

TV FICTION CLASSICS

MAGAZINE

CALL HIM "MISS"



**HEATHER TEACHES SHANNON
EVERYTHING A GIRL SHOULD KNOW.
BUT SHANNON IS A BOY!?**

VOLUME 77

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CALL HIM "MISS"

By SARA WARREN

Illustrations by

GABI



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Contact Sandy Thomas for Information.
P.O. Box 2309
Capistrano Beach, CA 92624-0309

My E-MAIL ADDRESS IS:
sandythomas@cox.net

DESIGN AND EDITORIAL BY:
'LOVE EDITING'

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QUOTE BOARD

"When you are going through hell...keep going!"

CALL HIM "MISS"

By Sara Warren

With a little help from Dawn Bell & Sandy Thomas

Shannon gazed out the window of the 737 as it banked to the right and then straightened out on its approach to the airport. Tiny white sailboats skittered across the bay below as the jet slowly descended. As the choppy surface of the bay loomed ever closer, he turned to his mother for reassurance. She seemed to guess what he was thinking as she gave his hand a slight squeeze and smiled at him.

"This part always makes me a little nervous too," she told him. "Trust me...this is a good move."

Up until a couple of days ago Rachel Nelson was a senior programmer at one of the high-tech companies that lined Boston. Now she was preparing to start her new job as vice president in charge of development at a major multi-media software producer. She was eagerly looking forward to her new job for several reasons. There were a number of exciting new projects and not least, it got her away from the chilly Boston area and its memories of her ex-husband, whom she detested.

Shannon's father was a traveling salesman. When he was home on weekends, he spent most of his time at the country club, either out on the golf course or in the bar. Then one day, out of the blue, he announced that he was leaving her for another, younger woman. When Rachel found out that he had been having an affair with his secretary, she was furious. Thus the divorce and the move to California.

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Shannon wasn't too affected by the divorce, since his father was never around and when he was, he was either hung-over or picking on Shannon to cut his hair.

But that was the past. Now the two of them were about to start a new life in Northern California. Rachel called several people she knew who lived in the area, trying to get a feel for what to expect.

One of them was her old college roommate, Emily Lansing, who lived in rural Marin County, north of San Francisco. Rachel and Emily had become the best of friends while in college. They had continued to stay in touch and see each other whenever possible even as they married and moved apart.

Emily had married well: the only son and sole heir of a millionaire investment broker, Howard Lansing was considered quite a catch. Emily only really discovered just what a catch he was after his private corporate jet plowed into the side of a mountain while he was slipping off to Aspen with a cocktail waitress he had met the day before.

Sometimes what makes for a bad husband also makes for a good predecessor. The bereaved widow was left with a small daughter and a very large pile of cash. She settled into a large, sunny, antique-filled Victorian house in western Marin County. The house sat on a ridge top with panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean and the rugged shoreline. She and her daughter Heather had made a comfortable life for themselves there.

When Rachel called Emily for advice, Emily didn't hesitate in inviting her and Shannon to stay with them until they could find a place of their own.

Emily and Heather were waiting for them at the gate when their plane landed.



Heather had to laugh when a porter handed Shannon's bag to her to carry. Like he wasn't strong enough...

"Now I want you to be nice to Shannon," Emily admonished her daughter. "I'm sure he's unhappy about the divorce, and moving away from all his friends."

"But you know how creepy boys his age are," Heather protested with a slight whine in her voice. Although she was only about two months older than him, she rightly considered herself and her girl friends to be much more mature than any of the boys her age.

"Well, we'll just have to make the best of it, okay?" Emily warned her as they turned to peer down the ramp at the arriving passengers until they saw Rachel.

Emily and Rachel hugged each other warmly while Heather and Shannon stood off to either side. As the women chatted excitedly, momentarily ignoring their children, the two teenagers awkwardly hung back, until

finally Heather introduced herself. Shannon mumbled a weak hello. She immediately realized the poor boy was painfully shy.

Shannon was quiet for most of the drive, only becoming animated as they crossed the Golden Gate Bridge.

The Lansing's house was at the end of a long drive and the nearest neighbor was almost a half-mile away. Emily showed them to their rooms as soon as they arrived.

"I know you two must be tired from your trip, jet lag and all," she told them. "You can freshen up and take a little rest. I'll have dinner ready in a couple of hours."

The room Shannon was large and airy, with tall, wide windows trimmed with lace curtains. The furniture was all antique: a double-sized four-poster canopy bed with a hope chest at its foot, a tall six drawer bureau, and a lovely three-mirror dressing table. Emily opened one of the doors to show him the bathroom.

"You share this bath with Heather," she told him. "I hope you don't mind."

"Oh no," the boy smiled weakly. He was too tired and disoriented to object to anything. All he wanted to do was to lay down for a little rest. He stretched out on the bed as soon as she left him alone. Within minutes of his head hitting the pillow he was sound asleep.

When he opened his eyes again the room was dark. Enough light came in through the windows to enable him to find his way across the room where he remembered seeing a light switch. In the soft glow of the overhead light the room looked warm and inviting. The

highly polished antique furniture was set off by the chintz and lace of the bed coverings and the curtains.

The wallpaper was covered with tiny pink roses on an off-white background. He headed toward what he remembered was the bathroom door and opened it cautiously. Since he was sharing it with Heather he didn't want to barge in and upset her.

He had been nervous about coming out here to stay with a girl his own age. He had always been shy and awkward around girls, and generally avoided them. For their part, most of the girls in his old high school considered him to be somewhat geeky and none paid much attention to him. As a result, he had almost no experience socializing with girls his own age. But Heather had seemed genuinely nice when they first met and he didn't want to screw things up right away.

Fortunately the room was empty. He crossed to the stool and was about to lift the seat when he remembered that he was now living in a house full of females. Back home he had gotten into the habit of always putting the seat back down when he finished his business, as a courtesy to his mother. Now that he was a guest he realized that it was even more important that he remember to do so. Why not just give in and get in the habit of sitting down regardless of what he had to do? he reasoned. That way he'd never have to worry about forgetting about the seat.

Pleased with himself, he smiled, dropped his trousers and sat down. As he sat there he surveyed the rest of the room. The floor and the lower half of the walls were covered in one-inch square white tiles. The wallpaper on the upper half of the walls was decorated with vines of pale yellow and blue flowers. The tub was deep and long with old-fashioned claw feet. A shelf above the tub was crowded with colorful jars of bath salts and

bubble bath in a variety of fragrances. A pedestal sink stood against the opposite wall, two milk glass sconces on either side of the mirror above it.

Suddenly the other door opened and Heather to walked in. She stopped short when she spotted Shannon.

"Oh, sorry," she mumbled as she quickly backed out and shut the door.

Shannon quickly stood up and rearranged his clothing. After tapping the handle on the tank he went over and knocked on Heather's door. "I'm done," he announced. "It's all yours."

She opened the door before he had a chance to retreat to his own room. "I'm sorry to have barged in on you like that. I guess just I'm not used to sharing the bathroom with anyone."

"Oh, that's okay. No harm done."

"I suppose we ought to get in the habit of knocking before we open the door."

"Alright," the boy nodded.

"I just wanted to get my shampoo and conditioner," Heather went on. "Since there aren't any showers in the bathrooms, mom and I find it easier to wash our hair at the kitchen sink. It's got a sprayer."

"How come there are no showers?"

"Mom wanted to restore the house to its original condition. I can understand in a way, but sometimes it's a pain. Anyway, I'm used to it now." She glanced at his shoulder-length hair. "Your hair is pretty long. You'll find it easier to wash it like I do, downstairs." She smiled at him as she offered him a towel. "Come with me and I'll show you what to do. It's easy."

He felt a pretty grimy after his trip and had been looking forward to taking a shower before he went to bed. So he wasn't happy to find out that he would be forced to take a bath instead. He tried to picture himself sticking his head under the faucet in the tub to rinse shampoo out of his hair. He'd had long hair for as long as he could remember. When he was little Rachel had started taking him to the hair salon where she had her hair done.

The women stylists had always fussed over him and made him feel comfortable in an environment that most boys his age would have shunned. His hair was long, down to his shoulders, but neat and well styled in an almost feminine fashion. It was a wash-and-wear style, requiring almost no effort on his part, other than brushing, to keep it neat.

The long hair was a never-ending source of friction with his father who was an ex-marine. But somehow, Rachel was able to keep him at bay.

Shannon just shrugged and accepted the towel. He meekly followed Heather down the back stairs and into the kitchen. He stood to one side of the sink, leaning against the counter, while he watched her quickly shampoo and condition her hair.

When she was done she wrung the excess water from her hair and then wrapped the towel around her head turban-style. Then she stepped aside and gestured for him to try it. He felt a little awkward at first bending over the sink, but he soon got the hang of it. Heather offered him advice and encouragement. His biggest problem was making sure that he didn't spray the rest of the room with water. Other than that, it really didn't seem too much different than his usual routine in the shower. In a short time he was done and had the towel wrapped around his head, just like Heather.

"See, that wasn't so hard, was it?" she wanted to know.

"No, it's pretty easy, actually," he admitted.

Rachel and Emily walked in while they were still standing by the sink.

"Hi darling," his mother greeted him. "I see Heather has shown you the easiest way to shampoo your hair in this house."

"Yeah," he said shyly as he patted the towel on his head. He was afraid it might slide off.

"You'll get used to it," Emily volunteered. "You might even find you prefer it this way. I find that it's a lot easier not to have to worry about washing my hair every time I take a bath. I like to relax and soak in a nice warm tub at the end of the day. Maybe Heather will let you use some of her bath salts."

"Now that would be a real treat!" his mother said.

"I'd love to share them with you," Heather told him. "They smell great and they're really good for your skin."

"I...I don't know," the boy blushed and started to stammer. He looked down at the floor.

"Oh, now don't be embarrassed," Rachel said gently as she crossed to where he was standing and gave him a hug. "It's just us girls here. If we encourage you to experiment with some of the ways we relax and pamper ourselves, we're not going to criticize you too. And we won't tell anyone either, will we girls?"

Emily and Heather nodded in agreement. "That's right," Heather said firmly.

Shannon looked up to see the three of them smiling at him expectantly. They seemed warm and sincere in

their attitude and he hesitantly gave in. "Okay," he finally nodded. "I'll try it."

"That's the spirit," Heather said as she gave him a hug. "There's lots of neat stuff I can show you."

The boy followed her upstairs to her room where she had him sit down at her vanity table. Then she unwrapped the towel from his head and combed out his damp hair. Once it was smooth, she reached into a drawer pulled out a blow-dryer and plugged it in.

"I usually set my hair in rollers, but I have one of these when I'm in a hurry." Heather explained.

The warm stream of air from the dryer soothed the boy as Heather went about drying his long locks. She used a round brush to pull and straighten his hair and soon it was nearly dry and gleaming like silk.

"Gee, Shannon, you have such pretty hair! You're so lucky." Heather said, causing Shannon to blush. "I'm just going to get this hair out of your way so you can lie back in the tub and soak awhile."

Taking the hairbrush, Heather began brushing Shannon's hair from front to back, pulling it all tightly along his scalp and capturing it at the back in her left hand. More and more of his slightly damp hair became held at the back of his head. Now holding the hair tightly, as if to make a ponytail, Heather twisted the hair she was holding clockwise while gently pulling it upwards along the back of Shannon's head.

As she twisted it again and again, the hair began to form a tight vertical seam. Soon, all the boy's hair was in a neat twist up the back of his head. Holding her left hand firmly in place, Heather reached over with her right hand and opened one of the drawers in her vanity. Rummaging around for a second, Shannon's eye grew

wide as he saw her take out a large, blue hair comb. The kind he saw women use to hold their hair up.

"Uh, what are you doing Heather?"

"Just putting your hair up out of the way, so it doesn't get soapy and wet in the tub." She replied as she firmly slid the comb all the way into the left side of the twisted seam at the back of his hair. Taking her hands away, Shannon saw that the comb now firmly had his hair locked in place. The end of the twisted hair bobbed up and down just at the crown of his scalp. Heather took a couple of bobby pins from the vanity and slipped them in alongside the comb to complete the job.

"There, all nice and neat. You can even leave it like that for the night. It should be comfortable and it will keep it from tangling." She stated matter-of-factly as if it was the commonest thing for a boy to wear his hair "up" for the night. Regardless, Shannon stared in awe as Heather held up a hand mirror behind his head so that he could take a look. The perfect Twist complemented the sleek hair that was pulled from front to back. His resistance melted as a strange excitement built up within him as he admired the very feminine hairdo that he now possessed.

Next, Heather stepped into the adjoining bathroom and started to fill the tub. As the boy watched, she selected a jar of lavender scented bath salts and poured a generous amount into the tub as it filled with water. "Soak for as long as you like, the longer the better," she told him as she retreated back to her own room and closed the door. He shrugged off his clothes and slipped into the fragrant water.

The tub was long enough for him to stretch out completely with only his head and neck above the water. The warm water felt very relaxing. As he lay there, his hands kept moving up to his head and gently running

his fingers along the back, feeling the twist, the firmly planted comb and bobby pins. He spent nearly forty-five minutes in there, until the water started to cool off. After he got out he toweled off, put on his pajamas, and then knocked on Heather's door.

"I'm all done," he announced. "It's your turn."

"Come in, she called. She was sitting at her vanity table when he opened the door. "How did you like it?" she asked him.

"It was great. I've never felt so relaxed. I almost fell asleep," he admitted.

She giggled. "I thought you'd like it. You can use any of the bath stuff you want any time. My mom will buy us some more so don't worry about using it up."

She had set her hair while he was soaking in the tub. Then she'd pulled on a lacy pink net cap to cover up the curlers. Now she was cleaning her face with a cotton pad soaked in skin cleanser. "Have you ever done this?" she asked him. When he shook his head she said, "You'd be surprised at how much dirt these things take off."

"I wash my face carefully every night," he told her.

"So do I, but look at this," she showed him the pad she had been using. "See how much dirt was still left."

"Wow, yeah. That's a lot," he observed.

"Want to try it?" she asked.

When he nodded she got up and gave him her seat in front of the mirror. He took a clean pad and wiped his face as she directed. He was amazed to see the amount of dirt it collected.

"See what I mean?" she said.

"Yeah. No wonder I get blemishes."

"You should do this every night, like I do," she told him.

"I will," he promised.

"And when you're done cleaning you should use a night cream too." She handed him a jar. "It keeps your skin soft and supple. No wrinkles. Try it."

He dabbed a small amount on his fingers and started to spread it on his face. "Like this?" he asked.

"All over, from your neck to your hair line. Just keep it out of your eyes," she instructed him. "It isn't greasy, so just rub it until it disappears into your skin. That's it."

It never occurred to the boy to question why he would want soft and supple skin. He enjoyed sharing this feminine experience with Heather just as he had enjoyed shampooing his hair, having a girl give him a feminine updo and soaking in the lavender scented tub. When he was finally done he stopped to examine his face in the mirror. Heather, in the meantime, was getting ready to take her bath. Just before she disappeared into the bathroom she stopped by the vanity table and gestured towards all the bottles, jars and tubes of various cosmetics. "You can borrow anything you like," she told him with a smile.

"Thanks," he replied, without pausing to consider why a boy would want to borrow a girl's cosmetics.

Later, his mother came to visit him in his room before she went to bed. He was sitting up in bed reading a book. She sat down next to him.

"Oh my goodness, for a second there I thought you had cut your hair!" She exclaimed as she put her hand on his cheek to turn his head and take a look at his new

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hairdo. Sensing his mother's question, Shannon explained.

"Heather dried my hair then did it like this. It was so that I wouldn't get it soapy when I lay back in the tub."

"Oh...great idea." His mother said with a smile.

"And, uh...she said that it might be a good idea to leave like this for the night. You know, keep it from tangling and stuff."

"Why certainly, and I think it's better than that boring ponytail you wear sometimes. I'll have to get you a couple of combs so you don't have to borrow Heather's all the time." His mother said nonchalantly, hiding her own excitement seeing her son with such a feminine style.

"You mean, you think I should wear it like this more often?" He asked surprised and a more than a little hopefully.

"Of course, it's so nice to have a friend like Heather who is willing to show you how to take care of such things as long hair. I've been neglectful on that front. I'm sorry, it's just that I've been so busy lately."

"Aw, you haven't been neglectful Mom." Shannon exclaimed and pulled his mother to him to give her a hug.

"How are you doing?" she wanted to know.

"Okay," he smiled. "How about you?"

"I'm very happy. I just hope you like it here," she told him.

"I'm just fine," the boy replied. "And Emily and Heather are real nice too."

"You smell good," his mother observed as she leaned toward him and sniffed.

"Heather let me use some of her bath salts," the boy said shyly.

His mother looked pleased. "Lavender, huh?"

"Yeah." He hesitated to tell her how much he really enjoyed it.

"If you'd like, I'll get some more for you," she offered.

"Oh, that's okay," he told her. "Heather said I could use all I want of hers. She said her mom will just buy some more," he said eagerly.

She smiled warmly at her son and then gave him a big hug. "I've got to leave for work early in the morning. I imagine I'll be long gone before you get up. I hope you enjoy yourself tomorrow."

"Oh, I'm sure I'll find something to do," he replied.

The morning sun filled his room when Shannon awoke. The first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was the lace canopy over his bed. It took him a moment to remember where he was. He crawled out of bed and headed toward the bathroom. At the last minute he remembered to knock on the door before he opened it.

When there was no response he cautiously opened the door, but the room was empty. The first thing he noticed was that the seat was still down on the stool. "Aha," he said to himself when he remembered his vow to leave the seat down. He was proud of himself for remembering. "Heather's so nice," he said to himself, "I don't want to offend her."

He looked in the mirror, once again admiring his girly hairstyle. He decided to leave it in "for a while". After all, Heather's mum had not seen it yet. He looked forward to her reaction, hoping it was a positive as Heather's and his mom's was.

After washing his face and brushing his teeth he and wandered down to the kitchen.

Emily was busy loading the dishwasher when he walked in. "Good morning," she smiled at him. "Did you sleep well?"

"Yeah, the bed is real comfortable."

"My, your hair looks smart this morning!"

"Thanks, Heather did it last night." Shannon explained relating the story to Emily.

"Well, I'm glad you left it in. It makes you look so handsome." Emily stated, boosting the boy's ego. In fact, she thought he looked girlishly cute.

He settled himself at the table and had a bowl of cereal while she continued with her chores.

"Where's Heather?" he asked.

"She volunteers three days a week at the hospital. Monday, Wednesday and Friday. It's just the two of us here today. I hope you won't be too bored."

"I'm sure I can find something to do," he said.

After breakfast he went back upstairs and got dressed. When he returned, Emily was loading clothes into the washing machine. After starting the machine she picked up a basket of damp, freshly-washed clothes and headed out the back door.

"Are you going to hang those outside?" the boy asked.

"Uh huh. Might as well take advantage of this sunny day."

"Would you like some help?" he asked her.

She gave him a skeptical look. "Are you sure you want to help? You don't have to, you know."

"It's okay. I'd like to. Honest."

"Okay," she shrugged. "I'm certainly not about to turn down any offer to help with the washing."

Shannon followed her out into the back yard and over to where the several clotheslines hung between tall posts. She handed him a cloth bag of wooden clothespins.

"Do you know how to hang clothes?" she asked.

"Sure. I've helped my mom before."

She watched him pin up a bath towel. "How am I doing?" he asked.

"Just fine," she smiled at him. "Why don't you give me a hand with these sheets?" It was certainly easier for the two of them to handle the large sheets without risking them dragging on the ground.

The two of them made quick work of the basket-load and were soon back in the house.

"What's next?" the boy asked Emily as she dropped the basket by the washing machine.

"I've got some hand washing to do, but I can handle that by myself," she told him. "I've got more time to spare now, thanks to your help."

"Would you like me to help with the dusting and vacuuming?"

"Heather usually does that on Tuesdays," she told him. "Maybe you can help her tomorrow. I'll bet she'd appreciate that."

"Okay, sure," he said.

He sat down at the kitchen table and thumbed through an old copy of one of Heather's teen magazines while Emily hand washed some delicate lingerie. When the washing machine finally stopped he jumped up and

ran over to unload it. Then, under Emily's direction, he filled the machine again with dirty clothes, poured in the detergent, and started it up again. She finished up her work at the sink while he hung the freshly washed clothes on the line. She soon joined him to hang up the lingerie.

When they were done they took a lunch break: cottage cheese and fruit, with Melba toast. "We've got to watch our weight," she told him.

"I know," he agreed. "It's terrible, isn't it?" they both laughed.

After lunch they hung up the final load of laundry and checked the rest of the clothes hanging in the breeze. "Not quite dry yet," Emily observed. Back in the kitchen, they paused for a cup of tea at the table. "You've been a big help today," she told the boy. "I usually have to do this all by myself. I really appreciate all your help."

"I don't mind, really," he told her. "Besides, it helps make the time go faster."

While they talked Emily rubbed her hands with skin lotion. When she noticed him watching intently, she explained, "My hands get red and chapped from all the housework I do, so I use a moisturizing lotion on them every day." She reached across the table and picked up his hands. "You could probably use some yourself. Here," she offered the bottle, "hold out your hands."

The boy did as she said and she squirted a little into the palm of each hand.

"Just rub it in until it's all absorbed."

While he rubbed his hands with the fragrant lotion she began to file and shape her nails with an emery board. When she was done with her own nails she took one of his hands and without a word began to do the

same to his. The boy drew his breath in sharply as if to say something, but she spoke first.

"Don't worry. This won't hurt, you know. Your nails could stand to be trimmed a little, and filing is better than clipping them. It doesn't leave any rough edges that might snag your clothes. Plus it's hard to get them even with nail clippers, don't you think?"

The boy just nodded dumbly as he watched her work. He felt a little nervous, but her friendly manner and the soothing tone of her voice put him at ease. He did start to become alarmed however when, after finishing with his last fingernail she kept hold of his hand and reached around to the counter behind her to retrieve a bottle of clear nail polish.

That's when he finally spoke up. "Oh, no," he started to protest. A deep, cold chill ran through his body.

Emily gave him a look of innocent surprise. "Why not," she said. "It's a great way to protect your nails."

"But...but everyone will make fun of me," he insisted.

"It's clear polish. No one will know you're wearing it," she pointed out. "If you're cold, put my scarf on."

"Okay," he murmured softly as he watched, fascinated, as she quickly and expertly brushed the polish on his first nail. She was soon done and she admonished him, "Now don't touch anything until they dry. I put two coats on, so you wait at least fifteen minutes to make sure they don't smudge."



The brush tickled his fingertip causing odd chills.

He sat there with his hands on the table and his fingers spread apart while he watched her turn her attention to her own nails. When she was finished she held out her fingers just like he was doing.

"You'll have to learn to take some time out to pamper yourself once in awhile," she told him. "A little preventative maintenance now will keep you looking younger longer." The boy just sat there and nodded dumbly, too confused to question why.

However, when she took a sip of tea he followed her example, picking up his tea cup delicately with the tips

of his fingers. When she smiled and nodded approvingly he grinned back at her. Eventually he began to relax as he sat there and admired his first manicure.

When Emily was sure that their nails had dried she suggested that they go out and check on the clothes hanging on the line. The sheets were dry, and working together they soon had them folded and stacked in the basket. They gathered all of the other dry clothes and brought them inside to fold. When Emily got out the ironing board Shannon volunteered to help her out.

"You know how to iron too?" she asked him.

"Sure," he nodded. "I've helped out my mom a lot," he said proudly.

"Well then be my guest," she gestured toward the ironing board. "I'll start to prepare dinner while you do some of the ironing."

While he would have had trouble explaining why, Shannon enjoyed working over the ironing board in the kitchen while Emily busied herself preparing dinner. He kept admiring the glint of his freshly polished nails as he worked. That was where Heather found them when she got home.

"Hi, you two," she greeted them as she breezed into the kitchen. She was slightly taken aback to see the boy ironing clothes, but she was smart enough not to say anything. She stopped to kiss her mother before heading for the refrigerator for a carton of yogurt. Once she was seated at the table she proceeded to tell them about her adventures that day at the hospital. Emily knew most of the people she mentioned and occasionally made a comment or asked a question, but Shannon just stood silently and listened while he continued with his ironing. At one point he reached up to brush back his hair and Heather caught a glimpse of his polished nails. She

arched her eyebrows slightly but still didn't say anything.

Shannon hadn't expected Heather to show up like that and he'd been a little startled when she walked in. He almost felt embarrassed to be caught ironing her blouses. But her complete lack of reaction helped put him at ease. It was almost as if she expected him to be doing housework when she got home he mused, as he found a hanger for the blouse he had been working on and picked another from the basket.

When he was finally done he turned off the iron to let it cool and stood there wondering what to do with the collection of neatly pressed clothes. Heather noticed his hesitation and jumped up from the table. "Here, let me help you with those," she volunteered.

The two teenagers gathered up the clothes and took them upstairs. In her bedroom Heather helped him sort out her things from her mother's. She took Emily's clothes down the hall to her room and then returned to hang up her own things.

"It was real nice of you to help mom with the ironing," she smiled at the boy.

"I didn't mind. It gave me something to do. Besides, I've done it before for my mom."

"You did such a good job," she observed as she held up one of her skirts. The pleats were all neatly creased. "I kind of figured you must have had some experience. You do a better job than I do."

When the boy started to blush, she quickly added, "I meant that as a compliment, you know."

"Uh, thanks," he said softly as he looked down at the floor.

"Hey. You want to listen to some music?" the girl asked in an attempt to rescue him from embarrassment.

"Sure," he brightened up.

"Here, put on whatever you like," she gestured toward a box of CDs next to her boom box. "I'm going to change my clothes." She was still wearing the red and white-stripped jumper that was her uniform as a hospital volunteer. She grabbed a top and a pair of jeans and stepped into the bathroom. "I'll be right out," she told him.

He found a CD of one of his favorite groups and had just put it in when she reemerged. "This is a lot more comfortable," she told him.

"You don't like to wear a dress?" he asked.

"It's not that," she told him. "Actually I do like dresses and skirts a lot. It's just that I don't want to get this jumper wrinkled and dirty. Then I'd have to wash and iron it again to wear it when I go back to the hospital on Wednesday."

"I'd do it for you," the boys said spontaneously.

She reached out and touched his cheek. "That's very nice, but I don't want to make extra work for you."

When he realized what he had said, the boy started to blush again. She quickly changed the subject. "I really like this music, don't you?" she gestured toward the boom box.

"Uh huh," he nodded.

The two teenagers sat on the floor and listened quietly for a while. After awhile Heather picked up one of her teen magazines and started to page through it. Shannon looked around and finally settled for an old issue of "Cosmo." He found an article on skin care and be-

came absorbed in it. When the CD was finished Heather reached over to change it.

"What are you reading?" she asked.

"How to avoid blemishes," the boy replied.

"What does it say?"

"It says to use those cleansing pads like you showed me last night. And the night cream too."

"Uh huh. Is that the article that talks about facial masques too?"

"Yeah. It's supposed to be good for your pores."

"I've got some of that stuff. I use it occasionally."

"It says you should use it every week."

"Would you mind helping me put it on? It's easier if someone else does it for you."

"Yeah, sure. Okay," the boy replied.

Heather sat down in front of her mirror and took a cloth-covered elastic band, sort of like a sweatband, and slipped it on so that it circled the top of her head and behind her ears. The band effectively held her hair back away from her face. Then she grabbed a towel from the bathroom and lay on her back on the floor. She draped the towel around her neck so that nothing would spill on her clothes. Following her instructions, Shannon used his fingers to gently smooth the green gel all over her face, taking care to keep it away from her eyes, nose and mouth. At one point they both started giggling and he had to stop.

"How does it feel?" he asked when he was at last done.

"It feels really cool when you first spread it on," she told him as she sat up.

"How long are you supposed to leave it on?"

"Half an hour. Want to try it?"

"Oh, no," he started to protest.

"Oh, come on. It's fun. And besides, it's good for your skin." Without waiting for a reply, she took another hair band and used it to pull the hair back from his face. Then she patted the floor until the boy obediently lay down. He was tense at first, but started to relax as she gently spread the gel on his skin.

"Doesn't it feel neat?" she asked him.

"Uh huh," he finally acknowledged.

They again ended up giggling before she finished with him. They were still laughing a few minutes later when Emily appeared in the open doorway.

"Well I see you two have found something to amuse yourselves with," she observed.

"You're the one whose always talking about preventative maintenance, mom," Heather said.

"And I'm glad to see you two are taking my advice," her mother replied with a smile. "In the meantime, though, have you seen the cheese grater? If I recollect, you were the last one to use it."

"Isn't it where it supposed to be?"

"Nope."

"Are you sure?"

"Give me a break girl! I looked and it's not there. I want you to find it for me."

"Oh, all right," she groaned as she got up off the floor.

Shannon followed them down to the kitchen where Heather spent several minutes searching before she found the lost utensil.

"Now that you've found it, why don't you grate two cups of cheddar for me?" Emily suggested.

"Okay mom," Heather told her.

"Can I help?" Shannon wanted to know.

"No thanks. Everything's just about ready. I'm just keeping things warm until your mom gets home from work."

As if on cue, Rachel walked in the back door. "Hi, everyone! I'm finally home." As she gazed around the room she noticed her son with mild astonishment. "Looks like he's really fitting into a house full of females," she said to herself as she did her best to maintain her composure.

Shannon blushed a deep red, but it was impossible to tell because of the masque covering his face. While he had started to feel comfortable in front of both Heather and Emily, he was still nervous about his mother's reaction. She hadn't seen him since this morning and it seemed like a lot of things had happened since then.

Rachel crossed the room and gave her son a big hug. "I'd give you a kiss, but I don't know where," she said jokingly.

"The kids are engaging in a little preventative skin maintenance," Emily explained.

"Well, I think that's a great idea. You're never too young to start. How does it feel?"

"Okay," the boy said shyly.

"We're going to do it once a week, like 'Cosmo' recommends," Heather piped up.

"I think that's a splendid idea," Rachel told them. "Maybe you'd let me borrow some sometime, huh?" she looked at Shannon.

"It's Heather's," her son replied.

"You can use it any time you want," Heather told her.

"Why thank you, dear."

"Maybe you two better get cleaned up for dinner, okay?" Emily suggested.

"Sure mom. Come on, Shannon," Heather said as she took his hand.

"I could use a drink," Rachel said when the kids had left.

"Not because of Shannon, I hope."

"Oh, no. Not at all. It's just been a strenuous first day at work. Actually, in some strange way I almost found it a relief to see him like that. I wasn't sure how he would react to the move and all."

"He's a wonderful child," Emily told her as she uncorked a bottle of red wine. "Let me tell you what a help he was around the house today."

Meanwhile upstairs the teenagers took turns washing their faces at the bathroom sink. Shannon had quickly gotten over his initial embarrassment at having his mother find him like that and the two of them giggled and laughed as they inspected each other's faces for traces of the masque.

"I hope it works," he told her.

"Me too. We'll have to do it regularly like the instructions say."

"Okay."

They hurried back downstairs and soon all four were seated at the dining room table. Almost as soon as they started passing the plates of food around Rachel noticed the glint off of her son's polished fingernails. Again she just smiled to herself and didn't say anything. It was well into the meal before Shannon happened to put his hand up to his head and realized that he was still wearing the colorful headband. It startled him and his first impulse was to rip it off. His mother saw what was happening and spoke up.

"Don't take it off, darling. It looks very nice and it does keep your hair neat."

"But..." the boy started to protest.

"Yeah, it really does look good," Heather joined in. "Go ahead and leave it on."

He looked around the table at everyone smiling and nodding at him. "Oh, well," he thought. "If they don't think it's weird, then what the heck." He shrugged and said, "Okay, okay. You win."

After dinner he and Heather cleared the table and did the dishes. As soon as they were done, she got ready to shampoo her hair.

"You wash your hair every night?" he asked her.

"Sure, don't you?"

When he shook his head she said, "You should. That's what the hairdresser told me. You want to keep it healthy and clean. It prevents hair loss. You don't want to go bald, do you?"

He shuddered at the thought. "Nope!"

"Then you'd better start shampooing every night too."

So he took her place at the sink as soon as she was done. When he was done he again wrapped the towel around his head and went back upstairs to look for Heather. She was seated at her vanity table setting her hair on large rollers.

"Do you set your hair every night?" he asked as he sat down on the edge of her bed.

"Yeah, just about. Unless I'm really tired or something."

"Isn't it uncomfortable to sleep with those on your head?"

"Naw. You get used to it pretty quick. It does help to have a couple of extra soft pillows, though."

"Hmmm," he said.

"Want to try it?"

"No way! I'd never be able to sleep."

"It's really not a big deal. Most girls set their hair at night. Your mom does. So does mine. We all get enough sleep."

"No thanks. Not tonight."

She just shrugged and continued her task. When she was done she took the lacy sleep cap and started to stretch it over the rollers. It got snagged on one of the ones in the back.

"Here, let me help you," he said as he stood up to give her a hand. He quickly adjusted the cap.

"Thanks," she said.

"No problem."

"Who's going to bathe first tonight?" she asked.

"You go ahead. I can wait," he told her as he unwrapped the towel from his head. He went back to his room to comb his hair, then lay down on the bed with another of Heather's "Cosmo's. That's where his mother found him.

"How was your day, darling?" she asked as she sat down next to him.

"Great. I think I like it here. How was work?"

"Tiring, but I think I'm going to like it too. Emily tells me you were a big help today. Thank you for being so helpful."

"You don't have to thank me. I didn't mind at all. I just did some of the things I used to do to help you out, that's all."

"Well I still appreciate it. Emily has been so nice to let us stay here that I don't want to impose on her any more than we have to."

"I'll do whatever I can to help out," he told his mother.

"Thank you darling. Oh, by the way." She took his hand. "I like your nails. Did you do them yourself?"

"No, Heather's mom did them for me." He told her how it happened.

"I think they look very nice. I hope you keep them looking like that."

"You want me to keep them polished?" he was surprised.

"Sure, why not? You want to maintain a neat and clean appearance, don't you?"

"Yeah, but she said no one would notice the polish."

"I guess I noticed because I'm your mom," she smiled at him.

"Oh, yeah. I guess," he didn't sound really convinced.

"Well, I've got to get ready for bed, dear. It's another long day tomorrow. Give me a kiss." They hugged and kissed each other good night. "Good night dear. I'll see you tomorrow evening."

"Okay. Good night, mom."

A few minutes later Heather knocked on the door to their adjoining bathroom. "Come in," he called to her.

"It's all yours," she told him as she opened the door. She was dressed in her nightgown and robe.

"Okay, thanks."

"You can use my bath salts again if you'd like," she told him. "And I left the jar of night cream out for you too."

"Oh, thanks. I almost forgot about that."

"See you in the morning."

"Yeah, okay. Good night."

He got up in a few minutes and collected his pajamas and slippers and went to fill the tub. He inspected all the bottles on the shelf next to the tub before choosing the lilac scented salts. He poured in a generous amount as he had seen Heather do last night and when the tub was full he slipped carefully into the warm soothing water. He lay there for a long time thinking about his experiences of that day. He considered it one of the nicest days he'd had in a long, long time, but he couldn't get over the fact that he had done very little if anything that would be considered boyish.

In fact just about everything he had done today was decidedly feminine. And not only that, his mother, along

with Emily and Heather, seemed to be subtly encouraging him to be more feminine. Now he was soaking in a tub full of lilac-scented water while inspecting his manicured and polished fingernails. He knew that the kids back at his old school would tease him unmercifully if they ever found out. But they never would because now he was living out here in California and for the first time in he couldn't remember how long he was really enjoying himself.

He didn't care if the things he was enjoying were considered feminine or not. He was having fun and neither his mom, nor Heather, nor Heather's mom seemed to think there was anything wrong with him. The heck with it, he decided. "I'm just going to do what feels right," he said to himself.

In the morning he found Heather and Emily sitting at the kitchen table, the remains of their breakfast in front of them. They were still in their nightgowns and robes, with their hair in curlers, so he didn't feel out of place to still be in his pajamas. He mumbled hello to them as he padded his way over to the fridge for a glass of orange juice.

They were discussing what needed to be done around the house. Heather usually took care of dusting and vacuuming the downstairs rooms, but it seemed that she had been neglecting this chore lately.

"Alright mom," she groaned as she rolled her eyes. "I'll do it today. Don't get all worked up about it, okay?"

"I'm not getting all worked up about it. I just want it done, that's all. You haven't touched those rooms in at least a month."

"Alright, alright."

"I'll help you Heather," Shannon piped up.

"It's her job," Emily pointed out. "You shouldn't have to do it."

"I don't mind, honest. Besides, it's not like there's a whole lot of other things to do around here." he pointed out.

"Thanks," Heather said with a grateful look. "I hate housework."

When he finished his bowl of corn flakes the two teenagers went upstairs to get dressed. It took Heather longer to get ready because she had to do her hair too. Shannon watched as she removed the last of the rollers, then combed and brushed her curly locks into an attractive style.

"Your hair looks really nice," he told her when she was finished. "I didn't know that styling hair was so complicated. You really know what you're doing."

"It's really not that difficult, once you get the hang of it," she told him. "I learned most of what I know from my girl friends, and the hair dresser, of course. The basic cut is the most important thing. If it's cut right, then everything else just sort of falls into place, you know?"

"Uh huh," he nodded, remembering that that was what the woman who used to cut his hair had told him.

When she was done she tied a colorful kerchief over her hair. In response to his questioning look, she explained, "It's to keep the dust and dirt out of my hair."

"Oh."

She stood up and gestured toward the chair. "Sit here and I'll find one for you too."

"Oh no," he began to protest.

"Don't be silly," she told him. "You don't want to get your hair dirty any more than I do. It's only practical."

Despite his protestations he sat down anyway. When he looked in the mirror he saw that his shoulder-length hair was still all flattened out on one side despite all the brushing he had done earlier. The same thing had happened yesterday and he assumed it had to do with falling asleep with still damp hair. The hair on the side of his head that lay on the pillow ended up flat and distorted looking. Heather saw him fiddling with it.

"We can fix that if you like," she told him.

"Oh yeah? How?" he wanted to know.

"Hot rollers," she said as she reached over and plugged her set into the wall. "It won't take long."

"I don't think I want to bother with all of that," the suddenly nervous boy responded.

"Oh, come on," she said. "Experiment a little. Besides, like you said earlier, it's not like there's a whole lot else to do around here today except clean the house."

The boy remained seated despite his misgivings while she stood behind him and fingered his hair. In a few minutes the rollers had heated up and she began.

"You have such nice hair Shannon. Are you sure your mother has never suggested curling it a little?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. But she has kidded me about trying it sometime."

"Well, than I'd better do a real good job so she won't be disappointed." Heather teased as she combed out a section of the boy's long hair on top and wound a large roller down to his scalp. Taking one of the U-shaped clips she slid it over the roller holding it firmly in place. Shannon could feel the heat radiating from the roller along his scalp. Roller after roller followed as she set not only the side of his head with the problem hair, but his entire scalp. Shannon was surprised at the feel-

ing of weight that the rollers added when he moved his head.

"We might as well put a scarf over them and leave them in for a while until they are completely cooled down." She said as she placed a large blue chiffon scarf over Shannon's curlers and tied the ends in a bow at the back of his neck snugly beneath the bottom row of rollers.

The nervous boy just sat there and watched her in the mirror. As he looked at his roller-covered head a strange thrill went through him. He realized that in spite of his nervousness he enjoyed having this teenaged girl work on his hair. A hesitant smile started to appear on his face. Heather spotted it immediately.

"You're having fun, aren't you?" she said.

He looked up at her and blushed and nodded slightly. She leaned over and hugged him. "Me too. I'm glad you're staying with us. You aren't like other boys. It's almost like having a girl friend living in the next room." She caught herself and stopped short.

"Thanks!" he smiled.

"What I mean is... Most boys...I...," she stuttered.

"It's okay. I know what you mean," the boy told her softly. "I'm just glad you don't make fun of me or think I'm weird."

"Oh no! I'm glad you are different than other boys our age. They are all so crude and immature. And you're so nice and sweet."

"Sweet?" he arched his eyebrows.

"Yeah, is that okay?" she gave him a little hug.

He hesitated for a moment, then nodded his head.

Although she had kicked herself at first for blurting out the "girl friend" remark, Shannon wasn't offended. As a matter of fact, things were now better than she could possibly have hoped for. She no longer had to feel guilty or hesitant about encouraging any signs of effeminacy in the boy. Quite the contrary. He seemed to be willing to go wherever she led him. "Boy, are we going to have fun!" she mused to herself.

"Let's go downstairs and do some housework, then after lunch I'll take your hair down and comb it out for you."

"Go down like this??" Shannon resisted. "What will your mother say?"

"I think she has seen a person with their hair up in rollers before. Duh, like we do every night...." Heather exclaimed pulling the boy up from the chair and out the door.

Emily held back doing a "double take" as Heather and the sheepish Shannon entered the kitchen. My goodness, he looked so cute. "That girl has him wrapped around her finger." She thought to herself.

"Oh, that's why you guys took so long. Trying a new hairstyle?"

"Yeah, his hair was all wonky on one side from sleeping on it when it was damp. I thought that the hot rollers would give it some lift and shape."

"That's a good idea! You know Shannon, my Heather is a real whiz with hair."

She smiled to herself as she watched Heather pick out a couple of bright floral-print bib aprons and hand one to Shannon. It didn't take them long to dust and vacuum the downstairs rooms, and soon they were back in the kitchen snooping around for lunch.

"There's nothing to eat," Heather complained as she stood in front of the open refrigerator.

"Don't just stand there with the door open, letting out all the cold air," Emily replied calmly.

"Let me fix lunch," Shannon volunteered. He was having so much fun he was willing to both fix the meal and clean up afterwards. He ended up fixing them each a salad, with lettuce, carrots, radishes, tuna fish, raisins, and chow mien noodles, with low calorie Italian dressing.

"This is delicious," Emily told him while they sat at the kitchen table and ate. "Where did you learn to make this?"

"I just threw it together from what I found," the boy shrugged. His mom had taught him to cook years ago and he often made entire meals from scratch. He didn't consider this simple luncheon salad to be a big deal.

After he and Heather cleaned up the kitchen they hung their aprons back up and Heather slipped the kerchief off her head..

"Let's go upstairs and I'll finish your hair." Heather said.

"Oh, I like your hair," Emily told him when they came down. "I told you Heather was a wiz!"

"I showed him how to use hot rollers on it," Heather told her. "He really ought to have a set of his own...."

"Pretty!" she nodded. "I think it looks really good like that. Don't you?"

"Uh huh," her daughter replied proudly.

"What do you think, Shannon?"

The boy still found it hard to believe that they were standing there admiring his quite feminine hairdo. "I like it too," he finally admitted.

The teenagers spent the afternoon hanging around, listening to music and browsing through Heather's vast collection of teen magazines.

Rachel was again surprised when she walked in the door and saw her femininely coifed son setting the table. Not completely surprised, however, since she had expected some new sign of femininity in him. In fact, she had spent a good part of her drive home wondering what new girlish experiences he might be exploring. When she greeted him with a kiss and a hug and only casually complimented him on his new hairdo, he was a little surprised. He had really expected her to make more of a big deal of it. Instead, she acted as if it was perfectly natural for him to have such a feminine hairstyle.

As soon as the dinner dishes were cleared away Heather, as usual, shampooed her hair at the kitchen sink. Next it was Shannon's turn, and then their mothers would each take their turns. It took some coordination and cooperation on everyone's part to make sure everyone was done by a reasonable hour. Tonight, however, as Heather was still bent over the sink toweling her hair, Shannon announced that he was going to forego his turn.

"Is everything all right?" his mother wanted to know.

"Yeah, sure. I'm just tired of my hair looking all messed up in the morning." He went on to explain about his damp hair at night and how Heather had used the hot rollers on it, and all. "I'll admit it looked real nice after she was done with it, but she won't be around tomorrow. She's going to be at the hospital again, and I

don't know how to use the rollers anyway. I'd be afraid I'd burn myself."

His mother nodded sympathetically as she listened to his story. Before she could say anything though, Heather piped up, "Why don't you just set it like we do?"

"That's a solution," Rachel agreed.

"But isn't it hard to sleep with those on your head? Don't they hurt?"

"No, they don't hurt. You use a soft pillow and you'll get used to them real quick," Heather pointed out.

"Are you sure?"

"The three of us get plenty of sleep every night, don't we," she gestured toward their mothers still seated at the table. Emily and Rachel nodded in agreement. Rachel couldn't help but notice that the half-hearted objections he raised all had to do with issues of comfort. He didn't seem to be concerned about being called a sissy.

"I don't know how," he hesitated.

"I'll teach you," Heather offered.

"There you go," Emily said.

"It's settled," his mother announced.

He soon found himself seated at the vanity table in his bedroom, a towel still wrapped around his damp locks, watching her get everything ready. She had dug a colorful tote bag full of various sized plastic rollers out of the back of her closet, along with a tray of clips and bobby pins. After unwrapping the towel she combed all the tangles out of his hair and then sectioned it off with plastic clips.

Starting at the top, she separated each section of hair, gave it a spritz of setting lotion, and then carefully wound it onto one of the rollers. As she worked she ex-

plained each step to the attentive boy. He watched her in the mirror with rapt attention. After securing the last roller she produced a lacy pink sleep cap identical to the one she wore every night and slipped it over his head.

She bent over and rested her chin on his shoulder. "See," she said into the mirror. "We look like twins!"

They both started giggling.

"Let's show our moms," Heather finally managed to say. The two teens skipped down the stairs and into the living room. Their mothers looked up expectantly and both of them smiled warmly when they saw Shannon. Heather stood next to him and held her head next to his.

"We look like twins, don't we?" she said again.

"You certainly do," Emily nodded in agreement.

"You both look very cute," Rachel told them. She turned to her son. "Did you watch while Heather did your hair, so you can do it yourself when you want to?"

Before he could answer Heather piped up, "I hope so. I was hoping that we could do each other's hair every night."

"What a good idea!" Rachel told her as Emily nodded in agreement.

"Maybe I should see if I can sleep in these first," he said. Shannon had been so caught up in the fun of the moment that he hadn't thought about the future. Now he began to have second thoughts. It was one thing to play around like this for one night, but quite another to commit himself to doing it every night. Boys don't set their hair on rollers every night. At least not the boys he knew. But any misgivings were quickly overcome by the infectious spirit of the evening.

Later, after he had bathed, he settled into bed with a book. Heather had to get to bed early because she had to be at the hospital in the morning. Emily had found a couple of extra soft pillows for him and he took a few minutes to arrange them comfortably. His mother had a big grin on her face when she came in to say goodnight to him.

"I hope you're able to get a good night's sleep tonight," she told him. "Heather having a great time."

"Me too," he said. He showed her the extra pillows and said the rollers hadn't gotten uncomfortable yet. "So far, so good."

"Actually I don't think you'll have much trouble sleeping," she told him. "Millions of women sleep in curlers every night but it might take a few nights to get used to them."

"I'll give it a try," he said as he gently patted at the rollers that covered her head. "I look silly, don't I?"

"It's a small price to pay for a nice hairdo. You'll be pleasantly surprised in the morning, I'm sure."

"Too bad you won't be here to see it," he reminded her.

"Heather used setting lotion on it, didn't she?"

He nodded.

"Well it should hold its shape all day. I'll ask Emily to use some hair spray on it when she combs it out for you. That'll help too."

Shannon nodded solemnly. This was all happening pretty fast and he wasn't sure he could keep up with all the changes he was going through. He turned off the light after his mother left and as he lay there in the dark he tried to make sense of what was going on. He was both intrigued and apprehensive about this new world of

women that he was now a part of. Without a man in the house, there was a new freedom. No one made fun of his cooking skills like his father. His long hair was no longer the butt of father's jokes.

He closed his eyes and relaxed, enjoying the new smells and sensations....

He awoke from a restless sleep with a start the next morning. The unfamiliar feeling of the rollers on his head had disturbed his sleep, and the first thing he did was reach up to touch them. As he lay there he remembered watching Heather set his hair the night before and how they had both had fun, laughing and cracking jokes. Now he felt a little strange at having allowed her to do it.

When he glimpsed himself in the mirror as he washed his face, however, a shiver of excitement ran down his spine. With a host of conflictive feelings running through his head he cautiously made his way down to the kitchen. He was half-way through a bowl of cereal when Emily walked in. She was dressed, but had not yet taken the curlers out of her hair. When she spotted him, she unconsciously reached up and patted her own head, as if they both had something in common.

"Good morning, doll face," she said cheerily.

Shannon nodded back, his mouth full of cereal.

"Sleep well?" she asked as she casually motioned toward his head.

"Sort of. I kept tossing and turning."

"They take a little getting used to," she told him. "I can't wait to see your hair though."

"Mom said you'd help me with it?"

"Why don't you finish your breakfast while I do my own hair. I'll meet you in your room when I'm done. Don't bother to get dressed until after we've taken the rollers out. You'd probably have trouble slipping anything over your head with them on."

Twenty minutes later he was seated at the vanity table in his room, watching Emily carefully remove each roller. He was fascinated to see that his hair sprung back in tight curls.

"Heather did a good job," she observed as she worked. "It's really going to look nice when we're done."

Shannon just sat silently watching her. When the last curler was out she back-combed each section to give it even more body before arranging it a halo of curls that surrounded his head. A final mist of hair spray held everything in place. The result was an obviously feminine hairdo.

She said, "It's full now but will relax into the final style over the next few hours. I hope you like it?"

"Wow. It's... it's..." the boy stuttered.

"It's what? Do you like it?"

"Yeah! It's cool! But..."

"But?"

"It's too bad I can't go out like this. People would make fun of me."

"What makes you say that?"

"Doesn't it look like a girl's hairdo?"

"I'd say it looks more unisex," Emily lied. "We'll take a good look after it relaxes."

"You really think it's okay for a boy?" the boy replied as he eyed his hair critically in the mirror. He had to admit that he loved his new hairdo. He just didn't want to be teased and humiliated in public.



Shannon felt so different even though he was wearing his own clothes. Could a few curls change so much?

"I'll tell you what," Emily volunteered. "I have to do some shopping this morning. Why don't you come with me? We'll go over to San Rafael, where no one knows either of us. That way you can test people's reactions without having to worry about any consequences. What do you say?"

When he hesitated, she added, "Com' on. You must be getting cabin fever anyway. You haven't been out since you got here. Just getting out of the house will do you some good. Okay?"

He finally nodded in agreement as he continued to stare into the mirror, unable to tear himself away from the vision that he saw there.

After some more prodding from Emily, he finally got up and got dressed. He put on a clean pair of jeans and a large over-sized, light green sweater.

Last summer he had insisted that his mother buy it for him after he had seen a teenager in the local mall wearing one just like it. It was a big, bulky cable knit cotton sweater with a loose cowl neckline so as to now ruin his hair. It was so long it came to the tops of his thighs.

The long arms had to be pulled up to keep from covering his hands. When he first saw one, Shannon had decided immediately that he wanted one for himself. He hadn't even noticed who was wearing it. His mother had searched nearly every store in town trying to find what he wanted. The only place that carried them was a small shop that carried women's and girl's fashions. She didn't bother to mention that when she brought it home.

"That sweater looks fantastic on you Shannon," Emily exclaimed when she saw him. "I want one just like it. Where did you get it?"

"My mom bought it for me. I saw one just like it and told her about it."

"You have very good taste, my dear," she told him as they walked out to the car.

The boy was quiet most of the way to San Rafael. Finally he spoke up. "What are you shopping for," he asked.

"Oh, a little of this and a little of that," Emily told him. "I've got a long list of things that I've needed for awhile. Odds and ends mainly. Today just seemed like a good day to get it done."

The boy just nodded. He didn't say anything, but he was nervous about other people's reactions to his hairdo. He didn't realize that his hair along with the sweater he was wearing, he could pass very easily for a teenaged girl.

Once they got to San Rafael it didn't take long for a response. Emily parked in a lot near downtown and they walked into a nearby drug store. Since he wasn't looking for anything in particular, he just followed Emily into the cosmetics department. He was standing in the aisle idly inspecting the shelves of shampoos and conditioners when one of the sales clerks walked up to him.

"Can I help you find something, miss?" she smiled at him.

"I... uh..." Shannon started to stammer.

Fortunately, Emily had overheard the clerk and she came over quickly. "She's just waiting for me," she told the clerk.

Undeterred, the clerk turned to her, "Well, is there anything I can help you with?"

Emily said no and the clerk finally wandered away. She turned to Shannon as the boy started to giggle. "She called me miss," he whispered.

Pleased that he wasn't offended, she started laughing along with him. "I think she needs glasses."

After picking up some more items, she paid the cashier and then they wandered back outside. Next stop was the hardware store, then a bakery. Shannon just tagged along as Emily worked her way down the list.

By the time she was done both of them were loaded down with shopping bags. At Emily's suggestion they stashed everything in the car and went looking for a bite to eat. Near the railroad station they found a little cafe with tree-shaded outdoor tables.

A waiter soon arrived at their table with glasses of water. "Hello ladies," he greeted them. "What can I get for you?"

Again Shannon started giggling, this time while trying to hide behind the menu.

"Can you give us a few more minutes?" Emily asked the young man.

With a smile and a nod he went back inside.

"Either everyone in town needs glasses or this hairdo isn't quite as unisex as you claimed," Shannon said as soon as the waiter was gone. He didn't seem to be the least bit upset about being mistaken again for a girl.

"I'm sorry. Maybe I went a little overboard with the styling. But it just looks so nice on you. I hope you're not offended."

"Oh no. I think it's funny that they can't tell the difference between boys and girls," he told her.

"He'll be very embarrassed when he finds out."

Shannon paused to think about it. "Let's not say anything. I don't want to cause a scene. Then I might get embarrassed too."

Emily leaned over the table and whispered conspiratorially, "Maybe you should be a girl for the rest of the afternoon?"

The blushing boy thought for a minute, then shrugged. "Sure, why not?"

She grinned at him. "I think this is going to be fun."

When the waiter returned they each ordered salads. "We girls have to watch our figures," Emily told him while Shannon did his best to keep from bursting out laughing. While they sat there waiting for their food Emily instructed him on how to sit, with his knees together and his back straight. Once their salads arrived she cautioned him to take small bites and put his fork down frequently. "Don't eat too fast," she warned him.

During the meal they watched the passersby on the sidewalk in front of them. Emily asked his opinion of some of the women's outfits and was pleasantly surprised to find out that he knew quite a bit about fashion.

"Where did you learn so much about women's clothes," she finally asked.

"Talking to mom," he said. "And sometimes I read some of her magazines."

"Is that where you got the idea for that sweater you're wearing?"

"No. Actually I just saw one and liked it."

At her suggestion they stopped at a clothing store after lunch. Emily said she was looking for some things for herself and Heather too, and wanted Shannon's advice. The boy felt flattered that she would ask for his opinion.

As soon as they walked into a nearby shop a clerk came up to them.

"May I help you ladies?" she said pleasantly.

"We're just looking." Emily told her while Shannon beamed at her side.

"We're running a sale on misses and teens tops and skirts," the clerk said, turning to Shannon.

"Oh, that's nice," the boy told her. Fortunately his voice hadn't started to turn yet and he didn't have to strain to speak in a higher pitch.

"They're right over here," the clerk persisted, gesturing towards several racks along one wall.

Shannon allowed himself to be led over while Emily followed closely behind. She wanted to make sure he didn't get into any trouble. When the clerk showed no signs of leaving, she finally spoke up.

"Thank you. We'll let you know if we need any more help."

After the clerk had reluctantly moved away, Emily explained, "She's probably working on commission. She doesn't want to lose a sale."

They started looking through the racks. "Oh, look," Emily exclaimed as she held a garment up in front of her. It was a copy of the bulky sweater that Shannon was wearing, only in peach rather than green. She held it up in front of him.

"It's just like mine," he exclaimed.

"Let's check the sizes," Emily said as she had him turn around so that she could read the label inside at the back of the neck. "They're the same. I'll bet this would look great on Heather. Do you think she'd like it?"

"Sure."

"These over-sized things are all the rage these days, aren't they?"

"Yeah, lots of kids like them."

"What about this?" she pulled another top from the rack. It was a ribbed cotton long-sleeved tunic with a teal/cream print.

"Oh, wow. That looks great," the boy said.

She looked at him expectantly. "Would you like this?"

"Me?" he was surprised.

"Uh huh," she nodded. "I think it would look great on you. Want to try it on?"

She took his arm and led him to the dressing rooms before he could object. Once inside she quickly lifted off his top and carefully slipped the new garment over his head. Leading him back out, she stopped in front of one of the large mirrors.

"Ohhh," was all he could say as he admired himself in front of the mirror. While he was absorbed in his own image she stepped away for a minute and returned with a pair of white cotton slacks.

"Try these on too," she urged him back toward the dressing room.

He didn't need any prodding this time and soon he was back out in front of the mirror. The clerk had joined them by now and she and Emily stood to the side while Shannon turned this way and that to see himself from all angles. It was only when he had changed back into his other clothes and the clerk was ringing up the purchases that he started to object.

"You shouldn't have to spend your money on my clothes," he told her. "Mom buys me everything I need."

"Money is not a problem for us, I assure you my dear. And I'm sure Rachel won't object to my buying you a couple of presents. Besides, you're a young lady for the afternoon, remember? And what do young ladies love to do more than anything except to shop?"

"Oh, yeah," he giggled. "I forgot."

As they walked out of the store, Emily spotted a jewelry store across the street and had a brilliant idea. "I know just the thing to help you remember this afternoon. What do you say?"

"Sure, I guess," he said without any idea of what he was agreeing to.

"Come with me," she took him by the arm and led him across the street. Once inside the jewelry shop she went right over to the nearest clerk.

"My young friend here would like to get her ears pierced," she announced.

Shannon froze in his tracks. "Oh no," he started to object.

"She's already agreed to it, but she's a little nervous," Emily interjected.

"That's quite understandable," the clerk said sympathetically. He turned to Shannon, "Now don't worry dear. I'll spray a little freezing solution on your ears and you'll never feel a thing. I promise. We've had lots of experience. We get several girls in here every week to get their ears pierced. Some of them come in more than once for multiple piercings. And none of them have ever complained."

"But... but..." the boy tried to say something.

"Come over here and pick out the earrings you want," Emily persisted.

The nervous boy joined her at the counter in front of the earring display.

"I love the long dangling ones," Emily told him. "But you'll have to settle for some studs until the holes heal. Which one's do you like?"

There were so many that he had trouble deciding, but he finally picked out a pair of gold stars.

"A good choice," the clerk said encouragingly as he had Shannon sit on a stool while he sprayed the solution on his ears and marked where the holes should go. Bang, bang. In less than five minutes they were back out on the street. All the way home he kept fingering his new earrings, as if he were still having trouble believing what had happened to him.

Once home, Shannon took his new clothes upstairs, but before he had a chance to hang them up, Emily knocked on his door.

"I picked up a few things for you while we were out," she told him. She was standing in the doorway with a plastic bag in her hand. "May I come in?"

"Sure," he said. "Anytime."

She brought the bag over to his vanity table. "Since you'll be setting your hair every night from now on, I thought it best if you had your own set of rollers," she said brightly as she pulled out several packages of them in assorted colors and sizes, along with a box of hair clips, a lacy sleep cap like he had borrowed from Heather, and a large plastic container in a bright floral print to hold everything.

"Those were for me?" He'd seen her buying things but hadn't been paying much attention. "Thanks, I guess," the confused boy responded hesitantly.



Later, Shannon sat in bed looking at his new things...girl things. Things that no boy would want yet he was thrilled and excited.

While he had gotten a kick out of having his hair set last night, he wasn't at all sure that he wanted to do it on a regular basis. But that was obviously what Emily had in mind.

"Wait," she told him. "That's not all."

She reached in the bag and handed him a new natural boar's hair brush and comb set. "I thought you'd like to have one of your own. Plastic brushes can break hair..."

Shannon couldn't believe his ears. His father had threatened to tie him down and cut his hair nearly everyday. Now he was being encouraged to let it grow.

She also produced a bottle of skin cleanser and a jar of night cream for his face. "So you don't have to be borrowing Heather's. And I thought you might want to start doing your own nails too," she told him as she handed him a complete nail care kit along with a bottle of clear polish and a polish remover. "We sometimes have 'nail care' on Thursday nights."

"You and Heather have such pretty nails," he stammered.

"Thanks you. I looked for some clear lip-gloss too, so you don't get chapped lips, but they were out. This is as close as I could find," she said as she handed him a tube of gloss. "There's next to no color in it, just a tinge. I'm sure no one will notice, but it'll help protect your lips from drying out."

"Gee, thanks," he said dubiously as he started to put the gold tube down on the table.

Emily was not to be deterred, "Let me show you how to use it," she told him. She had the boy apply it to his lips, then blot them just as he had seen his mother do so many times, then re-apply it. In the mirror he could see

just the faintest hint of color, but his lips did look moist and healthy. He wondered how obvious it would be to others.

Emily headed toward the bathroom. "I also bought you two some more bath salts, since you seem to like them so much. And I got you some bubble bath too. Have you ever had a bubble bath?"

He shook his head.

"Well you're in for a real treat then," she told him. "It's one of my favorite ways to relax."

The slightly bewildered boy sat down at the vanity table and surveyed all of the things Emily had bought for him. She seemed to be treating him more like a girl than a boy. What surprised him as much as anything however, was his own reaction? He assumed most boys would feel outraged and offended to be treated like this. But he was, if anything, intrigued by his new experiences. A little shiver ran down his spine as he examined himself in the mirror.

He had to admit he loved his new hairdo. And the lip gloss, along with his sweater, did all add up to a decidedly unisex, no, feminine image. But it was his image, and he felt very comfortable looking back at it.

He was just thankful that they had moved across country to where no one knew him, because he knew that all the kids from his old school would tease him unmercifully if they could see him now. "Well, the heck with them," he muttered to himself. "I like the way I am. And my mom, and Heather, and her mom like me this way too. So there!"

Heather returned shortly from her volunteer work at the hospital. Since she had had to leave early that morning she hadn't had a chance to see the results of her setting the boy's hair the night before. Now she was eager to get a look at him. She ran up the stairs and found him in his room, filing his nails with an emery board he had found in his new nail care kit.

"Wow," she greeted him. "Your hair looks great. Do you like it?"

"Yeah," he patted it softly. "Your mother says it turned out really nice."

"Did you have any trouble sleeping last night?"

"A little," he admitted. "But it wasn't too bad."

"You'll get used to it," she assured him. "It's worth it for sure. I really like your hair," she said as she went over to him and fingered the ends that brushed his shoulders. That's when she spotted the earrings. "You got your ears pierced!" she gasped.

"Your mom talked me into it," he shook his head. "I'm not quite sure how it happened."

"But they look great," she stepped back to admire them. "Wait till your ears heal and you can wear all kinds of neat ones. I've got lots of the long, dangling ones. How'd she talk you into doing BOTH ears?"

When she looked at him quizzically he told her all about his adventure in the jewelry store. "It was right after we bought these," he showed her the clothes on the bed.

"Gee. You had quite a day. I'm jealous. You got to go shopping for some neat clothes and got your ears pierced and I had to work all day. It's not fair."

"I'm sorry," he told her.

"I'm only kidding," she said to him. "I'm glad you had a good time. Honest. I get to do lots of shopping. Maybe we could even go again tomorrow since I don't have to work."

"Yeah, okay."

Then she spotted the rest of the things on top of his table. "Wow! You really did go shopping!"

"Oh, your mom bought some hair things for me. She said that way I don't have to borrow yours. I guess she assumes you will continue doing my hair... "

"Good idea. Although I don't mind. You can borrow anything of mine any time you'd like, honest. I don't mind sharing my things." She picked up the gold tube of lip-gloss. "You know, I'll bet we're the same size too."

"You think so? Well, you can borrow anything of mine too," he told her.

At the dinner table that night he had everyone laughing as he and Emily recounted their shopping adventures.

"So everyone called you 'miss' today," his mother chuckled.

"Yeah. It was so funny. Seems like no one could tell the difference," he shook his head while missing the significant glances among the other three at the table.

"Did you show your mom your new earrings?" Heather wanted to know.

"Earrings? You got earrings today too?" Rachel looked amazed.

"It's my fault," Emily admitted. "I got carried away and talked him into it. I hope you don't mind."

"I don't mind. Let me see them darling," she leaned over to try and get a better look as the boy brushed the hair back from his ears. "Gold stars. Very patriotic." She laughed, "Well, now I know what to tell your father to get you for your birthday."

"Aww, mom," he blushed, but at the same time he felt a tingle of excitement at the thought. "Tell him I want some real long pendants with little hearts...!"

After he and Heather cleared the table and cleaned up the kitchen, they started to get ready for their nightly shampoo and set ritual. As Heather collected her things Shannon made a suggestion.

"Why don't you let me set your hair for you tonight? I know how much fun it is to have your hair done by someone else and you've been so nice, I thought I'd repay the favor."

"I'd love it! That'd be great! But have you ever done it before? Do you know how?"

"I've watched my mom do her own hair plenty of times and I watched you do mine last night. And as you pointed out, millions of girls set their own hair. I figure it can't be that difficult. You can give me directions, too."

"Okay. It's a deal," she laughed.

Shannon was a quick learner and he soon acquired the knack for carefully rolling Heather's hair onto the plastic curlers. She sat at her table watching the effeminate boy in the mirror while he worked on her hair.

"This is so much fun," she thought to herself. "It is almost like having a girl friend living here. I wonder if I could talk mom into letting them live here all the time, and not just till they find a place of their own."

While Shannon didn't have a clue to what Heather was thinking, his own thoughts were moving along similar lines.

"I've never had so much fun in my whole life," he mused as he clipped the last roller into place. "I wish I'd met Heather years ago. It's like we're best friends and yet we only met a few days ago. I wish I could stay here forever."

When it was his turn to sit at the table, Heather suggested that he change his top. "The neck is kind of narrow," she pointed out, "And with all the rollers on you might not be able to pull your head through the opening. In that case you'd have to sleep in it tonight."

"I haven't bathed yet. What should I wear?"

"Do you have a robe you could throw on?"

"Nope," he shrugged.

"Here, try this on," she handed him a pretty floral print kimono. "I'm sure this will fit you."

Without hesitation the boy pulled off his sweater and slipped the feminine garment on. When he sat back down in front of the mirror a shiver ran down his spine when he saw his reflection.

Heather worked quickly and efficiently and soon his head was again covered with colorful plastic rollers. He continued to stare into the mirror long after she had adjusted the lacy cap on his head. Finally she spoke up.

"Knock, knock. Anyone home?"

This startled him out of his reverie. "Oh, sorry. I was just looking at myself in the mirror."

"So I noticed," she said with an amused look.

"I look like a girl, don't I?" he wanted to know.

She nodded thoughtfully. "Right now you do. Does that bother you?"

He thought about it for a minute, then shook his head slowly. "I don't think so." He looked up at his new friend. "I guess I'm more concerned about what other people will think. I've been teased enough at my old school for being a sissy. Even my father was on me...I don't need it here too."

"I understand what you're saying, but I wouldn't worry about it if I were you. No one around here knows you. You can start off fresh, without all the baggage from before. The most important thing is being true to yourself. If you're comfortable with who you are, then everything else will fall into place."

He continued to gaze into the mirror while lost in thought. Finally he said, "I can see why those people today thought I was a girl."

Heather put her arm around him and gave him a big hug. "Boy or girl, you're my best friend. Just remember that, okay?"

He leaned against her and a little tear rolled down his cheek. "Okay," he said softly.

He found Heather and her mother sitting on the back porch the next morning when he came downstairs. They were both still dressed in their nightgowns and robes, with their still in rollers, as was his. He was wearing his pajamas along with the kimono that Heather had loaned him last night. She had told him he could keep it.

"Good morning," Emily greeted him. "Did Heather loan you that? It looks very good on you."

"Thank you," he said proudly but added, "Heather said it's easier to put on and take off with curlers in my hair.

"I also told him he could borrow anything of mine that he wanted. Did you know we're the same size, mom?"

"Well that's certainly convenient," she commented.

Heather turned to Shannon. "Mom says she'll take us shopping today. Want to go?"

"Sure. What are you looking for?"

"I don't know, but I'll know when I find it," she laughed.

"Clothes," Emily said emphatically. "My daughter has a 'black belt' in shopping...."

"Aw, come on, mom. Who did I learn that from?"

"Not from me," she protested.

Shannon realized that this was just good-natured bantering between mother and daughter. They were both having fun and he didn't doubt for a minute that they were both capable of shopping till they dropped.

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After breakfast the teens went upstairs to fix their hair and get dressed. Shannon sat on Heather's bed and watched her take out the curlers and then style her hair. When she was done he took her place at the vanity table and she did the same for him.

"I want you to watch carefully," she told him. "Both so you can do my hair and also so you can do your own whenever the need arises."

The boy paid careful attention while she backcombed and brushed his hair into an even more feminine looking style than he wore yesterday. He was enchanted with his image in the mirror.

"Maybe we should comb it down?" he asked. "Everyone will think I'm a girl again."

"So?" Heather even suggested that he wear the outfit her mother had bought him the day before. "It'll look terrific with that hairdo," she told him.

After he finished dressing he paused at Heather's door while she put the finishing touches on her makeup. That reminded him of the lip-gloss Emily had given him and he returned to his room to put some on. Heather came in while he was putting it on. She tried to hide her surprise.

"Where did you get that?" she asked.

"Your mom bought it for me yesterday."

"Oh."

"She said I should use it so my lips don't get chapped. They were all out of clear, but she said this was so lightly colored that no one could tell the difference. What do you think?"

"Oh, I agree," she lied. "It looks fine. If anyone thinks you are a boy, I'm sure no one will notice."

The two teens sat in the back seat on the way to the mall and chatted about clothes. When they got there they headed straight to Macy's to see what was on sale. Just inside the door they ran into Marjorie Kingston, the administrator at the hospital who ran the volunteer program that Heather participated in. Heather really liked Mrs. Kingston and she eagerly introduced her to her mother and to Shannon.

"Mom, I want you to meet my boss, Mrs. Kingston."

"How do you do?" Emily greeted her. "Heather has nothing but nice things to say about you."

"Well the feeling is mutual, I assure you. I must congratulate you on the wonderful daughter you've raised. She's a hard worker, and always cheerful. I wish all my volunteers were half as dedicated as she is."

Emily beamed with pride in response to the praise.

"And who's your friend?" Mrs. Kingston said as she turned to Shannon.

"This is Shannon."

"How do you do Shannon? Are you new in town? I don't believe I've met you before."

"My mom and I just moved here a few days ago," he said a little shyly.

"Well you've found a wonderful friend here in Heather. She's one of the most popular girls in town. And speaking of making new friends, I've got a terrific idea. There's no better way for a new girl in town to make friends than to volunteer as a 'candy striper.' Don't you agree Heather? If you have the time we could always use the help. And Heather could introduce you to the other girls. What do you say?"

"I, uh..., " the boy stammered and blushed.

Heather rushed in. "She'd love to. And I'd be glad to show her around."

"Splendid. Then I'll see both you girls tomorrow," Mrs. Kingston beamed as she turned to leave.

"Oh no," Shannon moaned. "Why did you tell her I agreed?" he said accusingly.

"You told me how much fun you had yesterday when everyone mistook you for a girl. Looks like we are off to the same start today."

Shannon moaned. It was suddenly not fun.

"I just figured you'd get a kick out of it," Heather defended herself.

"It was fun with strangers, but I can't fool everyone into thinking I'm a girl. Once people find out, I'll never live it down."

Emily finally spoke up. "If that's all you're worried about, then you have nothing to fear. You're not even trying to fool anybody and they all accept you as a girl. Even Mrs. Kingston and she works with girls all day long."

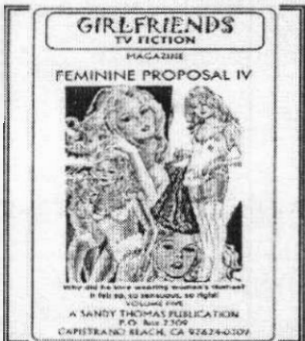
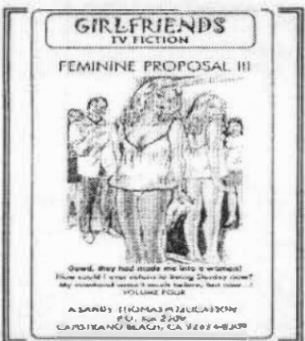
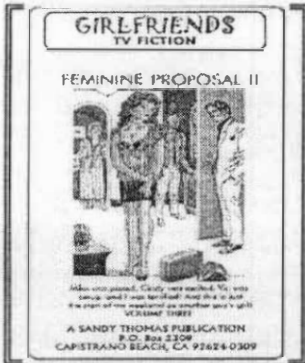
"What are you suggesting?" he asked.

"With just a little help you'd make a perfect girl. Have you taken a good look in the mirror lately? With that hair do...Look, let's go have a soda and talk this over," Emily suggested.

Shannon gasped and moaned, "What's mother going to say?"

End of Part one of two...

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IN THE PINK



Gee, Tom.

Just becuae I'm wearing a dress now
doesn't mean we can't we can't go fish'n.



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