like fun," Gabe said.

"It does, don't it?" Doc put in. "I'm in."

"Yeah, me too," Jenner said. "We can even pull the sheets off the beds and sleep out here, if you wanted."

"Here's something we could do, too," Amos said. "I don't know about y'all, but that closet full of clothes in there is startin' to interest me. I didn't want to put none of that stuff on, ever, right at first, but after talkin' with Laura a little bit, I'm curious."

"I think we all are, a little," Ketcham said.

"So what do y'all say to making this sleepover thing a 'girls only' affair?" Amos suggested. "Every one of us has to wear something out of that closet to sleep in, something that a girl would wear. I figure the reason none of us has tried none of that stuff on is because none of us wanted to be first. But if we all do it at once, then there won't be nothing to be embarrassed about, will there?"

"I like it," Corey said. "I'll do it."

All the team agreed happily, and there seemed to be an air of lighthearted fun about the whole thing. They even talked Laura and Yolanda into staying with them that night. Although Corey was a little concerned about not keeping in contact with Dr. Creeger that night, it just seemed more important to bond with the group. They wolfed the rest of breakfast and headed out to the gym. A very girlish notion was in their minds - the sooner they got the rest of the day out of the way, the sooner they could get dressed for bed and go and have a little fun.

\* \* \*

After a long day in the pit, surrounded by smoke and fumes and grease and the smell of burnt rubber, it seemed strange for Corey to go into his little room and shower with lilac-scented body wash and wash his hair with papaya shampoo and ginseng conditioner. After brushing his hair out and drying it with the blow dryer (it was becoming long and lush and incredibly thick and softer every time he washed it, and his receding hairline was now completely gone), he slipped into a little filmy pink babydoll nightie, a matching thong panty (strange that he actually liked the feel of the strip of lacy cloth between his rounded, hairless buttocks) and tied a pink ribbon into his shoulder-length hair. Grabbing his pillow from the bed, he made his way into the front room with a hint of trepidation. The babydoll was more see-through than not and hardly even covered his crotch. What if the others hadn't dressed quite so 'girly'? How embarrassed would they make him feel?

Swallowing hard, he turned the doorknob and stepped out.

The mattresses and sheets were in a pile in the center of the room, and all of the team were out there, sitting in a circle and chatting amiably. Cayman was sitting in a babydoll much like the one Corey wore, except Cayman's was red satin. Cayman drew his shiny, hairless legs up underneath him sidesaddle as he chatted with Doc Jones, who was wearing a pair of long pale blue flannel pajama pants with little frogs on them and a little white tank with a frog embroidered between the breasts. Little pale-blue spaghetti straps went over the smooth shoulders, exposing the tan-lines from the bikini top Doc had taken to wearing in the tanning bed.

Jenner was sitting cross-legged on one of the couches, wearing a peach-colored satin camisole and matching tap pants. He was paging effortlessly through the latest Victoria's Secret catalog with Gabe and Ketcham over his shoulder. Gabe, the tallest of the group at five

foot nine, was wearing pajamas like Doc's, but his were pale pink and had little clouds and stars on them, and the little camisole tank he wore had the word 'Princess' picked out on it in red sequins - funny, because Gabe had been the one who'd objected to the use of the word 'Princess' in relation to them a few days earlier. Ketcham only wore a long Raiders football jersey with the number 72 on it, with bare legs and pushed-down ankle socks sticking out of the bottom.

Bucky was in the little kitchen unit with Sid and Amos, stirring a big bowl of something while the others repeatedly thrust their fingers in the mixture and stuck them into their mouths. Bucky wore a little pink satin teddy and he had to go up on the tips of his little red-painted toes (and made his hairless legs look fantastic in the process) to get anything down from the cabinets. A long way from the six-foot-four giant he'd been only last week. Sid - of them all, Sid was far and away enjoying the 'girly' aspects of their lives the most of any of them, and Corey suspected that deep down he might have been a transvestite and hadn't even admitted it to himself before the change - was in flowing silk drawstring pants, a shimmery black, and had a little barely-there lace off-the-shoulder tubetop which hardly concealed his budding breasts. He looked fantastic, especially with his long chestnut hair hanging over his shoulders as he helped himself to another fingerful of whatever Bucky was mixing up. Amos had certainly given in to the curiosity he'd felt earlier about women's clothing - he wore a royal blue silk charmeuse which fairly shone against his tanned skin.

"That's gorgeous," Corey said to Amos, pointing to the little garment. "It looks incredible on you."

"Thanks," Amos said. "It's from Vicky's. You look really cute, too."

Cute? Corey thought in shock, but then forced it down and mumbled a thanks. God, this was all happening so fast. Amos Rollins was one of the roughest sumbitches Corey had ever met - he'd seen Amos in action in a bar fight in Savannah one time and had been amazed at how tough he'd been. Now the same man, standing a shrunken five foot six and with an ass that Corey would have drooled over a month ago, was calling his outfit 'cute' and referring to Victoria's Secret lingerie as 'Vicky's.' It was happening so damned quickly.

"What did the doctor say to you?" Corey asked.

Amos grinned ear to ear. "Didn't you hear? He was examining me when the little flap of skin covering up my hole just tore. It didn't hurt or nothin'. Just 'pop,' and I was wide open. I'm a girl now."

"Wow!" Corey said, feeling genuine delight for his companion. "That's wonderful, Amos! I'm so happy for you!"

"I'm happy too," Amos confessed. "I was a little scared when they told me, and I cried some. Then they did the pelvic exam. I was really scared then, but it wasn't really so bad. They put these headphones on me and the music almost put me to sleep. When I woke up, I didn't feel like crying anymore. I felt more like dancing."

Corey smiled. So it was true. Sylvia was looking out for them. He felt better about having formed his little midnight truce with the woman immediately, and gathered Amos up into a tight hug.

"Did anyone else?" Corey asked excitedly. "Just go 'pop' like you did?"

"Not the way I did," Amos said co-conspiratorially. "But when Jenner and Ketcham heard what had happened to me, they went into the bathroom and did it to each other."

"You're kidding," Corey said, gasping. He was completely unaware of how feminine he was sounding - both because of his voice, which was rapidly settling into a mellow, throaty mezzo-soprano and because he was gossiping with his buddy like they were old biddies at a church function.

"No lie," Amos said. "They both 'popped' each other and then went back to the waiting room. It was kinda cheating, if you ask me, but I'm really happy for them both."

"I am, too," Corey said, looking over at Jenner and Ketcham, who were exchanging knowing looks with one another as they gushed over the Victoria's catalog with Gabe. When Gabe noticed Corey looking, he motioned the lead driver over with a long-nailed wave.

"C'mere, Corey," he bade in his high, cheerful soprano. "Victoria's Secret is one of our sponsors, and Laura told me that they'll let us have anything in the catalog we want for free! All you have to do is fill out an order form and they'll send it to us."

"Really?" Corey asked.

"Really," Jenner said. "I've already filled up two pages."

"I'll be right over," Corey said. "And Jenner, Ketch - congratulations. I'm really happy for you both."

"So are we!" they chorused together, before they collapsed together, giggling like born girls.

"Amazing," Corey said to himself.

\* \* \*

The party was in full swing by the time Yolanda and Laura made the scene. They were sitting around in a big circle, chatting amiably about this and that. It was truly remarkable how much support they were drawing from one another - sharing all the joys and helping shoulder all the little tragedies about what was happening to them. Strangely - and, Corey suspected, due to the tireless help of Dr. Creeger - none of them seemed to miss ever being a man. Corey was a little taken aback at how he was still a little aroused by the women in the Victoria's catalog, but his thoughts turned more quickly towards how he was going to look in the clothing they had displayed rather than the appeal of the models wearing them.

Laura and Yolanda had come prepared, as well - two brimming suitcases stuffed with promotional items from their sponsors. Corey was soon loaded down with a big tackle box overflowing with top-of-the-line Ingénue cosmetics, a big clear plastic tote bag stuffed with shampoo, conditioner and styling products from Paul Mitchell, several fashions from Victoria's Secret and Carabella (their newest sponsor), a new bikini from Venus Swimwear, a subscription to Cosmo and two cartons of the skinny little Virginia Slims cigarettes. Of all the promotions, the cigarettes were perhaps the best received - all of the men had smoked cigarettes or dipped snuff before the transformation, and close to two weeks without tobacco had taken its toll. The room was soon covered by a light haze of blue smoke as all of the new women partook of their sponsor's largesse. All of them seemed to lean towards the longer 120's variety, not because of any appreciable difference in flavor or potency, Corey knew, but because they looked so goddamned sexy held between their long-nailed fingers.

As with most large same-sex gatherings, the conversation soon turned towards sex and sexuality. Sid was the first to express what all the others had on their minds.

"I've been having dreams lately," he said nervously. "I don't know about the rest of the guys, but I have. Dreams about. about."

"About men?" Yolanda asked carefully.

"Yeah," Sid said, blushing a bright scarlet.

"It's okay, Sid," Doc said. "I've been having 'em too."

"And me," Gabe offered.

"So, I guess what I want to know is," Sid said, fidgeting, "what's it like?"

Yolanda smiled and put a comforting hand on Sid's knee. "It depends. When you're with a guy you really care for, then even if it's 'not so good' it's still wonderful. A lot of things influence it. I mean, sometimes I get so horny that all my boyfriend has to do is look at me a certain way and I just explode inside. Other times, it takes a long time for me to get going. Sometimes all I feel like doing is kissing and touching, and sometimes all I feel like doing is giving pleasure to him."

"But, the thing. The thing itself. What's it like?" Cayman asked.

"You mean being penetrated?" Yolanda replied. "My first time, I was scared silly. I just knew that I was going to get pregnant, or everybody was going to know and think I was a slut. And as horny as I was at the time, I couldn't have told them I wasn't. I swear, I would've done anything that boy asked me to - he had my whole body singing."

"Who was he?" Bucky asked.

"My boyfriend, my junior year in high school. We'd just gone to the homecoming dance and I was in this really great dress my mom and I had made together. He was a real romantic - he promised me a fancy dinner, but what wound up happening was he took me out to the park where he'd set a table with candles out in the trees, and he bribed his little brother to be a waiter and serve us Burger King. It was silly, but God, it was romantic. I pretty much decided that I was going to do it with him right then."

"So?" Ketcham pressed. "What happened next?"

"We went to the dance for a while, but it was really lame. We left after about an hour and we went back to the park for a walk. He was really embarrassed - his brother had given him some condoms and the keys to his apartment earlier that night, and I'd found them in the car. He was afraid I was going to think he was planning something. He said he didn't want to push me into anything. I kissed him and told him to shut up and get in the car."

"But what did it feel like?" Jenner demanded.

"I've heard it's different for every woman," Yolanda said. "Most people had told me that it was going to hurt, but it really didn't. I was really, really wet, for one thing. I'd also masturbated a lot as a teenager, kinda probed around down there with my fingers, which had me used to the idea. Also, my boyfriend wasn't very big down there. Just the right size, as a matter of fact. There was just kind of a pressure, and then a pop and all of a sudden, it felt really good. Really good. It didn't take him long, since it was his first time too, but we held each other and kissed - and that felt just as good to me as the other - and soon he was able to try

again. It was a lot better the second time, since we were starting to get used to one another, and after the first time we weren't as scared."

"It was a lot different for me," Laura said. "I was already in college - I was saving myself for someone special, like a lot of girls I knew were. I really thought I'd met the man of my dreams - his name was Chris and he had the most amazing green eyes - and I was already kinda ramping up to do it with him. Then I saw him at a tailgate party, kissing Amanda Bancroft."

"Bastard," Corey spat. "I hate guys like that. I've kicked the ass of one or two in my day."

"I was heartbroken, and madder than hell," Laura said. "I went over to the keg and got completely loaded. All I could think about was getting my revenge. I got blasted and then hooked up with the first guy that hit on me. We went back to his dorm room and I just gave it away. I've always regretted it."

"Was it different for you than for Yo-Yo, though?" Sid asked. "Did it feel different?"

"Not really," Laura said. "Honestly, it was a relief more than anything. I really liked it - it was like all this tension I was carrying around in my mind just evaporated, all at once. I came like a wildcat, three or four times. He'd finish and I'd jump on top of him again, grind my pussy in his face and suck him until he got hard again. I just mauled him -" she paused to giggle at the recollection " - and had the time of my life. I've always wished it could've been with someone I really cared about, but that came later."

"That's terrible," Cayman said. "I'm so sorry."

Laura blew a raspberry. "It wasn't so bad, Cayman. I did what I did, and I enjoyed myself thoroughly. I'd never given myself permission to be that wild before. I liked it. And besides, there was a plus side. I got a reputation as the campus slut, and I got asked out a lot after that - I've always had a thing for 'bad boys' and they were the ones that were suddenly interested in me. And that's how I met my fiancé, Will. And once I met him, I did get to discover what it was like to make love to someone I really cared about, and it wasn't as some blushing, nervous virgin. We got to skip over all the awkwardness and fear and just get right to the business of giving one another pleasure."

"Is it that good, then? Giving out pleasure like that?" Gabe asked.

Laura's eyes fairly twinkled. "Sometimes, when you have his dick in your mouth, he'll just toss back his head and groan. Will always laces his fingers in my hair. And you realize, here's this man who's bigger and stronger and tougher than you're ever going to be, and he's completely powerless to you. You have him in your complete control. It's incredible. I get so wet when that feeling hits me. I could come just from that alone, sometimes."

"Wow," Sid said. "Don't take this the wrong way, fellas, but - damn, I can't wait to feel what that's like."

The group laughed, but not maliciously. "To hear Laura describe it, I can't neither," Corey confessed.

"Take some advice, then," Yolanda said. "Look up at him while you're sucking his cock. Every guy I've done it to thinks that's the sexiest thing imaginable."

"I always liked that, before," Jenner said. "I thought it was pretty damned sexy, too."

"It's like my sister told me," Laura said. "Love can move mountains, but the only thing that can get you diamond earrings is a well-done blowjob."

"Shit," Amos said. "Christ knows how much money I've spent on women who did it to me. Might be nice to be on the receivin' end for a change. Maybe I can get my money back."

"Amos Rollins, master cocksucker in training," Bucky said, shoving his friend's shoulder gently. "Wait'll the guys down at Delaney's hear about that."

"Line 'em up," Amos said, grinning. "I'll get a pair of diamond earrings from every last one of 'em before the night's done."

"Practice on a pickle," Laura suggested. "That's what my sister did, and she had quite a reputation around school as a true artist."

"Did you ever practice on any pickles?" Cayman asked playfully.

"I've never liked pickles," Laura said, blushing brightly. "But I have it on good authority that a big carrot works just as well. Not that I'd know anything about that."

The girls roared with laughter, collapsing weakly against one another. Corey joined in the laughter as well, but with the sinking suspicion that one of the 'girls' would be making a request to the staff for a jar of pickles or a big bunch of carrots in the next day or so. Things were changing so quickly. So dizzyingly quickly.

For neither the first nor the last time, Corey Hoffman sincerely hoped that Dr. Creeger knew what the hell she was doing.

\* \* \*

The next two days were a haze of time trials and pit rehearsals in the mornings and then physical therapy and sessions with Laura and Yolanda in the evenings. They'd formed into a very tight-knit unit, not just from being truly gifted at their sport, but because they were good friends brought together by the hardships of the transformation. Their times were going down drastically, and Jenner's crew had already beaten the magical fourteen-second time for a pit stop several times. With Gabe and Ketcham as the tire carriers, Doc and Sid as the changers, Bucky and Amos on the gas can and Jenner running the jack, they had made the organized chaos of the pit into something resembling a ballet. Laura and Yolanda had agreed to be the support crew, handing the tires over the wall.

Corey and Cayman were each racing better than they ever had, as well - the seconds were melting away from their lap times. Both superlative drivers, they also practiced on the track together, giving one another more experience in blocking drivers trying to pass and aggressively jockeying for higher positions. It was a dead heat as to who was the better driver, so Ingénue made the decision on experience alone. Corey would take the Ingénue car and Cayman would wait a season as backup driver and then get some saddle time and experience racing in the Busch league.

The evenings were crammed with lessons in makeup and hairstyling, learning to walk in high heels, dancing, talking, movement and mannerism, everything. They'd even learned - at Gayle's urging, of course - to do a little modeling as well, learning how to strut and turn on the catwalk and develop posture, gesture and smiles. The modeling coach, Susan LaFontaine, was a real pro and had the 'ladies' looking like the E! fashion shows in a matter of hours. Corey

couldn't help but suspect that Dr. Creeger had something to do with that as well. Sometimes the music they were rehearsing to seemed to have a strange hum or buzz in the background, just barely noticeable. It seemed that the good doctor was everywhere.

Evenings were spent rubbing their chests with a thick, chilly cream called Bloussant and taking handfuls of pills which were supposed to encourage breast development. Unfortunately, there was little change in their bustlines. Although the decreased body fat percentages and the constant physical therapy and raceway work had them toned, fit, and muscled like panthers, none of the 'girls' had anything more than Sid's shallow A-cup.

Corey was just taking the car out to shake down the adjustments Doc and Jenner had made to the differential when he saw Sid flagging him into the pit. He pulled into the pit as soon as he passed, shedding speed with the engine before applying the brakes. The track was still a little wet and covered with leaves from last night's thunderstorm, which made him extra-careful when braking. Even so, he couldn't avoid the stout-looking branch which had blown into the pit area from a nearby tree - nothing major that would hurt the vehicle, thank God, but enough to give the car a good solid bump.

Corey hopped out the window, tossing his helmet to Sid and working the zipper of his jumpsuit - pink and white, the Ingénue colors, and sewn with sponsor patches - irritably.

"You okay, Core?" Gabe asked, a little concerned that Corey hadn't looked or spoken to anyone upon getting out of the car.

Corey lowered the zipper to crotch level and snaked his slender, long-nailed hand into the waistband of his cotton panties. The probing finger searched through the thick folds of what had once been his scrotum, past the little bud of the penis - now the clitoris, he supposed - and past the puckered opening of his newly-formed urethra. Back, between the legs, towards the little membrane that covered his feminine opening.

And he felt no resistance whatsoever. So that was the strange tearing feeling he'd felt when he'd hit that branch. He brought his fingers in front of his face and stared at them uncomprehendingly.

"It happened," he muttered.

"It did?" Gabe said, laughing. He gathered his friend up into a tight hug. "Oh, honey, I'm so happy for you! What was it?"

Corey pointed vacantly to the tree branch. "I hit that, and there was a big bump, and I felt something tear. And then - I dunno - everything just kinda felt. I dunno, natural."

"A tree branch," Gabe said, laughing. "Of all the dadgum things to do it."

"Why'd y'all flag me in?" Corey asked, zipping the jumpsuit, starting to feel a little less stunned about his new womanhood and more and more excited and proud.

"Ms. Gayle is here. She says there's someone she wants us to meet," Gabe said. "All the others are there already, I said I'd wait on you to get in. We're the last two guys out here."

"Last two girls," Corey corrected. "I'm a girl now. And don't you forget it."

The went back towards the garage, arms around one another, long hair flowing behind them.

\* \* \*

"Girls, we're thrilled with your progress. You've surpassed everything we ever expected. There is only one thing that isn't up to standards," Gayle told the assembly.

"Tell us about it," Ketcham said, cradling his sadly-undersized chest.

"There simply isn't enough body mass to support breast formation," Gayle said. "The process of transformation took too much out of you. But we think we have an acceptable solution, if everybody is willing. I'd like you all to meet Dr. Kevin Schussler. He works in the same labs where we developed the virus."

"Hello, ladies," Dr. Schussler said in a lightly-accented tenor. "I'm amazed at your progress. It's remarkable. Utterly remarkable. I am a colleague of Dr. Amelia Vandermeer and Dr. Warren Stevens, the two who adapted the virus to affect the transformation. We'd originally developed that virus as a method of delivering a combination of drugs and vitamins directly to the hair follicles - making a rapid hair-growth formula for marketing. As it stands, the use of the X chromosome is going to be worth a fortune to the transgendered community around the world.

"When Ms. Lourdes explained your, um, problem to me, I immediately thought of something else we've been developing in our R and D labs. I think I have a solution."

Dr. Schussler held up a little jar of a thick, oily yellow substance. "This is IRD-2281. It's one of the products we're developing for our Cosmetic and Reconstructive Surgery Division. It's designed to solidify into a spongy layer when injected into the body and there release collagen and elastin. We affectionately call it 'Facelift in a Jar.'"

"How does it help us?" Doc asked.

"Alone, it doesn't. But it solves another problem. The reason that none of you have been considered for breast implants is because you don't have enough native breast tissue to make it look anywhere close to natural. If we were to use implants on you now, their appearance would be similar to if we simply taped balloons onto your chests. But if we were to install the implants, behind the pectoral wall going in from under the breast, and then fill the areas around the implant with IRD-2281, it would give a layer of padding that would look and feel very similar to female breast tissue."

"Ain't them implants dangerous?" Amos spoke up.

"Not particularly," Schussler explained. "The saline implants have a tendency to rupture, but we wouldn't be using saline. Our implants would be filled with a variation on IRD-2281, called - imaginatively enough - IRD-2281b which forms into a porous gelatin once it cures. It is safer than saline, it's closer to real breast tissue, doesn't interfere with lactation in any way, and because it's semi-solid, it won't lose its shape due to rupture the way a saline implant would. Also, the body doesn't absorb IRD-2281b the way it does saline. They'd be, more or less, permanent, since the body won't try to assimilate them."

"We can't, of course, require this of you," Gayle said. "But if any of you ladies would like to volunteer, we can get the process started immediately. It's going to take some time - about a month - to heal back up to one hundred percent. We know it will throw your training schedule, but it will be more time for you all to learn how to become women before you go out in public."

"Hell," Doc said. "I'm sick of looking like a skinny little teenager. I want me some curves. Sign me up."

Ketcham giggled. "Do we get to pick what size we want?"

\* \* \*

Corey wasn't the first one awake - he noticed that Cayman and Amos' eyes were also open, but they were exhibiting the glassy, lethargic stare that heralded coming out from under a general anesthetic. The surgical gurneys they were on had been lifted into a sitting position, and the sheets had fallen away from their new additions. A two-banded compression garment - one strap below the breasts and around the midsection, another atop the breasts to force them downwards so they wouldn't be up around the women's chins - was on each person, and two very puffy, red and large breasts stuck proudly from each woman's chest. The absurdly large nipples and areolae they'd had before the surgery were now perfectly suited to their blossomed chests. Huge, soft-looking spheres - marred only by the surgical dressings under each swell - now graced the feminine curves of each woman.

Corey looked hazily down at his own. The doctors had warned that swelling after surgery and something about the pocket of scar tissue around each implant - called the 'capsule' - would make them seem much bigger than they would eventually be when they dropped down. They looked enormous from Corey's vantage, and it seemed as though they would take him over forwards if he tried to stand. It hurt a little to move his arms, but that was only supposed to last for a few days. After that, only light exercise and no real lifting until they healed completely.

He looked over at Cayman, who was calmly paging through Cosmo on his gurney. His sore, swollen breasts were still a scalded red tinge, but there was also the purple shade of surgical bruising underneath the nipples and a webwork of tiny little blue veins across the tautly-stretched skin. They'd be using the Bloussant and a high-powered medical moisturizer for the next few weeks, trying to help the abused skin adapt to its new payload. Cayman managed a lopsided, but genuine, smile.

Corey blinked his eyes in rapid succession, still surprised by the thick fan of eyelashes that swept across his field of vision and tickled the tops of his cheeks when he did. He'd been using Ingénue's new "Magic Length" mascara and it had made his lashes a whole lot longer. He brought his arms up slowly - there was pain involved - and ran his hands across the smooth surface of his new breasts. The IRD-2281 was still solidifying, but already they felt just like natural woman's breasts. The skin was soft, but sore - almost like a bad sunburn. He put his hands by his sides again. They were so big! He never expected them to be quite this huge, even after the doctors had told him that his height and body type would be best suited to a full 36C. But he couldn't forestall the flash of pride he felt at them, how soft and smooth and large they were. Corey could remember dimly the sound of some kind of music in his ears just as he was being put under for the surgery, and he distantly remembered something like a voice. Dr. Creeger's voice, if he guessed right. Nothing like three hours of forced sleep as a chance to fill their heads with more hypnotism. But was it the 'good' hypnotism or the 'bad' hypnotism?

"How're you feeling, hon?" Amos asked quietly. His voice had finally settled into a soothing, husky contralto that was as lovely speaking as it was singing.

"Groggy," Corey responded in his throaty mezzo. "Sore. But good. Did the doctors say anything about anybody while I was out?"

"Everybody came through it just fine," Cayman said in his gravel-in-a-bucket, hoarse alto. "No problems at all."

Corey couldn't resist asking. "How big did you get 'em?"

Cayman smiled. "I'm the proud owner of a lovely new set of 36C's, just like yours."

"They recommended a 34B for me, but I always liked 'em bigger, so I wound up getting a 34C," Amos supplied.

"Who's our winner?" Corey asked.

"Who do you think?" Cayman giggled. "Ketcham got 38DD's. They're enormous. But Gabe and Doc both tied for second with 36DD's. Same size as Anna Nicole Smith. Like walking around with basketballs on your chest, if you ask me."

"Far as I know, though, nobody got smaller than a C cup," Amos supplied. "We just all seemed to want 'em big, for some reason."

Damn you, Dr. Creeger, Corey thought, even as he felt a flash of pride and satisfaction that he had big tits. Even though there were still parts of him that rebelled, for the most part he couldn't wait to see the looks on the boys' faces when they saw them straining against the top of his brand new bikini.

"Who sent the flowers?" Corey asked, noticing the huge bouquet of day lilies in the vase near the door of the large group recovery room.

"They're from Laura and Yo-Yo," Cayman said. "They sent balloons, too."

"That's so sweet," Corey said, can't believing he was saying it and meaning it. He was even starting to sound like a girl. Calling his teammates 'honey' and 'sweetie' and 'girlfriend.' Going on and on about how 'cute' things were, if they weren't 'adorable' or 'precious.' And now he's talking about people being 'sweet.' Corey wasn't sure if the scarier part of it was that he didn't even realize it had happened, or that such a big part of him didn't seem to care anymore.

"Oh, look who's awake," Amos said. "Welcome back, Gabe."

Gabe coughed and looked down at his chest. "Whoa. What a rack."

Cayman spluttered. "Don't make me laugh. It hurts."

"How's everybody?" Gabe said.

"Sore, but good. Man, those things are big," Corey said. "What in the world possessed you to get tits that big, girl? You're going to have back problems."

"I dunno," Gabe said. "I just thought about it and decided that I wanted 'em. I mean, really wanted 'em. So I told the doc and he just wrote something down and said 'okay.' But hell, they ain't that big. Look over there at Ketcham. Leastways I didn't get 'em blown up as big as hers."

Corey blinked. "Did you say 'hers?'"

Gabe's femininely-arched eyebrows knit. "Shit. I did, didn't I?"

"I suppose we shoulda expected that," Cayman said. "I mean, she don't look like no guy anymore, does she?"

"Now you're doing it, too," Amos said.

"It just don't feel right anymore, calling any of y'all 'him.' Don't make sense, if y'all know what I mean," Cayman said with a careful shrug.

"She's right," Amos said, then gasped. "Shit, I just did it, too."

Cayman looked strangely at Amos, then at Gabe and then Corey. "Man, oh man. When you called me 'she' just then, Amos. I don't know. Something about the sound of it. It made me go all over goosebumps. I really liked it."

Dr. Creeger had done her work well, Corey thought, looking out the window in a mixture of fear and frustration. He hoped he hadn't risked everything by placing so much trust in the unseen doctor. Things were happening so quickly. Half of Corey was scared to the bone, and the other half feeling like laughing and dancing. Half of her was fearful that she'd never again know who the hell she was again while the other was seriously considering practicing on that pickle in the evenings.

Corey hadn't even realized she'd been thinking about herself in the feminine as her eyes closed over trembling, tearing eyes.

\* \* \*

Dr. Creeger went over her notes carefully as she waited for the computer to finish, before locking down the control room for the evening. Her work on the women had been absolutely exhausting and was paying off well. All of the women were exhibiting the bimbo tendencies that Gayle had been expecting all along - all of them flighty, indecisive, easily distracted and easily led. Preoccupied with their appearances and with attracting the opposite sex, even though interaction with the opposite sex was still a long way off. But the large breasts, the tight and revealing clothing, the high heels, the makeup and the hair, the long white cigarettes, the gossiping and giggling - all of these were key elements of what these ex-men considered femininity. They were stuck that way, hypnosis or no hypnosis. All of them had grown up looking at Playboy and associated the makeup, the costumes, the high heels, the hair and the big breasts to be a feminine ideal, something they as women would aspire to for the rest of their lives. And with the collagen-releasing breast implants they'd received, Sylvia had no doubt that they would remain young-looking and fresh-faced well into their seventies, which would leave a very long time for the young men (Doc was the oldest at twenty-nine) to aspire towards that goal.

Creeger had mitigated the damage as best she could, reminding them constantly of their senses of self, stressing that they were independent, decisive, capable and also members of a championship racing team. They didn't need anyone to tell them who they were, to influence them in any way they didn't want to be influenced. Gabe and Cayman's idea of a self-defense class was a positive boon in that department - twice a week getting a healthy dose of physicality and empowerment only made Sylvia's task easier. These were confident, capable women now - just masked over with a flighty, giggly exterior that could be easily stripped away now.

The computer sounded a noise and the CD-RW tray ejected. She added it to the pile of CDs she'd already burned that day - seven of them, all screenprinted at considerable expense to mimic the look of several professionally-distributed music CDs. Wordlessly, she slipped them into a CD wallet by the side of the computer, extracted a fifty-dollar bill from her purse and went outside into the hallway.

The young man in the red jacket stood as soon as she saw him. Creeger handed him the CD wallet and the fifty as they walked out the front door together.

"You sure she ain't gonna be pissed off?" the garage attendant asked.

"It's just a practical joke," Creeger assured him. "She won't get pissed off at you. I might be a different story, but it'll be worth it. Just put it back in her car before she notices it's gone and that'll be the end of your part in it."

"Cool," the boy said, grinning. "Tell me how it turns out, willya?"

Creeger smiled a mirthless smile. "It's going to be great. Trust me."

\* \* \*

The final days before their introduction to the public were a blur of activity. The car was given the last fine-tunings by Doc and Jenner and loaded on the trailer to head out to the Talladega superspeedway for Team Ingénue's first race. After that they were taken by bus to La Raïson, a very upscale salon and day spa which did all the consulting for women who were considering becoming professional cheerleaders for the nearby Atlanta football or basketball teams. They specialized in making women glamorous, visible and gorgeous, and Team Ingénue was a canvas well worth painting on.

The pampering was delicious. First a soak in a hot tub and a drawn-out massage by well-muscled and exceedingly gorgeous masseurs. Then a chemical flesh peel and microdermabrasion to even out their already flawless complexions. After that, a mud pack for the face and a sea-kelp protein treatment for the hair. All of the women had hair easily down to the bottoms of their shoulderblades from the constant vitamin treatments and the specialized products from Ingénue's R&D labs.

Corey took a chance and made herself a honey blonde with sun-streaked highlights, choosing a 'Jennifer Aniston' cut which fell in soft, feathery and straight tendrils which curled inwards around her cleavage. The makeup artist took her through the whole process of what he did to open up her face and draw attention to the eyes. Gabe only added a little bit of auburn highlight to her lustrous chestnut hair and wore it long and straight, with wispy little bangs that flirted into her eyes. Jenner went all out, deciding on a vibrant strawberry blonde mane of loose curls and dramatic, 'party girl' makeup. Sid, ever the 'girly' girl, chose a versatile 'Audrey Hepburn' variant on her dark sable locks, but with a more 'Gibson Girl' look to the face which left her looking wide-eyed and girlish. Doc and Bucky kept it toned down a little bit, going for the golden-highlighted 'beach bunny' hair worn long and straight to float in the seaside breezes. With the tanned skin from the tanning booth, they could have easily been bikini models. Amos had fallen in love with a dark, 'Andie MacDowell' shower of kinky curls which spilled over her shoulders in a shiny, soft cascade. Ketcham - the resident wild one - had opted for a short, pixie-ish cut dyed a lustrous, platinum blonde and dramatic, almost-trashy makeup. She'd taken to adding a sultry little strut to her walk which set her enormous breasts

jiggling provocatively, and the new 'look' only made it more pronounced. She'd draw eyes everywhere she went.

Even the normally staid Gayle had given in to temptation and let the hairstylists and makeup people work their magic on her. She laughed and giggled her way through, saying continually that she didn't know what had gotten into her, that this 'girl' stuff must be going to her head, but she wasn't complaining when she got turned around to the mirror to see her high-maintenance, flyaway hairstyle dyed a luscious honey-gold with white highlights and the wide-eyed, flirtatious and glamorous look the makeup artist had worked on her quite pretty face. She even let Sid and Ketcham talk her into a manicure, and Gayle surprised them all by getting extensions that made her nails longer than any of the other girls. She wondered aloud how in the world she was going to be able to type with those claws, but the smile on her face showed she didn't have any regrets or any thought of cutting them off again. She left the salon with an extra wiggle in her walk, commenting gaily about Sid's shoes (a pair of strappy stiletto-heeled sandals) and the skin-tight leather jeans that Doc was wearing.

After the pampering, they were given all the new clothes that Victoria's Secret had promised them and the afternoon devolved into an impromptu fashion show as the girls modeled every single thing they'd bought. Gabe produced a little disposable camera and walked around the room happily, talking in a sadly-rendered Euro-trash accent and telling the girls to 'show me angry, show me angry, show me grr' as she snapped picture after picture. She even stuck her head into the rooms as the girls were changing, threatening to put the pictures there onto the Internet and make a fortune in the process.

Afterwards, they packed everything up and left the recovery facility for good. They'd all been set up with upscale apartments in Atlanta, but they didn't go there - they headed for the Ingénue building downtown instead, taking nervous seats behind a curtain while they listened to the raucous sounds of the press milling around outside. A press secretary commented sweetly about all their appearances, had them sign some more waivers and distributed thick envelopes to all of them. Then, before they were really even ready, they could hear Gayle's voice on the microphone outside, saying:

"Although the typically male-dominated sport of NASCAR Auto Racing has had its women pioneers, such as Shawna Robinson, Tammy Jo Kirk, Patty Moise and Louise Smith, never before has there been an all-female racing team to enter the prestigious Winston Cup Series. Until now. Ingénue Cosmetics is pleased to announce the formation of the first all-female racing team in the history of NASCAR - a team of remarkable young women who will take the cause of women well into the twenty-first century by finally proving that age-old adage: anything a man can do, a woman can do just as well - if not better!

"And so, ladies and gentlemen, we are thrilled to introduce you to Team Ingénue! First, the pit crew. First up is the Rear Tire Changer, Autumn "Doc" Jones."

The roar of the cameras going off was almost deafening. Otto "Doc" Jones, now and forever Autumn, stepped through the curtain into the sea of light and shouting.

"Next, the Rear Tire Carrier, Gretchen Smith."

Ketcham jumped a little at the sound of her new name and went through the curtain.

"Front Tire Carrier, Gabrielle Knowles."

Gabe went through the curtain, smiling ear to ear - she'd guessed that they'd choose Gabrielle for her new name and had won twenty dollars off of Doc, who'd guessed they'd choose Gail or something similar.

"Front Tire Changer, Sydney Keller."

Sid stood and went through the curtain, shrugging a little bit. They'd only changed a single letter in her case, and she'd been kinda hoping for Cindy. Like Cindy Crawford. But there was nothing wrong with Sydney as a girl's name. Corey thought it was kinda pretty, and it suited her well.

"Gas Girl, Becca Cox."

Bucky stood in a sudden leap that set her generous breasts bouncing provocatively and half-ran out the curtain, her hands by her sides and her legs kicking up behind her like a cheerleader. Corey was a little bit jealous - she'd always liked the name Rebecca for a girl, and had kinda wished for it herself.

"Gas Can Catcher, Aimee Rollins."

Amos pulled a comical face as she stood. "Good as any, I guess," she said as she went smilingly through the curtain into the sea of light and noise.

"Support Crew, Yolanda Campos and Laura Dales."

Laura and Yolanda must have been behind another curtain, somewhere else in the pavilion. But there was the sound of more pictures and babbled questions through the curtain.

"Nervous?" Cayman asked Corey.

"Scared shitless," Corey replied.

"Don't be," Cayman said, elbowing her. "We're gonna tear that damned track up. We're gonna be the best there ever was, and this is just gonna be the beginning."

"Jack Operator and Crew Chief, Jennifer Colfax," Gayle introduced from outside.

Jenner stood with a brilliant cover-girl smile. "Knew it," she said. "Kids used to call me that in school to make fun of me. If they could only see me now."

"Can we call you Jenny?" asked Cayman playfully.

"Only if I can call you Forrest Gump," Jennifer shot back. "Nope. It's Jennifer. And I'm damned proud of it."

"And now Ingénue Cosmetics is proud to introduce the drivers of our pride and joy, Number 36, the newest car on the NASCAR circuit. Ladies and gentlemen, driving for Ingénue Cosmetics, Virginia Slims, Victoria's Secret, Chrysler-Daimler, Cosmopolitan Magazine, Carabella and Paul Mitchell."

Corey gripped Cayman's hand tightly.

".please welcome drivers Kaitlyn Lockhart and Courtney Hoffman!"

"Ready, Courtney?" Cayman asked, standing up.

"Ready as I'll ever be, Kaitlyn," Courtney answered, standing. They went through the curtain into the sea of flashing lights and applause.

\* \* \*

"Tim Harmon, ESPN," the reporter said, standing. "Courtney, Kaitlyn - are either of you intimidated by the field of other drivers out there? Auto racing has long been a male-dominated sport."

"Intimidated, no," Courtney told him, leaning in close to the microphone. "I have a lot of respect for the other drivers out there - they're great racers and great competitors. But I think we have as good a shot as anyone else out there."

"Our records on the dirt tracks are every bit as impressive as theirs were when they were first starting out," Kaitlyn put in. "And we have a great crew and a kick-butt car. But I think, if anything, the intimidation is going to work the other direction. We're an unknown quantity out there, and in my experience that's more intimidating than somebody with a few checkered flags on him."

"Candace Lewis, E! Network," a stylish woman said, standing next. "I know the one thing our viewers are going to want to know is - auto racing? How on earth did you get into that? Weren't you discouraged, being women? What did you have to overcome to get here today?"

"We couldn't just tell people that 'anything a man can do, a woman can do too,'" Jennifer said, leaning in. "We had to show them. Even the most pigheaded man in the world is eventually going to have to realize that if a girl keeps kicking the snot out of him on a racetrack, then she's probably a better driver. Or a better crew chief, or mechanic, or whatever."

"We let our work speak for itself," Autumn said diplomatically. "I don't put much stock in what people tell me I can and can't do. It's been my experience that it's easier to just shove it down their throats than to argue with 'em."

"Besides, we can win races and look a lot better doing it," Gretchen said, accompanied by a peal of laughter. She had leaned so far over to get to the microphone that she'd displayed a generous amount of her delicious cleavage, and the photographers were clicking away.

"We don't want to be known as the all-girl racing team," Aimee said. "Even though we are. We want to win races, and give good showing out there, and be known because we're good at what we do, not that we're girls in an all-male sport."

"Larry Pitts, Sports Illustrated," another reporter said. "If you don't want to be known as the only all-girl racing team, like you said, then could you explain your sponsors?"

"They're the ones who put the most stock in backing us," Becca said. "We're still a novelty act, until we start taking some checkered flags. And yeah, I'm sure that there are going to be a lot of people interested in us for other reasons than how well we drive. And I'm okay with that - I don't mind posing for magazine covers or calendars or whatever. But that has to do with being a girl. So do the sponsors. But out there on the track - and Courtney and Kaitlyn will back me up on this - it's only about being racers."

"Becca nailed it," Jennifer put in. "None of us is just a crew chief or a tire changer or a driver or a mechanic. When we take off the uniforms, we're just girls. I look at it this way - when we were getting all dolled up for this press conference, we got to sit down and pick out the clothes

and play with the makeup and get our hair done. All 'girly' stuff, but it was still a lot of fun. But now, in front of you good people, we're a racing team. Once we leave here, we're girls again."

"We don't get all caught up in the fact that we're women," Kaitlyn said. "Why should everybody else? You're a reporter, but does that stop you from being a man, or a husband or maybe even a father?"

"Right," Courtney added. "Sure, we're girls. And we're girls in a sport dominated by men. But that doesn't mean that we can't win, and just because we do win doesn't mean we still ain't girls."

"Randy Ehrenson, Car and Driver," another reporter said. "Can you tell us a little bit about your car?"

Autumn - it was hard to think of her as "Doc" anymore - smiled broadly. "Now you're talking our language," she said, and pulled up the first presentation slide.

\* \* \*

Vivian West was angry. Her eyes were flashing like daggers and the hands folded primly in her lap were white-knuckled as she gave Gayle a look of purest disdain. Gayle tried to concentrate on driving in the thick lunch-rush traffic, the better not to think about her boss' disapproval.

"That was not what we agreed upon," Vivian said snappishly, at length. "You told me that we would be able to use these women as targets for the female 18-24 market. I wanted bubbleheads, Gayle. Party girls. Those. women are not the face we wanted to put on the newest product lines. Something to sell cosmetics to teenagers."

"I know, Vivian," Gayle said plaintively. "I don't know what went wrong."

"You told me you had that Creeger woman under control."

"I don't know what happened," Gayle told her. "Before, at the salon - they were the perfect little ditzes. Perfect for what we wanted, maximum visibility. I'm telling you the truth. The women at the salon, they would have been hip-deep in night-life and sexual scandal by the end of the week, and every tabloid article would have mentioned Ingénue. They would have been everywhere! The women at the press conference, I don't know where the hell they came from. The 'airhead' personalities were supposed to surface when they heard their new names for the first time. That's why we timed it the way we did."

"Dammit," Vivian swore. "All that time and money, wasted."

"Perhaps not. Maybe it was a mix-up with Creeger's programming," Gayle said.

"Where is she? I want this mess sorted out, Gayle. I want those women on Entertainment Tonight, not ESPN Race Day. Our target audience is not race fans. We're trying to get to teenage girls, not trailer-park mothers of twelve."

"It's salvageable," Gayle consoled. "I'm heading to the lab right now. Creeger will be able to tell us what went wrong."

"If she can't, then I'm going to see her flipping burgers before Friday," Vivian swore.

"She'll sort it out," Gayle told her placatingly. "Just wait and see. She's a remarkable woman. Don't worry."

"If you say so," Vivian said, looking out the window. The disdain and tension on her face seemed to melt a little. After a contemplative pause, she gestured to the CD player in the dashboard.

"This is nice," she commented. "What is it?"

"Gipsy Kings," Gayle said. "One of my favorites."

"Very relaxing," Vivian said.

"Would you like to borrow it?"

"I'd love to. I love acoustic guitar music."

Gayle ejected the CD and handed it to her, replacing it with another.

"Miles Davis, Kind of Blue," she said as she pressed 'play.' "I always listen to this when I need to de-stress."

"Very nice," Vivian said, a ghost of a smile appearing on her severe face as she slid the borrowed CD into her jacket pocket. "It is relaxing. But you should probably get your car looked at. You have a very bad buzz in your speakers."

"I know. It started just the other day. But it's not going to stop me listening to music while I drive. It's one of the only nice things about being stuck in traffic."

"I can see that," Vivian said, tapping her foot softly to the music. And after a while, the little buzz in the speaker didn't seem so noticeable. And the day seemed so much nicer. Maybe Gayle was onto something. Vivian felt lighter, somehow - younger. The troubles of the world didn't seem to weigh on her quite so heavily for some reason.

"How far to the lab?" Vivian asked.

Gayle shrugged, winding a loose tendril of her newly-honey gold hair around one long-nailed finger. "About twenty minutes, probably more if this damned traffic keeps up."

"Why don't we take the long way?" Vivian asked. "I'm kind of enjoying just driving and listening to the music. We're not in any hurry, after all, are we?"

Gayle smiled and turned onto a side street. "Not any more."

\* \* \*

"NASCAR driver Kaitlyn Lockhart spends eight hours a day destroying her hair's health and shine. But she resurrects it in ten minutes with the new Paul Mitchell leave-in conditioner. It infuses her hair with Vitamin E and rich extracts that nourish and restore the hair at the root and all along its length."

\* \* \*

"Thirty to fifty percent off bras and panties at the annual Victoria's Secret Race Angels sale. Come in to find prices slashed on the Body by Victoria shapewear and all seamless bras

and panties. Fifty to sixty percent off Victoria's signature Wonder Bra. Show off your curves in style - no matter how fast you take them."

\* \* \*

"Enjoy the races like Autumn Jones and Becca Cox, in style in the new Virginia Slims windbreaker, free with proofs of purchase from twenty (20) packs of Virginia Slims 100s, 120s, Ultra Lights or Superlights. Virginia Slims - it's a woman thing."

\* \* \*

"Introducing Lighter-Than-Air Crème Powder - Powder convenience with liquid coverage. Only by Ingénue - It's All You. In honor of Team Ingénue, receive a gift of a free Glamour-Eyes eyeshadow kit or Moisture-Seal lipcolor when you purchase \$50 or more of Ingénue cosmetics. Jennifer is wearing Shimmer Tan Lighter-Than-Air Crème Powder, the Red Berry eyeshadow collection and Playful Pink lipcolor. Courtney is wearing Bronze Kiss Lighter-Than-Air Crème Powder, the Golden Glow eyeshadow collection and Mocha Plum lipcolor."

\* \* \*

"In racing news, the upstart Team Ingénue, the controversial all-female NASCAR racing team, took first places in the NAPA Auto Parts 500 at the California Speedway. Even after an impressive fifth-place finish at the Talladega 500, the team was still looked upon with doubt by other racers in the field. But Saturday saw these girls ready to race, and race they did, coming up from twelfth place with six laps to go to take the two lead spots for a very dramatic checkered flag."

The shot cut to Courtney in the winner's circle, laughing.

"We're really happy with the performance out there," Courtney said with an ear-to-ear, glowing smile. "I was really sweating it about twelve laps out, but all of a sudden the opportunities just started showing up, and Kyle over there was right on my tail through the whole thing. I thought he was gonna pass me, there at the end, but I managed to keep it just in front. It was a hell of a race."

\* \* \*

"ATLANTA (AP) - NASCAR Racing Team Ingénue came under fire yesterday for their sponsorship by Virginia Slims, a cigarette targeting young women. Representatives for Philip Morris and Team Ingénue answered questions in a press conference at the Ingénue Building in Atlanta, Georgia.

'We're not encouraging anyone out there to smoke cigarettes,' said Gretchen Smith, one of the NASCAR team's pit crew. 'That's a decision that every person makes - and they will make it, regardless of advertising or endorsement or government interference.'

'Just because I smoke cigarettes, and I have a cigarette brand name on the car I drive doesn't mean I encourage girls to go out and smoke, just because I do,' said Courtney Hoffman, one of the team's two drivers. 'Look at it this way - the government has banned tobacco advertising right and left, they've taxed the hell out of a pack of cigarettes, and it hasn't made any difference in the amount of people who have started smoking. Tobacco is one of the reasons that the country was first settled. People are going to do it, whether it's advertised or taxed or not.'

Continuing in the vein of Team Ingénue's commitment to independence, Hoffman went on to say, 'I don't see what the big deal is, honestly. Nobody has any problem at all with cars who have the corporate logos of some of the biggest polluters in the United States, or companies with racist, sexist or anti-gay policies. But put a slogan for a cigarette on my car, and everybody's shocked. Let's get our priorities straight, here, people.'

\* \* \*

"Eleven against Four Hundred: Cosmo talks to Team Ingénue about life, love, racing and overcoming all odds."

\* \* \*

"In business news, Ingénue Cosmetics has seen a drastic increase in stock prices with their racing team's victory at the Hometown-Miami Speedway's Pennzoil 400 last week, despite allegations that Vice President of External Development Vivian West and one of her senior managers were implicated in a sexual harassment lawsuit on Monday. Sources tell us that West and her manager were exchanging promotions in their organization to male employees in exchange for sex and hiring new staff members based on their attractiveness."

\* \* \*

"The prestigious Society of Experimental Social Psychology Distinguished Scientist Award was bestowed today on Dr. Sylvia Creeger for her groundbreaking advances in the field of hypnotherapy for the treatment of patients with gender identification issues."

\* \* \*

"It's the same old story - Girl Power takes the checkered flag once again! Courtney Hoffman fought it out for eight laps with Rusty Wallace and Darrell Waltrip for first at Daytona, pulling it out of her pocket in the bell lap for one of the most dramatic first seasons in Winston Cup history. We go live to Daytona, Florida."

\* \* \*

"Cherchez la Femme - 27-year-old Gayle Lourdes is October's Penthouse Pet of the Month. This golden-haired beauty hails from Atlanta, Georgia where she works as an exotic dancer and secretary for a local accounting firm. 'I love the South,' our Georgia Peach tells us. 'I was born and raised, and the men there are sexier than anyplace else in the world.'"

\* \* \*

"How are you girls adapting to the fame? Is it a lot to take in?" Jay Leno asked.

"It was, right at first," Autumn said, "but you get used to it after a while. It's great that people recognize us and want autographs and stuff like that."

"I still kinda miss being a nobody sometimes, though," Aimee laughed.

"We're just a bunch of girls from backwoods Georgia, so it's taken us a little longer to get our heads around it," Sydney chimed in.

"I'll tell ya, there must be something in the water in backwoods Georgia," Leno quipped. "Do all the girls in backwoods Georgia look like you do? Because I'm thinking of buying a house out there."

\* \* \*

"Stay tuned for E!'s Spring Break 2003 - Fort Lauderdale, with your hosts, the girls of Team Ingénue. They'll run you through the straightaways and speed you around the curves in the wildest, wettest beach party in history. Only on E! - the Entertainment Network."

\* \* \*

"Diamonds may be a girl's best friend, but sometimes it takes a six-liter Magnum V8 with more towing capacity than any other truck in its class to do what a diamond can't - like the new Ingénue series Dodge Ram Club Cab. All the toughness and reliability of the Dodge Ram with all the amenities a girl could need - like tilt steering, power windows and locks, air, cruise control, four-speaker CD system and optional third door. Save up to two thousand dollars with factory-dealer incentives in the Dodge Team Ingénue sales event. For the woman who has everything - and needs a truck that can haul it. The New Dodge."

\* \* \*

"New from Vivid - Some girls will do anything to get to the top! Head for Business stars fresh-faced newcummer Vivian West as a lonely secretary in search of a hot tip in her ultra-hot debut - see her take some heavy dick-tation from T.T. Boy's hot pole while giving Sean Michael's ebony bone a tongue-bath you won't believe! She gushes her appreciation with an explosive female ejaculation too hot to miss! The insatiable Vivian then joins gal-pals Janine and Julia Ann for cigars and a hot sapphic three-way that has to be seen to be believed! Also stars Chasey Lain, Asia Carrera, J. R. Carrington, P.J. Sparxx and Randy Thomas.

\* \* \*

"Courtney Hoffman, the Winston Cup champion driver for Team Ingénue, was awarded the first ever Dale Earnhardt, Sr. Award for Excellence today for her twelfth straight victory at the Budweiser Shootout in Daytona, Florida. Ever since her teammate Kaitlyn Lockhart's move to the NASCAR Busch Series, Courtney has dominated the field in the Winston Cup circuit for the last year, taking finish after finish in a winning streak that has no end in sight. Congratulated by Dale Earnhardt, Jr., Courtney had the following to say about the award:"

"'I can't say enough about how much this means to me,' Courtney said to the reporters. 'To be selected out of a field of drivers like the one I'm in, to be honored like this in the name of one of the greatest drivers in history - it's more than I ever expected when I started racing. I don't see how my career can ever get any higher than it is now.'"

"The fifty thousand dollar check which accompanies the prize will be donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation in their ongoing search for a cure."

\* \* \*

"You've waited and waited - and now it's here! The one and only authorized Team Ingénue Swimsuit Calendar, brought to you by Ingénue Cosmetics and Cosmopolitan magazine. See your America's favorite team - Courtney, Kaitlyn, Jennifer, Autumn, Gretchen, Gabrielle, Aimee, Sydney, Becca, Yolanda and Laura - in the hottest swimwear from Victoria's Secret, Venus

Swimwear, Just Add Water and Skinz. Available only at Barnes & Noble Booksellers - be there Friday the eighteenth when the girls will be at the Barnes & Noble on Fifteenth and Main to sign calendars in person! Don't miss out! Proceeds will be donated to aid the fight against breast cancer."

\* \* \*

Becca and Aimee were the last to arrive to the old garage and apartments where they'd originally trained and undergone their transitions to womanhood. They continued to train there, since a part of them would always consider it home. The barbecue pit was going strong by the time they'd parked their new cars (Dodge was being very generous - most of them were driving either the Ingénue Series Ram or the new Viper) in the small lot and made their way through the fence and onto the grounds. Becca was clinging happily to the arm of Steven Bruning, a sales representative for Mopar that she'd met in Daytona. Rumor had it that there was a diamond ring in the offing. Aimee had come stag, but she - or none of the other girls, for that matter - were hurting for male attention.

Jennifer tossed out her cigarette and stood to gather her teammates into a tight hug. They were celebrating because the proceeds from the calendar sales had topped the fifteen million dollar mark and every last penny had gone to charity. That, and it was about time for them all to start heading back to the tracks and thinking about the Winston Cup again - including Kaitlyn, who was bringing up her Number 21 Ingénue car into the 'big leagues' on a string of high-profile checkered flags.

Sydney and Autumn were there with their new husbands, Mike and Danny, whom they'd met and romanced while in Puerto Vallarta shooting the calendar. All of the girls were still very tan and very happy from their little three-week jaunt for the shoot. Gretchen was in the lap her beau-of-the-week, an utterly scrumptious young man named Adam, and waved happily to the new arrivals once she'd finished lighting her cigarette. Gabrielle was busy behind the pit - her job now as it was when they'd been men - turning the meat and guzzling light beer just as if she'd never changed at all. But now it was a long, slender Virginia Slims cigarette dangling from her red-painted lip instead of a Camel and some really cute leather wedge sandals, capri pants and a midriff-baring halter top which strained over her ample chest instead of the stained t-shirt, cutoff jeans and grass-stained tennis shoes that Gabe had worn.

Courtney sipped from a bottle of light beer and smoked a cigarette from her place on the hood of her champion Number 21, chatting away with Kaitlyn, who was there with her new boyfriend Keith and her new pit crew - eight ladies trained by the original team and every bit as good on the Busch Series pit road as Jennifer and the girls were in the Winston Cup. Sarah, Tammi, Nicole, Janelle, Suzanne, Mia, Heather and Michelle were already beginning to show the excitement of their own calendar shoot in a month, and Kaitlyn couldn't be happier.

Yolanda and Laura were there as well, with husbands and boyfriends in tow. And even though there were the ever-present reporters lining the fence - none of them could really step outside anymore with flashes going off - and a brand new racing season staring them in the face, the good mood of the gathering couldn't be dimmed down. They were among friends, in a place they loved, and the party was just getting started.